



# NO GOING BACK



STRONGER TOGETHER  
**CONGRESS**  
Northern Ireland Committee  
Irish Congress of Trade Unions

## Biennial Delegate Conference | 2021

23 March 2021

## Membership of the Northern Ireland Committee 2018-20

|                  |              |                          |            |            |                                  |
|------------------|--------------|--------------------------|------------|------------|----------------------------------|
| Chairperson      | G Murphy     | INTO                     | Ex-Officio | S Nunan    | President ICTU (July 17 to 2019) |
| Vice-Chairperson | A Millar     | NIPSA                    |            | P King     | General Secretary ICTU           |
|                  |              |                          |            | O Reidy    | Asst. General Secretary          |
| Members          | J Pollock    | UNITE                    | Observers  | M Galloway | Retired Workers Committee        |
|                  | D Harte      | Craigavon Trades Council |            | S Harvey   | Youth Committee                  |
|                  | J White      | UTU                      |            |            |                                  |
|                  | D Kennedy    | CWU                      |            |            |                                  |
|                  | K Clarke     | UCU                      |            |            |                                  |
|                  | P Wolfe      | PCS                      |            |            |                                  |
|                  | D Walker     | GMB                      |            |            |                                  |
|                  | A Speed      | UNISON                   |            |            |                                  |
|                  | P McKeown    | UNISON                   |            |            |                                  |
|                  | N McNally    | SIPTU                    |            |            |                                  |
|                  | P Mackel     | GMB                      |            |            |                                  |
|                  | J McCamphill | NASUWT                   |            |            |                                  |
|                  | M Lafferty   | USDAW                    |            |            |                                  |
|                  | T Trainor    | UNITE                    |            |            |                                  |
|                  | J Quinn      | FBU                      |            |            |                                  |
|                  | M Morgan     | NIPSA                    |            |            |                                  |

### Attendance at Meetings

At the time of preparing this report 20 meetings were held during the 2018-20 period. The following is the attendance record of the NIC members:

|           |    |            |    |              |    |
|-----------|----|------------|----|--------------|----|
| J Pollock | 3  | M Morgan   | 12 | K Clarke     | 9  |
| D Kennedy | 8  | M McNally  | 16 | P Mackel     | 17 |
| A Millar  | 17 | J Quinn    | 3  | J McCamphill | 17 |
| P Wolfe   | 9  | M Lafferty | 14 | A Speed      | 20 |
| T Trainor | 19 | J White    | 13 | P McKeown    | 16 |
| G Murphy  | 19 | D Harte    | 16 | D Walker     | 13 |

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This report covers the activity of NIC-ICTU for the period February 2020 - March 2021.

It is a supplement to the 2018-20 Report prepared for the BDC planned for March 2020 which was postponed. That report is online and can be read [here](#):

**Our Rights  
Our Future**  
*Organising for change*

Northern Ireland Committee  
Irish Congress of Trade Unions

**Biennial Delegate  
Conference**  
25-26 March 2020

# Section A Introduction

## A1 Introduction

**Owen Reidy**

Assistant General Secretary, ICTU



This report reflects the work of the NIC-ICTU from 2020 up to February 2021. It should be read in addition to the report detailing our work from 2018-20 previously issued to you.

The last 12 months has been an unprecedented time in all our lives. The world has been gripped by the Covid 19 pandemic which has changed everything for everyone to varying degrees. 12 months ago when we deferred our NIC-ICTU BDC until the September 2020 none of us fully appreciated how our lives were going to change fundamentally.

At the outset of this report I want to pay tribute to the frontline heroes, from both the public and private sectors right across our trade union movement and beyond who have gone to work every day in the knowledge that notwithstanding the best efforts of health and safety protocols, they were taking calculated risks with their safety to protect and support others in our society and in our economy. Indeed, many have paid with their health and sadly some with their lives and we take this opportunity to express our gratitude and solidarity to all our members and their families who have been touched by this disease.

Our duty as a trade union movement is to relentlessly and strategically pursue an objective to ensure that work truly pays for everyone, as we have seen clearly for many of our truly essential workers, it has not to date. We must now harness that growing public mood that thirsts for a better, fairer society and a more inclusive and participatory economy. The time for this has never been more important. Our movement must equip itself with the means to truly deliver for all workers as we emerge from this pandemic.

To that end there can be No Going Back to the old ways of an under resourced state, with a penal social security system that's punishes rather than protects people. There must be No Going Back to the years of austerity, as it is neither necessary nor right and wholly counter-productive. We must ensure that there is tax equity and justice and that those businesses that have rightly been supported through this pandemic pay their fair share when it comes to tax on national insurance. We can have a more interventionist active state which supports a vibrant and inclusive private sector but it will not come about by chance. Trade unions must now reach out beyond their membership and build progressive alliances across society and deliver on our mission now more than ever.

This is why the ICTU Executive published the paper 'No Going Back – A New Deal toward a Safe and Secure Future for All.' This paper highlights the need for change in both jurisdictions on the island of Ireland around our economy, our health system, the promotion of real collective bargaining rights, a green new deal, a more inclusive education system, a fair social security system and better housing amongst many other policies. Crucially we outline how such a society and economy can be funded. With some modest actions, an additional £3.6bn could be generated to the NI Executive.

It is our obligation to build a momentum around these issues and truly play our role in this society by seeking to make some of these achievable, realisable and extremely necessary ambitions a reality over the next decade and beyond. Our members deserve no less.

## A2 Obituaries

The Committee records with regret the death of a number of colleagues who would be well known to delegates.

### Denis Keatings



Denis Keatings was Joint Regional Convenor of UNISON NI and regularly assisted the smooth running of the NIC-ICTU BDC as a member of the Conference Arrangements Committee. He was also an active member of the NIC-ICTU Health Committee.

His sudden Covid-related passing in May 2020 caused great shock to his colleagues in Unison, an affiliate hard hit during the pandemic with many

members falling ill or dying after being infected while delivering essential health care. His Regional Secretary Patricia McKeown paid this tribute:

*"Denis joined NUPE in the 1970s and was part of the historic struggle known as the Winter of Discontent, when public service workers engaged in sustained strike action for pay justice. For his fearless leadership Denis was soon elected as Convenor of the Mater Hospital, then part of the NUPE's largest branch, North & West Belfast District Health Branch, covering the Mater, the Royal Victoria Hospitals and social services across the North and West of the city.*

*"He campaigned for equal pay for the women cleaners, successfully spearheaded the fight against privatization of catering and cleaning services at the Mater and supported our members through some of the darkest times of 'the Troubles'.*

*"Denis was a trade unionist to his core. He wanted nothing more than justice and fair treatment for our members and they in turn loved him for it. We all did. He was a big, fearless, loyal fighter with a generous heart. There was no task he would not tackle, serving the members in the workplace, across Northern Ireland, at UNISON UK level and in the ICTU.*

*"We are proud to call Denis a UNISON activist. We pay tribute to the enormous contribution he has made to our union. We will miss him deeply. We send our love to his partner Elaine and his whole family."*



## Mel Corry



Mel Corry was a committed trade unionist who served on Craigavon Trades Council, a musician who graced many trade union rallies and benefit gigs, a lecturer in trade union studies for ICTU as well as Unite, and a key community relations worker delivering anti sectarian and anti racist training for Trademark.

His obituary in the Morning Star summarised much of his work:

*"During his 13 years with Trademark, he was at the centre of everything positive the organisation did and achieved. Working alongside the late Joe Law, he developed and delivered pioneering anti-sectarian training on the shop floor and in communities.*

*"In more recent years, he established new and fruitful relationships with marginalised republican and loyalist constituencies as well as helping to resolve sectarian disputes in a number of workplaces. In the wake of the 2007-8 financial crash, Mel was central to the development of Trademark's new political education programmes for trade union, community and political activists. Over the years he delivered these impactful programmes to hundreds of people, in community centres and parish halls, pubs and social clubs. He would travel for hours, at all times and in all weather, to fulfil his commitment to this vocation."*



## Section B Conference Resolutions



### B1 Introduction

See the 2020 report for details of motions discussed and passed at the 2018 BDC and how they were actioned and implemented.

**B**

Conference Resolutions

**NO GOING  
BACK**

Biennial Delegate Conference **2021**

**B**

Conference Resolutions



## Section C Trade Union Organisation

### C1 Officers of the Northern Ireland Committee 2016-18

At its meeting held in April 2018, the Committee elected the following Officers:

Chairperson: Gerry Murphy (INTO)

Vice-Chairperson: Alison Millar (NIPSA)

**NOTE:** The outbreak of Coronavirus led to a public health emergency in mid-March 2020, and as a result the planned NIC-ICTU BDC scheduled for 25/26 March was postponed.



The immediate consequence was that the mandate of the 2018-20 NIC membership would be extended until the postponed BDC could be safely arranged. At the April meeting of the NIC, the first to be hosted on Zoom, it was agreed that the four incoming members be invited to attend as observers until the formal election of the NIC after the postponed BDC. It was also agreed that the occupants of the positions of Chair and vice-Chair continue until the BDC. The sole nominations for those incoming officer posts, Alison Millar and Paddy Mackel, agreed to this and Paddy joined the F&GPC to attend its meetings.

The incoming 'observer' NIC members participated fully in the activities and discussions at that and all subsequent NIC meetings, as did those outgoing NIC members who wished to continue their participation.

We are grateful to those who extended their service: Anne Speed (Unison); Katherine Clarke (UCU) and Maria Morgan. Paul Wolfe resigned in 2019.

The incoming members of the 2020-22 mandate are:



John-Patrick Clayton  
(Unison)



Angela Moffatt  
(Prospect)



Helena McSherry  
(NIPSA)



Gayle Mathews  
(PCS)

Every regular monthly meeting of the NIC was held using Zoom, as were a number of special briefings on Covid-related matters, such as the Engagement Forum.

## C2 Staff

The following refers to the staff in the Northern Ireland Office during 2018-21, some of whom have moved on to other employment or retirement:

|                                         |                                                   |
|-----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| Assistant General Secretary             | Owen Reidy                                        |
| Education, Training & Lifelong Learning | Kevin Doherty                                     |
| Finance & Programme Manager             | Gillian Allen                                     |
| Equality & Social Affairs               | Clare Moore                                       |
| Policy & Communications                 | John O'Farrell                                    |
| Project Officers                        | Julie Gorman                                      |
| Administrative Staff                    | Tony Gallagher<br>Eileen Gorman<br>(Retired 2019) |



### C3 Women's Committee

The work of the Women's Committee is contained in Section G of this report, along with the other equality committees.

### C4 Youth Committee

The Youth Committee continues to be a vibrant part of our work and organisation and has been integral to the online campaigning and socially distanced support for workers and students as well as being active in addressing issues facing young people in Northern Ireland.



## C5 Global Solidarity

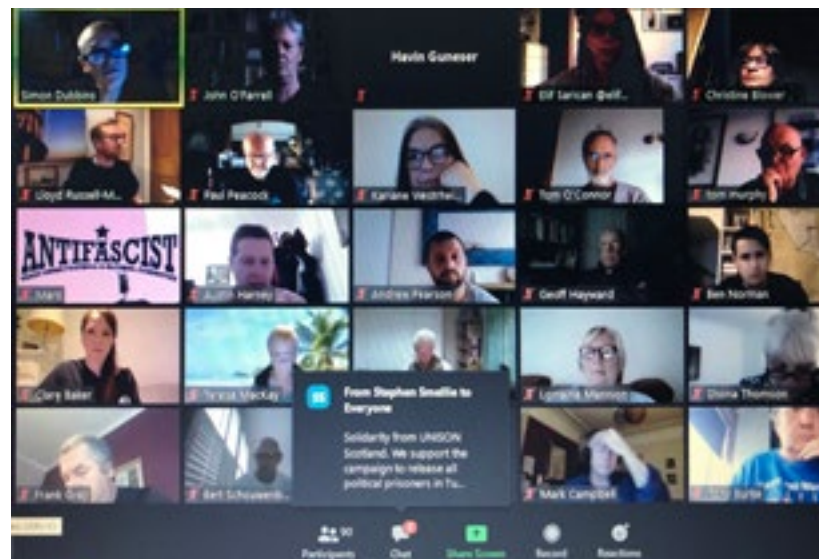
NOTE THE 2018-20 PERIOD IS COVERED FROM PAGE 22 OF THE [2020 BDC REPORT](#)

The NI Global Solidarity Committee has been involved in raising public awareness around the movement, in relation to human trafficking, the human rights situation in Columbia and the political and humanitarian crisis in Palestine.

The following affiliates are represented: INTO, UTU, NASUWT, Unison, NIPSA, SIPTU Prospect, Unite, Equity, Congress Youth committee and several trades councils. From 2018 until February 2021, the chair has been Kevin Daly (INTO) with Paddy Mackel (Belfast Trades Council) as Vice-Chair. The committee was reconstituted in 2021 and the committee is now led by Dooley Harte (Craigavon Trades Council) as Chair and Paddy Mackel (Belfast & Dirstict Trades Council) as Vice-Chair.

The committee was reconstituted in February 2021 and is developing a work programme in co-operation with the all-island ICTU Global Solidarity committee.

The disruption caused by the pandemic limited meetings of the committee, but the necessity of using new technology meant that both Global Solidarity committees in the two jurisdictions could work together and host a series of informative and often challenging talks and seminars from experts from around the world.



Beginning in June, under the banner of Congress Global Solidarity, a series of briefings was organised in order to provide opportunities for Trade Unionists in both jurisdictions to hear about the impact and responses to Covid19 from around the world and how trade unions are struggling to promote the interests of their members – many in the frontline.

Beginning with Latin America, we heard from two of the most affected countries, Brazil and Colombia, where health systems are under pressure and yet restrictions were being lifted.

To discuss the situation in Brazil, Congress Global Solidarity secured Alex Praça, the Human and Trade Unions Rights advisor for the Americas for the International Trade



Union Confederation. The update on the situation in Colombia was delivered by Nick MacWilliam, Trade Unions and Programmes Officer at Justice for Colombia, who has spent several years working in Latin America as a freelance journalist and translator.

ICTU President Gerry Murphy hosted a webinar in July. Omar Barghouti, co-founder of the nonviolent Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement for Palestinian rights, Fatin Al Tamimi, Chairperson of the Ireland-Palestine Solidarity Campaign (IPSC), Eamon McMahon, Trade Union Friends of Palestine and Senator Frances Black were among the speakers at the webinar discussing Israel's plans to annex parts of the West Bank and Jordan Valley and what political measures must be taken to resist.

Global briefings held and discussion on an autumn programme, including two in September 'Using development cooperation to build back better' (DG Irish Aid and ITUC) and on the 'Global March against Child Labour' and the ITUC.

The ICTU General Secretary delivered an input at the July online rally Freedom for Ocalan expressing support for the Kurds in northern Syria facing attacks from the Turkish army, the Syrian regime, its Russian backers and the remnants of Da'esh/ ISIL.

Support was further expressed for CUT Brazil day of action in August - and pro-democracy protests and strikes

in Belarus. Solidarity was also stated with people of Lebanon and the trade unionists of Hong Kong.

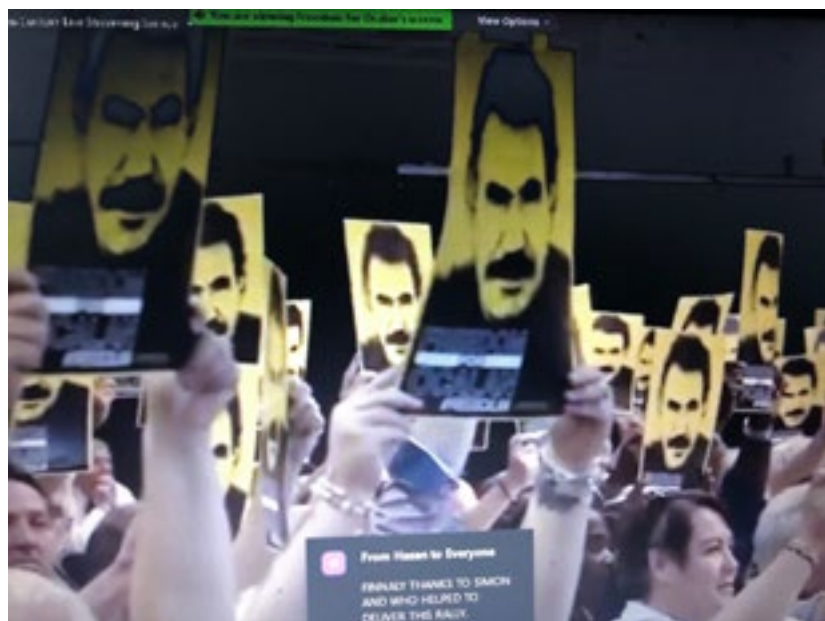
Congress supported calls for release of Palestinian Human Rights defender, Mahmoud Nawajaa, who was subsequently released in August. More recently, Congress issued statements against the re-imposition of military rule in Myanmar/ Burma, and the forced relocation of Rohingya refugees by authorities in Bangladesh.

