

30th September 2022

NWC Gender Analysis of Budget 2023

Why gender and equality proofing is necessary

The budget is the principal expression of a government's priorities. As a feminist organisation, NWC recognises that a more equitable collection and distribution of public resources is required to advance gender equality.

Gender inequalities are most pronounced where they intersect with inequalities based on ethnicity, class, disability, sexuality and so on. Gender and equality proofing of budgets is necessary because:

- Women continue to be under-represented in public life resulting decisions not taking women's needs and priorities into account
- Women continue to be responsible for unpaid care work, reducing their income and opportunities for paid work. Investment in public services can help to mitigate this
- Women are more likely to be in poverty, low paid work and have lower pensions so benefit less from cuts to income tax and more from spending on social protection
- Gender inequalities carry a significant health burden. Marginalised women benefit from investments in public health and face barriers to care in a privatised system
- Violence against women continues to be endemic. Failure to invest sufficient resources in prevention work, services and supports impacts on women's equality. Policies that decrease women's access to independent incomes increases financial dependence and vulnerability

Gender budgeting is good budgeting not only because addressing inequality and discrimination is an important public policy goal, but also because it contributes to achieving other goals such as improved transparency and accountability in the raising and spending of public resources. In addition, the positive relationship between equality and sustainable growth helps to generate the resources to invest in better outcomes for diverse groups of women and men in Ireland.¹

Progress on gender and equality budgeting has been made in recent years. However, budgetary decisions continue to be made that further embed inequalities experienced by women.

NWC's response to Budget 2023

Budget 2023 includes many positive developments, including structural investment in childcare to reduce childcare costs and in women's health. Investments in essential public services help to reduce costs and are essential for resilient and sustainable societies.

NWC also welcomed the one-off payments which will help to support women and families through this cost of living crisis this winter. However, an over reliance on one-off payments will not protect women from poverty and income inequality in the long term. Investment in essential public services must go hand in hand with ensuring that our social protection system is capable of ensuring an adequate income for all women.

¹ https://www.nwci.ie/images/uploads/Gender_Budgeting_is_Good_Budgeting_NWCI.pdf

Investment in care

Early Years and School Age Education and Care

A lack of affordable childcare is the single biggest barrier to women's equality in the workplace. The Early Years workforce is 98% women and the sector is one of the lowest paid in the economy.

Budget 2023 represented a significant breakthrough on childcare - Additional funding of €121m has been allocated from January 2023, representing the largest ever investment to tackle affordability for parents. Universal subsidies, available to parents of children up to 15 years of age will be increased from the current €0.50 per hour to €1.40 per hour. In 2023, this will provide a maximum subsidy of €63 per week for families availing of full-time care. With the substantial investment in core funding last year and a pay deal for workers agreed in September, Budget 2023 is setting us on a clear path to achieve public childcare.

Notwithstanding this welcome progress, because fees are already so high (averaging €187 per week nationwide and €222 in Dublin) even an investment as significant as today's will leave many parents paying extraordinarily high fees. The investments in Budget 2023 must be built on in the next two budgets, as part of a pathway to a public model of childcare that is affordable, accessible and of high quality.

Budget 2023 also included an additional €53m for core funding. However, further investments in core funding are needed to progress work on improving pay and conditions for workers.

NWC also welcomes the introduction of Free School Book Scheme for primary school children. This is a welcome investment in a key public service. However, the cost of providing for secondary school aged children is even more expensive so this welcome development should be extended to secondary level students in subsequent budgets.

Social care

Investment in universal, social care services are vital to ensure older people and disabled people have the necessary supports to reduce dependence on family and friends and to maintain a private life with dignity and to provide better pay and conditions to the many women workers in the sector.

Among the Budget 2023 commitments was an additional €50m to maintain home care hours at current levels and an increase of 15% in new home care hours, ringfenced for people with dementia. Budget 2023 also provided an additional €29.3m to disability services. The Disability Capacity Review identified that €350 million was required from 2022 to 2032 to meet demographic and unmet need. Budget 2023 investment falls far short of the levels identified in the Review and will be insufficient to fund the kinds of supports disabled women need to live independent lives of their choosing.

