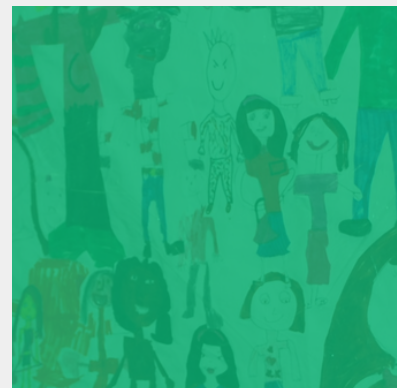
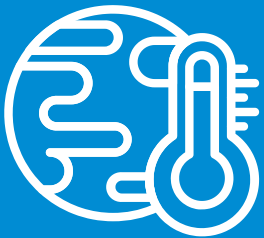




Kummissarju għat-Tfal  
Commissioner for Children

# The World According to Children

Ideas & recommendations by  
children on how to  
improve the implementation of  
children's rights  
in Malta and beyond.



The Office of the Commissioner for Children was set up in terms of the Commissioner for Children Act of 2003, to promote the welfare of children and the compliance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, as ratified by Malta, and such other international treaties, conventions or agreements relating to children as are or may be ratified or otherwise acceded to by Malta.

© Copyright 2024, Office of the Commissioner for Children

Published by the Office of the Commissioner for Children  
16/18, Tower Promenade  
St, Luċija, SLC 1019, Malta

Tel: +356 21 485180

Email: [cfc@gov.mt](mailto:cfc@gov.mt)

Websites: [www.tfal.org.mt](http://www.tfal.org.mt) and [www.żgħażaġħ.org.mt](http://www.żgħażaġħ.org.mt)

# Table of Contents

Message from the Commissioner

---

05

Introduction

---

07

**1** Space for children to form their views

---

09

**2** Voice for children to form their views

---

09

**3** Audience to listen to the views of children

---

10

**4** Influence to take the views of children on board

25



# Message from the Commissioner

During my tenure as Commissioner for Children, I have had many an opportunity to hear children speak their mind. There was never an occasion when I was not positively surprised by their vivid awareness of the most current and important issues animating the public debate. The sheer breadth of this awareness shows that children are not happy to concern themselves with only those issues that are strictly related to children and children's rights or that are meaningful only in the national context.



Children nowadays have a remarkably global and holistic outlook. This is thanks to the fact that they are steeped in today's fluid borderless world. Because they are able to absorb so much of the discourse of the modern world, listening to them is an excellent social and cultural barometer of our times.

When I hear children, I am also impressed and inspired by how they process and feedback the issues they are aware of. In today's highly complex and complicated world, I believe the profound and powerful simplicity of children's thinking can offer surprising insights and solutions to the most pressing problems that are afflicting us.

Yet, it is this very simplicity that so often makes us ignore or underestimate what they say. As adults, we tend to overthink things and get stuck in a loop of increasingly complex problems calling for increasingly complex solutions. By listening to children and starting to think a bit more like them, we can escape this downward spiral and find simple and sustainable solutions to global problems that we have so far been unable to solve.

## Antoinette Vassallo

Commissioner for Children



# Introduction

The reason why it is important to listen to children, as prescribed by Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, is self-evident. If we want to serve children, we must first hear them out, then serve them accordingly.

The purpose of the Office of the Commissioner for Children is “to promote and advocate for the rights and interests of children”<sup>1</sup>. To fulfil such purpose, the Office listens to children constantly and completely. It does so inter alia by means of focus groups with various ages of children in various schools across Malta and Gozo.

The latest cycle of such consultation, conducted in the first half of 2024, saw 15 focus groups held in as many schools as well as two focus groups with children attending the Rights 4U live-in courses (See Table 1)

**Table 1 Breakdown of Focus Groups with children conducted by CFC in 2024**

<u>Date</u>	<u>School</u>	<u>Class Cohort</u>
16th February	Thai Lakin, Attard	Year 4s
23rd February	St Patrick’s, Sliema	Year 9s
8th March	Birzebbugia Primary	Year 6s
12th March	Floriana Primary	Year 5s
15th March	St Julian’s Primary	Year 4s
9th April	Lija/Balzan/Iklin Primary	Year 4s
3rd May	St Lucija Secondary	Year 9s & Council Members
3rd May	St Francis, Msida	Year 6s
7th May	Immaculate Conception, Tarxien	Year 9s
8th May	Marsascala Primary (St Anne)	Year 5s
10th May	Dingli Primary	Year 5s
13th May	St Michael School, St Venera	Year 9s
16th May	St Augustine Primary, Marsa	Year 6s

<u>Date</u>	<u>School</u>	<u>Class Cohort</u>
24th May	St Aloysius Primary, Balzan	Year 4s
24th July	Rights4U live-in	13-15 year olds
28th August	Rights4U live-in	13-15 year olds

The present report consolidates these views and presents them according to the Lundy model of participation, which calls on those who want to hear children out effectively to give them the space to form their views, the voice to express their views, an audience to listen to their views, and an influence to take their views on board.

# 1 Space for children to form their views

For children to form their views, it is necessary that they know their rights. In this respect, the focus groups were not conducted in a vacuum but were backed by years of children's rights education provided to children by the Office of the Commissioner for Children by means of resources that are distributed every year to all children of all ages.

Notwithstanding children's prior knowledge of children's rights, each focus group kicked off with a brief but holistic overview of children's rights by the Manager of the Office.

