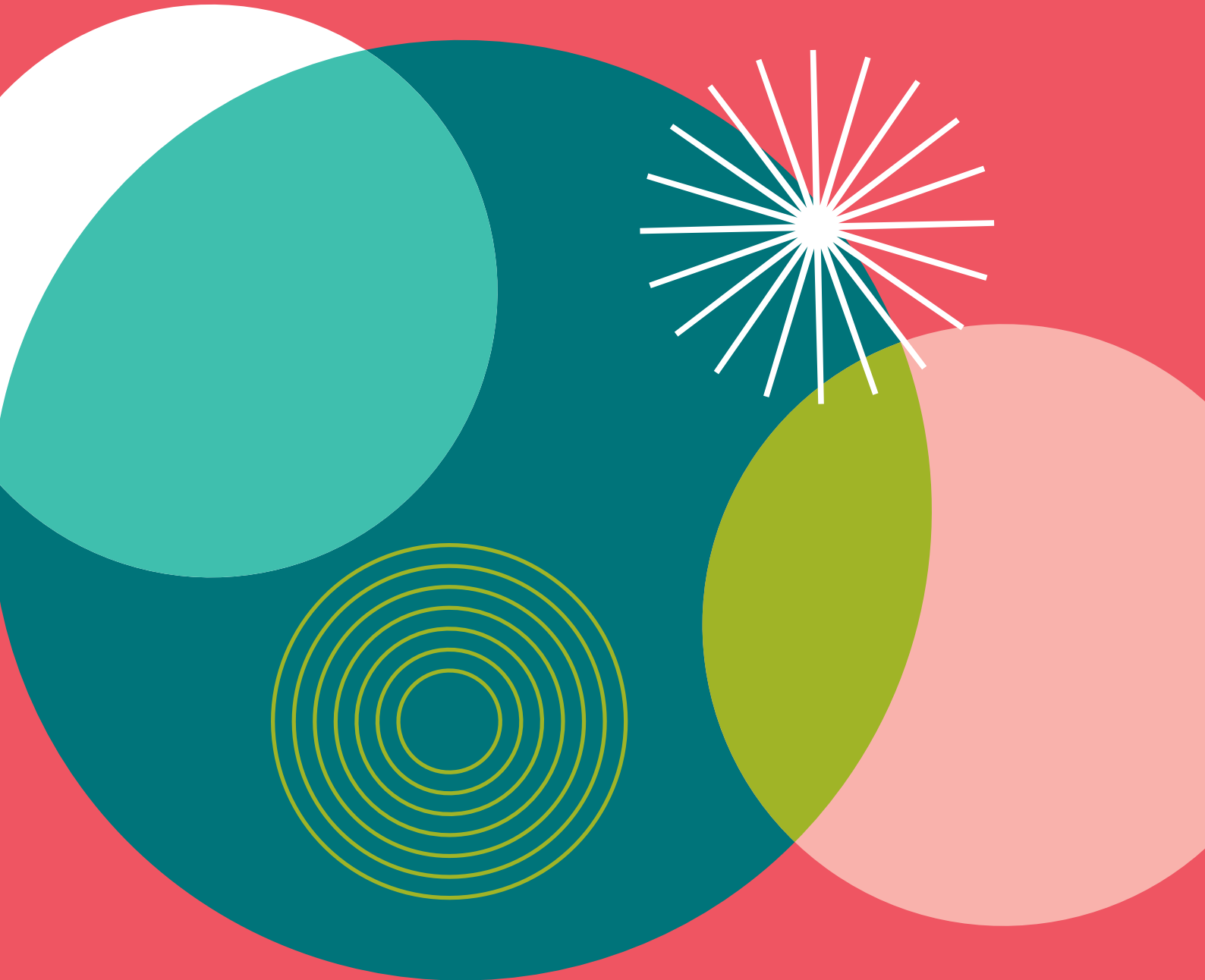


# FÓRSA

YOUR UNION,  
YOUR POWER



Your Motions in Action 2022-2024:  
better work, better lives, a better world

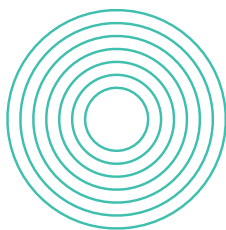
**FÓRSA** YOUR UNION,  
YOUR POWER

Conference 2024  
15 - 17 May, INEC Killarney  
#Forsa2024



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Dear members,

In May 2022, Fórsa's Biennial Conference, the first in-person national conference since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, took place in Killarney, Co. Kerry. More than 700 of you, delegates representing your workplaces, gathered to debate and agree union policy.

Your decisions there formed the basis of the agenda and policies for the National Executive Committee (NEC) over the past two years. You can consult Fórsa's Biennial Report 2022-2024 and the Action on Motions 2022-2024 report on [forsa.ie](https://forsa.ie). They outline in detail the union's work over the past two years.

The purpose of this document is to highlight some of the achievements that your NEC, your colleagues, and your branches, have collectively won that were a direct result of motions passed at Conference 2022.

Our union's strength is you and your colleagues. Collective bargaining works when workers organise collectively and participate in high numbers. This is how to ensure no power is left on the table. Together, as a collective, we strive to make work better, lives better and the world better. This report looks at recent progress in these areas.

**Kevin Callinan**  
General Secretary



# Better work

## Fair and equal pay

The union's strategy for the extension of *Building Momentum* (August 2022) and the new *Public Service Agreement 2024-26* (January 2024) was shaped by the decisions you made at Conference in May 2022. **A wide range of motions called for future negotiations to take inflation and the rising cost of living into account.** Your message was heard loud and clear. The subsequent negotiations resulted in pay increases in the context of prevailing inflation projections, including a significantly enhanced outcome for lower paid workers.

