

Speech

Statement by Minister Donohoe on Budget 2024

From [Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform \(/en/organisation/department-of-public-expenditure-and-reform/\)](/en/organisation/department-of-public-expenditure-and-reform/)

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Introduction

A Cheann Comhairle, recent Budgets to this House have responded to Brexit, to a pandemic, to the war in Ukraine, and now to the rising cost of living. In response to all of these challenges, Government has helped.

Businesses received huge support while their trade was disrupted due to Covid.

The wages of those impacted by the pandemic were supported.

Shelter and warmth was provided to those fleeing conflict.

Significant help was provided to assist with large increases in the cost of living.

All of this was done from a position of strength. Minister McGrath and I are deeply aware of the needs of so many today.

But, Ireland is still a great country to call home, a safe place in which to live and a nation that takes its responsibilities to its citizens and to other nations seriously. We are aware of what we owe to each other – particularly our most vulnerable. We are aware of what we owe to generations to come.

This strength is mirrored in our economy. In recent years we have returned our public finances to surplus twice, we have now set up funds to make best use of these surpluses, we have reduced the burden of our national debt, and we have never had more people working in our country.

I remember the opposition to setting up the Rainy Day Fund, then the National Reserve Fund – well, we know their value now.

This economic resilience, the importance of carefully managing our public finances is, at times, a difficult argument to make – making the case for not spending every cent we have.

But it allowed the government to help last year when prices began to rise. It will allow us to help again as the cost of living is still a challenge for so many.

Temporary support measures

Cost of living

€12 billion in Cost of Living supports have been provided over the past two years to families, businesses and community organisations, meaning that for many households the supports provided have significantly reduced the impact of inflation.

However, even as inflation falls and energy bills decrease, I am conscious that many people listening today are concerned about rising costs and particularly the challenges of heating and lighting their homes this winter.

This Budget provides an immediate and substantial response across 2023 and 2024. Our supports are targeted to the families that need them most – older persons, households with young children and people with a disability.

- today I am announcing that all households will receive a further set of credits to assist with energy bills over the winter period. Three credits of €150 each will be provided between the end of this year and April of next year

This represents a package of supports worth €2.3 billion.

- a €300 lump sum payment will be made to recipients of the Fuel Allowance in the last quarter of this year
- an additional €200 will also be paid this year to recipients of the Living Alone Allowance
- for those in receipt of regular Social Protection payments, I can confirm to the House that the Christmas Bonus will be paid in early December
- in addition to this, to support those in receipt of a weekly social welfare payment, I am providing for a once-off double week "Cost of Living Support" payment to all qualifying Social Protection recipients. This will be paid in January and will include pensioners, carers, people on disability payments and jobseekers;
- to support those most in need, a special, once-off payment of €400 will be made before Christmas to those who receive the Carer's Support Grant, Disability Allowance, Blind Pension, Invalidity Pension and Domiciliary Care Allowance
- this is a Budget that makes concrete progress in ensuring Ireland is one of the best places in the world to be a child. A double payment of Child Payment, worth an additional €140 for each child, will be made to all qualifying households before Christmas. A double payment of the Foster Care allowance will also be made this year
- to ensure that our supports are targeted to the families that need them most, I am also announcing that a €400 lump sum payment will be made to recipients of the Working Family Payment later this year;
- for the first time, this Budget provides a lump sum payment to each child in receipt of the Qualified Child Increase
- to assist families with the costs of education, I am announcing an extension of the fee reduction on school transport services for a further year, an extension of the fee waiver for students sitting state exams, a €60 million capitation payment for schools to continue to meet increased running costs and funding for supports for the most disadvantaged groups
- I am also providing a once off reduction of the student contribution fee by €1,000 for free fees students; a once-off reduction of approximately 33% in the contribution fee for apprentices in higher education and an increase in the Post Graduate Tuition fee contribution by €1,000 for student grant recipients
- recognising that the rising costs also have impacts for businesses across the country, I am today announcing a scheme of business supports worth €250 million

The payments I have announced are substantial. They are needed because the cost of living is still rising.