The space to form their views was also created by the fact that the children were provided with a safe space to express themselves and they were given repeated assurances of absolute confidentiality by the Office. This ensured that children were able to freely engage with their rights and filter their personal experiences through them in order to form their views autonomously.

# 2 Voice for children to form their views

Within this space, the children were given the lead and the liberty to suggest how the implementation of children's rights in Malta can be improved. Hence the voices of children were not channelled through a pre-set agenda of points to discuss, which meant that children could share what was foremost in their minds and hearts. The two Rights 4U focus groups were a bit of an exception, since internet safety was presented as an overarching topic for discussion. However, the all-encompassing nature of the web in the lives of children meant that the voices of children were not restrained by the thematic focus of the group.

The role of the Commissioner was simply to make sure that every child felt heard and that their ideas and experiences are integrated into her work.

The choice of schools where to conduct the focus groups was made with a view to listen to the widest possible representation of children in terms of age and geography.

# 3 Audience to listen to the views of children

The Commissioner actively and open-mindedly listened to the views expressed by children. Since child participation differs from surveys in giving less weight to how often a given view is expressed than to the content of the view, this section of the report presents the views expressed by children in their entirety.

It presents them according to where the rights invoked by views of children are played out, namely in the World, on the Web, in their Country, in their Community, in their School and other Institutions, and in their Home.

For each of these places of children's rights experience and action, the report analyses the risks that children said they want to see less of, and the opportunities they said they want to see more of. In many cases, the children also suggested how the desired ends can be achieved.

To convey children's views in the most vivid manner possible, the style adopted for this part of the report is such that it is the children themselves who are speaking.

## WORLD

What we want to see **LESS** of in the world:

### WAR

Unlike so many our age living in war-torn countries, we are lucky not to have directly experienced armed conflict. Nevertheless, we are painfully aware through the media of how destructive war is and how easily it can spread and escalate. We thus call on all world leaders to work to immediately stop all the wars raging in the world.

What we want to see **MORE** of in the world:

### PEACE

We want lasting peace and fresh outbreaks of war to be avoided in the future. We thus call on world leaders to make and keep peace.

# WEB

What we want to see **LESS** of on the web:

## CYBER-BULLYING

We are often bullied online. The issues that we are bullied about, such as the number of likes and views we get or how bad we are at a particular game, may seem silly, but they do cause us a lot of stress. Sometimes we are bullied by the very same people who bully us at school, so that we feel stalked by them almost 24/7.

Although people may think cyber-bullying is easier to control because all you need to do is to disconnect, it is virtually impossible to do so as the internet is socially and educationally vital for us. We, thus call on the relevant national and international players and authorities to increase their efforts to address cyber-bullying.

## DIGITAL HACKING

When we are online, we are at risk of our identities being stolen, our privacy being violated and some very ugly things being posted about us seemingly by us. The increased access to AI is making us ever more fearful that ill-intentioned people will take possession of our digital selves and create and disseminate damaging images of us.

All those who have operational or regulatory responsibilities for the functioning of the web must do more to combat digital hacking.

## ONLINE TRACKING

What we do online should remain private unless we want to share it with others. Our online behaviours should not be tracked and analysed without our informed consent to create a profile of what we like so that we can be targeted by commercial parties.

## INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT AND CONTACTS IN ONLINE GAMING

Although we really enjoy playing online games, we often encounter hyper-violent or sexualised content that is totally unsuited to our age. On the other hand, when the games we play online are appropriate for our age, we often meet adults online playing the same games who do not always behave in a manner that is respectful of our age, or we get bombarded by inappropriate ads that should not pop up on a site that is meant for children.

We therefore call on the relevant authorities to limit access of children to gaming sites that are meant for adults and vice versa, and to exert control over the ads that appear in our virtual spaces.

## DECEPTIVE OR ANONYMOUS PROFILES

Unlike the real world, where you tend to know exactly who you're dealing with, in the virtual world you often do not know or you have a false impression of who is on the other side of the screen, because people don't disclose who they are or act like catfish, i.e. they provide false identities. This makes us nervous and anxious when we're online. Anonymous profiles should be illegal on any internet site or platform, and users should need to provide proof that they really are who they claim to be.

## SEXTING

The pressure put on some of us both by people we know and people we don't know to share sexual images of ourselves with them is enormous. We sometimes give in to this pressure even though we wouldn't feel comfortable doing so, especially due to the risks of what we share becoming public.

## TIME SPENT ONLINE

We admit that the internet can be addictive and that we spend too much time online. All those involved in running and regulating the web must work harder to address excessive use of the internet among children.

What we want to see **MORE** of on the web:

## ONLINE/OFFLINE BALANCE

Even those of us who do not use the internet excessively find it hard to establish and maintain a healthy balance between our online and offline activities. More needs to be done to educate children from an early age on how to create this balance.

## EDUCATION ABOUT ONLINE RISKS

The internet is an extremely powerful tool. Like any other very powerful tool, we need to be taught how to use it well and to be made aware of the risks we may face online.

## PARENTAL CONTROLS

We encourage parents to limit what we can and cannot do online. They can search our history and ask us what we've been up to on the web. There should be better systems in place for them to be able to monitor what we do online but they also need to be more familiar with gen alpha slang (words used by those born between 2010 and 2024) so that they can pick up offensive remarks that we may have made or received online.