### Review of Building Momentum

By the close of Conference 2022, the officers of ICTU's Public Services Committee (PSC) had already held an initial meeting with senior Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) officials after Minister of Public Expenditure Michael McGrath TD agreed to engage with unions on pay and inflation. This came after Fórsa, and the other PSC unions, triggered a review clause in the *Building Momentum* agreement in March 2022. Fórsa took the lead on this, proposing it to the PSC, arguing that sustained high inflation, which was not expected when *Building Momentum* was negotiated in December 2020, constituted grounds for a review of the agreement's pay terms.

The WRC facilitated the resulting negotiations between public service unions, led by Fórsa General Secretary Kevin Callinan, and the DPER between May and June 2022. The talks broke down on 17th June 2022 after union negotiators rejected a Government offer totalling 5% (on top of existing *Building Momentum* pay adjustments), in the context of an extension of the agreement by another year.

Talks resumed on 29th August and the Government made a revised offer, which was further improved following negotiations. On 30th August 2022, the WRC published proposals for a public service pay package aimed at resolving differences between public service unions and the Government. The package contained pay increases of 3% with effect from 2nd February 2022, 2% from 1st March 2023 and 1.5% or €750 (whichever was the greater) from 1st October 2023. These proposals which favoured workers on lower incomes were overwhelmingly accepted by Fórsa members with just over 91% voting in favour of the extension to the *Building Momentum* agreement.

### Community and Voluntary Sector

Progress has been made to restore pay **parity for members working in Section 39, Section 56 and Section 10 agencies.** In January 2023, Fórsa took the decision to pay members in the community and voluntary sector if an indefinite strike action took place.

Later that year, after a ballot of members, formal notice of an indefinite strike was served. Preparation began for a joint strike with the INMO and SIPTU. Intense negotiations chaired by the WRC then followed, and an interim agreement was secured by Fórsa as part of the ICTU group of unions, the night before the strike was due to begin.

This agreement addresses the core issue of pay inequality through pay raises and a commitment to developing a mechanism to align the pay of Section 39, 10 and 56 workers with public sector pay. The agreement was accepted by a significant majority of members of Fórsa and the other unions following a national ballot.

