

Pregnant women and new parents to get enhanced redundancy protections

- Legal protections against redundancy to be extended by six months for new mothers returning to work
- parents returning from adoption and shared parental leave will also be protected
- boost in protections builds on biggest package of reforms in a generation as part of the Good Work Plan

Pregnant women and new mothers could receive up to 2 years of legal protection against redundancy, with new protections today (22 July) being extended for an additional 6 months after their return to work, Business Minister Kelly Tolhurst announced.

The move comes in response to a [government consultation](#) which found that new parents continue to face unfair discrimination. Research estimates that up to 54,000 women a year felt they had to leave their jobs due to pregnancy or maternity discrimination.

Pregnancy and maternity discrimination is illegal, and those on maternity leave have special protection in a redundancy situation. These reforms will for the first-time extend that redundancy protection for 6 months from the date of a mother's return to work as well as covering those taking adoption or shared parental leave. This will help ensure new parents are protected from discrimination in the workplace, regardless of gender and circumstance.

Today's announcement follows a raft of recent measures designed to support working parents, as part of the [Good Work Plan](#). These include proposed [new leave entitlements](#) for parents of sick and premature babies and proposed new measures to ensure large businesses are more transparent on their policies for parental leave and pay and flexible working.

Kelly Tolhurst, Business Minister said:

There is no place for discrimination against new parents in the modern workplace. It is unacceptable that new parents continue to feel they are treated unfairly and the government is determined to put an end to this.

The reforms announced today will better protect new parents, giving them the peace of mind to manage the return to work while also caring for a new child.

The government has also announced that a new taskforce made up of employer and family groups will be established to develop an action plan on what further steps government and other organisations can take to make it easier

for pregnant women and new mothers to stay in work. It will also make recommendations on raising awareness of employer obligations and employee rights.

Research commissioned by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS), found that 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.

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.

[Working Families](#) CEO Jane Van Zyl said:

We hear from women struggling with pregnancy and maternity discrimination every single day on our helpline. These reforms are a step forward in protecting the jobs of new mothers and parents returning to work, sending a strong message to rogue employers that discriminating against new parents is unacceptable.

Ultimately, the more that UK workplaces embrace flexible working and gender equality, the easier it will be for mothers and fathers to return to work and progress in their careers after parental leave.

These measures form part of the government's modern [Industrial Strategy](#), published in 2017, which sets out how the whole of the UK can build on its strengths, extend them into the future, and capitalise on new opportunities.

There are two main pieces of legislation which currently offer protections for pregnant women and new mothers. These are the Equality Act 2010 and the Employment Rights Act 1996 and regulations made under it (the Maternity and Parental Leave etc. Regulations 1999).

The Equality Act sets out a 'protected period' during which women who are pregnant or have recently given birth are explicitly protected from discrimination. During this 'protected period' a woman is protected against discrimination that arises as a result of:

- her pregnancy
- any illness related to her pregnancy, or absence because of that illness
- being on compulsory maternity leave
- seeking to take, taking or having taken ordinary or additional maternity leave

The 'protected period' currently runs from the start of a person's pregnancy

until:

- she returns to work from ordinary or additional maternity leave (if she is entitled to either form of leave), or
- two weeks after the end of her pregnancy, if she is not entitled to maternity leave

Under Regulation 10 of the Maternity and Parental Leave etc. Regulations 1999 if, during an employee's maternity leave a redundancy situation arises and it is not practicable by reason of redundancy for the employer to continue to employ her under her existing contract, the employee is entitled to be offered a suitable alternative vacancy (where one exists).

Following the [consultation](#), the government has now committed to:

- ensure the redundancy protection period applies from the point the employee informs the employer that she is pregnant, whether orally or in writing
- extend the redundancy protection period by/to 6 months once a new mother has returned to work
- extend redundancy protection into a period of return to work for those taking adoption and shared parental leave
- establish a taskforce of employer and family representative groups. The taskforce will make recommendations on what improvements can be made to the information available to employers and families on pregnancy and maternity discrimination. It will also develop an action plan on what steps government and other organisations can take to make it easier for pregnant women and new mothers to stay in work

Those taking adoption leave will receive the same protections as those on maternity leave, while the practical and legal differences between shared parental leave and maternity leave may mean that it will require a different approach. Further guidance on this will be issued in due course.

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.

Employees on maternity leave currently receive additional protection in redundancy situations. Government intends to extend this protection for additional 6 months once a mother returns from maternity leave. If a mother was to take her full entitlement to maternity leave, this could amount to 18 months protection – months more if you add the period of pregnancy.

Government acts to strengthen development aid fund after report

The government has today (Monday 22 July 2019) responded to the [Independent Commission for Aid Impact \(ICAI\)](#) review of the Newton Fund and accepted all 6 of its recommendations.

5 of the recommended measures are already being implemented due to BEIS own ongoing evaluation processes.

The Newton Fund's primary objective is to reduce poverty by generating and putting into use knowledge and technology to address development challenges and advance development for the poorest people and countries.

