

# Pre-Budget 2024 Submission to the Joint Committee on Social Protection, Community and Rural Development and the Islands

May 2023



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

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

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## 1. Introduction

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**The Children’s Rights Alliance unites over 140 members working together to make Ireland one of the best places in the world to be a child. We change the lives of all children 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.**

**The Alliance welcomes the opportunity to share its views with the Joint Committee on Social Protection, Community and Rural Development and the Islands on the need to take measures to tackle child poverty in Budget 2024.**

Ireland has an international obligation under Article 27 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child to ‘recognize the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child’s physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development’ and States are 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 the Irish Government to raise social welfare rates to reflect the cost of living as a key means by which to ensure children have access to an adequate standard of living.<sup>4</sup> The Committee also called for children seeking asylum to have ‘prompt’ access to social protection.<sup>5</sup>

The annual poverty statistics captured by the Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) provide important data on the proportion of the population experiencing poverty. When examined by age, children have the second highest risk of poverty rate at 15.2 per cent, higher than the rate amongst the general population at 13.1 per cent.<sup>6</sup> Households with children headed by one adult have a higher rate of 23.8 per cent versus those in two adult households (13.1 per cent).<sup>7</sup>

SILC measures a household’s experience of deprivation, i.e. the proportion of households unable to afford a set of 11 goods and services which are considered the norm for society. While 17.7 per cent of the population experience deprivation the rate was higher amongst children (19.9 per cent) and in one parent families (43.5 per cent).<sup>8</sup>

Children are most vulnerable to consistent poverty, with a rate of 7.5 per cent versus an overall rate of 5.3 per cent.<sup>9</sup> Children living in households headed by a lone parent are significantly more vulnerable to consistent poverty at a rate of 14.1 per cent compared to 5.3 per cent of two parent families.<sup>10</sup> While SILC provides important evidence on the levels of poverty and deprivation amongst

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

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

<sup>4</sup> UNCRC, ‘Concluding Observations Ireland’ (2023) UN Doc CRC/C/IRL/CO/5-6, para 34.

<sup>5</sup> UNCRC, ‘Concluding Observations Ireland’ (2023) UN Doc CRC/C/IRL/CO/5-6, para 40.

<sup>6</sup> Central Statistics Office, *Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) 2022* (CSO 2023).

<sup>7</sup> Central Statistics Office, *Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) 2022* (CSO 2023).

<sup>8</sup> Central Statistics Office, *Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) 2022* (CSO 2023).

<sup>9</sup> Central Statistics Office, *Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) 2022* (CSO 2023).

<sup>10</sup> Central Statistics Office, *Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) 2022* (CSO 2023).

the population, a major shortcoming is that it does not provide data on certain cohorts such as the Traveller Community.

We are calling for Budget 2024 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.

## 2. Summary of Budget 2024 Asks for Joint Committee on Social Protection, Community and Rural Development and the Islands

<p><b>School Meals</b></p>	<p>Realise the commitment made in response to the publication of the evaluation of the school meals programme to fund all DEIS schools to provide a hot school meal in 2024 [Estimated Cost: €7.7m].<sup>11</sup></p> <p>Alongside the commitment to expand hot meals to all DEIS primary schools, invest additional resources to ensure that all Special Schools and DEIS Secondary schools can provide a hot school meal in 2024 [Estimated Cost: €6.3m].<sup>12</sup></p> <p>Put in place an implementation plan for the roll-out of universal provision of hot meals in all schools by 2030 at the latest.</p> <p>Fund and develop a pilot initiative for the expansion of school meals during holiday time by leveraging existing community infrastructure and relationships between schools and summer camps.</p>
<p><b>Social Welfare Rates</b></p>	<p>Raise the Qualified Child Increase by a minimum of €5 for children under 12 and a minimum of €10 for children over 12. <b>[Estimated Cost: €102.5m]</b>.<sup>13</sup></p> <p>Benchmark all social welfare rates to MESL to ensure that all households with children can afford a minimum standard of living.</p>
<p><b>Income Supports for Children in Direct Provision</b></p>	<p>Increase the Direct Provision Daily Expenses Allowance for children living in Direct Provision from €29.80 to €42 for children under 12 and €50 for children over 12 in line with QCI and benchmark the payment in line with further QCI increases.</p> <p>Introduce the International Protection Child Payment for children living in Direct Provision at the same rate of the universal Child Benefit payment.</p>

<sup>11</sup> RSM, *Evaluation of the School Meals Programme*, (DSP 2023), Appendix 9.

