



**Katia Amore**

**Active Civic Participation  
of Immigrants in  
Malta**

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## **POLITIS – a European research project**

### **Project information**

POLITIS is short for a research project with the full title: Building Europe with New Citizens? An Inquiry into the Civic Participation of Naturalised Citizens and Foreign Residents in 25 Countries. The European Commission funds the project that mainly seeks to improve our understanding of different factors that promote or inhibit active civic participation of immigrants. A unique project construction is developed that includes workshops with foreign-born students who are recruited as discussants and interviewers. National experts in all 25 EU countries have prepared country reports on the contextual conditions and state of research concerning civic participation of immigrants. These reports can be downloaded from [www.uni-oldenburg.de/politis-europe](http://www.uni-oldenburg.de/politis-europe)

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European University Institute (**EUI**)

Florence

[www.iue.it/RSCAS](http://www.iue.it/RSCAS)

Churches' Commission of Migrants in Europe (**CCME**)

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## Abstract

Malta has been a country of emigration for many decades and, only since 2002, after the increasing inflow of immigrants, it has begun to realise its switch into a country of immigration.

The political approach to immigration is generally quite protectionist and mostly based on the very same observation that led so many Maltese to emigrate in the past, that is the fact that Malta is a small densely populated country with limited resources and, therefore, no space for newcomers. So far, within the country, the issue of immigration has been seen as a question of border control, both when discussing about it in relation to the issue of accession to the EU and when discussing about the illegal immigration phenomenon.

In the first part, this report provides an overview of the key events that have marked the history of migration in Malta and indicates the main topics prevailing in the current public debate on the subject. It indicates the general views that Malta is a transit country and the vast majority of migrants hope to reach other European countries rather than settle in the Islands. It also includes relevant statistical information on migration and the foreign population in the Maltese Islands.

Part two of the report, presents an analysis of the results of a state of the art review on immigration and immigrants' civic participation in Malta. Moreover, since the result of the survey of possible existing literature on the subject showed a complete lack of academic studies, the rest of the report is mainly based on grey literature, media reports and the findings of fieldwork conducted in Malta in October 2004. During the fieldwork government officials, researchers and journalists were interviewed. The report indicates some of the main immigrant groups settled in Malta and, on the basis of the available information, draws a profile of each community and describes their activities.

In the conclusions, it indicates possible future research development and alerts against the possible risks of limiting research to the topical issues of illegal immigration and border control.

A list of all library catalogues and databases consulted is provided in Annex 2, together with a list of institutions contacted in Malta and the details of the people interviewed for the research.

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## Part I: Understanding the conditions for immigrant participation

### **Key events and demographic developments in the migration history of Malta**

Immigration in Malta is a relatively recent phenomenon. The country has a long history of emigration which was often used as a “safety valve” to ease population pressures.

In fact, with an area of just over 300 square kilometers and a total population of 399,867<sup>1</sup>, the Maltese Islands have been for several decades one of the most densely populated countries in the world, thus facing the problem of how to strike a balance between population growth and the limited economic resources of the country. During particular historical phases, the combination of overpopulation and unemployment resulted in the emigration of thousands of Maltese abroad. Since the 1980s, however, such emigration has slowed down and, over the past recent years, the flows have reverted with immigration being on the increase.

Large scale emigration has been a feature of Maltese life since the early years of the nineteenth century when, under British colonial rule, early efforts to encourage and assist Maltese to migrate began. The outflow started to develop on a more permanent basis during the two World Wars when the government established the Department of Emigration to manage the emigration flow (NSO 2003a).

After the Second World War, Maltese emigration reached its peak. Government’s efforts to facilitate it were intensified and turned migration into one of the main political answers to the country post-war economic hardship. In fact, in the aftermath of the war the economic conditions of the country had begun to take a down-turn and, consequently, many Maltese lost their jobs (i.e. the dockyard, which used to employ about 11,000 people, began gradually to wind down). Furthermore, a baby boom in the immediate post-war period, led to a net population growth of about 8000 people/year thus leading to a density of 1,158 people per km<sup>2</sup> and a total population of nearly 350,000. As a consequence, in the late ‘40s and ‘50s, many Maltese began to leave the country and migrate abroad opening a new phase of massive and rapid migration.

Attard (1997) explains that:

“Intensive propaganda was carried out to the squares of every town and village so much so that many had the impression that to solve their problems all they had to do was to pack their belongings and leave.” (Attard 1997, p. 2)

As a matter of fact, from 1945 to 1979 around 140,000 men, women and children left the Maltese Islands with Australia, the UK, Canada, and the US being the main destinations. The figure below shows emigration movements from 1946 to 1974.

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<sup>1</sup> According to the Department of Information of the Maltese government, in 2003 the population of the Maltese archipelago which consists of three islands, Malta, Gozo and Comino, was 399,867. The large island, Malta, had a population of 388,867.

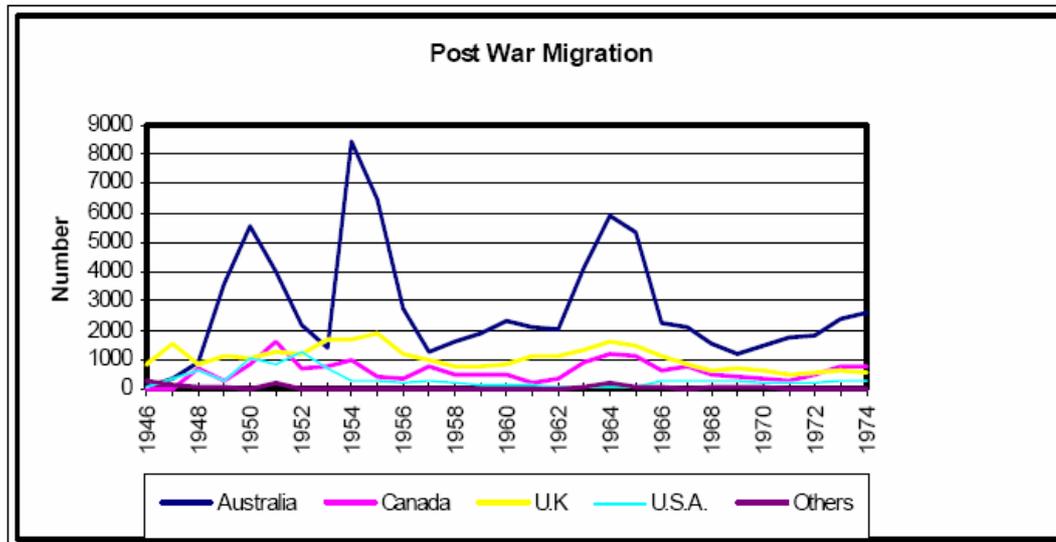


Figure 1: Post War Migration Flows

Source: NSO 2003a

During the 1970s, outflow migration started to decrease and the country began to witness the first influx of returnees. Return had always been part of the general migration programme and, overall, one in four migrants came back for a total of 39,000 returnees between 1946 and 1996, with a peak in 1957 (when 1671 migrants returned), and one in 1975 (when the number of returnees suddenly rose to 2957). According to Cauchi (1999) the factors which determine which migrants decided to return to Malta have never been studied in any depth. However, the 1995 Census provides some useful data and indicates two important factors that caused return migration over the twenty-five year period prior to Census day: firstly, many people who had left the country in the period between the second world war and the early seventies, returned to Malta either to retire or re-settle with their relatively young families; secondly, return was not seen as a risk for their future socio-economic prospects any longer in consideration of the views that the economic conditions in Malta had improved considerably.

The 1995 Census is the source of Table 1 which includes a table on return migrants by age and gender.

Age Group	Males	Females	Total	%
0-4	54	31	85	0.38
5-9	139	108	247	1.10
10-14	229	239	468	2.09
15-19	364	372	736	3.28
20-24	424	421	845	3.77
25-29	415	464	879	3.92
30-34	658	650	1308	5.84
35-39	893	1034	1927	8.60
40-44	1372	1225	2597	11.59
45-49	1957	1545	3502	15.62
50-54	1732	1162	2894	12.91
55-59	1278	846	2124	9.48
60-64	1016	596	1612	7.19
65-69	774	471	1245	5.55
70-74	578	353	931	4.15
75-79	318	183	501	2.24
80-84	170	154	324	1.45
85-89	81	73	154	0.69
90-94	16	13	29	0.13
95+	5	1	6	0.03

Table 1: Returned Migrants by Gender and Broad Age Group  
Source: 1995 census, Vol. V

Figure 2 provides, instead, an overview of return migration flows between 1945 and 1995.

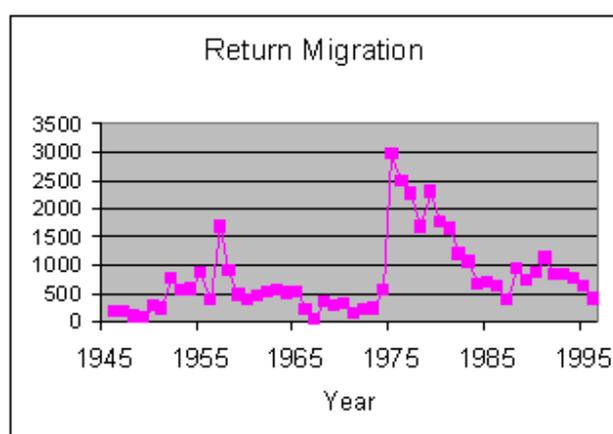


Figure 2: Return migration from 1945 to 1995.  
Source: Cauchi, 1999.

