



Achieving for Women in Work

a New Economic Model
for Women Workers

Womens
Conference
2026

STRONGER TOGETHER
CONGRESS
Irish Congress of Trade Unions





Timetable

Thursday 19 March

09.30am Registration and coffee

Session 1 Opening Session

10.00am Welcome and introduction

Tina Creaney & Lynda Scully, Joint Women's Committee Chairs

Chair of Conference Arrangements Committee

Civic Welcome

CLlr Niamh Brady, Cavan County Council

President's address

Phil Ní Sheaghdha, Congress President

Session 2 Motions to Conference

11.00am Motions to Conference together with appropriate sections of report to conference.

Guest speakers:

Paul Mac Flynn and Dr Lisa Wilson,
Nevin Economic Research Institute

12.30 - 1.30 Fringe Events:

Trade Union Friends of Palestine host fringe meeting examining latest developments in Gaza and how trade unions can offer support and solidarity. Cuilcach Suite.

What works for women workers? What the data tells us -
Paul Mac Flynn and Dr Lisa Wilson, NERI. Main Conference Hall.

Tackling misogyny and hate: taking positive action. Members of the ICTU Womens Committee will lead a discussion about ways trade unions can effectively challenge misogyny in work and in society. Claddagh Suite.

See separate handout for detail on fringe meetings.

1.30 - 2.15 Lunch.



Session 3 Motions to Conference

- 14.15pm** **Motions**
- General Secretary's address
Owen Reidy
- Motions to Conference
- 16.00pm** **Coffee break**
- 16.15pm** **Session 3 resumes**
- 17.30pm** **End of Day 1**
- 19.30pm** **Conference dinner followed by disco.**

Friday 20 March

Session 4 Motions to Conference

- 09.30am** **Motions to Conference and appropriate sections of report to Women's Conference**
- Guest Speaker:**
Mary McDermott: Chief Executive Officer Safe Ireland
- 10.45am** **Coffee Break**
- 11.00am** **Voting on motions and appropriate sections of report**
- 13.00pm** **Close of Conference**



Introduction



I am delighted to extend a very warm welcome to the 2026 Irish Congress of Trade Unions Women's Conference and congratulate you on the theme for the conference: *Achieving for Women in Work: A New Economic Model for Women Workers*.

Congress as the representative voice of workers on the island of Ireland has developed this New Economic Model in conjunction with NERI as our contribution to the debate about how we want our society to look and what type of economy we aspire to for our children and grandchildren.

We intend to relentlessly promote and popularise this progressive vision of how this island can and should be over the next number of years and beyond. Having the opportunity to debate and discuss this at our Women's Conference is an importance chance to further shape our policies and strategy for rolling our vision out.

Everyone wants to see a strong economy, with good, well-paid jobs. Yet in the face of global challenges and changing economic environment, we hear the same old calls for cuts to wages and threats to workers' rights. European competitiveness will not be rebuilt through deregulation, or by weakening workers' rights and protections, by cutting pay, forcing longer hours, or making work more insecure. That path creates a race to the bottom. Europe will not win by lowering the bar.

Now is the time to decide what we want our future to look like. We cannot continue with the same risky overreliance on corporation tax receipts. Our New Economic Model sets out a clear framework for a productive, stable, and supportive economy, one that places workers at the heart of economic resilience.

Support for collective bargaining, valuing care, pay transparency and investing in infrastructure: these aren't just good for workers and families, they support the wider economy as well. With the New Economic Model, we're demonstrating a clear vision of the future.

I would like to commend the Congress Women's Committee and all of you for your role in protecting workers and highlighting issues which particularly impact on women workers; I have been particularly impressed by the tireless way you have championed the safety of women and girls in the trade union movement, in the workplace and in wider society and I am pleased that this issue has now become a priority for the Congress Executive Council.

War and instability continues to destabilise the lives of millions across the world, particularly affecting the lives of women and children. The catastrophic war and humanitarian disaster in Gaza and a difficult economic recovery at a time when the cost of living is sky rocketing will mean that the trade union movement must respond robustly to protect working people and their families.



At the same time, it is important to remain positive. The theme of your conference is timely and I believe that there are huge opportunities to shape the world of work for the better. Working together we can make a difference to women workers across this island – including through seeking to influence the effective implementation of the recently launched National Strategy for Women and Girls and campaigning to ensure that a complete suite of social inclusion strategies are launched, resourced and monitored in Northern Ireland. We will also continue to take action to support women trade unionists internationally who are struggling to achieve peace and basic human rights.

I want to finish by commending the Women's Committee of Congress North and South for their work in promoting gender equality in work, in trade unions and in society and wish you well for this important conference.

Owen Reidy
General Secretary



Motions for the Congress

Women's Conference 2026

1. New Economic Model serving Women's needs

The ICTU Women's Committee commend the Executive Council on the 'New Economic Model' proposals and welcome the opportunity to play a full role in achieving decent work for women and all workers through the achievement of a fair and progressive economic system across the island of Ireland.

Women now make up over half of trade union members across the island, yet women are still more likely to be found in precarious and low paid jobs; furthermore, the labour market continues to be segregated, with the work traditionally undertaken by women consistently undervalued.

The Women's Committee therefore urge the Executive Council to ensure that the NEM considers the particular needs of women in work and society including:

- Bringing forward proposals in relation to Work Life Balance, to include publicly provided model of childcare as well as a comprehensive parental leave system.
- Challenging the persistent undervaluing of women's work, particularly in the care sector.

- Capitalise on the evidence which indicates that women are more likely to join unions by ensuring that women trade unionists are mentored and encouraged to take up leadership positions throughout the trade union movement.

Furthermore, the ICTU Women's Committee welcomes the focus which the Executive Council has given to the issue of ending violence against women and girls. This work needs now to be strengthened and the Conference calls on the Executive Council to bring forward an action plan to outline how this work will be progressed, particularly in relation to male leadership and action to end violence against women and girls.

Women's Committee, NICICTU

2. New Deal for Women Workers

Life has changed intensely for many women over the past 40 years. The hopes and opportunities offered to women have grown beyond recognition. Despite this progress women are still underrepresented in high-ranking positions and overrepresented in low-skilled, low-paid, part-time, precarious work.



In today's environment, too many women find themselves being corralled into jobs below their skills and abilities because of childcare and domestic responsibilities. Moreover, women continue to face maternity discrimination, sexual harassment in the workplace and are discriminated against in terms of pay.

Women's economic empowerment is essential to achieving women's rights and gender equality. Women's economic empowerment means ensuring women can equally participate in and benefit from decent work and social protection; access markets and have control over resources, their own time, lives, and bodies; and increased voice, agency, and meaningful participation in economic decision-making at all levels from the household to international institutions.

Promoting women's economic justice and rights in the economy and closing gender gaps in the world of work are key to achieving a new deal for women workers. When more women work, economies grow.

Increasing women's and girls' educational attainment contributes to women's economic empowerment and more inclusive, environmentally sustainable economic growth. Education, upskilling, and re-skilling—especially to keep pace with rapid technological transformations affecting jobs—are critical for women's and girls' health and wellbeing, as well as their income-generation opportunities and participation in the formal labour market.

Women's economic equality is good for business. Companies greatly benefit from increasing employment and

leadership opportunities for women, which is shown to increase organisational effectiveness and growth. It is estimated that companies with three or more women in senior management functions score higher in all dimensions of organisational performance.

Decades of painfully slow progress on women's economic equality have taught us that meaningful change can only be achieved through proactive policy-making underpinned by statutory duties and regulations, with effective accountability mechanisms.

UNISON therefore calls on the ICTU Women's Committee and affiliates to:

- Call for mandatory reporting of gender pay gap action plans;
- introduce a plan to end the gender pay gap;
- campaign for reform of equal pay legislation so that employers are held to account;
- support pay transparency initiatives, and the implementation of the EU Pay Transparency Directive in ROI, providing greater rights for women to access information about their pay level compared to male colleagues performing work of equal value;
- provide support and leadership to trade unions for workplace campaigns on equal pay;
- Campaign for reform of flexible working law and policy to include a right to have, as opposed to a right to request, flexible working;



- tackle job segregation and ensure part-time work is available in all job roles;
- implement legal rights to take cases on dual grounds such as race and sex discrimination;
- implement statutory rights for union equality reps;
- restore employment rights from day one and campaign to end zero-hours contracts.

UNISON

3. Public model for Early Years Education and Care

Conference welcomes the trade union engagement with the “Together for Public Alliance” that is campaigning for the introduction of a public system of early childhood education and care (ECEC), including the rollout of publicly-delivered services alongside community and private provision.

The groundswell of support for a genuine public childcare model exists because parents want a guarantee of a quality service at an affordable price and an end to the annual will-they-won't-they threats of their daycare centre withdrawing from State schemes.

