

MINISTRY FOR THE FAMILY AND SOCIAL SOLIDARITY

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity strives to ascertain an improved quality of life through the provision of:

- sufficient social benefits for individuals and families in need;
- quality social welfare services;
- proper housing in order to boost the local communities;
- appropriate long-term care and quality services for the elderly with a strong concentration on active ageing and keeping such people in the community for as long as possible; and
- the preservation of equal opportunities for all persons with disability.

The above is catered for by a synergy of competent networking, cooperation and good communication between its departments and directorates, mainly: the Corporate Services, HR Management, Department for Social Security, Benefit Fraud & Investigation Department, Social Welfare Standards, EU/International Affairs, Social Policy, Department for the Elderly and Community Care, together with the required IT infrastructure of the IMU. In its commitment to enhance social cohesion, solidarity and social inclusion for all, the Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity continuously seeks to improve the range of services that it offers with a view to efficiently and effectively address ongoing and emerging needs.

CORPORATE SERVICES DIRECTORATE

This Directorate has the following sections falling under its remit: Financial Reporting, Accounts, Accounts Special Items, Advances, Contracts and Procurement, Office Management and Registry, Special Accounts, Social Security Accounts (Benefits), and Reconciliation and Maintenance.

For the first quarter of the year, this directorate continued to provide its support to the Ministry for Social Dialogue, Consumer Affairs and Civil Liberties (MSDC).

This office provided continuous assistance and support to ESF 3.234 - LEAP! Project. This included the issue and evaluation of a number of calls for quotation and tenders. Other ad hoc meetings with the Project Leader and other stakeholders took place in order to meet a number of deadlines and timeframes. Funds were identified and allocated for events in lieu with the opening of Family Resource Centres. Since no pre-financing was available funds were hedged to bridge the gap.

Tender for the Ordnance Street lift was concluded and contract signed with the preferred bidder. Various other tenders and call for quotations for capital projects were issued and works were either completed or kicked off.

Director Corporate Services attended to and participated in all monthly MFSS Project Team meetings in lieu of the Electoral Manifesto proposals. Furthermore, various meetings were held with Project Manager and Proposal Owners in lieu of 2014 and 2015 targets. Where applicable, respective proposal costings were analysed and approved.

Two training courses in collaboration with Department of Contracts were delivered to all MFSS procurement officers in order that by 2015 all departments and entities within MFSS will issue their respective tenders and calls for quotation (RFQs) through this portal.

Financial Reporting

This section was mainly responsible for the drawing up of the monthly financial reporting and Cash flow projections, the quarterly Accrual Accounting report and other submissions as requested by the Treasury and Ministry for Finance. This section was highly involved in drafting replies to Parliamentary Questions (PQs), the preparation and coordination of the 2015 Financial Management and Business Plans and the submissions of the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) return.

Amongst the achievements of the CSR exercise were the elimination of 5 line items under the Programmes & Initiatives and the creation of a new line item – 5790 Public Social Partnerships. Also 6 Capital Votes were removed and replaced by the establishment of Housing Authority under Contributions to Government Entities – line item 6793.

This section also assisted the Department for Local Government in the administration of the Community Inclusive Employment Scheme (CIES). This involved direct communication with the Parliamentary Secretary for Disability and Active Ageing, the Department for Local Government, ETC and a number of Local Councils. This section also prepared consolidated lists of Direct Orders, Variations, Award of Tenders, Quotations, Expression of Interest and Contracts for Service of all Contracting Authorities falling within MFSS portfolio. These lists were then published in the Government Gazette.

This office also provided support to the National Focal Point for Drugs and Alcohol Addiction with regards to the EMCDDA agreement.

Accounts Section

This section processed all kind of payments under the Ministry and the Department of Social Policy votes. This entailed various kinds of payments such as payment vouchers, multi-payments and schedules. The Accounts section constantly kept liaison with all other directorates and entities within the Ministry. It is to be noted that European Structural Funds (ESF) payments have increased considerably mainly due to the LEAP! Project.

This section was responsible for the June and December issue of Bonus to non Government Pensioners, remuneration to Board members and also assisted in compiling information for Parliamentary Questions.

It is to remark that due to changes in cabinet, the amount of Parliamentary Questions asking for financial information was considerable. The dual change in Ministry's and Parliamentary Secretary secretariats resulted in a number of new contracts for telephone services, both for fixed lines and mobile, for Ministry's officials and Advisors. This involved continuous liaising with the main telephony service providers.

Advances Section and Accounts Special Items

This section administered 151 travel advances, one of which included 21 delegates who travelled to Lisbon on a study visit related to the LEAP! Project. Travel arrangements for this trip required a tremendous effort due to the short time-frame.

The MEAIM circular 1/2015 with regards to *short-term training courses abroad on EU-related matters* resulted that a number of MFSS employees made profit of this opportunity. This meant that this section had to liaise with both CDRT and MEAIM in order to process the travel advances and the respective reimbursements.

The officers within this unit made a rigorous exercise to finalise Advance files of the previous year and ensure that 2014 files were closed within a reasonable time. The MFSS Travel Standard Operating Procedure was reviewed and disseminated accordingly.

Due to the various audit trails the travel procedure is to be carried out in a diligent manner. In fact on a number of occasions, guidance from Cabinet Office, Ministry for Finance and Treasury was sought to verify that the issue of subsistence and contingency were in line with PSMC and other regulations.

Throughout this year, this unit sought quotations from various leading travel agencies and Air Malta.

This section also submitted requests to the Government Property Department and Housing Authority respectively to verify if alternative premises were available to house DSS District Offices.

The list of items of a historical or artistic nature, held by MFSS at the Ministry and at the Permanent Secretary's Office, was reviewed as soon as the Cabinet reshuffle was announced and reviewed again as soon as the new Minister and Parliamentary Secretary occupied the premises.

Other tasks met by this office included:

- Gender mainstreaming return in line with OPM Circular 15/2012;
- Attended the NCPE annual conference and other related seminars;

- Participated in the Green Economy Inter-ministerial task-force.

Contracts and Procurement

This section uninterruptedly continued in meeting all procurement and contractual issues for departments, entities, commissions and sections falling within MFSS. This entails strict adherence to the Public Procurement Regulations, Financial regulations, Contracts Circulars and related legislation. During this year, this office issued sixteen (16) departmental tenders and prepared documentation for the publishing of one (1) Department of Contracts tender. Moreover, a total of forty (40) calls for quotations (RFQ) for the provision of various supplies, works and services. This office was instrumental in sustaining the LEAP! Project to meet the set timeframes.

All tenders and most of the above RFQs were issued through the Electronic Public Procurement System (Epps). This entailed the processing of all the procurement stages – from the preparation of the call to the award. Staff members were thus highly involved as tender coordinators, opening staff, and evaluators and also as evaluation committee secretary.

During this year this office also catered for five (5) Expression of Interest calls and one (1) call for Partner Organisation as follows:

Reference	Title
EOI 001/2014	Invitation to submit Proposals for the Provision of Properties in Gozo to Accommodate Persons with Disability
EOI 002/2014	Invitation to submit Proposals for the Lease of premises to house District Offices of the Department of Social Security in various localities in Malta
EOI 003/2014	Sale 'tale quale' of four (4) Second Hand Vehicles from the Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity
EOI 004/2014	Invitation to submit Proposals for the Provision of residential homes and services for persons with disability
EOI 005/2014	Invitation for the submission of proposals to lease furnished apartments under the Residential Halfway Programme
CFPO 001/2014	Call For Voluntary Organizations and/or Public bodies to become Partners to the Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity for the Distribution of Food Packages under the Fund for the European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD).

The Senior Procurement Manager serves as secretary to the Departmental Contracts Committee (DCC) and another officer within this office represents the Permanent Secretary on the same board. The secretary prepared the checklists for 111 submissions that were presented to the board by the respective contracting authorities within MFSS.

This section also coordinated four (4) Boards of Survey in connection with the exhaustive exercise to clear stores and write off unserviceable fixed assets. Furthermore, following EOI 003/2014 four (4) MFSS vehicles were scrapped.

The inventory and fleet management system were regularly updated mostly due to the change in Minister and Parliamentary Secretary. This office also catered for two printing runs of the Medical Certificate booklets. Moreover, it provided uniforms and health & safety attire to both messengers and maintenance staff respectively.

For the first quarter of the year this section sustained its support to the Ministry for Social Dialogue and Civil Liberties.

Social Security Accounts Benefits

Due to the retirement of the senior officer who managed the Special Accounts section, this section was integrated within the Social Security Accounts Benefits.

Henceforth the main tasks of the Social Security Accounts Benefits were threefold:

- Expenditure (Benefits);
- Revenue (National Insurance Contributions);
- Arrears of Revenue.

During year 2014, payments made by Debit Advices increased by about €38,400,000 over 2013 and amounted to circa €852,900,000. These were effected through 800 Debit Advices in liaison with the DAMP unit within DSS, processed and sent to both Treasury and Central Bank for payment. Moreover, about 520 schedules of payment and 120 multi-payments were submitted to government departments, entities and private sector companies regarding the payments of sickness benefit due to employees falling on half pay.

In liaison with the DSS International Relations Directorate, a number of pensioners living abroad had their respective pension credited into their bank account. This simplification procedure eliminated the role of Maltese embassies as middleman. Weekly payments were thus processed either by direct credit or through Maltese embassies. These amounted to circa €13,000,000, similar to the previous year.

In relation to revenue, close collaboration ensued with the Inland Revenue Department in order to obtain data regarding the collection of National Insurance contributions. The amount collected in 2014, including State Contribution, summed to about €699,200,000. This shows an increase of €53,900,000 over 2013.

The procedure for the submission of Arrears of Revenue collection by DSS District Offices was reviewed. This was certainly one of the main achievements for 2014. Standard Operating Procedures were issued and disseminated accordingly. DSS District Offices are now no longer calling at this section to deposit the collection of monies but are depositing such monies at their respective local BOV branch. Henceforth, the Public Account is then credited accordingly.

The collection of Arrears of Revenue amounted to about €2,100,000, leaving an outstanding balance of circa €21,300,000. Following meetings with MITA and NAO as of this year the Arrears of Revenue report was issued through SABS.

Reconciliation of expenditure and revenue with DAS was processed on a monthly basis. Financial statements were submitted to NSO and Financial Management section.

Reconciliation

The main task of this Section was the reconciliation of all social security benefits transactions. Furthermore, it also monitored and reconciled the encashment of energy benefit vouchers. To this end, close liaising with Social Security, ARMS, DAMP and local banks occurred.

As of this year the Energy Benefit payment was integrated into the Water and Electricity bill. This was one of the simplification processes affected by MFSS. To implement this measure ARMS had to upgrade its payment system at the cost of €116,675. Such payment was refunded by MFSS as this measure would result in high cost savings mostly in postage and cheque mailers expenditure.

The below table indicates the amount of cheques, direct credits and energy benefit vouchers that this section verified during 2014.

Cheques	ACRT Count	Energy Benefit Vouchers	Total
540,411	1,429,752	130,049	2,100,212

Office Management and Registry

This section managed the smooth running of a number of contractual agreements, mainly the cleaning contract, supply of photocopiers to District Offices and Head Office, fire alarm system and air conditioning systems.

During this year this section was involved in coordinating the installation of the new chillers system at Palazzo Ferreria and ACCESS centres, and oversaw that the new systems provided effective and efficient service. Two officers from this section were also involved in the installation of evacuation plans, emergency exits and provision of Fire Extinguishers as a result of the risk assessment exercise which was carried out in 2012. Another important exercise carried out by this unit was the post occupancy evaluation exercise within Palazzo Ferreria.

The Registry was involved in the usual registry works, file movement, creation of new files especially files relating to payment for Board members. Furthermore, an exercise to replace thorn file covers was embarked upon.

Maintenance

The maintenance team was highly involved in the successful completion of refurbishing works within the Ministry, mostly on works at various District Offices and Regional Development premises. The carpenters embarked on the project of replacing dangerous wooden louvers at Palazzo Ferreria. Other staff catered for the replacement of the main water supply and drainage pipes at the same premises.

Director Corporate Services also provided guidance, assistance and support to the Parliamentary Secretary for Disability and Active Ageing in order to achieve relative approvals with regards to a number of either contractual or lease agreements for the provision of beds for elderly persons in private institutions, respite services and day centre activities.

HR MANAGEMENT DIRECTORATE

The Human Resources Management Directorate within the Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity encompasses the full range of human resources practices, including recruitment, data management, employee relations, training and development, amongst others, on a corporate level for all the Directorates and Departments within the Ministry. The Directorate also provides support and advice to the Permanent Secretary and to the entities falling within our remit. It also ensures that the policies and procedures of the Public Service and relevant legislation are adhered to.

Furthermore, the Directorate assists on a day-to-day basis a number of internal clients providing support and information depending on the nature of their query. The staff within the Directorate apply the standards outlined in Directive 4 and are currently preparing to ensure full compliance with Directive 8. The Directorate co-ordinates activities of a corporate nature and seeks to achieve uniformity in implementing policy directives issued by the Office of the Prime Minister, the Public Administration HR Office as well as by the Ministry itself.

The vision of the Directorate is to spearhead HR policies and practices that promote the well-being of employees and to improve the efficiency and service-delivery of its employees.

Recruitment

Following the approval of vacancies emanating from the Capacity Building Exercise as well as *ad-hoc* requests, the Directorate issued of a total of 45 calls. The Directorate worked closely with the Ministry for Energy and Health in posts and positions in the caring /medical sector. This relatively new area within the remit of this Directorate required becoming accustomed to sectoral agreements pertaining to such posts and positions.

