

## Budget 2023

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

The Children's Rights Alliance has summarised Budget 2023 from a children and young person's perspective.

This year's Budget provided significant investment in key areas of children's lives that will have meaningful and sustained impact beyond 2023. The realisation of the goal to invest €1 billion in Early Childhood Education and Care is a milestone event in terms of reform of this sector, delivered five years ahead of schedule. This year's budget also sees an unprecedented €43 million investment to address the cost of education by providing free school books for all primary school children. This milestone announcement aligns with the approach of our European counterparts and even closer to home, Northern Ireland who have been providing free books for years. Securing a permanent measure in a budget pulled apart by the cost of living crisis should not be overlooked. We particularly welcome the huge difference and certainty this secures for disadvantaged children and families.

Overall, the Budget has been framed as a key intervention in the Cost-of-Living crisis. There are welcome measures in Budget 2023 that will help families to keep their heads above water this coming winter. These include a double payment of social welfare in Autumn and at Christmas, along with a lump sum payment for Fuel Allowance recipients, a lump sum payment for Working Family Payment recipients and a double payment of Child Benefit, all before the end of 2022. In 2023, the adult social welfare rates will rise by €12 and the threshold for the Working Family Payment has been increased by 40 percent to take account of the forthcoming rise in the National Minimum Wage rate.

However, there is not enough effective targeted measures to reach children and young most in need. The Qualified Child Increase (QCI) available to children whose parents are in receipt of a social welfare payments, only increased by €2 for children under 12 and €2 for children over 12. Not only is this increase less than last year's, but it also falls far short of the €7 and €12 increases respectively needed to ensure that these families have an adequate weekly income to afford the basics given the rapid rise in the cost of living. The application of €2 irrespective of the age of the child fails to take account of the fact that families with older children spend more on food, clothing and education. The fact that older children will not avail of other benefits included in this year's budget like the free school books will further exacerbate their situation. For families headed by a lone parent the lack of targeted measures will push many deeper into poverty.

It is deeply disappointing to see children and young people living in direct provision being left even further behind in this year's budget. These families already receive the lowest social welfare payments in the State. They will not get to experience the impact of the welcome double child benefit payment as they cannot avail of it. The Alliance have been calling for the introduction of a child benefit payment to be made available for these children as committed to in the Government's own White Paper. This has yet to happen.

Budget 2023 has delivered landmark investments in education and in early years that will have a significant and permanent impact on children, young people and their families. In early years, this milestone comes five years ahead of schedule. It demonstrates the potential the budget has in progressing long-term solutions to some of our key concerns for children and young people. It is this long-term vision coupled with equal levels of ambitious investment that is now needed across the health, housing and social protection to address child poverty that will persist beyond the cost-of-living crisis.

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, Inclusion and Youth

The total budget allocated to the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Inclusion and Youth in 2023 is € 2.45bn. This includes €40m for capital. The largest increase in the Department's budget was for early childhood education and care which had a total allocation of over €1bn for the first time ever.

### *Our response:*

Ireland has one of the highest childcare costs in all of Europe and given the current cost of living crisis, it is essential that this year's budget makes inroads in the affordability of these services. We welcome the reduction in the cost of childcare which will alleviate some pressure from families across the country. Budget 2023 delivers the single biggest investment in childcare. We acknowledge the significant work of the Minister and officials at the Department to bring investment in this space to a total of €1 billion, five years earlier than planned in First 5.

### Expenditure Measures Announced:

#### *Early Years*

- €357.6m for continued implementation of the National Childcare Scheme (NCS), offering supports to a greatly expanded cohort of children and families at significantly higher subsidy levels– with additional funding of €121m ensuring the hourly universal subsidy under the NCS can increase from 0.50c per hour to €1.40 per hour from January 2023.
- €266m to support continued implementation of the Core Funding scheme for the first full programme year, September 2022 to August 2023, and into the next programme year from September 2023, with additional funding of €59m being made available to cover the costs of increased levels of capacity and numbers of graduates in year one and for a number of enhancements in year two of the Scheme.

