FÓRSA Civil Service Division

Strategy and Priority Work Programme 2025-2027

Playing our part – Together

Foreword

The Civil Service Divisional Conference in 2023, adopted, for the very first time, a divisional strategy. The Strategy was titled as 'Reclaiming Our Place'. The adoption of that strategy arose from the 2022 Fórsa Biennial Conference adoption of the Fórsa Strategic Plan 2021 – 2025. 'Reclaiming Our Place' focused on the challenges within the Civil Service area.

In the lead up to the formulation of 'Reclaiming Our Place,' the Civil Service Divisional Executive Committee felt that the Civil Service, as an employer, remained dominated by the culture of restriction, manifested in the last era of austerity. It had lost its place as a leading employer of choice. In fact, other areas of the public sector, who traditionally followed Civil Service policy, were striving to introduce progressive policies (e.g. menstrual and menopausal welfare and support for victims of domestic violence) for which the Civil Service had shown no real appetite. Furthermore, the Civil Service industrial relations system in the context of the Conciliation & Arbitration Scheme had virtually collapsed.

'Reclaiming Our Place' set about pursuing the creation of an environment where the Civil Service, as an employer, could once again become a leading employer of choice, in a very competitive and tight labour market, through the introduction of progressive workplace policies. And we have had significant success in this regard, in areas such as menopausal welfare, support for victims of domestic violence and the right to disconnect.

In relation to the industrial relations system, we are now on the cusp of a new era in Civil Service industrial relations, and a completely re-modelled and 'fit-for-purpose' Conciliation & Arbitration Scheme will be launched in autumn 2025. Considering all of this, the Civil Service DEC has decided to retain the three core foundation pillars of 'Reclaiming Our Place' as the core foundation pillars of 'Playing Our Part – Together', a divisional strategy for 2025-2027.

The three foundation pillars are:

1. **Recruitment and organising**
2. **Industrial relations and policy**
3. **Communications**

However, the forthcoming strategy will have targeted industrial relations and policy priorities in addition to an increased effort, synergetic with an all of union effort, to increase not only the number of workers who join and become organised members of Fórsa, but who become interested in participating in the union on workplace issues which affect them. This is the surest way to safeguard our future ability to represent workers and deliver fair outcomes in the years ahead.

We have already seen evidence of senior management decisions to test our mettle and our ability to respond effectively in attempts to unilaterally alter blended working arrangements and open up HEO recruitment without consultation or agreement. We were able to resist these moves by having the collective resolve to take appropriate action. However, this is only sustainable in the medium to longer term if we significantly increase the density of our union membership. And we can.

The last census indicated that there were now 52,000 civil servants employed. Of that number, 40,000 are in posts in grades represented by Fórsa. So, while our divisional growth to 25,000 members is encouraging, there is lots more to do in order to reach our potential. Part of this strategy is to put systems in place, not only to increase the number of members, but to ensure that as a collective group of workers they are organised, with significantly higher levels of participation in the union on issues which affect them. The surveys leading up to the formulation of local bargaining pay claims clearly told us that there were large numbers of members willing to get involved in the participative pursuit of these pay claims. So, to put it simply, this plan is about finding ways to make us stronger in order to improve our ability to deal with the challenges we face, by playing our part, together.

I would like to thank the CSDEC committee members and officers for their continued support and commitment to seeing us on the right pathway. I would also like to acknowledge the invaluable contributions of the Fórsa Civil Service staff team to putting this strategy and work programme together.

Mise le meas,

Éamonn Donnelly
Deputy General Secretary
Head of Civil Service Division

A message from the Chairperson

When I addressed the Divisional Conference in 2023, I asked for your support to endorse a new initiative, a divisional strategy which set out our goals and vision, consistent with the goals of the union, but tailored to focus on the civil service membership. It was our maiden voyage into those waters. The timeline for the strategy 'Reclaiming Our Place' was 2023 -2025. Looking back, I am personally pleased to have begun that journey. A number of the aims and ambitions have either been realised or are moving in the right direction. Some others haven't been realised but still can. There is still so much more to do, and that is a challenge we should relish collectively, playing our part, together. The best chance we have to get the best outcomes is to grow a stronger union with high member participation.

This strategy retains the core strengths of the previous strategy. It is as much a prioritised work plan as it is a strategy. The priorities are based on what the members have told us through AGMs, conferences, surveys and regular meetings. It simply would not be possible to develop a strategy and work plan without your engagement.