The Directorate also facilitated a total of 208 Vacancy Requests Forms on behalf of the various entities falling under the Ministry's remit. This role of the Directorate is to process the VRF in line with RRAG and MFIN regulations and Directive 7.

Promotions and progressions of general service grades and departmental grades were also processed and deadlines were respected in the vast majority of the cases. In this regard, the accuracy and quality of the requested documentation is highly important for the award when due of such promotions or progressions. Appointment letters and contracts of service were accordingly drawn following notification from the Public Service Commission, following the delegated authority process.

During 2014, due to a change in Ministerial responsibility, the Directorate was involved in the drafting of secretariat contracts for both the Ministry and the Parliamentary Secretariat within the Ministry and ensuring that parameters and guidelines were respected. This exercise called for termination and closure of the respective previous secretariats' agreements and enrolment of current staff.

The Directorate also assisted in the drafting of Contracts for Service, ensuring compliance with MFIN regulations. The Directorate also liaised with the Directorate for Corporate Services especially with respect to procurement regulations.

Records

The directorate is also responsible for keeping up-to-date records of employees. This includes updating of vacation and sick leave records, timely renewals of family-friendly applications in line with the central policy, and the processing of the Performance Management Programme. Furthermore, the Directorate is also responsible for the issuing of the GP 47 – Service and

Leave Record for all members of staff. The Directorate has also consolidated and expanded the statistical data pertaining to employee absenteeism, leaves and family friendly measures. The infoshare portal has been utilised as a platform to upload and update the data. This has ensured that a more coordinated and efficient approach is adopted to data management.

The Directorate's remit also includes the administration of Disciplinary Procedures. Emphasis on professional people management is promoted in order to try and instil in our staff good practices and raise awareness of and compliance with procedures and regulations. However, when needed, disciplinary action is taken in line with the parameters established in the Public Service Commission Regulations.

Salaries and Remuneration

Another major responsibility falling under the HR Directorate is the processing, computation and data management of the payroll of employees falling under our remit. Queries from staff are answered professionally and the section interfaces with the Treasury in Gozo and with the HR Management Systems Directorate within PAHRO in order to ensure the timely and correct computation of salaries. Following the coming into force of the Collective Agreement, Personal Record Sheets, and other records were updated.

HR Management Staff

The staff complement within the Directorate remained within the same level as the previous year. The Directorate holds regular staff meetings to review work practices with the aim of improving our service delivery. As part of the performance management plan, members of staff were encouraged to attend specifically selected training courses organised by the CDRT with the aim of improving their work performance and as part of their continuous professional development.

The HR Management Directorate continued to promote an organisational culture built on training and development by facilitating access to the programmes provided by CDRT particularly ESF funded programmes. In line with Directive 8, the directorate made the preparatory work in connection with the implementation of this Directive and ensured that adequate staff within the various Departments were involved in hands on training and briefing sessions for the successful roll-out of the process.

Employee Support Programme and Staff Well-being

Throughout 2014, the HR Management Directorate collaborated closely with the Employee Support Unit in order to promote further this service and to inculcate within our Ministry a culture of staff well-being and employee support. As a new initiative, the HR Management Directorate in collaboration with the Employee Support Unit and the Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Directorate held a staff wellbeing week with the theme "Fuq Xogħolna b'Saħħitna" .

DEPARTMENT FOR SOCIAL SECURITY

The Department of Social Security is responsible for the administration of Social Security Legislation which provides for the payments of benefits under the contributory and the non-contributory schemes. These sections cover the entire population which is in some way recipient of such benefits. The Department is mainly involved in ensuring that financial support is given to those sections of the community which are vulnerable and are mostly in need, namely those with a low-income, the sick, the elderly and the unemployed.

Total Expenditure

The total expenditure on Social Security Benefits for 2014 reached €852.8m, reflecting an increase of €42.6m over the previous year.

The following table shows the expenditure on all Social Security benefits payable under the Social Security Act, (Cap 318) during 2014. This table comprises the contributory and non-contributory benefits issued by the Department.

Type of Benefit	2013	2014	(+ or -)
Pensions in respect of Retirement	409,538,262	424,427,439	14,889,177
Pensions in respect of Invalidity	25,634,606	25,846,396	211,790
Pensions in respect of Widowhood	113,843,454	116,748,275	2,904,821
Benefit in respect of Industrial Injuries	1,564,801	1,168,312	-396,489
Benefits in respect of Unemployment	2,673,559	2,308,149	-365,410
Children's Allowance	42,794,375	51,435,318	8,640,943
Maternity Benefit	2,163,862	3,006,472	842,610
Sickness Benefit	6,774,005	6,555,992	-218,013
Orphan's Allowance	84,050	89,258	5,208
Marriage Grant	774,810	849,047	74,237
Bonus	59,299,086	64,554,224	5,255,138
Total	665,146,883	696,988,882	31,841,999
Pensions in respect of Age/Visually Impaired	21,057,452	23,258,599	2,201,147
Pensions in respect of Disability	11,961,735	12,786,147	824,412
Social Assistance	75,127,686	79,647,590	4,519,904
Disabled Child Allowance	795,979	1,320,762	524,783
Medical Assistance	18,285,330	18,842,372	557,042
Bonus	11,004,927	11,110,315	105,388
Supplementary Allowance	6,811,331	8,879,048	2,067,717
Total	145,044,440	155,844,833	10,800,393
Grand Total	810,191,323	852,833,715	42,642,392

New Social Security Measures

A measure introduced during the year 2014 is the Tapering of Benefits Scheme. This scheme is aimed at persons in receipt of Social/Unemployment Assistance for at least two years in the last three years and earning the weekly National Minimum Wage (€165.68). Eligible beneficiaries are entitled to 65% of the rate for the first year, 45% of the rate for the

second year and 25% of the rate for the third year. The employer is also entitled to 25% of the rate for a maximum period of three years.

Contributory Scheme

The total revenue collected during 2014, in terms of the Social Security Act (Cap 318) amounted to €699,191,297 which reflects an increase of €53,894,447 over the previous year.

These figures are broken down in the following table:

Type of Contribution	2013	2014	(+ or -)
Social Security Contributions	427,523,279	463,055,435	35532156
Further Contributions	4,010,521	4,608,144	597,623
State Contribution	213,761,639	231,527,718	17,766,079
Total	645,296,850	699,191,297	53,894,447

Contributory Pensions

The following table shows the number of persons in receipt of a Contributory Pension at the end of 2014. For this year, the upward trend in the increase in the number of pensioners slowed down drastically as a result of the gradual increase in the pension for men by one year and for women with two years. In fact the net increase for year 2014 over 2013 has decreased to 0.203%.

As a result of the budget speech for 2014 all pensioners were awarded the full cost of living increase. Thus two-thirds of the cost of living increase €2.33 was added to the weekly pension rate and the remaining one third amounting to €1.16 was paid on a weekly basis in addition to pension weekly rate. This new method adopted with effect from January 2014 replaced the method of one lump sum used up to 2013.

As in previous years the maximum pensionable income for Social Security purposes was once again increased by the cost of living allowance to reach the amount of €17,810.48.

Contributory Pensions

Type of Benefit	2013	2014	+ or -
Retirement Pension	7,440	7,266	-174
Increased Retirement Pension	2,017	1,166	-851
National Minimum Retirement Pension	8,720	8,560	-160
Decreased National Minimum Pension	108	99	-9
Increased National Minimum Ret. Pension	3,155	2,973	-182
Two-Thirds Pension	39,603	41,431	1,828
Invalidity Pension	427	371	-56
Increased Invalidity Pension	140	137	-3
National Minimum Invalidity Pension	4,516	4,553	37
Decreased National Minimum Invalidity Pension	6	6	0
Widow's Pension with Service Pension	321	300	-21
National Minimum Widow's Pension	8,087	7,724	-363
Widow's Special Allowance	-	-	-

Widow's Benefit	-	-	-
Widow's Allowance	-	-	-
Early Survivor's Pension	1,819	1,655	-164
Survivor's Pension	6,905	7,189	284
Disablement Pension	295	296	1
Orphan's Allowance	16	19	3
Parent's Allowance	-	-	-
TOTAL	83,575	83,745	170

New Pension claims

During the period under review the pensions section within the Department of Social Security continued processing new claims for Retirement, Widows and Invalidity Pensions. The number of new claims for a Retirement Pension amounted to 3396 which represents an increase of 1689 new claims over 2013, 1078 new claims for a Widows Pension representing an increase of 169 new claims over 2013 and, 494 new claims for an Invalidity Pension representing a decrease of 30 new claims over the previous year.

Pension reviews

During the same period, revisions were undertaken for Retirement, Widows and Invalidity Pensions in connection with new collective agreements for private sector employees that came into effect during 2013 and by virtue of the service pension budget measure announced in the budget for the year under review.

As a result of a new budget measure related to widows, reassessments were also carried out where a widow in receipt of a widows pension was also in employment given that through said measure, no abatement of the widow's pension was carried out and therefore such persons became eligible to a full widows pension.

Furthermore, through the service pensions measure of ignoring a further €200 from the service pension for reassessment purposes, another 5,260 pensioners benefitted from a higher weekly pension rate.

Short Term Benefits

During 2014, the Short Term Benefit (STB) Section in Gozo continued with the normal duties of processing claims pertaining to sickness benefit, unemployment benefit and injury benefit where a decrease in the number of claims was recorded over the previous year as per table 2 further below. As per table 3, there was also a decrease in the submission of weekly medical certificates for sickness benefit purposes which had to be keyed in in order for such claims to be assessed and paid accordingly.

As in the previous years, the Gozo Branch once again managed to issue the annual reviews of Supplementary Allowance claims on time and as in previous years the whole staff compliment performed their duties mostly via Telework. The total number of Supplementary Allowance claims reviewed amounted to 27,333 of which 24,261 were reviews to ascertain entitlement for year 2014/2015 and 2,025 claims pertained to late or change of status applications. Total number of Marriage Grant applicants during 2014 were 3,072.

The Short Term Benefits Section also continued with the processing of Energy Benefit applications. A total of 2,197 new applications were assessed and the relative deductions were directly made from ARMS Ltd bills through the new system which eliminated Energy Benefit vouchers. Another 92 payments were also issued to charitable institutions.

The section also re-issued 3,307 vouchers with the preceeding system which had expired and also took action on 221 cases which were referred by the Benefit Fraud & Investigations Directorate.

The Call Centre in Gozo which is manned by staff trained to perform Customer Care & information duties by telephone on 25903000 answered 68,998 calls from various DSS enquiring clients during 2014.

Short-Term Benefits

Number of Claims Type of Benefit	2013	2014	+ or -
Sickness Benefit	125,837	123,921	-1,916
Unemployment Benefit	17,850	17,421	-429
Special Unemployment Benefit	1,137	810	-327
Injury Benefit	3,056	3,142	86
Marriage Grant	3,227	3,301	74
TOTAL	151,107		

Type of Medical Certificate	2013	2014	+ or -
First/Final (less than 4 days)	76,662	77,125	463
First/Final (from 4 to 6 days)	29,396	27,782	-1,614
First (open)	19,779	19,014	-765
Intermediate	96,908	90,714	-6,194
Final	17,985	17,161	-824
TOTAL	240,730	231,796	-8,934

Children's Allowances and other Family Benefits

Children's Allowance Benefit (CA): During the year 2014 the Children's Allowance Section in Gozo reviewed all the Children's Allowance claims that were in payment with a view to establish the new Children's Allowance rates for the benefit year starting July 2014.

In 2014, a total of 24,349 beneficiaries were paid through the process for Children's Allowance Flat Rate (CAFR), while 18,047 beneficiaries were paid through the Children Allowance Means Test (CAMS). The total of CA beneficiaries up to end 2014 amounted to 42,396.

During 2014, the Children's Allowance Section received and processed 1,977 New Claims (1st time application), 492 Separation claims, 302 Conversion claims, 15,435 claims CAMS 13 and 11,276 claims CAMS 12 which altogether amount to 29,482 claims.

Apart from the annual review as described above, the Children's Allowance Section received 3,952 requests for an adjustment in the payment rate of the Children's benefit due to a change in the family's circumstances such as additional children and termination of employment. These adjustments necessitate a review over and above the annual review

indicated in the previous paragraph. A further 152 reports were also processed in connection with new marriages and deaths of one of the spouses.

Maternity Benefit (MB): During the year under review a total of 2,002 Maternity Benefit (MB) claims were received by the CA Section. MB falls under the Quality Service Charter (QSC). All claims were processed and paid within the established time-frame.

Maternity Leave Benefit (MLB): Maternity Leave Benefit (MLB) claims received and processed by the end of 2014 were 1,452.

Disabled Child Allowance (DCA): During the year 2014, CA Section received 261 new applications for this benefit. 180 of these claims were accepted while 77 were rejected by the Medical Panel. At the end of 2014 the remaining 4 claims were still pending the Medical Panel examination. During this year, 420 claimants who were already in receipt of DCA had their claim reviewed by the Medical Panel. The total of DCA beneficiaries up to end 2014 amounted to 1,019.

