



# FORSA

CSQ

## Civil Service Quarterly

ONLINE SUMMER 2024



# THE FUTURE OF WORK

### **Challenges ahead:**

Labour market and  
workplace relations

**pages 4 & 5**

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Brazier Media

[www.brazier.media](http://www.brazier.media)**Message from the Chair****Thanks to Seán for his unstinting service****Hello colleagues,**

Since the last edition of CSQ was published, much has happened in our union and in our division. I would like to begin by paying tribute to Seán Carabini, our former colleague and long-time editor of CSQ. In March of this year Seán moved on from Fórsa to a new role in the Civil Service. I want to thank him here publicly for his tireless efforts on behalf of members throughout his time with Fórsa, and prior to that with the PSEU.

Unflappable and unfailingly committed to our members, he was always determined to ensure clarity and consistency were to the fore in union communications with members, and that members' terms and conditions were protected. While he has not gone far, we will miss him and are very grateful for his contribution to the union.

CSQ will now be produced by Fórsa's Communication Unit. I hope you will continue to find it as informative as ever. This edition contains an interview with Éamonn Donnelly on the future of the C&A scheme, and an insightful overview of a recently-

released WRC report on the future of the Irish workplace.

Our national union conference took place in May. Delegates came together to pass motions defining union policy for the next two years and to elect a new officer board. A detailed review of conference is featured on pages 12 to 17.

Following the recent European Elections we are delighted to feature a guest column from Esther Lynch, General Secretary of the European Trade Union Confederation, and a member of Fórsa, in this issue. No doubt in the months ahead elections will continue to dominate the news agenda.

For now, I hope you have a restful summer break planned and look forward to continuing to work with you in the months ahead.

**Helen Linehan**Chairperson  
Civil Service Division

## Analysis

# New WRC report looks at the future of work

# Challenging times

### Brendan Kinsella

Fórsa Communications

A recently released report from the University of Limerick's Kemmy Business School explores the current and possible future impacts of several key developments affecting the Irish labour market. The research, carried out on behalf of the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC), looks at the effects of inflation, recruitment and retention challenges, technology, and climate change on what work will look like in Ireland in the coming years.

The research consisted of two parts. The first was academic research drawing upon a wide variety of international sources from across a number of disciplines, and the second part consisted of interviews with representatives of organisations and state bodies, ranging from the Department of Enterprise, Trade & Employment, to the National Women's Council and Fórsa. The responses from interviewees paint a clear picture of workers' concerns.

### Inflation

Of the four key factors, inflation was seen as having the greatest priority for employers and workers. This was in part due to "its immediate impacts on business costs, incomes, and related wage negotiations."

Inflation was found to be "inextricably linked" to recruitment and retention challenges. Especially for higher cost areas such as Dublin, where high cost-of-living was seen as a push factor for people already living there and a deterrent to others considering relocating to the city.

There was little hope of a quick resolution to the problem, with interviewees expecting inflation to be an ongoing issue for the medium term. This is expected to lead to weakened economic growth and the closure of some businesses. The labour market is, however, expected to remain strong. This is driven by the expectation that employers will maintain

Picture: (CC 0)



**INFLATION** Wage demands to address cost-of-living price hikes could spark workplace conflict

**The cost-of-living crisis is an ever-present deterrent to attracting new workers. The availability and costs of housing and childcare likewise make moving for work an unattractive prospect**

high recruitment intentions, an increase in female participation in the workforce, and inward migration.

Currently the labour market, while strong, is tight, that is expected to continue and will contribute to wage growth. This is expected to be nominal with "growth of 5.0 per cent in 2023 and 5.5 per cent in 2024."

Although to date there has been little evidence of inflation causing significant workplace conflict, it is leading to tensions. If inflation continues unabated workplace conflict will become a more real possibility as workers' wage demands increase to meet continued rising cost-of-living.

### Recruitment and retention

The effects of a tight labour market are not being felt evenly across all sectors. The vacancy rate in the Information and Communication sector has halved since 2016, while the rate in Public Administration and Defence has doubled in the same period.

There is evidence of skills gaps across all sectors. This issue is exacerbated by difficulties in recruiting and retaining workers from other parts of the country and abroad.

The cost-of-living crisis is an ever-present deterrent to attracting new workers. The availability and costs of housing and childcare likewise make moving for work an unattractive prospect.

International recruitment is often the go to means of addressing labour and skills shortages. While work permit schemes help, they are far from perfect. From the employers' point of view concerns were raised about the difficulty of accessing the schemes to fill certain roles.

There were concerns for migrant workers who are paying exorbitant fees for work permits and experiencing difficulties when seeking to change jobs. Especially difficult is being distanced from their families, as work permit schemes do not allow migrant workers to bring their families to Ireland.

The report outlines that employers have implemented a number of strategies to increase employee retainment. Strategies range from offering more flexible work arrangements, to making efforts to promote a culture of respect in the workplace.

## Analysis

their own time.

Commonly seen as a disruptive technology, AI was frequently cited as likely having the greatest consequences for work.

Of particular concern was AI being used in managerial or HR contexts. The report noted these concerns were reflected in proposed EU legislation which considers AI systems to be “high-risk in these contexts because they can potentially lead to discriminatory outcomes impacting workers’ careers, livelihoods, and rights.”

There were worries that existing legislation may not be sufficient for the challenges arising from technological change. While the EU considers its AI laws, 40% of HR departments at multinational companies are already using AI applications, despite concerns over risks.

### Climate change

Even though it is one of the biggest issues facing the planet, the inexorable march of climate change was seen as something which could be planned around. Interviewees thought that with proper planning mitigation and adaptation, measures could be introduced without creating significant conflict.

There were worries that an insufficient amount of strategic planning and action had taken place, despite the size of the crisis and its potential to impact the labour market.

There was an impression that implications of climate change for workplace relations “had not been given significant attention by actors with limited national level dialogue.” Interviewees saw the immediate ‘here and now’ issues such as inflation being prioritised over long-term planning.

Lack of proper planning was expected to be exacerbated by the wider impacts of climate change which have yet to emerge and won’t be seen for 10-20 years.

Overall, the report provides fascinating insights into the concerns workers in Ireland have, and the solutions they believe could address workplace relations challenges.

● The full report can be found on the **Workplace Relations Commission** website. Scan here...



### From page 5

It is expected that employers will begin offering significant pay rises for roles experiencing acute labour shortages. As employers compete against each other over a smaller pool of potential workers, there is a worry that this may cause friction as new hires get offered better pay and conditions than pre-existing staff.

There was disagreement between interviewees as some expected the tight labour market to lead to an increase in pay claims and industrial disputes, while others believed that workers would choose to move jobs rather than pursue a claim.

All were, however, in agreement that greater social dialogue is needed to properly address the issues facing recruitment and employment.

### Technology

Digitalisation and automation were seen as both a threat and a possible benefit for workers. There is a clear potential for technology and automation to make workers’ lives easier, make workplaces safer, and allow workers more leisure time. Some interviewees went as far as to contend “there was little evidence of job loss to date.”

Upskilling/reskilling was cited as one way to offset the potential threat to jobs. This comes with the danger of ‘skills churn’ increasing in pace. Skills churn is “the necessity for workers to constantly update skills to maintain employability.” This puts pressure on workers over who funds their learning, and whether they are expected to undertake upskilling in

**TECHNOLOGY** Digitisation, automation, and the increasing use of AI will have consequences on jobs

Illustration: Chris Potter (CC BY 2.0)



Picture: Matthew (CC BY 2.0)

In Numbers...

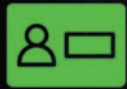
# BETTER IN A TRADE UNION

IT'S THE ONLY WAY YOU ARE GOING TO GET THE BEST FOR YOURSELF

CHRIS CROWLEY FÓRSA MEMBER



In unions  
500k



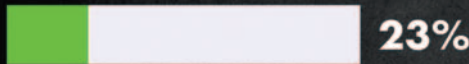
Forsa Members  
85k



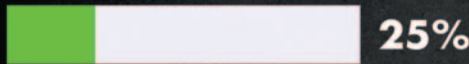
.. and union coverage in Ireland has grown from 34% in 2017 to 43% in 2022!

## How Do People In Ireland Feel About Trade Unions?

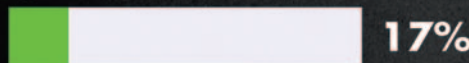
Nearly one in four of workforce is represented by a trade union



One in four are not represented by a trade union but is interested in joining



Nearly one in six have previously been represented by a trade union



# 2k+

That's the number of new members who joined FÓRSA during the BETTER IN A TRADE UNION campaign, compared to the previous month!

