

Remote work must not be for the privileged few

National Membership Report

We're organising for a better deal

Online Spring 2026



April 27th – May 1st 2026

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**BETTER IN A
TRADE UNION**


FÓRSA

FÓRSA CSQ
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ONLINE SPECIAL
 Spring 2026

Editor:

Hannah Deasy
hdeasy@forsa.ie

Asst Editor:

Brendan Kinsella
bkinsella@forsa.ie

Staff writers:

James Redmond
 Niall Shanahan
 Mehak Dugal

Fórsa Civil Service Division

Tel +353 1 817 1500

Tel +353 1 676 5394

Email <https://www.forsa.ie/contact/>

Message from the Chair

Springing into action on behalf of members

Dear members,

Welcome to the latest edition of CSQ, your union's magazine for members in the civil service.

Spring has finally arrived and with it a flurry of union activity. Preparations are well underway for our national conference, which will take place this May in Killarney. With over 150 motions on the agenda, it will be a key moment for union democracy. The preliminary agenda has now issued to branch chairs and secretaries, and I am pleased to say the Civil Service division will be well represented in the debates.

The national pay agreement currently in operation is due to expire in June 2026. Ahead of that we have launched a major campaign calling for: 'A Better Deal'. With increasing economic uncertainty on the horizon, it is critical that union members stand together. Over 25,000 people have already signed our pledge and you can too. Turn to our feature on pages 4 and 5 to learn more.

In this edition of CSQ we have columns on artificial intelligence by general secretary Kevin Callinan, ICTU's Laura Bambrick considers the progress made 50 years on from the Equal Pay Act, while Tom McDonnell from NERI provides a vision for Quality Jobs in the future.

ETUC general secretary Esther Lynch outlines the concerns the European trade union movement has with the European Commission's new 'EU Inc' proposals and considers the potential impact on Irish civil servants.

We also have articles on remote work, an issue that continues to dominate headlines and is a clear priority for Fórsa members, updates from around the union and a report from the ICTU women's conference.

I hope you enjoy this edition of CSQ.

Jean Taylor

Chairperson
Civil Service Division



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Take the pledge

Don't miss out - get involved in our campaign for...



James Redmond Hannah Deasy

Fórsa Communications

As many members will be aware national agreements set pay for civil servants and public service workers in Ireland. The current Public Service Agreement expires in June 2026.

Amid an ever-changing international landscape, the cost of living keeps on rising, the ongoing housing crisis worsens, while pressure on public services and growing threats to flexible and remote working have left workers increasingly stretched and frustrated.

That's why we launched a new campaign, called A Better Deal, last November to mobilise members in advance of the next round of pay talks.

In the first phase of the campaign thousands of workplace conversations took place across the country, with union activists, workplace representatives and branch leaders laying the groundwork for the campaign with planning

meetings and pilot programmes in select employments across the civil and public service.

Deputy general secretary Katie Morgan explains that the first phase allowed the union to better understand the strength of its structures.

She said: "In the first three months 7,000 one-to-one conversations took place about the campaign across almost 500 pilot workplaces, 95 Fórsa branches, involving 631 workplace representatives and campaign champions, and covering 120 employers."

"This grassroots organising has launched the campaign with member-led enthusiasm and energy. Now we're expanding the campaign to all members and potential members covered by the public service agreement."

All members have now received the link to the pledge by email, and signatures have shot up, with over 15,000 signatures registered in the first 24 hours after the link issued to members.

Deputy general secretary and

head of the civil service division Éamonn Donnelly explained why the pledge is now also open to non-union members.

He said: "It's so important that we show Government how serious we are about taking a different approach to the next pay talks.

"People are under pressure and our members have consistently told us that just to make ends meet, they need pay rises that match inflation, and that protecting flexible work matters

Continued page 5



COLLECTIVE STAND
DGS Éamonn Donnelly



7,000	one-on-one conversations
631	Workplace reps & champions
500	pilot workplaces
95	Fórsa branches

Take the pledge

From page 4

almost as much to them as pay. The more people that sign this pledge, the stronger the message we are sending. We are saying that we, as a collective, stand together."

If you want to get involved in the campaign and become a pledge champion, you can take part in online briefings for any member who is interested in finding out more about the campaign.

These will take place every week in April, in

It's so important that we show Government how serious we are about taking a different approach to the next pay talks... The more people that sign this pledge, the stronger the message we are sending

addition to local workplace briefings and events.

A new digital campaign toolkit is available for workplace activists who want to organise events or build support for the pledge in their workplaces.

The toolkit includes a leaflet with a QR code linking directly to the pledge, workplace posters, FAQs and other digital resources.

● For more information or to request a pledge toolkit email pledge@forsa.ie

OUR BETTER DEAL PLEDGE

I will only support a Public Service Agreement if it provides for:

- Pay increases that address the cost of living.
- Resolution of local bargaining claims.
- A fairer work-life balance through agreed policies on flexible work arrangements, remote working, and a shorter working week.
- Targeted investment in public healthcare and housing.

**By signing this pledge,
I am committing to take
a stand to secure
the above demands.
Let's win a deal
we deserve and
a fairer future, together.**

Scan
here



Participation in this pledge is voluntary, and if any member does not wish to sign it, it is not an issue.

**Want to get involved?
Email pledge@forsa.ie**



Divisional News



PEAK-TIME TRAFFIC Fórsa has argued that hybrid working has many spin-off advantages, including slashing fuel emissions and reducing pressure on transport infrastructure

Picture: Pexels

Fórsa – hybrid working remains the common-sense response to fuel crisis

Niall Shanahan

Fórsa Communications

Fórsa has responded to a recent adjudication hearing over the Department of Social Protection's attempt last year to require an additional in-office day per week for staff. Civil Service unions will lodge their objection to the adjudication outcome at the Civil Service General Council (CSGC) next month.

Fórsa said the hearing concluded without adequately addressing the practical realities now shaping work and commuting patterns, while hybrid working arrangements continued to help lower peak-hour demand as a fuel crisis takes hold.

Fórsa deputy general secretary, and head of the civil service division, Éamonn Donnelly said that while the process examined the union's position, insufficient data had been presented to justify the

change, its outcome does not reflect the rapidly evolving external context in which such decisions must be made.

He told CSQ: "In particular, the escalation in global fuel uncertainty and its impact on commuting costs and congestion have significantly strengthened the case for maintaining existing hybrid working arrangements.

"Evidence from recent years demonstrates that remote and blended working models can reduce peak-time traffic, ease pressure on transport infrastructure, and contribute to lower fuel demand. This is the approach supported by the International Energy Agency."

Recent disruption to travel, linked to protest activity in Dublin city centre, further illustrated the resilience that hybrid arrangements provide in maintaining service delivery under challenging conditions.

Éamonn added: "There would have been significant challenges to continuous service provision if we were relying on all staff making their way into a city centre office during recent protests. Thankfully blended work meant that didn't happen.

"There is a ready-made solution to reducing peak-hour fuel demand right in front of us. We need to allow common-sense to prevail while global fuel uncertainty continues to be a

major economic threat," he added.

In correspondence to the Department of Social Protection, Fórsa official Paul MacSweeney requested that any moves to increase office attendance be put on hold in light of the growing fuel crisis.

Paul told the Department that a recent Fórsa survey on blended working, with responses from approximately 20,000 members, showed that 78% of workers cited reduction in travel costs as a reason for seeking remote working.

Paul added: "Our survey also noted that commuting times are increasing as more staff are mandated to return to the office."

Fórsa will continue to press for a pragmatic, evidence-based approach that aligns workplace policy with economic and environmental realities.

Evidence from recent years demonstrates that remote and blended working models can reduce peak-time traffic, ease pressure on transport infrastructure, and contribute to lower fuel demand

Divisional News

'Supportive' Dignity at Work policy after review

A new Dignity at Work policy for the Civil Service was agreed in early 2026. The previous policy, dating from 2021, was reviewed following the putting in place of new codes of practice on bullying at work by both the Workplace Relations Commission and the Health & Safety Authority.

Assistant general secretary Úna Faulkner said: "The new policy has more emphasis on intervention and resolution which will support civil servants who experience bullying or harassment in the workplace.

"Everybody deserves to feel safe at work and this new policy clearly sets out the protections that apply to civil servants, contractors, and agency workers within the Civil Service. It also explicitly states that the policy applies whether a person is working in the office or remotely, which is a welcome reflection of reality."

Engineer Grades claim under the spotlight

The Engineer Grade claim is now being examined to see what options may be possible in respect of the available 1% of payroll quantum. Fórsa has provided a mapping list to DPER of all pay linkages which apply across the professional and technical grade structures.

Fórsa official Pat Ennis told CSQ: "The Engineer Grade is a marker grade with many roles across the Civil Service linked to it, so this claim impacts a larger cohort than you might initially think. That's why an accurate mapping list was essential to guide these talks." Discussions are continuing.

Clear picture needed on failed probationers

Following concerns around the recent increased number of failed probationary periods, the staff panel of unions is seeking clear data so it can better understand the scale of the issue. The union side does not accept the argument that this data is only available at departmental level and should therefore be a matter for respective departmental

councils. The union side believes this is a matter for General Council so that there is a clear picture across the Civil Service. DPER has committed to reconsidering its position.

Assignment deferrals in Civil Service Competitions

A new circular has issued on deferral of assignments in exceptional circumstances, in Civil Service competitions, following agreement at the General Council in March.

