

Policy

Social Protection

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Introduction

The last 2 years have been an exceptional time for the Department of Social Protection. In 2020, the government introduced a number of supports to cushion the impact of the public health emergency restrictions arising from the COVID-19 pandemic. These supports included both an employment income support ([COVID-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment](/en/service/be74d3-covid-19-pandemic-unemployment-payment/)) and wage supports ([Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme](#)

(<https://www.gov.ie/en/service/578596-covid-19-wage-subsidy/>) and [Employment Wage Subsidy Scheme](https://www.revenue.ie/en/employing-people/ewss/index.aspx) (<https://www.revenue.ie/en/employing-people/ewss/index.aspx>).

The total Social Welfare expenditure in 2020 was just over €30.46 billion, an extraordinary increase of 46% in expenditure compared to the previous year. The total expenditure by the department corresponded to:

- 29.3% of general government expenditure
- 8.2% of GDP in 2020

Over 1.6 million people were in receipt of a weekly Social Welfare payment, which was paid in respect of over 2.3 million beneficiaries.

Illness, Disability and Carers

The department provides supports to people who cannot work or can only work part-time due to illness, disability, or caring responsibilities. This department spent a total of €4.7 billion on these schemes in 2020.

The [Illness Benefit](/en/service/ddf6e3-illness-benefit/) (</en/service/ddf6e3-illness-benefit/>) is the main income support for those who become ill. Over 45,000 people and their dependants are supported by this payment, at a total cost of almost €593 million in 2020. An additional €57 million was spent on the [Enhanced Illness Benefit](/en/service/df55ae-how-to-apply-for-illness-benefit-for-covid-19-absences/) (</en/service/df55ae-how-to-apply-for-illness-benefit-for-covid-19-absences/>) payment in respect of COVID-19.

in the [National Disability Inclusion Strategy, 2017-2021](#),

(<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/8072c0-national-disability-inclusion-strategy-2017-2021/>) the [Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities](#) (<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/83c2a8-the-comprehensive-employment-strategy-for-people-with-disabilities/>) and the [Make Work Pay Report](#), (<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/0fb542-make-work-pay-report/>) the government reaffirmed its commitment to supporting people with disabilities with their employment, personal and social ambitions.

The [Disability Allowance](#) (<https://www.gov.ie/en/service/df6811-disability-allowance/>) is the department's fifth largest scheme and it supported 152,580 people and their dependants in 2020, at a cost of over €1.8 billion. The department also [provides employment supports for people with disabilities through its Public Employment Service and its schemes](#). (<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/f6d74-get-work-supports-if-you-have-a-disability/>)

The government recognises the valuable contribution of carers. Based on the [National Carers' Strategy](#), (<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/a1e44e-national-carers-strategy/>) the government aims to support those who provide care and empower them to have a life outside caring. 92,604 people received a carer's support payment in 2020.

[Your Guide to our Schemes and Services: Illness, Disability and Caring](#), (<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/5b72a7-illness-disability-and-carers/>), published in January 2022, provides information on some of the ways the department can help you if you are ill or disabled. It can also provide guidance if you are in a caring role on a temporary or permanent basis.

Working Age Income Supports

Some €8.3 billion was paid on Working Age Income supports in 2020 which is a rise of 156% on the previous year, on account of the introduction of the [COVID-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment](#). (<https://www.gov.ie/en/service/be74d3-covid-19-pandemic-unemployment-payment/>)

The COVID-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment was introduced in March 2020 as an emergency payment available to employees and the self-employed who lost their employment due to the COVID-19 Pandemic.

In normal circumstances, the jobseeker's schemes are the main income support payments for people of working age who have lost work and are unable to find full time work.

[Jobseeker's Benefit \(/en/service/1221b0-jobseekers-benefit/\)](/en/service/1221b0-jobseekers-benefit/) and [Jobseeker's Benefit for the Self-Employed \(/en/service/a030c1-jobseekers-benefit-self-employed/\)](/en/service/a030c1-jobseekers-benefit-self-employed/) are paid to people between 18 and 66 years of age who become fully or partly unemployed and have paid enough pay-related social insurance (PRSI) contributions.

In line with the Programme for Government commitment [Benefit Payment for 65 Year Olds \(/en/service/49d25-benefit-payment-for-65-year-olds/\)](/en/service/49d25-benefit-payment-for-65-year-olds/) was introduced in February 2021 under the Jobseeker's Benefit and the Jobseeker's Benefit Self Employed schemes. It is a payment for 65 year olds who are no longer in employment or self-employment who are required to or choose to retire at age 65 but do not qualify for State Pension until they are 66.