## Research shows a gap between trade union members and the general public in awareness of the role played by trade unions:

Representing employees in pay negotiations



Protecting improving employment terms and minimising job losses



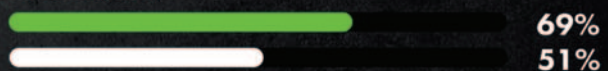
Negotiating national pay rates for specific sectors of employment



Lobbying for improved national employment laws, leave entitlements and rights



Individual trade unions are part of a single, all co-ordinating body



Involvement and support for civil society campaigns



TU Member ■ Total Population ■

Source: Red C Research for the Better in a Trade Union campaign



**WORLD FIRST** 2004 saw Ireland trailblaze a workplace smoking ban, a move followed by dozens of other countries

# Stubbing it out in the workplace

## **Brendan Kinsella**

*Fórsa Communications*

Friday 29th March marked the 20th anniversary of Ireland's smoking ban, a step that made this country the first in the world to put in place a nationwide workplace smoking ban.

The legislation to institute a comprehensive smoking ban was brought in by then Health Minister Micheál Martin TD, following years of campaigning from pressure groups, unions, and concerned individuals.

Mark Wynne and Mick McLoughlin, who were members of the municipal employees' division of IMPACT, one of Fórsa's predecessor unions, played a significant role in the campaign for a smoking ban.

In 2002, they brought forward a "landmark motion" calling for a smoking ban to IMPACT's biennial conference. This motion became part of the campaign for a legislative change that would have what Mick McLoughlin recently described as a "seismic effect on the health of workers". Before the nationwide smoking ban there was a wave of workplace smoking bans

## Smoking ban had seismic impact on health of workers

in county councils. Mark Wynne played a significant role in the first of these bans which was put in place by Dublin City Council.

Sitting on the council's health and safety committee, Mark was able to convince the council of the need for a smoking ban.

This did not come without resistance. Mark remembers how he and the other committee members overcame opposition by visiting depots and workplaces.

When they spoke to workers, Mark recalls: "We outlined what we were hoping to do, and most importantly, why we were going to do it.

"At that time, I used to drive a lorry. There'd be three or four men in the lorry and if one was smoking it meant the other three were being affected by passive smoking. It wasn't a nice

experience at all."

Mark cites the New York City smoking ban in hospitality as providing inspiration. Though it was less comprehensive, it proved that a smoking ban was achievable.

Since the ban came into force, the number of smokers in Ireland has dropped from a little over one-in-four to a little under one-in-five.

Richy Carrothers, Head of Fórsa's Local Government & Local Services & Municipal Employees' divisions, said: "I don't think it is possible to measure the health impacts of the smoking ban.

"Workers will live longer, healthier lives in a more pleasant, safer working environment. Today it just seems like common sense, but at the time it was a big deal, and our members were front and central in this fight."

Despite early scepticism the smoking ban has endured, spreading across the world, with similar bans now in effect in 74 countries. Unions played an important role in that success, having thrown their full support behind the ban.



# Here for you.

Fórsa members can avail of counselling, legal advice and support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year, at no additional cost to the member, through the following helplines:

- At no additional cost to the member, legal help in bodily injury cases **0818 776644**
- At no additional cost to the member, 24/7 legal advice helpline **0818 776644**
- At no additional cost to the member, 24/7 confidential counselling helpline **1800 776655**
- At no additional cost to the member, 24/7 domestic assistance helpline **091 545928**

## Health and medical information service – **0818 254164**

Another service exclusive to Fórsa members is an information service on health and fitness, and non-diagnostic advice on medical matters.

Advice on allergies, the side effects of drugs and how to improve general fitness are also available as part of this service.

Health and medical information is provided by qualified nurses 9am – 5pm, Monday to Friday, excluding public and bank holidays.

If you call outside these times, a message will be taken and a return call arranged within the operating hours.

Call **0818 254164**





## Spotlight

The existence of the Conciliation and Arbitration system (C&A scheme) is the reason civil servants do not have access to the Workplace Relations Commission or Labour Court. Fórsa along with other unions have argued for some time now that the scheme needs to be modernised. CSQ Editor **Hannah Deasy** spoke to **Éamonn Donnelly**, head of Fórsa's Civil Service Division, to learn more...

# Breakthrough in fight for new C&A scheme for civil service workers

### **Tell us more about why the Conciliation and Arbitration scheme needs to change?**

The scheme was set up in 1950 and it hasn't changed since then. It's an industrial relations system that no longer suits the realities and challenges of the 21st century workplace. For individual workers there is no avenue to pursue a claim and for collective disputes there are no time limits. Quite simply, it is outdated, outmoded and no longer fit for purpose.

In this day and age, the current dispute resolution process for civil servants doesn't make sense anymore and is simply not tenable. To be frank, it is not designed to deliver outcomes. We are intent on reforming the C&A scheme, so that civil servants can benefit from the same protections at work as other workers.

### **What are the main problems with the C&A scheme as it stands?**

There are a number of problems with the scheme. It's very hard to win outcomes for workers when individual grievances can't be submitted, and if you go down the route of submitting statements to the arbitration board there are no timelines for submission of

counter statements. Not to mention the fact that the terminology and process around 'agreed reports', 'disagreed reports' and so on is confusing and archaic.

One of the most glaring deficiencies of the current scheme is the lack of a dispute resolution process to resolve trade disputes as they happen, like the conciliation service provided by the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC). It simply isn't fair and doesn't make sense that civil servants don't have access to the same type of industrial relations process as all other workers in the state.

### **How is Fórsa seeking to change the current scheme?**

Fórsa has been at the centre of negotiations in relation to the re-modelling of the C&A scheme. We want to bring similar efficiencies and conditions into the scheme as those which exist within the industrial relations machinery and processes provided by the state, through the WRC and the Labour Court, to which all other public servants have access.

After a long process of negotiation,

we achieved a significant win at the end of May. The Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform (DPENDR) has now confirmed its agreement, in principle, to the introduction of a dispute resolution facilitation process. We hope that such a process will be facilitated by WRC personnel, given their significant expertise in dispute resolution. If we get this right, we can have a C&A scheme which is both exemplary and durable.

### **What's next?**

We have to maintain momentum and engage with WRC officers around operational practicalities. In the meantime, we can set about agreeing a timebound process for adjudication and arbitration hearings and begin to design a modern and effective grievance procedure.

My own ambition is that the next time I address the Civil Service divisional conference, in May 2025, that the new C&A system will be in operation, and members will be able to benefit from a fairer and more efficient system when they encounter issues at work.

## The C&A scheme explained

Established in 1950, the Conciliation and Arbitration scheme (C&A scheme) governs industrial relations for civil servants. It sets out the conditions governing the operation of the General Council and Departmental Councils, as well as for facilitation, arbitration and the procedure for dealing with claims.

Each government Department has a Departmental Council where issues pertaining to that Department are negotiated, if an issue is across numerous Departments this should be addressed at the General Council.

The General Council is the main industrial relations forum for Civil Service unions. It is made up of senior, elected and full-time officials from Fórsa and other unions, as well as senior officials from the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform (DPENDR).



**'EXEMPLARY & DURABLE'**  
Éamonn Donnelly, head of Civil Service Division, sets out his hope for new scheme

Looking back...

# Trade union movement's proud record of supporting PRIDE

For the first time this year Fórsa members marched side by side as a group in the Dublin Pride parade. **James Redmond** looks back at the history, shedding light on lesser-known instances where workers on this island contributed to its success over the years...

Pride, as we know it today, began as a commemoration of the 1969 Stonewall riots in New York City. The disturbances followed an NYPD raid on the Stonewall Inn in the Greenwich Village area of the city which was resisted by bar patrons and two sex workers, Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera, who led a small but organised response to police violence that was targeting LGBTQIA+ businesses and workers.

A year later, on 28th June 1970, the first gay pride marches took place across America to cement this new era of upfront resistance against discrimination.

In Ireland, the first official Pride events took place in 1980. In 1983 a large march took place, with groups coming from Belfast, Cork, and across the country to call for gay rights and law reform. It came a year after the murder of Declan Flynn, who was beaten to death in Fairview Park because of his sexuality. The "queer-bashing" teenagers involved in his murder were given suspended sentences, serving no time whatsoever for the crime.

In March 1984, some 150,000 members of the National Union of Mineworkers went on strike, defying anti-union public opinion in the UK and entering an existential conflict with the Thatcher government. A London-based lesbian and gay group raised money for the miners' cause and went down to the Dulais Valley, in South Wales, to show their support, proudly displaying the banner *LGSM: Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners*.

A year later, the miners went to London to march at the Pride parade in June 1985 and fought to have gay rights added to the agenda at the 1985 Labour Party conference. The heart-wrenching 2014 film *Pride* directed by Matthew Warchus documents that struggle and the emerging AIDS pandemic that decimated many of those centrally involved.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, trade unionists in Ireland worked with gay rights campaigners to create



Picture: Kieran Rose Photography Collection

**Our trade union has a long history of fighting for what's right, for our members and our communities. We're proud to be a diverse union - welcoming of all and stronger together**

equality legislation that transformed the nation.

