



2024

**PRE-BUDGET
SUBMISSION**

BREAKING THE CYCLE

**Proposals to
end poverty
in Ireland**



Society of St. Vincent de Paul

MISSION STATEMENT

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul is involved in a diverse range of activities characterised by:

Support and friendship

Through person-to-person contact, we are committed to respecting the dignity of those we assist and fostering self-respect. We assure confidentiality at all times and endeavour to establish relationships based on trust and friendship.

Promoting self-sufficiency

It is not enough to provide short-term material support. Those we assist are also helped to achieve self-sufficiency in the longer term and the sense of self-worth this provides. When problems are beyond our competence, we enlist the support of specialised help.

Working for social justice

We are committed to identifying the root causes of poverty and social exclusion in Ireland and, in solidarity with people experiencing poverty and disadvantage, to advocate and work for the changes required to create a more just and caring society.

2024

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THE CYCLE**

**PROPOSALS TO
END POVERTY
IN IRELAND**



Society of St. Vincent de Paul

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Foreword by SVP National President

The last eighteen months have been an incredibly difficult time for those that seek our help and a very busy time for our Members right across the country. With sky-high food and energy prices, household budgets are already stretched beyond their limits, leaving people with little options on what to prioritise.

We have seen the positive impact of Government supports through the cost of living crisis but they are sticking plasters for long term and deeper issues. Even before this crisis, people were battling a rising tide of high rents, growing bills, educational disadvantage, and often juggling health conditions, work and caring responsibilities.

Next year, will mark 180 years since the Society was established here in Ireland. While there are many reasons to be proud of the progress Ireland has made over the years, the issues and solutions we outline in this year's pre-budget submission bring into sharp focus why we need to continue to work for social justice and seek inspiration from the words of our founder Blessed Frederick Ozanam.

'I am asking that you look after people who have too many needs and not enough rights – people who demand with reason a greater say in public affairs, freedom from poverty, access to education and security in employment.'

Blessed Frederick Ozanam – Founder of SVP

Rising child poverty remains a significant concern for our Members. Almost 70% of the 230,000 calls we received last year were from households with children. We know all too well that children living in poverty are more likely to have poor educational outcomes, and risk becoming early school leavers who will face the prospect of living out their lives excluded and unable to fulfil



their potential. We all want to live in a society where every child is supported to be the best they can be, and with the right policy measures Government can make a difference.

The new Child Poverty Unit in the Department of an Taoiseach has the potential to break the cycle of poverty but it will require a number of Budgets focused on the needs and rights of children living in disadvantaged circumstances. The recent progress on education costs must be built upon and expanded to address issues like family homelessness, education costs at second level, support for children with additional needs, and access to affordable, quality childcare.

At the same time as supporting children we need to make sure the right supports are there for people when they need them – whether that is in retirement, out of work due to illness or disability, caring for loved ones or when experiencing unemployment. This year's Budget must focus on protecting people's incomes, promoting access to good quality jobs and preventing poverty through affordable quality services.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Rose McGowan'.

Rose McGowan
SVP National President



Why we work for social justice

Almost **700,000** people live below the poverty line

Poverty 	875,000 people going without basics 	One-in-five children now living in enforced deprivation 
Housing 	Over 12,000 people living in emergency accommodation 	64% increase in child homelessness in one year 
Education 	'Voluntary' contribution requests of between €30 & €550 	Average cost of going to college including rent €15,154 
Income 	Over 1/2 of households had difficulty making ends meet in 2022 	€66.70 gap between core social welfare rates & the cost of an MESL 
Energy 	377,000 people were unable to afford adequate heat in 2022 	Average energy bills more than double in 18 months 

How we help 	 230,000 requests for assistance	 €14.7 m in support with food	 €4.3 m for those struggling with utility costs*	 €4.3 m supporting access to education	 €14.7 m for clothing and furniture
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*Figure excludes support distributed through supplier hardship funds

INTRODUCTION



The impact of the cost of living crisis on households SVP is supporting has not abated, despite the intervention of Government at the end of 2022 and into 2023. So far this year our local offices have taken over 100,000 requests for help from families who cannot afford life's basic essentials. The cost of living crisis has added extra pressure to those who were already struggling and caused people to seek our help for the first time due to mounting bills.