The new arrangements significantly broaden the circumstances that allow a candidate to defer. These now include: family relocation needs, dependent care arrangements, medical or compassionate grounds and service in international institutions.

Assistant general secretary Paul MacSweeney told CSQ: "This expansion is very welcome. All sorts of personal reasons can make it challenging for someone to take up an assignment, and no one should be penalised or miss out on a promotion because they are faced with difficult circumstances."

One off payments sought for Presidency work

As Ireland's EU Presidency approaches, many civil servants will take on, or already have taken on, increased workloads and responsibilities. The six-month rotating Presidency, which begins in July, will see Ireland shoulder numerous sensitive legislative dossiers and host high-profile international events.

A claim about work carried out by civil servants both in preparing for and during the course of the Presidency, was tabled by the Civil Service staff panel at General Council in March.

The claim seeks one-off payments for civil servants of varying amounts, depending on the extent of their involvement in Presidency-related duties. This involves cases where members take significant travel, or carry primary responsibility for the chairing, negotiation, or co-ordination of Presidency business, requiring sustained additional attendance over the course of its duration.

It also includes those who are assigned to roles involving significantly increased EU co-ordination, reporting, or engagement responsibilities as a result of the Presidency.



'PART OF PEOPLE'S LIVES NOW' Fórsa DGS Éamonn Donnelly underlined how important safeguarding hybrid and remote working arrangements were to workers during a panel discussion at the recent IRN conference in Dublin

Remote work tops agenda at IRN event

Niall Shanahan

Fórsa Communications

The Department of Enterprise, Trade & Employment's review of the 'right to request remote work' within the Work Life Balance Act (2023) has concluded. The principal finding was that the legislation is an efficient mechanism, but that low take-up was largely due to a lack of awareness.

Rejecting this notion Fórsa has argued that the legislation, as currently set out, is a blunt instrument which does not provide sufficiently for an objective rationale for refusals, and that the appeals process only covers procedural deficits.

Deputy general secretary Éamonn Donnelly, speaking at the annual Industrial Relations News conference, at Croke Park on 12th March, underlined the importance of protecting flexible working arrangements. Taking part in a panel discussion alongside legal and employment

experts, Éamonn stressed that safeguarding hybrid and remote arrangements remains a key priority for the union in collective negotiations. He said: "We're better off getting into the space where we collectively bargain to get the best working model.

"What is the benefit, or otherwise, of blended working to the employer in terms of productivity? To the worker? To the environment? To mental health and wellbeing?"

He also outlined the value of using remote working arrangements to ease traffic congestion: "Take the two hours someone spends in a traffic jam on the M50 – zero productivity, and then you need to ask if you can be the best version of yourself at work, if you navigated that on the way in?"

Éamonn added: "What we need to do is break down the barriers of suspicion on remote work, connect the socio-economic factors and accept it's a systemic part of people's lives now."

Report

Fórsa membership continues to grow

James Redmond

Fórsa Communications

A newly-published report has documented recent growth across all Fórsa divisions, bringing the union within reach of a landmark 100,000 members across the country and seeing a reversal of decline in the Civil Service Division.

According to the union's latest national membership report, Fórsa recorded 96,924 members at the end of 2025, continuing a steady multi-year trend of expansion. The figure represents an increase of more than 17,000 members since 2017, equivalent to a 21.8% rise in overall membership during that period.

Director of Membership Seán McElhinney says the growth reflects sustained recruitment efforts, improved organisational infrastructure and high levels of engagement among members.

Surpassing targets

"In 2025 alone, 12,578 workers joined the union, surpassing its annual recruitment target by 11.6%. All six of the union's divisions achieved at least 95% of their recruitment goals, with several exceeding expectations. The figures confirm Fórsa's position as one of the largest trade unions in the State and highlight the union's expanding reach across a range of public-sector professions," reported Seán.

In terms of a more granular demographic breakdown, the membership base is predominantly female, with approximately 75% of members women and just under 25% men. The average age of a member is 41 years, slightly lower than the average of around 43 recorded in 2022.

The report also notes a growing number of retired members, with that cohort now numbering more than 1,200, reflecting the maturing of the organisation as well as the striking efforts of the Retired



Members Association.

Across the board growth

All six divisions of the union recorded membership increases during the year.

The Civil Service Division recorded 23,408 members, marking a return to sustained growth after a period of decline earlier in the decade. Since 2022, membership in the division has grown by nearly 15%.

Meanwhile, the Health and Welfare Division remains the union's largest, with 33,933 members, while the Education Division posted the most dramatic expansion, rising to 20,743 members.

Membership in that division has grown by more than 76% since Fórsa was established in 2018, largely driven by industrial campaigns led by school staff such as secretaries, caretakers and Special-Needs Assistants (SNAs).

The Local Government and Local Services Division now has 9,791 members, putting it within reach of the 10,000 mark. Elsewhere, the

Services and Enterprises Division grew to 7,663 members, while the Municipal Employees' Division reached 1,386 members, recording its first growth since the creation of Fórsa in 2018.

Overall, the union operates through 194 branches, with around 70% of branches recording membership growth during 2025.

Boosting recruitment

One of the report's most striking findings concerns how workers join the union. Key mobilisation moments are pivotal to the union's growth – energising workers and pulling them into the union.

So, it's probably no surprise who features in the top three branches for recruitment. If there was a leader board for recruitment then the obvious winner is the Dublin Hospitals branch who have clearly benefitted from the concentrated efforts of a specially-drafted project team on that front.

SNA branches in North Dublin and North Leinster, and Munster come in a close second and third with School Secretaries in fourth place. The pension parity strike in schools and the battle over the pay and numbers strategy in the HSE clearly paved the way for an uptick in recruitment.

Pop the question

Seán is quick to point out one fact that always seems to chime through in these types of reports.

"The union's most effective recruitment method is still personal invitation: four out of five members join because a colleague asked them.

"Thanks to robust structures, passionate activists, and a focused plan for the coming year, Fórsa is ideally situated to broaden its reach, increase membership, and achieve positive outcomes for members throughout Ireland, but we need our activists to start popping that question: have you joined the union yet?"

Seán also says that the preparation period for the A Better Deal campaign was as huge boost to recruitment efforts. "That involved centralising our list of workplace representatives on our membership system. In total, the union has around 2,000 workplace reps – these are the absolute backbone of the organisation. These are the people on-site, who are able to link the broader union structures to the workplace and our people. They are key to recruitment."

With biennial conference just around the corner, Seán says the most important thing now is to keep focused. He is also quick to point to the staff-wide groundwork that has been laid for deeper member engagement.

"Fórsa has dramatically improved its overall accurate



Continued page 9

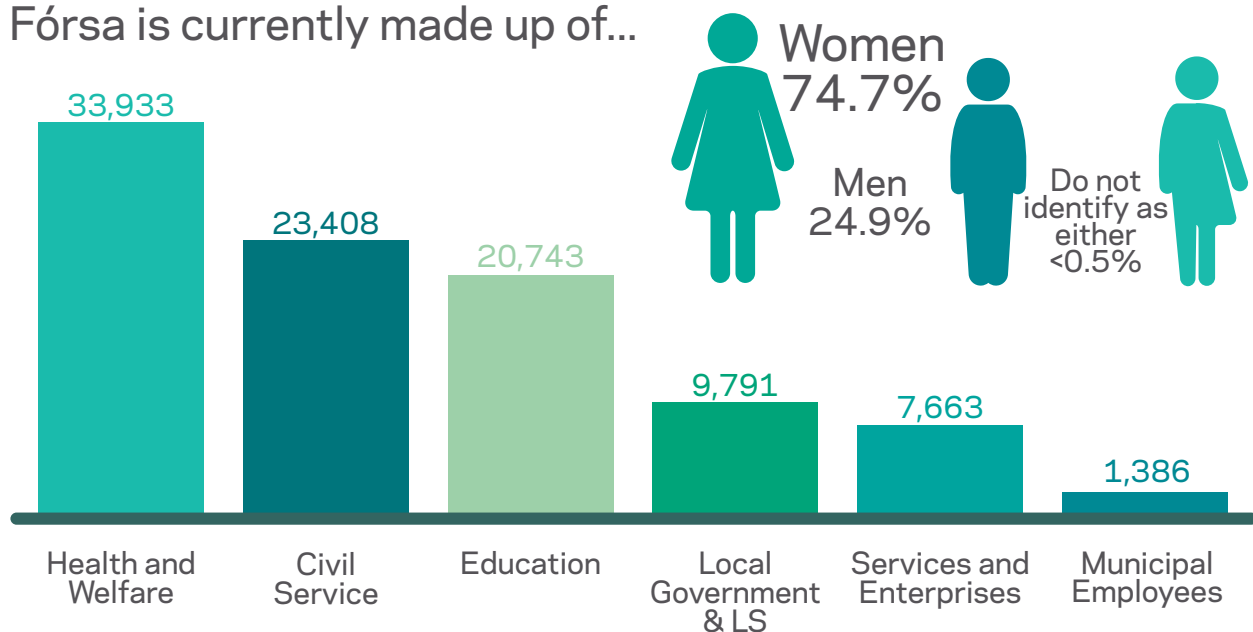
CSQ Spring 2026

96,924 Members on 31st December 2025

Goal to reach **100,000** members in 2026

Will need to recruit **10,599+** new members to reach goal

Fórsa is currently made up of...



