

**National Report on Beijing +25**

**MALTA**

**October 2024**

**The thirtieth anniversary of the  
Fourth World Conference on Women and Adoption of the  
Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995)**

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## **List of Abbreviations**

BA	Broadcasting Authority
BPfA	Beijing Platform for Action
CCWR	Consultative Council for Women's Rights
CGBVDV	Commission for Gender-Based Violence & Domestic Violence
DIER	Department for Industrial and Employment Relations
DLAP	Department for Learning and Personal Development
EIGE	European Institute for Gender Equality
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
FSWS	Foundation for Social Welfare Services
GEI	Gender Equality Index
GEMSAP	Gender Equality & Mainstreaming Strategy and Action Plan
GMU	Gender Mainstreaming Unit
HRD	Human Rights Directorate
IMC	Inter-Ministerial Committee
MCAST	Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology
MPs	Members of Parliament
MJR	Ministry for Justice and Reforms in the Construction Sector
MTCA	Malta Tax and Customs Administrations
NCPE	National Commission for the Promotion of Equality
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics
THB	Trafficking in Human Beings

## Section One: Highlights

The **National Report on the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA)** outlines Malta's progress and continued efforts toward gender equality and the empowerment of women over the past five years. The report is structured into key sections, each highlighting various initiatives, challenges, and priorities in achieving gender equality across sectors, aligned with both national goals and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Malta has made significant strides in strengthening its gender equality framework, particularly through the launch of the **Gender Equality and Mainstreaming Strategy and Action Plan (GEMSAP)** in 2022. The country has improved women's participation in politics and the labour market, while also addressing gender-based violence and domestic violence through national strategies. However, challenges such as the gender pay gap and underrepresentation of women in senior decision-making roles persist.

The report highlights Malta's institutional framework, including the establishment of the Gender Mainstreaming Unit (GMU) in 2019, which oversees the implementation of GEMSAP. Furthermore, the Inter-Ministerial Committee on Gender Equality ensures coordination among ministries, while the Consultative Council for Women's Rights (CCWR) provides an advisory role on issues relevant to women's rights.

### 1. Key Areas of Progress:

- Political Representation: The introduction of gender quotas in politics has significantly increased female representation in Parliament, with the percentage of women MPs rising from 13% to 28% following the 2022 general election.
- Economic Empowerment: Malta has seen a remarkable rise in women's employment rates, with female labour force participation reaching 81.7% in 2023, surpassing the EU average. This success is largely attributed to family-friendly policies, such as free childcare services, the Breakfast Club, and the Club 3-16 program, which support working parents, particularly mothers.
- Combatting Gender-Based Violence: Malta has strengthened its legal framework to address gender-based violence (GBV) and domestic violence (DV). The country ratified the Istanbul Convention in 2018 and continues to implement national strategies aimed at prevention, protection, and support for survivors. In 2022, femicide was recognized as an aggravating offense under Maltese law. The report also highlights the establishment of the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Meeting (MARAM) to address high-risk cases of GBV and DV.

### Commitments to the 2030 Agenda

The report emphasizes Malta's commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 5 on gender equality. Through its national strategies, Malta aims to foster an inclusive society where gender equality is mainstreamed across all levels of policymaking, thus ensuring no one is left behind in the country's development efforts.

### Next Steps

Looking ahead, Malta remains focused on addressing the remaining gender disparities, particularly in leadership and economic empowerment. The report outlines priorities for the

coming years, including closing the gender pay gap, enhancing support for unpaid care work, and promoting more equitable work-life balance policies.

In conclusion, Malta is committed to advancing gender equality through a combination of legislative reforms, gender-sensitive policies, and continued engagement with stakeholders across society.

## Section Two: Priorities, achievements, challenges and setbacks

### 1. The most important achievements, challenges and setbacks in progress towards gender equality and empowerment of women over the past 5 years

The Maltese Government has taken several initiatives to address gender inequalities in legislation and policy to ensure equal opportunities for all. The progress of women's empowerment has been significant, and there is now greater awareness in society about the importance of gender equality for a better functioning society.

The Gender Mainstreaming Unit (GMU), established in 2019, has been reinforced in terms of capacity and resources. This unit falls under the Human Rights Directorate (HRD), which is responsible for the Government's human rights and equality mainstreaming and operates under the Parliamentary Secretary for Reforms and Equality within the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM).

The GMU's purpose is to oversee the day-to-day implementation of the Gender Equality Mainstreaming Strategy and Action Plan (GEMSAP), which was launched in 2022. It serves as the primary governmental coordinating body that interacts with various entities, provides information, and integrates the gender perspective into ongoing processes. The unit also highlights issues and concerns raised by women and gender minorities and their respective organizations with the goal of finding lasting solutions and aiding in government policy development in this area. Additionally, the unit seeks to maximize existing funding sources to enhance services, provide training, raise awareness, and build communities.

With 67.8 points out of 100, according to the 2023 European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) Gender Equality Index Malta ranks 14th in the EU. This score is 2.4 points below the score for the EU as a whole however, since 2010, Malta's score has increased by 13.4 points, which is one of the highest increases among the EU Member States. One driver of this change has been an improvement in the domain of power (+ 24.4 points). Since 2020, Malta's overall score has increased by 2.2 points, mainly due to improvements in the domains of knowledge (+ 4.9 points) and power (+ 4.9 points).

In 2022, Malta introduced its first Gender Equality and Mainstreaming Strategy & Action Plan (GEMSAP) 2022 – 2027. [GEMSAP](#) acknowledges that society cannot reach its full potential without enabling every individual to thrive equally, free from gender-based obstacles. Therefore, this strategy aims to identify and eliminate those obstacles by strengthening the gender perspective at all levels and stages of policy making.

The Gender Equality and Mainstreaming Strategy informs the Action Plan by adopting a dual approach. First, it introduces gender mainstreaming, which means incorporating a gender perspective into all stages and sectors of policymaking. Second, it commits to implementing direct, targeted measures to achieve full gender equality. Both approaches are essential as they ensure that policies are informed by the specific situations and needs of people, taking into account the challenges related to gender and identities in various aspects of life. This leads to more effective and fair policies, as well as a more equitable allocation of resources.

An Inter-ministerial Committee (IMC) on Gender Equality & Mainstreaming, monitored by HRD, has been established to ensure coordination between Ministries and the HRD in implementing the GEMSAP. The IMC consists of focal points from each ministry that are responsible for driving the agenda forward and reporting on progress made.

Another important structure to facilitate dialogue between the Government and civil society is the Consultative Council for Women's Rights (CCWR). This advisory body, established in 2019 and still functional to this day, aims to advise the government on issues relevant to women's emancipation and equality. It also proposes legislative measures, policies, and other actions to advance women's rights, consulting with the Minister. Members of the CCWR are nominated by the Minister from organizations working in the field of women's rights, and the CCWR works closely with the GMU.

Malta is also committed towards combatting gender-based violence and domestic violence through the strengthening of legal measures and policy development, together with the enhancement of the services provided. This is all being performed in the framework of the Istanbul Convention of the Council of Europe that Malta signed and ratified in 2014. Over the last years, Malta adopted various initiatives and implemented several measures aimed at addressing gender-based violence and domestic violence.

Malta has seen a significant increase in the employment rates of women over the past decade due to active labour market policies aimed at facilitating the entry of women, particularly mothers, into the workforce. According to Eurostat data, the female employment rate in 2023 was 81.7%, compared to the EU average of 75.3%.

Part of the success of the Maltese economy can be attributed to the rise in female participation. This increase can be directly linked to the National Employment Policy implemented in 2014, which included a set of active labour market policies designed to attract and encourage women to join the workforce. The policy provided support through various fiscal incentives, including the tapering of unemployment benefits, in-work benefits, and tax exemptions for women returning to work. Additionally, measures such as free childcare for children between three months and three years of age helped parents achieve a better work-life balance and promoted female participation in the labour market. These policies removed financial and non-financial barriers related to childcare, allowing women to pursue full-time employment and increase their income.

In addition to supply-side policies, the government introduced the Maternity Leave Benefit Fund to eliminate discrimination that could hinder the employment of young female workers. Employers in the private sector are required to make a yearly contribution for each employee, regardless of gender, and are then entitled to reimbursement for 14 weeks of maternity leave.

To further incentivize employment and reduce gender employability gaps, the Maltese government introduced the In-Work Benefit and the Tapering of Benefit schemes. The In-Work Benefit is aimed at assisting employed couples and single parents with children under 23 who are still dependent. The government plans to increase the annual threshold of the In-Work Benefit scheme to benefit more parents. A new in-work benefit scheme was also announced for workers with "atypical hours," providing them with a yearly payment of €150.

As part of the 2021-2030 National Employment Policy, the government has renewed its commitment to supporting industry-led training programs for women re-entering the labour market, particularly in STEM-related careers, where women are underrepresented. The goal of this initiative is to address gender imbalances in certain sectors.

The Ministry for Active Ageing has introduced the National Strategic Policy on Active Ageing for the period of 2023 to 2030. This policy includes key initiatives such as creating a centralized website featuring resources related to government pensions and various social benefits. The ministry also aims to enhance public awareness, including among migrant workers, regarding the importance of contributing to social security and making investments for improved retirement planning. Recent measures to address the pension gap include gradually granting

the equivalent of the full retirement pension of the deceased spouse to those who receive a widow's pension, contribution credits to women who stopped working because of parental or caring commitments, the revision of certain pensions where there was still gender discrimination, and other measures targeted to help individuals bridge gaps in their contributory record.

Malta strongly believes that mainstreaming gender into all levels of policy and decision-making is crucial to ensure that both women and men's concerns are addressed by our actions. Act No. XX of 2021 was a significant development in gender equality in political and public decision-making. It introduced, by virtue of Article 52A of the Maltese Constitution, a corrective mechanism whereby if the number of MPs identifying as the under-represented sex totals to less than forty per cent of all the elected Members of Parliament (MPs), twelve MPs of the under-represented sex will be added. This mechanism has a sunset clause of twenty years from its coming into force, unless revoked or re-enacted (requiring a two-thirds majority).

The same Act amended the General Elections Act (Cap. 354 of the Laws of Malta), increasing the number of members forming the Electoral Commission from eight to ten and requiring no less than four members of every sex. This mechanism was first put to the test during the 2022 general election and more than doubled the percentage of female Members of Parliament; from 13% in 2020 to 28% in 2022.

Malta's commitment to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) embodies a roadmap for progress that is sustainable and leaves no one behind. Achieving gender equality and women's empowerment is integral to each of the 17 goals. In fact, it is only by ensuring the rights of women and girls across all the goals that we will achieve justice and inclusion, sustainable economies and environment for future generations.

Through several initiatives undertaken by the Maltese Government throughout the past years, gender inequalities in both legislation and policy have been considerably reduced. Women's empowerment has made significant progress, and society has become more conscious of the importance of gender equality for a better functioning society.

#### *Developments relating to combating gender-based violence and domestic violence.*

The Commission for Gender-Based Violence and Domestic Violence (CGBVDV) is currently implementing the third national strategy and action plan on gender-based violence and domestic violence.

Malta's top priorities to combat gender-based violence (GBV) and domestic violence (DV) are reflected in policy and legislative developments which have been implemented over the past five years. These developments were guided by Malta's national strategies aimed at addressing GBV and DV; [Society's Concern: Gender-Based Violence and Domestic Violence Strategy and Action Plan \(2018-2020\)](#), [Second National Strategy and Action Plan on Gender-Based Violence and Domestic Violence \(2021-2022\)](#) and the current national strategy, [UNITE. ENGAGE. ELEVATE. National Strategy on Gender-Based Violence and Domestic Violence \(2023-2028\)](#). The action plans embedded in these strategies are based on the four pillars of the Istanbul Convention and the recommendations of the GREVIO's baseline evaluation report (2020). The Commission on Gender-Based Violence and Domestic Violence (CGBVDV) is the national coordinating body responsible for coordinating, implementing, monitoring and evaluating the national strategies to ensure the implementation of the Istanbul Convention in Malta. Malta has also published its first [National Strategy and Action Plan on Combatting](#)



[Trafficking in Human Beings in Malta \(2024-2030\)](#) to address forced prostitution and exploitation for sexual purposes as a crime.

Amongst the recent developments, one of the most significant is the legal amendment to the [Criminal Code](#) (Chapter 9 of the Laws of Malta). [Act No. X of 2022](#) recognises femicide as an aggravating offence and rejects the use of the so-called ‘crime of sudden passion’ defence strategy. In 2023, [Act No. XVIII of 2023](#) was implemented as a preventive measure encompassing a procedure where persons who feel at risk of experiencing DV and IPV may request information regarding their partner’s history of GBV and DV related convictions.

One of the crucial developments in the past years was the establishment of the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Meeting (MARAM) in July 2023. The MARAM provides a platform for professionals and stakeholders to conduct immediate action and safety planning in high-risk cases of GBV and DV.

Another significant implementation in line with Malta’s third National Strategy on GBV and DV, was the legal amendment of the legal definition of the family and domestic unit through [Act No. XXII of 2024](#) in the Gender-Based Violence and Domestic Violence Act (Chapter 581) of the Laws of Malta. The driving force behind this amendment, which was done in accordance with the Istanbul Convention, was to narrow the focus and offer specialised assistance to victims of GBV and DV and to reduce the backlog of GBV and DV cases in court. Furthermore, in 2024, the Malta Police Force (MPF) established its first hub of the Gender-Based and Domestic Violence Unit (GBDVU) in the southern region of Malta to offer specialised support and immediate response in cases of GBV and DV. Plans are underway to establish a second hub located in the northern region of the island.

#### *Ensuring equal access to the labour market*

Jobsplus' (Maltese PES) services and programmes are designed to improve women’s access to the labour market, address gender disparities, and promote inclusion. Special focus is also given to vulnerable groups, including migrant women, refugees, and those from minority backgrounds. Through initiatives like training and career development programmes, the PES aims to support women at every stage of their professional journeys, whether they are young women entering the workforce, those returning after a career break, or those facing specific challenges such as working mothers, women with disabilities, or migrant women.

Jobsplus offers a wide range of professional development [courses](#), many of which focus on employability skills. These programmes are open to all residents of Malta, with many specifically designed to encourage women’s participation in the workforce. For instance, the PES provides courses in digital skills, entrepreneurship, and green jobs, aiming to address the gender gap in industries where women are typically underrepresented. In the three-year period from 2021 to 2023, more than 8,000 women (unique data) participated in Jobsplus’ training courses.

Promoting a healthy work-life balance is another area where the PES has been a strong advocate, encouraging flexible work arrangements with its employees such as teleworking and providing access to childcare services. These initiatives support both men and women in balancing their professional and family responsibilities, with a particular focus on helping women stay in the workforce by making employment conditions more accommodating.

One of the key programmes under PES' umbrella is the [Free Childcare Scheme](#), launched in 2014. This initiative offers free childcare to parents or guardians who are working or studying, covering children up to the age of three. The scheme has been expanded to include parents unable to work due to terminal illness, as well as single-parent or foster families whose guardians are employed or pursuing education. The programme has played a significant role in helping families achieve a better work-life balance, particularly supporting mothers to remain in employment or continue their education.

Indeed, the Free Childcare Scheme has had a [profound impact on female labour force participation](#). In 2013, prior to the scheme's implementation, only around 51%% of women (20-64 years) in Malta were in employment. By 2023, this figure had risen to 73.6%, surpassing the EU average by 3.4 percentage points. The Maltese government allocated approximately €46 million to the scheme in 2023, supporting 8,960 children across 188 childcare centres. The programme's positive impact on both family welfare and economic growth has earned it recognition from the [European Commission](#) for promoting employment and encouraging a healthier work-life balance.

The Maltese Government has recognized the need, in line with Article 6 of the [ECEC recommendation](#), of having quality childcare services for parents/legal guardians who work atypical hours. The Free Childcare Scheme aims to include all parents and legal gradians who work atypical hours, such as evenings, late nights, weekends, and public holidays. As per PES' records there are 5 childcare centres which operate 24/7 service and childcare centres who open on Saturdays and Sundays. Parents making use of these childcare centres can benefit from the Free Childcare Scheme administered by Jobsplus. Entitlement is based on the number of hours worked, i.e. if the parent (only hours of the mother/parent 1 are taken into consideration) or guardian work for 20 hours a week, the entitlement will be worked on 20 hours per week. Computed monthly, the working hours amount to 86.7 hours a month (20 x 52 weeks/12 months). To make up for unforeseen exigencies, the beneficiary is entitled to an additional 10% of the working hours for the month and is also entitled to 20 hours monthly to make up for commuting time. Parents who are studying are eligible for a specified number of hours. Part-time students are eligible for 20 hours a week, while full-time students are eligible for 40 hours a week.

