

# Pre-Budget 2025 Submission

August 2024



Founded in 1995, 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 in Ireland by making sure that their rights are respected and protected in our laws, policies, and services.

A.S.S.C Accompaniment Support Services for Children  
Alcohol Action Ireland  
Amber Women’s Refuge  
Amnesty International Ireland  
An Cosán  
Anew  
Anne Sullivan Foundation  
Aoibhneas  
Archways  
AsIAm  
Association of Occupational Therapists of Ireland (AOTI)  
Association of Secondary Teachers Ireland (ASTI)  
ATD Fourth World – Ireland Ltd  
Atheist Ireland  
Barnardos  
Barretstown  
Bedford Row Family Project  
BeLonG To Youth Services  
Bodywhys  
Breaking Through CLG  
Catholic Guides of Ireland  
Child Law Project  
Childhood Development Initiative  
Children in Hospital Ireland  
Children’s Books Ireland  
Children’s Grief Centre  
ChildVision  
Citywise Education  
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  
Empowerment Plus  
EPIC  
Equality for Children  
Extern Ireland  
FamiliBase  
Féach  
Focus Ireland  
Foróige  
Gaeiloideachas  
Galway Traveller Movement  
GIY Ireland  
Good Shepherd Cork  
Helium Arts  
Humanist Association of Ireland  
Immigrant Council of Ireland  
Inclusion Ireland  
Inner City Organisations Network (ICON)  
Institute of Guidance Counsellors  
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  
Jigsaw  
Katharine Howard Foundation  
Kerry Diocesan Youth Service (KDYS)  
Kids’ Own Publishing Partnership  
Kinship Care  
Laois Domestic Abuse Services  
Leap Ireland  
Let’s Grow Together  
LGBT Ireland  
Meath Women’s Refuge & Support Services  
Mecpaths  
Mental Health Reform  
Mercy Law Resource Centre  
Migrant Rights Centre Ireland  
Mothers’ Union  
Move Ireland  
Museum of Childhood Ireland  
Music Generation  
My Mind  
My Project Minding You  
National Childhood Network  
National Forum of Family Resource Centres  
National Parents Council Post Primary  
National Parents Council Primary  
National Youth Council of Ireland  
New Directions  
Novas  
One Family  
One in Four  
Our Lady of Lourdes Community Services Group  
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  
SAFE Ireland  
Saoirse Domestic Violence Services  
SAOL Project  
School of Education UCD  
Scouting Ireland  
Sexual Violence Centre Cork  
Simon Communities of Ireland  
SIPTU  
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  
StartBright Early Learning Centres  
TASC  
Teachers’ Union of Ireland  
Teach Tearmainn  
Terenure College Rugby Football Club  
The Ark, A Cultural Centre for Children  
The Irish Red Cross  
The Jack and Jill Children’s Foundation  
The UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, NUI Galway  
The Wheel  
Transgender Equality Network Ireland  
Traveller Visibility Group Ltd  
Treoir  
UNICEF Ireland  
Variety – the Children’s Charity of Ireland  
Vision Ireland  
Women’s Aid  
YMCA Dublin  
Young Ballymun  
Young Social Innovators  
Youth Advocate Programme Ireland (YAP)  
Youth Work Ireland

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# 1. Introduction

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**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’.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup> Ireland was last examined by the Committee in January 2023.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup> 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 in one parent families, refugee children and those from ethnic minority groups.<sup>5</sup>

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.<sup>6</sup> The deprivation rate refers to 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.<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup>

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).<sup>9</sup> It is important to note that the SILC data is based on a household survey which does not provide detail of the rates of poverty or deprivation amongst members of the Traveller or Roma community.

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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 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

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.<sup>10</sup> 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 February<sup>11</sup> and May 2022<sup>12</sup> as part of Budget 2023<sup>13</sup> and Budget 2024<sup>14</sup> included the introduction of additional income supports to help households and families to meet the costs of energy,<sup>15</sup> health,<sup>16</sup> and transport.<sup>17</sup>

However, the increase in the enforced deprivation rate means that more people are unable to afford items seen to be the norm in society.<sup>18</sup> 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 did not go far enough.<sup>19</sup> 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 at the Department of the Taoiseach that Budget 2025 ‘will seek to support and deepen the focus on child poverty and well-being’.<sup>20</sup> 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 departments can take to make this commitment a reality.

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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 The Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) captures the level of deprivation experienced by the population as a whole. Items included on the list of deprivation items include: Without heating at some stage in the last year; Unable to afford a morning, afternoon, or evening out in last fortnight; Unable to afford two pairs of properly fitting shoes in good condition that are suitable for daily activities Unable to afford a roast once a week. The full list can be found in the Background Notes of the SILC publication. Central Statistics Office, *Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) 2023* (CSO 2024).

