

# ANNUAL REPORT

2022



Kummissarju ghat-Tfal  
Commissioner for Children





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The Office of the Commissioner for Children was set up in terms of the Commissioner for Children Act of 2003, to promote the welfare of children and the compliance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, as ratified by Malta, and such other international treaties, conventions or agreements relating to children as are or may be ratified or otherwise acceded to by Malta.

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# 1. MESSAGE FROM THE COMMISSIONER



Throughout the first year of my tenure as Commissioner for Children, I have really experienced, hands on, the complex and vast world of children's rights. Beneath this vastness and complexity, however, lies the basic calling of a children's rights advocate, which is to protect and provide for the rights of all children, and to enable all children to actively participate in the preservation and cultivation of their own well-being.

But even this simple formulation, I have come to realize, gives but a partial picture of my role and that of many others who work with and for children. For while the 3 Ps (Provision, Protection and Participation) are the input of our work, the output reaches beyond the well-being of children, as crucial as this is, into the subtler dimension of character formation in children.

What I mean is that the things we as professionals or parents/guardians do to protect children should be geared not just to preserve the elements of their well-being from harm, but also to nurture in children the complementary qualities of caution and resilience. Similarly, when we strive to provide for the well-being of children, our aim should not simply be to give them things like a good education and robust health but also to help them develop independence and altruism in their exercise of these rights. The same goes for participation: yes, we should always listen to children and take their views and feelings into account, but we should also want them to hone their critical and creative intelligence and express their individuality and personality through their participation.

The development of these qualities in children is not a natural outcome of our work with them. We may be very good at protecting children from harm but not as good at helping them develop resilience if we over-protect them. We may do an excellent job of providing for children but fail to help them become independent if we are always doing things for them. We may be all ears to hear what children have to say but fall short of understanding what they really mean if we filter and interpret their words from our perspective as adults.

It is with this mindset and philosophy that I have tried to fulfil my duties as Commissioner for Children through the activities and situations described, and the recommendations put forward in this report. I trust this Annual Report will help many of those who have the power and desire to improve the lives of children in Malta to better understand their needs and rights.

**Antoinette Vassallo**  
Commissioner for Children

## 2. COMMISSIONER FOR CHILDREN (BACKGROUND)

### **The necessity of a Commissioner for Children**

The ultimate test for gauging the importance of the role of the Commissioner for Children is to ask oneself if children in Malta would be worse off if there were no such role.

The plain answer is yes. Children would be worse off since without this Office, Malta, as State Party to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, would be reminded of its pending obligations every five years, that is at the turn of every reporting cycle.

Thanks to the Commissioner for Children as an institution embedded in Malta's institutional fabric, these reminders are constant. This means that children in Malta stand a better chance of having their fundamental rights not merely spoken about but actively championed, fought for and realized with the Commissioner for Children than without.

### **The effectiveness of the Commissioner for Children**

How effectively the Commissioner for Children is able to act as the country's moral conscience in terms of children's rights depends on three main factors: powers, resources and independence.

The Commissioner's powers include the power to demand and obtain any official document that is conducive to the Commissioner's work (Article 15) and thus to investigate any alleged breach of children's rights that is not sub judice (Article 14). On the other hand, the recommendations put forward by the Commissioner are not legally binding.

The extent of the resources, be these financial, material or human, at the disposal of the Commissioner for Children also determines how effective the Commissioner can be in his/her work for children.

Article 4 of the Commissioner for Children Act grants the Commissioner a functional independence to act in any way s/he deems to be in the best interests of children in Malta.

### **The history of the Commissioner for Children**

The role of the Commissioner for Children has been in existence and operation since 2003, shortly after the Commissioner for Children Act was passed into law in the same year. As of the end of 2021, this Office had seen the incumbency of four Commissioners, who fulfilled their duties towards the rights of children in Malta on the strength of an annual budget and a staff complement that have increased over the years.

True to its role as the country's public conscience in matters of children's rights, the Office of the Commissioner for Children has over the years raised awareness on and proposed solutions to many shortcomings in Malta's implementation of children's rights. For instance, from at least the

year 2008, the Commissioner for Children had voiced its concern at Malta's low age threshold of criminal responsibility, which stood at 9 years of age. The Office's unrelenting advocacy on this issue bore fruit in 2014 when Parliament approved a legal amendment for the age to be raised to 14.

### 3. 2022

2022 was a year of renewal in more ways than one. It marked the start of a new cycle in the country's democratic process with a general election held in the first quarter. Even though the outcome of this event spelt continuity of governance, it nevertheless brought about a significant element of novelty in terms of both the political content and protagonists of two of the four pillars of the State, namely the Executive (Government) and the Legislature (Parliament).

Though not bringing a definite close to the Covid-19 pandemic, the year marked the beginning of the end of over two years of social and economic turmoil for people of all ages, particularly children, who to a significant extent were able to return to life as it had been before the pandemic. But 2022 also brought fresh unrest, chiefly the outbreak of war in Ukraine, and its impact on Malta in terms of increased economic and migratory pressures.

## 4. INTRODUCTION

As laid down in Article 19 of the Commissioner for Children Act, this Annual Report describes the content and outcomes of the various activities undertaken by the Office of the Commissioner for Children in the context of the prevailing and emerging situations of children in 2022. The identified outstanding challenges for and unmet needs of children in Malta are translated into concrete recommendations for changes to law, policy and practice.

In terms of its overall structure, the report is divided into two main parts. The first part sets out the work, challenges and recommendations for securing a solid foundation for advancing children's rights in Malta. This is divided into two subparts: the strengthening of structures that work for children, and the promulgation of knowledge of children's rights among children and other stakeholders.

Since children's rights are vehicles for the well-being of children, the longer second part of the report deals with the work, challenges and recommendations related to actions by stakeholders who work with children towards protecting children from threats to their well-being and providing children with opportunities for their well-being. The participation of children in this work permeates the whole structure of this report.

## 5. STRENGTHENING MALTA'S CHILDREN'S RIGHTS STRUCTURES

### **Ministry for Children's Rights**

This designation, which puts children's rights at the centre of social policy, was renewed and confirmed with the formation of the new executive at the beginning of the new legislature. There was further continuity in the reappointment of Hon. Dr Michael Falzon to head this Ministry.

However, as identified by the Office in its interim report published in 2019, further efforts should be made for the setting up of a steering body for the implementation of the National Children's Policy, which is due to be renewed at the end of 2023.

### **Commissioner for Children**

#### **Resources**

Shortly before the start of the new legislature, Ms Antoinette Vassallo was appointed as the Commissioner for Children, succeeding Ms Pauline Miceli, who had come to the end of her second term of office. Ms Vassallo's personal and professional experience, which includes leadership positions in the Communications Authority and the Housing Authority as well as in the Children and Young Persons Advisory Board, denote a high degree of familiarity, closeness and sensitivity to the needs, perspectives and modern-day realities of children, especially the most vulnerable children.

To bring this vast experience to bear on her new Office and the challenges it faces, Ms Vassallo, in her first year of office, was able to count on a staff complement of seven workers. In addition to their wealth of experience in the field, the Office staff regularly receive training to update their skills or develop new competencies. Three members of staff followed a course in First Aid, which has enhanced the Office's ability to not only manage the health and safety of its staff but also that of the children and youth it works with.

The Office operated on an annual budget of €270,207.07.

## CFC 2022 Income and Expenditure Breakdown:

### Income

Government Subvention	262,995
EU Funds	7,212
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>270,207</b>

### Expenditure

Salaries	177,993
International Memberships	1,350
Utilities	3,697
Projects and Initiatives	10,161
Materials and Supplies	3,573
Repair and Upkeep	9,689
Office services	8,918
Office Car expenses & Transport	3,666
Travel	8,479
Information Services	23,400
Contractual Services	4,176
Training	105
Hospitality	629
Sponsorships/Donations	662
Promotional Items	578
<b>Total Expenditure</b>	<b>257,076</b>

While the staff of the Office is what powered the work of the Commissioner in the course of the year, Ms Vassallo was able to receive additional guidance and counsel from two structures within her office. The first of these structures was the Council for Children, which is a consultative body to the Commissioner set up under Article 12 of the Commissioner for Children Act that is made up of children and representatives from various ministries.

Julianne Elise Galea, Samara Muscat, Yevgeny Spiteri and George Vella are four youths who were co-opted to the new Council that was appointed by the Minister for Children's Rights sometime after the start of the new legislature. The unique combination of a new Commissioner and a new Council<sup>i</sup> brought a renewed freshness of vision. In fact, in the first of two meetings held in the year, the Commissioner, as chairperson to the Council, asked the Council members to set the agenda of the Council by suggesting concrete children's rights issues for the Council to discuss and propose a way forward on.

The work of the Office was informed also by the Permanent Children's Advisory Board, which the Office set up in the course of the year. Unlike the Council for Children, this listening body, which is coordinated by the Office's Manager, is made up of children and youth only. These total seventeen in number with an age range of 13-16 and a rich diversity of backgrounds and identities that ensures a very wide representation of Malta's heterogenous child population.

To enhance its ability to listen to the voices of children, the Office held talks with the Information Management Unit within the Ministry for Children's Rights with a view to setting up a chat function, which is a more child-friendly and immediate channel of communication than the email function, on the Office website [tfal.org.mt](http://tfal.org.mt).

### **Powers**

While the Commissioner for Children has the power to obtain information that can be useful for the purposes of an investigation called by him/her, the Commissioner is not similarly empowered to enter any premises where children are housed, such as a school, hospital or detention facility, without the prior consent or notification of the people managing the premises. This stops the Office from obtaining first-hand undoctored accounts of any alleged breaches of children's rights that it may get wind of. Commissioners or Ombudspersons for children in other countries have such power.

In an interview on a radio programme, the Commissioner championed the advisory role of her Office as an ambassador for the views of children, calling on Government to be more heedful of the Office's recommendations.

### **Independence**

In a strictly legal sense, the Commissioner for Children is a rather abstract entity that includes the Commissioner's person, functions and powers but not the physical structure of the Commissioner's Office as composed of staff members. Considerable progress was achieved on this front in 2022 through the definition of a set organizational structure for the Office, with clear designations of positions, salary scales and progressions.

Nevertheless, the Office still lacks a legal personality of its own as a result of which, it cannot, despite its functional independence, take legally binding actions, such as applying for EU funds, unless this is done under the auspices of the Ministry.

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<sup>i</sup> Ms Antoinette Vassallo, Commissioner for Children, Ms Darlinka Barbara, Mr Victor Bugeja, Julianne Elise Galea, Ms Svetlana Grech, Samara Muscat, Yevgeny Spiteri, George Vella, Dr Patrick Zahra and Ms. Suzanne Garcia Imbernon (Secretary), Hon. Rosianne Cutajar, Mr Neil Portelli.