"There was no equality. Age limits were particularly discriminatory, particularly against women. There was a whole raft of inequality that had to be tackled. The trade union movement began that process," remembers Kevin O'Driscoll, former National Secretary of LGPSU and IMPACT.

"The trade union movement was a shining light of support for LGBT people. I was a member of the Cork branch of the LGPSU in 1982, and I put a motion to the local branch AGM, a very strong motion, calling for decriminalisation on the basis of equality, calling for equality legislation," recalls Kieran Rose, activist and Fórsa member.

Over 40 years ago, the LGPSU, one of Fórsa's predecessor unions, brought a motion to an ICTU conference supporting the "decriminalising of homosexual acts". At the time, this was a groundbreaking and brave motion to bring.

In a recent interview with

Fórsa, Rose recalled: "It was the first powerful organisation in Ireland to come out unequivocally in support of lesbians and gay men. And it's a kind of an untold story. I think many people, including LGBT people, don't recognise the role that the trade union movement has played in our progress over the past 40 years.

In a new publication on the history of the Irish trade unions and LGBTQIA+ equality Kieran Rose wrote: "The trade union movement was hugely important in progress for LGBT people in Ireland from the early 1980s when we had few supporters but many powerful enemies.

"Crucial moments were the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) and LGPSU resolutions of 1982, the ICTU lesbian and gay rights seminar of 1985, the Employment Equality Agency under the leadership of Sylvia Meehan in 1986 supporting sexual orientation to be included in its legislation, the publication of the ICTU policy *Lesbian and Gay Rights in the Workplace: Guidelines for Negotiators* in 1987, and the Civil Service anti-discrimination policy of 1988."

Rose continued: "All of this contributed significantly to later progress such as; Labour Party Equal Status Bill 1990 including sexual orientation, the equality-based gay law reform in 1993, the inclusion of sexual orientation in the Unfair Dismissals Act 1993, and later Equality legislation. The trade union movement also played a crucial role in the achievement of Civil Partnership in 2010 and the successful Yes Equality Referendum of 2015, as well as progress on Transgender issues.

"Our trade union has a long history of fighting for what's right, for our members and our communities. We're proud to be a diverse union - welcoming of all and stronger together. Last year, we stood in solidarity with workers in our libraries as they stood up against hate speech and violent attacks in their workplaces.

Fórsa National Secretary Richy Carrothers explains: "There was a coordinated campaign against the trans-community and by extension the LGBTQIA+ community, with people screaming and shouting, hurling abuse at our members and live-streaming these incidents to social media for clickbait.

**Continued on page 11**  
Summer 2024 ONLINE CSO



Looking back...



**ON THE MARCH** Fórsa contingent that took part in the Pride parade through Dublin on Saturday, 29th June

**From page 10**

It wasn't just a Cork phenomenon.

"Fórsa took that matter really quite seriously. At the time, we were the only ones. The employers and people in the political system essentially went [into] hiding, and it was left to us to stand up and speak out on behalf of library workers across the country."

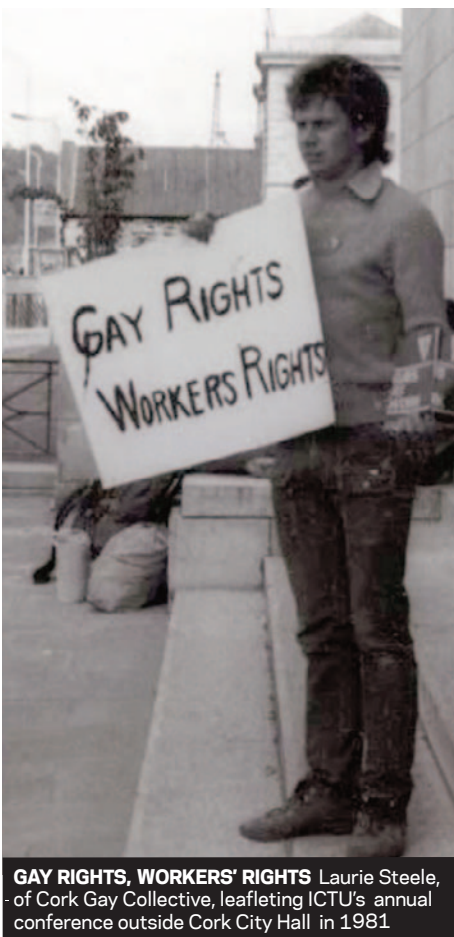
Unions have long been instrumental in the fight against workplace discrimination and harassment and were early supporters of civil partnership and marriage equality. At our national conference this year, delegates passed a motion calling for a Fórsa LGBTQIA+ network to be created.

Our members spoke about their personal experiences in a deeply moving session. One of those at the forefront of pushing these issues in the union is Rob Partridge of the Galway branch.

He told CSQ: "Every year, for as long as I can remember, there has been someone from this union attending the Pride march in Galway. They haven't gone to say, 'Look, here we are, we're going out again.' They've come to say, 'We're supporting the community.'"

Reflecting on the growing levels of far-right activity targeting the community and harassing staff in libraries, Rob added: "Working together, we can put a stop to it. And I'm proud of what the branch has done to fight the far-right. As an openly gay man, saying the far-right gets stopped by Fórsa makes me proud to be a member."

Picture: Kieran Rose Photography Collection



**GAY RIGHTS, WORKERS' RIGHTS** Laurie Steele, of Cork Gay Collective, leafleting ICTU's annual conference outside Cork City Hall in 1981



**PANEL DISCUSSION** Kieran Rose (centre) with NUJ's Seamus Dooley and ICTU's Clare Moore



**PROUD TO BE A FÓRSA MEMBER** Galway branch activist Rob Partridge speaking at conference

● Check out the Fórsa YouTube channel for a short documentary showcasing members' efforts in confronting the far-right, alongside a piece featuring Kevin O'Driscoll and Kieran Rose discussing the union's role in pushing equal rights in Ireland. Scan the QR code (right) to download *Trade Unions and Progress for LGBT People: A Personal History* by Kieran Rose



## Trade Union Week



**FOOTBALL STARS** Forsa's Chris Crowley (second left) – proudly sporting his Better in a Trade Union-emblazoned Bohs shirt – in front of Jer O'Leary's famous Starry Plough banner. Bohemian FC players James Akintunde (third left) and Anna Hegarty (seated) are also pictured

# We only want the earth

## James Redmond

Fórsa Communications

Ireland's first ever Trade Union Week rolled out from April 29th to May 5th, 2024. Fórsa activists joined with other trade union members across the country to highlight the power of collective action. I hit the road for the historic week and found it was about far more than cupcakes and tote bags, but was a grassroots island-wide celebration of the strength and unity of workers.

One standout initiative was the collaboration between the Better in a Trade Union campaign and Bohemian FC. The Phibsboro-based club is known for its playful strips celebrating cultural icons like Bob Marley and building social solidarity on issues such as gay pride and refugee solidarity. It was a brilliant kick-off.

Bohs' third kit was emblazoned with the campaign logo splashed against a geometric backdrop featuring Liberty Hall. The back includes a famous quote from James Connolly:

"Our demands most moderate are – we only want the earth." Leftie trainspotters and design fetishists went gaga for the embroidered hem tag showcasing Jer O'Leary's red and black version of the Starry Plough flag.

Chris Crowley, chair of the Dublin Garda Civilian Branch, took part in the launch alongside Bohemian's ace striker James Akintunde and Anna Hegarty.

Chris explained the significance of the collaboration: "They have a good fan base, a

lot of young people would see this on their jerseys, and hopefully it will make them want to join a trade union. With more numbers, we have more power. It's a great campaign to get involved in."

Another massive high was a surprise gig by Irish folk legend Christy Moore in Dun Laoghaire. Moore showed up with his union card and belted out a track from his first album called *Strike Weapon*, penned by Dominic Behan, a serenade for solidarity channelling the ghost of James Connolly.

Trade Union Week featured numerous grassroots events organised by branches across the country. Manning a buzzing stall in the foyer of Naas Hospital, Keivan Jackson described the diverse participation: "This is the first ever Trade Union Week in Ireland. There's SIPTU, Fórsa, and the INMO, all in one event. We've got our merchandise, cupcakes, coffee vouchers, and a range of different grades of staff meeting here, chatting, and all

**One of the key benefits is definitely collective power. There's such strength in numbers, and when you want to effect change in your workplace, with power and collective numbers you can make all sorts of changes**

**Continued on page 13**

Summer 2024 ONLINE **CSQ**

## Trade Union Week

**YOUTH EVENT** (From left) Hazel Nolan of the union's Strategic Change Unit, Fórsa Youth Chairperson Isabella De Luca, and Fórsa National Secretary Katie Morgan



### We only want the earth

**From page 12**

getting involved in Union Week.”