TUFP's September webinar included Jamal Juma' from the West Bank and Dina Nasser from East Jerusalem, Eamon McMahon, Northern Secretary, TUFP, and was chaired by Phil Ní Sheaghda, General Secretary, INMO.



## Refugees and Asylum Seekers

NIC-ICTU is represented on the Steering Committee of Belfast City of Sanctuary, whose work welcoming refugees and asylum seekers has been supported by many affiliates. Many Global Solidarity activists promoted online solidarity events with migrants. Workshops on Employment Rights for refugees have also been delivered.



## Trade Union Friends of Palestine

Although the COVID 19 pandemic has restricted the organising of meetings, conferences and public demonstrations, TUFPP has continued to meet regularly online to mobilise solidarity action by networking with affiliates and encouraging active campaigning work.

We continue to provide frequent updates and news bulletins, reports, calls for action, petitions, and campaign endorsements. We have also hosted film screenings and webinars to highlight the harsh injustices faced by the Palestinian people under the illegal Israeli occupation, settler colonisation, and apartheid.

This work is even more important given the intensification of ethnic cleansing, demolitions and effective annexation of the majority of the West Bank. The associated human cost is the mass imprisonment of Palestinians, including hundreds of Palestinian children seized from their beds, and the frequent and casual killings of Palestinian workers.

Over the last year we have mobilised the membership on a number of interventions addressing these grave human rights abuses. We made a significant contribution to the global campaign for the release of Palestinian human rights defender and BDS coordinator Mahmoud Nawajaa who had been detained by the Israeli internal security Shin Bet. The Irish Congress of Trade Unions also responded to our call

and issued a statement supporting the BDS movement and calling for targeted sanctions to end Israel's regime of oppression of the Palestinian people <https://www.ictu.ie/press/2020/07/30/congress-calls-for-release-of-palestinian-human-ri/>

See also: <https://bdsmovement.net/news/freemahmoud-mahmoud-nawajaa-free>

Support was also mobilised throughout the movement to defend the life of Palestinian prisoner and hunger striker Maher Al-Akhras who was close to death as he protested against his human rights violations. There was a strong response to the call from TUFPP to our supporters to protest his imprisonment without charges, including letters addressed to the Irish government calling for intervention.

TUFPP launched a similar campaign to protest at the destruction in November of the entire village of Khirbet Humsa, destroying the livelihoods and homes of 72 Palestinians. This was a significant escalation of the ethnic cleansing taking place on a daily basis in Area C, which is 60 % of the West Bank and effectively annexed by Israel.

In early 2021 TUFPP responded to the call from the Palestinian New Federation of Trade Unions (the New Unions) for support for the striking workers at the Yamit factory in the industrial zone of Nitzanei Shalom. This is the location of 12 Israeli chemical factories built on stolen Palestinian land

in Tulkarem. Our call mobilised declarations of solidarity from throughout the movement, including from Congress.

TUFPP and senior officials from a number of ICTU affiliates recently organised the very successful **Conference on Palestinian Children** held on the 22/23 November 2019 in Dublin.

Following this and the education-focused delegation to Palestine in 2019 TUFPP has helped establish a working group with representatives from INTO, UTU, ASTI, TUI and IFUT to look at developing links with the Palestinian education sector.

In the wake of the conference we have also played a key role in the establishment of the soon to be launched **Ireland Palestine Mental Health Network**.

In September 2020 TUFPP hosted a webinar - '**Covid, Colonialism and the People's Resistance**' - to draw attention to how the conditions of military occupation, apartheid and colonialism heightened the impact on Palestinian workers and families. Following this TUFPP and ICTU mobilised a **Covid Response Fund** which raised over 30,000 euro, 20,000 of which has been to supply testing kits and PPE to Gaza.

TUFPP, which helped to establish the **European Trade Union Network for Justice in Palestine (ETUN)**, continues to play a leading role in the Steering Committee of the network.

The network has commissioned and published a major report on Palestinian workers under colonialism and violent occupation, works closely with the global sectoral federations, and has mobilised to highlight the UNHRC database on complicit companies in breach of international law. See: <http://www.etun-palestine.org/site/>

TUFP has been playing an active role in seeking to have other companies (eg HP, CAF) added to the UN list. We play an active role in the global BDS-led network mobilising the HP boycott campaign.



**TUFP Ambassadors - Delegations to Palestine** - 17 members took part, including the Presidents of INTO and NIPSA, and a Fórsa National Secretary, in the Winter 2019 delegation. The next health delegation – which will be health focused but restricted to health unions – will take place as soon as feasible.

TUFP has continued to work closely with Kairos Ireland, which we helped establish, and with other Palestinian solidarity groups including in the planning of the Apartheid Free Zone campaign.

As well as working closely with affiliates TUFP meets every two months to coordinate solidarity work and plan future activity. The TUFP Steering Group meets on alternative months.

For further information, or to be added to the TUFP email network, please contact John O'Farrell at the Congress office or TUFP Northern Secretary Eamon McMahon at [eamonmcmahon@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:eamonmcmahon@hotmail.co.uk)



## C6 Trades Council Consultative Committee

Trades Union Councils (TUCs) bring together union activists and members to work and campaign around issues affecting working people in their local workplaces and communities. They have been the backbone of, and at times the instigators of, many trade union campaigns that have sought to unite affiliates and communities behind common issues.

The Trades Councils have assisted the Northern Ireland Committee by campaigning on a range of issues. These issues have covered:

- Campaigns against cuts in services.
- Welfare Reform.
- Supporting BME migrant workers and challenging racism.
- Defending the NIHE and opposing stock transfers.
- Banning zero hours contracts.
- Providing solidarity to workers engaged in industrial action.

Currently there are active trades' councils in Ballymena and Antrim, Belfast, Craigavon, Derry, Fermanagh, North Down and Ards, Mid Ulster, and Omagh.

Examples of some of the activities of trades' councils include:

Ballymena and Antrim Trades Union Council worked to reduce racial tensions in the Ballymena area and in lobbying politicians around local cuts to services and job losses.

Campaigning and education have been among the priorities for the Belfast & District Trades Union Council. The B&DTUC actively supported the Alliance for Choice campaign and opposing Housing Executive stock transfers. They ran seminars on precarious employment, the *New Decade New Approach* agreement and H&S legislation relating to Covid-19 with John Hendy QC as a guest speaker. As a result of the Covid-19 restrictions the B&DTUC organised an online programme to celebrate May Day 2020.

Craigavon Trades Council has been working closely with the NIC ICTU Migrant Workers Support Unit and the *Crossing Borders, Breaking Boundaries* project to support migrant workers in their area, to organise in trade unions and build community relations. The CTC organised a successful seminar on the *Caledon Lockout - 100 years on*.

Opposition to Welfare Reform has been an important aspect of the work of the Derry Trades Council along with organising of a *Workers Rights and Social Justice Week*. The DTC also organised an online programme to celebrate May Day 2020 and launched a Worker's Charter on May Day.



Celebrations to mark the centenary of Fermanagh Trades Council included an exhibition in the Enniskillen Castle entitled, *Struggling Workers: A History of Fermanagh Trade Unionism, and the launch of Labouring Near Lough Erne – a Study of the Fermanagh Labour Movement 1826 -1932.*

Other issues Trades Councils have worked on include: providing solidarity to workers engaged in industrial action; supporting trade union recruitment campaigns; engaging with local media; campaigning against social and economic deprivation in local communities. A number of Trades Councils have been involved in other campaigns such as *Save Our Sperrins*.

The Councils come together quarterly at the Trades Councils Consultative Committee (TCCC) to share information and initiatives, and to develop and coordinate joint campaigns. The TCCC also organise joint seminars for trades' councils on themes such as on tackling racism, prejudice and the rise of right wing populism, along with the ICTU Migrant Worker Support Unit.

To maintain and develop this work the TCCC appeals to unions to ensure that they affiliate to, and encourage their members and activists to engage with trades councils in their local areas. If you are interested in establishing a new local Trades Council please contact [kevin.doherty@ictuni.org](mailto:kevin.doherty@ictuni.org)

## C7 Retired Workers' Committee



The Retired Workers' Committee (RWC) continued to meet online and held regular meetings after the initial lockdown hiatus. Many members of the RWC were shielding at home, but fortunately were able to connect with their family and friends online. Since the lockdown which commenced right after the 2020 Age Seminar held in Dublin on 20/21 February, there have been six online meetings of the committee, and these were used to plan and deliver a limited Age Webinar in February 2021.



*Age Seminar*



*Patricia King opens 2020 Age Seminar*

First held in Dublin in February 2016 the Age Seminar has become an annual fixture, alternating between Belfast and Dublin. The Seminar was addressed by trade union leaders, academics, guests from the UK NPC and the NI Older People's Commissioner.

A great supporter of the RWC is Eddie Lynch, the Commissioner for Older People NI, who briefed the committee in June and contributed to a session on the rights of older people during the pandemic at the 2021 Age Seminar. Eddie had earlier travelled to Dublin to take part in the Age Seminar held in February 2020.

Another group which has a strong relationship is the UK-based National Pensioners' Convention. It's formidable campaigner Neil Duncan-Jordan has attended every Age Seminar since its inception in 2016, and recently moved on to a full time post with Unison in England. Neil attended the 2020 seminar and was presented with a special gift from the RWC in gratitude for his friendship, expertise and support over the years.

The NPC's excellent relations with the RWC continue, and its new General Secretary Jan Shortt spoke at the 2021 Age Webinar, and it is hoped that an end to the pandemic will mean the chance for a 'real world' Age Seminar with retired trade union activists in the same room will happen soon.

The Age Webinar also included another supportive friend of the committee, Dr Gemma Carney, a gerontologist from

Queen's University Belfast, who continued the tradition of sharing her latest social research into ageing societies, and who actively seeks feedback and ideas from our experienced members.

A regular speaker who appeared in 2020 was Pdraig Yeates, who delivered his near-annual history talk before dinner for all of the delegates. Other speakers came from Age Action, Alone, Safeguarding Ireland and the Nevin Economic Research Institute. There were speakers from trade union campaigns for pension justice, including Deborah Yapicioz of the UNISON Women's WASPI group & Ethel Buckley from SIPTU's Stop 67 campaign. Other trade union speakers included ICTU vice-president Kevin Callinan (Fórsa), Phil Ni Sheaghda (INMO) John Douglas (Mandate), Brendan Ogle (UNITE) and Owen Reidy.



As ever, the leadership of the trade union movement were subjected to rigorous but mannerly questioning from retired members, moderated by Margaret Galloway, who see themselves as working components of the movement, including ICTU General Secretary Patricia King in 2020 and ICTU President Gerry Murphy in 2021.

*RWC vice-Chair Hugh Rafferty (Unite)*

## C8 May Festival

In 2020, Belfast Trades Council worked with Northern Visions TV to create a full day of programming celebrating May Day and workers struggles past and present.

It included contributions from musicians and activists, and included programmes on:

- Belfast Cleaning Society - a workers' cooperative;
- An interview with Francis Devine on the books he co-edited with Patrick Smylie, *Left Lives in Twentieth Century Ireland*;
- Robert Ballagh - *Talent in Solidarity*;
- A news programme with interviews of workers;
- May Day music and archive films of previous May Day parades.

Plans are being developed for May Day events in 2021.

## Section D Trade Union Education, Training and Lifelong Learning

### D1 The Trade Union Education Programme

The NIC ICTU Education Programme is a vital resource for all trade union officials, representatives and members. It provides a forum for trade unionists to come together to develop their knowledge and skills, and to learn from the experiences of others. Over one thousand learners participate in the training and seminars offered by NIC ICTU each year.

The programme contains progression pathways for union officials, union representatives, health and safety representatives, equality representatives, union learning representatives. All courses are accredited through Open College Network (OCN). On successful completion learners will obtain level 2, or 3 Awards, Certificates, or Diplomas. The courses are free and are run mainly on a day release basis over 3, 5, 10 or 32 days depending on the level of qualification attached to the course.

The programme is delivered in partnership with the South Eastern Regional College (SERC) and our courses are open to all affiliates of ICTU.

The NIC ICTU Education Department also designs and delivers bespoke courses to meet the needs of affiliates which can be run in affiliates offices, the workplace and other locations.

The NIC ICTU Education Programme continues to develop with a number of new courses added to the programme reflecting demand from affiliates and changes in the workplace and society. The Programme is flexible and includes bespoke courses tailored to the needs of individual affiliates.

In March 2020 all 'face to face' trade union education courses were halted with the introduction of Covid-19 restrictions. The NIC ICTU Education Department, working with a number of affiliates, developed online delivery learning models in response.

As keeping workers safe and well and protecting jobs became a key priority for the union movement the NIC ICTU Education Department switched the emphasis of the programme towards:

**D**

Trade Union Education,  
Training and Lifelong Learning



- Knowledge of Covid-19.
- Providing information on government advice, H&S rights and how to use them.
- Implementing safe systems and processes.
- Rights and protections when working from home.
- Wellbeing and keeping safe.
- Protecting jobs and handling redundancies.

The online programme began, in June 2020, with pilot webinars on the following topics:

**Returning to Work Safely** – With the relaxation of the initial lockdown measures this information session covered the health & safety measures that need to be in place to protect workers and the associated legal rights for union reps and workers.

**Working From Home** – As home working has become the new norm for many during the covid-19 crisis this webinar looked at the benefits, challenges and risks for employees. The webinar also provides advice on protections and conditions for home workers.

**Dealing with Redundancies** – With large scale redundancies becoming the latest feature of the Covid-19 crisis this course aims to provide an overview of the trade union response to this situation along with information on employment protection rights and the employer's obligations when proposing to make workers redundant.

All the webinars were interactive with a panel of experts to answer learner's questions.

As the webinars proved very popular the Education Department went on to introduce accredited online courses commencing with 'Ensuring Safe Workplaces.' This short, accredited online course provides an in-depth focus on the H&S measures that need to be in place to ensure that people return to work, and continue to work, safely during this Covid-19 crisis. The course covers:

- Risk assessments and identifying hazards
- Role and rights of H&S representatives
- Rights of employees and legal obligations on employers
- Dealing with serious and imminent danger.

In response to demand this course has been run on 4 occasions and sector specific versions have been delivered in response to the request of affiliates.

From this the Education Department has gone on to deliver a range of the core courses for reps and H&S reps, officials and members. We have also recommenced bespoke online courses for affiliates including,

We have also recommenced bespoke online courses for affiliates including, accredited health and safety training for reps and school leaders.



**Mental Health Wellbeing Dealing with Stress** – Work related stress and challenges to wellbeing have become a more visible and pressing issue in the last few years and especially now during the Covid-19 crisis. This webinar provides an overview of factors that lead to stress, key markers to look out for and solutions for lessening stress, especially those found when working in a school setting.

For further information or if you wish to enquire about arranging bespoke courses for your union please contact the NIC ICTU Education Officer at [kevin.doherty@ictuni.org](mailto:kevin.doherty@ictuni.org)

While there are significant drawbacks to this learning model it appears that it will be the only option for trade union education until the Covid-19 restrictions are fully lifted.

The NIC ICTU Education Department would like to record their thanks to the Trade Union Tutors for their flexibility and vital contribution moving to an online learning model. We would also like to thank the affiliates who also successfully made the switch to online learning.

