

FOURTH EVALUATION ROUND

Measures to prevent and detect vulnerabilities
to human trafficking

EVALUATION REPORT MALTA

GRETA
Group of Experts
on Action against
Trafficking in Human Beings



Implementation of the
Council of Europe Convention
on Action against Trafficking
in Human Beings

GRETA(2026)02

Adopted on 20 November 2025
Published on 6 May 2026



Secretariat of the Council of Europe Convention
on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings
(GRETA and Committee of the Parties)
Council of Europe
F-67075 Strasbourg Cedex
France

trafficking@coe.int

www.coe.int/en/web/anti-human-trafficking

Table of contents

Preamble	4
List of acronyms	5
Executive summary	7
General information on trafficking in human beings in Malta	10
I. Introduction	11
II. Overview of trends and changes in the legislative, institutional and policy framework for action against human trafficking	13
III. Addressing vulnerabilities to trafficking in human beings	16
1. Prevention of trafficking in human beings	16
a. Introduction	16
a. Measures to prevent the vulnerability of specific groups to trafficking in human beings.....	17
<i>i. Children and young people</i>	17
<i>ii. Migrant workers</i>	19
<i>iii. Asylum seekers and refugees</i>	22
<i>iv. Vulnerabilities related to the gender dimension of human trafficking and of persons engaged in prostitution</i>	25
<i>v. Persons with disabilities</i>	26
<i>vi. LGBTI persons</i>	27
2. Measures to protect and promote the rights of victims of trafficking	28
a. Identification of victims of THB	28
b. Assistance to victims	32
3. Substantive criminal law and procedural law	34
a. Notion of “abuse of a position of vulnerability” in the law and case-law	34
b. Investigation, prosecution and sanctions	35
c. Protection of victims from intimidation.....	38
d. Criminalisation of the use of services of a victim	39
IV. Addressing human trafficking facilitated by information and communication technology (ICT)	39
V. Follow-up topics specific to Malta.....	41
1. Compensation.....	41
VI. Conclusions	43
Appendix 1 - Table with statistics on victims and cases of THB in Malta in 2021-2025	45
Appendix 2 - List of GRETA's conclusions and proposals for action	47
Appendix 3 - List of public bodies and civil society actors with which GRETA held consultations.....	53
Government's comments.....	55

Preamble

In accordance with Article 38, paragraph 1, of the Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (“the Convention”), GRETA evaluates the implementation of the Convention following a procedure divided into rounds. At the beginning of each round, GRETA selects the specific provisions on which the evaluation procedure is based.

The first round of monitoring of the Convention provided an overview of its implementation by States Parties. The second evaluation round examined the impact of legislative, policy and practical measures on the prevention of trafficking in human beings (THB), the protection of the rights of victims, and the prosecution of traffickers, paying particular attention to measures taken to address new trends in human trafficking, in particular trafficking for the purpose of labour exploitation, and child trafficking. The third evaluation round focused on trafficking victims’ access to justice and effective remedies.

For the fourth evaluation round of the Convention, GRETA has decided to focus on vulnerabilities to human trafficking and measures taken by States Parties to prevent them, detect and support vulnerable victims, and punish the offenders. An additional focus concerns the use of information and communication technology (ICT) to commit human trafficking offences, which brings structural changes to the way offenders operate and exacerbates existing vulnerabilities.

A number of provisions of the Convention establishing substantive and procedural obligations are relevant to this topic. The concept of “vulnerability” appears in Articles 4 (definitions), 5 (prevention of trafficking in human beings) and 12 (assistance to victims). According to paragraph 83 of the Explanatory report to the Convention, “by abuse of a position of vulnerability is meant abuse of any situation in which the person involved has no real and acceptable alternative to submitting to the abuse. The vulnerability may be of any kind, whether physical, psychological, emotional, family-related, social or economic. The situation might, for example, involve insecurity or illegality of the victim’s administrative status, economic dependence or fragile health. In short, the situation can be any state of hardship in which a human being is impelled to accept being exploited. Persons abusing such a situation flagrantly infringe human rights and violate human dignity and integrity, which no one can validly renounce.”

GRETA refers to the ICAT Issue Brief No. 12/2022 on Addressing vulnerability to trafficking in persons which refers to vulnerability as “those inherent, environmental or contextual factors that increase the susceptibility of an individual or group to being trafficked”. It classifies vulnerability factors in three categories: personal (e.g. age, gender, ethnicity, disability), situational (e.g. destitution, unemployment, legal status) and contextual (e.g. discriminatory laws, policies and social norms, armed conflicts, crises) factors, which interact and may increase the risk of human trafficking for certain individuals, groups and/or communities.¹ Vulnerability to human trafficking is also subject to intersectional factors, such as gender, belonging to a minority group and socio-economic status.

