

The Malta Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society

The Malta Wellbeing Index Conference

Parliament

22<sup>nd</sup> March 2023

Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca

## **Happiness is interlinked with Wellbeing.**

It is for this reason that the Malta Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society together with the University of Malta, chose to celebrate the International Day of Happiness, by meeting here today, to share some further insights and updates on the development of a Wellbeing Index for Malta.

It has been just over a decade ago, when the UN General Assembly invited countries to pursue, happiness and wellbeing, when developing their public policies, for all peoples without prejudice.

*The UN resolution specifically said, and I quote:*

*“Conscious that the pursuit of happiness is a fundamental human goal,*

*Recognizing also the need for a more inclusive, equitable and balanced approach to economic growth that promotes sustainable development, poverty eradication, happiness and the well-being of all peoples” end quote.*

Since then, the UN has invited all Member States, organizations of the United Nations system, and other international and regional organizations, as well as civil society organisations, and individuals, to observe the International Day of Happiness in an effective manner, through education, and public awareness-raising activities.

**It is for these reasons that the Malta Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society, in 2019 took the bold decision to pursue the development of a Wellbeing Index for Malta.**

**Today's event, aims to bring to you new insights from the wellbeing index project, which constitutes the long standing efforts of the Malta Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society, to advocate for the necessary changes in our society, by making the wellbeing of our children, families and communities a priority.**

**It has been our mission to highlight that wellbeing is tantamount to the well-deserved dignity of each, and every one of us in our society, whoever we may be.**

**It has been our commitment to help in developing a rights-based approach to national policies and action plans to ensure wellbeing for all.**

**It has been our aim ever since, to advocate to place the multi-dimensional concept of wellbeing, at the heart of Malta's vision and policies.**

**Happiness and life-satisfaction is a right to be safeguarded, and, which all of humanity should enjoy.**

**Therefore, since the setting up of the Malta Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society, as early as 2014, we have argued that we need regular and robust national wellbeing statistics to compare the wellbeing of different segments of Maltese society, over time, and with other countries, to guide and inform policy.**

**As back as 2018, the Foundation engaged with the National Statistics Office to start the collation of data, that would be important and essential, for the visibility and the monitoring of the wellbeing situation, of the people of these islands.**

**What we share with you today is the fruit of that vision and mission.**

**Through the data, and through the work of the Foundation on the ground, we have become increasingly aware, that there were marked differences in the quality of life, and the wellbeing enjoyed by all members of our society.**

**Our work reflects on the inequitable access to:**

- **physical and mental health,**
- **income and employment,**
- **family and social interaction,**
- **levels of education and skills,**
- **freedom of expression and engagement,**
- **leisure,**
- **environmental quality and open spaces, and**
- **other benchmarks of wellbeing.**

**We will hear about some factual disparities in life satisfaction and wellbeing in Malta, from our Researchers, later on.**

**At the Malta Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society, we also go beyond academic and scientific research.**

**We are believers of participation processes, and therefore, we also work on initiatives on the ground, with the hope of bringing together the collective popular wisdom of the people of these islands.**

**We also believe that in this way all strata of society will be contributing to their wellbeing, by informing our advocacy work, for a more equal and equitable society.**

**I will therefore take the opportunity today, to mention a few examples of our work on the ground, in particular about the work we do, with and for children and young people, also within the family setting, and the community at large.**

**Let me start with the Progett KomunitArja, where we heard children express the need for green, open, and safe spaces in the community through a 3-tier consultation process with the participation of over 900 children, coming from across Malta and Gozo.**

**Another project, which we called SafeSpace/GħallKenn, is the development of a mobile app to help young people manage their emotions, and to reduce urges to self-harm.**

**This App includes a mood diary, a toolbox of evidence-based techniques to reduce distress, and an automatic routing to all support services available, including emergency services for young people in Malta.**

**Again, this foreshadows the findings, which sadly are echoed in our experience on the ground with the Blossom Project, led by The Malta Trust Foundation another foundation which I chair, and which provides counselling services in Schools.**

**We are overwhelmed with the diverse array of presenting issues. We are concerned, by children as young as 9 years who are already struggling with serious mental health challenges.**

**The Wellbeing Index Project is at this moment concluding the collection of data on children aged 7-8, and 9-16, which we will present later this year.**

**A notable project that is worth mentioning is the Children's Manifesto, which brought together years of child participation processes. This is the result of a strong and reliable study of children's aspirations in Malta. In fact, 1 in 5 children living on these islands, participated, and contributed to these processes.**

**The Children's Manifesto, includes 99 tangible proposals which have been enforced by academic evidence in a collaborative project led by the Children's Rights Observatory Malta, which is a relatively newly founded entity between the Malta Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society and the Faculty for Social Wellbeing of the University of Malta.**

**We are believers of collaboration, and therefore, we have also set up a number of collaborative networks over the years, to lend a strong voice to diverse groups, and target their challenging circumstances.**

**We have set up:**

- **The Rainbow Families Network (RFN) in collaboration with Malta Gay Rights Movement, aiming at bringing together LGBTIQ+ families, and their children, to create the**

**much-needed support and awareness for these families and in particular their children.**

- **emPOWER is a network for all organisations on the islands, that work with and for gender equality.**
- **Spark15, is a youth refugee-led NGO, that targets specific challenges that young refugees face in our society.**
- **A Migrant Led NGO Platform, aiming at offering a unique space whereby migrant-led NGOs could come together in a safe space to strengthen their voices.**
- **MaltaCan is a network that brings together national organisations that work with and for Children, aiming at highlighting the importance of safeguarding children's rights and the necessary investment in children for a better today and a resilient society tomorrow.**

**We have targeted some of the most vulnerable communities, whose wellbeing demands particular focus.**

**This is where the importance of disaggregated data comes in.**

**Overall, the Malta Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society, aims to work towards a society where all people may enjoy quality of life.**

**Today, thanks to the Malta Wellbeing Index Project, a collaboration between the Foundation, together with the University of Malta, we have the data at hand to assess whether the diverse people of these islands, are effectively enjoying quality of life and wellbeing.**

**It is our aim to highlight the importance of securing and safeguarding equality and equity. The Malta Wellbeing Index Project aims to be an ongoing reality check, as inequalities should not grow wider.**

**We aim to reinforce our believe in securing an economy for the people, and not a people for the economy.**

**As a society we need to earnestly work for the necessary transformative action, to effectively address inequality and inequity amongst us.**

**I look forward to hearing our able Principal Investigator, Dr Marie Briguglio and her team, share the outcomes of this year's work with you.**

**Finally, I must convey my heartfelt appreciation to:**

- **Dr Marie Briguglio and her team of researchers.**
- **Our partner the University of Malta.**
- **All of our collaborators in particular the National Statistics Office and other entities.**
- **Ms Stephanie Zammit, our newly appointed Director and the team at the Malta Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society.**
- **Mr Speaker and your team at Parliament House.**
- **members of the media. and**
- **last but not least to the Members of the Board of Administrators of the Malta Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society who have been so supportive as from our first discussion and decision, to take on board, this important project.**