



Maltese Association of Social Workers

MASW Administrative Report January 2021 – December 2021

MASW Executive 2020/2021

- Chairperson: Ms. Charlene Martin
- Vice Chairperson: Ms. Roslynn Vella
- Secretary: Ms. Carly Zarb
- Treasurer: Mr. Bernard Borg Pellicano
- Assistant Secretary & Memberships Officer: Ms. Jillian Spiteri
- Continuous Professional Development Officer: Ms. Maria Borg Pellicano
- International Relations Officer: Mr. Andrew Azzopardi
- Media Relations Officer: Mr. Aaron Azzopardi
- Social Work Campaign Officer: Mr. Michael Farrugia
- Student Representative: Mr. Gabriel Sciberras
- The Executive Committee decided that Mr. Andrew Azzopardi will represent MASW within the University of Malta and Mr. Michael Farrugia will represent MASW in the Social Work Professions Board.

MASW Executive 2021/2022

- Chairperson: Ms. Charlene Martin
- Vice Chairperson: Ms. Roslynn Vella
- Secretary: Ms. Carly Zarb
- Treasurer & Assistant Secretary: Mr. Carmel Bezzina
- Memberships Officer: Ms. Jillian Spiteri (*Resigned on 13 September 2021*)



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- Continuous Professional Development Officer: Ms. Maria Borg Pellicano
- International Relations Officer: Mr. Andrew Azzopardi
- Current Affairs & PR Officer: Ms. Kerry Hermitage
- Media Relations Officer: Mr. Aaron Azzopardi
- Social Work Campaign Officer: Mr. Michael Farrugia
- Events Officer & Memberships Officer as of 14 September 2021: Ms Aimee Zammit Grech
- Student Representative: Ms. Nicole Vella
- The Executive Committee decided that Mr. Andrew Azzopardi will represent MASW within the University of Malta and Mr. Michael Farrugia will represent MASW in the Social Work Professions Board.

As part of its ordinary business, the Executive Committee met 15 times during the year. It also dealt with the correspondence it received, mostly by email, and with a number of student requests for support with their research. In relation to this, the Association circulated a number of requests for participation in research coming from students who joined the Association, to its members. Moreover, the Association shared various social work vacancies as well as webinars, online trainings and conferences organized by other entities with its mailing list.



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MASW Memberships

During this term, official correspondence and updates were being sent to MASW Members. In addition, MASW members are obtaining a reduced price for MASW Training. At year ending 2021, MASW had 129 members including professional, associate and student members within this association.

MASW kept the below membership prices and packages in order to attract more social workers, students and professionals to join the association:

Regular Membership (1 year) - €27 (<i>Social Workers</i>)	Student Membership (1 year) - €12.50 (<i>B.A.(Hons) Social Work/Policy</i>)
Regular Membership (3 years +1 year free) - €81 (<i>Social Workers</i>)	Student Membership (4 years) - €40 (<i>B.A.(Hons) Social Work/Policy</i>)
Regular Membership (<i>for Social Workers who are 65+ years</i>) (1year) - €10	Student Membership (1 year) - €12.50 (<i>Master of Social Work/Policy</i>)
Associate Membership (1 year) - €30 (<i>Other related professionals</i>)	Student Membership (2 years) - €20 (<i>Master of Social Work/Policy</i>)

Press Releases

MASW Executive Committee took an active role by issuing and endorsing various Press Releases during the year. The following are the Press Releases that were issued:

- 12 March 2021: MASW was approached by the Times of Malta to state its position on the time-barring in child sexual abuse cases. Position was published in the press article titled ‘*Call for removal of time-barring in child sex abuse*’.
- 15 March 2021: To celebrate World Social Work Day, MASW issued a press statement titled ‘*UBUNTU – I Am Because We Are*’ which reflected the theme chosen by IFSW. The statement highlighted the importance of the profession, the values and the true meaning of what it means to be a social worker.
- 6 April 2021: MASW endorsed the press statement, ‘*Where are they? Joint Civil Society Press Statement on the fate of over 100 people abandoned at sea*’ that was proposed by Aditus Foundation.
- 10 April 2021: MASW formed part of the joint call in the press article of the Times of Malta titled call ‘*92 NGOs and 90 band clubs say new fundraising laws will strangle sector*’. NGOs jointly called for the government to withdraw new laws regarding fundraising and charity shops.



