



Migration Profile

MALTA

A. Executive Summary

Malta is an island situated in the Mediterranean Sea, halfway between the coasts of Tunisia and Sicily. It is the tenth smallest country in the world and the fourth most densely populated. Until the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Malta was an important source of emigration. Maltese communities can be found in Australia, Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom and Belgium.

Malta joined the European Union in 2004, and in the first years of the twenty-first century it became a preferred destination for immigrant communities from EU and other Western countries, in particular those with English as the official language. At the same time, Malta also became a port of entry for African asylum seekers arriving by sea, the majority of whom are men. While economic migrants are well integrated in the economic and social insertion context, refugees, despite their legal status, remain at risk of poverty. Finally, as regards human trafficking, Malta differs from other countries because the majority of victims of trafficking are involved in forced labour and only a minority are sex trafficking victims.

B. Country Profile

I. Basic Information

Malta is the world's tenth smallest country and fourth most densely populated. It consists of the main island of Malta and the smaller islands of Gozo and Comino with a total area of 316 Km². Malta's population is 483,500 inhabitants, 93.9% of whom are Roman Catholic, 3.9% atheist, 1.3% other Christians, 0.6% agnostics and 0.3% Muslim. The official languages are Maltese and English. The government system is a unitary parliamentary constitutional republic. The President is George Vella and the Prime Minister is Robert Abela.

II. International and Internal Migrants

Midway through 2019, there were 84,900 persons of non-Maltese citizenship, representing 19.3% of the total population, with men in the majority (55.1%). The top five countries of origin were Germany, UK, France, Italy and Spain.

Regarding internal migration, in 2011 more than 10,000 people changed locality. This flow was most intense in the Northern Harbour District, followed by the Southern Harbour District. That

same year, the Northern Harbour District was the receiving area for a large number of migrants, who constituted 38.3% of the residents.

It is unknown if economic migrants to Malta have been transferred there by their employer in their country of origin, or if they have accepted a new job in the Maltese local labour market.

Typically, migrants do not struggle after arriving in Malta in the socio-economic sense due to the fact that the vast majority speak English. Moreover, they may arrive with a confirmed job contract. Given these distinct characteristics and in the context of the media's focus on sensational issues of migration flows, people arriving from the EU and other Western countries are not deemed to be newsworthy.

III. Emigration and Skilled Migration

Despite the dearth of information about economic migrants in Malta, it is safe to assume that those arriving from the EU and other Western countries are mostly skilled migrants. The same was certainly true for those Maltese citizens who left Malta in the last decades of the twentieth and the first years of the present century. Nowadays, Malta is mostly a receiving country. As for Maltese-born residents abroad, in 2013 there were 111,100 of them, and the top five countries of settlement were Spain, UK, France, Poland and Germany, highlighting the predominantly European character of these flows.

IV. Forced Migrants (internally displaced, asylum seekers and refugees)

In 2019, the total number of asylum seekers arriving in Malta was 3,406. In the first six months of 2020, slightly half that number (1,699) arrived. Until mid-2018, due to an informal agreement between Malta and Italy, all migrants who had been rescued in Maltese territory or in search and rescue waters were disembarked in Italy. When the Italian government decided to stop these flows in 2018, Malta signed relocation agreements with other EU countries and some 1,000 people who had been rescued at sea were transferred from Malta to France, Germany, Portugal, Spain, Luxembourg and Ireland.

In mid-2020, the top five countries of origin of asylum seekers were Sudan (33%), Bangladesh (15%), Somalia (11%), Eritrea (7%) and Cote D'Ivoire (7%). Most were men (69%), with relatively few women (5%), and children accounting for 26% of migrants. In the same period, 395 unaccompanied children reached Malta, an increase of 35% compared to mid-2019. The majority of these children were from Sudan (27%), Somalia (23%), Bangladesh (18%) and Cote d'Ivoire (7%).

Civil wars and human crisis are the main factors that force people to leave their countries of origin.