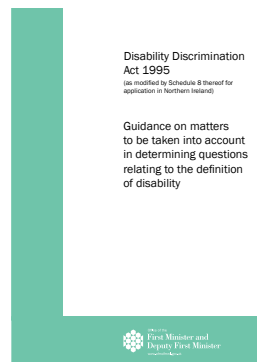
The NIC ICTU TU Education Programme also offers the following courses:

### Core Skills

|                                      |
|--------------------------------------|
| Trade Union Reps Stage 1             |
| Trade Union Reps Stage 2             |
| Certificate in Employment Law        |
| Health and Safety Stage 1            |
| Health and Safety Stage 2            |
| Union Learning Reps Stage 1          |
| Union Learning Reps Stage 2          |
| Negotiation and Communication Skills |
| Pay and Bargaining                   |
| Handling Grievance and Disciplines   |
| Social Media for Trade Union Reps    |
| Dealing with Redundancies            |
| Public Sector Pensions               |

In addition to the core courses the programme also offers:

|                                                                           |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Taking a case to Tribunals                                                |
| Mental health Awareness                                                   |
| Discrimination and Equality Law                                           |
| Women in Leadership                                                       |
| Dealing with Stress, Bullying and Intimidating Behaviour in the Workplace |
| Disability Champions                                                      |
| Equality Reps in the Workplace                                            |
| Tackling Prejudice and Discrimination                                     |
| Trade Unions and Globalisation                                            |
| Confidence in the Workplace                                               |
| Introduction to Economics for Trade Unionists                             |
| Diploma Equalities (32 Week Course)                                       |
| Diploma in Employment Law (32 Week Course)                                |
| Diploma in Health & Safety (32 Week Course)                               |



## Seminars/Webinars

NIC ICTU also runs a variety of unaccredited seminars with the Labour Relations Agency and the Equality Commission as and when required on various employment related issues. Due to Covid-19 these seminars are now also delivered through webinars.

**The topics include:**

Supporting Mental Health in the Workplace

Unconscious Bias

Flexible Working

Early Conciliation

Bullying and Harassment

Redundancy

Employment Law NI and GB - The Differences

Trade Unions - Legal Framework and Case Law Update

Annual Review of Employment Law

Introduction to the Disability Discrimination Act 1995

Introduction to the employment anti-discrimination laws

Expecting Equality - A short seminar examining the rights of employees who are pregnant or who are new mothers

An Introduction to the Industrial Tribunal System

Further information regarding the above seminars can be found on the NIC ICTU website

[www.ictuni.org/educationtraining](http://www.ictuni.org/educationtraining)

## D3 Union Learning

### Union Learning Fund

Under an agreement with the Department for the Economy, NIC ICTU continues to have full responsibility for the administrative and financial management of the Union Learning Fund (ULF). In January 2020, applications were sought for a new three year project plan. The following 11 project applications to the ULF were successful:

| UNION                     | PROJECT TITLE                                                           |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>AEGIS</b>              | Learn with Aegis                                                        |
| <b>BFAWU</b>              | Supporting, Structuring and Developing Workplace and Community Learning |
| <b>FBU</b>                | Promoting Lifelong Learning in the Fire Service                         |
| <b>FSU</b>                | FSU Future Skills                                                       |
| <b>GMB</b>                | GMB Reachout                                                            |
| <b>INTO</b>               | Career Development and Support for Teachers                             |
| <b>NIPSA</b>              | NIPSA Union Learn 2020/2023                                             |
| <b>UNISON</b>             | Unison College                                                          |
| <b>UNITE CONSTRUCTION</b> | Building & Sustaining Learning in Construction                          |
| <b>UNITE</b>              | United in Learning                                                      |
| <b>USDAW</b>              | Developing a Mainstream Union Learning and Skills Offer                 |



During the 2019/20 reporting period, ULF projects achieved the following outcomes:

1. Over 600 learners enrolled onto Essential Skills courses in Numeracy, Literacy or IT.
2. Over 800 learners completed up-skilling or vocational qualifications.
3. Over 200 migrant workers completed OET, IELTS training or ESOL qualifications.
4. Over 250 Health & Social Care staff completed CPD.
5. 230 learners completed basic IT courses.
6. Projects helped over 300 members facing redundancy with CV writing and Interview skills.
7. 30 new Union Learning Representatives (ULRs) were recruited and trained.

### Union Learning Conference

In March 2020, the annual Union Learning Conference was held in Mossley Mill, Newtownabbey. Over 70 ULRs attended and heard from key speakers addressing the theme of Skills for a Sustainable Economy.

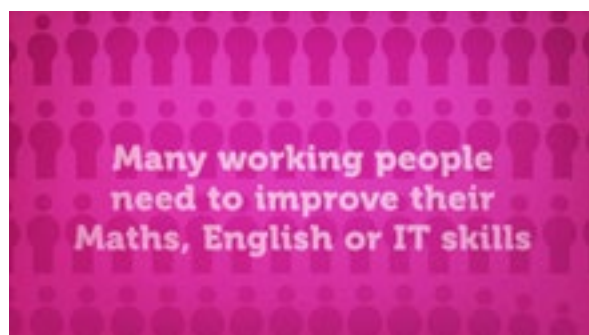
Terry Park, Head of Further Education Delivery from the Department for the Economy, opened conference and presented the Trade Union Learner of the Year award to Sharon Brazier, USDAW.

### Online Learning

In most cases, ULF projects rely on FE colleges to deliver Essential Skills and other upskilling or vocational qualifications to project participants. The Covid-19 pandemic has affected educational systems throughout Northern Ireland, leading to the near-total closure of FE colleges and other learning providers during lockdown restrictions.

Working in partnership with the FE colleges and other distance learning providers, ULF projects reacted and adapted, to promote, support and deliver online learning opportunities to members. Given the challenges faced during 2020, the ULF project is on track to achieve targets set in agreement with the Department for the Economy for the 2020/21 reporting period.





## Section E Political & Economic Report

### E1 No Going Back

In June 2020 the all island ICTU Executive endorsed a paper drawn up by the secretariat and NERI entitled 'No Going Back - A New Deal Towards a Safe and Secure Future for All.' This paper is intended to be a blue print and road map for the trade union movement and others to both articulate the need for a new society and economy and to crucially map out how such a society and economy can be funded and developed. The paper essentially points out that the crisis has given us a glimpse of what is possible. It addresses the role of the state, how it interacts with business and society, the role and future of work and how we today value and indeed undervalue much important essential work. The paper also highlights key areas that need to be addressed including areas around,

- The need for a universal public health system fully funded and free at the point of use
- The right to adequate and affordable housing
- A high quality public service early years and early care system for our children
- Increased investment in our education systems at all levels
- The right to collective bargaining and for the states on this island to promote collective bargaining as a positive for the economy and society
- A proper social security system that protects, not punishes citizens
- A new green deal with a 'just transition'

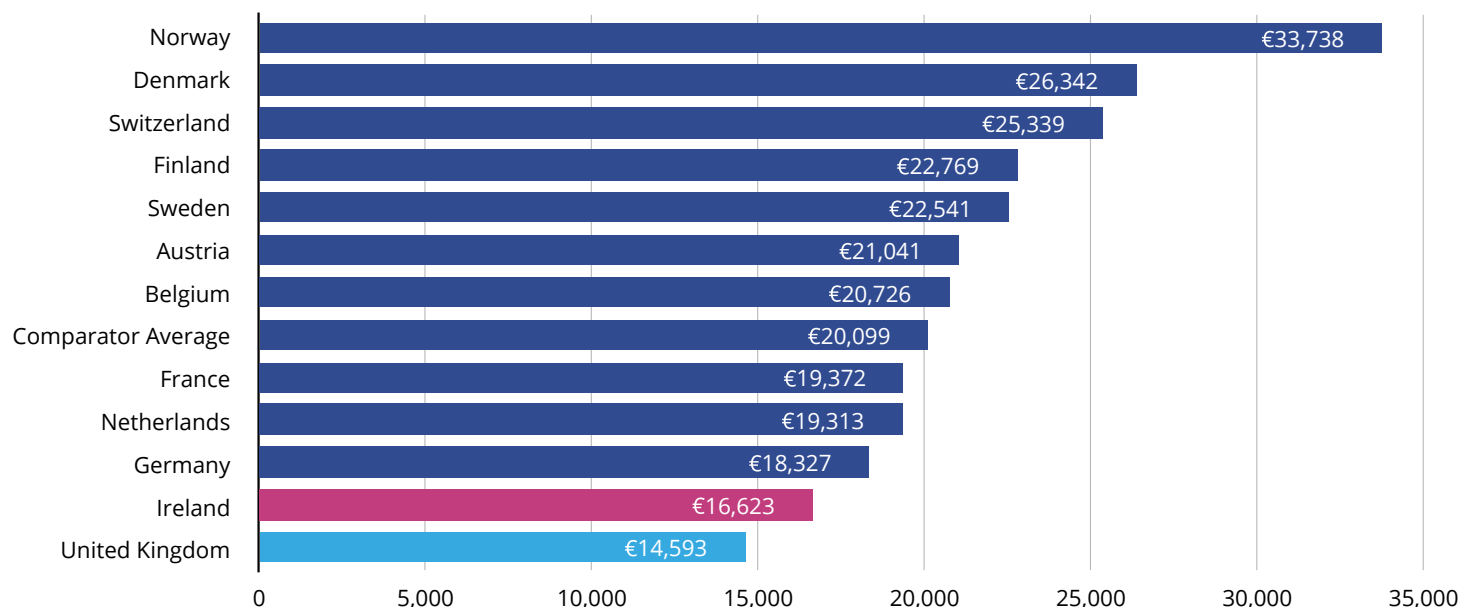
As stated above the paper also charts how we can pay for this. We highlight the low levels of public spending in the UK and Republic of Ireland compared to other similar European states.



We also highlight the glaring inequity when it comes to how the state is funded both in the UK and ROI. This shows that employers NIS on labour in the UK is a mere 41% of the average of other comparable European states. In a NI context if this inequity was addressed over a decade this would lead to the NI Executive having an additional £3.6bn in public spending to resource the state. This would merely be catching up with EU norms.

The arguments made in this paper are crucial for all trade union activists. It is essential we mobilise ourselves and prepare for the inevitable calls for austerity policies to 'pay' for the necessary emergency measures put in place by the state becoming the insurer of last resort with the C19 pandemic. What is clear to us is those very businesses that have accepted and sought necessary state support during this crisis must accept that they need to do more to adequately resource the state for the long haul. Austerity will neither be necessary nor appropriate and we must have good coherent arguments

## Low levels of public spending compared to European norms (Public spending excluding debt interest per person 2019)



backed up by facts to defend and advance the interests of our members. The 'No Going Back' paper gives us just that.

We have seen this paper as a campaigning tool and we have been seeking to engage wider society on the issues in the paper. The NIC-ICTU has had the following meetings and engagements to promote and advocate the arguments in the paper.

- We have addressed the all-party NI Assembly Economy committee on the issue.
- We have met the SDLP, SF, the Greens and Alliance on the issue.
- We have addressed the all-party Finance Committee on the issue.
- We have met Louise Haigh MP Shadow Secretary of State for NI to promote the ideas in the paper.
- We have met with the lay leadership of a number of affiliates on the matter including NIPSA, Unite, the INTO and the UTU.
- We have met a number of other bodies including the Equality Coalition, the NI Women's Budgeting Group and the Social Change Initiative.
- We have engaged with employer bodies including the IOD, Chambers NI, Manufacturing NI, the CBI and the NI Retail Consortium on the matter.

- We have promoted the paper on media platforms including the BBC TV programme 'The View' and on radio programmes.

We will continue to use any available platform to promote this crucial piece of work over the next number of years.

**Table 1: Labour tax receipts from employers and employees**

| Comparator                            | Employee payments  | Employer payments  |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Republic of Ireland                   | €4,609             | €1,692             |
| UK                                    | €3,156<br>(£2,792) | €1,425<br>(£1,260) |
| High-income Western Europe            | €4,689             | €3,478             |
| Republic of Ireland as a % of Average | 98.3%              | 48.7%              |
| UK as a % of Average                  | 67.3%              | 41.0%              |
| Republic of Ireland 'under-taxation'  | €80                | €1,785             |
| UK 'under-taxation'                   | €1,533<br>(£1,356) | €2,053<br>(£1,816) |

Source: European Commission, Taxation and Customs Union [Data on Taxation](#) (2020), [Eurostat Population on 1 January by age and sex](#) (2020), author calculations

Note: All € figures are per head of population.

## The Northern Ireland Engagement Forum

The Northern Ireland Engagement forum was established by The Executive Office (TEO) at in April 2020 in response to the impact of the C19 pandemic on the Northern Ireland labour market. The role of the forum was to report to the NI Executive via the Minister for the Economy on all relevant labour market initiatives that were necessary in relation to the devastating impact of C19 on the regional economy.

NIC-ICTU, initially through our **Better Work Better Lives** campaign and subsequently with the publication of the **New Decade New Approach** Agreement, had been advocating that Northern Ireland needed an inclusive, robust and participatory forum for social dialogue to bring together the key social actors and pillars in Northern Ireland. It is noted that while it took a global pandemic for the NI Executive to act, nevertheless the forum was quite unique across these islands. It brought together 6 representatives of the trade union movement, the 6 key business bodies, a number of state agencies including HSE NI, the PHA, Solace and including in its membership the two Junior Ministers in the TEO. The forum was chaired by the chair of the LRA, Maria Mallon and assisted by the CEO of the LRA.

Initially the forum produced at the request of the NI Executive two bespoke pieces of work, the agreed detailed list of essential workers and later an agreed [Protocol](#) on a safe return to work (which took place in some firms in the summer months of 2020) and which the NI Executive adopted in full.

The forum was briefed from time to time by Minister Dodds, the PHA, Invest NI and at each meeting receives a detailed report from the Permanent Secretary of the Department for the Economy, Mike Brennan. The forum initially met fortnightly with sub groups meeting as required. In recent months it has met monthly. The ICTU representatives on the NI Engagement Forum are; Gerry Murphy Chair of the NIC, Alison Millar Vice Chair of the NIC, Patricia Mc Keown Unison, Jackie Pollock Unite, Michaela Lafferty Usdaw, replaced by Denise Walker GMB in June 2020 and Owen Reidy ICTU.

The membership of the Forum has been discussing and debating the potential of the Forums future and re-design post pandemic. There is a shared view from both the trade union side and the employer participants that a redesigned forum has a role to play. Regrettably it seems this view is not shared by all parties in the NI Executive given that the chair of the Forum wrote to OFM/DFM in July 2020 regarding the future of the forum and has disgracefully not yet received a response. Clearly despite the commitments in the NDNA agreement some parties do not wish to engage in meaningful social dialogue with representatives of the labour market. This is and remains an issue which we shall challenge. Such a process works in the interests of workers in Wales and Scotland and across most of Europe, it therefore can and must work in Northern Ireland. The NIC receives detailed monthly briefings on the activities of the forum and has the opportunity to place matters of interest and concern on the agenda.



## E2 Brexit

Regrettably the UK left the EU on 31st December 2019 at 11pm. The transition period ended at 11pm on 31st December 2020. A trade and cooperation agreement (TCA) was reached between the EU and UK around Christmas 2020. This very modest free trade agreement does just that, provides for free trade. However, the nature of the Brexit as pursued by the UK Tory government has been quite hard.

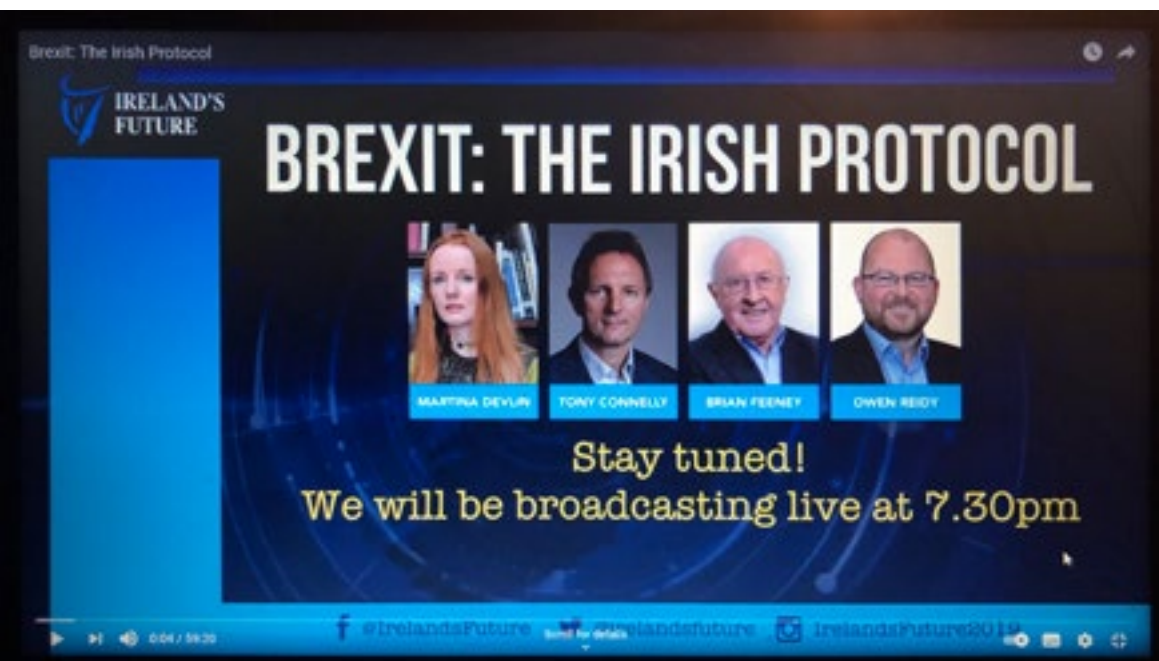
The trade union movement has been clear from day one. We campaigned against Brexit. We argued that any agreement reached between the parties would be less favourable than the status quo. We argued that anything other than as soft as possible a Brexit would be potentially destabilising for Northern Ireland. As far back as 2017 we stated that a harder border on the island of Ireland was unacceptable and that a

border in the Irish sea would be equally unacceptable. Tragically those in Northern Ireland who have demanded a hard Brexit, and who had some political leverage at the time to facilitate a softer Brexit, are the very same voices decrying the Ireland/Northern Ireland Protocol which was agreed by the UK government and the EU some time ago.

