



Fórsa position on automation in the Civil and Public Service

General Principles

1. Automation / robotics will transform the world of work in coming decades, not least in the Public Service. This transformation will require significant engagement to ensure that it becomes less a threat to workers and more an opportunity to improve the quality of working lives.
2. Artificial intelligence, automation and robotics should create more jobs – albeit different jobs- the design of the workplace of the future must be a collaborative event and must be human centred and led.
3. Key to this in the Public Service will be to ensure that staff and future employees are suitably equipped to engage in new opportunities.
4. Lifelong learning and innovative workplace training are key elements to achieving this.
5. Fórsa will not support the diminution of workplaces through the march of automation for automation sake.
6. Nor will we support the worsening of good public services, involving hands on human intervention, more so we will support properly thought out automation, controlled by workers whose aim will be the continued enhancement and delivery of public services.

7. Citizens do not want to talk to machines. Consider the frustration of many citizens as they try to engage with mostly automated service companies in the private sector. Do we really want this model in public services?
8. The mantra that private is good and public is bad is a badly founded principle, created by those who would see the worst excesses of the private sector transplanted in the public service.
9. A mistake best seen in the Government reform that transformed HR services into a remote call centre. Effectively taking the human out of human resources and turning staff members into case numbers. A reform that should really be reversed because there is nothing wrong in saying we got it wrong.
10. As the demographic changes in the Civil Service, which it will, particularly as we approach a significant retirement cliff, we must ensure that new recruits are fully equipped with the technological tools and expertise to work and lead a human centred and increasingly automated public service workplace. Young people will need help in navigating the increasingly difficult school to-work transition. Older workers will need expanded choices that enable them to remain economically active as long as they choose especially with new choices in retirement age.
11. The recently agreed IT apprenticeship scheme in the Civil Service is the sort of innovative model that should hopefully help to deliver a well trained workforce for the future. Older workers should not be cast aside with these new innovations. Specific measures are also needed to address gender equality in the technology-enabled jobs of tomorrow.
12. Offices like the Revenue Commissioners have proven that with new models of work and retraining that they can best deliver on their goal of an ever increasing tax take, and rather than reduce jobs- ensure that workers are engaged centrally in enhanced functions such as audit and fraud control.
13. No less an approach should take place across the civil and public services, retraining, new work and better services is what we in Fórsa will support.
14. Fórsa has made it clear that it will not stand in the way of technological advancement, evidence will show that we are no luddites, but technological advancement should not be at the cost of improved services or job losses.

15. IT platforms in the public service should be state of the art and their design and development should be primarily led in house. The diminution of in house IT Services over the last two decades has seen the growth of a hugely costly consultant led approach to designing new systems. This must change in the future. A creeping privatisation that met none of the service provision rules set out in successive national agreements.
16. Workers also need greater autonomy over their working time, while meeting business needs. Utilising technology to expand choice and achieve a balance between work and personal life can help them realise this goal and address the pressures that come with achieving work life balance and dealing with the increasing drift of work into personal and family time. The blunt instrument of increased hours introduced under the Haddington Road Agreement was a retrograde step that gave no credence to the changing face of work and the fact that the future is about smarter working not longer working.
17. In the Civil and Public Service remote working should also be a significant feature in the work place of the future. Technologies allow this and employers should support the concept more.
18. In conclusion and to quote the International Labour Organisation it is all about taking responsibility;

“The ILO called on all stakeholders to take responsibility for building a just and equitable future of work. Urgent action to strengthen the social contract in each country requires increasing investment in people’s capabilities and the institutions of work and harnessing opportunities for decent and sustainable work. Countries need to establish national strategies on the future of work through social dialogue between governments, Unions and employers”.

Ultimately Fórsa support for technological advancement and greater automation will be based on the commitment to some of the important principles set down in this document. The world of work will change as will society and we must ensure that this is achieved equitably and that well remunerated civil and public service jobs continue to be key to the delivery of better public services.

We would propose continuing engagement as the procurement process progresses.

Derek Mullen
Head of Division for the Civil Service
Fórsa