Since the mid-80s up to present times outflows have been particularly low (731 Maltese emigrated in 1985, 160 left in 1990, 107 in 1995 and 121 in 1998) while in the last few years immigration to Malta has been on the increase (NSO 1999).

According to the spokesperson of the Ministry for Justice and Home Affairs (interview obtained 11 of October 2004), up to the year 2000 Malta received approximately 50-60 migrants per year (these figures do not include EU citizens and returnees) coming mostly through North Africa and generally claiming asylum upon arrival. An exception was the arrival of a few hundreds of Iraqis (300-600) who arrived during the first Gulf War through the UNHCR but were later resettled in other countries (i.e. Canada, Sweden, Norway).

In 2002 and 2004, the number of immigrants arriving in Malta increased sharply. In 2001, 2,204 people were refused permission to enter the country and about 60 immigrants arrived in Malta irregularly. The following year, in 2002, a record of 21 boats landed in Malta bringing a total of 1,680 illegal immigrants, who had no personal documents or other means of identification. For the country this was a record number as it represents almost half its birth rate. Moreover, the government was caught unprepared to deal with the influx that put the existing infrastructure under considerable strain. In fact, many of the migrants were asylum seekers and had to be dealt with by the Refugee Commission (REFCOM) that had become operational just a few months before their arrival. When the commission was set up, no one had envisaged such a relatively huge caseload on the basis of the previous years' experience. Therefore, coping with the arrival of so many asylum seekers in a relatively short period of time was no easy task. Nonetheless, by the end of January 2004 there were no asylum seekers in detention waiting to be interviewed.

In 2003 the influx continued but numbers were quite small with 497 arrivals. As a matter of fact, at the beginning of 2004 only 100 immigrants had remained in the various detention centres in Malta. Unexpectedly, over the summer numbers increased again with an influx of over 1300 taking the issue of illegal immigration once more at the top of the public debate.

## Statistical Information

The fact that immigration is a relatively recent phenomenon in the Maltese context is reflected on the lack of the term in official statistics. The National Statistics Office uses mainly the terms 'returned migrants' and 'non-Maltese nationals' referring respectively to Maltese nationals who are former emigrants returning to Malta and people of other nationalities settling in Malta (Eurydice 2003/4).

In the latest demographic review of the year 2003, Malta National Statistics Office explains that while statistical data on migration outflows<sup>2</sup> are quite accurate given that emigrants could apply for a subsidised passage, migration statistics related to inflows have posed a few problems over

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<sup>2</sup> Data on emigrations has undergone some changes since the Labour Department dismantled its section of Emigration in January 1995. Since then, the only sources for collecting data on prospective emigrants were those from Embassies and High Commissions.

the years. The review states that in 2003, only 40 people left to settle abroad and 518 former emigrants returned, while there were 721 non-Maltese settlers and 621 naturalizations and registrations, which include 32 adoptions (NSO 2004a).

The foreigner population of Malta is composed in its majority by British nationals who have made of Malta their retirement home encouraged by the mild climate and the fact that English is the second national language in the country. As figure 3 indicates, they are still the larger number of settlers in Malta and in 2002 they represented 58% of the foreigner population settling in Malta.

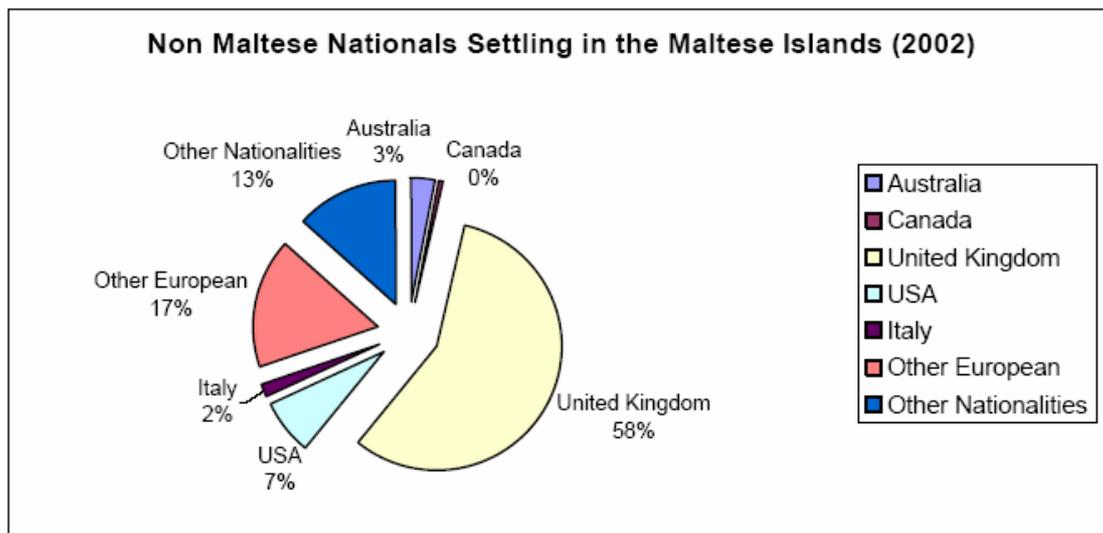


Figure 3: Non-Maltese Nationals settling in Malta in 2002.

Source: Eurydice 2003/4.

The predominance of British settlers is confirmed for the year 2003 by data presented in the 2003 Demographic Review prepared by the Malta National Statistics Office (NSO 2004a) as indicated by table 2.

Age group	Nationality														Total		
	Australia		Canada		United Kingdom		USA		Italy		Other European		Other Nationalities				
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	T
0 - 4	-	1	1	-	6	3	3	4	-	-	3	-	2	1	15	9	24
5 - 9	2	1	2	1	9	4	2	4	-	-	6	2	-	4	21	16	37
10 - 14	2	-	2	-	4	11	3	-	-	-	-	4	3	15	14	29	
15 - 19	-	3	2	-	6	3	3	2	-	-	2	-	4	3	17	11	28
20 - 24	-	-	-	1	5	3	-	1	-	-	1	2	2	1	8	8	16
25 - 29	-	-	1	1	3	3	3	1	-	1	-	1	2	2	9	9	18
30 - 34	-	-	-	-	8	8	-	3	2	-	3	7	2	2	15	20	35
35 - 39	-	2	-	-	9	6	-	3	3	-	5	4	7	3	24	18	42
40 - 44	3	-	1	-	13	12	4	1	-	-	7	6	5	4	33	23	56
45 - 49	1	2	-	1	17	21	1	1	1	-	3	7	9	9	32	41	73
50 - 54	1	-	1	1	24	20	1	3	1	-	1	6	11	7	40	37	77
55 - 59	1	-	1	-	21	22	1	2	-	1	6	8	6	7	36	40	76
60 - 64	-	-	2	-	40	30	5	2	-	-	7	6	7	3	61	41	102
65 - 69	-	-	1	-	28	14	1	2	-	-	1	-	2	7	33	23	56
70 - 74	-	-	-	-	19	11	-	-	-	-	2	1	3	1	24	13	37
75 & Over	-	-	-	-	6	4	-	-	-	-	-	3	2	-	8	7	15
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>218</b>	<b>175</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>391</b>	<b>330</b>	<b>721</b>

Table 2:  
Non-Maltese nationals settling in the Maltese Islands classified by age and sex: 2003

In general, the 2003 Demographic Review prepared by the Malta National Statistics Office (NSO 2004a) offers the most recent data about the Maltese population. However, it does not contain a detailed list of the country of origin of non-EU settlers or naturalized citizens. An interesting set of data in the review is the one concerning Live Births (see table 3) which includes a distinction between Maltese and non-Maltese nationality of the parents. Unfortunately, it does not report the specific nationalities of non-Maltese parents.

Age Group	By Age of Mother		By Age of Father		Of which births outside marriage	
	Maltese	Other	Maltese	Other	By Age of Mother	By Age of Father
All Ages	3,902	134	3,902	134	678	678
Under 20	219	5	22	-	172	15
20 - 24	784	23	309	7	262	117
25 - 29	1,441	49	1,167	24	128	106
30 - 34	1,018	29	1,195	32	70	57
35 - 39	361	24	612	32	40	40
40 - 44	77	4	223	15	6	16
45 - 49	2	-	45	9	-	8
50 - 54	-	-	19	2	-	10
55 - 59	-	-	5	-	-	1
60 - 64	-	-	2	2	-	1
65 +	-	-	-	-	-	-
Unkown	-	-	303	11	-	306

Table 3:  
Live births by age of mother/father, nationality and births outside marriage: 2003.

According to the National Statistical Office of Malta, the foreign element in the population is small, around 2.3 per cent. It was not possible to obtain further data related to immigrant population stocks in Malta. These data are also missing from various Council of Europe's country reports on Malta<sup>3</sup>, including the latest 2003 edition.

Over the last ten years, the incidence of foreigners within the Maltese population increased gradually from 6,730 to 11,000 persons. According to the last Census held in 1995, the number of foreign residents was 7,213, of whom 3,555 or 49 per cent were British (NSO, 2004a).

There are different ways to obtain permission to remain in Malta: acquiring citizenship, receiving a permanent residence permit, getting a work permit or claiming asylum. We present below some statistical information in relation to each form of status.

