

Children are now!

Annual Report 2006



Kummissarju ghat-Tfal

Commissioner for Children

Contents

Message of the Commissioner.....	3
----------------------------------	---

Chapter 1

Report of Activities.....	5
1. Composition of Office.....	5
2. Council for Children.....	5
3. Education and Public Awareness.....	5
4. Research and Policy.....	5
5. Schools & Educational Issues.....	12
6. Children's Rights Education: Rights, Respect and Responsibilities.....	12
7. Giving a Voice to Children and Young People.....	13
8. International Relations.....	15
9. Other activities.....	16

Chapter 2

A General Description of the Circumstances of Children in Malta.....	19
Part A: Children's Right to Play: A Study of Maltese Children's cultural and recreational activities.....	20
Part B: Survey of playing fields and the provision of alternative leisure facilities.....	23
Part C: Young Participants' Presentations to Mayors.....	27

Chapter 3

Feedback from Ministeries, A Survey of the Major Developments that affected Children in 2006.....	29
1. Office of the Prime Minister.....	29
2. Office of the Director, Employee Relations.....	29
3. Ministry for Competitiveness and Communications.....	30
4. Ministry of Education, Youth and Employment.....	30
5. Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity.....	34
6. Ministry for Investment, Industry and Information Technology.....	35
7. Ministry for Resources and Infrastructure.....	36
8. Ministry for Rural Affairs and the Environment.....	37
9. Parliamentary Secretariat within the Ministry for Justice and Home Affairs.....	37

Chapter 4

Recommendations regarding the need for Legislation or change in rules or Policy.....	39
1. Recommendations for Amendants to the Commissioner for Children Act.....	39
2. Recommendations for Action in response to the United Nations Committee on the Convention on the Rights of the Child.....	39
3. Office of the Commissioner for Children.....	39
4. Paedophilia.....	39
5. EU Strategy on Children.....	40
6. Children in Care.....	40
7. Child Asylum-Seekers.....	40
8. Children and School Transport.....	40
9. Pro-Life Day, Feb 5 th 2006.....	40
10. Childcare Centres or Kindergartens?.....	40
11. Recommendations to Ministry for Education.....	41
12. Children and Adoption.....	41
13. Children in Court.....	41
14. Proposed Strategy on Good Quality Programming for Children.....	42
15. Children with Very Challenging Behaviour.....	42

Document A: Press Release Recommendations regarding the Full Criminal Record (Fedina Penale).....	42
---	----

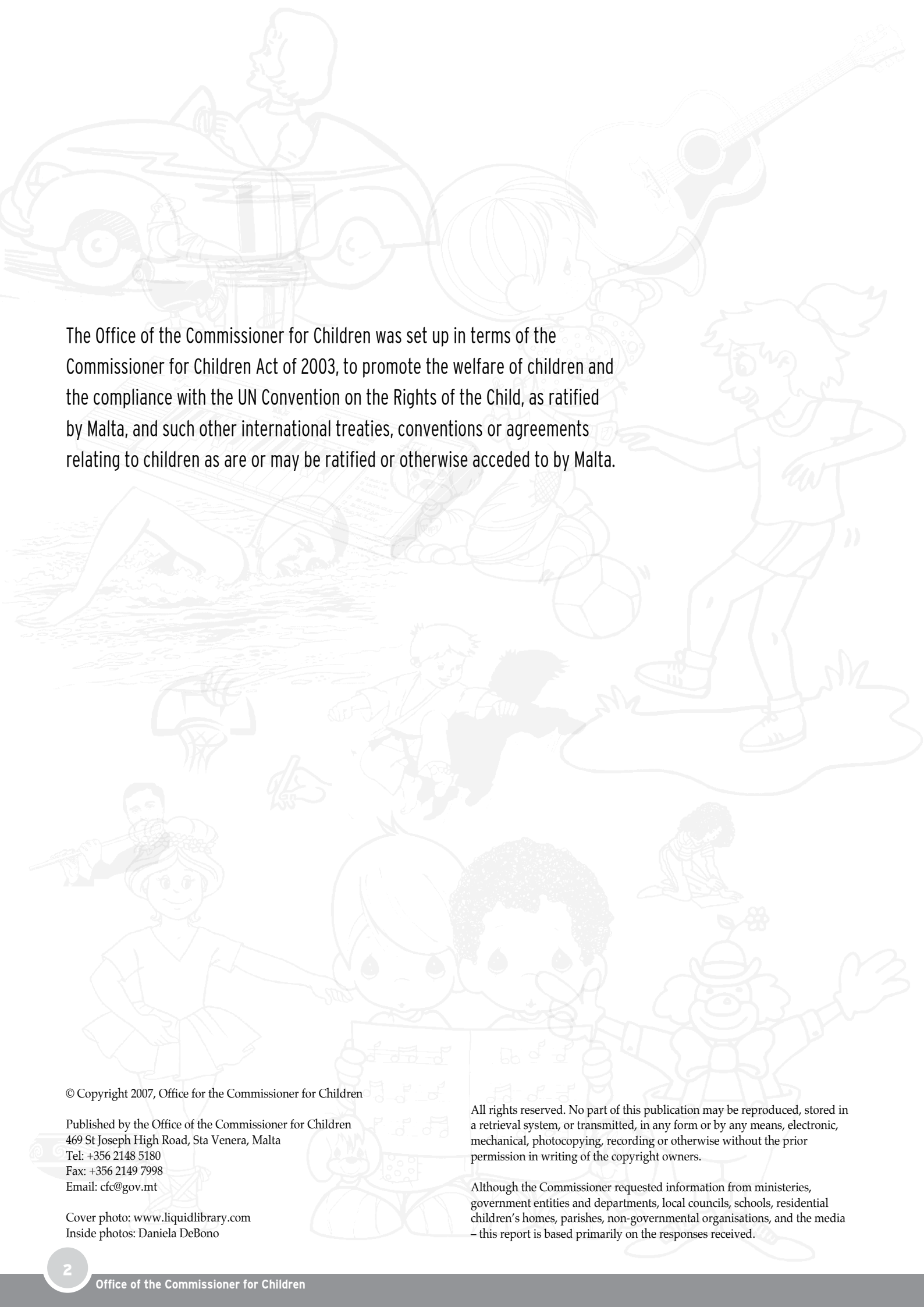
Document B: Commissioner's Proposed Amendments to the Commissioner for Children Act.....	43
--	----

Document C: Outstanding Issues from the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child Malta Report, 13 th February 2006.....	47
---	----

Document D: Proposed Strategy for Quality Children's Programming.....	51
---	----

Chapter 5

Responses made to the Commissioner in accordance with the Commissioner for Children Act.....	55
--	----



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 2007, Office for the Commissioner for Children

Published by the Office of the Commissioner for Children
469 St Joseph High Road, Sta Venera, Malta
Tel: +356 2148 5180
Fax: +356 2149 7998
Email: cfc@gov.mt

Cover photo: www.liquidlibrary.com
Inside photos: Daniela DeBono

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without the prior permission in writing of the copyright owners.

Although the Commissioner requested information from ministries, government entities and departments, local councils, schools, residential children's homes, parishes, non-governmental organisations, and the media – this report is based primarily on the responses received.

Children are now!

This is the main message that I would like to pass on this year as Commissioner for Children.



Sonia Camilleri
Commissioner for Children

Last year's report carried the phrase 'Children cannot wait'. Quite a few people in strategic positions appreciated the truth of this maxim and did their best to keep it in mind when dealing with children's issues. Others, unfortunately, are so entrenched in their relaxed 'adult' pace of doing things, that children were left to wait for services, for proper learning environments, for healthcare, for necessary legislation, for justice to be carried out... The children have suffered because of the delays, however so will society for not having addressed pressing issues with the required promptness. It is not too late. But we must *really* wake up to treating children as a priority!

'Children are the future' is a phrase that is often heard in different circles. "Children are the society of tomorrow", "Children are the Church of tomorrow", "Children are the parents and the professionals of tomorrow". Yes, Children will one day hopefully be all of these things, however their value lies in what they are *today*. Only by addressing their needs *now*, fulfilling their dreams *now*, listening to them *now*, playing with them *now*, showing them that we love them *now*, will we be doing them justice.

Children are *now*!

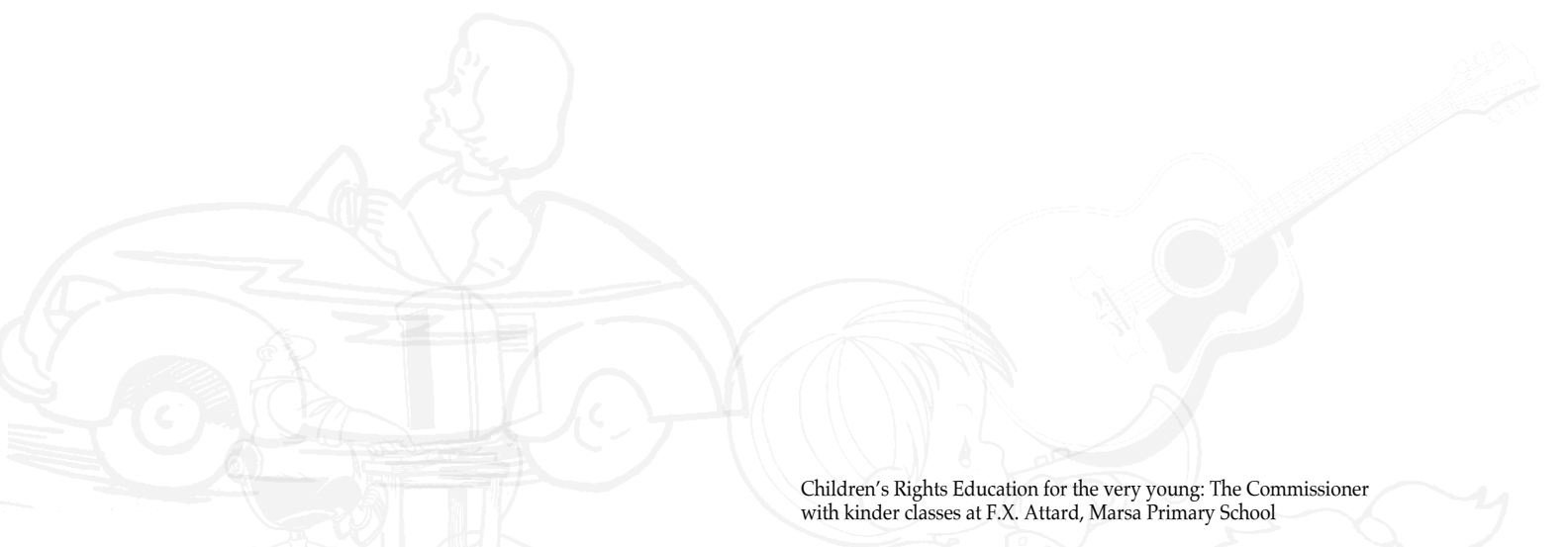
The research project on this year's chosen theme on 'The Right to Play' has revealed that we often do not even have the patience to let them play as children should, but instead bring the competitive and the examination element even into things like sport, dance and music, lest a moment be wasted in the accumulation of certificates and the assertion that 'my child is better than the next one'.

Children have a right to their childhood. Many are being made to grow up far too fast, and talk like adults on adult topics. A nine year-old should not be worrying about the family budget or about which of his separated parents he/she is going to sleep with tonight. A ten year-old should not be terrified of not passing the exams at the end of primary school, and a young child should not have bad dreams because of what they saw on the internet and television, when left unsupervised. No child should be robbed of their childhood because of abuse.

In my three years as Commissioner for Children I have met far too many children who do not act or speak or even dress like children or young people anymore.

Children are *NOW*. Parents, teachers and authorities in general must give children the space to be children and to learn to appreciate them for what they are now and not for what they may eventually turn out to be.

January 2007



Children's Rights Education for the very young: The Commissioner with kinder classes at F.X. Attard, Marsa Primary School



Report of Activities

1. Composition of Office

The Commissioner for Children Act was passed through Parliament on the 5th of December 2003, and Mrs Sonia Camilleri started her mandate on the 16th December 2003 on a part time basis.

The Office is presently composed of a:

Manager (Research & Policy)	Full-time
Office Secretary	Full-time
Legal Consultant on Children's Rights	Part-time

This year a Manager (Research and Policy) became the first member of staff specifically employed to work with the Commissioner for Children's Office.

The budget for the year 2006 was increased to Lm25, 000 (around 60,000 Euros). Whilst this was acknowledged by the Commissioner, the improvement in monetary terms was minimal as a larger percentage of salaries and logistical expenses had to be paid out of this sum.

The Office secretary is Ms Carmen Cassar. The Office was assisted on a voluntary basis by Ms Josette Mifsud Matrenza in educational issues, whilst Ms Bernardette Aquilina helped in the general running of activities.

2. Council for Children

[ref. Chap 462; Art 12]

The Council for Children is made up of:

- the Commissioner as Chairperson
- six other members appointed by different Ministers and the Parliamentary Committee
- three other members co-opted by the Council
- four children and young persons (14 – 17 year olds) elected by the participants of the children's rights course and co-opted by the Council.

The Council, on average, held a meeting every two months.

An important step taken by the Council for Children was to advise government to make it a requirement that anyone applying to work with children should produce his/her Full Criminal Record and not the short term Good Conduct Certificate that is currently requested. The move has been well received, however no concrete measures in this direction have been taken so far. Discussions with the Police are underway to apply this new measure. This was Council's first initiative in the fight against Paedophilia on the island.

3. Education and Public Awareness

Public relations have been very important. Promoting awareness of the Commissioner's Office and of children's rights is an important part of the Commissioner's Office mandate and has remained a priority.

The Commissioner is frequently present at seminars and conferences; and giving talks or facilitating discussions of children, young people & adults both in schools and in their local community organisations.

The Commissioner has kept her presence on the media (TV, Radio, Newspapers, Children's Newspapers) regular in this last year. There have also been several Press Conferences and Press Releases issued. The Media was also invited to key activities organized by the Office.

The Commissioner's website was launched in a draft, though functional, format in November 2005. Stickers have been distributed promoting the website and several complaints, reactions or even simply comments have been sent through this website. It is planned that this website will be updated. The website is www.tfal.org.mt



The Commissioner chairing a panel at the Quality Children's Programmes National Consultation Conference: Dr Gorg Mallia, Mr Stephen Zerafa, Fr Joe Borg, Dr Sandra Dingli, Ms Marian Muscat Azzopardi, Ms Sonia Camilleri (the Commissioner), Mr Adrian Hillman, Ms Isabelle Gatt, Dr Mary-Anne Lauri

4. Research and Policy

a. Children and the Media: Quality Children's Programming

• Aims and Research

The Commissioner for Children and the Malta Broadcasting Authority set up a working group in 2005 to discuss and submit proposals for the amendments of the section on the Protection of Minors within the Broadcasting Act. The working group focused on two main issues. The first was amendments to the current Act to further protect minors from various forms of exploitation and abuse. The second was that to draft and possibly also include in the proposals a set of guidelines for good quality children's programming.

After a series of meetings with professionals in the area, the working group mapped out the main difficulties encountered by the different professionals and also the main stumbling blocks that hinder both the production of good local programmes and the 'importation' of children's programmes from other countries. A Round Table Conference in November 2005 which brought together all the professionals who had been consulted individually was held to discuss further the draft guidelines and the strategy based on the research that had been carried out.

• National Conference and Consultation

In June 2006, a National Conference was held where the research reports, the Guidelines and the Proposed Strategy were presented and discussed. Several experts from different professions presented their reactions to the Guidelines and Proposed Strategy, and a discussion ensued with all the stakeholders present.

All stakeholders, including children, were invited to this National Conference, which was also open to the general public.

The formal papers and the ensuing discussion were transcribed and each reaction and amendment proposed was considered and, if relevant, included in the Final Guidelines and the Proposed Strategy.

• Guidelines for Quality Children's Programming

The Guidelines were adopted by the Broadcasting Authority. The Broadcasting Authority sent the Directive to the TV stations which informed them of the guidelines and that the stations must adhere to them. It is also hoped that these Guidelines will be proposed as an annex to the Broadcasting Act in due course.

• Proposed Strategy for Quality Children's Programming

On the 20th November 2006, the Commissioner for Children formally sent the Proposed Strategy for Quality Children's Programming to the Prime Minister and the Ministers concerned, and held a Press Conference to explain the Strategy to the Press.

• Letter from PM launching action for implementation

The Prime Minister in a letter to the Commissioner dated 5th December 2006, thanked the Commissioner for the Proposed Strategy on Quality Children's Programming.

The Prime Minister expressed his wish to see the media contribute towards the positive development of children. He stressed the importance of training for children in how to relate to the media in a critical way.

The Prime Minister instructed the Minister for Tourism and Culture, who is responsible for media policy, so that, together with the Ministers concerned, they would follow-up the reports and consult the Commissioner on the best way of reaching the aim of assuring good quality children's programming.

• Publication

The Guidelines and the Proposed Strategy for Quality Children's Programming, a collection of speeches and presentations held during the two Conferences and a transcript of the discussion which took place with the stakeholders during the National Conference will be published in January 2007. The publication is called Quality Children's Programming and is edited by the members of the Joint Working Group Dr Kevin Aquilina, Mr Mario Axiaq, Ms Daniela DeBono and Mrs Marian Muscat Azzopardi.

• Other issues

In parallel to this the working group also kept abreast of developments within the broadcasting field in particular where the protection of minors is concerned, and has also conducted several meetings with the social welfare agency and NGOs concerned with the aggressive advertising of products promoting gambling, drinking and smoking.

The Broadcasting Authority in August 2006 issued a directive prohibiting the advertising of lotteries before the 9.00pm watershed.

The Broadcasting Authority, after consultation with the Commissioner for Children and APPOGG, adopted Amendments to the Broadcasting Authority Guidelines regarding Participation in Media Programmes of Vulnerable Persons. These amendments aimed at the further protection of children stated that programmes aimed at establishing the identity of the national parents of children, including adopted ones, may not be broadcast.

Programmes dealing with the subject of adoption may only be broadcast after the 9.00pm watershed. This applies also to repeats of programmes and programme promotions of such programmes dealing with adoptions.

These amendments are effective as from the 1st January 2007.

b. Children with Very Challenging Behaviour

• Aims and research

There is currently no rehabilitation programme for children and young people with 'very' challenging behaviour¹ in Malta. Children and young people with these problems usually end up in Mount Carmel Psychiatric Hospital, often

¹ The base definition for challenging behaviour used for this project is "Behaviours of such intensity, frequency or duration that the physical safety of the person or others are placed in serious jeopardy, or behaviour which seriously limits the person's access to ordinary settings, activities and experiences".



The Prime Minister addressing the National Conference 'A Fair Deal' on children with very challenging behaviour which was convened by the Commissioner

being admitted to adult wards. If convicted of crimes they spend time in the in the young persons section (YOURS) of the Corradino Correctional Facilities. Both institutions are seen to be inappropriate for children and young people with such behaviour.

The aim of this project was to put forward a set of proposals of how children and young people with very challenging behaviour could be helped and assisted in a dignified manner. The project included research on different aspects to enable us to understand better and get a fuller picture before coming up with proposals. The areas researched were: a) history of services; b) statistics; c) current services and residential care; d) suggestions from abroad, and e) meeting the children and young people who have been in touch with the services.

• National Conference

In June 2006, a National Conference was held during which the research reports were presented together with the proposals to the Prime Minister of Malta. Two publications were launched on the day 'A Fair Deal: Children and Young People with Very Challenging Behaviour' and a child-friendly version in both Maltese and English 'See it My Way'. 15, 000 copies of the youth-friendly version are being distributed through schools to all 12 and 13 year olds in Malta and Gozo with the aim of encouraging informed and rights-based discussions amongst young people.

The course was coordinated by Ms Anna Grech from Youthscape together with Mr Sandro Balzan and Mr Manuel Fenech.



Young people at a crafts sessions during the Rights4U children's rights course



The Commissioner together with Marie Claire Vella and Kurt Mizzi at a meeting with the Marsascala Mayor to discuss the implementation of the right to play in Marsascala

- **Setting up of Working Group**

The Prime Minister announced during the National Conference that a working group would be set up under the auspices of the Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity with the mandate of evaluating the proposals presented. This working group has been set up. The Commissioner feels that top priority must be given to addressing the rehabilitation of these young people.

**c. The Implementation of Article 31:
Children's Right to Play**

- **Rights4U**

In July 2006 a children's rights course for young people was organised. The theme chosen for this year was the Right to Play, and the course was designed in such a way as to include sports, arts and drama activities besides information sessions and discussions on the UN Convention and the Right to Play. The idea was to give the participants knowledge of the right to play and a taste of how life would be if their right to play was fully respected.

