Alliant

Alliant Global Services

Global Knowledge Center – Legal & Regulatory Updates

January 2025

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Belgium

Shared adoption leave and foster parental leave further increased, starting 1 January 2025

Published 4 January 2025

Effective 1 January 2025, employees who take adoption leave (*congé d'adoption*) or foster parental leave (*congé parental d'accueil*), are entitled to an additional week to be divided between the parents.

Adoption leave

Adoption leave entitlement

When an employee adopts a child under the age of 18 years, they are entitled to adoption leave to care for the child.

Adoption leave consists of:

- An individual entitlement per adoptive parent of up to six weeks (special rules apply to children with disabilities and for the simultaneous adoption of several children); and
- An additional entitlement that can be shared between the adoptive parents.

It is this additional shared entitlement that increases from 1 January 2025, bringing the total length of the sharable portion of the adoption leave to four weeks.

The employee must provide the employer a sworn statement specifying the distribution of the sharable portion of the leave by, at the latest, on the start date of the adoption leave.

The increase is one step in a phased implementation of the sharable entitlement, which is as follows:

- One week, as of 1 January 2019;
- Two weeks , as of 1 January 2021;
- Three weeks, as of 1 January 2023;
- Four weeks, as of 1 January 2025; and
- Five weeks, as of 1 January 2027.

The increased entitlement to four weeks of sharable adoption leave applies to employee requests submitted from 1 January 2025, provided that the requested adoption leave starts on or after 1 January 2025.

Payment during adoption leave

The employee is entitled to their normal pay during the first three calendar days of adoption leave. During the remainder of the adoption leave, the employee is entitled to an allowance from their mutual insurance

company (i.e. Federal health insurance financed by employer and employee contributions and general tax revenues).

Foster parental leave

Foster parental leave entitlement

An employee who welcomes a child under the age of 18 years into their family as part of a long-term foster placement is entitled to foster parental leave to care for the child.

Long-term foster care means family care where it is clear from the outset that the child will stay with the same foster family or foster parent(s) for at least six months, as certified by the relevant regional foster care service.

Foster parental leave comprises:

- An individual entitlement per foster parent, of up to six weeks (special rules apply to children with disabilities and for the simultaneous care of several children under the age of 18 years), and
- An additional entitlement to be shared between the host parents.

This additional shared entitlement has been increasing in a phased manner over the period 2019 to 2027 in parallel to the phased increases in the shared portion of adoption leave, and its duration is similarly based on the date of application for the leave and the leave's start date.

The leave's sharing arrangements between the foster parents must be specified in a sworn statement given to the employer.

Payment during foster parental leave

During the first three calendar days of a foster parental leave, the employee is entitled to their normal salary paid by the employer. During the remainder of the parental leave, the employee does not receive a salary but is entitled to an allowance from their mutual insurance company.

It is worth recalling that foster parental leave (*congé parental d'accueil*) is distinct from the foster care leave (*congé d'accueil*) which is to allow employees who are officially designated as foster parents to be on leave for up to six sharable days per calendar year per foster family for events specifically related to fostering a child and for which the employee's involvement during working hours is required (e.g., appointment with family foster care service). This entitlement remains unchanged. During foster care leave an employee is entitled to an allowance paid by the National Employment Office (*Office national de l'emploi, ONEM*) which is finance by employer and employee contributions and general tax revenues.

Employer Actions

Effective 1 January 2025, eligible employees are entitled to one additional week of sharable adoption leave as well as one additional week of sharable foster parental leave, bringing the total employee entitlement to these leaves to four weeks to be shared between the parents.

The increased entitlement to four sharable weeks of leave applies to employee requests submitted from 1 January 2025, provided that the requested leave starts on or after 1 January 2025.

Employers must grant the additional week of leave to eligible employees. There is no change to employers' payment obligations during the leaves.

Employers are advised to update their leave policies, procedures and practices as well as all employee communications materials to account for the increases in leave duration.

Underlying legislation

The phased implementation of the sharable portions of the adoption leave and the foster parental leave were introduced by:

- Royal Decree concerning the distribution between the two adoptive parents of the additional weeks of adoption leave referred to in Article 30ter, § 1, paragraph 2, of the law of 3 July 1978 relating to employment contracts (*Arrêté royal du 1 mars 2019 concernant la répartition entre les deux parents adoptifs des semaines supplémentaires du congé d'adoption visées à l'article 30ter, § 1er, alinéa 2, de la loi du 3 juillet 1978 relative aux contrats de travail*), which was published in the Official Journal (*le Moniteur belge*) on 18 March 2019.
- Royal Decree implementing certain provisions Article 30ter of the Law of 3 July 1978 relating to employment contracts in matters of parental leave (*Arrêté royal du 1 mars 2019 portant exécution de certaines dispositions de l'article 30sexies de la loi du 3 juillet 1978 relative aux contrats de travail en matière de congé parental d'accueil)*, which was published in the Official Journal (*le Moniteur belge*) on 18 March 2019.

Belgium

Employee training plan must be in place by 31 March 2025

Published 22 January 2025

By 31 March 2025 at the latest, private sector employers with 20 or more employees are required to finalize an employee training plan (*plan de formation*) with their works council or failing that a union delegation, if their previous plan was an annual plan or for a longer duration but expiring.

It is worth recalling that the minimum duration of an employee training plan is one year. The law mandating employee training plans came into effect on 1 September 2022, requiring initial training plans be ready for implementation starting 1 April 2023.

Timeline of employer obligations

The proposed employee training plan must be finalized in consultation with the works council or a union delegation who are required to issue an opinion on the employer-proposed plan by 15 March 2025, at the latest.

