



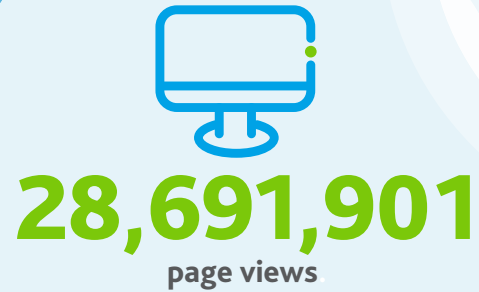
# Annual Report **2023**



# 2023 in Numbers

## citizensinformation.ie website

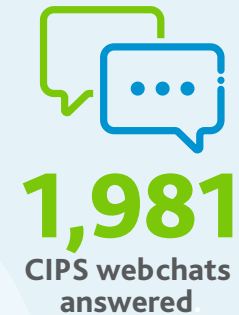
\*citizensinformation.ie website statistics are gathered using Google Analytics (GA4) and only capture users who accepted cookies when browsing the website.



## Social Policy Returns

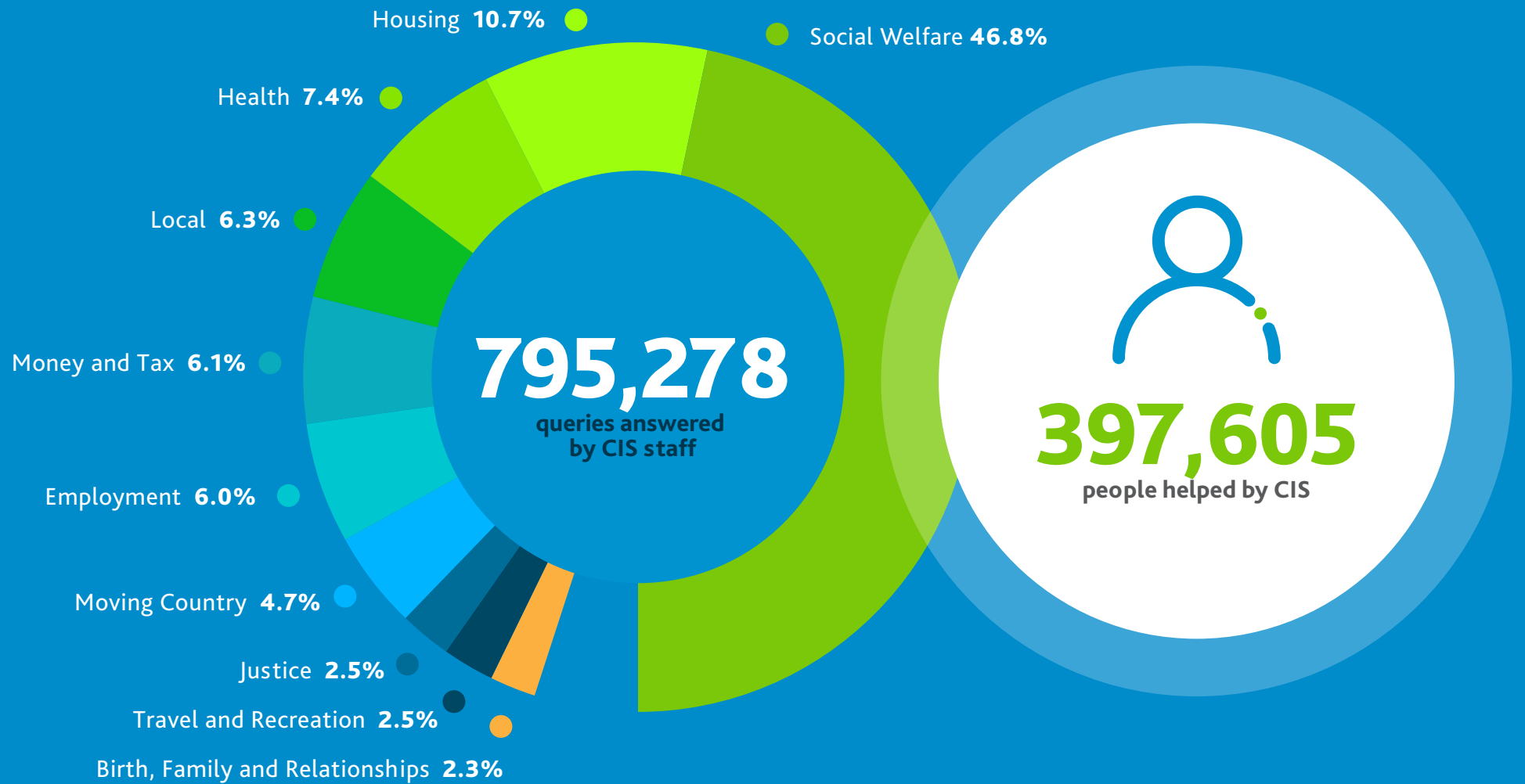


## Citizens Information Phone Service



# Citizens Information Service

## Top 10 CIS Query Categories in 2023



## Citizens Information Service Advocacy

  
**3,788**  
short-term  
advocacy cases

  
**1,678**  
new long-term  
advocacy cases

  
**2,626**  
active long-term  
advocacy cases

  
Citizens  
Information

## Money Advice and Budgeting Service

  
**19,487**  
MABS new clients

  
**29,169**  
MABS Helpline calls



## MABS Support

  
**7,925**  
applications from the  
public for access to  
financial support in  
dealing with  
energy costs

  
**1,905**  
queries from  
MABS companies

## National Advocacy Service for People with Disabilities



**3,125**

NAS initial enquiries



**950**

NAS new cases



**1,775**

NAS Active cases

## Sign Language Interpreting Service



**200+**

ISL Social Inclusion Voucher Scheme applications approved from 1 October to end of year



**9,785**

remote interpreting appointments carried out by SLIS's Irish Remote Interpreting Service (IRIS)

## Register of Irish Sign Language Interpreters



**121**

Irish Sign Language Interpreters registered



# Chair Introduction

Catherine Heaney,  
Chair



I am very pleased to introduce the Citizens Information Board annual report for 2023. The end of 2023 marked the half-way point of my term as Chair, so I am delighted that the organisation's new strategy is now the focus of this report and that such strides were made in how the governance structures of the Board operate. In particular, 2023 saw the introduction of a structure of five committees of the Board, providing oversight of the full sweep of CIB activity, including standards and development, compliance and reporting, and ICT, digital and data.

CIB's Strategy 2023 – 2026 was approved in July 2023 and sets objectives for us in areas such as supporting face-to-face services, communications, digital developments and the establishment of impact metrics. CIB's three core organisational values: availability, sustainability and accountability form the backdrop to all our discussions and decisions in this strategy cycle.

Some key milestones during the year included the publication of the review of volunteering in the Citizens Information

Services and the extension of the Abhaile scheme, aimed at people in long-term mortgage arrears, to 2027.

Fiona Coyne left the organisation as Chief Executive in August, having established an organisation structure to deliver the strategy and set in motion many of the strategic actions during her tenure. My thanks go to Fiona for her hard work and dedication in the role. I want to offer my thanks too to my fellow Board members, and in particular to Fiona Penollar, Cearbhall O Meadhra and

## Availability, sustainability and accountability form the backdrop to all our discussions and decisions

Tina Leonard, who left the Board during the year. A number of new appointments were also made to the Board, with Mary Corcoran, Catriona Curtis, Mary Dorgan and Stephen Lycett joining us in 2023.

I am grateful to the Minister for Social Protection, Heather Humphreys TD, for her invaluable support and assistance to CIB, and for the support and assistance of her officials in the Department.

CIB works with twenty-two Service Delivery Companies to deliver services that include information, advice, money advice and advocacy. I want to express my gratitude to the staff members, volunteers and Board members of the Citizens Information Services, the Money Advice and Budgeting Services, the Citizens Information Phone Service, MABS Support, National Traveller MABS, the Sign Language Interpreting Service, the

National Advocacy Service for People with Disabilities and the Register of Irish Sign Language Interpreters.

Lastly, I continue to be impressed by the commitment of staff members in the Citizens Information Board and I would like to thank them for their engagement with the new strategy and for their determination to see it come to life.



**Catherine Heaney,**  
Chair





# CEO Foreword

Graham Long,  
Acting CEO

I started as Acting Chief Executive in September 2023 and since then it has been a great honour to work on key priorities stemming from the Board's new strategy. I am grateful to the CIB staff for their continued support, flexibility and engagement with the new strategy.

I have enjoyed engaging with the Service Delivery Companies and getting to know more closely the wide range of activities covered by the Citizens Information Board and the Service Delivery Companies, from advice on debt and mortgage arrears to advocacy in employment law matters, from sign language interpreting to court mentors and content development.

This report provides some insight into the scale and extent of those activities. CIB meets its mandate with the ongoing work of the Boards, staff and volunteers of the Service Delivery Companies, with the support of the Department of Social Protection and with the dedication of the CIB's Board and staff members.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'G. Long'.

---

Graham Long,  
Acting CEO

# About Citizens Information Board

## Who We Are

The Citizens Information Board (CIB) supports the provision of information, advice, money advice and advocacy services for the public. Established under the Comhairle Act 2000, CIB comes within the remit of the Department of Social Protection. CIB's legislative mandate includes ensuring that individuals have access to accurate, comprehensive and clear information relating to social services and providing feedback on social policy. CIB provides a number of services directly to the public, including citizensinformation.ie and mabs.ie. Other services are provided to the public by the companies funded by CIB, known as Service Delivery Companies.

### CIB funds twenty-two Service Delivery Companies:

- Eight regional Citizens Information Services (CIS) including Dublin South CIS, North Dublin CIS, South Leinster CIS, North Leinster CIS, North Connacht & Ulster CIS, South Connacht CIS, North Munster CIS, South Munster CIS.
- Eight regional Money Advice and Budgeting Services (MABS) including North Dublin MABS, Dublin South MABS, South Leinster MABS, North Leinster MABS, North Connacht & Ulster MABS, South Connacht MABS, North Munster MABS, South Munster MABS.
- National Advocacy Service for People with Disabilities (NAS)

- Citizens Information Phone Service (CIPS)
- MABS Support
- National Traveller MABS (NT MABS)
- Sign Language Interpreting Service (SLIS)
- Register of Irish Sign Language Interpreters (RISLI)

CIB provides oversight and infrastructure for the Service Delivery Companies, including ICT support. In turn, the Service Delivery Companies provide frontline services, and it is their interaction with members of the public that sees CIB's legislative mandate come to life.

