Beyond Measurement – Insights for Wellbeing Policy in Malta

The Malta Wellbeing INDEX Project

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The Malta Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society

Wellbeing INDEX

Indicators | Networking | Data | Exploration | eXchange

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List of Abbreviations

A4MH	Alliance for Mental Health
BLI	Better Life Initiative
BRAINPOol	BRinging Alternative INdicators into POLicy
CES	Conference of European Statisticians
CW	Commonwealth
CIW	Canadian Index of Wellbeing
EEB	European Environmental Bureau
ERA	Environment and Resources Authority
EU	European Union
EU-SILC	European Union's Statistics on Income and Living Conditions
FSWB	Faculty for Social Wellbeing
FSWS	Foundation for Social Welfare Services
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GHC	Global Happiness Council
GPI	Genuine Progress Indicator
GNH	Gross National Happiness
HDI	Human Development Index
HDR	Human Development Report
INDEX	Indicators, Networking, Data, Exploration, eXchange
KEP	Knowledge Exchange Platform
MAPHM	Malta Association of Public Health Medicine
MEUSAC	Malta-EU Steering and Action Committee
MFWS	Malta Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NSO	National Statistics Office
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal(s)
SNA	System of National Accounts
SWB	Subjective Wellbeing
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNECE	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
UNESCO	United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
USA	United States of America
WBI	Wellbeing Indicators
WISE	Wellbeing, Inclusion, Sustainability and the Economy
WEAll	Wellbeing Economy Alliance
WEGo	Wellbeing Economy Governments partnership
WEIRD	Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich, Democratic
WHR	World Happiness Report
WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature
YMCA	Young Men's Christian Association

Executive Summary

The Malta Wellbeing INDEX project (www.wellbeingindex.mt) is a collaborative effort between the Malta Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society (MFWS) and the University of Malta (UM). The project is intended to serve as a repository of information and pave the way for the establishment of a wellbeing framework for the Maltese islands. This report constitutes one of the research deliverables of the project and is intended to provide a structured review of the grey and scholarly literature on the way various countries are tackling the matter of policy to enhance wellbeing, culminating in recommendations for policy makers with a view to seeding a national discussion.

Internationally, the last two decades have seen a burgeoning literature on the measurement of wellbeing, complemented by increased efforts in the field among supranational institutions and various countries to publish metrics of wellbeing. Efforts in policy-making have now started to move beyond measurement: various countries have committed to long-term economic visions that focus on wellbeing and in some, wellbeing policy frameworks have already been developed. Commensurately, institutions such as the United Nations (UN), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and the European Union (EU) among others have made headway in promoting policy visions and toolkits for progress on wellbeing.

This report starts by examining the issues related to the measurement of wellbeing. It proceeds by offering a review of the main processes involved in policy making for wellbeing. Subsequently, it presents a review of key efforts at the international level as well as the experiences of some countries (Germany, New Zealand, Bhutan, Iceland, Canada, Ireland, and Ecuador), in their efforts to measure wellbeing and to integrate wellbeing metrics more systematically in policy-making. The report then turns to a review of the Maltese context, where research and initiatives on this theme have also evolved in recent years. It concludes with a synthesis of the main findings, on the basis of which a number of policy recommendations are drawn up.

In summary, these recommendations are:

- To consult citizens and experts in establishing a wellbeing measurement framework;
- To consistently generate subjective and objective wellbeing user-friendly data that may be disaggregated beyond averages and that may be studied in longitudinal form;
- To nominate a wellbeing watch-dog/key ambassador to champion policy for wellbeing;
- To build capacity and offer training opportunities for all key players involved;
- To integrate wellbeing into core policy visions and forthcoming legislation;
- To subject legislation and policy to wellbeing impact assessments;
- To subject annual budgets and funding programmes to a wellbeing impact assessment;
- To consider the role of education for wellbeing;
- To communicate wellbeing information and data in a compelling and timely manner; and
- To strengthen collaborations across data and research entities.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The Malta Wellbeing INDEX project (www.wellbeingindex.mt) is a collaborative effort between the Malta Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society (MFWS) and the University of Malta.

This report constitutes one of the research deliverables of the project and is intended to provide a structured review of the grey and scholarly literature on the manner in which various countries are tackling such a quest, culminating in recommendations for policy makers. At this juncture, whereby the establishment of a wellbeing policy framework is still gaining traction across the world, this review of other countries' efforts sets the stage for a deeper discussion on a national level.

Across multidisciplinary studies, the terms (subjective) wellbeing, happiness, utility, quality of life, welfare and life satisfaction are often used interchangeably to refer to similar concepts (Easterlin, 2003; MacKerron & Mourato, 2013). While different conceptions of wellbeing have been put forward (Dodge et al., 2012; Parfit, 1984), many of them trace their roots in the measure of what is good for the individual (Diener, 1984) and what should be promoted as an end goal in our lives and the lives of others (Angner, 2010; Frijters et al., 2020).

By any definition, the last two decades have seen a burgeoning literature in the social sciences on the measurement of wellbeing. According to the World Happiness Report (WHR) (Helliwell et al., 2023), while attention to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is declining in the literature, references to happiness have increased sharply over the last 10 years, whether measured by the frequency of those words in books in multiple global languages, by the scale of published research, or by the number of government measurement initiatives. There is a growing recognition that without better measures of wellbeing that go beyond GDP (and include education, health, the state of the natural environment, and how people themselves feel in their lives), policy makers cannot gain the insight needed to ensure societal progress.

In several countries, wellbeing frameworks have already been developed. These include the Canadian Index of Wellbeing, Measures of Australia's Progress, the New Zealand Living Standards Framework, the Taiwan National Wellbeing Index, the UK Measures of National Wellbeing, among many others. In Bhutan, the systematic measure of Gross National Happiness (GNH) is "a multidimensional development approach seeking to achieve a harmonious balance between material wellbeing and the spiritual, emotional and cultural needs of society." (GNH Centre Bhutan, n.d.-a)

But defining and measuring wellbeing is not an end in itself, and the past years have also witnessed a renewed policy effort in promoting wellbeing through policy. Countries which registered progress on the measurement of wellbeing are now turning to the next challenge: identifying how to integrate these metrics in policy formulation. This is so in the majority of European countries recently reviewed by the United Nations Economic Commission for

Europe (UNECE) (UNECE, 2023), as well as in several countries of the OECD (Exton & Shinwell, 2018).

At an international level, institutions such as the United Nations have made serious contributions to this shift in economic perspective. Indeed, Resolution A/RES/65/309 entitled 'Happiness: towards a holistic approach to development' was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2011, emphasising the need for economic growth to result in happiness and elevated levels of wellbeing (United Nations, 2011). The 6th World Forum on the future of wellbeing, held in November 2018 by the OECD, also led to enhanced cooperation to contribute to the advancement of the measurement of wellbeing, evidence-based policy, and the use of alternative sources of data to measure progress. The European Union (EU) has long recognised the importance of providing policy makers with a sufficiently rich and accurate picture of the way in which the economy performs for its citizens, beyond GDP (European Commission, 2009). In its recommendations for future actions, the Council of the EU has suggested an agenda towards a wellbeing economy, which includes reprioritizing investment to account for both wellbeing and growth (Council of the European Union, 2019).

Taking stock of what is happening internationally can be useful to inform forthcoming policy and practice in Malta. An organised and rigorous evidence-base is an effective tool for evaluating and, if necessary, adapting existing efforts with the aim of developing policy that addresses its citizens' wellbeing objectives. This report contributes towards these goals.

1.2 Structure of the Report

The report starts with a literature review of the progress that has been made to measure wellbeing and apply it to policy settings, in order to identify good practices and instigate reflection on the measurement of wellbeing and how this can shape policy in the local context. Section 3 provides a brief overview of some initiatives carried out by international institutions relevant to the question of wellbeing measurement and policy. Section 4 presents a review of the experiences of several countries, namely Germany, New Zealand, Bhutan, Iceland, Canada, Ireland, and Ecuador. It describes both the efforts at measuring wellbeing in these countries, as well as some of the mechanisms that have been developed to integrate wellbeing metrics more systematically in policy decision-making. Section 5 presents an account of the local context, as recent years have also witnessed research and initiatives on this theme of wellbeing in Malta. Section 6 concludes with a synthesis of the main findings of this report, on the basis of which, a number of policy recommendations are drawn up.

2. Review of the Literature

2.1 Defining and Measuring Wellbeing

Any attempt at designing policy for wellbeing would require, in the first instance, an understanding of what wellbeing is. One way is to consider wellbeing as the satisfaction of one's wants and needs (Harsanyi, 1996; Parfit, 1984). By this account, maximising GDP and growth, which allows for increased purchases of goods and services, makes way for the satisfaction of more preferences and hence higher levels of wellbeing (Dolan & Peasgood, 2008). However, since the seminal work of Easterlin, there has been plenty of evidence to indicate that beyond a certain level of income, there is little benefit to happiness from additional income (Easterlin, 1974). Indeed, it has been shown that "countries that rank highest on happiness are not the countries with the highest income per capita" (Sachs, 2019, p. 5). Furthermore, it has long been established that the pursuit of GDP growth often comes at the cost of the natural environment and social relationships (Frijters & Krekel, 2021). Thus, although GDP provides an objective and widespread measure of some aspect of wellbeing, it offers a limited depiction of quality of life and of societal prosperity more broadly (Diener et al., 2009).

Another way is to define wellbeing by referring to phenomena that are deemed to be objectively good or bad for humans to flourish (Sen, 1999; Dean, 2009), such as essential needs (e.g., food, shelter, employment status, security, environmental quality and good health), and the freedom to choose or determine one's life-course. By this account, it is possible to utilise readily available data to assess the status of the conditions that are associated with higher levels of wellbeing (Elliott et al., 2017). These so called "objective indicators" can help to monitor general wellbeing and inform national policy (Dolan & Metcalfe, 2012; Dolan & White, 2007; Sen, 1999). Examples of such indicators at a national level include the Australian National Development Index (Australian National Development Index, 2020), the Measures of Australia's Progress (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012), Wales' National Indicators on Wellbeing (Wellbeing of Wales, n.d.), New Zealand's Living Standards Framework (New Zealand Treasury, n.d.), and the Canadian Index of Wellbeing (Canadian Index of Wellbeing, n.d.).

Neither GDP nor objective indicators specifically set out to measure how people actually *feel*. The measurement of wellbeing increasingly encapsulates the subjective experience of wellbeing in daily lives (Dolan & White, 2007), typically life satisfaction, pleasant emotions, and unpleasant emotions (Diener et al., 1999) as well as purpose (Dolan and Metcalfe 2012). Measuring Subjective Wellbeing (SWB) involves people self-rating how they feel about their lives and experiences (Dolan et al., 2017), commonly through surveys (Dolan & Metcalfe, 2012) and employing scales like the unipolar Likert scale (from zero to ten). People thus become invaluable and inexpensive channels of information on their wellbeing themselves (Helliwell et al., 2014).

Therefore, in pursuing GDP as a proxy for wellbeing, the implicit assumption has been that wellbeing is about widening choice sets and satisfying more (material) desires. In seeking to

pursue a wider set of goals in sectors like education, health and security, the assumption is that wellbeing will respond to the basic ingredients needed to make a decent life. In pursuing SWB by asking people directly how they feel about their lives, the assumption is that what constitutes a good life is something that individuals themselves can assess (Stiglitz et al., 2009). While objective measures make assumptions about what is important to individuals, SWB measures each human's individual experience, as opposed to those of specialists (Frijters et al., 2020; Hicks et al., 2013). The challenge with SWB, in turn, is its dependence on the measurement tool used (Cramm & Nieboer, 2012), on respondents' honesty (Kenny, 2005) and moods (Yardley & Rice, 1991).

The considerations above have led to accounts and measurement of wellbeing that include *both* subjective and objective data. As has been argued, "measures of both objective and subjective wellbeing provide key information about people's quality of life. Statistical offices should incorporate questions to capture people's life evaluations, hedonic experiences and priorities" (Stiglitz et al., 2009, p. 12). The OECD's Better Life Index and Eurostat's Quality of Life Dashboard are two examples of such metrics. Indeed, all things considered, it is safe to say that wellbeing is typically viewed as being multidimensional (Diener, 2009; Michaelson et al., 2009; Stiglitz et al., 2009). In turn, its multidimensional nature encompasses economic, social, cultural, psychological, and environmental dimensions, typically including material living standards (income, consumption, wealth, housing), subjective well-being (life evaluation, affects, sense of meaning and purpose of life), health, education, work and leisure, civic engagement, social life, safety, and the environment. This makes it hard to summarise its meaning in one universal definition (UNECE, 2023).

