



**Convention on the Elimination  
of All Forms of Discrimination  
against Women**

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**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination  
against Women**

**Combined fifth to seventh periodic reports submitted by  
Malta under article 18 of the Convention, due in 2025<sup>\*,\*\*</sup>**

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\* The present document is being issued without formal editing.

\*\* The present document was submitted pursuant to the simplified reporting procedure. It contains the responses of the State Party to the Committee's list of issues prior to reporting ([CEDAW/C/MLT/QPR/5-7](#)).



## General

### Reply to paragraph 1

1. Gender Equality and Mainstreaming Strategy & Action Plan (GEMSAP) 2022–2027, (GEMSAP) recognises that society cannot reach its full potential without allowing each person to thrive equally, without gender-based obstacles. This Strategy therefore aims to identify and eradicate those obstacles by strengthening the gender perspective at all levels and stages of policy making.

2. GEMSAP focuses on eight strategic objectives:

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

3. One of the objectives outlined in GEMSAP is to enhance the collection of gender-disaggregated data across various sectors. This includes further collaboration with the National Statistics Office (NSO) to improve the collection and sharing of data related to gender equality and gender mainstreaming. The significance of having sex-disaggregated data is also accentuated in Malta’s verification mechanisms for the Recovery and Resilience Plan (RRP), which highlights the country’s commitment to such data.

4. The aim is to prevent and combat gender stereotypes and sexism considering that gender stereotypes are a root cause of gender inequality and affect all areas of society. Gender stereotypes are often combined with other stereotypes such as those based on race or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age, or sexual orientation, hence this Strategy and Action Plan aims to adopt intersectionality throughout.

5. A dedicated unit within the Public Service has been actively addressing the challenges faced by women and gender minorities since its establishment. The Gender Mainstreaming Unit (GMU), part of the Human Rights Directorate, was formed in January 2019 and serves as the primary governmental coordinating body. Malta collaborates with various national, European, and international entities, shares information, and integrates a gender perspective into ongoing processes.

6. An Inter-Ministerial Committee (IMC) was established to support the implementation of GEMSAP. This committee includes a representative from each Ministry in Malta and stakeholders directly involved in GEMSAP initiatives.

7. 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.

8. Challenging stereotypes is one of the priorities of GEMSAP. There are various objectives within the action plan that are aimed at mitigating such:

- Strengthen positive gender representation in formal education of all subjects to tackle gender stereotypes and to ensure that the content of the curriculum includes values and attitudes of gender equality (4.1.1);
- Ensure that all personnel of educational institutions are adequately trained to tackle gender discrimination and stereotypes, promote equal treatment, and equal value, and guarantee a safe and inclusive environment free from discrimination, marginalisation and/or violence (4.3.1);
- Promote co-responsibility between women and men, and tackle gender role stereotypes and care responsibilities in families to instil a cultural change (5.1.2);
- Raise awareness on gender bias and stereotypes, sexism and discrimination against women including sexist hate speech online and offline in the political discourse (6.1.3);
- Raise awareness among professionals in health and social services on gender stereotypes and gender-specific health risks (7.1.1).

9. The Strategy calls for the systematic inclusion of a gender perspective within every policy area. It emphasises the implementation of intersectionality to ensure that no one is left behind. By incorporating these approaches, national actions can address the widest range of discriminatory practices possible.

10. The media also plays an important role in shaping people's beliefs, values and perception, and are thus further key channels for changing attitudes and challenging stereotypes. In 2021, the Broadcasting Authority developed Gender Representation Guidelines for Discussion Programmes aiming at raising awareness on the issue, whilst helping to narrow the representation gap between men and women in discussion programmes. Through GEMSAP, we aim to continue monitoring these guidelines whilst ensuring that adequate training and support is provided.

11. As Malta continues its journey toward an inclusive and equitable society, the 2024 Annual Report for the Gender Equality and Mainstreaming Strategy and Action Plan (GEMSAP) reflects the collective commitment of our public administration, institutions, and civil society partners toward embedding equality at the core of national policy and governance. The progress captured in this report is both encouraging and inspiring: from increased gender-disaggregated data collection to the expansion of Equality Mark certifications and the pioneering introduction of free menstruation products in schools. We are not only implementing policy – we are fostering a cultural shift. This momentum, however, is not self-sustaining. It requires our continued investment, vigilance, and courage to confront structural inequalities wherever they appear.

## **Women's rights and gender equality in relation to the coronavirus disease (COVID19) pandemic, recovery efforts and global crises**

### **Reply to paragraph 2**

12. The National Sexual Health Strategy 2025–2030 was launched for public consultation on the 10th of December 2024. This Strategy includes an epidemiological overview on the main STIs including HIV, sexual health service usage, testing, teenage pregnancies and other sexual health and wellbeing indicators. Public stakeholders and civil society organisations took an active role in the

consultation process. Their feedback is currently being gathered and will be incorporated into the final document.

13. Malta's strategy during the COVID-19 pandemic focused on mitigating the health crisis, supporting the economy, and preparing for the future by implementing a recovery and resilience plan to foster a strong, resilient economy and society. Specific measures included a phased approach to restrictions, vaccination rollout, and economic support packages, which were also updated in alignment with the European Commission's REPowerEU Plan to address new energy market challenges.

14. Key aspects of Malta's COVID-19 strategy:

- Public Health Measures: The government implemented public health protocols and restrictions to control the spread of the virus;
- Vaccination Program: Malta pursued an active vaccination program to protect the population and facilitate a safe reopening of society and the economy;
- Economic Support: Recovery and Resilience Plan: Malta was part of the EU's Recovery and Resilience Facility, which provided significant funding to support the country's recovery and future resilience;
- Economic Stimulation: The plan focused on transforming the economy and society, with funding used for investments and reforms aimed at a "stronger, greener, and more digital future";
- Adaptability: The strategy was designed to be adaptable, with the recovery plan being updated in response to evolving circumstances, including the energy market disruptions following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, as highlighted by the European Commission.

15. In Malta there is no difference in the care or treatment given to different genders, including women, when it comes to any infectious disease, chronic illness, or COVID during a pandemic. Every patient receives the same medical attention and treatment regardless of their gender, age, or race. In November 2022, the Maltese Government announced that its abortion law would undergo an amendment where doctors will be able to terminate a pregnancy to safeguard a woman's life. In this regard ACT No. XXII of 2023 was published on 30 June 2023 whereby the Criminal Code was amended.

16. The amendment foresees two separate scenarios:

- In the case of a pregnant woman suffering from a medical complication which may put her life at immediate risk, the medical intervention is done immediately to save the woman's life. In such cases, if the foetus is determined to be viable, all efforts are undertaken to ensure safe delivery;
- In cases where a woman is suffering from a medical complication that may put her life at risk or her health in grave jeopardy, which may lead to death. The emphasis on the word "may" is significant as health professionals will not have to wait until a woman is on the brink of death to intervene. This amendment will allow medical professionals to intervene to avoid that the woman's condition worsens, risking further complications. For the first time, medical professionals will be given full protection of the law to carry out such interventions and in turn, save more lives. Government also made this very clear at the parliament committee stage, which is also used as a point of reference for when interpreting the law.

## **Reservations**

### **Reply to paragraph 3**

17. Malta is looking into lifting its reservations in relation to CEDAW Articles 11 and 15.

18. Malta maintains its reservation to Article 16 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). In accordance with Articles 241 to 244 of the Maltese Criminal Code, the termination of pregnancy through induced abortion remains illegal, except in limited cases as defined by the amendments to the Criminal Code enacted in 2023 (Act No. XXII of 2023), permitting termination of pregnancy solely where this is carried out as a medical intervention for the purpose of saving the life and protecting the health of a pregnant woman suffering from a medical complication which may put her life at immediate risk or her health in grave jeopardy which may lead to death. Malta is unable to agree to language that carries the implication that a State must legitimise abortion or treat it as a recognised form of birth control.

## **Women, peace and security**

### **Reply to paragraph 4**

19. Malta remains firmly committed to the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda, as reflected in its first National Action Plan (NAP) for the period 2020–2024. This plan was structured around four key pillars: Promotion, Prevention, Participation, and Partnership, and was aligned with Malta's broader development and gender policies. To ensure effective implementation, Malta allocated dedicated human, technical, and financial resources.

20. Capacity-building on the WPS agenda is necessary to bring about the required systemic change. In this regard, Malta invested in training on WPS among University students, members of the Police and Armed Forces, and primary school children. Moreover, to increase public outreach on the agenda, a radio programme entitled 'Nisa u Paċi' (Women and Peace) was aired on a local radio station RTK 103 with the financial support of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Tourism. The programme ran from October 2024 till June 2025 and each week, various stakeholders involved in implementing the WPS agenda on a National or International level were invited as guests to share their expertise with the public.

21. Malta also provided funding towards the implementation of the WPS agenda internationally by contributing towards the: UN Women Afghanistan Country Office (2020); the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund's Rapid Response Window (2021); UN Women's Core Resources (2021–2023); the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund's Libya appeal to support women-led organizations in dealing with the aftermath of the floods (2023); 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); UN Women (earmarked for WPS (2024–2026); the NGO Working Group on WPS (2024–2026); and the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund (2021–2028).

22. Prior to Malta's term on the UN Security Council between 2023–2024, 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 UNSCs work. In this regard, Malta endeavoured to mainstream WPS language across different UNSC dossiers. Malta also served as a Coordinator for the Shared Commitment Holders during 2024, which meant that Malta had a key role in coordinating WPS positions

on various files. In this regard, Malta provided multiple opportunities for women and CSO briefers from Afghanistan, Colombia, Syria, and Myanmar with a platform to be heard.

23. WPS was also prioritised during Malta's term as Chairperson-in-Office of the OSCE in 2024. In February 2024, a Joint meeting of the Forum for Security Co-operation (FSC) 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 woman helicopter pilot in the Maltese armed forces was one of the panellists.

24. Furthermore, WPS is one of the core partnership goals under Malta's Individually Tailored Partnership Programme (ITPP) with NATO, launched in February 2024. In this context, Malta recently accepted an invitation from former NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg to align with NATO's WPS Policy. Malta is in discussions with NATO on targeted capacity-building initiatives in the field of WPS and Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (CRSV).

25. 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 WPS Agenda. Thereafter, a Maltese diplomat was nominated to attend the "International Mediation: Theory, Cases and Skills," that took place in Oslo in June 2024. Looking ahead, Malta seeks to continue building capacity of the foreign service in this area. In this regard, in October 2024, Malta joined the Secretary-General's "Common Pledge for Women's Full, Equal and Meaningful Participation in Peace Processes" further committing to take concrete steps on women's full, equal, and meaningful participation in all peace processes.

26. Based on the foundations laid in the first NAP; by increasing awareness on the WPS agenda, giving a voice to various stakeholders, and exploring avenues to increase women's participation in peace processes, consultations are currently ongoing on the second NAP. The pillars of the new NAP that would last until 2030, will align more closely with those of UNSCR 1325, namely Promotion, Prevention, Participation and Relief and Recovery. It seeks to bolster efforts to increase broad understanding of the WPS agenda, as well as integrate a gender perspective more into the work of various stakeholders in Malta, including uniformed personnel. Moreover, the NAP seeks to increase the evidence base for actions in the field.

