Understanding Financial Supports in Foster Care

5th November 2026

Irish Foster Care Association

Purpose:

To share information about the financial supports available to Foster Carers.

To understand the criteria attached to these and in which contexts they might apply.

To signpost to where you can get more information and check for eligibility.

Note: Information is from 5/11/25 and may change over time due to changes in policies, social welfare payments, revenue criteria etc.
This session cannot describe all individual circumstances and confirm eligibility but strives to signpost participants to where they can get more information.

Overview on Payments to Foster Carers Budget 2026

The allocation for Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, stands at €1.336 billion. This brings the overall figure allocated to the Department of Children, Disability and Equality in Budget 2026 to €7.04 billion, which is a 15% increase on Budget 2025.

Section 1: Tusla Payments	Section 2: Social Welfare Payments	Section 3: Other Financial Items
• Foster Care Allowance • Enhanced Foster Care Allowance • Setting up Allowance • Day Fostering Allowance • Additional Payments • Exceptional Payments • Retainer • Respite • Adoption Maintenance Allowance • Family Placements • Home Improvements • Supported Lodgings • Aftercare Allowance/Grant • Aftercare & Education • Travel Rates • General Indemnity Scheme	• Child Benefit • Domiciliary Care Allowance Disability Allowance Carers Allowance, Benefit, Support Grant • Increase for Qualified Child Dependent Jobseekers Allowance	• National Childcare Scheme (NCS) & Early Childhood Care and Education Scheme (ECCE) • Medical Expenses Passport Fees • Brief Introduction to Pension Credits • Tax and Inheritance • IFCA legal Insurance

Section 1
Tusla Financial Payments in Foster Care

Foster Care Allowance – Child Under 12 Years	€400	Day to day costs; does not include medical/additional costs. *not reckonable for taxation or welfare purposes.
Foster Care Allowance **Child Over 12 years**	€425	Day to day costs; does not include medical/additional costs *not reckonable for taxation or welfare purposes.

Enhanced Foster Care Allowance	For enhanced needs where there is a requirement for high levels of personal care and supervision	Up to a maximum of twice the standard Foster Care Allowance rate can be paid. **Example of max amounts from November 2024:** €425+€425=€850 (Child Over 12) €400+€400=€800 (Child Under 12)	Discuss with Link Worker in first instance. Area Manager/Service Director can authorise this payment.

Setting Up Allowance *Refers to first foster care placement only	Budget 2025 allocated funding to new placements – now active.	€400 – Under 12 €425 – Over 12	Current Standard Operating Procedures to be read in conjunction with National Financial Payments Policy for Alternative Care *Awaiting updated policy

Respite Rate for Child under 12 years	Calculated per overnight 1/7th of the Foster Care Allowance	€57.14 = 1/7th of FC Allowance	Note this payment refers to payment to Respite Foster Carers.
Respite Rate for Child over 12 years	Calculated per overnight 1/7th of the Foster Care Allowance	€60.71= 1/7th of FC Allowance	Note this payment refers to payment to Respite Foster Carers.

Note: Respite can take place up to 8 days per month depending on need. If Respite exceeds 8 days in a month, the Foster Care Allowance paid to the Foster Carer will be deducted by 1/7th per each full day/overnight (24 hours) of respite received.

A Respite Carer who cares for over 4 days receives the full Foster Care Allowance.

Day Fostering for Children under and over 12 years	Less than 4 hours = Over 4 hours =	€20 €40	Used for Respite purposes mainly *TBC how this will be aligned for 2026 *Awaiting updated policy
Enhanced Day Fostering Allowance	For enhanced needs	Varies	Area Manager/Service Director can authorise this payment.

Additional Payments	One off or short-term payments are provided. e.g., re medical costs, educational, dental, travel etc (**routine medical/ dental procedures/referrals are via HSE/medical card) Dental Costs for Children Dentists will not accept medical cards. If additional orthodontic care is needed by the child, apply via the child's Social Worker for payment of this.	Amount varies	Discuss with the child's Social Worker in the first instance. Any request for additional payments are recommended by the Principal Social Worker and then authorised by the Area Manager. (page 5 of National Policy: Financial Payments/Allowances in Foster Care, Aftercare, Supported Lodgings and Adoption Maintenance) Foster Carers may be asked to make a contribution, the amount of which is agreed on a case-by-case basis with the Social Worker.

