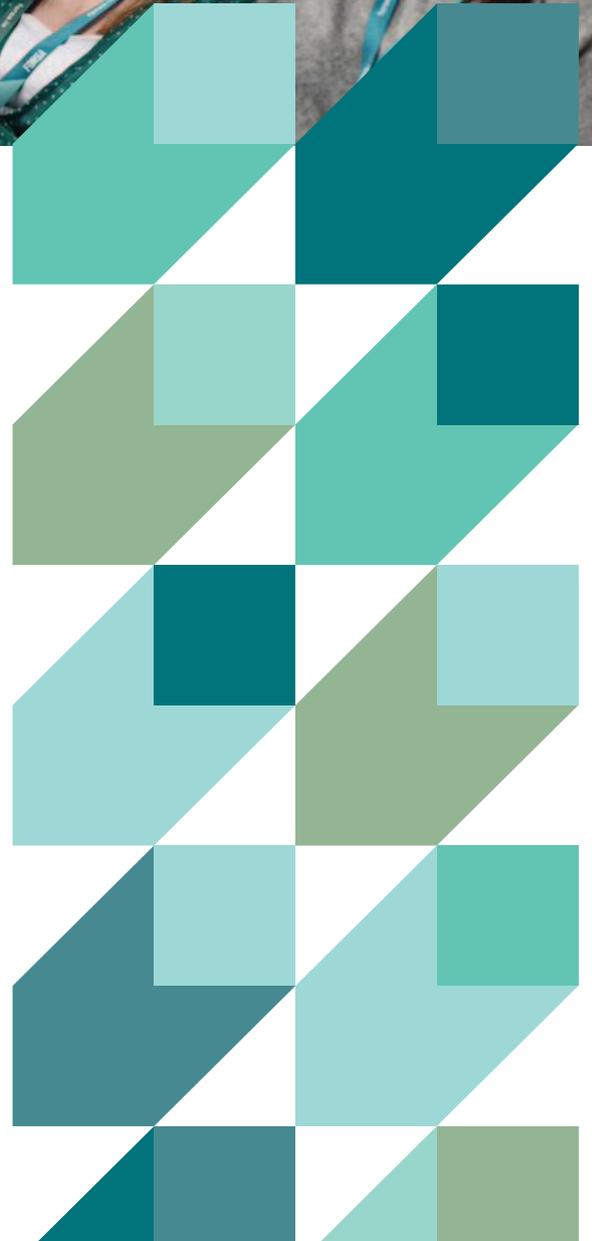




**FORSA**

# **CIVIL SERVICE DIVISION**

**REPORT 2023**





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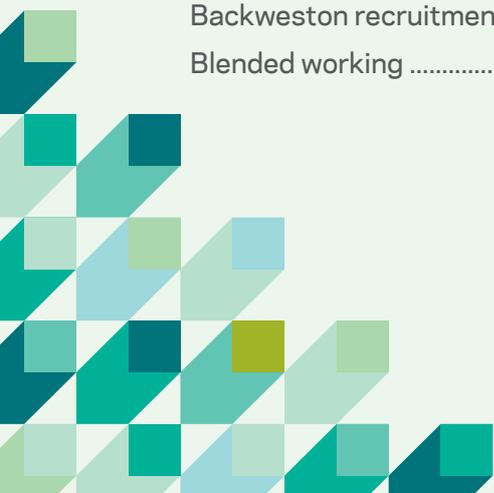
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# Organisation

## Divisional Executive Committee

The current Civil Service Divisional Executive Committee is made up as follows:

**Clerical:** Helen Linehan (Chairperson), Siobhan Kiely, Jean Taylor, Paula Gilman, Michelle McMorrow, Christopher Crowley, Jonathan Clonoo, Don Deane, Martin Gallagher, Mary Dunne, Jane McDermott.

**Executive:** Michael Crowe (Vice-Chairperson), Alan Hanlon, Majella Murphy, John Buggy, Martin Kehoe, John O'Connor, Tanya O'Neill, Deirdre Mehigan, Larry Kelly, Cormac Donoghue, Melissa Brennan.

**Professional & Technical:** Darragh Fox (Vice-Chairperson), Eugene Dunne, Gerry Wilson, Michael Peters, Thomas Madden, Anne Collins.

The following members also sat on the CSDEC par part of the 2021-2023 term:

Kieran Sheehan, Deirdre Fanning, Sue Kelly, Margaret Rose McGeehan, Kelley Rickard, Daniel Coppertwaite and Sean Malone.

## Staffing

Éamonn Donnelly was appointed Deputy General Secretary of Fórsa in July 2022 and his post incorporates the role of head of Civil Service division. Derek Mullen was head of the division until July 2022.

Staff assigned to work within the civil service area are as follows:

**Assistant general secretaries:** Des Fagan, Deirdre O'Connell, Clíodhna McNamara, Jim Mitchell, Sean Carabini, Paul Moyer, Paul MacSweeney, Una Faulkner.

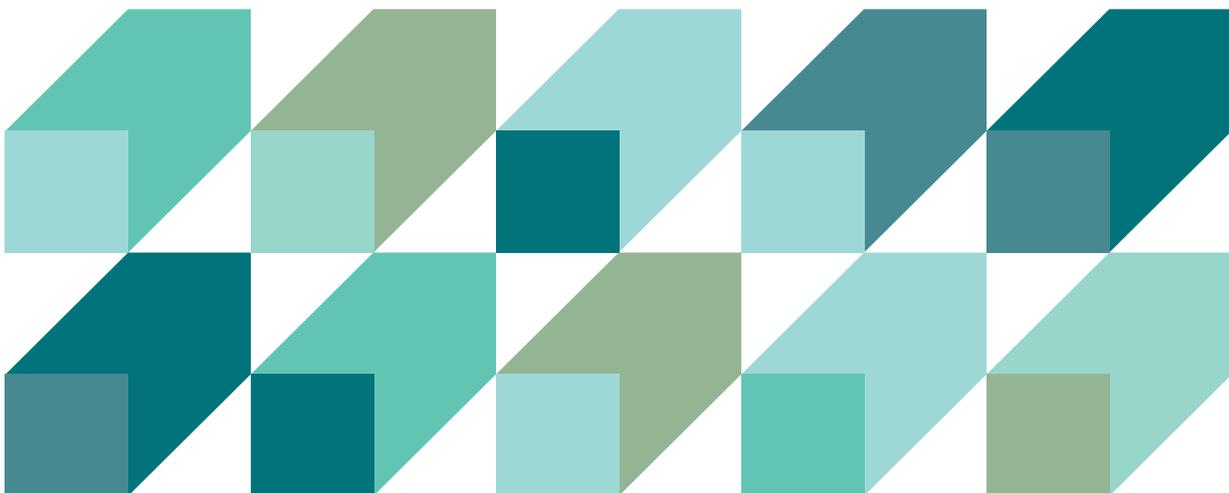
**Industrial relations officers:** Donna Mooney, Ellen Brennan (FGE)

**Lead Organiser:** Bernie Aston

**Organiser:** Helena Pryor

**Seconded staff:** Tony Conlon (DSP Clerical), Caitriona Oates (DSP Exec), Noreen O'Flynn (Revenue Clerical), Des Ryder (Revenue Exec)