When asylum seekers arrive in Malta, most are welcomed in the country's Open, Detention and Initial Reception centres. These Open Centres allow asylum seekers only a certain amount of mobility beyond the confines of these buildings, which are located far from the urban areas. Consequently, the migrants have almost no interaction with the local population. In June 2020, the Open Centres housed 1,490 persons, another 1,653 were in Detention centres and 321 were in Initial Reception centres.

The journeys that forced migrants endure before their arrival in Malta have different levels of risk and danger. The first critical point is the necessity of crossing the desert *en-route* from Sudan. Then, in Libya they run the risk of being tortured or raped. After that, crossing the Mediterranean Sea in

a leaky boat represents another high degree of risk. Arriving in Malta, some asylum seekers must wait in Detention Centres before they receive a decision about their claims. Others must wait in Open Centres, living in crowded containers with little protection in cold and hot weather. Furthermore, it is important to note that compared to the total number of claims, the percentage of successful claims is very low. Between January and May 2020, there were 777 claims, and the top five nationalities of these claimants included Sudan, Somalia, Nigeria, Morocco and Syria. Only 21% of the claims were recognized, and 19% were rejected. Of the claims that were recognized, 5% were given refugee status, 16% were given subsidiary protection and 2 cases resulted in temporary humanitarian protection. Refugee status and subsidiary protection were granted to people arriving from Syria, Libya, Sudan, Turkey and Cote d'Ivoire. Despite obtaining refugee status or subsidiary protection, these migrants continue to be at risk of poverty.

Asylum seekers in Malta are not entitled to the social welfare benefits designed to help the country's poorer citizens and long-term residents. However, immigrants with subsidiary protection status and who live in the Open or Detention centres are awarded basic social assistance.

Maltese media have two different approaches when reporting about forced migrants. On the one hand, some focus on the sensational elements of migration, putting the attention on crisis and invasion and often using inappropriate language. On the other hand, others focus their reporting on the human rights of these persons and their struggle to reach Malta safely.

V. Victims of Human Trafficking

In 2017, Maltese police identified 30 victims of human trafficking, 24 of whom were Ukrainian labour trafficking victims, 6 were women, 4 came from China and 2 from Hungary. In 2019, police identified 11 victims, 9 in labour trafficking and 2 in sex trafficking; 4 were male and 7 female. Most of them came from the Philippines, Bangladesh, Colombia, the Gambia and India. No children or Maltese victims were identified. That said, women and children from Malta have also been subjected to sex trafficking within the country. In general, forced labour or sex workers and victims of human trafficking come from China, Eastern Europe, and Southeast Asia with a growing number from the Philippines.

Most human trafficking victims are located in urban areas. In some cases, they are not authorized to stay in Malta. In other cases, they may enter the country with a work permit which might or might not be fraudulent.

There is little information about the route or the channels being used by the traffickers, but in the cases of Russia and Ukraine the journey is typically direct and usually by plane.

The lack of coordination among ministries can delay the issuance of residency and work permits. Furthermore, difficulties in accurately identifying the victims can result in them becoming invisible. In 2017 for example, although NGOs reported assisting victims who were children, the government never formally identified them, despite the fact that some minors were eventually accused of prostitution.

The main programs and activities that victims of human trafficking can access are as follows. Program Crime Stop is a phone help line using the number 119. Police refer victims of trafficking to *Aġenzija Appoġġ* to receive different kinds of support including shelter. The National Welfare

Agency offers medical care, employment services, counselling, and additional emergency shelters and staff.

While media tend to look for the more sensational aspects of irregular migration, little coverage is given to human trafficking and its victims. This is consistent with the invisibility that still characterizes this complex issue.

VI. National Legal Framework

Malta's main laws that govern migration, asylum and human trafficking are: Immigration Act; Refugees Act amended in 2015 and 2017; White Slave Traffic (Suppression) and Victims of Crime of the Laws of Malta; Care Orders Act; Prevention of Disease Ordinance. A part of the Maltese Criminal Code is dedicated to human trafficking and the most recent amendment is dated 2018. Furthermore, in 2013 several amendments to the Criminal Code were made to integrate EU Directive 2011/36/EU on Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Human Beings.

