

# Press release: Plans to boost protections for pregnant women and new parents returning to work

- Pregnant women and new parents returning to work are set to receive greater protection from redundancy, under new government plans
- The legal protections currently enjoyed by parents including women on maternity leave could be extended to other parents, such as those returning from adoption or shared parental leave
- This boost in protection builds on the biggest package of workplace reforms in 20 years to create an economy that works for all as part of the modern Industrial Strategy

The consultation, launching tomorrow (25 January 2019), proposes that the legal protection against redundancy for pregnant women and new mothers on maternity leave is extended so that it continues for up to 6 months after they return to work. It will also seek views on affording the same protection to parents returning from adoption leave or shared parental leave.

Research commissioned by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS), found 1 in 9 women said they had been fired or made redundant when they returned to work after having a child, or were treated so badly they felt forced out of their job. The same research estimates 54,000 women a year may lose their jobs due to pregnancy or maternity.

Prime Minister Theresa May said:

People in this country already benefit from some of the most rigorous workplace standards in the world, including parental leave and pay entitlements, but we are determined to do even more as we leave the EU.

It's unacceptable that too many parents still encounter difficulties when returning to work. Today's proposals are set to provide greater protection for new parents in the workplace, and put their minds at ease at this important time.

This move goes further than current EU requirements on maternity entitlements and parental leave, showing that the UK is going even further in its commitment to workers' rights and meeting the challenges of the changing world of work. This follows the biggest package of workplace reforms for over 20 years that was set out by the Business Secretary in December 2018.

On parental leave and pay alone:

- we already offer maternity entitlements of up to 52 weeks of maternity

leave – 39 weeks of which are paid

- we have given fathers and partners a statutory right to paternity leave and pay, and we have allowed eligible parents to share leave and pay where the mother does not intend to use all of her maternity entitlements
- and we have given all employees with 26 weeks' qualifying service a right to request flexible working, not only those returning from parental leave

Business Minister Kelly Tolhurst said:

Pregnancy and maternity discrimination is illegal. But some new mothers still find unacceptable attitudes on their return to work which effectively forces them out of their jobs.

Through the modern Industrial Strategy and the largest upgrade in workers' rights in a generation, the government is building an economy that ensures everyone can progress at work. That's why we are looking at ways to further protect new parents by giving them time to re-establish themselves in the workplace and show the value they bring to their employers.

Justine Roberts, Mumsnet founder, said:

Mumsnet users talk a lot about pregnancy and maternity discrimination, and in a 2018 survey 96% of women we surveyed said having children affected mothers' careers for the worse.

It's a multifaceted problem requiring a change in attitude and culture as well as legislation, but stronger legal protection is a very welcome first step.

Jane van Zyl, CEO of work-life balance charity Working Families, said:

We hear from women struggling with pregnancy and maternity discrimination every single day on our helpline. But pregnancy and maternity discrimination isn't just bad news for families; it's also bad news for the economy.

Whilst many of the companies we work with already understand the business benefits of family-friendly workplaces, some employers still don't. Proposals to extend protection from redundancy to new mothers and parents returning to work should go a long way toward protecting their jobs – and to reducing the shocking number of women who lose their jobs due to pregnancy and maternity discrimination.

Because more and more parents are sharing care equally, we welcome

plans to ensure equal treatment for parents returning from Shared Parental Leave or adoption – bringing their rights in line with those enjoyed by women on maternity leave.

The consultation will be available on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk), and will run for 10 weeks ending on 5 April 2019.

[Research](#) commissioned in collaboration with the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) in 2016 found that 11% of women reported they were either dismissed; made compulsorily redundant, where others in their workplace were not; or treated so poorly they felt they had to leave their job. 20% of mothers reported other financial loss which included failing to gain a promotion, salary reduction, a lower pay rise or bonus, not receiving non-salary benefits and/or demotion.

The consultation on pregnancy and maternity discrimination will:

- set out the current legal protections for pregnant women and new mothers under the Equality Act 2010 and the Employment Rights Act 1996
- ask how an extension of redundancy protection currently afforded under the Employment Rights Act for those on maternity leave and other types of family related leave and pay might work best, and how long this protection should last
- ask whether a similar protection should be afforded to other groups (such as those returning from other forms of long term childcare leave – principally adoption leave and shared parental leave)
- set out the steps that the government is taking to increase employees awareness of their rights and employers' awareness of their obligations, and invites comments on how they might be improved, to tackle pregnancy and maternity discrimination more effectively
- consider the existing approach to the enforcement of employment and equalities legislation in the context of recommendations from the Women and Equalities Select Committee and the Taylor Review
- discuss the 3-month time limit within which a claim of discrimination can ordinarily be brought to an Employment Tribunal

These measures form part of the government's modern [Industrial Strategy](#), published last year, which sets out how the whole of the UK can build on its strengths, extend them into the future, and capitalise on new opportunities.

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