The use of combinations of measurements leads to a further question in wellbeing measurement, namely, whether this should take the form of an index combined into a single figure (e.g., the Human Development Index and the Better Life Index) or whether it should be presented as a series of indicators in the form of an 'indicator dashboard' (e.g., the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) or the EU Quality of Life Dashboard). The advantages of a composite index have been pointed out in the literature (e.g., Kroll, 2011; Stiglitz, Sen, & Fitoussi, 2009) and include ease of communication and comparison. An index has the attractive feature of offering a simple headline number, accessible to diverse audiences, providing unambiguous up or down trends over time and differences across regions or groups. A key challenge, on the other hand, relates to the selection of the elements that constitute wellbeing and eventually of aggregating them (Thoma, 2021). Summing across different domains, across people, and generations may be particularly problematic.

The alternative is the dashboard approach, which chimes with the notion of wellbeing as encompassing factors across multiple domains, rather than a single summary metric (Forgeard et al., 2011; Jayawickreme et al., 2012). A dashboard of wellbeing indicators, one which is "small enough to be easily comprehensible, but large enough to summarise what we care about the most" (Stiglitz et al., 2018, p. 6), can monitor progress across a number of domains and can guide policy decisions (Doran et al., 2014) by informing policy makers about citizens' material conditions, the quality of their lives, inequalities thereof, and sustainability (Stiglitz et al., 2018). Individuals, organisations, and governments may then select the domains of wellbeing that are most relevant and important to their context, to observe how they compare to others and devise strategic ways to enact change. Yet, a criticism that is levelled at the dashboard approach is that it can perpetuate the silo approach to components

used in the measurement of wellbeing (Van Phan & O'Brien, 2019) – and encourage cherry-picking of results. Communication of multiple domains can also be challenging. To communicate its dashboard of indicators, the UK Office of National Statistics developed a 'wellbeing wheel' which shows results at a glance across all dimensions – subsequently replacing this by an online dashboard.

Whether wellbeing metrics are presented as an index or a dashboard, Stiglitz et al. (2018) further advise that data should be *disaggregated* by age, gender, disability status, sexual orientation, education, and other social status markers to draw out group differences in wellbeing outcomes. The distribution of wellbeing outcomes within society, as opposed to only average scores, is considered essential to the wellbeing measurement approach (OECD, 2017, 2020a). Simply put, average values do not correspond to anyone's experience. A better way to summarize the experienced wellbeing of a group is to show its distribution and scalar inequality metrics. A further complexity is the potential trade-off between the present and future generations, posing the question as to whether sustainability should be included as a component of wellbeing or happiness or a separate goal. Most measurement frameworks consider indicators of *current* wellbeing as indicators of current life outcomes while the measurement of wellbeing sustainability focuses on inputs and the resources needed to achieve and maintain the desired outcomes (UNECE 2023). Some of the more recent theoretical frameworks include current wellbeing, inequality, and also the sustainability of wellbeing.

Several researchers (e.g., Sachs, 2012; Layard, 2011; Jayawickreme et al., 2012) have claimed that developments on the wellbeing front have made it possible for it to be reliably measured and used for applications in policy-making, but others (e.g., Lambert et al., 2020; Elliott et al., 2017; Lomas, 2015; Henrich et al., 2010) have pointed out that wellbeing research is still based largely on Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic (WEIRD) contexts. "Though questions around progress in wellbeing vis-à-vis GDP growth have assumed global importance, it is obvious that most of the country initiatives are based in high income countries" (Elliott et al., 2017, p. 12). Similarly, although international data and indicator systems do cover various regions and nations, making it possible for cross-country comparisons to be made in principle, the focus of these indicators and frameworks might still lack country-specific dimensions. "Often, the large number of countries covered in these international indicators systems force the selection of data and indicators to consider the lowest common denominator" (Nyman et al., 2016, p. 7). The possibility of calibrating questions (for instance by using vignettes) emerges as one potential solution to improve the comparability of data.

While discussion on the way to measure wellbeing remains lively, there is some consensus on the need to assess current levels of wellbeing and to review trends over time with a view to informing policy design and its appraisal (Dolan & Metcalfe, 2012). Measurement of wellbeing can also help to identify the trade-offs between its diverse determinants (WEAll, 2021). In the words of Stiglitz, "What we measure affects what we do; and if our measurements are flawed, decisions may be distorted" (Stiglitz et al., 2009, p. 7).

2.2 Beyond Metrics: Wellbeing-based Policy

As argued by Layard (2011), the policy makers' focus should be to generate the most happiness – particularly among those who are least happy. It is also in government's best interest to put wellbeing at the heart of policy-making (Frijters et al., 2020). Yet "our societies are not well organized to promote happiness" (Sachs, 2019, p.7). Therefore, while the development of a wellbeing framework can guide decision-makers to gain a better understanding of the inter-relationships and trade-offs that exist between its various dimensions (WEAll, 2021; Durand & Exton, 2019), measuring wellbeing is not an end in itself. Rather, it is a way to guide dynamic policy-making to create healthy, just, and sustainable communities and nations (Krishnakumar & Nogales, 2015). While not as developed as the theory and application of the measurement of wellbeing, the need to recalibrate the goal of policy itself towards achieving collective wellbeing is increasingly acknowledged (e.g., Frijters & Krekel, 2021; Lomas, 2021; Adler & Seligman, 2016).

An in-depth review by the Conference of European Statisticians' Bureau (based on a survey of national experiences) found that 30 out of 39 countries have a wellbeing measurement framework (UNECE, 2023). Most countries also reported that the indicators were used for policy purposes, to assess socioeconomic development within countries, to monitor policy strategies and operational programmes, and to inform future national plans. Wellbeing indicators are also often linked to budgetary planning (UNECE, 2023). However, about a third of the countries reported having no policy use of the indicators or having no knowledge within the statistical office on whether the indicators are used for policy purposes (ibid.).

This then begs the question of how to design policy for wellbeing. Noting that there is "no blueprint or 'best practice' model for successful implementation of wellbeing policy" (Exton & Shinwell, 2018, p. 6), and that even front-runner countries like New Zealand and Canada still talk about their processes being evolutionary in nature, the question is not an easy one to answer. However, there are some lessons to be learnt from guidance issued by international institutions and from national case studies. Furthermore, a small but increasing number of researchers have already attempted to address similarities among wellbeing frameworks and approaches (e.g., King et al., 2018; McGregor, 2018; Agarwala et al., 2014; Graham, 2021).

Gearing policy for wellbeing "requires building wellbeing into the machinery of government, and the tools used to take decisions" (Durand & Exton, 2019, p. 142). Indeed, there are various opportunities along the policy cycle where a wellbeing perspective can influence policy decisions, such as at the point of agenda-setting, policy formulation, implementation, monitoring (of inputs, outputs, and outcomes) and at the stage of evaluation as to whether the outcomes meet the goals. This can then contribute in the setting of governments' long-term agendas and in supporting the identification of areas that require action or development (Exton & Shinwell, 2018; Stiglitz et al., 2018).

According to the Wellbeing Economy Alliance (WEAll) (2021), designing a wellbeing strategy also involves identifying those activities and behaviours that directly contribute to wellbeing and aligning institutions and stakeholders for wellbeing – including government, businesses, communities, and citizens. Its 'Wellbeing Economy Policy Design Guide' (WEAll, 2021) provides a structured approach, including the development of a wellbeing vision, the design

of a wellbeing economy strategy, the assessment and selection of policies, their implementation, and the evaluation of policy impacts of wellbeing. It views these steps as continuous feedback loops with interconnections between the different steps of policy creation.

Similarly, an 'Economy of Wellbeing' is defined by the Council of the EU as: "a policy orientation and governance approach which aims to put people and their wellbeing at the centre of policy and decision-making" (Council of the European Union, 2019, p. 2). The Council of the EU suggests that for this to be achieved, knowledge-based policy-making is required, with "an adequate set of high-quality indicators, comprehensive impact assessments and the evaluation of short, medium and long-term cost-effectiveness" (Council of the European Union, 2019, p. 3). Emphasis is also placed on cross-sectoral collaboration between different policy areas, suitable policy structures and structural reforms (Council of the European Union, 2019). Taking a high-level approach in outlining possible future actions for the EU and its member states, the Council of the EU suggests four key agenda items towards a wellbeing economy, namely, (i) establishing a strategy; (ii) assessing impacts on wellbeing; (iii) reprioritizing investment to account for both wellbeing and growth; and (iv) addressing inequalities in outcomes (European Union, 2021).

In the follow-up to the seminal Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi Commission, the OECD also highlights the importance not only of having different measures, but also that such indicators should be anchored in the various stages of the policy cycle (OECD, 2018). In their working paper published in 2019, Llena-Nozal, Martin, and Murtin (2019, p. 8) define a wellbeing economy as one that (i) expands the opportunities available to people for upward social mobility and for improving their lives along the dimensions that matter most to them; (ii) ensures that these opportunities translate into wellbeing outcomes for all segments of the population, including those at the bottom of the distribution; (iii) reduces inequalities; and (iv) fosters environmental and social sustainability. The same paper further provides an analysis of four channels that connect wellbeing and economic growth: education and skills, healthcare, social protection and redistribution, and gender equality (ibid.).

Various other research entities have started to produce wellbeing policy guidance. For instance, the ZOE Institute for Fit Economies has a wellbeing policy guide which describes the process of identifying stakeholders and implementing wellbeing policies, designing a wellbeing economy strategy (including dealing with trade-offs and tensions), policy assessment, and evaluating the impact of policies on wellbeing (ZOE Institute for Future-Fit Economies, n.d.). Other relevant work emerges from the 2019 Beyond Growth Conference, as part of the Finnish Presidency, which recommends shifts in fiscal policy and more broadly in the EU Semester, the EU's Social Scoreboard, and the EU budget (Fingo, 2019). In 2022, the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), WEAll, and the European Environmental Bureau (EEB) published a briefing, in which they recommended increased coherence across wellbeing measures, more policy tools to guide decision-making including scenario models, budgets, and cost-benefit analyses; and more participatory policy approaches (Hoekstra, 2022).

In the following sections, some of the key components needed for wellbeing policy are reviewed.

2.2.1 Building Capacity and Leadership

Shifting policy towards wellbeing goals entails building public sector capacity and tweaking the cultures of practice within institutions (Durand & Exton, 2019). This is evident in several countries. For instance, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) published a Happiness Policy Manual, aiming to introduce the 'science of happiness' to the policy-making process, proposing innovative ways to incorporate it into current and future public policies and then evaluating their effect on the happiness and wellbeing of society (Khaleej Times, 2017). New responsibilities can also be assigned within existing structures (Whitby et al., 2014), as evidenced by New Zealand's Treasury (Ministry of Finance) which acquired a key role in the country's wellbeing goals.

Leaders, both political and managerial, can drive wellbeing principles in decision-making (Durand & Exton, 2019). The lead agency responsible for driving wellbeing measures differs in diverse contexts. In some instances, wellbeing work was developed or initially commissioned by the central government (such as in Israel, Sweden, Finland, and Germany) or specific ministries such as the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Planning (e.g., Ecuador, France, Italy, and New Zealand). In other cases, such as Austria, Luxembourg and the Netherlands, efforts were led by respective national statistical offices. Wales appointed a Future Generations Commissioner, the UK formed the 'What Works Centre for Wellbeing' agency, the UAE established a Minister for Happiness and Wellbeing while in Ecuador, a *Buen Vivir* Secretariat was founded.

2.2.2 Screening and evaluating Policy

Assessing policies for their anticipated impact on wellbeing is another key element in shifting towards wellbeing outcomes (Durand & Exton, 2019). To ensure that wellbeing priorities remain central to their policies, Bhutan developed a GNH Screening Tool with which to evaluate the impact of individual policies and projects *ex ante*. New Zealand too developed a cost-benefit analysis template for submissions of spending proposals. This requires departments to identify and quantify the impact of proposals on wellbeing and their sustainability (New Zealand Treasury, 2018). Similarly, the UAE implemented a Happiness Impact Assessment Tool (Sutton, 2017) through which policy proposals must pass before they can be presented to Cabinet. The UK has also made headway in its wellbeing cost-benefit analysis tool (HM Treasury, 2022).

