

The 2024 IRN review of industrial relations and employment law

The year 2024 began with a public service pay deal that was very well received by trade union members across the sector. In the private sector, meanwhile, pay deals trended upwards, averaging around the 3.5% to 4% mark; by year's end questions were being asked about pay in 2025 against the backdrop of lower inflation and economic uncertainty. By and large, 2024 continued a relatively long period of industrial peace, with one stand-out exception, the strike by Aer Lingus pilots that was finally resolved by the Labour Court. The year also featured some major employment law rulings, with record compensation amounts as well as the landmark HA O'Neil v Unite judgment, which showed the Supreme Court is now taking a somewhat different approach to industrial relations matters.

JANUARY:

An IRN analysis of over **150 published pay settlements** across 2023, showed that about half were in the 3-4% per annum range, with a third over 4%. Vouchers were the most commonly-used benefit agreed, featuring in a third of the deals.

Public service trade unions described an opening Government offer worth 8.5% over two and a half years - with rises of 12.5% for the lower paid - as "lacking credibility". The offer also included a further 2% worth of local bargaining increases to be paid during the lifetime of "the next public service agreement". The union side was seeking pay rises closer to the 10% mark.

Within weeks however, a **new Public Service Agreement** (2024-2026), was agreed at the WRC, mapping out basic pay increases of at least 9.25% from 1 January 2024 to 30 June 2026. In addition, under '**local bargaining**', 1% will be available in 2025, with a further 2% earmarked for a successor agreement.

It was estimated that the deal would be worth up to 17.3% for some **lower paid workers**, due to the flat rate payments that feature in four of the seven phases of the agreement.

The agreement also included a commitment to **honour a number of Labour Court recommendations** and issues in disputes that had already been the subject of binding decisions, or formal reviews, during the period covered by the previous agreement, Building Momentum.

A new research paper posited that the Irish courts "would be willing to recognise a constitutional right to collective bargaining", there being "no conflicting rights recognised by the Constitution that would frustrate" a new law providing for such a right. Authored by academics Alan Eustace and David Kenny, the conclusion was that the Irish Constitution "is not a barrier to a statutory **right to collective bargaining**, and that no constitutional change would be necessary to facilitate a statutory right of this sort."

Management at **Boliden Tara Mines** sought a "new style company union agreement" to enable a reopening of the mines, while the group of unions signalled they might ballot for industrial action, claiming the company had 'reneged' on its position regarding what was needed to recommence operations. The rescue plan would include scaling back numbers, a pay pause for 2024 and that a re-opening of the mine would depend on whether a new agreement could be agreed, implemented and maintained.

Aer Lingus pilots rejected the findings of an agreed joint pay tribunal, which found that the costs of a 2019 deal that included lifestyle-friendly work arrangements should be offset against

the pay terms agreed with other groups at the airline. The tribunal recommended that pilots should have their pre-Covid pay scales largely restored, and benefit from the same pay terms agreed with other groups. But 3.75% of these pay increases should be offset against the costs of their 2019 agreement.

The European Council's Committee of Social Rights rejected a claim by the secondary teachers' union, ASTI, that different treatment by the Government of its members versus TUI members during a 2016/17 dispute, influenced the choice of teachers as to which union they should join.

A study showed that private sector unions in Ireland had successfully managed the **transition from national to company level pay bargaining**. Drawing heavily on pay deals verified in IRN, the academic paper, by Professor Bill Roche of UCD and Valentina Paolucci of Maynooth University, challenged the prevailing European academic view of bargaining decentralisation as being negative for trade unions.

Members of the **Air Traffic Controllers (ATC)** branch of Fórsa in AirNav accepted new terms, drawn up by Kieran Mulvey, covering a call-in scheme, 'scale re-alignment' and improved pay for student controllers. The joint Internal Disputes Resolution Board (IDRB) had appointed Mr Mulvey to mediate on ATC staffing requirements. Their union, Fórsa, stated that "compliance with all relevant collective agreements is essential and members should cooperate fully with the operation of the call-in scheme in the normal manner".

The HSE advised '**Section 39' health and social care providers** that it was making arrangements to fund employers to allow them to comply with the first two phases of a pay deal negotiated at the Workplace Relations Commission in 2023. Section 39 pay, an issue at the start of 2024, was to re-emerge dramatically during the course of November's General Election.

