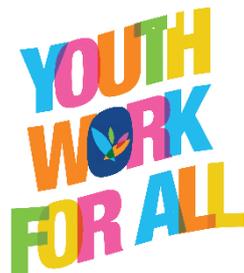




Youth Work Ireland

AMBITIOUS FOR YOUTH

**Youth Work Ireland
Budget Submission 2026**



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1 Introduction and Overview

The Irish economy continues to be robust and outperforms most of our EU partners on key metrics. Global trade and other uncertainties clearly present challenges in the near future. The cost-of-living and housing crises are still very real for young people. There has been a significant increase in the youth population in recent years according to the CSO's population estimates. Ireland has one of the highest shares of under-20s in the EU and has the youngest population in the EU at a median age of 39.4. Our overall population continues to grow at a fast rate.

The economy is still strong, and we are producing enough wealth to deal with the major problems facing our society today. It is no longer enough to say these issues must wait. Notwithstanding global events now is the time for a real recovery that addresses the needs of young people.

Our national debt to national income ratio is well inside the EU guidelines and we are one of the few EU countries with budget surpluses. While risks exist, particularly with corporate tax receipts, and trade tensions, a growing younger population needs to be supported by our public finances. Exchequer returns, published by the Department of Finance, show the Government collected €10.1 billion in tax in January – €2.3 billion (29.3 per cent) ahead of the same period last year.

Ireland will assume the presidency of the European Union in the second half of 2026. This an opportunity to showcase the best of our models of youth work and to engage with others on a broader stage to show ambition for the future for youth services, the young people who engage with them, and the communities they serve.

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

The policy and oversight environment for youth work in Ireland has been significantly developed over the last number of years. Young Ireland and Opportunities for Youth underpin the national policies in our field. All funding streams have been reviewed and various oversight methods developed.

It is now time, with all this in place, to show ambition for youth work and ambition for youth.

In this document Youth Work Ireland sets out its budget priorities and requests for 2026.

2 Supporting Youth Services

2.1 Our Workforce

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

It has become more and more difficult to offer a package of support to professional youth workers who are increasingly being attracted to other jobs and professions. Many are opting to turn to social work or education roles in state services where their skills and qualification are greatly appreciated. The DCEDIY has agreed to two successive WRC Recommendations for other funded staff which has major implications for the Youth Services that it also funds. These recommendations give rise to a 15% flatline increase in other areas of community services. This

effectively leads to a two-tier work force as youth services have small numbers of staff covered by these agreements, but the vast majority of youth workers are not. This has made it impossible to ensure equality between staff doing the same work and to retain staff.

The tenor of the recommendation and the representation of the Department at the WRC, means the funder is a stakeholder in these matters. The sub-inflation annual percentage increases for schemes supporting youth workers, such as Youth Information, put our members at a major disadvantage in recruiting staff. Youth Services thus face huge problems in recruiting, retaining and deploying staff due to these WRC agreements. The level of service, vacancies, and turnover levels are high in an area where consistency and relationships are critical.

Related to the above, the continuing inflexibility of the UBU rules relating to expenditure on staffing is exacerbating the recruitment and retention of staff. Even if services were capable of responding to pay pressure from workers the rules of the UBU scheme effectively prevent them from doing so, restricting the percentage of funding that can be allocated for this area. All the above is further exacerbated by continuing inflationary pressure and state services are recruiting those who work in the voluntary sector to better funded jobs with long-term prospects and pension arrangements.

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

Without a proper package of pay equalisation for youth workers the ability of youth services to provide services will inevitably be reduced. In many areas such as UBU, Youth Services have had to make drastic cuts already. Into 2026 a reduction of services is inevitable and unfortunately preparation for this is already underway. Without proper support for staff, existing levels of service will not be maintained in 2026, and critical staff will be lost. Maintaining the existing level of service needs investment. Increasingly due to funding levels part-time staff feature in our workforce. This needs to be addressed.

Before any other inflationary pressure, the need to restore services to pre Covid levels and the need to improve and extend services, an increase of €10.5m for youth services is needed to ensure an effective staff package and protect the current level of service.

- Opportunities for Youth sets out the need for workforce development and the need to support recruitment and retention.

Recommendation:

Increase in all funding schemes to address the pressures relating to staffing and the continual erosion of what can be offered to youth workers compared to others subject to the WRC recommendations.

Total Cost: €10.5m

2.2 Inflation and Programme Costs

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

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

- A 12% increase, since 2018, in the youth population (15-24)
- Increased demand due to Covid, inflation, Young people from Ukraine and the International Protection system
- Insurance, light, heat, compliance

The CSO has reported increased energy costs reflected in the yearly growth of Housing, Water, Electricity, Gas & Other Fuels, particularly in electricity (+62.7%), gas (+86.1%)”in 2023. While these may have eased somewhat frontline youth services are still playing catch up with these costs which have had huge impacts.

