

Valuing Care in all its forms

– prerequisite for a sustainable future

Irish Congress of Trade Unions

Women's Conference

2024

Thursday & Friday 7/8 March
The Hodson Bay Hotel, Athlone



STRONGER TOGETHER

CONGRESS

Irish Congress of Trade Unions



unite the union
FIGHTING FOR
NHS
JOBS, PAY & CONDITIONS

THE RANGING
WORKERS
Deserves Respect

FAIR NHS PAY
= MORE PHYSIO
= BETTER CARE

Value NHS
Physio Staff
#CSP4FairPay





Timetable

Thursday 7 March

10.00am Registration and coffee

Session 1 Opening Session

- 11.00am Welcome and introduction**
Maxine Murphy-Higgins & Margaret Coughlan, Joint Women's Committee Chairs

Chair of Conference Arrangements Committee

Civic Welcome

- 11.15am President's address**
Justin McCamphill
Congress President

Session 2 Motions to Conference

- 12.00pm Motions to Conference together with appropriate sections of report to conference.**

Guest speaker :
Dr Jilan Wahba Abdalmajid,
Palestinian Ambassador to Ireland
- 1.00pm Lunch and Fringe Events -2.15pm**
See separate handout for detail on fringe meetings.

- 1. Trade Union Friends of Palestine** host fringe meeting examining latest developments in Gaza and how trade unions can offer support and solidarity.
- 2. Care matters: exploring how working carers can be supported and models of sustainable care.**
- 3. Tackling the Far Right in our workplaces and on our streets - a trade union response.**

Session 3 Motions to Conference

- 14.30pm Guest Speaker: Professor Mary Murphy, Maynooth University**

Motions to Conference
- 15.30pm Guest Speakers - Update on the work of the NERI -**
Paul MacFlynn and Lisa Wilson
- 16.00pm Coffee break**
- 16.15pm Session 3 resumes**
- 17.30pm End of Day 1**
- 19.30pm Conference dinner followed by disco.**

Friday 8 March

Session 4 Motions to Conference

- 09.30am Motions to Conference and appropriate sections of report to Women's Conference**

Guest Speaker:
Owen Reidy,
Congress General Secretary
- 10.45am Coffee Break**
- 11.00am Voting on motions and appropriate sections of report**
- 13.00pm Close of Conference**





Introduction

I am delighted to extend a very warm welcome to the 2024 Irish Congress of Trade Unions Women's Conference: Valuing Care in all it's forms - a prerequisite for a sustainable economy.

From childcare to caring for our elderly citizens and most vulnerable adults, care in all it's forms is the building block for the labour market, for a sustainable economy and most importantly for a decent society.

Regrettably, it remains the fact that the burden of care rests with women and despite recent historic victories by trade unions in the care sector, caring as a profession is undervalued, underpaid and often overlooked by governments as a major sector in sustainable jobs as well as an priority economic infrastructure.



As General Secretary, I wish to thank the Women's Committee for choosing to focus on Care in all it's forms at this conference. Without a proper caring infrastructure, including accessible and affordable childcare as well as a quality social care infrastructure and a valued and well paid caring workforce, it is impossible to achieve the trade union aspiration of decent and sustainable work for everyone who wants it and a safe and secure society. As Congress General Secretary, I will ensure that the deliberations and recommendations from this conference are considered as priority work for the Congress Executive Council.

I would like to commend the Congress Women's Committee and all of you for your role in protecting workers and highlighting issues which particularly impact on women workers . There remains significant work to do both at home and internationally. The ongoing war in Ukraine together with the catastrophic war and humanitarian disaster in Gaza and a difficult economic recovery at a time when the cost of living is sky rocketing will mean that the trade union movement must respond robustly to protect working people and their families.

At the same time, it is important to remain positive. The theme of your conference is timely and I believe that there are huge opportunities to shape the world of work for the better. Working together we can make a difference to women workers across this island as well as take action to support women trade unionists internationally who are struggling to achieve peace and basic human rights.

I want to finish by commending the Women's Committee of Congress North and South for their work in promoting gender equality in work, in trade unions and in society and wish you well for this important conference.

Owen Reidy
General Secretary

Motions received for the Congress Joint Women's Conference 2024

1. Creating a safe and respectful working environment: code of conduct for ICTU

Congress has zero tolerance for any violence or type of harassment including sexual harassment. Violence and harassment in the world of work deprives people of their dignity therefore being incompatible with decent work. It is a threat to equality, equal opportunities and to safe, healthy, and productive working environments.

Violence, harassment and sexual harassment are contrary to trade union values and may prevent persons, particularly women, from participating and advancing in the labour movement.

As part of our ongoing commitment to create working environments that are free from violence, harassment and sexual harassment, Conference requests that Congress and its affiliates adopt such a policy and procedure relating to all of our events - Biennial Delegate Conference, other conferences (including this one), Courses and training events, Executive Council, sub-committees and all of Congress Committee meetings and events.

The work of the ETUC in developing their Code of Conduct for Meetings, Events and Courses should serve as very useful guidance in this work.

Women's Committee Republic of Ireland

2. Peace and Courage - Solidarity on International Women's Day

Conference, as we celebrate International Women's Day we reflect on the theme that has been chosen for IWD in Northern Ireland: 'Peace and Courage'

We send a in solidarity a message of Peace and Courage to women everywhere and send a special message of solidarity, peace and courage to women in the midst of war, hunger and grievous human rights abuses.

Sisters, we abhor the killing and maiming of children and civilians in Gaza, indeed across Palestine and in Israel and reiterate the trade union demand for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza. We condemn the indiscriminate slaughter of Palestinians with impunity by the Israeli regime, described by Amnesty International as

an "Apartheid state". We also welcome the initial findings of the International Criminal Court that "it is plausible that Israel's conduct amounts to genocide."

UN Women report that hundreds of thousands of civilians in Gaza have spent months living under unbearable conditions. Nearly 1 million women and girls have been displaced, and upwards of 30,000 Palestinians have been killed. UNICEF has called Gaza the "most dangerous place to be a child". The people of Gaza are in the midst of an epic humanitarian catastrophe. Four in five Gazans already face hunger and starvation, according to the World Food Programme, and there is risk of famine.

UN Women has also highlighted numerous accounts of gender-based atrocities and sexual violence during the 7th October attack which claimed the lives of some 1,200 people and have called for all accounts of gender-based violence to be duly investigated and prosecuted, with the rights of the victim at the core.

We urge renewed support for the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign and applaud the work of the Trade Union Friends of Palestine (TUFPP) in leading the trade union movement's work in this area.

Conference further endorses the six steps outlined by the Congress Executive Council and urges all affiliates to prioritise this work

1. Immediate humanitarian ceasefire guaranteed by the U.N.
2. Immediate entry to Gaza for life-saving humanitarian aid including water, food, fuel, and medicine.
3. UN protection for the 2.3 million Palestinian civilians trapped under siege in Gaza.
4. A rejection of ethnic cleansing.
5. A comprehensive military embargo on Israel.
6. A full and swift investigation by the International Criminal Court into war crimes and crimes against humanity, including the crimes of genocide and apartheid.

Women's Committee Northern Ireland



3. Parental Leave

- A. Congress recognises the important role that parental leave plays in enabling workers to fulfil their caring roles;
- B. Acknowledges the steps that have been taken to improve access to parental leave for teachers including the recent extension of parental leave to parents of all children up to age 16;
- C. Congress calls:
 - i. On the Department of Education to conduct a review of the flexibility of the parental leave scheme for teachers;
 - ii. For provision to be made within the scheme to permit teachers to take parental leave on individual days rather than the current arrangement which is a minimum duration of 7 consecutive days;
 - iii. On the government to increase the amount of parental leave available to sole parents to equal that of two parent families

Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO)

4. Menopause Leave

That the ICTU negotiate with the relevant bodies, with the aim of introducing menopause leave which will allow workers to request suitable workplace adjustments such as flexibility, time off to attend medical appointments and work task adjustments when workers are experiencing symptoms.

Association of Secondary Teachers in Ireland (ASTI)

5. Special leave for miscarriage and abortion before 24 weeks

Statistics show 1 in 4 pregnant people in the workplace will suffer a miscarriage at some stage. Alongside this, the number of terminations being carried out is increasing each year, with 2021 showing the highest number in recorded history. As it stands, legislation and workplace policies are not evolving at the same pace.