## Networks and Collaborations

The Office continued its active participation as a member of the European Network of Ombudspersons for Children (ENOC), an organisation which gathers independent children's rights institutions across Europe and serves as a forum for the exchange of information, capacity building, and professional support. In the Spring Seminar organised by the network, the Commissioner and Manager had the opportunity to follow a presentation by Prof. Ursula Kilkelly on the two gold standards which an Independent Children's Rights Institution (ICRI) like the Office should hold itself up to, namely the Paris Principles and General Comment no. 2 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Commissioner and Manager also participated in the General Assembly of ENOC, during which event they proposed and gained approval for Malta to be the General Coordinator for the 2023 edition of the European Network of Young Advisors, ENOC's child participation structure.

The Office extended its membership of Eurochild, a Europe-wide network of organisations that work with and for children. The Policy Officer participated in the network's Annual General Meeting, which was held online.

The Office extended its partnership with the Foundation for Social Welfare Services (FSWS), the Directorate for Learning and Assessment Programmes within the Ministry of Education and the Cybercrime Unit within the Malta Police Force into the seventh cycle of the BeSmartOnline! project, which was launched<sup>iii</sup> in the course of the year in order to continue promoting a safer internet for children. In recent years especially, internet safety has also been one of the main foci of the Lanzarote Committee, whose regular meetings were attended by the Head of Office, Dr Lorna Muscat, who was also re-elected for a second term of office to serve as a member of the Bureau to assist the Committee in its work.



Launch of the 7th Cycle of BeSmartOnline



## Corporate Social Responsibility

The Office exercised its social responsibility by raising awareness on breast cancer during Pink October<sup>iv</sup>.



## Bottom-up structures

With the right structures in place, children can take the lead in bringing about positive change for themselves in accordance with their fundamental rights. One such structure is the incorporation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child into domestic law, which would enable children or those acting on their behalf to file a lawsuit on the basis of an alleged breach of their rights according to the Convention. Successful suits of this kind tend to create case law that acts as a catalyst for systemic change in children's rights in Malta.

Despite a declared political will and plenty of groundwork done by the Office to make the incorporation of the children's rights convention happen, there was no progress during the year with the ambitious but necessary project seemingly shelved, if not abandoned altogether, and conspicuous by its absence in the electoral manifesto of the political party that went on to win a majority in the general election.

A second structure that would give children greater and more direct agency in claiming their rights involves the ratification of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a Communications Procedure (OP3). This would enable children who would have exhausted domestic avenues of redress for an alleged violation of their rights to lodge a complaint with the Committee on the Rights of the Child, which is the guardian and arbiter of the Convention.

Not only was this protocol not ratified in 2022, ten years after Malta signed it, but the Office is not informed of any preparatory work done to ratify and implement this very important protocol. It is pertinent to say that OP3 has so far been ratified by a significant number of EU countries.

### **Recommendations**

#### **Further strengthen Malta's children's rights structures by:**

- Setting up a Department for Children's Rights within the Ministry for Children's Rights that is adequately resourced to monitor and steer the implementation of a National Children's Strategy;
- Amending the Commissioner for Children Act to:
  1. include, in line with the Paris Principles, a guarantee of adequate funding for the Office to carry out its functions effectively;
  2. give the Commissioner the power to enter institutions where children are housed without prior notification or consent;
  3. give legal personality to the Commissioner's Office;
- Enacting a law that incorporates the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in full into Maltese legislation;
- Ratifying the 3<sup>rd</sup> Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a Communications Procedure (OP3) and setting up the necessary structures for its implementation.

## **6. SPREADING KNOWLEDGE OF CHILDREN'S RIGHTS AMONG ALL STAKEHOLDERS**

### **Policymakers**

As in previous years shortly before a general election, the Office produced a compendium of recommendations for the advancement of children's rights in Malta, called Manifesto for Children. The content of the Manifesto was established in consultation with the Office's Youth Advisors, which the Commissioner shared with her European counterparts in the ENOC Annual Conference as an example of child participation.

The Office chose to present its proposals in the form of a poster so as to exploit the superior immediacy and succinctness of the poster format over the booklet format and thus deliver its message more effectively to stakeholders. The poster consisted of 35 one-line recommendations that were colour-coded according to the five policy pillars<sup>v</sup> of the National Children's Policy. The Manifesto also included recommendations to ensure the well-being of children participating in political and electoral campaigns.

In order to promote children's rights as priority issues in the drafting of electoral programmes, the published Manifesto for Children poster was disseminated to all political parties and independent candidates contesting the 2022 General Election. This complemented other initiatives that were being taken to put children's rights at the heart of the electoral campaign<sup>vi</sup>.

# Manifesto for Children 2022

Through its role of monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the National Children's Policy, the Office of the Commissioner for Children has identified the priority areas that need to be addressed so as to guarantee children's rights.

To have a stronger National Children's Policy, Political Parties must pledge to:

- ▶ Incorporate the UNCRC into law
- ▶ Develop a national children's rights strategy
- ▶ Set up a unit to spearhead the implementation of the strategy
- ▶ Include children's rights in national emergency preparedness plans
- ▶ Mainstream children's rights across the entire education system

## To enable all children to live and grow in a healthier Home Environment, Political Parties must pledge to:

- ▶ Identify and help struggling families with children through appropriate services
- ▶ Provide better planning and funding for out-of-home care
- ▶ Promote positive parenting and co-parenting
- ▶ Make corporal punishment illegal in all settings
- ▶ End domestic violence

## To ensure the social wellbeing of all children, political parties must pledge to:

- ▶ Carry out Child Rights Impact Assessments in all law and policy making
- ▶ Strengthen the independence of the Office of the Commissioner for Children to carry-out its function
- ▶ Increase awareness and knowledge about children's rights and needs
- ▶ Further encourage and provide training for the participation of children
- ▶ Address the issue of bullying and peer pressure and provide adequate support for children

## To enable children to live in good Health and Environment, Political Parties must pledge to:

- ▶ Significantly reduce child obesity by promoting better nutrition and physical activity
- ▶ Raise awareness on how children can maintain good mental health
- ▶ Address problematic use of the internet in children
- ▶ Create more and better public spaces and youth clubs for adolescents
- ▶ Significantly improve air quality across Malta

## To enhance the prospects of children in Education and Employment, Political Parties must pledge to:

- ▶ Make education inclusive and respectful of all differences between children, including different gender and sexual identities
- ▶ Create an education system through which children can become active and open-minded learners and citizens as well as free and critical thinkers
- ▶ Extend free childcare to all children
- ▶ Expand vocational training in secondary education
- ▶ Increase time dedicated to school breaks and give more importance to physical education and activity

## To guarantee children's right to Leisure and Culture, political parties must pledge to:

- ▶ Provide adequate and safe places for adolescents including the regulation of teen parties
- ▶ Create open spaces even in urban areas by closing busy roads so that children can play
- ▶ Increase efforts to promote participation in cultural and traditional activities
- ▶ Promote fun and sport activities to encourage children to create an online/offline balance
- ▶ Constitute an authority to regulate fun parks and luna parks

## To ensure the wellbeing of children participating in political and electoral campaigns, political parties must pledge to:

- ▶ Establish a plan for the protection of children involved
- ▶ Provide information to parents and children on the possible positive and negative impact
- ▶ Obtain consent in writing of parents and children
- ▶ Carry out an assessment prior to approving the participation of children
- ▶ Ensure the protection of children of politically exposed persons

This Manifesto for children highlights the gaps identified by the interim-report on the implementation of the National Children's Policy which was based on a large number of focus groups carried out with children.

The Manifesto was drawn up in collaboration with the Office's Youth advisors.

The full report can be accessed by scanning the QR code.



Although the electoral manifestos of the parties and individual candidates contesting the election were not short on proposals that would directly or indirectly benefit children, it is not clear to what extent the input of children and those who work with them was sought and incorporated into the manifestos. Meaningful participation is not accidental but the result of a carefully planned process, as was illustrated by the Manager in her presentation on Child Participation and Empowerment at the ENOC Spring Seminar.

The Office's drive to sensitise the political class to the priorities of children continued after the general election with the Commissioner holding meetings with the Members of Parliament Dr Amanda Spiteri Grech, who is a lawyer with a professional background in children's rights issues, and Ms Graziella Attard Previ, the Opposition spokesperson for children's rights. The Commissioner also delivered a presentation to the Parliamentary Committee on Social Affairs on her Office's work over the previous year as detailed in the Office's Annual Report 2021.<sup>vii</sup>



The Commissioner for Children, Ms Antoinette Vassallo, with the Hon. Members of the Social Affairs Committee

Promoting children's well-being is as much about taking action that will benefit children as it is about refraining from action that will or may harm them. In the Manifesto for Children and in an article penned by the Manager entitled 'Children should be our priority!', the Office called for Children's Rights Impact Assessments (CRIAs) to be carried out before any legal or policy action, such as the closure of schools, is implemented. The Commissioner repeated this call when, intervening at the ENOC Annual Conference, she urged all political parties to carry out CRIAs on laws and policies affecting children. The need for CRIAs is all the more important in or before situations of emergency like the Covid-19 pandemic, where another Manifesto proposal called for children's rights to be included in national emergency preparedness plans.

## General public

On the occasion of Human Rights Day, the Office published a post on its social media reminding people that “Children’s Rights are Human Rights!”.<sup>viii</sup>



Manifesto for Children 2022 was channelled to the general public through a press release that was carried on all the major newspapers in a bid to shine a spotlight on children’s rights issues in the midst of the electoral campaign. The need to mainstream children’s rights at such a sensitive and fertile phase of Malta’s democratic process was felt particularly because the presence of children in the electoral campaign was much more noticeable in the choreography than in the content and substance of the campaigns. This is disappointing also in view of the fact that this was the first national election in Malta where children aged 16 and 17 were exercising their newly gained voting rights.

Ms Vassallo was very vocal about the right and need of children to be heard and her determination as the newly appointed Commissioner for Children to ensure that children’s voices are not ignored<sup>x</sup>. To usher in the European Sustainable Development week, the Office underlined the primary role of children in helping the world achieve the Sustainable Development Goals set by the United Nations<sup>xi</sup>.





Children in Malta were not the only ones whose needs and rights risked being sidelined in the turmoil of a major political confrontation. Children in Ukraine were facing the predicament of the war with Russia that had just broken out on their soil. The Office sought to raise awareness in Malta on the plight of children in Ukraine by issuing a press statement in which, as a member of ENOC, it drew attention to the fact that the war was exacerbating the suffering and severe disruption which children in this part of the world had endured for the past eight years. The Office called on all European institutions and governments to do everything in their power to ease the suffering of children in Ukraine. The Government in Malta responded to this call inter alia by providing continued medical treatment in Malta to children in Ukraine suffering from chronic disease<sup>xii</sup>.