A call by Ibec on the Government, to "pause all further **labour market policy measures** which involve a direct or indirect cost to employers", drew a critical response from trade unions. The question of employer costs versus new benefits for workers would ebb and flow throughout the year.

FEBRUARY:

Workplace Relations Commission proposals aimed at ending a work-to-rule over the **HSE's recruitment embargo** were backed by Fórsa clerical and admin grades. The HSE's embargo covered all grades, with the exception of 2023 graduate nurses and consultants, and was to re-emerge as a contested area again later in the year.

Audrey Cahill became the new Director General of the WRC, the first person from the private sector to lead the Commission. She previously held lead HR roles at major companies, such as Debenhams, Keelings and UPMC.

IRN recalled the long forgotten, 100-years old **Wigg-Cochrane** case, which had major implications for the pension entitlements of sitting civil servants following the hand-over of power from the British administration to the Irish Free State in December 1922. Historian Martin Maguire explained the importance of the case, which uniquely required an amendment to the Anglo-Irish Treaty in order to restore the authority of the new State.

Speaking in the Dáil, the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Simon Coveney, said the social partners were set to begin work on Ireland's '**action plan' to promote collective bargaining**. The plan was to form part of Ireland's obligations under Article 4 of the Directive on

Adequate Minimum Wages, which applies to Member States with collective bargaining coverage below 80%. But in an early blow to trade union hopes for legislation to support any measures, the Minister said there “is not the same demand for union membership in some sectors of the economy as there is in others” and that it “is far too early for the Government to be setting a specific target.”

Private sector unions under ICTU’s umbrella were advised to seek pay increases of 4-6% per annum in 2024. IRN commented that pay increases in this range would be in the upper third of pay settlements actually achieved in 2023, but that the Congress target range was not unexpected.

Ryanair and **Fórsa** concluded an agreement to further enhance the pay of directly employed pilots at Ryanair, providing for productivity-related increases of between €6,500 and €7,500 a year for captains. Essentially, IRN observed, the deal significantly ‘topped up’ the terms of an ongoing four-and-a-half year Comprehensive Labour Agreement (CLA), negotiated at the end of 2022 in the wake of Covid-19.

The Labour Court recommended that Unite the union should accept a 4% pay increase offer at **New Ireland Assurance**, part of the Bank of Ireland Group. The terms had already been accepted by two other unions in the group.

Updated figures provided to IRN showed that the Department of Social Protection’s ‘Scope’ Section’s continuing investigation of **employment status at RTÉ** showed that 67% of completed cases were determined to have ‘employee’ status. Of the 132 Scope decisions issued, 89 were found to have an employee status (Class A) while 43 were determined to be self-employed (Class S). IRN observed: “This is in stark contrast to the Eversheds review of RTÉ cases in 2018, which found 36% of workers reviewed had ‘attributes akin to employment.’” RTÉ had commissioned **Eversheds** to review its use of freelancers in 2017.

Bank of Ireland announced to its staff that, for the first time in 15 years, it could provide variable pay through the Group’s Profit Share Scheme. The range to be applied was between 2% and 5% of pay, depending on performance.

Health unions revealed that some ‘**Section 39**’ agencies had told them that they hadn’t received funding to pay agreed interim wage rises worth 5% for 2023, while others were apparently advised they would not be receiving any funding to pay the increases.

The Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI) introduced 24 weeks of paid leave for staff who are welcoming a child through surrogacy, with an extra 16 weeks’ unpaid leave also available. The new parent, while on leave, retains all of their annual leave, privilege and public holiday entitlements. All staff are eligible for the leave, regardless of their role or contract type.

MARCH:

The annual **IRN/CIPD survey of private sector pay** showed only a slight lowering of pay increases in 2023 compared to the previous year, with the average increase planned for 2024 at around the 4% mark. The 200 respondents to the survey said they increased pay by a median of 3.9% during 2023, while the average pay increase was 4.38%.

The same survey found that over 70% of **non-union firms** would not consider bargaining with trade unions. Regarding mooted reforms of Ireland’s IR framework, including a measure to

compel non-union employers to have ‘good faith’ engagement with trade unions, 73% of non-union companies still wouldn’t consider such collective bargaining.