They are, however, of a lower value than a year ago because the cost of living is not rising as fast as it was a year ago. Prices are high, but inflation is falling and wages and core rates are increasing to fill the gap. These supports reflect that.

It is right that temporary challenges are addressed with temporary measures. They cannot become an unaffordable element of ongoing spending. The Cost of Living measures are temporary in nature and need to decline as the level of inflation falls.

Expenditure strategy

I now want to outline our broader approach to public spending.

It is based on a commitment to safe public finances. The reason the government can deliver further Cost of Living measures is because we run budget surpluses and our public debt is manageable.

While we cannot meet every demand, we know we can meet most needs, today and tomorrow.

This Budget is a further step in this direction.

In devising our strategy, we need to ask ourselves, do we spend the current receipts from Corporation Tax or do we plan for progressive growth in public services while retaining exceptional tax receipts to invest in and for future generations?

We entered 2023 in a strong position. Our resilience in the aftermath of the pandemic and energy price shocks is mostly due to the public spending policies that this government has pursued over the past number of years. These policy choices did not happen by accident.

To maintain this balanced and planned approach, while smoothing the impact of inflation, Minister McGrath and I announced plans in the Summer Economic Statement for an overall budgetary package of €91.2 billion for 2024; this includes an additional €5.3 billion over what was announced this time last year and €1 billion more than had been initially planned for 2024.

In capital, an additional €0.9 billion is being made available under the National Development Plan. This will support the delivery of the most ambitious and green infrastructure plan in the history of the State.

€250 million from windfall Corporation Tax receipts will further support this ambition and will accelerate the delivery of projects that are shovel-ready or almost at completion. This is part of a programme of additional capital investment of €2.25 billion over the years 2024-2026, maximising the value of windfall Corporation Tax receipts.

These core expenditure plans are in line with what was announced in the Summer Economic Statement.

In addition to the temporary Cost of Living measures that I have already outlined, I am announcing further non-core funding of €4.5 billion. This funding will support the response to exceptional circumstances, including the ongoing impact of Covid-19 on our health services and our humanitarian response to the war in Ukraine and the increased demand for international protection in this country.

The past year and a half has seen a dramatic increase in the number of people arriving to our shores seeking our protection.

Ireland has always been a welcoming country and I commend communities across Ireland for opening their hearts and their homes and welcoming those fleeing war. The selfless acts of kindness that the Irish people have demonstrated over the past eighteen months to those seeking international protection highlights the very best of our nature.

Taken together, these measures will put in place the building blocks for further improvements in the delivery of our public services, and support a fair and equitable response to the needs people currently face.

Children - Tackling child poverty

A Cheann Comhairle, this is a Budget for building a better future for this country. That starts with making sure Ireland is one of the best places on earth in which to be a child. Ending child poverty remains a core ambition of this government and a Child Poverty Unit is now established in the Department of the Taoiseach.

In August, the government published a Programme Plan on child poverty and child well-being to transform the lives of our youngest citizens and that Plan is reflected in this Budget. We will continue to improve understanding in this area and I have allocated an additional €1 million to the Central Statistics Office for the Growing Up in Ireland Survey to meet this goal.

In addition to direct supports to family income that I outlined as part of our Cost of Living package, I am announcing the following permanent changes to our Social Protection payments, specifically targeting the wellbeing of children:

- I am raising the Qualified Child Increase by €4 to €46 per week for under 12s and to €54 per week for over 12s
- the hot school meals programme will be expanded to a further 900 primary schools in April 2024
- Parents Benefit will be extended to 9 weeks from August 2024
- I am also increasing the monthly rate of Domiciliary Care Allowance by €10
- extending the Child Benefit payment to 18 year olds in full time education
- raising the income threshold on the Working Family Payment by €54 per week

Quality and affordable childcare

Today I am allocating a further €338 million to the core spending of the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth.

