



Malta

Tackling child poverty and promoting the social inclusion of children

A Study of National Policies

Mario Vassallo
University of Malta

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Executive Summary

Rampant financial poverty does not exist in Malta. This is partly due to the strong family and social structure of Maltese society and partly due to the advanced provisions of the welfare state. This is not to say that poverty is non-existent or that there are no pockets where child poverty is felt at times, even intensely.

Malta has many activities and social programmes that seek to make up for systemic deficiencies by helping individuals and groups that find themselves in difficulty. Traditionally these types of services were provided by the Church, but with structural differentiation they have been further developed by the state. Overlaps exist, and the lack of a clearly defined policy – written in one document that brings together the various agencies involved in child wellbeing – creates a situation that has negative effects on the services themselves.

Poverty in Malta is primarily the result of what is termed in this report ‘cultural ignorance’, i.e. a state of mind among segments of the population who are unable, rather than unwilling, to set their priorities in such a way as to lead them out of the poverty trap. ‘Curative’ social work and social support, including financial support, can alleviate the situation, but what is required is preventive instruction that aids those trapped in poverty to escape it through conviction.

Over the past few years significant changes have been taking place and where targets were established, such as in the reduction of early school-leaving and absenteeism, they are largely being met. But in many areas specific targets do not exist, and this makes assessing and monitoring progress extremely difficult, if not impossible. Those charged with working to reduce poverty among children and promoting their social inclusion need to realise that unless they establish clear targets based on solid scientific research and work more in teams to optimise their efforts, child poverty will linger on, even if not in its extreme forms.

1. Introduction

In line with the new Laeken definition that was endorsed by the SPC in June 2006, children are defined as ‘persons aged 0-17’ for the purposes of this report.

The family unit has traditionally been very strong in Malta. The Catholic religious tradition and the small size of the islands have largely prevented the widespread incidence of disinterest in one’s offspring. Children are held in very high esteem within the Maltese family and the closeness of family ties has at times even been considered a major obstacle to progress and social change. Prior to the advent of the welfare state, the close-knit community and the extended family very frequently extended care and support to parents who had problems providing their children with the necessary means of support and nurturance. When the family and the local community failed, numerous homes (or ‘institutes’, as they were commonly known) run by the Church provided institutional care from birth through to adulthood. These homes still remain active today, but rather than operating independently of each other, on the main island of Malta they are now co-ordinated by a central office of the diocese.¹ Church-run institutions work very closely, even if mostly informally, with the various state-run or state-funded institutions that have been created by the provisions of the welfare state.

¹ Since each of the two main islands in the Maltese archipelago is a separate ecclesiastical diocese, Gozo is considered to be a separate ecclesiastical structure. In Gozo there is only one Children’s Home; it is officially listed under the Gozo Caritas.

As such, it can be stated from the very outset that widespread extreme child poverty has been an unknown phenomenon for many years in Malta, even though this aspect of social life has only been formally measured in recent times. This is not to say that there is no poverty in Malta, or that no child is at risk, but structures do exist that, in theory at least, seek to eliminate child poverty in its various manifestations. Since poverty is, by definition, a relative term, relative financial poverty lingers on, as do some forms of poverty other than the purely financial.

1.1 The indicators

The data in Table 1.1 is based on Malta's Household Budgetary Survey conducted by the National Statistics Office (NSO) for the Malta figures, and on Eurostat for those of the other Member States. The data shows that at the beginning of this century, on the basis of that particular study, the overall at-risk-of-poverty rate for children was a high 20.6 % (22.2 % for males and 18.8 % for females). It is to be noted that this is only indirectly comparable to the figures of the other European states since the research instrument used was not identical, but approximate comparisons are possible and valid. According to Table 1.1, Malta registers an at-risk-of-poverty rate of 20.6 %, in comparison with the EU15 rate of 24 %. This practically puts Malta in the middle of the EU15, which in the same table ranges from a rate of 10 % in Slovenia to a rate 29 % in Turkey.

The at-risk level for Maltese female children was 18.9 %, 3.3 percentage points lower than that established for males. The lower at-risk rate of poverty rate for females is not universally evident in all the Member States; Malta shares this tendency with Cyprus, Latvia and Slovenia.

Table 1.1: At-risk-of-poverty rate by age and gender in a European context

	BG	CY	EE	LV	LI	MT	PL	RO	SK	TR	EU15
	2001	1997	2000	1999	1999	2000	2000	1999	1999	1994	1998
Total	19.0	12.0	21.0	20.0	21.0	20.6	21.0	21.0	10.0	29.0	24.0
Male	17.0	13.0	21.0	22.0	20.0	22.2	21.0	21.0	10.0	28.0	25.0
Female	20.0	12.0	22.0	19.0	21.0	18.9	22.0	21.0	9.0	29.0	23.0

Source: NSO. 2000 Structural, Poverty and Social Exclusion Indicators: Table 36: At-risk-of-poverty rate by age and gender. Data is being reproduced as available. It is regretted that data for the same year is not available.

When the data is analysed by household type for 2000, as per Table 1.2, the most significant level risk was registered in the category '*Single-parent household with at least 1 dependent child*'. Unfortunately, the data by household type is not available separately for 'children' as defined here. But it is significant that in Maltese single-parent households with one child, where it can readily be assumed that the age of the child falls in the 'child' category as defined here, the figure registered (55.1 %) was high, indeed the highest at-risk-of-poverty rate of the countries for which the relative figures were then available.

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Table 1.2: At-risk-of-poverty rate by household type, 2000

	Bulgaria 2001	Cyprus 1997	Estonia 2000	Latvia 1999	Lithuania 1999	Malta 2000	Poland 2000	Romania 1999	Slovenia 1999	Turkey 1994	EU15 1998
Total	15.0	16.0	18.0	16.0	17.0	14.9	16.0	16.0	11.0	23.0	18.0
1-person household (Total)	30.0	64.0	30.0	15.0	27.0	24.5	11.0	23.0	36.0	N.A.	N.A.
1-person household (Male)	20.0	54.0	32.0	23.0	24.0	16.7	20.0	16.0	25.0	N.A.	N.A.
1-person household (Female)	32.0	67.0	29.0	11.0	28.0	28.0	8.0	25.0	41.0	N.A.	N.A.
1-person household, under 30 years	4.0	25.12 u	34.0	21.0	12.0	33.8	7.0	10.0	19.3 u	0.0	32.0
1-person household, 30-64 years	24.0	34.0	29.0	24.0	24.0	23.1	16.0	17.0	24.0	19.0	16.0
1-person household, 65+ years	33.0	83.0	31.0	3.0 u	33.0	25.3	7.0	28.0	46.0	34.0	28.0
2 adults, no dependent children (at least one person aged 65+ years)	8.0	58.0	9.0	13.0	10.0	24.6	8.0	11.0	19.0	21.0	16.0
2 adults, no dependent children (both under 65 years old)	6.0	11.0	12.0	1.0 u	13.0	11.1	8.0	8.0	13.0	10.0	9.0
Other households with no dependent children	10.0	10.0	13.0	12.0	13.0	4.5	10.0	14.0	9.0	14.0	9.0
Single-parent household with at least 1 dependent child	23.0	41.0	37.0	24.0	30.0	55.1	24.0	22.0	23.0	30.0	35.0
2 adults with 1 dependent child	11.0	6.0	13.0	13.0	13.0	12.7	11.0	10.0	10.0	10.0	11.0
2 adults with 2 dependent children	16.0	9.0	17.0	17.0	16.0	15.9	13.0	11.0	7.0	13.0	13.0
2 adults with 3+ dependent children	60.0	16.0	23.0	31.0	30.0	28.5	29.0	30.0	12.0	36.0	41.0
Other households with dependent children	15.0	6.0	19.0	20.0	18.0	8.3	20.0	23.0	10.0	26.0	22.0

Source: NSO. 2000 Structural, Poverty and Social Exclusion Indicators: Table 38: At-risk-of-poverty rate by age and gender

Some of the comparable figures based on the 2005 SILC study for Malta have only just become available at the time of writing this report; they are presented below in Tables 1.3 and 1.4 by age and gender and by household type, respectively. It is to be noted that when the full SILC report is published, the data should then be directly comparable to that of other EU Member States because the same research instrument is being used.

Table 1.3: At-risk-of-poverty rate by age and gender, 2005

Age	Males	Females	Total
	%	%	%
Total	14.2	15.5	14.9
0 - 15	22.2	21.9	22.0
16 - 24	10.7	11.6	11.1
25 - 49	11.7	13.6	12.7
50 - 64	11.7	14.4	13.1
65+	15.7	16.8	16.3

Source: NSO, SILC 2005

Table 1.4: At-risk-of-poverty rate by household type, 2005 compared to 2000

Household type	At-risk-of-poverty rate (%)	
	2000	2005
1-person household (total)	24.5	21.2
1-person household (male)	16.7	14.8
1-person household (female)	28.0	24.3
1-person household, under 65 years	(not comparable)	22.9
1-person household, 65+ years	25.3	19.9
2 adults, no dependent children (at least one person aged 65+ years)	24.6	18.3
2 adults, no dependent children (both under 65 years old)	11.1	13.9
Other households with no dependent children	4.5	4.7
Single-parent household with at least 1 dependent child	55.1	47.9
2 adults with 1 dependent child	12.7	12.4
2 adults with 2 dependent children	15.9	16.5
2 adults with 3 or more dependent children	28.5	34.7
Other households with dependent children	8.3	11.1

Source: for 2000: Table 2 above; for 2005: NSO, News Release 75/200, SILC.

What is significant in comparing Table 1.3 with Table 1.1 and Table 1.4 with Table 1.2 is the fact that the overall at-risk rate for children has increased from 20.6 % in 2000 to 22.0 % in 2005. In sharp contrast to this, the at-risk rate for the category 'Single parent household with at least 1 dependent child' has decreased from the 2000 level of 55.1 % to 47.9 %, suggesting that the plight of single parents with one child has improved even though the overall at-risk level for children has increased.

