

# **A Year in Review – €11.5 billion in Welfare Supports in response to Covid-19 Pandemic**

From [Department of Social Protection](#)

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**Over 850,000 people supported through the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP)**

**20 million PUP payments issued totalling over €6.3 billion**

**30,000 people visited Intreo Centres on a single day last March**

**10 million phone calls answered by DSP staff**

**Department of Social Protection Webpages most used across the Public Service**

**Almost 142,000 people supported through the Enhanced Illness Benefit**

**Almost 456,600 received the PUP this week, a decrease of 8,280 on last week**

The Department of Social Protection has today provided a detailed account of the range of income and other supports extended to hundreds of thousands of people since the start of the Pandemic.

During an unprecedented 12 months, the Department provided €11.5 billion in weekly payments and other supports introduced to assist people impacted by Covid-19.

## **Pandemic Unemployment Payment**

Designed and developed over two days, the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP) has proven to be a vital income support to workers, thousands of whom lost their jobs virtually overnight. It is estimated that on 13th March alone approximately 30,000 people visited their local Intreo Centre to seek an income support having lost their job.

It peaked in the first week of May 2020, when some 602,000 were in receipt of the PUP.

Since its introduction:

- just under 20 million PUP payments have been made
- to over 850,000 people

- providing income support of more than €6.3 billion to date

Over the 12 month period, just under 2 million PUP claims were received and processed and the scheme itself was refined – first by increasing the rate of payment to match average wages in the two most affected sectors – retail and hospitality, and then by linking it to a person’s earnings before Covid-19.

To support this new scheme, new communications campaigns were implemented, new telephone support lines were developed and new online and web based services were delivered. In the past 12 months the Department’s webpages have been the most used across the entire public service (with more visitors than all other public service websites – including the HSE). Meanwhile, staff have received and answered over 10 million phone calls.

### **The Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme/Employment Wage Subsidy Scheme**

In parallel with developing and implementing the PUP, the Department started work on the development of an employer refund scheme with the intention that, rather than laying staff off, employers could keep their workers on the payroll, and then claim a refund from the Department.

It was this scheme that ultimately became the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme (TWSS).

Launched on 26th March, the TWSS was developed in partnership with the Department of Finance and administered by the Revenue Commissioners.

During its lifetime, just under 650,000 workers employed by just under 70,000 employers were supported by the TWSS to the value of just over €2.7 billion.

The TWSS was itself refined and replaced by the Employment Wage Subsidy Scheme (EWSS) from 1st September. Since then, the EWSS has supported just under 550,000 workers employed by just under 50,000 employers to a value of €2.3 billion.

### **Enhanced Illness Benefit**

The Department also recognised the importance of providing workers who fell ill or were diagnosed with the Covid-19 virus, or were required to self-isolate with an income support while absent from work.

Even before the PUP was introduced, and in anticipation of high levels of Covid-related illness claims, the Department had developed and introduced an Enhanced Illness Benefit scheme. This scheme is paid at a higher rate of €350 per week, compared to the standard rate of €203 per week and requires a person to have made just one social insurance contribution in the period prior to claim. In addition, unlike the Department’s general Illness Benefit it is available to self-employed workers and does not have a ‘waiting-days’ period before payment commences.

Since the scheme was introduced, almost 142,000 people have been medically certified for receipt of the Enhanced Illness Benefit with approximately €88 million paid in this income support.

## **Targeted Measures**

In addition to core income supports, the Department put in place a range of other targeted measures during the initial stages of pandemic, including:

- A four-week extension to the 2020 Fuel Allowance season;
- Arrangements for parents to register electronically the birth of their new-born babies;
- Special arrangements for the Rent Supplement Scheme, and in particular, enhanced access arrangements for victims of domestic violence;
- An Enterprise Support Grant for Small Businesses to provide owners in receipt of PUP with a once-off grant of up to €1,000 to re-start their business – over 8,000 small businesses have been paid over €8 million under this scheme.
- Special support arrangements for self-employed people e.g. the arts and entertainment sector - Self-employed people in receipt of the PUP, including people in the arts and entertainment sector who may have opportunities for occasional earnings can earn up to €960 over an eight-week period, while retaining their full PUP entitlement;
- School Meals Programme – funding was continued by the Department during periods of school closures under Level 5 restrictions;
- New measures were introduced to support community based programmes - CE and TÚS schemes;
- New online functionality on MyWelfare (e.g., applying for, confirming your continued eligibility for PUP and closing your PUP);
- Changes to Redundancy schemes to extend the period of time that people can be laid-off without automatically triggering redundancy terms.