In the last 12 months the NIC-ICTU has sought an agreement between the UK and the EU, one that avoids a cliff edge and crash out. Such an agreement did emerge but it is a relatively poor and modest agreement. In many ways the TCA which has emerged will keep the EU and UK in perpetual negotiations regarding its relationship.

We have sought to use whatever means at our disposal in raising the interests of workers across Northern Ireland in the context of Brexit and also seeking to highlight and prioritise the primacy of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement in every situation.

Through our work in Europe, Patricia Mc Keown Unison Regional Secretary is a member of the powerful and influential EESC group and has ensured the interests of the people of Northern Ireland and the island as a whole have been on the agenda in Europe. Owen Reidy our Assistant General Secretary is the Ireland member of the ETUC Executive and with other colleagues in Europe has engaged in a number of meetings with EU Commission officials on Brexit related matters.



Closer to home we have worked in particular with our colleagues in the WTUC and STUC in relation to the previous UK Internal Markets Bill which would have completely undermined the prospect of an agreement and would have led to a Westminster power grab. Our participation in the Equality and Humans Rights Coalition has led to ongoing reaching out to the bipartisan Irish America lobby over 2020 and there has been regular engagement with Irish government officials.

We have also regularly liaised with Louise Haigh MP Shadow Secretary of State for NI since she replaced Tony Lloyd. Belatedly the UK government have seen the value in reaching out beyond the political parties and business interests in NI and we have with others in civic society sought to hold the UK government to account regarding the obligations in meetings with Brandon Lewis the Secretary of State and his new Permanent Secretary.

Earlier this year we found ourselves in the position that yet again we had to call people out for the potential of serious threats being made against port workers at Larne who are legally obliged to carry out customs checks. While there has been some discussion about the role the Mid and East Antrim Council Council have played in all of this, any prospect or potential possibility of a threat to any worker going about their lawful work must always be called out and we will always support our affiliate unions in this.

The protocol is imperfect, problematic and far from ideal. However, given the type of Brexit pursued and delivered by the UK government such a protocol is necessary. We will work with others across the community and seek to ensure that no-one's identity is threatened by the protocol. We advocated the setting up of a wider group of unions and civic society at a recent meeting with EU Vice President Maros Sefcovic and Minister Michael Gove that could meet with the Joint Committee and work through issues over time. The UK and the EU have an obligation to make the protocol work for all of the people of Northern Ireland and indeed the island of Ireland. Brexit may have occurred but its legacy and ramifications will unfortunately be the subject of many many BDC reports over the years to come.



## E3 New Decade New Approach and Workers Rights'

The NIC-ICTU welcomed the publication of the New Decade New Approach Agreement which had something for everyone, but given the nature of politics not everything in the document would suit everyone.



However, page 44 section X concerning workers' rights was novel, as it says,

"There will be an enhanced focus within the Programme for Government on creating good jobs and protecting workers' rights. The parties agree that access to good jobs, where workers have a voice that provides a level of autonomy, a decent income, security of tenure, satisfying work in the right quantities and decent working conditions, should be integral to public policy given how this contributes to better health and wellbeing by tackling inequalities, building self-efficacy and combating poverty."

This is a potentially very significant section in the document. It is significant for a number of reasons. Firstly, this agreement was brokered and agreed by the two governments and the 5 NI Executive parties signed up to it. It is the trade union movements obligation to seek to make the ambition in the 2 critical sentences above a reality, in both policy and legislative terms.

Over the last 12 months NIC-ICTU has used every available opportunity to promote this clause and to seek its implementation. We prepared a paper in 2020 and issued to all MLAs outlining why we needed more worker friendly legislation in Northern Ireland.

To that end we have,

- Met with a range of Assembly parties on the paper.
- Raised the issue of section X in NDNA on Workers' Rights at the NI Roundtable and also at the NI Engagement Forum, which endorsed our call for action on this.
- Have raised the matter directly with the department of the Economy and the Minister of the Economy.
- We are raising these issues in the context of public procurement through our position on the NI Public Procurement Board.
- Have made it a central part of our engagement with officials from TEO regarding the PfG.
- Raised the issue across a number of media platforms including TV, radio and newspaper opinion pieces.

The fact the employment rights is a devolved matter in Northern Ireland gives the NI Executive extensive scope to address the issue. There can be no economic recovery and regeneration unless the issues of low pay, collective bargaining and workers' rights are satisfactorily addressed. We will not rest until we have achieved progress on this central matter.

## Public Sector Pensions

In December 2018 the 'McCloud' ruling was reached when the Court of Appeal in England and Wales upheld claims brought by some Firefighters and Judges that the transitional protections afforded to older members of those schemes were unlawfully age discriminatory. On 27 June 2019 the UK Supreme Court refused permission for a further appeal on that ruling.

Although devolved, this judgement has far-reaching implications for every public sector pension, as reformed public service schemes in Northern Ireland incorporate similar age-based transitional protections, therefore it is appropriate that this discrimination is removed from public service schemes made under the Public Service Pensions Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

Technical discussions went underway at the CCWG forum in early 2020 to take initial views on proposals for required scheme changes. A formal public consultation then followed in due course, which confirmed that members who were subject to the discrimination will be within scope of changes made to public service schemes, whether they are deferred, pensioner or active members.

This process reached a stage in early 2021 when HM Treasury conceded that:



*"...the government will proceed with the deferred choice underpin. This approach will mean all eligible members are members of their legacy scheme for the period between 1 April 2015 and 31 March 2022, known as the remedy period. Eligible members retiring after implementation will get a choice of whether to take legacy or reformed scheme benefits for the remedy period when their pension benefits become payable. Where affected reformed scheme members retire before implementation, a choice between benefits will be offered as soon as practicable..."*

The full response from HMT can be read [here](#):

This 'best-of-both-worlds' result is a significant victory, largely thanks to brave Firefighters and their allies the Judges, plus years of patient negotiation with management side at the CCWG and paying attention to the often perplexing detail of pensions, in particular from NIPSA's Bumper Graham, who co-chaired the CCWG and has now stepped aside as chair of the NI Civil Service Pension Scheme Board.

It is anticipated that it could take some time to fully implement the commitment to remove the discrimination from all public service pension schemes, whilst also ensuring that members can keep benefits that they have earned to date. It will require changes in legislation and complex changes to administrative processes.

## E4 Education Trade Union Group



Union Learning Conference 2020

The ETUG is made up of teaching and support staff unions organising in the education sectors.

It meets regularly to develop education policy matters for the NI trade union movement, and was extremely busy during the pandemic as the schools became contentious sites over the public health discussion.

Speaking after its first meeting on Zoom, ETUG chair Denise Walker welcomed on behalf of the unions, the assurance by



the Education Minister Peter Weir that “no decisions have been taken by the Executive on relaxation of the current lockdown, and when decisions are made, they will be based on expert scientific and public health advice.”

“We further welcome the Minister’s pledge that his “Department will consult and engage with all relevant parties, including school leaders and trade unions on behalf of staff as this work progresses.”

Trade Unions representing principals, teachers and support staff had a lengthy and rewarding discussion on the staggering scale of disruption caused to our education system by this Pandemic, while acknowledging that this crisis has exposed many underlying problems. The common determination among all unions was that their members and the children they are entrusted to educate cannot have their health endangered by re-opening the schools before key measurements are taken and precautions fulfilled.

All education unions welcomed the establishment of the Engagement Forum to ensure that presently functioning workplaces are safe, and the work it is engaged in drawing up guidelines for a wider return to work and opening of public services. Unions called for adequate testing and contact tracing, and making PPE available. There must also be a thorough evaluation of the mass experiment in remote learning, in particular how this impacted on children from more deprived backgrounds.

It was agreed to commence drafting a document detailing concerns and proposing measures aimed at ensuring that when schools re-open, they function safely and fairly for each child.

This set the template for a series of engagements with the Education Minister and the NI Assembly Education committee, a series of letters and written submissions, and direct evidence with the committee in Stormont and online. This worked in parallel with union representatives on the existing bargaining structures with DENI and the Education Authority.

There was extensive media work running alongside this work, as schools became a fulcrum of debate on the whole direction of society’s response to covid, often in the face of bad faith arguments from individuals and interest groups with a new-found interest in the life-chances of deprived children.

In late summer, the ETUG was embroiled in discussions with DENI on the safe re-opening of schools, and a range of logistical problems such as meal provision, cleaning and transport, not to mention the specific and serious problems facing SEN provision. Childcare for education workers was another cause for concern. Here are some bullet points highlighting other concerns



unions expressed to the Minister and the Stormont committee:

- Lack of consultation on updated restart guidance;
- Guidance on face coverings excludes support staff;
- No consultation on changes to the role of classroom assistants;
- Transport plans and relaxed social distancing;
- Why has Transport has been so unprepared for the Restart? (Bus modifications were not started until a week before Restart, there have been PPE shortages from the outset and Individual Risk Assessments have not been carried out in a timely manner);
- Basics like incorrect or ill-fitting PPE, lack of risk assessments, or risk assessments completed by unqualified / untrained staff, staff told to limit the use of PPE;
- Budget for schools and the need for additional funding;
- Fit-test of masks re SEN;
- Mitigation measures – pupils in bubbles in school then compromised by transport arrangements, movement of staff between bubbles;
- Conflicting messages between different executive departments – DE (Schools) v Dept of Econ (FE Colleges) and Dept of Health;
- Engage programme – lack of resources and none for classroom assistants.

Many of those issues remained unresolved for the second round of 'debate' on reopening schools after the Xmas break,

which led to absurd situations such as schools re-opening for one day in January before locking down again. However, as the pandemic ground on, the lines of communication between management in DENI and the EA improved, with weekly meetings with unions, and expert input from other state actors, such as the Public Health Agency. A focus in the new year was the availability of the covid vaccine to education workers, with a priority made for SEN teachers and support staff. This was the subject of correspondence with the Health Minister, with the support of health trade unions.

In the course of the year, and the postponement of the NIC BDC in March, the ETUG was reconstituted with Denise Walker (GMB) stepping aside as Chair, and Maxine Murphy-Higgins (NASUWT) taking the helm. Alan Law (NIPSA) became Vice-Chair. The ETUG continues to meet regularly and often at short notice in response to fast-moving developments.

Mr Robin Swann MLA

Minister of Health  
Castle Buildings  
Stormont BT4 3SQ

23 February 2021

From Maxine Murphy-Higgins, chair NIC-ICTU Education Trade Union Group.

Dear Minister Swann

The NI Executive has stated that it is their priority to get all pupils back to school and college and today we hear that Minister Weir was recommending a full return of the schools from the 8<sup>th</sup> March and that he believed the health officials at Stormont had been "over-cautious" in recommending a phased return.

However, re-opening schools and colleges fully on 8 March is one thing; keeping them open and preventing the need for further restrictions is quite another.

It is vital that the NI Executive recognises that it has already lost the trust of many education workers and needs to do much more to win the confidence of the sector that has continued, throughout the pandemic, to deliver everything that has been asked of them.

Although the rollout of the vaccination programme is going well, it is hugely regrettable and frustrating that the NI Executive has continued to refuse to prioritise education staff in the vaccination programme. Vaccinating education staff would send a clear message that the NI Government is taking seriously the concerns of the profession and demonstrating a genuine commitment to limiting the risk of further disruption to children's education.

Vaccinating education staff can be done now if there is the political will to do so. There is simply no excuse and no reason to not do so.

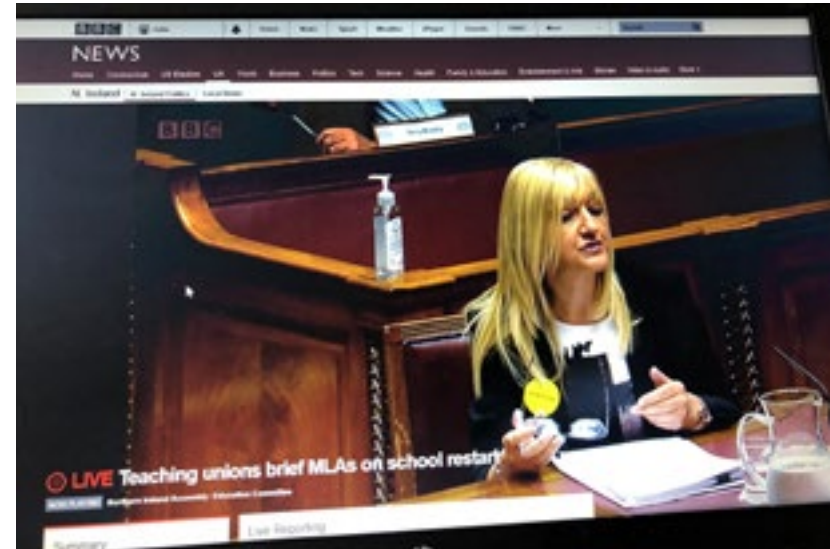
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Maxine Murphy-Higgins

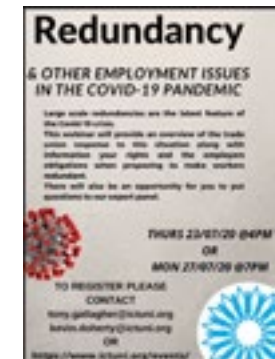
Chair, NIC-ICTU Education Trade Union Group





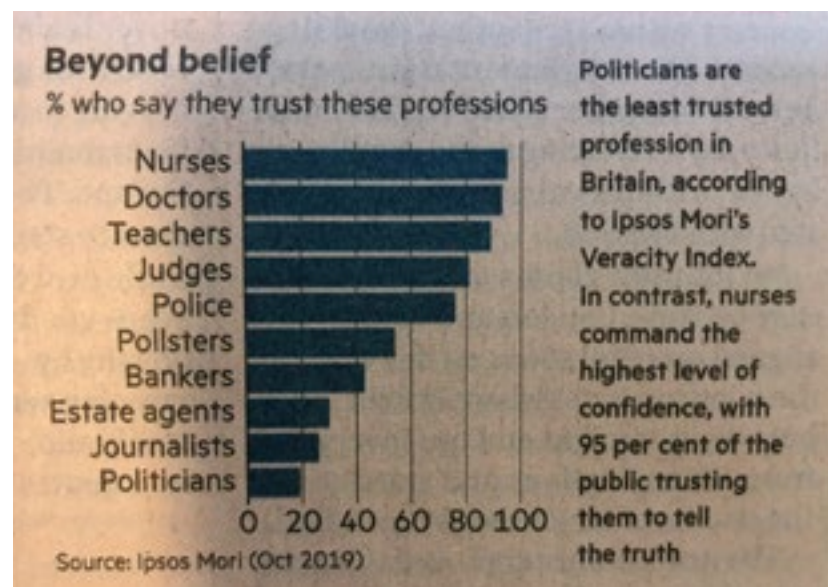


### Presenting on school restart



## E5 Health Committee

The Health Committee continued to meet regularly online through the pandemic, with interventions in the media, and with the NI Assembly Health Committee. The structures of partnership between trade unions and management established under the Delivering Together strategy endorsed by the NI Executive alongside long-standing bargaining structures, ensured that the trade union voice on workers' concerns and ideas were heard as the health crisis evolved over the year.



Health unions were represented by NIC ICTUs rep on both the Public Health Agency and the Department of Health's TAB (Transformation Advisory Board). In addition, the myriad TIGs (Transformation Implementation Groups) had union representation reflective of the specialisation of each TIG. The Partnership Forum, operated more on paper, and less than as a regularly active space for meaningful policy initiatives and development.

