



# Fertility and menopause

03 | Connected Knowledge | 2021

Ibec resources and research on supporting women in the workplace who are going through fertility treatment or menopause.

# Overview

**This booklet contains guidance, further resources and recent research findings on supporting women in the workplace who are going through fertility treatment or menopause.**

Further supporting information can be found in the Employer hub on [www.ibec.ie](http://www.ibec.ie).

## Disclaimer

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# Fertility

# Supporting employees who are undergoing fertility treatment

The journey to parenthood can be more challenging for some. The HSE estimates that around 1 in 6 heterosexual couples in Ireland may experience infertility. A staff member who is experiencing difficulties in becoming a parent may undertake fertility treatment, which will impact on her, as well as her partner.

There are a multitude of individual and workplace impacts of fertility treatment. Both partners in the relationship will be affected and they both may be concerned about informing their employer. Emotional, social and psychological distress can be felt and there is also a financial burden to carry.

Like other medical conditions, infertility drains employees emotionally, physically, and mentally. For the employee undergoing fertility treatment, there may be medication, surgery and/or assisted conception. The employee may experience physical side effects from medication, and she may need time to recover from procedures.

Having fertility treatment is time consuming and time sensitive with multiple appointments often at distant clinics. There is a need for flexibility because unavoidable last-minute adjustments to appointments are often required. Women and men having fertility treatment therefore experience considerable conflict between the demands of work and the time and emotional demands of treatment.

## Impact in the workplace

The type and duration of treatment will vary from couple to couple and will generally involve absence for the female. Women typically require around six to eight flexible days, this can include appointments for a variety of tests, possibly egg collection and transfer, multiple ultrasound scans and consultations and some of these treatments may render her unfit for work (e.g. egg retrieval and implantation).

Men need to attend for tests too and partners may also wish to attend medical appointments with the mother, particularly for those more invasive procedures. Sensitivity and understanding around the delicacy of this situation is needed from employers. It is advisable that employers consider what facilitations they can offer to couples going through this process. This may include paid time off for medical appointments, unpaid or paid leave for the mother and ensuring that any sick pay entitlements are available to the mother when certified absence occurs.

## Proactive approach

While leave for fertility treatments is not a legal entitlement, it is understandably a critical and emotive part of an employee's life and employers should be as supportive as possible. Careful consideration needs to be given to how best to handle the confidentiality of the situation alongside the running of the business. As the medical appointments and absences will be difficult to predict far in advance, employers should be as accommodating as possible and explore all available options to facilitate the employee during this time. Options include flexible working hours, time off or allowing the employee to adjust start or finish times to accommodate appointments. Remote working or an adjusted workload can also be put in place temporarily (e.g., flexibility to dial in remotely to meetings). Recent Ibec research (outlined later in this document) found that 55% of respondent organisations offered flexible working to accommodate appointments/treatments.

## Culture

It is helpful to have a workplace culture where sharing on this topic is encouraged and welcomed. Employees affected by these experiences can have concerns about sharing such

sensitive information with their employer and may have concerns around others' reactions and the implications for their career. The Ibec research found that there is a low instance of activities to increase employee awareness (12% of respondents) or manager awareness (7% of respondents) at present. However, in those organisations that are likely to introduce further supports, increasing the awareness of both these groups are the top planned activities.

Having a policy in place that covers fertility treatment in the workplace will demonstrate the organisation's commitment to supporting employees. Organisations may introduce a written policy that outlines the specific workplace supports that are available. A low proportion of respondents to the Ibec survey currently have a policy in place (6%), however where there are plans to introduce fertility related supports, a policy is planned in 60% of organisations, alongside other supports.

### Further resources

The Ibec parenting and maternity toolkit outlines employer obligations and best practice in the areas of parenting and maternity. Supporting employees who face challenges in these areas is important to building loyalty and reducing unnecessary staff turnover. This toolkit is available on the Ibec website [here](#) and includes a sample policy on fertility treatment.

An Ibec webinar addressing the legalities and guidance for supporting employees through fertility treatment, surrogacy and miscarriage is available [here](#).

