



The Lisa Maria
Foundation

SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN AND THE YOUNG

Recommendations for the refinement of legislation and policy for the increased safeguarding of children and youth in Malta and Gozo

Recommendations for:

Poverty and Social Exclusion Strategy 2025-2035 November 2024

Ministry For Social Policy and Children's Rights

The Lisa Maria Foundation
Alpine House, Naxxar Road, San Gwann, SGN 9032

Tel: +356 25762302 Email: info@lisamaria-foundation.org Web: www.lisamaria-foundation.org



The Lisa Maria Foundation

SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN AND THE YOUNG

Maintenance: Having a system of maintenance whereby it is automatically deducted from a person's salary. These would emphasise transparency, enforce accountability and would substantially reduce strain on the system because of ongoing reports and further court hearings. Possibly going forward there would be a system that flags failure to pay so that the report is automatically processed by the system. Ideally the parent receiving maintenance would receive the due amount directly from the Department of Social Security monthly and then the DSS would have a standing order where they receive the funds back directly from the payers salary/social security benefits/income. This would ensure that the receiving parent and children always receive the maintenance to cover their basic needs, and it would reduce the strain on other services due to ongoing reports. This would ensure that survivors of violence and children are not expected to survive on nothing, many times not even being able to tend to their basic needs and those of their children.

Benefit for those escaping violence: By providing an emergency benefit to women and children escaping violence, this could bridge the gap until the women settle court and maintenance, employment or access to funds. Many times, women and children would have nothing to survive on during this interim. This could be initiated by a social work report, for a fixed time frame, but would surely support women and children seeking safety to not have to choose between violence and staying hungry.

Housing and Homelessness: Housing remains a basic human right. Likewise the importance of supporting families to stay together where possible when facing issues of homelessness should be prioritised and services which are gender segregated may not allow for this. This is why it is important that there are more shelters which keep families unified when faced with homelessness. This helps to minimise the disruption to the lives of the children and families as much as possible.

Status: The status of women and children escaping violence should never be a barrier to them accessing housing, education, safety and finances for basic needs. Families, including very young children, are often facing severe poverty and limitations on accessing their basic needs due to their status in Malta. This could be a reason whereby a woman feels forced to return to an abusive relationship, in a bid

The Lisa Maria Foundation
Alpine House, Naxxar Road, San Gwann, SGN 9032

Tel: +356 25762302 Email: info@lisamaria-foundation.org Web: www.lisamaria-foundation.org



The Lisa Maria Foundation

SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN AND THE YOUNG

to provide for her children, maintain a status and survive financially, so we must have systems in place which allows these women and children to also seek safety without conditions and limitations.

Youth leaving care – These youth very often remain at risk of poverty and social exclusion. As well as having a difficult start to life and still facing numerous challenges following this start, these youth very often have limited support networks or sometimes they have networks that may abuse of their vulnerabilities. Entering early adulthood may be particularly difficult for them and we need to consider their needs separately to other youth in their age group. It would be helpful if there is a fund available for care leavers, as in the past, which gives them a cushion to starting out. Giving them subsidised housing options will also ensure that these youth are not forced to abandon education, when they have to work full time with the full financial responsibilities of a grown adult.

There should be a number of ongoing support for youth leaving care entering early adulthood, to support them to remain in education and to be less vulnerable when seeking to live independently. These can include:

- Having special tax rates
- Having subsidised housing rates
- Waiving of all educational costs
- Giving of additional tertiary educational grant to buy school needs
- Increased stipend

Mental Health difficulties in children - The strategy refers to the rise in mental health difficulties in children and this is an area which needs immediate attention. Unfortunately, services to support youth, especially within the 12-20 age group are very limited, and when the youth's mental health reaches a point that it is very difficult to manage and contain, there are no services which provide specialised residential care to work on the trauma and behaviour. This service gap is leading to



The Lisa Maria Foundation

SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN AND THE YOUNG

youth being left with unresolved issues, which manifest and grow with time, until they present as aggression, depression or very difficult behaviours in young adulthood. We have a duty of care to give these youth the specialised support they need, in a timely manner, to avoid unnecessary secondary victimisation.

Education and transportation - With regard to suggestions made in the strategy about education, there is a need for special considerations to be made for children who are currently residing in shelters for a temporary period. Currently they are being asked to relocate to the locality where the shelter is located due to transport or supervision not being able to be provided. Children would only be in a shelter for a short period of time, and asking them to change school after also moving to a shelter can be an additional stressor on the child. Additionally, after the stay at the shelter, the child might move to another locality and have to change school yet again. The system should be sensitive to the needs of these children and try to minimise harm caused as much as possible by this transition. Transportation can be sorted to avoid this unnecessary upheaval.

Hybrid Employment - More focus on creating and promoting hybrid employment opportunities can support single parent families to be present for their children whilst also being the primary breadwinner. Children are spending more and more time in the education system and away from the family unit when attending breakfast club and Klabb 3-16, and this is causing a strain on many families who have no other options or support networks. Hybrid employment opportunities can support these families to better balance their responsibilities and adapt to when a child is sick, or to create a better work/life balance. Benefits could be given to employers who encourage this balance and family friendly measure.

Vouchers for Fruit and Vegetable and Meat – For those families struggling with poverty, specific vouchers could be given to the families to ensure that they can maintain a balanced diet. It is becoming very difficult for children and families experiencing poverty to access these needs.



The Lisa Maria Foundation

SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN AND THE YOUNG

Childcare Hours - To extend childcare hours as suggested in the strategy, out of 'normal' working hours, to support families to work shifts or extended hours. Additionally child care should also be offered to those working part time, both to encourage employment and to not act as a deterrent to those who have other barriers to seeking full time employment.

Court fees for victims of violence - To waive court fees for victims who have been forced to escape their home to find safety in domestic violence and abuse cases, whether using a legal aid lawyer or not, in order for the financial barrier not to affect the person's choice to proceed with legal proceedings and find a life free of abuse.

Application time for educational clubs - Extending the application time for Breakfast Club and Klabb 3-16, so that women who find employment following the current closing application time, can still benefit from the service and engage in employment at any time of the year. This currently restricts women trying to engage in employment when the application is closed as they cannot make necessary arrangements for their children.

Safeguarding Training - The need for safeguarding training to be mandatory for all who work with children and youth. This should form part of a National Safeguarding Policy which regulates all entities to uphold a minimum safeguarding standard.

Trauma informed care - For systems and services working with families, whether in the healthcare, educational, social field, etc, to be trauma informed and to work from a position that minimises harm.

Youth in young offenders – No youth should be detained in youth offenders without a criminal record. For youth who are displaying 'challenging behaviour' this should be tackled with the creation of specialised, trauma informed, residential setting which aims to address the underlying traumas and not as a form of punishment.

The Lisa Maria Foundation
Alpine House, Naxxar Road, San Gwann, SGN 9032

Tel: +356 25762302 Email: info@lisamaria-foundation.org Web: www.lisamaria-foundation.org



The Lisa Maria Foundation

SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN AND THE YOUNG

Transversal Skills – In order to support skills development in youth, as well as the mental health of youth, transversal skills should be introduced to our education system. These skills will support children in their growth and will also help with learning empathy towards each other, possibly also helping with minimising bullying and peer on peer abuse. By reducing academic pressures and creating more time for youth to be able to work in teams and practice transversal skills during the school day, we will also allow space for discussion, reflection and growth.

The Lisa Maria Foundation
Alpine House, Naxxar Road, San Gwann, SGN 9032

Tel: +356 25762302 Email: info@lisamaria-foundation.org Web: www.lisamaria-foundation.org