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Non-discrimination

Malta

2026

including summary



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Country report

Non-discrimination

Transposition and implementation at national level of
Council Directives 2000/43 and 2000/78

Malta

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Reporting period 1 January 2025 – 1 January 2026

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Introduction

As of the end of 2024,¹ the total resident population of Malta was estimated at 574 250, representing a 1.9 % increase over the previous year. Of this total, 70.6 % were Maltese citizens and 29.4 % were foreign nationals, equating to roughly 169 000 foreign residents. Males accounted for 53.1 % of the population, and persons aged 65 and over made up 18.4 % of the total. Children under 18 comprised 14.5 % of residents.^{2 3}

According to the Labour Force Survey, for the third quarter of 2025, the number of persons in employment was 337 234, an increase of 4.8 % compared with the same period the previous year. This figure equates to 66.8 % of the population aged 15 and over. Unemployed persons were estimated at 9 434 (1.9 %), with inactive persons (neither employed nor unemployed) numbering 158 304 (31.3 %). The activity rate (active labour force as a share of those aged 15 and over) was 84.0 %, with the highest participation among persons aged 25–54. On average, 82 in every 100 persons aged 15–64 were employed, with 87.0 % of males and 75.1 % of females in that age bracket employed during this period.^{4 5 6}

An increase in the number of foreign nationals living in Malta has continued to be associated with rising diversity and social integration challenges. At the end of December 2024, 29 756 persons with a disability were registered with the Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability, of whom the majority have physical or intellectual disabilities, with others having psychosocial, hearing, or visual impairments. This marked a continued increase in registrations relative to previous years.⁷

According to the 2021 national census⁸ (the most recent full census), religious affiliation data for the resident population aged 15 and over showed that:

- 82.6 % identified with Roman Catholicism;
- 3.9 % identified with Islam;
- 3.6 % identified with Christian Orthodoxy;
- 1.4 % identified with Hinduism;
- 1.3 % identified with the Church of England;
- 1.0 % identified with other Protestant denominations; and
- 5.1 % declared no religious affiliation.

Various organisations in Malta, both governmental and non-governmental, actively seek to combat discrimination on various grounds. In addition to the measures taken to implement

¹ Data not available for 2025 by the cut-off date for this report (1 January 2026).

² NSO (2025a), 'World Population Day: 11 July 2025', press release, National Statistics Office, 10 July, available at <https://nso.gov.mt/world-population-day-11-july-2025/>.

³ NSO (2025a).

⁴ NSO (2025b), 'Labour Force Survey: Q3/2025', press release, National Statistics Office, 11 December, available at: <https://nso.gov.mt/labour-force-survey-q3-2025>.

⁵ NSO (2025b).

⁶ In Malta, detailed labour-market statistics are usually reported for the 55–64 age group. Persons aged 65+ are classified as inactive. The main reason for inactivity is retirement or early retirement, accounting for about 43 % of inactive persons within the population. Though there are no official statistics on this, employment among older adults has been increasing steadily, owing to later retirement, better health and longevity, labour shortages and growth in part-time/self-employment opportunities. Most people who remain actively working past the age of 64 work part-time, in self-employment, consultancy, retail, tourism, administration, or family businesses.

⁷ CRPD (2025), *Annual report 2024*, Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability, Birkirkara, available at <https://www.crpdp.org.mt/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/CRPD-OCO-Annual-Report-2024-EN.pdf>.

⁸ NSO (2023), *Census of population and housing 2021: Final report (Volume 1)*, National Statistics Office, Valletta, available at https://nso.gov.mt/themes_publications/census-of-population-and-housing-2021-final-report-population-migration-and-other-social-characteristics-volume-1/.

the directives, the Government continues to seek dialogue and consultation with people and entities working to combat and prohibit discrimination.

In December 2014, a consultation process was launched⁹ proposing the introduction of an Equality Act and legislation for a Human Rights and Equality Commission. An Equality Act was subsequently proposed, in July 2019, to supersede the current Maltese Equality for Men and Women Act, which it was felt no longer served its purpose, as its distinctions in providing for different grounds created an unwanted hierarchy of grounds. The new Equality Act is being proposed so as to present a less fragmented equality legal framework in Malta, as well as to introduce provisions on intersectionality.¹⁰ The ultimate aim of the proposed new Act is to have all the relevant provisions of the following EU directives included within one comprehensive act of legislation: Directive 2000/43/EC, Directive 2000/78/EC, Directive 2004/113/EC and Directive 2006/54/EC. On 10 December 2015, International Human Rights Day, the Ministry for Social Dialogue, Consumer Affairs and Civil Liberties presented drafts of the two aforementioned bills during a public seminar.¹¹ The consultation process ended on 31 January 2016. The respective bills were presented in Parliament in July 2019 and discussion commenced in November 2019.¹² The bills are still, by the cut-off date of this report, in committee stage and still in the process of enactment. While there is no standard timeline for the enactment of any legislation, it is clear that, given their importance, such laws are beyond normal timelines for enactment. There is no publicly available information demonstrating absolute opposition to the introduction of these laws. A number of amendments are being proposed to the initial drafts, some of which are likely to be adopted, following concerns raised by institutions and social bodies.¹³

The proposed legislative framework for the new National Human Rights and Equality Commission (NHREC), which will address human rights issues and violations and will monitor and advise on human rights priorities in Malta,¹⁴ will focus on potential and current systematic violations of human rights and will contribute to preventing such violations (based on the Paris Principles).¹⁵ The NHREC will be established by the proposed Human

⁹ The white paper presented on 10 December 2014 by the Minister for Social Dialogue, Consumer Affairs and Civil Liberties, Helena Dalli, launched a consultation process, which closed on 10 February 2015.

¹⁰ The eventual Act should contain a general provision against discrimination as well as positive equality duties and obligations. In addition, a revised list of grounds of discrimination is to be included to ensure that all grounds of discrimination are adequately included within one act. Intersectional discrimination is also to be tackled with specific provisions within the proposed legislation. The provisions of this Act should cover all spheres of life and will include provisions that allow for NGOs to submit cases on behalf of victims and for the possibility of class action suits and the processing of cases of discrimination without the need to identify an individual victim. Finally, provisions allowing for dissuasive sanctions in cases of proven discrimination are also proposed.

¹¹ See: <https://parlament.mt/media/101105/3-bill-96-equality-bill.pdf> (parlament.mt); <https://parlament.mt/media/101106/4-bill-97-the-human-rights-and-equality-commission-bill.pdf> (parlament.mt).

¹² At this point, the aforementioned Minister pointed out that the original version of the bill had been amended to take on board various recommendations made in 2018 by the Venice Commission, which had produced a report on the rule of law in Malta.

¹³ Concerns about particular provisions have been raised by the Catholic Church, by the medical profession and by the Pharmacy Council. These provisions are a supremacy clause which places this law as being supreme above all Maltese laws except the Constitution, the European Convention Act and any future Act of Parliament which amends the said law. It is contended that this supremacy clause has been inserted just in case any present or future laws are found to be discriminatory in terms of characteristics not protected by the provisions in the Constitution, such as genetic features and social origin. Doctors and pharmacists have proposed legal safeguards for their professions in the form of clauses which will allow them to refuse to provide services that go against their conscience. No similar objections appear to have been raised with respect to the law that will bring the new Equality Commission into being. The proposed amendments and feedback submitted by different bodies and stakeholders have been discussed to some extent during the parliamentary process, particularly at the Committee Stage of the Equality Bill. However, the Bill has not yet completed all parliamentary stages.

¹⁴ The NHREC will remain independent but will be directly responsible to Parliament. The NHREC should be vested with the ability to issue opinions, make legislative and policy proposals and also criticise the Government or any of its entities on human rights and equality matters.

¹⁵ The NHREC should be accessible to the public and will provide for accessible complaints procedures. The NHREC is to engage in proper collaboration with various stakeholders in its quest to establish the highest human rights standards in Malta.

Rights and Equality Commission Act and will be a legal successor to the present National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE).

2. Main legislation

The principles of equality of treatment and non-discrimination were first introduced into the Maltese Constitution of 1964.¹⁶ In December 2024, the Minister for Inclusion publicly announced that the Constitution of Malta was to undergo legislative amendments to recognise discrimination against persons with disabilities, strengthen enforcement and facilitate access to justice. These proposed amendments have not yet been introduced.

In 1987, the European Convention Act was enacted. Through this Act,¹⁷ Article 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights can be invoked before and enforced by the Maltese courts in the event that a person is hindered in the enjoyment of the fundamental rights and freedoms provided for in the Convention on grounds of discrimination. In addition, Malta ratified Protocol 12 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which provides for a general prohibition on discrimination.¹⁸ The Protocol removes the previous limitation on the application of Article 14 (non-discrimination) of the Convention and guarantees that no one will be discriminated against on any ground by any public authority.

In addition to this, Malta has introduced a number of specific legislative acts of relevance for the implementation of Council Directives 2000/78/EC and 2000/43/EC, in particular the Employment and Industrial Relations Act 2002,¹⁹ the Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability) Act 2000 and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act,²⁰ the Equality for Men and Women Act 2003,²¹ and Article 82A of the Criminal Code.²² The Equal Treatment in Employment Regulations filled the lacunae under the 2002 Act with regard to discrimination on the grounds of religion or religious belief,²³ disability, age, sexual orientation, racial or ethnic origin, pregnancy or maternity leave, and gender reassignment in the field of employment. The latter Regulations were amended by Legal Notice 53 of 2007 and refer, in particular, to the provision of reasonable accommodation to persons with disabilities and the defence of rights in line with the provisions of Directive 2000/78/EC.²⁴ The definition of 'discrimination' under the Equality for Men and Women Act has been extended to include not only discrimination based on sex or family responsibility but also sexual orientation, age, religion or belief, racial or ethnic origin, gender identity, gender expression or sex characteristics in the fields of employment, education, vocational training, financial services and advertising.

The Equal Treatment of Persons Order²⁵ further implemented the provisions of Directive 2000/43/EC. Thus, the Commission for the Promotion of Equality for Men and Women was designated as the body responsible for the promotion of equal treatment of

¹⁶ The Maltese Constitution of 1964, in Article 32, provides for protection from discrimination on the basis of race, place of origin, political opinions, colour, creed, sex, sexual orientation and gender identity and also states that no law shall make any provision that is discriminatory either of itself or in its effect.

¹⁷ European Convention Act, 19 August 1987 (Act XIV of 1987). This provides that the substantive Articles of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms have become and are enforceable as part of the *Laws of Malta*.

¹⁸ However, the Protocol was not incorporated into Maltese law and hence may not be invoked before the local courts.

¹⁹ Employment and Industrial Relations Act, 2 December 2002 (Act XXII of 2002).

²⁰ Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability) Act, 10 February 2000 (Act I of 2000); United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 17 August 2021 (Act LIX of 2021). The protection from disability discrimination falls under the 2021 Act while the 2000 Act sets up and regulates the Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD Malta) and its powers.

²¹ Equality for Men and Women Act 2003, 9 December 2003 (Act I of 2003).

²² Chapter 9 of the *Laws of Malta*, which criminalises incitement to racial hatred.

²³ Employment law does not differentiate between religion or other belief but merely refers to religion or religious belief.

²⁴ By virtue of Legal Notice 54 of 2007, the Equal Treatment in Employment Regulations were extended to employees in the public sector.

²⁵ Equal Treatment of Persons Order, 3 April 2007 (Legal Notice 85 of 2007).

everyone without discrimination on the grounds of racial or ethnic origin.²⁶ Malta is also a party to various international human rights instruments that provide for protection against discrimination.²⁷

As a general comment, little reference to local practice on the subject areas is made in this report because there is little case law or publicly available material, and only sparse practice exists.

3. Main principles and definitions

Discrimination is prohibited on all the grounds covered by the directives under Maltese law.²⁸

The Equal Treatment in Employment Regulations provide protection from harassment in matters of employment on all the grounds mentioned in the directives.²⁹ In terms of this law, the effects of the harassment need not be cumulative.³⁰ Article 27(1)(b) of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act,³¹ affords persons with disabilities protection from harassment.

The Fourth Schedule to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act provides that a person is considered to be acting discriminatorily when:

‘he treats or proposes to treat a person less favourably on the basis of a characteristic that appertains generally to persons who have such a disability or a presumed characteristic that is generally imputed to persons who have such a disability’.

Furthermore, since the Equal Treatment in Employment Regulations and the Equal Treatment of Persons Order 2007 provide for the prohibition of both direct and indirect discrimination, and as such definitions are taken from the Council directives, it may be argued that Maltese law prohibits discrimination on the grounds mentioned in the directives based on presumed characteristics.

The prohibition against victimisation is provided for under Article 28 of the Employment and Industrial Relations Act.³² This provision goes further than that required by Article 11 of the

²⁶ In addition, this Order prohibits discrimination on the ground of race or ethnic origin in relation to (i) social protection, including social security and healthcare, (ii) social advantages, (iii) education, (iv) access to and supply of goods and services which are available to the public, and (v) housing. It is to be noted that, by virtue of the Equality for Men and Women Act and the Equal Treatment of Persons Order, the remit of the NCPE relates to discrimination issues based on (i) sex/gender and family responsibilities, sexual orientation, age, religion or belief, racial or ethnic origin, gender identity, gender expression or sex characteristics in employment; banks and financial institutions, as well as education; and (ii) racial/ethnic origin and gender in the provision of goods and services and their supply.

²⁷ Malta signed and ratified Protocol No. 12 on 8 December 2015 as well as other international instruments as indicated in the relative appendix to this report.

²⁸ Although the Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability) Act 2000 and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act do not make any express reference to direct and indirect discrimination, the provisions of the Act clearly prohibit both forms of discrimination. Furthermore, the Equal Treatment in Employment Regulations and the Equal Treatment of Persons Order provide for the prohibition of both direct and indirect discrimination.

²⁹ It defines ‘harassment’ as a form of discriminatory treatment having the effect of violating the dignity of the person who is being harassed or where it has the effect of creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for the person who is so subjected. Furthermore, it provides that a person shall also be deemed to have discriminated against another if the former neglects their obligation to suppress any form of harassment at their place of work or within their organisation.

³⁰ The prohibition of harassment is also mentioned under the Public Service Management Code.

³¹ United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 17 August 2021 (Act LIX of 2021). Chapter 627 of the *Laws of Malta*, Second Schedule.

³² This provides that if any person (a) files a complaint with the lawful authorities or initiates or participates in proceedings for redress on grounds of alleged breach of the provisions of the Act, or (b) discloses information, confidential or otherwise, to a designated public regulating body, regarding alleged illegal or corrupt activities being committed by his or her employer or by persons acting in the employer’s name and interests, it is unlawful to victimise such a person for having acted accordingly.

Employment Equality Directive, since it relates not only to breaches of the obligation of equal treatment but to any breach of the provisions of the Act.

Similarly, Article 7 of the Equal Treatment of Persons Order, as regards race and ethnic origin, and the Fourth Schedule to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, as regards disability, both provide for a prohibition of victimisation and are in line with the provisions of the EU law requirements.³³ Furthermore, under Article 4 of the Equality for Men and Women Act, it will be unlawful for employers to discriminate, directly or indirectly, against a person in the arrangements made to determine or in determining who should be offered employment or in the terms and conditions on which the employment is offered or in the determination of who should be dismissed from employment.³⁴

Under the Exercise of Rights Conferred on Workers (Freedom of Movement) Regulations 2016, victimisation is defined as less favourable treatment for having made a complaint to the lawful authorities or for having initiated or participated in proceedings for redress on grounds of an alleged breach of the provisions of these Regulations, or for having disclosed information, confidential or otherwise, to a designated public regulatory body regarding alleged illegal or corrupt activities being committed by any person falling within the scope of these Regulations or by persons acting in such a person's name and interests. Moreover, Regulation 7 provides that victimisation will constitute prohibited conduct under these Regulations and will be tantamount to discrimination under the Equality for Men and Women Act.

The Equal Treatment in Employment Regulations prohibit instruction to discriminate in the field of employment and, under the Equal Treatment of Persons Order, in respect of discrimination under Directive 2000/43/EC. No such prohibition, however, exists under the Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability) Act 2000 or the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act or the Equality for Men and Women Act 2003.³⁵ One nevertheless notes that the prohibition on instruction to discriminate is more restrictive in the Equal Treatment of Persons Order than in the provisions of the said directive.

Article 2(3) of the Equal Treatment of Persons Order provides that less favourable treatment, which is based on a characteristic related to racial or ethnic origin, will not constitute discrimination where, by reason of the particular occupational activities concerned, or of the context in which they are carried out, the treatment is legitimate and the characteristic constitutes a genuine occupational requirement which is proportionate in the circumstances. One notes that the provisions of the Equal Treatment of Persons Order, under Article 2(3), provide a broader exception than the Directive, by referring to the 'treatment' as being legitimate under the genuine and determining occupational requirement test, rather than the 'objective' being legitimate, as stipulated in the Directive.³⁶

With regard to the occupational requirements laid down in the Employment Equality Directive, the Employment and Industrial Relations Act 2002, as well as the Equality for Men and Women Act 2003, contain provisions in this respect.³⁷

³³ This provides that it shall not be lawful to victimise any person for having made a complaint to the lawful authorities or for having initiated or participated in proceedings for redress on grounds of alleged breach of the provisions of the Act or for having disclosed information, confidential or otherwise, to a designated public regulating body, regarding alleged discriminatory behaviour, activities or practices.

³⁴ Furthermore, employers shall also be deemed to have discriminated against a person if such employers alter the working conditions or the terms of employment of employees to the detriment of such employees after such employees have invoked any right accorded to them under this Act or claimed the performance in their favour of any obligation or duty under this Act.

³⁵ On a more general level, the Constitution of Malta provides that no person shall be treated in a discriminatory manner by any person acting by virtue of any written law or in the performance of the functions of any public office or any public authority.

³⁶ The Directive provides that the objective must be legitimate and the requirement proportionate.

³⁷ Maltese law also provides for the provision of reasonable accommodation under subsidiary legislation issued

In Malta, national law does not make specific reference to the prohibition of discrimination based on association with people who have particular characteristics. Discrimination based on perception or assumption of a person's characteristics is prohibited under national law while multiple discrimination is prohibited only on the ground of disability.³⁸ Intersectional discrimination is not specifically prohibited under national law.

4. Material scope

Protection against discriminatory treatment under Maltese law is provided for under both general and specific laws. The Constitution of Malta and the European Convention Act contain a general prohibition against discrimination that could be taken to include all the fields of application listed in Article 3 of both directives.

The more specialised legislation contains specific anti-discrimination provisions in respect of certain spheres (mainly employment) or people (discrimination on the basis of sex, race and ethnic origin, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression or sex characteristics and discrimination against persons with disabilities). In this case, the protection afforded by these laws extends to matters between private individuals rather than matters between private individuals and public entities or authorities.

In fact, the Employment and Industrial Relations Act provides for the prohibition of discrimination in general. Similarly, the Equality for Men and Women Act prohibits discrimination in the field of employment, education, vocational training, the provision of financial services and advertising.

Employment in the public sector is regulated by the Public Service Management Code and Legal Notice 54 of 2007 issued under the Employment and Industrial Relations Act, the provisions of which were extended to public sector employees. In cases of discrimination against employees in the public sector by public authorities, these employees can invoke the provisions of the Constitution and the European Convention Act.

Furthermore, in respect of the engagement of employees by Government and Government-owned or controlled bodies and companies, under the Employment and Training Services Act 2018³⁹ it is illegal for a person to, *inter alia*, show favour to, or to discriminate against, any person for employment with any employer on the grounds of sex, religion or belief, economic means, race or ethnic origin, political opinion, disability, colour, sexual orientation or gender identity.

The Employment and Industrial Relations Act and the regulations issued thereunder prohibit discrimination in matters concerning vocational training and guidance and remuneration for work of equal value as provided for in Article 3(1)(b) and (c) of the two directives. Maltese law also prohibits discrimination on the grounds mentioned in Article 3(1)(d) of the directives. In cases of alleged discrimination in respect of the matters mentioned in paragraphs (e) to (h) of the Race Equality Directive,⁴⁰ the Equal Treatment of Persons Order 2007 has transposed those provisions of the Directive. The alleged victim can also seek to protect his or her rights by seeking redress under the Constitution, the European Convention Act and the Ombudsman Act.

As seen above, therefore, implementation applies to both the public and private sectors in all fields covered by the directives.

under the Occupational Health and Safety Authority Act 2000, as well as under the Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability) Act 2000. In addition, the latter Act provides that employers must provide reasonable accommodation for employees with disabilities.

³⁸ These should both be addressed in the new Equality Act once it is adopted and implemented.

³⁹ Employment and Training Services Act 2018 (Act XXXIX of 2018), *Laws of Malta*.

⁴⁰ Namely social protection, including social security and healthcare; social advantages; education; and access to and supply of goods and services which are available to the public, including housing.

5. Enforcing the law

Maltese legislation lays down various courses of action that may be followed should an individual believe that they were subjected to discriminatory treatment. Apart from recourse to action before the courts, there exist other bodies where an alleged victim can address their complaint. These include the Industrial Tribunal (under the Employment and Industrial Relations Act 2002); the Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD Malta) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) Redress Panel (under the Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability) Act and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act); the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality for Men and Women (under the Equality for Men and Women Act); the Public Service Commission (under the Constitution of Malta); the Ombudsman (under the Ombudsman Act); the Broadcasting Authority (under the Constitution of Malta); and the Employment Commission (under the Constitution of Malta).⁴¹

Access to the courts in cases of alleged breach of the provisions of the Constitution or of the European Convention Act is generally available to all. People who do not have adequate financial means to institute legal proceedings in Malta can apply for legal aid. Where this is not granted, costs can be seen as a deterrent. Delays in proceedings, which do occur, can also be seen as a deterrent.

As a rule, actions before such authorities are brought by victims themselves. However, both the Equal Treatment in Employment Regulations and the Equal Treatment of Persons Order provide that nothing will prevent any association, organisation or other legal entity having a legitimate interest in engaging itself either on behalf of or in support of the complainant, with his or her approval, in any judicial or administrative procedure.

One entity that is legislatively empowered to assist a complainant of alleged discriminatory treatment is CRPD Malta. Furthermore, Article 33A of the Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability) Act provides that any association, organisation or any legal entity which has a legitimate interest in ensuring that the provisions of the Act are complied with may institute, on behalf or in support of the person against whom an unlawful act of discrimination has been committed under the Act, with his or her approval, proceedings for redress before the competent court.

Under Article 11 of the Equal Treatment of Persons Order, the Commissioner for the Promotion of Equality may initiate investigations on any matter involving an act or omission that is allegedly unlawful under the provisions of the Order. They may also do so on receipt of a complaint in writing by people who claim to be the victims of an act or omission. Under the Employment and Industrial Relations Act, where it is alleged that a worker has been unfairly dismissed by an employer, or where there is an alleged breach of any obligation under Title I of the Act or any regulations thereunder, the matter will be referred to the Industrial Tribunal by means of a referral made by the worker alleging the breach or by a person acting in his or her name.

The general principle under Maltese law is that the burden of proof lies on the person making the allegation. However, the Equal Treatment in Employment Regulations provide that, in any proceedings brought by a person claiming discriminatory treatment, it will be sufficient for the claimant to prove that he or she has suffered discriminatory treatment, and the defendant has to prove that such treatment was justified. Similarly, the Equal Treatment of Persons Order and the Equality for Men and Women Act provide for the shifting of the burden of proof.⁴²

⁴¹ With respect to the Employment Commission, the Constitution limits the remit to discrimination on the basis of political opinion.

⁴² This rule shall also apply where the Commission itself takes action to refer an allegation of discrimination to the competent court on behalf of the person discriminated against or where it intervenes in support of a person alleging discrimination and taking action for redress.

Sanctions for breaches are applied. These normally take the form of payment of compensation or damages. Criminal sanctions are applied in respect of criminal violations.⁴³ It is pertinent to note that there have been no cases, whether before the courts or before the Ombudsman, challenging the amount of compensation awarded. Therefore, there is no publicly available evidence to show how effective, proportionate or dissuasive the available sanctions are. It is felt, however, especially with regard to the sanctions under the Employment and Industrial Relations Act and under the Equal Treatment of Persons Order, the implication is that since they do not provide for a cap on the damages which may be awarded, they are effective and sufficient.

Dialogue and/or consultation with the NGOs and/or social partners has taken place prior to the implementation of the laws and continues to take place.

6. Equality bodies

The National Commission for the Promotion of Equality for Men and Women (NCPE)⁴⁴ has been designated as the body in Malta to promote equality of treatment for everyone without discrimination on the grounds of racial or ethnic origin. The Commission seeks to ensure that Maltese society is a society free from any form of discrimination in all sectors and at all levels with respect to training and employment and the provision of services and benefits. The remit of the NCPE relates to discrimination issues based on (i) 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 – and these are the grounds which it deals with.⁴⁵ The remit of the Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD) is disability discrimination and this organisation works in order to eliminate any form of direct or indirect social discrimination against persons with disability and their families, while providing them with the necessary assistance and support.⁴⁶ CRPD Malta also has within it a panel, referred to as the UNCRPD Redress Panel, which is competent to hear petitions alleging that one or more substantive Convention rights have been, are being or are likely to be contravened.

Several entities, such as the NCPE and CRPD Malta, regularly organise publicity campaigns, participate in projects and hold seminars and public meetings to encourage persons of a particular religion or religious belief, disability, age, sexual orientation or racial or ethnic origin to participate in training to assist them in entering the labour market. Jobsplus, the public employment agency, is very active in this field, as one of the corporation's main objectives is that of assisting people in finding employment.

⁴³ Punishments for crimes under the Criminal Code are increased when the crimes are aggravated or motivated, wholly or in part, by hatred against a person or a group, on the grounds of gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, colour, language, national or ethnic origin, age, disability, citizenship, religion or belief, or political or other opinion. This aggravation applies generally and in respect of certain crimes, including wilful offences against the person, crimes constituting threats, violence and harassment, and crimes against public safety and injury to property.

⁴⁴ Although the Commission is generally referred to as the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (even on its website), Article 11 of Chapter 456 of the *Laws of Malta* (by which the Commission is constituted) states that, 'The Prime Minister shall upon the advice of the Minister appoint a Commission to be called the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality for Men and Women (hereinafter referred to as 'the Commission')'.

⁴⁵ The scope of the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality is intended to be widened so that it becomes a Commission for Human Rights and Equality (NHREC), acting as a national human rights institution as well as an equality body in accordance with the provisions established by the European Directives on equal treatment. Henceforth, the NCPE will be able not only to build on work which has already been identified, but also to expand and strengthen its work and responsibilities in the field of human rights and equality.

⁴⁶ The Commission is now made up of a Commissioner and a Council for the Rights of Persons with Disability. The panel is composed of three (3) persons, including a chairperson, being persons with disability or persons with lived experience of disability, appointed by the Commissioner, who may from time to time appoint more than one panel.

7. Key issues

Under Maltese law one finds some instances where national provisions are more restrictive in scope than the provisions of the directives. The prohibition of instructions to discriminate under the Equal Treatment of Persons Order is more restrictive than under the provisions of the Directive. Likewise, the same Order provides a more restrictive reference under Article 2(3) when referring to the treatment being legitimate as the test for a genuine occupational requirement, as opposed to the objective being legitimate, under the Directive. There do not seem to be any issues of concern regarding the use of artificial intelligence in relation to the implementation of the national legislation transposing the directives, or regarding the regulation of artificial intelligence generally.

INTRODUCTION

The national legal system

The Maltese Constitution contains limitations on parliamentary sovereignty. An extensive and judicially enforceable bill of rights, as well as judicial review of the constitutionality of legislation, is incorporated therein. It sets limitations on governmental power and provides remedies for cases of abuse, guaranteeing protection for the fundamental rights and freedoms of the individual vis-à-vis the state, and it provides for independent courts to secure that protection.

Thus, the Constitution is supreme over the executive and legislative branches, and the constitutional system provides for a system of checks and balances among and between the executive, the legislature and the judiciary. The Constitution of Malta was amended in April 2001, entrenching the system of local government. It is now stipulated that the

‘territory of Malta shall be divided into such number of localities as may by law be from time to time determined, each locality to be administered by a Local Council elected by the residents of the locality and established and operating in terms of such law as may from time to time be in force’.⁴⁷

The Constitution provides for the setting up of the legislature, and all bills must be presented to Parliament. Once they are approved, receive the consent of the President and are published, they become acts of Parliament, with the full force of law. Acts of Parliament may empower the minister responsible for the said act to issue regulations, orders or bye-laws by virtue of legal notices. A legal notice is deemed to be subsidiary legislation, having the full force of law, without the need to obtain parliamentary approval, given that the power to issue the regulations, bye-laws and/or orders was approved in the principal act.

It is also pertinent to note that Malta is a party to several international human rights treaties and has ratified various conventions such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.⁴⁸ Treaties and conventions do not automatically become part of domestic law. They would need to be incorporated into domestic law by legislation. Until such time, therefore, the provisions of the relevant conventions cannot be directly enforced by the Maltese courts. It should be noted, however, that the European Convention on the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms was incorporated into domestic law in 1987,⁴⁹ giving Maltese citizens the right to individually petition the European Court of Human Rights once domestic remedies have been exhausted. Likewise, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act incorporated the UN Convention into Maltese law in 2021.

List of main legislation transposing and implementing the directives

Official title of the law: Employment and Industrial Relations Act⁵⁰ Name used in this report: EIRA Abbreviation: EIRA Date of adoption: 2 December 2002 Entry into force: 27 December 2002 Latest amendment: Act XXXVI of 2025 Web link: https://legislation.mt/eli/cap/452/eng/pdf
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⁴⁷ Article 115A of the Constitution of Malta.

⁴⁸ The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Optional Protocol were ratified by Malta in October 2012 and came into effect in November 2012 following a wide-ranging consultation process with all stakeholders. In 2021, Malta incorporated the Convention into Maltese law through the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (Act LIX of 2021), Chapter 627 of the *Laws of Malta*.

⁴⁹ European Convention Act, 19 August 1987 (Act XIV of 1987).

⁵⁰ Chapter 452 of the *Laws of Malta*, available at: <https://legislation.mt/eli/cap/452/eng/pdf>.

Grounds covered: Marital status,⁵¹ pregnancy or potential pregnancy,⁵² sex, colour, disability, religious conviction, political opinion or membership in a trade union or in an employers' association.

Civil/administrative law

Material scope: Private employment (with reference to disciplined forces)⁵³

Principal content: Protection against discrimination related to employment, prohibitions on victimisation and harassment, and protections of gender equality and work for equal value, creation of a specialised body/court (the Industrial Tribunal)

Official Title of the law: Equal Treatment in Employment Regulations⁵⁴

Abbreviation: Full legal name applies

Date of adoption: 5 November 2004

Entry into force: 5 November 2004

Latest amendment: Legal Notice 274 of 2014

Web link: <https://legislation.mt/eli/sl/452.95/eng/pdf>

Grounds covered: Religion or religious belief, disability, age, sex, sexual orientation, and racial or ethnic origin

Civil/administrative law

Material scope: Private and public employment

Principal content: Prohibition of direct and indirect discrimination

Official Title of the law: Equal Treatment of Persons Order⁵⁵

Abbreviation: Full legal name applies

Date of adoption: 3 April 2007

Entry into force: 3 April 2007

Latest amendment: Legal Notice 427 of 2007

Web link: <https://legislation.mt/eli/ln/2007/85/eng/pdf>

Grounds covered: Racial or ethnic origin

Civil/administrative law

Material scope: Social protection, social advantages, education, access to and supply of goods and services which are available to the public, including housing, access to any other services such as banking

Principal content: Prohibition of direct and indirect discrimination, and harassment

Official Title of the law: Equal Treatment in Self-Employment and Occupation Order⁵⁶

Abbreviation: Full legal name applies

Date of adoption: 3 April 2007

Entry into force: 3 April 2007

Latest amendment: Legal Notice 260 of 2012

Web link: <https://legislation.mt/getpdf/60225979bc8272018c0f5b88>

Grounds covered: Religion or religious belief, disability, age, sex, sexual orientation, and racial or ethnic origin, pregnancy or maternity leave, gender reassignment⁵⁷ (underwent or undergoing or intends to undergo)

Civil/administrative law

⁵¹ Discrimination based on whether a person is married or otherwise.

⁵² Discrimination when a woman is treated less favourably than another person because she is pregnant or because she may become pregnant.

⁵³ 'Disciplined force' means – (a) a naval, military or air force of the Government of Malta; (b) the Malta Police Force; (c) any other police force established by law in Malta; (d) the Malta prison service; (e) the Assistance and Rescue Force within the Civil Protection Department.

⁵⁴ Subsidiary legislation (S.L) 452.95 of the *Laws of Malta*, available at <https://legislation.mt/eli/sl/452.95/eng>.

⁵⁵ S.L 460.15, available at <https://legislation.mt/eli/sl/460.15/eng>.

⁵⁶ S.L 460.16, available at <https://legislation.mt/eli/sl/460.16/eng>.

⁵⁷ Where a person is considering or intends to undergo, or is undergoing or has undergone, a process, or part of a process, for the purpose of reassigning the person's sex by changing physiological or other attributes of sex.

Material scope: Self-employment or occupation and harassment Principal content: Prohibition of direct or indirect discrimination
Official Title of the law: Persons with Disability (Employment) Act⁵⁸ Abbreviation: Full legal name applies Date of adoption: 7 February 1969 Entry into force: 7 February 1969 Latest amendment: Act XXXIV of 2021 Web link: https://legislation.mt/eli/cap/210/eng/pdf Grounds covered: Disability Civil/administrative law Material scope: Employment Principal content: Maintaining of a Register of Persons with Disability; determination of quota for entities with over 20 employees
Official Title of the law: Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability) Act⁵⁹ Abbreviation: Full legal name applies Date of adoption: 10 February 2000 Entry into force: 10 February 2000; 01.10.2000 Latest amendment: Act LIX of 2021 Web link: https://legislation.mt/eli/cap/413/eng/pdf Grounds covered: Disability Civil/administrative law Material scope: Protection of persons with disability Principal content: Creation of a specialised body (the Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability); a Board to determine what is reasonable (Test of Reasonableness) and Access to Justice
Official Title of the law: Equality for Men and Women Act⁶⁰ Abbreviation: Full legal name applies Date of adoption: 9 December 2003 Entry into force: 9 December 2003 Latest amendment: Act XI of 2015 Web link: https://legislation.mt/eli/cap/456/eng Grounds covered: Sex, family responsibilities, sexual orientation, age, religion or belief, racial or ethnic origin, gender identity, gender expression, sex characteristics, actual or potential pregnancy, or childbirth Civil/administrative law Material scope: Employment, banks and financial institutions, education and vocational guidance, sexual harassment Principal content: Prohibition of direct and indirect discrimination, creation of a specialised body (National Commission for the Promotion of Equality for Men and Women)
Official Title of the law: Exercise of Rights Conferred on Workers (Freedom of Movement) Regulations⁶¹ Date of adoption: 20 May 2016 Entry into force: 20 May 2016 Latest amendments: N/A Web link: https://legislation.mt/eli/ln/2016/173/eng/pdf Grounds covered: No grounds specified Civil/administrative law Material scope: Private and public employment

⁵⁸ Chapter 210 of the *Laws of Malta*, available at <https://legislation.mt/eli/cap/210/eng/pdf>.