Foster Care Allowance (FCA): 21 homes/institutes which together host an average of 120 children were paid the total amount of €436,170 in Foster Care Allowance. The total of FCA beneficiaries (institutes/homes/foster care families) for year 2014 amounts to 213

Children's Allowances and other Family Benefits

Number of Families in receipt of Means Tested Child allowance

Type of Allowance	2013	2014	+ or -
(a) Child Allowance only:			
(i) One eligible child	11,252	10,218	-1,034
(ii) Two eligible children	6,377	5,841	-536
(iii) Three eligible children	1,625	1,541	-84
(iv) Four or more eligible children	468	447	-21
TOTAL	19,722	18,047	-1,675

Number of families in receipt of the minimum rate of Child Allowance

Type of Allowance	2013	2014	+ or -
Child Allowance only:			
(i) One eligible child	12,058	12,664	606
(ii) Two eligible children	9,404	9,746	342
(iii) Three eligible children	1,621	1,689	68
(iv) Four or more eligible children	255	250	-5
TOTAL	23,338	24,349	1,011

Number of families in receipt of Disabled Child Allowance

Type of Benefit	2013	2014	+ or -
Disabled Child Allowance	939	1,019	80
TOTAL	939	1,019	80

Number of claims for maternity leave and maternity leave benefits

Type of Benefit	2013	2014	+ or -
Maternity Leave Benefit	1,437	1,365	-72
Maternity Benefit	2,116	2,002	-114
TOTAL	3,553	3,367	-186

Overpayments Section

The Overpayments Section gained further momentum in 2014. Its goals are to detect, follow-up, and recover outstanding non-performing overpayments by various debtors to DSS. It also performs necessary searches at the Public Registry to trace, wills and heirs of deceased debtors. Debtors who come to an agreement to pay debt by monthly instalments are also monitored periodically, and are intimated for repayment in case of default. A Legal Officer provides advice to the section and proceeds with legal action against individuals who deliberately fail to come to a repayment agreement with DSS.

During 2014, the Overpayments Section Sent 3,019 Intimation Letters, performed 349 searches with Public Registry and were almost entirely responsible for the recovery of €2,056,762.42. This is an increase in section performance of 47.9% in terms of Intimation Letters sent; 37,4% in terms of Searches; and 58% in recovered debts against results gained during year 2013. The Legal Officer also issued 199 Judicial Letters and another 94 Legal Intimation Letters in 2014. A percentage increase in Judicial and Legal Letters (65%) is also reflected against year 2013 by our Legal Officer.

Non-Contributory Scheme

The number of persons in receipt of non-contributory age, visually impaired, mentally/severely disabled, and carer's pension/allowance paid under the Act increased by 3.87% when compared to the previous year as shown in the following table:

Type of Pension/Allowance	Number of Beneficiaries as on 31.12.2013	Number of Beneficiaries as on 31.12.2014	+ or -
Old Age	5,171	5,354	183
Visually Impaired	219	245	26
Mentally/Severely Disabled	2,445	2,550	105
Carer's	151	146	-5
OAA	-	-	-
TOTAL	7,986	8,295	309

Social, Medical Assistance, Tapering of Benefits and Supplementary Allowance

There was a decrease of 3.40% in the number of Unemployment Assistance beneficiaries when compared to the previous year. The Budget 2014 measure referring to the Tapering of Benefits introduced 587 Social Assistance beneficiaries to this scheme.

Moreover, as from 2014, the persons having Subsidiary Protection status are being compiled separately and the statistics show that a total number of 1406 were paid Subsidiary Unemployment Assistance.

When we exclude the number of beneficiaries of Subsidiary Unemployment Assistance and the Tapered Social Assistance there was an increase of 0.2% in the Social and Medical Assistance Group.

Type of Assistance	Number of Beneficiaries as on 31.12.2013	Number of Beneficiaries as on 31.12.2014	+or-
Unemployment assistance	5,914	5,713	-201
Social Assistance*	13,131	13,950	819
Sickness Assistance	13,539	13,635	96
Milk Grant	107	108	1
Leprosy Assistance	33	34	1
Tuberculosis Assistance	1	1	0
Supplementary Allowance	26,424	25,816	-608
Subsidiary Unemployment Assistance	-	1,406	1,406
Social Assistance Tapered	-	587	587
TOTAL	59,149	61,250	2,101

* Social Assistance means
SA/SAF/SUP/DAD

Customer Care and District Offices

In order to reach the goals laid down in its mission statement, the Department of Social Security (DSS) provides its services, apart from its Head Office in 38, Ordnance Street Valletta and another back office in St. Francis Square in Victoria Gozo, also from 24 District Offices spread around the Maltese Islands, 22 in Malta and 2 in Gozo. Through such an approach, the Department aims at reaching out to provide assistance and advice on social security matters in the community.

The district offices mentioned above are situated in the localities of Ħal Balzan, Birkirkara, Fgura, Ħamrun, Ħal Luqa, Marsa, Mosta, Msida, Nadur (Gozo), Naxxar, Paola, Qormi, Rabat, Sliema, Qawra, San Gwann, Siġġiewi, Valletta, Victoria (Gozo), Vittoriosa, Ħaż-Żabbar, Ħaż-Żebbug, Żejtun, and Żurrieq. The work carried out at district office level mainly consists of dealing with customers' queries, filling in of applications for contributory and non-contributory benefits and pensions, and the registration under the Social Security Act of newly employed workers. The registration of unemployed persons is also carried out at district offices by means of finger reading machines except for Mosta and Vittoriosa where this service is available at the Employment & Training Corporation's premises within the same locality.

The District Offices of Qawra, Valletta, Msida and Vittoriosa are integrated in a complex under the name of LEAP! Centres. The main aim of the LEAP! Centre is to make it easier for the residents of that particular region to access a number of related services in an integrated manner (one-stop shop) comprising mainly of the Appoġġ Agency, the Department of Social

Security (DSS) and the Employment & Training Corporation (ETC). This concept of the One-Stop shop could expand to other regions in the future.

During 2014, the Department served an estimated total of 750,000 customer visits through its 24 front offices around Malta and Gozo. The majority of these, around 83%, were served face to face while the rest mainly by telephone. The figures include returning customers with most of them benefitting from non-contributory benefits and hence are economically inactive. The above figures show that through all its front offices, the Department of Social Security in 2014 served, face to face or by telephone, an estimated average of 2,877 persons a day or 125 persons a day per office.

District Offices' Set-up

A major reform implemented in 2012 led to the restructuring of district offices and appointments of Regional Coordinators and District Managers. The continuing expansion of the Department has seen its business activities spread across the mainland. This naturally imposed entirely new demands on the Department's services and challenges to managing the operations staff. The most important feature of this reform was the Regionalization of the District Offices. While all District Offices remain an integral part of the Department, they are now operating on a regional basis, both in terms of management of resources as well as to the provision of service.

Full-time opening District Offices (called parent offices) in the mainland were downsized to 18 with the remaining 4 offices (called satellite offices) opening daily but on shorter schedules of 5 hours daily. Furthermore basic customer care service from the local councils, besides those of Gudja, Xaghra and Mellieħa and Sannat (Gozo), was extended to Xewkija (Gozo), Qala (Gozo), Ħal Kirkop, Ħal Safi, Birżebbuġa and Swieqi.

Provision of customer care through Local Councils

In its quest to extend its services in the Community, the Department's long-term vision is to provide basic customer care service through Local Councils. Following the agreement reached with the Gudja Local Council in 2010 which led to the successful launching of a pilot project in August of that year, the project was during 2012 extended to another seven Local Councils. In September 2013 customer service was terminated in five local councils due to the very low level of customer demand. Discussions were held with interested Local Councils (is-Sannat, Ħal Safi, Ħal Kirkop, is-Swieqi, Qala, Kerċem, Birżebbuġa and Wied il-Għajn). In 2014 agreements were reached with the Local Council of Ħal Kirkop, Ħal Safi, Birżebbuġa, Swieqi, Xewkija (Gozo) and Qala (Gozo) which led to provision of basic customer service from the administrative offices of same councils.

Appointments of Regional Coordinators and District Managers

The District Offices' Reform saw the addition of a new grade – Regional Coordinator. In essence the five Regional Coordinators are now acting as the assistants to the Assistant Director (Customer Care) for their respective regions and will have to primarily address issues/problems in their regions themselves, e.g. staff needs and issues, rosters, providing a District Manager at the satellite offices twice a week, sending replacement staff, service from their respective Local Councils, etc.

The Regional Coordinators however have to work together as a team, with their respective District Managers and with management (primarily the Assistant Director Customer Care) to ensure that the service delivery at local council level, at satellite district office level, at parent district office level and at regional level, hence at national level, is uniform and of the highest quality throughout.

The District Offices' Reform of 2012 saw also the appointment of new District Managers. As to be expected in such an important role, the area manager has a wide range of responsibilities. These include providing their teams with a stimulating and supportive environment, maintaining and increasing standards of customer service, driving team performance and training and development of the operations staff. District Managers will have a large measure of autonomy, working alongside with Regional Coordinators and the Assistance Director Customer Care.

Refurbishment of District Offices

Minor maintenance works were carried out during 2014. The Department is also seeking to identify unallocated government premises or issue an expression of interest for alternative premises of a number of district offices.

Training for District Officers

Training sessions to the regional coordinators, district managers and district office personnel on various types of contracts and insurability issues were held during 2014 in collaboration the Legal Office of the Department. Preparations got underway to deliver trainings sessions to all front line personnel on the e-Gov portal in anticipation of the release of the DSS online application forms. The sessions will be held from March to June 2015. Customer service training courses were also delivered to district managers to enhance their competence when dealing with staff and serving the public.

It is the intention of the Customer Care Unit to collaborate closely with the Centre for Research and Training (CDRT) to deliver specialised courses in customer service skills to all the District Office staff. Plans got underway for the delivery of training programmes to address gaps in KSAs (knowledge, skills and attitudes) of members of staff in district offices.

Web based applications

2014 saw the full implementation of the automated assessment of the Free Medical Aid (Pink Form). Another major application that was released in the end of 2014 was the Customer Service Management application. This is considered as a major step forward in significantly increasing overall operational efficiency and customer satisfaction. It is expected that front office users will make use of the application in June 2015. 2014 saw the launch of the online marriage grant application form. Other DSS online applications are expected to be deployed in 2015.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS UNIT

During the course of the current year 2014, the International Relations Unit (IRU) within the Department of Social Security (DSS) continued to act as the point of reference within DSS for international matters; both within the EU dimension and also with regards to the implementation of the bilateral agreements ratified by Malta along the years. The IRU is responsible both for the operational side of the implementation of such agreements and also from the policy aspect. In this context, 2014 was another productive year for the International Relations Unit (IRU) which continued to work on a number of important tasks listed hereunder.

Pension Claims processed by the IRU

The majority of the cases dealt with by the IRU are pension cases (Retirement, Widow/ers and Invalidity). In the course of the last 6 years, the number of pensioners residing abroad saw an exponential increase of 18.26% totalising a number of 6671 pensioners. This amount

is equivalent to 11.22% of the total DSS pension beneficiaries. It is thus evident that the international dimension of DSS is becoming even more relevant along the years which, fuelled by the right free movement enjoyed by EU accession. It is therefore most likely that this trend will continue in the future.

According to the latest statistics reported below, during the current year the IRU processed the following number of pension claims where:

- Number of Incoming claims refer to claims received from persons residing abroad;
- Number of Outgoing number refers to claims received from persons residing locally who are claiming a foreign pension.

2014	Incoming	Outgoing
EU	108	116
Australia	243	185
Canada	22	81
Other	77	42
Total	380	424

Life Certification

In view of the ever-increasing number of pensioners residing abroad, in 2011 a Life Certification system was introduced as a safeguard against possible fraudulent cases. This system is providing the DSS with the necessary tools to maintain adequate contact with pensioners not living in Malta with whom the Department has not direct communication as well as maintain an updated record of next of kin details.

By means of this system, the International Relations Unit is in a position to know about significant changes in each pensioner's circumstances. A Life Certification form is mailed to the pensioner's address which s/he has to return with the necessary information about any change in address and/or status and with information details of the next of kin with whom the IRU can make contact in case of need. The Certificate also needs to be endorsed and stamped by an official witness. Such a system is proving useful in cases of unreported deaths of pensioners as it is minimizing the payment of undue pension payments.

The following are the number of Life Certificates issued by the IRU during 2014:

Country	Amount	Suspended Cases
Canada	857	N/A*
Australia	177	18
UK	851	62
EU (other)	239	29
Rest of the World	75	6

* Non-Returned report had not yet been generated at the time this report was compiled.

Moreover, in view of the obligations arising out of the EU Regulations on the coordination of social security (883/2004 and 987/2009), the IRU had to widen its remit to cater for the payments of sickness benefits, unemployment benefits, insurability matters, accidents at work and occupational diseases which involve a cross-border element, whilst giving policy guidance to the Children's Allowance section within DSS when cases of family and maternity benefits are encountered.

In view of the responsibilities outlined above, during the current year the IRU processed the following requests:

Form	Number
U1 (Certificate of Insurance for Unemployment Benefits)	616
U002 (Standard Electronic Document for Unemployment Benefits)	54
U004 (Standard Electronic Document for communication of Salary Info)	28
U009 (Standard Electronic Document for confirmation of registration)	113
U013(Standard Electronic Document for monthly confirmation of registration)	76
E104 (Certificate of Insurance for Sickness Benefits)	198
E205 (Certificate of Insurance for Pension Purposes)	560

Determination of the Legislation Applicable

One of the main responsibilities of the IRU is the determination of the legislation applicable.

