

- EMPLOYMENT LAW
- HOUSING
- SOCIAL WELFARE
- FAMILY MATTERS
- MIGRANT RIGHTS
- HEALTH SERVICES
- EDUCATION
- MANY OTHERS

Free & Confidential Service

Funded by the Department of Social Protection

Citizens Information Service 

MAKING AN IMPACT:

The Public Value of Citizens Information Services in Ireland

Dr Nat O'Connor
Institute for Research in Social Sciences (IRiSS), Ulster University



Information • Advice • Advocacy
A Free and Confidential Service



Acknowledgements

The National Development Managers' Network wishes to thank the following:

The Making an Impact committee, comprising Deirdre Casey (Dublin City Centre CIS), Martina Cronin (Co. Wicklow CIS), Mary Dunne (Dublin North West CIS), Anne McCloskey (Dublin 12 & 6W CIS), Nuala Crowe Taft (Clondalkin CIS), Sean Sheridan (NACIS), GERALYN McGARRY (CIB) and Cora Pollard (CIB).

We gratefully acknowledge the additional funding provided by CIB.

Finally, thanks to Nat O'Connor, Ulster University, for researching and compiling the report.



Citizens Information Service

Find your local Citizens Information Centre:

<http://centres.citizensinformation.ie>

National phone service:

0761 07 4000

Website:

www.citizensinformation.ie



This report was compiled by Dr Nat O'Connor,
Institute for Research in Social Sciences (IRiSS), Ulster University

ISBN 978-0-948141-12-6

© 2017 CIS National Development Managers' Network

Contents

FOREWORD	3
WHO'S WHO	4
INPUTS What Resources Are Available	5
ACTIVITIES What Do Citizens Information Services Do?	7
National Level	8
Local Level	9
OUTPUTS Counting Citizens Information Activity	11
In 2016	11
In the Period 2008–2016	11
Serving Communities all over Ireland	12
OUTCOMES What Citizens Information Services Achieve	14
Public Trust	15
Access to Entitlements	15
Access to Redress	17
Connecting People with Public Services and NGOs	17
Savings to the State	17
Social Inclusion of Communities with Particular Needs	18
Social Inclusion of New Communities and Minorities	18
Research Findings and Social Policy Advocacy	18
Civic Education	19
Developing Citizens' Self-Reliance	19
Promoting Active Citizenship	19
Alleviation of Stress	19
INTERNATIONAL ROLE	20
IMPACT Public Value Creation	21
PUBLIC VALUE INCLUDES...	23
CITIZENS INFORMATION SERVICES' PUBLIC VALUE	24
RESEARCH NOTE	26
CONCLUSION Looking to the Future	27

A D V I C E

Customer Services

Citizens Info

Income supports
Employment rights
Social welfare
Family matters

Free & Confidential Service

Being your job is keeping you

Funded & supported by the Citizens Information Board

I cannot speak highly enough of the support service I received.



FOREWORD

Information services for citizens have come a long way since the first Community Information Centres (CICs) were established 40 years or so ago. The CICs provided a service which was free of charge, voluntary and local but which met standards set nationally. To that original model today's Citizen Information Services (CISs) have added professional management along with advice and advocacy services.

This report looks at the overall public value generated by CISs in Ireland. The headline figures are impressive: over 600,000 people are served by the CISs annually and there are 19 million visits to the citizensinformation.ie website. The CISs operate in over 200 locations covering entitlements in areas such as social welfare, employment, education, health, justice and immigration.

The case studies in this report illustrate the value of face-to-face interaction with citizens seeking information and advice on their entitlements. I am impressed also with the recognition of the need to bridge the digital divide and to cater for people who are unable, or do not wish, to use the internet. With so many of our personal, professional and other interactions increasingly made online, this is a reminder of the vital importance of the human connection, a connection that should be the cornerstone of a citizen's engagement with the State.

As European Ombudsman, I am also pleased to see the National Association of CISs has been involved since 2013 in the EU-funded Triple A (Access to information, Advice and Active help) project which aims to spread a Citizens Information & Advice model to the Western Balkans and Turkey.



Emily O'Reilly
European Ombudsman



WHO'S WHO



The **Citizens Information Services (CIS)*** refer to the confidential drop-in information, advice and advocacy services provided which are free-of-charge, open to all, impartial and non-judgemental. The 42 CISs are independent, local organisations which are registered charities governed by voluntary Boards of Directors. CISs provide face-to-face services in every county in the Republic of Ireland.



The **Citizens Information Board (CIB)** is the national, state-sponsored body that funds local services. The CIB plays an important role in providing supports to local services and delivers some services directly. Citizens Information Services are independent of the Citizens Information Board, but they work closely together.



A **Development Manager**, accountable to a Board of Directors, heads each of the 42 Citizens Information Services. They are all members of the **National Development Managers' Network**, which commissioned this report.



Each CIS runs one or more **Citizens Information Centres (CIC)**, which are the public offices where face-to-face services are available.



In addition, most CISs also provide **Outreach Services**, which are one-off or regular services provided in a variety of settings, such as hospitals, prisons or community centres.



The **National Association of Citizens Information Services (NACIS)** is the representative organisation for all 42 CISs.



The **Citizens Information Phone Service (CIPS)** is an independent organisation, which is also funded and supported by the CIB.