- **Visits to Mayors**

Following a proposal made by the young participants at the Rights4U course, the Commissioner together with some of the young participants visited Mayors of seven Local Councils to discuss the implementation of the right to play in their locality. During these meetings the young people

presented their findings of the facilities they found in the locality and what they feel can be improved.

- **Survey to Local Councils**

A survey was conducted amongst Local Councils in Malta and Gozo on the implementation of the Right to Play in their locality. The aim of this survey was to explore the implementation of Article 31 at local and local governance level.

This questionnaire should be seen as part of the larger year-long project undertaken by the Commissioner which also looked into the cultural and artistic aspects of Article 31. The information being sought was from Local Councils however it was felt important to seek information both on public and private facilities including free play areas, availability of alternative leisure facilities including art, drama and sports.

The same questionnaire was sent to all the Local Councils. The questions asked can be generally divided into three:

- The first few questions are of an introductory nature and seek general information about the existence of playing fields, the number of playing fields and the total area this covers, and the number of children in their locality.
- Specific information about the playing fields in their locality including questions about the apparatus in place, health and safety, maintenance and opening hours.
- The last section seeks information on alternative leisure and recreational facilities available in their locality. The aim of this section was to get an idea of the availability of alternative leisure facilities and thus the questionnaire asked about the availability of 20 different kinds of alternative leisure. No distinction was made between public and private leisure facilities

The results can be found in Chapter 2 of this Annual Report.



The Commissioner with the Commissioner's youth delegation and other young people at the Children's Parliament held in November 2006

- **Children's Parliament:**

- **Commissioner's Delegation**

At the Children's Parliament organised by the Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity, the five young people who represented the Office of the Commissioner for Children chose to prepare a presentation on the right to play and alternative leisure, based also on the research they had conducted during the Rights4U course. (See Chapter 2)

The five young people were James Spiteri, Kurt Mizzi, Lara Cassar, Marie Claire Vella and Lynette Camilleri, young participants of the Children's Rights Courses. The group was facilitated by Ms Anna Grech from Youthscope.

- **Children's Meeting with the Minister**

The Commissioner nominated Ms Shanna Spiteri, a young Council member, to the 'Interview the Minister' session held on the 8th November 2006 organised by the Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity.

Ms Spiteri's intervention was about the implementation of the right to play in Malta outside school hours.

- **Support of Munxar Families and their children's right to a proper playing field**

The Commissioner for Children was approached by families in Munxar who drew her attention to the fact that only half the area originally designated by MEPA as a playing field was being developed as such. The remaining area was being given to a farmer.

The Commissioner followed the case, offered to go on site and supported their claims with the Local Council as well as with the Department for Local Councils.

- **Use of Sports facilities**

The Commissioner followed up requests by the Cospicua Parish Priest so that children of the area would be allowed to make use of the Cottonera Sports Complex. Cooperation was found from the Kunsill Malti għall-iSport who designated specific days and times when children could use the Complex.

A similar claim by the MUSEUM Society which was asking for free access to local football grounds during the Sunday afternoon outings was followed up and positively resolved, again with the help of the Kunsill Malti għall-iSport.

- **Kunsill Malti għall-iSport**

A very healthy working relationship was established between the Kunsill Malti għall-iSport and the Office of the Commissioner for Children.



Children at the Don Bosco Summer School in Victoria, Gozo, during the Commissioner's visit

A variety of issues were discussed and worked upon. These ranged from investigating the possibility of imposing proof of a clean full criminal record on persons applying to work in sports facilities which children attend, to the introduction of changing rooms for younger children at the National Pool, and to the concern registered at the decreasing number of children with disabilities taking part in the SkolaSajf programme.

- **Malta Playing Fields Association**

In view of the fact that the Office of the Commissioner for Children was highlighting the Right to Play during the year 2006 a meeting was set up with the President and Secretary of the Malta Playing Fields Association (MPFA).

A variety of issues were discussed including the responsibility that is being taken by the Local Councils since the 1993 Local Councils Act establishing from then on that they will be responsible for the playing fields. The quality and maintenance of apparatus used in playing fields was also discussed at length and the MPFA offered suggestions to the upcoming questionnaire that was being prepared to be sent to the Local Councils by the Commissioner's Office.

- **Opening of MMSA children's exhibition no 'Art without Borders'**

The Commissioner for Children gave an opening speech at the 'Art without Borders' a children's art exhibition showcasing works by refugee and local children which was organised by the Malta Medical Students Association on the occasion of Human Rights Day, the 10th December 2006. The exhibition was particular in that it was not only an exhibition of works of art, but actually allowed the children to paint and draw during the opening itself.

- **Research Project on Children's Right to Play**

In May 2006, the Commissioner commissioned Dr Valerie Sollars, a Senior Lecturer in Early Childhood Education



Young people and a youth facilitator during the consultation on Issues of Concern for Children and Young People organised jointly by the Commissioner for Children's Office and the Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice

at the University of Malta to collect and analyse data on the local implementation of the right to play in schools, local councils, NGOs, and parishes. The Commissioner was motivated by concerns that the right to play might be curtailed and limited in favour of other formal education activities. Anecdotal evidence seems to suggest that this emphasis on academic success and undue pressure is brought about by an exam-oriented education system. Consequently, children and young people's participation in recreational and culturally-enriching activities is limited. On the other hand, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child explicitly states that children have a right to play and relax by doing things like sport, music and drama.

In December 2006, the publication 'Children's Right to Play: A Study of Maltese Children's perceptions on Cultural and Recreational Activities' was published. This research by Dr Valerie Sollars from the University of Malta, presents the results of a study conducted among primary and secondary school children in an attempt to establish what recreational and cultural activities they engage in during school hours as well as in their free time, during the week and on the weekends. The study also sought to find out which activities are popular with children, how they choose to spend their free time and indeed if children and young people do have free time which they can spend in recreational and cultural activities.

d. Children and the Internet

The Commissioner's Office has followed closely the developments in this field due to an increasing concern that children's safety might be jeopardised because of the spread of online illegal material (using children), extensive chatting in the net whilst online grooming has become a problem.

- **Round Table on Child Abuse over the Internet**

On the 5th September 2006, the Commissioner addressed the Round Table on Child Abuse over the Internet organised by the Agenzija APPOGG.

The Commissioner in her address referred to the study which had been carried out together with the National Statistics Office, the Ministry for Information Technology, the Ministry for Education, the Police Department and the Malta Communications Authority, aimed at researching children's use of the Internet in Malta. In parallel, another survey was carried out, researching their perceptions on the use of the Internet by their parents.

This research had brought home several alarming issues amongst which was the lack of awareness of the dangers of meeting strangers who were first encountered online, the different perceptions of the Internet of parents and what their children are up to on the internet, the absence of grooming as an offence in our legislation and other lacunae in our legislation with regards to the protection of children.

APPOGG designed a National Hotline on Child Abuse over the Internet to receive complaints from children and the general society regarding illegal material on the internet.

The Commissioner outlined the future contribution of her Office to the new proposed Hotline. This would take the form of:

- a) monitoring the overall service and marketing strategy of the hotline;
- b) setting up clear working practices between the Hotline and the Commissioner's Office to make sure that no referrals fall through the net;
- c) promoting the Hotline with children and general society during the regular visits to schools, children's organisations and children's homes.

- **Safer Internet Plus Project**

The Commissioner's Office has been involved in a two year Safer Internet Plus project which will be coordinated by the Ministry responsible for IT and will reach out to the general sections of the public.

- **Internet Safety for Children Policy**

The Commissioner's Office has been consulted at length on a new Internet Safety for Children Policy drafted by the Ministry responsible for IT and due to be launched in the coming months.

- **Internet Chatting Project of the Drama Unit**

A project, which the Commissioner greatly appreciated, was carried out by the Drama Unit within the Education

Division on Internet Chatting. The Commissioner gave feedback on the script which was being used and attended a session together with students from two different schools at the Drama Unit.

The Commissioner was satisfied that the matter was being addressed in a very professional way and that awareness of the dangers of the internet were being passed on to the students.

- **E-Security Working Group**

The Commissioner's Office is represented on the National e-Security working group set up by the government under the auspices of the Ministry responsible for IT to draft a strategy and implementation for an e-Strategy. This working group includes representatives from the different Ministries, the private sector (Internet Service Providers) and other entities.

e. Children's Health and Safety

- **Address at the National Seminar:
Child Safety on our Roads**

The Commissioner for Children addressed the National Seminar 'Child Safety on our Roads' organised by the Malta Association of Public Health Medicine.

The aim of the conference was to raise awareness and instigate positive change on this issue which is of national importance and requires a multi-sectoral approach. The conference tackled many facets of children's safety on the roads including school transport, local and European health and safety regulations and standards, the educative

approach towards road safety, environmental issue and local regulation of the transport and road sectors. This conference had the full support of the Ministries of Health and Education, and the Transport Authority.

The Commissioner highlighted the main reasons why complaints are made on school transport at her Office: very early morning pick-up time; no supervision by adults; condition of the vehicles and dangerous pick-up points.

- **Presentation at Conference
on Children's Health and Safety**

The Conference on Child Safety organised by the Health and Safety Section at the Ministry of Education, Youth and Employment was addressed by the Commissioner for Children.

The Commissioner quoted several articles from the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child to show how Child Safety is a children's rights issue.

The Commissioner presented the Stockholm Manifesto of 2005 'Creating a safe environment for children in Europe' which asserts that injuries are predictable and preventable. She called for the three-pronged approach, which is suggested in the same Manifesto: Education; Engineering; Enforcement measures.

- **Partner in the Walking Bus project**

Ġużè Delia Primary School, Siggiewi is the first school in Malta to organize a Walking Bus – an initiative which already taking place in different countries around Europe and Australia. The Commissioner for Children was one of the main partners of this project together with the Kunsill

The Walking Bus! A pilot project at the Guze Delia, Siggiewi Primary School fully supported by the Commissioner



Multi ghall-iSport, the Health Promotion Department and the school administration, council, parents and other volunteers.

The walking bus consists of a group of students who walk from home to school safely every morning under the guidance of adult supervisors who are mainly parents.

This initiative:

- gives children the chance of being active on a daily basis
- provides them with road safety education
- gives them the opportunity to socialize and
- diminishes the air pollution and traffic management/ parking problems in the school area.

5. Schools & Educational Issues

The Commissioner personally visited 37 kindergarten, primary, secondary and post-secondary schools this year. Her primary aim is meeting children and young people, and in all the schools she visits she particularly requests a meeting with the student (or pupil) council.

A detailed account of issues encountered in schools which needed addressing together with a list of recommendations was sent to the Director General of the Education Division in September 2006.

The Commissioner's Office also keeps abreast of developments, reforms and new policies issued by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Employment, and where necessary sends reactions.

• Closing Speech at EkoSkola's Annual Meeting

The Commissioner was invited to deliver the closing speech at the EkoSkola's Annual Meeting which was held on the 7th December 2006. The EkoSkola programme is supported by the Office of the Prime Minister, the Ministry for Rural Affairs and the Environment and the Ministry of Education, Youth and Employment.

EkoSkola is a programme empowering students to take informed decisions and participate pro-actively in matters related to the environment. It aims at mobilizing whole schools to adopt an active role in environmental action, improve their quality of life, and foster sustainable lifestyles. EkoSkola also organises the annual Eko Parliament where participating schools attend a parliamentary session and discuss a host of environmental issues with members of Parliament.

The Commissioner has largely supported the project and during her Closing Speech highlighted the very positive

way in which the participation of children was being encouraged and nurtured throughout the whole project. She reminded those present of the particular suggestions made by children regarding the environment, which politicians would do well to take into consideration and implement.

• Opening Speech for 'Reaching the Kids' programme in Primary Schools on Mental Health

'Reaching the Kids' was launched as a pilot programme in 2005 at the Mqabba Primary School in the presence of the Commissioner for Children and Mrs Kate Gonzi, Chairperson of the HSBC Cares for Children Fund. This was later started with Year 5 pupils in primary schools in 2006.

The Commissioner attended a session at St Julian's Primary School C where she had the opportunity of recognizing the need of addressing mental health issues among children of primary schools.

The Commissioner received the report of the programme from the CEO of the Richmond Foundation with whom related issues were discussed at length.

• Speech at the Annual General Meeting of the Dyslexia Association

The Commissioner for Children supports the Dyslexia Association and was invited to address members of the Dyslexia Association who were having their Annual General Meeting at the Catholic Institute on the 29th September 2006.

The Commissioner spoke on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and gave a summary of children's rights in general, and focused on the four groups of rights: the basic needs and survival rights, developmental rights, participation rights and protection rights.



Ms Analiza Vella, an educator designed the children's rights playing cards for 3 to 5 year olds. She is seen here playing the game with 5 year olds at the F.X. Attard Marsa Primary School

The two-hour session included very valid discussions with the floor where various issues were raised which went beyond the immediate area of dyslexia.

6. Children's Rights Education: Rights, Respect and Responsibilities

a. A Children's Rights game for the very young

As part of the Commissioner's ongoing children's rights campaign 'Rights, Respect and Responsibilities', a children's rights game was developed targeting very young children (3 – 5 yr olds). The Commissioner for Children distributed and introduced the game in kindergarten and primary schools.

The game which is a floor puzzle is primarily aimed at 3 -5 year olds and consists of 12 different flash cards showing sad characters when rights are not respected, and the same characters clearly happy when their rights are respected. The children have to pair the flash cards. The game is particularly useful for teachers, parents and carers as an educational resource, and with this in mind each flash card also includes the particular children's right in words, in both Maltese and English.

The six rights depicted in the floor puzzle are:

- 1) I have a right to have fun with my friends;
- 2) I have a right to learn;
- 3) I have a right to play;
- 4) I have a right to be cared for;
- 5) I have a right to a clean environment;
- 6) I have rights like everybody else.

This project was made financially possible with a sponsorship from Plasmon.

b. Youth-friendly UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in Maltese

The Commissioner's Office printed 10,000 youth-friendly leaflets of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in Maltese which are mainly intended for young people of secondary school age (11 – 16). They are distributed to young people mainly through schools and NGOs starting from September 2006. The printing and design of the leaflet were made possible with the support of the Health Promotion Department.

c. UNICEF Clips on TV

In the run up to World Children's Day, the Commissioner's Office together with the Broadcasting Authority aired UNICEF's Cartoons for Children's Rights for 30 days on all TV stations, 3 times a day as Public Service Announcements.



March 2006: The Commissioner describing the aims of the Consultation on Issues of Concern for Children and Young People

These 10 Public Service Announcements consisted of 30-second non-verbal spots explaining a right each. The ten rights were: Freedom from Discrimination; Family; Identity; Education; Protection in War; Protection from Neglect; Freedom from Discrimination; Freedom from Child Labour; A Protective Environment; and Self Expression. For this project, the Office was assisted by Ms Alexandra Scicluna.

d. Media Presence

The Commissioner participated in 39 radio and television programmes in order to speak about children's rights.

The Commissioner and eight children collaborated with the production team of award winning TV programme 'Qalb in-Nies' to put up two programmes on 'The effect of family separation on children'. They contributed greatly to the script and to the interviews on the programme.

'Qalb in-Nies' was also instrumental in having the Child Advocate appear for the first time on television in order to explain her role as the voice of children in court.

7. Giving a Voice to Children and Young People

a. Consultation on Issues of Concern for Children

On the 10th February, a Consultation was carried out with the aim of getting an indication from young people themselves of the main issues of concern within the children's field at large. The half-day Consultation which took the form of a seminar included several ice-breaking games, discussions and a questionnaire which each individual had to fill in. It was carried out together with the Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice.

b. National Youth Day 2006

The Commissioner's Office was one of the entities organising the celebrations for National Youth Day which is celebrated annually in Malta on the 21st of March.

The Commissioner opened the celebrations with a speech where she mentioned that the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Commissioner for Children Act cater for children under the age of 18; whereas the National Youth Policy of Malta states that young people are defined as such from age 14 onwards. She highlighted the element of participation of young people that was characteristic of the week dedicated to youth activities.

The Commissioner also led a public workshop for young people on 'The Right to Participation and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child' at Baystreet where the main celebrations were held.

The Commissioner's representative on the Coordinating Committee was a young person Ms Bernice Briffa. She was assisted by Ms Dorianne Coleiro from Youthscape.

c. Rights4U: Children's Rights Course for Young People

The Commissioner's Office organized a children's rights course for children and young people (13 – 16 yr olds) based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Around 70 participants were selected. As in the previous year, an effort was made to reach out to disadvantaged groups.

The course was based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the theme chosen this year was The Right to Play. The participants had the opportunity of discussing in small groups the right to play, conducted on-site investigations, including interviews with locals, in 7 different towns to see if the right to play is being implemented in that particular locality, and took part in organised games throughout the weekend.

The course was coordinated by Ms Anna Grech from Youthscape together with Mr Sandro Balzan and Mr Manuel Fenech.

d. Elections of Young People's Representatives

On the 8th December 2006, the young people who participated in the three Children's Rights Courses were invited to elect 4 young people to represent them in activities of the Commissioner.

The meeting started with the Commissioner giving the children and young people an update of the main highlights of her work in the last three years. It was then followed by presentations from Mr Charlot Borg, Ms Lara Camilleri, Mr Malone Debono, Ms Shanna Spiteri – the four young people who's mandate was coming to an end. They spoke about their experience in the Council for Children and their involvement in the Commissioner's activities and also put



The Commissioner with the newly elected young representatives

forward recommendations.

The young people who were interested were asked to nominate themselves in the weeks before, and on the day they introduced themselves. Only the children and young people who had not reached the age of eighteen could vote. The Electoral Commission was also made of young people who could not vote because they were over eighteen but still wanted to support the activity.

The four young people who were elected were Ms Lara Cassar, Mr Mahmoud El Bakry, Mr Kurt Mizzi and Mr Gerald Sant.

e. World Children's Day 2006

On the occasion of World Children's Day 2006, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Employment, the Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity, the Office of the Commissioner for Children, Agenzija APPOĠĠ supported by the HSBC Cares for Children Fund in collaboration with the Kunsill Malti għall-iSport and the Ministry for Rural Affairs and the Environment, organised a celebration for all the family called Fid-Dinja Mzewqa tat-Tfal (In the Colourful World of Children).



World Children's Day 2006: The Commissioner is seen with Mr Joe Gerada of the Foundation for Social Welfare Services and ZOO, popular children's entertainers

The event was held at Ta' Qali and the chosen theme for this year's World Children's Day was Għall-Ħarsien Aħjar tat-Tfal (For the better protection of children). During this activity the Ta' Qali picnic area was transformed into an activity area where children, young people and all family members could enjoy three hours of free entertainment.

There were several organised games, such as, tug-of war, volleyball, archery, football, basketball, human table soccer, bungee run, bouncy castle and mountain climbing. There were also animators, balloon shapers, face painters, film and cartoon characters and stilt walkers to provide the best entertainment possible. At the same time, there were also performances by children and young people who took their turn on the main stage singing and dancing together with the participation of well-known artists. Various sports, political and television personalities, amongst others, were invited to pass on positive messages throughout the event.

The environment and its conservation were also highlighted during this activity. The Ministry of Rural Affairs and the Environment, with the 34U Campaign organised a tree planting event as part of the celebrations on World Children's Day. This was accompanied by a talk about the appreciation of the environment. Also, on the occasion of the 10th Anniversary of the Scoops project (which promotes the concept of co-operatives in secondary schools), the Board of Cooperatives, together with the Scoops National Council planted 150 trees. Each of the 42 articles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child was attached to the trees. Finally the Malta Girl Guides Association supported the event by distributing the child-friendly children's leaflets which the Commissioner for Children's had just published.

8. International Relations

International relations are important to our Office to:

1. Keep informed of the way other offices with mandates which are similar to ours are operating and the challenges they are facing
2. Promote greater awareness of children and young people's realities in other countries
3. Keep up to date with major issues and violations of children's rights internationally
4. Keep alive the universal aspect of the Convention and children's rights even in the presentation of children's rights.

Unfortunately due to budgetary and human resources limitations during the last year, very little was invested in this area.



European Network of Ombudpersons for Children Annual Meeting: Sonia Camilleri is seen here with Mr Xavier Bonal, the incoming ENOC Chairperson and Mr George Moschos, the current ENOC Chairperson

• Trip to Tunisia

The Commissioner together with three young members of the Council for Children was invited to one of the bi-annual sessions of the Children's Parliament in Tunis in March 2006. The Children's Parliament is held twice a year, in March and in November. A theme is chosen every time and children are prepared in advance and encouraged to draw up questions on the issue. The parliamentary session consists of the children asking questions and a Minister of government answering them. The session they attended was tackling 'Children's rights through legislation and justice for children', and the Minister of Justice was present to answer questions.

The Commissioner and the young Council members also had visits planned with the Minister for the Family of Tunisia, and met the three regional Delegates (directors of welfare) for children. A very full 4 day programme of visits to children's institutions was also arranged for the delegation.



