

## Budget 2021

### *What does it mean for Children and Young People?*

**The Children's Rights Alliance has summarised Budget 2020 from a children and young person's perspective.**

A budget like no other. Despite being the biggest budget in our history, Budget 2021 is planned to prevent further fallout from the impact of Covid-19 rather than an ambitious plan for significant changes in public services. While it does not reach the levels of investment we were looking for, Budget 2021 does include some critical investments in Tusla – the Child and Family Agency, youth services and mental health services that will enable them to meet the increased demand from young people during this pandemic.

An additional €61 million has been allocated to Tusla to plug a major deficit in their funding. We were concerned that without additional funding this year, Tusla's services would not be positioned to respond to the rise in domestic violence and potential child protection reports. This investment will also help keep other supports running including the family support programme, the education support service and the relocation programme and reduce the number of children waiting for a social worker.

With health spending overshadowing a lot of other areas in this Budget, the Alliance is relieved to see some of our asks on child poverty reflected in the plan: an additional €5.5 million investment in the hot school meals programme and increases in the Qualified Child Allowance by €5 for children over 12 and €2 for children under 12. While this is a step in the right direction, families will need more support to keep their heads above water. The investment in youth and mental health services is very positive. Over half of young people engaged in youth and student organisations in Ireland come from socially or economically disadvantaged communities. This investment will reach the more vulnerable young people in our society and ensure no child is facing new challenges alone.

In the area of early childhood care and education, Budget 2021 maintained the investment in 2020 with an allocation of €638 million. In addition, the unspent allocation from 2020 due to the reduction in demand for schemes during the Covid-19

restrictions will be carried over and used to increase investment in Access and Inclusion Model and the Tusla Inspectorate in 2021. The Government has indicated that it is waiting for two major reports to be published on a new funding model and on workforce development before making future investment. Given the essential role the sector has played in caring and educating children as well as enabling parents to continue to work during this pandemic, it is essential that investing in early years services is top of the Government's agenda.

For our reaction, see our press release [here](#) or check out our Twitter feed which will be updated with Budget reaction throughout the coming days.

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## **Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth**

The total budget allocated to the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth for 2021 is €1.958 billion and includes €32 million allocated for capital spending. This does not include spending on disability as this remains under the Health budget.

*Our response:*

The focus in Budget 2021 is on vulnerable children and young people. We know that children and young people have been significantly impacted by this pandemic and it has thrown new challenges at families and multiplied issues for those already disadvantaged. Given the cuts endured by the youth sector in previous budgets and the increased demand from young people on youth services, the investment of €5 million to Youth Services and Organisations is very welcome.

We commend the efforts of the new Minister in securing an investment of €878 million in Tusla and its services. Many families are at breaking point as they try navigate the impact of Covid-19 on their everyday life. The past few months have also highlighted some very serious concerns for vulnerable children including a rise in domestic violence and increased reports of child abuse. The additional €61 million announced for Tusla, a priority ask in the Alliance's budget campaign, will help respond to an inevitable demand-surge and importantly, will ensure that child protection concerns do not go unanswered.

With an allocation of €638 million, investment in Early Childhood Care and Education remains at 2020 levels. This essentially means that the current schemes that were disrupted by the pandemic will resume in 2021. These include important programmes for families such as the two years of Early Childhood Care and Education and the Access and Inclusion Model. Government needs to prioritise investment in a new public model of childcare that guarantees quality for children and affordability for parents.

*Expenditure measures announced include:*

- Increase the allocation to Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, to a total of €878 million in 2021. This is an effective overall increase of €61 million or 7.5% over the original 2020 allocation (€817 million).
- The additional resources will allow Tusla to:
- Continue work to reduce the number of children awaiting the allocation of a social worker (reduce number of unallocated cases).
- Address significant demand led cost pressures in residential care.
- Provide care and protection through quality services for victims of domestic, sexual and gender based violence.
- Continue to improve organisational and service performance to achieve better outcomes for vulnerable children, young people and their families.
- Support Tusla to meet our commitments to transfer additional unaccompanied children in Greece to Ireland as quickly as possible.
- An additional €5m to Youth Services and Organisations bringing the total to €70 million
- The 2021 Budget allocation of €638 million for Early Learning and Care and School Age Childcare remains at 2020 allocation levels. This allows resumption of 2020 deliverables in 2021 which have been disrupted by the pandemic crisis. The anticipated savings due to demographics on the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme have been reallocated to improve service delivery of programmes including the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM). As a result, the 2021 allocation allows for:
  - The continued support of the National Childcare Scheme (NCS) in 2021 for both universal and targeted subsidies.
  - An increase in the funding provided for AIM by €3.5 million. This will provide an increase in AIM level 7 support from €195 per week to €210 per week, as well as allowing for an increase in the number of Inclusion Coordinators.
  - Continue to meet the cost of two years of ECCE.
  - An increase of €500,000 in allocation towards Tusla’s Early Years Inspectorate will allow for additional recruitment of inspectors to help ensure regulatory standards are maintained.
  - Total capital funding of €8.8 million will be available in 2021 and the €19.4 million Programme Support Payment will continue to be paid.
- An increase of €145 million in International Protection Seekers Accommodation to bring the total Budget to €226 million.