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

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

## 2. Summary of Budget 2025 Asks

### Department of Social Protection

#### Investment in Targeted Income Supports

- Raise the Increase for a Qualified Child by a minimum of €6 for under 12s and €15 for over 12s. [Cost: €138.9 million].<sup>21</sup>
- Increase the earnings disregard for the One Parent Family Payment and Job Seekers Transition to €205.
- Expand the Fuel Allowance to families in receipt of the Working Family Payment. [Cost: €22 million].<sup>22</sup>

#### Continue to invest in measures to address Food Poverty

- 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.

### Department of Education

#### Address the Cost of Education<sup>23</sup>

- Extend free schoolbooks scheme to senior cycle in secondary school. [Cost: €47.5 million].

#### Additional Support Measures in Schools

- Increase the number of Educational Welfare Officers by 30 WTE to adequately resource the services of TESS and to promote an early intervention approach to tackling educational disadvantage.

#### Investing in Out of School Educational Provision

- Prioritise investment in Out of School Education by providing funding to establish a National Co-Ordinator and funding for the establishment of two new long term, and two new short term education settings.

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

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

23 Costings are based on calculations in SVP *Delivering an equal and inclusive budget SVP's Proposals for Budget 2025 and the next Programme for Government* (SVP 2024), 15.

## Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth

### Increase investment in Early Years with a focus on supporting families experiencing disadvantage

- Funding for the National Childcare Scheme should focus on the income assessed subsidies and sponsorship rates in order to unlock the potential of early childhood education and care to break the cycle of poverty. This could include adjusting the income thresholds to enable more families to access higher subsidies. Raise the income threshold to €33,000 to ensure more families qualify for the maximum hourly childcare support.
- Invest €50 million in the roll out for the new Equal Start Model to support access and participation in early learning and care (ELC) and school-age childcare (SAC) for children and their families who experience disadvantage.
- Building on the significant investment of €1.1 billion in early years in 2024, Budget 2025 should invest an additional 0.15 per cent of GDP in early years and commit to increasing investment by this rate in the two subsequent budgets. Government should set out a plan to deliver a longer-term objective of moving closer to world leader, Iceland, which invests 1.8 per cent of GDP.

### Increase resources for Tusla

- Increase Tusla's overall budget by €20 million to provide investment in the core child protection and welfare system for Tusla to be able to provide appropriate placements as well as access to health and mental health services for children in their own communities.

### Measures to address food poverty in youth services

- Develop and fund a pilot initiative to address holiday hunger in youth services by ringfencing funding for UBU services to apply for to support food poverty initiatives at a local level [Cost: €1 million].

## Department of Health

### Preventative supports in early childhood

- Invest in creating a dedicated public health nurse service for children and develop a strategy for 'home visits' to ensure every child has access to the prevention and early intervention supports they deserve in their own community.

## Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage

### Prevention and Support for Children Experiencing Homelessness

- Ensure that every child living in homeless accommodation has a support worker to help them to navigate the challenges they face in this situation. [Cost: €1.5 million].
- Invest in homeless prevention services to support families from becoming homeless. Aligned to this, consider introducing legislative measures that increase tenancy rights and introduce measures to secure long terms tenancies.

### 3. Department of Social Protection

#### 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 or young person attending second level school.<sup>24</sup> 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.<sup>25</sup> This means that the current child income supports meet less than 90 per cent of the costs for these two age groups.<sup>26</sup> However, the weekly shortfall in child income supports to meet the MESL needs of a second level child are €55.42 per week.<sup>27</sup> 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.<sup>28</sup> 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.<sup>29</sup> 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.<sup>30</sup> This has had a disproportionate impact on low-income households with households on the lowest income decile who experience a higher rate of inflation at 20 per cent compared to an overall rate of 19.1 per cent for the general population.<sup>31</sup>

To address rising inflation, the Government has prioritised introducing one-off payments in the last two budgets.<sup>32</sup> 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.<sup>33</sup> 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.<sup>34</sup> To ensure there is a sustained reduction in the rates of child poverty, Budget 2025 could focus on targeting resources towards increases in the weekly rate of child income supports.

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.<sup>35</sup> 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.<sup>36</sup> Both measures would have roughly the same net impact on

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

25 *ibid.* 52.

26 *ibid.* 52.

27 *ibid.* 52.

28 *ibid.* 52.

29 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).

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

31 Central Statistics Office, *Estimated Inflation by Household Characteristics September 2023* (CSO 2023).

32 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.

