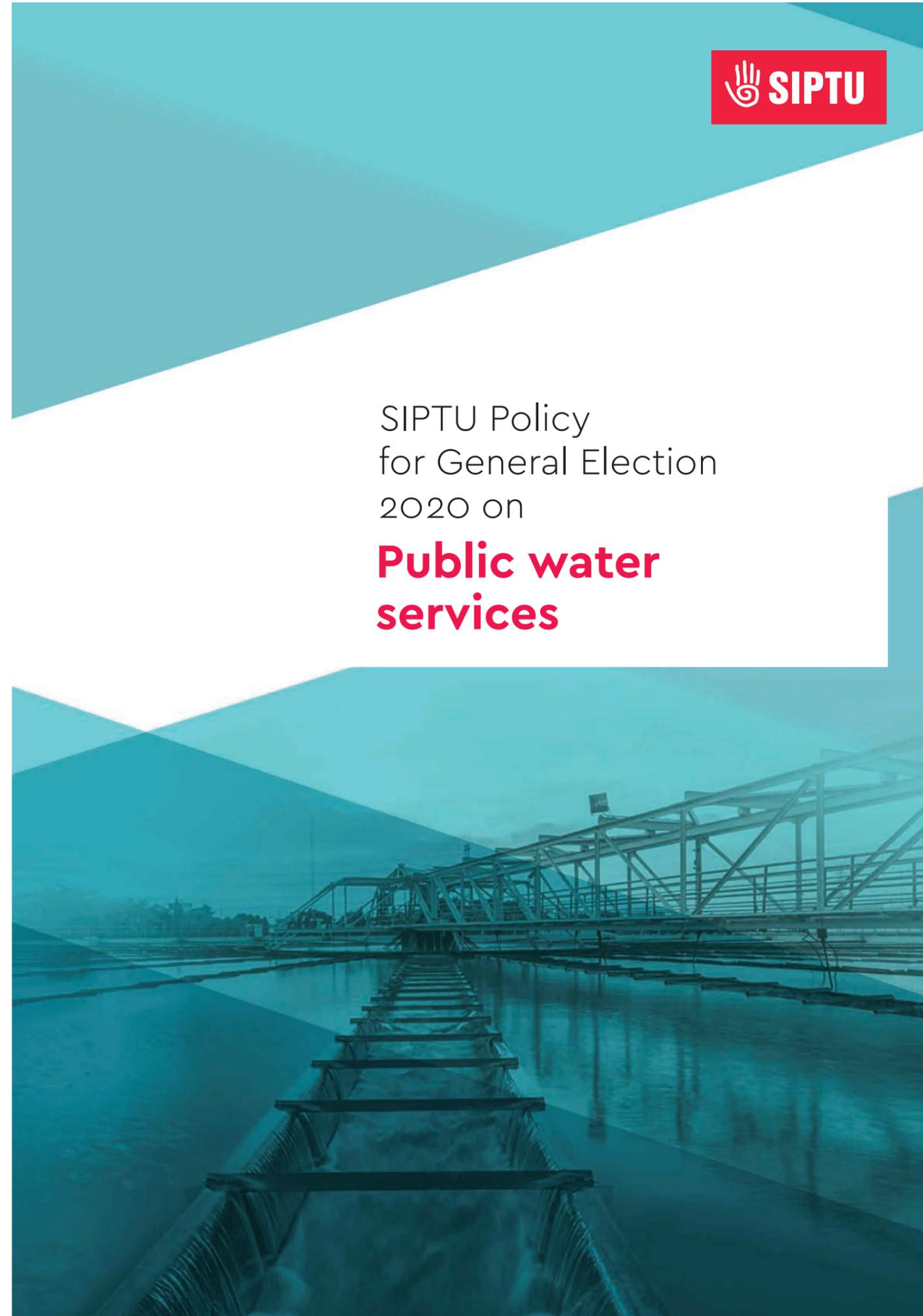




SIPTU Policy  
for General Election  
2020 on  
**Public water  
services**

SIPTU is the largest trade union in the country representing over 200,000 workers across almost every sector of the economy. We are organised across the island of Ireland.



The incoming government must commit to holding a referendum to amend Article 28 of Bunreacht na hÉireann to keep the provision of water services and associated water infrastructure in public ownership in perpetuity.

Water provision is perhaps the most essential service for the functioning of our communities. There is widespread public and political support for a call by trade unions to have the public ownership of water services given constitutional protection.

Constitutional protection would demonstrate a recognition and commitment by the Irish State to the provision of water as a human right provided by the public service. It would also provide a constitutional guarantee that our water services and supply networks remain in public ownership and operation. This is in order to ensure the essential long-term investment and democratic control of their operation.

## The experience elsewhere

There has been a move in previous years across some European and North American municipalities to privatise the provision of water services with very negative consequences in terms of water quality, security of supply and customer cost in accessing water services.

However, this disastrous experience has led some countries such as Scotland and major cities such as Paris, Berlin and Barcelona to bring back water services under public ownership and control (re-municipalisation).

In England and Wales, the cost to the public of water services is estimated to have risen by 40% in real terms since privatisation, while £18 billion (€20 billion) has been paid out in dividends to private shareholders in water companies. As a result, the UK Labour Party has committed to the re-municipalisation of water services in England and Wales.



## Why there needs to be a referendum now

The timing of our call is not accidental. In July 2018, the Government set out proposals to create a single water utility for the State. SIPTU is very clear that any such organisation must remain in the control and ownership of the State.

Despite this, it is clear from our discussions with Irish Water that the method of service provision towards which they are working is to rely solely on private contractors. Within time, the drive towards effective cost management of our water and waste-water treatment system would suggest pooling this series of private contractors into a single multi-annual contract with one provider. The argument would be that this is justified on the grounds of economies of scale and value for money for government. Instead, it would hand over control of our water system to a private operator.

The experience within Irish Water is that local authority water service workers who are directed to work under Irish Water management frequently report that they have to return to rectify poor quality work done by private contractors who are only focused on short-term profits. This results in extra cost for the public which is not reimbursed by the private contractors.

## Support for a referendum needs to be put into the Programme for Government

Following the 'More Power to You' campaign by SIPTU, FÓRSA and Connect Trade Union, TDs from most political parties, and many leading Independents committed to working for a referendum to constitutionally safeguard publicly provided water services from the threat of privatisation.

The political parties with members in the current Dáil, which have pledged their support for the holding of such a referendum include Sinn Féin, Solidarity-PBP, the Labour Party, Green Party, Independents4Change, Social Democrats and some Independents. Leading members of Fianna Fáil have also signed the pledge to commit to the holding of a referendum and to the maintenance of the public operation of water services. To see the full list of politicians who signed the SIPTU/Connect Trade Union Water Guarantee visit: [www.siptu.ie/waterguarantee](http://www.siptu.ie/waterguarantee)

