

# Fórsa wants to negotiate an agreement on public service remote working

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**Fórsa is formally seeking the negotiation of “agreed and comprehensive guidelines” on remote working, for application across the civil and public service.**

In a letter to Public Expenditure & Reform Minister, Michael McGrath, the union’s general secretary Kevin Callinan said their claim was designed “to reach agreement on a clear and consistent public service approach to remote working, based on principles of fair access, adequate employee protections, and robust measures to underpin continued public service quality and productivity.”

Mr Callinan asked the minister to instruct senior DPER officials to open an early engagement with Fórsa on its claim.

The union says the claim, which was submitted on Monday, March 29, can be discussed under the auspices of the new public service agreement, Building Momentum, which commits public service management and unions to accommodate “the potential of remote working where appropriate in line with the Programme for Government” and to establish the public service “as a driver of best practice in this area.”

Fórsa’s move comes in the same week that the union welcomed the publication of the Government’s plan for rural Ireland, which further outlined the Government’s thinking on remote work in the public service.

The union’s detailed claim seeks agreement under 20 broad headings, including:

- The consistent application of agreed guidelines for identifying functions that can be performed remotely, and for selecting staff to be allocated to home working arrangements
- Fair access and the right to request remote work
- The principle that individual employees can decline remote work arrangements
- Compliance with health and safety legislation, including specific measures relating to mental health, pregnant women, young workers, and workers with disabilities
- Specific advice on compliance with working time legislation and the ‘right to disconnect’
- Agreed guidance on flexible work arrangements, work attendance and time measurement
- The provision of management training and supports to line managers

- The promotion of regular, quality communications between line managers and their staff, and the inclusion of remote workers in collective workplace activities, including business meetings and training
- Strong direction that staff who work remotely should routinely spend some time in the workplace
- Full transparency and agreement over the use of any surveillance products or practices, and a guarantee that employees' rights to privacy and a reasonable work-life balance will be protected, along with full compliance with the provisions of data protection legislation.

Fórsa says the discussions should also address measures to underpin productivity and service quality, and that any agreement “should preclude individual departments, organisations or managers from opting out of some or all elements of an agreed approach unless an objective rationale is demonstrated.”