If one assumes that the figures are directly comparable, this would indicate that the improved social security benefits now accruing to single parents with one dependent child have been effective in helping to reduce their at-risk-of-poverty level.

From the data in Table 1.4, a decrease in the at-risk-of-poverty rate has also been registered for another category, namely *2 adults with 1 dependent child*, for which a reduction of 0.3 percentage points is registered. But the opposite is true for three other categories, namely: *2 adults with 2 dependent children*; *2 adults with 3 or more dependent children*; and *other households with dependent children*. The at-risk level for each of these groups increased by 0.6, 6.2 and 2.8 percentage points, respectively.

It can thus be seen that policy measures taken since 2000 have not affected all the categories uniformly.²

The full range of data needed to build a comprehensive index of child wellbeing in Malta based on the EU social indicators is not available; at present the data collected by Bradshaw *et al.* is the best source for a comparative analysis.³ Table 1.5 below summarises the data for Malta published by Bradshaw *et al.* The first column lists the indicators, the second the reading for the individual indicators, whilst the third column gives the Index as worked by Bradshaw.

² It must be noted that the indicators are based on income. As such, any income which is not declared is not reflected in the indices. This can skew the results against salaried persons and wage earners whose income is automatically declared by their employers in favour of non-salaried individuals, especially the self-employed who underdeclare their earnings, in some cases quite heavily. Whenever this is the case, such persons accrue for themselves moneys that are due to the community in the form of income tax and in VAT.

³ See Bradshaw, Jonathan *et al.* 2006. An Index of Child Wellbeing in the European Union. *Social Indicators Research* (2007) 80: 133-177.

Table 1.5: An index of child wellbeing: Malta

	Indicators after Bradshaw et al.	100-Point Index
Child and income poverty	N/A	
Deprivation	-1.1	
% of children living in workless families	8.4	
Material situation in the EU		87
Health at birth	0.2	
Immunisation	-0.1	
Health behaviour	-1.1	
Child health in the EU		86
Educational attainment	N/A	
Educational participation	N/A	
Educational outcomes	N/A	
Education		N/A
Overcrowding	0.2	
Quality of the local environment	-0.7	
Housing problems	1.4	
Housing and environment		104
Family structure	1.7	
Relationship with parents	NA	
Relationship with peers	0.4	
Children's relationships		117
Self-defined health	-0.9	
Personal wellbeing composite	-0.4	
Wellbeing at school	-0.3	
Subjective wellbeing		94
Accidental and non-accidental deaths of persons under 19 years of age per 100,000	0.1	
Risky behaviour	0.6	
Experience of violence	0.2	
Risk and safety		110
Civic participation in the EU	N/A	
Child wellbeing in the EU, by domain	99	
Child wellbeing in the EU, countries with 70 % response rate, by domain	N/A	

Source: Bradshaw, J. *et al.* 2006, various tables and figures

In each case for the above table, Bradshaw calculated the index using a range of 75 to 125 points, thus making 100 points a midpoint. In a number of domains, the individual indicators for Malta (those with a negative result) clearly point to the need for improvement. In indicators with a positive reading, the figures compare well with those of more advanced Member States. On the individual readings for the index itself, Malta has an index reading above the 100-point level in three categories. In their final ranking of the 25 states, Bradshaw *et al.* ranked Malta's placement across levels of aggregation using z scores as 'medium' for both 'cluster' and 'domain' levels. In their subsequent placements across levels of aggregation using average ranks, Malta ranks 'low' on both 'cluster' and 'domain' levels.

In view of this report, the NSO have also made a number of additional unpublished tables available. The details in Table 1.6 confirm that 17 % of Maltese households with dependent children are living below the poverty line. But what is most striking is the fact that the percentage distribution of households in each of the rows for households above the poverty line, as compared to the distribution of households below the poverty line, is not very different. In effect, for the factor 'pollution or other environmental problems' the percentage of 'yes' responses for households above the poverty line is 3.6 percentage points higher than for households below the poverty line (34.0 % vs. 30.4 %).

In addition, the number of 'no' responses for households above the poverty line is quite high in some instances (i.e., 'afford one week's holiday away from home', with 68.6 % for households above the poverty line and 83.4 % of those below the poverty line). This effectively means that some households below the poverty line can afford types of expenditure that households above the poverty line cannot afford. These figures confirm that though differences do exist, and that these are related to income, they are not very wide. They also confirm that amenities (telephone, colour TVs, washing machines and, to a lesser extent, cars and computers) are available across the spectrum of Maltese households. The last section of this table, 'Ability to make ends meet', showing percentages for the level of difficulty for households above the poverty line and for households below the poverty line is very telling: there are households below the poverty line which can afford to make ends meet with less difficulty than those above the poverty line. This further confirms that, although differences in standard of living exist between the two groups, they are not vast at present.

Table 1.6 Percentage of households with one or more dependent children over / below the poverty line by deprivation factors

	% of households		
	Above the poverty line	Below the poverty line	Total
All households with dependent children	83.0	17.0	100.0

Problems with dwelling	Yes	No	Total	Yes	No	Total	Yes	No	Total
	Households above the poverty line			Households below the poverty line			Total		
	% of households								
Leaking roof, damp, rot	6.4	93.6	100.0	9.4	90.6	100.0	6.9	93.1	100.0
Not enough light / too dark	5.2	94.8	100.0	8.0	92.0	100.0	5.7	94.3	100.0
Noise from neighbours / street	21.8	78.2	100.0	24.2	75.8	100.0	22.2	77.8	100.0
Pollution or other environmental problems	34.0	66.0	100.0	30.4	69.6	100.0	33.4	66.6	100.0
Crime / vandalism in the area	12.9	87.1	100.0	16.1	83.9	100.0	13.5	86.5	100.0

Ability to afford	Yes	No	Total	Yes	No	Total	Yes	No	Total
	Households above the poverty line			Households below the poverty line			Total		
	% of households								
One weeks' annual holiday away from home	31.4	68.6	100.0	16.6	83.4	100.0	28.9	71.1	100.0
Eat meat / fish every other day	92.2	7.8	100.0	79.0	21.0	100.0	89.9	10.1	100.0
Face unexpected expenses	68.1	31.9	100.0	40.8	59.2	100.0	63.4	36.6	100.0
Keep home adequately warm	88.8	11.2	100.0	83.4	16.6	100.0	87.9	12.1	100.0

Household owns	Yes	No, cannot afford	No, other reasons	Total	Yes	No, cannot afford	No, other reasons	Total	Yes	No, cannot afford	No, other reasons	Total
	Households above the poverty line				Households below the poverty line				Total			
	% of households											
Telephone	99.4	0.3	0.3	100.0	95.8	2.6	1.6	100.0	98.8	0.7	0.5	100.0
Colour television	99.9	0.1	0.1	100.0	99.1	0.9	-	100.0	99.8	0.2	0.0	100.0
Computer	78.9	4.3	16.8	100.0	64.8	12.5	22.7	100.0	76.5	5.7	17.8	100.0
Washing machine	99.7	0.1	0.2	100.0	98.3	0.4	1.3	100.0	99.5	0.2	0.3	100.0
Car	95.8	2.1	2.1	100.0	84.7	8.4	6.8	100.0	93.9	3.2	2.9	100.0

Ability to make ends meet	% of households		
	Above the poverty line	Below the poverty line	Total
With great difficulty	11.3	32.2	14.9
With difficulty	24.0	28.9	24.8
With some difficulty	36.8	24.7	34.8
Fairly easily	21.6	11.8	19.9
Easily	6.0	2.0	5.3
Very easily	0.3	0.5	0.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: NSO, SILC, 2005, unpublished data

1.2. Unpublished study

In an as-yet unpublished study, conducted jointly by a sociologist and a psychologist⁴, it is concluded that:

- Long-term health problems are significantly more frequent among the poor ($\chi^2 (1) = 5.018, p > 0.025$); there is a higher rate of health problems among single parent households below the poverty line ($\chi^2 (1) = 8.315, p > 0.004$);
- 11 % among the adult poor are illiterate; 5.2 % among the non-poor are illiterate ($\chi^2 (1) = 13.308, p > 0.00$);
- Unemployment is significantly higher among the poor ($\chi^2 (3) = 65.219, p > 0.00$);
- There is a significant difference in intergenerational unemployment between poor and non-poor households ($\chi^2 (1) = 5.541 p > 0.019$).
- Poor households are larger in size ($\chi^2(4) = 10.226, p > 0.037$);
- Arguments occur more frequently in poor households ($\chi^2 (4) = 9.993 p > 0.041$).

1.3 Key at-risk groups

The main groups of children which are considered to be at risk of poverty in Malta can be grouped as follows:

- Children in single-parent families
- Children residing in residential care at the point of leaving residential care
- Children suffering abuse
- Children whose parents are residing in institutional care

⁴ Tabone and Abela, two academics from the University of Malta, made the following generic data available. The full report is still to be published. The objective of the study is to explore the relationship between economic deprivation and indicators of social exclusion, including health, education, employment, emotional wellbeing and the social environment. The study is based on a sample of 360 female heads of household living below the poverty line elicited from the HBS survey; a control group of 100 female heads of household was retrieved from those living above the poverty line in the HBS sample. These results still have to be validated against the SILC study when this is published in full.

2. Policies: description and analysis

2.1 Introduction

Malta does not currently have a holistic policy for children delineated in any one specific document clearly outlining policy objectives, which services are available, and which routes are to be followed by those who require services. There is, however, a plethora of initiatives and structures that provide different services, even if independently of each other or with very loose inter-linkages. The lack of a coherent policy described in one document, with clearly defined objectives and a listing of the policies and services available to meet these objectives, is one of the major weaknesses of child-oriented policy in Malta.

