

Annual Report  
Tuarascáil Bhliantuil  
2021

Citizens Information Board  
*information · advice · advocacy*



Rialtas na hÉireann  
Government of Ireland

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"I was very relieved when I went into Citizens Information... I was treated with great kindness and **sensible, clear advice**. I believe I'd still be fighting if it wasn't for the CIS."

CIS customer

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## Chairperson's introduction

It is my privilege to introduce this annual report for 2021, which covers the activities of the Citizens Information Board and of the companies it funds during what was a complex and many-faceted year. I would like to start by thanking my predecessor in the role, Seán Sheridan, who stepped in for the first six months of 2021 and steered both the Board and the Strategy and Governance Committee with great skill. Seán concluded the new Oversight Agreement with the Department of Social Protection, a critical piece of work, and coordinated the first steps towards CIB's new digital strategy. I would also like to give my particular thanks to Fiona Coyne, who was appointed as Chief Executive on a permanent basis at the end of the year and who has been a tremendous support to me as I become familiar with the organisation.

2021 saw important developments for the Citizens Information Board, including the commencement of the five-yearly Periodic Critical Review under the *Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies*. As I write, the review is almost complete and I would like to thank my colleagues on the Board and in the Department of Social Protection for their positive and rigorous engagement in this process. During 2021, the Board took the decision to extend the strategy 2019 – 2021 for a further year, in part to provide space to reflect on the outcomes of the Periodic Critical Review and to ensure that the Citizens Information Board as a whole is aligned with its mandate and ready to adapt to new realities and opportunities post-pandemic. With the appointment of Fiona, work on the Periodic Critical Review, and commencement of the implementation of all outstanding aspects of our strategy, CIB is now well positioned to take a medium-term view of how we best implement our services.

When I applied for the role of Chair of the Citizens Information Board, I placed a particular focus on CIB's role in information-giving. Both personally and professionally, I am acutely aware of the importance of trusted sources of information, particularly in the context of growing disinformation and misinformation. There is a growing public desire for trusted sources of information, and this applies at both a global and domestic level. As I noted in speaking with the Joint Oireachtas Committee in July last year, these insights probably come as no surprise, but they place an onus and pressure on organisations such as the Citizens Information Board – and all of its associated services – to ensure it remains a trusted voice, and that it continues to be agile in communicating across all channels so that information gaps do not arise, and everyone – especially those who experience disadvantage – is communicated with in formats that suit their needs.



Trusted sources of information are essential, but so too are advocacy and advice in helping people – and again, especially those who experience disadvantage or are in vulnerable situations – to make sense of their options and to exercise their rights. COVID brought about many changes to how services are provided, including in accelerating a pivot to digital and virtual engagements that had already been underway. This pivot signals new challenges and opportunities that we need to consider as we emerge from the pandemic, all the while ensuring that we meet greatest need.

I would like to thank the Minister for Social Protection, Heather Humphreys TD, and the staff of her Department for their support during the year. I would also like to thank the staff and boards of management involved in delivering services across the country in the Citizens Information Services, Money Advice and Budgeting Services, in MABS Support, National Traveller MABS, in the National Advocacy Service, in the Sign Language Interpreting Service, in the newly-formed Register of Irish Sign Language Interpreters and in the Citizens Information Phone Service - you served the public with great flexibility and commitment through a highly challenging year. Finally, I would like to thank the staff of the Citizens Information Board for continuing to go the extra mile and my fellow Board members for guiding the organisation through these uncertain times.

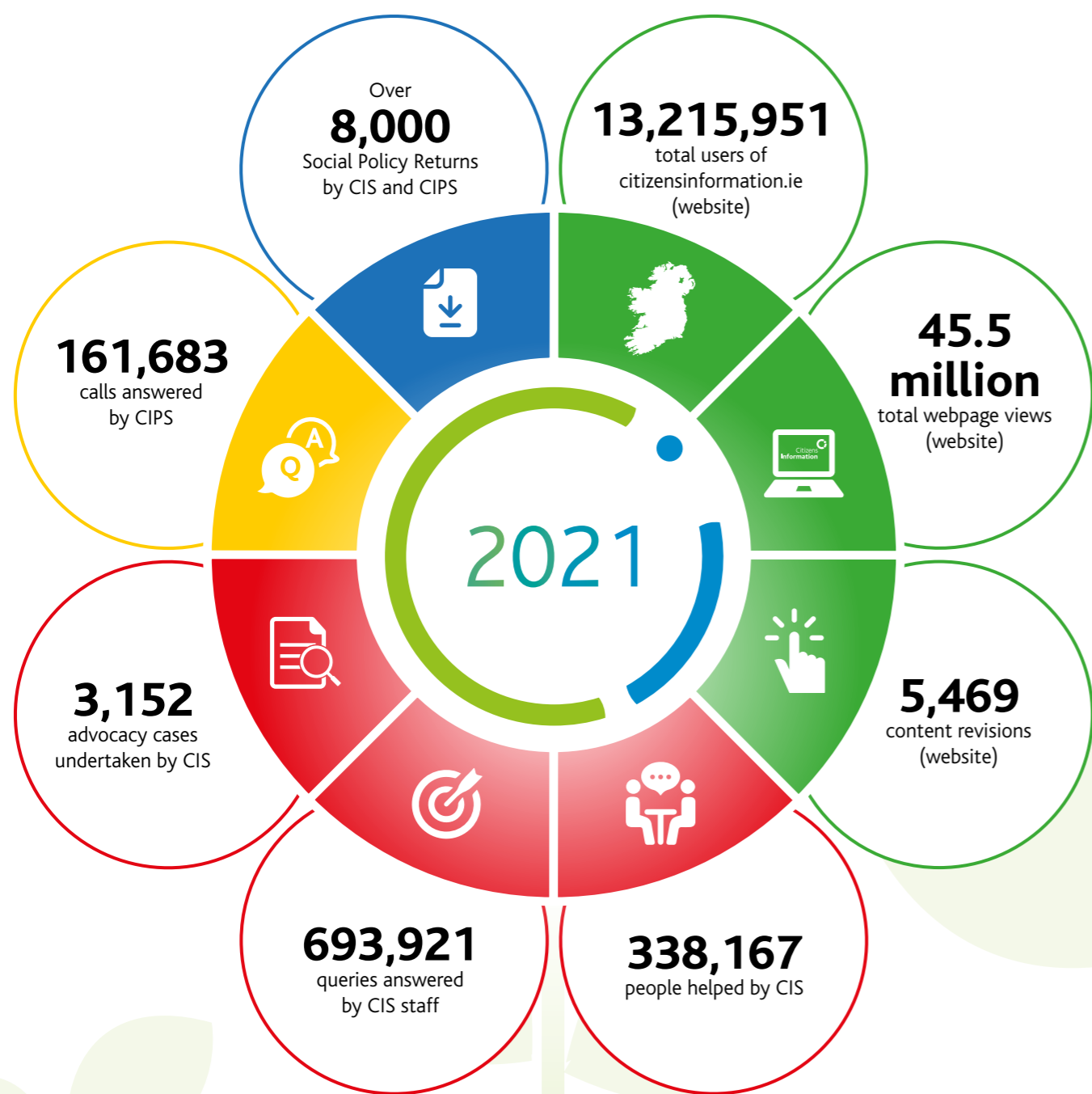
**Catherine Heaney**, CHAIRPERSON



Board Members. Back row: Seán Sheridan, Mary Doyle, John Saunders, Tim Duggan. Front row: Cearbhall O Meadhra, Catherine Heaney & Tina Leonard.



# 2021 in numbers



\*cumulative figures since scheme commenced

## Chief Executive Officer foreword

In reviewing this annual report, I am struck once again by the pace of change during 2021 and by how that pace of change has only increased in 2022.

COVID was of course a dominant theme across the year, with the five most visited pages on citizensinformation.ie – with more than five million views between them – all related to COVID. The shifting nature of public health restrictions and requirements, as well as new rules around payments and travel, led to a remarkable 5,469 content revisions on the website. CIB's commitment to providing information that is accessible, accurate and current is reflected in the number of users who choose citizensinformation.ie as a trusted information source.

COVID also caused many in-person services to be closed or offered on a more limited basis during the year. The data shows a shift to telephone and other channels, demonstrating the importance of digital transformation to the services we fund. I am pleased that we are developing a digital strategy for CIB and I look forward to completing this strategy and moving to the implementation phase on the initiatives identified. Infrastructure is a key part of digital delivery, and so it was crucial that the Wide Area Network (WAN) upgrade and transition to the new 0818 telephone numbers was completed in 2021. The new mabs.ie website was launched last year, and work was begun on the innovative new Data Hub, now live on citizensinformationboard.ie. The Data Hub shows trends and themes from the more than 690,000 queries recorded by the Citizens Information Services. This information will be updated on a quarterly basis initially to provide comparative data to allow us track trends in queries. I hope that services and others will find this information useful.

Unfortunately, the first months of 2022 saw the deeply saddening events taking place in Ukraine. CIB's funded services have responded to the arrival of refugees from Ukraine with speed, with compassion and with great professionalism, and I would like to extend my thanks to everyone who has been involved in initiatives to support Ukrainians arriving and living here. My thanks also go to the staff members and boards of management of each of the funded companies for their work in providing services through a period of continued upheaval as we get used to living with COVID.

One theme that emerges from this report is that of the rising cost of living. In the course of 2021, the Money Advice and Budgeting Services continued to work with clients encountering difficulties in meeting household bills, while National Traveller MABS had a particular focus on energy poverty among Travellers. One impact of the war in Ukraine is the upwards pressure on energy costs, and I expect that this is just one area of change that will shape the work undertaken by MABS in 2022.



In the course of 2021, CIB changed the basis of funding to the funded companies after engagement with the Department of Social Protection on the implementation of Circular 13/14 for grants we provided. This process led to the full return of surplus funding within the year and has brought CIB into full compliance with the circular.

CIB's Periodic Critical Review was also commenced last year and, while still in draft form as I write, the review underpins the need for CIB to re-organise internally and to place renewed emphasis on compliance, standards and metrics. CIB is now re-organising based on four divisions: financial and operational compliance, standards and development, ICT, digital and data, and corporate services. I would like to express my thanks to the staff of the Department of Social Protection for their work on the Periodic Critical Review and for their support to me in my first year as Chief Executive. Work on CIB's next strategy has begun and I am very much looking forward to working to ensure that the organisation is set up to deliver on strategy commitments in 2023 and beyond.

CIB staff members worked largely remotely during 2021 and a blended working pilot is now underway, offering a mix of office-based and remote working. It has been great to meet people in person again and to get that sense of teamwork and purpose that I feel is so inherent to the Citizens Information Board. I would like to give special thanks to the members of staff who left the organisation in the last year with only a Zoom call to acknowledge their contribution – I hope that a more fitting event can be organised in the course of 2022.

I would also like to thank all the staff of CIB for their work throughout the year and in particular, their response to me as I took on the role of CEO. I want to say a special thanks to the members of the Board, and particularly to Seán Sheridan and Catherine Heaney, for the trust they have placed in me and for their unstinting support and guidance.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Fiona Coyne'.