The Health committee's Chair and vice-Chair interventions continued with the support of over 12 affiliated unions representing workers across the Health and Social Care sector.

Before the outset of the covid health emergency and since, detailed submissions were made to the Assembly Health committee on the significance of workforce planning as an integral part of the transformation programme underway across the HSC.

In particular, affiliate unions representing physiotherapists, allied health professionals and radiographers were concerned about the lack of implementation of recommendations made within workforce reviews conducted within these areas. A lack of investment in training and recruitment of specialist staff was a major area of concern. Within midwifery, there were concerns there was no sense of what the optimum midwifery and maternity support workforce should be both now and in the future. A review process was



also underway in relation to the social work care workforce and had to be incorporated into the implementation of the post 2019 dispute framework agreement on safe staffing. Bargaining structures advised NIC ICTU of their interventions on workforce vacancies and the burden of agency staffing costs.

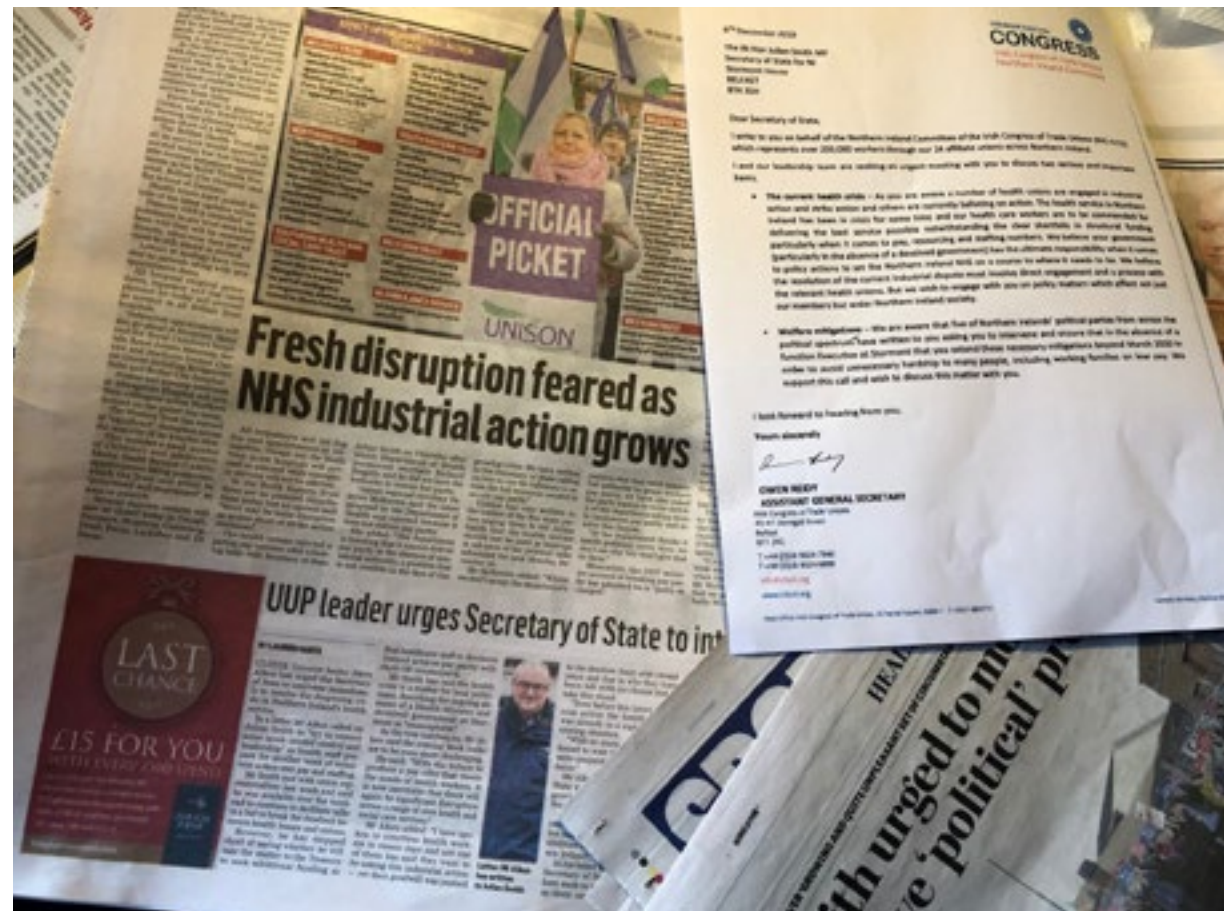
Work is underway driven by trade union side intervention on the preparation of legislation on safe staffing.

The transformation of health services will only be successful in delivering better health outcomes for the public where it has the support of the workforce. However, workforce planning and engagement had not been sufficiently mainstreamed into the transformation programme and the workstreams. Some examples of this include workforce issues that are not identified as a specific criterion by the Department in its policy on assessing the sustainability of services, and that workforce planning and reviews that have not been undertaken prior to public

consultation exercises which for example proposed to remove to remove stroke and breast assessment services from certain locations.

The pandemic has once again highlighted both the incredible effort and dedication of HSC workers but also the need for investment in and reform of the entire system in a way that will genuinely benefit the public and the workforce.

A significant and longstanding concern for health unions pre Covid-19 was the impact of health



inequality on our members, their families, their communities and the wider health and social care system. Significant and persistent inequalities exist between the most and least economically deprived areas, such as lower life expectancy, increased suicide rates and higher preventable death rates. Health unions have highlighted the detrimental impact that such substantial health inequalities have on the operation of the HSC system in terms of significantly higher hospital admissions from the most deprived areas compared to the least deprived.



To address this situation, health unions believe we need a model of public health which requires not only radical reform of the health and social care system, but also a radical change in the way all Government Ministers and Departments take their share of responsibility for the health and well-being of all the people. Health outcomes are not just the responsibility of the Department of Health, HSC Trusts or the various arms-length bodies. A significant, cross-governmental approach is required to tackle health inequality.

From the early stages of this pandemic we have been concerned by the approach that has been taken to Covid Testing and Contact tracing. Our concerns have included the speed with which testing capacity has grown and the extent of testing for both the public and health and social care workers. Due to our interventions, testing has intensified across the care home sector to the extent that a programme is now in place to test all residents and staff across all care homes, though it has taken months to reach this point.

From a very early stage health trade unions have been expressing concerns at the situation with regards to the provision of PPE and guidance on its use across acute settings, community settings and within private sector social care. Engagement with trade unions on these issues by the Department of Health, the responsible health bodies and individual employers has not always been consistent and our views have not always been acted upon.

In anticipation of a surge of Covid-19 cases, numerous services were stood down across HSC Trusts. It is clear that the standing down of HSC services will have a significant negative effect on already unacceptably long waiting lists, as acknowledged by the Health Minister. We are concerned by the potential for such changes to become permanent reconfigurations in the absence of full consultation with trade unions and the public. Key principles for the restarting of services should include:

- Co-production and co-design approaches be used by HSC Trusts when considering how to restart services. Trade unions as representatives of the workforce should be involved from the earliest possible stage;
- Protocols for staff returning to workplaces and/or being redeployed should be developed and agreed with trade unions.

There were additional concerns expressed around the disproportionate impact of Covid-19 on BAME communities and workers across the world, particularly within health and social care services. Health unions have been engaging with the Department of Health and the HSC Trusts to seek that they put measures in place to support BAME workers who are potentially at greater risk from Covid-19, including within the private care home sector where there can be significant groupings of BAME workers.

Another issue which arose at the commencement of the pandemic was the availability of abortion services in all parts of NI. Together with the NIC-ICTU Women's Committee, we sought urgent assurances that the Health Minister to act quickly to provide this vital healthcare to women and girls living in Northern Ireland. We asked the Minister to commit to a time frame for commissioning to get under way as a matter of urgency, and to commission the full abortion services provided for in the regulations laid by Northern Ireland Office to ensure these are resourced and accessible to all who need them.

This remains an unresolved issue and is a most worrying development. Health unions have united with allies to lobby the minister and his department to ensure that this recent and long overdue service is implemented and then defended from those who would restrict access to this human and health right for NI's women.

## E6 The ICTU North/South Committee

The ICTU North/South committee has met on a number of occasions in the last 12 months. The main matters which the committee has been engaged with are issues relating the Brexit, including the Ireland/Northern Ireland protocol, the Internal Market Bill along with a sharing of information and analysis on both state's responses to the Covid 19 pandemic. A number of representatives of the North/South committee had an initial meeting with senior officials from



the Department of the Taoiseach in March 2021 to discuss the Irish Governments Shared Island Unit.

The current members of the North/South committee are,

**Gerry Murphy**, ICTU President and INTO

**Alison Millar**, ICTU Vice President and NIPSA

**Kevin Callinan**, ICTU Vice President and Forsa

**Joe Cunningham**, ICTU Treasurer and SIPTU

**Patricia King**, ICTU General Secretary

**Owen Reidy**, ICTU Assistant General Secretary

**Anne Speed**, Unison

**Brendan Ogle**, Unite

**David Kennedy**, CWU UK

**Denise Walker**, GMB

**Eoin Ronayne**, Forsa

**Gerry McCormack**, SIPTU

**Jackie Pollock**, Unite

**John Boyle**, INTO

**Paddy Mackel**, UCU

**Patricia McKeown**, Unison

**Phil Ni Sheaghdha**, INMO

## E7 The Trade Union Council of the Isles

The Council of the Isles is the annual meeting of the leadership of the trade union centres on these islands. It is comprised of the Trade Union Congress (TUC) of England, the Scottish TUC, the Welsh TUC and the Irish Congress of Trade Unions. The Council of the Isles originated from Strand 3 of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement and discusses issues of mutual concern and examines areas of potential cooperation.



The 2020 Council of the Isles was supposed to be hosted by the STUC but given the public health restrictions the meeting took place 28th May virtually. The ICTU was represented by Gerry Murphy President, Patricia King, General Secretary and Owen Reidy, Assistant General Secretary. Issues discussed included the various trade union centres responses to the C19 pandemic and Brexit.

Later in 2020 the WTUC, STUC and NIC-ICTU came together to share both analysis and actions being taken regarding the C19 response across the three centres. To date we have had 2 meetings of our collective leaderships. The first meeting was chaired by ICTU President and NIC Chair, Gerry Murphy in November 2020 and the second meeting was chaired by Mary Senior, STUC President and took place in February 2021. This initiative we hope will facilitate closer engagement on a sector basis across the 3 devolved states when it comes to areas such as education and health.





**NERI Special Labour Market Report:  
Covid-19 & the labour market one year on:  
The Good, the Bad and the Ugly.  
Dr Lisa Wilson**

**One year on from the start of the Covid-19 pandemic: What can be said about our labour market?**

The start of 2021 brought with it a surging third wave of Covid-19 and as we know well by now, this resurgence of the virus did not just bring with it the by now familiar challenges for our health service, but also another wave of impacts on our economy and our labour market. This is because going into lockdown reduces economic activity and hours worked, particularly in sectors forced to shut.

Now, however, as the rollout of the vaccine has been picking up speed and as confidence grows that this will be our last re-emergence from lockdown, it is worthwhile taking stock of where the labour market is and how it has fared through the crisis. It is only through understanding the good, the bad and the ugly of the labour market impacts can we make good recommendations for the future path of policy.

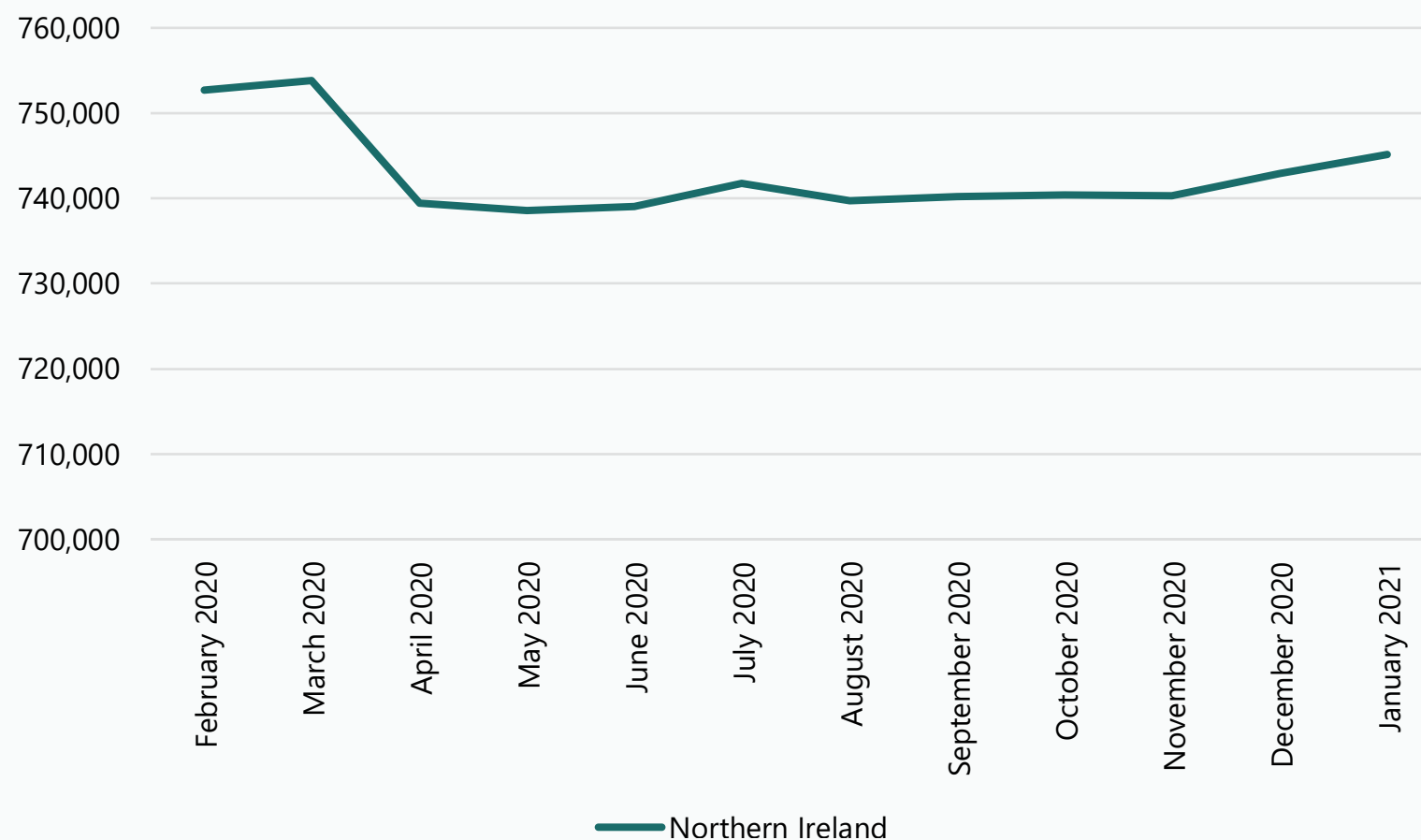
### **The Good - Jobs**

Starting with jobs, we can get a picture of how the various lockdowns over the year have been impacting upon jobs from two key sources. The first is provided by HMRC's PAYE employment data which gives us a more timely and up-to-date count of employee jobs than that provided by our second data source - the Labour Force Survey. The Labour Force Survey is typically published with a two-to-three-month lag. In this respect, whilst there are pros and cons to both data sources, the HMRC PAYE employment data is extremely valuable in its timeliness.

Looking at the HMRC PAYE employment data in the graph below we can see that with the exception of the sharp fall-out of jobs in the initial stages of the first lockdown we have seen a steady picture in terms of the number of paid employees over the course of the year, and indeed, a visible uptick in the number of jobs through December which continued into January. By January 2021 there was around 745,000 paid employees, compared to around 753,000 jobs in February 2020.

All in all, whilst there has been a decline over the year in the number of employee jobs, the scale of deterioration is nowhere close to the scale as what some were predicting this time last year. Indeed, the improving of the trend in the eve of the most recent lockdown is promising and suggests that we have reason to be optimistic that when those sectors of the economy which have been forced shut are allowed to reopen, that we will see a continuation in the rebound in employment.

## Number of paid employees, February 2020 – January 2021



Source: HMRC real-time PAYE employment, via ONS Labour Market Statistics.

