



Youth Work Ireland

Youth Work Ireland Budget Submission 2025

1. Introduction and Overview

Notwithstanding some clear pressures in key areas of society all recent Government publications make it clear that the Irish economy continues to be robust and outperform most of our EU partners on most metrics. There is little dispute that young people have been through a lot in the last few years. The impact of Covid is clear, particularly on young people.

The war in Ukraine has been another blow to stability and the economy but the country and the voluntary sector have shown their normal commitment to inclusion and solidarity. The cost-of-living and housing crises are very real for young people. There is also a significant increase in the youth population ahead of other cohorts.

There are significant pressures on young people and those who work with them in a post Covid environment such as inflation, new arrivals from Ukraine and the IPO system, increased costs of insurance, light, heat, and compliance burden.

We have seen that the economy is strong, and we are producing enough wealth to deal with the major problems facing our society today. It is no longer enough to say these issues must wait. Now is the time for a real recovery that addresses the needs of young people. Many gaps need to be filled but with a positive budgetary situation now is the time to make an impact.

Our national debt to national income ratio is well inside the EU guidelines and we are one of the few EU countries with budget surpluses. While some risks exist, particularly with corporate tax receipts, a growing younger population needs to be supported by our public finances. We saw €44.7bn collected in the first half of the year, a figure up more than 9pc on the same period in 2023.

Some once off investments can also dovetail with budgetary strategy to hedge against the risks of unpredictable tax income. The Future Ireland Fund and the Infrastructure, Climate and Nature Fund should be used in imaginative and creative ways to address infrastructure deficits for young people.

In this document Youth Work Ireland sets out its budget priorities and requests for 2025.

2. Supporting Youth Services

2.1 Our Workforce

Staff in the form of youth workers engaging with people on the frontline is the major item of expenditure for youth services.

It has become more and more difficult to offer a package of supports to professional youth workers who are increasingly being attracted to other jobs and professions. Many are opting to turn to social work or education roles in state services where their skills and qualification are greatly appreciated. The DCEDIY has agreed to a WRC Recommendation (Oct 2023) for other funded staff which has major implications for the Youth Services that it also funds. The recommendation has meant an 8% increase for some staff in Youth Services which creates an expectation of similar from their colleagues. This has made it impossible to ensure equality between staff doing the same work.

The tenor of the recommendation and the representation of the Department at the WRC, means the funder is a stakeholder in these matters. The sub-inflation annual percentage increases for schemes supporting youth workers, such as Youth Information, put our members at a major disadvantage in recruiting staff.

Youth Services thus face huge problems in recruiting, retaining and deploying staff. The level of service, vacancies, and turnover levels are high in an area where consistency and relationships are critical.

Related to the above the continuing inflexibility of the UBU rules relating to expenditure on staffing is exacerbating the recruitment and retention of staff. Even if services were capable of responding to pay pressure from workers the rules of the UBU scheme effectively prevent them from doing so, restricting the percentage of funding that can be allocated for this area.

All the above is further exacerbated by continuing inflationary pressure and state services are recruiting those who work in the voluntary sector to better funded jobs with long term prospects and pension arrangements.

Pension auto enrolment is also approaching putting further pressure on already over extended budgets, an estimated 3% on staffing costs on a blended basis would be needed for this alone with the legislation just passed.

Without a proper package of pay equalisation for youth workers the ability of youth services to provide services will inevitably be reduced. In many areas such as UBU, Youth Services are already running projects at a loss. In to 2025 a reduction of services is inevitable and unfortunately preparation for this is already underway. Without proper support for staff, we believe our Youth Services will work with 2,500 fewer young people in 2025.

Before any other inflationary pressure, the need to restore services to pre Covid levels and the need to improve and extend service, an increase of 13% for youth services is needed to ensure an effective staff package and protect the current level of service.

Recommendation: A 13% increase in all funding schemes to address the massive pressures relating to staffing

Cost: €9.1m

2.2 Inflation and Programme Costs

The other, and often neglected, aspect of delivering frontline services is the need to support the programme alongside the staff. In recent years this has come under inordinate pressure. Funding of individual schemes is still behind amounts in 2008 even allowing for inflation with, for example increases of 2-3% for UBU in recent years.

There are other significant pressures in this area which have not been accounted for such as;

- Significant increase in the youth population ahead of other cohorts
- Covid, inflation, young people from Ukraine and the IPO system
- Insurance, light, heat, compliance

While the headline inflation figure for 2023 was 8.5% the CSO reported the most significant increases in 2003 “were seen in Housing, Water, Electricity, Gas & Other Fuels which was up 26.0%, Food & Non-Alcoholic Beverages, which rose by 13.1%. Increased energy costs are reflected in the yearly growth of Housing, Water, Electricity, Gas & Other Fuels, particularly in electricity (+62.7%), gas (+86.1%).”

