



annual
review
2010-11


maternity action



Maternity Action grew rapidly in 2010-11, providing a wider range of services and more active campaigning to improve the lives of pregnant women, new mothers and their families.

Employment rights and benefits:

Challenging pregnancy discrimination

Pregnant women and new mothers are facing a more difficult time at work during the economic downturn. Unscrupulous employers are taking advantage of the recession to get rid of pregnant women and new mothers – which is illegal pregnancy discrimination. Many other women are struggling to claim basic maternity rights, such as health and safety protection.

Maternity Action campaigns to reduce pregnancy discrimination. We distributed 10 000 'Know your rights' posters to maternity services, Children's Centres and workplaces. We raised awareness of the problem of pregnancy discrimination in the media and with Government. We convene the Alliance Against Pregnancy Discrimination in the Workplace which is a network of voluntary organisations, law firms and unions working on this issue.

Improving European law

In 2010, the European Parliament debated improvements to the Pregnant Workers Directive. This is a fundamental source of UK law on maternity at work. We organized a stakeholder roundtable of voluntary organisations working on maternity issues to meet with the Department of Business Innovation and Skills and communicate the importance of these changes.

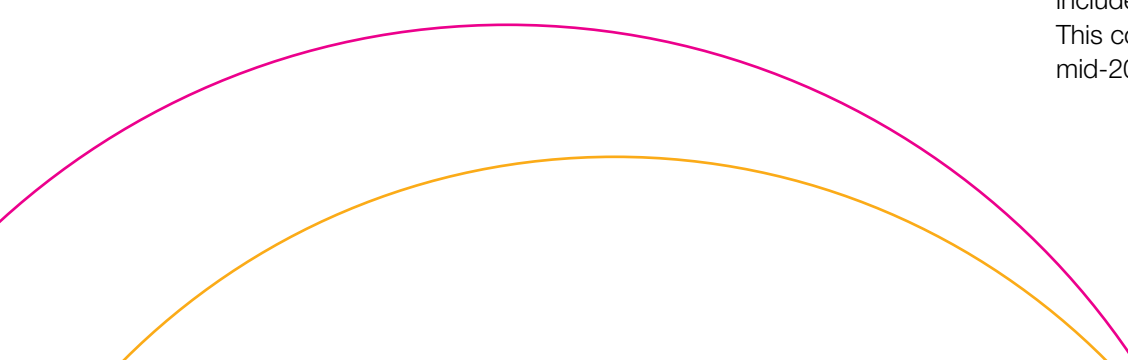
We actively campaigned for UK MEPs to support improved maternity pay, protection for breastfeeding mothers, protection against unfair dismissal, improved health and safety and more flexible leave arrangements. The improvements were passed by the Parliament, some with a narrow majority. Disappointingly, these were blocked by the UK Government and others in the Council of Ministers.

Know your rights

Our online information has become a primary source of guidance about maternity and parental rights at work, in the benefits system and in the NHS. All our information sheets are available free of charge and can be copied and distributed by community workers, health professionals, unions and others. In January 2011, 13 000 people downloaded our information sheets.

We provide introductory information on employment rights as well as detailed material on the specific questions which arise for women and their partners in the workplace. We explain the different benefits, tax credits and other sources of financial support which are available to new parents. We also provide information for migrants, whose entitlements to financial support and services vary according to their immigration status.

We obtained funding to expand our services to include telephone advice. This commenced in mid-2011.





Supporting vulnerable women:

Improving maternity care

Refugee and asylum seeking women make up 12% of all maternal deaths, yet few midwives have received any training in this area. We researched the barriers to improving care for asylum seeking women and developed a two day training course for midwives. The course will be rolled out across the UK from 2011.

Campaigning for asylum seekers

Maternity Action campaigned for improvements in asylum support policies to assist pregnant women and new mothers. Working with the Women's Asylum Charter, we gained an extension of the timeframes for applying for maternity grants, giving more women access to financial support.

We remain concerned at the situation of refused asylum seeking women who may be left destitute until late in their pregnancy. We are working in partnership with the

Asylum Support Appeals Project, Royal College of Midwives and Asylum Aid to obtain support earlier in pregnancy.

Charging for maternity care

Some vulnerable migrant women are asked to pay for NHS maternity care. For women on low incomes or destitute, a bill in excess of £3000 can deter them from accessing desperately needed maternity care.

We campaigned unsuccessfully to exempt maternity care from charging but did achieve improvements in the new Department of Health regulations and guidance. The guidance now states that pregnant women should be informed that they are entitled to maternity care even if they can't pay. We also fed into National Institute of Clinical Excellence (NICE) guidance which now recommends that women receive information on their entitlements and midwives be trained about the rules on charging for care.

Women's health

Maternity Action is one of seven members of the Women's Health and Equality Consortium (WHEC), which is a Department of Health Strategic Partner. Through the WHEC, we feed into policy development within the Department of Health and other agencies, and improve capacity within women's organisations working in health and social care.

Financial summary

In 2010-11, Maternity Action received £131 707 in income and incurred expenditure of £100 333. We gratefully acknowledge support from the Big Lottery Fund, Comic Relief, Equality and Human Rights Commission and the Trust for London.



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