



An Roinn Coimirce Sóisialaí
Department of Social Protection

Language Scheme 2023 – 2026

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Chapter 1: Background

1.1 Introduction

This Language Scheme has been prepared by the Department of Social Protection ('the Department') as required under the Official Languages Act 2003 ('the Act').

The Act provides for the preparation by public bodies of a statutory scheme detailing the services they will provide:

- a) through the medium of Irish;
- b) through the medium of English;
- c) through the medium of Irish and English.

and the measures to be adopted to ensure that any service not provided through the medium of the Irish language will be so provided within an agreed timeframe. The Act also puts a duty on public bodies to gradually improve both the level and standard of services it provides through Irish.

Responsibility for confirming Schemes lies with the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media ('the Minister').

In accordance with section 14(3) of the Act, Language Schemes remain in force for a period of 3 years or until such time as a new Scheme is confirmed by the Minister, whichever is the later. This will change as a result of the Official Languages (Amendment) Act 2021.

1.2 Context for the Scheme

The Official Languages Act 2003 was the first piece of legislation to provide a statutory framework for the delivery of services through the Irish language.

The Department is committed to fulfilling our obligations under the Official Languages Act and the Department's policy is to ensure that:

- All letters and emails received in Irish are replied to in Irish;
- Headings of stationery, including for example, notepaper, compliment slips, file covers, labels and envelopes are provided in Irish or bilingually;
- All recorded oral announcements on phonelines are bilingual;
- Documents setting out public policy proposals, financial statements, annual reports and strategy statements are published bilingually on the Department's website;
- Signage in Departmental offices is compliant with the Acts;
- Circulars/mailshots are in both Irish and English;
- Application forms are in both Irish and English
- The official place names of Gaeltacht areas are used by the Department.

1.3 Preparation of the New Scheme

The 2003 Act provides that public bodies prepare a draft Scheme for confirmation by the Minister. This Scheme has been developed within the policy context of the Government's '20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010–2030'. It has been formulated with the intention of ensuring that all relevant obligations under the Official Languages Act 2003 by the Department will be fully addressed on an incremental basis, through this and subsequent legislation.

The DSP Scheme 2023–2026 has been drawn up in accordance with the guidelines issued by the Minister, guided by the principle that the provision of services in the Irish language should be based on:

- the level of demand for specific services in the Irish language;
- the importance of a proactive approach to the provision of such services; and
- the resources, including human and financial, and the capacity of the body concerned to develop or access the necessary language capability.

This Scheme complements the principles of high Quality Customer Service, the Department's [Customer Service Charter 2020–2022](#) and our [Customer Service Strategy 2020–2022](#).

In October 2021, the Department launched a public consultation inviting submissions from interested parties in relation to the preparation of the new Scheme. A Social media campaign was also conducted. A notice was placed on the Department's website and a similar invitation was conveyed to all staff of the Department. This new Scheme has been informed by the submissions received.

1.4 Objective of the Scheme

The objective of this Scheme is to build on progress achieved during the lifetime of previous schemes and to maintain and enhance the level of high-quality service available through Irish to our customers during the lifetime of this new Scheme.

1.5 Commencement of the Scheme

This Scheme has been confirmed by the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media. The Scheme takes effect from 01 February 2023 and shall remain in force for a period of 3 years from this date or until the relevant Part of the Official Languages (Amendment) Act 2021 has commenced.

Chapter 2: Department Overview

2.1 Mission and Objectives

The Department's mission is:

'To promote active participation and inclusion in society through the provision of income supports, employment services and other services.'

The Department's overall objective as set out in the Department's Statement of Strategy 2020–2023 is to continue putting our clients at the centre of all our operations, providing an efficient and effective service and to continue developing our staff, structures and processes.

2.2 Our Values, Behaviours and Culture

The Department of Social Protection has identified five core values, all of which directly support the Department's strategic goals. Our values were subject to thorough consideration and reflect a strong consensus among staff and stakeholders as to the values which underpin excellent service from this Department.

