

PROTECTING PROGRESS



LGBTIQ+ Equality Strategy and Action Plan

PROGRESS REPORT

August 2025 - July 2026

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FOREWORD

Building on Progress: Achievements, Partnership and the Path Ahead

It is my pleasure to present the Annual Report on the Implementation of the LGBTIQ+ Equality Strategy and Action Plan. This report is particularly meaningful to me as it is the first to be published since assuming responsibility for the Equality and Civil Rights portfolio. It provides an opportunity not only to reflect on the significant work undertaken by my predecessors, but also to reaffirm the Government's commitment to ensuring that equality remains at the heart of public policy and service delivery.

This reporting period also marks a new chapter. For the first time in Malta's political history, our country has established a Ministry solely dedicated to Equality and Civil Rights. This unprecedented milestone sends a clear message that equality and human rights are national priorities deserving focused leadership and sustained commitment.

Malta has long been recognised internationally for advancing the rights of LGBTIQ+ persons. Yet meaningful equality cannot be measured solely through legislation or international rankings. It must be reflected in people's everyday experiences, in the opportunities available to them, and in their ability to participate fully in society free from discrimination and exclusion.

The progress outlined throughout this report demonstrates the value of a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach. Over the past year, public authorities and civil society organisations have continued working together to promote inclusion and address the challenges faced by LGBTIQ+ persons in Malta.

Particularly encouraging has been the continued mainstreaming of equality considerations across a wide range of sectors. The implementation of this Strategy demonstrates that LGBTIQ+ equality is not a standalone policy area but a shared responsibility. Increasingly, equality considerations are being integrated into broader policies and services, helping to ensure that public institutions respond effectively to the diversity of our society.

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to all ministries, public entities, independent authorities, stakeholders and civil society organisations whose expertise, commitment and collaboration continue to make this work possible.

Hon Rosianne Cutajar
MINISTER FOR EQUALITY AND
CIVIL RIGHTS





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List of Abbreviations

ADI-SOGIESC	Council of Europe's Committee of Experts on SOGIESC
ARC	Allied Rainbow Communities
AWAS	Agency for the Welfare of Asylum Seekers
CGBVDV	Commission for Gender Based Violence and Domestic Violence
CoE	Council of Europe
CRPD	Commission for the Rights of Persons with a Disability
DAACC	Department for Active Aging and Community Care
DELH	Directorate for Early Years, Languages and Humanities
ERC	Equal Rights Coalition
EU	European Union
EUA	European Union Asylum Agency
EUPA	European Union Programmes Agency
FRA	European Union's Fundamental Rights Agency
GWC	Gender Wellbeing Clinic
HPDP	Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Directorate
HRD	Human Rights Directorate
IDAHO+	International Day against LGBTIQ+ phobia
IGLYO	International LGBTIQ+ Youth and Student Organisation
ILGA	International LGBTI Association
IPA	International Protection Agency
IPS	Institute for the Public Service
ITS	Institute for Tourism Studies
LGBTIQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Intersex and Queer
LGR	Legal Gender Recognition
MER	Ministry for Equality and Civil Rights
MES	Ministry for Education and Sport
MGRM	Malta LGBTIQ Rights Movement
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MPF	Malta Police Force
MTA	Malta Tourism Authority
NCPE	National Commission for the Promotion of Equality
OPSA	Older Persons Standards Authority
PEP	Post-Exposure Prophylaxis
PrEP	Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis
SOGIESC	Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Gender Expression and Sex Characteristics
SVPR	St Vincent De Paul Residence
UM	University of Malta
UN	United Nations





01

About the Human Rights Directorate



Who are the Human Rights Directorate and the SOGIGESC Unit?

The Human Rights Directorate (HRD) is Malta's central government body responsible for advancing, coordinating, and mainstreaming human rights, equality, and non-discrimination across public policy and governance. Established in 2015, the Directorate operates within the Ministry for Equality and Civil Rights (MER) and works to ensure that Malta's national frameworks, legislation, strategies, and public services uphold the fundamental rights and freedoms enshrined in the Constitution of Malta, European Union law, and international human rights instruments.

The Directorate's overarching mission is to foster a society founded on dignity, equality, inclusion, and respect for diversity. Through a combination of policy development, implementation, coordination, monitoring, capacity-building, and public engagement, the HRD seeks to ensure that human rights are not treated as isolated policy concerns, but are systematically integrated throughout all levels of decision-making and service delivery. This approach reflects the understanding that the protection and promotion of human rights require collective responsibility across Government and society.

The Directorate leads the development and implementation of a number of thematic national strategies and action plans covering areas such as LGBTIQ+ equality, gender mainstreaming, anti-racism and integration, and anti-human trafficking. It serves as the primary coordinating body for inter-ministerial and cross-sectoral cooperation on these matters, providing policy guidance and technical support to Ministries, government entities, local authorities, civil society organisations, academia, social partners, and international stakeholders.

A core function of the Directorate is the monitoring of policy implementation and the evaluation of progress toward national objectives. Through dedicated governance structures, working groups, committees, and reporting mechanisms, the HRD supports Ministries and public entities in translating strategic commitments into concrete actions and measurable outcomes. The Directorate also plays an important role in collecting evidence, facilitating research, producing reports, and supporting the development of data-driven policies that better respond to the lived realities of diverse communities.

Beyond policy coordination, the Directorate undertakes extensive awareness-raising and educational work. Public campaigns, conferences, seminars, consultations, and training programmes are regularly delivered to government employees, professionals, service providers, civil society organisations, and members of the public. These initiatives seek to increase knowledge of human rights principles, strengthen institutional capacity, combat discrimination, and foster a culture of respect and inclusion throughout society.

The Human Rights Directorate also represents Malta in numerous regional and international fora. Through engagement with European Union (EU) institutions, the Council of Europe (CoE), United Nations (UN) bodies, and other multilateral organisations, the Directorate contributes to the development of international human rights standards while ensuring that Malta remains aligned with evolving obligations and best practices. This international engagement enables the Directorate to both contribute to and benefit from the exchange of expertise and experiences across jurisdictions.

To fulfil its mandate, the Directorate brings together a number of specialised units focused on distinct thematic areas of human rights and equality. These include the Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Gender Expression and Sex Characteristics (SOGIGESC) Unit, the Gender Mainstreaming Unit, the Intercultural and Anti-Racism Unit, the Anti-Trafficking Unit, the Legal Unit, and the Research and Coordination Unit.

The SOGIGESC Unit was established in June 2018 as Malta's specialised government unit dedicated to advancing the equality and human rights of LGBTIQ+ persons. The Unit serves as the Government's focal point for policy development, implementation, monitoring, and stakeholder engagement on matters relating to SOGIGESC.

The Unit's principal responsibility is the coordination of Malta's national framework on LGBTIQ+ equality. At present, its work is primarily guided by the LGBTIQ+ Equality Strategy and Action Plan 2023–2027, a comprehensive policy framework containing more than ninety measures across ten thematic areas. The strategy aims to mainstream LGBTIQ+ equality throughout key aspects of social life, including employment, education, healthcare, sport, family life, service provision, research, and protection from discrimination, hate crime, and hate speech. It also incorporates an intersectional approach, recognising the diverse experiences of LGBTIQ+ persons across different age groups, disability statuses, migration backgrounds, and other identities.

The SOGIGESC Unit works closely with Government Ministries and entities to ensure that equality considerations are incorporated into policy development, legislation, public services, and administrative procedures. Through ongoing consultation and technical assistance, the Unit supports public authorities in identifying barriers, improving inclusivity, and strengthening compliance with national and international obligations relating to LGBTIQ+ rights. It further monitors the progress of strategic measures, coordinates reporting exercises, and facilitates data collection and analysis in support of evidence-based policymaking.

Stakeholder engagement constitutes a fundamental aspect of the Unit's work. The Unit maintains continuous dialogue with civil society organisations, advocacy groups, researchers, professionals, service providers, social partners, and members of the LGBTIQ+ community to ensure that policies and initiatives remain responsive to emerging needs and realities.

Ultimately, the SOGIGESC Unit exists to ensure that all persons, irrespective of their sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or sex characteristics, can live free from discrimination and enjoy equal opportunities, dignity, safety, and full participation in society.



02

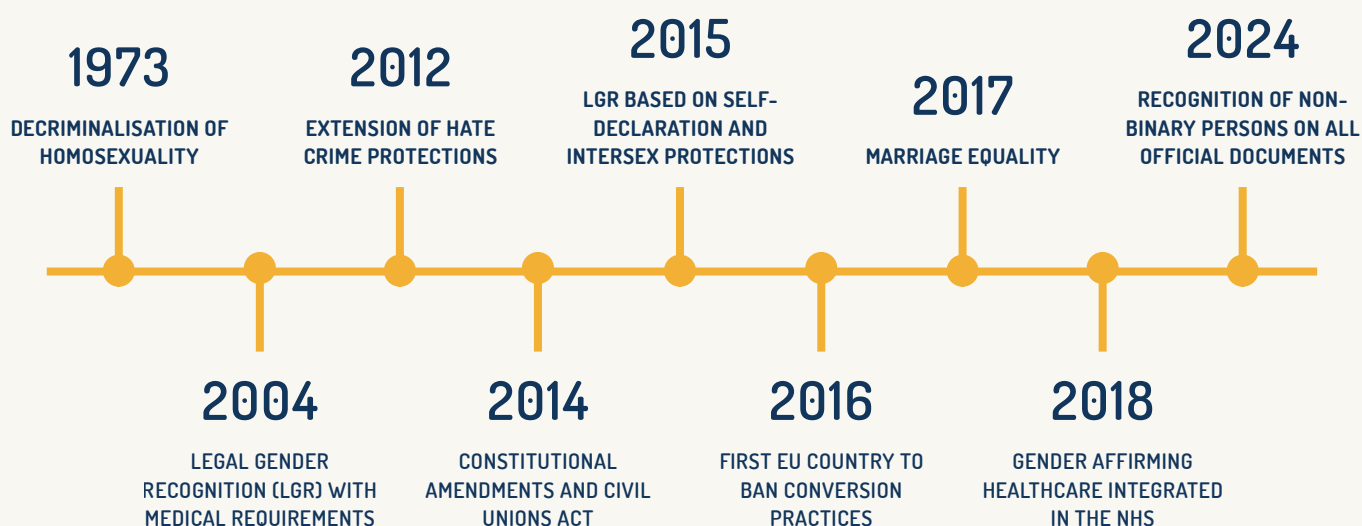
Malta's Standing on LGBTIQ+ Rights



An Overview of Malta's Legal Framework, Social Climate and International Standing on LGBTIQ+ Rights

Malta's experience in the field of LGBTIQ+ equality is often regarded as one of the most significant human rights developments in Europe during the past decade. Through sustained legislative reform, targeted public policy measures, institutional investment, and ongoing collaboration with civil society, the country has moved from a context in which legal recognition of LGBTIQ+ persons was limited to becoming one of the most highly regarded jurisdictions globally for the protection of the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex and queer persons. This progress has not been the result of a single reform but rather of a continuous and coordinated process of policy development that has sought to embed equality across different sectors of society, including employment, education, healthcare, family life, sport, migration, ageing and public administration.

