

The logo for Fórsa, featuring a red chevron pointing right above the word "FÓRSA" in a bold, teal, sans-serif font.

FÓRSA



**LOCAL GOVERNMENT
AND LOCAL SERVICES
DIVISION**

2019-2021
Biennial report

Contents

Organisation	3	Industrial relations	17
Divisional Executive Committee	3	Local government staffing	17
Divisional Council	3	More power to you campaign	17
Staff	3	Outsourcing	17
EPSU Local and Regional Government	4	Housing	17
Covid-19 and local authorities	4	Job evaluation	18
Incomes	5	Flexitime	18
Public service pay and conditions	5	Water services	18
Sectoral bargaining.....	6	Libraries.....	19
Hadding Road hours	7	Fire services	19
Productivity	8	Grievance and disciplinary procedures.....	20
Other measures	8	Clerical and admin grades:	
Negotiating the agreement	8	Confined competitions	20
Minimum wage	10	Senior executive officers	20
Pensions.....	10	Technicians	20
Travel and subsistence	10	Environmental technicians/scientists.....	20
The Covid-19 crisis	11	Social workers and housing	
Protecting workplace safety	12	welfare officers	20
Remote working	13	Art officers	21
Working time.....	14	Museum curators	21
Childcare	15	Archivists.....	22
Economic and recovery measures	16	Heritage officers.....	22
		Veterinary services	22
		Civil defence.....	22
		Appendices	23
		Appendix one: Pay scales.....	24
		Appendix two: Travel and subsistence	26

Organisation

Divisional Executive Committee

The following people were elected to the Divisional Executive Committee (DEC) for the period 2019-2021:

- Tom Browne (Galway Health and Local Government branch)
- Pat Considine (Clare Health and Local Government branch)
- Julie Flood (Dublin City Local Government branch, also elected third divisional representative on the union's National Executive Committee)
- Finbarr Keaney (Leitrim Health and Local Government branch)
- Ray Kennedy (Offaly Health and Local Government branch)
- Pdraig McGivney (Cavan Health and Local Government branch)
- Ann Marie Maher (Laois Health and Local Government branch)
- Orla Murrin (Sligo Health and Local Government branch)
- Gerry O'Quigley (Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown branch, also elected Leas Cathaoirleach)
- Sean Reid (Donegal Local Government branch, also elected Cathaoirleach)
- Vincent Savage (Tipperary Local Government branch)
- Susan Sherin (Limerick Local Government branch)
- Seamus Smith (Kerry Health and Local Government branch)
- Catherine White (South Dublin branch)
- Michael Whyms (Fingal branch)
- Kevin O'Malley was elected to the position of Fórsa honorary treasurer at the union's national conference in November 2020.

Divisional Council

The Divisional Council comprises one delegate from each Fórsa branch with members in the division. The council met quarterly throughout the period under review.

Staff

Peter Nolan is head of division and has responsibility for supporting the activities of the Divisional Executive Committee. Linda Casey is head of administration in the division.

EPSU Local and Regional Government

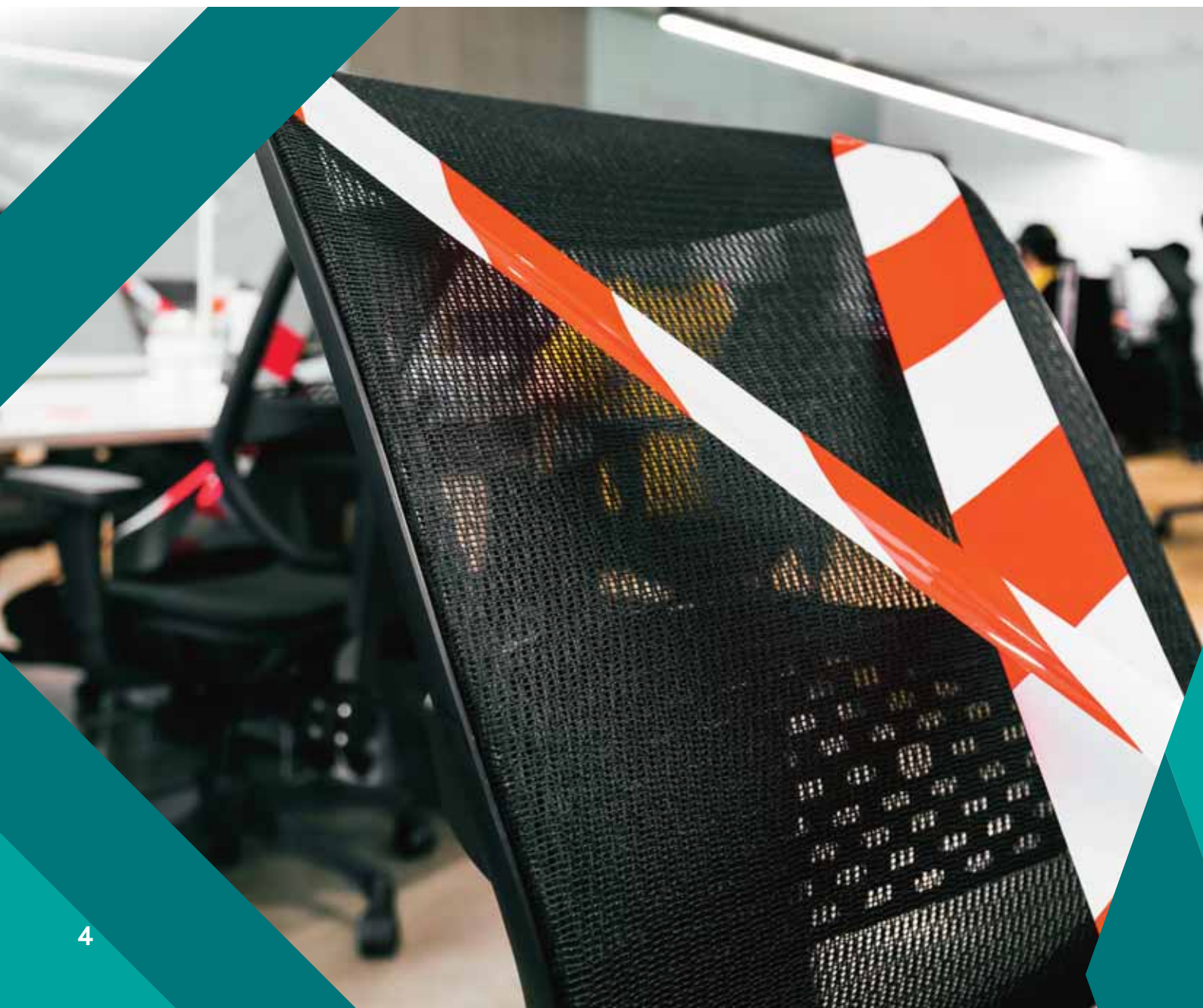
EPSU, the European Federation of Public Service Unions, represents eight million workers in 54 countries. Peter Nolan represents Fórsa on its Local and Regional Government Standing Committee, and was elected vice-president of the committee in 2020.