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- 23 April 2021: A press release was issued titled '*MASW Condemns Union Directives Effecting Elderly People*' following the concerns which were raised upon the directives issued which highly effected elderly patients within hospitals and those living within residential homes.
- 26 April 2021: MASW was approached by the Times of Malta to state its position and share its comments on the current drop in Care Orders and delays related to the Child Protection Court Cases. Position was published in the press article titled '*Substantial drop in care orders amid concern over court sensitivity, delays.*'
- 10 May 2021: Another statement was issued by the Association in relation to the Cannabis White Paper. '*The Maltese Association of Social Worker's statement on the White Paper regarding the Legalisation and Decriminalisation of Cannabis*' was also sent to the media and press.
- 14 May 2021: Alongside other organisations, MASW endorsed a letter which was compiled by Aditus Foundation and Moviment Graffitti regarding the worrying situation in Palestine. The letter was sent to the Ministry for Foreign and European Affairs and was also read out during a press conference from the Embassy of Palestine in Malta.
- 31 May 2021: The Times of Malta published an article on the MASW Social Work Awards Event 2021 titled '*From dead-end' existence to award-winning social worker*' which also included the personal experience of one of the winners.
- 4 June 2021: MASW endorsed the statement issued by Aditus Foundation and The Malta Refugee Council in relation to a new policy introduced which was blocking access to employment for some asylum-seekers – '*A new policy to drive people into poverty and marginalisation*'.
- 31 July 2021: MASW issued the press release '*Call to revoke judgement that is harmful to children*' raising its concern regarding a court judgement which sentenced two mothers, who appeared to be victims of human trafficking, to prison. Because of this judgement, the mothers were separated from their children.
In relation to this matter, MASW was also present during the demonstration organised by Moviment Graffitti on 5 August 2021, where alongside main stakeholders, MASW had the opportunity to read its statement live.
- 21 August 2021: MASW endorsed the press statement '*Ongoing uncertainty at the prison*' alongside various associations and entities which raised concerns about the situation at Correctional Service Agency.
- 2 October 2021: MFPA issued a statement to dismay the inhumane actions and treatment shown towards an injured construction worker. MASW endorsed this statement.



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- 4 October 2021: The press release ‘*Victims of sexual crime in Court proceedings*’ was issued as a reaction towards the lengthened justice process for an alleged victim of rape to be interviewed by the Malta Police Force.
- 19 November 2021: MASW issued a press statement to categorically deplore the public insensitivity shown in Valletta by bystanders towards a person evidently experiencing a vulnerable moment in his life as he was contemplating suicide.
On 22 November 2021, MASW was invited on TVAM, Television Malta’s breakfast show, to share its reaction towards this case. Ms Kerry Hermitage together with Dr Mark Xuereb, discussed the importance of adequate responses to people experiencing mental health difficulties and how people in this situation can be better supported. Available services were also discussed together with the need for further services and resources related to mental health and suicide.
- 7 December 2021: Amongst many NGOs, stakeholders, and lobby groups, MASW endorsed the petition on the Cannabis Bill that was being discussed in parliament, asking for further discussions with stakeholders and to consider to amend the law according to the proposed suggestions.
MASW was also present and supported the agencies who organised the press conference ‘*Harm Reduction Working for Society’s Wellbeing*’ held on 12 December 2021. This conference was held to mark the closure of the petition for the amendments to the Cannabis Bill.