Exceptional Payments/Allowances in special circumstances	For special circumstances an exceptional payment can be made, e.g. death, illness, other.	Amount varies	Any request for additional payments are certified* by the Principal Social Worker and approved by the Area Manager. (page12 of National Policy: Financial Payments/Allowances in Foster Care, Aftercare, Supported Lodgings and Adoption Maintenance) *Supporting documentation/ certificates need to be provided

Retainers when child leaves a placement	Maximum of 6 weeks Foster Care Allowance equivalent can be received See section on Foster Care Allowance above for the rates.	Foster Care Allowance weekly rate x up to 6 weeks	For exceptional circumstances - made as an additional payment Speak to your Fostering Link Worker in the first instance to see if this applies to you.

Adoption Maintenance Allowance	To ensure that the child is financially secure and to enable the child to access any additional supports needed	Payment is aligned to the rates of the Foster Care Allowance.	Allowance will be based on the needs of the child and decision will be made as part of the fostering to adoption assessment. Reviewed yearly.

Family Placements	For babies born to young women in foster care.	Standard Foster Care Allowance rate applies for the baby if the baby is received into care and is cared for by the Foster Carer who is also caring for the young mother. No additional payment applies if the baby remains in the care of the young mother while the mother remains in her own foster placement.	Date of payment is from the date the baby is placed in the foster placement.

Home Improvement Financial Assistance **NB: SPEAK WITH YOUR LINK WORKER IN THE FIRST INSTANCE AROUND THE PROCESS.** These financial supports relate to requests for financial assistance towards the cost of household extensions made to improve living facilities for children in long-term foster care and to prevent overcrowding. In previous years the price of extensions to houses could be met mainly from the funding available through the County Council supports, currently set at €30k. - Tusla 2025	For household extensions which will improve living facilities for children in long term care	Maximum payment payable has been increased – TBC - was previously 15K *Awaiting updated policy	Each application is dealt with on a case-by-case basis. Apply via Social Worker to Area Manager and to be signed off by Service Director.

Exceptional Payments/Allowances in Special Circumstances	In the case of death, serious illness, or exceptional needs. Agreed arrangements can be considered.	Amount varies	Speak to Fostering Link Worker in the first instance. *Certified by Principal Social Worker and approved by the Area Manager. *Certs/documentation required.

Supported Lodgings Supported Lodgings is accommodation for young people aged 16+ who are unable to live at home but not ready to live independently. The supported lodging provider supports the young person to develop skills to prepare for living independently.	Payments re: supported lodgings may vary but are due to come in line with the Foster Care Allowance following review.	Policy is currently under review. *Awaiting updated Policy	Refer to Social Worker/Team Leader to initiate payment.

Aftercare Allowance Aftercare plans are based on an assessment of need carried out by the Aftercare Worker in collaboration with the young person, their Foster Carer and Social Worker in advance of their 18th birthday. Request a review where there is a change in circumstances. Appeals can be made to Aftercare Worker and Aftercare Manager. **Tusla (2017) *Aftercare Policy 2017*, Tusla Child and Family Agency, available here.**	To support young adults pursing full time education or accredited training including the National Learning Network.	€300 per week – No change 2026 Budget but policy under review as part of Tusla Strategy.	Paid weekly for young people leaving care who meet the eligibility criteria as per Aftercare Policy 2017(paid to Foster Carer/supported lodgings provider if living with them or directly to young person if living independently). **Paid up to age 21 years or 23 years if the young person is still in full-time education**

Aftercare Grant for moving to independent living	One month's rent and deposit. Plus a Setting Up Home allowance.	As set out by Dept of Social Protection. €300 once-off payment.	This is agreed as part of the Aftercare Plan for the young person and is separate to payments made under the SUSI grant.

Aftercare in relation to Further Education **Queries: Drop into an Aftercare service, see more here.** Note: Special considerations for support can be made via Aftercare Worker to Aftercare Manager for consideration by the Principal Social Worker and approval by the Area Manager	**SUSI Grant:** Young people can apply for the SUSI grant via Aftercare Worker/Foster Carer or themselves directly. The SUSI grant will be payable to young people in care irrespective of the income of their foster carers. Maintenance (help with living costs) and fees grants are available under SUSI - see table online here. **Higher Education Access Route & Disability Access Route to Education:** HEAR & DARE Scheme via CAO: Allows entry to college on reduced points. See: **www.accesscollege.ie** for information on college/further education. **PLC Courses:** Medical Card covers Government Contribution fees & Tusla pay for fees **Overseas Courses (that are not available in Ireland and are accredited** Tusla will consider fees. Discuss with the young person's Social Worker

Student Updates – Budget 2026

Permanent €500 reduction in the student contribution fee – the first permanent reduction since free fees were introduced in 1995. Apprentices in higher education will also see an up to 17% cut to their contribution, applied on a pro-rata basis.

