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**CRC Concept Note for the General Comment 26 on children’s rights and the environment with a special focus on climate change**

Input from the Government of Malta

**The National Children’s Policy**

The National Children’s Policy document presents Malta’s way forward for safeguarding and promoting the rights and general wellbeing of children. Guided by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), this Policy promotes the holistic development and wellbeing of children by focusing on the physical, psychological and socio-economic aspects in the life of the child. In order to address the needs of children in a comprehensive manner, this Policy identifies and addresses five main dimensions, namely:

* home environment,
* social wellbeing,
* health and environment,
* education and employment,
* leisure and culture.

Whilst acknowledging children as a specific social group which demands specialised attention, this Policy highlights the uniqueness of each child. This Policy places the child within the context of his/her personal background and wider environment, by taking into account the child’s informal network of family, friends, communities and the natural and social environment. This Policy also adopts a life-course approach to wellbeing, by considering the various opportunities and challenges associated with different developmental stages and the dynamic and multiple needs experienced by children throughout their lives.

In line with its three main principles of protection, provision and participation, the National Children’s Policy promulgates a series of objectives under each of the different dimensions of wellbeing with the aim of:

* securing the safety of children and protecting them from danger and harm;
* ensuring the availability and accessibility of quality services and support structures;
* promoting children’s involvement across all levels of society and spheres of social life.

In advancing these objectives, this Policy calls for greater visibility, understanding and consideration of children’s views, needs and interests, as well as enhanced awareness of their rights and wellbeing so that these are safeguarded and promoted by all. Moreover, it calls for more child-friendly interventions, and strongly recommends that national legislation, policies and service provision are compliant with the scope and objectives set out in this Policy.

**Children’s Rights and the Environment – within the National Children’s Policy**

The National Children’s Policy outlines that “Children’s health is closely associated with the condition of the environment in which they interact.” The Policy addresses pregnant mothers (the mother’s womb as the first environment that surrounds children) and the home environment – both physical and psychological – which welcomes children and starts shaping their upbringing and personal development. Moreover, the Policy states that “the physical environment in which children can grow and develop healthily should include natural habitats free from pollution, more open spaces and play areas. Sustainable and safe community regeneration is essential for the healthy development of children.” Environmental threats and detrimental effects on children’s physical and psychological health have also been highlighted, including: “A decline in the state of the environment, both natural and urban, through the reduction of green areas, increased levels of traffic and industrial pollution, and the impact of climate change”.

The specific Section on Health and Environment within this Policy puts forward a number of policy actions to:

* promote and attain a child-friendly physical environment, healthy lifestyles and healthy relationships, prevention and early intervention;
* deter risky behaviour.

The Policy also addresses the benefits and risks of the digital environment, including the protection of children from inappropriate exposure, exploitation and abuse within the digital environment, particularly within the Leisure and Culture Section. Furthermore, every Section highlights significant action towards the rights of the child in terms of various natural and urban environments, such as:

* the educational and leisure environment, including play, sports and culture;
* the home environment including having a safe place to live, play and learn, as well as access to nutritious food, adequate clothing, personal hygiene and healthcare. Of particular note, “Whilst recognising the relationship between a positive home environment and healthy child development, this Policy acknowledges the fact that in those households which manifest such challenges as poverty, domestic violence, addictions, child abuse, long-term ill health and terminal conditions, disability and mental health issues, the wellbeing of the child asks for increased focus.”;
* the eradication of poverty and social exclusion and the provision of high quality services;
* juvenile justice;
* awareness raising;
* inclusive and anti-discrimination practice;
* enhanced collaboration; and
* meaningful participation of children. The National Children’s Policy was drafted in close collaboration with children, including the views of a wide stratum of children between the ages of 4 and 17 years. Besides advocating for and addressing the meaningful participation of children, this Policy states that “Their full participation in healthy development and wellbeing guarantees their dignity and respect.

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