Meetings with Various Entities

- 18 February 2021: MASW Exec held a meeting with Hon. Claudette Buttigieg, Deputy Speaker and Spokesperson on behalf of the Opposition on Social Policy and Families. During this meeting the following matters were discussed: the work being carried out by MASW, the Social Work Profession, the Minor Protection (Alternative Care) Act, the importance of transparent processes and appointments, Social Workers to be prioritized for the Covid-19 Vaccine and other social matters related to children, elderly, addictions, prostitution and mental health.
- 18 March 2021: A meeting was held with Her Excellency, President Emeritus Marie-Louise Colerio Preca. During the said meeting collaborative approaches between the Association and the Malta Trust Foundation were discussed. Moreover, a request of support was also put forward to recruit social workers to offer services on a pro-bono basis to the Foundation.
- 10 June 2021: MASW Exec had the opportunity to meet with the President of the Malta Federation of Professional Associations (MFPA), Mr Ben Rizzo. During this meeting the



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Executive had the opportunity to discuss future collaborations and understand better the vision of Mr Rizzo for MFPA.

- 8, 9 and 10 October 2021: Ms Charlene Martin and Mr Andrew Azzopardi attended the IFSW Europe Delegates Meeting which was held online.
- 11 October 2021: A meeting was held with the Minister for Justice, Dr Edward Zammit Lewis. The executive was given the opportunity to discuss a number of issues within the justice system which create obstacles for service users and vulnerable client groups. Some of the items discussed included time frames for court judgements and procedures, juvenile court, proportionate and consistency in sentencing and the need for a general victim-centred approach both in the physical environment and in creating a supportive climate.
- 19 October 2021: MASW was invited for a consultation meeting by the Ministry for Inclusion and Social Wellbeing to discuss the various legislative reforms that would enable the better implementation of the obligations of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
- 23 November 2021: MASW met the President and Vice-President of Studenti Harsien Soċjali (SHS), Mr Tonio Galea and Ms Nicole Vella. Collaborations, including the involvement of SHS in the social work campaign, and other pertinent matters for the students were discussed during this meeting.

Malta Federation of Professional Associations (MFPA)

Ms. Roslynn Vella, who was later joined by Ms Kerry Hermitage, attended the MFPA monthly meetings on behalf of the Executive Committee which due to pandemic were all held online. Focus was done in sharing of various experiences between the different organisations, whereby good practices in terms of work adjustments that had to be done in order to continue delivering the services required. MASW has participated in a sub-committee to amend the statute in view that the MFPA will be enrolling as a Voluntary Organisation.

Social Work Professions Board

Mr. Michael Farrugia was chosen to represent the MASW Executive on the Social Work Professions Board (SWPB) and was accepted by the Ministry for the Family, Children's Rights and Social Solidarity. He replaced Dr Patricia Bonello. Ms Alexia Baldacchino was elected during the MASW Annual General Meeting 2020, to act as the members' representative on the Board instead of Ms Maria Mangion.



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The SWPB carried on its work online in view of the pandemic and all warrant applications were processed to avoid unnecessary backlogs. There were continuous discussions about whether the SWPB should hold the warranting ceremony in view of the changes reality of the COVID-19 situation. Moreover, there was a shift between the Minister for Social Justice and Solidarity, The Family and Children's Rights, and the SWPB Chairperson as the person who will be dispensing the warrant certificate for successful candidates.

Plans for the work by the SWPB in collaboration with MASW and the University of Malta to work on a document that outlines plans for Continuous Professional Development (CPD) carried on. This document will include proposals of how warrant retention will be tied with CPD in an effort to improve and assure best practice within the local Social Work sector and affiliate professions. The document will be made available at consultation stage duly.

Advocacy

Throughout the year, the Association was a voice to a number of social workers who approached the Executive Committee on arising matters. Discussions were held to provide further support, assistance and guidance.

- **Social Work Representatives Group**

In January 2021, MASW circulated a call for interested members to become representatives of their respective social work field. The main aim behind the call was because the Executive felt that it is crucial for the Association to widen its communication with the diverse social work fields. The Executive constantly strives to be representative of all the sectors and present a coherent voice most especially when putting forward concerns and matters on a policy and decision making level. Therefore, on the 18 February 2021 a Whatsapp Group was created with the social work members that expressed their interest in forming part of this group to facilitate such communication.

This group is currently composed of sixteen (16) social work professionals representing the fields of: children's residential homes, child protection, health, homelessness, youths, mental health, education, communities, disability, drugs, safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults, and prostitution. This group is also serving as an opportunity to have a more holistic picture of social work in different fields and to share knowledge and relevant information.