The foundations of Malta's current framework can be traced to the gradual expansion of legal protections during the early 2000s, followed by a period of intensive legislative reform beginning in the 2010s. Significant milestones included the introduction of civil unions and adoption rights for same-sex couples in 2014, the inclusion of gender identity as a protected characteristic within Malta's constitutional equality provisions, and the adoption of the Gender Identity, Gender Expression and Sex Characteristics Act in 2015. This legislation attracted international attention for establishing a model of legal gender recognition based on self-determination, removing requirements for medical interventions, surgical procedures or psychiatric diagnoses. In 2016, Malta became the first EU Member State to prohibit so-called conversion practices, while marriage equality was introduced, guaranteeing equal recognition of couples irrespective of gender. More recently, amendments introduced in 2024 extended legal recognition to non-binary persons through the inclusion of the "X" gender marker on official documentation. Together, these reforms have positioned Malta among a small number of states that provide extensive protections across sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics.



Malta's legal framework is particularly notable for its breadth. Anti-discrimination provisions extend across employment, education and healthcare, while legislation provides recognition and protection for diverse family forms, including same-sex marriage, adoption, civil unions and assisted reproduction. The country is also internationally recognised for its protections relating to bodily integrity and sex characteristics, having introduced some of the earliest legislative safeguards intended to limit medically unnecessary interventions on intersex children. These legislative measures have not existed in isolation, but have been complemented by policy initiatives, public sector guidance, training programmes and implementation mechanisms coordinated primarily through the HRD and the SOGIGESC Unit.

A defining feature of Malta's approach has been the adoption of successive national strategies and action plans dedicated to LGBTIQ+ equality. Since 2015, government action has been guided by comprehensive policy frameworks designed to introduce legal reform and mainstream equality throughout public administration and society. The current LGBTIQ+ Equality Strategy and Action Plan 2023–2027 contains over ninety measures spanning ten thematic areas and focuses on issues ranging from access to healthcare and education to hate crime prevention, research, sports inclusion, family life, ageing and migration. The strategy reflects an increasingly intersectional understanding of equality, recognising that the experiences of LGBTIQ+ persons are shaped by factors such as disability, age, ethnicity, migration status and socio-economic circumstances.

The social climate for LGBTIQ+ persons in Malta has evolved substantially alongside these legal developments. Research conducted through the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) indicates that levels of openness among LGBTIQ+ persons are comparatively high and that experiences of discrimination, harassment and fear are generally lower than European averages. Data show that a significant proportion of respondents in Malta report being open about their identity, while fewer avoid public displays of affection or certain public spaces because of safety concerns. These surveys indicate that most respondents believe prejudice and intolerance have declined over recent years and that confidence in government efforts to address discrimination remains considerably higher than the European average. These findings suggest that legal reform has been accompanied by broader social change, including increased visibility of LGBTIQ+ persons within public life, education, workplaces and the media.



76%

**SAY PREJUDICE HAS DECREASED
OVER THE PAST YEARS**



83%

**BELIEVE GOVERNMENT EFFECTIVELY
COMBATS PREJUDICE**

FRA LGBTI Survey II, 2024

Nevertheless, progress remains uneven and important challenges continue to exist. Both national and European research demonstrate that legal equality does not automatically translate into equal lived experiences. A number of studies have identified ongoing concerns relating to bullying within educational environments, barriers faced by trans and non-binary persons, experiences of online hate speech, stigma in certain social settings, and difficulties encountered by particularly vulnerable groups such as migrants, asylum seekers, elderly LGBTIQ+ persons and persons with disabilities. While Malta's legislative framework receives widespread recognition, civil society organisations and international monitoring mechanisms continue to encourage further improvements in implementation, service delivery and social inclusion. The challenge facing Malta today is therefore less about establishing formal legal equality and more about ensuring that equality is fully realised in everyday life.

Internationally, Malta has become an influential actor in the promotion of LGBTIQ+ equality and human rights. For over a decade the country occupied the highest position on ILGA-Europe's Rainbow Map, which assesses legal and policy frameworks across forty-nine European countries. Although Malta moved to second place in the 2026 edition, achieving a score of 88%, this change reflected advances made elsewhere rather than any substantial rollback of rights domestically. Malta remains among Europe's highest-performing countries and continues to serve as an international example of good practice in areas such as legal gender recognition, equality mainstreaming, policy coordination and intersex rights.



**Malta's movement to
second place reflects
Spain's legislative
advances rather than any
rollback of rights in Malta.**

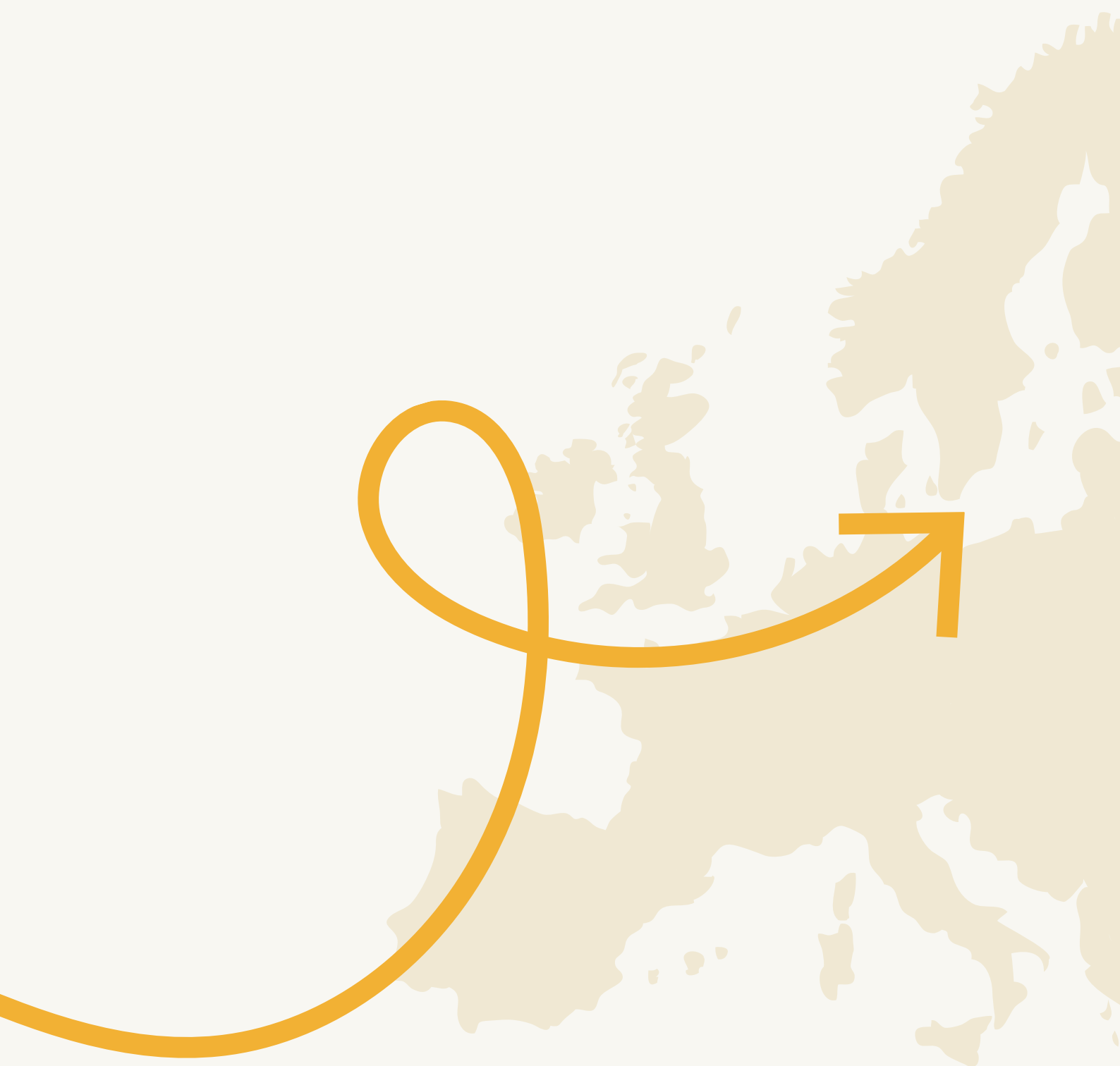


ILGA-Europe, 2026

Beyond rankings, Malta's international standing is also reflected in its active participation within European and global human rights structures. The country contributes to the CoE's Committee of Experts on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, and Sex Characteristics (ADI-SOGIESC), participates in the Equal Rights Coalition (ERC), contributes to the implementation of EU equality initiatives, and regularly shares policy expertise through international conferences, peer-learning activities and multilateral cooperation. Malta's election to leadership roles within international equality mechanisms further demonstrates the extent to which the country's experience is viewed as a source of expertise and policy innovation beyond its borders.