In the absence of a works council or union delegation, an employer-proposed plan must be directly shared with employees by 15 March 2025, and agreed to by employees by 31 March 2025.

Employers are required to save annual employee training plans, and provide access to them by employees, the works council or union delegations.

An anonymized version of the employee training plan must be submitted online to the Directorate General for the Control of Social Laws (*Direction générale contrôle des lois sociales, SPF Emploi*) within one month of its implementation start date.

Employees concerned

Employee training plans concern all employees. However, the underlying legislation requires employers to pay particular attention to employees from "at-risk" groups who are at least 50 years of age.

- At risk-groups are any of the following:
- Employees aged 50 years or older;
- Employees aged 40 years or older who are at risk of termination;
- Unemployed or recently (less than one year) recruited employees;
- Individuals with reduced work capacity;
- Youth under the age of 26 years undergoing training, either in a work-study training program, pursuing certain vocational training, undergraduate degree, or master's degree.

The employer must also consider employees' national origin, gender, and those with disabilities when preparing their proposed employe training plan.

Employee training plan content

Employers may select the training courses to be included in their employee plan. However, the plan must at least include formal (i.e., meeting criteria set by the Central Bank of Belgium's Social Report) and informal training; and must explain how these trainings contribute to the overall employee training goals set at sectoral level.

An employee training plan must also address the lack of candidates in shortage occupations of the employer's sector of activity. Mandatory sectoral collective bargaining agreements (CBA) may provide the minimum requirements of employee training plans.

Employer Actions

Employers with 20 or more employees with an annual or an expiring employee training plan must start preparing their draft employee training plan to be shared with and jointly agreed to with their works council or failing that a union delegation by 15 March 2025 and 31 March 2025, respectively.

In the absence of a works council or union delegation, the employer-proposed training plan must be directly shared with employees by 15 March 2025, and agreed to by employees by 31 March 2025.

Employer must submit an anonymized version of their employee training plan to *SPF Emploi* online within one month of the training plan's implementation start date, which is typically 1 April 2025.

Underlying legislation

(*loi du 3 octobre 2022 portant des dispositions diverses relatives au travail*), which was published in the Official Journal (*le Moniteur belge*) on 10 November 2022.

Brazil

Default rules on cancellation of health plans for non-payment amended

Published 08 January 2025

Effective 1 December 2024, medical plans' default rules for automatic cancellation due to non-payment are amended to only be canceled if an employer fails to pay at least two monthly invoices. Prior to this change, one overdue monthly payment was sufficient for a group health plan to be cancelled.

Additionally, employers may opt to receive electronic notifications to prevent cancellations.

These default provisions concern plan agreements signed on or after 1 December 2024, which do not provide for specific provisions on the matter.

Delinquent payment conditions

Under previous default rules if an employer has outstanding payments cumulatively totaling 60 days or more in a calendar year, then the operator may cancel the plan after a 50-day notice. In practice, this allows operators to cancel plans for just one overdue monthly payment.

Effective 1 December 2024, by default, group health plans may only be canceled if an employer fails to pay at least two monthly invoices, consecutively or not, within the same twelve-month period.

To suspend or cancel a health plan, operators must notify delinquent employers by the fiftieth day of non-payment (unchanged).

Under the new default rules, upon receiving notice employers have 10 days to pay the outstanding amount. If payment is made within 10 days, the employer will not be considered as having been in default for purposes of contract cancellation.

Methods of notification expanded

Previously, plan operators could only notify employers of their delinquent status via express registered or certified mail addressed to the employer, requiring the recipients' signature.

Effective 1 December 2024, delinquent employers can be notified through any of the following means:

- e-mail, SMS text message, or WhatsApp message, which the employer must confirm they have read;
- personal recorded telephone call, provided that the caller confirms the data;
- express letter by post, with no signature requirement;
- through an agent or employee of the operator, with proof of receipt signed by the employer; or
- on the operator's website, as long as the employer has access with a personal login and password.

Underlying legislation

The changes were brought about by Normative Resolution 593/2023 (*Resolução Normativa 593/2023*), which was published in the Official Journal (*Diário Oficial da União*) on 12 December 2023.

Canada

Quebec employers restricted from requiring medical certificates for sick leave or caregivers leave

Published 12 January 2025

Effective 1 January 2025, employers are prohibited from requesting a medical certificate for an employee's sick leave or for short-term caregivers leave (sometimes referred to as "family or parental leave and absence" in Quebec).

This measure is intended to relieve the burden placed on physicians and health practitioners.

Employee absences owing to sickness

Currently, employees are entitled to up to 26 weeks of sick leave over a 12-month period. Employees must advise their employers as soon as possible providing the reasons for their absence and, upon the employer's request, provide a document supporting those reasons.

Effective 1 January 2025, no employer may request such supporting documentation for the first three periods of absence not exceeding three consecutive days taken over a period of 12 months. Employers will remain entitled to require a medical certificate where the absence is likely to last four consecutive days or more, or upon the third period of absence due to sickness.

Paid short-term caregiver's leave

Currently, employees with three months of service are entitled to up to 10 days per year of paid short-term caregiver's leave to fulfill obligations relating to the care, health, or education of a child or the child of a spouse, or to care for an individual for whom they act as a caregiver. Employees must advise employers of the absence as soon as possible and take reasonable steps to limit the duration of the leave. Employers may request that employees provide a document supporting the reasons for the absence.

Effective 1 January 2025, employers may no longer request that an employee support the reasons for taking paid short-term caregiver's leave with a medical certificate.

Employer Actions

Effective 1 January 2025, all provincially regulated employers are prohibited from requesting medical documentation supporting an employee's sick leave, or paid short-term caregivers leave.

