



Action on Motions to Fórsa Conference 2020

Virtual Conference, November 2020

Report to National Conference 2022

Updated 26th April 2022

Conduct of union affairs

Motion 1 - National Executive Committee

Conference notes that:

1. In March 2020, Fórsa sought and received legal advice on the question of the deferral of the 2020 National Conference in light of the extraordinary circumstances of the Covid-19 public health emergency
2. The legal opinion was that the National Executive Committee (NEC) had powers, under rule, to defer the 2020 National Conference until a date in the second half of 2020
3. On 25th March 2020, the NEC received a proposal from the union officers to defer the conference to dates in November 2020. The NEC subsequently approved the proposal in a vote conducted by email
4. The General Secretary advised Fórsa branches of the decision to defer Conference in a letter sent by email on Thursday 19th March 2020
5. On foot of continuing and extraordinary coronavirus-related public health restrictions on travel, public gatherings, and related matters, the 27th July 2020 meeting of the NEC subsequently decided that it was permissible under rule to organise the 2020 National Conference on a remote basis, and to conduct the 2020 election of officers by secure postal ballot. The NEC agreed to both measures
6. The Fórsa officers subsequently agreed that the conference would be a one-day event, to take place on Thursday 19th November 2020
7. The General Secretary informed branches of the details of the arrangements for the remote conference and secure postal ballot in an emailed letter of 11th August 2020.

In light of this, Conference ratifies:

1. The decision to defer the Fórsa National Conference to the second half of 2020
2. The decision to conduct the conference on a remote basis on Thursday 19th November 2020
3. The decision to conduct the 2020 election of the Fórsa officers by secure postal ballot on the basis set out by the General Secretary in his letter of 11th August 2020, and
4. The decisions made by the NEC to manage the affairs of the union in the period between Friday 15th May 2020 and Wednesday 18th November 2020

Conference also enables the NEC to take further decisions necessary to protect Fórsa members and ensure the safe conduct of union business in the context of the pandemic.

This was an enabling motion, and no action arose from it.

Covid-19 response

Motion 2 - National Executive Committee

Conference expresses its deep solidarity with all workers, families and communities touched by the Covid-19 virus, here and abroad. Conference salutes the staff in all areas of the public, private and community sectors who rose to the many challenges presented by the pandemic, often in the face of risk to themselves and their families.

Conference reaffirms the union's commitment to cooperate with measures necessary to contain the virus, protect the health and safety of citizens and workers, and maintain essential services during this unprecedented public health emergency.

Conference commends Fórsa's and ICTU's rapid and effective intervention, which led to the negotiation of the Covid-19 Return to Work Safety Protocol, which applies to all workers regardless of their work location during the pandemic. By placing detailed and clear responsibilities on employers and staff, the Protocol hugely strengthened worker safety protections and saved lives by helping control the spread of the virus.

Conference also acknowledges the contribution of workplace 'lead safety representatives,' who have taken on substantial responsibilities on behalf of their colleagues, along with other workplace health and safety representatives, branch activists, and health and safety professionals.

Conference calls on the Government to oblige employers to report workplace-related Covid-19 outbreaks to the Health and Safety Authority (HSA), and to instigate a national assessment of the health and safety response to the pandemic, involving consultation with all relevant stakeholders, to ensure that health and safety powers and provisions - including the numbers and powers of HSA inspectors - are strengthened and adapted as necessary.

Conference also commends the staff of the HSE and other public health agencies for their response to the crisis, and calls for increased investment in health services and staffing to enable the delivery of high-quality health and social care provision, free at the point of delivery, in the Covid-19 era and beyond.

Conference instructs the National Executive Committee to redouble its campaigning efforts against the many injustices and inequalities - including in health, housing, education, childcare, and provision for migrants, older people and younger people - that have been laid bare by the pandemic.

