GOVERNMENT OF MALTA
MINISTRY FOR SOCIAL POLICY
AND CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

A **SOCIAL VISION** FOR **MALTA** 2035

SHAPING THE FUTURE OF OUR SOCIETY

POLICY DOCUMENT
DECEMBER 2022

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MINISTER'S FOREWORD

Michael Falzon
Minister for Social Policy and Children's Rights

Over the past decade, Malta has realised remarkable social and economic achievements, with a social protection system that keeps on providing the necessary support and assistance to our people. We must now look ahead and build on the lessons learnt during the COVID-19 pandemic, while acknowledging that the international turmoil (in particular the war in Ukraine) will engender new challenges that will affect the whole European continent, if not the world. It is in times like these that we need to ensure that we have a clear plan which is achievable and addresses the current and future challenges of our country.

After an extensive consultation process, the Ministry for Social Policy and Children's Rights has developed the Social Vision for Malta 2035. This document articulates our objectives for the future, seeks to address current and future challenges, and concurrently ensures that the needs of our citizens are met. Ultimately, the objective of this Government is to contribute towards a better quality of life of our citizens and improving life chances.

To achieve this objective, we must now all pull together to make this Vision a national reality. Through the collaboration of all stakeholders, I am convinced the Social Vision 2035 will contribute towards increased wellbeing and a fairer society supporting the most vulnerable.

MESSAGE FROM THE PERMANENT SECRETARY

Mark Musu

Permanent Secretary, Ministry for
Social Policy and Children's Rights

New realities are thrusting Maltese society towards more diversified and changing needs. The challenges faced by Malta in recent years, most of which were determined by international upheavals, continue to highlight the increasing importance of social resilience.

To this end, Government has developed the Social Vision for Malta 2035 to provide a holistic long-term plan for the social sector. Society must be in a position to cope with, and adjust, to new realities and future challenges. In this context, it behooves Government to support society to ensure every individual has the opportunity to succeed and fulfil his/her own potential.

Building upon existing strategies and initiatives, the Social Vision for Malta 2035 determinedly sets out clear policy objectives defined in 11 thematic areas which aim to address the aspirations of Maltese society. These policy goals have been defined within the spirit of the sustainable development goals, with the ultimate objective being to improve social wellbeing and provide a better quality of life to citizens.

The development of this Social Vision was only possible through the cooperation and contribution of various stakeholders. We look forward to continue this positive experience together to achieve the objectives of the Vision.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Social Vision for Malta 2035 is an over-arching goal-setting framework earmarked to address the contemporary and future challenges of Maltese society. This document will provide the necessary direction to develop or renew national policies and strategies in view of ever-changing socio-economic contexts and emerging trends.

Building upon existing strategies and an extensive consultation process, Malta's Vision document for the social sector sets out ambitious, yet realistic aspirations, based on the principles of social fairness and prosperity to ensure that no one is left behind. The ultimate aim is to empower society and build resilience particularly amongst the most vulnerable cohorts.
The Vision document is built on eleven thematic areas , namely:

- Poverty and Social Exclusion;
- Families;
- Children;
- Youth;
- Ageing;
- Addiction to Substances, Gambling and Other Behaviours;
- Re-integration of Ex-offenders;
- Persons with Disability;
- Persons Identifying as LGBTIQ;
- Violence, Abuse and Exploitation; and
- Migration.

These thematic areas have been identified in an effort to address society in a holistic manner. For each thematic area, a number of medium to long term policy goals that will guide Government policy making in the years to come have been identified. The policy goals are expected to be achieved through the implementation of appropriate policy instruments, strategies and action plans, developed by the relevant stakeholders.

The future policy goals are outlined in Annex I.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AROPE	At-Risk-of-Poverty or Social Exclusion Rate
ARP	At-Risk-of-Poverty Rate
ART	Assisted Reproduction Technology
CRPD	Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability
ARUC	Authority for the Responsible Use of Cannabis
DSS	Department of Social Security
DV	Domestic Violence
ESL	Early School Leavers
ESPAD	European School Survey Project
EU	European Union
FEAD	Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived
FSWS	Foundation for Social Welfare Services
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
HA	Housing Authority
HC	Hate Crime
HCS	Hate Crime and Speech
HT	Human Trafficking
IT	Information Technology
LTC	Long Term Care
MD	Material Deprivation
MDH	Mater Dei Hospital
MFED	Ministry for Education
MSPC	Ministry for Social Policy and Children's Rights
MFH	Ministry for Health
MISW	Ministry for Inclusion and Social Wellbeing
MGA	Malta Gaming Authority
MNEI	Median National Equivalised Income
MTICP	Ministry for Transport, Infrastructure and Capital Projects
NEET	Youth Not in Education, Employment or Training
NAP	National Alcohol Policy
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NSO	National Statistics Office
NSPAA	National Strategic Policy for Active Ageing
PWD	Persons with Disability

SDGs   Sustainable Development Goals

SFFD   State Funded Distribution Scheme

SILC   Survey on Income and Living Conditions

SMD   Severe Material Deprivation

UNCRC   United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

UNCRPD   United Nations Convention for the Rights of Persons with Disability

VLWI   Very Low Work Intensity

WHO   World Health Organization

WI   Work Intensity

WHY DO WE NEED A SOCIAL VISION 2035?

Addressing the diversified and changing needs of Maltese society requires a planned and coordinated effort with a view to meeting the aspirations of citizens. In this regard, Malta's Social Vision for 2035 has been designed to outline the main aspirations of Maltese society for the future. Such an endeavour would not not have been possible without extensive consultations involving relevant stakeholders. In fact, a bottom-up approach has been adopted to develop Malta's Social Vision 2035. In this regard, a series of pre- consultation initiatives with a myriad of stakeholders have been undertaken in order to provide input towards the development of this Vision.

The development of a Social Vision for 2035 will contribute towards the amelioration of social resilience with the aim to attenuate future risks. Whilst the principle that no one should be left behind will remain a key priority for Government, Malta's vision is intended to strike a balance between Malta's social market economy and protection of persons in need. Furthermore, Malta's Vision will also aim to provide the necessary support to citizens, in particular vulnerable groups, to participate in the economy and have access to better life chances.

The 'Social Vision for Malta 2035' hinges upon the principles of sustainable development and will build upon the political commitments made in relation to the UN Sustainable Development Goals 2030, that is to prioritise social wellbeing and design a citizen-centred approach towards policy development and service delivery. In this regard, initiatives undertaken must contribute towards better quality of life and improved life chances. The ultimate aim is to have a society equipped with the necessary skills to address future challenges while grasping the opportunities for social prosperity.

Within this context, the Social Vision for Malta for 2035 will provide an overarching framework delineating the needs and requirements in the field of social policy in the medium- to long- term. Building upon existing strategies, the Social Vision will create a series of objectives to be achieved through various strategies and action plans in the years to come and will provide tangible initiatives to address the concerns and ambitions of citizens.

At this critical juncture, Maltese society aspires for a social vision that bolsters social fairness and prosperity, through an economy that supports people. A holistic and a unified vision for the social sector is pivotal to provide the necessary direction in this regard. This will require leadership and national commitment to translate this long-term vision into a national reality. It will be Government's priority to ensure that this Vision will indeed become a reality.

OUR
APPROACH

Developing a national vision for the social sector requires a clear understanding of the current and expected challenges that Maltese society will be facing in the years to come. Within this context, both top-down and bottom-up approaches were undertaken. In this regard, to ensure that the Social Vision for Malta 2035 is truly reflective of today's and future realities, the Ministry for Social Policy and Children's Rights has carried out an extensive consultation exercise at different stages.

The initial internal scoping phase provided a clear overview of the current situation of the key vulnerabilities and barriers hindering social wellbeing. This has contributed towards the identification of 11 thematic areas that correspond to vulnerabilities occurring both throughout the life-course, and across multiple cross-cutting realities, namely:

Childhood

Youth

Ageing

**LOOKING ALONG
THE LIFECOURSE**

Poverty & Social Exclusion

Persons with Disability

Addiction to Substances,
Gambling and Other Behaviour

Families

Migration

Persons Identifying as LGBTIQ

Violence, Abuse, and Exploitation

Re-integration of Ex-offenders

**LOOKING ACROSS
MULTIPLE REALITIES**

A series of pre-consultation sessions provided a more comprehensive picture through contributions from a number of stakeholders operating on the ground . The pre-consultation meetings organised by the MSPC promoted discussions on the status of Malta's social sector as well what are the aspirations for Maltese society for 2035. The feedback provided contributed to a better technical understanding of the current and future challenges faced within this sphere of activity. In order to facilitate the discussion 11 concept notes were developed based on desk research and intra-Ministerial consultations.

Further consultations included a number of focus groups with the main targeted cohorts to enable a better understanding of the realities and experiences of children, youth, elderly and persons with disability. The feedback obtained from these consultation processes coupled with extensive research contributed towards the development of the public consultation document. Feedback received during the public consultation period was analysed in detail and relevant feedback taken into consideration for the finalisation of the document.

PHASE 1 - SCOPING

INTERNAL DISCUSSIONS AND SYSTEMATIC DESK-BASED RESEARCH PERTAINING TO THE STATUS QUO FOR 11 THEMATIC AREAS

PHASE 2 - PRE-CONSULTATION

A SERIES OF SEMINARS WITH KEY STAKEHOLDERS (JULY AND SEPTEMBER 2021) TO IDENTIFY THE CHALLENGES FACED BY VARIOUS POPULATION

PHASE 3 - DRAFTING

BASED ON THE INFORMATION GATHERED DURING PHASE 1 AND PHASE 2, THE PUBLIC CONSULTATION DOCUMENT HAS BEEN DEVELOPED FIRST DRAFT SOCIAL VISION FOR MALTA 2035

PHASE 4 - CONSULTATION PERIOD

PHASE 5 - ANALYSIS OF PUBLIC CONSULTATION FEEDBACK

FINALISATION OF DOCUMENT
LAUNCH OF SOCIAL VISION FOR MALTA 2035

THE REGIONAL DIMENSION - GOZO

Malta's social vision has been developed to address not only the social challenges within Malta but also in Gozo. Similarities between the two islands exist; however the vision document is flexible enough in its strategic approach to permit tailor made solutions which address the regional realities as appropriate.

INTRODUCING THE MAIN SOCIAL THEMES

Government has over the past years contributed towards the development of various policy and strategic documents aimed at improving the quality of life of citizens.

Building upon the achievements registered to date; Government is in the process of developing a Social Vision for Malta 2035 that endeavours to provide an overarching framework for the development of the social sector in the medium- to long- term.

Malta's Social Vision outlines Government's aspirations for Maltese society for 2035 which are based upon existing strategies as well as feedback received from various stakeholders. This framework aims to better guide policy development and ensure cohesiveness amongst the different aspects governing the social sphere. Malta's Social Vision takes into account lessons learnt from the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the adversities brought about by the war in Ukraine to where possible strives to foresee the challenges which society will face in the years to come. In this regard, this framework focuses upon life phases as well a number of thematic areas which have been identified as the basis for Malta's Social Vision 2035.

Childhood, Youth and the Elderly offer different life realities, challenges and opportunities. Thus, in designing Malta's Social Vision for 2035, Government has adopted a tailor-made approach for each phase addressing the different needs. Within this context, it is the intention of Government to act as an enabler which fosters the right environment for every individual to succeed and fulfil its own potential. Families are the backbone of society. It is in the interest of Government to ensure that families are appropriately supported so that they continue to provide a nurturing environment, where individuals are able to grow and prosper. In this regard, Malta's Social Vision aims to better address the specific needs, challenges and realities of the various forms of contemporary families.

Based on the principle that no one should be left behind, Malta's Vision devotes particular attention to poverty and social exclusion - a top priority within the National Agenda. The multi-faceted and ever- changing nature of poverty and social exclusion require a robust, sustainable social justice system that is both inclusive of, and targeted towards, the needs of all individuals. In this regard, sustained efforts to develop tailor made solutions in cooperation with all relevant stakeholders will be key instruments with a view to ameliorate the quality of life of citizens. Substances, gambling and other addictions also pose specific challenges to society which can only be mitigated through appropriate preventive measures such as educational and awareness programmes for school children coupled with treatment, rehabilitation and re-integration of victims into mainstream society.

Malta's Social Vision for 2035 also identifies particular vulnerable groups. Persons with Disability will remain a core priority for Government with the objective to ensure their full inclusion in society. In this regard, efforts aimed at reducing barriers, protecting against discrimination and abuse, as well as providing the necessary services and spaces that allow persons with disability to live fulfilling lives within the community need to be sustained. Within this context, Malta's Social Vision aspires to ensure that persons with disability are provided with the freedom of choice in all aspects of their individual life.
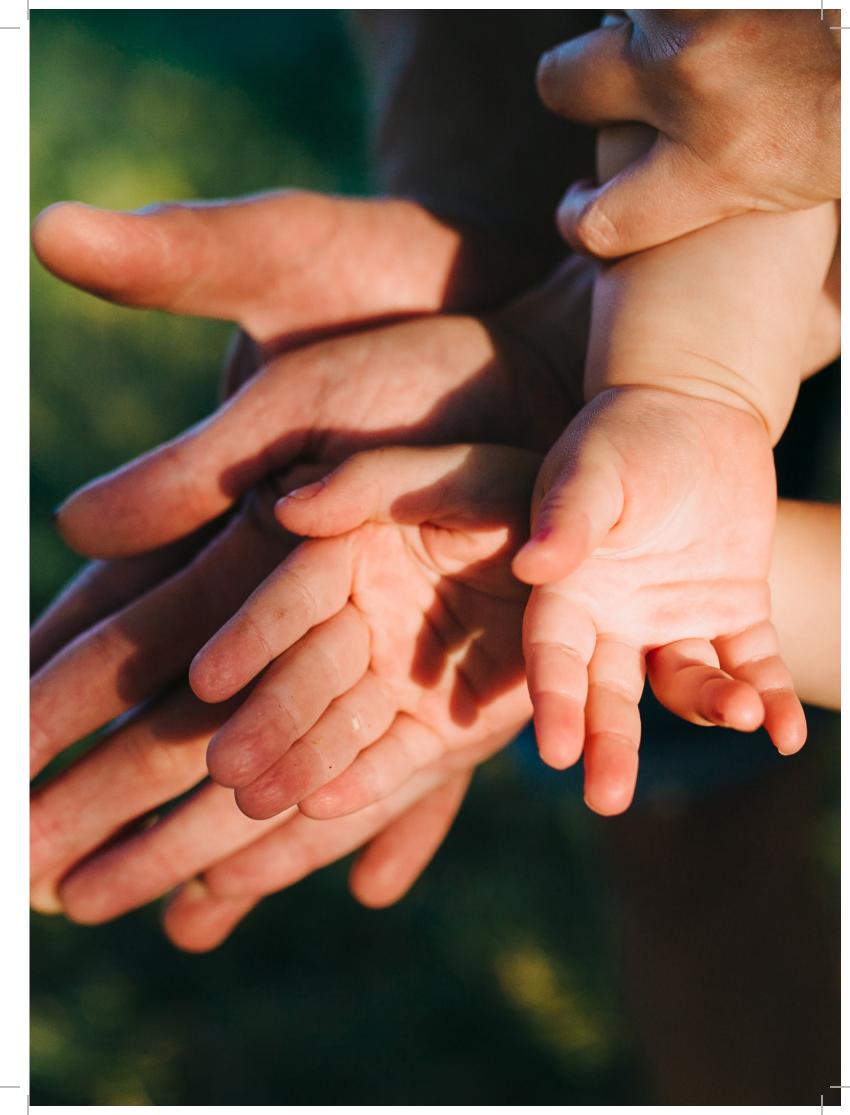
Malta is currently a leading State in terms of the protection and promotion of the rights and wellbeing of the LGBTIQ community. Notwithstanding, further efforts are required for LGBTIQ persons to be fully included into society. Malta's Social Vision aspires for a society which ensures that all citizens have equal opportunities to realise their full potential. The same efforts are

also relevant for ex-offenders. In fact, Malta's Vision of an inclusive society also looks at the re-integration of ex-offenders, and their families, into mainstream society. The re-integration process starts from the prosecution stage to post-release support and aspires to promote the general wellbeing of the persons concerned and reduce the risk of poverty, social exclusion, and re-entry into the prison environment.

Migration is also shaping Maltese society. This multi-variate phenomenon has an impact on Maltese society, the economy and the labour market; and is expected to continue in the years to come. In this regard, Malta's Vision acknowledges the importance of addressing the challenges emanating from migration with a view to maximising both the benefits of migration to society as well as the wellbeing of migrants residing in Malta.

Violence, abuse and exploitation are challenges which are expected to continue to impinge on Maltese society and thus need to be appropriately addressed both in terms of policy instruments and measures. The need to invest in preventive measures, coupled with appropriate reporting and intervention measures is key. Furthermore, Government aspires to develop a person-centred approach which provides timely, tailor-made support to victims particularly where children and the elderly are concerned.