Malta's position today may therefore be understood as the result of two interconnected developments. The first is the establishment of one of the most comprehensive legal frameworks for LGBTIQ+ equality worldwide, characterised by robust anti-discrimination protections, family recognition, legal gender recognition and protections relating to sex characteristics.

The second is the gradual emergence of a more inclusive social environment in which visibility, acceptance and participation have increased considerably, even though challenges persist. As Malta continues implementing the LGBTIQ+ Equality Strategy and Action Plan 2023–2027, the country's future efforts are likely to focus increasingly on consolidating legislative gains, strengthening implementation, addressing intersectional inequalities, combating hate speech and ensuring that the benefits of equality are experienced consistently by all members of the LGBTIQ+ community. In this respect, Malta's journey can be viewed not as a completed project but as an ongoing process of deepening and sustaining equality, inclusion and human rights for everyone.





03

Assessment of the Implementation of the LGBTIQ+ Equality Strategy and Action Plan 2023-27



AREA 01

Measures to Promote and Guarantee Equal Treatment in Employment and Service Provision

Capacity building across the public administration

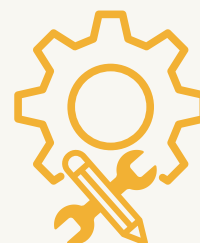
The SOGIGESC Unit continued to deliver regular training and capacity-building activities across the public administration, with the objective of strengthening public officers' understanding of equality, human rights and inclusive service provision. This was further enhanced through collaboration efforts with the private sector, with the delivery of tailor made sessions.

Participation in these training and outreach events exceeded 300 participants. These activities strengthened awareness of SOGIGESC terminology, relevant legal protections, respectful communication and the responsibilities of public authorities when serving LGBTIQ+ persons.

In collaboration with the Institute for the Public Service (IPS), the SOGIGESC Unit also developed and delivered a dedicated course entitled Equality and Human Rights in the Public Service. The introductory programme provides public officers with a foundational understanding of equality and human rights principles and supports them in applying these principles within their daily functions. Through practical examples and participatory learning, the course enables participants to identify equality and human rights concerns, respond appropriately to discriminatory situations, and promote dignity and inclusion in public service delivery. More than 80 public officers completed the programme.



<120
TRAINED
THROUGH THE IPS



<300
TRAINED BY THE
SOGIGESC UNIT

Capacity building continued through the Managing a Diverse Workforce programme, in which 58 public officers participated. The programme supported greater awareness of equality, diversity and inclusion within the public service and strengthened the ability of managers and other officials to foster respectful and inclusive working environments.

Taken together, these initiatives demonstrate a sustained investment in institutional knowledge and in the practical implementation of equality standards across public administration. They also reinforce the SOGIGESC Unit's role as a source of specialised guidance and professional development for public entities.

Mainstreaming equality through the NCPE

The National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE) continued to integrate sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics into its training portfolio. Training sessions addressed the legal protections established under Chapter 456 of the Laws of Malta and provided participants with practical guidance on promoting equality, preventing discrimination and responding to harassment or discriminatory conduct.

The Commission also continued to support public and private organisations in developing and reviewing equality and sexual harassment policies. Feedback provided by the NCPE assisted organisations in aligning their internal policies with national equality legislation and in ensuring that SOGIGESC grounds were adequately represented within workplace protections and reporting procedures.

Through the Equality Mark certification and recertification process, the NCPE assessed organisations' commitment to equality and diversity in the workplace. Although the Equality Mark principally addresses equal treatment between women and men, the certification process also requires organisations to maintain equality and sexual harassment policies that provide clear procedures for reporting and addressing discrimination and harassment. The NCPE consistently promoted the inclusion of SOGIGESC grounds within these policies and encouraged organisations to communicate their commitments effectively to employees.

Awareness of the Equality Mark and wider LGBTIQ+ equality topics was further promoted through publications and social media activity. This included the publication of the article *Advancing Equality for LGBTIQ+ Individuals* and communications marking relevant international observances and equality initiatives.

As part of the Strengthening Knowledge on Integration and Non-discrimination project, the NCPE organised engagement sessions with community members, including persons of African descent and Muslim participants. These sessions addressed SOGIGESC-related discrimination and the protections available under Maltese law, while providing information on the institutions and organisations through which persons may seek redress in cases of discrimination, harassment or sexual harassment. The initiative supported a more intersectional understanding of equality and encouraged dialogue across communities that may experience multiple or overlapping forms of discrimination.

Diversity and Inclusion Charter

The HRD continued to support the implementation and growth of Malta's Diversity and Inclusion Charter, developed in partnership with CORE Platform. The Directorate had previously participated in the stakeholder consultation process and became the Charter's first signatory at its launch on 20 March 2024.



A three-year partnership was established with CORE Platform to co-organise an annual Diversity and Inclusion Conference between 2024 and 2026.

The establishment of the Charter enabled Malta to participate in the EU Platform of Diversity Charters and strengthened cooperation between public, private and voluntary organisations committed to equality and inclusion.

The HRD supported the National Diversity and Inclusion Charter Conference held in May 2026. The event brought together more than 100 stakeholders, with the Directorate coordinating sessions within the main themes of the event, particularly with the international author, Emma Holten.

Participation in the Charter continued to grow, reaching 76 signatory organisations. New signatories included the European Union Programmes Agency (EUPA), Grant Thornton Malta, Persepolis Co. Ltd, Siefert Systems Malta and Women in Aviation. Further entities expressed their intention to join, demonstrating increasing interest in structured organisational commitments to diversity and inclusion.

The continued expansion of the Charter has strengthened the visibility of equality commitments across sectors and created a broader network through which inclusive employment and service-delivery practices can be promoted.

Inclusive employment practices and private-sector engagement

The HRD continued to support initiatives promoting LGBTIQ+ equality within employment. Collaboration between Allied Rainbow Communities (ARC) and the Malta Chamber of Commerce, Enterprise and Industry resulted in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) through which ARC participates in a Chamber subcommittee addressing LGBTIQ+ workplace issues and inclusive employment practices.

This cooperation complements the work undertaken through the Diversity and Inclusion Charter and the NCPE Equality Mark by encouraging employers to move beyond formal non-discrimination commitments and consider how organisational cultures, procedures and workplace practices affect LGBTIQ+ employees.

Inclusive tourism and service excellence

The SOGIGESC Unit engaged with the Malta Tourism Authority (MTA) and the Institute for Tourism Studies (ITS) to explore how the Skills Pass programme for third-country nationals working in tourism and hospitality could further support inclusive service provision for LGBTIQ+ travellers. The programme incorporates diversity and inclusion concepts and directs participants towards HRD resources for further learning.

The MTA continued implementing a comprehensive strategy aimed at reinforcing Malta's reputation as a safe, welcoming and inclusive destination for LGBTIQ+ travellers. Its work included international marketing, media and influencer partnerships, engagement with tourism operators, participation in Pride events, support for LGBTIQ+ organisations, familiarisation visits and targeted promotion across priority markets. This work was supported by the appointment of a dedicated LGBTIQ+ segment coordinator and by continued MTA representation on the Board of the European LGBTIQ+ Travel Alliance.

The Authority adopted a market-sensitive approach that took account of available resources, audience characteristics and the legal and social contexts within different jurisdictions. Earlier investments continued to generate media coverage and destination visibility throughout the year, even where additional centrally funded campaigns were not launched.

In the United Kingdom, campaigns included Malta for All with Guardian Labs, a national radio campaign with Gaydio and content produced in partnership with OutThere Magazine. Influencer collaborations were also used to reach audiences in Ireland, France and Italy. In Austria, the MTA established a substantial partnership with Vienna Pride between April and October 2025, including destination branding, an exhibition stand, sponsorship activities and collaboration with the Pride Run Vienna. This was followed by a destination visit by Austrian content creator Bianca "Full of Dreams", supporting targeted visibility during the lower tourism season.

In Germany, engagement included participation in Salon Blu Berlin and cooperation with the Embassy of Malta, supported by continued promotion of the Authority's dedicated LGBTIQ+ tourism microsite. In Belgium, content arising from a Pride-focused influencer visit generated an estimated earned media value of approximately €75,250. French promotional content generated an estimated earned media value of €10,500, while social media and owned digital channels sustained visibility in Italy.

Inclusive destination messaging was also incorporated into campaigns in Hungary, the Netherlands, Spain, Portugal, the Nordic region and Switzerland. Amsterdam Pride provided an opportunity to promote Malta as an inclusive wedding destination and to highlight the legal recognition of same-sex marriage. Previous Pride-related advertising and editorial coverage continued to sustain visibility in Sweden and Denmark.

Outside Europe, collaboration in Japan progressed towards the development of a dedicated LGBTIQ+ travel package for Malta. In North America, Malta's participation in the International LGBTQ+ Travel Association Global Convention was complemented by media partnerships, advertising, editorial coverage and direct engagement with consumers and the travel industry.



Campaigns in the United Kingdom, Austria, Germany, Belgium, France, Italy, Hungary, the Netherlands, Spain, Portugal, Nordic Countries, Japan and the United States.



Community engagement and visibility

LGBTI+ Gozo continued to promote community participation through research, focus groups, funding applications, consultation meetings and social activities. The organisation also undertook preparations related to Pride and worked to develop new partnerships. While participation in some events remained challenging, its outreach contributed to greater connection and visibility for LGBTIQ+ persons in Gozo.

