

Spotlight

# Building menopause-friendly workplaces across the private sector

# About this document

**The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)-led Coalition for Reproductive Justice in Business** helps forward-thinking companies champion sexual and reproductive health at work. From menstrual health to gender-based violence prevention, the Coalition's aim is to set a new standard and close the equity gap for the millions of women powering workplaces and supply chains across the world.

This case study explores how companies can take action on women's health in the workplace. Centred on menopause, it offers practical insights, key lessons and examples from Champions of the Coalition for Reproductive Justice in Business, designed to inspire other businesses to champion women's rights at work.



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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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This case study was developed under the auspices of the UNFPA Private Sector and Civil Society Branch in its role as the Secretariat for the Coalition for Reproductive Justice in Business

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# Foreword

It is time to talk about menopause. For too long, this natural and universal life stage – experienced by half the world's population – has been ignored, leaving millions of women experiencing menopause to navigate its challenges alone. **Menopause is not only a health issue; it is an equality and justice issue.** By opening this conversation, we can transform stigma into support and silence into solutions.

**Every year, 47 million women enter menopause,** many at the peak of their professional lives. When societies, including workplaces, fail to recognize and respond, the cost is immense: lost talent, reduced productivity and stalled progress on gender equality.

This case study – presented by Essity and Bayer in partnership with UNFPA – shows what leadership in the private sector looks like. By embedding reproductive health and rights into workplace policies, we can demonstrate that supporting women through menopause is not just the right thing to do, but also a smart choice. Experience shows that inclusive actions improve well-being, increase retention and drive growth. This is where the private sector can lead by example, and inspire policymakers to take action as well.

Through the **Coalition for Reproductive Justice in Business**, UNFPA is uniting a growing movement of companies determined to set a new global standard: workplaces where reproductive health and rights are respected, protected and celebrated. Together, we can ensure that menopause is no longer viewed as an obstacle, but as a stage of life where women are fully supported in the workplace so they can continue to thrive and lead.

The message is simple: **when women thrive, businesses thrive and societies prosper.** Let us work together to end the stigma, champion equality and build workplaces that support women at every stage of life.

**Ian McFarlane**

*Director, External Relations  
United Nations Population Fund*



# 1 It's time to talk about menopause

Menopause marks the end of a woman's menstrual cycles and fertility, typically occurring between the ages of 45 and 55. Starting with the perimenopausal period in the early to mid 40s, the menopause transition is typically associated with a constellation of symptoms (including hot flashes, "brain fog" and anxiety) and can last up to 10 years. Menopause itself is said to occur 12 months after the last menstrual period.

## Why menopause matters in the workplace

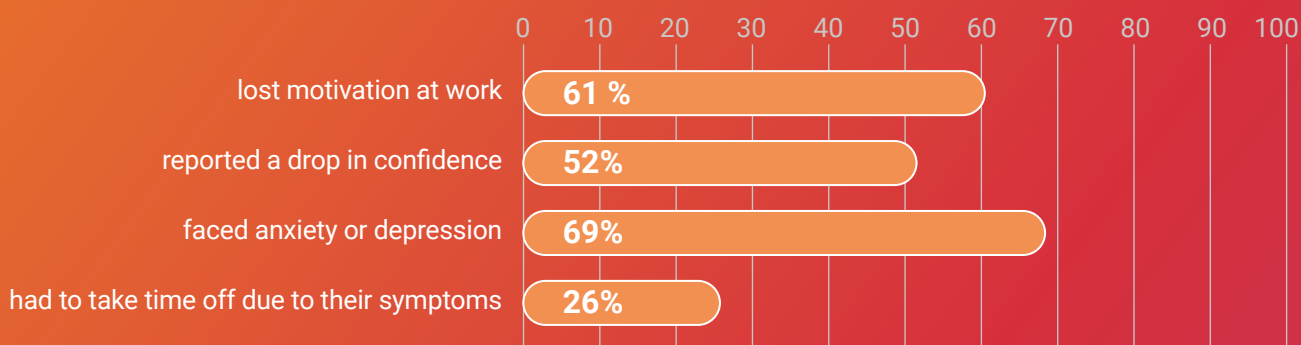
Today, the total number of women in menopause (perimenopause through post-menopause) exceeds one billion globally (FP Analytics and Bayer, 2025). For many, the transition begins just as they are reaching the peak of their careers, with women of menopausal age now one of the fastest-growing segments of the global workforce (Tomlinson, 2023).