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

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

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

36 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.<sup>37</sup>

### Budget 2025 Ask:

- Raise the Increase for a Qualified Child by a minimum of €6 for under 12s and €15 for over 12s. [Cost: €138.9 million].<sup>38</sup>

### 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.<sup>39</sup> This is compared to a rate of 17.7 per cent for households with two adults and 1-3 children under 18 years.<sup>40</sup>

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.<sup>41</sup> Post-Budget 2024 analysis from the ESRI highlights that overall one parent families will see an increase in their disposable income of just above 3.5 per cent.<sup>42</sup> 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.<sup>43</sup> 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.<sup>44</sup>

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.<sup>45</sup> This means that a lone parent can earn up to €165 per week and they may still be entitled to their full rate of the One Parent Family Payment. However, since then, the National Minimum Wage has increased by €2.60 to €12.70. This 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.<sup>46</sup>

### Budget 2025 Ask

- Increase the earnings disregard for the One Parent Family Payment and Job Seekers Transition to €205.

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37 *ibid.*

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

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

40 *ibid.*

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 *ibid.*

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

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

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



## 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.<sup>47</sup> 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.<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, energy poverty has been linked to a higher level of poor parental mental health, particularly amongst mothers.<sup>49</sup>

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.<sup>50</sup> 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).<sup>51</sup> 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.<sup>52</sup> 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.<sup>53</sup> In the previous year, the society saw a 20 per cent increase in calls for assistance with energy costs compared to 2021.<sup>54</sup>

## Budget 2025 Ask

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

## 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 to feed their children.<sup>56</sup> 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.<sup>57</sup>

Schools are an excellent setting to reach children, teachers, families and the surrounding community.<sup>58</sup> They provide a social environment where children can access and enjoy food, without financial constraints.<sup>59</sup> An evaluation of the School Meals Programme was published in March 2023.<sup>60</sup> The report highlights that the programme is viewed as a positive initiative with many

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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/2RjkogN>> accessed 14 June 2022.

48 *ibid.*

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].

56 Barnardos, *Child Food Poverty 2022* (Barnardos 2022) <[www.barnardos.ie/news/2022/february/child-food-poverty/](http://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).

important impacts.<sup>61</sup> The evaluation makes a number of recommendations for further action.<sup>62</sup> 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.<sup>63</sup> 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.<sup>64</sup> The Minister committed to universal provision by 2030 albeit with the ambition ‘to move faster’.<sup>65</sup> 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.<sup>66</sup>

### 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.

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61 *ibid.*

62 *ibid.*

63 *ibid.*

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 *ibid.*

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

## 4. Department of Education

### Address the Cost of Education

Reducing the cost of education is one of the six priority areas in the initial programme plan for the Department of and Taoiseach Child Poverty and Well-Being Programme Office.<sup>67</sup> In 2023, parents of children in fourth class in primary school spent an average of €320 on back-to-school costs.<sup>68</sup> The positive impact of the introduction of free books at primary school can be seen here, with a reduction of €124 on the previous year.<sup>69</sup> At post-primary level, schoolbooks represent the biggest outlay for parents of first- and fifth-year students, costing €226 and €206 respectively and accounting for a similar proportion of overall costs as those parents with a fourth class child.<sup>70</sup> Calls for support to the Society of St Vincent de Paul (SVP) were down by 20 per cent in the first year of the scheme at primary school level, demonstrating the immediate and tangible difference it made to families across the country.<sup>71</sup>

The average back to school cost for a first-year student in post-primary was a significant €972 in 2024, with €232 needed to cover the cost of schoolbooks alone.<sup>72</sup> Budget 2024 committed to extending free books to Junior Cycle and demonstrates a continued commitment from Government to tackle child poverty. This historic investment of over €68 million announced in Budget 2024 will benefit more than 212,000 students across 670 post-primary schools across the country and will allow for the provision of free schoolbooks in addition to core classroom resources such as journals, copybooks, dictionaries, and calculators.<sup>73</sup> Consideration should now be given to further expand the free books scheme to include all students up to the end of senior cycle. With books alone costing an average of €234 for a fifth-year student,<sup>74</sup> this would be an effective financial measure across primary and post-primary schooling.

Parents are finding themselves under considerable financial pressure to meet costs and have expressed frustration and exasperation with being compelled to pay high uniform costs, large sums for digital tools, and increased voluntary contribution fees, which are not really 'voluntary'.<sup>75</sup> SVP commissioned a report in 2023 to explore concerns that there may be deficits between the grants provided to secondary schools and their day-to-day operating costs, leading to a reliance on voluntary contributions and charges to fund vital school resources and activities.<sup>76</sup> Responses to the parent survey in the SVP research clearly showed that these contributions are not generally communicated as being optional, that they place a significant amount of stress on some families, and that many of the respondents made sacrifices in other areas in order to pay the voluntary contribution asked by the school.<sup>77</sup>

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67 Department of the Taoiseach, *From Poverty to Potential: A programme for Child Poverty and Well-Being*, Initial Programme Plan July 2023-December 2025 (Department of the Taoiseach Child Poverty and Wellbeing Office) 5.