In the National Action Plan on social inclusion (NAP), child poverty is acknowledged, but not as a key priority. Strategies and initiatives for children and young people in the NAP are valuable components in the fight against poverty and social exclusion, but these also target other vulnerable groups such as disabled children and unaccompanied minors entering the country as illegal immigrants. Consequently, it is rather difficult to identify the specific short-, medium- and long-term targets of the NAP proposals. No time frames for identifying or reaching objectives are stipulated within these documents.

Within the NAP, children and young persons have indeed been identified as relevant actors in the sense that issues concerning them have been considered. However, their voices in the development of the NAP were not heard due to organisational and time constraints. The Plan was indeed developed through extensive consultation with various professionals working directly with children, but children did not participate directly. The involvement of children in policy development and services is in its infancy in Malta. Increasing the participation of children has been highly advocated by the first Children's Commissioner, who took office at the end of 2003.

The Maltese **National Action Plan on social inclusion (NAP)** identifies four major and overarching policy priorities:

1. Empowering social cohesion
2. Building stronger communities
3. Strengthening the volunteer sector
4. Networking the social welfare sector with other sectors

The issues of child poverty and social inclusion are acknowledged in the NAP, particularly in the first policy objective, empowering social cohesion.

The areas of social policy that directly affect children can be grouped under the following four domains: wellbeing; schooling; access to the labour market; and child disability. There are, of course, other policy areas of importance, such as those affecting children whose parents are in institutional care, but it is within these four domains that the majority of issues fall, and these will now be addressed in turn.

2.2 Wellbeing: Access to essential services

2.2.1 Health

Malta provides comprehensive and free health service to residents of all ages. Health services are constantly being consolidated, with particular focus on those services that cater towards children and young people with mental health difficulties. A new general hospital is due to be officially opened on 29 June 2007.

Medical services are free at all levels for all members of the population. The Child Development and Advisory Unit (CDAU) follows up on children who appear to have some difficulty soon after they are born and provides multidisciplinary diagnosis and care to all Maltese children. Children are monitored at school through the School Medical Services, parents are obliged to follow an immunisation programme, and both children and adults have full access to a range of medical and paramedical services which are paid for completely out of general taxation. Individuals (including children) must pay for medical care expenses only if they request services from private medical practitioners. Private medicine is available in parallel to the state-sponsored medical services.

There is one pitfall, however: placements for children with mental health or serious behavioural difficulties are practically non-existent except for in the Young People's Unit, which is situated at Mount Carmel Hospital, the central hospital for mental healthcare. These children are assigned to the existent residential homes both to their detriment and to the detriment of other children in residential care. A new unit that will be run by the Richmond Foundation will soon open outside the mental health hospital; it has already excluded those children needing one-to-one carers, those with mobility problems and those with severe learning difficulties. Malta probably needs to create two different units to house these groups of children.

2.2.2 Housing

There are a number of strategies in place to promote the provision of adequate and affordable housing, particularly to households with children. The Government seeks to increasingly provide affordable and quality housing in order to enhance the wellbeing of vulnerable children and young people. As can be seen from the 'Problems with dwelling' section of Table 1.6 above, the needs of children living below the poverty line in respect of housing conditions are not very dissimilar from those of children living in dwellings within families which are considered to be above the poverty line, though they are more intense.

Existing social welfare services that focus on children and young people are currently being reviewed and restructured in order to effectively address emerging needs. The greatest effort has been to address the needs of single parents, and, as has already been pointed out above, positive progress has been made in this regard.

2.2.3 Education and Schooling

Education has been identified as an important domain in the fight against child poverty and social exclusion. The main strategy target focuses on decreasing the incidence of school absenteeism by 25 %. Although Malta has long provided universal free - and compulsory - schooling, this is not

enough to effectively address emerging realities. A reform in education, based on a number of ad hoc studies and consultations, has therefore been undertaken with a view to:

- (a) effectively address early school leaving;
- (b) reduce illiteracy rates; and
- (c) enhance the provision of inclusive and quality education for all.

It is known that a child's outcome in life is dependent on their ability to follow higher education. Through advancement in education, an individual can improve their life chances despite their personal backgrounds and hardships.

Very often, life chances and social exclusion go in tandem. It is well known that an individual's life chances vary according to particular criteria, such as gender, race, disability and ethnicity, among others. For this reason it is pertinent to ask 'Who gets what?' In this respect, even for a minuscule state like Malta, one needs to underline the fact that the life chances of a girl born to an immigrant couple are bound to be lower than those of a boy born within a family whose parents are established professionals, especially with regard to one's chances of pursuing higher education. This is usually the case not only because of racial and ethnic factors, but also because of financial considerations. The ability of a child to feel included as a part of the mainstream group can also act as a pushing or pulling force with respect to the child's access to education. Social status also affects the child's access to education. Children in care are also at times singled out in state schools; in a recent case, a child who returned to care from a failed fostering placement was refused transfer back into the school she had previously attended. Those responsible for her care tried to arrange this transfer because she returned to the same residential home she was fostered from, but the school authorities rejected her because they claimed that they had a 'saturation' of children from this residential home.

The very fact that the working class child has a lower cultural capital further hinders their life chances in comparison to their upper- and middle-class counterparts. From the very outset lower-class children are at a disadvantage, especially since their parents often do not have high expectations and thus do not push their children to work hard to gain entrance to institutions of higher learning. It is understandable that since the children are affected by all these factors, they are not goaded to pursue higher education.

There remain other factors that need to be accounted for. In Maltese state schools, not all of the scholastic materials are provided by the Government. In fact, quite a few basic scholastic materials such as workbooks, which are required, may be too expensive for the child's parents to purchase. This issue is frequently the subject of public debate in Malta. In cases when the parents cannot afford to provide their child with such basic materials, children frequently opt not to go to school so as to avoid meeting the teacher who has required such basic material. This may be one of the reasons for the high rate of absenteeism. Children in care also suffer from this lack of required material, since many residential homes find it practically impossible to afford to purchase the required workbooks for all their children, in addition to being charged a hefty Lm15 (or €34.95) for photocopies for each year.

Early school-leaving

Policy is focusing on improving the school infrastructure, the curriculum variety, the quality and method of teaching (even through ICT tools), and the provision of guidance services. Vocational training / institutions are also in place to catch children who have dropped out and offer other

chances to individuals who choose not to continue formal schooling. Significant progress has already been made in this respect. The current reform of the primary and secondary educational system, which envisages the grouping of schools in colleges, should further contribute to reducing the number of early school leavers by putting in place an institutional structure that will address disparate abilities at an early stage and provide adequate support to both students and their families.

Although the indicator for early school-leavers in Malta is the highest among the EU25, significant drops were evident among both genders during the period 2002-2003. In these two years, there were respectively 53.2 % and 48.2 % early school-leavers with a lower secondary education at most, as compared to both the EU15 (18.7 %), and to the EU25 (16.6 %) in 2002. Dropout levels continued to fall in 2004, to 42.0 % per cent for both genders, and declined further (to 41.2 %) in 2005. Among women, there was a 49.7 % rate of early school-leaving in 2002 and a 46.8 % rate of early school-leaving in 2003, as compared to the EU15 (16.1 %), the EU25 (14.2 %) in 2002 and the EU15 (15.9 %) and the EU25 (13.9 %) in 2003). The relative figure declined to 39.5 % in 2004 and to 39.3 % in 2005. The same pattern was observed among males. In 2002 and 2003, respectively 56.5 % and 49.7 % of all employed men were not in further education in the same period. The EU15 rate was: 20.9 % and the EU25 rate was 18.7 % in 2002. In 2003 the figures were EU15: 20.2 % and EU25: 17.9 %. The figure for both genders in Malta decreased, to 44.2 per cent in 2004 and again to 43.0 % in 2005. See Table 2.1 for details.

Table 2.1: School leavers with a general secondary education

	Total	Females	Males
	%	%	%
2002	53.2	49.7	56.5
2003	48.2	46.8	49.7
2004	42.0 ^(b)	39.5 ^(b)	44.2 ^(b)
2005	41.2	39.3	43.0

Note: ^(b)=Break of Series

Source: Eurostat: Social Cohesion

Absenteeism

As already indicated above, the rate of absenteeism in Malta is high. Data on this area are available both from the NSO and the Education Division. In the first 120 school days (between September 2004 and March 2005), a total of 534 292 school days were lost to absenteeism. This figure accounted for 7.7 % of the total number of school days during this period, or an overall absence rate of 9.2 absent days per pupil - that for boys being 10.0 days per pupil (1.2 less than the previous year) and for girls 8.4 days per pupil (0.7 less than previous year). This also signified a decrease of 1.0 % of absences over the total number of school days taken per pupil over the course of the previous year. This figure compares the 617 659 absent days for a pupil population of 60 603 in 2003/04, with 534 292 absent days for a pupil population of 57 800 in 2004/05. This decrease was a result of a slight descent in the number of absences – authorised and unauthorised – at the primary and secondary levels both within public and private schools. Detailed figures supporting the forthcoming discussion are included as Tables A2 - A8 in Appendix A.

The overall unauthorised absence rate for boys in all primary and secondary schools was 4.7 days per pupil (a decrease of 0.4 days from 2003/04) while the authorised absence rate stood at

5.4 (a decrease of 0.9 days from 2003/04). The overall absence rates for girls stood as follows: 3.7 days per pupil for unauthorised absences (0.5 days fewer than in 2003/04) and 4.7 days per pupil for authorised absences (0.2 days fewer than in 2003/04).

Public primary schools registered a decrease of 0.1 absent days per pupil over the previous year, to 7.9 days per pupil during 2004/05 - 8.1 days per pupil for boys and 7.5 days per pupil for girls. The unauthorised absence rate for boys at public primary level stood at 3.2 days per pupil, whilst the authorised rate stood at 4.9 days per pupil. The unauthorised rates for girls stood at 2.9 days and the authorised for boys at 4.6 days per pupil.

