

## Verdala Declaration on Homelessness 2025

We, the participants at the first national conference on homelessness on the 14th November 2025 are united in our commitment to uphold the dignity of persons who are homeless and to work together to arrive at compassionate and effective solutions to this complex issue. We believe that all people in our community should have a stable and adequate place to call home, and should receive person-centred and timely support if they need it.

We endorse the EU's commitment in the Lisbon Declaration to end homelessness by 2030. We welcome the important progress already made through the establishment of the Homelessness Service within the Foundation for Social Welfare Services; the increased government funding of shelters, and the sustained and dedicated service provided by these shelters; the Housing Authority's schemes and specialised projects; the community policing teams; social workers; and numerous non-governmental organisations who work so hard to help prevent homelessness and to support people through it.

At the same time, we assert that the current efforts are necessary but insufficient to address this growing problem. We recognise that the absence of an official definition and a dedicated National Strategy against Homelessness limits effective action. It also makes it hard to measure the problem, though data from homeless services and shelters show it to be increasing. We note with concern the rising incidence of the criminalisation of persons who are homeless. We also call for sensitivity and responsiveness on the part of front-line staff; improved communication between service entities; and the elimination of procedures that work against the best interests of persons experiencing homelessness.

We urge the acceptance of Article 31 of the Revised European Social Charter that recognises the Right to Housing, and establishes the commitment to promote access to housing of an adequate standard; to prevent and reduce homelessness with a view to its gradual elimination; and to make the price of housing accessible to those without adequate resources.

In addition, we call for urgent action in the following areas:

### 1. Establish a Clear Framework and Governance

- **Official Definition and Monitoring:** Expedite the introduction of an official, legislated definition of homelessness (as envisaged for 2026) and ensure its rigorous monitoring.
- **Dedicated Strategy:** Develop a National Strategy against Homelessness with clearly allocated responsibilities, distinct from and coordinated with the National Strategy for Poverty Reduction and Social Inclusion.
- **Cross-Entity Coordination:** Establish the necessary inter-ministerial group to analyse and address homelessness within the broader fight against poverty, ensuring improved coordination between all relevant entities.

- **Further investment in homelessness expertise:** Invest in and develop expert resources in the field of homelessness research, data analysis, and service design.

## 2. Increased and innovative Housing Supply

- **Develop a Social Housing Market:** Treat housing as a social good, and utilise financial and regulatory support to encourage the growth of non-profit and cooperative housing initiatives. This will help expand the supply of stable, affordable solutions.
- **Review Eligibility Criteria for benefits and services:** Address the critical barrier reported by NGOs - people without a fixed address lack an identity card, and hence cannot access services that would improve their situation, even though they are sometimes granted temporary use of the FSWS address. We also note that the lack of an identity card precludes persons from exercising their constitutional right to vote.
- **Lay the groundwork for "Housing First":** Prepare for a gradual move to the Housing First approach, where people are placed in stable accommodation *first* and then receive integrated social support.

## 3. Strengthen and Target Support Services

- **Integrated Support:** Ensure that all publicly-funded shelters continue to provide immediate, safe shelter alongside the integrated support services necessary to help users transition to permanent housing and exit poverty.
- **Low-threshold Shelter:** Ensure the availability of shelter for persons in very complex situations such as substance misuse and mental illness.
- **Accessibility:** Shelters should be accessible for persons with different disabilities, including for people who use wheelchairs.
- **Strengthen Anti-Poverty Measures:** Ensure the recommendations of the National Strategy for Poverty Reduction and Social Inclusion, particularly those strengthening social accommodation, rent subsidies, and other benefits, are fully implemented to help prevent and mitigate homelessness.

## 4. End the Criminalisation of Homelessness

- **Repeal the Criminal Provisions on Vagrancy and Begging:** We call for compassion and legal reform. Articles 338(w) and 338(x) of the Criminal Code, which criminalise vagrancy and begging, should be repealed because they punish individuals for their status or for trying to survive, instead of actually causing harm.
- **Phase Out Anti-Loitering Bylaws at Local Level:** We recommend that Local Councils progressively phase out anti-loitering bylaws. They unfairly punish vulnerable people by confusing passive public presence with disorder. Councils should use targeted

strategies that focus only on demonstrable harm or disruptive conduct while referring the persons concerned to available services.

We affirm our willingness to fully collaborate, in line with our respective remits, in the development and implementation of a cohesive, evidence-based National Homelessness Strategy. An end to homelessness in Malta is achievable through a united will, and the dedicated and concerted effort of entities in the public, private and non-governmental sectors. This will help to ensure that the complex situation is addressed comprehensively and with a higher probability of success.

Adopted at a Conference entitled 'A Place to Call Home: Reimagining Homelessness' held at Verdala Palace on the 14th November 2025, organised by the Anti-Poverty Forum and PROMISE Research Cluster (University of Malta) and sponsored by APS Bank.



This document and its contents are endorsed by:

- 1 Anti-Poverty Forum
- 2 PROMISE Research Cluster, Faculty for Social Wellbeing, University of Malta
- 3 OASI Foundation
- 4 Suret il-Bniedem
- 5 Soup Kitchen OFM
- 6 Aditus Foundation
- 7 Women For Women Foundation
- 8 National Council of Women Malta
- 9 Richmond Foundation
- 10 St Jean Antide Foundation
- 11 Rise Malta



- 12 Alleanza Għall-Ġustizzia, Ugwaljanza u Paci
- 13 Sudanese Community Malta
- 14 YMCA
- 15 St Paul's Parish, Valletta
- 16 Malta Association of Social Workers
- 17 Żgħażaġġ Haddiema Nsara
- 18 Kunsill Lokali Bormla
- 19 Kunsill Lokali Żebbuġ (Malta)
- 20 Caritas Malta
- 21 Dar Hosea
- 22 Kunsill Lokali San Lawrenz
- 23 Holy Trinity Parish, Marsa
- 24 St Julian's Parish
- 25 Kunsill Lokali Għajnsielem
- 26 Franciscan Welfare Association (Djakonija Qawra)