Since prevention is better than cure, parents should make better use of parental locks, controls or filters to block our access to sites with inappropriate content. They should also consider not allowing us to own and use a smartphone before we reach a certain age, say when we start secondary school.

## AGE LIMITS AND VERIFICATION

Many of us lie about how old we are in order to access certain sites. Although this is wrong, it is incredible that we're able to get away with it so easily. If it weren't so easy to lie about our age online, many of us would not do it. Sometimes we don't even have to lie, since some apps don't have any age limits, even though they should.

## CHILDREN-ONLY SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

The best way to stop adults from infiltrating our digital lives is to make sure they are not on the social media platform in the first place by creating a platform that is exclusively for children. This won't make it 100% safe, since children themselves can be hurtful, but it will make our online experiences much safer.

## HELPLINES & HOTLINES

For all the things that are so readily available online at the click of a button, psychological help, which is the most vital thing in difficult moments, can be hard to come by. We call on national authorities to make support tools like Kellimini.com more accessible by installing the relevant app on all school tablets.

Also, it should be a lot easier to report bad things that happen online to the competent authorities.

# COUNTRY

What we want to see **LESS** of in our country:

## WASTER OF ENERGY & WATER

We understand that energy and water are two vital resources for our well-being but they are not infinite and inexhaustible. Therefore, we call on national government to make stronger efforts to save energy and conserve water by, among other things, using artificial lighting more sparingly.

## POLLUTION

We are deeply concerned with the amount of pollution there is all around us. We would like to urge national authorities to strengthen efforts to ensure that we live in a clean environment free from pollution.

## MARINE POLLUTION

Since we live in a maritime country, we are very sensitive to and upset by the pollution of our beautiful sea. We thus call on national government to increase its efforts to promote cleaner beaches and seas, particularly to rid our waters of plastic thus protecting marine life.

## AIR POLLUTION

We are aware of the important role trees play. We thus call on the national government to stop deforestation. We also want to see stronger efforts to improve air quality by reducing air pollution from factories and through a decrease of combustion engine cars by inter alia promoting car-pooling and improving public transport and increasing the proportion of non-polluting vehicles, notably electric cars and bicycles.

## HARM TO ANIMALS

As children, we are especially fond of animals and we do not wish them to be harmed. We thus make a heartfelt appeal to the national government to step up action against people who harm animals, including capturing them and holding them in captivity. We also call on the competent authorities to take better care of animals, inter alia by setting up and managing safe places for stray cats.

## ROAD HAZARDS

Since we are regular road users, be it as passengers, pedestrians or even scooter-riders, we know all too well how busy, chaotic and, ultimately, dangerous roads have become. We thus call on authorities to improve road safety by reducing the density of vehicular traffic, better managing its flow also by means of traffic lights, addressing unsafe road infrastructure, such as potholes and reckless driving, including drink driving. There needs to be more awareness and enforcement, including speed cameras, and improving awareness and facilities for non-motorised modes of transport like walking and cycling through more and better pavements, pedestrian crossings, street lighting and bicycle and scooter lanes.

## FOOD CONSUMPTION

We are concerned about food consumption particularly food wastage and unhealthy food consumption. We thus call on national authorities to make efforts to reduce wastage of food, and to address the national problem of obesity in our country by increasing the availability of public spaces for physical exercise and access to gyms and sports facilities.

## CONSUMPTION OF HARMFUL SUBSTANCES

We see the health of our peers and significant others damaged by the consumption of alcohol, drugs, energy drinks, tobacco, vapes and weed. We make an urgent appeal to the relevant national authorities to strengthen their fight against this phenomenon by raising more awareness on the harm these substances cause when they are consumed by or near children and by more strictly enforcing existing laws limiting their sale to minors.

## CHILD ABUSE

All children have a right to live free from abuse. Abuse against a single child is a violation of the rights of all children. We therefore stress the need for national government to make it a national priority to combat and root out child abuse, including by making more online reporting tools available in Maltese.

## DISCRIMINATION

All children, irrespective of who they are, should have access to their rights. We thus call on the government to take tougher action to end racism in our country, such as through stiffer fines against those who perpetrate racist behaviour, including the use of hurtful and offensive language.

What we want to see **MORE** of in our country:

## SUSTAINABLE ENERGY

We are aware of the importance of sustainable development therefore, we advocate for more investment in solar energy as a source that is not only clean and renewable but also plentiful in our country.

## NATATION

We want Malta's waters to be clean not only in order to protect marine life but also because we love swimming. We thus urge government to promote swimming in clean waters and water safety.

## HEALTHY NUTRITION

We understand that to have a healthy diet that builds and maintains health we need to eat the right food and drink enough water. To this end, we call on the government to promote the purchase of locally grown food, especially fruit and vegetables.

## MENTAL HEALTH

We should take care of our mental health just like we do our physical health. We would thus like to impress upon the health authorities the urgent need to increase public awareness of maintaining good mental health.

## SPECIAL PLAY AND SPORT FACILITIES

Play is very important for us and we need appropriate facilities. We call on government to provide play facilities including trampolines and water parks so that we can enjoy ourselves. We would also like to see more variety in the sports that are offered to and practised by children.

## POSITIVE TREATMENT OF CHILDREN

We know that we have rights but we feel that more needs to be done to spread and deepen awareness of children's rights and to instil in all adults a disposition to listen to us and to always communicate and explain to us the reasons for the decisions that are made on our behalf.

