

NYCI Budget 2026 – Youth Issues analysis

Executive summary

A number of measures in Budget 2026 will have a positive impact on Ireland's youth population. The efforts to reduce homelessness, invest in apprenticeships, improve access to CAMHS and support for Traveller young people are all welcomed by NYCI; particularly the budget's commitment to fund the national programme of child and youth participation.

However, on the whole, Budget 2026 represents a plateau for young people. While many of the programmes and initiatives introduced in past years have been maintained, the government have missed opportunities to address pressing youth-specific issues such as sub-minimum rates of pay, equalising Jobseekers Allowance for U25s, student contribution fees and free public transport for U25s.

With the Youth Homelessness Strategy concluding in 2025, a decision on sub-minimum rates of pay deferred until 2029, and over 4,400 children on waiting lists for CAMHS, the coming year represents a critical juncture for young people as NYCI urges the government tackle these issues head-on, with the urgency they deserve.

1. Ending Youth Homelessness

What NYCI Asked for

NYCI called for the government to ringfence dedicated funding for a successor Youth Homelessness Strategy starting January 2026 following the conclusion of the existing strategy at the end of 2025.

What was announced in the Budget?

Budget 2026 made no commitment to a successor strategy to the Youth Homelessness strategy.

Comment and Analysis

The Department of Housing did announce enhanced funding allocation of €563.5 million up from €328m last year to support the provision of homeless services. This includes emergency accommodation, homelessness prevention initiatives, tenancy sustainment supports, and transitional accommodation for individuals experiencing homelessness. NYCI await further detail, but this funding must include a dedicated and ringfenced funding source to prevent and tackle youth homelessness.

2. Equalise Jobseekers Allowance for U-25s

What NYCI Asked for

NYCI advocated for the equalising of the U25s Jobseeker's Allowance in budget 2025 as over 9,000ⁱ young people face incomes at least 46% below the minimum essential standard of living in Irelandⁱⁱ.

What was announced in the Budget?

The Government did not equalise Jobseekers Allowance for U25s, maintaining their position that this measure prevents long-term welfare dependencyⁱⁱⁱ

Comment and Analysis

Budget 2026 continues to deny young people equal access to Jobseeker's Allowance. This unequal treatment assumes youth unemployment is a choice, not a circumstance, ignoring the reality of a competitive, unstable job market while forcing young people into financial hardship.

3. Abolish Sub-minimal Rates of Pay

What NYCI Asked for

NYCI advocated for the abolition of sub-minimum rates (SMR) of pay in budget 2025 as recommend by the Low Pay Commission in 2024. Under the current legislation, an 18-year-old working a 40-hour week will earn over €100 less than a 20-year-old colleague for doing the same work.

What was announced in the Budget?

The government did not abolish SMR of pay in this budget. In fact, on the 25th of September Minister Peter Burke outlined this government's commitment to defer any decision on SMR of pay to 2029.^{iv}

Comment and Analysis

Budget 2026 has perpetuated a discriminatory pay structure that undervalues young workers and deepens income insecurity. Sub-minimum wage rates are fundamentally unjust. They assume young people's labour is worth less, even when they're doing the exact same job. This budget was a missed opportunity to implement the expert recommendation of the Low Pay Commission to abolish these discriminatory rates.

4. Fund Youth Mental Health Services

What NYCI Asked for

NYCI Campaigned for the Child and Youth Mental Health Action Plan to be allocated the full funding required to deliver the 16 key actions with-in the plan.

What was announced in the Budget?

Budget 2026 includes funding to increase access to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) and Traveller Mental health initiatives alongside funding for the "Sharing the Vision – A Mental Health Policy for Everyone (2020–2030)". One of the priorities of the "Sharing the Vision" policy over the next two years is to deliver the Child and Youth Mental Health Action Plan^v.

Comment and Analysis

Increased access to CAMHS and Traveller mental health services is a much needed and welcome investment given that there are over 4,400 children and young people are on waiting lists to access these services ^{vi}. Furthermore, NYCI welcomes the governments ongoing commitment to the "Sharing the Vision" policy and urges the Minister to ensure that this results in the delivery the Child and Youth Mental Health Action Plan 2025–2027.

5.Reduce Third-level Fees and Abolish Apprenticeship Contributions.

What NYCI Asked for

NYCI called for the reduction of the student contribution fee by €1,000 permanently in budget 2026 and the abolition of contributions for apprentices.

What was announced in the Budget?

The government announced a permanent reduction of €500 in the student contribution fee alongside increased investment in apprenticeships.

Comment and Analysis

Last year students paid €2,000 in student contribution fees, this year they will pay €2,500. This real increase of €500 is out of line with previous government commitments and will add additional financial strain on young people and their families.

While increased investment in apprenticeships is also welcomed, a greater focus on measures to retain apprentices, such as the abolition of apprentice fees, will also be required to create a sustainable apprenticeship program.

6.Introduce Free Public Transport for U-25s

What NYCI Asked for

NYCI recommended the introduction of free public transport for under 25s in Budget 2026.

What was announced in the Budget?

Budget 2026 contained no provision for free public transport for under 25s, while the reduced rate for 18–24-year-old will be retained.

Comment and Analysis

NYCI welcomes the retention of the reduced rate of public transport fares for 18–24-year-olds, however Ireland has missed an opportunity to provide greater opportunities for young people a chance to connect with peers, explore their

communities and lead more fulfilling lives with the introduction of free public transport for U-25s.

Other announcements relevant to young people

Department of Children, Disability and Equality

- Funding of €2m supporting the implementation of actions under the National LGBTIQ+ Inclusion Strategy II 2024-2028.
- €6.8m allocated to implement the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy II 2024-2028.
- Funding is being allocated to promote equality for women and girls. This includes funding to implement the successor to the National Strategy for Women and Girls.
- Funding is being provided to operate the national programme of child and youth participation.
- Additional 1,400 Day Service places for young people who will leave school in 2026

Department of Housing

- Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) and other advocacy services will receive funding of €24 million
- Renters' tax credit extended for three years at its current level of €1,000 for an individual or €2,000 for a couple.
- Increase in funding for homelessness provisions

Department of Further and Higher Education

- Income thresholds for Susi grants will rise by €5,000 to €120,000 per household

ⁱ Parliamentary Question [30691/25]

ⁱⁱ $\frac{\text{U25 rate of JA}}{\text{MESL Single Adult (urban)}} = \frac{€153.70}{€287} = 53.55\%$ **OR** $\frac{\text{U25 rate of JA}}{\text{MESL Single Adult (Rural)}} = \frac{€153.70}{€353} = 43.54\%$

ⁱⁱⁱ Parliamentary Question [30691/25]

^{iv} Parliamentary Question [50574/25]

^v Pg 19, [Sharing the vision a mental health policy for everyone implementation plan 2025 to 2027](#)

^{vi} [HSE Response to PQ \[38171/25\]](#)