Miscarriage at the early stages of a pregnancy can have a massive impact on someone's mental and physical health, whether based on a decision to terminate or the pregnancy failing naturally. The physical effect on the body is the same whether you are going through a miscarriage or an

abortion. There is a major mental impact in both scenarios also as making the decision to terminate a pregnancy could be considered as difficult as miscarrying during a pregnancy that someone has tried for a long time to make happen.

Currently there is no legislation in place that considers the mental and physical strain a person goes through after the loss of a pregnancy prior to 24 weeks. Legislation such as this would allow the person adequate leave to grieve or recover physically and mentally. Some private companies have policies in place allowing a person some limited time off, but this is often at management discretion and massively varies between organisations.

Conference instructs ICTU to work with all relevant government bodies to lobby that the existing legislation in place for special leave for pregnancy loss be extended to apply at any stage of a person's pregnancy, including miscarriage or induced miscarriage.

CWU NI Telecoms Branch

6. Reviewing access to Carers Leave / Benefit

Preamble

The majority of those in receipt of Carers Benefit and Carer's Allowance payment are women. Opting to care for loved ones is often not a choice but a necessity and is a gendered issue. Persons in receipt of Carer's Benefit are permitted to avail of paid employment for up to 15 hours per week. This enables them to maintain a connection with their employer or at the very least with the workplace if they have the capacity to do so. When the 104 weeks expires, a decision must be made either to return to previous working arrangements or sever the link with the employer.

Carers provide an essential service to their community, society and to the state at a much-reduced cost in comparison to alternative care arrangements for their family members. Restricting the period of time where Carers can receive financial support may result in exposure to poverty for that family.

Under the provisions of the Carer's Leave Act 2001, a person may apply to avail of Carer's Benefit and take a leave of absence from their place of employment for a period of time, up to 104 weeks. Following this they must return to their previous work arrangements or terminate their employment. In many cases family members need further care

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for an unspecified time into the future. Restricting the number of weeks that a person may suspend their employment often has negative consequence for Carers and for those they provide care for. This puts immense stress on families and compels people to make life changing decisions sooner than necessary. ESU calls on ICTU to undertake a national campaign to change the provisions of the Carer's Leave Act (2001) to remove the time limit of 104 weeks.

Energy Services Union (of Ireland)

7. Parental Pay Equality

In Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the self-employed do not share the same rights as employees to Statutory Shared Parental Leave (SSPL) and Statutory Shared Parental Pay (ShPP).

Under current legislation, only employee partners are entitled to share up to 52 weeks of SSPL between them. They can then share ShPP for 39 weeks of this, in at least 3 separate blocks of leave each.

Self-employed mothers do not have a right to SSPL or ShPP. They can claim Maternity Allowance, paid for 39 weeks at the same rate as ShPP. It can only be shared with a partner if the partner is an employee.

There is currently no mechanism by which self-employed partners (unless they are the sole carer) can claim financial support for looking after their child. As such, self-employed mothers are penalised by an inflexible system that automatically looks to place all of the responsibility of childcare on the mother.

Equity is seeking for parity between PAYE and self-employed parents. We ask ICTU Women's Conference to support the work of Parental Pay Equality in campaigning for this change by highlighting their petition and campaign for SSPL and ShPP to be available to self-employed parents in Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

EQUITY

8. Cancer as an Industrial Injury for firefighters

Conference notes the Fire Brigades Union has commissioned research into the effects of fire contaminants on the health of firefighters. Research is being carried out by the University of Central Lancashire (UCLAN), in GB, led by Professor Anna

Stec. The findings were shocking. **Firefighters were found to be four times more likely to develop cancer than the general public** and were developing these cancers at a much younger age.

Conference notes that in 2022 The World Health Organisation classed firefighting as a carcinogenic profession. Despite these findings and terrifying statistics, Fire and Rescue Services have not implemented regular health monitoring for cancers as standard practice.

Conference further notes the UK's Industrial Injuries Advisory Council (IIAC) failed to recognise cancer as a prescribed disease in firefighters - citing lack of available UK Specific evidence, despite UCLAN's findings.

Conference believes that as only 9% of Firefighters in the UK are women (lower percentage in Ireland), the study's findings focused mainly on men, due to a lack of available data either in GB or Ireland.

Conference believes that cancers affecting mainly or exclusively women such as breast, ovarian and cervical cancers are diagnosed daily, and that women firefighters are undoubtedly at an increased risk from these cancers too.

Conference calls on Fire and Rescue Services across the island of Ireland to implement annual cancer health monitoring for women firefighters to ensure that cancers are detected early, and to lobby the UK IIAC and other relevant bodies to review their position and recognise cancers suffered by firefighters as an Industrial Injury. This will enable firefighters who develop cancer as a result of their occupation to access benefits and care.

Fire Brigades' Union (FBU)

9. Access to free health care

We only have to look back at the scandals of the past century to realise Ireland's history of validating and prioritising women's health is lacking.

Women's life stages are based on the reproductive cycle, beginning with menstruation, and continuing through menopause. Many women suffer throughout this journey often in silence and when seeking treatment are met with expensive medical bills.

The health service and its two-tier system is particularly unkind as social determinants and inequalities continue to determine access to healthcare. This congress acknowledges there has



been investment in the delivery of free accessible health care to women in recent years – but this is not enough.

We have seen changes in recent years such as free contraception, but access is cut off at a certain age, some changes to IVF treatments and minimal assistance for HRT treatment – but all these initiatives come with stipulations and restrictions that impede access.

This congress calls on ICTU and its affiliate unions to campaign for better health care for women, throughout their life journey. Care that is free to access regardless of their age or other restrictions.

Fórsa Trade Union

10. Family Leaves & Flexible Working

Adequate, affordable and accessible childcare which is structured around work is an essential building block for gender equality and a sustainable economy. However, support for caring requirements does not stop at childcare; workers, particularly women, require support throughout their careers in order to be able to fulfil their potential, stay in work, have a decent work life balance while also being able to provide care.

Conference notes and applauds the demand of the Northern Ireland Committee of ICTU that the NI Assembly develop a progressive Employment Bill for Northern Ireland. As part of this work, conference advises the NIC ICTU to work closely with the Women's Committee to ensure that a draft employment bill fully meets the requirements of working carers.

Conference also notes the extensive recommendations made to government by ICTU in Republic of Ireland in relation to the Work Life Balance Directive adopted from the EU. The provision of the Work Life Balance Act was set out as a means to allow working parents to better reconcile their professional and private lives, but there is much work left to be done by individual unions in all sectors.

Affiliates in all employment sectors should carry out:

- A review of all family leaves, including maternity, paternity and parental and parents leave to ensure that workers are being fully protected and support working carers. Any review should ensure provision of the best possible employment framework and include a move away from statutory payments to top ups to full pay by employers.

- The prioritisation of flexible working to ensure that flexible working becomes the default for all jobs with employers required to justify any divergence.
- Adequate carers leave, properly structured and which is fully remunerated.

Affiliate unions should progress claims against employers to top up such leaves to ensure those workers availing of them are not negatively impacted financially in order to balance their lives, caring duties and work.

Financial Services Union (FSU)

11. Pre-Menstrual tension policy within workplaces

Over the last few years we have come far with recognising Menopause and all the symptoms experienced by individuals going through this life changing experience.

Pre-menstrual tension in younger females within the workplace is being overlooked. Younger women are experiencing similar symptoms as with menopause without any support measure in place.

It might not always be obvious who is experiencing pre-menstrual tension symptoms.

Anyone can be affected by hormonal changes during their lives for a number of reasons, including pregnancy, fertility treatment, gender transitioning, conditions needing hormone treatment, and pre-menstrual tension. These can bring about symptoms which could and can affect them at work.

PMT symptoms can begin any time after ovulation (though they typically begin in the week before your period) and last until 5 or so days after menstruation begins. Menstruation, or bleeding, will usually begin on day 28 of the cycle.

Symptoms can include physical symptoms such as cramps, headaches, joint and muscle pain. Behavioural symptoms such as binge eating and problems sleeping. Mental and emotional symptoms, such as feeling very anxious, angry, depressed or, in some cases, even suicidal.

The effects on a woman's physical and emotional health can significantly impact how she does her work and her relationships with her colleagues. There are a number of varying treatment options for women, ranging from natural remedies, changes to diet or medical intervention.