While the above screening tools consider a wide range of wellbeing impacts, others investigate specific issues that have been identified as priorities. The United Kingdom for instance, introduced the Family Test, that explicitly targets the family perspective and potential impacts on family relationships and functioning in policy-making (Department of Work and Pensions, 2021). New Zealand's Ministry of Social Development developed a Child Impact Assessment Tool which screens the impact of proposed polices on the wellbeing of children and young people (New Zealand Ministry of Social Development, 2018); the country's Treasury also developed a cost-benefit analysis tool named CBAx to evaluate policies based on their wellbeing impacts (The Treasury, 2022). Policies (e.g., regulations, social services, taxes,

etc.) already in place need to align with the objectives of a nation's priority wellbeing goals, and where they do not, reforms would need to be carried out (Elliott et al., 2017). This may mean that they are to be adjusted, developed or phased out (Allin & Hand, 2014).

The evaluation of *existing* policies can also provide insights about impacts on wellbeing, including unintended or unexpected consequences. This can also shed light on the continued appropriateness of objectives and of indicators themselves (World Bank, 2005; Perrin, 2005). Reviewing the impact of interventions can highlight any barriers or contributing factors towards successful policy implementation and can provide the insight necessary to adapt the policy design process. Commensurately, research on wellbeing is useful when used to inform policy and practice (McDaid, 2014) - indeed, a well-developed and accessible evidence base supports wellbeing policy (Durand & Exton, 2019). The literature suggests that multidisciplinary evaluations of policies and programmes are often required to adequately assess impacts on overall wellbeing (Whitby et al., 2014).

While there is a rich literature that looks at the determinants of wellbeing (Briguglio, 2019), there is, however, a notable gap in the research that assess the direct impact of wellbeing policy. This, in part, is due to the recent emergence of most of the initiatives and even more so, their application. Wellbeing economies may require years to be fully developed and for the shift in institutions and practices to reflect that. Abercrombie et al. (2015) claim that it takes seven to 10 years for successful changes to be implemented. Changes in policies and measures may also not be immediate nor (given the interlinkages) straightforward to assess (Wallace, 2013).

2.2.3 Budgets, Strategies, and Legislation for Wellbeing

Reviewing budget proposals through the wellbeing lens can also result in resources being allocated to where they matter most for wellbeing (Exton & Shinwell, 2018; Stiglitz et al., 2018). In this way, the application of wellbeing indicators can inform budgetary decisions. New Zealand recently branded its budget as a "wellbeing budget". In its 2021 edition, for instance, the budget's third page is entirely devoted to reporting statistics of wellbeing (New Zealand Government, 2021). Wales, Scotland and Iceland have similarly announced wellbeing budgets (WEAll, 2022). As of 2022, the Government in Ireland started featuring the Wellbeing Framework within the budgetary process, with ongoing dialogue to determine how best to do this (Government of Ireland, 2023). In fact, in 2023, its budget publication was titled 'Budget 2023: Beyond GDP – Quality of Life Assessment'' (ibid.). Similarly, Sweden has also included its New Measures of Wellbeing in its budgeting process. This effort has been led by the Ministry of Finance since 2017 (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2021).

In tandem with budgets, strategies and action plans can steer policy towards wellbeing. Finland recently published a National Action Plan for the Economy of Wellbeing (EPR, n.d.). Legislation is another key lever to implement lasting change in policy (Durand & Exton, 2019). Legislation typically requires a debate and consensus, offering a longer-term commitment. Several countries have introduced legal measures to secure the adoption of wellbeing frameworks and approaches. In Italy, a new law stipulates that 12 wellbeing indicators (Benessere Equo e Sostenibile) should be annually reported to Parliament in the context of budgetary discussions (Exton & Shinwell, 2018). In France, Parliament passed a law

committing the Government to annually report progress against 10 leading indicators that reflect the country's economic, social and environmental situation as well as an impact assessment of the main reforms envisaged in light of these indicators (Exton & Shinwell, 2018). Scotland introduced the Scottish Community Empowerment Act (Scottish Government, 2015). Wales brought in the Future Generations Act 2015 (Welsh Government, 2015) which focuses on different public bodies setting and reaching wellbeing objectives. These are just some examples of laws that commit governments to regularly report on wellbeing indicators, and in turn, to encourage policy makers to consider a broader set of outcomes in policy design processes.

2.2.4 Engaging Stakeholders, Communication and Education

The involvement of wide audiences for consultation emerges as an integral part of the design process of the overall measurement approach - although this is done with varying levels of intensity and scale (Exton & Shinwell, 2018). While most elements surrounding wellbeing may be universal, experiences of wellbeing can be context-dependent (Kern et al., 2020; Alexandrova, 2017). "Any framework for wellbeing must be a living process that resonates deeply with the priorities, the places, the practices and dreams of local citizens where they live" (Doran et al., 2015, p. 37). Wallace and Schmuecker (2012) emphasize that wellbeing measures are at their most effective when they are supported by a combination of appropriate policy processes, wide buy-in from civil society, the media, and citizens as well as strong leadership. Similar insights are observed in a recent policy review: "Our analysis shows that a policy design process that facilitates support and buy-in from a wide range of stakeholders to the vision, a strategy and plan designed from this vision, selecting policies based on this vision and strategy, confronting and addressing trade-offs and tensions, as well as robust impact assessment all set the preconditions for resulting impact" (Siebert et al., 2022, p. 40).

The EU's BRAINPOoL project observed that a number of beyond GDP projects "had failed to connect with the public, perhaps partly because there was nothing emotionally charged, that resonated, with the public […] and no strong accompanying narrative" (Whitby et al., 2014, p. 28). In this respect, meaningful civic participation has been emphasised in many contexts as "both a means and an end: it is a means to a better framework that reflects the needs of the people […]; it is an end because reasoned deliberation and engagement with the decisions that affect our lives is known to directly improve wellbeing" (Carnegie UK Trust, 2015, p. 11).

Stakeholder buy-in can also support a wellbeing framework to withstand the test of time or of changes in governments. Durand and Exton (2019) remark that for wellbeing development strategies to survive through political cycles, it is important to ensure "the ongoing commitment of a wide range of government agencies, partners and civil society, as well as cross-party political support" (p. 146). This kind of buy-in from across government as well as broader social partners sustains the effort to introduce wellbeing in policy (Exton & Shinwell, 2018). In turn, empowering localised policy implementation is touted to "provide space for coordinated local action in designing and implementing policies to ensure greater legitimacy, adaptability, and continuity of wellbeing policy initiatives" (WEAll, 2021, p. 36).

Engaging with stakeholders, such as citizens, policy makers, civil society groups and experts also ensures widespread appreciation of the interconnected nature of wellbeing and a better

understanding of the shifts that may be necessary to improve collective wellbeing (WEAll, 2021; McDaid, 2014). More than a decade ago, the Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi Commission advocated that “at the national level, roundtables should be established, with the involvement of stakeholders, to identify and prioritise those indicators that carry the potential for a shared view of how social progress is happening and how it can be sustained over time” (Stiglitz et al., 2009, p. 18).

Communication pathways, such as community feedback forums and information sharing systems, may be created for people to give their feedback throughout the implementation process. Working with voluntary and community organisations to lead community conversations, or reaching out through social and traditional media to reach wider audiences can also be elements of this communication process. Possible approaches to this include focus group discussions, key informant interviews and stakeholders’ conferences that can bring policy makers, development practitioners and citizens to interact (Elliott et al., 2017). For instance, in Northern Ireland**,** citizen engagement is comprised of focus groups with key constituencies including minority groups, stakeholder interviews including public servants, political parties, trade unions, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and thematic groups, and include a wider call for input (Doran et al., 2015).

Another important application relates to incorporating wellbeing within educational systems. A whole-school approach is emphasised (Cefai et al., 2021; European Education Area, 2023; Taylor et al., 2022). This approach is supported in Malta by Senior Leadership Teams (Haber, 2020). In fact, Cefai et al. (2021) emphasise the role of schools beyond academic knowledge in the pursuit of mental health and wellbeing, including educating teachers, improving the wellbeing of adults who have a role in children’s lives, including a mental health and wellbeing curriculum for European schoolchildren and preventing bullying. The European Commission has also implemented two key initiatives: first, the establishment of an expert group on wellbeing in schools, and second, through the Pathways to School Success initiative (European Education Area, 2023). The OECD have also emphasised students' wellbeing in their PISA Results, with a number of indicators to monitor students' wellbeing (OECD, 2017b). The role of teachers' wellbeing is also widely recognised (European Education Area, 2023; Taylor et al., 2024).

2.3 Synthesis

While the literature reviewed is arguably focused mainly on western, rich countries, and while evidence of impact of wellbeing policy is still sparse, useful insights can be drawn from reports, reviews, and studies carried out to date as to the actions that would appear to be necessary to move towards wellbeing policy. At this stage, these can be summarised as (i) the importance of measuring wellbeing in a multidimensional, disaggregated manner; (ii) the need for a wellbeing strategy or framework that reflects contextual priorities developed in consultation with stakeholders; (iii) the role of capacity building in relevant institutions, including the need for leadership - both political and managerial; (iv) the role of screening tools to assess potential impacts of forthcoming policy on wellbeing; (v) the need to evaluate *existing* policies against their wellbeing impacts, through an evidence-based and multidisciplinary perspective; (vi) the need to align budgetary proposals by assessing them

through a wellbeing lens; and (vii) the potential of introducing legal measures to secure the adoption of wellbeing approaches.

3. Efforts at the International Level

As already evident, international institutions have made important strides towards wellbeing policy. “Global policy makers are progressively adopting wellbeing as an overarching framework by which to assess, track, and respond to human development challenges and opportunities” (Lambert et al., 2020, p. 1).

3.1 The United Nations

The United Nations (UN) has published documentation on the meaning of standards of living and the use of indicators since 1954 (United Nations, 1954). Since 1990, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)’s Human Development Report (HDR) and its Human Development Index (HDI) have offered a concrete challenge to GDP, measuring achievement across countries in the basic dimensions of human development – education, life expectancy and health. By these measures, countries like Norway, Ireland, Switzerland, Hong Kong, Iceland, Germany, Sweden and Australia are among the top-ranking countries (Conceição, 2020).

In 2011, member states unanimously adopted a resolution that GDP “was not designed to and did not adequately reflect the happiness and wellbeing of people” in a country (United Nations, 2011, p. 2). They invited countries “to pursue the elaboration of additional measures that better capture the importance of the pursuit of happiness and wellbeing in development with a view to guiding their public policies” (United Nations, 2011, p. 1). In June 2012, the Rio+20 ‘Earth Summit’ further endorsed calls for new statistical approaches to complement GDP. It was argued that the inclusion of other components of life factors, such as health indicators, education opportunities, access to art and culture, political freedom and environmental protection, can provide a wider view of the extent to which economic structures and the dynamics surrounding them are effective; insofar as they contribute not merely at a financial level, but to citizens’ overall quality of life (Smits & Steendijk, 2015; Dolan & Metcalfe, 2012). In June 2014, a decision of the General Assembly led to the declaration that the ‘International Day of Happiness’ would be celebrated on March 20th every year (United Nations, n.d.).

The UN’s Agenda 2030 (United Nations, 2015) and its SDGs also place critical emphasis on the value of a holistic approach towards development, the end of extreme poverty, social inclusion and social justice, and the protection of the environment. The 17 SDGs seek a transformation of the financial, economic, and political systems that govern today’s societies to guarantee the human rights of all. The goals address issues including poverty, inequality, health, education, gender discrimination, climate change, justice, and affordable and clean energy. Studies indicate that, in general, countries that are closest to reaching the SDGs, tend to report higher levels of subjective wellbeing (De Neve & Sachs, 2020; Sachs, 2019).[1]

The UN has consistently emphasized the need for coherent and consistent metrics to guide national, regional and global efforts towards inclusive, fair and sustainable policy (United

[1] Progress on these goals are also reported for European countries (Sustainable Development Solutions Network & Institute for European Environmental Policy, 2021, 2022).

