



## Budget 2022

# Keeping our Promise to Children

Early Childhood Ireland has always recognised that childcare is an essential public good that vindicates children's rights to care and education and supports them and their families.

The importance of early years and school-age childcare and the vital role it plays in our society has been brought home by COVID-19. On 12 March 2020, the pandemic forced the closure of all settings but on 29 June, with specific public health and additional funding supports in place, many reopened and have remained open since, unlike any other education sector. This has provided continuity of care and education to children, supported parents, played a special role in caring for the children of essential workers, and enabled the economy to reopen at a time of unprecedented crisis.

COVID-19, while highlighting early years and school-age care as essential, also exposed a sector facing major sustainability challenges. Historical state underinvestment, complex funding streams and dependence on high parental fees had created an operating model so fragile that it warranted a bespoke version of the Employment Wage Subsidy Scheme in order to remain viable. The scheme currently supports 80% of salaries in childcare settings, more than in any other sector.

## Early Childhood Ireland's Priority for Budget 2022

On foot of a national crisis, an unstable childcare system is no longer acceptable. It is not a discretionary or optional service. To ensure we transition to a resilient future, Early Childhood Ireland calls on the Government to meet the commitment in the national early years strategy, First 5, to at least double investment by 2028.

**In Budget 2022, the government must begin to meet this target by increasing funding and announce the plan to achieve it over the following six years.**

The case for increased investment, although never more urgent, is also informed by Ireland's consistent position in the lowest ranks of funding in early years care and education in Europe. The Programme for Government has committed to reforming and investing in Childcare, yet in Budget 2021, despite significant investment in other essential services, childcare funding was not increased.

We seek a full realisation of these commitments. Every child should have access to high-quality care and education. Budget 2022 must see government keep its promises to children, their parents and to the thousands of professionals in our essential sector.