



Migration Profile

MALTA

A. Executive Summary (max: 2100 characters including spaces)

Malta is situated in the Mediterranean Sea, between the coasts of Tunisia and Sicily. It is located 180 miles north of Libya and is strategically located at the world's busiest shipping lanes.ⁱ Its location has made it an important transit and destination country for migration.ⁱⁱ Nevertheless, until the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it was essentially a source of emigration.ⁱⁱⁱ

In 2004, Malta joined the European Union and since 2007 is part of the Schengen zone, meaning that Maltese citizens have freedom of movement to other Member states. This has also implied an increase in European citizen's immigration rates to the country.^{iv} Malta is also an attractive destination due to its economic growth in recent years (7% average rate between 2013-2019).^v Together with Czechia and Poland, it has one of the lowest unemployment rates in the Eurozone (3% in December 2021).^{vi} Its climate and the fact that English is one of its primary languages are other pull factors for migrants.^{vii}

In 2020, the top five countries of origin for immigrants were the U.K., Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and Italy.^{viii} Furthermore, Malta also hosts many refugees and asylum seekers. In 2022 there were 433 new arrivals to the country^{ix} and their principal nations of origin were Syria, Bangladesh, Egypt, and Lebanon.^x Regarding the emigration of Maltese nationals, the preferred destination countries in 2013 were Spain, UK, France, Poland, and Germany.^{xi}

Malta has a very open economy, a preponderant tertiary sector, an export-oriented industrial sector, and a small primary sector. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, there was a sharp decrease in the service sector, impacting Malta's economy.^{xii} The tertiary industry represents 76.1% of the GDP and employs 80.1% of the workforce.^{xiii} Tourism is an economic engine for the country.^{xiv} Intra-EU trade accounts for 50% of Malta's exports (Germany 17%, France 9% and Italy 7%).^{xv} Likewise, 57% of its imports come from E.U. Member States.^{xvi}

In 2021 its GDP was US\$ 17,189,730,470,^{xvii} experiencing an annual growth rate of 9.4% of its GDP compared with the previous year, which had decreased -8.3%.^{xviii} Foreign Direct Investment net inflows amounted to 29.7% of its GDP in 2020.^{xix} The inflation rate in 2021 represented 1.5%, compared with 0.6% the previous year.^{xx}

B. Country Profile

I. Basic Information

Malta comprises islands and islets located in the centre of the Mediterranean Sea. It is bordered on the north by Italy, the south by Libya, and the west by Tunisia.^{xxi} Malta and Gozo are the most significant islands, while Comino, Cominotto, and Filfla are uninhabited.^{xxii} Malta is a low mountainous country and lacks permanent rivers or lakes. It has a total surface area of 316 km² (2020) and a population of 534,294 (2023).^{xxiii} The country is divided into 68 local districts.^{xxiv}

Its capital city, Valletta, has 5,750 inhabitants.^{xxv} Maltese (90.1%) and English (6%) are the official languages, 3% are multilingual, and others represent 0.9 % (2005).^{xxvi} Catholicism (98%) is the official religion.^{xxvii} Almost all population belongs to ethnic Maltese (descendants of ancient Carthaginians and Phoenicians with stable features of Italian and other Mediterranean ethnicities).^{xxviii}

II. International and Internal Migrants

Malta has registered a high increase in migrants over the past years. In 2021, there were 115,449 persons of non-Maltese citizenship, representing 22.2% of the total population, with a majority presence of men (68.48%) compared to female migrant workers (31.52%).^{xxix} In 2020, the top five countries of origin were the U.K., Australia and New Zealand, Canada, and Italy.^{xxx} Italian nationals have increased their presence in the territory, followed by non-EU migrant workers, mainly from the Philippines, Serbia and India. Malta has become the country with the highest population per square meter in the E.U.^{xxxi}

Malta is an archipelago comprised of Malta and Gozo islands, 94% of the population resides in Malta island, whereas Gozo is more rural.^{xxxii} Regarding internal migrations, in 2011, more than 10,000 persons moved to another locality, and this flow was most intense in the Northern Harbour District, followed by the Southern Harbour District. Furthermore, the Northern Harbour District in 2011 was the first area for a high number of migrants (38.3%). Urbanisation has expanded to new business hubs in Malta Island's north, central and south. These hubs have contributed to providing labour opportunities motivating the internal mobility of workers from the Inner Harbour port area around the capital Valletta to relocate to secondary urban centres.^{xxxiii}

Economic migrants have come to Malta to integrate its labour market. Most residence permits in 2021 were granted for employment reasons to citizens from India, Turkey, Albania, the Philippines, and Serbia.^{xxxiv} Non-European workers equalled the European workforce in 2019.^{xxxv} However, it is still being determined if they move because of a relocation inside the company where they worked in the country of origin or if they have accepted a new job in the Maltese local labour market.