This brings pay parity closer than it has been for a decade. For the first time the Government, as the main funding body, acknowledged that members' pay had fallen behind equivalent and comparable grades in the public service. The agreement confirms that the funders are committed to fully dealing with the issue before the end of the new *Public Service Agreement 2024-2026*.

Fórsa successfully negotiated a 5% pay increase in two phases in 2023 for Community Employment Supervisors and Assistant Supervisors. Fórsa also achieved a new mechanism for engagement on future pay determination. The pay agreement was accepted in a ballot of members of the Community Employment Supervisors branch.

## Public Sector Pay Agreement 2024-2026

A challenging set of negotiations on a new public sector pay agreement concluded in January 2024. The pay terms of this new agreement are valued at 9.25% over 2.5 years. The pay provisions in each year of the agreement will deliver significantly more for lower paid workers.

Going into the negotiations the union side, led by Fórsa's General Secretary Kevin Callinan, had a clear set of priorities. These priorities were agreed in the first place by Fórsa's NEC and then by the Public Services Committee of ICTU.



These priorities were that any new agreement would:

- address the rising cost of living, especially for low-to middle income earners;
- contain provisions to allow for the normalisation of industrial relations;
- contain a measure to stabilise the agreement through the inclusion of a local bargaining clause;
- address the future proofing of public services.

**These four priorities were directly informed by motions put to Conference 2022.** They also reflected the concerns of over 20,000 Fórsa members who told us directly, in a survey conducted in April 2023 by Ámarach, on behalf of the union, that the rising cost of living was their top concern.

The new agreement includes flat rate increases which means that the percentage increases are greater for those on lower incomes and significantly so for those on very low pay.

Whilst it is impossible to be definitive about future inflation, there is a large level of consensus among institutional forecasters, including our own advisors in NERI, that price inflation will be in the range of 6.0% to 6.5% over the course of the 30 months of the agreement. If this turns out to be the case the pay increases will make good losses incurred during 2022 and 2023.

The agreement also provides for the implementation of several outstanding Labour Court recommendations, as well as provisions for local bargaining, allowing trade unions to negotiate up to an additional 3% of pay costs, inclusive of allowances, for particular grades, groups or categories of employee.

Detailed arrangements for local bargaining are to be agreed by the 30th of June 2024, with local negotiations to take place between July 2024 and June 2025, and agreements secured, to the greatest extent possible, through direct negotiations.

Thus, this agreement has the potential to restore living standards for workers after a period of high inflation even before the benefits arising from personal taxation changes are considered. For lower paid workers the agreement should mean significant gains in 'real wages'.

The *Public Sector Agreement 2024-2026* was overwhelmingly accepted by 94% in a national ballot of Fórsa members and was ratified on 25th March 2024 by a meeting of the Public Services Committee of ICTU.

# Better lives

## Life beyond the workplace

At Conference 2022, there was a significant focus on issues beyond pay around the changes you want to see beyond the workplace. Motions were debated and adopted on work life balance, menstruation and menopause, domestic violence, bullying and harassment, and pregnancy related sick absence. Over the past two years, winning improvements on these topics has been to the fore of our work.



Motion 35 dealt with **remote and blended working** and sought to significantly improve the way in which this issue was managed. It referred to all the areas which should be addressed, including fair access, consistency, health and safety, monitoring, transparency, and flexitime accrual.

Securing the aims of the motion remains a live issue across the union. As the civil service sets the bar for many policies, the motion was initially referred to the civil service division for action. The matter of flexitime accrual is going through the Civil Service Arbitration Board. The staff side have submitted their statement to the board and await developments.

The Blended Working Framework will need to be revisited in light of the Workplace Relations Commissions (WRC) Code of Practice for Employers and Employees Right to Request Flexible Working and Right to Request Remote Working which was published in March 2024. Progressing all aspects of the motion is ongoing.

Motion 52 on **pregnancy related sick leave** has been pursued through claims aimed at improving several pregnancy and maternity-related issues for civil service workers.