Parents/legal guardians who are attending any of PES' training courses and who are not already benefiting from the free childcare initiative are eligible for the Childcare Subsidy Scheme. This scheme offers a subsidy of €4.50 per hour for children up to one year old and €4.30 per hour for children aged 12-36 months. The subsidy is designed to cover the duration of the training course plus an extra two hours for commuting. This initiative aims to facilitate parents' participation in lifelong learning and improve their job prospects by reducing the financial burden of childcare.

Additionally, Jobsplus has launched [several programmes](#) which may have contributed to help women enter or re-enter the workforce, particularly those who have been out of work for an extended period. These include:

1. **Access to Employment (A2E) Scheme:** This EU-funded initiative provides financial incentives to employers who hire disadvantaged job seekers, including women. The scheme benefits both the employer and prospective employee. The employer receives financial assistance, while the prospective employee gets an opportunity in finding suitable employment. Under the programming period 2014-2020, 1,813 women (not unique data<sup>1</sup>) have participated in the program.

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<sup>1</sup> Not unique- a person may have participated more than once in the said programme.

2. **Investing in Skills:** Funded by the European Social Fund, this scheme offers training opportunities to enhance workers' skills and employability. It has been particularly beneficial for women returning to work after a career break. Between 2017 and 2023, nearly eleven thousand women (unique data) participated in the scheme.
3. **VASTE Programme:** This EU-supported programmes focused on assisting persons with disabilities and vulnerable groups, including women. The programme delivered by Jobsplus supports jobseekers to enhance their participation in the labour market. The tailored services include personalised training options, employment exposure plans, guidance and mentoring services, on-the-job coaching and professional services. The VASTE programme is currently closed although services are still being offered.
4. **Work Exposure Scheme** offered by Jobsplus is designed to assist individuals, particularly unemployed persons and inactive job seekers, in gaining practical experience through hands-on training in various work environments. The program is aimed at easing the transition into the workforce by providing participants with 240 hours of work experience. During this time, participants receive a training allowance equivalent to the national minimum wage for each hour of participation. The Work Exposure Scheme is particularly attractive because it mirrors real-world labour market demands, making it easier for participants to find suitable long-term employment following their training. Under the programming period 2014-2020 more than 1,900 women (not unique data) have participated in the program.
5. **Training Pays:** The scheme offered assistance in the form of a training grant to aid participants (individuals, who have completed compulsory schooling up to 64 years of age) with costs relating to accredited training for MQF Courses up to level 7 and non-accredited, but industry recognised courses related to ICT, Aviation and Maritime. Together, these initiatives and others that offer training and employment subsidies, are playing a crucial role in closing the employment gap for women in Malta.

**2. Over the past five years, what have been the top five priorities for accelerating progress for women and girls in your country through laws, policies and/or programmes?**

*Political participation and representation*

One of Malta's priorities over the past five years has been to increase equal representation in political and public decision making. Particularly due to the fact that political activities and public decision-making remain male-dominated areas. In fact, although there was an increase from previous years, the 2023 GEI highlighted that the most room for improvement remains in the domain of power.

The domain of power measures gender equality in decision-making positions across the political, economic and social spheres. The sub-domain of political power examines the representation of women and men in national parliaments, government and regional/local assemblies. The score for Malta in this domain is 45.3 which is below the EU average in 59.1.

A public consultation document with proposals with the aim of achieving a gender-balanced parliament was published on 26 March 2019. Positive measures have long been deemed as a possible remedy to the traditional under-representation of women, which afflicts the Maltese political system. Four main pillars were suggested namely:

- Constitutional and legal amendments to permit additional seats for the under-represented sex that obtains less than 40% of the Parliamentary seats;
- Gender mainstreaming in Parliament and family-friendly measures;
- Incentives in the form of state funding to political parties in order to recruit, train and support candidates from the under-represented sex to contest the Maltese general elections;
- Extended remits for the Electoral Commission.

Consequently, act No. XX of 2021 introduced, by virtue of Article 52A of the Maltese Constitution, a corrective mechanism whereby if the number of MPs identifying as the under-represented sex totals to less than forty per cent of all the elected Members of Parliament (MPs), there shall be an increase of twelve MPs of the under-represented sex. This mechanism has a sunset clause of twenty years from its coming into force, unless revoked or re-enacted (requiring a two-thirds majority).

This mechanism was first put to the test during the 2022 general election, and more than doubled the percentage of female Members of Parliament; from 13% in 2020 to 28% in 2022.

This priority is also being addressed in objective 6 of the Gender Equality and Mainstreaming Strategy and Action Plan (GEMSAP), which deals with achieving gender balance in political and public decision-making. Measures under this objective aim to raise awareness of the benefits of equal representation and power-sharing between women and men, and to raise awareness of gender bias, stereotypes, sexism, and discrimination against women, including sexist hate speech online and offline in political discourse. As well as, collecting and analysing relevant gender disaggregated data with regard to women's representation in Parliament, local councils and government appointed boards.

### *Combating gender-based violence and domestic violence*

Malta is committed to continue upholding its obligations to prevent and combat GBV and DV and to protect and support victims experiencing all forms of GBV and DV.

One of the main priority areas involves the protection of children experiencing violence (including witnessing DV), mainly by exploring good practices to protect victims and their children related to alimony and parental consent. The findings from the [Safety in Childhood: A Prevalence Study of Childhood Abuse Experiences in Malta](#) (2023), which was the first local research studying the prevalence of childhood experiences with abuse and witnessing violence, will be utilised to formulate and/or amend policy measures and legislation. Furthermore, CGBVDV, HRD and the Office of the Commissioner for Children (CFC) initiated discussions with relevant stakeholders to propose legal amendments to address child marriages in the local context and to explore initiatives to reach migrant communities in Malta.

Another significant priority is the implementation of the Family Court Reform. Its first round of recommendations address measures related to the Family Civil Court, primarily custody and visitation rights in cases of DV. The proposal also recommends structures and resources to establish a support system where psycho-social professionals conduct evaluations and risk assessments on all families submitting cases to the Family Court. Currently, the process of mediation is compulsory and if the court determines that there is a case of DV during mediation, the mediation halts and the case proceeds. However, the reform proposes that prior to mediation and to filing their case before the Family Court, both parties must submit evidence of DV experiences, ensuring that the case is processed immediately to court. Moreover, the reform

proposes a separate legal representation of children from that of parents to protect the rights of children in matters related to custody and visitation rights. Recommendations related to restraining and protection orders are expected to occur in the second round of recommendations of the Family Court Reform. The first round of recommendations enlisted in the Family Court Reform are going to be issued for public consultation by the end of 2024.

In order to enhance data collection and track cases of GBV and DV, a new Case Management System (CMS) is expected to be implemented for the Office of the Attorney General (AG) and the Court Services Agency (CSA) to facilitate the monitoring and management of cases in all stages of judicial proceedings.

Malta is also committed to explore the necessary legal amendments to transpose the Directive (EU) 2024/1385 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 May 2024 on combating violence against women and domestic violence.

### *Gender equality*

The following legal amendments sought to increase the participation of women in politics:

- In 2021 the Gender Corrective Mechanism was introduced in Malta as a positive measure to enhance gender balance in the national Parliament. In the General Election of 2022, 15% of the elected members were women, same result as in the previous General Election (2017). Thus, the Gender Corrective Mechanism was triggered and the 12 unelected women candidates who attained the highest number of votes were equally credited to the two parties represented in Parliament, with the representation of women rising to 28%.
- The General Elections Act was amended to enhance gender balance in the Electoral Commission ensuring that: *“The Commission shall be composed of the Chief Electoral Commissioner as chairman and ten (10) members as Electoral Commissioners; such members shall reflect equal representation between sexes, in any case not having less than four (4) members of every sex.”* Currently the Commission is made up of: Chief Electoral Commissioner: male; Electoral Commissioners: 6 males and 4 females<sup>2</sup>.
- In preparation for the 2024 local council elections, a report was published with a set of recommendations to be led by different stakeholders to achieve more balanced representation of women and men in local councils. Such recommendations included:
  - o When the situation warrants, priority is to be given to persons from the under-represented sex to fill vacant posts on local councils; these individuals are identified by the political parties, not via an election process.
  - o The fee for Local Council candidates to register to contest the election was abolished.
  - o Political commitment from governmental institutions, political parties, NGOs and the media as well as promotion of gender balance in local councils through government policies and information campaigns.
  - o Inclusive measures within local councils, as well as policies and support structures.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://electoral.gov.mt/electoralcommission>

- Comprehensive research on the participation of women and men in local politics to identify reasons for gender imbalances and effective measures to address them.
- Recruitment of underrepresented genders by political parties.
- Establishment of party environments capable of addressing gender-specific needs and promoting inclusive policies at all levels and promotion of anti-discrimination policies.
- Training programmes primarily targeting underrepresented genders on leadership and communication skills.
- Mentoring and networking programs connecting aspiring female politicians with mentors for guidance and support.

Actions relating to Unpaid care and domestic work / work-family conciliation (e.g. paid maternity, paternity or parental leave, care services)

In 2021 the NCPE carried out an online survey *The COVID-19 Pandemic – Research on the distribution of work in households* between women and men during the pandemic. The survey asked respondents about the increase/decrease in time spent on different tasks – paid work, housework, caring for children, home-schooling for children, caring for dependent adults, leisure/free-time, personal care and sleep - as a result of COVID-19. It also inquired about the respondents' perception of equality in the sharing of responsibilities with their partner during the pandemic. The findings indicate that, during the pandemic, the increase in the number of hours spent doing household tasks and childcare increased more for women than for men, while the time spent on leisure, personal care and sleep decreased more for women than it did for men. Hence, the existing gender inequality in the distribution of unpaid household and caring responsibilities was exacerbated as a result of the pandemic.

The NCPE's study *Perceptions and Attitudes of women and men in Malta towards Work-Life Balance: with a specific focus on family size* (2024). In this context, the need to strengthen work-life balance measures was highlighted in relation to the reconciliation of work and family responsibilities as follows:

- Comprehensive revisions of work-family policies and leave entitlements, including: extending maternity and paternity leaves; improving parental leave; promoting spatial and temporal flexibility; introducing leave for sick children; exploring shorter working weeks; safeguarding equal opportunities in work-family rights; and analysing the work family rights in the private and public sectors.
- Challenging gender norms and promoting shared responsibilities between women and men by encouraging work-life balance for men; challenging maternal gatekeeping and strengthening gender sensitivity education.
- Other recommendations called for strengthening childcare and education policies; providing financial and housing support for families; enhancing family and fertility support through government initiatives; and adopting national approaches to family support and fertility.

Since August 2022, the Maternity Trust Fund was adjusted to include the Work-Life Balance entitlements introduced that same year and renamed the Work Life Balance Fund to include reimbursement of wages during the paternity and parental paid leave in cases of birth and adoption and in the case of parental leave the benefits are extended to fostering too.

In the case of parental leave, employees are entitled to 4 months of leave each per child, eligible to be taken until the child reaches 8 years of age. The same applies in case of fostering leave except this is availed of per parent and not per child.

Under this scheme, employers will pay a maximum of 8 weeks of Parental/Adoption/fostering Leave to their employees. They then apply for Refund of applicable benefit rates from the Department of Social Security when the employee returns to work.

Other work-life balance measures as of August 2022 include:

- An employee (father/equivalent second parent) is entitled to be paid paternal leave immediately as from date of commencement of employment. In this case, employees have the right to 10 paid days of paternity leave.
- Carers' leave means leave from work in order to provide personal care or support to a relative/person who lives in the same household who needs support for a serious medical reason. Every worker is entitled to 5 days of unpaid carers' leave per year.
- Flexible working arrangements allow workers to work flexibly according to their personal needs for caring purposes. Flexible arrangements may include remote working, work on reduced hours, and flexitime.

Malta provides women with free training and schemes aimed to upskill/reskill their current skillsets, such as the Training Pays Scheme and the Investing in Skills Scheme. It also provides free childcare services through the Free Childcare Scheme, offered to children aged between three months up to 3 years of age and has assisted parents/guardians in finding a better work-life balance whilst promoting female participation in the labour market. The scheme has been widened to include parents who are in education and parents/guardians who work atypical shifts. In addition, subsidised rates to parents/guardians who are unemployed were also given.

In the GEMSAP, priority is given to promoting co-responsibility and balance of work, private, and family life, as outlined in objective 5. The People & Standards Division (P&SD) has confirmed that family-friendly measures are accessible to all individuals working in the public service, regardless of gender. However, the availability of these measures is subject to management approval and depends on the nature of the employee's work. Additionally, the usage of these measures is analysed from a gender perspective. The National Employment Policy (2021-2030) acknowledges the significance of flexible working arrangements for parents to facilitate their involvement in the labour market. These policies are open to all public service employees, regardless of gender.

### **3. Over the past five years, what specific actions have you taken to prevent discrimination and promote the rights of marginalized groups of women and girls?**

*People with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities or expressions, or sex characteristics*

Government has also taken several initiatives aimed at addressing existing inequalities and injustices through concrete actions that lead to the enjoyment of all human rights and civil liberties regardless of sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and sex characteristics. The adoption of the Gender Identity, Gender Expression and Sex Characteristics (GIGESC) Act (CAP 540) aimed at providing for the recognition and registration of the gender of a person and to regulate the effects of such a change, as well as the recognition and protection of the sex characteristics of a person. The legislation introduced a pathway to legal gender recognition through the enrolment of a public deed following a

declaration before a notary. The law did away with any medical or surgical requirement and de-pathologised trans identities. Two amendments to the Gender Identity, Gender Expression and Sex Characteristics (GIGESC) Act are currently being considered – the first to ensure that the provisions of the Act fully apply to persons who wish to amend all their official documents (including birth certificate) to include an ‘X’ marker; and the second to ensure that the effects of the Act extend to third-country nationals living in Malta. The first has been approved by Parliament, and expected to come into effect in September this year (2024), while the second is still at consultation stage among relevant entities and stakeholders.

At the same time, the Gender Identity, Gender Expression and Sex Characteristics Act of 2015 makes non-medically necessary surgical interventions on the sex characteristics of a person unlawful, thus granting greater protection to intersex persons. The Act sets out that “any sex assignment treatment and, or surgical intervention on the sex characteristics of a minor which treatment and, or intervention can be deferred until the person to be treated can provide informed consent (Art. 14(1)). Medical practitioners or other professionals in breach of this article shall, on conviction, be liable to the punishment of imprisonment not exceeding five years, or to a fine (multa) of not less than five thousand euro (€5,000) and not more than twenty thousand euro (€20,000) (Art. 14(2)). Government is in the final stages of adopting a new treatment protocol relating to variations of sex characteristics, and expected to be implemented in the coming months.

The legislation was followed by the introduction of two policies, one aimed at the education sector and the other at the correctional facility. The policies aimed at establishing clear principles and guidelines in the treatment of trans, gender variant, and intersex persons in these settings.

A structured dialogue between Health authorities and the LGBTIQ community led to the establishment of the GW Clinic in 2018 and legal changes, including the provision of free hormone treatment. In April 2018, the Ministry for Health launched a consultation on transgender healthcare. The adopted Trans Healthcare Protocol sets out that *“All persons seeking to benefit from publicly funded hormone treatment, psychosocial support and surgical procedures will be referred to the multidisciplinary team to ensure competent and specialised assessment and support throughout the gender affirming transition and beyond.”*

The first point of contact for clients is generally the specialist nurse who coordinates patient care and conducts the initial evaluation. This initial interview seeks to gather the relevant background information, any gender affirming medical interventions already undergone, relevant medical history and psycho-social factors and the services being sought through the clinic.

The clinic follows the World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH) standards adapted to Malta’s legal framework and an approach based on informed consent to care.

The services provided by the Gender Wellbeing Clinic on the National Health Service to date include: Initial Assessment; Psycho-social Support; Family Support; Hormone Prescription and Follow-ups by Endocrinologist; Voice Therapy; Psychiatric care; Gynaecological Support; Orchiectomy; Hysterectomy; and Preservation of Gametes. Not currently covered are: Vaginoplasty; Metoidio/Phalloplasty; Hair removal; and Facial surgery.

In 2022 the Prime Minister announced that Vaginoplasty; Metoidio/Phalloplasty would be made available throughout this legislature and also covered by public health insurance. This was reiterated as part of the third LGBTIQ+ Equality Strategy and Action Plan.



In 2014, Malta adopted the Civil Unions Act (CAP 540), which granted equal recognition to all couples with the same rights and obligations as marriage, including parenting rights. Following the marriage equality law of 2017, persons who had contracted a civil union were able to turn their civil union into a marriage before the end of 2022. Civil unions remain in the books. As such same-sex couples after 2017 continue to enjoy all rights attached to marriage at an equal footing with their different-sex counterparts.