68 Barnardos, 'Back to School 2023' (Barnardos 2023).

69 *ibid.*

70 *ibid.*

71 Society of St Vincent de Paul, 'SVP Records Fall in Back-to-School Calls', Press Release 31 August 2023.

72 Barnardos, 'Back to School 2023' (Barnardos 2023).

73 Department of Education, 'Minister Foley announces details of a new scheme to eliminate the cost of schoolbooks for families of Junior Cycle students', Press Release 5 March 2024.

74 *ibid.*

75 Barnardos, 'Back to School Survey 2023' (02 August 2023) <<https://www.barnardos.ie/barnardos-back-to-school-survey-2023/>> accessed 03 May 2024

76 Grant Thornton, *The role of voluntary contributions in post-primary schools in Ireland* (Grant Thornton St. Vincent de Paul 2023) 4

77 *ibid.* 4

### Budget 2025 Asks

- Extend free schoolbooks scheme to senior cycle in secondary school. [Cost: €47.5 million].

### Additional Supports in School

Educational Welfare Officers (EWOs) play an important role, particularly in relation to early intervention, to support school attendance for children aged 6 to 16 years.<sup>78</sup> EWOs engage in home visits and collaborative working with other agencies. Under the Department's Social Inclusion measures, funding of €5 million was provided in 2024 for additional Educational Welfare Officers posts.<sup>79</sup> There was also €2 million made available for increasing services in school retention and completion programmes and supports targeted at the children experiencing most education inequality.<sup>80</sup>

The latest performance data captured by TESS indicates that the number of EWOs currently in post does not meet the growing demand for these supports. In the first seven months of the current school year, 5,050 referrals had been screened by senior educational welfare services.<sup>81</sup> This was a 20 per cent increase on the first seven months of the 2022/2023 school year.<sup>82</sup> Furthermore, in March there were 3,429 referrals waiting for educational welfare services, an increase of 6 per cent on the previous month and the fifth monthly increase in a row.<sup>83</sup> TESS also reports an overall increase in the number of new individual children they are working with compared to the previous year.<sup>84</sup> It is critical that Budget 2025 targets increased investment in the number of EWOs.<sup>85</sup>

### Investing in Out-of-School Educational Provision

Research consistently shows that a disproportionate number of young people who leave school early are from lower socioeconomic groups.<sup>86</sup> The Review of Out-of-School Educational Provision found that despite Ireland having a high retention rate to Leaving Certificate, there is a small group of students who find it difficult to engage in mainstream education.<sup>87</sup> While there are alternative options for students, some alternative education providers are oversubscribed. It is essential that alternative forms of education provision are adequately funded and available throughout the country to ensure every child has the opportunity to continue with an education that can help them realise their full potential. Budget 2025 provides an opportunity to prioritise investment in Out of School Education by providing funding to establish a National Co-Ordinator and funding for the establishment of two new long term, and two new short term education settings.

### Budget 2025 Asks

- Increase the number of Educational Welfare Officers by 30 WTE to adequately resource the services of TESS and to promote an early intervention approach to tackling educational disadvantage.

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78 Tusla, 'EWS - Educational Welfare Services' <https://bit.ly/4cBmTTk> accessed 24 June 2024.

79 Department of Education, 'Main Features of Budget 2024', Department of Education October 2023, 7

80 *ibid*

81 Tusla, *Monthly Service Performance and Activity Report March 2024* (TUSLA 2024) 15.

82 *ibid*. 15.

83 *ibid*.15.

84 *ibid*.15.

85 *ibid*. 15.

86 Emer Smyth, Joanne Banks, Jessica O'Sullivan, Selina Mccoy, Paul Redmond and Seamus McGuinness "Evaluation of the National Youthreach Programme" (2019) Research Series Number 82.

87 Social Inclusion Unit Department of Education, Review of Out-of-School Education Provision, Version 2 – October 2022, 10.

- Prioritise investment in Out of School Education by providing funding to establish a National Co-Ordinator and funding for the establishment of two new long term, and two new short term education settings.

## 5. Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth

### Increase investment in Early Years with a focus on supporting families experiencing disadvantage

A review of international evidence from programmes across five countries shows that investing in early years is one of the most effective methods to break the cycle of poverty.<sup>88</sup> *First 5* committed to develop a Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) type model for early childhood education and care.<sup>89</sup> The Report of the Expert Group on the Funding Model addresses this commitment by recommending the introduction of a new funding stream to tackle socioeconomic disadvantage.<sup>90</sup>

Building on the record level of €1 billion in investment for early years in 2023, Budget 2024 committed to providing €4.5 million to fund an initial phase of a new model of early years to tackle disadvantage. In May 2024, Equal Start, a funding model and a set of associated universal and targeted measures to support access and participation for children and their families who experience disadvantage, was launched.<sup>91</sup> For Equal Start to work, Budget 2025 needs to invest in this new funding model and develop an implementation plan that allows the new model to be agile enough to learn and respond to the unique needs of the children it supports.