**Fiona Coyne, CEO**

## Acronym glossary

Throughout this report, acronyms and abbreviations are used for the names of our organisations as well as our external stakeholders. These are written in the text when they are first mentioned. This page offers a summary of definitions you may find helpful when reading this report:

Us:		External stakeholders:	
CIB	Citizens Information Board	DSP	Department of Social Protection
HR	Human Resources	HSE	Health Service Executive
ICT	Information Communications Technology	ISI	Insolvency Service of Ireland
PR	Press Relations	PAS	Patient Advocacy Service
Services we fund:		Other:	
CIC	Citizens Information Centres	DMA	Dedicated Mortgage Arrears
CIPS	Citizens Information Phone Service	GDPR	General Data Protection Regulations
CIS	Citizens Information Services	PIA	Personal Insolvency Arrangement
IRIS	Irish Remote Interpreting Service	PIP	Personal Insolvency Practitioner
MABS	Money Advice and Budgeting Service		
NAS	National Advocacy Service		
NTMABS	National Travellers Money Advice and Budgeting Service		
RISLI	Register of Sign Language Interpreters		
SLIS	Sign Language Interpreting Service		

**1**  
**The Citizens Information Board (CIB) – Who we are and supporting funded services**

# Chapter 1:

## The Citizens Information Board (CIB) – Who we are and supporting funded services

### Our mandate

To assist and support individuals, in particular those with disabilities, in identifying and understanding their needs and options.



### 1.1 About CIB

CIB provides independent information on public and social services directly to the public through the Citizens Information website (citizensinformation.ie) and periodicals and publications where the public can access up-to-date information. CIB funds and supports 22 independent companies referred to as service delivery companies.

A key role of CIB is to support, promote and develop information on the effectiveness of current social policy and services, and to highlight issues raised by the users of those service delivery companies.

CIB supports the provision of information, advice, advocacy, money advice and budgeting assistance across a wide range of public and social services. These services are delivered in three different ways – online, by phone and in person.

CIB employs 79 people who work under four organisational pillars:

- Corporate Services
- Citizens Information Services and Advocacy
- Money Advice and Budgeting Services, and Abhaile
- Digital Content, eLearning, and Social Policy and Research

CIB's head office is in Dublin with additional offices in Cork, Kilkenny, Limerick and Galway.

In 2021, CIB received funding of €51,251,733. The Comptroller and Auditor General audits CIB's financial statements. CIB will publish the 2021 audit on the CIB website (citizensinformationboard.ie) when available.

#### 1.1.1 CIB's values and mandate

The values CIB upholds and applies to all aspects of CIB's work are:

- **Available to all:** We will offer independent, impartial, confidential and non-judgemental information, advice, money advice and advocacy in ways that are accessible to all
- **Responsiveness:** We will always listen to people's views, reflect on what we learn and review our services to ensure they are responsive to changing situations and emerging needs. We will make the best use of new technologies and other opportunities
- **Customer service:** We are committed to supporting a professional, impartial and timely service that responds to people's needs
- **Confidentiality:** We will respect and promote people's right to privacy
- **Focus on quality:** We will continually improve our products, services and methods of working to meet the needs of all our stakeholders
- **Excellence:** We will motivate our staff to deliver products and services that exceed objectives, needs and expectations
- **Leadership:** We will offer supportive leadership and encourage innovation in our areas of expertise in a way that benefits everyone
- **Promotion of equality and human rights:** We will promote equality and human rights in all we do

# CIB's Mandate





### 1.1.2 Strategic Plan 2019-2021: Delivering information, advice, money advice and advocacy services for our communities

The vision for this three year plan is an Ireland where everyone is adequately equipped with the information and advice that allows them to realise their rights. The plan places particular emphasis on delivering this information and advice to the most vulnerable.

The strategy's dual objectives are to build on the restructuring of services over recent years and maximise the benefits of these investments to deliver greater quality and more accessible services for the public.

This strategy concluded in 2021 and the Minister's approval was sought to extend it to the end of 2022. CIB will develop a new three year strategy in 2022, which will serve as our strategy from 2023 to 2026.

#### Strategic priorities

##### Strategic priority 1: Enhancing service quality and availability

Achieving a consistently high standard through a modern, measurable framework of information, advice, money advice and advocacy services.

##### Strategic priority 2: Service development and innovation

Identifying, promoting and implementing service development and innovation.

##### Strategic priority 3: Consolidation and delivery

Building the capacity of the network of CIB services, including leadership and support, to consolidate and deliver the benefits of restructuring.

The full text of the current strategic plan is available on CIB's website [citizensinformationboard.ie](http://citizensinformationboard.ie) in both English and Irish.

### 1.1.3 Public sector equality and human rights duty

All public bodies in Ireland have a responsibility to promote equality, prevent discrimination and protect the human rights of their employees, customers, service users and everyone affected by their policies and plans. CIB has established a Public Sector Duty working group to ensure we are meeting our obligations.

Under Section 42(1) of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Act 2014, CIB, in common with all public bodies, must have regard to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination
- Promote equality of opportunity and treatment for its staff and the people to whom it provides services
- Protect, promote and fulfil the human rights of its members, staff and the people to whom it provides services

Equality of access to information, advice and advocacy is a core principle of CIB and the services it provides and funds. CIB is committed to diversity and will ensure that the right to equal treatment as established by equality legislation is upheld. We aim to ensure equality of access by funding or providing services in person, by phone and online, and through the Live Advisor (webchat) service and the Irish Remote Interpreting Service (IRIS).

We communicate in Irish and Irish Sign Language, on request, and publish major documents, such as our annual report, in Irish and English. CIB's Access Officer arranges support for people with disabilities who access our information and services. Our websites [citizensinformation.ie](http://citizensinformation.ie) and [citizensinformationboard.ie](http://citizensinformationboard.ie) are designed to provide a high level of accessibility.

CIB has robust policies and procedures to promote equality and human rights and support our staff. If requested, accommodations are provided at recruitment stage and continue through the induction process and continually through the employee's working cycle.

CIB's Staff Resource Pack contains detailed policies and procedures on employee relations including policies relating to dignity and respect in the workplace, learning and development, bullying and harassment, employee performance and safety, and health and welfare.

All staff are required to undertake the Dignity at Work training course. CIB offers flexibility with its family-friendly leave policies, assisting working parents in work-life balance. CIB's health and safety committee meet regularly and communicate important updates to all staff.

Through CIB's Employee Assistance Programme, staff are encouraged to maintain good physical and mental health. Employee health and wellbeing is supported. CIB invests in training and upskilling to support staff in their current roles and careers.

### 1.1.4 Promoting diversity and inclusion

CIB recognises and respects the value of diversity and inclusion among our staff, stakeholders and the public we serve.

We work to promote diversity and inclusion by:

- Respecting and recognising people as individuals
- Treating all individuals, inside and outside of CIB, fairly
- Ensuring equal access to employment and promotional opportunities for all employees and candidates, regardless of gender, age, sexual orientation, civil status, family status, religion, disability, race or membership of the Traveller community
- Recognising the individual needs of those we employ and support

#### Respecting and recognising people as individuals

At CIB we value and respect each individual and the contribution they make to deliver high standards of service to the organisation. We firmly believe that seeking the views, opinions and recommendations of employees, plays a vital role and stands at the core of our success.

#### Treating all individuals fairly

CIB has a Dignity at Work Policy in place, with ongoing training and support provided for new and existing members of staff. All employees of CIB have signed up to our Code of Business Conduct, confirming that they will act with integrity and professionalism at all times while representing the Citizens Information Board. At CIB we also employ public service pay scales which are applied to all our staff members equally, at their relevant grade, on the basis of their length of service alone.

#### Ensuring equal access to employment and promotional opportunities

As at 31 December 2021, the Board had seven (58%) female and five (42%) male members. The Board therefore meets the Government target of a minimum of 40% representation of each gender in the membership of State Boards.

The following measures are planned to maintain and support gender balance on this Board:

- An advertisement for the vacancies on the Board was published on stateboards.ie in March 2022. The information booklet includes the following paragraph: "The Minister encourages applications from diverse, qualified candidates to ensure the Board is a true reflection of

Irish society, from all parts of Ireland and shall have regard to the desirability for gender balance, diversity and inclusion on the Board as the Minister considers appropriate and determines from time to time when making appointments, in line with the updated Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies 2016."

- In addition, section 9 of the Comhairle Act 2000 (as amended) stipulates that: "In making appointments to the Board the Minister shall have regard to the objective of there being not less than 6 members who are women and not less than 6 members who are men." This legislation is also referenced in the information booklet.

The CEO and Chair of our Board are both female, while the Senior Management Team (SMT) is 75% male, 25% female. The management team that reports to the SMT is 66% female, 34% male.

In terms of recruitment, CIB is actively developing its network of advertising to include support agencies that provide assistance to various groups to find employment.

We have also expanded and further highlighted the equal opportunities wording within our recruitment and advertising materials, providing confidence to any potential candidates that CIB will strive to find suitably qualified candidates to fill any role regardless of gender, age, sexual orientation, civil status, family status, religion, disability, race or membership of the Traveller community.

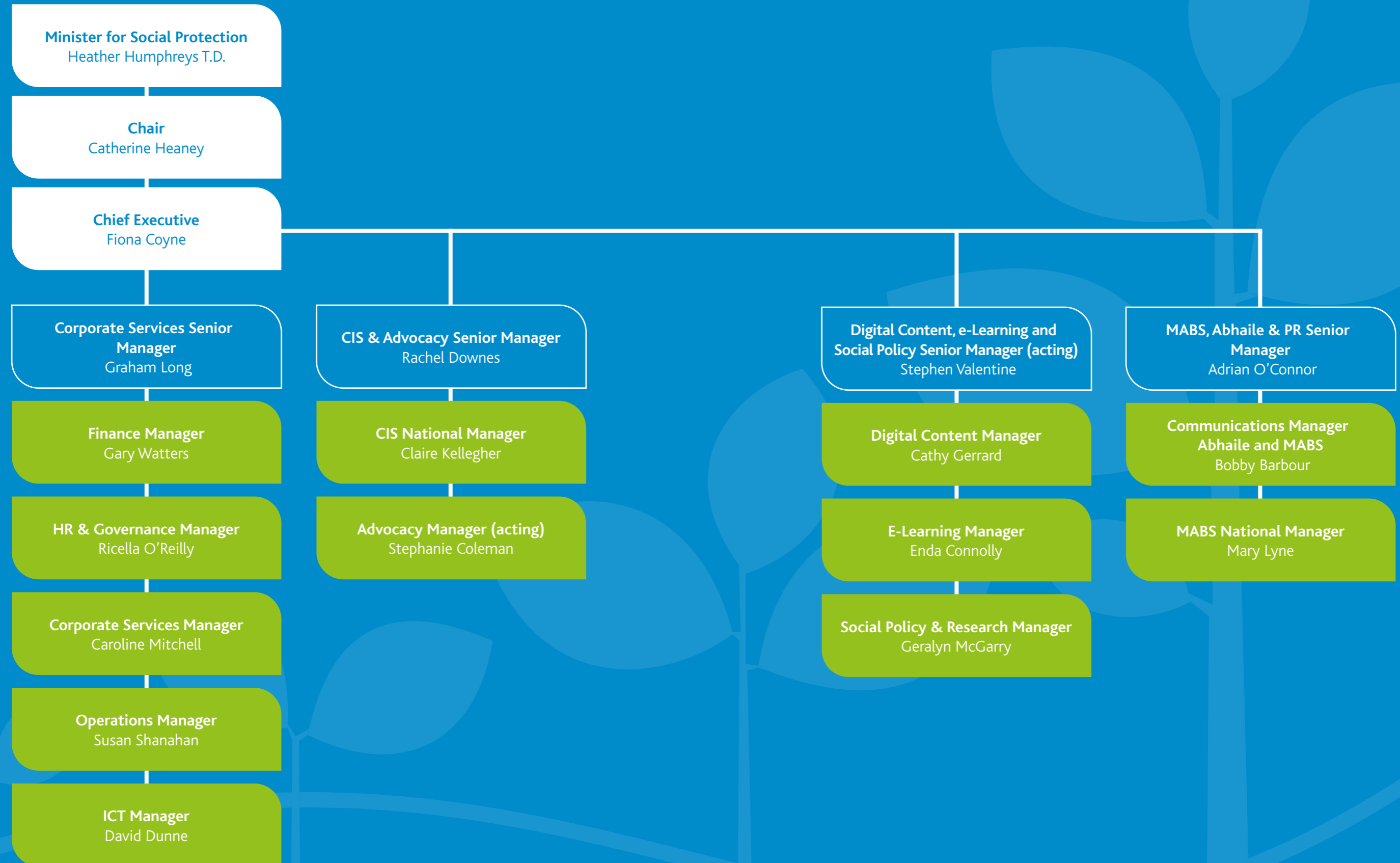
CIB has and continues to invest in training and upskilling within the organisation. We are committed to continue this support through engagement, career development and a more defined focus on the performance and development elements of our Performance Management and Development System (PMDS) process.