Policies need to be put in place to educate all staff and assist managers to understand

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their responsibility in supporting staff with pre-menstrual tension related issues.

Line managers should be supportive during this time and should be aware of symptoms and realise that it can be daunting or embarrassing for a woman to openly discuss their issues.

GMB

12. HSE Maternity Pay Scheme

While the HSE cites its commitment to family friendly policies and measures, the HSE's calculation of pay under the Maternity Pay Scheme can result in NCHDs (Non-Consultant Hospital Doctors) and other healthcare workers facing a significant reduction in their income while on maternity leave.

This meeting calls on the HSE to review its Maternity Pay Scheme to ensure that maternity leave payment is calculated on an average of all premium payments and allowances in addition to basic pay that were payable to the individual prior to their pregnancy.

Irish Medical Organisation (IMO)

13. Government investigation and supports are required to address the disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women workers

Conference affirms that the Covid-19 pandemic and its impact on society has not been gender neutral and has had a disproportionate impact on the working lives of women.

Conference commends the Working In Ireland study by the UCD Smurfit School of Business and the Nevin Economic Research Institute which gave a detailed insight into the realities of the work performed by nurses, doctors, care staff, retail workers and other essential workers during the pandemic. The study found that female workers' well-being was significantly more impaired and was evident in their more intensive work effort levels and more pronounced levels of anxiety and stress.

Conference calls on the Irish, Northern Irish and UK governments to take immediate action in supporting frontline essential workers who gave their all during the Covid-19 pandemic and its immediate aftermath. Action must include examining the impact of burnout on frontline essential workers, examining supports available to frontline workers when they contract illnesses in the

workplace, and the impact the Covid-19 pandemic has had on intention to retire early.

Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation (INMO)

14. 'The standard you walk past is the standard you accept' - a call for active bystander training in Workplaces

Conference is appalled by the persistent and alarming rates of violence against women and girls (VAWG) across these islands, and the detrimental impact of VAWG on the mental, emotional, and physical well-being of individuals, leading to long-lasting consequences that extend beyond the immediate incident.

Conference commends the work of the Trade Union movement in its development of sexual harassment policies and toolkits to address VAWG in the workplace and the recognition of the importance of education and the introduction of prevention and intervention measures.

The Active Bystander Approach is a vital strategy that empowers individuals to actively intervene in situations where they witness or suspect potential harm, thus creating a collective responsibility to prevent and address violence.

Studies show that the Active Bystander Approach develops:

- an increased awareness of gender-based violence and knowledge of what is acceptable behavior;
- increased confidence in intervening and confidence that their peers would also intervene;
- improved knowledge of how to intervene calmly, without violence.

In June 2022 the NI Executive hosted The Active Bystander Approach Conference, which recognised the importance of Active Bystander training in Ending Violence Against Women and Girls. Conference commends the bystander initiatives already taking place in schools, universities, youth clubs, sporting organisations, workplaces, trade unions, and within the PSNI, but the reach and access to this training needs to be broadened.

Conference believes we need to proactively tackle the issue of violence against women and girls through the development of Active Bystander Approach training across workplaces, including schools and colleges in order to foster a safer and more respectful society for all.



Conference calls on Congress to:

- Collaborate with governments, education departments, relevant stakeholders, and community organisations, to create a multi-faceted approach in in to end violence against women and girls through the Active Bystander Approach.
- Advocate for the development, funding and implementation of training programmes for educators, equipping them with the skills and knowledge to effectively teach and promote the Active Bystander Approach within schools and colleges.
- Support research initiatives that assess the impact of the Active Bystander Approach on reducing incidents of VAWG within workplaces, educational settings and the wider community.

National Association of Schoolmasters and Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT)

15. Valuing Care in all its forms - prerequisite for a sustainable future

Conference notes more than 220,000 people in Northern Ireland are providing unpaid care for a sick or disabled family member, friend or neighbour – representing roughly one in eight people. The number of people performing the most intense unpaid caring roles has increased significantly during the last decade, putting more and more pressure on them to cover gaps in a rapidly deteriorating Health and Social Care system. We have always known that unpaid carers make an immense contribution, but research conducted on behalf of Carer's NI underlines that unpaid carers in Northern Ireland are now providing care worth an astonishing £5.8 billion per year.

Unpaid caring is very gendered in Northern Ireland, with women representing nearly 60% of the unpaid carer population and research showing that they're more likely to be pushed out of the labour market, and have their career prospects inhibited, by unpaid caring.

Carers allowance payments in NI are the lowest in the UK, Ireland and Europe.

The pressures of remaining in work, while juggling the ever-increasing burden of caring for loved ones is pushing our members into poverty, damaging their physical and mental health, and pushing them out of work. Workers need the protection of flexible workplaces, properly supported by the Benefits system, and recognised by the UK Government and the Assembly as a service for which they should provide in full.

If Government and the Assembly really want to see sustainable caring in the future, they need to completely overhaul the current massive gap that causes severe poverty in NI.

Conference calls on the ICTU Women's Committees to campaign on the following:

- Statutory paid carer's leave from work and a day-one right to request flexible working for all unpaid carers;
- Career break style unpaid leave without fear of being dismissed;
- Development of a cross-Departmental Carers Strategy for Northern Ireland, to act as a vehicle for the strategic policy change unpaid carers need;
- The introduction of a new legal right to breaks from unpaid caring, taking inspiration from the similar policy currently being introduced in Scotland;
- The Introduction of a Carer's Allowance Supplement scheme to boost the value of Carer's Allowance;
- The delivery of a root-and-branch reform of the Carer's Allowance system, including:
 - An increase overall of NI carers allowance, in recognition and commensurate as reimbursement of the extra remuneration that carers actually spend on caring);
 - Multiple payments for those caring for more than one person;
 - Expansion of the earnings threshold and the introduction of a taper, to allow unpaid carers to keep part of their Carer's Allowance as they earn more;
 - Eligibility for unpaid carers in receipt of their State Pension; and
 - Introduction of a new Carer Essentials Payment, to help unpaid carers better afford the high and inescapable extra costs of caring for someone with an illness or disability.

Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA)

16. Care Workers' Right to Organise

Conference recognises that organising a strong union in the workplace and engaging in collective bargaining are the most effective ways for workers to win fairness at work and justice in society.

Unionisation gives workers the tools that they need to tackle low pay and poor working conditions in the workplace. It empowers workers to address gender inequality, precarious work and bogus self-

employment across the labour market. Unionisation also provides working people with a powerful vehicle with which to campaign on the social, economic and political issues which affect their lives such as housing, healthcare, education and public services.

However, in Ireland workers do not have a legal right to organise or to collectively bargain. Employers use union-busting and union avoidance tactics to prevent workers from unionising. Union activists are often targeted for penalisation, victimisation and even dismissal for attempting to organise their workplace. This behaviour by bad employers deprives workers of a fundamental human right to balance the inherently unequal relationship between an employer and an individual worker.

Conference notes that in the long-term residential care sector, 74% of all beds are now provided in private homes and that 14 for-profit operators now provide approximately 40% of all beds. The private nursing home sector has traditionally had low levels of unionisation and a culture of hostility towards employees unionising. Workers employed in private nursing homes and indeed by private care companies generally will need strong protections in order to unionise safely.

Conference therefore calls on Congress to utilise all of the policy, campaigning, organising, industrial, political and legislative tools available to the trade union movement to improve conditions for unionisation in the Irish labour market both North and South and to deliver on the fundamental human right to organise.

Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU)

17. Maternity leave and other relevant leaves

Congress demands that equal treatment in respect of maternity leave and other relevant leaves be afforded to all who have children born through surrogacy. Congress instructs the ICTU to engage with all the necessary government departments to ensure this objective is achieved in a timely manner. All children should be treated equally.

Teachers' Union of Ireland (TUI)

18. Cuts in Education and the Impact on Women & Children in Northern Ireland

The cuts in Northern Ireland to Education, as well as those in the Department for Communities, Infrastructure and Health will have the most detrimental impact on children and young people. It will impact children and young people who have the least and who require increased social investment to ensure that they have a fair chance to achieve, particularly through the cost-of-living emergency.

A lot of these cuts are to programmes and initiatives borne out of the Covid-19 pandemic which represented crucial recognition that investment was urgently required to ensure that disadvantaged pupil's opportunities were protected.

