

Malta

Each year, the ESN European Semester Group follows the European Commission's cycle of policy coordination with EU Member States known as the European Semester and produces a report based on a questionnaire completed by public social services authorities on the social situation in European countries with a particular focus on social services. This country profile identifies the most important common challenges facing social services as reported by ESN members in Austria, related to three principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights and makes recommendations for the 2023 European Semester. The full report, with cross-country analysis of all the participating countries is available [here](#).

1. Children's services

1.1 Key issues

In Malta, a lot of emphasis is being placed on deinstitutionalising and providing alternative care for children deprived of parental care. To this end, financial support was increased for foster parents and a specific helpline was set up for them.

The enactment of the new [Minors' Protection \(Alternative Care\) Act](#)¹, Chapter 602, in 2019, has enabled national agencies providing child protection services to set up additional alternative care services. Moreover, an After-Care Service was set up to offer tailored support to persons leaving care by facilitating their independent living and ensuring a smooth transition into adulthood.

Furthermore, in 2021, a special healthcare service was created for children in alternative care, aimed at providing a holistic medical care plan which includes also mental health support. A home-based therapy service has been developed to support families who are

at risk of breakdown, child protection services involvement, a care order, or whose children are in residential or foster care. Parenting programs and therapeutic interventions are offered to children and their families by therapists and counsellors.

Incidents of domestic violence are still common in Malta, and many remain off the social services radar. This is due to the criminal nature of domestic violence allegations and the mandatory involvement of the police, which discourages many victims from reporting abuse. Within the legal framework of the above Act, the Maltese [Foundation for Social Welfare Services \(FSWS\)](#) has created specific units to investigate child abuse reports and taking any necessary action to ensure the protection of vulnerable children. Due to the mandatory reporting regulations under this Act, all professionals working with children are obliged to report to the FSWS' Directorate for the Protection of Minors any suspicions that a child is suffering, or is at risk of suffering, from significant harm resulting from physical, sexual, emotional abuse or neglect.

¹ <https://tfal.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Minor-Protection-Act.pdf>.

1.2 Recommendations

In order to ensure safe and secure conditions for all children to develop, it is necessary to combat any form of domestic violence and underlying reasons. Ensuring an adequate level of income for families who are at a social and economic disadvantage and enhancing competence of social services in violence prevention, instead of focusing only on policing and courts involvement, should improve early identification of abuse risks and reduce the incidence of domestic violence.

2. Long-term care

2.1. Key issues

Malta strives to provide every person in need of long-term care with financial benefits and/or personal assistance as needed. Assistance services range from a few hours a month to 24/7 live-in support. However, every year it becomes more difficult to find the resources necessary to address the needs of people with dependency needs. The number of people in need is increasing, while there is a shortage of both funds and caregivers. The elderly and persons with disabilities have to rely on private care companies that recruit workers from abroad. These individuals often do not speak English and are unable to communicate effectively with service's users. The government also invest in accessible houses in communities where small groups of people with disabilities can live together with support, so they can remain autonomous for as long as possible. However, the upkeep of these homes is costly and requires a significant number of staff.

In September 2021, Malta adopted [the National Strategy on the Rights of Disabled Persons²](https://meae.gov.mt/en/Public_Consultations/MISW/Pages/Consultations/Maltas20212030NationalStrategyontheRightsofDisabledPersons.aspx) to implement the UNCRPD and SDGs. The Strategy emphasises improving the number of services in people's homes and in the community.

2.2. Recommendations

The implementation of the National Strategy on the Rights of Disabled Persons should be closely monitored to achieve the goal of deinstitutionalising long-term care.

3. Support for homeless people

3.1. Key issues

The current active homeless shelters have robust organisational structures where homeless people are offered comprehensive support but the number of places available limited compared to the number of homeless people requiring help. Government statistics show an increase in homelessness rates since 2020. A large number of homeless people are migrants from African countries who are in illegal, unskilled jobs and earn less than the minimum wage, which prevent them from securing adequate accommodation.

A particular problem is the lack of accessible services targeting substance abusers, who make up a significant proportion of homeless people. Current homeless shelters have restrictions regarding the admission of persons with substance misuse to safeguard other residents. Sedqa, the national agency responsible for supporting individuals with addictions is currently working to better adapt social services to the needs of substance abusers.

The abovementioned issues are compounded by a general lack of affordable housing in the country and limited access to social housing. The Covid-19 pandemic made the situation of homeless people much worse. During this time, many users disappeared off the social services radar due to health restrictions. To this day, there are difficulties in admitting homeless people suspected of having Covid-19 to shelters.

² https://meae.gov.mt/en/Public_Consultations/MISW/Pages/Consultations/Maltas20212030NationalStrategyontheRightsofDisabledPersons.aspx.

To address these challenges, the country has undertaken several comprehensive programmes. A system of low-cost housing loans for vulnerable families was introduced and a mapping exercise is carried out across the country, aimed at identifying needs and designing tailored community-services in specific areas. Social services have begun working with the Housing Authority to jointly process housing applications and monitor the housing situation in Malta. For example, in the Diocese of Gozo, church buildings are being converted to accommodate the homeless.

Intersectoral cooperation has also been strengthened between social services, health care, education, and employment agencies. To address the problems of housing and homelessness, the Ministry of Social Policy and Children's Rights has signed partnership agreements with several NGOs working in this field. Finally, a new procedure was introduced in the previous budget to allow persons who do not have a fixed address to access Social Assistance.

3.2. Recommendations

Given the limited number of places in homeless shelters in Malta, social services should seek new ways to reach and systematically support people, who may be at risk of homelessness, particularly ensuring that they are provided with housing opportunities within the community.



Read the report online

Putting People First
Investing in Social
Services. Promoting
Social Inclusion.