A special update to the November 2020 virtual conference included an extensive report on the union's Covid-related activities. Further updates are contained in the 2020-2022 Fórsa biennial report. Working through ICTU, Fórsa was at the forefront of the negotiation of an agreed national 'return to work safety protocol' in the summer of 2020. This has been updated frequently to reflect prevailing official public health advice and requirements. The union worked through ICTU to lobby for workplace-related Covid outbreaks to be reported to the HSA and for increases in the number of HSA inspectors. The union contributed to the ICTU 'No Going Back' publication and campaign, which sets out union demands for a rights-based society including 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. This formed the basis of ICTU budget submissions in 2020 and 2021, and extensive political lobbying took place with the major Government and opposition parties. From early in the pandemic, the union's general secretary was at the forefront of the public debate on post-Covid society, economy and public services. The union continued to make detailed inputs into ICTU submissions and representations on the subject, and did the same at a European level through the European Federation of Public Service Unions (EPSU) and other international trade union confederations. Throughout the period, the general secretary published several blogs and national newspaper articles and made high-level representations as a member of the Labour Employer Economic Forum (LEEF), the Government-union-employer social dialogue vehicle. In February 2022, Fórsa published a major new report on 'The Irish State Post-Pandemic,' which was commissioned by the union and produced by the TASC think-tank. Drawing on macro-economic analysis, case studies, and stakeholder interviews, the research explored the political and economic space for enhancing the role of the State post-Covid to improve public services, increase social mobility, reduce inequality, and integrate climate action into economic development.

Motion 3 – Probation Officers’ Branch

The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of coherent, efficient and accessible health care for everyone. Furthermore, it has shown us that joined up thinking and provision based solely on need is possible when the political will is there to provide it. Fórsa believes in the principle of health care for all, based on need, funded through central taxation and free at the point of use. Fórsa will campaign to bring about the establishment of an all-Ireland National Health Service. This will be a high-profile campaign and will involve working with the ICTU with appropriate political parties and with other relevant professionals and agencies who share or who can be persuaded to share the objective.

The issue of quality healthcare, free at the point of use, was encompassed in actions set out under motion 2 above.

Motion 4 – Probation Officers’ Branch

Fórsa recognises the emphasis placed by Government on addressing the problems of homelessness and rough sleeping during these early stages of the Covid-19 pandemic. Whereas the situation has been far from perfect, it is clear from the policy response to Covid-19 that if the political will existed to do so, the phenomena of “rough sleeping” could be properly and permanently addressed as could all other aspects of the current housing crisis. Fórsa recognises that in a world focused on the effects of this pandemic, the attention of many people is now on what people should expect the society in which they live should look like in the future. With that renewed focus in mind Fórsa asserts the right to decent housing for all people and will campaign for; increased capacity and improved standards of emergency accommodation, improved resourcing for social work and support services for people in housing difficulty, a comprehensive programme of building and acquiring local authority housing and a shift in public funding from a model based on private landlordism to a publicly funded and democratically accountable system of housing provision. Fórsa has within it many members working in and around the housing field and these members will be consulted and involved in any campaigning and lobbying on the issue.

The issue of housing and homelessness was encompassed in actions set out under motion 2 above. The objectives detailed in motion 4 are reflected in those of the union-led Raise the Roof campaign. Fórsa has played a leading role in this campaign since its inception, and the union contributed to the development of the campaign’s policy paper called ‘Remaking Ireland: A New Deal for Housing.’ Fórsa continues to actively support ICTU’s housing and homelessness campaigns including the union-led ‘Raise The Roof’ campaign.

Motion 5 – Higher Education Branch

The Higher Education Branch call on Fórsa to advocate and promote measures in relation to the health, safety and wellbeing of its members in the workplace as a result of these unprecedented times

The issue of health, safety and wellbeing during the pandemic was encompassed in actions set out under motion 2 above.

Jobs and pay

Motion 6 - National Executive Committee

Conference calls on the Irish Government and its counterparts across Europe to prioritise the creation and maintenance of quality jobs, capable of supporting decent living standards, as the central plank of economic and fiscal policy in the wake of the Covid-19 health and economic crisis. Only after a return to full employment should Irish and EU policy address the public debt that has arisen from the emergency, and this should be done without a recourse to failed 'austerity' policies.

