

## Henkel implements fully paid gender-neutral parental leave for its employees worldwide



As of the start of 2024, Henkel implements a new gender-neutral parental leave standard for its 48,000 employees worldwide. This includes the company's 200 employees in South Africa.

Henkel will offer parents up to eight weeks of fully paid parental leave, based on the caregiver role, rather than a gender or biological parent status. This demonstrates a firm commitment to equity, promoting equal parenting and childcare for all parents, including adoptive, foster, surrogacy, and LGBTQ+ parents.

"Henkel will become the first German DAX40 company to offer its employees worldwide eight weeks of fully paid parental leave", says Carsten Knobel, CEO of Henkel. "This initiative sends a strong signal to all our employees and underscores our unwavering commitment to fostering a more inclusive culture and more gender equity."

### **Setting a new global standard**

The new global standard should be considered the minimum standard, complementing existing local practices and regulations. It serves as a crucial foundation for promoting family-friendliness and greater gender equity, particularly in countries where parental leave opportunities are currently lacking.

Moreover, many practices exclude specific family types, such as single fathers, adoptive parents, and surrogacy parents. Recognising this, Henkel has identified the need to establish a universal standard that applies to all caregivers.

After the implementation phase, Henkel employees in approximately 80 countries can take paid time off

work to care for and bond with a new child. The new parental leave minimum standard is already fully implemented in South Africa. With this new approach, the company demonstrates a firm commitment to its diversity, equity, and inclusion ambitions by taking tangible actions to promote equal access to opportunities consistently around the world.

Charlene Kotze, Henkel South Africa Human Resources Manager, said: "At Henkel, we foster a culture of belonging and strive for equity to release the full potential of our diversity. This Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) aspiration implies equal access to opportunities and offerings for all our colleagues. We back this commitment with tangible action by implementing the global guidance on fully paid gender-neutral parental leave as of 2024."

As per law in South Africa, parental leave remains at four months for mothers. Fathers or other caregivers are now eligible for eight weeks vs. 10 days prior to the new leave policy. The gender-neutral parental leave programme is to be seen as global minimum standard across Henkel.

Believing that the gender-neutral parental leave standard is important for multiple reasons, Kotze says that no global standard on parental leave had existed at Henkel as of 2024 and countries had applied different local legal practices and offerings. At the same time, these practices tended to exclude certain family types, such as single fathers, adoptive and surrogacy parents.

"We want to be prepared for the workforce of the future and our candidates' rising expectations. Younger generations tend to have a stronger focus on equity and work-life-flexibility, and already today in several countries in which we operate \*70-90% of men want to be more actively involved in caretaking. In addition, we see an opportunity to strengthen our position in peer competition. In the DAX40, no company has introduced a global gender-neutral parental leave standard yet making us a true pioneer in diversity, equity and inclusion."

With an aim to support parents and challenge traditional gender roles, Kotze noted that the initiative is meant to empower employees to participate equally in childcare since they believe that it is essential to support a family-friendliness and greater gender equity at workplace.