

BUDGET 2027
**SECURING
FOUNDATIONS**



OUR MEMBERS

Amnesty International

An Óige

AsIAM Ireland

BeLonG To Youth Services

Blakestown & Mountview Youth Initiative

Boys Brigade

Catholic Guides of Ireland

Central Remedial Clinic

Cherry Orchard Integrated Youth Project

Church of Ireland Youth Department

Coláiste na bhFiann

Crosscare

ECO-UNESCO

EIL Intercultural Learning

Feachtas

Finglas Youth Resource Centre

Foróige

Friends of Africa

Gaisce – The President’s Award

Girls Brigade Ireland

Girls Friendly Society

ICTU Youth Committee

Involve Youth Service Ltd

Irish Association of Youth Orchestras

Irish Girl Guides

Irish Methodist Youth & Children’s
Department

Irish Red Cross Youth

Irish Refugee Council

Irish Second-level Students’ Union

Irish Traveller Movement

Irish Wheelchair Association

Killinarden Community Council
Youth Project

Labour Youth

Localise Youth and Community Service Ltd

Macra na Feirme

Migrant Rights Centre Ireland

No Name Club

Ogra Fianna Fail

Ógras

Order of Malta Cadets

Rutland Youth Service CLG

Scouting Ireland

Solas Youth

Sphere 17 RYS

SpunOut.ie

St. Andrew’s Talk About Youth Project

St. Vincent de Paul Youth

Swan Youth Service

Tiglin

Traveller Visibility Group

Union of Students in Ireland

Voluntary Services International

West End Youth Centre

YMCA Dublin

YMCA Ireland

Young Fine Gael

Young Irish Film Makers

Young Social Innovators

Youth Theatre Ireland

Youth Work Ireland

PRE-BUDGET 2027 SUBMISSION AT-A-GLANCE

SECURING FOUNDATIONS

WHY YOUTH WORK MATTERS

Young people need safe spaces and opportunities to build trusted relationships, develop skills and increase their confidence. Youth work provides these supports, and it leads to stronger, more connected communities for all of us.

OUR AMBITION FOR BUDGET 2027

Stability first. Youth work services across Ireland are under pressure. Rising costs and limited resources are putting existing provision at risk. Our immediate ambition is not expansion. It is viability.

We need to ensure that services can continue without:

- ✗ Cutting programmes
- ✗ Reducing opening hours
- ✗ Turning young people away

Only by stabilising current services can the sector engage in strategic planning and deliver on national policy commitments, including Opportunities for Youth, with additionality emerging naturally from services that are adequately funded and secure.

RECOMMENDATION



€27.3 million will keep youth work open, accessible and supporting young people in every community

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

€13.5 million

15% increase in Existing Levels of Service

€13.75 million

Additional capital funding for youth spaces (in addition to €4 million already committed in the NDP)

WHAT THIS DELIVERS

This investment will:

- ✓ Secure the sustainability of existing youth work services
- ✓ Support the staff and volunteers delivering essential programmes
- ✓ Maintain access for young people who rely on youth work in their communities
- ✓ Provide safe, suitable places and spaces for youth work to happen

National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI)

The National Youth Council of Ireland is the representative body for voluntary youth organisations in Ireland.

Our member organisations work with, and for, up to 380,000 young people in every community in Ireland, with the support of 40,000 volunteers and 1,400 paid staff. NYCI functions to represent the interests of young people and youth organisations and its role as the National Representative Youth Work Organisation is recognised in legislation (Youth Work Act, 2001).

The work of NYCI is based on principles of equality, social justice and equal participation for all. In achieving these aims, the NYCI seeks the emergence of a society in which young people are valued and supported to achieve their full potential.

youth.ie

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Introduction

Youth work in Ireland is a cornerstone of our society, providing young people with the spaces and opportunities to build relationships, explore their identity, develop skills, and increase their confidence.

The relationships young people have with themselves, others, and their communities matter. All young people should have access to the relationships, resources, spaces and opportunities that they need to live a fulfilling life. This is where youth work comes in. In this pre-budget submission, we make practical recommendations regarding critical investments required to strengthen the youth work sector and improve outcomes for young people.

