



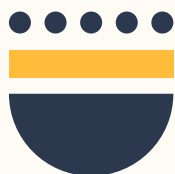
MINISTRY FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE AND SOLIDARITY,
THE FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

NATIONAL STRATEGIC POLICY FOR POVERTY REDUCTION AND SOCIAL INCLUSION **2014 - 2024**

IMPLEMENTATION & EVALUATION REPORT 2017 - 2019



DEC | 2020



CONTENTS

PG NO.

05	Minister's Foreword
06	Permanent Secretary's Message
07	Executive Summary
08	Social Changes Over Time
09	List of Tables and Figures
10	List of Abbreviations
13	Chapter 1: Introduction
13	1.1 Overview of the National Strategic Policy
14	1.2 Aims and Objectives of this Implementation and Evaluation Report
17	Chapter 2: Implementation of the Strategic Policy
17	2.1 Mechanisms set up to monitor the implementation of the strategic policy actions
17	2.2 Measures undertaken to address the strategic policy actions
19	2.2.1 Income and Social Benefits
25	2.2.2 Employment
29	2.2.3 Education
34	2.2.4 Health and Environment
40	2.2.5 Social Services
44	2.2.6 Culture
49	Chapter 3: Evaluation - Measuring Progress
49	3.1 General Population
57	3.2 Main Vulnerable Groups
57	3.2.1 Children and Young People
62	3.2.2 Elderly Persons
64	3.2.3 Unemployed Persons
68	3.2.4 Persons Experiencing In-Work Poverty
71	Chapter 4: The Impact of COVID-19 on Poverty & Social Exclusion
75	Chapter 5: Conclusion
77	ANNEXES

MINISTER'S FOREWORD



It is with great satisfaction that I announce the launch of the second “Implementation and Evaluation Report” for the National Strategic Policy for Poverty Reduction and for Social Inclusion 2014-2024 this report covering the period from 2017 until 2019. This builds upon the first Implementation and Evaluation Report that analysed the measures implemented between 2014 and 2016. Evaluating our social inclusion and poverty strategy, enables us to ensure that our strategy is on track and is yielding the expected results on the ground.

This Report highlights the progressive effect that the national strategic policy has had on the quality of life and wellbeing of our citizens, particularly vulnerable groups namely children and young people, elderly persons, unemployed persons and the working poor.

I am certain that one of the major factors in the success of the National Strategic Policy for Poverty Reduction and for Social Inclusion 2014-2024 has been the strong collaboration with our colleagues at the Ministry for Education and Employment (MEDE), the Ministry for Health (MFH) and the Ministry for National Heritage, the Arts and Local Government (MHAL). This collaboration ensures that the challenge of combatting poverty is addressed in a holistic manner.

The Implementation and Evaluation Report presents a statistical analysis of the general economic and living conditions indicators published by Eurostat and the National Statistics Office (NSO). The implementation of the national strategic policy has led to 12,000 people being lifted out of poverty or social exclusion. These results are encouraging, however efforts must be sustained and further consolidated, particularly when facing the challenges brought about by COVID 19. I am confident that our commitment as a Government to combat poverty and social exclusion will yield the expected results within this area.

Michael Falzon
Minister

Ministry for Social Justice and Solidarity, the Family and Children's Rights

PERMANENT SECRETARY'S MESSAGE



Accountability is one of the four pillars on which our renewed public administration is built. It is within this context that we are presenting this second Implementation and Evaluation Report to provide a transparent account of the work being carried out to address the 94 policy actions of the National Strategic Policy for Poverty Reduction and for Social Inclusion 2014-2024.

In the first 6 years since the launch of this strategic policy we implemented a total of 469 measures and initiatives through the joint effort of various ministries. This inter-ministerial approach is vital in the fight against poverty and social exclusion, given the multi-dimensional nature of poverty.

Through these measures and initiatives, we continued to enhance our social protection system, introduced activation measures, created more employment opportunities and facilitated job-mobility, addressed social, educational and cultural inequalities, ensured equal access to quality health care, promoted an environmental health friendly approach, enhanced social services at community level, and developed evidence-based policies and practices to address emerging needs and challenges.

The results of the last 6 years are very encouraging, notwithstanding the above-average growth in our population. At risk of poverty or social exclusion, severe material deprivation and material deprivation went down substantially. The number of persons not at risk of poverty, not at risk of poverty or social exclusion, not in severe material deprivation and not in material deprivation have increased by tens of thousands. Benefit dependency decreased by more than 50% as thousands of inactive persons, mostly women, have been enticed into the labour market through making-work-pay initiatives, enabling them in turn to improve their quality of life. Buoyed by unprecedented economic growth, up to the end of 2019 unemployment went down to record low levels.

Challenges remain, especially for certain vulnerable groups such as those aged 65 years and over. Despite various enhancements in pensions and other benefits paid to older persons, at risk of poverty for this group has increased, paradoxically due to the fact that the average household disposable income and the related poverty thresholds increased by at least 20% in these last 6 years. This is further explained by the positive fact that, the number of older persons living in severe material deprivation has decreased, while the number of older persons not at risk of poverty or social exclusion and not living in severe material deprivation has increased substantially.

As we brace ourselves for the post Covid-19 era, our work will continue incessantly in our ongoing commitment to further reduce poverty and social exclusion by promoting the well-being and improving the quality of life for all.

Mark Musu'

Permanent Secretary,

Ministry for Social Justice and Solidarity, the Family and Children's Rights

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The National Strategic Policy for Poverty Reduction and Social Inclusion 2014-2024 outlines Malta's long-term strategic policy direction with regards to addressing poverty and social exclusion through a results-oriented, participatory and partnership approach. Due to the multifaceted nature of poverty - going beyond one's financial circumstances - the Strategic Policy required a highly collaborative, inter-ministerial approach spanning six core dimensions of wellbeing, namely: income and social benefits; education; employment; social services; health and environment; and culture. In this regard, 94 strategic policy actions have been identified which not only target the population in whole but also highlight concentrated efforts for members of the four main vulnerable groups i.e. children; elderly persons; unemployed persons; and the working poor.

The inter-ministerial approach adopted in the development and implementation of the Strategy was also utilised for the purpose of the monitoring and evaluation processes. In this regard, an Inter-Ministerial Committee was established for the purpose of facilitating the implementation of the policy actions, and an Implementation and Evaluation Report on the progress sustained is published every three years. The first of this series of reports was published in 2017, covering the period between 2014 and 2016, whereby the Report highlighted the various actions undertaken contributing towards lifting 14,000 people out of poverty or social exclusion within those years.

Building on the Implementation & Evaluation Report 2014 - 2016, this new report focuses on the 2017 to 2019 period whereby Government continued to implement various policy measures contributing towards the 94 policy actions proposed by the Strategic Policy. Data presented within the current report compared to the situation in 2013, that is the year preceding the start of the Strategic Policy, highlights further reductions in the share of individuals living at risk of poverty or social exclusion, in severe material deprivation, in material deprivation and also positive changes made with respect to a number of other statistical indicators.

Notwithstanding the positive results yielded by the end of 2019, the worldwide crisis generated by the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic in 2020 brought with it unprecedented circumstances that impacted the progress sustained within all dimensions of wellbeing, even within the national context. Government remains committed to pursue its fight against poverty and has endeavoured through various budgetary measures and other programmes and initiatives to do its utmost in order to offer protection to its citizens during such difficult times. The employment of measures in order to reverse the effects of 'The Great Lockdown' will continue to be monitored alongside the measures scheduled for the next three years, culminating in a final report at the end of the term covered by the National Strategic Policy.

Possibly now more than ever, impartial, evidence-based, holistic, and sustainable policymaking and evaluation are crucial tools in efforts to reduce or eliminate drivers of poverty and social exclusion, as well as to obtain a clear picture of the status quo, to identify areas requiring further attention, and to inform future action related to the phenomena in question. These concerted efforts are expected to contribute towards attenuating the impact of the pandemic with the objective of improving the quality of life for people particularly for the most vulnerable.

SOCIAL CHANGES OVER TIME

2013-2019	
No of addressed strategic policy actions (2014-2019)	93 (out of total of 94)
No of implemented measures (2014-2019)	469
Average Household Disposable Income	+€5,000 +21.3%
At-Risk-of-Poverty threshold (for single adult)	+€1,540 +20%
At-Risk-of-Poverty threshold (for couple)	+€2,310 +20%
At-Risk-of-Poverty threshold (for single parent + 2 children under 14)	+€2,464 +20%
At-Risk-of-Poverty threshold (for couple + 2 children under 14)	+€3,234 +20%
At-Risk-of-Poverty or Social Exclusion (whole population)	-4.5pp -5,000 persons
Not At-Risk-of-Poverty or Social Exclusion	+76,000 persons
At-Risk-of-Poverty	+1.3pp +18,000 persons
Not At-Risk-of-Poverty	+53,000 persons
Severe Material Deprivation	-6.5pp -24,000 persons
Not in Severe Material Deprivation	+98,000 persons
Material Deprivation	-11.5pp -41,000 persons
Not in Material Deprivation	+115,000 persons
At-Risk-of-Poverty or Social Exclusion - Children	-9.4pp -6,000 children
Not At-Risk-of-Poverty or Social Exclusion - Children	+12,000 children
At-Risk-of-Poverty or Social Exclusion - Aged 18-24 years	-8.9pp -4,000 persons
Not At-Risk-of-Poverty or Social Exclusion - Aged 18-24 years	+3,000 persons
At-Risk-of-Poverty or Social Exclusion - Aged 65+	+8.2pp +11,000 persons
Not At-Risk-of-Poverty or Social Exclusion - Aged 65+	+9,000 persons
Severe Material Deprivation - Aged 65+	-4.5pp -3,000 persons
Not in Severe Material Deprivation - Aged 65+	+23,000 persons
Living on social assistance	-8,189 persons
Very Low Work Intensity	-4.2pp
Unemployment rate	-2.5pp
Registering for work	-5,682 persons

pp = percentage points

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

- Table 1. Implementation Covering Period January 2014-December 2019
- Table 2. Policy Actions targeted by more than one measure 2014-2019
- Table 3. Benefit Dependency and Making Work Pay initiatives 2013-2019
- Table 4. Registered Patient Populations for the POYC Scheme and the 70+ Domiciliary Delivery Scheme
- Table 5. At-Risk-Of-Poverty or Social Exclusion in Malta and EU by Sex 2013-2019
- Table 6. At-Risk-Of-Poverty Rate in Malta and EU by Sex 2013-2019
- Table 7. At-Risk-Of-Poverty in Malta and EU (anchored in 2008) by sex 2013-2019
- Table 8. Severe Material Deprivation in Malta and EU by sex 2016-2019
- Table 9. Material Deprivation in Malta and EU by sex 2013-2019
- Table 10. Main items of Deprivation of Persons living in Malta 2013-2019
- Table 11. Share of Population in very low work intensity (VLWI) in Malta and EU by sex 2013-2019
- Table 12. Income quintile share ratio (S80/S20) in Malta and EU by sex 2013-2019
- Table 13. Children At-Risk-Of-Poverty or Social Exclusion in Malta and EU by Sex 2013-2019
- Table 14. Rate of unauthorised absences in Primary and Secondary State Schools for the last five scholastic years
- Table 15. Children attending formal childcare 2013-2019
- Table 16. Children from low-income families attending free childcare 2013-2019
- Table 17. Young persons At-Risk-Of-Poverty or Social Exclusion in Malta and EU by Sex 2013-2019
- Table 18. ESL Rate by sex 2013-2019
- Table 19. NEET Rate by sex 2013-2019
- Table 20. Elderly Persons At-Risk-Of-Poverty or Social Exclusion in Malta and EU by sex 2013-2019
- Table 21. Severe Material Deprivation among Elderly Persons in Malta and EU by sex 2013-2019
- Table 22. Main Items of Deprivation of Persons Aged 65 and over, 2013-2019
- Table 23. Unemployed Persons At-Risk-Of-Poverty or Social Exclusion (18-64 years) in Malta and EU by sex 2013-2018
- Table 24. Long-Term Unemployed Persons in Malta and EU by sex (20-64 years) 2013-2019
- Table 25. Persons registering for work under Part I and Part II of the Unemployment Register in Malta and Gozo by sex as at December 2013-2019
- Table 26. Persons with a Disability registering for work under Part I and Part II of the Unemployment Register in Malta and Gozo by sex as at December 2013-2019
- Table 27. Participation in Adult Formal and Non-Formal Education (25-64 years) in Malta by sex 2013-2019
- Table 28. In-Work At-Risk-Of-Poverty in Malta and EU by sex and age (18-64 years) 2013-2018
- Table 29. Main Poverty Indicators During Covid-19 Period
-
- Figure 1. ARP Rate Before and After Social transfers, 2013-2019 59
- Figure 2. Housing Cost Overburden by Poverty status, 2013-2019
- Figure 3. Unemployment Rate, 2013-2019
- Figure 4. In-work at risk of poverty by work intensity of the household, 2013-2018
- Figure 5. In-work at risk of poverty by educational attainment, 2013-2019

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

A2E	Access to Employment
ALP	Alternative Learning Programme
ALP+	Alternative Learning Programme Plus
AROPE	At-Risk-of-Poverty or Social Exclusion Rate
ARP	At-Risk-of-Poverty Rate
CRA	Carers Allowance
CfC	Office of the Commissioner for Children
COLA	Cost of Living Allowance
CPS	Child Protection Services
CRPD	Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability
CSW	Child Support Worker
CYPAB	Children and Young Persons Advisory Board
DSS	Department of Social Security
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESF	European Social Fund
ESL	Early School Leavers
EU	European Union
FEAD	Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived
FSWS	Foundation for Social Welfare Services
HA	Housing Authority
ICRA	Increased Carers Allowance
IMC	Inter-ministerial Committee
IT	Information Technology
LTU	Long-Term Unemployment
LWI	Low Work Intensity
MATSEC	Matriculation and Secondary Education Certificate
MCAST	Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology
MCRB	Minors Care Review Board
MD	Material Deprivation
MDH	Mater Dei Hospital
MEDE	Ministry for Education and Employment (now Ministry for Education)
MFCS	Ministry for the Family, Children's Rights and Social Solidarity (now Ministry for Solidarity and Social Justice, Family and Children's Rights)
MFH	Ministry for Health
MFIN	Ministry for Finance (now Ministry for Finance and Employment)
MFSS	Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity (now Ministry for Solidarity and Social Justice, Family and Children's Rights)
MGOZ	Ministry for Gozo
MHAL	Ministry for National Heritage, the Arts and Local Government
MHAS	Ministry for Home Affairs and National Security
MHSE	Ministry for Home Affairs, National Security and Law Enforcement
MJCL	Ministry for Justice, Culture and Local Government
MJEG	Ministry for Justice, Equality and Governance
MNEI	Median National Equivalised Income
MQF	Malta Qualifications Framework
MSDC	Ministry for Social Dialogue, Consumer Affairs, and Civil Liberties
MTICP	Ministry for Transport, Infrastructure and Capital Projects
NCFHE	National Commission for Further and Higher Education
NEET	Youth Not in Education, Employment or Training
NEI	National Equivalised Income
NLA	The National Literacy Agency
NSO	National Statistics Office
POYC	Pharmacy of Your Choice
PP	Positive Parenting
SCSA	Social Care Standards Authority
SDH	Social Determinants of Health
SEC	Secondary Education Certificate

SILC	Survey on Income and Living Conditions
SMD	Severe Material Deprivation
SRE	Sexual Relationship Education
TEP	Training for Employment Project
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
VCA	Valletta Cultural Agency
VET	Vocational and Educational Training
VINFL	Validation of Informal and Non-Formal Learning
VLWI	Very Low Work Intensity
WHO	World Health Organization
WI	Work Intensity

Chapter 1 | Introduction

OVERVIEW OF THE NATIONAL STRATEGIC POLICY



1.1 OVERVIEW OF THE NATIONAL STRATEGIC POLICY

Malta's National Strategic Policy for Poverty Reduction and for Social Inclusion launched in 2014 by the Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity (MFSS)¹, marked the beginning of a ten-year journey towards the reduction of poverty and social exclusion for the Maltese Islands.

Poverty and social exclusion have profound effects on a multitude of facets of an individual's life experience such as negative impacts on physical and mental health, increase in tendency of school drop-out rates and underachievement, unemployment and precarious employment, low participation in socio-cultural life and increased potential for homelessness and housing exclusion. The complex reality underpinning poverty and social exclusion requires a multifaceted approach which are reflected in the large number of diverse, yet corresponding actions identified within the Poverty Strategy. These actions not only represent key contributors to the wellbeing of individuals who are at-risk-of – or already experiencing – the detrimental consequences of poverty or social exclusion, but also aim to serve as a safety net for the population as a whole, based on the premise that poverty or social exclusion can affect any individual over the course of their life. It is within this context that the Poverty Strategy takes a life-course approach in its endeavours to meet people's needs given that such needs change during the course of life document.

Through the implementation of this strategy, Government aims to contribute towards achieving the below results, namely:

- increasing disposable income for a good standard of living;
- promoting activation and creating more quality employment opportunities;
- ensuring equal access to quality healthcare and a health-friendly environment;
- promoting inclusive education, and opportunities for further and higher education;
- consolidating social services to promote social solidarity and social cohesion; and
- promoting a more inclusive culture.

In developing this document, a collaborative aspect of the strategic policy is reflected not only in the extensive consultations made with relevant stakeholders in its formulation and development, but also in the collaboration involved in its implementation. Furthermore, although this strategic policy is the main policy document representing a comprehensive framework for Malta's fight against poverty and social exclusion, it is complemented by a number of additional national strategies and policy documents aiming to promote improvement within the dimensions of wellbeing. These include policies and strategies related to social welfare and housing², education and employment³, health⁴, and culture⁵.

Finally, the establishment of an Inter-Ministerial Committee (IMC) for the purpose of benchmarking, monitoring, and evaluating the success of the policy's implementation further highlights the multi-faceted nature of Malta's hard work in targeting the issue of poverty and social exclusion.

Notwithstanding the fact that this report covers the period 2017-2019, it has been deemed opportune to include a brief overview of the impact of the COVID 19 pandemic within the Maltese Islands which will impinge on poverty and social exclusion.

1. As of June 2017, the name of this Ministry was changed to 'Ministry for the Family, Children's Rights and Social Solidarity (MFCS).

2. Such as the following: National Strategic Policy for Active Ageing 2014-2020; National Strategic Policy for Positive Parenting 2016-2024; National Children's Policy 2017; The Strategy for Retirement and Financial Capability: Knowledge, Planning, Action 2017-2019; National Adoption Strategy for Children and their Families 2019-2022; Renting as a Housing Alternative: White Paper on the Rental Market; The National Strategy for Persons with Disability 2020-2030.

3. Such as the following: National Youth Policy Towards 2020; Framework for the Education Strategy for Malta 2014-2024; A Strategic Plan for the Prevention of Early School Leaving in Malta 2014; Addressing Attendance in Schools Policy 2014; Addressing Bullying Behaviour in Schools Policy 2014; The National Employment Policy 2014; A National Literacy Strategy for all in Malta and Gozo 2014-2019; National Digital Strategy 2014-2020; Trans, Gender Variant and Intersex Students in Schools Policy 2015; Malta National Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020.

4. Such as the following: A Healthy Weight for Life: A National Strategy for Malta 2012-2020; National Health Systems Strategy for Malta 2014-2020; Food and Nutrition Policy and Action Plan for Malta 2015-2020; A Whole School Approach to a Healthy Lifestyle: Healthy Eating and Physical Activity Policy 2015; National Breastfeeding Policy & Action Plan 2015-2020; Diabetes: A National Public Health Priority: A National Strategy for Diabetes 2016-2020; National Policy for Sport in Malta and Gozo 2017-2027; National Cancer Plan for the Maltese Islands 2017-2021; A National Strategy for the Elimination of Hepatitis C Virus as a Public Health Threat in the Maltese Islands 2018-2025; Mental Health Strategy for Malta 2020-2030.

5. Such as the Create 2020 Strategy (2015).

1.2 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THIS IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION REPORT

This report outlines an evaluation of the measures and initiatives designed to address the actions emanating from the National Strategic Policy for Poverty Reduction and for Social Inclusion 2014-2024, between 2017 and 2019. Within this context, this report aims to analyse the progress made throughout the period under review within each of the six dimensions of wellbeing.

To achieve this goal, progress on the status of implementation of measures that contribute towards the actualization of the policy actions of the strategic policy were collated and documented by relevant stakeholders. Statistical analysis was also carried out on local trends pertaining to general economic and living conditions indicators published by Eurostat and the National Statistics Office (NSO) and complemented by relevant in-house statistics compiled by different Ministries. The approach adopted aims to provide an overview of the effectiveness of the initiatives that were implemented by the various Ministries in their commitment to combat poverty and social exclusion.

***OVERCOMING POVERTY IS
NOT A GESTURE OF CHARITY,
IT IS AN ACT OF JUSTICE***

Nelson Mandela

Chapter 2

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STRATEGIC POLICY



This Chapter: outlines the mechanisms set up to monitor the implementation of the strategic policy; and presents an overview of the measures undertaken to address the strategic policy actions.

2.1 MECHANISMS SET UP TO MONITOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STRATEGIC POLICY ACTIONS

The National Strategic Policy for Poverty Reduction and for Social Inclusion called for the development of a national structure for the purpose of assessing progress made within the different dimensions of the strategy across its operative term. For this reason, an Action Committee was set up following the launch of the strategy in December 2014 with the intention to:

develop an action plan for the implementation of the measures proposed by this strategic policy document;
 assess the implementation progress of measures; and
 analyse the impact of these measures against the SMART objectives to be achieved by this strategy.

Considering that the effort to reduce poverty and promote social inclusion requires a multidisciplinary and collaborative approach which extends beyond implementation to monitoring and evaluation, regular input from numerous stakeholders is necessary. Within this context, in 2015, the aforementioned Action Committee was replaced by an Inter-Ministerial Committee (IMC) in 2015 whereby representatives from the key Ministries contribute towards the implementation of the six dimensions. Representatives include:

- Ministry for Education and Employment (MEDE) to report upon the employment and education dimensions;
- Ministry for Health (MFH) to report upon the health and environment dimension;
- Ministry for Justice, Culture and Local Government (MJCL)⁶ to report upon the culture dimension; and
- Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity (MFSS) to report upon social benefits and social services dimensions.

The IMC ensures an open channel of communication that promotes synergy among the key stakeholders, thus facilitating the implementation of this strategic policy. Furthermore, the IMC also contributes towards the evaluation of the different measures being implemented towards the reduction of poverty. Indeed, all data provided within this Chapter was collated by Ministerial representatives on the IMC unless otherwise indicated.

2.2 MEASURES UNDERTAKEN TO ADDRESS THE STRATEGIC POLICY ACTIONS

The IMC monitored the implementation of the 94 actions put forward in the National Strategic Policy for Poverty Reduction and for Social Inclusion 2014-2024. The progress sustained towards the implementation of this strategic policy document is outlined by Table 1 below which presents an overview of the measures that were introduced between 2014 and 2019 in respect of the six dimensions of wellbeing underpinning the strategic policy.

6. As of 15th January 2020, the name of this Ministry was changed to 'Ministry for National Heritage, the Arts and Local Government'.

Table 1. Implementation covering period January 2014 - December 2019⁷

Dimensions	Policy Actions	Policy Actions being addressed	Policy Actions not yet addressed	% of Actions being addressed	No of measures/projects feeding into the policy actions
Income & Social Benefits	14	14	0	100	103
Employment	13	13	0	100	40
Education	17	16	1	94.1	73
Health and Environment	11	11	0	100	59
Social Services * (refer to note below)	30	30	0	100	152
Culture	9	9	0	100	42
Total	94	93	1	98.9	469 ⁸
* Information about Social Services' policy actions and measures is broken down as follows:					
* Social Welfare Services	8	8	0	100	32
*Children & Young People	5	5	0	100	40
*Elderly	6	6	0	100	26
*Other Vulnerable Groups	6	6	0	100	26
*Housing	5	5	0	100	28

It is worth noting that out of the total 94 policy actions presented in the Strategic Policy, 79 have been targeted by more than one measure, amounting to 74.4% as presented in Table 2 below.

This further emphasises the multifaceted nature of poverty and social exclusion, as well as the intersectoral and inter-ministerial action necessary to address these issues.

Table 2. Policy actions targeted by more than one measure, 2014 - 2019⁹

Dimensions	Income & Social Benefits	Employment	Education	Health and Environment	Social Services	Culture	Total	Total %
Number of policy actions	14	13	17	11	30	9	94	100
Number of policy actions targeted by more than one measure	12	8	14	9	27	9	79	74.4

7. These figures were sourced from the Ministry for the Family, Children's Rights and Social Solidarity (MFCS).

8. Excluding 11 overarching measures which contribute towards more than one dimension. These include: the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD); the launch of the National Strategic Policy for Positive Parenting 2016-2024; the State Funded Food Distribution (SFFD); the launch of the National Children's Policy; the launch of the Renting as a Housing Alternative: White Paper Rental Market; the Equity Sharing Scheme; the Child Participation Assessment Tool (CPAT); Free Transport for Church and Independent Schools; the launch of the National Strategy for Volunteering 2020-2025; introducing the Heritage Malta Passport; and establishing the Valletta Cultural Agency (VCA).

9. These figures were sourced within the Ministry for the Family, Children's Rights and Social Solidarity (MFCS).

In addition to the listed measures specifically addressing the 94 strategic policy actions, Malta has implemented a number of other measures having a horizontal impact on society in particular for vulnerable groups. These include initiatives designed to strengthen the efficiency in the use of energy; and to promote the use of energy from renewable sources and improve Malta's overall digital capacity and competency. In this regard, measures such as: (i) encouraging a shift towards collective and sustainable transport; (ii) a grant on the purchase of bicycles/pedelec bicycles; (iii) and the launch of the Digital Malta Strategy to boost basic and advanced digital skills are also indirectly contributing towards the reduction in risk of poverty and social exclusion

A comprehensive list of all initiatives undertaken by the responsible Ministries, Departments, and entities between 2014 to 2019 can be found within Annex A to Annex J.

2.2.1 INCOME AND SOCIAL BENEFITS

Income and social benefits are instrumental in contributing towards the reduction of poverty and social exclusion. Social benefits aim at addressing inequalities in income with a view to enable a dignified living for all. Within this context, this dimension addresses a wide range of policies and measures which aim to strengthen the Maltese social benefit system and other means of financial provision.

Measures introduced during the 2017-2019 period that contribute towards the strategic policy actions presented under this dimension include the:

1. consolidation of existing measures;
2. increase in contributory and non-contributory pensions and benefits;
3. increase in the minimum wage;
4. reform of non-contributory benefits;
5. drop in benefit dependency and making work pay initiatives; and
6. sustained promotion of financial capability which is seen as complementing the increased provision of social security benefits.

Further details in relation to these measures are outlined below¹⁰.

Consolidation of existing measures

Various existing policy measures introduced during the 2014-2016 period were consolidated. These include the Tapering of Benefits¹¹, In-Work Benefit¹², Deficiency Contribution Bonus¹³, Senior Citizen's Grant¹⁴, Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD)¹⁵, and project Għaqal id-Dar, Hajja Aħjar¹⁶ amongst others.

10. Data pertaining to numbers of beneficiaries has been obtained through the National Statistics Office available online via: https://nso.gov.mt/en/News_Releases/Documents/2020/04/News2020_055.pdf [Accessed on 24/09/2020], unless otherwise stated.

11. During the period under review, the yearly average of beneficiaries was 3,261. MFCS data.

12. During the period under review, the yearly average of beneficiaries was 4,337. MFCS data.

13. During the period under review, the yearly average of beneficiaries was 12,746. MFCS data.

14. During the period under review, the yearly average of beneficiaries was 31,401. MFCS data.

15. Food packages are provided trice yearly. In 2017, a yearly average of 3,092 eligible households collected the food packages out of the 3,907 yearly average eligible households (translating to a take up of 87%). In 2018, a yearly average of 2,843 eligible households collected the food packages out of the 3,505 yearly average eligible households (translating to a take up of 81%). In 2019, a yearly average of 2,524 eligible households collected the food packages out of the 3,213 yearly average eligible households (translating to a take up of 79%). MFCS data.

16. In 2017, the project was carried in another 12 localities across Malta and Gozo, benefitting a total of 193 persons. In 2018, the project was carried in another 11 localities across Malta and Gozo and in 1 entity (Dar Merħba Bik), benefitting a total of 260 persons. In 2019, the project was carried in another 5 localities across Malta and Gozo and in 5 entities (Dar Merħba Bik, St Jean Antide, Dar Qalb ta' Gesu, Isla Salesjani, Dar Kenn għall-Saħhtek), benefitting a total of 125 persons.

Increase in contributory and non-contributory pensions and benefits

All pensions¹⁷, both contributory and non-contributory, were increased in 2018 by €2 per week and €2.17 in 2019, whilst also affecting the following increases to already-existing benefits:

- the maximum yearly rate for Supplementary Assistance¹⁸ for married couples below 65 years of age was increased in 2017, from €422.76 to €652.08¹⁹. Beneficiaries of the maximum rate for this assistance amounted to 647 in 2017, 567 in 2018 and 478 in 2019²⁰;
- the yearly rate for Supplementary Assistance received by married elderly couples was increased by €126.36 per year. Unique beneficiaries of this raise in assistance included 5,817 couples in 2017, 6,110 couples in 2018 and 6,302 couples in 2019²¹;
- the Old Age Pension²² received by married couples was increased by €4 per week in 2017. There were 730 beneficiaries in 2017, 727 beneficiaries in 2018 and 711 beneficiaries in 2019²³;
- the Medical Assistance²⁴ received by married couples where both spouses suffer from chronic illness was increased by €5.14 per week in 2019. During this year, 1,782 couples benefitted from this measure²⁵;
- the Increased Severe Disability Allowance²⁶ made annual stepped increases between 2017 and 2019 that totalled €30 per week. As at December 2019, the rate stood at €150 per week²⁷. In this regard, a yearly average of 484 persons benefitted from this Allowance during the period under review;
- the Children's Allowance²⁸ for families with a gross income under €20,000, increased the maximum rate payable up to €96 per year per child. The total unique beneficiaries for this allowance were 16, 559 in 2017, 17, 638 in 2018, and 17,403 in 2019²⁹;
- the Disabled Child Allowance³⁰ increased by €5 per week and thus providing a total of €25 per week for each child with disability. During the period under review, there were around 1,500 beneficiaries on average yearly³¹;

17. 91,389 persons and 98,171 persons benefitted from the general increase to all social security benefits in 2018 and in 2019 respectively. MFCS data.

18. This assistance is given to heads of household and single individuals having a low income. The income ceiling differs depending between single or coupled persons, and according to the cost of living.

19. This data was provided by the Ministry for the Family, Children's Rights and Social Solidarity (MFCS).

20. This data was provided by the Malta Information Technology Agency (MITA).

21. MFCS data.

22. This pension awarded to married couples who have reached the age of 60 years and share a capital not exceeding €23,300, in addition to satisfaction of a weekly means test of income derived from foreign pension, maintenance, rents, interests and dividends, and any other income.

23. MFCS data.

24. This assistance is provided to married couples suffering from chronic diseases forming part of the provisions of the Social Security Act and sharing a capital not exceeding €23,300, in addition to satisfaction of a weekly means test of income derived from local or foreign pension, maintenance, rents, interests and dividends, and any other income. This assistance is awarded following an assessment by a Medical Panel appointed by the Department of Social Security.

