

General Workers' Union Budget Proposals 2026

TOWARDS A FAIRER, JUST AND MORE INCLUSIVE MALTA

September 2025

GENERAL WORKERS' UNION | WORKERS' MEMORIAL BUILDING

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Introduction

The General Workers' Union presents these budget proposals as a reflection of the realities faced by workers, families, and communities across Malta. At a time when society is being reshaped by rapid technological change, demographic pressures, global uncertainty, and environmental challenges, it is essential that the national budget prioritises the well-being of people. Economic growth is important, but it must always go hand in hand with social justice, fairness, and dignity. Workers are the backbone of the economy, and it is only through investing in their security, rights, and opportunities that Malta can sustain progress and build a more resilient future.

These proposals are grounded in the everyday experiences of employees across all sectors. They are shaped by the aspirations of young people seeking a stable future, by the struggles of families trying to balance rising costs with decent living, by the concerns of pensioners whose dignity must be safeguarded, and by the voices of vulnerable groups who deserve equal protection. The GWU believes that a modern budget must go beyond numbers and accounts; it must reflect the collective priorities of society and serve as a blueprint for fairness, inclusion, and sustainable growth.

In presenting these proposals, the GWU emphasises constructive dialogue and partnership. Our vision is not one of confrontation but of collaboration, where government, employers, and workers work together to ensure that the benefits of progress are shared widely. The themes presented in this document from health and education to housing, pensions, workers' rights, and sustainability are interconnected. They form part of a holistic vision where no citizen is left behind, where the economy serves the people, and where solidarity remains the cornerstone of national progress.

Economic Note

Economic Growth in Malta

The Maltese economy has sustained strong momentum in 2025 despite an increasingly uncertain global environment. Following GDP growth of 5.6 per cent in 2023 and 4.6 per cent in 2024, preliminary results for 2025 indicate real GDP expansion of approximately 4.0 per cent. While this represents a gradual moderation

in growth, the Maltese economy continues to outperform many euro area counterparts.

Growth in 2025 has been primarily driven by a combination of resilient domestic demand and buoyant exports. Household consumption was supported by government energy subsidies, stable employment, and strong wage growth. Meanwhile, exports benefited from the continued recovery of the tourism sector, which returned to record levels in both arrivals and expenditure. The broader export base, including electronics, entertainment, and professional and financial services, has further strengthened Malta's gross value-added performance.

Looking forward, both the Central Bank of Malta and the European Commission project that real GDP growth will ease to around 3.5 to 4.0 per cent in 2026 and to approximately 3.3 per cent in 2027, reflecting the normalisation of post-pandemic recovery effects. Even within this moderating trend, Malta's economy is expected to grow at a pace above the average of the euro area.

Inflation and the Cost of Living

Inflation remains a key challenge. Headline inflation peaked at 7.4 per cent in September 2022 but has since trended downward, averaging 2.8 per cent in 2024 and falling to 2.3 per cent in 2025. Forecasts indicate a further decline to around 2.1 per cent in 2026 and a convergence with the European Central Bank's 2.0 per cent target in 2027.

The government's intervention through the 'Stabbilità fil-Prezzijiet' scheme, which reduces recommended retail prices across approximately 400 food products, has been an important factor in easing pressure on households. However, food and services inflation continue to remain elevated compared to euro area averages, which is a matter of concern for the General Workers' Union.

For workers, pensioners, and retirees, inflationary pressures remain a real burden, particularly when rising prices in food and essential services erode disposable income. The GWU stresses the urgent need to modernise the Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA) mechanism so that it more accurately reflects contemporary household expenditure, including the rising cost of housing and healthcare. Without such reform, the COLA risks falling short of its purpose as a safeguard for the most vulnerable.

Public Finance and Fiscal Policy

Malta's fiscal position has improved steadily, with the general government deficit narrowing from 5.5 per cent of GDP in 2022 to 4.9 per cent in 2023 and 3.7 per cent in 2024. In 2025, the deficit is projected to decline further to around 3.4 per cent. Fiscal forecasts point to continued consolidation, with deficits narrowing to 3.0 per cent in 2026 and 2.7 per cent in 2027.

The debt-to-GDP ratio remains well below the Maastricht threshold, although it has edged upward due to pandemic-era support and equity injections into the national airline. After standing at 50.4 per cent in 2023 and 52 per cent in 2024, public debt is expected to stabilise at around 49 to 50 per cent in 2025 and 2026, before easing slightly in 2027.

The GWU acknowledges the importance of fiscal consolidation but insists that it must not come at the expense of necessary investment in energy infrastructure, healthcare, education, and social protection. Fiscal tightening that undermines social cohesion or reduces workers' living standards cannot be considered sustainable. The Union will closely monitor the government's medium-term fiscal-structural plan, as outlined in Article 36 of Regulation (EU) 2024/1263, to ensure that budgetary discipline aligns with social justice.

Labour Market and Employment Policy

The Maltese labour market remains one of the strongest in the EU, characterised by robust job creation and historically low unemployment. In 2025, unemployment averaged 3.0 per cent, well below the EU average. Projections suggest that unemployment will remain at or below 3.0 per cent through 2026 and 2027, reflecting a persistently tight labour market. Employment growth, which was exceptionally high in 2023 and 2024, has moderated to around 3.0% in 2025 and is expected to slow further to between 2.4% and 2.7% in the years to come.

While this labour market strength is a positive indicator of economic resilience, it also poses challenges. Employers increasingly report difficulties in recruiting suitably skilled candidates, particularly in technology, healthcare, and financial services. This shortage has intensified competition for labour and raised wage pressures. Wage growth in 2025 reached 4.4 per cent, outpacing inflation but projected to slow gradually to 3.7 per cent in 2026 and 3.5 per cent in 2027.

The General Workers' Union recognises the dual challenge of protecting workers' incomes while ensuring long-term labour market sustainability. The Union believes that Malta must adopt a comprehensive labour market policy framework built on three main pillars: fair compensation, skills development, and inclusive participation.

Fair Compensation and Retention

The GWU insists on the need for enhanced compensation packages that extend beyond basic wages. Health insurance schemes, improved retirement benefits, and other non-wage benefits must become standard components of the employment package to retain talent in key sectors. Employers must also strengthen career development pathways and implement structured retention policies to reduce turnover.

Skills and Training

Given the mismatch between demand and supply in certain occupations, Malta must prioritise upskilling and reskilling. The GWU calls for significant expansion in vocational education and training, alongside workplace learning schemes that prepare workers for digitalisation, healthcare expansion, and financial sector growth. Investment in lifelong learning is not just a matter of competitiveness but also of social equity, ensuring that all workers can adapt to technological and structural changes in the economy.

Inclusive Participation

Malta's participation rate remains below potential, particularly among women, older workers, and persons with disabilities. The GWU believes that flexible work arrangements, including remote work and adaptable schedules, must be further developed to widen the pool of available workers. Policies to promote gender equality and diversity in recruitment are also essential to ensuring that the benefits of growth are shared more broadly across society.

Taken together, these labour market policies represent a proactive response to the challenges of a tight labour supply. They also align with the Union's long-standing goal of ensuring that economic growth translates into decent work, fair wages, and a more inclusive society.

Tourism and Sustainable Development

Tourism has solidified its position as a key driver of Malta's economic growth. By 2025, tourist arrivals and expenditures are expected to surpass pre-pandemic levels, contributing significantly to GDP and employment growth. The outlook remains favourable, with steady demand expected through 2026 and 2027.

Yet the benefits of tourism are increasingly offset by strains on infrastructure, the housing market, and essential services. Overcrowding in peak months, combined with climate-related pressures such as extreme heat, underscores the need for a strategic shift. The GWU advocates for a sustainable tourism policy that prioritises quality over quantity, promotes off-season travel, and raises standards across hospitality and entertainment sectors.

In this regard, the Union continues to call for the introduction of a Tourism Skills Passport, a centralised system that documents workers' qualifications and competencies. Such a tool would raise professionalism, support workforce planning, and foster continuous upskilling. It would also provide workers with greater mobility and recognition of their skills, helping to improve working conditions and earnings in a sector where wages remain among the lowest in the economy.

Future Challenges and GWU Policy Direction

Looking ahead, Malta's economy is expected to continue growing, albeit at a slower pace, with GDP expansion of around 3.5% to 4.0% in 2026 and approximately 3.3% in 2027. Inflation is forecast to converge with the European Central Bank's target by 2027, while unemployment is projected to remain among the lowest in the EU. Fiscal deficits will continue narrowing, and debt levels will stabilise below EU thresholds.

The General Workers' Union acknowledges these positive indicators but remains vigilant to the risks that could undermine Malta's progress. These include persistent inflationary pressures in essential goods, skills shortages in key sectors, and the social implications of fiscal consolidation. Moreover, the need for diversification and environmental sustainability has become more pressing as Malta confronts the twin challenges of climate change and global economic volatility.

The Union's priority remains clear: to safeguard workers, pensioners, and vulnerable communities while ensuring that Malta's economic growth is both sustainable and equitable. This requires a renewed commitment to fair wages, stronger labour rights,

and sustained public investment in skills, infrastructure, and social protection. The GWU stands ready to work with government, employers, and civil society to ensure that Malta's future prosperity is inclusive, resilient, and just.

Malta Vision 2050 – Building a Shared Future

The General Workers' Union welcomes and strongly supports the Government's initiative to launch Malta Vision 2050. This long-term framework is a historic step that sets out a clear roadmap for our country's future, ensuring that social, economic, and environmental policies are guided by a unifying vision. The GWU proudly notes that it was among the first social partners to call for such a comprehensive national strategy. We have long argued that Malta needs not only short-term fixes but a long-term framework that reflects our values of fairness, inclusion, and sustainability.

The consultation period has created space for dialogue, but now is the time for concrete action. The GWU proposes that once consultation is concluded, government must immediately start the process of adoption and implementation. The vision cannot remain a document on paper; it must become a living framework that guides national policy and investment for decades to come. To ensure transparency and accountability, we propose that government provides quarterly public updates on the milestones achieved and the progress being made. These updates should highlight not only infrastructural and economic advances but also the social and environmental dimensions of the Vision, ensuring that all citizens can see and measure progress.

Malta Vision 2050 must be inclusive, and people centred. Its success will depend on how well it addresses the needs of workers, families, vulnerable groups, and future generations. This requires a commitment to social dialogue, where trade unions and other partners are fully engaged in shaping policies and monitoring progress. The GWU stands ready to play its part, bringing forward the voice of workers and ensuring that the transition towards 2050 is just, fair, and sustainable.

The GWU believes that Malta Vision 2050 is more than a government project; it is a national project. It reflects the collective aspirations of our people and must be embraced by society as a whole. By aligning policy with this long-term framework, Malta can ensure stability, resilience, and shared prosperity, turning challenges into opportunities and leaving a stronger legacy for generations to come.

The General Workers' Union applauds the launch of Malta Vision 2050 and calls for its swift adoption and full implementation. By committing to quarterly updates, ensuring accountability, and embedding social dialogue at its core, government can transform Vision 2050 into a concrete roadmap for progress. This will allow Malta to advance not only economically but also socially and environmentally, creating a fairer, stronger, and more inclusive society for all.

Energy Prices

Subsidies are intended to protect consumers by keeping prices low. The General Workers' Union applauds to no small measure the continued policy adopted by the government of not increasing energy, fuel, and cereal prices. Latest inflation statistics issued by the National Statistics Office show that inflation is not fuelled by government induced costs.

Government's priority should remain keeping energy prices for consumers including businesses, stable. This policy, while expensive is fundamental to keep cultivating economic growth and keep fighting inflation.

We propose that the government keeps subsidising fuels, energy prices and cereals.

World of Work

The world of work is constantly evolving and plays a crucial role in shaping the global economy. As economies develop and societies advance, the nature of work undergoes significant shifts. The rapid pace of technological progress, coupled with greater efficiency and the concept of 'just in time,' has brought about profound changes in the work environment. It is essential to delve into the complex relationship between human resources, skills, labour markets, technological innovation, and policy frameworks to understand the challenges and opportunities that define modern employment.

In this context, the swift rise of technologies like automation, artificial intelligence, and the platform economy has dramatically transformed job markets, reshaped traditional employment structures, and altered the skills required. Multiple factors contribute to this rapidly changing world of work, including policies that promote inclusive growth, social protection, and equality, demographic shifts as well as those

that encourage a future-focused approach to human resources, skills development, education, and workforce mobility. Together, these elements influence economic productivity and competitiveness.

Updating Employment and Industrial Relations Legislation

In the context of the new world of work, the General Workers' Union is proposing the immediate revision and updating of Malta's employment and industrial relations framework. The current legislation, which was enacted in 2003, no longer reflects the realities and challenges faced by today's workforce. A modern and dynamic labour market requires laws that are fit for purpose, fair, and responsive to the evolving needs of both workers and employers.

The GWU calls for the implementation of the final report on the streamlining of the Wage Regulation Orders, ensuring that workers across all sectors enjoy equitable protections and conditions of employment. We are also proposing the introduction of new legislation that allows for the public naming of employers who abuse their employees, sending a clear message that exploitation will not be tolerated. Furthermore, Malta should take decisive steps to sign and ratify additional International Labour Organisation conventions and recommendations that strengthen workers' rights and align the country with international standards.

These reforms are essential to ensure that the Maltese labour market is fair, transparent, and just, while positioning the country as a leader in upholding workers' rights within Europe and beyond.

Equal Minimum Wage from Age 16

Under existing Maltese labour laws, employees aged 16 and 17 are entitled to a lower minimum wage than adults over the age of 18. While the law stipulates the precise amounts, this differentiation unfairly undervalues the work and contribution of young employees, many of whom perform the same duties as their older colleagues.

The General Workers' Union believes that this distinction is outdated and unjust. We therefore propose that every employee in Malta, from the age of 16 onwards, should be entitled to at least the full statutory minimum wage. Equal pay for equal work must apply irrespective of age, provided the employee has reached legal working age.

This reform would ensure fairness and dignity for young workers entering the labour market and reinforce the principle that wages must reflect the value of work performed, not the age of the worker performing it. Eliminating this wage disparity would also demonstrate the Government's and social partners commitment to fairness, inclusivity, and social justice.

Definite Contracts

We are proposing that the government legislate so that if a worker on a definite contract has his contract not renewed, if the same workplace wants to employ another employee in the same position, they should employ the same employee for whom the contract was not renewed. This principle already exists for those who are made redundant. This way the experience and knowledge of the employee are not lost.

Work Performed on Sundays

We are proposing that all work performed on Sundays and Public Holidays should be paid at double time irrespective of the economic sector.

Extreme Weather and Heat

We require a comprehensive national discussion on establishing robust health and safety regulations specifically designed to address work conducted under extreme weather conditions. This discussion should extend beyond outdoor work environments to include indoor workplaces where individuals are exposed to severe temperatures. It is essential to develop and implement a national framework that safeguards employees across all settings, ensuring their well-being and safety regardless of the environmental challenges they face. By setting stringent standards and creating guidelines tailored to extreme weather scenarios, we can better protect workers from heat stress, cold-related illnesses, and other temperature-related hazards. Such a proactive approach will not only enhance occupational health and safety but also contribute to a more resilient and equitable working environment for all.

32-Hour Working Week Without Loss of Pay

The concept of a 32-hour working week, typically structured over four days, is gaining momentum worldwide as societies and economies adapt to new realities. Advances in technology, evolving business models, and a growing recognition of the importance of work-life balance have sparked widespread interest in reduced working hours without loss of pay. For Malta, a strategically phased transition to a 32-hour working week presents an opportunity to lead in sustainable labour practices, align with our Vision 2050 goals, and enhance both worker well-being and national productivity.

International experience provides compelling evidence in favour of such a shift. In Iceland, extensive trials between 2015 and 2019 involving over 2,500 workers demonstrated that reduced hours maintained or improved productivity while significantly boosting employee well-being and reducing stress. Following these results, 86% of Iceland's workforce now has the right to work shorter hours without a pay cut. Similarly, in the United Kingdom's 2022 pilot—the largest of its kind—61 companies employing 3,300 workers reported revenue growth of 35%, a 57% drop in staff turnover, and substantial reductions in burnout, with more than 90% of participants making the change permanent. In Spain, a government-funded pilot showed improvements in health, work-life balance, and environmental outcomes, while in Japan, corporate and public sector trials demonstrated productivity gains of up to 40% alongside energy savings.

Worker sentiment globally has been clear: reduced working hours without financial penalty are highly valued. In Ireland and Germany, more than half of workers say they would choose a shorter workweek even if pay remained the same. Employers, too, are increasingly receptive, with surveys indicating that nearly two-thirds of business leaders believe a four-day week could become standard practice within five years. The key is careful implementation to ensure productivity is maintained, service levels are protected, and sector-specific needs are addressed.

The benefits for Malta could be significant. A shorter workweek can reduce burnout, improve mental and physical health, enhance job satisfaction, and strengthen family and community life. It can also help attract and retain talent in a competitive global labour market, positioning Malta as a forward-thinking, worker-friendly economy. Furthermore, environmental benefits from reduced commuting align with our climate targets, while the integration of digital tools and AI can help sustain productivity.

We acknowledge that challenges must be addressed. Certain sectors, particularly healthcare, retail, and hospitality, may require careful scheduling adjustments, additional hiring, or innovative shift patterns to maintain service levels. To manage this transition effectively, we propose an initial three-year pilot programme in both the public sector and selected private industries, supported by government incentives and accompanied by rigorous data collection. This phased approach will enable Malta to measure impacts on productivity, employment costs, service quality, and worker well-being, and to make evidence-based adjustments before broader rollout.

A 32-hour working week without loss of pay is not merely a reduction in hours; it is a reimagining of work in a way that aligns with technological progress, environmental sustainability, and human needs. The global evidence is clear: when designed well, such a system can deliver strong outcomes for workers, businesses, and society alike. Malta could be at the forefront of this transformation, shaping a future of work that is healthier, fairer, and more productive for all.