## Citizenship

Maltese citizenship can be acquired through two different procedures: registration or naturalization. Registration is a process open to specific categories of people who were previously Maltese citizens or are related to a Maltese citizen, while naturalization is a process

<sup>3</sup> The country reports of the Council of Europe are available on-line, [www.coe.int](http://www.coe.int).

open to foreigners who meet specific requirements which are defined by the Citizenship Act<sup>4</sup>. Among the eligible people are those who can prove to have resided in Malta for at least five years, a person born abroad whose father was born abroad as well, but whose grandfather and great-grandparent were both born in Malta, a minor child of a Maltese citizen. In any case, the granting is discretionary. We explain the difference between registration and naturalization in more detail later in the report.

The number of people who acquired Maltese citizenship over the past five years is listed in the table below (Table 4). Once again, no details in relation to the countries of origin were available.

Year	Registrations	Naturalizations	Total
1997	111	128	239
1998	111	110	221
9/98 - 8/99	76	66	142
9/99 - 8/2000	299	31	330
9/2000 - 8/2001	1072	129	1201
9/2001 - 7/2002	651	105	756

Table 4: Number of people who acquired Maltese citizenship via registration or naturalizations between 1997 and 2002.

Source: Borg 2001-2002.

### Permanent residence permit

The settlement of foreigners in Malta goes back to the early 1960s. Since then, the Maltese Islands have attracted people from overseas, especially British citizens, through the convenient Permanent Residence Schemes. Provided that certain conditions are met by an applicant, he/she is granted a residence permit that allows him/her to remain indefinitely in the country, gives them exemption from customs duty and VAT, a flat 15% tax rate on all income and other benefits.

The conditions to obtain such a status include: a minimum annual income of Lm10000 (23,000 euros); an annual income brought to Malta of at least Lm6000 (around 13,800 euros), plus Lm1000 (around 2,300 euros) per dependent.

However, no employment or engagement in business may be undertaken by permanent residents unless authorised by the competent authorities. In general, the government welcomes the

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<sup>4</sup> Chapter III of the Constitution of the Republic of Malta 1964 deals with Citizenship. The Maltese Citizenship Act (Cap 188), was amended several times over the years. The latest amendments were introduced in 2000 with Act No IV to give effect to new provisions governing dual or multiple citizenship. A copy of the Act is available online [http://www.uniset.ca/naty/malta\\_ch188en.pdf](http://www.uniset.ca/naty/malta_ch188en.pdf).

introduction of overseas expertise and ideas especially in the tourism, manufacturing and catering sectors (NSO 2004b).

Between September 2000 and August 2001, 273 people obtained a permanent residence permit with the larger groups coming from the UK (72), Holland (32), China (27), Italy (16) and Switzerland (14) (Ministry for Justice and Home Affairs 2000-2001). As for July 2004 around 1300 people had this form of permit (NSO 2004b).

## Work Permit

Malta also has a Work Permit Scheme, giving permission to reside and work in the country for a definite period of time to migrants whose skills requested by the employer are locally absent or in short supply. The Department for Citizenship and Expatriate Affairs is the department responsible for the issue of the licenses. A board, which includes representatives from different government departments and agencies, examines each application for employment licence and gives its recommendations. This process takes approximately 3 to 4 months.

The licences issued are usually valid for one year and may be renewed further, provided such requests are justified. In case of a renewal of the permit, it is recommended that a renewal form is submitted at least 5 months before the expiration of the current permit. In case the foreigner applying is an investor in the manufacturing or financial sectors and holds substantial shareholding in the enterprise, the relative licence may be issued on an indefinite basis. We discuss this scheme later in more detail.

According to the National Statistic Office, during the past ten years the number of Work Permit holders fluctuated, but over the last three years it has nearly remained constant; the stock at the end of 2003 being of 2,928, of which 813 were females (NSO 2004a).

A list of expatriates holding employment licenses under the terms of section 11 (3) of the Immigration Act, (Cap. 217), is updated and published monthly for general information on the website of the Department of Information of the Maltese Government and includes personal data of each permit holder including: name, profession, company and the expiry date of the permit (Department of Information-Malta 2004). Table 5 below, indicates the number of work permit holders at the end of June 2002 and the distribution by nationality and sex.

Country	Males	Females	Country	Males	Females	Country	Males	Females
Afghanisan	1	-	German	72	69	Palestinian	7	-
Albanian	5	11	Ghanaian	5	-	Peruvian	1	1
Algerian	9	3	Greek	6	3	Philippines	25	20
Angola	1	-	Hungarian	3	4	Polish	8	10
Armenian	3	1	Iceland	3	-	Portuguese	3	-
Australian	25	18	Indian	152	14	Rumanian	19	10
Austrian	25	5	Iranian	1	1	Russian	75	76
Bangladesh	4	-	Iraqi	17	3	Seychelles	1	-
Belarus	1	-	Irish	9	6	Sierra Leone	10	-
Belgian	17	11	Israeli	1	-	Slovak	4	10
Bosnia-Herzegovina	67	8	Italian	131	12	Slovenian	1	-
Brazilian	2	1	Japanese	-	4	Somalia	4	-
British	254	133	Jordanian	4	1	South African	3	1
Bulgarian	101	45	Kazakhstan	-	1	Spanish	5	6
Cameroon	2	-	Kenyan	1	-	Sri Lanka	7	-
Canadian	8	5	Korean	1	1	Stateless	1	-
Chinese	127	105	Latvian	42	2	Sudanese	5	-
Columbian	1	-	Lebanese	9	2	Swedish	77	13
Congolese	1	-	Libyan	133	8	Swiss	10	2
Croatian	8	5	Lithuanian	1	2	Syrian	18	-
Cuban	1	-	Luxembourg	-	1	Taiwan	-	1
Cypriot	-	1	Macedonian	3	1	Thai	9	6
Czech	8	7	Malaysian	4	-	Tunisian	17	5
Danish	12	10	Moldovan	-	1	Turkish	38	15
Dutch	32	19	Moroccan	6	8	Ukrainian	15	16
Egyptian	27	4	New Zealand	5	1	United States	17	10
Estonian	-	2	Nigerian	17	7	Uzbekistan	-	1
Finnish	2	7	Norwegian	11	2	Venezuela	1	-
French	34	23	Norwegian	11	2	Yugoslav	263	43
Georgian	5	2	Pakistani	19	4			
						<b>Total</b>	<b>2,083</b>	<b>830</b>

Table 5: Work Permit Holders by Nationality and Sex - end June 2002.  
Source: NSO 2002.

## Asylum

Malta signed the 1951 Geneva Convention on Refugees in 1970 but lacked a refugee law. Therefore, for decades, asylum applications were processed by the Emigrants' Commission as UNHCR's Operational partner in Malta. However, as of the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2002 this responsibility passed on to the Refugee Commission. In fact, with its first asylum bill, the Refugee Act of 2000, Malta appointed the first Commissioner for Refugees and the Maltese Refugee Commission is now the national body that deals with asylum applications. During its first years of operation the Office of the Refugee Commissioner dealt with over 1,000 asylum seekers. During the Refugee Commission's first two years of operation 75 persons were recognised as refugees, 439 persons were granted temporary humanitarian protection and 473 asylum seekers had their application rejected.

## Illegal Immigration

Irregular migration has increased dramatically over the past five years in Malta. However, there are no exact figures as it is the case with all other EU member states. According to information obtained from the Ministry for Justice and Home Affairs, the latest estimate (end of November 2004) of migrants who have illegally entered Malta and are known to the authorities was of 810 individuals and they were all kept in detention. The general widespread view is that the vast majority of migrants arriving in Malta plan to move on to other EU Member States by reaching the Italian coast.

## **Major issues discussed with relation to immigration**

Two main issues have dominated the public debate in relation to migration in Malta over the past five years: the accession to the EU and illegal immigration. In both cases, the starting point for the debate was, once again, the consideration that Malta is a small and highly densely populated country with “limited space” to accept newcomers. At the end of 2003, with a population of 399,867 people and a population density of 1265 persons per km<sup>2</sup>, Malta was still the most densely populated country in Europe and the third highest in the world.

Malta’s concerns for the potential influx of other EU citizens coming to work in the country after accession and competing with nationals in the job market were a central issue of interest to the general public, the media, politicians and trade unions.

A policy paper prepared by the General Workers Union on Social Security and Migrant Workers summarizes the widespread worries about the potential negative consequences of accession on migration flows:

“We believe that in order to discuss the issue of social security and migrant workers in its perspective we must see the magnitude of the problem. If Malta will be affected in accordance with European Union estimates of 1.5% mobility, and if Malta will face an influx from nearby Sicily alone, then 1.5% would mean a magnitude of 7500 persons of the 500,000 unemployed Sicilians. One must note that this figure is higher than the unemployment figure of 6400 published last December.

On the other hand, we must consider also the out flow of Maltese citizens wanting to work in other European Union countries. Experience has shown that such an outflow would consist mostly of the best trained and the best qualified of our workforce. This would seriously harm the prospects for our local industry to face adequately the challenges of tougher competition.” (General Workers Union 2000)

These points were incorporated in the negotiations with the EU on free movements of persons that were closed in June 2001. On this matter, Malta secured a special deal allowing for restrictions in case of a big influx of EU workers into the country to be adopted unilaterally, while ensuring that Maltese citizens could move freely to seek work in other EU countries from the first day of membership. The deal consist of a period of seven years after membership, during which Malta can apply safeguards on the right of EU nationals to work in the country, thus retaining the work permit system in relation to EU workers and the right to withhold work permits in the case of a threat of disruption to its labour market (Rieck Zahra, R. 2001).