⁵⁹ Chapter 413 of the *Laws of Malta*, available at <https://legislation.mt/eli/cap/413/eng/pdf>.

⁶⁰ Chapter 456 of the *Laws of Malta*, available at <https://legislation.mt/eli/cap/456/eng>.

⁶¹ Legal Notice (L.N) 173 of 2016, available at <https://legislation.mt/eli/ln/2016/173/eng/pdf>.

Principal content: Prohibition of direct or indirect discrimination

Official Title of the law: United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act⁶²

Abbreviation: Full legal name applies

Date of adoption: 17 August 2021

Entry into force: 17 August 2021

Latest amendment: N/A

Web link: <https://legislation.mt/eli/cap/627/eng>

Grounds covered: Disability

Civil/administrative law

Material scope: Social protection, employment, education, access to property, provision of goods, facilities or services, health and accommodation.

Principal content: Incorporates the substantive rights of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, establishes the Directorate for Disability Issues.

There are other pieces of legislation that, without being the most important, relate directly or indirectly to non-discrimination.⁶³

⁶² Chapter 627 of the *Laws of Malta*, available at <https://legislation.mt/eli/cap/627/eng>.

⁶³ Gender Identity, Gender Expression and Sex Characteristics Act, 2015, Affirmation of Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Gender Expression Act 2016, Various Laws (Persons with Disability) (Membership in Various Entities) Act 2015, Marriage Act and other Laws (Amendment) Act 2017, Maltese Sign Language Recognition Act 2016.

1 GENERAL LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Constitutional provisions on protection against discrimination and the promotion of equality

The Constitution of Malta includes the following articles dealing with non-discrimination:

Chapter IV, which is entitled 'Protection of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms', includes Article 45, which deals with protection from discrimination on grounds of race, place of origin, political opinions, colour, creed, sex, sexual orientation or gender identity. One notes the use of the term 'creed' here as opposed to 'religious belief', as found in national anti-discriminatory provisions under employment law. 'Creed' is not defined under the Constitution but is generally commonly defined as a statement of belief, normally a religious belief. Hence as opposed to the provisions of the directives where the term 'belief' is not limited to 'religious belief', the term 'belief' under employment law is interpreted restrictively and excludes 'belief' which is not religious belief. On the other hand, in the Equality for Men and Women Act 2003, reference is made to 'religion or belief'.

These provisions apply to all areas covered by the directives. Their material scope is not broader than those of the directives.

These provisions are directly applicable.

These provisions cannot be enforced against private individuals (although they can be enforced against the state).

Chapter II of the Maltese Constitution⁶⁴ lays down a number of principles; however, according to Article 21 of the Constitution, these are not judicially enforceable. These principles cover, *inter alia*: the right to, and the protection of, work; the right to free education in state schools; the equal rights of men and women; and the right to social assistance and insurance.

Chapter IV of the Constitution⁶⁵ provides for those fundamental rights and freedoms of the individual in respect of which an aggrieved person may apply to the court⁶⁶ for redress. The rights thereunder are directly applicable. *Inter alia*, Article 32 provides that 'every person in Malta is entitled to the fundamental rights and freedoms of the individual, that is to say, the right, whatever his race, place of origin, political opinions, colour, creed, sex, sexual orientation or gender identity', subject to the respect of the rights and freedoms of others and in the public interest.

The principles of equality of treatment and non-discrimination under Article 45 of the Constitution of Malta relate to protection from discrimination on the basis of race, place of origin, political opinions, colour, creed, sex, sexual orientation or gender identity. This list is ground-specific and exhaustive and also provides that no law will make any provision that is discriminatory either of itself or in its effect. Article 45(3) states that:

'..."discriminatory" means affording different treatment to different persons attributable wholly or mainly to their respective descriptions by race, place of origin, political opinions, colour, creed, sex, sexual orientation or gender identity whereby persons of one such description are subjected to disabilities or restrictions to which

⁶⁴ Articles 7 to 21 (inclusive).

⁶⁵ Articles 32 to 47 (inclusive).

⁶⁶ An aggrieved individual may seek enforcement of these rights by means of an application before the First Hall of the Civil Court, with final appeal at national level to the Constitutional Court. Procedures are inexpensive and regulations currently in force provide that all human rights cases are to be heard as expeditiously as possible.

persons of another such description are not made subject or are accorded privileges or advantages which are not accorded to persons of another such description'.⁶⁷

In fact, the Maltese courts have held that, if there is any other consideration upon which the discrimination is based besides those mentioned, such discrimination will not be deemed unconstitutional.⁶⁸ The Maltese Constitution does not make specific mention of the words 'ethnic origin' in Article 45. However, one may try to argue that this may be implied through the words 'race' and 'place of origin'. Likewise, the Constitution does not make specific reference to age or disability and the reference to these grounds cannot be implied from the grounds actually mentioned. However, protection under these grounds is afforded under specific national legislation.

Under the European Convention Act 1987, a person who alleges breach of the enjoyment of the fundamental rights and freedoms provided for in the Convention on grounds of discrimination may apply to the Maltese courts for redress. In fact, since the grounds of non-discrimination under Article 14 of the European Convention for Human Rights are merely illustrative, proceedings in respect of alleged discrimination can be instituted on a wider range of grounds than those that could be invoked under Article 45 of the Constitution of Malta. Therefore, alleged victims of discriminatory treatment based on disability or age may invoke Article 14 of the Convention.⁶⁹ It is to be noted that the right to protection from discrimination under Article 45 of the Constitution of Malta is an independent right and can therefore be invoked even if there is no breach of any other Article of Chapter IV of the Constitution.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ The Act amending the Constitution – Act X of 2014 – introduced 'sexual orientation' and 'gender identity' as grounds on the basis of which discrimination is prohibited in the public sphere. More particularly, this therefore means that acts of discrimination on these grounds are forbidden in any law or in the conduct of a public entity. Prior to this extension, protection against discrimination was limited to the 'race', 'place of origin', 'political opinions', 'colour', 'creed' or 'sex' of an individual. Moreover, the Act introduced the principle that any law imposing qualifications related to sexual orientation or gender identity shall be held to be discriminatory in relation to calls for service as a public officer or service for a local government authority or body corporate established for a public purpose. The Act does not provide for a definition of 'sexual orientation'.

⁶⁸ Constitutional Court, *Dr Walter Cuschieri et al v. The Hon. Prime Minister et noe*, 30 November 1977.

⁶⁹ Malta signed and ratified Protocol No. 12 on 8 December 2015.

⁷⁰ As held by the Constitutional Court in the case of *Victoria Cassar v. Malta Maritime Authority et al* (2 November 2001), protection from discriminatory treatment under the Constitution is guaranteed as being specific, autonomous and independent of other rights and freedoms. In this context, the discrimination itself is considered to be the basis for the action and therefore there is no need to make any reference to any other fundamental right or freedom.

2 THE DEFINITION OF DISCRIMINATION

2.1 Definition of the grounds of unlawful discrimination within the directives

a) Racial or ethnic origin

Under the Equal Treatment of Persons Order of 2007, 'discrimination' is defined as 'direct or indirect discrimination based on racial or ethnic origin', but without a definition of 'racial and ethnic origin' being offered.⁷¹

b) Religion or belief

Article 40 of the Constitution of Malta provides that, 'all persons in Malta shall have full freedom of conscience and enjoy the free exercise of their respective mode of religious worship'. This Article is one which requires at least two thirds of all members of the House of Representatives for the purposes of amendment.

Maltese law does not provide definitions of the terms 'conscience' and 'religion'. It is assumed that the interpretation of these words should be according to their meaning in common usage and the interpretation given by the European Court of Human Rights.

Through the enactment of the European Convention Act,⁷² Malta adopted the European Convention as part of its domestic law. Thus, Article 9 of the European Convention on the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, together with the case law developed by the European Court of Human Rights, became applicable in Malta. Under Maltese law, there is no legislation which regulates the establishment and recognition of religious communities. Thus, there exists no legal requirement for recognition and no system of registration of the same.

As noted above, while the Constitution makes reference to the term 'creed' when listing the grounds upon which there could be discrimination, employment legislation refers to protection from discrimination, *inter alia*, on the basis of religious conviction and the Equality for Men and Women Act 2003 makes reference to 'religion or belief' and hence is in line with the provisions of the directives in this regard.

c) Disability

The ground of disability under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act refers to the guidance under Article 1 of the Convention, in which the purpose of the Convention, namely to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities, and to promote respect for their inherent dignity, is set out. Article 1⁷³ also provides that persons with disabilities include those who have 'a long-term physical, intellectual, sensory or mental impairment which, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder one's full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others'.⁷⁴ Therefore, the Maltese definition appears broader in scope than the definition given by the CJEU in *Ring and Skouboe Werge*,⁷⁵ in that it extends beyond a situation in which an individual is hindered in participation in 'professional life' to cover 'participation in society'. Furthermore, Article 2 prohibits any distinction, exclusion or restriction on the basis of disability which has the purpose or effect of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal basis with others, of all human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political,

⁷¹ In interpreting this definition, the courts will make reference to foreign case law on the matter.

⁷² Act XIV of 1987.

⁷³ No definition can be found in the Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disabilities) Act.

⁷⁴ UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, adopted by the General Assembly by its resolution 61/106 of 13 December 2006, which entered into force on 3 May 2008, and which the Government of Malta signed on 30 March 2007 and ratified on 10 October 2012.

⁷⁵ Judgment of the court (second chamber), 11 April 2013, joined Cases C-335/11 and C-337/11.

economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field. It includes all forms of discrimination, including denial of reasonable accommodation.⁷⁶

d) Age

There is no definition of 'age' in Maltese law. There is no case law which identifies the scope of the protection distinguishing between younger and older people.

e) Sexual orientation

In the Affirmation of Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Gender Expression Act, 'sexual orientation' refers to each person's capacity for profound emotional, affectional and sexual attraction to,⁷⁷ and intimate and sexual relations with, persons of a different gender, the same gender or more than one gender in lieu of a formal definition. There does not appear to have been any interpretation given by the local courts.⁷⁸

2.2 Multiple and intersectional discrimination

In Malta, multiple discrimination is prohibited by law only on the ground of disability.

In Malta, multiple discrimination is taken into account when deciding on discrimination cases (e.g. when imposing a sanction) in the case of alleged disability discrimination.

Therefore, both the Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability) Act and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act make reference to multiple discrimination. The latter, under Article 6, makes reference to women and girls with a disability being subject to multiple discrimination, while under Articles 32 and 33 of the former, reference is made to 'discrimination alleged in such matters of a multiple or intersectional nature'. However, no definition as to what constitutes multiple discrimination can be found under either law. Under Article 32 of the Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability) Act, the Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability will have exclusive jurisdiction in relation to matters involving any substantive Convention rights, or otherwise, brought under any provisions of this Act, unless the discrimination alleged in such matters is of a multiple or intersectional nature, in which case the jurisdiction of the Commission will not be exclusive, and jurisdiction for other matters will be vested in the relevant competent body depending on the nature and scope of the allegation.⁷⁹ Likewise, under Article 33(B), the UNCRPD Redress Panel will have exclusive jurisdiction in relation to matters involving any substantive Convention rights, unless the discrimination alleged in such matters is of a multiple or intersectional nature, in which case the jurisdiction of the

⁷⁶ Article 2.

⁷⁷ The definition is the same as that found under the Yogyakarta Principles (<https://yogyakartaprinciples.org/preamble/>). There is no indication in legislation or elsewhere that asexual persons are included or otherwise excluded. The legislation refers to a person's capacity for profound emotional, affectional and sexual attraction as opposed to asexual persons, who neither feel emotional or sexual attraction which nonetheless cannot be interpreted to mean that they do not have the capacity mentioned in the definition.

⁷⁸ December 2016 saw the implementation of the Affirmation of Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Gender Expression Act. This law is separate from the Gender Identity, Gender Expression and Sex Characteristics Act 2015. The purpose of the 2015 Act was to legislate on the recognition and registration of an individual's gender, in particular when there have been changes made thereto, as well as to recognise and protect the sex characteristics of a person. Of particular interest is Article 13(2), which provides that 'The public service has the duty to ensure that unlawful sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics discrimination and harassment are eliminated, whilst its services must promote equality of opportunity to all, irrespective of sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics.' The purpose of the 2016 Act was to affirm that everyone has a sexual orientation, a gender identity and a gender expression and that no particular combination of these three characteristics constitutes a disorder, disease, illness, deficiency, disability and/or shortcoming; and to prohibit conversion practices as a deceptive and harmful act as well as interventions against a person's sexual orientation, gender identity and/or gender expression.

⁷⁹ Such as the Industrial Tribunal, NCPE or the ordinary courts.

Panel will not be exclusive, and jurisdiction for other matters will be vested in the relevant competent body depending on the nature and scope of the allegation.

Currently, there are no legal restrictions which prevent a person from claiming discrimination on one or more grounds under one or more laws.

In Malta, there is no case law dealing with multiple discrimination.

In Malta, intersectional discrimination is not prohibited by law. In Malta, intersectional discrimination is not taken into account when deciding on discrimination cases (e.g. when imposing a sanction).

While the white paper for the draft equality bill made mention of the introduction of provisions on intersectionality, the bill as currently drafted only makes reference to multiple discrimination.⁸⁰ Compensation will take the form of damages.⁸¹

In Malta, there is no case law dealing with intersectional discrimination.

2.3 Assumed and associated discrimination

a) Discrimination by assumption

In Malta, discrimination based on perception or assumption of a person's characteristics is prohibited under national law only insofar as the field of disability is concerned. The Fourth Schedule to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act specifically makes reference to a person having a presumed characteristic in providing that a person is considered to be acting discriminatorily when 'he treats or proposes to treat a person less favourably on the basis of a characteristic that appertains generally to persons who have such a disability or a presumed characteristic that is generally imputed to persons who have such a disability'.

No other national legislation provides for discrimination by assumption on any of the other grounds covered by the directives.⁸²

b) Discrimination by association

In Malta, discrimination based on association with persons with particular characteristics is prohibited in national law⁸³ in relation to disability discrimination.

By way of interpretation, reference can be seen to be made under Part A of the Fourth Schedule to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2021, which refers to disability discrimination due to being assisted or accompanied by an assistant or a carer. Similar indirect reference can be seen in Part C of the said Fourth Schedule, which provides that it will be unlawful for an educational authority or institution to discriminate against (a) an applicant for admission as a student on the grounds of his

⁸⁰ Under Article 5 of the equality bill, discrimination may occur: (a) on the basis of a single ground, which shall be deemed to occur when a person is discriminated against on the basis of only one of the protected characteristics; or (b) on the basis of multiple grounds, which shall be deemed to occur when a person is discriminated against on the basis of a combination of two or more of the protected characteristics.

⁸¹ In this regard, it is provided that 'Without prejudice to the provisions of the Employment and Industrial Relations Act, the Human Rights and Equality Commission Act, 2019, and any other applicable law, any person who alleges that any other person, association, organisation, or legal entity has committed in that person's regard any act which is deemed to be unlawful under this Act may, by application filed before the Civil Court, First Hall, request the Court to order the defendant to desist from such unlawful acts, or to order the payment of damages suffered as a direct result of such unlawful acts.'

⁸² Protection from discrimination by assumption is specifically provided for in the Equality Bill.

⁸³ The equality bill defines indirect and direct discrimination. In the latter case, the definition includes situations in which there is less favourable treatment on the basis of a person's association with another person who has one of the protected characteristics under the bill.

or her disability or a disability of any of his or her family members by refusing or not accepting his or her application for such admission, or in the terms or conditions on which such educational authority or institution is prepared to admit him/her as a student; and/or (b) a student on the grounds of his or her disability or disability of any of his or her family members by denying him/her access, or limiting his or her access, to any benefit provided by such educational authority or institution or expelling him/her from the educational institution he or she is attending.⁸⁴

There have not been any national cases which have dealt with the prohibition of discrimination based on association with people with particular characteristics in the field of disability.

National law contains definitions of discrimination which reflect the definitions found in the directives and therefore the interpretation given in *Coleman v. Attridge Law and Steve Law*,⁸⁵ *CHEZ Razpredelenie Bulgaria* (C-83/14), *Bervidi* (C-38/24) and similar cases would have to be mirrored if a similar case were to be brought before the national courts. However, it is pertinent to note that the doctrine of precedent is not binding on the local judiciary.⁸⁶

2.4 Direct discrimination (Article 2(2)(a))

a) Prohibition and definition of direct discrimination

In Malta, direct discrimination is prohibited under national law. It is defined.

The Equal Treatment in Employment Regulations issued under the Employment and Industrial Relations Act 2002 provide for the prohibition of direct discrimination. Regulation 3(2)(a) provides that direct discriminatory treatment will be taken to occur where one person is treated less favourably than another is, has been or would be treated in a comparable situation on any of the grounds referred to in sub-regulation (1) of this Regulation. This provision is taken from Article 3 of the directives and is therefore compatible therewith.

In the Equal Treatment of Persons Order 2007, 'discrimination' means 'direct or indirect discrimination based on racial or ethnic origin'. Article 2(2) states that 'direct discrimination shall be taken to occur where a person is treated less favourably than another person is, has been, or would be, treated in a comparable situation'.

The Equality for Men and Women Act 2003 does not make specific reference to direct or indirect discrimination, other than where reference is made to the use of statistical evidence in proving indirect discrimination. However, in Article 2, 'discrimination' is defined as:

'discrimination based on sex or because of family responsibilities, sexual orientation, age, religion or belief, racial or ethnic origin, or gender identity, gender expression or sex characteristics and includes the treatment of a person in a less favourable manner than another person is, has been or would be treated on these grounds'.

Furthermore, the law further amplifies the definition of discrimination to include treating men and women less favourably on the basis of parenthood or family responsibility or for some other reason related to sex or sexual orientation, age, religion or belief, racial or ethnic origin, or gender identity, gender expression or sex characteristics.

⁸⁴ Protection from discrimination by association is specifically provided for in the Equality Bill.

⁸⁵ Judgment of the Court (Grand Chamber) of 17 July 2008; *S. Coleman v. Attridge Law and Steve Law*.

⁸⁶ EU law / judgments of the CJEU are not binding on the local judiciary but are a source of reference. The Maltese judiciary does not adhere to the doctrine of precedent and hence the local courts are not bound to adopt any previous decisions on the same subject matter before them.

Neither the Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability) Act 2000 nor the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2021 make any express reference to direct and indirect discrimination. There is, however, a definition of 'discrimination on the basis of disability', which under the 2021 Act refers to Article 2 of the Convention and to the Guidelines set out under the Fourth Schedule. 'Discrimination on the basis of disability' is defined as:

'any distinction, exclusion or restriction on the basis of disability which has the purpose or effect of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal basis with others, of all human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field. It includes all forms of discrimination, including denial of reasonable accommodation'.

There also exists a list of those instances which are deemed to constitute discrimination under Part A of the Fourth Schedule. Direct discrimination is clearly prohibited under Part A of the Fourth Schedule under paragraphs (b) – (i), which provides that:

'A person would be discriminating with another person due to disability if such person: (a) inhibits the free thought, social and economic improvement, and the integration in society of that person; (b) deprives the other person from the protection and rights provided by law; (c) fails to provide full access to a person with disability for all those actions provided by law; (d) fails to furnish information with regard to the rights of the other person by means of communication which the other person can understand; (e) fails to offer help to the other person in procedures linked to an investigation, the giving of evidence and other similar procedures; (f) knowingly limits or by any other act inhibits the enjoyment of any right acquired by the other person both *inter vivos* or *causa mortis*; (g) refers to a person or persons, or addresses them in a language which is disrespectful, both directly as well as by references on all means of communication, such as, but not limited to, broadcasting, publishing and correspondence; (h) in circumstances which are similar or are not materially different, and with different accommodations and/or services that may be required by the person with a disability in no case being deemed as constituting said circumstances, he treats or proposes to treat a person who has a disability less favourably than he treats or would treat a person who does not have such a disability; (i) treats or proposes to treat a person less favourably on the basis of a characteristic that appertains generally to persons who have such a disability, or a presumed characteristic that is generally imputed to persons who have such a disability.'

Under paragraph (k), discrimination on the grounds of disability could also arise if the person with a disability is treated less favourably than others because he or she is accompanied by or possesses any assistive means. Furthermore, in order to eliminate discrimination as prohibited by the Act, under paragraph (n) a person is deemed to discriminate against another on the grounds of disability where he or she fails to publicise, in an effective manner, those goods, facilities and services provided by him/her to persons with a disability. In practice, this obliges all providers of assistive means used by persons with a disability to publicise the said provision. However, the law does not explain specifically the manner in which the goods, services and facilities are to be made available to the public.

Paragraph (o) refers to the discrimination to which a person may be subjected due to the fact that he or she is accompanied by an assistant due to his or her disability:

'A person shall discriminate against another person on the grounds of disability if he treats or proposes to treat another person less favourably than he treats or would treat others who do not have such a disability because of the fact that such other person is accompanied by:

- an interpreter; or
- a reader; or
- an assistant; or
- a carer;

who provides interpretative, reading or other services to such other person because of the disability of such other person or because of any matter related to that fact, whether or not it is the practice to treat any person who is accompanied by an interpreter, a reader, an assistant or a carer, as the case may be, less favourably.’

The Gender Identity, Gender Expression and Sex Characteristics Act does not define ‘discrimination’,⁸⁷ but under Article 13(2) the Act provides that:

‘the public service⁸⁸ has the duty to ensure that unlawful sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics discrimination and harassment are eliminated, whilst its services must promote equality of opportunity to all, irrespective of sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics.’⁸⁹

b) Justification for direct discrimination

Other than the exception provided for below, the Equal Treatment of Persons Order provides for no situations in which direct discrimination may be justified.

As noted above, in the Equality for Men and Women Act, discrimination includes the giving of less favourable treatment, directly or indirectly, to men and women on the basis of their sex or because of family responsibilities or because of their sexual orientation, age, religion or belief, racial or ethnic origin, or gender identity, gender expression or sex characteristics. A justification is mentioned under this provision, but it must be based on factors unrelated to sex, despite the fact that the relevant provisions cover various other grounds. It is not clear why the Act provides for this limitation and restricts the justification to factors unrelated to sex.⁹⁰

2.5 Indirect discrimination (Article 2(2)(b))

a) Prohibition and definition of indirect discrimination

In Malta, indirect discrimination is prohibited in national law. It is defined.⁹¹

The Equal Treatment in Employment Regulations provide for the prohibition of indirect discrimination. Regulation 3(2)(b) provides that:

⁸⁷ It is assumed, however, that in interpreting this Act the courts will have regard to provisions in other domestic legislation.

⁸⁸ People engaged by the state.

⁸⁹ The Public Service Management Code, applicable to the public service, also provides that public officers shall not discriminate on the grounds of sex, marital status, pregnancy, age, race, colour, nationality, physical or intellectual impairment, sexual preference or religious, political or other convictions/allegiances. Furthermore, the Code of Ethics for public employees under the Public Administration Act 2019 provides that employees employed by the state shall not discriminate in any manner or on any basis including race, place of origin, nationality, skin colour, political opinions, creed, sex, sexual orientation, expression or gender identity, civil status, mental or physical wellbeing.

⁹⁰ Equality for Men and Women Act 2003, Article 2(3)(d). There is no publicly available evidence of the matter having arisen before the national courts.

⁹¹ The equality bill defines indirect discrimination as occurring where there is any treatment based on an apparently neutral provision, criterion or practice, which would put persons having any one or a combination of any of the protected characteristics at a particular disadvantage compared with other persons, unless that provision, criterion or practice is objectively justified by a legitimate aim and the means of achieving that aim are appropriate and necessary.

‘indirect discriminatory treatment shall be taken to occur where an apparently neutral provision, criterion or practice would put persons of a particular race or ethnic origin or having a particular religion or religious belief, disability, age, or sexual orientation at a disadvantage when compared with other persons’.

The prohibition against indirect discrimination is taken from Article 2(2)(b) of Council Directive 2000/78/EC and is therefore compatible with the provisions of the said Directive.

Under Article 2 of the Equal Treatment of Persons Order of 2007:

‘indirect discrimination shall be taken to occur where an apparently neutral provision, criterion or practice would put a person at a particular disadvantage compared with other persons, unless that provision, criterion or practice is objectively justified by a legitimate aim and the means of achieving that aim are appropriate and necessary’.

This definition is in line with the provisions of Council Directive 2000/43/EC.

Paragraph (m) of Part A of the Fourth Schedule to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2021 does not define ‘indirect discrimination’ but provides for a prohibition on indirect discrimination, stating that ‘a person shall be discriminating with another person on the grounds of disability if he subjects such other person to a particular disadvantage through an apparently neutral provision, criterion or practice’. It can also be argued that paragraph (j) of the said Part A of the Fourth Schedule provides for a prohibition on indirect discrimination whereby a person will be deemed to discriminate against another person on the grounds of disability if that other person is required to comply with a requirement or condition with which the majority of persons who do not have the disability comply or are able to comply, and (a) which is unreasonable in the circumstances of the case; and (b) with which that other person does not comply or is unable to comply.

The Equality for Men and Women Act does not define ‘indirect discrimination’ and does not make specific reference to the term, other than where reference is made to the use of statistical evidence in proving indirect discrimination. However, under Article 2, the definition of ‘discrimination’ includes the treatment of a person in a less favourable manner than another person is, has been or would be treated on the mentioned grounds. For the purposes of this Act, discrimination includes any treatment based on a provision, criterion or practice which would put persons at a particular disadvantage compared with persons of the other sex or sexual orientation, age, religion or belief, racial or ethnic origin, or gender identity, gender expression or sex characteristics unless the said provision, criterion or practice is appropriate and necessary and can be justified by objective factors unrelated to sex. While the reference to indirect discrimination replicates that which is provided for in the directives, the same cannot be said for the justification and the provision that the same must be unrelated to sex.

b) Justification test for indirect discrimination

As noted above, under the Equality for Men and Women Act, any treatment based on a provision, criterion or practice which would put persons at a particular disadvantage compared with persons of the other sex or another sexual orientation, age, religion or belief, racial or ethnic origin, or gender identity, gender expression or sex characteristic unless the said provision, criterion or practice is appropriate and necessary and can be justified by objective factors unrelated to sex, is deemed discriminatory. It is relevant to point out here that, despite the extension of the definition of discrimination in 2012 to cover grounds other than gender, the justification test is limited to factors unrelated to sex.⁹² A similar exclusion is not found in the directives.

⁹² In this Act, the terms ‘gender’ and ‘sex’ are distinguished and have different meanings.

The same test that applies in Article 2(2)(b) of Council Directive 2000/78/EC to determine whether there has been indirect discrimination or otherwise applies in Regulation 3(2)(b) of the Equal Treatment in Employment Regulations. There is no mention of a justification test for indirect discrimination in any other legislation.

As there have been no judicial pronouncements in Malta on indirect discrimination, one cannot detail the legitimate aims which have been or would be accepted by the national courts.

2.5.1 Statistical evidence

a) Legal framework

In Malta, there is legislation regulating the collection of personal data.

The Data Protection Act 2018 regulates the collection and processing of personal data.⁹³ The provisions of this Act relate to the processing of personal data, as defined under EU Regulation 2016/279, wholly or partly, by automated means and to such processing other than by automated means where such personal data forms part of a filing system or is intended to form part of a filing system. Under Article 6, subject to certain safeguards,⁹⁴ controllers and processors may derogate from the provisions of the Act in the case of processing for archiving purposes in the public interest, scientific or historical research purposes or statistical purposes, such as when collecting data in a national census. Under the Persons with Disability (Employment) Act 1969, employers must maintain a register with the details of all the persons they employ and also of persons registered with a disability. The statistics on such registers will be used to collect such statistics on a national basis.

In Malta, statistical evidence may be admitted under national law in order to establish indirect discrimination. Maltese law does not specifically prohibit the use of statistical evidence to establish indirect discrimination. Reference is made to the use of statistical evidence only under the definition section of the Equality for Men and Women Act,⁹⁵ which provides that indirect discrimination may be proven by means of any evidence, including statistical evidence. No such reference is made in any other relevant legislation, and therefore there is no provision in statute to confirm that this form of evidence can be used when alleging discrimination under any other legislation.

b) Practice

In Malta, statistical evidence is not regularly used in practice in order to establish indirect discrimination. To date, there has been no case law in Malta relating to the admissibility or

⁹³ The Data Protection Act in Chapter 440 of the *Laws of Malta* distinguished between personal data and sensitive personal data. However, this Act was repealed with the entry into force of the GDPR and was replaced by the Data Protection Act in Chapter 586 of the *Laws of Malta*. The GDPR is directly applicable in Malta as it is a Regulation. Under the GDPR, a distinction is made between personal data (any information relating to an identified or identifiable natural person ('data subject')); an identifiable natural person is one who can be identified, directly or indirectly, in particular by reference to an identifier such as a name, an identification number, location data, an online identifier or to one or more factors specific to the physical, physiological, genetic, mental, economic, cultural or social identity of that natural person) and special categories of data (personal data revealing racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, or trade union membership, and the processing of genetic data, biometric data for the purpose of uniquely identifying a natural person, data concerning health or data concerning a natural person's sex life or sexual orientation). Therefore, the main distinction between the two sets of data is that, while processing of personal data is permitted as long as it is done in accordance with Article 6, processing of special categories of data is prohibited unless it is done in accordance with Article 9.

⁹⁴ Processing shall be subject to appropriate safeguards for the rights and freedoms of the data subject, including pseudonymisation and other technical and organisational measures to ensure respect for the principle of data minimisation. It is pertinent to note that while the distinction between sensitive and non-sensitive data exists, this distinction is not found in the current legislation.

⁹⁵ Equality for Men and Women Act 2003, Article 2(4A).

otherwise of statistical evidence and the conditions of its eventual admissibility and, nor have there been, any reported cases in which the court was reluctant to use statistical data as evidence in court. Although the Maltese courts do look at legal developments in other countries to assist them in reaching their decisions, this is not obligatory in practice.

2.6 Harassment (Article 2(3))

a) Prohibition and definition of harassment

In Malta, harassment is prohibited in national law. It is defined.⁹⁶ National law is in line with the personal and material scope of the directives applying to all sectors and persons. In Malta, harassment explicitly constitutes a form of discrimination.

The Equal Treatment in Employment Regulations extended the protection from harassment in matters of employment to cover all the grounds mentioned in the two directives. The regulations define 'harassment' as a form of discriminatory treatment which violates the dignity of the person who is being harassed or which has the effect of creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for the person who is subjected to such treatment.

Regulation 3(3) of the said legal notice does not require that the effects of the harassment be cumulative. Furthermore, Regulation 3(4) provides that a person will also be deemed to have discriminated against another if the former neglects his or her obligation to suppress any form of harassment at their place of work or within their organisation.

Under the Equal Treatment of Persons Order 2007, 'harassment' of a person means 'to subject the person to any unwelcome act, request or conduct, including spoken words, gestures or the production, display or circulation of written words, pictures or other material', and 'to harass' a person will be construed accordingly. Under Article 2(2)(c) of the Order, 'harassment shall be deemed to be discrimination when it is related to racial or ethnic origin and takes place with the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person and of creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment'.

Under Article 4 of the same Order, 'the failure by any person responsible for any establishment and/or entity to fulfil his obligation to suppress harassment shall, for the purposes of Article 4(1) constitute discrimination. Such persons must not permit the harassment of persons present in such establishment or entity, or to avail themselves of any facility, goods or service provided at such establishment or entity'.

Under Article 27(1)(b) of the First Schedule of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2021, a person is protected from harassment in the field of work and employment.

The concept of harassment is also mentioned in other regulations.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ According to the equality bill, harassment shall be deemed to occur when there is unwanted conduct related to one or a combination of any of the protected characteristics, which has the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person, in particular when creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.

⁹⁷ In the Public Service Management Code, under Section 6.6.2, unethical behaviour is taken to include sexual harassment and victimisation, resulting in disciplinary proceedings being taken against a public employee. Disciplinary proceedings in the public service are regulated by the Public Service Commission Disciplinary Regulations 2017, which provide that an officer shall be subject to disciplinary proceedings for misconduct such as unethical or unprofessional behaviour. As specified in the schedule thereto, such misconduct includes sexual harassment and victimisation of a witness or an officer or other person lodging a report or doing his or her duty under these regulations or any other regulations issued under Article 121 of the Constitution. Under the Code of Ethics for the Public Service, public employees are obliged to avoid discrimination or harassment in any form, direct or indirect.

b) Scope of liability for harassment

In Malta, where harassment is perpetrated by an employee, the employer may be held liable for the acts of the employee. Therefore, employers are liable unless they can prove that they exercised due diligence to avoid the harassment, in which case the harasser is liable.

Under Article 29 of the Employment and Industrial Relations Act, the employer is to do all that is reasonably possible to avoid any kind of discrimination or harassment and may therefore be held criminally liable for a discriminatory act perpetrated by an employee. With regard to trade unions being held liable for actions of their members, this is not provided for in the law.

Provision is also made where an employer is an entity rather than an individual, in which case liability is assumed by an officer representing such an entity. Thus, Article 46 of the Employment and Industrial Relations Act provides that, where an offence against the provisions of the Act or of any regulations or orders made thereunder is committed by a partnership, company, association or other body of persons, every person who, at the time of the commission of the offence, was a director, manager, secretary or other similar officer of such partnership, company, association or other body of persons or was purporting to act in any such capacity will be deemed to be guilty of that offence unless he or she proves that the offence was committed without his or her knowledge and that he or she exercised all due diligence to prevent the commission of the offence.⁹⁸

Similarly, Article 14 of the Equal Treatment of Persons Order 2007 provides that, where an offence against the provisions of the Order is committed by a partnership, company, association or other body of persons, every person who, at the time of the commission of the offence, was a director, manager, secretary or other similar officer of such partnership, company, association or other body of persons or was purporting to act in any such capacity will be deemed to be guilty of that offence unless he or she proves that the offence was committed without his or her knowledge and that he or she exercised all due diligence to prevent the commission of the offence. Whoever is found guilty of an offence will be subject to the penalty imposed by the adjudicating authority. A person found guilty will be liable on conviction for a fine (*multa*) of not more than EUR 2 329.37 or for imprisonment for not more than six months, or for both a fine and imprisonment.

2.7 Instructions to discriminate (Article 2(4))

a) Prohibition of instructions to discriminate

In Malta, instructions to discriminate are prohibited in national law. Instructions are not defined.

In Malta, instructions explicitly constitute a form of discrimination. While the term 'instructions' is not defined, the law does define what constitutes instructions to discriminate. Instructions to discriminate includes both explicit and implicit instructions and/or preferences or suggestions with a discriminatory impact and/or encouragement or pressure.

In Malta, instructions to discriminate do not require a hierarchical relationship between the instructor and instructed person. The provisions do not require that the instructor be in a superior employment position to the instructed person.

⁹⁸ The term 'due diligence' is not defined, nor does any case law exist in this regard. Due diligence would be interpreted to mean that the employer acted diligently and took all necessary measures to prevent harassment from being perpetrated.

Article 45(3) of the Constitution of Malta provides that no person will be treated in a discriminatory manner by any person acting by virtue of any written law or in the performance of the functions of any public office or any public authority.

The Equal Treatment in Employment Regulations introduced into Maltese employment legislation a prohibition against instructions to discriminate. Regulation 3(4) provides that a person will also be deemed to have discriminated against another person if he or she instructs any person to discriminate against such other person. Protection is afforded on the following grounds: religion or religious belief, disability, age, sex, sexual orientation, racial or ethnic origin, pregnancy or maternity leave or gender reassignment.

