



national consumer agency
gníomhaireacht náisiúnta tomhaltóirí

putting **consumers** first



National Consumer Agency

Who are we?

The National Consumer Agency is an independent national agency that was established by the Irish government under the Consumer Protection Act 2007.

Our activities incorporate the work that was previously done by the Office of the Director of Consumer Affairs (ODCA). We also have additional areas of focus, which are outlined below, and we have extensive new powers. Among other things, these powers allow us to deal with unfair, misleading or aggressive commercial practices.

What do we do?

Our aim is to provide strong and modern consumer protection, safeguarding consumers in Ireland and empowering them to understand and to exercise their rights.

To achieve our aim, we:

- inform consumers of their rights through **consumer information**;

- promote a strong consumer culture in Ireland through consumer **education and awareness**;
- help businesses obey consumer law through our **enforcement** activities; and
- represent consumer interests at all levels of local and national consumer policy development through **targeted research** and **forceful advocacy**.

Our consumer website, www.consumerconnect.ie, provides a broad range of consumer-related information, news, top tips and an email enquiry service. If you can't find what you are looking for on our website, ring our friendly and helpful advisors on **LoCall 1890 432 432**.

Our corporate website, www.nca.ie, helps businesses understand their obligations. It also provides useful references for the media and researchers. Further information is available in our leaflet ***A Guide To The National Consumer Agency***.

1. Value for money	4
2. Why do we have legislation?	4
3. Where should the price be displayed?	6
4. Must the price always be displayed?	8
5. Must the price be shown in Euro?	8
6. What is unit pricing?	8
7. What about displaying taxes and charges?	9
8. What are the rules for service providers?	10
9. What is price fixing?	10
10. Who should I complain to?	11

a guide to consumer law and prices

As consumers, the price we pay for goods and services affects us all. In an increasingly globalised and competitive marketplace with a wide variety of goods and services on offer, we need to know:

- how much we are paying for goods;
- how the cost is broken down; and
- how we can expect the price to be displayed.

The law tells shops and service providers how to display prices so that consumers can easily compare them and make informed choices.

This guide:

- explains the legislation;
- lists the agencies responsible for enforcing it; and
- deals with a number of frequently asked questions.



value for money

Generally speaking, there is no law in Ireland that states what the maximum or the minimum price for any product or service should be. This encourages retailers and service providers to compete with each other to attract your business.

It's not against the law for any seller to charge more than their competitors. If you're unhappy with the prices being charged you should take your business elsewhere. Shopping around and comparing prices should help you to get the best value.

Why do we have legislation?

Pricing legislation was designed to make sure we have the information we need so we can compare prices before we buy something.

'Price display' legislation allows us to compare prices between different outlets, different brands and different sizes of a particular product.

The legislation also applies to goods sold:

- by mail order;
- through catalogues; and
- on the Internet in Ireland.



Shopping around is the best way to find good value. If you find that traders are not sticking to the legislation, you should complain to them.

If you feel they are not dealing with your concerns, you should complain to us in the National Consumer Agency. We can prosecute traders if they don't obey the law.



where should the price be displayed?

Whoever is supplying the goods or services should generally display the price either on the product or near it, for example on a label on the edge of a shelf.

However, there are occasions when the law states exactly how the prices must be displayed. There are four 'Price Display Orders' that make sure consumers can easily compare prices without committing themselves to buying anything.

Hairdressers and Barbers

Hairdressers and barbers must:

- display an up-to-date price list for every service they provide; and
- make sure the list must be visible from the street or immediately inside the entrance to the premises.

Petrol stations

Petrol stations must:

- display the prices per litre for petrol and diesel;
- make sure the sign is clearly visible from the side of the road;
- use writing on the sign that is at least 20cm in height; and
- match the price displayed to the actual price charged at the petrol pump.

Pubs and other licensed premises (but not off-licences)

Licensed premises must display two price lists.

1. Immediately outside or just inside the entrance, they must display a 16-item list showing the prices of 16 specific drinks.
2. Within each drinking area, they must also display a full list of all drinks.

32.50

99.79

If the premises has a bar and lounge, each charging different prices, the price being charged in each area must be displayed on the relevant list.

Restaurants, cafés, hotels and pubs serving food

Restaurants and other places that sell food to be eaten on the premises must display prices outside and on their menus.

If they don't give out individual menus, they must have a clear display of prices on the premises, such as on a blackboard. The price list must show if there is a:

- minimum charge;
- service charge – and whether this is included in the price of the food; and
- cover charge or any similar charge.