Covid-19 and local authorities

The 31 local authorities in the local government sector were inconsistent in their approach in the early stages of the pandemic, and Fórsa worked to ensure best practice in each local council. In July 2020, local authorities provided a template of essential local authority services.

Fórsa successfully led a campaign to ensure that trade union representatives held lead worker safety representative positions in all 31 local authorities. These positions have proved an invaluable resource, ensuring vigilance in the maintenance of workplace health and safety measures.

In January 2021, the union issued a public statement of its concerns that several local authorities and other public service employers were operating workplace attendance patterns that were inconsistent with public health advice. A considerable improvement in employers' responses was evident subsequent to this media intervention.





Incomes

The final instalment of the Public Service Stability Agreement (PSSA), which was worth 2% of gross pay, was paid with effect from 1st October 2020. The pay adjustment meant that, over its three-year lifetime, the PSSA has brought pay adjustments of more than 7% for over 70% of civil and public servants, with slightly smaller percentage adjustments for the higher-paid. Following the PSSA and earlier adjustments, around 90% of civil and public servants have now had their basic pay rates restored to 2009 levels. But most of their incomes are lower than in 2009 because of other factors, including increased pension contributions.

Public service pay and conditions

Fórsa members in the public service voted by a margin of 94%-4% to endorse a new public service agreement called Building Momentum. Because of the Level Five Covid-19 restrictions on travel and assembly, the union conducted the ballot electronically for the first time. The outcome of Fórsa's ballot, which was announced in late February, was as follows:

Ballots issued:	67,527
Ballots returned:	39,457
Votes cast in favour:	37,828
Votes cast against:	1,629
Majority in favour:	36,199

Fórsa then backed the deal at a meeting of the ICTU Public Services Committee (PSC), which also overwhelmingly endorsed the agreement. Thirteen of the 17 PSC affiliates supported the package and the remaining four subsequently said they would be encompassed by it. The agreement came into force with immediate effect, and runs until December 2022.

Building Momentum allows for two pay increases, each worth 1% of annual salary or €500 a year, whichever is the greater. This means the deal is worth substantially more for lower paid workers in percentage terms. A third increase, worth a further 1%, is available for grade-based bargaining for all public service grades. This can either be used to deal with issues affecting particular grades, or it could be taken as a straight 1% pay award.

Part-time workers and others who don't work full-time hours will get pro-rata adjustments based on the number of hours they work.

Pay at a glance

1st October 2021:

A general round increase worth 1% of gross pay or €500 a year, whichever is the greater. The €500 a year floor means those on lower incomes will receive a significantly larger percentage increase than higher paid staff.

1st February 2022:

The equivalent of a 1% increase in annualised basic salaries through a 'sectoral bargaining fund'.

1st October 2022:

A second general round increase worth 1% of gross pay or €500 a year, whichever is the greater.

Sectoral bargaining

Building Momentum will see the establishment of a 'sectoral bargaining fund,' initially worth 1% of basic pensionable pay during the lifetime of the agreement. It's not possible to increase the allocation by proposing productivity measures. Neither can the process "give rise to unintended cost increasing outcomes."

The fund can be used to deal with outstanding adjudications, recommendations, awards and claims that are relevant to specific grades, groups or categories of workers within the various sectors of the public service. Alternatively, groups can opt to use the available allocation, or part of it, as a sectoral pay round.

The bargaining units - ie, the different grades, groups and categories subject to sectoral bargaining - are to be agreed between unions and employer representatives by the end of March 2021. Unions and management will then decide how the fund will apply in each bargaining unit no later than the end of April 2021. Management and unions would then agree proposals, which must be submitted to the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DEPR) for verification by the end of June 2021. Payment would fall due on 1st February 2022.

Haddington Road hours

Building Momentum also addresses the additional hours introduced for many civil and public servants under the 2013 Haddington Road agreement. This will be done through the establishment of an independent body by the end of March 2021. This body will make recommendations to begin the process of returning to pre-Haddington Road hours.

Roll-out of these recommendations will begin within the lifetime of the agreement, with €150 million available to commence implementation of the outcomes during 2022. Unions and management representatives will then engage proactively on what's necessary for the implementation of any remaining recommendations in the context of the 2023 budget estimates, which will be announced in 2022. Any successor to Building Momentum will deal with the implementation of remaining measures.