For people who do not qualify for Jobseeker's Benefit/ Jobseeker's Benefit Self Employed or whose entitlement to these payments has expired they can apply for [Jobseeker's Allowance \(/en/service/1306dc-jobseekers-allowance/\)](/en/service/1306dc-jobseekers-allowance/) which is a means-tested social assistance payment.

There were just over 177,250 people and their dependents who were being supported by a jobseeker's payment at a total cost of €2.06 billion in 2020.

Retired and Older People

The government aims to ensure adequate, secure and sustainable pension support for retired and older people. Additional services are provided in response to changing needs, which allows people to have a reasonable standard of living when they reach retirement age.

The [Roadmap for Pensions Reform 2018 - 2023 \(/en/publication/abdb6f-a-roadmap-for-pensions-reform-2018-2023/\)](/en/publication/abdb6f-a-roadmap-for-pensions-reform-2018-2023/) aims to create a fairer and simpler contributory pension system, where a person's pension reflects their social insurance contributions.

It also aims to foster a culture of personal retirement saving in Ireland.

The government is considering the recent [Report of the Commission on Pensions \(/en/publication/6cb6d-report-of-the-commission-on-pensions/\)](#) into the sustainability of the Social Insurance Fund and the [State Pension \(Contributory\) \(/en/service/e6f908-state-pension-contributory/\)](#) into the future. Total state pension expenditure in 2022 is projected to be over €9.1 billion.

The [Programme for Government: Our Shared Future \(https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/7e05d-programme-for-government-our-shared-future/\)](#) and the [Economic Recovery Plan 2021 \(https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/49b23-overview-of-economic-recovery-plan-2021/\)](#) both commit to introducing a pensions automatic enrolment (AE) system. The objective of this commitment is to increase the proportion of employees in Ireland with supplementary pension cover. In March 2022, Minister Humphreys announced the [Final Design Principles of the AE System \(https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/27bab-launch-of-the-final-design-of-an-automatic-enrolment-ae-retirement-savings-system-for-ireland/\)](#) which outlines the key design elements of the system and sets out a timeline for implementation.

Families and Children

The government recognises under [Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures \(https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/775847-better-outcomes-brighter-futures/\)](#) that providing welfare services to support children is highly effective. Targeted support can help children become healthier and perform better in education and make them more resilient.

Payments are provided to support families, particularly those with children. These payments are both means-tested and based on social insurance contributions. Supports are also available to those in low-paid employment and for parents raising children without the support of a partner. The government's commitment to protecting the welfare of children was shown with the introduction of [Parent's Benefit \(/en/service/b321b1-parents-benefit/\)](#) in November 2019 and subsequent expansions of the scheme in 2021 and 2022.

€2.1 billion was spent on Child Benefit (</en/service/f14140-child-benefit/>) in 2021. Payments were provided for 625,000 families. There were 43,318 claims awarded for Maternity Benefit (</en/service/apply-for-maternity-benefit/>) in 2021.

The Youth Guarantee (<https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1079>) aims to help around 30,000 teenagers and young people who are at very high risk of long-term unemployment. It aims to provide them with an apprenticeship, education or employment.

Bereavement

The government wants to support people in times of loss. To do this, there are payments available for widows and widowers, orphans, surviving parents of children and carers. Most social welfare payments continue for six weeks following the death of the recipient, with Carer's Allowance being paid for 12 weeks following the death of the person who was being cared for.

Social Inclusion

In January 2020, the Government produced the Roadmap for Social Inclusion, 2020-2025: Ambition, Goals, Commitments. (<https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/46557/bf7011904ede4562b925f98b15c4f1b5.pdf#page=1>)

The Roadmap will build on the work of its predecessors with the aim of reducing the number of people in consistent poverty in Ireland and increasing social inclusion for those who are most disadvantaged. This is reflected in its clearly stated ambition to: “Reduce consistent poverty to 2% or less and to make Ireland one of the most socially inclusive countries in the EU”.

The Roadmap translates this ambition into seven goals underpinned by 66 unique commitments (actions) to be taken to help deliver these goals. Delivery of these commitments is shared by a number of government departments. The Department of Social Protection is responsible for the monitoring and reporting on progress for the Roadmap as a whole. This will be undertaken by the department's Social Inclusion Division. [Information on the work of the Social Inclusion Division, including links to the Roadmap, progress reports and other publications can be found here.](#)
(</en/organisation-information/be955a-social-inclusion-division/>).

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