### **Commenting on the Department's response to the Pandemic, Social Protection Minister Heather Humphreys said:**

“A year on since the start of the pandemic, it is only right that we reflect on the hurt and devastation that has been felt by people who lost friends or loved ones due to the pandemic.

“Thousands of lives were lost; hundreds of thousands of people found themselves without employment, often for their first time in their working lives.

“As we reflect on what has been one of the most difficult years in our country's history, I am reminded of the great sense of togetherness shown last March in response to Covid-19.

“That sense of solidarity has been key in helping us mitigate the worst effects of the virus whilst enabling us to support our incredibly brave frontline health professionals who have worked tirelessly throughout the pandemic.”

### **Minister Humphreys continued:**

“I am immensely proud of the efforts of my Department's staff since last March when they mobilised quickly to introduce the PUP in a matter of days.

“I also want to pay tribute to our customers for their co-operation and understanding as we implemented these new schemes and measures to provide them with supports during these difficult times.

“I am particularly pleased that so many have made use of our online channel by applying through MyWelfare.

“Last year MyWelfare processed more than 2.9 million customer transactions, compared to 450,000 in 2019.

“The PUP has supported hundreds of thousands of workers, protecting them from a sudden shock to their incomes.

“Aside from the PUP, our officials introduced new IT systems and an online application process through MyWelfare in record time. They and their colleagues in the Revenue Commissioners and various other Government Departments exemplified all that is good about our public service.

“I want to thank them all for their important contribution in providing essential income supports to our citizens since last March.”

### **The Impact of the Government Covid-19 Income Supports**

Research by the ESRI and more recently by both the Central Statistics Office and the Central Bank of Ireland indicates that the gross median income of Irish households would have fallen by almost 20% in the second quarter of 2020 without the intervention of Government supports such as the PUP, the Temporary Wage Subsidy and the Employment Wage Subsidy schemes.

In practice, the income supports cushioned this income effect and were particularly effective for low income households. The Department’s own analysis late last year, similar to that of the ESRI, indicates that on average for most households in the lower 40% of the income distribution the income supports came close to fully cushioning the income losses due to Covid-19 related employment lay-offs. Recent data from the CSO (see ‘note for editors’ below) produces similar outcomes.

### **Conclusion**

The Government has confirmed that the Covid-19 income supports will be maintained until at least the 30th June 2021. The position will be kept under review and the future of the supports beyond that time will be considered over the coming months. Any changes that may be made after June will be informed by matters such as the trajectory of the virus and the status of the vaccination rollout programme.

### **Weekly PUP Figures for Week commencing 15th March**

This week, the Department of Social Protection has issued weekly payments valued at €136.46 million to 456,580 people in receipt of the PUP.

The number of people receiving the PUP this week has decreased by 8,280 compared to last week.

These figures are in addition to the 186,702 people who were on the Live Register at the end of February.

All Covid-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payments issued were in recipients' Bank accounts or at their Post Office on Tuesday, 16th March.

Dublin is the county with the highest number of people who are receiving PUP this week at 144,683. It is followed by Cork (46,068) and Galway (24,563).

All sectors have fewer people receiving PUP this week than last week, reflecting the number of people who have closed their claims this week to return to work.

The sector with the highest number of people receiving PUP this week is Accommodation and Food Service activities (108,767), followed by Wholesale and Retail Trade (73,070) and Construction (57,269).

Construction is the sector that has seen the largest decrease in the number of people receiving PUP this week, with 1,595 fewer people receiving the payment compared to last week. The Wholesale and Retail sector has seen the number of PUP recipients decrease from 74,153 last week to 73,070 this week. This is followed by the Accommodation and Food Service activities sector which has seen the number of PUP recipients decrease from 109,754 last week to 108,767 this week.

Almost 50% of those in receipt of PUP are receiving the maximum rate of €350 this week.

