### Background

**Caritas Malta** is a not-for-profit, non-governmental organisation which strives to eradicate poverty and promote a decent quality of life for the most vulnerable. Ensuring an accessible, appropriate, nutritious diet is one of its activities.

In 2019-2020, Caritas Malta conducted a study to establish a *Minimum Essential Budget for a Decent Living* (MEBDL), covering basic necessities such as food, and with a focus on low-income households.

### Objectives

Key MEBDL goals included:
- To calculate the monthly Euro amount required for food for three family configurations
- To offer evidence for food security policy development
- To produce tools for counselling on sustainable, healthy, low-cost meal planning

### RESULTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monthly cost of 7-day menu</th>
<th>2 adults &amp; 2 children</th>
<th>Lone parent &amp; 2 children</th>
<th>Elderly couple</th>
<th>Cost of food amounted to of the Basic MEBDL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basic</td>
<td>€593.45</td>
<td>€430.65</td>
<td>€281.24</td>
<td>41.51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic menu + Eating out (simple snack or meal)</td>
<td>€633.45</td>
<td>€460.65</td>
<td>€301.24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Specimen day menu for 2 adults and 2 children**

### Background & Objectives:

A study was conducted by Caritas Malta in 2019-20 to establish a *Minimum Essential Budget for a Decent Living* (MEBDL), covering basic necessities, including food. Key objectives included:
- To calculate the Euro amount required for food for three family types, to offer evidence for food security policy development, and to produce tools for counselling on food budgeting and meal planning.

### Study Design & Method:

Three 7-day menus were created, comprising three meals and two snacks daily and meeting the nutritional needs of three configurations of low-income households. Feedback on the menus was obtained from representatives of these target households during one-to-one or focus group interviews. The menus were then costed in a supermarket having moderate prices. Finally, the cost of national food aid packages distributed to low-income households was deducted from each of the three menu totals.

### Results:

The monthly cost of the three menus were €593.45, €430.65 and €281.24 for households made up of 2 adults and 2 children, 1 adult and 2 children, and 2 elderly persons, respectively. This cost corresponded to 41% to 51% of the total MEBDL. Adding eating out once a month increased the cost by €10 per person.

### Conclusions:

Feedback on the menus was sought from representatives of the 3 family types:
- 4 one-to-one interviews (partnered parent and lone parents)
- 2 focus group interviews (elderly individuals and lone parents)

The three menus were costed in a popular supermarket having moderate prices. Preference was given to foods which were local, fresh, and had an ‘healthy’ dietary/nutrition profile keeping in mind value for money.

The cost of food aid packages distributed by the state to low-income households as part of national food security programmes was also computed. This cost was deducted from each of the shop-cost totals to achieve the final cost of the three menus.

### ABSTRACT

**Background & Objectives:** A study was conducted by Caritas Malta in 2019-20 to establish a Minimum Essential Budget for a Decent Living (MEBDL), covering basic necessities, including food. Key objectives included:
- To calculate the Euro amount required for food for three family types, to offer evidence for food security policy development, and to produce tools for counselling on food budgeting and meal planning.

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**Conclusions:** In low-income Maltese households, a sustainable, healthy diet would account for a high share of the total expenses for basic necessities of low-income households. Nutrition educators have a key role in providing guidance to policymakers, and advice to households, on maximising nutrient density in dietary intake based on income. A selection of healthy, low-cost, weekly menus, such as those designed for the MEBDL, could be useful educational tools for those working with low-income families.