## Survey findings

This survey was undertaken across HR contacts in Ibec members companies in October 2021. There were 295 respondents.

### Key findings

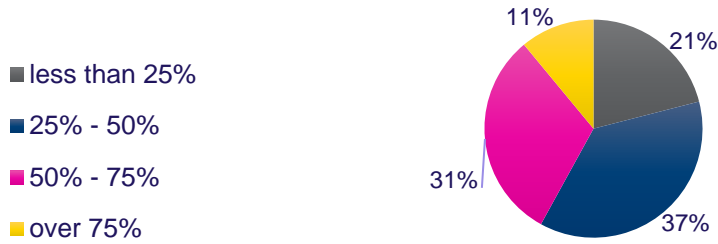
- 72% of respondents stated that fertility related supports were relevant to their organisation.
- Of the supports provided to employees undergoing fertility treatment, access to support through the company EAP service was the most popular (72%), with scheduling annual leave around appointments (57%) and flexible working options to accommodate appointments/treatment (55%) also very common.
- 16% of respondents said that it was very likely that they would introduce fertility specific supports in the next 1 – 2 years, with 48% saying that it was 'somewhat likely'.
- Of these companies, the most popular supports planning for the future were education and training for management/HR (76 %), communications/events to increase employee awareness (71 %) and a specific company policy on fertility supports (60%).

### Respondent profile

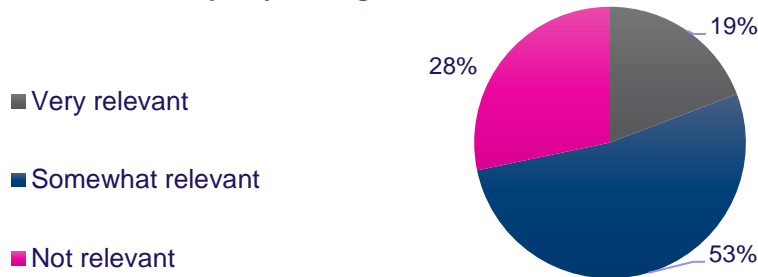
#### Company size



### Proportion of the workforce that are female



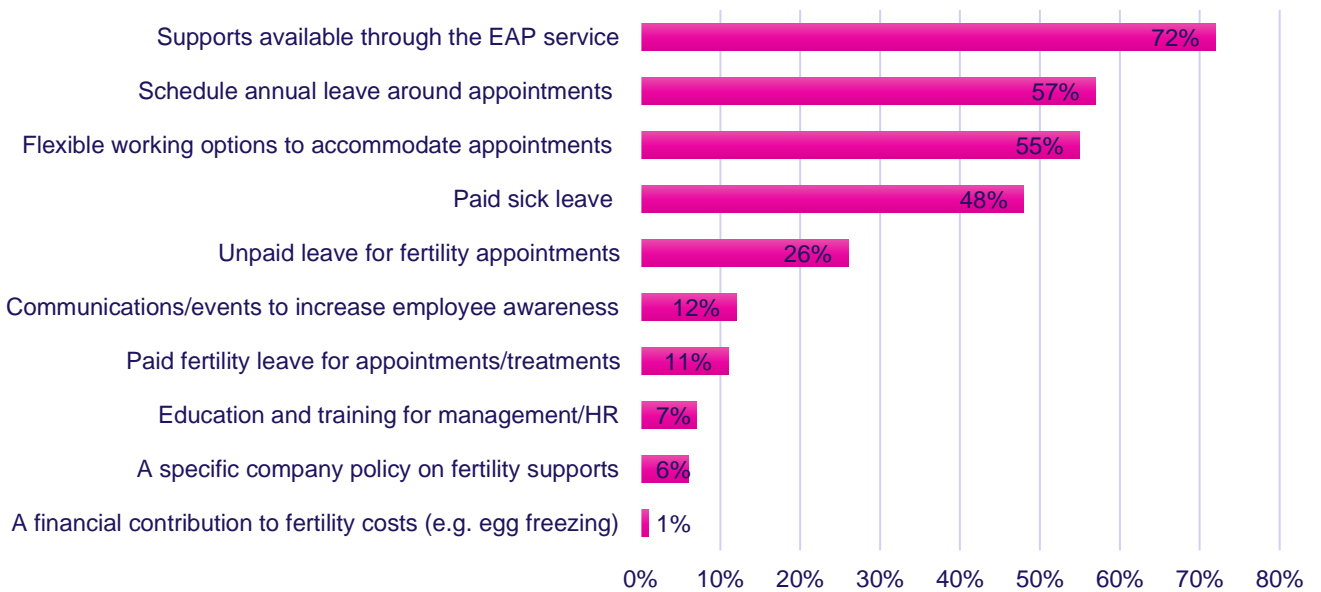
### Relevance of fertility to your organisation