Under the Equal Treatment of Persons Order 2007, the prohibition on giving instructions to discriminate arises out of the definition of harassment. Under the definition, 'harassment' means 'to subject the person to any unwelcome act, request or conduct, including spoken words, gestures or the production, display or circulation of written words, pictures or other material'. In addition, the Order, under Article 2(2)(c) and (d), provides that 'harassment shall be deemed to be discrimination when it is related to racial or ethnic origin and takes place with the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person and of creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment, and any instruction to harass a person in such a manner shall constitute discrimination'. In essence, therefore, the Order prohibits instructions to harass but not (explicitly) instructions to discriminate. There are no provisions prohibiting instructions to discriminate on the grounds of racial/ethnic origin in the fields outside employment covered by Directive 2000/43/EC. This could be interpreted to constitute a provision which is not deemed to be fully compliant with the provisions of Directive 2000/78/EC, in that its scope is more restrictive than that found under the Directive as the latter refers to instructions to discriminate and not solely instructions to harass.⁹⁹

Article 1044 of the Civil Code¹⁰⁰ and Article 42 of the Criminal Code¹⁰¹ can provide the basis for judicial action against a person who allegedly gave instructions to another person to discriminate.

With respect to instructions to discriminate that are given by public authorities, one can plead Article 45(3) of the Constitution. With regard to the giving of instructions to discriminate in the private sphere, Regulation 3(4) of the Equal Treatment in Employment Regulations appears specifically to conform to the provisions of the directives by prohibiting an instruction to discriminate against another person. As noted above, under the Equal Treatment of Persons Order 2007, the prohibition of giving an instruction to discriminate arises out of the definition of harassment, and its scope is found to be more restrictive than that found under the directive.

It is pertinent to note that the definitions contained in the Civil Code, Criminal Code, Constitution and Equal Treatment of Persons Order do not exactly reflect the relative provisions under the directives.

b) Scope of liability for instructions to discriminate

As is detailed below, in Malta the instructor and/or the discriminator is liable.

Under Article 46 of the Employment and Industrial Relations Act 2002, where an offence against the provisions of this Act or of any regulations or orders made thereunder is committed by a partnership, company, association or other body of persons, every person

⁹⁹ The concept of instructions to discriminate is not covered in the Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability) Act nor in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2021.

¹⁰⁰ Civil Code, *Laws of Malta*, Chapter 16. Article 1044 provides that: 'Where damage has been unjustly caused, any person who has wilfully contributed thereto with advice, threats, or commands, shall also be liable'.

¹⁰¹ This deals with the offence of complicity.

who, at the time of the commission of the offence, was a director, manager, secretary or other similar officer of such partnership, company, association or other body of persons or was purporting to act in any such capacity, will be deemed to be guilty of that offence unless he or she proves that the offence was committed without his or her knowledge and that he or she exercised all due diligence to prevent the commission of the offence.¹⁰²

It is also pertinent to note that, under the 2002 Act, the definition of an 'employer' includes a partnership, company, association or other body of persons, whether vested with legal personality or not.

2.8 Reasonable accommodation duties (Article 2(2)(b)(ii) and Article 5 Directive 2000/78)

- a) Implementation of the duty to provide reasonable accommodation for persons with disabilities in the area of employment

In Malta, the duty to provide reasonable accommodation is included in the law. It is defined under the First Schedule to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2021,

“‘Reasonable accommodation’ means necessary and appropriate modification and adjustments not imposing a disproportionate or undue burden, where needed in a particular case, to ensure to persons with disabilities the enjoyment or exercise, on an equal basis with others, of all human rights and fundamental freedoms.’

In accordance with paragraph 1(5) of Part B of the Fourth Schedule, the phrase 'make reasonable accommodation' in relation to employment is defined as including:

'(a) making existing facilities used by employees readily accessible to persons with disabilities; (b) restructuring jobs, instituting part-time or modified work schedules, reassigning vacant positions, acquiring or modifying equipment or devices, appropriately adjusting or modifying examinations, training materials or policies, providing qualified readers or interpreters, and making any other similar alterations¹⁰³ for a person with a disability; and (c) quality and vocational career guide, which guide shall be free for the person with disability'.

In accordance with paragraph 1(2)(d) of Part B of the Fourth Schedule, an employer shall be considered to have discriminated on the grounds of disability against a person as is referred to therein if such employer fails to make reasonable accommodation for the disability of such a person, unless the employer can prove that the required alterations would unduly prejudice the operation of the trade or business run by such employer.

In the absence of national judicial pronouncements, an indication as to what constitutes 'reasonable' accommodation is laid down in Article 20 of the Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability) Act 2000, which provides for the test of reasonableness, and can be referred to.

¹⁰² It has been argued that the provisions of Article 28 of the Employment and Industrial Relations Act 2002, which deals with 'victimisation' and which provides that, 'It shall not be lawful to victimise any person for having made a complaint to the lawful authorities or for having initiated or participated in proceedings for redress on grounds of alleged breach of the provisions of this Act, or for having disclosed information, confidential or otherwise, to a designated public regulatory body, regarding alleged illegal or corrupt activities being committed by his employer or by persons acting in the employer's name and interests', mean that a person acting in the employer's name and interests cannot bring forward in his or her defence the claim that he or she was instructed to discriminate by his or her employer. The author agrees with such an interpretation, since this provision does not appear to prohibit a person from giving instructions to discriminate.

¹⁰³ Necessary and appropriate modifications and adjustments.

The Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability) Act 2000 continues to further regulate the provision of reasonable accommodation and should be read in conjunction with the provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, which include the duty to provide reasonable accommodation. Therefore, in determining the reasonableness of any action to be undertaken by any person in the fulfilment of the provisions of this Act or of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, including any alteration, change and/or provision of services, facilities or assistive means, regard will be had by a purposely appointed board as to whether such actions could be undertaken without unjustifiable hardship.

Thus, the 2000 Act provides that, for the purposes of interpreting the provisions of that Act or of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, in determining the reasonableness of any action to be undertaken by any person in fulfilment of the provisions, including any alteration, change and/or provision of services, facilities or assistive means, a purposely appointed board will decide. The board¹⁰⁴ appointed under Article 20A of the said Act will determine whether such actions could be undertaken without unjustifiable hardship. Amendments introduced to the 2000 Act in 2016 oversaw the constitution of the board to consider all requests for reasonable accommodation and generally in rendering all buildings accessible to everyone. All building applications, including any such applications made by an employer, have to be considered by the board and there is no appeal following a decision taken by the board.¹⁰⁵

Thus, Article 20(1) of the Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability) Act 2000 states:

‘in determining the reasonableness of any action to be undertaken by any person in the fulfilment of the provisions of this Act or of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, including any alteration, change, and/or provision of services, facilities or assistive means, regard shall be had by the Board as to whether such actions could be undertaken without unjustifiable hardship’.

In essence, therefore, the assessment of whether there is unjustifiable hardship is part of the assessment of whether action is reasonable. Article 20(2) contains an illustrative list of those factors which are to be considered in determining whether such actions could be undertaken without unjustifiable hardship in determining compliance with the reasonableness test:

¹⁰⁴ This board is set up under Article 20A of the 2000 Act, which provides that there shall be a board to determine what is reasonable, appointed by the commissioner (Commissioner for the Rights of Persons with Disability) for a period of three years. The board shall be composed of: (a) five people to represent organisations, public entities and experts in the sector; (b) a technical consultant of the commissioner; and (c) a member of a committee of a voluntary organisation as defined under Article 2: The representatives of public entities and experts in the sector and the technical consultant of the commissioner may from time to time be appointed according to the nature of the case discussed by the board. At least half of the total number of members of the board shall be persons with disabilities or family members of persons with disabilities who cannot represent themselves. The number of persons with disabilities shall be higher than the number of family members of persons with disabilities who cannot represent themselves. The board shall be presided over by the Chairperson, who shall be a person with disabilities and who shall preside over every meeting of the board, aided by the Vice Chairperson, who shall be a person with disabilities.

¹⁰⁵ In 2023, the CRPD processed 118 public consultations, but no data is available for those specifically carried out by the Compliance Unit. The most recent publicly available data relates to 2022, when the Compliance Unit received 6 467 consultations for vetting of planning applications from the Planning Authority, of which 3 757 did not fall under CRPD’s remit and 582 were excluded from being vetted by CRPD. It is to be noted that the figures do not account for individual planning applications, but for the times an individual planning application was vetted by CRPD technical officials, as typically a planning application may be vetted multiple times, sometimes over 10 times. This includes vetting of revisions of drawings presented by applicants after being solicited by CRPD. Unit officers also carried out 202 site inspections prior to recommending the issuance of a Compliance Certificate, without which one cannot apply for electricity and water utilities. Out of these, 171 were found to be compliant, and 31 were not compliant. In 2023, the Test of Reasonableness Board heard 84 exemption requests, out of which 47 cases were deemed reasonable or reasonable with conditions, 22 were not accepted and additional information was requested in 15.

'The factors to be considered in determining whether such actions could be undertaken without unjustifiable hardship shall include:

- the nature and cost of the actions in question;
- the overall financial resources of the person, body, authority or institution concerned and the effect on expenses and resources or the impact of such actions upon the operations of such person, body, authority or institution; and
- the availability of grants from public funds to defray the expense of the said actions.'

While national law does not provide a definition of 'disproportionate burden', it refers to situations which would 'unduly prejudice the operation of the employer's trade or business'. Under paragraph 1(4) of Part B of the Fourth Schedule to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, the factors to be considered in determining whether providing alterations for an employee with a disability would unduly prejudice the operation of the trade or business run by the employer will include (a) the nature and cost of the alterations; (b) the overall financial resources of the workplace involved in the making of the alterations; (c) the number of employees at the workplace requiring alterations; (d) the effect on expenses and resources and the impact of the required alterations upon the operation of the workplace; (e) the overall financial resources of the employer; (f) the overall size of the business of the employer including the number of employees, and the number, type and location of its workplaces; (g) the type of operation or operations of the employer, including the composition, structure and functions of the workforce; and (h) the availability of financial assistance from public funds to defray the expense of any alterations. Clearly, these factors are very close to the wording found in the Directive and go further in amplifying the scope of its provisions.

Paragraph 1(4) of Part B of the Fourth Schedule to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act refers to the factors to be considered in determining whether any alterations would hinder the business of the employer, while Article 20 of the Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability) Act 2000 refers to the factors to be considered in the test of reasonableness;¹⁰⁶ the latter contains fewer factors to be considered than those to be found under the 2021 Act, and they are more varied and extend in scope beyond those of the 2021 Act, given that they are not limited to employment.

The 2021 Act makes reference to financial assistance to be provided by the state in order to ensure compliance with the employer's obligations in this regard under paragraph 1(4)(h) of Part B of the Fourth Schedule to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act.

Under Article 4A of the Equal Treatment in Employment Regulations 2004, issued under the Employment and Industrial Relations Act,

'employers shall provide reasonable accommodation for persons with disabilities. In particular, employers shall take appropriate measures to enable a person with a disability to have access to, participate, or advance in employment, or to undergo training unless such measures would impose a disproportionate burden on the employer: provided that this burden is not disproportionate when it is sufficiently remedied by measures existing within the framework of the national disability policy'.

It is to be noted that the duty to provide reasonable accommodation applies to all employers, in both the private and the public sector.

¹⁰⁶ 'Reasonableness' here refers to any action to be undertaken in compliance with the provisions of both pieces of legislation, including any alteration, change, or provision of services, facilities or assistive means.

b) Case law

To date, there have been no judicial pronouncements with regard to what constitutes 'reasonable' accommodation or whether such accommodation imposes a 'disproportionate burden' on those who are required to make such accommodation, as all claims are generally dealt with by the Compliance Unit, whether stemming from the private or the public sector.¹⁰⁷

c) Definition of disability and non-discrimination protection

Both the Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability) Act and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act do not have a definition of disability, but the latter makes reference to the relevant UN Convention, which also does not contain a definition but does, under Article 1, provide that persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments, which, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. Both pieces of legislation co-exist, with similar obligations on employers which they must comply with in relation to employees with disabilities. By referring to the guidance on the concept of 'disability' provided by the UN Convention, the legislator wanted to ensure uniformity. Therefore, the definition of 'disability' for the purposes of claiming reasonable accommodation is the same as the one that applies for claiming protection from non-discrimination in general. Furthermore, the same definition applies under the Equal Treatment in Employment Regulations.

Definitions apply to both the private and the public sector.

d) Failure to meet the duty of reasonable accommodation for persons with disabilities

In Malta, failure to meet the duty of reasonable accommodation in employment for persons with disabilities is recognised as a form of discrimination in both the private and the general public sector.

An employer will be considered to have discriminated on the grounds of disability under paragraph 1(2)(d) of Part B of the Fourth Schedule to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act if such employer, unreasonably, fails to make reasonable accommodation for a person with a disability, unless the employer can prove that the required alterations would unduly prejudice the operation of the trade or business run by them. Therefore, an employer will be deemed to discriminate against an employee with a disability if the employer fails to provide the employee with reasonable accommodation without having a valid reason for not doing so. Such failure results in direct discrimination. Under Article 3 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, any person with disability on their own behalf, or any person on behalf of any other person with disability for whom, or with whom, they are authorised to exercise legal capacity, may submit a petition to the UNCRPD Redress Panel in respect of a claim of alleged discrimination, in order that such Panel could examine the said petition and decide upon it. Furthermore, where any such person or any association, organisation or any legal entity which has a legitimate interest in ensuring that the provisions of the 2000 Act are complied with, that alleges discrimination on the basis of disability, in respect of any of the substantive Convention rights, and when the remedy sought in respect of said alleged discrimination also includes a remedy of a pecuniary nature, whether said remedy is sought

¹⁰⁷ One example of where the CRPD became involved concerns a complaint filed in 2022 by an employee of the Water Services Corporation who had disabilities. He contacted the CRPD after being refused reasonable accommodation by his employer. The CRPD then contacted the company, which reached an agreement on reasonable accommodation after identifying the employee's needs. The CRPD continued to follow the case until the employee signed a new job description reflecting his newly assigned duties. See also *Pierre Tonna (217075M) v. Dr Duncan Borg Myatt (44578M)*, *Joanna Calleja (94790M) u ghal kull interess li jista' jkollha s-socjeta' Malta Freeport Terminals Ltd (C-27581)* in section 12.2.

in conjunction with any other form of remedy or otherwise, they can avail themselves of a civil action, under Article 33E(1) of the Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability) Act.¹⁰⁸

Under Article 4A of the Equal Treatment in Employment Regulations 2004, an employer is obliged to provide reasonable accommodation for persons with disabilities. In particular, employers are to take appropriate measures to enable a person with a disability to have access to, participate or advance in employment, or to undergo training, unless such measures would impose a disproportionate burden on the employer. Under Article 14 of the Regulations, any person contravening the provisions of these regulations will be guilty of an offence and will, on conviction, be liable for a fine (*multa*) not exceeding EUR 2 329.37 or for imprisonment for a period not exceeding six months, or for both a fine and imprisonment.

Therefore, it can be noted that a failure to provide reasonable accommodation constitutes direct discrimination. It is felt that the provisions under employment law and those under the Acts specifically prohibiting disability discrimination should be deemed to be complementary.

- e) Duties to provide reasonable accommodation in areas other than employment for persons with disabilities

In Malta, there is a legal duty to provide reasonable accommodation for persons with disabilities outside the area of employment.

The duty to provide reasonable accommodation for persons with disabilities outside the employment field arises out of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which Malta has ratified;¹⁰⁹ Malta has now incorporated the said Convention into national law by virtue of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2021.

By virtue of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2021, discrimination on the ground of disability is prohibited in the provision of goods, facilities, services, education, health and accommodation and in the employment sector, with the Act making reference to the duty to provide reasonable accommodation to persons with disabilities in all spheres. Accordingly,

“Discrimination on the basis of disability” is defined as any distinction, exclusion or restriction on the basis of disability which has the purpose or effect of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal basis with others, of all human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field. It includes all forms of discrimination, including denial of reasonable accommodation.’

“Reasonable accommodation” is defined as necessary and appropriate modification and adjustments not imposing a disproportionate or undue burden, where needed in a particular case, to ensure to persons with disabilities the enjoyment or exercise, on an equal basis with others, of all human rights and fundamental freedoms.’

¹⁰⁸ Any person who alleges that one or more substantive Convention rights have been, are being or are likely to be contravened, and is seeking a remedy of a pecuniary nature exceeding the sum of EUR 5 000, whether or not such remedy is sought in conjunction with any other form of relief, or is a person other than a person described in Article 33B(4), may, without prejudice to any other action with respect to the same matter that is lawfully applicable, apply to the First Hall of the Civil Court for redress, and the said Court shall have exclusive jurisdiction in relation to any such matters, unless the discrimination alleged in such matters is of a multiple or intersectional nature.

¹⁰⁹ Malta signed the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Optional Protocol in March 2007, which were ratified in October 2012 and came into effect on 9 November 2012.

f) Duties to provide reasonable accommodation in respect of other grounds

In Malta, there is no legal duty to provide reasonable accommodation in respect of other grounds in the public sector and/or the private sector.

3 PERSONAL AND MATERIAL SCOPE

There are no cases of discrimination stemming from and/or involving the use of artificial intelligence and/or automated systems.

3.1 Personal scope

3.1.1 EU and non-EU nationals (Recital 13 and Article 3(2), Directive 2000/43 and Recital 12 and Article 3(2), Directive 2000/78)

In Malta, the following residence/citizenship/nationality requirements apply for protection under the relevant national laws transposing the directives.

Regulation 1(5)(a) of the Equal Treatment in Employment Regulations states that the Regulations do not apply to any differences of treatment based on nationality and are without prejudice to laws and conditions relating to the entry by and residence of third-country nationals and stateless persons in Malta or to any treatment which arises from the legal status of the individuals concerned. This reproduces what is stated in Article 3(2) of Council Directive 2000/43/EC.

Similarly, the Equal Treatment of Persons Order 2007¹¹⁰ provides that the Order will not apply to any differences of treatment based on nationality, and this without prejudice to laws and conditions relating to the entry by and residence of third-country nationals and stateless persons in Malta or to any treatment which arises from the legal status of the individuals concerned.

3.1.2 Natural and legal persons (Recital 16, Directive 2000/43)

a) Protection against discrimination

In Malta, the personal scope of anti-discrimination law covers natural and/or legal persons for the purpose of protection against discrimination. There is no recent case law on the matter.

Article 4(e) of the Interpretation Act 1975¹¹¹ provides that in that Act, and in every other act, whether passed before or after the commencement of the 1975 Act, unless the contrary intention appears, the expression 'person' will include a body or other association of individuals, whether or not they are granted legal personality. The term is therefore to be interpreted in accordance with the above provision of the Interpretation Act.

However, with respect to the protection against discrimination afforded under the Constitution of Malta, Chapter IV, which is entitled 'Fundamental Rights and Freedoms of the Individual', this can clearly be invoked only by natural persons. This is in compliance with the relevant provision in the Directive.

There are various laws – as can be seen in the sections below – which protect citizens against discrimination, such as the Equal Treatment in Employment Regulations,¹¹² the Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability) Act and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2021,¹¹³ the Equal Treatment of Persons Order¹¹⁴ and the Employment and Industrial Relations Act;¹¹⁵ the said laws offer protection to both

¹¹⁰ Equal Treatment of Persons Order 2007, Article 2(4).

¹¹¹ Interpretation Act, 4 February 1975, *Laws of Malta*, Chapter 249.

¹¹² Equal Treatment in Employment Regulations 2004, Articles 3 and 7 for natural and legal persons respectively.

¹¹³ Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability) Act 2000, Article 2, and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2021, First Schedule.

¹¹⁴ Equal Treatment of Persons Order 2007, Articles 4-5.

¹¹⁵ Employment and Industrial Relations Act 2002, Articles 26-32.

natural and legal persons except where automatically excluded by way of implication in the case of disability discrimination, which can be suffered only by an individual.

b) Liability for discrimination

In Malta, the personal scope of anti-discrimination law covers natural and legal persons for the purpose of liability for discrimination. The relevant legislation is that referred to above under 3.1.2(a).

Maltese legislation does not draw a distinction between natural and legal persons for the purpose of liability for discrimination but uses the term 'person'. There is no case law on the matter.

The term is therefore to be interpreted in accordance with the above provision of the Interpretation Act.

3.1.3 Private and public sector including public bodies (Article 3(1))

a) Protection against discrimination

In Malta, the personal scope of national anti-discrimination law covers the private and public sectors, including public bodies, for the purpose of protection against discrimination, subject to certain exceptions.

Generally, national law is applicable to both the private and public sectors, including public bodies. However, there are pieces of national legislation which are specifically applicable to employees in the public sector, such as the Public Service Commission Disciplinary Regulations,¹¹⁶ and the Public Administration Act, while there are others which apply specifically to employees in both sectors. Under Article 84 of the Employment and Industrial Relations Act, all the provisions of that Act are rendered applicable to people in both the public and private sectors, except for those provisions which relate to the voluntary settlement of disputes and to the termination of employment.¹¹⁷ Similarly, the provisions in the Equal Treatment in Employment Regulations¹¹⁸ apply to anyone working in the public and private sectors.

As far as public bodies are concerned, there are bodies, as stipulated in Section 6 of this report, which are constituted by virtue of the provisions of particular laws, and hence the said laws would regulate the public body concerned.

b) Liability for discrimination

As stated above, in Malta the personal scope of anti-discrimination law covers both the private and public sectors, including public bodies, for the purpose of liability for discrimination, subject to exceptions where certain regulations apply to only one particular sector.

3.2 Material scope

There are no cases of discrimination stemming from and/or involving the use of artificial intelligence and/or automated systems.

¹¹⁶ These Regulations cover disciplinary proceedings involving public officers and termination of office.

¹¹⁷ The Act provides that all provisions, other than the provisions of Articles 69 and 72 and the provisions relating to dismissals or termination of employment, shall have effect in relation to Government employment and to workers who are Government employees as they have in relation to other employment and to other workers. In this Article, 'Government employment' means employment under or for the purposes of a Government department, otherwise than as a member of a disciplined force, and 'Government employee' means a person who, for the time being, is in Government employment.

¹¹⁸ Equal Treatment in Employment Regulations 2004, Articles 1(2) and 2.

3.2.1 Conditions for access to employment, to self-employment or to occupation, including selection criteria, recruitment conditions and promotion, whatever the branch of activity and at all levels of the professional hierarchy (Article 3(1)(a))

In Malta, national legislation prohibits discrimination in relation to conditions for access to employment, to self-employment or to occupation, including selection criteria, recruitment conditions and promotion, whatever the branch of activity and at all levels of the professional hierarchy, for the five grounds and in both private and public sectors, as described in the directives.

Access to employment in the private sector is regulated by the Employment and Industrial Relations Act 2002. Article 26 of the Act provides for the prohibition of discrimination in a general manner by providing that an employer should not subject his or her employees or prospective employees to any discriminatory treatment. The Employment and Industrial Relations Act 2002 does not apply to people who are not in employment or who are self-employed. By virtue of the provisions of Legal Notice 54 of 2007,¹¹⁹ the provisions in the Employment and Industrial Relations Act establishing equality of treatment of people in employment have been extended to employees in the public sector.

Article 26(1)(a) of the Act states: 'It shall not be lawful for any person when advertising or offering employment or when advertising opportunities for employment or when selecting applicants for employment, to subject any applicants for employment or any class of applicants for employment to discriminatory treatment.' This Article is to be read in conjunction with the definition of discriminatory treatment under Article 2, whereby an employer cannot discriminate against employees or prospective employees on the basis of marital status, pregnancy or potential pregnancy, sex, colour, disability, religious conviction, political opinion or membership of a trade union or of an employers' association. No specific mention is made of gender identity/expression or sex characteristics in this Act.

However, Article 26(2) provides that the situations that are deemed to constitute discriminatory treatment under subparagraph (2) are merely illustrative and not exhaustive. Consequently, the courts could decide that other situations that may arise may constitute discriminatory treatment. There have been no reported cases on this matter.

Regulation 1(4) of the Equal Treatment in Employment Regulations¹²⁰ provides that the Regulations will be applicable to everyone in relation to conditions for access to employment, including the advertising of opportunities for employment, selection criteria and recruitment conditions, whatever the branch of activity and at all levels of the professional hierarchy, including promotions.

In the area of freedom of movement, workers¹²¹ are afforded protection under the Exercise of Rights Conferred on Workers (Freedom of Movement) Regulations.¹²² The purpose of these Regulations was the transposition of the relevant EU directive, which is applicable to all EU citizens and their families. Workers and their families moving within the EU are thereby afforded full rights with respect to access to employment¹²³ in Malta. As in other EU Member States, workers are empowered to bring forward a complaint if they feel that obstacles exist in the exercise of their rights. Third-country nationals working in Malta enjoy the same rights and are subject to the same obligations as workers of Maltese nationality. They therefore enjoy the protection against discrimination guaranteed by the above-mentioned Regulations in the same way as workers of Maltese nationality.

¹¹⁹ Extension of Applicability to Service with Government (Equal Treatment in Employment) Regulations, 5 November 2004.

¹²⁰ These regulations apply to all persons in employment.

¹²¹ Persons in employment.

¹²² These regulations transpose Directive 2014/54/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 April 2014.

¹²³ As well as access to social and tax advantages, housing, training, education and conditions of employment.

Furthermore, Article 15(1) of the Employment and Training Services Act 2018,¹²⁴ which deals with the recruitment of employees to the public sector,¹²⁵ provides that all employees required by the Government of Malta from outside its service or by any body corporate or company in which the Government of Malta has a controlling interest or over which it has effective control, whether these are employed on a contract for a specified time or for an indefinite period, will be recruited through the employment service provided by Jobsplus, which is established under this Act. Article 15(6) provides that any person who, *inter alia*, shows favour to, or uses discrimination against, any person for employment with any employer referred to in Article 15(1) on the grounds of sex, religion or belief, economic means, race or ethnic origin, political opinion, disability, colour, sexual orientation or gender identity, will be guilty of an offence under the Act.

Under Article 4 of the Equality of Men and Women Act 2003, it is unlawful for employers¹²⁶ to discriminate directly or indirectly, against a person in the arrangements made to determine or in determining who should be offered employment; in the terms and conditions on which the employment is offered; or in the determination of who should be dismissed from employment. Discrimination in this Act includes discrimination based on gender identity, gender expression or sex characteristics.

Access to self-employment and occupation is protected by virtue of the provisions of the Equal Treatment in Self-Employment and Occupation Order and of the Equality for Men and Women Act. There are no limitations in respect of how to access this sector of employment. Under Article 4(A) of the Equal Treatment in Self-Employment and Occupation Order, no person in self-employment or occupation is to be discriminated against in relation to the establishment, equipment or extension of a business or the launching or extension of any other form of self-employed activity or occupation. For the purposes of this Order, a person in self-employment or occupation will also be deemed to have been discriminated against if, in relation to the establishment, equipment or extension of a business or the launching or extension of any other form of self-employed activity or occupation, he or she is subject to harassment or sexual harassment, or if any person is instructed to discriminate against a self-employed person or someone in an occupation.

Access to employment for persons with a disability is regulated under Part B of the Second Schedule to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2021, whereby no employer is to discriminate on the grounds of disability against a qualified person with a disability in regard to: (a) procedures relating to applications for employment; (b) the hiring, promotion or dismissal of employees; (c) employee compensation; (d) job training; and (e) any other terms, conditions and privileges related to employment. Likewise, States Parties should promote opportunities for self-employment, entrepreneurship, the development of cooperatives and starting one's own business.

As noted above, gender identity is specifically mentioned under Article 15(6) of the Employment and Training Services Act 2018 in relation to the recruitment of persons in the public sector and under Article 45 of the Constitution of Malta. By virtue of Act X of 2014, the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity were introduced into Article 45 of the Constitution as the supreme law of the land, despite already being covered in other laws. Another principle introduced was that any law imposing qualifications related to sexual orientation or gender identity will be held to be discriminatory in relation to calls for services as a public officer or service for a local government authority or body corporate established for a public purpose. The Equality of Men and Women Act, under the definition section provides for discrimination based on gender identity, gender expression or sex characteristics. Therefore, protection from discrimination on the basis of gender expression

¹²⁴ Employment and Training Services Act 2018 (Act XXXIX of 2018), *Laws of Malta*, Chapter 594.

¹²⁵ It therefore excludes the self-employed and those employed in the private sector.

¹²⁶ The prohibition applies to employers and employees.

and sex characteristics can be found under the latter law as well as under the Gender Identity, Gender Expression and Sex Characteristics Act which provides for the recognition and registration of the gender of a person and to regulate the effects of such a change, as well as the recognition and protection of the sex characteristics of a person. Article 13(2) provides that:

‘The public service has the duty to ensure that unlawful sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics discrimination and harassment are eliminated, whilst its services must promote equality of opportunity to all, irrespective of sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics.’

3.2.2 Employment and working conditions, including pay and dismissals (Article 3(1)(c))

In Malta, national legislation prohibits discrimination in the following areas: working conditions, including pay and dismissals, for all five grounds and for both private and public employment.

Malta does not have specific anti-discrimination legislation which deals with contractual conditions of employment. This is covered in employment legislation.

Article 26(1)(b) of the Employment and Industrial Relations Act 2002 provides that it will not be lawful for any person, in respect of employees already in employment, to subject any such employee or class of employees to discriminatory treatment regarding conditions of employment or dismissal.

Article 27 of the same Act provides that employees in the same class of employment are entitled to equal pay for equal work. Furthermore, it provides that any distinction between classes of employment based on discriminatory treatment other than in accordance with the provisions of the Act or any other law, will not apply.

Regulation 1(4) of the Equal Treatment in Employment Regulations 2004 provides that the provisions of these Regulations will be applicable to everyone in relation to employment and conditions of employment, including remuneration and dismissals.

The conditions of employment for workers and their families who need to move for the purposes of work are protected under Article 3 of the Exercise of Rights Conferred on Workers (Freedom of Movement) Regulations. According to these Regulations, their conditions of employment and work, in particular as regards remuneration, dismissal and health and safety at work, and for instances where workers become unemployed or are reinstated or reemployed, are protected. Workers and their families moving within the EU are empowered and given the tools to bring forward a complaint if they feel that obstacles exist to the exercise of their rights. Third-country nationals working in Malta enjoy the same rights and are subject to the same obligations as workers of Maltese nationality. They therefore enjoy the protection against discrimination guaranteed by the Regulations in the same way as workers of Maltese nationality.

No specific mention is made of gender identity/expression or sex characteristics in the aforementioned employment legislation.

Under Article 4 of the Equality for Men and Women Act, it will be unlawful for employers to discriminate, directly or indirectly, against a person in the arrangements made to determine or in determining who should be offered employment or in the terms and conditions on which the employment is offered or in the determination of who should be dismissed from employment. Furthermore, employers will also be deemed to have discriminated against a person if such employers alter the working conditions or the terms

of employment of employees to the detriment of such employees after such employees have invoked any right accorded to them under this Act or claimed the performance in their favour of any obligation or duty under this Act. For the purposes of this Act, 'discrimination' means discrimination based on sex or because of family responsibilities, sexual orientation, age, religion or belief, racial or ethnic origin, or gender identity, gender expression or sex characteristics and includes the treatment of a person in a less favourable manner than another person is, has been or would be treated on these grounds.

Part B of the Second Schedule to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2021 refers to the obligation of States Parties to protect the rights of persons with disabilities, on an equal basis with others, to just and favourable conditions of work, including equal opportunities and equal remuneration for work of equal value, and safe and healthy working conditions. In terms of such provisions, the law provides guidance on interpreting the provisions that prohibit discrimination by employers on the ground of disability.

3.2.3 Access to all types and all levels of vocational guidance, vocational training, advanced vocational training and retraining, including practical work experience (Article 3(1)(b))

In Malta, national legislation prohibits discrimination in vocational training outside the employment relationship, such as adult lifelong learning courses or vocational training provided by technical schools or universities.

As detailed below, various pieces of national legislation, which prohibit discrimination, also regulate access to guidance and training as defined and formulated in the directives.

Article 26(4) of the Employment and Industrial Relations Act 2002 provides that, for the purposes of Article 26, the term 'offering employment' includes recruitment or training of any person with a view to engagement in employment and in regard to a person already in employment it also includes promotion or engagement in a different class of employment. Article 26 regulates the protection from discrimination in employment on the basis of marital status, pregnancy or potential pregnancy, sex,¹²⁷ colour, disability, religious conviction, political opinion or membership of a trade union or of an employers' association, and, by virtue of the subsection referred to, is extended to matters concerning vocational training and guidance.

Furthermore, Regulation 1(4) of the Equal Treatment in Employment Regulations provides that the provisions of these Regulations will be applicable to everyone in relation to access to all types and to all levels of vocational guidance, vocational training, advanced vocational training and retraining, including practical work experience.

In addition, under Regulation 6 of Legal Notice 51 of 2007, which is entitled 'Contracts of Service for a Fixed Term Regulations 2007', the employer will endeavour to facilitate access by employees on a fixed-term contract of service to appropriate training opportunities in order to enhance their skills, career development and occupational mobility.

Under Article 3 of the Exercise of Rights Conferred on Workers (Freedom of Movement) Regulations issued under the Equality for Men and Women Act, workers moving within the EU for the purposes of work are given full rights regarding access to training and access to education, apprenticeships and vocational training for the children of workers. Third-country nationals working in Malta enjoy the same rights and are subject to the same obligations as workers of Maltese nationality. They therefore enjoy the protection against discrimination guaranteed by the Regulations in the same way as workers of Maltese nationality, including the right to training, as applies to all employees in Malta.

¹²⁷ Sexual orientation is not referred to here.

With regard to access to any educational institution, protection is afforded under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2021, where Part C to the Fourth Schedule prohibits an educational authority or institution (defined as 'a kindergarten, school, college, university or other institution at which education or training is provided') to discriminate against:

'(a) an applicant for admission as a student on the grounds of his or her disability or a disability of any of his or her family members by refusing or not accepting his or her application for such admission, or in the terms or conditions on which such educational authority or institution is prepared to admit him/her as a student; and/or (b) a student on the grounds of his or her disability or disability of any of his or her family members by denying him/her access or limiting his or her access to any benefit, facility or service provided by such educational authority or institution or expelling him/her from the educational institution s/he is attending'.

Under Article 8 of the Equality for Men and Women Act, it will be unlawful for any educational establishment or for any other entity providing vocational training or guidance to discriminate against any person (a) in access to any course, vocational training or guidance; or (b) in the award of educational support for students or trainees; or (c) in the selection and implementation of the curricula; or (d) in the assessment of the skills or knowledge of the students or trainees. It will also be the duty of educational establishments and entities providing vocational training, within the limits of their competence, to ensure that curricula and textbooks do not propagate discrimination. For the purposes of the Act, 'vocational training' is defined as all forms of vocational training and retraining. For the purposes of this Act, 'discrimination' means discrimination based on sex or because of family responsibilities, sexual orientation, age, religion or belief, racial or ethnic origin, or gender identity, gender expression or sex characteristics and includes the treatment of a person in a less favourable manner than another person is, has been or would be treated on these grounds.

