Mr Chair,

My delegation aligns itself with the statement delivered by the Delegation of the European Union. I would therefore like to make only a few additional remarks from our national perspective under agenda item 65a.

The Maltese Government is giving priority to children’s rights, and plans are being set in motion in a bid to offer children more protection.

A National Commission for Child Policy and Strategy has been set up in June 2013 by the Minister for the Family and Social Solidarity with the task of developing a child-rights based strategy and policy for children, based on child participation. The Commission is also tasked with drafting a children’s act and a children’s policy to protect the rights and interests of children, following due consultation with children. Moreover, in pursuance of such objective, the Commission is drafting and amending legislation to address all aspects of children’s rights, including matters of care orders, adoption and fostering.
The role of the Commissioner for Children in Malta is also expected to be strengthened and given the powers to implement decisions.

Mr Chair,

Measures aimed at enhancing child care facilities in Malta are being intensified in order to consolidate childcare facilities and ensure accessibility to quality child care for all in line with Maltese Government policy. The standards of child care in the country are being raised through various initiatives including the voluntary regulation of the sector, training of child carers and incentive schemes to improve child care facilities.

In Malta, state kindergarten education (0-3 years) is provided free of charge and accessible to all. Also, an after-school hours' service for school-age children between 3 and 16 years is offered by the Foundation for Educational Services within the Ministry of Education and Employment. The service bridges the gap between school and parents' work finishing times, and apart from continuing to contribute to improvement of the working conditions of working parents provides also further opportunities for children to develop social, emotional and learning skills.

Mr Chair,

With the rise in recent years in the percentage of children at risk of poverty and social exclusion, Malta recognises the long term economic benefits of social investment in child wellbeing and is therefore adopting a life course approach based on prevention and early intervention, which are key to breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty, by addressing poverty among children.

Amongst the more recent measures undertaken, one can mention the increase in children's allowances for families and the advance payment of such allowances to coincide with the start of the current school term. The Cost of Living Allowance (COLA) for means tested and non-contributory benefits such as supplementary assistance and energy benefit schemes has also been increased to help more vulnerable households. Moreover, as from 1st January of this year maternity leave has been increased from 16 weeks to 18 weeks. Furthermore, measures aimed at increasing accommodation
facilities for children who need to be removed from their birth family are being carried out.

In Malta, the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality works to raise awareness with children and to empower them on issues related to equality, discrimination and stereotypes. In fact, the Commission carries out training with different groups of stakeholders, including groups of children and students to disseminate information on this subject matter.

The Ministry responsible for Education also undertakes various initiatives to promote equal opportunities and improve service delivery, particularly in the case of those who are disadvantaged or in need of more help, by fostering an inclusive education approach for students in need of a learning support assistant.

Mr Chair,

The above initiatives provide a brief overview of Malta's policy direction and priority actions for safeguarding the rights and promoting the well-being of children. However, despite the ongoing emphasis and the substantial developments made in this particular area, combating child poverty remains a major national challenge. Efforts are hence being intensified by the Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity to prevent and counteract those factors which may impact negatively upon the well-being of children. Malta is committed to seek further progress in this area by empowering children and thus also combat the intergenerational transmission of poverty and social exclusion.

Thank you.