Employers are advised to update their leave policies and employee communication materials as needed to ensure compliance with the new restrictions.

Underlying legislation

The changes were introduced by Bill 68, An Act mainly to reduce the administrative burden of physicians, which was published in the Official Gazette on 6 November 2024.

Canada

Ontario introduces serious medical condition leave and adoption and surrogacy leave

Published 28 January 2025

Effective 19 June 2025, eligible employees are entitled to up to 27 weeks of unpaid leave for serious medical conditions.

Additionally, eligible employees will become entitled to up to 16 weeks of leave upon welcoming a child through adoption or surrogacy. This provision will come into effect on a date to be set by proclamation of the Lieutenant Governor.

The changes would affect all provincially regulated employers and their eligible employees.

Serious medical condition leave

Effective 19 June 2025, employees with at least 13 weeks of service are eligible for up to 27 weeks of unpaid employment-protected leave when diagnosed with a serious medical condition, including chronic or episodic conditions.

To take the leave, employees are required to notify the employer in writing and provide a certificate setting out the period during which they will not be working because of a serious medical condition. The certificate must be issued by a qualified health practitioner.

Taking serious medical condition leave allows employees to apply for up to 26 weeks of Employee Insurance (EI) sickness benefits, which currently amounts to 55% of their weekly pay up to CAD 668, after a one week waiting period.

Previously, employees with serious medical conditions could use their entitlement to three unpaid days per calendar year of personal illness, injury, or medical emergency leave. This three-day leave entitlement remains unchanged.

Adoption or surrogacy leave

Employees with at least 13 weeks of service will be eligible for to up to 16 weeks of unpaid employment-protected leave for welcoming a child through adoption or surrogacy. As indicated above, the effective date of this provision remains to be set by proclamation of the Lieutenant Governor.

The leave may be taken on the earlier of:

- the day corresponding to six weeks before the estimated placement date; or
- the child's actual placement date.

Note that the law defines "placement", in part, "as the arrival of a child into an employee's custody, care and control for the first time where the person who gave birth to the child is a surrogate".

The maximum duration of the leave which may be taken in respect of the same child or children remain unchanged at 16 weeks, regardless of whether one or both parents apply for the leave.

Prior to the introduction of this new leave, employees with at least 13 weeks of service were entitled to an unpaid parental leave of up to 63 weeks (unchanged). The entitlement is reduced to 61 weeks for birth mothers who take maternity leave.

With the newly introduced adoption or surrogacy leave, employees welcoming a child through adoption and surrogacy who take this new leave will see the duration of their parental leave entitlements reduced to 62 weeks.

Employer Actions

Effective 19 June 2025, employers must grant eligible employees up to 27 weeks of unpaid leave for a serious medical condition.

Serious medical condition leave does not entail mandatory employer payments but will allow eligible employees to apply for up to 26 weeks of EI sickness benefits. Employers who top-up EI sickness benefits are likely to experience an increase in short-term disability expenses that will need to be reflected in their annual budgeting exercise.

On an effective date that remains to be set by proclamation of the Lieutenant Governor, employers will be required to grant eligible employees up to 16 weeks of unpaid leave for welcoming a child through adoption or surrogacy in addition to current parental leave entitlements.

Employers are advised to revise their leave policies, procedures, and practices, as well as all relevant employee communication materials to reflect these changes.

Underlying legislation

The changes were brought about by Bill 229 - An Act to enact the Skilled Trades Week Act, 2024 and to amend various statutes with respect to employment and labour and other matters, which received Royal Assent on 19 December 2024 and is pending publication in the Ontario Gazette as of the date of this article.

Canada

Quebec establishes regulatory framework for variable payment life pension funds

Published 14 January 2025

Effective 4 December 2024, new legislation establishes a regulatory framework for variable payment life pension funds (VPLP) to allow DC plans, including voluntary retirement savings plans (VRSP), to offer VPLPs.

As a reminder:

- VRSPs are a type of DC plan which employers with over five employees are required to offer, with voluntary employee participation, and
- VPLPs are a type of variable pension life annuity (VPLA) offered under defined contribution (DC) plans.

Effective 4 December 2024:

- The assets of VPLPs must be kept separate from the rest of a DC plan's assets;
- Every VPLP must offer the option that pension payments be guaranteed for 10 years; and
- The amount of a surviving spouse's pension may not be less than 60% of the amount of the member's pension.

Employer Actions

Employers are advised to ensure that the assets of VPLPs offered to employees remain separate from other DC plan assets, and to offer the option that pension payments be guaranteed for 10 years.

In the event of a member's death, the amount of pension payable to their spouse may not be less than 60% of the amount which would have been paid to the member.

Underlying legislation

The changes were brought about by Bill 80, An Act respecting the implementation of certain provisions of the Budget Speech of 12 March 2024 and amending other provisions, which received royal assent on 4 December 2024.

Chile

New noncompliance fines apply in advance of a doubling of employment quotas for individuals with disabilities

Published 24 January 2025

Effective 1 January 2025, new fines apply for noncompliance with the mandatory quota of hiring individuals with disabilities. This was implemented as part of recent amendments to the Labor Code.

More importantly, the amendments provide for a conditional doubling of the mandatory hiring quota. This change would come into effect once 80% of employers with at least 100 employees comply with the current mandatory quota of 1% of their workforce.

As a reminder, the same amendments also introduced controls on existing alternative means of compliance with the mandatory hiring quota. These came into effect on 24 August 2024.

Conditional increase in hiring quota

Effective the January following a Ministry of Social Development report confirming that 80% of employers with at least 100 employees comply with the currently applicable 1% of workforce hiring quota for individuals with disabilities, the mandatory quota will increase to 2%.

