

Pre-Budget 2025 Submission for the Department of Social Protection

June 2024



Founded in 1995, the Children's Rights Alliance unites over 140 members working together to make Ireland one of the best places in the world to be a child. We change the lives of all children in Ireland by making sure that their rights are respected and protected in our laws, policies and services.

Accompaniment Support Service for Children (A.S.S.C.)
Alcohol Action Ireland
Amnesty International Ireland
An Cosán
Anew
Aoibhneas
Archways
AslAm
Association of Occupational Therapists of Ireland (AOTI)
Association of Secondary Teachers Ireland (ASTI)
ATD Fourth World – Ireland Ltd
Atheist Ireland
Barnardos
Barretstown Camp
Bedford Row Family Project
BeLonG To Youth Services
Bodywhys
Catholic Guides of Ireland
Child Law Project
Childhood Development Initiative
Children in Hospital Ireland
Children's Books Ireland
Children's Grief Centre
Clarecare
COPE Galway
Cork Life Centre
Cork Migrant Centre
Crann Centre
Crosscare
CyberSafeKids
Cycle Against Suicide
Dalkey School Project National School
Daughters of Charity Child and Family Service
Dental Health Foundation of Ireland
Department of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy, UCC
Disability Federation of Ireland
Doras
Down Syndrome Ireland
Dublin Rape Crisis Centre
Dyslexia Association of Ireland
Dyspraxia/DCD Ireland
Early Childhood Ireland
Early Learning Initiative (National College of Ireland)
Educate Together
EPIC
Equality for Children
Extern Ireland
FamiliBase
Féach
Focus Ireland
Foróige
Gaeleoidachas
Galway Traveller Movement
Good Shepherd Cork
Grow It Yourself
Helium Arts
Immigrant Council of Ireland
Inclusion Ireland
Institute of Guidance Counsellors
Irish Aftercare Network
Irish Association for Infant Mental Health
Irish Association of Social Workers
Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU)
Irish Council for Civil Liberties (ICCL)
Irish Foster Care Association
Irish Girl Guides
Irish Heart Foundation
Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO)
Irish Penal Reform Trust
Irish Primary Principals' Network
Irish Refugee Council
Irish Second Level Students' Union (ISSU)
Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children
Irish Traveller Movement
Irish Youth Foundation
iScoil
Jack and Jill Children's Foundation
Jigsaw
Katharine Howard Foundation
Kerry Diocesan Youth Service
Kids' Own Publishing Partnership
Kinship Care
Leap Ireland
Let's Grow Together! Infant and Childhood Partnerships CLG.
LGBT Ireland
Mecpaths
Mental Health Reform
Mercy Law Resource Centre
Migrant Rights Centre Ireland
Mothers' Union
My Mind
My Project Minding You
Museum of Childhood Ireland
Music Generation
New Directions
National Childhood Network
National Council for the Blind of Ireland
National Forum of Family Resource Centres
National Parents Council Post Primary
National Parents Council Primary
National Youth Council of Ireland
Novas
One Family
One in Four
Parents Plus
Pavee Point
Peter McVerry Trust
Prevention and Early Intervention Network
Psychological Society of Ireland
Rainbow Club Cork
Rainbows Ireland
Rape Crisis Network Ireland (RCNI)
Realt Beag/Ballyfermot Star
Respond Housing
SAFE Ireland
Saoirse Housing Association
SAOL Beag Children's Centre
Scouting Ireland
School of Education UCD
Sexual Violence Centre Cork
SIPTU
Simon Communities of Ireland
Social Care Ireland
Society of St. Vincent de Paul
SPHE Network
SpunOut.ie
St. Nicholas Montessori College
St. Nicholas Montessori Teachers' Association
St. Patrick's Mental Health Services
TASC
Teachers' Union of Ireland
Terenure College Rugby Football Club
Transgender Equality Network Ireland
The Anne Sullivan Foundation
The Ark, A Cultural Centre for Children
The Irish Red Cross
The UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, NUI Galway
Traveller Visibility Group Ltd
Treoir
UNICEF Ireland
Variety – the Children's Charity of Ireland
Women's Aid
Youngballymun
Young Social Innovators
Youth Advocate Programme Ireland (YAP)
Youth Work Ireland

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1. Introduction

The Children’s Rights Alliance unites over 150 members working together to make Ireland one of the best places in the world to be a child. We change the lives of all children by making sure their rights are respected and protected in our laws, policies and services. We also provide legal information and advice to children, young people and their families through our helpline and legal advice clinics.