The proposed agreement cites a range of issues that the independent body must take account of, including the cost and service impact of addressing the HRA hours. These are set out in section four of the proposed agreement.



Productivity

In common with all previous public service agreements, Building Momentum also includes certain productivity measures. It acknowledges the recent “unprecedented display of commitment, flexibility, hard work and agility in public service provision” and commits the parties to harness this momentum to meet the immediate challenges of 2021 and 2022. It says these include the continuing response to Covid-19, ensuring that schools remain open and addressing challenges that arose for children during the crisis, a return to normal delivery of health services, managing the response to Brexit, establishing the public service as the driver of best practice on remote working, and addressing digitisation.

It sets out measures to harness the potential for technology to improve service delivery, including engagement with new technologies, and streamlined, automated and redesigned processes and procedures, including remote working “where appropriate.” It identifies the need for staff upskilling and retraining as jobs, roles and processes change.

It also sets out measures to improve access to services through reformed work practices, including enabling temporary reassignments where necessary and increasing the movement of staff across the public service where necessary.

And it sets out an implementation and reporting mechanism to ensure delivery of agreed reforms, including through sectoral action plans.

Other measures

Building Momentum retains the strong protections against outsourcing that have been a feature of public service agreements since 2010. These include requirements on employers to present a ‘business case’ if they want to outsource a service or part of a service, and a requirement to consult with staff representatives.

Crucially, employers are forbidden to include labour costs in any business case. This is a substantial safeguard because discarding the labour cost provision would effectively mean the majority of business cases would support outsourcing and lead to the privatisation of public services regardless of the impact on pay, working conditions or service quality.

Building Momentum includes a commitment that overtime and premium payments that were reduced or abolished under the 2013 Haddington Road agreement (HRA) will be fully restored by 1st July 2021. This includes the abolition of the hour of unpaid overtime introduced under the HRA. The deal says any costs that arise from these measures must be managed within allocated overtime budgets.

Like the last public service deal, the Public Service Stability Agreement (PSSA), Building Momentum contains a provision to review the terms of the agreement “where the underlying assumptions of the agreement need to be revisited.” However, the union negotiators successfully insisted that PSSA language, which linked this specifically to a worsening economic situation, was deleted. This creates the opportunity to seek a review of the package if the economic situation improves beyond expectations.

Every public service agreement has included restrictions on industrial action, and Building Momentum is no exception. The agreement sets out a detailed dispute resolution process, including an “industrial peace” clause.

Negotiating the agreement

Throughout 2019, Fórsa had pressed for an early engagement to shape and inform negotiations on the successor to the Public Service Stability Agreement (PSSA), which expired at the end of December 2020. The 2019 engagements took place against the background of strong and improving economic performance and public finances. At that time, Fórsa argued that negotiations should address the fact that public service pay movement had been slower than both inflation and economy-wide pay trends in the period since the 2008 financial crisis. The union also said any new agreement must be capable of dealing with sectoral and grade issues, as well as addressing outstanding restoration issues including working time.

However, a long delay in the engagement emerged before and following the general election, which took place in February 2020. The election was followed by months of talks on government formation and the new coalition Government was not in place until 27th June. In the meantime, the Covid-19 crisis had radically damaged the country's economic and fiscal position, while pushing the issue of a PSSA successor down the list of public policy priorities.

Nevertheless, the June 2020 programme for government committed the new administration to seek to negotiate a new public service pay deal. It said the new Government's approach to public service pay would "be guided by the State's financial position and outlook, challenges in relation to recruitment and retention, and conditions within the broader labour market." It also acknowledged the "important role" played by public servants, and pledged to ensure that "positive work practice changes" introduced during the Covid-19 emergency are embedded in any new pay deal, along with general productivity gains. The programme for government said the Government would seek a sectoral bargaining clause in any agreement, although it did not elaborate on this.

Following the formation of the new Government, the ICTU Public Services Committee met the new Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, Michael McGrath, who agreed that public service unions and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) would engage in September 2020 to explore the potential for a successor to the PSSA.

Exploratory talks followed and Fórsa general secretary Kevin Callinan, who led the union side in the negotiations, outlined the union's headline issues. Fórsa said the process must acknowledge the contribution of public servants, both during the pandemic and in the hard years following the 2008 banking crisis. The union also called for the talks to address outstanding restoration issues, including additional working time introduced for lower and medium-paid workers in 2013. It sought a mechanism for dealing with issues specific to particular grades and categories of staff, as well as an acceptable approach to public service-wide pay adjustments over the lifetime of any new agreement.

The talks were slowed again by Government preparations for Budget 2021, which took place on 13th October. Later that month, the ICTU Public Services Committee (PSC) expressed concerns that the time available to negotiate, draft and ratify any agreement before the end of December was running short. In a statement, the PSC outlined the real possibility that no agreement would be in place at the end of 2020.

Although exploratory engagements continued, formal talks didn't resume until later November. Intensive negotiations then led to agreement on proposals for a two-year agreement. These were subsequently put to ballot and accepted overwhelmingly (see above).



Minimum wage

A February 2021 report from the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) found that increases in minimum wage rates don't lead to higher labour costs or job cuts. The research found that a 2016 increase, which raised the minimum wage from €8.65 to €9.15 an hour, led to increased labour costs for just 3% of firms. The average labour costs in 90% of firms with staff on minimum pay increased in line with those of employers with no minimum wage workers.