## Our Vision



**An Ireland where everyone has seamless access to a trusted, independent source of information, advice and advocacy.**

## Our Mission



**To enable the delivery of quality information, advice and advocacy services to the public, based on a foundation of strong governance, systems and standards.**

## Our Values

### Availability



We will support service development and delivery so that trusted information, advice and advocacy is available to the public in formats that meet their needs. In doing so, we will be strongly guided by our Public Sector Duty requirements, ensuring that those who need most support are prioritised.

We will collaborate with the Department of Social Protection, the Service Delivery Companies, users and other organisations to design accessible, seamless services.



### Sustainability

We will consider sustainability in all of our decision making and in our ways of working, ensuring that CIB-funded services are resilient and fit-for-purpose in the long-term.

Sustainability will be considered in respect of our workplace, the environment, funding, and, crucially, in how services are delivered to the public.

### Accountability



We will operate strong systems of governance and oversight to drive performance.

We will use public funds prudently to deliver positive outcomes for the public.

We will work with the Department of Social Protection, the Service Delivery Companies and other organisations to ensure that trusted information, advice and advocacy is available to the public in a timely and accessible way.

Citizens Information Board members are appointed by the Minister for Social Protection. Members' terms are for a period of five years. The recruitment process for Board members is overseen by [stateboards.ie](https://stateboards.ie)

## Board Members



**Catherine Heaney, Chair**  
Appointed 7 July 2021



**Teresa Blake**  
Appointed 11 December 2020



**Claire Byrne**  
Appointed 14 September 2022



**Mary Corcoran**  
Appointed 12 October 2023



**Catriona Curtis**  
Appointed 12 October 2023



**Orlagh Nevin**  
Appointed 29 April 2024



**Sarah Harte**  
Appointed 14 September 2022



**Brid O'Donovan**  
Appointed 14 September 2022



**Ian Power**  
Appointed 15 June 2016



**John Saunders**  
Appointed 15 June 2016



**Mary Dorgan**  
Appointed 12 October 2023



**Seán Sheridan**  
Appointed 17 November 2015



**Seamus Smith**  
Appointed 14 September 2022



**Fiona Ward**  
Appointed 12 October 2023



**Stephen Lycett**  
Appointed 3 April 2023

# Organisation Chart



**Catherine Heaney**  
Chair



**Graham Long**  
Acting Chief  
Executive Officer



**Caroline Mitchell**  
Head of Division  
Corporate Services (Acting)

**Gary Watters**  
Finance Manager

**Currently Vacant**  
Corporate Services Manager

**Tanya Cannon-Howley**  
HR & Governance Manager

**Stephanie McKeown**  
Data Protection Officer



**Rachel Downes**  
Head of Division  
Standards & Development

**Enda Connolly**  
eLearning Manager

**Mary Lyne**  
Standards & Development  
Manager

**Stephanie Coleman**  
Advocacy Standards &  
Development Manager  
(Acting)



**Carmel Beirne**  
Head of Division  
Compliance & Reporting

**Claire Kellegher**  
Operational Compliance &  
Reporting Manager

**Susan Shanahan**  
Financial Compliance &  
Reporting Manager

**Bobby Barbour**  
Communications Manager  
Abhaile / MABS



**Adrian O'Connor**  
Head of Division  
ICT, Digital & Data

**Cathy Gerrard**  
Digital Content Manager

**Geralyn McGarry**  
Data & Research Manager

**David Dunne**  
ICT Manager



# Our Strategy

The Citizens Information Board's (CIB) staff members, supported by the Board of CIB, are at the core of ensuring the successful achievement of the CIB strategy. In turn, the support of the Board members, staff and volunteers of the Service Delivery Companies is essential to the successful delivery of the initiatives in this strategy.

**Strategic Objective 1:**

# Service Accessibility and Delivery

**Increase accessibility of Citizens Information Board services for everyone.**

**Objective one of the strategy aims to adapt service channels to expand access and meet the needs of service users. Initiatives under this objective include developing data insights, continuing to improve the accessibility and functionality of [citizensinformation.ie](https://citizensinformation.ie), and supporting and promoting face-to-face services.**





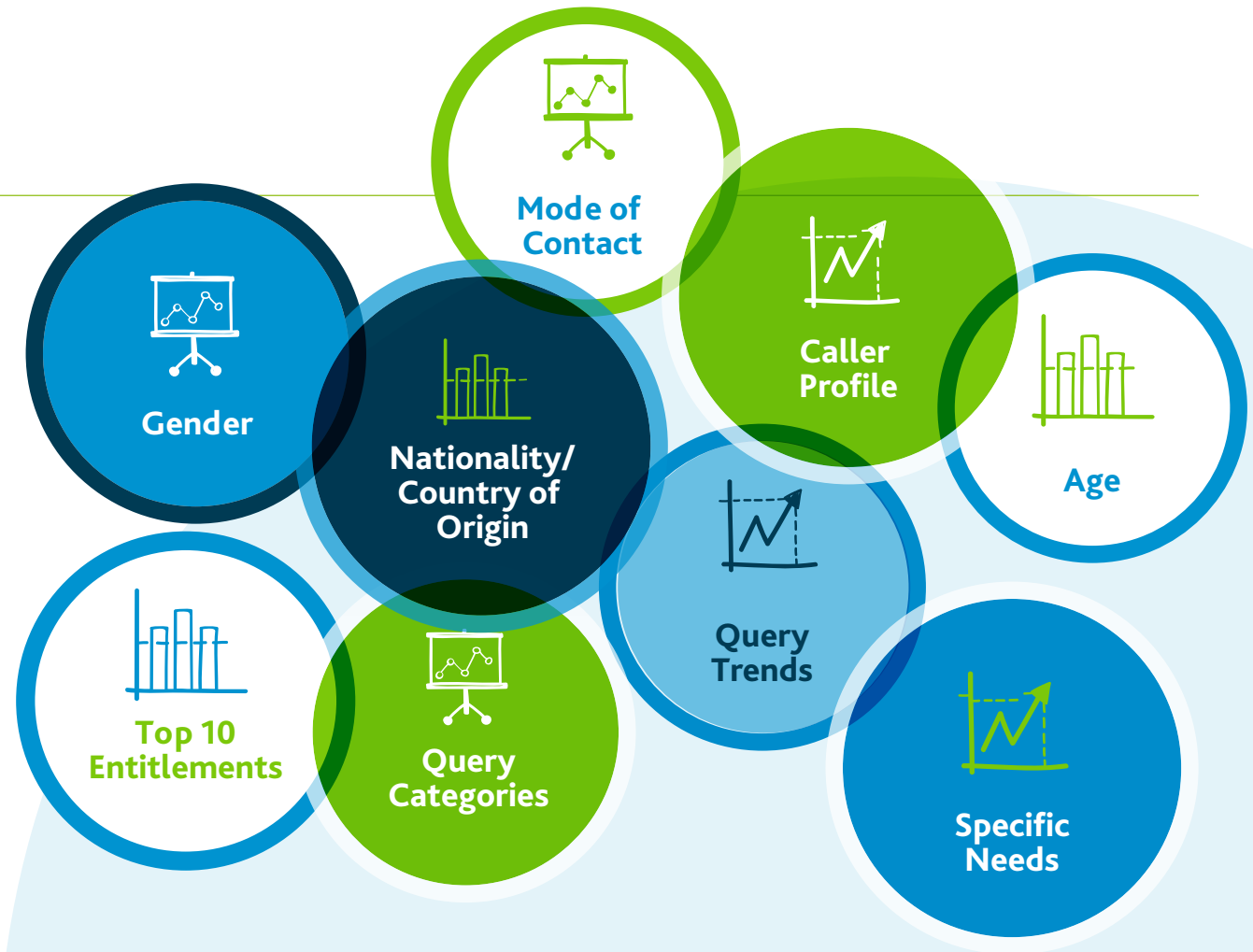
# Data Insights

## Data Hub

The Data and Research team continued to develop the CIB Data Hub as a key repository for caller and query data, from the Citizens Information Services (CISs) and the Citizens Information Phone Service (CIPS). The Data Hub provides analysis of the main queries and concerns that are raised by the callers to services, the top categories and trends arising each year and the policy issues that staff within services see clients experience.

In 2023, data for CIPS was added to the Data Hub to give an insight into the top queries raised by callers to this national service – the data trends for CIPS reflected broadly similar patterns to the CIS network of services.

## Categories of data available on the Data Hub

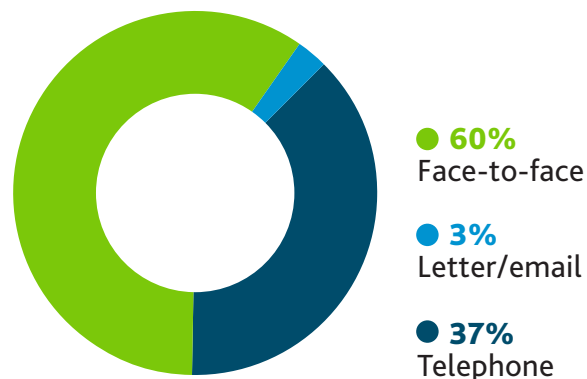


### Citizens Information Service (CIS) callers and queries

In 2023, CISs dealt with **397,605 callers** and **795,278 queries**.

- Face-to-face callers accounted for 60% of contacts (236,661 callers).
- The number of face-to-face callers increased by over 44% on the previous year.
- 93% of face-to-face callers were drop-in and 7% were appointments.
- The top 3 query categories were Social Welfare, Housing and Health.

#### Mode of contact

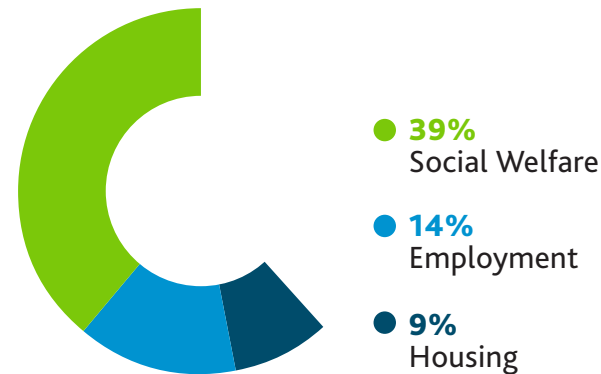


### Citizens Information Phone Service (CIPS) callers and queries

In 2023, CIPS answered 133,258 calls and 1,981 webchats.

The top 3 query categories were Social Welfare, Employment and Housing.