This conditional effectiveness approach to increasing the hiring quota affords employers the time to start gradually increasing the percentage of individuals with disabilities in their workforces, i.e., to ensure a smoother and planned adjustment to the forthcoming increase in the mandatory hiring quota.

Specific fines for noncompliance apply

Effective 1 January 2025, the fines applicable for failure to meet the statutory quota of employment of individuals with disabilities vary based on employer size and range between 20 UTM (*Unidad Tributaria Mensual*) and 30 UTM per month in violation, currently CLP 1,332,560 and CLP 1,998,840, respectively.

Previously, there were no specific fines for disability quota non-compliance. Applicable fines were the generic ones provided for by Article 506 of the Labor Code for non-compliance, which range between 2 UTM and 60 UTM per month in violation, based on employer size. Currently, these limits correspond to CLP 134,588 and CLP 3,997,680, respectively.

It is worth recalling that the new fines may be applied to employers whose reported reasons for their inability to comply with the quota are deemed insufficient by the National Employment Exchange.

Controls on existing alternatives to hiring individual with a disability

Existing legislation continues to provide for two alternatives to direct recruitment of individuals with disabilities for employers to meet their hiring quotas. These are:

- Donations to approved foundations which work toward the inclusion of individuals with disabilities in the labor market; and
- Subcontracting a third-party who employs individuals with disabilities.

Effective 24 August 2024, the amendments introduced controls on donations to government-approved labor inclusion programs and foundations that employers may use as an alternative means to comply with the individuals with disabilities hiring quota, namely by:

- Prohibiting donations to programs or foundations that have a relationship with the donor's management, directors, partners, or shareholders;
- Barring employers from allocating more than 50% of total donations to any one institution; and
- Requiring employers donate to at least one program or foundation headquartered outside the Santiago metropolitan region.

Additionally, the amendment introduced a new control on a different alternative means for employers to meet their hiring quota, which is subcontracting third parties that employ individuals with disabilities. Specifically, effective 24 August 2024, the contracted employees with a disability are no longer to be counted both for their direct employer and their direct employer's client.

As a reminder, employers wishing to benefit from either alternative method of compliance must submit an electronic report to the National Employment Exchange (*Bolsa Nacional de Empleo*) attesting to the reasons for their inability to directly comply with the quota and receive approval.

Employer actions to consider

Effective 1 January 2025, employers are subject to new fines specific to noncompliance with the hiring of individuals with disabilities quota, which currently stands at 1% of their workforce. The new fines range from 20 UTM to 30 UTM (CLP 1,332,560 and CLP 1,998,840, respectively) per month in violation.

Effective the January following a Ministry of Social Development report confirming that 80% of employers with at least 100 employees comply with the current 1% hiring quota of individuals with disabilities, the mandatory quota will be increased to 2%.

At that time, employers with 100 or more employees must have adjusted their recruitment and selection processes to account for the increased quota, or officially apply to the National Employment Exchange to adopt one of two alternative methods of compliance (i.e., subcontracting or donation), which are both under tight control and required to meet new conditions since 24 August 2024.

Underlying legislation

The amendments were made by Law No. 21,690 Introducing amendments to the Labor Code and other legal bodies regarding labor inclusion of persons with disabilities and disability pension beneficiaries (*Ley No. 21.690 Introduce modificaciones al Código del Trabajo y otros cuerpos legales en materia de inclusión laboral de personas con discapacidad y asignatarias de pensión de invalidez*), which was published in the Official Gazette (*Diario Oficial de la República de Chile*) on 24 August 2024.

Czech Republic

Tax-exemption limits of in-kind non-meal benefits increased

Published 15 January 2025

Effective 1 January 2025, new limits apply for social security and health contributions exemption and for income tax-exemption for in-kind benefits, which take two forms that are referred to as non-monetary benefits, and “leisure” nonmonetary benefits.

Nonmonetary benefits exemption limit

The limit for such benefits is set at the national average wage, which is CZK 46, 557 for 2025 benefits, up from previously CZK 43,967 for 2024.

Section 6, paragraph 9. d) of Act No. 470/2024 defines non-monetary benefits as benefits provided to the employee or their family member from the cultural and social needs fund, the social fund, from net profits or against expenses unrelated to achieving, securing, and maintaining revenue, in the form of a purchase of goods or services of a health, medical, hygienic and similar nature from health facilities or the purchase of prescription-based medical devices.

Non-monetary benefits exceeding the above limit are subject to income tax and to social security and health insurance contributions.

Leisure nonmonetary benefits exemption limit

The exemption limit for the remaining, so-called "leisure" non-monetary benefits remains at 50% of the national average wage, i.e. CZK 23,278.50 for 2025 benefits, up from previously 21,983.50.

Section 6, paragraph 9. d) of Act No. 470/2024 defines leisure non-monetary benefits as use of educational or recreational facilities, provision of recreation or travel, use of pre-school child facilities, including kindergartens, use of employer's library, physical education and sports facilities, employer benefits in the form of cultural or sports events, books, excluding books where 50% of the surface area is for advertisement.

Non-monetary benefits exceeding these limits are subject to tax and to social security and health insurance contributions.

Underlying legislation

The changes were confirmed by Section 6, paragraph 9. d) of Act No. 470/2024 amending Act No. 435/2004 Coll., on Employment, as amended, and certain other acts (*Zákon č. 470/2024 Sb., kterým se mění zákon č. 435/2004 Sb., o zaměstnanosti, ve znění pozdějších předpisů, a některé další zákony), which was publisjed in the Official Gazette (sbírka zákonů*), which was published in the Official Gazette (*Sbírky zákonů*) on 27 December 2024.