More families will qualify for student grants - the income threshold to receive a SUSI student contribution grant will rise to €120,000

€79 million investment in apprenticeships

30,000 students to get more support when living or travelling away from home - from September 2026, SUSI non-adjacent payments will rise by €200–€430, with a pro-rata increase this academic year - helping students who live 30km or more from their college campus with the cost of rent, travel, and day-to-day living.

Travel Rates

Funding allocated in Budget 2025 for mileage costs for Foster Carers.

*Awaiting updated policy

Currently Tusla pay mileage for any mileage over 150km related to the child's attendance at family contact visits or medical/therapeutic appointments on a single journey.

Or

A total mileage (including family contact visit, medical/therapeutic appointments, school etc) can be claimed back in excess of 300km per week.

Example 1

Foster Carer travels 600km per week, they can claim back 300km x civil service rate.

Example 2

Travel for access in a week of 278km, they can claim back 128km.**Rate paid in line with current civil service rates.*

You can find out more ***here****.*

Current Mileage Rates (from 1 September 2022) *no change

Distance band	Engine capacity up to 1200cc	Engine capacity 1201cc - 1500cc (This band applies to electric vehicles also)	Engine capacity 1501cc and over
Up to 1,500 km (Band 1)	41.80 cent	43.40 cent	51.82 cent
1,501 - 5,500 km (Band 2)	72.64 cent	79.18 cent	90.63 cent
5,501 - 25,000 km (Band 3)	31.78 cent	31.79 cent	39.22 cent
25,001 km and over (Band 4)	20.56 cent	23.85 cent	25.87 cent

Source : www.revenue.ie

General Indemnity Scheme via Tusla

Covers Foster Carers for personal injury/third party property (e.g. house or car*) damage when carrying out their duties as a Foster Carer, as per their contract with Tusls (does not apply to car damaged in a car accident as this would be covered by own motor insurance).

Covered under the General Indemnity Scheme (GIS)

Personal injury claims & third-party property damage

Report to the State Claims Agency via Tusla: legalhelpdesk@tusla.ie

Irish Foster Care Association (2021) GIS State Indemnity Guidance: State Indemnity For Foster Carers – overview, available here.

The full range of Tusla financial supports available are contained within Tusla National policy on financial payments in Alternative Care (2021) *Awaiting updated Policy due by December 2025

[Link: Tusla (2021) National Policy: Financial Payments/Allowances in Foster Care, Aftercare, Supported Lodgings and Adoption Maintenance.]

Section 2
Social Welfare Payments

Social Welfare Payments

(that can be applied for when a child is in foster care where eligible)

Child Benefit Further information available here Parents retain the child benefit payment for 6 months after their child has been taken into care, After that it is transferred to the Foster Carer and 'follows the child'. The Foster Carer makes the application for Child Benefit. Processing time may vary – once processed the payment is backdated to the beginning of the child's placement. To move this along, Foster Carers can contact the Dept. of Social Protection and send them on a letter of support from the child's Social Worker	Monthly universal payment for ALL children Child Benefit will be extended to children aged 18 who are in full-time education, training or has a disability and lives with you.	€140 per child	Can be claimed by the Foster Carer after the child has been in care for 6 months. The payment thereafter should follow the child.

Child Support Payment	Increase per child in a household	**Child under 12:** €50 full rate **From Jan 2026 increasing to:** €58 **Child over 12:** €62 **From Jan 2026 increasing to:** €78	Foster Carers on certain social welfare payments can apply for this payment

Back to School Allowance ***IFCA are actively campaigning for the means testing of the BTSA to be removed.**	Foster Carers are now eligible to apply for the Back to School Allowance if they are on a qualifying social welfare payment.	Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance rate of €160 extended to children aged 2 and 3, who are eligible for this allowance.	Foster Carers on certain social welfare payments can apply for this payment

Disability Allowance Further information available here. ***Double one off payment due in December 2025**	For young people/adults with a disability over age 16	Currently €244 per week (personal rate) Budget 2026: Rate increasing by €10 for all rates from Jan 2026 Increasing to €254 personal rate.	Must meet the criteria to be eligible: ▪ Have a medical assessment stating disability/medical condition expected to continue for a year or more ▪ Be aged between 16 and 66 ▪ Be substantially restricted from doing work suitable to age, experience and qualifications ▪ Pass a means test ▪ Live in Ireland - ‘habitual residence condition’.