The SOGIGESC Unit maintained an active communications presence throughout the year. Social media was used to mark significant dates, communicate legislative and policy developments, promote services and opportunities, and provide visibility to ongoing initiatives. Digital outreach was complemented by articles in the media, television and radio interventions, interviews and advertising.

Through this combination of institutional training, workplace engagement, tourism-sector cooperation and public communication, equality and inclusion were promoted as cross-government and cross-sector responsibilities rather than isolated areas of specialist policy.

AREA 02

Equality Data and Research Reflecting the Lived Experiences of LGBTIQ+ Persons

LGBTIQ+ research symposium and Mapping the Rainbow

The HRD continued its cooperation with the University of Malta (UM) and civil society to promote research on the experiences, rights and wellbeing of LGBTIQ+ persons.

On 19 May 2025, the Department of Gender and Sexualities within the Faculty for Social Wellbeing, the Institute for European Studies, the HRD and the Malta LGBTIQ Rights Movement (MGRM) hosted the fourth edition of the LGBTIQ Research Symposium.

The Symposium brought together academics, practitioners and student researchers to examine the experiences of LGBTIQ+ persons across social, cultural and institutional contexts. Contributions reinforced the importance of intersectionality, cultural sensitivity, evidence-based policymaking and inclusive public services. The event also provided an important platform for emerging researchers and strengthened links between academic inquiry, community knowledge and policy implementation.

Work continued on compiling the Symposium proceedings for publication in the fourth volume of Mapping the Rainbow and launched in September 2026. The series supports the development and dissemination of Malta-based LGBTIQ+ research and provides a national platform through which scholarship can inform policy, professional practice and public discussion.

Establishment of Astarte: Mediterranean Journal on Gender and Sexualities

The HRD continued its collaboration with the Department of Gender and Sexualities at the UM to establish Astarte: Mediterranean Journal on Gender and Sexualities, a new academic publication dedicated to advancing interdisciplinary scholarship on gender, sexualities, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics within the Mediterranean region and beyond.

Throughout the reporting period, substantial groundwork was undertaken to establish the journal's editorial and operational framework. This included extensive planning and coordination meetings, the development of the journal's visual identity, the establishment of editorial structures and governance mechanisms, and the refinement of manuscript specifications, submission requirements and publication guidelines. Significant efforts were also dedicated to building partnerships with academics, researchers and practitioners, while promoting the journal and encouraging high-quality submissions through an open call for papers.

A key milestone was reached in May 2026 with the organisation of an academic conference bringing together researchers, academics, students and practitioners to present papers and research intended for publication within the journal. The conference provided an important platform for scholarly exchange and critical discussion on a wide range of issues relating to gender and sexualities, while also strengthening collaboration between academic institutions, policymakers, civil society organisations and researchers working across the Mediterranean region.

Following the successful completion of the peer-review and editorial processes, the inaugural edition of Astarte is expected to be published in October 2026. The establishment of the journal represents a significant achievement in strengthening Malta's contribution to international scholarship on gender and sexualities and supports the development of a sustainable platform for research dissemination, academic dialogue and knowledge exchange. In addition to increasing the visibility of Maltese and Mediterranean research, Astarte is expected to contribute to evidence-based policymaking by promoting greater understanding of the diverse experiences, challenges and realities of individuals and communities across the region.



The newly unveiled logo of this academic journal.

Public lecture on gendered digital abuse and violence

In December 2025, the HRD organised the public lecture *Mic Check: Reclaiming Rights in the Age of Gendered Digital Abuse and Violence* at Spazju Kreattiv, Valletta. The event brought together academics, practitioners and stakeholders to examine the impact of digital environments on human rights, with particular attention to gendered forms of online abuse and violence and their implications for women and LGBTIQ+ persons.

The lecture featured expert contributions exploring themes including online trafficking, gender-responsive policy approaches, and the challenges experienced by groups that are often overlooked within existing protection frameworks. The event fostered interdisciplinary dialogue and encouraged critical reflection on emerging forms of digital harm, while contributing to a broader understanding of how discrimination, misogyny, anti-gender narratives and online abuse intersect in contemporary society.

Regional and community-based research

LGBTI+ Gozo launched a regional research survey and conducted focus groups to strengthen understanding of the experiences and needs of LGBTIQ+ persons in Gozo. This work supported greater regional visibility and created opportunities for the perspectives of Gozitan community members to inform future services, projects and advocacy.

The development of equality data remains subject to practical challenges arising from Malta's population size and the smaller number of respondents within particular identity groups. These limitations reinforce the importance of combining quantitative data with qualitative research, consultation, focus groups and other methods capable of capturing lived experience while protecting confidentiality.



Panel discussion held as part of the public lecture organised in December.

Increased Visibility and Inclusion of LGBTIQ+ Older Persons, Persons with Disabilities, Migrants, Children and Young People

LGBTIQ+ older persons

The implementation of the National Strategic Policy for Active Ageing 2023–2030 continued to provide the policy framework for addressing diversity and inequality within services for older persons. The Policy recognises that older LGBTIQ+ persons may have been overlooked within earlier approaches shaped by predominantly heterosexual and cisgender assumptions and calls for more inclusive social, health and residential care.

The Department for Active Ageing and Community Care (DAACC), St Vincent de Paul (SVPR) and the Older Persons Standards Authority (OPSA) registered progress in strengthening cultural sensitivity, staff knowledge and regulatory oversight across care settings.

The DAACC organised specialised training for staff working in Active Ageing Centres in collaboration with the NCPE. Training addressed the history of discrimination experienced by older LGBTIQ+ persons, their specific needs and the importance of respectful and culturally competent care.

SVPR introduced a specialised programme on LGBTIQ+ issues at the intersection of ageing in collaboration with the HRD and the IPS. Ongoing training for healthcare workers remains crucial to support the sustainability of this work.

The OPSA integrated inclusion criteria within its licensing audit process, including consideration of anti-oppressive practice, rights, norms, values and recognition of diverse family structures. Audit findings confirmed compliance with the inclusion-related standards assessed. The Authority also continued developing an LGBTIQ+ inclusiveness tolerance scale for care facilities, with a dedicated focus group meeting twice between January and May 2026. A further focus group continued its work on ensuring that care services remain sensitive to different ethnic norms and values.

These initiatives are creating a stronger evidence base for future sector-wide guidance on LGBTIQ+ inclusion. Training outcomes, regulatory findings and focus-group discussions can help establish more consistent standards and improve the ability of staff and management to provide safe, respectful and rights-based care.

The HRD participated as a partner in the development of the RainboWiser project, a transnational initiative submitted under the CERV-2025-EQUAL Programme.

The proposed project sought to promote inclusive health and social care services, strengthen community participation, develop professional capacity, and support policy development through training, awareness-raising activities, intergenerational engagement and the development of practical tools.

The project brought together partners from several European countries and drew on Malta's experience in equality policy and inclusive service provision. The HRD contributed to the development of the proposal and the design of activities aimed at strengthening the wellbeing and inclusion of older LGBTIQ+ persons. Although the application was ultimately unsuccessful in securing funding under the programme, the proposal facilitated valuable cooperation with international partners and contributed to the exchange of knowledge and good practices on ageing and LGBTIQ+ equality. The Directorate will continue to explore future opportunities to advance this area of work through alternative partnerships and funding mechanisms.

Children and young people

Aġenzija Żgħażaġh continued to support the inclusion, participation and wellbeing of LGBTIQ+ young people through its structured partnership with the MGRM.

The Agency provided professional youth workers and premises for the bi-weekly Rainbow Support Service Youth Group and the monthly Rainbow Family Support Network. These initiatives ensured continued access to safe, inclusive and professionally facilitated spaces for young people and rainbow families. They also enabled young people to discuss issues affecting their lives and to contribute to the development of future collaborative activities.

A renewed Memorandum of Understanding strengthened this partnership by introducing reflective supervision and mentoring for professionals engaged by MGRM. This supported continuous professional development, quality assurance and the delivery of consistent youth work services.

Aġenzija Żgħażaġh also supported arts-based and participatory initiatives, including Il-Każin tal-Imqarbin, a Maltese musical exploring HIV/AIDS, queer stigma and sexual health. Support included workshops, community engagement, rehearsal spaces and logistical assistance for projects such as It-Teatru tal-Miskin, Safer Grounds and Il-Każin tal-Imqarbin.

The Agency continued disseminating the LGBTIQ+ Youth Pack Toolkit, which youth workers used during outreach activities to address SOGIGESC, coming out, family relationships, wellbeing and the creation of safe spaces. The Toolkit also supported trauma-informed consultation practices by encouraging confidentiality, safeguarding and meaningful participation.

The [IN]VIŻIBBLI Youth Well-being Festival, held from 10 September to 10 October 2025, comprised more than 20 events across Malta and Gozo for young people aged between 12 and 30. The Festival used creative, participatory and non-formal learning approaches to address equality, identity, family acceptance and wellbeing.

Discussions associated with the Festival contributed to the development of the Bla Misthija podcast series. The 12-episode digital series promoted open and evidence-based discussion on sexual health, sexuality, gender identity, relationships and wellbeing among young adults. Topics included stigma and shame, queer women's health, trans experiences, faith and sexuality, healthy relationships, body image, consent, sexualised drug use, media literacy relating to pornography, and asexuality.

The podcast combined professional expertise with lived experience and provided a youth-accessible platform for discussion of issues that may otherwise remain underrepresented. Safeguarding measures included informed consent, pre-interview preparation, participant review opportunities and careful management of sensitive subject matter.