A session at the Children's Parliament in Tunis which was visited by the Commissioner and three young members of the Council for Children

- **Annual Meeting: European Network of Ombudspersons for Children**

Children's Ombudspersons and Commissioners convened in Athens this year for their Annual ENOC Meeting. Participating countries numbered 30 this year, while the Commissioner for Children of New Zealand was invited as a special guest and observer. Malta was participating for the third consecutive year. Finland joined the group for the first time.

Items high on the Agenda this year were:

- Listening to children in order to understand and strengthen their voices.
- Intervention in child care institutions.
- Reporting to Parliament on Children's Rights issues.

The Conference's main themes, however, were:

- Supporting anti-discrimination policies and legislative changes.
- Human Rights Education in Schools.
- Integration of special groups: minorities with special needs.
- Tackling bullying in schools.

Two important sessions directly related to the above issues were the discussion and adoption of the statement on unaccompanied children/minors and an open dialogue with Mr Patrick Trousson, from the EU Commission on the way in which ENOC can be involved in the European Forum on Children's Rights and the promotion of the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child.

Commissioners welcomed Mr Brent Parfitt, a member of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, who spoke about the role of children's ombudspersons in the process of examination of national reports to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. This contribution by Children's Commissioners was seen to be vital in order to guarantee better local implementation of the Convention. The Commissioner for Children, Mrs Camilleri and Ms DeBono from the Office participated.

- **International Conference: Ombudswork for Children**

The Commissioner for Children's Office participated in the conference called 'Ombudswork for Children' organised by the Russian Federal Ombudsman for Human Rights, the Greek Ombudsman and his Deputy for Children's Rights (also Chairman of the European Network of Ombudsmen for Children) and the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights.

The three main issues of this conference were:

- a) Why and to what extent ombudsmen – whether specialised or not – are vested with responsibility for the protection of children?

- b) The different ways in which the specific task of defending children can be entrusted to an ombudsman institutions.
- c) How can we listen to children and involve them in our work?

The Commissioner's Office was represented by Ms Daniela DeBono, Manager Research and Policy at the Office.

9. Other activities

- **Support for law addressing Underage drinking**

The Focus Group on Underage Drinking met the Commissioner and the Council for Children as part of their strategy to meet stakeholders in the field. The aim of these meetings was to explain their role and their work, and to explore possible ways of collaborating together.

The Bill regulating underage drinking had just presented to Parliament, and it was being discussed by the Social Affairs Committee following which it will pass on to the Attorney General's Office to be vetted.

The focus group asked the young members of Council for their views of the Bill, and they were greatly encouraged by the young members to work closer with children on this issue.

- **All Different – All Equal Campaign**

This campaign which is a Europe-wide campaign co-organised by the European Union and the Council of Europe with the aim of encouraging and enabling young people to participate in building peaceful societies based on human rights, diversity and inclusion, in a spirit of respect, tolerance and mutual understanding.

The Youth Section, within the Ministry of Education, Youth and Employment is the coordinating body in Malta. The Commissioner for Children's Office is one of the main partners together with other youth entities.

- **Roundtable Conference on Missing and Sexually Exploited Children: Malta in a European Framework**

The Commissioner was invited to address this multi-agency Round Table on combating Sexual Exploitation of Minors, coordinated by the Foundation of Social Welfare Services. The Commissioner referred both to the Commissioner for Children Act and to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child which both promote the protection of children from physical or moral harm or neglect including all kinds of abuse, or sexual exploitation. She mentioned the work that had been done together with the Chief Justice regarding outstanding court cases on child sexual abuse,



and commented on the lack of mandatory reporting in such cases that was still the situation in Malta. Regarding child abduction, she referred to cases which involved countries which were not signatories of the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of Child Abduction and suggested ways of working in these situations in order to try and defend the children who are the victims.

The main issue resulting from the conference was the need to address the 'poor and chaotic type of data collection' with regards to children who are victims of child abuse and sexual abduction.

- **Consultation with SEDQA regarding their position paper on Gambling**

A meeting was held with SEDQA and officials of the Malta Broadcasting Authority at the premises of SEDQA in St. Venera where SEDQA's position paper on gambling was discussed at length. It was good to notice that all three entities were on the same wavelength and the need was felt to address this issue before it went out of hand.

- **Presentation of special swings for newborn babies needing methadone**

The Commissioner was invited to the Children's Ward Karen Grech at St. Luke's Hospital to present the special swings designed for babies who were born dependent on methadone. The swings donated by SEDQA could be programmed to hold the children as if they were being rocked by an adult and were deemed necessary in order to give these babies the constant sense of security that they were lacking.

- **Visit by pregnant mothers and members of the Group for the Unborn Child**

The Commissioner welcomed a visit by pregnant mothers and the members of the Group for the Unborn Child on the occasion of World Children's Day.

The Group addressed the Commissioner and thanked her for the constant support she has given to unborn children in the protection of their rights. The Group appealed to the authorities and the general public not to forget that the unborn child has rights too, and that this is included in the Commissioner for Children Act.

- **Speech at the Annual General Meeting of the Multiple Connection Group for families with Multiple Births**

The Commissioner was invited to address parents of the Multiple Connection Group who were holding an Annual General Meeting at the Playmobil Funpark. The Commissioner praised the support that parents were giving each other within the group, and appreciated the tremendous effort that went into organising such an event by a small nucleus of mothers who themselves were parents of triplets or quadruplets. She noted with satisfaction that the group had increased in numbers since she first met them in 2005.

- **Networking**

Networking remained a priority throughout this year and meetings were regularly held with various Ministries, government departments and government agencies, the judiciary, embassies, non-governmental organisations, the Church and international organisations.



Maria-Rosa Tanti, Maria Muscat Azzopardi and Malone Debono after voting for their youth representatives at the elections which were held in December 2006

World Children's Day 2006 was celebrated at the picnic area at Ta' Qali and organised by a group of entities chaired by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Employment



A General Description of the Circumstances of Children in Malta

As in last year's Annual Report I will again be looking at the circumstances of children in Malta primarily in the light of a particular article of the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child.

In 2005 Article 12 of the Convention, which speaks of children's right to participation, was investigated in depth with reference to the local context. This year, the same was done with Article 31, the children's right to play and cultural activities.

The rationale behind this strategy is to alert children and adults in general, together with all those in authority, of the existence of a particular right every year with a view to educating the population about, as well as monitoring, the rights of children as outlined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Article 31 of the Convention reads:

1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.
2. States Parties shall respect and promote the right to the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity.

This year saw a great deal of the attention and resources of the Office dedicated to The Right to Play.

The Annual Children's Rights Course, Rights4U, was dedicated to Article 31. The 70 children, aged 14 to 16, who participated had a taste of life as it would be if their Right to Play was fully respected. A weekend packed with recreational, sportive and cultural activities left them no time to think of opting out of any activity or of getting up to any of their characteristic mischief. They enjoyed every minute and were very conversant on Article 31 by the end of the three days.

The survey on the right to play which the young people carried out during the Rights4U: Children's Rights Course was presented by them during the summer months to the Mayors of the 7 Local Councils and was a good opportunity for them to discuss their findings about the implementation of the Right to Play in the Maltese context. (See Chapter 2, Part C, Young Participants' Presentations to Mayors)

A major survey among 6,000 children in State, Independent and Church schools about their perception of the right to play during and after school hours was entrusted to Dr. Valerie Sollars from the Department of Education of the University of Malta. Following is the executive summary of the findings. (See Chapter 2 Part A, Executive Summary: Children's Right to Play: A Study of Maltese Children's cultural and recreational activities)

The Commissioner, together with the Office Manager on Research and Policy, Ms Daniela DeBono, carried out a survey among Local Councils in order to ascertain whether children at their local level are being given their right to play. A summary of the survey and findings follows. (See Chapter 2, Part B, Survey of playing fields and the provision of alternative leisure facilities)

The young people who had undertaken the Children's Rights Course were so keen on the Right to Play, that when some of them were later selected to take part in a Children's Parliament session, their choice of subject was obvious and they spoke of and asked questions relating to opportunities for alternative leisure and related issues.

The main emphasis during the year was indeed on the Right to Play and in the many visits that were carried out to schools, parishes, youth organizations and Local Councils, the right to play was invariably explained, monitored and encouraged.

The climax of the year's attention to Article 31 was reached on the 15th of December 2006 with the Press Launch of the publication on 'The Right to Play'. This document is currently being disseminated among a great number of professionals and policy makers who are invited to take the results into consideration in their particular field of work ...or play.



The right to play was fully exercised by the young participants of the Rights4U course

PART A Children's Right to Play: A Study of Maltese Children's cultural and recreational activities

Valerie Sollars

Executive summary¹

1. Article 31 of the Convention of the Rights of Children explicitly states that²:

States Parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.

States Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity.

This implies that signatories to the Convention are responsible for the implementation of this right in their country.

2. Across the globe, international fora have expressed concern about changes in societies which are affecting childhood and children's development. The concerns include: the indifference to the importance of play by both policy makers and the general public; the growing emphasis on theoretical knowledge and academic success; the unhealthy competition to succeed in sports activities; parents' increased workloads, leaving little free time or energy to be with children; and the amount of time children spend in front of screens, be it TV, films, computers.
3. In the local context, anecdotal evidence does suggest that children and young people growing up in Malta have much pressure brought on by an exam-oriented education system. This means that academic success is rewarded to the exclusion of other activities.
4. If children and young people are giving priority to academic success, willingly or otherwise, it would suggest that there is limited, if any, time available for leisure, cultural, artistic and recreational activities.
5. Apart from the right to play and engagement in cultural and artistic activities as a means of recreation and leisure, such activities promote the overall, healthy development of the human being. Linguistic, physical, intellectual, personal, emotional and social development depend on a healthy balance between work and relaxation.

1 Executive Summary from Sollars, V., *Children's Right to Play: A Study of Maltese Children's cultural and recreational activities*, Office of the Commissioner for Children, 2006

2 <http://www.ohchr.org/english/law/pdf/crc.pdf>

6. Where young children are concerned engagement in playful, cultural, artistic and recreational activities is the way of learning which needs to be promoted.

The current study

The study was conducted with children in primary and secondary schools. The choice of schools included state, church and independent institutions. In all, 31 primary schools and 15 secondary schools participated in the study for an overall sample of 6,000 students.

The children and young people were given the opportunity to share their experiences in play, recreational, cultural and leisure time activities through a detailed questionnaire that was class administered. Information was sought about a number of cultural and recreational events held during schools hours as well as leisure time activities after school and on the weekends.

In an attempt to corroborate data collected from the children, questionnaires and interviews were measures used to collect information from heads of schools, service providers and adults responsible for religious societies/groups, dance, music, drama and football clubs.

Key findings

7. The majority of children in Primary schools as well as the higher classes in Secondary school (Forms 4 and 5) have only one P.E. lesson a week. In most schools there is a tendency to reduce P.E. lessons as the Junior Lyceum, SEC and MATSEC exams approach. Primary and Secondary schoolchildren agree that they have an insufficient number of P.E. lessons.
8. From amongst the participating Primary schools, only 22% have a gym. Consequently, P.E lessons are difficult or impossible to conduct on rainy days. This is especially true if the school does not have an indoor play area allowing for some physical activity.
9. The lack of indoor play areas poses difficulties for children to play during break time on rainy days. Classrooms and corridors feature highly as the main alternatives, albeit inappropriate ones.
10. Whereas primary school children capitalize on their break times to run around and get some exercise, secondary school students seem to prefer the more relaxed activities such as walking, talking/chatting, spending time at the cafeteria, visiting the computer labs or the library.



Arts and crafts activities are included in Article 31: The Right to Play

11. For primary school children, break-times tend to be quite short considering that half the allotted time is spent eating lunch.
12. In primary and secondary schools 71.2 % and 71.8% of the students respectively reported they never have a music lesson or have it once in a while.
13. Drama appears to be the least represented of the creative arts. Considering the benefits students can obtain through participation in drama, it is indeed a pity that so little importance is given to this activity. Drama helps children develop self-confidence and esteem. It can also allow students to express themselves, identify with or empathise with different characters in various circumstances and in so doing, rehearse or replicate real life situations.
14. Computer games are a new source of 'play' for the younger group whereas the older children use the computer mostly for chatting.
15. The video games console appeals more to boys than to girls but for older children, it appears to be losing its appeal.
16. A high percentage of children and young people watch a number of DVDs per week, contributing to a sedentary lifestyle. This appears to reinforce the whole picture emerging from the results: as children grow older, there is more limited physical activity and even in their free time, activities taken up tend to be free from any strenuous exercise.
17. Going to the cinema appears to be a favourite outing among young people, reinforcing the attraction of passive activity in front of a screen.

18. More boys than girls in both cohorts report that they practise sports. Boys seem to dominate sport activities, with football being one such example.
19. About 50% of the cohort claim that they practise some type of sport in their free time.
20. Whereas 'play' is a popular activity for young children and is given priority, especially on the weekend, this seems to be replaced with studying, homework and reading as children grow older.
21. At any time of the weekend, visiting, spending time with, and /or going out for lunch with grandparents, especially the grandmothers were frequently mentioned. Other relatives such as aunts, uncles and cousins were also referred to.
22. Sunday afternoons is typically time for family outings to the countryside in winter and to the beach in summer. On the other hand, eating out at restaurants appears to be a favourite family activity for Saturday evenings.

General conclusions

23. There is general agreement that among the key factors which deter children and young people from attending after-school activities are the pressures brought on by an exam-oriented system, home-work and after school lessons.
24. Strong commitment and good time-management are essential. Especially where young children are concerned, many may rely on or even depend entirely on parents taking them and collecting them for after-school activities. Unless parents are available or willing to chauffeur or accompany their children, participation in activities remains an unattainable goal. For children and young people growing up with parents who are both in employment, taking children for after-school appointments that start any time between 3 and 5pm may be difficult to manage. For children and young people growing up with one parent, these difficulties may be even greater.



Children and young people at an activity organised by the Brigata Laburista to which the Commissioner was invited



Children enjoying themselves at Kidstart a summer club for young children which the Commissioner visited this summer

25. Financial considerations were not an issue raised directly with participants in the survey. However, some respondents mentioned it explicitly. In other instances, the responses given suggest that there are financial burdens and implications for users of the service. From the perspective of service providers, funds are necessary to maintain premises and equipment, purchase new apparatus and pay staff members. From the perspective of the users, in addition to fees, other costs are incurred to cover costumes, uniforms and specific clothing (sports-gears; dancing shoes and frocks); tools, equipment, accessories and consumables (e.g. musical instruments, music scores, manuscripts, theory examination past papers; materials for art and craft activities; transport costs when hiring coaches or vans etc.); paying for exams. In addition, some organizations which may not charge any fees and which may be subsidized (e.g. several religious groups and organizations), periodically have fund-raising activities. From time to time, they also organize cultural outings or events which entail some financial expense. Therefore, although not a direct focus of the study, and taken collectively, these issues raise concerns about whether leisure time activities are truly available and accessible for all.

26. With the exception of drama, the football clubs, music and dance schools also have an element of competition and examination. Various members of the football association amply highlighted the pressures of competition in football. Although many children and young people participating in this survey reported that they play musical instruments for relaxation and enjoyment, it is also true that many others sit for music exams. Heads of the dance and music schools reported that most of their children and students follow exams. The implication is clear: children who are sitting for exams must put in some effort to succeed and this require

PART B

Survey of playing fields and the provision of alternative leisure facilities

Sonia Camilleri & Daniela DeBono

Introduction

The Commissioner for Children's Office during 2006 investigated several aspects of the implementation of Article 31, of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, The Right to Play.

Children and young people, defined here as those aged under 18, comprise around 25% of the Maltese population.

This questionnaire should be seen as part of the larger year-long project undertaken by the Commissioner. The information being sought was from Local Councils however it was felt important to seek information both on public and private facilities including free play areas, availability of alternative leisure facilities including artistic, drama and sports.

General Rationale

The aim of this survey was to explore the implementation of Article 31 at local governance level.

The Questionnaire

The same questionnaire was sent to all the Local Councils (vide Annex 1). The questions asked can be generally divided into three:

- The first few questions are of an introductory nature and seek general information about the existence of playing fields, the number of playing fields and the total area this covers, and the number of children in their locality.
- Specific information about the playing fields in their locality including questions about the apparatus in place, health and safety, maintenance and opening hours.
- The last section seeks information on alternative leisure and recreational facilities available in their locality. The aim of this section was to get an idea of the availability of alternative leisure facilities and thus the questionnaire asked about the availability of 20 different kinds of alternative leisure. no distinction was made between public and private leisure facilities

The total number of questionnaires sent were 68, and the total number of questionnaires received back were 39, a percentage of 67 %.

The total number of questionnaires received from local councils in Malta was 27 out of 54 (40%); whereas the total number of questionnaires received from local councils in Gozo are 10 out of 14 (71%).

SECTION 1: Playing Fields (P.F.)

See Table 1

Comments

1. Accessibility

It was good to note that 77% of the P.F.s are accessible to wheelchair users. However by law these should all be so.

2. Safety and Maintenance

On safety and maintenance of equipment only 33% of the local councils stated that they had a certificate of safety whilst 46% stated that they did not have. Also of concern is that only 33% of the local councils stated that the equipment is inline with EU regulations, 28% that they are not in line and 39% who do not know.

3. 3rd Party Insurance and Surveillance

On the question of 3rd Party Insurance one notes that whilst 49% are covered by such an insurance, 36% are not and a further 15% do not know or did not answer. With regards to surveillance, 38% are surveilled by the police whilst 54% are not surveilled. Some local councils pointed out that they would like there to be more surveillance.

4. Bars serving Alcohol

A shocking figure of 18% of bars serving alcohol in playing fields cannot go unnoticed. This goes to prove how the culture of drinking is present in children's environments even when they are of a very young age, something which must certainly be discouraged.

5. Bocci Clubs

On a general note, the question regarding the Bocci Club was included because complaints had reached the office regarding the inappropriate language some adult players were using and which was being picked up by children. Ideally the P.F. and the Bocci ground would not be near each other.

6. Space available for Play

The overriding questions (nos 1 and 2) were about the availability of playing fields. It was good to note that P.F.s are available in 95% of the localities. We appreciate the feedback that was given, and a future study can further the research to include other factors like the area per child that is available for play in the area, and allocation of funds of Local Councils per child towards the implementation of Article 31.

7. Maintenance

It was also good to note that 82% of the Local Councils said that they had maintenance programmes in place. However all Local Councils should have this in order to fully protect accidents from happening on the P.F.

Table 1: Playing Fields

Playing Fields	Frequency			Percentage		
	Yes	No	Other Replies	Yes	No	Other Replies
1. Are there P.F. for children in your locality?	37	2	0	95%	5%	
2. Is there more than one P.F. in your locality?	22	16	1	56%	41%	3%
3. How many children under the age of eighteen are there in your locality?						
- gave an answer			22			56%
- did not give an answer			17			44%
4. How many square metres are covered by P.F. in your locality?						
- gave an answer			21			54%
- did not give an answer or the question was not applicable			18			46%
5. P.F. Equipment						
a. Does the Council have an inventory of the P.F. equipment?	24	10	5	62%	26%	12%
b. Is the P.F. equipment appropriate both for younger children and older children?	29	8	2	74%	21%	5%
c. Is the equipment made of fibreglass or galvanized iron?						
- fibreglass			2			
- galvanized iron			16			
- from both			15			
- other replies			6			
d. Has the equipment of the P.F. been increased since 1993?	28	7	4	72%	18%	10%
e. Has the equipment of the P.F. decreased since 1993?	30	5	4	77%	13%	10%
f. Does the equipment have a security certificate?	13	18	8	33%	46%	21%
g. Does the equipment satisfy the requirements of the EU, according to EN 1176 and I-EN 1177?	13	11	15	33%	28%	39%
h. Does the Council have a maintenance programme for the equipment?	32	2	5	82%	5%	13%
i. When is the last time that maintenance was carried out on the equipment?	<i>The replies indicate that maintenance is done on a regular basis, and also when needed</i>					
j. Has the equipment ever been vandalised?	26	9	4	67%	23%	10%
6. How often is the P.F. cleaned?	<i>Cleaning is done regularly with the replies ranging from once a week to every day</i>					
7. At what time during the day is the cleaning of the P.F. carried out?	<i>Cleaning is usually done in the morning</i>					
8. Is the P.F. closed at night?	7	29	3	18%	74%	8%
9. Does the Council have 3rd Party Insurance on the P.F.?	19	14	6	49%	36%	15%
10. Is the P.F. surveilled by the Police or the Wardens at some time during the day?	15	21	3	38%	54%	8%
11. Is there any bar which serves alcohol in the P.F.?	7	28	4*	18%	72%	10%
12. Is the local Boćci Club just next to the P.F.?	11	21	7	28%	54%	18%
13. Is the P.F. accessible to children with mobility problems?	30	5	4	77%	13%	10%

* "Other replies" includes those localities which have more than one P.F. and answered both yes and no; and those which did not answer because they do not have a P.F.