The ICAI recommended that:

1. BEIS should ensure that the Fund increases its focus on achieving its primary purpose, which is to meet the development needs and priorities of its partner countries.
(Accepted and already implementing).
2. The Newton Fund should ensure it meaningfully considers options for reducing gender inequality and reports against its progress.
(Accepted and already implementing).
3. BEIS should ensure that the funding practices of the Newton Fund comply with both the letter and the spirit of the untying commitment.
(Accepted and already implemented).
4. BEIS should improve the governance and accountability of the Newton Fund and put in place a strategy setting out how it will maximise development impact as its primary purpose.
(Accepted and already implementing).
5. BEIS should improve the Newton Fund's approach to and measurement of value for money.
(Accepted and already implementing).
6. The Newton Fund should improve its approach to monitoring, evaluation and learning at the Fund level.
(Accepted and already implementing).

The government has also published the [BEIS Research and Innovation Official Development Assistance \(ODA\) annual report](#) which provides a summary of both the Newton Fund and Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF), and financial information for 2017 to 2018. The report also covers how these funds support capacity building for a more sustainable future and how the funds contribute to wider UK government objectives.

DIT launches first ever 'InsurTech for Development' conference in Africa

The Department for International Trade (DIT), in partnership with London-based InsurTech business MarketMinds and UK Kenya-based tech accelerator The Baobab Network, have hosted the first ever InsurTech for Development conference in Africa this month.

The conference was hosted in Nairobi, with the theme of 'Sealing the insurance gap – Africa 3.0', exploring the ways that governments and regulators can enable insurance innovation across Africa to increase the use and application of insurance products.

The two-day event provided a platform for tech companies and the insurance sector to collaborate on development opportunities, with a close focus on the health, agriculture and InsurTech sectors. The event explores how future partnerships between tech and insurance companies can deepen the insurance penetration and overcome development barriers across Africa.

Over 250 delegates attended the conference, including representatives from technology firms, insurers, banks, telecommunication companies and investors from the UK and Africa.

Secretary of State for International Trade, Liam Fox said:

The UK's InsurTech sector is one of the most exciting strands of our financial services industry, so I'm delighted my department has been able to play a key role in supporting the first InsurTech for Development conference in Africa.

Increasing the number of citizens able to access insurance products is a key priority, and the UK as a world-leading insurance hub, and global hub for tech in Europe, has a huge mass of expertise to share with firms here to support the development of their market.

The UK is committed to working with African businesses, to ensure the UK is the partner of choice in Africa.

Her Majesty's Trade Commissioner for Africa at the Department for International Trade, Emma Wade-Smith OBE said:

I am delighted that DIT, in collaboration with our strategic partners, have hosted the first-ever InsurTech for Development conference and focused on development issues in Africa. This

reflects the ambition and commitment of the UK Government to catalyse new partnerships between UK and African tech companies, insurance and the broader financial services sector.

Technology and innovation form a key pillar of our prosperity agenda on the African continent, and this InsurTech conference is an excellent lead up to the UK Government's Africa Investment Summit on 20 January 2020 in London. This will bring together businesses, governments and international institutions to showcase the breadth and quality of investment opportunities across Africa.

The conference was jointly supported by DIT, DFID and the FCO, and builds upon recent initiatives between DIT and the UK InsurTech sector. In June, the Minister for Investment Graham Stuart MP, signed a statement of intent on behalf of the department to partner with 'Insurtech UK', a newly formed industry association representing UK InsurTech firms.

The new partnership will see the department work with industry to help to support InsurTech firms establish a presence overseas and attract InsurTech firms to the UK.

The UK is an international hotspot for InsurTech firms, boasting the largest number of InsurTech firms in Europe and the largest overall InsurTech hub.

£2.9 million extra funding to boost action on making homes more resilient to floods

Communities across England are set to be better protected against the impacts of flooding thanks to almost £3 million of government investment, Environment Minister Thérèse Coffey confirmed today (Monday 22 July).

Following a competitive evaluation process, three projects across Yorkshire, Devon and Cornwall and central England have been chosen to receive up to £700,000 each to boost research into, and uptake of, property-level measures which can better protect homes and businesses from flooding.

The funding will go towards new research initiatives, demonstration centres and advice portals which will help people to learn about the benefits of installing measures in their homes which can significantly reduce the potential impacts of flooding. The remaining money will be used to fund further research, support project delivery and evaluation as well as

initiatives to share the findings and lessons learned from the three projects across the rest of the country.

Property-level flood resilience can include a range of measures to reduce the damage that flooding can cause to buildings. This can include installing flood doors, hard floors and ensuring that electrics are raised off ground level around the home. The measures can significantly reduce the amount of time people are out of their home following a flood.

Environment Minister Coffey said:

I am delighted to award funding to the pathfinder flood resilience projects in the Ox-Cam arc, Yorkshire and the South West.

I expect the councils and organisations involved will increase the take up of property resilience measures by home owners and businesses, making their properties safer, and quicker to return to if flooding does happen.

The Oxford-Cambridge Pathfinder, led by Northamptonshire County Council, will be centred on the delivery of one million high-quality homes across a wide area, including neighbouring counties, by 2050. Ten communities will be identified to engage with the project, ensuring resources to promote and install property flood resilience are prioritised in the areas most vulnerable to the impacts of flooding.