Conference, therefore, calls for:

1. The maintenance (or reintroduction) of substantial Government spending on income supports at levels that can sustain individuals and families
2. Supports for business sectors most affected by the crisis, linked to the broader objectives of rebuilding and expanding employment capable of supporting decent living standards and underpinning workers' rights including the right to representation through collective bargaining, and
3. Job-creating State investment in infrastructure, a just climate transition, and high-quality public services including health and housing.

Conference notes that economic recovery depends on workers and their families having the capacity and confidence to earn and spend money in order to stimulate economic activity. Conference, therefore, directs the National Executive Committee to:

1. Work to ensure the restoration and improvement of pay in sectors of the economy that have experienced cuts in jobs, incomes and output during the crisis
2. Reinforce its campaign for pay justice in the community and voluntary sectors where, once again, workers have demonstrated their commitment and contribution throughout the emergency
3. Continue to work with other unions and organisations to address the gender pay gap, and
4. Seek to negotiate a successor to the Public Service Stability Agreement (PSSA), in order to satisfactorily address living standards, outstanding issues linked to the fiscal crisis of 2009-2013, and issues arising from the response to the Covid-19 emergency, while having the capacity to deal with specific grade and sectoral issues over time.

Amendment - EASP Executive Grades

To add "to include a pay increase" in point 4 which would read as:

Seek to negotiate a successor to the Public Service Stability Agreement (PSSA), to include a pay increase, in order to satisfactorily address living standards, outstanding issues linked to the fiscal crisis of 2009-2013, and issues arising from the response to the Covid-19 emergency, while having the capacity to deal with specific grade and sectoral issues over time.

From the outset of the pandemic, Fórsa worked through ICTU to establish, extend and retain Covid-related income and employment supports. The union also worked through established industrial relations structures to protect incomes and employment throughout the pandemic and, where they had been eroded, to restore pay and other working conditions as the economy recovered at varying speeds across sectors.

The union led the negotiations that led to agreement on a successor to the PSSA. Building Momentum delivered significant pay increases in the context of prevailing inflation projections, including a significantly enhanced outcome for lower paid workers. The officers of ICTU's Public Services Committee (PSC) had an initial meeting with senior Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) officials in mid-April 2022 after public expenditure minister Michael McGrath agreed to engage with unions on pay and inflation. This came after Fórsa and other unions triggered a review clause in the Building Momentum agreement in March 2022. Fórsa had proposed this to the PSC, arguing that sustained high inflation, which was not expected when Building Momentum was negotiated in December 2020, was grounds for a review of the agreement's pay terms. In April 2022, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform said he would raise the issue of public service pay and inflation with the Cabinet and that he expected talks with unions to get underway.

It was not possible to achieve an acceptable funding model for the community and voluntary sector in the Building Momentum talks. Fórsa's 2021 'Harvey' report, which updated the union's earlier 'Caring At What Cost' report, set out the case for multi-annual funding for the sector, and Fórsa led in the ICTU Group of Unions joint industrial and political campaign, which has been intensified in this regard. Preparations for further industrial action and a day of action were underway as this report was being finalised.

Fórsa continued to campaign with ICTU and independently for effective legislation on gender pay gap reporting. In March 2022, the union welcomed the Government's announcement that it will this year introduce an obligation on employers of more than 250 staff to report on their gender pay gaps. The union also called for a rapid expansion of the number of companies covered. The divisions were asked to lodge claims where necessary.

Motion 7 - Probation Officers' Branch

Fórsa asserts the right of all workers to be treated with fairly and paid adequately. This right is a minimum standard upon which to base the future progress in the world. The Covid-19 pandemic has rightly focused attention on what are the important roles needed for society to function effectively for all of the people. During the pandemic to date it has become increasingly evident that workers in the most fundamentally important roles are often the workers experiencing poor working conditions, insecurity, lack of effective employment rights and pay that is too low to live on. This includes many workers caring for vulnerable people, workers in the supply chain for food and goods, retail workers, cleaning and maintenance workers and many others. Fórsa will campaign with others for changes in law, regulations and practice to bring about a society where the value of key worker roles is properly valued and acknowledged. As a starting point we will aim to establish a situation where all workers are paid at least a minimum living wage, have basic health and safety measures monitored and enforced, have the right to defined contracts of work hours, sick pay, paid holidays, leave for family related matters and the right to organise and be represented by a Trade Union.