This proposal is also consistent with Malta's strategic objectives as outlined in Malta Vision 2050 and the National Employment Policy 2021–2030. Both frameworks recognise that Malta's future prosperity relies on sustainable economic growth, social cohesion, and the ability to adapt to structural transformations driven by technology, demographic change, and environmental challenges.

From the perspective of Malta Vision 2050, the transition directly supports the vision's call for improved quality of life, stronger social foundations, and a resilient, dynamic economy. By prioritising worker well-being and productivity rather than hours worked, this policy would deliver tangible improvements in work-life balance, mental and physical health, and civic participation. Reduced working hours, if implemented without a loss of pay, would also help redistribute productivity gains from digitalisation and automation more equitably, thereby fostering a fairer economy and aligning with the vision's emphasis on inclusive prosperity.

The National Employment Policy 2021–2030 identifies the need to future-proof Malta's labour market through investment in skills, innovation, and workplace adaptability. A shorter working week would encourage employers to embrace flexible work organisation, technology adoption, and efficiency-enhancing practices. This aligns with policy measures aimed at increasing productivity while maintaining Malta's competitive edge in high-value sectors. Furthermore, the Employment Policy stresses the importance of active ageing and gender equality in employment — both

of which could be advanced by a reduced-hours model that supports greater participation by older workers, carers, and parents, especially women.

The proposal also addresses the Employment Policy's concern about labour shortages by enhancing Malta's attractiveness to both local talent, European workers and skilled migrants. Evidence from international trials indicates that organisations adopting shorter weeks often experience higher retention rates and reduced recruitment costs. In Malta's small labour market, these outcomes could have significant positive effects, particularly in knowledge-based and high-skill industries where talent retention is critical.

In terms of political feasibility, this proposal can be positioned as a phased reform beginning with a targeted pilot in sectors with the greatest potential for productivity maintenance or growth thereby mitigating business concerns and demonstrating measurable benefits. The public sector could lead by example, showcasing the societal and economic value of the change, while incentivising voluntary adoption by private firms through tax credits or wage subsidies during the transition period.

Ultimately, the introduction of a 32-hour working week without loss of pay is more than a labour reform; it is a strategic investment in Malta's human capital and societal resilience. It would cement Malta's position as a forward-thinking economy that embraces innovation not only in technology, but also in how it defines and values work — in full alignment with the country's long-term vision and employment strategy.

The EU Pay Transparency Directive: Advancing Equal Pay and Transparency

Context and Purpose of the Directive

Equality between women and men in pay has long been a fundamental European principle, yet the gender pay gap persists across Member States. In Malta, despite having one of the lowest gaps in Europe, the difference still hovers around ten percent. This remains a pressing concern as it represents a visible form of gender inequality and contributes to greater poverty risk among women.

The EU Pay Transparency Directive, adopted in 2023, was designed to confront this reality by requiring greater transparency about pay structures and strengthening the enforcement of equal pay laws. Its aim is to combat pay discrimination, close the

gender pay gap, and empower workers to enforce their right to equal pay for equal work or work of equal value. By eliminating pay secrecy, the Directive seeks to transform equal pay from an abstract principle into a concrete and enforceable right.

Key Provisions of the Directive

The Directive introduces a robust set of measures to ensure fairness and accountability. Employers are required to disclose the starting salary or pay range for advertised positions and are prohibited from asking candidates about their salary history. Job advertisements must be gender-neutral, and recruitment processes must be non-discriminatory. Pay and career progression criteria must be objective and transparent. Employees will now have the right to request information about their own pay and the average pay of colleagues doing equal work or work of equal value.

Larger companies, those with more than one hundred employees, are required to publish pay gap reports. If these reports show a gap of five percent or more that cannot be justified by objective factors, the employer must carry out a joint pay assessment with worker representatives. These joint audits aim to identify and resolve the causes of the gap.

The Directive also shifts the burden of proof in pay discrimination cases onto employers, who must now demonstrate that differences are based on legitimate criteria. Workers found to be victims of pay discrimination are entitled to full back pay and compensation. Member States must enforce effective penalties for non-compliance, while also ensuring that workers with disabilities and vulnerable groups can access these rights without barriers.

Implications for Workers in Malta

For Maltese workers, the Directive has the potential to transform workplace fairness. All employees will benefit from the ability to directly compare pay with counterparts, helping to close the persistent gender gap.

In both the public and private sectors, pay transparency will foster trust and fairness. The public sector is expected to adapt more easily due to standardised pay scales, while larger private employers may need to introduce new reporting systems and potentially adjust pay structures. Over time, this should lead to greater equity, improved morale, and a culture of meritocracy.

Role of the GWU in Implementation

The General Workers' Union will play a pivotal role in ensuring the Directive's promises translate into real progress. The GWU will focus on collective and personal representation, educating workers about their new rights, monitoring employer compliance, participating in joint pay assessments and where necessary take legal and industrial action.

By collaborating with employers, regulators, and equality bodies, the GWU will ensure that transparency becomes a cultural norm rather than a bureaucratic exercise. The union will continue its historic role as a guardian of fairness, ensuring that equal pay for equal work is achieved in practice.

The EU Pay Transparency Directive should be seen not as an external obligation but as a national opportunity. Its swift and robust implementation will reinforce Malta's long-term vision for a fair and inclusive economy, strengthen trust in the labour market, and improve the daily lives of thousands of workers. The General Workers' Union calls on government to introduce this important directive not just as an EU members' obligation but also as an inclusive, principled and ethical way forward.

Disciplinary Forces

Increase of pensionable emoluments by 23%

In budget 2024, it was announced that employees of the Disciplinary Force who remain in service for four (4) additional years after reaching twenty-five (25) years of service totalling twenty-nine (29) years will increase their pension by 23%. We propose extending this incentive to those employees who continue to serve in a Disciplinary Force on a part-time basis after completing the equivalent of four (4) years of service, which maximum is calculated at 8,320 hours of part-time service in a Disciplinary Force. In this case, their pension from the year of retirement should also be increased by 23%. For those employees who were already serving part-time as of October 1, 2023, their previously completed service should also be taken in consideration.

Proposed Amendment

Every Disciplined Force employee who renounces to the 25-year pension for a period of not less than one year from the date when he becomes eligible shall benefit from an increase in the rate of the pension from the date when he decides to start receiving the aforementioned pension in the following manner:

- (a) an increase of 5% if he decides to receive the pension a year later (Part-timers 2080 hours).
- (b) an increase of 10.5% if he decides to receive the pension after two years (Part-timers 4160 hours).
- (c) an increase of 16.5% if he decides to receive the pension after three years (Part-timers 6240 hours); and
- (d) an increase of 23% if one decides to receive the pension after four years (Part-timers 8320 hours).

Gratuity over 29 years of service

The Union recognise and appreciate the government's 2024 budget measure to compensate loyal Disciplined Forces employees which had already served more than 29 years of service.

Proposed Amendment

However, we are also proposing that employees within the Disciplined Forces which on 1st October 2023 had already served more than 29 years of service shall have their previous years of service from the mentioned date considered and shall be entitled to an additional sum equivalent to six (6) months basic salary for each additional years of service, which additional period of service for the purposes of the said payment shall not exceed a maximum of eight (8) years of service instead maximum of four (4) years of service.

Long Protection Insurance premiums

We are frequently receiving justified complaints where our members in the Disciplinary Forces stationed in operational posts, whose work involves higher risk situations, are being obliged to pay significantly higher Long Protection Insurance premiums compared to other colleagues in the same force when they apply for a bank loan.

Therefore, we propose that these employees be granted a government reimbursement for the difference in premiums they are required to pay due to the nature of their work. This reimbursement should be provided to these employees within six (6) months of the succeeding year.

We urge the government to urgently address the situation where Discipline forces employees, particularly members of the Armed Forces who are deployed abroad in countries where the general population is advised to avoid all travel (such as Libya and Lebanon recently), are not covered by Long Protection Insurance related to their loans. This is a very disappointing considering that these officers are abroad on behalf of the government of Malta. This situation must be addressed with urgency. We propose that the government directly cover these employees to provide them and their families with peace of mind.

Compensation for Correctional Officers

Compensation for Correctional Officers who served between May 1, 1994, and December 31, 2020. Following the signing of the first collective agreement for Correctional Officers, MEP Dr Alex Agius Saliba brought to our attention a considerable number of former Correctional Officers who were treated differently before they had the right to join a trade union. Our research on this issue confirmed that that employees from another Discipline Force (Police) stationed in Corradino Correctional Facility received two specific allowances, a special duty allowance and a shift allowance, while Correctional Officers did not receive any form of allowance, despite performing the same duties and working shifts.

Together with MEP Dr Alex Agius Saliba, we proposed to Minister Dr Byron Camilleri that these employees be compensated with €6.50 for each week worked during the specified period. The total number of weeks is 1,392, and therefore the maximum amount an officer can receive is €9,048 ($1,392 \times €6.50 = €9,048$).

We are proposing that in this year's budget this proposal is included in.

Maritime Sector

The General Workers' Union recognises Malta's position as a strategic maritime hub and its heavy reliance on shipping, fisheries, and seafaring activities. This sector employs a considerable number of workers, including third-country nationals, yet too many remain outside the protection of Malta's labour laws. For Malta to maintain its international reputation and to ensure fairness, it is vital that the rights and dignity of all maritime workers are safeguarded.

The fisheries sector remains segregated from Maltese labour legislation, leaving workers exposed to precarious conditions. The GWU calls for the immediate integration of this industry within Malta's labour laws, ensuring that fishers are afforded the same protections and entitlements as other workers. Stronger enforcement mechanisms must also be established, as too often it is vulnerable third-country national employees who are penalised while operators benefiting from exploitation escape accountability. Enforcement must shift focus to those responsible for the abuses.

Equally, Malta must ensure that all seafarers are formally included in the country's labour migration policies. This would guarantee fair treatment, proper regulation, and protection against irregular practices, while also creating clarity for employers and authorities alike. Malta's credibility as a maritime hub depends on closing the gaps that leave many seafarers in limbo.

To achieve this, the GWU proposes the adoption of a Seafarers' Charter. This should be developed in collaboration with Transport Malta, Identità, Jobsplus, DIER, the Fisheries Department, law enforcement authorities, social partners, and trade unions. The Charter must set minimum standards for wages, working conditions, accommodation, health and safety, and social protections. It should require employment contracts to be verified before entry into Malta and introduce stronger border controls to ensure that only seafarers with compliant contracts are admitted. Furthermore, enforcement must be reinforced to target abusive employers and operators rather than penalising vulnerable workers.

Special attention must also be given to the situation of seafarers admitted under "okay to board" arrangements. These individuals often end up working onshore under inadequate protections, or on vessels certified as equipped despite lacking

basic facilities such as proper accommodation. This creates unacceptable risks of exploitation. A proper enforcement process should be introduced to ensure that vessel certification is only granted when all basic requirements are genuinely met. By strengthening oversight and accountability, Malta can close the loopholes that allow abuses to persist.

The GWU believes that comprehensive reform in this sector is both urgent and necessary. Malta must protect all seafarers and fisheries workers with fairness and transparency, ensuring that exploitation is eliminated, rights are respected, and the maritime sector continues to contribute to the economy with integrity.

National Skills Council – Driving Skills for the Future

The transformation of the world of work through digitalisation, automation, artificial intelligence, and the green transition requires a bold rethinking of how Malta evaluates, develops, and certifies skills. The National Skills Council (NSC) has a crucial role to play in this process. Its mandate must extend beyond recognition of experience to become a central institution in shaping Malta's future workforce.

The NSC's existing task — to evaluate, assess, and certify workers' skills and trades, particularly for those without formal academic qualifications — remains essential. Yet in the context of the twin transition and Malta's Vision 2050, this role must be accelerated, expanded, and strategically resourced. Workers with practical expertise who lack certification should see their competencies validated swiftly and reliably. But equally, the NSC must also anticipate the new skills landscape: coding, AI literacy, renewable energy systems, digital manufacturing, and green construction methods. Certification frameworks must be adapted to these emerging sectors so that workers can transition into future-proof jobs with credibility and trust in the eyes of employers and regulators.

We propose a significant increase in funding and a fast-tracked roadmap for implementation. The NSC should act not only as a certifying body but also as a skills intelligence hub, mapping labour market trends, identifying shortages, and working with national Authorities, employers and trade unions to design training and certification pathways. In line with the National Employment Policy 2021–2030, it should become a permanent bridge between the education system, industry, and workers, ensuring no skill goes unrecognised and no worker is left behind.

Certification must be more than a document; it must open doors. It should carry the weight of national recognition, enhancing employability, facilitating career mobility,

and ensuring that skills are portable across industries and even across borders. This is particularly vital for third country nationals and other vulnerable workers, who often bring valuable experience but struggle to have it recognised formally.

By repositioning the NSC as a driver of Malta's skills transformation, we will strengthen the resilience of our workforce, improve social mobility, and secure the country's competitiveness in a rapidly changing global economy. This approach is fully consistent with Malta Vision 2050, which calls for inclusive growth, innovation, and resilience, and with the National Employment Policy, which highlights the need for lifelong learning and adaptability in the labour market.

The National Skills Council must evolve from a certifier of experience into a catalyst for the future of work. With proper resources, foresight, and political commitment, it can empower workers, support employers, and ensure that Malta remains competitive, fair, and inclusive in the era of digital and green transformation.

Expanding Skill Cards Across All Sectors

The General Workers' Union strongly believes that skills recognition and certification must become a cornerstone of Malta's future labour market. The introduction of Skill Cards in the construction sector in 2015 and the Skills Pass in the tourism and hospitality industry in 2024 have shown the value of structured systems that verify workers' competencies, raise standards, and improve safety and professionalism. However, the current fragmented approach must now evolve into a national framework that applies across all sectors of the economy.

We therefore urge government to enact legislation that makes Skill Cards or equivalent certification obligatory in all industries, starting with those most prone to safety risks and high levels of precarious employment. No worker should be permitted to access a construction site, a hospitality establishment, or any other regulated workplace without a recognised Skill Card or Skills Pass. Extending this principle across sectors will ensure that only trained and competent workers are engaged, reducing accidents, protecting consumers, and safeguarding the dignity of labour.

This reform aligns directly with the objectives of Malta Vision 2050 and the National Employment Policy 2021–2030, both of which emphasise skills development, lifelong learning, and worker protection as pillars of Malta's sustainable economic model. In the context of the twin transition, digitalisation and the green economy, skill certification must also cover emerging areas such as renewable energy, artificial

intelligence, advanced manufacturing, and green construction. Certification should reflect not only technical knowledge but also transversal skills, ensuring workers are adaptable and future-proof.

To support implementation, GWU proposes that the National Skills Council take on a central coordinating role in establishing a unified National Skills Card Framework, building on existing schemes in construction and tourism. This framework should be linked with training and reskilling pathways, ensuring that workers who lack formal qualifications can obtain certification through recognised trade tests or prior learning validation. Financial support measures, including subsidies for SMEs and vulnerable workers, should also be introduced to guarantee that the system is accessible and inclusive.

By making Skill Cards obligatory across all sectors, Malta will not only reduce workplace accidents and exploitation but also create a culture of professionalism, accountability, and lifelong learning. This reform is an essential step towards achieving the aspirations of Vision 2050: a competitive, resilient, and inclusive labour market where all worker's skills are recognised, valued, and protected.

Upskilling and Reskilling

The General Workers' Union proposes that employees who are pursuing university courses directly aligned with their work should be granted flexible working arrangements, including adaptable hours and additional leave to prepare for examinations and to complete dissertation requirements. Such a measure would not only support lifelong learning but would also strengthen the link between academic study and workplace practice. By enabling workers to upskill and reskill without sacrificing their employment stability, Malta can build a more competitive and adaptable workforce capable of meeting the challenges of a rapidly evolving labour market.

Mental Health & Mental Health First Aiders

For many of us, work is a major part of our lives. It is where we spend much of our time, where we get our income and often where we make our friends. Having a fulfilling job can be good for our mental health and general wellbeing. All of us have times when life gets on top of us – sometimes that is work-related, sometimes it is our health, our relationships, or private circumstances. It is important that employers

take care of the well-being of all employees by addressing mental health at work for those who are facing tough times or are at risk. We believe in workplaces where everyone can thrive. We also believe in the role of employers, employees, and trade unions in creating thriving workplaces.

Every year several employees experience mental illness. Many people are not knowledgeable or confident enough to help. Physical first aid is legally obligatory in our workplaces; however, most do not cover mental health problems. Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) teaches people the skills to help someone about whom they are concerned. Good mental health at work and good management go hand in hand and there is convincing evidence that workplaces with high levels of mental wellbeing are more productive. When we enjoy good mental health, we have a sense of purpose and direction, the energy to do the things we want to do, and the ability to deal with the challenges that happen in our lives.

Awareness of mental health is increasing, but we still face a world where people with mental health problems face discrimination and can face challenges getting the help they need. Many people try to conceal their feelings hidden because they are afraid of other people's responses. Fear of discrimination and feelings of shame are among the top reasons people give for not telling their colleagues about their mental health problems. The GWU is proposing that a new legislation/regulation be enacted to make it compulsory to have a mental health first aider in every workplace. We are also proposing to normalize mental health routine check-ups, making them a standard part of healthcare, just like other routine health checks.

Also, mental health-related absenteeism is a growing concern across workplaces, and it must be addressed as both a health issue and a workplace safety matter. The General Workers' Union believes that mental well-being deserves the same recognition and support as physical health in employment policies and practices.

We propose the introduction of annual mental health assessments for workers, to be carried out by certified therapists, ensuring that early signs of stress, burnout, or related conditions are identified and addressed in a timely manner. Employers should also allocate specific paid leave days dedicated to mental health recovery, giving employees the space they need to manage their well-being without stigma or financial penalty.

