

From pensions to parental leave: The new worker rights due this year

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There are plenty of new employment rights in store for workers this year but it remains to be seen whether the Government keeps its new-year resolutions in 2024.

We will see whether it finally delivers on a promise that has been made for more than a decade – a new national “auto-enrolment” pension savings system.

This is crucial to the future of hundreds of thousands of workers in the private sector who will otherwise have no retirement savings to rely on, bar the state pension.

All eyes will be on Social Protection Minister Heather Humphreys to see whether the scheme gets up and running as promised in the second half of the year.

In the immediate future, the biggest ever increase in the national minimum wage that came into force on Monday will not only push up wages for the lowest-paid, it is also likely to have a ripple effect as higher-paid employees fight to ensure their pay keeps pace.

National minimum wage

The minimum wage rose from €11.30 to €12.70 an hour for those aged 20 and over on Monday.

Employees aged 19, 18 and under 18 will be entitled to hourly minimum pay of €11.43, €10.16 and €8.89 respectively.

The move is expected to have a knock-on effect across the economy as employees on higher wages demand relative increases.

Maeve McElwee, executive director of employer relations at Ibec, said the move would involve large costs for businesses.

She said a Government aim to replace the minimum wage with a living wage that is worth 60pc of median wages by 2026 – or around €15 an hour – would push up wage costs by 25pc.

Ms McElwee said a €250m state scheme to support businesses during the transition to the living wage had been spread too thinly, so lots of people were getting a small amount of money.

She warned that some businesses in the “experience economy” such as restaurants, might have to make staff redundant or reduce working hours due to increased costs.

“We are going to need a minimum of two more years of significant support funds,” she said.

Right to request remote and flexible working

Workers will be able to request remote and flexible working. The legislation has been signed into law but has not

yet commenced. It will be rolled out after the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) draws up a code of practice. Ms McElwee said it was likely to have a big impact on organisations and would put them under a lot of administrative pressure.

Siobhra Rush, partner at law firm Lewis Silkin, said more employees were requesting remote working already. “Some employers are already getting a lot of requests to work remotely and some are finding it terribly difficult to get people back to the office,” she said.

“The world of work is still getting used to the hybrid model. When teams are in they are having an anchor day for meetings but some employers are taking the view that they won’t discipline those who don’t come in.

“Workers have to do their job and if the requirement is to be in the office, that’s the employer’s prerogative. But most are trying to coax people back in. They don’t want to force them.”

New national pension auto-enrolment scheme

This is expected in the second half of the year.

Workers between 23 and 60 who are not in an occupational scheme and earn €20,000 or more a year will be enrolled in the proposed new scheme. Employers, workers and the Government will contribute. Workers can opt out after six months.

Ms Rush said a lot of people were sceptical that it would be ready in the second half of this year because the legislation hadn’t been drafted yet.

More statutory sick pay

Employees are entitled to three days of paid statutory sick leave. This increased to five days on Monday. This is paid by the employer and is set at 70pc of pay, subject to a maximum daily payment of €110. To qualify, employees must have 13 weeks’ continuous service and provide a medical certificate.

Better parents’ leave

Parents’ leave is due to rise from seven to nine weeks from August. This leave is available for parents whose children are two years or under and they can apply for Parents’ Benefit from the Department of Social Protection.

Gender pay gap reporting extends to smaller employers

More workers will find out what the gender pay gap is at their workplace.

Employers with 250 or more employees were required to report on their gender pay gap for the first time last year. From this year, all employers with 150 or more employees will have to report. The deadline will be in December.



How to face down the back-to-work fear and focus on the positives

ANNE-MARIE WALSH



Rising unease or even anxiety about returning to work after Christmas is completely normal

It’s early January. There’s an unopened credit card bill near the front door and you have overdone it on the festive celebrations. It begins to dawn on you that you’re return to work is looming large.

What is known as “the dread” or “the fear” is creeping in.

Kilkenny-born author and wellness guru Shane Cradock advises not stressing out about it.

Rising unease and anxiety before the return to work after the Christmas break is completely normal.

He estimates that around 80pc of workers are affected by some form of low mood or even an excruciating sense of anticipation before they return to the daily grind as the festive season draws to a close.

“Most people talk about the fear,” he said.

“I don’t know where we got that phrase from. Maybe it’s just Irish. It’s often associated with alcohol. Someone who has been a few nights out on the lash might say it.”

The corporate coaching guru and author of *The Inner CEO* recommends taking charge of your thoughts when the back-to-reality realisation hits in the new year.

The father of two, who lives in Wicklow, has worked with a large number of corporate clients, including Apple, Louis Copeland, Aspire Technology and Sherry FitzGerald.

“For me, the fear is totally normal,” he said. “Step back and think about it.

You’re in a routine and going about your work and your life and all of a sudden, you stop that for seven or 14 days.

“Most people are drinking more than they should, eating richer food, having lie-ins and are around family who, most of the time, are going to trigger them in some way. I don’t know any family that’s straightforward.

“It’s normal that your mind is going to have a wobble when thinking, ‘Now I’ve got to go back, ah here we go.’”

“Most recruiters say people look for a new job in January but faraway hills aren’t always greener... easing back into a routine, getting enough sleep and cutting back on alcohol helps”