**Administrative team:** David Moore, Mary Murtagh, Liz Brennan, Gary Hearne, Monica Rooney.

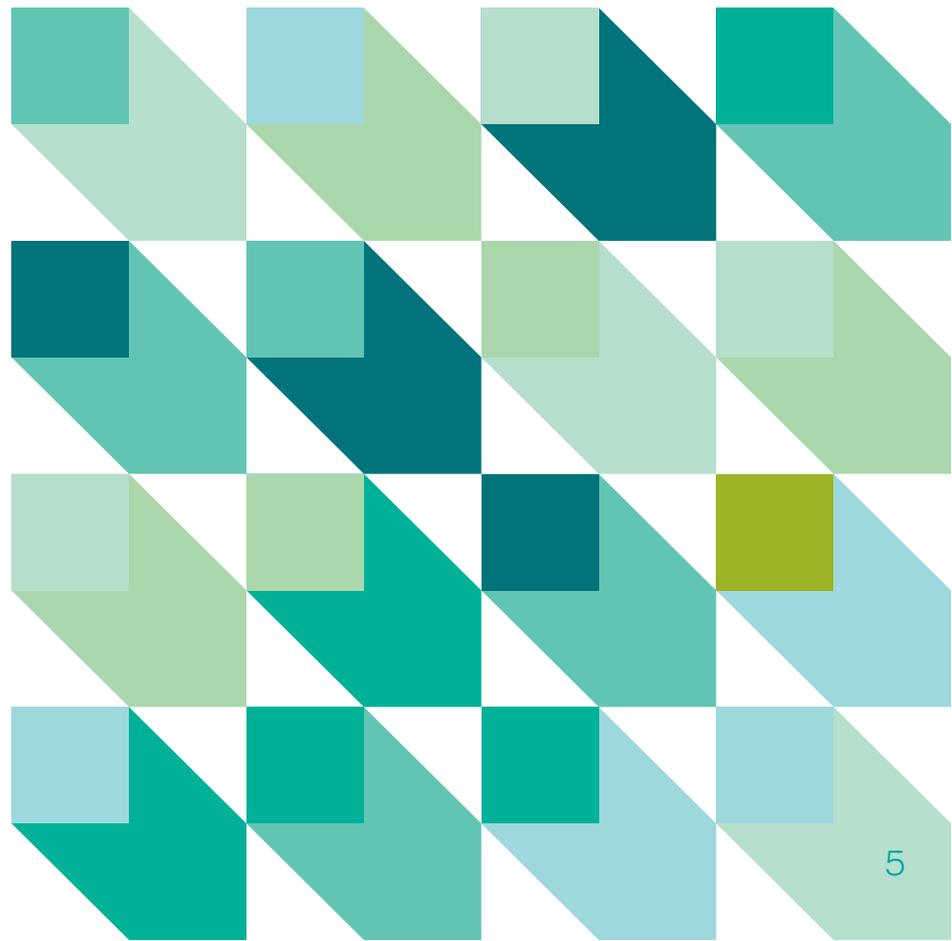


# Divisional strategy

The Civil Service Divisional Executive Committee (DEC) formally adopted the Divisional Strategy, 2023-2025 'Reclaiming our Place' at its April 2023 meeting. The strategy synchronises with the core objectives of the Fórsa Strategic Plan 2021-2025. The divisional strategy is based on three specific pillars:

1. Recruitment of and Organising workers in the Civil Service
2. Developing an Industrial Relations Strategy and Policy to deliver better outcomes for members and to enhance members experience of working life in the Civil Service and
3. Communications and enhancement of member engagement. The CSDEC will now activate and monitor the actions contained within the strategy.

A copy of the divisional strategy is included as Appendix 5 in this report.



# Industrial relations

## Access to the state industrial relations machinery (WRC/Labour Court)

The staff panel of unions took a decision in 2014 to seek access to the state industrial relations machinery. Although exploratory discussions took place at that stage with DPER, no real progress was made, with the exception of the drafting, by the staff side, of a new proposed internal disputes resolution procedure, which would be utilised as a mechanism for resolving disputes within the workplace. In autumn 2022, the staff panel once again re-iterated its resolve to attain access to the WRC and Labour Court and we tabled this resolve, in addition to the proposal on internal dispute resolution process at the General Council in September 2022.

There are two principal reasons why the unions took this course of action. Firstly, the staff panel of unions firmly believes that both the General Council and Conciliation & Arbitration Scheme are outmoded. They're not agile enough to resolve disputes at the time resolution is required, and their processes are weighted heavily in favour of the employer. Secondly, the unions believe that the denial of access for civil servants to the industrial relations processes provided for by the state is a clear denial of worker's rights, leading to an environment where it becomes increasingly difficult to resolve any trade dispute. Workers across the public sector are not denied such rights.

In the absence of a response by the official side to what had been tabled in September 2022, the staff side indicated its intention to consider withdrawing from General Council. In January 2023, DPER explained that a legislative change was required regarding the legal definition of a worker in the context of the civil service. Although the staff side has never accepted this, rather than become embroiled and bogged down in a battle of legal variance, the staff side decided that it would push the official side to clarify what steps were being taken to remove this legal obstacle. In addition, the staff side formally stated its intention to consider whether

to continue to participate at General Council. The staff side has now been invited to present to the official side a vision of the type of issues which would be processed through the WRC if access was to be conceded.

## Government departments

### Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine

#### Agriculture No. 1 branch

The union has sought to replace AS grades in areas and provide an appointment for an AS in workforce planning section. This would enable the experience of a technical officer in HR to determine whether a role was suitable to be replaced by another grade in a technical work area. A comparison of grades within DAFM shows that most grades have recovered their numbers to pre-2010 levels apart from the grades represented by the branch. Issues raised related to the non-replacement of District Superintendents (DS) and Supervisory Agriculture Officers (SAO) as well as the prioritising of Technical Agriculture Officers (TAO) to VPHIS (Meat Processing) and to ICD.

An adjudication hearing in November 2022 issued a recommendation advising that a badger vaccination allowance for Technical Agriculture Officers (TAO) should not be paid. A meeting with the department and Fórsa took place in January 2023. The meeting was conducted as a conciliation conference with former Labour Court chairman Kevin Duffy. In February 2023, a payment that averages €55 per TAO was finally agreed as a method to resolve the dispute. Members had benefitted from the 1% local bargaining under Building Momentum. TAOs supervising Farm Relief Service staff have achieved an added benefit in the new agreement. The union will await the coming year to review with members how the supervision duties are progressing.

A Disagreed Report on the outsourcing of knackery sampling has been forwarded to the official side. Fórsa and the AHCPS have objected to this outsourcing proposal.

### **Agrilabs branch**

The two laboratories in Limerick and Cork are to be relocated to a site in Mallow. The union sought and received commitments from management that staff would be involved in all aspects of the relocation and would be offered site visits and views of the plans for the new laboratory. Discussion has taken place regarding a relocation expense package, the redeployment of staff who cannot travel to Mallow, and the 45km radius applied for redeployment under the Croke Park/Haddington Rd. agreements. The parties recognised that the 45km rule will have to be raised at the General Council for a review of its terms.

### **Clerical officer grades**

Management advised the union of their intention to implement new rosters for portal inspector COPI and EOPI grades in October 2022. For those members in T10 the new shift arrangements worked out slightly better for time off. However, for those members in T9 the proposal would eliminate the 12 hour shift arrangements and bring all staff on the same roster.

An agreement was drawn up that committed the Department to providing compensation to grades in T9 who had suffered losses in salary as a result of the changes. There is a dispute regarding the payments being made to other staff in the department who have also suffered losses in pay as a result of the actions of the department in changing shift arrangements.

The union is currently attempting to clarify this matter with management and intend to bring a claim if necessary for all members who have suffered losses regarding the new shift arrangements.

Management has been advised of the unions position on the implementation of correcting the salaries of staff working 24/7 shift patterns to have the Sunday Premium allowance included in pension contributions.

Members who have attempted to have the Sunday Allowance included in their pension arrangements were given a further boost when management agreed to include the payments that they earned in their pension payments from 1st of January 2023. This arrangement is in line with the Revenue pay out to staff who have

retired. The union remains committed to securing an acceptance by DPER to retrospectively include any Sunday Premium allowances for the past three years prior to the retirement of DAFM, Revenue and Dept Justice staff who have received the allowance during their working life.

### **Executive Grades branch**

A claim, which included criticism of the department for not following procedures, guidelines and agreements with the branch, was related to the appointment of staff within their grades, and will be put to arbitration. The department had advised the union it would not agree to a disagreed report. This has been duly signed off and the union awaits a hearing in this regard.

### **Harbour Masters**

Continued efforts to proceed with the claim for an upgrade have been strengthened by the acceptance of senior management to pay overtime to staff who were called out on unsocial hours duties.