Jobseekers Allowance	For young people 18-24 with care experience classed as 25+ Jobseekers rate…	€244 per week *Increasing by €10 from January 2026	Further information available here.

Domiciliary Care Allowance The law says to get Domiciliary Care Allowance, a child must have "a severe disability requiring continual or continuous care and attention, substantially in excess of the care and attention normally required by a child of the same age". (Citizens Information 2024) Further information available here. ***Double one off payment due in December 2025**	For children under 16 with a disability, needing substantial care	€360 per month - increasing to €380 per month from Jan 2026.	This is not means tested and can be applied for by a Foster Carer whose child meets the criteria re disability.

Carers Benefit https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/social_welfare/social_welfare_payments/carers/carers_benefit.html You may be able to get Carer's Benefit if you care for a child who qualifies for Domiciliary Care Allowance . You do not have to be the person who gets the allowance for the child to be their carer **Rates may vary if caring for more than one person**	For carers leaving work to meet the needs of an adult or child in need of full-time care. To check eligibility, see: https://www.gov.ie/en/service/455c16-carers-benefit/#how-to-qualify	Max rate €261 (per week/for one person) Budget 2026: Increasing by €10 from January 2026 Should be eligible for Fuel Allowance with this payment Carer's Benefit income disregard currently is rising to €1000 in 2026 for a single person.	Must be under age 66, meet criteria and have enough PRSI contributions. Can be paid up to 2 years If qualified can avail of a GP Visit card. Note: **Carers Benefit is classed as income for tax purposes..**
Carers Allowance https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/social_welfare/social_welfare_payments/carers/carers_allowance.html **Note: Rates vary for Carers Allowance if caring for more than one person**	For carers caring for a person (aged16 years+) in need of full-time care Max rate for one person: €260 Increasing by €10 from January 2026 To check eligibility: https://www.gov.ie/en/service/2432ba-carers-allowance/#how-to-qualify	Max rate €260 (under 66/1 person) Max rate €298 (over 66/1 person) Increasing by €10 for both rates from Jan 2026. **Once-off double payment in Dec 2026** Should be eligible for Fuel Allowance with this payment. Carer's Allowance income disregard currently is rising to €1000 in 2026 for a single person and €2000 for a couple from Jan 2026.	No age limit rates vary for under 66 and over 66, must meet criteria. Means tested. **Classed as income for tax purposes**. Note: additional welfare benefits such as Free Household Benefits package and free travel may be possible; can also apply for PRSI contributions.

Carers Support Grant If you are in receipt of the Domiciliary Care Allowance, Carers Allowance or Carers Benefit you are automatically eligible for the Carers Support Grant. For eligibility, see link here. And also Citizens Information here.	Yearly grant paid to carers of people needing full time care that are receiving Carers Allowance, Carers Benefit or Domiciliary Care Allowance	€2,000 from June 2025	Paid annually in June once the criteria is met for the relevant allowances listed

Other social welfare rates may apply depending on circumstances

For further information visit:

https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-social-protection/publications/budget-2026/

Section 3
Other Financial Items

National Childcare Scheme (NCS) & Early Childhood Care and Education Scheme (ECCE)

National Childcare Scheme (NCS): Provides financial support to help families with their early learning and childcare costs.

The NCS is available to those caring for children or acting in loco parentis from birth to 18 years to support associated childcare costs.

Speak with your Link Worker or the child's Social Worker as Tusla will apply for the subsidy of your behalf under what is called 'Sponsor Referral'.

There is no income assessment and there are no fees in the case of Sponsor Referral to the NCS.

For more information on the Sponsor process, you can contact the NCS Sponsors Team by phone at **01 906 8535** or by email at sponsors@ncs.gov.ie.

This scheme covers cost of participation in summer camps for children receiving afterschool care as long as the service provider is registered with both the NCS and Tusla and the camp takes place during the official business hours of the service.

For more information, see**: www.ncs.gov.ie and Citizens Information.**

Early Childhood Care and Education Scheme (ECCE):

The ECCE Early Childhood Care and Education Scheme provides early childhood care and education for children of pre-school age. The scheme is offered in early years settings (pre-schools, Montessori's, creches, playgroups) for 3 hours a day, 5 days a week, 38 weeks of the year. Children are eligible to start the ECCE scheme in the September of the year that they turn 3 years old.

Access & Inclusion Model (AIM)

The Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) is a child-centred model, involving seven levels of progressive support, moving from universal to the targeted, based on the needs of the child and the pre-school provider. AIM is designed to enable children with disabilities to access and fully participate in the ECCE programme.