In June 2018, Malta effected changes to the Embryo Protection Act, which removed discriminatory provisions in access to IVF treatment. The provisions revised the definition of prospective parent to be inclusive of same-sex couples as well as single persons and also decriminalised gametes donation.

In 2016, Malta banned conversion therapies in the Affirmation of Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Gender Expression Act. The scope covers SOGIE grounds, for both minors and adults, and both professional and non-professional settings, i.e. regardless of whether those administering the practice were paid for it or not. The sanctions are higher for professionals and also if they targeted “vulnerable” persons, such as minors under 16, people with disabilities, and others. In 2023, amendments were adopted to more precisely define what counts as promotion and advertising.

### *Migrant women and girls*

Over the past five years, Malta has mainly addressed migrant women through the continuation of the work of the Integration and Anti-Racism Unit within HRD. This included the development and implementation of two strategies and action plans namely: The Migrant Integration Strategy & Action Plan (Vision 2020) as well as the first Anti-Racism Strategy.

In order to protect the rights of women and girls who experience multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, the Government set up an Integration and Anti-Racism Unit (IARU), which is Malta’s entry point for integration. One of the main aspects tackled within the unit is the process of the so-called ‘integration request’ lodged during an ‘Integration Request Meeting’ (“IRM”), which then leads to participation in the I Belong Programme. The I Belong Programme provides Malta, English and Cultural training to all those who apply thus aiding migrants in their journey for integration into Malta. IRMs are private and attended by the client alone (except in the case where translators are required), in order to support the client’s individual and personal path to the full and successful integration and the client is given time to explore any difficulties being faced during their time in Malta.

Through the Integration Strategy and the AMIF funded project Learning-Exchanging-Integrating, the Diploma in Education for Cultural Mediation was created. This course, which began to be delivered by the University of Malta in 2021, trains professionals in facilitating harmonious relations between migrants and citizens in the host country, promoting mutual exchange of knowledge and the establishment of positive relations between individuals of diverse cultural backgrounds and ethnic origins.

The Anti-Racism Strategy tackles the problem of racism and xenophobia with all the concerned stakeholders including Government and the public sector, democratic and political institutions, the media, but also the private sector, civil society, and the general population. This Strategy is in line with the EU’s Anti-Racism Action Plan 2020-2025 and the ball has also been set rolling for the Second National Anti-Racism Action Plan. Throughout the strategy, outreach and awareness-raising activities also took place throughout and across all levels of society, particularly the grassroots. Furthermore, the HRD convened the Anti-Racism Platform composed of representatives from civil society, academia, and the social partners. The Platform

was then handed to civil society and is a primary method of communication with the stakeholders affected by racism on a day-to-day basis. From its inception in 2021, the Platform has seen a large contribution from its female representation and it has been particularly useful to identify and tackle forms of racism existing within the experiences of people living in Malta.

### *Women and girls with disabilities*

While the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (Cap. 627 of the Laws of Malta), implementing the Convention locally, and the Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability) Act (Cap. 413 of the Laws of Malta), regulating Malta's disability equality body and redress mechanisms, mainstream disability discrimination protections, a particular focus, as necessary, on disabled women and girls, is highlighted in various sections of Malta's 2021-2030 National Disability Strategy, and in specific outputs undertaken further to it, notably:

- ⇒ Objective 1 - Reforms and Equality - in the Disability Assessment and Programme Eligibility Reform envisaged, the new Inter-Professional Panel will pay particular attention to the gender perspective, both through the composition of its pool of professionals further to a public Expression of Interest that was issued, and through the way it conducts sessions, in which respect mock assessments have already been held, and continuous professional development will be provided to Panel members.
  
- ⇒ Objective 2 - Research and Data Collection – a mapping exercise across line Ministries and public entities, was conducted to gather different disability-related indicators and identify gaps, in order that a number of common indicators could then be developed together with the National Statistics Office (NSO).
  
- ⇒ Objective 5 - Participation in Culture, Leisure, Recreation and Sports - MIV has worked to empower disabled women and girls in the community, by sponsoring a number of initiatives, including through specific schemes, benefitting community organisations that involve disabled women as administrators or beneficiaries, including those with wider intersectional identities, such as disabled victims and survivors of domestic violence, and disabled migrant women who would then act as multipliers within their communities in delivering culturally-sensitive awareness and linking potential beneficiaries to support outlets
  
- ⇒ Objective 6 - Relationships, Family, Sexuality and Parenthood - Specific initiatives on sex education and education on sexuality developed jointly by Agenzija Support, Malta's State disability service provider, and the University of Malta's Faculty for Social Wellbeing, are tailored and delivered in an age and gender-appropriate manner to the Agency's service users, as well as to family members such as siblings, and their close support networks. Additionally, through Act X of 2024, passed following the involvement of key stakeholders and civil society representatives, Malta amended article 251F of the Criminal Code to comprehensively ban forced sterilization, a practice disproportionately affecting disabled women and girls, as pointed out by the UNCRPD Committee, and further to Malta's obligations under the Istanbul Convention

- ⇒ Objective 8 - Healthcare – entities ensure that not only a disability perspective, but also that of disabled women and girls specifically, would be factored into Malta's upcoming revised Sexual Health Strategy. This links in with previous improvements supporting disabled women and girls at the National Screening Centre, Genitourinary Clinic and Gender Wellbeing Clinic. This element was, furthermore, factored into feedback provided by MIV to MHA concerning MHA's proposed Framework on Non-Communicable Disease Prevention, and will be included in an upcoming training for medical professionals on autism and neurodivergence that will be delivered by the Autism Advisory Council with the participation of key local and international experts. This aspect is also being factored into ongoing discussions between MIV, MHA and the WHO, on implementation of the WHO Guide for Action and Disability Health Equity in Malta
  
- ⇒ Objective 9 - Work and Employment - While the Lino Spiteri Foundation currently strives to address the gender perspective through job coaching, job mentoring and job matching services offered to disabled women, MIV and the Autism Advisory Council have partnered with the AX Foundation, and a number of local and foreign experts and activists, in order to develop a pilot programme that would strengthen Agenzija Sapport's Way to Work programme, targeted at potential employers and disabled employees. Addressing neurodivergence as a first step, and then moving on to further areas of disability, this programme will seek to address the needs of those potential disabled employees who currently fall through the cracks, while focusing on job retention, and will ensure that a gender perspective will be included in both group and one-on-one content
  
- ⇒ Objective 13 - Regional and International Efforts - Malta brought the issue of Gender-related initiatives, and Data in this respect, as needing to be included in relevant pillars that would underpin the future Regional Framework on Disability being developed by the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM). The rights of disabled women and girls were additionally supported by the Valletta Declaration, adopted following the EU-Arab High Level Meeting on Disability Rights hosted by Malta in 2019, and on the basis of which concrete initiatives, such as the Arab-EU Disability Research Network, are being developed and operated, together with partners such as UN ESCWA, academia, national focal points and civil society stakeholders

Finally, implementation of these Strategies is aligned with that of the EU's 2021-2030 Strategy on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, as well as with Malta's Gender Equality and Mainstreaming Strategy and Action Plan (GEMSAP), both in respect of general Actions, as well as concerning specific additional Actions in MIV's Plan, that correspond to relevant Actions in the National Disability Strategy.

**4. Over the past five years, how has the confluence of different crises affected the implementation of the BPfA in your country, and what measures have you taken to prevent their negative impact on progress for women and girls?**

No, the implementation of the BPfA in Malta was not affected by any humanitarian crises caused by conflict, extreme weather or other events.

**5. Over the next five years, what are the priorities for accelerating progress for women and girls in your country through laws, policies and/or programmes?**

*Equality and non-discrimination under the law and access to justice*

Following an institutional reform in 2019, the Office of the State Advocate was set up and took the advisory functions that used to be performed by the Attorney General. The first appointee who took up office as State Advocate was a female, who later in 2020 became the first female appointed as Attorney General in Malta. Moreover, as at end of December 2021, the number of female magistrates amounted to 18 whereas 8 females were appointed to the bench as Judges from a total of 47 members of the judiciary. Continuation of the 24 x 7 service provided by Legal Aid Malta for victims of domestic violence, a service which was launched in April 2020.

In June 2022, Parliament approved the Femicide Bill, which adds the concept of femicide to Malta's legal structure. It limits the judiciary's discretion when it comes to sentencing in relation to homicides with femicidal circumstances - when a woman is killed because she is a woman. In such cases, the defence of 'crime of passion' will no longer be deemed to be an acceptable mitigating factor.

Malta plans to continue to address this priority through the GEMSAP (2022 – 2027). In fact, Objective 8 of the strategy specifically aims to eliminate gender imbalance through the field of justice by addressing gender bias and gender stereotypes.

Through measures under this objective, in 2023, women seeking legal advice regarding domestic violence and other matters have been provided with legal aid lawyers assigned to them for advice and eventually for court representation if required. As of 1<sup>st</sup> January 2024, the Agency created a panel of legal aid lawyers for advice to victims of crime, which also encompasses victims being women, girls and victims of gender-based violence. Moreover, another panel of legal aid lawyers for court assistance and representation to victims will also be available to those requesting legal aid assistance.

Moreover, the Ministry for Justice and Reforms in the Construction Sector (MJR) is currently finalising a study on identifying, compiling and disseminating good practices from other member states to reduce obstacles and facilitate women's access to justice.

In addition, the digitalisation of justice is a clearly a strategic priority for government. On the basis of the Digital Justice Strategy for the years 2022 to 2027, court data will automatically be disaggregated by sex/gender. This will in and of itself assist in the follow up to court decisions.

### *Gender-responsive budgeting*

This priority is addressed in objective 1 of the GEMSAP specifically action 1.4 - Introduce a gender-responsive budgeting system with clear, measurable targets, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

In 2023, the Ministry for Finance (MFIN) started continuous research on Gender Budgeting. They participated in a webinar organised by DG Reform, where they received an overview of the TSI instrument, which included information on the countries and regions that have benefitted from it. The webinar also mentioned the European Council's request for a standard definition for gender budgeting, which would help standardise the implementation of gender mainstreaming in public policy and budgeting.

### *Changing discriminatory social norms and gender stereotypes*

Gender stereotypes are preconceived social and cultural patterns or ideas, whereby women and men are assigned characteristics and roles determined and limited by their sex. As gender stereotypes are pervasive and operate throughout time, a life-cycle approach is needed to address the socialisation of men and boys in a wide range of social contexts: at home, throughout the education system, at the workplace and the wider economy, in the public space, in social media and networks, as well as in personal relationships. Gender stereotypes both result from, and are the cause of, deeply engrained attitudes, values, norms and prejudices.

Challenging stereotypes is one of the priorities of GEMSAP. In fact, objective 4 of GEMSAP aims to directly address segregation, stereotyping and gender gaps in education and training with the aim to advance the gender balance in traditionally male or female-dominated professions and address gender stereotypes.

Continuously, throughout the years, the HRD has carried out several awareness-raising campaigns across social media and in collaboration with local media houses highlighting key issues. This also included a number of events organised, in collaboration with various relevant stakeholders.

In 2023, On International Women's Day, Dr. Claudia Borg was presented with the Women and Girls Inspirational Leadership Award by British High Commissioner Cathy Ward for her contributions to innovation and technology in Malta. The Science in the City 2023 campaign was launched to recognize and celebrate women in science and encourage girls to pursue careers in this field. As part of the campaign, STEM faculties were visited by students, and Malta was declared as the global capital for women and girls in science during a meeting with the Royal Academy for Science International Trust.

The Department for Learning and Personal Development (DLAP) has taken an initiative called 'Code.Sprint' to promote coding skills and diversity in the tech industry. This collaborative coding competition opened to individuals of any gender to showcase their coding abilities. DLAP has introduced the Best Female Performance Award to recognise and encourage outstanding female participants. The initiative aimed to promote diversity and acknowledge excellence, believing that anyone can excel in STEM fields regardless of their gender. Similarly, MCAST prepared an all-female team to participate in an international robotics competition, promoting women's involvement in STEM fields.

This was also complemented by a series of posts on social media aimed at raising awareness on gender equality and eliminating stereotypes.

Following the introduction of the Gender Corrective Mechanism, an enhanced commitment towards the implementation of the remaining recommendations published in the Consultation Document ‘Gender Balance in Parliament Reform’ (2019)<sup>3</sup>, namely: Gender mainstreaming in Parliament and family-friendly measures, including child-care services.

### *Changing discriminatory social norms and gender stereotypes*

The main recommendations from the NCPE study *The Prevalent Gender Role Perceptions and Attitudes among Adults Living in Malta*<sup>4</sup> (2023) are:

- Addressing misogyny and toxic masculinity through education, training of professionals and awareness raising.
- Ensuring a change in attitudes and values, with different institutions in Maltese society needing to work in tandem.
- Tackling underlying ideologies about gender roles, unpaid care work, and the respective roles the state, market, and family need to play in providing care for young children and other vulnerable family members through state-led initiatives.
- Promoting the equal sharing of unpaid work undertaken in the private sphere, while facilitating the earner-caregiver model with generous and coordinated statutory work-family policy schemes made available in both the private and public sectors.

In light of this, the NCPE is working on an awareness campaign to address gender stereotypes and on how power and control can affect women and girls in the context of a patriarchal society.

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[https://www.um.edu.mt/library/oar/bitstream/123456789/103754/1/Gender\\_balance\\_in\\_Parliament\\_reform\\_consultation\\_document\\_2019.pdf](https://www.um.edu.mt/library/oar/bitstream/123456789/103754/1/Gender_balance_in_Parliament_reform_consultation_document_2019.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> <https://ncpe.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Leaflet-The-Prevalent-Gender-Role-Perceptions-and-Attitudes-among-Adults-Living-in-Malta-1.pdf>

### Section Three: Progress across the 12 critical areas of concern

**6. Over the past five years, what actions has your country taken to advance gender equality in the world of work (including informal and non-standard employment as well as entrepreneurship)?**

In the third quarter of 2023 the NCPE officially launched the Equal Pay Tool which assists companies with ensuring the principle of equal pay for work of equal value between women and men in practice. The tool was integrated into the NCPE Equality Mark Certification, with companies employing at least 50 employees have the option to also apply for the Equal Pay Certification. To date 3 companies have been awarded the Equal Pay Certification and others showed interest. Further information is available on: <https://ncpe.gov.mt/the-equality-mark/>

The NCPE Equality Mark Certification is awarded to organisations that make gender equality one of their values and whose management is based on the recognition and promotion of the potential of all employees, irrespective of their gender and/or caring responsibilities, and demonstrate a commitment towards best practices in the area of gender equality that go beyond what is mandatory by law. Till June 2024, there are 147 organisations, that have been awarded the Equality Mark Certification, employing over 37,000 employees. Further information is available on: <https://ncpe.gov.mt/the-equality-mark/>

The NCPE carries out training on equality, discrimination, harassment, and sexual harassment, to Government departments/ entities, private companies, and educational institutions. In the 5 year period between 2019 - 2023, the NCPE carried out 348 training sessions with 6,561 participants.

**7. In the past five years, what actions has your country taken to recognize, reduce and/or redistribute unpaid care and domestic work, promote work-life and family balance and strengthen the rights of paid care workers?**

In addition to the information above, the NCPE *Study on the Perceptions and Attitudes of Women and Men in Malta towards Work-Life Balance: with a specific focus on Family Size* (2023), analysed: whether women and men of childbearing age are interested in having children/more children; factors that hinder or encourage women and men to have children/more children; whether and which challenges are faced by women and men when reconciling work and child-care responsibilities; and which services or measures would support them to have children/more children.

Challenges in reconciling work and childcare responsibilities were evident and revealed significant gender disparities, with work family-conflict disproportionately negatively affecting mothers and their fertility intentions. An evaluation of current family leaves, including Maternity, Paternity and Parental Leave revealed dissatisfaction with both the duration and compensation levels of existing policies, and called for longer and well-paid leave, including a new leave for parents when their children are sick, and a strong demand for Temporal and Spatial flexibility to improve work-life balance. Moreover, better financial support to families was also indicated as one of the means to encourage respondents to have more children.

In 22 July 2022 the *Work-life balance for Parents and Carers Regulations 2022* were published. The scope of these regulations was to transpose the relevant provisions of Directive (EU) 2019/1158 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20th June 2019 on work-life balance for parents and carers and repealing Council Directive 2010/18/EU (the “Directive” or the “WLBD”).