If they charge different prices at different times or days, the price display should specify these different prices and which items they relate to.

If any of the types of businesses fail to display their prices as the law dictates, or charges you more than the price displayed, you should tell us in the National Consumer Agency.



must the price always be displayed?

Yes, in the case of goods. Services are slightly different and we deal with that later in the booklet. In general, shops must display the selling price of every item offered for sale.

For products that are sold by weight or volume, the selling price must show a unit price **by reference to the metric measure**, for example price per kilogram or per metre.

Must the price be shown in Euro?

EC regulations require that the prices of goods sold in Ireland must be clearly and legibly displayed in euro. However, they don't specify that the price shown for the product in Ireland is the only price displayed. Traders may also show prices in another currency.

The euro price does not have to be displayed more prominently than the price in other currencies. We realise that this can sometimes confuse consumers, but it does not breach consumer legislation.

However, if any consumer, is concerned about how prominently the euro price for Ireland is displayed compared to the price for other countries, they can raise their concerns with traders or the National Consumer Agency.

What is unit pricing?

Unit pricing is a useful way to compare prices of groceries that come in different sized packages. The 'unit price' of goods is the price it would cost for a given quantity of the product, for example, one litre of fruit juice or one kilogram of potatoes.

In the case of wine the unit price should relate to a 75cl container or bottle and for spirits it should relate to a 70cl container or bottle. If a product is sold by weight, volume or measure, in addition to displaying its actual selling price, the seller must also show the product's unit price. This unit price should be displayed on or near the item. So if you are a keen consumer, it's well worth checking the unit prices of



products of a similar type – even if this price appears to be in the small print.

For example, the unit prices for boxes of cereals from a single manufacturer will generally show that the bigger the box, the better the value. You can use this information to compare prices across different manufacturers to find the best value.

What about displaying taxes and charges?

Shops must display the final selling price of goods in euro, including VAT and any other taxes or charges. The price shown must be for a single item of that product, such as one jumper, or a given number of items, such as six eggs in a box. They must clearly display the price on or near the product.

There are some exceptions to these rules, such as items that are:

- sold at auction;
- provided in the course of a service; or
- sold in bulk, where the final selling price can only be determined once the consumer has decided how much they want to buy.

In certain invoices, such as phone and electricity bills, the VAT may be shown separately.

An exception to the ‘tax-inclusive’ rule is a business selling goods intended mainly for other business customers. Examples are a ‘trade only’ electrical distributor; or a cash-and-carry that is generally for ‘trade only’ customers. These kinds of businesses are allowed to show prices that exclude the VAT element.

what are the rules for service providers?

Due to the nature of a 'service' it is not always possible to display the price in advance. However, providers must inform the consumer of the total cost of the service and how this was calculated before they are engaged by the consumer.

There are also rules about how additional charges and booking fees are shown in certain advertisements for concerts and theatre shows. Any additional charges and the reason for them must be stated separately.

What is price fixing?

Price fixing is when prices in a particular sector are being kept deliberately high because it is dominated by:

- just one company (a monopoly); or
- a small handful of businesses (a cartel).

If you suspect 'price fixing', you should report it to the Competition Authority (see address across). You can submit an anonymous complaint, but the Authority says it "can only act on such complaints if the information is verifiable and of sufficient detail to be useful".



Who should I complain to?

One of our objectives is to prioritise consumer interests across all sectors of the economy. We encourage consumers to be assertive when they are dealing with businesses.

If you are concerned about possible breaches of pricing legislation, tell the relevant retailer or service provider. If you think a shop is charging you too much, then you should tell them so.

If you feel a shop or service provider is not taking your concerns seriously, then you should contact us at:

The National Consumer Agency

4 Harcourt Road
Dublin 2

Consumer Helpline LoCall 1890 432 432

www.consumerconnect.ie

You may also contact
The Competition Authority

14 Parnell Square
Dublin 1

Tel: (01) 804 5400

Fax: (01) 804 5401

Email: info@tca.ie



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The booklet is produced by:

National Consumer Agency
4 Harcourt Road
Dublin 2

You can get copies of this booklet and all our publications by:

- downloading them from www.consumerconnect.ie; or
- contacting our Consumer Helpline at **1890 432 432***

*Note that the rates charged for the use of 1890 (LoCall) numbers may vary among different service providers.