25. MFCS data.

26. This is granted to persons having a disability forming part of the provisions of the Social Security Act.

27. MFCS data.

28. Payable to each family having children under 16 years of age, with a reduced rate for children over 16 years if they are in full-time education, training or unremunerated employment.

29. MFCS data.

30. Payable to every family with children under 16 years of age suffering from physical or mental disability as per provisions of the Social Security Act, and paid concurrently with the Children's Allowance. Applications for this benefit are assessed by the Medical Board.

31. MFCS data.

- the Carers Allowance (CRA)³² weekly rate was set at €90 in 2017³³ and increased by €2.72 in 2019, whilst the Increased Carers Allowance (ICRA)³⁴ weekly rate was set at €140 in 2017³⁵ and increased by €4.08 in 2019, resulting in rates of €92.72 and €144.08 respectively in 2019. Around 275 persons on average yearly benefitted from the CRA between 2017 and 2019 whereas in 2019, the number of beneficiaries of ICRA increased to 1,146 from 527 in 2017;
- the Foster Care Allowance³⁶ (introduced in 2018) was increased by €30 per week to reach a weekly allowance of €100 in 2018, and benefitted 190 persons in 2018, and 192 persons in 2019³⁷;
- the Drug Addicts Allowance³⁸ (introduced in 2018) was also increased from €30 to €40 per week in 2018. Over the years 2018 and 2019, 60 persons benefitted from this initiative on average each year.

Increase in the minimum wage

The National Agreement on the Minimum Wage was reached in 2017 between the Government, the Opposition and the Social Partners represented on the Malta Council for Economic and Social Development (MCESD). The objective of this agreement is to reduce the number of persons on the current minimum wage³⁹ and minimize the period in employment that a person may remain on the minimum wage. The measures agreed upon were purposely designed to preserve wage relativities and industrial relations, while addressing social inequalities. Through this agreement:

- employees on minimum wage will, upon completion of the first year of employment with the same employer, be entitled to a mandatory increase of €3 per week in the second year of employment and upon completion of the second year, to an additional €3 per week;
- employees earning more than the basic minimum wage will still be entitled to the portion of the increase mentioned above during the second and third year of employment;
- employees on the minimum wage who are transferred or offered new employment with another company within the same group of companies will carry their accumulated years of service for the purposes of the increases mentioned above;
- employees who are engaged on a definite contract and who are affected by the increases in wages mentioned above, shall not on the expiry of their contract be replaced by another person for up to a period of one year unless a good and sufficient reason is provided. If, within six months of expiry of the first contract, the employee is offered another definite contract, the two periods shall be considered as one continuous period, both in terms of law and for the purpose of these agreed increases in wages; and
- a *Low Wage Commission* is planned to be set up by 2020, to establish an effective mechanism to determine whether the minimum wage needs reviewing.

Reform of non-contributory benefits

Various reforms to non-contributory benefits have been carried out to make them available to more people who are vulnerable and who were not being captured by the previous eligibility criteria and assessments. Besides eliminating bureaucratic procedures, these amendments also ensure that social justice is attained through the provision of cash benefits to those who need them. These include the reform of the:

- means test of all non-contributory benefits⁴⁰. Capital limits beneath which persons could qualify for non-contributory

32. Information on this benefit is found under point iv) c).

33. Following the reform to the Carers Pension.

34. Information on this benefit is found under point iv) b).

35. Following the reform to the Carers Pension.

36. This is awarded to parents who foster children after they submit an application to Aġenzija Appoġġ and are certified by the Fostering Board.

37. MFCS data.

38. This allowance is awarded to persons who are following a drug or rehabilitation therapeutic program.

39. In 2018, 37,844 people earned less than the minimum wage from employment (not including self-employment).

40. Non-contributory benefits include: Social Assistance or Unemployment Assistance, Subsidiary Unemployment Assistance, Tapering of Benefits, In Work Benefit, Sickness Assistance, Milk Grant, Free Medical Aid (Pink Form), Schedule 5 (Yellow Card), Drug Addict Assistance (for those following a residential drug rehabilitation programme), Disability Assistance, Severe Disability Assistance, Increased Severe Disability Assistance, Severe

benefits have been revised to make thresholds more realistic, thus capturing more persons with a low income or at the risk of poverty. This is estimated to have reached around 1,000 beneficiaries;

- Increased Carers Allowance (ICRA), which as of 2017 substituted the Carers' Pension that was only payable after means-testing the carers' income and in cases where the patient was wheelchair bound or bedridden. ICRA is payable without means-testing to those carers⁴¹, who would be giving care⁴² on a full-time basis in their residence to a person with a high level of dependence. There were 527 beneficiaries in 2017, 819 beneficiaries in 2018 and 1,146 beneficiaries in 2019;
- Carers Allowance (CRA)⁴³ which as of 2017, widened its eligibility criteria to include persons who are married, in civil union, or cohabiting in addition to single persons. As from 2019, this allowance is no longer given according to a means test, and the dependency of the care-receiver over 85 years of age is no longer assessed by the Multi-Disciplinary Board. Rather, an assessment is carried out by a social worker to verify whether the elderly is truly being cared for by the allowance receiver. In 2017, there were 298 beneficiaries, 252 beneficiaries in 2018 and 271 beneficiaries in 2019;
- Disability Pension⁴⁴ based on three tiers as from 2017. Persons receiving the Disability Pension in the first tier⁴⁵ will not have their income considered in the assessment of eligibility for the Pink Card⁴⁶, and persons within the second tier⁴⁷ will no longer have their income from employment considered in the assessment for Pink Card eligibility. Recipients of the Disability Pension who have a Pink Card and are thus entitled to free medication, will have this card valid for one year rather than for three months. The third tier includes the gradual coverage by law of a number of disabilities and the provision of benefits to persons with disability who did not receive any benefits. Benefitting from this pension were 3,678 beneficiaries as at end 2017, 4,022 beneficiaries as at end 2018 and 4,321 beneficiaries as at end 2019⁴⁸;
- Disability Assistance⁴⁹ whereby as from 2019, besides the Barthel Index applicable to people with mobility problems, an Impairment Rating Evaluation is being used. Such a tool widens the criteria from those who absolutely cannot work to consider also those who cannot work to their full capacity. As at end 2019, there were 169 beneficiaries;
- Sickness Assistance which as of 2019, widened its criteria for persons suffering from bipolar disorder, psychotic depression and terminal illness. Provided that a person meets the criteria of the means test⁵⁰, eligibility for those suffering from these conditions was extended to heads of households as well and not only to young men and women living with retired parents. As at end 2019, 111 beneficiaries benefitted⁵¹; and

Intellectual Disability Assistance, Assistance for the Visually Impaired, Carers Allowance, Increased Carers Allowance, Children's Allowance, Single Unmarried Parent Allowance, Energy Benefit, Supplementary Allowance, Senior Citizen Grant and Age Pension.

41. Single or married persons under pension age taking care of their parents, brother, sister, grandparents, uncle, aunt, mother- or father-in-law.

42. Verified through a home visit assessment by the Multi-disciplinary Board.

43. Payable to persons under pension age taking care of their parents, brother, sister, grandparents, uncle, aunt, mother- or father-in-law, with medium level of dependence, on a full-time basis and in the same residence.

44. This includes the Increased Severe Disability Assistance (ISDA), the Severe Disability Assistance (SDA), the Assistance for the Visually Impaired (BLD) and the Disability Assistance (DA).

45. Falling within the first tier are persons who cannot participate in gainful occupation according to the Barthel Index and who will receive the highest allowance, rising gradually to become equivalent to the Minimum Wage.

46. The Pink Card provides for free medical aid (such as drugs, spectacles, dentures and other prosthetic aids) required in the presence of diseases and conditions stipulated under Part II of the Social Security Act Cap. 318 (Accessed on 19/08/2020 on: <http://justiceservices.gov.mt/DownloadDocument.aspx?app=lom&itemid=8794>). This medical aid is given to: i) adults who satisfy the means test (couples not exceeding €23,300 in capital and earning €169.90 per week - €195.48 per week if a couple pensioner; or single persons not exceeding €14,300 in capital and earning €161.75 per week - €171.57 per week if single pensioner); or ii) adults who are in receipt of Social Assistance; Social Assistance for Single Parents, Unemployment Assistance; Non-Contributory Age Pension or Increased Severe Disability Assistance and Severe Disability Assistance, or iii) children who are in foster care or attending full-time education.

47. The second tier includes those persons whose disability falls within the parameters of the Social Security Act and who are working or are able to work, so as to facilitate their entry into gainful employment.

48. MFCS data.

49. Payable to individuals suffering from a permanent total paralysis or permanent total severe malfunction or permanent total disease, whether through amputation or otherwise of one of the upper or lower limbs. This assistance is subject to a means test.

50. Before awarding the benefit, a Capital Test and a Weekly Means Test are carried out. Single households or households with a number of persons whose head of household is either an unmarried person; separated person; or single parent are not to exceed €14,000 yearly income to be eligible for Sickness Assistance. In cases of married/cohabiting households, the yearly income should not exceed €23,300.

51. This data was provided by the MFCS.

- Supplementary Assistance⁵² by considerably raising the ceiling from €11,089 to €13,000⁵³ for married couples with low income. Moreover, the Supplementary Assistance was extended to single persons who are not head of household and earn less than the single persons' quota. In total, there were 25,339 persons who benefitted from this assistance in 2017, 24,967 beneficiaries in 2018 and 24,262 beneficiaries in 2019.

Drop in benefit dependency and making work pay initiatives

The key thrust of national policy since 2014 has been the creation of favourable economic and employment conditions to reduce the proportion of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion, and at the same time, address the EU's country specific recommendations and attain the Europe 2020 employment target.

Alongside policies to boost economic growth and invigorate employment levels, a package of active labour market initiatives was developed to entice more people to enter the labour market and reduce the at risk of poverty incidence as part of a 'Making Work Pay' nation-wide initiative. The package comprised the tapering of social benefits, the In-Work Benefit scheme, free childcare for parents in employment and education, and the availability of care for primary pupils before and after school hours.

The tapering of benefits scheme was tailored to wean inactive persons off social benefits and provide them with greater security when landing a job. It was launched with the crucial support of employers in the private sector who were willing to offer job placements to scheme participants.

Under the three-year scheme, beneficiaries are allowed to retain part of their social benefits when they get employed. In their first year in a job, they retain 65% of their main benefit. In the following 2 years they retain 45% and 25% respectively. At the same time, job providers are assigned 25% of the benefit throughout the three-year period.

Single parents with children under 23 years have also been given the opportunity to participate in the scheme, but with different criteria to address the particular realities of single parenthood in Malta.

The In-Work Benefit Scheme was concurrently launched as an anti-poverty measure to enhance the income of low-to-medium households where parents are in employment and have dependent children up to 23 years of age. The benefit is payable for each child in the family and is calculated solely on income from employment net of social security contributions.

On the other hand, the free-childcare programme was designed to facilitate the entry or retention of women in the labour market. It is open for children under 3 years of age where parents are in employment, in education or actively seeking a job. The service is provided through State and registered private childcare centres.

Backed by exceptional economic growth and the creation of thousands of new jobs, the Making Work Pay framework recorded a notable success, resulting in a 54% decline in benefit dependency in the period between 2014 and 2019.

This is clearly underlined in Table 3 which shows the drop in the number of social assistance beneficiaries and unemployment assistance beneficiaries over this period, and the number of persons yearly participating in the tapering and in-work schemes. Most encouragingly, the majority of the participants of the tapering of benefits scheme, of which 2 out of 3 were women, remained in employment after exhausting the 3-year period and their families had the opportunity to avail themselves of the In-Work Benefit.

52. This assistance is given to heads of household and single individuals having a low income. The income ceiling differs depending between single or coupled persons, and according to the cost of living.

53. This is still being updated according to the cost of living and in 2019, it stood at €13,434.

Table 3. benefit dependency and MAKING WORK PAY INITIATIVES, 2013-2019⁵⁴

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Social Assistance Beneficiaries	10,784	9,639	8,445	8,110	7,494	6,840	6,312
Unemployment Assistance Beneficiaries	4,330	3,791	2,570	1,391	939	766	613
Tapering of Benefit Beneficiaries	-	497	1,659	2,482	2,539	1,958	1,572
In-Work Benefit Beneficiaries	-	-	1,359	2,294	2,873	4,514	4,556
Children in Free Childcare	-	3,856	5,852	5,335	5,939	6,737	7,341

Furthermore, the free childcare policy was of particular assistance to mothers to enter the labour market as otherwise it would not have been possible for them to afford the additional cost of childcare. The success of the scheme is further underlined by the figures which show that over 6 years the number of children placed in free childcare nearly doubled, reaching over 40% of the population of under 3-year olds in Malta.

The number of jobless persons have in the meantime dropped to record low levels and enabling the country to reach the Europe 2020 employment target well before time.

Sustained promotion of financial capability

The promotion of financial capability was sustained through various initiatives undertaken since 2017 led by the Working Group for Retirement and Financial Capability (which was set up following the launch of the Strategy for Retirement and Financial Capability: Knowledge, Planning, Action 2017-2019) within MFCS. This Working Group was at the end of 2018 rebranded as GEMMA⁵⁵. GEMMA aims at empowering different population cohorts⁵⁶ and vulnerable target groups⁵⁷ to become more financially capable by acquiring knowledge on the basis of which they can act on an informed basis for retirement and financial matters for both day-to-day and long term planning in a manner that fits their personal circumstances.

Financial capability is pivotal for combatting poverty and social exclusion and for enabling a good quality of life for all. A broad range of policies have been carried out on two fronts: independent trusted information and education. The measures introduced during 2017-2019 that contribute towards these two areas include:

i) managing debt; ii) managing a daily budget; iii) building a safety net; iv) planning for the future; v) understanding the basic financial landscape; and vi) understanding basic consumer rights.

Various activities were completed until December 2019 to address financial capability within the aforementioned areas. Different campaigns directed towards persons in low income employment, persons in unemployment, and self-employed and family businesses were undertaken. These were implemented through an ESF project entitled Knowledge, Training, Communications and Support Measures in Support of Vulnerable Groups. Activities carried out by GEMMA through this ESF project consisted of research on financial capability in the local context with specific reference to certain vulnerable groups⁵⁸, financial literacy programmes⁵⁹ for professionals working in social protection and social welfare services and a targeted retirement and financial capability awareness campaign. This financial capability education campaign is

54. Sources: Department of Social Security, Income Support and Compliance Division, Jobsplus

55. GEMMA which means 'to save' in Maltese is the name of financial capability mascot - the honey bee.

56. This includes but is not limited to children in education from primary to tertiary education, women, Maltese students going to study abroad, people in first employment, and people preparing to having a family.

57. i) persons in low income employment; ii) persons in unemployment; iii) self-employed persons; iv) teenagers; v) post-secondary students; and vii) family members working in family businesses but not paying social security contributions.

58. In addition to the conduction of a general survey on financial literacy and capability in Malta, research was specifically carried out amongst the following target groups: i) persons in low income employment; ii) persons in unemployment; iii) self-employed persons; iv) teenagers; v) post-secondary students; and vi) family members working in family businesses but not paying social security contributions.

59. Level 3 Financial Literacy Programme in collaboration with MCAST.

expected to continue till 2021 targeting more vulnerable groups⁶⁰. Each of the targeted group's campaign includes focus groups and a multi-media campaign⁶¹ with resources made available on the website www.gemma.gov.mt.

These activities were complemented by other campaigns funded through GEMMA targeting the better understanding of the social security contributory system, money management, scamming, and such relevant themes in the area of financial capability. GEMMA also financed education tools and content including a broad range of resources such as calculators⁶², video material⁶³ and a prominent social media campaign on Facebook⁶⁴, preparation of e-learning material and ebooks.

Furthermore, GEMMA is also actively engaged in forming a series of strategic partnerships including banks, trade unions, amongst others. In this regard, a strategic partnership was signed with the University of Malta for students in the Department of Artificial Intelligence with a view to design financial gamification concepts, the best three of which are expected to be taken to prototype stage. Measures implemented during the 2017-2019 period, related to income and social benefits do not solely focus on provision of income and benefits but also aim at equipping the population with the necessary knowledge to manage their personal responsibilities. Such measures provide the means and tools to empower more people to make ends meet across their life course and to exit or limit poverty.

2.2.2 EMPLOYMENT

The main objective of this dimension is that of promoting access to employment for all; empowering, assisting and training jobseekers; promoting workforce development, and assisting employers in their recruitment and training needs. This is in line with Malta's Employment Strategy which is being implemented by Jobsplus⁶⁵. In this regard, Government is undertaking a number of initiatives with the aim of assisting individuals to obtain the necessary knowledge, skills and competence required to find and retain employment; promote the recruitment of disadvantaged and vulnerable people and promote productive investments and job-creation both through EU and nationally funded initiatives. Within this context, Government aims to adopt a holistic approach towards employment in that investment undertaken within the educational sector directly contributes to ameliorate the employment prospects of for citizens.

Various schemes and measures which were introduced till 2016, continued to promote employability and job mobility, and integrate people in both private and public sector employment. This supported the reduction of social dependency; the reduction of the intergenerational cycle of joblessness and the dependency on the welfare state. Through the latest social welfare benefits reforms, including targeted active labour market measures⁶⁶, a number of benefit dependents and inactive persons were shifted into employment. This has also been possible through the setting up of new market sectors and the restructuring of traditional sectors. Moreover, efforts in line with the global shift towards encouraging female participation in the labour market have contributed towards expanding service provision on the already existing free-childcare scheme, breakfast clubs and after-school care services⁶⁷.

The following information is being presented with the aim of outlining some of the efforts undertaken to implement a number of preventive, supportive and reactive measures under this dimension. Feeding into the strategic policy actions presented under this dimension, a number of the measures undertaken aimed at: ensuring the provision of good quality education, apprenticeship, traineeship or employment to youth as well as; promoting the upskilling of employees and job mobility. Furthermore, in an effort to increase long term investment in employment; and enhance investment in job creation for vulnerable groups, Government has also sought to maximise the utilisation of EU Funds.

60. i) persons with mental health challenges; ii) persons with disability; iii) elderly persons; iv) widows; v) single parents; vi) separated/divorced persons; vii) tertiary education students; viii) persons in their first employment; ix) young women; and x) young adults who got married recently.

61. Including TV, radio messages, posters, advertising, and social media.

62. Calculators: My Gemma Budget Planner. Accessed via <https://gemma.gov.mt/resources/calculators/> on 19/08/2020.

63. Gemma Know, Plan, Act. Youtube, 31 Oct. 2017. Accessed via <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCBYOWIjTOp15RLgNXUu1h7Q/videos> on 19/08/2020.

64. Gemma - Know, Plan, Act. Facebook (Group Page). Accessed via <https://www.facebook.com/gemma.know.plan.act.on.19/08/2020>.

65. As part of the medium to long-term strategy to implement Malta's Employment Policy 2014, in June 2016, an act of Parliament brought about the change in name from Employment and Training Corporation to Jobsplus.

66. Incentives such as free childcare and the tapering of benefits schemes led to the employment of thousands of persons who were previously inactive.

67. Further information on these initiatives can be seen under the Education Section.

Good education, apprenticeship, traineeship or employment to youth have continued to be central to the Youth Guarantee scheme.

This EU-funded project developed for young people aged 15 to 24 years, retained its efforts towards its four education and employment related initiatives, namely:

- The NEET Activation Scheme II⁶⁸,
- SEC Revisions Classes⁶⁹,
- MCAST Preventive Classes⁷⁰,
- and the ICT Summer Courses⁷¹.

Based on preventive and assistive measures, each opportunity is designed to help young people continue their education or increase their chances of finding satisfaction and success in the world of work. The Youth Guarantee scheme helped to reduce the number of youths who are not in education and employment (NEET) and early school leavers (ESL), increase their skills through training programmes and provided incentives for education and continuous learning with the aim to improve youth skills and enhance their employability.

Following recommendations gathered among stakeholders concerning the NEET Activation Scheme II, in 2018, an online version of the employers' application form was launched, and the necessary briefing was offered to both employers and participants at the initial phase of the work exposure. Since the introduction of this scheme till end December 2019, 480 participants were profiled in Malta and Gozo, and 223 participants divided in 45 groups were trained. A total of 125 participants achieved an overall attendance rate of 80% or more in both the training and the work exposure phase.

Recommendations on the **SEC Revision Classes** arising from the 2017-2018 evaluation were taken on board and included: a Student and Parents' Survival Guide; supporting educators with extra resources as needed; and the provision of better facilities.

In 2018, the eligibility for the **ICT Summer Courses** was extended to include participants who have finished the Alternative Learning Programme (ALP), youth referred by the school guidance teams as well as inactive youth who are not in education, employment or training (NEET).

Upskilling of employees and job mobility continues to be promoted through a number of programmes, schemes and legislative frameworks as follows:

Work Programme

Jobsplus and its three private service providers⁷² have been working to help long-term job seekers re-integrate in the labour market. This programme helps participants to improve their employability skills with the aim of assist them in actively participating in the labour market. As from the beginning of this programme in 2015 up till end April 2019, there were 1,635 participants who were enrolled in the Work Programme.

In order to make participation in these initiatives more practical and attractive to both employers and prospective trainees, from April 2019, some changes came into effect as follows:

Work Exposure Scheme: a change has been undertaken with respect to the number of hours in on the job training. Whereas before the 240 hours had to be spread over 12 weeks with an average of on the job training of 20 hours per week, now the maximum number of placement hours in a given week has risen to 40 hours. The 240 hours threshold within the maximum period of 12 weeks still applies.

68. The NEET Activation Scheme II aims at encouraging the reintegration of young people from 16 to 25 years who are detached from the education system and the labour market, through training, mentoring and support to facilitate their transition from education to employment. In the initial phase, they are profiled and obtain motivational and behavioural training intervention to prepare them to be prospective employees. This is followed by training through continued education or else participate in work exposure, leading to an offer of traineeship. The participants also receive an allowance equivalent to the minimum wage.

69. Students who failed their May sitting of their SEC/Ordinary level exams in English, Maltese, Mathematics, Biology or Physics are offered five weeks of free revision classes in a choice of up to three subjects in preparation for the September resits. Students are helped to achieve higher grades and enrol in an educational institution to further their educational attainment prospects.

70. The MCAST Preventive Classes give students who fail one of the exams, a chance to follow Level 1, 2 or Level 3 of the respective course at the Malta College for Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST). This initiative helps to decrease the rate of dropouts.

71. Students aged 15 to 25 years are provided with an educational opportunity to acquire ICT skills. A preparatory course in English is also offered to these students.

72. FSS Ltd., KPMG Talent (P5+) Ltd., Melita Tourism and Resource Management Ltd.

Traineeships: Whereas before the traineeship varied between 14 to 16 weeks duration in terms of on the job training, now the maximum number of weeks is down to 12. During this period, 282 hours are dedicated for on-the-job training and 18 hours for off- the-job training. The maximum number of on-the-job training in any given week is of 40 hours.

Training Pays Scheme

The purpose of this Scheme is to assist individuals to develop and/or improve their skills by participating in further off-the-job education and training. Through this Scheme, assistance is provided in the form of a training grant equivalent to 75% of the direct training cost excluding VAT, to aid participants with costs relating to training. This grant is awarded to the individual (trainee) after successful completion of their training.

The Scheme is open to applicants of working age population 16 to 64 years as per applicable law. In the case of persons aged between 16 and 24, they must not be participating under the Youth Guarantee NEET Activation Scheme II. Moreover, the training programme must be pegged to an MQF level 1 to 5, must not already be offered by Jobsplus, and - bar exceptions - needs to be offered by an NCFHE licensed training institution.

From the launch of scheme in March of 2017 until the end of December 2019, Jobsplus received 1025 applications. Out of these, applications from 743 (unique) individuals were deemed eligible for funding. By the end of December 2019, Jobsplus disbursed €243,072 under this Scheme.

National Apprenticeship Scheme and the enactment of the Work Based Learning and Apprenticeship Act

Following MCAST's strategic plan in 2019 which ensures that work-based learning is implemented across all programmes at all levels offered within Vocational and Educational Training (VET); the legislation on the Work-Based Learning and Apprenticeship provides a legal framework for the governance and administration of accredited training programmes for work-placements, apprenticeships and internships for VET purposes. This legislation is also protecting the rights and obligations of both the trainees and employers. Through this Act, Malta has now introduced a system where all apprentices have the opportunity to obtain the qualification needed in the specific field chosen, while being able to put the skills they learn into practice at the same time, with the assistance of experts. This reform is attracting more learners to VET subjects and motivate them to stay in labour market relevant programmes.

In the academic year 2019/2020, 50 courses were provided on apprenticeship with a total of 950 apprentices. MCAST also registered 1,500 industry partners of which 1,100 were active companies. In 2019, MCAST also launched a new suite of MQF Level 6 Degree Apprenticeships in Biomedical Engineering, Construction Engineering, Software Development, Multimedia Software Development, Computer Systems and Networks and Fashion. Students following such degree apprenticeships will be able to achieve a recognised qualification while simultaneously getting paid for gaining valuable work experience.

Mature Workers Scheme

The Mature Workers Scheme remained available to employers recruiting persons aged between 45 and 65 years. Since the launch of the scheme in 2014, applications⁷³ continued to be received, reaching a total of 732 applications until the end of December 2019. In particular, from the start of 2017 until the end of 2019, 419 applications were received. In total, between 2014 and 2019, 58 employers were deemed eligible and the employment of 99 persons were assisted through this scheme.

Employment Advisory Services for Job Changers and Migrants

In 2017, Jobsplus launched an outreach Employment Advisory Services targeting two groups of jobseekers which were not being formally reached-out to at the time - job changers (these are clients who are already in employment but would like to find alternative employment), and migrants who are beneficiaries of subsidiary protection. Through this service such jobseekers are provided with guidance and information on training and possibly funding opportunities that are available in order for them to acquire or upgrade their existing skills and knowledge in order for them to take up alternative employment that may result in better conditions of work, including earnings.

Average Wage Earners Scheme

This scheme aims to financially assist employed and self-employed persons attending one of Jobsplus courses and whose weekly wage does not exceed €300 (basic) per week. Employed individuals following these courses can benefit from a financial grant of €25 per week provided that they attend a minimum of four hours of training

73. Since an application is submitted for every person to be employed, one employer may have had more than one application.

per week. The grant is given to an individual upon successfully completing the whole course. Over three years (2017-2019) Jobsplus disbursed €331,850 under this scheme and 1,353 unique persons benefitted through the receipt of funds.

The Occupational Handbook

In 2018, the Occupational Handbook was launched to provide information about 246 occupations found in the Maltese labour market. This handbook is instrumental for job seekers, students, employment advisors, guidance teachers, employers and training service providers. It includes information on labour demand, job description and duties, knowledge and skills required, qualification, warrants, licenses needed, and salary.

Trade Testing System/Validation Process

The Trade Testing process assesses individuals who have acquired knowledge, skills and competence in a particular occupation but do not possess a formal qualification. Applicants need to undergo an interview, present evidence of skills and knowledge through a portfolio of work and also undergo a theory and practical test. Candidates who successfully pass from the trade test are awarded a Certificate of Competence in that particular occupation. The acquisition of such certificates can improve a person's employment prospects including earnings. From the start of 2017 until the end of 2019, 1,275 persons benefitted from this service.

Long term investment in employment has continued to be increased by the utilisation of EU funds within certain schemes and projects, including the:

Access to Employment Scheme

The Access to Employment (A2E), which is co-financed by the European Social Fund (ESF), Government and Employers, provides employment aid to enterprises in Malta and Gozo to promote the recruitment of the more challenged individuals amongst jobseekers and inactive persons. From the start of the Scheme in 2015 until the end of December 2019, the A2E Unit received 1,897 applications for 2,028 participants of which 1,312 participants were still on the Scheme (i.e. 1,264 unique participants).

Training for Employment Project (TEP)

Jobsplus is offering training opportunities in the form of Traineeship, Work Exposure and Work Placement schemes. These three schemes are part-financed by ESF and are aimed at providing jobseekers with valuable job experience and exposure that facilitates a smooth transition into the labour market. A combination of on-the-job and off-the-job training is provided to participants in the Traineeship Scheme. Jobseekers who have low skills and low education obtain hands-on training to acquire the knowledge, skills and competence in the Work Exposure Scheme. Other jobseekers can acquire theoretical and practical training if they participate in the Work Placement Scheme. Under TEP, from January 2016 until end of December 2019, Jobsplus placed 582 (unique) trainees under the Traineeship Scheme, 1,199 (unique) under the Work Exposure Scheme and 134 (unique) trainees under the Work Placement Scheme⁷⁴.

Investing in Skills Aid Scheme

Following the success of the Training Aid Framework (TAF), the Investing in Skills Aid Scheme was launched in March 2017 with a budget of €8 million (ESF.03.0S1). This Scheme aims to promote the training of persons that are already actively participating within the labour market, with the objective of increasing productivity and enhancing adaptability. As at the end of December 2019, 2,310 applications were received of which 1,664 remain valid. 874 Grants have been paid with a total value of €1,331,246.67. By the same timeline 4,790 persons underwent training through the assistance of this Scheme.

Investment in job creation for vulnerable groups was sustained through a number of schemes, projects and services as follows:

The **Community Work Scheme** provided dignity and work for a number of vulnerable persons who had been claiming unemployment benefits for years through an agreement signed between Malta Investment Management Company and the General Workers Union in 2016. By end December 2019, there were 919 employees, of whom 740 are males and 179 are females.

74. These figures exclude the placements done with respect to persons who for some reason or another opt not to start the scheme.

In 2016, the **Document Management Scheme** enabled the creation of job opportunities for persons with disability. In addition, the Sheltered Employment Training (SET) within this Scheme, prepares individuals with mental, physical and/or intellectual disabilities for employment⁷⁵ through a focus on punctuality, work ethics, independent living, communication and social skills. As from the launch of this scheme till end December 2019, there were 65 people with disability in employment under this scheme. All employees are supported by a number of job coaches from the Lino Spiteri Foundation. As at end of December 2019, over €3 million was remitted for claims of payments related to document management tasks carried out by employed persons with disabilities.

The **VASTE Project**, launched in August 2017, is part financed through the ESF 2014-2020. This project assists persons with disability to enter employment through professional assessments and training provided through the Sheltered Employment Training and Pre-Employment Training. The Lino Spiteri Foundation is supporting this project through job coaching services during both work exposure and employment.

The **LEAP2 Enterprise** assists vulnerable individuals in setting up their own sustainable, income-generating business activities. Since 2018, Malta Enterprise together with the Foundation for Social Welfare Services (FSWS) and Jobsplus assist beneficiaries to set up their own business or develop an income generating activity. A maximum of ten initiatives deemed to be economically viable were supported through a financial assistance package of up to €25,000 over a period of 24 months.

The **Job Brokerage Service**, introduced in May 2017, aims to address the employment of migrant workers through the provision work experience in Malta including the work ethic expected of them by Maltese employers.

Through this service migrants seeking employment are matched with requests from employers for short time work placement. Employers who are satisfied with the work ethic of the migrant concerned can subsequently offer the migrant full-time employment.

During the years under review, 2,216 migrants registered for this service of which 2,063 were short term employment training placements. These resulted in 111 migrants benefitting from full time employment after benefitting from the Job Brokerage Service.

Initiatives and measures outlined within this dimension, aim to provide the necessary educational support with a view to provide adequate employment prospects. The notion of education throughout the working life of a person is also given due importance with a view to ameliorate employment prospects. Within this context, the Employment dimension portrays a multifaceted approach in ensuring active participation within the labour market, through:

- continued education and training;
- the provision of second chance education to early school leavers and low-skilled youths,
- support people with disability with sheltered employment;
- measures aimed to address gender gaps within the labour market; and
- provision of traineeships and employment opportunities to all job seekers and people in employment.