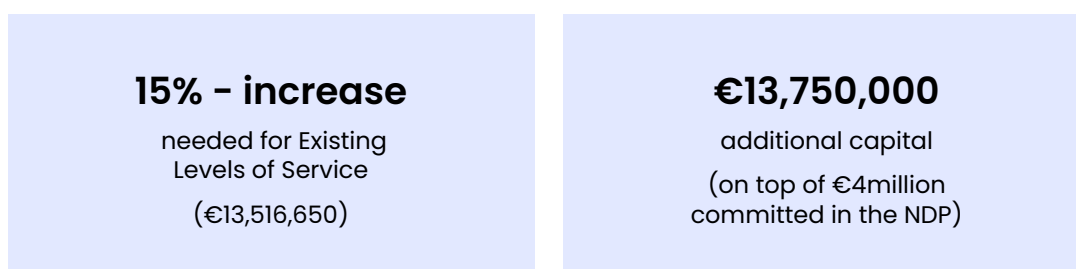
NYCI AMBITION FOR BUDGET 2027

The ambition for NYCI, agreed through our membership following extensive consultation, for youth work in Budget 2027 is simple: ensuring the sustainability of our existing youth work services, ensuring they are viable and can continue to offer programmes without threat of curtailment of services to those young people already accessing them. The immediate ambition is not expansion, but viability: ensuring that youth work services can continue without the risk of cutting programmes, reducing opening hours, or turning young people away. Only by stabilising the present can the sector realistically engage in strategic planning and deliver on the ambitions set out within *Opportunities for Youth*.

PRE BUDGET 2027: IN NUMBERS



WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?



RECOMMENDATION

To secure the foundations of youth work and ensure that existing services remain viable, *well-resourced*, and able to continue delivering *high-quality* support to young people, Budget 2027 should provide an additional €27.3 million. This investment must stabilise core provision, support the staff and volunteers who deliver essential programmes, and include increased capital funding to provide safe, suitable places and spaces where youth work can take place.

Youth work

Youth work offers young people the safe spaces and opportunities to explore their identity, build relationships, and develop essential life skills. These experiences are beneficial both in the short term and long term, supporting mental health, helping young people find their path, and equipping them with the skills and confidence to succeed in life.

Youth work is diverse and adaptable, catering to the varied needs and interests of young people. Young people are not a homogenous group, so choice and variety are essential in youth work; It includes clubs, groups, projects, and support services that provide young people with the opportunities to learn, grow, and contribute to their communities. This variety is what makes youth work so valuable and essential.

Youth work is a non-formal educational process which takes place in a range of contexts and settings to support a young person's personal, social and educational development. It is voluntary, which makes it unique from many other areas of young people's lives such as school and it is focused on improving wellbeing, not just through the consideration of their physical, mental, or emotional health, but also the surrounding contextual influences that affect them.

WHY DO WE NEED TO SUPPORT YOUTH WORK?



Youth work services play an essential role in improving outcomes for young people by providing safe spaces, support and new opportunities.”¹



While young people need multiple services in their lives, they value youth work because it is different from school and specific support services: it is open, informal, and they engage by choice rather than being referred or required to attend. Youth work volunteers and paid staff build voluntary trusted relationships with young people, providing a safe space and fun and engaging activities to nurture young people's skills and interests.

Ireland has undergone significant changes, and amidst the burgeoning crises that dominate the news, it is the ambitions, skills, and positivity of our growing youth population that lie at the heart of our collective future. The transformational impact of youth services and trusted relationships on young people enhances their life skills, strengthens their communities, and benefits society at large. Let's support it.

