



# The Development of the Priorities and Policy Programme for Ireland's Presidency of the Council of the European Union 2026

December 2025

**Fairness  
at Work and  
Justice in  
Society**

## Introduction

SIPTU, the Services, Industrial, Professional and Technical Union, is Ireland's largest trade union.

We represent over 180,000 workers from virtually every category of employment across almost every sector of the Irish economy. We campaign for the right of every worker to organise in their workplace, receive the pay they deserve and be treated with respect. We fight against exploitation, harassment and injustice – and believe that everyone has the right to a voice at work through a trade union.

SIPTU welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Public Consultation on the Development of Priorities and Policy Programme for Ireland's Presidency of the Council of the European Union 2026.

Ireland will hold the Presidency of the Council of the European Union for the eight time from July to December 2026. This will be an important opportunity for Ireland to play a central role in shaping the EU's policy and legislative agenda.

Ensuring the delivery of a successful Presidency will be essential for Ireland's position and influence in the EU.

The cost-of-living crisis across the EU continues to place immense pressure on workers, with persistent widespread low pay and rising housing costs eroding living standards and widening inequality. For many households, wages are no longer keeping pace with soaring rents, mortgage repayments, energy bills, and essential goods, leaving working people struggling to make ends meet despite contributing their essential labour to society and the economy.

This crisis highlights the urgent need for stronger protections, including real wage growth, robust collective bargaining rights, and government action to expand affordable, secure housing.

The Presidency comes at a time when there are some critical developments at EU level. The Commission's

'Quality Jobs Roadmap' presented in early December 2025 will be advanced in 2026 during Ireland's six-month term. The Quality Jobs Roadmap commits to improving job quality and creating high-quality, well paid and future-proof jobs. The Quality Jobs Act is scheduled to be proposed in 2026.

Ireland's Presidency can address the Irish and European housing crisis by prioritising housing in the Presidency Policy Programme and building meaningfully on the Danish Presidency's work on affordable housing. Ireland can explicitly frame housing affordability, supply, and quality as a cross-cutting EU priority linked to social rights, economic competitiveness, and climate goals—ensuring it appears in all relevant Council configurations (EPSCO, ECOFIN, Environment, and Energy). Ireland can also advance legislation already initiated to reform State aid rules for public housing and can push for recognition of non-market housing as essential infrastructure with more favourable State-aid conditions to allow governments to invest in public and affordable housing at scale.

Ireland can highlight the link between housing and labour mobility, productivity, and fair working conditions—supporting broader EU social initiatives such as quality jobs, living wages, and strong collective bargaining.

This would represent a return to a more Social Europe thereby renewing the EU's commitment to policies that prioritise social rights, equality, and the wellbeing of workers and communities—rather than focusing mainly on market competition or austerity. It means strengthening the social dimension of the European project through measures such as fair wages, strong collective bargaining, secure employment, public services, social protection, and investment in affordable housing, healthcare, and education. A return to Social Europe also implies ensuring that economic progress translates into improved living standards for all, reducing inequality between regions and workers, and reaffirming the EU's role in protecting people's rights at work. In essence, it calls for an EU that places social justice at the heart of its policies and decision-making.

**We will now address the four specific questions posed in the Submission Form.**

**Question 1 - What should Ireland choose as the high-level thematic priorities for its Presidency of the Council in 2026?**

SIPTU believes that Quality Jobs must be a central and explicit thematic priority for Ireland's EU Presidency. For workers across Ireland and Europe, delivering decent pay, secure work, strong collective bargaining, and fair conditions is essential to building a competitive and sustainable European economy.

Our recommendation is strongly supported by existing EU commitments:

- The Strategic Agenda 2024-2029, endorsed by the Taoiseach and EU leaders, commits the European Union to creating good jobs.
- President von der Leyen's Political Priorities for the 2024-2029 Commission included a Quality Jobs Roadmap to support fair wages, good working conditions, training, fair transitions, and -crucially- increased collective bargaining coverage.
- Published in early December 2025, the Quality Jobs Roadmap contains a strong commitment to improving job quality and creating high-quality and future-proof jobs in Europe.
- The forthcoming Quality Jobs Act should ensure workers' rights while keeping the EU up with technological, climatic and societal changes.
- The Joint Declaration on the EU Legislative Priorities for 2025 emphasises that promoting quality jobs is essential to Europe's sustainable prosperity and competitiveness.
- The Danish Presidency Programme commits to active engagement with the Commission's Quality Jobs Roadmap.
- The (draft) Cypriot Presidency Programme also commits to advancing policies that promote quality employment.