The above selected social themes are a cross-cutting representation of contemporary realities within society that citizens encounter. Notwithstanding, there are other vulnerable groups such as women, which have been tackled in a horizontal manner across all thematic areas. Clearly, Malta's Social Vision for 2035 needs to be built around the needs of the citizen and should meet the aspirations for Maltese society for the future.

COMMON ASPECTS

The consultation meetings highlighted a number of common overarching principles and themes. The emergent principles correspond to numerous qualities that are envisaged for society as a whole, that should also be phased towards the individual.

The below figure represents a visualisation of the most frequent and pertinent principles considered by stakeholders as characterizing an 'ideal' Maltese society in 2035.

In the coming years, Malta will endeavour to combat the barriers brought about by rapid socio-economic and cultural changes, diversity, and complex threats to social inclusion. Addressing the common challenges and opportunities will lead to an active, resilient and inclusive society.

REFLECTIONS FROM THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

The feedback received throughout the whole consultation processes (as described above) has resulted in exceptionally valuable feedback that has significantly enriched the Social Vision for Malta 2035. Throughout all the consultation phases three prominent questions have been addressed:

During the development of the Vision document, three important questions have arisen, which guided the consultation initiatives of Malta's Social Vision, namely:

- Where are we now?
- Where do we want to go? and
- How will we get there?

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

The consultation processes aided in establishing the main characterstics of the current state of play within the Maltese Islands as outlined below:

RAPID CHANGE – the current situation is a result of rapid developments over recent years. Globalisation, digitalisation, and socio-demographic changes are some of the main contributors towards this change.

DIVERSITY – Maltese society is diverse and will continue to diversify mainly as a result of globalisation. Mirroring the global reality, the Maltese Islands have become a melting pot of numerous nationalities, cultures, abilities, sexual orientations and gender identities. Therefore, a multitude of belief systems, norms, and cultures coexist and bring with them different realities which need to be considered in the development of Social Policy.

COMPLEX ISSUES – The challenges currently being faced by Maltese society are vast, complex, and multi-dimensional. Poverty and social exclusion, addiction, disability, migration, violence and exploitation require tailor made approaches which are expected to change over time.

WHERE DO WE WANT TO GO?

Cognizant of where we are now, the next step is to determine where we want to go. In this regard, during the consultation phases the following elements were identified:

RESILIENCE – a resilient society capable of converting challenges into opportunities; and existing weaknesses into strengths.

ACTIVE SOCIETY – the importance of active citizenship in policy design and the design of measures is of utmost importance with a view to ensure that challenges are addressed in a meaningful manner which meet citizens' demand.

AN INCLUSIVE SOCIETY – a society which is inclusive by design which prevails over differences in race, gender, class, generation and geography.

HOW WILL WE GET THERE?

Government will act as a provider and enabler with a view to create a resilient, active and inclusive society. In this regard, the following principles have guided for the development of policy within the social sphere:

PERSON-CENTRED – develop policies and measures around the needs of the citizens.

ACCESSIBLE – ensure that policy instruments and initiatives are accessible to all; and

SUSTAINABLE – an effective Social Vision is one that will withstand the test of time. In this regard, social policy and service provision need to be proactive, innovative, and must acknowledge their impact on individuals and society both in the 'here and now', as well as in the medium- to long-term.

A FOCUS ON THE MAIN THEMES

POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

Local Context

In recent years, Malta experienced a decreasing trend for the At-Risk-Of-Poverty and Social Exclusion (AROPE) rate (from 22.2% in 2015 falling to 20.3% in 2021)[1], lower when compared to the EU average (21.7% in 2021)[2].

The principle of "Making Work Pay" has been at the heart of labour market measures intended to tackle poverty, with the objective of having regular, stable and high-quality employment. In 2021, the share of unemployed persons who are experiencing poverty and social exclusion stood at 56.7%[3] whilst persons who suffer in-work poverty stood at 7.4% in 2020 and 7.3% in 2021[4].

In 2021, persons at risk of poverty rate with low education levels stood at 30.3%[5]. Education has a significant impact on a person's poverty risk. In fact, persons with a tertiary education are much less likely to fall below the poverty thresholds than persons with a secondary or lower level of education. Moreover, the impact of education appears to be generational, meaning that persons born to parents with a lower education levels are more likely to fall below the poverty threshold.

Child poverty has registered a decreasing trend[6]; however children facing the highest risk of poverty and social exclusion were those whose parents were either single (52.6%)[7] , low- skilled (44.6%)[8] , or foreign-born (24.7% compared to 18.9% for Maltese-born children)[9].

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1 The AROPE indicator was modified, following an update in two of its three components. The Severe Material Deprivation (SMD) indicator was replaced with the Severe Material and Social Deprivation (SMSD) indicator, with the main change being the inclusion of social deprivation items apart from items already included on material deprivation. The (quasi-)jobless household indicator, also known as the Work Intensity (WI) indicator, extended its coverage to persons aged 18-64 years instead of 18-59 years. Source: Eurostat. 14 September 2022. People at risk of poverty or social exclusion by age and sex - ILC_PEPS01N. Accessed at: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ILC_PEPS01N__custom_3116603/default/table?lang=en [Accessed on 22/09/2022]

2 Eurostat. 14 September 2022. People at risk of poverty or social exclusion by age and sex - ILC_PEPS01N. Accessed at: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ILC_PEPS01N__custom_3116603/default/table?lang=en [Accessed on 22/09/2022]

3 Eurostat. 14 September 2022. Persons at risk of poverty or social exclusion by most frequent activity status (population aged 18 and over) - ILC_PEPS02N. Accessed at: https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=ilc_peps02n&lang=en [Accessed on 28/09/2022]

4 Eurostat. 14 September 2022. In-work at-risk-of-poverty rate by age and sex - ILC_IW01. Accessed at: https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=ilc_iw01&lang=en [Accessed on 28/09/2022]

5 Eurostat. 14 September 2022. Persons at risk of poverty or social exclusion by educational attainment level (population aged 18 and over) - ILC_PEPS04N Accessed at: https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=ilc_peps04n&lang=en [Accessed on 28/09/2022]

6 In 2021, child poverty stood at 23.2%, whereas in 2015 it stood at 27.8%.

7 NSO. 13 September 2022. EU-SILC 2021: Salient Indicators. Available at: https://nso.gov.mt/en/News_Releases/Documents/2022/09/News2022_162.pdf [Accessed on 28/09/2022]

8 Eurostat. 14 September 2022. Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion by educational attainment level of their parents (population aged 0 to 17 years) - ILC_PEPS60N. Accessed at: https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=ilc_peps60n&lang=en [Accessed on 28/09/2022]

9 Eurostat. 14 September 2022. At risk of poverty rate for children by citizenship of their parents - ILC_LI33. Accessed at: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ilc_li33/default/table?lang=en [Accessed on 22/09/2022]

Some challenges also persist when it comes to people aged 65 or over; Malta's AROPE for the elderly stood at 29.9% in 2021 (28.5% in 2020 and 30.7% in 2019)[10] . Despite pensions increasing annually over the last few years, wages have increased at a higher rate. The issue is further accentuated by the fact that many Maltese women did not accrue pension entitlements, thus most pensioner households in Malta depend on one pension.

Government is committed towards sustaining its efforts to combat poverty and social exclusion. In this regard, in line with the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan, Malta has set a 3.1% national target (from the 2019 baseline) to reduce the number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE) by 2030.

Current Policy Framework

The National Strategic Policy for Poverty Reduction and for Social Inclusion (2014-2024) addresses six dimensions of well-being: income and social benefits, education, employment, health and environment, social services, and culture. This strategic policy document is complemented by the Strategy for Retirement and Finance Capability: Knowledge, Planning which aims to improve the financial literacy of people in Malta in order to enable them to reach better informed financial decisions that fit their individual circumstances.

Government's main instrument in the fight against poverty and social exclusion is the national social protection system. Malta's Social Protection System is purposely designed to safeguard society against the social risks in relation to individual, familial and societal wellbeing. Poverty, social exclusion, sickness, disability, old age and unemployment represent some of the social risks many people face in their lifetime and which Malta's social protection system aims to counteract.

Government also provides a number of social services and social support through specialised entities. In particular, the Foundation for Social Welfare Services (FSWS) was set up to empower and assist individuals to become responsible, integrated and productive members of society for self-actualisation. This is consistent with the real and emerging needs of children, families and the community with a view to contribute towards mitigating against social exclusion. In addition, Government provides support to vulnerable individuals and families through the provision of food and other materials. In fact, the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (which is financed by the EU), aims to alleviate food and material deprivation by providing non-financial assistance to vulnerable citizens. Similarly, the State Funded Food Distribution Scheme (SFFD) caters for the persons most in need.

Our Vision

The fight against poverty and social exclusion will remain a challenge and a priority. Based on the principles of social justice, it is vital to pledge a decent and dignified life to all individuals while ensuring that no one is left behind. Acknowledging that different people have different needs, Government will strive to ensure that the most vulnerable persons have the necessary support. National economic growth is one of the most effective instruments that can reduce poverty and

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10   Eurostat. 14 September 2022. People at risk of poverty or social exclusion by age and sex - ILC_PEPS01N. Accessed at: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ILC_PEPS01N__custom_3116603/default/table?lang=en [Accessed on 22/09/2022]

improve quality of life. In this regard, economic growth must be inclusive to provide sustainable jobs and promote equality. Thus, it is crucial to combine inclusive growth promoting policies which enable vulnerable persons to participate fully in the opportunities created and subsequently contribute within the labour market. In this regard, cooperatives, in particular social cooperatives, may be an instrument which can contribute towards increasing economic participation of vulnerable groups by allowing them to own their place of work together with others.

The continued investment in appropriate policy tools, training for professionals and workers in the social field and in Malta's social protection system are essential to create the foundations for a more just, equitable and inclusive society. Through an appropriate dialogue, involving all relevant stakeholders, efforts will be made to adequately address societal needs and provide appropriate support to individuals who have the will and capacity to make it on their own. Government is nevertheless cognizant that there are pockets of society who require support through social assistance for a decent living. Thus, efforts towards the adequate provision of social assistance towards these target groups will remain a priority.

Furthermore, it is imperative to ensure that social benefits and services are channelled to the most vulnerable and that beneficiaries have the necessary skills and capabilities to utilise such funds in the most efficient and effective manner. Within this context a review of the adequacy of a number of social benefits will allow a better channelling and utilisation of national funds.

Access to education and training has a significant impact on a person's social well-being and the related poverty risk. Education is the key to combat generational poverty and to give better chances of success to children who are born in families with less-than-average income including investment in life-skills education. In this regard, it is of utmost importance to ensure that citizens have the necessary life skills which enable them to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday[11]. Furthermore, efforts are also required to focus on safeguarding the physical, psychological (mental health), and social wellbeing when designing policies and provide the necessary support to enable them to succeed.
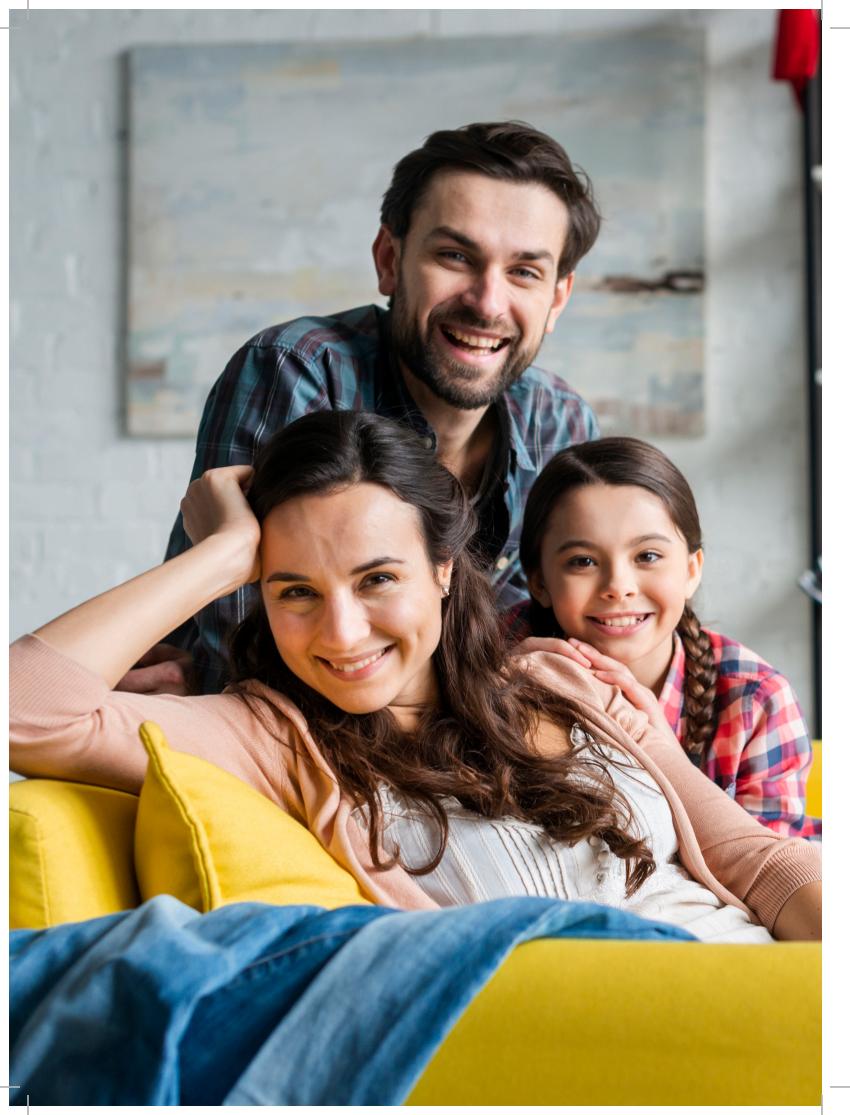
Future Policy Goals

1.   Strengthen the fight against poverty through appropriate policy instruments, strategies and action plans, in collaboration with relevant stakeholders, which are translated in tangible measures implemented for the benefit of the citizens.

2.   Strengthen Government collaboration with relevant stakeholders including academia, NGOs, and civil society, with a view to better understanding the needs on the ground.

3.   Support persons at risk of poverty through appropriate tailor-made inclusive education and training initiatives as a means to break the poverty cycle.

4.   Strengthen efforts towards the promotion of voluntary work and cooperatives that aim to support persons living in poverty.

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11   The World Health Organization (WHO) defined Life Skills as "the abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday". Source: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. No date. Prevention: Life & Social Skills. Accessed at: https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/prevention/life-and-social-skills.html [Accessed on 22/09/2022]

FAMILIES

Local Context

Families are the basis of society. This social grouping of kin provides a nurturing environment, socialisation, and support to each other. Furthermore, the family is the primary institution for childrearing and thus, social investment in the family is necessary to support the healthy development of the next generation.

Marriages and civil unions in Malta are subject to the provisions of the Marriage Act. Changing societal dynamics led to the introduction of divorce in Malta in 2011, followed by other laws that widened the accessibility to the right to a family life. Contemporary concepts of family and household are diverging and may or may not involve legal, biological, or intergenerational ties.

Households consisting of couples are very heterogeneous and may take the form of the traditional nuclear family: with or without children, including adopted and fostered children; retirees and empty nesters; but may also include same sex couples, blended families, and cohabiting couples. Maltese youth are some of the last to leave the family home in the EU. This may be a result of various factors including geographical limitations, cultural factors, and the high cost of home ownership or rentals amongst others. Despite a recent reduction in the number of marriages registered, one should recognise that marriage still remains very important in Malta's contemporary social context. Although cohabitation rates in Malta increased between 2007 and 2017, at under 2% of household Malta remains among the lowest in Europe[12]. Similarly, Malta has the lowest divorce rate in the EU, reflecting the relatively recent introduction of divorce in 2011, and also the strict criteria in place to obtain a divorce.

While earlier family forms were generally characterised by greater stability and homogeneity, contemporary society has seen the emergence of new trends, including the decline of the nuclear family and the increase in single-parent, multi-cultural and blended families.

Other social and economic factors, such as the increase in female participation in the labour market and increasing educational attainment, have resulted in a delay in the marriage age and childbirth. As a result of this increase in female employment, policy measures were required to support the work–life balance of parents, while also possibly encouraging the fertility rate to improve. To encourage and support childbearing, various pro-natal measures have been introduced, including the introduction of Assisted Reproduction Technology (ART), amongst others.

In 2022 Government legal amendments[13] in relation to the paternity leave, parental leave and carer's leave have been introduced to better support a work-life balance, encourage a more equal sharing of parental leave, and to address women's underrepresentation in the labour market.

