



**An Roinn Coimirce Sóisialaí**  
Department of Social Protection

# **Jobseeker's Allowance Control Survey 2020/21**

**Published: February 2022**



# Contents

Contents .....	3
1. Introduction .....	4
1.1 Background.....	4
1.2 Methodology and categorisation of results .....	4
2. Main results .....	6
3. Scheme characteristics .....	7
3.1 Overview.....	7
3.2 Eligibility conditions.....	7
3.3 Payment rates and means test.....	8
4. Survey Findings & Conclusions.....	9
4.1 Survey findings .....	9
4.2 Risk analysis by cohort .....	9
<i>Expenditure Impact</i> .....	9
4.3 Measures which will improve control activity .....	10
Annex 1 - Detailed survey results.....	11

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Background

The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection undertakes Control Surveys to establish baseline incorrect benefit levels for social welfare schemes, with a view to designing processes and control measures specifically targeted to minimise the level of future risk.

This survey was undertaken on the Jobseeker's Allowance (JA) scheme. JA is a means-tested payment made to people who are unemployed and:

- Who do not qualify for Jobseeker's Benefit (JB)/Jobseeker's Benefit (Self-Employed) (JBSE);
- Whose entitlement to JB/JBSE has expired;

OR

- Who do qualify for JB/JBSE but choose to claim Optional Jobseeker's Allowance.

In all cases the applicant must meet the means test requirements, be habitually resident in the state and be genuinely seeking full time employment.

For the survey, 750 randomly sampled JA claims in payment in 2020 and 2021 were reviewed to assess recipients' compliance with the rules of the scheme. These reviews took place in three batches: 250 claims were selected in January 2020, another 250 in November 2020 and a further 250 in July 2021.

It should be noted that work on this survey was delayed for several months by staff redeployments within the Department during the Covid-19 pandemic and the public health restrictions in place.

The headline reporting metric for this Control Survey is shown as Net Loss to Government, which is the overpayment rate established by the survey, minus transfers to other schemes, minus the value of overpayments recovered.

## 1.2 Methodology and categorisation of results

The results are categorised based on the decisions taken on each case in the sample:

- ✓ **Benefit Correct:** Includes cases where no evidence was found that any conditions for receipt of benefit, or the rate of benefit in payment, were not satisfied.
- ✓ **Incorrect Benefit:** Includes cases where one or more of the eligibility conditions for receipt of benefit, or the rate of benefit in payment, are not being met, such that a revised decision has been made, or should in principle be made, leading to a change in the payment rate for this customer or the termination of the claim. Cases of incorrect benefit are further classified based on the decisions of the Deciding Officer in each case included in the survey sample:

- Suspected fraud arises where a Deciding Officer is satisfied that there is sufficient evidence that the customer deliberately provided false or misleading information or wilfully concealed relevant information.
- Customer error refers to cases where a customer provided inaccurate or incomplete information or there was an unreported change in a person's circumstances; and
- Official error refers to cases where benefits are paid incorrectly due to inaction, delay or mistakes made by the Department's staff.

The main results of the survey are set out in section 2.

## 2. Main results

The survey finds that Net Loss to Government for JA was 7.1% of total expenditure.

Table 1 – Main results of JA Control Survey

Percentage of Expenditure	Predominant category	Type of claim impact (percentage of expenditure)					Overall, Over / Underpayment
		Over-payment	Transfer with other schemes	Recoveries	Net Loss to Government	Under-payment	
	Suspected Fraud	4.7	0			0	4.7
	Official Error	0.1	0			-0.0	0.1
	Customer Error	3.1	0.1			-0.8	2.2
	<b>Total</b>	<b>8.0</b>	<b>0.1</b>	<b>-0.8</b>	<b>7.1</b>	<b>-0.9</b>	<b>6.2</b>
	95% CI Lower	6.2	0	-0.8	5.3	-0.5	4.8
	95% CI Upper	9.9	0.3	-0.8	9.1	-1.3	7.8

Source: DEASP. Figures may not add due to rounding.