These initiatives also contribute towards the reduction in dependency on the state welfare. Complementary to these measures are the initiatives outlined in the following section concerning Education.

2.2.3 EDUCATION

Education is the key which can open the door to a better quality of life thus contributing towards poverty reduction, greater social mobility and social inclusion. It is within this context, that this dimension promotes inclusive, quality education within all educational levels and settings.⁷⁶ During the years under review, Government continued to sustain its investment within the educational sector with a view to provide present and future generations with opportunities to develop the necessary values, skills and attitudes for active citizenship and employability; whilst simultaneously closing the gap between education and employment.

The Framework for the Education Strategy for Malta 2014-2024 is the umbrella strategy which provides the overarching plan for all the policies and measures falling within the remit of MEDE. The Framework for the Education Strategy for Malta 2014 -2024 outlines four pillars in line with European and world benchmarks namely to: (i) reduce the gaps in education between students, decrease the number of low achievers and raise the bar in literacy, numeracy and

75. First to sheltered employment and eventually to open employment.

76. Formal, informal and non-formal.

science competency; (ii) support children at risk of poverty and reduce the number of early school leavers; (iii) increase participation in lifelong learning; and (iv) raise levels of student retention and attainment in further vocational, and tertiary education and training. The committed targets are achievable through improving service provision and identifying new avenues for learning opportunities, as well as through the creation of synergies with health and social welfare providers.

More specifically, the strategic policy actions presented under the education dimension within *Malta's National Strategic Policy for Poverty Reduction and for Social Inclusion* are being implemented through a number of measures aiming at addressing the below policy objectives:

- modernising the education system and improving governance
- addressing educational inequalities and improving quality education for all; and
- consolidating life-long learning, vocational training, and informal and non-formal education.

An overview of the measures being implemented under these three policy objectives is provided below.

Modernising the education system and improving governance

The only constant thing is change and thus it is clear that educators need to remain abreast of developments in the working world. Higher quality learning can be achieved through improved competence and professionalism of educators as well as solid efforts in reviewing and re-evaluating curricula and educational services to reflect emerging realities. Within this context, various initiatives are being implemented. These include:

New methods of teaching for all educators

These enhance pedagogy with innovative means to be able to offer higher quality learning. For instance, the introduction of new courses in novel methods of teaching for educators and educational leaders (Heads and Assistant Heads of School) saw the application of 50 course participants within 2 separate cohorts between October 2018-2019. Furthermore, since 2019, professional development courses in novel teaching methods are being offered to supply teachers and other degree-qualified professionals that wish to venture into the teaching profession. As of June 2019, there were 35 participants reading at Masters level, and 20 participants at Bachelors level.

The Institute for Education is gradually transforming into a digital institute in that the courses it offers are increasing the online component. This strategic decision has led to greater accessibility and flexibility allowing educators to benefit from qualifications and training opportunities at their own time and ease.

My Journey - Achieving Through Different Paths

In November 2016, MEDE proposed a more equitable quality secondary education intended to provide inclusive and comprehensive equitable quality learning programmes for the compulsory secondary schooling structure. The My Journey reform is driven both by the values of inclusion, social justice, equity and diversity, and the four main targets of the Framework for the Education Strategy for Malta 2014-2024.

The new system builds on the previous one but ambitiously moves forward in democratising academic, vocational and applied learning for all students within a framework of parity of esteem. This reform further propels the transition from 'one size fits all' system to a more inclusive and comprehensive learning systems by introducing learning outcomes instead of prescribed syllabi and allowing students to choose from several education routes among general, vocational or applied subjects for their elective subjects (beyond the core curriculum).

In order to maximise every student's potential to learn, new learning programmes and syllabi introduced at the beginning of scholastic year 2018-2019 provided a shift towards a more student-centred teaching approach through continuous assessment and the discontinuation of mid-year exams. The introduction of equitable learning programmes enables more quality time for in-depth learning whilst increasing learning opportunities and easing labour market entry. In scholastic year 2019-2020, more than 55% of Year 8 students in State schools have opted to study at least one vocational or applied subject.

Addressing educational inequalities and improving quality education for all

Malta has endeavoured to offer equal opportunities to all, leaving no child behind. In this regard, various measures are being implemented, aiming at encouraging the inclusion of persons who are at risk of exclusion due to differences in levels of development, literacy, nationality, and family income. This section provides an overview in relation to the initiatives undertaken during 2017-2019 namely: a) fostering inclusion at school; b) improving literacy; c) consolidating after-school hours services, summer clubs and childcare centres; d) providing free transport for Church and Independent Schools; e) waiving the MATSEC and SEC examination fee; and f) providing new opportunities for higher education.

Fostering inclusion at school

Investing in inclusive education within schools is very important as it provides all children with the ability to develop a sense of belonging and to better understand their role as part of the community from an early age; thus equipping children to become better prepared for life in the community.

Within this context, Government has issued A Policy on Inclusive Education in Schools: Route to Quality Inclusion and A National Inclusive Education Framework⁷⁷. Launched in 2019, these documents offer a comprehensive guide to educators, professionals and parents for fostering a more inclusive education system, and endeavour to reduce the gaps in educational outcomes, increase participation of learners, support educational achievement of all children and young people, and raise student attainment levels. In line with the Framework for Education Strategy, these commitments are key in the transition of the local education system from a 'one size fits all' approach to one that responds to the diversity of needs of all learners in our school community.

In recent years, a number of specific initiatives have been implemented which have contributed towards the fostering of inclusion in schools. Some examples include:

Early intervention programmes for young children on the autism spectrum: The Hand in Hand Programme was enhanced via a pilot project implemented between September 2017 and September 2018. During scholastic year 2017-2018, this programme provided the opportunity to 12 learners on the Autism Spectrum who also exhibited challenging behaviour, to positively contribute towards their learning and inclusion in class. Through this initiative, the learners' needs were addressed with the aim of re-integrating them back into mainstream classes. In fact, 5 students were reintegrated to mainstream education, and 2 students started attending San Miguel Primary Education Resource Centre. Due to the pilot project's success, the programme was implemented again for Scholastic year 2018-2019, which saw 12 learners benefitting from this intervention.

Multisensory rooms: Since 2017, investment has been made in providing inclusive set-ups and newly equipped multisensory rooms in mainstream schools. Multisensory rooms are immersive environments that aid students on the autism spectrum and other students with severe disability in the development of their sensory abilities. Specialist sensory equipment endeavours to stimulate mental activity and encourage interaction, all within a relaxing environment. The first 3 multisensory rooms were set up as from scholastic year 2017-2018, and during 2018, 40 students attending mainstream education benefitted from the services. Another 6 multisensory rooms for 6 different primary schools started operating as from January 2019.

Induction programme for migrants: Migrant learners attending State schools have benefitted from an induction programme, delivered in 27 schools, for further support in basic and functional language learning over and above the teaching that is already provided by class teachers. Through this initiative, supported through EU Funds (LLAPSI + Project), migrant learners are provided with the opportunity for language acquisition, which facilitates them towards inclusion. For the first time in September 2019, an induction hub for secondary students was set up, aiming at teaching basic communicative skills in Maltese and English to migrant learners at the secondary level, thus facilitating their integration into the Maltese Education System. As at December 2019, 541 EU nationals and 443 Third Country Nationals were receiving this support.

Improving literacy

Improving literacy levels in Malta remains a core priority for Government. Within this context, during the period under review, the National Literacy Agency (NLA) continued with a number of programmes aimed to improve literacy outcomes, resulting in inclusive practices, higher education qualifications and better job prospects. As from scholastic year 2018-2019, a new Reading Recovery Literacy Program was introduced into 9 state primary schools in Malta and Gozo. This programme constitutes a short-term, school-based intervention targeting children aged 5 and 6 years of age, at the lowest level of achievement in literacy following their first year of school. The objective of the programme is to help participating students reach the level expected of them by the age of 6 in reading and writing, within 100 sessions over 20 weeks. Sessions are held individually by teachers who are specifically trained in the provision of such programmes, and material is tailored towards the needs of each individual student. During the scholastic year 2018-2019, 4 in every 5 young⁷⁸ students who were selected for this emergency literacy course went from having weak to strong reading and writing skills in 20 weeks.

77. A parents' guide to these policy documents is available and can be found online at: https://meae.gov.mt/en/Public_Consultations/MEDE/Documents/MEDE_parents%20guide_EN_v2.pdf.

78. Students aged 5 or 6

Consolidating after-school hours services, summer clubs and childcare centres through the launch of the Child Support Workers (CSW) service

During extra hours of Klabb 3 to 16 after-school care service and Skolasajf non-compulsory summer education programme in 2019. The service of a child support worker (CSW) launched in 2017 provides assistance according to the child's individual needs. The child support worker provides assistance in the day to day operation of the Skolasajf Programme and undertakes face to face work with the children. This includes supporting and collaborating with colleagues in the running of Skolasajf activities, assisting in the preparation of educational materials and playing an active part in all the components of the instructional and educational process in class.

Providing free transport for Church and Independent Schools

The free transport service which was being provided to students attending State schools, has, as from scholastic year 2018-2019, been expanded to students attending Church and Independent Schools. Hence, all students attending kindergarten up to secondary school in Malta and Gozo are now eligible to use the service, regardless of which school they are attending, their nationality or that of their legal guardians. As from scholastic year 2018-2019, a total of 28,000 students attending State, Church and Independent schools started to benefit from this free transport scheme.

Waivering the MATSEC⁷⁹ and SEC examination fee

In order to provide the opportunity for all students to participate in MATSEC and SEC Examinations, fees were waived by half in 2018, and later completely waived for students sitting for the 2019 sessions. Within this context, students are provided with the opportunity to sit for as many exams as they see fit without putting a financial burden on their families.

As a result, the total number of beneficiaries for the years 2018 and 2019 were 8,769 and 9,142 individuals respectively, signalling an increase that could be attributed to the complete waiver of examination fees.

Providing new opportunities for higher education

The rate of new entrants to the first cycle of higher education coming from families with low educational background in Malta is one of the highest in the EU (around 40%). Notwithstanding efforts have been sustained to provide a financial impetus that encourages prospective applicants, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds to participate in higher education. For example, as from academic year 2017-2018, post-graduate students under 40 years of age are exempt from income tax for 2 years as an incentive to improve their educational attainment. Moreover, maintenance grants were extended to mature and foreign students who follow a full-time day course in higher education institutions. In academic year 2018-2019, 263 students have applied for the Students Maintenance Grant under the Maturity Clause.

Consolidating life-long learning, vocational training, and informal and non-formal education

The creation of robust education structures within the context of successfully bridging the gap between education and employment is geared towards increasing academic attainment and employability. MEDE commits itself to strengthening the transitions within compulsory education, post-secondary education, and/or working through closer collaboration with receiving entities such as tertiary institutions and employers.

The provision of on-the-job training, apprenticeships and vocational schemes continue to provide students with the necessary complementary skills that allow them to make the most of their time spent in education. Thus, this broadens the horizon of employability for students by equipping them with a holistic repertoire of knowledge and skills that can be utilised within the working environment. However, Malta's efforts at broadening job prospects for its population do not end with the younger generation. Offering opportunities to adults further boosts the potential of the working population as a whole to become one that is skilled, productive, and employable. These initiatives are outlined below.

Alternative Learning Programme (ALP)

As from scholastic year 2016-2017, MEDE launched the Alternative Learning Programme Plus (ALP+) for students between the age of 16 and 18, an extension programme of the original ALP⁸⁰, which enables students in vocational education to continue their learning experience at a post-secondary level, whilst receiving a monthly grant. The

79. Matriculation and Secondary Education Certificate.

80. The ALP is aimed at students who are reaching the end of compulsory schooling, but who clearly demonstrate that they will not attain the desired qualification. This second chance programme has a strong vocational component and students are expected to continue their education or training in full-time higher education institution or in other lifelong learning institutions on a part-time basis.

ALP and ALP+ programme provide students with an alternative opportunity through vocational subjects, enrich them with relevant and competent skills, and thus prepare them to step into higher vocational education with practical and theoretical knowledge. As at December 2019, the intake for

scholastic year 2019-2020 was 185 students for the ALP, 80 students for the ALP+ and 5 students for the ALP+ second year apprenticeship scheme.

Connecting Education with Industry

Government sustained its efforts to bridge the gap between education and employment through several initiatives. One of these initiatives, the Education-Business Encounters, was created with a view to encourage partnerships between industry and education. In line with the Work Based Learning and Apprenticeship Act(2018)⁸¹, MEDE reached an agreement with the hotel industry to provide all non-state and state students studying Hospitality at Secondary Education Certificate (SEC) level⁸² with the opportunity to carry out the practical sections of the syllabus within hotel premises as part of the assessment. In February 2019, MEDE also signed a partnership agreement with the different sectors within the agribusiness industry to combine learning in schools with out-of-school practical training (in the industry) for students in secondary schools so as to ensure a hands-on learning experience. These initiatives encourage the application of study materials to on-the-job training within a workplace, offering a holistic educational experience, and presenting students with an opportunity to consolidate their learning by doing, rather than by listening or reading.

In addition, the National Commission for Further and Higher Education (NCFHE) provides routes for lifelong learning, including the validation of informal and non-formal learning in order to broaden the certification of skills and competence in the workforce. Validation of informal and non-formal learning (VINFL) is a major step in promoting lifelong learning and facilitating access to learning for individuals who have no qualifications from formal education. This VINFL process supports low skilled, low-qualified adults and those with disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds and upskilling pathways.

Lifelong Learning Programme

As from 2019, MEDE increased and expanded its courses, and is now offering more than 450 courses in 77 different subjects, which include vocational and training courses. Since these learner-centred courses are available to all adults, and free or subsidized in the case of pensioners and members of vulnerable groups, learning opportunities are being made available to all, regardless of socioeconomic status. In this way, persons with limited financial means can acquire skills that are relevant to their lives, their needs and their work.

Community Learning Spaces for community members

In 2017, the EU Agenda for Adult Learning in Malta conducted a pilot project in the Valletta Primary School to explore schools as learning community spaces particularly aimed towards adults. The main aim of such project was to create a learning space for adults to interact even during compulsory school hours. Following the success of the pilot project, it was decided to launch the programme in other primary schools. A total of 10 schools showed interest in participating in the programme. This project is a second chance route for young people who would like to sit for their SEC examinations and for adults who would want to improve their job prospects.

The above-mentioned initiatives portray the multifaceted approach adopted in order to ensure that all individuals, especially persons from disadvantaged backgrounds have the same opportunities for holistic education and skills development, throughout the course of life. Malta is investing heavily in its education and training system and is taking measures to modernise curricula, improve quality in teaching and assessment and promote digital skills. The aim behind the reforms in the education system is to ensure that all children develop into young people and adults equipped with the necessary skills and attitudes to be active citizens.

81. The Act provides a legislative framework supporting the establishment of effective placements and apprenticeships.

82. Equivalent to (MQF/EQF levels 2 & 3).

2.2.4 HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT

The socio-economic conditions of an individual are intrinsically linked to their health and well-being throughout the course of life. Health is a state of physical, emotional, and mental wellbeing that allows individuals to satisfy their own needs, realize aspirations, and change or cope with the environment. Similarly, decreased health is detrimental to one's capacity to make a living and can lead to reduced income, which, in turn, contributes to further ill-health. Within this context, it is clear that health is crucial in breaking the poverty cycle. Furthermore, strengthening health systems leads to improved health across the whole population, particularly persons who are more at risk of poverty or social exclusion, among whom poorer health seems to be concentrated.

This dimension focuses on the endeavours undertaken to secure access to equitable and universal healthcare for all, and to address environmental factors that sustain the cycle of poor health. Furthermore, this dimension also acknowledges the impact of social determinants on health and wellbeing and aims to address health inequities through both general and targeted measures. Such measures fall under three overarching categories namely the: (i) development and implementation of legislative frameworks, strategies, guidelines, and initiatives that promote healthier lifestyles and prevent non-communicable diseases; (ii) consolidation of equal access to quality healthcare for all; and (iii) ongoing research to provide evidence-based care. These measures, which feed into the strategic policy actions for alleviating poverty and combatting social inclusion, are outlined below.

Preventing non-communicable diseases through developing legislative frameworks, strategies, and guidelines, and specific initiatives that promote healthy lifestyles

Health promotion and education are important drivers of positive health behaviour, and therefore are considered as important elements of public health. In fact, health promotion and education equip individuals with better knowledge about the prevention and management of illness, thus improving autonomy and empowering them to make healthier decisions. This, in turn, contributes towards reducing the costs that accrue from preventable diseases both at an individual and national level. Additionally, promoting healthier lifestyles is particularly beneficial to groups that are more closely associated with poverty or social exclusion, who may have relatively limited levels of health literacy.

In Malta, a substantial number of deaths can be attributable to dietary choices such as high sugar and salt intake, and low levels of physical activity. Moreover, obesity is a major national public health threat. Within this context, Malta has placed significant importance on the promotion of appropriate physical activity and nutrition throughout the lifespan through a number of initiatives. In this regard, efforts were undertaken, by targeting children, with the objective to instil and consolidate satisfactory health behaviours from an early age. This approach is expected to equip children with the tools and knowledge necessary to develop healthy lifestyles later in life.

The Dietary Guidelines for Maltese Children aged 3 to 12 years: the Mediterranean way and the Dietary Guidelines for Maltese Infants and Young Children Aged 6 months to 3 years: a guide for parents, were developed in 2017 and 2018 respectively to complement the previously existing dietary guidelines for adults⁸³. The latter aims at equipping parents with knowledge related to weaning and progressively introducing infants to new foods constituting different tastes and textures, such that infants can enjoy a nutritious and well-rounded diet by the end of the first year of life. Furthermore, the Principles of the 'Healthy Plate' continue to offer guidance on good eating habits until 3 years of age. Meanwhile, the former guidelines aim to support parents, grandparents, and guardians in developing children's healthy eating habits and lifestyles between 3 and 12 years of age.

The Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Directorate (HPDPD) also leads numerous initiatives in increasing children's health literacy. The implementation of A Whole School Approach to A Healthy Lifestyle: Healthy Eating and Physical Activity Policy (2015)⁸⁴ was complemented by a number of European Union initiatives specifically targeting children, and included the:

- a) Health factor⁸⁵ - a teacher's tool kit published in 2016 as part of a healthy lifestyle project with kindergarten classes to support teachers in communicating the importance of healthy eating and physical activity and thus contributing towards developing healthy lifestyles;

83. 'Healthy Eating: The Mediterranean Way - Dietary Guidelines for Maltese Adults'. Available online via: <https://deputyprimeminister.gov.mt/en/health-promotion/Pages/campaigns/2016/Dieta%20Mediterranja.aspx> [Accessed on 31/08/2020].

84. Aims to promote healthy eating and physical activity in the whole school community, thus empowering children to achieve the required health literacy and adopt healthy behaviours from a younger age. A copy of this policy can be obtained online at : <https://education.gov.mt/en/resources/Pages/Policy-Documentation.aspx> [Accessed on: 26/08/2020].

85. A copy of Health Factor can be obtained online at : <https://www.hesc.org.mt/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Health-Factor-reduced-file.pdf> [Accessed on: 26/08/2020].

b) *ToyBox Project* - an evidence-based, multi-component preschool intervention aimed at preventing obesity in early childhood through teacher-led physical activity sessions, promotion of water drinking and healthy eating, environmental changes to the classroom, as well as parental education materials and parent-child activities. This was introduced in Church and Independent kindergarten schools in November 2018; and

c) *School fruit scheme* - available in all primary schools, the scheme provides all school children with a seasonal fruit twice a week and exposes them to the benefits of including fruit in their diets.

Furthermore, in order to establish a lifelong approach that promotes physical education and balanced diets, The Healthy Lifestyle, Promotion and Care of Non-Communicable Diseases Act⁸⁶ was enacted in 2016. Through this legislation, the Procurement of Food for Schools Regulations⁸⁷ came into force in 2018, leading to the mandatory implementation of food and beverage standards for school tuck-shops, and stipulating lists of permissible and prohibited foods and drinks, as well as nutrient-based guidelines for food and drink providers. This initiative promotes a level of standard in terms of nutrition are established for children across Malta and Gozo whilst also contributing towards a change in culture in terms of healthy eating.

The above were accompanied by additional educational interventions aimed promoting physical activity and healthy eating in the general public. The approach adopted by Government aims to make the right information available across numerous settings. Initiatives undertaken include:

a) an ongoing weight management programme to equip participants with the knowledge and skills necessary to lose and maintain weight through 2-hour-long informative sessions on nutrition and healthy weight, as well as 1-hour-long sessions related to physical activity;

b) the Workplace Health Initiative competition held in October 2019 to commemorate World Obesity Day. Fourteen workplaces from different sectors took part in this competition, organizing initiatives such as healthy breakfast and lunches at work, cooking sessions, and fitness sessions such as Yoga, Pilates, group walks, and circuit training; and

c) a treasure hunt with Heritage Malta in order to further physical activity in a creative and engaging way.

Throughout the years under review, Government also engaged in numerous educational activities that centred around other topics such as mental health, sexual health, and pre-, and post- natal health. Such activities include: the delivery of talks to University of Malta and MCAST students; the promotion of appropriate breastfeeding practices through an educational campaign and guidelines for working environments; and the conduction of seminars parents on weaning and care during the early years, amongst others.

Ensuring equal access to quality healthcare:

Extensive efforts have been made over the past few years in the development of the local health system into one that caters to the needs of the general public, as well as those groups who find themselves to be more vulnerable due to debilitating physical and mental issues. Mental health disorders, multiple forms of cancer, diabetes, and Hepatitis C are among the chief concerns faced by the Maltese population, and actions to improve the lives of sufferers can be found below. These are complemented by actions that aim to broaden the reach of Malta's health services in such a way that they are accessible by all that may come to require them.

Strengthening of Mental Health Services:

Human health does not limit itself to the absence or diminishment of physical disease, but also constitutes one's mental wellbeing. Much like with physical wellbeing, mental wellbeing is associated with poverty status in a complex manner, in that individuals with mental health issues face additional barriers to other dimensions of wellbeing (such as education and employment) and are more at risk of poverty and social exclusion. Poverty and social exclusion, in turn, bring about a substantial amount of stress that can further impede healthy mental functioning. However, the additional stigma that can be associated with reduced mental health can further increase the likelihood of social exclusion. Through initiatives that promote mental wellbeing over recent years, Malta has aimed to significantly contribute to the holistic development of its population. Additionally, Malta has strived to offer services that enhance the quality of life of those who suffer from mental disorders and ensure that they remain functional members of their communities. Initiatives that have taken place over the years in review include the following: The Mental Health Strategy⁸⁸, launched in July 2019. This Strategy aims

86. More information can be found online at : <https://deputyprimeminister.gov.mt/en/strategy-development-and-implementation-unit/Pages/legislation.aspx> [Accessed on: 26/08/2020].

87. More information can be found online at : <https://deputyprimeminister.gov.mt/en/strategy-development-and-implementation-unit/Pages/legislation.aspx> [Accessed on: 26/08/2020].

88. A Mental Health Strategy for Malta 2020-2030 can be found online at : <https://deputyprimeminister.gov.mt/en/Documents/>

to foster the development of a society that encourages mental health and well-being for everyone, prevents mental disorders among persons at high risk, and provides quality treatment and support to individuals who suffer from mental disorders. This objective is expected to be achieved through the implementation of a series of actions grouped under four clusters, namely: the promotion of mental health and wellbeing via addressing the wider determinants of health; the transformation of the framework within which mental health services are delivered; the support of all persons with mental disorders as well as their families; and the development of capacity and innovation to improve the performance of mental health services.

The process of refurbishment within Mount Carmel Hospital between 2017-2019, which continued to ensure a safe environment conducive to optimal care. In fact, three wards (St Bernardette Ward, San Ġorġ Preca Ward and St Jeanne Antide Ward) housing psychogeriatric patients were completely refurbished with a total of 81 patients benefitting from this initiative.

Close monitoring of involuntary care users by the Office of the Commissioner for Mental Health in order to ensure that patients deprived of their liberty are receiving the attention they need and deserve. This followed the implementation of the new 2012 Mental Health Act, which aimed to pave the way towards the necessary perceptual and attitudinal changes to ensure that people suffering from mental health problems are considered 'full citizens'.

Ongoing cooperation with NGOs to improve mental health services in the community, which allowed more persons suffering from mental illness and who require sheltered accommodation to continue to benefit from the opening of new hostels. An 18-bedded hostel was opened by Dar Suret il-Bniedem in 2018, whilst another 2 hostels in Mosta and Kappara accommodating a total of 18 persons, were opened by the Richmond Foundation in 2019. Research has been concluded regarding specialised centres where patients can be transferred from Mount Carmel Hospital so that they can continue receiving care in the community. A public call for offers is expected to be issued for the provision of such services.

Advancement in Cancer Services:

Cancer remains a major cause of morbidity and mortality on the Maltese Islands. The general increase in life expectancy experienced by the local population is accompanied by an increased lifetime risk of developing cancer, and more people are now living with or beyond being diagnosed with cancer. Furthermore, the procurement of treatment or care for cancer patients is expensive, and sometimes beyond a person's financial means.

Over the years, Malta has endeavoured to provide support to cancer patients. Within this context, Government has developed *The National Cancer Plan for the Maltese Islands*⁸⁹, which presented a number of actions that Malta is adopting with the objective to continue improving the provision of public cancer control services during the 2017-2021 period. Through this Plan, Government aims to reduce cancer incidence, improve cancer survival whilst at the same time improve service provision as well as ameliorate the quality of life of cancer patients. During the period under review, the following measures were implemented with a view to further develop the efficacy of local detection and treatment:

Expansion of the three National Cancer Screening Programmes: namely Breast, Colorectal and Cervical Cancer. This expansion was based on the premise that early detection greatly increases the chances of successful treatment. In the *National Breast Cancer Screening Programme*, over a 3-year period, a total of 38,063 persons (58.3% of those who were invited to participate) were screened, of whom 170 were diagnosed with Breast cancer. On the other hand, the *National Colorectal Cancer Screening Programme*, over a 3-year period, a total of 55,286 persons (62.8% of those who were invited to participate) were screened of whom 84 were diagnosed with Colorectal cancer. Similarly, the *National Cervical Cancer Screening Programme* has over a 3-year period screened a total of 8,535 persons (24.1% of those who were invited to participate) of whom 2 were diagnosed with cervical cancer.

The introduction of 5 Oncology Nurse Navigators within the Directorate for Cancer Care Pathways⁹⁰, aiming to facilitate timely access to care; educate patients; assist with barriers; offer psycho/social support and referrals to Multidisciplinary Team services; provide on-line blood investigation ordering; and operate a telephone support line service. During 2018, a total of 620 patients diagnosed with either colorectal, lung, urology cancer benefitted from the Nurse Navigation Services, whilst the following year saw a total of 663 patients benefitting from such services.

The provision of new drugs for use in the treatment of cancer in 2017 by the National Health Service - including those targeting liver, bladder, prostate, skin, ovarian, and cervical cancer, and leukaemia. This further strengthened Malta's

/2020].

89. 'The National Cancer Plan for the Maltese Islands 2017-2021' can be found online at: <https://deputyprimeminister.gov.mt/en/CMO/Documents/NationalCancerPlan2017.pdf> [Accessed on: 26/08/2020].

90. This Directorate continued to provide direction, support and practical interventions to enhance access and continuity of care for cancer patients and their families. Included in this myriad of services are Fast-Track Coordination for any potential cancer referrals, wherein 2017-2019, 109 persons benefitted from this service.

response to the incidence of cancer. New drugs on the formulary for cancer have been introduced from time to time, however since 2017, there has been a firm commitment from Government via a specific budgetary measure where new cancer drugs are being continually being introduced following the relevant health technology assessments, prioritisation exercise, consultant recommendation and fund allocation. Through this initiative innovative and highly expensive and unaffordable medicines that were not available to the patients requiring them have now become available, easing financial pressures on patients and leading to higher and better patient outcomes.

Benefits for diabetics:

Persons that suffer from diabetes make up a significant proportion of the Maltese population. The introduction of benefits aimed at diabetics as part of the implementation of the National Strategy for Diabetes 2016-2020⁹¹ promised to offer aid in the procurement of the necessary equipment and treatments for diabetics, thus reducing the financial burden that accompanies that management of their condition. These benefits included:

- the introduction of new free medications in 2017, free glucose sticks and glucose monitors, free antibiotics, free dental care, and a subsidy on spectacles and weight management classes; and
- new analogue insulins introduced in 2019 as part of the government formulary, with 5,800 persons benefitting from these medications.

The National Strategy on Hepatitis C⁹²,

Launched in April 2018, the National Strategy aims at eliminating Hepatitis C as a public health threat from the Maltese Islands by 2025. The strategy is based on a public health approach focusing on the prevention of infection and disease, early diagnosis and treatment, health promotion, quality of life improvement, and prolonging life among the affected population. The main investment is in the Direct-Acting Antiviral therapy which was included in the Government Formulary List in mid-2018 and made available for free.

Addressing out-of-stock medicine and long waiting lists:

Ensuring the adequate provision of medicine and treatment in a timely manner is key particularly for persons who live in a state of poverty or else are at risk of poverty. In this regard, a number of initiatives have been undertaken with a view to contribute towards ensuring the timely provision of medicine and services. These include:

The expansion of the list of localities served by the 70+ Domiciliary Medicine Delivery Scheme in 2017. The objective is to support senior citizens, especially those who are particularly debilitated and have no means with which to obtain any necessary medication. As can be seen in Table 4 below, there has been a considerable increase in terms of the 70+ citizens when compared to 2016.

Table 4. Registered patient populations for the POYC scheme and the 70+ Domicillary Delivery Scheme⁹³

Registered Patient Population		
Year	POYC Scheme	70+ Domiciliary Delivery Scheme
2016	147,806	268
2017	154,621	849
2018	159,781	942
2019	160,081	1,124

- Rigorous processes of stock-taking in pharmacies enrolled with the Pharmacy of Your Choice (POYC) scheme aimed at improving the monitoring system of the scheme. Four stock-take exercises are undertaken in each pharmacy annually. Table 4 also shows a yearly breakdown of registered patients for this scheme, which have increased by 12,275 since 2016;

91. 'Diabetes: A National Public Health Priority: A National Strategy for Diabetes 2016-2020' can be found online at : <https://deputyprimeminister.gov.mt/en/Documents/National-Health-Strategies/NDS-EN.pdf> [Accessed on: 26/08/2020].

92. 'A National Strategy for the Elimination of Hepatitis C Virus as a Public Health Threat in the Maltese Islands 2018-2025' can be found online at : [https://deputyprimeminister.gov.mt/en/Documents/National-Health-Strategies/71354_MH_Hepatitis_C_Bk_\(ENG\).pdf](https://deputyprimeminister.gov.mt/en/Documents/National-Health-Strategies/71354_MH_Hepatitis_C_Bk_(ENG).pdf) [Accessed on: 26/08/2020].

93. Data obtained via correspondence with representatives of the Ministry for Health.

- Ongoing initiatives at Mater Dei Hospital (MDH), aiming to provide more efficient and quality service for reducing waiting lists. These include the 'Sunday initiative', where elective interventions are carried out on a Sunday; outsourcing to private facilities; and continuous investment in medical equipment which endeavour to improve the quality and efficiency of the surgical intervention;
- MDH outpatient services have been improved through the development of an SMS system for appointment confirmation (including emails) and the 'patient dashboard' - a new system which has been rolled out for practitioners to view outpatient blood results, medical imaging reports, past discharge letters, and other personal medical information. Furthermore, the system also allows the physicians to input clinical notes;
- Addressing waiting lists for surgical operations via improved monitoring and business process re-engineering through the distribution of responsibilities among surgical theatre charge nurses and nursing staff to increase efficiency whilst ensuring patient safety and effectiveness as well as the conduction of minor procedures within Mosta Health Centre such as gynaecological (e.g. colposcopies), orthopaedic, ophthalmologic, and dermatological (e.g. skin tag removal) procedures.