## **Women's access to justice**

### **Reply to paragraph 5**

27. From a justice perspective, Malta does not distinguish between gender or age when it comes to awareness of rights or access to legal remedies. The Maltese legal system guarantees equality before the law and ensures that access to justice, legal aid services, and information on available remedies are equally accessible to all individuals, regardless of gender. The justice sector operates within a framework that emphasizes inclusiveness, transparency, and non-discrimination, in line with EU and constitutional standards.

28. Capacity building within Malta's judiciary and legal sector is an ongoing priority. Training and professional development courses are coordinated through the

Judicial Studies Committee and the Academy for the Judiciary, which deliver continuous education on ethics, decision-making, and emerging areas of law. These initiatives form part of broader efforts under the national justice reform to strengthen institutional quality, digital competence, and procedural fairness in line with EU standards.

29. The Provision of legal aid in Malta is gender neutral. On cases relating to civil law, a means test is carried out. For an applicant to qualify under the means criteria, the person must not possess property of any sort, including disposable money, the net value whereof does not exceed €13,000 for the preceding twelve months. Moreover, the applicant's income should not, for the period of twelve months prior to the demand for the benefit of legal aid, exceed the national minimum wage for persons above the age of 18. Moreover, in calculating the net value for eligibility account shall be taken of the rent paid for the property used as the main residence, upon presentation of a registered contract according to law and relevant payment receipts; and account shall be taken of the maintenance paid to the other spouse and children, issued by a Court order, upon presentation of relevant evidence of payment. Excluded from the means test assessment are, inter alia, the principal residence of the applicant or any property (both movable and immovable) which forms the subject matter of court proceedings.

30. For matters relating to criminal law, no means and merits test are undertaken.

31. The Judicial Studies Committee is a specialized entity entrusted with the responsibility of implementing comprehensive training programs for all members of the judiciary. These programs encompass a broad spectrum of subject matter, including both established legal principles and emerging issues, with the overarching objective of advancing judicial competence, enhancing legal knowledge, and fostering professional development. Beyond its core training initiatives, the Judicial Studies Committee also convenes regular seminars aimed at promoting knowledge sharing and discussion, collaborative learning, and the dissemination of best practices. These events provide a platform for exchanging insights, debating complex legal matters, and fostering professional collaboration.

## **National machinery for the advancement of women**

### **Reply to paragraph 6**

32. The Human Rights Directorate published the Gender Equality and Mainstreaming Strategy & Action Plan 2022–2027 (GEMSAP) that recognises that society cannot reach its full potential without allowing each and every person to thrive equally, without gender-based obstacles. This Strategy therefore aims to identify and eradicate those obstacles by strengthening the gender perspective at all levels and stages of policy making. This document draws inspiration from the approach recommended by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) for Gender Equality Plans in its identification of evidence-based challenges to equality, and their effective mitigation. Gender equality and mainstreaming will only be achieved when women and men enjoy a full and equal share in economic, social, cultural and political decision-making, which requires a nation-wide gender equality and mainstreaming effort. This mainstreaming effort considers women and men's different needs, roles, and opportunities, and drafts policy and takes decision within this mindset.

33. The Gender Equality and Mainstreaming Strategy 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 Gender Equality and Mainstreaming Strategy informs the Action Plan by adopting a dual approach. First,

the introduction of gender mainstreaming – that is, a gender perspective into all stages and all sectors of policymaking. Secondly, the commitment to direct, targeted measures to achieve full gender equality. One approach cannot replace the other: this duality implies that policies are informed by the concrete situations and needs of people, by recognising the challenges attached to gender and their identities arising in various spheres of life. By doing so, policies are more effective, just, and lead to a fairer use and allocation of resources. The Strategy calls for the systematic inclusion of a gender perspective within every policy area, as well as the implementation of intersectionality, to ensure that no one is left behind, and that national actions address the widest range of discriminatory practices possible. Gender mainstreaming also ensures the redistribution of power, influence, and resources in a fair and gender-equal manner, tackling inequality, promoting fairness, and creating true equality of opportunity.

**National human rights institution**

**Reply to paragraph 7**

34. The National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE) is the national equality body that works to ensure that Maltese society is a society free from any form of discrimination based on: (i) sex/gender and family responsibilities, sexual orientation, age, religion or belief, racial or ethnic origin, and gender identity, gender expression or sex characteristics in employment; banks and financial institutions, as well as education; (ii) racial / ethnic origin and gender in the provision of goods and services and their supply; and (iii) freedom of movement for workers in the EU.

35. The NCPE is also empowered to promote, analyse, monitor and support gender balance on boards of listed companies.

36. The government-funded budget for the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE) increased throughout the years, as per the below table.

**Government Funding Received by the NCPE**

2024	€750,000
2023	€640,000
2022	€550,000
2021	€520,230
2020	€403,431
2019	€453,431
2018	€350,000

37. The NCPE collaborates with public authorities, non-governmental organisations, academia, the private sector, and other stakeholders, to provide training to different groups on rights and responsibilities related to equality, and on the gender mainstreaming strategy and reporting obligations and gives feedback to laws, policies, and strategies issued for public consultations.

38. Forms part of the Inter-Ministerial Committee on Gender Equality & Mainstreaming that monitors the implementation of the Gender Equality & Mainstreaming Strategy and Action Plan 2022–2027.

39. Attends events organised by stakeholders such as social partners and NGOs; and subsequently invites them to events organised by the NCPE as panellists or audience members.



40. Invites social partners and NGOs to partner on projects to enhance the development and implementation of specific initiatives.

41. Awards the Equality Mark to organisations that foster gender equality as one of their core values and whose management is based on the recognition and promotion of the potential of all employees, irrespective of their gender and caring responsibilities. As at September 2025, 155 companies employing around 37,640 employees were certified with the Equality Mark.

42. Developed an Equal Pay Tool to promote equal pay for the same work and work of equal value between men and women, assisting organisations to identify and address potential pay inequalities that are not justifiable. NCPE provides a report with confidential information and guidance on the equal pay situation within the organisation, and an Equal Pay Certification is awarded when the Equal Pay Tool finds that there is a Low Risk of non-compliance with the equal pay principle. As at September 2025, 4 companies were awarded the Equal Pay Certification.

43. In July 2019, the Human Rights and Equality Commission Bill was presented to Parliament, aiming to establish a National Human Rights Institution (NHRI) with its independence guaranteed in law and with a mandate to promote and protect human rights and equality, in line with the Paris Principles. However, due to the 2022 general elections in Malta, Parliament was dissolved when this Bill had not yet been enacted into law. The Bill is currently under review and will be presented to Parliament in due course.

## **Temporary special measures**

### **Reply to paragraph 8**

44. From an electoral perspective – Legal amendments were made to the Constitution of Malta and the General Elections Act through Act No. XX of 2021 which introduced the Gender Corrective Mechanism, to ensure de facto equality between men and women in politics. More specifically, this gender corrective mechanism allows for a maximum of twelve additional parliamentary seats to be allocated to members of the House of Representatives, more specifically to the under-represented sex (in cases where candidates from only two political parties are elected, and the number of the elected members of the under-represented sex is less than 40% of the total number of Members of Parliament making up the House of Representatives).

45. The following measures are not considered temporary in principle. However, in general, the Public Service does adopt a zero-tolerance discrimination at the workplace and mechanisms are in place to ensure gender equality.

46. The Code of Ethics, which enshrines the values, principles and good governance of the Public Administration, upholds eight important principles amongst which is non-discrimination. (Code of Ethics for Public Employees and Board Members, First Schedule, Public Administration Act, Chapter 595 of the Laws of Malta). This value is further reinforced through the Equality Policy which provides a framework to promote equality and diversity that safeguards the rights and dignity of employees. The policy upholds the principle of non-discrimination based on gender, age, ethnicity, marital status, disability, sexual orientation etc.

47. Alongside the Equality Policy, the Public Service offers a mechanism for the prevention and redress of bullying and harassment at work by offering employees a fair, confidential and professional investigation in terms of the provisions emanating from the Harassment and Bullying Free Workplace Policy. Likewise, both men and

women have the same opportunities to apply for calls for applications, progression and promotion, so long as the eligibility criteria are met.

48. To further promote gender equality, the Public Administration offers a number of modern work practices and work-life balance measures to support employees find a balance between their work and personal life.

49. Further to the above, disciplinary action in terms of the PSC Disciplinary Regulations may be taken in the case where there are grounds of discrimination.

50. With regard to the promotion of such measures, the Public Service, through the Institute for the Public Services (IPS) provides training for all the Maltese Public Administration. Such training includes information sessions on the Public Service Management Code (as code aimed to regulate the behaviour of public officials) as well as any related and thematic policies, measures and mechanisms mentioned before, (that are applicable for the Public Administration).

## **Gender stereotypes and harmful practices**

### **Reply to paragraph 9**

51. In 2023 the NCPE carried out a study *The Prevalent Gender Role Perceptions and Attitudes among Adults Living in Malta*<sup>1</sup> that sought to investigate the prevalence of traditional gender roles and attitudes among adults living in Malta and to find out whether sexual stereotypes prevail within the different strata of the population. Overall, participants tended to uphold progressive gender role perceptions, especially regarding gender roles in the public sphere. On the other hand, some traditional gender role expectations emerged, particularly in relation to the care of young children and elderly dependents. When the survey findings were compared to macro-data, cognitive dissonance emerged. This resulted from the fact that there was a discrepancy between the way the respondents answered and what eventually happened. As a follow-up to this study, the NCPE developed a plan for an awareness raising campaign on the topic. Both the research study and the plan for the campaign were part of a Memorandum of Understanding signed by the NCPE with the University of Malta in 2022. The plan for the awareness campaign focused on gender stereotypes in the context of patriarchal society. The NCPE is working to implement the campaign in 2025.

52. In view that the Equality for Men and Women Act prohibits discriminatory advertisements for vacant posts in employment, the NCPE reviews local newspapers and online media for any discriminatory advertisements, informs the publishers, and provides suitable alternatives. Every year, the NCPE publishes newsletters on matters pertaining to equality and non-discrimination, and disseminates them with various stakeholders.

53. In 2023, the NCPE proposed a targeted training session for all teaching staff at pre-primary education level (Kinder 1 and Kinder 2) in all Maltese, state, church and private schools. The training is aimed to address gender stereotypes and gender roles in pre-primary education.

54. In 2024, the NCPE delivered an intensive half-day training session to career guidance and career advisors on how to address gender stereotypes and gender roles among young students, especially with reference to career choices. This session will be delivered again in 2025.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://ncpe.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/The-Prevalent-Gender-Role-with-final-corrections.pdf>.

55. The NCPE was part of a committee with the Broadcasting Authority that drew up the Gender Representation Guidelines for Discussion Programmes in 2020. The guidelines seek to assist the sector and to facilitate the work of journalists, presenters and producers to not only be aware of gender representation in broadcasting, but also to give greater importance to a fair presentation of women and men.

56. Throughout the years the NCPE has advocated on the importance of women's participation in STEM sectors by: publishing articles in local newspapers and sharing relevant information on social media.

57. The NCPE worked to combat gender stereotypes on the roles of women and men through a set of initiatives<sup>2</sup> (2015–2017) aimed at increasing awareness on the importance of men's role in gender equality and on the benefits of family-friendly measures for both women and men: consultation/training sessions and a business breakfast with employers; a roving van in post-secondary and tertiary educational institutions asking male students for feedback on the topic; a drama activity with secondary school students; an event for post-secondary and tertiary students; an open air event; and a social media campaign.