- we are building on last year's investment in childcare. The National Childcare Scheme will see a further 25% reduction in childcare costs. This is further evidence of this government's commitment to making childcare affordable and will be implemented from September 2024

*increased personal assistance hours

- we are increasing investment on the supply side through core funding. This will support providers, the workers and help to maintain the fee freeze
- we will increase the statutory foster care rate by the end of 2024 by €75 per week for children under 12 and €73 per week for children over 12, bringing it to €400 and €425 per week respectively

Further supports to that department will also provide €64 million for investment in disability services.

This will deliver:

- more than 90 additional residential places
- 1,400 day places for school leavers
- rate increases for staff providing home supports

Supports for education

Education is vital for investment in supporting our children and our future. That is why this Budget will allocate €10.5 billion to the Department of Education in 2024, including a capital budget of €940 million.

This will facilitate the continued rollout of urgently needed school building projects, including the 300 building projects currently underway. A further 200 school building projects will commence construction over the course of 2024 and 2025.

Today's Budget builds on the progress we have made in building a more inclusive education system and will provide for over 740 additional teachers to support those with special educational needs in special classes, special schools and mainstream settings. I am also providing for over 1,200 additional SNAs, giving us the highest

number of SNAs we have ever had in our education system. In addition, this Budget will provide additional resources to special schools to support the vital work they do in supporting our most vulnerable students.

A Cheann Comhairle, reducing the cost of education is a priority of this government. Today, I am providing funding to extend the free school books scheme to all junior cycle pupils in recognised post primary schools within the Free Education Scheme from September next year, benefitting over two hundred thousand pupils.

Further measures include capitation payments to schools from the beginning of 2024 and a €50 million increase in funding for School Transport.

Today's announcements represent further important strides in transforming the quality, affordability and inclusivity of our education system.

Social protection

While providing supports we also need to ensure our welfare system improves living standards and helps all people to fulfil their potential.

I am announcing a Social Protection package for 2024 worth almost €1.1 billion targeted to those with the greatest need, in particular our children. This includes:

- for an individual in receipt of a weekly Social Protection payment, I am providing for an increase of €12 per week

To further support those with a disability and carers, I am:

- increasing the Carer's Allowance Means Test disregard to €450 for a single person and €900 for a couple
- allocating additional funds to provide free travel for people medically certified unfit to drive
- reducing the minimum weekly hours threshold for eligibility for the Wage Subsidy Scheme from 21 hours to 15

My colleague the Minister for Finance has announced a one-off tax scheme to offset increased mortgage costs for eligible claimants in early 2024.

Further to this, my colleague, the Minister for Social Protection, will work with the Minister for Finance to provide a payment, where necessary, through the Department of Social Protection. The details will be worked out following the Budget.

It is also important that we begin to address the long-term sustainability challenges faced by our pensions system. Earlier this year the government decided against increasing the pension age but instead to take a measured approach to increasing PRSI contribution rates on a phased, incremental, basis over a number of years.

It is therefore appropriate that we act now to increase PRSI contribution rates; so from 1 October next year all PRSI contribution rates will increase by 0.1%. This measure, which will raise €240 million in a full year, is a modest but necessary step to secure pension entitlements for this and for future generations.

The Minister for Social Protection will bring forward proposals on a new pay-related benefit in advance of the Social Welfare Bill.

Taken together, the measures we are introducing throughout the remainder of this year and next year represent substantial levels of State support for our most vulnerable.

Over the past two years, this government has successfully combined increases in core social welfare payments in combination with a series of targeted Cost of Living packages to provide the most protection to those households with the lowest incomes from the impact of inflation. This Budget builds on that approach.

Housing

To continue providing support where it is needed, a Cheann Comhairle, the provision of housing continues to be an absolute priority for this government.

Housing delivery is performing strongly, with more than 21,000 new homes started in the first eight months of the year, meaning we are now expected to exceed our target of delivering 29,000 new homes by the end of this year.

As a result of this progress, around 400 first time buyers are purchasing their own home each week.