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## Education

The total budget allocated to the Department of Education is €8.862 billion for 2021. This includes €740 million in capital expenditure which will support circa 145 school building projects in 2021 under the Large Scale and Additional Accommodation Scheme.

*Our response:*

We are pleased to see a continued increase in investment in Education from last year’s Budget to Budget 2021. In particular, we warmly welcome the significant investment in

Special Educational Needs, representing a quarter of current expenditure in the Department. The prioritisation of children with additional needs is critical in the current climate as they were disproportionately impacted by the school closures during lockdown and the barriers in accessing education and educational resources that may persist as we learn to live with Covid-19. The €2 billion allocation will mean additional special education teachers and classes, 990 additional special needs assistants and an additional occupational, speech and language and behavioural therapists as part of the School Inclusion Model. We also see a commitment to ensure support for disadvantaged children with €2 million allocated for supporting DEIS schools.

With increased financial pressures on families as a result of the pandemic, back to school costs remains a serious concern for the Alliance. A third of parents reported going into debt just to try get their child ready for the return to school. It is disappointing to see that no further progress will be made to rollout the Free School Books pilot this year.

*Expenditure measures announced include:*

- The total budget for Special Educational Needs is highest investment in recent years, bringing it to a total of over €2 billion, representing a quarter of current expenditure in the Department of Education. This will make provision for:
  - 145 additional special education teachers,
  - 258 additional special class and special school teachers,
  - 990 additional special needs assistants, which will support the full rollout of the new frontloaded Special Needs Assistant model and bring the total number of SNAs to over 18,000.
  - An additional 80 occupational, speech and language and behavioural therapists and 30 National Educational Psychologists to support the phased roll out of the School Inclusion Model, which will ensure students with additional needs get the right supports at the right time.
- €10 million for 990 additional Special Needs Assistants
- €6.6 million for 403 additional Special Education Teachers
- €2 million for School Inclusion Model rollout
- €7 million for State Examinations Commission
- €10 million for Additional Mainstream Teachers. This will comprise:
  - 268 extra teachers to meet demographic pressures,
  - 307 extra teachers to reduce the staffing schedule at primary level by one point to 25:1, and
  - 87 additional teachers at primary level to alleviate the risk of a school losing a teacher in 2021.
- €2 million for Supporting DEIS, including Home School Liaison.

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## Health

The total Budget allocated to the Department of Health for 2021 is €22.117 billion. This includes over €1.8 billion allocated under Covid expenditure and over €1 billion in capital expenditure.

*Our response:*

Health was one of the big ticket items for 2021, given the seismic shift in health spending that was and is needed to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic. Yet despite the pressure on the Government in this area, some key investments were made that will support children and young people in the coming year. Investments in Disability and in Mental Health are of particular significance. It is great to see that delivery of new service provision initiatives including Progressing Disability Services for Children and Young People supported with a €100 million allocation in Budget 2021. €38 million has also been invested for the development of new services desperately needed in the current public health crisis.

Budget 2020 made positive progress when it came to access to healthcare for vulnerable children and young people with the extension of the Free GP Cards. As we face rising child poverty rates, we are acutely aware of the importance of making healthcare as accessible as possible for families. We are worried that the failure to deliver free GP care for all children will result in those who are already experiencing disadvantage falling further behind.

*Expenditure measures announced include:*

- €100 million for disability services including among other measures more targeted at adults, the development the delivery of new service provision initiatives such as ‘Progressing Disability Services for Children and Young People’, by increasing therapeutic staff under the newly established Children’s Disability Network model.
- A total of €50 million for mental health services in 2021 including €38 million in new investment for the development of new services and the implementation of “Sharing The Vision”, the updated Mental Health Strategy.
- From November 2020, prescription charges for over-70s will reduce by €0.50c to €1 per item, and for under-70s will reduce by €0.50c to €1.50 per item. This measure will benefit over 1.5 million persons with medical card eligibility.
- From November 2020, the Drug Payment Scheme threshold will reduce from €124 to €114 per month benefiting the 1.38 million persons registered under the scheme.
- €12 million to expand the public health workforce.
- €20 million is allocated to Healthy Ireland (with a particular focus on preventative measures as well as promoting health and wellbeing in disadvantaged areas).