The Work-Based Learning and Apprenticeship Act 2018¹²⁸ regulates work-based learning and apprenticeships within the context of vocational educational and training programmes. People who have attained school-leaving age as defined by the Education Act 2019 will be eligible to enrol for work placements, apprenticeships and internships in accordance with this Act. Sponsors must ensure that the learners' wellbeing is safeguarded and that they are trained in an environment that is free from discrimination, workplace bullying or harassment. They must also ensure that entry requirements and the selection of learners are equitable and free from discrimination on the grounds of age, belief, creed and/or religion, colour, ethnic origin and/or race, disability, family responsibilities¹²⁹ and/or pregnancy, family and/or civil status, gender expression and/or gender identity, genetic features, health status, political opinion, sex and/or sex characteristics and sexual orientation.

3.2.4 Membership of, and involvement in, an organisation of workers or employers, or any organisation whose members carry on a particular profession, including the benefits provided for by such organisations (Article 3(1)(d))

In Malta, national legislation prohibits discrimination in relation to membership of and involvement in workers' or employers' organisations, as formulated in the directives, for all five grounds and for both private and public employment.

Under Article 2 of the Employment and Industrial Relations Act 2002, 'discriminatory treatment' is defined as 'any distinction, exclusion or restriction which is not justifiable in a democratic society including discrimination made on the basis of marital status,

¹²⁸ Work-Based Learning and Apprenticeship Act 2018, 6 March 2018 (Act III of 2018).

¹²⁹ Normally refers to family caregiving responsibilities.

pregnancy or potential pregnancy, sex, colour, disability, religious conviction, political opinion or membership of a trade union or of an employers' association'.

Regulation 1(4) of the Equal Treatment in Employment Regulations 2004 establishes that the provisions of this legal notice will be applicable to everyone in relation to membership of, and involvement in, any organisation of employees and employers, or any organisation whose members carry on a particular profession, including the benefits provided for by such organisations.

No specific mention is made of gender identity/expression or sex characteristics in the aforementioned employment legislation.

With the enactment of the Exercise of Rights Conferred on Workers (Freedom of Movement) Regulations 2016,¹³⁰ issued under the Equality for Men and Women Act, under Article 3, the right of workers to freely become members of trade unions and their eligibility to join workers' representative bodies is once again afforded protection in the case of workers moving from one country to another and their families. The Equality of Men and Women Act, under the definition section provides for discrimination based on gender identity, gender expression or sex characteristics. Therefore, protection from discrimination on the basis of gender expression and sex characteristics can be found under the latter law as well as under the Gender Identity, Gender Expression and Sex Characteristics Act which provides for the recognition and registration of the gender of a person and to regulate the effects of such a change, as well as the recognition and protection of the sex characteristics of a person. Article 13(2) provides that:

'The public service has the duty to ensure that unlawful sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics discrimination and harassment are eliminated, whilst its services must promote equality of opportunity to all, irrespective of sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics.'

In addition, Article 42 of the Constitution of Malta, which deals with protection of freedom of assembly and association, provides that no one will be hindered in the exercise of their right to peacefully assemble and to associate with other people and in particular to form or belong to trade or other unions or associations for the protection of their interests. By virtue of Act X of 2014, the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity were introduced into Article 45 of the Constitution as the supreme law of the land, despite already being covered in other laws. Another principle introduced was that any law imposing qualifications related to sexual orientation or gender identity will be held to be discriminatory in relation to calls for services as a public officer or service for a local government authority or body corporate established for a public purpose.

3.2.5 Social protection, including social security and healthcare (Article 3(1)(e) Directive 2000/43)

In Malta, national legislation prohibits discrimination in social protection, including social security and healthcare, as formulated in the Racial Equality Directive.

Under Article 4 of the Equal Treatment of Persons Order 2007, which implements the provisions of Directive 2000/43/EC, no person, establishment or entity, whether in the private or public sector and including public bodies, is to discriminate against any other person in relation to social protection (including social housing), including social security and healthcare, based on racial and ethnic origin. However, the Maltese enabling legislation makes no specific reference to social protection.

¹³⁰ Exercise of Rights Conferred on Workers (Freedom of Movement) Regulations, 20 May 2016, LN 173 of 2016.

The Exercise of Rights Conferred on Workers (Freedom of Movement) Regulations 2016 allow workers who are EU citizens and who move within the EU to freely access the social and tax advantages available and grant them the right to bring forward a complaint if they feel their rights have been restricted. These Regulations were issued under the Employment and Industrial Relations Act and hence the protection from discrimination afforded to workers under the enabling Act would also apply to workers who move within the EU. Workers who are not EU citizens are still afforded protection under the general laws detailed above, namely Article 26 of the enabling Act, if they are deemed employees in terms of the said Act.

Article 28 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2021 refers to States Parties' recognition of the right of persons with disabilities to social protection and to the enjoyment of that right without discrimination on the basis of disability, and the undertaking to take appropriate steps to safeguard and promote the realisation of this right, and lists measures that are to be taken in this regard. The 2021 Act therefore recognises and protects the right to social protection without discrimination due to one's disability.

Part F of the Fourth Schedule to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act specifically relates to the provision of health services. The Act provides¹³¹ that 'A person would be discriminating with another person due to a disability if that person is refused the giving of a health service of the same standard, conditions, even financial, of a range and quality like that given to other persons, including but not limited to that related to sexual and reproductive health'. This also includes, but is not limited to, the refusal to administer food and fluids to the person with disability due to that disability. Furthermore, the Act provides that:

'A person with disability shall also have a right to the health services required by persons with disability specifically due to their disability, including: (a) the early identification and intervention as appropriate; (b) an assessment which reflects the actual needs and health conditions of the person with disability; and (c) rehabilitation and habilitation services designed to minimise and prevent further disabilities: so however that the state shall offer all help as the case may be'.

The Gender Identity, Gender Expression and Sex Characteristics Act 2015 provides for the recognition and registration of an individual's gender, in particular when there have been changes made thereto, as well as to recognise and protect the sex characteristics of a person. Of particular interest is Article 13(2), which provides that:

'The public service has the duty to ensure that unlawful sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics discrimination and harassment are eliminated, whilst its services must promote equality of opportunity to all irrespective of sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics.'

Furthermore, Article 15 provides that the pathologisation of any form of sexual orientation, gender identity and/or gender expression as may be classified under the International Classification of Diseases or any other similar internationally recognised classification, will be null and void in Malta. The nullity of such classification will not impact negatively the provision of any healthcare service related to sex and/or gender.

a) Article 3(3) exception (Directive 2000/78)

¹³¹ Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability) Act 2000, Part F of the Fourth Schedule.

Maltese legislation does not mention the exception in Article 3(3) of Directive 2000/78/EC in relation to religion or belief, age, sexual orientation, gender identity/expression or sexual characteristics.

3.2.6 Social advantages (Article 3(1)(f) Directive 2000/43)

In Malta, national legislation prohibits discrimination in social advantages as formulated in the Racial Equality Directive.

Under Article 4 of the Equal Treatment of Persons Order, which prohibits discrimination on the grounds of racial and ethnic origin, no person, establishment or entity, whether in the private or public sector and including public bodies, is to discriminate against any other person in relation to: (a) social protection, including social security and healthcare; (b) social advantages; (c) education; (d) access to and supply of goods and services which are available to the public, including housing; (e) access to any other service as may be designated by law for the purposes of this Order.

While these benefits may not always be set out in legislation, there is no specific corresponding legislation (except for the provisions in the Equal Treatment of Persons Order) prohibiting discrimination in the granting of said benefits on the basis of religion or belief, disability, age, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression and sex characteristics.

In Malta, the lack of definition of social advantages does not raise problems because, while the law does not expressly provide for those people who merit social advantages, the schemes providing such benefits, which, in the main, provide for payments, specify who may so qualify and the applicable criteria.

3.2.7 Education (Article 3(1)(g) Directive 2000/43)

In Malta, national legislation prohibits discrimination in education, as formulated in the Racial Equality Directive.

Under Article 4 of the Equal Treatment of Persons Order 2007, which implements the provisions of Directive 2000/43/EC prohibiting discrimination on the basis of racial and ethnic origin, no person, establishment or entity, whether in the private or public sector and including public bodies, is to discriminate against any other person in relation to education. Furthermore, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act prohibits discrimination in the field of education under Article 24,¹³² where Part C to the Fourth Schedule prohibits an educational authority or institution (defined as 'a kindergarten, school, college, university or other institution at which education or training is provided') from discriminating against any applicant for admission as a student in view of their disability or that of a family member or access or expulsion in view of the same disability. Similarly, article 3 of the Education Act 2019¹³³ provides that every person of compulsory school age residing in Malta has the right of access to education without any distinction of age, sex, religion or belief, economic means, race or ethnic origin, political

¹³² It shall be unlawful for an educational authority or institution (defined under Article 2 as a kindergarten, school, college, university or other institution at which education or training is provided) to discriminate against (a) an applicant for admission as a student on the grounds of his or her disability or a disability of any of his or her family members by refusing or not accepting his or her application for such admission, or in the terms or conditions on which such educational authority or institution is prepared to admit him/her as a student; and/or (b) a student on the grounds of his or her disability or disability of any of his or her family members by denying him/her access, or limiting his or her access, to any benefit provided by such educational authority or institution or expelling him/her from the educational institution he or she is attending.

¹³³ Education Act, 1 January 2021 (Act XXIX of 2019), Chapter 605 of the *Laws of Malta*. Most provisions came into force in October 2021.

opinion, disability, colour, sexual orientation or gender identity but with no mention of sex characteristics or gender expression.

In Malta, the general approach to education for pupils with disabilities does not give rise to any problems. Since the mid-1990s, Malta has been implementing the concept of inclusion. Malta has witnessed a substantial increase in pupils with disabilities attending mainstream schools and a decrease in the number of students in special schools, thus enabling a more specialised and individualised service for the latter, while at the same time allowing pupils with disabilities who do not need to attend specialised schools to integrate with pupils who do not have disabilities. European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education figures from 2022/23 show that over 96 % of those children with an educational statement attend mainstream classes, which is approximately 5 482 children, while 207 children do not attend mainstream schools. Under the Education Act 2019, the Minister for Education is responsible for ensuring that the national policy on inclusive education is applied in all schools.¹³⁴ Under the Act, the state is responsible for the promotion of education in Malta, based on the values of democracy, inclusion, diversity, active citizenship, critical thinking, responsible behaviour and ethical conduct.¹³⁵ All schools have to establish a safe and inclusive learning environment. The Act also provides that the Division of Education provide the resources required for inclusive and special educational programmes and for other schemes related to individual educational needs.¹³⁶ The Act refers to equitable education in providing that the Minister may make regulations, issue policies and give directives, as that Minister deems appropriate, to reach out to all children entitled to attend school, including for the establishment of alternative learning programmes, educational spaces, nurture groups and learning support zones in the school and of learning support centres and resource centres outside the school, for the transfer of students from the class and the school to these zones and centres, and for any other matter ancillary thereto as may be required.

a) Trends and patterns regarding Roma pupils

There are no specific patterns existing in education regarding Roma pupils, such as segregation, as there are no Roma in Malta.

3.2.8 Access to and supply of goods and services that are available to the public (Article 3(1)(h) Directive 2000/43)

In Malta, national legislation prohibits discrimination in access to and the supply of goods and services as formulated in the Racial Equality Directive. Maltese law, in line with the provisions of Article 3(1)(h), refers to the supply of goods and services which are available to the public.

Under Article 4 of the Equal Treatment of Persons Order 2007, which prohibits discrimination on the grounds of racial or ethnic origin, no person, establishment or entity, whether in the private or public sector and including public bodies, is to discriminate against any other person in relation to access to and supply of goods and services which are available to the public, including housing. National law does not make specific reference to the supply of goods and services made privately. Protection would be afforded to such supply under the general prohibitions of discrimination.

Under Part E of the Fourth Schedule to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2021:

¹³⁴ Under Article 2, 'inclusive education' refers to the valuing and acceptance of diversity and the rights of learners not only to attend mainstream schools, but also to belong thereto as valued members through the active participation of all learners and reducing the barriers that may lead to exclusion from school curricula, cultures and community.

¹³⁵ Education Act (Act XXIX of 2019), Chapter 605 of the *Laws of Malta*, Article 4.

¹³⁶ Over the years the NCPE has been active in reaching settlements and mediating between education providers and children/students with disabilities to ensure that they have the required support.

‘no qualified person with a disability shall, on the grounds of disability, be excluded from participation in or be denied the benefits of the programmes or activities of any person or body in relation to the goods, facilities or services¹³⁷ or be discriminated against by any person or body providing such goods, facilities¹³⁸ or services which the qualified person seeks to obtain or use’.

No statutory protection can be found in the case of discrimination based on gender identity or expression and sex characteristics. Likewise, no specific prohibition exists in this field on the grounds of religion and belief, age and sexual orientation.

a) Distinction between goods and services available publicly or privately

In Malta, national law does distinguish between goods and services available to the public (e.g. in shops, restaurants and banks) and those only available privately (e.g. those restricted to members of a private association).

3.2.9 Housing (Article 3(1)(h) Directive 2000/43)

In Malta, national legislation prohibits discrimination in housing as formulated in the Racial Equality Directive.

In cases of alleged discrimination in respect of the matters mentioned in paragraphs 3(1)(e) to (h) of the Racial Equality Directive, protection is found in the provisions of the Equal Treatment of Persons Order under Article 4, which adopted the same wording as the Directive. No exceptions in the case of housing are made. Furthermore, the alleged victim can seek to protect his or her rights against the relevant public body providing housing services by invoking the right to protection from discrimination under the Constitution and under the European Convention Act 1987.

Part G of the Fourth Schedule to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act refers to accommodation and provides that:

‘no person shall discriminate with another person on the grounds of the disability of such other person or a disability of any of their family members: (a) by refusing the application of such other person for accommodation; or (b) in the terms or conditions on which the accommodation is offered to such other person; or (c) by deferring the application of such other person for accommodation or by according to such other person a lower order of precedence in any list of applicants for that accommodation; or (d) by denying or limiting the access of such other person to any benefit associated with accommodation occupied by such other person; or (e) by evicting such other person from any accommodation that is occupied by such other person; or (f) by subjecting such other person to any other detriment in relation to accommodation occupied by such other person; or (g) by refusing to permit such other person to make alterations to accommodation occupied by such other person if: (i) such other person has undertaken to restore at his own expense the accommodation to its condition before alteration on leaving the accommodation and the action required to restore the accommodation to its condition before alteration is, in fact, practicable;

¹³⁷ The provision (whether on payment or not) of goods, facilities and services to the public or any sector of the public.

¹³⁸ In *Kummissjoni Nazzjonali Persuni B'Dizabilita' v. Malta Football Association*, final judgment, Civil Court, First Hall, 16 November 2017, confirmed on appeal, Ref. 462/2013, the Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability instituted a case against the Malta Football Association on the basis of lack of accessibility to persons with disability at the National Stadium. The Court did not consider that it was reasonable to order the defendant to carry out the alterations suggested in order for wheelchair users to be given access to the cafeteria. It also noted that, in an ideal situation, financial and logistical considerations would not be taken into account, but it could not discard the element of proportionality in such circumstances. Consequently, the Court considered that the exception raised by the defendant (under Article 12(2) of the Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability) Act) was satisfied in light of the lack of reasonableness of what was requested by the claimant.

(ii) the alteration does not involve the alteration of property occupied by other persons. Provided that these provisions shall not apply if (a) the person who provides or proposes to provide the accommodation or a near relative of that person, resides and intends to continue to reside in that property; and (b) the accommodation provided in that property could cater for no more than four persons and (c) if the provision of accommodation in properties where particular services or facilities that would be required by the person with a disability would be unreasonable in the circumstances.'

No statutory protection can be found in the case of discrimination based on gender identity or expression and sex characteristics. Likewise, no specific prohibition exists in this field on the grounds of religion and belief, age and sexual orientation.

The Housing Authority provides financial assistance for adaptation works in houses occupied by persons with disabilities. This assistance will enable these individuals to adapt their homes according to their needs so as to be able to lead a more independent or semi-independent lifestyle. Works may consist of general alterations – for example, bathroom or WC facilities; approaches to rooms, such as ramps, steps or their modification and handrails; doors and windows; staircases and lifts; water services and electrical and heating services; and kitchens. Moreover, a further scheme exists for persons with autism, the SensAbility Scheme, whereby the Authority provides financial assistance to families with members who have this condition to cover part of the expense to purchase equipment to equip a sensory room for the needs of these persons.¹³⁹ An occupational therapist verifies each case and recommends the works financed through this scheme.

The Housing Authority has a further scheme in place which provides for the installation of a lift where at least one of the applicants or his or her relative who lives in the building has a disability related to mobility or mobility problems. This scheme provides for the installation of lifts in blocks or entrances of apartments built by the Government or the Housing Authority in Malta and Gozo that are occupied by tenants who have the said mobility issues and are recognised by the Government as having such needs.

Another scheme promoted by the Housing Authority and Agenzija Support relates to semi-independent living. The main aim of the Supported Independent Living Service is to provide a semi-independent environment to develop and sustain a person's ability to live as independently as possible, either in their own home or in accommodation with staff on site. This type of housing with care allows residents to retain their privacy and independence within their own self-contained apartment, but with access to necessary support to assist them to integrate better into the community. It is open to persons with disabilities, including persons with a psychosocial disability, homeless people, young people needing care or adult or child victims of domestic violence.

In November 2023 CRPD Malta carried out a research project principally hearing the voices of several stakeholders to serve as a foundation for the creation of a deinstitutionalisation strategy, which is one of the key objectives of the National Disability Strategy, Freedom to Live (2021-2030). As outlined in the Strategy, Malta is committed to address deinstitutionalisation of persons with disabilities through the formulation of a National Deinstitutionalisation Strategy together with better provision and coordination of community-based services, among other actions. This is set out through specific goals in Objective 10 of its National Disability Strategy.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹ A sensory room is a specially designed room that combines a range of stimuli to help individuals develop and engage their senses. These stimuli can include lights, colours, sounds and aromas, all within a safe environment that allows the person using it to explore and interact without risk. The scheme covers sensory rooms in private homes.

¹⁴⁰ 'Towards the Deinstitutionalisation of Persons with Disability in Malta', CRPD Malta, November 2023.

In 2019, the Parliamentary Secretariat for Social Accommodation designed specialised housing programmes (SHPs) as a measure that specifically creates housing and integrated service provision that offers solutions based on the needs primarily of vulnerable groups.¹⁴¹ They are intended to provide vulnerable or specific groups with tailored support and living arrangements. The focus on the relationship between vulnerabilities, housing, wellbeing and socio-economic status builds on the EU 2020 strategy, which has as one of its core goals the prevention of social exclusion in order to address people who are significantly more at risk than others.¹⁴² SHPs therefore provide funding to accommodation projects which seek to ensure environmental wellbeing where the final design will be mindful of the benefits of incorporating social thinking that improves the wellbeing and quality of life of the user group.

The main form of accommodation provided to migrants consists of access to reception centres.¹⁴³ Asylum seekers have the right to reside in accommodation centres run by the Agency for the Welfare of Asylum Seekers (AWAS) for free for a period of six months (for single men) or one year (for women and families). Refugees are entitled to apply to the Maltese Housing Authority for alternative accommodation known as 'government units for rent', provided they have been residing in Malta for 12 months and have limited income and assets. Refugees are also entitled to all of the schemes that the Housing Authority offers. In recognition of the difficulties faced by migrants in accessing housing, following the intervention of the European Commission, the state is further committed to introducing measures to improve public housing schemes and to eradicating discrimination that migrants may face in accessing housing.¹⁴⁴

a) Trends and patterns regarding housing segregation for Roma

There are no patterns of housing segregation and discrimination against the Roma as there are no Roma in Malta.

¹⁴¹ See the document *Sustainable Communities – Housing for Tomorrow*, available at: <https://housingauthority.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Housing-Booklet-2020.pdf>.

¹⁴² Those who are likely to suffer from social exclusion more than any other sub-group are people who might be experiencing: low income; family conflict; being in care; school problems; being from a sexual and gender minority; being an ex-prisoner; being from an ethnic minority; living in a deprived neighbourhood in urban and rural areas; mental health problems; age-related issues; or disability.

¹⁴³ Five of the six centres are run by Agency for the Welfare of Asylum Seekers (AWAS) and one is run by an NGO. The total reception capacity of the centres is approximately 2 964 places. In June 2025, there were 193 persons residing in open centres in Malta. This number has decreased, owing to fewer irregular arrivals of migrants and a shift in policy promoting community-based accommodation and integration. One NGO also offers accommodation in the form of private houses or flats, also falling within the AWAS overall reception system. In exceptional cases, particularly where the existing facilities are overcrowded, alternative venues are utilised as, for example, shelters for homeless persons.

¹⁴⁴ Communication between the Commissioner of Human Rights and the Minister for Home Affairs, February 2018.

4 EXCEPTIONS

4.1 Genuine and determining occupational requirements (Article 4 Directive 2000/43, Article 4(1) Directive 2000/78)

In Malta, national legislation provides for exceptions for genuine and determining occupational requirements.

Regulation 4(1) of the Equal Treatment in Employment Regulations provides that any difference of treatment based on a characteristic related to religion or religious belief, disability, age, sexual orientation or racial or ethnic origin will not constitute discriminatory treatment if, by reason of the nature of the particular occupational activities concerned or of the context in which they are carried out, such a characteristic constitutes a genuine and determining occupational requirement, provided that the objective is legitimate and the requirement is proportionate. This reflects the relevant provisions of the directives other than for the limitation to religious belief and the exclusion of other types of belief.

Subparagraph (3) of Article 26 of the Employment and Industrial Relations Act provides that:

‘The provisions of subparagraph (1) and (2) shall be without prejudice to the rights and obligations prescribed by the Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability) Act, and shall not apply to any preference or exclusion which is reasonably justified taking into account the nature of the vacancy to be filled or the employment offered, or where a required characteristic constitutes a genuine and determining occupational requirement or where the requirements are established by any applicable laws or regulations.’

Furthermore, Article 2(3) of the Equal Treatment of Persons Order provides that less favourable treatment which is based on racial or ethnic origin will not constitute discrimination where, by reason of the particular occupational activities concerned or of the context in which they are carried out, the treatment is legitimate and the characteristic constitutes a genuine occupational requirement which is proportionate in the circumstances. The burden of proving a genuine occupational requirement will lie on the person who alleges its existence. We note here that the reference to the requirement of a ‘legitimate objective’ is absent. This provision is not in line with the provisions of the directives, as the requirement here is that the treatment is legitimate, rather than the objective.

There is no case law on the matter. National legislation is in compliance with the interpretation given in the latest CJEU case law on matters of discrimination. However, there are compliance issues, arising from the decisions in *Achbita* (C-157/15); *Bougnauoui* (C-188/15) and *Commune d’Ans* (C-148/22), which could be interpreted as evidence gaps in national legislation and thus could result in employers invoking defences that the CJEU has declared inadmissible. This notwithstanding, it is worth noting that the national judiciary does refer to European case law in the absence of provision in local legislation.

4.2 Employers with an ethos based on religion or belief (Article 4(2) Directive 2000/78)

In Malta, national law provides for an exception for employers with an ethos based on religion or belief.

Regulation 4(2) of the Equal Treatment in Employment Regulations states that when an employer has an ethos based on religion or religious belief, the nature of the employment or the context in which it is carried out constitute a sufficiently genuine and legitimate justification for the employer to require that such work be carried out by a person of a particular religion or religious belief, and any difference of treatment based on a person’s

religion or religious belief will not constitute discriminatory treatment, provided that it is proportionate to apply that requirement in that particular case.

In addition, and in line with the second sub-section of Article 4(2) of the Directive, Regulation 4(3) provides that employers whose ethos is based on religion or religious belief will have the right to require individuals working for them to act in good faith and with loyalty to the organisation's ethos, provided that the other provisions of the Regulations are complied with.

This appears to conform to Article 4(2) of Council Directive 2000/78/EC, except for the fact that national regulations are more restrictive and provide for an ethos based on religion or religious belief, while the Directive provides for an ethos based on religion or other belief. Accordingly, Maltese regulations do not regulate an ethos which is based on a belief which is not religious. However, as it is a derogation regarding the prohibition of direct discrimination in the Directive, the fact of narrowing the scope of the derogation does not seem to be contrary to the Directive. Furthermore, it is noted that the national provision does not specifically refer to the qualification included in Article 4(2) of the Directive, namely that this difference of treatment will be implemented taking account of Member States' constitutional provisions and principles, as well as the general principles of EU law, and should not justify discrimination on another ground.

4.3 Armed forces and other specific occupations (Article 3(4) and Recitals 18 and 19 Directive 2000/78)

In Malta, national legislation provides for an exception for the armed forces in relation to age and disability discrimination (Article 3(4), Directive 2000/78/EC). Regulation 1(5)(b) of the Equal Treatment in Employment Regulations provides that the provisions of the said legal notice will not apply to the Armed Forces of Malta¹⁴⁵ insofar as discriminatory treatment on the grounds of disability and age is concerned.

In Malta, the scope of the exception is not limited to safeguarding the combat effectiveness of the armed forces. The scope extends to other non-combatant staff, such as civilians employed in administrative positions in the army. The relevant provision in the Regulations does not refer to particular roles within the armed forces.

4.4 Nationality discrimination (Article 3(2))

a) Discrimination on the ground of nationality

In Malta, national law includes exceptions relating to difference of treatment based on nationality.

Regulation 1(5)(a) of the Equal Treatment in Employment Regulations provides that the provisions of the said legal notice will not apply to any differences of treatment based on nationality and are without prejudice to laws and conditions relating to the entry and residence of third-country nationals and stateless persons in Malta and to any treatment which arises from the legal status of the individuals concerned.

Similarly, Article 2(4) of the Equal Treatment of Persons Order 2007 provides that it will not apply to any differences of treatment based on nationality, and its provisions are without prejudice to laws and conditions relating to the entry by and residence of third-country nationals and stateless persons in Malta and to any treatment which arises from the legal status of the individuals concerned.

¹⁴⁵ In Malta, national legislation provides for a definition of 'armed forces' under the Malta Armed Forces Act, where armed forces are to include the regular force (any armed force other than the reserve force and the territorial force), the territorial force and reserve force raised under the said legislation.

Thus, the wording of the aforementioned provisions is the same as that provided under Article 3(2) of the directives.

In Malta, nationality (as in citizenship) is not explicitly mentioned as a protected ground in national anti-discrimination law. The pending equality bill would, if adopted, cover nationality as a protected ground.

b) Relationship between nationality and 'racial or ethnic origin'

There is no case law on discrimination on grounds of nationality and ethnicity.

No specific reference is made to nationality discrimination in national legislation. However, this does not mean that in practice nothing is done to counter this form of discrimination. Information dissemination carried out by the NCPE also addresses this form of discrimination.¹⁴⁶

In October 2022, three police officers were arrested and charged in court for allegedly abducting and beating up foreign nationals, after other police officers had filed internal reports within the Malta Police Force about these cases. The Malta Police Force stated that it will never tolerate such incidents and highlighted the fact that it had introduced a system of anonymous reporting which helped with exposing this case. It appears that the alleged victims were chosen by the alleged perpetrators on the basis of their skin colour and nationality.¹⁴⁷

4.5 Health and safety at work (Article 7(2) Directive 2000/78)

In Malta, there are exceptions in relation to disability and health and safety at work (Article 7(2), Directive 2000/78/EC).

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, under paragraph 2 of Part B of the Fourth Schedule, provides that, if a person with a disability is employed, nothing is to preclude his or her employer from informing, if s/he deems it necessary, supervisors and managers within the same establishment regarding any necessary restrictions on the work or duties of such applicant and any alterations that may be required and first aid and safety personnel regarding any emergency treatment that might be required by such applicant because of his or her disability or regarding any special precautions that might need to be taken because of the said disability.

Furthermore, Legal Notice 44 of 2002, entitled the Work Place (Minimum Health and Safety Requirements) Regulations 2002, states under Article 30 that:

'(1) The employer shall ensure that the workplace is so organised and arranged to take account of the health and safety requirements of any workers with disability, if necessary.

(2) Without prejudice to the generality of sub-regulation (1), this provision applies in particular to the doors, passageways, staircases, showers, washbasins, lavatories,

¹⁴⁶ In order to ensure anti-racism mainstreaming within the different spheres of Government work – encompassing human resources, policy drafting and implementation, and service provision – each Ministry is required to develop an Intra-Ministerial Anti-Racism Action Plan (IMARAP). During the second quarter of 2023, the NCPE started developing a policymaking tool to support the implementation of the IMARAPs. The main aim of the tool is to aid public officers tasked with the design, implementation and monitoring of policies in every Ministry, in order to create and execute policies capable of preventing unlawful discrimination and harassment, as well as to bring about structural changes that address racial inequalities in their different social and economic manifestations. The Anti-Racism Policymaking Tool seeks to facilitate the recognition of racial inequalities by policymakers, as well as proactively eliminate racial inequalities and advance equality. The development of the tool was completed in 2024.

¹⁴⁷ There do not seem to have been any recent developments on this case, information in respect of which is publicly accessible.

resting and eating facilities and workstations used or occupied directly by persons with a disability.

(3) The employer shall ensure that the work equipment assigned for use by the person with disability, or the type of work itself is such that the disabled person is not exposed to added risks to health and safety due to the disability.'

Therefore, Article 30(3) allows employers to treat persons with disabilities differently by ensuring that the employer assigns appropriate work in line with the capacities of the person with a disability, in order not to endanger their health and safety.

4.6 Exceptions related to discrimination on the ground of age (Article 6 Directive 2000/78)

4.6.1 Direct discrimination

a) Justification of direct discrimination on grounds of age

In Malta, national law allows for specific justifications for direct discrimination on the ground of age.

Regulation 5 of the Equal Treatment in Employment Regulations reflects the provisions of Article 6 of Directive 2000/78/EC and provides that, notwithstanding Regulation 3(1) and (2),¹⁴⁸ difference of treatment on the ground of age will not constitute discriminatory treatment if:

- '(a) such differences are objectively and reasonably justified by a legitimate aim, including a legitimate employment policy or labour market and vocational training objectives; and
- (b) if the means of achieving that aim are appropriate and necessary.'

b) Permitted differences of treatment based on age

In Malta, national law permits differences of treatment based on age for any activities within the material scope of Directive 2000/78/EC. These are reflected in Regulation 5 of the Equal Treatment in Employment Regulations.

Regulation 5 goes on to provide that non-discriminatory differences of treatment referred to in sub-regulation (1) of this Regulation may include:

- '(a) the setting of special conditions on access to employment and vocational training, including dismissal and remuneration conditions for young people, older workers and persons with caring responsibilities in order to promote their vocational integration or ensure their protection;
- (b) the fixing of minimum conditions of age, professional experience or seniority in service for access to employment or to certain advantages linked to employment;
- (c) the fixing of a maximum age for recruitment which is based on the training requirements of the post in question or the need for a reasonable period of employment before retirement.'

Therefore, to that extent, Article 6 of Council Directive 2000/78/EC has been fully implemented.

¹⁴⁸ These provisions deal with the concept of discriminatory treatment.

c) Fixing of ages for admission to occupational pension schemes

In Malta, national law allows occupational pension schemes to fix ages for admission to the scheme, taking up the possibility provided for by Article 6(2).

With regard to second pension funds and third pension funds, under the Retirement Pensions Act 2011¹⁴⁹ a retirement scheme is one where the commencement of payment of retirement benefits to a member is to take place on a date that is not earlier than that on which such member has attained the age of 50, or not later than the specification provided in the pension rules,¹⁵⁰ which is set at the age of 75, unless the payment is made by reason of the permanent disability or death of the beneficiary or the termination of employment. Similarly, in the case of a long-term contract of insurance issued by a licence holder under the Voluntary Occupational Pension Scheme Rules 2017 where the commencement of payment of benefits to a qualifying individual is to start at an age not earlier than 50 or not later than the date when the individual attains the age of 70 or any other age specified in pension rules applicable to occupational retirement schemes under the Retirement Pensions Act or any other law substituting the said Act, except in those cases where the long-term contract of insurance provides that the payment is made by reason of the permanent disability or death of the beneficiary. The law does not appear to specifically provide for the use of age criteria in actuarial calculations or any restrictions on the use of such criteria.

4.6.2 Special conditions for younger or older workers

In Malta, there are special conditions set by law for older workers in order to promote their vocational integration. The Business Promotion Regulations 2000¹⁵¹ provide fiscal incentives to employers who create jobs for, and employ and train, people aged over 40.¹⁵² If such persons are registered as having a disability, these incentives are further increased. There is no obligation for employers to take action to benefit from such incentives or otherwise. There are no special conditions for young people but there are incentives to encourage young people to continue studying.¹⁵³

4.6.3 Minimum and maximum age requirements

In Malta, there are exceptions permitting minimum and/or maximum age requirements in relation to access to employment and training. The exception relates to personnel in the army, by which applicants wanting to join the armed forces cannot exceed the age of 30.

Under Maltese law, any person who has passed the compulsory school age¹⁵⁴ may seek employment and/or be employed. Under Article 58 of the Education Act 2021, no person may employ a minor of compulsory school age or otherwise bound to regularly attend school under the provisions of this Act without the written permission of the Division of Education.

However, Article 48(3) of the Employment and Industrial Relations Act 2002 provides that the minister responsible for Employment and Industrial Relations may make regulations which prescribe the manner and the circumstances in which people who are above compulsory school age, as defined in the Education Act 2019,¹⁵⁵ but who have not yet

¹⁴⁹ Came into force in 2015.

¹⁵⁰ Pension rules for occupational retirement schemes, issued under the Retirement Pensions Act by the Malta Financial Services Authority.

¹⁵¹ Business Promotion Regulations 2000, 1 November 2000, Regulation 13.

¹⁵² Similarly, tax deductions for older jobseekers can be claimed, training costs reimbursed and employment subsidies claimed by employers, aside from receiving job counselling and training support.

¹⁵³ Students in post-secondary and tertiary education receive a government stipend intended to help them cover expenses related to their studies, but there are no conditions attached to how it may be used.

¹⁵⁴ At the age of 16.

¹⁵⁵ Education Act (Act XXIX of 2019). Chapter 605 of the *Laws of Malta*.

attained the age of 18 years, may be employed. This includes the power to designate certain categories or classes of employment as prohibited employment for such people.

There is no evidence of age discrimination when it comes to accessing training opportunities. Jobsplus, which is the public employment agency, provides various training schemes.¹⁵⁶ It also provides training courses specifically directed at registered unemployed people over 40 years of age.

4.6.4 Retirement

a) State pension age

In Malta, there is a state pension age at which individuals must begin to collect their state pensions. State pensions are payable when a person reaches retirement age, also referred to as the state pension age, which is stipulated at 65.¹⁵⁷ However, if an individual wishes to work beyond the state pension / retirement age and agreement is reached with the employer, the pension cannot be deferred. The individual can therefore collect the state pension and still work.

The Social Security Act 1987¹⁵⁸ provides in Article 2 that the pension age applicable to both men and women in Malta is 65; but:

- In the case of a person born on or before 31 December 1951, the pension age will be 61 years.
- In the case of a person born during the calendar years 1952 to 1955, the pension age will be 62 years.
- In the case of a person born during the calendar years 1956 to 1958, the pension age will be 63 years.
- And in the case of a person born during the calendar years 1959 to 1961, the pension age will be 64 years.