In addition, workplaces should be equipped with on-site wellness resources, including stress management workshops, counselling opportunities, and mindfulness programmes. These initiatives would normalise conversations around

mental health, create supportive environments, and empower employees with tools to manage challenges effectively.

The expected outcomes of these measures are clear: reduced long-term sick leave, improved morale and retention, and the strengthening of Malta's reputation as a society that values compassion and holistic well-being in its workplaces.

We are also proposing an increase in the allocation of funding for initiatives that provide mental health support and create safe spaces for LGBTIQ+ Youth and other vulnerable minorities, who often face unique challenges related to mental health and discrimination.

Work-life Balance.

Work-life balance is not a buzzword. Workers are constantly juggling between working and private lives. While in our last proposals, we welcome the legislation on the work-life balance, we cannot accept the payment for parental leave and the non-payment of the career leave. The legislation states that the payment must be attractive enough to attract the take up of the leave. During the discussion we always proposed the Nordic model and full payment for every employee.

We are proposing that the payment is increased gradually to full pay.

Flexible Working arrangements

In a fast-paced new world of work, every employee is finding it very hard to reconcile his/her work and his/her family commitment. After the introduction of the 40-hour spread on 4 days concept in the public service, we are proposing more flexible working arrangements both in the public administration and the private sector if the flexibility still respects the Working Time Directive.

We are proposing where possible, and there is an agreement between employers and employees or their representatives (trade unions) the option to establish core hours, and the rest of the working hours be performed during the entire paying period.

Remote and Teleworking – Towards a Modern Framework

During the pandemic, telework and remote working were promoted and encouraged on an unprecedented scale. Employers and employees alike adapted quickly to this

new reality. Productivity levels rose in many sectors, while employees benefited from reduced commuting times, greater flexibility, and an improved work-life balance. At the time, all stakeholders agreed that a hybrid model was the most sustainable way forward.

Yet, almost three years after the pandemic, many workers have been compelled to return full-time to the office, largely due to employer resistance. This shift has undermined the benefits experienced during the pandemic and ignored the clear evidence that remote and hybrid work arrangements can enhance both efficiency and well-being. The General Workers' Union believes that remote and teleworking must once again be promoted and encouraged as part of a forward-looking employment strategy.

To achieve this, the GWU proposes the introduction of a robust legislative framework that reflects the realities of the modern workplace. At present, coverage and protection under the Telework National Standard Order (S.L. 452.104) are minimal and outdated. It is the opportune time to revise and strengthen this framework, ensuring that both telework and remote work are properly regulated, with clear protections for workers and obligations for employers.

We propose that government and social partners work together to draft new legislation that guarantees fair working conditions for remote and teleworking employees. This includes provisions on the right to disconnect, health and safety standards for home offices, protection against discrimination for those working remotely, and mechanisms to ensure equal career opportunities and progression.

In parallel, we propose the introduction of incentives for employers and employees to encourage the adoption of hybrid and remote work models. These could include fiscal benefits for companies that adopt structured remote work policies, subsidies for setting up secure and ergonomic home working environments, and the use of EU funds to support digital infrastructure that enables flexible working.

Remote and teleworking should not be considered as a temporary solution, but integral elements of the new world of work. If supported by a strong legislative framework and meaningful incentives, they can deliver productivity gains, strengthen work-life balance, and contribute to environmental goals by reducing commuting. Malta cannot afford to fall behind. We must embrace remote and teleworking as a standard, modern form of work organisation that benefits employees, employers, and society as a whole.

Continues Personal Development

Another facade that the country needs to address is coaching, training, up-skilling, re-skilling, and lifelong learning. The economy is continuing to grow and creating new jobs. We are also envisioning a green sustainable economy; new quality jobs will be created which needs a skilled workforce. Consequently, human development is a must to fill these quality jobs. We need to create synergies between formal/informal education institutions, future industries, and trade unions. It is imperative the input of trade unions in the formation of these new forms of work. Therefore, it is equally important the continuous social dialogue on development skills and a national vocational education strategy. Adult learning and continuous personal development must become part of our culture. National policies, as well as actions needs to be initiated and consolidated to create a culture of continuous learning and development society.

Performance Pays and Commission-based Income

Since the world of work is changing fast, and pay structures are also changing the pension system should reflect these changes. Performance pay and commission-based income should also be included in the social security contribution. In most cases, the employee is not offered any choice and must accept the terms and conditions of these employment contracts.

In other instances, performance bonuses are offered to circumvent the system. In some instances, the employer pays part of the salary as a performance bonus. Employers and employees will not be paying social contributions on these commission/performance bonus but only the employee will be impacted in his pension.

As such we are proposing that performance bonuses and commissions are included together with the basic pay on which social insurance contributions are paid on. This will have a huge impact on the employees' pension and the state coffers.

Bridging the Digital Gap and Fostering Tech Adoption

In an era shaped by artificial intelligence and rapid digital transformation, it is essential to ensure that all individuals, regardless of age or technical proficiency, can confidently engage with technology. The General Workers' Union believes that digital

inclusion is not a luxury but a necessity, and that every worker must be empowered to thrive in a technology-driven society.

One important measure is to support employees and non-tech-savvy individuals by removing financial barriers to access. Government, in collaboration with civil society, should introduce schemes that provide affordable smart devices and reliable internet connectivity. This ensures that no worker or family is excluded from the digital transition simply due to cost. Equally important are practical, hands-on workshops delivered through local councils and community initiatives. These should focus on the use of everyday digital tools such as smartphones, headphones, and AI applications, with young students and volunteers guiding older citizens. This approach would not only build digital confidence but also strengthen intergenerational learning and social cohesion.

Community-based technology hubs should also be established, offering direct support to individuals who require assistance with digital tasks such as online bill payments, banking services, or shopping. Such spaces would create a safety net for those at risk of digital exclusion, while encouraging wider community engagement with technology.

A further initiative proposed by the GWU is the introduction of an IT Buddy Programme for workplaces. This scheme would pair senior employees with tech-savvy colleagues to ease transitions into new systems and processes. Beyond ensuring smoother adaptation, the programme would promote cross-generational collaboration, maintain productivity during digital upgrades, and reinforce inclusivity. Crucially, it would value and respect the experience of older workers while equipping them with the skills needed to operate confidently in modern work environments. By providing inclusive support, the programme would help sustain morale, strengthen workplace solidarity, and boost overall job satisfaction.

Capping of Sub-contracting Employees

While the General Workers' Union applauds the government for introducing the new legislation on equal pay for work of equal value, much more can be done to curb the abuse and exploitation. In the private sector, many vacancies are being filled by sub-contracting employees. In every working organisation, you will find more than four types of employers –subcontracting companies provide administrative, cleaning, clerical, security, and operational services. We must ensure that all employees can benefit from the success of every working organisation.

If we want a resolute, loyal workforce in decent jobs, we must ensure that all employees are treated fairly and equally. Access to decent jobs is a fundamental human right. As such if we really want to create careers and not just jobs, we must ensure that every employee can develop his/her full potential. We are proposing that the government should legislate that only 20% of the workforce in every organisation should be outsourced.

The Adequate Minimum Wage Directive

The Council adopted the Directive on Adequate Minimum Wages on 4 October 2022. Its central aim is to ensure that workers in the European Union earn an adequate minimum wage that guarantees decent working and living conditions while contributing to fair and resilient economies and societies, as established under Principle 6 of the European Pillar of Social Rights.

Adequate minimum wages are not only a matter of social justice but also of economic sustainability. They improve working and living conditions for employees, reduce in-work poverty, and support fair competition among enterprises. They also stimulate productivity, enhance economic and social mobility, and contribute to reducing the gender pay gap, given that more women than men are minimum wage earners. It provides for clear and stable criteria for setting statutory minimum wages, indicative reference values to guide adequacy, regular and timely updates, and the establishment of consultative bodies to advise the competent authorities. It also limits excessive variations and deductions while requiring the effective involvement of social partners in statutory wage-setting and updating. A key pillar of the Directive is also the goal of increasing collective bargaining coverage to at least 80% of the workforce.

In Malta, the second agreement reached between government, trade unions, and employers will gradually raise the minimum wage to 60% of the median salary over the coming three years. This step is important in ensuring a decent living for workers and in addressing in-work poverty. The establishment of the Low-Wage Commission has provided a structured platform for discussion, but challenges remain regarding the 80% collective bargaining target.

Most importantly, the GWU insists that regardless of the outcome of the legal challenge currently before the Court of Justice of the European Union, the Government of Malta should commit to implementing the principles of the Directive. Adequate minimum wages and expanded collective bargaining are indispensable to

securing fair competition, sustainable growth, and an inclusive economy where no worker is left behind.

Automatic Trade Union Enrolment with Opt-Out - Ensuring Fairness and Adherence with Local Laws & EU Standards

The General Workers' Union firmly maintains that automatic union enrolment, combined with a clear opt-out mechanism and a nominal contribution from non-members benefiting from collective agreements, is the most effective and socially just path forward for Malta.

This proposal is not about imposing mandatory membership in a coercive sense. It is about creating a default protective framework that guarantees every worker the benefits of collective representation, while fully respecting the individual's right to opt out. The real legal risk lies in failing to address the systemic vulnerabilities it is intended to solve, as evidenced by repeated court cases exposing the exploitation of platform workers and other precarious groups.

An independent survey by the Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society found that 5% of workers in Malta were denied the right to associate by their employer. This stark reality highlights the urgent need for a stronger system that guarantees genuine freedom of association.

The government's recent change of stance abandoning the commitment to automatic enrolment represents a missed opportunity to deliver a structural solution to worker exploitation. It also fails to address the injustice of the "free-rider" phenomenon.

Awareness campaigns and membership drives, while welcome, are no substitute for structural reform. Experience in Malta and abroad shows that such campaigns achieve only marginal, short-term gains in union density. They do not provide the enabling framework necessary to achieve the 80% collective bargaining coverage benchmark required by the EU's Adequate Minimum Wage Directive.

The GWU urges government to reconsider its position in the national interest. Ensuring fairness, compliance with EU law, and the sustainability of decent work in Malta requires bold reform. A mature democracy must not avoid difficult debates but face them with evidence-based dialogue.

Automatic enrolment with opt-out represents a balanced and modern solution: it strengthens worker protection, addresses systemic injustices, ensures compliance with EU directives, and upholds fairness in Malta's labour market. The GWU stands ready to engage with government, legal experts, and social partners to develop a framework that is both constitutionally sound and socially indispensable.

Income Tax on Overtime

In previous budgets, the government introduced a new tax rate on overtime income, at 10% on the first €10,000 for employees whose basic annual pay does not exceed €20,000. The GWU is proposing that the capping of €10,000 is eliminated, the capping on the amount is eliminated as well and the rate of 10% is fixed on all overtime income.

We are also proposing that the rate of 10% tax rate is also applied on all allowances.

Department of Employment and Industrial Relations

The GWU believes that labour laws should be such to provide reassurance to all workers in our country irrespective of their nationality, gender, or beliefs. These laws have been enacted to safeguard and protect employees. Therefore, it is unacceptable for any employer not to adhere these laws because he/she thinks it is above the law. Although the labour laws in our country are among the best in Europe, we cannot accept that the provisions of the law are abused without harsh consequences for those who abuse employees. We are calling for increased inspections and stricter penalties for employers who engage in such abuse.

We are proposing that the Department of Employment and Industrial Relations apart from being given more resources to function efficiently and enforcement, it should also be transformed to a regulatory body like an Authority.

Social Partners

The term social partners refer to representatives of employers' organisations, trade unions, and civil society that engage in social dialogue. Not only do social partners play a key role in collective bargaining but also play a significant role on the National level through the Malta Council for Economic and Social Development (MCESD). The council function as an advisory council that issues opinions and recommendations

to the Maltese government on matters of economic and social relevance. Social partners strive to improve social dialogue and to put forward sound and concrete recommendations about socioeconomic matters to the government before any reforms or measures of relevance. Trade Unions shape working conditions and influence social policy, either through collective bargaining or tripartite social dialogue. They are interlocking parts in a multilevel system of governance that includes the European, National, company, and establishment levels.

To continue providing an enhanced and professional service, the GWU is proposing that trade unions be allocated financial assistance to hire economic, financial, and environmental professionals.

Furthermore, we are proposing that the current grant given to social partners to cover affiliation fees to European Confederations and flights to attend to European Social Dialogue is increased substantially. Currently this grant only covers less than 50% of all expenses incurred by the General Workers' Union.

Employee Employability Insurance

We are proposing Employee Employability Insurance, safeguarding the health of the employee. This is apart from the standard government social security contribution. This insurance will offer financial security during accidents and deaths at the place of work. Employers should pay for this insurance. Economic sectors who are more prone to accidents should implement this type of insurance immediately. This insurance must prioritize the employee's well-being.

Asbestos-related Diseases

The General Workers' Union commends the Ministry of Finance for compensating Shipyard workers who have suffered from Asbestos-related diseases or deaths. Since these diseases can manifest years later, the GWU is proposing the reopening and continuous availability of this scheme. Moreover, we are proposing the extension of this scheme to workers afflicted with these diseases from other government entities.

Regularisation of Work Permits

The GWU is proposing a revamp of the single work permit system that truly serves the permit holders. Many a times we meet with third-country nationals who lost their right to work due to a technical error or due to lack of proper documentation. On most occasions, it was not the employee's fault. It is to be pointed out that once the working permit is rejected or refused, the holder must leave the island immediately. If the employee does not have the necessary funds, then he/she will start working in the shadow economy. During the last couple of years, we have witnessed hundreds of third-country nationals working in the informal economy, paid less than the minimum allowed by law, deprived of basic health and safety standards, living in humiliating and squalid conditions, and constantly abused.

Apart from the revamp, the GWU is proposing that the government launches a scheme applicable to all those third-country nationals who entered Malta legally and became illegal to regularize their position. This scheme can be monitored by social partners, national authorities, and private employers in need of human resources. This coordinated effort can help eradicate abuse and precarious employment, regularize regular employment, and increase the revenue for the employees and the state.

We are also proposing that the appeals system is revamped to cater for the current situation. We are informed that while the applicant has 10 days to find alternative employment or leave the island, in some cases it takes months to have his/her appeal heard. In the meantime, the employee is not allowed to work.

Industrial Estates

Industrial Estates Associations

To enhance the efficiency and appeal of Malta's industrial areas, we propose an increase in funding to the Industrial Estates Association. This funding would be dedicated to the upkeep and upgrading of industrial estates, ensuring they remain competitive, safe, and conducive to business growth. Upgraded infrastructure, including better roads, utilities, and waste management systems, will attract investment, improve operational efficiency, and reduce environmental impact. Moreover, well-maintained industrial areas enhance the working environment, contributing to employee satisfaction and productivity. Additional funding will also

support the implementation of modern technologies and sustainable practices, such as energy-efficient systems and green spaces, aligning with Malta's broader environmental goals. By investing in the continued improvement of these industrial areas, the government can help drive economic growth, create jobs, and ensure that Malta remains an attractive destination for both local and international businesses.

Childcare Centres and Medical Clinics in Industrial Zones

We are proposing new childcare and medical facilities in every industrial estate. Apart from facilitating the drop and pick up of children by parents, medical centres are essential to give instant medical care in case of an accident. We are also proposing that these facilities are open for a 24-hour service to help shift working parents.

Public Transport and Accessibility to Industrial Areas

The accessibility of Malta's workforce to reliable and efficient transport remains a pressing challenge. In particular, the public transport system in Hal Far requires urgent revision to reflect the realities of a growing industrial hub. Current schedules are inadequate, with overcrowded buses and long waiting times during peak hours. Shift workers, whose schedules fall outside of standard daytime hours, are often forced to rely on private cars, as bus services do not cater to early mornings or late nights. This is compounded by the limited number of bus stops in key industrial zones, which leaves many employees facing long walks before even reaching their workplace. Such shortcomings reduce the efficiency and attractiveness of public transport, undermining Malta's broader sustainability goals.

To address this, the GWU proposes both an improved public transport schedule tailored to high-demand periods, and the expansion of bus stop networks in key industrial areas. Aligning timetables with the realities of shift work and ensuring more frequent and reliable services will reduce travel times, enhance accessibility, and encourage greater use of public transport. These reforms would complement Malta's broader strategy of reducing congestion, cutting emissions, and fostering sustainable mobility under the Reshaping Our Mobility Strategy.

In parallel, the GWU has long advocated for the establishment of an independent, direct transport system linking localities to Malta's major industrial estates. We welcome the current tripartite discussions between the GWU, the Ministry for the

Environment, Energy and Enterprise, and employers to advance this initiative. Such a service would not only reduce the reliance on private cars but also alleviate the growing parking pressures in industrial zones, lower commuting costs, and contribute to environmental sustainability. Both employees and employers stand to benefit from a system that is more efficient, cost-effective, and aligned with the needs of Malta's modern economy.

By integrating these proposals with the government's ongoing commitments to sustainable transport, Malta can achieve a model that supports both workers' needs and national environmental goals. Better connectivity to industrial areas is not only an economic imperative but also a social one: ensuring that workers have access to affordable, reliable, and sustainable transport is a cornerstone of a fair and inclusive society.

Unused, Abandoned Trailers

The General Workers' Union already raised the issue on the number of unused and abandoned Trailers during the past year. We applaud the government for initiating the process and towed vehicles and abandoned trailers. We urge the government to continue to act as still unscrupulous owners continue to park these unused and abandoned trailers. These neglected vehicles not only create an eyesore but also pose significant safety hazards, obstructing roadways and increasing the risk of accidents, particularly in an area with high traffic and pedestrian activity. The presence of these vehicles hampers visibility and accessibility, making it difficult for both drivers and pedestrians to navigate safely.

Malta Marittima Agency

Malta Marittima Agency aims to develop and promote the maritime industry in Malta, positioning the country as a key maritime hub in the Mediterranean. It serves as a platform for collaboration between various stakeholders, including government bodies, private enterprises, and educational institutions, to foster growth, innovation, and sustainability within the maritime sector.