Conference notes with concern the cuts to Education which include:

- An end to Free School Meal Payments during holiday periods ('Holiday Hunger Scheme') which provided 96,300 children with £27 a fortnight.
- An end to Happy Healthy Minds
- An end to Engage
- An end to the Digital Devices scheme
- An end to the Baby Book scheme
- A pause on capital development
- 28 New school projects paused
- A 40% cut to Free Period Products budget
- A 50% cut to the Shared Education budget
- A reduction in Nurture funding from £70 million to £62 million
- An end to schools coaching programme run by Irish Football Association (IFA) and Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA)
- An end to funding available to Young Enterprise NI
- A pause on a cashless scheme for schools
- A depletion of funding available to Extended Schools (ES)
- A significant shortfall in resource for pupils with SEN
- The Secretary of State, Chris Heaton-Harris and the Tory government's deficit reduction strategy is unfair and will disproportionately disadvantage women and families, particularly those on low incomes.

UNISON NI Women's Committee also believes that the Cost-of-Living Crisis should be viewed in the same way as the Covid-19 crisis and warrants an urgent response to ensure that no long-term harm is caused, particularly to women, children, and young people.



UNISON NI Women's Committee instructs the Executive Council to campaign and lobby the government and employers against these cuts and to protect services that provide support and opportunities to those most in need.

UNISON

19. ADHD Assessments for Young Women

This conference notes that ADHD is more commonly diagnosed in boys than girls, with girls often presenting later in late adolescence as their behaviour becomes more apparent. Girls with ADHD often go unnoticed, with many only realising later in life as adults that they have ADHD, particularly when they're in education or the workforce and therefore seek referrals for a diagnosis over the age of eighteen where there is little or no service in some of the Health Trusts. Where there is a service, consultants are in undated with referrals. Those who can afford the £1000.00 cost to go private then have to pay for private prescriptions to access their prescribed medication at a cost of £200 per month. This is because it is a class A drug and GPs are not prepared to honour the assessment as it needs to be referred through the NHS shared care scheme.

In the Republic of Ireland, the HSE currently have only four Adult ADHD clinics and you must be living in a Community Health Organisation (CHO) catchment area to avail of the service. Access to the assessment and treatment is by GP referral to your local Community Adult Mental Health Team for initial screening, unfortunately those outside the catchment areas for this service must get the assessment done privately with costs of up to €1150.

Conference recognises the importance of diagnoses for some people to allow them to ask their workplaces about supporting their needs as a recognised disability. Often the extent of the needs and the suggested workplace accommodations are not known without a formal assessment and diagnoses.

Conference recognises the huge financial barriers that obtaining an official ADHD diagnosis as an adult can have on workers, particularly for those who feel it is impacting their job but feel the cost is too much for them to pursue the diagnoses. As many women already face the hurdles of gender pay gaps, over representation in low paid work, additional menstrual costs, and unpaid **labour in the home**, this is an additional gender weighted cost woman face.

Conference calls on the ICTU to raise awareness of this issue, to call on the abolishment of fees for ADHD assessments, and to lobby the governments to address this concern which predominantly impacts young women more so as they haven't been diagnosed in earlier years.

UNITE

20. Supporting Women Carers

Conference notes recent research confirming that women continue to be more likely than men to provide unpaid care.

Providing care has an impact on most aspects of women's daily lives, decision making and financial circumstances and yet their care responsibilities and the effort required to make themselves available to do their jobs is frequently invisible to or ignored by employers.

Due to this lack of recognition and support in the workplace, women carers are often compelled to reduce hours of work, take unpaid or sick leave or give up work altogether. This has a knock-on effect on income.

While we welcome national government measures to provide carers with the ability to take time away from work and acknowledge that they give trade unions a base from which to negotiate improvements, without pay they make little practical difference to low paid women carers.

There is still much to do in policy terms to ensure that care is valued, and carers are supported appropriately. Public expenditure must be regarded as an investment in our communities, our society and our economy.

Conference calls upon the ICTU to continue to press for:

- i. Flexible and paid employment rights that explicitly value the contribution of unpaid carers, no matter what kind of job or contract they have.
- ii. Improved access to quality and reliable social care.
- iii. Social security and decent jobs that prevent and protect against poverty and enable women to work and care.

Union of Shop Distributive and Allied Workers (USDAW)

21. Facilitation of breast-feeding

Conference has grave concerns about the on-going lack of understanding and support in many workplaces regarding the facilitation of breast-feeding.

Conference believes that the value added to the employment situation for working mothers by providing such support would far outweigh the relatively straightforward adjustments which would be necessary to support women in implementing choice for the care of their children in the early stages of return from maternity leave.

Conference further believes that the fact that so many workplaces fail to support workers in this regard is a sad reflection on the appreciation of some employers for the multiple roles carried out by women in our society.

Conference calls on Congress to assert pressure through any and all appropriate channels across both jurisdictions to ensure that employers are aware of and, more importantly, fulfil their responsibilities to provide the necessary support and resources required for nursing mothers in the workplace.

Ulster Teachers' Union (UTU)

22. Collective Bargaining and Right to Organise

This Conference notes that in April 2021 the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality made a significant 'priority recommendation' on the establishment of a legal right to collective bargaining. Under the heading 'Support Employment Contract Security,' 96.7% of the Assembly voted in favour of establishing a legal right to collective bargaining to improve wages and working conditions.

Collective bargaining reduces in-work poverty, lowers wage inequality, and can help to close the gender pay gap and, in recognising these benefits the EU developed the Directive on Adequate Minimum Wages.

This Conference notes that since the Citizens' Assembly, the EU adopted the EU Directive on Adequate Minimum Wages (2022), and the government is required to transpose the Directive by end November 2024.

This Conference acknowledges the EU Directive requires the government to produce an action plan to significantly increase collective bargaining coverage by promoting collective bargaining and

making it easier for workers to join and organise their union. The ability to organise and to bargain collectively are inextricably linked. One without the other is meaningless.

First, we organise, then we bargain.

This conference calls on the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment to prioritise working with trade unions and stake holders to deliver a positive, impactful, and strong transposition which is working centric in its outlook.

This was the clear message from the Future of Collective Bargaining Seminar organised by Congress in April 2023, and which was attended by industrial relations officials and organisers.

This Conference endorses the position adopted by ICTU on the transposition of the EU Directive on Adequate Minimum Wages and congratulates the trade union movement on its Right to Organise Campaign.

This conference understands from UCD's Research led by Professor John Geary that nearly half of all workers want union representation and this increase to 2/3rds of all 16-24-year-olds who stated they want a union in their workplace.

Noting that the Directive on Adequate Minimum Wages states that 'In a context of declining collective bargaining coverage, it is essential that the Member States promote collective bargaining' including 'measures easing the access of trade union representatives to workers' this conference supports a strong transposition of the EU Directive on Minimum Wages in a manner which:

1. Puts in place an outright ban on union-busting by bad employers.
2. Introduces stronger protections for union members so workers cannot be victimised, isolated, discriminated against or dismissed for their union activity.
3. Introduces prescribed facilities for union representatives so they have the means to discharge their functions professionally and with the support of their employer.
4. Provides access for unions to meet and talk to staff in the workplace who wish to join their union.
5. Includes union recognition and collective bargaining as a positive attribute in all public tendering processes and related to any provision of public funds or supports to companies.

Communications Workers' Union (CWU) and Mandate

Conference Report

September 2022 - March 2024



- prerequisite for a sustainable future

Congress continued to pursue the broad gender equality agenda North and South under the guidance of the Women's Committees who continued to work jointly on areas of common interest, as well as pursuing initiatives within the two jurisdictions on the island.

The Officers for the Joint Committee were

Women's Committee ROI

The Women's Committee officers for the period were:

- **Margaret Coughlan** (Fórsa) Chair;
- **Ann Ryan** (SIPTU) replaced by **Lynda Scully** (SIPTU) after BDC 2023;
- Secretary, **Moira Leydon** (ASTI)



Margaret Coughlan and Maxine Murphy-Higgins, Joint Chairs.

Women's Committee in Northern Ireland

The Officers during the period were

- **Geraldine Alexander**, NIPSA, Chairperson, replaced by **Maxine Murphy Higgins** (NASUWT)
- **Danielle McCusker**, UNISON, Vice Chair, replaced by **Tina Creaney** (NIPSA)
- **Eileen Gorman**, FSU, Secretary.