This pressure is reflected in national statistics as the Survey of Income and Living Conditions (SILC) for 2022 shows an estimated 875,000 people went without basic items such as adequate heating, nutritious food and suitable clothing. This is an additional 184,000 people compared to 2021. One parent families (45.4%), people out of work due to illness or disability (42.7%), those who are unemployed (45.0%) and renters (34.1%) continue to face the highest rates of deprivation. One in five children are now living in enforced deprivation (20.1%).¹

Between 2021 and 2022, the number of children growing up in consistent poverty increased by over 27,000 – Government must act decisively for children in this Budget to prevent a lifetime trapped in poverty.

In Ireland, we believe that everyone should be able to live with dignity. But a lack of income and inaccessible services limits people's options, and people are forced to make difficult decisions between essentials every day. Inadequate social welfare and low pay means people are trapped in poverty, which seriously damages their physical and mental health.

Poverty is not inevitable and with the right policies Government can make a difference. For example, when poverty was rising rapidly among older people in the late 1990s, successive governments acted to reverse the trend, with the proportion of older people at risk of poverty falling from 27.1% in 2004 to 9.6% in 2010 and the proportion in consistent poverty falling to a low of 0.9% in 2010.* Similar focus and ambition is needed now to address poverty at all ages and stages of life.

¹ CSO (2023) Survey of Income and Living Conditions 2022

*<https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-silced/surveyonincomeandlivingconditionssilcenforceddeprivation2022/>

Data extracted from the CSO Statbank and Survey of Income and Living Conditions <https://data.cso.ie/#>

FOUR PILLARS TO BREAK THE CYCLE IN BUDGET 2024

For Budget 2024, the Government must protect more people from experiencing poverty and exclusion as the cost of living continues to rise. At the same time, we need to see progress on the structural issues like income inadequacy, low pay and underfunded public services that are trapping people in the cycle of poverty.

We know our Government are capable of changing these issues and providing supports where they are needed. The design of our current system of supports is the result of a set of decisions that were made about our society's priorities and resources. As the experience during the pandemic shows, we can redesign it to work for everyone. In this Budget, we are calling on Government to:



Protect people's incomes and guarantee the essentials

While one-off measures help, the failure to increase social welfare payments in line with inflation in Budget 2023 put many people at risk of being pulled further into the kind of grinding daily hardship that is very difficult to escape. Any further erosion of supports through real term cuts in social welfare will have long term implications on people's lives that are difficult to reverse. We know that steps can be taken by Government in Budget 2024 to prevent and intervene where needed, to change the tide for people living in Ireland on low incomes.

Committing to benchmark social welfare to an adequate level would ensure we have a social protection floor that guarantees people's basic needs and would make sure that no one is excluded from full participation in society. An adequate income would allow individuals and families to plan for the future and provide an anchor for people to pursue opportunities and access training, education and good quality jobs and better lives lived

At a minimum we need to ensure that the basic rate of social protection is never so low that people are unable to afford essentials such as food, utility bills, housing, transport, basic household goods and having the means to participate in our community.



Prioritise children in poverty

As a society we understand that all children should have a fulfilling childhood and be given what they need in life to reach their potential. The new Child Poverty and Well-Being Unit in the Department of An Taoiseach presents the opportunity for a coordinated and cross-departmental approach to end child poverty. Children and their families must be front and centre in Budget 2024. This must be the first step in a wider strategy to support families and break the cycle of disadvantage for children.