*Cultural Agencies as agents of women emancipation*

58. The Valletta Cultural Agency (VCA) is committed to highlighting the vital contributions of women to art and culture through our diverse programme. Exhibitions, performances, workshops and events celebrate the achievements of women, ensuring their stories are shared and their legacies recognised. By fostering collaborations with women artists, designers, and entrepreneurs, and engaging the public through outreach initiatives, VCA aims to inspire future generations and promote gender equity across creative and intellectual fields.

59. Our efforts encompass a wide spectrum of talent, from internationally celebrated figures who have achieved global acclaim to promising local talents who are shaping the future of Malta's cultural and creative landscape. Equally, the VCA highlights up-and-coming local talents, providing a platform for women to reach wider audiences.

60. Through the Valletta Design Cluster, a hub for the cultural and creative industries, the Valletta Cultural Agency provides opportunities for creative people to develop their business and their entrepreneurial, creative and artistic skills by providing spaces, tools and training. The gender balance in the current group of members as well as the predominantly women's participation in many talks and hands-on workshops indicates that the Valletta Design Cluster is fostering an inclusive environment that empowers women and promotes gender equity in the cultural and creative industries, demonstrating its commitment to supporting diverse perspectives in innovation and entrepreneurship.

61. The Superintendent of Cultural Heritage is raising awareness among the general public on the contribution of women to art, science and culture:

62. Women employed at SCH are making significant contributions to archaeological practice in Malta ensuring our cultural heritage is safeguarded for generations. Notable recognition of women's achievements has been highlighted in the media through informative and engaging programs on television networks and in social media on a regular basis.

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<sup>2</sup> These initiatives are carried out as part of the EU co-funded project *JUST/2014/RGEN/AG/GEND/7785 Equality beyond Gender Roles*.

63. Presentations at schools are held several times a year, to highlight the cultural heritage sector and the important role women at SCH play in protecting and managing our cultural heritage.

64. On International Women's Day, a social media campaign is executed yearly, to highlight all the women working at SCH and the contributions they have made to the cultural heritage sector in every capacity.

## **Gender-based violence against women and girls**

### **Reply to paragraph 10**

65. In 2014, Malta ratified the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (the Istanbul Convention) with a full transposition into national legislation in 2018 through the enactment of the Gender-Based Violence and Domestic Violence Act (Chapter 581) of the Laws of Malta. This widened the remit of the Commission on Domestic Violence governed by the Domestic Violence Act (Chapter 481) of the Laws of Malta prior to 2018, establishing the Commission on Gender-Based Violence and Domestic Violence (CGBVDV) as the national coordinating body in Malta in line with Article 10 of the Istanbul Convention. Since 2018, Malta adopted three National Strategies and Action Plans to implement the Istanbul Convention:

- Society's Concern: Gender-Based Violence and Domestic Violence Strategy and Action Plan (2018–2020);
- Malta's National Strategy on Gender-Based Violence and Domestic Violence (2021–2022);
- UNITE. ENGAGE. ELEVATE. National Strategy on Gender-Based Violence and Domestic Violence (2023–2028).

66. Based on the four pillars of the Istanbul Convention, these three strategies contain lists of measures and actions which guide the implementation of the Istanbul Convention in Malta with CGBVDV carrying out coordination, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of these action plans. Furthermore, following Malta's first GREVIO Baseline Evaluation Report in 2020, GREVIO's recommendations were incorporated in the subsequent strategies and action plans to continue Malta's commitment and progress in preventing and combating gender-based violence (GBV) and domestic violence (DV). CGBVDV is currently within the Parliamentary Secretariat for Equality and Reforms, within the Office of the Prime Minister, OPM-ES.

67. Significant amendments to national legislation have seen the introduction of the Gender-Based Violence and Domestic Violence Act (Chapter 581) of the Laws of Malta, amending the Criminal Code (Chapter 9) of the Laws of Malta through ACT No. XIII of 2018 which also introduced provisions related to Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) an imported phenomenon and has never been part of the local culture. Moreover, S.L. 595.37 of 2020 established the Victims Support Agency (VSA) to serve as point of contact for victims of crime and provide legal support and assistance services to victims of crime. Other major amendments also include the establishment of femicide as an aggravating offence and exclusion of the use of 'crime of sudden passion' defence strategy (ACT No. X of 2022) and the establishment of the Domestic Violence Prevention Act (Act No. XVIII of 2023), a procedure enabling individuals who believe they may be at risk of DV to request information on their partner's history of GBV and DV-related convictions. Recent amendments include the protection of women and girls with disability from forced sterilisations (Act No. X of

2024), the criminalisation of virginity testing (Act No. XI of 2024) and the amendment of the legal definition of the family and domestic unit in line with the Istanbul Convention to dedicate more specific focus on cases of GBV and DV and to reduce the backlog of GBV and DV cases in Court (Act No. XXII of 2024). As guided by the third National Strategy on Gender-Based Violence and Domestic Violence (2023–2028), CGBVDV shall continue monitoring and providing its feedback on legal amendments and reforms in both Family and Criminal Courts.

68. With regards to funding allocated for the implementation of the National Strategy, CGBVDV received funding allocated for financial and human resources as well as for the implementation of the National Strategy. For this reason, CGBVDV has two line votes:

<i>Year</i>	<i>Vote 6038: Recurrent Expenditure</i>	<i>Vote 5246: BV &amp; DV National Strategy</i>
2021	€300,000	€70,000
2022	€500,000	€70,000
2023	€500,000	€70,000
2024	€500,000	€70,000
2025	€650,000	€70,000

69. The current strategy, UNITE. ENGAGE. ELEVATE. National Strategy on Gender-Based Violence and Domestic Violence (2023–2028), provides a five-year vision to continue fostering national efforts towards implementing coordinated policies, preventing GBV and DV, protecting and supporting victims and survivors of GBV and DV whilst also addressing prosecution of GBV and DV perpetrators.

#### **Reply to paragraph 11**

70. Malta's first National Action Plan, Society's Concern: Gender-Based Violence and Domestic Violence Strategy and Action Plan (2018–2020) contained 27 measures. Out of these, 24 measures were achieved whereas 3 pending measures were included in the second National Action Plan of Malta's National Strategy on Gender-Based Violence and Domestic Violence (2021–2022). This Action Plan incorporated 13 outcomes, of which 11 were achieved, 2 were in process and 1 pending. In November 2023, CGBVDV launched the UNITE. ENGAGE. ELEVATE. National Strategy on Gender-Based Violence and Domestic Violence (2023–2028). As of 2024, CGBVDV together with other stakeholders had already started addressing 72.8% of 81 actions listed in the National Action Plan. Every year, CGBVDV publishes a detailed Annual Report providing updates with regards to the implementation of the concurrent strategy.

71. According to the findings published in 2024 of the Survey on Safety and Well-being 2022, conducted by the National Statistics Office (NSO), 22.3% of males and 19.2% of females who have experienced non-partner violence reached out to authorities or support services, or they reported the incident to the police. This outcome was the least popular as the majority (68.9%) preferred disclosing their experience to their close ones, even if 40.1% of women feared for their life when the violence was occurring. When it comes to experiences of physical or sexual violence by a former partner, the findings suggest that although 51.4% of respondents feared for their life during at least one incident, 74.3% spoke about at least one episode to a close person, 41.1% contacted health or social authorities or support services, while only 32.1% reported an episode to the police.

72. Another result from this survey reveals how 88.1% of persons who experienced stalking, did not contact relevant support services, nor did they consult with a lawyer. 76.3% did not report their stalking experience to the police and only 23.1% reported (or someone else reported) the latest experience of stalking to the police. Many of these participants believed that their experiences were a private matter, were afraid, self-blamed or were discouraged by someone to report (29.3%) while others considered them as unserious (55.1%). The majority of those who reported to the police, noticed that the stalking pattern decreased or ceased after reporting to the police (73.9%). Out of individuals who experienced sexual abuse during childhood (3.4%), 34.2% talked to a family member, 19.5% talked to a friend, schoolmate or a person from school, and 9.6% reported their experience with sexual abuse during childhood to health or social service, victim support service, helpline, the police or other authority.

73. With regards to support provided for victims of GBV and DV, a multi-agency approach is promoted to prioritise the safety of victims. In July 2023, the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Meeting (MARAM) was established. The MARAM consists of fortnightly meetings to discuss high-risk cases (previously assessed by the DASH risk assessment tool and as of July 2024 by the Danger Assessment (DA) Tool) and ongoing discussions between professionals and Designated MARAM Officers (DMOs) to formulate immediate safety plans. The MARAM is guided by a Manual of Procedures document which was finalised in June 2023. Several stakeholders form part of the MARAM including: the Malta Police Force (MPF), the National School Support Services (NSSS), the Directorate for Child Protection Services (CPS), the Victim Support Agency (VSA), the Domestic Violence Services (DVS), the Ministry for Health and Active Ageing (MHA; Accident & Emergency Department; Primary Health Care; Mental Health Services), the Department for Probation and Parole (DPP), Aġenzija Sedqa, and the Foundation for Social Welfare Services (FSWS) Gozo. Apart from the MARAM, other support services include VSA which provides emotional support and legal guidance to victims of crime. VSA also notifies victims when perpetrators are released from custody or apply for parole. Moreover, DVS within Aġenzija Appoġġ (FSWS) psychosocially assist victims in their recovery and collaborates with other services, for instance housing and employment, to provide a holistic service. Another service is that of STOP! The Violence and Abuse programme, delivered by FSWS for perpetrators of GBV and DV. Mater Dei Hospital (MDH) also collaborates with Victim Support Malta (VSM), an NGO which offers the Care for Victims of Sexual Assault 24/7 service (CVSA) at MDH to assist persons who experienced sexual assault. A more detailed overview of the existing support services may be found in Malta's report addressed to GREVIO submitted in September 2024.

#### **Reply to paragraph 12**

74. In line with the National Strategy on Gender-Based Violence and Domestic Violence (2023–2028), CGBVDV continues to spread awareness among the public and target groups, and implement training opportunities for professionals to emphasise the root causes of GBV and DV. This element is present in all awareness-raising and training initiatives conducted by CGBVDV. In 2025, CGBVDV carried out an evaluation of the awareness-raising campaigns that occurred between November 2024 and March 2025. The findings indicate that 67% of respondents have recalled seeing or hearing something about the topic of GBV and DV during that timeframe. This continues to inform CGBVDV to improve awareness-raising efforts when communicating information about the forms of GBV and DV, the support services, the importance of consent and the root causes of GBV and DV.