Similarly, private and church primary schools also registered a decrease of 0.3 absent days per pupil over 2003/04. The overall absence rate for these schools stood at 5.0 absent days per pupil - 5.0 for boys and 4.9 for girls. The unauthorised absence rate for boys at private primary level stood at 0.5 days per pupil, whilst the authorised rate for girls stood at 4.6 days per pupil. The unauthorised and authorised rates for girls stood at 0.5 and 4.4 days, respectively.

The registered decrease in the overall number of absent days per pupil also occurred on the level of secondary education. Government secondary schools (including Junior Lyceums and the Boys'/Girls' secondary schools) registered a considerable decrease in the number of absences per head, down by 2.2 absent days per pupil (from 18.0 in 2003/04 to 15.8 in 2004/05). The average unauthorised absence rate for boys was 11.3 days per pupil and 7.4 days per pupil for authorised absences. The unauthorised absence rate for girls was 7.9 days per pupil, whilst the authorised absences stood at 5.3 days per pupil.

Like the public secondary schools, private secondary schools registered a decrease of 1.1 absent days per pupil over the previous year (from 5.7 to 4.6 absent days per pupil). The unauthorised rate for boys at private secondary level schools stood at 0.6 days per pupil, whilst the authorised rate for girls stood at 3.7 days per pupil. The unauthorised and authorised rates for girls stood at 0.7 and 4.2 days per pupil, respectively. The incidence of absenteeism within private schools both on the primary and secondary levels was definitely much lower than in public schools. In fact, in 2004/05, the total overall absence rate stood at 4.8 days per pupil in private schools (0.7 less than in 2003/04) and 11.8 days per pupil within public schools (1.2 less than 2003/04).

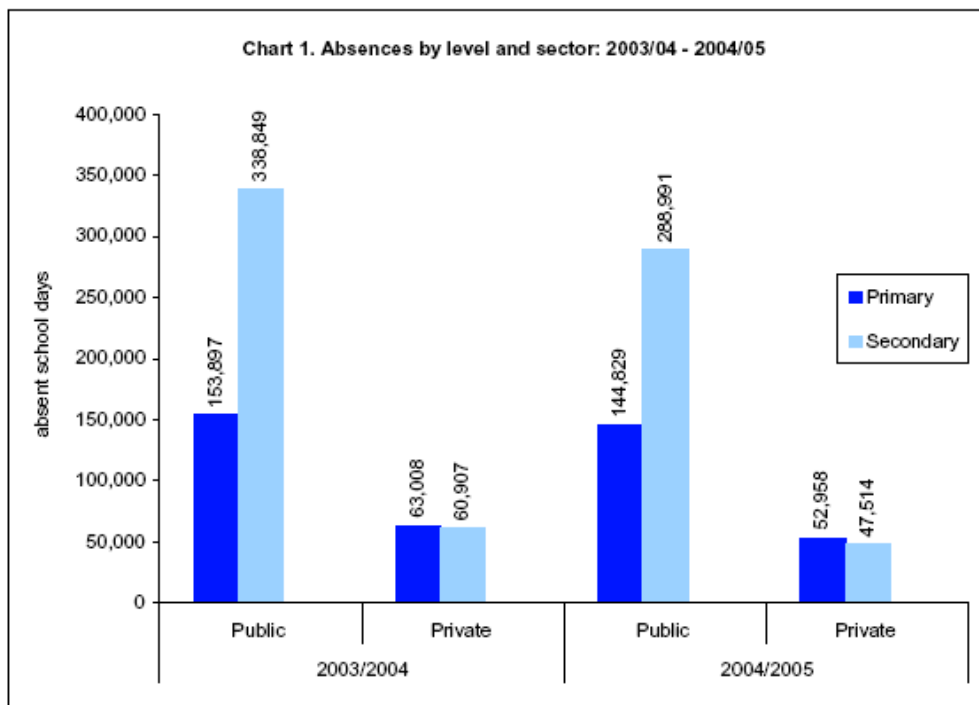
Particularly noteworthy is the fact that unauthorised absences rates were reported to be much higher in public schools, with 6.3 absent days per pupil, compared to the 0.6 absent days per pupil in private schools. Authorised absence rates were also reported to be higher in public schools, with 5.3 absent days per pupil, against the 4.2 absent days per pupil in private schools.

Absence rates in schools varied across the Maltese districts but followed same patterns along the three educational sectors - public, church and private. Out of all the public primary schools, the Northern Harbour district registered the highest average number of absent days per pupil (9.3 days), whilst Gozo and Comino registered the lowest number of absent days per pupil in public primary schools, with 5.6 absent days per pupil. Likewise, the Northern Harbour district registered the highest number of absent days per pupil in private and church primary schools, with 5.4 absent days per pupil, whilst Gozo and Comino once again registered the lowest number of absent days per pupil in private and church primary schools, with 4.3 absent days per pupil. The Northern Harbour district is steadily replacing the Valletta and Cottonera areas. In these areas, anonymity abounds, and the worst cases of child neglect and abuse are reported there. The Northern Harbour district is perhaps the worst slum area in Malta. Modern apartments in this area are commonly partitioned to accommodate 3 to 4 families in sub-standard living conditions.

Secondary schools followed a different pattern from primary schools across the three sectors. The highest average number of absent days in public secondary schools was registered again in the Northern Harbour district, with 22.8 absent days per pupil; but in private and church secondary schools, the highest average number of absent days was registered in the Southern Harbour district, with 5.4 absent days per pupil. Gozo and Comino reported once again the lowest number of absent days per pupil, yet this time this was registered in private and church secondary schools only, with 2.4 absent days per pupil. The lowest average number of absent days in public secondary schools was registered in the South Eastern district, with 7.5 absent days per pupil. The numerical data to illustrate this is presented in Tables A5-A8, which respectively present the data for government secondary schools, government boys'/girls' secondary schools, government-dependent private secondary schools, and independent private primary schools.

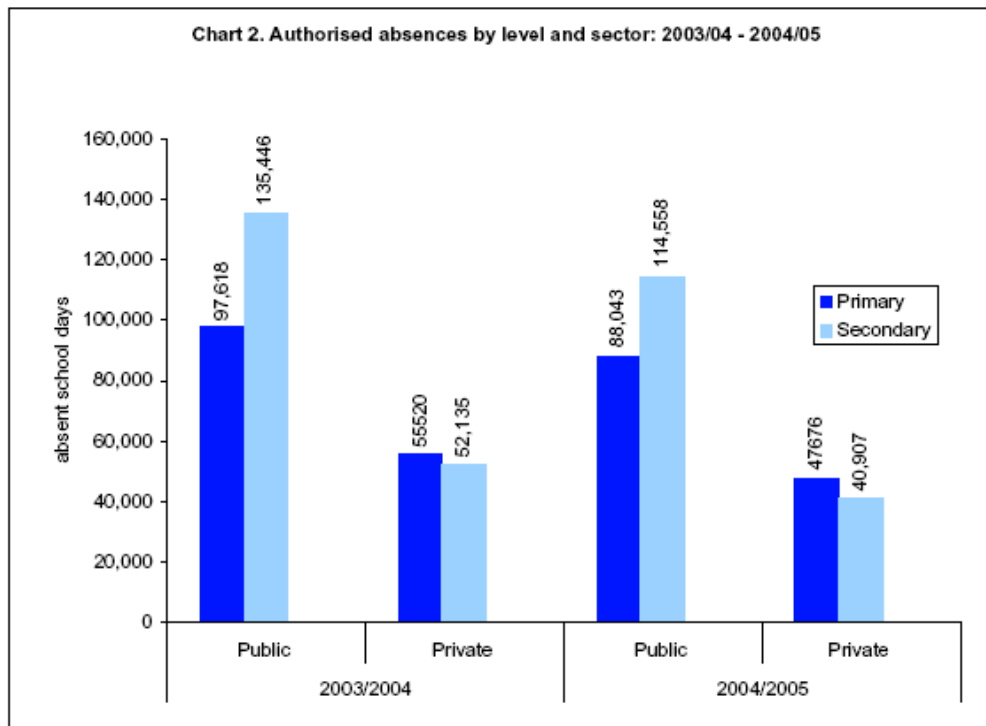
Charts 1 and 2 show the occurrence of absenteeism by sector for total absenteeism and authorised absenteeism, for the scholastic years 2003/04 and 2004/05.

Chart 1: Total absences by level and sector, 2003/04 and 2004/05



Source: NSO, 2006 News Release, No. : 166/2006.

Chart 2: Authorised absences by level and sector, 2003/04 and 2004/05



Source: NSO, 2006 News Release, No. : 166/2006.

Established Targets

Targets to reduce absenteeism have been established: a target of 92 % attendance for all Junior Lyceums (present attendance rate is 90.58 %), a target of 85 % for all area secondary schools (present rate is 78.59 %) and a target of 75 % for all girls' and boys' schools (previously 'opportunity centres') to be achieved by the scholastic year starting in 2007.

For primary schools, a general target of 95 % attendance, to be achieved by the end of the academic year 2007/08, has been established. This general target is to be supplemented by annual individual targets for those schools not yet achieving this level. The focal point to achieve these targets is a centralised structure facilitating seamless service provision among the various services. The focal point's role is to provide high-quality advice, analysis of data and random inspection of registers, and to review casework services to schools in order to ensure the prompt detection of children whose attendance is a cause for concern and the effective use of a range of alternative strategies in order to effect improvements. A system where all public, church and private schools follow uniform reporting procedures should be established and enforced. This might include the development and provision of a software programme to be used by all schools to report attendance figures. ICT will be used to rationalise data collection and interpretation.