“Our focus must be on reducing child poverty and improving wellbeing. Our vision is to make Ireland the best country in which to be a child. We must give everyone the best start in life, empowering them to make the most of that start through education, equal opportunities and good jobs to work towards a better future.”

Taoiseach Leo Varadkar, 17 December 2022

3.

Promote access to good quality jobs

Work is not always a route out of poverty and that’s why we need employment opportunities that are based on the rights and needs of workers which support people to have long term and sustainable employment. This requires a recognition that access to employment relies on the strength of services such as childcare, public transport and in work income supports, as well as decent wages and conditions. For many trapped in the cycle of poverty, having the option to gain access to education and training opportunities is the first step on the road to a good job and financial stability.



4.

Prevent poverty through affordable and accessible services

A strong social protection net must go hand in hand with an investment in quality public services. Ireland is a rich country, and we must use the revenue available to build a country that lifts people out of poverty and supports the well-being of everyone in society. Windfall gains in taxes must be invested in vital infrastructure and services especially housing, energy efficiency measures, public transport, and childcare.





SOCIAL PROTECTION AND GOOD QUALITY JOBS

As the cost of living rises, SVP is concerned about how many people in Ireland are experiencing growing income inadequacy. Analysis from the Vincentian MESL Research Centre shows that deep income inadequacy has expanded from 31% of cases in 2022 to 59% of cases in 2023.² In addition, the incidence of deep income inadequacy has now spread to a wider range of household types. There has also been a deepening of the inadequacy found amongst households with teenagers, lone parent households and single working-age adult households. Maintaining the real value of core social welfare supports relative to living costs over this period of high inflation is the best way to prevent an increase in hardship and financial strain.

“With rent and bills going up, I can barely afford food shopping anymore. Some days I don’t eat so my daughter can.”

Family seeking support from SVP in 2023

In-work poverty remains a priority concern for SVP as high housing costs, lack of childcare and social welfare cliff edges impact many working families, particularly lone parents. Policy changes in previous Budgets to support low wage workers show us that change is possible. We have a long way to go, but we know that new pathways to sustainable, decent and family-friendly employment is achievable.

SVP Members meet many people who due to their disability or caring roles incur extra weekly costs. Research shows the net additional costs required to enable a socially acceptable MESL for a household caring for a child with a profound intellectual disability range from €207 to €308 per week.³ If the cost of disability and caring for a loved one was included in the social welfare system it would support them and prevent them experiencing higher rates of poverty and deprivation.

We all have a greater understanding of the many challenges for those seeking international protection and SVP support the Government’s aim to end direct provision. SVP Members support those who have experienced immense difficulties which led them to seek asylum in Ireland and now trying to survive on a very low income. In May 2023, the Vincentian MESL Research Centre published a new working paper looking at the adequacy of the daily allowance for families in direct provision.⁴ The income meets approximately 50% of estimated MESL needs for the two household types examined. Budget 2024 must address this extreme inadequacy without delay.

Social protection should act as a lifeline, keeping people on low and fixed incomes afloat in a sea of rising living costs. Living below an MESL has an impact on the well-being of parents and children, with

2. Vincentian MESL Research Centre (2023) Annual Update 2023 https://www.budgeting.ie/download/pdf/mesl_2023_-_annual_update_report.pdf

3. VPSJ (2022) Care at Home: Costs of Care Arising from Disability <http://www.budgeting.ie/download/pdf/care-at-home-costs-of-care-arising-from-disability-2022.pdf>