Average age of Fórsa Members

Health and Welfare
Civil Service
Education
Local Government & LS
Services and Enterprises
Municipal Employees



From page 8

email coverage for members; from less than 60% in 2021 to over 96% in 2025. Furthermore, because of widespread mapping, we have obtained workplace data for over 80% of members: up from just under 30% at the end of 2024," Seán says.

"Look it's easy to get distracted by the numbers game. There's been huge breakthroughs in the knowledge

Spring 2026 **CSQ**

we have about members, we've been shoring up a lot of drafty gaps, insulating the attic and retrofitting the extension. We've laid the groundwork to grow the Fórsa family here," he adds.

All of this filters down into allowing for more direct communication and an improved organising capacity.

The union bounce

Looking ahead, Fórsa has set a national recruitment target of

10,599 new members for 2026. If the union reaches this goal, it will push membership beyond the 100,000 mark for the first time.

"If the figure of 100K sounds impressive to you, it should! Very few other unions are experiencing this type of growth or bounce. In fact, many are in severe decline. It's very easy to always find fault and concentrate on what we're missing – but we've got

momentum here, folks.

"We're in this together and something is happening in Fórsa that's quite powerful. We are building an organisation that can fight for the common good and shape the world for the better on behalf of workers and communities everywhere. Isn't that a mission worth signing up to?" concluded Seán.

● A copy of the report can be accessed by emailing **membership@forsa.ie**

Opinion

AI won't decide Ireland's future, workers will

Kevin Callinan

Fórsa General Secretary

The future of work in Ireland is not automated. It's negotiated. If we asked previous generations what once felt absurdly out of reach for Irish workers, they might say: "A weekend, paid holidays, maternity leave, even a chance to see your children before bedtime."

Most of what was then dismissed as mad, utopian or economically impossible eventually became reality because workers made it so.

Those earlier transitions remind us of a simple truth: machinery and technology are not the primary drivers of progress, people are. And as Ireland confronts the rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI), it's workers who must again shape what comes next. History highlights how powerful workers can be in shaping the future. Yet right now, the Irish workforce is deeply uncertain about this latest wave of technological change.

Recent polling paints a striking picture of how Irish people feel about AI. A *Sunday Independent/Ireland Thinks* survey in December found 48% of respondents believe AI will be a negative force in Irish life, with just 27% positive. An Ipsos B&A poll the previous month had similar findings on AI and employment.

Most striking of all: young people – typically the optimistic early adopters of new technology – are the most pessimistic. As journalist Mark Little observed: "The digital natives are jaded by Big Tech companies that promise empowerment but make the future ever more precarious. They sense the hammer of AI falling in the workplace, removing entry-level jobs that were a gateway to a stable career."

This should concern us all. If a generation raised on technology sees AI as a threat, not opportunity, it is a sign that we're mismanaging this transition. History tells us their concern is



AGENTS OF CHANGE Fórsa general secretary Kevin Callinan argues that technological change does not just happen to workers, it is shaped by them

well-founded. According to the Economic Policy Institute, between 1948 and 1973 – during the dawn of the computing age – a 97% jump in productivity was coupled with an inflation-adjusted 91% increase in average hourly wages. Workers and employers shared in the gains of technological progress.

But between 1973 and 2013, productivity increased by another 74% while, when similarly adjusted for inflation, average hourly compensation increased by just 9%. Workers were getting more productive thanks to technological advancement, yet they were rarely the ones who benefitted.

Too often, AI is presented as a tool for efficiency alone: a way to cut costs, shrink headcounts, and squeeze more from fewer people. If that's all it becomes, we already know the outcome. Workers who feel the ground shifting beneath them, with no say in where it settles, do not stay silent forever. But it doesn't

have to be this way. We can choose a path where technology expands human potential, not compresses it – one that safeguards responsibility and protects the judgment, creativity and empathy that make us human, rather than treating them as inefficiencies to be engineered away.

If AI genuinely makes us more productive, that productivity can be channelled into something better than leaner payrolls and longer hours. It can mean improved conditions. It can mean more time for life outside work. It can mean reinvestment in the public services on which Irish people depend. The choice is not between progress and fairness – it's about whether we have the will to pursue both.

Workers have the capacity to organise, to act together, and to insist that technological change benefits the many, not just the few. This isn't utopian thinking. The Oireachtas Joint Committee on Artificial Intelligence, in a

recent interim report, emphasised AI decisions should be "rooted in human rights and equality considerations". It warned "a key focus for Government must be how to avoid deepening existing inequalities".

Cross-party consensus recognises AI adoption must be handled carefully. What's missing is a strong voice for workers in that conversation.

The trade union movement has long understood technological change is not something that simply happens to workers – it is something that can and must be shaped by them.

Recent research conducted by Amárach among 14,000 Fórsa members showed their priorities were clear: safeguarding hybrid and remote working, more flexible working arrangements, and a shorter working week. They feel as strongly about these issues as they do about pay. And more than eight in 10 say they're prepared to take action to secure them.

The Government has a role to play too, not just as regulator, but as Ireland's largest employer. It can lead by example: adopting AI to the highest ethical standards, while demonstrating the gains are shared with workers and reinvested in public services.

The current public service pay agreement expires in June. What comes next can be a beacon for all employers and workers across the country. When discussions begin, civil and public servants will want to see a fair, negotiated approach to AI on the table, where AI doesn't replace what makes our work human, but instead gives people more space to do it.

When workers lead, the impossible becomes possible, progress becomes shared, and Ireland moves forward together.

When discussions begin, civil and public servants will want to see a fair, negotiated approach to AI on the table, where AI doesn't replace what makes our work human, but instead gives people more space to do it

● This opinion piece by Fórsa general secretary Kevin Callinan originally appeared in the *Irish Examiner* on Thursday 19th February 2026.

Remote work must not be for the privileged few

Niall Shanahan argues that inequality will be built into the working week if hybrid work becomes a perk for higher paid workers

In February, we learned that an “overwhelming” number of jobs in the Irish economy offer no flexibility to work from home, prompting concern that remote and hybrid work is now largely confined to higher-paid roles.

If current patterns continue, a situation may develop where you only have access to remote or hybrid work if you are earning more than a hundred thousand a year, and not at all if you earn much below sixty grand. Harsh?

JobLeads, an online job platform based in Germany, reported recently that only 3.7% of 48,000 active Irish job postings are fully remote, with 13.4% hybrid and 83% requiring daily workplace attendance. It also found that just 5% of roles paying under €60,000 offer remote or hybrid options, while jobs paying €100,000 and above account for more than a quarter of them.

These figures suggest that the push back to the office could collapse one of the most significant innovations in modern working life. It also risks hardening inequality within the workforce if remote work becomes an exclusive perk for higher-paid staff, condemning others to longer days and wasted time.

Revolutionary

The overnight shift to remote work during the Covid pandemic in 2020 was remarkable because it was largely unplanned, yet it mostly worked. We quickly adapted to its possibilities and learned to recognise its limitations. For the most part, it was warmly embraced and was spoken of in almost revolutionary terms.

Remote and hybrid working changed commuting patterns, easing peak-time congestion, cutting emissions and journey times, and relieving pressure on Ireland's road infrastructure. Regional economies got a boost, and workers with caring responsibilities experienced a greater degree of flexibility, allowing for a more sustainable balance between caring and work demands.

Despite all these gains, anxieties about workplace collaboration, city centre footfall and productivity have continued to colour

TWO-TIER FEARS In future will remote and hybrid working be reserved for the higher-paid? (Picture for illustration purposes only)



If access to remote and hybrid work is allowed to harden into a perk for higher-paid roles, then inequality will be built into the working week itself

the debate. This is why Fórsa has challenged employers over unilateral attempts to force people back into the grind of 10 commutes a week. Most recently, this has arisen in a dispute with the Department of Social Protection over increased office attendance. Following union pushback, the matter is now due to go to a conciliation process.

Priority

In a survey of 14,000 Fórsa members last year, 55% of respondents said their main priority was to protect existing hybrid and remote working arrangements. It reflects the real concerns of Irish workers, who have already proved beyond doubt that remote and hybrid arrangements can serve the needs of workers and employers without compromise.

A drift back to the pre-Covid status quo, driven by concern over commercial property values or an old-fashioned desire for control, would constitute a real political failure by the government that facilitates it.

No government will be rewarded for

forcing more people to spend more time in more traffic. Dublin is now the third-most congested city in Europe, its main arterial routes are clogged every morning, for miles in every direction. Our climate action goals take a hit too, while public transport remains overwhelmed and everybody's journey becomes slower and longer. A recent Dáil debate on revised legislation on remote work saw one TD miss the debate because he was stuck on the M50.

Housing & Care

In this context, being herded back to the office is making life tougher than it needs to be for a lot of people, not least those with caring responsibilities at home. The same applies to those who've made the difficult decision to move further away to afford a home.

Taking those JobLeads figures at face value, the only exception would be higher paid, senior staff and management grades. In that scenario, higher-paid staff avoid peak commuting while junior colleagues, mandated back to the office, collaborate with them over video calls.

The Government's own remote working policy, published in 2021, envisaged 20% of public sector employees working remotely or on a blended basis, with further annual increases planned up to this year. But five years on that enthusiasm has dampened and there is a risk that the State looks set to follow private sector employers in pushing for more office-based work.

