

Following a ballot of all Fórsa members working in the civil and public service, nationwide industrial action will now take place. The following document outlines what happens next, and how this applies to you.

SECTION ONE: Industrial Action

What is industrial action?

There are many forms of industrial action.

Industrial disputes often have several phases, with different activities and tactics being used during different phases. When a decision is taken to move to the next stage this is called 'escalation' and members are informed as to what the next form of action will be.

Strikes, or work stoppages, 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 or several days, or indefinite.

How will my employer know that I am taking industrial action?

All employers will be served an official notice of industrial action, in writing, by the appropriate union. This is a legal requirement under the 1990 Industrial Relations Act.

The Industrial Relations Act requires one week's notice of industrial action.

There is an agreement between the health service and health unions that three weeks' notice is served. This notice was served on Wednesday 9th September by some unions, including Fórsa, to allow time for appropriate contingency arrangements.

Will there be any exceptions?

Sometimes 'derogations' are granted during industrial action. A derogation means that a certain type of work, or worker, is exempt from the union instruction. Usually these are only granted when maintaining the industrial action could have life threatening consequences.

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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.

How do I know what I should do?

Fórsa will issue 'union instructions' which outline in detail what you are expected to do or not do during industrial action. Members in each division will receive an instruction.

If the dispute escalates, a further instruction will be issued.

Please make sure your contact details are up to date, so you receive all communications about the industrial action. You can do this [here](#).

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Who will the industrial action involve?

All members working across the civil and public service.

Will every member be asked to do the same thing?

Fórsa has six divisions. Our members are organised in the following areas: Civil Service, Education, Health & Welfare, Local Government & Local Services, Services & Enterprises and Municipal Employees. Each division will determine the industrial action most appropriate to the employments and members in their specific area, which will then be brought to the National Disputes Committee for approval

Who is organising the industrial action?

Your local branch and workplace representative(s) should be able to provide you with accurate, up to date, local information on what activities are taking part during the industrial action in your workplace.

Strike Organising Committees are being established across each division. The National Executive Committee (NEC) is the National Disputes Committee and the union officers, in consultation with the Cathaoirligh of the Divisional Executive Committees as appropriate, are authorised to act on behalf of the NEC between meetings.

Branches have a crucial role to play in organising local activities during the industrial action, from answering members' queries, to awareness raising and planning pickets.

What should I do during the industrial action?

A detailed union instruction has issued to members working in the HSE, Tusla and Section 38 organisations. It outlines the work to rule and non-cooperation actions you should follow as part of this industrial action. It lists specific tasks, programmes, projects and committees you should withdraw and disengage from. It is very important that you are familiar with the instruction and understand it.

This FAQ is considered a guide to help with general queries and will be updated as a live document over the coming weeks.

You are not obliged to notify your manager whether you intend to participate in the industrial action

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however if a manager asks you to carry out any task or action covered by the withdrawal instruction, you should state you are following the union instruction and that the matter should be raised at national level.

How does a 'work to rule' work?

In general, 'work to rule' industrial action involves a worker working strictly to the terms of their contract, role or function.

If you don't have a contract or a description of your role or function, you should work to your usual role and duties and not carry out other additional duties that are outside of your contract.

Some union instructions may outline that a specific task should cease.

For example, many instructions will state that members should not cover the work of a vacant post during industrial action, even though that might be part of your normal working day.

If your job description or contract allows for 'other tasks assigned by your manager', you should stick to your normal duties and not take on any additional or new tasks during the industrial action. You can ask your local branch or official if you are unsure.

A work to rule also means working strictly to your scheduled working hours and not doing unscheduled or un-rostered overtime.

It also often means a withdrawal of goodwill. Some examples of this could be taking on some duties beyond your job description to 'help out' and generally being flexible on working hours or duties beyond your contract. How this works in practice will differ significantly from workplace to workplace. Contact your local branch or official to clarify any queries you have.

Check the FAQ for your division for further details on the union instruction that applies to you.

How can I build visibility of the industrial action in my workplace?