### **One Health One Welfare**

Crowe Consulting had commenced a report early 2022 on behalf of the department to determine the needs of its 15 divisions that have responsibilities in the area of food production.

The union has recently been requested to attend a meeting to address questions raised related to the recommendations of the report. Union concerns centre on any changes that may affect the terms and conditions of the seven Fórsa branches that operate in the department.

The report included 10 recommendations including the creation of an Office of the Chief Operations officer who will be provided with staff to determine the priority areas to be actioned.

### **Blended working**

Several meetings were held with department officials to challenge the imposition of a 60/40 split in blended working arrangements. Unions await the publication of a survey undertaken that has been discussed at Departmental Councils. The department has implemented a working arrangement that provides for a three-day office attendance under Blended Working arrangements. The proposals include an 'anchor day' where all staff attend the workplace, following this overlap, some staff work from home and others attend in the office dependent on their position in the rotation.

## Department of Foreign Affairs

### Passport Office

The Passport Office and Fórsa members faced an unprecedented demand for passports following the Covid pandemic, dealing with some 6,000 passports per day to meet the expected demand of 1.4 million passports overall, exceeding the previous record of 900,000. Staffing in the department was increased from 720 to 920 to meet demand.

Health and Safety provision in the Cork office remains problematic and the union continues to discuss with the department remedial measures to improve sanitary and rest availability and conditions. The staff await the actions of the Office of Public Works in securing alternative accommodation for the Cork office.

### Clerical Grades

In March 2023, Fórsa successfully persuaded the Passport Office (PPO) in Balbriggan to re-advertise an Acting EO position on the basis of the competition being open to job sharers. Originally the position was only open to full time staff, however the union argued that women who were carers with family responsibilities, and who had a 50% work share pattern, were being excluded from the role. This followed a member seeking assistance who advised that she was refused by HR to take up the role because of her work pattern.

### Executive Grades branch

The union had written to HR regarding the proposed recruitment of an events manager for the London Embassy. The union was concerned that the advertised position might have led to a non-civil servant acting as a manager for civil servants. Following a high-level intervention, with the assistance of the secretary general, the matter was resolved.

### Third secretaries

Agreement to extend the passports to unmarried partners was welcomed by the staff side at a recent Departmental Council meeting. The staff side also advised the Department of its intention to take an equality case due to the differences of treatment of staff and their partners on foreign missions.

The Professional Agriculture Inspectors branch (PAI) has been proactive in organising events for members and non-members in a bid to recruit newly-appointed staff who have been appointed to the grade. The events which were well attended included speakers from Mercers and the Charity Pieta House.

### Backweston recruitment drive

As a result of the relocation of Forensic Science Ireland to Backweston the union will arrange an open day for recruitment and advice to the unions more than 10 different branches that now occupy the site. The meeting is likely to be scheduled for the autumn when FSI are fully located in Backweston.

### Blended working

The policy introduced in the Department of Foreign Affairs contains a 50/50 split of working from home and in the office. The main issue is to seek to have implementation of the policy for passport services where acute staff shortages and an unprecedented demand are leading to problems in that area.

## Central Statistics Office

### CSO Professional branch

Discussions between CSO management and DPER related to the removal of jump increments saw no agreement particularly on the substantive issues of additional increments, retrospection, and the restructuring of the grade. Fórsa submitted a supplementary statement in 2022. A tripartite meeting in May 2023 with the CSO and DPER tabled a proposal seeking to resolve the IR issue. The committee has rejected the proposal as it does not resolve the issue. The branch will ballot members. Should the proposal be rejected, Fórsa will move it on to the Civil Service Arbitration Board for a third party decision.

### Quarterly National Household Surveys (QNHS) branch

Management is seeking to make changes to the work of field interviewers, which will also see changes sought for competition payments. Fórsa had a series of meetings with CSO management, and they have presented the proposal document to us which the committee is currently considering. An issue has arisen regarding higher scales and Fórsa has lodged a claim to the Departmental Council seeking higher scale assignments and for these to be backdated.

### Dublin Airport enumerators

Following discussions with CSO management to implement a new roster in Dublin Airport, a new 24/7 10-hour roster went live in July 2022, with a three shift pattern. The union secured Sunday and bank holiday premium payments, the retention of shift allowance, loss of earnings (under the Mulvey Formula), upgraded or new staff rooms and break rooms. An issue with the restoration of pre-Haddington Road hours emerged as it was identified members were working more than their contracted hours. This has been resolved favourably for members including TOIL for the additional hours worked.

Fórsa lodged a claim at Departmental Council seeking an additional Team Leader be assigned, and a date for a hearing with the Civil Service Arbitration Board is awaited.

# Civil Service No. 1

## Community Service Supervisors (CSS)

A long outstanding matter regarding subsistence related to Graffiti Buses in Cork. Fórsa is seeking to refer it to the JNIC before moving it for determination in the court.

## Civilian teachers

In 2016, a dispute arose between the former IMPACT and An Garda Síochána, Garda College, regarding the introduction of an electronic time and attendance system, Kelio. No resolution was found. In late 2021, the members sought that the matter be revisited due to Covid and access to family friendly initiatives. The matter was referred back to the Civil Service Adjudicator, a hearing took place on in May 2023, and the union was successful in securing everything the members had sought with immediate effect.

## Technical bureau

A statement of claim for an expert allowance was lodged with the Civil Service Adjudicator in December 2020. A hearing date has been confirmed in May 2023.

## Ministerial drivers

In late 2021, the Dáil approved the removal of ministerial drivers in favour of armed Garda drivers. Their contracts state that they will drive for the minister while that minister remains in post. Fórsa secured an agreement to ensure those drivers who wished to become a Temporary Clerical Officer (TCO) in the Department of Social Protection could do so.

## Chaplains

A pay disparity arose in 2015 when the Irish Prison Service (IPS) and DPER decided to employ lay pastors rather than chaplains, on a rate of pay reduced by €18,000 per pay point. The first competition at the reduced pay scale took place in 2015. Chaplains were not organised until 2020, when they became members of Fórsa. The union has sought to address the pay disparity through bilaterals with the IPS. Following the claim lodged at Departmental Council, a report from the Department of Justice is awaited.

Fórsa secured agreement with IPS management for the amendment of the terms of reference for the review of the chaplaincy service. The review will identify that on-call allowance is not being paid and some are required to work Sundays without the payment of shift and Sunday/bank holiday premiums.

## FGE branch

In January 2021, Fórsa raised the matter of Contracts of Indefinite Duration (CIDs) for 14 cleaner members with An Garda Síochána. A bilateral to resolve the claim took place in July 2021. AGS management agreed that CIDs were warranted but ceased engaging with the union. Fórsa lodged complaints with the WRC under Section 14 of the Protection of Employment (Fixed Term Work) Act, 2003.

Following two mediations the matter was referred for adjudication. A hearing in May 2023 heard three cases, and further hearing are to be scheduled for the remaining 11 members. Fórsa secured backdating of the awarding of the contracts to the 1st April 2019, for pay and pension, and is seeking compensation as part of the complaints before the WRC.

## Outsourcing

Issues remain regarding outsourcing of many grades represented by the FGE branch, the service officer and cleaner grades in particular. Fórsa is formulating an approach to oppose this across all departments.

## Children, Equality, Disability, Integration, and Youth (CEDIY)

Members working in International Protection Accommodation Services (IPAS) were initially volunteering to work in Dublin Airport and City West to deal with the intake of refugees from Ukraine. Arrangements were put in place to compensate members for shift arrangements.

The department has acknowledged there are about 160 vacancies across all grades and Fórsa has agreed internal competitions throughout the rest of this year.

## Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC)

When IHREC launched its blended working policy they made it a requirement for three days office attendance with flexi accrual only when working in the office. Following negotiations, Fórsa was able to secure a two-day office attendance from April 2023. Management has agreed to discuss full flexi accrual while working in the office and at home.

## Adoption Authority of Ireland

Fórsa secured a higher scale policy and amendments to the AAI's blended working policy.

## Charities Regulator Authority

Discussions are ongoing regarding their blended working policy, internal competitions and awarding of higher scales.