Aġenzija Żgħażaġħ further invested in professional development through Theatre-in-Education training and the IN-TOUCH Youth Worker Training. These programmes equipped youth workers with reflective, inclusive and creative methodologies through which to address stigma, sexual health, queer history, safe self-expression and diversity. Participants in the Theatre-in-Education programme were also prepared to facilitate structured workshops in secondary schools, contributing to the sustainability of the initiative.

The Office of the Commissioner for Children commenced preparations to participate in the European Network of Young Advisors 2026 Youth Participation Project. The initiative focuses on the rights of LGBTIQ+ children and young people and is intended to enable participants aged between 13 and 17 to develop rights-based recommendations for presentation at the annual conference of the European Network of Ombudspersons for Children.

Collectively, these measures demonstrate a sustained commitment to youth participation and to the provision of inclusive, evidence-based and professionally supported services for LGBTIQ+ young people and their families.

LGBTIQ+ migrants and asylum seekers

The HRD continued to support the development of more informed, consistent and rights-based responses to LGBTIQ+ asylum seekers and migrants. Stakeholders from the Agency for the Welfare of Asylum Seekers (AWAS) and the International Protection Agency (IPA) were encouraged to participate in the CoE HELP course on LGBTI persons in the asylum procedure. The course provides specialised knowledge relevant to the treatment and assessment of claims linked to sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics.

AWAS continued investing in its psychosocial services and in the professional development of its multidisciplinary team, including psychologists, counsellors, social workers, welfare officers and cultural mediators. Training addressed trauma-informed and person-centred support, migrant and refugee children's rights, conflict management and mediation, asylum procedures, gender-based violence, victim support and vulnerability screening.

Operational discussions identified challenges relating to interpretation during asylum procedures. These included inconsistent translation of SOGIESC terminology, variations in interpreting styles and limited familiarity with concepts linked to identity, Pride and LGBTIQ+ experiences. Such challenges may affect applicants' ability to explain their experiences and can create difficulties during credibility assessment.

Applicants from contexts in which LGBTIQ+ identities are criminalised, stigmatised or not openly discussed may also lack the language or confidence required to disclose relevant experiences. In detention settings, fear, stigma and concerns regarding confidentiality may further discourage disclosure, even where disclosure is necessary to identify protection needs.

The EU Agency for Asylum (EUAA) Practical Guide on SOGIESC continued to serve as an important reference for terminology and professional practice.

The HRD commissioned a specialised legal research study to examine international good practices and potential policy options relating to a number of emerging issues affecting LGBTIQ+ equality in Malta. The study explored the legal and administrative implications of extending access to legal gender recognition to third-country nationals residing in Malta and reviewed existing frameworks governing family reunification for LGBTIQ+ persons whose relationships may not be recognised in their country of origin.

Undertaken through external independent legal expertise, the research included comparative analysis of legislative models, administrative practices, and relevant human rights standards across a range of jurisdictions. The study serves as an important evidence base to inform future policy discussions and engagement with competent authorities, while contributing to the Directorate's ongoing efforts to identify practical, rights-based approaches that strengthen equality, legal certainty, and access to rights for LGBTIQ+ persons in Malta.

LGBTIQ+ persons with disabilities

Work continued to strengthen accessibility and recognise the intersecting experiences of persons with disabilities who identify as LGBTIQ+.

The LGBTIQ+ Equality Strategy and Action Plan includes a commitment to explore a sexuality and relationships advisory service for persons with intellectual disabilities. Although a standalone centre was not established, Aġenzija Sapport continued addressing the objective through its Professional Advisory Prevention Team. The Team's wider remit includes prevention, guidance, wellbeing, healthy relationships and informed decision-making, and its services are intended to be inclusive of LGBTIQ+ persons.

Aġenzija Sapport prepared a pilot workshop to support parents in discussing sexuality and relationships with persons with disabilities. Subject to the outcome of the pilot and available capacity, the Agency intends to offer further workshop groups.

The Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD) continued promoting accessible information on sexuality, relationships and sexual health. Building on earlier Easy Language resources developed in collaboration with Agenzija Sapporot, the Commission progressed work on an Easy Language dictionary covering sexuality, sexual health and relationships.

The CRPD also collaborated with MGRM on improving the accessibility of information provided through its new website and sexual health resources. Due to the volume and sensitivity of the material, adaptation requires careful review, including the participation of persons with intellectual disabilities, to ensure that the final content is clear, appropriate and accessible.

The Commission maintained regular cooperation with LGBTIQ+ civil society on issues arising at the intersection of disability and LGBTIQ+ equality, including when complaints or requests for guidance were received. Its disability database records service users' gender preference as M, F or X, supporting respectful engagement with individuals using its services.

The Consultative Council on Disability Rights initiated outreach to organisations working in the LGBTIQ+ sector to encourage dialogue and identify opportunities for cooperation between disability-rights and LGBTIQ+ organisations.

CRPD also incorporated intersectional representation within its awareness and advocacy work. Through the EU ACTIVATE project, which provides advocacy training for autistic young people, the programme included personal accounts and video contributions from autistic LGBTIQ+ persons.

At international level, the Directorate for Disability Issues co-organised a side event during the June 2025 Conference of States Parties to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The event addressed disability, autism, sexual abuse and bodily integrity, drawing on research and direct engagement with disabled and autistic survivors.

The discussion highlighted barriers to justice, vulnerability to abuse and coercion, the impact of intersecting discrimination, and the importance of accessible support, sexuality and consent education, advocacy and self-advocacy. This work contributed to wider efforts to promote the safety, bodily autonomy and equal participation of persons with disabilities.

CRPD also maintained annual engagement with Pride Week and continued raising awareness of the intersection between disability and SOGIESC equality.



The Consultative Council on Disability Rights initiated outreach to organisations working in the LGBTIQ+ sector to encourage dialogue and identify opportunities for cooperation between disability-rights and LGBTIQ+ organisations.



The Fight Against Discrimination, Hate Speech and Hate Crime

Police training and inclusive policing

The SOGIGESC Unit continued providing training to newly recruited and promoted members of the Malta Police Force (MPF). The programme addressed LGBTIQ+ terminology, relevant legislation and respectful professional engagement with LGBTIQ+ persons. A further 70 officers completed the dedicated programme, bringing the cumulative number trained since its inception to 1,945.

Additional training strengthened awareness of fundamental rights and the effective handling of hate crime and hate speech. A total of 155 serving officers received training on fundamental rights and hate crime, while 18 Officer Cadets completed training on LGBTIQ+ issues and fundamental rights. A further 48 recruits undertook the Basic Training Course leading to a Pre-Tertiary Certificate in Police Studies, which includes modules on ethics, equality, diversity and inclusion.

This continuing investment in police capacity supports respectful service provision, improves institutional awareness of SOGIGESC-related discrimination and strengthens the ability of officers to recognise and respond to hate-motivated conduct.

Council of Europe Roundtable on Hate Speech and Anti-LGBTIQ+ Narratives

In February 2026, the HRD, through the SOGIGESC Unit, contributed to the organisation and delivery of a CoE roundtable focusing on hate speech and anti-LGBTIQ+ narratives. The event brought together representatives from public entities, law enforcement agencies, international experts, civil society organisations, academics and practitioners to examine emerging trends in anti-LGBTIQ+ discourse, the increasing visibility of anti-gender narratives, and the challenges these developments pose to equality, human rights and social cohesion.



National roundtable on hate speech and anti-LGBTIQ+ narratives organised in partnership with the Council of Europe.

The roundtable was particularly well attended by the MPF, including a significant number of District Superintendents responsible for local policing across Malta. Their participation provided an important opportunity to discuss the practical realities of hate speech, community tensions and evolving patterns of discrimination at a local level, while strengthening cooperation between equality bodies, policymakers and frontline law enforcement officials.

Participants exchanged experiences and good practices related to the prevention, monitoring and reporting of hate speech, the growing influence of misinformation and disinformation, and strategies for building institutional and societal resilience. Discussions also examined the role of public institutions, civil society and law enforcement agencies in responding effectively to harmful narratives while safeguarding fundamental rights and democratic values.

The findings and discussions arising from the roundtable informed the development of a CoE report examining contemporary manifestations of anti-LGBTIQ+ hate speech and anti-gender narratives and identifying recommendations for member states. The initiative contributed to ongoing efforts to strengthen evidence-based responses to discrimination, improve understanding of emerging challenges, and support the development of more coordinated approaches to combating hate speech and promoting equality and inclusion.

European project development

The SOGIGESC Unit, in collaboration with the Anti-Racism Unit, led the development and submission of a multi-partner funding application under the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) Programme. The proposed project sought to strengthen Malta's response to racism, LGBTIQ+ phobia and intersectional discrimination while supporting the implementation of the National Action Plan Against Racism 2025–2030 and the LGBTIQ+ Equality Strategy and Action Plan 2023–2027.

The proposal brought together public authorities, civil society organisations and international partners and included a range of measures aimed at enhancing prevention, awareness-raising, capacity building, victim support and policy development. These included specialised training programmes, a Train-the-Trainer model, policy mapping exercises, the development of good practice frameworks, awareness campaigns, and the piloting of a national mechanism for reporting online hate speech based on the Trusted Flaggers methodology.

Although the application was ultimately unsuccessful in securing European funding, the project development process strengthened cooperation between stakeholders working on equality, anti-discrimination and human rights issues. It also contributed to the identification of emerging needs, potential areas for future collaboration, and opportunities for advancing a more coordinated and intersectional approach to tackling hate speech, hate crime, discrimination and victim support in Malta.

Facilitating Access to Private and Family Life

Inclusive responses to gender-based and domestic violence

The National Strategy on Gender-Based Violence and Domestic Violence 2023–2028 recognises the specific barriers and vulnerabilities experienced by LGBTIQ+ persons. It promotes accessible support services, consultation with equality bodies, professional training and measures aimed at strengthening the accessibility of emergency shelters. It also encourages the participation of LGBTIQ+ organisations in policy development, awareness raising and professional capacity building.