Out of the requests forwarded to the IRU for continued insurability under the Maltese social security system, the Unit processed those of individuals performing duties in another EU Member State mostly on a posting assignment. The Unit received various applications in this regard. It then analysed and vetted all the requests in accordance with the applicable rules. Accordingly, the Unit issued 224 A1 forms (Certificate concerning the Social Security legislation which applies) for each accepted case as requested by the Regulation.

Also in connection with the abovementioned insurability duties carried out by the IRU, during the year 2014 this Unit was involved in various meetings with foreign and local companies and other individuals to discuss social security issues, emanating from the EU Regulations mentioned above. The IRU carried out the necessary research and analysed all cases presented. Having gone through this exercise, the appropriate advice was given to the respective stakeholders/entities involved, regarding the insurability position of employees/self-employed individuals to be engaged in employment activity in another EU Member State and EU nationals to be involved in employment activity in Malta.

Number of queries dealt with by the IRU

The IRU is also responsible for dealing with queries from the public. During the year under review the IRU received nearly 6,000 queries from the general public by letter, fax, in person or mostly by e-mail (4,573).

SEPA Changeover

With a view of improving service delivery to pensioners, during the current year an extensive exercise was carried out involving a total of 225 pensioners whose pension was previously, in the vast majority, paid through the various Maltese representations in Europe and a few were even paid by means of a payment voucher on a 6 monthly basis. With the introduction of the SEPA (Single Euro Payments Area) the IRU was involved in the adaptation of the DSS IT system to cater for such a system. Subsequently all 225 pensioners were asked to submit to the IRU their banking details which were inserted in the system. A cut-off date was also devised for each individual Embassy to stop their payments in conjunction of the coming into force of the SEPA system. This process involved a considerable effort but the IRU is glad to report that this system is now fully functional, that our pensioners are receiving their pension in a timelier and efficient manner whilst reducing expenses for the DSS in terms of better control of pension payments, less bank charges, fewer eventualities of overpayments, less errors by inexperienced non-DSS staff, reduction of LEPs, and less overtime to issue arrears following Budget COL increases.

Group	Mission	Retirement	Widows	Invalidity
0	Manual Payments	07/06/2014	14/06/2014	21/06/2014
1	Poland	05/07/2014	12/07/2014	19/07/2014
2	Netherlands (inc. Finland, Norway, Sweden)	02/08/2014	09/08/2014	16/08/2014
3	Ireland Greece Portugal Spain Switzerland	30/08/2014	06/09/2014	13/09/2014
4	Austria Belgium Denmark France	26/09/2014	03/10/2014	10/10/2014
5	Germany	24/10/2014	31/10/2014	07/11/2014
6	Italy	21/11/2014	28/11/2014	05/12/2014

Transfer of Pension Rights

Another important task carried out by the IRU is the processing of claims from employees of EU institutions who had previously contributed in the Maltese social security system and who, as provided by Council Regulation 259/68 which lays down the Staff Regulations of Officials and the Conditions of Employment of Other Servants of the European Communities,

are offered the possibility to transfer the pension rights accumulated in the Maltese scheme to the EU scheme. During the year 2014 the following applications were processed:

	Applications Received	Transferred Cases	Withdrawn Cases	Pending Cases
2014	31	28	3	0

The transferred cases totalised a transferable amount of €829,711.54 which were transferred to the EU scheme.

The IRU is always committed to improving its service delivery and will continue to do so in the future. An online application form for various E-forms is already available on the Ministry's web page. The introduction of an online application for the issuance of a social security number was fully embraced by the Unit which gave an active input in the design of this system which now caters for international cases as well. In the coming months the IRU will also be launching the online application for the A1 form (Certificate concerning the Social Security legislation which applies to the holder).

Policy Work carried out in 2014

Apart from the operational commitments, the IRU is also actively involved from a policy point of view. Members of the IRU represented Malta in various meetings at EU level, namely the Administrative Commission for the Coordination of Social Security Systems, Council **Working Parties, Working Groups, MISSOC meetings and as experts of the FRESSCO network.**

The IRU has taken a leading role in the court case faced by Malta in the European Court of Justice (ECJ) concerning the practice of abatement of Service Pensions from Maltese pension entitlement. No formal judgement has yet been delivered by the ECJ. Through the IRU's efforts, Malta gained support on the case from other Member States (namely Austria and the UK) who also have an interest in the case. This support was also due to the positive working relationships that the IRU nurtured along the years.

In the course of this year, the DSS received a notification of a national court case filed against its mode of implementing the Transfer of Pension Rights prescribed under Council Regulation 259/68. The IRU has been assigned competency in this regard since such transfers fall under its remit as reported above. Following a meeting with the Attorney General's representative on the case, the IRU put forward its contending arguments which will now be debated in court during the course of next year.

Concurrently, the IRU is also carrying out an analysis of the whole Social Security Act in order to identify instances of conflicts with EU law such as on gender equality.

During the current year, the IRU recruited the services of a research analyst to focus on various reporting and legislative issues stemming mainly from EU legislation and legislative proposals. A manager responsible for all Insurability issues (both EU and non-EU) was also recruited in order to centralize queries related to the topic and also with the intent of nurturing a nucleus of expertise in the matter which is highly sensitive, particularly at EU level.

Information Data & Protection Office

The Information and Data Protection Office continued to deal with queries related to the administration of the Data Protection and Freedom of Information Acts. The office dealt with 4 major requests for information or clarification on Data Protection issues besides innumerable verbal requests for advice. No requests for information under the Freedom of Information Act were received.

During 2014, the office continued to update the Department's website and also its internal intranet portal which contains substantial information which staff requires for the day to day delivery of its duties. As part of this Office's duties to coordinate the participation of staff in media programmes to disseminate information to the public, it oversaw the Department's participation in various programmes on local TV & Radio stations to provide the necessary information to the general public and create awareness on social security matters.

This office continued to take care of the Department's publications.

Work commenced on the revamping of the Social Security Benefits information leaflets. They were revised, updated and given a new format and look. This time, they will be issued as cards rather than as leaflets. Hopefully, the print will occur next year i.e. 2015.

The DSS Link, the Department's in-house magazine has been issued regularly with various continuously train and keep staff updated with social security developments.

The Information and Data Protection Office also carried out various other tasks within its scope such as the compiling of the Department's Annual Report, the continuous updating of the Department's overview, the dissemination of circulars, government publications such as issues of the Government Gazette, issue of Legal Notices, Acts and Bye-Laws.

It also continued with the general maintaining of the Department's generic email.

The Information and Data Protection Office was also responsible for the graphical layout of all leaflets, posters and other printed material dealing with information and with the activities organized in the Department for training and social purposes, the organizing of seminars and conferences of the Department, besides the attending itself to seminars locally and abroad, the assisting in local fairs disseminating general information to the general public on social security matters.

Data Audit Management and Processing

The Data Audit Management and Processing Unit within the Department of Social Security is responsible for all the payment processes of all the benefits, pensions and assistances paid. It is also responsible for the issuance of bulk correspondence related to payments effected.

- Number of cheques issue: 540,411;
- Number of direct credits issued: 1,429,752;
- Number of correspondence issued: 545,566;
- Number of energy benefit files processed: 97;
- The count for the Awards generated from the 97 Energy Benefit voucher files amounts to 131,604.

Appeals to the Umpire

The following table shows how the number of appeals that were up for one or more hearings during 2014 as dealt with as compared with the same figure of 2013.

Appeals	2013			2014
A. No of Appeals for hearing:				
(i) Brought forward from previous years	699		676	
(ii) Lodged during the current year	856		965	
(iii) Differed	271	1826	285	1926
B. No of Appeals settled:				
(i) Decided against appellant	490		448	
(ii) Decided in favour of appellant	37		87	
(iii) Withdrawn by appellant	269		191	
(iv) Cancelled	32		48	
(v) Revoked by Department	309		195	
(vi) <i>Sine Die</i>	11		36	
(vii) Awaiting reply from appellant/ Department	2	1150	24	
Outstanding Appeals		676		

Appeals re Invalidation Cases	2013			
A. No of Appeals for hearing:				
(i) Brought forward from previous years	88		92	
(ii) Lodged during the current year	177		92	
(iii) Differed	9	274	17	
B. No of Appeals settled:				
(i) Decided against appellant	47		24	
(ii) Decided in favour of appellant	94		52	
(iii) Withdrawn by appellant	17		11	
(iv) Cancelled	20		6	
(v) Revoked by Department	0		0	
(vi) <i>Sine Die</i>	4		0	
(vii) Awaiting reply from appellant/ Department	0	182	24	117
Outstanding Appeals		92		84

BENEFIT FRAUD AND INVESTIGATION DEPARTMENT

The Benefit Fraud and Investigation Department (BFID) focuses its resources on investigating all reports of alleged abuse in Social Security benefits and on initiating investigative exercises to curb social benefit abuse.

Sources of Information

As in the previous years, BFID continued to receive reports on alleged social benefit fraud from two main sources; the general public and the Department of Social Security (DSS). The general public is aware of the effective operations of BFID and has therefore continued to submit a large number of reports, most of which were anonymous. These reports were received by phone, including the freephone (80072345), through emails, through letters and other media. BFID has on its webpage the facility to submit on-line requests for investigation in Maltese and English. Staff from DSS also continued to submit a substantial number of *Requests for Investigation* on the template that was provided to them by BFID. During the year, BFID continued to take the initiative to identify other sources/trends where benefit fraud was suspected and to take

appropriate action to curb such abuse. BFID regularly monitors closely all financial data that is uploaded on the SABS computer system operated by DSS. This data, which is obtained from the local financial institutions, is used to investigate, monitor and thereafter make recommendations to DSS to suspend the claims of those beneficiaries of non-contributory means tested benefits whose financial means exceed the applicable financial scales. Further investigations are then conducted in those cases where the claimants to such benefits register a sudden substantial increase in their financial assets.

Coordination

During the year, BFID continued to coordinate its operations with a number of government departments/entities and with the private sector in order to obtain information that is considered critical for the conclusion of its investigations.

Operations

In January 2014, the National Audit Office published its Performance Audit Report on the issue of Addressing Social Benefit Fraud. This report gave extensive information on the operations of the Benefit Fraud and Investigation Department and about the local situation in this sector.

In July 2014, the Department issued a new call for applications for Benefit Fraud Inspectors soon after it lost the services of two of its five Inspectors. During 2014, the Department continued the exercise that it had started in 2013 and assigned once again some of its resources to continue to update its database with information on cases, mainly overpayments that had been investigated and referred to DSS for action. Through this exercise a considerable number of cases were closed when the relative input on the action taken by DSS was obtained and inserted in the database. The number of on-site inspections conducted by the BFID Inspectorate in 2014 was 1,391.

From the on-site inspections and from all other investigations conducted by BFID, 721 cases were concluded during the year. Of all the cases investigated by BFID during the year, 430 were not considered to be in breach of the Social Security Act (Cap 318).

BFID recommended to DSS that the remaining 291 cases, which were considered to be in breach of the provisions of the Act, be reviewed/suspended and that any resulting overpayments be collected. Up to the end of December 2014, BFID had full or partial feedback on the 592 cases that were evaluated by DSS and these covered a total of 887 social benefits (vide table). A number of these cases had more than one benefit in payment. By the end of the year, BFID was still expecting full or partial feedback from DSS on 2,133 cases.

The estimated annual savings for 2014, collated from the feedback received from DSS, totalled €3,831,983.

Benefits found in Breach	
Invalidity Pension	4
Supplementary Allowance	69
Child Allowance	106
Sickness Assistance	180
Social Assistance	169
Unemployment Assistance	126
Age Pension	66
Social Assistance - Single Unmarried Parent	77
Social Assistance Carers	2
Carers' Pension	2
Special Unemployment Benefit	10

Disability Pensions (Non-contributory)	1
Energy Benefit	74
Senior Citizen Grant - SCG	1
Total	887

By the end of 2014, BFID had 581 cases pending investigation or conclusion.

It is estimated that during the period 2006 - 2014 the Benefit Fraud and Investigation Department contributed through its operations to savings amounting to **€31,698,568**. This was achieved with a Cost/ Savings ratio of **€7.51: €100**.

DEPARTMENT FOR SOCIAL WELFARE STANDARDS

Administration Office

In 2014, this office continued to provide financial and administrative services to the department as well as performing routine internal management tasks. The staff members also answered queries in connection with childcare facilities from the child care freephone installed at same office besides other general office duties such as Registry duties, maintenance of premises and administration of DSWS email account.

With regards to finance, the Administration Office worked out monthly revised estimates and coordinated funds accordingly.

Capacity Building

In 2014, seven (7) officers namely, four Assessors (three females, one male), one Research Analyst (Male) and two Research Officers, (one Male and one Female) were recruited. All these are working within the Welfare Services Assessment Unit.

Meanwhile a call for Project Administrator ESF 4.249 'Enhancing human capital in the regulation of Social Care' was drafted and sent to the Human Resources Directorate within the Ministry.

WELFARE SERVICES ASSESSMENT UNIT

Assessing Child Day Care Facilities

Throughout 2014, the *assessment* of facilities providing child day care services remained the main focus of the Welfare Services Assessment Unit. In line with the monitoring process requested by this Department, in accordance with the National Standards for Child Day Care Facilities (2006), the WSAU carried out a compliance assessment cycle of 3 planned visits, 2 announced and 1 unannounced, in each of the 75 child day care facilities for children aged 0 to 3 years on provisional registration, drawing up registration renewal reports for each of the centres.