## Department of Defence

The Independent Review Group (IRG) report into gender-based violence, harassment and bullying in the Defence Forces was published on the 28th March. The report details a wide range of unacceptable incidences and illustrates an urgent need for organisation and culture change. Many Fórsa members work closely with military personnel and may have been affected by the practices highlighted in the report. Fórsa contacted members to assure them the union is there to assist, advise and provide support to them, and to provide details of a range of other supports available to help.

Fórsa sought, and was granted, the opportunity to be part of the process to draw up the Terms of Reference (TORs) for the IRG. Fórsa and the AHCPS agreed additions to the draft TORs and has shared these with SIPTU and Unite colleagues for comment. The report recommends a Working Group be established as part of this process and Fórsa is seeking to have this working group formed without delay.

## Department of Justice

Discussions have been held with the department on the significant promotional liabilities owed to internal panels. In some cases, the liabilities run into triple figures. Fórsa has paused bringing the department to a third-party to enforce a clearing of the liabilities, to see if a series of promotion competitions over the course of the next year resolves the situation.

Fórsa has raised - both departmentally and centrally - the risk of trauma exposure for members who work in areas such as the probation services, forensic science, the Coroner's Court, international protection and other areas. The union believes that clinical psychological support should be available for staff who work in areas with a high risk of secondary trauma and are actively campaigning for it to be improved.

In the probation services, Fórsa has engaged on the proposed introduction of a new probation assistant grade. Fórsa has embarked on a review of the Probation Officer Workloads agreement and are seeking a similar agreement for senior probation officers.

In Forensic Science Ireland, Fórsa has had a continuous engagement on issues related to the move of the lab from the Phoenix Park to Backweston.

## Office of the Chief State Solicitor

Fórsa has had a number of disputes in the CSSO that the union is seeking to move to a third party. Fórsa has stated that the manner in which the proposed implementation of the recording of working time is incompatible with the working arrangements of legal professional members and Fórsa has sought to bring the matter to a third party. The union has also disputed an instance in which the rules for a competition panel were changed unilaterally, after the establishment of the panel, and is seeking to bring it to adjudication.

### Director of Public Prosecutions

Fórsa established a Departmental Council structure in the DPP in 2022. Among the issues discussed to date have been the proposed expansion of staff numbers and related potential accommodation difficulties, issues with competition liabilities and career paths for the Legal Technical grades.

### Irish Prison Service (IPS)

Fórsa and the AHCPs had a number of discussions with the IRD regarding blended working policy. A pattern of three days one week followed by two days the following week was agreed in August 2022. The current arrangement is to continue until September 2023, while management has agreed to a six-month trial of the An Post model (two days office attendance a week but with a floating day to be used when business needs arise) so that both sets of data can be compared.

### Assistant Legal Advisors

The union successfully took a case to arbitration on behalf of the Assistant Legal Advisor grades involving pay restoration.

### Legal Aid Board

Fórsa has challenged the outsourcing of mediation work in a manner the union deems to be outside the scope of the terms of various national agreements. This is continuing. The union has also sought to bring resolution to a long-standing pension calculation issue for mediators.

The resolution of the Grade III solicitor pay scale in the Legal Aid Board remains a priority. At present, the Grade III solicitor pay scale stops €18,000 below the salary of all other civil service legal professional grades, despite carrying similar caseloads and requiring the same qualifications.

### SO/EO amalgamation

The union has held central negotiations on the final phase of the SO/EO amalgamation. At present, while the general service SO grade has now been amalgamated with the EO grade, the SO payscale is still used for a number of technical grades. Fórsa has sought to bring the max of these payscales in line with the EO grade. At the time of publication, however, it has not been possible to get a clear answer from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform on this matter.

### Department of Social Protection

There has been significant change in DSP over the past two years mainly driven by the challenges initiated by a change of management structure, the Ukrainian refugee response, the cost-of-living crises and automation. Fórsa has met with DSP and outlined a need to reset the IR agenda. Regular IR consultation is now expected post-pandemic.

### Functional management structures

There has been significant change of management structure from geographic-based to function-based. The change in management structures has meant that line management may be located in other counties and, in certain functions, access to certain family friendly policies has become more difficult to avail of. Application of higher duty allowances has changed from local application to functional application, which may be applied on a nationwide basis. The functional model has seen the establishment of the National Processing Team (NPT), a virtual back office Intreo Centre function. A National Intreo Centre Contact Centre (NICC) has also been established. Staff numbers in ICs available to deal with customers face-to-face has reduced with the establishment of the NPT and NICC. Fórsa has sought additional staffing in customer facing IC roles and implementation of an agreed template on staffing numbers. Fórsa members in a growing number of ICs are facing lengthy queues, frustrated customers, restrictions on leave, work-related stress and unrealisable work output expectations.

### National Intreo Contact Centre (NICC)

Restrictions on flexi attendance in NICC has been flagged by Fórsa as a problem, as is work variety and the lack of staff rotation that were to be facilitated under DSP staff mobility. DSP has advised that it hopes to increase the variety of work. Fórsa is seeking that, from a health and welfare perspective, no more than 50% of work in NICC should be based on phones. There are models in DSP and in other Departments of such a split in duties and feedback indicates improved work satisfaction.

### Intreo Centres

Over 80,000 Ukrainian refugees have now been housed in Ireland. Fórsa members in DSP are providing supports to these and other refugees. This has led to a significant increase in footfall in Intreo Centres (ICs). New financial supports are also available to people living in Ireland who are struggling to make ends meet due to significant cost of living increases. This has driven footfall to ICs and has put our IC members, our Community Welfare Officers (CWOs) and support staff in Community Welfare Services (CWS) under extreme pressure. While there has been sanction to increase staffing in DSP the increase in numbers, the grading of the staff and appointment of temporary staff is inadequate to deal with the level of increased workload.

### Digital self-service

Increased footfall, and delays in payments to vulnerable customers, has increased aggressive behaviour and violence by a very small minority of customers against Fórsa members and other customers. Fórsa has engaged with DSP on this matter to ensure that all health and safety measures are being observed. Fórsa has emphasised that understaffing is a difficulty. Management is seeking that members provide demonstration to service users on how to access DSP's digital self-service on the floor in ICs. Fórsa has said any demonstrations should be carried out behind the protection of counters following an independent health and safety assessment.

### Grade appropriate work

The technical report was published in 2007 and outlined IC grade appropriate work. Since the technical report was completed two Adjudication findings have noted that new technology has automated and simplified certain processes and that they are now appropriate to the CO grade. DSP is now requesting that COs carry out other

work which is graded at a higher grade in the technical report and is appropriate to the EO grade. Fórsa raised grading of work in ad-hoc facilitated negotiations under the auspices of the WRC, in the context of the rollout of Front Office Back Office (FOBO). The matter of grading of work will now be assessed under the C&A scheme.

### Community Welfare Services

CWO numbers have been halved since the CWS function transferred from the HSE. This has led to the loss of most local CWS clinics being available to the public and has driven increased footfall into ICs. DSP has now moved to downgrade CWO work, which is HEO work, to EO level in the CWS Hub in Sligo. Members in Sligo have voted overwhelmingly to engage in work-to-rule, up to and including industrial and strike action where they are penalised for following union instruction to carry out grade appropriate work and not to carry out HEO/CWO work in the absence of a Higher Duty Allowance. Discussions are ongoing. DSP has sought that EO members carry out CWO work pending referral to adjudication. Fórsa has sought that the trade dispute is referred to the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) for ad-hoc mediated negotiations.

Separately, Fórsa is in discussions on the provision of an on-call allowance for CWO members who make themselves available for out-of-hours work.

While there has been a sanction to increase CWO numbers by 14, this follows on from a reduction of more than 300 CWOs in the Department. Members are under extreme work pressure which can only be addressed through the recruitment of additional HEOs and CWOs.

### EOI/HEOI claim

The Civil Service Adjudication process recommended an assessment of the Executive Officer Inspector (EOI) grade to see whether the posts should be upgraded to HEO level, should receive an allowance or maintain the status quo. The Assessor, having carried out a thorough and comprehensive review, has recommended an allowance with adjudication or arbitration deciding on the level of allowance. It's hoped to get to third party in the near future to finalise matters. The claim for an upgrade in posts was initially taken by PSEU in 2016 based on EOI and HEOI work being interchangeable.