- €308.2m for the continuation of the ECCE programme that will benefit more than 108,000 children in 2023 and the continuation of the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) to ensure more than 5,000 children with a disability can access and meaningfully participate in the ECCE Programme.
- €84.5m to support the delivery of a range of regulatory and quality supports for the implementation of the National Action Plan for Childminding, Nurturing Skills, the Workforce Plan, and the ongoing development of the registration and inspection system as well as policy development commitments set out in First 5 and the Programme for Government.

#### *International Protection*

- €213 million to international protection accommodation.
- The allocation for the team implementing the White Paper to End Direct Provision and to establish a New International Protection Support Service is increasing by 41 percent to €22m, up from €15.6m in 2022.

#### *Other Measures*

- Under the Department's Children and Families Programme there has been an increased funding allocation of €37 million (4.4 percent) to Tusla. This brings their total budget to €935m in 2023. This additional funding will address increased demand for Tusla services and the increased complexity of cases they are responding to.
- Provision has been made for a 5 percent increase in expenditure on Traveller and Roma initiatives by the Department, bringing total spending to €5.942 million in 2023.
- 3 per cent increase in funding to promote LGBTI+ equality and inclusion.
- An allocation of €76m (an increase of €2.4m) for Youth Services. This will continue to progress the programme for Government commitment to invest in youth services.

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## Education

The total budget allocated to the Department of Education is €9.625bn. This includes an allocation of €860m in capital funding.

#### *Our response:*

The Children's Rights Alliance has long called for measures to tackle the burden of school costs. The cost of education has a significant impact on families, particularly those most disadvantaged. For years, we have heard from parents about how much stress and pressure they are under to simply get their children out the door to school. The introduction of free school books for primary school children is a significant step towards delivering free education. This measure is set to benefit over half a million children (up to 540,000 primary school students). However, the provision of free primary school books should be seen as a first step towards truly free education. Further progress will be needed in subsequent budgets.

It is welcome that the Government recognises the continued impact of the pandemic on children and young people's education by allocating €45m for a number of measures. The funding will support the continuation of the Enhanced Summer Programme for another year along with funding Wellbeing and Inclusion supports including a pilot scheme to schools to provide therapeutic intervention post Covid-19; actions to prevent and tackle bullying (which has increased since the

pandemic); and expansion of School Completion Programme, Home School Community Liaison & Diversity Inclusion supports to address the impacts of Covid-19.

*Expenditure measures announced:*

- Free School Books Scheme to all primary pupils in recognised primary schools in Autumn 2023.
- €100m for schools to support increased energy costs and to support transport providers.
- €45m to address the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Continuation of the Enhanced Summer Programme for a further year to mitigate against impact of learning losses as a result of Covid-19.
- 370 teachers to reduce school staffing schedules by 1 point for all primary schools.
- 296 teachers at post-primary level to meet demographic pressures.
- 1,194 additional SNAs, bringing the total number of SNAs to close to 20,400.
- 686 additional teachers for special education working in special classes and special schools, and Special Education Teachers in mainstream settings to support children with special educational needs.
- Increased funding for the National Council for Special Education, including funding for Irish Sign Language Tutors.
- Continued investment to allow children access to the School Transport Scheme.
- Further reforms of the Senior Cycle at post-primary level.

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## Health

The total Budget allocated to the Department of Health for 2022 is €23.4bn. This includes €1.17bn in capital voted expenditure.

*Our response:*

The cost of healthcare is a huge concern for many families and for years, advocacy groups working on the issue have called for Government to address hospital charges. It is very welcome to see that in-patient hospital charges will be abolished as part of Budget 2023. This will help ensure more children get access to healthcare when they need it.

Free GP care has been a key priority for the Children's Rights Alliance for successive budgets. The expansion of the GP visit card to children under eight is a step in the right direction however, it is an announcement that has made for a number of years and never materialised. Budget 2023 again commits to expanding free GP care to under eights. What we need to see next is political will to get the necessary stakeholders together to reach an agreement to see this commitment delivered.