Table 2 – Outcomes by predominant category and eligibility component (percentage of expenditure) – Overpayments

Percentage of expenditure affected	Predominant incorrect benefit component	Predominant category			
		Suspected Fraud	Official Error	Customer Error	All Over-payments
	Customer failed to supply required information	2.0	0	0	2.0
	Customer does not meet basic eligibility criteria	1.1	0	0.3	1.4
	Customer means not correct	1.7	0.1	2.2	3.9
	Additional allowances are not correct	0	0.0	0.2	0.2
	Other unreported change in circumstances	0	0	0.5	0.5
	<b>Total</b>	<b>4.7</b>	<b>0.1</b>	<b>3.1</b>	<b>8.0</b>

Source: DEASP. Figures may not add due to rounding.

## 3. Scheme characteristics

### 3.1 Overview

Jobseeker's Allowance (JA) is a means-tested payment made to people who are unemployed.

The characteristics of the scheme on the dates of sample selections (January 2020, November 2020 and July 2021), are summarised below in Table 3:

Table 3: Characteristics of the scheme

Date	Characteristic	Sample	Population
January 2020 (250 cases)	Age (mean, median)	40, 39	40, 39
	% men	62%	63%
	% women	38%	37%
	% part-time/casuals	24%	24%
	Claim duration [months] (mean, median)	33, 16	37, 16
	Payment (mean, median)	239, 203	236, 203
November 2020 (250 cases)	Age (mean, median)	40, 40	40, 39
	% men	65%	63%
	% women	35%	37%
	% part-time/casuals	14%	14%
	Claim duration [months] (mean, median)	35, 16	36, 16
	Payment (mean, median)	237, 203	234, 203
July 2021 (250 cases)	Age (mean, median)	40, 39	40, 39
	% men	62%	63%
	% women	38%	37%
	% part-time/casuals	14%	15%
	Claim duration [months] (mean, median)	37, 19	39, 19
	Payment (mean, median)	237, 203	236, 203

Source: DSP. Figures may not add due to rounding.

The eligibility conditions for JA are summarised below, and further information is available at <https://www.gov.ie/en/service/1306dc-jobseekers-allowance/>.

### 3.2 Eligibility conditions

To qualify for Jobseeker's Allowance, an applicant must:

- Satisfy a means test;
- Aged 18 to 66 years;

- Be habitually resident in Ireland;
- Be capable of work;
- Be available for full-time work;
- Be genuinely seeking work; and
- Be fully or partly unemployed (at least 4 days out of work in every 7).

**Note:** If an applicant is self-employed, the last condition does not apply.

### **3.3 Payment rates and means test**

The rate of payment will depend on an applicant's income and the outcome of the means assessment. If an applicant has no means, are aged 26 or over, and are single, s/he will get the full weekly payment of €208.

An increase is payable for each child dependant if an applicant is getting an increase for a qualified adult. If an applicant does not qualify for an increase for a qualified adult, s/he may get a half-rate increase for a qualified child dependant.



## 4. Survey Findings & Conclusions

### 4.1 Survey findings

The Net Loss to Government arising from JA is 7.1% of scheme expenditure. This is made up of the overpayment rate established by the survey of 8.0% of expenditure, minus 0.8% of expenditure recovered from overpayments in the relevant years, and 0.1% transfers to other schemes. (Figures may not add due to rounding). Some 5.1% of claims were found to have been underpaid.