<sup>12</sup> RSM, *Evaluation of the School Meals Programme*, (DSP 2023), Appendix 9.

<sup>13</sup> Heather Humphries TD, Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection, *Social Welfare Benefits 25 April 2023* [19289/23].

### 3. Our Budget 2024 Asks

#### a. School Meals

##### Budget 2024 Asks:

- Realise the commitment made in response to the publication of the evaluation of the school meals programme to fund all DEIS schools to provide a hot school meal in 2024 [Estimated Cost: €7.7m].<sup>14</sup>
- Alongside the commitment to expand hot meals to all DEIS primary schools, invest additional resources to ensure that all Special Schools and DEIS Secondary schools can provide a hot school meal in 2024 [Estimated Cost: €6.3m].<sup>15</sup>
- Put in place an implementation plan for the roll-out of universal provision of hot meals in all schools by 2030 at the latest.
- Fund and develop a pilot initiative for the expansion of school meals during holiday time by leveraging existing community infrastructure and relationships between schools and summer camps.

##### Rationale:

A survey published in February 2023 indicated that one-third of parents were always or sometimes worried about being unable to provide sufficient food for their children.<sup>16</sup> Schools are an excellent setting to reach children, teachers, families and the surrounding community.<sup>17</sup> They provide a social environment where children can access and enjoy food, without financial constraints.<sup>18</sup> Ireland is unusual in the European Union (EU) context in not providing a universal school meal programme.<sup>19</sup> However, a targeted School Meals Programme is funded by the Department of Social Protection. The programme provides funding towards the provision of food through the allocation of a per pupil rate for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Funding provided during the 2022/2023 school year, enabled 1,600 schools and organisations benefitting 260,000 children to take part in the scheme.<sup>20</sup>

An evaluation of the School Meals Programme was published in March 2023.<sup>21</sup> Amongst the key overall findings is that the programme is viewed as a positive initiative with many important impacts.<sup>22</sup> The evaluation makes a number of important recommendations for further action.<sup>23</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>24</sup> In response to this, the Minister for Social Protection announced the expansion of the 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>25</sup> The Minister commits to universal provision by 2030 albeit with the ambition 'to move faster'.<sup>26</sup> The universal

<sup>14</sup> RSM, *Evaluation of the School Meals Programme*, (DSP 2023), Appendix 9.

<sup>15</sup> RSM, *Evaluation of the School Meals Programme*, (DSP 2023), Appendix 9.

<sup>16</sup> Barnardos, [Food Insecurity in Ireland – Impact on children and their parents](#), (Barnardos 2023)

<sup>17</sup> Healthy Food For All, *A Good Practice Guide to School Food Initiatives* (Healthy Food for All 2009).

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Heather Humphries TD, Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection, School Meals Programme, Written Answers, 18 April 2023 [17567/23].

<sup>21</sup> RSM, *Evaluation of the School Meals Programme*, (DSP 2023).

<sup>22</sup> RSM, *Evaluation of the School Meals Programme*, (DSP 2023).

<sup>23</sup> RSM, *Evaluation of the School Meals Programme*, (DSP 2023).

<sup>24</sup> RSM, *Evaluation of the School Meals Programme*, (DSP 2023).

<sup>25</sup> 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.

<sup>26</sup> 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.