The Commission on Gender-Based Violence and Domestic Violence (CGBVDV) supported implementation through training, educational initiatives, public awareness activity and research informed by an intersectional approach.

Its three-day multi-agency training programme for frontline professionals included a dedicated module on the experiences of LGBTIQ+ persons affected by gender-based and domestic violence. The module addressed violence in same-sex relationships, barriers to disclosure and support, hate speech, homophobia, transphobia and discrimination linked to sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression.

The training strengthened participants' ability to identify abusive behaviour and provide informed, sensitive and victim-centred support. It also emphasised that gender-based and domestic violence can affect persons in any intimate relationship and that services must respond appropriately to diverse identities and family structures.

Public awareness activities included roadshows across Malta and Gozo during the 16 Days of Activism. The programme used theatrical performances to address violence in same-sex relationships, stalking, harassment and technology-facilitated abuse. Further initiatives promoted understanding of consent, coercive control and healthy relationships.

The Commission distributed educational material on consent and organised a UM panel discussion addressing consent in intimate relationships, sexual interactions and digital environments. A Valentine's campaign also engaged parliamentarians and encouraged public commitment to preventing gender-based and domestic violence.

Through the Together We Empower Programme, the Commission supported the LGBTI+ Gozo project *Beyond the Narrative: How Misinformation Fuels Gender-Based Violence*. The project examines how misinformation and anti-gender narratives can reinforce harmful stereotypes, discrimination and violence. It seeks to increase understanding of lived experience, challenge harmful norms, communicate available support and promote prevention through accessible educational content.

The Commission also developed Personal, Social and Career Development educational videos for use in schools. Two videos specifically address LGBTIQ+ themes, including stalking, harassment, coercive control, jealousy, intimate partner violence and warning signs within same-sex relationships. These resources encourage students to recognise harmful behaviour, understand when support should be sought and appreciate that abuse may occur regardless of the sex, sexual orientation or gender identity of the persons involved.

Strengthening Community-Based Support and Housing Services

The HRD continued to support efforts aimed at strengthening social support and community-based services for vulnerable members of the LGBTIQ+ community. Financial assistance was provided to support the development and functioning of Dar il-Qawsalla, a second-stage accommodation project for individuals experiencing or at risk of homelessness. The initiative contributes to the availability of safe, inclusive and supportive housing options for individuals facing family rejection, housing insecurity, or other circumstances that place them at increased vulnerability.

Access to specialised psychosocial support services for LGBTIQ+ persons also continued to expand through the LGBTIQ+ Wellbeing Service. The service provides individual, family and group-based support addressing issues such as family relationships, identity exploration, gender transition, social isolation, mental health and interpersonal relationships. Through close collaboration with government entities, community organisations and healthcare providers, the service has strengthened referral pathways and multidisciplinary support mechanisms while contributing to greater accessibility of tailored support services for LGBTIQ+ persons and their families.

Advancing Knowledge on Family and Relationship Rights

The Directorate continued to explore legal and policy measures aimed at strengthening equality in relation to private and family life. As part of these efforts, specialised legal research was commissioned to examine international good practices and emerging developments relating to family recognition, relationship rights, and access to legal protections for diverse family structures.

In parallel, the Directorate facilitated ongoing dialogue and collaboration between relevant government entities, legal experts, service providers and civil society organisations to identify practical and legal challenges affecting LGBTIQ+ individuals and families. These discussions focused on ensuring that existing frameworks remain responsive to evolving social realities and continue to provide appropriate safeguards and recognition for diverse family arrangements. Through a collaborative and evidence-informed approach, stakeholders explored a range of issues relating to family recognition, parenthood, administrative procedures, legal certainty and equal access to rights and services.

Supporting Rainbow Families and Young People

Support for rainbow families and LGBTIQ+ young people continued through collaboration between public entities, youth services and civil society organisations. Through initiatives such as the Rainbow Support Service and the Rainbow Family Support Network, young people and family members were provided with access to safe spaces, professional support, peer networks and opportunities for meaningful engagement.

These initiatives continued to promote wellbeing, strengthen support structures for families, and encourage greater social inclusion and community connectedness. Through the provision of structured support, information and opportunities for participation, these services contribute to creating environments in which LGBTIQ+ young people and their families can thrive and access appropriate assistance when needed.

AREA 06

Ensuring Equal and Non-discriminatory Access to Education

Building Educator Capacity and Promoting Inclusive School Environments

Efforts to strengthen LGBTIQ+ inclusion within educational settings continued through the development of educational resources, professional development initiatives, awareness-raising activities and cross-sector collaboration aimed at supporting inclusive school cultures and fostering safe learning environments for all students.

The Directorate for Early Years, Languages and Humanities (DELH) continued investing in professional development initiatives designed to strengthen educators' knowledge, skills and confidence in promoting equality, diversity and inclusion within schools. Capacity-building activities focused on themes including LGBTIQ+ inclusion and diversity, bias, stereotypes and prejudice awareness, equality and human rights, recognising and responding to hate speech, creating safe and inclusive learning environments, critical thinking, countering misinformation, and supporting student wellbeing and belonging.

In collaboration with civil society organisations and the HRD, a number of targeted training initiatives were delivered to educators across Malta and Gozo. These included dedicated sessions on LGBTIQ+ inclusion in schools, inclusive classroom practices, responding to hate and discrimination within educational settings, and recognising and challenging prejudicial attitudes and stereotypes. Training was delivered in collaboration with the MGRM, LGBTI+ Gozo, KOPIN and the SOGIGESC Unit within the HRD, reaching educators teaching students between Years 7 and 11 across a number of state colleges and schools.



The Ministry for Education and Sport, the Human Rights Directorate, and civil society organisations collaborated on focused training for educators.



These initiatives formed part of DELH's ongoing commitment to embedding inclusive practices within teaching and learning while strengthening schools' ability to respond to bullying, discrimination and LGBTIQ+ phobia. Through these programmes, educators were supported in creating learning environments that promote respect, inclusion and a sense of belonging for all students.

Educational Resources and Curriculum Support

The Directorate for Educational Services, through the Personal, Social and Career Development Department, continued collaborating with the CGBVDV to develop educational resources that promote critical thinking, equality, healthy relationships and violence prevention.

This included the use of drama-based learning resources addressing harmful gender stereotypes, harassment, coercive control, cyberviolence, consent, intimate partner violence and relationships among diverse groups. These resources continue to support classroom discussions across subjects such as PSCD, Ethics, Religious Education and Social Studies.

Further initiatives explored innovative and participatory approaches to learning. The Theatre-in-Education production Jennifer was delivered to Year 10 students attending state and non-state secondary schools. Focusing on themes of consent, personal boundaries, healthy relationships and responsible decision-making, the production provided students with opportunities for reflection and discussion within a structured educational environment. The initiative complemented broader Sexuality and Relationships Education objectives and supported the development of respectful attitudes and positive interpersonal relationships among young people.

Educational initiatives also included professional development sessions such as Artivism: Art as a Form of Social or Political Action, which introduced educators to creative approaches for exploring equality, social inclusion, solidarity and the amplification of marginalised voices through artistic expression.

Promoting Representation through Inclusive Literature

The National Literacy Agency continued implementing Measure 6.05 of the LGBTIQ+ Equality Strategy and Action Plan through the Aqra Kemm Tiflah programme. The initiative actively promotes the procurement and dissemination of age-appropriate literature featuring diverse identities, experiences and family structures.

Throughout the reporting period, LGBTIQ+ inclusive books continued to be distributed to early years and primary school classroom libraries, enabling educators to foster inclusive learning environments and promote empathy, respect and belonging from an early age. These resources support the positive representation of diversity while contributing to wider curriculum objectives relating to equality, human rights and inclusion.

Preparatory work also continued to extend the initiative to middle and secondary school libraries through the procurement of additional inclusive titles. This development will further expand access to literature that reflects the diversity of contemporary Maltese society and supports learners in understanding and appreciating different lived experiences.

Reviewing and Strengthening Sexuality and Relationships Education

Work also continued to strengthen Sexuality and Relationships Education within Maltese schools. Planning commenced for a national survey, being developed in collaboration with the Health Directorate, which is intended to gather students' perspectives on the implementation and effectiveness of Sexuality and Relationships Education content delivered through the Personal, Social and Career Development curriculum.

The survey will support future curriculum review processes by providing evidence-based insights into students' experiences and evolving educational needs. Combined with existing educational initiatives and classroom interventions, this work reflects a commitment to ensuring that Sexuality and Relationships Education remains relevant, responsive and aligned with contemporary realities affecting young people.

European Cooperation and School Leadership Development

Following cooperation between the Ministry for Equality and Civil Rights (MER), the Ministry for Education and Sport (MES), the CoE and the International LGBTIQ+ Youth and Student Organisation (IGLYO) also commenced preparations for a pilot initiative centred on the implementation of the IGLYO Inclusive Education Toolkit within Malta.

Planned for October 2026, the initiative will bring together school leaders, college principals, senior management teams, education authorities and other key stakeholders through a series of intensive training workshops focusing on inclusive educational leadership and whole-school approaches to equality and inclusion. The programme will support participants in assessing school policies, practices and culture against a set of structured indicators designed to strengthen inclusion and address discrimination related to sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics.

Beyond the implementation of the toolkit itself, the initiative represents an important opportunity to strengthen school leadership and headship capacity in promoting inclusive educational environments.

Through collaboration with the CoE and IGLYO, participants will explore evidence-based approaches to preventing bullying, countering anti-rights and anti-gender narratives in educational settings, promoting student wellbeing and embedding equality within school governance and leadership structures.

The pilot will also contribute to the validation and refinement of a European resource intended for broader use across CoE member states, while providing Maltese educators and school leaders with the opportunity to contribute directly to the development of emerging European standards and good practice in inclusive education.

