

Public v Private sector wages 2008–2026

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Ciarán Nugent

Summary: Private sector hourly wage growth has outpaced the public sector in Ireland since 2008. While nominal public sector wages are up on average by 37% over 18 years in the latest quarterly data, private sector wages are up by between 52% and 59% (depending on season). The difference in the consumer price index over the same period is 30.3%. As such, average hourly earnings are up less than 7% in real terms over 18 years in the public sector and between 19% and 26% in the private sector. Hourly wages are about 25% higher in the public sector on average in 2026. Average earnings for Gardaí have outperformed all other public sector worker groups by a considerable margin, while civil servants and public sector workers in regional bodies earn significantly less per hour in 2026 than they had in 2008 in real terms. Considering employee groups by educational requirements however, *Managers and Professionals* and *manual workers* in the private sector are paid more than in the public sector, while *Clerical and Service* workers are paid less.

Average wage growth

Data from the Earnings, Hours and Employment Costs survey show average hourly earnings growth in the private sector have outpaced earnings in the public sector since the first quarter of 2008 (the beginning of the available data series). Wages for both stagnated for many years after 2008 with the impact of the great financial crisis and austerity. In 2014 average wages were recorded above estimates in 2008 in the private sector for the first time in six years while public sector wages remained stagnant for another four, returning to 2008 levels around 2018. With a series of exogenous shocks that increased the price level facing households since 2022, approximately two thirds of the nominal growth in average wages has occurred in those four years in the public sector. Similarly, just under approximately half the growth in the private sector has occurred since 2022.

Average wages in the public sector are up 37.1% in nominal terms over 18 years, but 6.8% in real terms (the increase in the CPI is 30.3%). In q1 2026, private sector wages were up by 52.6% or 22.3% in real terms over the same period (Figure 1). Looking at the post covid period from the first quarter of 2022 in which the consumer price index in Ireland rose by €19.7%, public sector average wages grew ahead of inflation by about 4 percentage points or a one

percent annual real earnings increase on average, while private sector wages have lagged and are down in real terms closing the relative growth gap slightly which has favoured the private sector overall since austerity following the great financial crisis.

Figure 1: Average Hourly Earnings Growth 2008-2026

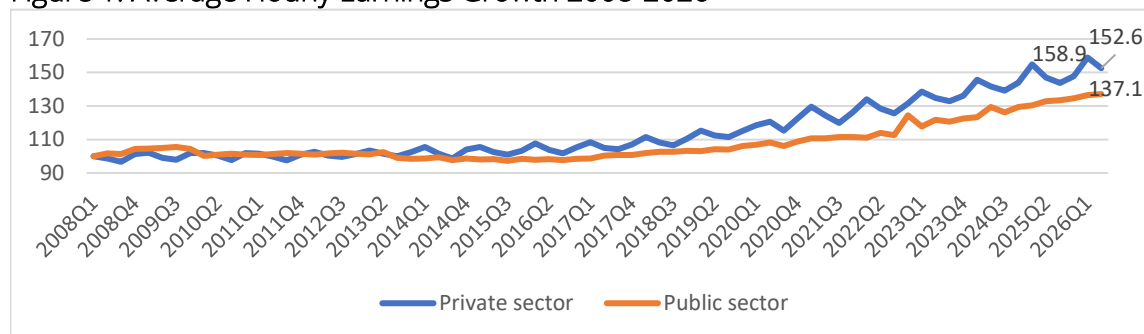
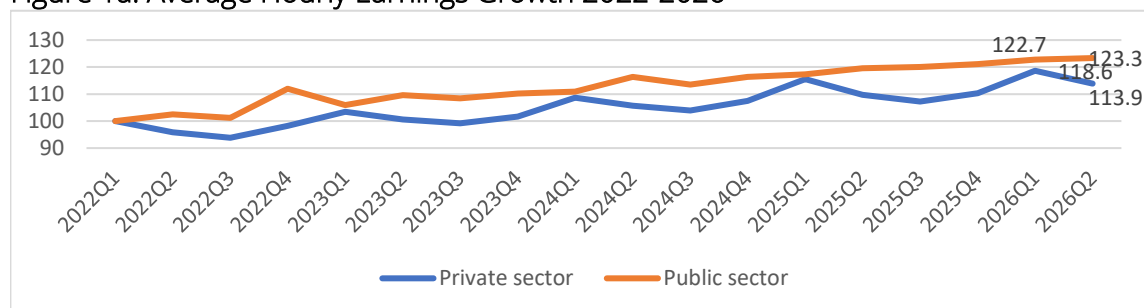


Figure 1a: Average Hourly Earnings Growth 2022-2026



Source: Earnings, Hours and Employment Costs Survey, <https://data.cso.ie/table/EHQ08>