Talk to your colleagues about why you're taking industrial action and use our resources to build awareness of the industrial action in your workplace and community.

You will find all ballot resources [here](#).

Branches are encouraged to organise activities to build visibility in the workplace throughout the industrial action.

Some examples of visibility actions include distributing Fórsa lanyards and pins, encouraging your colleagues to wear the lanyards and pins, putting up posters, and organising group photos of members taking action.

Branches have been provided with materials to support these activities.

How do I decline something covered by the instruction?

Decline politely, and in writing where you can. Say that you are acting on a Fórsa industrial action instruction. **You do not have to argue the merits or justify the action.**

Keep a short note of every request you decline: the date, who asked, and what was asked.

My contract has expired and I am waiting on renewal. Could taking part put my renewal at risk?

This is official industrial action, and members are protected by their union when engaging in industrial action. Penalising someone for lawful participation would be victimisation which is not allowed. If you are treated differently, or feel you are being singled out, contact your rep as soon as possible. Do not wait to see whether it develops.

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Half my office are members and half are not. How do we manage that?

The union instruction applies to members. Non-members are not covered by it and are not protected by the union during the dispute. If you know colleagues who are not yet members, now is the time to encourage them to join.

What happens if a member does not follow the instruction?

Under the union rule book, failure to act in accordance with union instructions during an industrial dispute is treated as conduct injurious to the interests of the union and can be dealt with under the disciplinary procedure. In practice the first step is always a conversation, and the branch would far rather understand why a member is not following the instruction than pursue anything formal.

I am unsure whether a particular task is covered by the instruction. What should I do?

Ask before you act, not after. Contact your local rep or the branch, describe the specific task and who asked for it, and wait for an answer. Nobody is expected to interpret the instruction alone, and it is better to fully understand what it means to you and your work: carrying out work that you are instructed not to do, weakens the action, and refusing work that is not covered may leave you exposed.

I'm not a member of Fórsa, what should I do during the dispute?

Only union members are protected during the dispute. You should join the union. The fastest way to join is online [here](#).

I have questions that aren't addressed here, who do I contact?

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
Service and Enterprises	sehelp@forsa.ie
Health and Welfare	hwhelp@forsa.ie
Local Government & Local Services/ Municipal	lghelp@forsa.ie

SECTION TWO: The State of Play

The Public Service Agreement 2024- 2026 expired in June. Exploratory talks did not lead to an agreement. As a result, public service unions have been balloting members on industrial action. A number of unions have now announced ballot results strongly in favour of taking industrial action, with ballots ongoing.

The ICTU Public Services Committee met on Friday 11th September and agreed to coordinate industrial action.

What was the result of the ballot?

96.6% of members who voted supported industrial action. The turnout was 64,481, equivalent to 72.6%. The majority in favour of action was a resounding 60,071.

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What does the ballot result mean for me?

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.

When will the industrial action start?

Industrial action will begin on Wednesday 30th September. A national strike action will take place on Wednesday 14th October 2026 with pickets to be placed on workplaces.

What is going on with talks with the Government?

There are currently no talks taking place.

Preliminary engagement with Government in June didn't convince union negotiators that living standards would be protected by the approach officials in the Department of Public Expenditure are taking to a new agreement.

Union negotiators have consistently said that Government must begin with a credible approach to pay, for 2026 onwards, that properly addresses the cost-of-living pressures facing public service workers, if they want another multi-annual pay agreement.

With no public service agreement in place, we are now in dispute with Government, as the employer of public service workers.

Why aren't we going into talks when Government Ministers are saying they are open to talks?

Our position is that talks must have a clear purpose from the outset, including a credible approach to protecting living standards, which can only be achieved by addressing pay.

For months unions have highlighted the Government's unwillingness to address cost-of-living measures at the start of any negotiations. This failure to immediately address pay for 2026 onwards, is the primary reason that talks cannot progress.

In previous public service pay negotiations, pay has generally been the final item on the agenda, usually following a period of intense negotiations on public service reform and other issues. Unions have made it clear to Government that a different approach is needed in 2026, and that workers need certainty in uncertain times.