Clearly much more work needs to be done to deliver on the comprehensive recommendations on valuing care set out by the Citizens Assembly on Gender Equality. With the Oireachtas Committee on Gender Equality due to make its report on implementing the Citizens' recommendations in December, next year's budget will need to have a strong emphasis on the care economy.

Health

Reproductive health

Budget 2023 provided significant welcome measures to support women's health, with a funding allocation of €22 million. NWC strongly welcomes the extension of free contraception to women aged 16-

30, rolled-out from September 2023 and expansion of the National Condemn Distribution Service. Enabling universal access to free and accessible contraception is fundamental to reproductive health and rights and critical for achieving gender equality, reducing poverty, protecting against adverse health conditions and prevention of unplanned pregnancies. Future budgets must continue this commitment to a phased roll out with further investment to remove the cost barrier across the age range.

Access and equity are important - NWC urges the Government to consider telemedicine and pharmacist-prescribing so as to reach as many women as possible. Pharmacist access is already a feature of women's contraceptive care in the US and Canada. It is also vital that the scheme is available in all maternity hospitals, not just GP surgeries, so that all women can access contraception as part of post-abortion or post-natal care.

NWC is concerned that the Minister for Health is suggesting a lower-age limit of 16 years – provision of free contraception with appropriate medical support is a public health intervention which, alongside robust relationships and sex education, mitigates the risk that adolescents face a crisis pregnancy. It is critical that the most marginalised girls are not left behind and that the free scheme is available to all teenagers in need.

The allocation of €10m to commence publicly funded IVF in September 2023 is a landmark moment for women and couples. The Women's Health Action Plan has begun the process of introducing a stepped care model for fertility support, with services due to be available in six fertility hubs nationwide, and investment in Budget 2023 will support development of tertiary services. The critical issue is how eligibility will be determined. The Minister has said work will now begin to determine criteria in consultation with patient groups and service providers. A clear timeline for this consultation is needed if the service is to be available from September 2023. While it is pragmatic to initially use private clinics for this roll-out, it is critical that investment is part of a long-term strategy to deliver public fertility services through hubs and hospitals, in line with Sláintecare principles.

Also welcome are efforts to remove cost-barriers to reproductive health more broadly, including the removal of VAT from period products, such as period pants, and HRT, and state reimbursement for Cariban, the severe pregnancy-sickness drug.

Universal Healthcare and Public Health

NWC welcomes the extension of GP cards to allow free GP visits to anyone on or below the median income level. The ability to pay is a significant barrier to women's access to timely healthcare. Women are more likely to be living in poverty and have lower incomes than men. They are also more likely to visit their GP.² This scheme extension will particularly benefit women between the ages of 45 and 64, as this age group is much more likely to visit their GP when they have a GP card or medical card.³ The extension of this scheme will allow more women to be able to visit their GP when they need to, without cost being a barrier. This is a vital progression towards developing a universal healthcare system in Ireland which is of particular importance for women.

The removal of in-patient hospital charges is a groundbreaking step towards achieving universal healthcare. The current in-patient charge for hospital treatment is €80 per visit, or up to a maximum €800 for the year. This represents a significant financial burden for those with long-term health conditions who need frequent in-patient treatment and don't qualify for a medical card. Women live on average four years longer than men in Ireland, which means that women are more likely to have increased years of poor health with chronic disease such as heart disease and cancers.⁴ The abolition of charges will significantly reduce the financial burden of accessing necessary healthcare.

² Department of Health (2021) *Healthy Ireland Survey 2021*.

³ Ibid

⁴ NWC (2019) *Evidence Base for the Development of the Women's Health Action Plan*.

https://www.nwci.ie/images/uploads/Womens_Health_in_Ireland_-_Evidence_Base_for_the_Development_of_the_WHAP_-_2019.pdf

Budget 2023 also provides €7 million for new measures to improve access to healthcare services for Travellers, people experiencing homelessness and refugees. This is a welcome investment which will support marginalised women and people who face disproportionate barriers to accessing healthcare services.