The entity focuses on several key objectives: promoting the maritime sector, facilitating collaboration among industry players, supporting research and development, and enhancing maritime education and training. Malta Marittima also emphasizes sustainable practices, aligning with global trends and regulations to reduce the environmental impact of maritime activities.

A significant part of its mission is to promote the Blue Economy, which involves the sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, job creation, and the preservation of ocean ecosystems. Given Malta's strategic location and its ship registry being one of the largest globally, Malta Marittima plays a crucial role in maintaining and expanding this vital sector. Through its initiatives, the entity ensures that Malta's maritime industry remains competitive, innovative, and aligned with international standards.

We are proposing an increase in funds to Malta Marittima to support research and development in the maritime sector. This could include investing in modern technologies for cleaner and more efficient shipping, renewable energy sources like offshore wind, and sustainable aquaculture practices. Enhanced R&D can keep Malta at the forefront of maritime innovation. These funds can also support the expansion of educational initiatives and partnerships with local and international institutions to develop specialized training programs. These could focus on emerging areas like maritime cybersecurity, blue economy entrepreneurship, and sustainable marine operations. This investment would ensure a highly skilled workforce that meets the evolving needs of the maritime industry.

Climate Authority and Climate Action in Malta

As a small island state, Malta faces a disproportionate impact from climate change, with threats ranging from rising sea levels and coastal erosion to water scarcity and increasingly frequent heatwaves. Climate action is not only an environmental necessity but also a matter of social and economic justice, as it directly affects workers, families, and communities. The establishment of the Climate Action Authority in 2025 is an important step forward, consolidating responsibility for Malta's climate policies and ensuring alignment with European and international obligations.

The General Workers' Union welcomes this development but insists that climate action must be grounded in a just transition framework that protects workers and communities. The drive towards carbon neutrality by 2050 and the EU's emission reduction targets will reshape sectors such as energy, construction, manufacturing, and transport. This transition must not come at the expense of jobs or social stability. Instead, it should be leveraged to create new, decent employment opportunities in renewable energy, green construction, sustainable transport, and circular economy industries.

The GWU calls for the Climate Authority to work closely with social partners in developing climate strategies, ensuring that the workforce is supported through reskilling, upskilling, and fair treatment during industrial transformation. National adaptation policies must also be strengthened to protect citizens from climate-related risks, including investment in water security, green infrastructure, and resilient healthcare systems.

Furthermore, the Union emphasises the importance of integrating climate objectives into broader economic and social policy. Measures such as incentives for renewable energy adoption, investment in sustainable public transport, and stricter building efficiency standards should be designed in a way that promotes fairness, affordability, and accessibility for all households. Workers and vulnerable groups cannot be left to bear the cost of the transition.

The GWU believes that climate action, if managed responsibly, can become a driver of both environmental sustainability and social justice. By embedding the principles of solidarity, fairness, and inclusivity into the work of the Climate Authority, Malta can lead by example in demonstrating that climate responsibility and workers' rights go hand in hand.

A Just and Fair Society

Integration and Inclusivity

Implementing integration policies and promoting inclusivity are crucial for building cohesive, prosperous, and resilient societies. As communities become increasingly diverse due to economic migration, and demographic shifts. It is essential to create environments where all individuals, regardless of their background, feel valued and included. Integration policies play a key role in helping newcomers adapt to their new environment, providing them with the tools and support they need to contribute effectively to society. This includes access to education, language training, employment opportunities, and social services.

Inclusivity goes beyond mere acceptance; it actively involves embracing diversity and ensuring that everyone has equal access to opportunities and resources. When inclusivity is prioritized, it fosters social harmony, reduces inequalities, and enhances the collective well-being of society. Diverse perspectives lead to more innovative solutions, driving progress in various sectors such as business,

technology, and public services. Moreover, inclusive communities are better equipped to address and overcome social challenges, such as discrimination and social fragmentation.

For governments and organizations, promoting integration and inclusivity is not just a moral responsibility but also a strategic imperative. It strengthens social cohesion, boosts economic growth by harnessing the potential of all citizens, and ensures that everyone has a stake in the community's future.

Judicial System

A democratic country requires an efficient judicial system to safeguard the rule of law, protect individual rights, and maintain social order. A well-functioning judiciary ensures fair and impartial resolution of disputes, upholds the constitution, and checks the abuse of power. It guarantees equal access to justice, fosters trust in institutions, and promotes economic growth by providing a stable environment for businesses. An efficient judicial system also deters crime, upholds democratic values, and reinforces the principles of accountability and transparency. It serves as a cornerstone of a just society, fostering citizen confidence and contributing to the overall stability and progress of the nation.

The saying goes that 'justice delayed is justice denied.' Implementing a reasonable but rigid time limit for deciding a case is essential to address the issue of delayed cases in our courts. By setting specific deadlines, we can expedite the judicial process, ensuring justice is delivered swiftly. This approach will benefit both litigants and society, as it promotes efficiency and discourages frivolous litigation.

In addition, there should be an increase in budget for investment in technological systems, efficiency, accountability, digitalisation, and human resources within the court agency.

Good Governance

Good governance is essential for the effective and equitable functioning of any society. It ensures transparency, accountability, and fairness in decision-making, fostering trust between citizens and institutions. By upholding the rule of law, protecting human rights, and ensuring that resources are managed responsibly, good governance promotes social stability and economic growth. It also empowers communities by involving them in the governance process, leading to more inclusive

and sustainable development. Ultimately, good governance is the foundation of a just and prosperous society, where the needs of all citizens are respected and met.

Towards a Living Income Framework

The GWU believes that every citizen in Malta should enjoy a decent income that guarantees a dignified standard of living. If we all accept this human principle, then as a society we must begin to gradually and systematically introduce the concept of a Living Income.

Living Income should be understood as the minimum level of resources required by a family or individual in Malta to live a dignified life without the risk of poverty. It goes beyond the concept of the Living Wage, as it does not only apply to workers but also encompasses other members of society who depend on pensions, health services, education, and social benefits. In this sense, Living Income integrates all streams of support that contribute to quality of life.

In our opinion, quality of life is not defined solely by money, but also by free time and the opportunity to enjoy one's personal and family life. A fair society must therefore consider both economic security and time for rest, family, and community.

The GWU has already taken the initiative to conduct independent scientific research to define what constitutes a Living Income and to calculate the level required for different family types and individuals. This research sets out the minimum expenditure and the equivalent income level necessary for a decent and dignified life in Malta.

We propose that government adopt this framework on a long-term and gradual basis, embedding it into the country's economic and social strategy. By aligning social protection systems, wages, and benefits with the Living Income concept, Malta can progressively guarantee that no individual or family is left behind. This is not only a matter of fairness but a cornerstone of building a resilient, inclusive, and sustainable society for the future.

Revamp of the Pharmacy of your Choice

We propose a comprehensive revamp of the Pharmacy of Your Choice (POYC) system to address issues of medicine availability and wastage. The revised system should include a more rigorous prescription review process to prevent the issuance

of excessive quantities of medication, thus reducing waste. We recommend implementing a real-time inventory management system that allows pharmacies to better track stock levels and predict shortages, ensuring that essential medicines are always available.

Additionally, the revamped system should introduce a streamlined mechanism for patients to report medication shortages or issues directly to a central authority, which can then facilitate timely restocking or alternative solutions. Establishing a feedback loop between patients, pharmacies, and the health authorities will improve responsiveness and efficiency.

By optimizing inventory management and improving communication channels, the proposed changes will enhance the reliability and effectiveness of the POYC system, ensuring that patients receive the medications they need without unnecessary delays or waste.

Adjusting Tax Bands and Reducing Income Tax

The General Workers' Union applauds the Government for last year budget cuts. The GWU believes that Malta's tax system must evolve to protect workers and families from unfair burdens created by inflation. While last year's tax cuts were a strategic step in the right direction, we need to address the "bracket creep."

Tax bands determine the income ranges at which different tax rates apply. When they are not adjusted regularly to reflect inflation, workers who receive cost-of-living adjustments or modest wage increases risk being pushed into higher tax brackets, despite their purchasing power remaining unchanged. This phenomenon – known as bracket creep results in workers paying a higher percentage of their income in taxes even though their real standard of living has not improved. In some cases, individuals end up earning less in real terms than in the previous year.

To address this, the GWU is proposing two key measures, the widening of tax bands in line with inflation. This adjustment will ensure that cost-of-living increases genuinely benefit workers, rather than being clawed back through higher taxation. By indexing tax bands to inflation, government can safeguard purchasing power and ensure fairness in the system.

The second proposal we are proposing to lower the income tax for the middle class. This will increase disposable income for workers and families, boosting consumer spending and stimulating economic growth. This in turn supports business revenues,

job creation, and overall economic expansion. For government, the broader tax base created by higher economic activity can offset initial revenue losses and lead to stronger long-term revenues.

Such reforms would not only protect workers' living standards but also enhance Malta's competitiveness. Lower personal taxation makes the country more attractive to talent and investment, while ensuring a fairer distribution of the gains from growth. It also supports Malta Vision 2050's aim of building a resilient, inclusive economy where prosperity is shared, and strengthens the link between tax policy, social well-being, and economic sustainability.

By widening tax bands and reducing income tax rates for middle class, Malta can ensure that tax policy is fair, growth-enhancing, and aligned with the principles of social justice. This is an opportunity for government to protect citizens from inflationary pressures, strengthen economic resilience, and guarantee that workers and families truly benefit from cost-of-living adjustments.

Reintegration of Former Prisoners into Society

Reintegration is vital to reducing reoffending and ensuring that former prisoners become active, responsible members of society. Upon release, many face serious challenges, including unemployment, lack of housing, broken family ties, and social stigma.

To address this, we propose a structured reintegration framework that provides vocational training, education, psychological support, and mentorship. Partnerships with employers should be encouraged through incentives to offer ex-prisoners real job opportunities. Furthermore, community awareness campaigns must be introduced to reduce prejudice and foster inclusion. Reintegration is not only a matter of personal responsibility but also a collective social duty. By providing support systems and genuine opportunities, we can help individuals rebuild their lives while strengthening communities and promoting long-term social stability.

Social Security Contributions by Married Couples

Social security contributions are meant to be payments made by employees, employers, and self-employed individuals into a government-run social security system. These contributions are used to fund our social welfare system which is aimed at providing financial support and protection for pensioners and the most vulnerable.

We propose that Maltese or European citizens married to third-country nationals (TCNs) should receive the same social benefits as couples where both partners are Maltese or European. Currently, in cases where one partner is Maltese or European and the other is a TCN, only the Maltese or European partner is eligible for fiscal benefits, such as the first-time buyer scheme. We recommend that, upon marriage, both partners be granted equal rights to these benefits, ensuring fair and equitable treatment for all couples regardless of their partner's nationality.

Pensions

The General Workers' Union applauds the Government for the continues investment in pensions and social benefits. We propose increasing both contributory and non-contributory pensions to elevate the standard of living for all pensioners. Increasing these pensions apart from the social aspects, and the economic aspect will provide retirees with a more secure and comfortable financial base. In addition to raising the pensions, both contributory and non-contributory, the government should also increase all additional existing supplements, to further support pensioners. This includes additional allowances for those with special needs, and other relevant benefits.

By implementing these measures, we aim to reduce financial strain on pensioners, ensuring they can better meet their essential needs and maintain a decent quality of life. Enhanced pension support will also promote social equity and acknowledge the contributions of retirees throughout their working lives.

Pensioners born Pre 1962

The union notes with satisfaction the implementation by the Minister of Social Policy and Children's Rights, to address the discriminations that have arisen due to the 2008 reform between those born before and after 1962. The GWU together with the Pensioners Section held various meetings with the Minister to address this issue.

During our routine meetings with the Minister and Permanent Se. Mr Musu, we proposed that those above the age of eighty and over are paid a higher adjustment then the €9.47 additional increase per week. This will make a stark difference in elevating the standard of living of our pensioners.

The threshold for energy subsidy should be increased so that more elderly people can benefit from discounted rates.

Pensioners should have their pensions adjusted accordingly as per signed Collective Agreements without further delay.

Strengthening the Non-Contributory Age Pension

In Malta, individuals, particularly elderly women, who do not qualify for a contributory retirement pension due to insufficient National Insurance contributions are entitled to the Non-Contributory Age Pension. This benefit, which is means-tested, serves as an essential safeguard for those who reach old age without having accumulated enough contributions for a standard pension. While this scheme provides important support, it must be reinforced to meet today's realities.

The General Workers' Union proposes an increase in the allowance amount so that it more accurately reflects the current cost of living and ensures that elderly beneficiaries can live their later years with dignity. Greater outreach and simpler application processes should also be introduced so that vulnerable individuals, including isolated elderly persons, can access this support without unnecessary administrative barriers.

These measures would better protect elderly citizens who, despite their contributions to society, find themselves without sufficient entitlement to a contributory pension. Strengthening the Non-Contributory Age Pension is not only a matter of fairness but a step in line with Malta Vision 2050's commitment to social inclusion and the National Employment Policy's emphasis on ensuring dignity at every stage of life. This proposal ensures that no older person is left behind and that our society continues to uphold respect and solidarity with its senior citizens.

Mentorship Roles for Pensioners in the Workforce

The General Workers' Union believes that the wealth of experience accumulated by pensioners should not be lost but instead harnessed as a valuable resource for Malta's labour market. Many retired workers are willing and able to contribute to society beyond their formal careers, particularly by sharing their knowledge with younger generations at the place of work.

We therefore propose the formal introduction of legal instruments for mentorship roles for pensioners across all economic sectors. This initiative would create structured opportunities for retired workers to guide, train, and support younger employees, apprentices, and those transitioning into new industries. By drawing on

their lifelong expertise, pensioner-mentors can help instil good work practices, improve professional standards, and transfer skills that are not always captured in formal education systems.

This proposal would not only benefit younger workers but also enhance the well-being of pensioners themselves, allowing them to remain active, socially engaged, and recognised for their lifelong contribution. The initiative is particularly relevant in the context of the twin transition digitalisation and the green economy — where younger workers may bring new technological skills, while older mentors provide the grounding of experience, problem-solving, and sectoral know-how. Such cross-generational knowledge exchange strengthens workplaces, fosters solidarity, and reduces generational divides.

We are proposing that the government introduce a formal legal instrument to establish mentorship schemes, coordinated in partnership with trade unions, the National Skills Council, employers' associations and educational institutions. Pensioners who wish to participate could be formally recognised and compensated for their contribution, ensuring dignity and value in their extended role.

Mentorship roles for pensioners would transform ageing into an asset for Malta's economy and society. By bridging generations through structured knowledge-sharing, we can build stronger, more cohesive workplaces and preserve Malta's human capital for the benefit of future generations.

Other proposal.

We are proposing that more medicine form part of the government's formulary to reduce the unavoidable cost on the elderly and pensioners.

Day Care Centres are spread around all our towns and villages and they can be considered as the "town's square" where old people meet and socialise. We are proposing increasing the number of Day Care Centres and extending their opening times so that the elderly can spend more time with their friends.

The GWU insists that the process initiated during the last budget for current pensioners to receive the full cost of living adjustment is accelerated so they can enjoy the same level of pension as those reaching pensionable age now.

Social Contributions

Social security contributions are payments made by employees, employers, and self-employed individuals into the national system designed to fund pensions and safeguard the most vulnerable. These contributions represent the backbone of Malta's welfare state, providing protection and dignity in old age and ensuring that no citizen is left without support.

The General Workers' Union proposes that married couples should be able to transfer contributions from one spouse to another to reach the minimum number of contributions required for pension eligibility. This principle already exists for separated couples and should be extended to married couples as a matter of fairness. Furthermore, spouses should also be granted the possibility to retroactively pay missing contributions, ensuring that periods of unpaid work, often due to caregiving responsibilities, do not result in long-term insecurity.

Increasing the maximum pay contributions

The average monthly basic salary for employees during the first quarter of 2025 was approximately €2,063. The highest earnings were recorded in the Financial and Insurance sector, while the lowest were in elementary occupations at around €1,293, with managers receiving up to €3,217.

Given this disparity, the GWU is also proposing the removal of the existing capping mechanism so that employees can pay contributions on their full salary. This would allow pensions to be calculated on the actual earnings of workers, ensuring that those who contribute more receive pensions that fairly reflect their lifetime income.

Dual Pension Eligibility for Surviving Spouse

The current structure of survivor pension eligibility in Malta continues to present serious challenges for individuals who have lost their spouses. The General Workers' Union proposes an amendment to pension regulations that would allow a surviving spouse to receive both their own retirement pension and the widow's or widower's pension in cases where both partners were employed and paid national insurance contributions.

Such a reform would acknowledge the full contributions made by both individuals throughout their working lives, while ensuring financial stability for the surviving partner. It would also reflect modern household income structures, where dual incomes are often necessary to sustain a decent standard of living. By adapting

pension rules in this way, Malta would not only respect the principle of fairness but also provide dignity and security to those who face the loss of a life partner.

Finally, the GWU proposes that contributions should begin to be calculated from the age of sixteen. At present, contributions made between the ages of 16 and 18 are excluded from an individual's record. Recognizing these early years of work would better reflect the contributions of young workers, many of whom enter the workforce straight after compulsory education. Together, these reforms would modernize the system of social security contributions, close existing gaps, and create a pension system that is fairer, more inclusive, and better aligned with the realities of today's workforce.

Third Pillar and Voluntary Occupational Pensions

To diversify retirement income and reduce dependency on state pensions, Malta introduced voluntary private pension schemes in 2015, including the Voluntary Third Pillar Pension Scheme (Personal Retirement Scheme) and the Individual Savings Account. These schemes were intended to help individuals supplement their state pension, supported by fiscal incentives.