The problem of absenteeism, however, does not result only from lack of financial or material wealth. Problems at home seem to compound absenteeism. In such situations, the child assumes the role of the parent with the result that the child remains home to take care of the house instead of going to school. Similar situations occur in single-parent households, where children miss school in order to look after their younger siblings because of the lack of affordable day care centres. These children absent themselves from school to assume the role of parents. In this way, the children are stripped of their right to just be children.

Furthermore, other educational materials which are necessary for the school curriculum, such as computers, are not purchased by the child's parents who can ill-afford to do so, with the result that the dearth of such learning instruments tends to marginalize the child. Both hardware and software materials are provided within the school, but since projects and research often need to be completed at home, not having a computer at home hinders the child and makes them feel ostracised. As a result, the child might opt to drop out of school early and may end up working in a lower-paying job.

2.2.4 Childcare

Disabled children

The State's commitment to assist students with disabilities is extensive in Malta. Spearheading most initiatives for persons with special needs in Malta is the Commission for Persons with Special Needs, which covers all ages and which has improved services through its programmes and educational activities. In Malta, just under 2 000 students attending schools are allocated a facilitator. Of these, however, less than 10 students have been able to continue their educational progress beyond the secondary level. The reasons why this is so have not yet been systematically studied, but they should be. A number of hypotheses could be tested, including investigating whether the facilitator support given at school is qualitatively not enough to support these children; whether the fact that the service of facilitators extends only to school-hours is hampering the continued success of these students, since the social backgrounds of many of these children do not stimulate them enough to proceed with educational advancement; whether these children are caught in a genetic trap that, despite the support given, will not afford them the capacity to proceed with higher education; whether support and accessibility programmes within higher-level education are not adequate enough to incorporate these students; and whether mainstreaming these children is not having the expected positive effect it is intended to have, despite the provision of facilitator services assigned to individual students. Until these and other hypotheses are tested, one has to rely on intuition and guesswork.

These issues, and specifically whether special schools should be retained if success rates of mainstreaming appear to be low, have been aired publicly from time to time. The 2006 Annual Report of the Commissioner for Children advises that to further increase inclusion of disabled students, not only within school but in society at large, they should be exposed to students who are not disabled.

Table 2.2 offers a snapshot of the schools providing education up to the higher secondary level in public, church, and private schools and in state-run special schools. It also breaks down the population in such schools into the various levels, as of January 31, 2005.

Table 2.2: Educational institutions and school population, Malta and Gozo (31/01/05)

Institutions	Kindergarten	Primary	Secondary	Higher Secondary	Special schools	Total
Malta:						
State	55	65	30	1	5	156
Church	28	22	21	21	0	92
Independent	29	15	9	2	0	55
Sub-total, Malta	112	102	60	24	5	303
Gozo:						
State	11	11	2	1	1	26
Church	6	4	1	0	1	11
Independent	0	0	0	0	6	0
Sub-total, Gozo	17	15	3	1	267	37
Total, Malta & Gozo	129	117	63	25	0	340
School population						
Malta:						
State	4,366	16,867	16,414	1,800	0	39,714
Church	1,158	6,682	7,196	648	267	15684
Independent	1,749	4,036	2,410	126	19	8321
Sub-total, Malta	7273	27585	26020	2574	0	63719
Gozo						
State	222	1651	1864	567	0	4323
Church	276	673	350	0	19	1299
Independent	0	0	0	0	286	0
Sub-total, Gozo	498	2324	2214	567	?	5622
Total, Malta & Gozo	7771	29909	28234	3141	?	69341

Source: Ministry of Education, Youth and Employment. 2005. 'Inclusive And Special Education: Review Report'

Table 2.3 in turn sets out the number of students with individual educational needs in mainstream schools, relating them to each level (kindergarten, primary, etc) and to the total school population. Independent schools, at the time when the set of Tables in this section were being compiled by an ad hoc working group assigned to study the problems associated with Inclusive and Special Education, did not have statemented students in their school population. They reported only 9 students (in two schools) with IENs. These are included in Table 2.3. Some Independent schools also advised the said Working Group that they have students with learning difficulties who may not be eligible for statementing once the process is extended to this sector. The schools provide such students with complementary teaching.

Various educators in the Independent school sector are committed to inclusive education as part of the ethos of the school they run. They insist that frequently children are registered with their school at birth or soon after, and, consequently, they cannot turn away students who, it subsequently results, have or develop a disability.

As things stand, however, the incidence of children with disability in mainstream schools is preponderantly evident in State schools. On January 31, 2005, out of a total of 1,785 students with IENs in the mainstream and in special schools - 2.57 % of the school population - 1,373 were in State schools (1,087 in mainstream and 286 in special schools). These students represented 1.98 % of the total school population. This can readily be seen from the following set of tables (Tables 2.3 - 2.5) which, respectively, give details of the number of children with IENs and in

Special Schools, the allocation of Assistants of Facilitators and the IEN-related expenditure share within the total expenditure on education in Malta.

Table 2.3: Students with IENs and in Special Schools Within School Population (31/01/05)

School Population	Kinder	Primary	Secondary	Secondary	Mainstream	Schools	Total
Malta	7273	27585	26020	2574	63452	267	63719
Gozo	498	2324	2214	567	5603	19	5622
Total	7771	29909	28234	3141	69055	286	69341
Of which IENs & Special School Students	Kinder	Primary	Secondary	Higher Secondary	Total IENs. Mainstream	Special Schools	Total in IENs & in Special Schools
<i>Malta</i>							
State	56	679	247	3	985	267	1252
Church	18	222	145	0	385	0	385
Independent	0	4	5	0	9	0	9
Sub-Total, Malta	74	905	397	3	1379	267	1646
<i>% of Malta Total</i>	<i>1.02</i>	<i>3.28</i>	<i>1.53</i>	<i>0.12</i>	<i>2.17</i>	<i>100.00</i>	
<i>% of total Malta School Pop.</i>	<i>0.12</i>	<i>1.42</i>	<i>0.62</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>2.16</i>	<i>0.42</i>	<i>2.58</i>
<i>Gozo</i>							
State	2	79	21	0	102	19	121
Church	1	13	4	0	18	0	18
Independent	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sub-total, Gozo	3	92	25	0	120	19	139
<i>% of Gozo Level</i>	<i>0.6</i>	<i>3.96</i>	<i>1.13</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>2.14</i>	<i>100</i>	
<i>% of total Gozo School Pop.</i>	<i>0.05</i>	<i>1.64</i>	<i>0.44</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>2.13</i>	<i>0.34</i>	<i>2.47</i>
Total, Malta & Gozo	77	997	422	3	1499	286	1785
<i>% of Malta & Gozo Level</i>	<i>0.99</i>	<i>3.33</i>	<i>1.49</i>	<i>0.10</i>	<i>2.17</i>	<i>100.00</i>	<i>2.57</i>
<i>% of Total School Population</i>	<i>0.11</i>	<i>1.44</i>	<i>0.61</i>	<i>0.00</i>	<i>2.16</i>	<i>0.41</i>	<i>2.57</i>
<i>IENs and in Special Schools Students in National Sectors</i>							
State	58	758	268	3	1087	286	1373
<i>% of National Level</i>	<i>0.75</i>	<i>2.53</i>	<i>0.95</i>	<i>0.10</i>	<i>1.57</i>	<i>100.00</i>	<i>1.98</i>
Church	19	235	149	0	403	0	403
<i>% of National Level</i>	<i>0.24</i>	<i>0.79</i>	<i>0.53</i>	<i>0.00</i>	<i>0.58</i>	<i>0.00</i>	<i>0.58</i>
Independent	0	4	5	0	9	0	9
<i>% of National Level</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0.01</i>
Total	77	997	422	3	1499	286	1785

Source: Ministry of Education, Youth and Employment. 2005. 'Inclusive And Special Education: Review Report'

Table 2.4: Learning support assistants, State schools (31/01/05)

Schools	Facilitators	Kindergarten Assistants, Special Education	Kindergarten Assistants	Part-time	Supply Kindergarten Assistants	Total
Malta						
Primary	183	49	25	2	315	574
Secondary:						0
Boys	36	1	0	1	96	134
Girls	25	1	0	0	41	67
<i>Total, Malta</i>	<i>244</i>	<i>51</i>	<i>25</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>452</i>	<i>775</i>
Gozo						0
Primary	29	10	14	0	11	64
Secondary:						
Boys	4	3	6	13		
Girls	3	1	2	6		
<i>Total, Gozo</i>	<i>36</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>19</i>	<i>83</i>
Total	280	64	40	3	471	858

Source: Ministry of Education, Youth and Employment. 2005. 'Inclusive And Special Education: Review Report'.

