



Prioritising Families

Essential Building Blocks of Society & Social Development



Families play a crucial role in the general stability and well-being of society. The nurturing environment, socialisation and support provided by the family is key for a person's health and wellbeing and acts as a preventive factor against risk behaviour. Investment in families is therefore conducive towards better quality of life. We have to continue investing in appropriate support mechanisms and initiatives which aim to ameliorate the wellbeing of families.

In the fast-paced world we inhabit, families are confronted with several challenges that span from economic and financial strains to developing social complexities and cultural norms. Policies that prioritise families contribute to social stability, economic prosperity, human capital development, and overall societal welfare.

A Vision for Families

As policymakers, we are committed to creating an inclusive and supportive society where all families can flourish. The foundation of Malta's Social Vision for 2035 rests on the recognition that societal transformations require constant attentiveness from policymakers.

The Ministry for Social Policy and Children's Rights has crafted a vision for the social sector embedded in the ideals of equitable social outcomes and collective prosperity. One of the eleven key themes identified in the Social Vision for Malta 2035 is Family. Malta's Social Vision strives to equip families with the necessary assistance to foster a positive environment for nurturing children, adeptly confronting life's challenges, and strengthening their resilience. This involves devising suitable strategies that accurately reflect the dynamic diversity inherent in the various forms of the family structures.

"We are committed to creating an inclusive and supportive society where all families can flourish"

Contact Information



+ 356 25903220



research.rpod@gov.mt

The Transformation of the Family Structure

The traditional idea of family structure is undergoing a fundamental transition in today's realities, which are continually evolving. A wide variety of family structures are emerging as a result of societal shifts and cultural changes. Recognising the transformation of family structures is vital for policymakers to create inclusive, equitable, and effective policies. By understanding the evolving nature of families and their unique needs, we can better address the challenges and opportunities presented by changing family dynamics in today's society.



National Policy Framework Supporting Families 2030



Our Society is constantly changing. Policymakers therefore need to remain alert to ensure the needs and aspirations of society are suitably met through the application of appropriate policy instruments. Government has embarked on a challenging Policy Framework for Families which aspires to meet citizens' expectations. This requires adequate planning and co-ordination and warrants the collaboration of stakeholders on the ground.

The National Policy Framework Supporting Families, which is in development phase, will aim to recognise the pivotal role of families in shaping the future of society. In prioritising the diverse needs of the families, sustained investments are necessary to enhance well-being. Within this context, the Policy Framework will aim to propose targeted measures that cater to the specific needs of families through:

- the promotion of appropriate policies that resonate with the family diversity.
- the creation a supportive environment for families, particularly during the child-rearing years, to promote work-life balance throughout their lives.
- the provision of essential support services, conducive surroundings, and the necessary skills to effectively navigate challenges.



To better focus on children's needs the Ministry has recently launched the *Policy Framework for Children 2024 – 2030: Investing in Children for a Better Tomorrow*. This reflects Government's unwavering commitment to provide children with an environment which enables them to embrace their individuality and thrive within our society. A central component of this policy is its acknowledgment of the pivotal role that the family structure plays in shaping the lives of children.



Acknowledging the Role of Parents within the Family Structure



Acknowledging the role of parents within the family structure is fundamental to understanding the dynamics, responsibilities, and impact of families on individuals and society as a whole. Parents play a pivotal role in shaping the family environment and the well-being of their children. To address their needs, the Ministry for Social Policy and Children's Rights has established dedicated organisations that provide a variety of support, including services tailored to families.

The National Strategy on Positive Parenting 2013-2024 is founded on the principle that engaging a positive parenting approach is an investment in the wellbeing of the Maltese society. Positive Parenting includes building a strong parent-child bond, setting boundaries, and allowing natural consequences when needed. This initiative aims to create a positive environment and support system for parents and their children. The Strategy also aims to help parents fulfil their parental responsibilities to the best of their capabilities.

A Positive Parenting and Strengthening of the Family Committee was established in 2018 by the Ministry for Social Policy and Children's Rights in coordination with key representatives from other Ministries. The Positive Parenting and Strengthening of the Family Committee is currently responsible for the implementation of the National Strategy on Positive Parenting 2013 – 2024. The committee holds regular monthly meetings, supplemented by additional meetings between the committee's chairperson and with engaged stakeholders. Through the website positiveparenting.gov.mt, this committee advocates for positive parenting and addresses a range of parenting-related subjects to help parents nurture and guide their children.



Addressing Families at Risk of Poverty and Social Exclusion (AROPE)

Towards a new Poverty Strategy post 2024

Addressing families at risk of poverty and social exclusion is a crucial responsibility for governments, communities, and society as a whole. Poverty and social exclusion can have long-lasting detrimental effects on individuals, families, and the broader community. This requires a multi-faceted, comprehensive approach that combines economic support, education, healthcare, and community engagement. By prioritising the well-being and inclusion of vulnerable families, we can work towards a more equitable and prosperous society for all.



When the Strategic Policy for Reducing Poverty and Enhancing Social Inclusion was launched back in 2014, nobody could have predicted the challenges that our society would face due to international crises. In particular, the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine have had huge impacts on the most vulnerable groups in our society.

During this difficult period, Government still continued to progress towards achieving the goals set out in the National Strategic Policy. Despite the challenges posed during the period 2019-2022, encouraging results were achieved in several areas, including in the overall reductions in the rates of: people at risk of poverty and social exclusion (AROPE); people in severe material and social deprivation (SMSD); people in material and social deprivation (MSD); and unemployment. The total number of persons living on social assistance has decreased drastically whereas the average household disposable income continued its upward trend.