Nations, 2022a). It is updating its System of National Accounts (SNA) involving a Wellbeing and Sustainability Task Team and comprising a dedicated chapter on Wellbeing and Sustainability (Chapter 2), Measuring Wellbeing (Chapter 34) and the Sustainability of Wellbeing (Chapter 35) (United Nations, 2023a) – with an update due in 2025 (United Nations, 2022b).

3.2 The European Union (EU)

A key development in the EU domain was the 2007 conference titled "Beyond GDP" hosted by the European Commission, European Parliament, the Club of Rome, OECD, and the WWF. Participants recognised the shortcomings of GDP and the need to improve data and indicators to complement it. By 2009, the European Commission released a road map and Communication marking five key actions to improve indicators of progress in order to address citizens' concerns and make the most of new technical and political developments (European Commission, 2009). Shortly after, in 2010, the *Directeurs Généraux des Instituts Nationaux Statistiques* conference gave rise to the Sofia Memorandum, reiterating the commitment by the European Statistical System to pursue its project on measuring progress, wellbeing and sustainable development enhancing the use of existing statistics (such as EU-SILC as a core quality-of-life instrument), and to develop new statistics in the longer term (Eurostat (DGINS ESSC), 2010). These would encompass various dimensions of quality of life and both objective and subjective wellbeing, in a manner that is timely, and comparable (ibid).

In 2011, the European Parliament motioned a resolution, emphasizing the need for a systematic approach and the development of the appropriate indicators that measure economic and social progress in the medium and long term, considering core dimensions of health, education, culture, employment, housing and environmental conditions, among other indicators (European Parliament, 2011). In 2013, the European Commission issued a report on the initiatives and action plans in several Member States, the different methods of going beyond GDP and their limitations and the need to recognise the policy context (European Commission, 2013). By 2019, the Council of the European Union had claimed that "people's wellbeing is a principal aim of the EU" (Council of the European Union, 2019, p. 2). It adopted conclusions on the economy of wellbeing, calling on the Commission and Member States to integrate a wellbeing economy perspective. The Council of the EU invited its members to perform a series of actions (Council of the European Union, 2019), including using wellbeing indicators for the monitoring and reporting of the national budget processes and for knowledge-based decision-making.

At the 2023 "Beyond Growth" conference at the European Parliament, emphasis was placed on challenging economic growth as a measure of success and development, with wellbeing frameworks acting as a potential vehicle to transition to a socioeconomic model beyond growth (European Parliament, 2023). At the time of writing this report, the European Commission had just issued a communication on mental health and how to incorporate considerations on this in policy. Recognizing the effects of adverse mental health both to the individual and society, it proposed a comprehensive policy framework which aims to bring mental health intervention on a par with that of physical health (European Commission, 2023).

Several of these developments are now reflected in Eurostat's 'Quality of life indicators' (Eurostat, n.d.-b) which include nine dimensions and which seek to complement traditional

measures of societal progress such as GDP, exposing trends over time and across countries or demographic groups within EU member states (Eurostat, 2021). Much of the data included is drawn from the EU-SILC, which covers all EU member states (and beyond), focusing on income, poverty, social exclusion and living conditions, with occasional modules dedicated to measuring wellbeing (Eurostat, n.d.-a).

It is also worth noting that the EU has also funded several projects on this topic, including e-Frame (European Framework for Measuring Progress) (Ciommi et al., 2013), and MAKSWELL (MAKing Sustainable Development and WELLbeing frameworks work for policy analysis) (Tinto & Baldazzi, 2018). A more recent flurry of projects includes WISE Horizons (Wellbeing, Inclusion and Sustainability) (Institute for Environmental Sciences Leiden (CML), 2023), adopting the framework by the Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi Commission to review policies in selected countries, including the EU (Kormann da Silva et al., 2023). The authors emphasise the interlinkages between current and future wellbeing, and also the close ties between wellbeing and inclusion (ibid.) Other relevant projects at the EU level include ToBE (Towards a sustainable wellbeing economy: integrated policies and transformative indicators) (European Commission, n.d.-a) and SPES (Sustainability, Performance, Evidence and Scenarios) (European Commission, n.d.-b). The project MERGE (Measuring what matters: Improving usability and accessibility of policy frameworks and indicators for multidimensional wellbeing through collaboration) brings together WISE, ToBe and SPES (European Commission, n.d.-c).

3.3 The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

The OECD has also been instrumental to the international movement going beyond-GDP (Boarini et al., 2006; OECD, 2001). The World Forum in 2007 was dedicated to the measurement of progress in societies discussing the importance of measuring progress, promoting it, the use of indicators and evidence-based policy, subjective wellbeing as well as measures of gross national happiness (OECD, 2008). Its Better Life Initiative (BLI), launched in 2011, investigates the quality of life, how this can be measured and how policies can improve to address development in this area. It places “a strong focus on people and households, reporting on ‘average achievements’ in each country and inequalities in achievements between people with different characteristics” (Boarini, 2011, p. 3). Based on theoretical foundations (e.g., Stiglitz, Sen, & Fitoussi, 2009; Hall et al., 2010), the OECD has published, *inter alia*, the Handbook of Constructing Composite Indicators (Nardo et al., 2008), a Compendium of OECD Wellbeing Indicators (OECD, 2011), as well as Guidelines on the Measurement of Subjective Wellbeing (OECD, 2013, 2023b).

The OECD has also held several events and published extensively on how to implement such frameworks into policies, in relation to wellbeing and mental health policies (OECD, n.d.-a), and also children’s wellbeing (OECD, 2021, 2023c). It has a page dedicated to such resources, which are full of policy insights on wellbeing and inclusion (OECD, n.d.-b). Of most relevance in the policymaking sphere, is the OECD’s Knowledge Exchange Platform (KEP) which serves as a repository on country initiatives, with 58 policies at the date of writing this report (OECD, 2023e).

3.4 Other International Efforts

An organisation which has consistently referred to wellbeing is the World Health Organization. In 2021, the Geneva Charter for Wellbeing emerged from its 10th Global Conference on Health Promotion. Over 5,000 representatives from 149 countries participated and considered wellbeing societies to be those with a “positive vision of health” including “social wellbeing”, and “new indicators of success beyond [GDP] that ... lead to new priorities for public spending." (World Health Organisation, 2021, p. 2)

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has also emphasised the importance of moving beyond GDP, supporting research on the shortcomings of GDP (Coyle, 2017), the Economics of Health and Wellbeing (Bhatt, 2021) and ‘A Life Well Lived’ (Bala et al., 2021). In 2021, it proposed its own measure, employing stated preferences and taking into account calibration questions to control for individuals’ different use of scales, systematic tendencies to elicit weights bypassing the requirement for large amounts of data and consideration for inequalities when transforming wellbeing indices into a composite index (Benjamin et al., 2021).

The Sustainable Development Solutions Network is responsible for the World Happiness Report (WHR) prepared annually and based on Gallup data, which is now a collaboration with the Oxford Research Centre as from 2024. The exercise ranks countries on three principal indicators of wellbeing (life evaluations, positive emotions, and negative emotions) and assesses six other objective variables (GDP per capita, social support, healthy life expectancy, freedom, generosity, and absence of corruption). Gallup itself is a private research entity whose World Poll measures multiple dimensions of wellbeing, including emotional states and life satisfaction. Data is gathered from nationally representative samples of the resident population aged 15 and older in over 160 countries based on the Cantril Self-Anchoring Striving Scale (Cantril, 1965; Gallup, n.d.). Covering 99% of the adult population globally, the Gallup World Poll informs the measurement of day-to-day emotional states, released annually through the ‘Global Emotions Report’ (Gallup, 2022).

In 2019, Pope Francis also launched the Economy of Francesco, prompting economists and youth to create a different kind of economy. This worldwide movement seeks to transform current economic models and draw out a future that is more inclusive for all of society, including the weakest, and a society that is not exclusively founded on material wealth. According to the Pope, “We need to correct models of growth incapable of guaranteeing respect for the environment, openness to life, concern for the family, social equality, the dignity of workers and the rights of future generations” (Francis, 2019, para. 3). The initiative issued 12 points of action to guide a re-dimensioning of the global economy, addressing themes such as work, finance, education, and artificial intelligence. In 2022, the Economy of Francesco Covenant was signed (Watkins, 2022).

Several alliances and councils have recently been formed to specifically tackle wellbeing. For instance, the Wellbeing Economy Alliance (WEAll), mentioned earlier, is a project that focuses on bringing together the diverse efforts of the Wellbeing Economy movement. The alliance aims to create a coordinated group of people and organisations that work towards a common vision of shifting economies to encompass a broad focus on ‘sustainable wellbeing’, where policy aims for human and ecological wellbeing, not simply economic growth (WEAll, n.d.-a).

It aims to gather knowledge and to make it available in a more coherent, solutions-oriented, and accessible format, and holds several initiatives to connect entities working on wellbeing. It has also been at the forefront in promoting policy implementation, through its research, including its Policy Design Guide (WEAll, 2021) and its Policymakers Network (WEAll, n.d.-c).

The Global Happiness Council (GHC) is a network of international happiness researchers and key practitioners acting in their personal capacity. It focuses on gathering knowledge on best practices with the aim of surveying and promoting advancement in the realm of beyond-GDP, happiness, and wellbeing. Launched on the International Day of Happiness, in 2017, the GHC is an advisory council that aims at advocating and championing the happiness agenda among governments and in international organisations. It also aims to provide practical tools for governments (Al Roumi, 2017). Overseen by the GHC, six thematic groups address education, workplace, personal happiness, public health, city design and management (Durand & Exton, 2019). The GHC publishes an annual 'Global Happiness and Well-being Policy Report'. Similarly, the World Happiness Summit - WOHASU - is an outfit dedicated to developing and delivering programs, services and experiences aimed at increasing individual, organizational and community happiness and wellbeing. It has organised training, policy fora, World Happiness Summits and other interventions around this theme (WOHASU, n.d.).

The Institute for European Environmental Policy and the ZOE Institute for Future-fit Economies also founded the EU Wellbeing Economy Coalition in 2021 for a collaborative space to discuss initiatives with shared objectives, which received backing from several influential entities including the Wellbeing Economy Alliance, European Environmental Bureau, European Policy Centre, and the Club of Rome, among others (IEEP & ZOE Institute for Future-Fit Economies, 2023).

3.5 Synthesis

In synthesis, it is evident that supranational entities and other bodies are progressively adopting or investigating wellbeing as an overarching framework to assess development across nations. These include the noteworthy declarations and initiatives of the UN, the EU, the OECD as well as the contributions of various other supranational organisations, alliances, and councils.

4. A Review of National Case Studies

As already suggested in the earlier sections, several countries have made significant contributions to the global wellbeing movement. Earlier reviews at a country level, including Kroll (2011) look at indicators across several countries and their policy relevance, highlighting both the similarities, as well as the differences. The review emphasises the importance of global harmonisation and of learning from each other's best practices, including participatory approaches and round tables, whilst discussing the challenges and ways in which indicators can be translated into policy (ibid.).

The number of countries recorded to have taken the plunge towards wellbeing policy is rapidly increasing (Institute for Environmental Sciences Leiden (CML), 2023). In the process of writing this report, numerous countries had declared their own wellbeing efforts in this regard. What follows attempt to give a flavour of the national experiences in a selection of diverse countries, namely Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Bhutan, Ecuador, Canada, and New Zealand with a view to exemplifying the kind of actions that can be taken in Malta.

Figure 1 illustrates the geographical spread of the countries presented as case studies. The choice was underpinned by a quest to have as much diversity as possible with a view to providing a wide understanding of wellbeing around the world – including Malta itself (reviewed in Section 5). To this end, countries are identified based on their different profiles to include EU and non-EU members, Commonwealth and non-Commonwealth, island states, landlocked countries, small and large states, and countries from different continents.