### 4.2 Risk analysis by cohort

The survey did not find significant differences in expenditure impact by claim characteristics. In terms of overpayment case numbers, the survey results identified the following risk factors:

- Part-time / Casuals were almost twice as likely to have received an overpayment compared to non-casuals (30.5% compared to 15.2%);
- Receiving payments at Post Offices was associated with a lower likelihood of receiving an incorrect payment (14.4%) compared to other payment methods (24.1%);
- Those aged 25 and older were more likely to have received an overpayment than those aged under 25 (19.5% compared to 6.4%);
- Ignoring employment means, those with any other means were over twice as likely to have received an overpayment compared to those without such means (35.5% compared to 14.5%);
- Customers who are married or cohabiting were more likely to have received an overpayment (28.5%) than those who were single (11.4%);
- There were no statistically significant differences:
  - Based on claim duration;
  - Based on customer nationality; or
  - By province of residence.

#### ***Expenditure Impact***

As outlined above, while part-time/casual jobseekers are more likely than non-casual jobseekers to have been overpaid, this is not reflected in the expenditure impact. This suggests that more casual jobseekers had smaller changes in payments compared to non-casual jobseekers. This should be the case given that casual jobseekers have declared means from their casual employment and would be receiving smaller weekly JA payments.

### 4.3 Measures which will improve control activity

The Covid 19 pandemic has impacted control reviews on the Jobseekers Allowance scheme during 2020/2021. Data Analytics, which were a primary catalyst in identifying cases for review, were suspended from March 2020 until November 2021. Social Welfare Inspector visits to customers and employer inspections were curtailed in line with public health restrictions. Special Investigations Unit were focussed on Pandemic Unemployment Payments investigations during this period. In addition, throughout 2020/2021 many control staff were assigned to assist with dealing with PUP applications. In order to reduce risk of disease transmission all new claims were paid via bank transfer rather than at post offices and existing recipients were offered the choice of having their payment made via their bank.

From the risk analysis of the Jobseekers Allowance (JA) Survey, the Department will ensure that a greater emphasis will be placed on data matching involving real-time payslip information provided by Revenue<sup>1</sup> for the identification, monthly, of the following instances:

- Nil means customers who have employment details showing on RTLU.
- Employment details for qualified adults where they are being paid with the customer.
- Changes in employment for casual JA customers.
- Other claims where the data matching may indicate a change of means that has not been reported.
- Ad Hoc checking of RTLU data by control staff, particularly around casual claims.

The Department will continue to utilize the resources and experience of the Department's Special Investigation Unit to target high risk sectors where fraud and abuse is considered to be the most prevalent, e.g. non-residency, concurrent working and claiming.

Previously, the Department had planned to run an awareness campaign to encourage customers to inform the Department, in a timely manner, of changes in their means/circumstances, thereby helping to ensure that correct payments are made, and no overpayments occur. This was postponed due to the pandemic. The Department will now revisit this campaign and run it as soon as it is possible to do so.

The Department will ensure that all new applicants for Jobseeker's allowance will be paid at the post office, and eventually all jobseekers will be paid through the post office.

Signing / Certification for jobseekers will be re-introduced following suspension during the pandemic.

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<sup>1</sup> The legal basis for the sharing of personal data with third parties and the processing of personal data is covered in more detail in the Department's privacy statement (<https://www.gov.ie/en/organisation-information/534503-privacy-statement/#section-6-the-legal-basis-for-processing>)