Public Expenditure Minister Paschal Donohoe announced the establishment of the **Senior Posts Remuneration Committee**, whose work will include a review of pay rates of CEOs of Commercial State Bodies (CSBs). The Committee was to be chaired by chartered accountant Maeve Carton, with members including Bernie Gray (management consultant), Liam Kelly (former DG of the WRC), Mary Connaughton (Director of CIPD Ireland) and Ultan Courtney (Chair of the Low Pay Commission).

Aer Lingus warned its pilots that if agreement could not be reached on pay, its parent company IAG “will interpret this as the pilot body wanting an alternative future”. IAG would not invest further in Aer Lingus growth, “which will mean an inability to acquire new aircraft through IAG, with new aircraft being allocated elsewhere in the group”, IRN observed.

In what were the most significant industrial relations rulings in recent years, **HA O’Neil v Unite & Ors**, the Supreme Court revealed a “culture shift” in how it considers trade union activity, now stating the 1990 IR Act should be read “generously”. The rulings of O’Donnell CJ, Murray J and Hogan J, delivered in the strike injunction case involving Unite the union and a construction sector employer, signalled a shift in thinking of the Supreme Court that would also go against the grain of the view that the Court would strike down stronger legislation on collective bargaining as being unconstitutional.

Long-awaited **rights to request remote working and flexible working** came into force with the publication of a WRC Code of Practice. While the law granting these rights was enacted on 4 April 2023, these rights couldn’t be put into action until the Code of Practice was finalised.

At **PepsiCo’s** Little Island location, 240 SIPTU operatives accepted pay rises of 9.5% over 25 months. Meanwhile, a one-year deal worth 4% was agreed between consumer electronics manufacturer **Glen Dimplex** and SIPTU in Dunleer, Co. Louth.

A Department of Health circular detailed how the pay terms of the ‘**sectoral bargaining**’ clause under the Building Momentum agreement were to be applied to specific medical grades. IRN observed that the agreement “brings to an end a case in which the IMO won the backing of the Labour Court ... for an agreement the union had reached in principle with the HSE and the Department of Health”.

While seen as a formality, **public service trade union members** backed the new Public Service Agreement, 2024-2026, by large margins across 19 affiliates, with just one small union against the deal. The result in unions like SIPTU, Fórsa and the INMO were “comfortably over 90% in favour”, which was even higher than the margins in favour of the previous Building Momentum agreement.

APRIL:

An Post concluded a two-year pay deal worth 8% with the **Communications Workers Union (CWU)** – over three phases - covering 8,500 workers. IRN noted that it was the highest per annum deal at the company in 20 years.

Meanwhile at Eir, a deal between the company and the CWU provided for an 11% increase in basic pay over 33 months for those earning up to €50,000, and 10% for employees earning up to €70,000. It was “front-loaded”, delivering 6.5 % in the first 12 months for those below €50,000.

Uisce Éireann (Irish Water) and three unions, Fórsa, SIPTU and Unite, agreed a substantial two-year pay agreement following months of negotiations, which was expected to mean a total increase of at least 7.7% for over 1,200 employees.

At the German-owned automotive parts manufacturer, Kostal, a 33-month pay agreement worth 11%, covering almost 800 workers at two plants, was agreed with SIPTU.

A High Court ruling on the **pension scheme for CIE group managerial and clerical staff** would allow the company to continue seeking amendments to the scheme, but significantly raised the bar if the scheme was to see further deficits in future. The case arose from a challenge lodged in 2021 by the committee responsible for administering the scheme, against the implementation of a November 2020 Labour Court recommendation on the scheme's restructuring.

The largest Garda representative body, the **Garda Representative Association (GRA)**, announced at its annual conference its acceptance of the public service agreement and recommended to members that they should also back a new deal on rosters and working time. IRN commented, however, that "the unprecedented absence of both the Garda Commissioner and the Minister for Justice at its annual gathering highlighted continuing tensions between the 11,000-member association for rank-and-file Gardaí and the management side".