Czech Republic

Tax-exemption limit for meal benefits increased by more than 6.5%

Published 17 January 2025

Effective 1 January 2025, the upper tax-exemption limit for monetary or non-monetary employer contributions towards employee meal benefits is CZK 123.90, up from CZK 116.20 in 2024.

Tax treatment of meal benefits

Starting 2024, as a part of the Consolidation Package Act No. 349/2023 amending certain laws in connection with the consolidation of public budgets (*Zákon č. 349/2023, kterým se mění některé zákony v souvislosti s konsolidací veřejných rozpočtů (dohoda o provedení práce*), the conditions for tax-exemption of employer contributions towards any of the three types of employee meal benefits (i.e., cash meal allowance, meal vouchers, or employer canteen) were aligned.

Employers are free to provide meal benefits to their employees in any amount, and this limit is a tax-exemption limit.

The tax treatment of meal benefits by employees and employers is detailed in the sections below.

Conditions for tax-exemption of meal benefits for employees

According to Section 6, paragraph 9, b) of the Consolidation Package Act No. 349/2023, the following conditions must be met for employer contributions to be income tax-exempt for the employee:

- A minimum of three hours must be worked during a shift (employees without a fixed shift must work at least three hours per calendar day);
- No entitlement to travel-related per diems may arise during the shift;
- The monetary or non-monetary employer contribution is up to 70% of the upper limit of the meal allowance allowable for employee business trips lasting five to 12 hours. In 2025, this limit corresponds to 70 % of CZK 177 (i.e., CZK 123.90).

The amounts paid may double for employees who work more than 11 hours.

Conditions for tax-deductibility of meal benefit expenses for the employer

Meal benefit expenses incurred by an employer are tax-deductible, if the employee entitlement to meal benefits is provided for by employer regulations, collective agreement or employment contract.

Underlying legislation

The change was introduced by the Decree No. 475/2024 on changing the rate of basic compensation for the use of road motor vehicles and meal allowances and on determining the average price of fuel for the purposes of providing travel reimbursements for the year 2025 (*Vyhláška č. 475/2024,o změně sazby základní náhrady za používání silničních motorových vozidel a stravného a o stanovení průměrné ceny pohonných hmot pro účely poskytování cestovních náhrad pro rok 2025*), which was published in the Official Gazette (*Sbírka zákonů*) on 27 December 2024.

France

Special regime allowing meal vouchers to purchase food that is not directly consumable is extended

Published 23 January 2025

The special regime allowing the use of meal vouchers (*titres-restaurant*) for purchasing products that are not directly consumable ended on 1 January 2025. The special regime is reinstated as of 23 January 2025.

A new law extends the possibility of purchasing any food product with meal vouchers, regardless of whether they are directly consumable or not.

Food products eligible for payment using meal vouchers

Food products that can on an exceptional basis be purchased via meal vouchers between 23 January 2025 and 31 December 2026, include:

- raw meats and fresh, unprocessed fish;
- pasta, rice, starches and other basic groceries such as, oil, flour, sugar, etc.; and
- pastries and other sweet desserts that are not made with dairy products.

Meal vouchers may continue to be used to purchase:

- fruits and vegetables,
- milk,
- still or sparkling waters, as well as fruit juices and non-alcoholic drinks,
- savory pies, quiches and pizzas,
- cold cuts, and
- canned foods.

As a reminder, restaurants and retailers are not required by law to accept meal vouchers. Each establishment sets its own list of products that can be paid for with meal vouchers.

Excluded food products

The following products may not be paid for using employer-sponsored meal vouchers:

- alcoholic beverages,
- confectionery,
- infant products,
- animal products, and
- non-food products.

Employer actions to consider

Employers may wish to inform their employees that as of 23 January 2025, the special meal voucher regime allowing them to pay for food products that are not directly consumable is extended until 31 December 2026,

Underlying legislation

Law No. 2025-56 of January 21, 2025 aimed at extending the exemption from the use of restaurant vouchers for all food products (*Loi n° 2025-56 du 21 janvier 2025 visant à prolonger la dérogation d'usage des titres restaurant pour tout produit alimentaire*), which was published in the Official Journal (*Journal officiel de la République française, JORF*) on 22 January 2025.

France

Tax-exemption limit in employers' share in meal vouchers' value increased by slightly over 1%

Published 2 January 2025

Effective 1 January 2025, the maximum exemption ceiling for the employer's share in covering the cost of a meal voucher (*titres-restaurant*) is increased to EUR 7.26 per voucher, up from previously EUR 7.18. The increased tax-exempt ceiling applies to meal vouchers issued on or after 1 January 2025.

The increase is to encourage employers to increase their share in financing meal vouchers.

This increase in the employer's share translates to an increase in the tax-favorable face value of meal vouchers granted to employees.

Employer payments beyond this ceiling are not tax-exempt, in that they count towards the basis for calculating the employee's income tax and social contribution.

Employer's share and face value of a meal voucher for maximum exemption

Employers may freely set their share in covering the face value of a meal voucher, in that there is no minimum or maximum face value to respect. However, in practice, the tax-favorable value depends on the meal voucher exemption limit and criteria (i.e., employer contribution representing 50% to 60% of the face value).

Specifically, when the employer's share represents 50% to 60% of the face value of the meal voucher and is equal to or less than a given ceiling, then the benefit is exempt from personal income tax and from employer and employee social contributions, including from the generalized social contribution (*la contribution sociale généralisée, CSG*) and the social debt repayment contribution (*la contribution au remboursement de la dette sociale, CRDS*).