In addition, all European social partners—ETUC, BusinessEurope, SMEUnited—together with the institutions, have recognised in the Val Duchesse Tripartite Declaration (31 January 2024) that Europe's long-term competitiveness must go hand in hand with quality jobs. SIPTU, as part of the ICTU and the ETUC, fully supports this shared position.

Prioritising Quality Jobs during Ireland's Presidency would help drive progress on initiatives that are of direct value to all Member States and build on the ongoing work of the Council. It would also align with the Commission's forthcoming legislation: with the Quality Jobs Act expected in late 2026 during the Irish Presidency. Ireland can and should play a lead role in this initiative.

Quality jobs will also form a key component of several dossiers that will be active during the Irish Presidency, including:

- The new Action Plan for the European Pillar of Social Rights,
- The EU Anti-Poverty Strategy,
- The Gender Equality Strategy 2026-2030
- The Fair Labour Mobility Package

Finally, the Government has already signalled its support. In his address to Eurofound's Foundation Forum on 20 November 2025, the Taoiseach welcomed the Commission's Quality Jobs Roadmap and described it as setting "an ambitious employment agenda for the EU to remain competitive, innovative and fair, and create a level playing field that prioritises high standards for quality jobs." Roxana Mînzatu, Executive Vice-President for Social Rights and Skills, Quality Jobs and Preparedness also addressed the event in Dublin.

Given this clear national and European alignment, SIPTU believes it is both logical and necessary for Ireland to make Quality Jobs a flagship priority of its Presidency in 2026 thereby delivering tangible improvements for workers in Ireland and across Europe.

## Question 2 - Which particular policy areas and legislative proposals should be a focus of work for the Irish Presidency of the Council in 2026? What should the Irish Presidency aim to achieve in these areas?

SIPTU believes that advancing the Quality Jobs Roadmap and preparing the ground for the Quality Jobs Act (expected in late 2026 during the Presidency, as previously mentioned) must be a central focus of Ireland's EU Presidency. This work is essential to delivering fair pay, secure employment, strong collective bargaining rights, and fair conditions for workers across Europe.

Alongside this, SIPTU identifies a number of other policy areas and legislative files that should be prioritised during the Irish Presidency. These include:

- Finalising key pending legislation that strengthens workers' rights

Several important proposals may still be under negotiation by the time the Cypriot Presidency concludes. If these files remain open by June 2026, the Irish Presidency should work to secure their adoption. These include:

- The Traineeships Directive, which aims to prevent exploitation and ensure quality learning conditions
- The revision of the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund, to provide stronger support for workers facing job displacement and restructuring
- The reform of the Regulation on the Coordination of Social Security Systems, crucial for mobile workers and fair labour mobility
- The sixth revision of the Carcinogens, Mutagens and Reprotoxic Substances Directive (CMRD), strengthening protections against workplace cancers and other occupational health risks.

### Advancing new Commission initiatives vital to workers

The Irish Presidency will also need to guide major forthcoming initiatives that have significant implications for working people. SIPTU highlights in particular:

- The EU Housing Package, including the European

Affordable Housing Plan and reforms to state aid rules for public and affordable housing (expected later in December 2025)

- The Public Procurement Act (expected in Q2 2026), which must ensure procurement rules support decent work and respect collective agreements
- And the Gender Equality Strategy 2026-2030 (Q1 2026), essential for tackling the persistent gender pay and care gaps.
- The new Action Plan to implement the European Pillar of Social Rights (Q4 2025), which must strengthen social protections and support quality employment
- Regulatory and non-regulatory measures on short-term rentals (expected in Q2 2026), relevant to labour mobility and affordable housing affordability
- The Fair Labour Mobility Package (expected in Q3 2026), including proposals for a European Social Security Pass, strengthening the European Labour Authority, and measures on skills portability
- the Fairness Package, comprising an Inter-Generational Fairness Strategy (Q1 2026), an EU Anti-Poverty Strategy (Q2 2026), and stronger commitments under the European Child Guarantee (Q2 2026)

### Ensuring all EU Presidency work improves workers' lives

SIPTU believes that Ireland must champion legislation that improves living and working conditions, in line with its treaty obligations under Article 151 TFEU. This means promoting measures that support decent work, quality jobs, collective bargaining, social progress, and equality – and rejecting proposals that undermine workers' rights, including any attempts under the simplification agenda to weaken vital worker protections in the guise of reducing bureaucracy. SIPTU has real fears that simplification could be used to undermine the worker protections laid down over decades of progressive legislative change.