### Children

There is at least one day of the year when it is relatively easier to bring visibility to children’s rights in a public landscape dominated by momentous events like wars and elections. The Office exploited the occasion of World Children’s Day, celebrated almost worldwide on 20<sup>th</sup> November, to increase awareness on children’s rights not only among the general public, which it did by means of a press release and press coverage of a joint visit by the Commissioner and the Minister for Children to a public school, but also among children themselves.



Photo: DOI - Clifton Fenech

Visit by Hon. Minister for Social Policy and Children's Rights Dr Michael Falzon and Commissioner for Children Ms Antoinette Vassallo to Gharghur Primary School.

The Office reached out to children by producing and distributing child-friendly, age-appropriate, children's rights-themed educational materials to all children in kindergarten, primary school and beyond. These materials, which were originally developed by UNICEF and translated by the Office into Maltese in collaboration with UNICEF, consisted of an animated video for children in kindergarten; an activity book for children in years 1,2 and 3; and a poster for children between the ages of 9 and 15.

1 DEFINITION OF A CHILD	2 NO DISCRIMINATION	3 BEST INTERESTS OF THE CHILD	4 MAKING RIGHTS REAL	5 FAMILY GUIDANCE AS CHILDREN DEVELOP	6 LIFE, SURVIVAL AND DEVELOPMENT	7 NAME AND NATIONALITY
8 IDENTITY	9 KEEPING FAMILIES TOGETHER	10 CONTACT WITH PARENTS ACROSS COUNTRIES	11 PROTECTION FROM KIDNAPPING	12 RESPECT FOR CHILDREN'S VIEWS	13 SHARING THOUGHTS FREELY	14 FREEDOM OF THOUGHT AND RELIGION
15 SETTING UP OR JOINING GROUPS	16 PROTECTION OF PRIVACY	17 ACCESS TO INFORMATION	18 RESPONSIBILITY OF PARENTS	19 PROTECTION FROM VIOLENCE	20 CHILDREN WITHOUT FAMILIES	21 CHILDREN WHO ARE ADOPTED
22 REFUGEE CHILDREN	23 CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES	24 HEALTH, WATER, FOOD, ENVIRONMENT	25 REVIEW OF A CHILD'S PLACEMENT	26 SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC HELP	27 FOOD, CLOTHING, A SAFE HOME	28 ACCESS TO EDUCATION
29 AIMS OF EDUCATION	30 MINORITY CULTURE, LANGUAGE AND RELIGION	31 REST, PLAY, CULTURE, ARTS	32 PROTECTION FROM HARMFUL WORK	33 PROTECTION FROM HARMFUL DRUGS	34 PROTECTION FROM SEXUAL ABUSE	35 PREVENTION OF SALE AND TRAFFICKING
36 PROTECTION FROM EXPLOITATION	37 CHILDREN IN DETENTION	38 PROTECTION IN WAR	39 RECOVERY AND REINTEGRATION	40 CHILDREN WHO BREAK THE LAW	41 BEST LAW FOR CHILDREN APPLIES	42 EVERYONE MUST KNOW CHILDREN'S RIGHTS
43-54 HOW THE CONVENTION WORKS	<b>CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD</b>					
The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is an important agreement by countries who have promised to protect children's rights.						



unicef  
for every child

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Commissioner for Children

# ENJOY THIS FUN ACTIVITY BOOK

Did you know that every child has the **RIGHT** to rest, relax, play and take part in creative and cultural activities?



School was again the medium through which the Office raised awareness on children's rights among children when it encouraged and supported up to 50 schools across Malta and Gozo to organise simple but special activities, many of them led by children, to mark World Children's Day. Local Councils, such as the Mellieħa council<sup>xiii</sup>, were also enticed and supported to mark World Children's Day with special events for children.

Children need to understand that climate change is not simply an environmental issue but a human rights issue, especially a children's rights issue. This was the backdrop against which, as described earlier, the workshop attended by the Commissioner and Manager on how to strengthen Human Rights Education was conducted. Human Rights Education in schools needs to be more holistic, interactive and pervasive. This was one of the main points of agreement in a workshop which Ms Vassallo and Ms Garcia Imbernon participated in as part of the ENOC Annual Conference. The participants also concurred on the need for children's rights to inform the formation and training of educators.

Educating children about their rights should not be about imparting knowledge to children but about empowering them so that they are able to recognise if their rights are not being respected, and thus claim their rights. This means that the more vulnerable children are those who need children's rights education the most. However, studies show that children's rights awareness tends to be weak among children from disadvantaged backgrounds. This begs the question if efforts to educate children about their rights are reaching these children, or if, on the contrary, they are, as it were, preaching to the converted.

It is not only pointless but deeply frustrating for children who know their rights to find that those who work with them, be it at home, school or in the community, do not always listen to their rightful concerns. Education and participation must thus go hand in hand.

## **Recommendations**

### **Further spread knowledge about children's rights to all stakeholders by:**

- Conducting focus groups with children and those working with them to feed into the drafting of electoral programmes;
- Holding at least one broadcast debate between electoral candidates from across the political spectrum that is dedicated entirely to children's rights issues and enable the meaningful participation of children in putting questions to the candidates;
- Promoting knowledge of human rights amongst children;
- Stepping up children's rights education efforts for vulnerable children;
- Enhancing the capacity of those who work with children to listen to children and take their feedback on board.

## 7. PROTECTION

### **Protecting children from climate change**

There is no doubt that it is the generations of children of today and tomorrow who stand to bear the brunt of and suffer the most from climate change. A rough idea of the negative impact of climate change on children's rights can be had from ENOC's Position Statement on "Children's Rights and Climate Justice", which the Office, as a member of the network, contributed to the drafting of. The statement lists a slew of children's rights, such as the right to health, including a healthy environment (Article 24), that are being violated as a result of this global phenomenon. Even though the adverse effects of global warming on children's rights are beyond question, the need is still felt, as the Commissioner and Manager together with representatives of other members of ENOC who met for the network's Spring Seminar concurred, for children's rights impact assessments (CRIAs) to be conducted to provide a holistic and detailed description of the scale and ramifications of this impact.

Later on in the year, ENOC themed its Annual Conference, held in Reykjavik, around the topic of climate justice. The Commissioner and Manager, who attended the conference, heard how the children's rights community had woken up relatively late to the reality of climate change and its potentially devastating impact on present and future generations of children. A member of the Committee on the Rights of the Child told the floor that work on a general comment by the committee focusing on children and the environment and climate justice had been in gestation for many years and was now slated for launch in 2023.

Because of the scale of this impact, caused by the unsustainable development policies promoted by the older generations, climate change has been the issue on which activism by children has arguably been strongest and most effective. Climate justice has gained currency as a term and slogan that has spurred youths like the Swedish activist Greta Thunberg and, as discussed in the ENOC Spring Seminar, a group of sixteen children who in 2019 lodged a complaint under OP3 regarding the negative impact of carbon emissions by their countries on their rights, to campaign for global action for the injustice of climate change to be righted.

Such activism is also reflected in the strong participation of children in advocacy initiatives on climate justice by children's rights bodies. At the ENOC Spring Seminar, the Commissioner and Manager followed a presentation of the plans of the Committee on the Rights of the Child to involve children in the drafting of General Comment no. 26. As part of its strong advocacy on climate justice, ENOC's European Network of Young Advisors (ENYA) came together both within and between ENOC countries to chart and propose a way forward on this issue.

The Manager coordinated a discussion on climate justice by Malta's young advisors in collaboration with Aġenzija Żgħażaġħ. This was backed by a talk from Ekoskola and crystallised in a number of recommendations about how to enhance action on climate change, such as an increased use of alternative clean and renewable energy sources, and the participation of children in such action, such as mainstreaming sustainable development into formal compulsory schooling.



ENYA 2022 Participants

Two of these young advisors, Sam Micallef and Julian Zahra, were accompanied by the Commissioner and Manager to meet their European counterparts and peers in the ENYA Seminar held in the Basque city of Bilbao. The participants were divided into four groups, each of which discussed a different sub-topic, one of which was led by the Manager. One of the recommendations agreed by the young advisors which was incorporated into the public statement by ENOC was about the need to “facilitate access to reliable information in climate change by providing information and training on media literacy and critical thinking, and fighting fake news with truthful information.”



**Commissioner for Children, Malta**

Sam and Julian presenting the ideas and recommendations of Maltese youth at the #ENYA2022 Forum which has brought together 34 young people from 17 different European countries and regions to discuss #ClimateJustice and #ChildrensRights

29 JUN 2022

## Protecting children from war

Solidarity with the people of Ukraine has not been limited to words. On the contrary, many countries in Europe have been very forthcoming in opening their borders to children fleeing from war. While finding shelter in border countries like Poland and, to a far lesser extent, Malta, the Commissioner, Manager and other participants in the ENOC Spring Seminar agreed that the situation of emergency placed children at risk of serious infringements of their rights, such as the non-child-friendly approach of border control officials, and human trafficking. In addition, concerns were also raised about the well-being of Ukrainian children who were forcefully taken to Russia, and the backlash against Russian children in European countries such as Finland in the form of bullying and discrimination.

Solidarity with those in distress is a must not an option as it is a human rights not a security issue. The Office expressed its dismay at the tragic avoidable death of young Loujin, urging the authorities to ensure that the basic needs of those who are stranded close to our borders are met irrespective of whether they have a right to enter the country or which country is duty-bound to rescue them<sup>xiv</sup>.



## Protecting children from illegal detention

The Office responded to a complaint about alleged inadequate living conditions at the Safi Detention Centre, namely lack of access to clean water and telephony, by visiting the section of the said centre, run by a mental health nurse, where irregular migrants claiming to be minors are held pending the outcome of the age-verification process. Although no structural inadequacies resulted from the Commissioner's inspection of the centre, the Commissioner nevertheless set up a meeting with the Minister for Home Affairs, Hon. Dr Byron Camilleri, to discuss a number of issues, notably the duration of the age-verification process and the unwarranted de facto detention of minors<sup>xv</sup>.



The Commissioner and Manager participated in a training session on the rights of unaccompanied minor asylum-seekers organised by the Jesuit Refugee Service. The two Office members also attended a meeting on the same subject organised by Aditus.

To raise more awareness of the unfair treatment that is all too often meted out to asylum-seekers by the authorities, the Office was presented with the publication 'Free the El Hiblu 3'<sup>xvi</sup>, the story of three African teenagers who fled Libya to Malta only to be arrested, jailed and accused of terrorism.

### **Protecting children from statelessness**

The Commissioner and Manager participated in a meeting organised by Aditus on identification and support of stateless asylum-seekers, especially unaccompanied minors.