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>27</sup>

The evaluation report raises concerns about the issue of ‘holiday hunger’.<sup>28</sup> This phenomenon relates to the inability of children to access ‘an adequate supply of nutritious food’ outside of school term times.<sup>29</sup> Participants in the evaluation study noted the challenges with providing meals over the long summer holidays but principals in particular saw the potential in expanding the programme during shorter holiday periods such as Easter and mid-term.<sup>30</sup> Generally, the Irish school meals programme does not provide funding to cover school holidays or for days when the school is closed. There is a need to clearly identify a means of combatting holiday hunger.

## b. Address the Cost-of-Living Crisis for Families dependent on Social Welfare

### Budget 2024 Ask:

- Raise the Qualified Child Increase (QCI) by a minimum of €5 for children under 12 and a minimum of €10 children over 12. **[Estimated Cost: €102.5m]**.
- Benchmark all social welfare rates to MESL to ensure that all households with children can afford a minimum standard of living.

**Rationale:** As noted in the introduction of this submission, annual poverty statistics captured by the Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) highlight the incidence of poverty for children aged 0-17 in comparison to the entire population.

**Table 2: SILC 2022 Child Poverty Statistics**

	At risk of Poverty	Deprivation	Consistent Poverty
State	13.1	17.7	5.3
0-17 age group	15.2	19.9	7.5
1 adult, with children under 18 years	23.8	43.5	14.1
2 adults, with 1-3 children under 18 years	13.1	17.7	5.3

**Source:** CSO Survey of Income and Living Conditions 2022

Further insight about the inadequacy of a household’s income to meet all expenditure costs is provided in *SILC: Enforced Deprivation 2022* report. In 2022, 50.8 per cent of all households reported some level of difficulty (from great to little) in making ends meet with 5.9 per cent reporting great difficulty.<sup>31</sup>

Two adult households with children experienced a higher rate of difficult making ends meet than the general population (57.1 per cent and 5.8 per cent respectively).<sup>32</sup> However, one parent families reported much higher rates across all levels of difficulty. Three-quarters of all one parent households (75.9 per cent) reported some level of difficulty making ends meet, with 9.8 per cent

<sup>27</sup> Healthy Food for All, A good practice guide to School Food Initiatives (Healthy Food for All 2009).

<sup>28</sup> RSM, *Evaluation of the School Meals Programme*, (DSP 2023).

<sup>29</sup> Pamela L. Graham et al. *School Holiday Food Provision in the UK: A Qualitative Investigation of Needs, Benefits, and Potential for Development* Frontiers in Public Health, (2016) Vol. 4, Article 172.

<sup>30</sup> RSM, *Evaluation of the School Meals Programme*, (DSP 2023).

<sup>31</sup> Central Statistics Office, *Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC): Enforced Deprivation 2022* (CSO 2022).

<sup>32</sup> Central Statistics Office, *Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC): Enforced Deprivation 2022* (CSO 2022).

reporting great difficulty.<sup>33</sup> Research from the EU Fundamental Rights Agency found that in 2018 38 per cent of Traveller and Roma families experienced difficulties in making ends meet.<sup>34</sup>

According to the CSO, the Consumer Price Index (CPI) rose by 7.7 per cent in the 12 months between March 2022 and 2023.<sup>35</sup>

The impact of inflation has a varying impact on different groups in society depending on their individual consumption patterns.<sup>36</sup> The household budget of lower income households tends to largely comprise of necessities.<sup>37</sup> A more in-depth analysis of the items included in CPI highlights the growth in prices for essential costs such as food, clothing and energy. These particular price increases will have a profound impact on low-income families and presumably many of those who self-reported difficulty in making ends meet in the deprivation figures recorded by SILC 2022. In order to protect social welfare rates against further increases in the cost of living it is critical that social welfare rates are increased substantially in Budget 2024.

The cost-of-living crisis is no doubt impacting on these families who are in or at risk of poverty in a more pronounced way as well as expanding outwards the numbers struggling. Benchmarking social welfare rates to a Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL), is critical and could ensure that everyone can afford the minimum needed to participate in society.