Significantly, it also found no evidence that firms cut staff numbers in response to the minimum wage increase. Politicians and economists frequently cite job protection as a reason for suppressing low-pay protections. But the ESRI found the increase in the pay floor was effective at reducing wage inequality, particularly for younger workers.

In September 2020, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) withdrew from the Low Pay Commission, which effectively sets the minimum wage in Ireland, because of its recommendation for a paltry increase in 2021. Both Fórsa and ICTU made submissions to a Government consultation on an EU draft directive on low pay and collective bargaining.

Pensions

Fórsa gave a broad welcome to news that retirees aged between 65 and 66 will no longer have to sign on to receive social welfare income support in the year between retirement and qualifying for the state pension. But the union has criticised the fact that the benefit will only be paid at a flat rate of €203 per week, which is equivalent to the maximum jobseeker's benefit rate. Recipients no longer have to sign on at a social welfare office to qualify for the payment, and can now take up an education course and still avail of the benefit. Prior to this change, workers who had to retire at the traditional retirement age of 65 were required to sign on and be available for work.

The union also welcomed the suspension of plans to raise the age for eligibility for the State pension from 66 to 67 from January 2021. Fórsa continues to call for an end to forced retirement and a return to a State pension age of 65, which was in place until 2014.

Meanwhile, the rollout of the proposed auto-enrolment pension scheme was delayed for at least a year due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The Department of Social Protection said rollout would put too much strain on employers at this time. When implemented, the scheme will see employees automatically enrolled into an occupational pension scheme, with contributions from themselves, their employer and the State. In a submission to a Pensions Commission consultation on the long-term sustainability of State pensions and the social insurance fund, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) argued against the privatisation of the scheme. Fórsa and other unions want it to be managed and paid out as a pay-related top-up of the contributory State pension.

It was confirmed that existing policy on the application of pay increases to civil and public service pensions will continue for the duration of the Building Momentum public service agreement. In the main, this means that pension payments will be adjusted in line with pay adjustments for serving staff. However, this is done in a way that takes account of the fact that, in a small number of cases, pension payments currently exceed parity with pay. This is because pensions were not reduced by the same extent as pay during the last fiscal crisis. Pensions are adjusted in line with the Consumer Price Index in the case of the single public service pension scheme, which applies to all civil and public servants who entered public service employment on or after 1st January 2013.

Travel and subsistence

The standard rates of domestic subsistence were reviewed in 2019, in accordance with an agreed recommendation made by the civil service general council. As a result, the daily subsistence five-hour rate of €14.01 rose to €15.41, and the ten-hour rate of €33.61 increased to €36.97 with effect from 1st July 2019. In accordance with an agreed formula, and in line with changes to the consumer price index (CPI), there was no change in the standard overnight rate. However, the vouched accommodation rate for Dublin increased as a consequence of the increase in the ten-hour rate. There were no changes in motor travel or foreign subsistence rates during the period covered by this report.

The Covid-19 crisis

The first case of the Covid-19 virus in the Republic of Ireland was confirmed on 29th February 2020. In the same week, and on foot of representations from Fórsa and other unions, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) issued guidance that civil and public servants who contracted Covid-19, or had to self-isolate, would receive basic pay including fixed allowances from day one. It also agreed that coronavirus-related sick leave would not be counted as part of sick leave records in cases where a worker had medical or HSE confirmation of the need to self-isolate.

In March sweeping public health measures were introduced and the Government advised people to work at home if possible. Fórsa staff made contact with hundreds of employers and provided members with updates on which employments would remain open to deliver essential services, and which were implementing remote working arrangements. Tens of thousands of Fórsa members were instructed to work from home. The union published advice to members about safety measures and work attendance, which was frequently updated throughout 2020.

DPER then announced new arrangements for a public service-wide mobilisation to tackle the Covid-19 virus and maintain essential public services. These included the temporary transfer of civil and public servants to critical roles for up to three months. Following consultation with Fórsa, the measures guaranteed that staff who took on temporary roles would continue to be employed, and paid, by their existing employer, and that they would return to their existing employer and role after the temporary transfer.

The Government set out a phased timetable for the easing of Covid-19 restrictions from mid-May and Fórsa published detailed return-to-work advice to members, which was revised and reissued frequently on foot of developments. Fórsa officials also initiated detailed discussions on return-to-work arrangements and the implementation of associated safety protocols.

In early June, Fórsa warned that a return to normal workplace industrial relations – where major issues are decided by agreement between managers and workers' representatives – must be a feature of the reopening of the economy. In a detailed written submission to the Oireachtas Special Committee on the Covid-19 Response, the union said workers and their unions had cooperated with huge changes, which had been introduced on an emergency basis. It said public servants and others had accepted this because of the scale and seriousness of the Covid-19 crisis, but that a return to normal negotiation and consultation was needed. The union's elected National Executive Committee (NEC) advised branches and officials that significant changes to, or departures from, agreements governing pay and working conditions should again be negotiated through normal industrial relations procedures.

In September, the Government published a new approach to coronavirus restrictions with five levels of response linked to levels of confirmed Covid-19 cases and related public health metrics. The entire country was at level two when the six-month plan was launched, but Dublin and Donegal soon entered level three. The rest of the country soon followed.

From midnight on 21st October, the entire country entered level five, the highest level of restrictions, for a six-week period. This was subsequently eased in early December, but the entire country had returned to level five restrictions by the end of 2020. Official public health restrictions on workplace attendance were set to remain in place at least until early April 2021 as this report was finalised.