The unit conducted *28 on-site inspections* to prospective child day care facilities to assess the suitability of new premises and processed 18 registrations of new facilities. As per legal notice 54 of 2008, the Welfare Services Assessment unit also processed applications for facilities to be registered as educational establishments.

The Welfare Services Assessment Unit received and investigated 18 *complaints* all related with registered child day care facilities. The Welfare Services Assessment Unit carried out announced and unannounced inspection at these facilities and investigated the complaints made. The unit also handled a total of 61 queries regarding the provision and regulation of child day care facilities.

In effort to up skill its current work force, and in view of approvals for the recruitment of another 4 assessors, Acting Manager, WSAU collaborated closely with Research Analyst, RSDU in filing an application for *ESF funding* to be invested in Training in the regulation of Social Care. The funding, which comprised input from Anglia Ruskin University and the University of Malta, Job Shadowing opportunities and a Scholarship scheme for additional courses, was approved.

Assessment of Adoption Agencies

During 2014 WSAU carried out 2 assessments, which consisted predominantly of observation of the training being provided by the respective agency to Prospective Adoptive Parents. There were 2 applications for the accreditation of new adoption agencies during the same period, in respect of which WSAU carried out a full assessment.

WSAU also collaborated with the CA in the process of assessment of an adoption agency which led to its closing down.

Implementation of National Standards for Out of Home Care

WSAU sustained its efforts in the implementation of the National Standards for Out of Home Care. A total of 13 meetings were held with out of home care service providers focusing on the development of policies and procedures which reflect the relevant out of home care sector.

Most providers have benefitted from the assistance of the WSAU assessors, and have now developed policy and procedure documents which are being vetted by WSAU.

WSAU and the Auditing and Quality Assurance unit within Appoġġ collaborated on the development of tools for the assessment of all services offered by Appoġġ, as a key component in the out of home care continuum, and which is also regulated by the National Standards for Out of Home Care. A total of 5 tools have been drafted, and are due for discussion within DSWS.

Initial meetings were also held with AWAS, Yours and Kids Programme with a view to exploring how the National Standards for Out of Home Care apply to these specialised services. In all cases, WASU and the service providing entity have agreed to further explore methods of collaboration for the implementation of the National Standards as relevant to each particular entity.

Training

During 2014, WSAU focused considerable effort upon organising training sessions for child care providers. Sessions were held in the areas of Child Protection, Child Nutrition and Data Protection. It is estimated that a total of 200 individuals attended the sessions.

During 2014, Assessors delivered lectures at MCAST Gozo, and delivered a session at the Breastfeeding Conference organised by the Parent Craft Unit, Mater Dei Hospital.

Sessions about child day care services and the implementation of the National Standards for Child Day Care Facilities are regularly delivered to participants in parents craft sessions. During 2014, a total of 18 of these sessions were delivered.

Social Impact Assessment

Much groundwork was covered in establishing the parameters for the operationalisation of the electoral measure into individual deliverables. Subsequently, consultation was undertaken with the Department for Social Policy and Social Work at the University of Malta so as to establish the parameters for the SIA guidelines. By the end of 2014 the guidelines were close to completion. Concurrently, proposals were submitted to MFSS for the setting up of a Cabinet Committee and a pool of focal persons from each Ministry. Nearly all focal points had been appointed by the end of 2014.

Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)

Under its remit as the National Co-ordinator on Malta's adherence to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the PDU held a number of meetings with various entities to explore, discuss and spur the necessary action with respect to the CRC. Amongst such entities were the Health Department, FSWS, AWAS, Kids Programme.

THE RESEARCH AND STANDARDS DEVELOPMENT UNIT

In 2014, the Research and Standards Development Unit carried out its ongoing activities, such as developing databases containing the data on childcare collected by the Welfare Services Assessment Unit.

The Unit was actively involved in setting up Standards and/or Guidelines for childcare services, children's indoor play areas, out-of-home care, services that cater for people with Addictions and services related to the Adoption of children. The RSDU conducted its work with valuable support from the Welfare Services Assessment Unit and the Administration Office, as well as with the benevolence of several stakeholders in the fields with which it came in contact.

Child day care Facilities

- **Developing and maintaining databases of data collected during Assessments by the WSAU**

Throughout 2014 the RSDU developed databases in which the RSDU collated all the data collected by the WSAU during inspection visits. In 2014, the RSDU worked on developing such databases for assessments carried out in 2014. These databases are aimed towards facilitating the extraction of data when needed, as well as enabling the analysis of data regarding the overall situation of Child Day Care Facilities registered with the DSWS.

- **Analyses of data collected during Assessments by the WSAU**

In 2014 the RSDU analysed and issued reports on the data collated during inspection visits.

In 2014 these reports included:

- Child Care Learning and Play (2014);
- Compliance to Child: Carer Ratios stipulated in Standard 1 (2014);
- Staff Turnover in Childcare centres (2014).

Addiction Services

- **National Standards for Services that cater for people with problems related to Addiction**

The National Standards for Services that cater for people with problems related to Addiction were finalised in 2013. In 2014, the finalised National Standards for Residential Facilities which provide accommodation to people with Drug, Alcohol and Gambling-related issues were presented to Minister Coleiro Preca and Dr Farrugia for publication.

Adoption Services: In 2014, the draft Standards for the adoption process were presented to the Minister for Family and Social Solidarity for his consideration and direction regarding launch for public consultation.

Disability Services: Following the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in October 2012, the DSWS started working on implementing Article 16 through the development of Standards for support services delivered to persons with Disabilities.

- **National Standards for Residential Services for Persons with Disabilities**

In November 2013, the DSWS formed a working group tasked with developing the standards in caption and chaired by the RSDU, under the aegis of the MCCA. The working group comprised of 46 individuals from 30 organisations. Dr Caruana and the working group launched the Draft Standards for public consultation in May 2014. The RSDU engaged in consultation with the public in the month that ensued, gathering data from a total of 137 questionnaires which were received and from the 29 persons who attended the consultation session. The RSDU collated this data in a Feedback Report. The working group reconvened to discuss the feedback collected through the public consultation period and finalise the National Standards for Residential Services for Persons with Disabilities. The working group met 19 times throughout 2014.

- **Draft National Standards for Respite Services for Persons with Disabilities**

The abovementioned working group developed Draft National Standards for Respite Services for Persons with Disabilities. The working group met 4 times regarding this task and the RSDU is liaising with the Ministry for their publication for public consultation.

- **Draft National Standards for Day Services for Persons with Disabilities**

In September 2014, the DSWS formed a working group tasked with developing the standards in caption and chaired by the RSDU, under the aegis of the MCCA. The working group, which comprises 41 individuals from 29 organisations, started meeting in October and met 5 times in 2014.

Out-of-Home Child Care

- **Malta Qualifications Framework Level and Occupational Standards for persons working within residential services for children**

In 2014, the RSDU developed Draft Occupational Standards for Residential Child Care Workers, pegged at MQF Level 4, and started collaborating with the National Commission for Further and Higher Education for their publication for public consultation.

Guidelines on safer recruitment of persons who work with children and adults in social welfare services

In 2014, the RSDU started consulting various entities and individuals about good practice in the recruitment of persons who work within social welfare services. This information was collected with the aim of developing Guidelines on safer recruitment in social welfare services so that service users will be safeguarded from vulnerable situations.

Guidelines on Buildings and Furnishings of Premises used to deliver Social Welfare Services: Following carrying out desk research regarding the subject in caption in 2013, in 2014 the RSDU started liaising with other entities with the scope of developing Maltese guidelines on the physical environment of social welfare services. This will serve to elaborate what is expected of day and residential services. Additionally, it will go some way towards implementing the Major Hazards and people with disabilities; EU Disability Action Plan;

Grant Agreement N. 07.030601/2005/423643/SUB/A5 and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Persons with Disabilities, Article 11. The DSWS is presently working on the development of Draft Guidelines in this regard with the support of MEPA, the Civil Protection Department, the Building Regulations Office and the National Commission for Persons with Disabilities.

ERDF Section: In 2014, the Intermediate Body processed the Letters of Acceptance which were issued to Call 4 Beneficiaries on the 11th February 2014. Consequently, the Grant Agreements were signed on the 14th February 2014.

Eventually, the Intermediate Body settled the sum of €26,438.40 to Call 4 Beneficiaries.

CENTRAL AUTHORITY FUNCTIONS

Accreditation: In 2014, the Central Authority (CA) renewed the accreditation of two adoption agencies and accredited two new agencies.

CA continued collecting adoptions registers as per Adoption Administration Act.

Draft Agreements and Inter-country adoptions: During 2014, the CA followed up the MOU with Slovakia by visiting the counterpart CA with the aim of initiating adoptions. The CA revived contacts with Poland, Vietnam and Cambodia.

Tracing: Together with the WSAU the CA assisted a number of adoptees who have now reached the age of 18 to trace their biological family.

Case work: During 2014 the CA dealt with a number of abduction, access and maintenance cases.

Participation in meetings: CA Unit participated in a number of local Conferences and Ministerial meetings relating to CA functions.

Questionnaires: The CA also forwarded feedback on and replied to questionnaires or queries requested by HCCH, other Ministries and other Member States.

DEPARTMENT FOR THE ELDERLY AND COMMUNITY CARE

During the year 2014, the Department for the Elderly and Community Care continued to address the challenges related to demographic change and societal changes to promote active ageing and improved quality of life for elderly persons. The increasing numbers of elderly persons require different forms of support and healthcare services. This presented an opportunity to explore ways to provide user centred care provision focusing on tangible benefits and long term care sustainability. The Department continued to increase its community services as part of its commitment to continue to support elderly persons living in the community and postpone entry into long term care.

Achievements in this legislation

During the year 2014, the Department for the Elderly and Community Care focused on the following objectives:

- a) The provision of domiciliary services to enable the elderly person to remain living in familiar surroundings within the community. During 2014, the DECC continued to expand the Community Care Outreach Service and worked in collaboration with Mater Dei Hospital and Rehabilitation Hospital Karin Grech to bridge the gap and fragmentation of care. Together with the Department of Orthopaedics, an Orthogeriatric service was initiated at MDH, where specified patients were jointly managed by orthopaedic surgeons and geriatricians in the pre and post operation periods of their stay in hospital;
- b) As from October 2014, Day Centres are being transformed into “Life Long Learning Hubs”. These Programmes are aimed to bring Life Long Learning opportunities closer to older individuals, encouraging Older adults who would not generally be motivated to participate in traditional educational provision to participate in informal learning sessions delivered by professionals, many of whom are older persons themselves. During 2014, one new Day Centre was opened in Gżira;
- c) Providing rehabilitation services and the best possible conditions for health improvement in geriatric institutions. During 2014, the Department focused on ensuring that services delivered added value through better health outcomes for elderly persons;
- d) Providing residential care to elderly persons who are unable to benefit from any of the foregoing services. In addition, more long term care beds were purchased in the private sector as part of the Public Private Partnership;
- e) Provision of ongoing training to both existing staff and training directed to fill in gaps in current human resources.

The total budget allocation for the year 2014 was €1,010,000 for Capital Expenditure and €75,277,555 for the Recurrent Expenditure. (This allocation includes SVPR.)

Performance Review and Analysis: Residential Homes for the Elderly

During 2014, the Department continued to sustain its efforts to offer all residents in State Community Homes a better environment and more effective care. In this regard, works continued to be carried out in all Homes so that the Residential Homes for the Elderly would be better furnished for the benefit of the elderly persons.

During the year under review, routine maintenance and up keep of both home premises and equipment were carried out in all of the eight (8) Elderly Residential Homes.

As part of an ongoing in-service training, for all Heads of Homes, Nursing and Caring staff, various courses and seminars were organised and attended to by the above mentioned staff with respect to various topics such as Dementia Care, Continence Care, Elderly Abuse, Leadership and Management Skills, and Moving and Handling.

Homes` Admission, Deaths and Transfers during 2014

Government Homes: Totals of Admissions, Deaths, Transfers and those that Went back Home in 2014:

Mosta Home:

	Admission	Deaths	Transfers	Went back Home
Total	13	11	1	0

Floriana Home:

	Admission	Deaths	Transfers	Went back Home
Total	7	6	1	1

Mtarfa Home:

	Admission	Deaths	Transfers	Went back Home
Total	15	16	0	1

Msida Home:

	Admission	Deaths	Transfers	Went back Home
Total	10	7	2	1

Cospicua Home:

	Admission	Deaths	Transfers	Went back Home
Total	19	16	3	0

Żejtun Home:

	Admission	Deaths	Transfers	Went back Home
Total	32	22	9	2

Mellieħa Home:

	Admission	Deaths	Transfers	Went back Home
Total	32	27	4	0

Zammit Clapp Hospital Residential Home:

	Admission	Deaths	Transfers	Went back Home
Total	29	26	3	1

The Resident Status within the Government Elderly Homes as on 31st December 2014 was as follows:

RESIDENT STATUS IN GOVERNMENT HOMES FOR THE ELDERLY

HOME	GENDER		TOTAL NUMBER OF RESIDENTS	AGE RANGE					
	Male	Female		below 60	60- 69	70- 79	80- 89	90- 99	100 +
Msida Home	10	54	64	0	6	10	29	19	0
Mosta Home	22	46	68	1	9	18	28	12	0
Mellieħa Home	50	129	179	13	13	38	100	15	0
Mtarfa Home	28	96	124	7	3	23	65	26	0
Floriana Home	12	34	46	0	1	8	21	16	0
Bormla Home	29	107	136	3	5	27	68	32	1
Żejtun Home	37	167	204	4	7	51	106	35	1
Zammit Clapp	34	94	128	3	8	33	67	17	0

Public Private Partnership (PPP) Scheme

Due to current demographic change, that is population ageing, the Government is estimating that an approximate 300 long-term beds are needed on a yearly basis.