When a worker is promoted in the civil service their sick leave record is assessed to ensure that the person will be capable of regular and effective service. A new policy will now see pregnancy related sick leave discounted from promotion consideration.

With this now secured in the civil service, the potential for improving pregnancy related sick leave policies in other employments is enhanced.

Motion 66 on **bullying and harassment** called for action on bullying in the workplace and led directly to a decision to hold a major seminar on 'Your Right to Dignity in the Workplace' on 16th November 2023.

The seminar followed a large-scale consultation of members on this topic. Almost 5000 members took part in the survey, with over 68% of members surveyed indicating that they had personally experienced workplace bullying.

The results of the survey informed the discussions at the seminar, which provided members with a valuable opportunity to exchange on this vital topic. After hearing from a panel discussion, participants joined working groups which looked at how to better address workplace bullying and harassment in health and safety policy.

There were eight separate motions from multiple branches on **domestic and gender-based violence**. The strength of feeling from delegates in the hall was palpable, as was the sense of determination.

68%

have experienced workplace bullying

64%

have experienced an unmanageable workload or were given tasks with unreasonable deadlines

45%

said they have been pressured into responding to work related issues outside of normal working hours

67%

have witnessed a colleague experience workplace bullying

54%

said they have witnessed a colleague be threatened or insulted



To give the strongest possible support to these motions, the NEC prioritised the issue of domestic violence leave by ensuring it was placed on the industrial agenda across all divisions.

In September 2022, the union also met with Women's Aid to discuss the need for the introduction of a workplace policy to include supports and ten days fully paid domestic violence leave, as is best practice, and the development of an awareness campaign.

They provided Fórsa with templates for best practice and highlighted examples of employers who were leaders on this front.

In October 2022, Fórsa conducted a cross divisional membership survey to garner a better understanding of domestic abuse amongst our membership. The study set

out to establish attitudes towards domestic violence and evaluate supports available in workplaces. The Communications Unit developed this survey in consultation with Women's Aid.

The results of this survey were presented at an Equality Network Seminar that took place in November 2022. At this time Government had committed to introducing paid leave for survivors of domestic violence under the new Work Life Balance and Miscellaneous Provisions Bill (2022) but the duration and rate of pay was still being discussed.

The seminar was attended by Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, Roderic O'Gorman TD and Fórsa used the opportunity to call for ten days fully paid leave to be covered under the new legislation, alongside the development of workplace supports.

In February 2023, Fórsa expressed the union's 'grave concerns' on the proposed rate of pay allocated for domestic violence leave. At that time, the Bill proposed a sick leave rate which capped payment at 70% of salary, or €110 per day.

Thanks to our intervention, and that of other stakeholders, this was increased to the worker's normal daily rate of pay. However, the number of days remained at five.

In September 2023, the civil service formally adopted a domestic violence policy.

**In November 2023, paid domestic violence leave became law through the introduction of the Work Life Balance and Miscellaneous Provisions Bill (2022).**

As the new law only provides for five statutory days of domestic violence leave, the union is continuing to campaign until ten days is achieved, a measure supported by Women's Aid and international research.

At the November 2022 Equality seminar, the **impact of trade union activism on the progress of LGBTQI+ rights** was also explored, with particular focus on the decriminalisation of homosexuality in Ireland and the progress that has been achieved to date.

Kieran Rose, a former LGPSU member and one of the key speakers at the seminar brought the first motions to decriminalise homosexuality to an ICTU conference almost 40 years ago. He was also instrumental in the development of the scheme to disregard the criminal records for "offences" committed before homosexuality was decriminalised in Ireland, introduced in 2022.





Motion 84 referred to the need for workplace **menstrual and menopause policies** and resulted in the high profile 'Stop the Stigma' trade union coalition campaign, led by Fórsa.

All Fórsa divisions committed to pushing this issue on their industrial agenda. Sample policies and educational materials for workplaces and employers covering what menstrual and menopausal workplace friendly policies should contain were developed and released.

