**OHCHR report on the rights of the child to the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, pursuant to HRC resolution 37/20**

**Questionnaire**

**Feedback of the Government of Malta**

1. **How the rights of the child are being upheld as a priority in your country in the face of the adverse impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on children’s rights and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.**

In order to safeguard children’s rights, Malta responded with an immediate closure of educational facilities, the publication of extensive guidelines, and the introduction of numerous measures to ensure the safety of its children and youth. The Maltese educational system endeavored to establish as seamless as possible a transition into digital/virtual education, within its capacities (with the use of virtual learning environments, video call applications, the launch of teleskola.mt, and grants/technological tools to learn online for children coming from vulnerable backgrounds). During the 2020/2021 scholastic year, guidelines for the re-opening of schools were issued. Moreover, since the start of the pandemic in mid-March, Malta introduced free childcare for healthcare workers in order to keep all essential medical services at full capacity at this critical time while also providing children of early years with the necessary care and attention.

Leave, as well as a Euro 800 per month benefit, were rolled out. These benefits allowed parents to stay at home with their children during the critical period. In addition, certain child support services, such as Supervised Access Visits, were temporarily suspended. Despite the suspension of other services affecting the general public, including families with children, certain exceptions were made. Such exceptions included:

1. the service of delivered food boxes to the most vulnerable households continued to be delivered; and
2. children recovered at the national main hospital - Mater Dei Hospital – the policy of temporary suspension of visiting hours did not apply when visiting children.

Furthermore, a number of health-related services which were reduced during the first COVID-19 outbreak were soon resumed, including the administration of vaccinations for children at all health centres around Malta and Gozo.

There was also an increase of helpline services for the general public who were encountering certain difficulties. Other helpline services targeted other vulnerable groups, such as persons with a disability. Moreover, Agenzija Sapport (Malta’s national disability services provider) streamed a series of workshops for parents of children with a disability to help disseminate information about coping during this crisis with limitations.

Considerable efforts have been made to guarantee the rights of children to education in the face of the public health challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Schools re-opened at the start of the new scholastic year with strict public health protocols in place to protect children and educators from the risk of transmission of the virus.  Online learning systems, such as the virtual school for state school children, have been set-up to enable children who are precluded from attending school due to vulnerability on health grounds to access their right to education.

1. **Particularly noteworthy examples of good practice towards realizing the rights of the child in your country, in relation to sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and the goals under review – including specific laws, policies and actions to advance the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.**

It is noteworthy that during these difficult times that are forcing authorities and citizens to accept a tradeoff between rights and security, progress is being registered in Malta when it comes to the incorporation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in domestic law. Such move will in turn give the rights enshrined in the Convention the force of law.