

## Budget 2024

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

Budget 2024 delivered key universal measures for children, but targeted interventions on income did not go far enough for low-income families. In this Budget we have seen key government departments continue to build on investment in services and interventions that address child poverty, in the areas of early years, hot school meals and education.

The Budget announcement includes an initial €4.5 million to get the Department of Children's (DCEDIY) new Equal Participation Model up and running. The Model will see a DEIS-style approach to early childhood education and care that focuses on children most impacted by poverty including Traveller and Roma children, a group often left behind in Budget discussions. A long-awaited increase in the foster care payment is particularly welcome as this has remained at the same rate since 2009, however this increase will not be fully introduced until the end of 2024. The Alliance have been calling for the introduction of a child benefit equivalent payment to be made available for children living in Direct Provision as committed to in the Government's own White Paper for Ending Direct Provision. The allocation of funding to progress this commitment to develop this child income support is particularly welcome. It is also positive to see Government follow through on its commitment to expand the Hot School Meals Programme to an additional 900 primary schools.

Amongst the income measures introduced are a double payment of Child Benefit to be paid in December, a €100 lump sum payment for recipients of the Increase for a Qualified Child and additional lump sum payments for other recipients of social welfare.

It is welcome to see some permanent increases to social welfare rates, including to the Increase for a Qualified Child. However, with the current cost of raising a child in Ireland, the announcement of an increase of €4 a week does not go far enough to break the cycle of poverty. The flat rate increase also fails to acknowledge the added cost of older children. With the double child benefit payment coming at a cost of €179 million, this money could have been better invested in more targeted measures.

Through successive budgets, we have witnessed how political decisions can make or break early interventions, the effectiveness of services for children and, the access to opportunities for children and young people. Child poverty is not inevitable. It is a direct result of political decisions and with Budget 2024, it is clear that Government has made some key decisions that will benefit children and young people. It will take successive budgets to deliver the significant investment and ambitious long-term thinking that is needed to end child poverty but at the very least, this Budget lays the foundation for renewed political attention and action to realise this vision. 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 with #ChildrensBudget24

## Children, Equality, Disability, Inclusion and Youth

The total budget allocated to the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Inclusion and Youth in 2024 is € 7.35 billion. This includes €135 million for capital expenditure.

### Our response:

Building on the record level of €1 billion in investment for early years, this year, funding in this area increased by 8 per cent or €83 million. This is a realisation of significant and sustained work and commitment from the Minister and officials at the Department. Early years is the single biggest leveller when it comes to tackling child poverty, but we know access to early childhood education and care is far from equal. The commitment to provide funding for a DEIS-style model of early years provision has the potential to ensure children and their families have access to the right supports, at the right time. There is compelling [evidence](#) of the positive outcomes these types of programmes can have.

Ireland has one of the highest childcare costs in all of Europe and given the current cost of living crisis, we welcome the reduction in the cost of childcare by a further 25 per cent under the National Childcare Scheme which will alleviate some pressure from families across the country.

Increased funding for Tusla – the Child and Family Agency means that in 2024, Tusla will be able to continue to provide existing levels of care and support to children and families, as well as increasing capacity in residential care. This additional funding will enable an increase in the statutory foster care rate by the end of 2024 by €75 per week for Children under 12 and €73 per week for children over 12, bringing it to €400 and €425 per week respectively. This is particularly welcome given that the rates have remained unchanged since 2009. However, the full rate increase will not come into effect until the end of 2024. The Budget 2024 expenditure report notes funding has been secured to develop a child income support payment for children living in Direct Provision, a commitment outlined in the [White Paper](#). Responsibility for disability services and supports now come under this Department and €8.5 million has been secured to improve children’s services such as the recruitment of additional therapy positions as well as supports for specialist children’s disability services. There was a welcome additional €5 million in funding for youth services.