Conference notes the recent announcement of Government's plans to acquire childcare facilities in 2026. They claim that these are the first steps in a new programme of acquisition and/or fit out of “State-led” early learning and childcare services and that the focus in the

State-led services will be on services to meet demand for affordable, accessible, high quality early learning and childcare that is not otherwise being delivered, including on full day provision particularly for younger children. Up to eight new services will be acquired over the course of 2026 resulting in approximately 700 new places being delivered.

However, it is the view of this conference that scarce childcare places, unaffordable fees and high staff turnover are the direct result of the Government's obsession with keeping business owners sweet, and this new State-led childcare initiative is more of the same and continues to rely on private service providers to deliver what should be a basic entitlement.

Community childcare services make up just one-quarter of all current providers, with only 140 being large services (i.e. catering for 100 or more children) 31 of which are in rural locations. Few, if any, of these are likely to be able to bid for public procurement contracts to deliver 100 more places in a State-owned facility. The bulk of large childcare service providers are for-profit businesses. Childcare chains, often carrying significant debt, are vulnerable to the whims of the market and investors. This is the kind of uncertainty and insecurity that the Government should be looking to remove from the childcare system.

The Government has said that the successful bidders will be required to deliver services on a not-for-profit basis. While taking the profit motive out of childcare is long overdue, how much more will keeping the middle man



cost the public purse? Will providers be able to expense directors' pay and pension contributions or their debt repayments?

Until Government moves off its dependency on private childcare services, the care of our youngest citizens, working families, and staff will remain trapped in a cycle of market failure.

Conference welcomes the upcoming New Economic Model paper on Early Childhood education and care and urges Congress to use this evidence to campaign for a genuine public early years model to be finally implemented.

Women's Committee, ICTU ROI

4. Assisting Unions to Unionise Women Workers

Conference notes that legislating for the Good Jobs Bill in Northern Ireland and strong implementation of the National Action Plan to Promote Collective Bargaining in the Republic of Ireland has the potential to create a legislative framework which is less hostile for workers and unions.

Conference commends Congress and affiliates for campaigning for protections and supports for employees and unions who are unionising workplaces and sectors as part of the campaign for the Bill and National Action Plan. Conference notes that demand for trade union membership is highest among women workers and that trade union membership and collective bargaining disproportionately improves pay, working conditions, job security, and workplace protections for women workers.

Conference calls on Congress to redouble its efforts to assist affiliated unions to unionise women employees particularly those in low-paid, insecure, part-time, casual and precarious employment. In so doing, conference calls on Congress to campaign vigorously, North and South, for robust legal protections for trade union representatives and activists, including enhanced unfair dismissal protections and meaningful penalties on employers. Women activists who lead the drive to unionise play a vital role in building our movement. We must ensure that they are protected against union-busting tactics, including intimidation, surveillance, spurious disciplinary action, victimisation and dismissal. An attack on an activist is an attack on our movement. It can not be tolerated.

SIPTU

5. Miscarriage Leave

That this conference calls for the introduction of paid leave for women and their partners who have suffered a miscarriage or who are undergoing IVF treatment.

ASTI

Amendment

After "women" insert "and their partners"

National Union of Journalists



6. Statutory right to paid leave for pre-viability pregnancy loss

1. notes the publication of the Government's PLACES report on early pregnancy loss in the workplace, which recommends the introduction of a statutory right to paid leave for pre-viability pregnancy loss, regardless of gestational stage or reason for the loss;
2. further notes that frontline workers, including teachers, are particularly impacted due to the limited flexibility and significant responsibilities inherent in their roles and the unique contexts of their workplaces;
3. acknowledges the Government's commitment to legislate for reproductive health leave within its current legislative programme;
4. Calls on the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and the Department of Children, Disability and Equality to work to ensure that paid statutory reproductive health leave is introduced without delay and made available to all employees and their partners.

INTO

7. Decriminalisation of Sex Work

Equity members have long understood and campaigned against the dangers of exploitation and lack of health and safety regulations in the workplace.

Safe conditions where workers can carry out their job without fear of injury and with proper rules in place to ensure adequate payment are vital. We stand in solidarity with all marginalised workers who risk their health and safety every day to carry out their job. To this end, Equity calls on the Conference:

1. To support and join together with unions campaigning for the full decriminalisation of sex work.
2. To support the unionisation of adult sex workers and to respect their demands for labour rights and to improve their working conditions, including occupational safety and health.

EQUITY NI

8. AI – a threat to Women

Conference is alarmed by recent reports of adaptation to AI platforms that allow users generate non-consensual sexualised images of people, including children. AI generated sexual intimidation and those who utilise the software to this end, result in a direct threat to women and children. It is a fact that criminal law and wider legislation has not kept pace with AI. We must be more proactive in protecting individuals from this threat and potential threats of AI.

We call on Conference to seek urgent engagement with Government and other relevant authorities calling for urgent legislative reform to protect individuals online.

FÓRSA



9. Gender based digital violence

This Women's Conference notes with grave concern the worrying increase in gender-based violence, much of it facilitated by digital platforms.

Last year's International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women focused on ending digital violence, a rapidly developing issue that laws and policies have failed to keep pace with.

In marking the day, the NUJ noted that research has shown that AI and other emerging technology is escalating the spread of gendered disinformation, AI-generated violence, and deepfakes. This dangerous spread of online gendered violence is fed by algorithms and disproportionately affects women.

Online misogyny and hate speech normalise abuse, create fear for women in all areas of life, and can cross over into physical assaults and femicide.

The December 2025 UN Women report, *Tipping Point: The Chilling Escalation of Violence Against Women in the Public Sphere*, identifies a serious escalation in violence against women in public life, with technology-facilitated abuse increasingly translating into real-world threats and attacks.

There has been a marked upswing in attacks, harassment, and intimidation against working women, including journalists, across Ireland and the UK, by those seeking to silence legitimate debate and undermine press freedom.

The UN report showed that 70 per cent of surveyed women human rights defenders, activists, and journalists had experienced online violence in the course of their work. Forty-one per cent of respondents reported offline harm linked to online abuse.

Women workers across Ireland have been singled out for violent, graphic, and gender-based online threats, which are too often minimised despite their potential to escalate into physical harm. Several Irish women journalists, both North and South, have already been subject to such physical and violent threats as have elected public representatives, election candidates, and a wide range of political and community activists.

UN Women reported that women in the public eye and marginalised women tend to be the most affected by technology-facilitated violence against women and girls, and UNESCO's 2022 study, *The Chilling*, reported that 58 per cent of young women and girls globally have experienced online harassment on social media platforms.

This abuse undermines women's personal safety and participation in daily and public life, freedom of expression, and democratic accountability.

Conference condemns:

1. The growing incidence of attacks, harassment, and abuse against women workers, both online and offline, including AI-enabled and gender-based abuse.



2. The failure of the owners of online tech companies such as X, formerly known as Twitter, to adequately tackle online abuse and their active enabling of the degradation of women, as reflected in the development of the pornographic features enabled by the Grok application.

Conference call on the ICTU Executive to:

1. Recognise technology-facilitated abuse against women workers as a form of gender-based violence with grave implications for participation in the public realm by women and a threat to press freedom.
2. Campaign on an all-island basis at a political level to strengthen legal, regulatory, and policing responses to hold perpetrators and digital platforms accountable for the harassment and technology-facilitated violence those platforms enable.
3. Continue to support and prioritise campaigns to improve the safety, security, and working lives of women across Ireland, North and South.
4. Develop union supports for workers facing technology-facilitated abuse and violence, including safety training, reporting mechanisms, and well-being supports, with specific focus on women workers.
5. Work with the Women's Committee in engaging with regulatory authorities, An Garda Síochána, the PSNI, and the owners of tech platforms to ensure greater protection for

women workers against technology-facilitated threats and attacks.

National Union of Journalists

10. Flexible work in education settings

This conference recognises that the requirement to be on site for five days a week in educational settings across the island places a huge burden on both full and part time workers in the sector. These burdens include the rising cost of commuting which often outstrips stagnant wages.

Conference notes that with advances in technology, change is now possible, and flexibility must be a right for the many not a privilege for the few. This is both viable and necessary for a modern education sector with knock on improvements in areas of recruitment and retention.

Therefore, this committee agrees that we need to advocate for all-island negotiations with relevant management bodies across all education sectors (Primary, Post-Primary, Further and Higher Education).

These negotiations should aim to secure the right that a fifth working day can be performed remotely, using improvements in technology to support the worker and thereby reducing the financial and time-burden on the most vulnerable workers.



11. Real Living Wage Campaign

The 2025 ASHE report stating NI average for jobs paid below the real Living Wage is 17.3% which equates to 203,000 jobs which is the second highest rate of jobs below the Living Wage in the UK.

The gender breakdown is 19% of jobs done by women are paid below the Living Wage as opposed to 15.4% of jobs done by men.

The lowest paid workers are disproportionately affected by the rising cost of essentials such as food, energy, water, gas and are struggling to keep their heads above water.

The Living Wage Foundation's most recent report, Life on Low Pay, found 3 in 5 workers paid below the real Living Wage have been forced to skip meals, fall behind on bills, turn their heating off or take out payday loans.