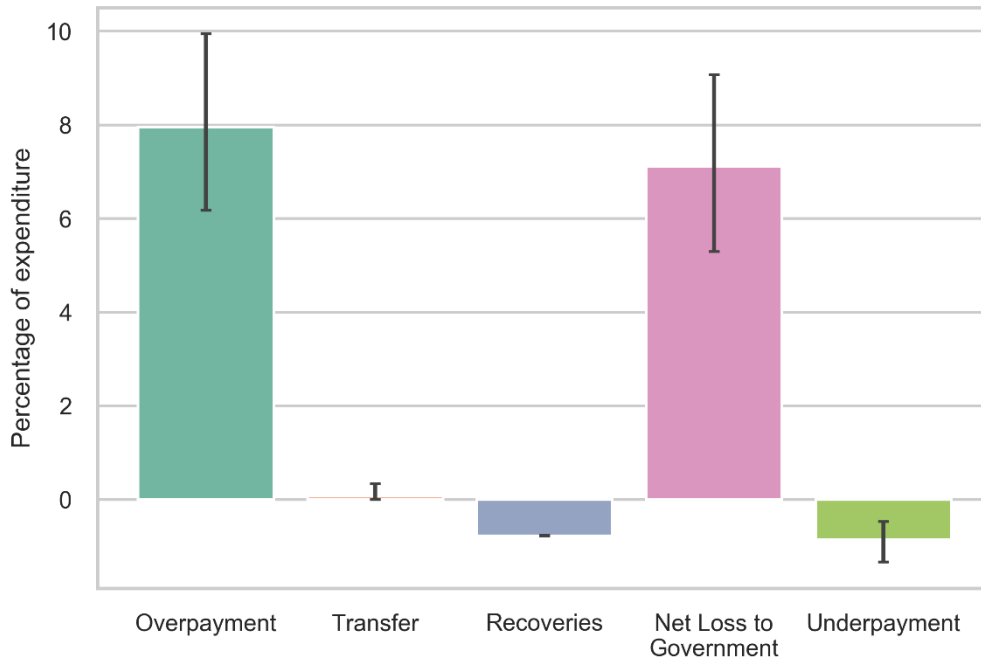
# Annex 1 - Detailed survey results

The results of the survey are presented in this section. Bootstrapped 95% confidence intervals for the results are shown both graphically and numerically below each table.

## Incorrect benefit by type and category

### Percentage of Expenditure

Figure 1 - Incorrect benefit by type and percentage of expenditure, with 95% confidence intervals



Incorrect benefit by type, with 95% confidence intervals

Table I-1 - Incorrect benefit by type and predominant category (percentage of expenditure affected)

Percentage of Expenditure	Predominant category	Type of claim impact (percentage of expenditure)				
		Over-payment	Transfers with other schemes	Recoveries	Net Loss to Government	Under-payment
	Suspected Fraud	4.7	0			0
	Official Error	0.1	0			-0.0
	Customer Error	3.1	0.1			-0.8
	<b>Total</b>	<b>8.0</b>	<b>0.1</b>	<b>-0.8</b>	<b>7.1</b>	<b>-0.9</b>
	95% CI Lower	6.2	0	-0.8	5.3	-0.5
	95% CI Upper	9.9	0.3	-0.8	9.1	-1.3

Source: DSP. Figures may not add due to rounding.