Figure 1 Selected Case Study Countries on World Map Visual

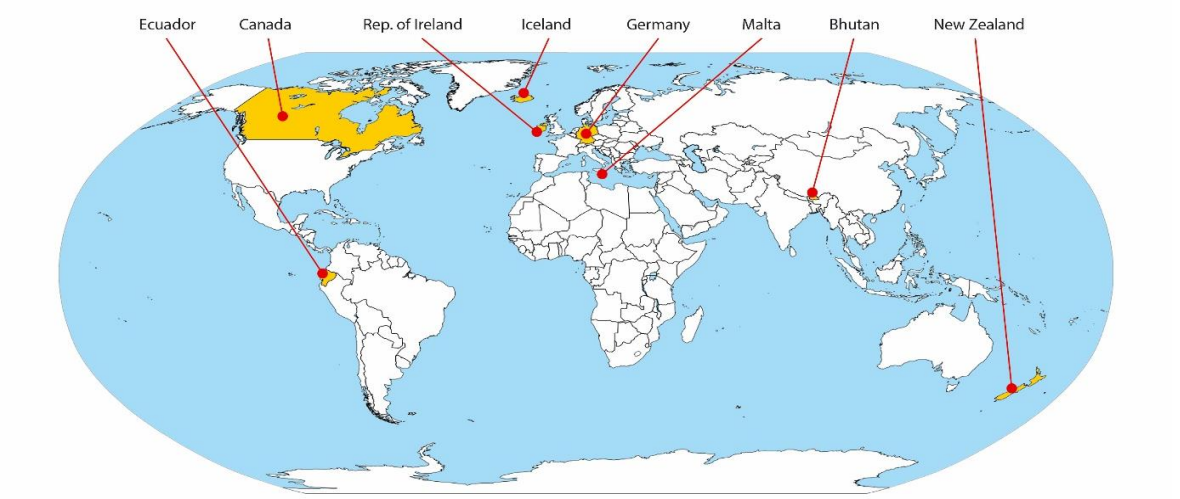

Table 1 Profiles of Countries Examined

Germany	A member of the OECD, Germany is the seventh-largest country in Europe (German Statistics Federal Office, n.d.). Germany is a member of the European Union and a member of the Schengen Area. Germany placed 16th among 137 countries in the ranking for happiness based on a three-year average 2020 – 2022 (Helliwell et al., 2023) while also placing at ninth place with respect to the HDI (UNDP, n.d.-a).
Iceland	A Nordic European Island state, Iceland is a member of the European Economic Area, the Schengen Area, and the European Free Trade Association but not the European Union. It is one of the three founding members of the Wellbeing Economy Governments (WEGo) alliance - an initiative of the WEAll. The people of Iceland often rank among the happiest in the world (e.g., Helliwell et al., 2023; UNDP, n.d.-a), placing third in the happiness ranking for 2020-2022 (Helliwell et al., 2023).
Ireland	Ireland is a member of the EU, with strong bilateral relations with the United Kingdom and United States (Geary, 2009). It was among the founding members of the OECD in 1961 and became a member of the UN in 1955. Ireland's performance relative to other OECD countries is mixed (McDonnell & Lennon, 2021). In 2018, it fared relatively well across the life satisfaction, knowledge and skills, and health dimensions, however it scored lower compared to the OECD average in terms of income and wealth, work-life balance and civic engagement (OECD, 2020b). Ireland also ranked 14th for happiness in the 2020-2022 period (Helliwell et al., 2023).
Bhutan	In Asia, Bhutan is a democratic, constitutional monarchy, a small country, whose ancient legal code (1629) declares that "if the government cannot create happiness for its people, then there is no purpose for government to exist". Accordingly, Bhutanese laws must promote happiness for all sentient beings, focusing on a flourishing human society living in harmony with nature. Bhutan ranked in the 127th place on the HDI in 2021.
Ecuador	In South America, Ecuador is one of the founding members of the UN, a developing country with a history of political unrest, high inequality and low economic activity, and gaps in gender, ethnicities and regions (Matano et al., 2020). It ranks at the 95th place in terms of HDI in 2021 and 74th on happiness in 2020-2022 (Helliwell et al., 2023)..

Canada	In North America, Canada is the world's second largest country and home to inhabitants from a mixture of diverse national and cultural groups. An influential member of the Commonwealth of Nations, and a founding member of the UN and the OECD, Canada ranks highly in terms of both the HDI for 2021 (15th) and happiness in 2020-2022 (13th).
New Zealand	In Oceania, New Zealand's population is dominated by two cultural groups: New Zealanders of European descent and the Māori, who are descendants of Polynesian settlers. A founding member of the Commonwealth of Nations it ranks highly with respect to the HDI in 2021 and happiness (at the 13th and 10th place respectively).

Summary information

	EU	OECD	CW[1]	Population[2]	Area[3]	Continent	Island
Germany	Yes	Yes	No	83.41	349.38	Europe	No
Iceland	No	Yes	No	0.37	100.83	Europe	Yes
Ireland	Yes	Yes	No	4.99	68.89	Europe	Yes
Bhutan	No	No	No	0.78	38.14	Asia	No
Ecuador	No	No	No	17.8	248.46	S. America	No
Canada	No	Yes	Yes	38.16	8,970	N. America	No
New Zealand	No	Yes	Yes	5.13	263.31	Oceania	Yes

[1] Sourced from The Commonwealth (The Commonwealth, n.d.).
[2] In millions, 2021 data sourced from Our World in Data (Our World in Data, n.d.-a).
[3] In thousands of km^2 sourced from Our World in Data (Our World in Data, n.d.-b).

4.2 Review of Wellbeing Initiatives

The following presents some salient insights on the efforts made in the space of establishing wellbeing frameworks. More information can be found on Germany's Federal Government website (The Federal Government, n.d.-b), the Government of Iceland website (Government of Iceland, 2019), the Government of Ireland website under "Understanding life in Ireland" (Government of Ireland, 2023), the Gross National Happiness Centre website in Bhutan (GNH Centre Bhutan, n.d.-a), the website of the Constitution of Ecuador (Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador, 2008), the CIW website (*Canadian Index of Wellbeing*, n.d.) and the Living Standards Framework website (New Zealand Treasury, n.d.).

4.2.1 Germany

In fulfilment of the coalition agreement of December 2013, the German Federal Government launched the initiative 'Wellbeing in Germany – what matters to us' (The Federal Government, n.d.-b). This was designed with the aim of aligning policies more closely with the values of German citizens and was a commitment towards conducting an open dialogue to gain an understanding of the citizens' views on wellbeing issues. In April 2015, Germany's federal

government commenced national discussions aiming at identifying the main issues that citizens considered to be important for a better quality of life (The Federal Government, 2017).

Germany's wellbeing vision was available for all to access in the form of interactive online reports, aside from having been disseminated around the nation throughout its creation with the use of postcards sent to households, use of major newspapers and dialogues held across the country. Communication was conducted using infographics, interactive reports and resources, or other means served to engage stakeholders (WEAll, 2021a). This national dialogue involved a large number of social groups, clubs and associations, such as charitable groups, adult education centres, religious groups, various unions and other key representatives of their society (The Federal Government, n.d.-a). The public consultations were carried out over a period of six months, including over 200 discussions throughout the country with over 8,000 participants. At least 50 of these meetings were attended by the Chancellor, Members of Government, and Ministers.

The outcomes of these dialogues were incorporated, together with international comparisons and research projects, into a framework consisting of 12 dimensions and 46 indicators, which are updated on a regular basis. Although most of these indicators are objective in nature, they also include subjective wellbeing measures. The three main categories are "Our Life" (health, good work and equitable participation, equal educational opportunities for all, time for family and work, and a secure income), "Our Surroundings" (living in security and freedom, at home in urban and rural areas, and standing together in family and society), and finally, "Our Country" (strengthening economy and investing in future, preserving nature and protecting the environment, living freely and equal before the law, acting with global responsibility and securing peace) (The Federal Government, n.d.-b). The Government is committed to apply this framework into policy (The Federal Government, 2017).

4.2.2 Iceland

In 2019, Iceland introduced its Icelandic Wellbeing Indicators (WBI) in a framework of 39 indicators surrounding domains addressing the environment, the economy and society, linked to the SDGs (Government of Iceland, 2019). Seventeen of the indicators are related to society, seven to the environment and 15 to the economy (Ragnarsdottir, 2020), with society encompassing health, education, social capital, security and work-life balance domains, environment covering air quality and climate, land use, energy, and waste and recycling domains, and finally, economy entailing economic conditions, employment, housing and incomes domains. Carried out over a period of two years, the development of the Icelandic WBIs involved various stakeholders, representing the general public, political opposition and the public service. The outcomes of the WBIs development process identified six wellbeing *priority* areas: mental health, secure housing, better work-life balance, zero carbon emissions, innovation growth and better communication with the public (Wellbeing Economy Alliance, n.d.). These inform Iceland's Five Year Fiscal Strategic Plan (ibid.).

Iceland also committed to conducting regular surveys on the nation's wellbeing due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The Icelandic Covid-19 stimulus package, in fact, took wellbeing into consideration and linked actions outlined to address the impact of the pandemic with the newly

established wellbeing indicators that are being implemented in Iceland. The economic stimulus package was directly related to eight out of the fifteen economic WBIs (Ragnarsdottir, 2020). In terms of policy making applications, Iceland forms part of the Wellbeing Governments initiative, as part of the Wellbeing Economy Alliance (Wellbeing Economy Alliance, n.d.).

It is worth noting that most Nordic countries regularly emerge as having high wellbeing scores and low wellbeing inequality. This is arguably due to the quality of institutions, reliable and extensive welfare benefits, low corruption, and the state of democracy and institutions, high degrees of autonomy and freedom, and social trust (Martela et al., 2020).

4.2.3 Ireland

In February 2021, the Irish Government committed to developing a comprehensive Wellbeing Framework aimed at measuring Ireland's progress as a country and to better align policy making with people's experiences. There were several reports on Ireland's wellbeing (Doran et al., 2014, 2015) to build a wellbeing framework. In July 2021, the Irish Government published the First Report on Wellbeing Framework for Ireland which captured the first phase of the development of the National Framework and set out the guiding principles (Government of Ireland, 2021) with a supporting dashboard measurement tool (National Economic and Social Council, 2021a). This seeks to bring together a broad range of data that can be viewed through a wellbeing lens to create a holistic view of how Irish society is faring. The consultation process for the development of Ireland's Wellbeing Framework involved a broad range of government departments, Ireland's Central Statistics Office and the National Economic and Social Council of Ireland (National Economic and Social Council, 2021a), together with the involvement of external experts and interested parties (National Economic and Social Council, 2021b). To this end, in October 2021, a 'public conversation' on the Framework was launched to create awareness and gain feedback on this work with a view to ensuring that it is reflective of the most important issues the Irish people face. Subsequently, in November 2021, the Department of the Taoiseach hosted a stakeholder event with around 100 attendees.

The overarching vision for this Framework is to make people's lives better by taking decisions and actions that have the greatest positive and sustainable impact. This also necessitates full integration of the Framework into policy making, such as in annual budgets (McDonnell & Lennon, 2021). The First Report also explores how the Wellbeing Framework supports policy making and presents a roadmap for further progressing this work. The Department of the Taoiseach (Office of the Prime Minister) maintains a lead role in the development of the framework and the framework is jointly sponsored by the Department of the Taoiseach and the Department of Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform (National Economic and Social Council, 2021b). It is worth noting that this effort is guided by the OECD Framework for Measuring Wellbeing and Progress (National Economic and Social Council, 2021a), the 'Wellbeing and the Measurement of Broader Living Standards in Ireland' research paper issued by the Irish Department of Finance on wellbeing budgets (McDonnell & Lennon, 2021) as well as the SDGs.

4.2.4 Bhutan

Bhutan is often considered as the pioneer in happiness policy. Its measure of Gross National Happiness was first used in Bhutan as early as 1972, when King Jigme Zingye Wangchuck declared that Gross National Happiness is more important than Gross Domestic Product (Asian Development Bank, 2016; World Economic Forum, 2021). Subsequently, in 1998, Bhutan's GNH featured in a document outlining the government's vision for the next twenty years of development (WEAll, n.d.-b). Bhutan envisioned an alternative approach to development seeking to take a holistic approach giving equal importance to diverse aspects of wellbeing. The GNH Index is made up of four pillars (GNH Centre Bhutan, n.d.-b), in nine domains, melding both objective and subjecting indicators (Ura, 2015). It includes both traditional areas of socio-economic concern such as living standards, health, and education, as well as less traditional aspects like culture and psychological wellbeing. It also includes an ecological diversity and resilience domain based on the belief that the happiness of human beings is not separate from that of other life forms. Comprehensively, the domains in this index entail measurement of Psychological wellbeing, Health, Education, Time use, Cultural diversity and resilience, Good governance, Community vitality, Ecological diversity and resilience and Living standards, that encompass a holistic reflection of the general wellbeing of the Bhutanese population. Revised in 2011, the index now includes 33 indicators.