Therefore, to achieve the maximum exemption from the employer's share in the cost of a meal voucher, the value of the meal voucher must be between EUR 12.10 and EUR 14.52. In other words, EUR 7.26 corresponds to 60% of EUR 12.10 and 50% of EUR 14.52.

Remote workers meal voucher entitlement

As a reminder, employees working remotely are entitled to meal vouchers if their working conditions are equivalent to those of other employees working at the employer's premises and who do not have a company restaurant. In other words, if other employees receive meal vouchers, the same applies to employees working from home, nomads, or in satellite offices.

Meal voucher benefits are considered as a social benefit and, according to the National Commission for Meal Vouchers (*Commission Nationale des Titres-Restaurant, CNTR*), it is generally accepted that they must be uniformly granted to all payroll employees.

However, employers may grant meal vouchers to certain employees, only on the condition that the others are compensated in an amount equivalent to that of the employer's financial contribution to the meal voucher.

Underlying legislation

The tax-exempt limit which is provided for by Article 81 paragraph 19 of the General Tax Code, is typically revalued annually according to the increase in the consumer price index, excluding tobacco.

The 2025 increase in the limit was introduced by the 2025 Finance Law and announced in the official social security bulletin (*le bulletin officiel de la sécurité sociale - BOSS*).

France

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The increase is to encourage employers to increase their share in financing meal vouchers.

This increase in the employer's share translates to an increase in the tax-favorable face value of meal vouchers granted to employees.

Employer payments beyond this ceiling are not tax-exempt, in that they count towards the basis for calculating the employee's income tax and social contribution.

Employer's share and face value of a meal voucher for maximum exemption

Employers may freely set their share in covering the face value of a meal voucher, in that there is no minimum or maximum face value to respect. However, in practice, the tax-favorable value depends on the meal voucher exemption limit and criteria (i.e., employer contribution representing 50% to 60% of the face value).

Specifically, when the employer's share represents 50% to 60% of the face value of the meal voucher and is equal to or less than a given ceiling, then the benefit is exempt from personal income tax and from employer and employee social contributions, including from the generalized social contribution (*la contribution sociale généralisée, CSG*) and the social debt repayment contribution (*la contribution au remboursement de la dette sociale, CRDS*).

Therefore, to achieve the maximum exemption from the employer's share in the cost of a meal voucher, the value of the meal voucher must be between EUR 12.10 and EUR 14.52. In other words, EUR 7.26 corresponds to 60% of EUR 12.10 and 50% of EUR 14.52.

Remote workers meal voucher entitlement

As a reminder, employees working remotely are entitled to meal vouchers if their working conditions are equivalent to those of other employees working at the employer's premises and who do not have a company restaurant. In other words, if other employees receive meal vouchers, the same applies to employees working from home, nomads, or in satellite offices.

Meal voucher benefits are considered as a social benefit and, according to the National Commission for Meal Vouchers (*Commission Nationale des Titres-Restaurant, CNTR*), it is generally accepted that they must be uniformly granted to all payroll employees.

However, employers may grant meal vouchers to certain employees, only on the condition that the others are compensated in an amount equivalent to that of the employer's financial contribution to the meal voucher.

Underlying legislation

The tax-exempt limit which is provided for by Article 81 paragraph 19 of the General Tax Code, is typically revalued annually according to the increase in the consumer price index, excluding tobacco.

The 2025 increase in the limit was introduced by the 2025 Finance Law and announced in the official social security bulletin (*le bulletin officiel de la sécurité sociale - BOSS*).

South Korea

Premature birth maternity leave, paternity leave, and fertility treatment leave increase, terms and conditions for reduced working hours relaxed

Published 23 January 2025

On 23 January 2025, the Ministry of Government Legislation confirmed in a Press Release 23 that February 2025 is the date of entry into effect of key statutes including those of Act No. 20521 on Equal Employment for Men and Women and Support for Work-Family Balance.

Effective 23 February 2025, entitlements to maternity leave for premature births, paternity leave, and fertility treatment leave increase, and statutory provisions regarding reduced working hours during pregnancy or for childcare are amended to support work-life balance.

Key changes detailed below.

Maternity leave for premature births

Leave entitlement

Effective 23 February 2025, the statutory maternity leave entitlement in the event of premature births will increase from 90 days to 100 days. Maternity leave must be taken in full.

Payment during leave

Maternity leave is paid at 100% of ordinary pay, i.e., excluding bonuses and overtime pay. The employer must pay for the first 60 calendar days (75 days in the case of multiple births). The remaining 30 maternity leave days (45 days in the case of multiple births) are paid by the Employment Insurance Scheme up to a limit of KRW 2.1 million per 30 days.

The newly introduced additional 10 days of maternity leave for premature births will be entirely paid by the Employment Insurance Scheme capped at the same KRW 2.1 million which applies for 30 days.

Paternity Leave

Leave entitlement

Effective 23 February 2025, paternity leave entitlement increases from 10 working days to 20 working days to be taken within 120 days of childbirth, up from currently 90 days. The leave may be drawn in up to four separate periods.

Payment during leave

Paternity leave days are employer-paid at 100% of regular earnings. However, Employment Insurance Scheme currently pays five of the 10 days up to a limit of KRW401,910 (for 2025) on behalf of small and medium-sized employers that meet sector-specific employee headcount and revenue limits.

Effective 23 February 2025, the Employment Insurance Scheme will pay for the entire 20-day paternity leave entitlement at a 100% of the employee's regular pay (up to a limit of KRW 1,607,640) on behalf of small and medium-sized employers that meet sector-specific employee headcount and revenue limits.

Fertility Treatment Leave

Leave entitlement

Effective 23 February 2025, per Article 18-3 of Act No. 20521, employees will become entitled to up to six days of fertility treatment leave per year, two days of which will be employer-paid, up from currently three days of leave, with one day being paid by the employer.