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12   European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions. Eurofound. 2019. Quality of Life: Household composition and well-being: Research Report. Accessed at: https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ef_publication/field_ef_document/ef19040en.pdf [Accessed on 22/09/2022]

13   Government of Malta: doi.gov.mt. Press Release by the Parliamentary Secretariat for Social Dialogue: Enhancing the quality of life: Introducing new rights. Accessed at: https://www.gov.mt/en/Government/DOI/Press%20Releases/Pages/2022/07/12/pr220943en.aspx [Accessed on 22/09/2022]

With recent amendments, paternity leave has been increased to 10 days fully paid, carers' leave to support a family relative has been set at five days fully paid and paid parental leave has been introduced for two months (the other two months can still be availed of but without payment). Furthermore, parents of children under eight can request flexible work.

Current Policy Framework

The main policy on families in Malta is the National Strategic Policy for Positive Parenting 2016-2024, based upon a positive approach to parenting that is considered an investment in the future of Maltese society. This approach prioritises children's best interests to help them grow in a safe environment conducive to their healthy development, while providing all the necessary guidance and support. Irrespective of the type of family formation, family policies need to underpin the significance that families should have – in providing a healthy and nurturing environment, which promote individual well-being and community cohesion.

Our Vision

Families are affected, directly and indirectly, by policies in many areas within and beyond the social field. Malta's Social Vision aspires to provide an overarching framework for the continued support and strengthening of the family in Maltese society. Keeping in mind the diverse family forms, and emerging changes within society, the Social Vision will aim towards families to be supported with a view to be resilient and better manage life challenges. In a society with an ever-increasing diverse family structure, it is also essential to ensure that there is no discriminatory treatment between family formation types or against any of their members.

Families need to be enabled to develop their socio-economic and psycho-social capacities to the full, to fulfil their aspirations, and to meet their economic and material needs. Within this context, support to families through the provision of adequate family services are becoming increasingly relevant in today's realities and need to be further consolidated. Support services to families need primarily to factor in the needs of family relationships, reflecting the diversity of family forms and made fully accessible to all.

Policies and initiatives also need to take into account the emerging forms of family arrangements and their needs. Similarly, employers need to be more sensitised about contemporary challenges faced by families. Efforts to make a culture change towards a business environment which is more appreciative of family needs are required. The economic and material needs of the family need to be seen within the context of the changing world of work, the changes of traditional gender roles, and the importance of an appropriate work-life balance.

A fundamental factor that needs to be taken into consideration in the medium to long- term is the impact of demographic trends. The three fundamental variables that will affect Maltese society are fertility, life expectancy and migration. These variables need to be taken into account appropriately in future policies.

More efforts are also required towards improving the quality of the environment, in particular the creation of recreational spaces for families, such as more open spaces which are safe for children. The safeguarding of the environment, together with good management practices to protect our natural resources are key factors in providing a sustainable and a healthy future to society.
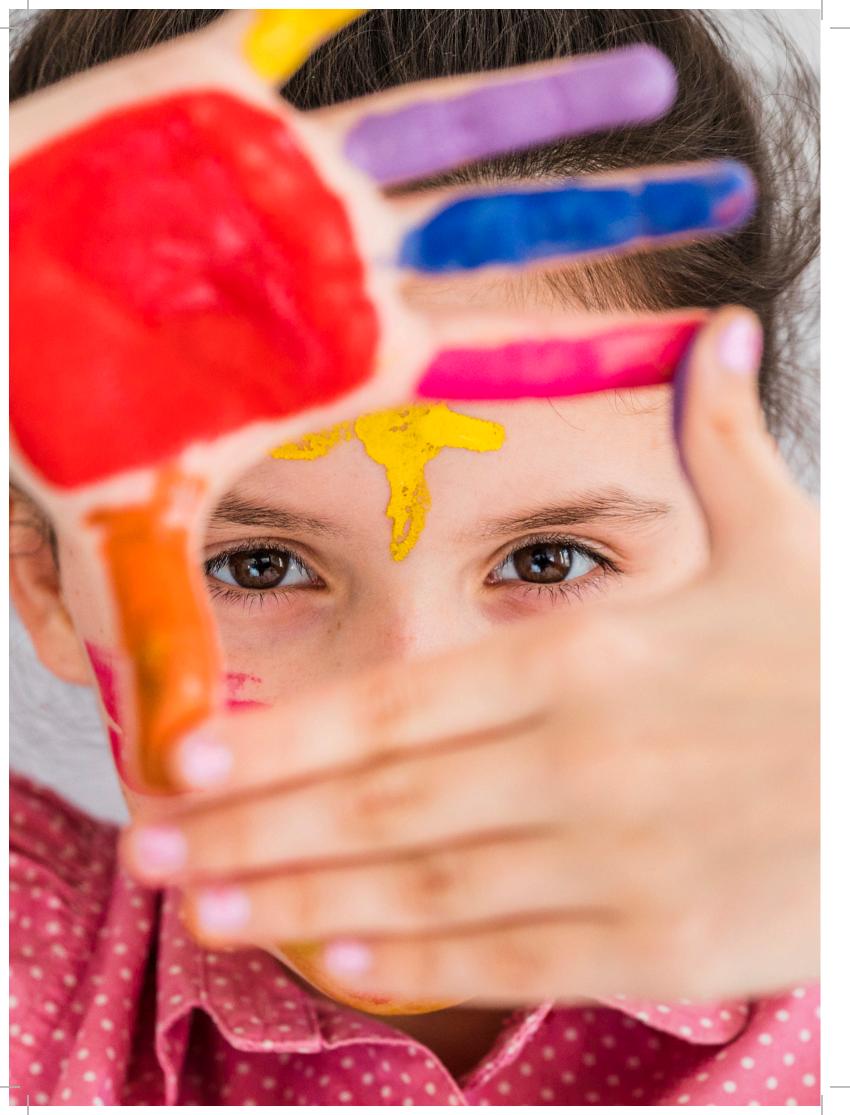
Government aspires that families are equipped to face current and future challenges and are resilient enough to address these challenges. Government's Vision aspires to strengthen the social support network that families provide. Families should be a source of social capital for future generations, to provide meaningful, life enhancing relationships at home, at the place of work and in society.

Future Policy Goals

1.   Provide families with the necessary support services, environment, skills and abilities to better manage challenges through appropriate policy instruments, strategies and action plans, also promoting a preventative approach.

2.   Create an environment which supports families (particularly during child rearing years) during the life course and promotes work life balance.

3.   Design appropriate policies together with informative outreach campaigns which reflect the ever-changing diversities among families and inform the public on available support services.

CHILDHOOD

Local Context

In 2019, children (0-17 years) made up 15.9% (81,948) of the total population, contributing to the second lowest share of children amongst EU countries[14]. The total child population is projected to increase to 16% (94,306 children) by 2030[15]. Government's children's policy has always been to recognise, respect and promote children's rights and overall wellbeing. Within this context, the priority of the current National Children's Policy is to ensure that all children, particularly those disadvantaged or at risk of marginalisation, are protected, nurtured and enabled to maximise their potential.

Children's Wellbeing

Poverty or social exclusion among children declined from 27.8% in 2015 to 23.2% in 2021[16]. Notwithstanding, a higher risk of poverty is recorded among migrant children, children experiencing housing exclusion, children of single-parent, as well as large and low to medium-skilled families[17].

Children's wellbeing and attainment are steered by their socio-economic situation and equality of opportunity. This is heavily influenced by the family's socio-economic background and children's access to subjective wellbeing such as: material possessions, family, home, health and safety, classmates and school life, play and leisure activities, the environment and neighbourhood, participation, autonomy and future prospects.

Children have experienced further challenges brought about by the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic mainly due to school closures and social distancing. This period emphasised the importance of primarily securing children's wellbeing through synergies among families, communities and services.

Family and Home

When compared to other countries, children in Malta live in relatively smaller families, with lower number of grandparents and siblings per household. In 2019, the most common type of household with dependent children was made up of two adults and one dependent child[18], while single parent households increased[19].

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14   NSO. 19 November 2020. News Release 186/2020: World Children's Day. Accessed at: https://nso.gov.mt/en/News_Releases/Documents/2020/11/News2020_186.pdf (News Release); https://nso.gov.mt/en/News_Releases/Documents/2020/11/News2020_186.xls (Spreadsheet) [Accessed on 22/09/2022]

15   Ibid.

16   Eurostat. 14 September 2022. People at risk of poverty or social exclusion by age and sex - ILC_PEPS01N. Accessed at: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ILC_PEPS01N__custom_3116603/default/table?lang=en [Accessed on 22/09/2022]

17   European Commission. 2019. Country Report Malta. Accessed at: https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/fileimport/2019-european-semester-country-report-malta_en.pdf [Accessed on 22/09/2022]

18   European Commission. 2019. Country Report Malta. Accessed at: https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/fileimport/2019-european-semester-country-report-malta_en.pdf [Accessed on 22/09/2022]

19   NSO. 2016-2020. EU-SILC: Main Dwellings. Accessed at: https://nso.gov.mt/en/Pages/NSO-Home.aspx [Accessed on 22/09/2022]

While the majority of children lived in households, 510 children lived in out-of-home care in 2019. During 2017/2018, the majority of children aged 11-15 years lived with both parents (76.3%), 15.4% lived with a single parent, 6.2% lived with a stepfamily and 2.1% had other family living arrangements such as fostering or were under the care of non-parental family members[20]. The 2020 Minor Protection (Alternative Care) Act reflects the State's commitment to ensure that children in Malta are safeguarded from all forms of maltreatment. Alternative Care is provided by the Government to safeguard the wellbeing of all children (0-17 years) in out of home care, vulnerable youths and young adults. In 2021 a total number of 501 children and young adults were living in alternative care.

Balancing work and family life (mainly through family-friendly measures) has moved up the national agenda in recent years. The provision of free formal child-care has increased and is being applied earlier in the life of the child. This has contributed towards an increase in female employment as well as provided opportunities for females to further their studies.

Health

All children in Malta have access to free healthcare services. Government has consistently invested in the health of all children from the early stages of development. Child healthcare provisions are delivered during pregnancy, childbirth, the neonatal period as well as during childhood.

Malta has high childhood vaccination coverage and low rates of smoking and second-hand smoking among children[21]. However, obesity and overweight issues, lack of physical activity coupled with intensive electronic media communication and problematic social media use, as well as binge drinking are major public health issues among children in Malta, which are seen to pose significant negative impacts on adulthood[22].

Education

Government provides free education to all children. Primary schools can be found in all the main towns or villages in Malta and Gozo. Furthermore, the provision of free transport to and from school is also another measure aimed at ensuring improved access to schools.

Around two-thirds of children aged 2-4 years attend pre-primary education (kindergarten). On the other hand, almost all children falling within the 5-16 years age group attend compulsory primary and secondary schools. Although school absence is low; this has been increasing yearly. Eighty per cent of children aged 15-17 years participate in post-secondary education exclusively while only a small number of students do so in conjunction with employment or are exclusively in employment[23].

20   World Health Organization. WHO. 2020. Spotlight on Adolescent Health and Well-being: Findings from the 2017/2018 Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children Survey in Europe and Canada: International Report: Volume 2. Key Data. Accessed at: https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/332104/9789289055017-eng.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y [Accessed on 22/09/2022]

21   European Commission, OECD and WHO. 2019. State of Health in the EU: Malta Country Health Profile 2019. Accessed at: https://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0005/419468/Country-Health-Profile-2019-Malta.pdf [Accessed on 22/09/2022]

22   Ibid.

23   Eurostat. 11 May 2022. Participation rate of young people in education and training by sex, age and labour status (incl. NEET rates) - EDAT_LFSE_18. Accessed at: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/edat_lfse_18/default/table?lang=en [Accessed on 22/09/2022]

Fifteen-year-olds in Malta have low attainment scores in reading and mathematics skills as well as social skills (making friends at school), while experiencing high schoolwork pressure[24]. Similarly, the rate of those not in education, employment or training (NEETs)[25] and the rate of early school leavers (ESL)[26] are still major concerns, despite the gradual and remarkable decreases along the years. Of particular note is the gender difference in ESL which is higher for males, and NEETs that is higher for females[27].

Play, Leisure, Culture, Spirituality and Democratic Participation

Play, leisure, culture, spirituality and participation are vital for a healthy child's development and a happy childhood. The lack of safe open spaces, the increase of digitalisation mainly due to the pandemic, as well as schoolwork pressures (with an average of 91% of children's time spent on homework), are resulting in children's sedentary behaviour[28], with many never exercising or doing sports[29].

Current Policy Framework

The National Children's Policy sets a number of objectives for safeguarding and promoting the rights and general wellbeing of children. This Policy addresses the needs of children through five main dimensions, namely: home environment, social wellbeing, health and environment, education and employment, and leisure and culture.

Alongside this framework, there are two other national policies relating to children's rights, namely the:

- National Strategic Policy for Positive Parenting 2016-2024: which aims to support parents/guardians in various ways to fulfil their role to the best of their abilities; and

- National Adoption Strategy for Children and their Families 2019-2022: which aims at consolidating and expanding efforts to improve services for currently adopted children and their families as well as prospective adoptive families and children.

24   UNICEF: Office of Research - Innocenti. 2020. Innocenti Report Card 16: Worlds of influence: Understanding What Shapes Child Wellbeing in Rich Countries. Accessed at: https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/Report-Card-16-Worlds-of-Influence-child-wellbeing.pdf [Accessed on 22/09/2022]

25   Eurostat. 11 May 2022. Participation rate of young people in education and training by sex, age and labour status (incl. NEET rates) - EDAT_LFSE_18. Accessed at: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/edat_lfse_18/default/table?lang=en [Accessed on 22/09/2022]

26   Eurostat. 28 April 2022. Early leavers from education and training (ESL) by sex and labour status – EDAT_LFSE_14. Accessed at: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/edat_lfse_14/default/table?lang=en [Accessed on 22/09/2022]

27   Ibid.

28   University of Malta: Centre for Resilience and Socio-Emotional Health. 2020. International survey of children's subjective wellbeing. Accessed at: https://www.um.edu.mt/library/oar/bitstream/123456789/60621/4/ISCWEB%20National%20Report%202020.pdf [Accessed on 22/09/2022]

29   Mater Dei Hospital, Staffordshire University and University of Malta. July 2020. Evaluation of the levels of physical activity amongst Primary school children in Malta. Accessed at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/342877224_Evaluation_of_the_levels_of_physical_activity_amongst_Primary_school_children_in_Malta [Accessed on 22/09/2022]

Our Vision

Malta's Social Vision for 2035 aspires to improve the experience of childhood by providing the necessary support so children may enjoy a good quality of life and grow to realise their full potential.

Family

Parents (or guardians) are the primary source of care and education. It is therefore crucial to provide the necessary support and flexibility to parents (or guardians) to be able to nurture their children in the best possible way. Within this context, a suitable environment, an adequate income, and family friendly measures are key. High quality positive parenting and home education, characterised by values and skills, will enable children to maximise their potential.

During the formative childhood years, the Social Vision 2035 recognises the importance of play (particularly in open spaces) to harness physical activity and expend energy while keeping children away from excessive use of technology.

A child's relationship with their parents, even in cases of the family breaking down, is crucial. In this regard, the Social Vision 2035 aspires to ensure that all children are adequately protected from any form of parental alienation when family relationships break down.

Services

The attainment of better outcomes for children is also based on the provision of high-quality services to children, which are tailor-made across different sectors. Close coordination and collaboration among the entities working in the area of childhood are essential to complement each other's actions. In particular, it is pertinent to address the challenges faced by children and young people who live in alternative out of home care, especially children who have no option of being unified once more with their birth families.

Education and health services remain crucial during childhood. With respect to education[30], it is important to equip children, from the early stages, with the necessary skills and abilities, through innovative learning and creative environments. Preventative tools to strengthen communication with children (i.e. that facilitate how children express themselves) are important to lead to better life skills and emotional literacy.

Culture, creativity and innovation are vital for the competitiveness and development of the economy and society and are all the more important in times of rapid changes and serious challenges. The priority will remain to give the necessary space and flexibility to children to develop their full potential.

On the other hand, with respect to health; existing services need to be maintained and developed further to cater for child-specific needs (especially in relation to mental health). The promotion and encouragement of healthy behaviours and habits at an early stage of life is crucial for the

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30   Including information on children's rights.

development of healthy habits and lifestyles. More accessible programmes for children and parents in this regard will also ensure that the service provision addresses the 'source' of the problem not only the 'symptom'.

Children come into contact with the justice system in many different ways. Whether children come into contact with the law as victims, witnesses, offenders or complainants, it is equally important that the system understands and respects children's rights and their unique vulnerability. A better provision of services for children therefore also entails a child-friendly justice which embraces the idea that Government must take special care with children whose lives have become entwined in the legal system.

In this regard, Government aspires to strengthen service provision through adequate and continuous training, support and supervision for professionals working with children, especially vulnerable children.

Protection

Children require a suitable environment to be able to grow safely. Within this context, it is important to ensure the provision of a resourceful, healthy and safe environment at all times. Both the physical as well as the digital environment need to be child friendly.