### **Protecting children from communicable disease**

"Not my remit" was the Commissioner's response to a public call made by Prof. Arnold Cassola for the Commissioner for Children to look into and pronounce herself on the legality of the presence of two Ministers in a classroom at a time when entry into schools by third parties was forbidden in order to protect children and educators from the risk of Covid-19 transmission. The Commissioner said it was within the role of the Superintendent for Public Health to investigate such an occurrence.

In a similar vein, in comments to the press, the Commissioner defended the role and expertise of the Superintendent for Public Health in managing the delicate process of gradually lifting the restrictive measures that were in place in schools among other places.

The mandatory wearing of face masks by students was the measure whose lifting or retention posed arguably the greatest dilemma, as scientific evidence had to be balanced against the conflicting demands of children and parents, many of whom wanted the measure to be lifted, and those of teachers, who in the main were calling for the measure to be kept. The Commissioner highlighted the needs of vulnerable students, that is those suffering from chronic conditions, as a key factor in the decision on whether and when to discontinue the mandatory wearing of facemasks in schools.<sup>xviii</sup>

### **Protecting children from non-communicable disease**

The Commissioner weighed in on Malta's high and rising rate of obesity even in children, calling for a stronger drive to promote healthy eating habits and regular physical activity as early as possible in children's development. Ms Vassallo recommended a more rigorous regime of physical activity in schools through more frequent and mandatory physical education sessions.

The Office used its social media channels to increase knowledge and awareness of the fact, established and promoted by the Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Directorate, that 'Children's school bags should weigh no more than 10% of their weight.'<sup>xxi</sup> The Office appealed to all stakeholders to ensure children do not carry weight that is in excess of this limit, which can negatively impact their musculoskeletal health and development.

## Protecting children from injury

Unfortunately, 2022 was a record year in terms of the number of road fatalities. Although none of the victims were underage, they may have been responsible for children in a way, notably as parents, that makes it hard or impossible for them to be replaced in the lives of the children hit by such tragedies. Besides, the statistic of road deaths does not include children who were seriously but not fatally injured in road accidents<sup>xxiii</sup>.

It was in this evolving context that the Commissioner met with members of the Road Safety Council, on which the Office was represented by the Project Officer, Mr Glen Gauci, to discuss the current state and possible changes to laws, policies and practice about the road safety for children both as passengers and pedestrians. There was agreement that the current levels of education about and enforcement of existing laws were not high enough to ensure adequate protection of children travelling as passengers on motorised vehicles.



**Malta Road Safety Council**  
20 Sept 2022 · 🌐

**Jonathan Joslin**  
20 Sept 2022 · 🌐

Proposing a National pledge to ensure our kids are safely driven on our roads.

Correctly used car safety seats can reduce the risk of pediatric death by up to 71%.

Putting forwards a proposal for a government mandate for the use of child restraint systems / child car seats in promoting road safety through a government sponsored subsidy on purchase of child car seats by the parents.

And that, my friends, was car seat safety in the 70s!



The point was raised that despite clear legislative provisions about the use of child restraint systems inside vehicles, notably seat belts and car seats, these laws were not always observed and enforced, placing children's lives at grave and unnecessary risk. There was also agreement on the need to educate children on how to safely navigate roads as pedestrians and to combat an attitude of over-protection of children which tends to leave them exposed to danger when for some reason or other they find themselves without the protective shield of an accompanying adult on or along busy roads.<sup>xxiv</sup>

Mayhem on Malta's roads is not only an everyday occurrence but is also characterised by hordes of people thronging the streets to celebrate some big event like a political, sports or academic achievement. In such circumstances, law enforcement should not turn a blind or forgiving eye to any unsafe behaviours that can cause major accidents <sup>xxv</sup>.

### **Protecting children from psychotropic drugs**

The Office met with the research team of the Foundation for Social Welfare Services (FSWS) to get a feel of the latest trends regarding substance abuse among older children. Findings from the latest ESPAD report for Malta were presented, which saw an overall downward trend in the consumption of addictive substances among 15-16 year-olds, accompanied by an increase in the consumption by girls relative to boys. Even among children who do not take drugs, there is a perception of easy availability of these substances, which, if true, puts them at risk of developing this very destructive habit.



FSWS research team members with members of staff from the Office of the Commissioner for Children

In an interview<sup>xxvi</sup> with a national newspaper, the Commissioner expressed her concern that children exposed to the growth and consumption of cannabis at home, as a result of the recently enacted law, were more likely to develop the habit. Ms Vassallo called for regular and rigorous checks by the cannabis authority to ensure that the substance is stored and consumed in a safe place away from the reach, eyes and noses of children.

### **Protecting children from conflict with peers**

The Office participated in an Erasmus Multiplier Event which sought to propose practical techniques for helping children resolve their differences with school mates in an amicable non-violent way. In a similar vein, the Commissioner publicly spoke on the need to include conflict resolution in school syllabi. The Manager attended a conference on Restorative Justice in schools, organised by the Malta Foundation for the Well-Being of Society<sup>xxviii</sup>.

These events took place against the background of a high number of bullying incidents, some of them of a serious nature and directed even to educators, that were reported in schools in 2022. This trend, which was also reflected in the Office's casework, follows on the heels of 366 registered cases of bullying the year before<sup>xxix</sup>. In comments to the press, the Commissioner appealed to all victims of bullying to "speak up for help".

### **Protecting children from dangers online**

The Office supported the Youth Panel of BeSmartOnline! in the production of and participation in a video which gave the takes of youths and experts in child internet safety, including the Manager, on six distinct but related threats to the safety of children online: fake news, cyberbullying, privacy, online respect, harmful content, and cyberstalking. The video was uploaded to the web and disseminated in all schools around Safer Internet Day, which was celebrated worldwide on 8 February 2022, in order to increase awareness of these challenging aspects of children's online experiences.

Over and above these challenges, the Manager participated in a Training Meeting organised by Insafe, the European Network of Safer Internet Centres, where she heard how new developments and emerging technologies in the world of ICT, notably the metaverse, were posing new potentially more serious threats to the safety of children online.

As the Office's representative on BeSmartOnline!, the Manager also discussed with her European counterparts the implications of the war raging in Ukraine on the online safety of children in Ukraine.

Possible solutions to the classic and modern challenges faced by children as people who dwell in the virtual world much more than adults were proposed in an interview<sup>xxxi</sup> with the Minister for Children's Rights, Hon. Dr Michael Falzon, by two youth ambassadors, who were supported by the Office in this task. When asked what was being done to counter online threats to children, the Minister replied that amendments to Malta's Criminal Code were being drafted that would contain distinct legal provisions against cyberbullying and cyberstalking. Mainstreaming internet safety in national legislation is a mammoth task which can be facilitated by using evidence-based tools, such as the Child Online Safety Toolkit, which was developed by the 5 Rights Foundation and presented by the same organisation in an online workshop, 'Protecting children's rights in the digital world' that was attended by the Policy Officer, Mr Nicholas Vella Laurenti, as part



of the Office's participation in the Eurochild Members' Day. It is important that any legislative initiatives in this direction are taken within the spirit and legal framework of restorative justice in order to also address the needs of the child perpetrators of cyberbullying and bullying in general.



Members of the BeSmartOnline! Youth Panel interviewing Hon. Minister for Social Policy and Children's Rights Dr Michael Falzon.

On the metaverse, which renders the online experience much more real, captivating and holistic, the Insafe meeting explored what is being done and what more needs to be done to incorporate children's safety into this budding technology, using a safety by design approach.

Alongside structural solutions by way of laws and technology design, knowledge and awareness of threats, especially by children themselves, is of the essence, as Minister Falzon said repeatedly in the interview, which was disseminated around Safer Internet Day. Preparations for the following edition of this day, on 13 February 2023, were discussed during the Insafe Training Meeting. As part of the BeSmartOnline! project, the Office contributed to the dissemination of a song called 'Simili' by the music group 'Travellers' whose lyrics deal with the theme of cyberbullying.

This was not the only day when the Office shone a spotlight on internet safety. The Office exploited another day, the International Day against Violence and Bullying at School, to highlight and raise awareness, through its social media, of the fact that a lot of the violence and bullying by and against schoolchildren was happening online, hence cyberbullying<sup>xxxii</sup>. Sometimes bullying happens in the real world but is captured on video and goes viral online, leading the victims, as the Commissioner said, to relive the traumatic experience.



Ms Suzanne Garcia Imbernon delivering a session on internet safety at Skolasajf

Over and above such special days, the Office, together with its partners in BeSmartOnline!, was busy throughout the year, including the hot summer months<sup>xxxiii</sup>, running workshops and interactive sessions for children on internet safety. In so doing, it used the friendship cards, developed by the Relationships are Forever Foundation, in order to instil empathy in children.

Action to stay behind such a rapidly and diversely expanding universe as the virtual world must be taken within a holistic and supranational framework. The European Commission's internet safety strategy 'Better Internet for Kids', or BIK+, was a main item on the agendas of both the Insafe Training Meeting and the Safer Internet Forum, a key annual event where the Manager, Ms Suzanne Garcia Imbernon and three youths from Malta whom she supported were among many stakeholders who came together to discuss the latest trends, risks and solutions related to child online safety. This strategy, which proposes inter alia an EU code on age-appropriate design, and a standardised age assurance and verification regime in Europe, was backed by the Declaration of Digital Rights and Principles, which the European Parliament and Commission published in 2022 as a rulebook for Europe's Digital Decade. The three youths from Malta were able to discuss the strategy with the participants from all over Europe within the Youth Participation Working Group, with the Manager leading a workshop on the subject.



Ms Suzanne Garcia Imbernon with the three youths from Malta

### **Protecting children from undue exposure in the media**

The Office took to the press and its social media channels to issue a statement<sup>xxxv</sup> where it warned against and condemned the unnecessary and harmful disclosure of sensitive personal details of vulnerable children in the public domain. Although the statement was worded in generic terms, it was prompted by the case of two vulnerable children who had been referred to Child Protection Services by the rector of the school they attended, who felt the need to make the case public through the media in such a way as to make the children identifiable<sup>xxxvi</sup>.

The Office also called on those working in the press not to rush to publication before carefully examining the repercussions of such publication on the right to privacy of the children concerned and before checking out the facts of the case. The statement stressed the need to let the competent authorities carry out their professional work for the protection of vulnerable children.