Ireland has an international obligation under Article 27 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child to ‘recognise the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child’s physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development’ and is obliged to:

[...] take appropriate measures to assist parents and others responsible for the child to implement this right and shall in case of need provide material assistance and support programmes, particularly with regard to nutrition, clothing and housing.¹

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child is clear that implementation of children’s socio-economic rights is not a charitable process but a basic obligation of Government.² Ireland was last examined by the Committee in January 2023.³ In its Concluding Observations, the Committee urged Ireland to strengthen its response to child poverty by increasing social benefits, expanding school meals and addressing the root causes of homelessness.⁴ Furthermore the Committee called for measures that seek to combat poverty to take a child rights-based approach and that have a focus on families that are particularly disadvantaged such as children on one parent families, refugee children and those from ethnic minority groups.⁵

The most recent Survey of Income and Living Conditions (SILC) revealed that in 2023 one-in-five children (21.4 per cent or 260,773 children) were living in deprivation.⁶ The deprivation rate refers to experience the proportion of households unable to afford goods and services which are considered the norm for society. This includes being able to afford a new pair of shoes for a child or replace broken furniture.

When examined by age cohort, children have the highest at risk of poverty rate at 14.3 per cent, higher than the rate amongst the general population at 10.6 per cent.⁷ Children are also most vulnerable to consistent poverty, with a rate of 4.8 per cent versus an overall rate of 3.6 per cent.⁸

Some children and young people are more at risk of poverty than others. Households with children headed by one adult have a higher at risk of poverty rate at 19.2 per cent versus those in two adult households (14.2 per cent).⁹ It is important to note that the SILC data is based on a household survey

1 Convention on the Rights of the Child (adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession on 20 November 1989) 1577 UNTS 3 (UNCRC). Ireland ratified the Convention in 1992.

2 UNCRC ‘General Comment No. 5 General measures of implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Arts. 4, 42 and 44) (2003) CRC/GC/2003/5 para 6.

3 UNCRC, ‘Concluding Observations Ireland’ (2023) UN Doc CRC/C/IRL/CO/5-6.

4 UNCRC, ‘Concluding Observations Ireland’ (2023) UN Doc CRC/C/IRL/CO/5-6, para 35.

5 Ibid.

6 Central Statistics Office, *Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) 2023* (CSO 2024).

7 Central Statistics Office, *Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) 2023* (CSO 2024).

8 Central Statistics Office, *Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) 2023* (CSO 2024).

9 Central Statistics Office, *Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) 2023* (CSO 2024).

which does not provide detail of the rates of poverty or deprivation amongst members of the Traveller or Roma community.

While the rates of poverty remain high, there are some green shoots of progress. In 2023, the at risk of poverty and consistent poverty rates for children decreased when compared to 2021.¹⁰ The decrease in the 'at risk of poverty rate' indicates that incomes have increased as this measure focuses solely on the proportion of the population living below a certain income threshold. This can be partly attributed to the response by the Government to address increases in the cost of living. Measures announced in February¹¹ and May 2022,¹² as part of Budget 2023,¹³ and Budget 2024¹⁴ included the introduction of additional income supports to help households and families to meet the costs of energy,¹⁵ health,¹⁶ and transport¹⁷ along with providing additional income supports.¹⁸

However, the increase in the enforced deprivation rate means that more people are unable to afford items seen to be the norm in society. Therefore, while the introduction of these measures to address increases to the cost of living are welcome, analysis from the Vincentian MESL Research Centre indicates that they needed to go further.¹⁹ In addition, the current weekly rate of social welfare is inadequate.²⁰ There is a need for Budget 2025 to prioritise permanent increases in the income supports targeted towards families most in need.

