



# NEWS IN BRIEF

## JUNE 2024

**ISCP**  
**VOICE OF OLDER PEOPLE**

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### Annual Parliament Meeting 2024

A very successful and eye-opening APM took place this year, reigniting our passion and approach to our body of work for the year ahead. Submitted and voted for by our members, 10 motions were carried and will be developed by both their proposers and the ISCP Team throughout the next year. The following motions were passed on Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> of May:

- 🗳️ **Commissioner for Ageing and Older People:** Establish a Commissioner for Aging and Older People with the necessary legal and budgetary/resources to carry out its function in supporting older persons and healthy ageing
- 🗳️ **Disabled Parking Permit:** to lobby the Government to have one body issue Disable Parking Permits, at the moment it's the IWA and the Disabled Drivers who issue them, there is a massive increase in misuse of them with a large number out of date
- 🗳️ **Digital Exclusion:** to lobby the Government to implement a strict code of practice, which requires all public service providers to have cognisance of the fact that 65% of older people in Ireland experience 'digital exclusion'
- 🗳️ **State Pension:** A substantial and sustainable increase in the state pension as well as continuation of the Pension Promise Campaign urging Government to benchmark pension rates to 34% of average earnings
- 🗳️ **Access for Retired Workers:** to pursue collective access for retired workers to the Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman
- 🗳️ **Assisted Dying Bill:** Urging a national discussion enriched with insights and practices from other countries. Advocate for enhanced and accessible palliative care options alongside assisted dying

- 🗳️ **Booking Free – Free Travel Pass:** to lobby the Government in relation to pre-booking fees for travel pass holders on buses and trains where a charge should not be incurred
- 🗳️ **Pressure on Older People to Downsize:** undue pressure is being placed on people (particularly older people) to downsize, notwithstanding, if people wish to avail of the opportunity to downsize an agreeable mechanism to be put in place.
- 🗳️ **Homecare and Healthy Ageing:** A call on the existing home care system be reformed; resources be transferred from the nursing home system to home care and that home care be prioritised. That it be delivered centrally by the HSE and that the HSE be forbidden to contract it out.
- 🗳️ **Industrial Relations (Pension) Bill:** for the Bill to be passed granting access to pensioners in negotiations concerning their pension beyond the current 6-month time limit post-retirement



As well as discussing and voting on this year's motions, we had the pleasure of listening to a provocative and inspiring speech from Mr. Joe Little; former Religious and Social Affairs Correspondent for RTE News and current member of the ISCP and (Pensions) Collective Network of Retired Workers. We then progressed into our pre-budget workshop which explored some results from the pre-budget surveys as well as discussing how best we can influence our local TDs, Senators and Councillors in joining our fight for equality and adequate living among generations.

### Pension Bill Update

The ISCP hosted a meeting on 28<sup>th</sup> May to bring together member organisations affected by the lack of a voice regarding their occupational pension. This has resulted in loss of income for many people in an environment of ongoing cost of living increases and hikes in energy costs. The ISCP formed a collective network some three years ago to address the lack of engagement with pensioners regarding changes to their pension provision. We support the progression of the Industrial Relations (Provisions in Respect of Pension Entitlements of Retired Workers) Bill 2021 sponsored by Brid Smith. The Collective Network of Retired Staff Associations have campaigned heavily to have this progress through all its stages. If passed, the Bill will address the fundamental right of pensioners to be at the table when any decision effecting their pension is being decided. Currently, the Bill is at second stage and is awaiting a report from the Joint Committee.

We thank UNITE for their support in providing the venue on May 28<sup>th</sup> and were delighted with the turnout. Eileen Sweeney gave a detailed overview of the work to date on the campaign to have the Bill passed. Our own Pat Mellon welcomed Brid Smith who took members through the history behind the Bill and its progression to the current stage. She highlighted the disrespect shown to older people by the lack of engagement of the Government on this key issue.

Dr Nat O Connor from Age Action who the ISCP work with on many campaigns,

highlighted the reality of income for older people; *If we look at PAYE income—income that is subject to tax but not including the state pension—of people at the age of 70, the median income—the middle point if you lined people up from lowest to highest income—is €8,136. Half of people at the age of 70 have an income less than that, not including the state pension, but an occupational or private pension income of €8,136 or less. At age 80, it's €7,700 or less. That's the middle point. Half of people have more, and half have less. We are sometimes told we have a very generous state pension, but when you look at the European statistics, at income replacement, it tells a different story. You don't expect it to replace 100%, but the European average is 58%—on average, across Europe, pensions (from all sources) replace 58% of the working income of people in their 50s. In Ireland, it's 38%—the second lowest in the European Union.*

The full report is available, so please contact us if you would like more information.



The meeting was addressed by some of the members of the Collective Network on the impact of loss of earnings and having no voice at the table. Paddy Fagan spoke about pension poverty and John Nugent expressed the urgent need to ensure this lack of engagement by the Government is addressed. We thank all who took part in the discussions following the panel inputs and we hope to see you all engaging with your local politicians to create the need to have this Bill passed and to end the inequality and discrimination faced by retired workers and employees.

