



Uffiċċju tal-Kummissarju għat-Tfal

Office of the Commissioner for Children

Annual Report 2021

19th October 2022

www.tfal.org.mt

Members of Staff

- Commissioner for Children
- Head of Office
- Task Manager
- Principal
- Policy Officer
- Project Officer
- Support Officer
- Driver

Budget



Total budget for 2021 was **€ 220,000**

- Including the salaries of 4 members of staff
- International memberships (Eurochild and the European Network of Ombudspersons for Children).
- Operational Costs (including maintenance)
- Project and Initiatives
- Some income is also received as part of EU Project.

Initiatives



- The Office uses various means such as publications, media participation, focus groups, school visits and media campaigns to provide public awareness and information designed to promote an understanding of the rights of children.
- In 2021 a new website was launched. The website was revamped and made available in both English and Maltese.
- Casework carried out by the Office was related mostly to children's right to education which reflects the disruptions children continued to face due to the pandemic.

Initiatives



- General Coordination of ENYA (European Network of Young Advisors) as part of ENOC (European Network of Ombudspersons for Children). The theme was ‘The Impact of COVID-19 on Children’s Rights’.
- The Office supported 17 European countries/regions (including Malta) that worked with young people between the ages of 13 and 17 to draw up a set of recommendations regarding the impact of COVID-19.
- The Office organized an online forum which brought together 33 youth from the different participating countries.

World Children's Day (20th November)

- The Office collaborated with UNICEF to produce a Maltese version of the child-friendly poster of the Convention which was distributed to all year 6 students on the occasion of World Children's Day.
- The Office also donated a set of reading books to all Middle school libraries to promote literacy in schools.
- A children's rights themed game produced by the Office was distributed to all children in year 5.
- The Office encouraged and supported over 70 schools to organise activities to celebrate World Children's Day.

Areas of Activity



- **Right to care**
- **Rights to Health**
- **Right to Education**
- **Right to Economic Security**
- **Right to Play, Leisure and Culture**
- **Right to Protection from abuse**
- **Right to Protection from Psychotropic Drugs**
- **Right to Child-friendly Justice**
- **Right to Protection from Abduction**

Right to Care



- The Office held various meetings with a number of stakeholders so as to gain insight on the **impact of COVID-19 on children**.
- The Commissioner formed part of the **Taskforce** responsible for the implementation of the **Positive Parenting Strategy**.
- The Office formed part of the **technical committee on Parental Alienation** set up to research, raise awareness and propose legal and policy recommendations.
- The Office met with a number of stakeholders to discuss why **Unaccompanied children** arriving in Malta were not being issued Protection Orders. A number of urgent recommendations were drawn up to address the situation.



Right to Health

- The Office is represented on the **Road Safety Council** which aims to protect children from road safety hazards.
- The Office distributed a **leaflet** to all students in year 8 on how they can prevent and seek help regarding mental health issues.
- As part of its work on BeSmartOnline!, an internet safety initiative, the Office together with the project partners organized a **Digital Detox Challenge** so as to encourage children to create an online/offline balance.

Right to Education

- The Office issued a position paper on the **revised Education Act**.
- The Office welcomed the fact that the right to education had been **extended to all children** residing in Malta.
- The Office called for school closures to be subject to a thorough, transparent and holistic **risk-assessment**.
- The Office commends the efforts made by Government to **facilitate access of disadvantaged students** to remote learning.
- The Office delivered a presentation to the National Board for Compulsory Education on how to mainstream **child participation** in the education sector. The Minister for Education duly accepted the Office's recommendation to include children on the Board.
- The Office supported a number of young people to participate in the drafting of the **Physical Education Strategy**.

Right to Economic Security



- The Office was consulted on the priority areas and groups for Malta's National Action Plan with respect to a **Child Guarantee for Children** at risk of poverty or social exclusion.
- The Office emphasized the need to promote the **participation of children** in need in the formulation of the plan.
- The Office has urged Government to ratify the **International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of all Migrant workers and their Families** so as to enhance the economic security of migrant children living in Malta.

Right to Play, Leisure and Culture



- The Office delivered a presentation to students reading for a degree in physical education on the importance of a **child-rights approach to doing sports with children**.
- The Office delivered a presentation to the members of the Local Council Association on **child participation** and how to involve children in community planning.
- The Office launched a **research study on Child-friendly Towns and Villages** which was being conducted in collaboration with the Centre for Resilience and Socio-emotional Health within the University of Malta and the Environment and Resources Authority.
- The aim of the study is to underline the importance of eliciting the **views of children** in urban design.
- The Office also collaborated with the Faculty for the built Environment to organise an **exploratory walk-about** for children around the streets in Hamrun.

Right to Protection from Abuse

- The Office distributed copies of the Council of Europe publication **Kiko and the Hand** to all children in Kinder 2. The Office produced the Maltese version of the story book which aims to make children more aware of their rights with respect to their own bodies. The book also contains a guide for educators/parents.
- The Office together with its partners, FSWS, the Ministry for Education and the Cyber Crime Unit launched the sixth cycle of **BeSmartOnline!** the Office continued its work to coordinate child participation as well as to carry out awareness raising initiatives on the safe use of the internet.
- With the support of BeSmartOnline! the Office produced the Maltese version of the Council of Europe Publication '**Kiko and the Manymes**' a story book on the protection of children's privacy.
- The Office held two focus groups on behalf of Insafe and as part of the European Commission on how to make **Europe's Digital Decade fit for Children.**

Right to Protection from Psychotropic Drugs



- The Office issued a press statement regarding the law on cannabis. The Office stressed that not enough safeguards were in place to protect children from the indirect exposure to cannabis.
- The Office called for an updated National Drugs Policy in order to ensure that children are sufficiently protected in terms of awareness and law enforcement from exposure to psychotropic drugs.

Right to Child-friendly Justice and Protection from Abduction



- The Office made various recommendations regarding child-friendly justice systems particularly the need for the Juvenile Court sittings to take place outside of the main courts in Valletta.
- Amendments passed by Parliament to the **Juvenile Court Act** have addressed concerns previously raised by the Office particularly that cases involving minors of 17 years of age are now being heard before the juvenile court.
- The Office welcomes the amendment to the Criminal Code that makes the act of removing or retaining a child outside Malta in breach of a care order or court order punishable with a jail sentence. This is crucial to bring justice to cases of **parental child abduction**.



Thank You

Email: antoinette.vassallo.1@gov.mt

Website: www.tfal.org.mt