During 2014, the Department for the Elderly and Community Care maintained its agreements with private entrepreneurs for the provision of beds for Government referred residents in private home settings within Casa Arkati at Mosta, Villa Messina at Rabat, Casa Serena at St. Paul's Bay, Central Home at Mosta, Roseville at Attard. An additional Public Church Partnership agreement continued with the Archdiocese of Malta Homes for the Elderly for the purchase of beds at Casa Leone St Julian's, Holy Family Home Naxxar, Dar Sant Anna Senglea and Dar Saura Rabat.

PPP Admissions, Deaths and Transfers during 2014

Totals of Admissions, Deaths, Transfers and those that Went back Home in 2014:

Casa Arkati:

	Admissions	Deaths	Transfers	Went back Home
Total	74	8	5	Nil

Villa Messina:

	Admissions	Deaths	Transfers	Went back Home
Total	48	17	5	18

Roseville:

	Admissions	Deaths	Transfers	Went back Home
Total	21	13	7	0

Holy Family Home:

	Admissions	Deaths	Transfers	Went back Home
Total	1	0	1	0

Sant Anna:

	Admissions	Deaths	Transfers	Went back Home
Total	5	2	0	1

Casa Leone :

	Admissions	Deaths	Transfers	Went back Home
Total	13	5	2	0

Dar Saura:

	Admissions	Deaths	Transfers	Went back Home
Total	5	5	0	0

Casa Serena:

	Admissions	Deaths	Transfers	Went back Home
Total	26	12	13	1

Central Home:

	Admissions	Deaths	Transfers	Went back Home
Total	22	9	8	3

Government Hired Beds under the PPP and PCP Schemes in Private/Church Homes for the Elderly:

HOME	GENDER		TOTAL NUMBER OF RESIDENTS	AGE RANGE					
	Male	Female		below 60	60- 69	70- 79	80- 89	90- 99	10 0+
Dar St'Anna	12	24	36	0	1	6	19	10	0
Dar Saura	5	13	18	0	0	4	10	4	0
Casa Leone	3	34	37	1	1	6	22	7	0
Villa Messina	17	61	78	3	4	14	41	16	0
Casa Arkati	26	89	115	3	7	26	62	17	0
Roseville	25	55	80	2	2	17	38	21	0
Holy Family Home	5	11	16	0	2	5	6	2	1
Age Concern	14	80	94	2	5	19	60	8	0
Casa serena	16	78	94	0	2	18	53	21	0

Community Homes Audit and Management Team

During 2014, the "Audit and Management Team", formerly established in 2012, continued operating within the Elderly and Community Care Department with the following responsibilities:

- assisting in the drawing up of a Master Contracts Document for the Issue of a Contracts tender entitled "Services Tender for the Provision of Long term Care Accommodation to persons who are referred by the Department for the Elderly and Community Care";
- revising present agreements at point of closure to come in line with the Masters Contracts Department;

- assessing and coordinating the allocation of new residents and transfers to vacant PPP beds based on their dependency level, and filling up these vacant beds in real time;
- assessing and approving PPP requests for changes in residents' dependency leading to revisions in payments/relocation;
- ensuring that care/ contractual obligations are met through ongoing audit (assessment of environmental, clinical and administrative standards); performing Extra Care Services (ECS) Assessments at Cospicua and Żejtun Homes.

The Residential Homes Meals Board

The Residential Homes Meals Board continued to meet again during 2014 in order to:

- safeguard the nutritional and dietary requirements of our elderly residents;
- offer a variety of menus; and
- provide food according to the residents' needs and desires. During 2014, nine (9) Meals Board meetings took place, while twenty (20) Meals Board Inspections were carried out at Mtarfa, Żejtun, Cospicua, Msida, Mosta, Zammit Clapp Hospital Residential Home (ZCHRH), Mellieħa, Floriana and Casa Leone.

Geriatrician Services

During 2014, the Geriatrician Services in Government Community Residential Homes as well in Public Private Partnership (PPP) and Public Church Partnership (PCP) Residential Homes continued to be delivered. As from December 2013, this specialised geriatric service was augmented with four (4) resident specialists to assist Dr Antoine Vella and Dr. Joe Dimech. In this manner all current residential homes will be visited by a resident specialist on a more frequent basis

The Geriatrician offers specialist medical support to General Practitioners (GP's) and other Homes' Professional Care Staff, in the management of frail older residents under their care in the Community Homes. It is envisaged that the integration of Geriatrician input with the rest of the Geriatric Multidisciplinary Team will help to enable frail older people in care, to continue to enjoy the maximum health and functional independence possible in the Community Homes; an intervention that should contribute to a decrease in avoidable admissions to acute hospital care.

Inter-disciplinary approach to service delivery

The integration of Geriatrician services through an inter-disciplinary approach is facilitating the execution of a comprehensive geriatric assessment, rehabilitative team care, chronic disease management, and education to residents and carers, in the form of a mobile specialist clinic in the Homes.

As part of this ongoing transformation, it is to be pointed out that the deployment of a Pharmacist is also required to be responsible for all pharmaceutical matters and formulation of standard operating procedures, and monitoring in all government and PPP elderly homes.

Given the increasing complex psychosocial issues encountered with elderly residents, it is highly recommended that a social worker is allocated specifically to the Residential Homes.

Allied Health Services, Service Provision within Government and PPP Care Homes

Investment towards the provision of Allied Health Services is a must. Service Provision within the Care Homes is stretched beyond limits. Professionals rendering this service are on loan from St Vincent de Paul Residence (SVPR) and Primary Health Care. In some situations, there is no continuation in this service delivery which is affecting the maintenance of independency levels or improving the overall function of the older person.

The total population of older persons within the Government and PPP Care Homes has by far exceeded that of SVPR (and these numbers continue to expand); and the dependency of the older persons within the Care Homes is reaching proportions similar to those of SVPR. However, the present numbers of older persons within the Care Homes do not have a 'state of the art' service of Occupational Therapist, Podologists, Physiotherapists, Speech Therapists, etc.

A stock taking, human resource exercise was undertaken during 2014 within the Occupational and Physiotherapy Departments at SVPR. The staff complement within the two departments satisfied the requirements for SVPR making it possible for the 'surplus' staff members to be deployed within the Care Homes. However, this redeployment did not materialize.

Due recognition must be given to the fact that Allied Health Service Provision within the Care Homes is necessary and a must. The older persons must no longer rely on the token services offered by either SVPR or Primary Health Care. As mentioned earlier, the Department already has the staff members, (a financial bonus for the department as no calls need be issued) who could initiate this much required service within the Care Homes. Due consideration to this Service Provision and Delivery has now become a requisite within the Care Homes.

Respite Care Service and Night Shelters

A Respite Care Service (comprising 14 beds) was inaugurated at Casa Leone, St. Julian's during November 2014. This service was realised through a PPP Agreement between the Department for the Elderly and Community Care and the Archdiocese of Malta (Homes for the Elderly).

There are also three other Night Shelters in use namely the Mellieħa with a total capacity of 8 beds; SVPR with a total capacity of 8 beds; and Żejtun with a total capacity of 8 beds.

Community Services: Day Centres

The Day Centres help to prevent social isolation and feeling of loneliness. They give the Elderly the opportunity to attend regularly, to socialise, to remain healthy, to remain active and to empower them to involve themselves in the activity programmes organised by the Day Centres.

In October 2014, Gżira Day Centre thus bringing the total of Day Centres to twenty two. The total number of new applicants during 2014 was 123. During this year, there were 1553 regular members; 155 males and 1398 females.

During the year in review, elderly persons were involved in a variety of activities including crafts and decorating the premises for special events. The purpose of this is to encourage the members to use their skills and to learn new ones. They were also encouraged to take part in dancing, singing, acting, poetry and guitar lessons and others.

Day Centres also organised a “Sports Day”, “Jum L-Anzjan” and “Annual Exhibition” where all Elderly members from different Day Centres could participate. This provided the elderly persons with an opportunity to show their capabilities and talents as well as encourage other elderly persons to participate in future activities.

Associations of Members of Day Centres

Associations of members of day centres were set up in each day centre. This initiative aims to strengthen the ‘voice’ of vulnerable groups to enable them to express their views on their needs, priorities and realities.

The size of the committee of these associations varies from one day centre to another depending on the number of members of the day centre and members interested. The officer in charge of the day centre guides the running of the committee. However any issues which arise are addressed to the Active Ageing Unit. Several meetings were held with committees of different day centres to clarify any issues which arise from time to time. The committee is elected through elections every two years.

A good number of these associations are functioning very well, some of the committees, have formulated written requests to the Active Ageing Unit. An example of which is a written request made to expand training offered on digital competence. Such requests are either addressed by the Active Ageing Unit itself or forwarded to higher authorities, as deemed most appropriate. Committee members of associations of day centres which open once or few times a week tend to be less motivated.

Active Ageing Unit

The Active Ageing Unit was set up in March 2014 with the aim to coordinate the implementation of the National Strategic Policy for Active Ageing: Malta 2014 – 2020 (NSPAA). The NSPAA consists of 73 policy recommendations divided into three major pillars: participation in the labour market, social participation, and independent living. This reflects ageing individuals as a highly heterogeneous group, ranging from active persons still participating in paid employment, to frail older people with a variety of needs.

Since the NSPAA is very extensive and addresses a variety of aspects, networking with different organisations and with other ministries is essential. For this aim several meetings are regularly held with different individuals for consultation and to explore different ways of cooperation.

Staff consists of a Senior Manager and an Executive Officer. An Executive Officer was assigned to the Active Ageing Unit as from mid-April 2014 till 3rd January 2015, after which she has taken up a position in another department. A replacement of this staff is still pending.

At the moment there isn’t a specific budget allocated to the Active Ageing Unit, and this is a limitation in funding the implementation of several potential programs.

Transforming the Day Centres of the elderly into Lifelong Learning Centres

The aim of this initiative is to change day centres for the elderly into lifelong learning hubs, where older members not only benefit from social interactions but have the opportunity to actively participate in lifelong learning sessions. Evidence suggests that participation in lifelong learning facilitates better quality of life, facilitates physical and mental wellbeing, while it also promotes socialisation, enhanced self confidence and personal fulfilment.

For this aim various learning programmes are being implemented in 20 day centres for the elderly. Several programs are being implemented based on 10 sessions of 2 hours duration each. The programmes range from programmes about the history of Malta, arts, drama and creativity, digital information, a programme in collaboration with PARKS, and dance therapy sessions. These programmes commenced in October and have been met with enthusiasm from different members of the day centres. There is a planned schedule up till June 2015, it is planned to continue with this program of activities and slowly extend it over more day centres. Sessions stop between July and September, due to lower attendance during summer.

Telecare Service

This emergency telephone, community service (inaugurated in March 1991; a venture between the GO plc and the Department of the Elderly and Community Care), is mainly for elderly persons and others with special needs. The service is progressing in the 23rd year of operation and aims at providing “peace of mind” in one’s home, especially at times of an emergency such as the need for a doctor, ambulance in the case of a fall or police in case of a crime.

The administration of the service is carried out at the Telecare Centre where Telecare applications are registered, assessed and processed. GO plc is responsible for the purchasing and maintenance of the Telecare sets and other equipment necessary for the running of the system.

As from November 2013 an upgrade from Telecare to Telecareplus was launched. Installations of the Telecareplus started in February 2014. Existing clients can upgrade to Telecareplus with a fee of 4 Euros per month plus 25 Euros deposit on the equipment. The existing pink form concession still remains. New clients are now served with Telecareplus equipment.

As at end of 2014 the total amount of installations reached the grand total of 8932 (8384 in Malta and 548 in Gozo).

Incontinence Service

During the year 2014, for Scheme A there were 395 new applications while 146 others stopped the service. This means that up to the end of 2014, there were 1770 persons making use of this service.

In 2014, 773 new applications were registered in Scheme B, while 560 stopped the service. This means that a total of 2765 benefited from the service up to the end of 2014.

Handyman Service

Handyman Section continued to provide the service in the elderly homes. During the year 2014, the section received a total of 1367 new applications. 1252 jobs were completed (figure includes pending jobs from 2013) the. The most requested jobs were: plumbing, electrical works and carpentry. Odd jobs are also performed by the section in Government Homes and Day Centres in exceptional circumstances.

Kartanzjan

During the year 2014, the Electoral Office processed 10,104 cards for new holders (60+) and (75+). The Elderly & Community Care Department is no longer responsible for distribution of Kartanzjan. The Kartanzjan will be part of the ID card as from 2015.

Social Work Unit

The main aim of this Unit is to provide help in the form of psychological support, counselling and guidance. It also discusses all referred social cases.

Services within the community have become a very important part of our service rendering. Through these services we can help prolong the elderly from applying for admissions into homes or S.V.P.R.

People are demographically getting older and the life expectancy is increasing, this means that the demand for these services are also increasing. They are to serve as a safety valve for their better quality of life.

It is right to feel good that our elderly people are increasing and living longer, but it would be even nicer if through the provision of community services, they would not need to be admitted into homes.

It is felt that the initial assessment should be carried out by Social Workers, who in return if the need is felt, will refer cases to other professionals.