Table 1 Estimates of Average Hourly Earnings

	2008 Q2	2011 Q2	2014 Q2	2017 Q2	2020 Q2	2023 Q2	2026 Q2
Private sector	19.21	19.43	19.77	20.41	23.46	26.22	29.69
Public sector	29.15	29.06	28.52	28.8	31.04	34.94	39.31

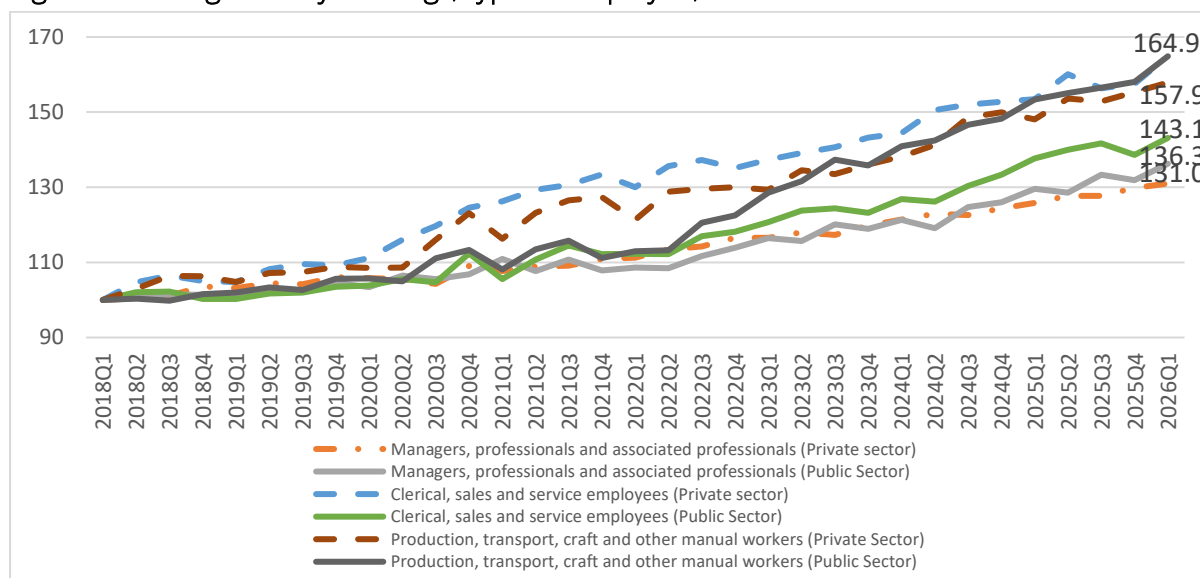
Source: Earnings, Hours and Employment Costs Survey, <https://data.cso.ie/table/EHQ08>

The composition of workers in public sector is skewed more heavily toward occupations with high skills requirements (requiring third level education for entry) than in the private sector. It is unsurprising that the nominal average wage is therefore still higher in the public sector by approximately 33% or €10 an hour. It was closer to 50% higher in 2008 (€19.21 and €29.15 in 2008 compared to €29.69 and €39.31 in 2026 (Table 1).

Looking at groups of different types of occupations by required level of education, wages are more equal than the headline figures suggest. High status positions (which generally require a third level qualification for entry) in both the private and public sector have shown the least proportional growth since the beginning of the available time-series (2018). Hourly wages are in the region of twice as high in managerial roles and the professions relative to both other groups (clerical and services and manual work) and wages for these workers in the private

sector are up approximately 4 percent over 8 years in real terms (the CPI increased by 27.0% between q2 2018 and q2 2026). Public sector wages for this top group grew slightly faster in real terms (9.3 percentage points over the course of 8 years). Manual workers in both the public and private sector and clerical, sales and service workers have made up ground relative to the top groups with strong growth over 8 years (31-38% in real terms).

Figure 2: Average Hourly Earnings, type of employee, Public v Private Sector 2018-2026



Source: Earnings, Hours and Employment Costs Survey, <https://data.cso.ie/table/EHQ57>

The top group of Managers and Professionals in the private sector earn 7.8% more on average than their public sector counterparts (€1,764 compared to €1,636 per week, a difference of €6,656 pa) and private sector manual workers earn 8.6% more on average than in the public sector (€857 compared to €789 a week or €3,536 more pa). Clerical, sales and service workers earn more on average in the public sector by 2.8% (by €1,104 pa).