75. A key responsibility of the CGBVDV is to carry out ongoing public awareness campaigns about GBV and DV. These initiatives aim to reveal the different realities and forms of GBV and DV, adopting both an intersectional lens and an active bystander perspective. Their main goal is to encourage those experiencing violence to reach out for professional help. To this end, CGBVDV makes sure that awareness materials always include contact details for professional support services, especially the 179 and 116 006 helplines, and the 112 emergency police line. Between 2021 and 2025, CGBVDV has implemented the following campaigns and initiatives:

- ‘We are All Human’ online campaign on IPV within same sex couples and LGBTIQ+ community. This campaign involved the participation of LGBTIQ+ individuals and was done in consultation with Malta Gay Rights Movement (MGRM);
- ‘My Disability does not Mean Consent for Abuse’ online campaign in collaboration with the Commission for the Rights of People with Disability (CRPD) on violence against persons with disability (PWD) and forms of violence which are exclusive to PWD. This campaign involved the participation of PWD;
- Campaign with Malta Dairy Products (Benna) to feature an empowering message against GBV and DV and the 179 helpline on milk cartons;
- Billboard campaign promoting students’ drawings which were submitted during a drawing competition organised for the 16 Days of Activism 2020 campaign;
- Stickers distributed to beauty and hair salons promoting the 179 helpline on salon products;
- Stand at Junior College fresher’s month in collaboration with Kunsill Studenti Junior College (KSJC) to raise awareness on dating violence among students;
- Commemorating the relevant international days as designated by UN on CGBVDV’s social media, with special attention to Women’s Day;
- Media presence throughout the year through interviews on television, radio, news portals and newspapers;
- ‘Your Voice can Set You Free’ campaign for the 16 Days of Activism 2021 involving a social media campaign (including a collaboration with Lovin Malta), adverts on television inspired by stories shared during interviews held by the Commissioner with residents at shelters, awareness-raising stand in collaboration with the Ministry for Social Justice and Solidarity (MSFC) to promote material and information on GBV and DV, drawing and writing competition in schools, writing workshops with Ghabex residents, launch of ‘Safe Dates’ pilot project, launch of Malta’s Observatory on Femicide in partnership with Women’s Rights Foundation, book donation to 5 shelters in collaboration with the National Book Council, and media presence on television, radio, and press. As previously mentioned, CGBVDV implements awareness-raising campaigns throughout the year to spread information on how gender stereotypes, harmful traditional norms and roles, and inequalities contribute to the tolerance and perpetuation of GBV and DV.

76. In 2022, CGBVDV, in collaboration with MEYR, implemented the pilot study titled, ‘Implementation of the ‘Safe Dates Programme’ in 4 Maltese State Schools’. ‘Safe Dates’ (Foshee & Langwick, 2021) is an evidence-based programme on preventing dating violence targeting youth and children through age-appropriate educational material and resources which address attitudes and behaviours that tolerate or perpetuate dating violence whilst promoting healthy relationships and gender equality. This programme, piloted with Year 10 PSCD students in 4 State

Schools, was adapted to the Maltese local context and its material covered several forms of GBV and DV including harassment, stalking, sexual violence, psychological violence and TFVAWG. The study involved pre- and post-evaluation questionnaires with students who followed the 'Safe Dates' programme and with students who followed the standard PSCD curriculum. Moreover, CGBVDV conducted focus groups with PSCD educators who implemented the 'Safe Dates' programme to gather feedback on the implementation of the programme in the classroom setting. From the evaluation carried out to assess the effectiveness of the 'Safe Dates' programme, the findings indicated that there was little significant difference between the two student cohorts. Nonetheless, data from the focus groups with educators revealed that 'Safe Dates' was useful for students to better understand psychological violence and handling dating abuse.

77. The data gathered from the 'Safe Dates' pilot study served to inform an initiative which CGBVDV is currently preparing for PSCD students in schools across Malta and Gozo. In 2024, as part of the 16 Days of Activism campaign, 'Together we Stand. Together we Heal.', CGBVDV presented a roadshow for the community with short theatrical plays depicting several forms of abuse in 5 different locations around Malta and Gozo. The CGBVDV adapted these plays to short videos so that they will be resourced in PSCD lessons about GBV and DV. These videos are expected to be launched by the end of the year, in collaboration with MEYR, and they will be implemented in the PSCD curriculum shortly after. Such initiative continues to address Measure 2.2(a) of the National Strategy on Gender-Based Violence and Domestic Violence (2023–2028) which promotes education for boys and girls on gender equality at all levels of education.

78. Furthermore, CGBVDV continued coordinating the Multi-Agency Training on GBV and DV for Frontline Professional with 5 to 6 rounds each year. These rounds entail a 3-day training programme with topics including the Istanbul Convention and the Maltese legal framework, understanding forms of abuse (inc. psychological violence, trauma, FGM, human trafficking, TFVAWG, etc.), working with victims and perpetrators, intersectionality of GBV and DV experienced by persons with disability, LGBTIQ+ individuals and migrants, and information on the National Strategy on Gender-Based Violence and Domestic Violence (2023–2028). This training programme, which delves into the root causes of GBV and DV and helps professional to identify signals and handle experiences of GBV and DV, has been delivered since 2022. To date, 17 rounds of the Multi-Agency Training on GBV and DV for Frontline Professionals have been delivered to a total 471 professionals. After each round, an evaluation is carried out with participants to gather feedback from professionals which shall continue informing the future expansion of the training programme.

79. In line with the National Strategy on Gender-Based Violence and Domestic Violence (2023–2028), CGBVDV continues to spread awareness among the public and target groups, and implement training opportunities for professionals to emphasise the root causes of GBV and DV. This element is present in all awareness-raising and training initiatives conducted by CGBVDV. In 2025, CGBVDV carried out an evaluation of the awareness-raising campaigns that occurred between November 2024 and March 2025 (as mentioned in Question 12 [e]). The findings indicate that 67% of respondents have recalled seeing or hearing something about the topic of GBV and DV during that timeframe. This continues to inform CGBVDV to improve awareness-raising efforts when communicating information about the forms of GBV and DV, the support services, the importance of consent and the root causes of GBV and DV.



*Rehabilitation and reintegration programmes for victims of GBV and domestic violence*

80. Aġenzija Appoġġ, as the agency offering quality psycho-social welfare services to individuals and families inclusive of all diversities through empowering, advocating and safeguarding the well-being of these persons. Specifically, through the Domestic Violence Services offered by APPOGG agency which provides social work service to adults suffering domestic violence in family and intimate relationships. It supports and empowers the service user being abused, helps to find emergency shelter when required, and refers them to any other necessary and appropriate services. This service is made up of a small team of professional social workers who provide support to victims of domestic violence and their children. The service aims at supporting victims at a time of crises and at other times, by providing immediate assistance to them to meet their needs, by helping them develop a safety plan, providing emotional support as required, and liaising with other professionals/personnel within the agency and from other entities regarding the victims needs vis-à-vis referrals for psychological help, housing, social security, legal advice, and children's schooling, among others.

81. In relation to shelters for victims of GBV and DV, FSWS has the Ghabex emergency shelter which caters for female victims of GBV and DV and their children. Moreover, Public Social Partnership (PSP) agreements with NGOs that provide residential shelter services are in place between the Ministry for Social Policy and Children's Rights (MSPC), FSWS and Fondazzjoni Sebh which run il-Milja second-stage DV shelter; Fondazzjoni Kenn u Tama which run the Dar Emmaus emergency shelter in Gozo; The Good Shepherd Sisters which run Dar Merhba Bik emergency DV shelter and Dar Santa Bakhita second-stage DV shelter.

82. Gender-neutral victims are also supported through an agreement with the Association of the Friends of Tourette which run Dar Hosea. Other shelters for homeless individuals are considered once safety concerns are no longer a threat, including:

- YMCA;
- Dar Maria Dolores;
- Dar Tereza Spinelli.

83. These shelters all have PSPs with MSPC and FSWS. The third National Strategy on Gender-Based Violence and Domestic Violence (2023–2028) also includes the opening of accessible first stage emergency shelters for different groups who are victimised by GBV and DV, including victims and children with substance abuse, male victims, and LGBTIQ+ victims (Measure 3.5 [b]). Additionally, Measure 3.3 [a] refers to the importance of consulting with national equality bodies and entities to ensure that information and services are equipped to cater for victims with different needs through accessibility audits, capacity building and policy development. Furthermore, psychological, social and legal support is available for victims of GBV and DV. CVSA is a psychological support service for victims of sexual assault who go to public hospital. Victims are provided with psychotherapy, family therapy, counselling and psychiatric care. The DVS within FSWS offers several psychosocial and counselling services for victims and perpetrators of GBV and DV and it entails the Domestic Violence Unit (DVU), the STOP! The Violence and Abuse Service for perpetrators, the Domestic Violence Risk Assessment Service, the Child-to-Parent Service as well as the Ghabex emergency shelter for victims of GBV and DV. Legal Aid Malta (LAM) is another service which offers legal counsel and representation to victims of GBV and DV in their judicial proceedings. Moreover, there are the services of VSA which are mentioned in Question 11. These services are all free of charge.

*Training about GBV and DV*

84. Training for professionals about GBV and DV is one of the main priorities of CGBVDV. In the past years, CGBVDV has organised diverse training and information sessions to professionals working with victims and perpetrators. CGBVDV coordinates the ongoing Multi-Agency Training on GBV and DV for Frontline Professionals training programme.

85. The training involves the following topics:

- The Istanbul Convention;
- The Maltese legal framework;
- Risk assessment and risk management;
- Psychological impacts on GBV and DV victims;
- Understanding trauma;
- Services working with victims and perpetrators;
- Multi-agency cooperation and referral pathways;
- Intersectional elements of GBV and DV (inc. persons with disability, LGBTIQ+ individuals, and migrants).

86. The content is delivered by experts in the field including academics, government officials and NGO representatives. Several professionals attend this training including, police officers and new recruits, social workers, risk assessors, probation officers, guidance teachers, counsellors, psychologists, legal aid lawyers, doctors, nurses, professionals from HRD and VSA, and NGO representatives. Since 2022, 15 rounds of the Multi-Agency Training on GBV and DV for Frontline Professionals have been conducted and 423 professionals have received this training to date.

**Reply to paragraph 13**

87. Aligning with the principles of the Istanbul Convention ratified in May 2024, Malta amended the Criminal Code (Chapter 9) of the Laws of Malta to redefine rape by emphasising the absence of consent rather than solely focusing on violence.

88. Rape is defined under Article 198 of the Maltese Criminal Code, Chapter 9 of the Laws of Malta. It is defined as non-consensual vaginal, anal or oral penetration with any sexual organ of the body of another person. The offence brings with it punishment of imprisonment for a term of six to twelve years. However, whosoever shall engage in non-consensual vaginal, anal, or oral penetration with any other part of the body (not mentioned in the first sub-article) on the body of another person, shall, on conviction, be liable to imprisonment for a term from three to nine years.

89. Following ratification, Malta started the process to identify the necessary changes to Maltese legislation to align with the Convention. This resulted in the introduction of the Gender-Based Violence and Domestic Violence Act (2018), which amended several laws including the Criminal Code and the Police Act to better protect victims and strengthen prosecution and punishment of offenders. Following such major overhaul to rape laws, the need to prove violence was replaced with the need to prove that consent was given. Specific amendments included a broadening of the definition of rape to include various forms of non-consensual penetration as well as placing the lack of consent at the core of the definition of rape.

90. However, there may be instances whenever there are sufficient circumstances that an offender has committed acts of a sexual nature against another person, which acts in themselves do not constitute any of the other crimes of a sexual nature (such

as rape). This is mentioned under Article 207 of the Maltese Criminal Code (Chapter 9 of the Laws of Malta). The 2018 amendments to the Article introduced the words “non-consensual act of a sexual nature” replacing the need to prove violent indecent assault.

