

Budget 2025

What does it mean for Children and Young People?

Budget 2025 represents a shift in political thinking that recognises the need for consistent, sustained investment to deliver the systemic changes that need to happen across all departments. There were a number very welcome universal and targeted investments in both income supports and services that seek to break the cycle of child poverty.

The Budget included the largest Social Protection Budget Package in the history of the State with a €2.6 billion budget package consisting of a mix of lump sum supports and increases to weekly payments.

This is the furthest this Government has gone in increasing income supports specifically for children and young people experiencing poverty raising the Increase for a Qualified Child by €4 for children under 12 and €8 for children over 12 as well as an additional, once-off €100 payment. While the increases remain below what we want to see to ensure a decent standard of living for these children, it represents a step in the right direction. Considering there have been flat rate increases in the last few budgets, this is a welcome change of direction as targeted income supports are critically important alongside any universal increases to break the cycle of poverty. However, Budget 2025 could have gone further to deliver effective targeted measures for those experiencing disadvantage. For example, not expanding the Fuel Allowance to families in receipt of the Working Family Payment. The failure to increase the earnings disregard for the One Parent Family Payment is a missed opportunity to address the high levels of poverty experienced by children in these families.

While the national budget is better spent on public services and targeted resources, in Budget 2025 the Government has introduced measures that are going to have an immediate effect on children and families who we know are struggling. This includes increased supports for carers, double child benefit payments, and an overall increase in core social welfare payments.

A commitment to end child poverty must include urgent action to lift children and young people in Direct Provision out of poverty. Currently this group of children and young people are left to survive less than €30 a week. Last year, Government allocated funding to deliver a child-benefit like payment but one year on, we have seen no movement. While it is positive to see a commitment included in Budget 2025 it is essential that the Government acts without delay to ensure this group of children and young people see the benefit of this measure. If ending child poverty is one of this Government's top priorities, they cannot continue to leave one of the most vulnerable groups of children and young people behind.

The commitment to expand the Hot School Meals Programme to all remaining primary schools is significant progress in addressing child poverty. Full expansion at primary level removes stigma and ensures that all children in poverty, regardless of whether they attend DEIS or non-DEIS schools, will be guaranteed at least one hot nutritious meal a day. In 2024, there are children and young people, and family members, going to bed or school hungry. The Hot School Meals Programme becomes a

lifesaver for those children. Therefore, it is welcome that Budget 2025 not only acknowledges that holiday hunger is a real and pressing issue but commits €1.3 million in funding behind a solution to tackle this issue. This will make a meaningful difference to the children and young people that need it the most.

Taking ambitious action is required to turn the tide of child poverty and through the delivery of free schoolbooks for all students, sustained investment of over €1 billion in early years and more targeted supports for children most in need, Budget 2025 proves it is possible.

It is disappointing to see that the budget for Equal Start, the early years DEIS type programme, rise to only €17.2 million with only €4 million being provided for new development measures. This includes the introduction of an Additional Nutrition Programme in Equal Start Priority Settings as well as the roll out of Parent Community Coordinator training, and Diversity, Equality and Inclusion training. Budget 2026 will need to see a significant ramp up in investment in the programme if the promise of an equal start for every child is to be delivered.

No one budget can end child poverty but what we have seen in Budget 2025, and the two preceding budgets, is that sustained increases in investment across a range of government departments can make a difference. What we want to see next is an equally ambitious approach to ramping up the measures designed specifically to break the cycle of poverty.

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

Children, Equality, Disability, Inclusion and Youth

The total budget allocated to the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Inclusion and Youth in 2025 is €8.274 billion. This includes €147 million for capital expenditure.

Our response:

For the third year in a row, funding for early years has exceeded €1 billion with €1.37 billion being allocated for 2025. The increased allocation will focus on reducing costs for parents, will ensure 216,000 children will benefit from the National Childcare Scheme and provide for the enhancements under Core Funding.

Of particular importance for children is that there will be ringfenced funding (amount not yet known) to support minimum rates of pay in the early years sector which will contribute to the retention and recruitment of a highly skilled workforce. It is disappointing to see that the budget for Equal Start, the early years DEIS type programme, rise to only €17.2 million with only €4 million being provided for new development measures. This includes the introduction of an Additional Nutrition Programme in Equal Start Priority Settings as well as the roll out of Parent Community Coordinator training, and Diversity, Equality and Inclusion training. Budget 2026 will need to see a significant ramp up in investment in the programme if the promise of an equal start for every child is to be delivered.