By virtue of these Regulations, fathers/second parents would be entitled to ten (10) working days' paternity leave with pay and availed of immediately after the birth or adoption of a child. Working carers will be able to take five (5) working days of leave per year to take care of a relative in the same household. The rationale for the introduction of this right is that when workers can take a short amount of time off work, to take care of a close relative, they are able to find a better work-life balance. Carer's leave is to be granted without loss of wages.

#### *National Agreement on the Minimum Wage:*

In October 2023 an National agreement on the minimum wage was signed by all members of the Low Wage Commission. By virtue of this agreement, the members acknowledged that an increase of the minimum wage is needed to avoid an excessively low minimum wage level that results in undesirable social and economic consequences.

By virtue of this agreement, the levels of the weekly minimum wage for the period 2024 to 2027 for persons aged 18 were raised.

#### *Transparent and Predictable Working Conditions*

In October 2022, the Transparent and Predictable Working Conditions Regulations 2022 were published. These Regulations transposed the requirements of the EU Directive 2019 (1152) on the transparent and predictable working conditions in the EU. The aim is to improve working conditions by promoting more transparent and predictable employment while ensuring labour market adaptability

It should be noted that many of the provisions of the EU Directive were already transposed into Maltese Legislation, however, there were certain provisions which needed to be introduced.

With regard to the information on the essential aspects of the employment relationship, this has to be provided within seven calendar days. At present, Maltese legislation requires that this information should be provided within eight working days.

The Directive requires that the probation period should not exceed six months, but Member States may provide for longer periods of probation when justified by the nature of employment. This is similar to what we already have in Maltese legislation. However, provisions have been considered and Cap 452 amended to reflect probation and definite periods of employment.

As regards parallel employment, the Directive states that an employer cannot prohibit an employee from taking up another employment outside his/ her work schedule except for grounds of health and safety, protection of business confidentiality, the integrity of the public service or the avoidance of conflict of interests.

The Directive also requires that Member States should ensure that where a workers' work pattern is entirely or mostly unpredictable, the worker shall not be required to work unless the work takes place within predetermined reference hours and days and that the worker is informed by his or her employer of a work assignment within a reasonable time established in accordance with national law, collective agreements or practice.



After six months service with the same employer and after completing the probationary period, the worker may request to be given employment which is more predictable and has more secure working conditions. The employer is obliged to provide a written reply within one month (within three months in cases of small and medium enterprises) with a justification if the request of the worker cannot be entertained.

This Directive also stipulates that where an employer is required by EU Law or national legislation or by collective agreements to provide training to a worker, such training is to be provided free of charge, shall count as working time and where possible shall take place during working hours.

In the proposed legislation, zero-hour contracts are prohibited except for the following cases:

(a) where the nature of the activity concerned requires the availability of replacement workers on short notice; and as long as the zero-hour contract is not the whole-time employment of the workers;

(b) where the worker is a full-time student, subject to any applicable laws, regulations and administrative or statutory provisions.

## **8. In the past five years, what actions has your country taken to reduce the gender digital divide?**

Seeking to make our digital economy contribution more effective for women, eSkills Malta Foundation made gender convergence one of its priorities. In this regard, the Foundation has planned a framework of activities for gender convergence in digital and ICT skills. These activities seek to encourage girls and women to improve their digital awareness and increase women in ICT.

The activities include:

- **Women in Digital Focus Group**, which is a Focus Group launched in 2017. Since its inception, it has met periodically. The Women in ICT Group members come from different walks of life and careers but mainly from ICT and entrepreneurship. The focus group meets quarterly or as required to discuss gender issues in the digital and ICT spheres. Possible solutions are recommended through policy change and implementation or specific projects.
- **Awareness Campaign** to encourage girls, women, and parents to increase their digital skills and knowledge and encourage female youth and women to study or join the digital sector. The awareness campaign are mostly be done through social media, organizing events, participating in panels of discussion about gender convergence in digital and TV ads, and supporting gender focus in specific events.
- **Digital Women Ambassadors**. Inviting Women to become eSkills Ambassadors and Girl Ambassadors, exposing their career and experience in digital. An informal call was issued on our social media.
- **Schools Visits**. Secondary School visits by eskills Women Ambassadors to promote the female gender ICT career are also taking place.

- **EU Funded Projects with gender convergence subject.** Malta is also seeking to participate in EU-funded projects that target gender convergence in ICT and STEM. In particular, Malta has joined a consortium led by JA Europe for a Digital Europe Call to boost EU Code week and digital skills, especially girls.
- **Other International Initiatives.** Malta has also engaged with Code.org to use their material and implemented the Code.org Hour-of-Code initiative with public, church and independent schools.
- **CODE.SPRINTMT.** This is a national coding contest organised yearly for students following studies in Computing Science at secondary, post-secondary, and undergraduate students following a bachelor's degree course in Computing/IT. The main objective of this competition is to gauge participants' problem-solving, computational and programming skills in an environment different than students are accustomed to, i.e. in schools/institutions or during traditional assessment methods. Besides being an open-book challenge, participants' work is assessed against criteria based on functionality, effectiveness, and creativity.
- **Courses and bootcamps.** Malta also organises various courses, some specifically targeting the female gender. The courses range from ICT to Marketing and are always in the digital sphere.
- **Stakeholder Advise.** The Government entities also seek to provide feedback about gender issues to various digital skills and education stakeholders coming from government, industry, education and society.

The Malta Digital Innovation Authority (MDIA) will be organising a workshop “AI Skills Accelerator for Young Women” aged between 18-25 to provide them with the necessary digital, ethical, and managerial skills to become content creators, and to boost creativity and innovation in solving challenges at the community level using AI. The workshop will be held on 16<sup>th</sup> October and on 29<sup>th</sup> October 2024. Moreover, the MDIA has also organised various bootcamps and summer camps for young students to learn about different topics related to digital innovation.

Tech.mt has been involved in a multi-country partnership through the ‘EEA Grants and the Norway Grants Fund for Youth Employment’, in implementing the Women4IT project. The aim of this initiative was to assist 1,000 young women to enter digital job-related employment, as well as to raise awareness on digital skills and the gender gap. Through this project, we assisted a number of participants in skills assessment, building partnerships with employers, developing an online employability profiling tool, as well as creating a learning/training platform that includes employer co-designed customised learning plan and a job application & on-boarding support system.

**9. In the past five years, how has the macroeconomic and fiscal policy environment affected the implementation of the BPfA in your country, and what macroeconomic policies has your country implemented in support of a more gender-equal economy?**

Over the past five years, Malta's macroeconomic and fiscal policies have been influenced by a robust economic growth trajectory, despite challenges arising from the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent global economic uncertainties. Malta has taken significant steps to ensure gender equality remains a priority in policy implementation, including under the commitments of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA).

The Maltese economy has remained resilient with continued GDP growth, driven by sectors such as financial services, gaming, and tourism. Despite the global pandemic, Malta's response was to adopt countercyclical fiscal policies, investing heavily in economic recovery packages and social programmes, many of which sought to safeguard vulnerable groups, including women. Government interventions focused on minimising unemployment, supporting businesses, and maintaining public services.

Malta has seen increasing public finance allocations aimed at advancing gender equality. More specifically, Government has enhanced funding for childcare services, parental leave schemes, and gender-sensitive education programmes. In recent budgets, there has been increased investment in services that enable women to participate in the labour market, including free childcare introduced for working parents. Malta has introduced fiscal incentives to encourage the employment of women, including tax credits for businesses that employ female workers and schemes to support women returning to work after childbirth. Malta Enterprise administers the 'Micro Enterprise' scheme which grants business undertakings aid in the form of tax credits to invest in their business, so as to innovate, expand and develop operations. In the case of female-owned undertakings, maximum eligible tax credits are increased from €50,000 over a period of 3 consecutive years to €70,000. Additionally, Malta has promoted work-life balance through the implementation of flexible work arrangements, which has been instrumental in maintaining female labour force participation.

Malta's trade and monetary policies have not had significant gender-specific components. However, the overall policy environment has supported economic stability, which indirectly contributes to improving gender equality by ensuring that economic growth and job creation remain inclusive. The Central Bank of Malta has maintained monetary policies that ensure low inflation and financial stability, indirectly benefiting households, including women-led households. The Maltese government has taken an active role in advancing gender equality by mobilising both public and private finance. Significant public investments have been directed towards enhancing access to education and healthcare, areas that particularly benefit women and girls. Additionally, private sector initiatives, supported by government incentives, have increased corporate engagement in promoting gender-diverse workforces.

In terms of fiscal consolidation, Malta has not engaged in significant austerity measures over the last five years. Instead, the Government has maintained an expansionary fiscal stance aimed at economic recovery, which has helped mitigate potential negative impacts on women and other vulnerable groups. However, some cost-containment measures were introduced, such as efforts to control public sector wage growth. To date, no formal assessments have been conducted to specifically evaluate the impact of these measures on women and men separately.

To foster a more gender-equal economy the government has prioritized addressing the gender pay gap, which decreased by 0.3 percentage points in 2022 compared to 2021, indicating a modest reduction in wage disparity between men and women. While the EU's gender pay gap

remained constant at 12.7% during this period, Malta's performance suggests a commitment to improving gender equality in the labour market.

Key macroeconomic policies have been implemented to support this agenda, including the Gender Equality and Mainstreaming Strategy and Action Plan (GEMSAP) for 2022-2027. This plan specifically aims to ensure equal pay for work of equal value, directly addressing wage disparities. Additionally, the government has implemented schemes aimed at combating gender-based pay discrimination, which aligns with the BpFA's objectives.

To bolster these initiatives, the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE) has been actively raising public awareness about gender pay issues, while the Equal Pay Tool—developed under the EU-funded project "Prepare the Ground for Economic Independence (PGEI)"—supports organizations with at least 50 employees that hold the Equality Mark in achieving equal pay for equal work. These combined efforts reflect a macroeconomic commitment to not only narrowing the gender pay gap but also addressing the broader gender pension gap, thus contributing to a more inclusive economic environment in Malta.

Recent measures also aimed to address the pension gap. These include the gradual granting of the equivalent of the full retirement pension of the deceased spouse to those who receive a widows' pension; contribution credits to women who stopped working because of parental reasons; the revision of certain pensions where there was still gender discrimination; and other measures targeted to help persons bridge gaps in their contributory record.

## **Poverty eradication, social protection and social services**

### **10. In the last five years, what actions has your country taken to reduce/eradicate poverty among women and girls?**

In the past five years, Malta has implemented a number of initiatives to combat poverty and social exclusion, which have benefited all individuals irrespective of sex and gender. These universal measures are aimed at promoting overall economic stability and reducing inequality in society. Although they are not specifically gender-targeted, they still provide a comprehensive response to challenges faced by women and girls in terms of economic empowerment and independence. Furthermore, some other measures targeted to women and girls were also introduced or are being planned.

Notably, although being higher than the rate for males (18.7% in 2023), Malta's female at-risk-of-poverty and social exclusion rate (21.1% in 2023) decreased during these last two years (in 2022 and 2023), remaining below the EU average rate. Likewise, improvements are noted in the female employment rate of the 20-64 age group (73.6% in 2023) which, as the rate for males (87.7% in 2023), kept increasing during the years and remained below the EU average. Key initiatives that were implemented include:

1. **Social Welfare Reforms:** Malta has made significant investments in its social welfare system, increasing benefits for vulnerable groups. This includes increases in pensions, social benefits, and allowances, which have disproportionately benefited women, particularly older women and single mothers, who are more likely to rely on such assistance. In addition, the pension bonus for women aged 62 years and older who spent many years out of the workforce due to past social norms, ensures that older women without a pension receive financial assistance, improving their social protection in old age.
2. **Education and Employment Programs:** The government has expanded access to education and training programs to improve employability across all sectors. These programs have supported women in acquiring skills for high-demand sectors, enhancing their participation in the workforce and reducing their risk of economic marginalization. Additionally, during the Covid-19 pandemic and post the pandemic, targeted awareness campaigns focused on improving financial literacy were introduced, specifically aimed at vulnerable groups such as single mothers, widows, and separated or divorced women. These efforts empowered them to make informed financial decisions, further reducing their risk of poverty and enhancing their economic independence.
3. **Family-Friendly Measures:** Various family-friendly policies, including extended maternity and paternity leave, flexible working arrangements, free childcare and pre- and after-school clubs, have been implemented. These initiatives have allowed more women to balance work and family life, thereby increasing their economic independence.
4. **Affordable Housing and Social Housing Programmes:** Malta has expanded access to affordable housing, reducing housing insecurity for low-income families, which includes many female-headed households.

While these initiatives are universal in scope, they are particularly effective in promoting gender equality by addressing the root causes of poverty, which often disproportionately affect women and girls. Through this holistic approach, Malta continues to work towards enhancing female economic independence and reducing poverty in a gender-inclusive manner.

Indeed, looking ahead, as part of the renewed National Strategy for Poverty Reduction and Social Inclusion (2025-2035) launched for public consultation, specific measures aim to increase girls' participation in STEM subjects and support women entrepreneurs, providing pathways to higher-paying and sustainable careers. Moreover, free childcare is being extended to cover atypical hours, further supporting parents (but on the majority women) that work in non-traditional or shift-based roles, thus increasing their economic stability and reducing poverty risks.

**11. In the past five years, what actions has your country taken to improve access to social protection for women and girls?**

The policy issues identified in the previous question are also effective in ensuring the improvement of access to social protection of women and girls.

**12. In the past five years, what actions has your country taken to improve health outcomes for women and girls in your country?**

A number of steps have been taken to address this important area.

In the field of formal education, a working group with the Education Ministry and other relevant stakeholders was set up in order to audit the Relationship and Sexuality Education Component of the PSCD subject across the sector during the years of compulsory schooling. Research and work through this working group is ongoing.

In the field of Sexual Health Promotion, various national population level campaigns on vaccination against HPV infection and cervical cancer took place over recent years targeting women and girls with the message in order to promote uptake of the vaccine which is available for free through government vaccination services.

A National Sexual Health Survey was commissioned by the Ministry for Health (MHA) on a representative sample of the Maltese population in order to identify trends in sexual health related knowledge, attitudes and behaviour of the Maltese resident population. The results are not publicly available but will be incorporated in the National Sexual Health Strategy which will be published in the near future.

Furthermore, over the last years, significant policy effort has taken place in order to update the medical sexual assault pathway in consultation with all stakeholders to make this more victim centred. An advanced draft of this policy is being cleared for publication and this ensures that all victims of sexual violence receive the necessary medical, forensic care through standard pathways including access to free morning after pill and post-exposure prophylaxis for HIV where necessary.

**13. In the past five years, what actions has your country taken to improve education outcomes and skills for women and girls, including in sectors where they are underrepresented?**

Within the framework of the Beijing Declaration, Malta has made significant strides in promoting quality education, training, and lifelong learning for women and girls. The country supports equal access to education at all levels, fostering skills development and narrowing gender gaps in traditionally male-dominated fields. Recent initiatives include policies encouraging girls to pursue STEAM subjects, support for vocational training, and initiatives aimed at adult women seeking continuous education. All these initiatives align with Malta's commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment, contributing to broader social and economic advancement.

### *Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)*

The Foundation for Educational Services (FES) operates within the non-formal education sector, offering services such as childcare, Klabb 3-16, and Skolasajf. While these services are often seen as child-minding, FES views them as an opportunity to broaden children's horizons through various non-formal educational activities. The programs are designed to promote positive role models, emphasising gender equality.

Language and activities within these programs are crafted to avoid reinforcing restrictive gender stereotypes. For example, in FES childcare centres, children are encouraged to play with any toys they choose and participate in various activities, such as role play and sports, regardless of their gender. This approach continues as children age and begin using Klabb 3-16 and Skolasajf services. All activities—whether sports, science, home economics, arts, or drama—are open to all genders. This ensures that children develop essential skills and confidence in all areas, free from societal expectations about gender.

In addition to breaking down gender barriers, FES activities introduce children to positive role models who defy stereotypes. These role models help inspire children and build their confidence to pursue careers or interests traditionally associated with the opposite gender. Through these initiatives, FES aims to develop empathetic, respectful children who can grow into confident individuals pursuing careers based on passion rather than stereotypes.

### *Compulsory Education*

The National Education Strategy for Malta 2024-2030 focuses on ensuring gender equality within the education system by promoting inclusive and equitable learning environments. It addresses the gender gap, particularly in fields such as STEAM, by implementing initiatives that encourage girls to engage in traditionally male-dominated areas. The strategy emphasises the importance of integrating gender-sensitive teaching materials and creating classroom environments that challenge stereotypes. By fostering inclusive education practices, the strategy seeks to provide all students, regardless of gender, equal opportunities to acquire skills and competencies critical for their future.