¹ Government of Ireland (2025) Programme for Government 2025. Securing Ireland's Future

The protective role of youth work has never been more important. When young people lack stable support systems, their exposure to risk increases. High quality youth work acts as a powerful protective factor: it provides steady guidance, emotional support, and developmental opportunities that help young people build resilience and form healthy relationships. It strengthens communities by giving young people a stake in local life and by reducing the conditions in which harm can take root. 2025 polling from REDC for NYC1 shows that 89% of the Irish public recognise the importance of investing in youth clubs, centres, and services, not only as a break from the pressures of digital life but as essential supports for mental health and wellbeing. The interim and main reports of the *Online Health Taskforce* reinforce this.

Foundational Principle No. 2 of the Online Health Taskforce's report *Online health and rights for Ireland's children and young people*² states that all relevant Government strategies, legislation, and funding mechanisms should work coherently to ensure that young people's online and offline spaces enable them to be safe, healthy, to learn, grow, and thrive. The Chair's essay, "Rooted in Reality: Investing in Spaces to Thrive and Places to Belong,"³ outlines how offline engagement opportunities are integral, not additional, to tackling online harms.

2 Department of Health. (2025b). Online Health Taskforce Report. Online health and rights for Ireland's children and young people . [Online] Available from: https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/b192b694/Online_Health_Taskforce_Report_Final_Sept_2025.pdf

3 Department of Health. (2025a). Online Health Taskforce Interim Report [Online] Available from: https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/20250323_Interim_Report_of_the_Online_Health_Taskforce_March_2025.pdf p23

BUDGET 2027

Securing the Foundations

To maintain current levels of youth work service and deliver the actions in *Opportunities for Youth*, a baseline uplift is required, alongside targeted multiannual capital for youth spaces.

Youth services consistently report that it is extremely difficult to plan for future needs when the foundations of current provision remain fragile. Many organisations describe operating at subsistence levels, with insecure funding, escalating demand, and issues with recruitment and retention constraining their capacity to engage in meaningful strategic development. Indeed, 88% of respondents to NYCf's member survey said they had concerns over whether they will have sufficient funds to provide services over the next 12 months.

There is significant concern that the reality of existing services who are struggling to sustain core provision is being ignored. Without stabilising the present, services cannot be expected to plan effectively for the future or deliver on the ambitions set out within *Opportunities for Youth*.

RISKS OF UNDERFUNDING

“**Less flexibility, staff feel under pressure and are time poor. Brain drain continues. Recruitment is difficult. General costs are making programme budgets difficult. Some funding streams are difficult to manage because costs will go up between quotes and money coming. Also unrealistic time frames”**

NYCf Member organisation response to Member Survey 2026



→ Service erosion:

Without a baseline uplift, more services face real terms cuts (reduced hours, fewer places, curtailed outreach) despite rising need.

→ Infrastructure lag:

Failure to meaningfully invest in capital and infrastructure has left communities without suitable youth spaces, reducing safe, prosocial engagement options.

→ Higher future costs:

Delayed investment compounds need and leads to larger corrective budget asks later, as well as higher spending in adjacent systems (education reengagement, mental health, justice).

Recent incremental increases have helped maintain continuity, but they have not yet created the stable platform needed for youth work to fully realise its contribution to national priorities. A structured baseline uplift in Budget 2027, alongside targeted multiannual investment, would allow services to plan with confidence, meet growing demand, and sustain quality provision as Ireland's youth population evolves. Investing now ensures that youth work remains an impactful service that strengthens communities, supports wellbeing, and advances Government commitments. Early and sustained investment is the most effective way to secure better outcomes for young people.

EXISTING LEVELS OF SERVICE (ELS) FUNDING IN BUDGET 2027

The underlying economic reality for youth services remains unchanged: recent uplifts have not protected services from real-terms contraction. Inflation, pay and non-pay cost pressures, and increased demand have outpaced annual budget increases. The priority for Budget 2027 must be to prioritise securing the substantial baseline investment required to make existing youth services viable and sustainable.

Inflationary pressures, increased employer costs, and population growth are placing sustained demand on frontline youth services. Moderate funding increases in recent years have not been sufficient to maintain real service levels; instead, most youth organisations are experiencing effective contraction. This challenge is already evidenced in the annual City of Dublin Actual Cost Exercise, which identified an 8.1% shortfall in 2026 simply to maintain existing UBU service provision. Without a baseline correction, services will continue to erode, undermining the State's ability to meet current commitments and future needs.