We are and feel respected also when serious efforts are made to help and make it possible for us to develop our individual talents and interests, whatever these may be and no matter how different these talents and interests are from each other or from what adults are used to.

## HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

We need to do more to nurture healthy relationships with and between children in order to combat loneliness, isolation and exclusion of children. These relationships must be based on the values of respect and tolerance, and the practice of inclusion and kindness, especially to those who are more vulnerable, such as children experiencing war, who need and deserve our support. We must do this within a context of diversity and a framework of equal rights, which does not mean that we should not celebrate and embrace our identity, including our beautiful mother tongue.

# COMMUNITY

What we want to see **LESS** of in our country:

## DIRTY, LITTERED OUTDOORS

We would like to see less litter and to live in a cleaner environment. We ask for local governments to provide more dustbins, stricter enforcement of anti-littering laws, more vigorous education campaigns also targeting children, and a reduced use of paper. It must also be ensured that the roads, pavements and squares of Maltese towns and villages are kept clean at all times.

## BUILDINGS AND CONSTRUCTION

We would like to see less construction. We call on the relevant authorities to improve urban planning so that we can have more space for play and recreation, less crowded spaces, and less high rise buildings.

## NOISE POLLUTION

We want less noise pollution including that of fireworks. We call for less road works at night so that they do not disturb us when we are trying to get our rest.

## DANGERS IN PUBLIC OUTDOOR SPACES

Outdoor spaces in the heart of our community where we can mix and play are very important to us. We thus appeal to local administrations to do everything in their power to make and keep these spaces safe through robust police presence and supervision, also with the use of CCTV cameras. More needs to be done to ensure there are no drugs, no gangs, no fighting and no vandalism in these spaces. We also call for the regular upkeep of playgrounds so that there is no faulty equipment, such as damaged or worn-out soft flooring, that can harm children. Such spaces should cater for all children and be big enough to avoid over-crowding.

What we want to see **MORE** of in our country:

### ACCESS TO NATURE AND GREEN OPEN SPACES

Since the majority of us live in urban areas, we miss regular contact with nature. We thus call on local authorities to work to facilitate our access to natural green areas in the community and to take care of the trees that live in these areas. At the same time, we realise that some localities in Malta are so heavily urbanised that there are no natural green areas for children to enjoy and get some fresh air. We thus urge local authorities to do everything in their power to make our communities greener, grassier and more relaxing by planting more trees and flowering plants and setting up picnic areas for children and their families.

### PLAY FACILITIES

We have a right to relax and play, we therefore call on local governments to work harder to set up and maintain playgrounds and outdoor areas away from the streets where we can ride our bicycles and scooters or skate and that offer fun outdoor equipment, like zip lines, laser tags, obstacle courses and trampolines, and fun activities, like adventure games.

### SOCIAL AREAS FOR YOUTHS

Once we become adolescents, we do not have adequate spaces to hang out in, to spend time with our friends and to listen to music. We thus call on local governments to set up appropriate public spaces in the community as hangouts for youths.

### SPORTS, LEISURE & CULTURE

For those of us who love sports, we ask local governments to facilitate our access to and use of football grounds and to set up gyms specifically for children.

We have a right to engage in cultural and leisure activities. We thus call on local councils to do more to promote reading, organise cultural activities, including at historic sites, and to offer premises for extra curricular activities.

### EASY TRANSPORT

We would like to be able to walk or cycle to places within our communities. However, this isn't always simple or safe. Therefore, we call on local governments to do more by way of education and traffic control to promote walking also among children as well as cycling by means of more bicycle lanes.

# SCHOOLS & OTHER INSTITUTIONS

What we want to see **LESS** of in our country:

## ABSENTEEISM

Even though it is illegal to not go to school without a good reason, there are still some children who miss many days of school and fall behind in their education even when they're not ill. Our schools, supported by the educational authorities, need to work harder to enforce the legal right of children to receive an education. We are annoyed that those of us who want to go to school, especially on critical days, like examination days, find it difficult to get to the venue due to heavy traffic. We thus call on the relevant authorities to better manage traffic on vital examination days and around exam venues.

## BULLYING AND FIGHTING

We go to school to learn and meet our friends. But this may be difficult for children who are being bullied. We make an urgent appeal to schools and the educational authorities to increase their efforts to combat bullying through more supervision especially during break time and in corridors, by teaching children to stand up for their bullied peers, by helping bullies take stock and address their bullying behaviour, and by educating children on the importance of being kind and inclusive.

Fights in schools may often be the result of unresolved conflicts or disputes between children. We believe much more needs to be done to prevent school fights by teaching children how to resolve conflicts peacefully, which can be as simple yet as hard as swallowing your pride and saying sorry for something said or done. When, however, fights do break out, we need to have more trained staff (in unison with the educators' unions) to break up these fights.

## PEER PRESSURE

We do feel and often give in to pressure to be like our peers, even when we don't like how they act. This can lead to wrong behaviours. We thus call on schools and school staff to do more to help us not to give in to peer pressure and to promote positive peer pressure.

## SMOKING AND VAPING

It is illegal and against school rules to smoke or vape. Yet some children do it. There needs to be more supervision in schools so that children will think twice about engaging in such bad habits and passing them on to their peers.

## DIRT AND DISEASE

We are repeatedly told to wash our hands regularly to avoid getting and spreading germs and disease. But often we do not find soap in school bathrooms.