The Ministry for Social Policy and Children's Rights has published the third Implementation and Evaluation Report for the National Strategic Policy for Poverty Reduction and for Social Inclusion 2014-2024 to evaluate our strategy against the projected outcomes and to lay down the initial foundations for planning future policy interventions.

National Strategic Policy for Poverty Reduction & Social Inclusion

2025-2035

The present *National Strategic Policy for Poverty Reduction and for Social Inclusion 2014-2024* has a time span of 10 years. But the challenges brought about by poverty and social exclusion have no expiry date. We as policymakers have to continue addressing poverty in a holistic way. The main target is for Malta to have one of the lowest rates of people 'At Risk of Poverty and Social Exclusion' (AROPE) in the European Union.

Malta's Social Vision 2035 devotes particular attention to poverty and social exclusion. The multifaceted 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.

Complimentary to the Sustainable Development Goals and following the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan set out in 2021, at a national level Malta has set itself a national target to reduce poverty and social exclusion (AROPE) by -3.1% (from 2019 baseline) by 2030. In this context, a renewed post-2024 national poverty strategy must thereby ensure the design of measures which contribute towards the achievement of such a target by 2030 latest.

Families affected by substance use

Substance use does not only affect the individual user, but also the community and the family of the individual. Family members affected may be parents/caregivers, siblings, spouses/partners and/or children. When a person within the family uses substances, it is important that s/he receives the support as warranted by the particular situation.

However, equally important is that the families of affected individuals also receive support to adequately tackle the situation at hand. This is particularly the case in a small society like Malta, where it is highly common that individuals continue living in the same household as their parents after reaching adulthood and continuing to do so until setting up their own families.

Concerns such as shame and stigma are important considerations when tackling issues of substance use within a family. One must also consider that when a family comes to know of substance use within the family unit, they may feel ill equipped to tackle the issue at hand, which makes it more important that the needs of these members of our communities be met with professionalism, empathy and adequate support programmes and tools.

National Drug Policy 2023-2033

The National Drug Policy 2023-2033 was launched by the Ministry for Social Policy and Children's Rights on the 26th of June 2023. The policy aims to address the problems related to the use of drugs by reducing the incidence of use among the general population. This policy puts particular emphasis on the needs of at-risk groups such as young people, women who use drugs, the aging generation of drug users, people within prison and those being released, and children and families of drug users who face greater risk of suffering stigma and social exclusion due to substance use within their respective families. The gender dimension of drug use and the improvement of harm reduction initiatives within our services that aim to minimize the harm to substance users, their families and the community in general are among the priorities addressed in this new Drug Policy. The policy also addresses the need for the improvement of prevention services that aim to prevent, or at least delay, the onset of substance use and the treatment of substance use disorder for people already affected by substance use. It is important to note that service providers in Malta that address the needs of people who use drugs also put major emphasis on providing services to affected family members.



The National Coordinating Unit for Drugs and Alcohol (NCUDA)

The National Coordinating Unit within the Policy Development and International Affairs Directorate was set up in 2010 as stipulated by the National Drugs Policy of 2008. The topic of substance use is one that is multifaceted, affecting society in a number of ways, hence efforts to tackle drug and alcohol related issues require an interprofessional approach that covers the reduction of supply of illicit substances through adequate law enforcement, the reduction in demand of illicit substances through the provision of drug related health and social services, the need for a robust legal and judicial framework as well as the aspect of policy evaluation and the undertaking of drug related research. The Unit is responsible for bringing together the various stakeholders working in multiple sectors in the field of substance use, with a view to foster inter-sectoral cooperation and monitor and facilitate the implementation of the National Drugs Policy 2023-2033 and the National Alcohol Policy 2018-2023.

The NCUDA is also a key player in the preparation, analysis and eventual publication of the General Population Survey on Alcohol, Tobacco and Drug Use, which was conducted in 2023 among residents of Malta between the age of 15 and 64 years. This survey follows two similar surveys that were conducted in 2001 and 2013 and has the purpose of providing a snapshot of trends of use and attitudes about drugs among the general population in Malta. The findings of this survey are envisaged to be published within the first half of 2024.

The National Focal Point

The effective implementation of policy measures aimed at improving the drug situation in Malta is contingent upon a robust data collection system that gives an accurate account of trends in substance use. The Focal Point is responsible for the collection, analysis and distribution of drug related data through the publication of the Annual National Report on the Drug Situation in Malta. This exercise is conducted with the cooperation of drug service providers, the police, health authorities, Correctional Services Agency (CSA), law courts, the Forensic Lab and Jobsplus amongst others. The Unit is also responsible for the distribution of drug related data within the EU, through its participation within the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA). The unit also participates in specific expert meetings organized by the EMCDDA through a network of experts from different disciplines within drug related service provision. The Focal Point also reports data to the UNODC for the purpose of compilation of data for the World Drug Report.

Final Remarks

This social bulletin underscores the paramount importance of families in shaping resilient and harmonious communities. By ensuring effective policies and support mechanisms, emphasis is drawn to the need for a collective effort in nurturing strong family bonds.

As we celebrate the diverse tapestry of families, we as policymakers, recognize that inclusive policies not only empower families but also strengthen the very fabric of our society. We will continue to advocate for policies that prioritize families, ensuring a brighter, more compassionate future for all. Together, we can build a world where families thrive, and every member finds support, love, and opportunities to flourish.

Contact Information



+ 356 25903220



research.rpod@gov.mt



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MINISTRY FOR SOCIAL POLICY
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familja.gov.mt