



Department of Social Protection

# Customer Charter & Customer Action Plan



2016 -  
2018



An Roinn Coimirce Sóisialaí  
Department of Social Protection

# Table of Contents

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02 Foreword from the Minister

---

03 Introduction by the Secretary General

---

04 Chapter 1: The Department of Social Protection

---

09 Chapter 2: Customer Charter 2016 - 2018

---

12 Chapter 3: Customer Action Plan

---

17 Appendix 1: Comments and Complaints Process

---

# Foreword from the Minister

The Department of Social Protection, through the wide range of services it provides, impacts on the lives of citizens each and every day. In 2015, over 1.6 million people received a social welfare payment each week and some 619,000 families received child benefit each month. In view of the scale of the services provided, it is critical that the Department continually responds to the needs of our customers and delivers the highest quality of service.

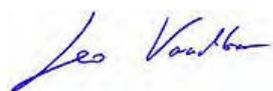
Over recent years, the Department has implemented a wide range of service and policy reforms, to help unemployed people secure employment, to reflect the changing needs and wishes of families and to improve service delivery. Intreo, the integrated service for all employment and income supports, is operating in all sixty Intreo centres nationwide. JobPath was launched in 2015, to provide an activation service that supports long-term unemployed people and those most at risk of becoming long-term unemployed, to secure and sustain paid suitable employment. Paternity Benefit, which supports new fathers to take time off, was introduced in September 2016.

Access to public services continues to be enabled through the increasing take-up and use of the Public Services Card (PSC). Since late 2011, the phased introduction of the PSC has been underway with over 2 million cards issued by mid-2016. The PSC provides for robust personal identification and enables individuals to access public services more efficiently and with a minimum of duplication.

As part of its modernisation programme, the Department has launched a new customer facing online service, [www.mywelfare.ie](http://www.mywelfare.ie), which is designed to enable customers to access personalised services. Utilising modern technology solutions this platform will provide for an extended range of online services and meet the increasing digital expectations of customers.

This Customer Charter and Customer Action Plan sets out the standards of service that people can expect in their dealings with the Department and builds on the substantial progress already made under previous strategies. It reflects a strong commitment to continued improvement in customer service delivery.

I would like to thank the staff of the Department, who work tirelessly every day to deliver a high quality of service and help people get access to the supports they need.



**Leo Varadkar T.D.**

Minister for Social Protection

# Introduction by the Secretary General

The Department of Social Protection delivers an extensive range of services nationwide, to a wide and diverse group of customers including families, jobseekers, people in employment, people with illnesses and disabilities, carers, older people and employers. These schemes and services are delivered locally through a national network of Intreo Centres and Branch Offices and from centralised offices countrywide.

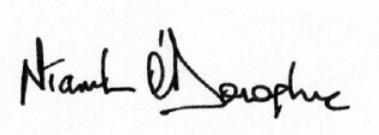
Over the last number of years the Department's role and the demand for the services provided has changed significantly. The Department has responded to this demand with the introduction of a range of new schemes and services. The Department is currently focusing on developing a range of secure, integrated online services with a view to meeting the needs of its customers through new service channels. [Mywelfare.ie](http://Mywelfare.ie) is a portal through which customers can access and receive Departmental services online, at a time and a place that suits them. The MyWelfare service is supported by a new secure online identity authentication service, [MyGovID](http://MyGovID). This service is also available to other Government Departments and public service agencies to facilitate their delivery of services digitally. Over the lifetime of this plan, the suite of services available on MyWelfare.ie will be extended.

Given the nature of work we do, the Department collects and relies upon personal information of customers to provide the required supports and services. The Department is committed to using the information we hold as effectively and

efficiently as possible and in accordance with Data Protection legislation. In this way, duplication of effort is reduced for customers and the Department can make best use of the information it holds to ensure customers obtain their correct and timely entitlements and to minimise social welfare fraud and abuse.

Work is continuing across the organisation to improve the way we do things. 'One DSP' is a wide-ranging programme of organisational development focussed on building a common identity, common values and a shared culture that will help us deliver the best possible service to our customers.

