

# National Action Plan for a Child Guarantee 2022-2030



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



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## INTRODUCTION

# 1. Background

## 1.1 What is the European Child Guarantee?

The European Pillar of Social Rights aims to reduce by five million the number of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion by 2030. In this regard, the **European Child Guarantee<sup>1</sup> (ECG)**, was established, through a Council Recommendation, with the objective to support Member States in the achievement of the said target. The European Child Guarantee aims to contribute towards combatting child poverty, by breaking the cycles of intergenerational poverty and fostering equal opportunities for children in need.

To this end, the Council Recommendation provides guidance to Member States on guaranteeing the effective and non-discriminatory access for vulnerable children to a set of key services, including education, healthcare, housing and healthy nutrition. In this regard, Member States have been requested to develop a National Action Plan to help ‘children in need’. While the term ‘children in need’ refers to persons under the age of 18 years who are at risk of poverty or social exclusion, a specific target group is further defined in Section Two of the National Action Plan.



The National Action Plan for a Child Guarantee 2022-2030 aims to prevent and combat social exclusion amongst children through the implementation of various measures which aim to provide:

- (a) effective and free access to high quality early childhood education and care, education and school-based activities, at least one healthy meal each school day and healthcare; and
- (b) effective access to healthy nutrition and adequate housing

### *Consultation*

The National Action Plan for a Child Guarantee encompasses a wide spectrum of policy areas whose responsibility and interests fall under different Ministries and entities. Within this context, the Ministry for Social Policy and Children’s Rights (MSPC) has carried out a series of consultations with the relevant Ministries aimed to contribute towards the development the **National Action Plan for a Child Guarantee**. A consultation event with all stakeholders (in relation to ‘Childhood’) was also carried out during the third quarter of 2021 as part of the pre-consultation process of Malta’s Social Vision 2035. Subsequently, as a sustained part of the consultation phase, MSPC organised a **Focus Group** to obtain detailed input and feedback directly from children.

Moreover, in view of the fact that a number of measures have been ongoing for a number of years, the public consultation process was carried out as part of the yearly budget document consultation process.

<sup>1</sup> Adopted by the Council of the European Union on 14 June 2021.

This has ensured a holistic national consultation with all relevant stakeholders, including non-governmental organisations promoting children’s rights, to ensure that the National Child Guarantee truly identifies the barriers faced by Children in accessing and taking-up the services.

## 1.2 National Context

Children are the future of society and it is pertinent to ensure that all children are enabled to maximise their potential. In Malta, children (0-17 years)<sup>2</sup> made up 15.9% (81,948)<sup>3</sup> of the total population in 2020<sup>4</sup>, contributing to the second lowest share of children amongst EU countries<sup>5</sup>. Children are inherently vulnerable and are projected to increase locally to 16% (94,306) by 2030. In 2020, 22.6% of persons under the age of 18 years in Malta were at-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion (AROPE). Table 1 below illustrates the AROPE Rate for children (by sex) between 2018-2020.

Table 1. Children at-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion (0-17 years)<sup>6</sup>

Year	% or Number of Persons	Male	Female	Total
2018	%	23.0	22.6	<b>22.8</b>
	Persons	9,414	8,981	18,395
2019	%	24.6	22.5	<b>23.6</b>
	Persons	10,354	8,945	19,299
2020	%	21.3	24.1	<b>22.6</b>
	Persons	9,097	9,632	18,729

\*The latest statistical data available does not illustrate the impacts of COVID-19 on AROPE children.

The Covid-19 pandemic had an impact on society, in particular on children. Children have been especially negatively impacted due to school closures and social distancing measures which may have contributed towards increased stress and anxiety, online exploitation and bullying, amongst others. Furthermore, such measures have also contributed towards a decrease in access to services such as sport and physical activities<sup>7</sup>.

### 1.2.1 Children At-Risk-of-Poverty or Social Exclusion (AROPE)

Focusing on children and tackling the existing rate of children in poverty is vital for a sustainable economic development as well as for ensuring a society that provides equal opportunities across generations. The National Action Plan for a Child Guarantee acknowledges that economic benefits of investing in children significantly outweigh the financing costs of the investment.

<sup>6</sup> Eurostat. 2021. 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\\_1886535/default/table?lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ILC_PEPS01N_custom_1886535/default/table?lang=en). [Accessed on 23/08/2021]

<sup>7</sup> University of Malta: Centre for Resilience and Socio-Emotional Health. 2021. The Resilience of Maltese Children during COVID-19. Accessed at: <https://www.um.edu.mt/library/oar/bitstream/123456789/70282/3/The%20resilience%20of%20Maltese%20children%20during%20COVID%2019%202021.pdf>. [Accessed on 10/06/2021]

*In line with the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan Malta has set a 3.1% national target to reduce the number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE) by 2030. Particular attention will be devoted to Child Poverty. Malta's National Action Plan for Child Guarantee will be one of the main instruments to monitor Government's efforts to achieve the established national target on children at risk of poverty or social exclusion.*

The number of children at-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion dropped by 6,000 from 2013 to 2020<sup>8</sup>. Yet, almost 1 in 4 children are still at risk of poverty or social exclusion. A higher risk of poverty rate is registered among children with precarious family situations. In fact, above average AROPE rates are recorded among children in single-parent households<sup>9</sup>, large families<sup>10</sup> and low to medium-skilled families<sup>11</sup>. Other vulnerable groups include migrant children<sup>12</sup> and children experiencing housing exclusion.

Children in Malta have relatively lower income inequality and higher child well-being compared to other European countries<sup>13</sup>. While the majority of the 81,948 children lived in households<sup>14</sup>, 510 children lived in out-of-home care in 2019<sup>15</sup>.

In Malta, data on homeless children was not available as at end 2020. Notwithstanding, children in Malta experiencing severe housing deprivation stood at 2.3%<sup>16</sup> in 2019; registering a decrease of 1% compared to 2017 figures at national level. This rate is also significantly lower than the EU27 average standing at 6.0%<sup>17</sup>.

In addition, the overcrowding rate of children recorded one of the lowest rates for Malta in 2020 standing at 6.3%<sup>18</sup>, which is very low compared to the EU27 average of 25.9%<sup>19</sup>. On the other hand, an increasing trend has been noticed in the housing cost overburden rate for children in Malta standing at 2.6%<sup>20</sup> in 2020. Notwithstanding, this rate is still very low compared to the EU27 average standing at 9.0%<sup>21</sup>.

### 1.3 Integrated and Enabling Policy Framework

Malta's Child Guarantee will continue to build upon the existing policy framework and will consolidate efforts towards social inclusion and breaking intergenerational cycles of poverty. The local

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<sup>8</sup> Eurostat. 2021. 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\\_1886535/default/table?lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ILC_PEPS01N_custom_1886535/default/table?lang=en). [Accessed on 23/08/2021]

<sup>9</sup> The 'two adults, three or more dependent children' category experienced the highest AROPE among all household types during 2018 and 2019 by 33.1% and 27.3% respectively.

<sup>10</sup> Eurostat. 2021. People at risk of poverty or social exclusion by income quintile and household type [ilc\_peps03]. Accessed at:

[https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/product/view/ilc\\_peps03?lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/product/view/ilc_peps03?lang=en). [Accessed on 23/08/2021]

<sup>11</sup> European Commission. 2019. Country Report Malta. Accessed at: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/file\\_import/2019-european-semester-country-report-malta\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/file_import/2019-european-semester-country-report-malta_en.pdf).

<sup>12</sup> A recent report by Eurostat (2019) referred to the 13% of non-EU foreigners living in Malta that live in overcrowded homes, compared to 0.6% EU nationals and 2% Maltese. 12% (9,892 children) of the total child population resident in Malta are foreign.

<sup>13</sup> United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). 2016. Fairness for Children: A league table of inequality in child well-being in rich countries.

Accessed at: [https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/RC13\\_eng.pdf](https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/RC13_eng.pdf). [Accessed on 7/12/2020]

<sup>14</sup> Within the community; with parents/guardians.

<sup>15</sup> Internal Data provided by FSWS Head Office on 10<sup>th</sup> May 2021.

<sup>16</sup> 2.1% boys and 2.6% girls.

<sup>17</sup> Eurostat. 2021. Severe housing deprivation rate by age, sex and poverty status - EU-SILC survey [ilc\_mdho06a]. Accessed at:

[https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ilc\\_mdho06a\\$DV\\_657/default/table?lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ilc_mdho06a$DV_657/default/table?lang=en). [Accessed on 23/08/2021]

<sup>18</sup> 4.8% boys and 5.3% girls.

<sup>19</sup> Eurostat. 2021. Overcrowding rate by age, sex and poverty status - total population - EU-SILC survey [ilc\_lvho05a]. Accessed at:

[http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=ilc\\_lvho05a](http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=ilc_lvho05a). [Accessed on 23/08/2021]

<sup>20</sup> 3.1% boys and 2.6% girls.

<sup>21</sup> Eurostat. 2021. Housing cost overburden rate by age, sex and poverty status - EU-SILC survey [ilc\_lvho07a]. Accessed at:

[https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=ilc\\_lvho07a&lang=en](https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=ilc_lvho07a&lang=en). [Accessed on 23/08/2021]

implementation of children's rights, including poverty reduction and the promotion of social inclusion, has been and remains a priority for Malta.

The two national policies which form the integrated and enabling framework to combat child poverty and social exclusion are the '**National Strategic Policy for Poverty Reduction and for Social Inclusion 2014-2024**'<sup>22</sup> and the '**National Children's Policy**'<sup>23</sup>.

*The National Strategic Policy for Poverty Reduction and for Social Inclusion 2014-2024*

*The National Strategic Policy for Poverty Reduction and for Social Inclusion 2014-2024* is Malta's current long-term strategic policy that puts forward a 10-year plan to address poverty and social exclusion, in which AROPE children and their families form part of the targeted population. The strategic policy acknowledges that no person is spared from the possibility of falling into risk of poverty and social exclusion.

Children are one of the four target groups identified in the National Strategic Policy for Poverty Reduction and Social Inclusion. This policy document outlines various strategic policy actions within various dimensions, which include: healthcare, education, employment, social services and others, with a view to enhance prospects for all vulnerable groups, in particular. These strategic policy actions aim to enhance the social protection system and promote activation measures to creating employment opportunities and facilitating mobility and de-segmentation in the labour market, addressing educational inequalities and ensuring equal access to quality healthcare, amongst others. Ultimately these policy actions would contribute towards addressing intergenerational poverty and social exclusion.

The development of the *National Strategic Policy for Poverty Reduction and for Social Inclusion 2014-2024* is based on a long-term approach towards poverty reduction and social inclusion directed by the following principles:

- An active inclusion approach which requires an integrated policy framework that combines adequate income, inclusive labour markets and access to quality social services.
- A human rights approach based on equality, diversity and social justice.
- A life-course approach which connects more directly with people's needs as they change throughout their lives.

### **National Children's Policy'**

The *National Children's Policy* acknowledges the special attention required for children, as a specific group and highlights the uniqueness of each child. Taking into consideration the various opportunities and challenges associated with different developmental stages and the dynamic and multiple needs experienced by children throughout their lives, this Policy, fosters a life-course approach to wellbeing.

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<sup>22</sup> Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity. 2014. National Strategic Policy for Poverty Reduction and for Social Inclusion 2014-2024. Accessed at: <https://family.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Poverty-Strategy-14-EN.pdf> [Accessed on: 02/09/2021].

<sup>23</sup> Ministry for the Family, Children's Rights and Social Solidarity. 2017. National Children's Policy. Accessed at: <https://tfal.org.mt/en/professionals/PublishingImages/Pages/Documents/National%20Childrens%27s%20Policy%202017.pdf> [Accessed on 02/09/2021]



The National Children’s Policy outlines a series of policy objectives within different themes and scenarios, which include, amongst others, social, education, health, nutrition and housing. This policy has identified a number of guiding principles namely::

- Protection – which highlights the importance to guarantee the safety of children by protecting them from significant harm;
- Provision – to cover the special needs of children and their right to access quality services, including the right to adequate standard of living and the right to leisure, play and cultural activities; and
- Participation – to ensure that children influence decision-making which affects their lives to bring about positive change.

Besides the above-mentioned, main policy documents there are other complementary policies which contribute towards the well being of children such as;

- the *National Strategy for Mental Health in Malta 2020 - 2030*<sup>24</sup>, with a special focus on children whereby it addresses the broader context and determinants of health, while pursuing inter-sectoral initiatives with schools and workplaces as a priority in the prevention of mental illness and
- the *Early Childhood Education and Care (0–7 years): National Policy Framework for Malta and Gozo*<sup>25</sup> which aims to ensure optimal foundations for the children’s wellbeing, learning and development.