Under the Direction of the Officers, each of the Committees both separately and together pursued an agenda which included ensuring that women's voices were heard in the issues raised by Covid-19, highlighting issues facing women workers such as lack of affordable childcare on return to work and highlighting all forms of gender based violence including sexual harassment in the workplace.

Joint Women's Committee Work included:

The Women's Committee worked together to organise the National Women's Conference in September 2022 in the Slieve Donard Hotel, Co Down. Entitled Women in Trade Unions: shaping the future of work, the conference heard from the Congress General Secretary as well as a range of guest speakers. The large part of the agenda was taken up with debating motions covering topics including violence and harassment in the world of



Geraldine Alexander (right) attending NIPSA rally.



work, childcare, balancing caring responsibilities with work, parental leave frameworks and tackling insecure work.

The Women's Committee also organised a Women's Seminar in the Fairways Hotel in March 2023. 'Demanding a Fair Deal for Women Workers' included fringe meetings on Afghanistan, Iran and Palestine as well as guest speakers on topics such as the gender pay gap and gender and climate change.

Women's Council of the Isles

The 2022 Women's Council of the Isles (WCol) took place in Glasgow and was hosted by the STUC Women's Committee. The overarching theme was tackling sexual harassment and members of the women's committee gave updates on developments in each jurisdiction.

The 2023 WCol took place in Llandudno, Wales hosted by the Wales TUC Women's Committee. Presentations included the Stop the Stigma campaign and women in leadership as well as updates on developments in relation to sexual harassment. Of particular interest was a presentation from participants from the WTUC Black Activist programme as well as Guest Speaker Hannah Blythyn, Deputy Minister for Social Partnership.



Congress Vice Presidents Katie Morgan, Fórsa and Phil Ni Sheaghdha, INMO.

International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women

Statements were issued to mark International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women which highlighted the action being taken by trade unions in pursuing workplaces and society free from gender based violence.

Women's Council of Isles 18 Oct 23



ETUC Women's Committee

Congress is represented on the ETUC Women's Committee by the NI Equality Officer and the Committee met a number of times during this period.

The ETUC Women's Committee led on work including lobbying on the proposed new EU Directive on Gender Based Violence as robust as possible. Despite lobbying efforts, negotiations within the EU remain extremely difficult and the ETUC Women's Committee continues to intervene on gender-based violence through a strong Ending Violence against Women and Girls Directive tackling pay inequality as well as ongoing work on the gender pay transparency directive. The ETUC Women's Committee completed a new project on tackling gender based violence and harassment focusing particularly on new forms of violence including cyber bullying and harassment via social media. Congress was represented on the steering group and participated in interviews to contribute to the report and toolkit.

Priorities for 2024 Include:

Presentation of draft priorities for 2024 (for discussion)

- Monitor and influence the transposition of the Pay Transparency Directive, monitor the Gender Pension Gap
- Push for ETUC key demands to be included in the Directive combating violence against women and domestic violence
- Deliver concrete tools to end the undervaluation of work predominantly done by women and the gendered labour market segregation through collective bargaining, social dialogue and legislation
- Launch a mapping of AI in the workplace and in training with the Women's Committee in preparation of the announced new Directive on AI in the workplace, influence the dialogues of the AI Act towards including a gender-dimension
- Adopt the Youth Action Plan at the Women's Committee meeting), and organise exchanges between the Women's Committee Presidium and the Youth Committee bureau.

Women's Leadership in the trade union movement



Patricia King

In noting the contribution of women to the leadership of the trade union movement, the Joint Chair's of the Women's Committee paid tribute to outgoing General Secretary Patricia King and her work to support equality and decent work.

'Patricia was an inspirational role model to many trade unionists, particularly women, and was always supportive of the work of the women's committee. Her support for the Women and Leadership initiative was particularly appreciated as she clearly recognised the importance of nurturing and mentoring women in the movement. We would like to thank Patricia for her contribution to our work and wish her well in her retirement'.

This period also saw the election of our own Esther Lynch as the first Irish General Secretary of the ETUC.

Esther first became a union representative when she worked in a micro-chip factory in the 1980s. She went on to work at the Irish Congress of Trade Unions for two decades, where she worked on the negotiation of Ireland's national pay and social partnership agreements and the union response to the Troika's attacks on wages and collective bargaining a decade ago. She joined the ETUC in 2015.



Esther Lynch



ROI Women's Committee

The Committee continued to meet on a regular basis and to work closely with our colleagues in Northern Ireland. Following the changes we all made during the Covid-19 crisis we have adapted to meeting in a hybrid fashion and also moved some meetings around with particular thanks to the INMO and Fórsa for hosting meetings during the period.

Our agenda items include a wide range of topics including: flexible working and working from home; increased risks for women in prostitution and the dangers posed by pornography; women and girls in Afghanistan and Palestine; women in leadership initiative, the menopause and violence against women and the threats posed by the rise of the far right.

The Committee especially welcomes the ratification by the Irish government of ILO Convention 190 on violence and harassment in the world of work and the introduction of 5 days paid leave for victims of domestic violence.

We continue to be represented on the National Strategy for Women and Girls strategy group by our Chair, Margaret Coghlan and the equality officer participated in a number of meetings in relation to a successor strategy which we understand will be forthcoming in 2024. We will be participating in consultations around this, the UN Convention to eliminate discrimination against Women (CEDAW) list of issues and Beijing +30 in 2024.

The period also saw significant developments since the work of the Citizen's Assembly on

Gender Equality, including the work of the Gender Equality Committee in the Oireachtas charged with planning how they will be implemented. The government finally announced the wording and a date for a referendum in late 2023. We had called on the government to publish wording in line with the recommendations of the Citizens' Assembly and the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Gender Equality report - which suggested that archaic language about women in the home be replaced with a wording that recognises the value of care work in all of its forms. An Executive Council statement said that excluding care in the wider community "would be a watering down of the Citizens' Assembly recommendation and would not be acceptable to Congress". Unfortunately, these calls were not heeded and the wording failed to include both care within the home and wider community, something referred to as a "lost opportunity for the value of care in all its forms, the vast majority of which is provided by women, to be reflected in our constitution." At the time of writing, the Executive Council is considering their position on the referendum and planning to meet with Minister O'Gorman at the February Executive.

The Committee has noted reports of some employers introducing some days leave for employees who have had a miscarriage and has been very supportive of the Organisation of Working Time (**Reproductive Health Leave**) Act 2021 in the name of then Senator Ivana Bacik. The genesis of this Bill was the work the INTO Equality Committee carried out among members that led to suggestions that unions as employers should provide paid leave for miscarriage and reproductive health related matters as per the Bill. Unfortunately, that

- prerequisite for a sustainable future

Bill has not been successful and the government has indicated that it will introduce their own scheme in the coming period. This follows the publication of the *PLACES: Pregnancy Loss (under 24 weeks) in Workplaces Report on Informing Policymakers on Support Mechanisms*, which was commissioned by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. The report, published today recommends the introduction of policies to provide time off work following pregnancy loss before 24 weeks, among other measures.

We urge the government to legislate for paid time off for employees dealing with pregnancy loss as a matter of urgency.

The menopause has been a serious issue for the Committee, building on surveys carried out by affiliates. Fórsa for example found that:

- 1 in 4 respondents have been diagnosed with a specific condition resulting in severe medical symptoms during menstruation, like heavy bleeding, migraines, and nausea
- Over 70% of respondents had to take time off work as a direct result of their periods
- Only 1% of workplaces currently have a menstrual welfare policy in place
- 65% of respondents did not feel comfortable telling line managers about their difficulties at work

The prevalence of diagnosis with a severe condition and the need to take sick leave from work during menstruation and menopause confirmed for us that addressing this in the workplace was an imperative, both as a negotiating agenda and as a public awareness campaign

We were proud to join the **'Stop the Stigma'** campaign with affiliate unions. 'Stop the Stigma' recognises the importance of providing a supportive and inclusive work environment for all employees, including those who experience periods and menopause. We were part of a Leinster House launch event for the position paper calling for employers and the government to implement mandatory workplace menstrual and menopausal policies. The paper also includes extensive research and a draft policy of recommended workplace policies in relation to menstruation and menopause.

We continue to advise Congress on its broad equality agenda and on all of the work carried out on our behalf outlined below.

Congress President Justin McCamphill address the room at the Good Friday agreement anniversary event.