The National Childcare Scheme (NCS) has been in operation since November 2019 and is the primary scheme aimed at supporting parents with childcare costs.<sup>92</sup> Under the NCS, parents earning the least income receive the highest subsidy rate<sup>93</sup> in line with the principle of progressive universalism.<sup>94</sup> Investment in the NCS in the last two Budgets has focused on the universal aspect of the scheme and improving costs for all parents.

Parents with an income below €26,000 per annum qualify for the maximum hourly childcare support subsidy under the NCS.<sup>95</sup> The original design of the scheme proposed that the base income threshold would be set at a rate that would ensure that all families living on incomes below the poverty line would receive the maximum subsidy rate.<sup>96</sup> In the year of the launch of the National Childcare Scheme, this rate was €26,000 for a household containing two adults and one child.<sup>97</sup> However, the latest data shows that this has risen to €33,000.<sup>98</sup> The effective freeze on the income thresholds to

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88 Conor Cashman, Margaret Buckley and Grainne Mulcahy, *Briefing Document on Early Interventions and Public Childcare Approaches*, (Children’s Rights Alliance and UCC 2023).

89 Government of Ireland, *First 5: A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families 2019 – 2028* (Government of Ireland 2018) strategic action 8.3.

90 Expert Group on the Funding Model, *Partnership for the Public Good: A New Funding Model for Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare* (DCEDIY 2021) 119.

91 Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, ‘Equal Start for children experiencing disadvantage’ Press Release (21 May 2024).

26 Department of Children and Youth Affairs, ‘Minister Zappone launches communications campaign on the National Childcare Scheme’ (Press Release 23 September 2019) <<https://bit.ly/2XZ1eFH>> accessed 14 February 2022.

93 Two types of childcare subsidies are available under the scheme: 1) A **universal subsidy** for children under fifteen years. Children over three who have not yet qualified for the ECCE are also eligible. This is not means-tested. 2) An **income-assessed subsidy** for children up to fifteen years old (Government of Ireland, ‘National Childcare Scheme: Types of Subsidy’ <<https://bit.ly/3rM6E0U>> accessed 14 February 2022).

94 Communication received by the Children’s Rights Alliance from Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, 6 November 2020.

95 Government of Ireland, *National Childcare Scheme Policy Guidelines* <<https://bit.ly/2H91t6j>> accessed 30 June 2022.

96 Department of Children and Youth Affairs, *Policy Paper on the Development of a new Single Affordable Childcare Scheme* (DCYA 2016).

97 Social Justice Ireland, *Poverty Focus 2019* (SJI 2019).

98 Social Justice Ireland, *Poverty Focus 2013* (SJI 2023).

access higher subsidy rates has been noted by the ESRI as having a negative impact on households with lower incomes, those of which may experience wage inflation and receive less support for childcare costs.<sup>99</sup> For instance, the national minimum wage rate has risen from €9.80 per hour in 2019<sup>100</sup> to €12.70 in 2024.<sup>101</sup> The base income threshold should be reviewed to ensure that all families below the current poverty line receive the maximum subsidy rate.

There is a need to provide practical supports to marginalised families, such as families from the Traveller Community, to access ECEC. Traveller organisations supporting families on the ground have found that families are often not aware of the subsidies available for ECEC or how to apply for them. Even with the information about the supports available, families often face other barriers, such as low levels of literacy to completing the necessary paperwork, as well as a lack of flexibility with regard to hours of provision. The latest *First 5: Implementation Plan* contains an action to implement the Equal Start Model and also to maximise participation and inclusion for all families with a particular focus on lower participating groups such as Travellers and Roma.<sup>102</sup> Consideration should be given to utilising the European Social Funds available for the implementation of the Child Guarantee to invest in community workers on the ground to support Traveller families in accessing ECEC for their children.

### Budget 2025 Asks

- Funding for the National Childcare Scheme should focus on the income assessed subsidies and sponsorship rates to unlock the potential of early childhood education and care to break the cycle of poverty. This could include adjusting the income thresholds to enable more families to access higher subsidies. Raise the income threshold to €33,000 to ensure more families qualify for the maximum hourly childcare support.
- Invest €50 million in the roll out for the new Equal Start Model to support access and participation in early learning and care (ELC) and school-age childcare (SAC) for children and their families who experience disadvantage.
- Building on the significant investment of €1.1 billion in early years in 2024, Budget 2025 should invest an addition 0.15 per cent of GDP in early years and commit to increasing investment by this rate in the two subsequent budgets. Government should set out a plan to deliver a longer-term objective of moving closer to world leader, Iceland, which invests 1.8 per cent of GDP.