Supporting child protection, prevention and intervention services and the provision of support services for families in difficulties will remain a priority.

Participation

Children's active and meaningful participation across all sectors of society is necessary to enhance their present and future prospects. Malta's Social Vision will continue to nurture, promote and support the right of children to engage in meaningful participation, by having their opinions actively sought and taken into consideration, both in national as well as international initiatives.

Future Policy Goals

1. Support families through appropriate policies and measures, that will enable parents (or guardians) to provide the best family environment for children.

2. Strengthen efforts to ensure that the provision of services for children (in particular health and education) provides better opportunities for children to maximise their life prospects. The priority will remain to give the necessary space and flexibility to children to develop their full potential.

3. Promote and support the right of children to meaningful participation, by having their opinions actively sought and taken into consideration in institutions and systems at various levels and spheres of society.

4. Ensure a safe physical and digital environment for children that safeguards child protection which is complemented with appropriate initiatives aimed to educate both children and parents/guardians.

YOUTH

Local Context

Youth play a key role in the development of society; thus, Government has endeavoured to foster the right environment for youth to develop and flourish. The youth population (aged 13 to 30 years) has been increasing in recent years, standing at 23.3% of the total population in 2019[31].

Family

A healthy and stable family plays a crucial role in the success of young people, especially in view of the new opportunities and challenges being brought about by an ever-changing society. Positive family connections are protective factors against a range of health risk behaviours. Although the nature of relationships is changing, the continuity of family connections and a secure emotional base is crucial for the positive development of young people[32].

Statistical data shows that youth in Malta tend to live longer with their family and in fact, youths leave the parental home at a relatively late stage, with males at 30.8 years and females at 28.7 years in 2021[33]. The 2011 Census data also highlights that the mean age of the first marriage is 31.6 years for males and 30.8 years for females[34] suggesting that youth marriage is increasingly becoming less popular. While the main reasons of 'why' young people are opting to marry rather later can be due to cultural factors, greater educational and career opportunities, one should not neglect the fact that youths are also facing financial constraints related to limited access to affordable housing[35,36].

Education

Youth years are usually characterised by significant investment in education, life-long skills and training. Within this context, Government has embarked on various policies and initiatives aimed at improving the quality of, and accessibility to, education and training[37]. As a result, the rates of Early School Leavers (ESL) and young persons (15-29 years) not in education or employment

31   Eurostat. 22 June 2022. Population on 1 January by age and sex - demo_pjan. Accessed at: https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=demo_pjan&lang=en [Accessed on 26/09/2022]

32   Howe, D., Brandon, M., Hinings, D. and Schofield, G. (1999). Attachment Theory, Child Maltreatment and Family Support. A Practice and Assessment Model. Palgrave: London.

33   Eurostat. 13 May 2022. Estimated average age of young people leaving the parental household by sex - YTH_DEMO_030. Accessed at: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/YTH_DEMO_030/default/table?lang=en&category=yth.yth_demo [Accessed on 26/09/2022]

34   Eurostat. 18 May 2022. Mean age at first marriage by sex - TPS00014. Accessed at: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tps00014/default/table?lang=en. [Accessed on 26/09/2022]

35   Vella, S. & Cassar, J. (2022). Young People and Family Formation in Malta. In M. Emirhaizovic et. al. (Eds.), Family Formation Among Youth in Europe: Coping with Socio-Economic Disadvantages (pp. 139-157). Information Age Publishing Inc.: Charlotte, NC.

36   Ministry for Social and Affordable Accommodation & Housing Authority. No date. The Annual Malta Residential Rental Study. Second Edition. Accessed at: https://rentregistration.mt/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Residential-Rental-Study-2nd-edition.pdf [Accessed on 26/09/2022]

37   A comprehensive list of policy documents is found on the Ministry for Education website: https://education.gov.mt/en/resources/pages/policy-documentation.aspx. [Accessed on 26/09/2022]

(NEET rate) have witnessed significant reductions between 2010 and 2021[38]. Notwithstanding, challenges still exist particularly with relation to ESL, as well as the proportion of underachieving 15-year-olds in Reading, Maths, and Science[39], which remain considerably low.

Wellbeing

There are numerous long-term physical and mental health-related consequences associated with behavioural patterns that most often begin in the youth years. These include unhealthy levels of food and drinks consumption, cigarette smoking and excessive use of digital technologies and the internet. In recent years, Government has encouraged healthy lifestyles and behaviours through targeted health promotion. Nevertheless, rates for behaviours such as alcohol or drug use and intoxication, internet and social media use, continue to be relatively high compared to other European countries. Additionally, there is a high prevalence of obesity in the Maltese context, signalling a need for more targeted action.

A strong impetus has been given to mental health in recent years, with a range of support services made available. Nonetheless, nationwide and international research illustrates that significant proportions of Maltese youth find themselves at high risk of anxiety, depression and behavioural disorders[40]. This may be attributed to various factors including familial conflict, educational pressures, bullying as well as the more recent reduction in social interaction resulting from COVID-19-related measures, amongst others.

The Community

The benefits of active engagement in the community particularly during the youth years may help reduce rates of crime and violence, addictive behaviours, school absenteeism and early school leaving. Notwithstanding, a decrease in youth participation has recently been recorded in sports, leisure, cultural, philanthropic, human rights and environmental organizations, and international youth projects. Commonly cited reasons for lower participation and activism levels are lack of time, inconvenient locations, having other interests and lack of empowerment.

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38   The proportion of Early School Leavers (ESL) stood at 25.7% in 2009 and 10.7% in 2021. The EU average in 2021 was 9.7%. Source: Eurostat. 27 September 2022. Early leavers from education and training (ESL) by sex and labour status - EDAT_LFSE_14. Accessed at: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/EDAT_LFSE_14__custom_1515755/default/table?lang=en [Accessed on 28/09/2022] The proportion of Young People Not In education or Training (NEET) stood at 14.9% in 2010 and 9.4% in 2021. The EU average in 2021 was 14.3%. Source: Eurostat. 11 May 2022. Young people neither in employment nor in education and training by sex, age and labour status (NEET rates) - EDAT_LFSE_20. Accessed at: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/product/view/edat_lfse_20?lang=en [Accessed on 28/09/2022]

39   In 2019, the proportion of 15-year-olds underachieving in Reading (Malta: 35.9%; EU: 22.5%), Maths (Malta: 30.2%; EU: 22.9%) and Science (Malta: 33.5%; EU: 22.3%). Source: Eurostat. 2020. Education and Training Monitor 2020: Malta. Accessed at: https://op.europa.eu/webpub/eac/education-and-training-monitor-2020/countries/malta.html [Accessed on 26/09/2022]

40   Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, Ministry for Health. July 2019. Building Resilience Transforming Services: A Mental Health Strategy for Malta 2020 – 2030. Accessed at: https://deputyprimeminister.gov.mt/en/Documents/National-Health-Strategies/Mental_Health_Strategy_EN.pdf [Accessed on 26/09/2022]

The Digital World

The digital world plays a key role in today's life, particularly in the lives of young persons. The 16-24-year-old age group score high amongst the EU27 countries in daily computer (Malta: 86%; EU: 77% in 2017)[41] and internet use (Malta: 98%; EU-28: 95% in 2019)[42]. A worldwide rise in the influence of social media is also reflected in the relatively large proportion of Maltese youths reporting that use of social media influences their decisions. On one hand, the online world is beneficial to youths given that it facilitates information acquisition, services, and support. On the other hand, the online world poses concerns in relation to the increased potential for online harassment and victimisation, misinformation, decline in social skills, and the impact on physical and/or mental health. Thus, taking into account the constant developments within the online world, further efforts are required with a view to maximising the opportunities offered by the online world whilst also mitigating its challenges.

Current Policy Framework

The National Youth Policy 2021-2030 aims to provide a flexible and innovative approach to encourage young people towards fulfilling their potential. The policy promotes young people at the centre of proactive policymaking, service provision and research. In this regard, the policy outlines strategic goals characterised by values such as respect, recognition, sustained support and solidarity. Furthermore, the National Youth Policy focuses on facilitating young people's transition to adulthood and the promotion of holistic wellbeing.

Malta's commitment towards bolstering youth potential is also evident in other national strategies such as the National Strategic Policy for Poverty Reduction and for Social Inclusion 2014-2024. The policy specifies both children (0-17 years) and young people (18-24 years) as two of its four main target groups and aims to promote the social inclusion of young people. This is envisaged through the implementation of measures that consolidate outreach and preventative services, enable early identification and intervention of high- risk youth, facilitate the transition from education to the labour market, and promote social participation and voluntary work among young people.

Our Vision

Malta's Social Vision for 2035 aspires to contribute towards the development of a society which embraces the needs and challenges faced by youth and enables youth to develop and become active citizens. In this regard, the Social Vision for 2035 aspires to facilitate young people's transition from family life to independent living, including through a better understanding of the challenges emanating from housing affordability youths. Within this context, Government will strive to facilitate and support as appropriate to ensure housing accessibility.

Government aims to provide the necessary support for youth to thrive, especially marginalised young people who are hard to reach via mainstream services and spaces. Within this context, education is key to provide the younger generation with the necessary knowledge and skills, including life skills, which will improve adult-life and career prospects. Within this context,

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41   Eurostat. 30 March 2022. Individuals - frequency of computer use - ISOC_CI_CFP_FU. Accessed at: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/isoc_ci_cfp_fu$DV_282/default/table?lang=en [Accessed on 26/09/2022]

42   Ibid.

Government will continue to act as an enabler in ensuring that youths are provided with the appropriate inclusive education, skills and training. In addition, further efforts are required to combat gender and other stereotypes among youths to achieve real gender equality and combat gender discrimination.

Enabling youths to live healthy lifestyles is also a key element which contributes towards improved quality of life. Thus, the consolidation of early prevention, particularly through health promotion and education, as well as intervention initiatives aimed to address health challenges faced by youths, are all considered to be a priority. In this regard, it is important to harness a culture that aims to make youth more aware of the improtance of physical and mental health well being, to recognize the benefits of physical activity and the harm caused by internet misuse(particularly social media).

Wellbeing is also dependent on the quality of the environment. The surrounding environment needs to act as an enabler for society to develop healthy lifestyles and habits in a safe manner. The surrounding environment is not solely limited to outdoor spaces but also to the family environment. In addition, the digital environment also has a significant impact on youths; thus appropriate action to ensure a safe environment where youths can develop, grow and socialise is required. Ensuring protection from harassment, victimisation, and misinformation allows youths to navigate the vast and ever-growing digital and technological world confidently, whilst reaping the benefits.
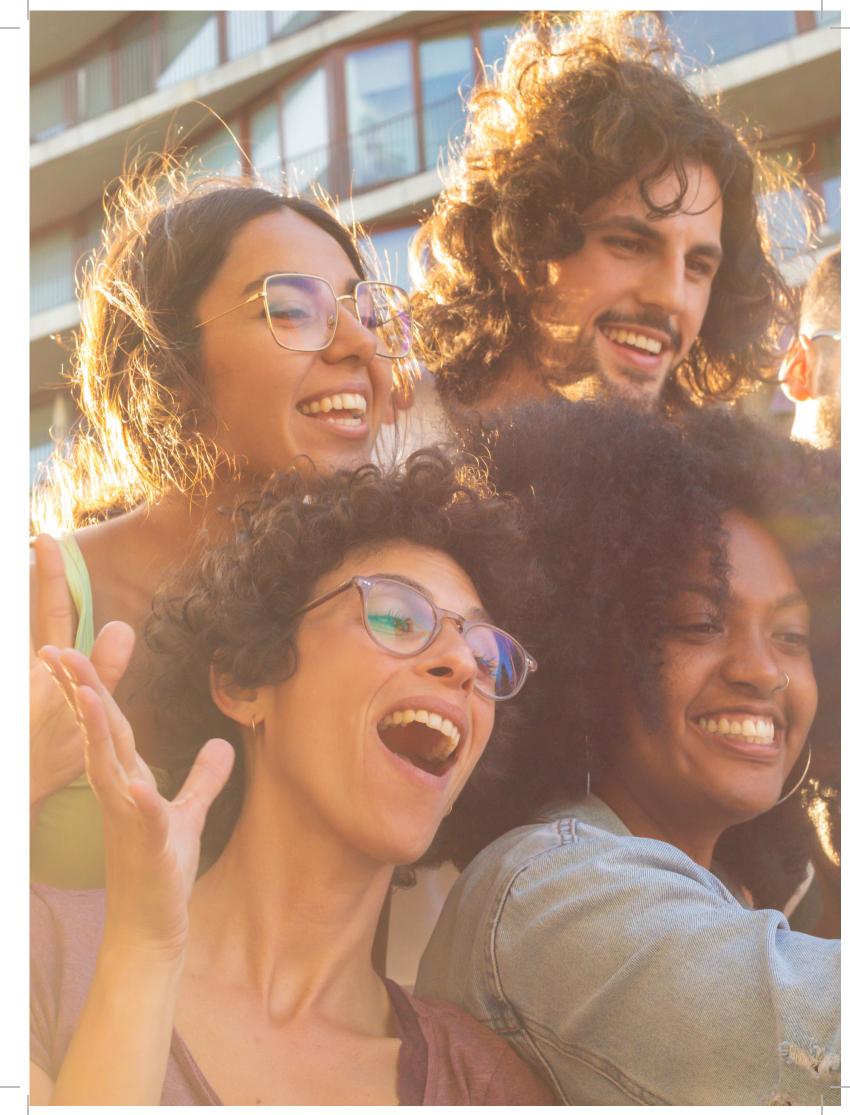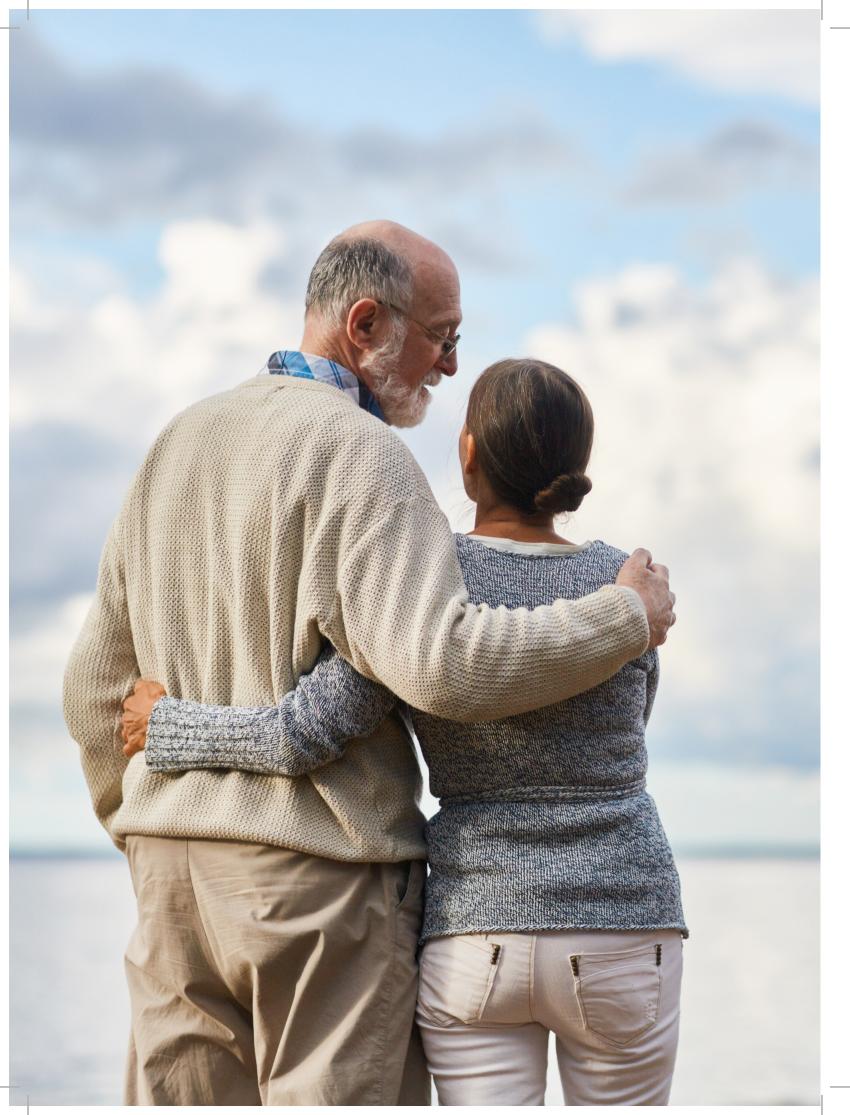
Future Policy Goals

1.   Support youths with the appropriate knowledge and skills, supported by values, through formal and informal education, which will also contribute towards improved healthy lifestyles, meaningful employment as well as physical and mental resilience.

2.   Ensure the provision of youth-centred policy development and services including the provision of adequate physical and mental health services.

