



Minister O’Gorman welcomes substantial investment under Budget 2024

10 October 2023

- Minister O’Gorman today unveiled an investment package worth €1.1bn for early learning and childcare for 2024, building on the substantial investment in Budget 2023 and delivering a 70% increase in total State investment in the sector since 2020.
- Families receiving the National Childcare Scheme (NCS) universal subsidy will see a further 25% average reduction in the cost of using full time early learning and childcare services. Also from September 2024, families using childminders can start to benefit from the NCS for the first time.
- Significant investment of over €1bn has been secured for Tusla, the Child and Family Agency. Foster Carers will receive an increase in the Foster Care Allowance
- Minister Rabbitte has secured an investment of €195m in Specialist Community Based Disability Services, which transferred to the Department in March, bringing the total budget to €2.8bn. This includes increased funding to enhance residential places, respite services, PA hours, Home Support and provide additional day places for school leavers.

Early Learning and Childcare Funding

The 2024 Budget follows an historic €1.025 billion made available in Budget 2023 for early learning and childcare.

This Budget continues to improve investment for early learning and childcare with funding increasing by 8% or €83 million in 2024, to €1.108 billion.

Through this funding, there will be improved affordability for parents, improved availability of early learning and childcare places and additional supports for children with a disability and for children experiencing disadvantage. There will also be significant enhancements to the Core Funding Scheme.

National Childcare Scheme

Budget 2024 introduces further reforms to the National Childcare Scheme (NCS) from September 2024, which will continue to improve the affordability of early learning and childcare for families and will enable families who use childminders to benefit from the Scheme for the first time.

From September 2024, all families accessing registered early learning and childcare will receive a minimum hourly universal NCS subsidy of €2.14 off their out of pocket costs, rising from a current hourly rate of €1.40.

For families on the minimum or universal subsidy, this will mean up to €5,007 off their annual bill per child. This represents up to an additional €1,731 off the annual cost of early learning and childcare per child.

Families on the maximum subsidies under the NCS, based on an income assessment and the age of the child, can already receive up to €11,934 off their annual fee.

Minister O' Gorman said:

“Delivering on my promise to bring further reductions to the cost of early learning and childcare in 2024 as well as opening up the NCS to families who use childminders has been my priority in Budget 2024. Changes to the NCS, from September 2024, through the universal subsidy, will substantially reduce out of pocket costs - by 25% on average and will benefit more than 150,000 individual children”.

Equal Participation Model

Budget 2024 also introduces a new initiative from September 2024 called the Equal Participation Model (EPM), which will assist services to enhance supports to all children who may be vulnerable or experiencing disadvantage.

The supports are both universal and targeted, meaning some are for all early learning and childcare services and the children they serve, while some are for services who provide early learning and childcare in a context of high levels of concentrated disadvantage.

The initial rollout of supports under the EPM will start from September 2024 with phase one, with phases two and three following in subsequent years.

Access and Inclusion Model (AIM)

Budget 2024 also provides for the continued implementation of the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) to ensure that an increasing cohort of children with a disability – approximately 7,000 - can access and meaningfully participate in the ECCE Pre-School Programme next year. It also provides for an expansion of targeted AIM supports to these children beyond time spent in the ECCE programme, in term and out of term.

Core Funding

€303.31m has been allocated for Core Funding in 2024, a 14% increase on the 2023 investment in the scheme. This substantial increase on the 2023 allocation will support continued implementation of the scheme for the second programme year, September 2023 to August 2024 and into the third programme year from September 2024, with additional funding of €14.65m being made available from September 2024.

The additional funding from September 2024 translates into a full year allocation of €331m for year 3 of Core Funding, an increase of €44m, or 15%, on the current allocation of €287m and will delivery of a range of enhancements in Year 3 of the scheme to support improved affordability and accessibility for families, improved pay and conditions for the workforce and improved sustainability for providers.

Disability Services

An additional €195m will be invested in Disability Services for 2024, bringing total investment to €2.8bn. Funding will be directed towards the enhancement of person-centred supports and services, supporting the progressive rollout of the Action Plan for Disability Services and the Roadmap for Children's Disability Services.

The Disability Services Budget in 2024 will include:

- €20.5m in extra funding for disability residential services for adults and children to deliver approximately 100 new residential places
- €10m in respite services to build on existing provision, to provide more alternative respite such as in homes, after-school and deliver new or enhanced services to families
- €8.5m to improve children's services including the recruitment of additional therapy positions, increasing third level places and supports for specialist children's disability services
- €18.2m for placements in adult day services for 1,250-1400 young people leaving school in 2024 and €23.7m in funding to provide for the full cost of school leavers in 2023
- €2m additional funding in Personal Assistant services to promote independent living, delivering around 80,000 additional hours, continued investment in Home Support services, and €1.4m for specialist community supports for people with neurological impairments
- In addition, Capital investment of €23.7m will provide for the upgrade and development of disability services

The allocation for 2024 will also drive a broader programme of work in Disability Equality Policy. A dedicated budget will support the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCPRD). In particular, we will develop and implement an ambitious new National Disability Strategy and the Autism Innovation Strategy. Funding will support important initiatives under the Disability Participation and Awareness Fund, including ring-fenced support for Disabled Persons Organisations, and employment supports for persons with disabilities through the Towards Work and Employers for Change Initiatives, as well as enhanced stakeholder engagement.