Given the significance of the Department's role in providing financial supports and delivering appropriate and timely services to those who depend on us, the principles of quality customer services remain to the fore in all we do. This Customer Action Plan aims to demonstrate that commitment and sets out how the Department will deliver services of the highest standard and efficiency to the people we serve. We recognise there is always room for improvement and are committed as an organisation to making every effort to deliver services in the best way that we can.



**Niamh O'Donoghue**  
Secretary General

Chapter 1

# The Department of Social Protection

# Statement of Strategy 2016 - 2019

## The Department's Mission is:

*To promote active participation and inclusion in society through the provision of income supports, employment services and other services.*

## The Department's overall objective is:

*To put our customers at the centre of all our operations, providing an efficient and effective service through on-going development of our staff, structures and processes.  
The objectives are:*



**01** Put the Client at the Centre of Services and Policies



**02** Drive Cost, Efficiency and Effectiveness



**03** Develop Staff Structures and Processes

**The Department supports the Minister for Social Protection in the discharge of governmental, parliamentary and departmental duties.**

## Its main functions are to:

- Advise Government and formulate appropriate social protection and social inclusion policies;
- Design, develop and deliver effective and cost efficient income supports, activation and employment services and to provide comprehensive and accurate information to customers;
- Work towards providing seamless delivery of services in conjunction with other departments, agencies and bodies; and
- Control fraud and abuse.

# Scale of the Department's Business

The Department serves a wide and diverse group of customers including families, people in employment, unemployed people, people with illnesses and disabilities, carers, and older people. In more recent times, the Department has expanded its remit and now provides a range of services to employers.

The Department has made a significant investment in enhancing its employer relationship capability in recent years so as to position the Department as the partner of first choice with regard to recruitment and employment support services.

## 2015 ACTIVITIES

### ACTIVATION

**300k**

Activation interviews

**124k**

Job opportunities advertised

**150**

National Jobs Week events (2016)

### SERVICES

**630k**

Public Services Cards issued

**170k**

PPS numbers allocated to customers

**25k**

Social Welfare appeals finalised

### PAYMENTS

**1.7m**

Applications processed

**82.2m**

Individual payments made

**1.6m**

Weekly payment recipients

**620k**

monthly Child Benefit recipients  
(1.2 million children)

### CONTROL

**1.1m**

Control reviews

**6,950**

Case investigations

**€69m**

Saved



**8.3 MILLION** Phone enquiries dealt with in 2015

## BUDGET 2016

2016 ALLOCATION

**€19.6b**

**38%**

OF GROSS CURRENT GOVERNMENT EXPENDITURE

ADMINISTRATION

**€613m**

(3% of total allocation)

## STAFF & SERVICES 2016



**124**

INTREO CENTRES & BRANCH OFFICES



**6,200**

STAFF



**70**

SEPARATE SCHEMES AND SERVICES

# Current Work in Focus

## DIGITAL SERVICES

The Department is actively modernising its service delivery platform and making full use of new and emerging technologies to broaden the range of service delivery channels offered. The new online self-service facility [www.mywelfare.ie](http://www.mywelfare.ie) enables customers to access personalised services on their mobile phones, tablets and desktops, at a time and place that suits them. The range of self-services available will expand on a phased basis to better meet the needs of our customers.