Projects this year: In July, two pilot studies started, one being a Social Worker visits a designated Local Council and the other being the Introduction of a Residents Association within State Homes.

The work of the Unit is to take care of all assessments following requests from elderly clients in need of 'Home-Help' and 'Court Cases'.

	SOCIAL CASES	HOME HELP
Cases Worked	201	665
Pending Cases	48	9

Home Help Unit

The principal aim of Home Help Service is to enable elderly people and people with disability and special needs to live as independently as possible and to encourage them to better their quality of life. It is meant to compliment not replace family support. Allocation of service is granted on the basis of social needs and/or medical problems and limitations.

Priority is given to elderly persons living alone, old persons, persons with disability and special needs, very dependent persons, persons at risk because of certain conditions such as dementia, disorientation or confusion, persons living in substandard housing, persons with psychological needs, persons needing respite and as temporary service for acute situations.

During 2014, the Board of Allocation met 15 times. The role of this Board is to decide whether this service is given or not depending on the social assessment and the medical certificate. During these board meetings a total of 513 cases were viewed; 341 cases were approved with a total of 674 weekly hours approved.

The total number of households receiving home help service by end of December 2014 amount to 2602 and the total number of beneficiaries amount to 3685. Total distribution of hours was 7,188 weekly.

The Department has worked on a new tender to extend the Home Help Service which has been submitted to the Contracts Department and is in the process to be issued.

CommCare Assessment Unit

The CommCare Assessment Unit strives to ensure that all patients who receive care in the community are appropriately cared for, whilst also acting as a bridge between the health and social care services in the community. The CommCare team is comprised of nurses, a physiotherapist, occupational therapist, social worker, personal carers and administrative staff. This team dynamic allows for the opportunity to provide supportive and comprehensive delivery of care, which results in addressing the needs of individuals more effectively. In order to achieve this, the following aims have been identified:

- To act as a monitoring unit for domiciliary care;
- To coordinate services and manage care plans for patients on an individual basis;
- To maintain and continue to develop a multidisciplinary approach in case management incorporating both health and social aspects through Outreach;
- To analyse data collected to address current needs and plan for future developments;
- To identify and strengthen assessment data needed to develop community health.

Statistics

- New requests received at CommCare - 4062;
- Follow up requests and readmissions referred to CommCare - 5895;
- Telephone reviews - 2747;
- Educational sessions - 4147;
- Interventions managed by telephone - 2284;
- Patients recruited to the Outreach Programme - 53.

Home visits are carried out by all team members at CommCare according to the required competency and professional ability. The average duration of each home visit is 1 – 2 hours. These visits include first time assessments, follow up/review visits and the Outreach programme. The number of home visits done by the CommCare team for 2014 was 3740.

MMDNA delivered more than 600,000 interventions during 2014. CommCare is in contact with MMDNA on a daily basis to ensure the delivery of these interventions as well as to address day to day issues that arise.

CommCare Outreach Team

The CommCare Outreach Team is a multidisciplinary team with Nurses, Occupational Therapist, Physiotherapist and specifically trained personal carers.

Referrals received from CommCare call centre are passed on to the Outreach team. First time assessments are carried out and an evaluation of needs is carried out via a single shared assessment. Patients may be identified as requiring solely clinical care (MMDNA) but other patients and families may be identified as potential recipients for CommCare team input so as to empower patients and families, support patients and family to regain or retain skills to promote functionality and independence and to support patients and their families during the convalescent phase for enabling. Thus, patients and their families benefited from a more complete deserved service.

Telephone Rebates

This service came into force in January 1996 whereby the client can apply for a discount on the rental charges of the telephone if in possession of a Kartanzjan and a Schedule V card. In 2014, there were 137 New Applications and 444 Cancellations. By the end of 2014 the number of beneficiaries stood at 3675.

Meals on Wheels Service

The Meals on Wheels service, run by the Maltese Cross Corps, remained popular with the elderly. In fact the year 2014 proved to be a successful year whereby due to the high quality of food which is professionally prepared by the personnel at the kitchen of St. Vincent de Paul Residence, its meticulous presentation in hygienic containers and its timely delivery, the requests for the service have continued to increase.

The main activity of the M.C.C., in collaboration with the Elderly & Community Care Department, is the delivery of meals to the elderly and persons with special needs. As at end of 2014 there were 1250 registered beneficiaries of which 385 beneficiaries making regular use of the Service. An average of 350 meals are delivered daily to beneficiaries in 46 localities in Malta. In 2014, the number of meals delivered exceeded 98,000 as against 90,000 in 2013. The M.C.C. has a waiting list of more than 200 for the service. The menu is varied and of good quality.

A system exists whereby the menus are changed to cater for individual needs and tastes. The beneficiaries pay €2.21 for each meal. The Department is in the process of adjudicating a tender for the provision of the service.

DIRECTORATE GENERAL SOCIAL POLICY

The role of the Directorate

During 2014, its first year of operation, the newly set up Directorate General (Social Policy) focused on establishing the foundations and embarking upon the implementation of its core functions, namely:

- (a) initiating, developing and co-ordinating policy initiatives in relation to the remit of the Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity;
- (b) overseeing and spearheading research projects in order to provide scientific and empirical-based data upon which policy formulation is based; and
- (c) developing an integrated policy framework in line with societal needs and aspirations so as to enhance social well-being in general and the prospects of vulnerable people in particular, through the development of social welfare policies that effectively address existing and emerging needs.

Key Tasks undertaken during 2014

In view of the key functions outlined above, during 2014 the Directorate:

- took an active role in Boards, Committees and working groups;
- participated in EU fora;
- participated in national seminars, conferences and workshops;
- provided analysis and feedback re social policy matters;
- compiled technical reports re national policies, strategies and documents;
- co-ordinated the drawing up of national policies;
- invested in staff training.

Boards, Committees and Working Groups

In line with its role and responsibilities to develop social policy so as to be more relevant and effective in a constantly evolving scenario, the Directorate contributed its technical input on boards, committees and working groups focusing on a range of social policy matters. In this regard, the Directorate actively participated in the discussions undertaken and decisions reached in meetings convened by:

- the Tripartite Interministerial Committee re absenteeism, more specifically in the Sub Committee on Community Services;
- the Active Ageing Interministerial Committee;
- the Public Social Partnerships Working Group;
- the Working Group re the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (2014-2020);
- the Working Group focusing on the introduction of the Tapering of Social Security Benefits;
- the Working Group tasked with the development of the Child Supplement under the Social Security Act;
- the Social Development Centres /Family Resource Centres Task Force;
- the Strategy and Planning Committee of the Ministry of the Family and Social Solidarity.

EU Fora

The initiation, development and co-ordination of policy initiatives ask for insight and understanding of evolving social realities and the actions that are being implemented or that need to be undertaken so as to effectively address such a dynamic scenario. In this regard,

the Directorate seeks to keep itself continuously adjourned both on a national as well as on a European level and has thus, during 2014:

- participated in an EU Peer Review organised by Belgium in January 2014;
- regularly attended and represented Malta in the EU Social Protection Committee and the Indicators Sub-group meetings.

Analysis and Feedback

During 2014, the Directorate worked closely both with other Ministries as well as with other Departments within the Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity since it strongly believes that only through such ongoing close collaboration can social policy be developed comprehensively and in such a way that it addresses actual and emerging needs. The development of effective services asks for insight with respect to existing realities and for foresight to anticipate the needs arising from a dynamic social scenario. In this regard, the Directorate worked closely with the Ministries responsible for education and health and with the Department of Social Security so as to understand and analyse the priority needs that warrant to be addressed through the modification of existing social benefits or the introduction of new benefits. It was through such collaboration that the necessary information was compiled and analysed so as to provide a sound basis for the introduction of the Child Supplement payable under the Social Security Act as from 2015.

Besides assisting with the analysis and feedback to set the foundations for the new Child Supplement, during 2014 the Directorate also worked closely with the programme implementation unit within the Ministry and the Social Security Department in terms of the new Fund for European Aid for the Most Deprived (2014-2020). Such collaboration facilitated the compilation of information and the analysis of the local scenario thus helping to identify the households most in need. This networking eventually led to the establishment of objective criteria that determine entitlement to food provisions being supplied under this new EU co-financed programme.

Technical Reports

The Directorate is fully committed to mainstream the promotion of the social policy dimension (particularly the reduction of poverty and social exclusion), in national documents and reports. During 2014, the Directorate was pleased to note that various departments and entities invited its feedback on draft documents and reports that they had compiled for eventual publication. In this regard, through such networked consultation, during 2014, the Directorate provided its technical feedback in respect of:

- *L-istrategija Nazzjonali għall-Ekonomija Diġitali*;
- Economic Vision for Malta 2014-2020;
- Framework for the Education Strategy for Malta 2014-2024;
- Food and Nutrition Policy and Action Plan;
- Malta National Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020;
- National Disability Policy;
- Malta National Electromobility Action Plan;
- A National Health Systems Strategy for Malta 2014-2020: Securing Our Health System for Future Generations;
- National Youth Policy;
- Consultation on Nearly Zero-Energy Buildings National Plan for Malta;
- Draft white paper - *Riforma fil-ligi tad-droga*;
- Positive Parenting draft policy.

National Policies

The overall well-being of society in general and vulnerable groups in particular is highly dependent on the development and implementation of policies that acknowledge and address priority needs through realistic and achievable strategic actions. Guided by this principle, during 2014 the Directorate strongly committed itself to the drawing up and finalisation of the *National Strategic Policy for Poverty Reduction and for Social Inclusion (2014-2024)* which puts forward a total of ninety four actions grouped under six dimensions, namely income, employment, education, health and environment, social services, and culture. During the final quarter of the same year the Directorate also started to focus on reviewing the draft children's policy.

Investing in Staff Training

The Directorate firmly believes that its output is highly dependent on the motivation and technical competencies of its staff. Thus during 2014, the Directorate continued to invest in its staff by encouraging and supporting them to participate in training offered both locally and abroad. During 2014, staff attended short-term courses offered by the Centre for Development, Research and Training (CDRT) in Malta as well as a training course offered by the European Institute of Public Administration (EIPA) in Maastricht, The Netherlands.

EU AFFAIRS DIRECTORATE

In 2014, the EU Affairs Directorate was entrusted with the task of coordinating the Ministry's response in EU and other international fora, as well as to contribute to the drawing up of policies in respect of matters pertaining to the Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity. This involved monitoring developments in the area of social affairs at both EU and international level, while also coordinating the formulation of Ministry positions in such an area, after holding consultations with relevant stakeholders.

The EU Affairs Directorate also provided positions to other Ministries whenever required. Moreover, the Directorate coordinated the participation of Ministry officials in various conferences, meetings, and other events, taking place abroad. Of particular relevance was the participation in EU-related Ministerial Council meetings of the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council (EPSCO), and the related Informal Ministers' Council meetings organised by the Greek and Italian EU Presidencies.

In addition to EU Affairs, the Directorate also dealt with matters relating to International Affairs, particularly in the area of social affairs. Many of the requests originated from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and mainly referred to documentation sent from the United Nations and the Council of Europe. In this context, of particular relevance was the participation by the Ministry in the United Nations Seventh Session of the Conference of State Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability held in New York, United States, from the 10th-12th June 2014, the High-Level Conference on the European Social Charter held in the Turin, Italy, on the 17th-18th October 2014, and the 16th Ministerial Conference of the Pompidou Group held in Strasbourg, France, on the 19th-20th November 2014.

With regards to Policy Development, the Directorate also incorporated within its structures the Research Unit and the Social Inclusion Office up to 17th February 2014 before these were taken over by Directorate General (Social Policy). Both the Research Unit and the Social Inclusion Office provided valuable advice and support towards the formulation of policy development analysis and positions related to social affairs. The Social Inclusion Office also upholds the overall responsibility for the promotion of social inclusion issues in Malta. Moreover, as part of the internal re-organisation which came into effect on 17th February 2014, the EU Affairs Directorate assumed responsibility for Programme

Implementation. This primarily involves coordinating and monitoring the implementation of EU co-financed projects and programmes pertaining to the Ministry.

EU Affairs

Drafting of Positions: During 2014, the EU Affairs Directorate drafted or coordinated the drafting of 23 Instruction Notes for EPSCO related Working Parties, COREPER I and Committees' meetings. In addition to this, the Directorate drafted 5 Briefing Notes, 17 Background Notes, and 9 Lines to Take/Speaking Notes in connection with participation in EPSCO Ministerial meetings and conferences, bilateral meetings with the European Commission, and meetings attended by the Permanent Representative of Malta to the European Union.

Participation in Inter-Ministerial Committee: The Directorate actively participated in all the Inter-Ministerial Committee for EU Affairs meetings held in 2014. In this regard, the Directorate last year prepared a total of 7 Explanatory Memoranda outlining Government's position on new proposals and communications issued by the European Commission for which the Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity was the designated implementing Ministry. The explanatory memoranda were cleared by the Inter-Ministerial Committee for EU Affairs and subsequently approved by Cabinet of Minister before being transmitted to the Standing Committee on Foreign and European Union Affairs of the House of Representatives for its approval.