More than 30 such events took place all over the country, raising awareness about the unified goals of different unions, emphasising their collective identity and the benefits of membership. In Naas, Siobhán Ní Currain highlighted the importance of collective power in achieving workplace changes: “One of the key benefits is definitely collective power. There's such strength in numbers, and when you want to effect change in your workplace, with power and collective numbers you can make all sorts of changes.”

In Wexford town, Trade Union Week included a significant commemoration of the 1911 Lockout. Held at the Red Books bookshop in St Peter's Square, the event featured a talk by Helen Corish who shared the historical context and ongoing relevance of the Lockout.

Wally O'Neill, who runs the bookshop, was delighted to be hosting the event, telling me that the lockout represents “the birth of the organised working class in the town”.

Local Fórsa member Kate Miskella gives me the lowdown on how Trade Union Week has been received on the ground in Wexford. “Better in a Trade Union has been very active on the ground here in Wexford this week. The amount of people who have come to us to say that they didn't even know what being in a trade union involved, it's been a great experience,” she said.

Helen Corish showed me a plaque commemorating the lockout at the bandstand just outside the bookshop in St Peter's Square. Helen is the granddaughter of Richard Corish, the first Secretary of the Irish Transport and General Workers Union after the 1911 Lockout and emphasised the enduring struggle for workers' rights: “We get inspiration from the locked-out workers and their families who suffered undue hardship and deprivation, almost on the verge of starvation, to join a union of their choice.”



**CUPCAKES & UNION INFO** Plenty of interest was shown at the busy Fórsa stall in the foyer at Naas Hospital



**HOST** Wally O'Neill who runs Red Books

The week culminated in the May Day rally in Dublin. Before this, Fórsa Youth hosted an event featuring young leaders in the union movement.

Isabella De Luca, Chair of Fórsa Youth, introduced the proceedings, while Fórsa General Secretary Kevin Callinan opened with a powerful call to action: “What can we do this May Day to make this gathering more significant than just us coming together? One

of the problems that we in Fórsa and other public service unions have failed to resolve is the imposition of lower pay for new entrants since 2011.”

Hazel Nolan, from the Fórsa Strategic Change Unit, shared her experience of organising with the GMB to keep shipyards open in Scotland and underscored the beating heart of the union movement. “When you strip everything back from a union, what it ultimately is, is the relationships between workers on the ground.”

Fórsa National Secretary Katie Morgan, who is also vice-president of ICTU and one of the engine drivers of the campaign, shared her thoughts on how the whole Better In A Trade Union project came about. For her it was all about presenting unions in a more relatable manner.

“People could actually look at those videos and relate to them and understand that the unions are a movement, and it's about more than just I've got an individual issue in the workplace. We wanted to use this campaign to try and generate some interest about the

**Continued bottom of page 14**

## Conference 2024

# Officer team elected

Picture: Dominick Walsh

## Brendan Kinsella

Fórsa Communications

Electing a new officer board is one of the most pivotal events at our union's biennial conference.

Ballot boxes for the presidential election opened at 9.30am on Thursday 16th May, closing just before noon. Votes were counted as the morning session continued. The subsequent elections continued throughout conference, wrapping up with the announcement of the election of vice presidents as conference closed on Friday 17th May.

**Martin Walsh**, of the Louth Health and Local Government branch, saw off competitors to become Fórsa's new president. Martin said: "It is humbling to be trusted with the role of president of Fórsa. We have so many



**FÓRSA'S NEW TEAM** (From left) Vice President Michael Crowe, Senior Vice President Julie Flood, Fórsa President Martin Walsh, Vice President Tara Horigan and Honorary Treasurer Michael Smyth

talented and committed members working for better workplaces, a better country, and a better world. I look forward to working hard to live up to their expectations."

**Julie Flood**, of the Dublin City branch, was successful in her bid to become the new senior vice president.

Outgoing president **Michael Smyth** of the School Completion Programme branch was elected honorary treasurer, passing on the chain of office to his successor with grace. On passing

the presidency to his successor, Michael said: "The peaceful transition of power is the cornerstone of democracy. It was a great honour to be president of Fórsa.

"I am grateful for all the people I met during my time as president, and I am very proud of the things we achieved together. I wish Martin all the best and have great hopes for Fórsa under his stewardship."

**Michael Crowe**, of the DSP Executive Grades branch, and **Tara Horigan**, of the Health &

Safety Authority branch, rose to the top in their race to become elected as vice presidents.

The election was decided through the votes of branch delegates. Officers will hold the positions for the next two years.

Under Fórsa rules, each of the union's divisions must all be represented on the five-person officer group, with the Local Government division and Municipal Employees' division counting as one constituency for this purpose.

## We only want the earth

From page 13

broader benefits of being a member of the union." Morgan noted that people join unions because their colleagues encourage them, and "It's not because an AGS or someone in Fórsa comes in and tells them. It's because their colleagues have encouraged them and they've organised around something and they see the real benefits. And then our members tell the positive stories about it."

Nerney's Court cleared out and people made their way down to the annual Dublin Council of Trade Union's May Day march. There was a sombre tone as Sam Nolan, a stalwart figure and keeper of the Dublin May Day flame, passed away recently. His partner Helena Sheehan marched with his portrait while a piper played a solemn air.

Seán McElhinney from Fórsa shared some impressive stats from the week. "The number of workers joining our union quadrupled in workplaces that hosted Union Week events," he said. Hundreds of non-union workers from all over the island signed up.

"Thousands of public servants are living in their overdrafts," McElhinney noted. Unions are about bringing people together to fight for better pay and conditions. Emphasising the impact of the campaign's efforts, McElhinney added: "Activity gets results - and workers are just waiting to be asked to join."



**POIGNANT** A lone piper, playing a lament for the late Sam Nolan, leads the DCTU May Day march



**FUTURE PROOFING** Fórsa Youth members Colm Parnell, Rachel Fennelly, Áine Bullock and Isabella De Luca



# Building for a better union and a better Ireland

## **Brendan Kinsella**

*Fórsa Communications*

On Wednesday 15th May, the first Fórsa members were spotted in Killarney, heralding the coming of conference to the town. Their numbers would swell over the next two days as tireless work was carried out to host more than 700 delegates and observers.

Events kicked off Wednesday evening with a stunning performance from Tolú Makay, enrapturing all in attendance with her wonderful voice. Outgoing President Michael Smyth then took to the stage, refocussing

CSO ONLINE Summer 2024



**'CONNECTIONS'** Michael Smyth

attention on the task at hand.

In his speech, Michael emphasised how "connection" lay at the heart of "everything we do as a union". He told delegates: "From fostering connections



**STUNNING PERFORMANCE** Tolú Makay

between members and their representatives to building relationships with other unions and civil society organisations, we continue to strengthen those bonds."

The motions on housing followed, with interventions ranging from impassioned to heartbreaking. Anne Marie Ryan, of the Westmeath Health and Welfare branch, called for "a meaningful and workable resolution to the housing crisis".

She told delegates: "We want the union to fight for stricter regulations on landlords, developers, and commercial funds to ensure fair and affordable housing options for all workers."

Helen Linehan, presenting on behalf of the Cork General

**Continued on page 16**

## Conference 2024

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Clerical branch, cited her younger work colleagues being forced to live at home and contemplating emigration as reason for presenting a motion on housing.

Ger McLoughlin's account of her son's difficulties finding accommodation while on Disability Allowance left few dry eyes in the room.

In a no-nonsense address the Municipal Employees' branch called for "a move back to public and social housing" to be made part of the union's position on housing. While the Justice Executive branch called for the establishing of a working relationship between Fórsa and the CATU tenants' union.

All housing motions having passed, conference closed the day by presenting the first round of distinguished service awards, leaving delegates to socialise and prepare for the long day ahead of them in the morning.

Proceedings kicked off on Thursday with a barnstorming address from Fórsa General Secretary Kevin Callinan.

In a wide-ranging speech Kevin declared Fórsa will take a lead role in building a better Ireland.

He told conference: "Everything we have, we won by organising. Now we have to do more than we ever have before. We need to mobilise on the issues that will make our country a better place to live and work."

Kevin's comments received widespread coverage in the media. His spirited criticism of Department of Health Secretary General Robert Watt's attempt to shift blame for waiting lists on to workers receiving special attention.

Following Kevin, Esther Lynch, general secretary of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) and a member of Fórsa, addressed delegates. In her speech, Esther reflected on the importance of the European elections.