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<sup>24</sup> Ministry for Health. 2019. ‘Building Resilience, Transforming Services: A Mental Health Strategy for Malta 2020-2030’. Available at: [https://deputyprimeminister.gov.mt/en/Documents/National-Health-Strategies/Mental\\_Health\\_Strategy\\_EN.pdf](https://deputyprimeminister.gov.mt/en/Documents/National-Health-Strategies/Mental_Health_Strategy_EN.pdf)

<sup>25</sup> Ministry for Education. October 2021. *Early Childhood Education and Care (0–7 years): National Policy Framework for Malta and Gozo*. Accessed at <https://education.gov.mt/en/resources/Documents/Policy%20Documents/NPF%20Early%20Childhood%20Education%20and%20Care%20-%20A4%20Oct21.pdf>.

# 2. Specific Target Group and Key Services

For the purpose of the National Child Guarantee, 'Children in need' is defined as children under the age of 18 years who are at risk of poverty or social exclusion (ARPE). This refers to children who either:

- live in households at risk of poverty; or
- are experiencing severe material and social deprivation; or
- live in households with very low work intensity.

Within this context, apart from targeting **all** children at risk or poverty and social exclusion, Malta's Child Guarantee places specific attention on a specific group of **children in precarious family situations**.

## 2.1 Children in precarious family situations

'Children living in precarious family situations' is a broad concept which encompasses different risks. There are three broad factors that may lead to family precariousness, namely:

- **Economic fragility:** refers to a situation where the household's assets and resources are insufficient to protect the child against poverty or hardship;
- **Household composition:** refers to certain characteristics of the members of the household where the child lives – for example, the age of the mother or the number of adults and children in the household (single-adult households with children, households consisting of two adults and three or more children); and
- **(Other) social risk factors:** these are individual/group characteristics or situations that may lead children and their households into precariousness. These include mental health issues, violence and exclusion due to discrimination or the spatial dynamics of urban segregation.

The National Action Plan for a Child Guarantee in Malta targets the children in precarious family situations with **economic fragility**.

### *The Effects of COVID-19*

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has left a mark on the economic and social well-being of families and children and is likely to affect children from disadvantaged backgrounds, especially families with low income.

## 2.2 Social Protection for Children in precarious family situations

Malta's Social Protection System is purposely designed to safeguard society against the social risks in relation to individual, familial and societal wellbeing. Table 2 below portrays a number of social benefits and social welfare services provided to families with children in need to alleviate the low socio-economic status.

Table 2. Social Benefits and Social Welfare Services

<p>Target Groups being addressed by ongoing/planned measures</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ All children aged 0 – 17 years and their parents/guardians</li> <li>✓ Low-income families with children aged 0 – 17 years</li> </ul>
<p>Ongoing / Planned Measures</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <b>Children's Allowance</b> is awarded weekly to families with children from birth until 16 years of age amounting to a total weekly minimum of €21.16 per child. Households who do not exceed the means test, are awarded higher rates of these allowances per child, up to a total weekly maximum of €41.58 per child.</li> <li>✓ <b>A one-time €300 Bonus</b> is paid to the mother of a newborn child or adoptive parent. Should the mother give birth or adopt more than one child at the same instance, the bonus is also paid for each newborn or adopted child.</li> <li>✓ <b>Widows' Pension (for Widows with Children)</b> amounting to a weekly maximum of €277.63 is payable to widows who have the care and custody of children.</li> <li>✓ <b>Foster Care Allowance amounting to €110 per week</b> is awarded to authorised foster carers providing a foster care service to a child. Similarly, the <b>Child in Care Benefit (Residential Service)</b> amounting to €110 per week is provided to residential/community children's homes for each residing child. Beneficiaries of these allowances are not in receipt of the Children's Allowance.</li> <li>✓ <b>Fostering Services</b> mainly work on: a) eligibility of prospective foster carers; ii) carrying out foster care placement agreements and their regular revision; iii) drawing up review reports on foster carers; and iv) permanent fostering and adoption through fostering whereby minors placed in foster care have less chance of being lost in care. <b>In addition, a designated helpline i.e. 1778 Helpline</b> is specifically aimed to provide support to persons who are interested in fostering.</li> <li>✓ <b>Supportline 179:</b> This National helpline is a crises hotline accessible on a 24/7 basis for children.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <b>Disabled Child Allowance</b> is granted to children who are certified to be suffering from a physical and/or mental disability. This allowance is paid in addition to the Children's Allowance.</li>   <li>✓ <b>Orphan's Allowance</b> is a weekly allowance (amounting to €66.44) paid to a guardian who is taking care of a child/ren aged under 16 years and where parents of the child are both dead. Similarly, a guardian is paid the weekly <b>Orphan's Supplementary Allowance</b> of €111.52 if they are taking care of a child/ren aged between 16 and 21 years where parents of the child are both dead and where the child is not following any gainful occupation and the gross earnings of which do not exceed the national minimum wage. Beneficiaries of these allowances are also in receipt of the Children's Allowance.</li>   <li>✓ <b>Sustainable Baby Box initiative:</b> Distribution of starter-kits with 10 sustainable baby products to all parents welcoming a child. Products include amongst others a baby blanket, a reusable nappy and a tote bag, a feeding bib, teether, socks and mittens.</li>   <li>✓ <b>Domestic Violence Services include:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Risk assessment services, access to secure shelter, legal aid and accompaniment to Court sittings by the Domestic Violence Unit at FSWS, the Gender-Based and Domestic Violence Police Unit and the Victim Support Unit situated at the Police Headquarters and Legal Aid Malta.</li> <li>○ A timely service to help perpetrators of violence and abuse. This also includes the Child to Parent Violence Service through which both the minor perpetrators and parent victims of violence are supported.</li> </ul> </li>   <li>✓ <b>Intake and Family Support Service</b> provides social work interventions and assistance to children and their families. Services provided include home visits, referral to the most appropriate services, regular follow-ups, etc. This service has sub teams working on Homelessness and Human Trafficking. Other social work services are also offered to targeted groups of individuals, such as the <b>High Support Service</b> which offers one to one support for minors at the community level concerning their needs, particularly their reintegration within the wider community.</li>   <li>✓ <b>Community Services:</b> One stop shops in various localities across Malta and Gozo offering support to families at risk of poverty or social exclusion, through social work and community work, including help with social/life skills, education and employment. These one stop shops also serve as distribution points of the food boxes given as part of the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD) and the State Funded Food Distribution (SFFD). The Community Services opened the first community mental health clinic on one of its premises, in collaboration with the Ministry for Health.</li> </ul>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <b>BeSmartOnline!</b> Is a project to create awareness amongst children, educators, parents/primary caregivers and other stakeholders on how to make safe use of the internet. This project also includes the <b>Child Web Alert Hotline</b>.</li> <li>✓ <b>Out of Hours Emergency Service:</b> A team of social workers who are on call after office hours to intervene in special situations requiring immediate assistance, primarily cases related to child protection, domestic violence and children in care.</li> <li>✓ <b>Adoption Services</b> support families who are in the process of adopting a child/ren as well as families who adopted. The unit works to facilitate local and international adoptions and to prevent placement breakdowns.</li> <li>✓ <b>Looked After Children (LAC):</b> Tailor-made care plans and monitoring in line with the Minor Protection (Alternative Care) Act (Chapter 602 of the Laws of Malta) for children in need of being looked after/in out-of-home care/living away from their natural family. These children could be living either in a community/residential home or in foster care.</li> <li>✓ <b>After Care Service for children in care aged 15-17 years.</b> Support to persons leaving institutional care to facilitate their independent living and ensure a good quality of life. An after-care plan is drawn, and a key worker follows this individualised plan together with the young person.</li> <li>✓ <b>Supervised Access Visits (SAVs) and Court Services:</b> supervised meetings between children and the non-custodial parents/other family members when access is not possible otherwise. The service is child focused and offered in a safe environment while it facilitates communication, relationship and maintenance building among all members. Social workers strive to enhance contact with the biological parents where appropriate. Moreover, for this purpose, Court Assessments are carried out and recommendations put forward to address access, therapy, and referrals to other services.</li> <li>✓ <b>Children’s House:</b> A child-friendly, developmentally sensitive procedure/house that aims at making judicial procedures and investigations less traumatic for children.</li> <li>✓ <b>Several holistic initiatives, interventions and services targeting young people experiencing precarious situations, including:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Social work and youth work one to one interventions for young people;</li> <li>✓ <b>Engaging Through Active Learning Programme (E.T.A.L.):</b> Through this programme a youth worker and social worker intervene with young people who engage in challenging attitudes within the school and home environment;</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <b>Embark for Life (EFL):</b> This project supports and addresses several needs of young people, mainly related to finding and retaining employment and to engage in training opportunities.</li> <li>✓ <b>Opportunity Knocks (OK)</b> project works with youth to learn and enhance skills, boost their employment possibilities and other opportunities to help them reach their goals and advance in their career.</li> <li>✓ Interventions with youth inmates within correctional facilities.</li> <li>✓ <b>Home Start (HS) Service</b> helps children and their families in need through family visits (both in HS offices and in the families' homes), follow-up phone calls, outdoor activities, virtual and reading sessions and food donations.</li> <li>✓ <b>The Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD):</b> Food boxes are distributed 3 times a year to families who are most in need or vulnerable.</li> <li>✓ <b>The State Funded Food Distribution (SFFD):</b> Food boxes are distributed twice a year to families who are most in need or vulnerable and is totally funded by the State.</li> <li>✓ <b>Programmes and Resources for Positive Parenting:</b> Three different types of positive parenting programmes are offered according to the type of household, including a specific programme for parents who are separated or in the process of separation.</li> <li>✓ <b>A social welfare services branch in Gozo:</b> A regional team based in Gozo offers the main services that are provided by FSWS in Malta, according to Gozo's social needs.</li> <li>✓ <b>Prevention Services</b> (in schools, in workplaces, in the community and through the media) concerning alcohol, drugs, gambling and other addictions. A team of youth workers, social workers and psychology graduates inform and help people, including children, parents and teachers amongst others, to lead healthy lifestyles away from addictions.</li> <li>✓ <b>A Substance Misuse In-patient Unit (SMIPU),</b> also known as Dar L-Impenn. A 24/7 medical observation unit operating by a multi-disciplinary team for substance misusers who need medical attention during the stabilisation of treatment, the substitution of treatment regimes, or the detoxification from substances of abuse.</li> <li>✓ <b>A Substance Misuse Outpatients Unit (SMOPU),</b> also known as the Detox Centre. A centre to engage individuals with a substance misuse problem in low threshold interventions, whereby basic medical, social and psychological needs are assessed, and the necessary assistance provided. For this reason, there is a multi-disciplinary team made up of doctors, nurses, social workers, a pharmacist, as well as a visiting psychiatrist.</li> </ul>
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	<p>✓ <b>Psychological and Court Services</b> (for persons having problems with alcohol, drugs and gambling). The Psychological Services offers a generic service and hosts an interdisciplinary team made up of Psychologists, Family Therapists, Gestalt Psychotherapists, an Art Psychotherapist and Counsellors. Court Services include psychotherapy service and coordination with persons who are being regularly seen and followed up on their progress by the Drug Offenders Rehabilitation Board (DORB).</p>
<p>Indicative Annual Budget for AROPE Children</p>	<p>✓ € 40,000,000</p>

## 2.3 Early Childhood Education and Care, Inclusive Education and School-Based Activities, including a Healthy Meal Each School Day

Government provides free education to all AROPE children through schools found in all localities. Transport is also provided for free to and from school to children (aged 3-4 years) attending Kindergarten or compulsory primary and secondary schooling (children aged 5-16 years).

At national level, Early Childhood Education and Care and Inclusive Education are primarily guided by the following strategies:

- the *Framework for the Education Strategy for Malta 2014-2024* which aims to: i) reduce the gaps in educational outcomes between boys and girls and between students attending different schools, decrease the number of low achievers and raise the bar in literacy, numeracy and science and technology competence and increase student achievement; ii) support educational achievement of children at-risk-of-poverty and from low socio-economic status and reduce the relatively high incidence of early school-leavers; iii) increase participation in lifelong learning and adult learning; and iv) raise levels of student retention and attainment in further, vocational and tertiary education and training;
- the *National Literacy Strategy for All in Malta and Gozo 2021–2030*<sup>26</sup> to reduce the number of individuals who are socially excluded because of a lack of or a low level of literacy skills;
- the *Strategic Plan for the Prevention of Early School Leaving in Malta*<sup>27</sup> that was launched in 2014 to implement focused attention as from early childhood to post-secondary education;
- the '*Policy on Inclusive Education in Schools: Route to Quality Inclusion*', '*A National Inclusive Education Framework*'<sup>28</sup> that was launched in 2019 to ensure there are inclusive education measures in place which are accessible to all children. By acting as a guide to educators, professional and parents, this policy aims to reach a more inclusive education system, reduce gaps in educational outcomes, increase learner participation, raise student attainment levels and support educational achievement for all children, thus moving away from a one size fits all approach; and
- the *Early Childhood Education and Care (0–7 years): National Policy Framework for Malta and Gozo*<sup>29</sup> that was published in October 2021 to outline its strategic plan for achieving the five goals concerning accessibility, the workforce, curriculum, monitoring and evaluation and governance and funding.