Mental Health

The creation of a Youth Mental Health Lead is a very welcome development in Budget 2023. Young women are disproportionately affected by depression⁵, anxiety and eating disorders. €750,000 funding for counselling and psychology training places is a positive step forward which will contribute to tackling staffing shortages and expedite access to mental health services. Research shows⁶ that women have a preference for talk therapies or counselling so this investment will be of particular benefit to women by ensuring timely access to psychology services.

It is disappointing to see a lack of investment in Specialist Perinatal Mental Health Services and investment to progress Ireland's first Mother and Baby Unit (MBU). Despite repeated commitments to develop the MBU and an action in the Women's Health Action Plan, this Budget does not allocate vitally needed funding to progress its development. In the absence of an MBU, mothers with severe mental health conditions are supported in general psychiatric units without their babies, contrary to best-practice, and this separation can have a profound adverse impact on parent-infant attachment.

Ensuring an adequate income for all

Social protection

Even before the cost of living soared, many women did not have a sufficient income to live a decent life. Lone parent households, 86% of whom are headed by women, are three times more likely to be pushed into consistent poverty than the general population. Disabled people continue to experience higher poverty⁷, as do Travellers and Roma.⁸ People on lower incomes face higher rates of inflation than the general population, spending a disproportionately high amount of their incomes on essentials like fuel and food. A minimum €20 increase in core weekly payments and targeted measures for those more at risk of poverty was sought by NWC and members in Budget 2023.

While the €12 increase to core social welfare payments including Jobseekers payments, One Parent family Payment, Carer's Allowance, Disability Allowance and pensions will benefit lone parents, carers, Travellers, disabled women and older women, NWC is disappointed that this will mean a real drop of 8.1% in the pension rate and a fall of 6.7% in working age payments between 2021 and 2023.⁹ An ESRI analysis confirms that lone parents and pensioners will be slightly worse off in 2023 and that policy changes for 2023 benefit men slightly more than women, compared to price adjusted policies.¹⁰

Budget 2023 delivered a number of one-off and welcome measures aimed at addressing cost of living, including €500 for those in receipt of the Carers Support Grant, €500 for those on Disability Allowance, €500 for those in receipt of Working Family Payment (WFP) and €200 for recipients of the Living Alone Allowance. However, the ESRI has cautioned that low-income households will face real terms cuts in

⁵ ESRI (2022) *Growing Up in Ireland – National Longitudinal Study of Children. The Lives of 20-year-olds: Making the Transition to Adulthood.* https://www.esri.ie/system/files/publications/BKMNEXT420_0.pdf

⁶ National Women's Council (2018) *Out of Silence – Women's mental health in their own words.* https://www.nwci.ie/images/uploads/NWCI_MentalHealth_Oct19_WEB.pdf

⁷ CSO (2022). [SILC 2021.](https://www.cso.ie/en/press-releases/silc-2021/)

⁸ EU Fundamental Rights Agency (2020). [Roma and Travellers in six countries.](https://www.fra.europa.eu/en/roma-and-travellers-in-six-countries)

⁹ Parliamentary Budget Office (2022). Preliminary review of Budget 2023. https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/parliamentaryBudgetOffice/2022/2022-09-28_preliminary-review-of-budget-2023_en.pdf

¹⁰ ESRI (2022). Post budget analysis briefing, Spencer Hotel, 30.9.22

living standards in 2023 without a repeat of these welfare bonuses, lump-sum payments and household energy credits.¹¹

- **Lone parents**

An increase of only €2 in the Qualified Child Increase is hugely disappointing. Government also failed to increase the WFP beyond the one-off payment. It is well established that the IQC and WFP are the most effective way of addressing poverty¹² and are particularly important supports for lone parents. No progress was made in addressing the income drop for lone parents when their youngest child reaches age 12. Government could have addressed this by extending Jobseekers Transitional Payment to lone parents in education, training or employment until the youngest child reaches the end of second level education. NWC is disappointed to see no budget line allocated to child maintenance in Budget 2023 despite its important role in the prevention of poverty.

- **Disabled women**

The one-off cost of living payment of €500 for disabled people pales in comparison to the ongoing, day to day, extra costs experience by disabled people, estimated at between €8,700-€12,300 in governments recent report.¹³ It is also only available to people in receipt of Disability Allowance. While this will do a little to alleviate poverty, working disabled women also face extra costs, including those associated with going to work. To address the inequality between the costs faced by disabled and non-disabled people, a cost of disability payment must be open to disabled women who are not in receipt of Disability Allowance.