#### **Reply to paragraph 14**

91. Forced marriage is addressed under Measure 1.3(a)(vi) of the Third National Strategy on Gender-Based Violence and Domestic Violence (2023–2028), as part of the ‘Integrated Policies’ pillar in line with the Istanbul Convention. The corresponding bill was introduced in Parliament on 13 January 2025, passed and enacted as Act No. XXII of 2025, titled *Various Laws relating to Child Marriage and Forced Marriage (Amendment) Act*. The Act raises the minimum age of marriage to 18 years, removing prior exceptions that allowed minors aged 16 or 17 to marry with parental consent or court authorisation. Any marriage involving a person under 18 is now deemed null and void, irrespective of whether it is civil, religious, or cultural. The legislation also clarifies the definition of “marriage” in the Criminal Code provisions relating to forced marriage, ensuring stronger protection for victims and recognising that the offence subsists whether or not the marriage is legally binding. During the Committee Stage, further amendments were made to ensure that marriages between minors are not considered valid in Malta even if contracted abroad in jurisdictions that allow such marriages. Related laws, including the Marriage Act (Cap. 255), the Civil Code (Cap. 16), and the Cohabitation Act (Cap. 614), were amended for consistency.

92. The 2025 amendments also reinforced Malta’s legal framework on the protection of minors by unequivocally setting the minimum legal age for marriage at 18 years, thereby closing all remaining legal loopholes that previously allowed underage marriage. This reform aligns Malta’s legislation with international human rights standards, particularly the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Council of Europe’s recommendations on preventing child and forced marriages. The new provisions make it explicitly illegal for any person under 18 to marry, regardless of parental approval, religious rites, or customary practices, and any attempt to facilitate or legitimise such unions constitutes a criminal offence. These measures strengthen Malta’s commitment to safeguarding children’s rights, preventing child exploitation, and ensuring that all marriages are entered into freely, responsibly, and with full legal capacity.

93. The Bill amends the Criminal Code’s provisions on forced marriage – a crime punishable by imprisonment for three to five years – and on luring persons to another state for the purpose of forced marriage – punishable by four to six years’ imprisonment – to specify that they cover “any religious or civil ceremony of marriage, whether or not legally binding.” These provisions aim to address concerns about forced or arranged marriages in specific communities.

### **Trafficking and exploitation of prostitution**

#### **Reply to paragraph 15**

94. As part of the implementation of the National Strategy and Action Plan on Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings (2024–2030), the establishment of a formalised National Referral Mechanism (NRM) for victim identification, referral, assistance, and protection, which follows a multi-disciplinary approach to victim identification is a priority. Through the NRM, Malta shall develop an updated formal written procedure to guide proactive victim identification and develop a centralised

system for data collection on victims of Trafficking in human beings (THB), disaggregated by gender, age, country of origin and form of exploitation.

95. The establishment of a structured and formal NRM will ensure the early identification and support of trafficking victims. This mechanism aims to streamline the end-to-end referral process and clearly define the roles of entities responsible for managing and implementing victim support. Recognising critical gaps, the strategy highlights the need for a specialised NRM for children, particularly to address the vulnerabilities of unaccompanied minors. It also underscores the importance of integrating multiple stakeholders, including government agencies, non-governmental organisations, and civil society organisations, to provide comprehensive victim assistance. The strategy prioritises training for professionals such as healthcare providers, social workers, and law enforcement officers to recognise trafficking indicators and refer cases through the NRM. To enhance the effectiveness of victim identification, the strategy calls for improved data collection and consistent use of trafficking indicators across sectors to monitor trends and refine processes.

96. Work on the establishment of an NRM as per the implementation of the Strategy is already underway as Malta is searching for a strategic international partner to work together on the NRM, which will also include an NRM for children. Malta is working in tandem with the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and the Council of Europe.

97. A two-day multidisciplinary training was organised by Malta in collaboration with ODIHR for THB stakeholders in December 2024 and focused on multidisciplinary approaches in the identification and referral of victims in the national referral mechanism. The setting up of a formalised NRM is an important part of the implementation of the Strategy and training is a crucial aspect of this. Anti-trafficking multi-agency representatives attended the training to enhance their knowledge on the role and methodology of a multi-disciplinary team in the process of identifying and referring both adult and child victims of THB. The training included methods and applicable tools in detecting and referring victims to assistance in a multi-agency context, while enhancing the understanding on specific needs and vulnerabilities of adult and child victims. Furthermore, the training allowed for a reflection on further measures needed to enhance current multi-agency approaches towards identification and assistance efforts in the context of the ongoing revision of the Maltese NRM.

98. Key topics included:

- The role of NRMs and a multidisciplinary approach in detecting, identifying, and referring victims to specialised services and support;
- Stages of identification of victims of trafficking, with a focus on recommended standards and principles;
- Understanding perspectives and experiences of victims of trafficking, including specific vulnerabilities;
- Referral of victims and child victims of trafficking to services including operational standards and procedures (with an emphasis on the Barnahus Model and ensuring the best interests of the child);
- Long-term support and assistance of victims for reintegration and recovery.

99. Further collaboration with ODIHR on the NRM development is being discussed and plans are underway for ODIHR to conduct an NRM assessment and also a legislative review for Malta's NRM on THB.

### Reply to paragraph 16

100. The Maltese Criminal Code does not specifically define prostitution, but it does contain articles against the exploitation of individuals in prostitution. Maltese law prohibits forcing, deceiving, or manipulating someone into prostitution, with such acts falling under crimes against humanity.

101. In Malta, while the act of prostitution itself isn't criminalized, women who engage in prostitution are not explicitly protected from abuse or harassment under specific laws; instead, they fall under general legislation against violence and exploitation, which can include provisions against sexual exploitation, human trafficking, and domestic violence. Support and exit programs in Malta are provided by various organizations, such as the Foundation for Social Welfare Services and the Women's Rights Foundation (WRF), which offer emergency shelter, legal advice, and advocacy for victims of exploitation and gender-based violence.

#### *Support and Programs for Women Leaving Prostitution*

102. Dar Hosea is part of a non-governmental organisation called FRIENDS of THOURET under the auspices of the Sisters of Charity. Dar Hosea provide diverse forms of care and support services to

- Women who are or were in prostitution;
- Victims of sex trafficking for sexual exploitation;
- Young people who are exploited into prostitution;
- Women and young people who are at risk of becoming victims of prostitution.

103. Services are offered irrespective of age; nationality; gender; socioeconomic status; and religion.

104. Dar Hosea regards prostitution as violence against women, and a violence against society. It provides a safe and welcoming environment for women engaged in prostitution, as well as those affected by sexual exploitation and sex trafficking. The centre offers a comprehensive range of services, including personalised care plans developed in collaboration with social workers. The primary mission of Dar Hosea is to empower these women, helping them rediscover their self-worth, self-love, and respect. By assisting them in breaking free from cycles of abuse and exploitation, Dar Hosea strives to enable these women to live independently and lead fulfilling lives. Apart from the mentioned drop-in centre as the main point of contact, services were also extended to women and girls in other settings such as correctional facilities, hospitals, rehabilitation programmes and even in their own homes. Furthermore, Dar Hosea has implemented a prevention programme aimed at reducing the risk of girls and women becoming entangled in exploitative cycles of abuse, thereby providing them with the tools and support needed to break free from such situations.

105. The Women's Rights Foundation (WRF) provides legal aid including legal representation for women who are survivors of sexual exploitation, human trafficking, and gender-based discrimination, as well as offering support for domestic violence and sexual assault. WTF also participate in projects focused on women's empowerment and advocate for gender equality. as well as offering support for domestic violence and sexual assault.

106. The Foundation for Social Welfare Services (FSWS) offers a support line (179) and provides various community support services, including the Ghabex Emergency Shelter, which can be accessed by individuals needing immediate help.

## Participation in political and public life

### Reply to paragraph 17

#### *Women in Diplomacy*

107. While women remain underrepresented overall, Malta has registered steady progress in recent years within its diplomatic service, where women now account for 29% of Ambassadors, which is an increase compared to previous years. Malta remains committed to further strengthening gender balance in ambassadorial appointments, reflecting its broader efforts to promote women's leadership and equal representation in foreign policy. With regard to senior management posts at the Ministry responsible for Foreign Affairs, 60% of these posts are held by women which is a considerable improvement.

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#### *Parliament and the Gender Corrective Mechanism*

108. The Gender Corrective Mechanism was enforced in the General Election of 2022, when only 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%. This meant that a larger pool of women MPs meant that more women MPs could have the opportunity to serve on parliamentary committees and inter-parliamentary delegations, amongst others. A notable achievement was the appointment of a woman MP as Government Whip, for the first time.

109. The Maltese Parliament was also subject to a Gender Audit by ODIHR in 2022, which included a number of recommendations for better female representation in parliamentary work, both at political and administrative level.

110. The Parliamentary Service engages staff solely on the basis of merit, without regard to gender or other defining characteristic. However, it is worth noting that out of the current staff complement of 39 of the Parliamentary Service, 25 are women, and currently the Clerk of the House, the Senior Clerk Assistant and Clerk Assistant are all women.

#### *Electoral Commission*

111. The General Elections Act was amended in 2021 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.”

112. Currently:

- One male Chief Electoral Commissioner;
- Electoral Commissioners: 6 men and 4 women.

113. In preparation for the 2024 local council elections, a report was published with a set of recommendations to achieve more balanced representation of women and men in local councils. Among them:

- 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;

- 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;
- Training programmes primarily targeting underrepresented genders on leadership and communication skills.

*Women in leadership positions*

114. Legal Notice 367 of 2024 – *Promotion of Gender Balance among Directors of Listed Companies Regulations* transposes Article 10 of the Women on Boards Directive which delineates the roles of the bodies for the promotion of gender balance in listed companies. In this regard, Article 3(1) empowers and entrusts the NCPE with the promotion, analysis, monitoring, and supporting the gender balance on boards of listed companies. A yearly report on the implementation of the Directive will be compiled on the boards of listed companies with a view to achieving the applicable objectives on gender balance.

115. Chapter 13 of the Malta Financial Services Authority: Capital Market Rules, *Gender Balance among Directors of Listed Companies* seeks to achieve a more gender-balanced representation among the directors of listed companies by establishing effective measures that aim to accelerate progress towards gender balance.

116. The NCPE carries out awareness raising initiatives to educate the general public on the importance of equality in decision-making positions, through:

- Articles and press statements, appearances on TV and radio programmes, and posts on its social media platforms;
- The Directory of Professional Women which gives further visibility to professional women, and increases their opportunity for appointment on boards, committees and other decision-making positions. There are currently 278 professional women;
- Conferences to discuss pertinent topics with different stakeholders. Particularly, a section of the 2025 International Women’s Day Conference focused on the relationship between gender disparities in time use and women’s participation in leadership positions.

117. In 2023 the NCPE published the study “The Prevalent Gender Role Perceptions and Attitudes among Adults Living in Malta”. This quantitative study sought to investigate the prevalence of traditional gender roles and attitudes among adults living in Malta and to find out whether sexual stereotypes prevail. Despite some traditional gender role expectations in relation to taking care of young children and elderly dependents, participants tended to uphold progressive gender role perceptions, especially regarding gender roles in the public sphere. Particularly, most respondents agreed that both women and men could become politicians or become a manager. Yet, when the survey findings were compared to macro-data, it emerged that there was cognitive dissonance; a discrepancy between the way the respondents answered and what happens in reality. Following the publication of this study, the NCPE is developing an awareness campaign on gender stereotypes and on how power and control can affect women and girls in the context of a patriarchal society.

118. The implementation of the Equality Mark for the 15th year, through which organisations make gender equality one of their values and demonstrate commitment towards best practices that go beyond what is mandatory by law. One of the criteria of the Equality Mark is to safeguard equality in career and personal development opportunities.