Consolidation of Primary Healthcare services:

In order to alleviate pressures from Mater Dei Hospital, efforts to consolidate the provision of primary health care services where appropriate are also being undertaken. Within this context, a number of measures have been undertaken to consolidate Malta's Primary Health Care System throughout the years under review. These efforts occurred alongside an ongoing process of decentralisation of services from the hospital setting to the primary care setting, and the introduction of a discharge liaison team to improve integration of care across settings. This initiative also feeds into the strategic policy target for providing a holistic service that transcends barriers through different levels of healthcare. Furthermore, Government continued to invest in the refurbishment of existing Health Centres as well as the introduction of new services and clinics promoting care at a primary level and making services more accessible at the community level. Such investments include:

- the improvement and expansion of services offered at Health Centres through their refurbishment and modernisation whereby works were carried out in a number of Health Centres and peripheral Health Clinics, including those in Attard, Pieta, Zurrieq, Sliema, Zabbar and Zejtun;
- the commencement of works on the Regional Health Centre in Paola, following extensive consultation with stakeholders and detailed planning on the design of the facility. The Health Centre is expected to offer a myriad of health services, including: operating theatres, ambulance services, a mental health centre, dental care services, a centre for the care of dementia and a disease prevention centre. As one of the largest Centres in Malta, it is expected that the Paola Regional Health Centre will provide the necessary medical care to approximately one third of the population of Malta - roughly 140,000 persons;
- the new Health Centre in Kirkop, opened in September 2018, aims to better accommodate demand in the Southern region of the island by directly servicing over 30,000 persons;
- a new 'Child and Adolescent Health Clinic' in Floriana Health Centre that offers holistic and comprehensive health to children and adolescents suffering from chronic conditions that do not require hospitalization or specialist intervention;
- a new 'Wellbeing Clinic' in Qormi Health Centre offering a preventive screening service;
- a new Gynae Clinic for trans men offering support and treatment services within Mtarfa Community Clinic;
- a primary eye screening centre offering eye care screening for the Maltese population located at the Floriana Health Centre;

These initiatives were further complemented by the provision of increased consultant services through the introduction of new consultants and health care professionals within the Primary Health Care system. Additionally, the certification of the Primary Health Care (PHC) system in December 2019 as per ISO Certification 9001:2015 Quality Management System aimed to establish standardisation and quality management across all administrative and clinical practices of PHC operations. These initiatives aimed at bringing specialist care out of hospital facilities and available in the community, where the disadvantaged and elderly are concentrated. This, in turn, contributes towards relieving the burden on available hospital beds, allows for earlier diagnoses, as well as more effective care, and indirectly mitigates the effects of poverty and deprivation.

Ensuring ongoing research to provide evidence-based care:

A number of research initiatives were supported with the objective to ameliorate healthcare provision. The results of various research projects are expected to improve the efficiency and efficacy of healthcare services. These research projects include:

- A study to assess policy and programme implementation in Malta in line with the World Health Organization's (WHO) Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child feeding⁹⁴, applying the World Breastfeeding Trends initiative⁹⁵;
- Ongoing surveillance and monitoring of food consumption and physical activity, through the Child Obesity Surveillance Initiative⁹⁶, Healthy Behaviour in School-aged Children⁹⁷, and European Health Interview Survey⁹⁸;
- Projects related to the EU-funded EUR 2.2 million project 'Establishing a National Platform to Address the Social Determinants of Health'⁹⁹ (SDH). These included:
 - The National Survey on Social Determinants of Health, a large research study commencing in 2018, aimed at generating data complementing that which has been collated on an international scale in the Review of Social Determinants and the Health Divide¹⁰⁰. Data collected from the Maltese general population over the age of 16 intends to fill in the knowledge gaps on resulting inequalities in the population;
 - A research module in collaboration with the Ministry for Education, from which an assessment tool for use by educators was developed to identify, monitor and refer to guidance and other relevant services as necessary, children who may be at higher risk of ill health due to their socio-economic background; and specific awareness raising and capacity building sessions in 2019 among all sectors – policy makers, government, civil society and general by the SDH Unit¹⁰¹ to tackle the social determinants and reduce health inequalities through a whole-of-government and a whole-of-society approach.

The measures discussed within this section illustrate Malta's commitment to targeting the poverty-health cycle and improving the prospects of the population as a whole. Firstly, through the promotion of physical and mental wellbeing, Malta has aimed at increasing the autonomy of the general population in engaging in healthier behaviours and thus prevent the incidence of illness. Ensuring that the national health service provides sufficient care reduces out-of-pocket spending and increases opportunities for members of the population to live as healthy and productive members of society.

94. 'Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding', 2003. Available online on: https://www.who.int/nutrition/topics/global_strategy/en/ [Accessed on: 26/08/2020].

95. Is an innovative initiative of the International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN) for tracking, assessing and monitoring the implementation of the Global Strategy in response to a worldwide need for focus on infant nutrition.

96. The WHO European Childhood Obesity Surveillance Initiative (COSI) measures trends in overweight and obesity among primary school aged children,

97. The Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children (HBSC) study provides data regarding the health, social environment and health behavior of 11-, 13-, and 15-year old children in 44 countries.

98. The European Health Interview Survey (EHIS) consists of 4 modules on health determinants, socio-economic variables, health status, and healthcare use targeting the population aged 15 years and older and living in private households.

99. Aims at providing the necessary tools and resources through research, training, awareness campaigns, and stakeholder meetings.

100. 'Review of social determinants and the health divide in the WHO European Region: final report' covers health inequalities.

101. A 'Social Determinants of Health Unit' was set up in 2017 to support and strengthen efforts across government and society to help develop, implement, monitor and evaluate initiatives that promote and address health equality by addressing the SDH.

2.2.5 SOCIAL SERVICES

Malta is committed towards social cohesion. In this regard, efforts are undertaken towards ensuring the wellbeing of all of its members and reduce any potential for discrepancies between different groups or individuals, particularly for those who are vulnerable. The provision of adequate social services to meet the needs of all persons is fundamental for reducing poverty and for propelling social inclusion. Thus, such service provision not only aims at contributing towards improving the quality of life, but also seeks to empower individuals in active societal participation. Within this context, this section outlines what has been done in order to improve social services in recent years by highlighting a number of measures that target:

- 1) social welfare services for families and children at risk of poverty and social exclusion, as well as for elderly individuals and persons with disability; and
- 2) the availability, affordability and adequacy of housing in the Maltese Islands.

2.2.5.1 SOCIAL WELFARE SERVICES

During 2017-2019 period, efforts in the area of social welfare were notably related to the introduction, consolidation and evaluation of policies and services that addressed: i) families and children at risk of poverty and social exclusion; and ii) elderly individuals and persons with disability.

Families and children at risk of poverty and social exclusion

Research and evaluation on legislation, policies and services for children and their families, with specific attention on those at risk of poverty and social exclusion, led to the development of evidence-based: a) legislation; b) policies; and c) practices that address emerging needs and challenges; as well as d) the enhancement of social welfare services to support families undergoing breakdown and/or separation proceedings.

Legislation

In terms of legislation, the Minor Protection (Alternative Care) Act (Cap. 602 / Act XXIII of 2019), enacted in Maltese Parliament, substitutes the Child Protection (Alternative Care) Act (Cap. 569 / Act III of 2017), with a view to safeguard, protect and give priority to the best interest of minors and to ensure the permanence of the care given to minors by providing "for protection orders for minors, for alternative care and for suitable protection for those minors deprived of parental care or in the risk of being so deprived, and for ancillary matters" (Minor Protection [Alternative Care] Act, p.1¹⁰²).

The Minor Protection (Alternative Care) Act underlines the principles and provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and its Optional Protocols by providing for the protection, provision of services and participation of children. A number of rights are listed in relation to minors in alternative care, and specifically minors in alternative care shall, inter alia, have the rights mentioned in the UNCRC. Hence, apart from enhancing the protection of children and the provision of services, the law also promotes participation by enabling children in out-of-home care to have a greater voice in issues which have a personal impact on their daily lives¹⁰³. Moreover, some of the most significant provisions of this Act include:

- the appointment, professionalism and autonomy of a Director (Protection of Minors). Having his/her powers, functions and responsibilities enforced by law, this Director is responsible for protecting minors at risk¹⁰⁴ and

102. Available online via: <https://legislation.mt/eli/cap/602/eng/pdf>.

103. This will be ensured by the implementation of the Children's House.

104. This means that the Director (Protection of Minors) shall: "(a) act in the best interests of the minor at risk, even if such minor is not a citizen of Malta; (b) ascertain the views and wishes of the minor at risk; (c) collaborate with all those involved in the protection of the minor at risk; (d) investigate whether any action taken in relation to the minor at risk is appropriate; (e) provide guidance to the parents and family of the minor at risk; and (f) from time to time issue guidelines as to what may be deemed as significant harm or a risk of significant harm" (*Minor Protection [Alternative Care] Act*, p.6). In particular, the Act states that this Director "shall hold regular meetings at suitable intervals with representatives of the Education Department, the Department of Health, the Police, and with any such other person or entity which the Director (Protection of Minors) deems as having responsibility for the protection of minors, or of a minor in particular, for the purpose of discussing any matter which falls within such responsibility and to set policies and protocols which are to be adopted, as well as serving as a committee for joint investigations amongst all entities having responsibility for the protection of minors or of a minor in particular" (*Minor Protection [Alternative Care] Act*, p.6).

- for exercising such related duties in an impartial manner;
- the consolidation of the structure of Aġenzija Appoġġ¹⁰⁵ and the regulation of social work services with minors, making such services more accountable;
- the formation of a new Fostering Board¹⁰⁶, the regulation of fostering agencies and the consolidation of the Minors Care Review Board (MCRB)¹⁰⁷. This restructuring shall ensure that the legal and professional foundations for upholding improved fostering services which are necessary to help vulnerable minors and families, are in place;
- the broadened responsibilities of the Social Care Standards Authority (SCSA) to license homes for minors. This ensures that the residential homes housing vulnerable minors are monitored and kept up to the standards designated by the national main competent authority in regulating and ensuring quality social welfare services;
- further involvement and expansion of the roles, responsibilities and procedures of the Courts with regards to child protection and the regulation of the Juvenile Court. This Act intends to bring the Maltese 'care order' system in line with judgements of the European Court of Human Rights and of the Maltese Constitutional Court. In particular, any party, even the minor, can now appeal a Court decision that jeopardizes the wellbeing and the best interests of the minor, and such minor will be granted with a Children's Advocate to represent them; and
- the establishment of a new Therapeutic and Secure Centre with the purpose of providing a safe and adequate place to minors with serious behavioural difficulties where they can be given the required therapy and assistance.

Policies

In terms of policy development, a number of initiatives were undertaken. These include: the *National Children's Policy*, the *Positive Parenting Policy*, the *National Alcohol Policy*, and the *National Adoption Strategy for Children and their Families 2019-2022*.

The National Children's Policy, launched in 2017, outlines the way forward for safeguarding and promoting the rights and general wellbeing of children through identifying and addressing five main dimensions, namely: home environment, social wellbeing, health and environment, education and employment and; leisure and culture. The child is viewed within the context of his/her personal background and wider environment, by taking into account one's informal network of family, friends, communities and the natural and social environment. As a result, amongst others, this Policy puts forward various policy actions which aim at reducing poverty and social exclusion among children, such as strengthening community support units and outreach as well as ensuring support to parents and children facing personal challenging situations.

The implementation of this Policy demands commitment, coordination and partnership among relevant stakeholders and the development of adequate mechanisms that monitor and evaluate the execution of this Policy. For this purpose, the Office of the Commissioner for Children (CfC) is monitoring, evaluating and reporting upon the progress achieved through the assistance of an inter-ministerial Committee which was set up in 2018. Additionally, CfC published a child-friendly version of the Policy and held a series of workshops in 27 State, Church and Independent schools between November 2018 and January 2019 with the aim of including children and young people in the implementation and monitoring of the Policy. Approximately 550 children and young people between the ages of 7 and 14 participated in these workshops.

*The National Strategic Policy for Positive Parenting 2016-2024*¹⁰⁸ provides a positive approach to build and sustain a positive culture and infrastructure for parents and their children, where parents are supported in various ways to fulfil their role to the best of their abilities. Following the launch of this policy, a Positive Parenting (PP) Taskforce consisting of professionals in the field was set up in 2018. During the course of 2018, the Taskforce developed a number of recommendations aimed at strengthening services offered to families and to reach more vulnerable families, especially those expecting or welcoming a child. Furthermore, the PP Taskforce worked on: strengthening mental health services

105. Aġenzija Appoġġ is the national Agency responsible for the wellbeing of minors, in particular child protection.

106. This will comprise seven members instead of the five provided in the previous Act. The seven members of the Board shall include: a Chairperson with at least five years professional practical experience in foster care; two social workers with at least four years professional experience; one person who is, or was, a foster carer for a period of at least three years; a social worker with three years experience in foster care; a warranted psychologist; and an adult person who had lived in foster care for at least three years.

107. The MCRB replaced the previous Children and Young Persons Advisory Board (CYPAB). The MCRB is now not only a consultative body as it had been exercised by the CYPAB, but is also shouldering the role of a quasi-judicial Board. This shall be comprised by seven members being: (a) a warranted advocate with professional experience in family law or law as relating to minors, or a warranted professional who is an expert in the social field, acting as the Chairperson; (b) a warranted psychiatrist; (c) a registered social worker; (d) a person qualified in family therapy; (e) a warranted psychologist; (f) a professional in the safeguarding of children which is to be nominated by the Commissioner for Children; and (g) a registered specialist for the paediatric field according to the Health Care Professions Act.

108. Positive parenting refers to parents' behaviour (or that of individuals designated to this role) which prioritises children's best interests in order to help them grow in an environment that is free from violence and conducive to their healthy development, while at the same time providing all the necessary guidance and support.

offered to families, particularly expectant mothers; identifying the support needs of expectant mothers facing domestic violence or experiencing poverty; improving PP courses to reach parents needing guidance and support; and launching and evaluating the first phase of a PP media campaign¹⁰⁹ aimed towards the general public.

The *National Alcohol Policy* which was launched in 2018, presents 23 Policy Actions to address the three categories of: underage drinking; harmful alcohol use in the general population; and reduction in drink driving. Following its launch, an Inter-Ministerial Committee (IMC) was set up with representatives from MFCS, MFH, MEDE, MTICP (Ministry for Transport, Infrastructure and Capital Projects), MJEG (Ministry for Justice, Equality and Governance), MGOZ (Ministry for Gozo), MHSE (Ministry for Home Affairs, National Security and Law Enforcement).

A *National Adoption Strategy for Children and their Families 2019-2022* was launched by SCSA in 2019. This strategy is based on the principles derived from the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the 1993 Hague Convention in Respect of Inter-country Adoption. Through its three priority areas¹¹⁰ and a specific focus on children's active participation¹¹¹, the strategy aims to consolidate and expand efforts to improve services for currently adopted children and their families as well as prospective adoptive families and children. This strategy sets an annual review and evaluation on each of its priority areas to be undertaken by a Monitoring and Evaluation Committee established within the Authority.

During these past three years, these policies were in their first phases of implementation and therefore, although these are considered important milestones in the social policy field, it is still early to analyse their benefits, particularly for those persons at risk of poverty or social exclusion.

Practices

The setting up of the Social Care Standards Authority (SCSA) and the implementation of the Child Assessment Participation Tool (CPAT) were two main policy level practices aimed at safeguarding and improving the wellbeing and quality of life of various vulnerable groups. The Social Care Standards Authority Act (Cap. 582 / Act XV of 2018) came into force in May 2018. This Act provides for the regulation of social welfare offered to individuals by public or private entities or any other entity or person and for the Social Care Standards Authority's (SCSA) functions. Consequently, SCSA was set up with the main functions of:

- issuing licences for social welfare providers;
- setting social regulatory standards for different areas of social welfare services;
- investigating complaints against service providers;
- monitoring and inspecting service provision; and
- assisting service providers to achieve a greater quality of social wellbeing.

By means of Legal Notice 191 and Legal Notice 192, the SCSA has been appointed as the Central Authority (Regulator) for the Child Adoption Services and Child Fostering Services. Moreover, through Act II of 2019 as an amendment to Act XV of 2018, the SCSA has also been appointed as the Central Authority for: Cross Border Child Protection, Cross Border Child Abduction/Access, and Cross Border Family Maintenance.

The role of SCSA as a regulatory body ensures that quality and standards in social welfare services are supported, monitored, evaluated and improved to protect and enhance the dignity, safety and welfare of all service users. Since its setting up, SCSA has actively involved both service users and service providers in the ongoing process of standard development and improvement through consultation, collaboration and dialogue. During 2018 and 2019, SCSA launched the Social Regulatory Standards for:

- Adoption of Children Regulations;
- Residential Services for Children in Alternative Care;
- Residential Services for Persons with Disability;
- Respite Services for people with Disability;
- Day Care Centre Services for Persons with Disability;
- Residential Services for individuals with problems related to substance abuse and other dependencies; and
- Outreach and other community services offered to individuals with problems related to substance abuse and other dependencies.

109. This first PP media campaign ran from January till March 2019. Work also began on the second PP media campaign which will take place during 2020.

110. The three priority areas posited by this strategy are that of: attaining a client-centred approach; promoting professional development of adoption agencies and staff; and establishing an integrated approach.

111. Child participation is one of the core principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), asserting the right of children and young people to freely express their views and positions on all matters that affect their wellbeing. This is indeed a strategic priority that enhances democracy through well-informed and engaged citizens from young ages.

In order to further uphold the promotion of child participation within the local context, and in so doing, providing for the best interests of the child, a project to implement the Council of Europe's Child Assessment Participation Tool (CPAT) was undertaken by MFCS and the Malta Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society (MFWS). This project aimed at capturing the reality of child participation in different sectors and at diverse levels in Malta, thereby allowing the undertaking of a baseline assessment of the current status of child participation. It has also served to highlight any measures needed to achieve further compliance and improve access to participation, particularly for children at risk of poverty or social exclusion.

Enhancement of social welfare services to support families undergoing breakdown and/or separation proceedings

Minors forming part of families undergoing separation proceedings are benefitting from a project spearheaded by Sedqa and the Foundation for Social Welfare Services (FSWS) in collaboration with the Ministry for Justice, Culture, and Local Government (MJCL). As part of this project, specially trained professionals designed and delivered educational courses to such families and children in order to address issues that may be faced by these minors, as well as their needs according to the Positive Parenting Policy. The project has successfully undergone its pilot process and evaluation procedure, and courses have now become part of operations.

In addition, the Supervised Access Visits (SAVs) service was strengthened to meet the needs of children that require a safe place to communicate with their non-custodial parents or family members, with whom communication would not otherwise be possible¹¹². The service has been mainly strengthened through the recruitment and training of more professional supervisors and the allocation of new premises where visits can be hosted.

Elderly individuals and persons with disability

The needs of elderly persons and persons with disability, as well as their respective carers, were addressed by a number of specifically targeted measures including:

- the introduction of a scheme offering a personal assistant at a subsidised rate for the purpose of helping persons with disability of any age with daily functions. As at December 2019, there were 59 individuals benefitting from this scheme.
- a respite service offered to informal carers working directly with dependent elderly individuals in 2017, in order to provide support through a week of rest every six weeks, with a maximum of three periods of rest per year. In 2017, 93 clients benefitted from this service, whilst 491 clients benefitted in 2018. In 2019, more care packages were introduced in order to offer beneficiaries an opportunity to further tailor their care to their requirements, and the number of beneficiaries increased to 649. Until December 2019, 7,800 hours of service were made available.
- an increase in the quality of the food delivered by the Meals on Wheels service. Efforts were also made to reduce any risks related to the delivery of this food, which as at end 2019, 693 elderly persons living in their homes were benefitting from this initiative.
- increased space and modernisation at the Mtarfa Day Care Centre for persons with disabilities. This process of extension and modernisation, allowed services to be improved and offered to a larger number of individuals¹¹³. As at December 2019, the Centre was being of service to 96 clients.
- the refurbishment and embellishment of the ten existing day care centres for persons with disabilities and the opening of a new centre in central Malta housing 50 persons. This allowed more individuals from these areas to be accommodated.

112. This service also provides valuable feedback to the respective family member for the improvement of his/her relationship with the child.

113. This Day Care Centre can now accommodate 180 persons.

2.2.5.2 HOUSING

The Housing Authority (HA) in collaboration with other entities executed a number of housing measures to embellish and restore as well as increase and upgrade existing social housing units; and to make home ownership more accessible and affordable to persons in low-income brackets including the:

Embellishment of social housing blocks accompanied by the installation of lifts and maintenance of the surrounding areas. This is a six-year project which aims to improve the living environments of around 900 residents once completed in 2022.

Nikru biex Nassistu scheme, which came into effect in September 2017, and encouraged property owners to rent out their properties to the Housing Authority for the purposes of social housing, thus broadening the range of available properties. Until the end of December 2019, over 60 availability agreements¹¹⁴ were signed.

Scheme offering financial assistance of up to €25,000 for every residence, aiming to aid those who wish to refurbish any unused properties for the purpose of social housing. The respective property would be hired for a period of ten years. Until the end of December 2019, the HA approved 19 applications.

Partial funding of the regeneration of dilapidated property aiming to further encourage the availability of social housing. The HA made the necessary arrangements with non-governmental entities to ensure the use of such property by vulnerable persons, at a lower rent price than one would find on the market.

Broadening of the Housing Loan Scheme through arrangements with an additional bank. This aimed at encouraging an increase in home ownership by offering social loans to prospective homeowners in the low-wage brackets. A total of 77 deeds were signed in the period under review.

HA's Equity Sharing Scheme, which was offered in May 2019 to individuals above the age of 40 years who were interested in buying a home. Through the scheme, individuals were given the opportunity of purchasing at least fifty per cent of the property whilst purchasing the rest of the share at a later stage from the Housing Authority. Until the end of December 2019, the number of benefitting individuals for this scheme amounted to 206.

Renting as a Housing Alternative: the White Paper Rental Market, published in 2019 outlines a number of proposals which seek to establish and maintain a fair balance between the needs of landlords as well as tenants for residential tenancies, and include: longer term contracts for stability; notice of withdrawal by tenant; notice of termination by the landlord; permissible increases; a more efficient judicial process; a more efficient pathway to minor dispute resolution; registration of inventory & deposit; registration of lease contract; and the establishment of a Residential Tenancies Unit.

The above-mentioned measures were key to implement various policy actions within the dimension of social services. The diversity of measures within both areas of social welfare services and housing contributed to significantly ameliorate people's lives, especially those of the most vulnerable members of society.

2.2.6 CULTURE

Inclusivity has always been a crucial element in the process of strengthening Malta's cultural milieu. Malta considers cultural activity as an important medium for combating poverty and social exclusion as well as promoting greater equality and equity. In fact, through the implementation of various culture-related initiatives over the years 2017-2019, Malta has registered progress in addressing inclusion and accessibility through culture.

National tradition and cultural events manifested through various arts can also have a positive impact on the quality of life of people. Persons at risk of poverty or social exclusion, whose participation, inclusion and empowerment may be consequentially curtailed, are targeted in this regard. The National Strategic Policy for Poverty Reduction and for Social Inclusion 2014-2024 recognises the contribution made by the cultural sector towards poverty reduction.

114. After concluding the application and contractual processes, an availability agreement is done between the HA and the property owners so that they may be granted financial allocations to make the necessary finishes to the property. By virtue of this agreement, the property owners are bound to complete the finishes to the property by the stipulated deadline (maximum time given is 6 months), thereby providing an indicative date of when the property will be available for social housing.

Within this context, this Chapter highlights the main initiatives deemed to have contributed towards poverty reduction and social inclusion. During the period under review, Heritage Malta launched a number of initiatives aimed at further encouraging attendance to heritage sites and increase cultural learning. These include:

- “Heritage Malta Passport- Students” launched in November 2018 whereby all students attending primary or secondary level education in Malta and Gozo, and any two accompanying adults benefit from free unlimited access to all Heritage Malta sites and museums. Over 55,000 individuals have benefitted from this initiative from December 2018 to April 2019.
- “Passport for Senior Citizens”, launched in April 2019, offers all senior citizens over 60 years, residing in Malta and Gozo, and any two accompanying youths free unlimited access to Heritage Malta sites and museums.
- Discounts on existing rates and the introduction of special reduced rates to Heritage Malta sites offered to Local Councils and groups. Furthermore, support was also offered to set up exhibitions of showcases and artefacts to increase local cultural heritage awareness/identities.

Another set of initiatives were undertaken by Arts Council Malta with a view to promote arts at the local level. In fact, the “Create 2020 Strategy”, has been developed with the aim to outline the cultural sector’s contribution towards community development, accessibility, inclusion, well-being and quality of life. It examined possible barriers¹¹⁵ to cultural access and recommended ways of overcoming them. As part of this national cultural strategy, during these last three years, intensive research has been conducted in terms of cultural participation in our society. Furthermore, the Arts Council has promoted several community-oriented projects, including:

- “The Creative Communities Fund”, that was launched to initiate community-led creative and artistic activities, primarily addressing local communities. It provides training, research and development of artistic projects to enhance cultural diversity and integration. Overall, 12 organisations have benefitted from 14 projects. These mainly focused on the creation of artistic installations using naturally sourced materials, informal outdoor photography workshops and the launching of short films on our local natural heritage.
- “Kreattiv Fund”, aimed at creating collaborations between creative practitioners, teachers and students across schools in Malta and Gozo. This project engaged educators and creative practitioners in dialogue while encouraging students and educators towards further engagement within the creative sector. During the 2017-2019 period, the number of participating students increased from the previous year, amounting to 5,700 students participating in 56 projects.
- The project “Of Peace and Unrest”, integrated a team of creative practitioners to develop and present a multimedia performance and a documented film highlighting socio-cultural realities including exile, conflict and the struggle for space. “Of Peace and Unrest” offered a dynamic platform through which audiences can experience seamless artistic co-operation and contemporary transnational integration through the universal language of the arts transcending language, religion and race.
- “The President’s Award for Creativity”, established in collaboration with the President’s Office acknowledges the work carried out by organisations with vulnerable and disadvantaged groups through creativity and arts-driven projects. This ongoing initiative which puts forward new projects every year, promotes the individual’s personal and emotional skill development, and the inclusion of socially disadvantaged youth. The Award acts as a platform for young promising talent to flourish and incentivises the contribution of organisations towards community development and collaborative arts projects.
- “The Cultural Rights Project” launched in October 2019, is a research project conducted through a series of focus groups and interviews with different stakeholder groups representing local communities, including; children, youths, people with different abilities and diverse cultural heritages, organisations promoting local traditional culture, senior citizens and groups from socially disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds. The project is based on the concept of diversity advantage and supports local practitioners in the design of initiatives to inspire creativity.

In addition to these community-based projects, the “Culture Pass” project, which was launched in 2016, as from 2019, expanded its criteria to be open to all kindergarten to secondary students from all state, private and church schools. This project contributes towards an inclusive culture since “Culture Pass” gives students the opportunity to appreciate better the importance of cultural heritage and identity as well as the opportunity to expose their talents through participation in cultural and artistic events. Beneficiaries significantly increased from 6,800 students in Academic Year 2016/2017 to 40,000 students in Academic Year 2019/2020.

115. Individual lack of interest and lack of time for local cultural activities.

Furthermore, Teatru Manoel, as one of Malta's key hubs for the performing arts, has also contributed towards poverty reduction through the promotion of cultural inclusion. In this regard, various initiatives have been undertaken, including:

- Free entrance and tour of the Theatre to children from state and church schools taking part in the 'Valletta Treasure Hunt'. Thus, a closer encounter to the history of the Manoel Theatre was facilitated;
- The implementation of a project, organised at St Vincent De Paul residency in collaboration with the former Valletta 18 Foundation, to provide elderly residents various creative activities as part of dementia therapy; and
- The launch of a free special musical event at the Theatre in July 2018 for senior citizens who reside at St Vincent de Paul and other care homes.

Valletta 18 consolidated the local cultural infrastructure in the Maltese islands. This led to the establishment of the Valletta Cultural Agency (VCA) in 2019. Through VCA, Valletta continued to flourish in its cultural heartland and new projects towards inclusivity, participation and capacity-building have been implemented. These include:

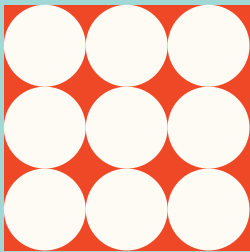
- "Mewġa Mużika", which aimed to dilute barriers between different communities, based on music and collaborative work. Approximately 1,750 persons participated in the four main events organized through this collaboration.
- "Naqsam il-MUŻA", by which local communities were encouraged to select their preferred pieces of art from the collection displayed in various localities within their own communities.
- "Exiled Homes", launched in 2018 is an anthropological and artistic project that shed light on the ways through which foreign home care workers (employees) and Maltese older persons (employers) integrate within the domestic space through the collection and understanding of these diverse narratives.
- The publication of the book "Undertow: Poetics of Displacement" in 2014, comprising a collection of migrant narratives and images, which led to diverse workshops and public events, including the production of a short movie, a film festival and a final exhibition in 2017 and 2018.
- "Utopian Nights", implemented in 2018, included a series of public events through the participation of local and European artists, academics and thinkers to discuss important social issues related to exile and conflict. The audience participating in the four events, held in different locations, was circa 800.
- "Opening Doors (IN)VISIBILITY" implemented in 2018 encouraged adults with different intellectual needs to develop their artistic and creative skill through the creation of original pieces in music, dance and theatre. It was estimated that 400 participants benefitted from this initiative.
- "The evaluation and monitoring, community inclusion and space project" documented the impact of Valletta 2018 for the period 2015 to 2018 through a longitudinal research. The project looked at the impact on the cultural sector and cultural participation, the economy and tourism and the image of Valletta 2018. The process evolved around four main cultural infrastructure projects in the city and how perception, liveability and usability of these four areas has been transformed. Several researchers, artists, stakeholders, academics contributed to the report 'Community Inclusion and Space' and in a Final Research Report published on valletta2018.org in March 2019.
- A number of focus groups and workshops with community members, representatives of NGOs, local artists and cultural practitioners, were coordinated in relation to the "Practice based research/Valletta 2018 Annual Conference" (2018) and the VCA Annual Conference entitled "Sharing the Legacy". This initiative has encouraged the understanding of practices and actions that should be undertaken within the cultural sector whilst also promoting liveability in cities for communities and creative practitioners. The needs of various communities, particularly the changing communities of Hamrun and Marsa were discussed.
- "The Valletta Design Cluster" focused on design, entrepreneurship and social impact, through national and EU funds as well as expertise in the creative economy and culture. This project supports and promotes user-centred design as a catalyst for innovation, and a multi-disciplinary approach to create positive impacts for communities and individuals. The project invested around €10 million in the regeneration of a derelict area with the aim of providing facilities to be used by various communities as well as the generation of sustained economic activity and employment. Until end 2019, 250 persons have benefitted from this project.

In addition to the above-mentioned projects, local councils undertook various initiatives towards the promotion of cultural activities in different localities across Malta and Gozo as outlined in the new Local Government Reform measure, such as traditional cultural events promoting local produce and arts and crafts.