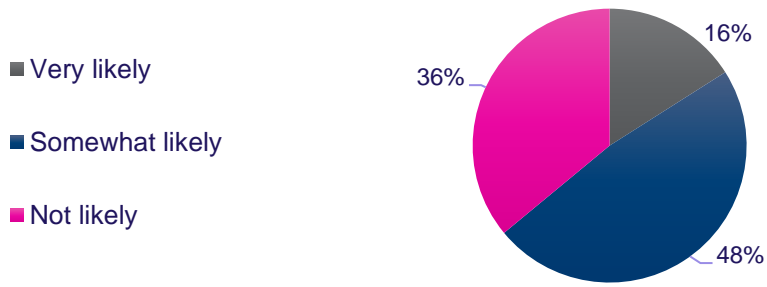
### Fertility related supports

Respondents to this survey were asked about the fertility related supports they currently have in place and what plans they have for the future.

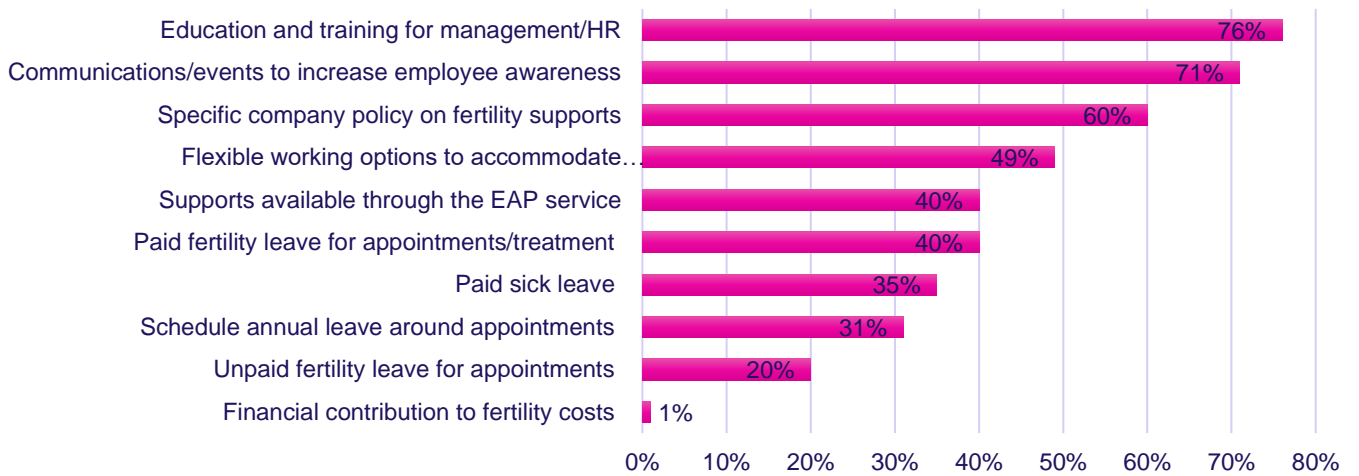
#### Specific fertility supports provided in the workplace currently



### Likelihood of introducing fertility related supports in the next 1-2 years



### Where fertility supports are very likely to be introduced in the next 1 - 2 years, the following are planned





# Menopause

# Supporting employees who are affected by menopause symptoms in the workplace

The workplace is enriched by the vast life experiences shared between colleagues on a daily basis. Employees need to be able to bring their whole self to work and not have to hide major aspects of their life experience due to the challenges they face going through the menopause. Depending on the demographics of a workplace, a considerable percentage of employees could be experiencing menopausal symptoms.