4. Vincentian MESL Research Centre (2023) Estimating the MESL costs for families in Direct Provision

https://www.budgeting.ie/download/pdf/working_paper_-_estimating_the_mesl_costs_for_families_in_direct_provision.pdf

implications for mental and physical health, educational attainment, loss of confidence and erosion of resources such as savings. Feelings of guilt, shame and embarrassment are all too common for parents who continually prioritise the needs of their children over their own and try to do the very best for their children on declining resources. This daily struggle in poverty carries a long term mental and emotional toll.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Due to the cost of living crisis, anything less than a €27.50 adjustment in core social welfare rates will be a real term cut.⁵ This is the absolute minimum required to prevent individuals and families being pulled deeper into poverty. Estimated cost: €934 million.⁶**
- **An increase of €10 per week for children under 12 and €15 per week for children over 12 is needed to retain the purchasing power of the Qualified Child Increase⁷ and to make real progress on tackling child poverty. Estimated cost: €175 million.**
- **Address in-work poverty by extending Jobseekers Transition Payment (JST) to one parent families in work, training or education until the youngest child leaves secondary education.⁸**
- **Maximise the returns from work for low-income employees by introducing a refundable tax credit which returns unused portions of the PAYE tax credit to workers. Estimated cost: €140 million.**
- **Ensure low income working households retain access to key supports by linking earning disregards, means-tests and income tests for supports to increases in the National Minimum Wage.**
- **Introduce an additional social welfare payment to provide for the cost of disability. To begin with, an additional payment of €40 per week should now be introduced to those in receipt of a disability-related payment. Estimated cost: €462.6 million.**
- **Increase the daily living allowance and extend Child Benefit type payment to families in the international protection process. Estimated cost of CB: €4.7 million.**
- **Invest in frontline Community Welfare Services to reduce wait times for application and processing. Review the maximum payment for home kit outs, white goods, furniture and funerals in line with the cost of living to ensure payments are adequate.**

5. Data from the Vincentian MESL Research Centre shows that an adjustment of €27.50 would be needed to restore the real value of core working age payments to 2020 levels but may need to rise to €31 at the end of 2024 depending on forecast inflation. The cost of the basket of goods needed to ensure Minimum Essential Standard of Living has risen by 18.9% since 2020. Vincentian MESL Research Centre (2023) Annual Update 2023 <https://www.budgeting.ie/publications/mesl-2023/>

6. Costing for working age payment excluding rates for Qualified Adults.

7. Data from the Vincentian MESL Research Centre shows that an increase of €8.50 for children under 12 and €12.50 for children over 12 is needed to restore the Qualified Child Payment to 2020 levels in real terms. These figures assume that the €100 increase in the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance will be retained. The rate recommendation above these rates stems from the need to make progress on tackling child poverty, particularly among older children. Vincentian MESL Research Centre (2023) Annual Update 2023 <https://www.budgeting.ie/publications/mesl-2023/>

8. Currently, a lone parent working full time in minimum wage employment can lose €56 a week once their youngest child reaches the age of 14 as they lose entitlement to the Jobseekers Transitions Payment. Vincentian MESL Research Centre (2023) Pre- Budget Submission https://www.budgeting.ie/download/pdf/vincentian_mesl_research_centre_-_pre-budget_2024_submission.pdf



HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS

The housing crisis has deteriorated further in the past year and is a real concern for SVP Members. Without a home it is impossible to participate fully in society and enable people to reach their potential. Ireland has committed to ending homelessness by 2030, however, without decisive action by Government this will not be achieved. Figures from April 2023 show that 12,259 people including 3,594 children are currently living in emergency accommodation.⁹ The impact of ending the no fault evictions moratorium in March has had further negative consequences on people renting and entering homelessness. We also have significant concern for the precarity of groups more vulnerable to homelessness such as older people renting, lone parents, Travellers, migrants, care leavers and other young people.

“I am in a very difficult situation at the moment. I lost my job recently and haven’t been able to pay the full rental payment for the last two months. I have always paid my bills and have never been in arrears before. I don’t know what to do, I am the sole carer for my seven year old daughter who has additional needs.”