Currently, illegal immigration is the most relevant migration issue discussed in the country. The highest circulation newspapers, *The Times of Malta* (TOM), *The Sunday Times of Malta* (STOM), *The Malta Independent* (daily) (TMI), *The Malta Independent on Sunday* (TMIS) and *Malta Today* (a Sunday newspaper) as well as the rest of the national media keep reporting news of immigrants landing illegally in the country.

The main stories usually cover: vessels overcrowded with immigrants stuck outside the Maltese coast (between Malta and Sicily, or between Malta and Tunisia), and accidents with immigrants

dying at sea. In 2004 special attention was given to Malta-Italy relations on the issue of illegal immigration and border control, and to the efforts to find a solution on people trafficking in collaboration with the Libyan government. In May 2004, an Amnesty International Report (AI 2004a) claimed that the majority of around 220 Eritrean illegal immigrants, who had been forcibly repatriated by Malta in 2002, had been imprisoned and tortured upon arrival in Eritrea, with many still being held captive. The story was taken up by the Maltese press and was on the media from around mid-May right up to European Parliament (EP) election week (Pace 2004).

There are no studies on media reporting on migration issues in Malta, however, it is interesting to consider the issue of media ownership in order to understand how political views on immigration are reflected in the way relevant news are reported. Alongside the state owned *Public Broadcasting Service*, which broadcasts both radio and television programmes, both the Nationalist Party and the Malta Labour Party own a television and radio station each. In addition the former publishes a daily and weekly newspaper while the latter publishes a printed weekly and an electronic weekly. The Catholic Church owns a radio station and a Maltese weekly newspaper.

Therefore, in February 2005, 100 journalists signed a petition against the government's policy regarding the refusal of their request to access immigrants' detention centres. The majority of Maltese media journalists and editors disapproved of this policy and insisted that the government should change it in the public interest. It was strongly maintained that refusing all requests for access to the media, limits local media coverage of immigrants' detention to the publication of official statements and press releases, and denies the possibility to ascertain the veracity of the news and gather first-hand information.

The petition was signed by editors, journalists, photographers, cameramen, columnists working for PBS, MediaLink, One News, Where's Everybody, The Times, The Sunday Times, MaltaToday, The Malta Independent, The Malta Independent on Sunday, l-Orizzont, It-Torca, The Malta Business Weekly, The Malta Financial and Business Times, di-ve.com, as well as correspondents and independent journalists (MaltaMedia News, 2005).

In the 'pre-accession to the EU' phase, both the issue of migration in relation to EU membership and illegal immigration were brought together by the widespread worry that joining the EU might also lead to an increase in the number of illegal immigrants arriving in Malta. MIC, the Malta-EU Information Centre addressed these worries in a pamphlet titled Question & Answer on Malta and the EU which deals with various issues of public concern related to accession. The pamphlet answers the question "If we join the EU, will the number of illegal immigrants increase?"

"As an island surrounded by the sea, Malta is already targeted by illegal immigrants who travel here by boat sometimes in very difficult conditions and at the risk of their lives. More often than not, we only get those immigrants who actually fail to get to their original destination, usually Italy.

Immigrants should not increase unless they actually want to land here. But if in time Malta is perceived as an economically advanced EU country, it may start to attract illegal immigrants in its own right.

Membership of the EU will certainly put on Malta a greater responsibility to police its coastal borders and this is included among the obligations of membership. Since the EU territory has no internal borders between EU countries it is more important for all countries that have an external border to control them well. Greater co-operation with EU countries will be necessary with

respect to security checks at our ports and airport as well as with respect to coastal border controls.

Upon membership Malta will also introduce visa requirements on countries that are usually among the countries of origin of illegal immigration.” (MIC 2002, pag13)

In conclusion the main focus of the debate on immigration in Malta is the phenomenon of illegal immigration. The worries of more immigrants landing on the Maltese shores and the questions related to the best solution to this problem dominate both the media and the political debate. However, as Camilleri (2004) explains, the worries over illegal immigration and the general protectionist approach to immigration in Malta are confronted every day by a different reality whereby a number of migrants, including those who are illegally staying in the islands, are actually employed in various sectors, especially the construction and the catering industries. Despite the fact that there are no reliable statistics available on the true extent of this phenomenon, reports carried in the local media highlight the continued relevance of this issue.

### **Institutional setting framing immigrant participation**

Malta became a Member State of the EU in May 2004. Therefore, the past few years were marked by a wave of rapid and unprecedented changes in various sectors in order to bring laws and policies in line with the *acquis*. Within this general frame, the area of migration and asylum posed, without any doubt, one of the greatest challenges since it required significant changes to national laws and policies in view of EU membership, while at the same time, being challenged by the sudden surge in the number of irregular migrants arriving in Malta (Camilleri 2004).

In consideration of the fact that Malta has only recently begun to attract immigrants and that they are generally considered to be in transit towards Italy and the rest of Europe, the political debate on immigration is still focused on matter of border control and little has been done on immigrants' integration matters and civic participation. The main legislative instruments that regulate the life of immigrants are the Citizenship Act, the Immigration Act and the Asylum Act. We discuss each in turn below.

The Maltese Citizenship Act (1964) has undergone a number of amendments (the most recent in 2000 in order to introduce provisions for dual citizenship). The Act defines the two available processes to obtain Maltese citizenship which are, as we mentioned, registration and naturalization.

The registration process is targeted to former Maltese citizens or aliens who are related to Maltese citizens. In more details, this includes: a former citizen of Malta who does not qualify automatically for double citizenship or was previously a Maltese citizen; an alien married to Maltese citizen who can apply after five years of marriage; a widow/widower of a citizen of Malta who had been married with the deceased for at least five years; an adult son/daughter of a female Maltese citizen born outside of Malta on or after 21 September 1964 and before 1 August 1989.

Maltese citizenship can be acquired, instead, by naturalization by a foreigner who has resided in Malta for at least five years (the granting is discretionary), a person born abroad whose father was

born abroad as well, but whose grandfather and great-grandparent were both born in Malta, a minor child of a Maltese citizen.

Obviously, once an individual becomes a Maltese citizen, he/she obtains all the rights of any other citizen including the right to vote in all elections, standing for office, adhere to political parties or other movements, etc.

The Immigration Act (Chapter 217 of the Laws of Malta) was first enacted in 1970 and, since then, has undergone several amendments in order to respond to changing national and international circumstances. Many of the most recent amendments (i.e. those brought in by Acts IV and IX of 2000 and Act XXIII of 2002,) were introduced to align Malta's immigration law with the EU *acquis* in view of accession. The Immigration Act regulates matters related to entry, visa regime and border control as well as the granting of temporary and permanent residence permits and the granting of permission for foreigners to work in Malta.

In general, the country has a rigid protectionist approach to labour immigration aimed at safeguarding the national labour force from external competition. As we have mentioned earlier in the report, there is a Work Permit Scheme that grants labour migrants permission to reside and work in the country for a definite period of time. The scheme is part of the immigration control strategy and has the aim of allowing for employment of foreigners, while at the same time protecting the long term interest of the resident work force.

As mentioned earlier in the report, employment licenses are issued by the Department for Citizenship and Expatriates Affairs, for a determined period of time (usually a year) and for a specific purpose. In order to obtain a license, it is necessary to prove that efforts to engage a suitable Maltese citizen for the job were fruitless. In cases where a foreign investor in the manufacturing or financial sectors holds substantial shareholding, he/she may be granted a Work Permit on an indefinite basis.

The Refugee Act (2001) incorporates the obligations that Malta assumed when signing the 1951 Geneva Convention on asylum and the 1967 Protocol, and provides the framework for procedures and policies regarding refugees and asylum seeker in the Maltese Islands. As explained earlier, until recently, the Emigrant Commission, which had been originally set up to deal with emigration issues, was the body in charge of asylum procedures as an operational partner of the UNHCR and the country lacked a refugee law and asylum system.

Only in 2001, with the Refugee Act, Malta finally established national provisions and procedures with regard to refugees and asylum seekers. Individuals who have been recognized as refugees and those who are given humanitarian protection are granted a residence permit and a work permit when requested (Eurydice 2003/4).

With article 11, the act establishes the following rights for an individual granted refugee status in Malta:

“Art. 11:

(1) Notwithstanding the provisions of any other law to the contrary, and notwithstanding any deportation or removal order, a person declared to be a refugee shall be entitled -

(a) to remain in Malta, and to be granted personal documents, including a residence permit; and if in

custody in virtue only of a deportation or removal order, to be immediately released;

(b) unless he is in custody awaiting judicial proceedings for the commission of a criminal offence, or is serving a term of imprisonment, to be given a Convention Travel Document entitling him to leave and return to Malta without the need of any visa;

(c) to have access to state education and training in Malta, and to receive state medical care and services.

(2) Dependant members of the family of a person declared to be a refugee, if they are in Malta at the time of declaration or if they join him in Malta, enjoy the same rights and benefits as the refugee.” (Refugee Act 2001)

In conclusion, those who obtain a work permit or refugee status receive a resident permit. This permit is an indispensable prerequisite to acquire a certain degree of civil and political participation.