## Context

There is a natural reduction in hormone production as a woman gets older. The falling level of hormones, particularly oestrogen, is thought to cause the menopausal symptoms that many women experience. The average age for the onset of menopause is between 50 and 51 years old but there is a wide variation with an early menopause occurring in some women under forty-five years old and some women continuing to have periods up to age 56 or 57. In some rarer instances women as young as thirty or less can become menopausal.

Symptoms of menopause can include:

- Hot flushes
- Night sweats
- Difficulty sleeping
- Problems with memory and concentration
- Headaches
- Joint Stiffness
- Aches and pains
- Mood changes, including low mood and anxiety

Women will experience varying degrees of symptoms. For some employees, this will be a private matter. For others, the symptoms may be such that sharing their experience and having the understanding of their manager and or colleagues would be helpful. There are a number of arrangements employers can consider in order to support their employees during this time.

## Open Communication

To support staff, it is helpful to have open communication channels within the organisation that encourage employees to engage and discuss the supports that could be put in place to assist them. Creating a culture of open respectful communications around this issue will give female employees the confidence to share their experience. Organisations can consider having a female senior member of management as the leading voice promoting discussion and encouraging employees to express how they are feeling when they are struggling with symptoms.

An Ibec member survey completed in October 2021 (detailed later in this document) found that 72% of respondents were very likely to introduce specific supports to increase awareness and communications around menopause in the next one to two years compared to 20% who currently have these supports in place.

## Training

Many managers may not be aware of the symptoms of menopause and may find it difficult to handle sensitive discussions on this topic. Training and awareness of the impact that menopause can have on their employees is crucial for managers, to enable them to support and make adjustments, where necessary, for those affected. Increased awareness and understanding can be achieved through including menopause as a topic in existing manager training or wellbeing sessions. Managers should have an understanding that experiences will differ for each individual going through the menopause transition. They should be mindful that some staff may value being able to talk openly to them, as this may help employees to reduce the impact of their symptoms.

Our survey revealed 13% of respondents had education and training for management and HR on menopause already in place, of the 25% who said they were very likely to introduce specific supports, 75% of those stated they intend to introduce this measure in the next one to two years.

## Support measures

For those employees seeking support during menopause, they should be fully aware of the different approaches they can make to seek assistance. Some may not be comfortable approaching their direct manager, so a point of contact person who is fully trained may be more appropriate in some cases. The Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) provider may offer support and advice for employees to access. Companies may wish to consider including their support initiatives for employees going through menopause in their overall wellbeing programmes. A female network support group or peer to peer support may be an option to consider. The opportunity to have book, walking or activity clubs to attend, may provide a platform for those affected to share their experiences.

The availability of supports through the company (EAP) was the most common support reported in our survey with 69% of respondents already having this in place. Of those who are very likely to introduce specific menopause supports in the next one to two years, the top activity planned (75%) is education and training for managers/HR.

## Working environment

Organisations can consider the workspace with regard to ventilation, access to fresh air or desk fans and the availability of drinking water. Consideration can also be given to women's rest rooms, where it can be beneficial if there is a larger private area, that offers either shower facilities or a toilet cubicle with a wash hand basin and toiletries. If uniforms are required to be worn, consideration might be given to the type of materials to be used in the design stages (e.g. cotton and breathable textiles vs synthetic/nylons etc). Offering the opportunity to employees to have additional uniforms available to them if required can be helpful. Organisations can also allow the uniform to be modified where possible, by delayering, for example if a jacket is part of the uniform, the option to remove the jacket if required.

If an employee is experiencing severe symptoms, absence from work may occur and medical advice may be needed to identify if reasonable accommodation within the workplace should be considered. The benefit of having an organisation committed to actively supporting employees impacted by menopause is that it can create a more inclusive workplace. As menopause impacts female employees for a significant period of their working life, a culture that encourages and supports open discussion and awareness of this subject is likely to motivate employees to engage with colleagues on their symptoms and for them to feel confident to ask for support when needed in performing their role.

