

Social partners outline IR expectations in election manifestos

ANDY PRENDERGAST

Ibec and ICTU have set out their positions on industrial relations in the run up to the next general election, with transposition of the Adequate Minimum Wages (collective bargaining) to the fore.

The Irish Congress of Trade Unions makes transposition of the Adequate Minimum Wages Directive priority number one, seeking four elements (below) for its full transposition. Congress also seeks the 2022 High Level Group's recommendations are implemented in full, as well as measures to strengthen social dialogue and the ratification of the ILO Collective Bargaining Convention 154 (1981).

Ibec stresses the "importance of Ireland's voluntarist model of industrial relations", supported by a "robust legal framework and a highly evolved body of employment rights legislation", which has "served the country well both in times of strong economic growth and more challenging economic circumstances."

The employer body wants a commitment from the next government "to continue to support Ireland's voluntarist model of industrial relations".

While Congress says new legislation will be needed to transpose the AMW Directive, Ibec "believes that it would be more appropriate, and likely more effective, for such framework and action plan to be established by way of agreement with the social partners rather than by way of legislative change."

ACCESS TO WORKPLACES

ICTU's stance on transposing the AMW Directive is that the next Government has to: "promote collective bargaining; facilitate the exercise of the right to collective bargaining for those who seek it; provide legal protections for workers and trade union representatives against victimisation and dismissal and for unions against acts of interference; and provide facilities in order that trade union representatives can carry out their role comprehensively".

Amongst these elements, Congress points to recital 24 of the Directive, that "measures easing the access of trade union representatives to workers" as one of the ways to promote collective bargaining on wage-setting. [ICTU emphasis]

To meet these requirements, legislation would be required. Ibec, however, says it wants a "commitment to facilitate the social partners in coming to an agreement with regards to a framework of enabling conditions for collective bargaining."

ICTU also calls for the 2022 High Level Group (HLG) report to be implemented in full. The implementation of the four HLG recommendations is apparently held up as the Department of Enterprise mulls over legal advice it obtained, warning of potential Constitutional complications to the recommendations.

Within the HLG report is a recommendation to access funds from the National Training Fund for training in collective bargaining to be made available to both employers and trade unions. Ibec notes it seeks a commitment "to make funds available from the National Training Fund to both employer groups and trade unions."

The employer body also wants the next Government to ensure that the development of any new EU social or labour market policies “support global competitiveness and fully reflect Ireland’s industrial relations model.”

ICTU also lists the following measures to improve collective bargaining and social dialogue:

- Implement the EU Council Recommendation on Strengthening Social Dialogue.
- Honour Ireland’s commitment under the ESF+ Regulation to support the capacity-building of social partners and of civil society organisations.
- Transpose and implement the Provisions of the Pay Transparency Directive that promote Collective Bargaining.
- Transpose and implement the Provisions of the Platform Work Directive that promote Collective Bargaining.
- Ratify the ILO Collective Bargaining Convention 154 (1981).
- Advocate for further measures to promote collective bargaining in the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan, 2025-2029.

INDEXING HIGHER RATE OF INCOME TAX

Ibec lists some other work-related changes it is seeking:

- A commitment to index the entry point to the top rate of tax well above the average full-time wage.
- A commitment to a supportive tax regime to attract mobile talent into the country.
- A commitment to a tax system which supports employers doing the right thing – including expanding Benefit-in-Kind (BIK) relief for health and wellbeing and allowing employers reward milestones and recognise expenses in the workplace without overly burdensome reporting.
- A commitment to allow employers reward exceptional performance in a flexible manner through expansion of support for share-options, residual stock units, the small benefits exemption and similar schemes.