Our biggest financial challenges are staffing-related. Retaining staff and managing their workload is difficult, and we urgently need additional funding to hire at least one more team member to handle the increasing demands and ensure current staff are not overworked."

NYCI MEMBER ORGANISATION RESPONSE TO MEMBER SURVEY 2026



Significant disparities between allocated budgets and the true costs of delivery, particularly in areas such as staff and volunteer retention, operational overheads, and programme sustainability, exacerbate the challenges faced by youth work clubs, projects, and services. With ongoing cost pressures, these services find themselves with limited options. The increasing expenses for energy, rent, equipment, and essential programme resources force many services to either cut back their hours or reduce the programmes and activities available to young people. While existing service levels are understood to mean keeping projects going at the current levels, the reality is that persistent cost pressures face clubs, projects, and services. As these pressures remain unaddressed, the options available are limited: many services face the difficult choice between reducing their hours, scaling back on staff, or cutting back on programmes and activities offered to young people. This situation not only impacts the accessibility and quality of services but also leads to longer waiting lists, and ultimately, reductions in the levels of service.

Engagement with our members consistently shows substantial gaps between the allocated budgets and the actual costs of delivering services, especially in areas like staff and volunteer retention, operational expenses, and programme sustainability. This unintended contraction of service capacity is occurring at a time when demand is rising, and the nature of presenting needs is becoming increasingly complex. Youth workers are supporting young people experiencing greater pressures and issues; issues that require time, skill, and stability to address effectively.

It is also important to recognise the deep, long-established network of youth work infrastructure across the State, much of it embedded in communities experiencing persistent disadvantage. The social capital built over years of committed, relationship-based work means these services are trusted spaces for young people and families. This trust not only benefits young people directly but also enables other parts of the State to reach and support them more effectively, from mental health services to education, community safety initiatives and targeted interventions. Without baseline increases and multiannual funding to sustain this infrastructure, youth work clubs, projects and services will be increasingly constrained in their ability to offer essential supports, undermining both their impact and the wider ecosystem that relies on their presence.

The current ELS funding allocation for the Youth Affairs is €90,111,000. However, following extensive consultation with our members, we know that in order to maintain existing service levels, a significant baseline funding increase is required to address the persistent actual costs pressures facing clubs, projects and services.

Baseline increases must be aligned with actual costs to directly support staffing, volunteer development and supports, programme budgets, and operational costs, ensuring clubs, projects and services can meet the growing demand. For that reason, NYCI recommends a 15% increase in the ELS funding for Youth Affairs in 2027.

	Total	Increase
15% increase	€103,627,650	€13,516,650

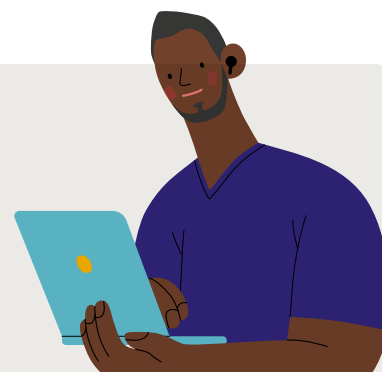
CAPITAL INVESTMENT

There is no doubt that additional support for infrastructure and utilities is required for youth work organisations. Many youth organisations operate in aging buildings that require substantial upgrades to meet current safety and accessibility standards. Without dedicated capital funding, these organisations are unable to invest in necessary renovations or expansions, leading to environments that may not fully support the increasingly diverse needs of young people.



Two satellite projects operate from portacabins and require upgrading and modernisation. Our main building has issues with pyrite and we will have to relocate at some point to enable repairs to be carried out"

NYCI Member organisation response to Member Survey 2026



This chronic underfunding not only impacts the physical infrastructure but also places additional strain on operational budgets, as resources are diverted to address urgent maintenance issues rather than being invested in programme development and delivery.