3.   Capitalise on the benefits derived from digital technologies whilst ensuring that appropriate safeguards are in place.

AGEING

Local Context

Persons are today enjoying longer and healthier lives, with more active lifestyles due to the socio-economic and medical advances of recent decades. Elderly persons benefit from an improved quality of life with the expectation to live as much as possible within the community and continue to actively contribute to society including through the provision of support to their families. Furthermore, the role of older adults in contemporary society is also evolving, including working past one's statutory retirement age, and active participation in socio-cultural affairs within the community.

Projected modelling of the age structure of the population shows that the Maltese population is an ageing one. In 2019, one-fifth of Malta's population (18.7 %) was aged 65 and over[43]. An ageing population brings about several challenges, in particular in relation to productivity, the health care system and Long-Term Care (LTC). These challenges are further accentuated as a result of Malta's birth rate, which is the lowest in the EU[44].

Pensionable Income

Pensions are a fundamental income stream in old age, and during this stage of life, financial security remains primarily based on the adequacy of pension. While pensions have been strengthened over the past years, other measures have been undertaken. These include promoting the uptake of private pension schemes, vocational occupational retirement pensions and the promotion of alternative income streams. However, older adults remain poorer than the general population, reflecting gender and labour market disparities, with older women remaining particularly financially vulnerable. This is primarily reflected in the gender pensions gap, where Malta has the second largest gender pensions gap in the EU. It is worth noting that these inequalities in pensions tend to accumulate over a person's lifetime and reflect other factors such as the gender wage gap, the type of employment contract and work interruptions due to family care responsibilities that disproportionately impact women.

Long Term Care (LTC)

According to the 2021 Ageing Report, public spending on long term care is expected to increase substantially, reaching 1.5 % of GDP in 2030 and 2.0 % of GDP in 2050. Within this context, various initiatives have been introduced with a view to support elderly living within the community and prevent undesirable residential care. Such initiatives include the provision of support to enable older adults to continue to live independently in their homes rather than in residential care. These include:

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43   European Commission (Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion) & Social Protection Committee. June 2021. 2021 Long Term Care Report: Trends, challenges and opportunities in an ageing society: Vol. 1. Accessed at: https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=738&langId=en&pubId=8396 [Accessed on 26/09/2022]

44   Eurostat. 22 June 2022. Total fertility rate - TPS00199. Accessed at: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tps00199/default/table?lang=en [Accessed on 26/09/2022]

- Meals on Wheels: provision of ready cooked meals in households with a view to support older adults who are still living in their own home but are unable to prepare a meal;

- Home help: provision of assistance to older adults in performing light domestic chores and shopping; and

- Carer at Home Scheme: provision of financial support to older adults who employ a carer of their choice so as to assist them in their daily needs.

Current Policy Framework

The National Strategic Policy for Active Ageing: Malta 2014-2020 (NSPAA), acknowledges the process of ageing as a life-long process, and thus is based on the assumption that persons should be supported from earlier ages in order to maintain a healthy and active lifestyle. The Strategy is based on three major themes: active participation in the labour market, participation in society, and independent living.

The Strategy also aims to increase the labour market activation rate of older workers, while empowering persons over the statutory retirement age to remain in employment. Retention of employment directly benefits older persons as it contributes towards the reduction of the risk of poverty. Furthermore, society also stands to gain through improved pensions adequacy and skills retention within the labour market.

The NSPAA 2022-2027 addresses the challenges that hinder the formation of an active ageing society. It acknowledges that active ageing demands strong levels of social cohesion, inclusion and participation. This can be achieved by providing equal opportunities and accessibility to services relating to political, social, recreational and cultural activities.

The NSPAA 2022-2027 issued for public consultation, takes a life-course approach and presents three principal aims i.e.; social inclusion, healthy ageing, and addressing diversity/inequality. The NSPAA aspires to a socially inclusive society that caters for the needs of the elderly and where elderly people are active within their communities, while promoting the support structures necessary to sustain this.

Complementing the Active Ageing Strategic Policy is the National Strategy for Dementia in the Maltese Islands (2015-2023). Dementia leaves a substantial social, health and economic impact, with a high percentage of dementia sufferers being referred to hospital care, residential, long-term nursing and community care services. The multifaceted nature of dementia necessitates a multidisciplinary approach to dementia management and care. In this regard, the Strategy outlines the following key objectives of the increasing awareness and understanding of dementia; timely diagnosis and intervention; and improving dementia management and care, amongst others.

Our Vision

Government aspires to an inclusive society which focuses on the needs and the best interests of older adults. This can be achieved through appropriate measures aimed towards maintaining wellbeing and life satisfaction in the later years, prioritising longevity and quality of life.

Within this context, efforts to ensure that elderly persons remain active within the community will contribute towards better quality of life for citizens whilst at the same time mitigate against long term hospitalisation. In this regard, the provision of adequate support structures needs to take into account the diversity of older persons with a view to enable active ageing. In particular, the involvement of the NGO's can play an important role in supporting elderly people to remain in their home settings.

The silver economy is an asset which needs to be capitalised by society as it enriches society both from an economic and social point of view. Experience and abilities of ageing individuals add value to the social fabric. To this end, older persons need to be empowered and sustained by adequate support structures, including through adequate financial resources and services with a view to maintaining a good standard of living. Older adults need to be enabled to live an independent lifestyle that is supported by safe, accessible, reliable, and affordable services. In this regard, the setting up of elderly-run cooperatives may contribute towards utilising the skills of the elderly, amongst others.
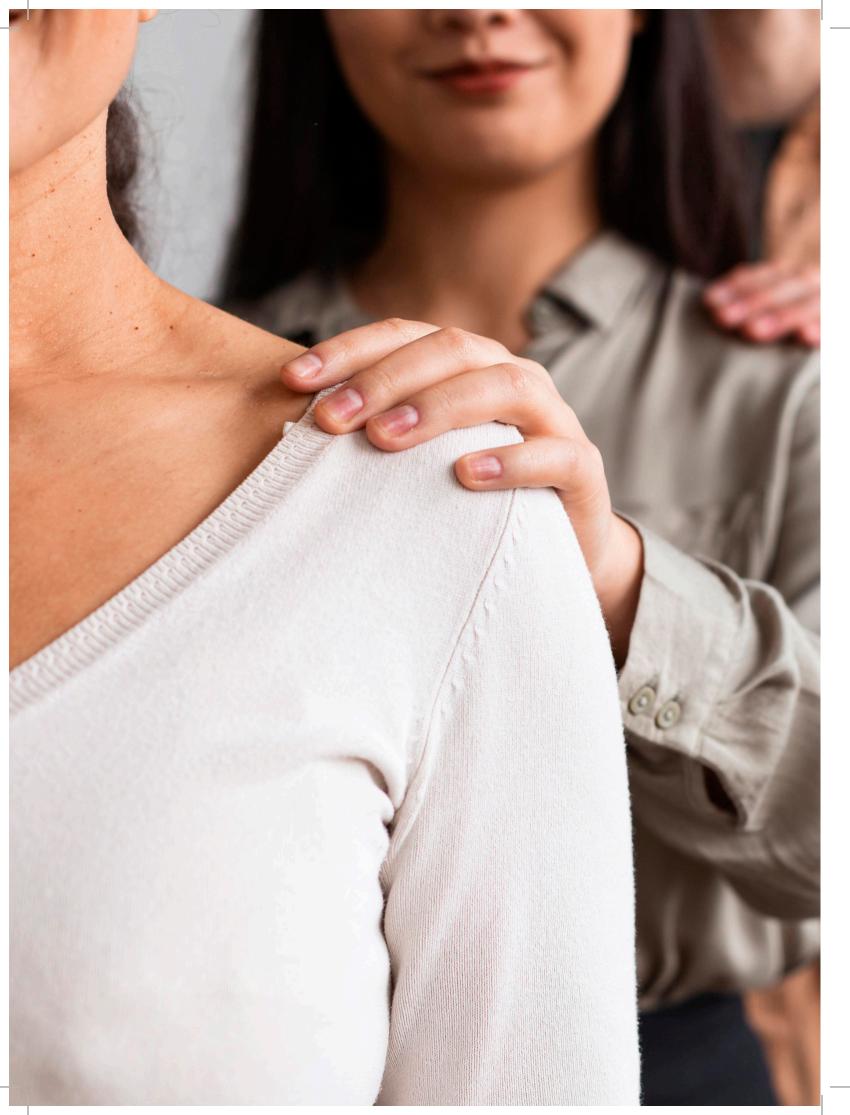
Strengthening the adequacy and sustainability of pensions will remain a challenge which requires appropriate action in the years to come. In addition, more efforts to strengthen the awareness of financial capability amongst the public are required, with the aim of increasing the importance of having, where possible, a diversified financial portfolio. Such portfolio would serve as a safety net during one's retirement stage.

Future Policy Goal

1.   Encourage an age-friendly society which focuses on the best interests of the elderly, where older persons can maintain their independence within the community as much as possible.

2.   Strengthen efforts to improve accessibility, affordability and sustainability of care and support structures for elderly persons including opportunities brought about by modern technologies.

3.   Further enhance the adequacy of income during pensionable years by means of appropriate measures targeted at younger generations in preparation for their future pensionable years.

ADDICTION TO SUBSTANCES, GAMBLING & OTHER BEHAVIOURS

Local Context

Excessive engagement in behaviours such as alcohol and other substance use, gaming, and internet use can sometimes lead to the development of addiction, and are recognised causes of avoidable negative physical and psychological and societal harms. Such harms are vast, complex and interrelated Sustained engagement in addictive behaviour can lead to several medical, legal, personal and social consequences for the individuals, their families and friends, and the community. Indeed, addiction may contribute towards the stigmatization of people who use drugs, deteriorating social and familial relationships as well as increased risks of unemployment, involvement in crime, poverty and social exclusion that can persist well into the longer term. Within this context, appropriate measures aimed to prevent the development of addictions; treatment, and the reintegration witihin society of people who become addicted need to be in place.

Alcohol and Substances

The minimum legal age for drinking alcohol in Malta is seventeen years. Evidence from the European School Survey Project (ESPAD) 2019, conducted with school children between the age of fifteen and sixteen, shows that in Malta, 82% of participants in the 2019 survey had consumed alcohol on at least one occasion in their lifetime. This indicates a decrease from the previous survey, which reported lifetime use at 86%. Notwithstanding, consumption of alcohol among school aged children still remains among the highest in Europe[45]. Furthermore, data from the Malta General Population Survey on the use of Alcohol, tobacco and other Drug Use (2013), conducted with individuals between the age of eighteen and sixty-five indicates that 76% of respondents had consumed alcohol in their lifetime. Consumption of alcohol during the previous twelve months was most common among participants aged between eighteen and twenty four (85%)[46].

Following alcohol and tobacco, cannabis is the most widely used substance in the Malta36. Data show that cannabis first time use (at 15 years old) occurs earlier than that for cocaine (at 21 years old) and heroin (at 22 years old) and is concentrated within the 18–24-year-old age bracket[47]. Data from local treatment services reveal higher shares of people who use heroin and cocaine as their primary drug within the services[48]. A high percentage of persons in treatment for heroin, cocaine and cannabis related problems are mainly men[49].

For both alcohol and other substances, it is well known that excessive use is linked to numerous

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45   World Health Organization. WHO. 2020. 'Spotlight on Adolescent Health and Well-being. Findings from the 2017/2018 Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children Survey in Europe and Canada. International Report': Volume 1. Key Findings. Accessed at: https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/332091/9789289055000-eng.pdf [Accessed on 26/09/2022]

46   Foundation for Social Welfare Services. 2020. European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs: 2019 Malta National Report. Accessed at: https://fsws.gov.mt/en/Documents/ESPADReports/MalteseReports/ESPAD_2019%20 report%20(Digital).pdf [Accessed on 26/09/2022]

47   Malta National Focal Point for Drugs and Drug Addiction. MNFPDDA. 2019. National Report on the Drug Situation in Malta 2019. Accessed at: https://family.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Drug-Report-2019-EN.pdf [Accessed on 26/09/2022]

48   European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction. EMCDDA. 2019. Malta Country Drug Report 2019. Accessed at: https://www.emcdda.europa.eu/system/files/publications/11328/malta-cdr-2019.pdf [Accessed on 26/09/2022]

49   Ibid.

consequences and contributes significantly to health and social issues and diseases[50]. Intoxication brings negative impacts on attention, cognitive and behavioural control, whilst longer term consequences may include decreased social, familial and work-related functionality. It must also be acknowledged that some prescription drugs may also have addictive properties and are also used for non-medical purposes. Data from 1994 to 2017 suggests that the majority of local non-fatal overdoses are attributed to excessive use of pills, medicinals and alcohol, rather than the use of illicit drugs[51].

To address the challenges emanating from substance use, numerous services are available, including: prevention, harm reduction, biopsychosocial treatment and reintegration services for people who use drugs. The Department of Probation and Parole, the Correctional Services Agency, the Prison Addiction Rehabilitation Management Board and the Drug Offenders Rehabilitation Board provide support in terms of treatment and re-integration processes for people who use drugs. Furthermore, Government also provides support, through social benefits, for persons who are enrolled in drug treatment services.

Gambling and Gaming

Gaming and gambling services have increasingly become part of today's household expenditure, witnessing a €3 million increase between 2015 and 2017, standing at €128million[52]. Although gaming has contributed to economic growth over recent years, around 2% of the Maltese population engaging in some form of gambling reported negative influences on their lifestyle in 2017. Excess gaming activity can potentially develop into clinically recognizable and significant syndromes characterized by intense patterns of engagement that result in deteriorating social and familial relationships, increased risk of unemployment, poverty and social exclusion.

Malta has established itself as a leading State in terms of the protection of individuals using the services falling under the umbrella of gaming, with several mechanisms already in place intended to protect persons who experience problems with gaming. These mechanisms include: (i) local anonymous support through a dedicated helpline and online chat function; (ii) the provision of information and advice; (iii) options for setting limits to control spending, losses and playing time; (iv) the option for self-exclusion for 6 months, 1 year, or indefinitely from all land-based gaming premises in Malta by means of the Unified Self-Barring System; and (v) psychosocial aid.

Internet Use and Video-gaming

Whilst excessive internet use has not as yet been found to generate problems for individuals, their families and society as a whole[53], Malta still rates highly amongst other EU countries with respect

50   GBD 2016 Alcohol and Drug Use Collaborators. 1 November 2018. The global burden of disease attributable to alcohol and drug use in 195 countries and territories, 1990-2016: a systematic analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study 2016. Accessed at: https://www.thelancet.com/action/showPdf?pii=S2215-0366%2818%2930337-7 [Accessed on 26/09/2022]

51   MNFPDDA. 2019. National Report on the Drug Situation in Malta 2019. Accessed at: https://family.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Drug-Report-2019-EN.pdf [Accessed on 26/09/2022]

52   Malta Gaming Authority. MGA. December 2018. An Inquiry into the consumption of gambling and gaming services by Maltese residents in 2017: Economic and social considerations. Accessed at: https://www.mga.org.mt/wp-content/uploads/7426-MGA-Gaming-Survey-Report-2018_v9-visual.pdf [Accessed on 26/09/2022]

53   President's Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society. 2015. Problematic Internet Use in Malta amongst Young People Aged Between 18-30 Years: A Quantitative Study. Accessed at: https://www.um.edu.mt/library/oar/bitstream/123456789/8307/1/

to electronic media communication, internet and social media use in the youth years. Increased likelihood of engaging in excessive internet use has been associated with factors such as younger ages, and being single (not in a relationship) .

Current Policy Framework

Alcohol

In 2018, Government launched the National Alcohol Policy (NAP) which outlines 23 Policy Actions focusing on prevention, harm reduction, and law enforcement. The NAP aims to address three specific issues: excessive drinking behaviours in the younger years, excessive drinking in the general population and drink-driving. In this regard, Government has continued to mitigate against the harmful impact of alcohol through restrictions on manufacturing, labelling and advertisement, sales levels and patterns of use amongst others.

Drugs

The National Drugs Policy launched in 2008 seeks not only to improve the quality and provision of drug-related services but also to provide a more coordinated mechanism for the reduction of drug supply and, the reduction of demand and drug related harms . In this regard, 48 policy actions spanning 6 overarching pillars were identified, namely: (i) coordination; (ii) legal and judicial framework; (iii) supply reduction; (iv) demand and harm reduction (v) monitoring, evaluation, research, information and training; and (vi) international cooperation and funding. Building on the 2008 policy, a draft for a new updated policy is in the process of being developed.

Drug possession, cultivation, manufacture, administration, sale, trafficking, importation and exportation are a criminal offence. In the Maltese context, a Drug law Reform in 2015 (Chapter 537, Drug Dependence -Treatment not Imprisonment Act) has led to an approach that allows for alternative sanctioning for offences related to the possession for personal use of illicit substances in stipulated amounts. The spirit of such reform is to divert individuals who use drugs away from the criminal justice system, with a view to promote treatment.