Employer body Ibec "demonstrated its influence on shaping employment regulation at its annual employment law conference ... in the context of new rights for employees and new rules for employers", according to IRN. Director of employer relations, **Maeve McElwee**, said they were not against the principle of regulation in the employment space, nor were they seeking to row back on existing rights, but Ibec believed that extra costs had come about in an "uncoordinated" fashion, thereby impacting employers' ability "to nurture employee relations within their organizations."

MAY:

A major €30m restructuring deal - agreed with the help of the WRC – was set to facilitate a gradual reopening of **Boliden Tara Mines**, after being decisively approved in trade union ballots. It provided for lump sum payments totalling €2,500 (mostly tax free vouchers), a revised roster, on-call allowances, outsourcing of some functions and a one-off voluntary severance scheme. Also agreed was a new dispute resolution procedure, with room for binding decisions with respect to interpretation of the agreement. Union recruitment at the site would also be facilitated.

A three-year pay deal worth 10% over a 3-year period was agreed for 180 SIPTU members at multinational medical devices manufacturer, **Beckman Coulter**, Co. Clare,

A **joint survey of secondary teachers** found that 81.7% of TUI members and 85.4% of ASTI members were in favour of "forming one single education union representing post primary, further and higher education". It was a possible step on the road to a merger, a goal held for decades by many union activists and members but which has remained elusive.

Somewhere between 30% and 37% of the work performed at RTÉ in the years 2018-2020 was conducted by "independent contractors", not employees, according to the long awaited expert advisory committee (EAC) report into HR practices at RTÉ. It found that in the context of where the use of **independent contractors** is still being investigated by the Department of Social Protection's Scope section – which had earlier identified misclassification in 67% of cases – the "high level of [contractors] over a period of years was neither credible or sustainable".

Long associated with the State's successful moves to attract foreign investment, **Liebherr**, the German-Swiss crane manufacturer, which arrived in Ireland in 1958, negotiated a 30-month pay agreement for over 300 workers at its plant in Killarney. Agreed with SIPTU and Connect, and with the assistance of Brendan Cunningham of the WRC, it provided for 10.3% in pay increases on a phased basis. It was the first pay deal at Liebherr since a 2019 rescue plan after a period that saw rolling industrial action. Workers had been put on a three-day week in 2018 and their sick pay scheme suspended in the wake of difficulties the employer was facing at that time.

Some 1,300 unionised workers (SIPTU and Connect) at Waterford-based contact lens manufacturer, **Bausch & Lomb**, backed a pay deal worth 11.7% over three years. It was negotiated with the help of the WRC, and included non-pay elements like sick leave, absence management, flexi-hours, and a new starter rate. The parties "recommitted" to a workplace innovation initiative through the company and the Ideas Institute.

The 2023 annual report from the WRC showed a large increase in activity across conciliation, mediation and adjudication, with 'significant trends' emerging, according to its new **Director General Audrey Cahill**. Demand for IR conciliation was up by 17%, while there was a 50% increase in adjudication decisions since 2022. Audrey Cahill said that 2023 was the year when the WRC "saw its first full year of normal services since 2019".

At **Aer Lingus** meanwhile, warning lights were flashing 'red' as pilots moved closer to a summer strike over pay, even though "both sides have good reason to avoid a damaging row", IRN observed.

The Supreme Court rejected the appeal of a county sheriff, Seamus Mallon, who was **mandatorily retired** at age 70. The ruling reset the approach to the application of **retirement ages**, steering away from 'individual assessment' – which is not required under EU law, according to the Court of Justice.

JUNE:

An **academic analysis of pay bargaining** since the financial crisis found ample evidence that "well-articulated" and "flexible" coordination has characterised private sector pay bargaining here. Professor Roche and Dr Valentina Paolucci found that post-crash pay deals have also been economically sustainable, pointing out that employers have not sought an alternative model. The pay bargaining system has also maintained Ireland's competitiveness, while levels of industrial conflict remain historically low.

IRN observed that the pay dispute between **Aer Lingus and its pilot union IALPA/Fórsa** "looks set to test the State's dispute resolution system". A decision by the pilots to go for an initial work-to-rule, rather than full strike action, "could elongate the industrial conflict over pay deeper into the summer season", IRN suggested.