However, investment cannot be limited to maintaining existing provision alone. Population growth, the development of new communities, and evolving youth needs require the establishment of new youth services, new, fit-for-purpose facilities or co-located youth services. Planning and investment in community infrastructure should be responsive to the needs of young people and youth work services, with facilities that are visible, accessible and capable of supporting a wide range of programmes and outreach activity. Without dedicated capital funding to expand the network of youth spaces, alongside current expenditure to staff and operate them, the State will be unable to extend the reach of youth work to areas of unmet or emerging need, undermining the goal of ensuring that every young person has access to safe, empowering spaces within their community.

Young Person's Facilities and Services Fund (YPFSF)

The Young Person's Facilities and Services Fund (YPFSF) was rolled out in 1998 with the overall aim to attract at risk young people in disadvantaged areas into facilities and activities that could divert them away from the dangers of substance misuse. The purpose of the fund was to assist in the development of youth facilities, in disadvantaged areas where a significant drug problem existed or had the potential to develop, with a view to attracting young people in those areas, at risk of becoming involved in drugs, into more healthy and productive pursuits.

While substance misuse remains a concern in many communities, the range of harms impacting young people has broadened dramatically. Online harms, rural and social isolation, mental health pressures, and the impacts of poverty now intersect with the traditional challenges of disadvantage. Moreover, these issues are not confined to areas of disadvantage; they are increasingly experienced by young people in diverse communities, underscoring the need to ensure that all young people have access to the supports and opportunities necessary to thrive.

	2027	2028	2029	2030
NDP Allocation	€4m	€4m	€4m	€4m
NYCI NDP Ask	€17.75m	€17.75m	€17.75m	€17.75m
Budget Ask Additional	€13.75m	€13.75m	€13.75m	€13.75m

NYCI recommends the creation of a €75 million Young People's Spaces, Facilities and Services Fund, building on the legacy of the original YPFSF. In the first instance, the NDP investment for youth affairs in the NDP sectoral plan for Education and Youth should be increased.

Policy Context

OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH: NATIONAL STRATEGY ON YOUTH WORK AND RELATED SERVICES 2024–2028

Opportunities for Youth: National Strategy for Youth Work and Related Services 2024–2028 sets out 3 strategic objectives and 18 priority actions designed to strengthen the visibility, accessibility and service quality of youth work, improve co-ordination, support workforce needs, and reinforce the data and evidence base underpinning youth policy and service-delivery.

However, to realise the objectives of *Opportunities for Youth*, the immediate priority is to consolidate and strengthen the core base of youth services. Budget 2027 provides the moment to ensure that existing provision is sustainable, resilient, and equipped to deliver consistently for young people. By securing the fundamentals, the Strategy's ambitions can be implemented with confidence and coherence.

A well funded, sustainable core is the platform from which innovation and additionality naturally emerge. When services are not preoccupied with short-term survival, they can expand reach, enhance quality, and contribute more fully to youth policy goals. *Securing Foundations*, the Youth work sectoral Budget ask, is therefore not simply a Pre-Budget funding request but an essential step in enabling the Strategy to translate into meaningful, measurable progress for young people.

Opportunities for Youth provides the national framework for strengthening visibility, access, quality and sustainability across youth work. Having set the strategic direction, the challenge shifts from vision to implementation. Budget 2027 is therefore pivotal: it is the moment where the Strategy's ambitions must be underpinned by the current and capital investment required to consolidate existing provision and build the infrastructure envisioned in the Strategy.

The Budget ask for 2027 supports the implementation of *Opportunities for Youth* in two important ways and together, they operationalise OFY's ambition to enhance visibility/ accessibility, embed rights and equality, and deliver quality, accountable, sustainable services guided by evidence:

→ **ELS** consolidates and sustains the *core engine* (workforce, quality, outreach, coordination) that delivers on the three strategic objectives day-to-day.

→ **Capital** provides the *places* that make those objectives real in communities, at scale and over time.