- **COVID-19 Vaccine**

In February 2021, following a intensive dialogue with the Health Authorities and Government, MASW Executive has successfully managed to secure the provision of the Covid-19 Vaccination for thirty nine (39) social workers who work in non-governmental organisations and twelve (12) Fourth Year Social Work Students who were about the



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commence their final fieldwork placement. The Executive was very pleased that all social workers were given priority to receive the vaccine which meant that social workers could continue their frontline work more securely.

- Television Slots

Between July and August 2021, as part of the Social Work Campaign, MASW was given the opportunity to raise awareness about the profession and pertinent topics related to the social field during the magazine programme *Gazebo* which aired on Television Malta. During the allocated slots the following areas were discussed:

1. A general overview of the social work profession and services available;
2. Mental Health and stigma around the area, and working collaboratively with the client;
3. Issues related to online abuse and online safety;
4. Social work within the LGBTIQ+ community;
5. Social work within the disability field.

- Current Issues & PR Sub-Committee

This subcommittee comprises of four MASW members and over the last few months the first item on the agenda of the subcommittee was the issue of people being employed as 'Social Welfare Professionals', and other similar titles, and whom are carrying out the role of a social worker. The main concerns surrounding this issue are the use of the word 'professional' for employees who are not warranted; who are not regulated by a law, code of ethics or professional board which protects the service users; and the issue that people not qualified as social workers are responsible for case loads and assessments without the relevant training and expertise.

The subcommittee worked on this concern by initially approaching, discussing and collaborating with the Department for Social Policy and Social Work within the University of Malta and with the Social Work Profession Board.

Webinars & Conferences Attended

- 28 April 2021: Mr Michael Farrugia attended the online webinar *Children, Obesity and Life Satisfaction* organised by the Malta Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society.
- On 24 September 2021: MASW was invited for the online lecture '*Medicinal Cannabis .. Myth or Miracle?*' organised by OASI Foundation. Ms Kerry Hermitage was present on behalf of the Executive. During this lecture the rationale was how society's approach towards drug use is fast changing and is becoming normalised. MASW reiterated the position of its members as had resulted from the survey and debate that MASW had conducted earlier on in



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the year. Amongst these were the stand that MASW is in favour of decriminalisation of the use of cannabis but firmly against the legalisation of it. Concerns discussed included the normalisation of the use of cannabis, the need for further education and limited research on the greater risks on already vulnerable groups.

Trainings & Forums Organised

- Change Against All Odds - The Tough Road to Recovery from Addictions

On the 19 April 2021, MASW organised the online training session which was facilitated by Mr Mike Orland who provided the practitioners present greater depth of insight into issues presented through substance misuse/addictions. Thirty six (36) participants were present for this training which included professionals and students from the social work field, counselling, psychology and medical professions.

- Online forum webinar regarding the White Paper related to the Decriminalisation and Legalisation of Cannabis

On 5 May 2021, MASW organised this free online forum webinar in relation to the Cannabis Bill given the period of open consultation. This forum was a platform for all social workers working within the field of addiction and beyond, to have more in-depth understanding of the matter. Fifty one (51) social work professionals and students were present for this debate.

The speakers present included:

- Mr Andrew Bonello, ReLeaf Malta;
- Mr Anthony Gatt, Caritas Malta;
- Ms Maja Kohek, ENCOD;
- Mr Mike Orland, Sedqa,
- Mr Noel Xerri, Oasi,
- Mr Robert Louis Fenech, Moviment Graffiti.

- Covid-19: Supporting people a year on

Following the successful series of webinars organised in 2020, MASW organised another two webinars which were held on the 13 and 27 October 2021. Frontlines from diverse social work settings came together to discuss how their areas have adapted to the changes brought by covid. The speakers also shed light on their service users' perspectives.

The speakers present included:

- Dr Daniella Zerafa, Department of Social Policy & Social Work;
- Ms Christine Camilleri, Correctional Services Agency;
- Ms Josette Stensen, Il-Milja;



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- Ms Kerry Hermitage, YMCA;
- Ms Loraine Borg, FSWS Gozo;
- Mr Massimo Borg, Agenzija Sapport;
- Dr Maureen Cole, Department of Social Policy & Social Work;
- Ms Nicole Vella, Student Social Worker & SHS Representative;
- Mr Noel Xerri, Oasi Foundation.