The application method and procedures for fertility treatment leave remain to be set by Presidential Decree.

The increase in fertility treatment leave also applies to employees who have used or are using infertility treatment leave in accordance with the current provisions, The increased entitlement will not apply in cases where a leave of two days or more has been used prior to 23 February 2025.

Payment during leave

The six-day entitlement will include two employer-paid days, up from currently one employer-paid day.

Reduced working hours for caring for children

Effective 23 February 2025, Article 19-2 of Act No. 20521 provides for reduced working hours for caring for children under 12 years of age or in the sixth grade of elementary school or lower, which may be used for up to three years for periods of at least one month.

Currently, the entitlement is for children who are eight years of age or in the second grade of elementary school or lower and the entitlement can be used for periods of at least three months.

The proviso of Article 19-2 Paragraph 4 shall also apply to employees who have used reduced working hours during a childcare period before 23 February 2025 but will only apply to the remaining childcare leave period after.

Reduced working hours during pregnancy

According to Article 74, Paragraph 7 of the Labor Standards Act, employers must allow employees who are less than 12 weeks pregnant or more than 36 weeks pregnant to reduce their working hours by up to 2 hours per day without a reduction in pay.

Effective 23 February 2025, with a physician's certificate employees experiencing high-risk pregnancies become entitled to reduced hours during the entire pregnancy period.

Government incentivizes reduced working hours for work-life balance

According to Article 20 of the Act on Equal Employment for Men and Women and Support for Work-Family Balance, if an employer allows an employee to take childcare leave or reduce their working hours for childcare purposes, the government may support a portion of the employee's living expenses and the employer's employment maintenance expenses.

Penalties for noncompliance apply

If an employer who has been notified of the need for maternity, paternity, parental, miscarriage/stillbirth, leave does not grant the leave to an employee or does not pay the leave used by the employee without justifiable reason, then a fine of up to KRW 100 million is imposed.

Employer Actions

Effective 23 February 2025, entitlements to maternity leave for premature births, paternity leave, and fertility treatment leave increases, and statutory provisions regarding reduced working hours during pregnancy or for childcare are amended to support work-life balance.

Employees must comply with the following amendments:

- An additional 10 days of maternity leave for premature births will be entirely paid by the Employment Insurance Scheme (the cap of KRW 2.1 million applies for 30 days continues to apply).
- Employer-paid paternity leave doubles to 20 working days. However, the Employment Insurance Scheme will pay the entire 20-day paternity leave entitlement at a 100% of the employee's regular pay (up to a limit) on behalf of qualified SMEs.
- Employees will become entitled to six days of fertility treatment leave per year, two days of which will be employer-paid.
- Employees will become entitled to reduced working hours for caring for children under the age of 12 years.

Employers are advised to revise their leave policies and update employee communication materials to reflect the above changes in employee's statutory entitlements.

Fines of up to KRW 100 million apply for noncompliance.

Underlying legislation

Act No. 20521 amending the Equal Employment for Men and Women and Support for Work-Family Balance (남녀고용평등과 일・가정 양립 지원에 관한 법률), which was published in the Republic of Korea Official Gazette (대한민국 관보) on 22 October 2024.

Spain

Terminations due to family-related teleworking requests or caregivers' leave requests automatically nullified

Published 8 January 2025

Effective 3 April 2025, the automatic nullity of terminations due to an employee's request for a modified working day to reconcile their work and family life, or due to a request for leave due to illness, hospitalization or surgery of a family member, will be re-instated. This measure is to correct an unintended error that came into effect on 22 August 2024 as part of amendments to the Workers' Statute (*Estatuo de los Trabajadores*).

As a reminder, all employees are entitled to up to five days of leave for a serious accident, illness, hospitalization, or surgery of a family member, paid by the employer.

Family member is defined as the spouse, domestic partner or relatives up to the second degree of consanguinity or affinity, including the blood relative of the domestic partner, as well as any other person who lives with the employee in the same home and who requires the effective care of the employee.

For work-life balance purposes, employees are entitled to request reasonable modifications to:

- the length and distribution of their working day,
- the organization of their working time, and
- their remote work terms.

Effective 3 April 2025, terminations due to work-life balance requests and requests to take leave due to serious accident, illness, hospitalization, or surgery of a family member are automatically null.

The nullification of a termination requires:

- the employee's reinstatement to their previous position;
- payment of wages that would have been paid to them during the period for which they were terminated;
- payment of social security contributions for the corresponding period; and
- compensatory payments for moral damage.

Employer Actions

Effective 3 April 2025, employers may not terminate employees due to family-related remote work requests, or requests to take leave due to a serious accident, illness, hospitalization, or surgery of a family member.

Family member includes the spouse, domestic partner, or second-degree relatives, including the blood relative of a domestic partner, as well as any other person, who is part of the employee's household and who requires the employee's care.

Background

Previously, employment protection applied to:

- requests, granted or not, for adaptations to working hours; and
- taking leave to care for children, family members and cohabitants.

However, amendments to the Workers' Statute which came into effect on 22 August 2024 included a "technical" error that resulted in these employment protections to no longer automatically apply.

Consequently, corrections to the wording of legislation needed to be made to restore the previously applicable employment protections.

Underlying legislation

The changes were brought about by Organic Law 1/2025, of 2 January, on measures for the efficiency of the Public Justice Service (*Ley Orgánica 1/2025, de 2 de enero, de medidas en materia de eficiencia del Servicio Público de Justicia*), which was published in the Official Gazette (*Boletín Oficial del Estado*) on 3 January 2025.