As a Department we value:

Public Service	We are dedicated to serving the people of Ireland in an efficient and impartial manner.
Customer Focus	We are totally committed to the positive difference we can make to our customers' lives and Irish society.
Total Professionalism	We are proud of our professionalism and commitment to quality in everything we do.
Engaged Staff	We believe that our effectiveness as an organisation is dependent on a highly skilled and engaged workforce.
Innovation	We believe that having the attitude and environment to adapt and innovate is core to our future success.

2.3 Organisation of the Department

The Department has a permanent staff complement of approximately 6,000, supplemented periodically by additional temporary and seconded staff.

The Department is structured as follows:

- Centralised offices at various locations countrywide administer the Department's long-term schemes, many of its short-term schemes, and also have a range of policy responsibilities. These include offices in Buncrana, Carrick-on-Shannon, Dublin, Dundalk, Letterkenny, Longford, Roscommon, Sligo and Waterford.
- The Department delivers schemes and services locally through a national network of 66 Intreo Centres and 58 Branch Offices. Branch Offices are required to provide services to the same level as Intreo Centres.
- Some of these offices are in Gaeltacht areas, including: Acaill (Achill), An Clochán Liath (Dungloe) and Béal an Mhuirthead (Belmullet) Intreo offices, and Daingean Uí Chúis (Dingle) Branch Office. All of these offices can provide a face-to-face and telephone service to customers through Irish.
- The Department's activities are supported by corporate services units such as human resource management, staff development and training, budget and finance, internal audit, information systems development, facilities management, legislation and provision of policy support and advice to the Minister.

The **General Register Office (GRO)**, which is based in Roscommon, manages the Civil Registration Service, which facilitates the registration of births, stillbirths, adoptions, marriages, civil partnerships and deaths in the State. Day-to-day delivery of the Civil Registration Service is provided by the Health Service Executive (HSE) through a network of local civil registration service offices across the State.

The **Social Welfare Appeals Office** is based in Dublin and is responsible for independently determining appeals against decisions on social welfare entitlements and insurability of employment.

2.4 Main Functions

The Department supports the Minister for Social Protection in the discharge of governmental, parliamentary and departmental duties. The Department's main functions are to:

- advise Government and formulate appropriate social protection and social inclusion policies;
- design, develop and deliver effective and cost-efficient income supports, activation and employment services and provide comprehensive, accurate information to all its customers;
- work towards providing seamless delivery of services in conjunction with other Departments, Agencies and bodies, and control fraud and abuse of funds within the social protection system.

2.5 Key Services

The Department serves a wide and diverse group of customers including families, unemployed people, people with illnesses and disabilities, carers and older people. The Department's remit also requires a significant level of engagement with employers including the provision of a range of employment services to employers. It administers over 70 separate schemes and services, which affect the lives of almost every person in the State.

Key services include:

- payment of a wide range of social insurance and social assistance income supports such as jobseeker payments, illness benefit, disability payments, carer's payments, pensions and supplementary welfare allowance, in addition to the universal payment of child benefit;
- through Intreo, the integration of employment and benefit payment services to ensure that payment of income supports to people who do not have a job is directly linked to the important task of supporting people in their pursuit of employment as well as training and education opportunities to improve their job prospects;
- delivery of a range of employer services including recruitment services, online publication of job vacancies, employment supports (e.g. wage subsidy schemes available to people with disabilities) and redundancy and insolvency payments;
- coordination of commitments under Pathways to Work Strategy;
- co-ordination of the [Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025](#);
- a range of community services to promote social inclusion and provide a pathway to employment for those who are unemployed.

2.6 Service delivery

Service delivery in the Department is provided to the public using a wide range of supports, including:

- online services
- face-to-face contact
- telephone
- written communication
- Department's website www.gov.ie/dsp
- MyGovID
- WelfarePartners
- JobsIreland
- Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram
- MyWelfare

Chapter 3: Irish Language Services

This Chapter sets out the services which are currently available to the public through Irish, as well as the measures and actions which the Department proposes to undertake over the next three years to improve these services.