We welcome the commitment from the Child Poverty and Wellbeing Programme Office that Budget 2025 'will seek to support and deepen the focus on child poverty and well-being'.²¹ Building on the measures introduced in Budget 2024, we are calling for Budget 2025 to be a Children's Budget – that places children and families most at risk of poverty and disadvantage at the very forefront of decision-making. In this submission we set out the actions that government department can take to make this commitment a reality.

10 Central Statistics Office, *Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) 2023* (CSO 2024).

11 Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, 'Ministers McGrath and Donohoe announce €505 million package in measures to mitigate the cost of living' (Department of Public Expenditure and Reform 2022) <<https://bit.ly/3zAS0y1>> accessed 14 June 2022.

12 Department of the Taoiseach, 'Government announces further measures to help households with rising cost of energy' (Department of the Taoiseach 2022) < <https://bit.ly/3Oghd4R> > accessed 14 June 2022.

13 Government of Ireland, *Budget 2023: Expenditure Report*, (DPER 2022), 26.

14 Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform and Department of Finance, 'Your guide to Budget 2024', <https://bit.ly/3PLAJsY> accessed 3 April 2024.

15 Three instalments of an energy credit of €200 (November 2022 and January and March 2023) and three €150 instalments (December 2023, January 2024 and March 2024). A €125 lump sum payment in March 2022 and €100 in May 2022 for those in receipt of the fuel allowance. A lump sum once off payment of €400 for Fuel Allowance recipients as part of Budget 2023 and a €350 lump sum in Budget 2024.

16 A reduction in the drug payment threshold to €80 per month.

17 A 20 per cent reduction in public transport fees until the end of 2024 and the expansion of the 50 per cent travel fare for young people to aged 19 to 25.

18 A double payment to all social welfare recipients in both October and December 2023 (Christmas Bonus) as well as a double payment of Child Benefit in Budget 2023 and 2024. A €100 once off payment to recipients of an Increase for a Qualified Child(ren) on their social welfare payment in November 2023. A lump sum payment of €500 in Budget 2023 and €400 in Budget 2024 to all recipients of the Working Family Payment.

19 Vincentian MESL Research Centre, *MESL Impact Briefing Budget 2024*, (Vincentian MESL Research Centre 2023).

20 Vincentian MESL Research Centre, *MESL Impact Briefing Budget 2024*, (Vincentian MESL Research Centre 2023).

21 Department of the Taoiseach, 'Taoiseach's summit shapes Ireland's leadership role in eliminating child poverty' (Press Release 23 May 2024).

2. Investment in Targeted Income Supports

Child Income Supports

The latest data from the Vincentian Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL) research shows that the cost of a child ranges from €60 per week for a pre-school child to €156 per week for a child/young person attending second level school.²² When the MESL costs are compared with the weekly child income supports received from social welfare, there is a shortfall of €14.34 for an infant and €11.63 for a child attending primary school.²³ This means that the current child income supports meet less than 90 per cent of the costs for these two age groups.²⁴ However, the weekly shortfall in child income supports to meet the MESL needs of a second level child are €55.42 per week.²⁵ The inadequacy of the current rate of payments for older children means that they meet just 63 per cent of the MESL needs for this age group.²⁶ This demonstrates that there is much to be done in terms of increasing the income adequacy of weekly social welfare rates particularly for older children.