Two year pay deals were agreed between SIPTU and **Abbott Nutrition** at separate plants, one at Cootehill, Co. Cavan, the other at Carbery Point in Sligo town. At the larger Cootehill location, where 250 operatives are employed, the terms provided for 7.8% in pay rises over 24 months. At the smaller Sligo operation, the terms were for 7.5% in total over 24 months.

Speaking at a special trade union seminar on the **Adequate Minimum Wages Directive**, Professor John Geary (UCD), held that while the Directive was important, he was "not optimistic" about its transposition, commenting that there is "enormous pressure" on the State to "leave things as they are". **ICTU General Secretary, Owen Reidy**, acknowledged "the state of

play is not good”, warning that if the Government didn’t legislate for the recommendations of the High Level Group on collective bargaining there was a serious question over whether social dialogue - in its current form – could be “viable, sustainable and meaningful”.

JULY:

Facing into one of its most challenging industrial relations disputes in years, the Labour Court heard from the **IALPA pilots branch of the Fórsa trade union** that Aer Lingus had to concede a 23.88% pay increase without any productivity concessions. Set against a company offer of 12.25%, already agreed with all other unionised groups at the airline, the pilots’ stance meant the chance of averting industrial action was slim to zero.

An **inflation review clause** formed part of a two-year pay deal at the Automobile Association (AA), worth 6.75% for 250 SIPTU members. If inflation exceeded 4.5% on average for the first six months of 2025, the parties were “to undertake a review of the agreement, on a ‘without commitment’ basis”.

Meanwhile, at **American Airlines** contact centre staff, members of the CWU, enjoyed a 7.8% pay rise in their ‘inflation plus’ deal. It comprised a 4.5% rise in year one, with the following two years providing for a basic pay increase that matched the average rate inflation, plus 1.5%.

Pay reduction measures under the **Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Acts (FEMPI)** had “achieved their objective” and had now been “fully unwound”, according to the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, Paschal Donohoe.

The temporary scheme of paid leave for some 250 public health workers still unfit for work due to ‘**Long Covid**’ was extended yet again – this time for a full 12 months. The trade unions, however, were still seeking a long-term occupational scheme that would benefit new claimants, not just those who were accepted into the scheme in 2022.

Former **Supreme Court Justice Hugh Geoghegan**, who served on the Court between 2000 and 2010, and best known in the IR sphere for his 2007 Ryanair decision, died aged 86. *Ryanair v The Labour Court (2007)* effectively emasculated the 2001-2004 Industrial Relations Acts before it was substantially amended in 2015.

HSE Chief Executive, Bernard Gloster, said the new “affordable” ceiling for **public healthcare recruitment** was 129,700, a target that the trade unions said meant that vacancies committed up to the end of 2023 had been “effectively suppressed”.

Aer Lingus pilots ended their work-to-rule after backing a **Labour Court recommendation** for a 17.75% pay increase over four years. IRN commented that the deal ended a damaging dispute that had resulted in 610 flight cancellations over three weeks.

In the case of *An Bord Banistíochta, Gaelscoil Moshíológ*, the Supreme Court reaffirmed that orders of **reinstatement or re-engagement** in unfair dismissal scenarios are an “exceptional” remedy, and that “proper consideration” has to be given when making such an order by decision makers.

AUGUST:

External **WRC adjudication officers** were preparing to bring a pay claim to the Labour Court, seeking a rise in their daily rate (€525) that hadn’t increased since before the Covid pandemic.

They referred their claim to the Court, under section 20(1) of the 1969 IR Act, which meant it would only be binding on the claimants.

A 21% pay increase over three years, front-loaded at 15%, was agreed for 200 SIPTU motor mechanics, employed by members of the **Society of the Irish Motor Industry (SIMI)**.

The privately-owned bus operator **Aircoach and SIPTU** agreed a pay rise of 4.8% over 9 months, plus the introduction of new rosters for the majority of drivers.

ICTU health unions told the HSE that an 'Action Plan' submitted to the Department of Public Expenditure & Reform went "far beyond" obligations signed up to under the public service pay agreement. The plan was one of many submitted across various departments that were required to allow for formal 'sign off' regarding a pay rise worth one per cent (dated June 1, 2024) under phase two of the public service pay deal.