A blended increase of these programme and overhead costs could be estimated at approximately 20% for the year and while these may have eased somewhat in the current year clearly the headline rate is not reflective of real day to day costs. These increases are significantly ahead of general increases from the DCEDIY.

Increased funding for inflation is still required to enable youth services maintain overheads and programme costs. The rules on UBU similarly restrict projects in the area of programme costs which in many instances have been completely eroded. Many projects have no programme budget and indeed effectively run at a loss. Real programme costs must be provided for with a proper sustainable baseline level of funding aligned with the new “greenfield” projects.

Historically Underfunded Projects

There is also a critical issue relating to historically underfunded UBU projects. Many of these were not addressed when the UBU Scheme was developed. Often better funded YPSF projects were transferred, and lower funding for SPY projects was made permanent at the level of one worker. Furthermore, amalgamations and various other measures during the austerity period also reduced funding in real terms and can lead to the potential for one worker in one geographic site.

The existence of one worker projects or one worker per site is a significant problem and falls well short of best practice in service delivery. This can also lead to issues relating to safeguarding and ratios. This often needs to be addressed by supplement staffing through C.E., student placements, or fundraising. This also entails a lower level of service to, along with potential discontinuity and limitation of service for young people.

We believe this should be addressed as a matter of urgency and be prioritised ahead of the establishment of new projects. We have provided in Appendix One of a three-year (flatline) approach to addressing this, year one (€352,773) 2026 is included in the overall amount set out below.

- In Opportunities for Youth, the UBU Scheme is seen as the core of Government policy. This is where many of these pressures manifest themselves magnified by strict rules with stricter interpretation and chronic historical underfunding

Recommendations

- A €8.5m inflation and programme costs adjustment to the main youth funding streams i.e UBU, Youth Service Grant, and Youth Club Grants Scheme to address increased costs and to provide for catch up to pre austerity level funding in real terms and a move towards a proper sustainable baseline.

- This increase should also focus on historically underfunded projects particularly to ensure and end to single worker projects and the allocation of one worker in specific geographic areas before providing for new projects

Total Cost €8.5m

3 Universal Youth Work

3.1 Revitalization of Youth Clubs

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

- Opportunities for Youth recognises that the delivery of universal services is strongly dependent on volunteers.

Recommendation

- A National campaign: National/ regional public relations campaign across all media in order to attract former volunteers, recruit new volunteers, and encourage youth participation in conjunction with our EU Presidency. cost: €250 000
- Club development workers: the provision of professional club development workers will ensure quality support of volunteer led provision. They provide training and support on Garda Vetting, Safeguarding, National Quality Standards Framework of Volunteer Led Youth Groups (NQSFLVYG), Health and Safety, insurance queries etc. They also support a community development and capacity building approach to the re-invigoration and re-start of our club network. 10 Club development workers plus support budget would cost €750,000
- Technology for youth work: In a rapidly changing environment youth work organisations and those working with young people face enormous challenges. The boundaries of technology are being expanded all the time while the lines between personal, private and public life are being blurred. Artificial Intelligence serves as a major challenge to everyone in our society and to the youth work sector where young people are often the main targets. There are of course tremendous opportunities also. A technology fund for youth organisations is needed with a cost of €0.5m

Total Cost: €1.5m

3.2 Youth Information Services

Youth Information Centres (YICs) provide a free, confidential information service to young people and those who work with them on a wide range of subjects including careers, education, employment matters, rights and entitlements, leisure, sport, travel, and European opportunities. Youth Information is now a critical element of youth work ensuring that young

people have the support of trusted adults in negotiating the complex online world with social media, new apps and fake news and artificial intelligence.

Most services now exist in the real and virtual world and believe the same standards of safety and protection must be applied to both. A number of youth organisations have piloted a chat service to connect the virtual and real world to ensure trusted adults are available to those signalling needs online.

Youth work Ireland Services operate 14 Youth Information Centres throughout Ireland. Due to funding constraints and lack of policy most Youth Information Workers are now part time. Greater geographic coverage of this universal service is expected involving complex issues with less and less staff. To achieve a basic level of service, augmentation is needed for the lowest funding projects to the level of €80,000 per project, we estimate the 2026 cost of this to be €440,000

- The current EU Youth Strategy commits to pursuing a more systematic approach to quality youth information, outreach and dissemination, building on its existing networks.

Recommendations:

- Support the cross organisational “chat” service and also enhance current provision. Cost €400,000
- Augment all projects to €80,000 to ensure proper full time staff before the support for new services Cost: €440,000
- National Coordination Function including training budget be reinstated. €160,000

Total cost: €1m

Total Youth Affairs Current - €21.5m

4. Infrastructure and Capital

Youth services have worked long and hard to have quality accessible premises and venues for youth work around the country, often in smaller towns and rural areas. This provision is uneven and inconsistent. The Government has wisely made provision for the future with the Future Ireland Fund and the Infrastructure, Climate and Nature Fund and has significant surpluses. To achieve growth and build these funds for the future long-term projects should be identified in Ireland.