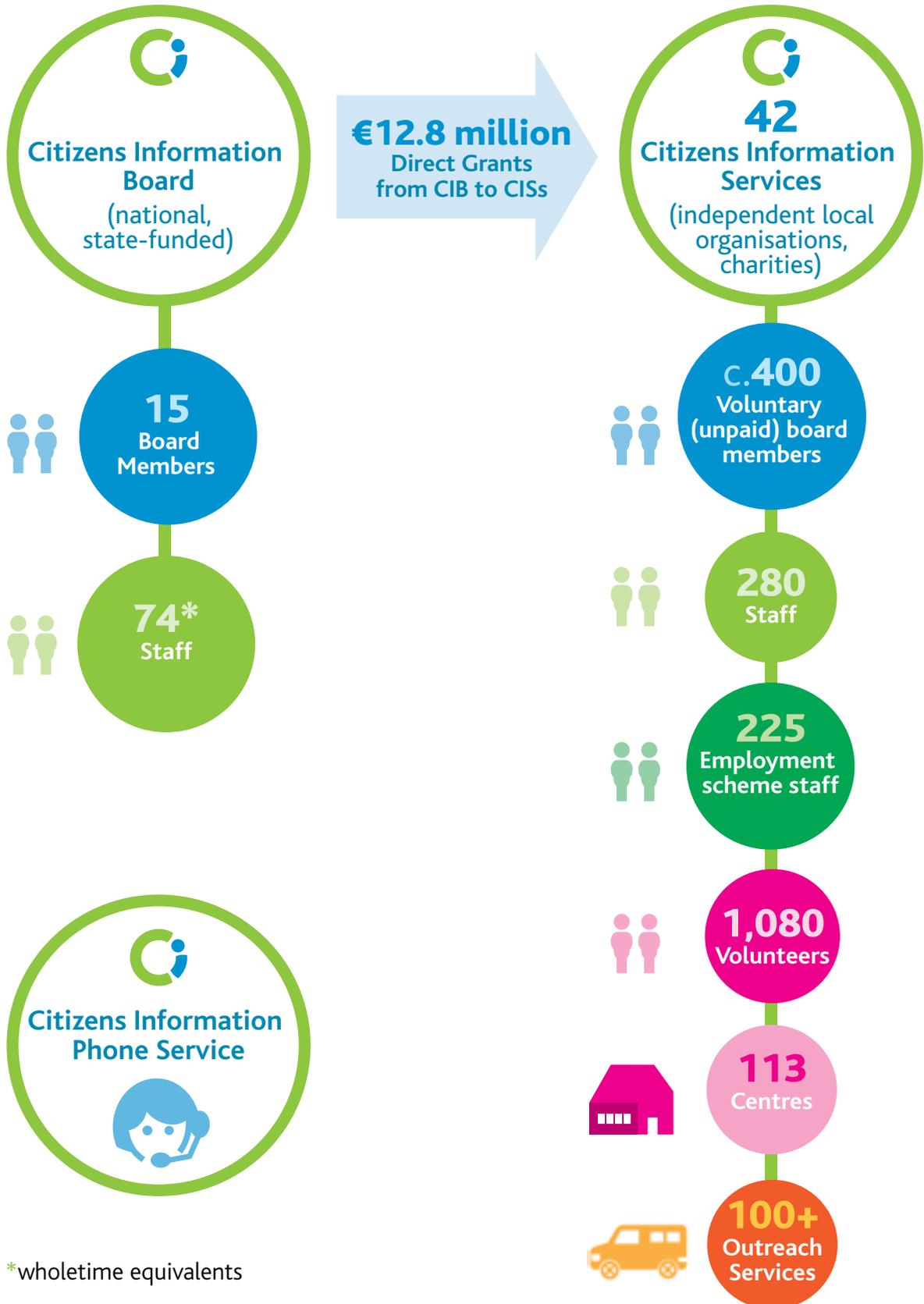


Clients and **Callers** are terms used to describe people availing of Citizens Information Services. They may be Irish citizens or people from other countries living in Ireland.

* Note: Citizens Advice, formerly Citizens Advice Bureaux, is the name used by similar services in the UK, not in the Republic of Ireland.

INPUTS

What Resources Are Available





I found the service excellent. I would have been lost without it.

ACTIVITIES

What Do Citizens Information Services Do?

Citizens Information Services provide **comprehensive information on public services and on the social and civil rights and entitlements of citizens** in Ireland. The services gather and source information from various government departments and agencies, and make sure that people have all the information they need to access their rights or entitlements, presented in an easy-to-understand way.

Citizens Information Services provide **confidential, independent and impartial information to all free of charge**.

Many clients require more than information, and nearly half of them receive **independent, impartial, confidential and non-judgemental advice and assistance**.

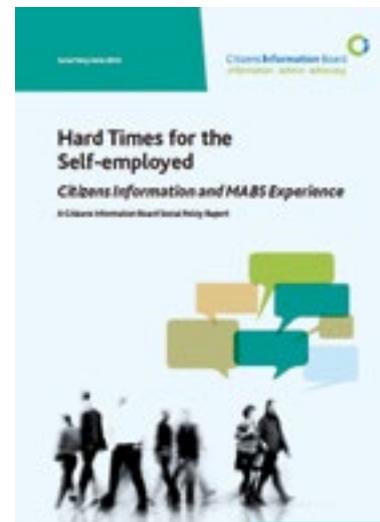
A growing number of clients require in-depth assistance, and Citizens Information Services also plays an important role in **providing advocacy with, or on behalf of, those clients who need it**, including people with disabilities.

Citizens Information Services are innovative and creative, and carry out **a wide range of activities and initiatives to enhance their core mission** of providing information, advice and advocacy, including **outreach** to communities and organisations providing support to people, such as those with disabilities. At a local level, Citizens Information Service initiatives address unmet needs and reach out to some of the most vulnerable and marginalised people in Ireland.



National Level

- **Websites**, provided by the CIB, include citizensinformation.ie – which is a comprehensive and constantly updated source of information about a wide range of public services and entitlements – as well as gettingbacktowork.ie, keepingyourhome.ie and assistireland.ie
- **Citizens Information Phone Service**, which is also available via email, fax, text/SMS, videophone and instant chat (Live Adviser)
- **Training** sessions and training resources
- **Quality control** and standards setting
- **Periodicals and journals**, including *Relate* the monthly journal on legal and public service developments, the quarterly *EU Supplement*, and *Social Policy Updates*
- **Social policy research and reports and advocacy support** at national level



The Citizens Information Board also has responsibility for the following services, which are not included in this report:

- MABS – Money Advice and Budgeting Service
- National Traveller MABS and MABS National Development Ltd
- NAS – National Advocacy Service for People with Disabilities
- SLIS – Sign Language Interpreting Service, including the Irish Remote Interpreting Service