Protecting workplace safety

From the outset of the crisis, Fórsa issued general advice to members on reducing personal risk and helping prevent the spread of the virus, along with guidance on the actions members should take if they showed symptoms. This advice was generally based on prevailing HSE guidance, though the union generally advised more caution for pregnant women and more vulnerable workers. Sectoral and workplace guidance was developed by Fórsa divisions. Union officials and staff dealt with thousands of individual member queries on safety and related matters.

In early April, Fórsa published specific guidance for members who were working in, or who could be asked to work in, environments where there is a higher-than-average risk of contracting the coronavirus. In mid-May, the union issued fresh advice on worker safety as staff began to migrate back to workplaces after periods of remote working.

Working through the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU), Fórsa was at the forefront of the negotiation of an agreed national 'return to work safety protocol,' which was also summarised in the new Fórsa guidance. The protocol, agreed in early May, required employers to implement a number of measures in advance of staff returning to workplaces. At union insistence, it included a requirement for employers to recognise at least one Covid-19 lead worker safety representative, with more in larger employments. Shortly after the publication of the protocol, Fórsa won confirmation that civil and public service employers must abide by its measures, and that it would apply equally to employees who remained in their workplace throughout the first lockdown.

In January 2021, Fórsa issued a statement that said many public service employers were flouting official Government restrictions on workplace attendance under level five of Covid restrictions. The union said the national effort to bring the coronavirus under control could be undermined by widespread management failure to properly identify which workers need to attend their work premises to undertake essential functions. It added that guidelines issued to civil and public service managers fell short of official Government advice to employers across the economy. The intervention led to significant improvements in most sectors.



As this report was finalised, Fórsa was engaged with senior officials of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) after the union raised concerns over sick leave arrangements for staff who suffer from 'long Covid'. This followed changes to DPER guidance on Covid-related sick leave, which could leave some long Covid sufferers with reduced incomes.

Between May 2020 and early 2021, some 47% of Irish workplaces were found to be in breach of Covid-19 guidelines following Health and Safety Authority inspections. Almost half of the 5,000-plus workplaces viewed by the authority didn't have proper measures in place to prevent the spread of the virus.

In December 2020, Fórsa called for certain groups of civil and public servants to be included as key workers being prioritised for Covid-19 vaccinations.

Remote working

In May 2020, Fórsa published detailed advice on remote working. *Working at home: Staying safe, connected, healthy and productive* contained advice on health and safety, setting up a workspace, breaks, staying in touch with managers and colleagues, and balancing work with home life and childcare. The guide also included useful tips on data protection, cybersecurity, and safeguarding mental health.

On 10th August, Fórsa issued the results of Ireland's largest ever employee opinion survey on the issue of remote working. The study, conducted on behalf of the union by Amárach Research, found that 86% of respondents were interested in working remotely. Over 80% of those who favoured home working expressed a preference for a hybrid arrangement.



Over 4,300 Fórsa members completed the survey. Seven-in-ten of those who had worked at home during the Covid-19 crisis said remote working had been a positive or very positive experience. Over two-thirds of those who had not worked at home during the crisis also expressed an interest in having access to remote working. Concerns about home working related to four broad areas: Disconnection from the workplace; work encroachment on home life; costs and the appropriateness of home work space; and health and safety issues. The biggest single negative aspect of home working, cited by 69% of respondents, was the lack of interaction with colleagues. Worryingly, just 28% of those who worked remotely said a manager had asked them about their home working set-up from a health and safety perspective.

Fórsa then made a very detailed submission to the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (DBEI) consultation on remote working. Informed by the union's membership survey, the submission made 20 recommendations and called on the Government to open a dialogue with unions and employers with the aim of strengthening the legal framework around remote working. It said employers should be required to set objective criteria for determining the tasks and staff selected for home working arrangements, and that employees should have the right to refuse home working without having to give their reasons.

The submission argued that those working remotely should benefit from the same rights, guaranteed by legislation and collective agreements, as comparable staff at their employer's premises. And it called for strong safeguards on health and safety, surveillance, privacy, data protection and cyber-security. It noted that additional household costs accrue from home working. "This was not addressed in temporary arrangements introduced during the Covid-19 emergency, but a different approach is required for long-term arrangements where employees are based at home for significant periods of work time," it said.

In January 2021, Fórsa welcomed the publication of the Government's remote working strategy, and called for engagement with trade unions and other stakeholders on the rollout of proposals to ensure fair access to remote working and proper protections for all staff, regardless of where they work. The Government strategy pledged to establish a legal right to request remote working, introduce legal protections on the right to disconnect, and review the treatment of remote working for tax purposes. It also confirmed the target of making remote working the norm for 20% of public servants.

Working time

The Covid-19 crisis had a significant impact on working time and other working arrangements for tens of thousands of civil and public servants, staff in State agencies and the community and voluntary sector, and in the private sector. These included remote working, temporary reassignments to new duties, and the suspension of flexitime. Many experienced temporary changes to rosters and shift patterns, introduced to support social distancing and other public health requirements. Staff whose shift patterns were altered were generally rostered for fewer hours than normal.

In its submission to the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (DBEI) consultation on remote working, Fórsa argued that these developments should be factored into broader policy debates about the scope for reducing working time, particularly in the context of the impact of artificial intelligence and other new technologies.

As part of the response to the coronavirus crisis, flexitime arrangements were suspended across the civil and public service in early April 2020. At the end of July, Fórsa sought the reinstatement of flexitime for staff who had returned to workplaces and were back on their normal hours and work patterns following periods of remote working or changed working time. The union raised the issue with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER), which agreed to return to normal flexitime arrangements in late August for those based in the workplace on pre-coronavirus working time and attendance patterns. The union is now seeking the restoration of flexitime for those working remotely or in hybrid arrangements.