Percentage of claims affected

Figure 2 – Cases of incorrect benefit by type, with 95% confidence intervals

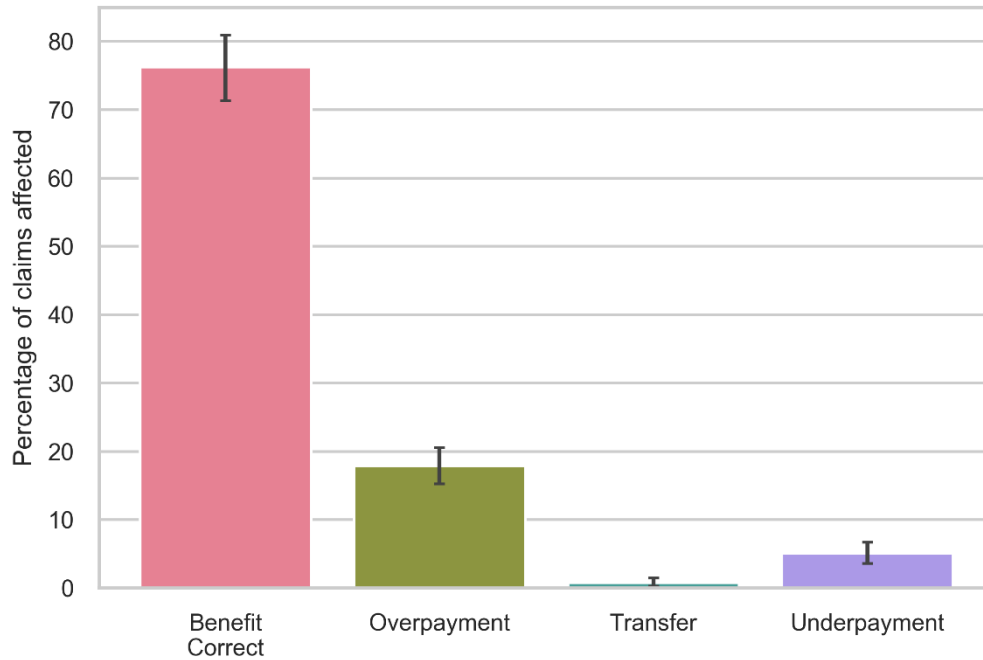


Table I-2 – Percentage of Overpayment and Transfer cases by type and category

Percentage of cases affected	Predominant category	Type of claim impact (percentage of cases affected)		
		Overpayment	Transfers with other schemes	Underpayment
	Suspected Fraud	4.9	0	0
	Official Error	0.5	0	0.3
	Customer Error	12.4	0.8	4.8
	<b>Total</b>	<b>17.9</b>	<b>0.8</b>	<b>5.1</b>
	95% CI Lower	15.2	0.3	3.6
	95% CI Upper	20.6	1.5	6.7

Source: DSP. Figures may not add due to rounding

*Predominant and overlapping error categories*

More than one category of incorrect benefit may be detected in respect of a given claim. In such cases, the *predominant* category is assigned according to the following hierarchy: 1–Suspected Fraud; 2–Official Error; 3–Customer Error. The tables in this section show which cases were affected by more than one type of incorrect benefit and provide an additional breakdown of the Fraud or Error categories found.

Figure 3 – Overpayments by *predominant* and *overlapping* category (*explanatory table*)

<i>Predominant</i> category ↓↓	↓↓ <b>All cases affected by this category (including overlaps)</b>		
	<b>Suspected Fraud (all)</b>	<b>Official Error (all)</b>	<b>Customer Error (all)</b>
<b>1. Predominantly Suspected Fraud</b>	Suspected Fraud (all cases)	←←of which, Suspected Fraud AND Official Error	<i>Not possible to combine</i>
<b>2. Predominantly Official Error</b>	<i>Cases with Suspected Fraud can't be predominantly Official Error</i>	Official Error (NO Suspected Fraud)	←←of which, Official Error AND Customer Error
<b>3. Predominantly Customer Error</b>	<i>Cases with Suspected Fraud can't be predominantly Customer Error</i>	<i>Cases with Official Error can't be predominantly Customer Error</i>	Customer Error (NO Official Error)

Table I-3 – Overpayments by *predominant* and *overlapping* category (*percentage of expenditure affected*)

<b>Percentage of Expenditure</b>	<i>Predominant</i> category ↓↓	↓↓ <b>Overlapping</b> category ( <i>percentage of expenditure</i> )		
		Suspected Fraud (any)	Official Error (any)	Customer Error (any)
1. Suspected Fraud		4.7	0.1	
2. Official Error			0.1	0
3. Customer Error				3.1

Table I-4 – Overpayments by *predominant* and *overlapping* category (*percentage of claims affected*)

<b>Percentage of Claims Affected</b>	<i>Predominant</i> category ↓↓	↓↓ <b>Overlapping</b> category ( <i>percentage of claims affected</i> )		
		Suspected Fraud (any)	Official Error (any)	Customer Error (any)
1. Suspected Fraud		4.9	0.1	
2. Official Error			0.5	0
3. Customer Error				12.4

Source: DSP. Figures may not add due to rounding.