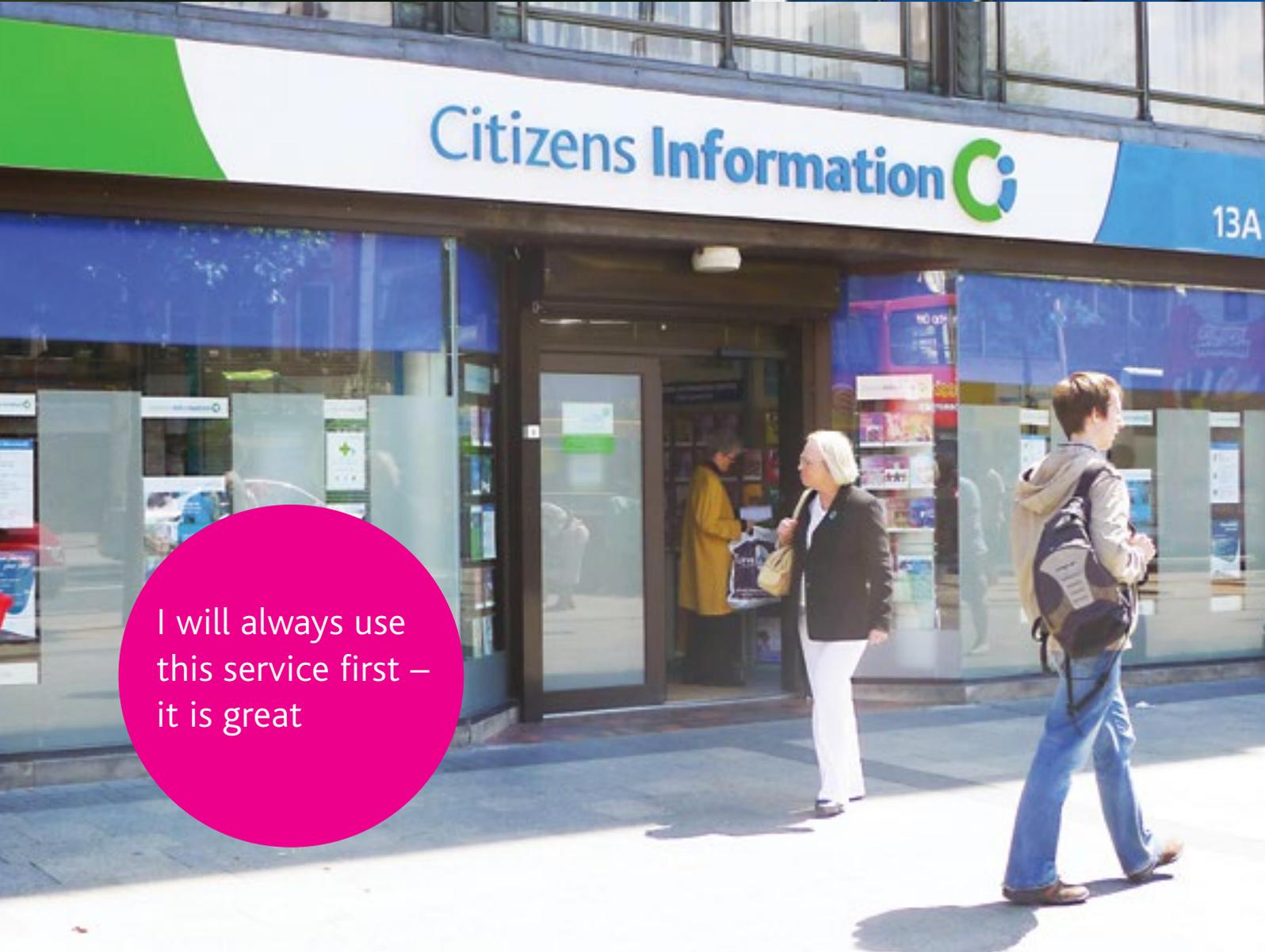
Local Level



- 113 local **Citizens Information Centres**
- Over 100 **Outreach** services
- **Presentations and mobile services**, serving groups with special information needs, family resource centres, hospitals, prisons, hospices, and other community centres, as well as smaller towns, villages and outlying areas.
- **Engagement with disadvantaged groups, minorities and new communities, and provision of advocacy supports**
- **Specialist services**, which typically include: FLAC (Free Legal Advice Centres) which are available in most CISs. Other specialist services may include CAVA (Chartered Accountants Voluntary Advice), Immigration Clinics, Ombudsman, Women's Aid, CASS (Citizenship Application Support Service), translation and interpretation services, Tax clinics, free financial advice, family law, and employment law clinics.
- **Publication of local directories, leaflets and other materials**
- **Educational materials** provided and presented to schools and communities of interest
- **Social policy research and reports** commissioned at regional and local level



