

FAQs

FORTHCOMING BALLOT FOR INDUSTRIAL ACTION IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

We are stronger together

Unite and other unions affiliated to the ICTU Public Services Committee (PSC) have agreed to conduct ballots for industrial action as part of a coordinated campaign to improve public service pay in the context of high inflation levels. The PSC is made up of all 19 affiliated unions in the Republic of Ireland with members in the civil and/or public service. These unions collectively represent the majority of the State's civil and public servants.

Although each individual union is obliged by law to conduct its own ballot of members, this coordinated campaign, by unions representing approximately 90% of Ireland's public servants, unites and amplifies our voices and gives us added strength in our determination to beat the cost-of-living crisis.

Why are we balloting?

The move follows exploratory meetings with the Department of Public Expenditure, Infrastructure, Public Service Reform and Digitalisation (DPENDR). Unions advised Government officials that they did not believe there was a viable basis for opening formal negotiations, as Government had not set out a sufficiently clear and credible approach to pay and living standards at the outset of the process.

The absence of a successor public sector agreement, together with the Government's failure to commence meaningful negotiations on pay and to resolve outstanding issues from the previous agreement, has created a clear trade dispute between public sector workers and public sector employers. Following discussions among Unite workplace representatives, it was agreed that members should be balloted to determine the union's response to this trade dispute and to provide Unite with a mandate to act on members' behalf.

The purpose of this campaign is to secure a new agreement that:

- Delivers meaningful pay increases for members
- Protects jobs within the public sector
- Resists outsourcing and privatisation
- Resists any attempts at forced redundancies
- Secures the full implementation of all outstanding elements of the previous agreement including local bargaining claims

What should pay increases look like?

The PSC argues that a pay increase is required to cover the period from July to December this year. While no specific figures have been proposed, unions noted that inflation was running at 3.6% in May, more than wiping out the benefit of the 1% increases paid in February and June. Any meaningful approach to pay, must from the outset, realistically address high inflation.

Pay increases under Building Momentum and the first two years of the Public Service Agreement 2024-26 amounted to 15.75%, or 16.89% cumulatively. Average annual inflation over the same period totalled 20.8%, or 22.44% cumulatively. Taken together, this means pay has fallen in real terms.

According to the CSO; Housing, Water, Electricity, Gas & Other Fuels have increased by +7.1% in the 12 months to May 2026. Energy bills are rising rapidly, with suppliers like Electric Ireland and others, increasing prices by 9.5% from June 2026. The national average price for a litre of diesel in May 2026 was €1.99, an increase of 33c on the same time last year and petrol prices rose by 17c to €1.87 a litre.

When will the ballot take place?

The Unite ballot will take place from **Friday, 24th July 2026** and will close at **1pm on Friday, 21st August**.

How will the ballot be conducted?

Each member eligible to vote (see below) will receive a ballot paper and a Unite addressed return envelope. Please complete the ballot and post back to us using the envelope provided to arrive no later than **1pm on Friday, 21st August**.

What if I don't get a ballot paper?

If you have not received a ballot paper by **Thursday, 6th August** (***note: date extended from the 4th***) please email adminroi@uniteunion.org with your name and details of your home address and membership number (if you have it to hand) or call your local Unite Office (details below).

Who gets to vote?

Legally, each individual union must conduct its own ballot of members.

Members directly employed in the civil or public service, including those in 'section 38' agencies, will be balloted.

Members in 'section 39' and 'section 56' community and voluntary sector agencies will not be involved in this ballot as they are not directly employed by civil or public service employers.

Members in commercial State agencies will not be involved in this ballot as they are not directly employed by civil or public service employers.

Although the defence associations (PDFORRA and RACO) are now associate affiliates of ICTU, they are precluded by law from taking industrial action. Therefore, members of these associations will not be balloted.

Will it be an 'aggregate ballot' among ICTU unions?

This is not an aggregate ballot among ICTU unions. Such an 'aggregate ballot' is one where each union is bound by the collective outcome of all ballots, even if their own members voted against industrial action. Unite will be bound solely by the vote of Unite members.

What form will industrial action take?

Union members will be asked to sanction industrial action up to and including strike action. This will give a mandate to take strike action and/or more limited forms of action. The precise nature and timing of industrial action will be decided by affiliated unions, in consultation with the ICTU Public Services Committee, once ballots are completed.

It is important to remember that industrial action will not necessarily mean a 'rush to the gate': it may take the form of actions such as a work to rule, a ban on overtime, or other forms of non-co-operation. Each action to be taken will be determined by through workplace discussion: you, the members, will direct this process.

How will industrial action impact public services?

Unions and their members only ever consider industrial action as a last resort because we know it means inconvenience for the people who depend on the important and valued services we provide.

This campaign has developed because of the Government's wholly inadequate response to the cost-of-living crisis and, specifically, its impact on State employees. If there is industrial action, unions and their members will ensure that emergency cover is in place so that the safety and dignity of service users is maintained and protected across the public services.

How can members get further information?

Although workplace representatives agreed that the strength of feeling amongst members warranted moving directly to a ballot, it is important that every member has the opportunity to discuss the issues involved and make an informed decision.

Throughout the ballot period, workplace representatives and Unite Regional Officers will be available to support members, facilitate workplace meetings and briefings, answer questions about the issues in dispute, and explain the ballot process. Where workplaces wish to hold additional meetings or discussions, every effort will be made to ensure these are supported and appropriately resourced.

Members are encouraged to speak to their workplace representative or Regional Officer if they require further information or clarification on any aspect of the campaign.

What happens if the ballots support industrial action?

A successful ballot will provide Unite and other public service unions with a strong mandate to pursue this trade dispute and seek meaningful engagement with Government on pay, local bargaining and job security

A strong vote in favour of industrial action will significantly strengthen the collective position of public service workers and demonstrate to Government that members are united in seeking a fair and negotiated settlement.

What happens if the ballots reject industrial action?

If unions fail to secure a mandate from members, it will weaken the collective position of workers seeking improvements in pay and conditions and make it more difficult to secure progress on the issues that have given rise to this trade dispute.

Unite Offices:

Unite Dublin Office : 01 873 4577

Unite Dundalk Office : 042 9334338

Unite Limerick Office : 061 204157

Unite Waterford Office : 051 874438