SEPTEMBER:

The Labour Court criticised what IRN observed was "**a remarkable instruction**" by the **Department Public Expenditure & Reform (DPER)** to the Department of Enterprise (DETE), not to attend a Court hearing on a pay claim by WRC external adjudicators.

In its letter, DPER told DETE: "Without a complete understanding of the clear basis for attendance at the Labour Court, the Labour Court's invitation to avail of its services in relation to this matter should not be accepted by your Department". In response, the Labour Court said that successive Governments and Ministers since 1946 "have publicly endorsed the proposition that disputing parties should engage with the institutions of the State to assist in the resolution of trade disputes."

The Labour Court rejected the appeals of a JP Charpentier, a lead member of the Verizon European Works Council (EWC), in what was the first case of its kind heard at the Court. The rulings, though appealed to the High Court on points of law, identified the absence of a route to take a collective dispute, which many argue puts Ireland's **Transnational Information and Consultation of Employees Act** at odds with the EWC Directive.

A WRC adjudication decision awarded a former **Twitter/'X'** executive a record unfair dismissal award of €550,000. The previous March, the record for the highest compensation award at the WRC, €464,000, had been set in a decision involving a music industry executive and Xhail Ireland, but the Twitter case surpassed that in August.

An **IRN survey of private sector pay** deals found that agreements remained "mostly over 3% per annum, with about a third over the 4% mark". IRN commented: "While inflation has declined to just 2.2% in June and July of 2024, pay settlements have not yet reduced in response to this. Many unions see lower inflation as an opportunity to recoup some of the real wage losses incurred by members when inflation was higher."

Meanwhile, an Ibec '**HR Update**' survey found that 85% of employers increased basic pay by an average of 4.1% in 2024, with an average pay lift of 3.4% planned for 2025.

A three-year pay deal at **Roadstone**, part of the CRH plc group, covering hundreds of SIPTU and Mandate members at around 40 locations around the country, provided for pay increases of 10.85% over 36 months, with an opening phase worth 4% from June, 2024.

A ‘**right to request remote work**’ case, taken under the Work Life Balance and Miscellaneous Provisions Act, involved a TikTok employee. Her case was unsuccessful, as have cases that surfaced later in the year. IRN notes that a pattern is emerging of unrepresented employees in the tech sector taking such claims, but arguably without a full understanding of what rights the law offers to workers.

Another one-day strike by the Unite trade union, affecting several members of the **Mechanical Engineering Building Services Association** (MEBSCA), resulted in pickets at four major construction sites, including two flagship Pfizer projects in Grange Castle and Ringaskiddy. The action was in pursuit of the union’s claim for the restoration of one hour’s payment per day for travelling to building sites. The employers group called on the ICTU to use its “offices” to bring an end to the dispute.

A significant ruling of the WRC (ADJ-00050138) found that Amcor Flexibles’ **sick leave scheme** was less favourable than the 2022 Sick Leave Act provisions, the first successful case of its kind. The adjudicator outlined several issues that legislators may need to consider in how the Sick Leave Act is operating in practice. The change from three days to five days statutory sick leave, in 2024, may mean some employers have to rethink their sick pay scheme in comparison to the statutory provisions.

Pepsico and SIPTU agreed an 8% increase in basic pay for 250 operatives at the multinational’s largest Irish plant, in return for the liability to work a new **24-hour, five-day shift system**. IRN noted that the increase was separate “and in addition to” a general round pay deal reached at the Little Island plant in Cork earlier in the year, worth 9.5% over 25 months.

A ballot on a proposed 5-year agreement between **AirNav and Fórsa** was delayed, due to a hitch over the issue of rosters for air traffic controllers (ATCs). The proposed agreement was described as a “comprehensive settlement”, covering basic pay – rises of 16% plus sectoral bargaining (1%) – rosters, salary scales, pensionable pay and recruitment.

OCTOBER:

Up to 600 unionised and non-union workers at **GE Healthcare** in Co Cork accepted a pay deal worth 10% over two and half years, recommended by an independently chaired ‘Orderly Dispute Resolution Framework (ODRF)’, which has been chaired by IR consultant, Jim O’Connell, since 2017. SIPTU was the main union involved, with Connect also having members.