Notwithstanding the above, in the case of a woman born on or before 31 December 1951, the pension age will be 60 years.

b) Occupational pension schemes

In Malta, there is no standard age when people can begin to receive payments from occupational pension schemes and other employer-funded pension arrangements. However, under the Retirement Pensions Act 2011¹⁵⁹ a retirement scheme is one in which the commencement of payment of retirement benefits to a member will take place on a date that is not earlier than that on which such a member has attained the age of 50, or later than that specified in the pension rules,¹⁶⁰ which is set at the age of 75, unless the payment is made by reason of the permanent disability or death of the beneficiary or the termination of employment. If an individual wishes to work for longer, payments from such occupational pension schemes can be deferred.

An individual can collect a pension and still work.

¹⁵⁶ By means of the Work Exposure Scheme, Jobsplus offers jobseekers work experience with an employer for a short period of time to help them improve their employability.

¹⁵⁷ 'Retirement' means the attainment of pension age.

¹⁵⁸ Social Security Act, 1 January 1987 (Act X of 1987), *Laws of Malta*, Chapter 318, as subsequently amended from time to time, with a definition of pensionable age introduced in 2006.

¹⁵⁹ Came into force on 1 January 2015.

¹⁶⁰ Directorate C – Social Statistics and Information Society. See: <https://nso.gov.mt/labour-force-survey/> Relates to retirement funds and service providers, as well as the requirement of recognition for persons performing back-office administrative services.

Employers can introduce retirement schemes, but employees must consent to them and cannot be forced to participate in the scheme. If an employee chooses not to contribute to the scheme, they cannot benefit under the same and will benefit from the state pension.

c) State-imposed mandatory retirement ages

In Malta, there is no general state-imposed mandatory retirement age (except for specific professions – see below) but there are general retirement ages set by law with discretion to extend. There are retirement ages stipulated in law which vary depending on the date of birth of the individual and the nature of the work of the person. The state does not force people to stop working on reaching retirement age. Where people are employed, as opposed to being self-employed, agreement must be reached with the employer should the employee wish to stop working before reaching retirement age or to continue working after reaching retirement age.¹⁶¹

National legislation provides for a retirement age, at which people are entitled to receive a state pension and deemed normally to retire. Under Article 2 of the Social Security Act 1987, the pension age is 65, subject to the exceptions mentioned above with respect to people born between 1951 and 1961. Nonetheless, agreement may be reached between the employer and employee for employment to continue and for an employee to continue working beyond pension age. An individual can therefore work and receive the state pension.¹⁶²

A state-imposed retirement age applies in the case of judges of the Superior Courts. Under Article 97 of the Constitution of Malta, a judge of the Superior Courts will vacate their office when they attain the age of 65 years unless they choose to stay on until the age of 68.¹⁶³ The same age limit applies to the Attorney General,¹⁶⁴ the State Advocate¹⁶⁵ and magistrates of the Inferior Courts.¹⁶⁶

d) Retirement ages imposed by employers

In Malta, national law permits employers to set retirement ages (or ages at which the termination of an employment contract is possible) by contract and/or collective bargaining and/or unilaterally.

The last proviso to Article 36(14) of the Employment and Industrial Relations Act 2002 provides that, 'the employer can terminate the employment of an employee when the employee reaches pension age as defined in the Social Security Act',¹⁶⁷ and this will constitute a good and sufficient cause for termination. It is to be noted that it is standard practice that employees leave employment on reaching pension age.

¹⁶¹ Mandatory retirement age is linked to pension age.

¹⁶² To encourage people not to retire early before reaching retirement age, the Government introduced a scheme that allows one to receive a higher pension for every year one remains in employment up to 65 years of age. The pensions percentage increase measure came into effect in 2016, for so-called delayed retirees working in private entities who have made enough contributions to benefit from the early opt-out and retire at 61 but who choose to continue working and retire at their proper pension age as per the pensions reform. With effect from January 2019, public service employees working in the public sector, who would have made enough contributions to draw a pension at 61 years of age but who choose to continue working are now eligible for a percentage increase to their pension rate, just like private sector employees.

¹⁶³ Amended by virtue of Act LV of 2020.

¹⁶⁴ Article 91 of the Constitution.

¹⁶⁵ Article 91A of the Constitution.

¹⁶⁶ Article 100 of the Constitution.

¹⁶⁷ Provided that an employer may not terminate the employment of a female employee born on or before 31 December 1951 before she reaches the age of 61 years.

e) Employment rights applicable to all workers irrespective of age

The law on protection against dismissal and other laws protecting employment rights do not apply to all workers irrespective of age, even if they remain in employment after attaining pensionable age or any other age thus possibly giving rise to age discrimination.

Thus if, at 65, a person continues working, he or she would not be afforded protection against dismissal on the grounds of age; however, as the person is still in employment, he or she would retain some employment rights under other laws protecting employment rights during employment.

f) Compliance of national law with CJEU case law

National legislation in this area may be in line with CJEU case law, but some questions still exist – for example, around pension-linked termination.

As stated above, the Employment and Industrial Relations Act provides that employment can be terminated by the employer when the employee reaches pension age. Therefore, the law provides for a pension age at which persons will normally retire but also provides that an agreement may be reached between the employee and employer whereby the employee can work beyond pension age.

4.6.5 Redundancy

a) Age and seniority taken into account for redundancy selection

In Malta, national law permits seniority to be taken into account in selecting workers for redundancy.

With respect to redundancy in the private sector, this is regulated under Article 36(3) and (4) of the Employment and Industrial Relations Act 2002. In the event that a person is declared redundant by his or her employer and the following provisions of law are not observed, legal action for unfair dismissal can be instituted by the employee against the employer.

Subparagraph (3) provides that a contract of service for an indefinite time may be terminated by the employer if there exists a good and sufficient cause for this¹⁶⁸ or on grounds of redundancy.

Furthermore, under Article 36(4), if an employer intends to terminate the employment of an employee on grounds of redundancy, they are to terminate the employment of that person who was engaged last in the class of employment affected by such a redundancy, unless the individual is related to the employer (not being a limited liability company or a statutory body) by blood or marriage.

In such an instance, the employer may, instead of terminating the employment of this individual, terminate that of the person next in turn. The reason for this exception has always been so as to try and prevent problems within families or through marriage.

Thus, it is clear that a person may be declared redundant not on the basis of their age, sexual orientation, disability, religious beliefs or racial or ethnic origin but on the objective criterion as to who was last employed in the post, subject to the proviso of relationship by blood or marriage.

¹⁶⁸ This deals with termination of employment on grounds of a good and sufficient cause. The law does not define 'good and sufficient cause' but lists those instances which are not deemed to constitute a good and sufficient cause. Each case is to be determined on its own merits to see whether the termination of the employment was based on a good and sufficient cause.

b) Age taken into account for redundancy compensation

In Malta, national law provides compensation for redundancy. Such compensation is not affected by the age of the worker.

Redundancy payments depend not on age but on the duration of the employment of the employee who is employed on an indefinite basis – for example, an employee who has worked for 3 years would be entitled to 4 weeks' notice of termination of employment, whereas if they had worked for 10 years, they would be entitled to 11 weeks' notice. The maximum notice period is 12 weeks. These notice periods are fixed by law and cannot be shortened.

On receiving notice of termination on the ground of redundancy from the employer, the employee may either continue to perform work until the period of notice expires or, at any time during the period of notice, may require the employer to pay them a sum equal to the wages that would be payable in respect of the unexpired period of notice and therefore, in the latter case, not work during the notice period. Usually, employees in this situation opt for the latter arrangement since, during such notice period, they may start seeking new employment. In addition, if the employer fails to give notice, they will be liable to pay to the employee a sum equal to the wages that would be payable in respect of the period of notice.

Furthermore, the employer may pay the employee additional amounts, but these would be paid at the employer's sole discretion.

4.7 Further exceptions necessary in a democratic society: public security, public order, criminal offences, protection of health, protection of the rights and freedoms of others (Article 2(5), Directive 2000/78)

In Malta, national law includes exceptions that seek to rely on Article 2(5) of the Employment Equality Directive on the below:

- public security
- public order
- criminal offences
- protection of health
- protection of the rights and freedoms of others.

Regulation 1(6)(a) of the Equal Treatment in Employment Regulations reflects the provisions of Article 2(5) of Directive 2000/78/EC and provides that the provisions of this legal notice will be without prejudice to, *inter alia*, any law necessary for public security, for maintaining public order, for the prevention of criminal offences, for the protection of health and for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.¹⁶⁹

4.8 Any other exceptions

In Malta, other exceptions to the prohibition of discrimination (on any grounds covered by this report) provided in national law are as follows.

Regulation 1(6) of the Equal Treatment in Employment Regulations provides that the provisions of the Regulations are to be read and construed without prejudice to the introduction and implementation of provisions in collective agreements or any other agreements entered into between employers and employees that lay down anti-discrimination rules in the areas referred to in sub-regulation (3) of Regulation 1 which respect the minimum requirements in the Equal Treatment in Employment Regulations.

¹⁶⁹ There appears to be no relevant case law on the matter.

5 POSITIVE ACTION (Article 5 Directive 2000/43, Article 7 Directive 2000/78)

a) Scope for positive action measures

In Malta, positive action in respect of racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation is permitted in national law. There are no requirements set in law which must be met in order for positive action to be implemented e.g. necessity/proportionality.

Regulation 6(1) of the Equal Treatment in Employment Regulations state that nothing will render unlawful any act carried out in or in connection with:

- Affording persons of a particular religion or religious belief, disability, age, sexual orientation or racial or ethnic origin access to benefits relating to training which would help prepare them for a particular job.
- Or encouraging such persons referred to in sub-regulation (1)(a) of this Regulation to take advantage of opportunities for doing a particular job.
- Or instances where it reasonably appears to the person carrying out the act that it prevents or compensates for disadvantages linked to the grounds of religion or religious belief, disability, age, sexual orientation and racial or ethnic origin. There are no prescribed criteria to determine what constitutes 'disadvantages'.

Part H of the Fourth Schedule to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2021 provides that the law does not prohibit any form of action that may be taken in the circumstances of the case by any person, authority or institution to ensure that persons who have a disability are granted equal opportunities, special treatment, grants, benefits or programmes with a view to the integration of such persons with other persons who do not have a disability in matters related to employment, education, accommodation, the provision and use of goods, services and facilities, the administration of laws and their capacity to lead an independent life within the community as a whole.

Several entities, such as the NCPE and CRPD Malta, regularly organise publicity campaigns, participate in projects and hold seminars and public meetings to encourage persons of a particular religion or religious belief, disability, age, sexual orientation or racial or ethnic origin to participate in training to assist them in entering the labour market. Jobsplus is very active in this field, as one of the corporation's main objectives is that of assisting people in finding employment. Jobsplus offers specific services to people who are in disadvantaged situations and who therefore find it more difficult to enter the labour market. These services are offered through the Inclusive Employment Services. People in disadvantaged situations include persons with disabilities, former substance abusers, former prison inmates, workers who have been out of the labour market for more than five years, and other people with different social problems. The employment advisers give assistance and job search guidance to these people. It is up to the individual to seek this particular service.¹⁷⁰

b) Quotas in employment for persons with disabilities

In Malta, national law provides for quotas for the employment of persons with disabilities.

Positive measures of a general social nature, applicable to both the private and public sectors, quotas and preferential treatment do exist with regard to persons with a disability in the employment field.

¹⁷⁰ Training and vocational training services are also offered by Richmond Foundation, Agenzija Support and Inspire. The schemes include the bridging the gap scheme, the community inclusive employment scheme, the community work scheme, the sheltered employment training scheme and the job bridge programme.

The Persons with Disability (Employment) Act 1969¹⁷¹ provides for the compulsory engagement, on a quota basis, of persons with disabilities registering for employment.¹⁷²

Section 15 of this Act states, *inter alia*, that:

‘(1) Any person to whom this section applies shall give employment to such number of registered persons as is his quota in accordance with the provisions of section 16 of this Act:

Provided that any person to whom, on the coming into operation of this Act, this section applies, shall (if needs be) comply with the provisions of this subsection as and when vacancies occur.

(2) A person to whom this section applies shall not at any time take, or offer to take, into his employment any person other than a registered person, if, immediately after the taking in of that person, the number of registered persons in his employment (excluding persons employed by him in an employment of a class at that time designated under section 19 of this Act) would be less than his quota.’

The quota is to be a number ascertained in accordance with the following provisions of Section 16 of the Act:

‘(2) The Minister, after consultation with the Corporation (Jobsplus), shall by order specify a standard percentage¹⁷³ and may, in like manner, specify a special percentage, either greater or smaller than the standard percentage.

(3) A special percentage specified by the Minister under subsection (2) of this section shall be made with respect to employment in any trade or industry, or in any branch or part of any trade or industry, or to employment with any class of employer, being employment to which, in the opinion of the Minister, a percentage, other than the standard percentage, should be assigned owing to its distinctive characteristics as respects its suitability for persons with disability.

(4) An order specifying a special percentage shall contain such provisions as may appear to the Minister to be requisite for more particularly defining for the purposes of this section the trade or industry, branch or part of a trade or industry, or class of employer, to employment in which or with whom such percentage is assigned.

(5) The quota at any time of a person to whom section 15 of this Act applies shall be the number ascertained by applying to the number of all the persons at that time in his employment (excluding persons employed by him in an employment of a class at that time designated under section 19 of this Act and any employee related to him by consanguinity or affinity up to the third degree)

- so far as they consist of persons employed by him in an employment other than one to which a special percentage is at that time assigned, the standard percentage; and
- so far as they consist of persons employed by him in an employment to which a special percentage is at that time assigned, that percentage:

Provided that, if the number so ascertained includes or consists of a fraction less than one half, such fraction shall be disregarded, and, if the number so ascertained includes or consists of a fraction being one-half or more, the quota shall be the nearest higher whole number.’

Section 16 also provides for enforcement measures. Thus, an employer who fails to respect the quota referred to will be asked by the corporation to make an annual contribution of EUR 2 400 for every person with disability who should be in his or her employment, up to

¹⁷¹ Persons with Disability (Employment) Act, 7 February 1969 (Act II of 1969), *Laws of Malta*, Chapter 210.

¹⁷² The register is maintained by Jobsplus.

¹⁷³ This figure is 2 % and applies to all trades and industries.

a maximum of EUR 10 000 for any employer who fails to respect the quota.¹⁷⁴ The contribution payable was staggered until 2017. However, as from 2017, the full amount is payable.¹⁷⁵

On 28 April 2016, a memorandum of understanding was signed between the Malta Employers' Association, the Chamber of Commerce, Enterprise and Industry and Jobsplus on the employment of persons with disabilities in the private sector. The memorandum has resolved the difficulties that employers had been facing in implementing the law. One issue tackled in the memorandum is that, in the case of a group of companies, the different companies within the group would be able to share – not necessarily equally – the number of persons with disabilities who have to be employed according to the law. The memo also enabled Jobsplus to inform employers if one of their employees is registered as having a disability, should the person concerned give consent.

According to figures published by Jobsplus, in early 2025, there were 5 393 persons with a disability in employment in Malta and Gozo. This figure has increased considerably in recent years. The total number of registered persons with disabilities seeking full- or part-time employment with Jobsplus as at January 2025 stood at 220.¹⁷⁶

It is pertinent to point out that not all persons with disabilities register with Jobsplus and hence the figures cannot be deemed to be an accurate reflection of reality.¹⁷⁷ Nonetheless, further initiatives need to be taken in order to encourage employers to offer employment to persons with disabilities so that the number of employed people will continue to increase and lead to equal opportunities for persons with disabilities seeking employment, given that the employment rate of persons with disabilities in Malta continues to be substantially lower than the rate among the general population.¹⁷⁸

Special arrangements exist to assist persons with disabilities to access employment in the public sector. Registered persons with disabilities who do not satisfy all the eligibility requirements in calls for applications but who are capable of carrying out, in essence, the duties attached to a particular post or position, are allowed to ask for special consideration when applying for posts or positions in the public service.¹⁷⁹

The Business Promotion Regulations 2000 provide fiscal incentives to employers who create jobs and employ and train people over 40 years of age. If such persons are

¹⁷⁴ With regard to the quota system, it has been noted that while some companies choose to pay the contribution instead of employing persons with disabilities, 30 % of the companies that do employ persons with disabilities are companies that were not obliged to do so under the quota system, because they employed fewer than 20 people.

¹⁷⁵ The contributions/fines paid by those employers who fail to satisfy the 2 % quota are administered by Jobsplus and contribute to the Lino Spiteri Foundation. This Foundation, established on 25 May 2015, was set up in order to improve the integration of vulnerable individuals into gainful employment through the empowerment of the individuals themselves, as well as the employers who recruit them. The Foundation wishes to reach and exceed a suitable and sustainable level of employment for persons with disabilities, mental health problems and vulnerable people, all of whom can contribute to the country's economy as well as civil society in general. The Foundation, through funding received and contributions, continues to work in conjunction with Jobsplus to provide persons with disability with the appropriate training and the opportunities to actually find the jobs they are seeking and to benefit from job coaching facilities.

¹⁷⁶ NSO (2024), 'Unemployment rate: July 2024', press release, 29 August, National Statistics Office, available at <https://nso.gov.mt/unemployment-rate-july-2024/>.

¹⁷⁷ In December 2013, the Government announced that it was drawing up a comprehensive register of persons with disabilities to better analyse and provide for their needs. Currently there are three registers being maintained, which does not aid the procurement of accurate data. No such comprehensive register has, as yet, been drawn up. As at end of December 2023, there were 27 091 persons with disabilities registered with the Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD).

¹⁷⁸ In the November 2023, at the 'CaVetta: Key for All' stakeholders' conference, representatives from employers' associations, government entities, academia and NGOs, as well as persons with disabilities, came together to discuss ways of addressing the issues being faced by persons with intellectual disabilities in the employment landscape. The project attempted to challenge stereotypes, as well as highlight the contributions made by persons with intellectual disabilities in their respective workplaces.

¹⁷⁹ Equality Policy for the Public Service, July 2013.

registered as having a disability, these incentives are further increased. There is no obligation for employers to take action to benefit from such incentives or otherwise. Likewise, other incentives, including fiscal (in the form of tax credits and exemptions from payment of tax contributions), are available to persons with disabilities who are seeking employment or already in employment and to encourage employers to employ persons with a disability.

Further positive action was taken through the enactment of the Various Laws (Persons with Disability) (Membership in Various Entities) Act 2015.¹⁸⁰ This Act seeks to integrate more persons with disabilities into the various entities in the Maltese legal and governmental system by way of a provision in which at least one person with a disability must be part of the major public entities/authorities (as specified below) governed by Maltese law. The Act provides for an increase of one member in each board or entity to include a person with a disability. There is no publicly available information on the enforcement or otherwise of this regulation.

The Act affects the composition of the following entities, increasing their number by one and imposing that at least one member be a person with a disability or a person representing such people as the case may be:

1. The Housing Authority (set up under the Housing Authority Act (Chapter 261, *Laws of Malta*));
2. The National Commission for Further and Higher Education (set up under the Education Act (Chapter 327, *Laws of Malta*));
3. Jobsplus (set up under the Employment and Training Services Act (Chapter 594, *Laws of Malta*));
4. The Broadcasting Authority (set up under the Broadcasting Act (Chapter 350, *Laws of Malta*));
5. The Refugee Appeals Board (set up under the Refugees Act (Chapter 420, *Laws of Malta*));
6. The Malta Statistics Authority (set up under the Malta Statistics Authority Act (Chapter 422, *Laws of Malta*));
7. The National Commission for the Promotion of Equality for Men and Women (set up under the Equality for Men and Women Act (Chapter 456, *Laws of Malta*));
8. The Commission on Gender-Based Violence and Domestic Violence (set up under the Gender-Based Violence and Domestic Violence Act (Chapter 581, *Laws of Malta*));
9. The Council for the Voluntary Sector (set up under the Voluntary Organisations Act (Chapter 492, *Laws of Malta*));
10. The Authority for Transport in Malta (set up under the Authority for Transport in Malta Act (Chapter 499, *Laws of Malta*)).

The above entities are all public entities and therefore the Prime Minister of Malta, or the relevant minister whose ministry governs the specific entity, as applicable, is responsible for the implementation of these provisions. The entities must be constituted according to these provisions, including the above new requirements. Otherwise, such public entities will not be considered as legally constituted in accordance with Maltese law.

¹⁸⁰ Various Laws (Persons with Disability) (Membership in Various Entities) Act, 10 March 2015 (Act VII of 2015).

6 REMEDIES AND ENFORCEMENT

6.1 Judicial and/or administrative procedures (Article 7 Directive 2000/43, Article 9 Directive 2000/78)

a) Available procedures for enforcing the principle of equal treatment

In Malta, the following procedures exist for enforcing the principle of equal treatment: judicial/administrative/alternative dispute resolution such as mediation. As can be seen below, recourse can be had by people alleging discrimination to the courts, commissions and other authorities set up under law, to the Ombudsman and even to mediation.

Maltese legislation lays down various courses of action that may be followed should an individual believe that he or she was subjected to discriminatory treatment, whether in employment in the private or the public sector. Apart from recourse to action before the Civil Court, First Hall, sitting in its constitutional jurisdiction, or before the Constitutional Court, there exist other bodies where an alleged victim can address his or her complaint, depending on the nature of such complaint.

These include the Industrial Tribunal (under the Employment and Industrial Relations Act 2002), the Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD Malta) and the UNCRPD Redress Panel (under the Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability) Act 2000 and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act), the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (under the Equality for Men and Women Act 2003), the Public Service Commission (under the Constitution of Malta), the Ombudsman (under the Ombudsman Act 1995), the Broadcasting Authority (under the Constitution of Malta), and the Employment Commission (under the Constitution of Malta), as detailed hereunder:¹⁸¹

- The Industrial Tribunal.¹⁸² Article 30 of the Employment and Industrial Relations Act states:

‘A person who alleges that the employer is in breach of, or that the conditions of employment are in breach of Articles 26, 27, 28 or 29, may within four months of the alleged breach, lodge a complaint to the Industrial Tribunal and the Industrial Tribunal shall hear such complaint and carry out any investigations as it shall deem fit.’

On the basis of the provisions of Article 30, actions can be instituted even after the employment relationship has been terminated provided that the relevant time limits are respected. Furthermore, Article 30(4) states that any action taken by a complainant in accordance with the provisions of this Article will be without prejudice to any further action that such complainant may be entitled to take under any other applicable law and will also be without prejudice to any other action to which the respondent may be subject in accordance with any other applicable law.

- The Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD Malta) can initiate investigations on any matter involving an act which is allegedly in violation of the provisions of the law and may also do so on receipt of a complaint similar in nature. Under the CRPD Act, there is also the UNCRPD Redress Panel, which is competent to hear petitions alleging that one or more substantive Convention rights have been, are being, or are likely to be contravened.¹⁸³

¹⁸¹ Insofar as the Employment Commission is concerned, the Constitution specifically limits its remit to discrimination based on political opinion.

¹⁸² The establishment and constitution of the tribunal are set out in Article 73 of the Employment and Industrial Relations Act 2002.

¹⁸³ Introduced in 2021 by virtue of Article 33B of the Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability) Act 2000.

- The National Commission for the Promotion of Equality investigates complaints received in respect of alleged acts of discrimination and assists any complainants in safeguarding their rights.¹⁸⁴
- The Public Service Commission deals with and resolves complaints relating to disciplinary issues within the public service as well as those which relate to appointments and termination of employment within the same sector.
- The Ombudsman receives and investigates complaints and resolves grievances which individuals allege to have suffered from Government departments and public authorities.¹⁸⁵
- The Broadcasting Authority receives and resolves complaints regarding impartiality in the provision of broadcasting services, in respect of matters of political or industrial controversy or relating to current public policy.
- The Employment Commission is there to ensure that, in respect of employment, no distinction, exclusion or preference that is not justifiable in a democratic society is made or given in favour of or against any person by reason of his or her political opinions.

The Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability) Act stipulates the procedure that is to be followed in cases in which the Commission receives a complaint from an aggrieved person, including in instances of alleged discrimination. Once it investigates, the matter is passed on to the Enforcement Unit¹⁸⁶ to take measures in respect of any person who infringes any provision of the Act, or any other law which the Enforcement Unit is entitled to enforce, or who fails to comply with any decision given by the Investigations Unit or the Test of Reasonableness Board.¹⁸⁷

Furthermore, Article 17(1) of the Equality for Men and Women Act 2003 provides that the Commissioner may initiate investigations (a) on any matter involving an act or omission that is allegedly unlawful under the provisions of the Act and (b) on receipt of a written complaint by a person who claims to be the victim of an act or omission contrary to the provisions of the Act.

Mediation does exist under national legislation. In terms of the Procedure for Investigation Regulations 2011, issued under the Equality for Men and Women Act, it is implied that the Commissioner may use mediation, in that, it provides that where the terms of the negotiation are not adhered to, the Commissioner may request the court to order such person failing to abide by the terms of the mediation to undertake all necessary remedial action as may be ordered by the court. While the Employment and Industrial Relations Act does not mention mediation, the Mediation Act, enacted on 21 December 2004, encourages and facilitates the settlement of disputes in Malta through mediation, establishes a Malta Mediation Centre as a centre for domestic and international mediation, and regulates the conduct of the mediation process.

Article 968 of the Code of Organisation and Civil Procedure, with regard to arbitration, states that any cause concerning any matter in dispute which has been brought before a court of civil jurisdiction in Malta may be submitted at the request of all the parties for determination by arbitration. However, paragraph 2 of Article 968 goes on to say that any submission to arbitration in regard to any dispute which concerns questions of personal

¹⁸⁴ The remit of the NCPE covers discrimination based on sex, sexual orientation, age, religion or belief, racial or ethnic origin or gender identity and free movement of persons.

¹⁸⁵ Ombudsman Act, 21 July 1995 (Act XXI of 1995), *Laws of Malta*, Chapter 385.

¹⁸⁶ Where the Enforcement Unit has *prima facie* evidence that the infringement represents an immediate hardship for the aggrieved party, the said interim measures to remedy the situation in advance of the termination of the investigations process include the immediate cessation of the act or omission contributing to the infringement. The Unit is also responsible for providing an on-the-beat presence, legal enforcement and helping in the curbing of abuse and misuse of the disability blue badges.

¹⁸⁷ Such measures are: imposing an administrative fine in accordance with the provisions of this Act; and ordering the cessation of any act or omission which are in breach of any provision of the Act and any other law that the Enforcement Unit is entitled to enforce.

status, including those relating to separation, divorce or annulment of a marriage between spouses, or in regard to things or rights which may not form the subject matter of a contract, whether absolutely or without certain formalities required by law, is null.

b) Barriers and other deterrents faced by litigants seeking redress

Costs in a court case are regulated by Article 1004 of the Code of Organisation and Civil Procedure, which states that costs will be taxed and levied in accordance with the tariffs in Schedule A annexed to the Code and with regulations made by the minister responsible for justice. The costs incurred to institute legal proceedings can at times be quite high, thereby possibly creating a barrier for people who want to lodge a complaint. Also, even though this is not really a requirement, it is advisable for a person to seek advice from a lawyer to assist in the proceedings. The Maltese legal system provides for the possibility of free legal aid for people who do not have the necessary finances to institute/defend legal proceedings.

Delays in judicial proceedings can be seen as a further deterrent, in that one is aware when proceedings will commence but not when they will end. Furthermore, in certain instances, time limits for lodging a claim or complaint must be respected, and failure to do so will nullify the lodgement of claim or complaint. Thus, in the case of proceedings under the EIRA, complaints must be lodged within four months of the alleged breach.

Aside from the costs and delays, other factors which may be seen as barriers to people seeking redress are the lack of information and also that parties try and settle disputes out of court to avoid delays and costs.

c) Number of discrimination cases brought to justice

In Malta, statistics on the number of court cases related to discrimination that have been brought to justice are not available.

d) Registration of national court decisions on discrimination cases

In Malta, court decisions on discrimination are not registered as such by national courts.

6.2 Legal standing and associations (Article 7(2) Directive 2000/43, Article 9(2) Directive 2000/78)

a) Engaging in proceedings on behalf of victims of discrimination (representing them)

In Malta, associations, organisations and trade unions are entitled to act on behalf of victims of discrimination.

Regulation 11 of the Equal Treatment in Employment Regulations provides that nothing will prevent any association, organisation or other legal entity from having a legitimate interest in ensuring that these regulations are complied with, or from engaging itself either on behalf of or in support of the complainant, with his or her approval, in any judicial or administrative procedure which is provided for the enforcement of obligations under these Regulations.

Furthermore, Article 16 of the Equal Treatment of Persons Order provides that nothing in this Order or in any other law will prevent any association, organisation or other legal entity, having a legitimate interest in ensuring that the Order is complied with, from engaging itself either on behalf or in support of the complainant, with his or her approval, in any judicial or administrative procedure provided for the enforcement of obligations under the Order.

Under Article 22 of the Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability) Act, CRPD Malta is authorised to carry out investigations to determine whether there have been violations of the Act and provide, where and as appropriate, assistance, to persons with disabilities in enforcing their rights under this Act. Under Article 32(2), the Commissioner may also initiate investigations on the receipt of a complaint alleging that a person has committed an act that is unlawful under any of the provisions of the Act. The Commission must also give assistance if the complainant requires assistance to formulate the complaint orally and/or in writing; it will be the duty of the Commissioner to take reasonable steps to provide appropriate assistance to that person. In exercising its role, the Commission is now to be assisted by an Investigations Unit and an Enforcement Unit.¹⁸⁸ It is to be noted that this provision does not refer to assistance in judicial proceedings but is limited to assistance with commencing investigations or lodging a complaint.

Furthermore, Article 33A of the Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability) Act provides that any association, organisation or any legal entity that has a legitimate interest in ensuring that the provisions of this Act are complied with may institute, on behalf or in support of the person against whom an unlawful act of discrimination has been committed under this Act, with his or her approval, proceedings for redress before the UNCRPD Redress Panel or the competent court.

These provisions are general in nature and no limitations exist as to the conditions under which or the terms upon which representation can take place. The complainant's authorisation is required, but no specific provisions stipulate the manner in which such authorisation is to be obtained. The type of remedy which an association may seek is the remedy which may also be sought by a complainant and which, as seen above, varies depending on the legislation. There are no differences in associations' standing in terms of remedies compared to actual victims. There are no special rules on the shifting of the burden of proof where associations are engaged in proceedings. There is no known case where any association, organisation or other legal entity has brought forward proceedings.

Under the aforementioned provisions, added protection is afforded to complainants under the relevant legislation, where an entity having a legitimate interest in ensuring the regulations are adhered to, may intervene on their behalf. The type of remedy which an association may seek is the remedy which may also be sought by a complainant and which, as seen above, varies depending on the legislation. There are no differences in associations' standing in terms of remedies compared to actual victims. There are no special rules on the shifting of the burden of proof where associations are engaged in proceedings.

Article 75(2) of the Employment and Industrial Relations Act 2002 also permits action to be taken on behalf of a person who is the subject of alleged discriminatory treatment. This provides that, where it is alleged that a worker has been unfairly dismissed by an employer, or where there is an alleged breach of any obligation under Title I of the Act (thus including discriminatory treatment) or any regulations prescribed thereunder, the matter will be referred to the Industrial Tribunal for a decision by it by means of a referral in writing made by the worker alleging the breach, or by some other person acting in the name and on behalf of the worker.

- b) Engaging in proceedings in support of victims of discrimination (joining existing proceedings)

In Malta, associations, organisations and trade unions are entitled to act in support of victims of discrimination.

Furthermore, Article 33A of the Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability) Act provides that any association, organisation or any legal entity that has a legitimate interest in

¹⁸⁸ Introduced by virtue of Act LIX of 2021 amending the Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability) Act.

ensuring that the provisions of this Act are complied with may institute, on behalf or in support of the person against whom an unlawful act of discrimination has been committed under this Act, with his or her approval, proceedings for redress before the UNCRPD Redress Panel or the competent court.

One entity that is legislatively empowered to assist a complainant of alleged discriminatory treatment, both in and outside court, is the Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD Malta). This Commission is empowered to provide, where appropriate, assistance, including legal and financial assistance, to persons with disabilities in enforcing their rights under the Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability) Act.¹⁸⁹

Furthermore, if it appears to the Commissioner for the Rights of Persons with Disability that a person wishes to lodge a complaint before the competent authorities under Article 32(2) of the Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability) Act and that that person requires assistance to formulate the complaint orally and/or in writing, it will be the duty of the Commissioner to take reasonable steps to provide appropriate assistance to that person.¹⁹⁰

Article 11 of the Equal Treatment in Employment Regulations and Article 16 of the Equal Treatment of Persons Order provide that nothing shall prevent any association, organisation or other legal entity, having a legitimate interest in ensuring the pertinent regulations are complied with, from engaging itself either on behalf or in support of the complainant.

In addition, under Article 12(1)(j) of the Equality for Men and Women Act 2003, the Commissioner for the Promotion of Equality, with the assistance of the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE), is empowered to provide assistance, where and as appropriate, to people suffering from discrimination by enforcing their rights under the Act. Assistance will be provided as and when required by the victim. It is pertinent to point out that it appears that the NCPE have adopted the policy, which does not emanate from a written policy, not to provide support to victims of discrimination in court but merely to limit their assistance to the receipt and investigation of complaints.

Under the Exercise of Rights Conferred on Workers (Freedom of Movement) Regulations 2016,¹⁹¹ nothing in the Regulations is to prevent any associations or organisations, including social partners or other legal entities with a legitimate interest in ensuring that the provisions of these Regulations are complied with, from engaging, either on behalf or in support of the complainant, with his or her approval, in any judicial and/or administrative procedure as is provided for the enforcement of the rights under these Regulations within 24 months of the alleged breach – provided that the provisions of the Regulations will apply without prejudice to any other competencies and collective rights of social partners and employees' and employers' representatives, where applicable, including the right to take action on behalf of a collective interest.

c) Submitting observations, e.g. *amicus curiae* briefs/letters

In Malta, associations, organisations and trade unions are entitled to submit observations to courts or other adjudicating bodies, such as *amicus curiae* briefs, in discrimination cases. However, there is no case law to support the practice of submitting such briefs in discrimination cases. It does appear to be the practice, though, for associations to assist in the preparation of proceedings but not directly or actively participate in them.

¹⁸⁹ Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability) Act, 10 February 2000, Article 22(k).

¹⁹⁰ Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability) Act, 10 February 2000, Article 32(3).

¹⁹¹ Article 3.

d) *Actio popularis*

In Malta, national law allows the equality body, the NCPE, to act in the public interest on its own behalf, without a specific victim to support or represent (*actio popularis*) on any matter involving any act or omission that is allegedly unlawful before any tribunal or court. This does not mean that other associations, unions and other bodies are prohibited from taking similar action and this in virtue of Article 116 of the Constitution.¹⁹²

As noted above, investigations may be commenced by the NCPE under Article 11 of the Equal Treatment of Persons Order,¹⁹³ but no particular rules are provided as to the instances where this may be done and the type of proceedings which are to be followed. As yet, there is no published information on whether the Commission has taken any such action.

e) Class action

In Malta, national law allows associations, organisations and trade unions to act in the interest of more than one individual victim (class action) for claims arising from the same event, but no specific reference is made to class actions except in the case of competition cases.¹⁹⁴

Article 11 of the Equal Treatment of Persons Order seems to indicate that an action could only be made on behalf of one complainant at a time. On the other hand, there is no specific prohibition on actions being brought on behalf of more than one complainant or of class actions. This cannot be verified due to the absence of case law.¹⁹⁵

6.3 Burden of proof (Article 8 Directive 2000/43, Article 10 Directive 2000/78)

In Malta, national law permits a partial shift of the burden of proof from the complainant to the respondent in the cases stipulated below.¹⁹⁶

The general principle under Maltese law is that the burden of proof lies on the person making the allegation.