Tourism and construction industries are the primary sources of employment. Secondarily, new industries such as gaming (online casino games) and blockchain are emerging and attracting international workers.^{xxxvi} Malta is also investing in the maritime and cinematographic industries.^{xxxvii} Despite that, the highest proportion of third-country

nationals is employed to perform essential services. Migrants cannot be self-employed, and their work permits must be renewed yearly.^{xxxviii}

The government launched a new integration plan in 2020 with the collaboration of the OIM. The project has integrated proposals from public consultation to third organisations and individuals. As a result, new policies have emerged to fight discrimination and integration governance.^{xxxix}

According to the Global Immigration Detention Observatory, the latest data from 2013 stated that there were 1,900 immigration detainees in Malta. In 2017, there were 113 detained minors.^{xl} The Legislative amendments in 2015 that ended mandatory detention failed to prevent the automatic placements of some migrants in detention. Detainees have limited access to interpretation services or legal representatives. Although not classified as an official detention centre, Malta's initial Reception Centre has operated as a secure detention site since 2018.^{xli}

Additionally, undocumented migrants typically arrive by boat, but their number has declined over the past years.^{xlii} Arrivals increased between 2018 and 2019 with 4,850 persons and decreased to 838 between 2020 and 2021.^{xliii} The majority of these new arrivals are constituted by citizens from Eritrea (26.3%), Syria (16%), Sudan (11.9%) and Egypt (11.5%).^{xliv} Despite that, these persons are unlikely to succeed with their asylum applications. The recognition rate has dropped from 90.1% in 2012 to 22.2% in 2021.^{xlv} As a result, many of these undocumented migrants are being relocated from Malta to other E.U. countries.^{xlvi}

III. Emigration and Skilled Migration (2000 characters including spaces)

Today, Malta is mostly a reception country. Nevertheless, there have been historical waves of thousands of Maltese and Gozitans who emigrated worldwide. The most significant movement occurred in the mid-fifties of the 20th century when a number of the diaspora communities were established in big cities such as London, Detroit, New York, Marseille, San Francisco, Sydney, and Toronto.^{xlvii} After the Second World War, organised emigration became a solution to Malta's challenge regarding overpopulation and unemployment.^{xlviii} Many Maltese emigrated to Australia, Canada, or the United Kingdom, forming significant communities in these countries. After 1965 many returned to Malta. In 1969 the Maltese Emigration Commission organised the first Convention for Maltese emigrants, discussing essential subjects such as statistics, assimilation, and spiritual help to migrants.^{xlix}

There is no recent official data on migratory flows from Malta. The last report at the National Statistics Office¹ outlines that in 2016 there were 8,303 emigrants (5,039 males and 3,264 females).^{li} In 2013, the leading destination countries were Spain, the UK, France, Poland, and Germany.^{lii} The European nature of these flows is due to the facilities and rights provided by the European Union. As part of the Schengen zone (since 2007), Maltese citizens have freedom of movement to other Member states.^{liii}

In order to increase connectivity with the diaspora, the state has launched a voluntary register entitled "Persons of Value - Giving value to our work together".^{liv} This database aims to obtain

value-added performance in entrepreneurship, business, trade, and sports sectors.^{lv} The Council for Maltese Living Abroad protects the diaspora's rights and interests abroad.^{lvi}

IV. Forced Migrants (internally displaced, asylum seekers and refugees) (2000 characters including spaces)

In 2022 there were 433 arrivals to Malta,^{lvii} a notable decrease compared to the 3,406 in 2019.^{lviii} The top four nationalities arriving by sea in 2022 were Syria (40%), Bangladesh (29%), Egypt (12%), and Lebanon (11%).^{lix} Up to September 2022, 94% had been rescued by the Armed Forces of Malta (AFM) at sea.^{lx} The average age of asylum seekers in 2022 was 24.^{lxi} Most were adult males (74%). 7% were adult females, and 19% were children. In total, in 2022, up to September, only 5% of the applications for international protection were accepted.^{lxii} The highest rates for recognition were granted to Syrian and Eritrean nationals (87%).^{lxiii}