Additionally, the strategy aligns with SDG 4, ensuring that all learners achieve proficiency in foundational skills like literacy, numeracy, and essential digital skills. To reduce gender disparities, the strategy promotes targeted interventions to increase female participation in ICT and engineering, leveraging collaborative efforts between educators and policymakers to create an environment where girls feel empowered to pursue technology-driven subjects.

The Quality Assurance Framework for Education in Malta (0-16 years) supports the implementation of the National Education Strategy by establishing clear standards for creating gender-inclusive educational practices. The framework encourages schools to develop leadership, teaching methodologies, and a school culture prioritising gender equity. This includes ensuring that both boys and girls feel safe, supported, and equally encouraged to succeed in their educational journeys. The framework also emphasises monitoring and accountability, ensuring schools adhere to gender-inclusive policies and practices and fostering an environment where all learners can thrive.

The Directorate for Digital Literacy and Transversal Skills (DDLTS) within MEYR has prioritised digital education for girls over the past five years, recognising the rapid digital transformation of the economy. This priority aligns with the EU's Digital Education Action Plan, which emphasises equal opportunities in digital learning for all individuals. Key

initiatives include the annual Girls in ICT Day, held in collaboration with the Human Rights Directorate and the University of Malta. These events provide workshops and talks designed to inspire female students by connecting them with successful women in the technology sector. Additionally, DDLTS has been running the One-Tablet-Per-Child project since 2016, providing digital devices to students, teachers, and parents. This initiative expanded into the One-Device-Per-Child project, with free digital literacy training for all involved, ensuring that students, regardless of gender, can access digital learning tools and resources.

### *Further and Higher Education (FHE)*

#### *University of Malta (UM)*

The University of Malta (UM) is committed to fostering gender equality through several initiatives. One of the most significant efforts is the Gender+ Equity Plan (G+EP) 2022-2025, which addresses structural, cultural, and situational barriers to participation. The plan follows an intersectional approach, considering not only gender but also disability, race, and socio-economic backgrounds.

UM's Strategic Plan 2020-2025 reinforces this commitment by addressing gender gaps in key professions like engineering and education, promoting policies that support the visibility of women and LGBTQ+ rights, and conducting regular gender audits. In addition, the Recognition of Prior Learning Policy helps ensure that women returning to education later in life have access to higher education programs, acknowledging skills gained through non-formal and informal learning experiences.

UM's collaboration with national and international bodies has further bolstered its commitment to gender equality. For instance, the University received the Equality Mark Certification from the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE), recognising its efforts in providing a gender-equitable environment.

Further information may be found in the annexed UM document.

#### *Malta College of Arts, Science & Technology (MCAST)*

Over the past five years, MCAST has actively promoted gender equality, especially within STEM disciplines. The college has launched various initiatives to increase female participation:

- **Outreach Programs:** MCAST has introduced outreach programs targeted at secondary schools and the community to encourage young women to engage in STEM subjects. These programs have contributed to a notable increase in female enrolment in STEM courses.
- **Vocational Ambassadors Program:** MCAST has appointed female representatives in historically male-dominated fields like STEM. These ambassadors participate in conferences and outreach activities to inspire young women to pursue careers in vocational and STEM subjects.
- **Equality Measures:** MCAST has also promoted gender equality through policies to create a safe and welcoming environment. This includes measures to combat harassment and creating a gender-neutral language guide.
- **Mentorship and Transition Support:** MCAST offers targeted mentorship programs for female STEM students to ensure their retention and success. The institution has also



focused on removing barriers that may prevent women from completing their education.

These efforts have shown positive results, with female enrolment in STEM courses rising from 21% in 2020 to 30% in 2024. Furthermore, the percentage of female STEM graduates increased from 23% in 2019 to 34% in 2023. Although men still dominate STEM fields, MCAST's focus on outreach, mentorship, and inclusive policies has contributed to a narrowing gender gap in these areas.

#### *Malta Further and Higher Education Authority (MFHEA)*

The Malta Further and Higher Education Authority (MFHEA) has identified gender imbalances within higher education, particularly in fields like ICT and engineering. According to the Eurostudent VIII National Report, while females make up 59% of the student population, they remain underrepresented in certain fields, such as ICT (23%) and engineering (42%).

MFHEA has responded with targeted policy recommendations to increase female participation in these fields. One such recommendation is to create a more inclusive and welcoming environment for women in ICT and engineering, ensuring that female students can access support systems and opportunities tailored to their needs. This includes promoting outreach programs aimed at secondary schools and the community to encourage young women to consider careers in STEM.

#### *Lifelong Learning*

The National Lifelong Learning Strategy 2023-2030 is designed to support individuals of all ages in their educational journeys, emphasising upskilling and reskilling adult learners. The strategy highlights the critical role that lifelong learning plays in addressing gender disparities in the workforce, particularly in fields like ICT and engineering, where women are underrepresented. One of the core pillars of this strategy focuses on providing accessible and flexible learning opportunities, enabling women to balance education with family and work commitments.

The strategy also emphasises essential skills development, including literacy, numeracy, and digital skills, to empower women who may have missed earlier educational opportunities. This is particularly important for promoting social inclusion and combating poverty, as access to lifelong learning can help women improve their employability and economic independence.

The National Education Strategy (NES) 2023-2030 also aligns with this by promoting vocational training and adult education, providing pathways for women to return to education and acquire new skills relevant to the current job market. Both strategies underscore the importance of removing barriers to participation, ensuring that educational programs are inclusive, gender-sensitive, and adaptable to the diverse needs of adult learners.

**14. What actions has your country taken to ensure that economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic closes gender gaps in poverty, employment, social protection, education, and/or health that the pandemic has exacerbated?**

During the Covid-19 pandemic, students had to attend their lessons online and employees worked from home. However, not all families had the resources to purchase a laptop or afford a good internet connection.

In order to provide access to digital opportunities and address challenges such as, limited access to devices and connectivity and lack of employment which contribute to social exclusion, the Malta Digital Innovation Authority (MDIA) launched the Digital Connect scheme in collaboration with other entities in 2021. This scheme targeted low-income persons and families to increase inclusion and improve their digital literacy, connectivity, integration of digital technology, and computer skills. Eligible applicants were given a free laptop and fixed broadband internet connectivity for a year.

**15. Over the past five years, which forms of gender-based violence, and in which specific contexts or settings, has your country prioritized for action?**

*Female genital mutilation*

In 2022, HRD embarked on several campaigns. The GMU collaborated with the CGBVDV and the Migrant Women Association Malta for the International Day of Zero Tolerance for FGM. Information in various major languages prevalent among migrants was disseminated at centres hosting migrants to raise awareness on this issue.

In addition, the Migrant Health Liaison Office organised 2 sessions on FGM for health professionals. Training on FGM is also planned for PSCD teachers and the Judiciary. The Migrant Health Liaison Office, together with paediatric consultants, provides medical certificates to girls examined for FGM, to prevent their return to FGM prevalent countries.

As part of one of the actions found in GEMSAP, in 2023, training was given to several healthcare professionals on FGM.

*GBV and DV*

Through the initiatives implemented by the CGBVDV, several forms of GBV and DV have been tackled over the past five years. The national helpline 179, the emergency number 112 and the 116006 helpline were promoted throughout these initiatives.

The awareness-raising campaigns organised by CGBVDV are designed to enhance the public understanding regarding GBV and DV, in all their forms and intersectional elements. Over the past five years, CGBVDV delivered the following awareness-raising campaigns:

- ‘We are All Human’ (2021) – an online campaign, developed in consultation with LGBTIQ+ activists, focusing on same-sex intimate partner violence.
- ‘My Disability does not Mean Consent for Abuse’ (2021) – an online campaign, delivered in collaboration with the Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD), focusing on experiences of persons with disability with GBV and DV including forms of abuse specific to persons with disability.
- ‘All Humans Have Dignity. RESPECT. PROTECT.’ (2022) – an awareness-raising campaign on the experiences of migrant victims of GBV and DV, in collaboration with

Migrant Women Association Malta and UNHCR Malta. The campaign involved an online campaign targeting the general public, focus groups with professionals working with migrants, and information sessions in migrants' residential centres.

- 'Consent Matters: Stop Sexual Violence' (2022) – the online campaign sought to raise awareness on the importance of consent and the active bystander approach when witnessing sexual violence and harassment, including gendered cyberviolence. Video-interviews with professionals explaining the services supporting victims of sexual violence were published.
- 'The Fear of Coming Out and Same-Sex Intimate Partner Violence' (2023) – a panel discussion for the public during EuroPride Valletta 2023 to raise awareness on the abusive experiences LGBTIQ+ encounter when coming out and in their intimate relationships.
- Information sessions in Active Ageing Centres (2024) – in collaboration with Active Ageing and Community Care, Victim Support Malta and Fondazzjoni Sebħ, CGBVDV is delivering informative sessions on DV and abuse against the elderly in the active ageing centres across Malta.
- 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence:
  - 'Your Voice can Set you Free' (2022) – as part of this campaign, CGBVDV produced animations depicting real-life experiences of DV and IPV, mainly psychological, physical and economic abuse. These animations were promoted on national television.
  - 'Beat the Silence' (2023) – as part of this campaign, CGBVDV, CFC and NCPE shared online posters to raise awareness on realities of GBV and DV at home, at the workplace and at educational settings.

In 2022, CGBVDV, in collaboration with the Ministry for Education, Sport, Youth, Research and Innovation (MEYR), implemented the 'Safe Dates' (Foshee & Langwick, 2021) programme in four state schools as part of the pilot study titled, 'Implementation of the 'Safe Dates programme' in PSCD lessons in four Maltese State Schools: A Pilot Project'. The educational resources, aimed at Year 10 PSCD students, included in the 'Safe Dates' evidence-based programme involved material promoting healthy relationships among students and addressing attitudes and behaviours related to dating abuse. Following this pilot study, discussions are underway to determine the future implementation of the 'Safe Dates' programme in educational settings.

To tackle GBV in the media, an information session with creative media production and journalism students was held in April 2023. In this session, CGBVDV informed students about the significant role of the media in portraying GBV and DV and in influencing the public perceptions of such violence. Reference to the [Reporting of Domestic Violence Guidelines for Journalists and Media Content Producers](#) (2018) guidelines was made during the session to highlight the importance of ethical considerations when producing material related to GBV and DV. Moreover, a training programme was designed and delivered by CGBVDV for PBS journalists to emphasise ethical coverage when reporting cases of GBV and DV in the news.

Moreover, CGBVDV coordinated several training initiatives for professionals over the past five years mainly, the Multi-Agency Training on GBV and DV for Frontline Professionals and COPE sessions for primary and secondary educators titled, 'Self-Awareness for Educators on

GBV and DV'. Twelve rounds of the multi-agency training programme have been delivered to 335 professionals and between 2022 and 2024, 193 professionals participated in the COPE sessions. In 2023, CGBVDV also provided specialised training programmes for PBS journalists on ethical reporting and in a seminar was delivered in collaboration with the Judicial Studies Committee to inform members of the judiciary about the victim perspective in IPV cases and children witnessing violence.

The third National Strategy on GBV and DV (2023-2028) highlights several developments for targeted policies on FGM, sexual violence and harassment, stalking, forced marriage, economic and psychological violence and gender-based cyberviolence.

In July 2024, CGBVDV, HRD and CFC initiated discussions with stakeholders to address the practice of child marriages in Malta to develop outreach-related initiatives with migrant communities and proposing new legal amendments to protect child victims of child marriages. Moreover, FGM was introduced into the Criminal Code (Chapter 9 of the Laws of Malta) through an amendment of Article 251D.

When it comes to addressing trafficking in women and girls, Malta has launched its first National Strategy and Action Plan on Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings in Malta (2024-2030) in August 2024. The action plan involves measures tackling forced prostitution and sexual exploitation, mainly through supporting victims of trafficking, tackling high-risk operations in sexual exploitation cases and research.

### *Equality*

The NCPE's remit covers sexual harassment as per the Equality for Men and Women Act. In light of this:

- The NCPE is empowered to carry out investigations on lodged alleged cases of sexual harassment and discrimination, as well as initiate *ex officio* investigations, as deemed necessary. In 2023 one new case of alleged sexual harassment was investigated.
- Awareness raising on rights and responsibilities on sexual harassment is carried out through leaflets and posters on the topic.
- The NCPE assists organisations in drafting equality policies and sexual harassment policies, either as a prerequisite to obtaining the certification/recertification of the Equality Mark, or otherwise.
- In 2022, following the femicide of Paulina Dembska, the NCPE carried out an online forum on the link between gender inequality and gender-based violence that was followed by a research study on *The Prevalent Gender Role Perceptions and Attitudes among Adults Living in Malta*.
- The NCPE carries out training on equality, discrimination, harassment, and sexual harassment, to Government departments/ entities, private companies, and educational institutions. In 2023, the NCPE carried out 77 training sessions with 1,456 participants.
- Awareness raising is another crucial role carried out by the NCPE. In 2023, in fulfilment of the *16 Day of Activism against Domestic Violence and Gender-Based Violence*, the NCPE participated in tv and radio programmes to raise awareness on sexual harassment at the workplace, published an article to encourage victims of sexual harassment to speak out against violence, disseminated a mailshot featuring graphics emphasising zero tolerance of violence and sexual harassment at the workplace, and also collaborated with the Commission on Gender-Based Violence and Domestic Violence and the Commission for Children to convey common messages throughout these 16 days of activism.

The NCPE is advocating the strengthening of structured training sessions on gender stereotypes and gender roles for all teaching staff from pre-primary education level upwards as well as Personal, Social and Career Development (PSCD) teachers in all Maltese state, church, and private schools.

**16. In the past five years, what actions has your country prioritized to address gender-based violence?**

As mentioned above, the national legislation included several amendments to protect victims of GBV and DV and with the third National Strategy on GBV and DV (2023-2028), Malta's vision for the next five years is consolidated within the five-year action plan to prevent and combat GBV and DV. With regards to funding, CGBVDV has consistently received funding allocated for human and financial resources to implement the concurrent national strategy.

**17. In the past five years, what strategies has your country used to prevent gender-based violence**

Over the past five years, two national strategies focusing on GBV and DV have been implemented and in November 2023, CGBVDV and the Parliamentary Secretariat for Reforms and Equality launched the third National Strategy on GBV and DV (2023-2028).

Guided by the action plans embedded in these strategies, CGBVDV has implemented several measures to prevent GBV and DV. Apart from the awareness-raising initiatives mentioned in Question 15, the CGBVDV organised an awareness-raising campaign in collaboration with Men Against Violence titled, 'Engaging Men and Boys in Violence Prevention'. For this online initiative, CGBVDV engaged local male influencers and public figures to feature in several video clips promoting the role of men and boys in preventing GBV and challenging harmful gender stereotypes. Moreover, the CGBVDV promoted posters and GIFs reimagining discriminatory proverbs on Lovin Malta news portal. The campaign concluded with a national conference in March 2022 where several professionals and experts, including representatives from eMANcipator (Netherlands) and MÄN Organisation (Sweden) to exchange views on gender stereotypes, masculinities and the significance of men and boys' contributions in combatting GBV and DV. These initiatives were followed by a roundtable discussion held in December 2022 where Dr Declan Coogan from the University of Galway, Ireland, shared his experience of working with young victims and perpetrators with multiple stakeholders.

As part of the 16 Days of Activism 2023 campaign, 'Beat the Silence', the CGBVDV and the Parliamentary Secretariat for Reforms and Equality delivered a sports campaign to raise awareness on GBV and DV among sports supporters. The campaign involved footballers promoting the 'Beat the Silence' banner in football matches and a video clip which was promoted on national television featuring several athletes promoting the 16 Days of Activism 2023 campaign. This initiative was conducted in collaboration with the Aquatic Sports Association, the Malta Football Association and the Regatta clubs of Bormla and Birgu. Furthermore, the 'Beat the Silence' campaign strongly promoted the [Collection of Services](#) online directory which compiled a list of professional support services for victims and perpetrators of GBV and DV. To encourage victims, bystanders and perpetrators to seek professional assistance, CGBVDV promoted the online directory through posters containing a QR code that directed users to access directory. These posters were distributed across Malta and Gozo including in bars, restaurants, groceries, supermarkets, barber and salon shops,

private clinics and pharmacies, churches, local councils and active ageing centres. The posters were also disseminated with the GBDVU, NGOs and members of the Inter-Ministerial Committee (IMC).

