



# **Government's proposal to Dáil Éireann for spending on Children, Equality, Disability, Integration & Youth in 2021**

*Vote 40 in the Revised Estimates for Public Services 2021*

## **A Note...and a Data Visualisation Presentation**

This Note serves as a 'gateway' to our [Flourish Data Visualisation presentation](#) on Vote 40 (Children, Equality, Disability, Integration & Youth) in Government's [Revised Estimates for Public Services 2021](#). By using the presentation, you will be able to understand the context and analyse voted spending in a more accessible way than by using a 'traditional' publication.

Please launch the [Data Visualisation presentation](#) using **Firefox, Edge or Chrome**.

## **Reading time is only 10 minutes in total...**

- ✓ This Note – a two-minute read; and
- ✓ The Data Visualisation – an eight-minute read.

## **Key Messages**

1. Following the realignment of several Vote Groups during 2020, Vote 40 (Children, Equality, Disability, Integration & Youth) now consists of five programmes: A - Children & Family Support, B - Sectoral Programmes for Children & Young People, C - Policy & Legislation, D - 'An Equal & Inclusive Society', and E - 'A Fair & Efficient Support System for International Protection Seekers'.
2. The total gross allocation proposed for Vote 40 is €1.9 billion – up €82 million on the final 2020 allocation. Within the Vote, programmes A and B account for 85% of the total Estimate for 2021, at over €1.6 billion (€892 million and €730 million respectively). At €229 million, programme E is the next largest programme.
3. The Vote has the third lowest proportional and actual Estimate allocation for capital spending across all Vote Groups in 2021. However, if implemented, plans to introduce an alternative reception and accommodation service to Direct Provision will see significant increases in capital spending requirements.
4. Subheads introduced to programmes A and B to allocate specific COVID-19 pandemic support payments from the Vote in 2020 have been effectively closed in 2021. It is unclear if the all funded measures related to the pandemic have ceased or whether the funding for such measures has simply been folded into the general expenditure subheads in these programmes.
5. No year-on-year increases in programme or subhead Estimates are what might be considered fiscally significant – relative to the size of the existing budgets. While the proposed increases to childcare subsidy and related subheads in programme B total €157 million (+ 29%), this increase returns spending in the sector to the same level as the pre-pandemic Estimate for 2020 (€638 million).

## Key Messages continued...

6. Estimated spending on Direct Provision accommodation is expected to increase to over €229 million in 2021 (+€21 million). The Estimate for 2021 would be the largest allocation for Direct Provision to date reflecting the need to provide safer living conditions during the pandemic for those in the system and the existing difficulties for some residents in exiting the system and securing alternative accommodation.
7. Programmes C and D account for 4% of the total Vote 40 Estimate for 2021 (€36.7 and €30.1 million respectively) and relate to the support of several vulnerable groups in society.
8. The metrics provided in the Revised Estimates against each programme in Vote 40 are of limited value in aiding the scrutiny of the Voted spending. While annual reports of Tusla (programme A) and Pobal (programme B) would offer greater clarity as to the effective use of public monies in these areas, the most recent data is for 2018 and does not offer context on future spending nor the impacts that the pandemic may have had.
9. The PBO welcomes the use of Equality Budgeting within the Vote (programmes B and D) and a future expansion of the measurements being used to convey results in this area.

## Why are the Revised Estimates important?

- » Even the smallest Vote Group in the Revised Estimates would, in the context of the private sector, be considered a large company in budgetary terms.
- » The Voted spending detailed in the Revised Estimates sets out the bulk of all spending on public services. Most of the remaining spending is outside of the direct control of central government.<sup>1</sup> The spending set out in the Votes allocates the money that is raised through taxation/borrowing and how Government will spend it on providing public services.
- » Constitutionally, the sole and exclusive power of making laws for the State is vested in the Oireachtas. The High Court has stated that budgetary allocation and taxation are key features of the representative duty of each Dáil Deputy.<sup>2</sup> The primary way the Dáil undertakes this duty is through the reference of the Revised Estimates for individual Votes to its Select Committees for scrutiny, prior to consideration for approval on the floor of the House.

## Voted spending developments prior to the COVID-19 pandemic

The PBO Note, [An Overview of the Revised Estimates for 2020](#), sets out pre-pandemic voted spending from 2016-2019 and the originally planned spending for 2020. It provides context for the level of 'core' spending and associated priorities before the Government's COVID-19 response.

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<sup>1</sup> For more detail about the composition of public expenditure, and why Voted Expenditure makes up the key portion of it for Dáil Scrutiny please see [General Government Expenditure: How its composition constrains decisions about government spending](#).

<sup>2</sup> Article 15.2.1 of *Bunreacht na hÉireann* and *Collins v. Minister for Finance* [2013] IEHC 530.



## Estimates for Public Services – The Process

Dáil Éireann must scrutinise and approve the Revised Estimates for the full budgetary allocation of a Vote to be spent. Up to 80% only of the proposed allocation for year x-1, as set out in that year's Appropriations Act, is available until the Revised Estimates for the current year (x) are approved.

Do you want to understand the role of the Oireachtas in the provision of public services? Click [here](#) for a PBO infographic.

The Estimates process is **not** over when the Revised Estimates are approved:

- » Some Departments do not spend all the money they are allocated; and
- » Others regularly under-estimate how much they need, or unexpected events lead to additional spending and thus to Supplementary Estimates.

The Revised Estimates are published two months after the *Estimates for Public Services* that accompany the Budget (as part of the *Expenditure Report*). They provide greater detail and update the spending proposed in Budget 2021. This additional information should, in theory, help Dáil select committees when they meet Ministers to scrutinise the public services to be provided in 2021.

The design of the Revised Estimates continues to hamper effective Dáil scrutiny of the money spent on public services. PBO [Publication 5 of 2021](#) (a 2-minute read) explains why.

Some Departments have made progress in the *Revised Estimates 2021* by explicitly linking subheads (money/inputs) to performance information. The bodies/Votes which have made progress are:

- ✓ Department of the Taoiseach (2);
- ✓ Office of Public Works (13);
- ✓ National Shared Services Office (18);
- ✓ Environment, Climate and Communications (29);
- ✓ Enterprise, Trade and Employment (32);
- ✓ Housing, Local Government and Heritage (34); and
- ✓ Army Pensions (35).

The PBO commends this progress which enhances transparency and makes scrutiny of the Revised Estimates by the Dáil and its Committees more straightforward. **The PBO would encourage other Departments to follow such best practice.**