Furthermore, in 2021 Malta legislated for the regularization of cannabis for personal use, cultivation for personal use and the regularized distribution of cannabis through Cannabis Associations, which will be regulated by the Authority for the Responsible Use of Cannabis (ARUC). The spirit of the law is to promote a harm reduction approach to cannabis use, disrupt significantly the illicit trade of cannabis, stop criminalizing and stigmatizing people who use drugs, and control the quality of cannabis being consumed.

Gaming and Gambling

The MGA is tasked with ensuring that Malta's gaming landscape is fair, responsible, safe, and secure. The Authority pays specific attention to the protection of minors and vulnerable persons, as well as the prevention of crime, fraud, and money laundering. Within this context, a set of laws and regulations have been developed that make up the regulatory framework covering activities licensed by the MGA.

Problematic%20internet%20use%20in%20malta%20amongst%20young%20people%20aged%20between%2018-30%20 years.pdf [Accessed on 26/09/2022]

Complementary Initiatives

These initiatives are complemented by the Mental Health Strategy for Malta 2020-2030 published in 2019, which references various addictive behaviours, tackling dual diagnoses, and preventing mental illness.

Our Vision

General Addictions

The field of addictions is vast, complex and multidimensional. Efforts in improving the prospects for persons experiencing any form of dependence need to be person-centred and designed around the needs of the individual. Assistance to persons with addictive behaviours should not solely focus on the health dimension but should also facilitate social reintegration and reduce stigma as well as marginalisation. Within this context, a holistic approach involving all relevant stakeholders is crucial.

A focus on preventative measures will also help to understand and address root causes and social determinants of common addictions. Efforts towards addressing stigma and current tendencies towards pathologizing certain behaviours need to be strengthened with a view to ensuring that persons suffering from addictions find the necessary support.

Alcohol and Other Substances

In relation to alcohol and other substances, it is important to strengthen approaches that decrease access to harmful and potentially addictive substances and behaviours. Such approaches require complementary measures that aim to increase access to healthier coping mechanisms and opportunities for alternative leisure. Focused efforts targeting young people are required since data continue to show that alcohol and substance use starts during adolescence and peaks between the age of eighteen and twenty four. This can be tackled through appropriate instruments including legislation and policy tools aiming towards restricting access, education[54], and prevention services targeted at young people, parents, and the general population.

Online Gaming , Gambling and Responsible Use of the Internet

Efforts aimed towards educating the general population in relation to the risks of gaming, gambling and responsible internet usage will be sustained. Taking into account the changing dynamics of the sector, appropriate policy instruments need to be studied with a view to adopting preventive and mitigation measures which attenuate the impact of gambling and gaming.

Adopting appropriate policy measures and initiatives aimed to address excessive internet use and video-gaming are also key to the protection of Maltese society from potential negative consequences. In this regard, appropriate preventive measures including appropriate alternative options for leisure, information campaigns targeted towards the general population and specific groups need to be put in place with a view to reducing screen time.

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54   Education on harmful substances' impact on health and other factors should clearly reflect the negative consequences and realities.
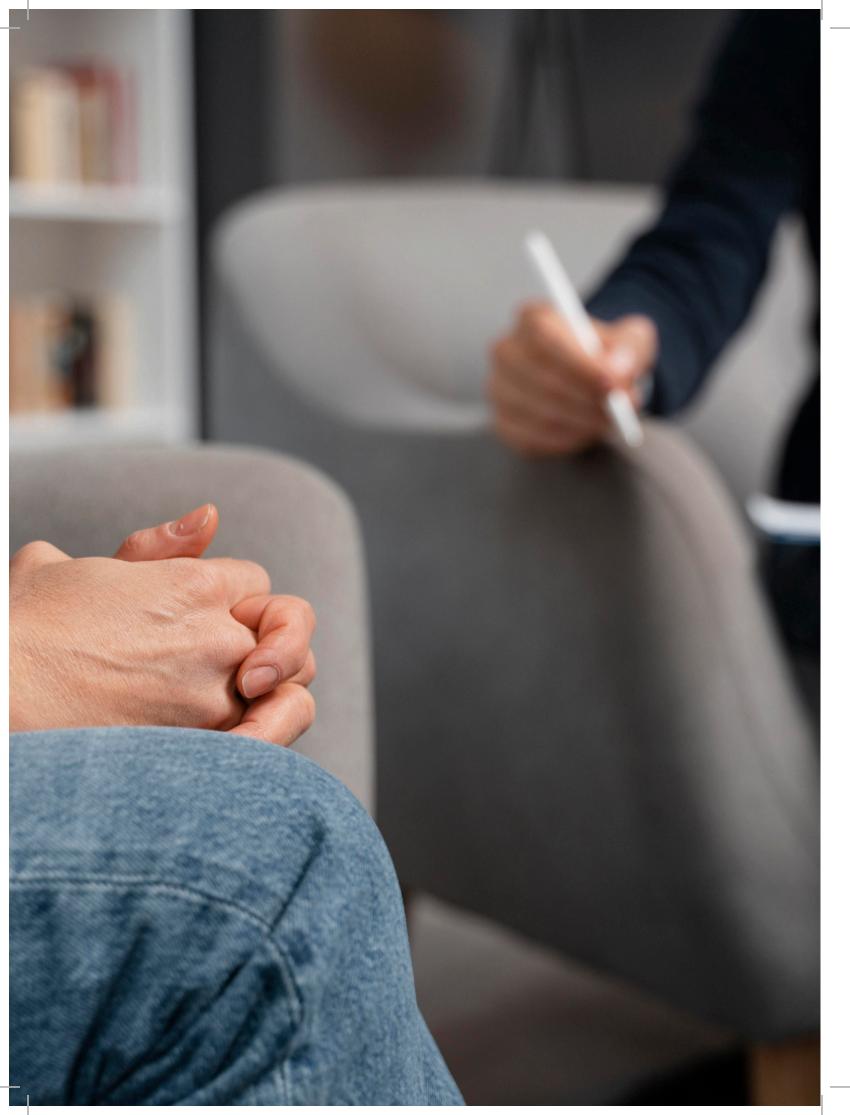
Future Policy Goals

1.   Strengthen the resilience of Maltese society against addictions of all forms through the adoption of a preventive approach.

2.   Ensure the development of personalised tailored treatment and harm reduction services that meet the needs of the individual, including rehabilitation programmes treating gambling addictions for minors.

3.   Continue to invest in the collection of National data related to the substance use and addictive behaviour with a view to continue to inform future policy initiatives.

4.   Strengthen collaboration between stakeholders with a view to addressing the impacts of addiction.

5.   Promote the best use of the potential of information technology, while prioritising health and relationships, through the development of appropriate initiatives including through educational measures including more awareness for parents in relation to internet addiction and gambling.

RE-INTEGRATION OF EX-OFFENDERS

Local Context

The convicted population in Malta has been increasing over the years, with the local correctional facilities approaching full capacity as at December 2020 with 868 inmates[55]. Conceptualisations of imprisonment have developed to reflect what is desired to be a transitional and reformative experience where re-offending is reduced through offering opportunities to lead law-abiding and self-supporting lives upon return to society[56]. Notwithstanding, such individuals face challenges that put them at risk of poverty and social exclusion upon their release, which can potentially lead to recidivism.

Individuals facing conviction are more likely to have lower levels of basic literacy and numeracy skills, and educational attainment compared to the general population. In turn, difficulties re-entering the labour market are pertinent barriers to social inclusion within this population and may face other forms of discrimination from employers. The disqualification of persons undergoing detention from pensions, benefits, or allowances payable under the Social Security Act also has an impact on the life of ex-offenders. Meanwhile, whilst available ex-prisoner hostels provide support for some individuals until they can re-integrate into the community, hostels are regularly at their capacities[57].

Inequalities are observed to be accentuated in specific inmate cohorts. For instance, women in prison suffer disproportionately from a range of physical and mental healthcare needs that can be exacerbated further by the increased amounts of distress experienced during incarceration[58]. Moreover, women inmates are more likely to have caring responsibilities for family members and other gender-specific needs that require specialised attention. Furthermore, whilst the detention of children[59] should be used as a very last resort, it is pertinent that child-friendly measures in these settings are implemented[60]. On the other hand, the increasing and diversifying migrant population[61] necessitates tailor made measures aimed towards social inclusion.

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55   CrimeMalta Observatory. January 2021. CrimeMalta Observatory Annual Crime Review: Year 2020. Accessed at: http://crimemalta.com/docs/CrimeMalta_Report2020.pdf [Accessed on 26/09/2022]

56   United Nations (UN) Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner. 2022. International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 16 December 1966. Accessed at: https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights [Accessed on 26/09/2022]
United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. UNODC. No Date. United Nations Standard minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules). Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 8 January 2016. Accessed at: https://www.unodc.org/documents/justice-and-prison-reform/Nelson_Mandela_Rules-E-ebook.pdf   [Accessed   on   26/09/2022]

57   UNODC. Ibid.

58   66 female prisoners were detained in Malta in 2019. Source: Institute for Crime & Justice Policy Research. 2020. Accessed at: https://www.icpr.org.uk/ [Accessed on 26/09/2022]

59   As at March 2019, the percentage of the prison population that was under the age of 18 years was 0.6%.

60   Locally, the Young Persons Offenders Unit (YOURS) is located in Mtaħleb and can accommodate approximately 50 persons, offering two cells for those with mobility issues, and also incorporating sports, educational, and visitor facilities.

61   The migrant prisoner population stood at around 62% of the Maltese prison population in 2020, with these persons hailing from over 60 countries.

Upon admission, the local correctional facilities offer health screening services for mental health disorders, oral complications, HIV, STIs and Hepatitis B and C. Educational programmes are also initiated immediately upon entry as per Maltese Prison Regulations and are tailored to specific needs at the individual level[62]. Basic numeracy, literacy, and ICT skills programmes are offered within the prison school. Recently efforts have been undertaken to improve the quality of education and training through cooperation with the University of Malta, the Directorate for Lifelong Learning and Jobsplus in order to reduce high drop-out rates and offer opportunities for vocational training[63]. A range of internal work-placements is also offered, which includes carpentry, sewing, kitchen preparation, masonry, fitting and bakery. These initiatives aim to enrich the skills of the person during imprisonment. Meanwhile, external work placements are offered to prisoners who make sufficient progress to continue developing on-the-job skills.

Support to ex-offenders continues also after release from imprisonment. In fact, in order to decrease the chances that ex-offenders find themselves without a home upon release, an allocation of additional funding has been made towards the refurbishment of dilapidated property for the purpose of accommodating ex-prisoners in the process of re-integration[64]. In addition, financial assistance is also available to ex-offenders enrolled in rehabilitation programmes or those experiencing mental health issues.

Our Vision

Malta's vision for ex-offenders is based around the central tenets of re-integration i.e. personal, social, educational and career development. In addition, efforts to develop a society that is more able to receive these individuals needs to be strengthened. The process of re-integration is envisaged to extend from prosecution to post-release support and covering income and social benefits, health, educational, employment, social welfare services, cultural and recreational activities. Treating ex-offenders with dignity and respect together with providing them with the opportunity to learn and work would give ex-offenders the opportunity to fully rehabilitate, reintegrate and re-socialise. This will promote general well-being and contribute towards the reduction of risk of poverty and social exclusion as well as mitigate against re-entry into the prison environment.

With a growing prisoner population, and an increasingly more diverse prisoner profile, the added challenges to employment and income accompanied by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, will add to the challenges faced by ex-offenders. In this regard, Government will endeavour to give due acknowledgement to each individual's personal health, social care, educational and vocational needs, as well as their language, culture, and norms in the provision of rehabilitative and re-integration services. More specifically, further efforts will be undertaken to consolidate education, and vocational training and incentivise employment in order to ensure that each

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62   Prisons Regulations (Subsidiary Legislation 260.03 of the Laws of Malta). 1st October 1995. Accessed at: https://legislation.mt/eli/sl/260.3/eng/pdf [Accessed on 26/09/2022]

63   Giordmaina, J. No date. ESF Project 02.064: Participation for Employment at CCF: Social Inclusion through Education and Training (P4E@CCF). Accessed at: https://josephgiordmaina.com/esf-project [Accessed on 26/09/2022]
Ministry for Education and Employment. MEDE. June 2014. A National Literacy Strategy for all in Malta and Gozo 2014–2019. Accessed at: https://education.gov.mt/en/Documents/Literacy/ENGLISH.pdf [Accessed on 26/09/2022]
MEDE. Malta National Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020. Accessed at: https://education.gov.mt/en/Documents/Malta%20National%20Lifelong%20Learning%20Strategy%202020.pdf [Accessed on 26/09/2022]

64   Parliamentary Secretariat for Social Accommodation & Housing Authority. March 2019. Sustainable Communities: Housing for Tomorrow: Towards Sustainable Homes and Neighbourhoods. Accessed at: https://housingauthority.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Housing-Booklet-2020.pdf [Accessed on 26/09/2022]

individual has the opportunity to achieve its potential. Ex-offenders also need tailor-made skills training and support to remain law-abiding. In addition, efforts to ameliorate prison (physical and psychological) health services targeting different age groups, gender, disability-related issues, or other specific health problems will need to be strengthened.

The impacts on a family of an ex-offender can be considerable. Imprisonment has a profound impact on families and can result in more risk of poverty and in becoming more isolated and stigmatised. Within this context, through more focused family services the Social Vision 2035 will aim to support the families affected by a family member's involvement in the criminal justice system.

A society which is more resilient and receptive of (ex)offenders is envisaged. Malta's Vision for 2035 foresees safeguards against opportunities for involvement in crime, directed as early as possible towards children which aims to instil core values of personal responsibility, respect towards others and positive ways of channeling emotions or opinions. A shift in the local culture in the coming years is required wherein there is less stigma and discrimination inherently attached to the label of an '(ex)offender'.

Future Policy Goals

1.   Establish a robust policy framework that offers sufficient opportunities for the re-integration of (ex)offenders that strikes a balance between the personal, social, educational and career development dimensions.

2.   Effectively address educational and skills gaps through opportunities that identify and provide competences relevant to the local job market. In this regard, appropriate support needs to be provided to employers.

3.   Ensure a smooth transition from imprisonment into society through appropriate support particularly in the first few months after release.

4.   Boost the receptiveness of Maltese society through appropriate measures aimed towards the general public in order to empower and motivate (ex)offenders and their families to an increased likelihood of successful re-integration into the Maltese society.

PERSONS WITH DISABILITY

Local Context

Perceptions of disability have experienced a substantial shift over the years. Persons with disability (PWD) face challenges not only in physical access to locations and information, but also with inclusion in care, quality education, meaningful employment and sufficient income, as well as participation in socio-cultural and leisure activities[65].

In recent years, Government has established a strong system of formal health-related support for PWD. Disability screening is offered from early childhood and aims to provide an adequate support to the child and family, in terms of services. Additional support such as respite services, day care centres, hostels, assisted or independent living[66], the provision of subsidies or funds for the employment of a personal carer[67] or assisting equipment[68] and other community services are available[69]. These services are guided by national standards aimed towards ensuring service quality. Recently, financial support and respite services have been offered to informal carers of PWD to alleviate the challenges faced by families with PWD. Notwithstanding, informal carers still report physical and mental health challenges, thus strengthening the rationale for the current impetus towards improved community services as well as the continued strengthening of formal support services.

The AROPE rate is higher among persons with 'some' or 'severe' activity limitations (31.8% in 2021[70]) when compared to persons without (16.2% in 2021[71]). Moreover, discrepancies between ARP rates in individuals of working age in Malta before (66.9% in 2021[72]) and after (27.1% in 2021[73]) social transfers suggest a high degree of dependence on financial aid. Considering the direct impact of employment in mitigating poverty and social exclusion, Malta has endeavoured to actively

65   Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD). September 2020. The Impact of COVID-19 on Persons with Disability. Accessed at: https://www.crpd.org.mt/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/0339-%E2%80%93-FSW-and-CRPD-The-Impact-of-Covid-19-on-Persons-with-Disability-Report.pdf [Accessed on 26/09/2022]

66   Small and personalized apartments and houses where people with intellectual (and with both intellectual and physical disabilities) can be supported by staff in their activities of daily living and training for community inclusion.

67   Direct Payment, Independent Community Living Scheme, and Personal Assistance Fund (PAF) are financial packages enabling PWD to have their personal carers, and offering free or subsidized care depending on the number of hours of aid needed.

68   Agenzija Sapport's Empowerment Scheme provides financial support and guidance to PWD in purchasing equipment to make them more independent.