There are a number of positive initiatives which will seek to tackle waiting lists. A dedicated approach to waiting lists for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and primary psychology and a commitment to continue to implement the Maskey Report recommendation is very welcome. The appointment of a Youth Mental Health Lead in the HSE is also a positive measure to ensure that children and youth mental health is prioritised, particularly given the impact of the pandemic on this cohort. Other services with targeted resources to tackle waiting lists include orthodontics. However, ongoing monitoring of waiting lists in 2023 will be needed to see the results of this investment.

*Expenditure measures announced include:*

- €11.7 million to address backlogs in Disability services in relation to Assessments of Need.
- €11.5m to backfill therapists into schools.
- €9 million to address waiting lists in orthodontics.
- €12.3 million to facilitate catch up programmes for human papillomavirus vaccine (HPV) to girls and boys at school and to women aged up to age 25.
- GP visit cards – Extension of GP visit to children aged 6 and 7 in Quarter 4 2022 (noted as a new measure but this was previously announced)
- Reduction in the threshold for the Drug Payment Scheme (announced earlier in 2022) threshold will be maintained at €80 per month.
- Additional funding of €29.25 million is being provided in 2023 to build long-term capacity for Specialist Disability Services and other Disability initiatives.
- €3.7 million allocated to increase the capacity of the Laura Lynn Children’s Hospice,
- An additional €72.8 million of funding for Mental Health which includes funding of €14 million for new measures in mental health services, including:
  - €750,000 for Counselling and Psychology Training Places in a new HSE initiative
  - The appointment of a youth mental health lead in the HSE
  - €9 million for new initiatives including Traveller Mental Health (€300k).

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## Social Protection

The total Budget allocated to the Department of Social Protection for 2022 is €23.4bn. This includes €16m in capital expenditure.

*Our response:*

We are acutely aware that we are heading into one of the toughest winters. Given the current cost of living crisis, any increase in the core social welfare payments is welcome as these payments are a core lifeline for so many families. However, the Government must look beyond the next four months in our national annual budget. Families are being pulled into poverty by the rising cost of living, exacerbating difficulties that existed before and Budget 2023 has failed to deliver enough effective targeted measures for those experiencing disadvantage.

We know that families with older children have much higher costs, and they will not reap the benefits of some of the more robust measures announced today like free primary school books. For these families, an increase in the Qualified Child Increase would have been a crucial intervention. The QCI increases announced bring the weekly payment to €42 for children under 12 and €50 for those over 12, however this is only an additional €2 per week. This simply will not be enough to support children on the brink of poverty and is far below what is needed to prevent more families falling into poverty.

*Expenditure measures announced include:*

### **Cost of Living Measures in 2022**

- For families dependent on weekly social welfare payments, a double week will be paid in October 2022 and in December 2022 (Christmas Bonus).
- Fuel allowance recipients will receive a €400 lump sum in November 2022.
- Recipients of the Working Family Payment will receive a €500 cost of living lump sum.
- There will be a double payment of the Child Benefit payment.

### **In 2023**

- Extension of the income thresholds for the Working Family Payment will ensure more families qualify for this payment. The threshold will increase by €40 per week regardless of family size.
- Increase of €2 in January 2023 on the Qualified Child Increase for children under 12 and over 12.
- Increase of €12 in core social welfare rates including Maternity Benefit, Paternity Benefit, Adoptive Benefit, Parent's Benefit and One Parent Family Payment from January 2023.
- The means assessment threshold for Fuel Allowance will increase from €120 to €200 in January 2023.
- Parents of babies remaining in acute hospital after birth will receive Domiciliary Care Allowance (DCA) for a period of 6 months.

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## **Housing, Local Government and Heritage**

The total Budget allocated for the Department in 2023 increased to €6.3bn. This includes a record investment of more than €4bn in funding for housing as part of Housing for All.

### *Our response:*

The housing budget reflects a change of policy in the provision of a renter's credit of €500 per person renting this year and next year. However, the continued reliance on the private rental sector continues to put many families at risk of homelessness. Families availing of the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) Scheme will not be eligible for the new tax credit which is a real concern given that HAP tenancies are the most common pathway out of homelessness. The commitment to provide 11,830 social homes in 2023, including 9,100 new build homes is important but these figures do not reflect any increased targets to meet the now growing demand for housing and an increase in the number of people homeless.

