



An Roinn Coimirce Sóisialaí Department of Social Protection

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Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection Joan Burton T.D. publishes annual report detailing progress made on the Department's Compliance and Anti-Fraud Strategy

In 2016, Department will target control savings of €510 million and review one million individual social welfare claims

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection, Joan Burton T.D., has today (Friday, 22 April 2016) published the Department's *Annual Report and Target Statement for 2016* under the *2014-2018 Compliance and Anti-Fraud Strategy*. This report sets out how the Department tackled welfare fraud and overpayments during the course of 2015 and its targets for 2016. The report highlights how savings of almost €464m in welfare expenditure were achieved during 2015 through the prevention of fraud and error, while €83 million in overpayments was recovered.

The Tánaiste said: ***"The Department's objective is to ensure that it pays the right amount of money to the right person at the right time. I have always championed the welfare system as a safety net for those who need it most. It's precisely why over the past number of years I have put in place measures to tackle fraud and abuse in the system, so that resources are there for people genuinely in need."***

Under the strategy, the Department will this year target savings of €510 million by reviewing approximately one million social welfare claims and rooting out fraud and error where it occurs. Where overpayments of benefit have been made in the past, the Department will aim to recover €90 million in overpayments this year.

The use of predictive analytics, which was introduced during 2015, will further enhance the Department's ability to detect and reduce fraud. Together with other technological innovations, such as use of facial recognition software and the use of the Public Services Card, the Department is now significantly better equipped to identify non-compliance across its various schemes.

The Tánaiste said: ***"We must remain alert to new and emerging forms of fraud and abuse and so our approach needs to be flexible and dynamic. In this context, a key aspect of the Strategy will be the use of new technology and co-operation with other agencies such as the Revenue Commissioners."***

This report looks at the key outcomes for 2015 and sets targets for 2016 across the various areas. Appendix 1 of the report sets out the headline figures for both years.

Some of the key achievements in 2015 were:

- Over 1 million control reviews were carried out which yielded control savings of almost €464 million;
- Seconded Garda officers continued to work with members of the Department's Special Investigation Unit in detecting and investigating serious and high-end fraud;
- Some €83 million in overpayments was recovered;
- Nearly 360 cases were submitted for prosecution, in excess of the target for the year;
- Two Fraud and Error surveys were completed (on Illness Benefit and Invalidity Pension). The surveys confirmed that both are low-risk schemes. Further surveys on Farm Assist, Family Income Supplement and Household Benefits Scheme are underway and are due to report by mid-2016; and
- Work continued during 2015 on building predictive analytics models to identify fraud amongst existing customers of the three main working age schemes. The One Parent Family Payment model is now in operation. The other two models (Jobseeker's Allowance and Disability Allowance) will become operational in mid-2016.

The full details of the report, including case studies of successful investigations carried out by the Department, are posted on the Department's website at the following link: <http://www.welfare.ie/en/downloads/DSP-Compliance-AntiFraud-Strategy-2014-2018.pdf>

The Department's priorities for 2016 will build on the work and outcomes achieved in the implementation of this strategy over 2014 and 2015. Specifically, using the control resources of the Department and the expertise of the Special Investigation Unit, activities will continue to focus on the following areas and actions:

- *Hidden economy* - the continued identification and active policing of the hidden economy where there is a prevalence of social welfare fraud and abuse.
- *Identity fraud/multiple claiming* - prioritising the investigation of potential cases of identity fraud/multiple claiming.
- *Construction sector* - undertaking site visits and inspections on construction sites where such projects are being publicly funded will be a key part of the SIU's work in 2016.
- *Undisclosed financial assets* – the Unit will undertake systematic investigations on social welfare means-tested claims where it has been identified that Deposit Income Retention Tax has been paid on capital invested which has not been disclosed.
- *Habitual residence* – case investigations and dedicated projects will be undertaken with regard to non-habitual residence in the jurisdiction.

- *Data matching projects* - systematic case investigations will be undertaken where data matches have taken place between the Department and other agencies under the appropriate legislative provisions.
- *Cross Jurisdictional Fraud Investigation* – the Unit will undertake case investigations and deal with requests for mutual assistance from other social security agencies on cross jurisdictional social welfare fraud.

The Tánaiste welcomed the continued engagement by members of the public who made over 15,700 reports to the Department last year expressing concerns about possible incidents of misclaiming social welfare benefits. She said: **“Members of the public have played their part in supporting the Department to identify where possible abuse of the social protection system may have occurred.”**

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