

## **Agenda Item 3 (a) Priority Theme: Social Integration**

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**Statement by**

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Mr. Chairman,

At the outset allow me to offer you my sincere congratulations on your election to preside over this year's Session of the Committee. Our best wishes also go to the other members of the Bureau. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General of the United Nations for providing comprehensive reports on such an important subject.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement delivered by the Delegation of Spain on behalf of the European Union, and would also like to make a few additional remarks on our national perspective of social integration.

Malta's social character is based on a strong sense of community and close family ties, hence it upholds a social welfare system entrenched in actively protecting those at risk-of-poverty. However, as a consequence of globalization trends and demographic changes, patterns in the life-style of individuals are changing, and now it is acknowledged that we cannot continue to rely upon traditional methods to promote social cohesion and reduce the risk of poverty.

In view of its commitment to address these concerns and emerging needs on the matters of social inclusion and integration, Malta's Ministry of Social Policy drew up a National Action Plan for the period 2008-2010 that focuses on three major and over-arching policy priorities:

- The promotion of the social inclusion prospects of children and young persons;
- The support for active inclusion; and
- The promotion of overall equality of opportunities.

These policy priorities cut across diverse population groups, situations and needs, in a way as to promote a comprehensive social inclusion strategy for both the general public as well as to identify vulnerable groups. The latter include; the long term unemployed, single parents, irregular migrants, drug and alcohol dependents, persons with mental health difficulties, victims of domestic violence, persons with a disability, older persons, children, and young people at risk.

Malta's National Action Plan for social inclusion also identifies and addresses Malta's main challenges and obstacles in combating poverty and social exclusion. In this regard, Malta is dedicated to:

- i) pursuing the commitment to reduce early school leaving, school absenteeism and educational underachievement and sustaining efforts to diminish the digital divide through increased computer literacy;
- ii) increasing the overall employment rate, particularly through the inclusion of vulnerable groups within the labour market, and making work pay;
- iii) promoting greater availability of adequate and affordable housing;
- iv) combating the intergenerational transmission of poverty and social exclusion;
- v) addressing the social aspects of migration and promoting equality and diversity; and

- vi) reforming the social protection system to ensure its sustainability, adequacy and comprehensiveness.

Malta also recognizes that a proactive social inclusion policy goes beyond a social protectionist vision to ensure that provision of services facilitate participation and inclusion. Social welfare service provision and accessibility are increasingly being aimed at empowering people towards greater self-actualisation, and autonomy through their integration in the labour market. At the same time Malta's social welfare service provision acts as a safety net for the most vulnerable members of society.

Malta's National Action Plan on Social Inclusion also puts forward an integrated active inclusion strategy based on three pillars, by addressing:

- Adequate income support by undertaking a review of the social security system and providing measures to increase solidarity;
- Access to inclusive labour markets through instituting measures aimed at increasing the overall employment rate and facilitating the entry of women and vulnerable groups into the labour market; and
- Access to quality social services by strengthening measures to enhance work life balance, reduce burdensome procedures and enhance the effectiveness and quality of its social welfare services.

Given the strong ties between unemployment and risk of poverty, promoting active inclusion through facilitating access to education and employment is thus seen to be crucial to Malta's strategy to prevent and combat poverty and social exclusion.

Active inclusion is upheld by Malta as being more effective if accompanied by measures that enhance people's prospects for participation in all aspects of life and promote equality of opportunity. In view of this, combating discrimination in its various forms and promoting integration is crucial for social inclusion. To ensure full social participation irrespective of religion or belief, disability, age, gender or sexual orientation, Malta aims to advance equality of opportunity and social inclusion by:

- Combating discrimination, through enacting legislation, promoting diversity, combating stereotypes and enacting measures to empower vulnerable groups;
- Promoting the integration of third country nationals by enacting and consolidating measures which enhance their well-being, increase their employability, and address racism.
- Mainstreaming social inclusion and anti-discrimination issues by strengthening structures and encouraging service users' involvement.

Effective service delivery requires the coordinated input of all stakeholders of society, including; public, private and voluntary entities. Malta in fact endorses the need to prevent poverty and social exclusion through the help of non-governmental organisations, and as a result has instituted measures to strengthen the role of the voluntary sector. Furthermore, it is recognized that apart from the range of available measures, the effectiveness of social inclusion measures also extensively rely on the disposition and ability of all stakeholders to coordinate their initiatives with a view to achieve common goals and objectives.

Combating the risk of poverty and social exclusion is a complex crosscutting challenge that affects various social welfare sectors. Malta's National Action Plan on social inclusion for the period 2008-2010 acknowledges such challenge through the provision of social inclusion policies and measures that strengthen legislative and administrative mechanisms. Malta is working towards such goal through; promoting the social inclusion prospects of children and young people, promoting active inclusion and promoting equality of opportunities so as to ensure full social participation by all.

Thank you.