### *Expenditure Measures Announced:*

#### *Early Years*

- An 8% increase in overall funding for early childhood education and care bringing total investment to €1.1 billion. This includes a 14 per cent increase in Core Funding as well as further supports under the Access and Inclusion Model.
- 25 per cent reduction in fees for parents under the National Childcare Scheme
- An allocation of €4.5 million for the initial implementation of the Equal Participation (DEIS-type) Model of early years.
- An increase in the rate paid under the sponsorship scheme to €5.30.

#### *Tusla*

- €1.1 billion in funding for the Child and Family Agency (Tusla). Increased resources for the Agency will allow it to continue to provide existing levels of service; increase capacity in residential care; improvement of staff recruitment and retention.
- Increase in the statutory foster care rate by the end of 2024 by €75 per week for Children under 12 and €73 per week for children over 12, bringing it to €400 and €425 per week respectively.

### *International Protection*

- €409 million allocated in current and capital funding in relation to international protection accommodation.
- A commitment to develop a child income support for children and families living in Direct Provision.

### *Other Measures*

- An increase of €5 million for youth services.
- €13.5 million to support a range of equality initiatives.

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## Education

**The total budget allocated to the Department of Education is €10.4 billion. This includes an allocation of €940 million in capital funding.**

### **Our response:**

For the second year in a row, the Government addressed the high cost that education places on families each September. The provision of free school-books at primary level last year has already seen positive outcomes. Investing in interventions such as this puts money back in the pockets of families juggling the increased cost of living. The continued investment to expand free school-books to Junior Cycle is hugely positive. It will provide certainty that many families living in poverty do not have when it comes to how they will get their children ready for back to school. We know that the cost of books increases alongside the cost of clothes, food, and activities for teenagers. Future Budgets should expand on this to extend this to all of second level in next year's budget. Increased investment in TESS, the provision of additional Educational Welfare Officers and further support for interventions such as the School Completion Programme will greatly benefit children experiencing educational disadvantage. The allocation of an extra €21 million in capitation funding on a permanent basis will provide much needed supports for primary and secondary schools.

### *Expenditure measures announced:*

- €67 million funding for free schoolbooks and classroom resources for Junior Cycle students bringing total investment in tackling school costs to €115 million.
- Additional funding for Tusla Education Support Services (TESS) and an increased number of Educational Welfare Officers. This includes €5 million for additional Educational Welfare Officers and €2 million for services related to school retention and completion programmes.
- An extra €21 million in capitation funding to assist schools with day-to-day running costs. This will support a permanent restoration of the basic rate of capitation to €200 per student in primary schools and to €345 in post-primary schools. This is permanent recurring funding.
- €60 million in cost of living supports paid to all primary and post-primary schools in the free scheme.
- The School Transport Scheme will receive an extra €92 million in funding. This will result in additional places for children with special educational needs and a continued reduction in school transport fees.
- €82 million in funding for an extra 1,216 SNAs and 744 SEN Teachers.

- An additional €11 million for special schools catering for children with special educational needs. €20 million in funding for the Enhanced Summer Programme totalling €40 million for summer 2024.
- €5 million to continue the pilot counselling services for another year.

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## Health

**The total Budget allocated to the Department of Health for 2024 is €22.5 billion. This includes €1.045 billion in capital voted expenditure.**

**Our response:**

Free GP care has been a key priority for the Children's Rights Alliance for successive budgets. While previous budgets have expanded access to primary health care, Budget 2024 failed to announce any further extension of this scheme. A full Medical Card is essential for those in low-income households. The income thresholds for the Medical Card have not been revised since 2005 and it is unclear as to how the Budget 2024 changes to social welfare, the National Minimum Wage and taxation measures will interact with the existing thresholds.

There are few new initiatives announced by the Department of Health in Budget 2024. However, increased funding for mental health, including additional staff for Child and Adult Mental Health Services (CAMHS), is noted.

*Expenditure measures announced include:*

- Increased funding for mental health, including additional staff for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) teams.
- An additional €3.5 million in funding for Drug and Alcohol Taskforces and Section 39 organisations and €1.5 million in funding for a drug and alcohol awareness programme.