OFY Strategic Objective	Why ELS funding is essential	Why Capital is essential
The role of youth work services in enhancing the lives of young people is strengthened, more visible and better aligned with other services.	Sustained core funding keeps existing provision stable so services can actually deliver the broad range of offerings, outreach and flexible approaches envisioned.	Fit for purpose, accessible, safe spaces make youth work visible and reachable in communities and allow colocation/linkages with other services.
An equality and rights-based approach is embedded across all youth work services and supporting structures.	Core funding is the platform for universal and targeted provision to operate side by side, sustain active outreach to groups facing barriers, and resource participation structures for young people; it also supports capacity building on rights/equality.	Capital investment can remove environmental/ access barriers (location, layout, accessibility, safety), ensuring spaces feel like places of belonging, safety and empowerment for diverse cohorts.
Youth work services are high quality, accountable, sustainable and shaped by relevant data and evidence.	Sustainable baseline funding can begin to address recruitment and retention issues, it supports implementation of quality frameworks, and enables proportionate reporting/ measurement so investment is transparent and impact focused	SO3 explicitly states that planning and investment in facilities and infrastructure must respond to youth needs; multiannual capital lines enable strategic, data led development and renewal of youth spaces over time.

MEDIUM TERM EXPENDITURE FRAMEWORK (MTEF) 2025–2030

This year's pre Budget submission for the youth work sector is framed within the Medium Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) 2025–2030, recognising the shift toward multiannual expenditure planning across Government. The MTEF emphasises fiscal sustainability, spending adequacy and spending efficiency, criteria that increasingly shape Budget decisions and Departmental negotiations.

the MTEF provides a structured lens through which to frame the youth work sectoral budget ask, ensuring it is both realistic and forward-looking. Under the MTEF, budget proposals must demonstrate Fiscal Sustainability, Spending Adequacy, and Spending Efficiency. Youth Work aligns naturally with these pillars:

- ➔ baseline funding is required to stabilise current provision (sustainability),
- ➔ expansion is needed to meet medium and long-term needs of a growing youth population (adequacy), and
- ➔ investments in data, evidence, and youth spaces support targeted, cost-effective delivery (efficiency).

NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

On 28th January 2026, the Department of Education and Youth published the NDP Sectoral Investment Plan for the 2026–2030 period. This followed on from the review by the Government of the National Development Plan and its publication in July 2025. NYCJ welcomes in the plan that:



The overarching vision is to ensure that all young people have access to safe, inclusive, fit-for-purpose spaces that support meaningful engagement, development, and participation.”



However, of the €7.55 billion allocated to the Department of Education and Youth, only €20 million—just 0.265%—is designated for youth affairs.

The plan notes that NDP funding of €20 million will be used to deliver as best as possible on commitments in the Programme for Government, relating to the Local Youth Club Grant Scheme and the rollout of the UBU Scheme, but also that the strategic direction for youth services will be guided by the Opportunities for Youth framework, with a particular focus on Strategic Objective 2, and Actions 9, 10, and 13.

NYCI recognises the Department’s positive step in explicitly stating that *“this marks the first time that the youth sector has had clear visibility and certainty regarding capital funding over a multiyear period⁴.”* Establishing a defined capital ceiling under the NDP is indeed an important milestone. It enables more structured planning, improves value for money, and supports coherent longterm development of youth facilities by youth organisations and ETBs. This visibility represents a significant cultural shift towards multiannual thinking for the sector.

However, certainty alone does not equal sufficiency. A capital allocation of €20 million is not commensurate with national demographic growth, the needs of rapidly expanding communities, or the strategic commitments set out in *Opportunities for Youth*. Nor does it align with the broader objectives of the NDP review, which seeks to deliver transformative infrastructure, improve living standards, and support sustainable, inclusive communities. The ambition of the Department’s Strategy is clear; the scale of investment required to deliver it is not yet reflected in the current capital envelope. For that reason, annual capital investment for youth services to 2030 must be increased.

⁴ Parliamentary questions 545, 546, 547, 554, 555, 556 of 3th February 2026
Available from: <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2026-02-04/545/>



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