As previously mentioned in Question 15, CGBVDV implemented the ‘Safe Dates’ pilot project to evaluate the ‘Safe Dates’ programme’s effectiveness in challenging the attitudes and behaviours of students in secondary educational settings regarding gender stereotypes and abusive relationships. The research study involved a pre- and post-evaluation questionnaire which was disseminated with students prior and following the implementation of the programme. To allow comparison of beliefs and attitudes between students who followed ‘Safe Dates’ and the ones who followed the current PSCD curriculum on dating violence, the same questionnaires were distributed with students who did not participate in ‘Safe Dates’. Additionally, four focus groups were held with educators who implemented the ‘Safe Dates’ programme to collect feedback regarding the programme’s implementation. Although the questionnaire results showed little significant differences between the two student groups, primarily due to the research limitations, including the Covid-19 mitigation measures, the data elicited from focus groups indicated that the programme improved students’ understanding of psychological violence and how to manage situations of dating abuse. Discussions regarding the future implementation of ‘Safe Dates’ have been initiated.

*Empowering women and girls to promote their economic independence and access to resources, and promote equitable relations within households, communities, and society.*

Malta has made progress in women’s participation in the labour market. The consistent increase in the female employment rate over the years marks how the multitude of measures aimed at increasing women’s participation in the labour market, such as free childcare, the Breakfast Club, Klabb 3-16, tapering of benefits and in-work benefit, left their desired effects.

GEMSAP aims to advance women’s participation in the labour market, aiming to have at least 73% of women engaged in full-time employment (20 – 64 years) by 2027 and strengthen the gender balance in segregation of labour. In fact, two of the objectives found in GEMSAP deal with guaranteeing equal access to employment in all sectors, combatting segregation, ensuring equal pay for work of equal value and enhancing women’s economic independence.

In 2023, NCPE launched the Equal Pay Tool during a Business Breakfast. The aim of this tool is to promote equal pay for the same work and work of equal value between men and women in organisations that employ at least 50 employees and are certified with the Equality Mark. Its purpose is to help organisations identify and address potential pay inequalities that are not justifiable. The NCPE also plans to organize further training sessions to help companies make the best use of the Equal Pay Tool.

Throughout 2023, Jobsplus continued providing several training courses, exposure/placement schemes, social partner agreements, and guidance services to its clients, including vulnerable females. Jobsplus conducted outreach activities through popular TV programs and radio interviews to promote its services, including the Inclusive Employment Services Unit, Lino Spiteri Foundation, ESF.02.048 VASTE Programme, and AMIG 11.01 Supported Employment Services for Migrants project. Jobsplus also held outreach meetings with relevant stakeholders to inform them about its services and collaborate on ad hoc projects.

In 2023, the customer care unit within DIER provided legal advice and information to clients regarding equal pay for equal work discrimination. Throughout the year, seven investigations were conducted for alleged breaches of this principle. These complaints included instances of

wage discrimination between foreign and local workers, class discrimination, and gender discrimination. DIER officials provided guidance to ensure compliance where irregularities were detected. The Department also offers a customer care service to address related queries and complaints.

In addition, the MTCA is undergoing discussions to review and revise inland revenue policies and legislation to ensure equal treatment between men and women, irrespective of civil status and, or sex where necessary.

**18. In the past five years, what actions has your country taken to prevent and respond to technology-facilitated gender-based violence (e.g. online sexual harassment, online stalking, non-consensual sharing of intimate images)?**

In 2022, CGBVDV designed and delivered the ‘Consent Matters: Stop Sexual Violence’ awareness-raising campaign which featured online sexual harassment and non-consensual sharing of intimate images online through various posters shared on CGBVDV’s social media platforms.

The third National Strategy on GBV and DV (2023-2028) involves plans to develop targeted policies on gender-based cyberviolence and to improve understandings and legal definitions of gender-based cyberviolence to strengthen prosecution of gender-based cyberviolence.

**19. In the past five years, what measures has your country taken to resource women’s organizations working to prevent and respond to GBV?**

The Consultative Council for Women’s Rights (CCWR) was established in November 2017 and started its work in January 2018, with the aim to represent women’s rights and serve as a platform the policy development and legislative proposals. The purpose of the Council is to advise the Government on issues affecting women in Malta and to present policy proposals. The members of the Council are appointed from among persons active in organizations working in the field of women’s rights including GBV. The Council is also in contact with the GBVDV through regular consultations and policy recommendations.

Malta invests in the field of GBV and DV by allocating financial and human resources for governmental and non-governmental entities and service providers. Moreover, consistent collaborations between governmental entities and NGOs continue to sustain the implementation of the national strategy.

The Ministry for Social Policy and Children’s Rights (MSPC) finances Public Social Partnerships (PSPs) for a duration of three years, with a possibility of renewal with NGOs and Voluntary Organisations (VOs) which offer direct or indirect support to victims of DV and their children:

- VSM which runs the Care for Victims of Sexual Assault (CVSA) service: €292,500 (2021 - 2023), €420,000 (2024 – 2026)
- Dar Merħba Bik (DV first stage shelter) and Dar Santa Bakhita (DV second stage shelter): €1,074,195 (2022 – 2024)

- St Jeanne Antide Foundation (SOAR) which provide various services in the sector including community social work and a family service centre for DV victims among others: €162,240 (2024 -2026)
- Il-Milja Programme (DV second stage shelter) which is run by Fondazzjoni Sebħ under the auspices of the Archdiocese of Malta: €1,013,070 (2021 – 2023). Negotiations are underway for another 3-year renewal.

In April 2024, MSPC renewed the PSP for Care for Victims of Sexual Assault (CVSA) with VSM (VO141/08) for another three years. CVSA is a service which caters for individuals who have been affected by a sexual assault. The Ministry further sponsors other organisations which offer more generic services including homeless shelters which extend emergency services to distressed women and their children, and who eventually are transferred to the more specialised services/homes mentioned above.

Moreover, in 2015, the Ministry for Gozo and Planning (MGP) signed a tripartite contract with MSPC and Fondazzjoni Kenn u Tama with regards to the management of Dar Emmaus which serves as an emergency shelter for DV and homelessness. As part of this contract, the MGP provides €40,000 in funding to Fondazzjoni Kenn u Tama for the administrative management of this shelter. Services are not restricted to women with children. Gender-neutral victims are similarly catered for through a tailor-made agreement, which was negotiated in 2023 with the Association of the Friends of Thouret. The association supports and assists vulnerable persons, particularly those involved in prostitution, through their services at Dar Hosea.

Furthermore, CGBVDV is currently working on establishing a fund for VOs to assist them in implementing awareness-raising initiatives as outlined in the third National Strategy on GBV and DV (2023-2028).

**20. In the past five years, what actions has your country taken to address the portrayal of women and girls, discrimination and/or gender bias in the media, including social media.**

The Broadcasting Authority (BA), launched the gender representation guidelines for discussion programmes in 2020 to ensure a fairer representation between the sexes. These guidelines were developed in the context of the 2017 manifest proposal for the “*introduction of guidelines in televised debates so that, when possible, a balance is achieved in the representation of the two sexes*”, and are also in line with OPM Circular 15 of 2012 Gender Mainstreaming in Practice which requires the public administration to adopt a pro-active approach in identifying those areas where any degree of inequality could potentially arise, assess the underlying causes for such inequalities, and take the necessary steps to bring about change.

Action 4.3.2 in GEMSAP aims to monitor the Gender Representation Guidelines for Discussion Programmes and ensure that adequate training and support is provided as required. In 2023, the BA chose several discussion programs to collect qualitative data on gender representation. They selected a sample from various radio and television stations to ensure coverage of different types of audio-visual media in the broadcasting landscape of Malta.

In addition, HRD has embarked on several social media campaigns throughout the years. Some of these involve a series of social media posts to educate the public on the stigma surrounding



menstruation and the importance of menstrual hygiene. As well as a series of social media posts to promote women in STEM, women and girls in science, the importance of equal pay, and women in politics, women in ICT.

As previously mentioned, the CGBVDV collaborated with Lovin Malta, a local news portal, in the ‘Engaging Men and Boys in Violence Prevention’ campaign. This collaboration facilitated the promotion of posters and GIFs which reimagined discriminatory proverbs in Maltese. Moreover, the CGBVDV continuously publishes articles on GBV and DV in news portals and utilises airtime on television to promote adverts related to GBV and DV. The Commissioner on Gender-Based Violence and Domestic Violence also attends to several television programmes and radio interviews to raise awareness on GBV and DV.

In 2023, CGBVDV coordinated a specialised training programme for PBS journalists which delved into the ethical and intelligent reporting of GBV and DV in the media. The session, delivered by Prof Marceline Naudi and Dr Lara Dimitrijevic, also referred to the [Reporting of Domestic Violence Guidelines for Journalists and Media Content Producers](#) (2018) guidelines and the significant role of the media in influencing the public perceptions on GBV and DV. Additionally, in 2023, CGBVDV was invited to deliver an information session with creative media production and journalism students to raise awareness on the importance of ethical considerations when reporting or producing material related to GBV and DV.

As outlined in the third National Strategy on GBV and DV (2023-2028), the CGBVDV is committed to continue engaging the media and the private sector to address gender stereotypes which continue to increase tolerance and acceptance of GBV and DV, mainly through active collaboration with the media and the private sector and by updating the reporting guidelines for journalists mentioned above.

In 2020 the NCPE participated in a committee set up by the Broadcasting Authority to draft the [Gender Representation Guidelines for Discussion Programmes](#). The guidelines are targeted for the media service providers/stakeholders to raise awareness and to narrow the gender gap in discussion programmes. These guidelines were discussed during a meeting bringing together journalists in the field.

In 2021 the NCPE published the newsletter *Equality Matters* which focused on equality in the media, delineating the Maltese legislation vis-à-vis equality and the media, different types of media, stereotypes in the media, and gender equality in the media sector. Reference was also made to cyber violence, the NCPE’s role in this regard, and recommendations on how the media can promote diversity. The newsletter was distributed to relevant stakeholders and is available on the NCPE’s website<sup>5</sup>.

## **21. In the past five years, what actions has your country taken specifically tailored to address violence against marginalized groups of women and girls?**

Malta’s national legislation has been amended to tackle violence against marginalised groups by introducing FGM in the Criminal Code (Chapter 9 of the Laws of Malta) through the amendment of Article 251D and by introducing virginity testing as a criminal offence through

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<sup>5</sup> [https://ncpe.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Newsletter\\_EqualityMatters\\_Issue13.pdf](https://ncpe.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Newsletter_EqualityMatters_Issue13.pdf)

[Act No. XI of 2024](#) to protect individuals from ‘honour-based’ abuse. Moreover, Article 251F through [Act No. X of 2024](#) criminalises forced sterilization to protect persons with disability.

In the past five years, several initiatives on GBV and DV have addressed the intersectional element of GBV and DV on marginalised groups. As referred in Question 15, The ‘My Disability does not Mean Consent for Abuse’ awareness-raising campaign, delivered in 2021 in collaboration with CRPD, sought to spread awareness in public communities through online video clips featuring the participation of persons with disability reflecting on violence against persons with disability, specifically abusive forms which are exclusive to persons with disability. Additionally, the online campaign ‘We Are All Human’, held in 2021, focused on addressing stereotypical assumptions regarding same-sex intimate partner violence. For EuroPride Valletta 2023, CGBVDV organised a panel discussion open for the public to highlight the realities of LGBTIQ+ individuals when experiencing family violence when coming out and abusive intimate relationships.

In 2022, CGBVDV, in collaboration with UNHCR Malta and Migrant Women Association, coordinated the ‘All Humans Have Dignity. RESPECT. PROTECT.’ awareness-raising campaign to highlight the experiences and barriers that migrant victims encounter when dealing with GBV and DV. Multilingual posters were disseminated online and in state schools, primary healthcare clinics and community clinics to spread information about the realities of GBV and DV and to promote the national helplines. Additionally, information sessions on gender stereotypes, GBV and DV were held for families residing at Hal Far Family Centre and men residing at Hal Far Centre. The campaign also involved focus groups with professionals who work with migrants to gather information about the experiences and barriers that professionals and migrants face when experiencing GBV and DV.

In 2024, CGBVDV, in collaboration with Active Ageing and Community Care, Fondazzjoni Sebħ and Victim Support Malta, is dedicating its efforts to spread awareness on violence against the elderly through information sessions in active ageing centres across Malta. In these sessions, elderly communities are informed on the forms of GBV and DV, recognising abuse, supporting persons experiencing abuse and seeking professional support services.

In all the campaigns mentioned above, the 179 and the 116006 helplines are promoted as well as the 112-emergency number to encourage victims of GBV and DV to seek professional assistance in situations of GBV and DV.

Furthermore, CGBVDV, HRD and CFC are currently holding discussions with stakeholders to address the realities of child marriage practices in Malta. The goal is to amend the national legislation to include child marriages and to raise awareness with migrant communities.

CGBVDV also incorporates intersectionality in the ‘Multi-Agency Training on GBV and DV for Frontline Professionals’ with sessions focusing on violence against persons with disability, violence against LGBTIQ+ individuals and violence against persons within migrant communities.

In line with the third National Strategy on GBV and DV (2023-2028), several measures are planned to continue addressing violence against marginalised groups to inform policy development, such as:

- Research on prevalence and barriers within migrant communities (Measure 1.2 [B]) and development of training programmes for professionals working with migrants (Measure 1.2 [C]).
- Research examining the incidence of GBV and DV on persons within marginalised groups (Measure 1.7 [A]).
- Evaluation of existing legislation and policies with research findings to ensure an evidence-based approach (Measure 1.7 [C]).
- Enhancement of teaching dating violence prevention, gender equality and intersectionality in schools (Measure 2.2 [A]).

## Participation, accountability and gender-responsive institutions

### **22. In the past five years, what actions and measures has your country to promote women's participation in public life and decision-making?**

*Introduced temporary special measures, such as quotas, reserved seats, benchmarks and targets that promote women's participation in politics, especially at decision-making level.*

Act No. XX of 2021 was a significant development in gender equality in political and public decision-making. It introduced, by virtue of Article 52A of the Maltese Constitution, a corrective mechanism whereby if the number of MPs identifying as the under-represented sex totals to less than forty per cent of all the elected Members of Parliament (MPs), there shall be an increase of twelve MPs of the under-represented sex. This mechanism has a sunset clause of twenty years from its coming into force, unless revoked or re-enacted (requiring a two-thirds majority).

The same Act amended the General Elections Act (Cap. 354 of the Laws of Malta), increasing the number of members forming the Electoral Commission from eight to ten and requiring no less than four members of every sex. This mechanism was first put to the test during the 2022 general election, and more than doubled the percentage of female Members of Parliament; from 13% in 2020 to 28% in 2022.

Objective 6 of the Gender Equality and Mainstreaming Strategy and Action Plan (GEMSAP), deals with achieving gender balance in political and public decision-making. Measures under this objective aim to raise awareness of the benefits of equal representation and power-sharing between women and men, and to raise awareness of gender bias, stereotypes, sexism, and discrimination against women, including sexist hate speech online and offline in political discourse. As well as, collecting and analysing relevant gender disaggregated data with regard to women's representation in Parliament, local councils and government appointed boards.

In addition, as part of the measures in GEMSAP, Malta is currently working on transposing the Women on Boards Directive into national law to ensure improved gender balance in corporate boards of listed companies.

### **23. In the past five years, what actions has your country taken to increase women's access to expression and participation in decision-making in the media, including through information and communication technologies (ICT).**

*Other please specify*

Specific actions under Objective 2 of GEMSAP focus on increasing women's participation in the ICT sector. These include:

- Establishing mentoring programmes for women interested in technology namely entrepreneurship, ICT Artificial Intelligence (AI) and blockchain technology, finance and science.
- Undertake regular raising awareness initiatives on careers within the ICT Sector, and equal opportunities within it.
- Proposing further fiscal and financial incentives for women taking up entrepreneurship, ICT careers, and employment opportunities related to the finance and science sector.
- Developing a statistical system to monitor women's participation in entrepreneurship, ICT, finance, and the science sector, including in terms of employment tenure and progression, access to various forms of finance, and business growth.

The Women in ICT Focus group, convened by the Eskills Foundation, serves as a platform for discussing the participation of women in the ICT sector, both in the Government service and private sector. The group also worked on Malta's roadmap to increase awareness of ICT careers, including job retention, promoting STEM subjects to women, and launching a Digital Skills Bootcamp for female participants. The Bootcamp aims to provide young minds with creative abilities in artificial intelligence and digital innovation, which are essential for all career pathways.

The Focus Group has set different priorities along the years, including changing parents' perception of ICT, introducing ICT to children at a young age, and improving the self-presentation of the ICT sector. Additionally, the Eskills Malta Foundation has planned several activities to promote gender convergence in digital and ICT skills. These activities include implementing a Focus Group of digital or tech women, organising awareness campaigns, inviting women to become eSkills Ambassadors, conducting secondary school visits by eSkills Women Ambassadors, participating in EU funded projects, and organising an Annual Women in ICT Bootcamp.