Next year, we will accelerate this progress with just under €7 billion of funding to the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, of which €2.6 billion will be capital investment in housing.

This capital provision will be supplemented by Land Development Agency (LDA) investment and Housing Finance Agency (HFA) lending, resulting in an overall capital provision for housing of over €5 billion for 2024.

Some of the measures that will be supported by this funding allocation include;

- €1.9 billion in capital funding in 2024 to deliver 9,300 new build social homes
- €265 million to support the delivery of 6,400 affordable homes in 2024
- €242 million for homeless services and accommodation with a further €35 million in capital funding to support the Housing First initiative and house homeless adults in permanent homes with wraparound supports
- €90 million to the retrofitting of social housing in 2024, demonstrating the State's commitment to help people reduce their energy bills and to ensure Ireland meets our climate targets
- €207 million in funding aimed at bringing back into supply vacant and derelict units through the voids programme and Croí Cónaithe Towns Vacant Grant scheme and to support regeneration of towns through the Urban Regeneration Development Fund (URDF)

These measures renew this government's commitment to Housing for All which will see us deliver 300,000 new homes by 2030.

Health

Just as housing has been a challenge for our society that we are rising to, so the last three and half years have been a period of extraordinary challenges for our health service. Similar to other countries, the health sector continues to experience the impacts of the post emergency phase of Covid-19.

In recognition of all these challenges, the government has prioritised very significant investment in the health services and the level of spending has been unprecedented. As a result, Ireland spends more of its national income on health than most European countries.

This investment is delivering:

- an expansion in capacity through the funding of over 2,500 additional beds in hospital and community settings
- an increase of over 22,000 staff through additional recruitment

We have cut costs for patients across the board; we have removed hospital charges; we have had the biggest expansion of access to free GP care in the history of the State; we have reduced the Drug Payment Scheme costs; and we have introduced publicly funded Assisted Human Reproduction (AHR).

Budget 2024 continues the very high level of investment in our public health system by providing for a total allocation of €22.5 billion. This includes an €808 million increase in core current funding to address demographic and service pressures.

I am also allocating non-core resources of over €1 billion for Covid and Ukraine spending in the health sector. This will facilitate continued investment in public health measures, including our successful vaccination programme.

It also includes further temporary resources beyond those announced in the Summer Economic Statement to fund the post pandemic escalation in demand and activity across our acute hospitals through a Health Resilience Fund.

The value of this record level of health investment needs to be fully realised with a focus on productivity, better financial governance and consolidating funded capacity.

Accordingly, this resilience funding will be accompanied by a programme of initiatives to improve financial oversight across the health system, as part of the progressive reform agenda. This programme will be finalised by year end.

The government remains committed to reducing waiting lists in our hospital and community services. This Budget will fund a range of measures to reduce waiting times for inpatient care, and to improve access to community diagnostics.

We will continue the targeted recruitment of additional staff to enhance capacity across a range of acute hospital and community settings as well as surgical hubs. We will also continue the reform measures to progress the regionalisation of the health service to make it more responsive to each patient's needs.

I am also ensuring increased supports across our community services through additional funding for mental health services – noting that today is world mental health day, social inclusion services, older people, and health and well-being initiatives.

€1.23 billion is being provided as part of the National Development Plan for the delivery of additional health infrastructure to enhance the wider sustainability of our health system.

Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science

Turning again to education, investing in further and higher education is investment in innovation, creativity, and our future. In 2024, I am committed to allocating over €4.1 billion to these sectors.

Reflecting its vital role in our economic success, I am providing €60 million to address the sustainable funding of Higher Education, as set out in Funding the Future, as well as additional funding for greater capacity in medicine places.

I am also providing additional supports to allow greater access for students already attending third level education, including increases in the Maintenance Grant rates, restoration of maintenance grants to eligible postgraduate students on a similar basis to undergraduates and improvements to the thresholds for maintenance and student contribution grants, from September 2024.

