THE MEDICAL ASSOCIATION OF MALTA

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MAM condemns punitive Budget measures against third-country nationals and warns of serious consequences for Malta's healthcare system

"The doctors who save our lives and the nurses and carers who look after our loved ones deserve respect, not penalties."

The Medical Association of Malta (MAM) expresses its strong opposition to the punitive and discriminatory treatment of third-country nationals (TCNs) announced in Budget 2027. These measures risk undermining Malta's ability to attract and retain essential workers, particularly doctors, nurses and other healthcare professionals on whom our national health service increasingly depends.

At a time when Malta faces growing healthcare demands, an ageing population and increasing difficulties in attracting and retaining healthcare professionals, the Government has chosen to introduce measures that make life more expensive and less welcoming for the very people helping to sustain our healthcare system.

This is not merely a question of fairness towards foreign workers. It is a question of protecting the future of healthcare in Malta.

Malta needs more healthcare professionals, not fewer

Malta's healthcare needs are increasing, driven by population growth, demographic changes and an ageing society. The number of doctors and other healthcare professionals being trained and retained locally is insufficient to meet all the demands and staffing requirements of our healthcare services.

Recent demographic projections indicate that Malta will require substantial additional healthcare manpower over the coming decades. Meanwhile, falling birth rates mean that the pool of young people entering the local workforce will face increasing pressure in the years ahead.

Malta cannot simply assume that it will always have enough doctors, nurses and carers to meet these needs.

The consequences of failing to attract and retain sufficient healthcare professionals could be devastating: longer waiting lists, reduced service availability, greater workloads, increased pressure on existing staff and, ultimately, risks to patient safety.

We cannot afford policies that drive away the very professionals our healthcare system needs to survive.

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International doctors are already saving Maltese lives every day

Third-country national doctors are not an abstract statistic in an immigration debate.

They are our colleagues, working alongside Maltese doctors across our hospitals and healthcare services.

They are often the doctors who examine patients in the emergency department in the middle of the night, attend to critically ill patients, provide specialist care and help keep essential services running during weekends, nights and public holidays.

The next time you or someone you love needs urgent medical attention, there is a very real possibility that an international doctor will be involved in your diagnosis, treatment or care.

That doctor may be the person who recognises a life-threatening condition, stabilises your critically ill child, manages your parent's emergency or contributes to saving the life of someone you love.

And yet, after completing demanding clinical duties, that same doctor may now face additional charges simply to drive to work, higher commuting costs or the withdrawal of childcare support for their family.

How can we expect doctors to remain available for emergencies, overnight shifts and unpredictable working hours while making it more difficult for them to travel to hospital or arrange care for their own children?

Are we seriously proposing to penalise the very people who leave their families at night to care for ours?

These doctors are not asking for privileges. They deserve fairness, dignity and working and living conditions that recognise their essential contribution to our country.

Childcare is not a luxury for healthcare workers

The decision to restrict access to free childcare for newly eligible third-country national families is particularly concerning.

Doctors, nurses and other healthcare professionals frequently work outside conventional office hours. Their responsibilities do not end at five o'clock, and medical emergencies do not wait until childcare arrangements are convenient.

Many international healthcare workers live in Malta without the support of extended family networks that others may take for granted.

Making childcare more expensive places additional pressure on families already balancing demanding professional responsibilities with raising children.

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It may also discourage internationally recruited professionals from settling in Malta, building their lives here and committing themselves to long-term service within our healthcare system.

A country that needs skilled professionals must also be willing to provide a reasonable environment in which those professionals can raise their families.

And what about those caring for our elderly and vulnerable?

MAM's concerns extend beyond doctors and healthcare professionals.

Every day, thousands of Maltese families depend on carers and nurses, many of whom are third-country nationals, to look after elderly parents, relatives with disabilities and loved ones who can no longer live safely without assistance.

These are the people to whom we entrust some of the most vulnerable members of our families.

They help our parents wash, dress, eat, take their medication and maintain their dignity. They offer companionship and reassurance, and make it possible for families to continue working and fulfilling their daily responsibilities, knowing that their loved ones are being cared for.

We trust these workers with our parents and our loved ones. Surely they deserve more than to be treated primarily as a source of additional revenue.

The Government must consider the human and social consequences of measures that increase the financial burdens on people performing such essential work.

Malta risks losing its attractiveness to international professionals

Malta has succeeded in attracting highly qualified international doctors and healthcare professionals, including individuals bringing valuable specialist experience and expertise.

However, this position cannot be taken for granted.

Healthcare professionals are internationally mobile, and Malta competes with other countries seeking to recruit and retain the same skills.

The decision to relocate is influenced not only by salary but also by professional opportunities, job security, family welfare, quality of life and **the extent to which workers feel respected and valued.**

Punitive measures targeting third-country nationals risk sending a damaging message to existing and prospective recruits: that their contribution is welcome, but their families and wellbeing are afforded less consideration.

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The Government must recognise that international recruitment is not simply about filling vacancies. It is about attracting talented individuals, recognising their qualifications, integrating them into our healthcare system and providing sufficient security for them to remain.

Losing experienced healthcare professionals would mean losing not only manpower, but also valuable clinical experience, continuity of care and investment in professional integration.

A call for responsible and forward-looking policies

MAM recognises that Malta faces legitimate challenges relating to population growth, infrastructure, housing and the sustainability of public services.

However, these challenges require carefully planned, evidence-based policies, not discriminatory financial penalties and restrictions based on nationality or residence status.

The healthcare sector cannot be treated in the same manner as sectors in which labour requirements may be reduced through automation or other productivity measures. Technology can support healthcare professionals, but it cannot replace the clinical judgement, responsibility and human care essential to medical practice.

MAM therefore calls upon the Government to reconsider the measures affecting third-country nationals, particularly those providing essential healthcare and caring services.

Specifically, MAM calls for:

1. The withdrawal or substantial revision of punitive financial measures that disproportionately affect third-country nationals providing essential services.
2. The protection of access to affordable transport and childcare for international healthcare professionals and their families.
3. An exemption from the new €400 infrastructure contribution for doctors and other essential healthcare workers.
4. Greater employment and residence security for international healthcare professionals, including fair contractual arrangements and appropriate recognition of specialist qualifications and experience.
5. A comprehensive long-term national healthcare workforce strategy, addressing domestic medical training, recruitment, retention, career development, work-life balance, remuneration and pensions.

Healthcare is about people, not just numbers

Malta's health service depends on the commitment of thousands of dedicated professionals, Maltese, European and third-country nationals alike.

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They work together, often under considerable pressure, to provide care to everyone who needs it.

Our future healthcare system will depend on our ability to preserve that commitment and attract the next generation of professionals.

We must not create a country where we welcome international doctors to save our lives but make it increasingly difficult for them to build a life of their own.

And we must not forget the carers who look after our parents, our elderly and our most vulnerable loved ones with dignity and compassion.

The people who care for Malta deserve a Malta that cares for them.

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