Minister Rabbitte commented, "I am fully committed to the continuous advancement of rights under the UNCPRD and to improving the range of disability services available to both children and adults. This year's allocation demonstrates the Government's strong commitment to building capacity in this area. This funding will provide greater investment in a range of service areas such as residential, respite, children's services, day services, PA, Home Support and neurological community services.

"It will also provide for a further iteration of important inclusion measures under the Disability Participation and Awareness Fund, including funding for Disabled Persons Organisations (DPOs), and support the development of the next National Disability Strategy and Autism Innovation Strategy. I will be working closely with my ministerial colleagues, the HSE, voluntary providers and DPOs to ensure this funding has a substantial impact in 2024.

"I will continue in 2024 to do the very best I can for people with disabilities and their families, to provide intervention and care when it is needed and to progressively deliver tangible improvements to the lives of people with disabilities."

Tusla

The allocation for Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, has also been increased to €1,038m*.

The primary advantage of this increased level of funding is improved support for foster carers through an increase in the weekly foster care allowance rate for the first time since 2009.

From January 2024 the Foster care allowances will increase by €25 per week. In November 2024 the allowances will be raised to €400 for children aged under 12 and €425 for those over 12. Foster carers will receive over €1,700 additional funding in 2024 which includes an extra €300 per month by the end of 2024 when compared with the current allowances.

A double week will also be paid at the existing rates to Foster carers before the end of 2023.

The Budget 2024 funding package will also allow Tusla to:

- Continue to provide existing levels of care and support to children and families referred to Tusla for help.
- Begin to address some of the increasing demand for Tusla services, in particular for complex residential care placements.
- Invest in and increase capacity in Tusla's residential care provision, in line with Tusla's Residential Care Strategy.
- Increase capacity in Tusla's residential care placements provided by private and NGO organisations.
- Support unaccompanied children arriving in Ireland who require care, housing and international protection.

*Allocation of €1,038m includes over €44m of non-core funding provided to Tusla in respect of Ukrainian and other separated children seeking international protection. Tusla also receives funding from a range of other areas of this Department for targeted programme assistance. Additionally, Tusla performs roles relating to the work of the Minister for Justice and the Minister for Education and additional funding is provided to Tusla to carry out those functions.

Ukraine response

Since February 2022, Ireland has welcomed over 96,000 Beneficiaries of Temporary Protection into Ireland, of which approximately 80% (over 72,700) have required accommodation and are currently being accommodated by the State.

The Department has been allocated €1.5bn for the Ukraine response in 2024, which will assist it to continue to meet its legal responsibilities in relation to short term emergency accommodation needs of beneficiaries of Temporary Protection who continue to arrive from Ukraine.

The provision of €61m in capital funding will enable the Department to progress the delivery of modular homes in various locations that will assist the Minister to meet the needs of beneficiaries of Temporary Protection.

International Protection

€409m is being allocated in current and capital funding to cover costs in relation to international protection accommodation.

€2.7m is being allocated as dedicated funding for the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF); this funding will enable the department to begin implementation of the new national AMIF programme.

€9.2m is being allocated towards Refugee and Migrant Integration to continue the work of Ireland's Refugee Resettlement programme and complementary pathways such as the Community Sponsorship programme.

The focus of expenditure will be on:

- Expanding the range of supports provided to international protection applications, including an additional payment for children;
- Providing funding to local authorities to coordinate local integration supports including establishment of a permanent network of Local Authority Integration Teams;
- Commissioning NGOs to provide targeted supports, particularly for vulnerable applicants;
- Delivery of supported accommodation for vulnerable applicants including a Victims of Trafficking Unit;
- Roll out of a third International Protection integration fund, to support community integration initiatives and deliver benefits for local communities;
- Continued roll out of a funding stream for the Children and Young People's Services Committees for enhanced support for children, young people, and their families in International Protection Accommodation.

Mother & Baby Institutions Payment Scheme

The Mother and Baby Institutions Payment Scheme is a centrepiece of the Government's Action Plan for Survivors. It will provide financial payments to an estimated 34,000 people and health supports to an estimated 19,000 people in recognition of circumstances they experienced while resident in a mother and baby or county home institution. At an overall expected cost of €800 million, it is the largest scheme of its type in the history of the State.

The legislation for the Payment Scheme - the Mother and Baby Institutions Payment Scheme Act 2023 - was signed into law on 11 July. The Department continues to work on establishing the administrative structures to deliver the Scheme. The Budget 2024 allocation contains €225m to support implementation of this multi-annual Scheme in 2024.

Equality

€13.55m is being allocated for a range of measures to support equality. This includes funding for women's organisations and for Traveller and Roma organisations. It also includes funding to promote Traveller and Roma employment and to support Traveller and Roma children in education. The allocation will support the continuation of LGBTI+ funding programmes. This funding will also be used to implement the successor strategies in relation to women's equality, LGBTI+ inclusion and Traveller and Roma inclusion.

The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission will also receive €8.7m which represents an increase of 6.1% in its allocation for 2024.

Youth

€77.95m is being allocated in Budget 2024 to current expenditure for youth services, an increase of €5 million, or 6.8%, on the 2023 budget. €74.45m is being provided for youth services funded under the existing funding schemes. In addition, €1million is being provided to establish a new Youth Employability

Scheme, to provide dedicated support to young people who are not in education or work. The aim is to promote the employability of disadvantaged young people. €2.5 million is being provided to support the expansion of universal youth services, which are provided by volunteer led youth organisations around the country. This funding will enable more groups to support young people and will create more places in youth groups.

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