### Increase resources for Tusla

Tusla's Annual Report for 2022 documents a 13 per cent increase in the number of referrals for its child protection and welfare services (compared to 2021).<sup>103</sup> A steady increase in referrals has been observed in the past four calendar years with a cumulative increase of 46 per cent in referrals since 2019.<sup>104</sup> However, despite such a significant increase in referrals, the Whole Time Equivalent Staff complement of Tusla has only increased by 13 per cent due to the lack of social workers.

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99 Doorley, K. *Post-Budget Engagement: Economic and Social Research Institute*, Committee on Budgetary Oversight (Houses of the Oireachtas 18 October 2023).

100 Workplace Relations Commission, 'Previous rates of pay under the National Minimum Wage' <https://bit.ly/3QNZd5w> accessed 17 May 2024.

101 Citizens Information, 'Minimum Wage', <https://bit.ly/3QNVznn> accessed 17 May 2024.

102 Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, *First 5: Implementation Plan 2023-2025*, (DCEDIY 2023).

103 Tusla, Annual Report 2022, (2023).

104 In the four year period 2015 to 2019 the increase in referrals was 26 per cent (rising from 43,596 referrals in 2015 to 55,136 in 2018). See Tusla Annual Reports, 2015; 2016; 2017 and 2018.

There are continued challenges in the recruitment and retention of social workers meaning that currently 17 per cent or 983 children in care do not have a designated social worker.<sup>105</sup>

One-fifth of all children in care do not have a care plan.<sup>106</sup> Tusla's annual report highlights that the recruitment of sufficient foster carers remains a challenge. The report notes that there were 75 fewer foster carers approved when leavers were taken into consideration.<sup>107</sup> Additional challenges for the agency have put the existing stretched resources under further pressure. There has been an increase in the numbers of referrals of unaccompanied and separated children. In 2022, this accounted for 597 referrals made to Tusla, of which 261 were from Ukraine; a 500 per cent increase from 2021. There were 195 unaccompanied and separated children in care or accommodation at the end of 2022; a 200 per cent increase from the end of 2021.<sup>108</sup> A total of 1,127 referrals of unaccompanied and separated children were made to Tusla up until 31 December 2023 of which 435 were from Ukraine.<sup>109</sup> Since the commencement of the war in Ukraine, there have been 474 referrals to Tusla.<sup>110</sup> As of 15 December 2023 there are 323 unaccompanied and separated children in care/accommodation.<sup>111</sup>

HIQA highlights resourcing as a challenge for Tusla's services in relation to staff vacancies and due to insufficient availability of appropriate alternative care placements for children. This impacted on the timeliness and quality of service provided to some children. The lack of appropriate placements has also been identified by the Child Law Project and noted in a letter by Judge Simms upon his retirement from the Dublin Metropolitan District.<sup>112</sup> This has resulted in Tusla relying on private unregistered placements which can create instability for the young person<sup>113</sup> and delays their admission to care and exit from special care.<sup>114</sup> These themes were recently picked up in May 2024, RTE's Primetime broadcast.<sup>115</sup>

In responding to these issues, HIQA recommends a collaborative national strategic approach to ensure that Tusla is resourced and enabled to ensure that children receive the right support and service at the right time. Central to this is the need for a National Plan on Child Protection and Alternative Care along with the establishment of an interdepartmental committee to drive cross Governmental working.

### Budget 2025 Asks

- Increase Tusla's overall budget by €20 million to provide investment in the core child protection and welfare system for Tusla to be able to provide appropriate placements as well as access to health and mental health services for children in their own communities.

### Addressing Food Poverty and Holiday Hunger in Youth Services

Amongst the findings in the *Evaluation of the School Meals Programme* is the issue of holiday hunger.<sup>116</sup> 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.

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105 Tusla *Monthly Service Performance and Activity Report March 2024* (Tusla 2024).

106 *ibid.*

107 Tusla, *Annual Report 2022* (Tusla 2023) 9.

108 Information received by the Children's Rights Alliance from Tusla on 04 April 2024.

109 *ibid.*

110 *ibid.*

111 *ibid.*

112 Child Law Project 'Letter from District Court Judge Dermot Simms of 17 May 2023' available <https://bit.ly/3WDNXfi> accessed 10 May 2024.