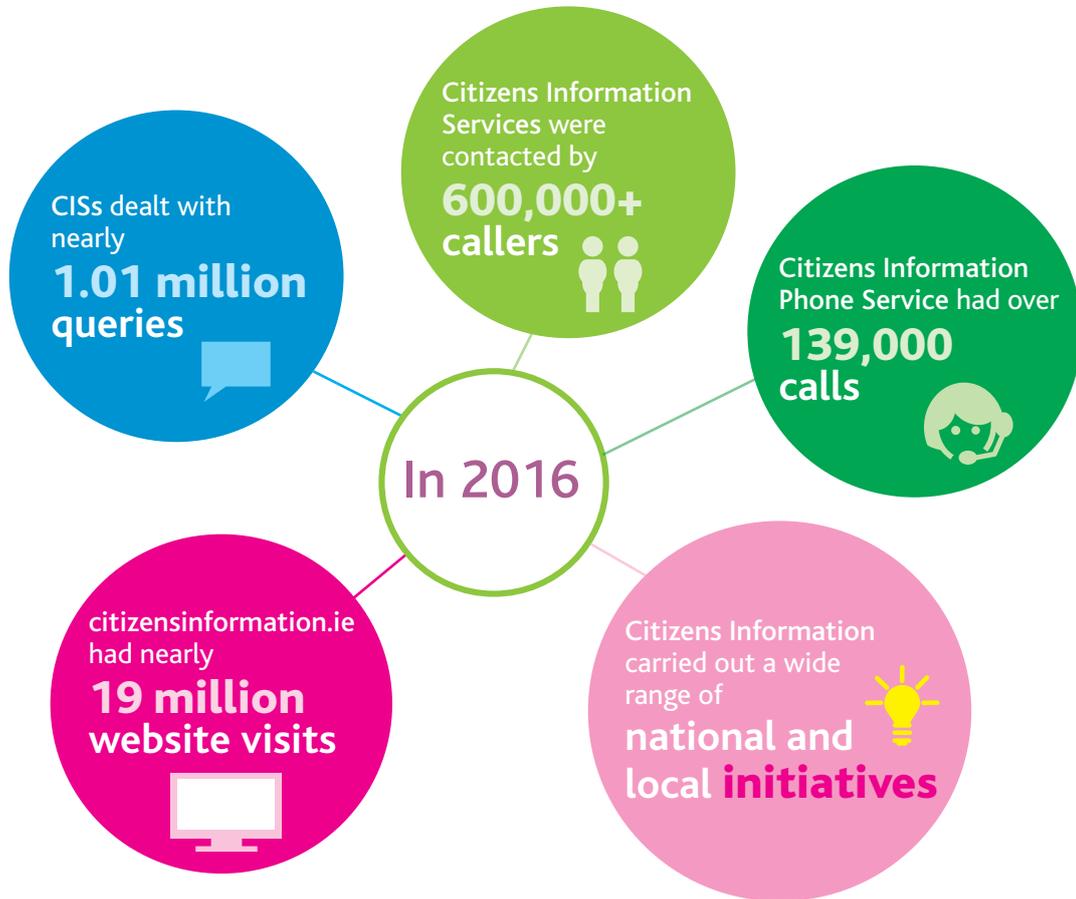
Information Outreach Event



I will always use
this service first –
it is great

OUTPUTS

Counting Citizens Information Activity

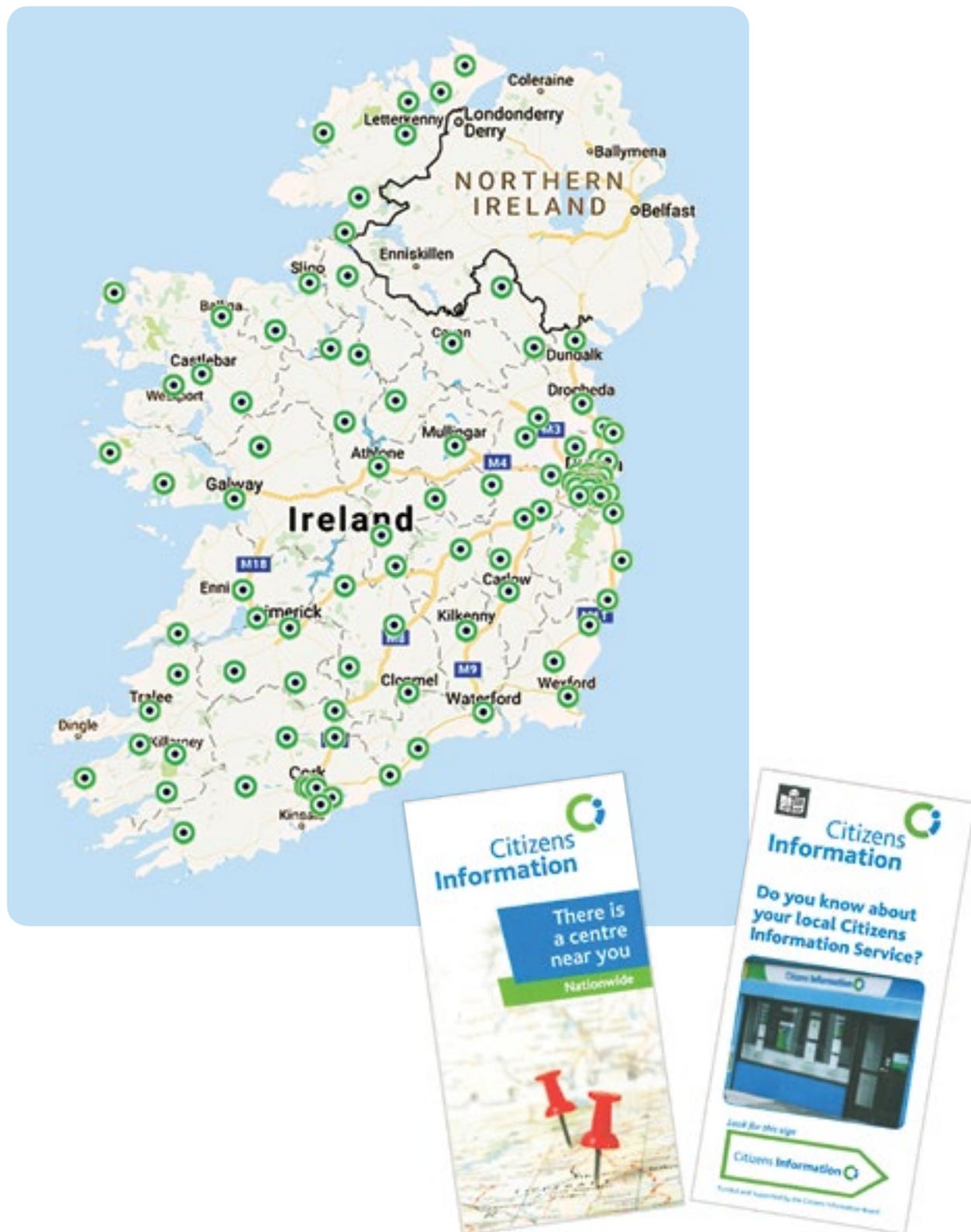


In the Period 2008–2016



Serving Communities all over Ireland

As illustrated in the map, Citizens Information Centres can be found all over Ireland.