She said: "Workers and our trade unions are the beating heart of Europe, our activists and shop stewards are our front-line defenders, standing up every day for the pay, terms and conditions of our members but also for the fundamental human right to belong to a trade union and to act collectively in our defence of



**UNION DEMOCRACY IN ACTION** Delegates gather and chat outside the INEC Arena before start of conference business

working people."

The morning saw a number of motions on new entrants' pay being carried, along with a number of other motions on pay provisions. The session closed off with the second and final round of distinguished service awards, and the awarding of the first Fórsa honorary lifetime membership to Alan Hanlon.

Breaking for lunch, attendees were encouraged to attend the fringe events prepared for the day. There were three sessions



**MOVING SPEECH** Ger McLoughlin

available. One on union recruitment, the launch of the Skills Academy mentoring programme, and a seminar on the rise of the far-right in Europe. All were well attended and well received.

Delegates were greeted back from lunch with a speech from Daniel Bertossa, president of Public Services International (PSI). He spoke about the work public sector unions across the world do to protect their

**Continued on page 17**



**MOBILISING ON THE KEY ISSUES** General Secretary Kevin Callinan delivers his address to Conference 2024 in Killarney



## Conference 2024



SOLIDARITY CALL Phil Ní Sheaghda



## From page 16

members. In the afternoon session delegates debated a wide variety of issues including the use of plain English in union communications, the creation of LGBTQI+ officers, and how the union can best support reps.

International policy motions closed off the day's debates with the majority of motions focused on the continuing catastrophe in Palestine.

Officer board elections had been running concurrently with debates and speeches. The results of votes were announced as counts were confirmed. Martin Walsh, of Louth Health and Local Government, was announced as president elect, and former president Michael Smyth announced as the new treasurer.

Friday morning kicked off with an address from Phil Ní Sheaghda, vice president of ICTU. In her speech Phil focused on the danger inherent in the rise of the far right and the necessity of solidarity and a strong union movement in combatting their narratives.

She warned: "The increased level of violence against our members and your library staff indicate the level of racism and the attempts by the far right to change the narrative to say 'Ireland is full!'"

Motions followed on a wide range of topics, including work-life balance, collective bargaining, the EU Adequate Minimum Wages directive, and artificial intelligence.

ICTU General Secretary Owen Reidy spoke later in the morning. He scorned the Government over its inaction on the EU Directive on Adequate Minimum Wages.

CSQ ONLINE Summer 2024



PUTTING FÓRSA FRONT &amp; CENTRE Outgoing President Michael Smyth (centre) with Distinguished Service Award winners



WELL-DESERVED Michael Smyth presents honorary life membership to Alan Hanlon



SPEECH PSI President Daniel Bertossa gave delegates the international perspective

Published in 2022, it's due to be transposed into Irish law by a November 15th deadline. One part of the minimum wage directive, aimed at cutting down on working poverty and inequality, is that governments need to support collective bargaining.

Owen reflected on the public appetite for joining a union, pointing out that "nearly one in two workers in this state, not in a union, want one" a trend he said is even greater among young workers. "67% of the 16 to 24 year olds not in a union want one."

Breaking for lunch attendees were again invited to join fringe events with offers including the presentation of Inaugural Fórsa Members' National Awards, and presentations on fighting for workers and human rights in Colombia, the danger of the Asian hornet as an invasive species, and union organising.

After lunch Dr Jilan Wahba Abdalmajid, Palestinian

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# Conference 2024

**SUPPORT** Dr Abdalmajid is greeted by a display of Palestinian flags as she is led into the conference hall



**'APPETITE FOR UNIONS'** Owen Reidy  
From page 17

Ambassador to Ireland, was welcomed by delegates with a prolonged standing ovation, before she delivered a moving and emotional plea for continued support.

Addressing conference, she said: "We - the Palestinians - deserve to live, deserve to be viewed just as worthy as other human beings, for our right to self-determination to be acknowledged."



**GEARING UP** DGS Éamonn Donnelly leads home a team of charity cyclists into the Convention Centre car park in Killarney

As conference came to a close, Fórsa General Secretary Kevin Callinan thanked delegates for their attendance and participation at conference.

He said: "We're building for a better union and a better Ireland. I'm really hopeful for the next two years based on the debates we had and the decisions we made."



**TERM OVER** Michael Smyth passes chain of office to new Fórsa President Martin Walsh

# Working for you on all platforms...

Conference Pictures: Domnick Walsh *Conference 2024*





Picture: Marco Verch (CC BY 2.0)

# Domestic violence

## ... a workplace issue

### Róisín McKane

Assistant Editor, CSQ

Fórsa is continuing to work to better workplace supports for those experiencing domestic abuse. Delegates to Fórsa's national conference in May overwhelmingly supported a motion calling on the union to further engage with government to increase domestic violence leave to 10 days paid, in line with recommendations from Women's Aid and advisory working groups.

A key issue for the union, Fórsa has fought hard for protections for workers experiencing domestic abuse. Following motions brought to Fórsa's Services and Enterprises conference in 2021, and the union's national conference in 2022, a survey was carried to garner a better understanding of domestic abuse among our membership.

The response was overwhelming, with more than 3,300 members taking part.

**SUPPORT** Fórsa National Secretary Ashley Connolly has called for increased paid leave for victims of domestic violence



Some 30% of members who responded indicated that they had personally experienced abuse, and half of respondents said they knew someone who had experienced domestic abuse. 48% of those who had personally

experienced abuse said the work environments offered safety or respite, and more than three-quarters of respondents overall felt that domestic policies in the workplace were required. The effects of domestic abuse often

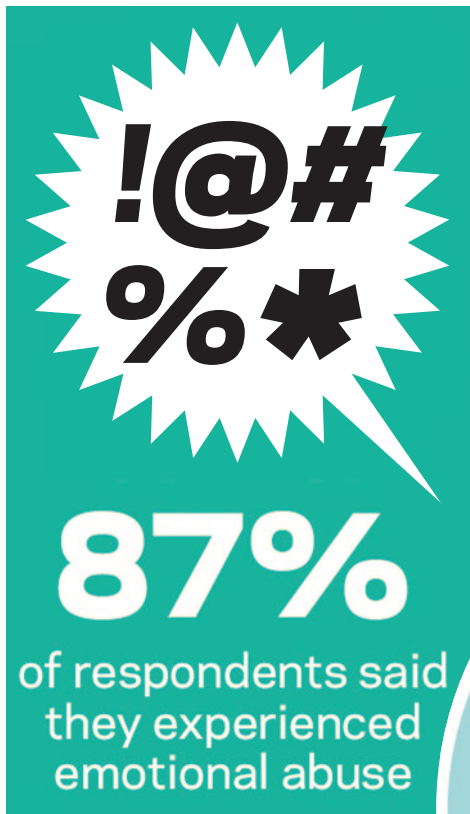
**The effects of domestic abuse often spill over into the workplace and Fórsa has long maintained that domestic violence is a workplace issue. Workers... should not face losing their jobs or income because they are experiencing abuse at home**

spill over into the workplace and Fórsa has long maintained that domestic violence is a workplace issue. Workers should feel supported and should not face losing their jobs or income because they are experiencing abuse at home.

Following a lengthy campaign, during which the union tirelessly lobbied for statutory paid leave for those experiencing abuse, and sought the implementation of domestic violence policies in workplaces across all union divisions, five days statutory paid domestic violence leave per year came into effect last November under the Work Life Balance and Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2023.

While broadly welcomed as a milestone in this hard-fought campaign, Fórsa had expressed disappointment at the five-day limit and committed to continue to collectively bargain for increased supports. At the time, Fórsa

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## Domestic violence ... a workplace issue

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National Secretary Ashley Connolly told CSQ: "No one experiencing domestic violence should have to risk poverty or unemployment to seek support. Financial independence from abusers is the key to escaping and building a better life. This leave helps workers find a pathway out of violence – it's disappointing that the leave is for only five days, but we will continue to work to collectively bargain to provide for 10 days paid leave, as has always been our position."

Also at this time, following the passage of legislation, Paschal Donohoe announced a new civil service policy entitling civil servants experiencing domestic abuse to five days paid leave. The robust policy also set out safeguards so that anyone taking this leave would be able to do so in a private and protected manner, requiring managers to keep information on domestic violence disclosures and leave applications confidential.

The employer must also be willing to change a civil servant's work phone and email so that

they cannot be contacted in work by their abuser.

In addition, the policy requires managers to have a designated and locked place in which to store information and are encouraged to watch out for any "changes in performance, attendance and behaviour" and any signs of "bruises or injuries with implausible explanations". The policy advises managers to "gauge when to start a conversation" about potential supports if the cause could be

domestic violence and abuse, and are required to consider changing the work duties and working patterns of a civil servant who is suffering from domestic violence on a temporary basis.