Survey on the Decriminalisation and Legalisation of Cannabis White Paper

In relation to the online forum webinar regarding the White Paper related to the Decriminalisation and Legalisation of Cannabis, MASW Executive was interested in understanding and gathering the feedback of the social workers. Therefore, on the 16 April 2021 MASW disseminated a survey which was circulated with social workers and social work students with the primary aim to understand their perspective on the proposed White Paper.

A statement with feedback was formulated on the basis of the results from this Survey and following the Forum Debate. This feedback was also sent as to Parliamentary Secretariat for Civil Rights and Reforms as part of the consultation process.

Other Organised Events

- Online Zumba Session

On the 3 February 2021, MASW held a charity event along with Zumba with Carly by organising an Online Zumba Session. This session was offered free of charge for MASW Members and non-members were asked to send a donation. All proceeds together with a contribution from MASW were given to *Treble Makers Malta* who were raising funds for *Fondazzjoni Sebħ* through an initiative called '*A Brighter Christmas for a Brighter Tomorrow*'. The sum of €100 was presented to *Treble Makers Malta*.

- World Social Work Day 2021

16 March 2021 marked World Social Work Day for the year. '*UBUNTU – I Am Because We Are*' was the theme chosen by IFSW for this year's celebration. To commemorate this important day for our profession and in conjunction with the MASW Social Work Campaign – *Believe in Change*, MASW Exec thought of an interactive and safe way how to highlight the work and achievements of the social workers during the whole month of March.

Social workers and other professionals were encouraged to submit a testimonial in relation to their positive experience and/or achievements within or in relation to the social work field. The Executive was very happy with the response received and these testimonial were



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gradually uploaded on the Association's Facebook Page throughout the month of March. Moreover, the Executive was very happy to share a special message dedicated to all Maltese Social Workers received directly from the President of the International Federation of Social Workers - Europe, Ms Ana Radulescu. This message was also uploaded on the Association's Facebook Page.

Ms Carly Zarb attended for a media interview on behalf of the Executive, where she highlighted the valuable work carried out by social work professionals. The interview was aired on the 16 March 2021 during ONE News.

- Social Work Awards 2020/2021

This remarkable event returned on the calendar of the Association as due to the challenges which brought the Covid-19 Pandemic, the Exec had no other option but to cancel the awards planned in 2020. However, the Executive was very happy with the overwhelming response of 72 nominations which were submitted for the below Award Titles. This event created a special opportunity for professionals to come together to celebrate the social work profession and recognise significant accomplishments.

The process of the nominations shortlisting was divided in two. The nominations were first shortlisted by the MASW Vice-Chairperson along with two other external juries and the winner was then chosen by an external panel of juries composed of seven individuals including the MASW Chairperson.

This year's awards include:

1. Promoting Best Practice
2. Promoting Self Development and Professional Growth in Social Work
3. Promoting the Voice of the Service User
4. Outstanding Social Work Student
5. Outstanding Newly Qualified Social Worker
6. Most Impactful Experienced Social Worker
7. Most Impactful Service of the Year – 2020/21
8. Social Worker of the Year – 2020/21

The award titles *Most Impactful Experienced Social Worker* and *Most Impactful Service of the Year – 2020/21* were introduced for the first time with the award list. A *Lifetime Achievement Award* was also given as an award on behalf of the MASW Executive.



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Conclusion

Over this year, the Association has continually tried to engage its members and other social workers and professionals related to our field in its various events and activities organised. In fact, a strong point which allowed the Association to engage new members was through the trainings organised.

Moreover, the Association continually strived to be representative of the maximum number of social workers especially when it faced challenging issues such as the administration of the Covid-19 Vaccine for all social workers. Therefore, the Association remains committed to keep engaging as many new members as possible and continually act on their behalf and be their representative when advocating for the benefit of the social work profession.

MASW also is following social work on an international level and was even mentioned on various occasions by IFSW Europe. MASW was praised for the work being done by the association for the social work field in Malta.