

SIPTU Policy on  
**Domestic Waste  
Collection  
Service**



## The incoming government must:

- Change the current system of waste collection across Ireland so that domestic waste is collected in an environmentally sustainable manner, illegal dumping is radically reduced by ensuring that every household is provided with an affordable service and that the workers in the industry earn decent wages and work in a safe environment.
- Eliminate side-by-side competition within municipal areas.
- Introduce a tendering regime by local authorities which would incorporate EU green procurement criteria and worker protection clauses.
- Reduce the number of household bins by the creation of community bins in cities.
- Establish a service provider of last resort.
- Construct a waiver system. The re-introduction of a waiver system for those who fall below a certain income-threshold would contribute significantly to reducing illegal dumping.

SIPTU believes that the State's policy in the area of domestic waste collection is seriously flawed and requires significant reform.

The present structure of domestic waste collection in Ireland has resulted in a chaotic situation whereby almost a quarter of all households have no domestic waste collection service, there are unsustainable levels of illegal dumping and low pay and poor working conditions are widespread across the industry.

It is time to overhaul the way Ireland collects its domestic waste. The aim of SIPTU's policy is to ensure that: domestic waste is collected in an environmentally sustainable manner, illegal dumping is radically reduced by ensuring that every household is provided with an affordable service and that the workers in the industry earn decent wages and work in a safe environment.

In order to achieve these goals the country needs to adopt a model of domestic waste collection in line with EU norms. The key finding of the report by the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (The Operation of the Household Waste Collection Market, Sept. 2018) is that Ireland is now exceptional within the EU in persisting with 'side by side' competition within 'a market area'. The principle recommendation of the report by the CCPC is the need for increased regulation.

## Increased public environmental awareness

There is a rising public awareness of the need to organise our economy in an environmentally sustainable manner. This environmental awareness also informs attitudes towards waste; the public increasingly recognises the need to both reduce waste drastically and maximise re-cycling. An entirely free-market approach to the collection of domestic waste is not sustainable. In some respects, the waste industry is a microcosm of the dysfunctional effects caused by the increased tendency to commodify services which up until relatively recently had been firmly within the realm of public services. In effect, everyone loses under the current policy – the environment, the citizens and the workers.

## Environmental concerns

One of the key findings of the CCPC report is that nationally 23% of households do not avail of a domestic waste collection service.

The same report suggests the cost to the State of cleaning up after illegal dumping was €7 million in 2017. Side-by-side competition in the domestic waste collection market has resulted in multiples of the trucks required operating in some municipal authorities.

The current policy allows for multiple providers to operate within the same municipal area, thereby increasing both carbon emissions and traffic congestion in our towns and cities.

Illegal burning of waste is also widespread and is grossly underestimated, contributing to additional carbon emissions and the release of other pollutants/toxins into the atmosphere at a time when Ireland is failing miserably to meet the Paris Climate Agreement targets.

## Cost to the household

Until 1977, Ireland was typical of most European states, i.e. households contributed through local taxation to the running of local authorities. This changed with the elimination of domestic rates in 1977.

Local authorities began a slow withdrawal from domestic waste collection from the late 1980's. Local authorities typically provided a waiver system where poorer households did not have to pay for a

domestic service. This ceased when local authorities withdrew from direct provision of the service. The average cost per household in 2018 was €228, an increase of 11% from 2012.

SIPTU believes that a long-term, environmentally sustainable service can only be achieved through reform of the 1996 Waste Management Act.

Ultimately, it would be more economical for local authorities to provide the service rather than have the State, through a number of agencies, incur the costs of policing, regulating and ultimately cleaning up after private sector provision. In the medium to long term, there is a compelling logic for local authorities to take back provision of domestic waste collection on environmental, cost and service grounds.

The CCPC report found that the provision of a domestic waste collection service was 'a natural monopoly' which, in our view, should be provided by the state.

At a very minimum, local authorities must at least be in a position to compete in the market that has been created, but for this to happen side-by-side competition within a municipal area must be eliminated and replaced with a tendering regime for the entire 'market'.

Such a tendering regime could incorporate EU green procurement criteria and worker protection clauses that currently exist under the Public Service Stability Agreement.

## Worker welfare

There are approximately 6,000 workers employed in the domestic waste collection industry. Typically, the rates of pay and the conditions are poor. General Operatives are on the minimum wage or less and drivers' rates vary between €14 – €17 per hour.

Agency workers are also becoming an increasing phenomenon within the sector. The workforce is largely comprised of foreign nationals. There is, in the main, outright employer hostility to trade union organisation. The rates of pay are so low in the industry that the State ends up subsidising sub-standard pay by providing Family Income Supplement and other social supports to employees and their dependents.

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.