*Gender equality and education*

119. From a compulsory education perspective, between 2023 and 2025, educator training initiatives led by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Research (MEYR) placed a strong emphasis on gender equality, women's rights, and the vital role of women in various sectors. These programs integrated gender-sensitive pedagogical approaches, aiming to dismantle stereotypes and promote inclusive classroom environments. Special focus was given to highlighting women's historical and contemporary contributions in education, STEM fields, and economic development, thereby challenging traditional gender roles and encouraging equal participation. Through workshops, policy briefs, and continuous professional development, MEYR reinforced the importance of empowering educators to advocate for gender equity and to serve as agents of change within their communities and institutions. Comprehensive national training of primary educators will be completed till 2028.

**Nationality****Reply to paragraph 18**

120. By the 2007 amendments to the Maltese Citizenship Act (Cap. 188), a person born outside Malta prior to 1 August 1989 to a mother who was a Maltese citizen by birth may apply for citizenship by registration, a formality that ensures mothers now have the same rights as fathers to confer nationality, thereby correcting prior discriminatory provisions. Provisions of the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons were incorporated into Maltese law, and Malta remains committed to aligning its legislation with international standards to prevent statelessness, including among children born abroad to Maltese parents. Migrant and asylum-seeking women may apply for naturalization under Article 10 of the Maltese Citizenship Act, which requires lawful residence, good character, and integration into the Maltese community, with further details available in sub-article 10(1) of the Act (<https://legislation.mt/eli/cap/188/eng>).

**Education****Reply to paragraph 19**

121. The Ministry for Education, Sport, Youth, Research and Innovation (MEYR), leads on the National Education Strategy for the period 2024–2030, which constitutes one of Malta's important national commitments. Malta monitors gender equality efforts through periodic reviews aligned with the National Strategic Plan. These include gender-disaggregated data collection and integration of gender-sensitive indicators in curriculum implementation.

122. The Early Leaving from Education and Training strategy (ELET Strategy 2023–2030) emphasises the importance of reducing educational gaps between boys and girls by identifying 'gender' as an overarching ELET risk factor. While the strategy does not explicitly mention the National Minimum Curriculum, it aligns with the broader goal of ensuring inclusive and quality education for all students. The strategy's focus on equity through the three main pillars (prevention, intervention and compensation), underscores the commitment to addressing gender disparities in educational outcomes. ELET includes gender disaggregated tracking of attainment, absenteeism, dropouts, and progression to post-secondary education. Also, the strategy's holistic approach involves an integrated, whole-school collaboration among schools, families, policymakers, and community stakeholders, which may include gender focused initiatives.



123. The Education Committee on Gender Equality and the Monitoring Committee have been formally established and meet quarterly to assess progress and recommend policy adjustments. Notable outcomes include the introduction of gender equity modules in teacher training and the development of school-level gender action plans. The Monitoring Committee has also issued annual reports tracking improvements in gender parity across educational institutions.

124. A review is underway regarding vocational subjects at the secondary level. Preliminary findings suggest a decline in female enrolment in MCAST technical courses, particularly in STEM-related fields. However, in 2023 MEYR set up a new Directorate with a specific focus on Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) and VET Programmes (DSVP). This sustains Malta's commitment to improve its education and training systems as a result of a nationwide commitment to quality STEM and VET education for all students.

125. The said Directorate is committed to provide quality STEM and VET Education for all, to raise the general profile of STEM education and VET within the community and to foster studies in STEM fields, namely through actively contributing towards national policy documents, designing and supporting the implementation of curriculum programmes, providing professional development opportunities for educators and developing innovative STEM and VET initiatives on a national, college and school level. It develops, implements and evaluates curricula and learning programmes for all year groups from pre-primary to secondary for all subjects and learning areas in all schools, whether these are from the State or non-State sector in the identified fields.

126. At further and higher education level, the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST) has aligned its vocational training with labour market demands by enhancing collaborations with industry representatives and focusing on STEM education.

127. The ELET strategy's focus on reducing educational gaps between boys and girls implies a commitment to addressing gender disparities in vocational and STEM education.

128. Measures include targeted outreach campaigns, mentorship programmes for girls in STEM, and collaboration with MCAST to enhance female participation in engineering and computing disciplines. Promoting STEM and addressing gender gaps are key areas of focus for Malta and collaborations have been made with secondary schools to introduce students to STEM principles early, to foster interest and mitigate skill shortages in these fields. Initiatives include mentorship programmes featuring women role models, facilitating active learning environments, and encouraging women participation in STEM-related competitions.

129. Examples of this include the Women in Digital Mentor Programme, Coding for Girls, Global International Robotics Competition among others. Furthermore, MCAST actively participates in events such as Girls in ICT Day, Global Game Jam Malta, and STEM workshops, inspiring young women to pursue ICT. This contributes to creating inclusive spaces for women and promoting confidence and engagement in technology-related disciplines.

130. The National Schools Wellbeing Services (NSWS) collaborates with various stakeholders, particularly the Malta Digital Innovation Authority (MDIA), Chamber of Engineers, Esplora and the Health Directorate, among others, to organise Talks, Career Orientation Visits (COVs) and national fairs for all students, including girls, whereby STEM sectors and career opportunities within these sectors are promoted. Certain events are also targeted to girls in particular for example the 'Empowering

Girls in ICT' event which takes place annually in April to inspire more female participation in the sector.

131. Apart from such initiatives for students, Education Officers organise 1-day Training/CPD sessions for guidance teachers and career advisors, also in relation to STEM contexts, so that practitioners become more aware of job opportunities and emerging trends within these sectors in order to be able to be well informed and better prepared when guiding students about their post-secondary/tertiary studying paths and eventual career opportunities. Several campaigns were also introduced for Year 5 pupils, adopting a 'catch them young approach', whereby pupils can participate in interactive workshops, two of which are related to Health (Nursing) and ICT apart from another one specifically related to Arts (STEAM).

132. Comprehensive sexuality education is being integrated into the Personal, Social and Career Development (PSCD) curriculum, with age-appropriate content tailored for both public and private schools.

133. Inclusive education strategies are being reinforced through support services, financial aid schemes, and targeted interventions for vulnerable groups, including girls with disabilities and refugee students.

134. Malta also provides its educational and community liaison services to eligible international students who are enrolled in compulsory schooling, regardless of the students gender, paying due regard also to gender mainstreaming considerations, and reaches out to migrant families.

135. From an inclusion perspective, several service users are girls attending educational institutions (mainstream schools, Church schools and resource centres alike). As an Agency, Aġenzija Sapport are committed to implementing the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) Article 24 by supporting service users to access education. Aġenzija Sapport services include comprehensive social work support to empower both the student and her family, and this may also involve direct engagement and liaison with other stakeholders. The Agency recently launched a scheme enabling families of minors to access a subsidy for employing a personal assistant. This personal assistant could support children with disabilities in various aspects of their daily lives including assistance within educational settings and support with therapy appointments. The aim is to remove barriers and facilitate equitable access to education, regardless of the nature or severity of the disability.

136. Services such as the Sonia Tanti Independent Living Centre (STILC) and the Access to Communication and Technology Unit (ACTU) also assess minors for adaptive equipment needs to assist with mobility and communication, helping the student to integrate fully within the educational environment. Through the Family Support Unit, Aġenzija Sapport have recently launched a programme conducting sensitivity sessions with parents, educators, and students, fostering a culture of inclusion, raising awareness, and promoting environments free from bullying, scapegoating, or discrimination. Through these initiatives, Aġenzija Sapport continues to uphold their commitment to inclusive education and to the principles enshrined in the UNCRPD, ensuring that every child – regardless of ability – can thrive academically and socially.

137. At the same time, the Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD) receives complaints from both disabled students and parents of disabled students who are concerned about the provision of education or lack of it. These complaints are either investigated by the Investigations team to find a solution to enable the student to remain in education or, for more serious cases, the Commissioner holds meetings with the Education Ministry directly to find a solution

to the complaint received. CRPD is also requested to provide feedback on potential programmes which the Education Ministry is wanting to implement.

138. Curriculum audits are ongoing to ensure alignment with the Convention's provisions.

## **Employment**

### **Reply to paragraph 20**

#### *Women in employment*

139. In 2013, Malta introduced the Making Work Pay concept, a comprehensive package aimed at increasing labour market participation by reducing barriers to employment. A cornerstone of this initiative was the launch of the Free Childcare Scheme in 2014, designed to support working parents/guardians, particularly mothers, by providing free childcare services to those in employment or pursuing education.

140. This scheme significantly alleviated the financial burden of childcare, enabling more women to enter or return to the workforce. By addressing a major obstacle to women in employment, this contributed to a steady rise in female participation in the labour market in Malta. The Free Childcare Scheme not only led to enhanced economic independence for women but also played a key role in fostering a more inclusive labour market and promoting gender equality in employment. Over the years, it has become a vital component of Malta's social and economic policy, demonstrating the effectiveness of targeted measures in empowering women and supporting families.

141. Since the launch of the scheme in April 2014 till December 2024, 37,535 children in the age group 0 to 3 years and their parents have benefitted from free childcare services. The implementation of the Free Childcare Scheme has increased the supply of labour in Malta as many women not previously active in the labour market took advantage of this scheme to participate in the labour market. This benefitted employers through the availability of an increased labour supply pool.

142. The employment rate of women has been steadily increasing since 2012. The number of employed women aged between 16 to 64 years stood at 70,055 in 2012, which increased to 99,762 in 2018 and has reached 130,089 as of August 2024 (latest available data). The employment of women aged 65 years and over has also seen an increase from 1,283 in 2012 to 2,354 in 2018 and reaching 4,060 as of August 2024.

#### *Creating employment initiatives for women and vulnerable groups*

143. With a focus on promoting equal opportunities, Jobsplus (Malta's Public Employment Services) actively supports initiatives which seek to increase women in employment and achieving balanced gender representation. Through tailored training schemes, career guidance, and partnerships with stakeholders, Jobsplus addresses barriers to women's participation in the workforce, ensuring that everyone, regardless of gender, has access to meaningful employment opportunities. Its commitment to empowering women is a critical step toward fostering economic growth and social cohesion in Malta.

144. Unemployed women can avail themselves of Jobsplus' Advisory Services which provide jobseekers with comprehensive support to identify their career aspirations, through the creation of Personal Action Plans (PAPs) to enhance their employability, and access relevant training opportunities. These services include personalised career guidance sessions, designed to assist individuals in exploring career options, refining

their CVs, and preparing effectively for job interviews. Additionally, jobseekers receive advice on available training courses and funding schemes.

145. Jobsplus is a licensed Further Education Institute that offers courses aimed at increasing the employability of clients. In the past year, Jobsplus' continued to offer free of charge courses to all persons that are of working age irrespective of their employment status. Training courses vary widely from basic skills to vocational educational training.

	December 2022	December 2023	December 2024
Women who have successfully completed training courses	2 955	3 468	3 245

146. In January 2023, the Access to Employment (A2E) scheme was relaunched under the new programming period 2021–2027. The scheme provides employment assistance to enterprises to promote the recruitment of the more vulnerable jobseekers. Employers receive a weekly subsidy for each new recruit for up to 52 or 104 weeks, depending on the target group. In the case of registered disabled persons, employers applying for the A2E Scheme whose application is found eligible will receive a higher weekly subsidy for a maximum of 156 weeks.