**In this moment, 1 in 5 working women is navigating menopause (Our World in Data, 2025).**

Despite this, their needs are often ignored. Research shows that in some countries, as many as 8 in 10 women said their companies do not offer menopause-specific support – leaving millions to manage their symptoms alone and in silence (Fawcett Society, 2022).

**Menopause isn't just a women's issue. It's a business and societal one too.**

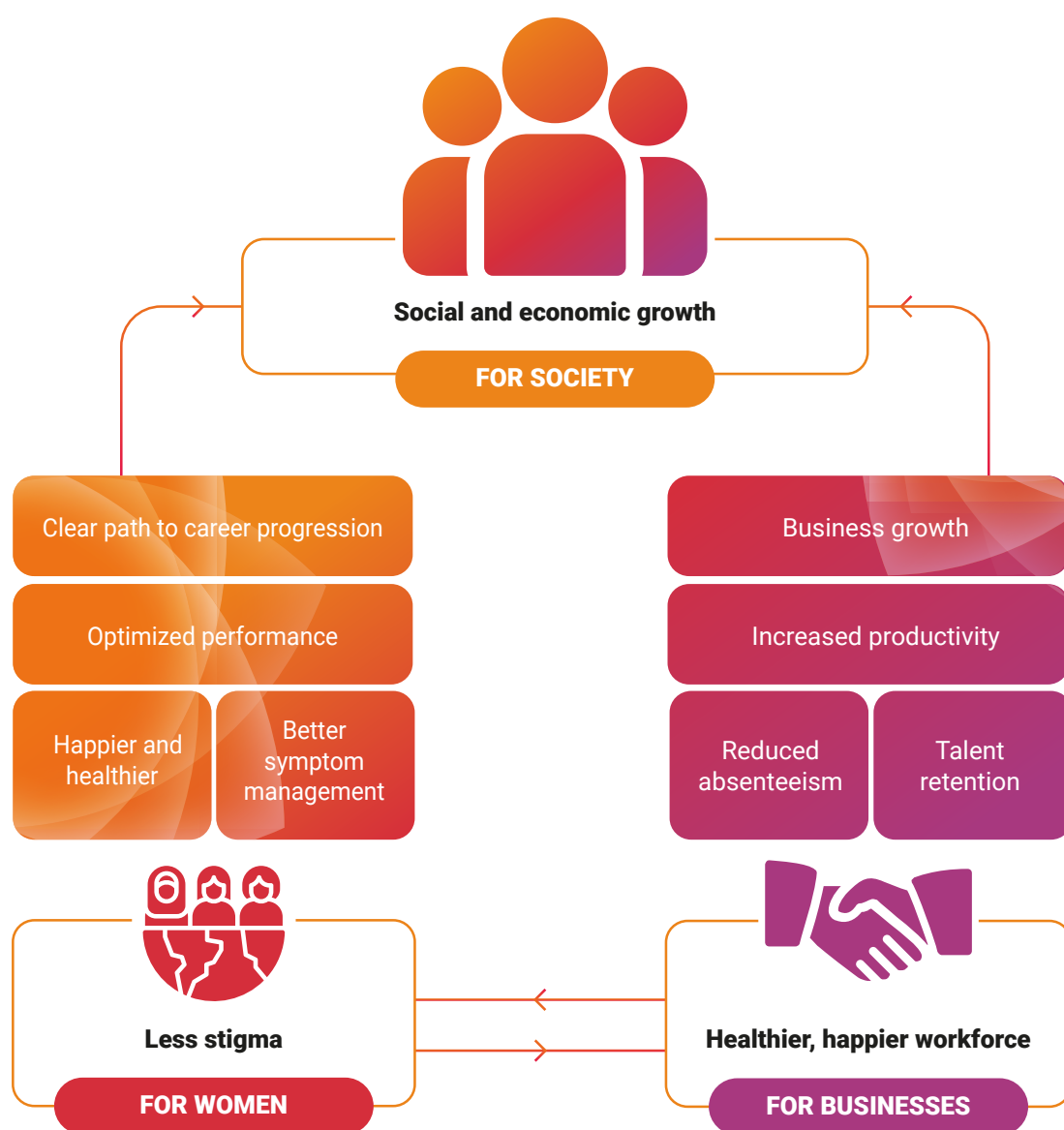
Women's experience of menopause symptoms at work can affect their confidence, mental health, work ability and productivity (Geukes et al., 2021; Simply Health, 2023; Faubion et al., 2023). While global data are limited, a study of over 4,000 women going through menopause in the UK (Fawcett Society, 2022) found that:



A clear barrier to career progression, 1 in 10 women reported leaving their jobs as a result of their symptoms, 14 per cent reduced their hours and 8 per cent decided not to apply for a promotion (Fawcett Society, 2022).

The impact of menopause at work does not just affect a woman's well-being, career and earning potential. Research suggests that global productivity losses linked to menopause now exceed an estimated \$150 billion each year (Bloomberg, 2021).

# A triple win: The benefits of investing in menopause in the workplace (FP Analytics and Bayer, 2025)



**If companies want to retain experienced, talented women, they must do better to acknowledge and support this life stage.**

## 2 Start the journey

Building workplaces that support women and individuals going through menopause starts with creating a positive work environment that makes sure they feel seen, heard and supported. Companies can work towards building inclusive workplaces responsive to the needs of employees in menopause by focusing on three key areas (Patterson, 2020; Hastwell, 2023):



**Inclusive policies**  
to provide clear guidance  
and protect against  
discrimination

- Having a menopause policy
- Providing menopause paid leave
- Evaluating hiring processes and policies



**Raising awareness**  
to break stigma  
and normalize open  
conversations

- Sharing educational materials
- Training for senior leaders and line managers
- Hosting workplace events or awareness days



**Improving access**  
to practical adjustments,  
resources, and health and  
support services

- Appointing a menopause specialist
- Offering menopause health check-ups
- Adapting the workplace

## Meet two companies leading the charge

Leading companies, including Bayer and Essity, are part of a growing movement of businesses making reproductive health a workplace priority. As Champions of the UNFPA-led Coalition for Reproductive Justice in Business, Bayer and Essity are taking action on key women's health issues – including menopause – and have committed to measuring progress using the UNFPA-developed sexual and reproductive health and rights metrics as a reference (UNFPA, 2024a).

By integrating these metrics into their environmental, social and governance (ESG) commitments and promoting accountability across workplaces and supply chains, they are leading corporate efforts to advance women's health and equity.



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**Bayer is a German multinational pharmaceutical and biotechnology company with a long-standing focus on women's health.**

Through its work, the company gained deeper insight into how menopause impacts a woman's personal and professional life. It is this insight that inspired Bayer to step up their commitment to women experiencing menopause in their own place of work.



**Essity is a globally leading hygiene and health company working to improve well-being through sustainable products, services and solutions, including in menstrual health and period care.**

To align with their stated values, Essity recognized the importance of ensuring workplace support for period care and the menstrual health needs of their 36,000 employees – 34 per cent of whom are women. They do this by embedding well-being and inclusion practices throughout their operations, and as part of their broader commitment to driving systemic change in women's health and menstrual health.