Table I-5 – Overpayments by **predominant** and **overlapping** category, with details (percentage of expenditure affected)

Percentage of Expenditure	Predominant category ↓↓	↓↓ <b>Overlapping</b> category, with details (percentage of expenditure)						
		Suspected Fraud		Official Error			Customer Error	
		Materially incorrect information	Willful concealment	Decision error	Failed to act on information	Length of time since last claim review	Inaccurate information provided	Unreported change in circumstances
		1. Suspected Fraud	1.1	3.7	0	0.1	0	
2. Official Error			0.0	0.1	0	0	0	
3. Customer Error						0.3	2.8	

Table I-6 – Overpayments by **predominant** and **overlapping** category, with details (percentage of claims affected)

Percentage of Claims Affected	Predominant category	↓↓ <b>Overlapping</b> category, with details (percentage of claims affected)						
		Suspected Fraud		Official Error			Customer Error	
		Materially incorrect information	Willful concealment	Decision error	Failed to act on information	Length of time since last claim review	Inaccurate information provided	Unreported change in circumstances
		1. Suspected Fraud	0.9	4.0	0	0.1	0	
2. Official Error			0.1	0.4	0	0	0	
3. Customer Error						0.7	11.7	

Source: DSP. Figures may not add due to rounding.

## Outcomes by incorrect eligibility condition

Figure 4: Incorrect Benefit by eligibility criteria and expenditure impact

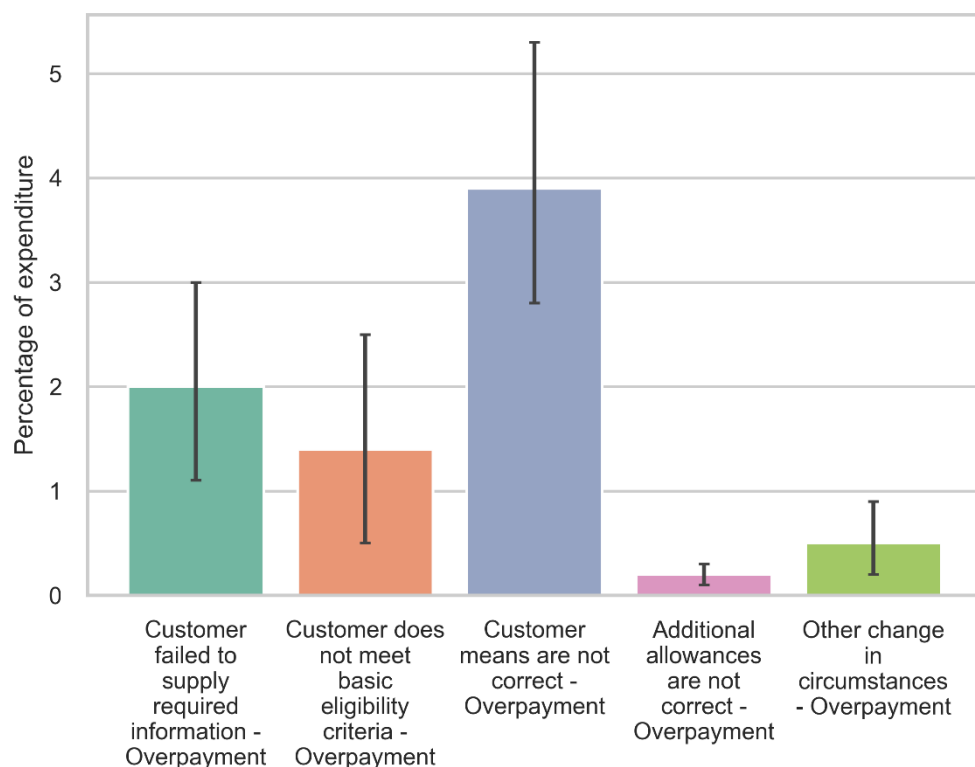


Table 1-7 –Outcomes by predominant category and eligibility component (percentage of expenditure) - Overpayments

Percentage of expenditure affected	Predominant incorrect benefit component	Predominant category			
		Suspected Fraud	Official Error	Customer Error	All Over-payments
	Customer failed to supply required information	2.0	0	0	2.0
	Customer does not meet basic eligibility criteria	1.1	0	0.3	1.4
	Customer means not correct	1.7	0.1	2.2	3.9
	Additional allowances are not correct	0	0.0	0.2	0.2
	Other unreported change in circumstances	0	0	0.5	0.5
	<b>Total</b>	<b>4.7</b>	<b>0.1</b>	<b>3.1</b>	<b>8.0</b>

Source: DSP. Figures may not add due to rounding.