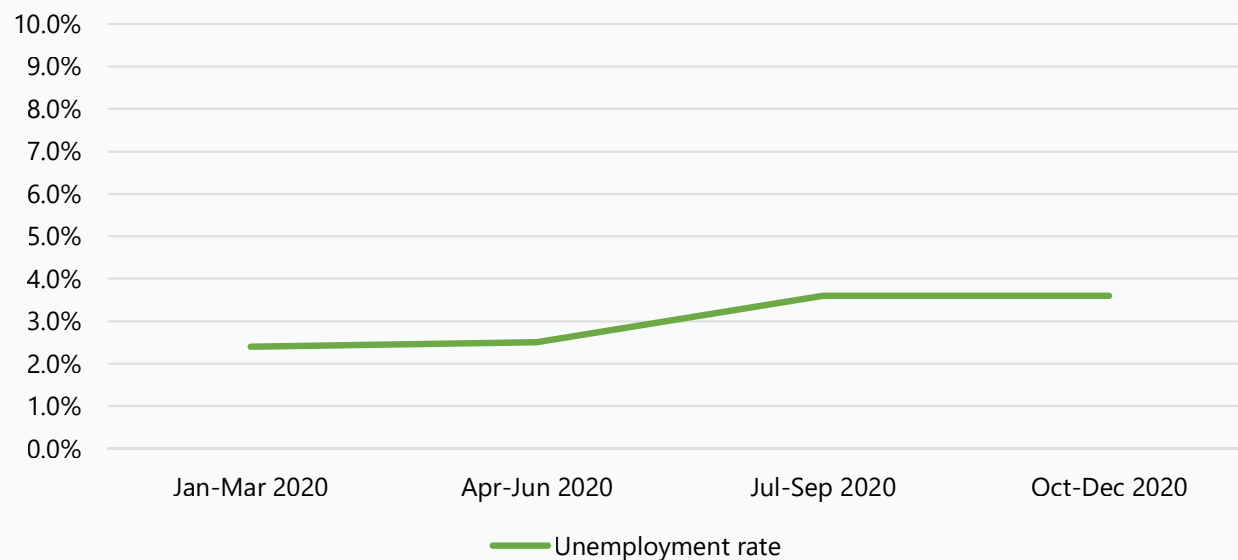
### Do not rely on the unemployment rate

Usually when there is a crisis in our economy or in our labour market economists' race to have a look at what is going on with the unemployment rate data to get to grips with the scale of the problem. But in this crisis, as can be seen from the graph below, the unemployment data is not a useful indicator and has been inadequate in characterising the effect of the pandemic on the labour market.

The unemployment rate has risen only very modestly since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic increasing from 2.5% in January-March 2020 to 3.6% by October-December 2020. It is however, noteworthy from the graph below that much of this increase occurred during the Summer period, despite much of the economy having reopened in that period.

As we emerge out of lockdown, into the recovery period and as supports are drawn away, the unemployment rate will become increasingly important to track again.

### Unemployment rate, January 2020-December 2020





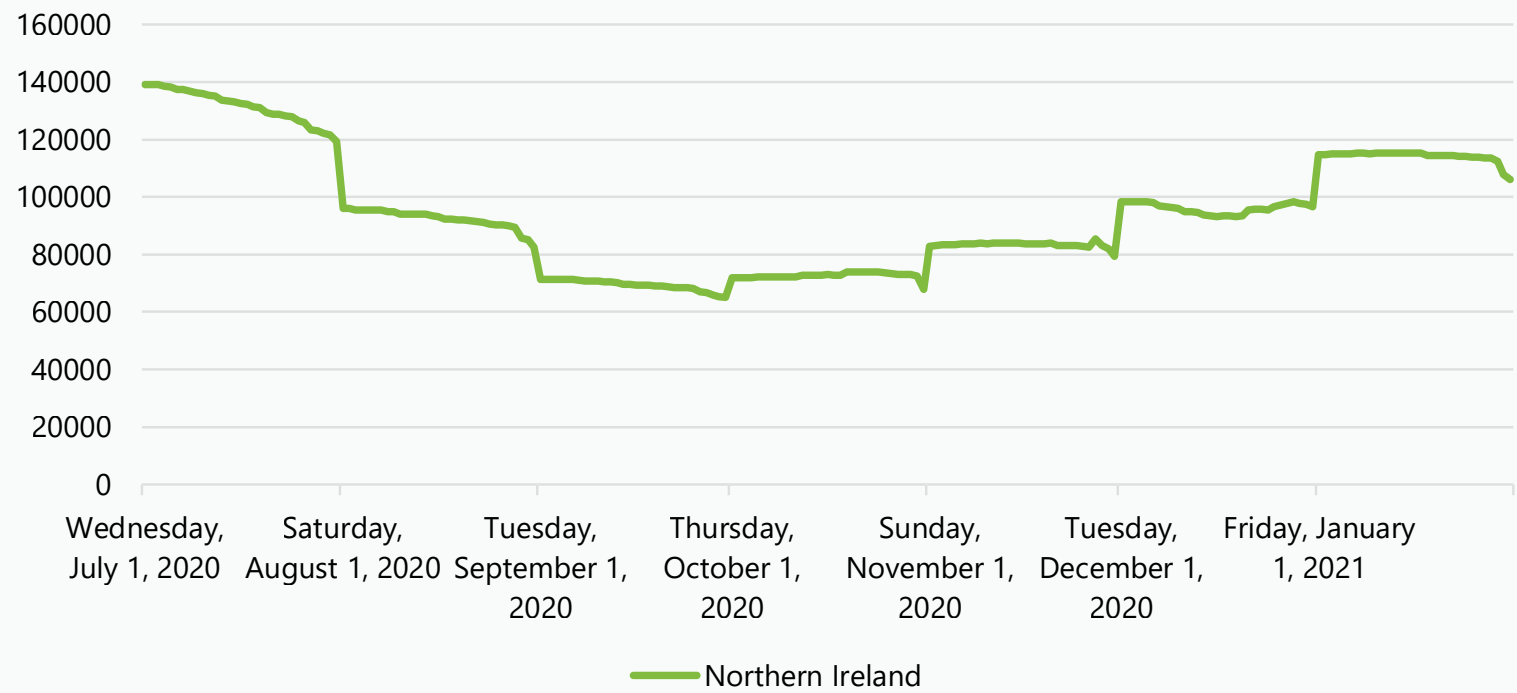
### The Coronavirus Job Retention scheme

By the end of January 2021, 1 in 7 paid jobs were being protected by the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme. The visible furlough stairs in the graph below, shows that as the economy was reopened through last Summer, the numbers on furlough began to have a staged drop. In contrast, through the Winter when lockdown restrictions were increasingly introduced, the numbers on furlough climbed again.

Until now, the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme has allowed us to avoid a situation of mass unemployment through monumentally delivering on its purpose of protecting jobs. The exception to this trend of supremacy in protecting jobs came in the Autumn with the rise in redundancies, as employers expected the scheme to be withdrawn.



Number on furlough in Northern Ireland



## The Bad – Redundancies & the claimant count

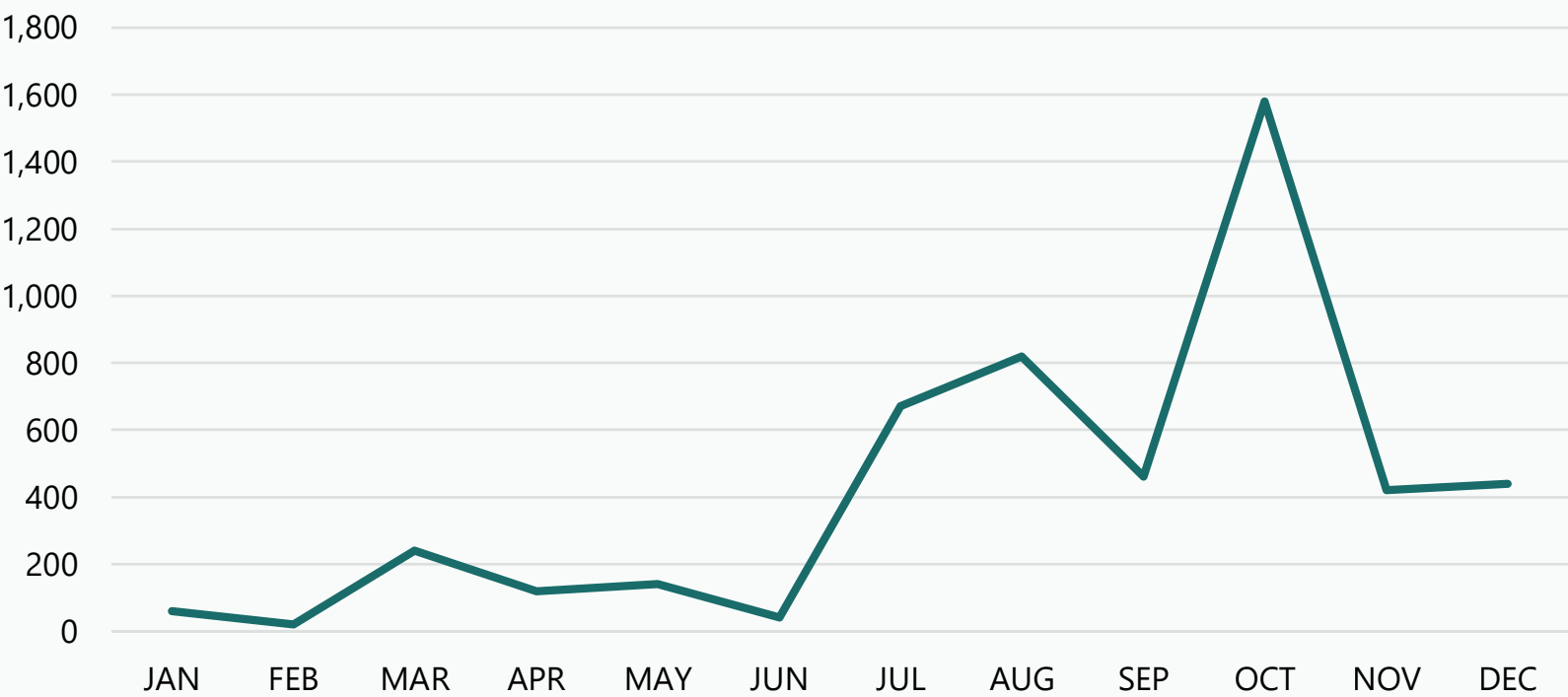
That being said, a closer look at some labour market data shows that despite the apparent stability that data on job numbers, employment and unemployment would lead us to believe is there, the terrain is relatively malleable. Some notable points of weakness remind us that the labour market is under pressure.

### Redundancies

A key marker of a worsening labour market however was redundancies, with the amount and timing of the sharp rise in redundancies through late Summer and into the Autumn driven in part by the Government's late extension of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme - the extension to the scheme was only announced a few weeks before it had been expected to close.

Over the last twelve-month period, 10,640 redundancies were proposed. At 5,150 the number of confirmed redundancies in the last year is much lower and in part reflects the advanced notification period between proposed and confirmed redundancies. Around 40% of the redundancy notifications took place in June and July while nearly 90% of redundancies confirmed in the last year were in the seven months since July.

Confirmed redundancies, January 2020 - December 2020



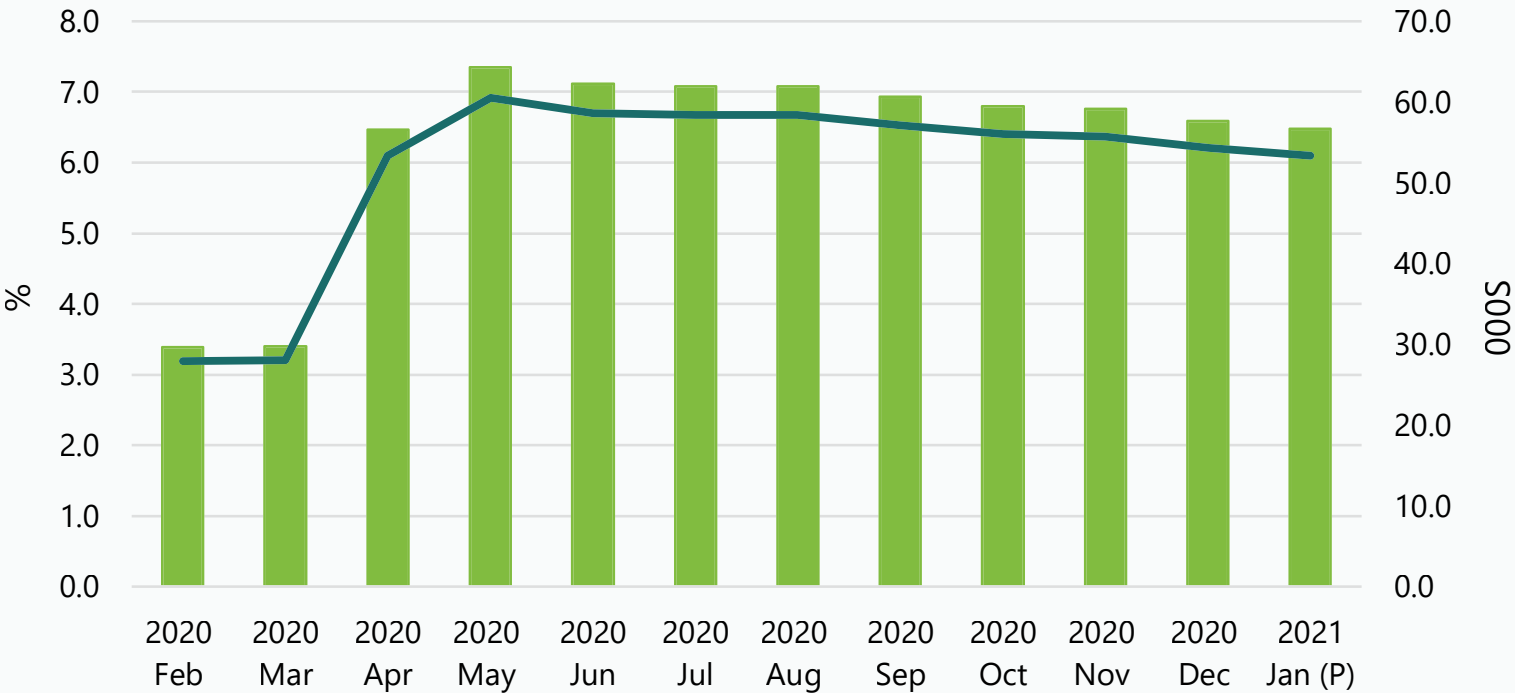
Over the latest twelve-month period there were 5,150 confirmed redundancies, which was 69% higher than the previous year (3,050) and the highest annual total recorded since 2004. Of these, 1,960 (or 38%) were confirmed in 'Manufacturing'. 1,100 (21% of all confirmed redundancies) were in the 'Wholesale and retail trade' and a further 500 (10% of all confirmed redundancies) were in the 'Transportation and storage' sector.

## The Claimant count

Looking over the year of Claimant count data also shows that all is not rosy in the labour market. That being said, as is clear from the chart below much of the increase in the claimant count occurred in the initial months of the pandemic and during the first lockdown and indeed we have seen a small, albeit continuous, decline in the claimant count in the months since. Increases in claimant count can largely be attributed to the increase in the numbers of people becoming unemployed or having their hours reduced, resulting in very low earnings below the administrative earnings threshold. The NI seasonally adjusted claimant count stood at 56,700 in January 2021, representing an increase of 26,900 since March 2020 or in percentage terms an increase of 91.4% over the year.



