PATERNITY LEAVE AND MINIMUM WAGES – HOW WILL THE NEW LAWS AFFECT YOU?

Employers and employees need to know about four new Acts which will usher in important changes to our labour laws.

The summary below is a short one of only those changes likely to affect a significant number of people and businesses, so take advice on your specific circumstances.

In a nutshell -

Parental leave extended

Until now, mothers have been entitled to unpaid leave when welcoming a new child into the world, in the form of 4 consecutive months’ “maternity leave”. Plus they can claim maternity benefits from the UIF if they are contributors. New fathers however have been limited to at most 3 days’ family responsibility leave.

That will now be extended to –

“Parental leave”: “Parents” (i.e. including fathers and same-sex partners) - 10 consecutive days’ parental leave.

“Adoption leave”: Adoptive parents of a child under 2 years old - either 10 consecutive weeks’ adoption leave or 10 consecutive days’ parental leave (where there are two adoptive parents, they decide between them who gets 10 weeks and who gets 10 days).

“Commissioning parent leave”: Commissioning parents in a surrogacy agreement – same provisions as for adoptive parents.

Parents taking unpaid leave as above also become eligible for UIF benefits.

Employers with maternity leave policies, and those who offer paid as opposed to unpaid maternity leave, should take advice on reviewing these policies.

Minimum wages introduced:

The new national minimum wage is set as follows –

Farm workers - R18 per hour

 Domestic workers - R15 per hour

 Workers in an ‘expanded public works programme’ – R11 per hour

 Other employees - R20 per hour.

Separate allowances apply to those in learnership agreements.

Employers who cannot pay the minimum wage will be able to apply for exemption for up to a year, but regulations allow for only a 10% exemption.

Failure to pay the minimum wage will expose employers to fines of the greater of 2x the value of the underpayment, or 2x the employee’s monthly wage (going up to 3x for second or further non-compliances).

Strikes, lockouts and picketing

An “advisory arbitration panel” can be (and presumably will be) appointed to help resolve protracted or violent strikes or lockouts, and those causing or exacerbating an acute national or local crisis.

New picketing regulations are also in the wind.