Since its inception, the concept of GNH has influenced Bhutan's economic and social policy and in this regard, the GNH Index became the measurement tool for policy making. On the basis of the GNH, Bhutan identifies four groups of people – unhappy, narrowly happy, extensively happy and deeply happy. It allows an analysis of the happiness that people already enjoy whilst also supporting the identification of policies that can increase happiness and sufficiency among the unhappy and narrowly happy people. The purpose of the GNH index is also that of supporting policy-making through facilitating review of the potential effects of proposed policies (WEAll, n.d.-b). This 'GNH Policy Lens' requires that, prior to implementing policy, its consequences are analysed on the basis of all relevant dimensions. Moreover, project screening tools are applied in assessing policy proposals in a range of project areas including agriculture, forestry, trade and manufacturing, media and information, youths as well as the above mentioned nine dimensions. The ultimate goal of government is that all policies work in tandem to maximise GNH (Asian Development Bank, 2016). It is interesting to note that Bhutan is the only carbon-negative country in the world (World Economic Forum, 2021) and that it achieved the Millennium Development Goals ahead of target.

4.2.5 Ecuador

In 2008, following approval by referendum, the concept of *Buen Vivir* (the good life) was embedded in Ecuador's constitution on the initiative of the country's President who sought "to build a new form of citizen coexistence in diversity and harmony with nature" (Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador, 2008, p. 19). The principles introduced were based on the values and world view of the native Quechua people (Durand, 2018) and were the result of a democratic process gathering the views of more than 100 Ecuadorian citizens in a constitutional assembly. The findings of this consultation with citizens highlighted the importance placed on achieving internal harmony, harmony in the community, as well as harmony with nature (De Marzo, 2011). Ecuador was in fact a pioneer in valuing nature, not merely as a resource, but as having constitutional rights in itself. Understandably therefore,

Buen Vivir advocated for a new form of sustainable development focusing on citizen wellbeing within communities and an overarching respect for nature.

The concept of *Buen Vivir* has been at the core of Ecuador's initiative to integrate wellbeing frameworks into policy making. Overall, it extends the view of wellbeing from one that solely relates to humankind to one including the wellbeing of nature, with its own intrinsic worth. In fact, while some aspects of it overlap with other wellbeing frameworks discussed, it differs mostly in its focus on environmental rights and community multiculturalism (Torrez, 2001), being founded on the notion of a balanced relationship between people, their community and nature (García-Quero & Guardiola, 2018).

In 2013, a Ministry for *Buen Vivir* (also known as the State Secretariat for Good Living) was established as part of the Office of the President. While it had no executive power of its own, it acted as a catalyst for transversal *Buen Vivir* initiatives (González, 2017). The ministry was responsible for *Buen Vivir* research and development, it carried out outreach and communication activities within the country, worked on the development of *Buen Vivir* initiatives for other ministries and disseminated *Buen Vivir* on an international scale. The rolling out of the *Buen Vivir* agenda also took centre stage through its embedding in the country's National Development Plans, which shape the national economy through four-year objectives. The National Plan for Buen Vivir 2017-2021 set out goals for national policy, adopting an inclusive approach so that no one is left out of the development process for a good life. This approach is based on three main policy areas: 'Lifelong rights for all citizens', 'An economy at the service of society', and 'A wider society for a better State', wherein 38 target levels were set based on a range of indicators.

4.2.6 Canada

The development of the Canadian Index of Wellbeing (CIW) began in 2000 focusing on key aspects of life, with the aim of measuring what really matters to Canadians. It involved extensive public consultative dialogues which took place across Canada, focusing on identifying what Canadians felt contributed most to their quality of life and wellbeing. These discussions included members of the public and different stakeholders, such as researchers, government officials, NGOs, community representatives, policy makers, high-school students, influential participants (decision-makers, heads of organizations, elected officials), and other groups located in rural areas (Hogan et al., 2014). Of particular interest are their so called 'hard-to-reach' citizens, which include those segments of society that are often not included in policy, such as those of different ethnic background, aboriginals, the young, the elderly, students, single mothers, and the homeless (Wyman, 2001). Following the dialogues, an analysis and selection of indicators and data sources were carried out through workshops. Indeed, one of the defining characteristics of the CIW is the ongoing cycle of public engagement, consultation and refinement, and the emphasis on ensuring that the Index is based on Canadian values, grounded in community experience, shaped by technical expertise, and responsive to emerging knowledge.

The CIW includes some 64 indicators surrounding eight interconnected domains: Community Vitality, Democratic Engagement, Education, Environment, Healthy Populations, Leisure and Culture, Living Standards and Time Use. It shifts the focus from the sole consideration of

income to include other critical areas of people's lives that lead to enhanced wellbeing. The indicators are also presented in a single-figure CIW composite index, which provides a single number, giving a quick snapshot of whether the overall quality of life of Canadians is improving or deteriorating (Michalos et al., 2011). It is reported at a national, provincial, and regional level. The CIW is continuously being revised and improved to reflect new data, knowledge and understanding. It has been developed further to create additional measures of wellbeing for specific groups, such as the Canadian Child and Youth Wellbeing Index (Unicef Canada, n.d.). A subjective wellbeing survey has also been produced based on the framework of the CIW to further supplement the data it measures.

4.2.7 New Zealand

In 2009, the New Zealand Treasury launched work on its Living Standards Framework (LSF), seeking to provide a framework to understand the drivers of wellbeing. The LSF involved wide consultation including targeted workshops with government, businesses, academia and community groups (Gleisner et al., 2011). The first version of the LSF was published in 2011 and introduced the distinction between societal stocks and flows. Four capital stocks: financial/physical, human, social and natural capital, were considered to be the drivers of flows in society. Flows such as income, employment, leisure, freedom, security and amenities influence future stocks and, therefore, future living standards (New Zealand Treasury, 2012). The LSF has evolved continuously to respond to feedback from stakeholders with significant effort from 2012 onwards aimed at applying the LSF to policy.

In 2017, New Zealand sought to become pioneers in embedding wellbeing and sustainable development into their budget decision-making process, through the use of social, cultural, and environmental metrics (New Zealand Government, 2021). The role of developing suitable metrics for this pursuit was entrusted to Statistics New Zealand, together with New Zealand's Treasury. In this respect, a selection process involving an extensive public consultation was launched seeking to identify wellbeing indicators that would be suitable for New Zealand's context (Durand, 2018). There are now a total of 109 wellbeing indicators, which go beyond traditional economic measures of progress to consider social and environmental measures. The indicators are sensitive to New Zealand's unique situation by incorporating cultural perspectives and indicators are accessible through a user-friendly webtool that allows users to see the high-level indicators and access data related to these. In 2021, particular emphasis was placed on culture, children's wellbeing, and the wellbeing impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic.

4.3 Synthesis

This section has briefly described seven national-level initiatives aimed at establishing (and revising) a wellbeing measurement framework with a view to systematically integrating wellbeing metrics in policy decision-making. Despite the diverse characteristics among selected countries, a number of commonalties stand out, including (i) a regularly updated, multidimensional framework; (ii) the broad similarity of dimensions and indicators; (iii) the importance of a lead entity; (iv) the key role of consultations with citizens and experts alike; and (v) the importance of legislation, collaborative practices across government.

In all the cases, data on people's economic circumstances and material living conditions was combined with indicators that consider a wider range of quality-of-life factors. Indeed, in most of the reviewed case studies, there are multiple indicators linked to a domain. This combination makes it possible for a detailed analysis of progress in each domain, as well as a more specific investigation of progress on particular aspects of it. This was apparent in the case of Germany, Bhutan, Iceland as well as Canada and New Zealand's approach.

Secondly, numerous similarities also exist in the choice of dimensions and respective indicators, although country-specific considerations are always present. Dashboards linking several wellbeing indicators to domains have been developed. These can guide decision-makers and stakeholders in observing trends and developments, and aid in reviewing the impact of policies and measures.

Thirdly, differences exist concerning the lead agencies assigned with driving the wellbeing work, with some assigning wellbeing responsibilities to previously existing ministries or entities or collaborations (Ecuador and Germany), others led by national research offices (Canada) and still others having dedicated wellbeing offices (Bhutan). Despite these differences, however, overall, there seems to be impetus and leadership to motivate, build trust, and guide. Bhutan's commitment towards creating a GNH nation, the German Chancellor and ministers' presence at citizen's dialogues and Statistics New Zealand's extensive efforts to include different representatives from central government at technical workshops are examples of the value attributed by these best-practice national cases of visible leadership towards placing wellbeing data at the heart of their mission and apply it in policy-making. This commitment was also often reflected in the nation's legislation. While wellbeing approaches may have found their roots in smaller initiatives by interested parties or groups, such as NGOs or specific ministries, having a long-term, national vision for society with a focus on wellbeing seems to bring these valuable initiatives together towards achieving their common goal while also being less vulnerable to the test of time and political tenures.

Fourthly, large-scale public consultations seem to be used to inform concepts and measures. In most of the case studies reviewed, extensive dialogues with citizens were central in determining the components of the nations' wellbeing frameworks and what matters to citizens. This has been done with varying levels of intensity, scale, and goals. In Canada, Germany, as well as in New Zealand, the development of a wellbeing framework involved working extensively with communities to understand what wellbeing meant to them, arguably giving residents a sense of ownership of the framework. These initial and ongoing discussions with the community also provided opportunities to establish how the different members of society could contribute to the achievement of wellbeing goals. Including and involving the public directly in the process and outcomes of wellbeing efforts can support the legitimacy of the framework and potentially increase public interest. To engage citizens and provide a picture of how the nation is faring on its wellbeing landscape, most countries seem to have made use of user-friendly channels to present data. Typically, online versions of dashboards or reports are made available and are complemented with interactive features, allowing users to navigate easily through large amounts of information.

Dialogues with citizens were nonetheless complemented by inputs from experts who were assigned the role of analysing and processing the outcome of the dialogues. In some nations,

such as Bhutan, New Zealand and Iceland, the emphasis was on roundtables, teams of experts, and committees involving stakeholders and representatives such as NGOs, trade union representatives, etc. These were tasked with reviewing international research and engaging in collaborations with key players in society towards the development of their wellbeing framework.

Finally, in the case studies reviewed, wellbeing efforts were often accompanied by a renewed emphasis on seeking collaborative intra-governmental practices towards addressing and attaining wellbeing outcomes. This approach replaces that of silo-based working styles and places the emphasis on a social partner approach to attain wellbeing outcomes – at times shifting cultures of practice within institutions. The Ministry of *Buen Vivir* for instance, brought forward proposals for other ministries to include *Buen Vivir* principles in their practices (González, 2017). Meanwhile, stakeholders across governmental departments were involved in the identification of wellbeing indicators and frameworks among most of the case studies reviewed. The application of wellbeing metrics in policy cycles varies among countries. In several instances, they are used at the policy formulation stage to guide the selection of policies, or at the evaluation stage to monitor effects. However, some countries also use metrics to guide agenda setting, publishing reports on a regular basis which are then referred to in parliament for instance, in the budget processes.

5. Wellbeing in Malta

The insights from the previous sections may inform policy makers in Malta wishing to embark on the quest of bringing wellbeing into greater focus in the policy agenda. Calls by diverse institutions, civil society as well as the media, more generally seem to have converged on the need to gain a better understanding of the quality of people's lives as well as to prioritise the achievement of goals beyond material wealth including the environment, education, income inequality, health and working conditions among others (Briguglio, 2015; Coleiro Preca, 2021).

Taking stock of the findings that emerge from work being done locally around wellbeing serves as an important starting point in the process of formulating a wellbeing framework. Juxtaposing this against the insights from the literature and case studies provides the basis for recommendations, presented in the final section. To this end, the following section provides a short snapshot of Malta and outlines the status of Malta's journey over the last years towards prioritising the wellbeing of its people.

5.1 Malta: A Snapshot

With a population of over half a million and a very small territory, Malta is best described as a highly developed, densely populated, small island state (Briguglio, 2022a). Malta is a member of the UN and the Commonwealth of Nations. Joining the EU in 2004 led to structural changes in the economy, including the removal of barriers to trade, resulting in a very open economy and one where the services sector employs over 75 per cent of the Maltese population (ibid.). GDP per capita compares well with the EU average and home ownership rates are among the highest in the EU. For over a decade, unemployment rates in Malta have been among the lowest in the EU (Briguglio, 2022a).