AREA 07

Facilitating the Inclusion of LGBTIQ+ Persons in Sport

Efforts to advance the inclusion of LGBTIQ+ persons within sport continued through collaboration with relevant stakeholders, awareness-raising initiatives, and the promotion of equality and non-discrimination within sporting environments. While implementation under this thematic area continues to present challenges, particularly in relation to the collection of data and the development of sport-specific measures, engagement has focused on encouraging greater visibility, awareness, and inclusion across the sector.

The HRD continued to advocate for inclusive sporting environments that are free from discrimination and harassment and that enable all individuals, regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or sex characteristics, to participate fully in sporting activities. Discussions with stakeholders highlighted the importance of ensuring that sporting policies, facilities, participation frameworks, and safeguarding mechanisms are responsive to the diverse needs of athletes and participants.

Particular emphasis was placed on awareness-raising and visibility initiatives aimed at challenging stereotypes and promoting positive representation. As part of broader national efforts, a public awareness campaign encouraging respect, diversity, and inclusion in sport was developed. The campaign included television advertisements broadcast during coverage of major sporting events, including the FIFA World Cup, enabling equality messages to reach wide and diverse audiences and reinforcing the importance of ensuring that sport remains accessible, welcoming, and respectful for all.

Although further work remains necessary to develop more targeted measures in this field, ongoing efforts have contributed to maintaining dialogue on LGBTIQ+ inclusion in sport and to promoting greater awareness of the role that sport can play in fostering social inclusion, wellbeing, participation, and respect for diversity. Future work will continue to focus on strengthening partnerships, identifying good practices, and exploring opportunities to support more inclusive sporting environments across Malta and Gozo.

Improving General Wellbeing and Access to Healthcare

Intersex healthcare and bodily autonomy

The Intersex Medical Protocol Working Group finalised its report, *Innate Variations in Sex Characteristics: A Report from the Intersex Medical Protocol Working Group*, and submitted it to the Ministry responsible for Health.

The report is intended to inform the development of a national medical protocol in accordance with the Gender Identity, Gender Expression and Sex Characteristics Act. The next stage requires the formal appointment of the interdisciplinary team responsible for developing, finalising and disseminating the protocol. Preparatory work also included efforts to recruit a Clinical Care Coordinator. At the close of the reporting period, the treatment protocol had been finalised, while the nomination of the relevant medical committee remained pending.

This work represents an important step towards a consistent, rights-based and multidisciplinary framework for care relating to innate variations in sex characteristics.

Gender-affirming healthcare

Progress was registered in relation to gender-affirming healthcare. Funding was allocated for the 2027–2029 period, and preparatory discussions commenced between UZ Ghent and the Gender Wellbeing Clinic (GWC) regarding staff training and formal referral pathways.

Gender-affirming surgeries were approved for inclusion within the national benefits package through the S2 funding route. Further multidisciplinary training and supervision were being prepared for 2027. Transdermal oestrogen patches and norethisterone were also added to the Government Formulary List.

These measures support improved continuity and accessibility of gender-affirming care. Continued attention will be required to ensure clear referral procedures, multidisciplinary oversight, timely access, patient information and sustainable professional capacity.

Sexual health and HIV prevention

The introduction of free Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) and Post-Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP) into Malta's national formulary on January 2026 represented a significant development in HIV prevention. It enables persons at risk of exposure to access preventive medication without charge and strengthens a public-health approach based on accessibility, prevention and health equity.

The National Sexual Health Strategy 2026–2030 was published in May 2026, with implementation measures commencing from January.

Through the REACH-OUT project and cooperation with the Primary Care Migrant Health Service, point-of-care testing for sexually transmitted infections became available in open and closed migrant centres.

Checkpoint Malta renewed its collaboration with the HRD to provide community-based HIV testing at the Paola Hub. A Memorandum of Understanding formalised the arrangement, with the LGBTIQ+ Wellbeing Service supporting referrals where required. The initiative strengthened cooperation between public services, community testing and psychosocial support.

The sexual health website was launched and continues to be updated with information and resources. Work with the CRPD and LGBTIQ+ civil society to produce Easy Language content is intended to improve accessibility for persons with intellectual disabilities and others who benefit from simplified communication.

HIV-related mental health and stigma

Mental health support for persons living with HIV was strengthened through cooperation with the hospital Psychology Department. The information provided indicates that routine referrals generally received appointments within two months, while urgent referrals were normally accommodated within two weeks.

Participation in the HIVE Horizon Europe project supported efforts to expand mental health services and address non-communicable diseases among persons living with HIV. Work to reduce stigma included continuing medical education for clinicians and improved arrangements through which authorised caregivers may access test results.

Access for patients requiring language support was strengthened through an upgraded telephone interpretation service. Following the change of provider in November 2025, monthly reports indicated increased interpreter availability, fewer technical issues and higher use of the service.

LGBTIQ+ Wellbeing Service

The LGBTIQ+ Wellbeing Service continued to provide specialised psychosocial support to LGBTIQ+ persons and their families.

Service users received assistance relating to gender transition, mental health, family conflict, relationship difficulties, social isolation and access to other services. The largest groups of service users were adults aged between 25 and 44 and young persons aged between 18 and 24. A significant proportion identified as transgender or were questioning their gender identity.

The service developed referral pathways and multidisciplinary cooperation with multiple stakeholders. It also promoted visibility through Malta Pride, Gozo Pride, media engagement, community outreach and training for professionals, including Supportline 179 personnel, school staff and community workers.

Additional social-work and community-based capacity was introduced to respond to increasing demand, together with processes for prioritising cases and managing waiting lists. The service also hosted counselling students completing professional placements, contributing to the development of future practitioners.

The service established itself as an important point of support for the LGBTIQ+ community. Priorities identified include expanding group programmes, strengthening outreach to young and older persons, and sustaining collaborative, client-centred care.

The multidisciplinary team within the LGBTIQ+ Hub also delivered sensitivity training to Mental Health Services community teams. Plans were developed to provide psychiatric trainees with practical learning opportunities relating to LGBTIQ+ mental health, supporting greater professional competence and cultural sensitivity.

Sexualised drug use and harm reduction

The HRD continued to strengthen awareness and coordination in relation to sexualised drug use (chemsex) through stakeholder engagement, capacity building and harm-reduction initiatives. Discussions were convened with LGBTI+ Gozo, Checkpoint Malta, FSWS Appogg, Sexual Health Malta, ARC and other relevant stakeholders to explore existing service gaps, emerging trends, and opportunities for developing a more coordinated response to information provision, support services and community outreach.

These discussions highlighted the need for increased awareness among professionals, improved access to specialist support services, strengthened harm-reduction approaches, and the development of community-informed resources capable of responding effectively to the realities and needs of those affected by chemsex.

Building on this work, the HRD, in collaboration with the Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Directorate (HPDP), organised a specialised workshop on chemsex in December 2025 for service providers, healthcare professionals, community leaders and representatives of relevant organisations. The workshop was facilitated by an independent expert from Controlling Chemsex, a United Kingdom-based organisation specialising in harm reduction, sexual health and support relating to chemsex. The event provided participants with an opportunity to explore current evidence, emerging challenges, lived experiences, effective intervention models and practical approaches to service provision and community support.

The workshop represented one of the first dedicated initiatives of its kind in Malta and contributed significantly to strengthening knowledge, awareness and professional capacity in this area. Participant feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with attendees highlighting the value of having a dedicated forum to discuss an issue that remains complex, often stigmatised and insufficiently understood. The initiative also helped strengthen collaboration between public entities, healthcare providers, community organisations and support services, laying the groundwork for future actions aimed at promoting wellbeing, reducing harm and improving access to appropriate support for affected individuals and communities.

Consolidating the Relationship Between Government and LGBTIQ+ Civil Society

The LGBTIQ+ Consultative Council continued meeting on a quarterly basis and remained a central mechanism for structured dialogue between government and civil society. The Council provided space to identify community concerns, discuss policy developments, share information and strengthen cooperation on implementation of the LGBTIQ+ Equality Strategy and Action Plan.

The SOGIGESC Unit supported the Council by sharing funding opportunities, consultation requests, seminars, surveys and capacity-building initiatives. This enabled civil society organisations to participate more consistently in policymaking, research, training and public discussion.

Capacity-building initiatives and mainstream voluntary-sector funding remained available to enrolled organisations on an equal and non-discriminatory basis. LGBTIQ+ organisations continued to benefit from these mechanisms, with MGRM remaining a regular beneficiary of funding administered by the Malta Council for the Voluntary Sector.

During Pride Week 2025, the SOGIGESC Unit organised its seventh consecutive annual conference at Villa Bighi. Approximately 70 representatives from government, civil society, service providers and community organisations participated.

The conference provided a structured opportunity to review implementation of the LGBTIQ+ Equality Strategy and Action Plan, assess progress, identify remaining gaps and discuss future priorities. It included a stocktake of policy and operational developments and a panel discussion addressing national identity, shared history, inclusion and representation. The event also strengthened networking and cooperation among stakeholders.

The Unit served as a principal sponsor of Pride Week and implemented a national visibility campaign through Bay Radio, online advertising, blog content and social media. Totem banners were placed at prominent locations in Valletta throughout September. The campaign increased the visibility of LGBTIQ+ equality and promoted awareness of the HRD's role and services.

Building on its wider awareness-raising efforts, the SOGIGESC Unit organised the IDAHOT+ Business Breakfast on 15 May 2026, focusing on LGBTIQ+ visibility and media responsibility. The event brought together representatives from public institutions, media organisations, journalists, civil society, academia and the private sector to explore how media narratives shape public understanding, social norms and inclusion.