Through the above cultural initiatives, Malta continued to foster social inclusion and poverty reduction across all demographic strata of society through efforts in encouraging increased opportunity for, as well as accessibility to, activities that propel interest in Malta's rich heritage and history. Increased active participation in the cultural world therefore strongly complements all measures undertaken within the dimensions previously outlined within this report, paving the way for a stronger, inclusive, and holistically healthy Maltese society as a whole.

Chapter 3 | **Evaluation**

MEASURING PROGRESS



Poverty and social exclusion are multivariate, with new causes and forms of poverty arising from an ever changing socio-economic, labour market, educational, cultural, environmental and technological setting. The analysis and evaluation of the causes of poverty and social exclusion must therefore take into consideration that this complex phenomenon needs to be measured by methodologically robust, peer reviewed indicators. Within this context, the headline indicators used for the purpose of monitoring and measuring progress on this complex phenomenon needs to be flanked by a variety of contextual indicators with a view to provide a holistic analysis on poverty and social exclusion.

Apart from the main headline indicators, such as AROPE indicator (At-Risk-of-Poverty or Social Exclusion Rate), Severe Material Deprivation (SMD) and Work Intensity (WI), a number of other contextual indicators contributing to the reduction of poverty and the promotion of social inclusion were also analysed. These indicators have been established in consultation with the NSO¹¹⁶, and provide insights within the main strategic policy objectives as well as contribute towards the EU 2020 Strategy.

3.1 GENERAL POPULATION

The National Strategic Policy for Poverty Reduction and for Social Inclusion addresses poverty and social exclusion among the population in general and the four target groups namely:

- children and young people;
- elderly persons;
- unemployed persons; and
- the working poor.

In this regard, this section provides an overview of the main headline indicator in the area of poverty reduction including the At-Risk-of-Poverty or Social Exclusion (AROPE) rate, the At-Risk-of-Poverty Rate (ARP), Material Deprivation (MD) and Severe Material Deprivation rate (SMD) and the Very Low Work Intensity (VLWI) indicator.

AT-RISK-OF-POVERTY OR SOCIAL EXCLUSION (AROPE)

The AROPE indicator is used to monitor the EU 2020 Strategy poverty target¹¹⁷. Table 5 below shows how the AROPE rate for Malta exhibited a substantial decrease between the base year 2013 (24.6%) and 2019 (20.1%). This decrease is mainly attributed to a number of factors, including the robust economic performance, leading to the low unemployment rates that have been registered. Malta has generally experienced a lower AROPE rate in comparison to the EU average in recent years. This is also reflected when the AROPE rate is disaggregated by gender. It is worth noting that, notwithstanding the decreasing trend registered for females (both at EU and MT level), the AROPE rate for females is still higher when compared to males. This may be attributable to certain factors, such as the lower female participation rate in the labour market.

It is also worth mentioning that the decrease in the absolute number of persons in AROPE is to be seen in the context of the increase in the total Maltese population in the same period. As a matter of fact, while the number of persons in AROPE decreased by 5,000 in this period, the number of those not in AROPE increased substantially by 76,000 persons.

116. Through the NSO's Social and Regional Statistics Directorate and in particular the Social and Cultural Statistics Unit. The latest available data was used, as at end August 2020.

117. The AROPE indicator refers to people in a household who are either at risk of poverty, are severely materially deprived or in a household with a very low work intensity.

Table 5. At-Risk-of-Poverty or Social Exclusion in Malta and EU by Sex, 2013-2019¹¹⁸

At-Risk-of-Poverty or Social Exclusion	2013	2016	2017	2018	2019
EU	24.6%	23.5%	22.4%	21.8%	:
Malta	24.6%	20.3%	19.3%	19.0%	20.1%
Malta: At-Risk-of-Poverty or Social Exclusion	102,000	90,000	87,000	89,000	97,000
Malta: Not At-Risk-of-Poverty or Social Exclusion¹¹⁹	312,000	353,000	365,000	378,000	388,000
EU: Males	23.7%	22.6%	21.5%	20.8%	:
Malta: % Males	23.8%	20.2%	18.5%	17.4%	18.8%
Malta: Males	49,000	45,000	42,000	42,000	46,000
EU: Females	25.5%	24.4%	23.3%	22.8%	:
Malta: % Females	25.5%	20.4%	20.2%	20.6%	21.4%
Malta: Females	53,000	45,000	45,000	47,000	51,000

AT RISK OF POVERTY RATE (ARP)

Malta has an ARP rate just below the EU average standing at 16.8%, compared to the 17.1% registered at EU level in 2018. As Table 6 shows, Malta has registered a relatively moderate increase in people who are at risk of poverty (ARP)¹²⁰ when compared to the base year 2013.

A disaggregation by gender shows that the ARP rate for both males and females in Malta has marginally increased compared to 2013. A contributing factor to higher ARP rate of Maltese females, when compared to Maltese males, may be the lower female employment rate in the labour market. It is worth noting that this trend is similar to trends at a European level.

The ARP indicator has to be interpreted with caution and not in isolation. The EU itself adopted a combination of three indicators to monitor progress towards its social inclusion targets. For instance, the ARP indicator does not measure the ability to afford basic necessities (unlike other indicators concerning material deprivation which will be analysed further below) but the relation of disposable household income to that of the rest of the population.

Although the nominal ARP rate has gone up slightly in recent years, this is the result of substantial increase in the total disposable income enjoyed by Maltese households over the past years. Since 2013, the average household disposable income went up by €5,000 to €28,500 or by 21.3%. As a result, the at-risk-of-poverty threshold (60% of the median equivalized disposable income) rose from €7,672 to €9,212, or by 20%, but the proportion of those falling below these thresholds increased by just 1.3pp. It should be noted that while the at-risk-of-poverty threshold rose by 20%, the cost of living during the same period rose by just 8%.

It is pertinent to point out that the updated threshold of €9,212 is relevant to a single person household. If there are

118. At-Risk-of-Poverty or Social Exclusion Rate in Malta and EU by Sex 2013-2019; Eurostat. Accessed via https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=ilc_peps01&lang=en on 02/09/2020 (: = not available) EU SILC 2019: Salient Indicators. Accessed via https://nso.gov.mt/en/News_Releases/Documents/2020/08/News2020_135.pdf on 22/08/2020 Note: Total Population in '000s may not tally due to rounding up.

119. Represents the difference between the total Maltese population in that year and the number of persons in AROPE, which yields the estimated number of persons not in AROPE.

120. The ARP is the share of people with an equivalised disposable income (after social transfers) below the at-risk-of-poverty threshold. Thus, the ARP rate only measures the financial aspect of poverty in relation to the moving 60% median National Equivalised Income (NEI).

more household members, the threshold is boosted by a factor of 0.5 for persons aged 14 years and over and by 0.3 for dependents under 14 years of age. For the average Maltese household, the threshold would be 1.8 times €9,212, while it would be 1.6 for a household formed of a single parent with two dependents under 14 years; and 2.1 for a couple with two dependents under 14.

On the basis of these scales, for the average Maltese family size (couple with two children under 14) not to be classified as at risk of poverty, its total disposable income has to exceed the updated threshold of €19,345 (€9,212 multiplied by a factor of 2.1). Similarly, the equivalized income of a household formed of a single parent with two underage children currently has to exceed the €14,739 mark (€9,212 multiplied by 1.6).

Paradoxically, the ARP indicator measure moves in a countercyclical way. In a growing economy the poverty threshold rises rapidly, but then during a recession it falls. This despite the fact that the amount of income to maintain a minimum socially acceptable standard of living does not fluctuate in similar fashion.

This means that had Malta's median equivalised disposable income remained at the same levels registered in 2013, 42,000 persons in 2019 would have been estimated as living below the at-risk-of-poverty threshold, nearly half as much as the amount deemed to have an equivalised income below the updated threshold today and a third less than the number in 2013. This, coupled with the substantial increase in the Maltese population registered in these last 6 years, means that while the number of persons in ARP increased by 18,000, the number of those not in ARP increased by 53,000 persons, or three times as much.

Table 6. At-Risk-of-Poverty Rate in Malta and EU by Sex, 2013-2019¹²¹

At-Risk-of-Poverty Rate	2013	2016	2017	2018	2019
EU	16.7%	17.3%	16.9%	17.1%	:
Malta	15.8%	16.5%	16.7%	16.8%	17.1%
Malta: At-Risk-of-Poverty	65,000	73,000	76,000	79,000	83,000
Malta: Not At-Risk-of-Poverty¹²²	349,000	369,000	377,000	389,000	402,000
EU: Males	16.2%	16.6%	16.3%	16.3%	:
Malta: Males	15.4%	16.5%	16.1%	15.6%	16.1%
Malta: Males	32,000	37,000	37,000	37,000	40,000
EU: Females	17.2%	17.9%	17.6%	17.8%	:
Malta: Females	16.1%	16.5%	17.3%	18.1%	18,1%
Malta: Females	33,000	36,000	39,000	42,000	43,000

In this context, it is worth noting that Eurostat's ARP rate anchored in 2008 that is the rate based on the ARP threshold adjusted for inflation) has improved by 4.5pp over the same period as shown in Table 7 below. Moreover, the improvement has been felt particularly by females, probably due to the higher percentage of women in work.

121. At-Risk-of-Poverty Rate in Malta and EU by Sex 2013-2019 Eurostat. Access via <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/product/view/tespm010?lang=en> on 02/09/2020 (e = estimated, : = not available)

122. Represents the difference between the total Maltese population in that year and the number of persons in ARP, which yields the estimated number of persons not in ARP.

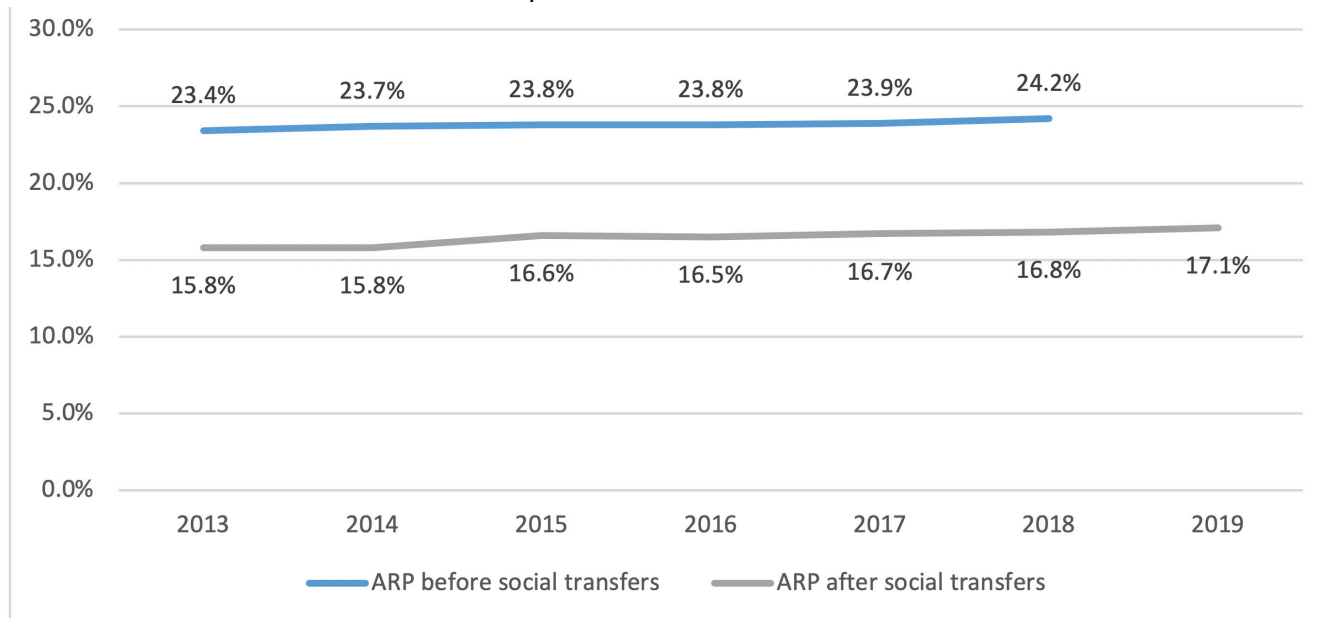
Table 7. At-Risk-of-Poverty in Malta and EU (ANCHORED IN 2008) by Sex, 2013-2019¹²³

At-Risk-of-Poverty Rate (anchored in 2008)	2013	2016	2017	2018	2019
EU 27	18.7%	17.5%	15.8%	15.1%	:
Malta	14.4%	11.3%	10.1%	10.1%	9.9%
Males EU 27	18.1%	16.9%	15.3%	14.6%	13.8%
Males Malta	14.2%	11.2%	10.3%	10.1%	9.7%
Females EU 27	19.6%	18.0%	16.4%	16.0%	15.3%
Females Malta	14.7%	8.8%	8.4%	8.4%	7.5%

THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL TRANSFERS ON THE ARP RATE

Social transfers are the primary tool in the fight against poverty and social exclusion. The impact of social transfers on the quality of life ¹²⁴ of people is seen in Figure 1, which shows the reduction of ARP for Malta after social benefits. Data published for 2019 indicates that the ARP after social transfers stood at 17.1%. Thus, these social benefits directly result in a reduction of 7.4% in the ARP rate ¹²⁵. This rate has been stable for these last years.

It is pertinent to note that the social transfers discussed above do not include social transfers in kind, such as free education, free healthcare and free social welfare services. Social transfers in kind affect both the level and the distribution of income. Furthermore, the provision of these social transfers, while available to everyone, tends to be largest to the lower income deciles.

Figure 1. ARP Rate Before and After Social transfers, 2013-2019

123. At-risk-of-poverty rate anchored at a fixed moment in time (2008) by age and sex - EU-SILC survey. Access via http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?lang=en&dataset=ilc_li22b

124. The impact of social transfers on the ARP rate can be calculated by comparing the income poverty rate before social transfers with the income poverty rate after social transfers. This indicator allows assessment of the impact of social transfers on monetary poverty.

125. ARP Rate Before and After Social transfers 2013-2019. Eurostat. Accessed via <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&plugin=1&pcode=tesov250&language=en> on 02/09/2020

SEVERE MATERIAL DEPRIVATION (SMD) AND MATERIAL DEPRIVATION (MD)

The material deprivation indicators ¹²⁶ provide a more nuanced view of the impact of poverty on the quality of life and lifestyle choices of people. These indicators express the inability of households to afford some items considered by most people to be desirable or even necessary to lead an adequate life. The severe material deprivation rate measures the proportion of the population that cannot afford at least four of nine economic strains and durables dimension; whereas material deprivation rates indicate how much households could not afford at least three items.

In line with the trend at an EU level in recent years, Malta has also registered a decline in Severe Material Deprivation (SMD) as shown in Table 8 below, with a slight increase registered in 2019 for both genders¹²⁷. Data shows that between the base year 2013 and 2019, SMD in Malta registered a substantial reduction in the rate from 10.2% to 3.7%, resulting in a drop of 24,000 persons. This reduction is attributable to the strong economic performance of the Maltese economy which generated higher employment and better wages and salary levels, as well as various initiatives including the reduction in the tax burden and utility bills that have resulted in higher disposable incomes.

In the period between 2013 and 2019 Malta's population grew by 75,000 to 488,000. So put in a demographic context, had Malta's population remained anchored at the levels of 2013, when it stood at 414,000, the effective drop in number of persons over the following years would have been substantially higher. This is clearly illustrated from the figures showing the number of persons who were not severely materially deprived, which by 2019 went up by 98,000 over 2013.

Table 8. Severe Material Deprivation in Malta and EU by Sex, 2016-2019¹²⁸

Severe Material Deprivation	2013	2016	2017	2018	2019
EU: Total	9.8%	7.9%	6.9%	6.1%	5.6% ^e
Malta: %	10.2%	4.4%	3.3%	3.0%	3.7%
Malta: Severe Material Deprivation Population	42,000	20,000	15,000	14,000	18,000
Malta: Population Not in Severe Material Deprivation ¹²⁹	372,000	423,000	436,000	453,470	470,000
EU: Male	9.7%	7.6%	6.7%	5.9%	5.5% ^e
Malta: % Males	10.1%	4.5%	3.2%	2.7%	3.4%
Malta: Males	21,000	10,000	7,000	6,000	8,000
EU: Females	10.0%	8.1%	7.2%	6.2%	5.7% ^e
Malta: %Females	10.3%	4.3%	3.4%	3.4%	4.1%
Malta: Females	21,000	9,000	8,000	8,000	10,000

126. The SMD is defined as the enforced inability to pay for at least four of the following 9 items of deprivation, while the EU currently defines material deprivation (MD) as the proportion of people living in households who cannot afford at least three of these 9 items: coping with unexpected expenses; one week annual holiday away from home; avoiding arrears (in mortgage or rent, utility bills or hire purchase instalments); a meal with meat, chicken, fish or vegetarian equivalent every second day; keeping the home adequately warm; a washing machine; a colour TV; a telephone; a personal car.

127. It is worth noting that the MD and SMD rates are usually related to the demographic characteristics of the persons falling under the MD or the SMD categories and the proportion and growth rate of these demographic groups compared with the growth in the total population.

128. Severe Material Deprivation in Malta and EU by Sex 2013-2019. Eurostat. Accessed via https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tepsr_lm420/default/table?lang=en on 02/09/2020 (e = estimated).

129. Represents the difference between the total Maltese population in that year and the number of persons in SMD, which yields the estimated number of persons not in SMD.

Table 9 below shows that the material deprivation rate in 2013 at 19.90% was slightly higher than the EU average, but in recent years it has appreciably dropped below EU levels. The annual rate dropped to 8.4%, in 2019 representing a reduction of more than 41,000 in number of materially deprived persons, despite the substantial increase in the total population. As a matter of fact, on the other side of the coin, the number of those who were not materially deprived shot up by over 115,000 persons.

Table 9. Material Deprivation in Malta and EU by Sex, 2013-2019¹³⁰

Material Deprivation	2013	2016	2017	2018	2019
EU average	19.80%	16.20%	14.80%	13.40%	:
Malta: %	19.90%	10.20%	8.00%	8.70%	8.40%
Malta: Materially Deprived Population	82,000	45,000	36,000	41,000	41,000
Malta: Not Materially Deprived Population¹³¹	332,000	398,000	415,000	427,000	447,000
EU: Male average	19.30%	15.60%	14.30%	12.90%	NA
Malta: % Males	19.50%	10.30%	7.60%	8.30%	7.90%
Malta: Males	40,000	23,000	17,000	19,400	19,500
EU: Female average	20.40%	16.80%	15.30%	13.80%	NA
Malta: % Females	20.20%	10.10%	9.00%	10.50%	11.00%
Malta: Females	42,000	22,000	19,000	21,600	21,500

Table 10. Main Items of Deprivation of Persons living in Malta 2013-2019¹³²

Item	2013 % population	2016 % population	2019 % population	2013 - 2019 Difference
Inability to afford paying for one-week annual holiday away from home	55.9	36.8	30.8	-25.1pp
Inability to keep home adequately warm	23.9	6.6	7.8	-16.1pp
Inability to face unexpected financial expenses (amount change every year)	23.0	20.8	15.1	-7.9pp
Inability to afford a meal with meat, chicken, fish (or vegetarian equivalent) every second day	15.3	7.4	5.9	-9.4pp
Inability to avoid arrears (in mortgage or rent, utility bills or hire purchase instalments)	12.5	10.4	7.8	-4.7pp

130. Material Deprivation in Malta and EU by Sex 2013-2019. Eurostat. Accessed via <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tessi080/default/table?lang=en> on 02/09/2020 (e = estimated).

131. Represents the difference between the total Maltese population in that year and the number of persons in MD, which yields the estimated number of persons not in MD.

132. Items of Economic Strain by Deprivation of Persons Living in Malta, EU-SILC 2013-2019, National Statistics Office.

MATERIALLY DEPRIVED PERSONS BY TYPE OF DEPRIVATION

Table 10 gives an overview of the five main items by which persons at risk of poverty were most deprived in 2013, 2016 and 2019. From 2013, there was a marked reduction in the number of those affected by these items of deprivation, with the highest decreases registered in those with inability to afford paying one-week holiday away from home and those with inability to keep home adequately warm.

Other significant reductions were registered in the other main areas of material deprivation, such as the inability to face unexpected financial expenses, the inability to afford a meal with meat, chicken, fish (or vegetarian equivalent) and the inability to avoid arrears in mortgage, rent, utility bills or hire purchase instalments.

SHARE OF POPULATION IN VERY LOW WORK INTENSITY (VLWI)

Table 11 below captures the share of people living in households who have no to little employment (VLWI)¹³³. In the Maltese labour market of a 40-hour week, VLW1 would show the proportion of adults in a household who work less than 8 hours per week, averaged out over a year, in the total number of members in the household. This is done to take into account seasonal jobs, whereby some adults in a household may work for a limited period and be inactive for the rest of the year.

As a result of the robust economic growth of the last few years, coupled with active labour market initiatives like the in-work benefit and the tapering of benefits, Malta has exhibited an increase in its employment rate which in 2019 stood at 77.2%. Due to this increase in work opportunities, Malta has also witnessed a decrease in its unemployment rate (20-64 years), which has declined from 5.5% in 2013 to 3.1% in 2019. In parallel with these positive trends, the share of people in VLWI has also been reduced, from 9.1% in 2013 to 4.9% of the total potential working hours in 2019.

Even in the context of a tight labour market, Malta has maintained a consistent percentage of people who can be considered as VLWI. This may indicate that the people in such households may have issues which could be hindering their participation in the labour market. Furthermore, a gender analysis of this issue sees a higher VLWI rate for Maltese females than males, although female VLWI has been declining for the last few years, which may be attributable to the provision of free childcare services.

Table 11. Share of Population in Very Low Work Intensity (VLWI) in Malta and EU by Sex, 2013-2019¹³⁴

Share of Population (aged 0-59 years) in Very Low Work Intensity (VLWI)	2013	2016	2017	2018	2019
EU: Total	11.0% ^e	10.5% ^e	9.5% ^e	8.8%	:
Malta: Total	9.1%	7.3%	7.1%	5.5%	4.9%
Malta: Total Population	29,000	25,000	24,000	19,000	18,000
EU: Males	10.5% ^e	10.0% ^e	9.2% ^e	8.3%	:
Malta: % Males	7.8%	7.2%	6.4%	4.5%	4.1%
Malta: Total Male Population	13,000	12,000	11,000	8,000	8,000
EU: Females	11.5% ^e	11.0% ^e	9.9% ^e	9.2%	:
Malta: % Females	10.4%	7.5%	7.9%	6.6%	5.9%
Malta: Total Female Population	16,000	12,000	13,000	11,000	10,000

133. VLWI is defined as those households where the adults worked 20% or less of their total work potential during the past year.

134. Share of Population in Very Low Work Intensity (VLWI) in Malta and EU by Sex 2013-2019. Eurostat. Accessed via https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tepsr_lm430/default/table?lang=en on 02/09/2020 (e = estimated, : = not available)

INCOME INEQUALITY (S80/S20 INCOME QUINTILE SHARE RATIO)

The income quintile share ratio, also known as the S80/S20 ratio¹³⁵, is a measure of the inequality of income distribution within a society. Table 12 below shows how the income inequality in Malta remains below the EU average (Malta 4.28, EU 5.12 in 2018) and remains at a general stabilised rate. Data published for 2019 indicates that in Malta, the income of the richest 20% of households was 4.18 times higher than that of the poorest 20%, down from 4.28 times in 2018.

Various factors contribute to this phenomenon, primarily increased wages and increased participation in the labour market. Moreover, average hours worked increased and such increase is noted both for households in full-time employment and for those who had a part-time employment¹³⁶. Furthermore, Malta has not suffered from major macro-economic instability, and enjoys stable industrial employment relations. However, it is relevant to note Malta's gender disparity in the S80/S20 Ratio; while the male inequality indicator has seen a gradual reduction, stabilizing in the last years, the female ratio has registered an increasing inequality trend during the period under review, with a sharp increase in 2018, though registering a subsequent reduction in 2019.

A contributing factor behind the generally increasing trend may be the gender gap, whereby, although female participation in the labour market is increasing, females are still hindered by structural factors once they start paid employment, resulting in this inequality. It remains to be seen whether the improvement registered in female inequality in 2019 is maintained in the coming years.

Table 12. Income Quintile Share Ratio (S80/S20) in Malta and EU by Sex, 2013-2019¹³⁷

Income Quintile Share Ratio (S80/S20)	2013	2016	2017	2018	2019
EU: Total	5.00	5.16	5.08	5.12	:
Malta: Total	4.14	4.22	4.21	4.28	4.18
EU: Males	5.07	5.23	5.11	5.14	:
Malta: Males	4.26	4.30	4.24	4.21	4.21
EU: Females	4.93	5.08	5.04	5.11	:
Malta: Females	4.01	4.15	4.14	4.35	4.15

HOUSING COST OVERBURDEN RATE BY POVERTY AND TENURE STATUS

Shelter is one of the most basic human needs which has an impact on the quality of life of individuals. In recent years, Malta has registered increases in the prices of property both in terms of purchases as well as in terms of rentals. This may be attributed to a number of factors, including the low interest rate environment which contributed to drum up housing demand, as borrowers could finance the acquisition of property at a relatively cheap rate. Demand was further incentivised via budgetary measures aimed at first-time buyers first announced in 2013 and, more recently, also for second-time buyers. Inward migration also drove up demand, together with a flourishing tourism industry which has seen a greater share of tourists staying in rented private accommodation. However, a conservative approach by banks¹³⁸ has resulted in a situation whereby, although house prices have picked up, the monthly average repayment to average

135. The S80/S20 ratio is calculated as the ratio of total income received by the 20% of the population with the highest income (the top quintile) to that received by the 20% of the population with the lowest income (the bottom quintile).

136. "Income and Wealth Inequality in Malta: Evidence from Micro Data" Central Bank of Malta. Accessed on 03/08/2020

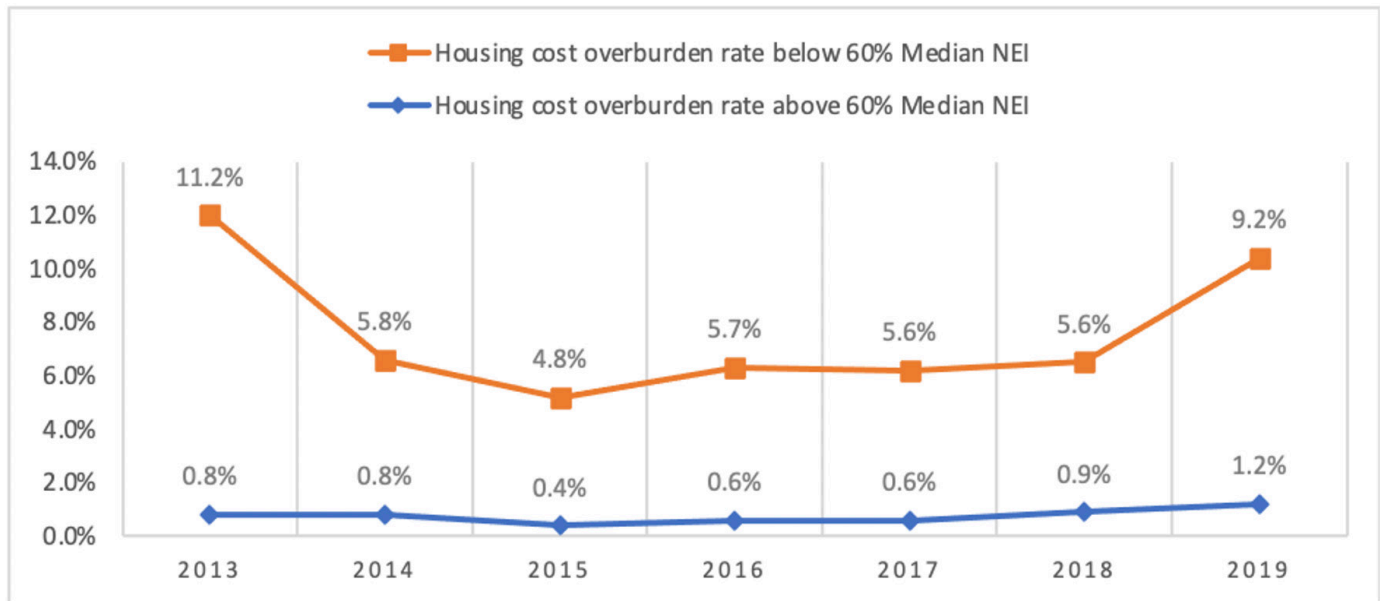
137. Income Quintile Share Ratio (S80/S20) in Malta and EU by Sex 2016-2019. Eurostat. Accessed via <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&plugin=1&pcode=tessi180&language=en> on 02/09/2020 (: = not available)

138. Banks' exposure to the real estate market and the Central Bank of Malta's macro prudential Policy response. Central Bank of Malta, 2018. Article published in the Financial Stability Report 2018, pp. 79-96

wage remained sustainable. However, this sustainability was maintained due to a reduction in the footprint of each individual unit.

The cost of housing is naturally relative to the financial resources of the household. The wide discrepancy in the housing overburden rate¹³⁹ between households above and below the poverty line is self-evident in Figure 2 below. The housing cost overburden rate for those households above the poverty line has remained relatively stable since 2016, increasing to 1.2% in 2019. On the other hand, the Overburden rate for Households below the Poverty line (60% of the median equivalised income) registered a steep decline between 2013 and 2015 and has remained relatively stable since 2016 and registering 5.6% in both 2017 and 2018. However, there has been a sharp increase to 9.2% in 2019. While this data should be read with caution, given the increase in property and rental costs in recent years, this may be partly explained by the fact that, in 2019, 58.4% of people resident in Malta were owners with no outstanding mortgage or housing loan, and 21.3% were owners with a mortgage or a loan. Furthermore, while 4.2% were tenants renting at a reduced price or had free accommodation, 8.7% were tenants renting at market rates in 2019.

Figure 2. Housing Cost Overburden by Poverty status, 2013-2019¹⁴⁰



3.2 MAIN VULNERABLE GROUPS

The *National Strategic Policy for Poverty Reduction and for Social Inclusion* primarily targets four main vulnerable groups namely: children and young people, elderly persons, unemployed persons and the working poor. Whilst addressing the needs of the general population, this section provides an overview of the quality of life and social situation of these vulnerable groups through an analysis of a number of indicators in the areas of poverty, employment and education.

3.2.1 CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

CHILDREN AT-RISK-OF-POVERTY OR SOCIAL EXCLUSION

Child poverty¹⁴¹ has long-term effects on the life prospects of the child. Children coming from low income families experience a number of disadvantages which tend to be exhibited in low outcomes across all aspects of wellbeing including health, education, income and employment, socialisation and behavioural/emotional development. As a

139. The Housing Cost Overburden Rate is defined as the percentage of the population living in a household where the total housing costs represent more than 40% of the total disposable household income. This indicator also factors in any housing allowances that the household receives.

140. Housing Cost Overburden Rat by poverty status. Accessed via <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&plugin=1&pcode=tespm140&language=en> on 02/09/2020

141. The child poverty indicator is defined as the number of children aged 0-17 years who live in households at-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion

result, combating the intergenerational transmission of poverty and social exclusion through a preventative and early interventionist approach offers an effective and sustainable approach to reduce poverty and promote greater social justice.

As illustrated in Table 13 below, the at-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion rate for children in Malta has exhibited a steady decline from 33% in 2013 to 23.6% in 2019. Malta's child poverty rate is relatively lower than the EU average standing at 22.8% in 2018, compared to an EU average of 24.3% in 2018. Since 2013, children at-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion decreased by 6,000 while the number of children not at-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion increased by 12,000.