An almost 14 per cent increase in funding for Tusla – the Child and Family Agency means that in 2025 Tusla will be able to increase support to Foster Carers, through a new initial placement allowance, the full year funding in 2025 for the increased Foster Care Allowance which had been introduced on a phased basis in 2024 and travel costs associated with caring for the foster child. It will also enable Tusla to maintain current levels of support for Family Support Services and programmes across Ireland. Additional funding will see an expansion to the network of Family Resource Centres, the introduction of step-down placements for Special Care and an increase in Tusla provision of Residential Care placements. Funding was also allocated to support separated children seeking international protection including those coming from Ukraine, numbers of whom have grown substantially.

The Budget 2025 expenditure report notes that €8.4 million funding has been secured to provide an international protection child payment (at an amount similar to child benefit) for children living in Direct Provision, to be rolled out in 2025. This will benefit an estimated 5,000 children a month. While this is very welcome and meets a commitment outlined in the [White Paper to End Direct Provision](#) the €4.7 million allocation for the payment in last year's budget has not been rolled out yet. The payment must now be urgently implemented.

Other key areas of investment in this Department include increased funding for youth work services including. The Department has secured €3.2 billion of current funding for Specialist Community Based Disability Services in 2025 representing an 11.6 per cent increase on last year. This funding will ensure there will be some further expansion including in relation to Children's Services.

Expenditure Measures Announced:

Early Years

- Increased allocation for Early Learning and Care now a total of €1.37bn
- More than 216,000 individual children set to benefit from the National Child Care Scheme in 2025.

- €17.2 million to advance implementation of Year 1 of Equal Start, with €4 million of this provided for enhancements in Year 2 focusing on the introduction of an additional Nutrition Programme in Equal Start Priority Settings and the development and rollout of Parent Community Coordinator training, and Diversity, Equality and Inclusion training.

Tusla

- €1.2 billion in funding for Tusla, the Child and Family Agency. Increased resources to maintain and support Family Support Services and programmes across Ireland including an expansion to the network of Family Resource Centres, introduce step down placements for Special Care and continue to increase Tusla provision of Residential Care placements
- Additional supports for foster carers including €10.6 million to the increased Foster Care Allowance; €0.3 million allocated to an initial placement payment to assist with the additional expense associated with the costs of beginning to care for a new foster child and €0.3 million allocated to travel costs associated.
- €1.6 million to open new special care step-down units during 2025 and measures to improve recruitment and retention of social care workers in special care.
- €6.9 million to fund full year costs of 3 new residential centre opened during 2024 and the opening and first-year costs during 2025 of a further 5 residential care centres.
- Funding allocated to Tusla supporting separated children seeking international protection.

International Protection

- €8.4 million allocated to provide an international child protection payment at a similar rate to child benefit for children and families living in Direct Provision.
- €50 million allocated to Local Authority Integration Teams (LAITs) who provide direct integration support to International Protection Applicants, those with status, Programme Refugees, and Beneficiaries of Temporary Protection across all 31 Local Authorities and the 3 national coordination staff in the Local Government Management Agency.

Other Measures

- An increase of €7 million or 9 per cent for youth services this will help to expand youth service capacity and enable 10 new targeted services to be opened. This funding will also help fund a new pilot initiative to address holiday hunger.
- Increased funding for equality initiatives such as for IHREC, and new national strategies on Travellers and Roma, LGBTI+ inclusion and women and girls.
- Funding for the development of new Autism Innovation Fund for local community groups supporting autistic children and adults.
- Funding for the expansion of initiatives to enable children and young people to participate in decision-making within the framework of the Participation of Children and Young People in Decision-Making Action Plan 2023-2028.

Education

The total budget allocated to the Department of Education is €11.24 billion. This includes an allocation of €1.3 billion in capital funding; for 350 building projects currently underway and 200 new projects.

Our response:

For the third year in a row, the Government addressed the high cost that education places on families each September. The provision of free schoolbooks at primary level in 2023 and the extension to Junior Cycle at post primary level in 2024 has significantly reduced back to school costs for families. Investing in interventions such as this puts money back in the pockets of families juggling the increased cost of living. The final expansion now to Senior Cycle is hugely positive. It will provide certainty that many families living in poverty do not have when it comes to how they will get their children ready for back to school. It is welcome that this budget sees the expansion complete to the end of Senior Cycle education given that we know that the cost of books increases alongside the cost of clothes, food, and activities for teenagers. It is disappointing that no provision was made for non DEIS schools, to support them to respond to increasing challenges within their schools, including children coming to them from emergency homeless accommodation, children from increasingly diverse backgrounds and children who have experienced trauma for a range of reasons.