### Filling of SIU-allowanced posts

Initial proposals to fill all SIU allowanced posts every five years were revised following negotiations with Fórsa and AHCPs. Management acknowledged that in 1991, as part of the Department's regionalisation programme, an agreement was reached on the regrading of former Social Welfare Officers (SWOs) as HEOs. The agreement dealt with a number of issues, including the method of filling SIU posts. The agreement provided for a continuation of the existing arrangement whereby such posts were filled by being offered to former SWOs on a senior/suitability basis.

Following a referral to adjudication in 2016, continuation of the 1991 Agreement was confirmed. Under the agreement reached any officer who was serving in SIU with an assignment end-date, on or before 31st December 2021, can remain in SIU without having to re-apply for the allowanced posts. For serving officers assigned with end-dates after 31st December 2021, the implementation of the policy was deferred until after the next panels expire (circa end 2023) and these officers will remain in SIU until that competition is held and the replacement panels are established. The agreement also provided for a consolidation of SIU locations to 15 HQ locations across the Country. The agreement protects the pay, pensions and tenure of our long serving members in SIU.

### Computer operator shift changes

Fórsa opposed a move to an eight-hour shift (from a 12-hour shift) as part of an overall move to a 24/7-hour shift from a 24/5-hour shift arrangement, for computer operators, arguing the eight-hour shift pattern will significantly increase attendance and reduce the current level of rest periods. The matter went to arbitration where the Board recommended in favour of a move to an eight-hour shift under the 24/7 hour roster. A promotion package, initially ringfenced for computer operator staff widened to all in DSP, has now been implemented under the agreement. Filling vacancies, in advance of implementation of the new eight-hour shift, has proven challenging. Reduction in the working day will also have to be factored into the new shift.

### Public Employment Services

Negotiations are ongoing in relation to the introduction of an online appointment Public Employment Services (PES) for jobseekers. A video appointment safety protocol is under discussion. Where agreed Fórsa is seeking written confirmation that video appointments will facilitate a greater level of remote working for PES staff carrying out video appointments, and that appointments will remain within the catchment area, and all reasonable safety measures and supports will be in place for our members.

### Remote working

At present over 60% of DSP staff are availing of blended working. In early April 2023, there were 4,174 DSP staff working remotely. Approximately 30% work remotely two days per week and 24% work remotely three days per week. Around 23% are working remotely one day per week with the same percentage working remotely four days per week. The number of DSP staff not working a blended working pattern is 2,739. Around 600 staff can accrue flexi while working remotely. At present, all others on flexitime and participating in blended working in DSP can only accrue flexi when working in the office. Fórsa is seeking the extension of flexi accrual when working from home under blended working.

### Desk booking

Fórsa and AHCPs has advised DSP that desk booking is not appropriate for members who work exclusively in the office. Separately, the union has advised the department that it does not support members signing in on a desk-booking app when they already sign in under flexible working hours system.

Under the Civil Service Blended Working Framework Policy, blended workers generally have no automatic right to a dedicated workstation in their employer's work premises but will have a shared workspace available to them when required to attend the office. Fórsa and the AHCPs have pointed out that this stipulation does not apply to staff who are working exclusively in the office and that there should be no requirement on the 40% of DSP workers who are not availing of blended working to 'check-in' to their dedicated workstation.

In discussions with the DSP it has confirmed that desks of staff whose workstations have been modified, as a reasonable accommodation, will not be required to share their workstation. Staff who are not availing of blended working, along with staff whose workstations have been modified, will have their workstations/offices block booked under the desk booking system. DSP has carried out a desk booking trial in several Dublin-based HQ buildings. Feedback was generally positive. DSP is now rolling out the desk booking policy. The check-in facility is paused currently.

### Appeals Office

AHCPS and Fórsa, following engagement with DSP, forwarded a submission to the Committee on Social Protection, Community and Rural Development and the Islands on the operation of the Social Welfare Appeals Office, following proposed changes to the Social Welfare Appeals Regulations. Fórsa's concerns related to the potentially undermining of the independence of the Appeals Office and change the reporting and working relationships. Fórsa will participate in a consultation process established by the DSP.

### Medical assessors

Fórsa has sought that Medical Assessor (MA) higher scale is implemented and backdated to when this local bargaining clause was negotiated. While other elements of grade restructuring were applied to the Medical Assessor scale many years ago, the higher scale wasn't. Separately, Fórsa is in discussion regarding the application of professional added years for the MA.

### Acknowledgement

Since the last Fórsa Civil Service divisional conference, there has been a significant turnover in Fórsa reps. Some have retired, moved through Civil Service mobility, others have taken up full time union posts, while some have been promoted into the AHCPS ranks. Fórsa acknowledges and thanks all those reps for their tireless work and engagement - in some cases they have represented their work colleagues over many decades - and wishes them well.

# Incomes

## Public Service Pay – Building Momentum review

In early 2022, Fórsa general secretary Kevin Callinan called on the Government to open negotiations on a new public service pay agreement, and said the size and timing of any agreed pay adjustments would “need to reflect the realities of the cost-of-living crisis, which is hurting workers regardless of what sector they work in.”

Kevin proposed seeking a review of the Building Momentum public service pay agreement at the AGM of the ICTU Public Services Committee (PSC) on 11th March 2022, as Fórsa continued its focus on cost-of-living pressures throughout the union’s AGM season and its biennial delegate conference in May 2022. Inflation had exceeded what had been projected when Building Momentum was negotiated in late 2020.

Average inflation across the whole of 2021 was 2.4%. The value of Building Momentum pay improvements was 0.25% over the same period. The EU predicted that Irish inflation would rise to 4.6% for the whole of 2022. This forecast would mean the annualised value of the Building Momentum increases in the same year would not exceed 1.2%, even when sectoral bargaining was considered.

With the deal due to expire at the end of 2022, Fórsa said talks on a successor agreement would need to prioritise the restoration and improvement of living standards in the context of high inflation.

Kevin Callinan maintained his call for decisive Government action to protect living standards, and to ensure the public service could compete in a tight labour market: “We need to act now to stabilise the current public service agreement, which is essential to certainty in public service delivery, industrial relations, and public finances.”

As pay talks got underway in June, the initial efforts indicated a significant distance between unions, represented by the ICTU Public Services Committee (PSC) and Government representatives.

By late June, the process had stalled. The PSC, chaired by Kevin Callinan, said the Government’s initial pay offer – an additional increase of just 2.5% for the (2021-2022) period, when inflation was expected to be at least 9% over that period – could not credibly be put to ballot while low and middle-income workers struggled with soaring prices. Unions told the WRC that an improved offer was necessary to make further talks on public service pay worthwhile.

The then Tánaiste, Leo Varadkar, said the Government wanted to reengage in the WRC-brokered talks, and that it was prepared to make a further offer. However, no further developments took place until mid-August, when unions announced they were preparing industrial action ballots in a coordinated campaign for improved pay terms due to the cost-of-living crisis.

Ahead of the commencement of the planned ballots, the pay talks process resumed at the WRC after a ten-week hiatus, during which the Government said it was reflecting on its position. Unions indicated they would engage positively in the process and were prepared to be flexible. Kevin Callinan restated his position that a significantly improved pay offer from the Government side was essential to any progress.

Progress was swift. By the beginning of September, Fórsa’s elected national executive (NEC) met to consider the details of new WRC pay proposals, engaging in a constructive debate that strongly acknowledged the financial realities facing working people across the economy, as well as their fears for the future. Kevin Callinan said the deal was the best that could be achieved through negotiations.

The NEC subsequently recommend the WRC-proposed public service pay package - to be known as the Review of Building Momentum Public Service Agreement - in a ballot of union members.

The main provisions of the deal are as follows:

- Increases of 3% with effect (backdated) from 2nd February 2022
- An increase of 2% increase from 1st March 2023
- An increase of 1.5% or €750 (whichever is the greater) from 1st October 2023.