- **Young women**

While young jobseekers will benefit from the €12 increase, NWC regrets that the inequality in rates for those under 18-24 still remains.

- **Asylum seekers and Roma women**

Child Benefit is a universal payment yet the Habitual Residence Condition requirement acts as a barrier to Roma children. This remains unchanged. NWC is disappointed that Budget 2023 failed to extend Child Benefit to those in the international protection process or to make progress on a new International Protection Child Payment scheme. There was also no increase to the Daily Expenses Allowance leaving women in Direct Provision on an income far below what is required.

Overall, while one-off cost of living payments will be welcome, what is missing in Budget 2023 is a clear pathway to address income adequacy in the long term and the already high levels of poverty experienced by many women, such as lone parents, disabled women and Traveller and Roma women.

Decent work

For many women, paid work is no guarantee of income adequacy with women predominating in sectors characterised by low paid and precarious work. 6 out of 10 low paid workers are women¹⁴ with young people¹⁵ and lone parents¹⁶ more likely to be low paid or National Minimum Wage (NMW) workers. NWC is disappointed that government did not go further than the recommendation of the Low Pay Commission and deliver greater progress on a living wage in Budget 2023. An increase of €0.80 per hour to the NMW is too low. In 2023, the new NMW of €11.30 will remain at least €1.60 below the Living Wage (due to be updated in October 2023 and likely to be higher than the current €12.90).

¹¹ ESRI (2022). <https://www.esri.ie/news/one-off-budget-measures-will-insulate-most-households-from-inflation-this-winter>

¹² ESRI (2022). Headline Poverty Target Reduction in Ireland and the Role of Work and Social Welfare. <https://www.esri.ie/publications/headline-poverty-target-reduction-in-ireland-and-the-role-of-work-and-social-welfare>

¹³ Indecon (2021). The Cost of Disability in Ireland – Research Report. <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/1d84e-the-cost-of-disability-in-ireland-research-report/>

¹⁴ Eurostat (2022). [Incidence of low pay](#).

¹⁵ LPC (2021). Annual report 2021.

¹⁶ ESRI & IHREC (2021). [Ireland's Young Workers 6 times More Likely to Be on Temporary Contracts than those over 25](#)

With tax and USC changes (see Taxation section), low paid workers earning €25-35,000 will benefit from only an additional €4 per week, whereas those earning €40,000 upwards will get an increase of 4 times that amount.¹⁷

Payments for Maternity, Paternity, Adoptive and Parent's Benefit were increased by €12 in line with core social welfare payments. However, Ireland has the lowest payment for Maternity Benefit in the EU, replacing less than a third of average earnings and this modest increase will do little to change that status. Payments in most OECD countries offer at least 50% of average earnings with many offering 100%.¹⁸

Tackling the cost of violence to women

In June 2022, the National Women's Council welcomed the Minister for Justice's publication of Zero Tolerance the Third National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (DSGBV), for recognising the harm and severe impact of male violence on women and for promoting the much needed zero tolerance approach to violence against women¹⁹. Last year there were 25 murders recorded in Ireland, of which 52% were linked to domestic abuse. On average gardaí respond to between 120 and 150 domestic abuse incidents every day with 37,435 incidents reported so far this year, a 9% increase on 2020.²⁰

The new five-year Strategy is ambitious and requires a significant increase in investment to address violence against women. Budget 2023 commitments show a welcome increase in budget allocation to start with the implementation of the Strategy, especially addressing services demand and the establishment of a new statutory agency for domestic, sexual and gender-based violence. There will be an additional investment of €9m (22% increase) to address service demands to survivors of DSGBV bringing the total budget to €41 million.

The additional €9m includes €7m for organisations funded by TUSLA to address acute service demands in existing services throughout the country and for the investment in new services. This includes addressing recommendations arising from Tusla's Accommodation Review of Refuge Provision (including the opening of domestic violence refuges in the nine counties which currently did not have one). However, there was no specific allocation or recognition of commitments to fully meet the additional needs of disabled, Traveller, Roma and migrant women, nor funding allocations for exit services and supports for those who are in, or who wish to leave, prostitution or the sex trade.