However, the Employment and Industrial Relations Act 2002 introduced a shift in the principle of the burden of proof in a particular case concerning discrimination. Article 26(2)(a) of the Act provides that discriminatory treatment will include the engaging or selection of a person who is less qualified than a person of the opposite sex, unless the

¹⁹² Article 116 of the Constitution provides for *actio popularis* by providing that a right of action for a declaration that any law is invalid on any grounds, other than inconsistency with the provisions of Articles 33 to 45 of this Constitution, shall appertain to all persons without distinction and a person bringing such an action shall not be required to show any personal interest in support of his action. This provision therefore allows any person to challenge a law, other than those which provide for human rights, without having a personal interest.

¹⁹³ As also reiterated under Article 4 of the Exercise of Rights Conferred on Workers (Freedom of Movement) Regulations.

¹⁹⁴ Collective Proceedings Act, 2012, where class actions are specifically provided for in the case of competition issues.

¹⁹⁵ The equality bill provides specifically for NGOs bringing forward class actions.

¹⁹⁶ This was specifically provided for in the Court of Appeal's (Civil, Inferior) final judgment in *Attard Frederick v. Malta International Airport plc*, 27 May 2015, Ref. 19/2012. In its decision, the Industrial Tribunal had stated that the principle of 'who alleges must prove' subsists and therefore it is for the claimant to prove discrimination. The claimant argued that this was not the case, as Directive 2000/78/EC states clearly that the opposite is in fact the case and it is for the accused to prove that they did not commit the alleged discrimination. The Court of Appeal agreed with this interpretation but added that this subsists only once the person alleging the discrimination has established the facts which presume the discrimination in some way. Similarly, the court in *Pierre Tonna (217075M) v. Dr Duncan Borg Myatt, Joanna Calleja u ghal kull interess li jista' jkollha s-socjeta' Malta Freeport Terminals Ltd* (see section 12.2) referred to the relative legal provisions, in particular Regulation 10(3) of the Equal Treatment in Employment Regulations.

employer can prove that the action was based on acceptable grounds related to the nature of the work or on grounds related to previous work performance and experience.

A more general provision can be found under regulation 10(3) of the Equal Treatment in Employment Regulations, which provides that, in any proceedings brought by a person claiming discriminatory treatment¹⁹⁷ in respect of his or her employment, it will be sufficient for the claimant to establish facts from which it may be presumed that he or she has suffered discriminatory treatment and it will become incumbent on the defendant to prove that such treatment was justified in accordance with these Regulations, in the absence of which the tribunal or court will uphold the complaint of the claimant.¹⁹⁸ As per the definition of discriminatory treatment, this covers all cases of discrimination on grounds of religion or religious belief, disability, age, sex, sexual orientation, and racial or ethnic origin. It also includes harassment and sexual harassment, as well as any less favourable treatment based on a person's rejection of or submission to such conduct and instruction to discriminate against persons on grounds of sex.

Regulation 10(3) correctly implements what is laid down in both directives. Directives 2000/43/EC and 2000/78/EC further provide that it is up to the Member State whether or not to introduce rules of evidence which are more favourable to claimants.

Similarly, Article 13 of the Equal Treatment of Persons Order 2007 provides for the shifting of the burden of proof in that, if a person who considers that he or she has been discriminated against establishes, before a court or other competent authority, facts from which it may be presumed that there has been direct or indirect discrimination¹⁹⁹ based on racial or ethnic origin against him or her, the burden of proving that there has been no discrimination will lie on the person, establishment or entity against whom the allegation of discrimination is directed. This rule will also apply where the NCPE itself takes action to refer an allegation of discrimination to the competent court on behalf of the person discriminated against or where it intervenes in support of a person alleging discrimination and taking action for redress.²⁰⁰

Under Article 19(2) of the Equality for Men and Women Act 2003, the burden of proof has been shifted. The claimant or the person instituting the said proceedings is to establish, before the court or before such other competent authority, facts from which it may be presumed that he or she has been treated less favourably, directly or indirectly, and specifically on the basis of sex or because of family responsibilities, and the defendant or the person against whom such proceedings are brought must prove that there has been no breach of the principle of equal treatment, or that such less favourable treatment was justified in accordance with the provisions of this Act. Therefore, the claimant has to prove that they have been treated less favourably on the basis of sex, which would include sexual harassment, and/or family responsibilities.

¹⁹⁷ Discriminatory treatment refers to the grounds of religion or religious belief, disability, age, sex, sexual orientation, and racial or ethnic origin. It also includes (a) harassment and sexual harassment, as well as any less favourable treatment based on a person's rejection of or submission to such conduct; (b) instruction to discriminate against persons on grounds of sex; (c) any less favourable treatment of a woman related to pregnancy or maternity leave within the meaning of Directive 92/85/EEC; (d) in so far as the ground of sex is concerned, any less favourable treatment of a person who underwent or is undergoing gender reassignment, which for the purpose of these regulations shall mean where a person is considering or intends to undergo, or is undergoing or has undergone, a process, or part of a process, for the purpose of reassigning the person's sex by changing physiological or other attributes of sex.

¹⁹⁸ This mode of procedure on the burden of proof was followed in the case *Pierre Tonna (217075M) v. Dr Duncan Borg Myatt (44578M), Joanna Calleja (94790M) u ghal kull interess li jista' jkollha s-socjeta' Malta Freeport Terminals Ltd (C-27581)*.

¹⁹⁹ Discrimination in this Order is taken to include harassment and instructions to discriminate.

²⁰⁰ It appears that the NCPE have adopted the policy not to provide support to victims of discrimination in court but merely to limit their assistance to the receipt and investigation of complaints. This does not appear to be due to a lack of resources.

6.4 Victimisation (Article 9 Directive 2000/43, Article 11 Directive 2000/78)

In Malta, there are legal measures of protection against victimisation.

Article 28 of the Employment and Industrial Relations Act provides that if any person (a) files a complaint to the lawful authorities or initiates or participates in proceedings for redress on grounds of alleged breach of the provisions of the Act, or (b) discloses information, confidential or otherwise, to a designated public regulatory body, regarding alleged illegal or corrupt activities being committed by his or her employer or by people acting in the employer's name and interests, it is unlawful to victimise such a person for having acted accordingly.

This provision goes further than is required by Article 11 of the Employment Equality Directive, since it relates not only to breaches of the obligation of equal treatment, but to any breach of the provisions of the Act.

The wording of Article 28, particularly in the case mentioned in (b) above, appears to extend protection against victimisation to persons other than the complainant.

In line with the provisions of the Racial Equality Directive, Article 7 of the Equal Treatment of Persons Order provides that it will not be lawful to victimise any person for having made a complaint to the lawful authorities or for having initiated or participated in proceedings for redress on grounds of alleged breach of the provisions of these regulations, or for having disclosed information, confidential or otherwise, to a designated public regulatory body, regarding alleged acts of discrimination or discriminatory treatment.

Similarly, Part A of the Fourth Schedule to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act provides that it will not be lawful to victimise any person for having made a complaint to the lawful authorities or for having initiated or participated in proceedings for redress on grounds of alleged breach of the provisions of the Act, or for having disclosed information, confidential or otherwise, to a designated public regulatory body, regarding alleged discriminatory behaviour, activities or practices.

Furthermore, under Article 4 of the Equality for Men and Women Act, it will be unlawful for employers to discriminate, directly or indirectly, against a person in the arrangements made to determine or in determining who should be offered employment or in the terms and conditions on which the employment is offered or in the determination of who should be dismissed from employment. Furthermore, employers will also be deemed to have discriminated against a person if such employers alter the working conditions or the terms of employment of employees to the detriment of such employees after such employees have invoked any right accorded to them under this Act or claimed the performance in their favour of any obligation or duty under this Act.

Under the Exercise of Rights Conferred on Workers (Freedom of Movement) Regulations 2016, victimisation is defined as less favourable treatment for having made a complaint to the lawful authorities or for having initiated or participated in proceedings for redress on grounds of alleged breach of the provisions of these Regulations, or for having disclosed information, confidential or otherwise, to a designated public regulatory body regarding alleged illegal or corrupt activities being committed by any person falling within the scope of these Regulations or by persons acting in such a person's name and interests. Moreover, Regulation 7 provides that victimisation will constitute prohibited conduct under these Regulations and will be tantamount to discrimination under the Equality for Men and Women Act.

6.5 Sanctions and remedies (Article 15 Directive 2000/43, Article 17 Directive 2000/78)

a) Applicable sanctions in cases of discrimination – in law and in practice

Under Article 30 of the Employment and Industrial Relations Act, if the Industrial Tribunal²⁰¹ upholds a person's allegations that his or her employer is in breach of, or that the conditions of employment are in breach of, specific provisions, namely: Articles 26 (discrimination and gender equality), 27 (work of equal value), 28 (victimisation) or 29 (harassment), the tribunal may take such measures as it deems necessary, including the cancellation of any contract of service or of any clause in a contract or in a collective agreement which is discriminatory, and may order the payment of reasonable sums of money as compensation to the aggrieved party.²⁰² Furthermore, Article 48(4) of the Act provides that any regulation made under the Act may provide for any matter relating to liability for the observance of such regulations, and the persons who may be liable, and for any matter relating to the enforcement of the said regulations, including, but not limited to, the imposition of a fine not exceeding EUR 11 647 in respect of any contravention of, or failure to comply with, the provisions of such regulations.

Under Article 15 of the Equal Treatment of Persons Order, without prejudice to the provisions of Article 30 of the Employment and Industrial Relations Act, a person who alleges that any other person has committed in his or her regard any act which, under any of the provisions of the Order is unlawful, will have a right of action before the competent court of civil jurisdiction, requesting the court to order the defendant to desist from such unlawful acts and, where applicable, to order the payment of compensation for such damage suffered through such unlawful act.

Under Article 50 of the Employment and Training Services Act, any person guilty of an offence against, *inter alia*, Article 15 of the Act²⁰³ will be liable, on conviction, to pay a fine of not less than EUR 2 500 but not exceeding EUR 15 000.

Under Article 33(E) of the Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability) Act, any person who alleges that one or more substantive Convention rights have been, are being or are likely to be contravened, and is seeking a remedy of a pecuniary nature exceeding the sum of EUR 5 000, whether or not such remedy is sought in conjunction with any other form of relief, or is a person, other than a person with a disability on their own behalf, or by any person on behalf of any other person with disability for whom, or with whom, they are authorised to exercise legal capacity who has petitioned the Redress Panel, may, without prejudice to any other action with respect to the same matter that is lawfully applicable, apply to the First Hall of the Civil Court for redress, and the said Court will have exclusive jurisdiction in relation to any such matters, unless the discrimination alleged in such matters is of a multiple or intersectional nature in which case the Court will not have exclusive jurisdiction. Furthermore, under Article 33(A), any association, organisation or any legal entity that has a legitimate interest in ensuring that the provisions of the Act are complied with may institute proceedings for redress before the competent court or before the Redress Panel.

²⁰¹ In hearing and deciding cases of alleged discrimination, breaches of the principle of work of equal value, victimisation or harassment, the Industrial Tribunal shall be composed of a chairperson alone.

²⁰² It is to be noted that, under Article 1045(1) of the Civil Code (*Laws of Malta*, Chapter 16), damage which is to be made good by the person responsible for causing such damage shall consist of the actual loss which the act will have directly caused to the injured party, the expenses which the latter may have been compelled to incur in consequence of the damage, the loss of actual wages or other earnings and the loss of future earnings arising from any permanent incapacity, total or partial, which the act may have caused. Thus, only real damages could be awarded. There have been very few cases concerning violations of human rights where moral damages have been awarded.

²⁰³ This provision deals with the engagement of employees by the Government and Government-owned or -controlled bodies and companies.

In the Criminal Code, Article 82A imposes imprisonment for a term of 6 to 18 months for a person who has been convicted for using threatening, abusive or insulting words or behaviour, or displaying any written or printed material which is threatening, abusive or insulting, or has otherwise conducted himself in such a manner, with intent thereby to stir up violence or racial hatred against another person or group on the grounds of gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, colour, language, ethnic origin, religion or belief or political or other opinion, or whereby such violence or racial hatred is likely, having regard to all the circumstances, to be stirred up.²⁰⁴ Furthermore, the Criminal Code provides that any sentence for a punishment established by law will always be deemed to have been awarded without prejudice to the right of civil action.²⁰⁵

Under Regulation 5 of the Exercise of Rights Conferred on Workers (Freedom of Movement) Regulations, a person who alleges that any other person has committed in his or her regard any unlawful act under these regulations will, within 24 months of the alleged breach, have a right of action before the competent court of civil jurisdiction requesting the court to order the defendant to desist from the unlawful act and to order the payment of compensation for any damage suffered through the unlawful act.

- i National legislation does not specifically provide for preventive or socio-preventive sanctions in the relative provisions. Injunctions in the form of desist orders can be found. No specific reference is made to structural injunctions. The relevant sanctions in national legislation are those provided for above, which, in some instances, leave a wide discretion to the adjudicating authority in imposing sanctions.
 - ii There are no sanctions specific to cases of collective redress (*actio popularis* or class actions).
 - iii There do not appear to be any sanctions to deal with cases of mass discrimination, particularly as a result of the use of AI or automated systems.
- b) Pecuniary sanctions – maximum and average amounts

No maximum amount of compensation is laid down under Article 30 of the Employment and Industrial Relations Act; nor under Article 15 of the Equal Treatment of Persons Order; nor under Article 33E of the Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability) Act, and there have not been any reported decisions in this respect. These are two of the few instances where the victim can be awarded compensation since, in most cases, the perpetrator of the discriminatory treatment can be ordered to pay a fine. This fine is paid to the state.

c) Assessment of the sanctions

There have been no cases, whether before the courts or before the Ombudsman, on the amount of compensation to be awarded. Therefore, there is no publicly available evidence to show how effective, proportionate or dissuasive the available sanctions are. It is felt, though, especially with regard to the sanctions under Article 30 of the Employment and Industrial Relations Act and under Article 15 of the Equal Treatment of Persons Order, that since they do not provide for a cap on the damages which may be awarded, they are effective and sufficient.

²⁰⁴ 'Violence or racial hatred' means 'violence or racial hatred against a person or against a group of persons in Malta defined by reference to gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, colour, language, national or ethnic origin, citizenship, religion or belief or political or other opinion'.

²⁰⁵ Criminal Code, Article 26(1).

d) Enforcement and monitoring of the implementation of sanctions

- i. Courts and other adjudicating bodies' mechanisms to monitor or enforce their decisions

Once the courts give a final decision, the sanctions imposed must be complied with. If the said sanction requires the payment of a sum of money and this is not paid, separate action may be taken to enforce the said payment and, in the case of default, further action will be taken by the courts to enforce the decision.

- ii. Possibility for courts and other adjudicating bodies to retain jurisdiction after sanctions have been imposed

When a final decision is delivered, action for the same claim cannot be taken again. When procedure allows for the lodging of an appeal, this is usually heard and decided upon by a different court/adjudicating board.

- iii. Further steps/measures that courts or adjudicating bodies can take in case of non-compliance with the sanction

Where a sanction has not been complied with, action can be taken by the complainant to enforce a decision received in their favour. This would result in enforcement action being taken, – for example, in the form of warrants. Furthermore, in certain instances, a fine that is not paid can be converted into a term of imprisonment.

- iv. The burden of enforcing sanctions

Claims for the enforcement of sanctions will be made by the claimant. However, expenses relative thereto will be added to those imposed on the person not complying with the decision once the claim is upheld.

7 BODY/BODIES FOR THE PROMOTION OF EQUAL TREATMENT (Article 13 Directive 2000/43)²⁰⁶

7.I.1 National equality bodies

a) General 'architecture' of equality bodies

There is one principal equality body, namely the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE), and two other relevant bodies, namely CRPD Malta and the Ombudsman.

By virtue of the provisions of the Equal Treatment of Persons Order 2007, the remit of the Commissioner for the Promotion of Equality for Men and Women covers the promotion of equal treatment irrespective of racial or ethnic origin within the meaning of the provisions of the Order and issues of compliance with, and the enforcement of rights under, the provisions of the Order, which functions are exercised with the assistance of the NCPE as constituted under Article 11 of the Equality for Men and Women Act.²⁰⁷ It is to be noted that as at the date of the writing of this report the last annual report to be published by the NCPE is that of 2024.

Malta has not yet transposed Directive 2024/1499 into national law, but the NCPE has been actively working towards and promoting the adoption of this EU Directive, having welcomed its approval and commended the efforts of all those involved in achieving this milestone. It expressed its anticipation for the transposition of the directive into Maltese legislation and its subsequent implementation, as this will enhance the NCPE's effectiveness in ensuring that equal treatment is truly enjoyed by everyone.²⁰⁸

There are two other relevant bodies dealing with discriminations issues: CRPD Malta (for disability-related issues) and the Ombudsman (for action taken by public authorities). These bodies complement the work of the NCPE on non-discrimination and equality.

In terms of Article 21 of the Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability) Act, there is a Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD Malta, formerly the NCPD), composed of the Commissioner for the Rights of Persons with Disability and the Council for the Rights of Persons with Disability. The competencies of this Commission are wide, and they clearly serve to combat any form of disability discrimination, in particular by working towards the elimination of discrimination against persons with disabilities; carrying out general investigations with a view to determining whether the provisions of this Act are being complied with; investigating such complaints as may be made to them of failure to comply with any provision of this Act in an individual case and, where it seems appropriate, conciliate in relation to such complaints, or otherwise take relevant action in respect of enforcement; and providing, where and as appropriate, assistance, to persons with disabilities in enforcing their rights under this Act, as elaborated further in the sections below.²⁰⁹

Similarly, on the basis of the Ombudsman Act 1995, should a person feel that he or she has been subjected to discriminatory treatment (particularly on the basis of racial or ethnic

²⁰⁶ Assessments and views concerning compliance with EU law throughout Section 7, notably for Directive 2024/1499 whose transposition deadline is 19 June 2026 after the cut off date for this report, reflect the author's opinion.

²⁰⁷ Although the Commission is generally referred to as the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (even on its website), Article 11 of Chapter 456 of the *Laws of Malta* (under which the Commission is constituted) states that, 'The Prime Minister shall upon the advice of the Minister appoint a Commission to be called the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality for Men and Women (hereinafter referred to as 'the Commission')....'

²⁰⁸ No drafts appear to have been published on this matter.

²⁰⁹ Previously, CRPD Malta was also responsible for monitoring and implementing the provisions of the UN Convention. This responsibility and similar jurisdiction are now vested in the Directorate for Disability Issues and the UNCRPD National Coordination Mechanism under Article 5 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2021.

origin) at the hands of the Government of Malta or any statutory body or partnership in which the Government or said body has effective control, or at the hands of any local council or its committees, including officers and staff members, this person can ask the Ombudsman to investigate the matter in accordance with the Ombudsman Act 1995. The complainant is to file his or her complaint before the Ombudsman, who will investigate the case and make recommendations to the Government. Such recommendations are not binding, however.

Access to all bodies is available to all and on an equal basis for all. Therefore, any person who feels aggrieved may file a claim before one of the aforementioned bodies and seek a remedy. The relative laws and regulations clearly provide for the procedure to follow in such a case and the possible outcome of such procedures.

- b) Designated body for the promotion of equal treatment irrespective of racial/ethnic origin according to Article 13 of the Racial Equality Directive

As detailed above, the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE) is the designated body. By virtue of Act IX of 2012, which amended the Equality for Men and Women Act, the remit of the Commission was extended to cover discrimination based on sexual orientation, age, religion or belief, racial or ethnic origin and gender identity. It was extended again in 2015 to include discrimination based on gender expression or sex characteristics, and it was further extended in 2016 to cover the exercise of rights by workers moving within the EU.²¹⁰ The scope of the NCPE is intended to be widened further so that it will become a national human rights and equality commission (NHREC),²¹¹ acting as a national human rights institution as well as an equality body, in accordance with the provisions established by European directives on equal treatment. Henceforth, the NCPE will be able not only to build on work which has already been identified, but to expand and strengthen its work and responsibilities in the field of human rights and equality.

People can communicate with the NCPE in various ways including by telephone, email and their social media platforms which are accessible by all persons. Where preferred or where persons do not have access to IT channels, they may visit the offices of the NCPE which are centrally located and are fully compliant with the Accessibility Standards for all in the Built Environment. There are also a number of reserved parking bays for blue badge holders and ramps/lifts are available as required.

Information is available in alternative formats such as easy-to-read documents and accessible PDFs and are written in clear and concise language. Videos that contain spoken English are subtitled in Maltese and videos that contain spoken Maltese are subtitled in English. Video clips also include inset sign language interpretation. Publications are normally published in both English and Maltese.

People lodging complaints of discrimination are given the choice of physical, online, or telephone meetings depending on their availability and preference. Assistance is provided to alleged victims of discrimination when lodging a complaint. Both entities have experienced officers in interacting with as well as supporting clients with disabilities having various requirements, such as using simple language to explain matters. Arrangements are made to accommodate clients according to their support requirements e.g. the provision of sign language interpretation.

²¹⁰ By virtue of Legal Notice 173 of 2016, entitled 'The exercise of rights conferred on Workers (Freedom of Movement) Regulations'. People who feel that they have encountered or are encountering obstacles to exercising their rights, or who have had or are having their right to free movement restricted without justification, shall have a right to file a complaint with the Commissioner, even after the relationship in which the obstacle or restriction is alleged to have occurred has ended, and the Commissioner shall initiate the proceedings prescribed in the Act or in any other applicable law or regulation.

²¹¹ Legislation is pending parliamentary discussion and approval.

Services provided by the NCPE are free of charge, except for training given to private companies which are normally delivered at a minimal fee.

7.I.2 Political, economic and social context of the designated body

The designated body, the NCPE, is supported by the Government and by other national institutions. There has not been any political hostility towards or interference in the governance of the designated body.

There is nothing to show that the Government has substantially varied the budget allocated to the designated body. This has remained stable in recent years. Popular debate has always been supportive of equality and diversity and of the work of the designated body.

7.I.3 Institutional architecture

In Malta, the designated body does not form part of a body with multiple mandates.

The NCPE 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. The Commission therefore is mandated and dedicates its resources to the equality/anti-discrimination mandate.

Given its mandate in the field of equality and non-discrimination, the Commission has widespread visibility in the field.

7.I.4 Status of the designated body – general independence and resources

a) Status of the body

- Separate or other legal status or personality:

The NCPE is an autonomous body. It was officially set up and started operating in January 2004. The Commission has a legal personality, separate from that of the Government, and its judicial representation rests in the Commissioner.

- Selection of governing body:

It is composed of a chairperson, who is the Commissioner, and six other members, at least three of whom must be women and one of the members must be a person with disability. No quotas are prescribed for members coming from a particular ethnic minority background. All the members of the Commission are appointed by the Prime Minister from among such persons appearing to him or her to be best suited to dealing with issues of equality for men and women and/or administrative issues connected therewith. Every member of the Commission will hold office for a term of two years and may be re-appointed at the end of their term of office. The Prime Minister may terminate the appointment of members of the Commission if he or she is satisfied that: (a) without the consent of the Commission, its members failed to attend the meetings of the Commission during a continuous period of six months; (b) its members are undischarged bankrupt persons, or have made an arrangement with their creditors, or are insolvent or have been found guilty of any voluntary crime against the person; or (c) its members are incapable of carrying out their duties.

- Sources of funding:

It is funded from funds allocated to it by the minister for the promotion of equality out of funds voted by Parliament for activities under the ministry or out of funds that may be donated or allocated to it from other sources in Malta or abroad.

- Powers to recruit and manage staff:

The NCPE has the power to recruit and manage its own staff.

- Accountability:

The Commission is answerable to the minister responsible for equality.

b) Independence of the body

The dependence of the NCPE on Government funding as well as the appointment of officials being done by the state could be seen to impinge on the independence of the body. However, the NCPE is deemed to be independent and autonomous. To date, nothing has ever been published to infer that such independence is hampered or not recognised, or that the said entity lacks sufficient and adequate resources to effectively address all complaints which are brought before it. Likewise, it is evident from the reports detailing the work that the Commission carries out each year that its work covers all areas of its remit. The NCPE not only deals with complaints which are brought before it, but carries out research, provides consultancy services and carries out investigations within its remit.

c) Resources

- The annual budget of the body:

During the 2024 financial year,²¹² the NCPE received Government funding amounting to EUR 7 500 000 (2023 – EUR 640 000). Other income²¹³ amounted to EUR 2 414.²¹⁴

- The share of the annual budget dedicated to the equality body mandate (if applicable):

All funding is allocated to the equality body mandate.

- The total number of staff of the body:

In 2024, the NCPE had a staff complement of 14,²¹⁵ headed by a Commissioner, a Commission of seven members and an Executive Director.

- The number of staff dedicated to the equality body mandate (if applicable):

All staff are dedicated to the equality body mandate.

There is no publicly available information to suggest that the NCPE is not adequately resourced or that there are backlogs in its work to suggest that more resources are required.

²¹² The figures for 2025 had not been published by the cut-off date for this report (1 January 2026).

²¹³ There is no publicly available information as to what 'other income' includes, but it would usually comprise small incidental receipts, such as bank interest.

²¹⁴ The budget for 2025 had not been published by the cut-off date for this report (1 January 2026).

²¹⁵ Figures for 2025 had not been published by the cut-off date for this report (1 January 2026).

7.I.5 Grounds and fields covered by the designated body

The remit of the NCPE relates to discrimination issues based on sex, family responsibilities, sexual orientation, age, religion or belief, racial or ethnic origin, gender identity, gender expression or sex characteristics, actual or potential pregnancy or childbirth, and the freedom of movement of workers within the EU. The Commission deals with migrant issues linked with discrimination based on racial or ethnic origin and deals with such issues on a par with any form of discrimination suffered or alleged by any persons in Malta. There is no publicly available information on how the employees within the Commission manage their work internally, but it does not seem that there are different departments or service desks dealing with the different areas. Likewise, there is no evidence to show that the Commission dedicates particular or greater attention to one or more areas.

The current primary task of the NCPE is to monitor the implementation of the Act to promote equality for men and women, to promote equal treatment irrespective of racial or ethnic origin, to promote equality in spheres where it may be lacking and to ensure compliance with the provisions of the Equal Treatment of Persons Order. The Commission seeks to ensure that Maltese society is a society free from any form of discrimination in all sectors including education, housing, provision of goods and services, and employment. It has the competence to provide assistance to victims, to conduct surveys and publish reports and to issue recommendations on discrimination issues.

7.I.6 Competences of the designated body – and their independent exercise

The current competencies²¹⁶ of the Commission include the following:

- to investigate complaints of a more particular or individual character to determine whether the provisions of the Act and the Order are being contravened with respect to the complainant and, where deemed appropriate, to mediate with regard to such complaints;
- to inquire into and advise or make determinations on any matter relating to equality between men and women as may be referred to it by the minister;
- to provide assistance, where and as appropriate, to people suffering from discrimination in enforcing their rights under the Act and the Order;
- to keep under review the working of the Act and the Order and, where deemed necessary, at the request of the minister or otherwise, to submit proposals for the amendment or substitution of their provisions; and
- to perform such other function as may be assigned by law or such other functions as may be assigned by the minister.

The NCPE has been vested with the required authority to act in an independent manner. This independence allows it to act effectively. It also has the required competent resources to be able to act effectively.

a) Independent assistance to victims

In Malta, the designated body has the competence to provide independent assistance to victims in bringing forward and defending their claims. It may assist people in bringing forward actions before the competent judicial authorities, including by assisting with investigations and making opinions. Under Article 12(j) of the Equality for Men and Women Act, the body is empowered to provide independent assistance, where and as appropriate, to persons suffering from discrimination in enforcing their rights under the Act. The law does not stipulate the form that such assistance is to take, so this would include assistance in the filing of a complaint and bringing forward a complaint. Such assistance to victims is therefore exercised by the Commission and no other third party is brought in unless by the

²¹⁶ Article 12 of the Equality of Men and Women Act and Article 10 of the Equal Treatment of Persons Order.

victim. The Commission may furthermore intervene in judicial proceedings on behalf of or in support of a complainant but it appears to be an unwritten practice that the NCPE have adopted not to provide support to victims of discrimination in court but merely to limit their assistance to the receipt and investigation of complaints.

b) Independent surveys and reports

In Malta, the designated body has the competence to conduct independent surveys and publish independent reports.²¹⁷ The designated body publishes regular reports with detailed information on its work, in particular in its annual reports, which set out in detail, amongst other things, the number of claims received, investigated and closed, including the relevant statistics. The body's most recent publication, published in 2024,²¹⁸ sets out the work carried out in the previous year with reference to the different areas of competence.²¹⁹

The NCPE has been vested with the required authority to act in an independent manner. This independence allows it to act effectively. It also has the required competent resources to be able to act effectively. In cases where it requires additional expertise and resources, it teams up with other organisations. The NCPE does engage in strategic planning and publishes their work in an annual report which lays down the strategies adopted and activities done on specific aspects of their mandate and that adopted by the central Government and on an international level.

c) Recommendations

In Malta, the designated body has the competence to issue independent recommendations on discrimination issues. The body is seen as a watchdog and does express itself, even publicly through the media, on matters which fall within its remit.²²⁰ Input is provided by the NCPE to Government laws, policies and strategies issued for public consultation. In its review, the NCPE evaluates the impact of the proposed actions on different social groups, checks whether the document contains provisions that are directly or indirectly discriminatory, and proposes the integration of measures that can combat discrimination and achieve equality in practice.²²¹

In 2024, following its review of the National Education Strategy 2024–2030, the NCPE recommended, among other things, systematic gender equality training for educators. It also called for awareness of artificial intelligence (AI) to be part of efforts to improve digital literacy and policies ensuring safe educational environments. In its input to the National Strategy for Poverty Reduction and Social Inclusion (2025–2035), the NCPE recommended introducing gender budgeting, improving parental leave policies and ensuring free access to childcare for all children. It also highlighted the risks of AI-driven discrimination and the need for digital literacy.

In 2023, for 'Malta's Sustainable Development Strategy for 2050', the NCPE outlined the benefits of an intersectional approach, the promotion of gender-inclusive language that challenges stereotypes, and the need to address vertical and horizontal segregations in the labour market. In the feedback on the public consultation held in preparation for a second 'National Integration Policy and Action Plan', several areas requiring policymakers' attention in order to foster integration were highlighted. These included spaces that are

²¹⁷ Equal Treatment of Persons Order, Article 10, and Equality for Men and Women Act, Article 12.

²¹⁸ The 2025 report had not been published by the cut-off date for this report (1 January 2026).

²¹⁹ For example, in 2023 the NCPE launched the Equal Pay Tool designed to assess equal pay for the same work and work of equal value between women and men, the tool is an important step towards addressing pay inequalities particularly in the context of the new EU Directive on Pay Transparency.

²²⁰ Equal Treatment of Persons Order, Article 10, and Equality for Men and Women Act, Article 12.

²²¹ Feedback may take the form of proposed amendments in legislation or comments when a law may be open for public consultation. Reference to same may be found in the NCPE annual reports.

experiencing migration-related challenges, language, work and the workplace, schools and education, and migration legal statuses.

Several proposals were also put forward by the NCPE as part of its input to the 2025 Pre-Budget Financial Document.²²²

Similar contribution was also made by the NCPE on an international level, particularly in connection with the two proposed directives on standards of equality bodies. Throughout 2024, the NCPE gave feedback on various updates and proposals during several rounds of debate in the Working Party on Social Questions. The NCPE Commissioner in 2024 continued to participate in the Equinet Project on Standards for Equality Bodies, while the NCPE participated in the working groups on communication, gender equality, policy formation, research and data collection; in the clusters on age and artificial intelligence; and in the pilot project on standards for equality bodies.

d) Prevention, promotion and awareness-raising

The NCPE carries out awareness-raising and promotional campaigns on social media and other types of media to increase education, training and awareness of the rights of all. Through Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, the NCPE raises awareness on equality and promotes the latest news related to the Commission's work. The NCPE website²²³ is updated regularly with the latest publications, events, media contributions and other material related to the NCPE's work. These fall within the competencies of the body and, judging from the amount of work done each day, as highlighted in the NCPE's annual reports, this is done in an effective and independent manner. In so doing it also cooperates with other civil society organisations but also uses other methods of collaboration in participating in initiatives both locally and on the international level.

e) Other competences

The NCPE have worked hard in establishing a strong media presence through different means of communication which is crucial for the dissemination of information related to equality and the NCPE's remit. The NCPE's website – ncpe.gov.mt – was revamped and updated to enhance its functionality and the user experience. The website serves as a dynamic platform to highlight the most recent events, articles, publications and other work carried out by the NCPE. The publications and resources featured on the website serve as a valuable source of information for researchers and other stakeholders. The Complaints and Information section is a resource for potential victims of discrimination, offering the relevant guidance and support. Employers interested in pursuing the Equality Mark can access information about the certification process.

Press statements are designed to notify media houses of the NCPE's positions and work, ranging from coverage of current issues to events organised by the NCPE throughout the year. As in previous years, in 2024 the NCPE continued to use traditional media, making a total of 56 contributions on a variety of topics, including employers' legal obligation to protect employees from sexual harassment, newly adopted EU directives on standards for equality bodies and the illegality of discrimination in access to housing. In addition, press statements highlighted key points from the NCPE conferences, including the International Women's Day Conference 2024 and the NCPE Annual Conference 2024.²²⁴

A robust social media presence was maintained throughout 2024, with 412 posts on Facebook, Instagram and X (formerly Twitter) in both English and Maltese. These posts contained infographics, posters, photos and videos, sharing stories, quotes and statistics related to equality matters. Moreover, in 2024, the NCPE opened a LinkedIn account to

²²² No public information is available as to whether they were approved or not.

²²³ See: <https://ncpe.gov.mt/>.

²²⁴ Data for 2025 is not yet published.

further enhance its reach and engagement. Social media has been instrumental in shaping the way people communicate in today's digital age.²²⁵

The 16th edition of the NCPE newsletter *Equality Matters* marked the 20th anniversary of the NCPE and reflected on the NCPE's milestones and achievements. It explored how the NCPE's remit has widened over the years and delved into its core aspects, including the investigation of complaints and promotion of equality through policy review and recommendations, research, awareness-raising campaigns and training. The newsletter celebrated the progress made and explored the work that lies ahead. It was posted on the NCPE's social media platforms and disseminated to different stakeholders. Throughout 2024, a variety of informative leaflets were created and distributed during conferences organised by the NCPE, events in which the NCPE actively participated and training sessions for various groups.

7.I.7 Legal standing of the designated body

In Malta, the designated body does have legal standing to:

- bring discrimination complaints on behalf of identified victims to court;
- bring discrimination complaints *ex officio* to court;
- intervene in legal cases concerning discrimination, for example, as an *amicus curiae*.²²⁶

If it appears to the Commissioner that people who wish to make a complaint require assistance to formulate that complaint, the Commissioner is to take or order the taking of such reasonable steps as may be necessary to assist such people in making the complaint. Moreover, should the Commission become aware of any alleged discriminatory act or practice hindering equality within society, the Commissioner may deem it necessary to initiate *ex officio* investigations on any matter falling within NCPE's remit. The NCPE does not appear to have legal standing to bring discrimination complaints on behalf of non-identified victims in court.