Table 2 Estimates of Average Weekly Earnings

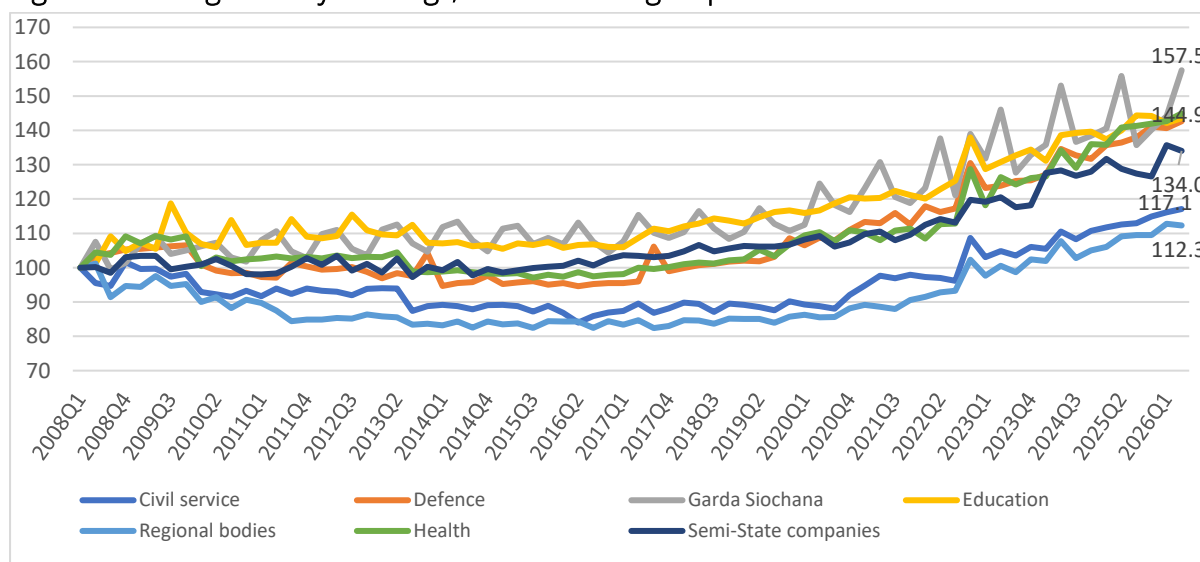
	2018Q1	2019Q1	2022Q1	2023Q1	2024Q1	2025Q1	2026Q1
Managers, professionals, associate profs							
Business and Services (B to O,S,T)	1,347	1,389	1,498	1,569	1,635	1,695	1,764
Public Admin, Education and Health (P to R)	1,201	1,214	1,304	1,398	1,457	1,556	1,636
Clerical, sales and service							
Business and Services (B to O,S,T)	475	497	617	652	685	728	783
Public Admin, Education and Health (P to R)	562	564	631	679	713	774	805
Production, transport, craft, other manual							
Business and Services (B to O,S,T)	543	569	659	703	751	804	857
Public Admin, Education, Health (P to R)	479	488	541	615	675	734	789

Source: Earnings, Hours and Employment Costs Survey, <https://data.cso.ie/table/EHQ57>

Sub sectors within the public sector show large disparities in wage growth over an 18-year period (Fig 3). Average wages in the Gardaí have grown significantly ahead of the rest and are approximately 27 percentage points ahead of inflation over 18 years, an average real wage

growth rate of circa 1.5% per annum. Average wages in Education, in Health and in the Defence Forces are also ahead of the consumer price index by approximately 14 points over 18 years. Workers in semi-states earn on average just under 3% more in real terms in 2026 than they had in 2008, while workers in both the civil service and regional bodies earn significantly less than they did in 2008 in real terms, lagging inflation by 13 and 18 percentage points respectively per hour.

Figure 3: Average Hourly Earnings, Public Sector groups



Source: Earnings, Hours and Employment Costs Survey, <https://data.cso.ie/table/EHQ10>

Table 3 Estimates of Average Hourly Earnings

2026Q2		2026Q2	
Civil service	33.59	Mining and quarrying (B)	31.51
Defence	34.05	Manufacturing (C)	30.41
Garda Síochána	42.48	Construction (F)	29.88
Education	50.94	Wholesale and retail trade; (G)	24.63
Regional bodies	31.27	Transportation and storage (H)	27.76
Health	37.3	Accommodation and food service activities (I)	18.08
Semi-State companies	36.2	Information and communication (J)	46.88
Commercial Semi-State companies	35.63	Financial and insurance activities (K)	43.27
Non commercial Semi-State companies	37.6	Real estate activities (L)	27.81
Total Public Sector including Semi State bodies	39.31	Professional, scientific and technical (M)	37.31
Total Public Sector excluding Semi State bodies	39.84	Administrative and support service (N)	27.02

Source: Earnings, Hours and Employment Costs Survey, <https://data.cso.ie/table/EHQ03>

Table 3 presents the most up to date average wage estimates by sector. Though *Education* workers earn the highest hourly rate (€50.94), there is good reason to believe that the difference between 'hours paid' and actually hours worked is a particular issue in the estimate for these workers. The second and third highest average hourly wages by sector are in *IT* and *Finance* (€46.88 and €43.27) followed by the *Gardaí* (€42.48), *Professional, Scientific and technical* (€37.31) and *Health* (€37.30).