Malta has ratified the following Conventions:

1990 – Convention on the Rights of the Child

2001 – ILO Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour

2002 – Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography

2003 – Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children” (known as the “Palermo Protocol”); and

2008 – Council of Europe Convention on Actions against Trafficking in Human Beings.

The main government players responsible for the implementation of laws governing migration, asylum seekers and human trafficking are the Ministry for Home Affairs and National Security and the Ministry for Justice and Home Affairs. According to the 2020 US report, despite these law enforcement measures, the government of Malta does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking and is given TIER 2 ranking, which means that it is making significant effort to fill the gaps.

VII. Main Actors

The State

Different governmental agencies and institutions are involved in supporting migrants such as the Immigration sections of the police authorities and the Department of Citizenship and Expatriate Affairs (CEA) that provides information about residence. Regarding refugees, the Office of the Refugee Commissioner (REFCOM), department of the Ministry of Home Affairs, provides information about asylum procedures and statistical data. The Agency for the welfare of the asylum seekers (AWAS) provides information about employment, housing, health, education and welfare, while the *Aġenzija Appoġġ* supports and protects children and youth against exploitation.

The Catholic Church

The Catholic Church is deeply involved in caring for migrants and refugees through different front-line organizations that help them by providing different services.

Caritas Malta has been offering its services to vulnerable people since 1968 and was officially registered as *Fondazzjoni Caritas Malta* in 2017. The Malta Emigrants' Commission (established in 1950) provides pastoral care, services of counselling and protection to migrants as well as people on the move and itinerant persons. During the current COVID-19 pandemic (2020), the Commission also engaged in the distribution of food and other basic necessities to refugee families most in need.

Since 1993, the Jesuit Refugee Service Malta (JRS) has been providing legal assistance and social work services (including healthcare and psychological support) to asylum seekers, while also advocating for just support and protection of the most vulnerable. Through its team of lawyers, social workers, nurses, Jesuit priests and religious, cultural mediators and volunteers, JRS Malta also reaches the local community through awareness raising programmes aimed at showing them the realities that each refugee and migrant experiences.

The John XXIII Peace Lab, founded thirty years ago by a Franciscan friar, promotes a culture of peace and justice through adult education programmes based on Christian beliefs. Since 2005, following an agreement with the Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity, the Peace Lab has been providing accommodation and basic care to asylum seekers and migrants.

Working in Malta since 2009, the RENATE project—Religious in Europe Networking Against Trafficking and Exploitation—is part of the *TALITHA KUM* international project created by the International Union Superiors General and helps the victim of human trafficking by offering a variety of services.

The Salesians of Don Bosco provide educational and pastoral activities in a number of residential homes, schools, churches and youth centres.

The Diocesan Commissions of the Archdiocese of Malta are deeply involved in the migration issue, while the Order of Malta is particularly involved in the wellness of migrants, especially single migrant mothers and their children.

In this context, and in view of the huge pressures experienced by the country because of the large number of boat arrivals (1,200 in April 2020), Maltese bishops, through the Maltese Episcopal Conference which is made up of two dioceses: the Island of Malta with its 70 parishes and the Island of Gozo with 15 parishes, take very firm positions on defending the rights and dignity of migrants and refugees, especially with regard to the phenomenon of the ongoing tragedies in the Mediterranean. They continue to make repeated appeals for concrete, concerted, and collaborative action.

International organizations

Among the international organizations, it is worth mentioning the Platform of Human Rights Organizations in Malta (PHROM) that is a network of NGOs that promote human rights, and IOM and UNHCR that support different projects focused on migrants and asylum seekers.

IOM Office in Malta was established in 2007 and is currently working on several projects and programmes of resettlement, assistance to refugees and migrants, return, relocation and the fight against human trafficking. IOM also provides a free phone helpline for migrants and victims of human trafficking while also promoting awareness raising campaigns for the local population.

Considering the strengths and weaknesses of the various organizations and entities involved in migration issues, there are some concerns. First, there is a lack of coordination not only among the government ministries, but also between them and the lay and religious associations involved in the care and protection of migrants. Second, the government did not enforce a labour recruitment regulation specific to those sectors most directly involved in human trafficking. Third, there is little accurate and current information about migration flows and migrants.