SECTION 2: Alternative Leisure and Recreational Facilities

The second part of the questionnaire focused on the availability of alternative leisure facilities. There were nineteen different facilities mentioned, and the last one was open - 'Any other'. As explained before, no distinction for the purposes of this survey, was made between public and private initiatives. A final open-ended question was made at the end asking which of the facilities marked as available were free of charge. The purpose of this question was to get an indication of what role financial accessibility played in the availability of these services. See Table 2

Table 2: Other Recreational Facilities for children under the age of eighteen

	Frequency			Percentage		
	Yes	No	Other Replies	Yes	No	Other Replies
A. In your locality can the following be found:						
1. Bicycle paths?	3	33	3	8%	85%	7%
2. Football ground?	30	9	0	77%	23%	0%
3. Football nursery?	31	7	1	79%	18%	3%
4. Skate park?	1	37	1	3%	95%	2%
5. Tennis court?	8	30	1	21%	77%	2%
6. Waterpolo pitch?	5	33	1	13%	85%	2%
7. Basketball court?	10	28	1	26%	72%	2%
8. Volleyball court?	9	29	1	23%	74%	3%
9. Squash court?	2	36	1	5%	92%	3%
10. Gym?	12	26	1	31%	67%	2%
11. Karate, judo, jujitsu clubs?	8	30	1	21%	77%	2%
12. Ballet, jazz and other dancing schools?	16	21	2	41%	54%	5%
13. Drama schools?	14	23	2	36%	59%	5%
14. Art schools?	8	28	3	21%	72%	7%
15. Music schools or band clubs which teach children?	28	10	1	72%	26%	2%
16. Swimming pool for the public?	0	24	15	0%	62%	38%
17. Camping site?	4	34	1	10%	87%	2%
18. Sailing club?	3	34	2	8%	87%	5%
19. BMX Cycle area?	3	35	1	8%	90%	2%
20. Others?	5	23	11	13%	59%	28%

B. Which are the recreational facilities which children can use without payment?

Many local councils mentioned playing fields and social, educational and cultural activities organized for children by the local council as the facilities which children can use free of charge (or at a nominal fee). Many local councils mentioned band clubs in their locality as offering services free of charge. Local Councils also mentioned other sports facilities which are offered in the locality free of charge like gym, football ground, volleyball court, basketball court and others.

Comments

- Several Local Councils said that they feel there is not enough space for children to play.
- The lack of an adequate playing area is usually felt more when in the localities there are Housing Estates which tend to house younger families and children in a restricted area.
- A Local Council in particular proposed that the authorities offer 'expert advice' on how best to be of service to children.
- Football grounds and nurseries are the most common available facility for sports. It was good to note however that new facilities for sports such as sailing, cycling, camping, basketball and volleyball are also sprouting on the island.
- Cultural centres and schools of karate, dancing, drama and art would seem to be present in quite a few localities.
- Another issue which cannot go unnoticed is that only one locality has a skatepark. This is disappointing in view of the fact that children and young people themselves have for the last years organized themselves as the Malta Skaters United and have been campaigning for a proper skatepark which can be used by younger and older children.

Table 3 shows the number of alternative leisure facilities that are offered in each locality.

Comments

This means that an average of 5 alternative leisure facilities are offered in each locality.

This table does not give any information on the issue of financial accessibility. It would be interesting to explore further which facilities are free, or charged at a nominal rate, and if not, how much is charged. The replies received from the Local Councils themselves show that the Local Councils themselves are very much aware of this.

The table should not be used to compare Local Councils as it would not be fair. The table as it is shows the number of alternative leisure facilities in each town and village but for comparison purposes one would have taken into consideration other factors like the population of the Local Council, the area covered, if facilities from neighbouring towns and villages are encouraged and used, and so on.

General Recommendations

- a. Monitoring on a regular basis of the implementation and compliance to Article 31 should be carried out to ensure that the State is meeting its obligations towards children.
- b. For a better outcome, and for the requirements of Article 31 to be met, the relationship between the Local Councils and the Malta Playing Fields Association should be enshrined in the Local Councils Act, and a clear set of the responsibilities of either party are set out.
- c. A similar arrangement with the Malta Council of Arts should also be explored to ensure the full implementation of the Right to Play.
- d. Policy makers should make available services of expertise which would be made available for better services for children.
- e. It was disappointing to note that there is a general lack of bicycle paths. In a country where we have started to encourage children to walk or cycle to school, the necessary infrastructure must follow.
- f. While it is laudable that so many facilities for football are available, a greater effort must be done to provide facilities for children who prefer different sports.

Table 3: Number of alternative leisure facilities situated in each locality

Locality	Alternative leisure facilities
Pembroke	11
Sliema	11
Birkirkara	10
Floriana	10
Mellieħa	10
Naxxar	10
Birżebbuġa	9
Hamrun	8
Attard	7
Mġarr	7
Nadur	7
Zurrieq	7
Balzan	6
Qala	6
Għarb	5
Munxar	5
San Lawrenz	5
Anonymous 1	5
Għajnsielem	4
Għargħur	4
Luqa	4
Mqabba	4
Pieta'	4
Qormi	4
Sannat	4
Zabbar	4
Birgu	3
Gudja	3
Marsascala	3
Mosta	3
Msida	3
Sta Venera	3
Tarxien	3
Xagħra	3
Anonymous 2	3
Kirkop	2
Għasri	1
Ta' Xbiex	1
Fontana	0
Average	5

PART C Young Participants' Presentations to Mayors

In the first weekend of July 70 young people from all over Malta and Gozo met for Rights4U, a Children's Rights Course spread over a weekend, which also had as its main theme: The Right to Play. As part of the weekend activities, the young people split into 7 groups and visited different towns and villages in Malta, in order to document the availability of space and facilities aimed at offering children access to play, sports and culture. The seven groups then put their findings into a power-point presentation which they presented to the whole which they presented to the whole group in the presence of the Commissioner and members of the Media.

During the summer, Mrs Camilleri met up with several of the young people and together they visited the Mayors of the seven localities under observation. The young people who took part in these visits were: Lynette Camilleri, Gail Galea, Kurt Mizzi, Marie Claire Vella, Gerald Sant, James Spiteri, Maria Muscat Azzopardi and Tamara Micallef.

The Mayors, Deputy Mayors and Executive Secretaries of Hamrun, Rabat, M'Scala, Zurrieq, Mosta, Cospicua and Msida, gave the delegations a very warm welcome and eagerly discussed the issues raised by the young people. Various points of interest and of concern were raised. Common themes ran through the meetings. The young people highlighted the lack of accessibility of many play areas and clubs for children with mobility problems. They also spoke of the lack of cleanliness found in many public parks, the lack of open spaces in many built up areas, the lack of bicycle paths and skate parks in almost all the towns visited, the very limited service of computers for children's use in the Local Council premises and the need of a greater variety of sports and cultural activities to be offered to children in their local environment. They also suggested the use of security cameras in playing fields for better monitoring of what goes on. The officials welcomed their suggestions and offered their views on the issues. A very common statement was that they would welcome better surveillance by the police especially around playing fields and in bars where adults take children along with them. Vandalism was a recurrent complaint and this was not even controlled by security cameras which only focus on certain areas, and at times, are also broken. More police presence is definitely necessary in order to make play areas safer for children. Cleanliness often depended on the conditions agreed to by the contractors, and most, for example, may not even empty bins and clean playing fields during all of the weekend. Consequently even syringes are sometimes left lying around at night may not be cleaned away for 2 days.



The Commissioner at young people discussing the right to play at the Zurrieq Local Council

A very common issue was that of recreational facilities found within schools and sports complexes which are not available to Local Councils. A case in point is Hamrun where 7 schools take up almost 1/3 of the area of the town with the remaining 2/3 being densely built up areas. Many facilities are closed off after school hours and in the weekend, whereas so many could benefit from them if the necessary arrangements were made.

Tied to this are two other issues: one is the lack of open space in most of built-up areas, and the other is the delays Local Councils are facing from MEPA and other Authorities in getting the go-ahead for Recreational Centres which have been on the drawing board for years.

The young people highlighted the Vittoriosa playing field which closes at night as an area which seems to offer safety, cleanliness and the absence of vandalism. This could possibly be an answer to some of the common recurrent problem.

In all, the visits to the Local Councils were very satisfying to all concerned. The young people were glad to highlight the issues that needed to be addressed, and, except for the one case where they felt that the mayor was out of touch with the reality of the young people in his town, they were pleased to find that some concrete steps were already being taken to rectify the concerns that they had brought forward.



Gail Galea, Lynette Camilleri and their friend just before the opening session of the Rights4U children's rights course

Young participants at the Rights4U preparing a presentation of the fieldwork they carried out in different localities in an attempt to establish if the right to play was being respected in different localities



Feedback from Ministeries, A Survey of the Major Developments that affected Children in 2006

As a means of finding out about the major developments that have affected children this year letters were sent at the end of August to the Office of the Prime Minister and to all the Ministries.

The OPM and 5 Ministries acknowledged our letter, whereas the OPM and 9 Ministries sent in feedback. These were: the Ministry for Competitiveness and Communications, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Employment, the Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity, Ministry for Investment, Industry and Information Technology, the Ministry for Resources and Infrastructure, the Ministry for Rural Affairs and the Environment, and the Parliamentary Secretariat within the Ministry for Justice and Home Affairs. Their feedback is being included in this report.

1. Office of the Prime Minister

During the year 2006, the Office of the Prime Minister and Ministry of Finance have played a key role in initiating a service that seeks to ensure that children placed at the Young Persons Unit at Mount Carmel Hospital are integrated within the community through either fostering or placement within a specialised home. Further to the financial aspect of this project, the Prime Minister commissioned the Minister for the Family and Social Solidarity to coordinate an inter-ministerial working group to analyse with a view to identify and implement proposals in the report presented during the conference for children with very challenging behaviour organised by the Commissioner's Office last April. Action on proposal no. 2 of the aforementioned report to set up an inter-agency forum has already been set in motion.

85,000 Maltese Pounds have been allocated for Programm Innocenti, which is at recruitment phase. The Office of the Prime Minister has also been responsible for the audit of the High Support Unit and the Young People's Unit as well as

been involved in the facilitation of the process leading up to the launching of Programm Innocenti.

2. Office of the Director, Employee Relations (OPM)

The last Collective Agreement, for employees of the Public Service, for the years 2005-2010, introduces several measures which are aimed at promoting and improving the already existing family-friendly policies, and should enable employees to better combine their work and family responsibilities. These measures apply to families with both natural and adopted children. The relevant sections are the following:

Section 7.3

- a. Introduction of more flexible parameters in the utilization of unpaid parental leave and reduced hours. Parents may utilize 3, 6, or 9 months instead of 1 year to take care of every child under the age of six instead of the previous five years. This leave may be shared by both parents.
- b. In addition to one year for every child, public officers are allowed a once-only long break to care for children. This once only break has been increased from previous maximum of three years to five years to enable parents to take care of children under six years instead of the previous five years. This leave may be shared by both parents.
- c. Work on reduced time-table is granted to take care of children under the age of twelve years. Prior to the last Collective Agreement, the age limit was eight years.

The increased flexibility in measures a., b., and c., introduces a more personalised approach that should enhance parents' ability to choose the best combination of work/ family responsibilities according to their own resources, child care demands and career plans. The longer periods of parental leave and work on reduced hours should increase parents' ability to be involved in the development of their children.

Section 8

- a. Continuation of implementation of existing flexibility measures and the exploration of other cost effective flexibility arrangements such as flexitime, job sharing and teleworking. These measures should enable parents who find it more difficult to work to traditional time-tables and to maintain traditional work practices to combine family/ work responsibilities.

Pilot projects have already started, and several departments have adopted flexible timetables which will be evaluated later on this year.

3. Ministry for Competitiveness and Communications (MCMP)

Many things have been organised with a view to informing and educating children regarding their rights as young consumers, since these too form part of the Internal Market.

- a. MCMP give talks in all schools, that invite MCMP as part of their curriculum;
- b. Every month MCMP contribute by writing articles in children's newspapers, e.g. Taghna t-Tfal, Saghtar, etc. which include competitions on the same subject.
- c. MCMP organize an annual event on 'Consumer Rights Day' [15th March], which is targeting especially for children, primarily for those who have won prizes from the competitions in magazines dealing with topics about consumer rights. In this event MCMP was a regular audience of about 400 between children and parents. MCMP gives each child a present, mainly consisting of books.

4. Ministry of Education, Youth and Employment

1. For All Children to Succeed

The proposals made in the discussion document 'For All Children to Succeed' (2005) was being discussed with stakeholders at the different levels during 2006.

The College system is bringing together a number of primary schools that feed a secondary school as clearly exemplified in the Gozo College – a College that enjoys the ideal setting. It is providing a forum for the pooling and sharing of ideas, experiences and expertise between Heads of School and teachers while offering opportunities for the sharing of services and facilities.

However, the main focus must remain the provision of higher quality education, equity and outcomes for each and every student. While the College system will facilitate the transition of students from one level of education to another, from kindergarten to secondary, it will also reduce the existing distinction between the provision of a junior lyceum and a secondary school type of education and facilitating social inclusion and cohesion by having students of different abilities and social and educational background studying and playing together, taught by the same teachers and sharing the same spaces and facilities.

The psycho-social services will be strengthened at College level. Each school and College will be provided for according to its specific requirements and characteristics. It is hoped that in the near future learning zones will be established in schools for students who need special attention and care while the needs of the more challenging students will be professionally catered for in separate learning centres for a definite period. Small scale piloting of these concepts is being monitored.

2. Education Act Amendments

The Education Act was extensively amended in 2006 in order to incorporate the agreed reforms, including the establishment of two Directorates of Education – the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education and the Directorate for Educational Services. These complementary Directorates will ensure quality and standards as well as the timely provision of the appropriate services to school in the best interest of the student.

At the same time, the amendments established the College system of education with its particular constitution, structures, roles and functions.

3. Inclusive and Special Education

As part of the process in the implementation of the recommendation of the report *'Inclusive and Special Education Review'* (2005), 370 Supply Kindergarten Assistants performing 'facilitator' duties in state mainstream schools in Malta have received 10 weeks (70 hours) special training to be able to provide better support to pupils with special needs. Another 80 Supply Kindergarten Assistants were receiving similar training in Gozo.

Deaf children using sign language as a means of communication and attending the mainstream schools and MCAST are being supported by sign language interpreters. The expense for hiring such a service from the Deaf Association is met by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Employment.

In 2006, Inclusion Coordinators trainees were working in mainstream schools supporting pupils with disabilities, their parents and teaching staff in order to ensure that these pupils receive their educational entitlement. It is envisaged that Inclusion Coordinators will be appointed in 2007.

The Special and Inclusive Education Network was set up.

During 2006, the Helen Keller Special School that caters for students with visual and hearing impairment as well as deaf students was accredited as an ECDL Test Centre. The Education Division's Department of Technology in Education set up a new section - ICT Support Unit Special Needs - in order to provide support in methodology and ICT implementation within the Curriculum for students with special needs.

It is planned to reorganise the special education sector in order to cater for the specific needs of students at the primary, secondary and post-secondary levels, with the last level catering also for vocational education and training as appropriate.

4. Early Childhood Education and Care

The Ministry of Education, Youth and Employment, published another policy document, *'Early Childhood Education and Care'* (2006). The report makes a number of recommendations which are being discussed with stakeholders for their eventual implementation.

The importance of quality provision as early as possible in a child's life is particularly felt where disadvantaged children are concerned and where working mothers need to leave their children in the care of others.

5. Assessment and Examinations

Following the publication of the report *'MATSEC, Strengthening a National Examination System'* (2005) at the end of the first five years of secondary education and the end of higher secondary education, another specialist working group is now studying the current examination systems at the end of the six years of primary education, that is the Junior Lyceum Admission Examination for State schools and the Common Entrance Examination for Church schools.

The publication of the book, *'Transition from Primary to Secondary in Malta: Time to break the mould?'* written by Dr Grace Grima and Dr Josette Farrugia and published by the Foundation for Educational Services should provide the required analytical background information to stimulate the discussion. It is worthwhile recalling that the College system of education attempts to diminish significantly the negative effects of the admission examination.

6. Basic Skills

'A Study of Young People following Basic Skills Courses in Malta' (2006) indicated very clearly the need for the adoption of strategies involving the early intervention of both teachers and parents as early as possible when children start showing their inability to acquire basic skills which are indispensable for any type of lifelong learning. Moreover, these children's progress needs to be closely monitored throughout their primary education and more so during their secondary education where they can get lost in the system because of lack of individual attention. Such children may need specialist intervention at the secondary level if they have failed during their primary education. Class and subject teachers need to be specifically trained to have the required competences and they should be provided with the appropriate resources as teaching aids.

In connection with basic skills, it is relevant to record that while illiteracy among the adult population aged 15+ was 12% according to the 1995 census, the indications are that the 2005 census shows that figure as 7.7%. It is clear that the improvement is the result of a reduction in the illiteracy at compulsory education age. In fact, the illiteracy among young people is probably around 1.4%. Besides, between 1999 and 2006, the number of pupils passing the Junior Lyceum admission examination has risen by about 10 percentage points.

7. School Attendance and Absenteeism

The Report on *'School Attendance Improvement'* (2005) analysed the different aspects, factors and causes of absenteeism and truancy, particularly visible in a number of schools and in certain geographic areas. The Report studied also the current pastoral provision that deals with absent children and their parents. The various recommendations

made by the report are gradually being implemented in this challenging and sometimes very complex problem that some schools, students and parents are facing. This problem highlights the importance of adequate professional social work that bridges an existing abyss between schools and certain parents and students. Both the parents and the school authorities have a crucial role to play.

It is interesting to note that, following coordinated action in the implementation of a number of recommendations made by the Report, the Cottonera College has already achieved a very significant improvement in the attendance of children at school. The Cottonera College's focus for 2007 will be to make the early primary years more enjoyable by emphasising learning through play and making school more attractive in the process.

8. Good behaviour and discipline in schools

Throughout the year, the importance of good behaviour and discipline of students in schools was stressed in order to facilitate learning and to avoid any kind of disruption. The Ministry of Education is not only emphasising the zero tolerance of poor behaviour policy but also indicating the primary responsibility of parents to ensure the proper behaviour of their children. Schools were asked whether there need to be any changes in the current national policy but the general reaction of schools was that the policy satisfied the needs and could be adapted to each school's particular profile and characteristics.

9. Healthy Food and Drinks Policy

The Education Division is ensuring the provision of healthy food and drinks in school tuck shops according to the existing national policy. At the same time parents are being encouraged to provide their children with healthy food and drinks during their lunch breaks. The National Curriculum Council commissioned a study called TASNE and the Education Division is working on the report in order to issue guidelines on food sold in tuck shops. Schools will be invited to draft their own healthy food and drinks policy within the national mega policy.

Eco-Skola is gradually gaining a substantial ground in the promotion of a healthy environment. The Saint Benedict College has made some outstanding contributions in this area and one of its primary schools is flying the Green Flag.

10. European Union Programme

In 2006, 80 Comenius Agreements covering 2006 / 07 projects were signed earning an average 5,000 euros each when funds may vary from 2,000 to 17,000 euros. In most projects, a number of teachers and students visit their counterparts abroad. In fact, over the past few years 1,200 students and teachers have travelled under this programme. For an island,

these projects have an added value in excluding limited vision, experiences and isolation. Besides, interesting projects complement and add value to the educational process and enrich the curriculum.

11. E-Twinning

E-Twinning is a European Union initiative that brings together schools from the different member states. E-twinning has been very successful in Malta through the participation of 84 schools involving 172 teachers and heads of schools and 83 different projects.

A pupil from the Primary School, Xaghra, Gozo, won the Prize for Kindness organised by the Peace Laboratory.

12. Foundation for Educational Services (FES)

The central mission of the FES is to stem the rise of illiteracy in Malta. The FES provides learning support to students grappling with literacy skills within compulsory education and helps empower parents in support of their children's learning and facilitates professionally networked basic skills action plans within a number of school groupings.

The capacity building and empowerment of parents engaged in the range of FES programmes has led to significant learning (literacy) and personal growth (self-esteem, relationships) of thousands of students who were previously struggling readers and writers.

In partnership with the HSBC Cares for Children Fund and the Children's Homes Directorate of the Diocesan Curia, the FES has re-engineered the Communicative English programme aimed at children in care from four homes, so that its operations become intrinsically linked to classroom and school curriculum processes. Through this project, children learn to communicate in English through a methodology that combines English literacy with drama, art, music and movement. The new programme will soon be tested in one residential care facility before extension to other homes.