Childcare

In a submission to the Oireachtas Special Committee on Covid-19 Response, published in June, Fórsa argued that the Covid-19 crisis had highlighted shortcomings in Ireland's system of early childcare and education. It said that the inadequacies of the State's response to Ireland's high-cost, low-pay early years system was inadequate prior to the crisis, and called for the formalising of early childcare and education as a publicly-funded and publicly-provided service.

While the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) and other public service employers had agreed to a number of measures to assist staff with childcare during the period of school and crèche closures, Fórsa and other unions were critical of the Government's response, especially on childcare provision for essential workers.

An Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) report, published in early May, had also criticised the Government's response. It said that over a fifth of the Irish workforce were essential workers, and that 100,000 of them had children under the age of 14. *Essential employees during the Covid-19 crisis* found that most essential workers were concentrated in low-paid sectors like retail and non-professional health grades, and couldn't afford extra childcare costs.



Economic and recovery measures

Fórsa, ICTU and the union-sponsored Nevin Economic Research Institute have all called for enhanced supports to workers, businesses and communities. Fórsa argued that the crisis had demonstrated what can be achieved when the State mobilises financial, organisational and human resources for the common good, when people work together collectively, and when citizens have equal access to essential goods and services. It called for a fundamentally different approach to economic reconstruction to that adopted during the 2008-2010 banking crisis. Fórsa and Siptu jointly drew up detailed proposals, which were submitted to ICTU as it developed its demands for a massive fiscal stimulus, with public investment across a range of public service and infrastructure projects, as part of a plan for Ireland's recovery from the economic crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

The ICTU programme was published in late May as 'No going back: a new deal towards a safe and secure future for all,' which called for universal free public health care, a massive programme of public house building, a cap on the price of childcare, increased investment in education, and the scrapping of plans to increase the State pension qualification age to 67. The paper outlined proposals for a 'green new deal' to tackle climate change and called for higher taxes on wealth, as well as higher social contributions from employers.

Fórsa developed its approach to economic recovery with the publication of a detailed submission on 'Reopening the economy: The State's response and support for businesses,' which was presented to the Oireachtas Special Committee on Covid-19 Response in early June 2020. The submission called for business supports to be made conditional on employers' support for jobs that can sustain a decent income. It also covered a range of economic and workplace issues including the need for Government to continue to support incomes and demand, EU policy requirements, safety issues related to the return to workplaces, childcare issues, remote working and the organisation of working time, industrial relations and social dialogue, and Brexit.

Fórsa and other ICTU affiliates continue to maintain that public money allocated to businesses should be conditional on maintaining employment with decent pay and working conditions, including collective bargaining.



Industrial relations

Local government staffing

There was a small increase in the number of people employed by local authorities in 2020. The total number was 29,475 in the first quarter of 2020. While this falls well short of the 37,000 staff employed prior to the financial crisis, it represents an improvement on the low point of 26,660 in 2015.

More power to you campaign

'More power to you' is an inter-union campaign, spearheaded by Fórsa, for enhanced local democracy and local authority services. The initiative, which aims to increase the relevance of local councils, was launched by Public Services International General Secretary, Rosa Pavanelli.

It engaged with Dublin City councillors and secured a commitment from them to bring the capital's domestic waste service back into public ownership and control. The council agreed to fund a research project to establish how this will be achieved.

The next phase of the campaign will see an increased emphasis on returning outsourced services to local authorities.

Outsourcing

Fórsa has used the provisions of the Public Service Stability Agreement (PSSA) to ensure the continued use of direct labour in local authorities. In October 2020, the union lodged a claim that sought a direction that local authorities should notify local union branches when existing outsourced contracts were due to expire. The Local Government Management Agency (LGMA), which represents council management, agreed to ask local authorities to comply with the union's request.

Housing

Fórsa's local government and local services division continued to highlight the chronic shortage of public housing, and called for an expansion of the direct construction of local authority housing. The division, which has opposed the transfer of local authority land to private development interests, also supported the 'Raise the Roof' campaign, which is made up of trade unions, housing charities and advocacy groups.

Job evaluation

The division continues its longstanding efforts to establish an independent job evaluation scheme for the local government sector. Similar schemes are now in place in the HSE and the higher education sector. On foot of a request from the Labour Court, Fórsa commissioned an independent report, from Resource Employee Relations, on the business case for a job evaluation scheme. But management representatives have refused to return to the Labour Court on the matter. As this report was finalised, the divisional executive committee was making arrangements to ballot members for industrial action on the issue. This was delayed as a result of issues relating to the Covid-19 pandemic and the Building Momentum ballot. It is expected that the ballot will be completed in the first half of 2021.

Flexitime

As part of the response to the coronavirus crisis, flexitime arrangements were suspended across the civil and public service, including the local government sector, in April 2020. At the end of July, Fórsa sought the reinstatement of flexitime for staff who had returned to workplaces and were back on their normal hours and work patterns following periods of remote working or changed working time. The union raised the issue with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER), which agreed to return to normal flexitime arrangements in late August for those based in the workplace on pre-coronavirus working time and attendance patterns. The union is now seeking the restoration of flexitime for those working remotely or in hybrid arrangements.

Prior to that, the union had lodged a claim for a national flexitime scheme similar to that operating in other sectors. The matter was referred to the Local Authority National Council (LANC), where the employers refused to progress the matter. The claim has been referred to the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) and a hearing on the matter is overdue. It is the division's intention to pursue the matter to the Labour Court if progress is not made at the WRC.