### c. Income Supports for Children in Direct Provision

#### Budget 2024 Ask:

- Increase the Direct Provision Daily Expenses Allowance for children living in Direct Provision from €29.80 to €42 for children under 12 and €50 for children over 12 in line with QCI and benchmark the payment in line with further QCI increases.
- Introduce the International Protection Child Payment for children living in Direct Provision at the same rate of the universal Child Benefit payment.

**Rationale:** It is critical that all families with children are treated equally regarding access to social welfare income. In April 2023, approximately one in every five applicants for international protection was a child, with 4,331 children being accommodated by the International Protection Accommodation Service.<sup>38</sup> Children living in Direct Provision centres are at a high risk of consistent poverty although they are not counted in the official poverty statistics.

Children and young people in Direct Provision have spoken about how a lack of income means they have few opportunities to take part in activities with their friends and peers after school. The financial cost of school trips or the need to take public transport after sport activities is a major barrier in terms of integrating into the community.<sup>39</sup>

Children in Direct Provision receive a weekly payment of €29.80 currently.<sup>40</sup> Historically the rate of the Daily Expense Allowance (DEA) has been significantly lower than other social welfare payments for children. For example, in 2013 the rate was €9.60 compared to €29.80 for the QCI paid to social welfare recipients.<sup>41</sup> The DEA rate has remained unchanged 2019 despite increases being applied

<sup>33</sup> Central Statistics Office, *Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC): Enforced Deprivation 2022* (CSO 2022).

<sup>34</sup> European Agency for Fundamental Rights, 'Roma and Travellers in six countries' (European Agency for Fundamental Rights) <<https://bit.ly/3zDz4yx>> accessed 15 June 2022

<sup>35</sup> Central Statistics Office, *Consumer Price Index March 2023* (CSO 2023).

<sup>36</sup> TASC, *The state we are in: inequality in Ireland 2022* (TASC May 2022) 28.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, *IPAS Weekly Accommodation Statistics – April 2023* (DCEDIY April 2023) <<https://bit.ly/41RYqUa>> accessed 25 April 2023.

<sup>39</sup> Ombudsman for Children, *Direct Division Children's views and experiences of living in Direct Provision* (OCO 2020) 28.

<sup>40</sup> Citizen's Information, *Direct Provision System* <<http://bit.ly/3S3dydD>> accessed 2 February 2023.

<sup>41</sup> Citizen's Information, *Budget 2023* <<https://bit.ly/3VP9Ovj>> accessed 9 May 2023.



the QCI and a separate rate being established for under and over 12s.<sup>42</sup> Families can also access the annual Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance Scheme and the Exceptional Needs Payment Scheme for assistance with necessary costs, such as buggies and clothing.<sup>43</sup>

Children living in Direct provision system do not have access to child benefit payment given to all children habitually resident in the State. The *White Paper* committed to the introduction of a monthly International Protection Child Payment which would be provided at the same rate as Child Benefit,<sup>44</sup> as they move into phase two accommodation.<sup>45</sup> This has yet to happen. Not only was provision not made for those in the international protection system to receive a child benefit payment at a time when a double child welfare payment was introduced, they also do not qualify for the Qualified Child Increase (QCI) available to children whose parents are in receipt of social welfare payments.<sup>46</sup> This was the only group of children in Budget 2023 that did not receive any additional help to tackle the increased cost of living. As a first step towards addressing this inequality the DEA should be increased in line with QCI and benchmarked for any future increases.

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<sup>42</sup> Citizen's Information, *Budgets* <<https://bit.ly/3LNBjdj>> accessed 9 May 2023.

<sup>43</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *ibid* 64-65.

<sup>45</sup> Communication received by the Children's Rights Alliance from the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth on 18 January 2022.

<sup>46</sup> Children's Rights Alliance, *Budget 2023 – What does it mean for Children and Young People?* (30 September 2022).