Thailand

Mandatory Employee Welfare Fund contributions or equivalent arrangements start 1 October 2025

Published 4 January 2025

Effective 1 October 2025, per Section 130 of the Labour Protection Act B.E. 2541 (1998) (พระราชบัญญัติคุ้มครอง แรงงาน พ.ศ. ๒๕๔๑), for-profit private sector employers with 10 or more employees must register their employees with the Employee Welfare Fund (EWF) unless they offer their employees either a provident fund (in accordance with the Provident Fund Act B.E. 2530 and its amendments) or adopt arrangements for equivalent benefits to be paid to employees in the events of termination of employment or death.

The implementation of Section 130 of the Labour Protection Act was pending decrees and regulations which were issued in November 2024.

The implementing legislation comprises a royal decree, two ministerial decrees, and an EWF Committee regulation. Together they set EWF contribution rates, spell out employer withholding and payment procedures, and provide guidelines and employer obligations in case alternative arrangements to EWF contributions are adopted by the employer.

EWF contribution rates

The Ministerial Decree Specifying the Rate of Savings and Contributions provides the EWF contribution rates and provides for two implementation phases, namely, a five-year initial phase with reduced contribution rates after which the rates will double.

Specifically:

- Effective 1 October 2025 through 30 September 2030, employer and employee contributions will correspond to 0.25% of pay, including performance-based payments; and
- Effective 1 October 2030, employer and employee contributions will be increased to 0.5% of pay, including performance-based payments.

Employer withholding obligations

Under the regulations, employers must withhold employees' mandatory EWF contributions and pay both the employer and the employee contributions along with the list of registered employee names to the EWF by the fifteenth day of the month following the withholding.

The labor inspector will notify the employer in writing to remit any outstanding balances within 30 days from the date of receipt of the notice. Noncompliance with this requirement will subject the employer to a surcharge of 5% per month of any unpaid balances.

Alternative arrangements

The Ministerial Decree Specifying Criteria and Procedures for Employers to Provide Support in Cases of Termination or Death of an employee spells out guidelines and employer obligations when offering financial support to employees in the event of termination or death as an alternative arrangement to EWF registration or a provident fund – a voluntary investment fund to support an employee's retirement via long-term savings.

In other words, this Ministerial Decree stipulates the criteria and methods that would exempt an employer with 10 or more employees and without a provident fund from the obligation to register their employee in the EWF.

In particular:

- The criteria and methods for employee support or allowance payments in the events of termination or death must be specified in writing and must include at least details on the rate of employee savings and employer contributions; the rules and methods for collecting the amounts; and the timing of payments.
- The employer is required to withhold employee savings and pay employer contributions at a rate agreed upon by the employer and the employee. This rate must not be lower than a Provident Fund rate (i.e., not less than 2% nor more than 15% of wages).
- Employers are responsible for depositing employee savings and employer contributions with commercial banks or other financial institutions.
- When an employee leaves their employment for any reason, such as resigning, retiring, voluntary or involuntary termination for any reason, the employers must pay the savings and contributions with interest to employees. In the event an employee's death, the amounts due will be paid to beneficiaries as notified in writing by the employee.

Employers who comply with the Ministerial Decree's criteria and obligations are exempt from having to register their employees with the EWF and from related contribution and reporting obligations.

Penalties apply

Employers may be subject to penalties comprising up to six months of imprisonment, or fines of up to THB 10,000, for:

- Failing to submit the list of employees who are registered members of the EWF;
- Failing to notify in writing a request for changes or amendments to the information within the stipulated timeframe: or
- Providing false information.

If a legal entity commits an offense due to the directives, actions, or negligence of a managing director or any individual responsible for the operations of the entity, that individual will also be held accountable and be subject to the applicable penalties.

Employer Actions

Effective 1 October 2025, private sector employers with 10 or more employees must register their employees with the Employee Welfare Fund unless they offer their employees either a provident fund or adopt arrangements for equivalent benefits to be paid to employees in the events of termination of employment or death.

Affected employers without a provident fund must either register their employees with the EWF or implement alternative savings arrangements in compliance with the provisions of newly issued legislation.

Employers are reminded that penalties comprising up to six months of imprisonment, or fines of up to THB 10,000, apply for noncompliance with the new obligations.

Underlying legislation

The recently issued implementation decrees and regulations consist of:

- Royal Decree Determining the Period for Starting the Collection of Savings and Contributions to the Employee Welfare Fund (พระราชกฤษฎีกากำหนดระยะเวลาเริ่มดำเนินการจัดเก็บเงินสะสมและเงินสมทบกองทุนสงเคราะห์ลูกจ้าง), was published in the Royal Gazette on 15 November 2024.
- Ministerial Decree establishing the withholding and contribution rates to the Employee Welfare Fund (กฎกระทรวงกำหนดอัตราการจ่ายเงินสะสมและเงินสมทบที่จะต้องส่งให้แก่กองทุนสงเคราะห์ลูกจ้าง), was published in the Royal Gazette on 22 November 2024.
- Ministerial Decree Determining the Criteria and Methods for Employers to Provide Support to Employees in the Event of Termination or Death, was published in the Royal Gazette on 22 November 2024. (กฎกระทรวงกำหนดหลักเกณฑ์และวิธีการสำหรับนายจ้างจัดให้มีการสงเคราะห์แก่ลูกจ้างในกรณีที่ลูกจ้างออกจากงานหรือตาย), was published in the Royal Gazette on 22 November 2024.
- Regulations on the submission of savings, contributions and additional payments to the Employee Welfare Fund 2567 (ระเบียบคณะกรรมการกองทุนสงเคราะห์ลูกจ้าง), was published in the Royal Gazette on 22 November 2024.

About Alliant Global

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