



How well is Malta doing?

We often hear news reporters talking about some report or other issued by some world authority or other about how well Malta is doing. But shortly after, someone else presents some other report saying that we're not doing so well after all. So the question is:

How do we measure progress in Malta?

This question is not unique to Malta. How to measure progress and wellbeing remains contested worldwide. Answering this question was the main objective of a research project undertaken between the University of Malta and the Malta Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society. A key goal was to gather all the key indices that measure wellbeing in Malta, in one virtual space. That way, we can compare and assess how well Malta is really doing and by what yardstick. Malta features in many global indices and thanks to them we can also examine Malta's progress over time and in comparison with other countries.

What kind of indices?

Gross Domestic Product is one such index. Every year the National Office of Statistics in Malta measures the size of the economy: how much we earn and spend annually. On this basis, Malta can be said to be performing well and growing annually. In fact it is among the top 40 countries in the world. But this measure ignores all that which cannot be bought by money, and in so doing, leaves out various aspects of life that matter to wellbeing, like health, education and free time.

The Human Development Index is a different measure which focuses on material wealth but also health and education. As people in Malta tend to live long, and many have attended school, Malta also does well on this index with annual improvements.

The Sustainable Development Goals show us how a state is doing in even more domains as they examine the economy, health, education, equality, environment, governance and more. Here we start to see a more nuanced picture of Malta's progress. In fact while Malta does well on several indicators, it ranks quite low in the overall European classification.

The Quality of Life Dashboard of the European Union also measures wellbeing. It gathers information on economic wellbeing, social, environmental, education, housing, health and even information on how people actually feel. Using this dashboard it becomes possible to see that Malta is doing well on various counts but could be doing better on others, for instance on work life balance and time use.

So what?

So we can see that Malta is doing well on the material front, on health and on other criteria but could be doing better to improve Quality of Life. In short, when we ask how Malta is doing, it is important to clarify by what tool we are using to measure it.