In general, aliens have the right to vote at local elections if they meet the following requirements:

- they have an identification card;
- they are over eighteen years of age;
- they are resident in Malta and have been residing in the country for at least six months before registering;
- they are not interdicted or incapacitated for any mental infirmity by a Maltese court;
- they have registered as voters in the Special Register.

If the migrant is registered as a voter in the general Electoral Register or the Special Register, he/she automatically qualifies to be elected as a member of the local Council<sup>5</sup> (IOM 2003). However, there are no special provisions to encourage immigrant civic or political participation.

Overall, minor efforts have been made towards the integration of immigrants and refugees; Malta is still taking its first steps towards realising and accepting its new role of an immigration country and, at the moment, the accent is still on its role as a transit country towards the rest of Europe. Therefore, there is a predominant view that migrants are not there to stay.

Some important developments on this front are taking place in relation to refugees where new policies are developing around the issue of refugee integration. In December 2003, the Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity took responsibility for refugees and asylum seekers in Malta and for developing an integration programme. In the first year of activities the Ministry has set the priority areas of intervention which are accommodation, health and education. New open centres for refugees and asylum seekers were set up and other activities were also organised such as English classes and training courses to improve employability. According to the policy co-

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<sup>5</sup> It would have been interesting to have some statistical information on this matter, however, despite repeated attempts, it was not possible to find reliable data on whether any alien in this position has indeed stood for local elections or not. A way to find this information could be that of getting in touch with all local authorities and asking them for direct information on their local council elections. Interviews with officials at the Ministry for Justice and Home Affairs and Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity, suggest that some British residents in Malta might have indeed stood for the local council of their area of residence.

ordinator of the ministry (interviewed on the 19/10/04), the fact that these initiatives did not generate enough response, confirms the idea that the refugees are not interested because they do not want to stay in Malta, but continue their journey to Europe. In order to improve conditions in the centres and develop better relations with the residents, the relevant Ministry department built the new open centre using a community model rather than a shelter model and encouraged them to elect their own leaders. The policy co-ordinator of the ministry affirmed that the model showed the first signs of success with residents becoming more active and participating in the every day organisation of life in the centre; however, problems in the coordination of various activities and residents' social interaction appeared as soon as the leaders left Malta to reach other destinations.

### Freedom of movement

According to the Maltese constitution, freedom of movement includes the right to move freely throughout the Maltese Islands, to reside in any part of the country and to leave or enter Malta. Those who are entitled to freedom of movement may reside in Malta without a permit by the Immigration Officer and do not require an employment licence to work. These are:

Maltese citizens;

Returnee who enjoy freedom of movement (people born in Malta who ceased to have Maltese citizenship after emigrating);

Widows/widowers of a citizen of Malta or a return migrant;

The non-Maltese son or daughter of a citizen of Malta or a returnee until the 21<sup>st</sup> birthday (IOM 2003).

Illegal immigrants, either asylum seekers or economic migrants, have not right to civic or political participation in Malta. They are usually detained upon arrival in closed centres. Detention policies in Malta have been harshly criticised for the low standards of treatment of the migrants and, especially, for the duration of detention which lasted between one and two years (AI 2004b). According to government officials, these conditions were due to the difficulties of coping with the unprecedented inflow of migrants and asylum seekers between 2001 and 2003.

Lately some of the problems have been tackled by the government by opening more centres, improving general standards and reducing waiting times for processing asylum applications. The most relevant change is the introduction of a temporary limit to detention for asylum seekers, whereby they can be detained only for a maximum of 18 months while waiting for an answer on their application, if this period is exceeded they are moved to an open centre.

## Part II: Active Civic Participation of Third Country immigrants

### Literature on immigrants' civic participation in Malta

Despite the fact that historically Malta has always attracted different civilisations (Phoenicians, Greeks, Romans, Arabs, British, etc.) that have conquered, ruled and inhabited these islands, strategically placed in the middle of the Mediterranean, so far in the report we have established that immigration in modern terms is a rather new phenomenon.

The recent history of Maltese mass emigration is still dominating the migration literature on Malta. There are no available academic studies on immigration in general and, therefore, also on immigrants' civic participation in particular. This is explained by the fact that Malta has only recently began to turn into a country of immigration and that it is still considered to be a transit country where most immigrants prefer not to settle.

For the purpose of this research various libraries' catalogues have been searched as well as abstracts catalogues resources (see Annex 2). The main libraries consulted were the British Library and the Library of Congress while the main databases were JSTOR and OCLC Sociological Abstracts.

We searched for different keywords in relation to immigration and civic participation in Malta with no results. Consequently, given the current situation in the country and the state of the art of studies on immigration in general in Malta, it is not surprising that no specific publications on immigrants' civic participation are actually available. As a matter of fact, a search on general studies on civic participation in Malta has shown even less fruitful results. A more specific source of data and information consulted was the library of the University of Malta. The most relevant section within the university library is the Melitensia which, together with the National Library of Malta<sup>6</sup>, contains one of the largest special collection on Maltese interests and a theses collection. The only relevant material was found among the theses of final year students of the University of Malta. None of these studies are specifically on immigrants' civic participation in Malta, however, they are the only studies available in relation to refugee and migration issues in the country. Unfortunately, two of the theses went lost and were not available for consultation at the time of the fieldwork (October 2004) as the library personnel was unable to locate them; these were Caruana (2003)'s work on Maltese law in relation to illegal immigration and Azzopardi (1999)'s study of social work interventions with refugees in Malta.

Therefore, the only two theses available were Young (1999)'s dissertation on refugees in Malta and Mangion (2001)'s study on the movement of economic migrants and refugees and its impact on Malta.

The first thesis is from 1999 and provides a general overview of the asylum system for refugees in Malta before the enactment of the Refugee Act of 2001. It explains the institutional setting, the procedures asylum seekers had to go through while waiting for an answer on their claim and the provisions for people who received refugee status. Moreover, through fieldwork with refugees at

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<sup>6</sup> A search of the catalogue of the National Library of Malta produced no results.

a Church Home for Refugees, it explores their life in Malta and their interaction with the asylum system and Maltese society in general.

The second thesis deals with the possible consequences of the increasing number of immigrants in Malta and discusses its potential economic, social and political impact on the country. It develops from the usual consideration that since Malta is a highly populated micro-state it is extremely vulnerable to an increasing inflow of immigrants and studies some of the possible impact a growing foreign population could have on Maltese society. The thesis is based on secondary sources and direct interviews with the Minister for Home Affairs Dr. Tonio Borg, Assistant Police Commissioner Andrew Seychell, Dr. Katrine Camilleri of the Jesuit Refugee Service and Mons. Philip Calleja of the Emigrants' Commission. The main topics of the interviews are the potential effect of an increasing number of immigrants in Maltese society and the introduction of the Refugee Act of 2001.

Both dissertations offer a useful overview of the developments of immigration in Malta over the past few years and help to explain the reason why no further studies are currently available.

Given the general dearth in academic studies in the field of immigration in Malta, the following part of this report is an attempt to build a profile of the current situation as regard immigrants in Malta and their civic participation and is predominantly based on non-academic sources and the result of direct fieldwork conducted in October 2004 (See Annex 3). Before delving into the specific issue, we provide a brief overview of the general political landscape in Malta and the debate on Maltese identity.

Baldocchio (2002) remarks the fact that Malta's proportional representation system with only two political parties represented in parliament is a unique case in Europe.

He explains that:

“With the allegiance of the voting population [...] split neatly down the middle, the difference in voter support between the two main political parties has never been more than 13,000 votes since 1971. In such a situation, a ‘winner takes all’ political system prevails. A candidate requires close to 3,300 votes to get elected to the 65-seat national parliament, a small number that institutionalises close personal and patronage links between politicians and their constituents.”

Moreover, he notices that today, both the MLP and NP, are ‘catch-all’ parties, which use conventional and modern methods to turn citizens into loyal party faithful. As explained earlier in the report, both parties now have a television station, radio station and newspapers, they also have their own emblems, flags and anthems and rely also on a web of party clubs and committees spread all over the country. In the densely populated social environment of Malta, the presence, if not control, of the party on people's votes is supreme.

According to Hirezy (1995), given the pervasive partisanship in the Maltese polarized polity, which is deeply rooted in class ideology and locality, preference patterns are almost known by street. Loyalties are generally strong, stable and linked to social and family background. He notices that candidates can rely on family networks and friends to promote their candidacy and to gain greater social control over their sympathizers, to whom they may also be able to offer rewards if elected.

Of paramount importance in Maltese society is also the Catholic Church. Malta is a country where 70% of the population identify commitment to religious values as the top priority in life and attend mass on a weekly basis, divorce is not legal and a third of the youth completes

schooling in church run schools. Baldocchio (2002) explains that, despite evident secularisation, “the Catholic Church and its ethos and ceremonies remain today the closest to a national Maltese symbol” (Baldocchio, 2002) and Catholicism is a defining element of Maltese national identity.

In recent years, the question of Maltese national identity has acquired a central role in the political and intellectual debate in Malta. This was mostly prompted by the possibility of joining the EU rather than by the increasing number of immigrants reaching the Islands, and became an integral part of the political debate on Malta’s positioning in relation to Europe.