The campaign saw us partner with a coalition of trade unions to further develop policy and build an awareness campaign around menstrual and menopause workplace policies and a campaign was launched on the Fórsa website.

Fórsa representatives met with Minister Roderic O'Gorman TD, to discuss the union's campaign and survey, and he expressed his intention to commission research in a bid to "make the workplace a better place for those who are experiencing menopause or experiencing significant menstrual symptoms." The Minister has also publicly credited Fórsa for its work in this area.

On October 24th 2023, the Stop the Stigma coalition launched its policy paper '*Menstruation and Menopause: Workplace Policy Reform for a Modern Labour Force - A Trade Union Led Initiative*' at the Oireachtas, hosted by the Chair of the Oireachtas Women's Caucus Senator Fiona O'Loughlin.

Also in October 2023, Fórsa welcomed the Department of Public Expenditure's menopause policy framework which mandates all civil service organisations to implement a menopause policy by early 2024.





# Better world

## When workers organise, we can change the world

Motion 57 on **organising for increased density and strength** specifically called for a renewed focus on increasing strength and density, in line with Core Objective 1 of the Strategic Plan. Organising has been identified as a key priority of the union and has featured at every major union meeting and event. Expert guidance on effective organising methods has been provided by Dr. Jane McAlevey and all staff have taken part in bespoke training.

**Over the last two years you showed employers that you and your fellow Fórsa members are getting organised and will act when you need to.**

Local Government workers decided they wouldn't wait any longer for the job evaluation scheme they had been demanding. By organising collectively and taking action workers secured an agreement so they will be paid for the work they actually do.

Workers in the HSE came together and protested to demand fair funding for clerical and administrative staff in the HSE, as part of the ongoing campaign of industrial action over the recruitment freeze. A series of lunchtime protests in 2023, across the country, demonstrated the power of Fórsa members when they stand together.

Library staff took a stand against intimidation and abuse, and were backed by members across all divisions, to demand protection in their workplaces when they were faced by hateful attacks from the far right.

Organising and building collective strength has led to wins for workers right across the union, and we're growing as a result. New members have joined Fórsa in bigger numbers than ever. 2023 saw the largest growth of any year since Fórsa was established. There are now 85,000 members in our union.

Since 2022, the Membership Unit has processed almost 20,000 new joiner applications, twice as many as were processed in the same period in the two years prior to the 2022 Conference.



Communication with Fórsa members has also improved, the membership team updated member details associated with more than 35,000 member records. The Solas database now holds email addresses against 96% of member records, an increase of almost 10% since 2021.

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. Fortnightly sectoral bulletins are issued to members across all divisions by the Communications Unit. These form the core outreach to members, keeping them up to date on union developments, workplace issues, and relevant national stories. In 2022 and 2023, the Fórsa website had over 3.3 million visits.

Motion 95 called for an **expression of solidarity with international affiliates** in island nations including New Zealand, Vietnam, Cuba, and Australia in their endeavours to prioritise the interests of public health in the context of the Coronavirus pandemic and applauded the government's Shared Island initiative which aims to harness the full potential of the Good Friday Agreement to enhance cooperation, connection and mutual understanding on the island and engage with all communities and traditions to build consensus around a shared future.

Collaboration with sister unions across the island of Ireland occurs through various committees of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions. Fórsa and Unison hosted a joint all island conference in early 2024 to identify shared challenges and opportunities in health.

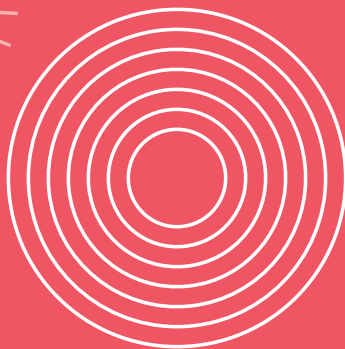
Motion 116A called for Fórsa to work with French trade unions. Fórsa engages with colleagues from across Europe and the world through our active participation in the European Public Service Union (EPSU), the European Trade Union Institute (ETUI), and Public Services International (PSI).







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