

Electricity and gas: 52 million calls to operators' call centres and over 500,000 written complaints.

ARERA published a **Call Centre Report** and a **Complaint Report**.
Over **€ 8 million** to consumers for compensation and conciliation

Milan, 2 August 2019 - Approximately **52 million calls were received in 2018 from electricity and gas suppliers**, monitored in ARERA's fourth "**Call Centre Quality Report**".

This Report provides a picture on the quality of telephone services based on **data provided by operators with at least 50 thousand** low-voltage and/or low-pressure **customers**¹. These are calls between **active customers and their suppliers**. The report **excludes** calls to emergency services and from competing operators offering service.

Overall, **calls by Italians to call centres have decreased**, especially for operators who have developed other means of contact (web services and smartphone apps). As to the reasons for the calls, according to the customer satisfaction survey, **38% concern the need to handle some procedure** (36% in 2017), 32.5 % the need to acquire information (37.7% in 2017), 23.9% having to solve a problem and **5.6% a complaint** (4% in 2017).

Altogether, **there has been a drop in phone calls for information and an increase in procedures and complaints**. **75% of companies use an automated answering service**, while in 25% of cases a live operator answers the customer. **In 2018, the average waiting time was 79.6 seconds**, compared to 77.0 seconds in 2017 (significantly lower than the 180 seconds minimum standard set by ARERA).

ARERA also monitored the satisfaction of call centre users through a **customer satisfaction survey** that involved the **26 companies with more than 50,000 customers** and at least 400 average calls per day, for a total of around 47.9 million customers. **The overall satisfaction index (ICS) for call centre services remained high and stable in 2018 (92.3)**, recording a slight increase compared to the second half of 2017 (+0.6).

Complaints and Conciliation Service

If a telephone call does not fix the problem, customers resort to **written complaints** and—in cases where no or an unsatisfactory response is received—**Conciliation Service**.

¹ In 2018, the number of suppliers with more than 50,000 end customers and the obligation to provide them with telephone service quality data was 54 in the first half and 53 in the second. These have declared overall to serve just over 51.2 million customers, of which more than 32.2 million are low-voltage (42.8% on the free market) and 19 million are low-gas-pressure (47.7% on the free market).

The framework of these latter cases is described in the "**Annual Report on Complaints and Dispute Resolution**" for the year 2018, which analyses the complaints submitted by customers to energy retailers and distributors.

According to this Report, **there were about 500 thousand written complaints, out of almost 54 million electricity and gas customers analysed and 550 suppliers. Written requests for information were fewer, amounting to 283 thousand.**

Both as regards complaints and requests for written information, there was a decrease compared to 2017, respectively -8.9% and -22.7% in the free market, -17.4% and -16.4% in the protected one. Only the complaints by medium-voltage electric customers (generally professional users), whose contracts are more complex, were on the decrease. **Billing was still the main topic of complaints and settlements.**

ARERA carried out its own customer satisfaction survey also on this issue of written complaints. 92% of customers had little or no information on the existence of specific standards for response to complaints and requests for information and **only 13.1% of customers who had submitted a complaint were aware of the existence of the vendor obligation introduced by ARERA to respond to written complaints within 40 days** (reduced to 30 from January 2019), **with automatic compensation in the bill in the event of no response or delay.**

In 2018, automatic compensation payments were granted to customers for approximately 2.8 million euros (-9.6% compared to 2017), to which must be added the resources recovered by final customers by recurring to **conciliation procedures, which totalled an additional 5.6 million euros.**

ARERA's Conciliation Service—set up by the Authority to provide electricity and gas customers with a resolution procedure for disputes with operators by means of an ombudsman (www.arera.it)—had a **stable number of requests compared to 2017, around 10,700, and a settlement agreement rate of 66%.**

The 2018 Reports "*Quality of telephone services of electricity and gas sales companies*" and "*Handling complaints and dispute resolution for electricity and natural gas customers*" are available on the www.arera.it website. From the Authority's website, you can also reach the *Energy and Environment Consumer Help Desk* and the *Conciliation Service*, for those wishing to learn more about active user protection services.