



Briefing for INMO members on the new public sector agreement

Key points of the agreement:

- 1% increase in pay and allowances in October 2021 (minimum €500)
- 1% increase in pay and allowances in October 2022 (minimum €500)
- Restoration of cuts for those on salaries over €70k in July 2021
- Process for restoration of hours back to 37.5 per week
- Overtime rates increased back to what they were pre-2013, in July 2021
- Fund for the managerial grade increase of 3.28% as confirmed by the Expert Review Group on Nursing and Midwifery

What is this about?

The current public sector pay agreement has expired. The INMO – as part of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions – has negotiated proposals for a new agreement. Talks finished in December and union members across the public sector are now voting.

The government were reluctant to engage on pay issues with us, due to the economic uncertainty, rising unemployment, and the economic effects of Brexit.

The trade unions argued that while pay from the last recession has only just been restored, there is still unfinished business when it comes to hours and overtime rates. For nurses and midwives, we have outstanding issues with pay for managerial grades, following the 2019 strike settlement.

INMO members employed in the public sector – as part of the wider public sector workforce – will vote whether to accept or reject this agreement.

What does the INMO recommend?

The INMO Executive Council and the INMO negotiation team recommend that you vote to accept the proposals. On balance the Executive Council believe that the progress on hours and the completion of implementation of the strike settlement merit acceptance in the current circumstances.

How long does this agreement last?

This agreement, if passed, will last for two years, running from 1st January 2021 until 31st December 2022. This is shorter than usual. If ratified, the INMO expects that negotiations on the successor agreement would begin in early summer 2022.

PAY:

How does the agreement affect basic pay?

For those with a basic salary under €70,000:

1st October 2021: Basic pay will increase by 1% or by €500 a year – whichever is higher. The €500 minimum means that those on lower incomes see a larger percentage increase.

1st October 2022: As above, basic pay will increase by 1% or by €500 a year – whichever is higher.

Pay restoration for those earning under €70,000 was completed in 2020. Those with basic salaries above €70,000 that were previously reduced will see their pay restored by 1st July 2021. If this remaining pay restoration is worth less than 1% each year, they will get a full 1% pay increase each year.

What about premium pay and allowances?

Premium pay (for night, weekend, or public holiday work) is based on your basic salary. Each time your basic salary increases, so too will the premium pay. Each 1% increase in basic pay means a 1% increase in premium pay too.

Fixed allowances will also increase by 1% each year. The location allowance would go from €2,347 today to €2,370 in 2021 and to €2,394 in 2022. The qualification allowance would go from €3,525 today to €3,560 in 2021 and to €3,596 in 2022.

Allowances apply to Staff Nurse and Midwives, Enhanced Practice Nurses and Midwives, CNM/CMM 1 and CNM/CMM2, PHN, and CNS/CMS grades.

What about overtime?

Overtime rates were cut in 2013. This agreement would increase them back to the level they were previously at. This would mean an increase in the overtime rates. Most members would see overtime rates for weekday, day shifts increase by 20%. The changes are below.

Overtime type	Current system	Restored system (Proposal)
Monday – Friday Between start of day duty and midnight.	Either time and a half at a low increment or time and a quarter.	Time and a half, at your full increment.
Monday – Friday Midnight to start of day duty.	Double time.	Double time.
Saturday	First four hours: either time and a half at a low increment or time and a quarter. Hours after that paid double.	First four hours: time and a half, at your full increment. Hours after that paid double.

What about pay for management grades?

Management grades will benefit from the increases set out above, but also have outstanding increases due from the strike settlement. In addition, those grades on higher salaries (over €70k) in 2013 had their salaries reduced. The final payment of restoration of their salary will be take place from July 2021. For the grades concerned this will yield at least a 1% increase.

In the 2019 strike settlement, pay increases were frontloaded for staff nurses and midwives, by the creation of the enhanced practice salary scale.

An expert independent review looked at the increases that should be considered for the management grades, based on the increases secured for staff nurses. That review recommended the level be set at 3.28%. This pay increase for management grades is facilitated by using the “sectoral bargaining fund”. This is a new fund set up under the agreement to deal with outstanding issues and claims, such as nurse/midwife management pay.