The Commission may furthermore intervene in judicial proceedings on behalf of or in support of a complainant but there appears to be an unwritten practice that the NCPE have adopted not to provide support to victims of discrimination in court but merely to limit their assistance to the receipt and investigation of complaints.

7.I.8 Dispute resolution

a) Quasi-judicial functions

In Malta, the designated body is not a quasi-judicial institution.

There is no separate quasi-judicial body/institution competent to decide on discrimination cases.

The NCPE cannot issue binding enforceable decisions. It can issue non-binding opinions.

i) Power to impose sanctions

Since NCPE is not a quasi-judicial body it does not have the power to impose sanctions.

ii) Nature and level of sanctions that can be imposed

²²⁵ See: <https://www.facebook.com/NCPE.Malta/>; @ncpe.malta on x.com and Instagram. Data for 2025 was not available by the cut-off date for this report (1 January 2026).

²²⁶ It is noted that the NCPE does not have legal standing to bring to court discrimination complaints on behalf of non-identified victims.

No sanctions can be imposed.

iii) Possibility to appeal (to the body itself or to courts)

Since NCPE is not a quasi-judicial body, there are no appeals.

iv) Enforcement of binding decisions

NCPE cannot issue binding enforceable decisions.

v) Implementation of non-binding opinions

NCPE can issue non-binding opinions. There are no statistics which show how opinions of the body are implemented or if they are in all cases. What is clear is that the NCPE does issue opinions on the complaints brought before it after carrying out the necessary investigations.

The NCPE is not a quasi-judicial body. Following collection of all possible evidence upon receipt of a complaint, the NCPE Commissioner issues an opinion outlining whether it is of the opinion that there was a breach of the Equality for Men and Women Act. The opinion is then sent to the complainant and to the respondent. The Commissioner will submit opinions to the Commissioner of Police in cases of criminal offence. It may also refer the case to the Industrial Tribunal or a civil court, as well as offering mediation between the parties. Therefore, the Commission receives complaints and also commences *ex officio* investigations on a regular basis, as detailed in its annual reports and other publications. Actions brought before the national courts are concluded with binding decisions from which appeals may be lodged within the parameters stipulated at law.

b) Amicable settlements

In terms of Article 12(h) of the Equality for Men and Women Act, the Commission has the power to independently investigate complaints of a more particular or individual character to determine whether the provisions of the Act are being contravened with respect to the complainant and, where deemed appropriate, to mediate with regard to such complaints. Mediation is carried out by the body.

7.I.9 Procedural safeguards

There do not appear to be any procedural limitations or safeguards other than for the fact that once a complaint is investigated by the NCPE this cannot be investigated further by the NCPE.

The Equality for Men and Women Act²²⁷ constituting the equality body and the regulations which regulate the carrying out of investigations by the said body do not stipulate how the NCPE, as the equality body, may use any information they may have gathered while carrying out an investigation into alleged discrimination. It is empowered to receive complaints and investigate the same. It is also empowered to refer the matter to a competent court or to the Industrial Tribunal for redress and in so doing may, as it deems appropriate, join in and become a party to the suit. The provisions of the Equal Treatment of Persons Order,²²⁸ subsidiary legislation issued under the enabling Act, makes reference under Article 13, which deals with the burden of proof, and under Article 16, which deals with assistance given to the complainant, to the intervention of the Commission in support of a person alleging discrimination and the Commission engaging itself either on behalf or in support of the complainant, respectively. The law however stops short of providing

²²⁷ Equality for Men and Women Act 2003, Act I of 2003.

²²⁸ Equal Treatment of Persons Order, 2007, Legal Notice 85 of 2007.

whether the equality body may make use of information gathered in the course of an investigation in providing such assistance before judicial bodies. Nonetheless, it appears that the NCPE have adopted the practice not to provide support to victims of discrimination in court but merely to limit their assistance to the receipt and investigation of complaints. Where the complaint constitutes an offence, a report may be made to the Commissioner of Police or in other instances to the competent civil court or to the Industrial Tribunal for redress.

7.I.10 Data collection by the designated body

a) Registration of complaints and decisions

In Malta, the NCPE registers the number of complaints of discrimination made and opinions (by ground, field, type of discrimination, etc.). Statistics for the complaints investigated are not published on a regular basis, but they are kept by the NCPE and fed into reports on particular aspects of equality and conveyed to the National Statistics Office as and when required. In its annual reports,²²⁹ the NCPE merely makes reference to the number of complaints received and splits them up by gender of the complainant, whether they concern direct or indirect discrimination and according to the grounds on which the complaints are based. The latest figures available are from 2024, as the 2025 report had not been published at the time of writing.

b) Equality data collection

In Malta, the designated body does not collect general equality data.²³⁰

The National Statistics Office collects data on a national level which is published.

There is no publicly available information as to whether the NCPE receives data or has access to data collected by others and if so by whom.

7.I.11 Roma and Travellers

There are no Roma or Travellers in Malta.

²²⁹ Available at: <https://ncpe.gov.mt/our-publications-and-resources/ncpes-annual-reports/>.

²³⁰ In 2024, the NCPE Commissioner continued participating in the Equinet Project on Standards for Equality Bodies, which discussed the progress of the directives, gave regular feedback on the ongoing debate and worked to develop a set of indicators on resources.

7.II BODY FOR THE PROMOTION OF EQUAL TREATMENT FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

7.II.1 Body for the promotion of equal treatment for persons with disabilities

In terms of Article 21 of the Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability) Act,²³¹ there is a Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD Malta, formerly the NCPD), composed of the Commissioner for the Rights of Persons with Disability and the Council for the Rights of Persons with Disability. CRPD was established in 1987.

7.II.2 Political, economic and social context of the body

The body, CRPD Malta, is supported by the Government and by other national institutions. There has not been any political hostility towards or interference in the governance of the designated body.

There is nothing to show that the Government has substantially varied the budget allocated to the body. This has remained stable in recent years.

Popular debate has always been supportive of the work of the body.

7.II.3 Institutional architecture

In Malta, the body does not form part of a body with multiple mandates.

7.II.4 Status of the body – general independence and resources

a) Status of the body

- Separate or other legal status or personality;

CRPD Malta is an autonomous body. The Commission has a legal personality, separate from that of the Government, and its judicial representation rests in the Commissioner.

- Selection of governing body;

The Commission is made up of the Commissioner for the Rights of Persons with Disability and a Council for the Rights of Persons with Disability. The Prime Minister, after consultation with the Minister responsible for the disability sector, appoints the Commissioner for the Rights of Persons with Disability, who as far as possible shall be a person with disability. The Council for the Rights of Persons with Disability appointed by the Minister aids the Commissioner in the exercise of their duties, made up of the Commissioner who shall preside and not less than fourteen members²³² appointed by the Minister. The Commissioner shall hold office for a period of three years and shall be eligible for a reappointment upon termination of such period. The Commissioner may at any time be removed or suspended from office by the Prime Minister after consultation with the Minister for the reasons of proven inability to exercise their functions as a Commissioner or proven misbehaviour or an unjustified absence of more than fourteen consecutive days or twenty-eight days within a period of twelve months. The members of the Council shall hold such position for three years and shall be eligible for reappointment as members when the period of such office terminates.

²³¹ Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability) Act, 10 February 2000, Chapter 413 of the Laws of Malta.

²³² Nine members must be representatives of voluntary organisations acting on behalf of persons with a disability, one member must be a representative of the University of Malta, one must represent entities that service persons with a disability, one must be a representative of residential homes for persons with a disability, and one member each is nominated by the Government and the Opposition. In addition, at least half the total number of members of the Council must be persons with a disability or family members of persons with a disability who cannot represent themselves.

- Sources of funding;

It is funded from funds allocated to it by the Minister for disability. At least two months prior to the end of its financial year, the Commission submits to the Minister, a business plan (including a financial plan) covering the proposed activities of the Commission during the following financial year. If approved by the Minister and by the Minister for Finance, such business plan shall be the approved budget of the Commission.

- Powers to recruit and manage staff;

CRPD Malta has the power to recruit and manage its own staff.

- Accountability;

The Commission is answerable to the minister responsible for disability, in that, should any deficiencies be identified in the operation of the said Commission it would be the Minister who would assume ultimate responsibility.

b) Independence of the body

The dependence of CRPD Malta on Government funding as well as the appointment by the State of the Commissioner and the members of the Commission could be seen to impinge on the independence of the body. However, CRPD Malta is nonetheless deemed to be independent and autonomous. To date, nothing has ever been published to infer that such independence is hampered or not recognised, or that the said entity lacks sufficient and adequate resources to effectively address all complaints which are brought before it. Likewise, it is evident from the reports detailing the work that the Commission carries out each year that its work covers all areas of its remit.

c) Resources

- The annual budget of the body;

In 2024, CRPD Malta was allocated a government budget of EUR 1 700 000.

- The share of the annual budget dedicated to the equality body mandate (if applicable);

All of the above budget was allocated to CRPD Malta.

- The total number of staff of the body;

With a staff complement of 43 persons, 19 staff members are registered persons with disabilities. Impairments range from visual to hearing, from intellectual to physical and also include invisible disabilities and persons on the autism spectrum.

- The number of staff dedicated to the equality body mandate (if applicable);

All staff members are dedicated to the equality body mandate.

There is no publicly available information to suggest that CRPD Malta is not adequately resourced or that there are backlogs in its work to suggest that more resources are required. In 2024, additional staff were recruited to support investigations, project management and research.

7.II.5 Grounds and fields covered by the body

The competencies of this Commission are wide, and they clearly serve to combat any form of disability discrimination, in particular by working towards the elimination of discrimination against persons with disabilities; carrying out general investigations with a view to determining whether the provisions of the Act are being complied with; investigating such complaints as may be made to them of failure to comply with any provision of the Act in an individual case and, where it seems appropriate, conciliate in relation to such complaints, or otherwise take relevant action in respect of enforcement; and providing, where and as appropriate, assistance, to persons with disabilities in enforcing their rights under the said Act. CRPD Malta was also responsible for the monitoring and implementation of the provisions of the UN Convention. Since 2021, this responsibility and similar jurisdiction is now vested in the Directorate for Disability Issues and the UNCRPD National Coordination Mechanism under Article 5 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2021.

An important function of CRPD Malta is in the field of compliance. The Compliance Unit is responsible for monitoring, auditing, giving advice and certifying applications that are made for the development of buildings that are open to the public. The Unit works with architects and developers to ensure that the plans that are eventually approved are accessible for persons with disabilities. The Unit's role is primarily in receiving planning applications from the Planning Authority for consideration on whether they are compliant with the Access for All Design Standards. Where the plans are not compliant, the technical experts in the Unit prepare an audit report showing the amendments that need to be made in order for the development to be approved. In the case of new buildings, the applicant is required to obtain a certificate from CRPD Malta stating that the plans are compliant with the Access for All Design Guidelines before the Planning Authority issues a compliance certificate to allow for water and electricity to be connected to the development. In cases where the building cannot be rendered accessible to all or be fully accessible to all according to the Access for All Design Standards, the applicant may appear before the Test of Reasonableness Board (TORB).²³³

With the implementation of the European Accessibility Act in Malta in 2025 and the introduction of the Accessibility Measures (European Accessibility Act) Regulations,²³⁴ the CRPD – including the Compliance Unit – took on a broader role in market surveillance of accessibility standards for goods and services, beyond just buildings. Under this new regime, the CRPD monitors compliance with accessibility obligations²³⁵ in areas such as banking, transport and telecommunications, among others, working with authorities such as the Malta Competition and Consumer Affairs Authority (MCCAA) and the Malta Communications Authority (MCA), and in line with the EU and Malta's Disability Strategy 2021–30.

In fulfilling its mission, CRPD Malta works in order to eliminate any form of direct or indirect discrimination against persons with disability and their families, while providing them with the necessary assistance and support as detailed above in the fields of application covered by the UNCRPD. CRPD Malta's first ever strategy focused on five strategic priorities:

- Priority One – Protecting, promoting, and monitoring the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

²³³ The Test of Reasonableness Board (TORB) operates within the framework of Article 20 of the Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability) Act and is responsible for determining the reasonableness of any action to be undertaken by any person in the fulfilment of the provisions of the Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability) Act or the UNCRPD, including any alteration, change and/or provision of services and facilities and whether such actions could be undertaken without unjustifiable hardship.

²³⁴ Legal Notice 214 of 2022, which came into force in June 2025, apart from some provisions, which are due to come into force in June 2027.

²³⁵ The CRPD has signed Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with entities such as the MCCAA and the MCA, which will support the Commission in fulfilling its oversight responsibilities under the Directive.

- Priority Two – Raising awareness on disability rights and obligations.
- Priority Three – Grassroots empowerment and strengthening the voice of persons with disability.
- Priority Four – Community-based independent living and deinstitutionalisation.
- Priority Five – Capacity building.

The Commission therefore is mandated and dedicates its resources to the curbing, control and elimination of disability discrimination. Given its mandate in this area, the Commission has widespread visibility.

7.II.6 Competences of the body – and their independent exercise

a) Independent assistance to victims

CRPD Malta receives complaints from persons with disability and their family members who feel that they are being discriminated against on the grounds of disability and hence there are violations of the provisions of the relative law. Furthermore, CRPD Malta is legally empowered to commence investigations into a case on its own initiative. These investigations are carried out by the Investigations Unit, the unit specialised in receiving and investigating disability discrimination complaints. Whenever it launches an investigation, this Unit tries to reach a speedy and amicable solution for the benefit of the person with disability as, in most cases, discrimination is the result of a lack of awareness of the rights of persons with disabilities. However, the Unit does not shy away from taking matters further should the need arise and, if need be, it also pursues the matter before the Courts of Justice. CRPD Malta does not only receive complaints, helps with investigation and possible mediation but also assists with enforcement, where and as appropriate, assisting persons with disabilities in enforcing their rights under the Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability) Act. There is no evidence to suggest that CRPD Malta does not effectively carry out its functions or is not free to exercise such with independence.

Access to CRPD Malta is available to all and on an equal basis for all. Therefore, any person who feels aggrieved may file a claim before the afore-mentioned body and seek a remedy. The relative law and regulations clearly provide for the procedure to follow in such a case and the possible outcome of such procedures.

People can communicate with CRPD Malta in various ways including by telephone, email and their social media platforms which are accessible by all persons. CRPD Malta also promotes the use of Short Message Service (SMS), a preferred option for deaf people. The websites are accessible comprising all the tools necessary for independent navigation. There are instances where the website provides the possibility for people to submit forms through the website itself, so they do not have to download, print out, scan, email or post forms. An example of this is the Blue Badge Abuse Form on CRPD website. People can also communicate with CRPD Malta via its social platforms namely Facebook, Twitter (being rebranded to X), TikTok, LinkedIn and Instagram. CRPD Malta also has a YouTube channel. The messages received via these platforms are monitored and passed on to officers accordingly.

Where preferred or where persons do not have access to IT channels, they may visit the offices of CRPD Malta which are centrally located and are fully compliant with the Accessibility Standards for all in the Built Environment. There are also a number of reserved parking bays for blue badge holders and ramps/lifts are available as required. CRPD Malta also have offices in Gozo.

Information is available in alternative formats such as easy-to-read documents and accessible PDFs and are written in clear and concise language. Videos that contain spoken English are subtitled in Maltese and videos that contain spoken Maltese are subtitled in

English. Video clips also include inset sign language interpretation. Publications are normally published in both English and Maltese.

People lodging complaints of discrimination are given the choice of physical, online, or telephone meetings depending on their availability and preference. Assistance is provided to alleged victims of discrimination when lodging a complaint. CRPD Malta has experienced officers in interacting with as well as supporting clients with disabilities with various requirements, such as using simple language to explain matters. Arrangements are made to accommodate clients according to their support requirements e.g. the provision of sign language interpretation.

Services provided by CRPD Malta are free of charge, except for training given to private companies which are normally delivered at a minimal fee.

As noted above, CRPD Malta have widespread physical and electronic presence in Malta throughout the Maltese territory which is accessible by all.

b) Independent surveys and reports

In terms of Article 22 of the Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability) Act and Article 5 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, the CRPD is vested with the power to produce reports and monitor and provide feedback on matters pertinent to the field of disability. The CRPD does not collect general equality data. There is no publicly available information as to whether CRPD Malta receives data or has access to data collected by others and if so by whom.

CRPD Malta conducts independent surveys and publishes independent reports. This competence is effectively exercised in an independent manner, in practice. Surveys are conducted, for example, in connection with training provided by CRPD Malta. The Disability Equality Training Unit regularly asks for feedback on the disability awareness-raising sessions carried out by CRPD Malta by sending a survey to contact persons of entities and organisations who have received this training. The last published evaluation report was issued in January 2022, in which the overall feedback received was positive and showed that Disability Equality Training and other awareness-raising sessions are proving effective to raise more awareness on disability issues.

CRPD Malta three-year strategy 2022-2024 was based on the Five Priorities as outlined above. 2024 was the third year of the implementation of the Commission's three-year strategy when, apart from its ongoing core work, CRPD Malta focused on proactive strategic priorities to ensure the growth of the disability sector in the future. In 2024, the CRPD stepped up its enforcement role, expanded outreach and rights awareness, and progressed on operationalising accessibility and inclusion priorities of the 2022-2024 strategy. Key outputs in 2024 included record reporting and investigations of discrimination, substantial enforcement actions (Blue Badge enforcement),²³⁶ wide range training and awareness activities, and participation in EU projects to strengthen its institutional capacity. These achievements show measurable advancement towards achieving the strategy's five priority goals and reflect growing public engagement with disability rights in Malta. It is noted that this was largely possible due to the Commission's gradual growing into its role as the disability sector's regulatory body, freeing it up to branch into areas which were previously largely unexplored on the national level like intersectionality, deinstitutionalisation and digital innovation are ripe for study, discussion and change. All of these raise questions which move the sector into new opportunities for growth. CRPD Malta publishes annual reports outlining their work for the previous year and setting out their plans for the subsequent year.²³⁷

²³⁶ Verification of the validity of and entitlement to badges.

²³⁷ The annual report for 2025 had not been published by the cut-off date of this report (1 January 2026).

c) Recommendations

CRPD Malta is a partner in a variety of projects from a number of different sectors and fields, both locally and internationally.²³⁸ The Commission's main role in these projects varies from research to providing feedback on tools to ensure that they are accessible for people with disability as well as drafting up of policy recommendations. The aims of the projects fall under the five priorities as listed out in CRPD Malta's strategy for the years 2022-2024. CRPD Malta is also consulted by national authorities when changes to the law affecting the disability sector are being proposed or discussed. Recommendations are provided in an independent manner and there is nothing to suggest that adequate measures are not taken to acknowledge and consider the implementation of such measures. CRPD Malta in terms of Article 22 of the Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability) Act and Article 5 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act is vested with the power to produce recommendations on matters pertinent to the field of disability.

d) Prevention, promotion and awareness-raising

As noted above, priorities 1 and 2 of CRPD Malta's strategy 2022–24 refer to the promotion of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and raising awareness on disability rights and obligations. In fact, the CRPD is the independent mechanism monitoring the implementation of the United Nations Convention for the Rights of Persons with Disability. In terms of Article 22(1) (q) and (r) Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability) Act, CRPD Malta is empowered to raise awareness and foster respect for the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities, to combat stereotypes, prejudices and harmful practices relating to persons with disabilities, including those based on gender and age, in all areas of life; and to raise awareness about the capabilities and contributions of persons with disabilities.

CRPD Malta carries out awareness-raising and promotional campaigns on social media and other types of media to increase education, training and awareness of the rights of all. CRPD Malta raises awareness on equality and promotes the latest news related to the Commission's work.²³⁹ CRPD Malta's social media network is updated regularly with the latest publications, events, media contributions and other material related to their work. These fall within the competencies of the body and done in an effective and independent manner. In so doing it also co-operates with other civil society organisations.²⁴⁰

e) Other competences

CRPD Malta's competencies have been widely explained above.

²³⁸ In 2024, the CRPD participated actively in a number of European projects. These included E.A.S.E. – 'Easy, Accessible, Simple and Effective' – aimed at promoting the use of easy language to improve access to information for people with disabilities, thus ensuring that they can make informed decisions about their lives; the Erasmus+ -funded project 'A Superpower to Defend Nature', led by BirdLife Malta, which promotes outdoor ecology and environmental education to increase the inclusion and participation of children with developmental disabilities; and the 'Points of Connection' project, which aims to enhance the inclusion and quality of life of autistic young people by fostering accessibility, awareness and opportunities for social connection. The Connect Project, a national initiative, adopted a holistic and personalised one-to-one mentoring approach to help young people with an intellectual disability transition into independent living. It also aimed to provide youth workers with skills and guidelines to help them support young people.

²³⁹ One way to overcome stereotypes is through education and training. In 2024, more than 3 600 people took part in CRPD Disability Equality Training sessions, delivered by people who have lived experience of disability.

²⁴⁰ In 2024, the CRPD carried out education and awareness campaigns on TikTok to broaden its outreach to the younger generation. The focus remained clear: to reflect the everyday experiences of disabled people, while challenging the idea that accessibility is niche.

7.II.7 Legal standing of the body

In Malta, the body has legal standing to:

- bring discrimination complaints on behalf of identified victims to court;
- bring discrimination complaints on behalf of non-identified victims to court;
- bring discrimination complaints ex officio to court;
- intervene in legal cases concerning discrimination, for example, as an *amicus curiae*.

In terms of Article 22(1)(i) of the Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability) Act, CRPD Malta may investigate such complaints as may be made to them of failure to comply with any provision of this Act in an individual case and, where it seems appropriate, conciliate in relation to such complaints, or otherwise take relevant action in respect of enforcement. As stated above and as reported by CRPD Malta whenever it launches an investigation, the Unit tries to reach a speedy and amicable solution for the benefit of the person with disability as, in most cases, discrimination is the result of a lack of awareness of the rights of persons with disabilities.

In terms of Article 22(1)(p) of the said Act, CRPD Malta has the power to take any appropriate action, including proportionate administrative measures and court action, to eliminate discrimination on the basis of disability as defined in this Act. Under Article 32(2), the Commissioner may also initiate investigations on the receipt of a complaint alleging that a person has committed an act that is unlawful under any of the provisions of the Act. The Commission must also give assistance if the complainant requires assistance to formulate the complaint orally and/or in writing; it will be the duty of the Commissioner to take reasonable steps to provide appropriate assistance to that person. In exercising its role, as of 2021 the Commission is assisted by an Investigations Unit and an Enforcement Unit.²⁴¹ As noted above, the action which may be taken by CRPD is not prescriptive in that it may also bring action before the courts to protect the rights of persons who feel aggrieved and feel that the provisions of the law have been violated in their regard.

In Malta, the CRPD registers the number of complaints of discrimination made and opinions/decisions (by field). This data is available to the public and published in its annual reports.²⁴² Statistics for the complaints investigated are kept by CRPD Malta and fed into its annual reports on particular aspects of equality and conveyed to the National Statistics Office,²⁴³ as and when required. In its annual reports, CRPD Malta makes reference to the number of complaints received and categorises them according to the nature of the complaint, the grounds on which the complaints are based, the sector and the entity involved. The latest figures available are from 2024, as the 2025 report had not been published by the cut-off date for this report (1 January 2026). In 2024, the CRPD received 512 new complaints, compared with 397 in 2023. Of the new complaints, 379 dealt with accessibility, 48 with education, 39 with provision of goods and services, 19 with employment, 16 with housing, 6 with health and 5 with rights. During 2024, there was a total of 253 reported complaints relating to Blue Badge or parking abuses. There is no published data about the opinions/decisions specified by ground.²⁴⁴

The law does not lay down any limitations on the conditions under which or the terms upon which action may be taken to protect the rights of the complainant or aggrieved party can take place. The complainant's authorisation is required, but no specific provisions stipulate the manner in which such authorisation is to be obtained. The type of remedy which CRPD

²⁴¹ Introduced by virtue of Act LIX of 2021 amending the Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability) Act and which primarily has focused on abuses relating to Blue Badges.

²⁴² See: <https://www.crpdm.org.mt/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/CRPD-Annual-Report-2022-EN.pdf> and <https://www.crpdm.org.mt/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/CRPD-OCOA-Annual-Report-2023-EN.pdf>.

²⁴³ The National Statistics Office collects and publishes national-level data.

²⁴⁴ See: <https://www.crpdm.org.mt/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/0581-OCOA-EOA-Report-2023-EN.pdf>.

Malta may seek is the remedy which may also be sought by a complainant and which varies depending on the legislation.

Furthermore, Article 33A of the Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability) Act provides that any association, organisation or any legal entity that has a legitimate interest in ensuring that the provisions of this Act are complied with may institute, on behalf or in support of the person against whom an unlawful act of discrimination has been committed under this Act, with his or her approval, proceedings for redress before the UNCRPD Redress Panel or the competent court.

7.II.8 Dispute resolution

a) Quasi-judicial functions

In Malta, the body can be considered as a quasi-judicial institution.

In Malta, CRPD through the Enforcement Unit can be considered as a separate quasi-judicial body/institution competent to decide on disability discrimination cases.

It could be contended that the UNCRPD Redress Panel also be considered as a quasi-judicial body in that it has decision-making powers. This Panel is competent to hear petitions alleging that one or more substantive Convention rights have been, are being or are likely to be contravened.

CRPD Malta can issue binding enforceable decisions and non-binding opinions.

i) Power to impose sanctions

The Enforcement Unit within the Commission does have the power to take action in respect of any person who infringes any provision of the Act, or any other law which the Enforcement Unit is entitled to enforce, or who fails to comply with any decision given by the Investigations Unit or the Test of Reasonableness Board. The Unit can impose administrative fines and order the cessation of any act or omission which are in breach of any provision of the Act and any other law which the Enforcement Unit has jurisdiction over. The Board decides on the accessibility or otherwise of a building.²⁴⁵

ii) Nature and level of sanctions that can be imposed

As stated above, the Enforcement Unit does have the power to impose administrative fines and to order the cessation of any act or omission which are in breach of any provision of the Act and any other law which the Enforcement Unit is entitled to.²⁴⁶

iii) Possibility to appeal (to the body itself or to courts)

²⁴⁵ In December 2024, the Minister for Inclusion publicly announced that the Constitution of Malta was to undergo legislative amendments to recognise discrimination against persons with disabilities. This reform aims to give the necessary strength to the CRPD, so that it can take concrete action against the challenges and injustices that affect persons with disabilities, with a strong system of 'enforcement and easier access to justice'. The new law will see the introduction of expert panels, which, in a more accessible and efficient process, will make decisions on complaints without the need for lengthy and costly court proceedings. These panels can not only order practical and financial remedies but also impose sanctions on those who break the law or obstruct the work of the Commission. Apart from that, for the first time, discrimination against persons with disabilities will be clearly recognised in the Constitution of Malta. The relative bill has not yet been published.

²⁴⁶ It appears however that the Minister has not exercised the power vested in terms of article 32C to issue regulations enacting provisions in respect of administrative fines issued in terms of the said law and therefore the level of fines which can be imposed cannot be indicated with legal certainty.

The Administrative Review Tribunal shall be competent to hear and determine appeals from decisions of the Investigations Unit as provided for in the Equal Opportunity (Persons with Disability) Act or in any law.

iv) Enforcement of binding decisions

The body can issue binding enforceable decisions. There is no published data on the level of enforcement taken by CRPD Malta. Information is given in their annual reports but these do not reproduce any statistics.

v) Implementation of non-binding opinions

It can issue non-binding opinions. There are no statistics which show how opinions of the body are implemented or if they are in all cases. What is clear is that CRPD does issue opinions on the complaints brought before it after carrying out the necessary investigations.

b) Amicable settlements

In terms of Article 22(1)(i) of the Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability) Act, CRPD may investigate such complaints as may be made to them of failure to comply with any provision of this Act in an individual case and, where it seems appropriate, conciliate in relation to such complaints, or otherwise take relevant action in respect of enforcement. As stated above and as reported by CRPD Malta whenever it launches an investigation, the Unit tries to reach a speedy and amicable solution for the benefit of the person with disability as, in most cases, discrimination is the result of a lack of awareness of the rights of persons with disabilities.

7.II.9 Procedural safeguards

There do not appear to be any procedural limitations or safeguards in respect of the exercise by CRPD of its several powers which include amicable settlement, investigations and the issue of opinions and recommendations.

7.II.10 Data collection by the body

a) Registration of complaints and decisions

In Malta, the CRPD registers the number of complaints of discrimination made and opinions/decisions (by ground). This data is available to the public and published in its annual reports.²⁴⁷

Statistics for the complaints investigated are not published on a regular basis, but they are kept by CRPD Malta and fed into reports on particular aspects of equality and conveyed to the National Statistics Office as and when required. In its annual reports, CRPD Malta makes reference to the number of complaints received and splits them up by the nature of the complaint and according to the grounds on which the complaints are based, indicating the type of entity against which the complaint is made²⁴⁸ and the name of said entity. The latest figures available are from 2024,²⁴⁹ as the 2025 report had not been published by the cut-off date of this report (1 January 2026).

b) Equality data collection

In Malta, the designated body does not collect general equality data.

²⁴⁷ See: <https://www.crpdmalta.org/annual-reports/>.

²⁴⁸ The highest number is filed against private entities.

²⁴⁹ See sub-section 7.II.7.

There is no publicly available information as to whether CRPD Malta receives data or has access to data collected by others and if so by whom.

7.II.11 Roma and Travellers

There are no Roma or Travellers in Malta.

8 IMPLEMENTATION ISSUES

8.1 Dissemination of information, dialogue with NGOs and between social partners

- a) Dissemination of information about legal protection against discrimination (Article 10 Directive 2000/43 and Article 12 Directive 2000/78)

Measures have been taken to disseminate information about legal protection against discrimination under Article 10, Directive 2000/43/EC and Article 12, Directive 2000/78/EC.

The information provided below principally relates to 2024, as the NCPE's 2025 annual report had not been published at the time of writing this report.

In 2024, as reproduced in its most recent published annual report,²⁵⁰ the NCPE continued to offer and deliver training on equality law, different social identities, harassment and sexual harassment, diversity management and gender mainstreaming to a wide range of participants. The NCPE provides training to various groups, including employees in the public and private sectors, managers, employers, educators and students. Requests for training are discussed with the respective organisation or group in order to ensure that the training is customised for their particular needs. In 2024, the NCPE gave 61 training sessions to 1 070 participants from the public and private sectors, such as healthcare workers, the Armed Forces of Malta, employees from private companies and students, on several topics, including anti-discrimination law, the NCPE and its remit, discrimination on the basis of race/ethnic origin and religion/belief, anti-Muslim and anti-African sentiments, rights and responsibilities at work and dealing with diversity in practice, so as to build an inclusive work environment in public service and sector-related roles.

Training given by the NCPE focuses on the following subjects:

- Equality law: The basic principles of Maltese equality legislation and EU Directives are explained and discussed. NCPE trainers outline the different grounds of discrimination in Maltese law as well as the different spheres it covers.
- Different social identities: The different characteristics protected by law are explained in detail in the context that equality is more than simple non-discrimination.
- Harassment and sexual harassment: Definitions of harassment and sexual harassment are discussed in the context of their being a serious form of discrimination, and sexual harassment a crime. The difference between the two is elucidated and examples provided. The obligations emanating from law related to addressing and preventing sexual harassment are discussed, and the NCPE outlines practical ways to deal with harassment as well as good practices for its prevention.
- Diversity management: The term 'diversity management' is discussed in its wider context. Diversity management is not about having different rules for different groups, but about the valorisation of different identities and the recognition that diversity can lead to better work processes and outcomes. Practical ways of managing diversity are outlined and discussed with the participants.

An integral part of the NCPE's mandate is to promote equality and non-discrimination among the general public. The key messages include: the meaning of discrimination and the fact that it is unlawful, highlighting existing inequalities, the promotion of positive action and the empowerment of people to seek redress by lodging a complaint to the NCPE's Commissioner or through other available means. The NCPE conveys these messages through various sources. In 2024,²⁵¹ the NCPE continued raising awareness on

²⁵⁰ The NCPE report covers 2024 and was published in 2025. The report for 2025 had not been published by the cut-off date of this report (1 January 2026).

²⁵¹ The 2025 report had not been published at the time of writing this report.

equality matters through various means of communication to convey targeted messages to a wide range of audiences. The number of contributions in the traditional media added up to 56. These contributions included: press statements, articles, press contributions and participation in television and radio programmes. Additionally, through infographics on social media NCPE makes use of a cost-effective way of reaching a wide range of people or specific target groups. Through Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, the NCPE has highlighted international days focusing on the human rights of different groups within society, as well as statistics, upcoming events and developments in relation to equality.²⁵²

Input is provided by the NCPE to laws, policies and strategies issued for public consultation. In its review, the NCPE evaluates the impact of the proposed actions on different social groups, checks whether the document contains provisions that are directly or indirectly discriminatory, and proposes the integration of measures that can combat discrimination and achieve equality in practice. The NCPE provided its input to the following documents in 2024: Children's Policy Framework (2024–2030), National Education Strategy (2024–2030), A Social Plan for the Family (2024–2030), Digital Education Strategy 2024–2030, A Strategy for Health-Enhancing Physical Activity, Family Courts Reform, National Strategy for Poverty Reduction and Social Inclusion, and the Pre-Budget Consultation Document.

In 2024, the NCPE contributed to the consultation process for EU and international documents and carried out desk research on various topics. In addition, throughout 2024 the NCPE contributed its input to various bodies operating at an EU level, via questionnaires, surveys, reports, studies, meetings and conferences.

For its part, CRPD Malta – following Malta's ratification of the UNCRPD and its transposition into Maltese law in virtue of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2021 – assumed its new dynamic role together with the UNCRPD Redress Panel, of providing an independent mechanism to protect, promote and monitor the implementation of the Convention. In order to be able to do this in the best possible manner, CRPD Malta ensures that it stays abreast of the latest updates in the disability sector in both local and international contexts.

Moreover, other work was carried out at a European level through liaising with the Disability High Level Group, Equinet and the Fundamental Rights Agency, among others. This ensured that CRPD Malta is continuously updated on the best practice that is being implemented at an international level, which can then be recommended in a local context.

With the enactment of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, the Directorate for Disability Issues (DDI) was established as the national focal point for matters relating to the implementation of the Convention. The DDI is to establish within its structures the UNCRPD National Coordination Mechanism to facilitate necessary action in connection with the Act. Furthermore, the DDI is to carry out duties of public administration, including updating national policies; undertaking disability-related research and compiling feedback and statistics as necessary; encouraging self-advocacy by persons with disability, including through training and empowering schemes; developing projects aimed at empowering persons with disabilities; collaborating with all relevant stakeholders in the field of awareness-raising and representing Malta's interests. The Act also provides for the setting up of ENGAGE as the civil society participation mechanism within the DDI, in line with the obligations set forth in Article 4(3) of the Convention. The aim of ENGAGE is for persons with disabilities, their families and their support persons to meet with people from governmental institutions to discuss the work that is being done to facilitate the lives of the persons with disabilities.