Expenditure measures announced:

- An additional €51 million funding to extend free schoolbooks to Senior Cycle students in post primary schools in the free education scheme. This will reduce the cost of education for 200,000 students bringing total investment in tackling school costs to €166 million.
- An extra €52 million for the School Transport Scheme to continue to support the transport of children to and from school.
- €10 million in increased capitation funding for recognised schools in the free education scheme.
- An additional €33 million in funding for an extra 1,600 SNAs and 768 SEN Teachers, working in special classes, special schools and mainstream settings to support children with special educational needs, with the aim of supporting the provision of an inclusive education system. This will bring the total number of SNAs to over 23,100.
- An extra €22 million in funding will provide for the continuation of curricular and assessment reforms, particularly in relation to the Senior Cycle.
- €9 million for the rollout of a 'Keeping Childhood Smartphone Free' initiative to make post primary schools smartphone free.
- Funding to provide additional funding for social inclusion programmes including the School Completion Programme, Tusla Education Supports Services, the Traveller and Roma Education strategy and supports for out of school education provision;
- Funding to establish a new special education innovation fund in 2025. This fund will be used to advance innovative solutions to improve and complement our education system.

Health

The total Budget allocated to the Department of Health for 2025 is €25.76 billion. This includes €1.46 billion in capital expenditure.

Our response:

There has been increased investment in Mental Health services (to a record €1.48 billion) with an additional allocation of €16 million for a number of initiatives. This is a welcome increased allocation which will focus on youth mental health services, counselling for the Traveller Community, the Cyber Safe Kids Initiative, and additional Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).

It is discouraging to see a lack of funding to support families experiencing poverty, and to support early intervention and care. The income thresholds for the Medical Card have not been revised since 2005 and at a minimum these should be set above the poverty thresholds. A full Medical Card is essential for those in low-income households to ensure that all families with children who are at risk of poverty will have access to necessary healthcare. There was no provision of funding to support the development of a dedicated public health nurse service for children.

Expenditure measures announced include:

- €16 million in additional funding for mental health services including youth mental health services, counselling for the Traveller community, suicide bereavement counselling, the Cyber Safe Kids initiative, and additional Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).
- Additional €2.5 million for staffing for CAMHS teams including funding for 8 additional staff to develop a new CAMHS emergency department liaison service and 7 additional staff for an extra CAMHS hub.
- An additional €1 million in funding for measures to support mental health services for the Traveller Community.
- Funding of €0.5 million to support breastfeeding and a commitment to fully fund Phase 1 of the obesity strategy.

Social Protection

The total Budget allocated to the Department of Social Protection for 2025 is €26.89 billion. This includes €17 million in capital expenditure. Our response:

The Budget included the largest Social Protection Budget Package in the history of the State with a €2.6 billion budget package consisting of a mix of lump sum supports and increases to weekly payments.

We warmly welcome the expansion of the Hot School Meals Programme to all primary schools in 2025. In recognition of the challenges many families face due to the gap in provision of hot school meals during holiday periods we were very pleased to see an allocation of €1.3 million for a Holiday Hunger pilot project in summer 2025. The pilot programme will be delivered through the existing summer programme delivered by schools. In Summer 2025 it is envisaged that 40,000 children will benefit from direct food support over a two-three period. In addition to this the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth have allocated funding to pilot an initiative to support selected youth services to address holiday hunger over holiday periods. These are positive measures to address food poverty in Ireland.

Considering the ongoing increases in the cost of living, any increase in the core social welfare payments is welcome as these payments are a lifeline for so many families. However, the increase to weekly payment rates falls below what is required. While it is welcome that a differentiated increase was applied given the high costs of older children in the increases given in the IQC (€4 for under 12s and €8 for over 12s), Budget 2025 did not deliver enough effective targeted measures for those experiencing disadvantage. For example, not raising the Child Support Payment by a minimum of €6 for under 12s and €15 for over 12s and not expanding the Fuel Allowance to families in receipt of the Working Family Payment. The failure to increase the earnings disregard for the One Parent Family Payment is a missed opportunity to address the high levels of poverty experienced by children in these families.