Responding to ongoing trade union protests over the “suppression” of posts in the public health system, both the **Department of Health and the HSE** countered that the level of investment in the workforce in 2023 had been the highest since the HSE was founded. The unions protested that thousands of posts had been removed, despite the formal lifting of a recruitment embargo in June.

A new book, ‘The Labour Court, 1946-2021: A History of the Seventy-Five Years of the Labour Court’, charted – in two parts - the history of the Court, from its post-World War Two beginning, right up to the present time, with the Court now the single appellate court for industrial relations and employment law claims. Part one of the publication, covering the Court’s first 50 years, is a re-print of a book published in the 1990s; the second part, covering 1996-2021, was jointly authored by IRN’s Andy Prendergast and Colman Higgins.

A collective bargaining agreement was concluded between the previously non-union **Sky Handling Partner and SIPTU**, after several months of negotiations with the assistance of the WRC. The company employs over 200 workers, most of whom are members of the union.

Stratis Consulting advised that pay settlements should moderate to a lower rate of increase so as to avoid negative effects on Ireland's competitiveness, pointing to a preferred 2.5% to 3.5% pay range for 2025. The consultancy said that as the labour market remains tight, pay moderation might be a challenge for employers, coupled with the 'acceleration' to the national living wage by 2026.

Aer Lingus agreed to apply a 1.5% permanent pay increase and a tax free voucher to its **non-pilot staff** from October 1, 2025, a deal that had been expected in the wake of the settlement terms achieved by pilots after their industrial action in July. The effect was to enhance an already agreed deal worth 12.25% over three years for the non-pilot workforce.

A **four-day, 39-hour week** was negotiated for maintenance craft workers in Dublin Bus, but with the option of remaining on five-day working. Three unions representing over 200 workers were involved: Connect, SIPTU and Unite. The terms differed from the four-day week sought by some groups in recent years, "in that the same number of hours as five days is concentrated into four days", although the unions retained the aspiration to reduce weekly hours for the same pay at some point in the future.

Hundreds of SIPTU members across two **Citizens Information** centres and related members in the National Advocacy Service (NAS), agreed a new pay deal worth 8%, as well as a new process covering future pay determination. The union had balloted for industrial action and engaged in a brief strike at the NAS.

ICTU General Secretary Owen Reidy, focussing on collective bargaining at SIPTU's Manufacturing conference, said the Irish state has been "at best a passive bystander" and "at worst an inhibitor and denier" on collective bargaining. Meanwhile, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment was "very conservative", with more 'enterprise and trade' in its approach than 'employment', he said.

NOVEMBER:

In the **mechanical engineering sector**, a new pay proposal brokered by the WRC for around 1,500 plumbers and pipefitters in two unions, Connect and Unite, would mean 6.6% in pay increases over 25 months, if accepted.

Health unions questioned a **proposed binding appeals process** in cases where individual HSE staff object to management 'reassignment' decisions. The planned appeals process was contained in a draft document, seen by IRN, covering the HSE's six new Health Regions.

The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment confirmed its position that no legislation was required to transpose the Adequate Minimum Wages Directive, which obliges the Irish State to promote **collective bargaining**.

A new survey on the characteristics of the '**free-riders**' - workers who are not members of a union but benefit from collective bargaining – found that over 35% of workers at unionised employers are 'free-riders'. '*Who are the union free-riders in Ireland? Evidence from the Working in Ireland Survey*' by UCD's Professor John Geary and Dr María Jesús Belizón Cebada, looked at younger, non-unionised workers, in particular.

A 3-year agreement on pay, worth 9%, at the **Royal College of Surgeons** in Ireland included an **inflation review clause**. Concluded with SIPTU and the Irish Federation of University Lecturers (IFUT), the clause says that if annual inflation – defined by the Consumer Price Index – is greater than 3% as of June 1, 2026, the parties are to review their agreement on a ‘without commitment’ basis.

Following lengthy negotiations, **AirNav** staff - members of Fórsa - finally voted to accept a comprehensive labour agreement (CLA) recommended by the union, which included a pay rise of up to 17% over 5 years. The commercial semi-state employs around 600, managing air traffic within Irish airspace. Importantly, the agreement allows for service continuity and a requirement “for continued flexibility in rostering”.