3.1 Quality Service

The Department is committed to providing high quality services to its customers in Irish and/or bilingually as required.

The Department's Customer Service Strategy 2020–2022 states in our guiding principles that the Department will 'provide quality services through Irish and/or bilingually and inform customers of their right to choose to be dealt with through one or other of the official languages', while the Department's Customer Charter 2020–2022 reinforces this principle by stating:

'We have staff throughout the Department that can provide our services through Irish. We will make every effort to facilitate persons who wish to conduct their business through Irish including access to an Irish speaker, as well as providing application forms and documents in Irish, where required.'

The Department will further progress this commitment to providing a quality service through Irish during the lifetime of this Scheme.

Commitments:

- When the new Customer Charter and Customer Service Strategy are being developed, the provision of a service through Irish will form an integral part of our commitments.
- In the current Charter, the Department committed to undertake its business through the Irish language, where requested. During the lifetime of this Scheme, we will endeavour to be more proactive in this regard and actively offer services through the Irish language to our customers.

3.2 Correspondence

In addition to fulfilling the obligation to reply in Irish to correspondence received through that medium, the Department is also committed to issuing correspondence in Irish to those customers who have expressed a preference to be dealt with through Irish only.

The Department has in place a programme of modernisation of our information technology systems and of replacing legacy systems with Business Objects Model (BOMi) systems. These systems have a facility for recording the client's language preference when a claim is registered. Where a customer expresses a preference to be dealt with through Irish, processes have been developed in business areas to ensure that this occurs. Almost all the Department's schemes are processed on BOMi, except for a few working age schemes.

Commitments:

- The Department will encourage staff to start and finish with a greeting/signature in

Irish (i.e. ‘A chara’/‘Le meas’/etc.);

- We will encourage staff to use bilingual ‘out of office’ notices;
- We will encourage the Minister, the Minister of State or Senior Officials of the Department to begin and end their speeches and statements in the Irish language, even if the rest of the speech/statement is in English or in another language;
- Further developments to the BOMi system will incorporate the working age schemes as part of this process.

3.3 Computer Applications

The Department’s computer applications and processing systems are capable of handling Irish language characters to support processing and communicating with customers through the medium of Irish.

The Department’s Template Request for Tenders for Services includes a stipulation that the Successful Tenderer shall comply with all policies and/or guidelines relating to the provision of the Services, including, but not being limited to, complying with policies and/or protocols on employment law, the Official Languages Acts, and health and safety regulations.

The Department is committed to ensuring that all new computer applications/processing systems will be capable of handling Irish language characters.

The Department’s procurement guidelines state that *‘the successful tenderer will be required to comply with the requirements of the Official Languages Act, 2003 as it relates to the delivery of the services with the following minimum requirements:*

- (a) All application systems are capable of handling Irish language data;*
- (b) Customer communications such as information leaflets and posters are produced in both Irish and English;*
- (c) Customers who wish to communicate through Irish in matters relating to the Services are facilitated.’*

Commitments:

- The Department will continue to ensure the above criteria are met as part of any contracts/negotiations entered into as part of a Request for Tender for Services;
- We will endeavour to ensure our computer applications/systems meet our obligations under the Official Languages Acts.

3.4 Customer Services

The Department’s main service areas consist of Intreo Centres and Branch Offices that provide local services, and Centralised Scheme areas that provide for a wide range of social insurance and social assistance income support schemes, e.g. illness/disability payments and pensions. All of these offices provide a service through Irish to customers.

When a customer phones the Department and requests an Irish language service, they are put through to an Irish speaking member of staff. If one is not available, their details are taken and an arrangement is made to have an Irish speaking member of staff return their phone call.

The Department's telephone service to customers also includes an Interactive Voice Response (IVR) option which allows them to select a service through Irish when dealing with certain scheme areas.