On the other hand, rapid economic development in Malta has left a toll on the environment (Moncada et al., 2018) and Malta has witnessed irreversible reduction in rural spaces, the depletion of other natural resources, increasing levels of waste produced (Environment & Resources Authority, 2018, 2020), and pollution (Malta Association of Public Health Medicine, 2020; Eurostat, 2019). Other environmental issues of concern include a rising number of vehicles on the roads, the increasing use of land for new developments, over-exploitation of ground water, increases in solid waste production and external effects (including occupational hazards) of the significant boom in construction activity (Environment & Resources Authority, 2020). Moreover, the large number of tourists and immigration has added pressure on Malta's already limited carrying capacity (Camilleri et al., 2020).

Social challenges also exist – including catering for pensions, improving the female glass ceiling, addressing precarious working conditions and overall low wages (Briguglio, 2022a). New challenges have emerged since the influx of foreign workers in Malta in the last 10 years (National Statistics Office, 2022). On the education front, Malta's average school-leaving rate fares worse than the EU average, and rates of achievement in reading, mathematics and science knowledge and skills are lower than OECD averages (OECD, 2023b).

5.2 The State of Wellbeing in Malta

Malta is one of 143 countries on which data is published in the World Happiness Report. Based on 2020-2022 average, Malta ranks in the top 30% out of 143 countries in terms of self-assessed life evaluation (Helliwell et al., 2024). Metrics contained within the same report, are used to explain this outcome: Malta ranks highly in terms of GDP per capita, social support, healthy life expectancy, generosity, and personal freedom even though it does less well in terms of perceived corruption. Despite the high life evaluation, Malta fares rather poorly on the other subjective wellbeing measures which measure emotion – namely in the frequency with which its people felt positive affect. It is also one of the countries with the highest frequency of negative affect. In this regard, Gallup's Emotions Report also reveals useful data. Maltese people feel nervous considerably more often than EU averages, and worrying rankings are reported for negative emotions (where Malta places 30th in the world). In one of the most recent reports, two out of three Maltese stated that they experience a lot of worry, whilst also reporting less enjoyment than the rest of the world and feeling stressed for a lot of the day (Briguglio, 2022b).

Other useful sources of relevant data on Malta include the Eurostat's Quality of life dashboard (Eurostat, 2021). Here, data on various aspects of Malta's quality of life (including both subjective and objective measures) are presented and compared with those in other European countries. The life satisfaction measure (drawn from the wellbeing module of the EU Survey on Income and Living Conditions) finds SWB in Malta to be in line with the EU average. On this metric, Malta performs better than the EU average in several indicators that measure objective determinants of wellbeing, like home ownership and social support, but it performs worse in areas like work-life balance and education.

Other reliable indices offer insights as to the conditions in Malta which can generate wellbeing. For instance, the Human Development Index (HDI) published annually by the United Nations, combines life expectancy (where Malta ranks very highly), schooling and GDP per capita and indicates significant improvements in Malta since 1990 (UNDP, n.d.-b). Malta's progress in terms of sustainable development, in particular in achieving the objectives of the SDGs, is also reported in the UN's and the EU's Sustainable Development Goals dashboards (e.g. Cambridge University Press, 2021; Sustainable Development Solutions Network & Institute for European Environmental Policy, 2022). On these metrics, Malta does well in areas like self-perceived health and life expectancy, lifelong learning, unemployment, university ranking, internet access, and housing conditions including overcrowding, but less so in areas like obesity, high early school-leaving rates, low levels of research and innovation, high levels of perception of corruption and corporate tax havens, people killed and accidents at work, and environmental issues like emissions from agriculture, and CO_2 emissions from imports.

Since 2018, Malta has amassed detailed SWB data using a suite of indicators on various domains of life satisfaction as well as frequency of a range of emotions based on the EU SILC wellbeing module (NSO, n.d.). Data published annually by the National Statistics Office is presented as a dashboard of indicators online (*Wellbeing INDEX – Wellbeing in Malta*, n.d.). The headline insights here are that wellbeing declined over the period 2018-2021 and wellbeing inequality increased. Of all the areas of satisfaction assessed Maltese people seem to be least satisfied with their *time* use (Parliament of Malta, 2023).

5.3 Institutions in Malta involved in Wellbeing

Recent years have witnessed heightened interest in wellbeing by various institutions in Malta. One institution which was purposefully established to focus on activities that identify, nurture, and promote wellbeing is the Malta Foundation for Wellbeing of Society (MFWS). Set up in 2014 (then as the President's Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society) and chaired by Malta's then President H.E. Marie Louise Coleiro Preca, it held its first National Conference on Wellbeing in Malta in 2015. During this conference, academics, and experts from different social and economic fields, discussed the prospect of a wellbeing framework for Malta. The conference acknowledged the need for a wellbeing agenda for the nation, the importance of comparing wellbeing of different demographic groups over time, the need to assess wellbeing in Malta as part of international efforts, and to contrast the different multiple layers of wellbeing (Schembri Orland, 2015).

Numerous research projects and initiatives have since been carried out by the Foundation whose aims are not only to achieve positive social change through advocacy, community-based initiatives, creation of safe spaces and alliances, but also explicitly to develop appropriate mechanisms to measure wellbeing on a national level, seeking to guide future work and influence governmental policy (Malta Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society, n.d.). In 2020, the Malta Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society, in collaboration with the University of Malta launched the Wellbeing INDEX project, to pave the way for ongoing and robust wellbeing statistics that look beyond traditional economic measures of progress, and seed research on the wellbeing of different segments of society to guide policies. The project investigates wellbeing among the Maltese population and seeks to act as a repository of information that can guide policy makers and stakeholders in measuring and addressing the island's wellbeing. Through this project, the Foundation also worked to develop alliances with other entities within civil society, and with local and international institutions in order to develop collaborative, collective outcomes (*Wellbeing INDEX – Wellbeing in Malta*, n.d.).

More broadly, Malta's Sustainable Development Vision 2050 was launched in 2019, aiming at providing a road map towards long-term sustainable development in the country, whilst integrating the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development into policies across all levels of government. Based on three main principles: Enhancing Economic Growth; Safeguarding our Environment and Social Cohesion and Wellbeing, it advocates a whole-of-government approach, creating a network involving representatives from all Government ministries, and a coordinating mechanism for sustainable development policy in Malta (ibid.). The vision was developed following a public consultation, discussions with NGOs, civil society representatives, community organisation, constituted bodies, the private sector, academia, representatives from ministries, departments and other Government organisations and bodies, as well as consultations with the Malta-EU Steering and Action Committee (MEUSAC), seeking to reflect the views of the citizens and the nation (Ministry within the Office of the Prime Minister, 2019). Moreover, the Implementation Directorate within the Office of the Prime Minister ensures that each budget measure presented to Parliament is aligned with the aims, targets, and indicators of the UN SDGs (Government of Malta, 2023).

Various other ministries have portfolios that are intimately linked with wellbeing. Notably, the Ministry for Health and Active Ageing is responsible for the formulation and implementation of

health policies and strategies – it oversees healthcare services, public health programs, and regulatory frameworks aimed at promoting wellbeing and ensuring the delivery of quality healthcare (Ministry for Health and Active Ageing, n.d.-a). The Superintendence of Public Health is responsible for public health initiatives, disease prevention, and health promotion, seeking to implement strategies to improve overall wellbeing (Ministry for Health and Active Ageing, n.d.-b). In the domain of mental health specifically, the government offers a range of services including a mental health helpline, various community services, hospital based psychiatry at Mater Dei, in-patient care at Mount Carmel and specialist clinics like neuropsychiatry, addiction services and eating disorders (Government of Malta, 2021a). The mental health strategy 2020-2030 sets out the roadmap to achieve and preserve mental wellbeing and to reorient the provision of mental health care towards a community-based service, among other goals (Ministry for Health, 2019). It regards mental health as a crucial component of overall wellbeing and contains policies related to mental health focusing on raising awareness, reducing stigma, improving access to mental health services, and providing support for individuals facing mental health challenges (ibid.). The Office of the Commissioner for Mental Health promotes and safeguards the rights of persons suffering from a mental disorder and their carers (Government of Malta, 2021b). It was established by the Mental Health Act (Mental Health Act, 2014).

In the social domain, the Ministry for Social Policy and Children's Rights issued a strategy titled "A Social Vision for Malta 2035", which acknowledges that "for a truly thriving vision, the people's wellbeing must be at the centre of its development" (Ministry for Social Policy and Children's Rights, 2022, p. 7). The Foundation for Social Welfare Services (FSWS) provides support and services to vulnerable individuals and families. It also plays a role in social welfare policies, addressing issues such as poverty, unemployment, and support for vulnerable individuals and families, aimed to enhance social inclusion and overall wellbeing. It is responsible for Aġenzija Sedqa, Aġenzija Appoġġ and Support line 179 (Office of the Commissioner for Mental Health, n.d.). The Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability advocate for inclusivity and equal opportunities (Commission for the Rights of Person with Disability, n.d.). The National Commission for the Promotion of Equality works towards ensuring equal opportunities and rights for all individuals, contributing to social wellbeing and inclusion (National Commission for the Promotion of Equality, 2023).

The Occupational Health and Safety Authority promotes health and safety in the workplace, with a view to contributing to the wellbeing of workers (Occupational Health & Safety Authority, n.d.). Initiatives catering to the wellbeing of senior citizens often include social activities, health services, and support networks to enhance the quality of life for the elderly population. Education policies in Malta often incorporate elements related to wellbeing, including student welfare, mental health support in schools, and initiatives to create a positive and inclusive learning environment. Schools and educational institutions have focused on bullying prevention (Cefai & Galea, 2020). Signs of adoption of the wellbeing agenda in Malta can also be seen in the efforts of Malta's Environment and Resources Authority (ERA) which published the Draft National Strategy for the Environment for 2050 in 2020 (Environment & Resources Authority, 2020). This Strategy argues for a strong political commitment for overall wellbeing having been developed following a ranking exercise carried out with citizens and experts, which "revealed a strong preference…among both citizens and experts…for measuring progress 'beyond GDP'" (Environment & Resources Authority, 2020, p. 3).

Within academia, various Faculties, Centres and Institutes at the University of Malta conduct teaching and research on wellbeing. The Faculty for Social Wellbeing (FSWB), set up in 2012, holds a remit that is squarely in this field. The faculty is committed to "promoting social wellbeing across society through knowledge and action, together with […] stakeholders and service users" (Azzopardi, 2020, p. 3). It organises several conferences and conducts studies on different aspects of wellbeing particularly related to social factors such as mental health and loneliness (Azzopardi et al., 2021). The University's efforts in this area are also complemented by the Centre for Resilience and Socio-Emotional Health which focuses on research addressing the wellbeing of Maltese children. The Faculty of Health Science's Department of Mental Health was set up in 2015. Research on wellbeing is also carried out within the Faculty for Economics, Management and Accountancy and the Faculty of Arts, among others. Much of the recent research on wellbeing in Malta is available at the University of Malta's open access repository. Complementing research, Malta's National Statistics Office (NSO) is responsible for the collection, compilation, analysis, and publication of a wide range of statistical information and related matters – including social statistics and wellbeing data.

In the non-governmental space, several other entities and NGOs have been active in wellbeing matters over recent years. The Justice and Peace Commission of the Archdiocese of Malta launched the initiative 'Beyond GDP' (Justice and Peace Commission, 2020) to look at the economy from a holistic perspective. Caritas Malta (Caritas Malta, n.d.) provides various services, including support for vulnerable individuals and families, counselling, and community projects (See, for instance, Piscopo et al., 2020). St Jeanne Antide Foundation supports vulnerable families in distress facing complex life-challenges (St Jeanne Antide Foundation, n.d.). YMCA Malta operates primarily in the fields of homelessness, youth work and wellbeing while seeking to promote the vision to build a more just society (YMCA, n.d.). There is a growing number of NGOs operating in mental health domain (Taylor-East, 2019). The Richmond Foundation is a leading non-governmental, non-profit making organisation specialising in the provision of community services for persons with mental health difficulties, the promotion of mental health and the prevention of mental illness (Richmond Foundation, n.d.). The Mental Health Association Malta promotes mental health awareness, providing support to individuals with mental health challenges, and advocating for improved mental health services in Malta. The Alliance for Mental Health (A4MH) is a group of organisations that represent professionals, patients and carers, and platforms such as the Maltese Association of Psychiatry. Kellimni.com is an online platform for emotional support from a professional team (Kellimni.com, n.d.). Many others operate in specific domains of mental health. Some private organizations in Malta also implement workplace wellbeing programs to support the health and wellbeing of employees such as wellness workshops, and stress management initiatives.