These measures are in addition to 1% or €500, whichever is greater, which fell due at the beginning of October 2022 under the existing agreement.

The minimum payment of €750 a year from October 2022 meant the package is of greater value to workers on lower incomes. The payment was worth 8% to a worker earning €25,000 a year and 7% to a person on €37,500 a year.

Fórsa produced a 'frequently asked questions' document, including a facility for members to ask questions, while a series of Fórsa information meetings took place online and in person across the country.

Kevin Callinan commented that neither side achieved all it sought in the negotiations, but that the revised package was a significant improvement on the pay terms of the current agreement, and worth more to those who need it most.

The Government was set to announce the 2023 Budget while the ballot was in progress. Kevin said Government pledges to supplement pay measures with other cost-of-living supports in the Budget would influence the outcome of the vote.

In his capacity as ICTU president Kevin led the trade union delegation at the September meeting of the Labour Employer Economic Forum (LEEF) where unions made a strong case for the need for very substantial assistance to help all workers, including public servants, cope with the cost-of-living crisis. At the LEEF meeting in December 2022, Transport Minister Eamon Ryan acknowledged that union representations had had a significant influence on the Government's budgetary approach

Budget 2023 was announced on 27th September 2022, and included a series of short-term measures to help people with the cost of living, including electricity credits, increased social welfare payments and a series of once-off payments.

Fórsa members backed the review of Building Momentum in an electronic ballot by a significant margin (91.3%) on a strong turnout (67%). Kevin Callinan said the result was a strong statement of support for the pay deal, worth 6.5% in addition to existing Building Momentum pay adjustments, with better increases for lower paid workers.

Fórsa's endorsement of the package meant the union supported ratification of the pay measures at a meeting of the ICTU Public Services Committee (PSC) on 7th October 2022. The revised pay deal would expire at the end of 2023, which meant that pay talks on a successor would need to take place before the end of the year.

Paid salaries averaged over 52 weeks for the first time, including the cash value of job seekers benefit, which means secretaries no longer need to sign on for unemployment benefits during school holidays. The deal also enshrined 22 days paid leave a year, as well as payment for ten public holidays, replacing ad-hoc arrangements that left many school secretaries with no paid holidays.

## Blended working

In July 2021, the Government published a new 'Blended Working Policy Statement,' which envisaged the civil service switching from pandemic-related remote working provisions to long-term 'blended working' arrangements between September 2021 and March 2022. The statement included a commitment to a consistent approach across the civil service, and to transparency and fairness on access to remote working. Fórsa prepared to engage with DPER to agree detailed measures to implement the policy.

In the run-up to Budget 2022 (October 2021), Fórsa and other unions argued for improved tax reliefs to help meet costs associated with home working. The Budget increased tax relief on vouched electricity and heating costs from 10% to 30%, while relief on broadband costs was retained at 30%.

Engagement on the new policy developed into sustained negotiations in the civil service General Council, with the aim of agreeing a civil service framework capable of being tailored and implemented in sectors across the public service and non-commercial semi-state sector. The management side paused the talks in December, but they resumed in February 2022 and a framework agreement was reached shortly after.

The framework was published in April 2022, requiring all civil service departments and offices to develop a blended working policy, and provides all civil servants the right to apply for blended working arrangements. Workers can have the decision reviewed if they are turned down. On Fórsa's insistence, the policy states that departmental policies should set out a decision-making process that ensures a consistent approach to assessing applications, and which ensures fairness across the organisation.

The new policy places a responsibility on managers to ensure a fair and effective system with strong supports, staff development, communications, and effective performance management. There can be no change to a worker's pay and working conditions on the basis that they have blended working arrangements.

It also states employers should provide the necessary equipment to home-workers, and requires employers to conduct health and safety assessments, which should determine specific risks and outline any information or training needs.

Although not directly connected, when the blended framework was agreed, the issue of flexi-time accrual was subsequently referred to arbitration. Civil Service management has conducted surveys on the effect of flexi-leave accrual, and the parties will engage at general council on this issue shortly. These discussions will take an overall look at how blended working arrangements are applied across all departments.

## Collective bargaining

The final report of the high-level working group on collective bargaining was published in October 2022. The group was established in 2021 by the Labour Employer Economic Forum (LEEF) in advance of a new EU directive that requires each member state to take action to expand the percentage of workers covered by collective bargaining on wage setting.

Collective bargaining coverage in Ireland is currently around 34%, the new directive requires that countries achieve up to 80% coverage. Non-union employers could potentially face penalties for failing to negotiate with trade unions.

Trade unions were represented on the high-level group by then ICTU general secretary Patricia King. Following its publication Patricia said the recommendations in the report will, through increased collective bargaining coverage, provide new opportunities to achieve decent working and living standards for hundreds of thousands of workers, and deliver improved outcomes for workers and employers, as well as for society and the economy.

The Executive Council of the ICTU endorsed the recommendations and believes them to be crucial to aligning Irish industrial relations procedures with other EU countries. The group's recommendations will form the basis for the transposition of the directive to comply with EU law, including:

- That existing legislation relating to Joint Labour Committees (JLCs) be strengthened to enable an Employment Regulation Order to be implemented on foot of employers being afforded all reasonable opportunity to engage
- That technical assessors be appointed by the Labour Court to advise the Court in pay comparison claims with the purpose of improving on current mechanisms
- That legislation requires an employer to engage with a trade union who seeks good faith engagement where they represent at least 10% of workers in a grade group or category within the employment. Where an employer refuses such an engagement and ignores the Labour Court decisions on the matter, the trade union can seek a Circuit Court order for implementation against the employer.

The report's recommendations illustrate the potential for radically improved collective bargaining conditions in Ireland. The crucial challenge for trade unions is to continue to build membership density.

The high-level group comprised representatives from ICTU, IBEC and Professor Bill Roche, UCD. It was chaired by Professor Michael Doherty of Maynooth University. A full copy of the report is available [here](#).

## 'Haddington Road' hours

Civil service circular 14/2022 was published at the end of May 2022, outlining the details of the union-negotiated restoration of pre-Haddington Road working hours, with a floor of 35 hours per week.

The circular, which then rolled out across the public service, implements an independent body's recommendation that public service employees' working time should be restored.

Additional 'Haddington Road' hours were introduced in 2013, but most people who saw their working time increased returned to pre-2013 levels, albeit with a floor of 35 hours per week.

The 'Haddington Road' hours ceased to be in effect from 1st July 2022, when working time was restored to pre-austerity levels.

The breakthrough was achieved following the formation of Fórsa, which brought 80,000 public servants – including thousands of activists and workplace reps – into one strong and united trade union.

The union made the restoration of the hours a top priority in the negotiations that led to the Building Momentum public service agreement in 2020, and insisted there'd be no deal unless the issue was addressed.

Fórsa's strategy won support from other unions, and Building Momentum established an independent body to resolve the issue. Its January 2022 report recommended a return to 2012 working time, with a minimum working week of 35 hours.

General secretary Kevin Callinan said the achievement was won because Fórsa had the determination, capacity, belief and collective strength to make it happen, despite dogged management resistance.

[Haddington Road hours FAQs.](#)

## Social dialogue

The Irish Congress of Trade Unions continues to engage at the Labour Employer Economic Forum (LEEF). ICTU is led in the LEEF engagements by ICTU president and Fórsa general secretary Kevin Callinan. The LEEF meets approximately four times a year and brings together senior Government, trade union and employer representatives to discuss economic, employment and labour market issues.

As cost-of-living pressures mounted last year, unions made a strong case at the September LEEF meeting for the need for very substantial assistance to help all workers, including public servants, cope with the cost-of-living crisis (see *Building Momentum* review on page 16). Unions highlighted the real risk of energy poverty for workers, including those who rely on social welfare benefits.

Employer representatives at the LEEF also supported very significant government intervention to assist households and businesses, and called for a huge fiscal response utilising buoyant exchequer finances. Unions noted that the Government was moving toward a similar viewpoint, indicating its intention to introduce a further range of 'cost-of-living' measures, which were introduced in Budget 2023 last September.