## WAITING TIMES FOR HEALTH SERVICES

Waiting for long hours to be seen by a doctor is not just boring but it can be dangerous and can put us off from seeking needed medical help. We urge the responsible authorities to do more to reduce waiting times for children in healthcare settings.

What we want to see **MORE** of in our country:

## ENERGY GENERATION

We learn so much at school about how every building should be self-sufficient in catering for its energy needs. Yet, we see so many schools that do not install energy-generating equipment, like solar panels, on their spacious roofs to reduce their carbon footprint. This must change.

## PHYSICAL EDUCATION

We only have just a few hours a week dedicated to physical education which is not enough! We call on schools and the education authorities to prioritise physical education by allocating more time (possibly three times a week), budget and equipment to P.E. We would also like to see more sports opportunities offered in schools.

## SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

We would like to see schools invest more in science and technology education, including through better equipped labs where scientific facts can be learned the way they were discovered, by experimentation.

## BOOKS

How much and how well we learn also depends on the quality of the textbooks we use. We call on schools and educational authorities to ensure that all textbooks are up-to-date with the latest knowledge and teaching methods. We would also like to see the carrying of textbooks to and from school managed better so that our schools bags are not too heavy.

We believe that reading is important and that we would read more if school libraries had more interesting books on their shelves.

## MORE ROUNDED EDUCATION

Our education is meant to prepare us to face the challenges of the world outside the perimeter of our schools. We believe that girls and boys should not be segregated in some schools when in all spheres of life men and women live and work together.

We are growing and are naturally curious about sex and in the absence of an adequate sex education, we will search and experiment with our own devices putting ourselves at risk. We also need to be made more aware about the risks associated with recreational drugs through PSCD.

We are also anxious about what jobs and career opportunities we will find after we finish our schooling. We need to have more hands-on exposure to different careers in order to make informed choices about our educational and career pathways. We also need to have more career opportunities in Malta if we are to stay and settle here and make our country prosperous.

## MORE TIME OUTDOORS

We are young and energetic and get stiff and tired sitting in class all day for the whole week. We would like school outings to be more regular. Even when we're at school, we would like to spend more time outdoors doing lessons and other informal learning activities in a more natural environment.

## BETTER TIME MANAGEMENT

There are always more things to do at school than there is time to do them. Time is what it is but we can be taught how to manage it better. We believe that some schools need more break time so that we have enough time to eat, go to the bathroom and our lockers.

Our teachers can also do better in terms of planning and communication at coordinating homework so that we don't have too much of it to do in a single day and we have more time to revise for exams and we're not too stressed having to juggle homework and revision. We also appreciate the value of school assembly and prayer at school, but we would like to have a bit more time allotted to these activities.

## CHILDREN FIRST

We have a right to participation and we feel we should be more involved in school decisions. The views of professional educators should carry more weight when parents are clearly not understanding where our best educational interests lie.

## AWARDS

It makes us feel so happy and proud to have achieved even the smallest milestone in our educational journey. We would like schools to acknowledge our achievements a lot more through awards and award-giving ceremonies.

## ADEQUATE FACILITIES FOR CHILDREN'S NEEDS

We are all different and we have different social and educational needs. Some of us have anger management issues as a result of trauma for which there should be calming rooms and suitably trained teachers in schools. Those of us who have Autism Spectrum Disorder require sensory rooms and services within schools. We must not forget the special needs of highly gifted students, who need special schools and programmes to develop their talents, especially if their families do not have the means to help them.

## COLLABORATION BETWEEN STUDENTS

We are not simply learners but co-learners at school. This means we learn from each other as much as we learn from our teachers. This requires promoting respect, sharing and support between children.

## HELP FOR CHILDREN IN HOSPITAL

Compared to schools with all the hustle and bustle of children, hospital wards for sick children are dreary environments. These children need more support.

# HOME

What we want to see **LESS** of at home:

## HOMELESS CHILDREN

It worries us that some children do not have a place to live. Not a single child should live a single day or sleep a single night without a place they can call home. This requires a renewed and concerted effort to reduce and destigmatise poverty in our country, including by curbing the cost of living. However, we need more shelters where children who despite these efforts still end up homeless can stay until their economic situation improves.

## PARENTAL CHILD ABDUCTION

Equally incredible and unacceptable is the fact that some children who have a home are forcefully uprooted from it and taken to another country by a parent trying to take custody of the child by force rather than by right. Authorities must do everything in their might to stop this phenomenon.

## DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Some of us have witnessed and been indirect victims of violence at home, typically directed against their mother. Stronger action is needed to prevent and heal the scars left by such ugly experiences.

## PARENTAL DISTRACTIONS

We love spending time with our parents. However, too much of this time is lost when our parents are using their phones rather than walking and talking with us.

What we want to see **MORE** of at home:

## OUT-OF-HOME CARE

Those of us who, for one reason or another, are unable to live with our family, should be fostered by a family who can provide the enabling environment they desperately need. In some cases, such an arrangement may not be possible or desirable so that support to these children should be provided in other forms, namely residential care.

## SUPPORTING FAMILIES

Although most of us feel loved by our parents, we need and crave better relationships with them by having them spend more quality time with us, supporting and listening to us especially in times of need, and communicating with us and giving us good examples to follow, and, last but not least, take us to family parks. On our part, we should do more to help out at home, including by separating waste, and putting to practical use what we learn at school about the 3 Rs.

