



## **Minister Hanafin announces the publication of the Social Welfare Appeals Office Annual Report for 2008**

**“Almost 18,000 people made appeals on decisions governing social welfare entitlements last year”** said Mary Hanafin, Minister for Social and Family Affairs as she published the 2008 annual report of the Social Welfare Appeals Office. Minister Hanafin said **“the Appeals Office is committed to providing an independent review mechanism for those who were dissatisfied with the outcome of their claim.”**

Last year some 2.46 million claims were cleared by the Department, with almost 1.8 million people benefiting from a weekly social welfare payment. **“While every effort is made by the Department to deal sensitively with all cases and decide entitlements in line with the relevant legislation, it is understandable that not everybody will agree with those decisions. The number of people who lodge appeals to the Social Welfare Appeals Office reflects to a very large degree the number of people claiming benefits”** said Minister Hanafin.

During 2008, almost 18,000 people made appeals of which 48% were decided in favour of the appellant, 39% were disallowed and 13% were withdrawn. 59% of appeals determined by Appeals Officers were dealt with by way of an oral hearing while the remainder were decided summarily. Oral hearings were held during the year in over 70 venues around the country.

In line with government policy, the Report is being published electronically and in bilingual form and is available online at [www.socialwelfareappeals.ie](http://www.socialwelfareappeals.ie).

- The annual report for 2008 provides a detailed statistical analysis of the Office's performance in processing appeals during that year, including trends in:
  - **Appeals received** - 17,833 appeals were received in 2008 compared with 14,070 in 2007, a 27% increase, the highest number of appeals since 1993.
  - **Appeals disposed of** - 15,724 appeals were finalised comprising 2,066 appeals which were withdrawn, 4,235 which were given the benefit of a revised decision by deciding officers in the Department of Social and Family Affairs and 9,423 which were decided by Appeals Officers.
  - **Reviews by Deciding Officers** - part of the appeals procedure involves a review by the deciding officer who made the original decision prior to the appeal going before an Appeals Officer. Frequently, new evid-



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ence becomes available in the course of an appeal and a revised decision is possible. There were 4,235 such revisions in 2008.

- **Appeal outcomes** - 13% of appeals were withdrawn and 27% were revised by Deciding Officers. 48% of appeals had a favourable outcome compared to 47% in 2007.
- **Appeal processing times** - it took an average of 22 weeks to dispose of an appeal in 2008 (identical to 2007). However, many cases take longer due to legal matters, medical considerations, additional investigations etc. If the 25% most protracted appeals are disregarded, the average falls to 14 weeks. [Note: The appeals system is judicial in nature and due process must be followed. There is very limited scope for fast-tracking cases.]
- **Oral hearings** - 59% of appeals determined by Appeals Officers were dealt with by way of an oral hearing compared to 63% in 2007.
- The Report details meetings and consultations held during 2008 with Appeals Officers and with the Decisions Advisory Office of the Department. This dialogue has proved to be an effective means of ensuring consistency in Appeals Officers' decisions and also of resolving difficulties and anomalies in the interpretation of legislation or policy.
- The Report also provides a number of case histories which serve to give an understanding and an insight into the appeals process. A larger number of case histories are published on the Social Welfare Appeals Office website available at [www.socialwelfareappeals.ie](http://www.socialwelfareappeals.ie).

**ENDS**

### **Notes for Editors:**

- The Social Welfare Appeals Office operates independently of the Department of Social and Family Affairs. It deals with appeals on decisions made in regard to entitlement to benefits under the Social Welfare Acts and questions regarding the insurability of employment. It also provides an appeals service to the Health Service Executive relating to Supplementary Welfare Allowance.
- It is based in Dublin and has a staff of 62 headed by a Chief Appeals Officer.