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## Social Protection

The total Budget allocated to the Department of Social Protection for 2021 is over €25 billion. This includes over €3 billion in Covid-19 expenditure and represents the largest ever allocation to the Department of Social Protection.

*Our response:*

One of the major fallouts of the Covid-19 pandemic has been the spike in unemployment. Youth unemployment is at 37 per cent and many people have lost

their job or had their income severely impacted due to the pandemic. Budget 2021 includes the largest ever allocation to the Department of Social Protection in an attempt to fill that gap. However, steps taken to try ensure the situation does not get worse also have a knock on effect on our ability to significantly improve the reality for vulnerable families. The measures to tackle child poverty are welcome but are modest.

The additional investment in the hot school meals programme is a sign of relief to the Alliance and to many of our members who saw a rise in food poverty over the past few months. This will benefit 35,000 children who will now receive a hot nutritious meal every day for the full year in 2021. However, we will have to wait before there is an opportunity to rollout the programme nationally. We also acknowledge the positive increase in the Qualified Child Allowance of €5 for children over 12 and €2 for children under 12 which will benefit almost 420,000 children dependent on these social welfare supports.

*Expenditure measures announced include:*

- Allocation of an additional €5.5 million for the hot school meals programme for the full year of 2021.
- €5 increase from €40 to €45 per week for children over 12 for recipients of all weekly payments including low income families, lone parents and people with disabilities.
- €2 increase from €36 to €38 per week for children under the age of 12.
- The income threshold for the Working Family Payment will increase by €10 for families with up to three children.
- Remove the €425 earnings threshold on One-Parent Family Payment.
- Extend Parent's Benefit by 3 weeks for parents to a total of 5 weeks for children born or adopted from November 2019.
- Increase in the grant for widowed parents with dependent children from €6,000 to €8,000.

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## Housing, Planning and Local Government

The total Budget allocated for the Department in 2021 is over €5 billion. This includes over €2.7 billion in capital expenditure.

*Our response:*

Until investment is made in a programme of affordable public housing, children and families will remain in emergency accommodation, in family hubs and without the homes that children need to grow and thrive. The Budget 2021 investment of €2 billion in housing includes €500 million for the building and delivery of 10,300 new social homes which is a positive step towards helping families out of emergency accommodation.

It is positive to see an additional allocation of €22 million to homeless services given the

essential work they do caring for the thousands of families who are currently homeless in this country.

We welcome the €15.5 million allocated for the delivery of Traveller accommodation but after successive years of little to no follow through from local authorities on spending these resources to improve the lives of Traveller children and families, Government will need to prioritise action in this area under their programme for government.

*Expenditure measures announced include:*

- €2.031 billion in total capital funding for housing, a large element of which will be used to deliver 10,300 new social homes (the vast bulk through building with a limited targeted acquisition programme).
- €1.276 billion in total current funding to support a range of other programmes, and, in particular, the delivery of 2,450 new social homes through long-term leasing by local authorities and approved housing bodies (AHBs).
- €15.5 million for the delivery of Traveller accommodation.
- An additional €22 million to support the provision of homeless services including emergency accommodation.

## Justice

The total Budget allocated for 2021 is €3 billion, the highest budget allocated to Justice.

*Our response:*

The Department of Justice also received an increased budget allocation with a total of €3 billion. The increased investment includes some long-overdue developments in access to justice for children and young people. €8 million will support the Courts Modernisation Programme and €1.75 million has been allocated to the internal protection system with the aim of making it function more efficiently.

We particularly welcome the investment of €2.7 million to combat domestic, sexual and gender based violence. This is a critical intervention at a critical time as incidences of domestic violence have increased during the pandemic.

*Expenditure measures announced include:*

- €42 million to modernise the Justice Sector through increased digital and ICT investment, including €8 million for the Courts Modernisation Programme.
- €2.7 million in increased funding to combat domestic, sexual and gender-based violence, as well as support for victims.
- An extra €2 million to fund additional staffing for the Data Protection Commission and help it achieve its goal of having well in excess of 200 staff by the end of 2021.
- Funding for victims of crime (€0.3 million) - total allocation €2.2 million.

- Asylum processing – an additional €1.750 million for the efficient functioning of the international protection system.
  - Increase of €500,000 in Budget 2021 for Youth Justice Interventions, bringing the total allocation for these measures to almost €18 million.
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