Innovative models of financing can utilise rent savings and other incomes to provide infrastructure in communities and a return on investment to the Governments rainy day funds. Other EU countries have significant experience in this regard and can serve as models. This may or may not be an area for Youth Affairs as other Departments have experience and capacity in this area, but youth services and youth work need to be central to any developments.

Support could also be provided to the renovation of existing facilities to include refurbishment and fit-out costs, improving access for young people with a disability, and new physical infrastructure with dedicated and guaranteed access for young people in areas where there is minimal provision.

There has not been a major tradition of significant capital expenditure in the area of Youth Affairs. However, this is not to say it isn't happening. A number of actors like local authorities, the OPW, private institutions, LEADER Companies and innovative partnerships are supporting this work. Support for this may come from a range of different funders and provide an outlet for rainy day funds for both a financial and community return. The recently announced review of the NDP is an ideal opportunity to address this issue.

- The absence of proper premises was well flagged in Opportunities for Youth and particularly in the youth consultation. The document commits to “a policy for youth spaces and facilities at a local level.”

Recommendation

- We call for a pilot capital budget for premises of €15m a year over 3 years.

Cost: €15m year 1

5. Youth Issues

5.1 Young People and Health

The mental and physical health challenges that children and young people face are significant. Research from the Growing up in Ireland Survey indicates a growing problem with obesity. Our Substance Misuse Strategy still needs major support and action. More support is needed for child and adolescent mental health teams.

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

- The benefits of youth work for physical and mental health and the need for more integration in supports here is highlighted in Opportunities for Youth

Recommendations:

- Youth work Ireland have developed and delivered a number of health-related programmes (Sexual Health, Mental Health etc) which have been delivered in the border regions as part of the PEACE programme. The effectiveness of these programmes has been evaluated and verified by the University of Ulster. We would like to roll out these programmes nationally over a three-year period: Cost: Year 1 of 3 years: €250,000.
- Implement a 3-year pilot scheme of youth counselling delivered by Youth Services – Cost: €2.75m.
- That the Department of An Taoiseach bring together an inter-departmental group to lead in the development of a dedicated national Health Strategy for young people (DECDIY, DOH and DOE) with representatives from the youth sector.

Cost: €3m

5.2 Housing and Homelessness

Housing and Homelessness have been critical issues over the last number of years. Affordability is out of the reach of many ordinary people, and this cascades down to many others in society particularly young people. Young people are impacted directly through youth homelessness, insecure accommodation, high rents, a shortage of student accommodation and being unable to get a foot in the housing market. The number of adults and children who are homeless across Ireland continues at a record high.

Figures published in January by the Department of Housing show there are now 15,199 people in emergency accommodation, including 4,658 children.

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

- The current Youth Homeless Strategy will expire at the end of 2025 and the issue receives little attention in Opportunities for Youth

Recommendations:

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

Cost: €10m

5.3 Education, Employment and Social Protection

Whether in boom or bust, Ireland has a deep-seated problem relating to educational disadvantage. Early school leaving remains an issue in many disadvantaged areas. The performance of children on key indicators under the PISA system is significantly less in DEIS schools despite some improvement. Non-attendance measured by Tusla (formerly the NEWB) is still high. We are still a way off the generally accepted school completion rates to senior cycle. Curriculum reform at the senior level needs to be a greater priority.

Our members see an upsurge in “Emotionally Based School Avoidance” which needs urgent attention. Data in this area and the related area of vocational education and training is weak since the ESRI's School Leavers Survey was effectively defunded. The Minister has indicated her intention to engage in a wide-ranging “conversation” on the entire education system after taking office.

- There are numerous points and actions concerning education, employment and social protection in Opportunities for Youth

Recommendations

- Fast track reform for the Leaving Certificate - no cost

- Reintroduce the Early School Leavers Survey - €0.5m
- Conduct a substantial research study on “Emotionally Based School Avoidance” - €1m
- Increase support for literacy and numeracy work in voluntary youth services and schools - €5m
- Increase support for voluntary youth services who work with early school leavers and the hardest to reach young people, support certified learning in these informal settings - €8m

Cost: 14.5m

5.4 Cost of Living

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

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

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

- While Opportunities for Youth covers child poverty and wellbeing, youth policy needs to focus on the immediate issues for young people
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Recommendations

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

Cost: 67m

6. Income Measures

These measures entail action across a number of Departments and the Department of Education and Youth and/or Department of Disability and Children. Funding for youth work needs a significant step up in the normal estimates process for the DCEDIY. We are happy to present a range of income measures that could also support these recommendations costed at approximately €131m