Policy

The response from employers looks shortsighted when you consider Irish productivity has not been adversely affected by remote and hybrid working. Labour productivity, measured by the Central Statistics Office (CSO), shows an increase in total economy activity between 2022 and 2025. Insisting that workers increase their current level of exhausting and pointless hours of commuting will do little to sustain the Irish economy.

If access to remote and hybrid work is allowed to harden into a perk for higher-paid roles, then inequality will be built into the working week itself. Longer commutes, heavier congestion and increased stress will be the price paid by those with the least choice. That is not an inevitable feature of modern work. It is a policy failure, and it should not be accepted as progress.

● This opinion piece by Fórsa Media Relations Director Niall Shanahan first appeared in *The Examiner* on Tuesday 17th February.

ICTU Women's Conference



FORGING LINKS Civil Service Division Chair Jean Taylor said she felt the conference 'allowed us to share perspectives and build stronger solidarity'

Achieving for women in work

Hannah Deasy

CSQ Editor

The Irish Congress of Trade Unions hosted its annual Women's Conference in March. The two-day event took place in Cavan, bringing together delegates from all unions across the island.

The conference theme was 'Achieving for Women in Work' and focused on the new economic model ICTU is advocating for, which calls for living wages to become standard, universal public services including public childcare, universal health care, and collective bargaining as a right, and ensuring every workplace has democratic participation.

Chair of the Civil Service division Jean Taylor was part of Fórsa's delegation. Reflecting on the conference Jean told CSQ: "Throughout the conference we heard powerful testimony from women trade unionists highlighting the issues facing members of all our unions.

"Coming together at events like this allow us to share perspectives and build stronger solidarity," she added.

Co-chairs of the ICTU Joint Women's Committee Tina Creaney (NIPSA) and Lynda Scully (SIPTU) led proceedings, welcoming delegates and



DELEGATION Fórsa's team at the ICTU Women's Conference in Cavan

highlighting the main topics on the packed agenda, ranging from universal childcare, reproductive rights, an end to violence against women, and climate justice.

ICTU President Phil Ní Sheaghdha addressed the opening session of the conference. She highlighted that Irish unions now have more women members than men, as the growth in female participation in the labour force in recent decades has been matched by a growing number of women joining trade unions.

Speaking about the impact unions can have on women's lives she said: "Trade unions offer something beyond the payslip. We offer dignity. We offer voice. We provide strength and solidarity. Being in a union

means the difference between accepting what you're given and negotiating what you deserve."

Outlining how the new economic model would benefit women workers, she said: "Our new economic model places workers, families, and communities at the heart of economic decision-making, not as an afterthought.

"It is not based on fantasy economics; these are practical policies already working in countries that prioritise social partnership over unchecked corporate power."

Melissa Brennan from the Civil Service DEC, spoke on the union's motion which called for action on AI-enabled sexual harassment and violence.

Urging delegates to support

the motion she said: "We are not talking about hypothetical future risks. We are talking about the reality of today, where AI platforms allow users to generate non-consensual, sexualised images, often referred to as 'nudification' or 'deepfakes'.

"These are not accidents or mere glitches in a system. These are malicious adaptations of AI technology. It is digital sexual intimidation designed to harass, silence, and isolate."

She added, "Technology has evolved faster than our enforcement mechanisms, creating a dangerous vacuum where abusers operate with impunity. We cannot wait for a watershed moment to act when the floodgates are already open. We need to be proactive."

Biennial Conference Preview

Planning well under way for Biennial Conference

Brendan Kinsella

Fórsa Communications

As May approaches, the considerable undertaking of organising Biennial Conference 2026 is well under way. Over 750 delegates from more than 200 branches will make their way to the Gleneagle events centre, Killarney to take on the important business of setting policy for our union.

Taking place from Wednesday 13th to Friday 15th May, delegates will propose, debate, and vote on motions which will decide the direction Fórsa will take on a wide array of issues from pay, to remote working, to accommodations for disabled workers, to the ethical introduction of artificial intelligence in the workplace.

Over the past three months, at AGMs held online and across the country, branches have decided upon the motions they will be proposing at conference. These motions have now been submitted and the task of collating, organising and validating has already begun.

National secretary responsible for conference arrangements Catherine Keogh said: "These motions are the voices of our members. They set the direction of the union and guide our work on a whole host of issues, so we take great care to ensure each motion abides by the union's rules and has an opportunity to be debated."

As the Public Sector Pay Agreement 2024-2026 is due to expire in June, it is expected that preparations for the following agreement will occupy much of the agenda.

Catherine told CSQ: "We have motions on housing, cost of living, healthcare, and working conditions. However, the public sector pay agreement has a big impact on the lives of a lot of our members, so there has been a focus on it. Outside of motions, we will also be talking about our A Better Deal campaign and some of our strategising as we prepare for talks with the government."

Also on the docket for debate is the Strategic Plan 2026 - 2030, which will guide Fórsa's work and growth for the next four years. This will seek to build upon the 2021-25 plan, which laid out a map for Fórsa's work over the past four years, guiding our efforts towards increasing union

Spring 2026 **CSQ**



'DEMOCRACY IN ACTION' Card vote at conference – a lot of union business is carried out at Fórsa BDCs



FANTASTIC Delegate keeping cool at the last BDC

membership, delivering for members, increasing the effectiveness of organising and campaigns, as well as building a more resilient union.

With little over a month left until conference begins, branches have begun to finalise their list of delegates and submit their nominations for Distinguished Service awards. The latter of which will be presented on stage in the Gleneagle during conference.

Organisation for another biennial conference tradition is also well underway, the conference charity cycle where Fórsa

staff and members cycle from Limerick to Killarney on the morning of the first day of conference. Since 2008, the charity cycle has raised almost €240,000 for charities, including cancer research projects and mental health/suicide prevention projects.

Fórsa official, Diarmaid Mac a Bhaird will be reprising his role as a cycle organiser and participant this year. He urged delegates, officials, and officers alike to take part and contribute.

He said: "We would hope to see another increase in the number of participants taking part in the cycle this year. You don't have to be a pro – this is a fun cycle, and you don't have to do the whole cycle to take part in the event. You can share a bike and do 5-10km, or more. You won't be left behind as we will all arrive at the conference venue at the same time."

A full conference schedule has yet to be announced. Once ready it will be emailed to branches, with full details of guest speakers, fringe events, and entertainment.

Catherine added: "We're excited to host our members in Killarney. Biennial conference is a pillar of our union's democracy. It's an opportunity for members to speak and be heard. It brings us together and unites us under the same ambitions. It is democracy in action."

SPOKES PEOPLE The charity fun cycle has become a fixture at biennial conferences



'No one goes hungry' Fórsa donates €10,000 to north inner city day centre

James Redmond

Fórsa Communications

Residents of Dublin's north inner city might be familiar with the occasional early morning sight of Capuchin Friars wearing their traditional brown habits making their way past rows of red-brick cottages, offering pastoral care to the local community, including the practical supports provided through the Capuchin Day Centre.

When it started back in 1969, the centre catered to 50 males on a daily basis – and later started to also see families coming through its door. They provide on average 350 hot breakfasts and 550 lunches each day. The mission is simple – no one goes hungry – but there's a suite of other services on site, with everything from haircuts and showers to clinical services available.

A recent €10,000 donation from Fórsa will directly support these essential services, helping the Capuchin Day Centre continue its mission of care, compassion and practical support for some of the most vulnerable people in our communities.

Founded by Capuchin Friar Brother Kevin Crowley and inspired by the spirit and values of St Francis of Assisi, the Day Centre was established to relieve the hardship faced by people who were homeless or struggling to meet their basic needs. Over more than five decades, it has grown into one of Ireland's most respected and trusted frontline services for those in need.

A core principle of the Capuchin Day Centre is dignity and respect. Everyone who comes through its doors is treated as a guest and welcomed without judgement. Support is offered on a "no questions asked" basis, ensuring that no one goes hungry or is turned away.

Fr. Kevin Kiernan, Order of Friars Minor Capuchin (OFM Cap), current Capuchin Director of the Day Centre is passionate about the work, saying: "Core to



PRACTICAL SUPPORT Fr Kevin Kiernan and his fellow Capuchins have fought the good fight against poverty and exclusion over five decades

the Day Centre's mission is the absolute unconditionality of access to the majority of services irrespective of age, race, gender, nationality and religious or political beliefs."

The Centre continues to be guided by the Irish Capuchin Friars, who remain actively involved in its daily life, helping ensure that the Centre's services reflect both its charitable mission and high

standards of care. In August 2022, Fr. Kevin Kiernan became Capuchin Director, taking over from Brother Kevin Crowley following his retirement.

Alongside a skilled team of professional staff and a large group of dedicated volunteers, the Day Centre relies in no small part on public support in the form of financial contributions to meet the high demand for its services. Expressing his

gratitude for the recent donation received from Fórsa, Fr. Kevin told CSQ: "We rely on the public for the vast majority of the funds needed to run these services. We are very grateful for the generous donation from Fórsa last December – it is thanks to the generosity and compassion of supporters like you that we can continue to open our doors to anyone seeking support and a warm welcome.

"It means we can offer a hot meal, along with many other essential practical supports and hopefully our guests, adults and families from all walks of life, also feel a sense of belonging and community."