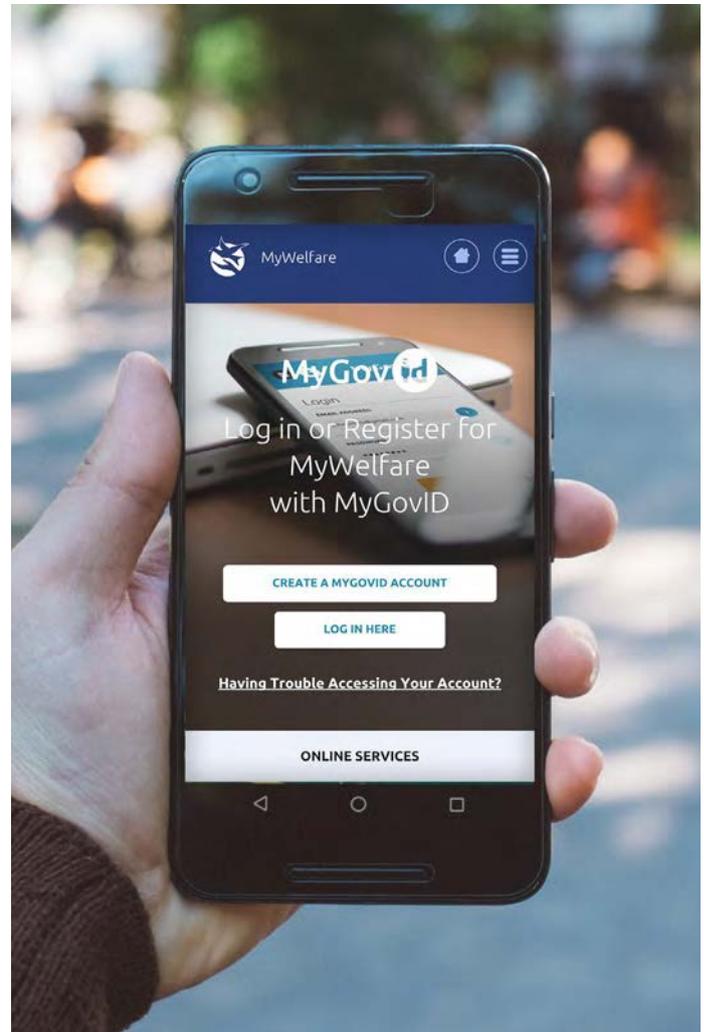
## MyWelfare

The [MyWelfare](#) service is supported by a new secure online identity authentication service [MyGovID](#), which is also available to other Government Departments and public service agencies to facilitate them in providing digital services.

The Department reuses and shares customer data, in accordance with Data Protection legislation, to streamline services, eliminating the need to collect the same information multiple times.

## PUBLIC SERVICES CARD

The Public Services Card (PSC) enables individuals gain access to public services more efficiently and with a minimum of duplication of effort, while at the same time preserving their privacy to the maximum extent possible.



It also, through the inclusion of a photograph, signature and better security features, considerably reduces the potential for identity theft, forgery and fraudulent use. The Department is focused on driving its digital agenda forward during the lifetime of this plan.





## PATHWAYS TO WORK

The Government's labour market strategy Pathways to Work 2012 - 2015 played a key role in the country's progress towards economic and social recovery. The goal of Pathways was to ensure that as many jobs as possible go to people on the Live Register. The Pathways to Work 2016 - 2020 strategy reflects a shift in focus from 'activation in time of recession' to 'activation in time of recovery and growth'. The main objectives are to continue the progress made to date and to extend the approach of activation to other people who, although not classified as unemployed jobseekers, have the potential and the desire to play a more active role in the labour force.

The Department's Intreo Centres, have played a pivotal role in the provision of integrated employment and income supports to jobseekers.

Over the two years 2014 and 2015:

- **500,000 people** participated in 20,000 Group Information Sessions.
- **Over 1,000,000** one-to-one interviews were conducted.



## ONE DSP PROGRAMME

The Department is engaged in a wide-ranging internal programme of organisational development called 'One DSP'. This programme is designed to support staff and build organisational and staff capability.

A key strand of One DSP is the focus on the culture and values of staff of the Department which are:

- Public Service
- Customer Focus
- Total Professionalism
- Engaged Staff
- Innovation

One such example is a programme of work currently underway to modernise our telephone and communication services. On completion, the improved services will better support both the staff of the Department and the customers we serve.



## Chapter 2

# Customer Charter 2016 - 2018

The Customer Charter sets out the level of service customers can expect when dealing with the Department. Please see Chapter 3 Customer Action Plan for further details.