Family seeking SVP Support, 2023

Official statistics only give a limited view of the prevalence of homelessness in Ireland. There are tens of thousands more people who are unaccounted for in the official figures who are ‘couch surfing’ or relying on friends or family for somewhere to stay. For example, there were 57,842 households on the social housing waiting list in 2022, 37% of which were living with their parents, relatives or friends.¹⁰ The statistics also do not capture women and children in domestic violence refuges, or people living in direct provision who have refugee status but cannot leave due to a lack of housing. Those individuals and groups affected require additional wraparound supports to assist them move out of hidden homelessness. Funding in successive budgets has been provided to react to homelessness, rather than distributing it between homeless prevention, tenancy sustainment, and necessary funding for homeless services such as hostels. In 2022, less than 10% of funding was spent by Local Authorities for homeless prevention measures.¹¹

Recent budgets have also failed to effectively provide interventions for children and parents living in emergency accommodation to prevent some of the trauma of homelessness. This is despite the fact that the homeless crisis has been an issue for many years now. The Governments actions on welcoming refugees from Ukraine has been positive, yet there is limited planning to ensure those that wish to remain have access to affordable and secure housing.

Whilst there has been improvements to the HAP payment with an increase in the discretionary uplift, our Members continue to see people struggling to pay their rent, cutting back on essentials such as food so

9. Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage ‘Homeless Report- April 2023’ <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/a6b69-homeless-report-april-2023/>

10. Housing Agency ‘Summary of Social Housing Assessment 2022’ <https://www.housingagency.ie/publications/summary-social-housing-assessments-ssha-2022>

11. Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage ‘Local Authority Regional Financial Reports’ 2022 <https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/80ea8-homelessness-data/#local-authority-regional-financial-reports>

that their rent is paid on time. The maximum monthly rent limits payable under HAP have remained largely unchanged since 2016. Even with the discretionary limits there were just 21 properties available for families with children.¹² It has become system wide for families to pay a top-up to their landlord to secure and maintain their accommodation. This exposes families to an even greater risk of poverty and in some instances an accumulation of rent arrears.

In 2021, Local Authorities had 141,483 dwellings in their ownership at the end of the year.¹³ The total number of vacant dwellings at the end of 2021 was 4,448 vacancies compared to the 2020 figure of 4,467.¹⁴ Whilst this is a relatively small number in the context of the overall number, it is unacceptable in a housing crisis to have housing owned by the state not being fully utilised.

A crisis like the one we are seeing requires a crisis response. Whilst we have seen some positive initiatives announced recently, such as the tenant in situ scheme and an expansion of the cost rental model, much more is required to reflect the scale of the issue.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Increasing Approved Housing Bodies and Local Authorities ownership of total housing stock to 20% through direct building will greatly increase access to secure and affordable housing.**
- **Allocate an additional €500 million from windfall revenues to ensure the delivery of 20,000 social and affordable cost rental homes and target Local Authority vacant housing.**
- **Provide funding to target the long term accommodation needs for those with permission to remain/refugee status currently living in direct provision. Estimated cost: €250 million.**
- **Provide funding of €5 million to address rent arrears for tenants availing of HAP.**
- **Increase HAP and Rent Supplement rates by 40% to provide increased support to low income households affected by high rents.**
- **Establish a dedicated homeless prevention budget, amounting to 20% of all homeless expenditure.**
- **Allocate €4 million to implement a pilot Housing First model for families with complex needs.**
- **Provide €4 million in funding to implement a pilot project of supported housing for youth.**
- **Ensure families in homeless accommodation who require additional support have a family support worker to assist them to deal with the practical challenges of homelessness and to exit homelessness as soon as possible. Estimated cost: €1.5 million.**

12. Simon Communities of Ireland 'Locked out of the Market, March 2023' <https://www.simon.ie/e-publication/locked-out-of-the-market-march-2023/>

13. National Oversight & November 2022 NOAC Local Authority Performance Indicator Report 2021 <https://noac.ie/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/NOAC-PI-Report-2021-FINAL.pdf> Pg 18

14. *ibid*



ENERGY, TRANSPORT AND CLIMATE JUSTICE

SVP Members are currently seeing the hardship caused by ongoing high energy prices. Last year we saw a 40% increase in requests for assistance related to energy, and in the first quarter of this year we have seen energy requests increase by a further 50%.