VIII. Other Important Issues

In 2018, the government of Malta endorsed the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. Notably, the Order of Malta is one of the signatories of this Compact. In this context, then, it is also important to highlight the many public declarations of the Maltese archbishops concerning the reports of deaths in the Mediterranean Sea and their entreaties to Europe's leaders to act.

September 2020

C. References

Institutional websites and NGOs

Police authorities – The immigration section

<https://pulizija.gov.mt/en/police-force/police-sections/Pages/The-Immigration-Section.aspx>

Department of Citizenship and Expatriate Affairs (CEA)

https://www.servizz.gov.mt/en/Pages/Identity_Citizenship-and-Immigration/National-Identity/Expatriate-Affairs/default.aspx

Office of the Refugee Commissioner (REFCOM)

<https://homeaffairs.gov.mt/en/MHAS-Departments/The%20Office%20of%20the%20Refugee%20Commissioner/Pages/Refugee.aspx>

Agency for the welfare of the asylum seekers (AWAS)

<https://homeaffairs.gov.mt/en/MHAS-Departments/awas/Pages/AWAS.aspx>

Jesuit Refugee Service Malta (JSR)

<http://www.jrsmalta.org/>

Caritas Malta

<https://www.caritasmalta.org/>

Aġenzija Appoġġ

<https://fsws.gov.mt/en/appogg/Pages/welcome-appogg.aspx>

IOM Malta

<https://malta.iom.int/>

John XXIII Peace Lab

<http://peacelab.org/>

Platform of Human Rights Organisations in Malta (PHROM)

<http://www.humanrightsplatform.org.mt/>

UNHCR Malta

<https://www.unhcr.org/mt/>

Malta Emigrants' Commission

<http://www.mecmalta.com/emmcomm.html>

RENATE - Religious in Europe Networking Against Trafficking and Exploitation

<https://www.talithakum.info/it/membri/170/renate-religious-in-europe-networking-against-trafficking-and-exploitation>

Salesians Don Bosco Malta

<https://www.salesiansmalta.org/>

Archdiocese of Malta

<https://church.mt/archdiocese/diocesan-commissions/>

Order of Malta – Maltese association

<http://orderofmalta-malta.org.mt/v2/>

Publications

AIDA (2019). *Country Report: Malta*. ADITUS & JRS.
<https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/58b98a624.pdf>

CENSUS (2014). *Census of Population and Housing 2011*. Malta: National Statistics Office
https://nso.gov.mt/en/publicatons/Publications_by_Unit/Documents/01_Methodology_and_Research/Census2011_FinalReport.pdf

Department of Social Security (2017). *Social Security Benefits in Malta*.
<https://socialsecurity.gov.mt/en/Documents/Booklet%20Social%20Security%20Benefits%202017%20EN.pdf>

Department of State (2020). *Trafficking in persons report*. USA.
<https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/2020-TIP-Report-Complete-062420-FINAL.pdf>

EJN (2017). *How does the media on both sides of the Mediterranean report on migration?*
<https://ethicaljournalismnetwork.org/resources/publications/media-mediterranean-migration>

JRS (2016a). *No giving up. Stories of unfinished journeys*.
http://www.jrsmalta.org/content.aspx?id=392212#Xxa_OIUzbiU

JRS (2016b). *Struggling to survive an investigation into the risk of poverty among asylum seekers in Malta*.
<http://www.asylumineurope.org/sites/default/files/resources/strugglingtosurvive.pdf>

IOM (2016). *Assistance in the Identification of Victims of Trafficking*.
<https://malta.iom.int/sites/default/files/2016%20Documents/Publications/Counter-Trafficking%20Training%20Modules%20-%20Assistance%20in%20the%20Identification%20of%20Victims%20of%20Trafficking.pdf>

UNHCR (2020). *Malta sea arrivals*.
https://www.unhcr.org/mt/wp-content/uploads/sites/54/2020/05/Malta-Sea-Arrivals-and-Asylum-Statistics_2019_UNHCRFactsheet_allyear.pdf