In 2017, government strengthened the system by introducing the Voluntary Occupational Pension Scheme Rules, which provided tax credits to both employees and employers, including the self-employed. Further fiscal incentives were announced in 2021, raising the annual tax-exempt value of contributions from €2,000 to €3,000. These measures sought to encourage greater participation in voluntary savings.

Despite these efforts, the uptake of private pensions remains limited. As of the end of 2024, only around 4,600 individuals, representing about 2 per cent of the working-age population, were contributing to voluntary occupational schemes. This highlights the limits of voluntary models and underlines the need for structural reform.

Recognizing this challenge, government has now committed to introducing an auto-enrolment framework with an opt-out option, beginning with the public sector, and gradually extending to the private sector. Under this system, employees would automatically be enrolled in a pension scheme, while retaining the freedom to opt out if they choose. Once the scheme is implemented, public sector employees will benefit from matching contributions of up to €100 per month from government. Also, through the new collective agreement, public administration employees from an

increase in tax benefits. Currently, there is a consultation process to establish a clear legislative framework for auto-enrolment.

The General Workers' Union has consistently supported the development of the Third Pillar and believes that automatic enrolment with an opt-out mechanism is the most effective and socially just way forward. International evidence shows that such systems lead to significant increases in participation, ensuring workers build retirement savings that supplement their state pension.

In the context of the future vision for Malta, automatic enrolment in private pensions strengthens the long-term sustainability of the pension system, enhances financial security for future pensioners, and contributes to the Vision's core goals of social inclusion, resilience, and economic well-being. It also aligns with the principle of fairness, ensuring that workers across all sectors and income levels have access to a supplementary pension system that can protect them from poverty in old age.

To make this reform effective, GWU proposes that government extend matching contributions to private sector employees, provide a clear timetable for implementation, and support small and medium enterprises in meeting administrative costs. Social partners, including trade unions, must be fully involved in the design and monitoring of the system to guarantee transparency and fairness.

Automatic enrolment into private pensions is not only a step towards modernizing Malta's pension system but also a cornerstone of achieving the Vision 2050 aspiration for a fair, resilient, and inclusive society where no pensioner is left behind.

Enforcement of Social Security Contributions

The General Workers' Union is gravely concerned that a significant number of employers continue to withhold social security contributions collected from their employees instead of passing them on to the Department for Social Security. Reports from last year revealed that arrears run into tens of millions of euros, including cases involving both self-employed arrears and missing contributions for employees in private entities. This situation is completely unacceptable. It represents not only a serious risk to the long-term sustainability of Malta's welfare system but also a betrayal of trust, as workers assume that their contributions are being properly credited towards their pensions.

Any sustainability measures introduced to strengthen the pension system will be ineffective if these outstanding contributions remain uncollected. Funds that

rightfully belong to workers must be recovered without further delay and channelled back into the system to enhance pensions and protect the most vulnerable. Failure to act can only be described as misappropriation of funds, and it cannot be tolerated.

The GWU therefore proposes that government immediately review and reinforce current revenue collection and sanction mechanisms to ensure compliance. Employers who default on their obligations must be held accountable through stricter penalties, transparent reporting, and improved enforcement systems. At the same time, a clear mechanism should be established to allow employees to directly verify that their contributions are being remitted and recorded.

Protecting the integrity of the social security system is fundamental to safeguarding the rights of current and future pensioners. Recovering what is owed and preventing future abuse is not only a financial necessity but also a matter of fairness and social justice.

Active Aging

The GWU welcomes the initiative being launched at St. Vincent de Paule and promote more similar initiatives.

Active ageing in Malta is supported by a comprehensive policy framework, yet greater efforts are needed to disseminate information about available programs to ensure that older adults are fully aware of the opportunities for engagement and support. With over 20% of Malta's population aged 65 and above, and an employment rate of 58.3% among those aged 55–64, older persons represent a significant and underutilized resource in both the labor market and the broader economy. Their participation can bolster the silver economy, reduce dependency ratios, and contribute to workplace diversity and resilience.

Moreover, older adults actively contribute to Maltese society through volunteering and community involvement, which enhances social cohesion and intergenerational solidarity. Internationally, several successful initiatives offer valuable models such as the European Innovation Partnership on Active and Healthy Ageing (EIP on AHA) promotes scalable digital and community-based solutions; France's "Watch Over My Parents" program integrates elder care into postal services to combat loneliness; and countries like Belgium and Australia focus on lifelong learning and digital literacy, while the UK's "Mid-Life MOT" helps individuals plan for healthier and more productive ageing.

To maximize the benefits of active ageing, Maltese policymakers should prioritize targeted outreach, especially to vulnerable groups, and promote the role of older persons not only as beneficiaries but as active contributors to Malta's socio-economic development.

Flexi Employment.

During the run-up of the last general election, the General Workers' Union together with the Chamber of Commerce proposed the principle of 'Flexi-Employment'. We argued that the existing 'all or nothing approach' to those who have full 40-year contributions and reach the age of 61 is replaced by a Flexi-Employment approach, which allows a person to balance their needs to opt-out of a 40-hour week whilst remaining active in the labour market. To ensure that such a Flexi-Employment approach does not become an exit route from retiring at the statutory retirement age, we put forward a set of conditions that may include the following criteria:

The pension to be drawn down should the person opt for early retirement at the age of 61 years of age whilst continuing to work pro-rated, for example, as follows:

Retiring at 61 years of age, the pension income entitled to is pro-rated at 50%.

Retiring at 62 years of age, the pension income entitled to is pro-rated at 60%.

Retiring at 63 years of age, the pension income entitled to is pro-rated at 70%.

Retiring at 64 years of age, the pension income entitled to is pro-rated at 85%.

The employee who selects a Flexi-Employment approach to retirement must work for a minimum set of hours established through a formal contract between them and their employer and employment registration with Jobs Plus to benefit from the drawing down of the retirement pension. We are also proposing that the top-up incentive mechanism, whilst proving to be successful, is based on a negative actuarial rate. This should be replaced by a positive actuarial rate so that more persons are incentivised to remain fully active in the labour market and defer the drawn-down of their pension. We believe that to make financial sense for employees the tax structure for senior citizens who receive income from continued post-retirement employment and pension income should be re-designed to become an incentive.

Disability

During the past years, a national strategy was enforced to encourage disabled persons to enter the world of work. During the Covid pandemic, vulnerable persons were advised to stay indoors. Since the lifting of all medical restrictions, the number of disabled persons never reached the same level. Enforcing current regulations and legislation is vital to give an opportunity to these vulnerable persons enter the world of work. It is also important to create a more inclusive and accessible work environment for disabled individuals. By ensuring strict compliance with existing laws, such as the Disability Act and the Employment Equality Act, we can break down barriers that prevent disabled persons from re-entering the workforce.

Government incentives, such as tax credits or grants, can motivate businesses to actively hire disabled individuals and adapt their workplaces accordingly. Additionally, strengthening partnerships with disability organizations can provide valuable resources and support networks for both employers and disabled job seekers.

This administration has re-energised the disability sector by introducing and implementing measures ranging from new accommodations for independent supported living, de-coupling the disability pension from the income earned from employment, the Legal Notice for setting up of Trusts by parents of disabled children, the removal of any means testing and the increase in assistance for severe disability.

More however needs to be done to help the most vulnerable in our society. As such the GWU recommends the setting up of Independent Support Living Fund that would be financed by government through the National Development and Social Fund (NDSF) - which establishes that 70% of IIP contributions are to be used “in the public interest inter alia for ... social purposes ...” and co-financed by parents. The purpose of the Fund would be that of providing supported living environment and support to disabled persons.

Social Housing

Social housing is vital for supporting the most vulnerable members of society, ensuring that everyone has access to safe, affordable, and stable living conditions. The rising housing costs have made it increasingly difficult for low-income families, the elderly, and individuals with disabilities to secure adequate housing. Without access to affordable homes, these individuals face the risk of homelessness,

instability, and a host of related challenges, including poor health, unemployment, and social isolation.

Social housing provides a critical safety net by offering secure and affordable housing options tailored to the needs of those who are most at risk. It helps create a foundation of stability, enabling individuals to focus on other important aspects of life, such as employment, education, and health. Moreover, social housing fosters a more inclusive society by reducing the inequality gap and preventing the marginalization of vulnerable populations.

As such the General Workers' Union is proposing increasing funds for social housing. Increasing funding towards social housing also ensures that all members of society have a fair chance to participate in and contribute to the community. In essence, social housing is not just about providing shelter; it is about building a more just and equitable society.

Strengthening Support for Single Parents

The General Workers' Union is deeply concerned about the growing financial strain faced by single parents, particularly those earning between €20,000 and €25,000 annually. Despite being in full-time employment, many of these families struggle to make ends meet as rising costs of living, combined with the burden of loan repayments or rent, erode their disposable income. The situation risks pushing working single parents into in-work poverty, undermining both family stability and social equity.

We therefore propose a targeted package of measures aimed at strengthening support for single parents. First, income thresholds for social benefits should be increased, ensuring that those within the €20,000–€25,000 bracket do not lose access to essential assistance. Second, the in-work benefit must be widened and made more generous, recognising the additional pressures faced by single-income households. Third, children's allowances should be increased to provide direct relief to families and safeguard children's well-being. Finally, we recommend the introduction of targeted subsidies on housing loans or rent for single parents, ensuring that housing costs do not consume a disproportionate share of income.

These measures are not only about fairness; they are about protecting vulnerable families, supporting children's development, and ensuring that work truly pays. By strengthening support for single parents, Malta can reduce inequality, promote

social mobility, and ensure that no family is left behind in our collective path toward inclusive growth.

Affordable Housing – A Step Towards Social Justice

Affordable housing is a crucial element in fostering stable and thriving communities. It ensures that individuals and families earning low to moderate incomes can access homes without spending an excessive share of their earnings on rent or purchase. This type of housing is vital to prevent homelessness, reduce economic strain, and improve quality of life, while also strengthening social stability and economic mobility.

In this context, the General Workers' Union applauds and welcomes the affordable housing initiative launched by the Government of Malta and the Archdiocese of Malta through the Foundation for Affordable Housing. This scheme represents a much-needed social measure, offering homes at up to 30 per cent below market value. It specifically addresses the plight of the “stretched class” — families and workers who earn just above the threshold for social housing but remain locked out of the property market.

The benefits of affordable housing extend beyond providing shelter. Families who secure affordable homes can redirect resources towards healthcare, education, and savings, resulting in improved health outcomes, higher educational attainment, and greater opportunities for upward mobility. Moreover, affordable housing fosters community stability, reduces the risk of displacement, and encourages inclusive, diverse neighbourhoods.

The GWU has always maintained that housing is not a privilege but a fundamental right. Secure and affordable homes are essential for family stability, worker well-being, and social justice. We therefore commend the collaboration between the Government and the Archdiocese, which demonstrates how institutions can work together in the national interest to deliver tangible solutions for vulnerable citizens. This effort also strengthens the principle of solidarity that underpins both trade unionism and the broader Maltese social fabric.

Looking ahead, GWU calls on government to adopt long-term policies that integrate affordable housing into Malta's broader social and economic strategy. This should include sustained investment, innovative financing models, and structured partnerships with social partners, NGOs, and the private sector. By embedding

affordable housing as a permanent pillar of national policy, Malta can ensure that every citizen has access to safe, stable, and dignified living conditions.

The affordable housing initiative is a step in the right direction, but it must form part of a broader, sustained effort to guarantee housing as a universal right. The GWU will continue to advocate for policies that protect vulnerable households, ease the burden on working families, and promote fairness and social justice in housing for all.

The Equity Sharing Scheme

The current Equity Sharing scheme is aimed towards individuals aged 30+ who, due to their age and income, cannot take a loan that suffices to purchase their home. The Housing Authority purchases up to 50% of a property worth up to €200,000, thereby lowering the value of the loan taken by the beneficiaries.

As already stated above, families on minimum wage are excluded from the housing market even small apartments, and their only option is to rent from the private sector. We are proposing that to help those families buy a home, the Equity Sharing scheme is extended also to those on minimum or low-level wages.

Monitoring of Prices Post-COLA Adjustment

The General Workers' Union insists that the effectiveness of the Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA) depends on ensuring that it translates into real improvements in workers' purchasing power. Too often, increases in COLA are quickly offset by unjustified rises in prices of essential goods and services. This practice undermines the very purpose of COLA, leaving families in the same position or even worse off despite the adjustment.

We therefore propose the establishment of a robust price monitoring mechanism under the responsibility of an independent authority. This body should regularly track the prices of essential goods and services following COLA increases, identify sudden or unjustified hikes, and recommend corrective action. Where abuse is detected, government must intervene decisively, including through fines, consumer protection measures, or temporary price stabilisation mechanisms.

Such monitoring not only safeguards workers' living standards but also ensures fairness in the market and reinforces trust in the COLA system. By guaranteeing that COLA adjustments genuinely improve people's purchasing power, Malta can

strengthen social justice and economic resilience while preventing exploitation of families during times of inflationary pressure.

The Well-being of Society

The well-being of society is the cornerstone of a prosperous, resilient, and harmonious Malta. It goes beyond physical and mental health to include quality of life, equality, social participation, and environmental sustainability. A society that prioritises well-being nurtures a more productive and engaged population, reduces healthcare costs, and builds stronger social cohesion. This requires a shared responsibility across government, businesses, communities, and individuals, who must all work together to create an environment where people can thrive.

Access to quality healthcare remains fundamental. A strong system must provide not only timely treatment but also preventive and mental health services that protect long-term resilience. Complementing this is education, which equips individuals with the skills and values needed to succeed, while fostering inclusion, empathy, and social cohesion. Economic stability is equally essential, supported by decent jobs, fair pay, and safety nets that protect the vulnerable. Policies must also encourage entrepreneurship and small businesses, ensuring opportunities for all.

Well-being must also be understood in terms of social sustainability. Organizations have a responsibility to adopt fair labour practices, support employee well-being, and invest in communities. By balancing economic growth with social justice, Malta can ensure inclusive and sustainable progress. This requires strong protections for families, youth, pensioners, persons with disabilities, and low-income households, as well as measures to reduce inequality and support those at risk of poverty.

Environmental sustainability is another pillar of well-being. Clean air, accessible green spaces, safe urban areas, and sustainable transport are central to quality of life. Protecting natural resources and promoting green practices not only safeguard future generations but also generate new economic opportunities. Malta must invest decisively in affordable housing, accessible community services, and initiatives that promote civic responsibility.

One such measure could be the National Blood Donation Solidarity Programme, encouraging all citizens to donate blood once a year as a voluntary act of solidarity, strengthening healthcare resilience while fostering a culture of shared responsibility.

Integration and inclusion must remain at the forefront of policy. Migrants, third-country nationals, and minority groups should be supported through education, training, and anti-discrimination measures, transforming diversity into a source of national strength. Inspired by European best practices, Malta should expand community-driven initiatives such as neighbourhood support networks, social prescribing in healthcare, and targeted outreach to disadvantaged groups.

Well-being is not a luxury but the foundation of Malta's long-term sustainability. By strengthening social protections, investing in communities, and embedding inclusivity and environmental care into policy, Malta can ensure that progress is measured not only in economic growth but in the lived experiences of its people. These priorities are fully aligned with Malta Vision 2050, which highlights social cohesion, inclusive growth, and improved quality of life as national goals, and with the National Employment Policy 2021–2030, which calls for equal opportunities and stronger integration of vulnerable groups into the labour market.

The well-being of society is the measure of Malta's success. By promoting civic responsibility, fostering solidarity, and ensuring fair access to health, education, housing, and opportunities, we can build a resilient and inclusive nation where every citizen has the chance to live with dignity and security.

Health Care

Malta's health system stands as one of the cornerstones of social well-being, providing universal access to essential services. However, demographic changes, an ageing population, and increasing pressures from chronic diseases have created urgent demands on the system. Workers across all sectors rely not only on the availability of timely and quality care but also on the sustainability of the workforce delivering these services. In the current context, strengthening health care is both an economic and social imperative.

We propose targeted investment in primary and preventive health care, with a focus on community-based services that reduce the burden on hospitals. This includes expanding out-of-hours clinics, enhancing telemedicine capabilities, and integrating mental health services into primary care settings. By shifting the balance from reactive treatment to prevention, Malta can reduce long-term costs while improving quality of life for all citizens.

Another priority is the strengthening of the health workforce. This requires competitive remuneration, improved working conditions, and career progression pathways to retain skilled staff and attract new talent. For example, a structured continuing professional development programme, funded jointly by government and social partners, would ensure the workforce keeps pace with evolving needs and technologies.

We further recommend enhancing workplace health initiatives across all sectors. Employers should be supported and encouraged to implement mental health first-aider programmes, regular occupational health screenings, and targeted awareness campaigns on lifestyle-related health risks. Government should consider make these initiatives mandatory in every workplace.

Finally, Malta should invest in digital health infrastructure to improve efficiency and patient outcomes. An integrated electronic health record system accessible across public and private providers would reduce duplication, improve patient safety, and allow for better planning. This aligns directly with Vision 2050's digitalisation goals and will be critical to managing care in an ageing society.

A robust and modern health care system is not only about treating illness; it is about sustaining a healthy, productive, and resilient population. By focusing on prevention, workforce sustainability, workplace health, and digital transformation, Malta can strengthen its health system in ways that benefit both workers and the wider society. These proposals align with national strategies, ensuring that health care remains a pillar of social cohesion and economic stability.

Social Care

Social care in Malta is a vital support system that underpins the well-being, dignity, and independence of thousands of citizens, particularly older persons, people with disabilities, and vulnerable families. It is also a sector that employs a significant number of workers, many of whom are women and third-country nationals. The sector faces persistent challenges: recruitment and retention difficulties, heavy workloads, and insufficient recognition for the critical role all social care workers play.