The Foundation for Educational Services (FES) offers a range of educational programmes aimed at developing and nurturing children's personality, talents and mental abilities. These include: (a) afterschool family literacy clubs called *Hilti* (my ability) Clubs that offer a fun-to-learn programme; (b) Nwar - a literacy programme for children and young people most at risk of educational failure offered in a family literacy context through six regional sites; and (c) Young Writers' Clubs and Family Writing Weekends to stimulate creative writing abilities from early childhood. Over 4,000 students have benefited from such programmes until the end of 2006.

During 2006, the FES stepped up its teacher and school capacity building processes so as to make an effective dent

into the problem of illiteracy early school leaving and their consequences of in-equitable access to the curriculum, absenteeism, early school leaving, and the risk of social exclusion. The initiatives included the following:

- a. 32 Literacy Acquisition Programmes (LAPs) at early years level in 32 state primary schools.
- b. A Basic Skills Training Course for teachers designated as Basic Skills Teachers. Through this training, teachers are using a newly developed Basic Skills Assessment Tool and using its results to develop Alternative Learning Programmes (ALPs) for students who acquired less than 40% marks in their English and Maltese assessment and 35% in Maths. This project will, as of 2007, be expanded to reach all secondary school teachers with a Basic Skills teaching function.
- c. Seeing a rise in the admission of students within the autistic spectrum in primary schools with a large population (over 1,000), the FES, in partnership with the School Network on Inclusion and Special Education, have embarked on a pilot project through which Kindergarten Assistants will be trained in the application and adaptation of the multi-sensory literacy acquisition teaching and learning methodologies – with specific reference to students with autism. In mid-2007, this initiative will be expanded to other schools to ensure that such children will learn to communicate and thus be able to access friendships with peers and teachers as well as access the curriculum with less hurdles and disadvantages.
- d. FES has worked with a number of state primary schools designated 'Writing Process Schools'. Through a project entitled Writing Across the Curriculum, the learning gains of students, especially those struggling to learn, is enhanced.
- e. FES has published, in November 2006, a meta-analysis of existing research on the impact on the mental health and attainment of children of streaming at age 8 and its inter-linked 11+ examinations.
- f. In 2006, FES was awarded Euros 5,000 and a special mention at the First MedChild Best Practice Award organised by the Genova-based Fondazione Istituto Mediterraneo per l'Infanzia -MedChild Institute. The award is aimed at promoting child-focused best practice programmes and services in the region in the fields of education, health, social welfare, urban environment.

13. Higher Secondary School

The demand for higher secondary education has increased its population by about 700 students during the last six to seven

years. As a result, another state-of-the-art four-storey block of lecture rooms, library, laboratories, multi-purpose rooms and offices has been built at the Higher Secondary School, Naxxar, to accommodate an additional 600 students. Besides, sports facilities are being increased to satisfy the growing need for these activities.

In 1999, 43% of the student cohort aged 17 used to continue their studies while in 2005, nearly 69% of the cohort continued to receive some kind of education and training.

14. Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST)

MCAST continued raising the status, visibility and attractiveness of vocational education and training by providing a wider choice of courses at the different levels for students who end their five years of compulsory secondary education. MCAST published its strategic plan and started the formulation of a master plan for its development during the next twenty years. More investment through the European Union structural funds will be made in the extension of the existing buildings, facilities and resources as well as in the professional development of its lecturers in order to provide the quality education and training required by a knowledge-based economy and careers for young people. A major achievement of MCAST is indicated in the substantial reduction in the number of early school leavers, that is students who do not continue their studies beyond the compulsory education age.

In 2006, MCAST became an integral part of the Education Act.

15. Foundation for Tomorrow's Schools (FTS)

The Foundation for Tomorrow's Schools continued to deliver its very ambitious programme through the potential investment of over Lm60 million in the modernisation, rehabilitation, maintenance and building of new schools with the appropriate spaces, facilities, equipment and services.

Major projects undertaken in 2006 included the building of the additional block at the Higher Secondary School, Naxxar, the new secondary schools at Tal-Handaq and at Verdala, the large scale works at the Primary School, Siggiewi, and at the Primary School, Luqa.

16. School Councils

In 2006, the National School Councils Association submitted its proposals for the revision of the School Councils regulations. Government is reviewing these proposals with the aim of introducing the new regulations as soon as possible in view of the potential increase in the participation and collaboration of parents in the running of the newly established Colleges.

5. Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity (MFSS)

The Malta Report on Missing and Sexually Exploited Children (February 16)

- The Report was presented during a multi-agency roundtable organised by Agenzija APPOĠĠ in collaboration with Childscope and included local statistics collated over the years regarding the cases of abuse referred to local services.
- Lm 36,000 were allocated to launch a new service - the added support scheme for fostered children with challenging behaviour / disability under a care order.
- Commonwealth Training Programme for professionals working with children and their families.
- Programm Innocenti (the name of the programme is now K.I.D.S - Kids in Development) - a residential care programme for children with very challenging behaviour, was launched towards the end of 2006. This programme will be accepting the first group of children during the first quarter of 2007. All staff are being recruited and the necessary training will be delivered by professionals from abroad. Staff have already visited similar programmes on other similar centres abroad.
- MFSS contributed towards the drawing up of the Early Childhood Education & Care: A National Policy, which was launched by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Employment.
- After an extensive consultation conducted in the previous years, MFSS published the First National Standards for Child Day Care Services. These standards will ensure that children in child day care services would receive an optimum service by all providers.
- Child Care: The improvement grant for existing childcare providers has started to be implemented by the Department for Social Welfare Standards. Lm130,000 have been allocated for this purpose. Moreover, provisional registrations for childcare facilities (including home-based, and private kindergartens catering for children under three years) are currently being issued. The granting of a provisional registration involves a detailed assessment visit and the drawing up of a detailed report.
- A number of assessors within the Department for Social Welfare Standards (DSWS) have taken up training related to childcare issues.
- The MFSS has continued working with MEPA, the Malta Qualifications Council, ETC, MCAST and other entities on issues pertaining to childcare.
- An Inter-Ministerial Working Group on the Report issued by the Office of the Commissioner for Children related to Children with Very Challenging Behaviour, was set up. The final report is currently being drawn up.
- MFSS and MHEC conducted an Operational Review and Financial Audit of the High Support Service and the Young People's Unit. The aim of this review is to identify the strengths and weaknesses of these two specialised services for children with challenging behaviour. The report also outlines the way forward to strengthen and upgrade these services.
- The Working Group on Residential and Foster Care (which is representative of all the stakeholders in this field, including NGOs) has met on a regular basis during 2006. A number of important policies related to children in care have been concluded. Consultation meetings with all the relevant stakeholders, including service users, have been carried out. These policies are currently being piloted in a number of residential homes.
- DSWS and the working group on Residential and Foster Care have introduced a new sub group to work on the first draft National Standards for Residential Care and Foster Care. The first draft from consultation will be launched in 2007.
- Discussions and plans were discussed with various stakeholders to open a New Child and Family Resource Centre in Birkirkara. This centre would be similar to the Smartkids project in Cottonera.
- APPOĠĠ made an extensive marketing campaign to recruit foster carers to offer their homes to children who are living in residential care. APPOĠĠ is the agency which offers training, assessment and support to foster carers.
- The first Homestart project was launched and started operating in the Cottonera, Żabbar and Kalkara area. This project helps very young children from vulnerable families who require support to ensure a good and healthy start to life.
- A new home for refugee unaccompanied minors and refugee children with their families was opened in Fgura.

- MFSS launched the national consultation on the draft Code of Practice and Conduct for Social Service Workers and Employers of Social Service Workers. The consultation closed at the end of the year and this code will be launched in early 2007.
- The National Strategy Report for Social Protection and Social Inclusion was published in September 2006. Children are included as one of the priorities in the strand of social inclusion. This report includes a whole list of initiatives in relation to children.
- MFSS in conjunction with MEYE, APPOĠĠ, the Commissioner for Children launched a number of activities for children in the occasion of World Children's Day. MFSS distributed a leaflet with a do it yourself kite to each household in Malta and Gozo. Children with their parents made these colourful kites which were flown for the World Children's Day Activity held in Ta' Qali.
- Parliament discussed legal amendments in relation to Underage Drinking. The legal amendments will introduce the consumption of alcohol by minors under the age of sixteen among other measures. The Minister for the Family and Social Solidarity launched an Inter-Ministerial Focus Group to coordinate an educational campaign in view of the upcoming proposed amendments to the Police Code to regulate underage drinking in public places (including sale, procurement and consumption).
- A Children's Parliament Session was held for World Children's Day. Various children from different schools and organisations gave their views and recommendations on various interesting subjects such as education, family life, sport, culture, leisure, etc.
- For the occasion of World Children's Day, the Minister for the Family and Social Solidarity invited a group of children to her office to listen to questions and recommendations that they wished to talk about. The active participation of children in all matters that concerned them was discussed.
- The Minister for the Family and Social Solidarity was guest speaker at the annual Eurochild Conference held in Berlin Germany in November. Eurochild agreed to hold their next annual conference in Malta.
- Malta participated in the Pan European Research Project on the standards on out of home care. The research is being conducted among Maltese children who are giving their views to help in the development of the best standards for out of home care.

6. Ministry for Investment, Industry and Information Technology (MIIT)

2006 Initiatives

Child Safety Awareness Campaign

In February 2006, the Ministry for Investment, Industry and IT in collaboration with Maltacom and Microsoft launched an intensive awareness campaign targeting children and parents on the safer use of the Internet.

The campaign followed the publication of the results of the NSO survey on Children and the Internet which provided a clear guideline on the issues that parents are facing when trying to protect their children in the online environment.

The campaign made use of the most prominent media including television, print adverts and bus shelters. Various radio and television interventions were made with the intention to help parents understand better issues related to Internet safety and precautionary measures that could be taken.

National Hotline for Child Safety over the Internet

In 2004, the MIIT together with Aġenzija APPOĠĠ submitted a proposal for funding under the European Commission's Safer Internet Programme. The funding requested was for the setting up of a national hotline to deal with queries and reports related to child safety over the Internet.

Following the successful evaluation of the proposal, and subsequently the granting of funds for such initiative to proceed, the Ministry worked with Aġenzija APPOĠĠ in an effort to successfully set up the said Hotline. The hotline was officially launched in February 2006 which marked the start of the Hotline's operations. Through this initiative the general public is able to make reports and seek help on various issues that might hinder the child's safety in the online world.

eSecurity Working Group

In March 2006 the Ministry launched an eSecurity Working Group that will regularly bring together all the stakeholders directly involved in security and the IT field. Although the Working Group's remit are extensive and cover a number of issues related to eSecurity, the issue of Child Safety over the Internet was given prominence and this is clearly indicated in the Working Group's terms of reference.

In addition, in an effort to better address such a delicate issue and be able to protect minors, the Ministry also proposed the setting up a Child Safety over the Internet subgroup. The subgroup has thus far been meeting regularly in order to devise new ways of protecting children in the online world.

Future Initiatives

Grooming Legislation

One of the most important tools that law enforcement authorities use when dealing with cyber-crime is the local legislation.

One of the main requirements is the introduction of the *Grooming Legislation*. This will enable local authorities to proceed with arrest and prosecution prior to the actual physical abuse taking place, thus reducing the possibility of children being abused and sustain damage from their aggressor. The introduction of grooming as a criminal offence will make it a crime to lure a child into sexual activity and therefore a person can be arraigned to court based on the online conversations or telephone/mobile calls that the adult has with the child in question.

Safer Internet Plus

The Ministry has submitted a request for funding, under the Safer Internet Action Plus, for an intensive awareness campaign on Child Safety over the Internet.

The proposal was submitted in September of this year. A decision is planned for the first half of next year, following a rigorous evaluation process which is standard for such EC programmes.

The campaign will include various publications as well as adverts in the local press and television. It is also planned that gadgets are given to children in local schools in order to increase the effectiveness of the campaign and be able to reach the target audience with an effective message. In addition, the Ministry will also be launching a Child Safety over the Internet website that will be kept updated with regular information for both parents and children on how to stay safe in the online world.

7. Ministry for Resources and Infrastructure

During 2006 the Ministry for Resources and Infrastructure undertook various embellishment projects. One of the main objectives of such projects is to improve the local living environment for Maltese families. Leisure time has become a very important aspect of modern living, and in our projects we strive to provide good quality design, a balanced use of materials and ensure general safety for users, especially children, in our projects.

There were two major upgrading and embellishment projects completed during 2006. The first was the Mdina paving project, a place visited by many Maltese families. The squares and narrow roads of the old capital have been paved with

appropriate hard stone materials. Most of the important historical buildings have been lit up, and the city of Mdina offers a splendid experience in the evenings.

The second major project completed during 2006 was the total upgrading of Hastings Garden in Valletta. This project brought to a close the cycle of projects undertaken by MRI to upgrade the capital city's main public gardens in successive years, and namely the Lower and Upper Barrakka Gardens besides Hastings Garden. Families visiting the capital city with their children can now enjoy these three splendid public gardens and the unique views they offer in a safe, relaxed and pleasing environment. In each of these garden projects great importance was given to the restoration of various monuments found in each of time. These restored monuments in a way can contribute to help our young children appreciate better the rich historical and architectural heritage found in these public gardens.

The Ministry was also responsible for various embellishment and upgrading projects in various localities in Malta. Great importance is being given to the upgrading of village cores, especially the main squares around the local parish churches. The villages of Lija, Kirkop and Mellieha were localities that benefited from this type of upgrading initiatives during 2006.

Child Care Facilities Project - Update

The joint committee for the setting up of Child Care Facilities for Government employees working at the Works, Education, Inland Revenue Divisions plus the Department of Social Housing, was formed in March 2006.

There was a general exchange of ideas regarding: interest in the service, mode of assessment for the demand, past experience, potential locations, cost, operation, etc.

A questionnaire was formulated and this was distributed amongst all employees of the four entities in May 2006.

To date, 234 questionnaires have been returned. The questionnaires have been processed. Over 100 employees requested to be notified when the service is to be launched as they are interested in making use of the service.

Entity	Questionnaires Returned	Notification of Interest
Services and Works Division	95	38
Education Division	80	33
Inland Revenue	48	29
Social Housing	13	10
Total	236	110

The majority of the interested employees would want to avail

of the facilities immediately once the facilities are in operation, whilst a number stated they would make use as soon as the need arises.

8. Ministry for Rural Affairs and the Environment

Through the 34U campaign which as its aim has to have a nation-wide tree-planting programme with the full participation of the public, national institutions, businesses, unions, voluntary organisations and others took the following initiatives which involved children and where also addressed to children, because apart from the tree-planting programme, the 34U campaign aims to educate the public especially children about the importance of trees in our lives.

- Organised various tree planting events where children came and planted trees in their own name or in the name of their parents (during mother's and father's day)
- Organised various half day school tours at Ta' Qali National Park which consisted of a visit to the nursery where the students were given a first hand experience of how trees are grown, shown the different types of seeds and all the other work related to the propagation of trees. This was followed by a treasure hunt, with questions and clues related to the park itself. Tree planting and tree identification were also included in the day's events
- The 34U campaign was also one of the main organisers of World Children's Day festivities held at Ta' Qali during which an educational show about the importance of trees was given by Xummiemu and during which 150 trees were planted. The Children's Convention rights were attached to these trees planted on the day
- At the beginning of the scholastic year, the Ministry launched the 34U campaign school Award which had to be won by the school which would plant the highest number of trees from the beginning of the scholastic year till Arbor Day. This award takes also into consideration the school's population. The award has a two-fold educational aim, to increase the awareness among schoolchildren on the importance of trees and to increase the areas with trees in the Maltese Islands.
- This year Arbor Day 2007 was celebrated with a difference as the activities co-ordinated by the Ministry for Rural Affairs and the Environment on Arbor Day (January 16th) included the presentation of the first 34U School Campaign Award mentioned above. St Catherine's High School Pembroke won this year's award and St Aloysius College placed as runner up. Minister George Pullicino presented the award and congratulated the students of the winning school for their success. Minister Pullicino also praised the dedication of teachers who are going beyond their normal duties to encourage participation by students. Minister

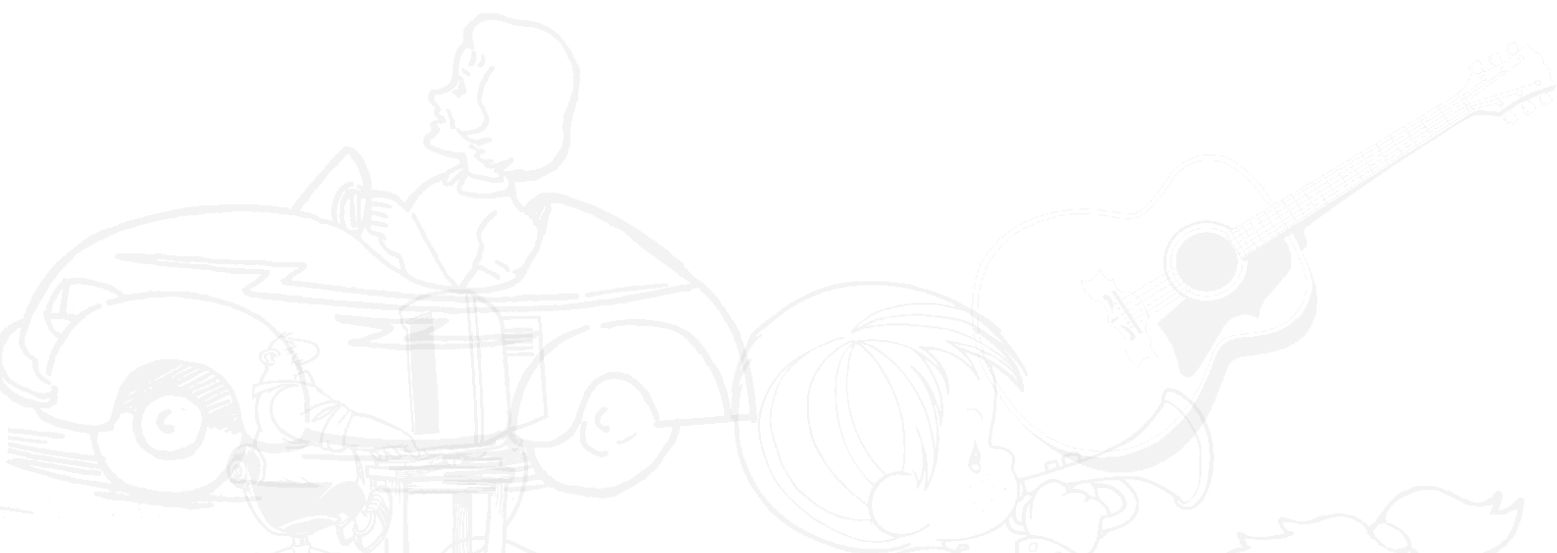
Pullicino reiterated Government's commitment to attach primary importance to environmental education since this is a sure way of instilling a positive environmental appreciation and awareness. He augured that this year's Arbor Day kick-starts yet another successful year in the areas of tree planting and the 34U Campaign.

- The above mentioned school tour at Ta' Qali was also organised twice during the Skolasajf 2006. During Skolasajf 2006 we also visited various schools to do tree planting in the school premises and held also various quiz sessions about trees at schools.
- Collaborated also with the Eden Foundation – during the Edefest 2006 where we encouraged people to plant trees and part of the funds was donated to the Eden Foundation.