69   NSO. 2020. Social Protection 2020: Reference Years 2014-2018. Accessed at: https://nso.gov.mt/en/publicatons/Publications_by_Unit/Documents/A2_Public_Finance/2020/Social%20Protection%202020.pdf [Accessed on 26/09/2022]

70   Eurostat. 14 September 2022. People at risk of poverty or social exclusion by level of activity limitation, sex and age. Accessed at: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/HLTH_DPE010/default/table?lang=en&category=hlth.hlth_dsb.hlth_dsb_pe Accessed on 28/09/2022]

71   Ibid.

72   Eurostat. 14 September 2022. People at risk of poverty before social transfers (pensions included in social transfers) by level of activity limitation, sex and age - HLTH_DPE030. Accessed at: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/HLTH_DPE030/default/table?lang=en&category=hlth.hlth_dsb.hlth_dsb_pe [Accessed on 28/09/2022]]

73   Eurostat. 14 September 2022. People at risk of poverty by level of activity limitation, sex and age. Accessed at: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/hlth_dpe020/default/table?lang=en [Accessed on 28/09/2022]

include PWD in the labour market[74]. This has resulted in a substantial increase in labour market participation of PWD, although it has been noted that Malta's employment rate for PWD still remains one of the lowest in Europe[75]. Furthermore, Government has invested in various policies and services aimed towards improving educational prospects for all students with disability. Notwithstanding, Malta still registers comparatively high Early School Leavers (ESL) rates for individuals experiencing activity limitations[76].

Cross-country data shows that, when compared to EU averages (25% in 2020[77]), a lower proportion of the Maltese population aged 16 years and over self-report 'some' or 'severe' long-standing limitations in usual activities (16.7% in 2020[78]). However, this figure does not portray the full picture, given that it does not include persons living in institutions. Related to this, Government is currently working towards a reform constituting the development of a holistic assessment system. This reform is expected to contribute towards ensuring a better overview of disability prevalence and the disability sector, as well as the support required.

Current Policy Framework

Launched in September 2021, Malta's National Strategy on the Rights of Disabled Persons 2021 – 2030[79] intends to serve as a roadmap for the disability sector leading up to 2030, is aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the United Nations Convention for the Rights of Persons with Disability (UNCRPD). Through this Strategy, Government has established an overall objective where all disabled persons are treated equally. Additionally, the Strategy gives increased importance to the aspect of intersectionality, and how this phenomenon impacts persons with disabilities who may face additional societal barriers. In fact, the Disability Strategy puts forward a two-fold approach towards disability inclusion, namely: (i) the representation of disabled persons at all levels of policy- and decision- making, and (ii) the formation of a civil society participation mechanism that can contribute to policy and decision-making[80].

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74   These include schemes that support the transition from unemployment to employment, including subsidies to employers or exemption from social security contributions, pre-employment training, job coaching, and sheltered employment training.

75   CRPD. 2021. Research into the current situation of People with Disabilities and Employment in Malta: Synopsis of Main Results. Accessed at: https://www.crpd.org.mt/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/CRPD-SYNOPSIS-REPORT-ENG.pdf [Accessed on 26/09/2022]

76   European Commission. 26 February 2020. Country Report Malta 2020. Accessed at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1584545686025&uri=CELEX%3A52020SC0517 [Accessed on 26/09/2022]

77   Eurostat. 14 September 2022. Self-perceived long-standing limitations in usual activities due to health problem by sex, age and labour status - hlth_silc_06. Accessed at: https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=hlth_silc_06&lang=en [Accessed on 26/09/2022]

78   Ibid.

79   Ministry for Inclusion and Social Wellbeing. No date. Freedom to Live: Malta's 2021-2030 National Strategy on the Rights of Disabled Persons. Accessed at: https://inclusion.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Disability-Doc-ENG-SEP-21.pdf [Accessed on 26/09/2022]

80   In line with Article 4(3) of the Convention, and General Comment No. 7 issued by the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and provided for in the UNCRPD Act.

Our Vision

The common vision for Maltese society for the coming years is one where the complexity of identity – and therefore, of ability – is given due acknowledgement. By 2035, Government envisions a society with mixed ability, characterised by autonomy, personal choice and independence, and whose members can participate equally, safely, and comfortably in all facets of life, without discrimination in an accessible physical environment. Government aims to provide a person centric approach through a timely service for all persons with disability.

As a point of departure, obtaining a comprehensive snapshot of the prevalence of disability on the Maltese Islands will facilitate the development of future policy and services. Government will continue to sustain its efforts towards obtaining a clearer overview of the changing needs and challenges of this sector. This will allow future policy making to be designed and implemented from the perspective of the specific needs and challenges of persons with disability in particular addressing prejudice, stereotypes and discrimination.

In line with international efforts to ascertain the full implementation of the UNCRPD, Government envisions that accessibility will be mainstreamed across society. Support – especially within the community – needs to be further strengthened. Furthermore, efforts to ensure that formal care givers have the necessary skills to address the needs of PWD need to be consolidated. It is also imperative to empower parents to perform their unique role as parents in the life of children with disability.

Future Policy Goals

1.   Development of an inclusive approach aimed at the full and active participation of PWD in society.

2.   Ensuring that a person-centred approach is taken, whereby the voice and needs of PWD are kept in the centre of every endeavour that affects them.

3.   Provision of tailor-made services and more adequate benefits to address the needs of persons with disability as a means to actively participate in society in an accessible physical environment.

4.   Promote initiatives related to the provision of accessible information, universal design, and the use of technological innovation.

PERSONS IDENTIFYING AS LGBTIQ

Local Context

In recent years, Malta has achieved significant progress with regards to LGBTIQ rights and equality. A number of legislative amendments, policies and practices have been introduced to ban, prohibit and condemn any form of discrimination and exclusion based on gender identity and sexual orientation[81].

The significant progress achieved during the period 2015-2017 following the adoption of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex and genderqueer (LGBTIQ) Action Plan have resulted in Malta's top ranking for seven years in a row on the ILGA- Europe Rainbow Index. . Malta also benefits from a vibrant LGBTIQ movement with a number of organisations providing support services, social spaces, and conducting awareness raising initiatives.

Although below the EU-28 (42%); 33% of Maltese persons identifying as 'LGBTIQ' in 2019 felt discriminated against in at least one area of life in the preceding year, particularly in educational environments, cafes, restaurants, bars, or nightclubs. Harassment is particularly pronounced in specific groups, where one in every five transgender and intersex persons reported being "physically or sexually attacked" in 2018 - almost double the number of persons within other LGBTIQ groups. Although Malta offers means through which its citizens can report abuse, only a fraction (around 13%) of persons experiencing verbal, non-verbal, or cyber-harassment reported this to the police, equality bodies or other local organisations.

Whilst awareness and acceptance are growing following nationwide initiatives including the dissemination of information, there still exist instances where persons identifying as LGBTIQ are bound to live in non-affirming environments, with society, including parents or family members, who do not quite understand or accept the diversity in sexual orientation and gender identity. Research has highlighted that persons identified as LGBTIQ may experience lower levels of closeness or attachment with their parents, higher risks of abuse at home, and sometimes even homelessness. Since issues during adolescence can potentially persist well into adult years, consideration of the challenges faced by LGBTIQ persons is crucial in efforts to 'leave nobody behind'. LGBTIQ individuals and couples are also increasingly choosing to become parents and may face various challenges when interacting with institutions such as schools, health care providers and others.

The LGBTIQ community experience a higher prevalence of health challenges as compared to the general population, including, but not limited to sexually acquired infections and mental health difficulties. In recent years, the issue of tackling existing LGBTIQ sexual health gaps was posited as a key priority area in Malta. Local strategies, policies, and initiatives have been launched over the years in order to address the issues of HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases, as well as to develop a trans-inclusive healthcare system that tackles facets of gender affirmation. A Gender Wellbeing Clinic was also launched in 2018, offering gender affirming services to trans persons,

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81 Human Rights and Integration Directorate, Ministry for European Affairs and Equality. No date. LGBTIQ Equality Strategy & Action Plan 2018-2022. Accessed at: https://meae.gov.mt/en/Documents/LGBTIQ%20Action%20Plan/LGBTIQActionPlan_20182022.pdf [Accessed on 26/09/2022]

and a wealth of resources was also developed by HIV Malta for people who are living with HIV with a view to increase the ease and uptake of testing together with the provision of preventive information. However, gaps still exist which are perceived as discriminatory, such as the one-year-long deferral period for blood donation for men who have sex with men.

Current Policy Framework

The launch of the 'LGBTIQ Equality Strategy & Action Plan' (2018-2022), outlined the necessary measures to guarantee substantive equality for LGBTIQ persons in practice. Other efforts in this regard included the extension of the right to civil unions and corresponding parenting rights including adoptions to gay couples[82], and the enactment of the Gender Identity, Gender Expression and Sex Characteristics Act[83] that secured rights to gender identity, bodily integrity, and physical autonomy for all persons. More recent amendments to the Embryo Protection Act and the corresponding treatment protocols also made it possible for LGBTIQ persons to access IVF services.

Our Vision

Government's main aim is for Malta to remain a leading State in terms of the protection and promotion of the rights and well-being of the LGBTIQ community, while addressing the existing lacunae. Government will focus its efforts to address existing difficulties that are being faced by LGBTIQ persons and which are impinging on realising their full potential and in achieving a good quality of life due to their gender identity and/or sexual orientation.

LGBTIQ rights are not a privilege but a human right. The Social Vision 2035 aims to give more impetus towards challenging heteronormative norms whilst increasing acceptance and awareness. While legislation has been enacted, it is important to ensure that this is translated into tangible action and results. Through a strategic, coherent, and action-oriented approach, which will involve all relevant stakeholders, the key principles of inclusion, tolerance and respect need to be further enshrined in society.

Educational institutions play a critical role in supporting the health and academic development of all youths, including the success of LGBTIQ youths. It is imperative to encourage an environment of respect and safety, tolerance and inclusion, through the provision of appropriate services. To cultivate such values, education is a priority. School curricula need to encompass inclusivity and diversity issues whilst supporting significant adults such as parents, teachers, guardians, carers, police, youth workers, outreach workers and society in general in their awareness journeys.

Health risks are perceived as important within the LGBTIQ community. In this regard, Government will continue to strengthen efforts to provide health-related programmes, services and research focused on LGBTIQ and other sexuality, gender, and bodily diverse people and communities. HIV issues are still pertinent in the Maltese Men who have sex with Men (MSM)communities; people are still reluctant to divulge their HIV status for fear of losing jobs, families or friends. Prevention is viewed as a critical service. In this regard, education, empowerment, support and networking

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82   Civil Unions Act (Chapter 530 of the Laws of Malta). 14th April 2014. Accessed at: https://legislation.mt/eli/cap/530/eng/pdf [Accessed on 26/09/2022]

83   Gender Identity, Gender Expression and Sex Characteristics Act (Chapter 540 of the Laws of Malta). 14th April 2015. Available at: https://legislation.mt/eli/cap/540/eng/pdf [Accessed on 26/09/2022]

are salient in the HIV journey as are the introduction of pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) and post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) on the national health service.

Recreational settings warrant further attention with the aim to create safe and inclusive services for LGBTIQ people to access physical and leisure activities. The involvement and acceptance of LGBTIQ persons in sports and the leisure industry needs to be augmented further while taking into consideration other vulnerable groups such as individuals with disabilities, migrants and older adults who are within the LGBTIQ spectrum.
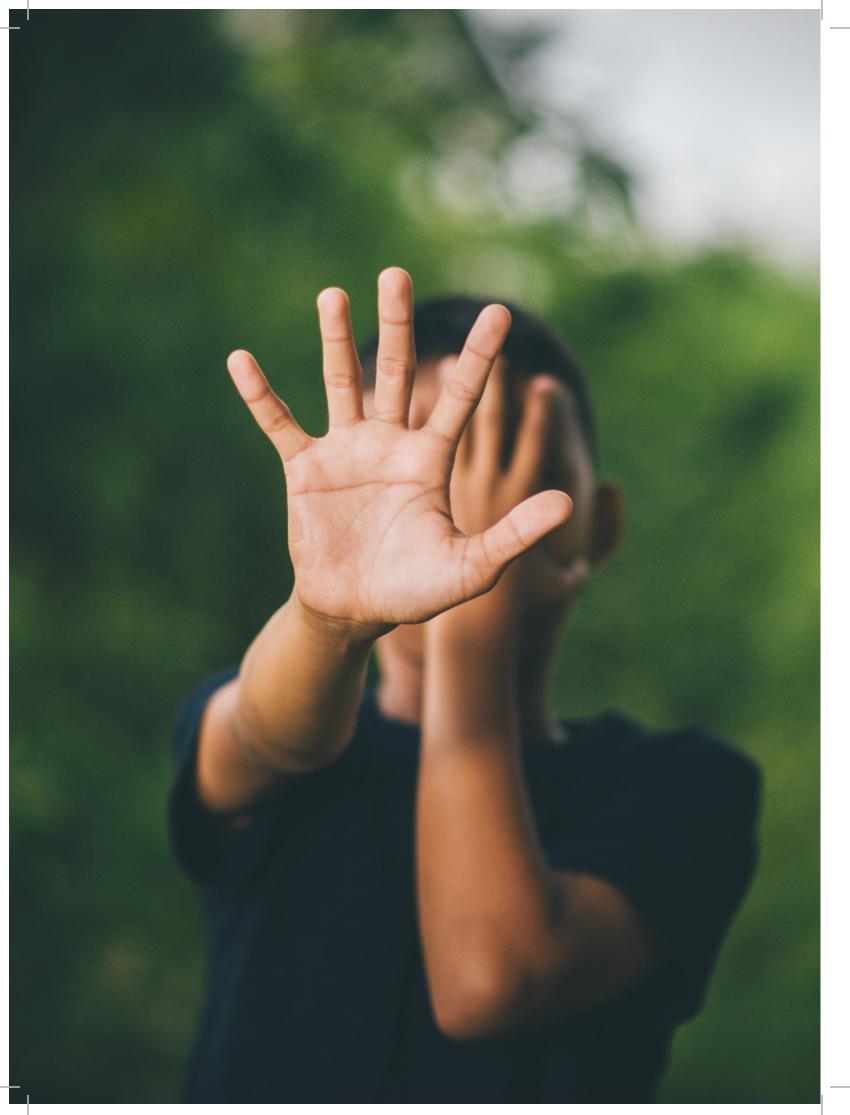
The needs of LGBTIQ during the elderly years need to be considered. LGBTIQ older adults are less likely to have children to care for them and are at much greater risk of social isolation. Long term solutions for the ageing LGBTIQ population need to cater for specific LGBTIQ needs and realities. In particular, elderly homes need to be LGBTIQ friendly, devoid of violence, minority stress, homophobia and hate speech.

Future Policy Goals

1.	Develop additional inclusive policies, initiatives and support services, in collaboration with relevant stakeholders, to address any forms of discrimination and stigmatisation applicable to LGBTIQ persons, with a view to guaranteeing equality in practice and sustainability of service provision.

2.	Creating and sustaining inclusive environments (particularly within schools and leisure/ cultural activities), that will facilitate the health and academic success of all.

3.	Strengthen efforts to ameliorate health services and provide health-related programmes and research focused on LGBTIQ (and other sex-orientation, gender, and bodily diverse people and communities) including through the provision of appropriate support and information.

VIOLENCE, ABUSE AND EXPLOITATION

Local Context

Vulnerable cohorts such as children, elderly, persons with disability, migrants, LGBTIQ, persons with dependencies and of lower socio-economic classes, are more pre-disposed to violence and/or abuse and other specific forms of victimisation. In addition, females, persons aged 45-54 years and persons who have some or severe activity limitation tend to report relatively higher rates of crime, violence or vandalism in their neighbourhoods.

A number of victim centric support agencies and non-governmental organisations offer assistance in victims' reporting, as well as provide advocacy and support according to the victims' needs. These include a variety of professional, physical, financial and emotional support services. Cases are followed by the required multi-pronged approach between the relevant legal, health and social welfare providers as well as community stakeholders. Support services include helplines, awareness raising and outreach services where early disclosure and reporting by victims is encouraged.

In 2021, the number of domestic violence cases reported to the Police amounted to 1741 cases[84]. Improvements were carried out in data collection methodologies, especially in Hate Crime (HC) and cybercrime amongst others. However, the issue of under-reporting in relation to certain instances of violence, abuse, and exploitation still exists. A major contributing factor to under-reporting is the cultural legacy of sexism, racism and xenophobia that is still felt locally in relation to gender-based violence (GBV), Domestic Violence (DV), Human Trafficking (HT) and Hate Crime and Speech (HCS). For much of the past years, since violence and abuse were not acknowledged as crime, victims did not get the needed legal, health and social welfare support.

Socio-cultural shifts such as globalisation, digitalisation and demographic changes have presented unique, complex, and dynamic risks for victims. Due to the increased mobilisation of persons for employment and education reasons, victim support is more difficult, given that legislations vary according to the country where the violent act happened and the victim's country of origin. Also, the movement of persons specifically for human trafficking purposes, which most often involves migrants for labour, forced displacement and sexual exploitation, makes reporting and support difficult. Such victims' lack of visibility makes allocation and provision of services challenging. Locally, Eastern European, Chinese, and South East Asian women have been recorded to experience exploitation.