One should note that child poverty tends to be distributed relatively evenly among males (24.6% and females (22.6%). In 2019, the children amongst whom poverty and social exclusion prevailed, were those whose parents were single (51%), low-skilled (40%), or foreign-born (33.5%). As a result of the increase in children's allowances, the poverty rate of large families has decreased. Furthermore, from January 2019, families with a gross income of less than €20,000 received a maximum increase in children's allowance of €96 per year per child.

Table 13. Children At-Risk-of-Poverty or Social Exclusion in Malta and EU by Sex, 2013-2019¹⁴²

Children (0-17years) At-Risk-of-Poverty or Social Exclusion	2013	2016	2017	2018	2019
EU: Total	27.9%	26.4%	24.9%	24.3%	:
Malta: %	33.0%	24.0%	23.0%	22.8%	23.6%
Malta: No of Children At-Risk-of-Poverty or Social Exclusion	25,000	19,000	18,000	19,000	19,000
Malta: No of Children NOT At-Risk-of-Poverty or Social Exclusion¹⁴³	51,000	59,000	61,000	65,000	63,000
EU: Males	27.9%	26.1%	24.7%	24.0%	:
Malta: % Males	33.6%	26.5%	24.6%	23.0%	24.6%
Malta: Total Male Population	13,000	11,000	10,000	9,000	10,000
EU: Females	27.8%	26.8%	25.1%	24.3%	:
Malta: % Females	32.3%	21.3%	21.3%	22.6%	22.6%
Malta: Total Female Population	12,000	8,000	8,000	9,000	9,000

ABSENTEEISM RATE

Absenteeism¹⁴⁴ in primary schools tends to be significantly lower than that for secondary schools. While absenteeism in primary schools has remained relatively stable over the last few years, as shown in Table 14 below, a significant improvement was registered for secondary schools with a decrease from 7.5% in scholastic year 2012-13 to 3.22% in scholastic year 2018-2019.

142. Children At-Risk-of-Poverty or Social Exclusion in Malta and EU by Sex 2013-2019. Eurostat. Accessed via <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&plugin=1&pcode=tespm040&language=en> on 02/09/2020
EU SILC 2019: Salient Indicators. Accessed via https://nso.gov.mt/en/News_Releases/Documents/2020/08/News2020_135.pdf on 02/09/2020 (: = not available)

143. Represents the difference between the total number of children under 18 living in Malta in that year and the number of children AROPE, which yields the estimated number of children not AROPE.

144. The absenteeism rate in state schools is calculated on unauthorised absences of 30 days and more.

Table 14. Rate of Unauthorised Absences in Primary and Secondary State Schools for the Last Five Scholastic Years¹⁴⁵

Unauthorised absences in state schools	2012-2013	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019
Primary schools	1.04%	1.20%	1.05%	1.12%	1.49%
Secondary schools	7.50%	4.50%	4.57%	4.75%	3.22%

SHARE OF CHILDREN ATTENDING FORMAL CHILDCARE

A flagship initiative that was implemented in recent years is the provision of free childcare available for children under 3 years who have working parents, or parents in education or training. Table 15 shows that the percentage of children aged 0-3 years attending formal childcare as at December 2016 accounted for 25.06 % of all children falling within that age cohort. In 2019, there was a substantial increase to 35.48% of children attending formal childcare in this cohort. When the age cohort is reduced to 0-2 years, the share of children attending formal childcare increases to 37.8% of children in this age cohort.

Table 15. Children Attending Formal Childcare 2013-2019¹⁴⁶

Age group	2013 (Revised)	2016 (Revised)	2017	2018	2019
0-3 years	11.41%	25.06%	29.55%	28.14%	35.48%
0-2 years	14.52%	31.78%	37.53%	32.08%	37.80%

This free childcare service is also available to children (0-3 years) residing in low-income households whose yearly income is less than €10,000, even if parents are not employed. Table 16 shows that the number of such children has declined steadily from 279 in 2013 to 44 in 2019. This is the result of the lower benefit dependency and the increase in household income which were treated earlier in this report.

Table 16. Children from Low-Income Families Attending Free Childcare 2013-2019¹⁴⁷

Children from Low-Income Families Attending Free Childcare	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Number of Children	279	241	134	153	71	61	44

145. Rate of Unauthorised Absences in Primary and Secondary State Schools for the Last Four Scholastic Years. Source: MEDE – DSS (Administrative data).

146. Children Attending Formal Childcare 2016-2019. Source: FES (Administrative data).

147. Children from Low-Income Families Attending Free Childcare 2013-2019. Source: FES (Administrative data).

YOUNG PEOPLE AT-RISK-OF-POVERTY OR SOCIAL EXCLUSION

In contrast to EU trends, young people in Malta are significantly less likely to be at-risk of poverty or social exclusion¹⁴⁸ (16.8% in 2019) when compared to 20.1% of the general population. In 2019, the AROPE rate for young people in Malta was 10.4 percentage points lower than the EU average (it was 5.8 percentage points lower than the EU average in 2013). A main driver behind this positive trend is the low rate of unemployment¹⁴⁹ for Maltese youth when compared to their EU counterparts.

As outlined in Table 17 below, following the trends registered for the child poverty rate, from 2013 youth poverty exhibited a decline of 8.9 percentage points or 4,000 persons. During the same period the number of young persons not at-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion increased by 3,000. On another note, while in 2013, the youth AROPE rate for females in Malta (27.0%) was higher than that for males (24.3%), nowadays young males AROPE (17.4%) is slightly higher than that for females (16.0%).

Table 17. Young Persons At-Risk-of-Poverty or Social Exclusion in Malta and EU by Sex, 2013-2019¹⁵⁰

Young Persons (18-24 years) At-Risk-of-Poverty or Social Exclusion	2013	2016	2017	2018	2019
EU: Total	31.5%	30.9%	29.0%	27.7%	27.2%
Malta: %	25.7%	20.0%	19.4%	17.0%	16.8%
Malta: No of Young Persons At-Risk-of-Poverty or Social Exclusion	10,000	7,000	7,000	6,000	6,000
Malta: No of Young Persons NOT At-Risk-of-Poverty or Social Exclusion	30,000	32,000	32,000	33,000	33,000
EU: Males	31.0%	30.1%	28.0%	26.2%	26.3%
Malta: %Males	24.3%	24.6%	22.4%	20.3%	17.4%
Malta: Total Male Population	6,000	6,000	5,000	5,000	4,000
EU: Females	32.0%	31.8%	30.0%	29.3%	28.1%
Malta: % Females	27.0%	14.8%	16.3%	13.3%	16.0%
Malta: Total Female Population	7,000	3,000	4,000	3,000	4,000

EARLY SCHOOL LEAVERS (ESL) RATE

While Malta's ESL¹⁵¹ rate has been consistently higher than the EU average, a gradual decline in early school leavers has been registered in recent years as explained in Table 18 below. A gender analysis of the ESL phenomenon shows that, in line with EU trends, Maltese males tend to have a relatively higher early school leaving rate than females. The male ESL rate has gradually improved, falling from 23.3% in 2013 to 18.3% in 2019. The female ESL rate fell from 18.1% in 2013 to 14.8% in 2019. Malta has met its EU 2020 target for tertiary education and has registered a significant increase in the rate of students completing tertiary education, reaching 34.2 % in 2018.

148. The youth poverty indicator is defined as the number of young people aged 18-24 years who live in households that are at-risk of poverty or social exclusion.

149. The age range for Youth unemployment indicator (15-24 years) is not directly comparable to that for Youth AROPE (18-24years),

150. Young Persons At-Risk-of-Poverty or Social Exclusion in Malta and EU by Sex 2016-2018. Eurostat. Accessed via https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=ilc_peps01&lang=en on 02/11/2020 (e = estimated, : = not available)

151. The Early School Leavers (ESL) rate is the share of population aged 18-24 years who have left compulsory schooling and who do not have at least 5 SEC passes grade 1 to grade 7 and who have not pursued further education or training.

Table 18. ESL rate by Sex, 2013-2019¹⁵²

NEET rate (18-24 years)	2013	2016	2017	2018	2019
EU: Total	17.1%	15.2%	14.3%	13.7%	13.2%
Malta: Total	10.1%	8.6%	9.2% ^b	7.6%	7.4%
EU: Males	16.7%	14.7%	13.9%	13.1%	12.8%
Malta: Males	9.6%	7.0%	8.6% ^b	7.5%	7.0%
EU: Females	17.4%	15.7%	14.7%	14.4%	13.8%

NEET RATE

The National Strategic Policy for Poverty Reduction and for Social Inclusion 2014-2024 puts an emphasis on improving the quality of life of young people aged 18-24 years and highlights this age cohort as one of its main target groups.

As there has been a break in series, the data from 2017 to 2019 is not comparable to previous years. However, Malta's NEET rate dropped to 7.4% in 2019¹⁵³ (18-24-year-old cohort). Despite the break in data series, Malta has, however, consistently registered a NEET rate (18-24-year-old cohort) that is much lower than the EU average for both males and females. While in previous years, females lagged behind their male counterparts, this gender gap has been significantly reduced to 0.8 percentage points, as outlined in Table 19.

Table 19. NEET rate by Sex, 2013-2019¹⁵⁴

ESL rate	2013	2016	2017	2018	2019
EU: Total	11.9%	10.7%	10.5%	10.5%	10.3%
Malta: %	20.8%	19.2%	17.7% ^b	17.4%	16.7%
EU: Males	13.6%	12.2%	12.1%	12.1%	11.9%
Malta: Males	23.3%	23.1%	20.9% ^b	18.8%	18.3%
EU: Females	10.2%	9.2%	8.9%	8.8%	8.6%
Malta: Females	18.1%	15.0%	14.3% ^b	15.7%	14.8%

152. ESL rate by Sex 2016-2019. Eurostat. Accessed via https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=edat_lfse_14&lang=en on 02/09/2020 (b = break in time series)

153. The NEET rate is the share of young people neither in employment nor in education and training.

154. NEET rate by Sex 2016-2019. Eurostat. Access via https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&plugin=1&pcode=sdg_08_20&language=en on 02/09/2020

3.2.2 ELDERLY PERSONS

ELDERLY PERSONS AT-RISK-OF-POVERTY OR SOCIAL EXCLUSION

The AROPE rate for elderly people over 65 years of age in Malta tends to be much higher than the EU average, registering at 26.7% in 2018 compared to an EU average of 18.7% in 2018. As shown in Table 20 below, data published for 2019 indicates that the Elderly AROPE rate in Malta increased to 29.1%. While pensions in Malta have been increasing annually over the last few years, wages have increased at a higher rate, thus pushing up the poverty threshold. It is worth noting that another contributing factor is that social transfers in kind, such as free health care and free medical aid which are more likely to be accessed by older persons, are not captured in the data. Moreover, in contrast to the EU most pensioner households in Malta depend on just one pension, as many Maltese women did not accrue pension entitlements. Otherwise from a material deprivation point of view, the situation of persons aged 65+ has improved as will be explained in the next section.

A gender analysis of elderly AROPE shows that in line with EU trends, Maltese females (30.5% in 2019) tend to exhibit a higher AROPE rate than Maltese males (27.4% in 2019). Moreover, while the AROPE rate for elderly women consistently increased between 2016 and 2019, that of elderly men registered a slight decline between the years 2016 and 2018 but increased to 27.4% in 2019. Elderly women remained more at AROPE than men throughout, registering 30.5% in 2019.

Table 20. Elderly Persons At-Risk-of-Poverty or Social Exclusion in Malta and EU by Sex, 2013-2019¹⁵⁵

Elderly Persons (65 years or over) At-Risk-of-Poverty or Social Exclusion	2013	2016	2017	2018	2019
EU: Total	18.2%	18.2%	18.2%	18.7%	:
Malta: %	20.9%	26.0%	26.2%	26.7%	29.1%
Malta: No of Elderly Persons At-Risk-of-Poverty or Social Exclusion	14,000	20,000	21,000	22,000	25,000
Malta: No of Elderly Persons NOT At-Risk-of-Poverty or Social Exclusion¹⁵⁶	53,000	58,000	60,000	62,000	62,000
EU: Males	15.2%	15.0%	15.2%	15.9%	:
Malta: % Males	20.5%	24.2%	23.7%	23.6%	27.4%
Malta: Total Male Population	6,000	9,000	9,000	9,000	11,000
EU: Females	20.5%	20.6%	20.6%	21.0%	:
Malta: % Females	21.2%	27.6%	28.4%	29.4%	30.5%
Malta: Total Female Population	8,000	12,000	12,000	13,000	14,000

As pensions are a fundamental income stream in old age, a major factor behind this gender disparity rate in the AROPE rate may be attributed to the gender pensions gap. These inequalities in pensions tend to accumulate over a person's lifetime and, amongst others, reflect such factors as the gender wage gap, the type of employment contract, and the work interruptions arising from a larger burden on women with family care responsibilities. While the design of pension systems may be a cause of this pensions gap, a number of initiatives have been implemented to rectify this situation, along with in-kind benefits and service provision. A comparative analysis of the elderly AROPE based on household composition between Malta and the EU leads to an interesting result. The data shows that the issue of elderly AROPE in Malta is particularly prevalent in households composed of two adults, where at least one person is over 65 when compared with the EU average; the rate of elderly AROPE in these households is 28.2% (EU: 15.7%). However, elderly AROPE for a single person household in Malta (30.2%) is much closer to the EU average (28.1%). A major factor behind

155. Elderly Persons At-Risk-of-Poverty or Social Exclusion in Malta and EU by Sex 2016-2019. Eurostat. Accessed via https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=ilc_peps01&lang=en on 02/09/2020
NSO EU-SILC 2019: Salient Indicators. Accessed via https://nso.gov.mt/en/News_Releases/Documents/2020/08/News2020_135.pdf on 02/09/2020
e = estimated.

156. Represents the difference between the total number of elderly persons (65+ years) living in Malta in that year and the number of elderly persons AROPE, which yields the estimated number of elderly persons not AROPE

this discrepancy is the high rate of elderly females with no or little pensions, who would rely on the husband's sole pension. On a more positive note, the number of elderly persons not at-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion increased by 9,000.

To mitigate the challenges to pensions, long term care and health systems, various measures have been introduced in recent years. After hefty increases were granted in 2016 and 2017 to those on minimum pension, Government further strengthened pension adequacy by increasing all pensions by a total of €8.25 per week in 2018 and 2019, including the cost-of-living adjustment for both years. Furthermore, the taxable ceiling on the income derived from pensions that was exempt from income tax was also raised and various tax credits targeting different vulnerable groups have also been introduced. In order to safeguard pensions sustainability, the number of contributory years has also increased to 41 years, while early retirement has been limited. However, despite the measures that have been implemented, the 2020 EU Country Report for Malta notes that pension adequacy remains an issue in Malta, especially for women and workers with incomplete careers.

SEVERE MATERIAL DEPRIVATION (SMD) OF ELDERLY PERSONS

As previously explained, SMD is the enforced inability to pay for at least four of 9 basic items¹⁵⁷ of deprivation. Table 21 shows that the SMD rate for those aged 65 years or over in Malta has registered a marked decline. While in 2013, the SMD rate in Malta stood at 7.1%, in line with the EU average of 7.6% in 2019 it decreased to 2.6% compared to an EU average of 4.9%. The main driver behind this decrease in elderly Severe Material Deprivation were the various measures introduced to strengthen pensions adequacy. However, in line with EU trends during the period under review, the SMD rate for females in Malta remained higher than that for males. This may be explained by the Gender Pensions Gap that would result in lesser disposable income for females in Malta. Furthermore, the number of those aged 65 years or over who are not in Severe Material Deprivation increased substantially by 23,000.

Table 21. Severe Material Deprivation among Elderly Persons in Malta and EU by Sex 2013-2019¹⁵⁸

Severe Material Deprivation for Elderly Persons (65 years or over)	2013	2016	2017	2018	2019
EU: Total	7.6% ^e	6.4% ^e	5.9% ^e	5.2% ^e	4.9% ^e
Malta: %	7.1%	3.6%	2.2%	3.0%	2.6%
Malta:					
No of Elderly Persons in Severe Material Deprivation	5,000	3,000	2,000	3,000	2,000
Malta: No of Elderly Persons NOT in Severe Material Deprivation¹⁵⁹	62,000	75,000	79,000	81,000	85,000
EU: Males	6.2% ^e	5.3% ^e	4.7% ^e	4.3% ^e	4.1% ^e
Malta: % Males	5.7%	3.4%	1.2%	1.9%	2.3%
Malta: Total Male Population	2,000	1,000	0	1,000	1,000
EU: Females	8.7% ^e	7.4% ^e	6.8% ^e	5.9% ^e	5.5% ^e
Malta: % Females	8.3%	3.8%	3.0%	3.9%	2.9%
Malta: Total Female Population	3,000	2,000	1,000	2,000	1,000

Note: '000 population may not tally due to rounding up/down

157. i) coping with unexpected expenses; ii) one week annual holiday away from home; iii) avoiding arrears (in mortgage or rent, utility bills or hire purchase instalments); iv) a meal with meat, chicken, fish or vegetarian equivalent every second day; v) keeping the home adequately warm; vi) a washing machine; vii) a colour TV; viii) a telephone; ix) a personal car. Items i-v fall under the 'economic strain' category and vi-ix fall under the 'durables' category.

158. Severe Material Deprivation among Elderly Persons in Malta and EU by Sex 2013-2019. Eurostat. Accessed via <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&plugin=1&pcode=tespm030&language=en> on 02/09/2020 (e = estimated)

159. Represents the difference between the total number of elderly persons (65+ years) living in Malta in that year and the number of elderly persons in SMD, which yields the estimated number of elderly persons not in SMD.

MATERIALLY DEPRIVED PERSONS AGED 65 YEARS OR OVER BY TYPE OF DEPRIVATION

Table 22 gives an overview of the five main items by which persons aged 65 and over were most deprived in 2013, 2016 and 2019. Since 2013, there was a significant reduction in the number of those aged 65 and over with inability to afford paying one-week holiday away from home and those with inability to keep home adequately warm.

Other reductions were registered in other material deprivation items, such as the inability to face unexpected financial expenses, the inability to afford a meal with meat, chicken, fish (or vegetarian equivalent) and the inability to avoid arrears in mortgage, rent, utility bills or hire purchase instalments.

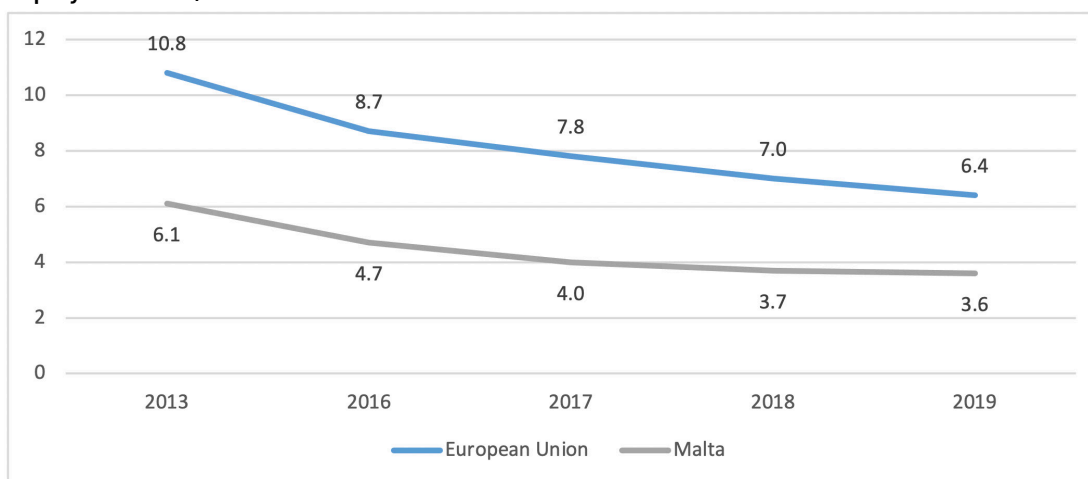
Table 22. Main Items of Deprivation of Persons aged 65 and over. 2013-2019¹⁶⁰

Item	2013 % population	2016 % population	2019 % population	2013-2019 difference
Inability to afford paying for one-week annual holiday away from home	52.6	42.7	31.5	-21.1pp
Inability to keep home adequately warm	23.6	9.2	9.8	-13.8pp
Inability to face unexpected financial expenses (amount change every year)	21.4	19.6	16.3	-5.1pp
Inability to afford a meal with meat, chicken, fish (or vegetarian equivalent) every second day	10.6	7.6	5.5	-5.1pp
Inability to avoid arrears (in mortgage or rent, utility bills or hire purchase instalments)	6.1	5.5	4.3	-1.8pp

3.2.3 UNEMPLOYED PERSONS

One of the main objectives in the fight against poverty and social exclusion is engagement in regular, stable and high-quality employment. This has also been the policy in Malta, where the principle of “Making Work Pay” has been at the heart of the labour market measures that have been implemented. There is a direct correlation between being unemployed and being financially poor (income poverty). The Maltese economy continued to exhibit a strong economic performance, successfully recording one of the highest economic growth rates in the European Union in recent years. Unemployment rates have continued to go down from 2016 to 2019 as shown in Figure 3 below. From 2013 to 2019, the unemployment rate went down from 6.1% to 3.6%, or 2.5pp.

Figure 3. Unemployment Rate, 2013-2019¹⁶¹



160. Items of Economic Strain by Deprivation of Persons Aged 65+ Living in Malta, EU-SILC 2013-2019, National Statistics Office.

161. Unemployment Rate 2016-2019. Eurostat. Accessed via http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=lfsa_urgaed&lang=en on 02/09/2020.

Table 23 below shows how the chances of being AROPE while unemployed tend to be significantly higher since employment undoubtedly has a major impact on a person's income. The AROPE for the unemployed in Malta stood at 46.1% in 2016, compared to an EU average of 48.6%. However, the AROPE rate for the unemployed in Malta is quite volatile, registering a substantial increase from 46.1% in 2016 to 57.4% in 2017, and 59.6% in 2018. Contrary to previous years, there is no substantial difference for the AROPE rate between unemployed men (59.6%) and unemployed women (59.4%)^u in Malta in 2018. This indicator should be read with caution given that it has been flagged as having unreliable variables due to low counts.

Table 23. Unemployed Persons At-Risk-of-Poverty or Social Exclusion (18-64 years) in Malta and EU by Sex, 2013-2018¹⁶²

Unemployed Persons At-Risk-of-Poverty or Social Exclusion	2013	2016	2017	2018
EU: Total	46.6%	48.6%	48.0%	48.6%
Malta Total: %	49.1%	46.1%	57.4%	59.6%
EU: Males	49.7%	51.4%	51.3%	52.0%
Malta: Males	50.5%	51.1%	59.3%	59.6%
EU: Females	42.9%	45.5% ^e	44.4% ^e	45.1% ^e
Malta: Females	44.2%	28.7% ^u	51.8% ^u	59.4% ^u

Malta has registered a relatively lower Long-Term Unemployment ¹⁶³(LTU) rate (20-64 years age cohort) compared to the EU average, diminishing from 3.3% in 2013 to 1.0% in 2019 as outlined in Table 24 below. Long-term unemployed men register a slightly higher rate (1.2%) than female LTU (0.7%)^u. However, the female LTU rate is flagged as having low reliability due to low counts. A significant measure behind this low level of LTU was surely the Tapering of Benefits scheme, whereby benefit recipients continued receiving benefits for three years while in employment.

Table 24. Long-Term Unemployed Persons in Malta and EU by Sex (20-64 years), 2013-2019¹⁶⁴

Long-Term Unemployment	2013	2016	2017	2018	2019
EU: Total	5.2%	4.0%	3.5%	3.0%	2.6%
Malta: %	3.3%	2.3%	1.9%	1.7%	1.0%
Malta: Total Population	6,000	5,000	4,000	4,000	2,000
EU: Males	5.2%	3.9%	3.4%	2.9%	2.5%
Malta: % Males	3.5%	2.3%	1.8%	2.0%	1.2%
Malta: Total Male Population	4,000	3,000	2,000	3,000	2,000
EU: Females	5.1%	4.1%	3.5%	3.1%	2.7%
Malta: % Females	3.0%	2.3%	2.0%	1.2%	0.7% ^u
Malta: Total Female Population	2,000	2,000	2,000	1,000	1,000 ^u

162. Unemployed Persons At-Risk-of-Poverty or Social Exclusion in Malta and EU by Sex 2013-2018. Eurostat. Accessed via http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=ilc_li04&lang=en on 02/09/2020 (e = estimated, u = low reliability).

163. The long-term unemployment (LTU) rate is the "share of persons who have been unemployed for 12 months or more in the total active population, expressed as a percentage.

164. Long-Term Unemployed Persons in Malta and EU by Sex (20-64 years) 2013-2019. Eurostat. Accessed via http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=une_ltu_a&lang=en on 02/09/2020 (u = low reliability).

PERSONS REGISTERING FOR WORK IN MALTA AND GOZO

This indicator measures the number of persons registering for work under Part I and Part II of the unemployment register on a monthly basis by the National Statistics Office. In actual terms, the number of people looking for work in Malta and Gozo declined steadily from 3,566 (Males: 2,621; Females: 945) in December 2016 to 1,700 (Males: 1,187; Females: 513) in December 2019 due to the economic growth that resulted in a strong demand for labour. Table 25 shows this in more detail.

Table 25. Persons Registering for Work under Part I and Part II of the Unemployment Register in Malta and Gozo by Sex as at December, 2013-2019¹⁶⁵

Persons registering for work	Dec-13	Dec-16	Dec-17	Dec-18	Dec-19
Malta and Gozo: Total	7,382	3,566	2,500	1,847	1,700
Malta: Males	5,122	2,288	1,504	1,182	1,083
Gozo: Males	504	333	270	115	104
Malta: Females	1,517	742	573	479	450
Gozo: Females	239	203	153	71	63

There has been a steady decline in the number of people with a disability looking for work as illustrated in Table 26 below. This has decreased from 358 in December 2016 to 221 in December 2019. Although the Disability (Employment) Act of 2015 was established to tackle discrimination at the workplace, people with a disability who want to work still face various barriers to employment, resulting in them being a main vulnerable group experiencing poverty. To mitigate this, Malta has specifically promoted the active inclusion of persons with disability. In this regard, various support measures have been introduced, including the improvement of disability and invalidity pensions, a grant for purchasing of special equipment, a dedicated helpline and training for employees in the disability sector.

Table 26. Persons with a Disability Registering for Work under Part I and Part II of the Unemployment Register in Malta and Gozo by Sex as at December, 2013-2019¹⁶⁶

Persons with a Disability Registering for Work	Dec-13	Dec-16	Dec-17	Dec-18	Dec-19
Malta and Gozo: Total	533	358	291	263	221
Males	444	276	221	195	154
Females	89	82	70	68	67

PARTICIPATION IN ADULT EDUCATION (25-64 YEARS)

Based on the limited data available¹⁶⁷, there appears to be an improving trend for participation in both formal and non-formal education, in particular for male participation in formal education, as being outlined in Table 27 below. This is particularly important since a major concern of employers was the lack of skilled personnel in the labour market that could be hindering companies from finding employees with adequate skills. This increase in skills is particularly important in view of the relatively strong growth recorded by the Maltese economy in recent years which requires a diversified set of skills to enable companies to meet market demand.

165. Persons Registering for Work under Part I and Part II of the Unemployment Register in Malta and Gozo by Sex as at December 2013-2019. Source: NSO

166. Persons with a Disability Registering for Work under Part I and Part II of the Unemployment Register in Malta and Gozo by Sex as at December 2013-2019. Source: NSO.

167. The Share of Total Population (25-64 years) Participating in Non-Formal Education is calculated from the Labour Force Survey by the NSO. Due to a break in series in 2017, the results are not comparable with previous years.

Table 27. Participation in Adult Formal and Non-Formal Education (25-64 years) in Malta by Sex, 2013-2019¹⁶⁸

Malta	2013 (r)	2016 (r)	2017 (b)	2018	Q1-Q3 2019 *
Share of total population (25-64 years) participating in non-formal education	5.0%	4.4%	7.9%	8.1%	9.0%
Males	5.0%	3.7%	7.3%	7.1%	7.9%
Females	5.1%	5.1%	8.6%	9.2%	10.1%
Share of total population aged (25-64 years) participating in formal education activities	3.3%	4.1%	3.9%	3.7%	4.5%
Males	3.1%	3.8%	3.0%	3.1%	4.2%
Females	3.6%	4.4%	4.8%	4.3%	4.8%

168. Participation in Adult Formal and Non-Formal Education (25-64 years) in Malta by Sex 2013-2019. Source: NSO^(r) Revised ^(b) Break in series. The break in series was caused by a change in the questions used to determine this indicator. * Quarter 4 data is not available yet.

3.2.4 PERSONS EXPERIENCING IN-WORK POVERTY

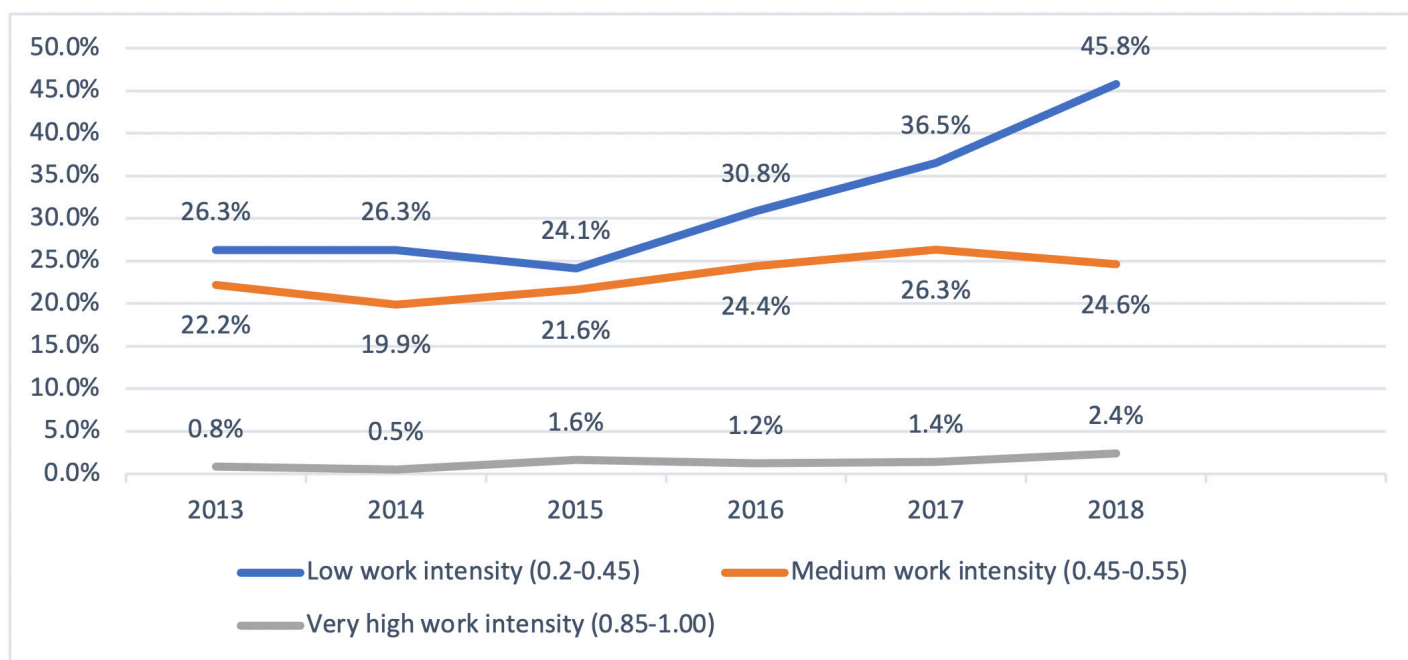
An important measure of the structural aspects of poverty and social exclusion, including biases within the labour market and the quality of employment contract, is the In-Work At-Risk-of-Poverty (IW ARP) ¹⁶⁹indicator. While a person may be employed, this indicator acknowledges that a person may also be in poverty or socially excluded despite being economically active.