Nevertheless, the general debate on Maltese identity and the relationship between Malta and Europe, on one side, and Malta and the South of the Mediterranean, on the other, has relevant implications for the life of ethnic minorities and immigrants in the Islands.

The political debate on the possible role of Malta within the EU focused on the assumption that Malta could assume the role of bridge between Europe and North Africa. The geopolitical position of the Islands and their historical role as a crossroad between the North and South, the West and the East, was used to support this view. “In the centre, that’s where we are.” (Schembri 2004b).

Schembri (2004b) affirms that:

“[...] a totally utilitarian need of our colonisers has been turned into an asset in the popular mind frame of independent Malta, a strategic position that is held to be useful no longer to conquest but to mediate and regulate the region within the European concerns for foreign policy and security. But let’s not kid ourselves: we promise to mediate dialogue between two cultures when we are only interested in one. Despite all our declarations in good faith about our diverse Mediterranean elements that make us Maltese, our aspirations remain European, our models come from Brussels, we all look up north.” (Schembri 2004b)

As a matter of fact, in this strategic position between Europe and North Africa, Maltese tends to stress their belonging to Europe as a way to distinguish themselves from North Africans. Grima (1999) explains that Maltese people identify themselves with Europe which corresponds to “us” while the South of the Mediterranean represents “them”, or “what we are not”.

During one of his programmes at Radio 101, before the membership issue was solved, David Casa (now MEP) said: “With whom do they want to affiliate us, with Arabs?” (Schembri 2004b).

Similarly, Josef Bonnici, at the time Minister for Economic Services, (now appointed EU Auditor by the government), said: “if we remain out (of the EU), we will be in the company of those other countries out of the EU in the Mediterranean, which are far worse than us”. (Schembri 2004b). While Labour MP Adrian Vassallo used the same arguments to reach the opposite conclusion and stated: “Malta is in the middle of the Mediterranean and EU membership will make Malta a frontier, just north of North Africa, where there are so many problems with fundamentalism [...] we already face enough problems with illegal immigrants and we’ll have to face far more when we become EU members”.

These views reflect and foment general stereotypes and xenophobic reactions to Arabs in Malta, with serious consequences for the local North African population which is the immigrant community which phases the highest level of prejudice and discrimination. We discuss this issue in more detail below.

## Immigrants in Malta: background and field of activity

The main groups of immigrants who are active in Malta are involved in ethnic associations, self-help networks, religious groups and children's schools activities. The dearth in research on these issues does not allow for a deep understanding of the level of civic participation of the various groups and the dynamics of their engagement in Maltese life. The following overview of the main communities is based on grey literature, media reports and interviews in Malta. The findings are an indication of possible areas of interest for further more in-depth studies rather than a summary of well-established research.

The largest group of aliens living in Malta are Maltese emigrants or descendants of Maltese emigrants returning to Malta or citizens of other EU member states, with British expatriates being the main group. Other groups of interest are the historical Indian community, the "Arab-Muslim" community, predominantly constituted by Libyans, and the smaller Nigerian and Albanian communities. We analyse below each group separately.

### **Maltese former emigrants or their descendants**

Returnees often hold Maltese citizenship or have a background that allows them to follow the root of registration to obtain it. They have various associations, housed by the Emigrants' Commission, which organise activities and meetings. Each of these Associations deals with a specific group of migrants and their needs, among them are:

- the Association of Families of Migrants (A.F.E.)
- the Maltese - American Association (M.A.A.)
- the Friends of Australia Association (F.O.A.A.)
- the Maltese - Canadian Association (M.C.A.)
- the International Wives Association (I.W.A.)

No information about their specific involvement in the current political life of Malta or in any other national associations was found. In any case, this does not mean they do not participate in activities whose focus is not the returnee community, but simply that no data are available on their wider civic participation.

### **EU Citizens**

Citizens of other EU member states who are resident in Malta are not the focus of this report, however, given the significant presence of the British population in the islands a short description of their situation is interesting. The vast majority of British citizens in Malta holds a resident permit or has become Maltese. There is a British Residents' Association that was founded in 1969 with the aim to provide help and support to its members and foster good relations among them and, between them and Maltese citizens. As we already mentioned, there is no evidence of

British settlers being involved in politics in Malta, however, some of the people interviewed during fieldwork recalled that few British settlers might have stood for local elections in their town of residence.

### **Indian community**

India and Malta have had friendly and cordial relations since the days of the British Empire of which they were both part. Currently, there are some 45 families, around 300 people, of Indian origin, all of them from the town of Hyderabad in Sindh, who have adopted Maltese nationality. As we explain below, their relationship with Maltese society is mostly related to business.

The majority of “l-Indjani” (the Indians), as the Maltese call them, belong to a well-established and respected business community which has been part of Malta’s commercial life for the last 115 years and has integrated fully into Maltese society while retaining its roots. Falzon (2001) has published an interesting study of the history of the community from the time they first arrived in Malta to present times. He explains that by the first decade of the twentieth century, at least ten Sindwork firms had set up their business in Malta. The community was linked to the wider Diaspora whose main activities were trade of “oriental” goods for tourists and visitors of the Mediterranean. Therefore, within this context, Malta’s central geographical location within the British Empire was strategically important for Sindhis trading operations.

Up until about 1930, Sindhi shops in Malta were mainly engaged in the curio and luxury textiles trade as well as Maltese lace. In fact, the local lace industry had gained in profile during the second half of the nineteenth century and Sindwork firms were quick to start selling it in their shops in Malta, as well as using their international networks to export it.

According to Falzon (2001) during the first decade of the century most Sindwork firms in Malta were advertising themselves as commission agents and/or retailers of Maltese lace and it is also possible that some of them were actually contracting the manufacture of lace specifically for export.

From a social point of view, he explains that the community lived a very isolated existence; employees were recruited in Hyderabad on a two-and-a-half or three year contract basis and were not allowed to bring their wives and dependents over from Hyderabad. Moreover, they tended to keep to themselves and form little enclaves. In fact it was only after the Partition of India in 1947 that Sindhi men in Malta were joined by their families.

In the early 1930s the main companies withdrew their interests in their businesses in Malta because of falling profits and, consequently, from the late 1930s onwards Sindhi business turned in the hands of the previous managers of the Sindwork firms who had become owners of the retail outlets.

With the exception of the close relatives of the traders who moved from Hyderabad to Malta to join their men permanently, Partition produced no significant influx of Sindhis because on one hand, Malta was not considered as a land of opportunity and, on the other hand, from 1952 to 1985 tight immigration laws meant that only the Sindhi men who got married to local Sindhi girls could obtain a permit to move to Malta.

As a consequence for about thirty-three years not a single person came from India and, therefore, Sindhi business has tended to be passed down and/or to change hands within/between the same 8-10 families.

Over the years their businesses have changed following the general trends of the market. By the beginning of the Second World War Sindhi businesses in Malta had become the import, wholesale, and retail of textiles mainly for the local market where women had begun to be more aware of fashion and the demand for textiles grew. However, by the mid-1980s, adapting to the increasing interest in ready made cloths, almost all of the textile shops in Valletta changed their line to prêt-à-porter.

Currently, there are nineteen Sindhi-owned businesses dealing in prêt-à-porter while four deal in high quality textiles, two or three still operate in the bazaar-type line for tourists.

Overall, the location of their shops, situated in the centre of Valletta, also meant that the Sindhis were excellently placed to take advantage of the major tourism boom of the 1970s and 1980s. In fact, a number of businessmen (generally those in the bazaar-type line) ventured into souvenirs and at present a significant number of souvenir shops in Valletta still belong to them and are situated on the main street where at one time were the Sindwork firms.

Since the 1970s Sindhis in Malta have ventured increasingly into new lines of business. One company, which was set up in 1972, has specialized in supplies to industry and employs nineteen Maltese people and imports and distributes a range of products used by the local manufacturing industry. Some of them have opened Indian restaurants as a subsidiary business to their import and wholesale trade; these are staffed by chefs and waiters recruited in India.

In terms of organizations and civic participation, the vast majority of these Indians have been Maltese citizens for generations, in 1955 Sindhi traders in Malta came together to form the Indian Merchants' Association (Malta). Falzon (2001) explains that the Association was never very active and in 1989 it was renamed to the Maltese-Indian Community, thus supporting his argument that a shift in perception from an immigrant community towards a local ethnic minority group has already taken place. Today the community deals mostly with the organization of activities such as Diwali parties and running both the temple and the community centre.

### **The Arab-Muslim community**

The Arab-Muslim community in Malta is made of about 3000 individuals, many of which are now Maltese citizens. The main activities they are engaged with as a community are related to religion or to their children education.

The main public figure is the Imam of the Maltese Muslim community, Sheikh Mohammed El Sadi, who has often been interviewed by the media on matters related to the muslim community in Malta or to international affairs. When interviewed by Karl Schembri for Malta Today, he claimed that, generally, the Muslim minority in Malta enjoys tolerance, freedom and hospitality, however, he explained that the community faces also “some degree of prejudice and unfair generalisation” (Schembri 2004a).