The Department's Translations and Interpretive Services Section facilitates requests from business areas for translation and language interpretation services. This service arranges for timely translation of correspondence and documentation. The Section also makes arrangements for an interpretation service in situations where a customer wishes to conduct their business in Irish and no staff member is available to provide the service. This can be provided by both telephone and in person.

Language Interpreter via Telephone — the service is provided via a three-way phone conversation between the customer, staff member and the Interpreter. In almost all cases, this service can be arranged on the spot without any waiting period.

Language Interpreter in Person — the service is provided by way of a face-to-face meeting with the customer, staff member and the Interpreter. This can occur when a customer visits an office and there is no staff member available to provide a service through Irish. In such instances, an appointment must be arranged. The type of interpreter service used will depend on the situation. For routine matters such as making and confirming appointments, interpreting via telephone or video link may be suitable. For more detailed interactions with a customer, an in-person service may be more suitable.

Commitments:

- Posters will be designed and displayed which will indicate to customers that the office can provide a service through Irish;
- The Department will work to ensure that phone services with an IVR will include an option to be dealt with through Irish;
- We will encourage staff to use bilingual voicemail notifications;
- The Department will continue to provide translation and language interpretation services during the lifetime of the Scheme, and will work to improve response times for these services.

3.5 Offices in Gaeltacht areas

The Department has four public offices in Gaeltacht areas: Acaill (Achill), An Clochán Liath (Dungloe) and Beal an Mhuirthead (Belmullet) Intreo offices, and Daingean Uí Chúis (Dingle) branch office. All of these offices can currently provide a telephone or face-to-face service through Irish and will continue to do so during the life of the Scheme.

The Department will work to maintain and improve the level of service available through Irish in Gaeltacht areas by:

- encouraging and facilitating staff to attend training courses to improve their proficiency in Irish;
- supporting staff who are willing to provide a service through Irish;
- supporting all managers in providing a service through Irish in offices serving the Gaeltacht.

It is intended that Irish will become the working language of our Gaeltacht offices.

Commitments:

- The Department will continue to ensure that a high-quality service through Irish is provided by these offices, and will strive to make any necessary improvements to this service if/as required;
- We will examine the feasibility of extending full services through Irish to other offices and areas close to the Gaeltacht community;
- Priority will be given to the Irish language in any dealings with the Gaeltacht community, whether those dealings or communications are in writing or orally, and correspondence will not be issued through English only unless specifically requested;
- Measures will be implemented within those offices to strengthen the Irish Language as a working language and as a means of communication for the staff in them. These measures will include:
 - internal meetings held through Irish;
 - training and appropriate support provided for members of staff who want to strengthen their competence in the Irish language, so that they are not prevented from taking part in those meetings.

3.6 Online Services

All services and information within www.MyGovID.ie, www.MyWelfare.ie and www.WelfarePartners.ie are available to our customers in both Irish and English.

A wide range of MyWelfare services are available. Progress will be made to increase the number of services available during the course of the Scheme.

Commitment:

- The Department will continue to work on and expand the number of online services available to customers, while enhancing the level of these services available through Irish.

3.7 Website

The Department's website <https://www.gov.ie/dsp> contains a large volume of material in both Irish and English. This includes information on the Department's range of schemes and services, while we also have a general inquiry page which is available in Irish at the link below: <https://www.gov.ie/ga/seirbhis/fiosruchan-ginearalta/>

Application forms and relevant information leaflets are available for download from the Department's website in both Irish and English.

The Department is committed to ensuring the information on its website is accessible to all.

The Department will build on progress made in the provision of information, application forms and leaflets in both Irish and English on the Department's website. Any new information leaflets and static application forms placed on the website will be available in both Irish and English in line with the requirement for simultaneous publication as laid out in the Official Languages Acts.

The press office arranges for all press releases to be translated into Irish and these are published on the Department's website. By their nature, press releases can be amended very close to the time that they issue and, therefore, it is not always possible to have a press release translated into Irish simultaneously upon publication of the English version. We commit, however, to ensuring that all press releases will be translated into Irish as soon as possible after they have been published in English.