The desire to draw public sympathy to a cause at the expense of the privacy of particular children was lambasted by the Commissioner, who in comments to the press, spoke out against the use of children in political campaigns even when this is done with the blessing of parents<sup>xxxvii</sup>. Ms Vassallo said that political parties were doing too much of a bad thing, namely associating individual children, including children of politicians<sup>xxxviii</sup>, with their partisan political cause thus putting them at risk of bullying, and not enough of a good thing, which is to give children a genuine say and voice in the substance and content, rather than the imagery and choreography, of political campaigns. In an interview on a radio programme, the Commissioner highlighted the fact that children can cast their vote from the age of sixteen. She also extended her criticism to the role of children in fund-raising campaigns, where children are used as objects of pity rather than as sources of wisdom.



### **Protecting children from inappropriate content in films**

The Support Officer, Ms Anna Maria Debono, represented the Office on the Film Classification Board, where she helped rate as many as thirteen films in order to help parents and children make informed decisions as to if and how children should watch specific films, and ultimately to help protect children from exposure to age-inappropriate content in films that are screened in local cinemas.

### **Protecting the unborn child from abortion**

In the wake of the episode of a pregnant woman who was denied an abortion in Malta<sup>xxxix</sup>, which threw the floodgates of the debate on abortion wide open, the Commissioner defended the right to life of the unborn child in comments she made on a radio programme. While noting that the protection of embryos was not strictly within her remit, Ms Vassallo claimed that acceptance or promotion of abortion was irreconcilable with the defence of children's rights<sup>xl</sup>.

### **Protecting children from child abuse**

The Office published a post on its social media to mark the European Day on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse, where it defended the right of all children to live a life free from such abuse and to receive adequate support if they suffer such abuse<sup>xli</sup>.

The Commissioner also met with representatives of the Police Force to discuss the protection of children from abuse. The Head of Office participated in a decision taken within the Lanzarote Committee to prepare a questionnaire to collect data on the occurrence of sexual violence against children in Parties to the Lanzarote Convention, using as a basis the 2010 survey as well as the relevant recommendations in Chapter 2 (Collection of data on child sexual abuse in the circle of trust) of its first monitoring report "Protection of children against sexual abuse in the circle of trust: The framework".

"First do no harm". This was one of the main messages delivered by the Commissioner in her keynote speech to a group of students who had just completed a diploma course in Safeguarding of Children and Youth, offered jointly by the Faculty for Social Well-Being and the Faculty of Theology within the University of Malta. The Commissioner thus harped on the need for all those working with children to ensure that the content and context of their activities with children posed no risk to the well-being of children, notwithstanding their potential benefits. The graduands were urged to detect and report as a matter of utmost priority any signs of possible abuse suffered by children outside their organisation.

The Commissioner also stressed the importance of building a relationship of trust with children and youth based on attentive non-judgemental listening to their views and concerns. Finally, Ms Vassallo called on the students to actively collaborate with others who work with children both within and outside their organisation.

Helping children develop resilience was another key concept conveyed by the Commissioner in her speech. This is as much a question of adopting a steely attitude in the face of adversity as it is about children acquiring practical skills that will help them face up to any hostile force in their social environment. In this respect, self-defence classes for children who have been victims of crime and abuse<sup>xlii</sup> are an excellent means to enable children to not live in fear of potential repeats of their past abuse.



### **Protecting children from domestic violence**

The Office responded to a horrific case of femicide that shocked the nation<sup>xliii</sup> by calling on the relevant authorities to step up preventive action, including by deploying additional resources to the courts of justice dealing with cases of domestic violence so that they can carry out their work more expeditiously and stop the spiral of violence<sup>xliv</sup>. This call for early intervention was echoed in a stakeholders' meeting, organised by the Women's Rights Foundation as part of the FEM-UNITED Project<sup>xlv</sup> in which the Support Officer championed the role of the Office in disseminating targeted age-appropriate information to increase awareness of what children facing this cruel reality can do to find help and support.

### **Protecting children from parental alienation**

As the Commissioner said in a video message to the 2nd International Experts Seminar organised by the voluntary organisation Happy Parenting - Malta (For Happier Children), children have a right to build a meaningful relationship with both parents unless this is not in their best interest. This concept was reiterated in a piece penned by the Manager called 'Children are our Priority', which called on parents whose relationship as a couple has broken down to place their children's well-being before their disagreements.

The clearest cases where children should be shielded from a parent are those where children have been abused by the parent. This is echoed in the recommendation 14.2 of the Working Paper<sup>xlvi</sup> authored by Dr Lynn Faure and presented to the Commissioner by the same author and the organisation *Flimkien Missirijiet Inqumu*<sup>xlvii</sup>, which calls for alienation to be ruled out if the alleged victim parent is proven to have abused the minor. However, even where children are not themselves the target of domestic violence, they are nevertheless primary albeit indirect victims of such violence. This means that parental alienation should not be used as a legal device to gain access to children, which would risk retraumatising children, nor to delay or derail court cases of domestic violence<sup>xlviii</sup>.

When the maintenance of regular contact with both parents is in the child's best interest, parents, as the Commissioner called on them to do in her video message, should put the best interest of their children before their differences and not harm their children by making them take sides. The Commissioner's video message also targeted the courts of justice, which she exhorted to avoid gender biases and polarisations in their decisions as to the care and custody of children. This can be done, Ms Vassallo stressed, by listening to children through better court structures, trained professionals and processes designed to hear children in family separation cases.

The need to address parental alienation as a subtle but pernicious form of child abuse was the mission of the Technical Committee, which includes the Commissioner for Children, set up by the Government in 2021. Unfortunately, this group, which was tasked with researching, raising awareness and proposing legal and policy recommendations to the Family and Justice Ministries, was non-operational for a while but has now been reconstituted and work has commenced.

### **Protecting children from child-insensitive court procedures**

The Commissioner met with a representative of the Legal Aid Office to touch-base on current systems and provisions to guarantee the right of children accused of a crime to legal representation irrespective of their monetary means. There was agreement on the need for better training on children's rights for lawyers serving child defendants.

Apart from the expertise of justice system workers on how best to deal with children for the sake of the children, the physical environment in which such dealings take place is a key feature of a child-friendly system. In this respect, in an interview with a newspaper<sup>xlix</sup>, the Commissioner welcomed the start of operations of the Children's House, an independent child-friendly and sensitive structure where children involved in court cases as witnesses, victims or accused are interviewed by social or court professionals. Ms Vassallo said that this service will help prevent re-traumatization of vulnerable children.

### **Protecting children from forced child marriage**

The Commissioner was quoted in the press as saying that the legal age threshold for marriage should be raised to 18 "specifically to prevent children from being promised for arranged marriages by their parents". Reported official statistics showed there had been 12 children involved in registered marriages between 2012 and 2021, though there is anecdotal evidence that the number of de facto undocumented and unregistered marriages is way higher than this. The Office got an insight into this worrying phenomenon from its meeting with an academic who has researched the practice of child marriages among Middle-Eastern and North African communities in Malta. The Office heard that child marriages in Malta were especially common among particular communities, and that one of the most alarming aspects of this social phenomenon was that girls would typically be married off to much older men, which increases the risk of the children being abused and exploited in marriage.

### **Protecting children from discrimination**

On World Tolerance Day, the Office took to social media to champion and celebrate human diversity as a richness to treasure not a cause for hatred and discrimination.<sup>li</sup> In a newspaper interview, the Commissioner underlined the need for more awareness in society with regards to human diversity of sexual orientation and gender, race and ethnicity.

The Manager reminded the panel and floor of the seminar, organised by the Human Rights Directorate to present and discuss the final annual report of the LGBTIQ+ Strategy & Action Plan 2018-2022, of the need to pay closer attention to the needs of LGBTIQ+ children. Ms Garcia Imbernon called for future plans to focus more on combating bullying of LGBTIQ+ children and providing support for their parents to better understand and support their children. She also strongly recommended publishing a child-friendly version of the strategy in its forthcoming cycle.

## Recommendations

### Further protect children from climate change by:

- Enshrining climate justice, or the long-term environmental sustainability of development policies, as a key value and requirement of the Constitution;
- Including the science and politics of climate change in the National Curriculum Framework for primary schooling.

### Further protect children from psychotropic drugs by:

- Intensifying awareness-raising campaigns targeted to children and youths on the dangers of drug dependency;
- Putting in place a more rigorous inspection regime for households with children that have a licence to cultivate and consume cannabis.

### Further protect children from war by:

- Enhancing cooperation between States at the Southern border of the EU and humanitarian organisations, to monitor and protect the safety of migrants crossing or stranded at sea.

### Further protect children from illegal detention by:

- Updating the Strategy for the Reception of Asylum Seekers and Irregular Migrants<sup>lii</sup> with a clear commitment to not detaining minors or would-be minors under any circumstance and guaranteeing decent child-friendly living conditions in open centres housing minors.

### Further protect children from statelessness by:

- Ratifying the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.

### Further protect children from injury by:

- Stepping up sanctions, enforcement and education relating to unsafe road practices involving children as passengers, pedestrians or non-motorised vehicle users.

### Further protect children from conflict with their peers by:

- Updating the Addressing Bullying Behaviour in Schools Policy<sup>liii</sup> as a strategy with clear deliverables, timeframes and responsibilities within a restorative justice framework that address the individual and interpersonal needs of victims and perpetrators of bullying.

### Further protect children from non-communicable disease by:

- Making Physical Education a core subject on a par with academic subjects that teach basic numeracy and literacy.
- Turning the Guidelines on the Weight and Carriage of Schoolbags into mandatory standards.

**Further protect children from dangers online by:**

- Updating the Malta Cyber Security Strategy (2016)<sup>lv</sup> with a sharper focus on the needs and vulnerabilities of children within the framework of the EU's BIK+ strategy.

**Further protect children from undue exposure in the media by:**

- Making it a legal requirement, as part of the proposed legal reform of the media in Malta, for media companies to adopt and provide training to their staff on UNICEF's Ethical Reporting Guidelines<sup>lvii</sup>;
- Finalising and promoting the adoption and implementation of the draft Maltese Standard DSM6200 on 'The participation of minors in political communication, election campaigns and referenda and all poll-related matters – Requirements'<sup>lviii</sup>.

**Further protect children from child-insensitive court procedures by:**

- Restoring the Juvenile Court to an independent and child-friendly venue.

**Further protect children from child abuse by:**

- Making it a legal requirement for all voluntary organisations that work with children to adopt and implement a child protection policy that addresses all forms of child abuse.

**Further protect children from domestic violence by:**

- Enhancing resources and procedures related to the hearing of cases of domestic violence at the Family Court;
- Enhancing domestic violence risk assessment methods in order to better flag and take precautionary measures against high-risk cases;
- Updating the Malta National Strategy on Gender-Based Violence and Domestic Violence 2021-2022<sup>lix</sup>.

**Further protect children from parental alienation by:**

- Stepping up efforts to promote the value and practice of co-parenting among estranged, separated or divorced parents.