Figure 5 - Incorrect benefit by eligibility criteria and number of cases affected

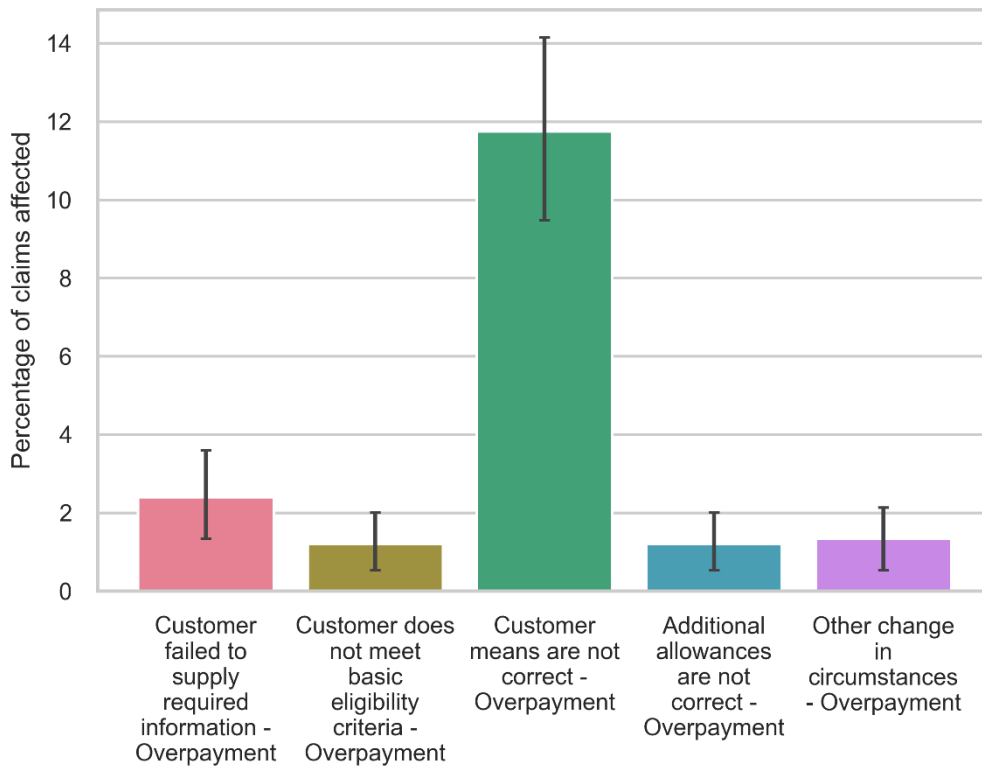


Table I-8 – Percentage of Overpayment cases by predominant category and eligibility component

Percentage of cases affected	Predominant incorrect benefit component	Predominant category			
		Suspected Fraud	Official Error	Customer Error	All Over-payments
	Customer failed to supply required information	2.4	0	0	2.4
	Customer does not meet basic eligibility criteria	0.9	0	0.3	1.2
	Customer means not correct	1.6	0.4	9.7	11.7
	Additional allowances are not correct	0	0.1	1.1	1.2
	Other unreported change in circumstances	0	0	1.3	1.3
	<b>Total</b>	<b>4.9</b>	<b>0.5</b>	<b>12.4</b>	<b>17.9</b>

Source: DSP. Figures may not add due to rounding.





