

Vote 4th August – 1st September

SECTION 1: The state of play

What is happening?

The Public Service Agreement 2024-2026 expired in June, and preliminary talks with government didn't convince your union negotiators that your living standards would be protected by a new agreement.

That means that there is now no agreement between unions representing public service workers and their employer (government) and we are now in dispute.

Without an agreement in place, no improvements will be made to your pay, and employers may try to impose changes on your working life without agreement.

Why am I being asked to vote in a ballot?

Costs keep going up and inflation is wiping out your pay increases.

We need to show the government how much this matters to you. By voting for industrial action, you can show government that **public service workers won't be taken for granted**.

By standing together and showing collective strength, you will put your negotiators in a stronger bargaining position for your pay, terms and conditions.

This isn't just about pay and conditions for public servants; it's also about decent standards of living and making sure that you and every person in this country has access to quality public services. It's about taking a stand for you and everyone in your community.

What about the A Better Deal pledge?

50,000 public service workers showed they want a better deal by signing the pledge. **Time and time again you told us that costs were too high and pay was too low, that you want flexible work, and that public services need better investment.** The issues in the pledge came from you and your colleagues, and that's what you're being asked to fight for now.

You and your colleagues said you would only support a new public service agreement that provided pay increases that address the cost of living, resolution of local bargaining claims, a fairer work-life balance and better investment in public services. **The ballot builds on the pledge and shows that Fórsa members are serious about achieving a better deal.**

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What is a public service pay agreement?

Public service pay agreements are negotiated between trade unions representing workers in the civil and public service and Government, as the principal employer of civil and public servants.

These agreements outline the agreed terms for pay and working conditions of civil and public servants. They are national agreements, though they sometimes also contain sectoral specific provisions.

They are for a specific period of time, usually two to three years. Usually negotiations begin shortly before an agreement is due to end, on a successor agreement.

All pay agreements are balloted on by union members for them to be formally accepted by a simple majority.

Pay agreements are also commonly referred to as 'pay deals', and negotiations are sometimes referred to as 'pay bargaining' or 'collective bargaining'.

The most recent agreement accepted by Fórsa members was the Public Service Agreement 2024-2026, which expired in June.

SECTION 2: Union negotiating strategy

What are your union negotiators calling for?

A pay agreement that protects your standard of living, with pay increases for this year, next year and any other years covered by an agreement.

That means increases that take inflation into account, resolution of local bargaining claims, protection of flexible work and enhanced investment in public services.

How do DPER want to approach things?

In exploratory talks in June, the Department of Public Expenditure officials, representing the Government, did not convince your union negotiators that your standard of living will be protected in a new agreement.

They want another agreement that guarantees industrial peace, cost certainty for budgetary planning, and wide-ranging cooperation with reform and other changes.

They say everything should be on the table, and we should follow the same approach as before.

What's wrong with that?

In previous negotiations, weeks were spent arguing over text on different topics, and they only put a pay offer at the very end, when the pressure is on to conclude a deal.

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Tell me more about how increasing inflation has wiped out pay increases?

Between 2021 and 2025, when the last two pay agreements were in place, basic pay increases added up to close to 16% but average annual inflation over the same period was close to 21%. **That means that your purchasing power is shrinking in real terms, so you're working for less.**

During this time, inflation has been more than 5% ahead of the salary of a public servant on average earnings. That hits your ability to maintain your standard of living.

What about this year?

The 1% pay increases in February and June have been wiped out by inflation, which was running at 3.6% in May, which is why your union negotiators are fighting for an increase that covers this year.

Didn't lower earners get more?

Yes, but only because we insisted on it in 2020 and in 2023. It's now accepted that the cost-of-living crisis has hit the lowest paid hardest. In fact, increases in the National Minimum Wage have outstripped the pay of the lowest paid public servants during the same period.

Aren't government ministers talking about tax reform in the Budget?

Ministers have made comments in the media about potential tax cuts to benefit workers. Anything they do will apply across the economy, and the first thing they will have to address is their own failure to index tax bands and allowances last year.

So, is pay bargaining still important?

Very. You and your colleagues standing together to collectively bargain is the only way for you to achieve fair pay for your work.

But the Government is saying that there are competing demands for limited funds.

The Government is trying to duck its responsibility as an employer to maintain your living standards. That is a political choice. **You also have a choice, if you don't want to let the Government off the hook then vote YES in the ballot.**

Where does Local Bargaining stand?

This was a form of bargaining in the last agreement, designed to provide a way of addressing grade issues. The first phase was to be implemented last September, but a majority of groups have still not seen outcomes. Resolving outstanding claims is one of the demands for any agreement.

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What other issues are on the table?

Important issues, including local bargaining, remote working, outsourcing, and artificial intelligence, also need to be addressed in these talks.

Remote working is under attack from some employers who are pushing workers to increase in-office days, when all the evidence shows that hybrid working is better for workers and employers, in terms of productivity, work-life balance and managing increasing costs.

Your job must be protected from outsourcing, and public services should be delivered by civil and public service workers. A future agreement must include strong protections against outsourcing to ensure maximum delivery of public services by directly employed public service workers.

Unions are also calling for a new social dialogue process that would create a place for negotiations on increased public investment on housing and healthcare.

Finally, the rise of artificial intelligence is rapidly impacting the world of work and unions are seeking protections for workers.

Could remote work be bargained away?

Protecting workers' access to remote and hybrid work is a core objective of your union. We know that remote work is under attack across all sectors.

Earlier this year, over 19,000 Fórsa members took part in research on remote work. The results clearly demonstrated the positive impact remote and hybrid work has on productivity, transport, infrastructure, regional development, local economies, family life and staff retention. Ensuring that workers who benefit from remote work can continue to do so is a priority for the union.

