

The Irish Congress of Trade Unions

‘Policy Priorities for Workers’

Proposals to Incoming Government



1. **Conditions of Employment**
2. **Education**
3. **Health Services**
4. **Pensions**
5. **Housing & Homelessness**
6. **The Water Sector**
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Irish Congress of Trade Unions

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Introduction

The Irish Congress of Trade Unions is the largest civil society organisation on the island of Ireland representing almost 800,000 workers. Congress has identified the following policy priorities which should be considered by political representatives seeking to form a new Government.

1. Conditions of Employment

- Facilitate and support the re-establishment of an Employer Labour Conference.
- Increase the hourly rate of the National Minimum Wage to align it with the hourly rate of the Living Wage, over the lifetime of the current Low Pay Commission.
- Implement the Recommendations of the University of Limerick Review on Low Hour Contracts.
- Implement the Recommendations of the Cahill/Duffy Review of laws protecting employees' interests.
- In line with the judgement of the European Court of Justice in the Wilson case, amend the law to ensure that employees have the right to trade union representation in work.
- A fair transposition of the EU public procurement directives in line with the provisions of Article (18.2).
- Strengthen the TUPE Regulations to provide for the automatic transfer of employees where a contract is lost and broadening their scope to include pensions as a transferrable condition of employment.
- Continue to ensure that pay in the Public Sector is determined through the normal process of collective bargaining.
- Outlaw all forms of bogus self-employment.
- Freelance workers should have the legal right to engage in collective bargaining and the law should be amended to prevent an employer using agency workers in the course of an industrial dispute.

2. Education

- A high quality system of public education that is accessible, affordable and inclusive is essential for an equal society.
- Funding for education should be provided through a system of progressive taxation with the share of public spending for education being at least equivalent to 7% of GDP.
- Atypical employment contracts in this sector should be regularised to provide stable and regular employment with secure tenure. The issue of pay parity needs to be addressed.
- Priority should be given to addressing educational disadvantage and those with special educational needs.
- Education should be democratically accountable with an enhanced role for the Education & Training Boards.

3. Health Services

- Health Services in Ireland are provided through a system that is broken,

unsustainable, unresponsive and profoundly unequal.

- There is no immediate fix to the problems in the health services. The required reform will only be implemented as part of a long-term plan, in consultation with its skilled and dedicated workforce.
- A new vision for the health service should be developed that is built on the following principles:
- An annual health service budget which is a minimum of 10% of GDP.
- A universally accessible single-tiered health service that is consultant delivered in acute settings.
- A health service that is democratically accountable and is responsive to the needs of citizens.

4. Pensions

- In the light of the collapse of Defined Benefit pension schemes and because of the lack of confidence in Defined Contribution schemes a new approach is required.
- Congress proposes the establishment of a National Superannuation Fund involving contributions from employers, workers and Government which could be mandatory for those workers and employers who are not already making second pillar contributions.
- The recent change to the age at which citizens become eligible for the State pension has profound consequences that have not been fully analysed. Before any further change is made to the pension age, these consequences need to be fully understood and appropriate measures adopted to mitigate the negative effects of this change.
- The pension age in Ireland should not be extended to age 68 unless it is done as part of a European-wide initiative.

5. Housing and Homelessness

- The Government should undertake to deliver the biggest housing programme in the history of the State. This programme should be targeted at resolving the housing crisis by 2019 – the Centenary of the ‘1919 Democratic Programme’. The housing programme should have separate components which would be integrated into an overall policy. This policy should include the following:
- State intervention to provide funding for the development of social and affordable housing.
- Facilitate citizens seeking to purchase a home through the use of special savings incentives, by allowing Local Authorities to provide finance to home buyers and by relaxing the Central Bank Lending Rules.
- Release land for house building through a system of compulsory purchase orders and apply a development surcharge on land not yet developed but zoned for housing. The surcharge would be collected by the State at the time of the sale of land and the monies recovered should be used to tackle the problem of homelessness.

6. The Water Sector

- A referendum should be held to enshrine the ownership and control of the water sector firmly in the public realm.
- The current system of domestic water charges should be abolished and an alternative model for funding of the sector developed.

7. Youth

- The level of youth unemployment in Ireland is currently 18%, a proportion of whom are not in any form of education or training.
- A number of special initiatives need to be taken in order to target young people who are consistently unemployed. These could include an expansion of apprenticeship schemes and special targeted training programmes.

8. Childcare

- A recent study by Congress highlighted the difficulties working families have in accessing quality and affordable childcare. The report has also shown the poor pay and conditions of employment in this sector.
- The recommendations of the report can be summarised as follows:
- Increase spending on childcare over a ten year period to reach the UNICEF recommended benchmark of 1% GDP.
- Increase employers' PRSI to contribute to the cost of childcare.
- Sufficient resources should be set aside for investment in early years care and education.
- There should be an urgent review of capitation payments.
- An extension of the Learner Fund to support existing staff in upskilling to level 7 and level 8 qualifications.
- A detailed road map for paid parental leave to cover first year of a child's life.

9. Community Sector

- The community sector employs tens of thousands of workers providing vital services which would otherwise have to be provided directly by the Public Service.
- It is essential that the recently established High Level Forum on the Community Sector is sufficiently resourced to resolve the multiplicity of challenges facing this sector.

10. Workers' Voice

- Over the past number of years, there has been a systematic removal of worker representatives from decision making processes. This policy enshrines an imbalanced approach where business and Government alone are heard and workers' voices silenced. It should be reversed.

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