**Further protect children from forced child marriages by:**

- Amending the Marriage Act to raise the age threshold for marriage to 18 years;
- Targeting families where children are at risk of child marriage to create awareness and support families to protect their children.

**Further protect children from discrimination by:**

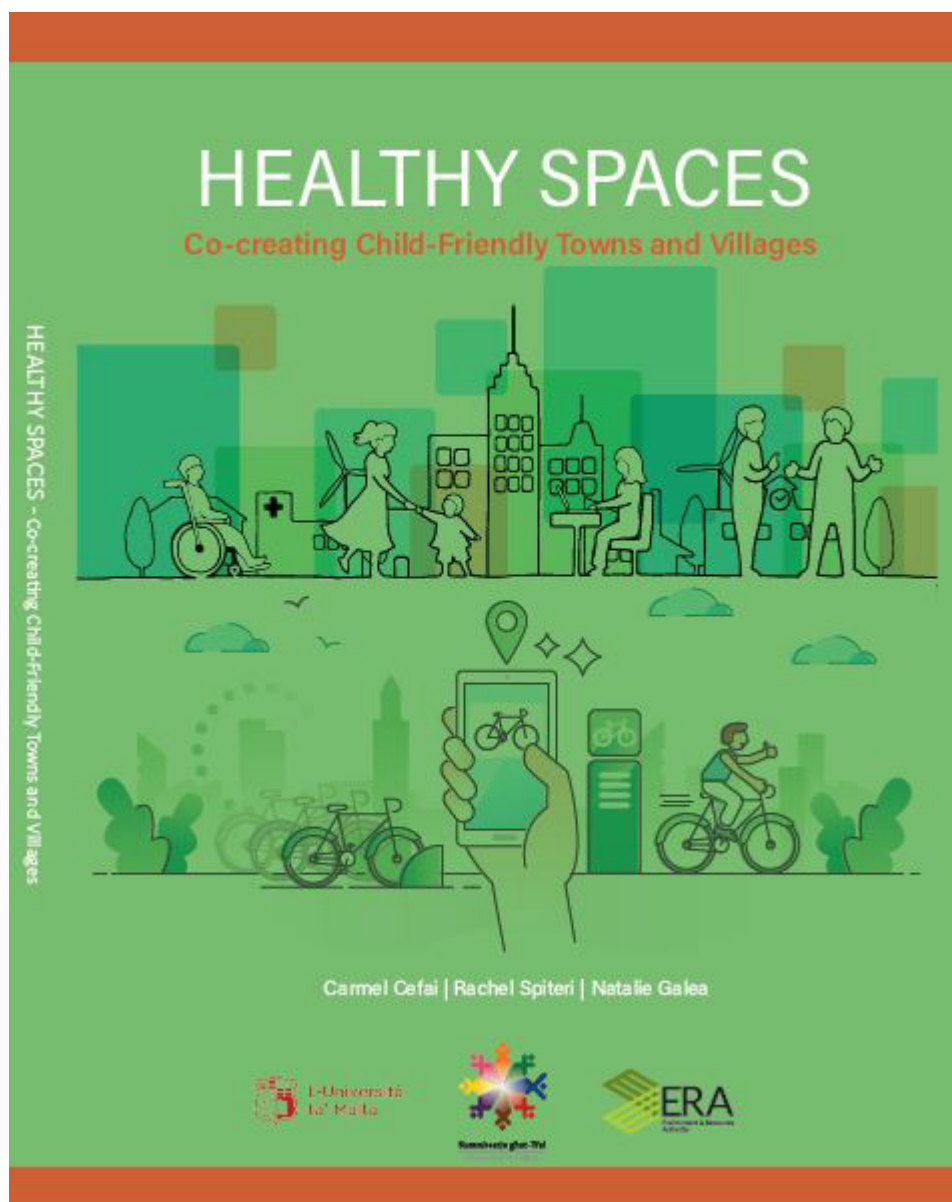
- Updating the LGBTIQ+ Strategy & Action Plan with a clearer focus on the needs and participation of LGBTIQ+ children, their parents, educators and peers.



## 8. PROVISION

### Providing children with child-friendly towns and villages

Children need child-friendly spaces well beyond the confines of their residential home. This was the main point pressed home by the Commissioner in her introductory message to the readers of *Healthy Spaces – Co-creating Child-Friendly Towns and Villages*<sup>x</sup>, a research study commissioned by the Office and conducted by the Centre for Socio-Emotional Health and Resilience within the University of Malta that was published in collaboration with the Environment and Resources Authority in the course of the year, as well as to the 70 plus attendees at the national conference organised by the Office to launch and discuss the issues, findings and recommendations raised by the study.



The research brought out the inadequacy of recreational spaces for children and adolescents in the community as a result of excessive and excessively fast urbanisation and the detrimental impact of this on the quality of life, health and wellbeing of children. The study also revealed low levels of perceived safety among children when playing outdoors or walking on their own, and regional inequalities whereby children in Gozo and the Western region came out as enjoying a better quality of life than their peers living in the Harbour regions and the Northern region.

The findings and recommendations of the study stemmed from the participation of a highly representative sample of close to one thousand children in a variety of questionnaires and focus groups. This was as much a methodological choice as it was rooted in the desire to grant children their right to participate in the process of urban planning, a desire that was strongly voiced by the children who took part in the research. The Commissioner mentioned this as another example of good practice when she gave her European counterparts, gathered at the ENOC Annual Conference, an overview of the study.

Building on the momentum and recommendations of 'Healthy Spaces', the Office embarked on a number of initiatives aimed at making urban planning in Malta more child-friendly and child-led. Partnering with the Policy & Strategy Unit within the Department of Local Government, the Office formulated an agreement of cooperation with the same Unit to work together towards assisting and encouraging local councils to actively involve children in the work of local councils so as to help transform localities into child-friendly environments and communities. In order to raise awareness on the need for localities to become more child-friendly and child-led, the Office published an article on the subject in the monthly magazine *Familja*, produced by the Ministry for Children's Rights.

Within the framework of this draft agreement, the Office conducted three training sessions with Local Councils personnel on how they can mainstream the voice of children in their work. In a presentation to the Gozo Regional Council, the Manager explained how child participation should be conducted according to the Lundy model of participation, which calls on those who wield decision-making power to give children the space to form their views, the voice to express their views, an audience to listen to their views, and, finally, an influence to take their views on board.

Alongside this pedagogical work, the Office initiated collaboration on a project spearheaded by the Malta Foundation for the Well-Being of Society to set up a children's regional council, so as to ensure child participation at regional level.

Notwithstanding the importance of child participation in the epistemology and politics of child-friendly localities, the research also shed light on the need for an objective index for assessing and promoting child-friendly towns and villages in Malta. To construct this index, the study recommended setting up an intersectoral committee, which the Office duly did, bringing together representatives from another six entities, including the University of Malta, the Police Force, the Department of Local Government, the Environment and Resources Authority, the Malta Competition and Consumer Affairs Authority and Aġenzija Żgħażaġħ. The committee met twice in the course of the year to lay the groundwork for the index.

### **Providing children with child-friendly communication**

The Commissioner intervened at 'Clear Writing', a conference organised by the Ministry for Social Policy and Children's Rights in collaboration with the Representation of the European Commission in Malta, to call on all stakeholders to design and communicate their content in a child-friendly manner to enable children to understand and participate in their initiatives. Ms Vassallo's appeal was backed by many speakers at the conference, including Professor Laura Lundy, who delivered a presentation on the process towards and final product of a child-friendly document.

### **Providing children with access to education**

On the cusp of the new scholastic year, the Office used its social media to highlight the fundamental importance of a quality education to the overall development of children and as a leveller of social and economic inequalities. The Office championed quality education for all as a fundamental right of children and as one of the key sustainable development goals.<sup>lxiii</sup>

In a press release, the Office made an urgent appeal to the parties involved in the industrial dispute between the administration and teaching staff of St Albert the Great College to come to a timely and fair agreement that respects the education rights of students.

While lamenting the disruption caused to children's education by the pandemic, the Commissioner hailed the increased access thanks to remote learning of children who were unable to attend school due to chronic ill-health as a silver lining.

The continuation of education despite the untold disruption caused by war was one of the main topics of discussion at the ENOC Annual Conference, where the Commissioner and Manager heard that more than 200,000 Ukrainian children who had found refuge in Poland were attending school or childcare there or following Ukrainian schooling remotely. With Malta too being at the receiving end of an influx of families with children from Ukraine, there were worrying reports of these families facing bureaucratic obstacles in their quest to enable their children to access education in Malta.<sup>lxiv</sup>

Bottlenecks in the processing of paperwork of Third Country Nationals with children leading to delays in the children's access to their education and other rights were a common theme in the Office's casework.

The cross-border nature of educational and employment opportunities encourages many youths to seek to further their education or gain work experience abroad, a practice which the Commissioner spoke highly of.

### **Providing children with a diverse education**

In an interview with a newspaper<sup>xv</sup>, the Commissioner said the key to enticing more children to continue their education was not to raise the age of compulsory education, as some were proposing, but to give children more and better opportunities to study vocational subjects at school while also gaining valuable experience and training in work environments.

Ms Vassallo also called for school syllabi to be rethought in a more holistic vein in order to embrace practical skills that can help children in their everyday life, and the ability to conduct and examine research, which is critical in forming citizens who are open-minded and free from prejudice.

The Support Officer was among several participants from various backgrounds in a one-day seminar on non-formal education organised by Aġenzija Żgħażaġħ. Ms Debono was involved in physical and thinking skills activities that centred on the belief that youths develop progressively and differently.

The Commissioner was a distinguished guest at an assembly of the Alternative Learning Programme students and staff, where the Office was also sponsoring a children's rights activity as part of their celebrations of World Children's Day.

Ms Vassallo also met with a group of parents of children attending the Malta Visual and Performing Arts School to hear their concerns regarding the lack of a clear and fruitful educational pathway for their children once they completed their studies at this educational institution.

### **Providing children with sex education**

Voicing her concern about children's easy access to pornographic content online, the Commissioner called for a more positivist, positive and participatory approach to sex education that imparts objective information about sexuality to children, highlights its healthful aspects and encourages children to explore and express themselves on the subject. Ms Vassallo opined that more time needed to be dedicated to sex education within PCSD and other academic subjects.

### **Providing children with meaningful and reasonable workload at school**

In an interview, the Commissioner voiced the concern expressed by children in workshops conducted by the Office in previous years about the irregular rhythm of homework assigned to them and called for more and better coordination between educators to ensure that the volume of homework is more evenly spread out over the school week. Unlike the proposal made by the ruling party in its electoral manifesto<sup>lxvi</sup>, Ms Vassallo did not call for the abolition of homework but recommended allocating time to doing homework at school after school-hours. This proposal echoes the longer schooldays that were reported to have been trialled abroad.<sup>lxvii</sup>

The Commissioner also called on schools to do more to promote the mental health of children, especially after such a difficult period as the pandemic. Ms Vassallo also held meetings with the Student Support Services within the Ministry for Education and the Institute for Tourism Studies.