A blended increase of these programme and overhead costs could be estimated at approximately 33% for the year and while these may have eased somewhat in the current year clearly the headline rate is not reflective of real day to day costs These increases are significantly ahead of general increases from the DCEDIY.

While only impacting on non-pay costs and following the logic of the rule on UBU for example a pro rata inflation adjustment amount would still be in the region of 8%. Allowing for previous increases and aspects of Government amelioration measures a 5% increase for inflation is still required to enable youth services maintain overheads and programme costs.

Recommendation: A 5% Inflation Adjustment to the main youth funding streams i.e UBU, Youth Service Grant and Youth Information

Cost €7m

3. Universal Youth Work

3.1 Revitalization of Youth Clubs

Youth Work Ireland has previously submitted a business case on the revitalization of youth clubs to the DCEDIY. Our network of Clubs is still struggling to recover from the pandemic. Youth Clubs are a critical piece of infrastructure supporting our growing population. The business case supports the measures needed to bring clubs back to pre-pandemic levels with ambitious targets regarding increases in the numbers of clubs, participating young people, and volunteers.

Recommendation:

- 1) **National campaign:** national/ regional public relations campaign across all media in order to attract former volunteers, recruit new volunteers, and encourage youth participation.

Cost:€150 000

- 2) **Club development workers:** the provision of professional club development workers will ensure quality support of volunteer led provision. They provide training and support on Garda Vetting, Safeguarding, National Quality Standards Framework of Volunteer Led Youth Groups (NQSFLY), Health and Safety, insurance queries etc. They also support a community development and capacity building approach to the re-invigoration and re-start of our club network.

Cost: 10 Club development workers plus support budget: €750,000

Total Cost: €900,000

3.2 Youth Information Services

Youth Information Centres (YICs) provide a free, confidential information service to young people and those who work with them on a wide range of subjects including careers, education, employment matters, rights and entitlements, leisure, sport, travel, and European opportunities. Youth Information is now a critical element of youth work ensuring that young people have the support of trusted adults in negotiating the complex online world with social media, new apps and fake news and artificial intelligence. Most services now exist in the real and virtual world and believe the same standards of safety and protection must be applied.

Youth work Ireland Services operate 14 Youth Information Centres throughout Ireland. Due to funding constraints most Youth Information Workers are now part time.

Recommendations:

- 1) That existing providers receive increased budgets in order to be in a position to support full time posts and also enhance current provision. Cost €500,000
- 2) New services to be established in white spot area over a three-year period (3 in year 1) Cost: €300,000
- 3) National Coordination Function including training budget be reinstated. €150,000

Total cost: €950,000

3.3 Infrastructure and Capital

Youth services have worked long and hard to have quality accessible premises and venues for youth work around the country, often in smaller towns and rural areas. This provision is uneven and inconsistent. The Government has wisely made provision for the future with the Future Ireland Fund and the Infrastructure, Climate and Nature Fund and has significant surpluses. To achieve growth and build these funds for the future long-term projects should be identified in Ireland. Innovative models of financing can utilise rent savings and other incomes to provide infrastructure in communities and a return on investment to the Government rainy day funds.

We call for a significantly increased capital budget of €10m a year over 3 years.

Recommendations:

- 1) Fund for the renovation of existing facilities to include refurbishment and fit-out costs for items such as IT/Digital and other services to improve quality of delivery.
- 2) Fund for improving access for young people with a disability.
- 3) Fund for the development of new physical infrastructure with dedicated and guaranteed access for young people in areas where there is minimal provision.

Cost: €10m year 1

4. Youth Issues

4.1 Young People and Health

There is currently no national health strategy for young people. The mental and physical health challenges that children and young people face are significant. Research from the *Growing up in Ireland Survey* indicates a growing problem with obesity. Our Substance Misuse Strategy still needs major support and action. More support is needed for child and adolescent mental health teams.

Youth services are key community services in the field of well-being, youth mental health and resilience but often are not recognized in this way. We welcome the promised reorientation of agencies like Tusla and the HSE to enhance relationships with voluntary and community providers. We have begun the task of significantly increasing our relationships at the national level here and with regional management in partnership with our members. Local youth services have responded to these needs themselves in an innovative way by for example creating counselling services with little or no state support.

Recommendations:

- 1) Youth work Ireland have developed and delivered a number of health-related programmes (Sexual Health, Mental Health etc) which have been delivered in the border regions as part of the PEACE programme. The effectiveness of these programmes has been evaluated and verified by the University of Ulster. We would like to roll out these programmes nationally over a three-year period: Cost: Year 1 of 3 years: €250,000.
- 2) Implement a 3-year pilot scheme of youth counselling delivered by Youth Services – Cost: €2m.
- 3) That the Department of An Taoiseach bring together an inter-departmental group to lead in the development of a national Health Strategy for young people (DECDIY, DOH and DOE) with representatives from the youth sector.

