



**New Nationwide Citizens Information Website Launched In
Roll-Out Of Customer Friendly 'Know Your Rights' Information
Service**

***Minister Brennan - "New One Brand Information Services
Designed To Meet Needs & Challenges Of Expanding And
Diverse 21ST Century Ireland***

The Minister for Social Affairs, Séamus Brennan T.D. today heralded the start of a new era in the delivery of a seamless and customer friendly national information, rights and entitlements awareness service when he officially launched the Citizens Information website: www.citizensinformation.ie

Minister Brennan said the new information initiative, in which the website will play a central role, is designed to meet the needs of a dramatically changing and evolving 21st century Ireland. The delivery of independent, quality, clear, accurate and integrated information is of crucial importance, particularly in helping those who are vulnerable in society and in meeting the information and advice needs of immigrants from the new EU Member States and elsewhere.

The Minister said the emphasis was on providing a nationwide information, advice and rights awareness service for all citizens under one easily accessible and highly visible brand - Citizens Information. This was being achieved by the drawing together of three separate existing channels of information under Citizens Information and the delivery in future of information services through the online website www.citizensinformation.ie , more than 230 Citizens Information centres and a single central phone number - Lo-Call 1890 777 121.

To further promote the one-brand approach, the name of Comhairle, which has responsibility for the provision directly to the public of independent information and advice on social services, will be changed to the Citizens Information Board (An Bord um Fhaisnéis do Shaoránaigh) under legislation that will be introduced in the Dáil next week.

The new website replaces the existing e-government initiative www.oasis.gov.ie – which attracted 2.5 million hits in 2005 - and Comhairle's online Citizens Information



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Database (CID). It has drawn on the strengths of these two websites to create an information resource that boasts an expanded range of content and detailed information together with enhanced search facilities. The website is available in English and Irish and key information and advice documents are also available in Polish, Romanian and French. It is planned to expand the range of information available and the number of languages used to meet rapidly emerging needs.

Minister Brennan said: "The provision of independent, clear and accessible information through a number of channels has a central role in helping to break down barriers, eases anxieties, opens up opportunities and very often clears the way for citizens, particularly those who are most vulnerable in society, to improve their situations and build better lives. The new website makes full use of the latest, innovative technology to present the information in a user-friendly, easily accessible format that is built around important events in people's lives, such as employment rights, buying a house, education issues, having a baby, buying a home, supports when ill, coping with disabilities, and much more.

"When you consider that over 970,000 payments are made by my Department each week that in total benefit more than 1.5 million men, women and children, it is understandable why queries on welfare rights and entitlements should make up more than one third of information, advice and rights queries. However, there are many other social issues, such as employment, health services, housing, education, family concerns and consumer rights, on which people need access to information. We now have the blueprint for the start of a new and exciting era in the provision of an information service that is geared to meet the needs and demands of an expanding and increasingly diverse 21st century Ireland".

The information is divided into 14 categories so that users can readily access the topic relevant to them. The straightforward, accurate, and comprehensive information is sourced from a wide variety of service providers and agencies. Each category addresses a series of frequently asked questions on the topic, which is supported with a wealth of in-depth information, informative case studies, supporting documents and downloadable forms.

The new website boasts a range of features such as a '*find an address*' tool which enables people to contact over 8,000 service providers and government bodies



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nationwide, and a *My Information* facility. Using the *My Information* feature, users can create their own accounts to store links to information and documents of personal relevance in addition to setting their own preferences for things such as type size or language. These documents are automatically updated to afford immediate access to new information and initiatives as they come online. The most up-to-date news will be featured on the site's *Home Page* where important events and key changes to the website will also be highlighted.

Ends