At least three-quarters of all urban areas in Ireland with a population of over 4,000 people have a Citizens Information Centre or regular outreach (listed on centres.citizensinformation.ie). Additional areas also benefit from outreach services and one-off initiatives to meet need (such as the Citizens Information mobile unit, which is used to bring the service to many outlying areas).

Over 600,000 people, representing at least one in six adults in Ireland, were served by Citizens Information Services directly in 2016, not counting the 19 million visits to the citizensinformation.ie website.

It is no exaggeration to suggest that nearly everyone in Ireland will benefit from Citizens Information at some point in their lives.

These are people who care about other people and always guide you in the right way

Citizens Information Mobile Unit



OUTCOMES

What Citizens Information Services Achieve



The Case Studies in the report demonstrate some of the positive outcomes which are regularly achieved for clients. Please note that all names have been changed to protect the identity of clients.



CASE STUDY

Welfare Payment

Maura came to the Citizens Information Centre (CIC) and advised that she had up to several months earlier been in receipt of Carer's Allowance for her teenage daughter who suffered from Asperger's Syndrome, among other problems.

She explained that she had received Domiciliary Care Allowance for her daughter and also Carers Allowance herself, as she was her daughter's main carer. When Maura's daughter turned 16, the Domiciliary Care Allowance ceased and she then had to apply for Disability Allowance in her own right. The Department of Social Protection stopped Maura's payment of Carers Allowance while a decision on her daughter's claim was made. Maura informed the CIC that when her daughter's disability payment was awarded she thought her Carers Allowance would be reinstated but to date she had not received payment. When she queried this, the Department informed her that they felt her daughter did not meet the relevant level of care required for Maura to be a carer.

The CIC wrote to the Department requesting an oral appeal and also requested the file under the Freedom of Information Act. The CIC met with Maura frequently to keep her updated and to discuss the advocacy actions performed as per her requests. The CIC built a file consisting of medical reports from all specialists and consultants associated with Maura's daughter and her condition. The appeal was allowed and it was decided that any arrears owing would be issued not only from the date of the new application but would be backdated to the time when Maura's daughter had been awarded Disability Allowance. Maura received arrears of over €15,000.

The following outcomes illustrate the positive impact that Citizens Information Services have on people's lives.

Public Trust

- Citizens Information Services are a highly trusted network of organisations

Access to Entitlements

Welfare Payment

CISs help people to access payments that they are entitled to, including helping them to work through appeals processes

Overpayment

Citizens Information Services help people to negotiate reasonable agreements, and sometimes reductions based on their due entitlements, in repayment of overpayments

A Social Welfare Appeal

Citizens Information Services help people to access back payments which they are owed, and to secure incomes into the future

I was in serious trouble with my benefits and it was sorted – the officer sent emails, letters and phone calls for me and it was all sorted quickly. I was delighted.



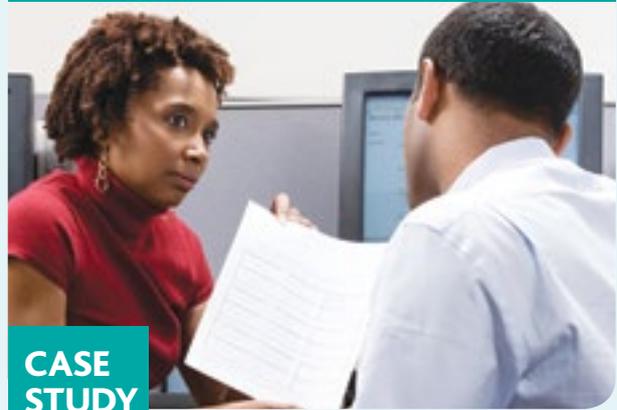
CASE STUDY

Overpayment

John is a pensioner who was upset by a notification that he owed the Department of Social Protection €100,000 on his non-contributory State Pension. This overpayment occurred over a number of years and it was considered fraud by the Department, which stated that John had not declared all of his bank accounts when applying for this means tested payment.

The CIS assisted John in examining his file and seeking a review with the DSP. John's file showed that he had declared several accounts when applying for his pension and had fully co-operated with the Department's investigation.

His case was reviewed and changed from fraud to accidental overpayment. The CIS discovered that John had an underlying entitlement to a contributory State Pension and this payment could be offset against the overpayment. The overpayment was reduced to €44,500 – a reduction of €55,500 – and John agreed to pay this new reduced rate.



CASE STUDY

A Social Welfare Appeal

Hasan came to Ireland to join his wife who was an EU citizen. He was working initially, but his hours were first reduced and then his post was terminated.

When he arrived in the CIC he was experiencing great difficulty obtaining social welfare entitlements. He had not understood what the social welfare officer requested from him but the office failed to accept that he required an interpreter. His application was refused and he was in the process of an appeal.

He was barely keeping afloat with money from his brother in law but his rent expenses were high and he had fallen into arrears. His wife was then pregnant and they had been given notice to quit their accommodation, and risked homelessness. However, he continued to look for work.

The CIC discovered that his appeal had never been sent from his local welfare office. Detailed paperwork was submitted on his behalf and the CIC also contacted his landlord to seek some breathing space for these appeals to be heard, which was agreed.

At the appeal, it became clear that payslip figures and the client's P45 had been misinterpreted. A decision was issued quickly. All of the client's appeals were successful and a backdated payment of around €6,000 was made to the client.



CASE STUDY

Redundancy

Sheila is one of a group of twelve employees who were made redundant when the company ceased trading. All of the other employees received their redundancy payments with the help of the CIS except Sheila, who was asked to prove "continuity of employment".

The CIS took Sheila's case on and had to go through many channels in order to obtain the correct information. At the time, Sheila was also terminally ill.

The CIS obtained letters from former employers to show Sheila's work history, and also obtained records going back as far as 1980 from the Department of Social Protection (DSP) and the Revenue Commissioners to show her social insurance (PRSI) contributions. The CIS then wrote a letter to the Department outlining Sheila's employment history, which showed that she did have continuity of employment for the period in question.

The DSP agreed with the CIS's findings and were able to make a redundancy payment of €4,385 to Sheila.