Table 2.5: IEN-related Expenditure in Within Total Education Expenditure, 2000 - 2005

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004(Prov.)	2005(Est.)
<i>Recurrent expenditure:</i>						
<i>Personal emoluments</i>						
IEN-related (learning support assistants)	1,344,632	1,821,746	1,690,053	2,449,635	3,394,576	3,918,182
Non-IEN-related operational and maintenance	33,636,621	40,015,679	40,738,593	41,226,623	41,722,549	46,483,000
IEN-related (school transport, etc.)	288,439	156,383	161,151	183,065	224,229	162,000
Non-IEN-related	4,129,063	4,144,823	3,974,378	4,204,009	4,074,567	4,185,000
<i>Special expenditure, non-IEN related</i>	<i>57,673</i>	<i>36,228</i>	<i>18,226</i>	<i>31,062</i>	<i>28,715</i>	<i>28,000</i>
Programmes and Initiatives expenditure, non-IEN related	9,183,844	9,101,254	10,021,139	10,538,378	10,037,067	10,982,000
Contribution to Government entities expenditure, non-IEN related	8,793,582	12,039,960	13,543,000	14,377,451	16,288,000	17,400,000
<i>Capital expenditure</i>						
IEN-related (allocation to special schools, etc.)	148,553	99,302	23,831	35,516	39,526	2,100
Non-IEN-related (including FTS)	7,200,011	6,245,269	6,447,426	7,124,793	6,355,435	5,230,900
<i>Total education expenditure</i>	<i>64,782,418</i>	<i>73,660,644</i>	<i>76,617,797</i>	<i>80,170,532</i>	<i>82,164,663</i>	<i>88,391,182</i>
<i>Of which</i>						
IEN-related expenditure	2,015,749	2,307,967	2,115,035	2,884,216	3,874,331	4,298,282
% Total education expenditure	3.11	3.13	2.76	3.60	4.72	4.86
Total Government expenditure	648,389,000	695,253,000	743,668,000	781,623,000	837,465,000	898,480,000
<i>Of which</i>						
Total education expenditure, % share	9.99	10.59	10.30	10.26	9.81	9.84
IEN-related expenditure, % share	0.31	0.33	0.28	0.37	0.46	0.48
Note: education expenditure total excludes						
Allocation to Eden Foundation	234,125	230,536	240,000	216,000	216,000	216,000
Contribution to church schools	8,080,000	9,412,710	9,452,170	9,920,444	10,000,000	11,500,000
<i>*Excludes interest on and repayment of loans, and contributions to Sinking Funds</i>						

Source: Ministry of Education, Youth and Employment. 2005. 'Inclusive And Special Education: Review Report'.

Welfare and Social Service Provision

Welfare and social service provision in Malta that caters for the needs of children are provided by two main agencies, namely by the Church-run *Ejjew Għandi*, previously known as *Children's Homes*, and by *Appoġġ*. *Appoġġ* covers both Malta and Gozo since it is a government agency, whilst there is only one Church-run children's home in Gozo.

Ejjew Għandi

The central office for the Malta diocese, recently renamed 'Ejjew Għandi', looks after 10 children's homes, 5 day care centres and 5 centres which care for cases involving domestic violence. The ten children's homes are organised into 24 'Children's Flats', each functioning as a semi-autonomous independent unit.

Ejjew Għandi also run a programme of preventive care, the specific aim of which is to assist problem households to learn the basic social skills they lack (general ignorance, lack of parental skills, inability to programme expenditure, lack of domestic skills like cooking, ignorance of how to prepare children for school, and others), in an attempt to rehabilitate these families and keep children within the family and away from institutional care. This last programme is run by a social worker aided by an extensive team of helpers, some of whom visit the families assigned to them on a daily basis to ensure that the families involved are keeping to the 'contract' terms they had agreed to when they were incorporated in the programme.

Though limited because of the unsupported way this programme is run, this preventive programme is considered to be one of the best practices involving children at risk in Malta. Its success rate in moving families and children out of the poverty trap has been substantial.

State services: Appoġġ

Ever since its establishment in 1994, *Appoġġ*, previously known as SWDP, has offered specialized social work services to children through the **Child Protection Service**. For a number of years this was the only service for children which the Agency delivered. As a result, the Child Protection Service was serving as a general child welfare service and was dealing with a vast range of problems encountered by children in addition to child protection issues. This resulted in an overload of work on the service.

In the year 2000, it was apparent to the new management of *Appoġġ* that this situation was not sustainable. An overhaul of the service was undertaken and has been underway since then. *Appoġġ* had to ensure the creation of a number of Children's Services to be able to deal with the demands placed on the service. This measure has been an important step in ensuring that abused children receive more efficient and effective service from the Child Protection Service while other children in need are also offered support from different services within *Appoġġ*, thus ensuring a more holistic and integrated Child Welfare Service.

The practice of foster care has existed in Malta for quite some time, though a formally organised system for administering foster care was not created until fairly recently. **Fostering Service** within *Appoġġ* was formally established at the beginning of the year 2000, when a team of qualified social workers was employed to promote foster care in Malta. Fostering Service provides social work support to foster carers and works in partnership with them to ensure the best possible service to children placed in their care. This service was well-desired, as it provides an alternative family setting for those children requiring out-of-home care. Table 2.6 provides details of the extent to which fostering has been developing under the auspices of *Appoġġ*.

Table 2.6: Foster care through Appoġġ

	Non related foster carers	Next-of-kin foster carers	Total
1996	25	2	27
1997	26	2	28
1998	30	2	32
1999	43	6	49
2000	50	7	57
2001	63	9	72
2002	66	24	90
2003	86	48	134
2004	82	74	156
2005	98	71	169
2006	74	58	132

Source: Appoġġ. 2006, 'Half Yearly Statistical Report'

Appoġġ developed a number of services soon after it was established. The **Looked After Children Service** was established in 2001 in order to ensure that children living away from their families, whether in residential care or foster care, are regularly followed up on with adequate and regular care plans. The service's ultimate aim is to return children to their own families whenever possible.

Court Services was established in 2001 and provides limited services in response to the ever-increasing demand from courts for custody reports and other related issues. At present, through a team of professionals appointed by the Agency, Court Services assists family court in the assessments, recommendations and monitoring of cases, mainly cases of separation. **Supervised Access Visits** was established in 1995, and has mostly responded during the past years to the increasing demands from the Family Court and The Children and Young Persons' Advisory Board. The service provides supervision by trained social care personnel for child access visits by non-custodial parents and parents with visitation disputes.

In 2001, the **Weekend Monitoring Service** was set up. A pilot project, this service supports looked after children who visit their natural family during the weekend and require monitoring during their stays at home. The visits offer security to these children, monitor their behaviour while at home and help them to build positive relationships with their parents or guardians. The service also aims at ensuring that children are safe during their visits to their families. The **High Support Service** was launched in 2002 for children under care orders who, due to their emotional and psychological needs, require a high level of support within a residential service. The service provides individualised care to these vulnerable children.

Apart from these specialized services falling under the portfolio of the Children's Services, over the years Appoġġ has also developed other therapeutic, community and generic services for children and families, all of which aim at supporting children and families in need.

Children's Services offers a wide range of specialized services for children who are facing some kind of crisis or trauma in their life. The services aim at providing intensive and integrated services to children, so as to promote their wellbeing, protect their rights and enhance their potential. With the involvement and participation of the children themselves, workers in this field develop care plans, take action to promote and protect children's rights and ensure that the

wellbeing of children is always given top most priority. Tables 2.7– 2.9 provide details of the caseload of *Appogg* since 2000 when it established its various child-oriented services. As can be seen from the tables, the caseload has fluctuated over the years, but without following a clear pattern with respect to the type of case handled.

Table 2.7: Children's Services

Year	Number of cases
2000	993
2001	982
2002	1386
2003	1734
2004	1462
2005	995
2006	1063

Source: Appogg. 2006, 'Half Yearly Statistical Report'

Table 2.8: Monthly service by year service opening

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	Total
January	29	27	16	186	62	33	62	415
February	29	19	12	90	122	21	84	377
March	56	16	37	77	87	20	79	372
April	59	28	81	132	57	13	85	455
May	70	62	50	100	61	17	95	455
June	48	36	46	104	42	24	81	381
July	39	23	43	115	36	16	0	272
August	53	15	42	71	71	45	0	297
September	30	24	48	83	64	27	0	276
October	35	14	193	126	54	21	0	443
November	49	19	179	70	30	19	0	366
December	25	12	65	62	46	22	0	232
Total	522	295	812	1216	732	278	486	4341

Source: Appogg. 2006, 'Half Yearly Statistical Report'

Table 2.9: Type of problem by year of opening

Type of problem	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	Total
At risk	68	32	86	91	33	16	96	422
Emotional	43	17	48	58	29	4	13	212
Emotional & neglect	0	10	24	27	8	3	5	77
Emotional & physical	65	23	54	92	56	20	33	343
Emotional & sexual	2	2	4	16	3	5	3	35
Emotional, neglect & physical	4	0	19	28	11	13	3	78
Emotional, neglect & sexual	1	1	4	3	0	1	0	10
Emotional, physical & sexual	1	0	12	9	3	3	1	29
Emotional, neglect, physical & sexual	3	0	1	2	4	0	5	15
Neglect	84	52	99	142	54	40	84	555
Neglect & physical	43	9	39	44	33	11	14	193
Neglect & sexual	4	4	10	14	4	13	3	52
Neglect, physical sexual	7	4	6	2	1	3	2	25
Physical	85	45	118	140	57	46	103	594
Physical & sexual	11	9	11	18	3	0	3	55
Prenatal	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	2
Sexual	45	20	70	118	53	36	108	450
Unknown	3	3	21	21	9	1	4	62
Total	469	231	626	827	361	215	480	3209

Source: Appogg. 2006, 'Half Yearly Statistical Report'

2.3 Access to the labour market

Absenteeism from school, lack of motivation and many other factors contribute to the exclusion of children from well-paying jobs. This maintains the status quo and acts in favour of children hailing from the middle and upper classes having greater access to higher education and better job opportunities. Various programmes have been designed specifically for young people to enhance their employability prospects:

- **Job Club**, a programme designed for young persons who leave formal education with low basic skills or no skills at all; and
- **Supported Employment Schemes** which are specifically designed for young people with special needs with a view to enhance their ability to integrate into the labour market.

In addition to this:

- The Housing Authority and the Employment and Training Corporation launched **Head Start**. The aim of the project is to support young people leaving care. The support is twofold: training on the job and subsidised accommodation. Head Start is doing extremely well.
- The **Youth @ Risk Project** is targeting young persons in disadvantaged areas, aiding them in securing employment and accessing social services.

In addition, to safeguard the rights of children and young people, Malta is actively considering adopting a number of measures during 2006-2008 in order to enhance the effectiveness of its juvenile justice system, namely:

- the development of primary prevention programmes targeting homophobia and promoting social diversity;
- the institution of secondary prevention and 'diversionary' services;
- strengthening of the Probation Service Unit and other services ancillary to the juvenile justice system;
- introduction of victim-offender reconciliation, parole, and prison aftercare systems, particularly in relation to youth offenders.