The following sections outline the main ongoing/ planned measures addressing the recommendations of the Council Recommendation establishing a European Child Guarantee. For ease of reference such requirements have been reproduced in apposite boxes. It is to be noted that unless outlined otherwise, the mentioned measures and services target all children, including AROPE children.

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<sup>26</sup> Launched for public consultation in June 2021. Accessed at [https://meae.gov.mt/en/PublicConsultations/MEDE/Documents/NLS%202021\\_2030%20Consultation%20Document%20June%202021.pdf](https://meae.gov.mt/en/PublicConsultations/MEDE/Documents/NLS%202021_2030%20Consultation%20Document%20June%202021.pdf)

<sup>27</sup> Strategic Plan for the Prevention of Early School Leaving in Malta Accessed at <https://education.gov.mt/en/resources/Documents/Policy%20Documents%202014/School%20Leaving%20in%20Malta%20June%202014.pdf>.

<sup>28</sup> A parents' guide to these policy documents is available and can be found online at: [https://meae.gov.mt/en/Public\\_Consultations/MEDE/Documents/MEDE\\_parents%20guide\\_EN\\_v2.pdf](https://meae.gov.mt/en/Public_Consultations/MEDE/Documents/MEDE_parents%20guide_EN_v2.pdf).

<sup>29</sup> Ministry for Education. October 2021. *Early Childhood Education and Care (0–7 years): National Policy Framework for Malta and Gozo*. Accessed at <https://education.gov.mt/en/resources/Documents/Policy%20Documents/NPF%20Early%20Childhood%20Education%20and%20Care%20-%20A4%20Oct21.pdf>.



**The European Child Guarantee calls on Member States to:**

- (a) identify and address financial and non-financial barriers to participation in early childhood education and care, education and school-based activities.**

***Financial Barriers: Free Services***

To address financial barriers to participation in education, a number of services are guaranteed by Government as from the early years:

- *Childcare:* In line with the established the National Standards for Early Childhood Education and Care Services (0-3 years)<sup>30</sup>, quality childcare is offered for free for children whose parents are in education or employment. Government actively supports those families who are unemployed and/or who are in the process of seeking employment and who are considered as ‘social cases’ by granting an exemption from all fees of childcare and referring them to the Foundation for Social Welfare Services (FSWS) to provide other necessary assistance. According to the established National Standards for Early Childhood Education and Care Services (0-3 years), childcare centres should offer equal opportunities for all children including those with special needs.
- *Education:* Free pre-primary (Kindergarten), primary, secondary and post-secondary education is offered to all children aged 3 to 17 years in Malta. Students’ active participation in the learning process through engagement in pro-social lifestyles, critical thinking, creative expression and hands-on learning – that reduce absenteeism and early school leaving – are promoted.
- *Before, After and Beyond School Programmes:* Government is investing in before, after and beyond school programmes to allow parents to work and avoid losing possible income. Whilst promoting parents’/guardians’ entry and retention into employment, these programmes offer a safe and interactive learning environment.

***Non-Financial Barriers: Inclusive Education***

Discrimination and social exclusion can be considered as non-financial barriers to participation in early childhood education and care, education and school-based activities. Apart from the strategy on Inclusive Education (mentioned under the previous section), other complementary strategies that tackle certain non-financial barriers to education include:

- *The Freedom to Live: Malta’s 2021–2030 National Strategy on the Rights of Disabled Persons*<sup>31</sup> which includes 13 objectives calling for a total of 63 actions to be completed within the short (2 years), medium- (5 years) and long-term (9 years). The strategy aims towards the achievement of more disability rights in line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals across multiple spheres, including amongst others; research and data collection, awareness-raising, accessibility and participation, relationships and sexuality, education and healthcare.
- *Respect for All Framework 2014* which aims to implement a whole school approach manifested by a unified collective and collaborative action among educators, administrators, parents and students. This document provides a planned and systematic way of how schools are to develop

<sup>30</sup> Ministry for Education. October 2021. National Standards for Early Childhood Education and Care Services (0-3 Years). Accessed at <https://education.gov.mt/en/resources/Documents/Policy%20Documents/MFED%20National%20Standards%20ECEC%20Oct21.pdf>.

<sup>31</sup> The Freedom to Live: Malta’s 2021–2030 National Strategy on the Rights of Disabled Persons Accessed at [https://meae.gov.mt/en/Public\\_Consultations/MISW/PublishingImages/Pages/Consultations/Maltas20212030NationalStrategyontheRightsofDisabledPersons/Proposed%20National%20Disability%20Strategy%20%E2%80%93%20Easy%20Read%20English%20version.pdf](https://meae.gov.mt/en/Public_Consultations/MISW/PublishingImages/Pages/Consultations/Maltas20212030NationalStrategyontheRightsofDisabledPersons/Proposed%20National%20Disability%20Strategy%20%E2%80%93%20Easy%20Read%20English%20version.pdf).

an environment for all students to have the opportunity to obtain the necessary skills, attitudes and values to be active citizens and to succeed at work and in society. It is within this context that this Framework simultaneously addresses the two pillars of ‘learning to be’ and ‘learning to live together’.

Table 3 below provides the ongoing and planned initiatives for 2022-2030 that address financial and non-financial barriers to education during all the entire childhood.

*Table 3. Initiatives addressing barriers to education throughout childhood*

<p><b>Target Groups being addressed by ongoing/planned measures</b></p>	<p>✓ All Children aged 0-17 years</p>
<p><b>Ongoing / Planned Measures</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <b>Free pre-primary, primary, secondary and post-secondary education to all children.</b> Educational Facilities are also equipped to cater for children with disabilities / special educational needs.</li> <li>✓ <b>Free Childcare Services.</b> The childcare centre coordinators work closely with other professionals and with the families to help ameliorate the families’ situation. New childcare centres will also start operating in new localities. A new measure has recently been introduced to have childcare centres open during the weekend and late hours.</li> <li>✓ <b>Breakfast Clubs.</b> Children attending State Pre-Primary and Primary School whose parents are employed or studying, are given the opportunity of having a healthy breakfast. Parents can drop their children early before school starts.</li> <li>✓ <b>Klabb 3-16.</b> An after-school care service within school structures is provided during the Scholastic year, particularly to bridge the gap between day school and regular working hours of parents in employment. It is currently being operated in 30 localities and one may choose the centre that is most convenient. The service is also offered to working parents during holidays.</li> <li>✓ <b>Skola Sajf.</b> A beyond school care service within school structures during Summer. The service engages children in a series of cultural, artistic, physical activities and outings. This service is offered in various centres around Malta and Gozo.</li> <li>✓ <b>Waiver of the Matsec and Sec Examination Fees.</b></li> <li>✓ <b>Students Maintenance Grants for all students (including those students who repeat a year).</b> The Maintenance Grants include the initial grant (payable to first-year or promoted post-secondary students, amounting to €322.94), the one-time grant (payable to first-year tertiary students, amounting to €465.87 or €698.81 depending on the course priority), the stipend (amounting to a maximum of €322.07 every four weeks depending on the course priority), the supplementary allowances for students facing specific disadvantages (amounting to a maximum of €324.70 every four weeks, depending on the course type and year), the single parents’ grant (varying by increased amounts as the MQF level gets higher and amounting to a maximum of €1,000), Summer Special</li> </ul>

	<p>Stipends (amounting to €243.83 every four weeks); and Top-up Stipends.</p> <p>✓ <b>€10,000 fund for vulnerable students:</b> The government will provide €10,000 per year to heads of State primary and secondary schools to spend on food and other basic resources for vulnerable students coming from disadvantaged family backgrounds.</p>
<p>Indicative Annual Budget for AROPE Children</p>	<p>✓ €64,000,000</p>

**The European Child Guarantee calls on Member States to:**

- b) take measures to prevent and reduce early school leaving, taking into account a gender perspective, to re-engage children who are at risk of dropping out or have dropped out of education and training, including by providing personalised guidance and strengthening cooperation with families.**

It is essential to equip children with the necessary skills and qualifications to fulfil their potential, however, a number of children still drop out of school, leave school early, or do not engage in further education.

In order to decrease the rate of early school leavers and dropouts, sustainable and long-term measures need to be implemented to retain student motivation and engagement. The second *Early Leaving from Education and Training (ELET) Policy: The Way Forward 2020-2030*<sup>32</sup> includes a holistic and inclusive approach, that not only targets students at risk but also those students who have already dropped out, their families and communities.

Incentives which aim to motivate students to remain in education, include the provision of career related information and guidance, job exposure opportunities and support services and programmes. Students have the opportunity to be guided on the job they aspire for and thus their preferred learning paths and subject choices. This also includes apprenticeships and work-based learning. From primary school years, students are exposed to different ways of being engaged in formal and informal discussions to familiarise with different careers. Secondary students are exposed to a number of subjects and career guidance which will pave the way for their professional choices.

Table 4 below illustrates ongoing and planned measures to prevent early school leaving.

*Table 4. Measures to prevent early school leaving*

<b>Target Groups being addressed by ongoing/planned measures</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ All children aged 5-17 years attending State Primary, Secondary and Higher Secondary Schools</li> <li>✓ Unmarried pregnant minors aged 13-17 years , their families and their partners</li> <li>✓ Parents of children in Year 7 (attending State and Church Schools) aged 11 years</li> <li>✓ Migrant Children</li> </ul>
<b>Ongoing / Planned Measures</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <b>One to one career guidance sessions.</b> This service aims to inform and prepare students about the world, even before students finish compulsory schooling. The service mostly focuses on secondary school students, with the aim of helping students to choose their post-secondary institution or career path. Year 10 students receive career exposure experience of their choice which helps them see the benefits of academic subjects in preparation for employment. The service is also provided within primary schools.</li> <li>✓ <b>The Alternative Learning Programme (ALP).</b> A vocational and creative centre that offers many hands-on and practical opportunities through a number of programmes and courses. It engages students to develop</li> </ul>

<sup>32</sup>Early Leaving from Education and Training (ELET) Policy: The Way Forward 2020-2030. Accessed at: [https://meae.gov.mt/en/Public\\_Consultations/MEDE/Documents/ELET%20POLICY%20Document.pdf](https://meae.gov.mt/en/Public_Consultations/MEDE/Documents/ELET%20POLICY%20Document.pdf)

themselves for the needs of a society that is increasingly demanding skilled and knowledgeable workers. The programme is available for students who are in their final year of formal compulsory schooling (Year 11) and can be pursued for two years. The ALP+ is also available for students between the ages of 16 and 18.

- ✓ **Gem16+.** A new school offering the opportunity to continue academic and work-related learning to those students aged 16 years and over who only attained 1 SEC exam, or the Secondary School Certificate and Profile. This is a 1-year educational programme.
- ✓ **A one-year induction course offered to non-Maltese students** who cannot communicate in Maltese or English; and an intensive course during the summer to cater for the needs of those migrant learners who do not understand English and Maltese and who were finding language barriers an issue in terms of integrating in Malta. After following the induction course, the learners achieve not only a linguistic fluency but also the skills to transition smoothly into mainstream schooling.
- ✓ **Servizz Għozza:** A support service and an educational programme is provided to unmarried pregnant minors with the intention of leading them to adopt a positive attitude towards motherhood while empowering them to pursue their career paths. The services offered include: i) a programme for pregnant girls; ii) a counselling service for girls, their partners and their respective families; iii) meetings for parents of pregnant girls; iv) support groups for mother and baby; v) prevention programmes for parents of students in Year 7 and to students in Year 9; vi) targeted outreach prevention programmes to specific groups of children requiring psycho-social assistance in secondary schools; vii) psychological, moral and educational support programmes aimed at enhancing the girls academic development; viii) facilitating contacts with and the support of other relevant organisations and services for the benefit of both schoolgirl mother and her child; and ix) liaising with and advising school administrators regarding pregnant students according to specific needs of each case.
- ✓ **Work-based learning.** Students are being provided with apprenticeships and experience on the workplace through work-based learning (WBL).
- ✓ **Support to increase school attendance.** Social workers contact parents of students who are not attending school to encourage them to send their children physically to school and offer support in this regard. Contact is also maintained with schools to update them regarding contact with students as well as conduct school visits to check on the students who returned to school. Most of the issues raised are solved and students resume attending.
- ✓ **Community Liaison Workers (CLWs)** work with the psychosocial support teams in colleges to follow cases of children out of school or at risk of social exclusion and poverty. The CLWs also work in particular with families of migrant learners who are at risk of underachievement or

	school drop-out or who are not attending school, through explaining education-related procedures, helping the family to overcome challenges by facilitating access to services.
<b>Indicative Annual Budget for AROPE Children</b>	✓ €400,000

**The European Child Guarantee calls on Member States to:**

- c) provide learning support to children with learning difficulties to compensate for their linguistic, cognitive and educational gaps;**
- d) adapt facilities and educational materials of early childhood education and care and of educational establishments and provide the most appropriate response to the specific needs of children with special educational needs and of children with disabilities, using inclusive teaching and learning methods; for this purpose, ensure that qualified teachers and other professionals are available, such as psychologists, speech therapists, rehabilitators, social workers or teaching assistants;**
- e) put in place measures to support inclusive education and avoid segregated classes in early childhood education and care establishments and in educational establishments; this may also include giving priority to, or, when needed, early access for children in need;**

Learning Difficulties

During 2018/2019, there were 6,189 children with disability. Out of these children: 3,521 had a Learning Support Educators (LSE) and 218 attended special schools. To address learning difficulties, the National Strategy on the Rights of Disabled Persons<sup>33</sup> aims to provide the Maltese disability sector with a roadmap up to year 2030. In particular, the strategy sets targeted actions aimed towards ensuring that there is better access to books and other materials in accessible formats in educational establishments and training for persons with disability on the use of digital technology. In this regard, Individualised Educational Plans (IEP's) are currently being provided for all students with a disability.