Fórsa continues to advocate for the State to strengthen its support for social dialogue between Government, unions, employers, communities and civil society organisations, in order to meet the range of challenges facing the country, including the housing crisis, climate response, childcare and education.

## Childcare

Responding to the Budget in September 2022, Fórsa said the future of the Irish workplace is being shaped by how working families with young children are forced to weigh the cost of childcare against entering or returning to the workplace.

The union acknowledged that the 25% cut in childcare costs announced in the Budget 2023 would help many families but said many would still be left with "near impossible" choices about the offset of childcare costs against work.

The existing deficit in childcare, a problem which the State has lagged on for several decades, needs more than a temporary crisis intervention. It demands a permanent and radical solution, such as a fully publicly funded universal system.

Failure to tackle childcare comprehensively means a significant block remains to many parents, usually mothers, hoping to enter the workforce or to return to work after having children.

## Statutory sick pay

The Commencement Order for the Sick Leave Act 2022 was signed in November 2022, creating a new entitlement to paid sick leave from an employer and which came into effect on 1st January 2023. The legislation followed a campaign by the ICTU for legislation to make sick pay mandatory, which won cross-party support and widespread public support.

Previously, no legal right existed to be paid while someone is on sick leave from work, meaning that half of the workforce, over one million workers, were not covered for paid sick leave in their terms and conditions.

Most Fórsa members are already covered by the public service sick pay scheme, while the new scheme will see many Fórsa members working in the private sector afforded greater protection.

From 1st January 2023, workers have a right to:

- Paid sick leave for up to three sick days per year, increasing to five days in 2024, seven days in 2025 and 10 days in 2026
- A rate of payment for statutory sick leave of 70% of normal wages to be paid by employers (up to a maximum €110 per day)
- Take a complaint to the WRC where they are not provided with a company sick pay scheme.

To be entitled to paid sick leave under the new scheme, an employee must be working for an employer for at least 13 weeks and will also need to be certified by a GP as unfit to work.

The legislation sets out the minimum standard that an employer must provide but does not prevent employers having superior sick pay schemes of their own to attract and retain staff, or on foot of an agreement with a trade union.

## Travel and subsistence

Revised rates for work-related travel and subsistence took effect from 1st September 2022. They include changes to the standard domestic subsistence rates, overnight and day subsistence rates. Full details are available on the Fórsa website [here](#) and Revenue website [here](#).

Fórsa has lodged a further travel expense claim in pursuit of an increase in the rate of travel for cycling. The claim reflects the Fórsa's policies for the promotion and implementation of active travel, consistent with the union's policies on climate action measures.

## A social wage

Income protection for workers is exceptionally weak in Ireland compared to the rest of the EU, and Ireland is the only country in the OECD not to require employers to contribute to a worker's pension. It is also one of the last of the EU's 27 member states to make sick pay mandatory.

In response to the Government's publication of a proposed overhaul of the jobseeker's benefit system - which could change the payment structure to make it directly proportional to the recipient's previous earnings - the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) published its position paper, *The Social Wage*, in March 2023.

The social wage plan proposes a move from a flat-rate to a pay-related benefit payment for workers, linking a person's jobseeker's payment to their previous earnings and work history. It's designed to soften the income shock that a person may face if they suddenly lose their job.

Speaking at the policy paper launch, Fórsa general secretary and ICTU president Kevin Callinan said that there is now a "heightened public demand to strengthen our frayed social safety net" in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic.

A full copy of the position paper is available [here](#).

## Domestic violence supports

Fórsa's conference in May 2022 unanimously backed a conference motion for statutory leave for victims of domestic violence. The conference motion committed the union to actively campaign for an effective statutory entitlement.

As the Work Life Balance and Miscellaneous Provisions Bill (2022), which included provision for domestic violence leave, made its way through the legislative process, Fórsa supported the call by Womens' Aid to include ten days of fully paid leave. This is widely considered to be best practice.

However, the legislation only provides for five days of domestic violence leave. Fórsa wrote directly to the Minister in February 2023, urging him to consider positions on this expressed by several senators at the Seanad Committee Stage debate in January. Fórsa has committed to working with other trade unions to collectively bargain to secure 10 days paid leave for workers who need to avail of domestic violence leave.

A human resources group within the Civil Service has been reviewing these supports. The group has invited Fórsa to talks on the evolution of these policies and are expected to take place shortly.

## Work Life Balance Bill

The Work Life Balance and Miscellaneous Provisions Bill (2022) was passed by both Houses of the Oireachtas on 29th March 2023. The Government's draft legislation, published in June 2022, attracted huge criticism from Fórsa and other unions, as well as labour law experts and others.

The revised legislation followed extensive work by the cross-union 'Make Remote Work!' campaigning group. Congress welcomed the Government delivering on its commitment to a new workers' right to request remote work.

The Bill introduces a new workers' right to paid leave for victims of domestic violence (see Domestic Violence leave) and new rights for workers requesting remote work, both of which ICTU and affiliated unions campaigned for. The legislation includes improvements to support working parents and carers balance paid work with family care, necessitated to give effect to EU law.



# Communications

Fórsa's head of communications Bernard Harbor retired from the union at the end of 2022. Under the union's programme of Strategic Change, a number of changes are underway to the configuration of the union's communications activity. There are four main areas of activity: campaigns, digital, membership communications and media relations.

Communications officer Niall Shanahan has assumed responsibilities for media relations. Kate O'Sullivan, formerly of Amnesty International and Save the Children, took up the post of director of digital in July 2022. Kevin Donoghue was appointed to the role of director of campaigns in September 2022, and a new post, director of membership communications, was created in 2023.

## Media relations

The union continues to develop its position in national media as an authoritative voice on industrial relations, public services, collective bargaining and a wide range of social issues. Aligning with Fórsa's strategic plan, the union plans to continue the development of boosting local media relations activity, working with branches regionally to create media content and establish local representative voices in the media.

## Membership communications

The new post of director of member communications will provide capacity for the union to lead in the direction and delivery of a diverse spectrum of events, outreach, media, and other practical supports and activities to inform and empower Fórsa's membership. The director of member communications will collaborate closely with the directors of media relations, digital, and campaigns teams to coordinate, reinforce, and amplify their work.

## Digital strategy

Fórsa's Digital Strategy for 2023-2025 focuses on five main areas:

### Recruitment

Driving membership recruitment through increased digital traffic, supporting and improving the Join Online process, and showcasing the value of Fórsa through social media.

### Membership retention

Utilising data and digital tools to help retain existing members. This includes data modelling, showcasing Fórsa achievements, and increasing digital communications on membership benefits.

### Membership information and services

Enhancing accessibility of Fórsa's digital presence and offering valuable resources to members. This includes redeveloping forsa.ie based on user analytics and tailoring social media content.

### Digital campaigning

Fostering online activism, increasing digital activism through strategic planning, and using paid digital ads.

### Digital trade unionism

Fórsa aims to embrace best practices from global partners, explore digital opportunities and use analytics to track member experiences and identify growth potential in online trade unionism.

## Campaigns unit

Campaigns unit research officer Juliette Cooper started working with the unit in 2022. The role enables the campaigns unit to contribute more broadly to research within the union. Juliette has made significant contributions to the research capacity of the unit since joining the team.

### TASC report

The campaigns unit arranged meetings with political parties and officials in relation to the content of the TASC report throughout 2022. Work will continue over the summer of 2023 to meet political parties about the role of the state. Supplemental research to the TASC report is currently underway to examine the physical operating capacity of the public service and civil service in Ireland, compared to other European countries similar in population size.

### Just Transition Alliance and climate change

Fórsa is a founding member of ICTU's Just Transition Alliance. Launched in March 2022, the alliance is composed of trade unions and climate change groups seeking a just transition for workers and continues to build political support.

### Housing

Fórsa is a member of the steering groups of Raise the Roof, a trade union coalition campaign, and Home for Good, a campaign to have the right to housing recognised in the Constitution. Lobbying for a referendum on the right to housing to be held within the next Government term. The campaign is hosting regional meetings to prepare for a referendum.