#### Top 3 CIPS query categories



### Social Policy Returns

The Citizens Information Service (CIS) and the Citizens Information Phone Service (CIPS) submit Social Policy Returns to CIB to highlight issues callers are experiencing accessing social or public services.

8,717 Social Policy Returns were submitted in 2023. CIB used this data in submissions and briefing papers to Government, to regulators and other agencies throughout the year. Most of these returns (42%) were focussed on social welfare concerns, almost 20% on housing and 10% related to money and tax issues.

## Continuing to Improve the Accessibility and Functionality of citizensinformation.ie

### Website Traffic

In 2023, the Citizens Information website saw 6,986,185 users and 28,691,901 page views. Over 4.3 million of our users arrived from a Google search and 2.5 million arrived directly to the website from a link or by typing the URL into their browser.

In 2023, the 5 most visited pages on the website were:

1. **State Pension (Contributory)** (374,483 page views)
2. **Illness Benefit** (318,442 page views)
3. **Working Family Payment** (307,195 page views)
4. **Fuel Allowance** (306,037 page views)
5. **Public Holidays** (299,672 page views)

There are 15 categories on the website. In 2023, the top 5 most viewed categories were:

1. **Social Welfare** (28% of total page views)
2. **Employment** (13.5%)
3. **Housing** (9%)
4. **Money and Tax** (8%)
5. **Moving Country** (7%).



## Content Developments on [citizensinformation.ie](https://citizensinformation.ie) in 2023



By year end, [citizensinformation.ie](https://citizensinformation.ie) held 1,358 content pages

**Social Welfare** was the busiest category on [citizensinformation.ie](https://citizensinformation.ie). Budget updates and changes to rates of social welfare payments at the start of the year impacted almost every page.

**Employment** saw a wide range of updates following legislative changes including new pages on sick leave and sick pay, unpaid leave for medical care and domestic violence leave.

New updates on assisted decision making were added to the **Health** category following the commencement of the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015.

**Housing** saw a substantial increase in users and pageviews (12%) with new pages on vacant homes and schemes to fix defects. Budget 2024 announced the extension of the Help-to-Buy Scheme to 2025 and introduced a new mortgage interest tax credit.

**Education**, a new sub-category on Further Education and Training with information on the new Tertiary Education Programme was added.

In 2023, there was continued traffic to the dedicated section on the website that provided information for people from Ukraine living in Ireland.

Forty-two new pages were added to [citizensinformation.ie](https://citizensinformation.ie) over the year. By year end, [citizensinformation.ie](https://citizensinformation.ie) held 1,358 content pages (85% of which were reviewed in 2022 or 2023).

## Website Accessibility

Significant improvements were made to the accessibility of citizensinformation.ie in 2023 including navigation improvements, focus functionality, colour contrast, and standardising list elements in the cookies modal and index pages. This led to a score of 82.2% in our accessibility score from the National Disability Authority's in-depth review for 2023. Additional work was carried out following this review, which led to a further increase in our weekly report score to almost 94%.

### National Adult Literacy Agency Plain English principles

National Adult Literacy Agency Plain English principles were implemented across the website with dedicated monthly Plain English training. CIB is actively working to identify and address areas for further improvement as part of our commitment to provide an inclusive online experience for all users.



**94%**

Significant improvements in our website accessibility led to a weekly report score of almost 94%

## Developing Services that are Accessible for All

### Service Delivery Companies

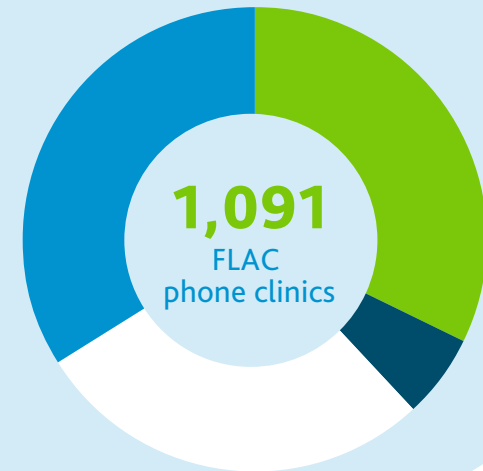
90 Citizens Information Centres (CICs) provided information, advice and advocacy services across the country with 18 occasional outreaches and 7 prison in-reach clinics.

58 Money Advice and Budgeting Service offices provided money advice and budgeting services with 26 occasional outreach locations in operation.

### FLAC

The Citizens Information Board (CIB) provides funding to Free Legal Advice Centres (FLAC), a non-governmental organisation that aims to promote equal access to justice. CIB funds FLAC to facilitate a series of phone clinics that provide free and confidential legal information to the public. In 2023, FLAC held 1,091 FLAC phone clinics, with Family (34%), Employment (28%), and Will/Probate (5.8%) law being the three most common types of legal queries from callers.

### Breakdown of calls to FLAC



- 34% Family
- 28% Employment
- 5.8% Will/Probate
- 32.2% Other





**South Leinster Citizens Information Service is funded by CIB to employ a Prisons Information Officer.**

### Bringing Information to Prisoners in South Leinster

South Leinster Citizens Information Service (SLCIS) is funded by CIB to employ a Prisons Information Officer. CIB worked with SLCIS to develop this in-reach service.

- There is a long-standing service arrangement between Portlaoise Citizens Information Centre and the Portlaoise and Midlands Prisons to deliver 'in-reach information' to these prisons.
- Care and Rehabilitation staff in the Irish Prison Service worked with SLCIS to explore providing a standardised Citizens Information Service to other prisons in Ireland.

### 2023 In-Reach in Irish Prisons Developments:

- Limerick Prison in-reach delivered its first information clinic in the Female Prison on 4 September 2023.

- A monthly in-reach clinic in Cork Prison is in development.
- A monthly in-reach service at Cloverhill Prison recommenced in December.

Two information videos, 'Renewing your Driving Licence from Prison' and 'Applying for the State Pension Contributory from Prison' were created for the internal Prison TV Channel.

### Irish Sign Language Voucher Scheme

In 2023, the Citizens Information Board (CIB) worked in collaboration with the Sign Language Interpreting Service (SLIS) to enhance social inclusion for the adult Deaf population of Ireland. The resulting Irish Sign Language (ISL) Voucher Scheme provides vouchers which pay for ISL interpreters to accompany Deaf adults to a range of social, cultural, medical, public and educational events.

The 2023 design for the ISL Voucher Scheme drew on insights gained from a pilot project that was run from July to October 2021.

From the launch of the ISL Voucher Scheme on 1 October until the end of December 2023, more than 200 voucher applications were approved by SLIS.

### Irish Sign Language Videos

In 2023, CIB produced several videos aimed at the Deaf community in Ireland:

- The 'About Us' page of the website [citizensinformation.ie](https://citizensinformation.ie) was translated into Irish Sign Language (ISL). This was widely promoted on our social media channels.
- Informative ISL videos about MABS published on Facebook and Twitter.
- Promotional ISL video for the National Ploughing Championships.
- Promotional ISL video for Deaf Awareness Week.

### 'Be Irish Sign Language Friendly Online'

The Citizens Information Board and the Centre for Deaf Studies, Trinity College Dublin launched 'Be Irish Sign Language Friendly Online' guidelines, a collaboration which highlights the importance of public sector bodies sharing important information online using Irish Sign Language (ISL) videos translated by Deaf interpreters.

ISL is the State's third official language and 'Be Irish Sign Language Friendly Online' calls on public sector bodies to translate important written content online into ISL to be more accessible to the Deaf community.

The guidelines 'Be ISL Friendly Online' were launched during Deaf Awareness week and an information webinar was attended by 150 representatives from a range of public sector organisations and other interested bodies.





## Strategic Objective 2:

# Communicate & Engage

**Develop communication and engagement with Citizens Information Board staff, Service Delivery Companies and the public.**

Objective two of the strategy will see the Citizens Information Board (CIB) put in place a number of strategies, including in relation to internal and external communication and staff development. A particular emphasis will be placed on engagement between CIB and the Service Delivery Companies. It will also involve CIB exploring a role in countering misinformation and disinformation.



## Internal and External Communication

### Internal Communications

In 2023, the Citizens Information Board:

- Recruited a Communications and Public Affairs Executive and a Communications Executive Officer to develop the communications function.
- Launched CIB's first Internal Communications Committee which delivered a new staff newsletter and presented on Internal Communications at CIB Staff Day 2023.
- Developed communications templates and communications information sessions for CIB staff.
- Introduced organisation townhalls to support the delivery of CIB's Strategy.

### Public Sector Equality and Human Rights

The Citizens Information Board's (CIB) Public Sector Duty Working Group continued its work in 2023 in a number of different areas. This work included specific Public Sector Duty training, the raising of awareness and understanding of forms of disabilities among staff members, and the review of human resources forms and materials. It also included the ongoing promotion of awareness of human rights issues to staff members, Service Delivery Companies and the public. The working group's Action Plan 2022 – 2024 outlines the work that will be undertaken in conjunction with other CIB teams.

The Public Sector Duty Working Group organised a staff survey to get a sense of their views on the key issues and priorities for CIB with regard to the Public Sector Duty. CIB prioritised equality and human rights perspectives in its social policy and research work and progressed commissioned





research on Equality Matters in 2023. Our policy submissions in response to public policy consultations had a strong equality focus and included contributions on migrant integration and access to civil legal aid. An external data audit concluded in 2023 made recommendations for enhancing equality (including gender, disability, and country of origin) data collection and analysis.

Also during 2023, the Public Sector Duty Working Group organised the following seminars for staff:

- Irish Traveller Ethnicity Day (1 March)  
Senator Eileen Flynn spoke about ongoing discrimination and stigma against the Traveller community and the important work CIB, and National Traveller MABS provide to the community.
- Senators Fintan Warfield and Jerry Buttimer highlighted the importance of acceptance, equality and inclusion for everyone in society during Pride Month

in June. The Senators talked about their personal experiences and the importance of empowering people to find their voice.

- On World Homeless Day (10 October)  
Father Peter McVerry spoke about his work since 1979 when he first opened a hostel for young homeless people right up to his continued advocacy today.
- On 14 November John Lonergan, a former Prison Governor, shared his experience of working in the prison system for over 42 years and also spoke about the importance of personal wellbeing.

The Human Resources (HR) team is responsible for establishing and maintaining a positive organisational culture.

By developing and implementing policies and practices that promote fairness, transparency and respect, HR helps to foster a supportive and inclusive work environment.

In 2023, the Citizens Information Board (CIB) formally implemented a Blended Working Policy in response to the introduction of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform's Blended Working Policy Framework for Civil Service Organisations. CIB has committed to reviewing this policy in 2024.