# 4 Influence to take the views of children on board

On the basis of the above views, the Office of the Commissioner for Children exercises its power to ‘make recommendations for action to be taken by other persons or body as may be necessary or expedient...’. Following the same thematic structure as the preceding section, this section premises the views expressed and the rights invoked by children and goes on to identify and call upon the responsible Government Ministries to take action to address the views of children within the framework of the relevant public policies and strategies.

## WORLD

Having heard children categorically reject war and make urgent appeals for peace, and considering their ‘inherent right to life’<sup>iii</sup>

The Office of the Commissioner for Children calls on:

▶▶▶ the Ministry for Foreign and European Affairs and Trade to be guided by Malta’s constitutional neutrality and by international humanitarian law in exercising all its diplomatic influence and power to help warring parties reach and respect ceasefire and peace agreements, and to protect children embroiled in wars from harm and abuse;

▶▶▶ the Ministry for National Heritage, the Arts and Local Government to ensure that children in Malta have access to child-friendly, factual, impartial and non-ideological information about the causes, situation on the ground and future prospects relating to war and peace-making efforts.

# WEB

Having heard children's appeals for a safer digital environment, and considering their rights to content that is 'aimed at the promotion of (their) social, spiritual and moral well-being and physical and mental health',<sup>iv</sup> to protection from 'arbitrary or unlawful interference with (their) privacy, family, home or correspondence,...to unlawful attacks on (their) honour and reputation',<sup>v</sup> from 'all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse'<sup>vi</sup> and from 'all other forms of exploitation'.<sup>vii</sup>

The Office of the Commissioner for Children calls on:

➤➤ the Office of the Prime Minister to do more to combat cyber-crime against children in the framework of an updated Malta Cyber-Security Strategy 2016<sup>viii</sup> and Malta Digitali 2022-2027.<sup>ix</sup>

➤➤ the Ministry for the Economy, Enterprise and Strategic Projects to:

- address the risks associated with AI in the framework of the Strategy and Vision for Artificial Intelligence in Malta 2030;<sup>x</sup>
- ensure the full implementation of the Digital Services Act and a stronger protection of children online;
- focus on the development of digital skills in children and parents in the framework of the National eSkills Strategy 2022-2025;<sup>xi</sup>
- the Ministry for Education, Sport, Youth, Research & Innovation to focus on the development of digital skills in children and parents in the framework of the Digital Education Strategy 2024-2030.<sup>xii</sup>

➤➤ the Ministry for Social Policy and Children's Rights to give a more solid and permanent financial basis to the BeSmartOnline! Project.

# COUNTRY

Having heard children express their aspiration to live, play and grow in a country that offers a clean, safe and health-promoting physical and social environment, and considering their fundamental rights 'to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health',<sup>xiii</sup> to be protected 'from the illicit use of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances'<sup>xiv</sup> and 'from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse',<sup>xv</sup> and to 'rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities';<sup>xvi</sup>

The Office of the Commissioner for Children calls on:

➤➤➤ the Ministry for the Environment, Energy and the Regeneration of the Grand Harbour to pursue environmental protection much more vigorously in the framework of Malta's Sustainable Development Strategy for 2050<sup>xviii</sup> inter alia by launching and kick starting the implementation of Malta's National Strategy for the Environment 2050;<sup>xviii</sup>

➤➤➤ the Ministry for Transport, Infrastructure and Public Works to prioritise road safety by reviewing and renewing Malta's Road Safety Strategy;

➤➤➤ the Ministry for Social Policy and Children's Rights to:

- double down in its fight against drugs in the context of the National Drugs Policy 2023-2033;<sup>xix</sup> renew its efforts to limit alcohol consumption among children by updating the National Alcohol Policy 2018-2023;<sup>xx</sup>
- formulate a strategy to address use of other licit harmful substances among children such as tobacco, vapes and energy drinks; and strengthen enforcement of existing laws relating to weed so that it remains inaccessible to children;
- step up efforts to combat child sexual abuse by means of an ad hoc and holistic national plan;
- increase knowledge, appreciation and respect for children's rights in the context of the Children's Policy Framework 2024-2030<sup>xxi</sup>

➤➤➤ the Parliamentary Secretariat for Reforms and Equality within the Office of the Prime Minister to do more to combat racism in Malta by enhancing the implementation, monitoring, evaluation and reformulation of the Anti-Racism Strategy<sup>xxii</sup>

➤➤➤ the Office of the Prime Minister to set up a division and a corresponding agency to coordinate efforts to enhance the provision in Malta of a wide array of non-sporting and non-artistic forms of leisure.

➤➤➤ the Ministry for Health and Active Ageing to step up efforts to increase public awareness of risks and management relating to mental health within the framework of A Mental Health Strategy for Malta 2020-2030,<sup>xxiii</sup> and to combat the prevalence of obesity in children by updating the National Healthy Weight for Life Strategy<sup>xxiv</sup>

# COMMUNITY

Having heard children express their aspiration to live, play and grow in a community that provides a clean, safe and health-promoting physical and social environment, and considering their fundamental rights ‘to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health’<sup>xxv</sup>, to be protected ‘from the illicit use of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances’<sup>xxvi</sup> and ‘from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse’<sup>xxvii</sup>, and to ‘rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities’<sup>xxviii</sup>

The Office of the Commissioner for Children calls on:

➤➤ the Ministry for Tourism and Public Cleanliness to intensify its efforts to make and keep Maltese towns and villages clean in the framework of the Malta Tourism Strategy 2021-2030.<sup>xxix</sup>