### Budget 2025

We had an overwhelming response to this year's pre-budget surveys and workshops

and a very positive reaction to our latest health-based survey. We wish to take this opportunity to thank each and every individual who took the time to fill out our questionnaires by post and online. **A total of 554 people filled out our surveys** which directly informs our submissions to various Government Departments ahead of Budget 2025. **With thanks to you all, we can now submit an extensive pre-budget submission to the Department of Health this year.**

Our Budget Survey results will be published in the coming weeks but until then, we have some key findings to share to date;

- 🍷 38.6% of ISCP members reported having to give up going out for a meal, 33.7% have had to give up the possibility of a weekend break and 29.85% have stopped attending social events since the rise in the cost of living.
- 🍷 44.1% struggle to pay their utility bills while 40% report that the high cost-of-living impacted their health expenses e.g. could not afford the GP or medication.
- 🍷 30% have been on a waiting list for a GP or Doctors appointment within the last 6 months
- 🍷 Almost 17% received a delayed/late diagnosis due to long waiting times for a medical or dental appointment
- 🍷 75% think that prescription charges should be abolished for all over 70s
- 🍷 79% are lucky enough to avail of Private Health Insurance with one person quoting an annual cost of €4000



## National Economic Dialogue

NED, which took place in The Printworks in Dublin Castle on the 27th May was a one-day event focused on a theme of "A more shock-

prone world: challenges and opportunities for Ireland". The opening address came from an Taoiseach Mr Simon Harris with Ministers Micheal McGrath and Paschal Donohue giving an update on public finances and the risks to the economy from external shocks. They highlighted the risk inherent in windfall corporate tax receipts. He explained that corporate tax receipts "a decade ago amounted to around €4 billion; the equivalent figure for this year is closer to €24 billion". "The Department of Finance estimates that almost half of the entire corporation tax yield may be 'windfall' in nature and could prove transient. When these receipts are excluded, the fiscal position is in deficit". The Minister went on to say that "No Budget decisions have been taken as yet" but then went on to note that there were "a number of themes which will be foremost in our thinking" as the budget package was being framed.

In the breakout session with Minister for Social Welfare Heather Humphries was asked about pension payments reform, means testing and mandatory retirement. While the cynical view would be that NED was held just before local and European elections and that there is in place a plan which the Government will PR what they might describe as a giveaway budget be in no doubt but that the ISCP need to be front and centre of direct input and persuasion of what is required not just for this budget but policy for equality and rights for our members going forward. We can be assured that a General Election will happen shortly after this "giveaway budget" and then another 4 years of stalled promises. We can't fall for false promises of "live horse and get grass". The ISCP intend to engage with all parties in the coming months and you the members will be called upon to be a direct part of that engagement.

## Social Inclusion Forum

The Social Inclusion Forum is an annual national event hosted by the Department of Social Protection. It provides people affected by poverty and social exclusion, as well as the community organisations representing them, the opportunity to come together with officials from relevant Government

Departments and the Minister for Social Protection. It also allows for discussion about the implementation of the Roadmap for Social Inclusion, the national strategy for poverty reduction and improved social inclusion. This year's forum was held in Croke Park on Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> May, organised by the Social inclusion Division, the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) Ireland and Community Work Ireland (CWI). The theme of *"Delivering Change and Achieving Ambition: Progress on the Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020 – 2025"* was discussed throughout workshops (summarised below) on the topics of Core Essentials, Communities, Disabled People and Employment.

#### Core Essentials:

**Transport** should be Accessible, affordable, available, acceptable and public transport booking fees should not be applied to Free Travel Pass holders. Improved access to better resourced

**Health Services** and full implementation of Sláintecare should be a priority.

**Housing** should include policies on the conversion of unused spaces and there should be a more targeted approach to energy poverty.

**Communities:** The Roadmap does not recognise **community work** as a key approach in addressing poverty and social exclusion. There needs to be further development of Community Centres, spaces and Hubs as well as recognition of the importance of Community Education and social integration.

**Disabled People:** Implement a programme of Disability Equality Training and facilitate genuine and effective engagement with Disabled People's Organisations. Ensure all actions are based on removing structural barriers to inclusion and implement the recommendations from the Cost of Disability Report.

**Employment:** Need to increase focus on approaches to addressing barriers in the employment system such as bias, stigma and discrimination. Address discrepancies around access to pensions and effectively plan for an older workforce. Abolish Mandatory Retirement Age in the private sector.

## A few words from Joe Little

The guest speaker at this year's APM was the journalist Joe Little, the RTÉ Retired Staff Association's nominee on the ISCP Executive.

He has recently contributed to the Parliament's campaign in support of Deputy Brid Smith's Private Member's Bill providing for the occupational pensioners' representation at all negotiations involving where their pension rights.

Mr Little paid tribute to the late Sylvia Meehan, the first CEO of the Employment Equality Agency and a lifelong trade unionist who helped to establish the ISCP thirty years ago. He noted her advocacy for Irish women who had been denied pension rights by the state and to her role in the ISCP's successful campaign in 2008 to prevent the abolition of medical cards for over-70's.

He said that many occupational pensioners represented by the Parliament had experienced trauma since the economic crash of 2008. He cited cuts of up to 20% in Aer Lingus, Dublin and Shannon Airport, and the ESB schemes remarking that in each case the pensioners were frozen out of the negotiations at which employers and trade unions slashed their incomes. He warned that if the state and parts of the pensions industry got away with such abuse, they'd be emboldened to victimize even more pensioners.

"It's only in the past four years that the RTÉ Retired Staff Association has succeeded in persuading our scheme's trustees to award increases to our members and the dependents of deceased members," he said.

He described his association's successful campaign to prevent, for the moment at least, RTÉ from taking over €30 million from his members' pension scheme to offset the station's financial crisis which has been triggered by Turbiditygate.



An Buidéal Forbartha  
Taidhle agus Pobail