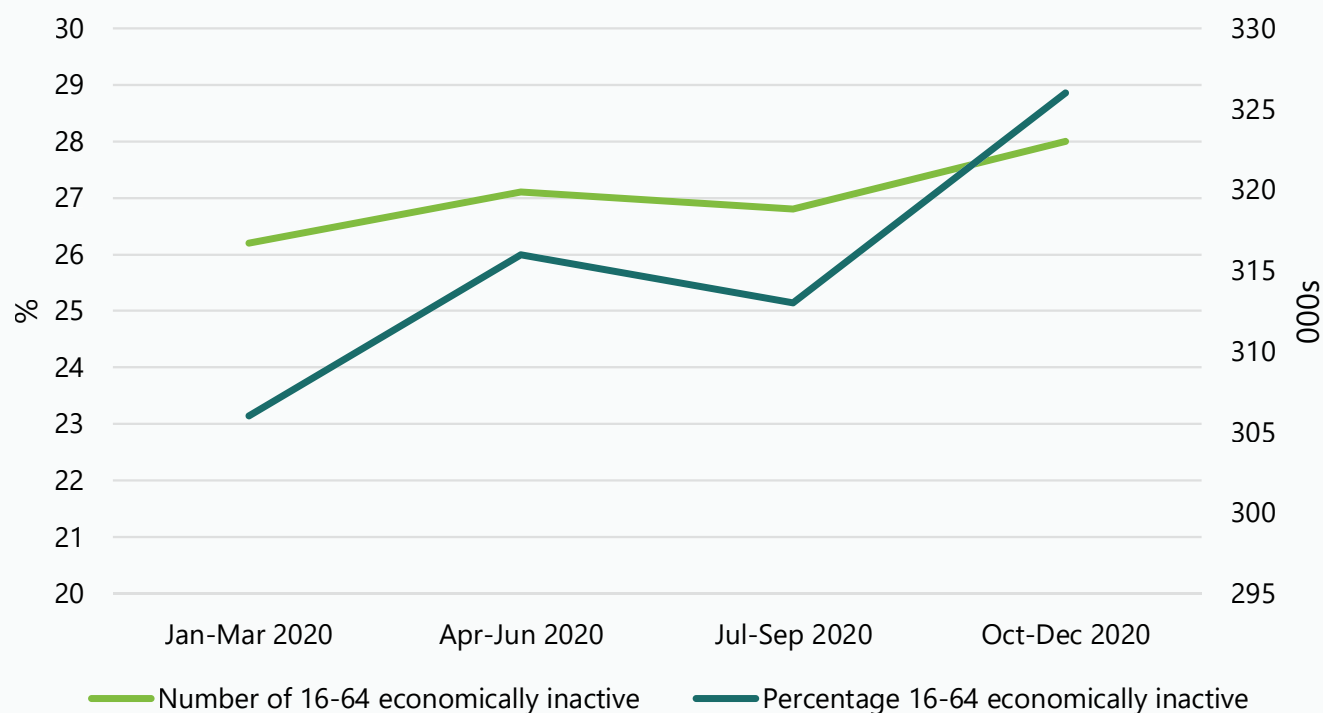
Claimant count, February 2020-January 2021



## The Ugly - Economic inactivity

Perhaps most worrying of all the labour market indicators, given that this issue has long been a thorn on the side of Northern Ireland's labour market performance, is that our rate of economic inactivity has been growing fairly consistently over the year and was close to 2 percentage points higher in October to December 2020 than it was in the first quarter of 2020.

### Economic inactivity, January 2020-December 2020



## Section F Migrant Workers

### F1 Migrant Workers Support Unit - BME Migrant Workers Project

#### Migrant Workers Support Unit

The NIC ICTU Migrant Workers Support Unit (MWSU) was established in 2007 through funding from the Department for the Economy. The Unit's main aim is to pursue the implementation of Congress policies by working towards the elimination of racism, discrimination, exploitation and barriers in accessing services for migrant workers.

The Belfast office operated a permanent Migrant Workers Employment Rights Centre as well as providing outreach clinics in other locations. The unit directly supported over 400 people per year and also ran advice centres, clinics and information sessions. Migrant workers were represented by the unit in the workplace and at Industrial and Fair Employment Tribunals with some well publicised positive outcomes for workers.

From the initial contact with our organisation, migrant workers have been encouraged to join a trade union and a number of successful union organising campaigns had their origins in contact through the MWSU.

A range of publications and training sessions helped to challenge racist attitudes and break down barriers between migrant and other workers.

The MWSU had strategic responsibilities of policy development and promoting protections for migrant workers. It lobbied government and was invited to participate in NGOs, local government and state sponsored sub groups. The Unit worked with partners both locally and internationally in support of equality for migrant and minority ethnic workers.

#### WORKERS ACTION GROUP

**Working in a meat or food processing company?**

Concerns about your working conditions during this Covid-19 crisis  
Changes needed to ensure your safety?  
Having problems with sick pay and leave?  
Other problems relating to your employment?

The Crossing Borders Breaking Boundaries Project provides support for workers through advice and training. We are helping you to improve your conditions at work. We would like to invite you to a confidential online meeting to listen to your concerns and give you the opportunity to meet other workers with similar issues. Interpreters will be available.

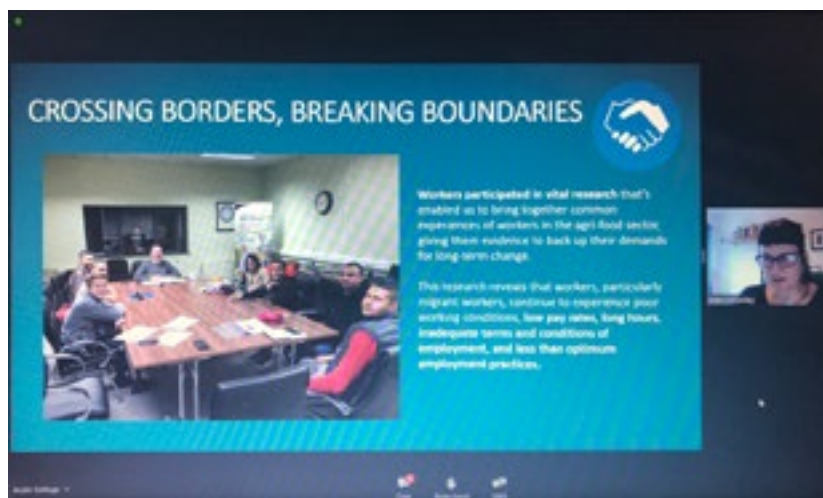
**Sunday 31st May 6pm via Zoom**  
Please contact us to receive the invitation link 07802330608

CONGRESS NIC CIP Ulster University Peace

## Crossing Borders, Breaking Boundaries

In 2018 the MWSU was relaunched when NIC ICTU, in partnership with Migrant Rights Centre Ireland, Ulster University and Community Intercultural Programme, successfully applied for Peace IV funding to run a project to develop a new model of labour market integration aimed at BME migrant workers (henceforth migrant workers) that will build positive relations with people from different communities and backgrounds.

This new project *Crossing Borders, Breaking Boundaries*, funded under the European Regional Development Fund of the EU and managed by the SEUPB, embraces many of the activities of the MWSU and also aims to build positive relations with people from different communities and backgrounds.



In the past two years the project supported over 1,200 workers to:

- Fight to get back unpaid wages, to defend jobs, to challenge bullying, harassment and discrimination, to speak out about exploitation, to regularise their status and more;
- Learn about their employment rights, how to access them, and to share this information with other workers.
- Empower them to stand up for their rights and join trade unions;
- Take part in workshops and courses to develop their knowledge, skills and English;
- Establish community groups and build relationships with others;
- Form campaigning workers action groups supported by local trade unionists;
- Participate in research, that's enabled us to bring together common experiences of workers, and giving them evidence to back up their demands for long-term change;
- Develop a *Charter to Protect Migrant Workers from Exploitation and to Build Inclusive Workplaces*, as their call for fair treatment at work and build social inclusion.

Workplaces can be crucial sites of integration and peace building. Exploitation of vulnerable migrant workers in the workplace creates a barrier to integration. Opportunities to unite workers from different backgrounds, however, can be created when workers are brought together to challenge the exploitative conditions they are forced to labour under. Building inclusion through challenging exploitation became a major feature of the *Crossing Borders, Breaking Boundaries* project's strategy. The project has been invaluable in making connections with and giving voice to sections of the most vulnerable members of our society. The project exposed truly shocking working conditions that some migrant workers have to endure today, particularly in the agri-food sector.

The Project used innovative approaches to reach out to and gain the trust of vulnerable migrant worker. Offering advice,



support and representation in the workplace the project established strategic relationships with organisations that provided support or services to migrant workers, families and communities. Joint outreach sessions with these organisations brought the project into contact with vulnerable migrant workers in non-unionised workplaces.

Once trust was established the Project deepened engagement with the migrant workers by providing ESOL courses, information sessions and linkages with local government and NGO's who could provide assistance with their needs and those of their community. In addition to representation in the workplace the project also assisted over 20 participants in taking strategic cases to Employment and Fair Employment Tribunals.

Over 80 migrant workers participated in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) accredited and unaccredited courses, mainly in Armagh, Lurgan and Newry, organised by the project with the Belfast Unemployed Resource Centre, Depaul, Newry and Mourne Council, BFAWU and the Southern Regional College.

The Project also worked to establish migrant community groups and encourage interaction between communities. Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon Borough Council provided valuable support the Bulgarian Community Group Lurgan which the project established.

Employment rights advice sessions were run by the project across the border regions and in other areas, providing assistance to migrant workers, introducing them to trade unions and drawing them into the work of the project.

Opportunities for unions to organise resulted from such engagements with migrant workers. Recognising that chal-



lending exploitation of migrant and other vulnerable workers in the workplace must begin with workers joining trade unions the project worked with affiliates to organise migrant workers in a number of workplaces. As well as assisting unions to reach out to migrant workers the project also assisted affiliates in supporting their existing migrant worker memberships.

Over 150 migrant workers participated in 17 workshops aimed at building inclusion and enhancing the skills of the project participants. Themes of the workshops included:

- Cultural competency;
- Community relations;
- Building Cross Cultural relationships;
- Challenging Racism and Discrimination;
- Employment rights;
- Representation in the workplace;
- Political lobbying;
- Hate crime;
- Human trafficking.

Trade union activists from a number of affiliates, Craigavon Trades Council and the Trades Council Consultative Committee joined representatives from NGOs and community activists in participating in these workshops.

The Trades Council Consultative Committee and Belfast & District Trades Council also held seminars on *Tackling Prejudice and Precarious Working in partnership* with the project.

To ensure that the work of the project was taken forward and led by migrant workers the project arranged for 17 key participants to go through an accredited leadership programme.

The project also assisted migrant workers to form a number of Workers Action Groups (WAG) to assert the voice of migrant workers, to fight for improvements in their employment rights and working conditions, and to build relationships between communities. The support of affiliates, the Craigavon Trades Council and other union activists has been invaluable with this aspect of the project. An aggregate WAG was established to commence campaigning around issues contained in the *Charter to Protect Migrant Workers from Exploitation and to Build Inclusive Workplaces*, produced by NIC ICTU on behalf of the project, however, the Covid-19 restrictions has hindered the work of this group.

Members of the WAG have participated in lobbying politicians on the banning of zero hours contracts. Over the past 2 years the project met with a range of MLAs, government departments and agencies to raise issues affecting migrant workers. The following ministers were written to by the project.

- Minister for the Economy – CJRS application to agency workers.
- Minister for Health – on Covid-19 on BAME migrant workers.
- Minister for the Communities – on the impact on new comer workers of the suspension of the issuing of Nation Insurance Numbers.

The project intervened effectively with the assistance of the Ballymena and Antrim Trades Council, BFAWU, Unite and other local trade unionists to help reduce racial tensions that had arisen in the Ballymena area and were being whipped up by a Far Right political group. Through working with local trade unionists, employers, community groups, the Mid and East Antrim Borough Council and other politicians the project helped reduce the myths that fuelled the racial tensions and to de-escalate the situation.

On the initiative of the Committee on the Administration of Justice (CAJ), the project joined with a number of organizations to agree a letter raising concerns over the UK government's new Frontier Workers scheme. The letter was sent to the Secretary of State and copied to Irish and Northern Irish government ministers and departments.

The project also produced research, conducted by the UU partners, on the profile, conditions, cross border dynamics, issues impeding labour market integration of migrant workers mainly in the agricultural, food processing and services sectors in NI and the border area. The research also looked at Practitioner Experience of Working with Applicants to the *EU Settlement Scheme*, and *Optimising Opportunities for Workplace Justice for Migrant Workers*.

The findings of this research, along with the direct input from the project participants, were used by NIC ICTU to produce the *Charter to Protect Migrant Workers from Exploitation and to Build Inclusive Workplaces*.



## Charter

People from a migrant background are now integral parts of our society as well as our economy. They must no longer be overlooked and regarded as just here to do the dirty, difficult, dangerous and unnecessarily low paid jobs that we disdain to do.

Like so many of our friends and relatives, migrant workers have left the land of their birth in the hope of a better life for them and their families. Yet many have to endure isolation, exploitation, racism and discrimination.

Migrant and other vulnerable workers face extra barriers which prohibit them from accessing their legal rights and from challenging exploitation, discrimination and dangerous practices in the workplace.

*The Charter to Protect Migrant Workers from Exploitation and to Build Inclusive Workplaces* attempts to give migrant workers a voice to call for change so that all people on this island can work, live, learn and socialise together with dignity, respect, free from exploitation, prejudice, hate and intolerance.

Some of the factors that lead to the vulnerability of migrant workers are:

- **Language barrier** - If you have little or no English, then it is highly likely that you will be unaware of your rights and entitlements and how to access them. You will be reliant on the employer.
- **Lack of resources and legal assistance**, along with the fear of reprisals by the employer put off many of those aware of their rights from attempting to enforce them.
- **Precarious employment** - the use of ZHCs and long term insecure employment through agencies has become the normal business model in parts of the agri-food sector.
- **Low pay** - minimum wage is the going rate in many un-unionised workplaces in this sector. - When your income is barely enough to cover your family's cost of living and pay the rent you will have no choice but to accept mistreatment in work out of the fear of losing it.
- **Long working hours** - low pay is normally combined with long, unsociable working hours. How do you integrate into society if you haven't the money or the time?
- **Lack of a wider family support network** to fall back upon, to look after children for example, or should you become ill or unemployed. For many migrant workers in the meat processing sector the risk of Covid-19 was less worrying than the fear of being left to support their families on SSP.

- **Restrictions on the immigration status.** The rolling out of UK Government's new immigration system, we will soon see an increase in the scale of this problem in NI.
- **Racism and discrimination** – this includes structural discrimination and interpersonal discrimination. Many BME migrant workers have come to accept racial abuse both inside and outside of the workplace. Some employers the project encountered appeared to tolerate, if not encourage, discrimination and ethnic divisions in the workplace to facilitate exploitation.

The charter makes recommendations that seek to overcome these debilitating dynamics.



There is a section on Ensuring Decent Work including:

- The right to employment documents and information on rights in the appropriate language of the worker.
- The right to decent pay and working hours.
- The right to Equality, Dignity and Respect.
- The right to work safely including recommendations around Covid-19.
- Better rights to representation by trade unions.
- Recommendations on immigration status and rights.
- Rights for agency and precarious workers.

There is a section on the *Right to Work Safely* as the Covid-19 crisis has intensified the poor and precarious working conditions of migrant workers in the agri-food sector. As production demands have increased, alongside the growing threat of virus transmission in the workplace migrant workers are putting themselves and their families at risk to get food on our tables.

Proposals contained in the charter to improve access to justice and the better enforcement of legal rights, if implemented, would improve the conditions of many workers here.

And there are also sections on Building an Inclusive Workplace with recommendations on recruitment of migrant workers, career development and policies to challenge prejudice and create a workplace culture based on inclusion.

This is an important section as building an inclusive society should begin in the workplace. In too many instances the workplace is the only site where people from different backgrounds come together.

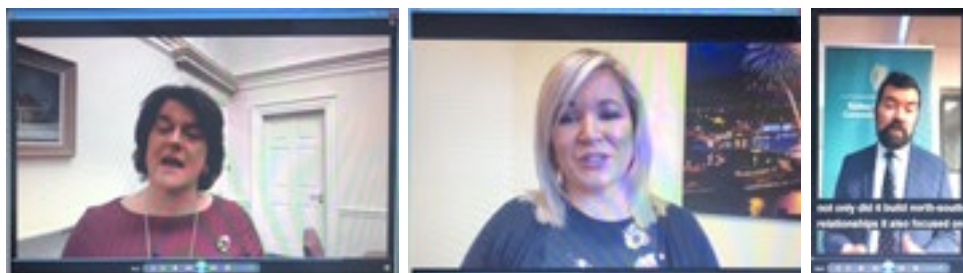
The purpose of the charter is to raise awareness of the conditions faced by vulnerable migrant workers on the island, as a benchmark for decency and as a campaigning tool to move towards an inclusive, just, and equal economy and society.

The full charter can be found on the NIC ICTU website at [www.ictuni.org/publications/ictu-migrants-charter](http://www.ictuni.org/publications/ictu-migrants-charter)

## End of Project

Unfortunately, as the core of this project was about bringing people together, Covid-19 greatly impeded the project's final year which ended in December 2020. A great deal of significant work has been done by the project's participants and partners, but there is still a lot to be done.