## COMMITMENTS TO OUR CUSTOMERS

### Level of service to expect when contacting or visiting the Department

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If you write, email, telephone or visit, we will:

- Treat you equally, with courtesy and respect.
- Inform you of your rights, entitlements and responsibilities.
- Protect your information.
- Respect your right to privacy.
- Provide translation and interpretation services, including sign language, as required.
- Ensure our services are fully accessible.
- Conduct business through Irish, where requested.
- Provide redress when you have a complaint.

### Monitor / Evaluate

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- We monitor our performance through the use of internal management information systems, consultation with customers and feedback received through the Comments and Complaints procedure.
- We report on our performance in the Department's Annual Report published on [www.welfare.ie](http://www.welfare.ie).



## WHAT TO EXPECT WHEN YOU CONTACT US

### Our Information

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- We provide clear, accurate and comprehensive information on all our schemes and services.
- We use clear simple language in our application forms, information leaflets and communications.
- We ensure that material on our website [www.welfare.ie](http://www.welfare.ie) is up-to-date and accessible.

### When you contact us by letter or email

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- We aim to respond to correspondence within **15 working days**.
- We give a contact name, telephone number and email address (if contact by email) so that you can contact us again if you need to.

### When you contact us by phone

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- We answer calls within the following timeframes:
  - 30%** of calls within  1 minute
  - 90%** of calls within  3 minutes
  - 100%** of calls within  5 minutes
- We give you our name and identify our area of work.
- If we cannot deal with your query immediately, we call you back.
- If your call needs to be transferred to another area, we will tell you the name of the area and why you are being transferred.

### When you visit the Department

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- We ensure our public offices are fully accessible for all customers and comply with Health and Safety standards.
- All visitors with appointments are seen promptly.

### How we deal with your claim

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- We process any claim you make properly, fairly and impartially in a timely way.
- We advise you of the outcome of your application and we inform you of the reason(s).
- We advise you of your right to review and/ or appeal.



## HELP US TO HELP YOU

To make the service better for you we ask that you:

- Have your PPS number or employer number to hand when you call or visit us.
- Give full and accurate information when you contact us. Be fully honest with us.
- Tell us if your circumstances change.
- Bring your Public Services Card or suitable photo ID when you visit our offices.
- Complete all forms correctly and bring all documents needed for your appointment.
- Remember, if you deliberately provide untrue or misleading information, you may be prosecuted.
- Treat our staff with courtesy and respect.

### WE VALUE YOUR OPINION

*Let us know when you get good service, when things go wrong, or how you think we can improve our services. This will allow us serve you better.*



## COMMENTS AND COMPLAINTS

- If you wish to **give feedback** on good service you received, you can make a comment.
- If you are **unhappy with the quality of service** you received, you can make a formal complaint.
- We deal with your complaint properly, fairly and impartially:

We acknowledge complaints within  **3 working days** of receipt; and

We deal with complaints within  **15 working days**, where practicable.



## HOW TO SUBMIT A COMMENT OR COMPLAINT

- Visit the [Contact Us](#) or [Comments and Complaints](#) area of our website [www.welfare.ie](http://www.welfare.ie)
- Talk to an Intreo Centre staff member
- Call us on (071) 919 3302 or 1890 66 22 44 \*
- Write to Customer Service, Social Welfare Services, College Road, Sligo



## HOW TO CONTACT US

- Talk to an Intreo Centre staff member
- Visit the [Contact Us](#) area of our website [www.welfare.ie](http://www.welfare.ie)
- Call us on (071) 919 3302 or 1890 66 22 44 \*

*\* The rates charged for 1890 numbers may vary among service providers. These rates can be considerably higher from mobile network providers.*

## Chapter 3

# Customer Action Plan

# Customer Action Plan

The Department of Social Protection is committed to providing a professional, efficient and courteous service to all its customers, providing and delivering the highest quality of service in accordance with the Principles of Quality Customer Service<sup>1</sup>.

The Customer Action Plan develops the commitments and standards set out in the Customer Charter and outlines the nature and quality of service customers can expect to receive. It is published in Irish and English in the [Corporate Publications](#) area of the Department's website.

The Department's Customer Charter is displayed in all our public offices.