Inclusive Education

Inclusive education and inclusive practices are essential to produce an effective and efficient education system. At national level, the education system (through the *Education in Schools: Route to Quality Inclusion and A National Inclusive Education Framework*) is engaged in efforts to be inclusive and aims to provide all learners with accessible education through a conducive learning environment where processes are re-designed to respond to the learners' needs and social realities. This ensures their right to access to an inclusive education through equitable and accessible learning environment.

Table 5 below provides the planned initiatives for 2022-2030 (most of which have been ongoing and enhanced along the years) that ensure inclusive education during the entire childhood, taking into consideration those with learning difficulties and that require special educational needs.

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<sup>33</sup> Ministry for Inclusion and Social Wellbeing. Malta's 2021 – 2030 National Strategy on the Rights of Disabled Persons. Accessed from: <https://inclusion.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Disability-Doc-ENG-SEP-21.pdf>.

Table 5. Measures seeking to ensure inclusive education throughout childhood

<p><b>Target Groups being addressed by ongoing/planned measures</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Children aged 0 to 7 years and their parents/guardians</li> <li>✓ All low ability primary school children attending Year 3 to Year 6 (aged 7 to 11 years) and their parents/guardians</li> <li>✓ All State Primary school children</li> <li>✓ All educators (including KGEs, Teachers and LSEs) in all primary, secondary and post-secondary schools</li> </ul>
<p><b>Ongoing / Planned Measures</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <b>Read with Me programme.</b> Free one-hour sessions which include sharing of stories from books, singing of nursery rhymes and other fun activities for this age group. The sessions are held once a week and support the development of reading and other literacy abilities.</li> <li>✓ <b>Reading Ambassadors Programme.</b> A school-based literacy initiative which promotes the pleasure of reading through events involving local personalities to motivate children and young people to read. Reading Ambassadors include authors, singers, actors, footballers, presenters, broadcasters and journalists.</li> <li>✓ <b>Nwar Programme.</b> An afterschool, family literacy programme to support low ability primary school children with literacy difficulties (who have not acquired the required basic skills level by end of Year 3) to acquire basic literacy skills by the end of Year 6.</li> <li>✓ <b>The Magic of Stories.</b> This programme aims to promote reading among children and their parents/guardians. Weekly sessions are held free of charge, where a number of stories are read in a fun and motivating environment, to stimulate children’s imagination.</li> <li>✓ <b>Training for Teachers.</b> All educators are given pedagogical training to remain abreast with new methods of learning through innovative and modern approaches including on-line courses to be better equipped to offer a higher level of teaching. Educators also received <b>pedagogical training</b> in vocational subjects, to be able to teach at secondary level, through foreign and local universities. Courses also provided to Supply Teachers to become regular teachers. Training might also involve train-the-trainers’ sessions.</li> <li>✓ <b>Instalment of Autism Units and Braille Machines:</b> More schools will have Autism Units and Braille Machines to improve and assist multi-sensory learning, as well as to increase knowledge and awareness amongst educators and students.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Indicative Annual Budget for AROPE Children</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ €420,000</li> </ul>



**The European Child Guarantee calls on Member States to:**

- f) provide at least one healthy meal each school day;**
- g) ensure provision of educational materials, including digital educational tools, books, uniforms or any required clothing, where applicable;**

Parents/guardians who have low income or who have a low educational background may find it increasingly difficult to provide adequate nutrition for their children and the necessary education materials. Healthy food and educational materials come at a high cost and there may also be a lack of awareness of what constitutes a healthy diet.

Through the *Scheme 9*, free healthy and nutritious meals, are provided on all school days to children in low-income families. Additionally, *Scheme 9* provides for other in-kind benefits including: free uniform; free stationary; free photocopies; and exemption from any fees in relation to extracurricular activities. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the provision of healthy meals was retained through a distribution service to the students’ homes, while an internet connection and computer/tablet at home were provided to the most vulnerable.

Free school textbooks are lent to all students in compulsory education, while reading books, adapted according to the child’s age, are provided to those benefiting from *Scheme 9*. Access to languages other than Maltese and English is increasingly given attention through the provision of books, digital resources and in-school activities.

As also indicated under the next Section on clauses (h), the provision of a tablet to each student from Year 4 to Year 6 (and envisaged to be introduced in Middle School), together with the complementary supply of tablets and training to all educators (including teachers and LSEs) shows the commitment of Government in providing digital educational tools as well as the proactive approach taken to engage digitalisation

Table 6 below provides the planned initiatives for 2022-2030 that address students’ basic necessities to ensure the provision of quality educational experiences and development in schools.

*Table 6. Measures addressing students’ basic necessities for the provision of quality education in schools*

<b>Target Groups being addressed by ongoing/planned measures</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ All children in Kindergarten to Year 11/end of Secondary school (aged 3 to 15 years) whose family income is equivalent to or less than the minimum wage, whose family relies solely on social benefits, or whose household composition includes more than one child and has an annual income below €15,000</li> <li>✓ All primary and secondary school students (aged 5 to 16 years)</li> </ul>
<b>Ongoing / Planned Measures</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <b>Scheme 9</b> caters for students from difficult socio-economic and socio-cultural backgrounds as well as to alleviate the effects of poverty on the teaching and learning process.</li> </ul> <p>Through Scheme 9, parents of eligible students can choose one between the provision of the following five benefits at the start of the scholastic year:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- free uniform</li> <li>- a free daily healthy school lunch</li> <li>- free stationery</li> <li>- free photocopies,</li> <li>- free extracurricular activities, including SkolaSajf, the Klabb 3-16 after school services and sports programmes through SportMalta.</li> </ul> <p>Besides this benefit, every child on this scheme also receives free reading books, adapted according to their age (Home Libraries).</p> <p>During the COVID-19 pandemic, lunches continued to be distributed at the students' homes. Students without an internet connection and/or a tablet or computer at home, were also provided with one.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <b>Books are lent for free</b> to the student per scholastic year. Books are returned by the student once the scholastic year finishes.</li> <li>✓ <b>Strengthening the teaching of different languages</b> other than Maltese and English, by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ a number of in-schools activities to promote the learning of foreign languages;</li> <li>○ increase access to books and digital resources.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p>Indicative Annual Budget for AROPE Children</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ €1,000,000</li> </ul>

**The European Child Guarantee calls on Member States to:**

- h) provide high speed connectivity, digital services and adequate equipment necessary for distance learning to ensure access to educational content online, as well as to improve digital skills of children in need and teachers and make the necessary investments to tackle all forms of digital divide and enhance digital competences.**

Digital connectivity, equipment, skills and services are currently steered by *the National Digital Strategy*. Various measures have been implemented to tackle the digital divide and enhance digital competences under the previous *National Digital Strategy 2014-2020* and the *National eSkills Strategy 2019-2021* which remain ongoing as part of the current Strategy. The main measures include: free Internet access in schools and dedicated Wifi access<sup>34</sup>; provision of MS Office 365 and MS Teams to all primary school students; various initiatives in Artificial Intelligence (AI), such as a Data Warehouse<sup>35</sup>; and continuous awareness and courses to teachers and children to harness specific digital skills (e.g. coding)<sup>36</sup>.

*A National Strategy for Digital Education and Transversal Skills 2030* published for public consultation in November 2021 aims to identify learning outcomes in digital literacy through five categories of digital competencies, namely: Information Management, Communication and Collaboration, Digital Media, Using Digital Tools for Learning and Management of the Internet. In this regard, supporting the formation of digitally literate learners and to enable them to become independent, confident and discerning users of technology, is a crucial element. This strategy also entails building competence in using digital tools in various media and in different modes of learning.

Table 7 below provides the ongoing and planned initiatives for 2022-2030 that address equality of access to:

- digital connectivity, services and adequate equipment necessary for distance learning;
- educational content online;
- digital skills of children in need and educators.

*Table 7. Measures addressing equal access to digital connectivity, educational content online, and increased digital skills*

<b>Target Groups being addressed by ongoing/planned measures</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ All educators (including KGEs, LSEs, teachers, HODs, HOSs, Assistant HOSs) in pre-primary, primary and secondary schools (Kindergarten to Year 11)</li> <li>✓ All children in Kindergarten to Year 11 (aged 3-16 years) and their parents</li> <li>✓ All first year Post-Secondary School Students (Children aged 16-17 years)</li> </ul>
<b>Indicative Annual Budget for AROPE Children</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ €300,000</li> </ul>

<sup>34</sup> The Internet is based on a fibre-based, high speed connectivity. Possible introduction of even better connectivity, such as 5G, are being studied to be introduced till 2030.

<sup>35</sup> Moreover, it is planned that some AI websites will be introduced to help children during their curriculum studies, especially to early years school children.

<sup>36</sup> Additional specific digital skills courses are offered to girls.

**The European Child Guarantee calls on Member States to:**

- i) provide transport to early childhood education and care and education establishments, where applicable**

School transport (from home to school and from school to home) is offered free of charge to all students attending Kindergarten or compulsory schooling (Primary to Secondary School) who reside more than 1km distance away from their school. Child supervision is offered on transport used by pre-primary children.

This initiative is currently ongoing, as per below Table 8. Table 8

*Table 8. Free transport for all*

<b>Target Groups being addressed by ongoing/planned measures</b>	✓ All children in Kindergarten to Year 11 (aged 3 to 16 years)
<b>Ongoing / Planned Measures</b>	✓ <b>Free Transport for all (home - school - home).</b> Supervision is offered on transport used by pre-primary children
<b>Indicative Annual Budget for AROPE Children</b>	✓ €7,320,000

**The European Child Guarantee calls on Member States to:**

- j) ensure equal and inclusive access to school-based activities, including participation in school trips and sport, leisure and cultural activities**

Equal and inclusive access to school-based activities in the daily school curriculum are crucial for children’s holistic educational experience and engagement. These activities together with spiritual, religious and ethical experiences at school also aim to enhance the educational opportunities to nurture the maximum potential of each child.

Apart from the educational component, these activities provide children with opportunities for meaningful participation, innovation, collaboration, creativity and cultural appreciation.

Below, Table 9 provides the ongoing and planned initiatives for 2022-2030 through which equal and inclusive access to school-based activities for children in need is going to be implemented.