In 2024, I am providing €67 million for the Craft Apprenticeship system to over 16,000 places next year, to grow our capacity to deliver on government priorities including the Housing for All and Climate Action plans.

I want to turn briefly to the matter of the National Training Fund which plays a vital funding role in how we future proof the skills needs of the labour market and ensure workers can readily access lifelong learning opportunities.

I am keen to ensure the fund is used in an effective and sustainable way. It is in surplus because of the combination of increases in employers' PRSI and the number of people at work in our country. At the same time, there are funding needs for Further & Higher Education but meeting these needs is always within the spending parameters of the annual budget. I want to re-examine this to find a way of better meeting these needs.

To that end, officials will bring forward options including legislative changes for the future operation of the fund.

The highly educated workforce these investments create is an essential component in supporting Ireland as an enterprising and productive economy.

Enterprise

Our enterprise sector is the lynchpin to economic growth, future wellbeing and prosperity.

As a government we have invested heavily to protect enterprises through the challenges of Brexit, Covid and the ramifications of the energy crisis. The fruits of this support can be seen across a range of economic measures, not least the fact that over 2.6 million people are now employed in our economy.

As I mentioned earlier, a €250 million package of temporary supports is being developed to support businesses through current challenges associated with Cost of Living pressures.

In addition, today I am allocating an additional €35 million to the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. This additional €35 million in conjunction with the existing resources available to the department will allow the following measures:

- €9 million to Local Enterprise Offices – the hubs for enterprise creation and business start-ups in local towns and communities – to allow them to extend their financial supports and mentoring programmes to a wider cohort of indigenous businesses
- €3 million for the Digital Services Coordinator to support enforcement of the Digital Services Act
- an increase in the IDA's capital allocation of €27 million will accelerate its Regional Property Grants Programme, ensuring balanced regional inward investments

Delivering on the National Development Plan

A better connected, more regionally balanced Ireland is at the heart of the National Development Plan which remains the blueprint for building a more sustainable and forward looking Ireland.

Today, I am providing an additional €900 million in 2024 for essential investment in providing more schools, hospitals infrastructure and for better public and road transport.

Today also marks the first Budget since my own department took the mandate of accelerating delivery of the plan. I have amended the Public Works Contract and developed new Infrastructure Guidelines, that will be published in the coming weeks, to ease the administrative burden of approving National Development Plan projects.

An independent evaluation of investment priorities and capacity of the National Development Plan will soon inform the delivery of priorities. A time-limited fund to accelerate key priority capital projects over the years 2024-2026 will also be provided, funded by windfall Corporation Tax receipts.

Minister McGrath has already spoken about the establishment of long-term savings funds to invest windfall corporation tax receipts.

The Infrastructure, Climate and Nature Fund will protect capital expenditure in the event of an economic downturn, enabling continued investment in large scale economic projects that can drive growth.

Climate action

A further plan, the Climate Action Plan will deliver positive change for our climate while improving the lives of communities across Ireland.

Energy

Accelerating the green transition is the best means of protecting the security of our energy supplies, breaking our dependency on imports and protecting consumers from fossil fuel price shocks.

Ireland is already number one in the world for the share of electricity demand met by onshore wind. By 2030, in just over six years' time, we aim to meet 80% of Irish electricity needs from renewable electricity. This Budget provides funding for the staffing of agencies to support the delivery of this critical target.

To help households with the green transition, this Budget provides a record €380 million to residential and community energy schemes. This will reduce greenhouse gas emissions and energy bills, meaning households throughout Ireland will be warmer and healthier, while having more money in their pockets. Within this funding, a record allocation will be made to the Warmer Homes Scheme that provides free energy efficiency upgrades to the homes of those who need it most.

Funding will also be provided;

- to accelerate community-based partnerships to deliver energy savings
- for solar supports that will allow households to profit by selling electricity back to the grid
- a new low interest loan scheme that will work alongside the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland grants to allow everyone the opportunity to benefit from energy savings

Individual households, schools, farms, local businesses and community enterprises,

including sports clubs and community halls are all eligible for support through schemes that have already installed solar panels on 70,000 buildings across the country.