The Real Living Wage is currently worth £2,418 more a year than the current National Living Wage. This is equivalent to 7 months' worth of food for a household or 4 months of housing and energy costs

Conference calls on ICTU to actively support the Real Living Wage Campaign and to promote in conjunction with affiliated trade unions as a way of lifting women and families out of poverty.

GMB

12. Equal Pay

That ICTU commits to advocating with the Irish Government and employer representative bodies to ensure that the national transposition of the EU Pay Transparency Directive includes:

1. A mandatory requirement that where an employer reports a gender pay gap exceeding 5% in any category of worker, and where this gap cannot be justified by objective, gender-neutral factors and is not remedied within six months, the employer be legally required to co-develop—together with a recognised trade union, or where no union is present in the sector, an elected employee representative group—a comprehensive joint pay assessment and joint action plan designed to close the gap.
2. A requirement that any employer subject to joint assessment must fully fund and deliver training for employee or trade union representatives prior to commencement of the joint pay assessment to ensure effective participation in the assessment and subsequent joint action plan negotiations.
3. A requirement that every joint action plan includes:
 - a. Specific, measurable, and time-bound targets for closing the gender pay gap
 - b. Joint monitoring and review mechanisms agreed with employee representatives
 - c. Mandatory public reporting



of progress against targets, ensuring transparency and accountability to employees and the wider public

4. A requirement that the joint pay assessment and joint action plan be published no later than 9 months after the original gender pay gap report.
5. A requirement that in any sector where more than one-third of employers reports a gender pay gap exceeding 5% in any category of worker that cannot be justified by objective, gender-neutral factors and is not remedied within six months, employer representative bodies must be legally obliged to:
 - a. Provide sector-wide support, including model frameworks for joint assessments and action plans
 - b. Implement sectoral capacity-building measures for employee representatives, including resources to strengthen trade union representation

That ICTU commits to providing training and support for trade union officials and elected representatives in best practice for conducting joint pay assessments and co-developing effective joint action plans aimed at closing the gender pay gap.

Financial Services Union (FSU)

13. Gender Pension Gap and Lump Sum Inequality

Conference notes the pension auto-enrolment will significantly increase access to an occupational pension for private sector workers – particularly female, migrant and low-paid workers.

CSO pension coverage 2024 survey shows there is only marginal difference between the number of female workers (44%) aged 55 to 69 years who spent 20 years or more in their occupational pension scheme and older male workers (43%).

However, progress should not be measured by pension coverage – the number of female workers with a pension. The measure of success is pension adequacy – the number with a decent retirement income.

Gender-disaggregated retirement data for 2024 and January to October 2025, including average pension and average lump sum for male and female retirees from the public health sector, (*obtained by the INMO from the Department of Health*) shows female workers retire with **lower average pensions and smaller lump sums than male workers.**

Conference recognises that women continue to bear a disproportionate burden of childcare, family and caring responsibilities which impacts on their length of service and career progression, while occupational pension schemes remain largely structured around uninterrupted, full-time career patterns.



Conference believes that the gender pension gap represents **deferred pay inequality**, undermines women's financial security in retirement, and conflicts with commitments to gender equality and decent work.

Conference therefore calls on ICTU to:

- Seek an urgent review of pension and retirement outcomes for female workers across all sectors, based on gender-disaggregated data.
- Engage with Government and employers to gender proof their occupational pension schemes.
- Campaign for mechanisms to allow top-up pensions contributions to make up for periods of leave or shorter hours for caring purposes.

INMO

14. Cost of Living Crisis and Impact on Education

Conference expresses deep concern at the rising cost of education across the island of Ireland and the disproportionate impact this is having on women, families and carers from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

Conference notes that the cost of living crisis has intensified financial pressures on households, with many women taking on additional paid or unpaid work, reducing essentials for themselves, or going into debt to meet education-related costs such as uniforms, transport, learning materials, digital devices and extracurricular activities.

Conference further notes that cuts to education budgets, including reductions in support services and widening inequalities in school resources, have resulted in families being required to subsidise what should be publicly funded entitlements. These pressures are exacerbated by prescriptive and increasingly costly school uniform requirements, limited access to financial support.

Conference believes that access to education must be equitable, inclusive and free from financial barriers, and that women - who disproportionately shoulder caring responsibilities and household budgeting - are particularly affected when education costs increase.

Conference calls on the ICTU and affiliated unions to campaign for:

- substantial, sustainable and equitable public funding for early years, primary and post-primary education across all jurisdictions on the island of Ireland;
- stronger regulation and enforcement of affordable school uniform policies, including the expansion of uniform grants and a ban on unnecessary branded items;
- a rights-based approach to education policy, ensuring that anti-poverty, childcare and equality strategies actively address the gendered impacts of rising education costs;
- an all-island review of education affordability, identifying structural inequalities and recommending coordinated action to reduce financial barriers for low-income families;



- v. support for women's voices and lived experience to be centred in all policymaking on education, child-care and family support.

Conference affirms that no child's educational opportunities should be limited by their family's income, and no woman should have to go without essentials to ensure a child can learn, participate and thrive.

NASUWT

15. Ending Precarious Work in Higher Education through appropriate public funding of the sector

This Conference Notes:

- The deepening funding crisis across Higher Education in Ireland, driven by a volatile tuition-fee model and the erosion of public investment in the sector.
- That precarious employment is now a structural feature of the sector, with significant numbers of staff on fixed-term, casualised, or "at-will" contracts.
- The "leaky pipeline" in academia, where women are disproportionately represented in entry-level, precarious roles but are frequently squeezed out before reaching senior or permanent positions.

This Conference Believes:

- Precarious work is a feminist issue. Women, especially those with caring responsibilities and/or those with

intersectional identities, are hit hardest by the lack of job security, making it impossible to plan for the future, secure mortgages, or take maternity leave without fear of contract non-renewal.

- The current funding model forces universities to treat staff as **disposable costs** rather than their greatest asset.
- Poverty pay and "gig economy" conditions in HE undermine the quality of education and the mental health of those delivering it.

This Conference Calls on ICTU to:

1. **Lobby the Government** to demand a sustainable, publicly-funded model for Higher Education that moves away from marketisation and prioritises long-term employment stability.
2. **Campaign for Permanent Contracts:** Work with sister unions to demand that all core teaching and research roles be moved to permanent contracts as the default.
3. **Data Collection:** Pressure universities to publish transparent, intersectional data on contract types, showing exactly how many women are trapped in perpetual cycles of short-term work.
4. **Collective Bargaining:** Support local branches in negotiating "Pathways to Permanency" agreements that provide clear, time-bound routes for casualised staff to gain job security.



16. Protection of Retail Workers as Essential Frontline Workers

Mandate Trade Unions ICTU Women's Council representative Ms. Joan Gaffney calls upon the ICTU Women's Committee to support and advance the Protection of Retail Workers Bill 2025 which legislates to provide legal protections for Retail Workers who are physically, verbally and mentally abused within their workplaces as a Criminal Offence with enforceable custodial sentences as a significant deterrent for those who engage in such offences.

Following the Dublin Riots in November 2023 many Retail Workers were entrapped within their workplaces which were under siege for a significant time period while arson attacks, looting and criminal damage were being perpetrated, leaving many Retail Workers traumatised, petrified and concerned for their own physical safety.

This motion is in support of the essential legislation required to protect Retail Workers in their workplaces, it is of high priority to ensure Retail Workers are recognised and categorised as frontline essential workers as they were during the Covid 19 pandemic by the Irish Government, this would provide Retail Workers with the similar legal protections as other frontline essential workers in other jurisdictions.

We call upon Conference to adopt the motion as policy, add it as a high priority agenda objective and actively

pursue the advancement of the Protection of Retail Workers Bill 2025 onto the Irish Statute Book.

Mandate Trade Union

17. Flexible working – barriers to female employment

This conference recognises the significant legislative and policy changes re carers, part time, flexible working etc that support women in the workplace. We acknowledge and applaud the women across the trade union movement who fought for and secured these changes following years of collective campaigning.

However, many of the rights secured place the onus on the woman worker to request them. While many do with support from their union, others do not for fear of being perceived as difficult, fear of hostility or potential negative impact on their career.

Legislative change has not been matched by cultural workplace change in the public and private sectors. Flexible working is not offered as a standard. It must be requested. Jobs continue to be advertised on a full-time basis, including 3,000 vacancies in the Northern Ireland Civil Service.

The culture continues to be full time working, full time hours and anything else is othered. Women who want to work but need flexibility for caring responsibilities will be put off applying for jobs that are advertised as full time, continuing the barrier to entering and maintain employment and financial independence.



This conference calls on ICTU and the ICTU Women's Committee to campaign against lip service to flexible working, to promote best practice and good employers who embrace flexible working from recruitment to employment, leading to real cultural change and to hold to account those employers who do not.