➤➤ the Ministry for the Environment, Energy and Regeneration of the Grand Harbour:

- to do more in the framework of the Noise Action Plan<sup>xxx</sup> to curb noise pollution, especially that deriving from construction;
- to ensure better urban planning by updating the Strategic Plan for the Environment and Development (SPED) <sup>xxxi</sup> so that urban development does not limit children’s ability to enjoy the outdoors;
- to plan and implement better protection of green areas in the framework of an updated and enforceable policy.<sup>xxxii</sup>

➤➤ the Ministry for Home Affairs, Security and Employment to strengthen law and order in the streets, squares and playgrounds of Maltese towns and villages in the framework of an updated Crime Prevention Strategy.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

➤➤ the Ministry for National Heritage, the Arts and Local Government to:

- ensure the regular upkeep of public playgrounds in accordance with SM 3500:2021 Public Playgrounds – Requirements for Public Playgrounds Safety, Accessibility, Play-Value and their Management
- create or designate age-appropriate outdoor areas for teenage children to hang out in;
- to create safe routes for children to move within the community on foot or through non-motorised means of transport such as bicycles;

➤➤ the Ministry for Education, Sport, Youth, Research & Innovation to make existing sports facilities in the community, notably football grounds, more accessible to children for leisure sports in the framework of the National Sports Strategy<sup>xxxiv</sup>

# SCHOOLS & OTHER INSTITUTIONS

Having heard children’s appeal for a safer, cleaner, more inclusive, more accessible and more educational environment in schools and other institutions, and considering their rights to ‘regular attendance at schools’,<sup>xxxv</sup> to an education that is directed to ‘the development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential’<sup>xxxvi</sup>, and ‘to facilities for the treatment of illness and rehabilitation of health’<sup>xxxvii</sup>

The Office of the Commissioner for Children calls on:

➤➤ the Ministry for Education, Sport, Youth, Research & Innovation to:

- renew its efforts to reduce school absenteeism through an updated Addressing Attendance in Schools Policy;<sup>xxxviii</sup>
- ensure better enforcement of Article 8(2) of the Education Act<sup>xxxix</sup> regarding the best educational interests of the minor;
- double its efforts to combat bullying in schools through an updated Addressing Bullying Behaviour in Schools Policy;<sup>xl</sup>
- ensure more supervision during student breaks as part of a policy to address fighting and conflict resolution in schools and to reduce children’s use of harmful substances in schools;
- strengthen PSCD in schools so that children acquire the knowledge, skills and strength of character to manage peer pressure, say no to drugs, to discover and develop their sexuality in a healthy manner, and explore career options;
- review the National Curriculum Framework to ensure more time is allocated to Science and Physical Education;
- ensure homework is coordinated between educators teaching the same children within the framework of an updated National Homework Policy;<sup>xli</sup>
- strengthen parent and student engagement in the management of school bags in accordance with the Weight and Carriage of School Bags Guidelines;<sup>xlii</sup>
- strengthen school libraries in the framework of A National Literacy Strategy for All in Malta and Gozo 2021-2030;<sup>xliii</sup>
- set up more facilities within schools to cater for children’s different needs in the framework of the third pillar of the National Education Strategy 2023-2030<sup>xliv</sup> and, A Policy on Inclusive Education in Schools;<sup>xlv</sup>
- formulate guidelines for the provision and management of time and facilities for children’s rest and recreation and for the awarding of educational achievement in schools;
- amend the National Minimum Conditions for All Schools Regulations to require schools to set up outdoor learning space and to install energy generation devices;
- ensure better enforcement of mandatory hygiene standards in schools as set by the National Minimum Conditions for All Schools Regulations.<sup>xlvi</sup>

➤➤ the Ministry for Transport, Infrastructure and Public Works to ensure better traffic management on days and at times when and towards places where important examinations are due to be held;

➤➤ the Ministry for Health and Active Ageing to:

- reduce waiting times for access to paediatric healthcare services;
- improve the physical and social environment in paediatric hospital wards.

# HOME

Having heard the appeal made by children for all children to enjoy a peaceful and enabling physical and social environment at home, and considering their rights to ‘material assistance and support programmes, particularly with regard to... housing’<sup>xlvii</sup>, to be protected from ‘illicit transfer and non-return of children abroad’<sup>xlviii</sup>, to be provided with ‘appropriate direction and guidance’ by their parents,<sup>xlix</sup> and to alternative care when necessary.<sup>l</sup>

The Office of the Commissioner for Children calls on:

➤➤ the Ministry for Social and Affordable Accommodation to increase efforts in line with the National Housing System Strategy of Malta<sup>l</sup> to ensure that all children enjoy adequate housing for their developmental needs;

➤➤ the Ministry for Social Policy and Children’s Rights to:

- strengthen its support to parents by means of an updated Positive Parenting National Strategic Policy<sup>lii</sup> to help them meet the psychosocial needs of their children in the best possible way;
- make good on the commitment made in the National Children’s Framework to ‘develop a National Alternative Care Strategy with a particular focus on deinstitutionalisation and aftercare support’;
- the Ministry for Home Affairs, Security and Employment to step up the fight against domestic violence through the National Strategy on Gender-Based and Domestic Violence 2023-2028<sup>liii</sup>