Regarding the accommodation of refugees in the country, up to September 2022, there were 306 persons in the Agency for the welfare of asylum seekers (AWAS) open centres, 24 in the Initial Reception Centre and 46 in the Church-run available centres.^{lxiv} Refugees are relocated from Malta to other countries: 270 people were voluntarily relocated to other E.U. Member States in 2020.^{lxv} Migrants and refugees have access to health care services in the country.^{lxvi} Moreover, there is an integration itinerary that involves Maltese and English classes, basic cultural and societal orientation and an assessment of qualifications.^{lxvii} The Maltese state also welcomed Ukrainian refugees and provided medical attention to needy Ukrainian children.^{lxviii}

Displaced people confront significant challenges in route, mainly deaths and disappearances in the Mediterranean for which there is a significant lack of data.^{lxix} Furthermore, refugees are vulnerable to unregulated working arrangements, low wages, and labour exploitation.^{lxx}

V. Victims of Human Trafficking

Malta is Tier 2 in the U.S. Trafficking in Persons Report, meaning that although it does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking, it is making significant effort to fill the gaps. Traffickers exploit domestic and foreign victims in Malta in sex and labour trafficking. Labour trafficking victims are mainly from the People's Republic of China, Eastern Europe, Central America, and Southeast Asia, with increasing numbers from the Philippines. Foreign women working in domestic work, massage parlours and nightclubs are especially vulnerable to trafficking. Refugees and asylum-seekers are also susceptible to trafficking in the informal labour market, construction, hospitality, and domestic work. Traffickers use fraudulent labour recruitment by replacing originally signed contracts with less favourable conditions, forcing victims to perform different jobs, and confiscating their passports.^{lxxi}

In 2021 the police vice squad initiated nine new investigations (compared to 16 in 2020). The Government did not report initiating any recent prosecutions of suspected sex traffickers. It cooperated with United States law enforcement officials on an international trafficking investigation. Moreover, in partnership with a university and international organisation, it provided extensive training to 40 new police recruits on victim identification, trafficker

profiling and an overview of victim referral mechanisms. It further trained immigration police and border control officers, 300 police sergeants and majors and social workers.^{lxxii}

In 2021 the State identified 18 potential foreign trafficking victims (11 for labour trafficking, five for sex trafficking and two for both). Sixteen of them were female. They were from 13 countries, with the majority originating from the Philippines. It operated a 24-hour hotline for individuals needing social services support and referral to care, including potential trafficking victims (two were identified in 2021). Assistance to victims includes shelter, food, psychological counselling, interpreters, medical and legal aid appointments, and help to obtain legal status and job searches. A Victim Support Agency was also launched, providing confidential emotional support and legal advice. In 2021, a new safehouse, which sheltered three trafficking victims, and a witness protection program that attended one victim were launched.^{lxxiii}

Currently, the country is still implementing the 2020-2023 anti-trafficking National Action Plan. It conducted anti-trafficking awareness campaigns through social media, national television, and newspaper articles. It cooperated with Frontex to reduce the number of undocumented migrants from Libya entering Malta and conducted 1,400 routine inspections of employers (mainly contracts and employment conditions).^{lxxiv}

Nevertheless, despite increasing efforts, the state still confronts deficiencies in combating trafficking, mainly related to a lack of coordination, slow court proceedings, an understaffed police force and victim identification gaps. It decreased the number of investigations compared to the previous year and did not prosecute or convict any traffickers in 2021.

VI. National Legal Framework (2000 characters including spaces).

The primary law governing the restrictions, control, and regulation of immigration into Malta is the Immigration Act of 1970.^{lxxv} The Act No VI of 2021 and XV of 2022 last amended the law.^{lxxvi} The Maltese Citizenship Act of 1964 regulates the acquisition, deprivation, and renunciation of citizenship of Malta. Act XXVI of 2017 and XV and XXXVIII of 2020 last amended the act.^{lxxvii}

The Refugees Act, amended in 2015 and 2017, makes provisions and establishes procedures relating to asylum and other types of international protection.^{lxxviii} Malta ratified the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol.^{lxxix}

A part of the Maltese Criminal Code is dedicated to the traffic of persons, and the last amendment is dated 2018. Article 248A-G of the criminal code criminalised sex trafficking and labour trafficking.^{lxxx} Furthermore, in 2013 several amendments to the Criminal Code were made to transpose E.U. Directive 2011/36/E.U. on preventing and combating the trafficking of Human Beings.^{lxxxi} Also, the White Slave Traffic (Suppression) and Victims of Crime of the Laws of Malta, Care Orders Act, and Prevention of Disease Ordinance regulate the suppression of Human trafficking in the country.^{lxxxii}