We propose a comprehensive Social Care Workforce Strategy to attract, retain, and develop skilled professionals in the sector. This strategy should include competitive pay scales, opportunities for career advancement, structured professional

development programmes, and improved working conditions especially those in the private sector. An emphasis on stability of contracts and adequate staffing ratios would not only reduce turnover and burnout but also improve service quality for those in care.

To complement workforce measures, we recommend expanding the capacity and accessibility of community-based services. This includes investment in home care programmes, day centres, respite care facilities, and outreach services that allow people to live independently for longer. Such services reduce pressure on institutional care settings and improve overall social well-being.

We also advocate for integration between health and social care systems, ensuring a seamless experience for those who require both. This can be achieved through shared care plans, coordinated case management, and a robust and consistent digital systems. Not only does this improve outcomes for service users, but it also creates efficiencies in resource use and avoids duplication.

Finally, we call for recognition of the importance of the caring class as a profession. This would help attract new entrants, professionalise the workforce, and ensure high-quality care standards across the board.

A sustainable and high-quality social care system is both a moral duty and an economic necessity. By investing in the workforce, expanding community-based services, integrating health and social care, and professionalising the sector, Malta can secure a future in which all citizens can live with dignity and independence. These measures align with our national development goals and reaffirm social care as a cornerstone of an inclusive and compassionate society.

Reforming Mental Health Infrastructure and Services

Mental health care is a cornerstone of a just and resilient society, yet Malta's system continues to depend on Mount Carmel Hospital, an institution that no longer reflects the standards or values of modern psychiatric care. The General Workers' Union recognises the commitment made by government to gradually phase out Mount Carmel and to strengthen community-based services. However, the strategy must go further and ensure that mental health care is fully integrated into Malta's mainstream healthcare system.

The GWU strongly proposes the facilitation and acceleration of plans to build a new, modern psychiatric hospital in close proximity to Mater Dei Hospital. Such a facility

would provide acute care, rehabilitation, and specialised services in an environment that is both humane and clinically appropriate, while also allowing patients to benefit from integration with general hospital services. The siting of the new psychiatric hospital near Mater Dei is critical to ending the isolation and stigma associated with mental health treatment. It would symbolise that psychiatric care is as essential as physical healthcare and deserves the same level of investment, attention, and dignity.

A comprehensive national strategy and policy framework must underpin this transition. Mental health services should not only respond to acute cases but also prioritise prevention, early intervention, and community-based alternatives to hospitalisation. This requires increased investment in professional training, stronger crisis response services, and better collaboration between health, social care, and education sectors. The new psychiatric hospital must be part of a wider strategy that provides continuity of care — from crisis intervention, to inpatient treatment, to community reintegration.

The GWU calls on government to commit to a clear timeline, adequate funding, and transparent milestones for this reform. A quarterly reporting mechanism on the progress of Mount Carmel's transition and the development of the new psychiatric hospital should be introduced, allowing workers, patients, and society to see that this reform is advancing with urgency and accountability.

Malta cannot afford to maintain outdated and inadequate facilities for mental health. The creation of a new psychiatric hospital near Mater Dei, supported by a modern strategy for mental health, would represent a transformative step forward in ensuring that all citizens have access to dignified, effective, and integrated mental healthcare.

Euthanasia as a Personal Right and Dignity for Terminally Ill Patients

The General Workers' Union welcomes the public consultation launched by the Government on the voluntary introduction of assisted euthanasia for adult patients who are terminally ill and have only a short time left to live. The GWU already stated its support for the introduction of euthanasia as a personal choice that respects the dignity of the individual.

While reaffirming the importance of palliative care, which must remain a fundamental pillar of patient support, the GWU believes that there must also be a legal and medical framework that respects the decision of the patient. Such a

decision is deeply personal and intimate, often taken under great suffering. Every choice must be guided by respect for the dignity of the individual and made with empathy and compassion.

The GWU views euthanasia as a matter of human rights, personal autonomy, and dignity in death. Society cannot ignore the intense suffering endured by certain patients in the final stages of their lives. Allowing a patient the right to choose euthanasia is an act of respect and mercy, recognising their will and giving them a dignified option supported by the State.

Now that the consultation period is over, the GWU appeals to the Government for the introduction of this right next year. We believe this reform can create a system that offers a dignified choice, supported fully by the State, to those who face unbearable suffering at the end of their lives.

Demographics and Fertility Rates in Malta

Malta's demographic reality has become one of the most pressing challenges for the country's long-term social and economic sustainability. Over the past decades, population growth has been shaped not by natural increase but increasingly by migration, as fertility rates have steadily declined. Historically, Malta once maintained a fertility rate sufficient to sustain population levels, but like much of Europe, it has experienced a sharp decline since the 1980s. Today, Malta's fertility rate stands well below replacement level, placing additional pressure on the labour market, pensions, healthcare, and long-term social cohesion.

The current situation highlights the scale of this challenge. Fewer children are being born, the population is ageing, and the country is becoming increasingly dependent on third-country nationals and EU migrant workers to sustain its workforce and economic growth. While migration has been vital in filling labour shortages, a society cannot rely indefinitely on inward flows to balance its demographics. An ageing population also creates new pressures on the pension system, social care services, and intergenerational solidarity.

This issue must be understood within a wider context of social, economic, and cultural changes. Rising living costs, pressures of the housing market, the delay of family formation due to career or financial stability and changing cultural attitudes towards parenthood have all contributed to lower fertility rates. While childcare in Malta is free and remains an important support mechanism, challenges persist in other areas such as housing affordability, work-life balance, and financial stability for

young families. These factors discourage or delay the decision to have children, deepening the demographic imbalance.

The General Workers' Union proposes a comprehensive approach to addressing these issues. First, we call for targeted incentives for young families, including tax relief, subsidies on housing loans or rent for first-time parents, and expanded in-work benefits to support those earning modest incomes. Second, measures to improve work-life balance must be prioritised, with employers encouraged to offer greater flexibility and family-friendly practices. Third, we urge investment in long-term fertility and family support policies, including awareness campaigns on the importance of family sustainability and enhanced financial support for fertility treatments for couples facing medical challenges. Finally, migration should remain an important complement to Malta's demographic strategy, but it must be integrated alongside policies that encourage stable family formation within the local population.

Malta's Vision 2050 clearly identifies demographics as a central challenge to the nation's future. If left unaddressed, the decline in fertility rates will threaten the sustainability of pensions, healthcare, and economic growth. However, with a coordinated strategy that combines family support, economic stability, and social responsibility, Malta can safeguard its demographic future while ensuring dignity and opportunity for all generations.

Respect for Law and Civic Discipline

A society that aspires to fairness, inclusivity, and prosperity cannot afford to allow indiscipline and disregard for the law to become the norm. Law-abiding citizens have a legitimate expectation that the rules which govern society are enforced consistently and transparently. Yet there is a growing perception that some individuals appear to be "above the law," receiving leniency while others face immediate sanctions. This undermines public trust in institutions and weakens the social contract. To strengthen cohesion and confidence in our justice system, enforcement must be fair, proportionate, and transparent, with court decisions clearly explained to the public. Transparency in sentencing and greater accountability in the application of justice are necessary to ensure that every citizen feels that the law applies equally to all.

Citizens also have the right to enjoy their homes and neighbourhoods in peace, free from nuisance, disturbance, and unruly behaviour. In recent years, residents in several localities have expressed growing frustration with the disruptive actions of

some youth tourists, whose late-night noise, disorderly conduct, and disregard for community norms have undermined the quality of life for law-abiding residents. Malta's hospitality and openness must not come at the expense of local families' well-being. Stronger enforcement, clearer regulations, and greater accountability are necessary to strike a balance between welcoming visitors and safeguarding the right of citizens to live in safe, respectful, and peaceful environments.

Equally concerning are cases of employer abuse of workers. Malta has made great progress in strengthening workers' rights, yet abuses persist, ranging from wage theft and unpaid overtime to exploitation of vulnerable and foreign workers. Such practices not only harm the individuals affected but also create unfair competition for law-abiding businesses. Europe offers strong examples of how to tackle these problems: Denmark's labour clauses in public procurement, Italy's laws criminalising labour exploitation, and the UK's naming-and-shaming of companies that underpay wages all show that abuse can be deterred when consequences are severe and visible. Malta must follow suit by reinforcing its labour inspectorate, introducing tougher penalties, ensuring supply chain responsibility, and providing confidential reporting systems for workers. Employers who exploit staff must face serious criminal consequences.

Another urgent area is road safety and alcohol-related enforcement. Too many lives are being lost or damaged due to drink-driving and reckless behaviour on our roads. The law must be enforced consistently, with systematic breath-testing, zero tolerance and harsher penalties for offenders. Evidence from across Europe shows that alcohol interlock devices for offenders and widespread use of speed cameras reduce accidents and fatalities dramatically. Malta must embrace these tools without delay, ensuring that our roads are safe for all. A culture of responsibility must be built, where driving under the influence is socially unacceptable and legally intolerable.

Civic discipline also extends to other areas such as waste disposal and respect for public spaces. While most citizens act responsibly, some individuals show disregard by placing rubbish bags days in advance or mixing waste streams improperly. Such behaviour diminishes the quality of life in our localities and disrespects neighbours. To address this, stricter enforcement is needed. Measures could include barcoding of waste bags to identify offenders, increased penalties for repeated breaches, and public awareness campaigns to encourage civic responsibility. A clean environment is a shared responsibility, and stronger discipline in waste management will help create healthier, more pleasant communities.

Finally, we must also reinforce discipline in road regulations more broadly. Beyond alcohol-related offences, reckless speeding, mobile phone use, and disregard for pedestrian safety continue to plague Maltese roads. Enforcement must be enhanced through penalty point systems, greater use of automated speed enforcement, and increased police presence in high-risk areas. At the same time, investment in public awareness and education campaigns can help create a culture where respect for traffic laws is not a matter of fear of punishment but of civic duty.

Respect for the law and civic discipline are fundamental to the functioning of society. Whether on the roads, in the workplace, in our neighbourhoods, or in the courts, every citizen has a right to fairness, safety, and order. By reinforcing enforcement mechanisms, ensuring transparency, and holding both individuals and employers accountable, Malta can restore trust and foster a culture where respect for the law is the norm. This will not only protect citizens but also enhance social cohesion and the quality of life across the country.

Waste Disposal Reform

Waste management has become one of the pressing challenges facing Malta's communities. The growing population, urban development, and higher consumption patterns have placed increasing pressure on the current system, often resulting in streets cluttered with bags, traffic disruption caused by garbage trucks, and unpleasant odours that reduce the quality of life for residents. The General Workers' Union believes that a cleaner and more efficient system is urgently required to meet the expectations of citizens and to align Malta's practices with modern standards of sustainability and civic discipline.

We propose the introduction of centralised waste collection points, with large, durable bins placed at strategic residential locations. These bins should be clearly labelled by waste type, weather-resistant, odour-controlled, and fully accessible to all residents, including those with mobility challenges. Such a system would reduce the clutter of individual waste bags on streets while promoting order and efficiency.

Alongside this, a structured weekly waste disposal calendar should be implemented to encourage proper separation. Designating specific days for organic, general, and recyclable waste would create consistency and strengthen public adherence to the system. Daily emptying and maintenance of the collection points by municipal services would ensure that bins do not overflow, odours are contained, and risks of pests or vermin are eliminated.

To ensure success, the reform must also be accompanied by a community awareness campaign. This initiative would educate residents on the new system, highlight the importance of waste separation, and outline penalties for improper disposal. By engaging citizens directly, the campaign would encourage responsibility and civic discipline in waste management.

The expected benefits of this reform are significant: cleaner streets and neighbourhoods, reduced traffic from garbage trucks during peak hours, and a substantial improvement in both public hygiene and environmental responsibility. By adopting such measures, Malta can move towards a waste management system that reflects the needs of a modern society while safeguarding the quality of life of its citizens.

Waste Management and Collection in Short-Term Rentals

With the rising popularity of short-term rental accommodations such as B&Bs, the volume and complexity of household waste generated by temporary tenants has grown significantly. In many cases, this waste is not properly separated, leading to contamination of recycling streams, added pressure on municipal waste services, and broader environmental consequences.

The General Workers' Union proposes that tenants of B&B establishments should be made directly responsible for separating and managing their waste in accordance with local regulations. This responsibility should be clearly communicated and enforced through the host, supported by standardized guidelines and adequate infrastructure provided at the property. Hosts should ensure that tenants are provided with multilingual instructions, properly labelled bins for each waste stream, and clear information about the penalties for non-compliance.

Amendments to waste management regulations are needed to explicitly include short-term tenants, staying more than twenty-four hours, as responsible parties for waste separation. Enforcement should be undertaken by the relevant authorities, who must be empowered to issue warnings or fines in cases of persistent breaches. Where tenants can be identified, fines should be issued directly through hosts or rental platforms and repeat violations should result in restrictions or penalties for non-compliant listings.

To support these reforms, government should develop a standardized waste separation guide for B&B use, available in major languages, and collaborate with

short-term rental platforms such as Airbnb and Booking.com to integrate waste management rules into booking processes. Incentives should also be introduced for hosts who adopt and promote sustainable waste practices.

The expected outcomes of these measures are clear: improved recycling rates, reduced waste management costs, greater equity in ensuring that temporary residents share environmental responsibilities, and long-term behavioural change among tourists and travellers. By ensuring that short-term tenants contribute fairly to local waste systems, Malta can protect its environment, promote cleaner neighbourhoods, and safeguard the quality of life in residential communities.

Healthy Living and Eating Well

Healthy living and eating well are essential for the overall well-being of every citizen. A balanced diet rich in nutrients provides energy, supports body functions, and enhances the immune system. Regular exercise improves cardiovascular health, maintains weight, and reduces stress. By prioritizing healthy living and eating well, individuals can increase longevity, boost productivity, and enjoy a higher quality of life. Small, consistent lifestyle choices today lead to a healthier, happier, and more vibrant future.

We are proposing grants, incentives subsidy and/or discounts should be introduced for the well-being of the individual for the use of gyms, swimming pools, sportswear, and equipment especially if suffering from a health condition such as obesity, diabetes, etc.

Vouchers for celiac people should be increased since such food is constantly increasing in costs. These vouchers should also be extended to dairy and gluten sufferers. We are also proposing the introduction of these vouchers for those suffering from gluten and dairy intolerance.

People should be encouraged to opt for healthier food including fruits and vegetables with a wider choice and a decrease in price.

Farmers Markets

To support local agriculture and provide communities with fresh, locally sourced produce, we are proposing increasing the number of farmers markets in every locality. Establishing more farmers markets will create accessible platforms for

farmers to sell their goods directly to consumers, promoting sustainable agriculture and reducing food miles. These markets will also foster community engagement, encourage healthier eating habits, and stimulate local economies by keeping money within the community.

The proposal includes collaborating with local governments to identify suitable locations for these markets, ensuring they are easily accessible to all residents. Additionally, providing support in the form of grants or subsidies for market setup and operation will incentivise farmers to participate. The markets should operate regularly, with flexible hours to accommodate various schedules, making fresh produce available to a broader range of people.

By increasing the number of farmers markets, we can enhance food security, support local farmers, and build stronger, healthier communities.

Urban and Rural Environment

In an era marked by climate change, rapid technological advancements, and globalization, the role of the environment in shaping society has never been more apparent. The intricate relationship between human society and the environment forms the foundation of our existence and influences our well-being, progress, and overall survival. The General Workers' Union proposals delve into the profound importance of the environment to society, exploring its multifaceted impacts and highlighting the urgent need for sustainable practices and conservation efforts.

The environment provides the essential resources necessary for human sustainability, such as clean air, water, and fertile land. Natural ecosystems contribute to biodiversity, enhancing ecosystems and enriching our environment. Furthermore, the environment must offer recreational and tranquil spaces to enrich our lives.

Environmental degradation, driven by greed, overconsumption, and pollution, poses significant threats to society's resilience and stability. Climate change, loss of agricultural land, and loss of biodiversity jeopardize human health, food security, and economic prosperity, especially for vulnerable communities.

Understanding the intrinsic link between the environment and society is pivotal in formulating effective policies and fostering a sustainable future. Our proposals aim to raise awareness, to monitor, to enforce, and punish those who disregard

legislation and regulations. Embracing sustainable practices, investing in renewable technologies, and preserving natural ecosystems are pivotal steps toward harmonizing society's progress with the delicate balance of our shared environment.

Only through a holistic and conscientious approach can we ensure a prosperous and thriving future for our society. We are proposing that as a country we need to focus our efforts on greener and more sustainable investments. Transitioning towards sustainability is crucial in addressing environmental challenges, mitigating climate change, and ensuring a better future for generations to come. Such a shift in investment priorities can have numerous benefits, both in the short and long term.

Construction and Planning Policies

Construction should be planned to safeguard national heritage, aesthetics, and national environment. Furthermore, planning of construction should be in lieu of the infrastructure to safeguard the efficient provision of electricity, water, and flow of wastewater. Natural open spaces should be protected, and safeguarded, and should remain untouched by construction. During the construction phase, in case of any inconvenience caused to residents or shop owners, we are proposing that developers compensate all those that are impacted.

Solar Panel Compensation Policy

The right to sunshine must be respected. There is no point in investing in solar panels and afterwards there is an adjacent development that obstructs the sunlight. The General Workers' Union proposes the introduction of a compensation mechanism for property owners whose solar energy output is diminished because of adjacent developments. Such a measure is essential to safeguard renewable energy investments, encourage responsible urban planning, and promote fairness and sustainability in the transition to cleaner energy.

We recommend that government establish a clear regulatory framework, supported by a compensation fund, to address these situations. This fund could be financed through development fees or related contributions, ensuring that the costs of urban growth do not unfairly undermine the renewable energy efforts of households and businesses. By protecting citizens who invest in solar technology, Malta would send a strong signal of its commitment to renewable energy and to ensuring that sustainable practices are both rewarded and respected.

Streetscaping should be part of any new development permit. Any development that goes against the street or locality scaping should be refused. We must ensure that we preserve the characteristics of our villages and towns.