5.4 Research on Wellbeing in Malta

Research about wellbeing in Malta is fast gaining ground. Similar to research in other countries, economic research in Malta about the determinants of subjective wellbeing has found that wellbeing is positively linked to income (Abela et al., 2020; Debono, 2020) and employment (Vella, 2017), education (Briguglio et al., 2020; Debono, 2020; Vella, 2017), health (Briguglio et al., 2020; Debono, 2020; Vella, 2017), quality of housing (Debono, 2020; Vella, 2017), being in a supportive relationship or living with a partner (Abela et al., 2020;

Debono, 2020), participation in sporting and religious events (Briguglio et al., 2020; Debono, 2020), trust in government (Debono, 2020) and generalised trust (Vella, 2017), involvement in environmental activities (Briguglio et al., 2020), as well as the level of cultural engagement (Briguglio et al., 2020). Interestingly, data in Malta also finds a negative relationship between wellbeing and political interest and a relatively stronger wellbeing among people living in Gozo (Briguglio et al., 2020). A study undertaken during the pandemic also shed light on the difficulties faced by the elderly (Briguglio et al., 2021). In 2020, Debono shed light on wellbeing determinants in the EU and found similar determinants among European countries, including Malta (Debono, 2020).

Published work addresses a broad range of facets of wellbeing, such as factors surrounding children (e.g. Cefai & Galea, 2020) and components of the educational system (e.g. Borg et al., 2015; Mercer, 2020); religion, human, social, cultural capital and neighbourhoods (Satariano, 2019, 2020), as well as family wellbeing (e.g. Abela et al., 2020). Through their work with disadvantaged and socially marginalised groups in Malta, Satariano and Curtis (2018) reported that psychosocial health and wellbeing within a Maltese context are influenced by "the powerful dynamics of social norms involving roles of extended family, traditional attitudes towards marriage as an institution, family honour, gender roles and religious beliefs and practices" (p. 45). Various other studies carried out at the University of Malta have highlighted issues surrounding wellbeing and its determinants in the local context, as well as mental health and loneliness in Malta (e.g. Clark et al., 2019), among others.

While the above studies mainly focus on subjective wellbeing, the report by the Justice and Peace Commission, mentioned earlier, synthesises objective indicators (Justice and Peace Commission, 2020). The report notes a widening disparity in Malta between individuals with increasing income and those at risk of poverty, an increase in the rates of household overcrowding and housing cost overburden, higher than the EU average school-leaving and lower than OECD rates of achievement in reading, mathematics and science knowledge and skills to meet real-life. While unemployment is not a problem in Malta, the Maltese labour force works longer hours, with possible implications on work-life balance issues and mental health issues. Increase in rates of obesity, cardiovascular disease, environmental matters with a rising number of vehicles on the roads, an increasing use of land for new developments, stress levels for water exploitation, increases in solid waste production and a significant boom in construction activity all trend towards negative pressures on wellbeing.

In wellbeing work conducted among children, Cefai and Galea (2016, 2020) report that family, school, friends, and the community are strong correlates of children's subjective wellbeing in Malta. They report generally high levels of wellbeing among most participants including foreign children in Malta (Cefai et al., 2019). Cefai and Galea (2020) however, point out that a number of Maltese children are dissatisfied with their lives, their living conditions at home, in their locality and at school, highlighting issues such as the relative lack of freedom and lack of participation in family decisions, the deficiency of public spaces to play and lack of safety in the neighbourhood, not having enough friends, bullying, low level of physical exercise, and concerns about the future, among others, and called for these to be addressed through policy. Research carried out by the Centre for Resilience and Socio-Emotional Health at the University of Malta also investigated the wellbeing of children amidst the pandemic, in particular their resilience (Cefai et al., 2021)

Gaps identified in local research include the issue of homelessness and research on specific sub-groups of the population such as prisoners and young offenders, children, and the elderly (particularly those living in elderly homes). Research in these domains and others can strengthen inclusive approaches that cater for specific groups of society and bring further insights for wellbeing policy. It is also worth noting that local studies of determinants of wellbeing have so far mainly relied on cross-sectional data and the use of longitudinal and panel data could yield stronger causal insights.

A final point to note Is that the Wellbeing INDEX Project founded Malta's first Wellbeing Research Network, with the aim of bringing researchers together and increasing visibility on the ongoing research in Malta in relation to wellbeing, across various disciplines (*Wellbeing INDEX – Wellbeing in Malta*, n.d.). Interactive data dashboards created in collaboration with Malta's National Statistics Office and publicly available on the website, should be instrumental to seeding more research in this area.

5.5 Synthesis

Rapid economic development has been registered in Malta in recent years, but several social and environmental challenges have intensified, and negative emotions are high in comparison with other countries. Echoing the ongoing efforts by other countries to establish frameworks that capture people's wellbeing and accordingly guide policy change, Malta may also choose to move towards a shared vision for wellbeing. There seems to be an increased sensitivity within Government, and among civil society organisations, academia, and other institutions on the importance of advocating and supporting an understanding of the interconnectedness of many aspects of wellbeing – and mental health. Work on capturing the status of wellbeing in this direction is currently spearheaded by the Malta Foundation for Wellbeing of Society and various other institutions and organisations such as the University of Malta, who are active in the field.

Research addressing wellbeing indicators among Maltese citizens has found that wellbeing is positively linked to income, education, health, quality of housing, living with a partner, participation in sporting and religious events, trust in Government and generalised trust, involvement in environmental activities, as well as the level of cultural engagement (Briguglio et al., 2024). As to the wellbeing of children, the family, school, friends, and the community have all been reported to be strong indicators of children's subjective wellbeing in Malta (Cefai et al., 2024). Bridging data gaps identified in the local research so far can yield a more inclusive approach that caters for specific groups of society and bring further insight on how policies and measures can address the needs of these groups.

6. Synthesis and Recommendations

6.1 Synthesis

While various entities are already involved in promoting wellbeing in Malta, bringing wellbeing into the focus in policy making will entail, first and foremost, a shift in the way we measure progress. Traditional measures of societal progress, such as GDP are insufficient to inform policy makers on wellbeing. A broader range of indicators (such as those included in the SDGs) together with subjective wellbeing measures (including how people feel), and their disaggregation (which should be periodically reviewed) will offer more useful information about the status of wellbeing in Malta.

In turn, wellbeing metrics may be used at various stages of the policy cycle: from policy formulation to evaluation. They can also guide agenda setting and inform the budgetary processes. Ongoing policy-impact evaluation can provide a space for reflection on the relevance and appropriateness of strategies and programmes implemented, and bring insight on the impact, intended or unexpected, of initiatives. Moreover, the nature of wellbeing implies new approaches to policy analysis involving multidisciplinary evaluations of policies and programmes.

For wellbeing to be prioritised, there needs to be cross-sectoral contributions by different policy areas. Structural reforms may be necessary to enable better integration. Policies may need to be realigned to address wellbeing objectives and to implement wellbeing policy interventions and programmes, backed by adequate resources.

Wellbeing measures seem to be more effective when they are supported by a combination of strong leadership, sound policy processes and the building of momentum through wide buy-in from civil society, citizens, and the media. Differences exist among countries with respect to the lead agencies involved in driving the wellbeing work (Durand, 2018). However, it is well proven that wellbeing policies are in the best interests of Government to pursue (Frijters et al., 2020; Layard & De Neve, 2023).

Whichever route is undertaken towards this aim, the involvement of citizens appears to resonate among most of the case studies reviewed. One formula is the national roundtable approach, bringing together a combination of social actors, representing academia, political representatives, civil society, trade unions and the business community. Others are engaged directly in nation-wide dialogues and focus groups including representatives of minority or vulnerable groups. This is also important for stakeholder buy-in towards trusting and adopting the wellbeing approach. In addition, the *timely* dissemination of wellbeing initiatives and data with the public was carried out by all nations reviewed, arguably enhancing the legitimacy of the framework, and increasing public buy-in. Countries have opted for user-friendly print and interactive online dashboards and reports that allow citizens to review their nation's progress and feel part of their nation's wellbeing landscape.

While research increasingly supports wellbeing policy, gaps have been identified. These include the lack of research on cross-cultural equivalence of wellbeing metrics, on the establishment of wellbeing frameworks focusing on hard-to-reach groups, and on the inclusion

of country-specific dimensions among others. Evidence on the direct impact of wellbeing policy interventions is still at its infancy but the field is evolving at a rapid pace.

Wellbeing policies are not a "one-size-fits-all" and challenges exist (OECD, 2023a). However, tangible solutions are rapidly emerging (Trebeck, 2024). Inertia, vested interests and complacency, weak implementation, and impatience, can be overcome by building partnerships and appropriate networks of those who champion wellbeing, adopting co-creative processes to challenge the status quo, and using everyday positive language (ibid.). A risk that has been identified in workplace wellbeing (but applicable in all domains) is that of "wellbeing washing" (Jarden & Roache, 2023), whereby people are led to believe that more is being done for wellbeing than actually is.

6.2 Recommendations

This review has illustrated the shift which is occurring towards new ways of viewing progress and wellbeing not just in the scholarly literature but also, on the ground, in several countries, in policy. It documented some of the activity taking place at the global level with entities like the UN, the OECD, and the EU in bringing wellbeing initiatives to the forefront. In addition, a review of the state of play in Malta suggests a growing appetite for a wellbeing-focus – even if such initiatives have yet to be integrated. The insights in this report may help pave the way towards wellbeing being the policy end-game in Malta. Based on this brief review of the literature, case studies and international experiences, the following recommendations emerge as adopted for the local context.

i. On the measurement of (and data on) wellbeing, it is useful to identify wellbeing priorities in the Maltese context in consultation with citizens (including through local councils) and experts, with a view to addressing Malta-relevant priorities and strengthening trust in the framework. Furthermore, it is necessary to ensure that data collection structures are in place for reliable, regular measurement and monitoring and timely reporting of objective and subjective wellbeing data that is also capable of disaggregation and of longitudinal analysis. Such data and its analysis would ideally be available annually ahead of budgetary and policy-setting agendas to track wellbeing outcomes over time and define the nation's priorities based on this progress. A notable gap lies in the use of longitudinal data, in research on barriers and opportunities for furthering wellbeing policy and on the wellbeing of specific vulnerable or minority groups.

ii. To build capacity for wellbeing, government may wish to nominate a wellbeing watch-dog or champion whose role would be to guide, support and join-up public sector entities in developing and evaluating wellbeing policy. It is also important for such a body to maintain communication channels with stakeholders and the public about the nation's progress on wellbeing. Keeping at pace with research and international wellbeing practices and undertaking capacity-building activities in the public and private sectors will ensure that Malta's policy is in line with the state-of-the-art. Liaising with supranational organisations and representatives from countries with experience in the field in this continuously-rapidly-developing area will complement national and local initiatives.

iii. As for policy for wellbeing, a starting point would be to integrate the concept of wellbeing into the mission statement of various government entities and promote a coherent and politically compelling narrative. While several existing strategies make mention of wellbeing (even in their vision), these need to be integrated, into an over-arching wellbeing strategy. More ambitiously, wellbeing principles should be embedded in the country's legislation with a view to aligning programmes and initiatives with the wellbeing priorities of the nation. A wellbeing economy would see the annual government budget and EU funding programmes for Malta subject to wellbeing impact assessments. Similarly, legislation and policy (both pre- and post- implementation) could be subject to such wellbeing assessments.

iv. On outreach, entities involved in wellbeing would do well to communicate by using trends in the data, employing a range of media such as social media, websites, data visualisation, live dashboards, and traditional media channels to instigate further discussion on the matter. There is scope to facilitate communication with the Maltese speaking community, through the development of a wellbeing taxonomy in Maltese. It is also important to assess the possibility of including wellbeing in school curricula particularly to increase awareness and resilience among children.

v. As for further research, it would be useful to strengthen collaborations across data and research entities like the Malta Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society, the National Statistics Office and the University of Malta (among others) and to continue to provide the much-needed insights for government intervention, informing policy-making cycles and impact-assessments and guiding the prioritisation of programmes and initiatives.

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