The scale of the Centre's work is significant. In 2025 alone, it provided 331,300 hot meals to adults and families and distributed more than 77,300 food parcels. Its family services provided 6,545 infant packs containing basic care essentials like nappies and formula milk to families. The Day Centre also provided over 7,500 showers for people sleeping rough and 189 on-site haircuts with the voluntary support of Haircuts for the Homeless. In partnership with SafetyNet, the Day Centre supported 3,434 people through clinics, including GP, nursing, chiropody and dentistry.

Speaking about the donation, Fórsa general secretary Kevin Callinan said: "As a union we advocate for a fairer, more equal and inclusive society. We are proud to support organisations that care for vulnerable members of our communities at times of great need. The Capuchin Day Centre is a remarkable organisation without which many people would suffer greatly."





SNAs take to the streets

James Redmond

Fórsa Communications

In February schools across the country began to receive notification that their SNA allocation would be reduced. Over a week-long period SNAs in over 200 schools were told their jobs could be in jeopardy.

The review strictly applied the 2014 circular governing the SNA role, which links allocation to students' "primary physical care needs" and does not reflect the full range of learning, emotional regulation and neurodivergent needs now present in mainstream classrooms.

Fórsa has consistently argued that the work of SNAs goes far beyond what is reflected in the current, outdated circular, and that SNAs are vital to supporting students' learning and wellbeing. In mainstream schools, SNAs play a crucial role in ensuring children can reach their full potential.

As school communities became aware of the proposed reductions a broad-based coalition came together, led by SNAs, parents, and teachers, calling for an immediate end to the cuts and for proper allocation of resources.

From Market Square in Buncrana to Market Cross in Killarney, grassroots protests over reductions to Special Needs Assistants were organised. In Dublin, crowds converged outside Leinster House on Wednesday 25th February, during a brief golden hour that held off the threat of rain. Parents stood with SNAs. Teachers stood with families. The mood was direct, coordinated and unflinching.

Samantha O'Flanagan, SNA, and member of the North Dublin North Leinster SNA branch, was live-streaming to supporters when we caught up with her. "This is one of the biggest movements that we've seen about special education at the moment. There are 30 protests happening across the country,



most of them today, some of them over the next few days. Because we're not stopping here."

The chants rolled through the crowd without pause – "When children's rights are under attack, stand up and fight back! When children's rights are under attack, stand up! Fight back!"

Jesslyn Henry, also from the NDNL branch, admitted the scale had caught even the organisers off guard.

She told CSQ: "We absolutely weren't expecting the crowds that have come here today, and we absolutely weren't expecting another 31 protests across the country. So, thank you, every single one. Ten years I have been fighting as part of Fórsa to make sure our voices are heard. We don't just help with the primary care needs that are listed in Circular 30/2014."

For many speakers, the issue went far beyond allocations and administrative circulars. Samantha O'Flanagan said: "Every child has a right to access an education, to feel safe in school, to participate, to communicate, to learn and to belong. But for many children with additional needs, those rights are only possible because of SNAs.

"This situation didn't happen overnight. It's

This situation didn't happen overnight. It's years of decisions made by the Government to under-resource our education system and to treat support for children with additional needs as an afterthought

years of decisions made by the Government to under-resource our education system and to treat support for children with additional needs as an afterthought. This was inevitable. This was allowed to happen by the people in the building over there."

Addressing the crowd the head of Fórsa's Education division Andy Pike underlined the problems with the 2014 Circular. He said: "It restricts access to students. It restricts access for us, and it prevents those with what they call secondary care needs from accessing state support. This is the document they use. It contains the criteria that says only primary care needs merit support. You can't discriminate any longer."

Andy also said that a broader discussion about whether special education is adequately resourced must take place, adding: "If the current workforce of more than 25,000 SNAs is not sufficient to meet identified need, then Government must look again at its investment strategy for delivering its commitments on special education."

The Dublin event closed with the words of a child read aloud, movingly underlining the vital role SNAs play in their lives: "She has a big smile and she gives me hugs. These are the people that are being taken away from our children. Please – children feel safe with those SNAs, and that should not be taken away."

Explainer

Double scoop with a cherry on top..?



Auto-enrolment
FAQs answered

The smooth rollout of MyFutureFund to date is to the credit of our members in the Department of Social Protection, from the implementation team in Áras Mhic Dhiarmada, Dublin, to the customer support service in Letterkenny, Donegal, which dealt with 36,000 customer engagements in the first two months alone. While civil servants are not directly concerned, many of you will have friends or family for whom auto-enrolment does apply. Below, ICTU's **Laura Bambrick** answers our questions about the new scheme.

What is auto-enrolment?

Auto-enrolment is a big change to how we do pensions and plan for retirement in Ireland.

Up to now, you have had to take steps to save for your retirement either by signing up to be a member of your employer's pension or by taking out a personal long-term savings plan.

Auto-enrolment flips the need to be proactive. Everyone who is eligible is automatically placed into the new retirement saving scheme known as MyFutureFund.

You only need to (re)act if you choose not to save.

Why auto-enrolment?

CSO figures show one-third of workers have no pension outside of the social welfare pension.

The Contributory State Pension is currently €15,500 per year. The job of this pension is to cover the basics to keep workers out of poverty in old age.

For most people, going from a wage to €299.30 a week will be a big drop in income. Unless there are retirement savings to add to the social welfare pension, it will also mean a big drop in living standards.

When asked why they don't have an occupational pension, more than two-thirds of employees said their employer didn't have a company pension or their employer didn't allow staff on their type of contract to join. It is only since the start of this year that employers are required by law to contribute to their employees' retirement savings.

MyFuture Fund

The new auto-enrolment retirement savings scheme is coming

You pay in, your employer pays in, and the State tops it up.

Visit gov.ie/AE

**Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland**

Auto-enrolment flips the need to be proactive. Everyone who is eligible is automatically placed into the new retirement saving scheme... You only need to (re)act if you choose not to save

How will it work?

Workers will automatically be placed into MyFutureFund if they are:

- An employee (including part-timers, seasonal workers, new

Continued page 17
CSQ Spring 2026

RETIREMENT PLAN The success of the MyFutureFund will in the end be measured by the number of people who can look forward to a decent retirement as a result of the initiative



From page 15

Picture: Unsplash

hires), and

- Aged between 23 and 60, and

- Earning above €20,000 before tax a year from one or more jobs, and

- Not already making pension contributions from their wages into a qualifying pension.

Employees can voluntarily join if aged 18-22 and 61-66 or earning less than €20,000, and over 5,000 had chosen to do so by the end of January.

MyFutureFund savings contribution are deducted from wages earned after January 1st. The amount saved is matched by the employer and the State puts in a top-up in place of tax relief on contributions. The contribution is set at a percentage of total gross (before-tax) earnings which will gradually increase over the next 10 years (see Table 1).

Membership is mandatory for the first six months. Employees not wanting to save will have an option to opt-out in July and August. Their contributions will be returned to them. Their employer and State contributions will also stop, with the contributions they made to date remaining in the employee's fund. After two years, the employee will be re-enrolled for a

Spring 2026 **CSQ**

Table 1

Year	Employee	Employer	State	Total contributions
2026 - 2028	1.5%	1.5%	0.5%	3.5%
2029 -2031	3%	3%	1%	7%
2032 - 2034	4.5%	4.5%	1.5%	10.5%
2035 onwards	6%	6%	2%	14% gross earnings

mandatory six months. Recognising that there will be periods that are harder on the pocket, there is also an option to pause making contributions for periods of up to two years.

Employees can monitor their savings on the MyFutureFund online portal, see that all contributions have gone in and select their preferred investment plan to grow their savings. MyFutureFund savings are the employee's property, protected

in law. They can be accessed at 66. There is no option for early access for any life event other than retirement. If death occurs before retirement age, the savings go to the employee's next-of-kin.

Will it be a success?

The experience from other countries when they introduced auto-enrolment is that only small numbers will choose to opt-out, in large part because workers

will have seen how quickly their savings grew over the compulsory six months when added with their employer and State contributions.

However, the measure of success is not the number of workers saving for retirement. Success will be determined by the number with a decent retirement income.

The first hurdle to this will be the intense lobbying to slow down or stop the planned increases in contributions and the omens don't look good. Last year, the Government ripped up agreed rollout plans on sick pay and a living wage. The trade union campaign for the right to a comfortable retirement is far from over.

The first hurdle to this will be the intense lobbying to slow down or stop the planned increases in contributions and the omens don't look good... The trade union campaign for the right to a comfortable retirement is far from over

From equal pay to pay transparency as history repeats itself



ICTU's **Laura Bambrick** looks at similarities surrounding the introduction of equal pay in the 1970s and the push to delay pay transparency today

Picture: Unsplash

This year marks the 50th anniversary of women in Ireland gaining the right to equal pay. Up to that point, it was commonplace for employers to have two pay scales – a higher one for men and a lower one for women.

Unique to the Irish civil service, single civil servants were paid equally. But when they married, men moved on to a higher 'married man's pay scale', which the new Free State Government introduced in 1925 and remained in place until 1977, while women civil servants were shown the door courtesy of the marriage bar.

Even though an equal pay directive from Europe in the 1970s put an end to such blatant pay discrimination, 50 years on women in the Irish workforce still earn an average 9.6% less per hour than men.

Lifting the veil

Secrecy surrounding pay has been identified as one of the main contributors to the gender pay gap, which a new EU pay transparency directive intends to lift the veil on.

