

include YOUTH

**Response to The Executive Office`s Spending
Plans for 2023-24
Equality Impact Assessment
August 2023**

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Include Youth

Include Youth is a rights-based charity for children and young people in or leaving care, from disadvantaged communities, or whose rights are not being met. We work to improve their employability, personal and social development enhancing inclusion, integration and good relations. We work with over 800 young people a year aged between 14-25. Our main offices are in Belfast, Armagh, Ballymena, Derry, Enniskillen, Newtownards and Omagh.

The young people we work with and for include those from socially disadvantaged areas, those who have had poor educational experiences, those from a care background, unaccompanied asylum seeking children and young people, young people with mental health issues, young people who have come into contact or are at risk of coming into contact with the justice system, misusing drugs and/or alcohol, at risk or experience of CSE. We provide a range of tailored employability programmes for these young people, including programmes delivered in partnership with community-based organisations.

One of our programmes, the Give & Take Scheme, adopts a youth work approach to improving the employability and increasing the self-esteem and confidence of young people aged 16 to 24 who are not yet ready to participate in mainstream training. We work across 9 primary sites and a number of outreach locations. The core components are personal development, mentoring, training, work experience, essential skills and transitional support.

Many of these young people have experienced social exclusion, poverty or have other complex challenges in their lives and therefore need additional support to overcome these barriers and positively progress their education, training or employment needs. Seventy-five per cent of young people on the Scheme are care experienced, while over a third have had contact with the youth justice system.

Include Youth also engages in policy advocacy work in a range of areas including employability, education, mental health, youth justice and policing. This work is informed by relevant international human rights and children's rights standards, is evidence based, including that provided by young people and practitioners and is based on high quality, critical analysis.

Our Care for Change project which started in September 2022 will employ 15 care experienced Expert By Experience (EBE) Youth Mentors over two years and across 6 Give and Take sites. Our current Youth Mentors are being trained and supported to mentor other young people to become change makers and policy advocates and to contribute to consultations and policy responses, meet with decision makers and co-facilitate focus groups.

General Comments

We welcome the opportunity to comment on the Budget 2023-2024 EQIA. Include Youth recognises that the Department is facing the most challenging budget in history and that difficult decisions will be made to meet the demands within the funding available.

It is worrying that the Department states that the magnitude of managing the current resource and capital shortfalls will 'undoubtedly have a significant and adverse impact on the Department's ability to deliver public services in 2023-24. As the consultation itself states 'the implications of this year's budget will be felt so keenly in our community'.

It is for that reason that an effective EQIA is critical to ascertain the potential impact of these decisions on the most vulnerable people in our society, including children and young people. Undoubtedly, these budget cuts will have an adverse impact on many of the young people Include Youth works with. It is imperative that TEO engage directly with individuals in Section 75 groups, including children and young people, to assess any adverse impact.

The consultation document notes that:

'it is therefore difficult to assess the impact of service reductions on Section 75 groups. The Department will seek to gather further information on potential impacts through consultation'.

We would be keen to hear how TEO have engaged directly with children and young people as they seek to gather 'further information' and what the plans are to do so in the future. Will a child friendly and accessible version of the document be produced to assist this information gathering?

Of particular note with regard to the Department's budget decisions and the adverse impact on children and young people, is the Concluding Observations and Recommendations of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, published in June 2023, following the recent examination of the UK government's implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Committee sets out clear recommendations to incorporate a child-rights based approach to the budgeting process.

Commenting on allocation of resources, the Committee recommended that the State Party:

'Incorporate a child-rights based approach into the State budgetary process' and:

implement a tracking system for the allocation, use and monitoring of resources for children, with a view to eliminating disparities and ensuring equitability, and assess how investments in all sectors serve the best interests of children;

Introduce budgetary allocations for children in disadvantaged situations and ensure that children are not affected by austerity measures;

Ensure that in situations of economic crisis, repressive measures are not taken without the requirements states in paragraph 31 of general comment NO.19 on public budgeting for the realization of children`s rights, including that children participate in the decision making process related to such measures;

Withdraw the 2023/23 budget for Northern Ireland and fully consider the equality and human rights implications of a new budget, taking all possible steps to mitigate any adverse impact on children`s rights before issuing a revised budget;

Ensure transparent and participatory budgeting in which civil society, the public and children can participate effectively. ¹

Specific Comments

Data:

Central to being able to make informed decisions about what differential impact may be felt by children and young people, is the availability of relevant data and research evidence. The document lists a number of available data sources against which impacts have been considered. While the TEO continue to work towards understanding potential adverse impacts and identifying mitigations, it is clear that the Department has not adequately explored the range of data which exists to inform decisions. It is concerning that the Department state:

‘there is not enough sufficient robust data to determine impact on all Section 75 groups’ and ...’It is therefore difficult to assess the impact of service reductions on Section 75 group’.