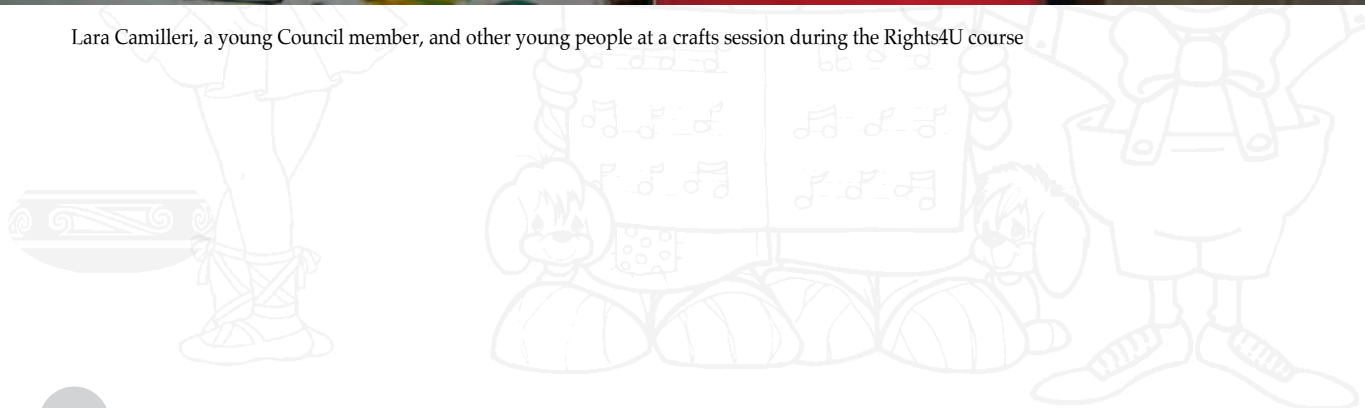
9. Parliamentary Secretariat within the Ministry for Justice and Home Affairs

There were four important developments in this last year:

1. the first development was about court cases which involved children. These will start being handled by one Magistrate, and not many. This means that every case will start being given more importance than before coupled with the added benefit that these cases will be handled with a member of the judiciary with greater specialization;
2. the second development was the Domestic Violence Act. This increased the protection during and after the case, and penalties were also increased. Legal mechanism will deter the accused from committing crimes against minors or in their presence. This is not applicable in the case of beating and fighting between married couples when children are at times the only witnesses;
3. the third development was video conferencing for children who are taking the witness stand. This administrative mechanism meant that children take the witness stand in a separate room and so do not see the accused, whilst the Court can see and hear the witnesses as though they are in the hall; and
4. the fourth development which has just been approved by Parliament stipulates that children in criminal court cases, as a general rule, take the witness stand only once. Their declaration is recorded by modern equipment which is both visual and acoustic. In this way, both the physical and mental state of the witness in that moment are preserved. This is particularly advantageous as, many times, one can easily tell when girls are abused at a young age.



Lara Camilleri, a young Council member, and other young people at a crafts session during the Rights4U course



Recommendations regarding the need for Legislation or change in rules or Policy

1. Recommendations for Amendments to the Commissioner for Children Act

The Commissioner for Children felt that her three years in office had served to highlight a number of issues. It was positive to note that the profile of the Office had been raised both locally and abroad with increased awareness of its existence which appropriate budget and staff would hopefully augment in the immediate future. However it was also apparent that there was a list of issues which merit revision of Chapter 462 of the Laws of Malta.

The Office carried out an intensive scrutiny of the existing legislation and concluded with a series of proposed amendments to the Commissioner for Children Act in the effort to further strengthen the institution. The proposals include issues relating to the independence of the Office of the Commissioner for Children, including the appointment and removal of the Commissioner, recommendations related to effective promotion, monitoring and enforcement of children's rights, staffing, child impact statements, and the Council for Children. The document was presented to the Prime Minister and the Minister for Family and Social Solidarity. (Document B).

2. Recommendations for Action in response to the United Nations Committee on the Convention on the Rights of the Child

The Commissioner for Children is entrusted with the overview of the protection of children's rights under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Following the last presentation by Malta to the United Nations Committee on the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 2000, a series of recommendations were made by the United Nations Committee highlighting issues which require State attention. The Commissioner felt these concerns should be reviewed and assessed in the light of progress made and initiatives taken.

To this end the recommendations of the United Nations Committee on the Convention on the Rights of the Child were scrutinised and a set of current recommendations

have been compiled in readiness for discussion within the next report (which is overdue). The document lists 23 items which deserve consideration from the authorities in order to be compliant with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. It covers issues relating to definitions, implementation, general principles with particular reference to discrimination and best interests, civil rights and freedoms, family environment and alternative care, health and welfare, education, leisure and recreation, protection measures and dissemination of reports.

The document was sent to the Prime Minister and the Minister for Family and Social Solidarity. (Document C)

3. Office of the Commissioner for Children

In 2006 the Office of the Commissioner for Children was moved out of the Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity building and housed at Ċentru Hidma Soċjali in Santa Venera. Although the proposal to move out of the Ministry was at first perceived as a positive step in acknowledging the independence of the Office of the Commissioner for Children, the alternative has been to backbench the Commissioner into a government department. The premises are limited and removed from easy access in Valletta. If the Office of the Commissioner for Children is to respond to the demands made upon it in terms of Articles 9 and 11 of the Commissioner for Children Act, separate premises with adequate staffing and facilities are urgently required. These recommendations were communicated on various occasions to the Minister for the Family and Social Solidarity both verbally and in writing.

4. Paedophilia

The Commissioner for Children highlighted the need to address issues relating to paedophilia and took the matter before the Council for Children for their feedback and recommendations. On the 3rd August 2006, a letter was sent to the Prime Minister and copied to the Attorney General, Speaker of the House of Representatives and all Ministers indicating a series of procedures considered essential in

the fight against paedophilia. These included reference to general legislative measures and the introduction of a series of procedures relating to enforcement. (Document A).

5. EU Strategy on Children

The Commissioner for Children was invited to give her recommendations in connection with the presentation of an EU strategy for children which was placed on the EU agenda in July 2006. The Commissioner made a number of recommendations within the local and wider context which have since been incorporated into a broader agenda.

6. Children in Care

a-In June 2006 the Commissioner for Children responded to public reports of concerns relating to the state of children in care with special reference to their monitoring by social workers. She initiated an investigation to appraise the situation for herself and contacted all heads of Children's Homes. She met with officials and with personnel who run residential homes for children. The Commissioner was repeatedly told of the need for a budget increase in order to supplement the number of social workers in this field who would then be in a position to respond to the growing numbers of children awaiting placement in a family. The report of the investigation together with the recommendations made was forwarded to the relevant authorities.

b-Communications were made with the Minister for Family and Social Solidarity, particularly in the light of urgent information received by the Commissioner relating to the plight of children in need of alternative care. With the shortage of places in a number of Church run facilities, a number of children who need to be taken from their homes are not receiving due protection or are being sent to Mount Carmel Hospital.

The Commissioner is pleased to note that in November 2006 some budget allocation was made for the setting up of a small facility to address the needs of young children requiring specialised care and attention, and that funds were also allocated for families who would be fostering children with challenging behaviour. However no further response has been forthcoming in relation to the pressing need for additional care facilities for children and to the strengthening of foster care arrangements. This is of particular concern in view of similar recommendations made under the 2005 report where the Minister for Family and Social Solidarity's response was to relay the request to the drafters of the law on fostering which is still not available at the conclusion of this 2006 report.

7. Child Asylum-Seekers

On the 21 June 2006 the Commissioner visited immigrant children who were camping with their mothers out in the open outside the Police Depot in Floriana. The Commissioner's inspection of the premises and meeting with the Commissioner of Police was reported to the Minister for Family and Social Solidarity with a view to defusing the tense situation and remedying the accommodation situation so detrimental to the young children and unborn children involved. The Commissioner raised her concerns regarding the impact of accommodating children in such conditions for any length of time. This was solved later in the year. There are no longer such vulnerable persons, including children, at the Police Headquarters.

8. Children and School Transport

The Commissioner for Children was approached by a number of parents voicing their concern relating to school transport. The issue is a complex one and the problems attached to it are also numerous. Perhaps the most pressing concern is the early time at which many children are required to leave home in the morning and the late time at which they return. It is also worrying to note that some schools still do not provide supervision on transport and children have been the victims of bullying or the subjects of victimisation, even by the driver.

The Commissioner for Children communicated with the authorities responsible for school transport within Church schools where the issue is largely unregulated and put forward her suggestions which are being taken into consideration..

9. Pro-Life Day, Feb 5th 2006

The Commissioner for Children joined a group of people who walked from Valletta to Sliema carrying balloons and slogans in favour of the Right to Life.

In a speech on the culture of life, the Commissioner referred to the need to defend 'the innocent child waiting to be born'. She also joined the Gift of Life Movement in their request for enshrining the Right to Life of the Unborn Child in the Maltese Constitution, by specifically referring to the issue of abortion.

10. Childcare Centres or Kindergartens?

In October 2006, the Commissioner expressed her concern that certain private kindergartens that she had visited during the year were accepting children as young as one and a half years old yet not complying with Childcare Centres' regulations because they were listed as a school. This state of affairs was relayed to the Minister for the Family and Social Solidarity

who appreciated this concern and took note of the situation with a view to having it better regulated. The Minister stated that 'clear procedures have been established whereby facilities catering for both age groups (under and over three years) are monitored and regulated by both the Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity and the Ministry of Education, Youth and Employment'.

11. Recommendations to Ministry for Education

a. re conditions in certain schools

In 2006 the Commissioner again visited a number of schools and presented her comments and findings regularly to the Minister of Education. In her recommendations she highlighted the conditions in which some students are housed. This communication echoed similar concerns shared with the Director of Education relating to certain primary schools which the Commissioner for Children had written about earlier.

These shortcomings are particularly relevant within the context of the project undertaken by the Office of the Commissioner for Children relating to the right of the child to play. While the Commissioner is pleased to note that a number of schools are being upgraded or built to ensure "state of the art" facilities, it is of great concern that a number of students who may never be integrated into the college system may not be benefiting from such amelioration.

b. re statementing issues

The Commissioner for Children wrote to the Minister for Education on the 12th October 2006 to communicate her concerns relating to the impact of lack of policy decision on the appointment of facilitators. Following a number of referrals from parents of children awaiting a decision from the Statementing Board which had been at a standstill for months, the Office of the Commissioner for Children urged the Ministry to finalise a new policy in order to provide a clear direction to the children who required special attention in class. In relation to similar issues, the Commissioner for Children also forwarded to the Minister for Education a letter from the Dyslexia Association.

c. re Examinations

The Commissioner for Children wrote to the Minister for Education on the 5th July 2006 in order to relay to him the concerns of 76 students who had participated in a Live-In organised by the Commissioner's office. The concerns were about the time-frames proposed for the SEC examinations in view of the Master Review Report and centred mainly on three points:

1. The exams might be held at the end of the June when the weather would be very hot

2. Resits might be held in December with results published in January when it would be too late to join a course at MCAST, ITS or University
3. Resits might not be held at all resulting in a student missing out on a whole year's education when s/he had failed even just one exam.

d. Policy suggestions to DG Education and Archbishop's Delegate on Church Schools regarding Sports Days

On participation at a Sports Day held in the late Spring by one of the Church Schools, the Commissioner wrote to Fr Scerri OP, Archbishop's Delegate for Church Schools, recommending that because of the heat experienced by the students and the teacher alike, on the particularly warm day Sports Days be moved from May to the end of March in order to avoid the hot weather.

The Commissioner further suggested that if towards the end of March there was the risk of bad weather, a contingency plan could be drawn up where the Sports Day would be held in a local Sports Complex. Another suggestion was that Sports Days could be held in the late afternoon as opposed to the morning so as to avoid the brilliant sunshine. Fr Scerri welcomed the suggestion and promised to discuss it with the Heads of Church Schools.

The Commissioner also sent a suggestion for state and independent schools on similar lines to the Director General of the Education Division.

12. Children and Adoption

The Commissioner for Children received a number of inquiries relating to procedures and costs of adoption. Concerns relating to screening at agency level, costs, aftercare, tracing etc are still to be addressed. On communication with authorities the Commissioner was (again) informed that amendments are due for imminent publication but at the time of completion of this report, no such launch had been made.

13. Children in Court

The Commissioner for Children received a number of reports from children and / or their parent(s) relating to the experience in Court and the aftermath. Children were particularly clear about their exclusion from issues relating to custody allocation and access arrangements. The Commissioner met with children in various settings and received letters and e-mails sharing their experiences with her and lamenting the fact that access is primarily in the parent's interests not the child's. In one particular case the children repeatedly refused to visit the father and the mother had been sentenced to 3 weeks imprisonment for failing to honour a

court order. Clearly the issue must take the children's wishes into account at all stages of the process.

The Commissioner for Children held a meeting with one of the Judges of the Family Court and had a number of meetings with the two Child Advocates currently appointed on a part-time basis in order to appraise the situation more fully. It would appear that representation of children in court still requires a great deal of attention if it is to truly serve the best interests of the child as delineated in Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (and the European Convention on the Exercise of Children's Rights which Malta has signed but not yet ratified).

The Office of the Commissioner for Children also participated in the Second Judicial Hague Conference on Cross Country Issues which dealt specifically with custody issues relating to children where one of the parents lived or proposed to live in a third country outside Malta; an issue frequently raised in the local context.

14. Proposed Strategy on Good Quality Programming for Children

The Office of the Commissioner for Children devoted considerable time and energy to concluding a project on the introduction of a strategy on Good Quality Programmes for Children. The project was a joint effort of the Office of the Commissioner for Children together with the Broadcasting Authority. Numerous meetings and a public conference (June 2006) were held in order to elicit the responses of experts in the field before drafting a final document.

The main thrust of the work is to encourage a strategy which should be adopted by Parliament in the form of legislation. This would serve to consolidate existing laws and introduce new provisions which address broadcasting issues related to children. The object and reasons of this law are to improve quality broadcasting programming for children. (Document D)

15. Children with Very Challenging Behaviour

In April 2006 a National Conference on Children with Very Challenging Behaviour was organised by the Office of the Commissioner for Children. It marked the conclusion of a project undertaken on behalf of the Commissioner for Children which had started in June 2005 involving a sizeable number of experts and feedback from children who were also involved in the research. The conference also launched the findings in book format providing two versions: an adult and a child friendly format. The Prime Minister and Minister for Family and Social Solidarity were both present together with a number of distinguished guests to hear the findings and recommendations.

The Commissioner has been informed that an Inter-Ministerial working group was appointed to consider the conclusions and that a small centre has been identified to respond to the needs of children with very challenging behaviour. While this is commendable, there is still the outstanding concern of the treatment of children with very challenging behaviour within the school environment and the persistent response of sending children (as young as six years old) and young people to Mount Carmel Psychiatric Hospital which a placement breaks down. The Commissioner trusts that the remaining detailed recommendations published will be addressed without delay.

Document A: Press Release Recommendations regarding the Full Criminal Record (Fedina Penale)

2nd August, 2006

Press Release of the Council for Children regarding protection from Paedophilia in Malta.

The Council for Children strives to promote the rights of children in all contexts and is committed to protecting them from situations that can be detrimental to them.

One issue that has been recently discussed within the Council, is the phenomenon of paedophilia. While recognizing citizens rights to fair trial and also the need for appropriate professional intervention, it is the Council's priority to discuss, suggest and ask for more improved ways of protecting children against any form of abuse, including paedophilia.

The Council considered different areas of society that are frequented by children such as schools, religious education classes, sports, drama, music and art sessions, as well as other social activities. It was noted that while there are certain laws, such as the Education Act and Sports Act, that regulate some of these activities, it seems clear that further legislation to better protect children can be enacted.

One concrete, short term proposal the Council would like put forward is to amend Maltese law to oblige employers to screen prospective employees in the field. The members agree with certain entities that require a certificate of good conduct which is mandatory when applying for a job, however, it should be pointed out that such a certificate solely covers the previous months from the date of application. The Council is proposing to Government that it should be mandatory for all those employing persons who are going to work with children, to request a full criminal record (fedina penali) with the application. In this way, if there is a criminal record

of child abuse or paedophilia, it will be known prior to employment. Such a legal amendment will also necessitate appropriate structures to enforce this regulation. The Council wishes to applaud this good practice which is already being implemented within some organizations.

The Council is convinced that all citizens acknowledge that the utmost should be done so as to protect the right of the child to grow serenely, without circumstances that endanger the child's existence, potential and future growth.

Document B: Commissioner's Proposed Amendments to the Commissioner for Children Act

Chapter 462

Proposal

Amendment

1. Interpretation

Article 2. "Commissioner" means the Commissioner for Children appointed under Article 3 and includes any officer assigned to assist the Commissioner and authorised by him in that behalf;

The Office of the Commissioner for Children is intrinsically a human rights institution but this is not referred to in the law.

Article 2. "Commissioner for Children" means the person appointed under Article 3 to head the human rights institution established for the participation, promotion, and protection of the rights of children and includes any officer assigned to assist the Commissioner and authorised by him in that behalf"

2. Appointment

Article 3. (1) There shall be a Commissioner for Children who shall be appointed by the Prime Minister after consultation with the Committee.

The Commissioner should ideally be appointed in a professional, transparent and child-friendly way.

(i) The law should require that the post be filled after an expression of interest is issued publicly. Ideally the interviewing board should be composed of a wide cross section of people involved in children's issues, and include children and young persons themselves. This has been the practice in recent appointments of Commissioners for Children in Europe and has been publicly praised by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. The shortlist would be presented to the Prime Minister who after consultation with the SAC will make the appointment.

Article 3. (1) There shall be a Commissioner for Children who shall be appointed by the Prime Minister after consultation with the Committee, following a call for applications and interview by a Board composed of children and persons directly involved in children's issues so appointed by the Prime Minister.

Article 6. (1) Subject to the provisions of sub article (2), the Commissioner shall hold office for a term of three years and shall be eligible for reappointment on the expiration of such term of office.

(ii) Article 6 specifies an appointment for 3 years while other European Child Commissioners are appointed for a minimum five-year term on a full time basis.

Article 6. (1) Subject to the provisions of sub article (2), the Commissioner shall hold office for a term of five years and shall be eligible for reappointment on the expiration of such term of office

3. Independence of Functions

Article 4. In the exercise of the functions established under this Act, the Commissioner shall act independently and shall not be subject to the direction or control of any other person or authority

The theory behind this article is commendable. The law however has not provided for the logistical independence of the Office of the Commissioner, particularly given the list of functions assigned to the Commissioner in

Article 4 A. (1) Subject to the provisions of this Act, the Commissioner may appoint such officers and employees as may be necessary for the carrying out of the functions, powers and duties under this Act. This power to

Article 11. In order to promote the welfare of children and to monitor the conditions under which children develop, the Commissioner shall:

- (a) provide public education and information designed to promote an understanding of the rights of children;
- (b) initiate measures for asserting the rights and promote the interests of children;
- (c) collect information and investigate any alleged breaches of the rights of children including the death of any child if the Commissioner considers such an investigation to be necessary;
- (d) set standards to be applied by ministries, departments or agencies of the Government to help ensure that their internal review processes are responsive to complaints about decisions concerning the provision of designated services to children;
- (e) monitor whether ministries, government departments and agencies referred to in paragraph (d) are meeting the standards set under that paragraph;
- (f) collect data about, conduct or encourage research into, matters relevant to services for children;
- (g) ensure that such services in relation to children are -
 - (i) accessible,
 - (ii) community-based,
 - (iii) co-ordinated and integrated,
 - (iv) inclusive of gender, culture and language, and
 - (v) responsive to individual needs;
- (h) provide public education and information designed to promote an understanding of, and to invite public comment on, the work of the Commissioner;
- (i) monitor and assess the policies and practices of social welfare services affecting children;
- (j) ensure that legislation relating to the protection of children's interests is observed;
- (k) act as a spokesperson for the rights, needs and interests of children and put forward proposals for measures which can solve or prevent conflicts between children and society;
- (l) advise the Government and propose to the Government such measures as may be required in order for the rights and interests of children to be provided for.

Article 11. The law in fact does not refer at all to the Office of the Commissioner. In view of this vacuum the Office is very much dependant on the Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity. The Commissioner cannot employ his/her own staff, cannot choose his/her own premises, cannot ask directly for his/her own finances, and cannot even choose which conferences to participate in abroad. These restrictions have a negative effect on the required promotion and monitoring of children's rights. A separate provision for recruitment, appointment and dismissal of staff should be added to the Principal Law.

appoint includes approval to the numbers of persons that may be appointed under this section whether generally or in respect of any specific duties or classes of duties, their salaries and conditions of appointment. (2) The Commissioner may in the conduct of an investigation engage, in a consultative capacity, any person whose particular expertise is essential to the effectiveness of the investigation. (3) Subject to the provisions of this section the Commissioner shall be responsible for approving the level of capital equipment, furnishings, materials, and administrative activities for the carrying out of the functions, powers and duties under this Act. (4) The finance required for the Commissioner's salary and allowances, and for the resources described in subsections (1), (2) and (3) of this section shall not exceed a maximum amount indicated in the Commissioner's plan approved by the House of Representatives and shall be a charge on the Consolidated Fund without any further appropriation other than this Act: Provided that the Commissioner shall present to the House by the 15th day of September of each year, a Commissioner plan which will indicate the ensuing year's activities. (5) The accounts of the office of the Commissioner shall be audited by the Auditor General and the Financial Administration and Audit Act shall apply.

Article 4 B. The Prime Minister may, at the request of the Commissioner, from time to time direct that any public officers shall be detailed for duty with the Commissioner's Office in such capacity and with effect from such date as may be specified in the direction. (5) The period during which a direction as aforesaid shall apply to any officers specified therein, shall, unless the officers retire from the public service, or otherwise cease to be public officers at an earlier date, and cease on the date specified in the direction or on the happening of any of the following events, that is to say -

- (a) the acceptance by such public officers of an offer of permanent employment with the Commissioner's Office ; or
- (b) the revocation by the Prime Minister of any direction made by him/her under this article in relation to such officers.