Over the past three years there has been a significant increase in prices, however the rate of inflation has reduced considerably in 2024.²⁷ While the rate of inflation appears to be falling, when considered cumulatively over the period March 2021 to March 2024 overall inflation has increased by 18.1 per cent.²⁸ This has had a disproportionate impact on low income households with households on the lowest income decile experiencing a higher rate of inflation at 20 per cent compared to an overall rate of 19.1 per cent.²⁹

To address rising inflation, the Government has prioritised introducing one-off payments in the last two budgets.³⁰ These payments have played an important role in ensuring fewer families get pulled into poverty. Analysis undertaken as part of SILC 2023 examined what poverty rates would be if these measures are excluded.³¹ Based on this, the at risk of poverty rate for children would have been 16 per cent (compared to 14.3 per cent when cost of living measures are included), an increase on the rate of 14.7 per cent recorded for 2022.³² Budget 2025 needs to target resources towards increases in the weekly rate of child income supports in order to ensure there is a permanent reduction in child poverty.

In terms of targeting increased income supports towards families with children on the lowest incomes, the Parliamentary Budget Office indicates that raising the Increase for a Qualified Child (IQC) is more impactful than targeting resources towards Child Benefit.³³ Increasing the IQC by €37.50 per week delivers a greater change for those on the lowest income, at 4.4 per cent, versus a €38 monthly increase in Child Benefit.³⁴ Both measures would have roughly the same net impact on

22 Vincentian MESL Research Centre, *MESL 2024*, (Vincentian MESL Research Centre 2024), 49.

23 Vincentian MESL Research Centre, *MESL 2024*, (Vincentian MESL Research Centre 2024), 52.

24 Vincentian MESL Research Centre, *MESL 2024*, (Vincentian MESL Research Centre 2024), 52.

25 Vincentian MESL Research Centre, *MESL 2024*, (Vincentian MESL Research Centre 2024), 52.

26 Vincentian MESL Research Centre, *MESL 2024*, (Vincentian MESL Research Centre 2024), 52.

27 Between March 2021 and March 2022 inflation increased by 6.7 per cent and between March 2022 and March 2023 the increase was 7.7 per cent. The annual rate of increase has fallen considerably between March 2023 and March 2024 to just 2.9 per cent. See CSO, *Consumer Price Index*, (various dates).

28 Central Statistics Office, *CPI Inflation Calculator* <<https://bit.ly/49qXtFl>> accessed 3 April 2024.

29 CSO, *Estimated Inflation by Household Characteristics September 2023* (CSO 2023).

30 Government of Ireland, *Budget 2023: Expenditure Report*, (DPER 2022), p. 26. Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform and Department of Finance, 'Your guide to Budget 2024', <https://bit.ly/3PLAJsY> accessed 3 April 2024.

31 The focus on the 2022 measures relates to the income reference period for SILC which is the preceding year to data collection.

32 Central Statistics Office, *Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) 2023* (CSO 2024).

33 Parliamentary Budget Office, 'Child Benefit Increases and Alternative Policy Options: Costs and Distributional Impact', <<https://bit.ly/4auc84A>> accessed 5 April 2024.

34 Parliamentary Budget Office, 'Child Benefit Increases and Alternative Policy Options: Costs and Distributional Impact', <<https://bit.ly/4auc84A>> accessed 5 April 2024.

the exchequer (€537 million and €535 million respectively), but the former targets these resources towards those most in need.³⁵

Budget 2025 Ask:

- Raise the Qualified Child Increase by a minimum of €6 for under 12s and €15 for over 12s. [Cost: €138.9 million].³⁶

Supports for One Parent Families

Children living in one parent families have a greater likelihood of experiencing poverty than those living in two parent families. The latest SILC data shows that households containing one adult and children under 18 years of age had a deprivation rate of 41.4 per cent in 2023.³⁷ This is compared to a rate of 17.7 per cent for households with two adults and 1-3 children under 18 years.³⁸