Table 28. In-Work At-Risk-of-Poverty in Malta and EU by Sex and Age (18-64 years), 2013-2018¹⁷⁰

In-Work At-Risk-of-Poverty (18-64 years)	2013	2016	2017	2018
EU: Total	9.0%	9.6%	9.4%	9.4%
Malta: %	5.8%	5.8%	5.8%	6.4%
EU: Males	9.4%	10.1%	9.8%	9.8%
Malta: Males	7.7%	7.6%	7.4%	7.6%
EU: Females	8.4%	9.1%	9.0%	8.9%
Malta: Females	2.5%	3.0%	3.3%	4.5%

As highlighted in Table 28, Malta has a lower rate of in-work poverty rate (IW ARP) at 6.4%, compared to a higher EU average of 9.4% in 2018. The phenomenon of IW ARP tends to affect 7.6% of male workers compared to 4.5% for females. This may be due to more men being employed in low-skilled, lower paying work when compared to women. There is a natural correlation between IW ARP and the number of hours worked (work intensity). Households with low work intensity experience a higher risk of IW ARP as shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4. In-work at risk of poverty by work intensity of the household, 2013-2018¹⁷¹



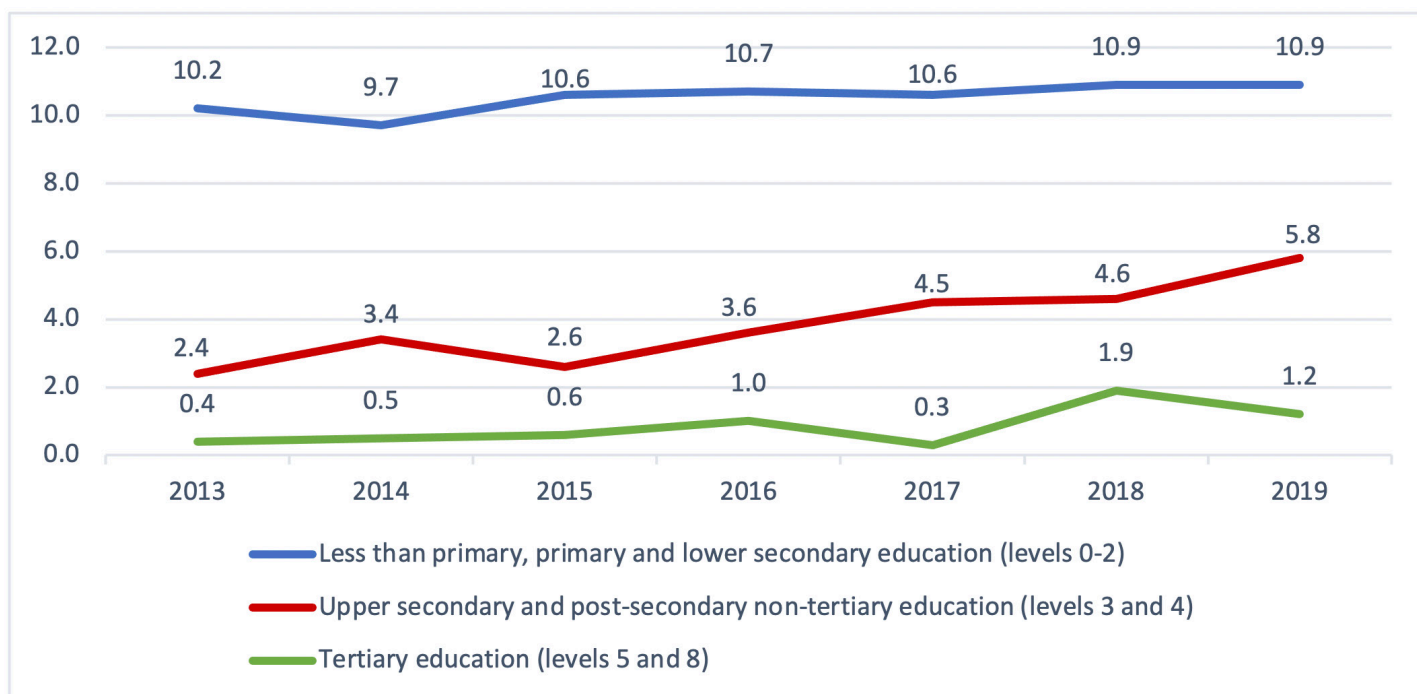
169. This indicator is defined as the percentage of persons in the total population who declared to be at work [and] who are at-risk-of-poverty i.e. with an equivalised disposable income below the risk-of-poverty threshold.

170. In-work at risk of poverty in Malta and EU by Sex and Age (18-64 years) 2013-2019. Eurostat. Accessed via <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&plugin=1&pcode=tesov110&language=en> on 02/09/2020 (: = Not available).

171. In-work at risk of poverty by work intensity of the household 2013-2018. Eurostat. Accessed via https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=ilc_iw03&lang=en on 02/09/2020

Similarly, Figure 5 shows that there is a substantial correlation between IW ARP and educational attainment¹⁷². The IW ARP of tertiary educated workers is practically negligible,¹⁷³ the IW ARP of workers having up to secondary education (ISCED level 3-4) has moderately increased while IW ARP of workers having up to lower secondary education (ISCED level 0-2), though highest of the three groups, has remained generally static. A major factor for this is that people with a lower level of education may not be able to fully benefit from the strong economic climate since they would not have the required skills to find employment in better paying work.

Figure 5. In-work at risk of poverty by educational attainment, 2013-2019



172. In-work at risk of poverty by educational attainment 2013-2018. Eurostat. Accessed via https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=ilc_iw04&lang=en on 02/11/2020

173. 2019 data is not available.

Chapter 4

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON POVERTY & SOCIAL EXCLUSION



COVID 19 will have an impact not only from an economic perspective but will also have a direct impact on poverty and social exclusion. The COVID-19 outbreak has affected all segments of the population, but is particularly detrimental to vulnerable groups, such as persons living in poverty, older persons, persons with disabilities, migrants, children and young people. This section aims to provide a general overview of the impact on Maltese society.

Economic Impact of COVID-19¹⁷⁴

The COVID-19 pandemic brought about unprecedented stresses to the global economy. The effect of this shock distinguishes itself from previous crises as the declines in demand were accompanied by supply restrictions resulting from the mandatory imposition of various lockdowns. Despite efforts by international institutions and governments, the economic situation going forward is overshadowed with uncertainty with respect to both the duration of the virus outbreak as well as its effect on the behaviour of economic agents.

Throughout the first half of 2020, nominal GDP contracted by 6.1%. Total gross value added declined by 5.2%, as the pandemic took its toll on the Maltese economy. The highest growth rates were recorded in the information and communication sector (7.5%), the arts, entertainment and recreation sector (6.6%) and the real estate sector (5.7%). After a strong start to 2020, the travel restrictions imposed to contain the spread of COVID-19 had a disproportionate impact on the tourism sector. The large-scale cancellations of bookings, the closure of airports and the collapse of new reservations strained airline operators' financial positions. The damage is also reflected in other sectors such as wholesale and retail trade and accommodation and food service activities, in which the interlinkages with the tourism sector are prevalent. In fact, a few sectors witnessed immediate negative implications from the outbreak of the pandemic, including the wholesale and retail trade; transport; accommodation and food service activities (-29.8%), the non-manufacturing industry sector (-12.5%) and the agriculture, forestry and fishing sector (-11.0%).

On the expenditure side, the Maltese economy contracted by 7.7% in real terms over the first half of last year. This decline was predominantly driven by domestic demand which recorded a contribution of -6.3 percentage points. Net exports negatively contributed 2.7 percentage points while a positive contribution from inventories of 1.1 percentage points was recorded throughout the first half of 2020. The decline in domestic demand is explained by an instantaneous negative shock in consumption by 11.1% due to the imposition of containment measures, receding employment and weak wage developments. Moreover, uncertainty intertwined with base effects acted as a drag on investment, which declined by 12.9%. On the other hand, government expenditure grew by 12.4% in real terms.

During the first quarter of 2020, the employment rate in Malta stood at 60.3%, an increase of 1.6 percentage points when compared to the corresponding quarter in 2019. According to the paper National Statistics Office¹⁷⁵, 62.0% of people who had a job felt that their employment was affected with the onset of COVID-19 during April, mainly due to reduction in the number of working hours or complete absence from work. An average of 29.0 hours per week were worked, down by 8.0 hours when compared to the average actual weekly hours in 2019.

Unemployment data covering the first three months of this year shows that Malta recorded one of the lowest unemployment rates among European Member States, at 3.4%, a fall of 0.2 percentage points when compared to the same period of the previous year. However, in the second quarter of 2020, the effects of COVID-19 on the labour market started to become evident as the unemployment rate increased to 4.2%, a 0.8 percentage point increase from the first quarter.

The Update of the Stability Programme 2020-2021¹⁷⁶ published by the Ministry for Finance and Financial Services in April indicates that the Maltese economy is expected to contract by 5.4% in real terms during 2020. International developments are projected to weigh heavily on Malta's net export performance with a negative 7.2 percentage points contribution to GDP. The domestic component of the economy is expected to contribute 1.8 percentage points to growth in 2020, as public expenditure is expected to compensate for the negative contributions of private consumption and gross fixed capital formation.

The outlook for 2021 is subject to a high degree of uncertainty and is highly contingent on the economic recovery in Malta's trading partners, the persistence of supply disruptions due to the severity of the shock as well as the speed at which the confidence and behaviour of domestic consumers and firms will return to normality. The baseline projection accounts for gradual resumption of economic activity from the third quarter of 2020, and a modest recovery in 2021.

174. This section was compiled and provided by the Economic Policy Department within the Ministry for Finance and Financial Services.

175. 'The Effect of COVID-19 on the Labour Market: A comparison between March and April 2020'. National Statistics Office. Available online via: https://nso.gov.mt/en/News_Releases/Documents/2020/06/News2020_107.pdf [Accessed on: 03/09/2020]

176. 'Update of Stability Programme 2020 - 2021'. Ministry for Finance and Financial Services. April 2020. Available online via: https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/2020-european-semester-stability-programme-malta_en.pdf [Accessed on 03/09/2020]

DISTRIBUTIONAL IMPACT OF THE INCREASE IN UNEMPLOYMENT DURING COVID-19 ON HOUSEHOLDS EUROMOD MODEL AND ASSUMPTIONS

EUROMOD - an EU-wide static tax-benefit microsimulation model¹⁷⁷ - was used to assess the impact of the increase in unemployment that occurred in the period between March and July, during the COVID-19 pandemic, on poverty and household's disposable income. The EUROMOD model simulates benefit entitlement (such as; unemployment benefits, housing benefits, social assistance and family benefits) and tax liabilities including both direct taxes and social insurance contributions for households based on the tax-benefit rules of the country, through harmonised micro-data of individuals and households across all EU countries.

Components of the tax-benefit system that are not simulated, such as old-age pension, are extracted from the European Statistics on Income and Living Conditions Survey (EU-SILC). The EU-SILC's¹⁷⁸ limitation of static data¹⁷⁹ which resultingly one cannot capture ever-changing dynamic characteristics, has been overcome by incorporating the increase in unemployment brought by the pandemic is incorporated to the 2018 EU-SILC through a randomisation process. Based on distribution by ages from administrative data provided by NSO, individuals are randomly selected and transitioned from one labour market status to another, thus from employed to unemployed. The amount of the newly unemployed is assumed to be around 2,300 individuals and it is projected that they shall remain unemployed from April until end of year (8 months). Moreover, updates are made to the market incomes from 2017 to 2019 using adequate indices for each income source¹⁸⁰.

Following the randomisation process and uprating of the model, the simulated household disposable income can be derived and used to analyse the distributional implications of the unemployment shock. The simulated household disposable income of the individuals that are affected by this shock depends also on the cushioning effect of the existing automatic stabilisers which includes:

- income taxes and social contributions;
- contributory benefits of those who lose their earnings (such as contributory unemployment benefit);
- other means-tested benefits (such as social assistance, supplementary allowance and housing benefit) and tax credits designed to protect families on low income; and
- other household income (such as pensions and benefit and income received by other household members).

RESULTS: DISTRIBUTIONAL IMPLICATIONS OF UNEMPLOYMENT SHOCK

The estimated at-risk-of-poverty rates disclose information on the distribution of income, specifically, whilst also putting forward changes in the income level of a particular social group relative to others. For instance, a lower income level for the middle-working group may also decrease the 60% median equivalised income, also known as the poverty line, leading to a decrease in the at-risk-of-poverty among other households with a fixed income close to the median range and increases the poverty risk among the working cohort. Therefore, the poverty rates are capturing the relative income level of the poor which, may not necessarily imply a deterioration in the absolute level of income.

Consequently, there are three main scenarios where the at-risk-of-poverty rate changes, namely;

177. Sutherland, H., & Figari, F. (2013). EUROMOD: the European Union tax-benefit microsimulation model. *International journal of microsimulation*, 6(1), 4-26.

178. Information on the accuracy and reliability of data can be viewed in a dedicated quality report available on the NSO's metadata website.

179. For example, in the EU-SILC 2018, the income reference year is based on 2017 and the demographic, household and labour characteristics reflect the situation captured in 2018.

180. A detailed description of the uprating factors and 2019 policy rules is presented in Malta's EUROMOD Country Report, available at: <https://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/euromod/resources-for-euromod-users/country-reports>. [Accessed on 26/08/2020]

- changes in the poverty line itself; when the median income rises/declines, the poverty line increases/decreases proportionately to it;
- changes in the level of income of those around the poverty line; if the equivalised disposable income of those just below/above the poverty line increases/decreases whilst the poverty line remains fixed, then the at-risk of poverty rate changes; and
- a combination of the above.

Table 29. Main Poverty Indicators DURING COVID-19 PERIOD

Indicators	Baseline	Unemployment Shock
Overall Poverty Rate	17.61%	17.65%
Children	19.50%	20.12%
Working age	13.41%	13.55%
Working age and economically active	7.42%	7.50%
Elderly	30.90%	30.04%
Gini coefficient	0.2877	0.2885
60% of Median Equivalised Income (Poverty line)	795.26	790.83
Median Income	1,325.43	1,318.04

Table 29 illustrates the results of the “**Baseline**” scenario, which is based on the 2019 tax and benefit model excluding the unemployment shock, and the “**Unemployment Shock**” scenario which captures the COVID-19 related increase in unemployment. The “**Unemployment Shock**” simulation suggests that the overall poverty rate increases from 17.61% to 17.65%, when compared to the baseline scenario. The highest increase in the poverty rate is experienced by the families with children cohort and working age cohort, with a rise of 0.62 and 0.14 percentage points, respectively. This suggests that the loss in their employment income, which is partly cushioned by the automatic stabilisers, causes the affected households to fall below the poverty line.

On the other hand, the elderly cohort experienced a decline in the poverty rate by 0.86 percentage points. This may be explained by the shift of the poverty line and that their main source of income, pensions, is not affected by the unemployment shock. The Gini coefficient, which is a measure of income inequality, increased by 0.08 percentage points, suggesting a marginal deterioration in the distribution of disposable income.

The effect of the unemployment shock on the income distribution outlined above does not incorporate the impact of household-targeted measures introduced by Government to mitigate the socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Measures such as the wage supplement scheme and various social measures (parental benefit, additional unemployment benefit, disability benefit and medical benefit) have contributed to mitigate the impact of the pandemic and the containment measures on household income and are not reflected in the results outlined above.

As is evident within the outline presented in this section, the COVID-19 pandemic has led to various consequences that can be seen to impede the progress that has been made over the last few years in terms of alleviating poverty and social exclusion. Indeed, the analysis presented pertains to the situation as at end August 2020, at which point the situation remains fluid, with public health data pointing to an increase in the number of active COVID-19 cases. The next Implementation and Evaluation Report to be published is envisaged to contain a clearer analysis of the impact of the pandemic. If not properly addressed via policy, the crisis brought about by COVID-19 will increase poverty, inequality, exclusion, discrimination and unemployment in the medium- to long- term.

Comprehensive and effective social protection systems - that are flexible in response to the emerging realities within society - play a large role in protecting citizens, acting as automatic stabilisers to mitigate the increase of individuals falling closer to - or below - the poverty line. First and foremost, Government is committed to continue its efforts in establishing strong protection systems against the consequences of the pandemic. Over the coming years, Malta will be attempting to compensate for such consequences, and will continue to implement the strategic policy actions presented within the *National Strategic Policy for Poverty Reduction and Social Inclusion 2014-2024*, whilst simultaneously evaluating its impact.

Chapter 5

CONCLUSION



The previous chapters have delineated the progress achieved in the context of the strategic policy actions outlined within the National Strategic Policy for Poverty Reduction and for Social Inclusion. Progress was evaluated through a collation of the implementation status of the numerous measures represented within the six dimensions of wellbeing, as well as any developments observed on several statistical indicators. Notwithstanding, that the report covers the period until December 2019, an economic assessment of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Maltese Islands in terms of poverty and social exclusion has also been included.

As reviewed in Chapter 2, the implementation of various measures and initiatives has addressed the majority of actions proposed by the strategic policy. This Chapter also shows the continuity of efforts towards the policy actions, such that 98.9% of the 93 policy actions have been addressed by measures implemented during the reviewed periods, i.e. 2014-2016 and 2017-2019.

This inter-disciplinary effort has positively contributed towards substantial improvements in the socio-economic situation as indicated by the statistical analysis presented in Chapter 3. Gradual declines in social benefits dependency, the AROPE rate (for children, youths, adults, and elderly men), SMD rate, MD rate, share of the population in VLWI, ESL rate, NEET rate, and LTU rate have been registered. Moreover, whilst other indicators have remained stable or increased slightly since the publication of the National Strategic Policy, it is important to note that Malta does not exceed the EU average for most of these indicators. Examples of such indicators include the ARP rate, the S80/S20 Income Quintile Share Ratio, and the IW ARP rate. These statistics exhibit steady improvements with regards to Malta's goals to lift its population out of poverty and social inclusion. Moreover, the average disposable income of Maltese families has increased steadily in these last 6 years resulting in sharp increases in the share of persons not living at risk of poverty or social exclusion, not in severe material deprivation and not in material deprivation.

Elderly AROPE remains a challenge, even though the number of elderly persons in SMD has declined and the number of elderly not in AROPE and not in SMD have increased substantially. This shows that while the income of elderly persons has not increased as much as that of those under 65 years who are primarily in employment, the income of elderly persons still increased sufficiently to lift thousands of them from material deprivation.

Ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the strategy is key to identifying lacunae in service provision, highlighting emerging needs, and developing the necessary measures that successfully address any arising demands. For this reason, the IMC aims to continue monitoring policy implementation through the collation and analysis of any relevant indicators, whilst also taking into account Malta's specific challenges and characteristics. Such monitoring will enable Government to ensure that the Strategy is yielding the expected results and to take action as necessary,

Malta's commitment towards the reduction of poverty and social exclusion is evident in the extent to which the strategic policy actions have been implemented since the publication of its National Strategy 2014-2024. Within this context, efforts will continue to be sustained with a view to ensure that the actions implemented yield tangible results for our citizens and especially those in most need.

ANNEXES

Annex A: Income and Social Benefits

List of measures/initiatives and projects introduced/enhanced/ongoing between 2014 and 2019 contributing to the implementation of the National Strategic Policy for Poverty Reduction and for Social Inclusion, and which are being implemented fully or partially by MFCS

No.	2014
1	Pensioners whose pension does not exceed the national minimum wage will not be taxable.
2	An incentive aimed at persons who have been registering for work for more than two years and want to work by introducing a system whereby, instead of terminating the full unemployment benefit the moment such persons start working, the benefit would be decreased gradually over a number of years in order to create a smooth transition from registering as unemployed, to entering the labour market.
3	In the first year, the beneficiary will retain 65% of the benefit, 45% in the second year and 25% in the third year. The difference will be redirected to a training fund.
4	Start the process so that over a number of years, and in a gradual manner, the National Minimum Pension would be equivalent to 60% of the national average wage.
5	Employed widows will benefit from the full widows' pension since the link that currently exists between this pension, income derived from work, and the age of their children will be removed.
6	Retain the measure by which service pensioners continue to benefit gradually from improvements in the two-thirds pension. As of 2014, the amount of service pension that is not taken into consideration in assessing the social security pension, which is €1,266, will rise by €200, thus amounting to €1,466.
7	Senior Citizen's Grant - During 2013, the €300 annual allowance was given to individuals aged 78 years or over. As from 2014, this allowance was extended to individuals who are 75 years of age or over.
8	Exempt elderly persons and persons with disability from paying the National Insurance Contribution when they employ a live-in carer to help them continue living in their own homes.
9	Increase the allowance given to children with disability from €16.31 per week to €20 per week.
10	Incentives to encourage the employment of older persons. ¹
11	Encouraging single parents to get training.
12	Flusi f'Idejja! - A project for money management awareness both on a personal and family level at the Msida/Birkirkara LEAP Community Services.
13	Improved guidance and support from existing specialised services to protect citizens from abuses such as usury, rental violations, and fraud.
14	Drawing up a legislation to specifically address precarious work ² .
15	Implementation of regulations enacted to address bogus self-employment and the resultant abuse.
16	Professionals and volunteers worked on a tailored plan of action to support families/individuals experiencing budgeting difficulties as part of the Budgeting Project at the Msida/Birkirkara LEAP Community Services.
No.	2015
17	From this year onwards, the full amount of COLA was granted to pensioners so that they will receive full compensation for the increase in the cost of living.

1. Measures 10 and 11 are being implemented by MEDE.

2. Measures 14 and 15 are being implemented by MSDC.

18	A one-time additional, non-taxable bonus of €35 to be given to all those full-time workers who will not benefit from the reduction in income tax as well as pensioners and all those on social security benefits. This will also be given pro-rata to part-time workers and students.
19	The introduction of the in-work benefit, which is linked to the concept of work will be paid to those families where both spouses are in employment, have low income and have children up to 23 years of age. This benefit will be calculated on the income after deduction of the social security contributions, and there will be no deduction from any other benefit that the family may be entitled to such as the Children's Allowance.
20	Those persons receiving Social Assistance for unemployment will be given four months to either join the Youth Guarantee and continue to receive benefits, or keep on registering in which case benefits will stop when one exceeds the age of qualification for the Youth Guarantee.
21	In cases of single parents under the age of 23 who are receiving social assistance for unemployment - this assistance will be paid until the youngest child is one year old. As soon as the child is one year, the mother will be enrolled in the Youth Guarantee and will continue to benefit from social assistance and free childcare. In cases where the younger child is over one year of age, she will be given the 4-month chance to join the Youth Guarantee. Should she refuse to enter the Youth Guarantee, the benefits will cease.
22	New cases of single unmarried parents under the age of 23 years, who apply for social assistance will be accepted and this will be paid on the same conditions (see measures 20 & 21).
23	As from 1 st January 2015, the tapering of benefits shall be introduced. Single parents who enter the labour market will still receive a percentage of their social assistance. In fact, during their first year of employment they will be receiving 65%, 45% in the second year and 25% during their third year of employment. The employer shall also benefit from 25% of the assistance for the first three years.
24	Launching a programme through which by end of February 2015, those who are not sure of their entitlement or are receiving benefits they are not entitled to, will have the possibility to regularise their position. Those who come forward by the stipulated date to verify the benefits due to them, and are found not to be in conformity with the law, will only have to pay a one-time minimal penalty as long as it is not a case of systematic fraud. The penalty will increase if the beneficiary does not come in time or is caught defrauding the Department for Social Security.
25	As from 1 st January 2015, a single parent who receives social assistance and marries or enters into civil union with a person who is employed will no longer lose entitlement to social assistance with immediate effect, but gradually over a period of three years. They will be receiving 65% during their first year, 45% in the second year and 25% during their third year of employment.
26	As from 1 st January 2015 onwards the rate of the maternity leave benefit will be increased and be paid at a rate equivalent to the National Minimum Wage. This means that all women in employment and giving birth will benefit from an increase of more than €6 per week in their Maternity Leave benefit.
27	The Senior Citizen's Grant (€300 annual allowance) will still be given to elderly aged 75 years or over.
28	In order to correct the anomalies created in the social security pension, and which affected thousands of workers, among them former Shipyard employees, as from 2015, the peg with Government salaries will no longer be applied at the point where the person retired from work but at the point when the company closed down or the post no longer was in place, and therefore the comparability will be based on the collective agreement currently in force. The anomaly was created when upon the closing down of the company or when their post became suppressed, their pension was calculated on the same salary structure of Government employees. In view of this, all pensions which were paid according to this system will be reviewed.
29	Service Pensioners shall continue to benefit, in a gradual manner, from the improvement in their two-thirds pension whereby an increase of €200 will not be taken into account in the calculation of their social security pension.
30	As from 1 st January 2015, persons who are still in employment but do not have enough contributions to qualify for a pension will be given the opportunity to pay up to five years in missing contributions, so that they improve their pension. These years do not need to be the five years preceding the claim.
31	As from 2015, those retirees aged between 62 and 74 years and do not have a pension will receive a bonus of €200 if they have paid more than five years contributions, and €100 if they have paid contributions for more than one year but less than five years. This measure aimed at bringing justice to a number of workers in particularly women, who in the past spent many years out of work either due to the laws applicable or the prevailing social situation during that time, and hence do not have a pension.
32	During 2015, an income supplement of €400 per child (€200 from the 4 th child up) will be given to low income families to combat child poverty.
33	A project to carry out structural works in private homes shall be initiated in order to allow disabled persons to continue residing in their own homes.
34	Improve respite services in specialised residential centres, in order to give relief to parents of children with a disability. This will also include the possibility whereby families will be able to provide this service on a basis similar to that of fostering.

35	Extend the services provided by day care centres for persons with disability.
36	A full disability pension shall be given to disabled persons even when they enter the labour market irrelevant of their income.
37	During 2015, the sum of €500,000 was invested for the documentation scanning of public documents by persons with disability. This initiative will create 80 job opportunities for persons with disability in Gozo.
38	The government is working to identify a centre where minor immigrants, whether accompanied or not, may be placed in a more dignified manner.
No.	2016
39	Extension of the in-work benefit.
40	Guaranteed National Minimum Pension.
41	Married couples who receive the minimum pension for married persons and who will not benefit from measure 35 will be given increased payments beyond the COLA to a total amount of €4.15 per week.
42	The full Widows Pension will be paid to those pensioners who were entitled to a retirement pension but had to renounce it on the death of a spouse.
43	Persons who are in receipt of the Disability Pension will be paid the Age Pension rate as soon as they reach the age of 60 years without the need to submit an application.
44	To continue to pay the Senior Citizen's Grant to elderly people aged 75 years or over who are still living in the community.
45	As from 2016, the children's income will not be considered in the means testing for Social Assistance purposes.
46	The Sickness Allowance will be paid to single persons who cannot work due to mental or terminal illness, and who live with their parents who are pensioners.
47	The National Commission for Persons with Disability (CRPD) will be setting up a call centre to improve the services it provides to persons with disability and their families. Families wanting to care for young people and adults with disability will be given support through the Sharing Lives scheme. Above all, the support given to persons with disability will be enhanced through the Empowerment Programme intended for disabled persons wishing to live independent lives as well as to provide improved respite services.
48	The "Ghaqal id-Dar" project.
No.	2017
49	Extension of the In-Work Benefit.
50	Increase in the Supplementary allowance for married couples (both below and above 65 years of age) with low income.
51	Increase of €4/week in the pension.
52	Supplementary allowance for elderly with low income.
53	Supplementary allowance for single persons with low income who are not head of household.
54	The Senior Citizen's Grant (€300 annual allowance) will still be given to elderly aged 75 years or over who still reside in their home.
55	Increase in the Bonus to make justice to a number of workers who do not have a pension; in particularly women; who in the past spent many years out of work either due to the laws applicable or the prevailing social situation.
56	Increase the rate of the Retirement Pension.
57	Elimination of gender discrimination in pension rates.
58	Reform in the carers pension (increase of €35 weekly and removal of the means test).

59	Increased Carers' Allowance for carers, including married persons, who take care of another person, in their own home and who is highly dependent.
60	Increased Carers' Allowance for carers, including married persons, who take care of another person, in their own home and whose dependency level is medium.
61	Increase in the payments to those who really cannot work and introduce a 3-tier payment system to persons with a missing lower or upper limb.
62	Extend the Free Medical Aid by 1 year instead of 3 months for persons with disability qualifying for such a benefit.
63	Fund for those Service Pensioners who are still experiencing discrimination.
64	Extension of the Live in Carer Project.
65	Revision of the means test for all non-contribution assistance including the free medical aid, be the same as non-contributory benefits.
66	Personal assistance for persons with disability.
67	Domiciliary respite service for carers.
68	The Strategy for Retirement and Financial Capability (2017-2019).
69	Media Campaign: "Añseb ghal ghada".
70	Close liaison with National Statistics Office with the aim of establishing poverty indicators.
71	Migrant Integration Strategy & Action plan (Vision 2020). ³
72	National Agreement on the Minimum Wage.
73	Equal Pay and Working Conditions for employees engaged by sub-contractors in the private sector.
No.	2018
74	An increase in the pension (both contributory and non-contributory) of €2 weekly.
75	Service Pensioners shall continue to benefit, in a gradual manner, from the improvement in their two-thirds pension whereby an increase of €200 will not be taken into account in the calculation of their social security pension.
76	The Senior Citizen's Grant (€300 annual allowance) will once again be given to elderly aged 75 years or over who still reside in their home.
77	Pensioners who remain in employment continue to pay social security contributions up till when they reach the age of 65. In cases where these do not have enough contributions paid (many of which are women) and hence are not receiving the full pension, as soon as they reach 65 years, a revision is to be done whereby the contributions paid after they reached pensionable age up to when they actually stopped working will also be taken into consideration.
78	Introducing the pro-rata (15%) contribution option for pensioners who are self-employed.
79	Continue to address the discrimination faced by a number of pensioners who worked during the 1970s. This year €10.5 million are being allocated to address these anomalies.
80	To increase the rate of the in-work benefit (from €350 to €450/child) payable to couples where only one person is in employment, and thus when both persons are working, they will qualify for a much better rate of the In-work benefit.
81	Reducing the tapering period for those who benefit from social assistance and enter the labour market, from 2 years to 1 year for a faster transition from depending on social benefits to be fully independent.
82	Increase in the Carers' Allowance. To be in line with Social Assistance where an additional increase of €8.15 per week is awarded for any additional person in the family composition, besides the beneficiary, if the married person loses his or her right to another social benefit when entitled to the Increased Carers' Allowance.
83	Increase in the Orphans Allowance to those orphans who are in the labour market. In order to enhance their way of living and encourage them to remain in employment all orphans who reach working age will benefit equally from the higher rate.
84	Increase in the Foster Care Allowance from €70 to €100 weekly.