(6) Where a public officer is detailed for duty with the Commissioner's Office under this article, such officer shall, during the time the direction has effect in relation to him/her be under the administrative authority and control of the Commissioner, but shall for all other intents and purposes remain and be considered and treated as a public officer and without prejudice to the generality of the aforesaid such public officer:

(a) shall not during the time while s/he was so detailed -

(i) be precluded from applying for transfer to a department of the Government in accordance

with the terms and conditions of service attached to the appointment under the Government held by the officer at the date on which such officer was detailed for duty; or

(ii) be so employed that his/her remuneration and conditions of service are less favourable than those which are attached to the appointment under the Government held by such officer at the date the officer was so detailed or which would have become attached during the said period had such officer not been so detailed.

4. Appointment, Removal, Suspension and Resignation

Article 7. A Commissioner may at any time be removed or suspended from office by the Prime Minister after consultation with the Committee on the grounds of proved inability to perform the functions of the office of Commissioner (whether arising from infirmity of body or mind or any other cause) or proved misbehaviour:

Provided that if the Committee is not constituted or if Parliament is not in session, the Commissioner may be suspended from office by the Prime Minister, acting in accordance with his own discretion, for inability to perform the functions of the office or misbehaviour proved to the satisfaction of the Prime Minister, but any such suspension shall not continue in force beyond two months after the Committee is constituted and Parliament is in session.

Article 6 (3) The Commissioner may at any time resign from office by writing addressed to the Minister.

Appointment, removal or suspension of the Commissioner may be made by the Prime Minister after consultation with the Social Affairs Committee. In the case of resignation the Commissioner must refer to Minister FSS. The amendment proposed is to bring all such actions under the Office of the Prime Minister.

Article 6. (3) The Commissioner may at any time resign from office by writing addressed to the Prime Minister.

5. Guiding Principles

Article 10. The Commissioner shall be guided by the following general principles:

- (a) that the best interests of children and the family are paramount;

The Commissioner should be guided by the best interests of the Child. In ensuring that children's interests are paramount, there have been conflicts of interest between child and family.

Article 10. The Commissioner shall be guided by the following general principles:

- (a) that the best interests of children are paramount;

6. Council for Children

Article 12. (1) There shall be a Council for Children appointed by the Minister to assist the Commissioner, composed of the Commissioner who shall be the chairperson and six other members as follows:

- (a) one person appointed by the Minister;
 (b) one person appointed by the Minister responsible for Health;
 (c) one person appointed by the Minister responsible for Education;
 (d) one person appointed by the Minister responsible for Home Affairs;
 (e) one person appointed by the Minister responsible for Justice; and
 (f) the Chairperson of the Committee.

-omissis-

(6) The functions of the Council shall be:

- (a) to monitor compliance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child as ratified by Malta and with all such other international treaties, conventions or agreements relating to children as are or may be ratified or otherwise acceded to by Malta;
 (b) generally to advise and assist the Commissioner in the performance of the functions of the Commissioner as listed in this Act;
 (c) to advise and assist the Commissioner in the promotion of the welfare of children as specified in article 11.

The composition of the Council was primarily intended as an aid "to assist" the Commissioner but the resulting structure has led to situations that were not foreseen in the law. Council members have at times asked to be excused from assisting the Commissioner on the grounds that this would be in conflict with their position in the respective Ministry. The following amendments have therefore been found to be necessary.

a. appointment – this is made by the Minister not Commissioner.

It is suggested that the Commissioner make the choice or that the Prime Minister make the appointment after consultation with the Commissioner.
 b. functions– the Council's functions are to advise and assist the Commissioner who chairs the same Council. All members should be aware that final decisions are taken independently by the Commissioner following receipt of such advice. The original text of the law in Article 12(6) causes duplication of functions which were not fulfilled by Council.

c. The Ministry for Justice and Home Affairs has two representatives where one would be sufficient

d. Social Affairs Committee (SAC) chairperson – although the intention of appointing the chairperson of the SAC Committee was undoubtedly to link the Committee and both sides of the House of Representatives to the Commissioner, it is questioned how effectively this role is currently being fulfilled.

It is doubtful how fully the SAC chairperson reports to the members of the SAC Committee regarding the Council activities and by the 30 September 2006, the Commissioner had not yet been invited to present the annual report (2005) to the SAC. Conflicts of interest have also been registered. A blatant example was when the SAC chairperson and member of Council presented himself at the launch of the Commissioner's annual report in lieu of the Minister FSS and made speech on behalf of government.

Article 12. (1) There shall be a Council for Children appointed by the Prime Minister, after consultation with the Commissioner, to assist the Commissioner, composed of the Commissioner who shall be the chairperson and four other members as follows:

- (a) one person nominated by the Minister for Family and Social Solidarity;
 (b) one person nominated by the Minister responsible for Health;
 (c) one person nominated by the Minister responsible for Education;
 (d) one person nominated by the Minister responsible for Justice and Home Affairs;
 (e) – omissis-

The Chairperson of the Social Affairs Committee shall be invited to attend all Council meetings in order to act as an effective link between the Council for Children and the House of Representatives.

(6) The functions of the Council shall be generally to advise and assist the Commissioner in the performance of the functions of the Commissioner listed in this Act.

Document C: Outstanding Issues from the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child Malta Report

Recommendations of CRC Committee* made on 28 June 2000 following Malta Report submitted under Article 44 of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child CRC

CRC/C/15/Add.129 (Concluding Observations/Comments)

A. Under heading General Measures of Implementation

1. Reservation to Article 26 and general comment

Reservation removed in 2002 when Hon. Helen D'Amato went to the UNGASS on children in New York. She said:

"... following the meeting with the Committee CRC further initiatives were taken to guarantee children's rights, including the withdrawal of our only previous reservation to Article 26.

During the past years, Malta has undertaken a thorough overhaul within the childcare sector. As chairperson of the Social Affairs Committee in Parliament, it was my responsibility in 1998/99 to take stock of existing services for children in need and at risk. Considerable time was spent listening to all stakeholders, including children.

The introduction of the Office of the Child Advocate and the setting up of the Family Court will ensure children of legal representation. The Children Act will incorporate all laws relating to Children and will consolidate existing rules. A Bill setting up the Office of the Commissioner or Ombudsman for Children is expected to be piloted shortly..."

The Children Act referred to has not materialised and legal representation of children is still in the very initial stages.

2. Status of Convention and incorporation into domestic legislation

The CRC remains to be incorporated into domestic legislation through an Act of Parliament (as with European Convention on Human Rights).

3. Co-ordination and monitoring

The Department for Social Welfare Standards is slowly being set up but is still not functioning fully in order to set standards and monitor all facilities for children.

The Commissioner for Children's Office was set up but still lacks a recommendation made by the Committee CRC "The Committee encourages the State party to establish an **independent** mechanism (e.g. an Ombudsperson for Children) to strengthen the monitoring of the implementation of the Convention. The Committee suggests that this mechanism be made easily accessible to children and that it deal with complaints of violations of their rights in a child-friendly manner and provide effective remedies for such violations. The Committee further suggests that the State party conduct awareness-raising campaigns to facilitate the effective use by children of the mechanism."

In spite of Article 4 of the Commissioner for Children Act, the Office is constrained by limitations on its independence. There is a responsibility on the State to facilitate or provide structural and practical support.

4. Limited collection and coordination of statistics

Committee CRC recommended the collection and coordination of data with special emphasis on vulnerable groups ("children with disabilities, children born out of wedlock, refugee children and children belonging to minority groups") and the use of statistics as a means to realise children's rights and help design policies for better implementation of the CRC. This is still a huge problem as demonstrated by the personal experience of the Office of the Commissioner for Children trying to get statistics for the Children with Very Challenging Behaviour project. (FSWS report 2006 on Malta's situation re Missing and Sexually Exploited Children also cites lack of essential statistics)

5. Budget allocation and National Policy

The Committee CRC expressed its concern at the lack of national policy on implementation of the rights of the child (CRC Article 4). This is still lacking. Furthermore little action has been taken to ensure appropriate distribution of resources from a child rights perspective.

6. Dissemination

Committee CRC expressed concern at the limited nature of measures to promote awareness of principles and provisions of CRC. The Office of the Commissioner for Children has started to address this issue but there is still the need for improvement of awareness-raising among public at large re implementation of principles and provisions of CRC. It remains the State's responsibility to make CRC available and for CfC to monitor and promote.

*CRC Committee: the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child is the monitoring body of the UN Convention

7. Training for professions

Committee CRC expressed concern at lack of training re CRC for professionals working with and for children. Although there has been some development, this is still largely the case. It is a State responsibility to disseminate to all groups including “judges, law enforcement officials, civil servants, personnel working in institutions and places of detention for children, teachers, health personnel, including psychologists and social workers.”

B. Definition of Child

8. Minimum age

There was State undertaking to review legislation relating to the minimum medical age for medical counselling without parental consent but this has not been concluded. Minimum age for criminal responsibility is still age 9 and was seen as too low – no action has been taken to amend the Criminal Code (see below in Part H No. 22)

C. General Principles

9. Discrimination

The removal of illegitimacy as a term was done by Act XVIII. 2004. But there is still remaining discrimination in intestate succession.

Chapter 16, Civil Code Art.815

“Where a person conceived and born out of wedlock succeeds ab intestato with adoptive children of the deceased or other children of the deceased who are not so conceived or born or descendants of such children, or with the surviving spouse of the deceased, the person conceived and born out of wedlock shall receive only three quarters of the share to which he would have been entitled if all the heirs of the deceased, including such person, had been conceived or born in wedlock, and the remaining quarter of the share to which he would have been so entitled shall devolve on the other heirs of the deceased to the exclusion of any of such heirs who is conceived and born out of wedlock as if it were a separate estate.”

Children conceived or born outside marriage who compete with other children or with the surviving spouse stand to lose out where the parent failed to make a will in their favour. The rules of intestate succession maintain that this child may only inherit three quarters of what would have been his due had there been a will. It is interesting that the remaining quarter does not go to the children conceived or born in wedlock – it would appear that the surviving spouse is the beneficiary although the position of the adoptee is also unclear.

Recommendation is to remove all discrimination against children born out of wedlock.

10. Best interests of child

While there are some measures present to incorporate the best interests principle the Committee CRC is “of the opinion that such measures are not sufficiently taken into account, especially within the family, the school, in care institutions and in the justice system”

Recommendation is to include the principle in ALL legislation affecting children and ensure it is taken into account in ALL judicial and administrative decisions, policies and programmes. It should be part of Commissioner for Children’s role to monitor such inclusion but lack of personnel and funding preclude this at the present.

D. Civil Rights and Freedoms

11. Participatory rights

The Committee CRC expressed concern at insufficient measures taken by the State to promote participation of children in family, community, school etc “to ensure effective enjoyment of their fundamental freedoms” (Articles 12-17). Recommendation is that measures are needed to promote participation and effective enjoyment of fundamental rights and freedoms as well as public awareness of participatory rights of children. There has been progress in this field although still a way to go (refer to Annual Report Commissioner for Children 2005)

12. Ill-treatment

The Committee CRC voiced its concern at continued application of “reasonable chastisement” as means to use corporal punishment in the home. Recommendation was that the State party to “take all effective measures, including legal ones, to include an explicit prohibition on the use of corporal punishment in the home; to ensure that this prohibition is adequately monitored and enforced, both at home and in the schools; and to promote positive, non-violent forms of discipline as an alternative to corporal punishment in the home”. To date this issue has not been given any attention.

E. Family Environment and alternative care

13. Alternative care measures

Committee CRC made reference to draft Children Act (The State consultant had been instructed to tell the Committee that “a draft bill entitled the Children Act was in its final stages of revision prior to being published as a White Paper for general consideration and feedback. It promoted children as individuals in their own right and included the repel of unacceptable concepts such as discrimination on the

grounds of birth outside marriage; it contained amendments to existing laws to enable better provision for child protection and development and the regularisation of procedures in foster and child day care: and it introduced a range of other concepts. Regulations to accompany the act were being drafted, and a bill to set up an Ombudsman for children was ready for publication alongside the Children Act” CRC 24th Session 26 May 2000 – UN Press release).

The Committee CRC expressed concern regarding current procedures governing adoption and foster care and the lack of procedures for inter country adoption. Although 6 years have passed and reassurances have been made that the draft law is almost complete, these issues are still pending.

The Committee CRC was also concerned about children’s long stay in residential care and limited alternative care measures for children deprived of family environment. To date no standards relating to residential care have been concluded or implemented.

Recommendation is that remaining Hague Conventions be ratified and domestic adoption law be brought into line. Furthermore, there is an urgent need to develop and promote alternative care measures

14. Child Abuse and neglect

The Committee CRC registered its concern at “limited information available to determine the scope of child abuse; the limited measures available for the rehabilitation of child victims of abuse; and the insufficient awareness within society regarding the harmful consequences of ill-treatment and abuse, including sexual abuse of children, both within and outside the family.” Scant attention was paid to this recommendation by the State.

Recommendation is for the State to take effective measures including establishment of interdisciplinary programmes and rehabilitation measures to prevent and combat child abuse and ill treatment of children but this has not yet been done. Another Recommendation was for the State to strengthen law enforcement regarding such crimes and introduce child-friendly procedures and mechanisms to deal with complaints of child abuse for prompt access to justice. Measures have recently been taken to ensure investigative procedures avoid double victimisation of children and a Domestic Violence Act came into force.

Educational programmes are still to be established to combat traditional attitudes to child abuse. There is still no perpetrators programme for perpetrators of child abuse, no child-friendly procedures, no educational campaign and insufficient training for professionals working in this field.

F. Basic Health and Welfare

15. Concern at low breastfeeding rate and high rate of child obesity

The Committee CRC recommended measures to increase and promote breastfeeding practices, strengthen special programmes re child obesity. Very limited funding has been allocated and health campaigns have not been sufficiently aggressive to address these concerns.

16 Children with disabilities

The Committee expressed concern at the stigma attached to this group of children and the accompanying barrier to social integration as well as limitations faced by NGOs in addressing needs of children with disabilities.

Reference to Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (General Assembly resolution 48/96) and Committee CRC recommendations following day of general discussion on children with disabilities (CRC/C/69).

Recommendation was for the State party to implement alternative measures to institutionalisation of children with disabilities, awareness raising campaigns to eliminate discrimination, special education programmes and encouragement of inclusion and social integration of disabled children into educational system and society, monitoring of private institutions for children with disabilities. Following the Spiteri Report, steps have been taken in the field of inclusion.

17. Adolescent health

The Committee was concerned at increased rate of teenage pregnancy, insufficient access by teenagers to reproductive health education and counselling services, including outside school and lack of structured policy on health education. Notwithstanding the setting up of Għozza, teenage pregnancy remains on the increase. Similarly concern was expressed at insufficient attention given to adolescent mental health, alcohol consumption and shortage of psychologists.

Recommendation is to take effective measures, develop programmes, hold effective campaigns relating to all these issues

G. Education, leisure and cultural activities

18. The Committee was concerned at issues of illiteracy, absenteeism and bullying in schools.

Recommendation was for the State party to “continue to strengthen its educational programme with a view to improving its quality and relevance”.

A task force was set up to address the issue of absenteeism in schools while FES and University programmes have started to address illiteracy and the Anti-Bullying Team has been established within the Education Division. Additional measures are required to encourage children to stay in school, particularly for compulsory education period and training programmes in human rights and specially children's rights to be held for teachers.

H. Special protection measures

19. Refugee children

At the time, the Refugees Act was being debated in Parliament, so concern was expressed at lack of legislation for protection of unaccompanied, asylum-seeking and refugee children and re family reunification, limited access to education, health services and housing. The Recommendation was for the State to enact legislation re asylum procedures and family reunification of refugees, continue taking measures re education, health and housing for refugees and provide assistance to refugee children who are victims of neglect, exploitation or abuse. The Committee CRC only refers to refugee children in terms of rights in its recommendations although the most pressing local issues relate to children with subsidiary forms of protection. Housing remains a problem.

20. Economic exploitation

The Committee CRC was concerned at under-age employment in family businesses and tourism-related activities during summer.

Recommendation was for the State to fully enforce child labour laws, strengthen labour inspectorates and impose penalties in cases of violation. Encouragement to ratify ILO Convention re Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour 1999 (No.182) – Malta ratified in 2001 which is a positive development but it is still a problem that there are no real statistics in this area.

21. Sexual exploitation and abuse

The Committee CRC expressed concern at lack of data and awareness re commercial sexual exploitation of children and “at the absence of comprehensive and integrated approach to preventing and combating this phenomenon.” Recommendation for the State to “undertake a national study on nature and extent of commercial sexual exploitation of

children with a view to designing policies and programmes, including for care and rehabilitation, to prevent and combat this phenomenon.”

FSWS have started to address this concern by working with other national and international agencies on the collection of data. This initiative followed a national study which highlighted the dearth of available statistics.

22. Administration of juvenile justice

At the time the Committee CRC made its observations Fejda was just opened and a similar programme for boys was being considered – Formula 1 was subsequently started but quickly closed down. The Committee was concerned at low age of criminal responsibility (referred to in item B N.8) set at 9, at legislation relating to children between 9-14 acting with “mischievous intent” and at the exclusion of children from 16-18 from juvenile justice system.

Reference was made to Article 37, 40 and 39 of CRC and UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice (the Beijing Rules) and the UN Guidelines for the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency (the Riyadh Guidelines) and the UN Rules for the Protection of Juveniles Deprived of their Liberty. Recommendation was to legislate to

- i. raise minimum age of criminal responsibility
- ii. eliminate assumption that child between 9 – 14 could act with “mischievous intent”
- iii. ensure juvenile justice system covers all children under the age of 18 years.

All items are still to be addressed

I. Dissemination of the reports

23. Recommendations

Committee CRC recommends that according to Article 44.6. State should make initial report and written replies “widely available to the public at large”, that the publication of the report should be considered along with summary records and concluding observations. “Such a document should be widely distributed in order to generate debate and awareness of the Convention, its implementation and monitoring within the Government, the Parliament and the general public, including concerned NGOs.”

This was never done. Perhaps it could be the impetus for encouraging open debate of the next report being drafted which is behind schedule.

Proposed Strategy for Quality Children's Programming

Ideally, this strategy should be adopted by Parliament in the form of legislation which consolidates existing laws and introduces new provisions which address broadcasting issues related to children. The object and reasons of this law would be to improve quality broadcasting programming for children.

For the purposes of this strategy:

"children" mean all persons who have not yet attained 18 years of age.

"Quality children's programmes" means those programmes that meet children's entertainment, information and educational needs and further the positive development of children.

The proposed strategy is divided into eight parts:

1. Institutional

A Quality Children's Programming Commission should be appointed to consist of experts in the field.

The Commission shall be appointed by the Prime Minister acting on the advice of the Broadcasting Authority and the Commissioner for Children.

The Commission shall consist of a chairman and five members well versed in psychology, education, children's media, artistic creativity related to the children's world, and children's rights; and there shall be at least 3 children who will sit on the Commission.

The Commission shall appoint such number of panels which it seems fit to carry out its functions. Each Panel is to be chaired by a Member of the Commission. At least one child shall sit on each panel. The duties of such Panels shall include:

[a] those of providing consultancy services to stakeholders;

[b] to adjudicate upon applications received from broadcasters and independent production houses in order to receive supportive grants for carrying out any part of the process of producing quality children's programmes;

[c] to monitor children's programmes.

The Commission shall recognise the need of children to benefit from children's programmes both in the Maltese and English Language.

The Commission shall draw up a business plan following consultations with stakeholders whereby it shall establish short, medium, and long-term goals and such business plan will have to be communicated to the shareholders within the first three months of each calendar year for programmes to be broadcast at the start of the broadcasting season within that year.

Three Panels that can be set up are the following:

[a] Consultancy Panel

This Panel is to be composed of a number of experts (in media, psychology, education, sociology, children's rights, etc.) to give free advice to radio and television broadcasting stations, independent production houses and advertising agencies on an ongoing basis with regard to the production of good quality children's advertising and programming.

[b] Programme Selection Panel

This Panel will select proposals from broadcasters and independent production houses for quality children's programmes falling within the following categories:

- children's television programmes;
- nationwide radio children's programmes;
- community radio children's programme;

each of the above three categories can be divided in the following age groups:

- i. toddlers to five years;
- ii. ages six to eight;
- iii. ages nine to twelve; and
- iv. age thirteen to seventeen.

Such proposals can be made with regard to programme development, actual production and post-production research aimed at establishing good practice.

[c] Programme Monitoring Panel

This Panel will:

- i) monitor children's programmes on all local broadcasting platforms;
- ii) draw up reports on local children's programmes;
- iii) obtain feedback from children, parents, teachers and others as to quality content;
- iv) carry out qualitative and quantitative research on children's programming;
- v) organise an annual meeting for broadcasters, independent production houses and advertisers to discuss issues relating to quality children's programmes current at the time and to update, from time to time, this strategy; and
- vi) provide feedback to the Commission and the other panels on the quality of children's programmes.