**24. Please describe your country's current national women's machinery (government entity exclusively dedicated to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women) and describe the measures that your country taken over the past five years to establish and/or strengthen it.**

The Gender Mainstreaming Unit (GMU) was established in January 2019 and has been active in addressing challenges highlighted by women and gender minorities ever since its formation. The Unit forms part of the Human Rights Directorate and it is responsible for the development of the first national framework on Gender Equality and Gender Mainstreaming (GEMSAP).

The GMU serves as a coordinating body that communicates with various entities, provides information and feeds the gender perspective to ongoing processes. Raising awareness is another priority to this Unit as it makes the general public aware of issues highlighted by women, gender minorities and other organisations with the aim to provide a long-lasting solution. Additionally, the GMU assists the government in policy making, make use of existing funding resources for the development of services, provide training and remains active in community building.

It is the sole responsibility of Ministries and Departments for the management of their budgets to allocate funds for the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women. The allocation on annual budgets to each line Ministry by the Ministry for Finance reflects the priorities presented by the same line Ministries each year, as part of the annual budget process. Considerations by the Ministry for Finance at budget preparatory stage would include the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women, as may be requested by the line Ministries, amongst other various functions of government. The same applies for budget measures that are proposed by the line Ministries each year.

The GMU designs and implements policies and programmes geared towards promoting gender mainstreaming and achieving gender equality, safeguarding human rights, upholding democracy and preserving the rule of law. The vision of the unit is to have a society where women and men, girls and boys, in all their diversity, are equal. A society free from violence and discrimination based on gender, where everyone is free to pursue their chosen path in life and have equal opportunities to reach their full potential in the use of all talents and diversity.

**25. In the past five years, what other mechanisms and tools has your country used to mainstream gender equality across sectors? (e.g. gender focal points in the Executive, Legislature or Judiciary; inter-ministerial coordination mechanisms; gender audits, consultations with women's organizations)**

Malta's Gender Equality and Mainstreaming Strategy and Action Plan (GEMSAP), adopted in November 2022, is the first framework that focuses on gender equality and gender mainstreaming. GEMSAP was formulated following intensive comparative research; consultations with the Consultative Council for Women's Rights (CCWR); a public consultation; and extensive consultation with all relevant stakeholders within government and civil society. The strategy focuses on eight strategic objectives:

1. Strengthening of Institutional Mechanisms for Gender Mainstreaming and Gender Equality
2. Guarantee equal access to employment in all sectors, combat segregation and ensuring Equal Pay for Work of Equal Value.
3. Enhancing women's economic independence.
4. Strengthening the principle of gender equality & mainstreaming in the education system and challenging gender stereotypes
5. Promoting co-responsibility and balance of work, private and family life
6. Achieving gender balance in political and public decision-making
7. Promoting gender equality in social wellbeing and healthcare policies
8. Eliminate gender imbalance in the field of justice by addressing gender bias and gender stereotypes

To ensure the effective implementation of GEMSAP, an inter-ministerial committee (IMC) with focal points from all ministries was created. The IMC ensures the necessary monitoring and evaluation of the policy framework together with the adequate collection of gender-disaggregated data. Crucially, the IMC also ensures that the Action Plan is framed within an

adequate timeline of work, breaking down each measure into objectives in close cooperation with all relevant stakeholders, and ensuring their timely and effective implementation.

Each strategic measure has a clear indication of the lead and supporting Ministry or Entity to ensure this continued cooperation between sectors. GEMSAP also takes into account several measures which are currently being discussed in upcoming European directives, and thus facilitates their eventual transposition, should they be approved by Member States. Moreover, GMU with the help of the IMC closely monitors the implementation of measures with progress being reported on a quarterly basis to serve as an annual political stock-taking of the progress being made.

**26. If there is a national human rights institution in your country, what measures has it taken to address violations of women’s rights and promote gender equality?**

There is no national human rights institution in Malta yet.

**27. In the past five years, what actions has your country taken to build and sustain peace, promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development and implement the women, peace and security agenda?**

Over the past five years, Malta has been implementing its first National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security which can be found in the following link: <https://foreign.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/WPS-Web-Version.pdf>. This National Action Plan was based on four pillars: promotion, prevention, participation and partnership. In the past five years, various initiatives have been implemented in line with the National Action Plan out of which the following three actions will be highlighted:

*Awareness-raising and training on a local level*

Prior to the start of the process to adopt Malta’s first National Action Plan (NAP) on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) there was very little awareness about the subject, not only within the Ministry for Foreign and European Affairs and Trade that is the lead entity to implement the NAP, but also among locals and stakeholders.

In this regard, over the past five years, various initiatives were taken in order to promote the WPS agenda among various stakeholders through trainings and lectures, as well as among the public through social media. With regard to the trainings, since 2021, lectures are given on a regular basis to police officers at various stages of their career. They have also integrated the subject within the curricula. Lectures have also been given to members of the Armed Forces of Malta for the first time in July 2024.

Outreach on the WPS agenda was also conducted among University of Malta students. Between February and May in 2022 and 2023, an extra-curricular course at the University of Malta course on WPS was organized by the University sponsored by the Ministry for Foreign and European Affairs and Trade. Throughout this course, students gained an understanding of the WPS agenda from both theoretical and practical perspectives. The WPS course introduced students to a gender perspective not only on peace and security but also on international law,

conflict resolution, humanitarian action and other related topics. This is also in line with objectives to build partnerships to promote knowledge on the Women, Peace and Security agenda with the aim of also encouraging research in the area, as set out in Malta's first National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (2020-2024). Moreover, a lecture on the WPS agenda was given to students of the Dual Master Programme on Conflict Analysis, Conflict Resolution and Mediterranean Security, which is a collaboration between the University of Malta and George Mason University (U.S.). The lecture delved into both theoretical framework of the Agenda, as well as how the Agenda is implemented on the ground, taking Mali as a case study. The lecture was delivered by an officer from the Ministry for Foreign and European Affairs and Trade which included a briefing from a female NGO representative from Mali.

Furthermore, on International Women's Day on the 8<sup>th</sup> March 2024, the Ministry for Foreign and European Affairs and Trade delivered lessons to young girls in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade of primary school to introduce them to the WPS Agenda as well as to different careers in the field of peace and security.

The aim of all of these trainings was to raise awareness on this important Agenda, and to sensitise current and future leaders on the relevance of this Agenda in their current or future lines of work.

#### *Monitoring the implementation of the first WPS NAP*

As outlined in Malta's first NAP on WPS, an Oversight Committee was appointed to oversee the implementation of the NAP which brings together representatives from government ministries, civil society, academia and independent individuals with relevant experience and expertise. Its responsibilities includes:

- supervising the regular and systematic evaluation of progress on achieving the outlined objectives and actions across all pillars in the NAP;
- revising existing actions and targets in light of emerging issues and policy agendas on Women, Peace and Security, in response to lessons learned coupled with challenges identified in the monitoring process;
- using outreach and communication mechanisms to ensure regular dissemination of updates to the stakeholders and, in particular, make sure that the perspectives of women affected by conflict are incorporated into the ongoing work of the Committee.

The Oversight Committee has so far met five times (18 March 2021, 6 December 2021, 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2022, 10<sup>th</sup> August 2023 and 14<sup>th</sup> March 2024), and has proven to be a useful tool to be able to take stock of the progress in implementing the NAP locally, as well as the challenges faced. It also provided networking opportunities for stakeholders. As awareness of the WPS increases, more stakeholders are joining the Committee, to ensure that implementation of the NAP is truly a whole-of-government and whole-of-society endeavour.

#### *Financial contributions to implement the WPS agenda*

Over the past five years, Malta has also provided funding towards the implementation of the WPS agenda. Key examples include:

- A contribution in relation the implementation of the UN Women Afghanistan Country Office during the Afghanistan Pledging Conference (2020)
- An annual contribution towards UN Women's Core Resources (2021-2023)

- A three-year agreement whereby funds are directed towards UN Women and earmarked for Women Peace and Security on an annual basis (2024-2026)
- A three-year agreement whereby funds are directed towards the NGO Working Group on WPS annually (2024-2026)
- A one-off contribution in response to the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund's Sudan Funding Appeal (2024)

**28. In the past five years, what actions has your country taken to increase the leadership, representation and participation of women in conflict prevention, resolution, peacebuilding, humanitarian action and crisis response, at decision-making levels in situations of armed and other conflicts, and in fragile or crisis settings?**

*Peace Mediation Capacity Building*

In November 2021, the Ministry for Foreign and European Affairs and Trade together with the Berlin Centre for International Peace Operations (ZIF) organised the First Peace Mediation Capacity Building Programme for diplomats with the generous support of the German Federal Foreign Office (GFFO). The target of this programme was to be a first step towards the creation of a pool of qualified peace mediators that would allow Malta to assume a more active role in peace-related activities, since peace mediation is an important aspect of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda.

The training course was well received, and the intention is to continue building capacity of the foreign service in this area. In this regard, a Maltese diplomat was nominated to attend the "International Mediation: Theory, Cases and Skills," that took place in Oslo in June 2024.

*Women, Peace and Security chosen as a priority during our term on the UN Security Council and as Chair-In-Office of the OSCE*

WPS is one of Malta's priorities as an elected member of the UN Security Council (2023-2024). Throughout Malta's membership on the Council, Malta is seeking to strengthen WPS elements across geographic and thematic agenda items, while ensuring that women's voices, including among CSO briefers, are given a platform to be heard. Prior to beginning its term, Malta endorsed the Shared Commitments on WPS, which aim to ensure that the WPS agenda is fully and meaningfully integrated into all aspects of the Council's work.

In keeping with the practice of WPS shared commitment holders, during Malta's Presidency in February 2023, Malta selected Somalia as the WPS country of focus and invited all Council members and briefers to consider various aspects of the WPS agenda in their statements. To limit the risk of reprisals to the invited CSO briefers, Malta circulated the statement by the Somali Gender Equality Movement as Security Council document (S/2023/137), a move commended by E10. Prior to the Council's meeting on Somalia, and in keeping with the practice of WPS shared commitment holders, Malta convened a dedicated WPS press stake-in with the 10 WPS Shared Commitment Holders.

Also during March 2023, Malta organized a breakfast roundtable meeting with Afghan women on 8 March (International Women's Day) in New York to provide an informal opportunity for Council members to hear directly from and engage with Afghan women leaders about the



challenges they are facing and their perspectives about political pathways forward, thereby providing a platform for Afghan women to identify policy and engagement options for the Security Council that support the work of Afghan women human rights defenders and identify opportunities for strengthening the UN's role in protecting the full spectrum of women's rights. Furthermore, Malta co-organised a press stake-in together with Albania (which also endorsed the WPS Shared Commitments) prior to the UN Security Council's meeting on Afghanistan on the day. For the first time, an Afghan woman civil society representative also participated in the UN press stake-in. Throughout 2023, Malta also joined a number of other press stakeouts organized by other WPS Shared Commitment Holders.

On 26 June 2023 Malta organized its first Arria formula meeting on "Enhancing the capacities of Member States to ensure a gender-responsive approach to counterterrorism" at the United Nations Headquarters in New York. The event was co-sponsored by Costa Rica, Jordan, Mexico, Mozambique, New Zealand Spain and the United States. Malta worked with the International Institute for Justice and the Rule of Law (IIJ) in the organisation of this meeting. The meeting aimed to consider the importance of building the capacity of Member States to ensure gender-responsive, human rights-compliant approaches to preventing and countering terrorism. The Permanent Representative of Malta to the UN, H.E. Ms Vanessa Frazier chaired the meeting. Ms Sarah Hendriks, Deputy Executive Director for Policy, Programme, Civil Society and Intergovernmental Support, UN Women, Ms Aleksandra Dier, Gender Coordinator, Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, and Mr Steven Hill, Executive Secretary, International Institute for Justice and the Rule of Law, briefed the meeting, as well as a civil society representative from Women in International Security briefed the meeting.

Moreover, in 2023, Malta convened informal briefings for Afghan women peacebuilders to engage directly with other Security Council members. Malta has also hosted and participated in numerous informal expert meetings with other Council members to hear from women peacebuilders, and environmental and human rights defenders from Colombia and Syria. Furthermore, as one of five countries on the Security Council with a woman Permanent Representative, Malta convened the '5W' (the five women Permanent Representatives) in an informal meeting with legal experts and civil society representatives to strategies about how the Council can best respond to the women's rights crisis in Afghanistan.

As from 2024, Malta started coordinating the WPS Shared Commitment Holders (SCHs) among 11 Security Council for the year 2024. In this regard, Malta facilitates coordination on the implementation of WPS resolutions and statements. As WPS SCHs, we have issued 9 press statements on various thematic and country situations.

Furthermore, during Malta's second Presidency of the UNSC in April 2024, Malta chaired the annual open debate on conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) on 23 April 2024 at the level of Deputy Prime Minister. The briefers were the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Pramila Patten, United Nations Goodwill Ambassador Danai Gurira, and Niemat Ahmadi, a Sudanese woman human rights defender and genocide prevention advocate. This debate focused on reducing CRSV through gender-responsive disarmament. Moreover, Malta sought to ensure the safe participation of 7 women Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) briefers in all their diversity during our Presidency. Finally, as the coordinator of the Shared Commitments (SCH) on WPS, Malta also convened two WPS SCH press stake-ins, on CRSV and the Great Lakes during that month, both of which provided a platform for the civil society briefers to engage directly with the media.

WPS is also a thread running through our role as Chairperson-in-Office of the OSCE. By way of example, in July 2024, a Joint meeting of the Forum for Security Co-operation (FSC) under the Chairpersonship of Croatia and Permanent Council (PC), held under the Chairpersonship of Malta was held. This included a Security Dialogue on “Women, Peace and Security: Women’s contribution to peace and security: lessons learned and challenges ahead.” Captain Iona Muscat, Malta’s first female helicopter pilot in the Armed Forces of Malta was one of the panellists.

#### *Funds to support women’s leadership in the area of peace and security*

Malta also made other financial contributions to support women’s leadership in the area of peace and security. Some examples can be noted below:

- A contribution towards the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund’s Rapid Response Window (2021)
- A contribution to the Women’s Peace and Humanitarian Fund’s Libya appeal to support women-led organizations to deal with the aftermath of the floods (2023)
- A contribution towards the Trust Fund of the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs under the Multi-Year Appeal, part of which would be dedicated to WPS (2024)
- A contribution towards the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund (2021-2024)
- A contribution towards the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund (2024-2028)

#### **Peaceful and inclusive societies**

**29. In the last five years, what actions has your country taken to enhance judicial and non-judicial accountability for violations of international humanitarian law and violations of the human rights of women and girls in situations of armed and other conflicts or humanitarian action and crisis response?**

#### *Taken measures to combat trafficking in women and children*

Gender-based violence is an important driver of trafficking in human beings (THB). Although human trafficking affects people of all genders, to ensure effective responses it is necessary to utilise a gender sensitive approach in combatting this crime. Over the past five years, Malta has made significant efforts to eliminate THB through an anti-human trafficking reform which was initiated in 2020. The Human Rights Directorate (HRD) has been tasked with managing this reform and special attention has been given to the gender dimension of this crime as well as taking into account the context of gender-based violence in human trafficking.

Malta’s National Action Plan on Human Trafficking 2020-2023 (NAP) addressed gender-based violence in terms combatting trafficking in women and girls.

Action 12 called for the creation of awareness sessions for women and girls aimed at providing information about:

- services that would assist in dealing with past traumatic situations;
- the threat posed by labour trafficking and human trafficking for sexual exploitation.

Besides the implementation of the NAP, the National Strategy on Gender-Based Violence and Domestic Violence 2023-2028 was also developed during this reporting period. This Strategy

is led by the Commission for Domestic Violence and Gender-Based Violence and it provides a measure which refers explicitly to the need to “develop a strategy to address human trafficking, addressing issues related to forced prostitution and exploitation for sexual purposes as a crime”, thereby prioritising combatting gender-based violence.

The Human Trafficking Service by the Foundation for Social Welfare Services (FSWS) has been focusing its efforts to raise more awareness amongst young women and girls on the risks of human trafficking and gender-based violence, as well as how to protect themselves. This was carried out through outreach in the streets which are mostly known for sexual exploitation of women and girls and in massage parlours. Sessions were also held with female inmates, migrant women and minors. These sessions aim to provide necessary life skills to be better equipped in avoiding traps of manipulation by having better communication skills, understanding attachment and setting boundaries. Additionally, social workers regularly visit commercial outlets specifically associated with human trafficking (mainly of women) and they try to reach out to women working there, leaving their contacts and encouraging them to seek assistance should they require it. Information sessions were also carried-out with various professionals who might encounter vulnerable women and girls including Child Protection Services, Looked After Children, 179 operators and support workers working in residential homes.