### **Providing children with paediatric care**

The Commissioner met with children who were receiving paediatric treatment at Mater Dei Hospital<sup>lxviii</sup>. Ms Vassallo expressed her support to the young patients and the healthcare staff caring for them. Since the visit happened shortly before Christmas, the Commissioner distributed presents among the children.





The Office advocated for the right of all children to have access to high-quality healthcare in a social media post which championed universal healthcare as a key sustainable development goal<sup>lxix</sup>. In this vein, the Council for Children paid attention to the needs of children on the Autism Spectrum when in its first meeting it included the long waiting lists these children face before they can access professionals such as psychologists and speech therapists<sup>lxx</sup> in its agenda of children’s rights issues to analyse, discuss and help resolve. The Government’s move to source additional services from the private sector<sup>lxxi</sup> is a step in the right direction.

**Providing children with early diagnosis and intervention**

The Office used its social media to disseminate a UNICEF guide for parents to help them recognise early or unobvious signs of depression in their children<sup>lxxii</sup>.

**Providing children with Positive Parenting**

Like her predecessor, the Commissioner was an active member of the Task Force that was set up to steer the implementation of the National Strategic Policy for Positive Parenting. In such role, the Commissioner helped raise awareness on how to be a positive parent, that is a dependable source of sound guidance and support, to one’s children. The message was conveyed by means of a new website<sup>lxxiii</sup> that was launched in the course of the year as a hub of information on positive parenting for actual, prospective or aspiring parents.

The latter were sensitised also through the campaign #BetheParent, which consisted of periodic illustrated social media posts that press home the basic need of children to enjoy healthy relationships with their parents. One post, echoed in the article written by the Manager 'Children should be our priority!', harped on the need to make quality time for children, which many parents are finding increasingly challenging in today's fast-paced world notwithstanding the important place the family still has in the hierarchy of values of Maltese people<sup>lxxiv</sup>.

As a member of the Task Force, the Commissioner visited the Office of the Information and Data Protection Commissioner to discuss data privacy-related issues arising from the work of the Task Force.

Speaking at a conference entitled 'Children of Prisoners – What they face and endure', organised by prisoners' rights advocacy group Mid-Dlam għad-Dawl, the Commissioner applauded the move to set up a new child-friendly and family-friendly centre away from the prison facilities where children can spend quality time with their parents who are serving a period of incarceration<sup>lxxv</sup>. Ms Vassallo cautioned that this was not enough to break the mental and cultural walls separating children from their jailed parents.

The Commissioner thus called for a paradigm shift away from a punitive to a restorative system of justice, where maintaining or recovering a primary role in the care and development of children is seen not as a concession but as a key part of the prisoner's rehabilitation. The child protection system, the Commissioner said, needed to embrace the potential resilience of children as the foundation of its work and see contact with an incarcerated parent as an opportunity not a threat for the child. The Commissioner lamented the negative stigmatising attitudes towards prisoners and their children, calling for society to be less judgmental and more forgiving of errant parents.

### **Providing children with good alternative care**

The technical committee that was set up in 2021 to chart a pathway towards the professionalisation of front-line work in residential out-of-home care in Malta met several times in 2022 under the chairmanship of the Commissioner and visited a number of residential homes for children.

The discussions that took place within the committee were geared towards formulating clear and doable recommendations to develop the residential alternative care workforce around the needs, rights and realities of children who grow up in this context. The recommendations, which will be finalised and published in 2023, depart from the fact that children in alternative care may have particular needs stemming from the multiple traumas and breakdowns of family-based care they have suffered. Training and qualification requirements for those who work or aspire to work in the frontline of residential out-of-home care must be trauma-informed and tailored to the vulnerabilities of children receiving this form of care, with a view to helping children recover and emerge stronger from their trauma.

The importance of this was reflected especially in the programme and proceedings of the first day of a two-day conference on Child and Youth Residential Care<sup>lxxvi</sup>, that was organised by St Joseph Home and attended among others by the members of the Technical Committee. The opening session revolved around the theme of 'Responding to the Needs of Children in Residential Care: Dealing with Trauma, Pain and Complexity'.

The warlike overtones of the reference to those who work directly with children in residential out-of-home care as front-line workers are quite fitting also in view of the unfortunate fact that the year saw hundreds of thousands of unaccompanied Ukrainian children fleeing the war and needing to be placed in alternative care in the host country. During the ENOC Annual Conference, the Commissioner and Manager heard about the problems faced by large groups of children who had been receiving care under the same roof of a large traditional institution in Ukraine only to be split into much smaller groups and transferred to mini-institutions, such as those in Poland, which consist of a maximum of 14 children. Several ENOC members expressed their concern for how those children who had found refuge in countries like Lithuania, which has gone a long way towards deinstitutionalising its alternative care system, would adapt to the new reality into which they had been thrust.

The Office dealt with numerous cases of parents who wanted the care order on their children revoked. This highlights the need for better guidance of expectations around if and when it is in the best interest of children to return to the care of their parents. Inadequate contact of parents or other next of kin with children in alternative care was another salient issue in the Office's casework.

### **Providing children with a chance to know their biological origin**

The Commissioner weighed in on pre-implantation genetic testing of embryos and surrogacy, both of which were the subject of bills being drafted<sup>lxxvii</sup> or debated<sup>lxxviii</sup> in Parliament. Ms Vassallo advocated for the right of children born through in vitro fertilisation or surrogacy to know their medical history and biological origin once they grew up.

### **Providing children with economic security**

In the context of the increasing poverty rate that was putting more children in or at risk of poverty<sup>lxxix</sup>, the Office took to its social media to highlight the fight against child poverty as the number-one concern for all those who work with or for children as well as for everyone else who is or should be worried about the future of our society.

That the political forces in Malta are not oblivious to this problem is shown by the publication of a plan to spend €145m for new measures on the National Action Plan for a Child Guarantee<sup>lxxx</sup>. Among those basic things that should be guaranteed to all children is the close loving presence of their parents in the first weeks of their lives, which requires an adequate level of parental leave pay. To discuss this and many other issues related to the well-being of the economically most vulnerable children, some of whom are homeless<sup>lxxxiii</sup>, the Commissioner met the Opposition Spokesperson on economic affairs, Hon. Ivan Bartolo.

The danger and emergency of child poverty and destitution was also a salient point of the debate on the situation of Ukrainian children at the ENOC Annual Conference. The Commissioner and Manager were given an overview of the actions taken in Poland to provide economic support to Ukrainian refugees, namely the new legislation that was adopted to guarantee their access to the labour market and social benefits.



Ms Antoinette Vassallo during the 'Connecting Worlds' Conference

When children grow older, they are able to secure their economic well-being not only through their family but also through their participation in employment. While stressing the importance of children continuing their education beyond compulsory schooling, the Commissioner told a gathering of human resource managers at the conference 'Connecting Worlds', organised by Fondazzjoni Sebh, that children and adolescents have a lot to give and receive from the workplace. Ms Vassallo's address focused on the need of older children who are in or have left alternative care for additional psychological support to thrive in the modern workplace. The Commissioner said that the investment in such support was a social and economic win-win for both care leavers and companies.



## Recommendations

### Further provide children with child-friendly towns and villages by:

- Putting in place a mechanism to grant additional funding to local councils that score high on an index of child-friendly towns and villages.

### Further provide children with child-friendly communication by:

- Setting up training courses for professional and non-professional content writers on child-friendly writing.

### Further provide children with access to education by:

- Making the necessary legal, policy and logistical changes for the provision of non-emergency remote learning for children who are unable to attend school for long periods of time;
- Enacting and enforcing legislation that protects children's right to learning where this is threatened by industrial disputes in the education sector;
- Expediting bureaucratic processes that are necessary for migrant children, including Third Country Nationals to receive the necessary documentation to access services including an education in Malta.

### Further provide children with diverse education by:

- Conducting a profound review of pedagogical content and methods so that children acquire a wider baggage of skills by hands-on doing rather than just abstract theorising;
- Updating the National Vocational Education and Training Policy<sup>lxxxiv</sup>.

### Further provide children with sex education by:

- Updating the Guidelines on Sexuality and Relationships Education in Schools<sup>lxxxv</sup>.

### Further provide children with a meaningful and reasonable workload at school by:

- Updating and promoting the implementation of the National Homework Policy<sup>lxxxvi</sup>;
- Enhancing the role of School Health Services in monitoring and promoting the mental health of school children.

### Further provide children with paediatric care by:

- Augmenting service capacity for children on the autism spectrum;
- Conducting national awareness-raising campaigns with resonance in local settings on mental health in children and youth.

### Further provide children with positive parenting by:

- Amending the Civil Code to give equal importance and weight to parental authority and parental responsibility, both of which should be defined within the framework of positive parenting.

### Further provide children with alternative care by:

- Formulating mandatory occupational standards for frontline workers working in residential out-of-home care for children;
- Enhancing the ability of the alternative care system to work with the parents of children in alternative care so that they are more engaged in and aware of the therapeutic process that can lead to the children returning to their care;

- Ensuring there is a system of contact of children in alternative care with their biological parents that always works in the best interest of children.

**Further provide children with a chance to know their biological origin by:**

- Amending Article 19(2) of the Embryo Protection Act<sup>lxxxvii</sup> to include the right of the child born through donated germ line cells or adopted embryos to know their biological origin.

**Further provide children with economic security by:**

- Ensuring the National Strategic Plan for Poverty Reduction and Social Inclusion 2014-2024 and the National Action Plan for a Child Guarantee are reviewed in light of emerging realities that impinge on the economic security of children and framed within a children's rights perspective.

## 9. CONCLUSION

The situations and needs described in this report bear out the strange paradox that there was never a better nor a worse time to be a child than in this twenty-first century, which is now nearing the end of its first quarter. For if children today have rights which children in previous centuries, before the Convention on the Rights of the Child came into existence, could hardly dream of, it is also true that the present generation of children is having to face multiple crises and emergencies, notably climate change, mass migration, the Covid-19 pandemic, war in Ukraine and in many other parts of the world, economic uncertainty, that are seriously threatening the enjoyment of their hard-earned rights.

But this report bears out another paradox, that somehow offsets the first. Children are not just possibly the worst victims of this global unrest, they are also quite possibly the best hope for its solution. Many children today are not only better off in terms of rights and guarantees. They are also much more vocal and forthright than any generation of children has ever been. The strong advocacy of children on climate justice, as described in this report, epitomises this.