Access to Redress

Redundancy

Citizens Information Services help people to get redress particularly when there are breaches in the law and assist clients in accessing their entitlements from employers, from landlords and from businesses in the resolution of consumer issues

Connecting People with Public Services and NGOs

- Citizens Information Services act as a signpost and guide, informing and advising people about public services and community and voluntary bodies that can help them
- Citizens Information Services help people to receive the services they are entitled to from public authorities

Savings to the State

- Citizens Information Services save public money by reducing the need for costly processes such as appeals, employment hearings and court cases
- Citizens Information Services act as an intermediary that helps public bodies to explain new policies and schemes to the general public

Social Inclusion of Communities with Particular Needs

- Citizens Information Services invest significant resources in reaching out and successfully include people and communities who experience disadvantage

Social Inclusion of New Communities and Minorities

Domestic Abuse and Immigration Status

Citizens Information Services have played an important role in bringing about the social inclusion of minority groups and migrant communities in Ireland, including refugees and asylum seekers

Research Findings and Social Policy Advocacy

- Citizens Information Services provide unique feedback to the Citizens Information Board and public authorities, by recording social policy problems at local level which is used in reports at national and local level to highlight issues to effect changes in law and policy.



CASE STUDY

Domestic Abuse and Immigration Status

Roda was extremely upset. She was twenty-one and was living with her father and step-mother. She had fallen out with her step-mother, who was described as a domineering and controlling individual. Her father, however, doted on his wife and would not pay any attention to what he was being told by his daughter.

Late last year, the step-mother began to bring men to the house when her husband was away at work. At first, they would just talk with the young woman. However, it did not take long for her to realise that they were there to exploit her sexually. Under pressure from her stepmother, she became involved in prostitution for a period of several months.

Finally she was able to run away from the house and secured the assistance of the kind lady who took her to the CIC. Her concerns were immigration-related as she was reliant on her parents for her immigration status, and she also had nowhere to stay. The Information Officer wrote to the immigration services outlining her situation and they quickly responded with permission for her to register with them. Similarly, the CIC contacted the Homeless Person's Unit and they were able to secure temporary accommodation and a payment for the young woman.

She recently visited the CIS and her situation was greatly improved. She was working and had secured more stable accommodation. She has had no further contact with her stepmother and she is no longer being exploited.

- Citizens Information Services have contributed to CIB commissioned research and have also commissioned and produced policy reports which have been influential at local and national level

Civic Education

- Citizens Information Services provide presentations and educational material to schools and groups with specific information needs and their publications foster civic education in the general population and in migrant communities

Developing Citizens' Self-Reliance

- Citizens Information Services provide constantly updated resources that empower citizens to inform themselves and to deal directly with public administration, businesses and landlords on a more confident basis
 - Citizens Information Services also empower people through a range of user-friendly booklets and other print publications
-

Promoting Active Citizenship

- Citizens Information Services staffing model is based on a mixture of paid staff, volunteers and employment support staff. This model provides added value and keeps services close to the communities they serve
 - Citizens Information Services invest in their volunteers and employment scheme staff in terms of training and personal development, and have seen many of them attaining greater opportunities as a result
-

Alleviation of Stress

- Citizens Information Services often deal with people experiencing crisis or distress, who are under severe pressure and who feel that they have nowhere to turn to. A great many people report significant relief from their anxieties due to the assistance, care, respect and personal support they receive from CISs.



A lifesaver



INTERNATIONAL ROLE

Supporting Services in the Western Balkans & Turkey

The National Association of Citizens Information Services (NACIS) has been a Partner in the **Triple A (Access to information, Advice and Active help)** project which aims to spread a Citizens Information & Advice model to the Western Balkans and Turkey since 2013. This EU Funded project, led by the European Citizens Action Service in Brussels, aims to support **Access to information, Advice and Active help** for citizens in the region and seeks to promote the role of civil society in giving citizens a voice and influencing government policy on key reforms and their implementation. In the first year of activity the 14 pilot projects in Bosnia, Serbia, Croatia, Kosovo, and Turkey provided free legal advice and information to more than 8,000 citizens, launched two websites and distributed more than 14,000 copies of information material regarding free legal aid, advice and active help.

The project was subsequently extended to include Albania, Macedonia & Montenegro and further grant aid was made available from the European Commission to set up pilot projects in these countries. To date 21 pilot projects have been established whose support has enabled many vulnerable citizens to access their rights.

The principal role of NACIS represented by a Development Manager has included organising Study Visits for pilot projects and providing mentoring support to projects in Bosnia and Albania. As well as transferring knowledge on the Irish model and presenting and facilitating various workshops NACIS has also had input into the Triple A Guidelines and Strategy, Calls for Proposals, Quality Standards, selection of pilot projects, creation of work-plan templates and mentoring documents and has participated in Steering Group Meetings with Triple A Partners.

By creating greater awareness of rights and entitlements and enabling access to justice, the projects are supporting multiple beneficiaries in the region.

For further information see:
<http://tripleacitizens.eu/>



Supporting Access to Information, Advice & Active help



This project is co-funded
by the European Union



Triple A Partners and Pilot Project Participants from the Western Balkans and Turkey

IMPACT

Public Value Creation

All organisations – public, private and voluntary – create “public value” whenever they generate economic, social or environmental benefits, as part of, or alongside, their core activity. Organisations create public value by adhering to the qualities of good public services.

Good public services are **ethical**, provide high **quality** service, are financially **efficient** and **effective**, are **responsive** to people’s needs, are **accountable** to the taxpayer, are **equitable** in how they treat anyone seeking a service, and are ecologically **sustainable**.

Citizens Information Services have demonstrated a range of activities they undertake, which ensure their professional management, good financial controls and constant striving for operational improvement (i.e. quality, efficiency, effectiveness and accountability to the taxpayer).

All 42 Citizens Information Services have achieved a gold star award under the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) excellence programme. Some services also availed of the opportunity to achieve Role Model status as the next step beyond EFQM.



IMPACT

Public Value Creation

Citizens Information Services provide a wide variety of training to staff, volunteers and employment scheme workers, and have contributed to research to monitor and improve their operations.