Conference recognises the importance of supporting and advocating for workers with non-visible disabilities including ADHD. A significant proportion of the workforce is affected by non-visible disabilities and fostering an inclusive and supportive environment is crucial for workers' well-being and success.

NIPSA

18. Greater support and services for women with ADHD

Congress notes that Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) in girls and women is under-recognised and under-researched, despite increasing awareness of clinical challenges and unmet needs, according to Eunethydis, the European Network for Hyperactivity Disorders.

Congress also notes research by advocacy group ADDitude which shows women with ADHD reported their adolescence was marked by feelings of sadness or depression (70%) and greater worry or anxiety (58%).

ADDitude also surveyed 4,000 women with ADHD about the impact of (peri) menopause. 70% said ADHD had a "life-altering" impact in their 40s and 50s, with 50% calling their ADHD "extremely severe."

According to the charity the Autistic Girls Network, for women who have ADHD, the effects of hormonal changes can be profound, persistent, and life-altering.

This conference notes while the Irish and UK government, NI Assembly and Health Service recognise the need for improved ADHD services, lengthy waiting times for assessment, which can range from one to eight years, present significant challenges. In Northern Ireland there is no commissioned ADHD service for adults, while in the Republic of Ireland, the HSE currently have only four adult ADHD clinics available only to those who live within the set catchment areas. This lack of uniform provision, coupled with excessive waiting times, has forced many women to seek assessment and diagnosis privately, costing up to £1000 (NI) / €1150 (ROI).

Further, women in NI often are faced with no choice but to pay in excess of £200 per month for prescription medication after diagnosis of ADHD, as many GPs refuse to provide 'shared care' where a private diagnosis is recognised.

The burden of this broken and inadequate system impacts women further when they seek to gain critical educational support for their children who have also been diagnosed with ADHD. In NI, a statement of special educational needs (SEN) which is vital in securing extra support in education, can only be provided by the Health Trust. Where families have sought a private assessment and diagnosis for their child, this is not recognised.



While trade unions have made significant progress in raising awareness, better policies and legal protections for menopause and neurodiversity, we need to do more.

This conference calls on the ICTU Women's Committee and ICTU to work with neurodiversity and women's organisations to raise awareness of hormonal impact on neurodiverse women through workplace campaigns and learning. Conference also calls on ICTU to lobby governments advocating the following:

- Increased number of clinics and support services for ADHD, including those specifically for adults, ensuring equal service across the island regardless of location
- Abolishment of fees for ADHD assessments
- Full acceptance of shared care agreements for privately diagnosed patients in NI
- Review of the process needed to obtain a statement of special educational needs for children to remove roadblocks causing unnecessary delay in supporting children in education

Composite motion from PCS and Unite the Union

19. Women United Against Racism and Misogyny

At a time of unprecedented challenge for anti-racist movement across Ireland and internationally, Congress welcomes the recent ICTU National Anti-Racism Conference.

Congress commends the role trade unionists and others have played in offering solidarity to migrant and Black communities under threat from racist violence and abuse.

We unreservedly condemn the anti-migrant riots that took place in the North of Ireland during the summer and the sharp rise in racist hate crime which has reached its highest level since records began.

We reject the far right's racist lies about 'protecting' women and girls. The far right seek to exploit violence against women to fuel hate and division.

Congress stands in solidarity with refugees and migrants, many of whom are themselves survivors of violence, war and persecution. Blaming people newly arrived to Ireland distracts us from tackling the deep-rooted causes of abuse against women and girls and from holding those responsible to account.

Our focus is the wellbeing of all women and girls including those in refugee and migrant communities right across Ireland. Those who have come here to work, study, join family, or seek protection are an asset to our country and trade unions have



a vital role to play in welcoming and supporting them and valuing their contributions.

Ireland is also witnessing a rise in aggressive misogyny, domestic violence including sexual violence, and abuse against women and girls. The far right are undermining our work to tackle misogyny and reinforcing the damaging myth that the greatest risk of gender-based violence comes from strangers.

We call upon the ICTU to:

- Continue to play an active part in the anti-racist movement across the island of Ireland.
- At every opportunity seek to broaden the conversation and change the narrative on migration to reflect the positive contributions of migrants.
- Highlight the fact that migrant women disproportionately experience homelessness, lack of access to healthcare, and unfair working conditions.
- Support affiliates to identify Black women activists, recruit new Black women reps and remove barriers to their participation in their unions.
- Actively support affiliate efforts to train union reps in anti-racism and anti-sexism.

20. Provision of Free Menstrual Products

This conference notes that access to menstrual products is a basic workplace equality and dignity issue, and that the cost of these products places an ongoing financial burden on workers who menstruate, sometimes even resulting in period poverty.

This conference believes that employers have a responsibility to ensure workplaces are inclusive, safe and supportive, and that the provision of free menstrual products should be recognised as a legitimate workplace entitlement.

This conference calls on:

1. All affiliated unions, their sectors, branches, workplaces and shop stewards/workers representatives involved in negotiations, to seek the inclusion of the free provision of menstrual products by employers in pay and conditions negotiations, with products provided free of charge in all workplaces.
2. ICTU to develop and circulate a practical resource for union representatives, outlining bargaining arguments, equality considerations and best practice on securing free menstrual products at work, to be shared with all affiliates. This should include draft wording that could be considered for inclusion.





Achieving for Women in Work

**a New Economic Model
for Women Workers**

Conference Report



Congress continued to pursue the broad gender equality agenda North and South under the guidance of the Women's Committees who worked jointly on areas of common interest, as well as pursuing initiatives within the two jurisdictions on the island.

The Officers for the Joint Committee were

Women's Committee ROI

The Women's Committee officers for the period were:

- **Margaret Coughlan** (Fórsa) Chair; replaced by **Lynda Scully** (SIPTU) after BDC 2025;
- **Margaret Coughlan**, Vice Chair;
- Secretary, **Moirá Leydon** (ASTI) replaced by Therese Moloney (UNITE) after BDC 2025

Women's Committee in Northern Ireland

The Officers during the period were

Chair

Maxine Murphy Higgins (NASUWT), replaced by Tina Creaney (NIPSA)

Vice Chairs

Tina Creaney (NIPSA), replaced by Una O'Farrell (PDA, resigned in 2025)

Maxine Murphy Higgins Secretary.

Under the Direction of the Officers, each of the Committees both separately and together pursued an agenda which included highlighting issues facing women workers such as lack of affordable childcare on return to work and highlighting all forms of gender based violence including sexual harassment in the workplace.



Chairs of Womens Committee Maxine Murphy Higgins, Cllr. Louise Heavin, Mayor of Athlone, Margaret Coughlan and Justin McCampbell

Joint Women's Committee Work included:



The Women's Committee worked together to organise the National Women's Conference in 2024 in Athlone, the theme was *Valuing Care in all its forms - a prerequisite for a sustainable economy.*



Writing in the report to conference ICTU General Secretary Owen Reidy said

From childcare to caring for our elderly citizens and most vulnerable adults, care in all its forms is the building block for the labour market, for a sustainable economy and most importantly for a decent society. Regrettably, it remains the fact that the burden of care rests with women and despite recent historic victories by trade unions in the care sector, caring as a profession is undervalued, underpaid and often overlooked by governments as a



major sector in sustainable jobs as well as an priority economic infrastructure. As General Secretary, I wish to thank the Women's Committee for choosing to focus on Care in all its forms at this conference.

Without a proper caring infrastructure, including accessible and affordable childcare as well as a quality social care infrastructure and a valued and well paid caring workforce, it is impossible to achieve the trade union aspiration of decent and sustainable work for everyone who wants it and a safe and secure society. As Congress General Secretary, I will ensure that the deliberations and recommendations from this conference are considered as priority work for the Congress Executive Council.



Palestinian Ambassador with Carol Scheffer, CWU

The Conference was honoured to receive the Palestinian Ambassador to Ireland Dr Jilan Wahba Abdalmajid. The Ambassador gave a moving speech highlighting the plight of women and children in Palestine and thanked the trade union movement for their support and solidarity. The Ambassador received a standing ovation of several minutes.

The Women's Committee also organised a Women's Seminar in the Fairways Hotel in March 2025. The seminar focused on themes of tackling the far right and the connections between misogyny, racism and other forms of discrimination. Speakers included Dr Ruth Breslin, Director of The Sexual Exploitation Research and Policy Institute, Giulia Massobrio from the ITUC as well as Kudsia Botool from the TUC and Aaskshanka Surve from the NUJ.

The seminar included fringe meetings on Palestine and the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions campaign and included updates on the situation on Palestine from the Trade Union Friends of Palestine.

Women's Council of the Isles (WCol)

The Wcol took place in Derry in 2025. Despite difficulties experienced due to an unprecedented all island red weather warning, the meeting heard from each of the Committees on topics as diverse as dealing with miscarriage and tackling the far right in schools and workplaces.

International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women

Statements were issued to mark International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women on 25 November which highlighted the action being taken by trade unions in pursuing workplaces and society free from gender based violence.