The Carbon Tax

Applying an appropriate price to the climate harmful effects of carbon through the carbon tax remains an important measure as we work together to meet our climate goals.

Today I am announcing an additional €165 million of Carbon Tax revenues will be available in 2024 to support a just transition and address fuel poverty, bringing the total Carbon Tax revenue available for investment to €788 million.

Almost half of this, some €380 million, will be invested in improving the energy efficiency of our homes.

In addition, the Carbon Tax will fund €262 million of Social Protection spend in 2024. An additional €44 million for targeted Social Protection measures namely, increases to the Qualified Child Payment, and to the income eligibility threshold for the Working Family Payment, will ensure that the most vulnerable are protected from unintended impacts of the tax increase.

An additional €32 million in carbon tax funding will be provided to the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine next year to support up to 50,000 farmers to improve biodiversity, climate, air and water quality outcomes.

To continue to cut down on our carbon emissions, the National Development Plan prioritises investment in sustainable, active, accessible transport.

Transport

It is transport that plays a critical role in our connectivity but also our climate ambitions.

To that end, this Budget will provide €3.5 billion to the Department of Transport; €892 million in current and €2.7 billion in capital funding.

Current funding will provide for:

Current funding will provide for,

- the continuation of the temporary 20% fare reductions until the end of 2024
- the roll-out of further services via BusConnects, Connecting Ireland and New Town service plans
- the transition to a world-class fuel efficient maritime and inland aviation rescue service

This funding will support the construction of MetroLink, the Cork Commuter Rail project, and investment in electric and hybrid-electric buses and the essential infrastructure required for new bus and rail fleets such as the electrification of bus and rail depots, as well as €1.35 billion for the development, protection and renewal of our roads network.

As part of the Cost of Living Package, the eligibility for the Young Adult Card is being extended to cover adults aged 19-25.

In addition, I will be working with the Minister for Transport in respect of further public transport affordability measures targeted at all those under 18 with a view to implementation in 2025.

This government has invested heavily in walking and cycling infrastructure and improved public transport. We will continue to meet our commitment to invest almost €1 million per day in cycling and walking infrastructure. Investment in Greenways is envisioned through an all island lens.

Construction on the Southern sections of the Carlingford Lough Greenway is due for completion this December, with the Northern Ireland route to be completed in 2024 – linking our communities across borders.

Our transport infrastructure is just one of the means of keeping our communities connected. Digital innovation has allowed our communities to stay connected even when we are physically apart.

Broadband and communications

The National Broadband Scheme is at the heart of our digital connectivity.

This government is keeping its promise to ensure every citizen in Ireland has access to quality, high-speed broadband, connecting rural communities, workers and businesses, supporting remote working, online education, allowing us to keep in touch with friends and family.

The National Broadband Scheme expects to reach 200,000 premises by the end of this year. Next year, a further €348 million will be invested to provide another 100,000 homes with the opportunity to connect to fibre broadband.

The provision of universal broadband access means that nobody will be left behind as we move towards a digitised society, at the forefront of global and European technological progress.

Of course, as our dependence on digital networks increases so too does the risk of disruption to them. The government is determined to protect Irish citizens and their data as well as digital infrastructure and services.

To achieve this, Budget 2024 provides for the continued expansion of the National Cyber Security Centre, to strengthen cyber security and build resilience, address the cyber skills gap and develop the cyber security industry in Ireland.

Better access to broadband connections breathing new life into many rural communities.

Rural and community development

The funding I am providing for rural and community development in this budget will support vibrant, inclusive and sustainable communities across Ireland.

The Budget provision of €431 million for this department provides over €205 million for rural development and over €220 million for community development.

This will support investment in regional, rural and local communities, investment in our islands, as well as a wide range of initiatives promoting social inclusion.

In addition to the core funding of €410 million for Rural and Community Development for 2023, I am providing a targeted social inclusion support of €11 million to provide assistance to new arrivals through the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme.