### **People returning to work**

This week's figures show that people from every county have closed their PUP claims. Overall, some 12,353 people closed their PUP claims, with 10,073 of these stating that they were doing so because they were returning to work.

Dublin had the greatest number of people closing their claims to return to work (2,466), followed by Cork (1,075) and Meath (518).

The top three sectors with the largest number of employees closing their Pandemic Unemployment Payment to return to work are Construction (2,134), Wholesale and Retail Trade (1,469) and Accommodation and Food Service activities sector (1,141).

The Department continues to remind workers who are returning to work that they must close their claim for the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP) on the actual date that they start back at work, in order to ensure that their claim is processed correctly and to avoid incurring an overpayment that the Department will take steps to recover.

The easiest way to close a claim for the Pandemic Unemployment Payment is online via [www.MyWelfare.ie](http://www.MyWelfare.ie). Any worker returning to work with an enquiry about closing their claim, can contact the Department's dedicated Income Support Helpline at between 9am and 5pm Monday to Friday.

### **Income Support Helpline**

Phone number:  
[1890 800 024](tel:1890800024)

## **Self-employed people and PUP**

Self-employed people in receipt of the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP) who are looking to maintain their business can earn up to €960 over an eight-week period, while retaining their full PUP entitlement.

There is no formal application process and a self-employed person simply needs to inform the Department if they earn over €960 in any eight-week period.

### **MyWelfare.ie – PPSN application service**

The easiest and quickest way to apply for many social welfare payments, including the Pandemic Unemployment Payment, Enhanced Illness Benefit and Jobseekers' payments is online at [www.MyWelfare.ie](http://www.MyWelfare.ie). This is a platform which is safe, secure and accessible anytime, anywhere and on all devices. People have the option of applying for Maternity Benefit, Paternity Benefit, Child Benefit, PRSI refunds and Jobseekers' payments as well as requesting a statement or a record of social insurance contributions from the Department.

The application service to apply for a PPS Number is available at [www.MyWelfare.ie](http://www.MyWelfare.ie) for people living in Ireland who are at least 18 years of age and need a PPS Number to avail of social welfare benefits, public services and information in Ireland. To apply for a PPS Number online, a person will need to have a basic [MyGovID](#) account.

In the interests of the public health advice and observing social distancing people are asked, if possible, not to attend their local [Intreo Centre](#). Instead, they should avail of the online services available through [www.MyWelfare.ie](http://www.MyWelfare.ie).

### **Control Measures**

The Department conducts a series of pre and post payment checks on all PUP claims. Subject to these checks being cleared the Department then processes payments based on the clients' self-declaration.

Subsequently, the Department runs post payment checks that includes verifying data against Revenue records, examining cases where the same Bank account is used multiple times, examining cases where an employer or members of the public report concerns, and the use of data analytics to identify and check claims. It also undertakes employer inspections.

This work is undertaken by the Department's Special Investigation Unit, which includes over 20 Gardaí on secondment to the Unit.

As is standard with all social welfare payments, people receiving the Pandemic Unemployment Payment may be asked from time to time to confirm their eligibility to continue to receive their payment. This helps to ensure that people who have, for example, returned to work are reminded to close their claim and avoid incurring an overpayment.

As it did last year the Department has commenced a process of contacting PUP recipients asking them to confirm their ongoing entitlement.

The Department wishes to make it absolutely clear that it is not requesting Bank account or other financial institution details as part of the 'Confirm Eligibility' process.

Recipients are being advised to use the online portal [www.MyWelfare.ie](http://www.MyWelfare.ie) and follow the instructions under the heading 'Continue eligibility to receive Pandemic Unemployment Payment'. This is the simplest and easiest way to do so. Any person who experiences difficulty in doing this should contact the helpline 1890 800 024 (Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm.)

### **Covid-19 Enhanced Illness Benefit Payment**

Currently, some 2,472 people are in receipt of an Enhanced Illness Benefit payment, compared with 2,938 last week.

The quickest and easiest way to apply for Enhanced Illness Benefit is through [www.MyWelfare.ie](http://www.MyWelfare.ie).

Full details on Enhanced Illness Benefit including sector and county breakdown as well as age profile are at Appendices 9, 10 and 11.

Note for Editors and Appendices follow.