- [i] Commissioner for Children Act, Article 9(a)
- [ii] Article 16, Commissioner for Children Act
- [iii] Article 6, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
- [iv] Article 17, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
- [v] Article 16, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
- [vi] Article 34, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
- [vii] Article 36, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
- [viii] <https://mita.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Mita- Maltese-Cyber-Security-Strategy-Book.pdf>
- [ix] <https://qrfy.com/api/storage/gcs/pdf/qrfyprod/16face9f-2403-495f-b768-90678876bf8b.pdf>
- [x] [https://www.mdia.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Malta\\_The\\_Ultimate\\_AI\\_Launchpad\\_2030.pdf](https://www.mdia.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Malta_The_Ultimate_AI_Launchpad_2030.pdf)
- [xi] [https://eskills.org.mt/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/National\\_eSkills\\_Strategy\\_2022\\_2025.pdf](https://eskills.org.mt/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/National_eSkills_Strategy_2022_2025.pdf)
- [xii] <https://education.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Digital-Education-Strategy-Consultation-Documents-ENG-Version-3.pdf>
- [xiii] Article 24, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
- [xiv] Article 33, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
- [xv] Article 34, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
- [xvi] Article 31, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
- [xvii] <https://sustainabledevelopment.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/Maltas-Sustainable-Development-Strategy-for-2050.pdf>
- [xviii] <https://era.org.mt/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/National-Strategy-for-the-Environment-2050-%E2%80%93-Public-Consultation-Draft.pdf>
- [xix] <https://familja.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/National-Drugs-Policy-2023-2033.pdf>
- [xx] <https://familja.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Alcohol-Policy-EN.pdf>
- [xxi] [https://socialsecurity.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Childrens- Policy\\_Framework\\_2024-2030\\_EN.pdf](https://socialsecurity.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Childrens- Policy_Framework_2024-2030_EN.pdf)
- [xxii] <https://humanrights.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/english-policy-doc-online.pdf>
- [xxiii] [https://health.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Building\\_Resilience\\_Transforming\\_Services\\_A\\_Mental\\_Health\\_Strategy\\_for\\_Malta\\_2020-2030\\_EN.pdf](https://health.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Building_Resilience_Transforming_Services_A_Mental_Health_Strategy_for_Malta_2020-2030_EN.pdf)
- [xxiv] [https://health.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/A\\_Healthy\\_Weight\\_for\\_Life-A\\_National\\_Strategy\\_for\\_Malta\\_2012-2020\\_EN.pdf](https://health.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/A_Healthy_Weight_for_Life-A_National_Strategy_for_Malta_2012-2020_EN.pdf)
- [xxv] Article 24, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
- [xxvi] Article 33, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
- [xxvii] Article 34, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
- [xxviii] Article 31, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
- [xxix] <https://tourism.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/National-Tourism-Strategy-2021-2030.pdf>
- [xxx] <https://era.org.mt/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Noise-Action-Plan-Agglomeration-Interactive.pdf>
- [xxxii] [https://issuu.com/planningauthority/docs/sped\\_approved\\_doc\\_1](https://issuu.com/planningauthority/docs/sped_approved_doc_1)
- [xxxiii] <https://era.org.mt/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/LocalitiesConservationValue-MalteseIslands-1987.pdf>
- [xxxiv] <https://sustainabledevelopment.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Crime-Prevention-Strategy-for-the-Maltese-Islands-2017-2021-Online.pdf>
- [xxxv] <https://tfa.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/National-Sports-Strategy.pdf>
- [xxxvi] Article 28(e), UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
- [xxxvii] Article 29(a), UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
- [xxxviii] Article 24(a), UN Convention on the Rights of the Child Article
- [xxxix] <https://educationservices.gov.mt/en/resources/News/Documents/Attendance%20Policy%20Document.pdf>
- [xl] <https://legislation.mt/eli/cap/605/eng>
- [xli] <https://migrantlearnersunit.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Addressing-Bullying-Behaviour-in-Schools.pdf>
- [xlii] <https://educationservices.gov.mt/Documents/Homework%20Policy.pdf>
- [xliii] <https://siggiewiprimary.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/mee-schoolbag-guidelines-guidelines-for-parents.pdf>
- [xliv] <https://nla.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/National-Literacy-Strategy-2021-2030-Consultation-Documents.pdf>
- [xlv] <https://education.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/NATIONAL-EDUCATION-BOOKLET-DEC-2023-2030.pdf>
- [xlvi] [https://educationservices.gov.mt/en/Documents/WEB\\_InclusionDocument\\_061222.pdf](https://educationservices.gov.mt/en/Documents/WEB_InclusionDocument_061222.pdf)
- [xlvii] <https://educationservices.gov.mt/en/dqse/Documents/NMC%20SL%20605.02%20eng.pdf>
- [xlviii] Article 27(3), UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
- [xlix] Article 11, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
- [l] Article 5, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
- [li] Article 20, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
- [lii] <https://www.housing2030.org/project/from-silos-to-systemic-reform-the-national-housing-system-strategy-of-malta/#:~:text=The%20strategy%20shifts%20away%20from,and%20security%20of%20tenure%20improvements.>
- [liii] <https://familja.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/National-Parenting-Policy-EN-8.02.17.pdf>
- [liiii] <https://www.stopviolence.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/VIOLENCE-STRATEGY-ENG.pdf>



**Kummissarju għat-Tfal**  
Commissioner for Children



21 485 180



16/18, Tower Promenade, St. Luċija SLC1019



[tfal.org.mt](http://tfal.org.mt)



[cfc@gov.mt](mailto:cfc@gov.mt)