Negotiated in consultation with Fórsa, the in-depth policy was welcomed by the union. Deputy General Secretary and Head of Fórsa's Civil Service Division Éamonn Donnelly said: "While we continue to advocate for 10 days

paid leave, the introduction of this policy provides essential support for survivors to assist them in making essential changes such as moving out of a violent situation, seeking legal support, and organising care for dependents.

"Workplaces are refuges from abuse. 48% of respondents to our 2022 survey said the work environment offered them some safety and respite from the abuse and this robust policy will provide protections for workers."

When surveyed, more than 70% of Fórsa members felt that workplace policies on domestic abuse leave and supports would encourage those in need of it to reach out to their employer for assistance.

Since its embedding in legislation last year, domestic violence leave has already made a significant difference to those trying to navigate a pathway out of abuse. Ashley points out that that domestic violence supports have a huge impact on those experiencing abuse, and the union continues to work to improve workplace supports for survivors.

"One of the critical ways in which people can be supported is by helping them maintain their financial independence from their abuser," she said. "Their work, as a source of income and personal autonomy outside of an abusive or controlling domestic environment, helps them to do that."

"In Fórsa we are continuing our work to bargain for 10 days paid leave for those experiencing abuse, as set out by Women's Aid and experts in this field. We know the difference these policies make – our members are a testament to this, and we will continue our efforts to support workers navigating a pathway out of abuse."

Over **80%**  
of respondents said they were **not aware of any domestic abuse policies and supports available in their workplace**

**1/2**  
of respondents said they knew someone who has experienced or is experiencing domestic abuse.

**50% said this person was a friend**

**42% said this person was family member**

**16% said this person was a colleague**

We understand that this can be a sensitive and difficult topic and we would like to draw your attention to some supports:

- If you or a family member are in immediate danger you can find a list of urgent supports at <https://www.womensaid.ie/help/immediatedanger.html>
- Women's Aid at <https://www.womensaid.ie>
- Men's Development Network at <https://mensnetwork.ie>
- Women's Aid has put together some useful resources to assist in safeguarding digital safety. You can read more at <https://www.womensaid.ie/help/digitalabuse.html>



SCAN  
HERE

Q&A

# Annual leave in the civil service: your questions answered

This guide, put together by **Seán Carabini**, provides a brief overview of Circular 08/2023

### How is my annual leave calculated?

Annual leave consists of two different parts: statutory and non-statutory leave.

**Statutory leave** is the leave that you are entitled to by law. This equates to 20 days for a full-time worker per annum.

**Non-statutory leave** is the additional leave that unions have negotiated over the years that is added on to your statutory leave. This means that, for example, an executive officer (EO) with a leave allowance of 26 days has, in effect, a statutory allowance of 20 days plus a non-statutory allowance of six days.

### How much leave am I entitled to?

Annual leave applying to all officers appointed/promoted to their current grade on or after 14th December 2011:

● *Members should note that many grades see an increase in annual leave depending on length of service. It is always advisable to check your HR record when you are due a leave increase to make sure that it was added to your allowance as there have been instances of this not being done automatically.*

### Carry over of leave...

The new arrangements for carry over of untaken leave are as follows:

All non-statutory leave can be carried over and used up within the next year's annual leave cycle.

Statutory leave is different. The Organisation of Working Time Act 1997 states that all statutory leave must be used up within the annual leave year. In exceptional



circumstances, a facility has been arranged to allow an officer who could not avail of their statutory leave allowance due to business reasons to carry it forward and use it within the first six months of the following leave year.

If leave is carried forward into a new year, the sequence in which it must be taken is:

1. Statutory leave from previous year.
2. Non-statutory leave from previous year.
3. Statutory leave from current year.
4. Non-statutory leave from current year.

### Does the annual leave circular refer to time off in lieu worked up as overtime?

No. This leave is separate to annual leave.

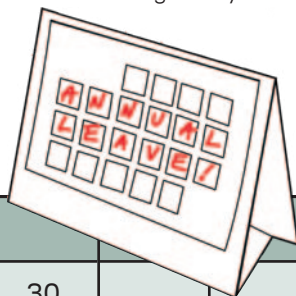
### Do I continue to accrue annual leave when I'm on sick leave?

When you are on sick leave for full or half pay, normal annual leave continues to accrue. However, if you move onto the Temporary Rehabilitation Remuneration (TRR) rate of sick pay, non-statutory sick leave does not accrue.

### Can I be paid for untaken leave?

No. However, in a circumstance where a person's employment comes to an end and they have untaken leave, payment may be

**EXAMPLES OF LEAVE ALLOWANCES** (note: full leave allowances for all grades are published in the circular). Annual leave applying to all officers appointed/promoted to their current grade **ON OR AFTER 14th December 2011**:



<b>Higher Executive Officer</b>	29	30			
<b>Administrative Officer</b>	25	29	30		
<b>Executive Officer</b>	23	24	25	26	27
<b>Clerical Officer</b>	22	23	24	25	26
<b>Service Officer</b>	22	23	24	25	26



#### From page 22

made by their employer for the untaken leave.

#### What is 'anticipated' annual leave?

A new facility has been negotiated to allow people to 'borrow' or 'anticipate' up to two days of their next year's allowance in circumstances where they have no leave left but an unforeseen event requiring leave arises. Decisions are made on a case-by-case basis.

#### If I am promoted within the civil service, do I retain my leave?

Generally, there is a commitment to making sure nobody ends up with less leave. The arrangements for this are outlined in Part 9 of the circular. However, this is subject to the overall maximum not being breached.

#### When does my leave year begin?

There are three different leave years in the civil service. For some, it will start in January. For others, it is February or April. Details of your leave year will be available on your record.

#### Can I carry leave over for three years?

No. This is no longer in force. However, there is a transitional arrangement in place depending on whether or not you were in year one, two or three of your cycle when the new circular came into force on 1st January 2024.

If you were in year three at that date, you have no carry over. If you were in year one or two, you will be allowed to carry over old non-statutory leave once more.

This will be allowed when your leave year beginning in 2024 starts. After that, it will revert to the new one year carry over system.

● *Issues with the most recent annual leave carry-over circular were raised at a number of AGMs. The Civil Service Divisional Executive Committee (CSDEC) has established a task group to review those issues.*

#### QR code

Full details can be found in the circular. Scan here...



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## Europe

# Europe's priority must be to rebuild economic security in people's lives

## GUEST COLUMNIST

### Esther Lynch

General Secretary, European Trade Union Confederation

In Ireland, as across the rest of Europe, the results of the European elections saw the centre hold but not without a worrying rise in support for anti-worker, anti-democratic forces.

All democratic parties now have a responsibility to use the majority they still hold at European level to tackle the root causes of the growing anger and fear we're seeing in our societies. Business as usual cannot continue. As civil servants, you will know better than anyone just how stretched our public services have become.

It was no surprise to see then, that when the European Parliament asked people for their priorities for the elections, the issue that came out on top in Ireland was public health.

Our public services were deliberately starved of funding for a decade through austerity policies which so badly affected Ireland. It left our health services in particular completely unprepared for the pandemic.

Austerity also had political consequences. Recent research found it created mistrust in democratic institutions of which the far-right were the main beneficiary.

The link between poor pay and working conditions and support for the far-right was also established in a new study carried out in 10 member states. It found that workers who were dissatisfied with their working conditions and pay and who had little say in their job were more likely to have negative attitudes towards democracy and to be more vulnerable to right-wing narratives about 'migrants'.

It is all too easy to see how we have arrived

**The link between poor pay and working conditions and support for the far-right was also established in a new study... It found workers dissatisfied with their working conditions and pay... were more likely to have negative attitudes towards democracy and more vulnerable to right-wing narratives about 'migrants'**

Picture: ETUC

**HOPE NOT FEAR**  
ETUC's Esther Lynch sets out vision of a truly Social Europe



at this point. Everywhere I go, working people are increasingly struggling to afford a roof over their head. The right lessons from these elections must be learned before Europe sleepwalks even further towards disaster. To address this urgency, Europe's priority must be to rebuild economic security in people's lives.

This requires public investment in schools, hospitals and housing. The austerity hawks are once again raising their ugly heads. There is no better way to send them packing and steer the EU away from returning to the ruthless austerity cuts of the past than confronting decision-makers with the reality on the ground. That's why we are working with sister unions like Fórsa across Europe to bring the stories of working people on the front lines of these battles to Brussels.

This approach will also be key to ensure Europe takes proactive measures to ensure there is sufficient funding in every member state for our public services and the green and digital transitions.

Ireland has received €1.15 billion in grants to fund infrastructure projects through the EU's Recovery and Resilience Fund, a scheme which has seen the economy bounce back from the pandemic much quicker than expected while boosting the green transition.

But that is set to end in 2026. The new Commission needs to ensure we have a new and permanent investment fund ready to take its place. That must come with a dedicated Just Transition directive to ensure that the industries and communities that will undergo the biggest changes as a result of decarbonisation are given a driving seat in this process.

