**Tripartite Social Summit – 22 October 2025**

**Intervention by Owen Reidy, General-Secretary, Irish Congress of Trade Unions**

President Von der Leyen, President Costa, Prime Minister Frederiksen, Vice-President Mînzatu, representatives of the social partners.

Thank you for the opportunity to take part in the Tripartite Social Summit for Growth and Employment.

I am happy to report that there are more people at work in Ireland than ever before.

When I started working as a trade union official in 1999, 1.7 million were at work in Ireland. Now there are almost 2.8 million.

The Irish Government forecasts employment to rise by 2.2% in 2025, and 1.5% in 2026.

At the same time, as the European Commission pointed out in its *Country report Ireland 2025*, 27% of workers in Ireland have *‘poor quality’ jobs.[[1]](#footnote-1)*

20% of workers are officially classified as ‘low-wage’ earners - five percentage points above the EU average.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Close to 12% of in-work households are officially categorised as living in enforced deprivation.[[3]](#footnote-3)

The European Commission also acknowledges that,

* Workers in Ireland have *no* right to collective bargaining – that, *‘Regardless of the number of workers a trade union represents, employers can refuse to negotiate.’* And we know from academic research that 44% of workers not in a union, want one.
* The share of workers ‘*protected by collective agreements’* has fallen from 52% in 2003, to 34% in 2017.[[4]](#footnote-4)
* Low membership of trade unions – 22% in 2024 (v. 33% in 2005) – *‘limits their capacity to negotiate fair wages and decent working conditions’*. [[5]](#footnote-5)

The Commission’s forthcoming Quality Jobs Roadmap and Quality Jobs Act is welcome and *must* follow through on the Commission President’s promise to support fair wages and good working conditions, *‘notably by increasing collective bargaining coverage.’[[6]](#footnote-6)*

We will never achieve high-quality growth and employment on the back of low-quality jobs.

Unfortunately, there is no consensus among the social partners and the Irish government around the definition of a quality job. IBEC, Irelands main employer group is on record stating that a quality job is one that merely adheres to the basic laws in the state. Successive Irish governments have also overseen the status quo which denies workers who want collective bargaining, the right to collective bargaining. This must change.

The way to achieving high-quality jobs is through collective bargaining.

I want to see the European Union, including under Ireland’s Council Presidency next year, make *real* progress towards vindicating *every* worker’s right to collective bargaining.

That is the path forward. Thank you.

1. European Commission (4.6.2025), *2025 Country Report – Ireland*, p.93 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Eurostat, News articles 27 February 2025, ‘*1 out of 7 EU employees is a low-wage earner’.* Low-wage earners are employees earning two-thirds or less of the median gross hourly earnings in the country of work. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ireland’s Central Statistics Office (2025) *Survey on Income and Living Conditions 2024.* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. In 2017 – latest year available. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. European Commission (4.6.2025), *2025 Country Report – Ireland*, p.93 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ursula von der Leyen (2024), *POLITICAL GUIDELINES FOR THE NEXT EUROPEAN COMMISSION 2024−2029, p.18* [↑](#footnote-ref-6)