



Policy brief: Wellbeing Policy - Some Insights for Malta

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1. The last two decades have seen considerable interest among policy makers on the measurement of wellbeing. This has been increasingly complemented by efforts in the field by supranational institutions and various countries to publish metrics of wellbeing. Efforts in policy-making have now started to move beyond measurement: various countries have committed to long-term economic visions that focus on wellbeing. Institutions such as the United Nations, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, and the European Union among many others have made headway in promoting policy visions and toolkits for progress on wellbeing.

2. Working towards a wellbeing economy entails a shift in the way we engage with the economy, manage and govern it, shifting the focus from wealth and GDP to a wider, longer-term view that seeks improvements for collective wellbeing.

3. Examples of countries that have made considerable headway include New Zealand with its “Wellbeing budget”; Iceland and its “Indicators for Measuring Wellbeing”; Canada with its “Index of Wellbeing”; Ecuador which embedded the concept of Buen Vivir in its constitution following approval by referendum; Ireland which has committed itself to better align its policymaking with people’s day-to-day experiences; Germany, where the federal government undertook extensive consultation on its “Wellbeing in Germany - what matters to us” initiative, and preceding all these, Bhutan whose Gross National Happiness Index includes nine domains: psychological wellbeing, health, education, time use, cultural diversity and resilience, good governance, community vitality, ecological diversity and resilience and living standards.

4. In Malta there are already various initiatives in Malta that have put wellbeing in focus. Strategies and policies within the public sector increasingly make reference to wellbeing. In the private sector the wellbeing of employees. In the non-governmental sector, there are complementary efforts to prioritise mental health, and demands to go “Beyond GDP”. The theme has come into increasingly focus in academia, as well as in the media.

5. Building on the insights that emerged from the literature reviewed as well as from the experience of several countries that registered progress in ‘going beyond GDP’, the authors above put forward a number of recommendations to integrate the concept of wellbeing in policy.

6. On the measurement of wellbeing, it may be useful to identify priority domains and indicators for the Maltese context in consultation with citizens (including through local councils) and experts. This ensures we address Malta priorities while strengthening trust in the wellbeing measurement framework. It is also necessary to ensure that data collection structures remain in place for reliable, regular measurement and monitoring of objective and subjective wellbeing data that is also capable of disaggregation. Such data and its analysis would ideally be available annually ahead of budgetary and

policy-setting agendas to track wellbeing outcomes over time and define the nation's priorities based on this progress.

7. In order to build capacity for wellbeing, government may wish to nominate a wellbeing watch-dog or champion whose role would be to guide, support and join-up public sector entities in developing and evaluating wellbeing policy. It is also important for such a body to keep up to date with research and international wellbeing best-practices and to undertake capacity-building activities to ensure that Malta's policy is in line with the state-of-the-art. Liaising with supranational organisations and representatives from countries with experience in the field in this continuously-rapidly-developing area will complement national and local efforts.

8. A key goal is to integrate the concept of wellbeing into the mission statement of various government entities and promote a coherent and politically compelling narrative. More ambitiously, it would be worth considering embedding wellbeing principles when enacting or revising legislation (or at least subjecting such legislation to a wellbeing assessment) with a view to aligning programmes and initiatives with the wellbeing priorities of the nation. A serious approach towards a wellbeing economy would see the annual government budget and EU funding programmes for Malta being subject to wellbeing impact assessments. Similarly strategic policies (both pre- and post- implementation) could be subject to such an assessment.

9. On outreach, entities involved in wellbeing would do well to communicate by using trends data, employing a range of media such as social media, websites, data visualisation, live dashboards, and traditional media channels to instigate further discussion on the matter. There is scope to facilitate communication with the Maltese speaking community, through the development of a wellbeing taxonomy in Maltese. It is equally important to listen and maintain open communication channels with stakeholders and the public. It is also important to assess the possibility of including wellbeing in school curricula particularly to increase awareness and resilience among children.

10. With regard to further research, it would be useful to strengthen collaborations across data and research entities like the Malta Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society, the National Statistics Office and the University of Malta and to continue to provide the much-needed insights for government intervention, to inform policy-making cycles and to guide the prioritisation of programmes and initiatives. A notable gap lies in the use of longitudinal data and on the wellbeing of specific vulnerable or minority groups.

***The Wellbeing INDEX project is a strategic initiative, led by the Malta Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society in collaboration with the University of Malta. The name "INDEX" summarizes the project's scope (Indicators, Networking, Data, Exploration and exchange). The project, launched in Parliament on the 10th December 2020, will pave the way for the measurement of wellbeing in Malta and evidence-based policy.**