The Commission will co-ordinate the activities of all three panels, monitor progress achieved by each Panel and ensure that the object and reasons of the Children's Broadcasting Act are met.

The Commission shall cooperate with such relative local and foreign initiatives which promote children's interests in the media.

2. Legal/regulatory

- There should be a legal and/or licence requirement that broadcasting free-to-air television stations should broadcast a minimum number of hours of quality children's programming.
- The public service broadcaster shall be required by its own license to broadcast a daily children's news bulletin which provides news directly of relevance to children and to local and international current affairs and presented in a child friendly manner.
- Adverts which harm minors (junk food, toy weapons, etc.) should be prohibited.
- Unfortunately, the Broadcasting Code for the Protection of Minors tackles primarily the advertising aspect. Hence it needs to be widened to cater for other aspects such as:
 - i) the impact on the psychological development of minors;
 - ii) children as viewers and listeners (violence, language, stereotyping, ...);
 - iii) children as participants in children's programmes;
 - iv) children as participants in non-children's programmes (e.g. factual programmes, current affairs programmes, news, ...);
 - v) children and the issue of consent;
 - vi) portrayal and interviewing of children;
 - vii) children in studio audiences;
 - viii) children employed as actors/performers;
 - ix) licensing requirements for children employed in broadcasting activities;
 - x) television programme classifications and watershed.
- Media Education should be introduced as a compulsory course in the State and private school curricula in order to equip children with the necessary tools to empower them to be critical of what they see and hear on the broadcasting media in a more construction manner.
- Good Quality Children's Programmes Guidelines should be part of the law.

3. Financial

- The drawing up and establishment of a Quality Children's Broadcasting Fund to be administered by the Commission. The Fund's objectives are to:
 - i) develop high quality children's programmes based on Maltese culture, heritage and experience;
 - ii) develop these programmes in the Maltese language;
 - iii) increase the availability of these programmes on the local broadcasting media;
 - iv) pay for the expenses incurred in the implementation of this strategy.
- The Fund should receive a reasonable percentage of television licence fees in order to distribute the revenue collected amongst broadcasters and independent production houses who would have competed amongst themselves for the said funds and, generally, for the implementation of this strategy.
- The Fund should also receive a nominal percentage of the advertising budget of each broadcasting station or such other percentage as may be determined by the Commission following consultation with broadcasters. This amount of money will be given back to such stations in the form of a programme, so that it can be used to compensate for the lack of advertising in children's programmes. Such money shall be pooled together by the Commission in order to produce quality children's programmes to be aired by all the stations which would have contributed part of their advertising revenue to the fund.
- The Fund could also receive donations from the private sector and from other entities such as foundations, etc.

4. Human Resources

Training and sensitisation shall be provided to local broadcasters and producers with regard to the provisions of the Guidelines for Audio-visual Programme Content Created for Children through:

- a] training to be given by the University of Malta (eg Faculty of Education and CCT), MCAST and any other recognised educational institution;
- b] placement of Maltese broadcasters and producers with foreign broadcasting stations (e.g. BBC, RAI, etc.) through EU funding;
- c] bringing over foreign experts to deliver lectures in Malta (e.g. with the assistance of various embassies such as the British High Commission, Australian High Commission, Italian Embassy, French Embassy, American Embassy, etc) or Foundations (Commonwealth Foundation, Strickland Foundation, Tumas Fenech Foundation, etc.);

d] training of parents/guardians and child carers in media literacy: e.g. utilisation of Education 22 for this purpose; and in operating parental guidance control on all platforms.

Education 22 shall strive to achieve the following aims:

- to provide educational tools;
- develop early good citizenship;
- help in linguistic development;
- stimulate child critical thinking (media education);
- provide individual communication training sessions;
- offers high-level teaching experiences to difficult children by providing interactive and entertaining educational games;

Training should not only focus on content but also on the techniques employed; and

Maltese academics should be sent abroad for training so that they can in return train the Maltese broadcasters/independent production houses employees (training the trainers).

5. Programming

A Pilot Project: could be commissioned consisting of four good children's quality programming which will focus on the four age groups categorised hereunder:

- i. toddlers to five years;
- ii. ages six to eight;
- iii. age nine to twelve; and
- iv. age thirteen to seventeen.

These 4 programmes will be used in focus groups composed of children so that their feedback thereupon could be obtained and used for raising private sponsorship for the Fund.

6. Awareness raising

An awareness campaign should primarily target:

- i) children;
- ii) parents and guardians;
- iii) teachers;
- iv) child carers;
- v) nongovernmental child welfare organisations; and
- vi) the public administration.

Other sectors of society have to be targeted as well - though this might overlap with item 4 above (training) - in the case of:

- i) broadcasters;
- ii) independent production houses;
- iii) advertising agencies.

Such a sensitisation campaign can take the form of:

- i) articles in the press / public service announcements on radio and television;
- ii) publication of leaflets, brochures, posters, compact disks, etc;
- iii) dissemination of the good quality children's programmes guidelines;
- iv) providing information with regard to the lodging of complaints on children's programmes which in the public's views do not achieve the required standard;
- v) a website to raise public awareness;
- vi) the print media should publish programme classifications in their respective medium so as to enable parents/guardians to get to know about the suitability for children of radio and television programmes.

Such awareness-raising campaigns can be done in conjunction with other interested entities (NGOs) involved in Children's Welfare

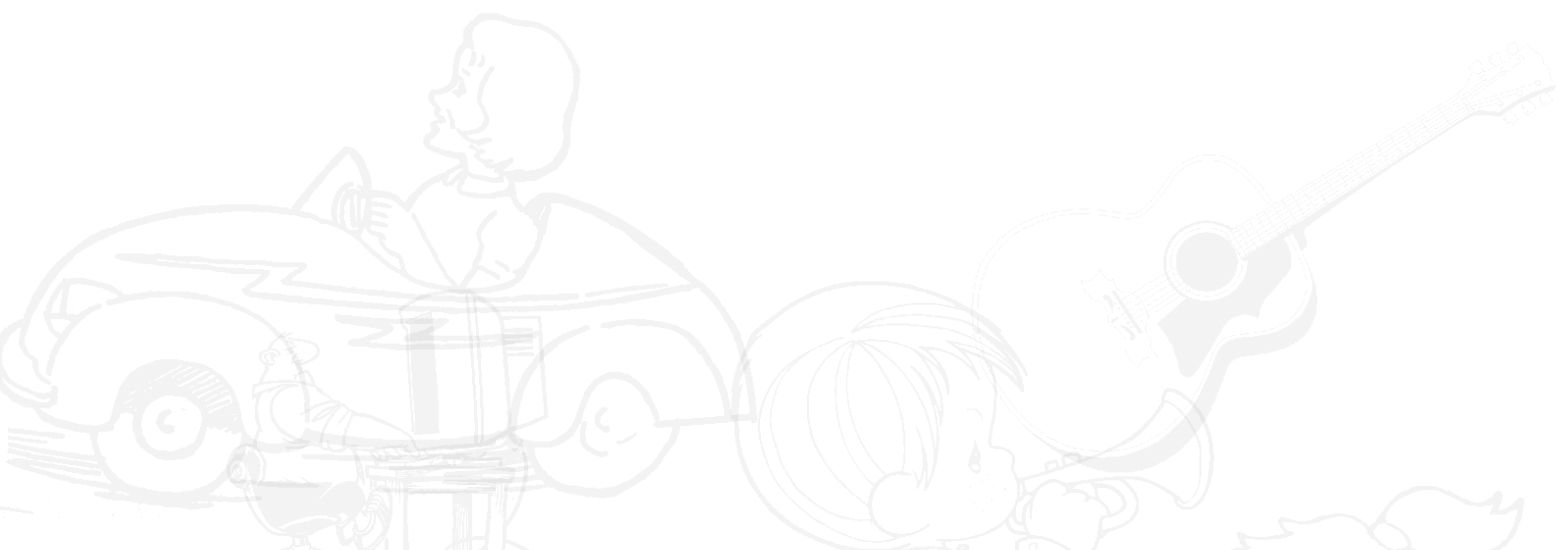
7. Enforcement mechanism

The Broadcasting Authority's guidelines aimed at protecting minors should become legally enforceable

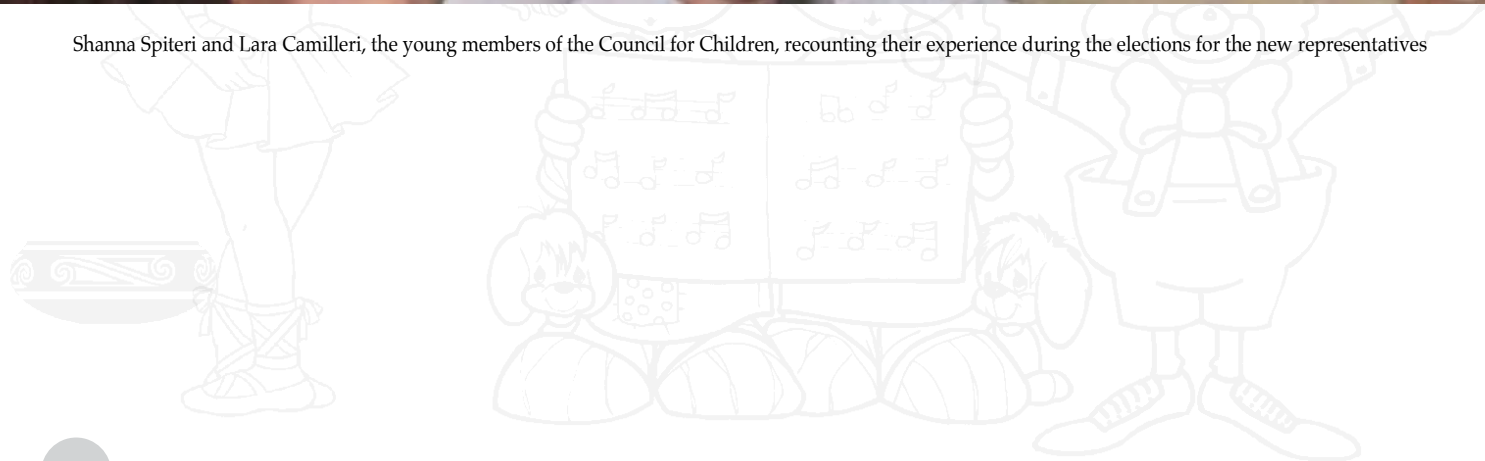
An enforcement mechanism has to be established in order to ensure that the provisions of the Children Broadcasting Act's provisions are complied with. The Broadcasting Authority can be entrusted with enforcing the provisions of this enactment.

8. New media

The impact of new media on children needs to be studied as well in order to ensure that programme filtering and blocking facilities are available to parents/guardians and child carers. Moreover such technology can also be combined with other media such as the Internet, play station, SMSs and interactive services and thereby broaden the scope for content regulation of these new media.



Shanna Spiteri and Lara Camilleri, the young members of the Council for Children, recounting their experience during the elections for the new representatives



Responses made to the Commissioner in accordance with the Commissioner for Children Act

General indications

June 2006 saw the move of the office of the Commissioner for Children from Valetta to St. Venera. There was some initial concern that people would hesitate to catch two buses in order to find the Commissioner and register their complaints. In fact the months of July and August were relatively quiet. However in all the complaints numbered 155, which is close to last year's figure of 162.

The cases brought to the Commissioner's attention concerned 176 children, 80 of which were under 10 years old, while 96 were between 10 and 18 years old. It is satisfactory to note that people who did not come across our repeated notice in all the newspapers regarding the change of address, contacted the office through our email address, which remained constant, and through our website. Use was also made of the MFSS website.

The absolute majority of complaints were received from adults. 80 were adult family members and 72 were adults who were not directly related to the children. 3 complaints were received directly from children. This state of affairs is similar to that of other offices of Ombudspersons for Children. Adults have more access to transport, email, and landlines. Children also still depend greatly on adults to protect and defend them. However, the need for more empowerment of children to put forward their own complaints is felt. Perhaps a catchy 3 digit telephone number, similar to the 179 Supportline number may be introduced in future. Office stickers with contact information will continue to be distributed to children and young persons at every opportunity.

The system of a Complaints Form was introduced this year. This was well received by the public and made for better procedural measures in dealing with complaints. The need for a Complaints Officer continues to be felt in order to provide for better and quicker investigation and follow-up.

This year an interesting and positive fact concerning complaints was registered at the office: 36 persons registered complaints that did not concern specific children but children in general. These complaints included issues of safety, such as swimming zones and playing fields, issues regarding offensive material within reach of children, issues regarding exploitation of children by the media, by family businesses or by marketing companies, school issues and even issues of domestic violence in the neighbourhood. We have put this down to a genuine interest by these persons in the well-being of children. It is probably the result of a growing awareness of Children's Rights among the public and of the responsibility being felt by citizens in the implementation of these rights.

Total number of complaints	155
Submitted by adult family members	80
Submitted by other adults	72
Submitted by children	3
Total number of children involved	176
Young children involved	80
Older children involved	96
General issues reported by the public	36
Issues concerning young children	24
Issues concerning older children	12

Nature of Complaints	
Educational	48
Family / Separation	48
Welfare	20
Health	14
Play and Recreation	12
Media	8
Other	5
Total	155

Educational Issues

Heavy schoolbags and other health issues	8
Special needs / Facilitators	8
Discrimination/ Bullying	9
Challenging behaviour	5
Verbal abuse by teachers	4
Transport	3
Stress from the curriculum	3
Uncontrolled absenteeism	3
Lack of school funds	2
Teacher missing school	1
Slander of child by school	1
Other	1
Total	48

Family Issues

Child access problems	17
Abuse	15
Custody issues	6
Adoptions	3
Housing problems	2
Financial difficulties	2
Needs arising from health issues	1
Delays at Court	1
Children's names	1
Total	48

Welfare Issues

Domestic Violence	6
Lack of places in Children's Homes	4
Lack of adequate services	4
Complaints against government services	3
Neglect/ Abuse	3
Total	20

Health Issues

Concern about safe environments	8
Radiation/ Hepatitis/ other	4
Stress issues	1
Psychological Support	1
Total	14

Other Issues

Children's Right to Play	12
Media	8
Betting/ Child Labour	2
Village feasts	1
Children at AFM Open Day	1
Child Care centres	1
Total	25

Conclusion

Once again this year it was evident from the nature of the complaints that reached the office of the Commissioner, that many people are not aware of all the services available within the sectors concerned, and also are not conscious of the procedures of redress, when problems arise. This would explain why the Commissioner found herself regularly directing people to other entities such as the Child Advocate at court.

In the education sector it was interesting to note that while children and their parents do know whom they have to address their complaint to, they choose not to do so for fear of the complaint backfiring on the student concerned. Various complaints were received regarding teachers using abusive language or shouting at students of both primary and secondary schools, however the complaints were often withdrawn for fear of the child being identified and discriminated against. A more child-friendly system of redress within the Education Division was asked for on various occasions. The system, however, has to guarantee that there will be no reprisals on the persons making their complaints.

It continues to come as a surprise to many who come with complaints to the office that the Commissioner cannot handle cases that are at court or that are of a personal family matter.

Equally surprising to many is the fact that the Commissioner has no statutory powers and cannot therefore order any entity to right a wrong but only draw the attention of the offender to the lack of a particular children's right, or report the case to the authorities. Information about the Commissioner's remit is given regularly on radio and television programmes.

It has been noticed that there is a growing awareness that the Commissioner has the onus and possibility of influencing issues regarding children on the national level through the recommendation of better legislation and policies regarding children. For this function to be carried out the regular feedback received at the office from children and adults regarding children's issues continues to be vital.

Status of Cases

Resolved at office level	40
Cases at court, therefore discontinued	9
Cases not followed up by complainant	13
Cases received without sufficient processing material	5
Cases referred to other entities and resolved	41
Cases referred to other entities and still pending	47
Total	155

*All cases received have been processed.
No cases are pending action from our office.*

L-istampi jitkellmu... The year in pictures



Uhud miż-żgħażaġh li vvutaw għar-rappreżentanti tagħhom
Some of the young people who voted for their representatives

Id-delegazzjoni taż-żgħażaġh li rrapreżentaw lil Uffiċċju tal-Kummissarju għat-Tfal fil-Parlament tat-Tfal flimkien mal-Kummissarju, u l-Ministri preżenti
The young delegation representing the Office of the Commissioner for Children at the Children's Parliament, together with the Commissioner and Ministers present



Il-Kummissarju flimkien ma' Xavier Bonal, Kummissarju għat-Tfal fi Spanja, li ser ikun il-President li jmiss ta' l-ENOC
The Commissioner together with Xavier Bonal, Commissioner for Children in Spain, who will be the next Chairperson of ENOC





*Żifna tat-tfal waqt l-attivitajiet ghal Jum Dinji tat-Tfal 2006 f'Ta' Qali
A children's dance at Ta' Qali on World Children's Day 2006*

*It-tfal setghu jagħzlu mill-hafna attivitajiet li kien hemm organizzati fl-okkazzjoni tal-Jum Dinji tat-Tfal
Children could choose from a variety of activities that were organised on World Children's Day*





Loghba fuq id-drittijiet tat-tfal ghal tfal zghar
A children's rights game for the very young

Il-Kummissarju flimkien mal-membri zghazagh eletti ghall-2005/6, u l-membri eletti ghall-2007
The Commissioner together with the young elected members for 2005/2006, and the newly elected members



It-tfal kienu mistiedna jizraw sigar bid-drittijiet
tat-tfal mdendlin maghhom fil-Jum Dinji tat-Tfal
Children were invited to plant trees with children's
rights attached to them on World Children's Day





Tfal jistennew esibizzjoni oħra fuq il-palk
Children waiting for another performance on stage

Iż-żgħażaġh jippreparaw preżentazzjoni ta' l-istharrig li għamlu
 f'lokalitajiet diffierenti waqt il-kors fuq id-drittijiet tat-tfal, Rights4U
*The young people prepare a presentation of the research they conducted
 in different localities during the children's rights course, Rights4U*

Il-Kummissarju ssegwi preżentazzjonijiet taż-żgħażaġh
The Commissioner follows the young participants' presentations





Gruppi tat-tfal u żgħażaġh li huma membri fl-Assoċjazzjoni tal-Girl Guides qassmu fuljetti b'verżjoni għat-tfal tal-Konvenzjoni lil tfal fl-attivita' tal-Jum Dinji taż-Żgħażaġh
Groups of children and young people members of the Girl Guides Association distributed leaflets of the child-friendly version of the Convention during the activities of World Children's Day

Fbieb godda!
New friends!

Żgħażaġh mill-Kunsill għat-Tfal kienu mistiedna t-Tuneżija biex jattendu għall-Parlament tat-Tfal u jzuru istituzzjonijiet oħra
Young members of the Council for Children were invited to Tunisia to attend the Children's Parliament and other institutions





Il-Kummissarju u ż-żghażaġh membri fuq il-Kunsill flimkien ma' żghażaġh mit-Tuneżija
The Commissioner and young members of the Council together with some young Tunisians



Uħud min-nies li għinu fl-organizzazzjoni tal-Konferenza "A Fair Deal" fuq tfaġ b'imġiba diffiċli hafna. Jidhru fir-ritratt: Rennie Cutajar, Noel Kenely, Danela DeBono, Maria Muscat Azzopardi u Carmen Cassar
Some of the organisers of "A Fair Deal" Conference on children with very challenging behaviour. From left: Rennie Cutajar, Noel Kenely, Danela DeBono, Maria Muscat Azzopardi and Carmen Cassar

Tul il-weekend il-partecipanti żghażaġh setgħu verament jifhmu xi jfisser id-dritt għal-logħob
Throughout the Rights4U weekend, the young participants got a taste of what the right to play is all about





Il-Kummissarju tindirizza lit-tfal u l-familji tagħhom fil-Jum Dinji tat-Tfal, fil-preżenza tat-tim ZOO
The Commissioner addressing children and their families on World Children's Day, with ZOO team looing on

Wiehed mill-gruppi ta' parteċipanti zghażaġh wara attivitajiet sportivi
One of the groups of young participants right after a sports activity

Zghażaġh jiddiskutu l-implikazzjonijiet tat-drittijiet tagħhom
Young people discussing the implications of their rights





Žghazagh waqt attività tal-kors Rights4U
A tug-of-war during the Rights4U course

Žghazagh waqt ikla mal-Kummissarju u voluntiera ta' l-uffiċċju, Bernardette Aquilina (fuq ix-xellug)
Young people enjoying a meal with the Commissioner and a youth facilitator, Bernardette Aquilina (far left)