I am also providing €10 million to projects approved under the Community Recognition Fund, which acknowledges the contribution by so many communities in welcoming and hosting arrivals from Ukraine and other countries.

The overall funding provided to the department will help promote social cohesion and support the development of rural and urban communities throughout the country.

Agriculture, food and the marine

Agriculture and farming households are at the heart of our rural communities and play a crucial role in supporting our economy, protecting our landscape, enhancing the environment and producing world class food.

The agri-food sector is an important driver of our rural economy and is the lifeblood of many towns, villages and coastal communities across Ireland.

Today, I am allocating €1.9 billion for the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine for 2024.

This allocation broadens the roll-out of the nearly €10 billion CAP Strategic Plan (CSP) 2023-2027. The funding will further enhance the environmental, social and economic sustainability of the world leading Irish agri-food sector.

Over €700 million is being provided in 2024 for farmers participating in agri-environmental actions, including through the Agri-Climate Rural Environment Scheme, Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme, Forestry, Organic Farming and other agri-environmental schemes.

In addition to the 2024 Budget allocation, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine will be administering over €1.2 billion of EU funding in direct payments to farmers.

Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media

The Budget today provides €1.17 billion for the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media.

This 2024 allocation will:

- support enterprise and employment in our tourism sector, and targeted measures to support downstream business impacted as a result of the war of Ukraine
- support our creative arts sector, fund our national cultural institutions and support our audio-visual industry
- support Irish as a living language, both in the Gaeltacht and the wider community
- recent weeks and days have reminded us of the inspirational potential of sport. This Budget will promote the contribution of sport to a healthier and more active society, and promote the increased participation of women in sport and invest in our sporting infrastructure
- support Irish language broadcasting through TG4

Justice

As we plan for a better future for the people of this country, I recognise that it is essential that the people who live here not only are safe in their communities but that they feel safe.

To that end, I am committing to a package of €172 million in 2024 for the Justice sector to enable continued investment in existing services and a range of new policy measures to support safety and vitality across our communities.

I am pleased to announce funding for recruitment next year of 1,000 Gardaí and up to 250 Garda civilian staff in specialist roles and to free up more Gardaí for frontline policing duties.

In addition, a €25 million increase in the annual overtime budget will mean that Gardaí can be deployed as needed to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour. These measures will ensure stronger, high visibility policing in our cities, towns and communities.

Budget 2024 also provides for additional staffing in the Courts Service, Prison Service, the Data Protection Commission and Policing Authority, as well as an increase in the range of Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (DSGBV) initiatives and the extension of Youth Diversion Programmes throughout the State.

Defence

Staying with our safety and security, and in recognition of the continued reform and importance of the Defence sector, I am announcing an allocation of €1.23 billion for the Defence Sector for 2024.

This includes the provision of an additional €21 million in current expenditure and an additional €34 million in capital expenditure compared to the original 2024 capital ceiling included in the National Development Plan.

This funding will further progress the priority recommendations of the Commission on the Defence Forces and the Independent Review Group as well as funding the first year of the Tribunal of Inquiry.

Increasing our permanent Defence Force numbers will be key to building capacity and further progressing the reform programme which is underway.

Today's allocation will provide for the recruitment, training and support of a net additional 400 military personnel in 2024 as well as posts across the Department of Defence and the Defence Forces to implement reform and in important roles such as cyber responders and analyst-capacity.

Budget 2024 also provides for significant investment in equipment and infrastructure to support the vital work of our Defence Forces at home and abroad.

Foreign affairs

Ireland has always played a proud role in world affairs. We are known for our contribution to global peace through both peacekeeping missions and overseas development assistance.

In 2023, Ireland provided the highest ever level of Official Development Assistance, in cash terms and as a percentage of our Gross National Income. I am proud that we have met the twin challenges of providing for war refugees without losing sight of other crises, including the drought in the Horn of Africa and the catastrophic floods in Pakistan.