#### Recognising the individual needs of those we employ and support








CIB actively promotes health and wellbeing for all employees. A dedicated employee assistance programme is in place.

As an organisation, we are committed to promoting the full and equal participation of staff members with a disability. Our goal is to ensure that any member with a disability does not experience a disadvantage in accessing or fully participating in working life with CIB or in accessing our services.

### 1.1.5 Organisational chart



## 1.2 The services CIB fund

	<p>Citizens Information Services (CIS) [page 75] Citizens Information Phone Service (CIPS) [page 73]</p>
	<p>Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) [page 47] MABS Support [page 48]</p>
	<p>Abhaile [page 51]</p>
	<p>National Traveller MABS (NTMABS) [page 50]</p>
	<p>The National Advocacy Service for People with Disabilities (NAS) [page 38]</p>
	<p>Sign Language Interpreting Service (SLIS) [page 41]</p>
	<p>Register of Sign Language Interpreters (RISLI) [page 43]</p>

## 1.3 How CIB supports the service delivery companies

CIB works closely with these services to ensure the public gets the best information, advice and support possible, and that the services comply with best practice in finance, governance, human resources and premises management.

CIB provides infrastructure and supports to help our services deal with citizens' enquiries and connect with local communities. High quality is ensured by setting and monitoring standards, and providing Information and Communication Technology (ICT) services, equipment, infrastructure, training, websites and publications.

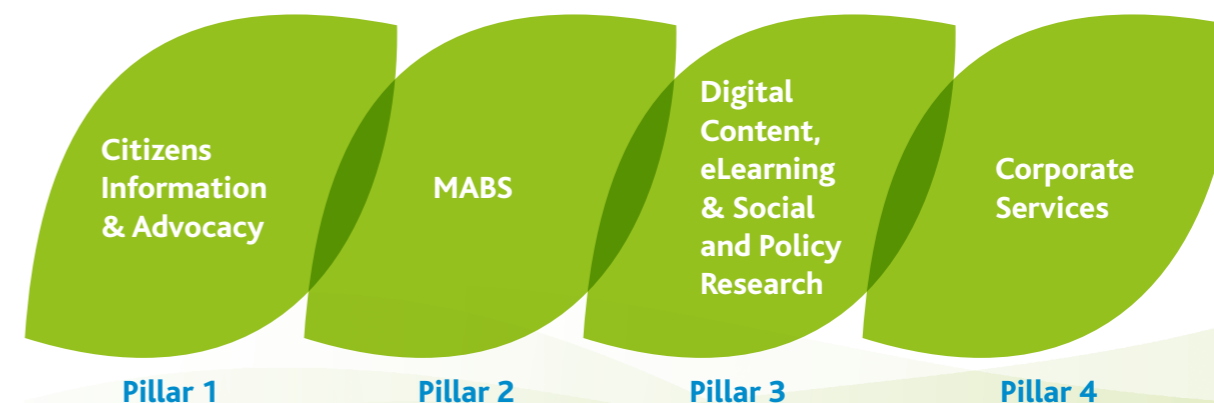
Comprehensive financial controls, reporting frameworks and Service Level Agreements (SLA) ensure that appropriate services are provided in return for funding.

SLAs with CIB's service delivery companies set out both parties' commitments. These agreements include delivery, governance, financial controls, Human Resources (HR) practices, data protection, reporting guidelines, evaluation and monitoring. An internal audit process provides recommendations on updating practices and improving compliance with the governance and reporting requirements.

Support for services is provided in a number of areas, including provision of ICT equipment and related infrastructure, advice on premises and facilities management, and access to a third party company when required for HR and industrial relations support. An Employee Assistance Programme is available to staff in all companies.

## 1.4 The four pillars

The CIB organises its work and service teams under four pillars.



### 1.4.1 Pillar 1 | Citizens Information Service and Advocacy

#### Citizens Information Service (CIS) team

This team monitors and supports the network of eight regional Citizens Information Services (CIS) companies and the Citizens Information Phone Service (CIPS). These companies provide free, impartial and confidential information, advice and advocacy services to the public. The team works to ensure compliance with the Service Level Agreement and financial controls.

In 2021, the CIS team:

- Participated in the Chief Justice's Access to Justice Conference (October)
- Coordinated the CIS Adult Safeguarding Policy Steering Group
- Supported and coordinated a prison in-reach programme through in-person and remote means to provide access to information, advice and advocacy
- Participated in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) Quality Customer Service Network
- Organised training events for CIS staff nationwide
- Worked in partnership with Free Legal Advice Centres (FLAC) and the CIS network to provide remote FLAC appointments

More detailed information on this service is reviewed in chapter six.

#### Advocacy

The Advocacy team is responsible for promoting and advancing the provision of advocacy services. The team collaborates with our CIS team to develop advocacy standards, policies and resources. It monitors and supports frontline services delivering advocacy. These are:

- National Advocacy Service for People with Disabilities (NAS)
- Citizens Information Services (CIS) network

The team also monitors and supports the Sign Language Interpreting Service (SLIS). As part of the National Disability Inclusion Strategy and the commencement of the Irish Sign Language Act 2017, SLIS established the Irish Sign Language (ISL) Unit and the Register of Sign Language Interpreters (RISLI).

### 1.4.2 Pillar 2 | Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) and Abhaile

#### MABS Service Delivery

The team is responsible for providing resources, support and oversight to a national network of 10 MABS companies (eight regional MABS companies, MABS Support and National Traveller MABS) in their delivery of money advice and budgeting services to the public.

#### Abhaile and MABS Communications

The team is responsible for the promotion of Abhaile, the free mortgage arrears support scheme, and MABS, the money advice and budgeting service. This is achieved using a wide range of traditional and digital media formats to inform, educate, and empower the public to engage with the services based on their need. The team is also responsible for project management of the MABS dedicated mortgage arrears service.

#### Public Relations (PR) and Promotions

The PR and promotions executive promotes awareness of CIB, Citizens Information and MABS. Detailed information on campaigns, media and partnerships is in section 1.5.

### 1.4.3 Pillar 3 | Digital Content, eLearning, Social Policy and Research

#### Digital Content

CIB's information website, citizensinformation.ie, provides public service information for Ireland. Gathering information from Government departments and agencies, this website ensures users have the knowledge they need, presented in an easy-to-understand way. The public uses the website to find out about their rights and entitlements and it is the main information source for information providers in CIS and CIPS.

#### eLearning

The CIB eLearning team is responsible for developing online courses and resources to support the learning and development needs of staff internally in CIB and the service delivery companies. The team works with key internal stakeholders to develop online courses containing interactive lessons, videos, case studies and assessments. CIB's eLearning courses are accessed, any time, through a dedicated learning management system on a self-service basis by learners in CIB and any service delivery company.

2,248 learners successfully completed CIB eLearning training in 2021.



For accuracy and relevance, the team updated all eLearning courses in the online learning library as part of the annual course refresh cycle. 17 new courses related to the provision of information on specialist topics, as well as policies and procedures, were developed. These were:

- Brexit
- COVID Induction / Return to Offices
- Deaf Awareness
- Death & Bereavement Issues
- DSP Carers Payments
- DSP Family & Child Payments
- DSP Illness and Disability Payments
- DSP Jobseekers Payments
- DSP Pensions
- Equality in Service Delivery
- GDPR & You
- HSE Entitlements
- Manual Handling
- Personal Taxation
- Reception & Customer Service Skills
- Safety Statement Awareness
- Travel & Motoring

**Common Travel Area (CTA)**  
 British citizens wishing to stay in Ireland  
 The UK's withdrawal from the European Union (EU) has not affected the rights of Irish citizens and UK citizens within the Common Travel Area. British citizens continue to have the right to live and work in Ireland as part of the Common Travel Area.  
 Irish citizens wishing to stay in the UK  
 If an Irish citizen wants to continue living in the UK, they do not need to apply to the EU Settlement Scheme. Their rights to live, work and access public services in the UK are protected under the Common Travel Area arrangement. However, even though they do not need to apply to the scheme for themselves, their family members from outside of the UK and Ireland will need to apply.

**Knowledge Check 3**  
 Will Paul Smyth be required to apply for a UK Frontier Work Permit to continue working in Northern Ireland?  
 Paul does not need to apply for the Frontier Work Permit, he will be covered under the Common Travel Area.  
 Paul will need a Frontier Work Permit from 1 July 2021 onwards. He should apply as soon as possible to ensure it arrives in time.  
 SUBMIT  
 Reminder:  
 Paul Smyth is an Irish citizen, living in Manorbhamilton, Co. Leitrim since 2018. He regularly works on building projects across the border in Northern Ireland.

**Queries about Brexit**  
 Continuous Development for Information Providers (CDIP)

### Social Policy and Research

The team collects and analyses information and data on social policy and the administration of social services from funded services. They produce social policy and research briefings and commission independent thematic reports on the effectiveness of current social policy and services, in order to highlight the concerns of service users to policy-makers. Evidence-based reports contribute to public policy formulation by responding to policy consultations and preparing submissions.

### 1.4.4 Pillar 4 | Corporate Services, HR and Governance, Finance, ICT, and Operations

#### Corporate Services

The Corporate Services team, established in 2020, is responsible for overseeing governance areas such as Data Protection, Freedom of Information (FOI), engagement with the Ombudsman and access to information on the environment. The team coordinates the provision of information to the Department of Social Protection (DSP) as required and will oversee the production of CIB's next three year strategy. This includes systems to capture outcomes, and key performance indicators (KPIs) aligned to the strategic plan. The team is also responsible for CIB's internal communication function.

In 2021, CIB migrated from an outmoded records management system to e-Docs, a BTS (Build to Share) business application. BTS is one of the key pillars under the Public Service ICT Strategy. As part of this project CIB availed of two applications used to track and manage FOI requests called 'eFOI' and Subject Access Requests under General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) called 'eCase'. In 2021, CIB's Data Protection Officer completed 22 FOI requests, three Subject Access Requests and two Officer of Information Commissioner (OIC) appeals. The team answered 46 Parliamentary Questions (PQs) this year.

**Human Resources (HR) and Governance**

The HR and Governance team supports CIB staff, in recruitment, induction, health and wellbeing, and training. In 2021, the team completed 23 recruitments, including internal and external competitions. The team manages two pension schemes for CIB employees. Membership of a pension scheme is compulsory and employees are assigned to the appropriate scheme according to criteria outlined in the relevant government legislation. CIB is responsible for the administration and acts as trustee for both schemes under the auspices of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform. 73 former staff members currently receive a pension through CIB.

The HR and Governance team works closely with the Operations team, which is responsible for supporting the service delivery companies on HR and governance matters.

**Finance**

The Finance team is responsible for all finance matters and procedures. The team makes sure that proper financial controls and reporting procedures are followed by CIB and service delivery companies to ensure the taxpayer gets value for money.

In 2021, the Finance team successfully procured and implemented a contract with a new outsourced payroll bureau service. This contract ensures timely and accurate payment of salaries and pensions to all staff members, board members and past staff members of CIB.