In recent years, public service pay has fallen significantly behind prices, by as much as 5%.

In September 2026, the CSO advised that annual inflation is running at 3.7%, while pay improvements delivered in 2026 amount to an average increase of around 1.5% across the year. This means, at a minimum, pay improvement measures need to be implemented for the latter part of 2026.

The Government side has not accepted this point and was unwilling to commit to this approach in preliminary discussions.

Until unions can secure a commitment to an approach that prioritises these pay issues, talks cannot progress.

Why does Jack Chambers keeps saying his officials are ready to negotiate?

He has been using this line since June in order to deflect from the problem we've identified where pay doesn't keep up with inflation, in an attempt to generate uncertainty around the pay dispute and to try to draw us in to protracted talks without clear commitments to meaningfully address pay for 2026 onwards.

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Will we enter into another multi-annual agreement?

Only if it adequately deals with cost of living first and satisfactorily addresses other priority matters too, like privatisation and outsourcing, working from home, and the impact of AI.

Why has Jack Chambers said wages have kept up with inflation?

He is cherry-picking a 'start date' and ignoring inflation during the austerity and pay restoration years. Our analysis clearly shows that inflation has wiped out recent increases, including the 2% from this year, as inflation is already over 3.7% for this year alone.

He has also said that the lower paid have received increases more than inflation, is that true?

In the last pay agreement, unions negotiated a fixed monetary amount for some of the increases that meant lower paid workers got whichever was greater. For example, in February 2026, the increase was 1% or €500, whichever was better for the worker.

Jack Chambers fails to explain this and is instead using pay rates near minimum wage levels to make that assertion, however that doesn't give a clear picture as the national minimum wage has increased by even more. In fact, the Low Pay Commission has recommended that it should be increased by another 5.9% next January.

How many unions are involved?

There are 19 unions with members working in the public service who are part of a group called the Public Services Committee (PSC) of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU). The two Defence Forces associations are not permitted by law to engage in industrial action, but all affiliate unions support the campaign.

Will all unions be taking industrial action at the same time?

The PSC is clear that a coordinated approach is essential. While sectoral differences will lead to some variance in what actions are most appropriate for some workers, where possible, industrial action will take place at the same time and be of a similar nature.

For example, targeted work to rule and non-cooperation actions will begin from Wednesday 30th September.

PSC affiliates have also agreed to co-ordinate national strike action on Wednesday 14th October 2026 with pickets to be placed on workplaces, and if necessary, a second-strike day has been scheduled for Wednesday 21st October.

A strike puts workers under pressure too, why are we taking this approach?

Government haven't changed their rhetoric since June, they don't seem to believe we're serious, so we need to show them that we are. Public service workers will be commencing industrial action from Wednesday 30th September. In many cases, these actions will be indefinite until the dispute is resolved. If Government have not committed to a credible approach to pay, for 2026 onwards, that properly addresses the cost-of-living pressures facing public service workers, our ultimate escalation is nationwide stoppages.

If civil and public service workers take part in a collective work stoppage it will clearly show we cannot be taken for granted, and that an agreement will only be reached if it meaningfully addresses the cost-of-living and other key claims.

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Public Service INDUSTRIAL ACTION 2026

FAQ

This document was last updated on:
Friday 2nd October 2026

What about the Budget?

We will have to wait until the Budget is announced on Tuesday 6th October to understand what impact measures in it will have on the cost-of-living crisis.

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 credits last year.

However, pay bargaining is the only way for workers to be sure that their pay can keep up with the cost of living.

In this dispute Government are both the employer and the state's policy maker. We can't let them confuse these two roles. The Government is the State's largest employer, and if it refuses to address pay falling behind inflation, it emboldens other employers to take the same approach, putting workers' pay across Ireland at risk.

Will every union be asked to do the same thing?

Each union will determine the most effective form of industrial action for its members; however, unions are working together to ensure that action takes place at the same time, where possible, to maximise the impact and demonstrate how vital public service workers are.

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