

# **A record €3 billion budget to modernise, reform and COVID-equip Justice Sector announced by Minister McEntee**

From [Department of Justice and Equality](#)

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The Minister for Justice and Equality, Helen McEntee TD, has today welcomed the highest ever budgetary allocation for the Justice Sector.

The record €3 billion allocation for 2021 will fund the recruitment of extra Gardaí and Garda staff, the reform and upgrade of digital infrastructure across the Justice Sector, the Courts Service modernisation programme, as well as wider changes across the sector.

In addition to the 2021 Budget allocation, Minister McEntee is also in advanced discussions with the Minister for Public Expenditure on securing additional funding for the remainder of 2020 which will allow An Garda Síochána to immediately increase their fleet of vehicles, fund overtime, and buy extra PPE and other equipment to help with COVID-19 and wider policing.

The immediate allocation for 70 new cars will help An Garda Síochána to replace some cars hired for COVID use with new vehicles for permanent use in the Garda fleet. These will be funded by a supplementary estimate for 2020.

Ms McEntee is also pleased to announce extra funding to tackle domestic, sexual and gender based violence, reflecting one of her key priorities as Minister for Justice.

This includes an allocation for the implementation of the recommendations of the O'Malley Report on Protections for Vulnerable Witnesses in the Investigation and Prosecution of Sexual Offences.

In the coming weeks, Minister McEntee will publish a detailed plan on how the recommendations of the O'Malley Report will be implemented.

The €3 billion allocation for 2021 includes:

- up to 620 new Garda recruits and 500 Garda staff, who will help free up more Gardaí for frontline duties
- €42 million to modernise the Justice Sector through increased digital and ICT investment, including €8 million for the Courts Modernisation Programme and €5 million for the Department of Justice ICT strategy
- €27 million for COVID-related measures

- an extra €10 million in capital expenditure and €4.4 million in current expenditure for Forensic Science Ireland
- €2.7 million in increased funding to combat domestic, sexual and gender based violence, as well as support for victims
- an extra €2 million to fund additional staffing for the Data Protection Commission and help it achieve its goal of having well in excess of 200 staff by the end of 2021
- an overall increase of €147 million in current expenditure and €51 million capital funding in the Justice Sector, bringing the total justice increase for Budget 2021 to almost €200 million

James Browne, the Minister of State for Law Reform, welcomed the additional budget funding to support his priorities in the Department of Justice, such as Youth Justice programmes and the establishment of the Office of the Gambling Regulator.

Minister Browne said:

"As a way of tackling and reducing the scourge of anti-social behaviour in our cities, towns and villages, I welcome the increase of €500,000 in Budget 2021 for Youth Justice Interventions, bringing the total allocation for these measures to almost €18 million. This is incredibly important work and I'm delighted to see it being supported, as research indicates that early intervention is crucial in helping young people to turn away from a life of crime.

"I also welcome the additional funding to support the establishment of the Office of the Gambling Regulator in 2021."

## **COVID Measures**

Minister McEntee said:

"We are unfortunately still dealing with the impact of the worldwide pandemic and COVID-19 is therefore central to Budget 2021.

"We must continue to properly fund our frontline services in the Justice Sector as they serve the public throughout the pandemic. Our frontline workers must feel safe themselves while they work to keep us safe."

The main aspects of the specific COVID-19 funding for 2021 are:

- €13 million for PPE for An Garda Síochána
- €5.7 million for increased PPE, cleaning and healthcare costs for the Irish Prison Service
- €5.7 million for the Courts Service, including for additional premises in Dublin and regional locations to enable court sittings to take place in a socially distanced and safe environment
- €0.4 million extra funding for organisations and groups responding to increased service demands from people impacted by domestic abuse during this period. In addition to continuing supports provided during the pandemic, the additional €400,000 for 2021 will provide extra remote counselling services, and help keep helplines open, as well as welfare packs and other practical supports for those most vulnerable

## **Modernisation of services and ICT investment**

Minister McEntee said:

"Driving the modernisation and digital agenda across the Justice Sector to ensure that our services are efficient and easily accessible to all who need them is a key priority for me as Minister for Justice.