### Four-day week

The four-day week campaign continues to build support in Ireland and across the globe. A report published in November 2022 provided insights into the experience of Irish companies and workers that took on the four-day week trial. Results were incredibly positive. Workers reported reduced stress and higher levels of satisfaction in their lives and careers. Employers rated their experience of the trial at 9.2/10. The Irish campaign will launch another round of trials in 2023.

## Remunicipalisation

A report on the remunicipalisation of waste services in Dublin City Council was commissioned in 2022 and will be publicly available in April 2023. The report explores the current set of waste services in Dublin City and makes recommendations on how to improve waste service provision.

### Job evaluation

The campaigns unit has been supporting the local government divisions on the job evaluation campaign, is currently supporting work relating to the ballot on job evaluation. A Valentine's Day publicity event was organised with the support of Fórsa's media relations director, gaining local coverage across the country.

## Stop the Stigma: Menstruation and Menopause

After members in Fórsa raised concerns about workplace supports for menstruation and menopause in a motion passed at the union's policy-setting national conference in May of 2022, Fórsa launched a survey to gauge member experiences with periods and menstruation in the workplace.

The stark findings from the research regarding the prevalence of diagnosis with a severe condition and the need to take sick leave from work during menstruation and menopause affirmed the union's position that this is a priority to address in the workplace, both as a negotiating agenda and as a public awareness campaign.

Which is why Fórsa has been working to launch the 'Stop the Stigma' campaign.

Built to support trade unions and employees in advocating for menstrual and menopause policies in workplaces, the new campaign aims to empower workers with the resources they need to ask for supports in the workplace, as well as informing workers about these policies generally so they know to ask for them.

Fórsa is also rallying support for the campaign by partnering with trade unions who are already or beginning to undertake advocacy and organising around these policies and raising it through the industrial relations forums with employers.

## Ireland for All

Fórsa joined up with Le Chéile – a cross-sectoral alliance working together to challenge the far right in Ireland – and the NWCI for the #IrelandForAll rally in February. The union's elected officers formally backed Fórsa joining the alliance, and to support its anti-racism rally in Dublin on 18th February 2023.

Participation in the rally is an important statement to oppose attempts by far-right organisations to spread hate, fear and misinformation about refugees and asylum seekers. Far right groups have been targeting working-class communities stoking unwarranted fear and resentment.

The trade union movement has a central role to play in facing down those attempts to frighten and intimidate people who have come to Ireland seeking sanctuary from hunger, poverty, climate catastrophe and war. Fórsa's participation in the rally continues the trade union movement's proud history of opposing racism, bigotry and sectarianism.

## Skills Academy training

Fórsa's director of Membership Training & Development is Fiona Dunne.

Since October 2022, Skills Academy has returned to delivering most courses and programmes in person, providing a welcome change for tutors and students alike.

The first of the 5-module Expanded Workplace Representatives Training (November – April 2023) was rescheduled to accommodate a high ballot return and delivered 30 modules across multiple locations to approximately 80 workplace representatives during the period. Two Annual Branch Returns workshops, in December 2022 and January 2023, were ably delivered by Finance staff who also assisted participants in the practical exercise of completing the returns. Other popular courses included *Preparing for the AGM* for novices, along with one-day courses for newly elected chairpersons, secretaries and treasurers, which was delivered this year in Cork.

Since January 2023, the *Fórsa101* online course, which provides an introductory overview of the union, was opened to all members and will be a permanent feature of our programme running twice on the second Wednesday of every month.

Another new addition is the online *Lunch and Learn* series, again open to all members running on the last Friday of every month and dealing with a different topic each month. This series complements our extensive programme of current courses with previous topics including *Writing a motion*, *Quick guide to public speaking*, *Protecting your data*, and *Menstrual and menopausal welfare at work*, all of which were recorded and are saved to the Skills Academy YouTube channel.

A six-member union learning group, comprising Connect, CWU, Fórsa, FSU, MANDATE and SIPTU, was informally established in November 2022 to develop new training opportunities, share resources, and deliver courses collaboratively across partners.

External bodies provided courses during the year including a mock conciliation by the WRC, a guide to procedures and submissions by the Labour Court, understanding the Public Sector Duty by IHREC, and public speaking for conference delegates and representatives presented by Montague Communications.

A new programme, *Foundational Workplace Representatives Training* is currently being developed with the support of all tutors, for a launch in September. This will form an essential part of our core package of programmes and will be delivered in every location during the next academic year.

Following a series of extensive consultations and discussions with tutors, officials and senior representatives, a permanent calendar of training has been agreed for delivery of core programmes. This will mean that both tutors and branches will be aware of when training programmes are scheduled to take place every year. A printed version of the calendar was published in April 2023 and has been circulated through branches via training officers and at divisional conferences.

Stand-alone tailored branch training days have also been developed throughout the year in collaboration with the branch executive and with the full consultation of the assigned officials.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all our students and tutors for their dedication to building capacity and developing new skills to represent our membership to the best of their ability. We would also like to thank all Fórsa staff across the country for their support and help to deliver our programmes successfully and look forward to working with everyone into the future.

For a more detailed explanation of our courses and programmes, please contact the Fórsa Skills Academy [here](#).

# Strategic organising

## Strategic organising

A strategic organising model was introduced in 2020 throughout sections of the Fórsa divisional and membership network. This approach resulted in the implementation of project-based sectoral initiatives, initially and primarily focused on creating influence and building power at workplace level. The initial implementation of this approach was conducted in several targeted areas, subsequently creating opportunities for significant and proactive ground and membership engagement, issue consolidation and the creation of appropriate strategies to advance agreed strategic organising objectives. It's worth noting that such a model was applied during the Covid pandemic and, despite perceived obstacles to achieving positive outcomes through the utilisation of such methodologies, the application of this model has resulted in consistent density and union leadership growth at employment level, and creating opportunities to address issues that are of concern to workers.

The advancement of strategic organising will continue to broaden scope as appropriate, and in line with central organisational objectives. However, it's worth noting that where this model is applied, significant union activation, growth and participation at ground and workplace level becomes evident, resulting in consistent increases in density, leadership and communications activity, and increased union leverage on matters important to Fórsa members. While extremely labour intensive, the investment in this process by the union, through the utilisation of a specialised group of staff, whom have considerable experience in creating effective and sustainable union change within workplaces. However such success requires the support and expertise of the union's activist and representative structure through all levels of the organisation, including, in some circumstances, divisional support. This methodology will continue to be rolled out in a phased and project-based manner, as appropriate.

## Equivalent Grades committees

The continued development and advancement of the existing Equivalent Grades committees (Executive/Grades IV - VII and Clerical Officer/Grade III) is one example of a significant contributor to the growth and influence of Fórsa in workplaces across the divisions during this timeframe. Formed under rule upon the formation of Fórsa, the Equivalent Grades committees are made up of divisional executive nominees, and meet quarterly to identify and discuss issues relevant to all concerned at the appropriate grades. This unique and proactive forum has facilitated the roll-out of several strategic organising and leverage strategies that are championed by the members of the various committees and disseminated through their membership networks. To date, such issue-based strategies have included pay, hours, leave and job evaluation which led to the creating organisational influence on specific national issues which has directly contributed to effecting positive change for clerical and executive officers, not just within their workplaces but beyond. Targeted work progresses for these committees as this cross-union forum continues to influence and amplify the voice of clerical and executive officers through the utilisation of a strategic organising model.

The Equivalent Grades committees form one constituent piece of numerous strategic organising projects that are currently operational in a number of sectors.



# Appendices

## Appendix 1

Circular 02/2023  
Application of 1st March 2023  
pay adjustments **HERE**

## Appendix 4

Civil Service Employee Assistance  
Service (CSEAS) activity report  
2022 **HERE**

## Appendix 2

Civil Service General Council  
Annual Report 2021  
**HERE**

## Appendix 5

2023-2025 'Reclaiming our Place'  
divisional strategy **HERE**

## Appendix 3

Civil Service General Council  
Annual Report 2022  
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