*Table 9. Measures for equal and inclusive access to school-based activities*

<p><b>Target Groups being addressed by ongoing/planned measures</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ All students attending pre-primary, primary, secondary and post-secondary level education (children aged 3-17 years)</li> <li>✓ Physical Education (PE) teachers</li> <li>✓ Children with a disability (attending mainstream and special schools)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Ongoing / Planned Measures</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <b>Physical Education within the National School Curriculum.</b> Children have regular lessons of physical activity at their schools; thus, promoting a healthy and active lifestyle among students. Through a variety of games, subject content focuses on the development of psychomotor skills and promotes physical, social and psychological development. Through this subject, children learn more about teamwork, fair play, leadership and social inclusion.</li> <li>✓ <b>The Heritage Malta Passport card</b> is provided to all students. This card provides free unlimited access for one student and any two accompanying adults to all Heritage Malta sites and museums. The card remains valid till the end of year of last school term of Year 11 (. Different events during the year as well as various promotions throughout the Christmas and Easter holidays are held to encourage holders of the said passport to visit Heritage Malta Sites and Museums.</li> <li>✓ <b>Outreach programs</b>, including talks on Heritage Sites and Museums which are not easily accessible, such as the Hal Saflieni Hypogeum. During the pandemic, these educational talks were held online.</li> <li>✓ <b>Thematic programmes</b> are delivered in different heritage sites to provide cultural information on these sites to children with disability. During the COVID-19 pandemic (2020/2021), instead of these physical thematic programmes, children with disability benefitted from 15 short</li> </ul>

	<p>visuals in sign language and audio-descriptive texts targeting the visually impaired at the National Museum of Archaeology.</p> <p>Currently work is in progress to transform museums into spaces that are accessible to children on the autism spectrum.</p> <p>✓ <b>Culture Pass</b> aims at creating cultural and artistic events/productions by creative practitioners to be offered to school children. The content of the activities is linked to topics covered by the national curriculum, such as Media, Globalisation, Human Rights and environmental Issues. Schools are invited to book any of these productions for their students. Events may take place at the school or outside the school.</p> <p>During scholastic year 2020/2021, the measure was extended to post-secondary students (MQF Level 4) and due to restrictions caused by COVID-19, the productions were offered to schools via an online programme.</p>
<p>Indicative Annual Budget for AROPE Children</p>	<p>✓ €50,000</p>

**The European Child Guarantee calls on Member States to:**

- K) develop a framework for cooperation of educational establishments, local communities, social, health and child protection services, families and social economy actors to support inclusive education, to provide after school care and opportunities to participate in sport, leisure and cultural activities and to build and invest in educational establishments as centres of inclusion and participation.**

The *National Inclusive Education Framework* is designed over ten central themes and invites schools to embark on a journey towards the development of high quality inclusion. Schools are invited to implement, review and commit towards inclusive policies and practices. Thus, providing high quality education for all learners to embrace social equity and achieve an inclusive society. This framework embraces the principles of ownership, diversity, autonomy, planning and research.

The Framework promotes the roles of the school leaders and educators in creating a nurturing and inclusive environment that supports learning for all according to each child's diverse needs at school and in cooperation with parents/primary caregivers and other members of the community. In so doing, the framework addresses: positive behaviour management, challenging learning and differentiated teaching, mentoring and support for staff wellbeing, continuous professional development and training, as well as prevention, screening, early intervention and support services to further facilitate inclusive access in child care centres, early childhood settings and compulsory school years.

## 2.4 Healthcare

Early child development is an important pediment upon which health in the later life years stands. Indeed, evidence illustrates numerous physical and mental health issues can be prevented in the early years, including cardiovascular diseases, obesity, and mental health disorders<sup>37</sup>. Thus, healthcare plays a major role in the provision of measures in the early years that can potentially serve as a protective factor in the development of physical and psychological issues in adult years. Quality early healthcare can protect the wellbeing of future adult generations. Furthermore, AROPE children and their families tend to have more complex needs related to both physical and mental wellbeing and may therefore derive further benefit from inclusive and accessible quality healthcare.

Government has significantly invested in ensuring adequate healthcare provision and is committed to continue guaranteeing universal inclusion of all children from the early stages of development. All children in Malta have access to free healthcare services provided by the public service from as early as the pregnancy stage, through childhood and up to adolescence. Improvements to the National Healthcare System made over the years have spanned from those aiming to consolidate general, specialised and mental health care (including service and treatment provision) - both within institutions and the community. Meanwhile, efforts are being made to educate children and their families around a number of health-related issues.

National strategies, policies and action plans have been developed with a view to structure the performance of health systems around evidence and systematic, strategic thinking. These policy documents target the population universally whilst acknowledging child-specific needs and include:

- Mental Health Strategy for Malta 2022-2030<sup>38</sup>
- National Cancer Plan 2017-2021<sup>39</sup>
- National Strategy for the Elimination of Hepatitis C Virus 2018-2025<sup>40</sup>
- Transgender Healthcare<sup>41</sup>

In addition, various collaborations have been established with foreign institutions and hospitals to improve the provision of treatment through the sharing of foreign expertise with the local healthcare workforce<sup>42</sup>.

### *The added value of Social Welfare Services*

Since vulnerable children and their families may be more susceptible to physical and mental health issues, over 30 services are offered by Government with the objective to ameliorate the quality of life of children and their families at risk of poverty and social exclusion. Operating from a 'cradle to the grave' approach, physical and psychosocial support is available with a focus on increasing the quality of life of service users, strengthening the family unit and the home environment. Routine immunization and dental care, as well as emotional support, are also made available and accessible to all children in out-of-homecare. Alternative care environments ensure that a specific, yet holistic care plan is constructed for each child, depending on their needs.

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<sup>37</sup> Centre on the Developing Child (2010) The foundations of lifelong health are built in early childhood. Boston: Harvard University.

<sup>38</sup> Ministry for Health. 2019. 'Building Resilience, Transforming Services: A Mental Health Strategy for Malta 2020-2030'. Available at: [https://deputyprimeminister.gov.mt/en/Documents/National-Health-Strategies/Mental\\_Health\\_Strategy\\_EN.pdf](https://deputyprimeminister.gov.mt/en/Documents/National-Health-Strategies/Mental_Health_Strategy_EN.pdf)

<sup>39</sup> Ministry for Health. 2017. The National Cancer Plan for the Maltese Islands, 2017-2021. Available at: [https://meae.gov.mt/en/Public\\_Consultations/MEH-HEALTH/Documents/MinistryForHealth-Cancer%20Plan.pdf](https://meae.gov.mt/en/Public_Consultations/MEH-HEALTH/Documents/MinistryForHealth-Cancer%20Plan.pdf)

<sup>40</sup> Ministry for Health (MfH). 2018. A National Strategy for the Elimination of Hepatitis C Virus as a Public Health Threat in the Maltese Islands 2018-2025. Available at: [https://meae.gov.mt/en/Public\\_Consultations/MEH-HEALTH/Documents/Hepatitis%20C%20Book\\_web%2020180130.pdf](https://meae.gov.mt/en/Public_Consultations/MEH-HEALTH/Documents/Hepatitis%20C%20Book_web%2020180130.pdf)

<sup>41</sup> Ministry for Health. Transgender Healthcare. Available at: <https://deputyprimeminister.gov.mt/en/Documents/National-Health-Strategies/Transgender%20Healthcare.pdf>

<sup>42</sup> Public Health in Malta 1999 - 2019



The programmes and measures directed towards the AROPE as illustrated within the healthcare section derive a total budget of circa €15,000,000.

The following sections will outline the main ongoing measures (or planned) to implement the recommendations of the Council Recommendation establishing a European Child Guarantee. For ease of reference such requirements have been reproduced in apposite boxes. It is to be noted that unless outlined otherwise, the mentioned measures and services target all children, including AROPE children.

**The European Child Guarantee calls on Member States to:**

- a) **measures taken to facilitate early detection and treatment of diseases and developmental problems, including those related to mental health, ensure access to periodic medical, including dental and ophthalmology, examinations and screening programmes; ensure timely curative and rehabilitative follow-up, including access to medicines, treatments and supports and access to vaccination programme**

The holistic healthcare approach which is provided in Malta encourages health issues to be detected as early as possible thus contributing towards ensuring that the adequate treatment is administered in a timely manner. Screening processes and programmes allow for the development of specific care plans for children that can be tailored according to the needs of each child. Timely screening can reduce challenges in other life dimensions including but not limited to education or other services. Hence, Malta places a great emphasis on the early detection and treatment of developmental, growth, sensory and learning problems, as well as physical disorders.

#### **Early Screening, Early Detection and Immunization**

Screening programmes are provided as early as possible with the aim to identify the signs of developmental delays, learning difficulties and/or educational needs at an early stage. In addition, screening services from pre-kindergarten level are available within all State and Church Schools. Various physical assessments are carried out at schools, for children based on their personal and family medical history.

A specialised unit is responsible for the screening of developmental and mental health issues in children. Multi-modal assessments are carried out with the aim to monitor for conditions such as Autism, Learning Difficulties, Attention-Deficit/ Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and other developmental disorders.

Families with vulnerable children may also be assigned a social worker to assess the child's developmental milestones using specifically designed tools. Assessments are carried out to understand whether child neglect and emotional abuse is occurring<sup>43</sup>. Depending on the outcome of the assessments, children and their families are provided with the necessary support and regular health check-ups are conducted to ensure that the care dedicated is sufficient. Government also provides, services targeting children with mental health issues and develop tailor-made plans that are regularly monitored.

Scheduled free vaccinations are provided to Maltese and EU nationals, infants, children and adolescents up to 16 years. All vaccinations are provided in line with national health standards, through the local hospital, various health centres and within the community.

Table 10 below delineates the key characteristics of all specific measures falling within this category.

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<sup>43</sup> More information on this service is found within Section 2.4 (Enabling Policy Framework)

Table 10. Key characteristics of healthcare measures for early screening, detection and immunization

<p><b>Target Groups being addressed by ongoing/planned measures</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ All AROPE children aged 0-17 years</li> <li>✓ All children in alternative care</li> <li>✓ All children referred to Social Services<sup>44</sup></li> </ul>
<p><b>Ongoing / planned Measures</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Free periodic screening for children aged 6 weeks to 18 months with the aim to identify the signs of developmental delays, learning difficulties and/or educational needs at an early stage.</li> <li>✓ <b>Lenti fuq l-Izvilupp ta' Wliedna</b> - An Autism screening programme for children aged between 18 and 30 months.</li> <li>✓ <b>Pre-school entry assessments</b> of children for early detection of diseases or developmental issues in pre-school children</li> <li>✓ <b>Comprehensive vision screening</b> (including screening for colour blindness) for all students attending State and Church Schools</li> <li>✓ <b>Scoliosis screening for all children attending state and church schools</b></li> <li>✓ <b>Periodic TB screening and vaccination record checking</b> for non-Maltese pupils who come from TB endemic countries.</li> <li>✓ <b>Monitoring of children diagnosed with Scoliosis</b> by GPs (whether in the school setting or not) by a specialized clinic. Here, children are monitored until the age of 18 or until the scoliosis improves. Complications or issues following the age of 18 are referred to Orthopaedic Surgeons.</li> <li>✓ <b>Multi-modal assessments for various developmental difficulties</b> including Autism, Learning Difficulties, Attention-Deficit/ Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) conducted by a specialized clinic dealing with developmental assessment.</li> <li>✓ <b>Remote Patient Monitoring of Blood Sugar Levels</b> -The blood sugar levels of children below 16 years with Type I diabetes are monitored remotely through the use of mobile technologies.</li> <li>✓ <b>Free vaccinations</b> to Maltese or EU infants, children and young persons up to 16 years</li> <li>✓ Nationwide dissemination of the <b>COVID-booster vaccine</b> is provided to all children aged 5-17 years.</li> </ul>

### *Provision of Medications and Specialised Paediatric Feeds*

The Social Security Act (Schedule V) outlines medicines which are provided free-of-charge to all patients suffering from specified chronic conditions (i.e. holders of what is known as a 'Yellow Card'). Alternatively, a Schedule II document (known as 'Pink Card') allows for children in alternative care,

<sup>44</sup> Referrals to Social Welfare Services can be made by social workers or other health professionals working within health centres, child protection and domestic violence entities, therapeutic services, and community family- or addictions- related centres or services.

fostered children living with a family, or students attending full-time education to have access to free medicines from a restricted list of essential medicines.

The Government Formulary list<sup>45</sup> contains a list of medicinal products, vitamins, food supplements and borderline substances available in Malta. The Government Formulary List also provides feeds for medical use: sip feeds, tube feeds, specialised formulas and feeds for metabolic diseases in childhood. **Exceptional Medicinal Treatment (EMT)** requests can be made for the procurement and provision of treatments that are not otherwise on the Government Formulary List. This includes specialised paediatric feeds or treatments, feeds for rare diseases and paediatric formulations.

As part of the *Mental Health Strategy for Malta 2020-2030*, new medicines targeting a variety of health issues are currently being reviewed for their potential inclusion within the Government Formulary List, including those specifically for children. A separate formulary list for medical feeds is planned to be introduced with the provision of a wider variety of treatment options.

The key characteristics of the abovementioned initiatives are outlined in the Table 11 below.

Table 11. Measures for access to medicinal products

<p><b>Target Groups being addressed by ongoing/planned measures</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ All AROPE Maltese and EU children aged 0-17</li> <li>✓ All children in Alternative Care</li> <li>✓ All children requiring medicines and treatments for chronic conditions in line with the Social Security Act.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Ongoing / planned Measures</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <b>Medications and treatments issued under Schedule V of the Social Security Act (Yellow Card)</b> – covering a total of 83 chronic conditions – is offered to all children suffering from any of these conditions. Meanwhile, Schedule II (Pink Card) offers access to free medicines from a restricted list of essential medicines to particularly vulnerable children</li> <li>✓ <b>Exceptional Medicinal Treatment (EMT) requests</b> – persons now have the options to make requests for treatment (including specialised paediatric feeds or treatments, feeds for rare diseases and paediatric formulations) not currently listed on the Government Formulary List.</li> <li>✓ <b>New and Innovative treatments, including Cystic Fibrosis Treatments and medicines for Anaphylaxis</b> to over 325 schools in case of emergency.</li> </ul>

### Provision of Mental Healthcare

Considering that half of all mental disorders can potentially start before the age of 14 years<sup>46</sup>, the treatment of mental health disorders at an early age is key for the effective and sustainable management of the mental wellbeing.