Malta ratified the Council of Europe Convention on Actions against Trafficking in Human Beings, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the ILO Convention on the Worst Forms of Child labour, the Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child prostitution and Child

pornography.^{lxxxiii} Also, Malta ratified the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons (Palermo Protocol) and the United Nations Protocol to Prevent and Combat Trafficking in Persons.^{lxxxiv}

Malta acceded to the 1954 Statelessness Convention in December 2019 but did not have a statelessness determination procedure (SDP).^{lxxxv} The country has only signed but has yet to ratify the 1997 European Convention on Nationality, which mirrors, to a large extent, the 1961 Convention.^{lxxxvi}

VII. Main Actors (7000 characters including spaces)

The State

The central administrations in charge of implementing the laws governing migration, asylum seekers and human trafficking are the Ministry for Home Affairs and National Security and the Ministry for Justice, according to the 2021 U.S. report.^{lxxxvii}

Different governmental agencies and institutions support migrants, such as the Immigration section of the Police authorities and the Department of Citizenship and Expatriate Affairs (CEA), which provides information about a residence.^{lxxxviii} Regarding refugees, the management responsible for registering asylum applications in Malta is the former Office of the Refugee Commissioner (RefCom), now known as the International Protection Agency. The IPA is also the authority responsible for taking decisions at first instance on asylum applications, and the Ministry of Home Affairs, Security, Reforms and Equality provides information about asylum procedures and statistical data.^{lxxxix} In the same way, the Agency for the welfare of asylum seekers (AWAS) includes information about employment, housing, health, education, and interest. At the same time, the Agenzija Appoġġ supports and protects children and youth against exploitation.^{xc}

The National Police is responsible for investigating human trafficking and other crimes.^{xcii} Victim identification among asylum-seekers is conducted by officials from the Ministry for Home Affairs and National Security and Law Enforcement (MHSE) in partnership with civil society. The Child Protection Agency was designated responsible for vulnerability assessment and interagency coordination for child victims.^{xcii}

In 2020, the Human Rights Directorate (HRD) assumed responsibility for coordinating national anti-trafficking and commercial sex efforts and reforms.^{xciii} In September 2021, the HRD dissolved the inter-ministerial anti-trafficking committee and took up most of its duties, which included implementing the national action plan (NAP), coordinating data collection, and reviewing policy and practice.^{xciv}

International organisations

The European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA) provides operational and technical support and training to the national authorities of E.U. countries.^{xcv} In Malta, the EUAA is responsible for registering asylum applicants and registrations within detention centres. The EUAA

assists the International Protection Agency (IPA) with the implementation of ad hoc relocation through the matching process. It appears that asylum-seekers to be relocated are prioritised for registration.^{xcvi}

UNHCR works with the Government of Malta, local agencies, and civil society organisations to ensure that asylum seekers and refugees have access to their fundamental rights in terms of international, European and national law.^{xcvii} In Malta, UNHCR focuses on legal protection, advocacy, integration, public information and on prevention and reduction of statelessness.^{xcviii}

UNHCR collaborates with the Jesuit Refugee Service in Malta to provide legal services and information to Persons of Concern in detention, open centres and in the community.^{xcix} It also works with JRS Malta to identify and refer persons with vulnerabilities and unique needs and provide them with the necessary support.^c

UNHCR, together with involved governments, partner agencies, and organisations such as IOM, UNICEF and EUAA (former EASO), coordinated and implemented a regional relocation project called REMA in Malta.^{ci}

IOM works on the development of policy guidance for the field; the formulation of global strategies, standard-setting, and quality control; and knowledge management relating to “mainstream” migration sectors^{cii}

Red Cross is present in Malta with a program called Restoring Family Links team that offers several services to migrants, primarily those who have made the journey by boat from Northern Africa, either during their detention or later in open centres.^{ciii}

NGOs and Other organisations

The Malta Refugee Council is a network of Maltese NGOs working to promote the fundamental human rights of persons affected by forced migration. The Council’s work advocates for legislation, policies, and practices of Malta’s international obligations and best practices.^{civ} In this regard, due to the humanitarian crisis caused by the war in Ukraine, the Council has called for the formation of a Humanitarian Coordination Committee in Malta to better manage assistance to refugees arriving in Malta to effectively provide information on legal procedures, entitlements, and services available.^{cv cvi}

