

How can employers support women in the workplace?



International Women's Day is celebrated globally on 8 March every year with the day highlighting women's achievements as well as opening up discussions to the ongoing issues and topics relating to women's equality.

To link in with this, we discuss the upcoming changes in employment law designed to provide women with increased protection and support in the workplace, as well as how employers can take steps to promote gender equality.

Protection from redundancy

From 6 April 2024, [The Maternity Leave, Adoption Leave and Shared Parental Leave \(Amendment\) Regulations 2024](#) will extend the period of special protection from redundancy for employees who are on maternity leave, adoption leave or shared parental leave. This special protection means employees who are on maternity leave, adoption leave or shared parental leave are entitled to be offered a suitable alternative vacancy in priority to other employees.

Under the new parental leave regulations, the period this priority status is afforded to will increase to include the entire pregnancy, as well as 18 months from the first day of the estimated week of childbirth (although the employee can change this to the exact date of birth if they inform their employer prior to the end of their maternity leave).

Adoptive parents will also receive priority status from 18 months from placement for adoption, and for shared parental leave the protected period will be 18 months from birth, provided the parent has taken at least six consecutive weeks of shared parental leave.



Neonatal leave

The Neonatal Care (Leave and Pay) Act will allow parents whose newborn baby is admitted to neonatal care to take up to 12 weeks of paid leave, in addition to other leave entitlements such as maternity and paternity leave.

The length of leave and statutory neonatal pay will be based on how long their baby receives neonatal care, and will apply if their baby receives neonatal care for more than seven continuous days before they reach 28 days old. Note this is not expected to come into force until April 2025.

Menopause policy

Introducing a menopause policy within your organisation can educate and inform managers and all employees of the potential symptoms of menopause, and how they can support women at work. Statistics show that around 1 in every 3 women has either experienced or is currently going through the menopause. Around 8 in every 10 women will experience noticeable symptoms and of these 45% will find their symptoms hard to deal with.

Employers should encourage an open conversation to ensure that women suffering with menopause symptoms feel confident and comfortable to discuss it, and ask for support and any reasonable adjustments they may need to help minimise the impact menopause may be having on their working life.

Flexible working

Most employers now offer a flexible working policy, as employees are looking for a better work-life balance. Flexible working allows employees to manage their time around childcare and other parental responsibilities.

Flexibility also can reduce costs of childcare for employees as hours can be worked around family time. It can also encourage women to return to work after maternity leave, knowing that they will have greater autonomy over their working hours.

From 6 April 2024 the Employment Relations (Flexible Working) Act 2023 will enhance the existing right for employees to request flexible working arrangements meaning that employees can make a flexible working request from day one of employment. Employees will also be able to make two request's in a 12 month period where as currently they are only able to make one. ACAS are due to be releasing a new statutory code on requests for flexible working shortly with this due to come into force on the 6 April 2024

Paternity leave

Upcoming changes to paternity leave mean that the two week statutory leave entitlement can either be taken as one block of two week's or two blocks of one week if the expected week of childbirth is after 6 April 2024. For births after this date the leave can be taken at any point in the 52 weeks after the child's birth. The increased flexibility around how and when this leave can be taken will no doubt also help those employees on or returning from maternity leave.

Carer's leave

Any employees with a dependent with a long-term care need will be able to request one week of unpaid leave in every 12 months to care for that dependent. This new right comes into effect on 6 April 2024 and will be a day one right. There is a 3 day or twice the amount of period of leave minimum notice provision in place.



Duty to prevent sexual harassment of employees

Employers will be under a duty to take reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment of their staff from October 2024. It is hoped this extra level of protection will help prevent all employees, to include women, from being harassed in the workplace. For further details regarding this new duty and other new legislation, please refer to our article [what to expect in employment law in 2024](#) or contact us directly.

How can we help

If you need assistance in implementing a menopause policy, if any of your policies and procedures need updating to reflect the upcoming changes or if you have questions please contact our [employment team](#).



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