The *National Strategy for Mental Health in Malta 2020-2030*<sup>47</sup> embraces a shift of care towards community-based support whilst also emphasizing the importance of dignity, autonomy and rights of all individuals with mental health, considering also the determinants of health. Prevention and

<sup>45</sup> Ministry for Health. 2021. The Government Formulary List. Accessed via: <https://deputyprimeminister.gov.mt/en/pharmaceutical/Pages/formulary/formulary.aspx>

<sup>46</sup> World Health Organization. November 2021. 'Adolescent mental health'. Accessed at: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/adolescent-mental-health>

<sup>47</sup> Ministry for Health. 'Building Resilience, Transforming Services. A Mental Health Strategy for Malta 2020-2030'. *ibid.*

promotion are pertinent objectives of this strategy, particularly for children. Amongst others, the key envisaged actions targeting children are:

- (i) increasing engagement in behaviours that are conducive to better mental wellbeing in the medium- to long- term;
- (ii) improving access to sources of support and age-appropriate information about mental health;
- (iii) promoting and encouraging awareness of mental health in the school environment;
- (iv) providing training to those working with children for the timely and effective identification of emotional problems, addictions, bullying or cyberbullying and self-harm;
- (v) developing a robust system of follow-up for children with mental health problems to ensure that these children do not slip out of the system.

The following specialised mental health services are free of charge:

#### *Mental Healthcare within Institutions*

Child-oriented psychiatric services are offered within Malta's General Hospital, in addition to a 24/7 day crisis service for acute mental disorders. Meanwhile, Malta's psychiatric hospital also sees persons aged 12 to 18 years with Bipolar Disorder, Depression and Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

#### *Mental Healthcare in the Community*

To complement the above, a community-based team offers intensive follow-up for 4 weeks after being discharged from inpatient and emergency care. Standalone therapeutic clinics or centres have also been erected to employ specific therapy modalities to meet the idiosyncratic needs of children experiencing mental health disorders and their families in a holistic manner. These include Specialised Integration Therapy (SIT) for children with Autism, and clinics offering therapy modalities focused on family relationships or particular hobbies. Finally, a multi-disciplinary and in-depth focus is especially dedicated to children with complex and co-occurring mental health problems.

#### *Mental Healthcare in the School Context*

Malta strives to promote a healthy educational environment that facilitates the learning and development of all children. Through evaluation, information and advice, intervention and provision, support is provided to children with various special educational needs. These needs vary from physical or mental health difficulties to specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia and dyspraxia; visual and/or hearing impairments; emotional and/or behavioural difficulties; communication difficulties such as autism; and giftedness. School personnel and other professionals who encounter children also receive professional development training in this regard.

#### *Mental Healthcare - Social Welfare Services*

Since vulnerable children are more likely to come across challenges that impinge on their mental health<sup>48</sup>, child-oriented and multi-disciplinary social work services for children aged 13-18 and their families are provided for issues such as neglect, abuse, alcohol/drug/gambling abuse and other mental health issues.

Malta's social welfare services include an outreach service aiming to help families with complex needs resulting from intergenerational cycles of difficulty, particularly where minors are present<sup>49</sup>. Support

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<sup>48</sup> World Health Organization. November 2021. *Ibid*.

<sup>49</sup> Home Based Therapeutic Services (HBTS).

Source: Foundation for Social Welfare Services (FSWS). 2018. '2017 Annual Report'.

Accessed at: <https://fsws.gov.mt/en/Documents/AnnualReports/FSWS%20Report%202017.pdf>

includes family therapy, parenting programmes, psychotherapy and psychoeducation with a view to enhance the quality of family life. In addition, various services are provided in relation to issues surrounding the use, misuse and dependency of alcohol, drugs and other addictive behaviours.

A comprehensive list of provisions related to mental health, as well as their key characteristics, is found in the Table 12 below.

Table 12. Measures for mental healthcare

<p><b>Target Groups being addressed by ongoing/planned measures</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- All AROPE Maltese and EU children aged 0-17</li> <li>- All children in Alternative Care</li> </ul>
<p><b>Ongoing / planned Measures</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <b>Psychiatric services for youths aged 12-18</b> with any of a number of mental health problems in Malta’s psychiatric hospital.</li> <li>✓ <b>Child-oriented psychiatric services (including a 24/7day crisis service)</b> offered within Malta’s general hospital</li> <li>✓ <b>Four-week intensive</b> follow-up within the community of children after being seen at- and/or discharged from- the above services.</li> <li>✓ <b>In-depth multi-disciplinary, intensive and individualised therapy</b> is provided by a specialized team to young people aged 13 – 25 years with multiple complex mental disorders within the community.</li> <li>✓ <b>Sensory Integration Therapy (SIT)</b> provided by a dedicated clinic to children with Autism.</li> <li>✓ Other stand-alone clinics or centres providing <b>family-focused therapeutic modalities, or services</b> affecting by the hobby (e.g. music, art, sports, etc)</li> <li>✓ Staff-oriented training is provided for the conduct of <b>Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT) skills groups</b> as well as for <b>Mentalisation Behaviour Therapy</b> for children aged 13-15 years</li> <li>✓ <b>Evaluation, advice and intervention related to child learning and development</b> is provided to children attending church and state schools, within such schools.</li> <li>✓ <b>Incredible Years Programme:</b> Children with ADHD and/or other challenging behaviour issues – and their families - are provided parental skills education within the school setting.</li> <li>✓ Children referred to the relevant social protection authorities and their families benefit from family therapy, parenting programmes, psychoeducation and psychotherapy within the community</li> <li>✓ <b>Youth In Focus Service:</b> Young persons aged 13-17 years receive assistance that addresses their specific needs<sup>50</sup> in collaboration with their family.</li> </ul>

<sup>50</sup> To name a few, these include: anger management, involvement in vandalism, turbulent relationships with others, alcohol/drug abuse, promiscuity, coming out, poverty & homelessness and money management.

**The European Child Guarantee calls on Member States to:**

- b) **measures taken to provide targeted rehabilitation and habilitation services for children with disabilities**

Malta's 2021-2030 National Strategy on the Rights of Disabled Persons<sup>51</sup> sets out a roadmap based on the underlying principle of equal treatment irrespective of one's ability. As part of this strategy, specific initiatives were designed for the wellbeing of children with disabilities. These include, but are not limited to:

- (i) approaches that encourage de-institutionalization, independent living and support offered within the community setting;
- (ii) better coordination amongst service providers for the provision and discussion of best practices;
- (iii) a greater focus on personal support schemes; and
- (iv) continued sensitisation and training of medical professionals for improved service provision and communicating with disabled persons.

This is complemented by the recently published *National Autism Strategy 2021-2030*<sup>52</sup> which establishes 7 key categories of actions aiming to ensure accessibility and inclusion for persons with autism throughout their life. The strategy places a significant amount of attention on health promotion and awareness-raising, as well as early detection and intervention. It also emphasises the need to safeguard the right to quality education and assistance in entering the labour market. Hereunder are services provided for children with disability including autism.

As a general measure, a specialised unit<sup>53</sup> offering speech / occupational therapy services as well as facilitates augmentative and alternative communication technologies to all children with disabilities has been set up. Within the educational context, a specialised team<sup>54</sup> aims to empower students with autism through facilitating learning and meeting their specific educational needs. The service receives referrals and makes the necessary liaisons with the school, offers informative sessions, conducts observation sessions to delineate each students' needs and provides materials to facilitate students' education. Finally, as part of Malta's efforts to ameliorate the support offered to children with disability in the community, small residential homes offer 24-hour support to children with disability. These residential homes are of benefit to children who are under a care order or whose parents are unable to care for them. Services include full support to attend school, life-skills programmes and leisure activities.

A comprehensive list of provisions related to disability, as well as their key characteristics, is found in the Table 13 below.

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<sup>51</sup> Ministry for Inclusion and Asocial Wellbeing. 2021. 'Freedom to Live: Malta's 2021-2030 National Strategy on the Rights of Disabled Persons' Public Consultation Document. Accessed at: [https://meae.gov.mt/en/Public\\_Consultations/MISW/PublishingImages/Pages/Consultations/Maltas20212030NationalStrategyontheRightsofDisabledPersons/Proposed%20National%20Disability%20Strategy%20%E2%80%93%20Standard%20English%20version.pdf](https://meae.gov.mt/en/Public_Consultations/MISW/PublishingImages/Pages/Consultations/Maltas20212030NationalStrategyontheRightsofDisabledPersons/Proposed%20National%20Disability%20Strategy%20%E2%80%93%20Standard%20English%20version.pdf)

<sup>52</sup> Ministry for inclusion and social Wellbeing. 2021. 'Respecting Diversity, Safeguarding Equity: Malta's 2021-2030 National Autism Strategy'. Accessed at: <https://inclusion.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/National-Autism-Strategy-EN.pdf>

<sup>53</sup> The Access to Communication and Technology Unit (ACTU)

<sup>54</sup> Referred to as the Autism Support Team

Table 13. Measures for children with disability

<p><b>Target Groups being addressed by ongoing/planned measures</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ All AROPE children with disability and their families</li> <li>✓ All children with disability in alternative care</li> </ul>
<p><b>Ongoing / planned Measures</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <b>A specialized unit offers speech /occupational therapy services and necessary tools to support communication</b> by augmentative and alternative communication technologies</li> <li>✓ <b>A one-stop-shop within the community</b> offers a wide range of services and assistance with independent living for persons with disability.</li> <li>✓ <b>A scheme offering</b> vouchers for private occupational therapy sessions to children with disabilities and their families.</li> <li>✓ <b>Support specialized for children on the Autism spectrum</b> that facilitates the learning experience within the school environment</li> <li>✓ <b>Small community residential homes for children with disabilities</b> offer 24-hour support to children who are under a care order or whose parents are unable to care for them.</li> </ul>



**The European Child Guarantee calls on Member States to:**

- c) **measures taken to implement accessible health promotion and disease prevention programmes targeting children in need and their families as well as professionals working with children.**

Government provides a myriad of health promotion services, starting from services targeting expecting couples and new parents/guardians with information covering a wide range of topics. Specific information is also provided by specialised multi-disciplinary units that deal with key issues such as breastfeeding and paediatric obesity or weight. Moreover, pregnant mothers experiencing psychosocial difficulties are guided and supported on selfcare and on the necessary care to their child during pregnancy, delivery and post-natal care.

Educational settings also promote balanced lifestyles at an early age throughout childhood, since physical and nutrition education is embedded within the school curriculum for all Year 7 and Year 8 students in State schools. Regular lessons include activities such as physical games, cookery or gardening classes with an aim to encourage healthy habits and lifestyles. These are offered with a view to reinforcing lifelong healthy habits. Informative sessions offered within the community context further increase access to correct health and health service information. This is particularly beneficial for children and families who are at risk of poverty and/or social exclusion.

Looking ahead, evidence-based provisions in the promotion of healthy lifestyles and child development initiatives will continue to be provided.

As the Table 14 below illustrates, the promotion of healthy lifestyles for children and their families are locally pertinent and provided in different settings.

*Table 14. Measures related to the promotion of healthy lifestyles*

<b>Target Groups being addressed by ongoing/planned measures</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ All AROPE children aged 0-17 and their families</li> <li>✓ All children of mothers with psychosocial issues</li> </ul>
<b>Ongoing / planned Measures</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <b>Education and support are provided to expectant or new parents/guardians</b> on various topics from as early as the pre-natal stages. These include, but are not limited to pregnancy, childbirth, adoption, positive parenting, teenage pregnancy and parenthood, dental care and speech and language development.</li> <li>✓ <b>Specialized walk-in clinics</b> provide help and information related to breast-feeding, and paediatric weight issues.</li> <li>✓ <b>Physical and Nutrition Education are embedded in the National School Curriculum.</b> Regular lessons aim to teach children about physical activity and nutrition through hands-on activities with an aim to instil healthy lifestyle perspectives and skills.</li> <li>✓ Specific programmes targeting behaviours related to nutrition, physical activity, and obesity in pre-school children and their families.</li> <li>✓ Specific parental psychoeducation is offered to parents of children on the Autism spectrum.</li> </ul>

## 2.5 Healthy Nutrition

Government is committed to continuously improve healthy nutrition for all children. In fact, Government published the “*Whole School Approach to a Healthy Lifestyle: Healthy Eating and Physical Activity Policy*”. This Policy builds on the experience gained through the implementation of the Healthy Eating Lifestyle Plan and is aimed to:

- give high priority to healthy eating and physical activity through holistic education;
- strengthen the necessary framework and support an enabling school environment to help the school community adopt healthier patterns of living by encouraging physical activity, promoting healthy foods and limiting the availability of products high in salt, sugar and fats;
- empower children to achieve the required physical and health literacy, to adopt a healthy lifestyle from an early age and to make informed choices about their lifestyles throughout the life course;
- make provision for a flexible curriculum which highlights the importance of health, nutrition, food safety and hygiene, food preparation and physical activity; and
- ensure that clear and consistent messages about food, drink and physical activity are delivered across the school day.