Since 2016, nine reports on one parent families and poverty have been published³⁹, including the 2017 Joint Committee on Social Protection Report on the Position of Lone Parents in Ireland.⁴⁰ Each of these reports paints a similar picture of children growing up in the grip of poverty. Recent budgets have introduced changes to social welfare payments to improve the income supports available to one parent families and to address the high levels of poverty they experience.⁴¹ Post-Budget 2024 analysis from the ESRI highlights that while overall one parent families will see an increase in their disposable income of just above 3.5 per cent.⁴² However, this falls to just over 1 per cent when temporary measures (such as the one off payments made to recipients of certain social welfare schemes, are excluded.⁴³ Furthermore, the post-Budget 2024 analysis from the Vincentian MESL Research Centre shows that even with the extra cost of living payments and social welfare increases, social welfare income only meets 81 per cent of the cost of the MESL budget.⁴⁴

Budget 2025 could make a positive impact on the incomes of one parent families by increasing the earnings disregard for the One Parent Family and Jobseekers Transitional payments as well as extending entitlement of the Jobseekers Transition payment.

In Budget 2020, the earnings disregard for the One Parent Family Payment and Jobseeker's Transitional payments was increased by €15 a weekly rate of €165 and it remains at this rate in 2024.⁴⁵ However, since then the National Minimum Wage has increased by €2.60 to €12.70. This

35 Parliamentary Budget Office, 'Child Benefit Increases and Alternative Policy Options: Costs and Distributional Impact', <<https://bit.ly/4auc84A>> accessed 5 April 2024.

36 Heather Humphries TD, Minister for Social Protection, Dail Debates, Written Answers, *Social Welfare Eligibility* 21 May 2024 [22799/24].

37 Central Statistics Office, *Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) 2023* (CSO 2024).

38 Central Statistics Office, *Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) 2023* (CSO 2024).

39 Russell, H., Privalko, I., McGinnity, F. & Enright, S. Monitoring Adequate Housing in Ireland (IHREC 2021); Society of St Vincent de Paul, Working, Parenting and Struggling? An analysis of the employment and living conditions of one parent families in Ireland, (SVP 2019); Regan, M., Keane, C., and Walsh, J.R. Lone Parent Incomes and Work Incentives. Budget Perspectives 2019, (ESRI 2018); Millar, M., Crosse, R., Canavan, J., Understanding, negotiating, and navigating the politicisation of evidence-based policy research: the case of Irish research on lone parent labour market activation policy (University of Bristol 2018); Millar, M., Gray, J., Et al., 'In-Work Benefits: The (in)adequacy of in-work benefits in Irish lone parent labour market activation policy' *Journal of Poverty and Social Justice* (2018); Delma Byrne and Cliona Murray An Independent Review to Identify the Supports and Barriers for Lone Parents in Accessing Higher Education and to Examine Measures to Increase Participation. (Departments of Education and Skills, Employment Affairs and Social Protection and Children and Youth Affairs 2017); Joint Committee on Social Protection, Report on the Position of Lone Parents in Ireland (Houses of the Oireachtas 2017); Indecon, Independent Review of the Amendments to the One-parent Family Payment since January 2012 (DEASP 2017); Millar, M and Crosse, R. Lone Parents and Activation, What Works and Why: A Review of the International Evidence in the Irish Context. (The UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, National University of Ireland, Galway 2016)

40 Joint Committee on Social Protection Report on the Position of Lone Parents in Ireland ((Houses of the Oireachtas 2017)

41 This includes supports made to all families such as an increase in the rate of the IQC in Budget 2023 and 2024; the lump sum payment for IQC in Budget 2024; the increase in the Working Family Payment thresholds in Budget 2023 and 2024.

42 Doorley, K. et al., ESRI *Post-Budget Briefing Budget 2024: Distributional impact analysis* (ESRI 2023)

43 Doorley, K. et al., ESRI *Post-Budget Briefing Budget 2024: Distributional impact analysis* (ESRI 2023)

44 Vincentian MESL Research Centre, Budget 2024 MESL Impact Briefing, (Vincentian MESL Research Centre 2023).

45 Citizens Information, 'Budget 2020', <https://bit.ly/45BeiBH> accessed 21 June 2024.

means that while the disregard equated to 16.3 hours of the National Minimum Wage in 2020 it now only equals 13 hours. The Vincentian MESL Research Centre calculates that this means a lone parent working fulltime on the National Minimum Wage qualifies for €16 less per week under the partial adult personal rate in 2024 compared to 2020.⁴⁶

Budget 2025 Ask

- Increase the earnings disregard for the One Parent Family Payment and Job Seekers Transition to restore value to 2020 levels.