147. Victims of human trafficking who benefit from the provisions of subsidiary legislation 217.07 (Permission to reside for victims of trafficking or illegal migration who co-operate with the Maltese authorities) and who are granted permission to reside in Malta and subsequently a residency permit, are also issued with a work permit. In line with this legislation, as the Public Employment Services, victims of human trafficking are eligible for Jobsplus' services to facilitate integration into the labour market through the Inclusive Employment Services Unit.

#### *Equal Pay for Men and Women for Equal Work or Work of Equal Value*

148. The principle of equal pay for men and women for equal work or work of equal value is safeguarded under the Employment and Industrial Relations Act (EIRA). The recent 2025 Temporary Work Agencies Regulations have further strengthened this framework by ensuring that temporary agency workers receive the same basic working and employment conditions, including pay, as comparable employees of the user undertaking. This reinforces the equal pay principle and prevents indirect gender-based disparities that may arise in atypical or temporary forms of work.

149. DIER continues to promote compliance through workplace inspections, guidance to employers, and collaboration with the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE) and social partners. Ongoing efforts focus on enhancing enforcement mechanisms, including the introduction of pay transparency measures aligned with the forthcoming EU Pay Transparency Directive, as well as encouraging gender-neutral job evaluation methods and regular pay surveys to detect and address unjustified pay gaps.

150. The recent Legal Notice 112 of 2025, known as the Transparent and Predictable Working Conditions (Amendment) Regulations, further strengthens this framework by mandating that employers disclose salary ranges and relevant collective agreement provisions to job applicants before employment commences. Additionally, employees now have the right to request information about their individual pay and the pay levels of others performing the same work, with employers required to respond within two months.

151. In 2023, the NCPE launched the Equal Pay Tool to help check equal pay for work of equal value between women and men. The Tool was integrated into the NCPE

Equality Mark Certification for companies employing at least 50 employees, which have the option to also apply for the Equal Pay Certification. Following the launch, the NCPE organised two online training sessions on the practical use of the Tool. When making use of the Tool, data inputted by companies is processed, and the NCPE provides a report with confidential information and guidance on the equal pay situation within the organisation. 4 organisations are currently awarded with the Equal Pay Certification.

152. The NCPE carried out a set of initiatives to raise awareness on the gender pay and pension gaps with different stakeholders as part of an EU co-funded project Prepare the Ground for Economic Independence (2018–2020):

- A seminar on the gender pay gap, female inactivity and the gender pension gap was aimed at raising awareness on these issues. This event served as a platform for discussions among different stakeholders, including trade unions, NGOs, policy-makers, and academics;
- Career guidance sessions to 60 career advisors, career guidance teachers, and guidance teachers, on how to empower young students to make wise choices in school subjects. The training focused on how to deal with obstacles which the girls might encounter when they start their professional working life;
- A research study on equal pay tools in Europe and the development of technical specifications of the Equal Pay Tool, which looked at the existent European Equal Pay Tools used to analyse equal pay between women and men;
- A study Equal Pay for Work of Equal Value between Women and Men in Collective Bargaining which focused on how trade unions in Europe tackle the concept of equal pay for work of equal value during collective bargaining and identified tools which were developed for this purpose;
- Consultation sessions were held with trade union representatives on how to safeguard equal pay in collective agreement negotiations. The sessions aimed at empowering trade union representatives with knowledge on equal pay for women and men and providing information on how to ensure that collective agreements are inclusive, equal and fair;
- An awareness-raising campaign on the gender pay gap with the scope to educate the general public through factual information on this area of concern.

#### *Sexual Harassment at the Workplace*

153. Article 29 of the Employment and Industrial Relations Act (EIRA) explicitly prohibits sexual harassment and requires employers to prevent and address such conduct in the workplace. DIER works closely with the NCPE to ensure that employers implement clear anti-harassment policies, provide training, and maintain effective internal reporting and investigation procedures. Cases of sexual harassment are addressed through the Industrial Tribunal, as well as civil or criminal courts, with outcomes ranging from compensation to disciplinary measures. In 2025, Malta began developments to start the ratification process of ILO Convention 190 on violence and harassment in the world of work, reflecting a continued commitment to promoting safe, fair, and inclusive workplaces and strengthening the enforcement of both equal pay and anti-harassment provisions.

154. The NCPE is empowered to investigate cases of sexual harassment at the workplace. Following the investigation, the Commissioner issues an opinion stating whether there has been a breach of the equality law. Moreover, since sexual harassment may potentially amount to a criminal offence, the NCPE Commissioner may forward the opinion to the Commissioner of Police for their action.

155. The following cases were lodged throughout the years:

#### Cases of sexual harassment lodged with the NCPE

	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Total</i>
2024	1		1
2023	1		1
2022	1	1	2
2021	1		1
2020	1		1
2019	0	0	0
2018	1		1

## Health

### Reply to paragraph 21

156. Sexual and reproductive health services are already available in community settings through gynae and GP led STI screening clinics at primary health care and also within the State Hospital through specialist clinics. Further access and plans for provision of free contraception including emergency contraception are included in the consultation document on the National Sexual Health Strategy 2025–2030 issued in December 2024. Access to such services was studied last before the publication of this strategy through the National Sexual Health Survey whose outcomes were used as an epidemiological basis for the measures included in the strategy document. In addition, data for access to these specific services is collected as part of the routine data collection activities for clinical services and primary and secondary health care level.

157. It is also pertinent to note that the morning-after pill has been available in all Maltese pharmacies since 2016.

158. An entire section of the National Sexual Health Strategy 2025–2030 consultation document focuses on family planning needs of the population including measures to ensure access to STI screening services including HIV and also contraception and family planning with specific mention of teenage pregnancies. The feedback received from the consultation document has been compiled and is being finalised for submission to cabinet together with an updated document which incorporates the feedback received.

159. Comprehensive relationships and sexuality education is delivered during the mandatory PSCD (Personal Social and Career Development) curriculum which can be found here: <https://curriculum.gov.mt/years-7-and-8-learning-outcomes-programmes-and-syllabi-2/#PSCD>.

160. Maltese legislation considers the termination of pregnancy through induced abortion to be illegal and, in doing so, does not recognize abortion as a family planning tool. The latter legislation and its jurisdictional application, is also safeguarded by Protocol 7, annexed to the 2003 Treaty of Accession to the EU.

161. In November 2022, the Maltese Government announced that its abortion law would undergo an amendment where doctors will be able to terminate a pregnancy to safeguard a woman's life. In this regard ACT No. XXII of 2023 was published on 30 June 2023 whereby the Criminal Code was amended. The amendment foresees two separate scenarios:

- Immediate risk: In the case of a pregnant woman suffering from a medical complication which may put her life at immediate risk, the medical intervention is done immediately to save the woman's life. In such cases, if the foetus is determined to be viable, all efforts are undertaken to ensure safe delivery;
- Health in grave jeopardy which may lead to death: In cases where a woman is suffering from a medical complication that may put her life at risk or her health in grave jeopardy, which may lead to death. The emphasis on the word "may" is significant as health professionals will not have to wait until a woman is on the brink of death to intervene. This amendment will allow medical professionals to intervene to avoid that the woman's condition worsens, risking further complications. For the first time, medical professionals will be given full protection of the law to carry out such interventions and in turn, save more lives. Government also made this very clear at the parliament committee stage, which is also used as a point of reference for when interpreting the law.

162. For the first time, the status quo has been challenged by amending the criminal code, which previously held termination of pregnancy illegal under all circumstances.

163. Malta attaches great importance to the right to freedom of expression, including for those who advocate for the human rights of women and girls, and for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women. This right is enshrined in the Constitution and protected under national legislation. Women human rights defenders in Malta regularly express their views and contribute actively to public debate, including through advocacy, activism, and engagement with the media. Malta acknowledges that such defenders, including those promoting reproductive rights and bodily autonomy, may face particular challenges, especially in the online sphere. Malta remains firmly committed to upholding fundamental freedoms and continues to strengthen institutional and legal safeguards, while promoting a culture of respect, equality, and public discourse which is free from harassment or discrimination.

## **Disadvantaged groups of women**

### **Reply to paragraph 22**

#### *Migration and Asylum*

164. Both the International Protection Agency, as the asylum-determination body, and the Agency for the Welfare of Asylum Seekers, as the entity that manages reception facilities in compliance with the Reception Conditions Directive, integrate gender-sensitive procedures throughout their operations. The International Protection Agency's complement includes female interpreters and protection officers (who are also responsible for interviewing applicants). The Agency for the Welfare of Asylum Seekers has invested substantially in psycho-social services with a team of dedicated professionals with further initiatives constantly being undertaken in this regard.

165. Malta reiterates its steadfast commitment to the principles of the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, as well as its obligations under EU law concerning asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection. Furthermore, Malta strictly adheres to the principle of non-refoulement in accordance with its international obligations.

166. Over the years, the Maltese government has consistently upheld its universal human rights and international obligations, particularly those related to search and rescue operations. The competent Maltese authorities diligently investigate, assess, prioritise, and act upon distress calls, fully respecting and adhering to relevant international law instruments, including the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea

and the 1979 Maritime SAR Convention. Malta has saved thousands of lives over the past two decades and more and hosts a significant community of refugees and beneficiaries of international protection relative to the size of the country's population.

167. On 11 December 2019, the Government of Malta acceded to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons following the deposit of the instruments of accession at the United Nations' premises in New York City.

168. The MoU with Libya seeks to enhance cooperation between the competent authorities of the two countries in the fight against migrant smuggling and human trafficking, thus contributing to the protection of migrants and the prevention of loss of life at sea.

*National Strategic Policy on Active Ageing, pension gap and measures against discrimination*

169. The National Strategic Policy on Active Ageing (NSPAA), adopted in 2023, provides Malta's framework to promote active, healthy, and inclusive ageing through Social Inclusion, Healthy Ageing, and Addressing Diversity and Inequality. Social Inclusion efforts have reduced isolation via community befriending, volunteer programmes, revitalised Active Ageing Hubs like Qormi, cultural and outdoor activities, financial literacy, civic engagement through "School Grannies," and expanded digital access. Healthy Ageing achievements include enhanced community nursing, night shelters, increased Carer-at-Home benefits (€8,500), extensive mental health support, physical activity and nutrition programmes, palliative care integration, and upcoming cognitive and hearing screenings. Diversity and Inequality initiatives focus on inclusive LGBTIQ+ and gender-sensitive care, anti-ageism campaigns, housing adaptations, homelessness consultations, dementia care standards and a dedicated directorate, active caregiver support, and participation in EU early diagnosis projects. Overall, the NSPAA has strengthened service access, infrastructure, and community engagement for Malta's older population.

170. According to Eurostat, Malta's gender pension gap widened significantly from 22.5% in 2015 to 43.4% in 2023, while the EU-27 average declined from 34.3% to 24.1%. This increase largely reflects a base effect stemming from the 2015 introduction of the deficient contributory bonus – an annual payment for individuals with fewer than 10 years of social security contributions. Although not gender-specific, most beneficiaries were women. Their subsequent inclusion in pension statistics – at lower pension levels – reduced the average women's pension and inflated the overall gap.

171. To address this disparity, Government has implemented several measures, including:

- Gradually granting widows the full retirement pension of a deceased spouse;
- Awarding contribution credits to women who left employment for parental reasons;
- Revising pensions with residual gender-biased provisions;
- Introducing initiatives to bridge gaps in contributory records.

