

Action brief

Analysis of the contributions and economic benefits of breastfeeding

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Country: El Salvador

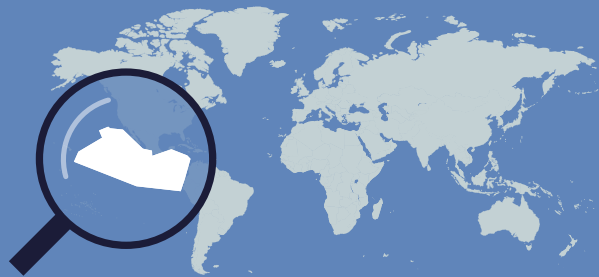
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Topics: Policies, budget cycle management and governance

Sub-topics: Knowledge management, operations research (data-driven policymaking)



Overview



This study aims to estimate the economic benefits of breastfeeding for the Government and for households.

For the Government, the study estimates the public health savings of reducing the use of breast-milk substitutes and decreasing infant morbidity, using a model based on the national indicator of exclusive breastfeeding and

combining in turn the protective factors of breastfeeding for three morbidities: acute diarrhoeal diseases, acute respiratory infections and otitis.

For households, the study estimates the costs and benefits attributable to exclusive breastfeeding, including the costs of breast-milk substitutes. The rate and duration of exclusive breastfeeding and the costs of preparing and dosing infant formula are taken as the basis.

The results of the study are a theoretical approximation of the total savings yielded by breastfeeding and the effects of this practice on public health services and family finances. It therefore also addresses the importance of improving national breastfeeding indicators through increased investment in breastfeeding.



Objectives of the action brief

The objective is to share the lessons learned from El Salvador by analysing the contributions and economic benefits of breastfeeding and using this data as a tool to improve public policies.



Period covered

In 2013, with support from UNICEF, the Centre for Support to Maternal Breastfeeding in El Salvador (CALMA) conducted a study to quantify the economic benefits of breastfeeding. The report yielded significant results, and with this data, the Centre for Support to Maternal Breastfeeding and others have had tools to promote breastfeeding to national decision-makers.

In 2021, with support from the SUN Movement, a new estimate of public health savings was made due to the decreased use of substitutes, decreased childhood morbidity, and costs and benefits to households attributable to exclusive breastfeeding, including the costs of breast-milk substitutes.



What action was taken?

To analyse the contributions of breastfeeding, the economic advantages of breastfeeding were estimated using information provided by the Ministry of Health on morbidity for children under 5 years of age in 2017–2020 and care costs in public hospitals. The analysis also used secondary information on the market prices of substitutes obtained through the websites of pharmacies, shops and national supermarkets.

The economic advantages were estimated using a model based on the preventive factors of exclusive breastfeeding for morbidities in children under 2 years of age – considering studies published in the journal *The Lancet* – and the family savings derived from cutting out the use of substitutes during the first year of the newborn's life.

Among the figures revealed by this analysis:

- The median health savings were \$3.5 million annually for the three morbidities analysed. The prevention of medical treatment appointments is the main contribution to savings for the public health system, representing 71 per cent of the total, or \$2.5 million.

- If mothers could maintain exclusive and continued breastfeeding up to the first year of the child's life, the savings they would gain would amount to approximately \$2,239 in the first semester and \$1,408 in the second – that is, \$3,647 total during the first year of life.
- In the current landscape of breastfeeding practice (46.7 per cent exclusive breastfeeding and 2.2 months duration), the savings are \$846 for the first semester and \$1,408 for the second – \$2,245 total during the first year of life.

Thus, it is clear that this report justifies the continued promotion of breastfeeding among the general public. It is also evident that it is of great interest to national policies aimed at fostering early childhood development.

It is important to note that the COVID-19 emergency and the implementation of mobility restriction measures during the pandemic may have affected the recording of 2020 morbidities, which could have contributed to the decrease in the estimate of public health system savings for that year.



What was the role of the SUN Movement in this good practice?

The SUN Movement, through its Pooled Fund, provided support for the new estimate of public health savings in 2021.



Adaptation and applicability

The Ministry of Health of El Salvador provided information critical to the analysis. For this study to be scalable in other contexts, it will be important to identify the main actors that can contribute to the gathering of information.



Next steps

The results of the research will continue to be disseminated (mainly to decision-makers), and breastfeeding will continue to be promoted by various means.



Further information



Análisis ventajas economicas de la Lactancia Materna



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