The Women's Committee supported an event organised by NASUWT focusing on 'The Bystander Approach' which included a screening of a film featuring Jackson Katz exploding myths around 'rape culture' and misogyny.

ETUC Women's Committee

Congress is represented on the ETUC Women's Committee by the NI Equality Officer and the Committee met a number of times during this period.

The ETUC Women's Committee led on work including lobbying on the proposed new EU Directive on Gender Based Violence as robust as possible.



While welcoming the adoption of the Directive in May 2024, the ETUC Women's Committee voiced frustration that it failed to adequately deal with gender based violence in the world of work, despite repeated interventions by ETUC and Confederations.

Also disappointing was the decision imposed by France and Germany to exclude Article 5 on the harmonised definition of rape based on consent in line with the standards of the Istanbul Convention.

In June 2024, the Executive Committee of the ETUC adopted a special resolution: On the Offensive to combat gender based violence in the world of work.

The [resolution](#) notes

Preventing and combatting gender-based violence in the world of work is a key priority of the ETUC. The recently adopted *Directive combatting violence against women and domestic violence* fails to deliver meaningful provisions to make the world of work safer for women workers. It also fails to recognise our role as trade unions to end gender-based violence.

Call for a new EU Directive eradicating gender-based violence in the world of work.

A Directive to eradicate gender-based violence in the world of work should be included in the work programme of the upcoming European Commission and European Parliament on the basis of the social policy chapter of the TFEU. Occupational safety and health legisla-

tion is an important entry point for such an initiative.

A proposal for a new Directive must include measures to prevent and tackle all relevant forms of gender-based violence in the world of work, online and offline, and offer practical solutions for safe workplaces through an intersectional lens, in which the social partners must be involved and trade unions have a key role. A strong focus should be made on how to define and address different aspects of economic violence, as well as the prevention of secondary victimisation and further discrimination. ETUC should seek support for such a call from the European Parliament, by means in particular, of monitoring the implementation of the *Directive combatting violence against women and domestic violence*, stressing the need for follow-up measures relating to the world of work.

The ETUC Women's Committee completed a new project on tackling gender based violence and harassment focusing particularly on new forms of violence including cyber bullying and harassment via social media. Congress was represented on the steering group and participated in interviews to contribute to the report and toolkit.

Priorities for the ETUC Women's Committee for the next mandate Include:

- Monitor and influence the transposition of the Pay Transparency Directive, monitor the Gender Pension Gap
- Push for ETUC key demands to be included in the Directive combating



violence against women and domestic violence

- Deliver concrete tools to end the undervaluation of work predominantly done by women and the gendered labour market segregation through collective bargaining, social dialogue and legislation
- Launch a mapping of AI in the workplace and in training with the Women's Committee in preparation of the announced new Directive on AI in the workplace, influence the trialogues of the AI Act towards including a gender-dimension
- Adopt the Youth Action Plan at the Women's Committee meeting), and organise exchanges between the Women's Committee Presidium and the Youth Committee bureau.

ROI Women's Committee

The Committee continued to meet on a regular basis and to work closely with our colleagues in Northern Ireland.

Our agenda items include a wide range of topics including: flexible working and working from home; increased risks for women in prostitution and the dangers posed by pornography; women and girls in Afghanistan and Palestine, reproductive leave, the menopause, domestic sexual and gender based violence and the threats posed by the rise of the far right.

The Committee noted the first Irish Government report on ILO Convention 190 on violence and harassment in

the world of work to the supervisory system of the ILO and advised Congress on its accompanying observations.

The committee continues to monitor the implementation of the 5 days paid leave for victims of domestic violence and looks forward to the imminent review of the legislation. Collective agreements in this area do not mention numbers of days and we will be advocating with partners in the sector for an increase in the number of days available on a statutory basis.

A new National Strategy for Women and Girls was finally launched in December 2025. The Department of Children, Disability and Equality addressed the Women's Committee and committed to trade union representation on the strategy committee.

The period saw some developments since the work of the Citizen's Assembly on Gender Equality, including the long-awaited care referendum in 2024. We had called on the government to publish wording in line with the recommendations of the Citizens' Assembly and the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Gender Equality report – which suggested that archaic language about women in the home be replaced with a wording that recognises the value of care work in all of its forms. Unfortunately, these calls were not heeded and the wording failed to include both care within the home and wider community, something referred to as a “lost opportunity for the value of care in all its forms, the vast majority of which is provided by women, to be reflected in our constitution.” The Executive Council, following a meeting



with Minister O’Gorman, did support the referendum. Following a lacklustre campaign it was defeated at the ballot box.

The Committee has continued its engagement with the issue of reproductive leave. However, almost five years since the Labour Party tabled legislation to ensure women and families could take time off work after miscarriage, and to ensure workers undergoing fertility treatment could take time off work without fear or financial stress, the Government have failed to act. For far too long, women have had to remain silent in their workplaces about the grief of early miscarriage; or have had to use their annual leave in order to attend appointments for IVF treatments. The Women’s Committee continues to seek legislation to provide women with support in the workplace, where they are struggling with fertility or other reproductive health issues. Recent reports have indicated that the Government is considering providing women who suffer a pregnancy loss three days of statutory paid leave and that it is hoped that such legislation will be progressed before the summer.

We continue to advise Congress on its broad equality agenda and on all of the work carried out on our behalf outlined below.

Congress Equality Work ROI

Congress broad equality work involved regular consultation and liaison with officials in the Department of Children, Disability and Equality (DCDE). Congress work on gender related issues

was carried out in consultation with the Women’s Committee and affiliate trade unions and included:

Early Childhood Education and Care

Through our participation in the Early Years LEEF and the Early Years Stakeholder Forum, we continued to advocate for more public investment in ECEC as a means to tackle low pay, affordability and quality.

The Committee met with the National Women’s Council of Ireland in Summer 2024 in order to strengthen ties and subsequently participated in the launch of the Alliance for Public Early Education and Care in September 2024. Ireland is unusual in Europe in having to rely exclusively on the private market to provide childcare services. We have no public childcare services, but rather a publicly subsidised, privately delivered childcare model. Three-quarters of all childcare services are for-profit businesses. The other quarter is not-for-profit community and voluntary services, mostly operating in areas of disadvantage.

As a result, we have long childcare waiting lists for young children¹. Because the required staff to child ratio is higher for babies (1:3) and toddlers (1:5), there is less money to be made than providing places for older children.

What is also driving the demand for childcare is more women in the workforce. Female employment has more than doubled since the turn of the

¹ <https://www.ictu.ie/blog/whats-behind-long-childcare-waiting-lists>



century. There are over 100,000 more women of childbearing age (15-44) in employment in the last five years alone. The employment participant rate among older women is also on the rise, meaning granny is unlikely to be available to step in to provide childcare even if you are lucky to be able to afford to live nearby.

While the cost of childcare was a hot topic in the general election, so too was the demand for public childcare, and commitments were subsequently given in the programme for government.

Childcare must be recognised as part of the vital infrastructure needed for a functioning economy.

Unfortunately, the omens are not good. If we look at the recently revised National Development Plan, which sets out how the government will invest in the country's infrastructure and development, childcare is mentioned only three times, twice in the introductory comments from ministers. Whereas addressing the shortage in the supply of housing is mentioned 32 times, water 29, transport 26 and energy 25.

Responding to the recently announced government's plans to acquire childcare facilities, Congress has stated that scarce childcare places, unaffordable fees and high staff turnover are the direct result of the Government's obsession with keeping business owners sweet, and their new so-called State-led childcare is more of the same. The groundswell of support for a genuine public childcare model exists because parents want

a guarantee of a quality service at an affordable price and an end to the annual will-they-won't-they threats of their daycare centre withdrawing from State schemes.

Unfortunately, the Government's proposed initiative to tackle long waiting lists continues to rely on private service providers to deliver what should be a basic entitlement.

While the Government has said that the successful bidders will be required to deliver services on a not-for-profit basis, keeping the middle man will continue to cost the public purse. Until Government moves off its dependency on private childcare services, the care of our youngest citizens, working families, and staff will remain trapped in a cycle of market failure.

The new funding model and the succession of Employment Regulation Orders (EROs) negotiated by SIPTU continue to be supported by the trade union movement as they have led to increased investment in the sector and improved pay and conditions for the undervalued staff. There is therefore serious concerns over the proposed judicial review of the Early Years Employment Regulation Order (ERO) now sought buy a small number of providers. Congress joins with SIPTU and all other stakeholders calling for a rejection of this request, including funding of a judicial review. In our view, any action which undermines the ERO places state investment at risk, and is contrary to the interests of providers, educators, children, parents and families.



Gender Pay Gap

We have now had a number of reporting cycles since the passing of the Gender Pay Gap Information Act. Employers with 50 employees are now obliged to choose a 'snapshot' date of their employees in June and to report on the hourly gender pay gap for those employees on the same date in December.