Malta’s commitment to this Policy is shown through the continuous *EU-School Scheme* of nutritious products and education on healthy eating, as described hereafter.

***EU-School Scheme*** (co-financed by the European Agricultural Guarantee fund and the Maltese Government)

Amongst the initiatives contributing towards healthy lifestyles amongst children is the EU School Scheme (2017-2023) which aims to expose school children to nutritious products and are educated on nurturing healthier eating habits when it comes to consuming food which can impact their food intake, weight and risk of illness.

This scheme promotes healthy habits to children between the ages of 3 and who attend state and non-state Primary Schools; and for children aged between 3 and 16 years attending Skola Sajf.

In addition, this scheme also contributes to the educational and awareness raising policy on the benefits of healthy diets and targets the need to substantially increase the intake of fruit, vegetables and milk in children’s diets whilst they are still growing up and forming their eating habits.

Following the closure of educational establishments (in March 2020) due to COVID-19 pandemic, the scheme evolved into a voucher allocation scheme. These vouchers are redeemable for a weekly portion of 500ml of milk, doubling the 250ml portion from previous years. These vouchers were sent to participating school children with a view to continue benefiting from the promotion of the healthy benefits by being provided with regular portions of milk. This system facilitated access and flexibility in collection of the portions since vouchers were redeemable from all grocers and supermarkets across Malta and Gozo. Key educational and health promotion messages were also sent along with the vouchers to provide nutritional information and dietary guidelines.

### ***Renewed School Scheme Post 2023***

The focus of the renewed **School Scheme for years 2023 -2027** is expected to continue guaranteeing effective access to sufficient and healthy nutrition for primary school children through the EU School Fruit, Vegetables and Milk. In this regard, the scheme is expected to continue to focus on more awareness and information dissemination on healthy eating habits, local food chains and on combating food wastage.

Vulnerable children, children living in poverty or children from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to face barriers in accessing healthy nutrition. Within this context, this measure will provide for one portion of fruit and vegetables per child, per week, thus capturing vulnerable children.

The following sections will outline the main ongoing measures (or planned) to implement the recommendations of the Council Recommendation establishing a European Child Guarantee. For ease of reference such requirements have been reproduced in apposite boxes. It is to be noted that unless outlined otherwise, the mentioned measures and services target all children, including AROPE children.

**The European Child Guarantee calls on Member States to:**

- a) **support access to healthy meals also outside of school days, including through in-kind or financial support, in particular in exceptional circumstances such as school closures; and**
- d) **provide adequate information to children and families on healthy nutrition for children.**

*Table 15. Healthy nutrition provisions*

Target Groups being addressed by ongoing/planned measures	✓ All Children between 3-11 years who attend primary school which are administered or recognised by the state.
Ongoing / planned Measures	✓ A School Scheme to encourage school children to consume milk, fruit and vegetables regularly as part of a healthy and balanced diet. Children and their families will also be provided with information on healthy nutrition as part of this scheme.
Indicative Annual Budget for AROPE Children	✓ €115,000

**The European Child Guarantee calls on Member States to:**

- b) ensure that nutrition standards in early childhood education and care and education establishments address specific dietary needs;**

The National Standards for Early Childhood Education and Care Services (0-3years)<sup>55</sup> stipulate that each childcare centre is required to have a healthy eating policy in place and to encourage parents to provide their children with healthy and nutritious food and drink for the day. Moreover, childcare centres are required to provide all children with free access to drinking water during their time at the centre. Staff members are also required to take careful note of any special dietary requirements and ensure that children receive the help required in feeding. Flexible eating routines are permitted.

Children in primary school years may benefit from the breakfast club service. In this regard, the food which is outsourced for the breakfast club must be compliant with the Ministry for Education's Healthy Eating Lifestyle Plan. This plan is designed following discussion with Home Economic experts and health authorities and ensures that the provided food does not exceed the permissible levels of fats, sugars and salts. Any food which is procured by schools needs to be in compliance to the regulations and policies in place.

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<sup>55</sup> National Standards for Early Childhood Education and Care Services (0-3 Years):  
[https://meae.gov.mt/en/Public\\_Consultations/MEDE/Documents/National%20Standards%20for%20Early%20Childhood%20Education%20and%20Care%20Services%20\(0%20-%203%20years\).pdf](https://meae.gov.mt/en/Public_Consultations/MEDE/Documents/National%20Standards%20for%20Early%20Childhood%20Education%20and%20Care%20Services%20(0%20-%203%20years).pdf)

**The European Child Guarantee calls on Member States to:**

- c) limit advertisement and restrict the availability of foods high in fat, salt and sugar in early childhood education and care and educational establishments;**

Schools are required to prohibit any promotions of fats, sugars and salts in line with **Legal Notice 266/2018 in relation to procurement of food for schools**. In fact, schools are subject to fines if found in breach of these regulations. Similarly, in line with the *Healthy Eating Policy*, educational programmes such as the Breakfast Club also have to ensure that to not promote or advertise any fats, sugars and salts.

Other tailor-made programmes, such as: campaigns, community outreach, the provision of information on the benefits of a healthy lifestyle, are prepared to assist schools to draw goals and to train staff in view of reaching healthy lifestyles. Campaigns such as '*the lunchbox campaign*' encourage the use of healthy and balanced packed lunches, while fruit and vegetable awareness campaigns that have been ongoing for several years deliver reinforcing health messages in line with a whole school approach.

## 2.6 Adequate Housing

Adequate housing, homelessness and housing exclusion has been identified as an area of priority within the 'National Strategic Policy for Poverty Reduction and Social Inclusion 2014-2024', where emphasis is placed on how Malta should address quality of life and wellbeing through measures encouraging the development of social housing. In order to address homelessness and housing exclusion, as well as promote more affordable and adequate housing, this strategic policy proposes the following priorities:

- Increase and upgrade existing social housing units, including improvements made to their energy efficiency;
- Undertake a holistic regeneration of urban areas through embellishment and restoration of vacant housing units;
- Promote housing policies that encourage neighbourhood mix that take into account ageing, socio-economic and inter-cultural dimensions;
- Develop proactive spatial analyses as part of an integrated social investment planning; and
- Reassess and reevaluate present subsidy schemes whilst considering the introduction of a housing benefit scheme for the most vulnerable.

In line with the above, the following sections will outline the main ongoing measures (or planned) to implement the recommendations of the Council Recommendation establishing a European Child Guarantee. For ease of reference such requirements have been reproduced in apposite boxes. It is to be noted that unless outlined otherwise, the mentioned measures and services target all children, including AROPE children.

### **The European Child Guarantee calls on Member States to:**

- a) ensure that homeless children and their families receive adequate accommodation, prompt transfer from temporary accommodation to permanent housing and provision of relevant social and advisory services;**
- b) assess and revise, if necessary, national, regional and local housing policies and take action to ensure that the interests of families with children in need are duly taken into account, including addressing energy poverty and preventing the risk of homelessness; such assessment and revision should also include social housing or housing assistance policies and housing benefits and further improve accessibility for children with disabilities;**
- c) provide for priority and timely access to social housing or housing assistance for children in need and their families;**
- d) take into account the best interests of the child as well as the child's overall situation and individual needs when placing children into institutional or foster care; ensure the transition of children from institutional or foster care to quality community-based or family-based care and support their independent living and social integration.**

## *Homelessness*

With the aim of providing and sustaining decent and affordable housing opportunities promoting stability and supporting social mobility, Malta takes a preventive approach to the issue of homelessness and housing exclusion.

Official figures tabled in parliament in October 2018 showed that only 27 people had been found sleeping rough between January 2013 and August 2018. Homeless service provision is organized through a *'referral system'*. After the initial contact with the homeless person is made (either personally or by a third party) these are subsequently referred to homeless shelters which provide accommodation. When it comes to the funding of the Homeless Service Providers, the state supports non-profit and non-governmental organizations that offer such services. In 2021, the Ministry for Social Policy and Children's Rights has invested in social agreements with 6 non-governmental organisations with a financial allocation of approximately 2€ million.

## *Social Housing*

Adequate housing is given specific priority by Government, mainly through the Ministry for Social Accommodation – which focuses on the management of social housing, affordable housing, rent, as well as housing projects management and embellishment. The *National Housing System* is based on four pillars: People, Connectedness, Sustainability and Digitalization was launched in August 2020; and provides a long-term vision to adequate housing in Malta.

In this regard, Government provides an extensive programme for social housing which includes free social housing for approximately 9,000 households. Furthermore, Government also provides direct housing subsidies to another 2,900 households. It is estimated that such housing subsidies assist lower income families by about €3,600 annually. A number of schemes are also offered to embellish and restore as well as increase and upgrade existing social housing units; and to make home ownership more accessible and affordable to persons in low-income brackets. Concurrently, households in low-income brackets are also assisted through a number of measures to address energy poverty. These include the two types of Energy Benefit<sup>56</sup>, the Eco-reduction scheme<sup>57</sup> and Financial schemes aimed at reducing energy and water consumption in low-income households through the replacement of old and inefficient appliances. Research is currently being undertaken to be able to offer housing applicants and social housing beneficiaries a comprehensive plan to access services, while addressing key challenges that led them to seek alternative accommodation. This is being done through the profiling of social housing applicants, as well as the designing of plans to assist applicants with different needs who have pending applications for alternative accommodation.

## *Community-Based Care and Foster Care*

Government provides residential care<sup>58</sup> for children in need of care through 7 community homes which house a small number of children together in the community. Moreover, some children are placed in foster care families. All children in alternative care (including foster care) are assessed in the first years of their experience in care and assessments are undertaken on a regular basis with a view to establish the feasibility of children returning back to the biological family. When the return to biological families

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<sup>56</sup> The *Energy Benefits* aims to mitigate the effect of the increase in expenditure on water and electricity bills of low income families. By the Energy Benefit, the consumption of electricity is reduced by 30%, with up to a maximum assistance of €75 per year per person in the household, while by the *Energy Benefit – Humanitarian*, the consumption of electricity is reduced by 80%.

<sup>57</sup> The Eco-reduction scheme incentivizes efficiency and lower consumption, while also having a positive effect on the bills of low-income households which receive a direct rebate on their electricity bill.

<sup>58</sup> Homes with access to services provided within the community. Some homes are covered and aided by Government via a Public Social Partnership (PSP).

is not possible, a permanency plan is prepared to offer stability and security to the children by taking into consideration their wishes and best interests.

Various schemes supporting young adults leaving the care system are in place as young adults move towards independent living. Such schemes include semi-independent living and supportive housing for youth aging out of the institutional care or rehabilitation centres, homeless and other youth at risk, persons suffering from mental health challenges, adults or children victims of domestic violence and persons with disability.

Specialised Housing Programmes are also offered to diverse cohorts throughout the life-course, including to families with children and young people. These programmes are a combination of inclusive domestic design and specialised service provision.

In addition, Government invested in services working with youths in after care and with vulnerable youths. The aim of these services is not only to develop the social skills, but also to help youth engage in training to learn new skills and make them more employable.

The following Table 16 contains information on the main measures that address housing for children:

*Table 16. Measures addressing housing for children*

<p><b>Target Groups being addressed by ongoing/planned measures</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Families with children that experience housing deprivation</li> <li>✓ All low-income families with children, in particular all low-income families with children who are renting</li> <li>✓ Families with children with disabilities</li> </ul>
<p><b>Ongoing / planned Measures</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Prioritisation of families with children in the social housing allocation policy.</li> <li>✓ Scheme to provide financial assistance to enable low-income earners to render their home energy efficient.</li> <li>✓ Financial assistance to assist in rent payments targeting low-income families with children will not pay more than 25% of their income in rent. The benefit varies according to the annual income of the applicants, the household composition and the rent being paid by them.</li> <li>✓ Prioritisation of families with children with disabilities on the waiting list for social accommodation.  Several housing units which are designed specifically for individuals who suffer from a disability are being built and shall be allocated accordingly.</li> <li>✓ A Sens-Ability scheme to provide financial assistance of up to €6,000 per family to enable parents of children and adults with autism or who have difficulty processing sensory information, to make a sensory room at home.</li> <li>✓ Energy Benefit: The two types of energy benefits mitigate the effect of the increase in expenditure on water and electricity bills of low-income families. By the Energy Benefit, the consumption of electricity is reduced by 30%, with up to a maximum assistance of €75 per year per person in the household, while by the Energy Benefit – Humanitarian, the consumption of electricity is reduced by 80%.</li> <li>✓ A number of community homes to house a small number of children together in the community: The aim is to keep siblings together or else to</li> </ul>



	provide a secure, stable environment with more individual attention for them to thrive. Support workers offer care to these children and all professionals ensure that their holistic needs are being met.
<b>Indicative Annual Budget</b>	✓ €70,000,000

### 3. Planned Measures 2022-2027

For the period 2022-2027, Government has allocated a total of €145 million for the Child Guarantee to strengthen its commitment of equal opportunities among children. Building on existing measures, this investment is intended to support all children, including children in need, with a view to enable children to succeed.