One of the questions asked in our survey was what support mechanisms were currently in place, the results showed that 15% of respondents currently have supports for adjusting the physical working environment.

## Further resources

In June 2021, Dr Rachel Keelan, Occupation Health Physician with Medwise, participated in a webinar hosted by Ibec entitled 'Menopause Supporting Women in the Workplace'. The broadcast covered many of the common symptoms that women suffer during this period. Dr Keelan offered tips and advice to those women impacted, along with practical suggestions on how employers can support their employees during the menopause. The webinar link is available to members [here](#).

Further reading and resources are available as follows;

- [www.wellnesswarrior.ie](http://www.wellnesswarrior.ie)
- [www.themenopausehub.ie/](http://www.themenopausehub.ie/)

## Survey findings

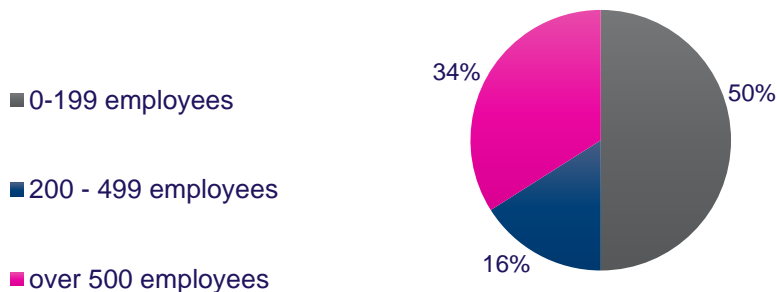
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### Key findings

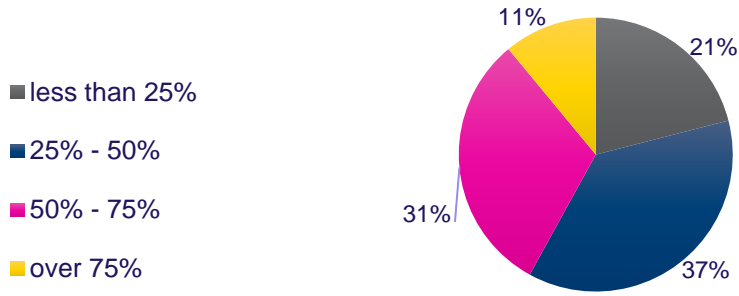
- 79% of respondents to this survey stated that menopause is relevant to their organisation.
- Of the supports provided to menopausal women in the workplace, the availability of supports through the company EAP service was the most common (69%), with flexibilities such as ability to schedule annual leave around appointments (47%) and flexible working where needed (40%) also very common.
- 26% of respondents said that it was 'very likely' that they would introduce menopause specific supports in the next 1 – 2 years, with 41% stating that it was somewhat likely.
- The most popular supports planned for the future were education and training for management/HR (75%), communications/events to increase employee awareness (72%), a specific company policy on menopause (65%) and menopause champions/ambassadors or similar (47%).