We will report on progress achieved in relation to customer service standards in our Annual Report.

## EQEQUALITY / DIVERSITY

Ensure the rights to equal treatment are adhered to and accommodate diversity, so as to contribute to equality for the groups covered by equality legislation (under the grounds of gender, marital status, family status, sexual orientation, religious belief, age, disability, race and membership of the Traveller community). Identify and work to eliminate barriers to access to services for people experiencing poverty and social exclusion, and for those facing geographic barriers to services. Provide quality services through Irish and/or bilingually, to inform customers of their right to choose to be dealt with through one or other of the official languages.

**01** Treat all customers equally and in accordance with relevant legislation.

**02** Provide translation and interpretation services, including sign language, to meet customer needs.

**03** Provide application forms in alternative formats, such as Braille, audio or other languages (as far as practicable), on request.

**04** Make the following available in both Irish and English:

- All major publications including the Department's Annual Report and Statement of Strategy.
- Main pages of our website, [www.welfare.ie](http://www.welfare.ie).
- Signage in public offices.

**05** Conduct business through Irish, where requested.

<sup>1</sup><http://www.per.gov.ie/en/quality-customer-service/>

## CHOICE

Provide choice, where feasible, in service delivery including payment methods, location of contact points, opening hours and delivery times. Use available and emerging technologies to ensure maximum access and choice, and quality of delivery. Foster a co-ordinated and integrated approach to delivery of public services.

- 06** Provide a range of contact channels for customers including: telephone; face to face; e-mail; SMS (text); through our websites [www.welfare.ie](http://www.welfare.ie), and [www.mywelfare.ie](http://www.mywelfare.ie).

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- 07** Make full use of new and emerging technologies to improve the delivery of services and the range of service delivery channels available to customers, including online and web self-service.

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- 08** Work with other Government Departments and organisations to ensure policies are developed, and services are provided, in an efficient and cost effective manner. Data is protected and shared in accordance with Data Protection and other legislation.

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- 09** Continue the rollout of the Public Services Card to allow customers access public services more efficiently and to reduce duplication.

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- 10** Extend the online Identity and Access Management service [www.mygovid.ie](http://www.mygovid.ie), to allow customers register for secure access to a range of Government online services.

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- 11** Continue to provide choice in the delivery of payment services, including informing customers that they can, where appropriate, receive their social welfare payment at Post Offices.

## INFORMATION AND PRIVACY

Take a proactive approach in providing information that is clear, timely and accurate, is available at all points of contact, and meets the requirements of people with specific needs. Ensure that Information Technology is used and that information provided on the Department's website meets accessibility standards. Simplify rules and regulations, application forms, information leaflets and procedures, where possible. Keep customers' personal data safe and secure and use it for business reasons only.

- 12** Provide customers with information that is comprehensive, clear, accurate and accessible for customers with specific needs:
  - Application forms and information leaflets comply with plain English standards and best practice.
  - Requests for information in alternative formats or languages facilitated.
  - Material on our website [www.welfare.ie](http://www.welfare.ie) conforms with web publication guidelines in terms of accessibility and official language equality.
  - Ongoing review and improvements to customer communications.

**13** Process all customer information in accordance with the Data Protection Acts, through the promotion of a culture of awareness and compliance.

**14** Carry out targeted information campaigns on significant service changes as they arise.



## TIMELINESS AND COURTESY

Deliver quality services with courtesy, sensitivity and minimum delay, fostering a climate of mutual respect between the Department and its customers. Give contact names in all communications to ensure ease of ongoing transactions.

**15** Treat all customers with courtesy and respect

**16** Process claims properly, fairly and impartially. Provide clear and concise claim decisions, in writing, to customers. Customers are advised of the:

- Outcome of their application.
- Reason(s) why a claim is disallowed or awarded at a reduced rate.

**17** Aim to deal with correspondence within 15 working days.

**18** Answer calls within the following timeframes:

- 30%** of calls within 1 minute;
- 90%** of calls within 3 minutes; and
- 100%** of calls within 5 minutes.