Women workers are more likely to under-price themselves in initial salary negotiations and are less likely to ask for a pay rise thereafter. But where they know what an

Picture: Pexels



Despite having had three years to prepare... business representatives are intensely lobbying, both here and in Europe, to delay the deadline. Echoes of the efforts to delay the introduction of equal pay legislation ring loud

employer hiring is willing to pay and pays their colleagues doing similar work, the evidence shows it narrows the 'ask gap' that perpetuates unequal pay.

When the directive becomes law across the EU on 7th June, Irish workers will gain the right to:

- Know how much a job pays before applying.
- No longer be questioned on their pay history in job interviews.
- No longer be subject to a secrecy clause in their contract or company pay policy.
- Know how much male and female colleagues doing similar work are paid on average.

Despite having had three years to prepare for pay transparency, business representatives are intensely lobbying, both here and in Europe, to delay the deadline. Echoes of the efforts to delay the introduction of equal pay legislation ring loud.

Signed into law

On 1st July 1974 the Anti-Discrimination (Pay) Bill was signed into law by President Erskine Childers. This was the first piece of employment equality legislation on the Irish

Continued page 19

CSQ Spring 2026



LOOMING DEADLINE EU-wide Equal Pay Days have become a regular fixture in recent years. Now the clock is ticking on member states to put in place the pay transparency directive by 7th June

From page 18

statute book. It gave women workers a right to be paid the same rate as their male colleagues for equal work or work of equal value, and vice versa. At the time, the 'women's rate' for a job was around half (53%) the 'men's rate' on average, including those covered by a collective agreement.

Employers had until 31st December 1975 to end pay discrimination. Business representatives complained loudly and often that an 18-month lead-in time was insufficient for employers. But the deadline had been set by Government to fulfil its obligations to implement an equal pay directive from Europe which would become fully binding in all member states from 12th February 1976.

However, in the aftermath of an oil and energy crisis arising from conflict in the Middle East, the onset of petrol shortages, price spirals and recession, business groups stepped up their campaign to postpone the Act coming into force.

On 9th January 1976, weeks before the deadline, the Cabinet approved an amending Bill to the Anti-Discrimination (Pay) Act giving struggling businesses and the civil and public service a temporary exemption from paying equal pay. The Minister for



Picture: Sébastien Bertrand (CC BY 2.0)

Foreign Affairs Garrett FitzGerald was tasked with getting approval from Brussels for a delay.

After a strong campaign of opposition mounted by trade unionist women and other women activists, on the 14th April 1976 the European Commission rejected Ireland's application to delay the rules of equal pay between men and women thus confirming

...again, workers in Ireland must look beyond our own government to Europe to vindicate our right to equal treatment in employment

the Anti-Discrimination (Pay) Act was law from its original 1st January 1976 commencement date.

Lessons learnt?

Fast forward 50 years to today, with the 7th June deadline fast approaching, the pay transparency directive is facing the same strong resistance from business representatives.

ICTU President Phil Ní Sheaghda and General Secretary Owen Reidy wrote to the Minister for Equality Norma Foley calling on Government to stand firm and not leave 1.3 million women employees carrying the cost of the gender pay gap for longer.

In reply, to *The Irish Times*, the Department of Equality has said the regulations to bring Ireland into compliance with the pay transparency directive will be brought in on a phased basis and that companies will not be penalised for failing to meet the EU deadline.

Over one million euro in fines to the European Commission for failure to fully transpose the directive on time can be expected and again, workers in Ireland must look beyond our own government to Europe to vindicate our right to equal treatment in employment.

Quality jobs critical for New Economic Model

NERI co-director **Dr Tom McDonnell** argues that generating decent jobs that pay well and which have a good work-life balance benefit both workers and employers. Secure, quality employment will become increasingly possible if legally-binding minimum standards become the norm

Both economies on the island of Ireland are unrecognisable from 40 years ago. Yet there are underlying weaknesses including low productivity in some industries, too many bad and low-paid jobs, underinvestment in public services, poor environmental performance, weak growth in the North and a housing crisis in the South.

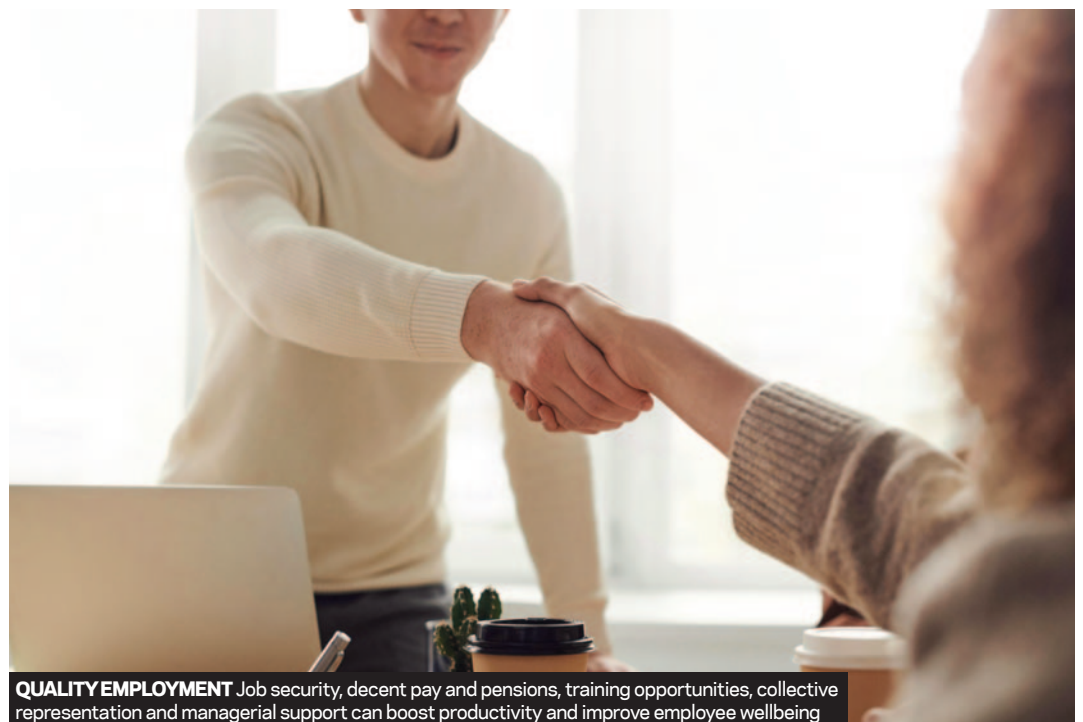
We are facing into an extended period of profound change. The world economy is going to be characterised by the four 'megatrends' of ageing populations; decarbonisation; digitalisation and Artificial Intelligence; and the partial unwinding of globalisation.

The New Economic Model (NEM) is the union movement's response to these weaknesses and challenges. At its heart, it is an evidence-based policy platform to deliver ongoing, inclusive, and environmentally sustainable economic progress in the 21st century.

It is structured around four mutually reinforcing pillars – a productivity-based economic strategy; more and better jobs; economic security throughout people's lives; and resilience against the shocks and the shifts of the global economy

Congress will be releasing a series of policy papers on different aspects of the NEM between now and the 2029 elections, and there will be supporting campaigns accompanying many of these reports. There will be reports on childcare, energy and housing among others. The first report focuses on Quality Employment and Good Jobs.

When people think about good jobs or job quality, they often focus on pay or whether someone says they are satisfied



QUALITY EMPLOYMENT Job security, decent pay and pensions, training opportunities, collective representation and managerial support can boost productivity and improve employee wellbeing

Picture: Pexels

or happy in their job. How much you're paid or whether you're satisfied with your job do matter, but on their own they do not give policymakers a reliable picture of the job's quality.

Job quality actually has many elements to it. It includes what we call extrinsic job attributes – your pay, how secure your contract of employment is, how predictable your hours are, and whether you have access to benefits such as paid sick leave

and pensions. It also includes intrinsic attributes that shape everyday work experience.

Examples include how your work is organised, the intensity of your work, how much autonomy you have over your work, what access you have to training and skill development, whether you have a voice in work matters and can have collective representation, the degree of managerial support available, and the social

environment of the workplace.

All of these aspects together determine whether a job supports or undermines workers' health, wellbeing, how long they will work and how productive they will be.

Jobs can make many demands on us in order to do our work, but they can also provide resources for us to do our jobs. High workloads, time pressure and long or unpredictable hours become harmful when workers have little or no autonomy or choice in their work.

The same can be said for training opportunities or supportive relationships. Without these "buffers", jobs become "high-strain" roles associated with stress, ill-health, and burnout.

The New Economic Model (NEM) is structured around four mutually reinforcing pillars – a productivity-based economic strategy; more and better jobs; economic security throughout people's lives; and resilience against the shocks and the shifts of the global economy

PILING ON THE PRESSURE High workloads and long or unpredictable hours become harmful when workers have little autonomy or choice in their work



Picture: Pexels

From page 20

On this basis, a **GOOD** job is one that:

- pays well;
- has demands that are manageable rather than excessive;
- provides secure and stable employment;
- offers opportunities for promotion and skill development;
- offers choice and control over how work is done;
- provides social support from managers, co-workers and unions;
- involves the worker and unions in decision-making in the workplace;
- is safe, and
- has a reasonable balance between work and life.