How do we deal with employers/management who try to impose change while there is no agreement in place?

We will not be restricted by an industrial peace clause, so if the majority of members vote yes in this ballot, we will be free to take whatever action is necessary to resist any change that is being imposed.

So, are you being asked to prepare for a 'no deal' scenario?

At the moment we are in a 'no deal' scenario. If this situation continues, you and your colleagues need to be ready to take necessary industrial action.

What is Fórsa leadership saying?

Your elected leaders from each division of the union who sit on the National Executive unanimously decided to ballot members in the public service.

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Is there a recommendation?

Their strong recommendation is that you and your colleagues vote yes in this ballot on industrial action.

Will industrial action be necessary?

Only if the Government fails to respond positively to your reasonable concerns over protecting your living standards.

Are we on our own?

There are 19 unions with members working in the public service who are involved in this process. Together they are part of a group called the Public Services Committee (PSC) of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU).

All 19 unions affiliated to the ICTU Public Services Committee are following the same strategy. Other unions are balloting in accordance with their own rules. There has been strong unity among the affiliate unions in recent years.

Who is the union negotiating team?

Four lead negotiators represent the PSC in the negotiations with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER). They are:

- Kevin Callinan, Fórsa general secretary
- John King, SIPTU general secretary
- Phil Ní Sheaghdha, INMO general secretary
- John Boyle, INTO general secretary

SECTION 3: The ballot

What will I be asked to vote on?

You will be asked if you are **willing to take industrial action** to secure acceptable pay increases, to achieve a full and satisfactory outcome to local bargaining claims, and to protect your working terms and conditions by resisting the threat of change imposed without agreement (for example on remote and hybrid working).

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How will the ballot work?

An online ballot of 90,000 Fórsa members working in the public service will take place. Voting opens on Tuesday 4th August and closes on Tuesday 1st September at midday.

You will receive a Unique Voting Code from Mi-Voice so that you can vote electronically. The other unions are running their own ballots.

What can I do now?

- Talk to your colleagues and get involved.
- Make sure your email address is up to date as it will be an online ballot.
- When the ballot opens, vote YES and talk to your colleagues about why they should vote.
- Recruit new members by talking to them about how important it is that they stand with you and your colleagues to maximise your collective strength.
- Share union updates online to make sure everyone is up to date.

If you have any questions, you should contact your local branch or the following email addresses:

- | | |
|---|-----------------|
| ▪ Civil Service | cshelp@forsa.ie |
| ▪ Education | edhelp@forsa.ie |
| ▪ Health and Welfare | hwhelp@forsa.ie |
| ▪ Local Government & Local Services/
Municipal Employees | lghelp@forsa.ie |
| ▪ Service and Enterprises | sehelp@forsa.ie |

SECTION 4: Industrial action

What is industrial action?

‘Industrial action’ is a term that can refer to any action a worker takes to withhold their labour in a dispute with their employer. A worker is ‘taking industrial action’ when they don’t do part or all of their usual work.

In Ireland, trade union members must vote to approve industrial action for it to be legal. When workers take legal industrial action in Ireland, they are protected from losing their job.

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What is considered 'industrial action'?

There are many forms of industrial action. Strikes are typically the most significant or high profile; however more targeted forms of industrial action can be highly effective. These include:

- Work to rule, this means workers strictly adhere to the duties outlined in their contracts and do not do any additional tasks or duties.
- Refusing to cover the work of a vacant post.
- A ban on overtime, this means only working your exact contractual hours.
- Refusing to engage with specific systems such as IT systems, administrative systems, or payment systems.
- Picketing, this means demonstrating outside your workplace.
- Work stoppage or strikes. These can be of varying duration, i.e. several hours, several days, or indefinite.

What happens if members vote in favour of industrial action?

If members vote in favour of taking industrial action, the union's National Executive Committee will determine the timing and nature of industrial action, while liaising with other public service unions.

Notice of industrial action will be served to employers, detailing the timing and nature of industrial action. Members will also be informed in writing.

We will look to create the maximum pressure on the employer (i.e. government), with the least negative impact on members. Targeted actions will be decided to suit each division.

When would industrial action take place?

When members of a union vote to take industrial action, the union is legally obliged to serve notice to the employer concerned. The legally required notice period is of one week. By collective agreement with the HSE, a longer notice period is provided for industrial action in the health services, where a period of three weeks' notice is served.

This ballot closes at midday on Tuesday 1st September; therefore, it is likely industrial action would begin later that month.

How would taking industrial action impact my pay?

Targeted industrial action typically has little impact on your pay. Full withdrawal of labour, such as a strike or work stoppage, could lead to loss of pay for the duration of the stoppage.

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Who will decide what type of industrial action I will be required to take?

If members vote in favour of industrial action, Fórsa's National Executive Committee, the highest elected decision-making body of the union, determines the form, format and length of industrial action.

This is then communicated to members in 'an instruction' which gives details of the industrial action.

Will there be any exceptions?

Union members are bound by the democratic decision of members. If a majority of members vote to take industrial action, then all members are expected to follow the union instruction.

Sometimes 'derogations' are granted during industrial action. For example, in the health service, when perfusionists went on strike for one day this year, a derogation was granted for emergency life-saving operations.

The employer must request a derogation, which will be assessed by the National Executive Committee (NEC), and the NEC will determine whether a derogation should be granted or not.

Will I be penalised for taking industrial action?

Trade union members in Ireland are legally protected when they take part in industrial action, if that action has been approved by a ballot of members. Simply put, you cannot lose your job for taking industrial action.

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