The Yorkshire Future Flood Resilience Pathfinder project, delivered by City of York Council, will work with communities, planning and construction professionals, the construction industry and the insurance sector. This initiative will encourage greater uptake of property flood resilience measures across the Yorkshire Regional Flood and Coastal Committee area. It will establish a community hub and learning lab, working with existing projects and initiatives in the area, and provide staff to deliver a large scale training programme.

The South West Partnership project, led by Cornwall County Council, will focus on local innovation to enhance the future take-up of property flood resilience measures. As well as establishing a demonstration hub and web portal it will seek to simplify and streamline processes, increasing the flood resilience of communities across Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly.

The projects will be delivered with support from the Environment Agency, the non-departmental body responsible for managing flood risk in England, and representatives of the insurance and construction industries. The Environment Agency will also monitor the projects to highlight successes and identify lessons that can be used to foster greater use of property flood resilience measures elsewhere across the country.

Emma Howard Boyd, Chair of the Environment Agency, said:

This new funding is a welcome step forwards for our efforts to boost the uptake of property-level resilience measures in homes and businesses across the country. The Environment Agency will work closely with the local authorities and organisations taking forward the Pathfinder projects to support their work and share lessons learnt.

Our experience shows that making these small changes in the home can make a huge difference to people's lives when flooding takes place.

Building greater resilience into our homes, businesses and infrastructure forms one of the core themes of the Environment Agency's [Draft Flood and Coastal Risk Management Strategy](#), looking at how we can prepare for increased climate risk over the next 100 years.

The Government is currently investing a record £2.6 billion to better protect 300,000 homes and thousands of business from flooding and coastal erosion between 2015-2021.

[Rail Minister visits zero-emission technology driving the future of railways](#)

- Minister Andrew Jones visits Steamology, which received £350,000 as part of government's £3.5 million 'First of a Kind' competition
- government funding is being used to develop cutting-edge technology which will decarbonise the railways, including hydrogen-powered trains with zero emissions
- visit coincides with report by the Rail Industry Decarbonisation Taskforce, setting out strategy for removing diesel-only trains from the network by 2040

Rail Minister Andrew Jones reiterated the Department for Transport's commitment to cleaner and greener rail journeys today (22 July 2019), as he visited a pioneering government-backed project which will develop a modern, zero-emission steam-powered system onboard a train.

Steamology, based in New Forest, Hampshire, received £350,000 earlier this year as part of the government's £3.5 million 'First of a Kind' competition. The firm is using the investment to develop its Water to Water (W2W) system – a zero-emission compact steam generator that runs on oxygen and hydrogen to drive a turbine, which will charge battery packs onboard trains. They believe

that the W2W system could be used as an environmentally friendly way to power trains in the future.

The First of a Kind competition has been set up to support world-leading innovation projects that can improve the railways, deliver low-carbon train journeys across the UK rail network and ensure Britain is at the heart of a low-carbon economy.

Other government-funded projects include drones capable of inspecting railway infrastructure for damage, a sound-bending wall to cut noise pollution and using artificial intelligence to predict where lineside vegetation could cause delays on the tracks.

Rail Minister Andrew Jones said:

We are committed to decarbonising our rail network, ensuring our trains are cleaner and greener for passengers. As a part of this we are funding innovation grants to help cutting edge businesses develop high tech solutions.

Steamology is a fantastic example of this, and it has been great to see how our funding has made a difference in helping them develop their ideas.

We are ambitious for our rail network and for the role it can play in improving our environment for the country.

Matt Candy, Steamology said:

We are delighted to have received a share of £3.5 million to support decarbonising our railway system.

Steamology is an innovative and transformative project which uses steam from hydrogen to power our trains, making the network more efficient and cleaner.

Simon Edmonds, Chief Business Officer at Innovate UK said:

Under the First of a Kind competition, we have backed pioneering projects such as Steamology's hydrogen technology which can deliver real benefits to passenger and freight operators and for the environment. The programme can also help innovative companies succeed, both at home and in export markets.

The UK's rail network is a vital economic asset to the nation, providing an environmentally sustainable system for the movement of both passengers and freight. By supporting new projects we can do more to boost the reliability of the network and to make it even greener.

Launched in 2017, the first round of the First of a Kind competition saw ten projects win a share of £3.5 million to develop ideas to improve passenger experience and demonstrate tomorrow's trains.

The second round focused on schemes aimed at cutting the carbon footprint on the UK's railways, and enhancing stations for passengers. These also saw another ten projects offered a share of £3.5 million.

Last month the third round of the competition saw 24 winners win a share of £7.8 million to strengthen the resilience of railway infrastructure and operations. Winners included 4Silence's plan to develop a noise-reducing wall that works by diffracting sound waves from passing trains upwards and Amey VTOL's development of a drone system that could carry out track inspections from the skies avoiding the need for people to set foot on railway infrastructure.

The visit coincides with the department welcoming the [work of the Rail Industry Decarbonisation Taskforce, who today published their report into how the industry can decarbonise the railways by 2040.](#)