The HR team is involved with many initiatives rolled out in the organisation in conjunction with the work of the Public Sector Duty Working Group.

The HR team is currently working on updating the Employee Handbook whilst updating existing policies in line with the values of the organisation in consultation with the Public Sector Duty Working Group.



## Policy Submissions

During 2023, CIB's Data and Research team made a total of 16 policy submissions based on data and insights provided by the Service Delivery Companies (SDCs) across a wide range of areas of social and public policy:

### National Strategy for Migrant Integration (November 2023)

CIB made this submission in response to the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth consultation on a new national strategy for migrant integration. The submission highlighted the relatively high representation of migrants amongst the client base in the Citizens Information Services (CISs) – in 2023, 24% of callers to CISs (where country of origin was noted<sup>1</sup>) were recorded as being migrants.

### Housing Commission consultation on housing policy (April 2023)

This CIB submission to the Housing Commission on long-term housing policy was based on the significant level of housing-related queries dealt with by the services. The submission notes the primary need for an enhanced State-funded social housing sector.



CIB's Data and Research team made a total of 16 policy submissions based on data and insights provided by the Service Delivery Companies

<sup>1</sup> Country of origin was recorded for 62% of callers (245,954) to Citizens Information Services in 2023

***CIB Pre-Budget Submission for Budget 2024***

(August 2023)

CIB's pre-Budget Submission provides a valuable insight into the broad range of issues that Service Delivery Companies (SDCs) are engaged in, and active on, with clients. The 2023 submission Budget 2024 Priorities – Income Adequacy, Housing, Public and Social Services and Financial Inclusion Measures focussed on the difficulties for clients caused by inadequate income, rising costs and accessing public services.

The Budget 2024 Outcomes is a follow up to the budget which tracks recommendations made in our Pre-Budget Submission in line with measures announced in the Budget. Many of the concerns that were raised by SDCs featured in the Government's budgetary provisions for 2024. This demonstrates the importance of this feedback in reflecting the broader issues and challenges facing the public each year and is indicative of the continuing relevance of the work of these services.

***National Counter Disinformation Strategy***

(October 2023)

***Legal Aid Board Strategy 2024 - 2026***

(September 2023)

***Private Residential Rental Sector Review***

(August 2023)

***Wage Subsidy Scheme Review (DSP)***

(July 2023)

***Medical Card/GP Visit Cards Concerns (HSE Primary Care Reimbursement Service)***

(June 2023)

***Social Welfare Appeals Regulations***

(May 2023)

***Family, Care and Gender – Constitutional Referendum Consultation*** (May 2023)***Personal Taxation System – Department of Finance*** (April 2023)***Pathways to Work 2021 – 2025: Mid-term Review Department of Social Protection***

(March 2023)

***Revenue - Access issues for clients of CISs***

(March 2023)

***Strawman Proposal on Pay-Related Jobseeker's Benefit Scheme*** (February 2023)***Civil Legal Aid Scheme Review*** (February 2023)***Department of Social Protection (DSP) Strategy 2023-2026*** (February 2023)

## Policy Engagement

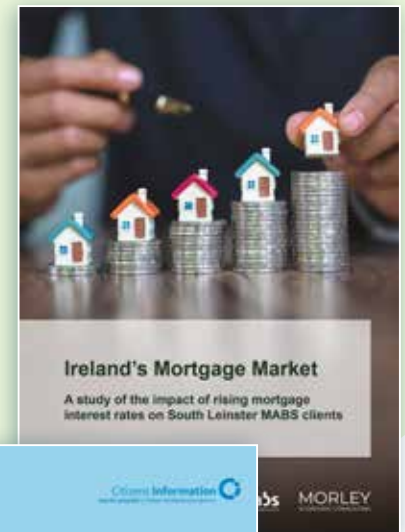
In addition to formal submissions, the Data and Research Team also engaged directly across a variety of policy fora and network initiatives to highlight concerns for our service users - in keeping with CIB's legislative mandate. During 2023, this included engagement on a broad range of issues such as disability payments reform, medical card provision, accessing Revenue services, legal aid reform, energy poverty and digital exclusion.

Representatives from the National Advocacy Service for People with Disabilities (NAS) and the Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) also addressed sessions of separate Joint Oireachtas Committees during 2023, using the data and insights from their work to contribute to debate and inform policy makers on specific matters.

## Social Policy Grant Scheme

CIB provides funding to Service Delivery Companies (SDCs) through the annual Social Policy Grant Scheme which aims to support and promote social policy work at regional and local level. During 2023, South Leinster MABS published a report, Ireland's Mortgage Market: A study on the impact of rising mortgage interest rates on South Leinster MABS clients funded under this scheme. The report investigated their clients' experiences of the recent increases in mortgage interest rates.

CIB's Social Policy Grant Scheme also assisted South Leinster Citizens Information Service to research the relationship between digital exclusion and financial independence amongst older people in County Wicklow. A Review of Older People's Capacity to Access Financial Services Online and to Independently Conduct their own Financial Affairs was commissioned.



## Social Policy Updates

### Informing Policy.

CIB Social Policy and Research News



CIB's Social Policy Update, a quarterly email circular which focuses on the social policy and research work of CIB and our SDCs was issued to over 800 email subscribers. The update is also published on the website.



## National Ploughing Championships 2023

- The Citizens Information Board (CIB) welcomed President Michael D Higgins and Sabina Higgins who spoke to specialists from Citizens Information Services (CIS) and the Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) about their important work in providing information, advice and advocacy to people nationwide.
- Over 6,800 people attended CIB's 'Putting You First' marquee at the event.
- CIS had a total of 498 queries from 243 attendees at the event.
- MABS specialists handed out 4,000 information packs.

Abhaile and MABS also exhibited at the Cork Summer Show in June, and the Tullamore Agricultural Show in August.



*Pictured left to right: Eimear Guiney, Siobhan Slevin, Matt Mulvey, Michelle O'Hara, South Leinster MABS Regional Manager, President Michael D Higgins, Sabina Higgins, Clodagh Browne, Graham Long, Acting CEO CIB.*



*Pictured left to right: Graham Long, Acting CEO CIB, President Michael D Higgins, Sean Carpenter and Nicole Boyle, MABS/Abhaile.*

## Abhaile Communications

- The extension of the Abhaile scheme – the National State Funded Mortgage Arrears Resolution Service was announced on 26 July 2023. The scheme was extended for a further four years until the end of 2027. This included extension of the MABS Dedicated Mortgage Arrears service. This extension will ensure that those in long-term mortgage arrears are supported.
- Two Abhaile awareness campaigns took place, the first beginning 24 April and running until 4 June and the second began 18 September running until 5 November. Total calls to the MABS Helpline increased by an average of 5% and total visits to mabs.ie increased by an average of 11% over the two campaigns.

## MABS 'Let's Work Together' Campaign

MABS 'Let's Work Together' advertising campaign aimed to raise awareness of its range of services available to the public. This campaign was a mix of animated videos and head-to-camera educational videos. The videos provided information on areas such as Debt Relief Notices (DRNs), Budgeting, Going to Court, and Tackling Debt. They were distributed on Meta (Facebook and Instagram).

- The Debt Relief Notices video generated the most clicks through to the MABS website. This video generated 4,139 clicks or 27% of all clicks in the campaign.
- Additional videos were created to support recruitment across the MABS national network, these were boosted over a 6-week period in August/September 2023.

## National Traveller MABS Launch

National Traveller MABS and Senator Eileen Flynn launched a research report on "An Exploratory Analysis of Insurance Exclusion Amongst Travellers" on 19 April.

## Social Media

CIB's Digital Content team managed 2 social media channels in 2023, Facebook and X. The channels highlighted topical issues, such as changes in payments, new legislation and scheme launch dates and directed people to popular topics on the website.

2023 saw over 7.2 million impressions<sup>2</sup> across Facebook posts, and almost 47,000 followers across both Facebook and X. Above average levels of engagement were achieved on our platforms, with an engagement rate of 2.1% on Facebook for 2023.

<sup>2</sup> All social media statistics are gathered via AgoraPulse.



## Monthly Social Media Campaigns

In 2023, CIB ran 8 monthly social media campaigns with a total audience reach of 726,090. Each campaign was aimed at a particular group of people or tackled a certain issue. The goal was to create useful themed information and bring users to the website. There was huge engagement with the campaigns, particularly with the Benefits and Taxes and Housing topics.

### Statistics for CIB's 8 monthly social media campaigns

Month	Topic	Posts	Engagement
February	Employment Rights	40	2,082
March	Benefits and Taxes	46	20,128
April	Holidays	43	2,961
May	Money Matters	47	2,424
June	Older People and Carers	37	2,604
August	Housing	62	3,917
October	Death and Taxes	60	3,242
November	Consumer	47	2,645
<b>Totals:</b>		<b>382</b>	<b>40,003</b>



## Returning to Ireland

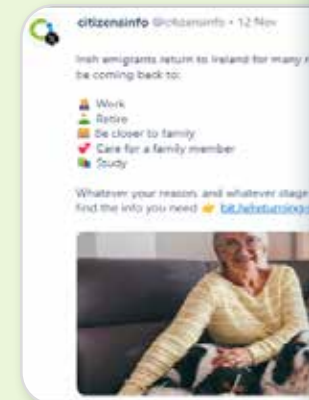
The Citizens Information Board (CIB) Returning to Ireland portal offers Irish emigrants all the information they need to know on returning to Ireland. In 2023, there were 149,884 visitors to the Returning to Ireland portal on [citizensinformation.ie](https://citizensinformation.ie) is supported by the Department of Foreign Affairs.

In 2023, the most visited pages on Returning to Ireland were:

1. Bringing your non-EEA spouse or civil partner home to Ireland
2. How to get your foreign qualification recognised in Ireland
3. Bringing your vehicle to Ireland
4. PPS numbers for returning Irish emigrants and their families
5. Irish citizenship and passports for children born abroad

an event to discuss issues of relevance to the Irish diaspora and to review the Irish diaspora strategy.

CIB promoted Returning to Ireland on social media and reached over 66,000 people across Facebook and X.



The Returning to Ireland portal offers Irish emigrants all the information they need to know on returning to Ireland.

CIB presented an update to the Interdepartmental Committee (IDC) on the Returning to Ireland project on 29 March 2023. This IDC was chaired by Minister of State for International Development and Diaspora, Seán Fleming TD.