Children's rights organisations have realised this and have been harnessing the extraordinary power of child-led children's rights advocacy to an extent that can slowly but surely turn the present tide of events to more just, peaceful and prosperous outcomes for all.

- i From Rights to Reality (link)
- ii Former Ta' Xbiex mayor Antoinette Vassallo appointed Commissioner for Children (maltatoday.com.mt)
- iii [https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=pfbid02qVUXqTFdXnna9dzR4TYkiwPrZrMr35pfPuPg6jWs8fR8X-BZWx8zoKQegC7cwBGznl&id=119059354837262&eav=AfZFGiujt5\\_rVdvQPFQHCcxo2\\_2qG3vlpWASSFkyR-upSICud1AmWGRW7kC4ScRSRq0&m\\_entstream\\_source=timeline&paipv=0](https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=pfbid02qVUXqTFdXnna9dzR4TYkiwPrZrMr35pfPuPg6jWs8fR8X-BZWx8zoKQegC7cwBGznl&id=119059354837262&eav=AfZFGiujt5_rVdvQPFQHCcxo2_2qG3vlpWASSFkyR-upSICud1AmWGRW7kC4ScRSRq0&m_entstream_source=timeline&paipv=0)
- iv [https://m.facebook.com/Comm4Children/photos/a.10152627512144455/10160335280514455/?type=3&source=48&paipv=0&eav=Afa8pJNLTIOgA6elrfuwOjBO9hGA7tb3PGnPMVD-fMPXKS\\_YnmJaKQjL3N9CkqHIVhU4](https://m.facebook.com/Comm4Children/photos/a.10152627512144455/10160335280514455/?type=3&source=48&paipv=0&eav=Afa8pJNLTIOgA6elrfuwOjBO9hGA7tb3PGnPMVD-fMPXKS_YnmJaKQjL3N9CkqHIVhU4)
- v Home Environment; Social Wellbeing; Health and Environment; Education and Employment; and Leisure and Culture
- vi Electoral candidates asked to pledge to push for children's rights (timesofmalta.com)
- vii [https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=pfbid0UVZmhzkzFdDD2mQ1EdYfstHTNq6QaTH2Mn-4fBS1ZDfcXF6R3RpNnMYBV9vvV53MmEI&id=99261679454&eav=AfZGjLiOLi4W339FRw5VbIC4G-NUfZqC5u3qiX459VvBlJlfzseQnwwEG4ROYWLWl0xs&m\\_entstream\\_source=timeline&paipv=0](https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=pfbid0UVZmhzkzFdDD2mQ1EdYfstHTNq6QaTH2Mn-4fBS1ZDfcXF6R3RpNnMYBV9vvV53MmEI&id=99261679454&eav=AfZGjLiOLi4W339FRw5VbIC4G-NUfZqC5u3qiX459VvBlJlfzseQnwwEG4ROYWLWl0xs&m_entstream_source=timeline&paipv=0)
- viii [https://m.facebook.com/Comm4Children/photos/a.10152627512144455/10160490129324455/?type=3&source=48&paipv=0&eav=AfaMZHxgDjIOYySaTpEJS1ZfJoZrj2yBADq7yFH5XssjmSzvolc\\_Wvnl1PtTRWmX1oc](https://m.facebook.com/Comm4Children/photos/a.10152627512144455/10160490129324455/?type=3&source=48&paipv=0&eav=AfaMZHxgDjIOYySaTpEJS1ZfJoZrj2yBADq7yFH5XssjmSzvolc_Wvnl1PtTRWmX1oc)
- ix 'We must give children a voice in everything we do' – Commissioner for Children - The Malta Independent
- x [https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=pfbid0Iqdureg32zYRzrGHYdsjbb4jb3m2hjDjmP3ap2SE7Qx-4PALQFT7U8gYmmVng7mK2l&id=99261679454&eav=Afbq-SslvujR7nNVPWrm5Lldl3hbRsgfhC7L-XKaT2xT-VjiGEu0x2WytIbUukVMtneY&m\\_entstream\\_source=timeline&paipv=0](https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=pfbid0Iqdureg32zYRzrGHYdsjbb4jb3m2hjDjmP3ap2SE7Qx-4PALQFT7U8gYmmVng7mK2l&id=99261679454&eav=Afbq-SslvujR7nNVPWrm5Lldl3hbRsgfhC7L-XKaT2xT-VjiGEu0x2WytIbUukVMtneY&m_entstream_source=timeline&paipv=0)
- xi [https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=pfbid02iRigzH8L8N9djaouyMGZ1mJU9dM81aazfkK-ab6YoKiNHXxWMy8Wp77xTCLb6AzMCI&id=99261679454&eav=AfYhcV0sbNIPY-5r0kBPkDWDAY-gh9-giCOV867-pPteE6wTGMa2PsTvkn3TRK275wk&m\\_entstream\\_source=timeline&paipv=0](https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=pfbid02iRigzH8L8N9djaouyMGZ1mJU9dM81aazfkK-ab6YoKiNHXxWMy8Wp77xTCLb6AzMCI&id=99261679454&eav=AfYhcV0sbNIPY-5r0kBPkDWDAY-gh9-giCOV867-pPteE6wTGMa2PsTvkn3TRK275wk&m_entstream_source=timeline&paipv=0)
- xii Ukrainian girl is first cancer patient to start receiving treatment in Malta (maltatoday.com.mt)
- xiii [https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=pfbid0Q1D3fN4SYv1qTA42k6dTXKcpUDkSd9p1448nTXbd9X-vWYDiyNyof5ojgSHDv4mNMI&id=100064940520487&eav=Afa0X6IH0hMdikEFF1G0BepepKujDghhF\\_awrbY-pezpwsTI-PsLSJugeov1NNCvkB2c&m\\_entstream\\_source=timeline&paipv=0](https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=pfbid0Q1D3fN4SYv1qTA42k6dTXKcpUDkSd9p1448nTXbd9X-vWYDiyNyof5ojgSHDv4mNMI&id=100064940520487&eav=Afa0X6IH0hMdikEFF1G0BepepKujDghhF_awrbY-pezpwsTI-PsLSJugeov1NNCvkB2c&m_entstream_source=timeline&paipv=0)
- xiv [https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=pfbid02v6PHQmmpTzkqRdbAyZi6qW8Eh1Se5dLQKiwKi9gtSRqb-BcFotsY8oFxpASzhkf7l&id=99261679454&eav=AfYb2FYd5JDNYHOiN0qtYlcm1T6rJSAMfMvEqp1Vew\\_e\\_uD-SujP491GipljHknXAXE&m\\_entstream\\_source=timeline&paipv=0](https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=pfbid02v6PHQmmpTzkqRdbAyZi6qW8Eh1Se5dLQKiwKi9gtSRqb-BcFotsY8oFxpASzhkf7l&id=99261679454&eav=AfYb2FYd5JDNYHOiN0qtYlcm1T6rJSAMfMvEqp1Vew_e_uD-SujP491GipljHknXAXE&m_entstream_source=timeline&paipv=0)
- xv Three children detained illegally for 58 days released from detention after court action - The Malta Independent
- xvi <https://cdn-others.timesofmalta.com/0a05c655494359bb485ffc11e2c81ae609dd7c01.pdf>
- xvii Commissioner for Children says ministers' presence in classrooms 'not my remit' - Newsbook
- xviii 'Let's let these children be children' - away from politics (timesofmalta.com)
- xix Malta's Childhood Obesity Numbers Have Skyrocketed, WH'We must give children a voice in everything we do' – Commissioner for Children - The Malta Independent
- xx 'We must give children a voice in everything we do' – Commissioner for Children - The Malta Independent
- xxi [https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=pfbid037L9hzJ5nydnTo65uEzFqIMLygFan1oDpEquRUZX-SEwec9vB4NjHFVMBhJG8uYhuml&id=99261679454&eav=AfbgR3kWUvdNERlXQonp1QvIW-i87SN-uBz-dO8d3uTelaFnrF2BWu3fzWjl1KVJolqE&m\\_entstream\\_source=timeline&paipv=0https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=pfbid037L9hzJ5nydnTo65uEzFqIMLygFan1oDpEquRUZXSEwec9vB4NjHFVMBhJG8uYhuml&id=99261679454&eav=AfbgR3kWUvdNERlXQonp1QvIW-i87SN-uBzdO8d3uTelaFnrF2BWu3fzWjl1KV-JolqE&m\\_entstream\\_source=timeline&paipv=0](https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=pfbid037L9hzJ5nydnTo65uEzFqIMLygFan1oDpEquRUZX-SEwec9vB4NjHFVMBhJG8uYhuml&id=99261679454&eav=AfbgR3kWUvdNERlXQonp1QvIW-i87SN-uBz-dO8d3uTelaFnrF2BWu3fzWjl1KVJolqE&m_entstream_source=timeline&paipv=0https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=pfbid037L9hzJ5nydnTo65uEzFqIMLygFan1oDpEquRUZXSEwec9vB4NjHFVMBhJG8uYhuml&id=99261679454&eav=AfbgR3kWUvdNERlXQonp1QvIW-i87SN-uBzdO8d3uTelaFnrF2BWu3fzWjl1KV-JolqE&m_entstream_source=timeline&paipv=0)
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- xxiii 13-year-old seriously injured in Luqa traffic accident (maltatoday.com.mt) 13-year-old seriously injured in Luqa traffic accident (maltatoday.com.mt)
- xxiv "L-akbar unur għalina huwa li nkunu kemm nistgħu viċin il-pubbliku u ngħinuh" - talk.mt
- xxvi 'We must give children a voice in everything we do' – Commissioner for Children - The Malta Independent
- xxvii 'We must give children a voice in everything we do' – Commissioner for Children - The Malta Independent
- xxviii Restorative justice in schools seen as first step to an empathetic society (timesofmalta.com)
- xxix Over 360 bullying referrals made in 2021 (timesofmalta.com)

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- xxxi <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XAYPW1NEtw4>
- xxxii [https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=pfbid02EesRBh9Uqa23zXVZjzdAXks7f1Za7E52ZVTjYzeAbiSXX-SAYq2VGeyvZkH5smdtCl&id=119059354837262&eav=Afa5OVM5o\\_fn5sOPTOiotbjiNI6vby-wQ8xU4wFb-nEFMXPLiZhhRAVfML6JL\\_W\\_Z8tM&m\\_entstream\\_source=timeline&paipv=0](https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=pfbid02EesRBh9Uqa23zXVZjzdAXks7f1Za7E52ZVTjYzeAbiSXX-SAYq2VGeyvZkH5smdtCl&id=119059354837262&eav=Afa5OVM5o_fn5sOPTOiotbjiNI6vby-wQ8xU4wFb-nEFMXPLiZhhRAVfML6JL_W_Z8tM&m_entstream_source=timeline&paipv=0)
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