HRD and Aġenzija Appoġġ have collaborated on the creation of a programme which worked to ensure that sex workers have adequate access to services, to safeguard their well-being and to reduce the risks of exploitation and gender-based violence which they may encounter in their work.

In July 2024 Malta launched the National Strategy and Action Plan on Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings in Malta 2024-2030. The Strategy includes specific measures that aim to contribute to strengthening a gender-sensitive approach to combatting THB and reduce gender-based violence. This includes taking into account the specificities of THB that are reflected in differences of recruitment, control and exploitation of women and men. The Strategy takes a gender-specific approach and was developed to ensure non-discrimination as follows:

- A gender-specific approach. The specificities of trafficking in human beings are reflected in differences of recruitment, control and exploitation of women and men. THB can also have specific and different impacts on women and men. For this reason, prevention strategies, as well as assistance and support measures for victims should be gender-specific, considering the different needs of male and female victims.
- Non-Discrimination: Different forms of discrimination (discrimination against minorities and vulnerable social groups, migration policies of discriminatory and restrictive nature, gender-based discrimination) are very often root causes of trafficking in human beings. The Strategy ensures that measures apply to all victims in a non-discriminatory manner, in accordance with Article 3 of the Council of Europe Convention against Trafficking in Human Beings – women, men and children, including persons with disabilities, whether subjected to transnational or national trafficking, regardless of the form of exploitation and the country where they were exploited.

Through the implementation of the Strategy a National Referral Mechanism (NRM) shall be developed through a centralised system for data collection on victims of THB which will be disaggregated by gender, highlighting this principle. Additionally, the National Action Plan includes actions to ensure that school children are educated about trafficking, exploitation,

gender equality, and the importance of human rights. Specifically, this will be done through the development of education materials on gender-based violence, trafficking and exploitation adapted to specific age groups, and integrated in the school curricula.

## Section Four: National institutions and processes

### **33. Please describe your country's national strategy or action plan for gender equality, including its name, the period it covers, its priority, funding and alignment with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including the targets under SDG 5.**

In 2022, Malta launched its first Gender Equality and Mainstreaming Strategy and Action Plan, which runs until 2027. The GEMSAP closely reflects the statement in the Beijing Platform for Action that while gender equality is the overarching and long-term development goal, gender mainstreaming, as a set of context-specific, strategic approaches, incorporates the technical and institutional processes necessary to achieve that goal.

Malta is committed to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which embody a roadmap for sustainable progress that leaves no one behind. Achieving gender equality and women's empowerment is integral to each of the 17 goals. Only by ensuring the rights of women and girls across all the goals will we achieve justice and inclusion, economies that work for all, and sustain our shared environment for future generations.

GEMSAP focuses on eight strategic objectives:

1. Strengthening of Institutional Mechanisms for Gender Mainstreaming and Gender Equality
2. Guarantee equal access to employment in all sectors, combat segregation and ensuring Equal Pay for Work of Equal Value
3. Enhancing women's economic independence
4. Strengthening the principle of gender equality & mainstreaming in the education system and challenging gender stereotypes
5. Promoting co-responsibility and balance of work, private and family life
6. Achieving gender balance in political and public decision making
7. Promoting gender equality in social wellbeing and healthcare policies
8. Eliminate gender imbalance in the field of justice by addressing gender bias and gender stereotypes

The Gender Equality and Mainstreaming Strategy was developed through thorough comparative research, consultations with the Consultative Council for Women's Rights (CCWR), and a public consultation. Extensive discussions with all relevant stakeholders within government and civil society were also conducted.

All Ministries are committed to addressing the intersectional aspect of gender with other grounds of discrimination in policy making, as guided by the Inter-Ministerial Committee (IMC), which will ensure the necessary monitoring and evaluation of the policy framework together with the adequate collection of gender-disaggregated data. Crucially, the IMC will also ensure that the Action Plan is framed within an adequate timeline of work, breaking down each measure into objectives in close cooperation with all relevant stakeholders, and ensuring their timely and effective implementation. In fact, within the first six months of operation the

IMC was tasked with determining the timeline and budget foreseen for each measure within the Action Plan. While national funds will mostly be used to finance the GEMSAP, the IMC also explores the possibility of tapping into relevant EU funding opportunities.

The relevant stakeholders involved in the design, implementation, and monitoring of the strategy were selected through a process undertaken by the Human Rights Directorate. This process included:

- Researching best practices and European strategies on gender mainstreaming and gender equality
- Analysing public perceptions through a public consultation
- Conducting individual meetings with the respective Ministers/Parliamentary Secretaries and their experts regarding all measures falling under their authority.

The fact that each strategic measure has a clear indication of the lead and supporting Ministry or Entity will furthermore ensure this continued cooperation. GEMSAP also takes into account several measures which are currently being discussed in upcoming European directives, and thus facilitates their eventual transposition, should they be approved by Member States.

The GMU within the HRD is the lead coordinating body of this Strategy and Action Plan, responsible also for its day-to-day monitoring and implementation. Monitoring of the Action Plan will be carried out at the end of each quarter. The GMU is responsible for evaluating the progress on achieving the outlined measures and actions across all objectives of the action plan, which will be reported annually. The annual report will highlight whether the implementation of measures is on track or otherwise, and, if not, propose remedial action from the implementing entity. Moreover, an independent body will be engaged to evaluate interim and final reports to ensure a stronger monitoring system. To date, the annual report for [2023](#) has been published.

GEMSAP acknowledges that despite significant progress, ongoing efforts are required to effectively address gender equality. To achieve this, the Government is committed to the actions outlined within this Action Plan, as well as their review and follow-up in 2027. Additionally, one year before the conclusion of this strategy, the Government is also committed to initiating the design of the next strategy.

The 2023 Gender Equality Index (GEI) published by EIGE revealed some of the evidence-based challenges that Malta faces when it comes to Gender Equality. With 67.8 out of 100 points, since 2010 Malta's scores has had one of the highest increases among the EU Member states, a positive ranking which this Action Plan seeks to improve further. GEMSAP aims to advance Malta's current position with 5-7 points within 5 years. Malta also aims to be in the top 10 places of this Index by 2027.

In addition to the GEMSAP, the Government has already committed to eradicating gender-based violence, a societal issue that, despite all efforts, persists. The Government's dedicated second strategy and action plan to address gender-based violence and domestic violence recognizes this and proposes actions to tackle it. Malta is also committed to continuing the fight against human trafficking through the development of a National Strategy.

**34. Please describe your country's system for tracking the proportion of the national budget that is invested in the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women (gender-responsive budgeting), including the approximate proportion of the national budget that is invested in this area.**

The national budget as a whole, does not track gender-responsive budgeting, however, it is the sole responsibility of other Ministries and Departments for the management of their budgets to allocate funds for the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women. The allocation on annual budgets to each line Ministry by the Ministry for Finance reflects the priorities presented by the same line Ministries each year, as part of the annual budget process.

Considerations by the Ministry for Finance at budget preparatory stage would include the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women, as may be requested by the line Ministries, amongst other various functions of government. The same applies for budget measures that are proposed by the line Ministries each year.

Through GEMSAP, Malta aims to introduce a gender-responsive budgeting system with clear, measurable targets, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

**35. What formal mechanisms are in place for different stakeholders to participate in the implementation and monitoring of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development?**

Malta considers that it has a good sustainable development governance model in place, which is underpinned by the Sustainable Development Act. This legislative framework mandates government to mainstream sustainable development in its workings. To reinforce this, the Act designates the Permanent Secretary in each Ministry and the Ministry SD Coordinator whilst designating directors responsible for policy development and heads of entities as SD Focal Points. The main objective of this focal point network is to mainstream sustainable development workings across all levels of government.

**36. Please describe how stakeholders have contributed to the preparation of the present national report.**

This report was compiled by the Gender Mainstreaming Unit within the Human Rights Directorate at the Office of the Prime Minister under the Parliamentary Secretariat for Reforms and Equality and in collaboration with the Ministry for Foreign and European Affairs and Trade. Various Ministries and other Stakeholders were consulted in the preparation of this report.

**37. Please describe your country's action plan and timeline for implementation of the recommendations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (if a State party), or of the recommendations of the Universal Periodic Review or other United Nations human rights mechanisms that address gender inequality/discrimination against women.**

Malta is proud of its achievements on gender equality. Over the past years, significant and important legislative measures have been implemented that have strengthened our existing credentials as an inclusive society. These steps forward have been recognized by a wide range

of local and international organizations and mechanisms, including those of the United Nations. On gender equality and women's rights, we make reference to the Country Visit report of the Working Group on Discrimination Against Women and Girls, presented at the Human Rights Council (HRC) in July 2024, where the Working Group recognized the important and expeditious improvement made by Malta on this thematic area. Malta is closely analysing the recommendations made by the Working Group in order to continue improving further.

Malta's latest UPR was held on 31 January 2024 and the HRC adopted the Working Group Report for Malta's review in July 2024, thus bringing Malta's 4<sup>th</sup> cycle to an end. Malta received 232 UPR recommendations, out of which Malta accepted/partially accepted 188, which amounts to 81% of recommendations.

Malta has demonstrated its full commitment to human rights, and has a solid record of ratification of international conventions and optional protocols, as well as a verifiable record of implementation of the obligations to which we subscribed. The UPR national process was coordinated by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in close contact with all relevant Ministries and departments. The recommendations received during our review, were carefully analysed by the different Ministries who then provided their feedback. All Ministries involved are aware of the importance of this exercise and are already working on implementing the 'accepted' or 'partially accepted' recommendations ahead of the next UPR.



## Section Five: Data and statistics

### **38. What are the most important areas in which your country has made most progress over the past five years when it comes to gender statistics at the national level?**

In 2022 the National Statistics Office (NSO) conducted the Malta Skills Survey which produced relevant statistics disaggregated by gender at the national level. Throughout the survey, traditional gender roles emerged. Assistance and caring skills were more common among females, indicating a stronger leaning of the female sex to care-giving roles. By contrast, Constructing and Working with machinery were dominated by males, indicating a sex disparity. From the point of view of age, younger people tended to lead in technology-related skills and Communication, collaboration and creativity capabilities, indicating a greater interest and engagement in digital activities among the younger cohort of the population<sup>6</sup>.

Additionally, the NSO conducted the Gender-Based Violence survey, which also provided significant improvements in the data available for this domain. This survey covered all residents living in households aged between 18 and 74 years and collected information from respondents on their experience of sexual harassment at work, intimate partner violence, non-partner violence, stalking, general victimisation, and violence experienced during their childhood years. Moreover, the survey collected information on the respondents' perception of gender-based violence and their knowledge of local services in this area. This publication, the first of its kind in Malta, presents the results of this survey.<sup>7</sup>

The GEMSAP inter-ministerial committee set-up by the Human Rights Directorate (HRD) is also a substantial step forward for national collaboration and the improvement of gender statistics.

### **39. Over the next five years, what are your country's priorities for strengthening national gender statistics?**

Current plans for the improvement of gender statistics include the development of new domains, such as disability statistics. Several discussions were held between NSO, ministries, and other agencies, to explore the options available for the creation of disability data registers and such data collection exercises. In addition, work is underway on a collaboration project between NSO and HRD for a publication focusing on statistics by gender.

### **40. What gender-specific indicators has your country prioritized for monitoring progress on the SDGs?**

As per the Malta Sustainable Strategy 2050, the indicators disaggregated by gender include those in the education, training, skills and employment domains.

### **41. Which data disaggregation are routinely provided by major surveys in your country?**

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<sup>6</sup> [MSS-Final-Report-Digital-.pdf \(gov.mt\)](#)

<sup>7</sup> [NSO Malta | Survey on Safety and Well-Being 2022 - NSO Malta \(gov.mt\)](#)

Most surveys are conducted in line with EU regulations and collect all core socio-demographic variables, such as geographic location, sex, age, education, marital status, etc. Additionally, in the Census 2021 (one-off) we also collected new variables such as sexual orientation, religion, and racial origin.

## **Section Six: Conclusion and next steps**

### **Key Takeaways from the Review of Gender Equality Progress in Malta**

Malta's participation in the review process of gender equality and women's empowerment has provided valuable insights and reaffirmed the country's commitment to accelerating progress toward gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. The review highlighted several lessons learned, challenges identified, and priority actions for the future that will be essential to achieving the goals set out in the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly within the framework of the Decade of Action for sustainable development.

Throughout the review process, Malta has recognized the critical importance of a holistic, cross-sectoral approach to gender equality. The key lesson from this review is that gender equality initiatives cannot be limited to individual sectors but must be integrated across all areas of policy, including health, education, employment, and social protection. Malta's GEMSAP reflects this realization, and the country is committed to applying this lesson by continuing to strengthen inter-ministerial collaboration and stakeholder engagement in gender equality efforts.

Additionally, the review underscored the need for data-driven decision-making. The process revealed gaps in gender-disaggregated data collection and analysis, which are crucial for assessing the impact of gender policies and identifying areas for improvement. Malta has learned that enhancing data systems to track gender equality progress across all sectors is vital. This will be applied through the continued development of national data collection frameworks that align with EU and global standards.

Malta also learned the importance of addressing cultural and societal norms that perpetuate gender stereotypes and hinder progress toward gender equality. The review emphasized that legal frameworks alone are not enough; there is a need to shift societal attitudes toward women's roles in both the public and private spheres. Malta will apply this lesson by scaling up awareness campaigns and educational initiatives aimed at challenging traditional gender roles and promoting equal sharing of caregiving responsibilities.

Despite significant progress, Malta faces ongoing challenges that require continued attention. One of the challenges is the undervaluation of unpaid care work, which disproportionately affects women. Although informal caregiving plays a crucial role in supporting Malta's aging population, it remains largely unrecognized and unsupported. This has long-term implications for women's economic security, as it limits their ability to participate fully in the workforce and reduces their pension entitlements. Addressing this challenge will require innovative policies that better support informal carers and promote a more equal distribution of caregiving responsibilities between men and women. Gender-based violence remains a critical issue that hinders the empowerment of women and girls. While Malta has made progress in strengthening its legal and policy framework to combat violence against women, including domestic violence, ongoing efforts are needed to ensure that all women and girls live free from violence and harassment. This includes improving access to support services, enhancing law enforcement responses, and raising public awareness about the importance of preventing gender-based violence.

## **Priority Actions to Accelerate Implementation of BPfA and 2030 Agenda**

To accelerate the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda, Malta is prioritizing several key actions:

1. **Strengthening Institutional Frameworks for Gender Mainstreaming:** Malta will continue to integrate gender perspectives into all levels of policymaking and governance. This includes enhancing the capacity of government institutions to conduct gender impact assessments, ensuring that all policies and programs are aligned with gender equality objectives, and expanding training for public officials on gender-sensitive policymaking.
2. **Promoting Economic Empowerment of Women:** Malta will focus on improving access to quality, affordable childcare, expanding flexible working arrangements, and encouraging both public and private sectors to adopt family-friendly policies. Additionally, policies will be introduced to better recognize and compensate unpaid care work, with particular attention to supporting informal carers.
3. **Combatting Gender Stereotypes and Promoting Cultural Change:** Malta will intensify efforts to challenge traditional gender roles by launching public awareness campaigns that promote the equal sharing of caregiving and household responsibilities. These campaigns will target both men and women and will be supported by educational programs in schools that emphasize gender equality from an early age.
4. **Enhancing Protection and Support for Women Affected by Violence:** The protection of women and girls from violence remains a high priority. Malta will continue to expand services for survivors of gender-based violence, including shelters, legal aid, and psychological support. In parallel, public education campaigns will raise awareness of the issue and promote zero tolerance for violence.
5. **Closing the Data Gap:** Malta will invest in improving gender-disaggregated data collection and analysis. This will ensure that policies are informed by accurate data, and progress toward gender equality can be effectively monitored and evaluated. The development of a robust data infrastructure will also support Malta's ability to report on its progress toward achieving the SDGs, particularly SDG 5 on gender equality.

## **Conclusion**

Malta's commitment to gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls is unwavering. The lessons learned from the review process will guide the country's continued efforts to address ongoing challenges and accelerate the implementation of the BPfA and the 2030 Agenda. By focusing on institutional strengthening, economic empowerment, cultural change, protection from violence, and data-driven policymaking, Malta aims to create a more inclusive society where women and girls can thrive in all aspects of life. The Decade of Action presents a critical window of opportunity, and Malta is prepared to seize this moment to achieve its gender equality goals.