First Time Buyers Scheme

We acknowledge and appreciate the Government's support measures for first-time buyers, which have provided vital assistance for many entering the property market. However, current realities show that the pegging of €200,000 no longer reflects the true cost of housing. Property prices have risen significantly in recent years, leaving many young couples and individuals unable to benefit fully from the existing scheme.

We therefore propose that the threshold be increased from €200,000 to €350,000 to better reflect today's market conditions. This adjustment would ensure that the Government's assistance remains effective, relevant, and genuinely accessible to those who need it most. By enlarging the pegging, more first-time buyers will be able to purchase suitable homes without facing undue financial burden.

This measure will not only ease the path to homeownership but will also strengthen social stability, support the property market responsibly, and provide a fairer opportunity for younger generations.

Government should do its utmost to encourage owners of dilapidated buildings to sell their properties so they can be restored and returned to productive use. Too many neglected structures pose safety risks, diminish the beauty of our towns and villages, and deprive communities of valuable housing or commercial spaces. By introducing targeted incentives, streamlining legal procedures, and enforcing stricter regulations on abandoned properties, Government can ensure these buildings are refurbished in a timely manner. This approach would not only preserve cultural and architectural heritage but also contribute to safer neighbourhoods, economic growth, and improved quality of life for residents.

We are proposing that the Government extends the existing schemes on the reduction of stamp duty for second-time buyers, the grant for first-time buyers of properties in Urban Conservation Areas (UCAs) and the purchase of property in Gozo.

Vacant Dwellings

We propose implementing a tax on vacant dwellings to address housing shortages and stimulate the property market. By imposing a financial penalty on property owners who leave their properties unoccupied, we can incentivize the use of vacant homes, increase availability and reduce pressure on the housing market. This tax would encourage property owners to either rent out their properties or sell them, thus improving housing accessibility and affordability. The revenue generated could be reinvested into affordable housing projects and community development initiatives, further enhancing housing options and supporting urban renewal efforts.

Noise and Air Pollution

To address the pressing issues of noise and air pollution, we are proposing a comprehensive set of measures aimed at creating a cleaner and healthier environment for all. While we applaud the government for the shore to ship system, we are proposing the following to enhance further our commitment to cleaner air. Firstly, implementing stricter emission standards for industries and vehicles will significantly reduce air pollution. Encouraging the adoption of renewable energy sources, electrifying all public transport vehicles, promoting more the use of public transportation and the adoption of fully electric private vehicles will further contribute to lowering emissions.

Apart from the current subsidies we are proposing an increase in subsidies, especially for fully electric vehicles. We are also proposing an increase in charging points.

To mitigate noise pollution, we suggest implementing noise control regulations in urban areas, including the establishment of quiet zones and noise barriers near residential and educational institutions. Encouraging the use of electric vehicles and enforcing noise limits for transportation and construction activities will also help in curbing noise pollution.

We applaud the government for the Green Project initiative and the increase in recreational parks. Promoting green spaces and urban green parks can function as natural filters, absorb pollutants and reduce noise levels. Additionally, raising public awareness through educational campaigns about the harmful effects of pollution will encourage responsible behaviour and foster a culture of environmental consciousness.

Collaboration between governmental agencies, businesses, communities, and individuals is vital to the successful implementation of these measures. Incentives for eco-friendly practices and penalties for non-compliance will ensure the effectiveness of the proposed initiatives. By prioritizing the reduction of noise and air pollution, we can create a cleaner, quieter, and more sustainable environment for present and future generations.

Thanks for sharing this. Since you want it in the same style as the rest of your pre-budget proposals (Aptos 12, justified, no bullet points, structured, and written in a professional but firm tone), I've toned down the language, so it is strong but balanced, while keeping the key arguments intact.

Construction and Planning Issues

The construction sector remains one of the largest economic sectors in Malta, sustaining thousands of jobs both directly and indirectly, and contributing significantly to the economy. At the same time, however, the sector faces serious challenges related to governance, regulation, and accountability. Concerns have been raised about practices that undermine the rule of law, place workers at risk, and create hardship for residents, 3rd parties and communities.

The General Workers' Union believes that government must act decisively to ensure that development respects the rights of citizens and safeguards workers. Stronger legislation and enforcement mechanisms are necessary to prevent abuses that often leave residents disadvantaged against developers with far greater financial and legal resources. Citizens must not be placed in situations where they are technically in the right yet find themselves unable to defend their rights due to lack of means.

We also call for competent authorities to increase strict and unannounced inspections on construction sites. Too often, vulnerable migrant workers are employed in conditions that fall short of acceptable labour standards. This type of exploitation is unacceptable and must be eliminated. In this regard, we reiterate our call for legislation requiring skill cards across the construction industry. No individual should be permitted on a site without a skill card, regardless of the project's size. Such a measure would not only protect workers from exploitation but would also help reduce accidents by ensuring that only qualified and trained workers operate in high-risk environments.

Another area requiring urgent reform concerns the planning system. Permits are frequently issued for residential purposes, only for later applications to be made for a change of use, often converting residences into guesthouses or other commercial establishments. This undermines community integrity and creates uncertainty for residents who placed their trust in the planning process. The GWU proposes that no change of use should be allowed within at least five years of a permit being granted, particularly when it involves converting residential properties into commercial enterprises in established neighbourhoods.

The GWU firmly believes that the construction sector can and should remain an important pillar of Malta's economy, but reforms are urgently needed to ensure that it operates fairly, transparently, and in line with the public interest. Workers' safety, citizens' rights, and community well-being must take precedence over short-term profits.

Roof Gardening

We are proposing the introduction of financial incentives for roof gardening that can significantly promote urban greening and environmental sustainability. By offering tax rebates, grants, or subsidies for rooftop gardens, the government can encourage residents and businesses to transform unused roof spaces into green areas. Roof gardens reduce urban heat, improve air quality, and contribute to biodiversity. They also offer insulation benefits, lowering energy costs for heating and cooling. These incentives would not only enhance the aesthetic appeal of urban areas but also support sustainable living practices, making cities more resilient to climate change while fostering community well-being and environmental stewardship.

Enforcement

We applaud the government for the setting up of the Building Construction Authority, the enactment of the New Health and Safety Legislation regulating the Occupational Health and Safety Authority, the introduction of contractor licensing, and the new consultation for the introduction of the stone mason licensing and the introduction of the new helpline. No accidental death in any workplace is acceptable. Nobody should go out to work and never return to his/her family. During the past years, the highest number of deaths was recorded in the construction industry. We are proposing a stringent and rigorous control measures at construction sites to ensure

optimal safety and efficiency. This will involve stringent adherence to health and safety protocols, continuous monitoring of personnel, equipment, and materials, regular and frequent inspections by qualified supervisors, strict enforcement of protective gear usage, and comprehensive and continuous training programs.

We are proposing that training on hazard identification and risk mitigation to minimize accidents, injuries, and property damage. Effective communication channels must be established to disseminate vital information promptly and efficiently. Through this approach, we aim to create a secure environment that fosters productivity while safeguarding the well-being of workers.

We are also proposing rigorous enforcement of all regulations and if a contractor fails to abide by the regulations, its license must be revoked immediately.

Table and Chairs and Open Spaces

To ensure public safety and accessibility, it is essential to enforce strict regulations on the placement of tables and chairs on roads and pavements. Increasingly, businesses are using public spaces for outdoor seating, often encroaching on pedestrian walkways and roads, creating hazards and obstructing access for pedestrians, including those with disabilities.

We are proposing the enforcing of the current rules and guidelines that specify the permissible areas for placing tables and chairs, ensuring they do not impede pedestrian movement or compromise safety. Regular inspections and penalties on the spot for non-compliance should be implemented to maintain order and fairness. Additionally, a permit system could be introduced, requiring businesses to apply for and display permits indicating approved seating areas. This approach would balance the needs of businesses with the rights of the public, fostering a safer and more accessible urban environment.

Environmental Laws

We are proposing enforcing current environmental legislation to safeguard our island's future. Strengthening regulatory measures will curb pollution, protect biodiversity, and promote sustainable practices. Transparent monitoring and stringent penalties for violations will ensure accountability. Collaborating with stakeholders and empowering environmental agencies will bolster conservation efforts. By upholding these laws, we can foster a cleaner, healthier environment for

generations to come, mitigating climate change and preserving our natural balance. Together, we must embrace a responsible approach, respect nature's limits, and secure a greener, more sustainable future for all.

We are proposing strict ODZ (Outer Development Zone) protection to preserve and protect designated areas surrounding urban centres from urban sprawl and uncontrolled development. Strict enforcement in urban planning policies, the strategy restricts new constructions and activities in these zones, promoting sustainable development within the urban core, and preserving natural landscapes and agricultural land is essential for a healthy society. By doing so, we aim to help maintain ecological balance, prevent environmental degradation, and safeguard biodiversity.

Groundwater is being constantly abused and should stop immediately. Strong enforcement on the protection of groundwater since such abuse is introducing more salt to the water table, destroying such resources. Citizens and companies extracting it illegally should be heavily fined, named, and shamed.

Enforcement of the environmental laws. To date, one can still see beach concessions and deck chair providers occupying whole beaches and seashores which is against the law. Also, the public should be guaranteed access to all the coasts/beaches.

We are proposing a new allocation fund towards local councils for the purchase and planting of mature indigenous trees in their localities. This would create a much greener streetscape. The current citizens may enjoy mature trees, and they can reduce the elevated temperatures Malta is currently facing.

Green Economy

The green economy is distinguishable from traditional economic models in that it considers natural and ecological capital and related services as having an economic sustainable value. Greening the economy is seen as an opportune mechanism that contributes to long-term prosperity, and short-term costs are likely to be compensated by multiple potential benefits in terms of increased competitiveness, jobs, improvement of security of resource supply, including energy and raw materials, inclusiveness, health, and well-being. Numerous international studies conducted point towards the increased resilience that is built into the economy when it embraces green concepts and technologies.

The government should accelerate investment in sustainable energy infrastructure and the creation of green jobs, as well as meet the UN Sustainable Development Goals, in particular SDG 7, to ensure access to affordable, dependable, sustainable, and modern energy for all.

We welcome the government's decision to introduce a new Authority to monitor the impact of climate change and mitigate its impact. In addition, we are proposing that the same Authority be responsible for the UN Social Development Goals and the Environmental, Social, and Governance Standards. We also propose that a holistic and national policy that is forward thinking to protect our environment both rural and urban is introduced.

We are proposing incentives to drive the industry towards sustainable practices by rewarding businesses that actively reduce, reuse, and recycle waste. We propose tax credits and grants to companies implementing innovative waste reduction technologies, investing in efficient recycling processes, and adopting circular economy principles. Additionally, we are proposing a certification program to recognize and promote eco-friendly businesses, boosting their market reputation.

Collaborative partnerships with recycling centres and waste management firms will be encouraged, promoting a closed-loop approach. Through these incentives, we hope to create a greener and more sustainable future while fostering responsible corporate citizenship and driving positive environmental change.

We are proposing enhanced schemes to encourage the use of alternate transport such as electric bicycles and motorcycles. In addition, we propose that where possible future roads include bicycles lanes.

We are proposing an increase in more green schemes to go hand in hand with the 'Fit For 55' package.

This could lead to Malta being entitled to more money from European funds. Investment in workers is crucial so that no one is allowed to fall behind, especially when it comes to re-training.

Strengthening Malta's Public Transport System

In line with the government's Reshaping Our Mobility strategy and the long-term objectives of Malta Vision 2050, the General Workers' Union proposes a

comprehensive plan to make public transport the backbone of Malta's mobility system.

First, we recommend increasing the number of buses on key routes, particularly during peak hours and in growing industrial and residential areas. This will help reduce overcrowding, shorten waiting times, and encourage workers and families to shift from private cars to public transport. The type and quality of buses introduced are fundamental: new fleets should be modern, electric, and accessible, ensuring that public transport also contributes to Malta's decarbonisation goals.

Second, improving the efficiency and reliability of bus services is essential. Expanding dedicated bus lanes, introducing stronger traffic management measures, and optimising route schedules will ensure punctuality and predictability. Real-time tracking systems, already underway, must be scaled up and integrated with digital mobility platforms to make services more transparent and user-friendly.

Third, we propose the expansion of bus stops and shelters across underserved localities. Every bus stop should provide adequate protection from sun and rain, making commuting more dignified and inclusive. This measure will improve accessibility and support increased ridership across all age groups.

Fourth, we call for strong accountability measures in the agreement with the service provider. Heavy penalties must apply if contractual obligations are not met, including adherence to agreed schedules, fleet requirements, and service frequencies. Public transport is a public good, and its quality must be rigorously enforced.

Finally, these measures must be integrated into a holistic transport vision that links buses with other modes, including park-and-ride facilities, cycling networks, and the future mass transit system foreseen under Vision 2050.

By improving service reliability, accessibility, and sustainability, Malta can transform its bus system into a credible alternative to private cars. This shift will reduce congestion, cut emissions, and build a transport system that supports the well-being of citizens, the productivity of workers, and the long-term sustainability of the country.

Revival of Shared Mobility Services

The General Workers' Union proposes the revival and sustainable operation of shared mobility services, including carpooling, car-sharing, and electric car rental

schemes, which have unfortunately ceased operating in recent years. These services are essential to reducing reliance on privately owned vehicles and to promoting a more sustainable transport system. To support their viability, vehicles forming part of such schemes should be granted access to free dedicated off-road parking spaces through partnerships with private car parks. By facilitating shared mobility, Malta can reduce traffic congestion, ease parking pressures, and advance its environmental and mobility objectives.

Upgrading of pavements

We propose upgrading of pavements to ensure they are fully accessible for pensioners and disabled individuals. Currently, pavements are often adjusted to garage heights, creating barriers that make them difficult to use. The proposal includes installing ramps and adjusting pavement heights to align with accessibility standards, ensuring smooth, level surfaces that accommodate wheelchairs, walkers, and other mobility aids. Regular maintenance and the inclusion of tactile paving for the visually impaired should also be considered. These improvements will enhance safety and mobility, allowing all individuals to navigate their communities more easily and independently.

Car-free Zones

We propose transforming core villages into car-free zones to enhance local quality of life and environmental sustainability. By restricting vehicle access, these areas can become safer and more pleasant for pedestrians, promoting healthier lifestyles and vibrant community interactions. Implementing dedicated pedestrian pathways, bike lanes, and improved public transport options will support this transition, reducing traffic congestion and air pollution. Additionally, introducing car-free zones can boost local businesses by increasing foot traffic and creating a more attractive shopping environment. This initiative will not only preserve the charm of core villages but also foster a more sustainable and connected community.

Planning of Road Works & Traffic Management

Traffic management has become one of the most pressing challenges in Malta, affecting residents, businesses, and commuters alike. At present, the system is fragmented, with local councils independently issuing permits for road closures without proper consideration of the wider impact. This often results in multiple roads

being closed at the same time, creating bottlenecks, congestion, and in some cases, entire areas being blocked by cranes or heavy machinery. Such inefficiencies not only disrupt daily life but also undermine public confidence in the authorities responsible for ensuring mobility.

The General Workers' Union proposes the creation of a central authority responsible for monitoring, coordinating, and issuing all road closure permits nationwide. A single accountable body would allow for proper planning and scheduling, ensuring that closures are staggered, emergency access is maintained, and alternative routes are clearly identified. This would reduce duplication, improve traffic flow, and provide a more efficient and reliable system that serves both public and commercial interests. To strengthen compliance, heavy fines should also be imposed on individuals or entities that close roads without proper authorization.

Equally important is the effective planning of road works. Continuous communication and coordination between competent authorities, contractors, and service providers are essential to avoid unnecessary delays. Clear completion dates should be established in tender documents to hold contractors accountable and to give the public the ability to plan accordingly. To further reduce disruption, especially in high-traffic areas, the rate of night work should be increased on main roads. By carrying out operations outside peak hours, the need for multiple simultaneous closures can be reduced, easing the burden on commuters. A centralised scheduling system should also be introduced to prevent overlapping projects in nearby areas.

By adopting these measures, Malta can significantly reduce traffic congestion, improve the efficiency of road works, and enhance public trust in the planning process. Effective traffic management and road works coordination are essential for ensuring that necessary infrastructure improvements are delivered while allowing the smooth functioning of daily life.

Alternative use of Hydrogen fuel

We are proposing the use of more environmentally friendly energy like hydrogen for the generation of electricity and as fuel. Our proposal advocates for a significant shift towards utilizing environmentally friendly energy sources, particularly hydrogen, to revolutionize electricity generation. Hydrogen, an abundant and clean resource, offers immense potential to mitigate climate change and reduce carbon emissions. By employing hydrogen-based technologies such as fuel cells and hydrogen

combustion, we can transition away from gas and fossil fuels and establish a sustainable energy future.

Hydrogen's versatility allows it to be produced through various methods, including electrolysis powered by renewable sources like solar and wind energy. This not only ensures a clean production process but also enables efficient storage and utilization. Furthermore, hydrogen-based electricity generation emits only water vapor as a byproduct, eliminating harmful pollutants and contributing to improved air quality.

Embracing hydrogen as a primary energy source for electricity generation would foster energy independence, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and drive economic growth through the development of modern technologies and industries. As we strive for a greener and more sustainable world, the integration of hydrogen into our energy landscape holds the promise of a cleaner, healthier, and more prosperous future for generations to come.

Electric Vehicles Grants

Currently, the grant to purchase new electric vehicles is set at €8,000, with the potential of a €1,000 add-on for those scrapping their previous vehicle. The amount of the grant was revised this year decreasing from €11,000. Also, electric, and plug-in hybrid vehicles with a range of 50km or more will remain exempt from registration tax and exempt from paying annual road licenses for five years from the date of first registration.

To encourage even more the use of cleaner vehicles we are proposing the increase of the grant from €8,000 to €15,000 and the exemption of registration and road license tax increased to 10 years. The scrappage scheme should be doubled.

