

MEDIA RELEASE

Turkmenistan adopts nutrition policies beneficial for children

Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, 2 September 2013 – From 1 to 7 September Turkmenistan marks the National Breastfeeding Week highlighting the importance of exclusive breastfeeding for a child's first six months and continued breastfeeding for at least one to two years of life. Earlier this year the Government of Turkmenistan endorsed two national documents on breastfeeding and nutrition, thus, creating an enabling policy environment for supporting initiatives on promoting breastfeeding, adequate complementary feeding, food safety, evidence-based research and capacity building in providing adequate nutrition for children.

The Law on Breastfeeding and the National Programme on Nutrition for 2013-2017 endorsed by the Government of Turkmenistan with UNICEF's continuous advocacy aim at creating conditions for supporting efforts to increase rates of breastfeeding by ensuring that all mothers have access to skilled support to initiate breastfeeding at maternity facilities within the framework of the Baby Friendly Hospitals Initiative (BFHI). The Law and the Programme stipulate building the capacity of primary health care workers to provide skilled counselling on breastfeeding as well as to carry out regular nutrition related awareness raising and communication campaigns and other events.

The National Law on Breastfeeding specifies policy and institutional practices on breastfeeding and young children's nutrition in general. It also includes advocacy and communication and education on child nutrition, marketing and labeling of baby food products and rights and obligations of health care institutions involved in improving child nutrition. The recent amendment prohibits distribution and gifting free samples of baby formula among mothers and family members.

The National Programme on Nutrition aims at ensuring safe nutrition practices and promoting healthy nutrition habits for the population, including children of Turkmenistan. Developed in partnership with UNICEF and WHO, the Programme provides strong ground for promoting healthy nutrition, and strengthening nutrition programmes in kindergartens, schools, and other catering establishments. The Programme also requires monitoring quality and safety of domestic and imported food products in accordance with healthy nutrition requirements.

The National Breastfeeding Week is an apt opportunity to reaffirm cost-effectiveness and vital benefits of breastfeeding both for a child and mother. It also serves as an occasion to advocate for the Government's increased allocations for quality implementation of the national programmes on breastfeeding and nutrition.

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