Our ability to assess the impact of gender pay gap reporting has been greatly hampered by the lack of a central portal for companies to upload their results. The new Government did introduce a portal on a voluntary basis at the end of 2025. The Department of Children estimates that a total of 6,000 organisations will be required to report their gender pay data to the new portal.

Congress continues to work closely with the ETUC to seek effective transposition of the Pay Transparency Directive and has submitted detailed views to the Department in that regard and held a meeting with officials in December 2025. The Directive is a very important one for women workers right across the EU where the gender pay gap still stands at 12 % at EU average. The measures included in the Pay Transparency are central to eliminating the gender pay gap and to end the undervaluation of work done by women because they help to recognise and properly value work in sectors that are heavily feminised sectors that have historically been devalued and under-paid. According to the Commission's impact assessment that accompanied the proposal for the Pay Transparency Directive, the directive is needed

because the long-standing EU right to equal pay for women and men is still not effectively enforced in practice.

Research indicates that pay transparency compliance, including transparent pay setting and pay progression policies yield a positive effect on businesses. Enhancing fairness and eliminating unequal pay improves trust of workers, prevents equal pay claims and attracts new talent. Eurofound research from December 2025 shows, "*pay transparency can be considered not merely as a regulatory requirement but potentially as a strategic tool to enhance competitiveness*".

According to the same research, pay transparency measures as included in the Pay Transparency Directive

- Harmonise equal pay rules across the EU, helping to create a consistent framework and a level playing field.
- Strengthen social dialogue and collective bargaining.
- Reduce inefficiencies linked to individual pay disputes and one-to-one wage negotiations.
- Supports talent attraction and retention, as transparent pay practices make employers more appealing. Evidence shows that publishing salary ranges in job adverts can increase application rates and improve candidate quality.
- May reduce staff turnover by improving perceptions of organisational support and fairness, leading to



substantial savings on recruitment and onboarding costs.

- Boost social accountability, builds trust-based and engaged workplaces, and enhances organisational reputation.
- Encourage stronger commitment and higher productivity.
- Improves matching efficiency between candidates and vacancies.
- Promote innovation, technological progress, and workforce development.
- Creates a clear and understandable link between skills, performance, and pay, which can motivate greater participation in upskilling and training opportunities

The Government has indicated that it is to introduce new laws that will require employers to evaluate whether they are paying men and women working similar jobs comparable wages. The Pay Transparency Bill will require an employer with more than 50 employees to carry out a “gender neutral job evaluation” for every position in their company. If it emerges during an evaluation that a male worker is being paid 5% or more above a female worker, for a job of the same value, the employer must work on a “joint pay assessment” to close the gap.

The laws are being introduced as Ireland is required to transpose the EU Pay Transparency Directive, with the deadline for its introduction in June 2026. However, Ibec has called on the government to delay the transposition

citing delays in the finalisation of guidance from the European Commission.

Congress continues to be an active member of the ILO’s Equal Pay International Coalition (EPIC) and spoke at their annual meetings in Paris in December 2024 and in New York in September 2025.

Transposition of the Work Life Balance Directive and right to request flexible working

In August 2025 the Court of Justice of the European Union fined Ireland €1.5m for the incomplete transposition of the directive on work-life balance into Irish law². We were 18 months late fully transposing its requirements, partly because the pandemic had more or less brought the legislative process to a standstill but mostly because of a decision to transpose the directive in a miscellaneous bill (included along with other very welcomed albeit additional provisions, such as improved breastfeeding breaks, new domestic violence leave and a right to request remote work. Wrangling over the latter being the main culprit for the delay/ €1.5m fine).

All 27 Member States were given three years, until August 2022, to bring their national law up to new EU minimum standards on four family-friendly employment rights:

1. Two weeks paid paternity leave for new dads within their baby’s first six months.

² <https://www.ictu.ie/blog/behind-irelands-eu15m-eu-fine-directive-delay>



2. Nine weeks paid parent's leave for both parents within their baby's first two years.
3. Up to 5 days a year unpaid care leave to provide care to a relative or housemate.
4. A right to request a flexible working arrangement (e.g. part-time hours, school term-time work, compressed hours, spilt shifts, remote work) for caring purposes.

The 2019 work-life balance directive builds on previous EU directives intended to address the employment gap between mothers and men; underrepresentation of women in senior roles; and the gender pay gap, through helping working parents and carers strike a better balance between their job and family's care needs.

Delays in transposing EU directives into Irish law on time, usually two or three years following publication, have cost us over €13m in late fines since 2020. Not an insignificant sum.

Infringement proceedings against Ireland for transposition delays or transposing directives incorrectly are not unusual (fortunately, few end in fines). In July 2024, the number of infringement actions open stood at 46 - a record low!

The last government established a Seanad Select Committee to scrutinise the transposition of EU directives into Irish law, including holding ministers and departments accountable for unnecessary delays in transposing directives. The new government has not re-established this Committee.

Domestic Sexual and Gender Based Violence (DSGBV)

We continue to grapple with the shameful reality that far too many people (predominantly women) face violence, harassment and abuse in their lives, something that unfortunately increased during public health restrictions due to the pandemic. We continue our work to address DSGBV across a wide range of areas and are pleased to report some successes in that regard.

As referenced in the above section, Ireland lead the way in bringing in paid leave for workers who are victims of domestic violence.

Congress participated in Women's Aid 50th anniversary conference and published a blog for the 16 days campaign³. We also met with CUAN - the new DSGBV agency re potential partnerships in tackling violence against women and are seeking to develop this partnership with the new agency.

We worked in partnership with the White Ribbon Project on a course to develop workplaces free from DSGBV and had the world-renowned leader on tackling DSGBV Jackson Katz at the BDC in July 2025. Mr Katz addressed the plenary of the conference and held a workshop on the active bystander approach to tackling DSGBV.

³ <https://www.ictu.ie/blog/trade-unions-demand-end-violence-against-women-and-girls-work-and-society>



Jackson Katz addressing the ICTU Biennial Conference 2025

“Being an active bystander requires someone to possess the qualities of a leader precisely because it is not easy for men—or women—to intervene and challenge abusive behaviors or the belief systems that foster the conditions within which they occur.”

Jackson Katz, *“Bystander Training as Leadership Training,”*

The Executive Council have since formed a subgroup to systematically plan how to carry forward this important work, including the important work of engaging men as allies.

We welcome the commitment to review the Act and to give serious consideration to extending the duration of leave to up to 10 days a year. As mentioned above, none of the collective agreements negotiated

by trade unions with employers are as low as 5 days and indeed many don’t even specify a specific number of days.

Congress submitted observations on the first Government report to the ILO on it’s implementation of ILO Convention 190. The submission welcomed these developments and also called for improvements in the Equality (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2024 including prohibition of intersectional discrimination to be extended beyond the equal status act to the employment equality act. We are also supportive of calls for a ban on discrimination on the basis of gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics in order to provide explicit protection to all trans and non-binary people. It also pointed out how Trade unions have come up with solutions to support and protect victims and survivors of domestic



violence through negotiating workplace policies in this area. Combined with the promised introduction of paid domestic violence leave these can play an important role in ensuring the workplace is a more supportive environment for those experiencing domestic violence.

Tackling the rise of the Far Right

The Committee has taken a strong interest and participates actively in our work to tackle racism and the rise of the far right. Among the activities in the period were a rally for hope and unity in November 2024 where a wide range of speakers and music marked a call to action for all who believe in an Ireland built on respect, compassion, and hope. We also supported the Le Chéile carnival event held in Dublin in September 2025 and addressed by Katie Morgan, Congress Vice President.

Committee members continue to engage with the Congress Anti-Racism project and work closely with the coordinator, David Carroll.

IHREC

We continued our active participation in the IHREC Worker Employer Advisory Group meetings covering a wide range of equality and human rights workplace issues. Among the topics on our agenda during the period was an Employer guide on recruiting and retaining members of the Traveller and Roma communities.

Activity in Northern Ireland

Good Jobs and the Good Jobs Employment Bill.

In 2024, the Economy Minister Conor Murphy, Sinn Féin announced his intention to prioritise building Good Jobs for Northern Ireland, enhancing and protecting workers rights and boosting the economy. On 28 April 2025, the Minister for the Economy, Dr Caoimhe Archibald MLA, announced the Department's plan to introduce a new Good Jobs Employment Rights Bill - a major employment law reform initiative aimed at modernising the workplace and enhancing protections for both workers and employers.

While the final draft Bill has still not been published, the Minister has indicated that it will contain 4 themes:

- Terms of Employment
- Pay and Benefits
- Voice and Representation and
- Work Life Balance.

An analysis by NIC-ICTU shows that approximately 60% of the proposals amount to 'catch up' with GB, aiming to bring our employment laws in line with the rest of the UK. Among the rights are reforms of flexible working legislation, the introduction of carers leave and neonatal leave and care.

Importantly, however, the Bill also proposes to eradicate zero hour contracts and strengthen the rights of workers to access trade union representation and points the way to a culture change in the workplace in Northern Ireland.