Through our participation in the Early Years LEEF and the Early Years Stakeholder Forum, we continued to advocate for more public investment in ECEC as a means to tackle low pay, affordability and quality. This of course led to a new funding model and the first Employment Regulation Order (ERO) coming into effect in September 2022 and we continue to support our colleagues in SIPTU and the Big Start campaign as they campaign and bargain collectively for increased investment in the sector and improved pay and conditions for the undervalued staff.

A new pay deal for 25,000 Early Years Educators and Managers will lead to a further 5% increase to the current minimum pay rate and a third round of pay talks is expected later this year and will be supported by €21 million of additional government investment secured by the campaign in Budget 2024. There are also plans for the inaugural SIPTU Early Years Conference on 6th April, "a historic occasion for Early Year educators and managers and will mark a significant milestone for Early Years SIPTU members on the journey towards professional pay and full recognition" according to SIPTU Head of Strategic Organising Darragh O'Connor.





Gender Pay Gap

We have now had two reporting cycles since the passing of the Gender Pay Gap Information Act. Employers with 250 employees are obliged to choose a 'snapshot' date of their employees in June and to report on the hourly gender pay gap for those employees on the same date in December.

However, without a central repository for reports it is difficult to get an accurate picture of the results. A PWC report in 2023 revealed a mean gender pay gap of 12.6% across the organisations that published reports in December 2022. Analysis in January 2023 by the *Irish Independent* of almost 600 gender pay gap reports found that men were paid more than women at 88% of Ireland's big companies. And that women were paid 11.5% less than men, on average, at Ireland's largest firms last year. While this indicates that the average pay gap has fallen compared with 2022, it is higher than the figure for the wider economy, which the Central Statistics Office puts at 9.6%.

Clearly we need more reliable data from the reports and Congress continues to engage with government about an online reporting system that would collect all of the data in one secure location. We participated in an Equal Pat International Coalition (EPIC) meeting in October 2023 and as well as feeding in our work in this areas were able to share some good practice from other countries.

An EU Pay Transparency Directive has been now also agreed and we have engaged with the DCEDIY insisting that the transposition will require some changes to our own Gender Pay Gap Information Act.

It is hoped that this will also deal with the one of the main concerns with our own legislation - the requirement to publish a statement setting out, "in the employers' opinion", the reasons for the gender pay gap in their company and what measures are being taken or proposed to be taken by the employer to eliminate or reduce that pay gap. This is not sufficient - employers must discuss the gap with workers and their representatives and agree on a joint approach to tackling any gaps identified in an effective manner.

Kevin Callinan, Jane Pillinger, Min Roderic O'Gorman, launch Gender Pay Gap Toolkit Sept 2022



Transposition of the Work Life Balance Directive and right to request flexible working

Congress continued to advocate for the Irish government to transpose the Directive as rapidly and comprehensively as possible. The Directive includes commitments to introduce paternity leave and carer's leave – areas largely covered by Irish law, but also includes an individual right to 4 months of parental leave, from which 2 months are non-transferable between the parents and are paid, and flexible working arrangements - the right for parents to request these arrangements has been extended to include working carers as well as working parents of children up to eight years old.

The EU WLB Directive was to be transposed by summer 2022 but the Government failed in this regard and have faced infringement proceedings from the European Commission.

However, in April 2023, the Work-Life Balance Bill was passed by both Houses of the Oireachtas delivering a suite of measures to make it easier for workers to combine their professional and personal lives. As well as legislating improvements to support working parents and carers balance paid work with family care, the Bill also introduced a new workers' right to paid leave for victims of domestic violence and new rights for workers requesting remote work.

While welcoming the government delivering on its commitment to a new workers' right to request remote work, we noted at the time that the campaign to win full flexibility for all workers continues.

Finally, at the end of January 2024, Minister Coveney brought in a Code of Practice on making and managing requests for flexible and remote working. The Code, developed by the WRC and social partners, guides employers, employees, and their representatives through the application process for flexible and remote working, ensuring compliance with the new legislation and best practice principles.

This brings Ireland into line with long-established employment law in peer countries by putting in place a legal framework for making and managing requests for flexible and remote working. Employers are now required to take account of the worker's needs and the new Code of Practice in addition to the needs of the business when considering a request and any changes that might later be sought or made to an agreed arrangement.

Domestic Sexual and Gender Based Violence (DSGBV)

We continue to grapple with the shameful reality that far too many people (predominantly women) face violence, harassment and abuse in their lives, something that unfortunately increased during public health restrictions due to the pandemic. We continue our work to address DSGBV across a wide range of areas and are pleased to report some successes in that regard.

As referenced in the above section, Ireland is now leading the way in bringing in paid leave for workers who are victims of domestic violence.

November saw the coming into force of new workers' right to five days paid Domestic Violence Leave. Trade unions have been raising awareness of domestic violence as a workers' issue for many years and have successfully negotiated paid leave at the enterprise level.

We were happy to work hand in hand with domestic violence civil society groups in the lead-up to legislating for this significant new right and believe that it will make workplaces supportive environments for workers experiencing domestic violence as well as enabling employers to retain talent and ensure the safety of all in their workplaces.

We welcome the commitment to review the Act and to give serious consideration to extending the duration of leave to up to 10 days a year. None of the collective agreements negotiated by trade unions with employers are as low as 5 days and indeed many don't even specify a specific number of days.

This payment of their full wages by employers (something Congress and the sector advocated strongly for) is a significant safeguard for victims of domestic violence, the vast majority of whom are women. It will assist them in retaining their economic independence in an extremely difficult time in their working lives.

Historically, domestic violence was relegated as a "private" issue, with no connection to work. Ratification of ILO Convention 190 and the passing of this Act in ROI are now an acknowledgment of domestic violence having real consequences for workers, enterprises and society at large and we can be proud of our role in this historic development.



Congress has also done some training with Women's Aid on workplaces being supportive environments for victims of domestic violence, is developing a workplace policy which will also serve as a template for other workplaces and for use in collective bargaining on the matter.

The period also saw the introduction of a new statutory Code of Practice developed by the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission to tackle workplace harassment and sexual harassment. It sets out the procedures and steps to ensure that employees are not subjected to harassment or sexual harassment in employment. The new code is legally admissible in evidence in proceedings before the courts, the Workplace Relations Commission and the Labour Court.

Tackling the rise of the Far Right

The Committee has taken a strong interest and participates actively in our work to tackle racism and the rise of the far right. Among the activities in the period were a joint statement with Ibec for the International Day Against Racism in 2023, support for the Ireland for All march in Dublin in February 2023, reacting to the Dublin riots in November 2023 and being part of the community response in hanging banners from our building sending out a powerful message of love and care to the communities in and around Parnell Square demonstrating that together we are stronger, we have each other's back, that our communities are welcoming, and staying united has never been more important.

Committee members welcomed the Congress Anti-Racism project and are engaged in various elements of the project with the coordinator, David Carroll.

IHREC

We continued our active participation in the IHREC Worker Employer Advisory Group meetings covering a wide range of equality and human rights workplace issues. Among the topics on our agenda during the period was a November 2022 conference Achieving Gender Equality in the Workplace - The Role of Care Policy and Practice which aimed to contribute to achieving gender equality in the workplace. It focused in particular on the relationship between care responsibilities, care policy and the achievement of gender equality in the workplace and included inputs from the ILO and our sister Ethel Buckley, SIPTU Deputy General Secretary.

Activity in Northern Ireland

For the large part of the period covered by this report, there was no Northern Ireland Assembly, following the DUP's decision to bring down the NI Executive in 2022.

Following on from historic industrial action in Northern Ireland, culminating in a mass day of action on 18 January 2024, the Northern Ireland Executive was reformed with a First and Deputy First Minister and other Ministers appointed and in position. For the first time the positions of First and Deputy First Minister and their Junior Ministers are all held by women.



The mass day of action congregated on O'Connell Street, Dublin on the 18th January 2024



Patricia McKeown addresses the Belfast Rally on 18th January 2024

Members of the Women's Committee played pivotal roles within their respective unions in organising Industrial action, pickets, demonstrations and rallies throughout NI.

Although the lack of a government meant that legislative progress ground to a halt, the Women's Committee continued to be very active, Including around safe abortion and access to reproductive healthcare, relationship and sexuality education In schools, tackling period poverty, addressing issues of domestic abuse in the workplace and supporting positive action around a range of workplace issues including the menopause.