**19** Give our name to the customers we are dealing with.



## CONSULTATION AND FEEDBACK

Provide a structured approach to meaningful consultation with customers in relation to the development, delivery and review of services. Maintain a well-publicised, accessible, transparent and simple-to-use system of dealing with comments and complaints about the quality of service provided. Staff are recognised as internal customers and are properly supported and consulted with regard to service delivery issues.

**20** Invite customers' feedback on the standard of our service delivery, through:

- Customer comments and complaints and
- Customer satisfaction surveys.

- 21** Engage proactively with customers and their representative groups on new services or significant changes to existing services.
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- 22** Provide easy access to customers who wish to give us feedback. Details of how to make a comment or complaint are available:
- in the [Comments and Complaints](#) area of the Department's website [www.welfare.ie](http://www.welfare.ie).
  - In the Customer Charter, available at all our public offices.
  - Full details are also available in Appendix 1.
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- 23** Staff are properly supported and consulted by the internal customer service areas of the Department, and kept informed of developments through use of appropriate and relevant channels.



## PHYSICAL ACCESS

Provide clean, accessible public offices that ensure privacy, comply with occupational and safety standards and, as part of this, facilitate access for people with disabilities or specific needs.

- 24** Suitable access and facilities are in place in our offices for customers and staff, including those with specific or additional access needs.
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- 25** Access Officers provide assistance and guidance, where required, to persons with disabilities who want to access our services. Contact details are available on our website.



## APPEALS

Maintain a formal, well-publicised, easily accessible and transparent appeal or review system for customers who are dissatisfied with a decision made on their claim.

- 26** Inform customers that they may request a Deciding Officer to review a decision made on their claim, if they are dissatisfied with the decision.
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- 27** Inform customers, where they have a right to appeal the decision of a Deciding Officer, how to make an appeal to the [Social Welfare Appeals Office](#).
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- 28** Inform customers, where the matter is still not resolved, of the right to contact the Office of the Ombudsman and seek to have the matter examined by that office.  
<http://www.ombudsman.gov.ie/en/>

# Appendix 1

## Comments and complaints process

The Department of Social Protection is committed to giving you the best possible service at all times. Let us know when you get good service, when things go wrong, or how we can improve our services.

If you are not satisfied with the standard of service you receive from us, you can make a complaint. The Department has a complaints process to help resolve complaints and we will investigate your complaint promptly, thoroughly and fairly.

### How to make a comment or complaint

If you wish to give feedback on the service you received, you can make a comment. If you have a complaint you should contact the staff member or section you have been dealing with to have it resolved. If the issue is not resolved to your satisfaction, you can make a formal complaint to our Customer Service Unit.

### You can submit a comment or complaint in a number of ways:

- Visit the [Contact Us](#) or [Comments and Complaints](#) area of our website [www.welfare.ie](http://www.welfare.ie);
- Talk to an Intreo Centre staff member;
- Call us on (071) 919 3302 or 1890 66 22 44 \*;
- Write to: Customer Service, Social Welfare Services, College Road, Sligo.

## How complaints are processed by the Department

We deal with your complaint properly, fairly and impartially.

- We acknowledge complaints within  **3 working days of receipt,**
- We deal with complaints within  **15 working days,**

or where this is not possible, an interim response will issue.

### Review of complaint

If you are unhappy with the outcome of the investigation, you can request to have your complaint reviewed by another officer, explaining why you are not satisfied with the reply you received. A review of a complaint will be completed within 20 working days.

### Office of the Ombudsman

If after review you are still unhappy with the outcome to your complaint you may contact:

Office of the Ombudsman  
6 Earlsfort Terrace  
Dublin 2, D02 W773

Telephone: (01) 639 5600 or 1890 22 30 30 \*  
Fax: (01) 639 5674  
Email: [ombudsman@ombudsman.gov.ie](mailto:ombudsman@ombudsman.gov.ie)

*\*The rates charged for 1890 numbers may vary among service providers. These rates can be considerably higher from mobile network providers.*

[www.welfare.ie](http://www.welfare.ie)