**Information and Communications Technology (ICT)**

ICT is responsible for the delivery of modern ICT supports to CIB and the service delivery companies. This involves the development and maintenance of networks and infrastructure as well as the provision of hardware and applications to all CIB staff and employees in the 22 service delivery companies nationwide.

After delays caused by the challenges of COVID-19, the ICT team completed the significant upgrade of the Wide Area Network (WAN) and telephony systems with its vendors. This project brought more than 170 CIB and service delivery company offices a more modern infrastructure fit for 21<sup>st</sup> century requirements.

The ICT team managed the change from the old 0761 to the new 0818 phone number. This was part of a nationwide update overseen by the Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg). This sizeable project affected all CIB, CIS and MABS offices and was successfully implemented by the end of 2021.

The ICT helpdesk, supporting CIB and the service delivery companies, answered 11,000 requests. ICT enhanced its infrastructure to provide more facilitates for staff in CIB and the funded services working from home. They ensured that a robust Virtual Private Network (VPN) or virtual desktop was set up for use by staff. Digital innovations enabled staff working in the service delivery companies to continue to support clients from a range of locations.

**Operations**

The team is responsible for supporting and monitoring the Service Delivery Companies (SDCs) in relation to HR practices, finance and premises. This is done through the provision of policies, guidelines, procedures and resources. It maintains best practice and ensures compliance with the law. The team oversee a number of areas in CIB, including health and safety, property development and management.

In 2021, the team approved and updated HR materials for the current 726 posts in the SDCs. The team completed periodic financial returns of all SDCs, monitoring all grant allocations to the 22 companies (see appendix 5). The premises function of the team oversaw leases across 239 SDC locations, and managed the portfolio of seven premises and all facilities for CIB. Property development across the SDCs and CIB is also part of the operations brief. In total, eight projects were undertaken and six were fully completed.

## 1.5 Public Relations (PR) and promotions

### Campaigns

There were three significant promotional campaigns in 2021.

### CIS Campaign:

This CIS campaign alerted the public to the advice and information they can receive from CIS and highlighted its advocacy offerings. Campaign analysis indicated a strong performance for both the digital and social campaigns, with social welfare posts performing best. New Ad Smart technology was used to direct the campaign ads to a targeted audience, based on factors like location and lifestyle behaviours, delivering 334,624 impressions.

### MABS Campaign:

The changed financial circumstances that many people experienced due to the pandemic was a central theme of this campaign. This campaign encouraged people to reach out to MABS's free, open and non-judgemental service. The campaign was successful. It was shown 3.2 million times on Facebook.

### 0818 Campaign:

In October 2021 a campaign was launched to inform the public that the prefix number for both MABS and CIS Helplines was changing to 0818. The old number ceased to operate on 1 January 2022. All CIS and MABS branding and marketing materials were reviewed and updated.

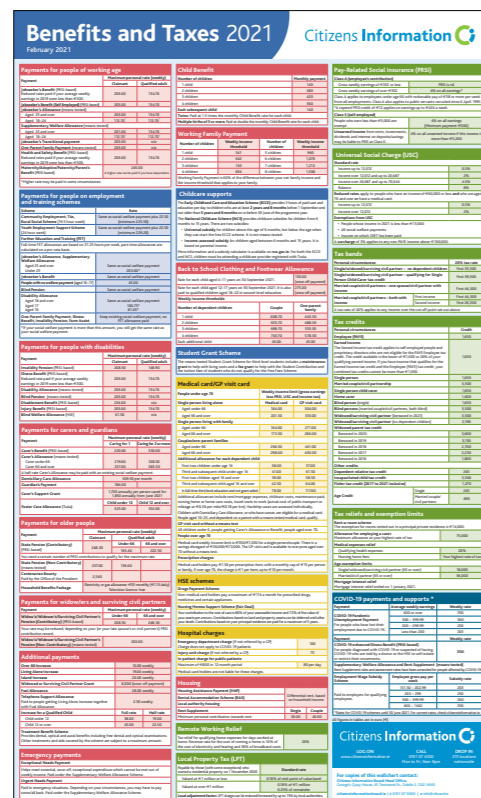
### Partnerships

- **SMEDIAS:** CIB partnered with SMEDIAS, the national student media awards, where CIS and MABS each sponsored an award. The purpose was to raise awareness of both services with a younger audience.
- **Irish Prison Service:** CIB worked with the Irish Prison Service to produce a video promoting the Citizens Information Service and its supports to prisoners. It is viewed within the internal prison TV service.

### Publications and leaflets

The Digital Content team published and distributed the [Benefit and Taxes 2021 leaflets](#) and [wallcharts](#) to MABS and CICs.

[Information for school leavers](#) was published in an electronic version only. A link to the publication was emailed to post-primary schools and Youth Information Centres.



### Media coverage

#### Online

Online coverage peaked in July, due to the back-to-school clothing and footwear allowance.

#### Print

There was a peak in national print coverage on 14 July, driven by mortgage arrears and tenants struggling to pay their rent. MABS coverage was prominently placed throughout the year, appearing on the first and second pages 35 times.





# 2

## Advocacy for people with a disability

## Chapter 2:

### Advocacy for people with a disability

#### Our mandate

To support the provision of, or directly provide, advocacy services for people with a disability.



The CIB Advocacy team promotes, monitors and supports frontline services delivering advocacy. Internally within CIB, they work with the CIS team to develop advocacy standards, policies and resources.

The Advocacy team monitors and supports:

1. The National Advocacy Services for People with Disabilities (NAS)
2. The regional network of Citizens Information Services (CIS)
3. Sign Language Interpreting Services (SLIS)
4. Register of Sign Language Interpreters (RISLI)

#### The CIB ISL Unit

The Irish Sign Language (ISL) Unit was established in 2020 within the Advocacy team to deliver on projects under the National Disability Inclusion Strategy and the commencement of the Irish Sign Language Act. The Advocacy team established the Irish Sign Language Voucher Scheme Pilot Project (June to October 2021) which allowed ISL users to connect to free interpretation to access events, services, and activities.



### Pilot On-Demand Irish Sign Language (ISL) Interpreting App

The Remote Irish Sign Language Interpreting App allowed SLIS interpreters to provide an on-demand interpreting service via the new App. SLIS and CIB worked together on the pilot project, which was launched on 16 November 2020 for six months. The pilot project provided direct access to an ISL interpreter and could be downloaded to a mobile phone, desktop or tablet. An evaluation study completed at the end of the project found that the pilot had been successful.

### Mentoring programme for ISL interpreters

CIB and SLIS ran the first mentoring programme training for sign language interpreters in Ireland. Nine registered ISL interpreters attended the training organised by TIEM Center – Teaching Interpreting Educators & Mentors to become professional mentors.

## 2.1 National Advocacy Service for People with Disabilities (NAS)

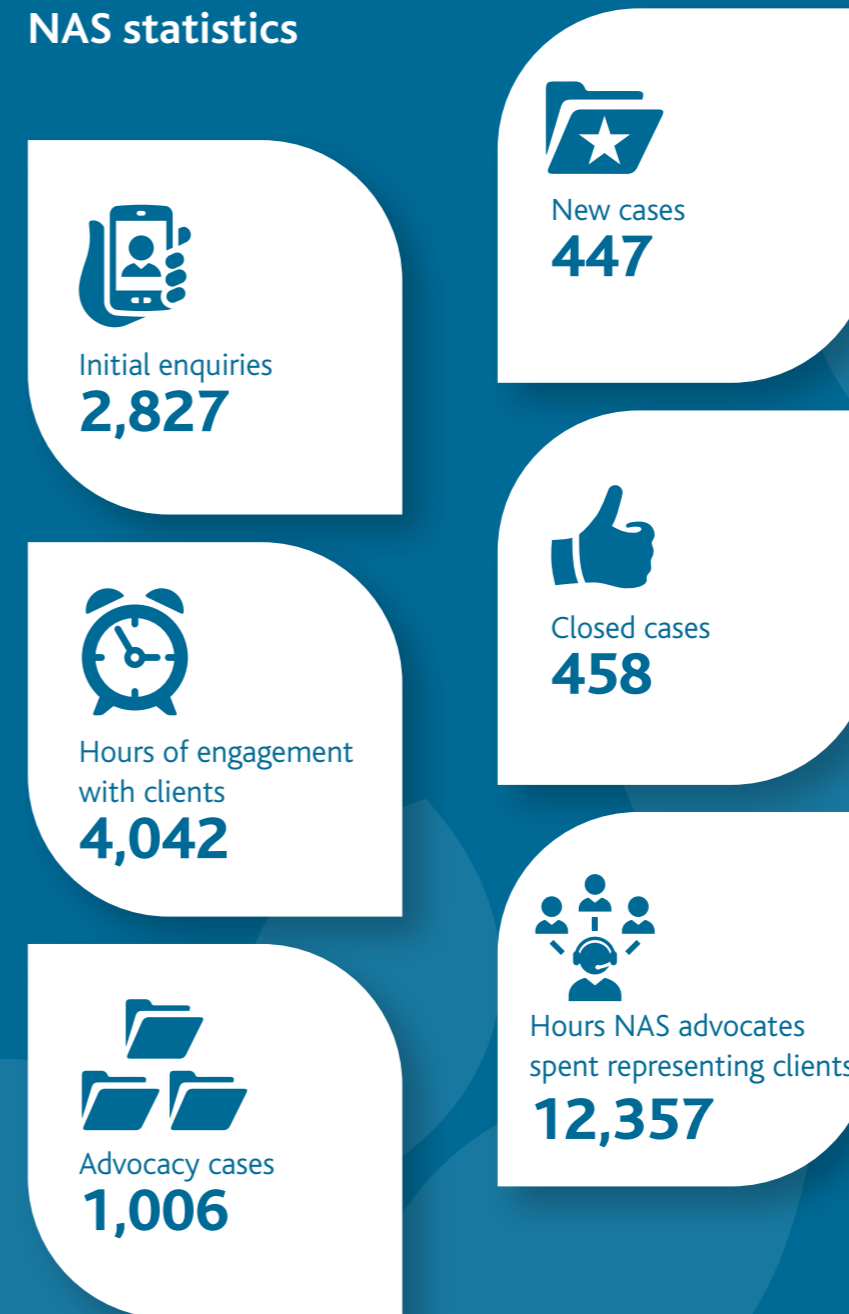
NAS provides a free and confidential advocacy service to adults with a disability, particularly those in vulnerable situations, isolated from their communities, who communicate differently or have limited formal or natural supports.

NAS works in partnership with clients and empowers them to make decisions about their lives. The advocates work to ensure clients are listened to and consulted by their families and service providers. They help clients access supports to live their lives and enjoy meaningful participation in family, work and leisure.

### Staffing and funding

In 2021 NAS employed 48 people nationwide. NAS received an overall grant allocation of €2,184,928.

## NAS statistics



## Reports

In 2021, NAS published four reports in conjunction with the Patient Advocacy Service (PAS). Each report focuses on NAS & PAS work, outlining the support provided and the positive outcomes this advocacy support helped to achieve. They show the key role that advocacy services play in supporting people who may be vulnerable in Irish society, particularly during periods of crisis.

1. Advocacy Matters: Advocating for people with disabilities in residential & day services during the COVID-19 pandemic
2. Advocacy Matters: Advocating for people regarding 'Access to Justice' and 'Decision Making' during the COVID-19 pandemic
3. Advocacy Matters: Advocating for people regarding health and social care during the COVID-19 pandemic
4. Advocacy Matters: Advocating for people living in nursing homes during the COVID-19 pandemic

NAS attended and took part in Oireachtas Committee meetings in October and December on Disability Matters that focused on "Aligning Disability Services with the United Nations Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)" and the theme of future service design for people with disabilities.

