

# MALTA

## ASYLUM

Civil society continued to lobby for the government to remove all countries that criminalise LGBTIQ+ persons, such as Algeria, Egypt, and Morocco, from the list of safe countries.

## BIAS-MOTIVATED SPEECH

Catholic priest David Muscat was acquitted in September of online hate speech charges, for two social media posts from January. In one of the posts, Muscat wrote that being gay was worse than 'being possessed'. Muscat received a formal warning from the Archbishop, requesting that he stop posting hateful content.

A study on cyberbullying found that one in four teens are victims, almost a third are bullies, and that half of those bullying had been victims themselves. The study also found that sexual orientation and physical appearance are common 'causes'.

## EDUCATION

The University of Malta's student council launched a sex education campaign in February, which included information on LGBTQIA issues.

## EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

The SOGIGESC Unit of the Maltese government published its annual report in September during its annual conference.

LGBTI Gozo shared its new study, finding that most LGBTI people in Gozo find it hard to be open about their identity and that migrants have faced additional xenophobia. The organisation also released a comprehensive action plan on LGBTI equality, consisting of over 30 points.

Work has started on the drafting of the next LGBTIQ Equality Strategy and Action Plan (2023-2027).

## FAMILY

275 same-sex couples have gotten married since Malta introduced marriage equality in 2017.

## FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

Gozo, a more conservative area in the Maltese

Islands, held its first Pride march this year. The event was attended by hundreds, including a number of politicians. LGBTI Gozo announced it would hold a one-week Pride event in Gozo next year.

Following the events in January (see under *Bias-motivated Speech*), LGBTIQ+ organisations met with the Archbishop of Malta. In May, Archbishop Scicluna spoke about LGBT equality on the occasion of IDAHOBIT, during mass.

## HEALTH

Prime Minister Abela announced in September that Malta would also provide genital surgeries that were previously not available, for free. The announcement was met with some criticism from conservative politicians.

The Ministry of Health announced in September, that men who have sex with men (MSM) will finally be able to donate blood, on an equal basis with others. The discriminatory regulation that set a lifetime deferral for MSM was lifted back in 2019 and replaced with a one-year deferral. Under the new rules, anyone can donate blood, regardless of their sexual orientation, if they only had a maximum of one partner in the last four months.

Malta's Gender Wellbeing Clinic, which has welcomed over 340 trans people since its opening in 2018, moved to a new location in Paola in June with an official launch in October. The new building is much bigger and more accessible and will be better able to cater to the needs of the community.

The media reported in July that Malta's sexual health clinic has a six-month waiting list for routine check-ups.

Access to HIV medications continued to be difficult. In May, the pharmacy of a large public hospital stopped selling PEP. Since the change, PEP has only been available in three pharmacies in the country, sparking worry as the drug needs to be taken within 72 hours after possible exposure. Malta has one of the highest HIV transmission rates in Europe. An activist also made note of the difficulty of access to HIV medication by LGBTIQ migrants during their speech at the Malta Pride Concert.



In October, MGRM in collaboration with the Health Promotion Directorate organised a [symposium](#) on HIV and STIs in Malta aimed at health professionals and other stakeholders.

## HOUSING

MGRM's [Dar il-Qawsalla](#) (Rainbow House) is being [restored](#) and hopes to welcome its first guests in 2024.

## INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

Several parties pledged their support for LGBTIQ+ equality in the leadup to Malta's Pride events in September (see [here](#) and [here](#)).

Government funding for EuroPride 2023 was increased by 2,200,000 euro.

## INTERSECTIONALITY

Care for LGBTIQ people with dementia was [discussed](#) during Pride week, alongside long-term care for community members.

The Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability [collaborated](#) with the Faculty of Social Wellbeing on a [qualitative study](#) on Intersectionality and Disability that [looked](#) into the experiences of LGBTIQ persons with disability. The findings were [presented](#) through a roundtable discussion during Pride Week. The CRPD also collaborated with LGBTIQ NGOs in the production of three podcasts featuring LGBTIQ persons with disability and activists.

## LEGAL GENDER RECOGNITION

A roundtable discussion and online consultation were held with persons identifying as non-binary to gather their views on the introduction of a third gender marker. They were supportive of such an initiative.

## PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC, CULTURAL AND POLITICAL LIFE

LGBTIQ NGOs presented a joint manifesto in the lead-up to the 2022 General Elections.

MGRM compiled profiles on the stance of democratic parties, which ran in the March elections, on LGBTIQ issues. The Green Party, for instance, decided to

mainstream LGBTIQ issues throughout its thematic focus areas.

MGRM organised an exhibition celebrating the life of Katya Saunders, one of the first openly trans women in Malta. In addition to being a fashion icon and performer, Saunders was also a community organiser, who supported many LGBT people in need.

## POLICE AND LAW ENFORCEMENT

In February, the Malta Police Force adopted internal Standard Operating Procedures on the Wellbeing of Detainees and Police Bail that mainstreamed provisions relating to the treatment of trans detainees.

## SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

Leading regional NGOs continued to express support for Malta's plans to decriminalise sex work, including the European Sex Workers' Rights Association and Transgender Europe. The government however continued to face criticism from a number of stakeholders who support the so-called Nordic model instead. The Labour Party which is in government pledged continued support for exit programmes for sex workers and decriminalisation in its 2022 electoral manifesto but mentioned nothing on regularisation. It is feared that it will backtrack on its promise.

The government is proposing an amendment to Malta's abortion law to allow for the termination of pregnancy to safeguard the mother's life from grievous danger. Abortion would still be illegal and prosecuted. There is opposition to this amendment by the parliamentary opposition, the Catholic Church and some NGOs.

## SOCIAL SECURITY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

(See under *Housing and Intersectionality*)

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