

# COVID – 19 CONTINGENCY PLANS

## Foundation for Social Welfare Services Malta

The **Foundation for Social Welfare Services (FSWS)** is a catalyst for change and development in the **social welfare** sector in **Malta**, consistent with the real and emerging needs of children, families and the community at large in order to avoid social exclusion. It is the main national service provider of social welfare services in Malta.

The Foundation is made up of the following Agencies and Directorates : Sedqa, the Agency against alcohol, drugs, gambling and addictions, Agency for Community & Therapeutic Services (ACTS), Child Protection Directorate, Alternative Care Directorate, Appogg Agency, Gozo Branch Operations and there are a number of other directorates operating from its Head office including: The office of The Chief Executive Officer and its Secretariat, Corporate Services, Finance, Human Resources and Training, Marketing, International Relations, Quality Assurance, Service Audits and Research Departments..

As an island, Malta has unfortunately also been struck by COVID-19 and is at the forefront with proactive measures on multiple facets to combat this challenge. In general, Malta is currently practising social distancing and as much as is possible, staying at home in an attempt to reduce the spread of COVID – 19. In parallel, FSWS with a workforce of just over 800 employees, is also taking a number of initiatives and measures so that whilst safeguarding its workforce, its services are continuing seamlessly.

Through its Agencies, directorates and departments, it has put in place measures and requested actions to protect both its service users and its employees through the preparation of guidelines and recommendations for its front line professionals and its administration too. The following are some practical examples:

- Where possible, FSWS is operating its services in distinct shifts and groups where one group within the particular shift is not in contact with the rest of the other groups within different shifts. Thus, in the event that one group has to go on quarantine, the other groups would still be available and operations are not halted.

With the measures that have been undertaken so far, FSWS is ensuring that it is still operating all its services across the board. Under the umbrella of services offered, one can mention a few where it is paramount that these continue to operate as if one is under normal circumstances. Such services include, residential services for children and drug rehabilitation, DETOX (Substance Misuse Outpatients Unit), Domestic Violence, risk assessors, Child Protection Services and Out of Hours' emergency services. This ensures further stability nationwide since FSWS is committed to contain pertinent matters related to its service users. Furthermore, FSWS is also providing for crisis interventions, phone intakes and also drop-ins as the need arises.

When it comes to its administration and other services within the Foundation that are not directly related to service users, the Foundation is acting in line with the directive issued by the Head of Civil Service and will continue following other similar instructions that may be issued from time to time. The directive lays down for teleworking requests by public sector employees to be accepted in their entirety, provided that the assigned work is carried out as requested.

In this regard, The Foundation has applied the rule of a minimum daily physical presence of 25% of its employees during normal working hours. This is being done to ensure continuity of service. Hand sanitisers have been fixed across the buildings to assist in the health upkeep of employees that are physically present in their offices.

FSWS is also abiding by the Government's Legal Notice on quarantine, which gives the **employee quarantine leave without loss of income** in cases where the employee is legally obliged to follow quarantine, that limits staff to a fixed zone

or place as determined by health authorities. To this extent, shifts have been developed and essential meetings are being carried out via different means of technology. Home visits have been temporarily postponed.

In some services, telephone interventions are currently substituting scheduled/ongoing office visits, whilst a drop-in roster has been maintained in order to attend to, via phone (whilst client is in counselling room) or on a face-to-face basis, depending on presenting situation, to any emergency case.

Sedqa Agency, in particular, has some of its prevention programmes that operate either in schools or within the community. In this regard, preparation of material in relation to forthcoming sessions as well as alternative planning re rescheduling of all suspended programmes and sessions is currently underway. Likewise, the same procedure is being adopted by other services to make best use of these exceptional circumstances.

In general, instructions have been clearly communicated to employees working with service users so that regular contact is kept with their clients via telephone interventions. Staff is aware that this is a difficult period for everyone, especially our service users who run the risk of feeling socially isolated. Service users have been encouraged not to visit the centres unless really necessary and to ideally always call beforehand in order to schedule an appointment.

Last but not least, FSWS operates a 24/7 National Helpline – 179 - which is manned by professionals who can advise about all issues related to the Foundation's remit and offer a sound guide to all those who are in need.

### ***Recommendations on how ESN can help FSWS:***

- Due to the Corona Virus, the Agency is constantly changing its practices to meet for the demands of the services whilst staying safe for all. ESN could be of help by extending deadlines or giving longer deadlines for submissions of questionnaires and compilation of feedback. This would be very helpful to not overstretch the staff with tight deadlines.

- ESN can support FSWS by providing more resources and opportunities such as online conferences and online meetings rather than face-to-face meetings/training so there is sharing of expertise whilst limiting travelling.
- ESN can support our Foundation in cross boarder issues by replying to emails and continue operating through the already set official channels.