Digitalisation is another challenge that has not only broadened perpetrators' reach to potential younger victims such as children but has also led to the increase of certain forms of crime such as online scams, phishing and romance fraud. The internet bears the element of added anonymity thus increasing the possibility that such acts of crime or harm cannot be addressed, which makes the recovery processes for victims more difficult. Although a multitude of new technologies contribute towards improved reporting, monitoring, and support provision to victims[85], the development of innovative and technological instruments is new and ongoing. Demographic

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84   House of Representatives - Parliamentary Questions Website. 10th May 2022. PQ no 173: Cases of domestic violence. Accessed at: https://pq.gov.mt/pqweb.nsf/06d013e9f9ab0283c12568f50054014f/c1257d2e0046dfa1c1258845002146d3!OpenDocument [Accessed on 26/09/2022]

85   Including mobile phone applications, helplines, and the use of Artificial Intelligence.

changes such as an ageing population and an increased migrant population, emphasize the need for strengthened safeguards against elderly abuse and culture-based victimisation which is often manifested as honour-based violence such as Female Genital Mutilation.

Current Policy Framework

Numerous legislative frameworks, policies and services have been strengthened throughout recent years to ensure more prevention, protection and support concerning victims[86]. However, data collated on the impact of violence, abuse and exploitation on victims remains limited, and is part of the deliverables expected to be undertaken through the recently launched Gender-Based Violence and Domestic Violence Strategy 2021-2022. Malta is also signatory of various human rights instruments against violence, abuse, and exploitation on an international and European level, which have mostly been embedded within Maltese legislation. These frameworks aim to recognise the experiences and adequately address the rights of persons having been victimised due to crime and/or abuse of power. Government has also recently published the EU-funded Police Transformation Strategy as an effort to instil trust through communication, accountability, consistency, and a more data-driven and community-centric Police Force[87], to positively contribute towards improving current reporting practices.

Our Vision

Government will strive to build a robust system to effectively recognise and address the diversification of experiences of violence. This will also be important in addressing intersectionalities and different vulnerabilities. Such a system will require an inter-disciplinary approach and inter-agency collaboration for the prevention, reporting, timely intervention, and holistic compensation of instances of abuse and exploitation. The protection and safety of victims is a priority across the board.

Early prevention and timely intervention are not only important to avert abuse, but also to prevent other problems, such as mental health difficulties, drug abuse and other addictions and poverty, amongst others.

Considering that the entire experience of contact with the justice system (including Court proceedings) can be a traumatic experience for the victims, it is imperative that services are strengthened to be timely addressed and well- coordinated whilst the victims are being effectively supported, resulting in the reduction of secondary victimisation. The development of flexible, inter-disciplinary services equipped with sufficiently trained and motivated human resources, is pivotal. One such example is the research and training required on the practices employed among legal and judicial professionals in cases of psychological/ emotional violence to ensure more appropriate and timely judicial procedures. This coordination is especially vital when considering the added risks and the implications of a rapidly developing online world on victimisation Government aims to bolster quality assurance of services and support measures. The resultant increased accountability through regular monitoring and follow-up will delineate

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86   Prevention services targeting such violence includes awareness raising and information dissemination, education in schools, as well as certification and guidelines for companies.

87   Malta Police. September 2020. Malta Police Transformation Strategy 2020-2025. Accessed at: https://pulizija.gov.mt/en/police-force/Documents/MALTA%20POLICE%20TRANSFORMATION%20STRATEGY.pdf [Accessed on 26/09/2022]

the impact of such support measures and ensure that perpetrators are kept responsible for their actions. Outreach to victims will continue to be further strengthened. In addition, strengthening community ties and the protective element of the community, such as: community policing and peer mentor services, amongst others will also remain a core objective.

This is expected to positively contribute towards increasing societal resilience. Whilst such action can heavily contribute towards the prevention of violence, abuse and exploitation, other preventive mechanisms will be further strengthened. These include:

- education and awareness-raising, particularly on human rights and relationships education; and

- screening and monitoring of crime and abuse with a view to identify people affected by violence and abuse and direct them towards appropriate sources of support.

Future Policy Goals

1. Place the victim at the centre of all legislation, policy development and service provision, by developing and consolidating objective monitoring and evaluating the impact of services and support measures on the individual.

2. Drive inter-disciplinary action and inter-agency collaboration for the prevention, reporting, timely intervention to address abuse and exploitation.

3. Reduce barriers to reporting abuse and victimization , through more secure protection for victims that report abuse.

4. Strengthen efforts to address the root causes of violence and other preventive mechanisms.

MIGRATION

Local Context

Migration is having an impact on Maltese society and it is within this reality that the Social Vision for Malta 2035 will also address the benefits and challenges emanating from this sector. Increased migration is one of the most visible and significant aspects of globalisation which may be attributed to various factors including better employment opportunities and improved quality of life amongst others. Cognizant of the high number of migrants arriving in Malta, which is one of the highest per capita immigration rate in the EU[88], it is evident that appropriate action is warranted. The impact of migration is further accentuated by the fact that Malta is the most densely populated Member State[89]. Hence, it is in the interest of society to ensure that the benefits and challenges brought about by migration are appropriately managed.

Around one-fifth of persons living and working in Malta and Gozo today are foreign-born. Furthermore, second and even third generation descendants of persons with a migrant background means that the diversity emanating from migration is now found in mainstream Maltese social contexts, such as in the family unit.

The first migrant integration policy framework, "Integration = Belonging," provided a framework for understanding successful integration, through the level of the migrants' own sense of belonging to Maltese society and the space Maltese society allows for such integration in its different sectors and strata. The Strategy and Action Plan highlights that Malta is a receiving country for migration and acknowledges Malta's dependency on migration for its labour market needs. It is within this context that, while the strategy acknowledged that integration is crucial, it also recognised the importance that migrants learn about the country's values, standards and culture. This is crucial for structured integration. The cornerstones of the first phase of integration governance were the setting up of the institutional structures and the development of the "I Belong" national integration programme. In this regard, Government has implemented various measures aimed at improving the integration of migrants and improve service accessibility particularly in the education, healthcare and social spheres.

Successful integration also hinges on education. In this regard, the Migrant Learners Unit within the Ministry for Education promotes the inclusion of newly arrived migrant learners into the education system. The Unit provides support to migrant learners and parents/ guardians with basic and functional language learning, enabling migrants to participate in mainstream education as well as within the community as a whole including participation within the labour market.

In fact, the National Employment Policy 2021-2030, acknowledges the need for foreign workers to address skills shortages within some sectors within the Maltese economy. Economic migration has positively contributed towards the Maltese economy particularly by addressing skills shortages as well as by contributing towards the development of new industries and boosting economic growth.

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88   Eurostat. March 2022. Migrant and migrant population statistics. Accessed at: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Migration_and_migrant_population_statistics [Accessed on 26/09/2022]

89   Eurostat. 28 August 2021. Population density - TPS00003. Accessed at: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tps00003/default/table?lang=en [Accessed on 26/09/2022]

Directive 2011/98/EU gives third-country nationals who are legally residing and working in Member States a common set of rights based on equal treatment with the nationals of the host Member State, irrespective of the initial purpose of or basis for admission. Similar benefits are also enjoyed by long-term residents. Moreover, other third country nationals, in particular refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection, also enjoy access to a specified set of rights in accordance with EU and national law. Furthermore, asylum seekers also benefit from assistance in terms of the Reception Conditions Directive. On the other hand, third country nationals who are irregularly present and who are not or are no longer asylum seekers, are not entitled to social welfare assistance. In this regard, efforts to return such migrants need to be further consolidated.

Healthcare services are available for migrants. Notwithstanding, different cultural backgrounds and lack of knowledge as to how to access the local healthcare system may pose challenges. Such challenges include linguistic barriers, cultural differences in the explanation for the cause of disease and the interpretation of symptoms, amongst others.

The reality of migration is expected to remain for the years to come. In this regard, the efforts undertaken to date need to be sustained and further stengthened in the best interest of society.

Current Policy Framework

The Migrant Integration Strategy provides a framework for understanding successful integration through the level of the migrants' own sense of belonging to Maltese society and the space Maltese society allows for such integration in its different sectors and strata. The Strategy and Action Plan note that Malta is a receiving country for migration and acknowledges Malta's dependency on migration for its labour market needs. It is within this context that, while the strategy acknowledges that integration is crucial, it also recognises the importance that migrants learn about the country's values, standards and culture. This is crucial for structured integration.

Our Vision

By 2035, Malta needs to guarantee that governance (legislation, policy, and services) of migration and two-way intercultural integration is rooted on three pillars: respect for equality, national security/border control, and the needs of industry/economy.

Migration is the result of globalisation and the Social Vision 2035 aspires to embrace the opportunities brought about by migration through various means, such as education. In this regard, integration plays a key role which can only happen if society is not driven by fear. An inclusive society aspires for a holistic integration of migrants[90], who can participate in the community by eliminating marginalisation, and positively contribute towards the amelioration of society. The needs of the Maltese industry and economy can no longer be adequately met without migration, and in fact successful intercultural integration is the rule at most places of work. On the other hand, migrants aspire for improved quality of life and career prospects.

Within this context, it is imperative to build upon existing policies and further develop an integration framework based on the respect of the individual's freedom and active participation within the community also focusing on the smooth integration of children living in Malta. In this

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90 Including those given protection.

regard, it is important to foster an environment where cross-fertilisation in terms of skills, culture, customs, amongst others can happen. This will result in a win-win situation for an intercultural and diverse Maltese society. Such aspiration can only be achieved through appropriate support structures as well as by ensuring that service provision addresses the diversity of needs, attitudes and aspirations of newcomers to Maltese society.

Future Policy Goals

1. A holistic integration framework which is built upon the principles of respect, diversity, and tolerance focusing both on the different migrant communities and the receiving communities.

2. Promote the positive impacts and opportunities brought about by migration.

3. Ensure that structures and service provision are appropriately equipped to address the diversity of needs, cultural attitudes and aspirations of the different migrant communities.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The success of Malta's Social Vision hinges upon the achievement of the objectives outlined therein. In this regard, the Social Vision for Malta 2035 necessitates an effective monitoring and evaluation mechanism.

The Monitoring and Evaluation stage during the policy development lifecycle will support the strategic planning of policy making, by facilitating inter-ministerial cross collaboration as necessary. This is essential to achieve the key medium and long-term objectives for the Social Vision 2035.

Within this context, the objectives defined within the Social Vision will be monitored by the MSPC on a bi-annual basis through appropriate monitoring tools. The intention is to ensure that the objectives outlined within the Social Vision are implemented through the various strategies, plans and policies as appropriate. Such monitoring tools will enable Government to evaluate the effectiveness of the Social Vision. In this regard, it is the intention of Government to undertake a mid-term evaluation report.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This Social Vision for Malta 2035 renews Government commitment to improve the quality of life and wellbeing of society. Meeting citizens' aspirations requires adequate planning, co-ordination and the active collaboration of all stakeholders on the ground. This vision for the social sector will guide a future towards more social fairness and prosperity, through an economy that supports people.

For a truly thriving vision it is crucial to ensure that Maltese society is sufficiently equipped to face future challenges while grasping the opportunities for prosperity. Efforts will continue to be sustained and further consolidated, to provide a society where future generations can thrive while leaving no one behind.

To make this Social Vision 2035 a national reality Government pledges national leadership and commitment. Through the successful implementation of the policy goals identified, Government will contribute to create a social environment that aspires and enables society to enhance the socio-economic status for the improvement of wellbeing.

ANNEX 1

Poverty and Social Exclusion: Future Policy Goals

Strengthen the fight against poverty through appropriate policy instruments, strategies and action plans, in collaboration with relevant stakeholders, which are translated in tangible measures implemented for the benefit of the citizens.

Strengthen Government collaboration with relevant stakeholders including academia, NGOs, and civil society, with a view to better understanding the needs on the ground.

Support persons at risk of poverty through appropriate tailor-made inclusive education and training initiatives as a means to break the poverty cycle.

Strengthen efforts towards the promotion of voluntary work and cooperatives that aim to support persons living in poverty.

Families: Future Policy Goals

Provide families with the necessary support services, environment, skills and abilities to better manage challenges through appropriate policy instruments, strategies and action plans, also promoting a preventative approach.

Create an environment which supports families (particularly during child rearing years) during the life course and promotes work life balance.

Design appropriate policies together with informative outreach campaigns which reflect the ever-changing diversities among families and inform the public on available support services.

Childhood: Future Policy Goals

Support families through appropriate policies and measures, that will enable parents (or guardians) to provide the best family environment for children.

Strengthen efforts to ensure that the provision of services for children (in particular health and education) provides better opportunities for children to maximise their life prospects. The priority will remain to give the necessary space and flexibility to children to develop their full potential.

Promote and support the right of children to meaningful participation, by having their opinions actively sought and taken into consideration in institutions and systems at various levels and spheres of society.

Ensure a safe physical and digital environment for children that safeguards child protection which is complemented with appropriate initiatives aimed to educate both children and parents/guardians.

Youth: Future Policy Goals

Support youths with the appropriate knowledge and skills, supported by values, through formal and informal education, which will also contribute towards improved healthy lifestyles, meaningful employment as well as physical and mental resilience.

Ensure the provision of youth-centred policy development and services including the provision of adequate physical and mental health services.

Capitalise on the benefits derived from digital technologies whilst ensuring that appropriate safeguards are in place.

Ageing: Future Policy Goals

Encourage an age-friendly society which focuses on the best interests of the elderly, where older persons can maintain their independence within the community as much as possible.

Strengthen efforts to improve accessibility, affordability and sustainability of care and support structures for elderly persons including opportunities brought about by modern technologies.

Further enhance the adequacy of income during pensionable years by means of appropriate measures targeted at younger generations in preparation for their future pensionable years.

Addiction to Substances, Gambling & Other Behaviours: Future Policy Goals

Strengthen the resilience of Maltese society against addictions of all forms through the adoption of a preventive approach.

Ensure the development of personalised tailored treatment and harm reduction services that meet the needs of the individual, including rehabilitation programmes treating gambling addictions for minors.

Continue to invest in the collection of National data related to the substance use and addictive behaviour with a view to continue to inform future policy initiatives.

Strengthen collaboration between stakeholders with a view to addressing the impacts of addiction.

Promote the best use of the potential of information technology, while prioritising health and relationships, through the development of appropriate initiatives including through educational measures including more awareness for parents in relation to internet addiction and gambling.

Re-integration of Ex-offenders: Future Policy Goals

Establish a robust policy framework that offers sufficient opportunities for the re-integration of (ex) offenders that strikes a balance between the personal, social, educational and career development dimensions.

Effectively address educational and skills gaps through opportunities that identify and provide competences relevant to the local job market. In this regard, appropriate support needs to be provided to employers.

Ensure a smooth transition from imprisonment into society through appropriate support particularly in the first few months after release.

Boost the receptiveness of Maltese society through appropriate measures aimed towards the general public in order to empower and motivate (ex)offenders and their families to an increased likelihood of successful re-integration into the Maltese society.

Persons with Disability: Future Policy Goals

Development of an inclusive approach aimed at the full and active participation of PWD in society.

Ensuring that a person-centred approach is taken, whereby the voice and needs of PWD are kept in the centre of every endeavour that affects them.

Provision of tailor-made services and more adequate benefits to address the needs of persons with disability as a means to actively participate in society in an accessible physical environment.

Promote initiatives related to the provision of accessible information, universal design, and the use of technological innovation.

Persons Identifying as LGBTIQ: Future Policy Goals

Develop additional inclusive policies, initiatives and support services, in collaboration with relevant stakeholders, to address any forms of discrimination and stigmatisation applicable to LGBTIQ persons, with a view to guaranteeing equality in practice and sustainability of service provision.

Creating and sustaining inclusive environments (particularly within schools and leisure/ cultural activities), that will facilitate the health and academic success of all.

Strengthen efforts to ameliorate health services and provide health-related programmes and research focused on LGBTIQ (and other sex- orientation, gender, and bodily diverse people and communities) including through the provision of appropriate support and information.

Violence, Abuse and Exploitation: Future Policy Goals

Place the victim at the centre of all legislation, policy development and service provision, by developing and consolidating objective monitoring and evaluating the impact of services and support measures on the individual.

Drive inter-disciplinary action and inter-agency collaboration for the prevention, reporting, timely intervention to address abuse and exploitation.

Reduce barriers to reporting abuse and victimization , through more secure protection for victims that report abuse.

Strengthen efforts to address the root causes of violence and other preventive mechanisms.

Migration: Future Policy Goals

A holistic integration framework which is built upon the principles of respect, diversity, and tolerance focusing both on the different migrant communities and the receiving communities.

Promote the positive impacts and opportunities brought about by migration.

Ensure that structures and service provision are appropriately equipped to address the diversity of needs, cultural attitudes and aspirations of the different migrant communities.

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