“

At Bayer, we are proud to be a leader in women's health, advancing initiatives that address critical issues, including on menopause, to ensure women can thrive throughout every stage of their careers.”

**Heike Prinz**

*Chief Talent Officer and  
Labour Director at Bayer*

“Our company purpose is to break barriers to well-being, both in the marketplace and across all our workplaces.”

**Sahil Tesfu**

*Chief Strategy and Sustainability  
Officer at Essity*



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The following section details examples of headline interventions introduced by each company, and key lessons that can be used to guide and support best practices.



## 3 Inclusive policies

**Clear organizational policies demonstrate that the menopausal transition is recognized and supported in the workplace.** Whether implemented as stand-alone efforts or as part of a broader framework, the aim is to reduce stigma and raise awareness by making supportive practices – such as flexible work, paid leave and guidance on reasonable adjustments – a standard part of working life.

In line with this, both Bayer and Essity moved to integrate menopause into broader efforts to support employee well-being and build an inclusive workplace culture. Their approaches were founded in insights-driven action, with initiatives grounded in the needs identified through direct engagement with employees and women globally.

For Bayer, an internal survey of 1,500 staff members across 58 countries was conducted to understand staff awareness, lived experiences and support needs around menopause at work. Meanwhile, Essity complemented its efforts with one of the world's **largest international menopause studies**, gathering insights from 16,000 women in 11 countries to elevate women's voices and inform more responsive solutions (Essity, 2022–2023). **Both surveys reached the same conclusion: menopause remains a taboo topic, with limited support despite its significant impact on women's personal and professional lives.**

### OUTCOMES

- **EQUITABLE TREATMENT**
- **WOMEN FEEL SUPPORTED**
- **RETENTION AND ADVANCEMENT**



“From pre-menstrual symptoms to maternity and menopause, our Equal Opportunity policy aims to create an equitable workplace where women feel included and supported.”

**Patricia Zambrano**  
HR Director for Latin America, Essity

## 4 Raising awareness

**Breaking the silence around menopause is key to creating an inclusive and supportive workplace culture.** Companies can start by offering awareness training, encouraging open conversations and building the understanding needed to transform company culture.

### **BAYER:** Creating space for conversation

Bayer's **Menopause Cafes** are an employee-led initiative that create safe, open spaces for discussions on menopause and menstrual topics to thrive. Taken up by offices in the United States, Europe, Latin America and beyond, events are open to female and male employees at every level. Sessions vary in style and size, with some taking place as informal meetings in a company coffee shop, while others use meeting rooms to host group sessions of up to 100 people.





## Building shared understanding

The “MenoVest” is part of a range of services provided by Bayer to help engage employees on the topic of menopause. A wearable vest that simulates the heat of a menopause-driven hot flush, it proved to be a popular part of the company’s activities for Menopause Awareness Day. During the event, male employees – including senior leaders – volunteered to wear the vest and experience what it’s like to manage menopause symptoms at work. This activity was designed to evoke understanding through shared experience, help employees develop empathy for their colleagues, and ultimately build male allyship. The active and intentional engagement of men and boys in achieving gender equality is critical in the effort to build inclusive workplaces, as being an ally is not just a concept, but a practice of concrete actions. This includes challenging sexism, amplifying women’s voices and promoting positive masculinities.



## ESSITY: Sharing lived experience

“**Courageous Conversations**” is a globally recognized internal initiative designed to foster awareness, open dialogue and employee engagement on key aspects of diversity, equity and inclusion – including menstrual health and menopause. The conversations feature workshops led by trained employee facilitators and aim to create safe spaces for reflection, discussion and learning, helping normalize conversations around stigmatized topics such as menstruation and menopause in the workplace. Workshops follow a consistent format that include real-life workplace dilemmas, small group discussions and actionable takeaways. Complementary resources such as *Inclusion Toolboxes* and the *Courageous Conversations Podcast* extend learning beyond the sessions.