The alleviation of stress and achievement of social inclusion is only possible because CIsS also pay serious attention to delivering services with the right ethos (i.e. ethical, equitable, sustainable and responsive to individual and local community needs). This ethos is kept strong through the role of volunteer board members and volunteers, as well as the strong commitment of staff to Citizens Information Service's mission. Likewise at national level, the Citizens Information Board subscribes to a vision that seeks to provide public value in all its dimensions.



Exhibition at City Hall

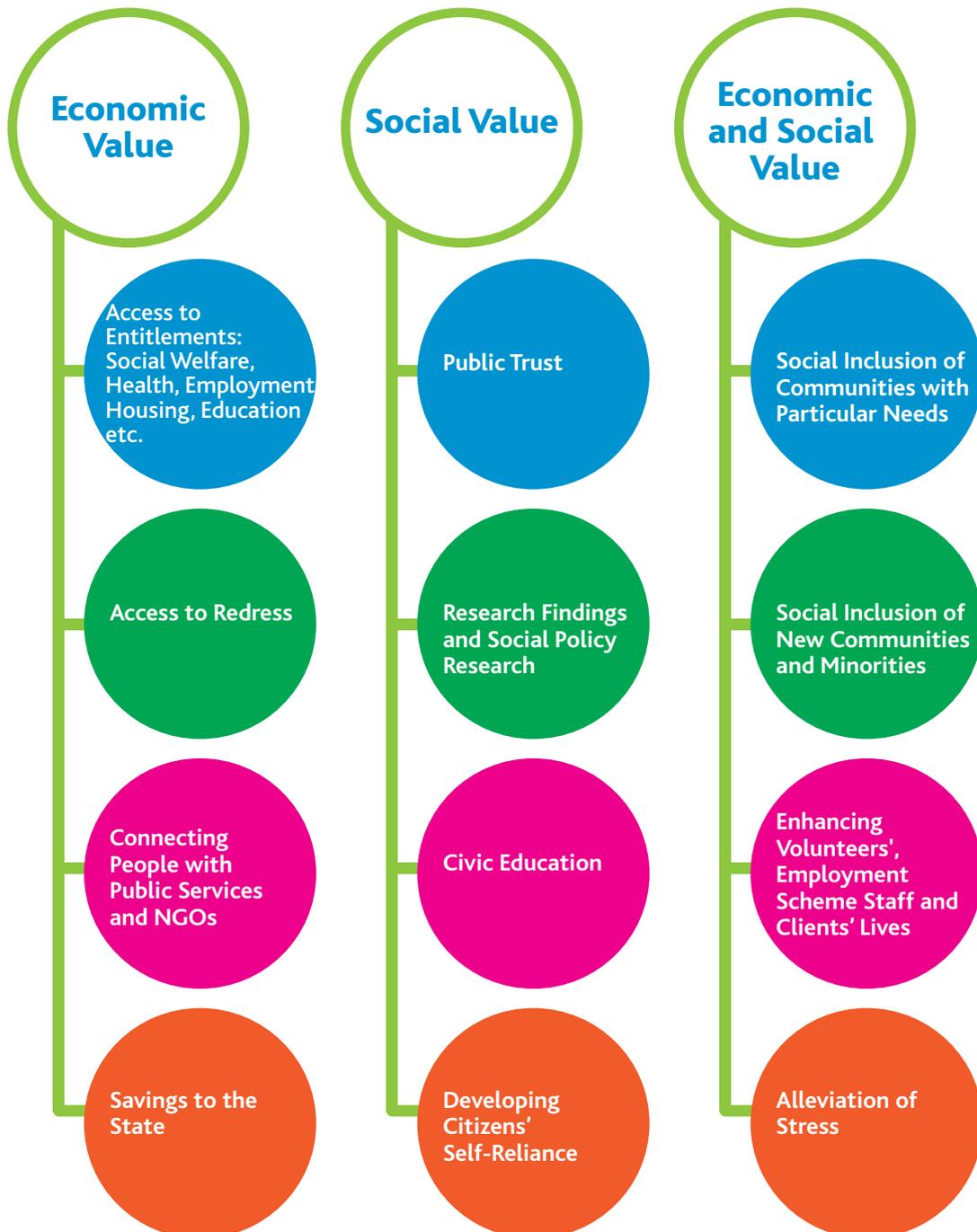


Promoting Citizens Information Services

PUBLIC VALUE INCLUDES...

“Economic value” means value that can be given a monetary value or estimate. “Social value” stands for results that people value, but which it is not possible or appropriate to monetise. Some outcomes achieve a significant amount

of both kinds of value. The combination of economic value and societal value is best expressed as a list or “dashboard” showing the total public value created.



CITIZENS INFORMATION SERVICE'S PUBLIC VALUE...

- The Citizens Information Service enjoys a high level of public confidence and trust.
- Tens of millions of euro value to individuals and families annually from receiving their entitlements, including welfare payments and public services like housing, health care or education, and including reduction of overpayment demands;
- Significant monetary value to individuals from getting redress from employers or resolution of consumer issues;
- Significant monetary value to individuals and families from getting access to public services they need;
- Millions of euro of savings to the State, from preventing costly processes such as appeals and employment hearings and reducing the need for call centres to accompany policy changes;
- Providing people with the information and advice they need to access their entitlements improves their access to public services, and thereby fosters confidence in the public sector;
- Social policy feedback, and reports at local and national level, have provided an invaluable resource to policymakers to help to improve the implementation of policies;
- Students, people from migrant communities and citizens generally have benefited from the civic education resources produced by Citizens Information;
- The existence of a reliable and constantly updated national website, as well as national and local publications, underpins the self-reliance and empowerment of citizens, who are better informed and equipped as a result;

Domestic Abuse and Disability

Providing targeted support to people in very vulnerable situations and who are suffering disadvantage has both a tangible economic benefit for those individuals and families and also helps to achieve the national goals of social inclusion and equality of opportunity;

Family Reunification

Providing specialised support to people in minority communities or from migrant backgrounds has both a tangible economic benefit for those individuals and families and also helps to achieve their full participation in society and the economy;

- The enhancement of the lives of volunteers and employment support staff has both a tangible benefit for them in terms of training and future employment, but also provides them with a strong sense of personal satisfaction from contributing to the Citizens Information Service's mission. The contribution of volunteers also represents a significant cash saving to the exchequer through the services they provide for free;
- Further tens of millions of euro value – and incalculable personal value – is gained by individuals from the alleviation of stress and reduction in mental health problems like depression and anxiety.