We welcome the €20m announced in Budget 2023 for the delivery of Traveller-specific accommodation but Government must ensure that it is utilised. The current homeless figures represent a disproportionate number of Travellers. After successive years of very little action from local authorities on spending the capital and resources they are provided with to improve the lives of Traveller children and families, they need to be prioritised going forward.

*Expenditure measures announced include:*

- More than €1.3bn invested in affordability measures in 2023 including the delivery of 5,550 affordable purchase and cost rental homes.
- In 2023, 11830 social homes will be delivered including 9,100 new build homes.
- €219m to fund programmes and supports for disabled people, older people and Travellers.
- €215m, an increase of 10 per cent, to ensure local authorities and NGOs can provide homeless prevention services and emergency accommodation.
- €50m for First Home Scheme delivering approximately 2,000 homes.
- €20m increase in capital funding for Traveller accommodation.
- An allocation of €544 million for the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) will enable 8,800 new households to be supported in a tenancy in 2023.

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## Justice

The total Budget allocated for 2023 is €3.3bn, this includes a capital allocation of €272m.

*Our response:*

It is very welcome to see an investment of €24m in youth justice, an increase of €2.5m on last year. This investment will support key commitments in the Youth Justice strategy including youth diversion projects and the important work of the youth and early intervention workers and family support workers that deliver these lifechanging services for young people.

We particularly welcome the increased investment in funding to combat domestic, sexual and gender-based violence (DSGBV). This will provide for funding to address acute service delivery demands, new service measures and raising awareness. It is particularly welcome that the Budget provides funding for the establishment of a new statutory agency with responsibility for DSGBV. This is a critical intervention given the increased incidence of domestic violence during the pandemic. €7m of this budget will be invested in organisations funded by Tusla to address acute service demands as well as the need to expand and develop new services as outlined in Zero Tolerance. It is also very welcome to see an investment of €900,000 specifically to rape crisis centres who we know have experienced increase demand for their services.

We have over 50,000 Ukrainian refugees and almost 10,000 internal protection applicants (almost three times the annual average). With the largest number of refugees and asylum-seekers seeking protection in Ireland, it is very welcome to see specific funding to meet these new challenges.

*Expenditure measures announced include:*

- €9m, an increase of 22 percent, for the further development of the DSGBV Strategy to tackle domestic, sexual and gender-based violence and support victims of these crimes.
- This will include €7m for organisations funded by Tusla to address acute service demand
- €3m to provide for additional staffing – including two additional Commissioners for the Data Protection Commission in 2023 in addition to other operational costs.
- €24m, an increase of €2.5 m on 2022, for the continued implementation of the *Youth Justice Strategy* in further developing and delivering programmes and early interventions for children and young people.

- €9.2m to support the Justice sector's response the Ukrainian crisis and provide additional resources in 2023.
- €17.7m to support the acceleration of the International Protection Office processing given the increase in applications for international protection.
- €1m to progress the establishment of Gambling Regulatory Authority.
- €2.5m to progress the ongoing Courts Modernisation Programme.

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## Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media

The total Budget allocated for 2023 is €1.142bn.

### *Our response:*

We welcome the announcement of €7.5 million to formally establish the new Media Commission which will include the hiring of an Online Safety Commissioner. It is critical that this office is adequately resourced from the outset if the Government is serious about protecting children online as well supporting the other functions of the Commission. We welcome the commitment to have the Online Safety Commissioner in post by November 2022 and the investment announced in Budget 2023 will help ensure that this office can hit the ground running to create a safer online world for children and young people.

### *Expenditure measures announced includes:*

- Exchequer funding of €7.5m in 2023 will progress the establishment of the Media Commission including the establishment of an Online Safety Commissioner that will oversee the effective regulation of online service providers and big tech companies.
- An additional €7.3m funding for TG4 that will also support the launch of a new dedicated Irish language children's channel to enhance services for younger audiences.