Policy in Focus Budget 2026

Social Welfare Rates

While we recognise that any increase to the core social welfare payment is positive, when we look at the details of how it works out for people a €10 increase, bringing the weekly rate to €254, means people won't be able to buy the same things or the full list of what they could afford to buy in 2020.

Post Budget the Economic and Social Research Institute **(ESRI)** shared that *"There is variation in how Budget 2026 will affect households of different income levels, with slightly higher losses, of 2.5% of household disposable income, expected for low-income households."* [1]

SVP and the Minimum Essential Standard of Living Research Centre recommended a €16 increase to core social welfare payments so that recipients could have enough to meet the full costs of their minimum needs.

Changes for Families

The announcement of extending Fuel Allowance to recipients of the Working Family Payment and the increases to the Child Support Payment based on the costs of living for those under and over 12-year-olds are great structural changes. The Child Support Payment has been increased by €8, bringing it to €58 for under 12-year-olds and €16, bringing it to €78 for over 12s.

The Fuel Allowance increased by €5 to €38 a week, this is €4.50 less than we recommended and will continue to leave people in fuel poverty. The Working Family Payment threshold has increased by €60 per week.

Education

We support the announcement of the DEIS plus model and the €50 capitation increase per child to primary schools. This will take the grant payment to schools to €274 per child, this is €25 less than what the Catholic Primary School Management Association, us and others asked for prior to the budget, though it will help make a difference to schools to

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[1] https://www.esri.ie/news/budget-2026-tax-and-welfare-measures-result-in-average-income-losses

meet their costs with the aim of removing schools needing to rely on parents to fill the gap through voluntary contributions and other school charges.

Post primary schools capitation rate was increased by €20, bringing the basic rate to €405 per pupil. Based on the rise in costs for light and heating we recommended the grant to be €422 or 33% higher. While we acknowledge the rate isn't what it needs to be, the increase rather than maintaining the current rate is a help for schools but we believe it is not enough to prevent the need for voluntary contributions payments from parents.

There was a €500 permanent decrease in third level course fees. This is welcome for the households we support through our education and training bursary programme and requests for assistance.

Most requests we receive are from students are entitled to the SUSI grant. SUSI is an important support, however, the funding awarded is insufficient to fully assist students through further and higher education. There were some very positive announcements from the Department of Further and Higher Education as announced from Minister Lawless. (click here)

The Back-to-School Clothing and Footwear Allowance for 2- to 3-year-olds in pre-school is a policy that we would not have recommended as MESL evidence on page 32, shows how positively children these ages needs are being met. Therefore, not increasing core social welfare payments doesn't actually care for children who live in families that receive those core welfare payments.

Housing and Homelessness

Housing and homelessness lacked any policy announcement that begins to get to solve the core of the problems and issues that have resulted in our housing and homelessness crisis. It also demonstrates that the policy decisions continue to allow the crisis to unfold for children experiencing homelessness.

Assessment of Need for Children

The announcement that funding has been secured for the carrying out of 6,500 Assessment of Need's applications on the Target Waitlist Initiative is positive, and for the continued roll-out of school therapy in special schools and extension to mainstream schools. We need to see timely roll-out for both of these initiatives to support children and families affected.

Who and What's Left Out of Budget 2026

The lack of any policy supports for the cost of disability payments, and no increase to the payments and income disregards to the living alone allowance, lone parents' payment and Jobseeker's Transitional Payment (JST) is more than just a lost opportunity but a choice the government made to not support the people in receipt of those payments. It's important to note the carers allowance changes, the income disregard for the carers allowance is expected to increase by €375 for a single person up to €1,000 and €750 for a couple up to €2,000.

But it's more important to remember that supporting carers does not directly or indirectly support those living with the cost of their disability. They are two different people who are both deserving to have their costs of living understood and met.

Based on what we know of current costs, inflation, and what people need to live, many people will not be able to get by, and getting by, for some, will be more difficult in the year ahead. SVP will continue to answer calls from those who are forced to pick up the phone. Poverty in a wealthy country is a policy decision.

Funding was placed behind certain payments, but it doesn't achieve the Government's own targets for eradicating and reducing poverty because it withheld much needed funding away in other areas. The money was just moved around.

The Budget has come and gone, the Government made their choices, our advocacy and policy work will continue with the aim to improve equity in the lives for those we serve.