In the public sector, we know that underfunding means increased stress for those delivering services. That's why one of our legislative priorities for the next five years will be a directive on psychosocial





**CHANGING THE TIDE** Voting in recent European Parliamentary elections in Milan, Italy. The centre held firm but the advance of the far-right is a cause for concern

## Europe's priority must be to rebuild economic security

From page 24

risks at work that tackles over-work and the increasing expectation that workers are always available or the use of AI surveillance software to monitor workers' every click.

Faced with an increase in ethical stress caused by overstretched services that will be familiar to you, we need to ensure public servants are given the right to provide the quality they believe in.

The public sector also has a crucial role to play in raising working conditions in the private sector. Public contracts worth hundreds of billions of Euro are awarded to private companies each year across the EU. Currently this money is usually allocated based on the lowest cost alone.

Another of our key aims for this term is to change the directives on public procurement

CSQ ONLINE Autumn 2023

**We're rightly proud in Europe of our social model but the truth is that it is being eroded at an alarming rate due to bad bosses enabled by anti-worker governments. If public administrations are allowed to outsource their work to cheap, exploited labour in the private sector, privatisation becomes more appealing to decision-makers**

to ensure that contracts are awarded based on social conditions, such as whether employers respect workers' right to bargain collectively.

It does not make sense that almost a billion in EU funds has been given to companies like Ryanair over the last decade without commitments to respect workers' rights.

Picture: (CC-BY-4.0): © European Union 2024 - Source: EP

We're rightly proud in Europe of our social model but the truth is that it is being eroded at an alarming rate due to bad bosses enabled by anti-worker governments. If public administrations are allowed to outsource their work to cheap, exploited labour in the private sector, privatisation becomes more appealing to decision-makers.

This is turned on its head if public funding to private companies is used as a lever to ensure workers have a strong hand to bargain collectively for better wages and conditions.

We can strengthen workers' power and secure the funding for governments to deliver on working people's priorities. For that, we will need to increasingly act as one across the EU.

I know that together, our trade union movement has what it takes to change the tide and set course for a truly social Europe.

- Follow ETUC on Instagram, Facebook, X and LinkedIn or sign up to its monthly newsletter. Go to [www.etuc.org](http://www.etuc.org)

## Recruitment

# Use your loaf, join a union

**James Redmond** talks to Fórsa's Director of Membership **Seán McElhinney** about what lies behind the stunning rise – at nearly double the usual rate – in the union's membership over the past year...

2024 has been a year of celebration for Fórsa as membership surged to more than 85,000 – up from an already-impressive 80,000 workers across the island. This marks nearly double the usual number of members joining the union compared to any similar period in the past decade.

Fórsa's Director of Membership Seán McElhinney partially attributes this steep rise to various material factors such as the broader economic conditions, youth migration, housing and living costs, and workplace issues.

And he leans into simple everyday anecdotes to explain it. He told CSQ: "Brennan's bread is now €2 a loaf and Kerrygold butter is now over €5.45 for 500g. So people are finding it harder to get by. And when it comes to fighting for better pay and fighting for a change in our society, it's the trade union movement – and Fórsa in particular – that seems to be the ones fighting for it."

It's not all been due to circumstances, though. There has been a real effort to increase participation in all aspects of union life and open doors for people to get involved.

With the hectic build up to the recent public sector pay deal ballot firmly in the rear-view mirror, Seán gives some details on Fórsa's pioneering work in digitally mobilising its members to take part in union democracy. During Covid, the union hosted the first ever online ballot for more than 69,000 workers with a very decent 58% taking part.

He added: "But just two years later, we were able to improve our level of participation to more than two-thirds of our whole membership. More than 67% of our members voted in the next online ballot which was the *Building Momentum* ballot in 2022."

Fórsa backed the public sector pay deal in a ballot earlier this year which saw 52,729 members voting on the new pay terms.



**COMMITMENT** Fórsa's Director of Membership Seán McElhinney (left) credits much of the union's membership growth to the zeal of the membership team

94% of members voted in favour of the deal. There was a turnout of 67.3%. Seán acknowledges persistent challenges, particularly in adapting to demographic and structural changes. However, he sees opportunities, particularly in moments like a pay ballot to further bolster membership and drive positive change. He encourages members and activists to engage with non-unionised workers and ask them to join the union.

He said: "It's about getting our activists and officers and reps involved in workplaces and our branches talking to people about

the issue of pay, talking to people about their economic circumstances, and about the change that Fórsa can affect provided we have the power, and to have the power we need the people and membership."

Seán proudly paints a vivid picture of a union that defies "pale, male and stale" stereotype and points out: "Three-quarters of all our members are female and a quarter are male."

He continued: "Most are under the age of 40. The median age of a Fórsa member is 39, mirroring the median age of someone in Irish

society, which I believe is about 38. So we're reflective of society. We're particularly representative of women workers. And when we secure pay rises, we're changing things for the better in Ireland."

Behind this growth is a very committed membership team. Seán is quick to praise their unwavering personal commitment to social justice and their work as the engine drivers behind Fórsa's mission to grow.

Team members talk to each and every new member – and with nearly 11,000 joining in the past year, that's a mammoth task.

"They understand the profound connection between their efforts and the transformative change sought by the organisation," he said. "They see a very real link between the work that they do and that change. Positioned at the forefront of every new member's journey, they ensure a warm welcome and personalised guidance."

Seán sees renewed vigour in



**Brennan's bread is now €2 a loaf... so people are finding it harder to get by. And when it comes to fighting for better pay and for a change in our society, it's the trade union movement – and Fórsa in particular – that seems to be the ones fighting for it**

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Recruitment



Use your loaf, join a union

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branches across the union; and, in particular, in the Civil Service division, which grew by more than 1,000 members last year. When asked why they joined, 80% said that a co-worker had asked them.

As he points out: "This highlights the power of personal connections and the crucial role that each of us can play in expanding our union."

These were the themes highlighted at the recent biennial conference in Killarney, where reps made impassioned speeches and interventions on a range of social issues from housing, to access to abortion, and discrimination among pay grades.

"Most of our new-recruits are under-35 and nearly half of under 35s are still living at home; affected by the lack of affordability in housing. I think the union is relevant to these young workers - Ireland needs a pay rise and we're the ones fighting for it." Trade union density in Ireland, as

**Most of our new recruits are under-35 and nearly half of under 35s are still living at home; affected by the lack of affordability in housing. I think the union is relevant to these young workers - Ireland needs a pay rise and we're the only ones fighting for it**

mirrored elsewhere in Europe, has declined significantly since the 1980s. And Séan insists there's a direct correlation between that decline and the state of society more generally.

"To change this, the most important action any of us can take is to ask every worker we know: 'Have you joined your union yet?' By doing so, everyone can contribute to transforming our country, one worker at a time."



**AGEING POPULATION** Increasing demands will be placed on Ireland's health and social care system

Image: RCN

# Why we must avoid a pre-election tax cutting splurge

**Dr Tom McDonnell**

NERI Co-director

With the local and European elections complete we are about to enter a period of election fever. An early budget is in prospect and it is very likely to be a massive giveaway with an eye on a general election in October or November.

But before the government runs down the path of a pre-election budget splurge on tax cuts it might be worth pausing first to consider the current budgetary position and the impact of looming mega-trends on Ireland's fiscal arithmetic.

The headline budgetary position seems at first to be very positive. There was a surplus of €8.3 billion or 2.9% of GNI\* in 2023. However, this flips to a deficit if the Department of Finance estimated €11.2 billion in windfall corporation tax receipts are excluded from these figures. Ireland's

corporation tax receipts have grown enormously in recent years and are highly concentrated in just a few companies. We don't know if the current level of corporation tax receipts is sustainable.

In addition, looming global mega-trends will upend the budgetary framework over the next two decades. The most fiscally significant of these mega-trends will be demographic change from longer life expectancies and falling birth

**...the rapid growth in the over 75s will put increased pressure on social care and healthcare. Demographic change will also mean fewer tax receipts from employment as the population's working age ratio declines**

rates. An ageing population means greater spending on pensions while the rapid growth in the over 75s will put increased pressure on social care and healthcare. Demographic change will also mean fewer tax receipts from employment as the population's working age ratio declines.

On a no-change basis ageing demographics imply an additional fiscal cost of 6% of output by 2050, according to the Department of Finance. The Irish Fiscal Advisory Council (IFAC) estimate even higher costs. Even if these are overestimates it is clear there are difficult tax and spending decisions ahead with immense significance for the future of the welfare state. Reckless policies in Budget 2025 will simply make these future choices even tougher.