Exactly how this would be done would be agreed between unions and management before the end of March 2021, with payment in February 2022. This payment would be in addition to the 1% increases set out above.

CONDITIONS:

What about working hours?

In the 2013 agreement during the recession, working hours were increased from 37.5 hours a week to 39. This was a major issue in these negotiations and an issue which the government refused to change their position on over recent years.

However, agreement was secured that hours will be reduced (without negatively affecting your pay) back to 37.5 per week. An independent body, with union representatives, will decide how this should be done. It will be established in March 2021, reporting back before the end of the year. It will also be tasked with determining where replacement is required and where it is not.

A fund of €150m has been set aside to achieve this aim. This is to ensure an equitable and fair system of returning to the pre-2013 hours and to ensure grades that need replacement are not disadvantaged.

These changes would be rolled out before the end of 2022.

What about the annual retention fee?

All nurses and midwives are registered professionals and must pay an annual retention fee to the NMBI to stay registered. This is currently €100 a year. The government have tried to increase this substantially, but it has been agreed that the fee will be capped at €100 and no increases permitted should this agreement be accepted.

What about pensions?

For those who joined the public service before 1st January 2013:

If the agreement passes, pension payments will be mainly adjusted in line with pay increases for staff. This is the same as now. Simply put, pay increases in this agreement will be reflected in your pension.

There are a small number of cases, however, where pensions reductions were less than the pay reduction for the grade one retired from and this will be taken into account in any adjustment.

For those who joined the public service on or after 1st January 2013:

Pensions for this group (the single public pension scheme) are not adjusted by this pay deal. Instead, they are increased annually in line with inflation, measured by the consumer price index.

Will the proposals lead to more outsourcing?

No. Strong protections against outsourcing remain in place. The government sought measures that would have increased the risk of outsourcing and privatisation, but this was resisted in negotiations.

The final text retains existing safeguards. These include requirements on employers to present a “business case” if they want to outsource a service or part of a service, and a requirement to consult with staff representatives. Crucially, employers are forbidden to include savings for outsourcing labour costs in any business case – meaning that weaker wages and employment rights cannot be used to make the case for privatisation or outsourcing.

What about redeployment?

The agreement does not affect the existing redeployment protections. We have also retained the geographical limit on redeployment of 45km.

Is there a “no strike” clause in the agreement?

Every public sector pay agreement includes restrictions on industrial action in matters covered by this agreement, and this one is no different. This agreement sets out detailed dispute resolution mechanisms, including an “industrial peace” clause.

What if the economic situation changes?

Like the outgoing agreement, this new proposal says that the terms of the agreement may be reviewed “where the underlying assumptions of the agreement need to be revisited”. The government initially proposed that this was only in the case of a worsening economic situation, but this was deleted. This creates the opportunity to seek a review of the package if the economic situation improves beyond expectations.

What else is in the agreement for healthcare workers?

At the INMO’s insistence, the agreement also contains specific commitments in the health sector. These include:

- Implementation of the Sláintecare health service reforms
- Acting on the health service Capacity Review 2018
- Continued implementation of the Safe Staffing Framework for nursing and midwifery
- Other strategies aimed at a single-tier, high-quality health service.

PROCESS:

What happens if the agreement is rejected?

If the proposals are rejected, there will be no public service agreement in place after 31st December 2020. That means that existing protections, which restrict management’s ability to impose workplace and other changes without discussion or agreement, would cease to be in place, as would the protections against outsourcing that currently exist. Also, the proposed improvements on pay, hours, and other issues would be off the table.

What happens next?

On 21 January 2021, the INMO Executive decided to recommend that you vote to accept the agreement. There will be a national ballot of paid up INMO members employed in the public sector (including section 38 agencies). INMO members will be voting as part of the wider public sector in aggregate, our vote will form part of this overall result.

Due to COVID-19, the INMO will be organising Q&A sessions and voting online. Further details will issue on our website and via email.

It is vitally important that you have your correct email address registered with the union. If you are not receiving our weekly update emails, this may mean that your email is not registered with us. Please contact the INMO immediately if this is the case.

Once balloting is complete, the INMO will submit the full results to ICTU in mid-February.

The INMO strongly encourages members to attend online Q&A sessions if they wish to know more or have any questions.