The Project would like to thank local trade's councils, including the Ballymena and Antrim, Belfast and Craigavon trades councils, the Trades Council Consultative Committee, BFAWU, NIPSA, SIPTU, UNISON, UNITE, other trade union activists and affiliates who participated in the project's activities and would welcome the involvement of others to help continue to break down barriers between communities. This work is essential to defeating the growth in prejudice, racial tensions and challenging the exploitation of workers.





## Section G Equality and Human Rights

### G1 Introduction

#### **EQUALITY & HUMAN RIGHTS SUB-GROUP (EHRSG)**

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The EHRSG is a sub-committee of the NI Committee which extends its membership to the chairs of the NIC's self-organised groups.

Despite the challenges brought about by COVID, NIC ICTU's equality committees have continued to meet and be active in a wide work programme.

This period has highlighted the disproportionate impact that COVID-19 has on many vulnerable groups, including women, disabled people and workers in frontline roles, many of whom are in insecure and low paid work.

#### **Women's Committee**

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The NIC ICTU Women's Committee has held regular meetings which have proven lively, motivating and a crucial exchange of information and solidarity. The Committee, through its members, has continued to provide support to many campaigns including abortion provision, tackling period poverty, addressing issues of domestic abuse in the

workplace and supporting positive action around a range of workplace issues including menopause.

The Joint Women's Committee Officers have held regular meetings to coordinate work and plan for the events for International Women's Day 2021.

#### **Women and Leadership**

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Building on motions to the ICTU Women's Conference, Congress held a Women and Leadership course in early 2020, just before the first lockdown. Women from across the island gathered together in Congress House in Dublin to work with facilitator Isobel Butler to explore themes of leadership in the trade union movement and in society. Participants also heard from a range of trade union leaders about their experiences – speakers included ICTU General Secretary Patricia King, former ICTU President Sheila Nunan, ICTU Vice President Alison Millar, SIPTU Deputy General Secretary Ethel Buckley and Forsa President Anne McGee.

The lockdown scuppered plans for a second course however working with Isobel, an online version of the course was launched in Autumn 2020. Whilst it could not replicate the face to face experience, it nevertheless had excellent participation and good feedback.

Participants noted that the course was

*"Well facilitated with lots of practical activities that got people talking in the room. Covered a lot leadership theory but in a very meaningful way."*

*"I found the course extremely helpful, it drew attention to different types of leadership models, what makes a good/bad leader, also made the participants think, talk, respond and report."*

## International Women's Day 2021

The Women's Committee decided to build on the theme of leadership and organised a webinar to mark International Women's Day 2021.

The webinar focused on **Leadership, Women and Change – in work and in society and Women and Leadership within the trade union movement – a reflection.**

A formidable panel of speakers included ICTU GS Patricia King, ICTU V President Alison Millar, representatives from the ETUC and ITUC as well as the Chairs of the Women's Caucus in the NI Assembly, Clare Bailey, and the Oireachtas Fiona O'Loughlin.



Members of the Women's Committee and affiliates also supported the events planned by Reclaim the Agenda for IWD across Northern Ireland. These included an online 'march' on Saturday 6th March as well as social media campaigns. Frontline workers were celebrated including

NHS workers as well as those working in retail, transport, care homes and domiciliary care workers.

## Women's Council of the Isles 2021

The Women's Committee participated in a virtual Women's Council of the Isles event in February 2021. Organised by sisters in the STUC, the event featured a panel discussion with the General Secretaries from each of the countries as well as presentations from the Women's Committees and invited guests.

Topics covered included Domestic Abuse Leave; Abortion provision in Northern Ireland and the rise of problem gambling for women.

ICTU was instrumental in organising a Women's Council of the Isles [Joint Statement](#) to mark 25 November 2020, International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. Signed by each of the General Secretaries from ICTU, TUC, WTUC and STUC, the statement noted:

*Domestic abuse is always a workplace issue and trade unions know that work is often a place of safety for women experiencing domestic abuse.*

*Every year sees mounting evidence of the devastating impact of violence against women but 2020 has been particularly difficult. During the lockdowns, which extended to all parts of the UK and Ireland, many women were stuck at home with the perpetrator of violence, unable to escape to, what for many women, is the safety of their workplace.*

*That's why we are calling on our Governments to immediately ratify [ILO Convention 190 on Violence and Harassment in the World of Work](#). Article 18 of the accompanying [recommendation](#) specifies measures which should be taken to mitigate the impacts of domestic violence at work including leave for the victims of domestic violence, flexible work arrangements and the inclusion of domestic violence in workplace risk assessments.*

## Abortion

Despite the introduction of long fought for legislation to reform the archaic abortion laws in Northern Ireland, in reality little has changed for women who need to access abortion healthcare.



*The Abortion (Northern Ireland) Regulation 2020* came into force on the 31st March 2020. For the first time the regulations provide 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 Womens Committee and Health Committee, to support [Alliance for Choice](#) in their work.

## Domestic Abuse Leave

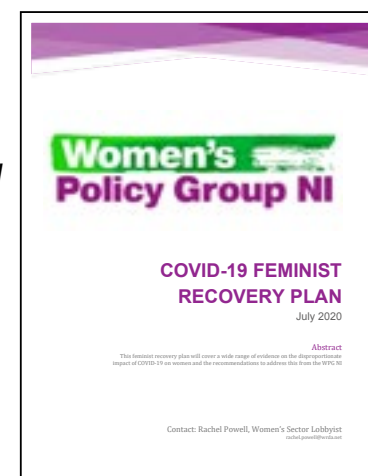
No one should lose their job or pay because of domestic abuse. As part of a response to Rachel Woods MLAs Private Members Bill to introduce paid domestic abuse leave, we called for victims of domestic abuse to be given additional employment rights. Very often people need to take time off to access legal or financial support and during the working day is the only safe time to do this. A day one right to paid time off from work to access this support, as in countries like Australia or New Zealand, would make a real difference to women's lives.

## Feminist Recovery Plan

Congress is represented on key policy group the Women's Policy Group. A major focus of the WPG was the production of an in-depth analysis of the effects of the pandemic on women. The [Feminist Recovery Plan](#) was produced in the summer of 2020 and ran to over a hundred pages long covering health, education, public life, violence against women among other topics. ICTU took the lead in writing the chapters on women and work which noted:

*Women in Northern Ireland continue to be more likely to be in insecure and part-time employment, and whilst the overall gender pay gap is the lowest in the UK, women still earn on average around 9.6% less than men. Having dependent children significantly amplifies this difference and women responsible for dependent children are more likely to be in insecure, part time work.*

*Policy failures around family leave frameworks fail all workers but impact disproportionately on women while the lack of affordable childcare, structured to facilitate women returning and staying in work, is still a very significant issue. Furthermore, women continue to experience significant sex discrimination, including sexual harassment and discrimination against mothers and pregnant women.*





*Recommendations to policy makers included*

- *Develop a women's employment strategy which identifies the labour market issues facing women and an associated cross departmental action plan to tackle these.*
- *Introduce Gender Pay Gap legislation which is fit for purpose for Northern Ireland. Ensure that this is accompanied by an associated strategy, action plan and accountability measures which should be properly resourced.*
- *Introduce gender transparency measures to tackle inequality in men's and women's pay and pensions.*
- *Review flexible working legislation and make this available as a day one right for all workers.*
- *Make parental leave available as a day one right, introduce 10 days of paid parental leave.*
- *Reserve a period of paid parental leave for fathers – use it or lose it.*
- *Introduce a duty on employers to proactively tackle sexual harassment at work to include mandatory training for all employees including managers and HR personnel.*

- *The Northern Ireland Executive should recognise and promote the importance of collective bargaining and trade unions as a driver for better pay and terms and conditions as well as higher productivity.*

### 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, 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.

This was raised by ICTU Assistant General Secretary Owen Reidy with the First and Deputy First Ministers in a letter which noted:

*The Northern Ireland Executive has responded to the COVID-19 emergency with a programme of significant financial support for many sectors and this is welcome. However, without considering the issue of childcare, a return to work for many people will not be possible. We would therefore suggest that the Northern Ireland Executive urgently needs to consider significant public subsidy in childcare to facilitate parents to return to work whilst ensuring that their children are receiving quality care.*

## Northern Ireland Strategic Equality Strategies

The New Decade New Approach agreement promised the publication of long awaited 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 (ICTU), Taryn Trainor, (UNITE) and John Patrick Clayton, (UNISON). Publication of the strategies is expected late 2021.

## Disability Committee

The Disability Committee organized a well attended seminar on mental health focusing on the HSENI's [Stress Management Standards](#) as well as the Equality law issues for trade union representatives.

## LGBTQ matters

Congress organized an online event to mark Pride across the island. Pride in Your Union featured speakers from UNSION, SIPTU, NUJ, INTO and more as well as a tribute to the marriage equality campaign in Northern Ireland.



## Section H Industrial Relations

### H1 NI Employment Relations Roundtable

The NI Employment Relations Roundtable (Roundtable) comprises a representative of the four lead employer organisations (Chamber of Commerce, Confederation of British Industry, Federation of Small Businesses and Institute of Directors) and four representatives from NIC ICTU, Patricia McKeown, Alison Millar, Jackie Pollock and Owen Reidy. It is hosted and facilitated by the LRA.

The Roundtable seeks to engage, advise and influence Government on all matters relating to employment/industrial relations.

In the Assembly's absence the ERR Roundtable has concentrated on the Joint Declaration of Protection, developing a joint IR skills programme, organising a conference to promote the role of positive industrial and employment relations in the broader economic context and the impact of Brexit.

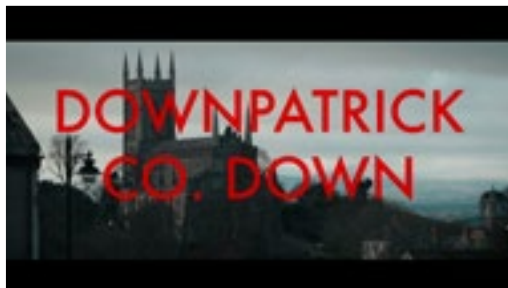
The Joint Declaration of Protection is a commitment by employers and trade unions to promoting and maintaining good and harmonious working environments. It is supported by a call for a fully resourced programme of action, comprising, among other things, an active communications strategy and training plans for making the declaration operational.

With the introduction of the Covid-19 restrictions the constituent organisations of the Roundtable switched their focus to the work of the Engagement Forum on Covid-19 that was established by the Minister for the Economy to address workplace safety and other related issues.

### H2 Industrial Disputes

The NIC supported and assisted affiliates in a range of industrial disputes and redundancy situations. These included:

- Royal Mail;
- BT Openreach;
- Aviation and Airport workers;
- Retail workers, incl. Debenhams;
- Moy Park and other food processors where workers felt under threat from infection with Covid-19;
- Newry, Mourne & Down District Council, where workers in four different unions united to remedy and long-standing pay injustice. This included strike action over the winter and resulted in a victory beyond the expectations of the workers at the start of the dispute. SIPTU, NIPSA, GMB and Unite demonstrated the strength of unity in what will become a model for future training courses.











# I Health and Safety

## I1 Health & Safety

The Health and Safety Committee met during this period and provided valuable feedback and insight into the many issues facing workers and trade unions.

Based on this feedback, Congress continued to press HSENI to provide guidance on various matters including the safety of pregnant women in relation to Coronavirus.

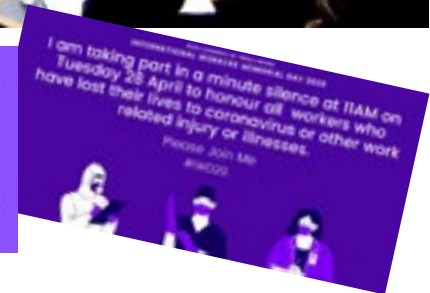
### Health and Safety Guidance and the Strategic Engagement Forum



As part of the work under the strategic engagement forum, Congress worked with other stakeholders to develop robust Practical Guidance on Workplace Safety – [Working Through this Together](#).

### Workers Memorial Day

WMD was marked in April 2020 by an online social media campaign calling for a minute's silence at 11AM on 28th April. The minute silence was widely observed and gained considerable traction on social media.



## Health and Safety during COVID – Reps Survey

The Health and Safety Committee launched a survey to assess the main issue for safety reps during the pandemic. Whilst at the time of preparing this report, results were still coming in, early analysis of the survey indicates that reps were coping with considerable and very serious issues.

## Working from Home Guidance

Congress produced guidance on working from home from an employment, health and safety and equality perspective.

The guidance also examined the issues connected with monitoring and privacy and surveillance noting that the trade union movement has become increasingly concerned to hear of the growing number of employers using Software products to measure workers keyboard and mouse usage, web browsing activity and to monitor for keywords or topics in workplace chat channels. Practices that facilitate employers to watch over remote workers, such as requiring a laptop camera and microphone to be always on and at the ready for supervisors spontaneously checking-in that they are actively working, are also disturbingly not uncommon.

The use of surveillance products and practices must comply with the transparency requirements of data protection law and not breach your right to privacy in the workplace. These practices should also be the subject of negotiation and

agreement with you and your trade union. Covert workplace surveillance should only happen in extreme cases, such as if there are grounds to suspect criminal activity or serious malpractice, and only for a limited period of time.



# Appendix

## List of Submissions and consultations 2020-21

### Public Sector Pensions

**February 2020** – Public Service Pensions – 2015 Addressing Age Discrimination Transitional Protections.

A series of expert meetings of sub-group on McCloud judgement.

Plus plenary meetings of management & unions at CCWG, 20 January, 14 February, 14 August, 20 October & 10 February.

### NIC-ICTU Health Committee:

**27 February 2020** – Briefing Note for NI Assembly Health Committee (workforce issues).

Evidence in person from AHPs:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8hKh96vu-Wes&list=PL5lnNfzfEzh7fTN1ISyT5Wm8BBUfv-F4RT&index=11>

**May 2020** – Letter to Health Minister on availability of abortion services, particularly during this COVID-19 pandemic.

**11 June 2020** – Briefing in person to NI Assembly Health Committee.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I9L2PJyuPE&list=PL5lnNfzfEzh7fTN1ISyT5Wm8BBUfvF4RT&index=33>

**June 2020** – Written briefing on Covid-19 for NI Assembly Health Committee (workforce & Covid-19).

**June 2020** – Briefing note on Care Home strategy.

**October 2020** – Evidence paper to NI Assembly Health Committee inquiry on Care Homes.

**20 October** – Verbal session with NI Assembly Health Committee. The proceedings are here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uPKrgLiP-jOk&list=PL5lnNfzfEzh7fTN1ISyT5Wm8BBUfvF4RT&index=2>

**February 2021** – Covid update report at request of NI Assembly Health Committee.

## Education Trade Union Group

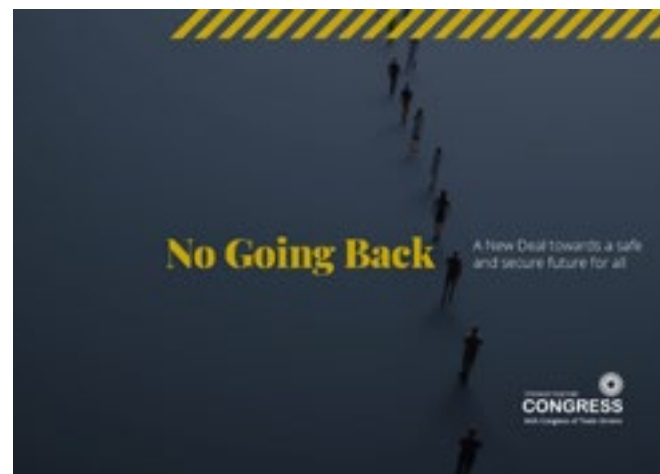
**May 2020** - Open letter to Education Minister on Covid-19.

**5 August 2020** - Open letter to Education Minister on re-opening schools.

**27 August 2020** - briefing paper for NI Assembly Education Ctte

**2 September 2020** - Evidence in person to NI Assembly Education Ctte.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GPLYWyM-ZIMQ&list=PL5lnNfzfEzh50MPoScq8uUiF3SWAJqMS-B&index=41>



**October 2020** - Verbal Briefing with Public Health Agency.

**February 2021** - Letters to Education and Health Ministers seeking vaccination programme for SEN staff and students.

## Retired Workers' Committee

**21 February 2020** - Age Seminar including briefing with Older People's Commissioner NI.

**31 July 2020** - Zoom briefing with Older People's Commissioner NI.

**February 2021** - Older People's Commissioner attends Age Webinar.







**NO GOING  
BACK** 

STRONGER TOGETHER



**CONGRESS**

Irish Congress of Trade Unions  
Northern Ireland Committee