2.4. Transport

There is no data available, nor any obvious problems, in respect to transport issues and how they affect children in Malta. The fact that Malta is a small island militates against the emergence of such problems.

School transport is provided by the state for children attending public schools, whilst it has to be paid for by the parents of children attending church, private or independent schools.

However, this is a non-issue in the Maltese context.

2.5. Social, cultural and sporting life

In this area too there is no specific data. Children in Malta have access to a multiplicity of associations and clubs that cater to cultural, spiritual and sporting life. Most prominent of these is M.U.S.E.U.M., which is primarily an association intended to promote Christian doctrine that caters to both boys and girls in different centres. This society organises many cultural and entertainment activities for the children who attend. Participation is capillary in the sense that, centres exist in practically every town and village and are within close distance of the children they serve. In cases where travelling distances are considered too great or too dangerous for young children, transportation is provided.

There exists an area, however, which has been a source of concern and which has been partially addressed by the first Commissioner for Children: membership in football nurseries. Membership in these nurseries is open to all boys, and the expense is minimal. But if a child wants to move from one nursery to another, payment is due to the nursery, allegedly as a contribution to the nursery for the 'training effort' made. This has created extensive concern since many parents feel it is not fair that what should be a 'fun' and innocent experience is reflecting practices seen in adult football. Correspondence by the Commissioner for Children to Malta's Members of European Parliament [MEPs] did not result in a solution because there is no provision at the European level that addresses this issue. Neither is there a provision at the local level, and in view of the restrictions it imposes on the mobility of children at such a tender age, attention to this issue and possibly to the unwarranted demands made on parents, is required.

2.6. General remarks

2.6.1 *Absence of clear, integrated policies*

The first thing that strikes the observer of the Maltese scene is that although there are many initiatives in place in Malta to address these issues affecting child poverty and social inclusion, there is no one blueprint that coherently brings all these initiatives together in a way such that clients (in this case the children and their families) can easily identify how to get help and where to go for help and such that practitioners (primarily social workers and all those involved in the delivery of care), can learn how to deliver help in a holistic way. There has been a recent movement to develop a one-stop shop as an experiment in the Cottonera region (ACCESS: Cottonera Community Resource Centre), but this remains an experiment and its success or failure still needs to be properly assessed. Both clients and practitioners would benefit from the addressing of this urgent need to integrate policies. The micro-structures are all in place, but it is not easy to clearly identify how the various programmes and initiatives can function seamlessly together whilst maintaining their individual ethos.

In this context, what is also definitely lacking in Malta is a Children's Act. This lack is officially recognised to the extent that a White Paper was published in the 1980's, but still no Children's Act has been enacted. The Government says it will be actuated in stages because there are effectively many references to children's rights already written into the laws of Malta.

This lack affects most negatively children in care. As a result, children are in care for far too long because there is no law that expressly deals with termination of parental rights on grounds of severe neglect. Those children placed in care voluntarily tend to be the ones that remain longest in care because the parents continue to enjoy care and custody benefits. Those children protected by a Care Order are those that benefit mostly from the services of the State (including psychological services, paid extra-curricular activities, and, often, a one-to-one High Support Carer for most of their waking hours in the case of highly disturbed children, of which there are many in residential care). Those not protected by a Care Order cannot benefit from these services unless sponsors are found by the Residential Homes themselves. The only income for Church-run Residential Homes is Lm12 [€27.96] weekly for each child in care, which is barely enough to cover one day's expenses, let alone a week's. Any other income comes from sporadic donations in cash or kind. If the Government were to buy services from the Church-run homes instead of taking them for granted, a much better service would be rendered to the children in residential care.

2.6.2 *Structures: State provisions and NGOs*

Although welfare provision has been, in one way or another, a long-standing feature of Maltese social life, in Maltese society, it was the Catholic Church that provided the first formal institutions for welfare, especially in respect of the care for children, primarily as initiatives of the Religious Orders or of other enterprising individuals, but almost always with an ecclesiastical underpinning. When Malta acquired independence in 1964, the state was too young to provide full welfare net provisions and, as an interesting offshoot of the loss of presidency by the Church and religion, as it was no longer necessary for religion to act as one of the two major surrogate carriers for national identity (the other being language)⁵, an interesting process of structural differentiation

⁵ The sociological literature on Malta is replete with data on this. See, e.g. Sciriha L & Vassallo M. *Languages of Malta*. Malta 2007

manifested within the Church itself as it started to develop the 'service ethic' through a spontaneous process of re-organising its own internal welfare-providing institutions. With the maturing of the state and increasing secularisation, the Maltese state started to provide an increasingly wider welfare net.

In this process, however, the role of NGOs, which no longer drive their inspiration exclusively from the religious establishment, has not been formally assessed and established. There are many linkages between state and non-state professionals working in the field of child wellbeing, and in some instances (such as between *Appoġġ* and *Ejjeu Għandi*) there are even formal co-operation agreements. But lack of clarity and the duplication of some efforts is apparent. Duplication of services is a serious handicap in Malta. Everyone wants to do their own bit. Manpower is wasted especially as in the case of a residential social worker in a Children's Home and a field social worker from *Appoġġ* doing the same work with the same children. There are no clear-cut policies as to who should take on which responsibilities in these services. One can frequently sense currents of mistrust between social workers affiliated with Church Homes and those working with *Aġenzija Appoġġ*, though one cannot generalize. The time has indeed come for this issue to be tackled rationally to ensure that maximisation of resources is ensured whilst the ethos of the different programmes and initiatives is scrupulously maintained.

2.6.3 *The ambivalent role of Government-dependent structures*

Following from the point just referred to, there is a lack of clarity in the role of Government agencies like *Appoġġ*, which, at one and the same time, provide services like any other agency and act and derive all the benefits (including access to outside resources) of NGOs, but which are also para-statal government departments which are used by the government to provide direct services to the Maltese. This is not meant to denigrate the usefulness of these services in any way, but it appears that the Maltese state, in this area especially, has not fully entertained the practice of being the provider of the wider parameters within which services are to be provided. It is still directly providing services to individual clients itself rather than acting as the 'controller'. As a government-dependent administrative structure, it seeks to implement the political objectives of providing the general framework to ensure that welfare provision is adequate and reaches its objectives and targets. Thus, the Maltese state does not delegate enough to NGOs and is not apt to stimulate the growth of welfare by NGOs through a tendering service, etc.

There are a number of consequences that result from this. In the first instance, welfare remains to be perceived as a form of charity provided by the state, and persons who may have benefitted because of the patronage system that underpins the Maltese political system cling to welfare even when they no longer have a strict claim to receive it. This is siphoning resources away from those persons who really need them.

But there is also another consequence that affects the professionals involved in providing these services within para-statal agencies. Like their counterparts in the civil service, it is noticed that these professionals are subject to the need to advance their careers rather than specialise in one particular area to improve themselves and the services they render. Movement across services is obviously an enrichment for those involved, and beneficial if undertaken in good measure. But when movement is the result of the need to climb up the administrative ladder, it translates itself in a loss in the quality of the services rendered and, it needs to be added, in the professional orientation of all those engaged. This issue needs to be properly addressed in the Maltese system. The high staff turnover rate at *Aġenzija Appoġġ* is very distressing both to the children in residential care and to the professionals involved in administering care. Many children have their 3rd or 4th new social worker within the span 2 years. This often adds to their emotional and

psychological problems, as they feel rejected every time this occurs. This high turnover rate is also observed among psychologists working with *Appoġġ* .

The time has probably come for State agencies in Malta to assume more the role of 'quality controllers' of existing services, to open new vistas for novel initiatives, and to stop providing direct services to individual clients themselves.

3. Monitoring

The preceding sections have sought to establish that in Malta there is a plethora of initiatives, programmes, services and activities that in some way or another address the issue of child poverty and promote the social inclusion of children. It is quite clear that there is widespread awareness of the problems facing children, and that different policies and programmes aim both at the root causes of poverty and at alleviating its consequences through direct intervention. Not all the initiatives could be described, or even listed, in this short document. What follows is a critique of the overall situation, intended primarily as a positive contribution to future development.

3.1 Monitoring and research

As could be readily understood from the preceding sections, in Malta there is quite an interest to monitor and evaluate services. These often take place at the initiatives of Ministers who appreciate the need to assess services. Data collection procedures are well-established and the dissemination of data by the National Statistics Office (NSO) and by the different agencies themselves naturally contributes to reflection and discussion. But integrated monitoring of services conducted by independent persons operating in independent structures is severely lacking. Specific targets have been established to address absenteeism and early school-leaving in the education sector, but not many other targets exist. In this regard, the need for a properly funded research institute that could focus on the analysis and monitoring of data—not just its sheer collection—in an independent way is apparent.

If this is done, the quality of the research initiatives of the type that have been undertaken so far would benefit because the end result would not just be the production of a report which, despite the good intentions of its drafters, may remain a dead letter because its findings are not implemented. An action-research orientation would ensure that the implementation of findings is regularly monitored, and that a continuous stream of current information would become available for both planners and actors in the field.

3.2 Cultural ignorance

But what appears to be most direly needed is an attempt to understand and address the poverty trap that, generation after generation, appears to be pulling people into the same disadvantaged situations despite the ever-enlarged welfare net. The best way to describe this trap is through the use of the term 'cultural ignorance'. The term is being coined to point at the apparent impossibility, or perhaps inability, of persons involved in situations that involve or lead to poverty to haul themselves out of it and to start moving away from the kind of situation as revealed by the still-unpublished study by Tabone and Abela (see section 1.2 above). The phenomenon exhibits itself extensively in most cases involving child poverty and exclusion. Instances of persons using their welfare benefits to purchase unnecessary or luxury items are not uncommon. The demand for benefits is even now taking the form of persons claiming to foster children born to an in-law, thus almost rendering farcical the idea of fostering itself (see Table 2.6, which shows that in 2006, as many as 43.9 % of all cases of foster care involve fostering of a child by an in-law!). Other examples could be mentioned and social workers are well aware of this, but find themselves unable to act at times because of professional ethics: they understand that their role is to help their clients, not to report their abuses.