Climate transition costs will also be significant and range from green infrastructure and upgrades, to just transition

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## Avoiding a pre-election tax cutting splurge

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supports, to the loss of green tax revenue as emissions decline. IFAC estimate these costs could amount to a further 2.5% of economic output by 2050. On the other hand, failing to meet EU emissions targets will lead to substantial EU fines.

De-globalisation and disruptive technologies such as artificial intelligence may also have important fiscal impacts. De-globalisation and a shift in industrial policies towards subsidies and on-shoring may have implications for Ireland's ability to attract foreign direct investment and ultimately Ireland's income and corporation tax revenues. Technological disruption will require the state to invest more in digital skills and life-long learning.

The recent Commission on Taxation and Welfare (Tax Commission) made 116 recommendations with the majority relating to the tax system. Their key message was that Ireland faces major fiscal sustainability challenges from the 2030s onwards and that, over time, the overall level of taxation as a share of national income will have to meaningfully increase.

A mature debate will be needed about expenditure needs and revenue sufficiency with multi-annual and transparent fiscal planning needs a priority.

- Can we better use tax policy to develop a viable growth strategy consistent with adequacy, equity and green goals?

- How will corporation tax fit into this debate and will the misalignment and tension between Irish development goals and international tax justice goals persist?

- Are new fiscal rules needed and what goals should they seek to achieve?

A proper debate on our long-term funding needs goes beyond the impact of the mega-trends. If corporation tax receipts are of unreliable sustainability then we should not rely on them. Thus, it makes sense to either save all of the windfall receipts or to save some of it and use the remainder to fund once-off 'transition' investments.

The EU's new fiscal rules will have limited impact on Ireland in the short term due to the masking effect of the windfall corporation tax receipts although the move towards five-year budgeting might assist with longer-term budgeting.

It is too simplistic to say that taxes will have to go up. We also need to focus on tax design. In general, the most growth-friendly taxes are taxes on capital stocks (wealth) and property and in particular on immovable property and land. As it happens, Ireland's taxes on wealth and property are comparatively low relative to the EU average. Household wealth is more unequally distributed than household income and such taxes are generally progressive if properly designed.

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**PROTECTING FAMILY INCOMES** Broadening the tax base - through taxing wealth and property - is more growth friendly and has less impact on everyday family budgets

The Tax Commission made the case for much greater taxation of capital including a recommendation to introduce a site value or land tax. Doing so would help reduce land and property prices and would be an economically efficient broadening of the tax base.

The Tax Commission also recommended a comprehensive item-by-item review of the

**It is too simplistic to say that taxes will have to go up. We also need to focus on tax design**

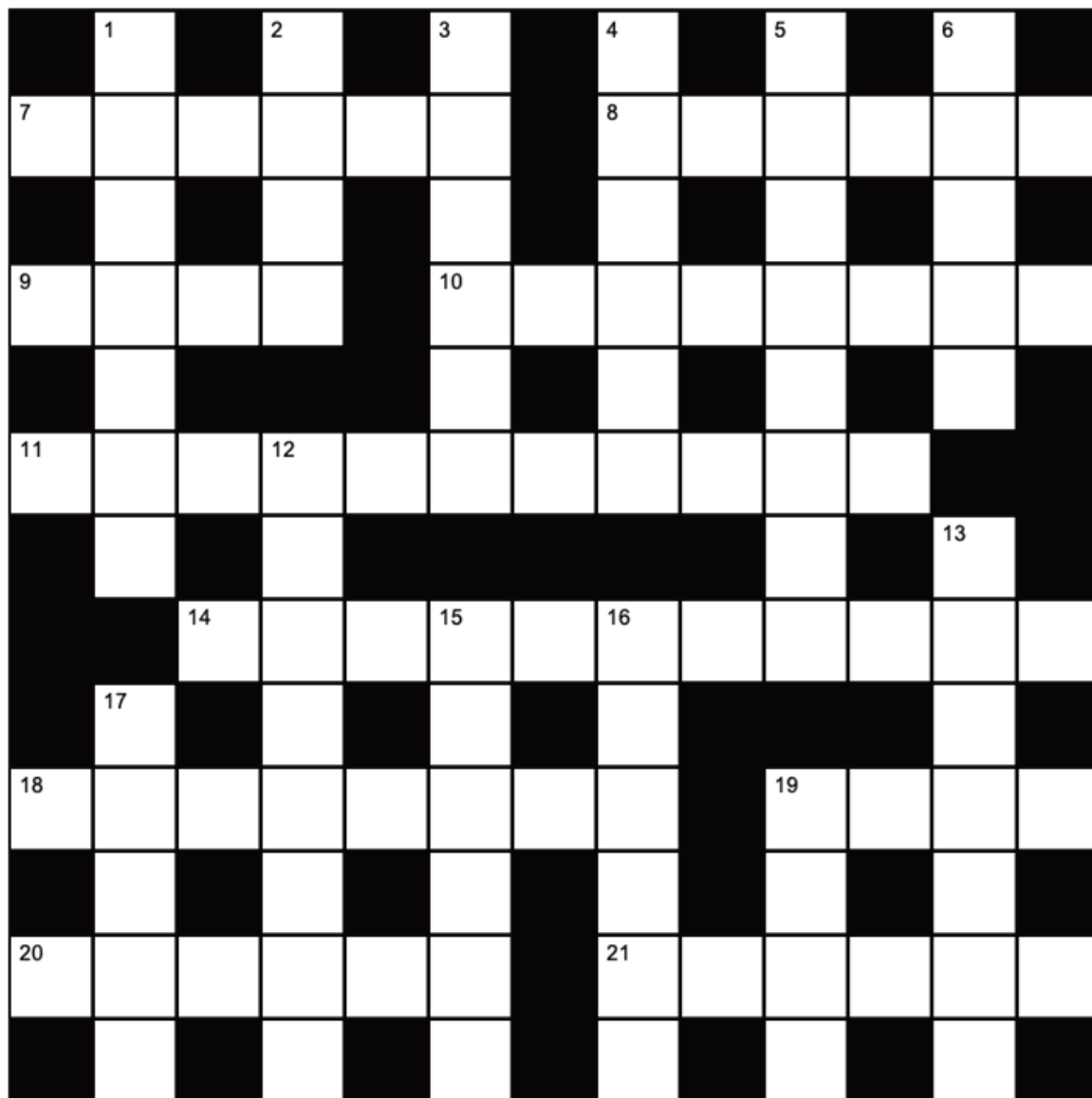
system of tax expenditures with a view to curtailing their use.

Eliminating tax expenditures would generate billions per annum. Ultimately, the scale of the long-term changes needed to the tax base will require more than increases in the smaller tax heads. With additional revenue from corporation tax unlikely to arise from higher tax rates, this in practice means changes to either income tax, VAT or PRSI.

In any event, the fiscal debate is set to become increasingly heated. Let's not make it harder with a tax cutting budget we will eventually have to reverse.

# Crossword

As **CSQ** is currently being published **online only**, we have decided to end the competitive element to the crossword as it is more difficult to track returned entries to Head Office. However, the crossword will continue to run in CSQ.



Crossword set by Peter Connaughton

## Across

7. Honey that has special medicinal qualities (6)
8. Free (someone) from a criminal charge (6)
9. And 19 down. 1962 film - "Whatever happened to .....?" (4)
10. Ecclesiastical staffs of office, based on the shepherd's crook (8)
11. Fishy GAA club on Cork's Southside (4,7)
14. He played "The Bad" in Sergio Leone's classic spaghetti western of 1966 (3,3,5)
18. Maltese capital (8)
19. "That isn't funny anymore" - The Smiths (4)
20. Helen played DCI Jane Tennison in "Prime Suspect" (6)
21. Boxing weight - between 115 lb and 118 lb (6)

## Down

1. Marine mammal also known as a sea cow (7)
2. 40th wedding anniversary gift (4)
3. Golfer Sergio and actor Andy (6)
4. A long piece of thin cloth that is worn wrapped around the waist (6)
5. He lives in a drey (8)
6. In astrology, the only inanimate star sign (5)
12. Codename for the D-Day operation (8)
13. And 17 down - He popularised 4 down at the 1998 World Cup (7)
15. Choosing someone or something in an election (6)
16. Close at hand; not far away (6)
17. See 13 down (5)
19. See 9 across (4)

## CROSSWORD SOLUTIONS CSQ winter 2023

ACROSS: 7. Boston; 8. Llamas; 9. Ajax; 10. Brasilia; 11. Tupac Shakur; 14. Mariah Carey; 18. Sycamore; 19. Paul; 20. Scythe; 21. Arnott  
 DOWN: 1. Bonjour; 2. Styx; 3. Anubis; 4. Vltava; 5. Caligula; 6. Nadir; 12. Atalanta; 13. Jesuits; 15. Ironed; 16. Hyenas; 17. Lynch; 19. Pint