In addition to the above, the Directorate also provided its feedback in relation to numerous other Explanatory Memoranda for which the Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity was participating Ministry. Other highlights of the Directorate's action in 2014 in the area of EU Affairs were the following:

Europe 2020 Strategy: Throughout 2014, the EU Affairs Directorate continued to monitor developments in EU discussions and provide its views when requested, as well as to hold consultations where necessary, with regards to Malta's contribution towards the European Semester discussion, particularly in relation to Malta's Country Specific Recommendation on Pensions and the EU's Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction headline target;

European Council Conclusions: The EU Affairs Directorate also coordinated Ministry's response with regards to the formulation of Malta's position for the four European Council meetings held in 2014;

Infringements: During the course of 2013, the EU Affairs Directorate coordinated Ministry response with regards to the following infringements:

(a) In 2014, the Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity continued to monitor developments on Infringement No. 2009/2161 concerning the calculation of pension entitlements in Malta, specifically with regards to the application of Article 46b of Regulation (EEC) No 1408/71 and Article 54 of Regulation (EC) No 883/2004 with regard to persons receiving a Maltese statutory social security pension and a civil service pension from another EU Member State. The infringement originates from complaints made by Maltese citizens who previously worked under UK civil servant schemes to the effect that the amount of their UK pensions is deducted from their Maltese retirement pension. Malta maintains that it is correctly applying the above-mentioned Articles with respect to all pensions paid by any EU Member State and which fall within the scope of the Regulations being cited. Therefore, in Malta's opinion, there is no breach of Community law. The case is now awaiting hearing before the Court of Justice of the European Union. Austria and the United Kingdom have also intervened on the case and submitted their views in support of Malta's position. On 25th November 2014, the European Commission presented its submissions in which it registered its disagreement with the position taken up by both Austria and the United Kingdom.

Following such developments, on 22nd December 2014, Malta filed an application for an oral hearing in the Court of Justice of the European Union;

(b) The EU Affairs Directorate also contributed towards Malta's response to request received from the European Commission for further clarifications on Pre-Infringement Memorandum (EU Pilot) regarding the transposition by Malta of Directive 2006/54/EC on the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation (recast). In its request, the Commission referred in particular to Malta's reply of 26th March 2014, as it did not agree with the interpretation given by Malta that Treasury Pensions paid by the Treasury Department are not considered to be occupational social security pensions' schemes. The European Commission therefore contended that these schemes should not be excluded from the scope of Maltese legislation on the equal treatment with respect to occupational social security schemes. In its reply of 8th October 2014, as uploaded on the EU Pilot database, Malta maintained that these schemes were categorised as "special schemes for civil servants" under Regulation 883/2004 and that therefore these should be considered as statutory schemes under Directive 79/7/EC;

Attendance in EU Meetings: In 2014, officials from the Directorate regularly attended EU meetings of the Social Protection Committee and the Indicators Sub Group of the Social Protection Committee, other EU committees such as the Programme for Employment and Social innovation (EaSI) and the FEAD Expert Group/Committee on which officials from the Directorate are nominated as either members or alternate members, as well as other EU-related meetings and events, whenever such participation was requested;

Director (EU Affairs) took part in two meetings with his Dutch and Slovakian counterparts in preparation for Malta EU Presidency in 2017. These technical discussions mainly dealt with the identification of EPSCO related priorities to be incorporated in the work programmes of the three Presidencies and were held within the margins of the Informal EPSCO Council and Social Protection Committee meetings respectively;

During 2014, the EU Affairs Directorate coordinated the participation of Ministerial delegations led by Minister Dr Michael Farrugia, Minister for the Family and Social Solidarity, at the Informal EPSCO Council held in Athens, Greece, on the 29th-30th April 2014, the EPSCO Council held in Luxembourg on 19th June 2014 and the Conference "The Europe 2020 Poverty Target: Lessons Learnt and the Way Forward" which was organised by the European Commission in Brussels, Belgium, on the 9th October 2014;

Moreover, the EU Affairs Directorate coordinated the participation of a Maltese delegation attending the 4th Annual Convention of the European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion which was held in Brussels, Belgium, from the 20th-21st November 2014.

International affairs

In 2014, the Directorate also coordinated the Ministry's response to requests for information received from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs on United Nations' Conventions and Protocols as well other international institutions of which Malta is a Member State, such as the Commonwealth and the Council of Europe, relating to social issues, such as social security provisions, welfare services, disability, children's rights, family matters, poverty reduction and social exclusion. Similarly, whenever requested, the Directorate provided its feedback to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in relation to meetings attended by representatives of this Ministry.

The EU Affairs Directorate provided its support towards the participation of Ministerial delegations led by Minister Dr Michael Farrugia, Minister for the Family and Social Solidarity, at the High-Level Conference on the European Social Charter held in the Turin, Italy, on the

17th-18th October 2014, and the 16th Ministerial Conference of the Pompidou Group held in Strasbourg, France, on the 19th-20th November 2014, as well as the participation by Parliamentary Secretary Dr Justyne Caruana, Parliamentary Secretary for Rights of Persons with Disability and Active Ageing, in the United Nations Seventh Session of the Conference of State Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability held in New York, United States, from the 10th-12th June 2014.

Policy Development

The EU Affairs Directorate coordinated the Ministry's response towards the drawing up of the measures included in Malta's National Reform Programme 2014 in respect of the Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction national target. The National Reform Programme was published in April 2014.

During the early part of 2014, prior to the relocation of both the Research Unit and Social Inclusion Office, work continued on Malta's headcount national poverty reduction target in relation to the Europe 2020 headline target, that included addressing the technical issues encountered in combining and merging data retrieved from a number sources in collaboration with the National Statistics Office (NSO) and the European Union SILC team.

Furthermore, the Policy wing of the EU Affairs Directorate continued coordinating Ministry response in relation to the Sustainable Development Act (2012). The Director (EU Affairs) had been designated as the Ministry's Sustainable Development Coordinator, while every entity within the Ministry appointed a Sustainable Development Focal Point. The Directorate also represented the Ministry at the National Strategy for Sustainable Development Review Process kick-off meeting held on 17th July 2014.

Also, as part of the Sustainable Development Act 2012 initiative, the Policy wing within the Directorate also coordinated the Ministry's response relating to the implementation of the National Environment Policy (NEP). More specifically, this response concerned one of the measures contained in this Policy which dealt with social housing.

On the other hand, the main highlight of the work carried out by the Social Inclusion Office, which also forms part of the policy wing of the Directorate, was the drawing up of Malta's National Report on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion for 2014. This was presented to Cabinet of Ministers on 2nd October 2014 and transmitted to the EU's Social Protection Committee (SPC) on 4th December 2014.

Programme Implementation

As from 17th February 2014, the Directorate also started monitoring the implementation of the various projects, initiatives and measures pertaining to the Ministry's remit, while also coordinating with other stakeholders to ensure smooth implementation of such projects and initiatives.

During 2014, the Programme Implementation Unit within the EU Affairs Directorate monitored five EU co-financed projects (4 ESF, 1 ERDF) that were in different phases of implementation. Two of these projects namely ESF 3.105 (*Promoting the Social Inclusion of Disabled persons with challenging behaviour* by KNPD) and ERDF Aid Scheme 136 (*Grant Scheme for Childcare facilities* by DSWS) terminated implementation during 2014.

The LEAP Project (ESF3.234), which is being implemented by the Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity, picked up momentum during the second half of 2014 and implementation is progressing satisfactorily. A total of 262 traineeship contracts had been signed with the involvement of more than 90 non-governmental organisations and public

entities. Most of the traineeships started in October 2014 and will run for a maximum period of eight months.

Two new projects were approved during the latter part of 2014 and these projects are currently preparing to publish and launch the tenders to embark on the contracting phase. The new ESF 4.242 project entitled *Capacity Building in care for the elderly and persons with disability* is being implemented by the Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity. The project aims to invest in higher quality, specialised nursing, and caring professionals in the area of elderly care and disability. The other newly approved project is ESF 4.249 entitled *Enhancing human capital in the regulation of Social Care* which is being implemented by the Department for Social Welfare Standards. This project will focus on providing training in various forms to personnel who are involved in the regulation of social care.

Ministerial Project Steering Committee: During 2014, the Directorate convened three Ministerial Project Steering Committee (MPSC) meetings on 28th March, 30th July, and 24th November respectively. During these Committee meetings, Project Leaders had the opportunity to give updates on the various aspects of their projects and also brought up for discussion any problems or challenges being faced by the projects. Since the MPSC brings together representatives from key stakeholders such as the Managing Authority, Treasury and the Certifying Authority, the problems presented could be addressed instantly and in fact there were a number of decisions and plans of action taken during the MPSCs that were agreed between all members of the Committee.

The Directorate also attended project progress (bilateral) meetings chaired by the Parliamentary Secretary responsible for EU Funds, as well as attended monitoring committees organised by the Managing Authority.

Physical on-the-spot-checks: The Directorate carried out a number of physical on-the-spot checks mainly regarding LEAP project traineeships in different regions. Officers from the Directorate verified attendance sheets and the actual work being carried out by the beneficiaries. The reports are compiled by the Directorate and endorsed by the respective Project Leader.

Project Progress Reports: During 2014, the Directorate reviewed Project Progress Reports (PPRs) which cover the periods January to June and July to December and are therefore compiled twice a year by Projects Leaders. The Directorate vetted the draft PPRs and requested amendments and corrections, whenever this was required, so as to ensure that reports that are as accurate and detailed as possible.

Moreover, a key objective which the Programme Implementation Unit is working on is that relating to the implementation of the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD), a new EU funding instrument established for the period 2014-2020, with the aim of exclusively supporting the most deprived persons and addressing the worst and most socially corrosive forms of poverty. In effect, the Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity is the designated Intermediary Body entrusted with the task of implementing the programme on the ground. Work on the implementation of this programme is gathering momentum and the distribution of food packages to materially deprived households in Malta and Gozo is expected to commence in the first half of 2015.

Other: As from February 2014, the EU Affairs Directorate was tasked with monitoring the progress made on the implementation of the Ministry's 2014 Budgetary and Simplification of Bureaucracy Measures through the compilation of monthly updates prepared following consultations carried out with line entities responsible for such measures. Besides the preparation of monthly updated lists, in 2014, quarterly progress reports were also compiled

which incorporated data relating to the amount of beneficiaries benefitting from these measures and the resulting percentage reduction in bureaucracy.

INFORMATION MANAGEMENT UNIT

A key resource within the Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity (MFSS) is the use of Information, Communications and Technology (ICT). The focus is on improving the way that the Ministry uses technology as a sound and effective foundation for delivering its corporate objectives. The right approach to and proper investment in ICT provide the MFSS with the opportunity to transform the way it does business. Keeping this in mind, the primary focus of the Information Management Unit is the strategic direction and management of information by ensuring that data is translated into information as a strategic resource.

Technical and Administrative Support

The Information Management Unit (IMU) offers a first line of support for ICT services for all staff within the Ministry's portfolio. The aim is to provide an ICT helpdesk in order to filter queries and requests forwarded by line departments, identifying the query or request.

Moreover, the procurement for ICT equipment for the line departments is carried out centrally by the IMU. This mechanism ensures more control on ICT spending and while allowing the IMU to monitor and ensure that suppliers deliver services/products in accordance to specifications, service agreements and/or contractual obligations.

The IMU is also involved in managing suppliers and coordinating repairs on electronic equipment to be carried out by third party suppliers. The IMU prepares the equipment for pick up by the supplier, keeps track of such equipment and ensures that the equipment was properly repaired and returned to its user/s.

In addition, responding to growing dependence on ICT entails the provision and maintenance of a resilient and reliable operations service in support of organisational objectives. The main priority is therefore to ensure that MFSS's investment in ICT solutions is adequately protected. This is done through effective contractual frameworks which are currently ongoing. This guarantees that agreed service delivery and support is provided in a cost-effective, secure and efficient manner.

Contractual arrangements cover the full spectrum of ICT services including network management, desktop support and application support/development. Getting the most from selected service providers and from the cost effective use of technology helps deliver efficiency savings and reduce costs, thus creating long-term cost-effective solutions. The formulation of a number of maintenance and support agreements related to hardware and/or Information Systems that are implemented within the Ministry or its Departments also fall within the remit of the IMU.

eStrategy

The Ministry's direction is to continue to improve the spread of online services to the general public. The IMU in collaboration with MITA has embarked on a programme of works to expand upon the existing services as well as a programme of simplification of Bureaucracy Initiatives, whereby beneficiaries will no longer be required to apply for their benefit entitlement.

Moreover, our commitment is that of providing information to the public. Through the ministry's websites it is ensured that the general public is provided with information which is maintained, updated and of high standard at all times. As an ongoing task, the IMU seeks to enhance, identify and extend components of the existing sites, or seek specific business areas in order to offer new services through the website.

ICT Governance

ICT Governance is a continuous function that should be embedded in all operations of the Ministry. In the execution of ICT Governance, the IMU provides leadership and control through the necessary policies and procedures. Amongst such policies is the deployment of an effective ICT Governance Framework for the adoption and use of information technology across the MFSS, consisting of Government ICT Policies (known as GMICT Policy). The IMU through the Governance of ICT seeks to provide line departments within the MFSS with the direction to implement governance of ICT within their spheres of accountability and responsibility.

Social Policy Information Centre (SPIC)

The Social Policy Information Centre (SPIC) is an information centre offering greater access to citizens for the provision of information related to Social Policy services. It is an additional channel through which the general public may obtain information.

At SPIC, we provide a telephony-based service offering all necessary and relevant information to all citizens of Malta and Gozo about social services and other services offered by departments and entities within the social policy portfolio. Our priority is to deliver an excellent service by making the user's phone call or request a positive experience, ultimately providing a faster and better answer.