Water services

Fórsa and other ICTU unions with members in water services, developed a four-stranded response to government and Irish Water proposals to establish a single water service authority and terminate service level agreements between Irish Water and 31 local authorities. These four strands sought:

- A constitutional referendum to keep water services in public ownership
- Protection of existing employment conditions, which would prevent compulsory conscription of staff to a new entity
- Proper governance of a new entity, including its establishment as a non-commercial state board, and
- A reinvigoration of local authorities in the event that the income stream from water services is removed.

Discussions on these strands have taken place in the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC). Fórsa raised concerns in relation to delays on proposals for a constitutional referendum at the WRC meeting in December 2019. The minister at the time, Eoghan Murphy, wrote to the unions indicating that a referendum would be held in the first half of 2020.

Following the February 2020 general election and the subsequent delays in government formation, no further developments occurred until late July 2020, when the unions met the incoming Minister, Darragh O'Brien. The minister said he intended to publish a policy paper on the matter in September 2020. It was eventually published in February 2021. The minister also reiterated that he wished to engage with the unions by way of a collective agreement.

As this report was being finalised, the invitation to discussions was being considered by the ICTU group of unions. Fórsa's local government and local services division expects progress on all four strands outlined by the union group. It has also said that all existing agreements on redeployment within the public service must be fully honoured by all employers.

Libraries

Minimum library staffing levels in each local authority are underpinned by a 2018 agreement brokered by the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC). A joint union-management review of this agreement commenced in 2020. Fórsa is represented by assistant general secretary Dessie Robinson. Preliminary indications from the review indicated a favourable response to the implementation of the agreement.

Fire services

A Fórsa sub-committee continues to consider proposals regarding reorganisation of the fire services. The committee has also considered issues relating to the roster and developments in Dublin Fire Brigade. The sub-committee continues to be represented at the Fire Services National Oversight Implementation Group.



Grievance and disciplinary procedures

Fórsa local government and local services division has been concerned for some time at weaknesses and inconsistencies in grievance and disciplinary procedures in the local government sector. The union has lodged a claim to review these procedures. A claim has been lodged at the Local Authority National Council (LANC). Assistant general secretary Richy Carrothers is leading these negotiations on behalf of the division. The management side is very resistant to any changes.

Clerical and admin grades: Confined competitions

Following a ballot for industrial action, the division achieved a ground-breaking agreement on eligibility for promotion to grades IV to VII. The issue was referred to the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) which brokered an agreement that provides for 20% of all promotions to these grades to be filled by competitions confined to the employees' own local authority, and 50% to be filled by competitions confined to employees across the local authority sector. The agreement was rolled out in 2020 after it received overwhelming support by members in a national ballot.

Senior executive officers

Fórsa has been in contact with the union group for senior executive officers regarding outstanding adjudication awards, including the award recommended in the second benchmarking examination. A meeting was organised with the representatives to consider the implications of the sectoral bargaining clause of Building Momentum.

The union is pursuing a claim for confined competitions for promotion to senior executive officer, similar to those in place in education, health, the civil service, and to that which the union achieved for promotion to grades IV to VII.

Technicians

The Local Government Management Association (LGMA) agreed to Fórsa's request for a review of the role of local authority technicians. However, the employers were not prepared to commence the review until the major discussions on water services (see above) have been completed. The union has sought commencement of the review in areas other than water.

Environmental technicians/scientists

No progress has been possible on the union's claim for promotional outlets for environmental technicians. The Local Government Management Association (LGMA) failed to reply to a Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) request in relation to the claim. The group is considering referring the claim to the Labour Court.

Social workers and housing welfare officers

Progress was made on outstanding claims for a number of CORU-registered social workers to be placed on the professionally qualified social worker scales. An independent review of the role of local authority social workers was published. The division sought discussions with the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage on the report.

Arts officers

Significant progress was made on the union's claim for standardised grading for arts officers across local authorities. The Local Government Management Association (LGMA) wrote to local authorities to say there was no obstacle to these posts being nominated at grade VII level.

Museum curators

The standardisation of grading for museum curator posts throughout the country was raised at the Local Authority National Council (LANC) on a number of occasions, but the Local Government Management Association (LGMA) was not prepared to discuss the matter. The divisional executive committee has written to the vocational group with a view to progressing a referral to the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) in keeping with similar claims for other groups.



Archivists

The standardisation of grading for archivist posts throughout the country was raised at the Local Authority National Council (LANC) on a number of occasions, but the Local Government Management Association (LGMA) was not prepared to discuss the matter. The divisional executive committee has written to the vocational group with a view to progressing a referral to the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) in keeping with similar claims for other groups.

Heritage officers

The standardisation of grading for heritage officer posts throughout the country was raised at the Local Authority National Council (LANC) on a number of occasions, but the Local Government Management Association (LGMA) was not prepared to discuss the matter. The divisional executive committee has written to the vocational group with a view to progressing a referral to the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) in keeping with similar claims for other groups.

Veterinary services

Fórsa resisted proposals to transfer veterinary inspectors to alternative employment. Members were balloted and supported a call for industrial action on the matter. Following discussions between the Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI) and the employers, the service level agreement relating to veterinary services has been extended to the end of 2021. The union has submitted proposals to the employer on a restructuring of the service.

Civil defence

Fórsa lodged a claim for the establishment of an assistant civil defence officer post in each local authority. Civil defence officers played a critical role in the local authorities' community response project to assist vulnerable groups at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic. The union expressed grave concern at the decision of the defence department to terminate funding for additional staffing to assist the community response project. The union was ultimately successful in its claim. There is now no obstacle to local authorities recruiting assistant civil defence officers and the Local Government Management Association (LGMA) has written accordingly to employers on the matter.