Prejudice and racism are mostly directed at Libyans in Malta and often extended to all Arab looking people living or visiting the country. While on one hand, at government level the two

countries entertain good relations, the general attitudes of Maltese versus Libyans have degenerated over the past years. Under Mintoff's government in the late '70s and '80s, Malta and Libya developed a special political partnership. Even at the time when Libya was in the international limelight for its alleged involvement in terrorist attacks, Malta gave its full support and opened the door of co-operation. Overall, the numbers of Libyan tourists increased drastically in 1992, when the United Nations imposed a number of sanctions on Libya as a response to its refusal to surrender suspects wanted in the US and Britain in connection with the 1988 Pan Am plane bombing over Lockerbie

Since that time, Libyans began to consider Malta as a stepping stone to the world. Thousands of them used to go to Malta to travel to other destinations or to buy essential foodstuffs, American cigarettes, and other products that had been rendered scarce by the imposition of sanctions. Illegal immigrants were also heading to Malta in search of a job (Schembri 2001).

Over the years various activities were started by the Libyans in Malta, a Libyan Cultural Institute founded in 1974, the Libyan Arab Maltese Holding Company Ltd in 1975, and an Islamic Centre with a mosque set up in 1978. Yet, Maltese-Libyan relations were, and still are, ambivalent. Many Maltese despise the Libyans (Vella Gauci 1996) and, recently, the situation is worsening as the intolerance towards Libyans has begun to increase. The problem touches everyday relations between Maltese and Libyans, from the customs at the airport to banks and hotels, from shops and rental agencies to the streets. The general perception of Arabs in Malta is based on the typical stereotype as a male in his twenties who comes to Malta for a short stay and who is either a criminal or a potential criminal.

This has reached the point when some night-clubs in Bugibba (an area famous for its night life) have started to stop Arab looking people to enter their premises and one specific place also displayed a sign, in Arabic, which said: 'Arabs are not welcome here'.

Schembri (2004b) explains that:

"Of course there are historical explanations behind such perceptions, ranging from negative popular reaction to Mintoff's close relations with Libya in the late '70s and '80s, to the rate of crimes committed by Arab youth during their brief visits here, moving on to the increasingly frequent images of hundreds of poverty-stricken migrants from North Africa and the Middle East disembarking from sinking boats in search of the Promised Land. Reality and stereotypes feed off each other."

The Imam's public comment on the increasing widespread stereotypes and discriminatory incidents against Arabs is the following:

"We are grateful to Maltese society for its hospitality, and we are also very grateful to the World Islamic Call Society and to Libya's Leader Muammar Gaddafi, who built this mosque to help us worship and practice our religion.

Muslims in Malta are doing their best to integrate, to be part and parcel of Maltese society. More respect for this community would help them to integrate more." (Schembri 2004a)

The Arab-Muslim community has some specific goals they would like to achieve within Maltese society for a better standard of life in Malta, for example the recognition of the Muslim marriage

contract and divorce and of Muslim festivities. Once again, it is the Imam who indicates some of the issues the community is pushing for in a public interview:

He claimed:

“Maybe in the future we can attain more recognition from the state, like for example, recognition of the Muslim marriage contract and divorce documents, like recognition of Muslim feasts, I mean all these things which will help the Muslim community to settle and integrate more.” (Schembri 2004a)

However, he does not consider the possibility of a political party representing the community as a possible development in the near future given the small number of its members.

The opening of a Muslim primary school has represented a great achievement for the community. The school is recognised by the state and has obtained the support and cooperation of the Education Ministry. This is officially a Maltese school that follows the national curriculum but also include the teaching of Islam and Arabic language. It has the aim of maintaining the identity of children of the Muslim community in Malta and enhancing tolerance and mutual respect between Muslims and other faiths. In fact, the majority of the school’s teachers are not Muslims and the headmistress herself is a Christian.

The Imam stated: “I’m happy because this will help Muslims settle and integrate in society, and enhance values of respect and tolerance. Many of our children come from Maltese families and some of them are even Christians, they mix, and we don’t want them to be isolated. We do not want Muslims to live in ghettos; we want them to mix and to integrate in society while maintaining their own identity. We also want to promote a sense of belonging to the country, a sense of loyalty and citizenship.” (Schembri 2004a)

## **Albanians**

Albanians begun to arrive in Malta as refugees in the early 1990s and in 1991 they established the association S.O.S. Albania. This is a voluntary organisation that was set up under the auspice of Emigrants' Commission and had the aim of assisting Albanian refugees through social and charitable projects. Among the projects realised by the organisation are: a home for people with disabilities, Preca College - secondary school and a family health centre. Over the years, some Albanians have settled, some have married Maltese citizens, others have moved to a third country or returned to Albania. New waves of Albanian refugees arrived in Malta during the Kosovo crisis in 1999 when the country accepted 110 refugees through the UNHCR evacuation programme (ECRE1999).

## **Nigerians**

Nigerians in Malta seem to be the most well known group of foreigners as they are mostly engaged in football, a sport loved by the whole country which has about fifty football clubs. Despite the lack of statistical data on their presence in the islands, we can safely claim that they are not one of the largest groups but simply one of the most visible ones. The field of their

activity gives them notoriety and a privileged access to the media. The most well known Nigerian in Malta, is Damian Iwueke Chukwuemeka a FIFA licensed agent who arrived in Malta in 1989 and became the agent for many Nigerian footballers (like Murphy Akanji, Chris Oretan and Orosco Anonam). He then founded the Nigerian Community Association, the Nigeria-Maltese Businesses and Cultural Association and also co-founded the Society for African Studies at the University of Malta. He works also as chief librarian and documentation officer for the Foundation for International Studies at the University of Malta.

Iwueke is now a Maltese citizen and in 2004 decided to run as an independent candidate for the EP elections with two slogans: “Why Not?” and “Adding colour to the EP elections”.

His agenda focused on minority rights and included women’s rights, single parenting rights, gay family rights and inheritance rights for gays, children’s rights, better conditions for sportsmen and sportswomen. He also hoped to polarise a protest vote against the government and parties’ politics.

In a press conference announcing his candidacy he stated:

“The issues I will tackle in the European Parliament will include minority issues such as women’s rights, the rights of single parents, the rights of gay couples to live as a family and for them to be recognised and be entitled to inheritance. [...] I will also push for children’s rights, youth affairs, exchange programmes for students, better conditions for sportsmen and in particular, I will use my influence as a FIFA agent to attract businessmen to invest in Maltese football. [...] I also want to attract foreign insurance firms to set up shop in Malta to get rid of the monopolistic local firms to give people a choice. I want to attract foreign investment and I want a better relationship with our southern Mediterranean neighbours to foster peace in our region. [...] Your vote for me will be a protest vote to show the parties that you are sick of their ways. I am appealing for the votes of all those who do not trust politicians; youths, men and women who believe in a multi-cultural Europe, gay people, small business owners, the disabled who are sick of being forgotten, foreigners in Malta, sportsmen and women.” (Carabott 2004)

Damien Iwueke obtained 157 votes and was the third most voted among the five independent candidates. This was obviously not enough to win a seat. The election was won by three candidates of Malta Labour Party and two of the Partit Nazzjonalista (Malta’s Nationalist Party currently in government). However, Iwueke, remains the main point of reference for Nigerians in Malta.

## **Examples of immigrant activists**

Sheikh Mohammed El Sadi

Sheikh Mohammed El Sadi is the *imam* of the Maltese Muslim community at the Corradino mosque. As the spiritual leader of the 3,000-strong Muslim community he has often been interviewed by the media on matters related to the Muslim community in Malta or to international affairs. He speaks up for the minorities in Malta and promotes good community relations and community cohesion.

## Damian Iwueke Chukwuemeka

Damian Iwueke Chukwuemeka is a FIFA licensed agent who arrived in Malta in 1989 and became the agent for many Nigerian footballers (like Murphy Akanji, Chris Oretan and Orosco Anonam). He then founded the Nigerian Community Association, the Nigeria-Maltese Businesses and Cultural Association and also co-founded the Society for African Studies at the University of Malta. He works also as chief librarian and documentation officer for the Foundation for International Studies at the University of Malta. He stood for the European Parliament election in 2004 and campaigned for the rights of all minorities in Malta.

## Part III: Expert Assessment

### What are the main fields of civic activities that immigrants engage in (e.g. religious associations, parent associations, political parties, etc.)?

The dearth in research on immigrants in Malta and their civic participation does not allow for a deep understanding of the situation. From the review of the little existing material and non-academic sources it appears that the main fields of civic participation are ethnic associations and self-help groups, followed by religious associations. Only one example of direct political engagement was found in the case of the Maltese candidate of Nigerian origin to the EP elections in 2004.

### What ethnic and nationality groups are particularly active, and why?

The relatively small scale of the immigration phenomenon in Malta, still in its early stage of development, together with the scarcity of available data do not allow for a definite conclusion on this issue. From the sources available, it is fair to indicate that the Arab-Muslim community is more active in pursuing its goals in the attempt to achieve a better degree of integration and participation in Malta and challenge the negative stereotypes and discriminatory behaviour targeted at Arabs and other Muslims.

The Maltese returnees might have a far more active level of participation in Maltese society than any other group, but the lack of information does not allow us to confirm this intuition and the opinion of some of the interviewees.

The Indian community, once very isolated, seems to have turned into a national local minority and is mostly engaged within Maltese society through business partnerships and relations. The other activities of the community are focused on maintaining the Indian traditions in Malta.

### Is the degree of active civic participation of immigrants high or low compared to the majority population?

Malta has a relatively high degree of active civic participation. There is very little information on the issue, but the data available provide a good indication of national trends. For example, the turn over to any elections in Malta is generally very strong, and the turnout in National elections is indeed amongst the highest in the world, as indicated in Table 6 below.

