

News

Archdiocese sets up Voluntary Solidarity Fund, donates €5,000

■ Giulia Magri

The Archdiocese of Malta is setting up what will be known as Voluntary Solidarity Fund (VSF) and is the first to donate €5,000 to the fund itself, Auxiliary Bishop Joseph Galea Curmi said yesterday.

Addressing a press conference, Bishop Galea Curmi said that the fund is being set up by the archdiocese as part of an international network. He said that the VSF comes at a crucial time when Pope Francis has called for a new leadership based on solidarity and the common good. VSF is a social organisation with the main goal to help deprived people to stand on their own socially and economically, and to reduce poverty and uphold human dignity.

He explained that VSF does not compete with existing charities and other organisations that provide such sustenance, but to complement them by creating a new tool intended to counter socio-economic decay. He said that VSF



Photo: Alenka Falzon

will also make micro loans through partner financial institutions for the set-up of small businesses.

“Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime” - Josef Bonnici

Former PN Economy Minister

and Central Bank Governor Professor Josef Bonnici, who is chairing the fund, said that VSF's ethos can be summarised by the

well-known proverb, “give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish, and you feed him for a lifetime.”

Bonnici said that the Fund will be reaching out to companies, businesses and people who have a higher income and who have financial and other talents, to contribute voluntarily to VSF. The main focus of the fund is to find means of sustaining and helping those individuals to gain skills to participate more in society and become socially independent.

These funds can help those also who wish to start their own business, especially if they do not have enough capital or resources themselves. That way these persons can live a better life and contribute to society.

He explained that VSF will work with a system of revolving loans, with individuals who gained positively from VSF by starting out their own businesses slowly paying back the capital to VSF. That way, the money can be given to other people who applied for aid through VSF.



Between 39% and 57% of migrant women in Malta at risk of female genital mutilation

Between 39% and 57% of migrant women living in Malta are at risk of feminine genital mutilation, a procedure that is illegal, a conference heard yesterday morning.

The data comes from a study conducted by the European Institute for Gender Equality in six European Union countries – Malta, Belgium, France, Italy, Greece and Cyprus.

It is estimated that around 180,000 women are at risk of FGM in Europe.

The study found that the women who are most at risk of female genital mutilation come from Somalia, Eritrea and Ethiopia respectively.

The main reasons are cultural, religious and traditional customs that are still practiced despite

being a criminal act considered as gender-based violence.

Equality Minister Helena Dalli said Malta had criminalised the procedure in 2014. This important step was followed by the full transposition of the directive that sets standards on the rights, support and protection given to victims of criminality as well as the Istanbul Convention, which introduced harsh penalties on gender-based crimes.

However, laws alone are not enough and the state should offer full support to victims of female genital mutilation, Dalli said.

The government, she said, is committed to invest further in education, training and the professional skills of those who work with the victims of FGM.



An increase of €8 million per year on cancer medicines

Over the past 18 months the number of cancer medicines made available free by the government has increased by eight, at a cost of €8 million per year, said Health Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Chris Fearnle.

Speaking earlier at a conference on World Cancer Day, organised by the Office of the President, Fearnle said that treatment will continue to improve.

He also said during the same period more than 600 patients were benefiting from a new innovative service. Such patients suffering from three different types of cancer are being treated in an indi-

vidual and personal manner.

Another programme launched during these past 18 months was the concept of a navigator, which guides particular patients through the various stages of treatment. That way the risk that a patient misses out on some form of treatment is reduced.

This innovative service for Malta began for pancreas cancer cases, and around 300 patients have benefitted from it. Now lung cancer patients can also benefit from it and further 150 patients are making use of this service. A similar service is to start for around 170 prostate cancer pa-

tients who will also benefit from it.

Fearnle said that the five pillars to tackle cancer are prevention, early screening, treatment, rehabilitation and research; all of which form part of the National Strategy which was released 18 months ago. He said that prevention can come from simply living a healthier lifestyle, eating a balanced diet, avoid smoking and large consumption of alcohol and dedicate time for physical exercise.

A campaign on healthy eating and lifestyles will be launched with Local Councils in the coming months.