In 2024, I am providing €776.5 million in funding to Irish Aid in the Department of Foreign Affairs; an 8.4 per cent increase on the level of funding provided in 2023. This increased funding will see Overseas Development Assistance through the Department of Foreign Affairs reach new record high levels. Within this commitment, we will provide at least half of the additional funding necessary to achieve the government's 2025 climate finance pledge. This funding will protect people in some of the most vulnerable nations on earth from the very real and growing consequences of a warming world.

Our Shared Island

Supported by European Union funding, the Global Ireland Strategy supports the development of our country at home as well as sharing our Irish values with the world.

Last month, I attended the launch of a new round of PEACEPLUS funding, supported by the European Union, and agreed with the United Kingdom. To support this work €1.1 billion in funding will be invested in projects that support shared peace and prosperity across Northern Ireland and the border counties.

The government has to date allocated €247 million of our own Shared Island initiative from the total commitment of €500 million out to 2025. We are moving ahead with major cross-border investment commitments, like the Ulster Canal restoration and a new teaching building at Ulster University's Derry campus. We will continue to invest in all-island partnerships, to build a more connected, sustainable and prosperous island for all.

EU funding

Half a century as a proud member of the European Union has been transformative for Ireland and its people. Our interests are best served by our active, engaged membership, and recent years have highlighted the importance of solidarity with our European family.

The €1 billion of funding reserved for Ireland from the Brexit Adjustment Reserve is the largest single allocation for any Member State, and continues to help counter the adverse economic and social consequences of Brexit across a range of sectors.

The Recovery and Resilience Facility, under which Ireland is set to receive almost €1 billion in EU funding over the four year period to 2026, supports Ireland in mitigating the impacts of Covid, as we continue on our path of an equitable, green and digital recovery.

REPowerEU funding, the EU response to the energy crisis caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, will accelerate our green transition.

Ireland will also receive €1.4 billion in Cohesion Policy funding for the 2021 to 2027 period. When this funding is co-financed at a national level, it will mean Cohesion Policy programmes, including PEACEPLUS, add a total value of almost €3.5 billion to the economy.

Sustainable public spending

A Cheann Comhairle, budgetary reform remains central to public expenditure management and is a key task undertaken by my own department to achieve value for money, efficiency and effectiveness in the delivery of programmes, and in strengthening governance and accountability measures across the public service.

Performance-, Equality-, Green-, and Well-being budgeting along with the Spending Review process are all examples of how we are refining the process in the decision-making of funding allocations.

A paper on the well-being impacts of this budget will be published by my department in the coming days.

Our public servants are key to ensuring that we can meet the needs of our growing and changing population and enabling this reform. The current Public Service Agreement, Building Momentum, expires at the end of this year.

Later this year my department will enter talks and endeavour to reach an agreement that is fair for public servants and affordable for taxpayers.

Of course, I would expect that the significant package of Cost of Living and taxation measures provided for in this Budget, which will benefit public servants, would be appropriately factored into those discussions.

Conclusion

And we will enter these discussions in a world that continues to change, and change quickly.

We know of the opportunities that this change brings, particularly for an economy that is so skilled, so entrepreneurial, in a country that is open and committed to our role in the European Union and in the international community.

But we know of the challenges, and of the risks too. The existential risk of climate change. The threat of violence and to the rule of law around the world.

In my introduction today, I acknowledged how all recent budgets have been defined by these challenges.

Any one of those challenges, at other points in our history, could have caused such long lasting harm to our economy.

But this has not happened. This is because our public finances were gradually, step by difficult step, returned to health, from deficit to balance to surplus.

This Budget continues that approach.

Not spending every cent today. Leaving some aside for tomorrow.

Helping with the cost of living. But changing that help as inflation slows.

Spending more on public services and building more homes, more schools and better public transport. But not basing that spending on money we may not always have.

That is why this Budget will help with the Cost of Living, will help with better public services, and will give more children a better start in life.

That is why I commend Budget 2024 to the House.

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