This approach has proven an effective and engaging way of working and engaging employees to challenge the status quo and create inclusive workplace cultures.

### OUTCOMES

- REDUCED STIGMA
- SHARED UNDERSTANDING
- EMPATHY AND ALLYSHIP

“

For some women, perimenopausal symptoms can be very disruptive. I could take my vest off at the end of the day. A woman going through menopause cannot.”

**George Roberts**  
*Global Impact Partnerships Lead, Bayer*

## Increasing demand for support

**Bayer’s latest employee survey** shows that initiatives such as Menopause Cafes and the MenoVest initiative are working. A comparison of data between 2022 and 2024 shows an 18 per cent increase in awareness of available support and a 30 per cent drop in embarrassment about asking for help from line managers. Findings also highlight demand for further action, with 90 per cent of respondents in favour of more support services. The most requested initiatives include educational events, flexible working options and training for managers.

## 5 Improving access

**To drive meaningful change, awareness must be paired with action.** Examples include the provision of free menstrual products, adjustments to work environments and uniforms, and access to counselling and healthcare services. Such measures demonstrate a genuine commitment to employee well-being and help create a working environment that enables all women to thrive.

### **BAYER:**

#### **Even a small change can lead to big impact**

For Bayer, efforts include the procurement of breathable cotton coveralls for women working on production lines, access to digital health information and resources, the provision of free menstrual and hygiene products at many locations, and healthcare insurance plans that include menopause care.

Motivated by the insights and understanding gained through employee surveys, the company continues to explore ways to enhance and develop menopause-friendly policies and services..

#### **OUTCOMES**

- **COMFORT AND DIGNITY**
- **HEALTH AND WELL-BEING**
- **INCREASED PRODUCTIVITY**

### **ESSITY:**

#### **Equal access to essential products**

For Essity, initiatives include facilitating access to free period products in all company washrooms worldwide. Available in offices, manufacturing and production facilities, it is a move that guarantees the availability of free and safe period products for *all* employees.

## 6 Key lessons

Reflecting on the experiences of Bayer and Essity, five additional key lessons learned can help companies create supportive, inclusive environments for women navigating menopause at work.

- 1 Change works from the bottom up:** Employee-led local initiatives build trust, spark engagement and create shared responsibility – driving meaningful, lasting cultural change.
- 2 Integration not separation:** Integrating initiatives into broader strategies for diversity, equity and inclusion reduces stigma and positions menopause-friendly policies as standard working practice.
- 3 Equity regardless of geography:** Building practical provisions (e.g. menstrual products, breathable uniforms) into global processes sets a standard to support women's health everywhere.
- 4 Building male allyship:** Involving employees at all levels and fostering allyship among men helps create a more supportive, inclusive environment.
- 5 Cultural change doesn't need a big budget:** Many effective interventions such as menopause cafes and webinars are low-cost and time-efficient, while helping you build your most valuable asset – human capital.



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## Stand up to stand out

While global conversation on menopause is advancing, awareness of its impact on individuals' personal and professional lives remains limited.

**To close this gap, UNFPA is calling on businesses like yours to step up and drive meaningful change for women's health and equity at work. UNFPA further encourages male leaders, and employees, to actively participate in creating menopause-friendly workplaces.**

To help you on your journey, UNFPA and Accenture have developed a set of ESG metrics and tools to identify priority areas of interventions and track progress over time.



Read the UNFPA and Accenture policy paper *"Advancing Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in the Private Sector"* to find out more.

## 8

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## THE CASE FOR INVESTMENT


### Menopause and human rights

Find out more about menopause, symptoms and how intersecting issues affect the rights and status of women in society (UNFPA, 2024b).

 [Click to access](#)

### Health and economic impact

Discover the business case for investing in menopause support through detailed case studies in the US, UK, Canada and Germany (FP Analytics and Bayer, 2025).

 [Download the report now.](#)

*Full links are available in the references.*

### For more information

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