The roots of cultural ignorance need to be discovered and the sheer ignorance of the parents in instances of what at times appears to be selfishness in attending to their needs and not those of their children (e.g., spending child benefits on wine or fast foods) properly addressed. Preventive programmes like those initiated by *Ejjeu Għandi*⁶ may be more demanding of both time and resources, but the chances of success to generate a culture shift away from the phenomenon of cultural ignorance in the medium and long term are more promising.

⁶ Other current initiatives that address prevention include:

- A programme “*Għozza*” aims to contribute to the prevention of school dropouts by addressing young mothers who are still in school. Support to single parents and pregnant young mothers has been considered as important contribution in helping these children to attain formal learning and qualifications. However, this programme also addresses their other needs through non-formal learning so as to ensure that they attain skills which they will need in view of child rearing.
- Programmes *Filti* and NWAR have been developed with the aim of enhancing literacy skills especially amongst children and young people at risk of social exclusion. The programme is a community-based initiative involving teachers, students and parents who collaborate to address the difficulties that the children may be facing and ensure that children acquire the adequate literacy skills necessary for their future, particularly for enhancing their prospects in the labour market.
- The *Initial Response* service has been set up and is tackling child neglect cases whilst the Child Protection Services has specialized in handling severe cases wherein children are most likely to be at higher risks.

Appendix A: Additional Tables

Table A1: Deprivation factors by whether or not there are dependent children in the household

Problems with dwelling	No dependent children			One or more dependent children			Total		
	Yes	No	Total	Yes	No	Total	Yes	No	Total
Leaking roof, damp, rot	9,826	77,202	87,028	3,643	49,422	53,065	13,469	126,624	140,093
Not enough light / too dark	7,760	79,268	87,028	3,032	50,033	53,065	10,792	129,301	140,093
Noise from neighbours / street	23,189	63,839	87,028	11,762	41,303	53,065	34,951	105,142	140,093
Pollution or other environmental problems	31,778	55,250	87,028	17,727	35,315	53,042	49,505	90,565	140,070
Crime / vandalism in the area	10,928	76,100	87,028	7,152	45,913	53,065	18,080	122,013	140,093

Ability to afford	No dependent children			One or more dependent children			Total		
	Yes	No	Total	Yes	No	Total	Yes	No	Total
One week's annual holiday away from home	32,893	54,107	87,000	15,319	37,746	53,065	48,213	91,853	140,065
Eat meat / fish every other day	78,063	8,937	87,000	47,722	5,343	53,065	125,786	14,280	140,065
Face unexpected expenses	53,672	33,329	87,000	33,628	19,372	53,000	87,300	52,701	140,001
Keep home adequately warm	75,217	11,811	87,028	46,649	6,416	53,065	121,866	18,227	140,093

Household owns	No dependent children				One or more dependent children				Total			
	Yes	No, cannot afford	No, other reasons	Total	Yes	No, cannot afford	No, other reasons	Total	Yes	No, cannot afford	No, other reasons	Total
Telephone	84,425	912	1,691	87,028	52,404	373	287	53,065	136,829	1,286	1,978	140,093
Colour television	84,991	750	1,287	87,028	52,912	106	25	53,042	137,903	855	1,312	140,070
Computer	26,643	4,388	55,975	87,006	40,585	3,021	9,458	53,065	67,228	7,409	65,433	140,071
Washing machine	80,766	1,364	4,898	87,028	52,760	100	182	53,042	133,527	1,464	5,079	140,070
Car	57,142	3,962	25,924	87,028	49,824	1,674	1,544	53,042	106,967	5,636	27,468	140,070

Ability to make ends meet	No dependent children	One or more dependent children	Total
With great difficulty	9,342	7,889	17,231
With difficulty	17,581	13,144	30,724
With some difficulty	28,227	18,435	46,662
Fairly easily	22,596	10,552	33,148
Easily	8,392	2,803	11,194
Very easily	868	197	1,064
Total	87,006	53,019	140,025

Source: NSO, SILC, 2005

Table A2: Total absences in government primary schools classified by year of study, September 2004 - March 2005

Year of Study	Total Pupils	Absences					
		Unauthorised	As a % of total school days	Average per pupil	Authorised	As a % of total school days	Average per pupil
Year 1	2,649	7,515	2.36	2.84	15,488	4.87	5.85
Year 2	2,746	8,533	2.59	3.11	15,427	4.68	5.62
Year 3	2,983	8,991	2.51	3.01	14,833	4.14	4.97
Year 4	3,323	10,198	2.56	3.07	14,004	3.51	4.21
Year 5	3,028	9,855	2.71	3.25	13,865	3.82	4.58
Year 6	3,706	11,694	2.63	3.16	14,426	3.24	3.89
Total	18,435	56,786	2.57	3.08	88,043	3.98	4.78

Source: NSO, 2006 News Release, No.: 166/2006.

Table A3: Total absences in government-dependent private primary schools by year of study, classified September 2004 - March 2005

Year of Study	Total Pupils	Absences					
		Unauthorised	As a % of total school days	Average per pupil	Authorised	As a % of total school days	Average per pupil
Year 1	1,052	424	0.34	0.40	6,642	5.26	6.31
Year 2	1,121	676	0.50	0.60	5,728	4.26	5.11
Year 3	1,058	574	0.45	0.54	4,716	3.71	4.46
Year 4	1,180	568	0.40	0.48	4,511	3.19	3.82
Year 5	1,171	500	0.36	0.43	4,482	3.19	3.83
Year 6	1,196	607	0.42	0.51	4,110	2.86	3.44
Total	6,778	3,349	0.41	0.49	30,189	3.71	4.45

Source: NSO, 2006 News Release, No.: 166/2006.

Table A4: Total absences in independent private primary schools classified by year of study, September 2004 - March 2005

Year of Study	Total Pupils	Absences					
		Unauthorised	As a % of total school days	Average per pupil	Authorised	As a % of total school days	Average per pupil
Year 1	635	307	0.40	0.48	4,069	5.34	6.41
Year 2	679	388	0.48	0.57	3,156	3.87	4.65
Year 3	622	176	0.24	0.28	2,841	3.81	4.57
Year 4	676	406	0.50	0.60	2,627	3.24	3.89
Year 5	656	365	0.46	0.56	2,526	3.21	3.85
Year 6	633	291	0.38	0.46	2,268	2.99	3.58
Total	3,901	1,933	0.41	0.50	17,487	3.74	4.48

Source: NSO, 2006 News Release, No : 166/2006.

Table A5: Total absences in government secondary schools classified by year of study, September 2004 - March 2005

Year of Study	Total Pupils	Absences					
		Unauthorised	As a % of total school days	Average per pupil	Authorised	As a % of total school days	Average per pupil
Year 1	3,324	18,931	8.92	5.70	13,461	6.34	4.05
Year 2	3,490	23,767	10.67	6.81	14,332	6.43	4.11
Year 3	3,550	26,605	11.74	7.49	17,451	7.70	4.92
Year 4	3,661	37,092	15.87	10.13	24,897	10.65	6.80
Year 5	3,587	49,685	21.70	13.85	36,517	15.95	10.18
Total	17,612	156,080	13.88	8.86	106,658	9.49	6.06

Source: NSO, 2006 News Release, No. : 166/2006.

Table A6: Total absences in government boys'/girls' secondary schools by year of study, classified September 2004 - March 2005

Year of Study	Total Pupils	Absences					
		Unauthorised	As a % of total school days	Average per pupil	Authorised	As a % of total school days	Average per pupil
Year 1	73	1,350	28.97	18.49	621	13.33	8.51
Year 2	114	2,569	35.30	22.54	849	11.67	7.45
Year 3	144	3,038	33.05	21.10	1,691	18.40	11.74
Year 4	156	4,950	49.71	31.73	1,831	18.39	11.74
Year 5	152	6,446	66.44	42.41	2,908	29.97	19.13
Total	639	18,353	45.00	28.72	7,900	19.37	12.36

Source: NSO, 2006 News Release, No. : 166/2006.

Table A7: Total absences in government-dependent private secondary schools classified by year of study, September 2004 - March 2005

Year of Study	Total Pupils	Absences					
		Unauthorised	As a % of total school days	Average per pupil	Authorised	As a % of total school days	Average per pupil
Year 1	1,568	418	0.22	0.27	5,386	2.86	3.43
Year 2	1,735	758	0.36	0.44	5,946	2.86	3.43
Year 3	1,604	610	0.32	0.38	5,844	3.04	3.64
Year 4	1,595	1,094	0.57	0.69	6,764	3.53	4.24
Year 5	1,556	1,503	0.80	0.97	7,625	4.08	4.90
Total	8,058	4,383	0.45	0.54	31,565	3.26	3.92

Source: NSO, 2006 News Release, No. : 166/2006.

Table A8: Total absences in independent private secondary schools classified by year of study, September 2004 - March 2005

Year of Study	Total Pupils	Absences					
		Unauthorised	As a % of total school days	Average per pupil	Authorised	As a % of total school days	Average per pupil
Year 1	488	189	0.32	0.39	1,647	2.81	3.38
Year 2	502	288	0.48	0.57	2,145	3.56	4.27
Year 3	502	363	0.60	0.72	1,942	3.22	3.87
Year 4	474	755	1.33	1.59	2,036	3.58	4.30
Year 5	411	629	1.28	1.53	1,572	3.19	3.82
Total	2,377	2,224	0.78	0.94	9,342	3.28	3.93

Source: NSO, 2006 News Release, No. : 166/2006.

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