Domestic abuse is the leading cause of homelessness for women and children. On average, 180 women and 275 children seek emergency accommodation every month and in 2021 more than 3,000 requests for refuge could not be met by services. There is an urgent need to establish domestic violence refuge accommodation units in every county and meet the requirements under the Istanbul Convention. In addition, NWC is gravely concerned that governments overall housing strategy will not address the systemic issues underpinning this crisis for women.

¹⁷ Budget 2023 tax policy changes. Examples showing the effects of Budget changes on different categories of single and married income earners. Example 1: Single person, no children, private sector employee taxed under PAYE, full rate PRSI contributor.

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/cc22-budget-2023-taxation-measures/>

¹⁸ OECD (2021). [OECD Family Database: PF2.1. Parental leave systems.](https://www.oecd.org/family/databases/pf2-1-parental-leave-systems/)

¹⁹ <https://www.nwci.ie/learn/article/national-womens-council-welcomes-most-significant-strategy-for-womens-equal>

²⁰ <https://www.independent.ie/irish-news/crime/domestic-abuse-now-behind-majority-of-murders-in-ireland-for-first-time-garda-figures-show-42012132.html?s=03>

The cost-of-living crisis has made it even more difficult for women survivors of domestic abuse to leave their abusers. In June 2022 Women's Aid UK in June 2022 reported that 73% of women say that the cost-of-living crisis has either prevented them from leaving or made it harder for them to leave.

Enabling women's participation and decision making

Ensuring that the voices of women are heard in decision making and that their participation is supported and resourced at all levels of society is key to tackling gender inequalities from the ground up. However, Budget 2023 did not sufficiently invest in enabling greater political participation for women, nor does it adequately support and fund community development.

Budget 2023 provides for:

- Increased support for the Community and Voluntary sector, increasing from €18.3m to €19.7m, with supports for volunteering seeing an increase of €1m, an increase to SICAP of €2m and funding relating to Public Participation Networks increasing by €0.4m
- A 5% increase in expenditure on Traveller and Roma initiatives
- Funding to promote LGBTI+ equality and inclusion is increasing to €1.055m for 2023.²¹
- €10 million for the Gaeltacht and community sectors as part of a €60 million fund to subsidise energy bills
- 7% increase for Community Services Programme
- €11m for the community sectors' ongoing Ukrainian integration work.
- Increased investment in rural development programmes

In terms of community development, there was a marginal increase of 4%²² on last year's funding but this is far below the needs of the community sector. NWC had called for an increase to women's community organisations to meet their full costs, including decent terms and conditions for workers in the sector. There are a diverse range of organisations and groups delivering key frontline services and advocacy for women and there are a number of funded programmes that engage with and deliver vital services directly to women in local communities including the Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme and the budget dedicated to Family Resource centres. It is not clear if the €2m of the Tusla increased funding will be allocated to the budget heading of the National FRC Programme which is a distinct community development programme within the C & V sector. However, demands on these funds has grown exponentially, most recently, as a result of the Covid pandemic and the Ukrainian crisis. An increase of 4% into community development will not provide the additional resources to meet additional demand. We need to move towards the development of progressive, multi-annual funding and meaningful investment which allows services and organisations to adequately respond to these challenges and to plan in a sustainable way.

Funding was ringfenced for the Peace Plus IV funding, in addition to €100m into the Shared Island Fund. This is a welcome allocation for furthering cross-border investment and cooperation. However, NWC had specifically called for a targeted 'Women's Fund', to increase the participation of women in peacebuilding and reconciliation. Evidence demonstrates that women in peace processes are more likely to focus on reconciliation, economic development, and transitional justice – all critical elements of a sustained peace. Despite this, women's contribution to conflict prevention and peace remains undervalued and under resourced.