Migrant Offshore Aid Station (MOAS) is an NGO committed to supporting and assisting refugees and asylum seekers in Malta. One of its main projects focuses on providing Information and Learning Centres, tailoring them to the needs of the refugee and migrant population.^{cvii} It also encourages remote learning for the migrant and refugee population to keep up to date with their studies. It also provides English language courses for beginners to facilitate the population's access to the labour market and better social integration.^{cviii}

Legal Aid Malta provides free legal aid to low-income people, refugees, asylum seekers and migrants in vulnerable situations. It aims to defend these people’s rights and make their voices heard to improve their quality of life.^{cix}

Malta Legal Network on Asylum brings together professionals based in Malta to support the exchange and improvement of legal knowledge and practice regarding refugee protection in Malta.^{cx} The Aditus Foundation coordinates the Malta network. In this sense, it provides the Network with legal updates and fosters knowledge exchange by organising workshops.^{cxii}

Blue Door English is an NGO providing literacy and language classes for migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers.^{cxii cxiii}

African Media Association promotes the African perspective through news, empowerment, and advocacy.^{cxiv}

Paper Seed Foundation is dedicated to strengthening educational opportunities for children and youth in underserved and under-resourced communities. In Malta, this organisation has been working with unaccompanied minors and young people who have come to the country in search of protection.^{cxv} Their BRIDGE programme aims to address and help mitigate instances of gender-based violence among young asylum seekers.^{cxvi}

The Catholic Church

The Maltese Episcopal Conference has emphasised the importance of listening to people fleeing humanitarian crises, understanding their story, and providing them with a suitable environment in which they feel safe, protected, supported, and integrated.^{cxvii}

In the 1950s, Catholic Action Malta founded the Migrants Commission which has hosted services for migrants and refugees ever since. The Commission's work continues today by managing eleven residences that host migrants, offering legal assistance to asylum seekers and social assistance to those most in need.^{cxviii} Through its collaboration with state agencies and local and international NGOs, the Migrant Commission seeks to welcome, protect, promote, and integrate all migrants in Malta.^{cxix}

Caritas Malta assists the poor and marginalised in the country through several services aiding the homeless with food, clothing, and ill people with specialised programs.^{cxx}

Jesuit Refugee Service provides refugees with legal, social, medical, psychological, school, and spiritual assistance. Its main objective is to meet immediate needs and foster long-term self-sufficiency. The JRS Malta team comprises lawyers, social workers, nurses, priests, Jesuits, religious and cultural mediators, outreach workers, administrative staff, and volunteers.^{cxxi} JRS provides information to the refugee population about the legal and administrative frameworks in the destination countries. When threatened by armed groups or when the population is hostile, they provide refugees with information on safe routes and local aid and security agencies.^{cxxii} In this regard, JRS Malta and UNHCR work together to provide legal services and information to Persons of Concern (PoC) detained in open centres and the community.^{cxxiii} JRS also works with the stateless population and advocates with the Government to ensure that children are registered and can obtain documentation to enable them to have legal status.^{cxxiv} Regarding psychosocial programmes, JRS emphasises strengthening community and family support: it provides safe spaces and activities for vulnerable groups, case management, as well as individual and group counselling.^{cxxv}

The Salesians of Don Bosco work in Malta in different areas, providing educational-pastoral training in various residential homes, such as St. Patrick's Residence, Casa Osanna Pia, and Casa de mama Margarita, where they provide accommodation for children and young people in vulnerable situations.^{cxxvi} Since 2010 in these residences, they also offer housing and care to young refugees arriving on the Island of Malta, providing them with food, medicine, and clothing, learning English and basic skills to help them integrate into society.^{cxxvii} The Sliema and Dingli Oratories provide young people with numerous opportunities and training paths for a better and secure future.^{cxxviii cxxix}

The Talitha Kum Network, an international network of Consecrated Life against human trafficking, to which the RENATE project Religious in Europe Networking Against Trafficking and Exploitation belongs, strives to abolish all forms of trafficking and exploitation of human beings that violate human dignity and human rights. Throughout its European Network, RENATE adopts a victim-centred, human rights and trauma-focused approach to trafficking about the law 12 May 2019.^{cxxx}

The John XXIII Peace Lab is an organisation that, for the past 20 years, has provided shelter to migrants and refugees and has become one of the leading voluntary organisations in Malta carrying out this mission. In addition to hosting asylum seekers, the centre also promotes other services and activities in the same spirit of inclusion, including a weekly radio programme focusing on African culture. The centre also offers medical services and has a library and an internet café.^{cxxxi}

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