Energy Poverty

The consequences of living in energy poverty impacts on children's health with an increased likelihood that they will have asthma, and two or more courses of antibiotics in a 12-month period.⁴⁷ Children experiencing energy poverty are predominantly living in the social housing and private rented sectors, with over three-quarters of those impacted living in these tenures.⁴⁸ Furthermore, energy poverty has been linked to a higher level of poor parental mental health, particularly amongst mothers.⁴⁹

While overall a small percentage of households report being unable to heat their home, the issue of fuel poverty is more pronounced amongst lone parent households compared to all other household types.⁵⁰ For instance, the latest deprivation data from the CSO SILC shows a higher incidence of being unable to keep the home adequately warm by one-parent (19 per cent) versus two-parent households (7.6 per cent).⁵¹ The rise in energy costs over the five-year period is multiple times higher than overall inflation and is recorded at 90.1 per cent by the CSO.⁵² This continues to be evident in the calls for help from low-income households, with the Society of St Vincent de Paul experiencing/receiving 20,000 contacts to the organisation in 2023 requesting assistance with energy costs.⁵³ In the previous year, the society saw a 20 per cent increase in calls for assistance with energy costs compared to 2021.⁵⁴

Budget 2025 Ask

- Expand the Fuel Allowance to families in receipt of the Working Family Payment. [Cost: €22 million].⁵⁵

⁴⁶ Vincentian MESL Research Centre, *Pre-Budget 2025 Submission*, (Vincentian MESL Research Centre 2024).

⁴⁷ Society of St. Vincent de Paul, *Growing up in the cold: a policy briefing on the nature and extent of energy poverty in households with children* (SVP 2019) <<https://bit.ly/2RikogN>> accessed 14 June 2022.

⁴⁸ Society of St. Vincent de Paul, *Growing up in the cold: a policy briefing on the nature and extent of energy poverty in households with children* (SVP 2019) <<https://bit.ly/2RikogN>> accessed 14 June 2022.

⁴⁹ Greta Mohan, "The impact of household energy poverty on the mental health of parents of young children." *Journal of Public Health* 44, no. 1 (2022): 121-128.

⁵⁰ Helen Russell, Ivan Privalko, Frances McGinnity & Shannen Enright, *Monitoring adequate housing in Ireland* (ESRI 2021).

⁵¹ CSO, *Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC): Enforced Deprivation 2023*, (CSO 2024).

⁵² CSO, *Estimated Inflation by Household Characteristics September 2023* (CSO 2023).

⁵³ Society of St. Vincent de Paul, *Over quarter of a million calls for help to SVP in 2023 creates another record*, Press Release, 15 January 2024.

⁵⁴ Society of St. Vincent De Paul, *Warm, Safe, Connected? Priorities to protect households in energy poverty — Policy, Practice, and Regulation* (SVP 2023).

⁵⁵ Heather Humphries TD, Minister for Social Protection, Dail Debates, Written Answers, *Social Welfare Eligibility* 21 May 2024 [22804/24].