The NAS and the PAS hosted a webinar in December to launch two of the "Advocacy Matters" reports. The two reports launched covered the areas of Residential and Day Services and Access to Justice and Decision-Making during COVID-19.

## Social policy, submissions and raising awareness

During 2021, NAS contributed to:

- A reference group to the Department of Health Nursing Home COVID-19 Expert Report Implementation Group. This group is now collaborating with the Implementation Oversight team and makes a contribution to the implementation of the recommendations
- The Health Service Executive (HSE) National Disability Consultative Forum
- The Safeguarding Ireland Committee
- The Department of Social Protection (DSP) Disability Consultative Forum
- The Irish Criminal and Justice Disability Network (ICJDN)

## 2.2 Sign Language Interpreting Service (SLIS)

SLIS supports high-quality ISL interpretation services to ensure Deaf people can access public and social services and take part in Irish society as full and equal citizens.

SLIS provides the Irish Remote Interpreting Service (IRIS) through a video link to help support Deaf people to access information, entitlements and rights.

### Staffing and funding

In 2021, SLIS employed 18 staff members. The CIB budget allocation for SLIS was €748,155.

## SLIS statistics



**849**

referral requests, including an emergency referral service



**6,604**

IRIS remote interpreting appointments



**9,507**

IRIS mainstream appointments



**460**

access support service requests



**2,903**

remote interpreting app appointments  
(November 2020 to June 2021)



**1,732**

GP and Primary Care-access scheme requests

## SLIS access support services

SLIS operated the following services in 2021:

- A 24/7 emergency service to arrange for sign language interpreters in crisis situations
- A referral service linking service providers and Deaf people with interpreters
- A service to enable access to a doctor (GP) and HSE Primary Care service
- IRIS increased its capacity to provide evening, Saturday and Sunday appointments and offered on-demand access to ISL interpreting through the app pilot scheme
- A support and access service to help service providers reduce barriers and become more accessible
- A Social Interpreting Fund to cover interpreting costs for funerals and hardship cases

## 2.3 Register of Sign Language Interpreters (RISLI)

One of the objectives of the National Disability Inclusion Strategy (2017-2021) was the establishment of a register and quality assurance scheme for sign language interpreters.

RISLI aims to:

- Establish and maintain a standards-based registration system for ISL Interpreters to ensure protection primarily for the Deaf community and service providers
- Set the standards for the provision of ISL interpreting that all public bodies require
- Support public bodies through access to a public register of interpreters
- Support professional ISL interpreters to meet and maintain standards
- Promote social inclusion of ISL users by supporting the use of registered interpreters including access to public bodies

# 3

## Access to information and support on debt and money management

## Chapter 3:

### Access to information and support on debt and money management

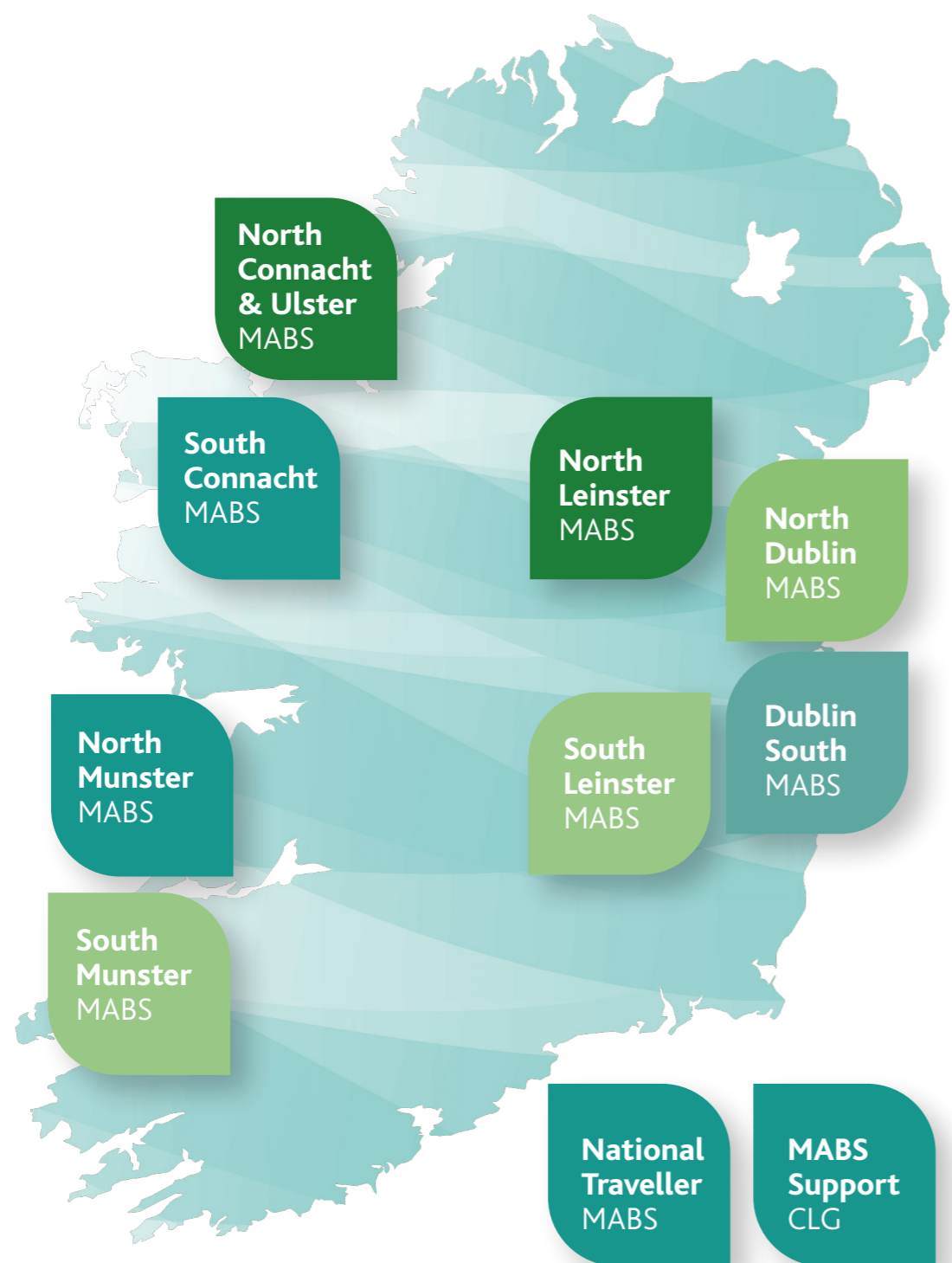
#### Our mandate

To support the provision of advice on personal debt and money management through the Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS).



The companies MABS operates from (with over 50 offices nationwide) provide free, confidential, non-judgemental and independent advice on debt and money management throughout Ireland. MABS also has a remit to address financial exclusion through education and money management. This year, MABS saw 13,317 new clients.

CIB funds and supports 10 companies in the MABS network, eight of which are regional companies. MABS received an overall grant allocation of €16,485,398.



### 3.1 Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) Service Delivery team

The MABS Service Delivery team is responsible for providing resources, support and oversight to all of the MABS companies.

Each MABS company has a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with CIB which outlines its organisational purpose and the services that are expected in order to meet funding requirements. The role of the team is to ensure compliance with the SLAs and financial controls and to work with the companies on various projects. The MABS team works with the companies to support organisational change via nationally agreed processes such as the MABS Staffing Strategy.

In 2021, the MABS team supported the development of the e-signing and virtual client consultations in MABS. The team organised webinars to support the development of MABS staff. These covered topics such as Insolvency, the Irish banking system, and the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects on people experiencing debt.

MABS met with clients remotely, with only essential meetings taking place face to face under COVID-19 protocols.

#### MABS projects

##### MABS Quality Assurance Framework

The development and implementation of a new nationally agreed MABS Quality Assurance Framework is a strategic objective for CIB. Several meetings were held in 2021 with contributors invited from Advice Northern Ireland and Money Advice and Pensions Service (UK) to highlight quality assurance approaches and systems in other countries. CIB tendered for a consultant to guide the development of a Quality Assurance Framework in MABS.

##### MABS.ie

Redesigned in 2021, this updated website improves the online client journey, based on feedback from mabs.ie visitors and the MABS network. This project reviewed all existing site content to ensure its accuracy and relevance.

The project team worked with the OGCIO (Office of the Government Chief Information Officer). A UX (User Experience) specialist was engaged to help improve the layout of the new website so it better meets the needs of mabs.ie visitors, ensuring they can find what they need in the most intuitive way possible.



### Debt Relief Notices (DRN)

All eight MABS regional companies are registered with the Insolvency Service of Ireland (ISI) to deliver DRNs. A DRN is designed for people with low disposable income or assets. It allows people who cannot afford to pay their personal debts to write off qualifying debt up to €35,000 subject to a three year supervision period. 184 DRNs were approved by the ISI in 2021.

### 3.2 MABS Helpline

The MABS Helpline is a national helpline operated by North Dublin MABS. Two significant changes were implemented: the adoption of a new case management system and a change to a new 0818 number. There were 23,502 MABS Helpline enquiries in 2021. The helpline service referred 1,170 people to different MABS companies nationwide. There were 1,473 queries to the online chat service through the new MABS WhatsApp number.

### 3.3 MABS Support

MABS Support is a separate company that provides high-quality training, money management education resources, policy and technical support to the network of eight regional MABS companies. The team works to ensure that MABS has a consistent approach to service delivery by developing quality standards, processes and procedures. They coordinate policy submissions on behalf of MABS to highlight the impact of policy proposals and changes on people who are financially excluded in Ireland.

"I couldn't have gone through this process without MABS. I have always found the service very helpful and informative. I couldn't have coped with the situation I was in without MABS."

MABS client

### MABS Support training

The MABS Support Learning and Development team worked closely with the CIB eLearning unit to develop new courses and contributed to courses being developed that were applicable to MABS staff.

475 staff members accessed MABS eLearning courses in 2021. New induction training and management development training was also provided.

### MABS policy submissions

Policy submissions were prepared by MABS Support in consultation with the MABS regional companies and CIB. All 2021 submissions are available on the website [mabs.ie](http://mabs.ie) and they include:

- Submission to the Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU) (January)
- Submission to the Review of the Standard Financial Statement– Central Bank of Ireland (April)
- Submission to the Consumer Protection (Regulation of Retail Credit Firms) Bill (March)
- Submission to the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage on the Mortgage to Rent Scheme (June)
- Submission to the Insolvency Service of Ireland (ISI) Review of Reasonable Living Expenses - Public Consultation (August)
- Submission on Pre-Legislative Scrutiny of the General Scheme of the Consumer Credit (Amendment) Bill (September)

### MABS presentations

In June, representatives from MABS Support were invited to present to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform, and Taoiseach as part of a detailed scrutiny of the Consumer Credit (Amendment) Bill 2018.

In October, MABS Support delegates presented to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) Technical Mission to discuss insolvency and debt restructuring. This was part of the periodic Financial Sector Assessment Programme (FSAP) of the Irish financial system.

### 3.4 National Traveller Money Advice and Budgeting Services (NTMABS)

NTMABS works to reduce poverty, discrimination and the financial exclusion of Travellers in Ireland. They work with the Traveller community and organisations to change policies and practices that impact Travellers financially.

In 2021, NTMABS continued to produce resources to enhance financial inclusion and awareness among the Traveller community. Social media was used to promote and share information on specific topics. Resources produced included a series of Money Matters videos in conjunction with West Limerick Primary Health Care covering a range of topics from budgeting to borrowing.