At the time of writing, Congress is seeking meetings with the appropriate Departments to ensure that the legislation under their control is enacted without delay. This includes the Bills which were passed through the Assembly prior to it's collapse.

Abortion

Despite the introduction of long fought for legislation reforming archaic abortion law in Northern Ireland, many months on, the reality for women seeking abortions has little changed.

The Abortion (Northern Ireland) Regulation 2020 came into force on the 31st March 2020. For the first time the regulations made provision for a legal framework for abortion provision in Northern Ireland. However, despite this, there is still no commissioned nor properly resourced service available consistent across the Health and Social Care Trusts (HSCT).

Congress continues to press for a comprehensive commissioned service to enable women to realise their full reproductive rights and has worked extensively through committees, including the NIC ICTU Women's Committee and Health Committee, to support a range of affiliated unions as well as allies in Alliance for Choice in their work.

Domestic Abuse (Safe Leave) Act

No one should lose their job or pay because of domestic abuse. In this Assembly mandate, former Green Party MLA Rachel Woods introduced a Private Members Bill to introduce paid domestic abuse leave. Congress fully engaged with Rachel and her team throughout the drafting of the Bill and we welcomed the final format as it was introduced to the NI Assembly.



The PMB was debated on the last sitting day of the Assembly and was carried, Royal Assent has also been granted. The drawing up of the regulations rests with the Department for the Economy; in his statement to the Assembly during the debate of the Bill, Minister for the Economy Gordon Lyons welcomed the Bill and committed to carrying out the necessary work involved in drafting the regulations in a timely manner.

The Department for the Economy has still to confirm the commencement date of the legislation and Congress and members of the Women's Committee continue to meet with Officials from the Department to discuss the content of the regulations and urge a speedy timescale.

Northern Ireland is the first UK jurisdiction to pass legislation of this kind that will enable victims of domestic abuse to avail of statutory entitlements without having to consider sick leave, or utilising holidays. It is hoped that the introduction of the legislation will also open up dialogue between employers, trade unions and employees, to facilitate a supportive working environment for employees experiencing domestic abuse.

The Act entitles victims of domestic abuse to no less than 10 days' paid leave in each leave year for the purposes of dealing with issues related to domestic abuse. Issues relating to domestic abuse are noted as including:

- a. Obtaining legal advice, or pursuing legal proceedings.
- b. Finding alternative accommodation.
- c. Accessing healthcare.
- d. Obtaining welfare support.
- e. Protecting family members.

Period Products (Free Provision) Act

The Period Products (Free Provision) Bill was brought forward by SDLP MLA Pat Catney and received royal assent in May 2022.

The Period Products (Free Provision) Bill has three broad policy objectives:

- a. To place a duty on the Executive Office to ensure that period products are available free of charge on a universal basis in appropriate locations.
- b. To require the Executive Office to specify by way of regulations public service bodies who

have a duty to ensure period products are widely obtainable free of charge in their premises.

- c. To place a number of duties on departments and other specified public service bodies in respect of their obligations under this Bill and to place a duty on Departments to issue guidance on the exercise of the functions conferred on specified public service bodies.

A number of affiliates and members of the Women's Committee actively engaged in the Period Dignity campaign, leading calls for free period product provision over a number of years.

Abortion Services (Safe Access Zones) Bill

The Abortion Services (Safe Access Zones) Bill also passed its final stage in the Northern Ireland Assembly before the dissolution prior to the elections.

The Bill provides for the Department of Health to establish safe access zones for premises providing abortion services. It also creates a criminal offence to do an act or make a recording in a safe access zone with the intent of, or reckless effect of directly or indirectly influencing, preventing or impeding access, or causing harassment, alarm or distress to a person attending a protected premises.

Progress on this Bill has stalled however as the Attorney General for Northern Ireland is using their powers of referral to bring a challenge to the Supreme Court, arguing that the Abortion Services (Safe Access Zones) Bill is beyond the legislative competency of the Northern Ireland Assembly as it breaches the European Convention on Human Rights, as incorporated by the Human Rights Act 1998.

The NIC ICTU Women's Committee fully supports the Bill and commends Clare Bailey, former MLA and Green Party Leader in leading on this important issue.

Childcare and the pandemic

As outlined in NIC ICTU's policy paper Childcare in Northern Ireland: Care, Cost and Gender Equality, Northern Ireland's system of childcare is woefully inadequate. Expensive and not structured to facilitate participation in the labour market, particularly of women, the issue of childcare rose to even more prominence during the Covid-19 pandemic. NERI's Lisa Wilson highlighted the huge issues in a piece of research which found that

scant consideration had been given to the issue of childcare when the economy was reopening during the summer months in 2020.

The issue of childcare featured prominently in the pledges made by all parties in the drive to reform the Executive in late 2023/2024; as part of our manifesto for the newly reformed Executive, Congress will work with NERI and the Women's Committee to present our ideas as to how families can be assisted with the cost of childcare in the short and medium term. However, it remains the fact that the sector needs to be supported in terms of both retention and recruitment - this will not be achieved until the pay and terms and conditions for childcare and early years workers is radically overhauled and this call has been a long held priority for the Women's Committee.

Northern Ireland Strategic Equality Strategies

The New Decade New Approach agreement promised the publication of long awaited social inclusion equality strategies. In late 2020, the Department for Communities invited NIC ICTU to nominate onto co design groups for the Gender Equality, Disability and Anti-Poverty Strategies. Nominations were Clare Moore (Congress), Taryn Trainor, (UNITE) and John Patrick Clayton, (UNISON).

At time of preparing this report, the Co design groups working on each of the strategies had committed significant time and energy to preparing robust documents which were sent to each Minister for approval. Given the collapse of the Northern Ireland Assembly, however, it became unclear whether the strategies would be adopted. Meetings are being sought with the appropriate Ministers to raise the outstanding commitments.

Gender Pay Gap Reporting regulations

Despite a commitment to the introduction of Gender Pay Gap reporting regulations in the Employment Act 2016, we still await the implementation. Congress will be meeting with the Minister for Communities and will continue to press for robust regulations, as envisaged by Schedule 19 of the Employment Act. This call has been included in the recommendations from the Co Design Group for the Gender Equality Strategy.

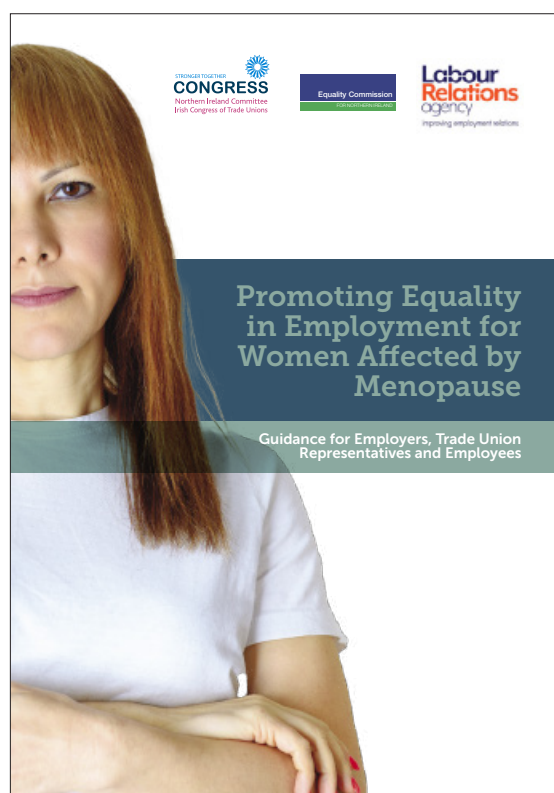


Taryn Trainor addresses Conference

Workplace Guidance

Joint Guidance on the Menopause in the Workplace

Congress, together with the Labour Relations Agency and the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, collaborated on joint Guidance aimed at employers and trade unions on managing menopause in the workplace. The Guidance has been promoted through a number of media appearances, webinars and through social media. The webinars have been extremely popular and as well as promoting the Joint Guidance, also offered the opportunity to showcase the work which is being undertaken by unions and employers to promote best practice in this area. The Committee has noted the need to broaden our agenda to include all forms of reproductive health in the workplace. This has been successfully highlighted by the Stop the Stigma campaign in the Republic of Ireland.