"New funding of €42 million builds on previous investment. This prioritisation of technology and modernisation will lead to a significant payback of improved public services right across the sector and I am particularly pleased to have secured additional ICT spending in key areas.

"For Gardaí, time saved on dealing with paperwork in the station means more time on patrol and on the frontline. This will also help the Government implement the reforms outlined in 'A Policing Service for the Future', which followed on from the recommendations of the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland.

"The new modernisation programme in the Courts Service is central to the reforms I want to drive across the justice system. We need to keep pace with the changes in society and this involves increasing the use of the tools and technology that will make it easier and quicker for people to resolve disputes and access justice.

"In the Department of Justice itself, significant ICT development is planned over the next three years. The funding made available in Budget 2021 begins that reform process. In particular, this ICT investment will allow me to reform the immigration area, where too many operations are still paper based, and help speed up services to the public."

ICT spending in Budget 2021 includes:

- Garda ICT - an additional €22 million has been provided for Garda ICT to bring the total allocation to over €70 million for the second year in a row
- a separate specific provision of €7 million has been made for the provision of additional mobile devices and related licensing and maintenance costs under the Garda Mobility project. These devices give Gardaí instant access to real-time, secure information on the roadside across a range of apps which enable them to scan registration plates, identify forged or false driving licences, and detect disqualified drivers, untaxed cars and stolen vehicles
- this unprecedented level of investment will enable continued investment in existing and new ICT systems which are critical to the implementation of the measures in the reform plan "A Policing Service for the Future"
- €8 million for Year 1 of the new Court Modernisation Programme which includes almost €4 million in respect of ICT Investment. The remaining expenditure will enable a dedicated staffing team to be put in place to manage and implement the reform measures supported by professional external expertise
- €5 million for the Justice ICT strategy

## **Garda Vote**

The total gross allocation for the Garda vote in 2021 is a record €1.952 billion. In addition to the increased provision for Covid and ICT measures the funding also includes provision for the following:

- the recruitment of up to 620 new Garda recruits and 500 Garda staff, with the details to be determined at the Commissioner's discretion
- on that basis, there should be 14,700 Gardaí, with a further 300 recruits in training in Templemore, by December 2021 – a total of 15,000. This allows for an estimated 300 retirements and departures next year
- an increase in supervisory ranks at sergeant and inspector level
- maintaining the overtime budget of €95 million for 2021
- additional funding for Garda equipment, including personal security equipment
- €8 million for continued investment in the Garda Fleet in addition to the highest ever investment of approximately €15 million in the Garda Transport Fleet in 2020 – a proportion of which relates to the Garda COVID response
- €34 million for the Capital Building and Refurbishment Programme including, the project to relocate An Garda Síochána from Harcourt Square to a new purpose built building at Military Road in Dublin

Minister McEntee said:

"More Garda recruits and more Garda staff means extra members of the service on the frontline and in specialist units battling organised crime groups and keeping people safe. The government is following through on our commitment in the Programme for Government to continue to train new recruits annually and to remove Gardaí from administrative duties to allow them focus on policing."

## **Justice and Equality Vote**

The Justice and Equality vote increases by €56.1 million (13.4%) on the comparative 2020 allocation, bringing the total gross allocation to €474 million.

### **Legal Aid Board**

An increased provision of over €2 million in 2021 will bring total funding to €44.6 million, a 6% increase. This will enable the Board to recruit additional staff and meet other costs to enhance delivery of its services across the country.

### **Forensic Science Ireland**

Forensic Science Ireland plays a key role in the criminal justice sector and additional funding of €4.4 million in current expenditure and €10 million in capital expenditure has been provided.

The capital budget is almost €51 million supporting the construction of FSI's new state of the art laboratory in Backweston, Co. Kildare, which is well advanced and will further progress during 2021.

Minister McEntee said:

"The importance of the work of Forensic Science Ireland in the justice system cannot be underestimated; FSI expertise provides us with answers based on scientific fact and hard evidence, which are key in both investigation and prosecution. I value FSI's dedication to staying at the forefront of forensic science and am delighted to be in a position to announce an increased allocation for 2021."