Planned measures focus on the provision of learning material, internet access, as well as participation in activities, amongst others. Such measures are expected to positively contribute both towards the development of the child as well as a means of inclusion.

Table 17 below provides the planned measures. These measures will be building upon existing initiatives whilst at the same time addressing any financial and non-financial barriers to participation in early childhood education and care, education, and school-based activities. Specifically, these measures fulfil the following sub-clauses (f), (g), (h) and (j) found under clause 7 of the Council Recommendation establishing a European Child Guarantee for “Early Childhood Education and Care, Inclusive Education and School-Based Activities, and a Healthy Meal Each School Day”:

- (f) provide at least one healthy meal each school day;
- (g) ensure provision of educational materials, including digital educational tools, books, uniforms or any required clothing, where applicable;
- (h) provide high speed connectivity, digital services and adequate equipment necessary for distance learning to ensure access to educational content online, as well as to improve digital skills of children in need and teachers and make the necessary investment to tackle all forms of digital divide;
- (j) ensure equal and inclusive access to school-based activities, including participation in sports, artistic and cultural activities.

Table 17: Planned measures for a Child Guarantee

Target Groups being addressed by planned measures	✓ All children aged 0-17 years and their parents
Planned Measures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Tax reduction from €100 to €300 per year for parents who send their children to sports, artistic or cultural activities.</b> Parents whose income is not taxable will receive the same amount in the form of a grant of up to €300.</li> <li>• <b>Extending the free childcare service to all children, regardless of whether or not their parents work.</b> In addition, the service offered by childcare centers will be improved to ensure good maintenance and top-level educational training.</li> <li>• <b>Distribution of a set of books each year to all the primary school children,</b> so that they can build a small library in their home.</li> <li>• <b>Extending the one-tablet-per-child initiative</b> and distribute a new laptop to every student in their seventh.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All primary and secondary school students from families earning €14,300 or less will be entitled to <b>one free basic and uniform internet service each year.</b></li> <li>• <b>Extending the Scheme 9 initiative</b> so that eligible children do not have to choose from the services offered but are eligible for all of them. Free eyeglasses to children who need them will be added among the already existing list of services offered.</li> </ul>
Indicative Annual Budget	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ €29,000,000 annually out of which circa €7,000,000 is estimated to specifically target AROPE children</li> </ul>

## 4. Outreach

Malta's social protection system provides various social benefits and in-kind services that target the various dimensions of wellbeing whilst also protecting and safeguarding children in Malta, including AROPE children. These have been based on a free at the point of access model, thus ensuring that there are little-to-no barriers to access. While current operating procedures are regularly reviewed and improved, recent years have seen an increased focus on community-based and outreach initiatives in key strategies and action plans that target health, education, housing and social protection.

Malta has consolidated all government services through Servizz.gov which offers an online website, a dedicated freephone and a network of one stop shops to facilitate accessibility, provide information and facilitates application procedures for the general public. Furthermore, Ministries and other statutory bodies have their own online presence, organize regular outreach events and participate in media events with the objective to provide relevant information to the general public.

In this regard, the below sections delineate the main outreach initiatives being conducted.

### **4.1 Early Childhood Education and Care, Inclusive Education and School-Based Activities and a Healthy Meal Each School Day**

Malta provides free childcare services to children of parents/guardians who are in employment or education. Information and guidance in relation to this service is available through the provision of printed media and other online information.

Various services are provided with the objective to promote inclusive education. Such services include free education up to university level, provision of student stipends to support student during their years of study, free transport, breakfast clubs and after school clubs amongst others. Furthermore, targeted services such as social workers, early intervention, anti-bullying etc. are also available. Outreach for these services is carried out through the school intranet, mobile push notifications, websites and via social media. Such initiatives provide an accessible and user-friendly format source of information for parents and students.

Children attending Kindergarten to Secondary schools, including Children with Disability, are also encouraged to participate in a number of cultural heritage visits, activities and information sessions on a regular basis. Additionally, children identified by educators who require special attention or services are referred for free support/guidance by Counsellors stationed at Schools. NGOs and educational institutions collaborate in the outreach of vulnerable groups through referrals or information sessions with the aim to instil awareness on various services.

### **4.2 Healthcare**

Similar to the education sector, all healthcare services are provided on a free at the point of access model, thus ensuring that there are little-to-no barriers to access. Outreach initiatives include: information dissemination via mass market modalities such as on billboards, posters and leaflets, a dedicated website, targeting via social media, promotional spots on TV and radio and the participation of health experts in the media.

With a focus on children, Parentcraft Services provide education and support. This targets inter alia expectant couples, baby groups and other guardians. Other targeted clinics provide problem-specific multidisciplinary attention to key issues such as breastfeeding and paediatric obesity. Outreach to these specific services is through professional handouts, booklets, a dedicated website including online video modules, a weekly radio programme and wider participation in the media.

Healthy nutrition is essential for child development. Malta is taking a multi-faceted approach to tackle the challenges faced by childhood obesity, including by legislation regulating the provision of foods and drinks in schools<sup>59</sup>.

Various healthy lifestyle initiatives and preventative measures within the community have also been rolled out in schools. This contributes to children's overall well-being and is given a high priority in educational curricula. Physical and nutrition education is provided for all Year 7 and Year 8 students in State Middle Schools with an aim to encourage healthy habits and lifestyles.

The promotion of healthy lifestyles and child development initiatives will continue to be provided by the established government health entities via promotions on the media and online. These raise awareness around the need for physical activity and mobility.

### **4.3 Adequate Housing**

There has been a consistent investment in social housing. Outreach measures are provided online via a website and on social media, also through a network of Servizz.gov one stop shops and LEAP centres. Other outreach measures include the distribution of informational leaflets and participation on media programmes.

### **4.4 Social Protection**

Social protection outreach measures that target children are provided via an extensive network through dedicated Government agencies. Outreach initiatives are also provided via online websites, freephone, weekly participation on tv and radio programmes and social media platforms. The following are a few examples:

- The Servizz.gov Family Hub provides assistance on social security and social welfare.
- Leap Centres have been strengthened to broaden their reach through the 'Fund for European Aid to the most Deprived' (FEAD) programme and State Funded Food Distribution Scheme. This offers food packages to vulnerable families, facilitating consent for a home visit by a LEAP mentor.
- Jobsplus (Malta's Public Employment Services) schemes and services can be found online, via social media and through an extensive network of Job Centres.
- Government also organises national events and promotes targeted newsletters on various topics disseminated to educators, school psychosocial teams, parents and students.
- A team of youth and social workers targets NEETs conducts door-to-door visits to maximise outreach. Youths who are either registering for work or inactive can access services directly at Job Centres or online through a youth specific online portal.

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<sup>59</sup>Subsidiary Legislation Legal Notice 266 of 2018: Procurement of Food for Schools Regulations (Available at:<https://legislation.mt/eli/sl/550.1/eng/pdf>) Accessed on 15/12/2021

## 5. EU Funds (ESF+)

In line with Article 7(3) of the Regulation (EU) 2021/1057 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 establishing the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1296/2013, Member States shall allocate an appropriate amount of their resources of the ESF+ strand under shared management to tackle child poverty. In view of the fact that discussions on programming are still ongoing between the Maltese authorities and the Commission, the exact amount will only be known once the ESF+ Operational Programme is finalised.

## 6. Governance, Monitoring and Reporting

### 6.1. Monitoring

The Action Plan will be monitored by MSPC on a bi-annual basis to ensure that the objectives outlined are implemented through the various measures and policies as appropriate.

An effective and well-monitored implementation of the Child Guarantee would not be possible without commitment of all the Ministries involved in the development and provision of all relevant services. Within this context, Ministries will be expected to provide the necessary information and updates in the form of reports.

For the purpose of the Child Guarantee, children in ‘precarious family situations (economic fragility)’ will refer to all those **families who have children under the age of 18 years and whose income does not exceed the National Minimum Wage**. Within this context, policy-targeting, monitoring and reporting will be based on following existing set of indicators as depicted in the following table 18.

Table 17. Pertinent indicators

Indicator	Available Data 2020
AROPE Children living in a single parent household	Single Parent Households with one or more dependent children AROPE: <b>51.5%</b> (8,154) <sup>60</sup>
Children living in low-income households	Children AROP <sup>61</sup> : <b>20.4%</b> (17,000 persons under 18 years) Children in Households with Low Work Intensity <sup>62</sup> : <b>5.4%</b> Children experiencing Severe Material and Social Deprivation <sup>63</sup> : <b>7.1%</b> Children experiencing Material and Social Deprivation <sup>64</sup> : <b>10.3%</b>

<sup>60</sup> NSO. 2020. EU-SILC 2019: Salient Indicators. Accessed at:

[https://nso.gov.mt/en/News\\_Releases/Documents/2021/12/News2021\\_221.pdf](https://nso.gov.mt/en/News_Releases/Documents/2021/12/News2021_221.pdf) [Accessed on 11/01/2022]

<sup>61</sup> Eurostat. 2021. At-risk-of-poverty rate by poverty threshold, age and sex - EU-SILC and ECHP surveys [ilc\_li02]. Accessed at: [https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=ilc\\_li02&lang=en](https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=ilc_li02&lang=en). [Accessed on 11/01/2022]

<sup>62</sup> Eurostat. 2021. People living in households with very low work intensity by age and sex (population aged 0 to 59 years) [ilc\_lvh11]. Accessed at: [http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=ilc\\_lvh11&lang=en](http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=ilc_lvh11&lang=en). [Accessed on 11/01/2022]

<sup>63</sup> Eurostat. 2021. Severe material and social deprivation rate by age and sex [ilc\_md11]. Accessed at:

[https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=ilc\\_md11&lang=en](https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=ilc_md11&lang=en). [Accessed on 11/01/2022]

<sup>64</sup> Eurostat. 2021. Material and social deprivation rate by age and sex [ilc\_md07]. Accessed at

[https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=ilc\\_md07&lang=en](https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=ilc_md07&lang=en). [Accessed on 12/10/2021]

### *Child Guarantee Coordinator*

To facilitate effective communication and monitoring of implementation, a national Child Guarantee Coordinator has been appointed. The Child Guarantee Coordinator will serve as a centralized contact point that will liaise with the relevant entities for the collation of the aforementioned information.

To assist the Child Guarantee Coordinator, the Ministry for Social Policy and Children's Rights has set-up a new specialized Unit, under the name of the Children's Rights Unit. This Unit will fall within the Policy Development and Programme Implementation Directorate which is also the Directorate tasked with the monitoring of implementation when it comes to European and International initiatives.

The Children's Rights Unit will be focusing on various areas directly relating to children and will be responsible for the overall implementation of the European Child Guarantee across Government.

## **6.2. Reporting**

The information obtained from the relevant Ministries will be compiled, analysed and interpreted to inform the drafting of a report to be submitted to the Commission every two years in line with the recommendation.

Such a report will outline the progress sustained, as well as any gaps for potential consolidation of policies and services for vulnerable children.



# 7. Concluding Remarks

Children are the future of society and it is pertinent to continue ensuring that **all** children are enabled to maximise their potential.

Childhood is a stage of life characterized by relative vulnerability and challenges such as poverty and social exclusion. While at national level children's policy has always been given significant attention, in recent years Government has considered 'childhood' as a priority within the context of policymaking and service provision. The National Action Plan for a Child Guarantee continues to build on an existing robust framework.

All children living in the Maltese context are offered accessible services that touch upon numerous aspects of their wellbeing. Early education and care as well as healthcare are – for the most part - free for all children. Moreover, Malta endeavours to ensure that standards for adequate nutrition and housing are reached and maintained and that no child is left behind in acquiring the resources that are necessary for holistic physical, mental and social development.

The National Action Plan (NAP) for a Child Guarantee aims to address the complex realities faced by particularly disadvantaged children, thus enabling overall social progress and sustainable development.