Commitments:

- The Department will build on progress made in the provision of information, application forms and leaflets in both Irish and English on the Department's website. Any new information leaflets and static application forms placed on the website will be available in both Irish and English;
- An Irish language version of all static information on the DSP website will be provided;
- All press releases will be published in Irish as soon as possible after the publication of the English version;
- The feasibility of having at least one member of staff in the Press Office who is bilingual will be examined.

3.8 Designated Irish Language posts

As part of the Department's workforce planning process, Principals in the Department are invited to identify posts which should be filled by staff capable of providing a service through Irish. Following consultation with Heads of Divisions, the Department has concluded that the delivery of business through Irish will be better serviced by designating locations that require a bilingual officer rather than developing a framework of designated functional bilingual posts which is considered to be too restrictive.

Assigning functional bilingual officers by location irrespective of grade means that the Department can draw from available PAS functional bilingual panels in the required location and through internal staff who are willing to provide a service through Irish.

Commitments:

- The Department will examine the requirement for bilingual posts in certain specialist areas with a view to filling such needs during the lifetime of the Scheme;

- We will liaise with PAS regarding the recruitment and selection of staff for specialised Irish Language positions;
- We will consider the awarding of extra marks for people who are competent to conduct official business through Irish in internal promotion competitions

3.9 Staff Support

The Department has an intranet site called STÓR. This site has a dedicated page which contains information to assist Departmental staff in complying with the obligations of the Official Languages Acts and improving the Department's service through Irish. A copy of this Scheme and an up-to-date list of the contact details of staff willing to provide a service through Irish will be available on STÓR. The Irish language material contained on STÓR will continue to be reviewed and updated accordingly. The Department will encourage staff to use the site as a key source of relevant material.

Commitments:

- An Irish Language site on STÓR will be re-designed to provide improved access and more relevant supports to staff;
- Regular notifications on updates to the site will issue to staff to encourage greater use of the facilities available to them;
- Surveys on the supports available to staff will be conducted;
- A survey to identify additional staff with a competency in the Irish Language will be undertaken early in 2022.

3.10 Training and Development

A range of supports are available through the Department's Staff Development Unit (SDU) to equip frontline staff with the necessary skills and confidence to communicate through Irish with the public by phone, letter and in person. The Department has assessed Irish language training requirements through consultation with managers and staff and has arranged Irish language training for staff. Staff are supported on an ongoing basis to complete a Certificate in Professional Irish (NFQ levels 3 to 6) with Gaelchultúr. Pre-entry language proficiency assessments are provided to ensure staff are supported to attend the appropriate level and a Preparatory Course is aimed at learners who are not yet at a suitable level to undertake the Certificate in Professional Irish.

The Department ensures that our obligations under the Official Languages Acts and the Irish Language Scheme are brought to the attention of staff at relevant staff training courses, including new entrant induction courses and training courses for managers. To this end, Irish Language Training is promoted by Staff Development Unit in "Meet & Greet", "Induction & Orientation" and "Frontline Customer Service" training.

Particular emphasis is placed on staff obligations under the Official Languages Act, and staff are informed of departmental interpretation and translation services and language training

supports, including the Department's Refund of Fees scheme for staff who pursue Irish language education outside of work hours.

Our organisation is committed to the continued development and training of staff to facilitate the provision of services through Irish. The Department will continue to assess Irish language training requirements through consultation with managers and staff, and will arrange training for staff as appropriate. As part of this process, Staff Development Unit intend to carry out a review in 2022 of staff engagement with Irish Language learning, and a repository of names where staff members have received an accredited qualification will be held centrally. This will then be used to support colleagues and business areas locally, where a requirement for Irish is needed to engage with customers. As part of this review, SDU will determine if there are business areas of the Department with any potential gaps or a lack of availability of Irish speakers, so that SDU can target these areas and this learning more effectively across the Department.

As part of their engagement with other business areas, SDU has approached the Department's Wellbeing Unit to ascertain whether there is an appetite for developing local Ciorcail Chomhrá groups for staff to further develop their interest in the Irish language, outside of formal training interventions. An officer from SDU will liaise with the Wellbeing Unit to develop this initiative further.