#### 3.4.1 NTMABS projects

##### The Pilot Caravan Loan Scheme (CLS)

NTMABS are represented in a group established by the Traveller Housing Unit in the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, to oversee the CLS. NTMABS contributed to accessible repayment mechanisms and provided feedback and information on the consequences of repayment default and other issues of concern for those hoping to avail of the scheme. NTMABS organised training with MABS staff to prepare them for the rollout of the CLS. The scheme began on 12 July 2021 with four county councils offering loans including Cork City, Dublin City, Limerick and South Dublin County.

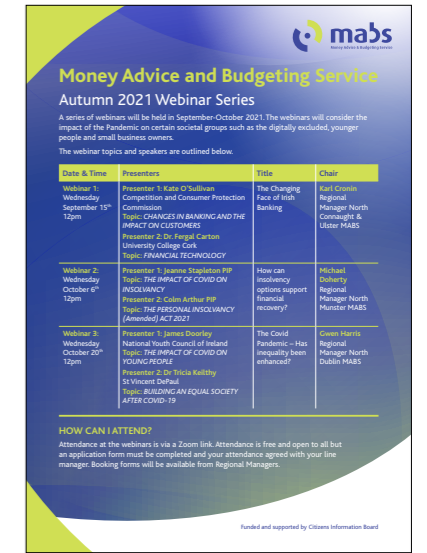
##### Energy poverty

NTMABS worked with a number of local authorities to address energy poverty in Traveller accommodation. NTMABS partnered with the Institute of Technology Sligo to research energy and mobile homes, for the purpose of informing a framework for more energy efficient and affordable accommodation for Travellers.

### NTMABS policy submissions

NTMABS contributed to the following policy submissions:

- SOLAS Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy 10 year Strategy for Ireland (January)
- Consultation process on the Regulation of Solid Fuels (March)
- Mental Health Act Review (April)
- Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI) Review (April)
- Higher Education Authority and Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science for the National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2022 -2026 (June)
- Quality Framework for Mental Health Services in Ireland (June)
- Consultation on the Review of the Equality Acts (June)



Abhaile provides a one-stop-shop to a range of financial and legal advice and supports. Financial advice is provided by MABS Dedicated Mortgage Arrears (DMA) advisers or Personal Insolvency Practitioners (PIP). Legal support is available from duty solicitors and MABS court mentors at circuit court possession hearings. Legal advice is available from a consultation solicitor service, and through Personal Insolvency Arrangement (PIA) reviews, also known as Section 115A reviews under the Personal Insolvency (Amendment) Act 2015.

The Department of Social Protection (DSP) and the Department of Justice jointly coordinate and fund the services of Abhaile. CIB administers the funding and scheme governance and has responsibility for the national communications of Abhaile. MABS, the ISI, the Legal Aid Board and CIB work together to implement the services of Abhaile.

Abhaile has been extended until the end of December 2022. The decision to extend the scheme reflects the continued high level of long-term mortgage arrears and the success of Abhaile in helping to reduce this.

### Abhaile communications

The primary aim of Abhaile communications is to raise awareness of Abhaile and encourage homeowners to contact MABS as the gateway to the supports available. MABS encourages and supports homeowners who have not engaged with their lender to do so. If they cannot do this, then they are encouraged to engage with Abhaile and the range of services available through the scheme.

In 2021, the Abhaile communications team worked to maintain awareness of Abhaile during the public health restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic, strategically increasing activity as restrictions eased. The services of Abhaile were available to those who needed them throughout the various public health restrictive measures. Therefore, it was important that communications remained agile in response to the changes.

The MABS website is an integral part of the overall Abhaile communications strategy. It provides those in need of support with more information on the services available.

## Abhaile statistics



**19,300**

households received financial advice\*



**28,356**

borrowers supported by Abhaile in court\*



**10,373**

borrowers in late stage mortgage arrears received advice\*



**1,786**

MABS Helpline callers who asked to speak with an Abhaile representative

\*Cumulative since the scheme commenced

# 4

## Social Policy and Research

## Chapter 4:

### Social Policy and Research

#### Our mandate

To support, promote and develop the provision of information on the effectiveness of current social policy and services, and to highlight issues that are of concern to users of those services.



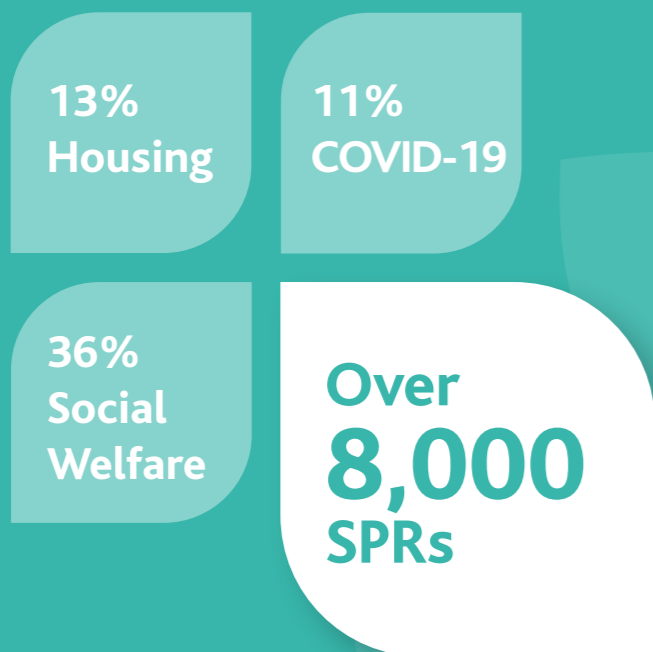
One of CIB's key roles is to support, promote and develop information on the effectiveness of social policy and social service provisions. The Social Policy and Research team gathers and analyses information and data to help determine what is working well for the public and where changes are needed so that social services are more responsive and easier to access.

#### 4.1 Social Policy Returns (SPRs)

In order to identify relevant social policy issues and themes the Social Policy team has a process in place where staff in the Citizens Information Services (CIS) can submit a SPR to CIB. They do this when a client is experiencing a particular difficulty in accessing social or public services. The SPRs often indicate a broader problem with a policy, practice or piece of legislation.

The data, evidence and insights these frontline services provide can show the impact of government spending, policy and policy administration. The Social Policy team uses this information to inform their submissions to highlight recurring issues so that policy and public services can be improved.

## Social Policy Returns (SPRs) to CIB



"I would strongly recommend it to a friend, everyone's problems are different, but MABS welcomes everyone."  
MABS client

## 4.2 Social Policy submissions

In 2021, the team responded to 20 public consultations. Topics ranged from sustainable State Pensions, Child Maintenance, the National Minimum Wage, to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCPRD) State report, the Housing for All Strategy, and a review of the Equality Legislation.

Submissions available to view on this website:  
[citizensinformationboard.ie/en/publications/submissions/](https://citizensinformationboard.ie/en/publications/submissions/)



A key submission was the CIB pre-budget submission, Addressing Citizens' Concerns on Adequacy of Income, Debt and Money Advice. This focused on the concerns of individuals and families experiencing particular pressures and 'pinch' points as raised by citizens in their queries to and contact with CIB delivery services. These related to housing, income inadequacy, moving from welfare to work, and gaps in services, including health services.

CIB's post-budget analysis, Budget 2022 Outcomes, demonstrated that many of the concerns that were raised by services in their regular feedback featured in the Government's budgetary provisions for 2022 and are indicative of the continuing relevance of the work of these services.



“There remains a large cohort with neither medical card nor health insurance. The Citizens Information Board (CIB) which is a good barometer for what is worrying the public has pointed to location being a factor affecting access to GP services for medical card applicants....It also said the income threshold for the means test for a medical card should be eased because it excluded many households on modest incomes.”

Eilish O'Regan, Irish Independent, 5/02/2022.

### 4.3 Data Hub

CIB's new Data Hub was developed in 2021. It provides quick and easy access to data on callers and queries to the national network of CISs. The Data Hub profiles a wide range of statistical information on the concerns that services are assisting the public with, across all aspects of rights and entitlements. The focus is on headline trends:

- Who uses CIS?
- What information and advice are they looking for?
- Which query categories are most prevalent and what trends are emerging?

Top queries across key categories include social welfare, housing, employment rights, health and COVID-19 related issues.

Access the Data Hub at:

[citizensinformationboard.ie/en/data-hub/](https://citizensinformationboard.ie/en/data-hub/)



Left to Right: Fiona Coyne, CIB CEO, Minister Heather Humphreys T.D., Catherine Heaney, Board Chair

# 5

## Access to information

## Chapter 5:

### Access to information

#### Our mandate

To ensure that individuals have access to accurate, comprehensive and clear information relating to social services.



#### 5.1 Citizensinformation.ie

CIB's information website, [citizensinformation.ie](http://citizensinformation.ie), provides public service information for Ireland. The website gathers information from Government departments and agencies to make sure users have the information they need, presented in an easy-to-understand way. The public uses this website to find out about their rights and entitlements and it is the main information source for information providers in Citizens Information Services (CIS) and Citizens Information Phone Service (CIPS).

#### Traffic to [citizensinformation.ie](http://citizensinformation.ie)

In 2021, this website saw 13,215,951 users, with almost 12 million users from a Google search and approximately 45.5 million page views.

The final three months of the year were exceptionally busy across the website with the release of the Government's Budget 2022, changes to COVID-19 restrictions and the introduction of COVID-19 booster vaccines.

### The five most visited webpages:

1.  Travelling to Ireland during COVID-19 over **2 million** page views

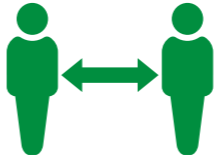
2.  COVID-19 restrictions in Ireland **1.5 million** page views

3.  EU Digital COVID Certificate **833,832** page views

4.  Public health measures for COVID-19 **701,416** page views

5.  Returning to Ireland and COVID-19 **603,648** page views

### Most viewed categories by % of page views:

 COVID-19 **23%**

 Social Welfare **22%**

 Travel **14%**

 Employment **11%**

"I just want to compliment you on the simplicity and clarity of your website... I wanted to find out some information on renting a property and the explanation was in clear English and, given the complexity of the subject, was easy to understand."

Member of the public

### 5.1.1 Accessible information

In late 2020, the Digital Content team began working closely with the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) on a training and mentoring project providing practical and interactive training sessions. Many pages in each category have been rewritten this year following Plain English guidelines, as well as incorporating feedback from CIPS and CICs to make content more user focused and accessible. This resulted in greater clarity across citizensinformation.ie.

### 5.1.2 Social media

The COVID-19 pandemic continued to dominate social media output in 2021. Content on changes to COVID-19 restrictions were regularly posted. Eight monthly mini-campaigns covering different topics or targeting a specific audience were also created and shared:

Month	Campaign topic	No. of posts	Impressions	Engagement
February	Employment rights	41	189,958	5,844
March	Marriage	38	46,378	865
April	Consumer	28	37,542	909
May/June	Information for school leavers	20	47,619	801
June	Older people and carers	36	85,590	2,106
July/August	School's out	32	64,135	1,237
September	Student life	32	46,483	892
November	Pensions	43	58,535	1,256

The most popular social media post of 2021 was on the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance.

**Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance**

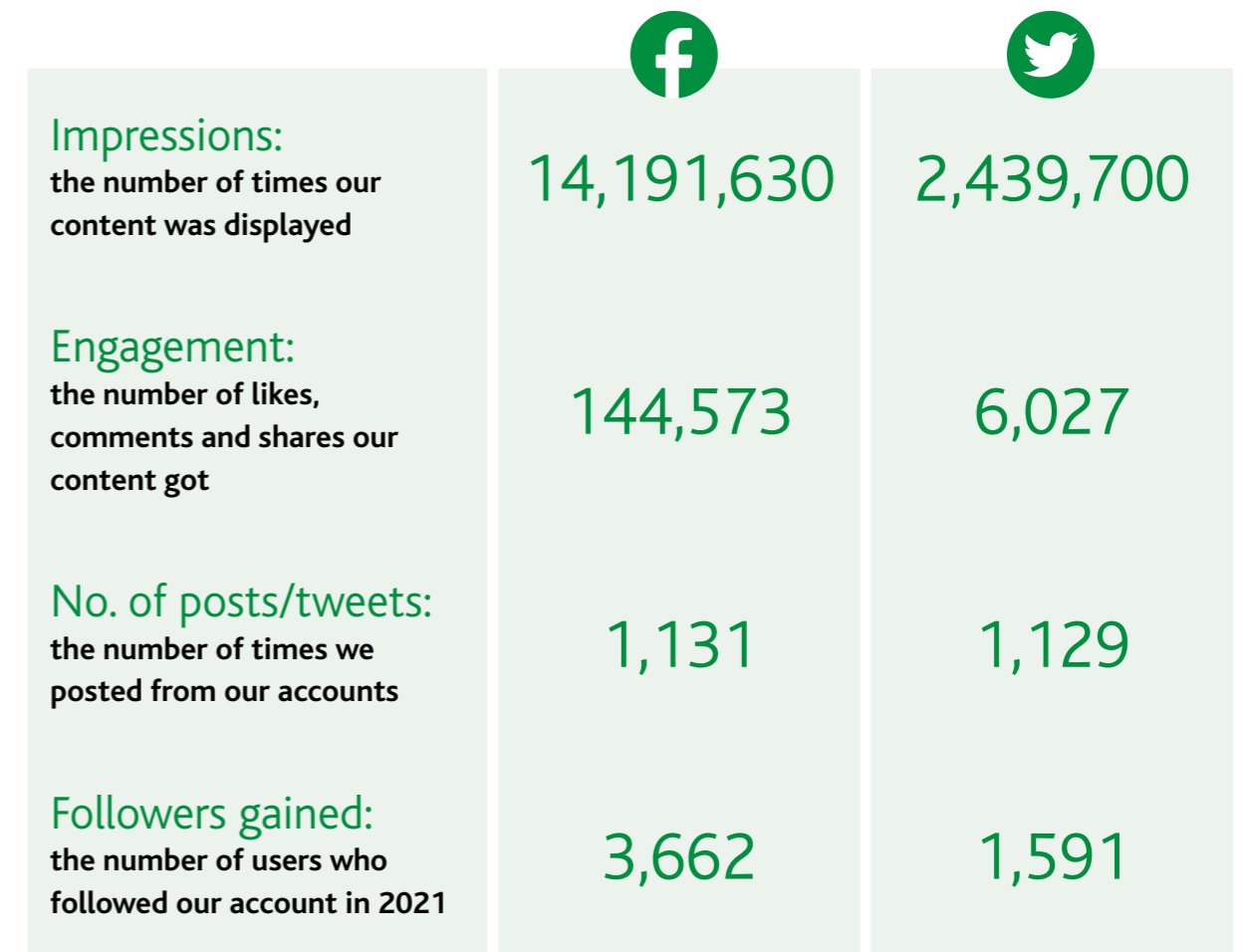
Rate for each child aged 4–11 years on 30 September 2021.	150.00 (once-off payment)
Rate for each child aged 12–17 years on 30 September 2021. It is also paid to qualified children aged 18–22 in second-level education.	275.00 (once-off payment)

**Weekly income thresholds**

Number of dependent children	Couple	One-parent family
1 child	608.70	443.30
2 children	653.70	488.30
3 children	698.70	533.30
4 children	743.70	578.30
Each additional child	45.00	45.00

Source: Citizens Information Twitter account.

In 2021, processes and guidelines were created to standardise the new way CIB used social media in response to the pandemic. The team used social media creatively, designing graphics and videos for campaigns, as well as developing Know Your Rights articles for Facebook.





### Social media promotional campaigns

CIB ran a number of paid promotional campaigns promoting Citizens Information's three channels and changes to phone numbers.

Other aspects of the organisations' work were promoted through campaigns advertising publications, website statistics, Irish Sign Language week and the CIB annual report.



Source: Citizens Information Twitter account.

### 5.1.3 Returning to Ireland portal

The Returning to Ireland portal on citizensinformation.ie, supported by the Department of Foreign Affairs, allows Irish emigrants planning to return to Ireland to find the information they need in one place. This portal currently holds 26 stand-alone dedicated webpages. The portal saw an increase in users to 558,002 (+5% increase on 2020). These users viewed 913,054 web pages. Visits to the dedicated portal pages accounted for 2% of the total page views on the website in 2021 (45.5 million).

The most popular pages in the portal were Returning to Ireland and COVID-19 followed by the portal home page and Bringing your non-EEA spouse or non-EEA civil partner home to Ireland.

### 5.1.4 Key changes on citizensinformation.ie

#### Social Welfare category

Social Welfare was the busiest category on the website with over 10 million page views. The most viewed pages have page views between 100,000 to 500,000 each. The COVID-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP) was the most popular page with over 500,000 page views.

Key changes: The Budget impacts the whole category both at the beginning and end of the year resulting in updates to most pages. There were also Budget and COVID-19 updates throughout the year.

#### COVID-19 category

COVID-19 specific content had over 10.2 million page views. In January alone, a quarter of the 4.2 million website page views were to COVID-19 specific pages.

In May, COVID-19 specific content had approximately one million views. Seven pages on the website carrying advice on COVID-19 restrictions and travel measures recorded 1.1 million of the 4.2 million page views recorded in July (the highest monthly total in 2021).

Key updates: Vaccine programme roll out, easing of restrictions for fully vaccinated people, and travel measures.

#### Travel and Recreation category

Travel and Recreation was the second busiest category with over six million page views. Travelling to Ireland during COVID-19 was the most popular page with over two million page views. The EU Digital COVID Certificate (DCC) had nearly 830,000 page views. The Mandatory Hotel Quarantine page received over 420,000 page views.

Key updates: Changes to hotel quarantine rules, changes to countries listed as non-designated countries, changes to testing requirements for people arriving into Ireland, changes to rules for having a valid DCC, processing of passports, extensions to driving licences, NCT and changes to driving tests.

### Health category

Health was the fourth busiest category on the website with over three million page views. The most popular pages in Health were COVID-19 related. Public health measures was the most popular webpage with over 700,000 page views.

Other popular pages were Testing for COVID-19 (357,000 page views), Vaccines for COVID-19 (335,000 page views), Restricted movement and self-isolation for COVID-19 (243,000 page views) and Close contacts and contact tracing (189,000 page views). Medical card was the fifth most popular page with 194,000 page views.

Key updates: Changes to COVID-19 restrictions and laws, changes to testing and isolation rules, vaccine programme updates, Emergency Medical Card for people who are terminally ill, legislative changes to the Fair Deal scheme and changes to the Drug Payment Scheme.

### Housing category

Housing was the sixth busiest category on the website, with nearly three million page views. The most popular pages in the category were the Housing Assistance Payment (245,862 page views) and Applying for social housing (188,629 page views).

Key updates: Renting documents were regularly updated as new residential tenancies legislation brought in a range of COVID-19 protections to protect tenants as well as general protections to try to prevent rising rents. New documents such as Mica redress scheme and Rights of way were added.

### Money and Tax category

Local Property Tax was the second most viewed page in the Money and Tax category with an annual increase in page views of 55%.

Key updates: New and updated content was published to the Local Property Tax subcategory before the introduction of changes to the tax.



# 6

## Citizens Information Services

# Chapter 6:

## Citizens Information Services

Our mandate

To promote greater accessibility, coordination and public awareness of social services.



The CIS Service Delivery team is responsible for providing resources, support and oversight to all of the CIS companies.

Each CIS company has a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with CIB outlining organisational purpose and service levels expected to meet funding requirements. The role of the team is to ensure compliance with the SLA and financial controls and to work with the companies on various projects.

The Citizens Information Service Delivery team in CIB monitor and support:

- Citizens Information Phone Service (CIPS)
- Eight regional Citizens Information Services (CIS)

### 6.1 Citizens Information Phone Service (CIPS)

CIPS provides a comprehensive and confidential telephone information service to the public. The call centre is based in Cork.

#### Staffing and funding

CIPS currently employs 32 people, and received an overall grant allocation of €1,201,552 in 2021.

CIPS contributes to other aspects of CIB's remit through:

- Social Policy Returns (SPRs)
- An accessible webchat service designed to meet the needs of those who experience barriers to communication by telephone
- The Peer Support Service, which is a direct link between CIPS and CICs nationwide. The service aims to offer local CICs access to a team of Information Officers who are available to provide query support and consultation
- Responding to social media queries
- Supporting the Request a Call Back Service provided by CIS in 2021
- Carrying out continuous call quality monitoring

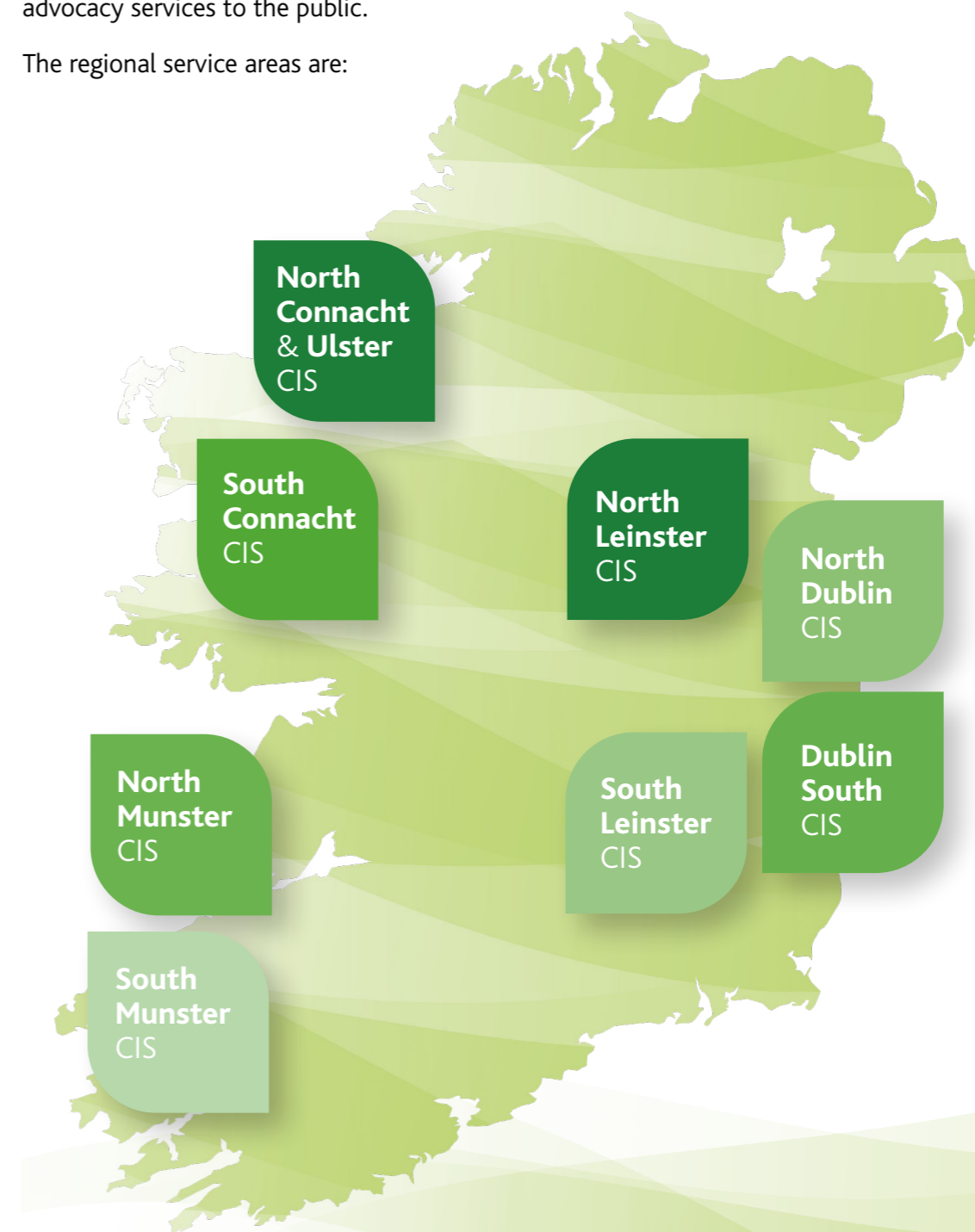
## 6.2 CIPS statistics



## 6.3 Citizens Information Services (CIS)

The national network of Citizens Information Centres (CICs), overseen by eight regional Citizens Information Services (CIS), provide free, impartial and confidential information, advice and advocacy services to the public.