A **POOR** job, by contrast, is one where many of these attributes are absent and instead:

- pay is low;
- demands are excessive;
- hours are long or unpredictable;
- security is limited;
- training and promotions are minimal;

The central task for policy is to recognise combinations of job characteristics and design interventions that can improve job quality in the round...

- workers have very little say in the workplace;
- support is lacking, and
- opportunities for rest, recovery and balance are scarce.

Most jobs sit somewhere between these extremes. The central task for policy is to recognise these different combinations of job characteristics and design interventions that can improve job quality overall, instead of looking only at pay.

What can be done?

Improving average job quality requires us to do a number of things.

1 Government must be focussed on incentivising employment in industries and occupations that produce higher

value-added activity. Research shows that there is a strong link between high productivity and good-quality jobs. These jobs are more likely to offer better pay, benefits, and working conditions.

This might seem like an obvious policy priority, but there are many examples where government policies expend resources on the creation of jobs in low value-added industries such as the recent hospitality VAT rate cut in the South.

2 We need to set minimum standards in law that give all workers basic rights and protections, no matter what job they do or which industry they work in. We know that not all work can be in high-value added sectors.

These standards would create a basic level of job quality that everyone can rely on. They would show a commitment to fair treatment, inclusive growth, and sustainable employment, and ensure that all workers have access to decent working conditions.

3 A good jobs agenda should not only set minimum standards but also aim to

improve the quality of existing jobs. Most people will stay in their current roles for the foreseeable future, so raising job quality where they already work will have the biggest impact on their well-being.

The key is to empower people to gain improvements and progress within their own jobs.

Expecting people to do this alone is neither fair nor realistic. All workers should have access to trade unions and trade unions must have access to them. These issues go beyond pay: including the right to be heard, a balanced working life, feeling secure and so on.

Good jobs benefit not only workers, but also employers, the wider economy, and society as a whole. Policymakers and employers that invest in and prioritise good jobs and other supports such will experience less employee turnover, less recruitment costs and greater innovation and productivity due to having a more experienced, qualified, engaged and motivated workforce.

In the long-run everyone will benefit from this high road model of development.



RISKY BUSINESS ETUC General Secretary Esther Lynch speaking at the 6th March demo in Cork said the proposed changes would allow firms to operate across the EU without taking into account national labour laws in the way they do business

Picture: ETUC-CES

'Regime' change won't be good for workers and public services

The European trade union movement is organising against a controversial piece of proposed EU legislation, known as 'EU Inc.' or the '28th Company Regime'. The EU Commission argues that it will make it easier to set up a business in the EU, but trade unions are concerned that this will come at the cost of workers' rights. ETUC General Secretary **Esther Lynch** tells us more

A recent demonstration in Cork on Friday, 6th March sent a powerful and unmistakable message. Trade unionists from across Ireland, led by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) and the Cork Council of Trade Unions, with the strength and clarity of organisations like Fórsa, stood shoulder to shoulder to defend workers' rights and the integrity of our public services.

That mobilisation was not just symbolic. It reflected a deep and growing concern that the European Commission's proposed '28th Company Regime', or 'EU Inc.', risks undermining both.

This debate is not abstract. We have seen time and again how without robust legal protections employers profit while workers suffer. Now this new proposal goes to the heart of how rules are enforced, which will place a direct burden on civil servants.

Europe's social model is built on clear rules, strong enforcement, and a balance between

economic freedom and social rights. It has been shaped over decades through collective action and responsible law-making. It should not be weakened by a system that creates loopholes and shifts responsibility on to workers and public authorities.

For Ireland's civil servants, the implications are direct. Increased complexity, legal uncertainty, and administrative burden shifted away from companies will make a tough job even harder. At the same time, the financial consequences of corporate failure risk falling on already-stretched public budgets.

This debate is not abstract. We have seen time and again how without robust legal protections employers profit while workers suffer

At its core, the 28th Company Regime proposes a legal framework allowing companies to operate across the EU, avoiding national labour law. While simplification of cross-border business is a legitimate aim, simplification cannot come at the expense of accountability, workers' rights, or the effectiveness of public administration.

There are three risks for civil servants and public services:

1. Registration abroad: a recipe for legal confusion

One of the most immediate concerns is the possibility for companies to register abroad. For civil servants that is not simplification, it is complication. It raises fundamental questions: when does Irish law apply, and when does the 28th Regime take precedence? How are disputes resolved? Which authority is ultimately responsible? These are not minor technicalities. They go to the core of legal

Continued page 23

Guest column



EU PARLIAMENT ETUC GS Esther Lynch has called on MEPs to 'rise to the challenge' and ensure robust mechanisms are put in place to respect national laws

Picture: Filip Maljkovic (CC BY-SA 2.0)

From page 22

certainty. We have already seen warnings that such a system could allow companies to avoid complying with Irish labour law, putting hard-won protections – from public holidays to maternity leave – at risk. For civil servants tasked with enforcement, this creates an unenviable situation: policing compliance in a system where the rules themselves are blurred.

2. Rapid wind-up: shifting risk on to the public purse

The proposal's emphasis on 'rapid wind-up' allowing companies to be set up and dissolved within as little as 48 hours, is presented as efficiency. In reality, it risks becoming a mechanism for evading responsibility.

If companies can appear and disappear at such speed, who ensures that their obligations to workers, to creditors, to the tax authorities, are fulfilled? Too often, that burden will fall on civil servants.

**When companies vanish,
the consequences remain.
Workers left without pay or
redundancy protections
will need turn to the state...**

When companies vanish, the consequences remain. Workers left without pay or redundancy protections will need turn to the state for payment under the insolvency scheme. Public budgets, already under pressure, will be expected to absorb the costs. Faster closures risk weakening redundancy protections and safeguards for workers. But they also stretch administrative systems, requiring more oversight, more investigation, and more public intervention – without additional resources.

3. Shares instead of wages: workers' insecurity, losses for the state

The proposal does not prevent companies

from replacing the employment contract and compensating workers with shares instead of wages.

For workers, it replaces certainty with risk. Shares depend on future success, something far from guaranteed, especially in a model where companies can shut down quickly. As trade unions have pointed out, you cannot pay rent or a mortgage with shares.

For the state, the implications are equally troubling. Wages are taxed in a predictable way and fund public services. Shares are often taxed at lower rates, if at all, and only when realised.

This risks eroding the tax base and undermining the funding of essential services. Civil servants in revenue and social protection systems will be left to manage this uncertainty, while public finances take the strain.

Taken together, these elements point to a broader problem: a proposal that assumes all actors will behave responsibly, without putting in place the safeguards needed when they do not. The mobilisation in Cork was an important first call to defend not only workers' rights, but also the integrity of public administration.

The European Parliament must now take a strong stand. Members of the European Parliament must ensure that any proposal includes clear, enforceable protections for workers, full respect for national laws, and robust mechanisms for accountability.

National governments also have an important role to play. The upcoming meeting of employment ministers set to take place in Ballina in July, under the Irish Presidency of the EU Council, will be a key opportunity to raise the need to amend the 28th Company Regime proposals.

Simplification must not become a loophole. Efficiency must not come at the expense of fairness. And Europe must remain a place where economic progress goes hand in hand with strong public services and respect for workers.

The leadership shown by Irish trade unions has set the tone. Now Europe's lawmakers must rise to the challenge.

FÓRSA

**Working for you
on all platforms**



Solidarity

Palestine GAA supporter tops now available

Brendan Kinsella

Fórsa Communications

Last year, GAA Palestine were thrust into the headlines when visa issues threatened their planned tour of Ireland. The tour would have allowed young hurlers from Moataz Sarsour Hurling Club to travel around the country, train with fellow hurlers, and experience the joy and hospitality of grassroots GAA.

Despite the best efforts of GAA Palestine and public outcry, the issues were not resolved in time, and the organisers were forced to cancel the tour.

Although the children would be united with their kits in a hastily-organised training camp in Jordan, disappointment had sapped much of the joy from the occasion.

At the time, both Fórsa and GAA Palestine were inundated with messages from people looking to buy supporter jerseys, both to show their solidarity and to provide financial support to GAA Palestine. These jerseys are now available to order online, with all proceeds going to young Palestinian hurlers.

Speaking on behalf of Fórsa's International Solidarity committee, national secretary Richy Carrothers said: "This jersey is a unique symbol of solidarity, but more importantly, it delivers very real support to children and communities that desperately need it. This initiative is about more than sport; it is about turning solidarity into action.

"When you buy this jersey, you are making a direct contribution to help the children in Palestine, as well as proudly showing your solidarity as Fórsa members and trade unionists."



supporters show their moral support; by

purchasing it, they contribute financially to vital initiatives on the ground."

Let them play

In addition to the jerseys, GAA Palestine ran a 'Let Them Play' campaign from February to the March this year. The nationwide equipment drive sought donations of huris, helmets, sliotars, gumshields and any other GAA equipment for children and volunteer coaches of clubs in the West Bank.

Fórsa's head office in Nerney's Court was one of a number of drop-off points for donations. Members and branches gave generously.

● Jerseys can be ordered from the borusports.ie website.

<https://borusports.ie/product-category/club-shop/gaa-palestine/>

Retired Clare player, Gordon Kelly, is one of the leading organisers of GAA Palestine. According to Gordon, jersey sales are the primary source of income for the organisation. He told CSQ: "This revenue enables everything we do, including purchasing equipment and training gear, hiring sports grounds, and rolling out new initiatives.