In laying out the summary of the consultation, the Minister said

Everyone benefits from Good Jobs.

A decent, reliable wage benefits workers and their families.

The flexibility to balance a career with family life means more people can stay in work, giving employers access to a larger pool of people.

More people working in better paid jobs reduces poverty and its associated societal problems, which benefits communities, as well as the public finances.

That is why creating Good Jobs is one of the key objectives in the Executive's Programme for Government.

My Department's Good Jobs agenda involves supporting businesses to become more productive, so that they are in a better position to offer Good Jobs.

It involves building our skills base, so that more people are equipped to take up those jobs.

It also involves strengthening employment legislation.

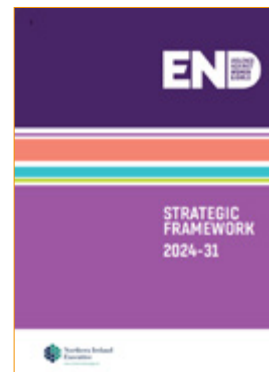
We know that women are more likely to have to rely on insecure and low paid work and that much of this work is deeply segregated along gender lines. While the Bill will not solve these systemic issues, it is an important step to laying out minimum standards in law and changing the culture of workplaces.

Congress conducted a poll carried out by LucidTalk in December 2025.

The results were conclusive, most voters across all demographics support the right for workers to be able to access trade unions in their workplace. They also agree that workers should be able to have a contract which actually reflects the hours they work and that they should be compensated if their employer cancels a shift. Women are even more likely than men to support access to trade union representation (88% female compared to 78% male). Congress continues to intensively lobby every political party to support the Good Jobs Bill.

Ending Violence against Women and Girls

The [Ending Violence against Women and Girls](#) strategy was launched in September 2024 following an extensive Co Design process, including representatives of trade union movement.



The Strategy included a commitment to establishing a workplace working group to include trade unions and employers and this was established under the auspices of the LRA Strategic Engagement Forum. This cross sectoral working group includes members of employer bodies, the Equality Commission as well as Secretariat from the Executive Office. We look forward to playing a full role in this group and to bringing forward the many progressive policies which trade unions have championed in this area.



Domestic Abuse Safe Leave Act

Royal Assent was granted for the Domestic Abuse Safe Leave Act in 2022. With the collapse of the Assembly between 2022 and 2024, the drawing up of the legislation was effectively shelved, despite the former Minister for the Economy Gordon Lyons welcoming the Bill and committing to carrying out the necessary work involved in drafting the regulations in a timely manner.



In November 2025, the Women's Committee organised a rally at Stormont to demand that the Act be brought in without delay. The Committee invited the Minister to attend and in addressing the rally, the Minister reiterated her commitment to this important legislation and promised to bring it forward as quickly as possible.

To this end, the Department has established a working group to draft the guidance to accompany the bill. The Women's Committee will continue to monitor this process, acting to call out any further delays.



What will the Act do?

Northern Ireland is the first UK jurisdiction to pass legislation of this kind that will enable victims of domestic abuse to avail of statutory entitlements without having to consider sick leave, or utilising holidays. It is hoped that the introduction of the legislation will also open up dialogue between employers, trade unions and employees, to facilitate a supportive working environment for employees experiencing domestic abuse.

The Act entitles victims of domestic abuse to no less than 10 days' paid leave in each leave year for the purposes of dealing with issues related to domestic abuse. Issues relating to domestic abuse are noted as including:

- Obtaining legal advice, or pursuing legal proceedings.
- Finding alternative accommodation.
- Accessing healthcare.
- Obtaining welfare support.
- Protecting family members.

Childcare

At the time of preparing this report, a draft Childcare strategy had been issued by the Department for Education for consultation.

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 struc-



tured to facilitate participation in the labour market, particularly of women, the issue of childcare rose to even more prominence during the Covid 19 pandemic. As part of the roll out of The New Economic Model, Congress will be producing policy options for childcare across the island in consultation with NERI. In doing so, it will be important to work with the Women's Committees as well as with allies in civil society.

Northern Ireland Strategic Equality Strategies

The New Decade New Approach agreement promised the publication of long awaited social inclusion 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 (Congress), Taryn Trainor, (UNITE) and John Patrick Clayton, (UNISON).

The Co Design groups working on each of the strategies committed significant time and energy to preparing robust documents which were sent to each Minister for approval. Given the collapse of the Northern Ireland Assembly, however, it became unclear whether the strategies would be adopted and to date the Gender Equality Strategy and the LGBT+ Strategy still appear to be shelved.

The Department has consulted on a draft Anti Poverty Strategy as well as a Disability Strategy. The Northern Ireland Committee made a submission to the APS and stated:



ICTU has consistently campaigned for a comprehensive and integrated anti-poverty strategy that not only targets the symptoms of poverty but also addresses its root causes.

We further believe that a robust, rights-based framework has the potential to deliver real, lasting change for all those living in poverty across Northern Ireland. The trade union movement supported the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement and has called for the full implementation of the Agreement, including a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland and a Charter of Rights for the island of Ireland.

Regrettably we regard the draft strategy presented by the Department as wholly inadequate.

The proposals fail to address the scale and complexity of poverty in our society, they lack the ambition and scope needed to deliver meaningful change for individuals and communities who continue to face hardship on a daily basis. The approach outlined in the draft strategy is fragmented and lacks a clear, cohesive vision and sufficient commitment to long-term solutions. It is overly reliant on existing frameworks that have proven inadequate and fail to challenge the structural inequalities that perpetuate poverty.

ICTU remains committed to working towards a fair, equal society. This draft strategy will not deliver this. Our members and every citizen in Northern Ireland deserve better than the proposals contained in this document.

We therefore call on the Department to withdraw this misguided draft and instead return to the proposals and recommendations delivered by experts in the Anti-Poverty Expert Panel as well as the Anti-Poverty co design group which should form the basis of a real and meaningful Anti-Poverty Strategy.

Furthermore, the Department should immediately bring forward draft Gender Equality, Disability Equality and LGBT Equality strategies based on the work and recommendations already delivered.

Gender Pay Gap Reporting regulations

Despite a commitment to the introduction of Gender Pay Gap reporting regulations in the Employment Act 2016, we still await the implementation.

At the time of writing this report, the Department for Communities has consulted on draft legislation for Gender Pay reporting with the stated intention that the Good Jobs Bill could be used as a legislative mechanism.

However the proposals fall far short of what is required, not least given the developments in Europe with the Pay Transparency Directive and the obligation on the UK Government to keep pace with developments under Article 2 of the Windsor Framework agreement.

In summary the ICTU position is as follows:



Key Recommendations

- At a minimum, the elements of the Gender Pay Transparency Directive must be transposed into NI Law by 2026, however, as detailed in our response, ICTU recommends that the NI Executive go further than the minimum set out in the Directive. This must include comprehensive and meaningful engagement with trade unions; ‘co-design’ processes should not be mistaken for such engagement.
- The Departments for Communities and of the Economy should work closely together to ensure that a range of measures are introduced within the context of the Good Jobs Bill. Collective Bargaining should be seen as a mechanism for reducing inequalities in the labour market.
- ICTU recommends that the threshold for pay gap reporting is set at employers with 10 or more employees.
- ICTU recommends that small and medium sized employers are provided with appropriate support and guidance to report effectively and bring about culture change. We recommend that the ECNI engage with employers and trade unions in the development of guidance as well as with the Department/s and other arms length bodies such as the LRA in relation to codes of practice.

ICTU recommends that monitoring and enforcement is done by the Equality Commission NI. We further recommend that the Commission is

provided with the necessary resources and powers, should additional powers be necessary.

Workplace Guidance

Work to support the guidance drafted on menopause and domestic abuse in the workplace continues. Affiliates pursue an active agenda in this respect and Congress has worked with partners to run training sessions and engage with employers and other partners.

Sexual Harassment in the Workplace

Sexual harassment in the workplace or associated with work continues to be a significant issue for many workers, predominantly affecting women. As part of ongoing joint work, Congress has worked with the LRA to publish guidance on preventing sexual harassment.



Minister for the Economy Conor Murphy MLA launches new Guidance with ICTU, LRA and Women in Business.

The Guidance is endorsed by Women in Business and was launched by the Minister for the Economy Conor Murphy in March 2024 as part of International Women's Day.

The Secretariat organised a training session on how to tackle sexual harassment in the workplace which was facilitated by Raise the Roof. This was attended by members of the Women's Committee, the NIC, the Youth Committee and others.

Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy

Domestic and Sexual Violence Strategy

Congress is represented on the current advisory group to the Domestic and Sexual Violence strategy and responded to the call for views on the new strategy.

Members of the Congress Women's Committee and the Congress Secretariat play an active role on a number of coalition groups including the Equality Coalition, the Human Rights Consortium and the Northern Ireland Women's European Platform.