CIB attended the Global Civic Forum from 20-21 April 2023 in Dublin Castle,



February 2023

### Payments for people of working age

Payment	Maximum personal rate (weekly)	Claimant	Qualified adult
<b>Jobseeker's Benefit (PBSI-based)</b>			
Reduced rates paid if your average weekly earnings in 2021 were less than €300	220.00	146.00	
<b>Jobseeker's Allowance (means-tested)</b>	220.00	146.00	
<b>Jobseeker's Allowance (Self-employed) (PBSI-based)</b>	220.00	146.00	
<b>Supplementary Welfare Allowance (means-tested)</b>			
– Aged 25 and over	220.00	146.00	
– Aged 18–24	129.70*	129.70*	
<b>Supplementary Welfare Allowance (means-tested)</b>			
– Aged 25 and over	218.00	146.00	
– Aged 18–24	129.70*	129.70*	
<b>Jobseeker's Transitional Payment</b>	220.00	n/a	
<b>One-Parent Family Payment (means-tested)</b>	220.00	n/a	
<b>Health and Safety Benefit (PBSI-based)</b>	220.00	146.00	
Reduced rates paid if your average weekly earnings in 2021 were less than €300	220.00	146.00	
<b>Maternity/Adoptive/Parent's Benefit (PBSI-based)</b>	262.00		

\*Higher rate may be paid in some circumstances

### Payments for people on employment and training schemes

Scheme	Rate
<b>Community Employment, Tax, Rural Social Scheme (19.5 hour week)</b>	Same as social welfare payment plus 27.50
<b>Work Placement Experience Programme (WPEP) (10 hour week)</b>	Weekly WPEP Allowance €33.00

**Further Education and Training (FET)**  
Full-time FET allowances are based on 31.25 hours per week, part-time allowances are calculated on a pro-rata basis.

### Payments for people with disabilities

Payment	Maximum personal rate (weekly)	Claimant	Qualified adult
<b>Incapacity Pension (PBSI-based)</b>	225.50		161.00
<b>Illness Benefit (PBSI-based)</b>	220.00		146.00
Reduced rates paid if your average weekly earnings in 2021 were less than €300	220.00	146.00	
<b>Disability Allowance (means-tested)</b>	220.00	146.00	
<b>Blind Pension (PBSI-based)</b>	220.00	146.00	
<b>Injury Benefit (PBSI-based)</b>	220.00	146.00	
<b>Blind Welfare Allowance (HSE)</b>	66.70	n/a	

### Payments for carers and guardians

Payment	Maximum personal rate (weekly)	Claimant	Qualified adult
<b>Carer's Benefit (PBSI-based)</b>	237.00		395.50
<b>Carer's Allowance (means-tested)</b>	236.00		354.00
<b>Carer's Allowance (HSE)</b>	236.00		413.00
<b>Domestic Care Allowance</b>	330.00 per month		
<b>Guardian's Payment</b>	203.00		
<b>Carer's Support Grant</b>	1,850 annually per person cared for		
<b>Foster Care Allowance (Total)</b>	Child under 12	Child 12 and over	
	325.00	392.00	

### Payments for older people

Payment	Maximum personal rate (weekly)	Claimant	Qualified adult
<b>State Pension (Contributory) (PBSI-based)</b>	265.30		237.80
<b>State Pension (Non-Contributory) (means-tested)</b>	254.00		167.80
<b>Continuance Bounty</b>	2,540		n/a
<b>Household Benefits Package</b>	Electricity or gas allowance €35 monthly (€115 daily) television licence free		

### Payments for widowers and surviving civil partners

Payment	Maximum personal rate (weekly)	Claimant	Qualified adult
<b>Widow's/Widower's/Surviving Civil Partner's Pension (Contributory) (PBSI-based)</b>	225.50		265.30
<b>Widow's/Widower's/Surviving Civil Partner's Pension (Non-Contributory) (means-tested)</b>	220.00		

### Extra payments

Payment	Maximum personal rate (weekly)	Claimant	Qualified adult
<b>Over 80 Increase</b>	10.00 weekly		
<b>Living Alone Increase</b>	22.00 weekly		
<b>Island Increase</b>	20.00 weekly		
<b>Widowed or Surviving Civil Partner Grant</b>	8,000 (once-off payment)		
<b>Fuel Allowance</b>	33.00 weekly		
<b>Telephone Support Allowance</b>	2.50 weekly		
<b>Increase for a Qualified Child</b>	Full rate	Half rate	
– Child under 12	42.00	21.00	
– Child 12 or over	50.00	25.00	

### Treatment benefit Scheme

Provides dental, optical and aural benefits including free dental and optical examinations. Other treatments and aids covered by the scheme are subject to a maximum amount, for example, the cost of one orthopedic heel replacement (due to illness).

### Additional Needs Payment

The Additional Needs Payment is paid under the Supplementary Welfare Allowance Scheme. It can help with an essential expense that you cannot pay out of your weekly income. It can also be paid after an emergency event such as a fire or flood.

### Child Benefit

Number of children	Monthly payment
1 child	140
2 children	280
3 children	420
4 children	560

Each subsequent child 140

**Twins:** Paid at 1.5 times the monthly Child Benefit rate for each child

**Multiple births of 3 or more:** Paid at double the monthly Child Benefit rate for each child

### Working Family Payment

Number of children	Weekly income threshold	Number of children	Weekly income threshold
1 child	591	5 children	1,010
2 children	692	6 children	1,126
3 children	793	7 children	1,242
4 children	894	8 children	1,358

Working Family Payment is 50% of the difference between your net family income and the income threshold that applies to your family.

### Accommodation Recognition Payment (ARP)

The Accommodation Recognition Payment (ARP) is a tax-free payment of €800 per month for each property used to provide accommodation to refugees from Ukraine. Accommodation must be provided for at least 6 months. ARP is not paid if there is a rental agreement in place. It is not included in the means test for grants or payments from the DSD or other public bodies.

### Childcare supports

The **Early Childhood Care and Education Scheme (ECCCE)** provides 1 hour of paid care and education per day for children who are at least 2 years and 9 months before 1 September and not older than 5 years and 6 months on or before 30 June of the programme year.

The **National Childcare Scheme (NCS)** provides childcare subsidies for children from 6 months (24 weeks) up to 15 years (children aged 15 do not qualify). There are two subsidies:

- **Universal subsidy** for children above the age of 6 months. It is not means-tested.
- **Income assessed subsidy** is based on parental income.

More information and a subsidy calculator is available on [ncc.gov.ie](http://ncc.gov.ie). For both the ECCCE and NCS, children must be attending a childcare provider registered with Tusla.

### Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance

Rate for each child aged 4–11 years on 30 September 2022	20200 (once-off payment)
<b>Rate for each child aged 12–17 years on 30 September 2022. It is also paid to qualified children aged 18–22 in second level education.</b>	305.00 (once-off payment)

### Weekly Income Thresholds

Number of dependent children	Income limit
1 child	642
2 children	692
3 children	742
4 children	792
Each additional child	50

### Student Grant Scheme

The means-tested Student Grant Scheme for third-level students includes a maintenance grant to help with living costs and a fee grant to help with the Student Contribution and the tuition fees of students who do not qualify for the Free Fees Scheme.

### Medical card/CP visit card

Single person living alone	Weekly income limit (Gross earnings less PBSI, USC and income tax)
– Aged under 66	18,400
– Aged 66 and over	30,400
<b>Single person living with family</b>	
– Aged under 66	201.50
– Aged 66 and over	333.00
<b>Complex/low parent families</b>	
– Aged under 66	164.00
– Aged 66 and over	271.00
– Aged 66 and over	173.50
– Aged 66 and over	286.00
– Aged 66 and over	266.50
– Aged 66 and over	441.00
– Aged 66 and over	298.00
– Aged 66 and over	492.00

**Additional allowance for each dependent child**

Number of children	Income limit
1 child	38.00
2 children	57.00
3 children	76.00
4 children	95.00
5 children	114.00
6 children	133.00
7 children	152.00
8 children	171.00
9 children	190.00
10 children	209.00
11 children	228.00
12 children	247.00
13 children	266.00
14 children	285.00
15 children	304.00
16 children	323.00
17 children	342.00
18 children	361.00
19 children	380.00
20 children	399.00
21 children	418.00
22 children	437.00
23 children	456.00
24 children	475.00
25 children	494.00
26 children	513.00
27 children	532.00
28 children	551.00
29 children	570.00
30 children	589.00
31 children	608.00
32 children	627.00
33 children	646.00
34 children	665.00
35 children	684.00
36 children	703.00
37 children	722.00
38 children	741.00
39 children	760.00
40 children	779.00
41 children	798.00
42 children	817.00
43 children	836.00
44 children	855.00
45 children	874.00
46 children	893.00
47 children	912.00
48 children	931.00
49 children	950.00
50 children	969.00

**CP visit card without a means test**  
All children under 6, people getting Carer's Allowance or Benefit, and people aged over 70. The CP visit card may be extended to other groups in 2023.

**People over age 70**  
Medical card weekly income limit is €5,000 (€7,000 for a single person/couple). There is a savings disregard of €16,000/€72,000. The CP visit card is available to everyone aged over 70 without a means test.

**Prescription charges**  
Medical card holders pay €1.50 per prescription item, with a monthly cap of €15 per person or family. If over age 70, the charge is €1 per item, up to €72 per month.

### HSE schemes

**Drug Payment Scheme**  
Non-medical card holders pay a maximum of €80 a month for prescribed drugs, medicines and certain appliances.

**Nursing Homes Support Scheme (Fair Deal)**  
Your contribution to the cost of care is 80% of your assessable income and 75% of the value of your assets per annum. If you own your home and are entering it, you pay only 40% of this rental income towards nursing home care and keep 60% of the rental income. Your home must be your principal residence.

### Hospital charges

Charge	Amount
<b>Emergency department charge (if not referred by a GP)</b>	100
<b>Charge (due to COVID-19) patients</b>	75
<b>In-patient charge (if not referred by a GP)</b>	75
<b>In-patient charge for public patients</b>	80 per day
<b>Maximum of €800 in 12-month period</b>	
<b>Medical card holders are not liable for these charges. Since September 2022, there are no public hospital in-patient fees for children aged under 16. Public hospital in-patient fees for adults are due to be abolished in April 2023.</b>	

### Housing

Scheme	Rate
<b>Housing Assistance Payment (HAP)</b>	Differential rent, based on household income
<b>Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS)</b>	Differential rent, based on household income
<b>Local authority housing</b>	Single
	30.00
	Couple
	40.00

### Remote Working Relief

Tax relief is available at your marginal tax rate for electricity, heating and internet costs for days working from home. The relief applies to 30% of qualifying costs.