Other areas in receipt of additional funding are as follows:

- Criminal Assets Bureau (€0.9m)- total allocation €9.96 million
- Inspector of Prisons resources (€0.75m)- total allocation €1.95 million
- Probation Service (€1.05m)- total allocation for Probation Service €50 million
- Criminal Legal Aid (€3.7m)- total allocation €69 million
- Youth Justice Interventions (€0.5m)- total allocation €14.5 million
- funding for victims of crime (€0.3m)- total allocation €2.2 million
- Criminal Injuries Compensation Tribunal (€7m) – total allocation €11 million
- Coroner Service €10.2m including for the Stardust Inquest - total allocation €13 million
- Parole Board (€0.75m)- total allocation €1.33m – to support the commencement of the Parole Act in the course of 2021
- asylum processing – an additional €1.750m for the efficient functioning of the international protection system
- Gambling Regulator (€0.1m)- total allocation for establishment support €0.2 million
- Judicial Council (€0.5m)- total allocation €1.750 million
- Property Services Regulatory Authority (€0.7m)- total allocation €3 million
- funding for the Free Legal Advice Centres (FLAC) (€196,000) – the department's allocation has been trebled to a total allocation of €294,000 to support these legal services to the most vulnerable

## **Prisons Vote**

The Prisons Vote will have a current expenditure budget of €358.5 million in 2021 and a capital budget of €36 million, mainly to complete the redevelopment of Limerick Prison. This represents an increase of €15 million in the capital allocation for 2021. This project will completely upgrade and modernise Limerick Prison, as well as eliminating the practice of slopping out.

In addition to an increase of almost €6 million in COVID related measures, the Prison Vote has received €1.65 million in additional funding to strengthen corporate governance across the Service.

A further €5.7 million has been made available for a range of other services including security costs, prisoner services and an increased maintenance budget of €2 million for the prison estate.

## **Courts Vote**

The total gross allocation of €158.8 million for the Courts Vote includes an allocation of €8 million for the new Courts Modernisation Programme.

Minister McEntee said:

"The Courts Service has already shown impressive innovation and adaptability during the COVID-19 pandemic, and in maintaining vital frontline services for those who need them, including the most vulnerable victims of domestic abuse."

Additional provision has also been provided for COVID measures.

## **Data Protection Commission**

The Data Protection Commission vote has received an increased allocation of €2 million for additional staff resources to be recruited during the course of 2021.

Following increases amounting to €15.3m over the past 6 years, this brings the allocation for the Commission to over €19 million in 2021, an increase of 13% on this year's budget.

In 2021, funding for the Data Protection Commission will increase more than five fold from its 2015 allocation of €3.647m.

Minister McEntee said:

"I am pleased to be in a position to further increase resources for the Data Protection Commission in Budget 2021, following increases over recent years.

"The DPC has increased responsibilities as the lead supervisory authority to the various multi-national organisations which have their European headquarters in the State. I am also conscious that COVID has increased pressure on the office as people are using more online services.

"Additionally, the legislative provisions of GDPR has set a high bar for the standards of personal data protection and security that citizens can expect.

"I am therefore very much aware of the importance of a well-resourced regulator; it is a matter the government will continue to keep under review in conjunction with the Commission."

## **Policing Authority**

The Policing Authority has a gross allocation of €3.8 million including an additional €350,000 in respect of updated recruitment processes to senior ranks of An Garda Síochána.

**ENDS**

## **Notes**

Gross expenditure budgets for the 6 Votes in the Justice Vote Group total €3 billion and cover the following Votes:

An Garda Síochána (€1.952 billion), Prisons (€394.5 million), Courts Service (€158.5 million), Department of Justice (€474.2 million), Data Protection Commission €19.1 million and Policing Authority (€3.8 million).

A supplementary estimate is used to secure Dáil approval mainly for the provision of additional funding for an existing service and usually occurs towards the end of the financial year.