Discussions reflected on the significant role that visibility and representation have played in advancing LGBTIQ+ equality in Malta while also examining emerging challenges linked to online misinformation, hate speech, algorithm-driven content amplification and the responsibilities of contemporary media actors. Participants further explored how inclusive and accurate representation can contribute to more informed public discourse and social cohesion.

In June 2026, the Unit also implemented a national visibility campaign comprising long-form social media content and television advertising centred on intergenerational conversations between LGBTIQ+ persons and long-standing allies and media personalities. The campaign reflected on the social climate of the early 2000s, the importance of media visibility in shaping public attitudes, and the role played by mainstream media in challenging stigma and normalising LGBTIQ+ lives. Through personal reflections and dialogue, the campaign highlighted how representation in media both reflected and contributed to broader cultural, legislative and social change in Malta, while reaffirming the continued importance of allyship, visibility and responsible storytelling in the face of contemporary backlash and misinformation.

The Directorate's cooperation with civil society extended across research, service provision, policy development, training, health, migration, youth participation, disability accessibility and European project development. This whole-of-society approach enabled community expertise and lived experience to inform public policy while supporting the sustainability and professional development of the sector.



Keynote speech by a CSO representative during the IDAHOT+ Business Breakfast, discussing media representation and online hate speech.

Promoting LGBTIQ+ Equality Internationally

Council of Europe leadership efforts

Malta continued to play an active role within the CoE's Committee of Experts on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, and Sex Characteristics (ADI-SOGIESC).

At the Committee's fourth meeting in Strasbourg on 28 and 29 October 2025, Malta was elected Chair for 2026. Discussions addressed implementation of the new intersex recommendation, support for intersex-led civil society, preparation of the next CoE LGBTI Equality Strategy, discrimination connected to gender expression and thematic work relating to hate speech, housing and social exclusion.

Malta's election to the Chair was an important recognition of its sustained contribution to the CoE's equality agenda. It also placed Malta in a strategic position to support cooperation between governments, civil society and international organisations during a period characterised by increasingly visible anti-gender and anti-rights narratives.

In October, the CoE also adopted Recommendation CM/Rec(2025)7 on the equal rights of intersex persons. Malta contributed to the drafting process and supported the high-level launch during its Presidency of the Committee of Ministers.

The Recommendation provides guidance to member states on bodily integrity, autonomy, equality, healthcare and protection from discrimination and harmful practices. Malta used the launch to share elements of its domestic legislative and policy experience and to reaffirm its commitment to advancing the rights of persons with innate variations in sex characteristics.

This represented one of the most significant international SOGIGESC policy developments of the year and highlighted the relationship between Malta's domestic legal framework and its multilateral human-rights engagement.



Launch of Recommendation CM/Rec(2025)7 on the equal rights of intersex persons.

Equal Rights Coalition

Malta continued participating in the Equal Rights Coalition (ERC) and retained its role as state co-chair of the National Laws and Policies Working Group, alongside OTD Chile as civil society co-chair. Discussions addressed democratic resilience, inclusive legislation, sustainable funding, humanitarian and crisis response, strategic litigation, national action plans and monitoring of anti-gender trends.

In May 2026, Malta's Permanent Representative to the UN attended the annual UN LGBTI Core Group Ambassadors' Dinner, during which Mexico was announced as the new Global South co-chair and the 2026–2027 workplan was adopted.

United Nations advocacy

Malta continued advancing LGBTIQ+ equality through the UN Human Rights Council, the General Assembly Third Committee and the Universal Periodic Review. During the General Assembly Third Committee, Malta delivered a national statement calling for action to eliminate stigma, discrimination and violence based on sexual orientation and gender identity. Malta also supported statements of the UN LGBTI Core Group and the Equal Rights Coalition.

Through the Universal Periodic Review, Malta recommended the repeal of legislation criminalising consensual same-sex relations and encouraged states to recognise sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics as protected grounds. Malta also promoted stronger measures against hate crime and hate speech, together with effective investigation, remedies and reparation for victims. During the 52nd Universal Periodic Review, Malta issued recommendations on banning so-called conversion practices, protecting LGBTIQ+ persons and civil society organisations, strengthening responses to hate crime and advancing legal recognition of same-sex relationships.

At the 62nd Session of the UN Human Rights Council in June 2026, Malta delivered a statement during the Interactive Dialogue with the Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. The intervention highlighted discrimination experienced by lesbian, bisexual and queer women, particularly where gender-based discrimination intersects with sexual orientation. Malta also co-sponsored a side event organised by Ukraine on conflict-related sexual violence affecting men, boys and persons with diverse SOGIESC. In addition, it supported a statement on women in sport that raised human-rights concerns regarding sex testing and sex-verification practices and called for proportionate and evidence-based approaches.



Malta has been elected chair of the Council of Europe's Committee of Experts on SOGIESC, and appointed co-chair of the European Governmental LGBTI Focal Points Network and the National Laws and Policies Working Group of the Equal Rights Coalition.



Diplomatic engagement

Malta's embassies, high commissions and permanent representations continued supporting LGBTIQ+ equality in accordance with national policy and relevant EU guidelines.

The Embassy of Malta in Ottawa engaged with Dignity Network Canada, the diplomatic representatives of the ERC co-chairs and Global Affairs Canada on reviving the Diplomats for Equality group. On 14 May 2026, the Embassy co-organised an event featuring Professor Daniel Conway, focusing on a diplomatic toolkit for integrating LGBTQ+ rights into foreign policy and diplomatic practice.

Malta's diplomatic missions also participated in briefings, panel discussions, Pride initiatives and solidarity statements. These included engagement in Slovenia, Germany, Poland, Ireland, Hungary, the United Kingdom, Slovakia, the Netherlands and Japan. In June 2026, the Embassy in Tokyo participated in Tokyo Pride for the first time. Maltese missions marked the International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia (IDAHOT+) through flag-raising and related activities in their host countries. These actions strengthened the visibility and consistency of Malta's international commitment to LGBTIQ+ equality.



04

Executive Summary and Way Forward



Progressing the Implementation of the LGBTIQ+ Equality Strategy and Action Plan

The implementation of the LGBTIQ+ Equality Strategy and Action Plan 2023–2027 made substantial progress during the reporting period, with action across all strategic areas. Through a whole-of-government and society approach, public entities, independent authorities, civil society organisations, academic institutions, and international partners collaborated to enhance equality, inclusion, and human rights for LGBTIQ+ people in Malta.

The year was marked by efforts to mainstream sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIGESC) across public policy, service provision, and professional practice. Significant investment was made in capacity building, with numerous public officers, educators, healthcare professionals, police officers, and other practitioners participating in specialised training and awareness initiatives. Equality considerations increasingly integrated into broader national policies and programs related to tourism, education, ageing, healthcare, migration, employment, domestic violence prevention, and public administration.

Research and evidence generation remained a priority. The launch of Astarte: Mediterranean Journal on Gender and Sexualities enhanced Malta's research infrastructure, contributing to a growing evidence base for policymaking. Efforts continued to improve understanding of the experiences of specific groups, including older persons, migrants, persons with disabilities, and young people.

Significant progress was made in healthcare and wellbeing, including the advancement of intersex healthcare protocols, enhanced gender-affirming healthcare pathways, the introduction of free HIV prevention medication, and the expansion of the LGBTIQ+ Wellbeing Service.

Internationally, Malta continued to lead in promoting LGBTIQ+ equality. Malta's election as Chair of the Council of Europe Committee of Experts on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Expression, and Sex Characteristics recognised the country's longstanding commitment to advancing equality and human rights.

The reporting period highlighted the importance of partnership with civil society. Through consultation mechanisms, collaborative projects, community-based services, research initiatives, and Pride-related activities, the lived experiences and expertise of LGBTIQ+ communities informed policy development and implementation.

Overall, the measures implemented during this period reflect sustained progress toward the Strategy and Action Plan's objectives. They also reinforce Malta's commitment to ensuring equality, dignity, and human rights remain central across public policy, service delivery, and social development.

Priorities for the Final Year of Implementation and Preparing the Next Strategy

The implementation of the LGBTIQ+ Equality Strategy and Action Plan has delivered tangible progress across various policy areas, though several challenges still need attention in the final phase.

A recurring issue is the availability of robust equality data. Malta's small population and the limited number of respondents in certain groups make it difficult to collect statistically significant data while preserving privacy. This highlights the need to complement quantitative data with qualitative research, consultations, focus groups, and community engagement to capture lived experiences and emerging needs.

The reporting period highlighted challenges from the growing visibility of anti-gender, anti-rights, and anti-LGBTIQ+ narratives, both internationally and online. These developments emphasise the need for ongoing monitoring, public education, institutional preparedness, and evidence-based responses to safeguard social cohesion and human rights while promoting informed public discourse.

Implementation has demonstrated the importance of investing in professional capacity building across sectors. While progress has been made in strengthening knowledge among public officials, healthcare professionals, educators, law enforcement, and service providers, ongoing training is necessary to maintain consistent service delivery and institutional competence.

Several thematic areas need further development, such as strengthening responses to LGBTIQ+ migrants and asylum seekers, improving equality data collection, understanding experiences in sport, expanding specialised support services, and ensuring that healthcare, family recognition, and inclusive service provision respond to evolving needs and challenges.

As the Strategy and Action Plan nears its final phase, the next reporting period will focus on consolidation, evaluation, and future planning. This work will lay the foundation for Malta's next LGBTIQ+ Equality Strategy and Action Plan, guiding national efforts over the next five years. Attention will be given to identifying emerging priorities, assessing existing measures' effectiveness, examining international developments, and ensuring future actions respond to the lived realities of LGBTIQ+ persons in Malta.

The final year offers an opportunity to complete outstanding measures, consolidate achievements, and establish a strong evidence base to inform the next generation of equality policy.

Building Equality.
Strengthening Democracy.
Advancing Resilience.

Human Rights Directorate

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