"The Palestinian people, and particularly the children in the West Bank, have strongly and warmly embraced GAA sports. They have a great fondness for Irish culture, driven by their deep appreciation for the

advocacy of the Irish people and the Irish government on the international stage.

"They view GAA sports as something unique, specifically calling hurling 'The Freeman's Sport'. They recognise that these games were not brought to Palestine by a colonial power; instead, they were introduced in an environment of genuine friendship and solidarity."

Gordon encourages people to buy jerseys if they can. He said: "Jerseys are a powerful way for people to show their solidarity with the people of Palestine, both in Gaza and the West Bank. By wearing the jersey,

This jersey is a unique symbol of solidarity, but more importantly, it delivers very real support to children and communities that desperately need it. This initiative is about more than sport; it is about turning solidarity into action

SHOW OF SUPPORT
Ricky Carrothers





Mid-week break discounts for Fórsa Retired Members' Association members

From Hotel Solutions DMC along with Hodson Bay Group

Fórsa Retired Members' Association Individual Rates

Hodson Bay Hotel	Individual Rates 2026	Galway Bay Hotel	Individual Rates 2026
February	€120.00 Twin or Double	February	€120.00 Twin or Double
March to May	€125.00 Twin or Double	March to May	€125.00 Twin or Double
June to Sept	€136.00 Twin or Double	June to Sept	€136.00 Twin or Double
Oct to Dec	€125.00 Twin or Double	Oct to Dec	€125.00 Twin or Double
Sheraton Athlone	Individual Rates 2026	Hyatt Centric Dublin	Individual Rates 2026
February	€122.00 Twin or Double	February	€188.00 Twin or Double
March to May	€127.00 Twin or Double	March to May	€197.00 Twin or Double
June to Sept	€137.00 Twin or Double	June to Sept	€204.00 Twin or Double
Oct to Dec	€127.00 Twin or Double	Oct to Dec	€194.00 Twin or Double

Terms & Conditions: Rates subject to availability. Single supplement applies. Rates valid Sunday to Thursday Nights ONLY. Rates per room, per night includes Breakfast. Excludes Bank holiday, mid-terms & citywide events. Complimentary Midweek activities. 10% off Spa treatments.

Fórsa Retired Members' Association Group Rates

Minimum 10 people to qualify for rates. Minimum 2 Night Stay

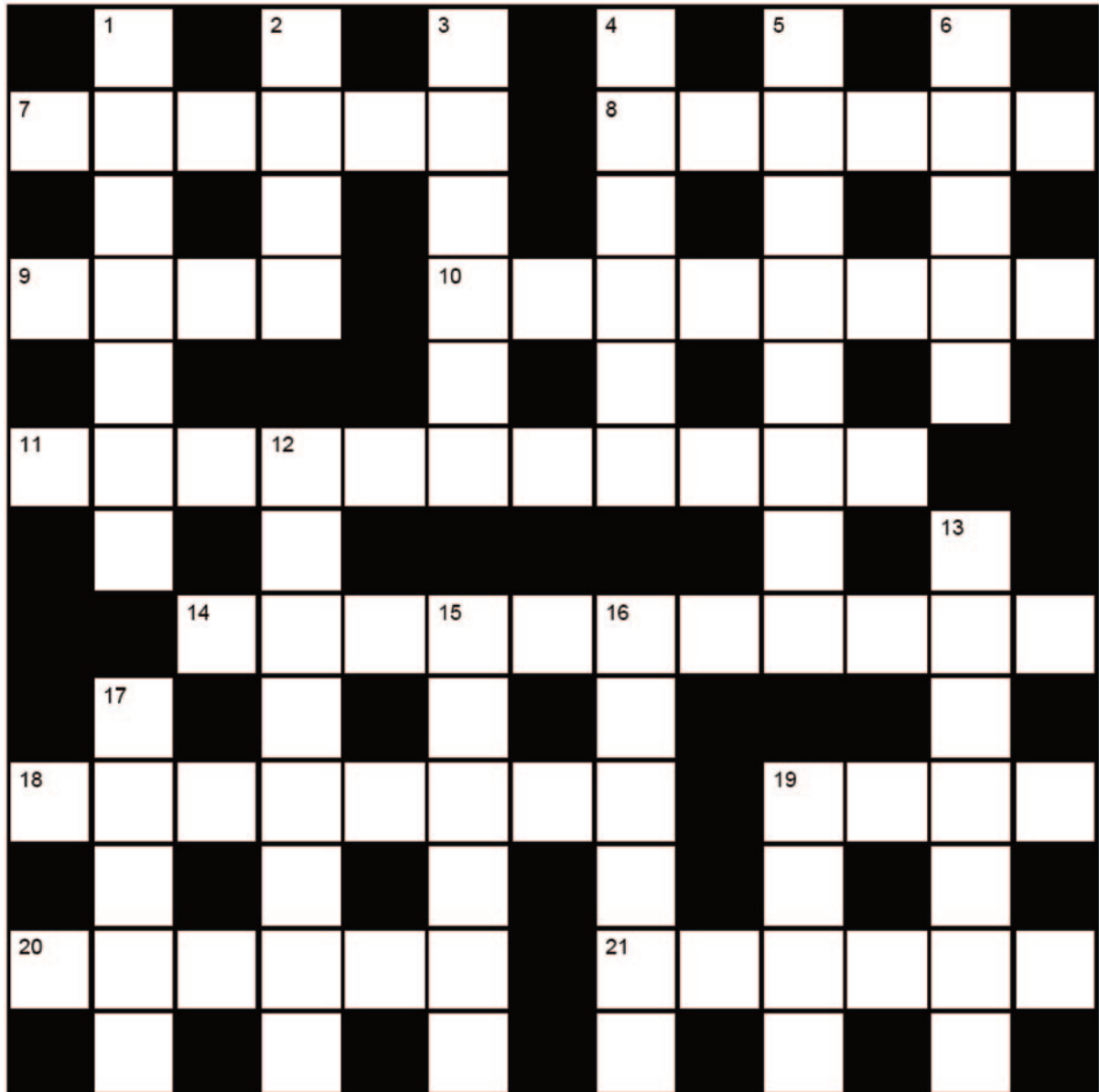
Hodson Bay Hotel	Leisure Group 2026	Galway Bay Hotel	Leisure Group 2026
February	€194.00 Twin or Double	February	€194.00 Twin or Double
March to April	€222.00 Twin or Double	March to April	€246.00 Twin or Double
May to Sept	€236.00 Twin or Double	May to Sept	€296.00 Twin or Double
Oct to Dec	€222.00 Twin or Double	Oct to Dec	€246.00 Twin or Double
Sheraton Athlone	Leisure Group 2026	Hyatt Centric Dublin	Leisure Group 2026
February	€194.00 Twin or Double	February	€261.00 Twin or Double
March to April	€222.00 Twin or Double	March to April	€313.00 Twin or Double
May to Sept	€236.00 Twin or Double	May to Sept	€325.00 Twin or Double
Oct to Dec	€222.00 Twin or Double	Oct to Dec	€313.00 Twin or Double

Terms & Conditions: Rates subject to availability. Rate includes Breakfast & 2 Course Dinner, per night. Minimum 2 Night Stay. Based on Sunday to Friday Nights. Supplement of €50 applies for Saturday Nights. Single supplement applies. Complimentary Tea/Coffee Scones on arrival. Complimentary midweek activities. 10% off Spa Treatments.



Crossword

Crossword set by Peter Connaughton



Across

7. Saudi Arabian city – major Islamic pilgrimage site (6)
 8. See 13 down (6)
 9. Centre of the earth and apple (4)
 10. Nickname of former goalkeeper David James (8)
 11. Administering the sacrament of Baptism (11)
 14. City in Minnesota, twinned with St. Paul (11)
 18. The 'I' in TIA – mini stroke (8)
 19. Continent and 80's super group (4)
 20. Four week season before Christmas (6)
 21. Caveat Buyer beware (6)

Down

1. Landlocked southern African country (7)
 2. "Time and wait for no man" – Chaucer (4)
 3. Tap in the USA (6)
 4. Island featured in Arthurian legend, and Roxy Music album (6)
 5. Expressive art and dance form from southern Spain (8)
 6. Singer – songwriter Tom won't back down (5)
 12. "..... and Irish women" – Proclamation of The Irish Republic (8)
 13. And 8 across, Californian hub of high technology (7)
 15. Broadway Joe – New York Jets legend (6)
 16. Symbol of the ninth sign of the zodiac (6)
 17. In theatre, a comment that an actor delivers directly to the audience (5)
 19. They can be French, Swiss, Italian or Julian (4)

CROSSWORD SOLUTIONS CSQ Autumn 2025

ACROSS: 1. Twelve; 4. Hades; 8. Ripon; 9. Iceberg; 10. Fuchsia; 11. CMAT; 12. Saw; 14. Ashe; 15. Orca; 18. Sea; 21. Port; 23. Cambria; 24. Learner; 26. Oisín; 27. O'Shea; 28. O'Dwyer.

DOWN: 1. Tariff; 2. Expects; 3. Vanishes; 4. Harp; 5. Dream; 6. Shinto; 7. Silas; 13. Wormwood; 16. Curtsey; 17. Apollo; 19. Accra; 20. Marner; 22. Roach; 23. Inca.