The Programme for Government identifies a need for greater diversity and gender equality in local government and commits Government to proactively support "measures to increase the participation of women and wider diversity in local government, through awareness and capacity building, candidate

²¹ DCEDIY (2022). Budget 2023 statement. <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/d422b-minister-ogorman-secures-1bn-investment-in-early-learning-and-childcare/>

²² Social Justice Ireland Budget 2023 analysis (page 19) <https://www.socialjustice.ie/publication/budget-2023-analysis>

training, research and other incentive schemes and programmes”. Rather than increasing investment in Local Government there was a 13% decrease in funding for 2023. Women are consistently underrepresented in local and regional decision-making structures. Women councillors have sought to increase their influence through the development of local and regional caucuses across Ireland. The absence of additional funding to sustain this work is disappointing.

Housing

Housing costs in Ireland are a staggering 78% more expensive than the EU average and this is a key factor in the rising cost of living.²³ Average rents of €2000 plus mean the capital is the third most expensive city for renters in the EU. Lone parent families are the highest proportion of families living in emergency accommodation, the vast majority having been made homeless from the private rental sector. The high cost of rent plays a key role in lone parent poverty. When rent is deducted from income, half of one parent families are at risk of poverty (50%).²⁴

Budget 2023 committed to a €500 rent tax relief for 2022 and 2023. Given the extremely high cost of rent, this will do little to address affordability. However, many women will not even be able to avail of this small support. The tax credit is not available to those receiving rent supports like Housing Assistance Payment (HAP). 54% of renters are in receipt of supports for housing costs.²⁵ Around three fifths of those in receipt of HAP are women.²⁶ By opting for a tax credit approach, lone parents will receive less support for housing costs than a two-parent family (who can avail of two credits if both parents are working) even though they may have similar housing costs. In addition, those working less than 30 hours at the National Minimum Wage do not earn enough to benefit.²⁷

A 2016 national study on women’s homelessness found that 10% of participants identified as members of the Traveller community.²⁸ Funding of €20m is allocated in 2023 for the delivery of Traveller-specific accommodation.²⁹ However, there was no specific mention of funding for a statutory Traveller Agency with powers to approve and enforce Local Authority accommodation.

Budget 2023 allocated €213m to cover costs in relation to international protection accommodation. However, the Minister acknowledged that further funding will be required to meet the accommodation needs of refugees from Ukraine and other regions.³⁰

Climate

International research has established that as climate impacts increase, existing inequalities, deprivation and exclusion will be worsened, with the worst impacts on women.³¹ Climate change mitigation and adaptation policies also have gender-differentiated impacts and must include a gender equality analysis if they are to be effective and fair.³² Unfortunately we saw little recognition of this reality in Budget 2023.

²³ Eurostat (2022). [Comparative price levels in Ireland 2020](#).

²⁴ CSO (2021). SILC 2020

²⁵ ESRI (2022). Low income renters and housing supports. https://www.esri.ie/system/files/publications/RS141_1.pdf

²⁶ DPER (2018). [Social Impact Assessment Series Social Housing Supports](#)

²⁷ ESRI (2022). Post budget analysis briefing, Spencer Hotel, 30.9.22

²⁸ Harvey, B (2021). [The Traveller community and homelessness](#).

²⁹ Government of Ireland (2022). Budget 2023 expenditure reports. Part II. Expenditure Allocations.

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/eb6ec-budget-2023-expenditure-reports/>

³⁰ Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. Press conference on Budget 2023. 28th September 2022.

³¹ European parliament-The Gender Dimension of Climate Justice 2015

³² European Committee of the Regions (2022). [Gender equality and Climate change: towards mainstreaming the gender perspective in the European Green Deal](#)

Budget 2023 did deliver a number of one-off measures to help people with increasing energy costs, including a further electricity credit of €600 at a cost of €1.3bn. Measures also included a one-off Fuel Allowance payment of €400 and an expansion of the Fuel Allowance scheme to make more older people eligible for this support. However, in expanding the Fuel Allowance scheme, Budget 2023 failed to open up the scheme to Carer's Allowance recipients and working families on low incomes. Lone parent households, predominantly led by women experience greater fuel poverty³³, and eligibility was not extended to those on Working Family Payment which would have particularly benefitted lone parents. An analysis of targeted compared to universal measures shows that additional Fuel Allowance payments are a much more progressive use of public funds than a universal energy credit.³⁴ Although the additional funding for retrofitting in 2023 is welcome, the target of 37,000 houses is unacceptably low when we are in a climate, energy and cost of living crisis. A core solution to energy poverty and reducing our emissions footprint is more insulation and retrofitting so people will have warmer homes, and lower bills with less pollution.