Cost: €2.25m

4.2 Housing and Homelessness

Housing and Homelessness have been critical issues over the last number of years. Affordability is out of the reach of many ordinary people, and this cascades down to many others in society particularly young people. Young people are impacted directly through youth homelessness, insecure accommodation, high rents, a shortage of student accommodation and being unable to get a foot in the housing market. The number of adults and children who are homeless across Ireland continues at a record high. The number of people accessing emergency accommodation has surpassed 14,000. The latest data published by the Department of Housing shows that in April there were 9,803 adults and 4,206 children in emergency accommodation.

We need to prevent young people from becoming homeless in the first place. The Government must give tenants greater security so young people can plan for their future. If young people become homeless the services and emergency accommodation, they receive must be designed to meet their specific needs. Young LGBTQ+ people are at higher risk of homelessness across the world. The Government must guarantee that all young people leaving state care have a secure home.

Recommendations:

- 1) Implement the Youth Homelessness Strategy – €10m.
- 2) Provide clarity for licensees in shared rented properties particularly the rent a room scheme and provide a role for the RTP here – No cost.
- 3) Improve statistics relating to children and young people to illustrate the impact of living in a family affected by homelessness – Limited Cost

Cost: €10m

4.3 Employment and Social Protection

Whether in boom or bust, Ireland has a deep-seated problem relating to educational disadvantage. Early school leaving remains an issue in many disadvantaged areas. The performance of children on key indicators under the PISA system is significantly less in DEIS schools despite some improvement. Non-attendance measured by Tusla (formerly the NEWB) is still high. We are still a way off the generally accepted school completion rates to senior cycle. Curriculum reform at the senior level needs to be a greater priority. Our members see an upsurge in “Emotionally Based School Avoidance” which needs urgent attention. Data in this area and the related area of vocational education and training is weak since the ESRI’s School Leavers Survey was effectively defunded. We are also now facing into a review of our senior cycles.

Recommendations

- 1) Fast track reform for the Leaving Certificate - no cost
- 2) Reintroduce the Early School Leavers Survey - €0.5m
- 3) Conduct a substantial research study on “Emotionally Based School Avoidance” - €1m.
- 4) Increase support for literacy and numeracy work in voluntary youth services and schools - €5m.
- 5) Increase support for voluntary youth services who work with early school leavers and the hardest to reach young people, support certified learning in these informal settings - €8m.

Cost: €14.5m

4.4 Cost of Living

The cost-of-living crisis is impacting on young people although often in a different way to adults. Higher costs for energy and associated areas are passed on and those with lower incomes have to pay more relative to their incomes. The National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI) has warned that the crisis is forcing many young people to rethink their future in Ireland. The finding of the Youth Council’s Report shows that while inflation is affecting all of society, it is impacting young people in a particular way.

Young people surveyed were more likely to report mental health difficulties and challenges with accommodation, education, and public transport expenses. Also, those living abroad reported much lower costs of living and better quality of life for example some reported paying one third of the rent in other major European cities compared to Dublin. UK Research by Demos showed young people are significantly more likely to have fallen behind on domestic bills and credit card repayments in the last six months (31%) than those aged 51+ (3%). Young people are spending more than twice as much as older people (aged 51+) on essentials, equating to nearly £1,300 more per month.

It should be noted, and indeed investigated, that the number of young people on the Live Register is considerably lower than those reported in the Labour Force Survey suggesting significant numbers of young unemployed people receive no payment. This also seems to be a development following the introduction of lower JSA rates for young people.

Recommendations

- 1) We support the call to reverse the lower rates of social welfare and minimum wages for young people to enable them cope with the cost-of-living increases - €67m.
- 2) As recommended by the Low Pay Commission - abolish Sub-Minimum wages – No cost to state, feasible for business in a high growth environment.

Cost: €67m

5. Income Measures

These measures entail action across a number of Departments and the DCEDIY. Funding for youth work needs a significant step up in the normal estimates process for the DCEDIY. We are happy to present a range of income measures that could also support these recommendations costed at approximately €111.45.

Recommendation	Cost (m)
Staffing Package	9.1
Youth Clubs	0.9
Inflation Adjustment	7
Youth Information	0.95
Capital	10
Health	2.25
Housing and Homeless	10
Employment and Social Protection	14.5
Cost of Living	67
Total	121.7
Income Measures	Income
DCEDIY Current Vote	17.7
Proportion of extension of minimum corporate tax rate to firms with lower turnover	30
Proportion of standard rating of non-pension tax reliefs	32
Proportion of increases CGT and CAT	28
DCEDIY Capital Vote and Future Ireland Fund and the Infrastructure, Climate and Nature Fund	10
Healthy Ireland and Slainte Care	4
Total	121.7