Recommendation	Cost (m)
Staffing Package	10.5
Youth Clubs	1.5
Inflation Adjustment	8.5
Youth Information	1
Youth Affairs	21.5 sub-total
Capital	15
Health	3
Housing and Homeless	10
Employment and Social Protection	14.5
Cost of Living	67
Other Measures	109.5
Total	131
Income Measures	Income
DCEDIY Current Vote	21.5
Proportion of extension of minimum corporate tax rate to firms with lower turnover	30.5
Proportion of standard rating of non-pension tax reliefs	32
Proportion of increases CGT and CAT	28
Relevant Capital Vote and Future Ireland Fund and the Infrastructure, Climate and Nature Fund (including innovative offsetting of rental funding etc)	15
Healthy Ireland and Slainte Care	4
Total	131

Appendix One – Historically Underfunded UBU Projects (Flatline basis)

Tranche One 2026 Budget - Less than two workers under 100,000 threshold						
YWI Member Service	Project	2025 Funding	Staff	Min Cost 2 worker equivalent	Additional Cost	Sites 2025
Youth Work Ireland Tipperary	Tipperary Rural Traveller Project	30,000	.60 fte	100000	70,000	Thurles and Littleton
Youth Work Ireland Galway	East Galway	€66,101	1.4	94,430	28,329	East Galway
FDYS	Gorey	88,524	1.5 fte	118,032	29,508	2
Youth Work Ireland Galway	Loughrea	€57,755	0.8	92,408	34,653	Loughrea
FDYS	Coolcotts	76,638	1.5 fte	102,184.00	25,546	1
Waterford and South Tipperary Youth and Community Service	Woodstown Residential & Activity Centre WW.012.14.UB	€25,696	0.5	102,784	77,088	the site(s) of delivery, and: Woodstown, Co. Waterford.
Carlow Regional Youth Service	UBU Traveller Project Burrin Street, Carlow, R93 XO39.	€49,078	1	98,156	49,078	Carlow

Youth Work Ireland Tipperary	Tipperary Town Youth Project	90,000	1.4	128,571	38,571	Tipperary Town
Totals first tranche (2026)					352,773	

Tranche Two 2027 Budget - Less than two workers per site under 120,000 threshold						
YWI Member Service	Project	2025 Funding	Staff	Total Cost2 worker equivalent	Additional Cost	Sites 2025
CDYS	CDYS Fermoy	107633	1.5 WTE	143,510	35,877	1
CDYS	CDYS Mallow	118638	1.5 WTE before resilience funding – 2 WTE from Q2 2025	158,184	39,546	2
CDYS	CDYS Mitchelstown	109287	1.5 WTE	145,716	36,429	1
Youth Work Ireland Galway	Tuam	€106,073	1.2	176,788	70715	Tuam
Youth Work Ireland Galway	CAPE & shOUT!	€105,090	1.6	€131,363	26,272	Galway
YWI North Connaught	YWI Leitrim UBU (1.5 fte)	€119,229	1.5 WTE	158,972	39,743	Drumshanbo and Ballinamore with a further site in Manorhamilton to be added in the coming months.

KCYS	KCYS Killarney	€106,719	1.83	114,896	8,177.00	
KCYS	KCYS Listowel	119,512	1.43	145,932	26,420.00	
Totals second tranche (2027)					283,179	
Tranche Three 2028 Budget - Projects with multiple sites therefore requiring more than two workers and projects over 120k						
YWI Member Servicee	Project	2025 funding	No of Staff	Total Cost 2 worker equivalent €	Additional Cost €	Sites 2025
In Sync Youth & Family Services	Athy	€120,051	1.8 fte	133,390	13,339	Athy Town
CDYS	CDYS Gurrabraher	€143114	1.5 WTE	190,818.66	47,704	* CDYS Gurrabraher has an additional 0.5 arts project worker who provides some support to the UBU & other external youth organisations in the area. This is a historical legacy issue
In Sync Youth & Family Services	Leixlip	€135,346	2 workers 2 wte	203,019	67673	3 sites in Leixlip:

FDYS	Enniscorthy	€111,795	2	167,692	55,897	2 Enniscorthy and Templeshannon
CDYS	CDYS Middleton	€128,197	2 WTE	192,295.50	64,098	1 full time site & 2 outreaches & Ukrainian Integration site
Youth Work Ireland Galway	Westside	€167,953	2.8	179,949	11,996	Westside
Clare Youth Service	Clare Youth Service	€301,274	4.6	399,465	98,191	Amalgamation from SPY - Five sites Ennis – Junction Ennis - Carmody Street Shannon Newmarket on Fergus Sixmilebridge
Totals third tranche (2028)					358,898	