For instance, SIPTU opposes initiatives such as a 28th Company Law Regime covering labour law (expected in Q1 2026). Such a measure would allow companies to sidestep national labour laws and collective agreements, undermining protections for workers and encouraging a race to the bottom. The Irish Presidency should make clear that this is not acceptable.

### **Question 3 - How can the work of the Council during the term of the Irish Presidency make the most substantial positive impact for people, businesses and communities across the EU?**

SIPTU believes that the Irish Presidency should prioritise strengthening and developing the EU framework on social dialogue, including collective bargaining, across all relevant legislation and initiatives on the Council's agenda. This is particularly important following the Court of Justice of the European Union's ruling on 11 November 2025 in Denmark's legal challenge to the Adequate Minimum Wages Directive, which fully upheld the Directive's provisions promoting collective bargaining as compatible with EU treaties. This ruling reinforces that collective bargaining is not only lawful but essential to a fair and competitive European labour market.

This recommendation is supported by multiple EU-level commitments and analyses:

- At the Porto Social Summit (May 2021), EU leaders, including the Taoiseach, affirmed that Europe's social dimension, social dialogue and the active involvement of social partners are at the core of a highly competitive social market economy.
- The Council Recommendation (12 June 2023) on strengthening social dialogue noted that Member States with robust social dialogue frameworks and broad collective bargaining coverage tend to have more resilient and competitive economies.
- The European Council's Strategic Agenda 2024-2029 commits the EU and Member States to further strengthen social dialogue.

- The Council guidelines on employment policies (December 2024) recognise social dialogue and collective bargaining as key to ensuring both economic competitiveness and social fairness.

Independent analyses reinforce this approach. The Letta Report (2024) highlighted that effective support for businesses and quality jobs requires enhanced coordination and negotiation between employers and workers, identifying social dialogue and collective bargaining as "unique tools for governments and social partners to find tailored and fair solutions". The Draghi Report (2024) stressed that modern competitiveness relies on knowledge and skills in the workforce rather than wage suppression and emphasised the critical role of trade unions in building trust, guiding skills development, and ensuring that technological and business changes benefit both companies and workers.

The Irish Presidency should therefore actively promote measures that strengthen EU social dialogue, particularly through key initiatives such as:

- The new Action Plan to implement the European Pillar of Social Rights.
- The Quality Jobs Roadmap and the forthcoming Quality Jobs Act.
- The Public Procurement Act.
- And other Council files that have direct implications for workers' rights, pay, and conditions.

By prioritising social dialogue and collective bargaining, Ireland can ensure that EU policies deliver real benefits for workers, support quality jobs, and contribute to a fair, competitive, and sustainable European economy.





**Question 4 – How can we best communicate the values and benefits of EU membership to its citizens and create a sense of ownership, amongst citizens, over Ireland's Presidency of the Council of the EU?**

The Irish Presidency could best communicate the values and benefits of EU membership and create a sense of ownership over Ireland's Presidency by strengthening and developing the EU's framework on social dialogue and collective bargaining, for workers in Ireland and across Europe, as recommended above.

We recognise that the Irish Presidency will face an extremely busy agenda and a very heavy workload across a wide range of policy areas during its term. But we cannot over-emphasise the importance of the Irish Presidency addressing and being seen to address the main day-to-day cost of living challenges facing workers and their families, especially low pay, insecure work, exorbitant housing costs, rising energy prices, which were identified as the most important issues in Member States (including in Ireland), according to the most recent Eurobarometer survey (Standard Eurobarometer 103) carried out in Spring 2025. The European Council's Strategic Agenda 2024-2029

committed to address the aspirations of citizens. The most effective way of Ireland doing this as far as workers are concerned would be by strengthening and developing the EU's framework on social dialogue and collective bargaining and advancing the next steps recommended in the Quality Jobs Roadmap agenda during its Council Presidency.



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