



*c/o Richmond Foundation, 424, St. Joseph High Road, St. Venera, SVR 1013, Malta*

*E-mail address: [apfmalta@gmail.com](mailto:apfmalta@gmail.com)*

*Voluntary Organisation Registration No: 0271*

## **Meeting with Social Affairs Committee**

### **MINUTES**

**Date :** 4<sup>th</sup> February 2015

**Present :** Hon. Deborah Schembri – Committee Chairperson  
Hon. Silvio Parnis – Committee Member  
Hon. Robert Cutajar – Committee Member  
Hon. Paula Mifsud Bonnici – Committee Member

Saviour Grima - APF Malta President  
Godwin Callus - APF Malta Secretary + Ċentru Fidi u Ġustizzja  
Carmel Callus - National Pensioners' Association  
Fr Vince Magri - Paulo Freire Institute  
Leonid Mc Kay - Caritas  
Fr Manwel Cordina - OASI Foundation  
Fr Carmelo Aquilina - Suret il-Bniedem  
Cynthia Zerafa - APF Malta Administrative Officer

**Excused :** Daniela Calleja Bitar - Richmond Foundation  
Roberta Vella Bonnici - Ufficcju Ejjew Ghandi

Meeting with Social Affairs Committee was held at The Parliament of Malta in Valletta between 1900hrs and 2015hrs

Social Affairs Committee Chairperson Hon Deborah Schembri welcomed Anti-Poverty Forum (APF) ExCo members and introduced the meeting by stating that poverty is a subject which is of interest to the Committee and that research studies are essential to show the current state of facts.

APF Malta President introduced the Committee and gave a brief overview of the work done by APF Malta locally and as members of the European Anti-Poverty Network.

Researcher Mr Leonid Mc Kay proceeded with the presentation of the European Minimum Income Network (EMIN) research details and its' findings. (Presentation attached).

Hon Robert Cremona asked if persons with disabilities are included in this study. It was explained that EAPN directed this study to the working age population and thus includes persons aged 18 to 64. Persons with disabilities are not included in the study.

Hon Silvio Parnis noted that despite all the social benefits offered by the Government, we still have people in poverty. He stated that through his political work, he can notice that there are people who deserve such benefits and others who teach us how to abuse the system. On the other hand he said that it is a mystery how certain families make do with €500 a month when they are living in a rented place.

With reference to the Social Assistance given to persons renting a place, Hon Deborah Schembri noted that there are individuals who are entitled to this benefit but are not claiming it since property owners do not want to show that they are actually renting their places.

Fr Emanuel Cordina explained that in various circumstances these people seek help from their families, parishes and the local organisations. He said that he helps different individuals thanks to the generosity of others who donate goods including furniture. Fr Cordina said that we should be cautious in our statements when addressing these people, since we are labelling them as poor. This is resulting in poverty becoming a mentality and it is being passed on from generation to another. In a later intervention, Fr Cordina noted that we should work on decentralisation of services, make better use of local councils and the census for better statistics.

Fr Vince Magri noted that persons seeking help require immediate assistance. Fr Magri explained that at Paulo Freire Institute he is providing Drama Therapy to a number of children with problematic background. He is finding this very helpful to the children in need, however funds are limited. Fr Magri also noted that the Government's initiative to launch the LEAP Project is proving to be a very effective solution since the services provided to people in need are now of higher standard. However the LEAP Project will come to an end in September 2015. Fr Magri said the Government should consider extending this project. In a later intervention, Fr Magri stated that poverty is long term and providing free child care facilities to these families will help to give support and a multi-stimulus environment to the children at an early stage.

Mr Godwin Callus noted that Millennium Chapel, a member organisation of APF Malta was also responsible for the distribution of free food donated by the EU. It was noted that whilst this scheme came to an end in February 2014, a similar scheme is about to be launched. Questions were raised on the criteria that will be set for families to benefit from this food scheme.

Saviour Grima pointed out that people in poverty suffer from stigma and through his experience, he is noticing internal migration, whereby families rent places in different localities so that no one notices their way of living. Grima also said that APF Malta is worried on the apathy and indifference these people in need show. He said that the government and NGOs need to motivate people in need through the various initiatives.

Leonid Mc Kay concluded the presentation on the EMIN research findings by noting that social benefits are a tool to improve situations of absolute poverty, but they are not being effective to address relative poverty.

Hon Silvio Parnis concluded that we should identify who are the people experiencing poverty in Malta and reform the system to address the real problems.

Hon Robert Cremona concluded that education is the essential tool to eradicate poverty.

Hon Paula Mifsud Bonnici in her concluding remark noted that the country is facing 3 challenges; i) to confirm that people who are beneficiaries of the social assistance schemes are truly entitled to such benefits; ii) to check if beneficiaries are receiving adequate income to live in dignity; iii) to address people who are not receiving any benefits but are still living in poverty.

Hon Deborah Schembri thanked APF Malta for this valuable research. Hon Schembri stated that she believes in research and any policy or law should be based on research. She believes that there are missing data pockets and thus research is essential to address the existing problem.