A just transition requires significant investment in creating the conditions for a low carbon economy, including public transport. In Ireland, 20% of journeys are "companion journeys" which include driving children to school, a responsibility primarily of women, so making it safer, easier and cheaper for children to get to school without needing a car would have a significant impact on household costs, oil imports and pollution.³⁵ More money for school transport is welcome, but we need a guaranteed school bus place for every child who lives more than 1km away from school³⁶.

The continuation of the 20% fare reductions for public transport for 2023 is positive but it should be permanent, and we must continue to reduce the cost of public transport and develop a cost-benefit analysis of introducing free public transport. For example, Germany has reduced public transport costs by 90% across all transport. In addition, the €360 million a year for cycling and walking infrastructure is good but we know that local authorities have been failing to spend it and government direction to drive this transformation is needed.

Taxation

Tax plays a key role in shaping Irish society through funding our public services and social infrastructure, supporting economic activity and progressively redistributing resources. Ireland needs to increase its tax take in a fair, progressive, sustainable and gender sensitive way. Of the €1.26bn allocated to tax initiatives in Budget 2023, 67% of this was allocated to benefit higher rate taxpayers.³⁷

One of the key measures in Budget 2023 was to increase the Standard Rate Cut Off Point by €3,200 to €40,000. Revenue data indicates that around 77% of workers are either exempt or pay tax at the standard rate³⁸ so only a minority of workers will earn enough to benefit from this measure. Since women are more likely to be part time and low paid workers³⁹, it is likely that this measure will further entrench income inequalities experienced by women. Unlike the one-off cost of living payments, this is also a permanent measure.

³³ Helen Russell, Ivan Privalko, Frances McGinnity & Shannen Enright, Monitoring adequate housing in Ireland (ESRI 2021).

³⁴ Parliamentary Budget Office (2022). Pre-Budget 2023 PBO Commentary https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/parliamentaryBudgetOffice/2022/2022-09-19_pre-budget-2023-parliamentary-budget-office-commentary_en.pdf

³⁵ CSO (2020). [National Travel Survey 2019](#).

³⁶ FOE (2022). [5 point plan to cut bills save energy and reduce pollution - may 2022.pdf \(foe.ie\)](#)

³⁷ Social Justice Ireland (2022). Budget 2023 analysis and critique. <https://www.socialjustice.ie/system/files/file-uploads/2022-09/Budget%202023%20Analysis%20-%20Full%20Document.pdf>

³⁸ Revenue (2023). Budget 2023 ready reckoner. <https://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/documents/statistics/ready-reckoner.pdf>

³⁹ Median pay for women is 37,462.00 and median pay for men was 44,105.00 in 2020. CSO (2021). Mean and median annual earnings.

This measure also has a hidden regressive cost in that it reduces the resources available to government, in 2023 and beyond, to spend on essential public services that can help to address inequalities. It represents a further hollowing out of the tax base.

Budget 2023 also failed to standard rate pensions tax expenditures. The State spends approximately €2.4bn per annum in private pension tax relief with highly regressive effects. In 2014, 72% of pension tax relief went to the top 20% of earners.⁴⁰ Men benefit from two thirds of the fiscal support offered by this system⁴¹, which means that State funding actively drives the gender pensions gap. Standard rating pensions tax expenditures would have provided an additional €423 of revenue⁴², based that could help to fund a universal pension. A universal state pension is the best way to support women and those who encounter barriers to the labour market, including disabled people, carers, lone parents and Travellers.

⁴⁰ Collins, M.L. & Hughes, G. Supporting Pensions Contributions through the tax system. IEA Conference 2017

⁴¹ Collins, M. (2020). Private Pensions and the Gender Distribution of Fiscal Welfare. *Social Policy & Society*: (2020) 19:3, 500–516

⁴² Revenue (2020). [Post budget ready reckoner](#).