APPENDICES

Appendix one: Pay scales

Revision of salaries with effect from 1st October 2020 unless otherwise stated.

Director of service/ executive manager DCC

95,765 - 100,117 - 104,471 - 108,822 -
113,176

Senior executive officer/county and city librarian/head of information systems/financial accountant/management accountant/financial and management accountant

69,267 - 69,886 - 72,518 - 75,151 - 77,788 -
80,396 - 83,022 - LSI 1 86,000 - LSI 2 88,970

Grade 7 - Administrative officer/senior executive librarian

50,832 - 52,075 - 53,529 - 54,984 - 56,443 -
59,076 - 60,368 - 61,654 - LSI 1 63,863 - LSI 2
66,082

Grade 6 - Senior staff officer/executive librarian/senior legal assistant/clerk of works/building inspector

48,540 - 49,711 - 51,124 - 53,780 - 55,365 -
LSI 1 57,337 - LSI 2 59,320

Grade 5 - Staff officer/librarian/legal assistant

43,633 - 45,020 - 46,409 - 47,798 - 49,185 -
LSI 1 50,794 - LSI 2 52,401

Grade 4 - Assistant staff officer/senior library assistant

28,753 - 30,718 - 33,507 - 35,339 - 36,942 -
38,491 - 40,582 - 42,096 - 43,633 - LSI 1
45,046 - LSI 2 46,465

Grade 3 - Clerical officer/library assistant/branch librarian*

24,602 - 26,218 - 26,618 - 27,425 - 28,604 -
29,786 - 30,968 - 31,826 - 32,799 - 33,926 -
34,726 - 35,845 - 36,969 - 39,086 - LSI 1
40,589

Branch librarian* (hourly rate)

12.74 - 13.59 - 13.79 - 14.51 - 14.81 - 15.43 -
16.04 - 16.48 - 16.99 - 17.57 - 17.98 - 18.56 -
19.15 - 20.25 - LSI 21.02

*Hourly rate for a Branch Librarian is based on the
Library Assistant salary scale. The rate below,
effective from 01/01/2020, is based on a 37 hour
working week. Local authorities should amend the
hourly rate as appropriate to the authority's
working week.

County engineer

82,970 - 85,951 - 88,926 - 91,906 - 94,884 -
LSI 1 98,019 - LSI 2 101,149

Senior engineer

77,522 - 79,358 - 81,188 - 83,021 - 84,853 -
86,694 - LSI 1 89,460 - LSI 2 92,231

Senior executive engineer

66,992 - 69,048 - 70,030 - 72,031 - 74,039 -
76,038 - 78,054 - LSI 1 80,585 - LSI 2 83,110

Executive engineer

50,534 - 52,372 - 54,210 - 56,052 - 57,894 -
59,734 - 61,576 - 63,409 - 65,258 - 67,093 -
LSI 1 69,209 - LSI 2 70,245

Assistant engineer

39,522 - 41,988 - 43,798 - 45,627 - 47,442 -
49,261 - 51,087 - 52,905 - 54,722 - 56,543 -
58,373 - LSI 1 60,244 - LSI 2 62,117

Graduate engineer

32,202 - 34,824 - 38,575 - 41,995

Project resident engineer

93,095

Senior resident engineer

84,778

Resident engineer

From: 64,243 to: 72,023

Assistant resident engineer

From: 46,117 to: 63,825

Graduate resident engineer

From: 35,051 to: 46,117

Site technician Level 1

From: 52,031 to: 56,497

Site technician Level 2

From: 44,226 to: 52,031

Chief technician

48,163 - 49,321 - 50,684 - 52,049 - 53,420 -
54,641 - 55,888 - 57,092 - 58,288 - LSI 1
60,374 - LSI 2 62,469

Senior executive technician

46,606 - 47,566 - 48,879 - 51,104 - 52,444 -
LSI 1 54,311 - LSI 2 56,186

Executive technician

43,812 - 44,909 - 46,034 - 47,152 - 48,276 -
49,392 - LSI 1 51,008 - LSI 2 52,618

Technician grade I

40,900 - 41,581 - 42,472 - 43,366 - 44,241 -
45,131 - 45,942 - LSI 1 47,439 - LSI 2 48,941

Technician grade II

27,926 - 29,433 - 30,911 - 31,714 - 32,643 -
33,725 - 34,456 - 35,537 - 36,595 - 37,679 -
38,753 - 39,771 - 40,900 - LSI 1 42,229 - LSI 2
43,546

Senior social worker

68,695 - 70,674 - 73,662 - 76,648 - 79,638 -
82,626

Social worker

35,309 - 38,052 - 39,114 - 41,120 - 43,202 -
45,282 - 47,341 - 49,450 - 51,526 - 53,120 -
54,714 - LSI 55,772

Professionally qualified housing welfare officer

46,723 - 48,956 - 51,189 - 53,428 - 55,656 -
57,887 - 60,123 - LSI 61,289

Housing welfare officer

36,738 - 39,426 - 40,703 - 42,664 - 44,715 -
46,747 - 48,760 - 50,792 - 52,827 - 54,244 -
55,881 - LSI 56,959

Appendix two: Travel and subsistence

Standard domestic subsistence rates

Effective from 1st July 2019

Overnight rates remain

Normal rate €147.00	Reduced rate €132.30	Detention rate €73.50
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Day rates

10 hours or more €36.97	5 hours but less than 10 hours €15.41
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Vouched Accommodation (VA) Domestic subsistence rates (for use in Dublin only)

Effective from 1st July 2019 will remain

Vouched Accommodation (VA) rate VA Rate	Accommodation Vouched cost of accommodation up to €147.00	Plus	Meals €36.97
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