Helen Crickard (pictured centre) delivered a Raise Your Voice workshop on sexual; harassment and bystander training to members of the ICTU Women's Committee and NIC in January 2024.

Joint Guidance on Domestic and Sexual Violence in the Workplace

Congress continued to collaborate with the LRA to promote the Joint Guidance for employers and trade unions on best practice in relation to the issues associated with domestic and sexual violence. This included participating in a seminar organised by Belfast Area Domestic and Sexual Violence Partnership as well as doing a podcast along with the LRA.

Sexual Harassment in the Workplace

Sexual harassment in the workplace or associated with work continues to be a significant issue for many workers, predominantly affecting women. As part of ongoing joint work, Congress has worked with the LRA to draft guidance on preventing sexual harassment; the Guidance is endorsed by Women in Business and it is anticipated that it will be launched in the first quarter of 2024 with a series of webinars and seminars thereafter.

Up-skirting and Down-blousing now recognized as criminal offences

Women's Committee member Maxine Murphy Higgins (NASUWT) represented the Committee in a Women's Policy group Evidence session to the Justice Committee during the scrutiny phase of the Justice (Sexual Offences and Trafficking Victims) Bill. NASUWT members were the subject of these horrific sexual offences and NASUWT has been to the forefront of campaigning to have the so called up-skirting and down-blousing recognised as crimes. The new offences became law in late 2023 when the Bill received Royal Assent.

Violence Against Women and Girls strategy

Following the high profile murders of women including Sarah Everard and Ashling Murphy, The Executive Office announced the development of a an Ending Violence against Women and Girls strategy, something which the trade union movement has been calling for over many years.



Congress responded to the VAWG call for views and was represented on the Co Design group which met a number of times in late - end of 2022.

The Women's Committee, together with Congress Secretariat has met with Officials from TEO to highlight the need to include the workplace in the eventual strategy (including the realisation of ILO C190) and to press for legislative reform where necessary.

Congress was pleased to note that the draft framework and action plan, which was consulted on in 2023, included among the priority actions, the establishment of a workplace working group to include trade unions and employers. We look forward to playing a full role in this group and to bringing forward the many progressive policies which trade unions have championed in this area.

In their inaugural speeches to the Assembly, both the First Minister, Michelle O'Neil and Deputy First Minister, Emma Little Pengelly, mentioned their commitment to this strategy and area of work.

Domestic and Sexual Violence Strategy

Congress is represented on the current advisory group to the Domestic and Sexual Violence strategy and responded to the call for views on the new strategy.

Members of the Congress Women's Committee and the Congress Secretariat play an active role on a number of coalition groups including the Equality Coalition, the Human Rights Consortium and the Northern Ireland Women's European Platform.



Ethel Buckley.

Standing Orders

September 2022 - March 2024



Irish Congress of Trade Unions Standing Orders Women’s Conference

1. Biennial Women’s Conference

- 1.1 The Congress Women’s Conference shall meet biennially. The place and date shall be decided by the Executive Council.
- 1.2 The Chairperson’s for the session of the Conference shall be nominated by the Women’s Committees.
- 1.3 A Conference Arrangements Committee of up to six persons, nominated by the Women’s Committees, shall be responsible for the arrangement of the business of the Conference and generally take charge of the meeting place.

2. Representation

- 2.1 Only bona fide members or fulltime officials who are members of an affiliated trade union may be appointed as delegates to the Conference.
- 2.2 Trade unions with up to 50 women members may appoint one delegate to the Conference and unions with 51 to 500 women members, two delegates.
- 2.3 Trade unions with over 500 women members may appoint the following number of delegates:

500 - 1,500	3 delegates
1,501 - 2,500	4 delegates
2,501 - 5,000	5 delegates
5,000 - 7,500	6 delegates
7,501 - 10,000	7 delegates
10,001 - 15,000	9 delegates
15,001 - 20,000	11 delegates
20,001 - 25,000	13 delegates
25,001 - 30,000	15 delegates

And two delegates for each additional 5,000 women members over 30,000

Local Councils of Trade Unions may appoint delegates (who must be members of affiliated trade unions) to the Conference in accordance with the following scale.

Up to 6,500 affiliated membership - 1 delegates

Over 6,500 affiliated membership - 2 delegates



3. Motions

- 3.1 Affiliated organisations may submit one motion for the Conference agenda. Motions must be signed by the authorised official of the organisation and forwarded to Congress not later than the date specified by the Executive Council.
- 3.2 The Women's Committees may submit one motion each for the Conference agenda.
- 3.3 Motions must relate to issues of particular concern to women and must be within the scope of the Objects of Congress as set out in the Constitution. **Motions should cover issues/strategies which have not been dealt with previously, or which develop current policy.** The Executive Council shall determine, in consultation with the Officers of the Women's Committees, whether motions submitted are in order and its decision shall be final.

4. Business of Conference

- 4.1 The business of the Conference shall be determined by the Executive Council following consultations with the Women's Committees but shall include the following items:
 - a. Report from Executive Council on Congress action on Equality issues and related matters
 - b. Reports from Women's Committees
 - c. Motions from affiliated organisations
 - d. Information/strategy papers on specific themes will be prepared and circulated to affiliates prior to Conference. The presentation and discussion of such papers will encourage open and less formal debate.
 - e. Unions will be invited to comment in advance of Conference on the information/strategy papers. These comments will be circulated to Conference.
- 4.2 The Conference Arrangements Committee may make recommendations to the Conference for the ordering of discussion and facilitating the completion of the business of the Conference.

5. Method of Voting

Voting at the Conference shall be confined to delegates and shall be by a show of hands, each delegate having one vote. Four delegates shall be appointed as Tellers.

6. Limitation of Speeches

Subject to the discretion of the Chairperson, the proposer of a motion shall be allowed four minutes and other speakers three minutes. No speaker shall speak more than once on the same question, except the mover of a motion replying to the discussion.

7. Executive Council

Executive Council members and Congress Officials are entitled to attend and speak at the Conference.

8. Other Matters

- 8.1 Affiliates and delegates to the Women's Conference are reminded of the requirement to seek the permission of the Conference Arrangements Committee in advance of the distribution of any material to delegates during the course of the Women's Conference.
- 8.2 Matters not covered by these Standing Orders shall in principle be dealt with in accordance with the Standing Orders of Congress.

Valuing Care in all its forms

- prerequisite for a sustainable future

Irish Congress of Trade Unions





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Better in a Trade Union

- **Better in a Trade Union campaign** — promoting the values and benefits of trade union membership by sharing the voices and experiences of our members on social media and bringing people together in workplaces and local communities through events as part of Trade Union Week.
- **How are people better in a trade union?** Statistically, trade union members tend to earn more and have better working conditions than non-members. Also provide additional supports like training and advisory services as well as preferential financial and insurance related packages. Support and professional employment representation when you need it.
- **Why this campaign now?** Because workers need better pay and conditions, but also because as a society, we need collective action. Trade unions are a powerful force for change that stand up for social justice, freedom, and human rights, including LGBTQ+ and women's rights, as well as campaigning on issues like housing and health care.
- **Now is the time for Collective Bargaining:** The Irish government is obliged to transpose the Adequate Minimum Wages directive this November. This directive was hard-won by trade unionists in Ireland and Europe. Essentially the directive requires member states to initiate and promote policies and legislation that increase collective bargaining coverage (the portion of workers covered by a collective agreement) and to facilitate the right to exercise collective bargaining. A right denied to too many workers in Ireland to this day. We know from research carried out by academics in UCD that there is a demand amongst workers not in unions for collective bargaining. They found that 44% of workers not in a union want one. They also found that 67% of all workers aged between 16-24 want access to collective bargaining and a union. Workers having access to unions is critical and unions having access to workers who want to unionise is essential. The government now must engage with the ICTU and deliver.
- **Trade Union Week** will take place between 29th April and 6th May. Coordinated programme of grassroots events will take place across the island of Ireland in workplaces, local communities, schools, colleges and universities.
- Events will be announced over the coming months but people can expect social events, information stalls, table quizzes, public talks, film screenings and perhaps a few surprises to be announced.
- Whether you work full-time or part-time, in the private sector, for a multinational, a government department or a public service, there's a trade union for you. Find out more by visiting **www.unions.ie** and follow Better in a Trade Union on Instagram, X, LinkedIn and Facebook.

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LEARN MORE AT

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