Staff Development Unit will engage with Corporate Planning Unit in relation to the training requirements, if any, of the members of staff who are willing and able to provide a service through Irish to our customers. This will include offering them training courses from Preparatory level up to Level 6 on the National Framework of Qualifications and, should they wish to avail of training courses at a higher level, supporting them through the Refund of Fees scheme.

Commitments:

- During the lifetime of this Scheme, the Department will actively encourage and facilitate staff to take advantage of the range of supports available to them, and in particular to attend Irish language training courses;
- We will continue to bring our obligations under the Official Languages Act and the Irish Language Scheme to the attention of staff at relevant staff training courses, including new entrant induction courses and training courses for managers;
- We will promote Irish Language Training in our "Meet & Greet", "Induction & Orientation" and "Frontline Customer Service" training;
- We will promote the use of the Refund of Fees programme to avail of Irish Language training outside of work hours;
- A review of staff engagement with Irish Language training will be undertaken by the Staff Development Unit;
- Staff Development Unit will determine if there are business areas of the Department with a lack of availability of Irish speakers, to target learning more effectively across the Department;

- Corporate Planning Unit (CPU) will liaise with the Staff Development Unit to identify those staff with a qualification in the Irish Language who would be in a position to support their colleagues and local business areas in relation to Irish Language enquiries/matters;
- CPU will work with Staff Development Unit to identify and develop training supports for those staff who have no knowledge or competency in the Irish Language but would be interested in trying to develop same;
- We will promote and encourage the establishment of Coircail Chomhrá among staff in all business areas to support their development and enable them to improve their Irish Language skills.

Chapter 4: Publication and Monitoring of the Scheme

4.1 Monitoring and Review

The Department will report on the delivery of services through Irish and the implementation of the Scheme in our Annual Report.

Corporate Planning Unit will co-ordinate monitoring and reporting on the Scheme by:

- overseeing the implementation of the Scheme by providing updates and reports on a twice-yearly basis;
- monitoring the demand for services through Irish;
- reviewing and updating a directory of staff willing to provide service through Irish on an ongoing basis;
- co-ordinating and responding to any customer complaints about the services being provided through Irish and liaising with Oifig Choimisinéir na dTeangacha Oifigiúla on an ongoing basis;
- promoting the use of Irish among staff and encouraging participation on relevant training courses;
- conducting a survey of our business areas to indicate the level and type of service available through Irish.

The Department will continue to consider any additional measures that are necessary to improve the level of service provided by the organisation in the light of demand and arising from the regular assessment of progress.

Heads of Business Areas will be responsible for the implementation of the Scheme in their areas. The Department will annually review the implementation of its commitments in the Language Scheme.

Commitments:

- An annual review of developments under the Irish Language Scheme will be undertaken and presented to Management Board;
- We will conduct a survey of our business areas;
- We will continue to update the numbers of staff available to provide a service through Irish;
- We will monitor the number of staff participating in Irish training courses and Refund of Fees scheme each semester;
- We will provide statistical information on the level of service through Irish provided by the Department. This will include the following:
 - The number of documents sent for translation into Irish;
 - The number of times the interpretive services was used to conduct telephone calls/virtual meetings with customers through Irish;
 - Details on the number of times services on MyWelfare.ie, MyGovid and

WelfarePartners are accessed/conducted through Irish;

- Updates on the number of complaints received from an Oifig Choimisinéir na dTeangacha Oifigiúla.;
- Details on the number of letters/other correspondence that issue to customers in Irish;
- The number of forms/publications downloaded from our website.

4.2 Publication and Promotion

A bilingual version of the Scheme will be made available on our internal and external websites.

Notices advising customers of the availability of services through Irish will be prominently displayed in all relevant offices.

A copy of the Scheme will be forwarded by the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media to an Oifig Choimisinéir na dTeangacha Oifigiúla.