Members are now supporting many households who are facing multiple bills that they cannot clear before the next one comes through. The situation continues to be a greater extreme for prepay customers, who face self-disconnection when there is simply no more money to feed the meter. People are forced to make inhumane sacrifices of either food or energy through the week. No one should be faced with that dilemma. This takes its toll on people's emotional, mental and physical health and Members see that distress when they are assisting people.

"We haven't had heating oil for weeks now and that means no heating or hot water. This is really tough especially because my kids have disabilities."

Family seeking help from SVP in 2023

The situation is clearly spelt out in the CSO's energy deprivation figures from 2022.¹⁵ The rates are stark and shows the inequitable distribution of hardship that SVP also witnesses. Around 1 in 5 single parents (21.5%) and people out of work due to illness and disability (19.5%), or unemployment (17.4%) couldn't afford to keep their home warm enough in 2022. Rates for renters almost doubled to 13.5% and are three times as high as owner occupiers (4.7%). The rate for people living rurally increased fourfold.

With core social protection rates not keeping up with inflation, we also saw the rate of the Fuel Allowance frozen, with the choice to instead opt for ad hoc payments. While these payments provided essential support to households, we are now faced with a severely devalued Fuel Allowance. The Fuel Allowance must also reach everyone who is in energy poverty, and we are particularly concerned about people on the Working Family Payment who don't receive it, including the 103,000 children in these families.¹⁶

Targeted action on energy prices through a Government-subsidised social tariff, to provide a discounted energy tariff for households on means-tested social welfare payments, is another mechanism to address energy poverty. A social tariff would enable the Government to provide focused support that can offer stable costs on an essential service responding to market conditions.

15. CSO (2022) 'Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC): Enforced Deprivation 2022' Available at: <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-silced/surveyonincomeandlivingconditionssilcenenforceddeprivation2022/enforceddeprivation/>

16. Response from Minister for Social Protection in a Dáil Éireann Debate, Thursday - 14 July 2022. Available at: <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2022-07-14/104/>

There is currently a significant gap in support available to people in energy poverty and struggling with energy costs as they are most likely to also face a combination of high costs or difficulties within the energy market, issues with their housing or heating systems, and income issues. A new service of Community Energy Advisors who are based in the local community and provide one-to-one tailored support to people with these complex energy and housing issues is needed.

SVP believe it is imperative to ensure every household in poverty is accounted for in residential retrofit plans and funding streams. The focus on rolling out free energy upgrades for low-income homeowners is welcome and we hope that efforts continue to bring down waiting times. But we need an adequate plan in place for private rented tenants and those in social housing.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Increase the annual value of the Fuel Allowance by €680.40 to restore its purchasing power, which equates to a weekly increase of €24.30 for a 28 week season. Consider restoring the 32 weeks of payment to better reflect the heating season and enable households to budget accordingly. Estimated cost: €255 million.**
- **Households in work on low pay receive no support for energy costs. Budget 2024 should recognise this and extend the Fuel Allowance to recipients of Working Family Payment. Estimated cost of extending to WFP: €83 million.¹⁷**
- **Use windfall taxes from suppliers to fund a social energy tariff for low income households to protect people during the price crisis and the transition to a low carbon economy.**
- **Pilot a programme of Community Energy Advisors to bridge the gap between supporting households with immediate energy needs and enabling them to access longer term solutions including retrofitting. This should form a part of a just transition to greener energy and advisors would assist people with immediate energy needs, and longer-term routes out of energy poverty. Investment for Budget 2024: €5 million.**
- **Make properties in the private rented sector eligible for funding equivalent to the 'Better Energy Warmer Homes Scheme,' for low-income tenants and their landlords, based on a tenant receiving the Housing Assistant Payment and having a long-term lease. Begin on a pilot basis in 2024 at an estimated cost of €20 million.¹⁸**
- **Invest in adequate, affordable and reliable rural public transport, focussing on 'everyday' routes that enable people to access education, employment and public services, and move towards a commitment to provide services at the transformative 'every village, every hour' level, while maintaining the 20% discounted fare rates permanently. Estimated cost of 20% discount: €54 million.**