CASE STUDY

Domestic Abuse and Disability

Mary fled an abusive marriage and was living in a women’s refuge. She suffered with mental health issues after years of physical and emotional abuse. She moved from the refuge to her mother’s house, but due to overcrowding she could not stay there and she became homeless along with her teenage son. The local council housed them in a hotel as they did not have suitable accommodation for them. Mary had applied for but was refused Disability Allowance on the grounds that the Department believed that she did not have a disability serious enough to prevent her from taking up employment.

Mary asked for help and the CIS appealed the decision not to grant Mary a Disability Allowance. This appeal was successful and Mary was granted a full Disability Allowance payment. Mary also secured the secondary benefit of Free Travel and, being on a disability payment, she will have a stronger case to get a Local Authority house if a suitable one becomes available in her area.



CASE STUDY

Family Reunification

Abraham applied for asylum in Ireland in 2011 and was granted refugee status in 2015. When he presented at the CIC he was very distressed about the situation in Afghanistan in relation to the safety of his extended family. As head of the family, following his father’s death, he supported his family financially by sending money.

He was concerned that the situation in Afghanistan had become increasingly volatile, especially for his brothers who could not go out because of extremist groups. His mother was ill and receiving medical treatment. His siblings were unable to attend school or college.

The CIC made an application for family reunification to the Minister for Justice and Equality on behalf of Abraham’s mother and his siblings. This was successful and permission was granted to allow Abraham’s family to travel to the State to reside with him.

The CIC also contacted the Red Cross who accepted an application on his behalf to assist with the travel expenses through the Travel Assistance Programme. The next step was to apply for the Irish entry visas on behalf of his family. The applications for the visas were completed online with the client and all documentation including the summary sheets and visa fees sent to the Department of Justice and Equality. Abraham is very happy and knows that he will see his family soon and the CIC is now assisting with their accommodation and educational needs for when they arrive in the State.

Research Note

This report (Making an Impact) is based on a much more detailed Technical Report¹, which provides information about the method used and the sources of evidence used for this report. The concept of public value creation was developed initially by Harvard Professor Mark Moore in 1995, and is at the centre of a wide range of academic and professional writing about how to measure the full value created by public services and not-for-profit organisations.

Citizens Advice in England and Wales, as well as Citizens Advice Scotland and Citizens Advice Northern Ireland, have produced reports in recent years demonstrating their economic and holistic public value. Reflecting the different nature of the service in Ireland, as well as the different kinds of information available here, this report does not try to replicate the UK reports. Instead, the focus here is on presenting the full depth and breadth of the service provided by Citizens Information in the Republic of Ireland, and giving a clear indication of its public value in terms of both economic value and societal value.

As a recommendation to Government departments, a unit cost database could be created for Ireland along similar lines to the one that exists in England and Wales, which facilitated their more detailed social cost-benefit analysis. Nonetheless, when considering public value, it is essential to always include a full expression of those societal benefits that can never be monetised alongside the monetary benefits to get the full picture of public value created.

¹ Available on citizensinformationboard.ie under Research and Social Policy publications

CONCLUSION

Looking to the Future

Over the period 2008 to 2016, the absolute number of callers to Citizens Information Centres remained steady, at over 600,000 callers a year. During the same period, usage of the **citizensinformation.ie** website rose from 4.3 million to nearly 17 million, which represents an almost four fold increase in website visits.

While many people in the population may be becoming more expert at searching for information online, Citizens Information Services have found a steady increase in the complexity of queries that they deal with. Even seemingly straightforward information requests often involve atypical circumstances or uncertainty about the interpretation of administrative rules. This trend has led Citizens Information Services to see advice and advocacy as growing demands.

In addition, not everyone can access information online. Citizens Information Services continue to play a vital role in bridging the digital divide by providing face-to-face information for those who cannot find it themselves, as well as for those who find it challenging to deal with form-filling or official jargon.

Advocacy on behalf of individuals who are disadvantaged in dealing with public administration has been identified as a clear public need, and Citizens Information Services have responded by prioritising the development of advocacy services and are currently developing a national advocacy strategy.

As independent, voluntary organisations, the 42 local Citizens Information Services are not part of the public service, but they provide a unique service for the public that would be almost impossible to replicate.

The service is constantly striving to improve, to innovate and to serve the wide spectrum of need for information, advice and advocacy in Ireland's population.



CIS was very kind and helpful in my quest for carer's allowance which I received after the CIS... guided me and my husband with the right information

Information • Advice • Advocacy

A Free and Confidential Service

Making an Impact: The Public Value of Citizens Information in Ireland is the first report that shows the holistic public value generated by CISs in Ireland.

Over 600,000 people, representing at least one in six adults in Ireland, are served by Citizens Information Services annually, alongside 19 million visits to the citizensinformation.ie website. Ireland's 42 Citizens Information Services are independent, voluntary organisations with charitable status. They provide free, impartial and confidential face-to-face information, advice and advocacy services in over 200 locations on people's social and civil rights and entitlements in areas such as social welfare, employment, education, health, justice, immigration, and more. They also provide a range of outreach and specialist services.

Citizens Information Services provide monetary value to individuals and families through helping them to access their entitlements or to receive redress from public bodies, businesses or landlords. CISs also prevent the need for more costly public service interventions.

At the same time, Citizens Information Services provide immeasurable additional societal value through promoting social inclusion and by being a vital support to people during crisis when they are at their most vulnerable.

Citizens Information Services are funded and supported by the Citizens Information Board.

Citizens Information Service 

Find your local Citizens Information
Centre:

<http://centres.citizensinformation.ie>

National phone service:

0761 07 4000

Website:

www.citizensinformation.ie