Sinn Féin, the Labour Party and the Social Democrats all backed a right to collective bargaining in their **general election manifestoes**. Of the two main Government parties, Fianna Fáil didn’t mention the issue in its manifesto, while Fine Gael promised to publish “an Action Plan for collective bargaining in 2025” and “if necessary, bring forward legislation to support this initiative”. Fianna Fail’s manifesto claimed ownership of **social partnership** as a concept, stating it wanted to conclude a new “national wage deal” when the current public service one expires.

A pay offer of between 4% and 7% over 12 months was made to AIB staff, plus other benefits, such as 10 days’ paid foster leave and the development of a new menstrual health policy for staff.

At Coillte, a three-year pay deal worth 6.5% over 3 years, which included a significant new flat rate pensionable allowance and increases to existing allowances, was agreed between the State forestry company and SIPTU.

Talks on a new pay agreement for workers in state-funded health and social care ‘**Section 39’ organisations** were at an impasse, after government negotiators told trade unions they had no mandate to concede on the issue of pay parity. This was despite firm commitments made in the election manifestoes of both Fianna Fail and Fine Gael to accord parity to this group.

Non-disclosure agreements within remit of discrimination were broadly banned with the passing of the Maternity Protection, Employment Equality and Preservation of Certain Records Act. There are still exceptions to the ban, such as a mediation agreement formed at the WRC.

Tesco Ireland announced a 3% pay increase, as well as a range of other benefits, for retail and warehouse staff, for 2025. Despite mediation attempts in 2024 to form a new IR framework between the employer and the Mandate and SIPTU trade unions, this proved unsuccessful and Tesco decided on the pay increase. Mandate and SIPTU expressed displeasure with the 3% pay increase, with some protests following in December.

DECEMBER:

IRN reported that the **ICTU’s annual private sector committee pay guidance** was based on viewing 2025 as a year of ‘catch-up, “with real wage growth returning this year, having been negative since late 2021”. The Congress committee’s target range of 4% to 7% was similar to its pay target range for 2024 – the main difference being that inflation fell throughout 2024.

Following on from the **Coillte**-SIPTU agreement in November, it was revealed that the semi-state had concluded a four-year deal on pay and benefits with Forsa, providing for adjustments

and a 'refresh' of five existing pay bands, base pay increases and pay progression as well as other benefit improvements.

Almost 1,000 workers at food producer Tirlán – formerly Glanbia - accepted a 40-month pay agreement, which provides for 12% worth of pay rises over 40 months. The unions involved, SIPTU, Unite and Connect, also committed to engage on a future pay agreement following the expiry of the deal.

The ESRI said **real wage growth** would come in at around 2.9% for 2024, predicting it would increase to 4% in 2025. The increase in real wage growth was attributed to a faster than expected fall in inflation, with the Consumer Price Index expected to average 2.1% for year, and just 1% in 2025.

IRN examined the question of **direct public sector provision of childcare services**, a promise made by several parties in the recent General Election campaign, which would have potential IR implications for the 30,000 workers in the sector. The emphasis on direct public provision, even if alongside existing privately-owned commercial and community facilities, would raise questions such as: “would these workers be full public servants, like teachers in primary schools, or employees of a state-owned commercial or non-commercial agency?”

Former Taoiseach, **Leo Varadkar**, suggested that when they enter talks on a new pay deal, health trade unions should consider **the idea of a 'pay envelope'**, within which issues like skill mix and re-assignment could be negotiated. Speaking at an Irish Medical Organisation lecture, he said when they are in negotiations and “people from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform say doctors in Ireland are among the best paid in the world, you can tell them civil servants are among the best paid in the world”.

Dunnes Stores announced a 5% increase for its employees, a headline pay increase in a lower paid sector. **Mandate**, while welcoming the pay lift, noted there are other aspects, such as paid maternity and paternity leave, which remain unaddressed.

Becton Dickinson workers, members of SIPTU, accepted an enhanced severance package that was negotiated over the closure of the company's plant in Drogheda. Industrial action had taken place at the site after the closure announcement in July. The parties used local discussions, external mediation (under former Labour Court Chairman Kevin Duffy) and conciliation under the auspices of the Workplace Relations Commission, before landing at a deal.