17. Costing includes recommended increase of €680.40 in the Fuel Allowance Rate

18. Based on the funding model for the Midlands Local Authority Retrofit Programme

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/de8c5-midlands-retrofit-programme-for-local-authority-homes-2020>



EDUCATION INCLUDING EARLY YEARS

Experiences in childhood last a lifetime, and the supports that are put in place for children benefits and enables them their whole lives. Providing access to affordable and quality early years care and education is an important measure in addressing child poverty. The National Childcare Scheme (NCS) is the primary mechanism at supporting parents with childcare costs. While the universal element of the scheme has seen increases in subsidies in the last budget which has benefited all parents, there is a need to introduce further budgetary changes so that low income families have access to free early learning care and education. The new Equal Participation Model is welcome and Budget 2024 must provide a mix of universal and targeted supports through services accessed by children and families experiencing disadvantage.

“I am a single parent on disability allowance and getting my sons books, uniform, copies etc. was and is a huge struggle so it’s going to take more weeks of scrimping to gather up the voluntary contribution. My son is going into fifth year and the expense has broken me mentally and financially as it is.”

Parent who took part in SVP’s survey on voluntary contributions

With the announcement of free schoolbooks for primary schools, increased supports for addressing child wellbeing, and the delivery of free school meals, Government are moving forward in cultivating a more positive and equitable education experience. These policies are steps towards dismantling structural inequalities in our education system. They improve children’s lives, the impact of which will be felt by them and throughout society. In light of SVP’s recent report on voluntary contributions, we need to build on this progress by expanding free schoolbooks to secondary school students and increasing funding to schools to end the practice of parent contributions.¹⁹ Smoothing the thresholds for the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance and compensating low income families for the loss of child benefit at age 18 while still in school would also provide much needed support to parents and students.

Progress was made in last year’s Budget with allocation for additional National Educational Psychological (NEPS) posts. This must be expanded on in this year’s budget with additional resources for Early Intervention Teams as increasingly SVP is asked to financially support psychological assessments. Investment in these vital service would ensure children have their care needs met in school and the community without being placed on long waiting lists for years.

The ongoing need to financially support lone parents and people with a disability who wish to access 3rd level education part-time is obvious, empowering them to reach towards their potential and be included in society. The current lack of support through the SUSI system for part-time students, places an unnecessary barrier in front of people trying to improve their lives and livelihoods whilst managing the

¹⁹. Society of St Vincent de Paul (2023) Closing the Gap: What is Needed to End Voluntary Contributions in School. https://www.svp.ie/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Closing-the-Gap_-What-is-needed-to-end-Voluntary-Contributions_-Report-2023.pdf

other responsibilities and demands on their time. SVP Members regularly witness the hardship experienced by families who are just above the income thresholds to qualify for the SUSI grant, as well as those who only qualify for the adjacent rate of grant which is inadequate to cover travel costs to and from college.