### Local Property Tax

You are liable for Local Property Tax (LPT) if you own a residential property on 1 November. LPT is based on market value bands. For valuation bands and LPT rates for the valuation period 2022 to 2025, see [citizensinformation.ie](http://citizensinformation.ie).

### Pay-Related Social Insurance (PRSI)

Class A (Employer's contribution)	Rate
Gross weekly earnings of €432 or less	PRSI 0 rate
Gross weekly earnings of over €432	4% on all earnings*

\*Class A applies to employees under age 66 with reckonable pay of €38 or more per week from all employers. Class A also applies to public servants recruited since August 1995.

\*A tapered PRSI credit of €12 applies on earnings up to €424 a week.

Class 5 (Self-employment)	Rate
People who earn less than €5,000 are exempt	4% on all earnings (Minimum payment €500)
Unearned income from rents, investments, dividends and interest on deposits/loans may be liable to PRSI at Class K	4% on all unearned income if this income is more than €5,000

### Universal Social Charge (USC)

Standard rate	Rate
Income up to 12,012	0.5%
Income over 12,012 and up to 22,920	2%
Income over 22,920 and up to 70,044	4.5%
Income over 70,044	8%

Reduced rates apply to people who have an income of €60,000 or less and who are aged 70 and over or have a medical card.

Income up to 12,012	Rate
Income over 12,012	0.5%

Exemptions from USC

- People whose income is less than €131
- All social welfare payments
- Income on which DEDT has been paid

A surcharge of 3% applies to any non-PRSI

### Tax bands

**Personal circumstances**

- Single/never-married/divorced civil partner
- Single/never-married/divorced civil partner – Single/never-married/divorced civil partner – Personal Child Care tax credit
- Married/coupled partners – one spouse income
- Married/coupled partners – both with income

A tax rate of 40% applies to any income over

### Tax credits

**Personal circumstances**

**Employee (PAYE)**

**Earned Income**  
The Earned Income Credit applies to self-employment income that is the lower of €1,775 or 20% earned income. If you have income that is less than €1,775, you can claim the credit. The credit cannot be more than 17.75% of your earned income.

**Single person**

**Married/coupled partners**

**Single person (single)**

**Blind person (married/coupled partners)**

**Widowed/surviving civil partner (over 65 years old)**

**Widowed/surviving civil partner (over 65 years old)**

**Widowed Parent Tax Credit**

**Renewed in 2022**

**Renewed in 2021**

**Renewed in 2020**

**Renewed in 2019**

**Renewed in 2018**

**Other credits**

**Rent Tax Credit**  
Maximum amount: 20% of rent up to limit Available 2022-2025. For 2023 rent, can be credited during year.

**Incapacitated Child Tax Credit**

**Age Tax Credit**

**Medical expenses relief**

**Qualifying health expenses**

**Qualifying health expenses**

**Age exemption limits**

**Single/never-married/divorced civil partner (€6,000)**

**Married/coupled partners (€5,000 or over)**

All figures in tables are in euro (€). Rates may be subject to change. For current rates, see [citizensinformation.ie](http://citizensinformation.ie).

**Find out more with 1**

Point the camera on your smartphone at the QR code to go to [citizensinformation.ie](http://citizensinformation.ie)

**Tax reliefs and exemption**

**Rent-a-room scheme**  
The exemption limit for rooms rented out is €10,000 per annum.

**Allowance for employing a carer**  
Maximum allowance at your highest rate of tax.

**Medical expenses relief**  
Qualifying health expenses

**Age exemption limits**  
Single/never-married/divorced civil partner (€6,000)

**Married/coupled partners (€5,000 or over)**

**citizensinformation.ie**



LOG ON [www.citizensinformation.ie](http://www.citizensinformation.ie) CALL 0818 07 4000 (Mon to Fri, 9am-5pm) DROP IN locations nationwide

For copies of this wallchart contact: Citizens Information Board Head Office, George's Quay House, 43 Townsend St, Dublin 2, D02 V685 [citizensinformationboard.ie](http://citizensinformationboard.ie) | 0818 07 5000 | [info@citib.ie](mailto:info@citib.ie)

## Citizens Information Board Publications

The Benefits and Taxes 2023 leaflet and wallchart were published and distributed to the Citizens Information Services and the Money Advice and Budgeting Services (MABS).

Leaving School, a guide from Citizens Information booklet in both English and Irish was distributed to post-primary schools.



## Leaving School

A guide from Citizens Information

[citizensinformation.ie](http://citizensinformation.ie)

## Development of Service Delivery Companies



### eLearning

CIB's eLearning team develops and delivers primarily online training for CIB and the Service Delivery Companies. The team works with key stakeholders to identify training needs, which are then developed into self-paced online courses containing interactive lessons, videos, case studies and assessments. In 2023, CIB's eLearning team added 13 new courses to the CIB online training library:

- Queries about Taxation
- Queries about Department of Social Protection (DSP) Family and Child Payments
- Queries about Childcare
- Queries about DSP State Pensions
- Queries about DSP Carer's Payments
- Queries about DSP Jobseeker's Payments
- Queries about DSP Injury, Illness and Disability Payments
- Role of Advocacy
- Queries about Consumer Law
- Queries about Employment Law
- Queries about Family Law
- Advanced Training for Information Providers – Employment Law
- Queries about Housing

Over **100 CIB-developed courses are now available** to learners in our continually expanding training library.

**192 CIS staff and volunteers** completed induction training courses.

**3,804 learners achieved certification** through online assessments.

**A new suite of bite-sized compliance courses** covering areas such as General Data Protection Regulation, Cybersecurity, and Child Protection were launched.

An **Advanced Training for Information Providers in Employment Law** was piloted. This was a blended learning initiative aimed at experienced Information Providers in the CIS. It included an in-person workshop based around a series of real-life employment law cases.

## MABS Support Training

MABS Support in collaboration with the Insolvency Service of Ireland, provided 13 MABS Money Advisors nationally with accredited Approved Intermediary training to support clients who wish to make an application for a Debt Relief Notice (DRN). This was supported by developing a DRN toolkit for MABS Money Advisors to use.

MABS Support continued to provide a suite of training events to support the work of MABS companies nationally.



**13 MABS Money Advisors were provided with accredited Approved Intermediary training**

## Engagement between CIB and the Service Delivery Companies

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### Quarterly meetings with Chairs and Managers

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The Citizens Information Board initiated a series of quarterly meetings with the 22 Service Delivery Companies, chairpersons and managers. The aim of the meetings are to promote and support proactive and informative two-way communications to advance the strategic aims of CIB and service delivery companies. The meetings follow a format whereby the executive in CIB meet with the employers, and subsequent meetings are held with the managers of companies.

### MABS Quality Assurance Programme Board

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The Money, Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) Quality Assurance Programme Board, established in 2023, worked on the implementation of a number of actions recommended in the research report, 'A Quality Assurance and Continuation Improvement System for MABS (2022)'.

A structure that streamlines the process in devising new quality standards and projects and updating existing quality standards for MABS was agreed.

'Subject expert groups', made up of MABS staff, were set up to revise standards and policies based on their individual experience and expertise.

### Perceptions of Quality Survey

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In 2023, the CIB Standards and Development team, in conjunction with the Citizens Information Service (CIS) Quality Working Group (2021 – 2022), carried out a comprehensive survey of all staff and Board members in a range of areas that support quality. There were 195 responses to the survey. Findings suggested a number of actions necessary to develop a process for continuous improvement. A report was compiled to outline findings of the survey and make recommendations.

Recommendations included the need to work towards all companies having a common approach to gather customer feedback, measure the current level of unmet demand in CIS and use this as part of an evidence base to develop a business case for additional resources in the CIS network. This will ensure that the complaints process is clear and structured in such a way that it offers useful feedback to the service. The CIS Quality Working Group, formed in 2023, has worked towards fulfilling these recommendations.

## Advocacy

CIB's Advocacy Standards and Development team produced a quarterly advocacy newsletter, distributed across the CIS network. This newsletter communicates new developments and updates on social welfare, employment, housing and immigration to Citizens Information Service (CIS) staff. The team produced the 2022 CIS Annual Advocacy Report which showcases the breadth of advocacy work undertaken in

the CIS and highlights a number of case studies which demonstrate the positive outcomes achieved for CIS clients. The team organised and facilitated training for CIS staff in the areas of social welfare and employment. The team supported the CIS Advocacy Development Group to oversee the development of advocacy in the CIS network, identify and address gaps in policies and resources and establish action groups to progress advocacy initiatives. The team progressed and completed a number of updates to the National Advocacy Service (NAS) case management system (ECMS) to improve data capturing and reporting.

## Register of Irish Sign Language Interpreters (RISLI)

CIB presented at the Register of Irish Sign Language Interpreters (RISLI) induction day for new Irish Sign Language (ISL) interpreters.

CIB supported the RISLI website upgrade project and re-launch of the [RISLI website](#).



## Misinformation and Disinformation

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### Counter Disinformation Strategy (October 2023)

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The Citizens Information Board submission to the National Counter Disinformation Strategy focuses on an integrated approach to sharing best practice on information provision and aligning Irish policy and regulatory approaches with those of the European Union.





### Strategic Objective 3:

# Technology and Supports

Improve technology and supports to deliver an enhanced experience for the public.

Objective three of the strategy relates to Citizens Information Board's (CIB) Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and digital supports. Under this objective, CIB plans to develop a digital strategy to expand the digital service provided, as well as to develop future-facing ICT infrastructure, applications, and cybersecurity systems.



## ICT Infrastructure, Applications, and Cybersecurity Systems

In 2023, the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) team reviewed its own digital roadmap and plans to move to more secure cloud-based access to our systems, applications, and data.

Several significant procurement competitions were completed. This included a new helpdesk service, PCs and laptops, and a managed print service.

CIB's ICT Helpdesk answered 8,562 requests from CIB staff and the Service Delivery Companies.

## Technical Changes to citizensinformation.ie

In 2023, citizensinformation.ie moved to a new content management system, Wagtail. CIB's Digital Content team now work more efficiently with an automated Irish language translation process, much more flexible editing and workflow management tools.

The What's New section of citizensinformation.ie was redeveloped. What's New provides news and updates with links to relevant pages across the website. Pages in What's New are now more engaging with video, images and graphic content.



**8,562**

ICT Helpdesk requests from CIB staff and the Service Delivery Companies were answered

## CIS Libraries Project

The Public Service Innovation Fund, administered by the Department of Public Expenditure NDP Delivery and Reform, provides an important opportunity for organisations in the Public Service to explore new and innovative solutions for improved services and more seamless and inclusive digital delivery. It encourages the development of scalable innovations and enhanced collaboration between Public Service organisations.