²⁵² In 2024, the NCPE published 412 social media posts across its platforms, in both English and Maltese.

- b) Measures to encourage dialogue with NGOs with a view to promoting the principle of equal treatment (Article 12, Directive 2000/43 and Article 14, Directive 2000/78)

Measures have been taken to encourage dialogue with NGOs with a view to promoting the principle of equal treatment (Article 12, Directive 2000/43/EC and Article 14, Directive 2000/78/EC).

Publicity, awareness campaigns, social dialogue and training are carried out locally by NGOs in conjunction with Government departments or other organisations and entities (some of which are statutorily regulated and some of which are not), by other NGOs or independently.

In Malta, various non-governmental organisations are involved in raising awareness of social issues. Consultation by central Government with NGOs does take place, and NGOs are often involved in discussions prior to the adoption of new regulations where their input would broaden the consultation process or where specialist advice is required. The Government often promotes consultation by issuing a white paper preceding the adoption of new laws in order to widen the spectrum of the consultation process, and NGOs often play an important role in this process. NGOs in Malta are regulated by the Voluntary Organisations Act (Act XXII of 2007), which came into force on 11 December 2007. The principal NGOs in Malta are ground-specific, and they work towards combating discrimination in specific areas only. The NGOs act very subjectively and independently of each other, and it is therefore rather difficult to obtain objective information from them. There is no NGO which could be said to cover all grounds of discrimination.

One principal NGO is the Malta Gay Rights Movement (MGRM), which represents the Maltese LGBTIQ community. The MGRM continues to create awareness of the rights of LGBTIQ persons. Another NGO involved in helping and promoting awareness – in this case, on the grounds of race and ethnic origin – is the Jesuit Refugee Service.²⁵³ The Aditus Foundation is a non-governmental organisation established in 2011 with a mission to monitor, report and act on access to human rights in Malta. Its work promotes a society where everyone is able to access and enjoy all their fundamental human rights, and where access to justice and remedies should be provided in instances of violations.

Founded in 2007, the mission of the People for Change Foundation is to undertake research, advocacy and proactive action to promote social cohesion, respect for human rights and empowerment. The Foundation works in the field of migration, asylum and race in Malta and across the EU, and undertakes on-the-ground legal and social research. It is a human rights think tank based in Malta which encourages evidence-based and data-driven policy and action to promote human rights through research and analysis, lobbying, advocacy and capacity-building.

In 2017, Spark 15 was set up; it is a Maltese NGO geared towards empowering young refugees and migrants to actively participate in achieving a more inclusive society.²⁵⁴ Its purpose is to achieve greater diversity among young people through dialogue.

The Platform of Human Rights Organisations in Malta (PHROM) has been designated as Malta's first network of NGOs striving to promote human rights. PHROM provides a national forum for human rights organisations in Malta to develop, promote and advocate for the values of human dignity and equality. PHROM attracts membership from Maltese NGOs working directly and indirectly in the promotion of human rights values, with the

²⁵³ The mandate of the Jesuit Refugee Service is to accompany, serve and defend the cause of forcibly displaced people. The JRS was set up in Malta in 1993 to support the first influx of asylum seekers to the island from crisis areas in the Mediterranean and Eastern Europe, mainly Iraq and Bosnia. The situation is now very different, with thousands of asylum seekers and forcibly displaced people arriving, mostly by boat, from the African coast every year.

²⁵⁴ Spark 15 has the support of the President's Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

understanding that networked advocacy is more effective and sustainable. PHROM wants to attract membership from NGOs working directly or indirectly within the human rights field. This includes areas such as gender, children, prisoners, migrants, domestic violence, LGBTIQ+, the environment and freedom of expression and religion.²⁵⁵

- c) Measures to promote dialogue between social partners to give effect to the principle of equal treatment within workplace practices, codes of practice and workforce monitoring (Article 11 Directive 2000/43 and Article 13 Directive 2000/78)

Measures have also been taken to promote dialogue between social partners to give effect to the principle of equal treatment within workplace practices, codes of practice and workforce monitoring (Article 11, Directive 2000/43/EC and Article 13, Directive 2000/78/EC). These take the form of meetings, workshops, training sessions and information exchanges.

There were two statutory bodies which, although they were not created specifically to promote social dialogue, contribute towards social dialogue by virtue of their composition. These bodies are composed of, *inter alia*, representatives of Government, employers and employees. These were:

- The National Employment Authority, created under the terms of the Employment and Training Services Act 2018,²⁵⁶ which was composed of three independent people, with two other people appearing before the President of Malta to represent the interests of employers and a further two people appearing before the President of Malta to represent the interests of employees; and
- The Employment Relations Board, created under the Employment and Industrial Relations Act 2002.

To date, however, neither body has been active.

Also, of relevance is the Malta Council for Economic and Social Development Act 2001²⁵⁷ which provides for the setting up of a Civil Society Committee (CSC) within the MCESD.²⁵⁸ The CSC is made up of core representation from civil society and is active in carrying out social dialogue.²⁵⁹

- d) Addressing the situation of Roma and Travellers

There are no Roma issues in Malta as there are no Roma.

²⁵⁵ In April 2019, PHROM presented a report with submissions to the Committee on the Rights of the Child – see: http://www.humanrightsplatform.org.mt/phromdocuments/PHROMCRCSsubmission_2019.pdf.

²⁵⁶ Employment and Training Services Act (Act XXXIX of 2018), *Laws of Malta*, Chapter 594.

²⁵⁷ Council for Economic and Social Development Act (Act XV of 2001), *Laws of Malta*, Chapter 431. The mission statement of the MCESD is that it is 'a Consultative and Advisory Body to the Government on issues relating to the sustainable economic and social development of Malta, whilst providing a forum for consultation and social dialogue between social partners and, where necessary, with Civil Society organisations'.

²⁵⁸ The Chairperson or the Deputy Chairperson of the MCESD chairs the meetings of the CSC.

²⁵⁹ The CSC must include the chairpersons of the following organisations: the Local Councils Association, the National Youth Council, the National Council for the Elderly, the Consumers' Association, the Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability and the Commission for the Advancement of Women. On the recommendation of the CSC, the MCESD approved the inclusion of the following NGOs to sit on the CSC: the Federation of Professional Bodies, the National Council of Women and the Alliance of Pensioners' Organisations, along with a representative of the island of Gozo and a representative of environmental groups.

8.2 Measures to ensure compliance with the principle of equal treatment (Article 14 Directive 2000/43, Article 16 Directive 2000/78)

a) Compliance of national legislation (Articles 14(a) and 16(a))

Maltese law provides that laws, regulations and administrative provisions which are contrary to the principles of equal treatment are abolished in line with the provisions of the directives. In this regard, Regulation 13 of the Equal Treatment in Employment Regulations provides that any provisions contrary to the principle of equal treatment in any law will be deemed null and void.

Furthermore, Article 6 of the Constitution of Malta provides that the Constitution is the supreme law of Malta and that, therefore, if any other law is inconsistent with this Constitution, it will prevail and the other law will, to the extent of the inconsistency, be void. Legal practitioners do not share the same opinion on this matter. Some believe that if the courts declare that a law is contrary to the principle of equal treatment, such a law will not be abolished *ipso jure* but would have to be repealed by Parliament, whereas others hold that, once the Constitutional Court has declared a law unconstitutional, it is inconceivable that a Maltese court would apply or enforce such a law. There do not appear to be any laws in force which go against the principle of equality.

b) Compliance of other rules/clauses (Articles 14(b) and 16(b))

Maltese law provides that contracts, collective agreements, internal rules of businesses and the rules governing independent occupations, professions, workers' associations or employers' associations that are contrary to the principle of equal treatment are, or may be declared, null and void or should be amended. In this regard, Regulation 13 of the Equal Treatment in Employment Regulations provides that any provisions contrary to the principle of equal treatment in individual or collective contracts or agreements, internal rules of undertakings or rules governing any registered organisation under the Act will, on the entry into force of these Regulations, be considered null and void.

Furthermore, the second proviso to Article 27 of the Employment and Industrial Relations Act 2002, which deals with the principle of work of equal value, provides that any distinction between classes of employment based on discriminatory treatment, other than in accordance with the provisions of the Act or any other law, will not have effect, whether they result from contracts of employment or collective agreement with a union.

Furthermore, if the Industrial Tribunal upholds a person's allegations under Article 30 of the Employment and Industrial Relations Act that his or her employer or conditions of employment are in breach of specific provisions of the Act – namely, Article 26 (discrimination and gender equality); Article 27 (work of equal value); Article 28 (victimisation); or Article 29 (harassment) – the tribunal may take such measures as it deems necessary. Such measures may include the cancellation of any contract of service or any clause in a contract or collective agreement which is discriminatory, and the tribunal may order the payment of reasonable sums of money as compensation to the aggrieved party.

9 COORDINATION AT NATIONAL LEVEL

9.1 Coordination at the governmental level

Responsibility for the Employment and Industrial Relations Act lies with the Minister for Finance and Employment. The Minister for Inclusion, Voluntary Organisations and Consumer Rights is responsible for the Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability) Act and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act; the Minister for Home Affairs, Security, Reforms and Equality is responsible for the Equal Treatment of Persons Order and for the Equality for Men and Women Act.

9.2 National Strategies and action plans

In 2020, the Government launched a public consultation entitled 'Towards a National Action Plan against Racism and Xenophobia' as a result of Malta continuing to be multicultural, with more and more foreign nationals arriving on its shores.²⁶⁰ By means of this public consultation, and the eventual drafting of Malta's National Action Plan against Racism and Xenophobia (NAPRAX),²⁶¹ the Government sought to address racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and intolerance in Malta by means of effective and measurable actions in various spheres of life.

In October 2021, the first ever anti-racism strategy for Malta was launched, entitled 'Anti-Racism Strategy 2021-2023'. It was a comprehensive policy document aimed at confronting and eliminating racism in all its forms – individual, systemic and societal – and to stimulate and support intercultural inclusion. Through its 22 measures, it made anti-racism and anti-discrimination both individual and collective responsibilities across all sectors of society – not only Government and the public sector, democratic and political institutions and the media, but the private sector, civil society and the general population. This policy was in line with the EU document 'A Union of equality: EU anti-racism action plan 2020-2025'.

As part of implementing the Anti-Racism Strategy, in April 2023 the Human Rights Directorate (HRD) set up an anti-racism platform – a key measure of the Strategy. The aim of the platform is to enable shared leadership for the implementation of the Strategy across all sectors; ongoing dialogue with key partners on the content, direction and impact of the Strategy; and critical reflection on the ongoing implementation of the Strategy as it evolves. Several initiatives have been implemented to date, with regular progress reports drawn up.²⁶² In its latest publication, issued in 2025, *Championing Humanity*,²⁶³ celebrating 10 years of the HRD, the Directorate detailed its achievements in the 10 years of its existence and its objectives for the future, which include continuing to work tirelessly until it becomes redundant. One of the most significant ambitions for Malta's human rights framework is the establishment of a fully autonomous and independent National Human Rights Institution (NHRI). This represents a deliberate evolution from a state-led initiative to a state-guaranteed right of independent oversight.

²⁶⁰ In 2024, net migration (immigration less emigration) decreased from the previous year to a total of 10 614 persons. Third-country nationals accounted for the largest share of net migrants, at 76.6 % of the total. See <https://nso.gov.mt/world-population-day-11-july-2025/>.

²⁶¹ The National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE) contracted the Equality Research Consortium to develop, through research and consultation, a framework leading to a national action plan against racism and xenophobia (NAPRAX) in Malta. The National Action Plan against Racism and Xenophobia, published in December 2010, was never endorsed or adopted by the authorities.

²⁶² See: https://humanrights.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Kopin_Report_02.pdf; <https://humanrights.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Mid-Term-Conference-Report-on-the-work-of-the-Anti-Racism-Platform-ARP-within-the-project.pdf>; <https://humanrights.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Final-Conference-Report-on-the-work-of-the-Anti-Racism-Platform-within-the-project.pdf>.

²⁶³ See: <https://humanrights.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/COMMEMORATIVE-BOOK.pdf>.

NAPRAX contributed to the creation of a more formal and updated National Action Plan Against Racism (NAPAR) covering the period 2025–2030.²⁶⁴ This is now Malta's comprehensive policy framework for combating racism and promoting a cohesive, inclusive, diverse and fair society that embraces strategic sustainable development and in which there is no place for racism, xenophobia and intolerance. Rooted in the ambition of Malta Vision 2050, the NAPAR recognises that true societal progress requires not only reducing race-based inequality but also fostering a sense of belonging and opportunity for all residents of the Maltese Islands. This second NAPAR, coordinated by the HRD, is the result of extensive consultation with ministries, public entities, civil society and international stakeholders. It adopts a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach, prioritising research, monitoring and accountability, and emphasising intersectionality and the lived experiences of racialised communities.

Following an extensive public consultation in June 2023 the Human Rights Directorate launched the Integration Strategy and Action Plan (2025–2030). This is the second national strategy in this sector and introduced the services of the 'I Belong' programme, which is the national integration programme. The Strategy also provides more detail on several integration-related recommendations listed in the Malta Labour Migration Policy.

A National Strategic Policy for Active Ageing 2023–2030 was published in November 2022. The Policy is structured around three key themes: social inclusion, healthy ageing, and the need to address diversity and inequality. Active ageing refers to the situation where older and ageing persons have an optimal opportunity to participate in the social fabric, especially in society's decision-making process, age healthily and independently, in a society characterised by social fairness, equity and justice. There is a list of measures that are to be implemented under each theme. The Policy also recommends the setting up of an Inter-Ministerial Committee responsible for coordinating and overseeing the implementation process.²⁶⁵

Commenting on 'Malta's National Research and Innovation Strategic Plan 2023–27' the NCPE recommended the adoption of an equality perspective that pro-actively seeks to increase the participation of underrepresented groups through combating stereotypes and removing structural barriers that hinder their full and equal participation in research and innovation (R&I). The importance of incorporating the gender dimension in the content of R&I initiatives was emphasised, as was preventing discrimination and the exacerbation of inequalities when developing and using artificial intelligence (AI).²⁶⁶

CRPD Malta published a policy document entitled 'Freedom to Live – Malta's 2021–2030 National Strategy on the Rights of Disabled Persons'.²⁶⁷ Through the adoption of a social model approach, the strategy outlines a nine-year plan for the country to improve upon the rights of persons with disability, with objectives to be reached over the nine-year period focusing on various issues, including in relation to work and employment. It covers the provision of training to employers; drawing up a strategy document for pre-employment, employment and maintaining employment and provision of assistance on career choices by young people, among other areas. There are 13 objectives included in the strategy. Each strategy is linked to different goals, which are linked to the provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2021. As per the last published annual report in 2024, CRPD does carry out training for all medical staff and professionals working in public hospitals, does carry out training and awareness campaigns on exercising one's rights in terms of current legislation and does work on representing persons with disabilities in the media.²⁶⁸ Actions to be taken by 2026 include: (i) training

²⁶⁴ The action plan was launched in November 2025.

²⁶⁵ See: <https://activeageing.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/NSPActiveAgeing2023-30.pdf>.

²⁶⁶ To date, it is not clear whether the NCPE recommendations have been adopted.

²⁶⁷ The key aim of this strategy is to provide a roadmap for the Maltese disability sector up to 2030 – the target year for achievement of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.

²⁶⁸ The report for 2025 had not been published at the time of writing this report and no information was available on whether points (iii) and (iv) have been met yet.

on disability awareness for service providers in the public and private sectors; (ii) including sign language and closed captioning in all television programmes and adverts; and (iii) supporting candidates with disabilities in local, national and EU elections. Each strategy is linked to different goals, which are linked to the provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2021.

The LGBTIQ Strategy & Action Plan 2018-2022 has been updated with the LGBTIQ+ Strategy & Action Plan for 2023-2027.²⁶⁹ The latter builds on the previous efforts²⁷⁰ and seeks to address those areas where interventions have started but ongoing work is needed, such as in education and health. This Strategy also identifies gaps and areas where more targeted actions are required in order to effect change. The measures identified were formulated by the HRD following several stakeholder consultations with LGBTIQ+ Civil Society organisations; government departments and public entities; academic institutions; trade unions; the private sector and the Consultative Council.²⁷¹

No national strategy exists on antisemitism and no strategy addressing the Roma community because there are no Roma in Malta nor a large Jewish community.

Projects mentioned above do appear to adopt an intersectional approach, in that they are general in nature and cover all minorities that may be present in each sector covered.

²⁶⁹ See:

<https://humanrights.gov.mt/en/Documents/LGBTIQ%20Equality%20Strategy%20and%20Action%20Plan%202023%20%E2%80%93%202027%20EN.pdf>.

²⁷⁰ During the period 2015-2017 the lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex and genderqueer (LGBTIQ) Action Plan was adopted. By October 2015, Malta reached the top spot on ILGA-Europe's Rainbow Index, which position has been retained until today. Similarly, in its first issue of the LGBTIQ Inclusive Education Index in January 2018, the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer and Intersex (LGBTIQ) Youth & Student Organisation placed Malta in the top position.

²⁷¹ The LGBTIQ Consultative Council is an advisory body set up in 2013 by the then Minister for Social Dialogue, Consumer Affairs and Civil Liberties. The aims of the Council are to advise Government on those issues which impact on LGBTIQ+ persons and to put forward legislation, policies and other measures to advance the rights of LGBTIQ+ persons in consultation with the Minister. The Consultative Council is now an advisory body within the Ministry for EU Funds, Equality, Reforms and Social Dialogue.

10 CURRENT BEST PRACTICES

The NCPE developed an internal strategy and work plan for 2025–2026, which it announced in its 2024 annual report. This strategy identifies key actions to be pursued across various areas to promote equality in Maltese society effectively. In line with the NCPE's legal functions, the key actions refer to its continuing to investigate complaints of discrimination, leading to the issuance of Opinions by the NCPE Commissioner on whether breaches of equality law have occurred, along with recommendations for appropriate remedies. The NCPE will also maintain its role in providing input from an equality perspective to national, European and international policies, strategies and reports. By doing so, it aims to advocate for frameworks that address the needs of diverse social groups and promote equality in practice.

An important function of CRPD Malta is in the field of compliance. The Compliance Unit is responsible for monitoring, auditing, giving advice and certifying applications that are made for the development of buildings that are open to the public. The Unit works with architects and developers to ensure that the plans that are eventually approved are accessible for persons with disabilities. The Unit's role is primarily in receiving planning applications from the Planning Authority for consideration on whether they are compliant with the Access for All Design Standards.²⁷² Where the plans are not compliant, the technical experts in the Unit prepare an audit report showing the amendments that need to be made in order for the development to be approved. In the case of new buildings, the applicant is required to obtain a certificate from CRPD Malta stating that the plans are compliant with the Access for All Design Guidelines before the Planning Authority issues a compliance certificate to allow for water and electricity to be connected to the development. In cases where the building cannot be rendered accessible to all or be fully accessible to all according to the Access for All Design Standards, the applicant may appear before the Test of Reasonableness Board (TORB).²⁷³ With the implementation of the European Accessibility Act in Malta in 2025 and the introduction of the Accessibility Measures (European Accessibility Act) Regulations,²⁷⁴ the CRPD took on a broader role in market surveillance of accessibility standards for goods and services, beyond just buildings. Under this new regime, the CRPD monitors compliance with accessibility obligations²⁷⁵ in areas such as banking, transport and telecommunications, among others.

In 2020, a set of guidelines for employers, entitled 'Disability and Employment in Malta', was published.²⁷⁶ The main aim of these guidelines is to assist employers in gaining more awareness and knowledge about persons with disabilities and to enable them to identify sources of any support required to employ persons with disabilities.²⁷⁷

²⁷² In 2024, the Unit received 8 955 planning consultations from the Planning Authority (PA); of these, 6 470 did not fall within CRPD's remit and 652 were exempt under the parameters of PA Circular 2/14 and were therefore excluded from being vetted by CRPD. Of the remaining 1 833 applications, the CRPD approved 408, while it issued an objection to 1 425 applications. Only 22.26 % were approved, compared with 54.6 % the previous year. This sharp drop raises urgent concerns about the commitment to accessibility in a rapidly growing construction sector. Meanwhile, the Test of Reasonableness Board heard 78 cases, yet only 31 % were fully exempted, thereby highlighting the ongoing complexities surrounding the interpretation and application of reasonable accommodation standards.

²⁷³ The Test of Reasonableness Board (TOR4) is a board operating within the framework of Article 20 of Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability) Act, responsible in determining the reasonableness of any action to be undertaken by any person in the fulfilment of the provisions of the Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability) Act or the UNCRPD, including any alteration, change and/or provision of services and facilities and whether such actions could be undertaken without unjustifiable hardship.

²⁷⁴ Legal Notice 214 of 2022, which came into force in June 2025, except for some provisions, which are due to come into force in June 2027.

²⁷⁵ The CRPD has signed Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with entities such as the Malta Competition and Consumer Affairs Authority (MCCAA) and the Malta Communications Authority (MCA), which will support the Commission in fulfilling its oversight responsibilities under the Directive.

²⁷⁶ The guidelines were commissioned by CRPD Malta and drawn up by Ernst & Young Malta.

²⁷⁷ The main results of the research into the status of persons with disabilities and employment in Malta, carried out by Ernst & Young, were also published. The research led to the drawing up and publication of a set of guidelines for employers, referred to above.

Throughout 2024, a number of meetings were held by officials from CRPD Malta on various issues including education, early intervention, accessibility and employment.²⁷⁸

As mentioned in the section on positive action, the Government has introduced measures to enforce the employment quota. Through this scheme, the Government seeks to ensure the implementation and enforcement of the 1967 law requiring companies that employ 20 people or more to employ persons with disabilities. The law now provides that failure to abide by the quota renders companies liable to pay a yearly compensation fee.

Special arrangements exist to assist persons with disabilities to access employment in the public sector. Registered persons with disabilities who do not satisfy all the eligibility requirements in calls for applications but who are essentially capable of carrying out the duties attached to a particular post or position are allowed to ask for special consideration when applying for posts or positions in the public service.²⁷⁹ In this regard, reference can also be made to the 2021-2030 National Strategy on the Rights of Disabled Persons with a variety of objectives to be met. Through the adoption of a social model approach, the strategy outlines a nine-year plan for the country to improve upon the rights of persons with disability with objectives to be reached over the nine-year period.

In 2023, the CRPD was a partner in two European Social Fund (ESF) projects that have now concluded. One of these was LADDER, a capacity-building exercise that sought to address the weaknesses of the Malta Chamber of SMEs in conducting social dialogue. The main activities involved designing a questionnaire, developing and implementing new software that can be used by organisations and businesses, and a report of the study of the online accessibility of businesses. The CRPD's role was to ensure that the tools for the study were accessible for persons with disabilities. It also helped with the drafting of the questionnaire. The other project focused bullying and ostracism at the workplace in Malta and was conducted in conjunction with Bbrave, an NGO in Malta that focuses on bullying. The aim of the project was to highlight the need to address the issue, establish potential solutions and assist businesses in reducing workplace bullying. A consultative committee – including the CRPD and other Maltese organisations active in the disability and business fields – was formed to guide bBrave throughout the project. The research showed that 55 % of workers with disabilities experienced bullying at the workplace, while 7 % of participants witnessed a person with a disability being bullied.

In July 2023, an EU co-funded project was launched by the NCPE in partnership with the Aditus Foundation, 'Strengthening Knowledge on Integration and Non-Discrimination' (SKIN). The main aim of this project was to identify the needs of, and discrimination faced by vulnerable groups, namely migrants and Muslims. As part of this project, the following activities were conducted in 2024: three capacity-building sessions designed to strengthen NCPE staff members' knowledge of the grounds of race/ethnic origin and religion. These sessions facilitated a deeper exploration of structural issues relating to race and religion in the Maltese context, while also assessing the various levels of discrimination faced locally by people of African descent and Muslims. These were followed by a series of focus groups with people of African descent and Muslims to gain a better understanding of the discrimination they face, as well as to better address their needs in relation to the work of the NCPE and the Aditus Foundation. The knowledge and skills acquired through the capacity-building sessions, alongside the insights revealed through the focus groups, informed the design and implementation of training sessions tailored to four target groups.

The Business Promotion Act Regulations 2000, which may be considered an example of positive action that has been taken, provide fiscal incentives to employers who create jobs for, employ and train people over 40 years of age. If such persons are registered as having

²⁷⁸ CRPD Malta *Annual Report 2024*, available at <https://www.crpdmalta.org/annual-reports/>. No report has been published for 2025.

²⁷⁹ Equality policy for the public service, July 2013.

a disability, these incentives are further increased. There is no obligation on employers to take action to benefit from such incentives or otherwise.

Further positive action was taken with the introduction of the law to regulate the compulsory addition of one member with disabilities to various entities which are governed by Maltese law. This law seeks to integrate more persons with disabilities into the various entities present in the Maltese legal and governmental system by way of a provision in which at least one person with a disability must be part of the major public entities/authorities (as specified above under Section 5) governed by Maltese law.

No best practices can be identified yet in relation to the use of artificial intelligence (AI) to improve the effective implementation of the national legislation transposing the directives combating discrimination stemming from the use of AI systems. Nonetheless, Malta is looking to AI and introducing such systems, as highlighted in Malta's research and innovation *Smart Specialisation Strategy 2021-2027* (RIS3). Malta's Realigned National AI Strategy explicitly lists 'Diversity, Equality, Fairness and Anti-Discrimination' as fundamental principles for AI governance. Malta is transposing into domestic law the EU Artificial Intelligence Act (Regulation (EU) 2024/1689), the first comprehensive AI legal framework, which introduces risk-based regulation for AI systems with strict requirements for high-risk applications, including those that might affect employment, education, credit scoring or other areas where discrimination could occur, and prohibiting certain harmful AI practices, including those that could lead to discriminatory outcomes.

11 SENSITIVE OR CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES²⁸⁰

11.1 Potential breaches of the directives at the national level

There are some instances under Maltese law where national provisions are more restrictive in scope than the provisions of the directives. Hence, in these instances, national legislation does not conform to the provisions of the directives.

The prohibition of instructions to discriminate under the Equal Treatment of Persons Order is more restrictive than under the provisions of the directive. In essence, the Order prohibits instructions to harassment²⁸¹ but not (explicitly) instructions to discriminate. There are no provisions prohibiting instructions to discriminate on the grounds of racial/ethnic origin in fields outside employment covered by Directive 2000/43/EC.²⁸²

Likewise, the same Order provides a more restrictive reference under Article 2(3) when referring to the treatment being legitimate as the test for a genuine occupational requirement, as opposed to the objective being legitimate, under the Directive.²⁸³

In addition, under the Equality for Men and Women Act, any treatment based on a provision, criterion or practice which would put people at a particular disadvantage compared with people of the other sex or another sexual orientation, age, religion or belief, racial or ethnic origin, gender identity, gender expression or sex characteristics is deemed discriminatory, unless the said provision, criterion or practice is appropriate and necessary and can be justified by objective factors unrelated to sex. It is relevant to point out here that, despite the extension of the definition of discrimination in 2012 to grounds other than gender, the justification test is limited to factors unrelated to sex. It is not clear whether the omission was accidental or deliberate. A similar exclusion is not found in the directives.²⁸⁴

11.2 Other issues of concern

There do not seem to be any key issues of concern with regard to the implementation and practical application of the anti-discrimination directives at the national level, other than perhaps a low number of cases being brought. The absence of case law could, in the past, have been caused by people's lack of awareness of their rights. However, the state, through its departments and agencies as well as the various NGOs, has in the recent past developed and run various campaigns (written, audio and visual) to disseminate information and to create more awareness among the general public, thus indirectly encouraging people to come forward with any complaints they may have. In practice, however, this has not led to an increase in the number of complaints being brought forward. The Government has introduced the equality bill to provide all-encompassing legislation on equality and more clarity in anti-discrimination cases.

There are no issues of concern which can be identified regarding the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in relation to the implementation of the national legislation transposing the directives, or regarding the regulation of AI in Malta. No specific regulation on the matter exists yet. In 2021, the Presidencies of the Council of the European Union presented Conclusions on topical issues related to equality, including the impact of AI on gender equality and the NCPE gave its input on the said draft documents. The NCPE has been active in discussions on the use of AI in the field of discrimination prevention and is principally looking at integrating AI with regard to gender equality. Similarly, the NCPE's proposals as part of pre-budget consultations in 2024 drew attention to discrimination and

²⁸⁰ The assessments and views expressed in both sections 11.1 and 11.2 reflect the author's opinion.

²⁸¹ Equal Treatment of Persons Order, Article 2(2)(d).

²⁸² Section 2.5.

²⁸³ Section 4.1.

²⁸⁴ Section 2.3.

inequality in the use of AI and to developing specific technology to identify and address potentially discriminatory outcomes.

12 LATEST DEVELOPMENTS IN 2025

12.1 Legislative amendments

In 2025, there were no legislative amendments adopted in Malta in anti-discrimination law.

12.2 Case law

There were no cases decided by the Maltese courts during 2025 on discrimination grounds covered by the directives.

ANNEX 1: TABLE OF INTERNATIONAL INSTRUMENTS

Country: Malta
Date: 1 January 2026

Instrument	Date of signature	Date of ratification	Derogations/ reservations relevant to equality and non-discrimination	Right of individual petition accepted?	Can this instrument be directly relied upon in domestic courts by individuals? All the answers in this field are subject to the underneath footnote ²⁸⁵
European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)	12.12.1966	23.01.1967	No	Yes	Yes
Protocol 12, ECHR	08.12.2015	08.12.2015	No	No	No
Revised European Social Charter	27.07.2005	27.07.2005	No ²⁸⁶	Ratified collective complaints protocol? No	Yes
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights	Not signed	13.09.1990 (accession)	The Government of Malta interprets ²⁸⁷ and reserves ²⁸⁸	Yes	Yes
Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities	11.05.1995	10.02.1998	The Government of Malta ²⁸⁹	No provision for individual petition	Yes

²⁸⁵ Dr Andrew Azzopardi from the Maltese Ministry of Foreign Affairs Legal Department confirms that, as a general rule, treaties, conventions or international instruments signed and/or ratified by Malta may not be directly relied upon in domestic courts by individuals, unless they are transposed and/or adopted into Maltese law. In general, this transposition is very rarely done. As a matter of policy, Maltese law is generally amended so as to reflect the provisions of any convention or international instrument that Malta is intending to sign or ratify. Therefore, as a matter of policy, Maltese law is broadly in line with all the conventions or other international instruments that it chooses to sign or ratify. This means that individuals may rely persuasively on the international instrument in domestic courts and mention the relevant international instrument in domestic courts. However, the corresponding Maltese law relating to the provisions of that international instrument should also be directly relied on in domestic courts by individuals primarily.

²⁸⁶ Malta has not accepted all the provisions of the Revised Charter.

²⁸⁷ Article 20 consistently with the rights conferred by Articles 19 and 21 of the Covenant but reserves the right not to introduce any legislation for the purposes of Article 20.

²⁸⁸ The right not to apply Article 22 to the extent that existing legislative measures may not be fully compatible with this article.

²⁸⁹ Reserves the right not to be bound by the provisions of Article 15 insofar as these entail the right to vote or to stand for election either for the House of Representatives or for Local Councils. Furthermore, the Government of Malta declared that with regard to Articles 24 and 25, Malta does not include national minorities in the sense of the Framework Convention. Its ratification of the Convention is deemed to be an act of solidarity in the view of the Convention.

Instrument	Date of signature	Date of ratification	Derogations/ reservations relevant to equality and non-discrimination	Right of individual petition accepted?	Can this instrument be directly relied upon in domestic courts by individuals? All the answers in this field are subject to the underneath footnote ²⁸⁵
International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights	22.10.1968	13.09.1990	Article 13 ²⁹⁰	No	Yes
Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination	05.09.1968	27.05.1971	There are no reservations ²⁹¹	Yes ²⁹²	Yes
Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women		08.03.1991 (accession)	Article 11 ²⁹³ Article 13 ²⁹⁴ Articles 13, 15, 16 ²⁹⁵	Yes ²⁹⁶	Yes

²⁹⁰ The Government of Malta declares that it is in favour of upholding the principle affirmed in the words 'and to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions'. However, having regard to the fact that the population of Malta is overwhelmingly Roman Catholic, it is difficult also in view of limited financial and human resources, to provide such education in accordance with a particular religious or moral belief in cases of small groups, which cases are very exceptional in Malta.

²⁹¹ However, there is a declaration that is not about equality or non-discrimination.

²⁹² However, Malta declares that it recognises the competence of the Committee to receive and consider communications from individuals subject to the jurisdiction of Malta who claim to be victims of a violation by Malta of any of the rights set forth in the Convention which results from situations or events occurring after the date of adoption of the present declaration, or from a decision relating to situations or events occurring after that date. The Government of Malta recognises this competence on the understanding that the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination shall not consider any communication without ascertaining that the same matter is not being considered or has not already been considered by another international body of investigation or settlement.

²⁹³ The Government of Malta interprets paragraph 1 of Article 11, in the light of provisions of paragraph 2 of Article 4, as not precluding prohibitions, restrictions, or conditions on the employment of women in certain areas, or the work done by them, where this is considered necessary or desirable to protect the health and safety of women or the human foetus, including such prohibitions, restrictions or conditions imposed in consequence of other international obligations of Malta.

²⁹⁴ (i) The Government of Malta reserves the right, notwithstanding anything in the Convention, to continue to apply its tax legislation which deems, in certain circumstances, the income of a married woman to be the income of her husband and taxable as such. (ii) The Government of Malta reserves the right to continue to apply its social security legislation which in certain circumstances makes certain benefits payable to the head of the household which is, by such legislation, presumed to be the husband.

²⁹⁵ While the Government of Malta is committed to remove, as far as possible, all aspects of family and property law which may be considered as discriminatory to females, it reserves the right to continue to apply present legislation in that regard until such time as the law is reformed and during such transition period until those laws are completely superseded. Article 16 – The Government of Malta does not consider itself bound by sub-paragraph (e) of paragraph (1) of Article 16 insofar as the same may be interpreted as imposing an obligation on Malta to legalise abortion.

²⁹⁶ Malta became a signatory to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.

Instrument	Date of signature	Date of ratification	Derogations/ reservations relevant to equality and non-discrimination	Right of individual petition accepted?	Can this instrument be directly relied upon in domestic courts by individuals? All the answers in this field are subject to the underneath footnote ²⁸⁵
ILO Convention No. 111 on Discrimination		01.07.1968	No	No	Yes
Convention on the Rights of the Child	26.01.1990	30.09.1990 (entered into force)	No	No ²⁹⁷	Yes
Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities	30.03.2007	10.10.2012	Yes ²⁹⁸	Yes	Yes

²⁹⁷ The Committee on the Rights of the Child may consider individual communications alleging violation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child or its two first Optional Protocols on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography as well as the involvement of children in armed conflict by State Parties to the Third Optional Protocol.

²⁹⁸ Pursuant to Article 29(a)(i) and (iii) of the Convention, while the Government of Malta is fully committed to ensure the effective and full participation of persons with disabilities in political and public life, including the exercise of their right to vote by secret ballot in elections and referenda, and to stand for elections, Malta makes the following reservations: With regard to (a)(i): Malta reserves the right to continue to apply its current electoral legislation insofar as voting procedures, facilities and materials are concerned. With regard to (a)(iii): Malta reserves the right to continue to apply its current electoral legislation insofar as assistance in voting procedures is concerned.

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