Thank you to all who were involved in the development of this strategy. Let's continue the hard work

Helen Linehan
Chairperson
Civil Service Division

Recruitment and organising

A Fórsa civil service staff team project, commencing immediately, will be run over two eight-week-long phases. This project will seek to achieve:

- The selection of a number of areas in each staff assignment for systematic mapping to establish the numbers in membership in each of those areas, the potential numbers in membership in each of those areas, the numbers of union representatives in each of those areas and the updating and cleansing of data in relation to members in each of those areas.
- An analysis of the relevant training history of union representatives and the relevant training requirements of union representatives.
- A reservoir of 'in-house' expertise on the practical usage and application information technology tools and resources available on the membership system.
- Up to speed analysis of the information garnered from the use of the above resources.
- Increased workplace presence to foster a culture of leadership identification, membership growth and membership participation.

The analysis of outcomes and trends from the above will be monitored and considered by the CSDEC, with a view to using the learning from the outcomes to develop a holistic and systematic approach beyond the selected areas across the Civil Service. In addition, training and development requirements arising from the findings of the project will be met. Currently, the CSDEC sits for one dedicated strategy session per calendar year. This will increase to two sessions per year, one of which will be solely dedicated to recruitment and organising.

The above will facilitate the setting of realistic recruitment targets within the lifetime of the strategy, in order to reach a density of over 75%.

In order to encourage members to participate in the pursuit of issues in the workplace which directly affect them, periodical surveys on the relevance of issues will take place as a mainstream activity.

The potential for consolidation and mergers of branches will continue to be examined and implemented in cases where it is agreed by stakeholders that such a merger would create a stronger and more efficient representative unit.

All of the above activity is designed to create a durable and across the board approach to recruitment, organising and increased member participation.

Industrial relations and policy

- Ensure a consistent and analytical approach to any review of blended working across the Civil Service, which is contained in the programme for government. Resist any arbitrary or unilateral changes which are not based on analytics. Such analytics should take account of the benefits or otherwise to the workplace, the worker, workplace productivity, the economy, personal well-being, childcare, care of the elderly, the environment, the housing crisis and other relevant factors.
- Increase membership participation in pursuit of the best possible outcomes in respect of pay bargaining, and in particular, local bargaining pay claims for grades, groups and categories across the civil service.
- Reduce the duration of the probationary period and retain the role of the Civil Service disciplinary appeals board in respect of appeals on non-successful probation on promotion assignments.
- Ensure that the re-modelled Conciliation & Arbitration Scheme, scheduled for autumn 2025, is adequately resourced in order to deliver a highly efficient industrial relations system.
- Reboot the political campaign to scrap the Civil Service Regulation (Amendment) Bill.
- Ensure direct labour provision across the Civil Service and reduce the incidence of outsourcing. Where outsourcing is deemed necessary, ensure compliance with the obligations set out in the public service agreements.
- Develop a strategy on the circumstances generated by the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in order to protect against work displacement and other threats.
- Develop an efficient information and discussion forum with the NSSO on systems and processes.
- Eliminate disadvantageous anomalies in starting pay on promotion/incremental credit.

The Civil Service DEC currently sits for one strategy session per calendar year. This will increase to two sessions per year, one of which will be dedicated to Industrial Relations & Policy and Communications.

Communications

Over the past two years the communications unit in Fórsa has undergone structural change in terms of dedicated functions such as media relations, member communications and digital communications. The CSDEC engagement with all of the functional leads is both available and ongoing. The functional leads have always made themselves available and willing to engage with the Division, and the CSDEC will seek to enhance a more structured engagement, the genesis of which needs to come from the Division itself as needs and opportunities are identified. The ambition of establishing a Communications Task Group of the CSDEC was never realised and should be implemented immediately. This group should consider ways to:

- Ensure that the Civil Service webpage is maintained, up-to-date and informative.
- Optimise digital communications opportunities.
- Develop a more participative and inclusive input into the e-bulletin content.
- Mainstream communications as a specialised item on each monthly CSDEC agenda.
- Periodically review members' communication needs and develop communications proposals in this regard.

General

Common to the three core foundation pillars of this strategy and work programme is the area of campaigning, and all campaigning opportunities will be maximised as required as and when strategy initiatives are rolled out.