In December 2022, the CIB Standards and Development team made a successful application for an award of €45,000 to complete a collaborative project with South Leinster CIS, South Connacht CIS and selected libraries. The application was inspired by the Government 'Digital First' agenda encouraging people to access services online. The aim of the project was to enable people who do not live close to a Citizens Information Centre to access free,

confidential and trusted information and advice online from a Citizens Information Centre in a dedicated private space in their local library.

As part of the development of this project, CIB conducted a face-to-face survey at the National Ploughing Championships and an online survey through [citizeninformation.ie](https://citizeninformation.ie), to collect information on whether people would use this service.

With the support of all stakeholders involved, a clinic commenced in Wicklow Library in November 2023, with positive feedback from those who have availed of the service. Clinics in Carraroe (An Cheathrú Rua) and Achill Library are being developed to follow.

All promotional materials have been prepared in Irish to promote the service in An Cheathrú Rua as it is located in a Gaeltacht area. Since the commencement of the project,

South Connacht CIS has engaged an Irish speaker to provide the service in Irish, with the assistance and support of Údarás na Gaeltachta.



## Strategic Objective 4:

# Oversee and Collaborate

Provide oversight and agree metrics with Service Delivery Companies.

Objective four of the strategy relates to Citizens Information Board's relationship with the Service Delivery Companies (SDCs). Plans under this objective include agreeing outcome-based metrics with the SDCs, enhancing compliance and reporting processes, assessing the scope of advocacy services, collaborating on new service design and implementing recommendations in relation to volunteers in the Citizens Information Services.



## Agreeing Outcome-Based Metrics with the Service Delivery Companies

### National Citizens Information Service Quality Working Group 2023

The National Citizens Information Service Quality Working Group was re-established in early 2023 to develop and agree a Quality Assurance Framework for the CIS network. The Quality Working Group supports continuous improvement across the CIS network for the benefit of the public.

## Enhancing Compliance and Reporting Processes

In 2023, CIB's Compliance and Reporting Division developed and issued an updated and enhanced Financial Controls and Reporting Requirements handbook to the service delivery companies. The Compliance and Reporting Division also developed handbooks for the SDCs on 'Guide to Best Practice Corporate Governance for CIB

funded Service Delivery Companies' and the 'Leasing Code of Practice for CIB funded SDCs'. CIB is currently developing eLearning courses to complement the handbooks.

## Collaborating on New Service Design and Implementing Recommendations in Relation to Volunteers in the Citizens Information Services

In 2023, the Board of CIB commissioned an independent review on volunteering in the Citizens Information Services (CIS) carried out by BearingPoint. The review was conducted in consultation with CIS volunteers, staff and boards.

The consultation involved a high level of engagement from CIS volunteers. CIS volunteers submitted more than 230 survey responses, while four focus groups were also held with volunteers in Cork, Dublin and online.

The review charts a way forward for the continued reintegration of volunteers to the CIS, which will allow for increased access to a vital and high-quality service for the public.

A volunteer strategy working group was convened to deliver on the recommendations from the review. They developed standardised communication materials inviting volunteers to return and supporting documentation including a national Volunteer Handbook.

## Assessing the Scope of Advocacy Services

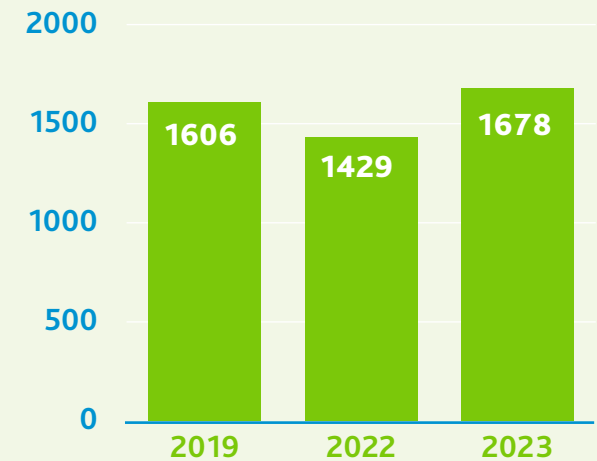
### Citizens Information Service Advocacy

Citizens Information Service (CIS) provide a free advocacy service to the public across a range of areas, including social welfare, employment, housing, immigration, health, consumer issues and education. The advocacy service supports and empowers people to ensure their interests and voices are represented in accessing their rights and entitlements to social services. The majority of this work involves supporting people to access a social welfare payment, redress a grievance with an employer, or secure a housing payment. Some of this work can be quite complex and involve supporting clients through an appeals process and even representing the client at an oral hearing. There were a total of 2,626 advocacy cases open in 2023.

### Top 3 categories for long-term advocacy cases

Category	New Cases	% of Total Cases
Social Welfare	1,238	72%
Employment	145	12%
Housing	132	7%

### New long-term advocacy cases



The number of new CIS long term advocacy cases has returned to 2019 levels.

## National Advocacy Service for People with Disabilities

The National Advocacy Service for People with Disabilities (NAS) provides a free and confidential advocacy service to adults with a disability, particularly those in vulnerable situations, isolated from their communities, who communicate differently or have limited formal or natural supports. NAS works for the person with a disability on the principle that they make decisions about their own lives and must be listened to and consulted by families and service providers to access supports to live their lives and enjoy meaningful participation in family, work and leisure.

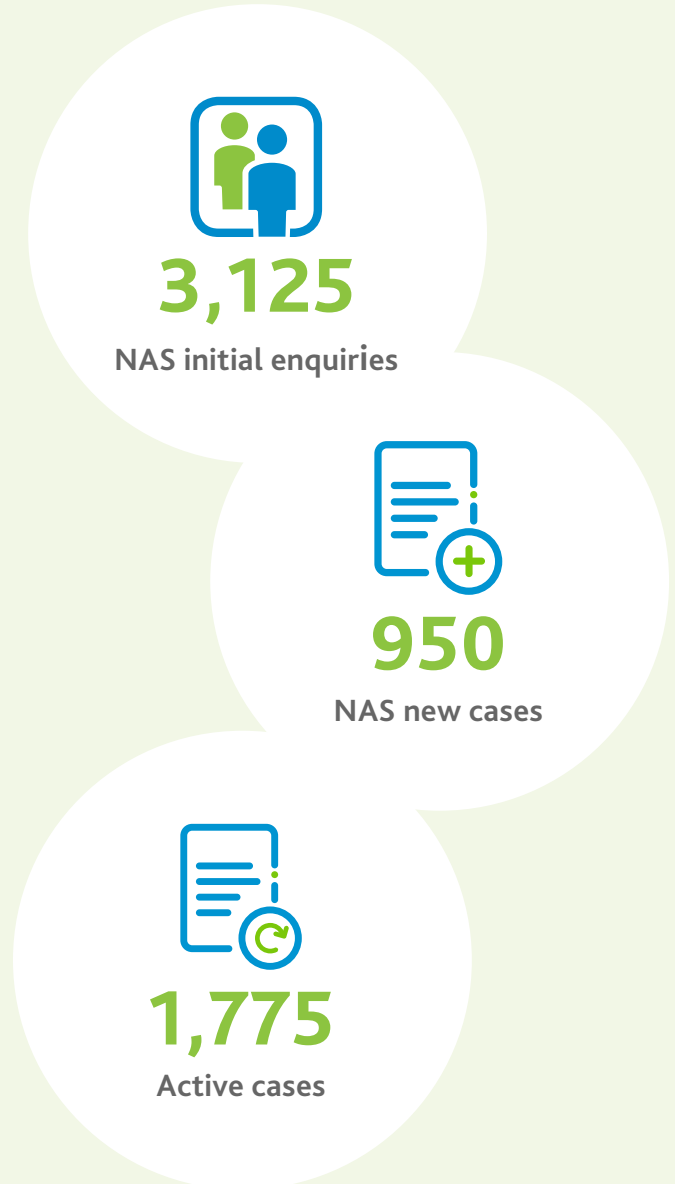
NAS provide empowerment advocacy and representative advocacy. In 2023, the average duration of a NAS empowerment case was 4 months and of a representative case was 18 months. NAS advocates logged 34,703 individual actions on cases, spending on average 3 hours per empowerment case and nearly 32 hours per representative case.

The top 5 issues presenting to NAS for people with disabilities in 2023 as a % of all new cases were:

Issue	% of 950 new cases
Housing and living arrangements	26%
Residential and healthcare settings	19%
Social and community life	19%
Capacity building and communication	18%
Decision-making	17%

\* Clients can present with multiple issues and therefore multiple categories can be selected for one case.

NAS cases in 2023



## Register of Irish Sign Language Interpreters

The Register of Irish Sign Language Interpreters (RISLI) was established to maintain a standards-based registration system for Irish Sign Language (ISL) interpreters. The registration system is referenced in the Irish Sign Language Act (2017). RISLI has developed a Code of Conduct for Irish Sign Language interpreters and set qualification, training and Continuous Professional Development (CPD) standards.

In 2023, there were 121 ISL interpreters registered on the RISLI register.



RISLI has developed  
a code of conduct  
for Irish Sign Language  
interpreters



121

ISL interpreters  
registered on  
the RISLI register



**Strategic Objective 5:**

# Demonstrate Efficiency and Effectiveness

**Demonstrate service value through governance and outcomes.**

Objective five of the strategy involves continuing to develop Citizens Information Board's systems of governance and internal control, as well as using outcome-based metrics to demonstrate the impact made by services.



# Governance and Internal Control

## Compliance and Reporting Division

The Compliance and Reporting Division monitored compliance by the twenty-two service delivery companies with their service level agreement with CIB. The Financial Compliance and Reporting team approved the cash budget plans of the service delivery companies on the basis of the CIB notified Operational Grant allocation. Quarterly financial reports were submitted by the service delivery companies which provided transparency and accountability in relation to the use of CIB operational grants and other CIB income. The quarterly financial reports and cash budget plans submitted by the service delivery companies were validated having regard to CIB's Financial Controls and Reporting Requirements handbook.

The Operational Compliance and Reporting team notified the service delivery companies of their approved whole time equivalent complement for the financial year and they reported on their actual staffing at the end of each quarterly reporting period. The Operational Compliance team provided advice and support to the service delivery companies in relation to HR matters, governance and the leasing of premises.

