

# Engaging young workers a key focus of ICTU conference

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**At the biennial conference this week, outgoing ICTU President, Kevin Callinan, spoke on the challenges faced by workers in a cost of living crisis and outlined some upcoming initiatives to engage young workers in union activity.**

The conference, titled 'Making Work Pay. Unions Transforming Work and Workplaces' was held at the Lyrath Hotel in Kilkenny this week.

Mr Callinan, who is also General Secretary of the largest public service trade union, Fórsa, outlined some of the issues workers are facing, including the cost of living crisis and inflation.

He argued that the "old chestnut" that wages drive inflation is untrue, and that instead, excessive profits are the leading cause.

"We're being warned about the risk of a wage/price inflationary spiral when what we're actually experiencing is 'greedflation'. Let me be very clear, workers and their families are the victims of inflation – they are not the cause", he said.

"At a time of very healthy profits (for many companies) and buoyant public finances, the Government is presiding over a significant fall in living standards due to rampant inflation in energy and food costs. Let's be clear, many authoritative sources – even from within the European Central Bank – have acknowledged that excessive profits are the key driver of soaring inflation rates not wages", he added.

He said that pay rises are needed to address this problem and that while inflation is an enemy, unions cannot allow the current situation to continue whereby workers are bearing a "disproportionate share of the burden while many companies profiteer."

He criticised the government and employers, saying: "As President of Congress, I am sending a clear message from this conference to Government and employers – north and south – that declining incomes in real terms will not be tolerated when the resources are clearly there to avoid it."

## TRADE UNION RENEWAL

Mr Callinan placed emphasis on the "the imperative of trade union renewal."

He noted how recent retrenchment in the tech sector – and manner with which it has been carried out – has created opportunities for the trade union movement to demonstrate relevance to workers.

Mr Callinan focused on how unions can encourage young people to join and highlighted some of the key initiatives ICTU is taking to engage young workers.

One such initiative is the Digital First Media Platform for the trade union movement, which aims to mirror “in public discourse what the Nevin Economic Research Institute (NERI) has done for the trade union movement in terms of economic policy”.

The platform will ultimately be funded by member union contributions, similar to NERI funding.

Additionally, the Executive Council has recently agreed to set up an editorially independent unit within the coming months.

This unit will be staffed by unionised multimedia journalists and its purpose will be to “create media content which will be broadcast through existing social media platforms to the wider public.”

Mr Callinan said that it will have a particular focus on younger potential union members and activists and its aim will be to drive union campaigns out to new audiences as well as providing a platform for union commentary and insights on key issues of public concern such as housing, health and anti-racism.

Another development focussed on engaging younger people in relation to unions, in addition to re-engaging former union members, is a major multi-media promotional campaign.

The campaign, which is scheduled to launch this autumn, is currently still being developed, but Mr Callinan said it will be focused on the benefits of union membership for workers and its weight and impact will be reinforced by parallel campaigning activity by individual unions.

He said that it is hoped that the planned promotional campaign, targeted at younger workers, will help to create greater awareness of trade unions and their role.