Amendment - EASP Executive Grades

To include "and have the right to access social welfare schemes and services" at the end of the motion

Many of the points in motion 7 are encompassed in actions set out under motion 2 above. Fórsa continues to work through ICTU on issues related to workplace health and safety, working time, leave union rights, and minimum pay and the living wage, including the demand that the statutory minimum wage be set at the rate of the living wage. ICTU has produced a comprehensive policy document on collective bargaining rights in Ireland, which calls for a Trade Union Rights Act to provide for trade union recognition, the right of access, the right to organise and a worker's right to be heard. The ICTU General Secretary met with the leaders of all political parties prior to the most recent general election. Since then, an employer challenge to a construction sector Sectoral Employment Order was upheld in the High Court. The State has appealed this to the Supreme Court. The ICTU Executive Council has developed a coordinated strategy between affiliated unions aimed at achieving a satisfactory outcome.

Reducing and reorganising working time

Motion 8 - National Executive Committee

Conference believes that working time and working patterns across the economy need to be fundamentally reviewed and reformed in light of the experience of the Covid-19 crisis, and in response to the impact of new and developing technologies, the climate crisis, increasing caring demands, and demographic shifts including longer life expectancy.

Conference notes the successful introduction of home-working in sectors across the economy during the coronavirus pandemic, and endorses Fórsa's (August 2020) submission to the Government's public consultation on the issue. Conference instructs the National Executive Committee to lead a campaign for expanded access to remote working and other employee-friendly working time flexibilities, accompanied by safeguards for workers including those who don't want to work remotely.

Conference also believes that reduced working time can be an important mechanism for maintaining employment as new technologies replace or change traditional jobs, and for sharing the benefits of improved productivity that flow from automation and other technological developments.

Conference therefore calls on the union's National Executive Committee and senior officials to continue to work for a steady and managed transition to a shorter working week for all employees in the private, public and community sectors, and to include in this work the short-term goals of:

1. Increasing the number of public holidays from Ireland's internationally-low number of nine
2. Securing four-day week pilots in appropriate public and private/commercial employments
3. Addressing additional hours introduced as part of the response to the earlier 2008-2013 fiscal crisis, as well as the excessive hours consistently worked by certain grades at the height of the coronavirus crisis
4. Developing, promoting and negotiating the implementation of remote-working and other arrangements that can improve work-time flexibility to the benefit of workers, employers and the economy
5. Developing and promoting mechanisms for work-time flexibility for workers approaching retirement, in light of increased life expectancy and other demographic trends.

Fórsa has campaigned and developed policy on the issues set out in the motion. The union ensured that the Haddington Road hours were addressed in the Building Momentum agreement, leading to the recommendation that they be fully abolished for most affected workers from July 2022. The issue of the low number of public holidays was raised with ICTU and, with other unions, Fórsa successfully pressed for a permanent additional public holiday in the wake of the pandemic. ICTU continues to campaign for more progress in this area.

The union led the four-day week campaign in Ireland and built on its formal launch by conducting a survey and promoting the results in September 2020. The campaign has led to the establishment of pilots in a number of companies, and Fórsa continues to press for pilots in the civil and public service. This has involved political lobbying and events and a meeting with the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform on the issue.

Fórsa has led in making the case for remote working in direct negotiations, submissions to consultations, conducting the largest ever Irish survey, in direct engagements with employers, and in the media and wider public domain. The union has been the most prominent union voice in campaigning and lobbying for legislation on the right to request remote working for employees across the economy, and is currently active in the focussed ICTU working group lobbying for substantial amendments to the inadequate draft legislation published by the Government in February 2022.

Fórsa divisions were asked to raise flexibility measures for those approaching retirement with employer bodies.

Union finances

Motion 9 - National Executive Committee

That this Conference appoints Mary McPartlan, Gerry Monaghan and Tara Robertson as union trustees from the close of this 2020 National Conference until the close of Conference 2022, and appoints the following to the panel provided for in Rule 32 (iii); Gina O'Brien, Paul Carey, and Pierce Dillon.

The appoints of trustees and panel members were made as set out in motion 9.



FÓRSA

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