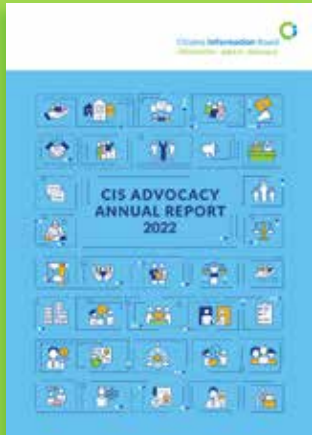
The Citizens Information Board is represented on the Abhaile Steering Board which focuses on high level policy, strategic and resourcing matters. The Citizens Information Board is also represented on the Abhaile Joint Working Group which is focused on the efficient and effective working of the Abhaile scheme.

## Finance Team

The Finance team manages CIB's finance, procurement and risk functions, including production of the annual financial statements and the maintenance of the risk register.

Finance looks to continuously improve systems, processes and controls and during 2023 adapted to changes required by external and internal stakeholders.

In 2023, the team launched an eLearning training course for all CIB staff aimed at improving the knowledge of public procurement. A Service Delivery Company specific course is currently being developed and will be rolled out in 2024.



CIS Advocacy  
Annual Report

## Outcome-Based Metrics to Demonstrate the Impact Made by Services

### CIS Advocacy Annual Report

The Citizens Information Board produced the CIS Advocacy Annual Report 2022.

This report highlighted the outstanding advocacy service offer provided by Citizens Information Services (CISs) through statistical data and case studies. The case studies in the report show how the work of CIS staff can have a tremendous impact on people's lives.

### Impact of Abhaile and MABS Communications

Compared to 2022 there was a:

- 9% increase in MABS Helpline Calls (29,169 vs 26,780)
- 18% increase in callers to the MABS Helpline who asked to speak to an Abhaile representative (1,561 vs 1,326)
- 28% increase in visits to MABS.ie (368,208 vs 287,633)
- 53% increase in resolved conversations via two-way chat on WhatsApp (4,103 vs 2,676)
- 72% increase in visits to the MABS.ie blog (58,511 vs 33,985)

# Appendices

# Customer Service Charter

The Citizens Information Board (CIB) provides independent information, advice and advocacy on public and social services through [citizensinformation.ie](https://citizensinformation.ie), the [Citizens Information Phone Service \(0818 07 4000\)](https://citizensinformation.ie) and the network of [Citizens Information Services](https://citizensinformation.ie). We are responsible for the [Money Advice and Budgeting Service \(MABS\)](https://citizensinformation.ie) and provide the [National Advocacy Service for People with Disabilities \(NAS\)](https://citizensinformation.ie).

We put the citizen at the centre of everything we do and this Charter sets out the principles that underpin our services. You can find our [Customer Service Action Plan](https://citizensinformationboard.ie) on our website, [citizensinformationboard.ie](https://citizensinformationboard.ie).

## We Are Committed To:

- 1. Clear, comprehensive and accurate information**  
We will provide clear and detailed information about public and social services to help you identify your needs and access your entitlements.
- 2. Prompt, courteous and efficient responses**  
We will be responsive to your needs and we will deliver our services sensitively and efficiently.
- 3. Equality and diversity**  
We will respect diversity and ensure your right to equal treatment.
- 4. Choice**  
We will plan and deliver our services so you can access them in the way that suits you best.

**5. Access**

We will ensure that all our services and offices are fully accessible. Contact our Access Officer at [accessofficer@ciboard.ie](mailto:accessofficer@ciboard.ie)

**6. Official languages**

We will provide our services through English, Irish and bilingually where required.

**7. Consultation and evaluation**

We will consult with you to establish your needs when developing, delivering and evaluating our services.

**8. Internal customers**

We will support our staff to ensure that they provide an excellent service to one another and to you.

**9. Co-ordination**

We will work closely with other organisations to deliver citizen-focused public services.

**10. Appeals**

We will maintain an accessible and transparent appeal and review system where appropriate.

**11. Comments and complaints**

We want to provide the best service possible to you and welcome all comments on our services. Contact our Complaints Administrator at [annemarie.owens@ciboard.ie](mailto:annemarie.owens@ciboard.ie)

# Protected Disclosures 2023

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## Development of Protected Disclosure Policy

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In accordance with the provisions of the Protected Disclosures Act, 2014 as amended by the Protected Disclosures (Amendment) Act 2022, it is the policy of the Citizens Information Board (CIB) to ensure its employees, as well as workers and volunteers of companies funded by CIB, can raise concerns about possible irregularities or wrongdoing in reporting, or other matters of concern related to the organisation.

A protected disclosure means an individual is protected in law to report a concern about a wrongdoing that they believe is occurring or has occurred in their workplace. Making a protected disclosure is also known as 'whistle blowing'.

In line with the 2022 Act amendment, a Protected Disclosure policy has been developed to provide a framework for individuals to raise concerns about potential wrongdoing. The policy aims to clarify examples of what wrongdoing might

include and what would not be classed as wrongdoing for the purposes of the Act, while highlighting existing internal policies which cover matters or other complaints outside the scope of the policy.

This policy is at final review stage, and it is envisaged it will be finalised in early 2024. CIB was not notified of any Protected Disclosures in the course of 2023.

# Energy Consumption

## Energy

The Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications Climate Action Plan 2023 (CAP 23) has specific climate action targets for public sector bodies including a 51% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030, as well as an improvement in energy efficiency in the public sector from 33% target in 2020 to 50% by 2030. The Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021 legally underpins climate action by public sector bodies.

The Citizens Information Board (CIB) is required to report its energy management and performance data to the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) using procedures and calculation methodologies specified by the SEAI under Statutory Instrument No. 426/2014 European Union (Energy Efficiency) Regulations 2014.

CIB is committed to reducing its greenhouse gas emissions and improving its energy efficiency having regard to the following 2030 targets:

- **Carbon**  
2030 greenhouse gas target is 45,439.2 KgCO<sub>2</sub> (including non-electricity greenhouse gas target of 16,041.3 kgCO<sub>2</sub>).
- **Energy Efficiency**  
CIB's 2030 energy consumption target is 505,649 kWh.

The Energy Efficiency target is an 'Intensity/performance metric', that is, kWh/m<sup>2</sup> rather than an absolute target. The 2030 energy consumption target is 155 kWh/m<sup>2</sup>, subject to area changes.

## Energy Performance

The latest statistics from the SEAI report CIB's energy consumption in 2022 against the 2009 baseline as follows;

- Energy savings 47.1% better than the 2009 baseline.
- CO<sub>2</sub> emissions down 50.1% when compared with the 2009 baseline.



# Funding Provided to Service Delivery Companies

Citizens Information Services	2023	2022
Dublin South CIS	€2,143,902	€2,003,748
North Dublin CIS	€2,402,450	€2,331,767
South Leinster CIS	€2,048,702	€1,981,653
North Leinster CIS	€2,315,040	€2,373,012
North Connacht & Ulster CIS	€1,988,133	€2,018,143
South Connacht CIS	€1,535,873	€1,489,396
North Munster CIS	€1,756,451	€1,773,458
South Munster CIS	€2,023,924	€1,990,403
<b>Total</b>	<b>€16,214,475</b>	<b>€15,961,580</b>

MABS	2023	2022
MABS Support	€1,108,991	€1,107,007
National Traveller MABS	€332,048	€368,604
North Dublin MABS	€2,948,325	€2,850,960
Dublin South MABS	€2,691,663	€2,724,587
South Leinster MABS	€2,406,871	€2,368,301
North Leinster MABS	€2,286,857	€2,167,894
North Connacht & Ulster MABS	€2,131,122	€2,187,426
South Connacht MABS	€1,749,206	€1,668,772
North Munster MABS	€2,430,572	€2,410,786
South Munster MABS	€2,193,860	€2,125,783
<b>Total</b>	<b>€20,279,515</b>	<b>€19,980,120</b>

<b>National</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2022</b>
Citizens Information Phone Service	€1,490,498	€1,342,041
Sign Language Interpreting Service	€725,542	€663,332
National Advocacy Service for People with Disabilities	€3,148,074	€2,972,746
Register of Irish Sign Language Interpreters	€254,706	€42,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>€5,618,820</b>	<b>€5,020,119</b>

<b>Supports</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2022</b>
Threshold	€47,000	€47,000
Free Legal Advice Centres (FLAC)	€140,000	€140,000
Treoir	€34,400	€34,400
Immigrant Council of Ireland	€68,000	€68,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>€289,400</b>	<b>€289,400</b>

<b>Overall</b>	<b>€42,402,210</b>	<b>€41,251,219</b>
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# Official Languages Act

The new provisions in the Official Languages (Amendment) Act 2021 came into operation on 13 March 2023. The Act places several significant requirements on public bodies regarding the use of the Irish language.

## Some of the provisions in the new legislation include:

- An objective that by 2030 20% of new recruits to the public sector and the Civil Service be proficient in Irish.
- A provision to ensure that communications with a public body on social media are answered in the same language.
- A provision requiring public bodies to ensure that at least 20% of their annual advertising is in Irish.

The Citizens Information Board (CIB) is committed to meeting the provisions outlined in the Act.

The senior official designated for the purposes of this Act is Caroline Mitchell, Acting Head of Division, Corporate Services, to oversee the performance of CIB under the obligations of this Act and report on this to CIB's Chief Executive Officer. Our mailbox for all queries regarding the Act is [ATO@ciboard.ie](mailto:ATO@ciboard.ie)

### In 2023, CIB:

- Achieved the target set out under section 10 Advertising and had at least 20% of our advertising in the Irish language.
- Recorded a spend of 3.13% in relation to the 5% target of any money spent advertising is to be used to place advertising in the Irish language through Irish language media. Lack of media agencies to meet the demand was a key reason.
- Attended several information seminars on the Act and organised a separate meeting with an official from the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media as part of informing ourselves about the Act.
- Liaised with the An Coimisinéir Teanga's office on a number of occasions to gather information.

## Keeping Staff Informed

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CIB wrote to all staff to inform them of the Official Languages Act, the history of the Irish language and information on a survey to support the development of Irish language courses for all staff in CIB.

- The survey was sent to all staff (85), we received 50 responses.
- Of those that responded, 82% confirmed they are familiar with The Official Languages (Amendment) Act 2021.
- In respect to proficiency in the Irish Language - 32% claimed to have no proficiency, 54% of respondents claimed to have a 'cupla focal', while 14% claimed to have either a good standard of Irish or have completed a certified course in the Irish Language.
- 74% of respondents expressed an interest in undertaking an Irish language course.



Rialtas na hÉireann  
Government of Ireland



Citizens **Information** Board  
*information · advice · advocacy*