



From the Office of the Dean

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From: Dr Andrew Azzopardi, Dean, Faculty for Social Wellbeing
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Budgeting for Social Wellbeing

The Faculty for Social Wellbeing at the University of Malta encourages Government to consider the widest plethora of initiatives possible to foster the wellbeing of Maltese society - particularly those who are most vulnerable and at risk of poverty and social malaise; going beyond the requisite monetary measures and ensuring continuous reform in the provision of social welfare services.

As researchers and practitioners amongst all sectors of Maltese society, we encounter children, young people, families and pensioners who live in dire conditions, who are marginalised and disenfranchised, facing challenges that weigh down on their lives and exclude them from the general wellbeing of the country. We feel that, following the economic growth recorded during the past years, it is time for the Government to take concrete and bold actions to ensure that the wealth that is being generated is widely enjoyed, empowering all people not only financially but in all aspects of their general wellbeing. We also encourage the Government to promote and enhance the conditions of the practitioners that dedicate their time, energy and commitment towards the wellbeing of these people, and invest in more resources and support to enable these practitioners to extend their reach, provide further services and consequently achieve better results for the benefit of the community.

Reiterating its commitment towards more research and an active role in the community, the Faculty for Social Wellbeing emphasises the need for a truly inclusive community, where social justice, rights and a collective sense of responsibility are the pillars that ensure the true growth of our country, not just in terms of material wealth but in terms of the wellbeing of every individual as a human being and a citizen.

The *Pre-Budget Document of 2017* looks beyond the statistics and material understanding of prosperity by acknowledging that “economic growth on its own is not enough to enhance prosperity for all groups in society”¹. It attempts to break the legacy of a reactive welfare system², thus reinforcing other recent national policy efforts such as early childcare provision, the pending overhaul of domestic violence legislation, and the *Draft National Alcohol Policy* currently undergoing consultation³.

¹ Ministry for Finance. (2016). In *Pre-Budget Document 2017* (p. 59). Malta: Ministry for Finance. Retrieved October 7 2016, from https://mfina.gov.mt/en/The-Budget/Documents/The_Budget_2017/PreBudget_Document_2017.pdf

² Briguglio, M., Bugeja, I. & Vella, M.G. (2016). Social Policy, Poverty and Social Exclusion. In Briguglio, M. & Brown, M. (Eds.). *Sociology of the Maltese Islands* (pp. 373-390). Malta: Miller Distributors Ltd.

³ Government of Malta. (2016). Jitnieda għal konsultazzjoni pubblika d-dokument tal-Politika Nazzjonali dwar l-Alkohol. (Reference Number: PR162174, Press Release Issue Date: Oct 06, 2016). Retrieved October 7 2016, from <http://mfss.gov.mt/en/Press%20Releases/Pages/The%20Minister%20Press%20Releases/Jitnieda-g%C4%A7al-konsultazzjoni-pubblika-d-dokument-tal-Politika-Nazzjonali-dwar-l-Alko%C4%A7ol.aspx>

This lends credibility and substance to the claimed achievements that, on a macro level, the country's "economy and the public finances continued moving along their respective positive trends"⁴ and that 5,000 persons escaped the clutches of severe material deprivation⁵.

However, stories in the daily media cast a shadow. 68,000 people still live in households whose incomes put them on poverty line², negatively affecting their chances of social inclusion. Not only do some groups benefit far more than others, but some also benefit at the expense of others. This suggests the need for a more comprehensive approach to empowerment – not only of individual, material progress but of true emancipation⁶ based not only on the remedy of deficits but which address diverse and intersecting vulnerabilities, such as a community's aging population or migration influx.

In practice, measures such as early childcare provision make poor financial and family-friendly incentives, unless coupled with optional extensions to current provisions of paid and unpaid parental leave; investment in public transport will fail to counteract overreliance on private transport, unless coupled to flexible work arrangements in public and private sectors; and while post-secondary and tertiary educational provisions may be very successful at fostering state of the art niche technical expertise, they need also to foster interdisciplinary and critical capabilities. A failure to do the latter would be particularly worrying at a time when Malta rightly flags inclusionary citizenship rights with the necessary legal and policy reforms addressing inclusion of gender identities and, anytime soon, extending voting rights to the younger citizen cohorts.

In this context, the roles of communities and civil society require a profound appreciation.

Research in Malta corroborates the promise of sustainable development and education to this end, though it requires interdependency and coordination within and between state and civil society to counteract a 'culture of inertia' that inhibits momentum towards more sustainable lifestyles⁷. This applies at the levels of geographical and spatial communities, but also among online, professional and other niche communities and broader Maltese society.

Consequently, we recommend that the Government takes into consideration the following:

- The Faculty calls for the ongoing development of professionals in the social care sector considering it as imperative, as is the urgent need to address the lack of human resources in crucial sectors like child protection, addictions, mental health and domestic violence.
- The Faculty calls upon the Government to give priority to measures that enhance the social wellbeing of our community, ensuring that social justice is both a clear goal and a policy achievement.
- The Faculty encourages initiatives that promote and continue to ascertain the involvement of the third sector and NGOs that provide keystone services in the area are also required, with an emphasis on budget initiatives that facilitate and encourage the development of NGO-based service provision.
- The Faculty encourages Government to take the necessary measures to ensure that the much awaited Child Policy (currently undergoing public consultation) and the strategic measures that it is projecting reach fruition.
- The Faculty looks forward to the forthcoming overhaul of the domestic violence legislation and commends resources for its implementation.
- The Faculty encourages Government to provide an update of progress on the implementation of the Green Paper on Poverty, and on the current status of the migrant integration policy.
- The Faculty urges government to review and update policies and service provision in other pivotal sectors including corrections, youth justice, crime prevention, youth policy, disability, the aged and family policy.

⁴ Scicluna, E. (2016). Foreword. In *Pre-Budget Document 2017* (p. 5). Malta: Ministry for Finance. Retrieved October 7 2016, from https://mfina.gov.mt/en/The-Budget/Documents/The_Budget_2017/PreBudget_Document_2017.pdf

⁵ National Statistics Office (NSO). (2016). Statistics on Income and Living Conditions 2015: Salient Indicators. (News Release 152/2016. Malta: NSO. Retrieved October 8 2016, from https://nso.gov.mt/en/News_Releases/View_by_Unit/Unit_C1/Living_Conditions_and_Culture_Statistics/Documents/2016/News2016_152.pdf

⁶ Inglis, T. (1997). Empowerment and Emancipation. In *Adult Education Quarterly*, 48(1), 3 – 18.

⁷ Pulis, A., Brown, M. & Georgakopoulos, A. (forthcoming, 2017). Education for sustainable development in non-formal set-ups: Diagnosing a culture of inertia. Paper to be presented at World Symposium on Lifelong Learning and Sustainable Development, Malta, 2-4 March 2017.

A multi-pronged, transdisciplinary approach is required to ensure that the lacunae in this sector are addressed for the long-term benefit of Maltese society.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Azzopardi', with a stylized flourish at the end.

DR ANDREW AZZOPARDI - Dean