113 See for example: <https://www.childlawproject.ie/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/01-2023vol1.pdf>

114 See: <https://www.childlawproject.ie/latest-volume/overview-of-special-care-list-judge-stresses-need-for-legislative-reform-in-a-number-of-areas/>

115 RTE, 'Babies in State care placed in private unregulated settings' (rte.ie 9 May 2024).

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



The report's short-term to medium-term improvements, to be delivered by 2025, outlines the need to 'extend a modified version of the School Meals Programme to beyond term time to address holiday hunger'.<sup>117</sup>

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.<sup>118</sup>

The Children's Rights Alliance are aware from our members working directly with young people that they are already struggling to provide sufficient food for those attending their service. For instance, as part of our food poverty programme we provided funding for four organisations to address the issue of holiday hunger during the summer of 2022. As part of this initiative, Crosscare Finglas ran a breakfast club for the children and young people they support. Over 8 weeks, 86 young people and 18 families were supported. As well as healthy meals, the breakfast club also provided the young people with a structure during the holidays and allowed the youth workers to check in with up to 80 young people weekly. In addition, Crosscare staff worked with local schools to provide food parcels to families at particular risk of food poverty.

In May 2024, the Children's Rights Alliance launched the Child Poverty Monitor at SWAN Youth Services based in the Northeast Inner City catchment area.<sup>119</sup> This is an area marked by systemic inequalities leading to an array of complex issues impacting people living in this community. Speaking at the launch the CEO of SWAN noted that the service's kitchen is open from 9 in the morning to 9 in the evening. Young people can go in and out to make whatever food they want. Based on their current core grant funding SWAN has a weekly budget of €60 to provide food to 150 children and young people.<sup>120</sup> This is the equivalent of a sliced pan a day. Staff at the service, instead of spending time engaging with young people through informal education spend their time trying to figure out how to create a meal for 30 kids on €10. But this is balanced by the fact that if these children/young people come in hungry they will not be able to engage in the services being provided.

It is critical that youth services receive adequate funding to enable them to effectively deliver their core work. However, alongside the provision of youth services many organisations are clearly already trying to respond to the issue of food poverty both inside of and outside of school term. Funding could be provided directly to services based on the amount allocated for hot school meals. The cost per year per child would be €300. A pilot initiative of €1 million could reach over 3,300 children.<sup>121</sup>

### Budget 2025 Asks

- Develop and fund a pilot initiative to address holiday hunger in youth services by ringfencing funding for UBU services to apply for to support food poverty initiatives at a local level [Cost: €1 million].

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117 *ibid.* 7.

118 *ibid.* 122.

119 Children's Rights Alliance, 'Child Poverty Monitor 2024 Launch', Live recording, 20 May 2024 <https://bit.ly/4cFUZpp> accessed 15 July 2024.

120 *ibid.*

121 This is based on the amount allocated for hot meals under the school meals programme of €3.20 per day. The number of days holiday primary school children incur is approximately 94 (week days).

## 6. Department of Health

### Preventative supports in early childhood

Public health nursing is under pressure due to a historical hiring embargo, recruitment challenges and the implications of a generalist model of public health nursing.<sup>122</sup> The number of Whole Time Equivalent (WTE) posts have yet to return to their pre-pandemic levels. The latest figures indicate that there continues to be a fall in the workforce numbers from 1,537 WTE pre-pandemic in December 2019 to 1,494 WTE in September 2023.<sup>123</sup> A lower number of public health nurses means that some areas need to put a system in place to prioritise patients with the greatest needs.<sup>124</sup> The redeployment of Public Health Nurses throughout the pandemic, including their involvement in the vaccination programme, severely curtailed routine visits and checks undertaken by these health professionals.<sup>125</sup>

The reduced level of contact with newborn babies and their parents during the Covid-19 pandemic meant that just 54.8 per cent received their developmental screening within 10 months between July and September 2020.<sup>126</sup> This had fallen to 53.6 per cent in the same period in 2021.<sup>127</sup> Prior to the pandemic, in 2019, the rate was 92 per cent.<sup>128</sup> In the past two years, there are indications that developmental screening checks returned to the level of activity in 2019. The data related to April to June 2023 shows that 87 per cent received their developmental assessment within 12 months,<sup>129</sup> an increase on the rate of 83.3 per cent in 2022.<sup>130</sup> While rates are showing much improvement from 2020 and 2021, they are still below the HSE's target of 95 per cent.<sup>131</sup>

Public Health Nurses may lack the time and supports necessary to move away from primarily treating ill health and towards health promotion and early intervention in children's early years.<sup>132</sup> The 2017 *Houses of the Oireachtas Committee on the Future of Healthcare Sláintecare Report* recommends investing in child health and well-being services by putting in place Public Health Nurses that are dedicated to child health work. *First 5: The Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families 2019-2028*, contains a related commitment<sup>133</sup> that is reinforced in the initial work plan of the Child Poverty and Wellbeing Programme Office at the Department of An Taoiseach.<sup>134</sup>

### Budget 2025 Ask

- Invest in creating a dedicated public health nurse service for children and develop a strategy for 'home visits' to ensure every child has access to the prevention and early intervention supports they deserve in their own community.

