

PRESS RELEASE

MALTESE PAEDIATRIC ASSOCIATION (MPA) marks the International Day for the Protection of Children on 1st June 2015

Appeal for child protection to be made a national priority

The Maltese Paediatric Association (MPA) is calling upon the authorities to place the safeguarding of children at the top of their agenda; protecting them against any form of maltreatment.

The MPA's announcement comes as the world marks International Day for the Protection of Children on June 1st. The draft law entitled "Child Protection (Out of Home Care) Act" had been presented to the Maltese Parliament over a year ago, however, unfortunately there has been no update to how this has progressed. The Children's Act is needed to provide the necessary legislative framework that supports all safeguarding work.

A Children's Act, said the MPA is one of the essential steps needed in providing a more robust system for safeguarding children. The multi-agency professionals in Malta have long recognised lacunae in the current legislation, that hinder their response to child maltreatment. The Association advocates for a parallel increased investment in improving the current safeguarding services, particularly both within health and social care. The MPA feels that sustained collaboration between health professionals and social services can only ensue if health professionals feel that their concerns are being addressed appropriately.

The MPA acknowledges the fact that social services need to be better equipped in order to handle referrals in a more timely fashion. Increased human resource investment and better working conditions are amongst the factors which can achieve this goal and which will also encourage more social workers to enter this very important field of practice.

Primary prevention in the maltreatment of children is also an area that needs further investment, said the MPA. Recent amendments to Maltese law, such as the banning of physical chastisement, are positive steps in keeping with the recommendations from the committee of the rights of the child, however, without clear education, the general public will remain unaware of their obligations to safeguard children.

Finally the MPA believes that professionals who report suspected cases of abuse in the best interest of the child should be protected from any legal liability, even when a safeguarding investigation does not substantiate the concerns put forward. This will further empower professionals to engage in this delicate work.

A Children's Act will reflect a strong political commitment towards safeguarding the needs of vulnerable children, in keeping with the UNCRC.

(The United Nations Convention of the rights of the child (UNCRC), established back in 1989 makes safeguarding children everybody's responsibility, in particular professionals working with children and families who play a key role in recognising, reporting and managing suspected cases of child maltreatment. Malta signed and ratified this convention back in 1990 making it legally bound by the obligations under its provisions, particularly Article 19 which calls for 'appropriate legislative measures' and 'effective procedures...in identification, reporting, referral, investigation, treatment and follow-up' of suspected cases of child abuse.)