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## Social Protection

**The total Budget allocated to the Department of Social Protection for 2024 is €25.228 billion. This includes €16 million in capital expenditure.**

**Our response:**

The Budget included the largest Social Protection Budget Package in the history of the State with a €2.3 billion budget package consisting of a mix of lump sum supports and increases to weekly payments. Given the ongoing increase in the cost of living, any increase in the core social welfare payments is welcome as these payments are a lifeline for so many families. However, the increase to weekly payment rates falls far below what is required. Families are being pulled into poverty by the rising cost of living, exacerbating difficulties that existed before, and Budget 2024 has failed to deliver enough effective targeted measures for those experiencing disadvantage.

It is positive to see Government follow through on its commitment to expand the Hot School Meals Programme to an additional 900 primary schools.

*Expenditure measures announced include:*

- Weekly rates of qualified child payments (IQC) will increase by €4 in January 2024 bringing them to €54 for those aged 12 and over and €46 for under 12s.
- Child Benefit extended to 18-year-olds in full time education from September 2024.
- Working Family Payment thresholds for all family sizes to increase by €54 from January 2024
- Parent's Benefit to be extended from 7 weeks to 9 weeks from August 2024
- Domiciliary Care Allowance will increase by €10 to €340 per month with effect from January 2024
- Increases in core social welfare payments of €12 from January 2024
- Hot School Meals to be extended to further 900 Primary Schools who responded to Expression of Interest

**Once off payments:**

- A double payment of Child Benefit for families receiving this payment to be paid in December 2023
- €300 Lump Sum payment to all households receiving the Fuel Allowance payment in November 2023
- €100 per child once off payment for those who receive the Increase for a Qualified Child(ren) on their social welfare payment, paid in November 2023.
- Christmas Bonus and January Cost of Living Bonus to be paid to all recipients of weekly social welfare payments.
- A €400 Lump Sum in November 2023 to families receiving the Working Family Payment.

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## Housing, Local Government and Heritage

**The total Budget allocated for the Department in 2024 increased to €6.945 billion.**

**Our response:**

Budget 2024 provided for an increase of capital funding for local authorities and Approved Housing Bodies to deliver much needed additional social housing and to deliver Cost Rental, Affordable homes and to bring vacant homes back into use. It is also welcome that there is an increase in expenditure on homeless services. However, we are experiencing the worst homelessness crisis in recent times. We are disappointed that in the face of nearly 4,000 children homeless, Budget 2024 failed to provide any targeted measures to support children and families who are currently in homelessness or at risk of homelessness.

*Expenditure measures announced include:*

- €1.86 billion to support the delivery of social homes by local authorities and Approved Housing Bodies.
- €525 million for the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) will enable an additional 8,800 new households to be supported in a tenancy in 2024.

- €111 million for the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) will support a further 1,400 households in 2024.
- €50 million is provided for the National Regeneration Programme which will benefit some of the most economically disadvantaged communities.
- €21 million for Traveller-Specific Accommodation for members of the Traveller community.
- Funding for homeless services increased by €27 million.
- €35 million capital funding for Housing First.

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## Justice

The total Budget allocated for 2024 is €3.538 billion, this includes a capital allocation of €274 million.

### Our response:

It is very welcome to see further investment in youth justice, with a total allocation of €33 million in Budget 2024. 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) (an increase of 25 per cent). This will provide funding for frontline service delivery and the establishment of a new statutory agency with responsibility for DSGBV.

### Expenditure measures announced include:

- €12 million to support a Zero Tolerance Strategy and the establishment of a new state agency and increase support to victims of violence.
- €7.9 million for community safety initiatives, including €3.75 million for Community Safety Innovation Fund, and the creation of Community Safety Partnerships through the National Coordination Office.
- €2.9 million in funding for Youth Justice Strategy bringing the total €33 million.
- €34 million to the International Protection Office and the International Protection Appeals Tribunal, the Legal Aid Board, and support for humanitarian aid to Ukraine.

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