3. Measures 71 and 72 were implemented by MEAE.

85	To date widow pensioners who receive the contributory pension and are in gainful employment are not granted sickness benefit. In order to enhance their way of living, they will be granted this benefit. The sickness benefits are being granted to those who have dependent children aged below 23.
86	Free Medical Aid (Pink Form) - Persons who receive/forward maintenance from/to their ex-spouses are having rejections when applying for this benefit, since the maintenance amountt is taken into consideration for the means-test and thus it exceeds the ceiling. As from 2018, the amount received/forwarded as maintenance will not to be considered for means-testing purposes.
87	Increase in the Drug Addict Allowance (DAD) from €30 to €40 weekly.
88	Research and discussions on contributory pensions in cases of separation/divorce/annulment.
89	MCAST - Financial Literacy Accredited Course.
90	Knowledge, Training, Communications and Support Measures in Support of Vulnerable Groups.
No.	2019
91	Increase in the Children's Allowance for families with an income of less than €20,000/year.
92	Amendment in the Social Security Act (Chapter 318): Self-employed persons with a new right to compensation in case of unemployment.
93	Increase in Medical Assistance.
94	Service Pensioners shall continue to benefit, in a gradual manner, from the improvement in their two-thirds pension whereby an increase of €200 will not be taken into account in the calculation of their social security pension.
95	Revision of social security pensions for service pensioners who are 72 years old or older, or who will reach this age next year.
96	The Senior Citizen's Grant (€300 annual allowance) will still be given to elderly aged 75 years or over.
97	More aid for people with disabilities - increase in the weekly assistance payment.
98	An increase in the Disabled Child Allowance.
99	Amendment in the Social Security Act (Chapter 318): Better pensions for those persons who worked in a Government entity and who retired after 1 st January 2003.
100	Adjustment in the means testing for Social Assistance for persons who receive this benefit and opt to further their studies.
101	Medical Assistance (bipolar, depression and terminal illnesses).
102	Enhancing the Increased Carers' Allowance.
103	An increase in the Deficiency Contribution Bonus (DCB) of €50.

Annex B: Employment

List of measures/initiatives and projects (including EU co-financed projects) introduced/enhanced/ongoing between 2014 and 2019 contributing to the implementation of the National Strategic Policy for Poverty Reduction and for Social Inclusion, and which are being implemented fully or partially by MEDE.

No.	2014
104	Youth Guarantee Scheme.
105	Work in Gozo for Gozitans.
106	Circular 2/2014 - Contracts for the Provision of Care, Security and Cleaning Services ¹ .
107	Circulars 8,9,12 & 16/2014 - Blacklisting of Economic Operators from the award of Public Contracts after being found guilty of offences in breach of the provisions of the Employment and Industrial Relations Act.
108	Circular 27/2014 - New Regulations Regarding the Award of Service Contracts within the Public Administration.
109	Preparation of a Charter on Employees Rights ² .
110	Develop the Framework Document for the Control of Work-Related Stress.
No.	2015
111	Free Childcare.
112	Access to Employment.
113	Training Aid Framework (2).
114	Work Programme.
115	Community Work Scheme.
116	Two incentives to encourage people with disabilities to seek employment.
117	
118	Circular 4/2015 - New Regulations Regarding the Award of Service Contracts within the Public Administration.
119	Revision of Employment and Industrial Relations Act (EIRA).
120	Engagement of Inspectors.
No.	2016
121	Investing in skills.
122	Training pays.
123	Work exposure and traineeships.
124	More work-based learning as part of the MCAST apprenticeship scheme.
125	Document Management Scheme.
126	Work and Training schemes in Gozo.

1. Measures 106, 107, 108, and 118 are being implemented by MFIN.

2. Measures 109, 110, 119, and 120 are being implemented by MSDC.

127	Circular 4/2016 - Award Criteria with respect to Security, Cleaning, Clerical and Care Worker Services Contracts. ³
128	Circular 6/2016 - Duration of Contracts and Conditions of Work with respect to Security, Cleaning, Clerical and Care Worker Services Contracts.
129	Procurement Policy Note 25 - Award criteria with respect to Security, Cleaning, Clerical and Care Worker Services.
130	New Public Procurement Regulations.
131	Reserved Contracts.
132	Contracts Circular No. 20/2016: Pegging of Hourly Remuneration for Street Sweepers in Public Contracts.
133	Publishing and distribution of Your Employment Rights Charter. ⁴
No.	2017
134	Contracts Circular No 01/2017: Regulations regarding the award of service contracts within public administration - New 2017 Rates.
135	Contracts Circular No 07/2017: Pegging of Rates in Line with the Collective Agreement Endorsed for 2017 Collective Agreement 2017.
136	Contracts Circular No 08/2017: Regulations Regarding the Award of Services for Public Private Partnerships (Elderly Care) and Homes for the Elderly Renting Out Beds to the Government of Malta.
137	Contracts Circular No 19/2017: Blacklisting of Cleaning and Security Services Ltd.
138	Contracts Circular No. 20/2017: Regulations Regarding the Award of Service Contracts within the Public Administration - 2018, 2019 and 2020 Rates.
No.	2018
139	LEAP2ENTERPRISE. ⁵
140	Contracts Circular No 02/2018: Exclusion Criteria - Notice to Evaluation Committees
141	Contracts Circular No. 20/2018: Regulations Regarding the Award of Service Contracts within the Public Administration - 2019, 2020 and 2021 Rates. ⁶
No.	2019
142	Contracts Circular No. 17/2019: Regulations Regarding the Award of Service Contracts within the Public Administration - 2020, 2021 and 2022 Rates.
143	Contracts Circular No. 01/2020: Further to - Regulations Regarding the Award of Service Contracts within the Public Administration - 2020, 2021 and 2022 Revised Rates.

3. Measures 127 - 132, 134 - 138, and 140 are being implemented by MFIN.

4. Measure 133 is being implemented by MEIB in collaboration with MEDE and MFCS.

5. Measure 139 is being implemented by MEIB.

6. Measures 141-143 are being implemented by MFIN.

Annex C: Education

List of measures/initiatives and projects (including EU co-financed projects) introduced/enhanced/ongoing between 2014 and 2019 contributing to the implementation of the National Strategic Policy for Poverty Reduction and for Social Inclusion, and which are being implemented fully or partially by MEDE

No.	2014
144	Free childcare centres.
145	Breakfast clubs.
146	Incentives for employers who offer work placements and apprentices.
147	Tablets for Year 4 students.
148	Professional Staff Development, Training and Quality Assurance for Adult Educators in the Community.
149	Students' stipends increase to include Cost of Living Allowance (COLA) pro-rata.
150	Stipends for students who repeat an academic year.
151	'Aqra Miegħi' programme to encourage reading.
152	Government-run childcare services.
153	Klabb 3-16 and 'Skola Sajf'.
154	Alternative Learning Programme (ALP).
155	Strategic Plan for the Prevention of Early School Leaving in Malta.
156	Publication of 3 workbooks for year 4, 5 and 6 regarding growing up topics in the primary for PSCD teachers.
157	One to one career guidance sessions.
158	Setting the stage for Budding Rockstars.
159	Core Competencies Online Assessment Tool (European fund for the Integration of Third Country Nationals [TCNs]).
160	Reading and Spelling Software (European fund for the Integration of Third Country Nationals [TCNs]).
161	Language Learning and Parental Support for Integration (European fund for the Integration of Third Country Nationals [TCNs]).
No.	2015
162	Students' stipends increase to include Cost of Living Allowance (COLA) pro-rata as from 1 st January 2015 as well as the additional bonus pro-rata.
163	All students' maintenance grants are exempt from income tax.
164	Higher Priority to Mathematics, Science and ICT in secondary schools.
165	New vocational subjects.
166	Introduction of Design and Technology, Home Economics, Art and Music to Year 7 (Form 1) students.
167	An increase of Physical Education lessons.
168	MCAST will continue to strengthen and widen the scope of the apprenticeship scheme whilst introducing new forms of work-based learning at different levels.
169	The establishment of the Youth Village.
170	A workbook for all Form 5 students, where objectives and outcomes related to sexual relationship education (SRE) are also highlighted.

171	Four-day training course organised in collaboration with the Health Promotion Unit for Education Officers and Heads of Department of Science, Religion and PSCD of both state and non-state schools.
172	A day seminar for the general public on issues related to sexuality in collaboration with the Health Promotion Unit.
173	Training regarding sexuality and relationships issues for State and non-state heads of school
174	Ongoing training for PSCD and Religion teachers in the form of in set courses on different issues related to SRE, such as, the serialization of children, pornography, masturbation, sexual orientations, sexuality and the Church.
175	Career Exposure.
176	Increase in Personnel in Student Services Department (SSD).
177	I choose Fair programme.
No.	2016
178	Child Care centres.
179	Paid Study Leave for teachers (Sabbatical leave).
180	Continuation of the development of the Youth Village.
181	Outreach and Detached Work for Youths.
182	Stipends to students applying under the maturity clause.
183	Screening programme entitled 'Lenti fuq l-lżvilupp ta' Wliedna'.
184	Agreement with University of Cambridge.
185	Prince's Trust Programme.
186	Revision of Klabb 3-16 programmes.
187	New School in Gżira - Ġem16+.
188	Transformation of the Foundation College, Technical College and University College at MCAST.
189	Sports facilities in Youth Village.
190	Updating the curriculum through the Learning Outcomes Framework with special emphasis to sexuality even in relation to internet use (e.g. sexting).
191	Training for Church primary teachers who are obliged to teach SRE at primary level of education.
No.	2017
192	Strengthening services offered by the National Libraries and the National Literacy Agency.
193	Strengthening the courses offered during the scholastic year and the summer intensive course for foreigners who cannot communicate in the English or Maltese language.
194	Using football to overcome illiteracy.
195	Automatic access to maintenance grants including supplementary grants for students with disabilities and those living in Homes.
196	Stipends for students following the ALP+ course.
197	Training for teachers provided by the Institute for Education.
198	Partnership with other foreign Universities for training in the pedagogy of vocational subjects.
199	Fund targeting the quality of life of students in difficulties.
200	Design of Learning Outcomes Framework (LOF), associated Learning and Assessment programmes and related Training (ESF 1.228).

No.	2018
201	Enhancing Autism Services in Schools.
202	Waiver of the MATSEC and SEC Examination Fees.
203	My Journey: Achieving through different paths.
204	Enhancing the Get Into Programme.
205	Training to educators on autism.
206	The possibility of a school for children with Autism.
No.	2019
207	A cost-of-living wage raise of €2.33 per week, with a pro rata addition for student stipends.
208	My Journey National Fair.
209	Providing new methods of learning to educators.
210	Providing courses to Supply Teachers to become regular teachers.
211	Strengthening the teaching of different languages to more students and gaining the skills to properly learn a language other than Maltese and English.
212	Career orientation visits in secondary and post-secondary schools to encourage more students to take science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects.
213	Introducing continuous assessment system at school and elimination of half yearly exams.
214	Launching of an educational campaign on the importance of a balanced and nutritious diet.
215	Improving apprenticeships and all sorts of experience that students have on the workplace, work-based learning and implemented a framework of quality assurance.
216	Providing informal education projects in schools after formal learning time.

Annex D: Health and Environment

List of measures/initiatives and projects (including EU co-financed projects) introduced/enhanced/ongoing between 2014 and, 2019 contributing to the implementation of the National Strategic Policy for Poverty Reduction and for Social Inclusion, and which are being implemented fully or partially by MFH

No.	2014
217	The opening of two acute wards by the end of 2015. These wards will accommodate 68 new beds by the end of 2015.
218	An action plan was formulated to improve the services offered by Mount Carmel Hospital, the Young People's Unit and other mental health services. Some mental health services will be extended in the community.
No.	2015
219	Further increase the efficiency in the use of operating theatres to ultimately increase the total number of operations performed.
220	A plan to deal with the exigencies in the health sector by increasing the number of beds in our acute hospital. The formulation of protocols and other systems will ultimately increase efficiency. Inter-sectoral work with the private sector will help to overcome the challenge of an ageing population.
221	New stock control practices which will decrease the fragmentation of stocks that characterises the current process, hence improving stock management.
222	Development of a Health System Performance Assessment Framework.
223	The Food and Nutrition Policy and Action Plan for 2015-2020.
224	National Strategy for Diabetes 2016-2020.
225	Cervical cancer screening will be introduced in 2015. This is one of the action plans set in the National Cancer Plan.
226	Healthy weight programmes will be offered for those overweight persons suffering from diabetes.
227	The government will invest in the modernization of existent health centres and the building of a new health centre for the residents of Żurrieq and nearby villages.
228	Opening of the new Sir Anthony Mamo Oncology Centre.
229	Investment in equipment and services as recommended by the experts from various specialities.
230	Three national surveys are being conducted by different entities: the European Health Interview Survey (together with a food consumption survey), a study about diabetes and a survey about sexual health.
231	Increase the number of surgical procedures to be able to perform various surgical procedures during the weekend.
232	Develop a plan to extend secondary and tertiary care services in the community, outside Mater Dei Hospital.
No.	2016
233	Implement the National Health System Strategy.
234	Reduction of waiting lists for operations.
235	Introduce new systems with regards to bed management at Mater Dei Hospital.

236	Renovation at Karen Grech Hospital.
237	Develop a new rehabilitation hospital.
238	A new dermatology centre with 12 beds (inpatient).
239	Address the out of stock medicines issue.
240	Renovation will be carried out at Kirkop Health Centre.
241	Enhance the services at Mount Carmel Hospital.
242	Develop a Charter of Patient's Rights and an Act on Organ Donation.
243	Provide primary healthcare through ACCESS Centres.
244	Upgrade the Paola Health Centre through ERDF Funds.
245	Free medicines for diabetic patients.
246	Free medicines for patients with rare conditions.
247	Introduce a Mobile Sexual Health Unit.
248	Implement the National Strategy for Diabetes 2016-2020.
249	Launch a National Cancer Plan.
250	Conduct research on obesity.
251	Setting up an Inter-sectorial Advisory Council on healthy lifestyles and wellbeing for the prevention of non-communicable diseases.
252	ESF Project in collaboration with WHO to determine the socio-economic determinants of health.
No.	2017
253	The construction of a new regional medical hub in Paola.
254	The opening of a new health centre in Kirkop.
255	The pilot project regarding the distribution of medicine in clients' own homes is to be extended to other localities.
256	Initiate the process to build a new acute mental health hospital.
257	Community mental health support in partnership with NGO's.
258	Continue to invest in equipment at Mater Dei Hospital (MDH) in order to improve both the quality and the efficiency of service delivery.
259	Continue to address the waiting lists for outpatients and operations.
260	Introduction of new medicines for diabetic patients on Government Formulary.
261	Free glucose sticks for diabetic patients.
262	Increase the benefits for diabetic patients.
263	Introduction of new medicines for cancer patients on Government Formulary.
264	Legislation banning smoking in cars in the presence of children.
No.	2018
265	Treatment for persons with Hepatitis C.
266	Refurbishment of other Health Centres.
267	Investment of a new 350 bedded hospital in Gozo.
No.	2019
268	Mental Health Clinic for the northern region as well as more Day Centres and Hostels.

269	Sensory Integration Therapy Clinic.
270	Reallocation of the Children's and Young People's Services to a new and more appropriate site and setting.
271	New Outpatients Department Block for Mater Dei Hospital.
272	New Primary Care Health Centre for Gozo.
273	Palliative Care Centre.
274	Introduction of new medicines in the national formulary.
275	Setting up of a Committee to evaluate medicines /treatment which are non-formulary but are required for rare disorders.

Annex E: Social Welfare Services

List of measures/initiatives and projects (including EU co-financed projects) introduced/enhanced/ongoing between 2014 and 2019 contributing to the implementation of the National Strategic Policy for Poverty Reduction and for Social Inclusion, and which are being implemented fully or partially by MFCS

No.	2014
276	Publish a Green Paper for consultation regarding a national strategy against poverty and social exclusion. After that, in 2014, the strategy would become Government Policy.
277	Launch of the National Standards for Residential Services for Persons with Disability.
278	Reform in long-term care assessment.
279	LEAP Media interventions.
280	Measures taken at Aġenzija Appoġġ to tackle waiting list.
281	Measures taken at Aġenzija Sedqa to tackle waiting lists.
282	Promoting the professionalism of social welfare employees and encourage their retention and progression.
283	Re-evaluate Public Private Partnerships and other forms of market-based welfare systems.
284	LEAP - Building the future together: Promoting Social Mobility.
No.	2015
285	Setting up the Inter-Ministerial Administrative Committee on Disability (IACD) for a more holistic approach with regards to Disability Services offered by the State.
286	Capacity building (6 new assessors, 2 research officers and 1 research analyst were recruited) within the Department for Social Welfare Standards.
287	Capacity Building in Care for the Elderly and Persons with Disability.
288	Enhancing Human Capital through the Regulation of Social Care.
No.	2016
289	Developing a Hub for Persons with Disability.
290	Setting up of an Inter-Ministerial Inter-Disciplinary Professional Board on Disability (IIPBD).
291	Enrichment of community services.
292	Forecasting, budgetary planning and allocation.
293	Provision of respite services at Casa Leone XIII in St. Julian's, Villa San Lawrenz in Gozo, and St. Elizabeth Home in Mtarfa.
294	Provision of night shelter services at Dar Padova in Ghajnsielem, Gozo and Casa Francesco in Santa Venera.
295	Setting up the Dementia Day Care Centre at Dar Padova in Ghajnsielem, Gozo.
No.	2017
296	A new Day Centre for persons with disability in the central part of Malta.

297	REACH Programme for persons with disability and their families.
298	Consolidation of Supervised Access Visits (SAVs) Services.
299	Sedqa project/services for families undergoing separation procedures.
300	National Standards for the Child Adoption Standards.
No.	2018
301	Investing in long-term care for the elderly by exploring private and public private partnerships possibilities.
302	Renovation of the day care centre for persons with disability.
303	The setting up of Social Care Standards Authority (SCSA).
304	Social Regulatory Standards: Adoption of Children.
305	Social loans for home ownership.
No.	2019
306	The National Adoption Strategy for Children and their Families (2019 - 2022).
307	The Minor Protection (Alternative Care) Act (Cap. 602 / Act XXIII of 2019).

Annex F: Social Welfare Services (Children and Young People)

List of measures/initiatives and projects (including EU co-financed projects) introduced/enhanced/ongoing between 2014 and 2019 contributing to the implementation of the National Strategic Policy for Poverty Reduction and for Social Inclusion, and which are being implemented fully or partially by MFCS.

No.	2014
308	Embark for Life Programme - This programme envisages the integration of young people into the labour market. It empowers young persons in acquiring skills, which would enable them to get into mainstream education and/or employment.
309	Implementation of the Be Smart Online service.
310	Various projects at the Cottonera LEAP Community Service.
311	Improvements in the Kids Point project.
312	The 12 to 14 Project and 12 to 14 Summer Project to offer a space for young people between the age of 12 and 14 years to express their creativity and feelings and attain social skills.
313	Outreach within the community by LEAP Centres.
314	The Colours of Life project at the Cottonera LEAP Community Services.
315	Proġett Tagħlim at the Cottonera LEAP Community Services.
316	Proġett Familja at the Cottonera LEAP Community Services.
317	The Qawsalla project at the Cottonera LEAP Community Services.
318	Homework clubs at various LEAP Community Centres.
319	The project We Are Young at the Msida/Birkirkara LEAP Community Services.
320	The Literacy Club in partnership with the Third World Group (TWG) at the Valletta LEAP Community Service.
321	The Pre-Teens and Teens project at the Valletta LEAP Community Service.
322	Mentoring at the Valletta LEAP Community Service.
323	The Butterfly Centre at the Qawra LEAP Community Service.
324	The project Dawra Durella at the Qawra LEAP Community Service.
325	Sessions at Summer Schools at St. Paul's Bay (including Qawra and Burmarrad).
326	The opening of a residential home for teenage girls.
327	Informative sessions at St. Paul's Bay (including Qawra and Burmarrad).
328	The opening of two Youth Hubs. ¹
329	Workshops with Children.
No.	2015
330	The benefit of leave days granted in case of adoption of children will be extended to be the same length as that granted to cases of maternity.
331	Implementing a more efficient Child Protection Service (CPS) system in working with high-risk children and youth.
332	The Youth Exchange project at the Cottonera LEAP Community Services.
333	The project Prima Klassi at the Cottonera LEAP Community Services.

1. Measure 328 is being implemented by MEDE.

334	The project Primi Passi at the Cottonera LEAP Community Services.
335	The Community Workshop at the Cottonera LEAP Community Services.
336	Youth Forum at the Valletta LEAP Community Service.
337	Home Based Family Therapy at the Qawra LEAP Community Service.
No.	2016
338	The Children's Project at the Valletta LEAP Community Service.
339	The project Alternative Youth Entertainment (AYE) at the Msida/Birkirkara LEAP Community Services.
340	The Mums & Tots project at the Qawra LEAP Community Centre.
341	Mental health support group at the Qawra LEAP Community Centre.
342	Marital separation support group at the Qawra LEAP Community Centre.
No.	2017
343	The setting up of a Secure Unit for Young People.
344	Volunteering and community support towards the most vulnerable in Birkirkara/Msida
345	Ftit Hin Għalijja - self-help group and community engagement for women of all ages in Valletta.
346	Learn and Play in a Fun Way weekly initiative (for children aged between 7 and 10) at the Qawra Community Service
No.	2018
347	Setting up of a Secure Centre for female youths.

Annex G: Social Welfare Services (The Elderly)

List of measures/initiatives and projects (including EU co-financed projects) introduced/enhanced/ongoing between 2014 and 2019 contributing to the implementation of the National Strategic Policy for Poverty Reduction and for Social Inclusion, and which are being implemented fully or partially by MFCS

No.	2014
348	Full pension to the elderly who choose to continue working beyond retirement age.
349	Allocation of funds for the extension of the Home Help service.
350	The opening of two new day centres for the elderly in Birgu and Balzan.
351	The government in partnership with the private sector improves the Telecare service through new technology.
No.	2016
352	The Carers Pension and the Social Assistance for Carers were revised and amalgamated within one framework.
353	Increase the number of credited years entitlement for pension purposes to those who had to stop working due to child/ren bearing and rearing.
354	Encourage people to strengthen their competencies, skills and knowledge as much as possible without the impact of not having enough contributions paid which may affect negatively their entitlement of a retirement pension.
355	Incentivise gainfully occupied persons to stay as long as possible in the labour market.
356	Increase the rate of pension of a number of persons who used to pay a high rate of social security contributions when they were employed but then became self-occupied with a lesser income with the consequence of having a lesser rate of pension.
357	Increase the rate of the Retirement Pension by including another €200 to be deducted from the original service pension.
358	Live in carer Pilot Project - A fund will be set to help families who care for an elderly dependent who needs constant supervision so as to subsidise the wages payable to qualified carers employed on a full-time or part-time basis.
359	Setup an Authority to implement minimum standards in residential homes for the elderly.
No.	2017
360	Enhancement and improvement of the Meals on Wheels service.
361	Embellishment and improvement of the day centre at Mtarfa.
No.	2019
362	An increase of €2.17 to all social security pensions.
363	Bonus for those who paid contributions but do not receive a pension.
364	Further incentives for people to remain in the workforce (this incentive will gradually be extended to public sector employees).
365	Past injustices will continue to be addressed - the process to pay pension arrears to former employees of the Malta Electricity Board or their heirs will be concluded.

366	Enhancing the Carers Allowance (CRA) and the Increased Carers Allowance (ICRA) a) the exemption from the means test will apply to both allowances; b) when a person applies to be a carer of an elderly person who has reached the age of 85, they will no longer need to undergo a medical evaluation.
367	Addressing past injustices for pensioners (who worked in Libya) who were affected by the Bilateral agreement in 1988.
368	Increase the rate of the in-work benefit (by €50 up to €100/child) depending on the family's income.
369	A 3 year Strategy Plan for the elderly including: 1) Modernising the Infrastructure; 2) Reengineering of current services; 3) Introduction of new services; 4) Increasing resources and training.
370	Social Media FB Page providing a direct link with our customers and also serves to provide news in real time.
371	Enforcing the Customer Care Directive to improve the quality of given to the elderly.
372	Information, Question & Answer Sessions, conducted in various towns and villages through Parishes and Local Councils.
373	EU Project - CONVERGE - Developing an IT case management with the aim to have a client oriented system which will enhance service efficiency and reduce duplication of work.

Annex H: Social Welfare Services (Other Vulnerable Groups)

List of measures/initiatives and projects (including EU co-financed projects) introduced/enhanced/ongoing between 2014 and 2019 contributing to the implementation of the National Strategic Policy for Poverty Reduction and for Social Inclusion, and which are being implemented fully or partially by MFCS.

No.	2014
374.	Launch the National Policy on the Rights of Persons with Disability.
375.	Enforcement of the Persons with Disability (Employment Act) - Cap. 210.
376.	Major amendments made in the Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability) Act - Cap. 413.
377.	Guidelines regarding Access for All Design Standards in the Built Environment.
378.	Amend the Equality Bill so as to enforce such forms of abuse through the establishment of a Commission for Human Rights. ¹
379.	Rehabilitation and re-integration of released offenders through social work services offered by the Intake and Family Support Services (IFSS) and Community Services within FSWS.
380.	Providing individualised guidance and empowerment programmes for lone parent households.
381.	Developing new forms of deterrent measures against any form of abuse on the elderly. These were later incorporated in the Maltese Criminal Code through the Commissioner for Older Persons Act, 2016.
No.	2015
382.	Strategy for the Reception of Asylum Seekers and Irregular Migrants. ²
383.	Reception Conditions Regulations under the Refugees Act (Cap. 240).
384.	Strengthen the integration of TCNs in Malta through: i) a dedicated website and publications; ii) the launch of a Framework Document entitled Towards a National Migrant Integration Strategy 2015-2020; and iii) the setting up of an Inter-Ministerial Committee on Integration and the Forum on Integration Affairs.
385.	Addressing addictive behaviour through the consolidation of preventive, outreach and rehabilitative services.
No.	2016
386.	Agreement between Jobs+, the Chamber of Commerce and Malta Employers Association so that companies would be more committed in employing persons with disability.
387.	Introduce the Bill of Rights (19 new rights for persons with disability).
388.	Launch of the Maltese Sign Language Recognition Act (Cap. 556).
389.	Launch of the Persons within the Autism Spectrum (Empowerment) Act (Cap. 557).
390.	Launch the National Strategy on the Rights of Persons with Disability (for public consultation).
391.	Combat violence against women/gender-based violence. ³

1. Measures 378 and 384 are being implemented by MSDC.

2. Measures 382 and 383 are being implemented by MHAS.

3. Measure 391 is being implemented by MSDC.

No.	2017
392.	Consultation process: Protection of Vulnerable Older Persons and Adult Persons with Disability Act.
393.	Intercultural project: Building friendships.
394.	Challenging Behaviours/Outreach to parents.
395.	Information Sessions for Migrants at the Qawra Community Service.
396.	Society's Concern: Gender-based violence and domestic violence strategy and action plan. ⁴
No.	2018
397.	Launching of an enforcement unit within CRPD.
398.	Launch of the National Alcohol Policy (2018-2023).
No.	2019
399.	Research - A Passage to Malta (Migrant Children).

4. Measure 396 is being implemented by MEAE.

Annex I: Housing

List of measures/initiatives and projects (including EU co-financed projects) introduced/enhanced/ongoing between 2014 and 2019 contributing to the implementation of the National Strategic Policy for Poverty Reduction and for Social Inclusion, and which are being implemented fully or partially by MFCS

No.	2014
400	The Housing Authority (HA) will put on the market a number of apartments in shell or semi-finished form at subsidised prices.
401	The HA is undertaking an exercise to revise social leases in line with clear criteria and a rental index which the Authority will establish for families and individuals.
No.	2015
402	In partnership with the Ministry for Transport and Infrastructure, the HA will be carrying out repair works in housing estates. General improvements and maintenance will also be carried out in residential property rented by the Government or the Authority.
403	The HA will resume the project of installing lifts in government-owned blocks.
404	Embellishment work in eleven blocks within three areas (St. Paul's Bay, Paola and Senglea) by the HA.
No.	2016
405	Embellishment works to be carried out in Hamrun Housing Estate by the HA.
406	Embellishment works to be carried out in Ta' Ġiorni Housing Estate by the HA.
407	Embellishment works to be carried out in Pembroke Housing Estate by the HA.
408	Building of new Housing Estates by the HA.
409	The HA will be increasing the grant given with regard to 2 existing schemes - 'Subsidy on adaptation works in residences occupied by owners or tenants' and 'Subsidy on adaptation works related to dangerous structures in private dwellings held on lease or emphyteusis'.
No.	2017
410	Increase in subsidy on rent payable by tenants to private landlords.
411	Widen the criteria on eligibility on rent payable by tenants to private landlords.
412	Revision of the minimum rent on Government/Housing Authority rented accommodation.
413	Regeneration of Housing Estates (installation of lifts and embellishment works).
414	Building of new units (continuation).

No.	2018
415	Regeneration of Housing Estates.
416	Widening of qualifying thresholds for the Rent Subsidy Scheme. Elderly over 65 years of age will enjoy more benefiting thresholds and subsidy.
417	'Nikru biex Nassistu' Scheme.
418	Financial assistance for rehabilitation works.
419	The recovery of vacant social housing from the elderly.
420	Installation of lifts and embellishment works.
421	Maintenance and Embellishment works.

No.	2019
422	Change in how financial aid will be given to make rent more affordable.
423	Incentive scheme for owners renting out their property at moderate prices over a long-term period.
424	Building of nearly 700 additional social housing units.
425	Regeneration of dilapidated property - two pilot projects which will be carried out in conjunction with non-governmental entities.
426	Continuing with the maintenance and embellishment programmes.
427	Further assistance for Gozitan students who study and live in Malta.

Annex J: Culture

List of measures/initiatives and projects introduced/enhanced/ongoing between 2014 and 2019 contributing to the implementation of the National Strategic Policy for Poverty Reduction and for Social Inclusion, and which are being implemented fully or partially by the MJCL/MHAL.

No.	2014
428	Reduced Rates for local groups and local councils, and assistance for local cultural heritage displays.
429	Happy Jam.
No.	2015
430	Creative Communities Fund.
431	Kreattiv Fund.
432	President's Award for Creativity.
433	L-ikla t-tajba.
434	Create 2020 Strategy.
435	Curatorial School.
436	MCAST projection mapping.
437	Darba Waħda.
438	KantaKantun.
439	The Box.
440	Audit on Theatre Spaces.
441	The Strada Stretta Concept.
No.	2016
442	Valletta Forum.
443	MewġaMuzika.
444	Naqsam il-MUŻA.
445	KulturaTV.
446	Sounds Out Loud.
447	Ohloq Kultura.
448	National Cultural Participation Survey.
449	Culture Pass (in collaboration with Arts Council Malta).
450	Ġewwa Barra.
451	Valletta Design Cluster.

No.	2017
452	Dance4All.
453	Altofest Malta.
454	Rima.
455	Social Inclusion initiatives undertaken by Teatru Manoel.
456	Thematic Programs for resource centre schools.
457	Outreach Programs on Sites & Museums that are not easily accessible.

No.	2018
458	Subjective Maps Malta.
459	Exiled Homes.
460	Equality in Music.
461	Utopian Nights.
462	Opening Doors (IN)VISIBILITY.
463	Of Peace and Unrest.
464	Evaluation and monitoring, community inclusion and space.
465	Practice based research/Valletta 2018 Annual Conference.
466	Initiatives undertaken by Local Councils.
No.	2019
467	Passport for Senior Citizens.
468	Cultural Right Project.
469	Belt il-Beltin.



MINISTRY FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE AND SOLIDARITY,
THE FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S RIGHTS



facebook.com/familjagovmt