The NCS scheme above can be used to subsidise hours outside the pre-school hours. Early Start is another option for children aged 3-5 for children not reaching their potential in school.

More information here and here. And Early Childhood Ireland

*** As part of the National Childcare Scheme Budget 2026 provides increased funding for Childcare Provision. Also, increased funding provided for ECCE & AIMS schemes for more see Budget 2026.**

Medical Expenses

Medical Exam for Foster Carer Review

- As part of your Foster Carer Review, you will be asked to attend for medical review with your GP
- Entitled to reimbursement
- Submit your receipt to your Link Worker

Prescription Charges

Passports

Tusla now covers the cost of a child’s passport fee

Passport fees reimbursed by submitting receipt to your Fostering Link Worker.

Pension Credits

Foster Carers can claim back credits for periods of home caring through one the following schemes re State Contributory Pensions:

Homecarers Scheme For Periods up to 20 years, more details here. and here.

Longterm Carers scheme: for periods of 20+ years – more details here

You are required to have 520 contributions which is equal to 10 years of paid credits to qualify for the State Contributory Pension. For those who have never worked outside the home the entitlement is the non-contributory pension payment.

When applying, Foster Carers are not required to give details of children in their care. However, a letter from the Social Work Department stating the length of time you have been fostering and the terms/periods of time you had children placed in your care needs to be submitted.

For further info: Dept. of Social Protection, Tel:

(01) 471 5898 or 0818 690 690

Tax & Inheritance

Income tax

- Foster Care Allowance is not reckonable income for the purpose of income tax
- Finance Act 2005 (Act 5 of 2005) Finance Bill 2005 (Bill 1 of 2005). Available at: https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/bills/bill/2005/1/

Gifts and inheritances – when a foster child is named in a will

- Group A Threshold
  - Foster child can qualify for 'Group A threshold', must meet certain criteria;
  - Group A threshold refers to the child as a son, daughter, stepchild or certain foster children
  - Applied where a foster child has resided with a foster carer for 5 years or more and have been cared for by the foster parents' expense.
- Group B Threshold
  - Foster children recognised for eligibility under Group B Capital Acquisitions Tax threshold based on their relationship to certain foster relatives or other individuals fostered by the same foster parent.

See following links for more information:

- Revenue
- Capital Acquisition Tax Thresholds for 2026 remain as for 2025: Group A: Children (including adopted children, stepchildren, and certain foster children) threshold is €400,000 New Capital Acquisition Tax Threshold – CKT
- Revenue Budget 2026 summary

IFCA's Legal Expenses Insurance Scheme

IFCA Legal Expenses Insurance Scheme

Available to Foster Carers who are current IFCA Members only

Optional extra to your IFCA membership

€40 per annum

For more info see:

Irish Foster Care Association

Legal Expenses Insurance Cover

What does this Insurance Cover?

IFCA's Legal Expenses Insurance Scheme

Legal Advice Service

The policy also provides a 24/7 legal advice helpline Tel: 0818 670 747 for all fostering related queries.

Specialist advice is available Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm.

Will advise on other issues outside of fostering activities, if necessary, e.g. motor and non-motor matters, disciplinary hearings, employment issues, personal injury etc.

Access to a 24hr counselling helpline. This is an independent confidential service providing counselling support over the telephone for anyone aged over 18 in your home.

This may be one-off assistance and where appropriate, you may also access up to six sessions of structured telephone counselling.

IFCA’s Legal Expenses Insurance Scheme

- Insurance covers legal expenses incurred in the event of an allegation being made against Foster/Relative Carers or members of their family permanently residing within the household. (Limit of cover is €65,000;this amount has been ample to cover any claim to date).

- ARAG extended the policy in 2022 to include solicitor’s attendance with Foster Carers at Stage 2 CASP interviews and any written response necessary following these interviews.

- The policy must be active when the alleged incident occurs to avail of the legal cover. Claims made for an alleged incident taking place while the policy is active can be made at any subsequent date. Claims made for an alleged incident taking place prior to the inception of the policy or after it lapses are not covered.

- All those residing permanently in the household, with the exception of the children or young persons in care or aftercare, must be named on the policy in order to be covered by it.

- **Please call 01 4599474 or email membership@ifca.ie re queries on legal insurance.**

We encourage all Foster Carers to speak with their Fostering Link Worker should any queries regarding financial assistance arise.

FOR FURTHER SUPPORT

IFCA's Helpline and Advocacy Services are available.

Our Helpline is open Monday to Friday, 11am to 3pm.

Visit www.ifca.ie for more information