Pioneering Women honoured in Belfast City Hall

In June 2024, the Women's Committee was hosted by Belfast Lord Mayor, Micky Murray in his parlour. The discussion with the Lord Mayor included a contribution by the artists who had made the sculptures of Mary Ann McCracken and Winnifred Carney. Following the reception, the Committee visited the statues alongside the Lord Mayor and Council Officers.



Women's Committee with Lord Mayor at statue of Mary Ann McCracken.



Women's Committee with Lord Mayor at statue of Winnifred Carney.



Irish Congress of Trade Unions

Standing Orders Women's Conference

1. Biennial Women's Conference

- 1.1 The Congress Women's Conference shall meet biennially. The place and date shall be decided by the Executive Council.
- 1.2 Chairperson's for the session of the Conference shall be nominated by the Women's Committees.
- 1.3 A Conference Arrangements Committee of up to six persons, nominated by the Women's Committees, shall be responsible for the arrangement of the business of the Conference and generally take charge of the meeting place.

2. Representation

- 2.1 Only bona fide members or fulltime officials who are members of an affiliated trade union may be appointed as delegates to the Conference.
- 2.2 Trade unions with up to 50 women members may appoint one delegate to the Conference and unions with 51 to 500 women members, two delegates.
- 2.3 Trade unions with over 500 women members may appoint the following number of delegates:

500 - 1,500	3 delegates
1,501 - 2,500	4 delegates
2,501 - 5,000	5 delegates
5,000 - 7,500	6 delegates
7,501 - 10,000	7 delegates
10,001 - 15,000	9 delegates
15,001 - 20,000	11 delegates
20,001 - 25,000	13 delegates
25,001 - 30,000	15 delegates

And two delegates for each additional 5,000 women members over 30,000



Local Councils of Trade Unions may appoint delegates (who must be members of affiliated trade unions) to the Conference in accordance with the following scale.

Up to 6,500 affiliated membership	-	1 delegates
Over 6,500 affiliated membership	-	2 delegates

3. Motions

- 3.1 Affiliated organisations may submit one motion for the Conference agenda. Motions must be signed by the authorised official of the organisation and forwarded to Congress not later than the date specified by the Executive Council.
- 3.2 The Women's Committees may submit one motion each for the Conference agenda.
- 3.3 Motions must relate to issues of particular concern to women and must be within the scope of the Objects of Congress as set out in the Constitution. **Motions should cover issues/strategies which have not been dealt with previously, or which develop current policy.** The Executive Council shall determine, in consultation with the Officers of the Women's Committees, whether motions submitted are in order and its decision shall be final.

4. Business of Conference

- 4.1 The business of the Conference shall be determined by the Executive Council following consultations with the Women's Committees but shall include the following items:
 - a. Report from Executive Council on Congress action on Equality issues and related matters
 - b. Reports from Women's Committees
 - c. Motions from affiliated organisations
 - d. Information/strategy papers on specific themes will be prepared and circulated to affiliates prior to Conference. The presentation and discussion of such papers will encourage open and less formal debate.
 - e. Unions will be invited to comment in advance of Conference on the information/strategy papers. These comments will be circulated to Conference.
- 4.2 The Conference Arrangements Committee may make recommendations to the Conference for the ordering of discussion and facilitating the completion of the business of the Conference.



5. Method of Voting

Voting at the Conference shall be confined to delegates and shall be by a show of hands, each delegate having one vote. Four delegates shall be appointed as Tellers.

6. Limitation of Speeches

Subject to the discretion of the Chairperson, the proposer of a motion shall be allowed four minutes and other speakers three minutes. No speaker shall speak more than once on the same question, except the mover of a motion replying to the discussion.

7. Executive Council

Executive Council members and Congress Officials are entitled to attend and speak at the Conference.

8. Other Matters

- 8.1 Affiliates and delegates to the Women's Conference are reminded of the requirement to seek the permission of the Conference Arrangements Committee in advance of the distribution of any material to delegates during the course of the Women's Conference.
- 8.2 Matters not covered by these Standing Orders shall in principle be dealt with in accordance with the Standing Orders of Congress.



Taryn Trainor, UNITE



Tina Creaney, NIPSA



SIPTU Delegates



Phil Ni Sheaghda, Congress President addresses the November 24 rally



Ailbhe Smyth and Sabina Higgins at Rally 2024



Helen Crickard, UNISON



Mosisa Princess, SIPTU activist in Dublin Bus at November 24 rally



Justin McCamphill, ICTU President



Katie Morgan at Le Cheile carnival event



Minister for the Economy with NIC ICTU Chair J White and Women's Committee Chair T Creaney - Where's Our Safe Leave rally, Stormont

Right: Ms. Maira Lacerda, Head of the Special Advisory Office for International Affairs at the Ministry of Labor and Employment, Federal Government of Brasil (EPIC Chair); Aine Maher (DETE) and David Joyce at the EPIC meeting at UN Women (September 2025)

UN WOMEN

هيئة الأمم المتحدة للمرأة

ONU FEMMES

妇女署

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هيئة الأمم المتحدة للمرأة

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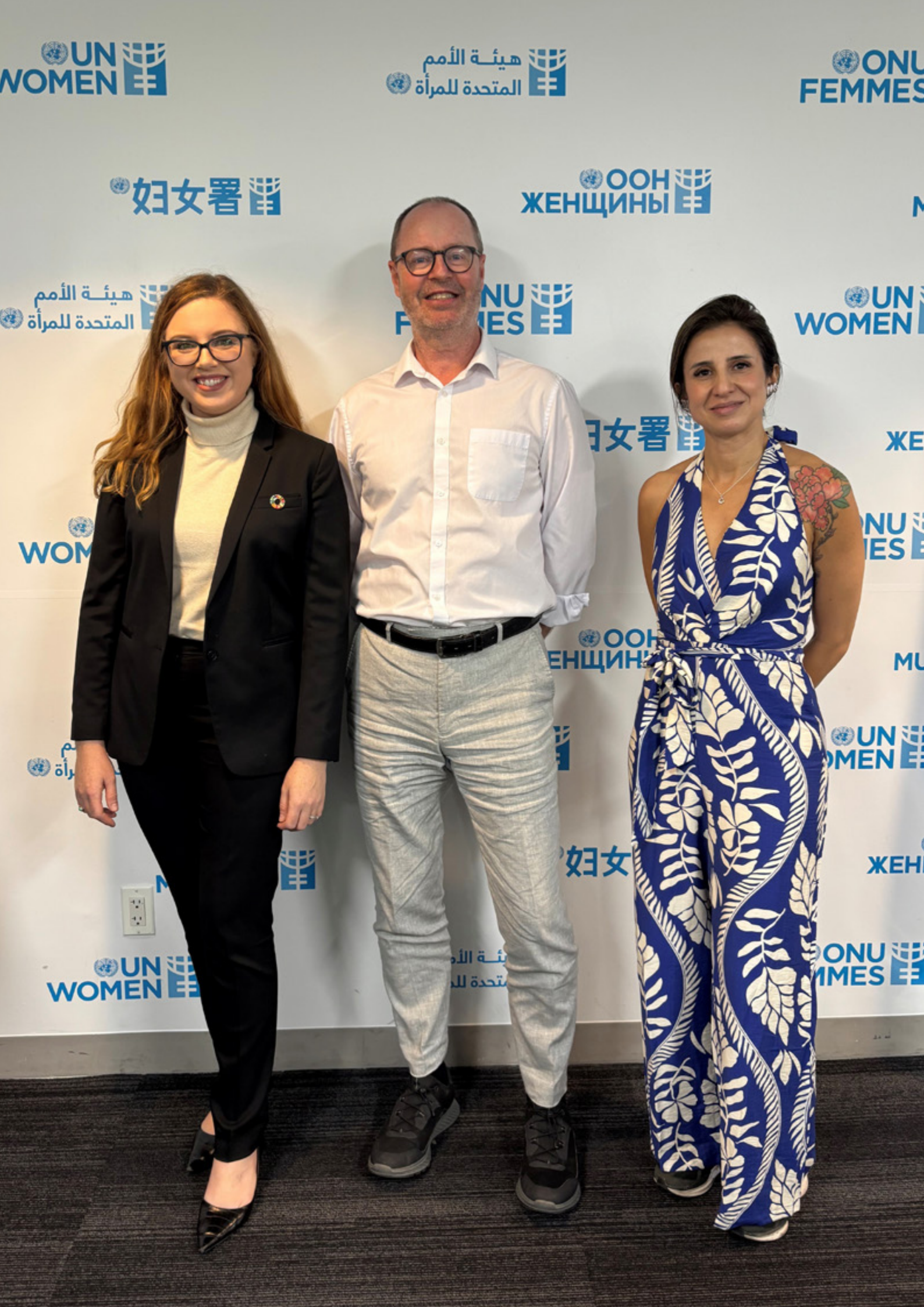
妇女

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UN WOMEN

هيئة الأمم المتحدة للمرأة

ONU FEMMES





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