3. Measures to Address Food Poverty

School Meals Programme

In November 2023, a survey was carried out on 465 parents and guardians commissioned by Barnardos. The survey found that 41 per cent of the parents surveyed, said they skipped a meal or reduced their portion in order to feed their children.⁵⁶ Furthermore, 12 per cent of parents surveyed said that they were always worried about providing sufficient food, and 33 per cent said they sometimes worry.⁵⁷

Schools are an excellent setting to reach children, teachers, families and the surrounding community.⁵⁸ They provide a social environment where children can access and enjoy food, without financial constraints.⁵⁹

An evaluation of the School Meals Programme was published in March 2023.⁶⁰ The report highlights that the programme is viewed as a positive initiative with many important impacts.⁶¹ The evaluation makes a number of recommendations for further action.⁶² Most significantly, the evaluation recommends all children should receive a hot school meal and this should be achieved by taking a progressive universalist approach to expanding the programme.⁶³ In response to this, the Minister for Social Protection announced the expansion of the hot school meal programme to all DEIS primary schools and special schools and that from 2024 hot meals will begin to be rolled on a phased basis to non-DEIS primary schools not currently delivering this option.⁶⁴ The Minister committed to universal provision by 2030 albeit with the ambition 'to move faster'.⁶⁵ The universal provision of hot meals in a school setting counters stigma and provides a social environment where children can access and enjoy food without financial constraints.⁶⁶

Budget 2025 Asks

- Maintain momentum in expanding investment in the provision of hot school meals by providing enough funding to include the remaining non-DEIS primary schools.
- Realise the commitment made in response to the publication of the evaluation of the school meals programme to fund all DEIS secondary schools to provide a hot school meal by 2025.
- Invest in additional resources to ensure that all Special Schools can provide a hot school meal in 2025.

⁵⁶ Barnardos, *Child Food Poverty 2022* (Barnardos 2022) <www.barnardos.ie/news/2022/february/child-food-poverty/> accessed 12 April 2024.

⁵⁷ *ibid.*

⁵⁸ Healthy Food For All, *A Good Practice Guide to School Food Initiatives* (Healthy Food for All 2009).

⁵⁹ *ibid.*

⁶⁰ RSM, *Evaluation of the School Meals Programme*, (DSP 2023).

⁶¹ RSM, *Evaluation of the School Meals Programme*, (DSP 2023).

⁶² RSM, *Evaluation of the School Meals Programme*, (DSP 2023).

⁶³ RSM, *Evaluation of the School Meals Programme*, (DSP 2023).

⁶⁴ Department of Social Protection, 'Minister Humphreys announces plans for roll-out of Hot School Meals to all Primary Schools', <https://bit.ly/44Mfs8n> accessed 9 May 2023.

⁶⁵ Department of Social Protection, 'Minister Humphreys announces plans for roll-out of Hot School Meals to all Primary Schools', <https://bit.ly/44Mfs8n> accessed 9 May 2023.

⁶⁶ Healthy Food for All, *A good practice guide to School Food Initiatives* (Healthy Food for All 2009).

Holiday Hunger

Amongst the findings in the *Evaluation of the School Meals Programme* is the issue of holiday hunger.⁶⁷ The evaluation notes that this phenomenon is compounded by external factors such as the cost of living and other challenges that families experiencing poverty may face.

The report notes that holiday hunger is an issue that requires a 'broader Government response' and that any decision on how to address it would have to 'align with the Working Group on Food Poverty'.⁶⁸ Amongst the report's short-term to medium-term improvements, to be delivered by 2025, there is a call to 'extend a modified version of the School Meals Programme to beyond term time to address holiday hunger'.⁶⁹

While a scheme to tackle holiday hunger has not been developed to date in Ireland, a pilot holiday hunger programme could be developed and overseen by the Food Poverty Working Group. Oversight from this group could help to encourage innovative responses that use existing community infrastructure. This group's perspective can facilitate a wider government perspective which may help to identify the most impactful way of addressing holiday hunger could be identified.⁷⁰

Budget 2025 Asks

- Develop and fund a pilot initiative to address holiday hunger by leveraging existing community infrastructure, and relationships. [Cost: €1 million].

⁶⁷ RSM Ireland, *Evaluation of the School Meals Programme* (DSP 2022) 113.

⁶⁸ *ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* 7.

⁷⁰ RSM Ireland, *Evaluation of the School Meals Programme* (DSP 2022) 122.