<b>Year</b>	<b>National Elections Turnout</b>
1992	95.31
1996	95.3
1998	94.1
2003	95.82

Table 6: Participation in Maltese Elections: Valid Votes Cast as a Percentage of Registered Voters. Source: Pace 2004

A study by Pace (2004) on the European elections in Malta indicates that the Maltese turn over at the European Parliament elections was around 82%, the third strongest in the European Union after that of Belgium and Luxembourg. Malta achieves one of the highest voter turnout in the world despite having a voluntary voting system. According to Hill and Louth (2004) this is due to the combination of the following factors:

“an unusually large number of features known to be congenial to high turnout: a small, urbanized and geographically concentrated population (Siaroff and Merer, 2002, 917); unitary, concentrated government; high levels of partisanship; proportional representation; ‘highly competitive elections resulting in one-party governments despite P.R.’; extremely intense election campaigns and a polarized electorate of partisan, committed voters (Hirczy, 1995, 255).” (Hill and Louth 2004, p. 7)

As for other forms of civic participation, a statistical research carried out by the National Statistics Office of Malta (2004c) describes a general increase in the number of youths becoming members of various youth organizations and indicates that the sphere of youth organizations’ activities is dominated by religious activities with a share of 21.2 per cent, followed by social activities with 18.7 per cent, educational activities with 18.3 per cent and cultural activities with 16.6 per cent.

Activity	Number	%
Social	45	18.67
Religious	51	21.16
Political	9	3.73
Cultural	40	16.60
Educational	44	18.26
Sports	7	2.91
Environment	8	3.32
Philanthropic	19	7.88
International	11	4.57
Other	7	2.90
<b>Total *</b>	<b>241</b>	<b>100.00</b>

*\* Note that some organisations may be of more than one type, so this total is not representative of the total number of organisations surveyed.*

Table 7: Youth Organizations by type: 2003.

Source: NSO 2004c.

A further study of the National Statistics Office of Malta (2004d) indicates that Maltese dedicate about 1.7% of their time to volunteer work and meetings during weekdays and around 3.3% at weekends.

Given the information available on the general degree of civic participation in Malta and immigrants' civic participation, one can deduce that the latter is generally lower than the national average. However, once more, the little information available does not allow us to reach conclusion of scientific validity, but simply indicate an interesting area for further research.

What is the relation between engagement in ethnic or migrant organisations (e.g. any organisation having the name of the minority in the name) compared to mainstream society organisations?

The findings of this report tend to indicate that majority of activities and organisation among immigrant communities in Malta focus around ethnic or religious associations. The vast majority of organisations have the name of the minority in their title, for example: Nigerian Community Association, S.O.S. Albania or the Maltese-Indian Community. Moreover, even many of the associations of Maltese returnees have the name of the country of emigration as it is the case of the Maltese - American Association, the Friends of Australia Association or the Maltese - Canadian Association (M.C.A.).

Unfortunately, there are no studies on immigrants' relations with mainstream society organisations on which one could base a comparison.

What issues do you consider to be of particular interest and importance in the field?  
Where do you see the major research gaps?

The relevance of immigration in the Maltese context has increasingly developed and calls for research in various aspects of the phenomenon. The general lack of academic studies means that there are gaps in all areas of research both from a quantitative and qualitative perspective, from the political and economic point of view to the sociological one. Given the current dominant role of the issue of illegal immigration and border control in the public debate and the predominant interpretation of immigration to Malta as a transitory phenomenon, there is a risk for future research to focus mostly on these issues and continue to overlook the conditions of immigrant communities already settled in the Maltese Islands. A deeper study of the relationship between Maltese society and immigrants, and academic research on the current level of integration and degree of civic participation of immigrant communities in Malta, could play an important role in the general debate on immigration. It could contribute to a better understanding of the impact of immigration in Malta, to the development of more efficient integration policies and antidiscrimination strategies and, ultimately, to further Malta's acclaimed role of mediator between the north and the south of the Mediterranean.

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## Annex 1- Research Competences in Malta

The general lack of research in the field of immigration to Malta, immigrants' civic participation and civic participation in general, is a clear indication that currently these issues are not the subject of research within national institutions. What follows is a list of institutions that could be useful links for further research on immigration in Malta.

### **The University of Malta**

Malta has only one university, The University of Malta, and within this institution no research has been conducted in relation to immigrants in Malta or civic participation in general. An exception is represented by the dissertation of final year students on immigration related issues that we listed in the report. However, within the university two research centres might be of interest in the future: the Workers' Development Centre and the Mediterranean Institute.

The former was set up in 1981 and organize educational activities which support the development of participation in the workplace and society at large and research on labour relations and employee participation, locally and abroad. The latter includes research in geography, anthropology and history of Mediterranean civilizations.

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Fax: (+356) 21 320 717

### **National Statistics Office**

The National Statistics Office is an excellent source of quantitative data on Maltese society. The material on immigration is still quite basic at this stage, but further research in the future could add interesting sources of information on the issue. Moreover, in 2005 a new National Census should take place and the findings could well reflect the general changes in the Maltese population brought by the increasing immigration flow of the past few years.

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### Research Centre Voice of the Mediterranean

The Research Centre houses a number of books, reviews and newspapers on migration, both Maltese and international, and focuses especially on issues related to Maltese emigrations. It is based at Dar l-Emigrant in Valletta and in order to obtain more information, or to get any published material, it is possible to contact Fr. Lawrence Attard at the following e-mail address: mecmalta@dream.vol.net.mt

### Annex 2- Library Catalogues Consulted

Table 8 indicates the main keywords used to search library catalogues in relation to the issue of immigrants civic participation in Malta and lists the number of items found.

	MAIN DATABASES AND LIBRARY CATALOGUES CONSULTED			
KEYWORDS	JSTOR	OCLC Sociological Abstracts	British Library	Library of Congress
Malta	200	9199	3734	3121
Malta Immigration	127	54	9	17
Malta Migration	149	24	5	6
Malta Emigration	98	51	11	21
Immigrants in Malta	0	17	1	4
Refugees in Malta	0	0	0	3

Table 8: Results of search on main databases and library catalogues for keywords related to Malta and immigration.

We searched for different keywords in relation to immigration and civic participation in Malta with no results. For example searching JSTOR’s catalogue under the discipline Geography, History, Political Science, Population Studies and Sociology we found a total of 200 entries for the general keyword “Malta”, 127 entries for the more specific combination of keywords “Malta Immigration”, 149 for “Malta Migration”, 98 for “Malta Emigration”, zero for “Immigrants in

Malta” and for “Refugees in Malta”; none of the references found was of any relevance to this study. Similarly, searching the OCLC Sociological Abstracts catalogue we found 9199 references using the simple keyword “Malta”, 54 references using the keywords “Malta Immigration”, 24 for “Malta Migration”, 51 for “Malta Emigration”, 17 for “Immigrants in Malta” and zero for “Refugees in Malta”, once again none of them were relevant as they focused on Maltese emigration.

Consequently, given the current situation in the country and the state of the art of studies on immigration in general in Malta, it is not surprising that no specific publications on immigrants’ civic participation are actually available. As a matter of fact, a search on general studies on civic participation in Malta has shown even less fruitful results, with JSTOR listing only 3 papers under the keywords “Civic Participation Malta”, none of which were actually on the issue of civic participation in Malta, while the OCLC Sociological Abstracts showed no results at all.

As already mentioned in the report, the Melitensia section of the library of the University of Malta was the most useful source of information for this study. Searching the Melitensia collection for the keyword Immigrants only two references were found both on Maltese immigrants in Australia. A search using the keywords immigrants in Malta produced no results, so did the following keywords: immigration, refugees, asylum, ethnic minorities, minorities, communities, international migration.

The only relevant material was found among the theses of final year students of the University of Malta. The theses catalogue was searched for the following keywords: immigration, asylum, refugees, and immigrants.

The four following theses in relation to refugees and immigration in Malta were found:

Caruana, Denise

The limitations of Maltese law in the field of clandestine immigration and the fight against underground economy. Thesis LLD, 2003.

Young, Marcia Dale

Refugees in Malta. BA in Anthropology, 1999.

Azzopardi, Eman

Social work interventions with refugees in Malta. BA in Social Work, 1999.

Mangio, Edward

Economic migrants and refugees: a study of the movement of people with a focus on the impact of migration on a Mediterranean micro-state – Malta. B.Com, 2001.

### Annex 3- List of interviews and organisations contacted in Malta in October 2004

In-depth interviews were carried out with the following people:

Joe Azzopardi, Communications Coordinator to the Deputy Prime Minister, Ministry for Justice and Home Affairs

Bryan Magro, Policy Coordinator, Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity.

Catherine Fenech, Responsible for Social Welfare (NGOs), National Statistic Office.

John A. Schembri, Coordinator of the Mediterranean Institute, University of Malta.

Karl Schembri, Journalist for Malta Today, The Malta Independent on Sunday, Europe Mag.

During fieldwork the following organisations and institutions were contacted:

Ministry for Justice and Home Affairs

Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity

Citizenship and Expatriate Affairs

Maltese Government - Department of Information

National Statistic Office

Dar l-Emigrant-Emigrants' Commission

The University of Malta

The Times of Malta

Malta Today