The regional service areas are:



### Staffing and funding

At the end of 2021, there were over 200 employees in the CIS network.

CIS companies received an overall grant allocation of €14,577,355 in 2021.

CIS Regional Managers are responsible for overseeing the delivery of a regional work plan, optimising available resources and driving a consistent approach to service delivery within their geographical area.

Regional boards of management hold responsibility for the management and governance of these companies, with CIB providing a range of oversight and support.

### 6.4 CIS statistics

Callers to the CIS: 338,167

The breakdown of callers to CIS is as follows:

- 6% email or letter
- 11% in person callers to services
- 11% were facilitated through the Request a Call Back service (established during COVID-19)
- 72% direct phone calls

Social Policy Returns: 6,936

#### Advocacy cases handled by CISs:

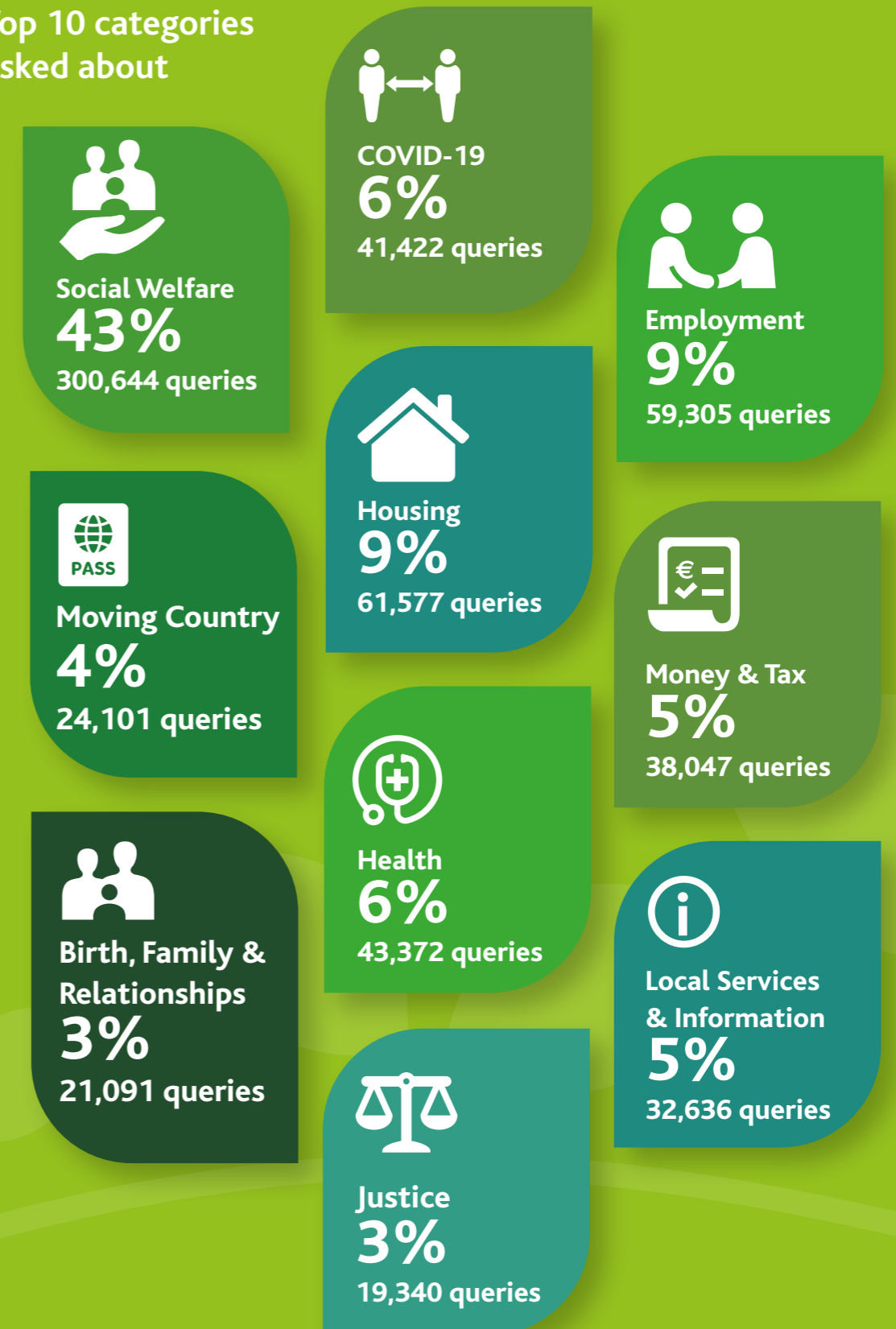
##### Short-term advocacy:

There were 1,094 cases.

##### Long-term advocacy:

Of the 2,058 individual advocacy cases dealt with by services, 814 cases were already open at the start of 2021. In total, there were 1,244 new cases (41% increase) and 1,254 cases were closed in 2021.

### Top 10 categories asked about





## Top 10 payments, schemes and entitlements that were asked about:



## COVID-19 and the CIS response in 2021

The CIS continued to deliver information and advice to the public throughout the pandemic. The service was delivered predominately through phone and email with appointments offered where health and safety measures allowed for socially distanced meetings.

The Request a Call Back service, established in 2020 in response to the pandemic, continued throughout 2021. The public completed a web form to receive a follow-up call from an Information Officer. The service was widely advertised and worked well to provide citizens with an alternative to in person services. It assisted 36,844 callers and ended on 19 November 2021 to allow for staff to focus on the return to in person services.

A CIS Service Delivery Advisory Group was established to ensure a consistent approach to re-opening CIS offices to the public. Initially, this was on an appointments only basis. It then expanded to reception and drop-in services when the lifting of COVID-19 health and safety measures allowed for safe engagement with the public.

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## Appendix 1: Customer Service Charter

CIB provides independent information, advice and advocacy on public and social services through [citizensinformation.ie](http://citizensinformation.ie), the Citizens Information Phone Service (0818 074 000) and the network of Citizens Information Services. We are responsible for the Money Advice and Budgeting Service and provide the National Advocacy Service for People with Disabilities.

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 on our website, [citizensinformationboard.ie](http://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)

**Appendix 2: Board members**

The Board members of CIB in 2021 were:

- Ms Teresa Blake
- Mr James Clarke (Board membership ended 25 September 2021)
- Ms Mary Doyle
- Mr Tim Duggan
- Ms Catherine Heaney (Chair)
- Ms Mary Higgins
- Ms Tina Leonard
- Dr Joanne McCarthy (Board membership ended 31 October 2021)
- Mr Niall Mulligan (Board membership ended 14 June 2021)
- Ms Joan O'Connor
- Mr Cearbhall O'Meadhra
- Mr Ian Power
- Mr John Saunders
- Mr Seán Sheridan
- Ms Nicola Walshe

You can find a list of current Board members on the CIB website, [citizensinformationboard.ie](http://citizensinformationboard.ie)

### Appendix 3: Energy use

By law, under S.I. 542 of 2009, public sector organisations are required to report annually on their energy usage and the actions they propose to take to reduce consumption.

Heating, lighting and ICT account for the main energy usage in CIB. Statistics from Sustainable Energy Association of Ireland (SEAI) reports CIB consumption as follows:

- Energy consumption 41% better than baseline, exceeding 33% target requirement
- CO<sub>2</sub> 48% less than baseline

In 2021, CIB activated our SEAI Interim Partnership Agreement.

CIB plans to further its energy reduction programme in 2022 by:

- Enhanced M&R Reporting to include
  - Travel statistics
  - Building register
- SEAI energy audits and energy reduction project planning
- Gap to target plan
- Green Team training and activation

### Appendix 4: Protected Disclosures Act

CIB is committed to fostering an appropriate environment for addressing concerns relating to potential irregularities or wrongdoing, with respect to financial reporting and other matters in the workplace. CIB is committed to providing the necessary support and assurances for staff who raise genuine concerns.

The Protected Disclosures Act 2014 requires public bodies to set up and maintain procedures for dealing with protected disclosures. CIB has robust procedures in place in line with the provisions of the Act.

CIB did not receive any submissions under the Protected Disclosures Act in 2021.

## Appendix 5: Funding provided to service delivery companies

Services	Total €	Total €
Citizens Information Services	2021	2020
Dublin South	€1,789,312	€2,073,868
Dublin North	€1,991,458	€2,343,264
South Leinster	€1,895,327	€1,917,986
North Leinster	€2,281,491	€2,419,694
North Connacht & Ulster	€1,691,547	€2,037,563
South Connacht	€1,372,442	€1,389,260
North Munster	€1,778,463	€1,861,122
South Munster	€1,777,316	€2,051,335
<b>Total</b>	<b>€14,577,355</b>	<b>€16,094,092</b>

Services	Total €	Total €
MABS	2021	2020
MABS ND	€0	€266,582
MABS Support CLG	€962,886	€1,209,076
National Traveller MABS	€268,182	€316,359
Dublin North	€2,178,834	€2,974,509
Dublin South	€2,388,569	€2,900,951
South Leinster	€1,867,250	€2,189,274
North Leinster	€1,654,517	€2,150,677
North Connacht & Ulster	€1,813,623	€1,951,071
South Connacht	€1,577,492	€1,819,385
North Munster	€1,969,496	€2,449,287
South Munster	€1,804,549	€2,046,728
<b>Total</b>	<b>€16,485,398</b>	<b>€20,273,899</b>

National	2021	2020
CIPS	€1,201,552	€1,251,419
SLIS	€748,155	€583,424
NAS	€2,184,928	€3,216,279

Supports	2021	2020
Threshold	€47,000	€47,000
Free Legal Advice (FLAC)	€140,000	€132,031
Treoir	€34,400	€34,400
Immigrant Council of Ireland	€68,000	€68,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>€289,400</b>	<b>€281,431</b>



## Appendix 6: Citizens Information Board main offices

George's Quay House  
43 Townsend Street  
**Dublin 2**  
D02 VK65

1st Floor  
Riverstone House  
23-27 Henry Street  
**Limerick**  
V94 3T28

101 North Main Street  
**Cork**  
T12 AKA6

4th Floor  
Dockgate  
Merchants Road  
**Galway**  
H91 EY10

Unit 2, Third Floor  
Desart House  
New Street  
**Kilkenny**  
R95 WF96



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**Citizens Information Board**

George's Quay House  
43 Townsend Street  
Dublin 2, D02 VK65

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e [info@ciboard.ie](mailto:info@ciboard.ie)  
w [citizensinformationboard.ie](http://citizensinformationboard.ie)

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