Expenditure measures announced include:

- Increase of €60 per week for the Working Family Payment income thresholds from January 2025.
- €150 tax credit increase for single-person child carer, and €300 incapacitated child tax credit increase.
- Weekly rates of the Child Support Payment (formerly the Increase for a Qualified Child (IQC)) will increase by €8 for children over 12 and by €4 for under 12s in January 2025.
- €15 increase in Maternity Benefit, Paternity Benefit, Adoptive Benefit and Parent's Benefit from January 2025.
- An increase rate of Domiciliary Care Allowance by €20 per month to €360 per month.
- €280 newborn baby grant in addition to the first month of Child Benefit payment from 1st January 2025.
- The extension of free public transport to children aged five to eight years old.
- €72 million for the extension of the Hot School Meals programme to all remaining primary schools in 2025.
- €1.3 million for a School Meals Holiday Hunger pilot project in summer 2025.

Once off payments:

- Two double payment of Child Benefit payments for families receiving this payment to be paid in November and December 2024.
- A double social protection payment in October, and a double social protection payment in December 2024 to tackle the cost-of-living crisis.
- €400 once off Working Family Payment to be paid in November 2024.
- €400 once off payment for those in receipt of the Domiciliary Care Allowance.
- €100 once off Child Support Payment lump sum.

Housing, Local Government and Heritage

The total Budget allocated for the Department in 2025 is €7.93 billion (€6 billion of which relates to housing).

Our response:

Budget 2025 provided for an increase of capital funding for local authorities and Approved Housing Bodies to deliver much needed additional social housing and to deliver Cost Rental, Affordable homes and to bring vacant homes back into use. There is an increase in expenditure on homeless services, with no specific initiatives to support children trapped in emergency accommodation. The increase in funding in this area indicates that the Department anticipates the numbers living in emergency accommodation will at best remain stagnant and at worst increase further. We are experiencing the worst homelessness crisis in recent times, and we are disappointed that in the face of over 4,400 children living in homeless accommodation, Budget 2025 did not announce any targeted measures to support children and families who are currently in homelessness or at risk of homelessness.

Expenditure measures announced include:

- An additional €61 million to support the provision of homeless services, including emergency accommodation, homelessness prevention measures and tenancy sustainment services.
- €110 million (inclusive of LPT) to support the delivery of an additional 7,400 new social homes in 2025 under the Social Housing Current Expenditure Programme (SHCEP).
- €257 million to support the delivery of 10,000 social homes by local authorities and Approved Housing Bodies.
- €85.4 million to deliver Cost Rental and Affordable homes.
- €1.25 billion to the Land Development Agency (LDA) for the delivery of social and affordable homes.
- €482 million for the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) for 8,400 new households to purchase a home in the private rental market and to continue support for over 50,000 HAP tenancies by the end of 2025.
- €101 million for the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) for a further 1,600 tenancies in 2025 and to continue support for 16,000 active tenancies by the end of 2025.
- €23 million is provided to deliver Traveller-Specific Accommodation for members of the Traveller community.
- €250 increase in the rent tax credit to €1,000 for an individual and €2,000 for a jointly assessed couple.
- The extension of the mortgage interest tax relief for mortgage holders for another year
- The extension of the Help to Buy scheme to 2029.

Justice

The total Budget allocated for 2025 is €3.92 billion, this includes a capital allocation of €310 million.

Our response:

It is very welcome to see further investment in youth justice, with an increase of funding by €3.2m to a total allocation of €33 million in Budget 2025. This investment will support key commitments in the Youth Justice Strategy including the addition of a further two new Youth Diversion Programmes. €3 million was allocated to provide a pilot project to support the voice of children in family justice proceedings, including the recruitment of 8 staff as well as other services to assist in these proceedings. It will also enable the use of expert reports as outlined in the Family Justice Strategy to ensure the voice of each child impacted by family break ups can be heard and to safeguard their needs within the justice system. We also particularly welcome the €7.9 million increase in funding to combat domestic, sexual and gender-based violence (DSGBV) bringing the total to €70 million. This includes €67 million to Cuan, the statutory agency dedicated to tackling and reducing DSGBV, to support the implementation of their zero-tolerance strategy and funding for 80 additional refuge places.

Expenditure measures announced include:

- €70 million to combat support combat domestic, sexual and gender-based violence (DSGBV) including €67 to Cuan.
- €3.2 million increase in funding for Youth Justice Strategy bringing the total €33 million.
- €25 million to support the continued costs of processing output across the International Protection Office and the International Protection Appeals Tribunal and provide for significant capacity and processing times enhancements.
- €9.5 million allocated for nationwide Community Safety Partnerships and the establishment of a National Office for Community Safety and the Community Safety Fund.

The Scheme to Support National Organisations is funded by the Government of Ireland through the Department of Rural and Community Development



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