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122 *ibid.*

123 HSE, *Management Data Report September 2023* < <https://bit.ly/4daSU5M> > accessed 22 April 2024.

124 Niamh Griffin, 'HSE 'prioritise' infant checks amid shortage of public health nurse' *The Irish Examiner* (Cork, 7 November 2022).

125 Health Service Executive, *The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the societal restrictions on the health and wellbeing of the population, on our staff and on health service capacity and delivery: A plan for healthcare and population health recovery* (HSE 2022).

126 Health Service Executive, *Performance Profile July – September 2020* (HSE 2020) 21.

127 Health Service Executive, *Performance Profile July – September 2021* (HSE 2021) 25.

128 Health Service Executive, *Performance Profile July – September 2019* (HSE 2019) 21.

129 Health Service Executive, *Performance Profile April – June 2023* (HSE 2023) 40.

130 Health Service Executive, *Performance Profile July – September 2022* (HSE 2022) 22.

131 Health Service Executive, *Performance Profile April – June 2023* (HSE 2023) 40.

132 Children's Rights Alliance, *The next programme for Government: Every Child Every Chance* (Children's Rights Alliance 2020).

133 Government of Ireland, *First 5: A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families 2019 – 2028* (Government of Ireland 2018) 160.

134 Government of Ireland, *From Poverty to Potential: A Programme Plan for Child Well-being 2023-2025*, (Department of An Taoiseach 2023).

## 7. Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage

### Prevention and Support for Children Experiencing Homelessness

Temporary measures introduced over the past four years have, on two occasions, sought to stem the number of evictions. First, in June 2020, measures introduced in response to the Covid-19 pandemic saw a significant decrease in the number of children living in emergency accommodation by the end of 2020 and into 2021.<sup>135</sup> Second, at the end of October 2022, the Government introduced legislation that would allow for a temporary ban on ‘no fault evictions’. Under the Residential Tenancies (Deferment of Termination Dates of Certain Tenancies) Act 2022, ‘no fault’ tenancy terminations would be deferred until after the 31 March 2023.<sup>136</sup> This moratorium on evictions came to an end on the 7 March 2023.<sup>137</sup> An examination of the Department of Housing’s homeless data highlights that over the six-month period of the ban, family homelessness remained fairly steady and increased by just 2 per cent.<sup>138</sup> In the six months following the lifting of the moratorium on evictions, the number of families in emergency accommodation rose at a quicker pace of almost 10 per cent.<sup>139</sup>

Since the start of 2024 the number of children living in emergency accommodation has continued to increase. Figures show that in April 2024 there were 4,206 children living in emergency accommodation.<sup>140</sup> This is an extra 612 children compared to last year when there were 3,594 children living in emergency accommodation in April 2023.<sup>141</sup> It is critical that these children are provided with the support they need to navigate this period of uncertainty and disruption.

Local authorities responding to homelessness are still engaging in prevention work which is helping to divert many children and families from the experience of living in emergency accommodation. By the end of 2023, 1,624 families were prevented from entering emergency accommodation.<sup>142</sup> Alongside this, 927 families exited from emergency accommodation in 2023.<sup>143</sup> There is a need to continue to prioritise investing resources in prevention work in order to ensure fewer children are impacted by homelessness.

#### Budget 2025 Asks

- Ensure that every child living in homeless accommodation has a support worker to help them to navigate the challenges they face in this situation. [Cost: €1.5 million].
- Invest in homeless prevention services to support families from becoming homeless. Aligned to this, consider introducing legislative measures that increase tenancy rights and introduce measures to secure long terms tenancies.

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135 Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, ‘Homelessness Data’ <<https://bit.ly/3op7UCh>> accessed 1 May 2024. For a visual representation see Focus Ireland, ‘Latest Figures on Homelessness in Ireland (Family)’ <<https://bit.ly/36cayol>> accessed 1 May 2024.

136 Residential Tenancies (Deferment of Termination Dates of Certain Tenancies) Act 2022.

137 Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, ‘Minister O’Brien announces additional measures to increase supply of social homes as winter eviction ban is phased out’, 7 March 2023.

138 Simon Communities of Ireland Locked Out of the Market Study in September 2023 The Gap between HAP Limits and Market Rents (Simon Communities 2023).

139 Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, ‘Homelessness Data’ <<https://bit.ly/3op7UCh>> accessed 3 January 2024.

140 Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, *Homeless Report April 2024* (DHLGH 2024).

141 Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, *Homeless Report April 2023* (DHLGH 2023).

142 Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage *Homeless Quarterly Progress Report Quarter 4 2023* (Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage 2024).

143 *ibid.*