172. The number of single-pension households is expected to decline as more women qualify for contributory pensions.

173. Gemma, the financial capability unit within the Ministry for Social Policy and Children's Rights, supports financial education through sessions on cashless payments, fraud prevention, social benefits, and money management – activities which, though not gender-targeted, attract many female participants.



174. The National Strategic Policy on Active Ageing (2023–2030) prioritises financial security, gender equality, and social inclusion for older women. Under Objective 1 (Social Inclusion), the strategy promotes lifetime financial planning and financial literacy to reduce insecurity and vulnerability to fraud. Under Objective 3 (Addressing Diversity and Inequality), it encourages lifelong learning and continued workforce participation through initiatives such as Third Age Learning, Fourth Age Learning, and the U4A programme, which resumed group sessions in 2024. A new centralised Active Ageing website will soon offer online learning and information on training opportunities, including those by FITA.

175. Civic engagement and independent living are also central pillars. The School Grannies Programme – now engaging 23 participants, mostly women – strengthens intergenerational ties, while partnerships with organisations like St Vincent de Paule expand volunteering opportunities. The Nibqghu Attivi programme, relaunched in 2024, helps older women remain active and independent at home.

176. Collectively, these initiatives aim to reduce financial insecurity, promote equality, and enhance the wellbeing and participation of older women in Maltese society.

177. Malta has taken several steps to prevent discrimination against women with disabilities, including as mothers. Under Article 3 of the UNCRPD Act (Chapter 627), women may lodge disability discrimination claims, with redress mechanisms available under the Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability) Act (Chapter 413), which is being amended to strengthen protections. The Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD) investigates complaints and may initiate inquiries. Legislative reforms have also enhanced protection, including the 2024 amendment to Article 251F of the Criminal Code criminalising forced sterilisation and introducing compensation provisions, and the repeal of the Lepers Ordinance and Regulations in 2024. Support is provided by Aġenzija Sapport through social work services, inclusive education initiatives, and a subsidy scheme for personal assistants supporting minors with disabilities. Women aged 60 and over fall under the remit of the Department for Active Ageing and Community Care, ensuring that older women with disabilities are included under the National Strategic Policy on Active Ageing 2023–2030.

178. Malta considers that current legislation, which is based on the European Union framework, adequately responds to the needs of women. Indeed, women already consistently benefit from this legislation, which takes into consideration their specific needs. The International Protection Agency strives to ensure that women's rights and needs are duly respected and safeguarded. This is achieved through continuous assessment of existing procedures and by identifying and addressing any situations that may arise during the screening process. Contributions and recommendations from professionals within AWAS and other relevant entities, particularly those related to Special Procedural Guarantees, are also taken into consideration. At the lodging stage, when an applicant declares that she has been exposed to violence, this information is generally highlighted by the team handling the lodging process. This ensures that, when allocating the case for an interview, appropriate sensitivity and attention are exercised. Whenever possible and subject to availability, the Agency seeks to assign female applicants to female Protection Officers. In cases involving vulnerable applicants, every effort is made to avoid the use of remote interpretation. Additionally, such applicants are scheduled for interviews on days with a lower number of appointments, to help create a calmer environment and allow them to take breaks if they feel overwhelmed. The Agency places great importance on ensuring that applicants, particularly women and vulnerable individuals, are treated with dignity, understanding, and care throughout the procedure.

179. This is already the case when it comes to a gender sensitive approach in the asylum process. Regarding interpretation, it should be noted that whereas applicants have the right to request an interpreter of the same or different gender, and while the IPA generally accommodates such requests, there is no legal obligation to do so. In this regard, one needs to keep in mind limitations in terms of available interpreters.

180. Malta has always complied with its international obligations, including those emanating from the SAR Convention. All migrants disembarked at sea can apply for asylum regardless of age or gender.

181. Malta has already acceded to the 1954 Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons.

## **Marriage and family relations**

### **Reply to paragraph 23**

182. Divorce legislation has been promulgated in the Maltese Civil Code by virtue of Act XIV of 2011, with subsequent amendments introduced through Act XXV 2021. Each spouse can initiate divorce proceedings. This can be done either jointly by both spouses or by one of the spouses against the other. The Courts of civil jurisdiction in Malta have jurisdiction to hear and determine a demand for divorce if at least one of the spouses is domiciled in Malta on the date of filing the demand for divorce or at least one of the spouses is ordinarily resident in Malta for a period of one year immediately prior to the filing of the demand for divorce. Article 66B of the Civil Code, contains the legal requirements for a demand for divorce to be upheld.

183. The demand for divorce is heard if on the date of commencement of the divorce proceedings the spouses have obtained personal separation by means of a contract or by court judgement. If the spouses are not legally separated, the law provides a timeframe within which spouses may proceed with a demand for divorce. If the spouses opt for a joint application, on the date of commencement of divorce proceedings, they must have lived apart for a period of or periods that amount to at least 6 months out of the preceding year, whereas if the application is filed by one of the spouses against the other, on the date of commencement of divorce proceedings, the spouses must have lived apart for a period of or periods that amount to at least one year of the preceding two years. This entails that the period within which the spouses lived apart need not be continuous, but when taken cumulatively would amount to six months or one year respectively. In addition to the above, the Court must be satisfied that there is no reasonable prospect of reconciliation between the spouses – this is usually confirmed by a sworn declaration of the parties, whereby they declare that they are living a separate life from each other and there is no possibility that their relationship will continue. The Court must also be satisfied that if maintenance is due either to one of the spouses or to their children, the parties concerned are receiving adequate maintenance; payments are done regularly, and no arrears are due. For the purposes of ascertaining this, the court may order the parties to present information about the payment of the children's maintenance. In the event, the spouse demanding divorce was bound to pay maintenance by means of a court judgement or contract and has not paid what was due, the Court shall not grant the demand for divorce where it is shown that by granting divorce it would be more difficult for the spouse concerned receive maintenance. If the community of acquests or the community of residue under separate administration had ceased to apply between the parties prior to the institution of divorce proceedings, and the parties still hold assets in common, the parties may proceed with divorce without liquidating these assets, if they both agree to do so.

184. A distinction needs to be drawn between spouses who have separated by means of a contract or court judgement, and spouses who proceed to opt for divorce straight away.

185. Article 66D provides that when making a demand for divorce, it is not necessary for the spouse making the demand to attribute fault on the other spouse as a justification for the proceedings, as opposed to personal separation proceedings. If a demand for divorce is made by spouses who have not separated by means of a contract or a court judgement, the spouses must first appear before a mediator, in accordance with Article 66I. The purpose for this legal provision is to attempt reconciliation between the spouses. If reconciliation is not attainable, the parties are given the opportunity to try and reach an agreement on the terms of divorce. The said agreement would need to cover the following terms: the care and custody of the children, access to the children, maintenance of the spouses and of the children, residence in the matrimonial home and the division of the community of acquests. Regulation 4(9) of Subsidiary Legislation 12.20 provides that where the parties have not reconciled and have either agreed on the terms of the divorce or failed to reach an agreement altogether, the mediator must inform the Court accordingly. Depending on the case at hand, the Court will then grant the parties authorisation to proceed before it within a timeframe of two months. If the parties did not reach an agreement, the applicant needs to bring forward demands that are usually determined during personal separation proceedings in the divorce application; particularly in relation to the dissolution of the community of acquests, and rights and obligations of the parties with regards to their children.

186. Article 66G of the Civil Code, places an obligation on the advocate of an applicant who wishes to proceed with divorce immediately; to discuss the possibility of reconciliation. The same applies to the advocate assisting the respondent. In fact, the law further provides that together with the divorce application, the advocate must present a note confirming that the above obligation has been fulfilled when the spouses are not legally separated. The divorce application must be filed before the Civil Court (Family Section). It is also possible for parties who instituted separation proceedings, to file a request pendente lite for the demand for separation to be considered a demand for the pronouncement of divorce. If the Court determines that the conditions stipulated in Article 66B are satisfied, the Court will proceed to hear and decide both demands together. During divorce proceedings, as is permitted during separation proceedings, the wife may elect to revert to her maiden surname by means of a request to Court in this sense. The law also provides for the possibility of the husband applying to Court to forbid his wife from using his surname. This is only acceded to if he proves to Court that further use of his surname will cause him grave prejudice. Upon the pronouncement of divorce, the right of the spouses to inherit each other, and the obligation of cohabitation between the parties cease to apply, and the divorced parties gain the right to re-marry. Divorce proceedings have no effect upon the rights and obligations of the divorced parties as parents if the parties concerned have children. The same principle applies if the divorced parties had entered into any agreements or obligations with third parties prior to the divorce judgement or decree.

187. Maltese law recognises different forms of family arrangements, including marriage, civil unions, and cohabitation. Marriage and civil unions provide full rights and obligations, including maintenance, inheritance, and property rights. The Cohabitation Act protects partners in long-term, non-marital relationships by granting limited rights – mainly related to residence and equitable distribution of property upon separation – ensuring protection for vulnerable partners while maintaining a distinction between cohabitation and marriage.

188. In line with judicial reform efforts has taken steps to enhance the operation of Family Courts and improve responses to domestic violence cases. A public

consultation on Family Court reform, launched in late 2024, identified key priorities such as improving procedural efficiency, ensuring timely hearings, and providing better support services within the justice system. These initiatives aim to strengthen accessibility, coordination, and effective adjudication of domestic and family cases, ensuring that victims receive fair treatment and access to safeguards in accordance with EU justice quality benchmarks.

## **Climate change and disaster risk reduction**

### **Reply to paragraph 24**

189. The Climate Action Authority (CAA) falls under the Gender Equality & Mainstreaming Strategy & Action Plan 2022–2027. Women’s involvement has also been incorporated into the operational aspects of the CAA. The CAA ensures equal pay for equal work, with no gender pay gap among employees. At CAA, everyone has the same training opportunities and flexible working measures are available to everyone.

190. Regarding the National Energy and Climate Plan (NECP), women have played a significant role in its development, particularly within the committee established for this purpose. Here, there was a generally higher proportion of women than men, since the relevant positions within stakeholders (headship and key leadership) being occupied by women.

## **Additional information**

### **Reply to paragraph 25**

191. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) is closely aligned with several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly those that promote gender equality, human rights, and inclusive development.

192. In alignment with these goals, Malta’s 2050 Sustainable Development Strategy incorporates CEDAW principles into various strategic objectives. Notably, within Strategic Goal 5 and, more specifically, Strategic Objective 1, the strategy emphasises empowerment through inclusive policy interventions.

193. Some concrete steps include strengthening the mainstreaming of principles of equal treatment and non-discrimination in the design, implementation, and monitoring of public services; enhancing the capacity of equality bodies, law enforcement, and legal systems to advance equality and to facilitate the reporting and prosecution of hate speech, hate crimes, and discrimination; and eliminating stereotypes through inclusive education, media reform, and public awareness campaigns.

194. Further objectives under Strategic Goal 5, Objective 5 include objectives to address gender gaps in employment by supporting industry-led training for women returning to the labour market or seeking career progression; enhancing equal pay for work of equal value through transparency and enforcement mechanisms; improving paid parental leave to encourage take-up by both women and men, including longer paid paternity leave; and ensuring that Malta’s official development assistance promotes women’s empowerment and access to decent work in developing countries.

195. Also, Strategic Goal 2, Objective 3 addresses demographic resilience and work-life balance through the promotion of flexible, family-friendly working policies facilitating gender equality in the private and public sector.