Include Youth believe that TEO has not gathered sufficient data to inform important decisions on the allocation of its budget, which will have a lasting impact on children and young people.

¹ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child Concluding Observations on the combined sixth and seventh reports of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, 2 June 2023.

CRC/C/GBR/CO/6-7 Accessible at:

https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRC%2FC%2FGBR%2FCO%2F6-7&Lang=en

Furthermore, the Department has not extracted the data or made it explicit how they have assessed the data to inform decisions. It is not for the public to extract and analyse this data but rather the Department's responsibility to identify how they have used the data to evaluate differential impact. This is a vital aspect of the process and the Department should be transparent about how decisions were made with regard to what programmes they are proposing to cut.

We are opposed to the dramatic reduction for the Central Good Relations Fund and the District Council Good Relations Fund. Adequate justification has not been provided on why these programmes will receive the largest proportion of budget reduction in comparison to other programmes.

We acknowledge that the Department has now issued a Child Right's Impact Assessment (CRIA) for TEO Spending Plans. We note that the Department has encouraged responses to the CRIA by 2nd August, which does not allow sufficient time for organisations to make responses. In our view the CRIA does not provide any further information on the specific impact of spending plans on children, over and above what the EQIA provides. Much of the content of the CRIA is a copy of the details contained in the EQIA. Include Youth are disappointed by the lack of detail in the content of the CRIA. We would be keen to hear what plans TEO have to engage directly with children on the CRIA and if a child friendly accessible version will be made available.

Mitigations:

While a list of potential areas for mitigation are highlighted in para 43, it is unclear how these mitigations will address the adverse impact on specific Section 75 groups, including children and young people. We would recommend making it clearer so that it can be easily seen what mitigations will specifically address inequalities with regard to children and young people.

While TEO have provided a list of `potential areas for mitigation`, many of the proposals are vague and lack detail on what exact actions will be taken to deliver them. It is difficult to comment on these mitigations because it is unclear how they will be achieved. For example, point 43 (f) states that TEO have identified `having regard to situations where there is a legitimate expectation of continued funding` as a mitigation. It would be beneficial to understand what `having regard to` will translate to in practice for specific Section 75 groups. Similarly, point 43 (l) states TEO have identified `working with other organisations in the public, private and voluntary sectors to identify alternative sources of support for groups impacted by the budget allocation` as a mitigation. Which organisations and `alternative sources of support` are TEO considering with regard to implementing this mitigation, and in connection with what Section 75 groups specifically?

Include Youth do not agree that TEO has correctly identified all relevant mitigation that could help reduce the adverse equality impacts of the budget reductions.

Business Areas for Budget Reduction:

Key programmes such as the Central Good Relations Fund and District Council Good Relations Programmes are important projects for children and young people and the proposed reductions in funding to these programmes will most definitely have a detrimental impact.

The proposed reduction in budget will have a negative impact on good relations between people of different religious belief, political opinion and racial grouping.

Given Include Youth's extensive experience of working with young people who are seeking asylum, we are concerned that these budget proposals will further exacerbate the racial discrimination and prejudice that many of the young people we work with have experienced.

The numbers of asylum seeking children and young people coming to NI are increasing at a rapid rate and this is not the time to reduce the good relations work that is being undertaken to address the building of relationships and understanding between different racial groupings.

In a recent focus group discussion with young people participating in Include Youth's Give and Take programme, many of whom were referred to us by the Trusts as Unaccompanied Minors, young people spoke openly about the racial discrimination and prejudice they had experienced since arriving in NI.² This racism had been experienced within the education system, in employment and in sports and leisure contexts.

We have been called many names, I mean two A4 pages wouldn't be enough to write them down on.

For the ones I know who went to school it was so difficult for them, it was about their culture, the kids just made fun of them because they thought that was cool, but it's not, they struggled then in their grades, and they ended up fighting, and having behaviour that effected their grades. They really did not like to go to school. Some were not confident and just went into their shells mentally, so there was no good solution – nothing balanced.

² Include Youth Response to Race Relations Order, June 2023.

[Include-Youths-Response-to-Race-Relations-Order-TEO-June-2023.pdf \(includeyouth.org\)](https://www.includeyouth.org/Include-Youths-Response-to-Race-Relations-Order-TEO-June-2023.pdf)

Yes, I get it (racist abuse) all the time, I used to work in surgery reception and the first one was because I am a woman of colour, the second one was because of my religion, that`s why I don`t work anymore in public facing jobs. I prefer to work just in the back.

.... I just want to do my own thing. ..I feel like racism is coming more at me during 2023, I`ve dealt with it three times, I feel like Northern Ireland is not a safe place for us anymore.

We are particularly concerned about any reduction to programmes working to support the needs of ethnic minority groups.

Concluding Comments

We are more than happy to provide further information if required and are open to facilitating direct conversations with some of our young people, if that would be helpful. We look forward to seeing the results of the consultation.