Alternative Means of Mass Transportation

More energy and investment must be directed towards the creation of a clean and reliable mass transportation system that goes beyond the current bus network. The General Workers' Union is proposing the development of alternative mass transport options, both by land and sea, that connect different localities more efficiently. Maritime transport, particularly through ferry and fast-ferry services, has already demonstrated its potential to offer quicker, cleaner, and less congested commuting options between Valletta, Sliema, the Three Cities, Bugibba and Gozo. Expanding this system to other coastal communities, supported by integrated ticketing with buses

and park-and-ride facilities, could significantly reduce reliance on private cars and ease pressure on the existing road network.

At the same time, Malta should continue exploring innovative land-based solutions, including investment in future green mass transit options such as light rail or metro systems as foreseen in Vision 2050. These efforts must be complemented by the introduction of low-emission or electric vessels and buses, aligning with Malta's decarbonisation goals under the twin transition.

While maritime transport brings clear opportunities in terms of reduced congestion, faster travel times, and environmental benefits, challenges such as weather dependency, infrastructure limitations, and affordability must be addressed through careful planning and long-term investment. By embracing a multi-modal approach that combines buses, ferries, cycling, and future mass transit, Malta can deliver a transport system that is cleaner, more sustainable, and more inclusive, meeting the needs of workers, families, and future generations.

Investment in Essential Infrastructure

We applaud the government for the implementation of the accelerated investment in energy distribution; we also recognize the critical need to enhance and upgrade other essential infrastructure to improve the overall well-being and sustainability of our country. As part of our comprehensive plan, we propose substantial investments in sewage, water, and other vital systems.

The sewage system is the backbone of public health, and we need to continuously monitor, modernize, and expand its capacity to meet the growing demands of our population. By continuing investing in state-of-the-art treatment plants like the one in Barkat and other advanced waste management technologies, we will ensure cleaner water and a healthier environment for generations to come.

Water infrastructure is fundamental to human life and economic prosperity. Investment in our water network needs to focus on the expansion and renovation of water supply networks, utilizing innovative approaches to conserve water and enhance efficiency. We need to continue to provide safe and reliable access to clean drinking water for all citizens, while also supporting agricultural and industrial sectors.

Moreover, we recognize the importance of upgrading other essential infrastructure, such as our road network. By improving transportation networks, we aim to reduce

congestion, enhance accessibility, and promote sustainable mobility options, contributing to a greener and more connected society.

Overall, our comprehensive infrastructure investment proposals will not only foster economic growth but will also improve the quality of life for all citizens.

Beverage Container Refund Scheme

The BCRS system is widely accepted by the public. The only criticism received by the union is about the number of machines around the island. The recycling rate of around 98% is proof of the enormous success of the system. Despite this success, there is a pressing need to address the issue of plastic and metal container dependency.

To this effect we are proposing the increase of machines around Malta and Gozo.

To address the dependency on plastic and metal containers, we are proposing a multi-faceted approach. Apart from conducting educational campaigns to raise awareness and encourage the public to reduce their reliance on plastic bottles, we are proposing the continuance of the subsidies on water purifiers and reverse osmosis systems. The goal is to ensure every household has access to these systems, thereby decreasing the demand for single-use containers and promoting the use of refillable alternatives. This initiative will empower households to purify and filter their own tap water, eliminating the need for purchasing bottled water and reducing plastic waste.

Youths and Education

Education is the foundation of human development and economic growth. In essence, no country can achieve sustainable economic development without substantial investment in human resources. Education enriches peoples understand, improves the quality of their lives, and leads to broad social benefits to individuals and society. Education drives productivity and creativity and promotes entrepreneurship and technological advances. It thus plays a very crucial role in securing economic resilience and social progress and improving income distribution.

Youth Entrepreneurship and Education Proposal

We are proposing an increase in grants or low-interest loans for young entrepreneurs to encourage innovative startups and small businesses, which can drive economic growth and job creation. We are also proposing an increase in grants for youths to take part in sports programs, which can promote more professional athletes in different sports disciplines.

School curricula should reflect today's reality and must be adapted to the requirements of the new world of work. Guidance counselling is of the utmost importance and students should be informed about the existing professions so that they can make informed decisions about the future of their studies.

Furthermore, we believe that our educational system is lacking valuable information and knowledge that is essential for our youths' future. Topics such as life skills, property buying procedures, knowledge about their working and fundamental rights, communication, and financial literacy are not covered. To address this lack of knowledge, we propose an innovative approach to education that focuses on preparing students for life after school. This approach should value critical thinking and ensure that students are well-informed on the mentioned subjects.

Internship and traineeship

We propose the implementation of a structured internship and traineeship program that mirrors the apprenticeship pay mechanism. This initiative aims to bridge the gap between education and employment by providing students and young professionals with practical, firsthand experience in their chosen fields, while also ensuring they are fairly compensated for their contributions.

The proposed program would establish a standardized framework for internships and traineeships across various industries. This framework would include clear guidelines on the duration, scope of work, learning outcomes, and mentorship responsibilities to ensure that the experience is both educational and professionally valuable. To further incentivize participation, we propose introducing a pay mechanism like that of apprenticeships, where interns and trainees receive a stipend or wage that reflects their level of contribution, and hours worked.

By aligning the pay structure with the apprenticeship model, this program would not only provide financial support to interns and trainees but also recognize the

importance of their role within the organization. This approach would help reduce barriers to entry for those who may otherwise be unable to afford unpaid or low-paid positions, ensuring that opportunities are accessible to a more diverse range of candidates.

Moreover, the introduction of this pay mechanism would encourage businesses to invest in the development of future talent, fostering a culture of continuous learning and growth. Employers would benefit from a motivated and engaged workforce, while interns and trainees would gain valuable industry experience, enhancing their employability and career prospects.

In summary, this proposal seeks to create a more equitable and effective pathway from education to employment by making internships and traineeships more structured, meaningful, and financially sustainable. By adopting a pay mechanism akin to apprenticeships, we can ensure that these opportunities are accessible to all, ultimately contributing to a more skilled and diverse workforce.

Education on Workers' Rights and Trade Unionism

The General Workers' Union proposes that education on workers' rights and trade unionism be incorporated into the national curriculum. From an early stage, students should be made aware of their rights and responsibilities in the workplace, as well as the role that trade unions play in safeguarding fairness, equality, and decent working conditions. By embedding these values within the education system, Malta can nurture a generation of informed workers who are better equipped to stand up for their rights, engage in social dialogue, and contribute positively to a more just and democratic labour market.

Working permit for refugee students

We propose the waiving of the working permit fee for refugee students, those who have been granted international or national protection status. The students have the access to enrolled in any course at MCAST or any other educational institution. In the eventuality that these courses entail the completion of a small number of apprenticeship hours, then they need to pay the working permit fee. This fee creates an unfair recruitment environment, with these students.

Individual Learning Accounts

Presently a local working committee is studying the possibility of the introduction in Malta of Individual Learning Accounts (ILA) similar to those already being run in Germany, The Netherlands and Spain, amongst others.

As the ILA offer numerous benefits, particularly for learners who seek to enhance their skills, pursue professional development, or adapt to new career opportunities as the programme provides financial assistance, which helps cover the costs of courses, training materials, or certifications. This reduces the financial burden on learners, making education and upskilling more accessible.

The programme helps individuals identify and address specific skills gaps, making them more competitive in their current roles or when seeking new employment. This targeted approach ensures that learners acquire skills that are directly relevant to their career paths, thus, boosts employability and career advancement. ILA training programmes will foster a culture of learning in Organisations leading to more skilled, engaged, and loyal workforce.

Hence we are proposing that the Government will acquire EU funding to launch such scheme and will start with one or two days (1-2) days leave per year to those employees attending these courses which will be added up by one (1) day per year, for the next 4 years.

Introduction to Healthier Lifestyle

The successful breakfast benefit, 3-16 club, and summer school should become mandatory for all schools including private ones.

Physical activity and nutritional education in schools, should be an integral part of the curriculum which in turn will reduce obesity and other health risks related to lack of physical activity.

Educational curriculum should also focus on transversal skills that will help the transition from the school to the working world. Sometimes the transition from an individual environment to teamwork is difficult. We also believe that education should not only be academic, but it must also teach respect & attitude.

Get-Qualified scheme

We propose extending the Get-Qualified scheme beyond 2025 to continue supporting individuals in pursuing further education and professional development.

This tax credit initiative has been instrumental in making higher education more accessible, enabling students and professionals to upskill and meet the evolving demands of the job market. Extending the scheme would not only encourage lifelong learning but also help bridge skill gaps in key industries, fostering economic growth and innovation. By continuing this valuable program, we can ensure that more individuals can advance their careers and contribute meaningfully to the economy.

Direct transportation to MCAST and other Educational Institutions

We propose the introduction of direct transport options, such as shuttle buses, from park-and-ride locations across Malta to MCAST and other large educational institutions during peak hours. This initiative would ease traffic congestion, reduce the carbon footprint, and provide students and staff with a more efficient and reliable way to commute. By offering a seamless connection between park-and-ride facilities and educational institutions, we can encourage the use of public transport, alleviate parking issues on campuses, and contribute to a more sustainable transportation system. This proposal supports both environmental goals and the convenience of the academic community.

Vocational Education and Training

Young people need help in navigating the increasingly difficult school-to-work transition. "Older workers will need expanded choices that enable them to remain economically active for as long as they choose and that will create a lifelong active society." ("Work for a brighter future – Global Commission on the Future of Work ...") All workers will need support through the increasing number of labour market transitions throughout their lives.

The GWU is proposing the accelerated implementation of Vocational and Training Institutions. This proposal is not just based to address early school leavers and the lack of skilled workers but also because trade schools can support the transitions to a green and digital economy in times of demographic change. Vocational Education Institutions can play a crucial role in increasing skills and improve employability, youth employability, and adults in need of continuous up- and reskilling. VET can benefit from the increased use of digital tools and digitisation systems. A national strategy on vocational education can play a significant role in VET in the lifelong learning continuum and its strong links to all education and training sectors.

Workplaces, social partners, and vocational institutes can work together to define the learning experience, working methods, and types of standard operating activities and map better, tailor-made courses to help youths achieve their full potential while increasing skills competencies. By reintroducing Vocational Schools, students with different educational aptitudes can reach their full potential in their working lives besides having a highly skilled workforce. We are sure that a well-structured vocational national strategy can help young people entering the labour market and equally important help adults in need of continuous up-skilling and re-skilling. The National Strategy must be flexible to understand the skills challenges, offer fast reskilling programmes, and link to future economic strategies and innovation systems. Additionally, the strategy can invest in business incubators, support start-ups and technology diffusion for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

To facilitate the increase in skills, we are proposing that educational institutions and the private sector should cooperate to upskill employees' skills. These courses should be held during working hours and on company premises. It is exceedingly difficult for employees, especially, those with children, to attend courses, outside working hours.

We are also proposing the launch of a strong campaign to attract students who excel in technical skills. This ensures their talents are recognised and developed, rather than being lost in the wider employment system.

Emphasis on Transversal Skills and Life Skills

The General Workers' Union proposes that schools place greater emphasis on transversal skills to ensure that future generations are equipped with the tools needed for adulthood. Areas such as basic legal and financial literacy, effective communication, and creativity should form part of the core educational experience. At the same time, lifesaving courses, including basic health and safety, should be formally accredited to provide students with practical skills that prepare them for real-life challenges. By embedding transversal and life skills within the curriculum, Malta can strengthen the personal development of its students and ensure they are better prepared for the demands of the modern world of work and society.

Gozo Budget Proposals

Gozo holds a unique place within the Maltese islands, both geographically and socially. Its smaller scale, distinct cultural identity, and relative isolation demand policies that are sensitive to its specific challenges while harnessing its opportunities. A sustainable vision for Gozo must balance economic growth with social well-being, connectivity, and environmental preservation. The proposals set out here are intended to address the structural imbalances faced by Gozitans while ensuring that the island contributes fully to the national vision of an inclusive and resilient Malta.

Connectivity and Infrastructure

Connectivity remains the cornerstone of Gozo's economic and social sustainability. While improvements in fast ferry services and discussions on a permanent link continue, immediate investment must be directed towards enhancing reliability, frequency, and affordability of transport between Gozo and Malta. Residents and workers must not be left at the mercy of irregular or expensive connections. A robust connectivity strategy must also include improvements in internal road networks, pedestrian pathways, and sustainable transport solutions within Gozo itself. Priority should be given to safe cycling routes, integrated public transport services, and maritime links that reduce car dependency.

We propose the establishment of an integrated connectivity framework that ensures reliable services across all modes of transport. Government should also subsidise the cost of inter-island commuting for Gozitan workers and students, reflecting the principle of fairness and equal opportunity. These measures would reduce social isolation and strengthen Gozo's role in the wider Maltese economy.

Economic Development and Employment

Gozo's economy must evolve beyond its dependency on traditional sectors such as tourism and public employment. The island has significant untapped potential in digital industries, green technology, artisanal production, and niche agriculture. Government must incentivise private investment in these areas, providing targeted tax benefits and infrastructure support for businesses that choose to establish operations in Gozo. Employment policies should also emphasise training and

reskilling opportunities tailored to the island's future growth sectors, ensuring that Gozitans can access decent and well-paid jobs locally without having to commute to Malta.

We propose the creation of a Gozo-specific innovation hub that brings together local entrepreneurs, international investors, and academic institutions. Such a hub could foster start-ups in digitalisation, artificial intelligence, renewable energy, and sustainable tourism, providing new avenues for employment while reinforcing Gozo's contribution to Malta's twin transition.

Education and Skills

Access to education and training in Gozo must be placed at the forefront of social development. Students should not be disadvantaged simply because of geography. The GWU believes that investment in post-secondary and tertiary education facilities in Gozo is vital to prevent brain drain and provide young people with opportunities close to home. Programmes in technical skills, vocational training, and digital competencies should be expanded, ensuring that the workforce is equipped for the evolving labour market.

We propose targeted scholarships and bursaries for Gozitan students, particularly in fields that are aligned with the island's economic priorities such as environmental sciences, hospitality management, and ICT. The National Skills Council should establish a dedicated branch in Gozo to accelerate skills recognition and certification for workers, ensuring that no talent goes unrecognised.

Health and Well-being

Access to healthcare in Gozo remains uneven compared to Malta, particularly in specialised areas. The Mater Dei–Gozo General Hospital link is still overburdened and waiting times for specialist services are disproportionately high. Gozitans must not be treated as second-class citizens when it comes to healthcare.

We propose expanding telemedicine services and ensuring that key specialities are permanently available in Gozo, reducing the need for costly and time-consuming travel to Malta. In addition, investment should be made in mental health facilities, elderly care, and preventive health programmes to ensure a holistic approach to well-being. Affordable housing initiatives must also be extended to Gozo, recognising that rising property prices are a growing concern for young families and workers.

Environment and Sustainability

Gozo has long been branded as an “eco-island,” but this vision requires concrete action. Environmental sustainability must underpin all future development. Stronger measures are needed to protect Gozo’s natural heritage, reduce waste, and promote renewable energy solutions. With its smaller size, Gozo is ideally placed to serve as a model of environmental innovation for Malta and the Mediterranean region.

We propose accelerated investment in solar and wind energy projects on the island, alongside incentives for households and businesses to adopt green practices. Waste management must be strengthened through education campaigns and stricter enforcement, including penalties for illegal dumping. Investment in sustainable agriculture and water conservation is also critical to ensure that Gozo’s rural identity is preserved for future generations.

Gozo’s challenges are unique, but so are its opportunities. A coherent strategy for the island must balance connectivity, economic growth, education, healthcare, and sustainability. By investing in infrastructure, diversifying the economy, empowering workers, and preserving the environment, Gozo can become not only a stronger part of Malta but also a regional model of inclusive and sustainable development. These proposals are intended to ensure that Gozitans enjoy the same rights, opportunities, and quality of life as all citizens of Malta, in line with the aspirations of Malta Vision 2050 and the National Employment Policy 2021–2030.

Conclusion

The proposals outlined in this document represent more than a list of demands; they form a coherent vision for a fairer, stronger, and more inclusive Malta. The challenges facing our nation from rising living costs and demographic shifts to the twin transition of digitalisation and sustainability require bold choices and long-term planning. Yet at the heart of every challenge lies a common principle: the dignity and well-being of people. This is the measure against which any budget must be judged.

We have highlighted the urgent need for reforms that protect workers’ rights, strengthen pensions, and guarantee that all citizens enjoy decent living standards. We have called for policies that promote education, skills, and lifelong learning so that every worker can adapt and thrive in a rapidly changing labour market. We have addressed pressing social issues such as affordable housing, mental health, civic

discipline, fair taxation, and social security reform, each essential to building stability and fairness across society. These are not isolated issues but interconnected priorities that shape the daily lives of workers and families.

The GWU has also looked to the future. We have embraced the opportunities and challenges brought by digitalisation, artificial intelligence, and the green transition, insisting that workers must remain at the centre of these transformations. At the same time, we have recognised that demographic realities and declining fertility rates pose long-term risks to social cohesion and sustainability. In each case, we have presented practical proposals that balance ambition with responsibility.

Underlying all our proposals is a belief in solidarity and fairness. Whether through ensuring equal pay, protecting migrant and vulnerable workers, introducing fairer taxation, or supporting the rights of pensioners, our vision is one of a society where every citizen has the opportunity to live with dignity and security. This requires not only economic measures but also a renewed commitment to values, to justice, compassion, and respect for all.

The GWU calls on government, employers, and social partners to view these proposals not as competing interests but as shared investments in Malta's future. A strong and fair society is one where prosperity is widely shared, where no worker is left behind, and where the next generation can aspire to better opportunities. These proposals are therefore not simply about the present year's budget, but about shaping a Malta that is inclusive, resilient, and humane.