PRIORITIES FOR BUDGET 2024

- » Provide free access to early learning care and education for families on the lowest incomes by providing higher levels of subsidisation under the NCS for all families in receipt of the medical card.
- » Provide €5 million in funding for the implementation of the Equal Participation Model. Initial investment should include a focus on wraparound services, provision of food and parental support.
- » Deliver free school books at second level to ensure full participation of all students. Begin with a pilot scheme across school types in 2024. Estimated cost: €3 million.
- » Make progress on ending voluntary contributions by increasing the capitation grant to restore the purchasing power to 2010 over two budgets. This requires an increase of €52 at second level and €44 at primary level. Estimated cost: €54 million.
- » Expand a child benefit type payment to young people over the age of 18 still in school and in receipt of the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance (BSCFA).
- » Retain the €100 increase in the BSCFA and smooth the thresholds to support more low income families with back to school costs and promote parental participation in work, training and education. Estimated cost of retaining €100 uplift: €21 million.
- » Provide a dedicated and resourced fund for in-school activities such as cultural trips, tours, music, drama, sport, including swimming lessons to promote the participation of students from low income families. Funding should be provided on a per capita basis using the student data used as part of the DEIS identification model. Investment for Budget 2024: €3 million.
- » Invest €25 million to increase the capacity of Early Intervention and School Aged Teams to address long waiting lists and inadequate service provision for children and young people with additional educational needs.
- » Provide €5 million to expand the programme of counselling and wellbeing/mental health supports to post-primary schools targeting pupils at key transition stages in education.
- » Increase the grant rates and income thresholds for SUSI by 15%. Estimated cost: €12.6 million
Expand eligibility for the SUSI grant to part-time students. Estimated cost: €60 million.
- » Make the SUSI grant payable to those in receipt of the Back to Education and Training Allowance (BTEA) to widen participation in higher education.

Summary of recommendations



In this Budget, we are calling on Government to:

1.

Protect people's incomes and guarantee the essentials

- Prevent poverty with a minimum €27.50 adjustment in welfare rates.
- Introduce a cost of disability payment starting with a €40 payment.
- Increase the daily living allowance for asylum seekers.
- Fund Community Welfare Services effectively.
- Increase the Fuel Allowance by €680.48 to restore its purchasing power.
- Extend the Fuel Allowance to recipients of WFP*.
- Use windfall taxes to fund a new social energy tariff for low income households.
- Provide funding of €5 million to address rent arrears for HAP* tenants.
- Increase HAP* and Rent Supplement rates by 40%.
- Provide a dedicated homeless prevention budget.

2.

Prioritise children in poverty

- Raise the QCI* by €10 for children under 12 and by €15 for children over 12.
- Provide €5 million for the implementation of the Equal Participation Model.
- Deliver free school books at second level, starting with a pilot in 2024.
- End voluntary contributions by increasing the capitation grant.
- Expand child benefit to students experiencing disadvantage over the age of 18.
- Pay a child benefit type payment to children living in direct provision.
- Retain the €100 increase in the BSCFA*.
- Provide a fund for in-school activities for pupils experiencing disadvantage.
- Invest to end long waiting times for psychological assessments for children.
- Ensure children in homeless accommodation has a family support worker.
- Expand mental health and wellbeing supports to secondary students.

3.

Promote access to good quality jobs

- Provide free access to childcare for families with a medical card.
- Increase the grant and income thresholds for SUSI by 15%.
- Expand eligibility for the SUSI grant to part-time students.
- Make the SUSI grant payable to those in receipt of the BETA*.
- Extend JST* to one parent families in work, training or education.
- Smooth the thresholds to the BSCFA* to promote parental participation in work.
- Introduce a refundable tax credit to low income workers.
- Move to a Living Wage and link increases to thresholds for secondary supports.

4.

Prevent poverty through affordable and accessible services

- Build 20,000 social homes and refurbish Local Authority vacant housing.
- Pilot a Housing First Model for families with complex needs.
- Fund a pilot project of supported housing for youth.
- Provide funding to support refugees with residency status into housing.
- Pilot a programme of Community Energy Advisors.
- Retain public transport reduction.
- Increase funding for the Rural Public Transport Scheme.

*WFP = Working Family Payment, BSCFA = Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance, JST = Jobseekers Transition Payment, NMW = National Minimum Wage, HAP= Housing Assistance Payment, QCI = Qualified Child Increase. BETA = Back to Education and Training Allowance.

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