### Respondent profile

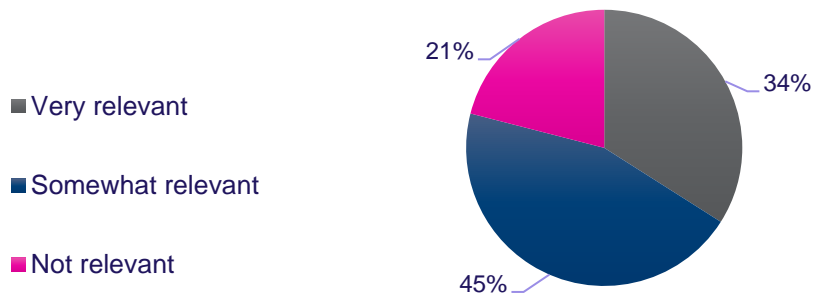
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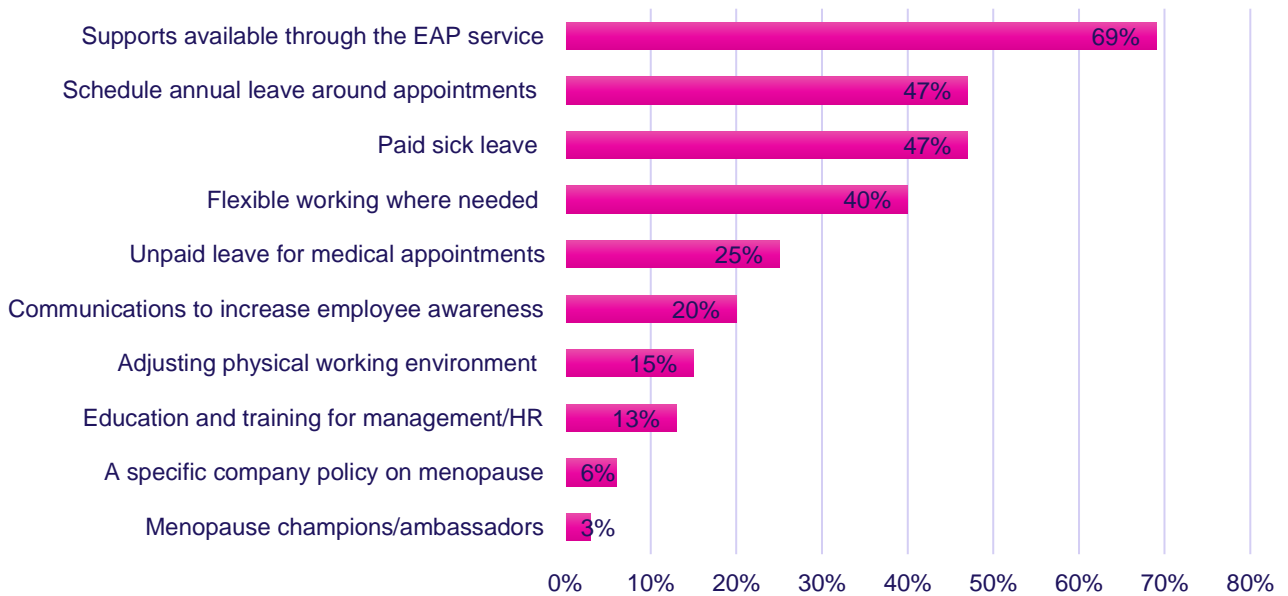
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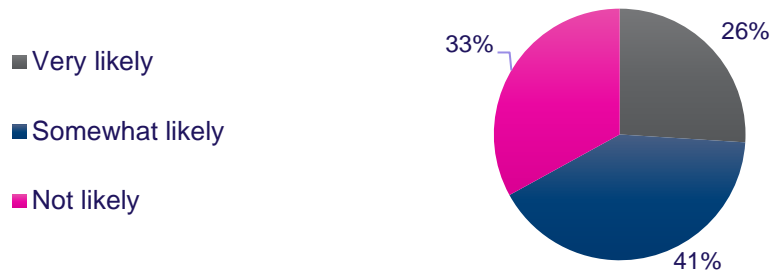
### Relevance of menopause to your organisation



### Supports currently available to menopausal women in workplace



### Likelihood of introducing menopause related supports in the next 1-2 years



### Where introducing menopausal supports in the workplace is very likely in the next 1 - 2 years, the following are planned



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The KeepWell Mark™ from Ibec, validates and recognises organisations that put the wellbeing of employees at the forefront of company policy. It focuses on the key areas of workplace wellbeing ranging from leadership, mental health and absence management to physical activity and healthy eating.

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- Access to sample corporate wellbeing policies and guidelines

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See the other relevant titles

01 | Flexible and remote working toolkit

02 | Parenting and maternity toolkit



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**Advocacy and Representation:** supporting Ibec members navigate all stages of the employment lifecycle, workplace disputes and representation at the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) and Labour Court.

**Knowledge Centre:** providing expert advice and support on employment legislation and practice, workplace disputes and investigations.

**Legal:** advising on employment law, the team of legal professionals provide specialist advice and knowledge while also monitoring trends and influencing the development of legislation impacting employers nationally and internationally.

[Ibec.ie/employer-hub](https://ibec.ie/employer-hub)  
[knowledgecentre@ibec.ie](mailto:knowledgecentre@ibec.ie)

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