In addition to the thematic focus on vulnerabilities to human trafficking, GRETA has decided that each State Party will receive country-specific follow-up questions related to recommendations not implemented or partially implemented after the third evaluation round.

GRETA recalls that it has adopted the use of three different verbs - “urge”, “consider”, and “invite” – which correspond to different levels of urgency for bringing the State Party’s legislation and/or practice into compliance with the Convention. Thus, GRETA uses the verb “urge” when it assesses that the national legislation or policies are not in compliance with the Convention or when it finds that, despite the existence of legal provisions and other measures, the implementation of a key obligation of the Convention is lacking. In other situations, GRETA “considers” that it is necessary to make further improvements to fully comply with an obligation of the Convention. By “inviting” a country to pursue its efforts, GRETA acknowledges that the authorities are already on the right track and encourages them to continue existing action.

¹ [ICAT Issue Brief No. 12 on Addressing vulnerability to trafficking in persons - Search \(bing.com\)](#)

List of acronyms

AGO	Attorney General's Office
ATU	Anti-Human Trafficking Unit (ATU)
AWAS	Agency for the Welfare of Asylum Seekers
CC	Criminal Code
CEDAW	Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
CEPEJ	European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice
CJLA WG	Technical Working Group on Criminal Justice and Legislative Amendments
CRPD	Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
DIER	Department for Industrial and Employment Relations
ECCHR	European Centre for Constitutional and Human Rights
ECHR	European Convention on Human Rights
ECtHR	European Court of Human Rights
EU	European Union
EUAA	European Union Agency for Asylum
FIAU	Financial Intelligence Analysis Unit
FSWS	Foundation for Social Welfare Services
HRD	Human Rights Directorate
HTMC	Anti-Human Trafficking Monitoring Committee
ICT	Information and communication technology
IMC	Anti-Human Trafficking Inter-Ministerial Committee
IMCMHR	Inter-Ministerial Committee for the Mainstreaming of Human Rights
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IPA	International Protection Agency
JIT	Joint Investigation Teams
JRS	Jesuit Refugee Service
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NRM	National Referral Mechanism
ODIHR	Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
OPM-ES	Office of the Prime Minister for Equality, Reforms and Social Dialogue
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

SCSA	Social Care Standards Authority
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
TSI	Technical Support Instrument
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
VSA	Victim Support Agency

Executive summary

The report, covering the period 2021-2025, evaluates the measures taken by Malta to prevent vulnerabilities to trafficking in human beings (THB), detect and support vulnerable victims, and punish the offenders. In doing so, it pays particular attention to the use of information and communication technology (ICT) to commit human trafficking offences as well as to the use of technological innovations to prevent THB, protect victims, and prosecute traffickers. The report also evaluates progress made in selected areas examined by GRETA during previous evaluation rounds.

Over the years, the Maltese authorities have taken a series of steps to develop the legislative, institutional and policy framework for action against THB. The Anti-Human Trafficking Inter-Ministerial Committee, which was established in July 2022, was replaced in 2025 by the Inter-Ministerial Committee for the Mainstreaming of Human Rights, set up to co-ordinate state action on human rights issues, including action against human trafficking. On 1 August 2024, the Cabinet of Ministers adopted the National Anti-Trafficking Strategy (2024-2030), accompanied by an Action Plan for the period 2024-2027.

The total number of presumed victims of human trafficking identified in 2021-2024 was 62, but only 15 of them were formally identified as victims by the Maltese police, most of whom were women originating from Latin American countries and subjected to sexual exploitation. Two children were among those identified as presumed victims. There has also been an increase in presumed victims from Asian countries who seek assistance from the social services but do not want to report their cases to the police.

The report notes that children in or leaving residential care are particularly vulnerable to THB and the protective measures in place are insufficient. Therefore, GRETA considers that the Maltese authorities should ensure regular and effective monitoring of child residential institutions by an independent body enabled to conduct unannounced visits and equipped with a sufficient number of trained staff to prevent abuse and exploitation of children. The authorities should also strengthen their efforts to raise public awareness of the risks and different manifestations of child trafficking.

Around 130 000 migrants reside in Malta, primarily from India, the Philippines and Nepal, many of whom work in low-paid jobs and sectors such as construction, hospitality and domestic work. Further, there are concerns about the situation of migrants working on fishing boats. The Maltese authorities have taken measures to strengthen the protection of migrant workers, including the adoption of a law in 2022 to ensure minimum wage for platform workers and new Employment Agencies Regulations in April 2024 which require temporary work agencies and outsourcing agencies to be licensed. However, GRETA notes that labour law enforcement remains weak due to insufficient control in high-risk sectors and employment agencies. Consequently, GRETA urges the Maltese authorities to take additional steps to prevent trafficking for the purpose of labour exploitation, in particular by reviewing the legislative framework on the employment of migrant workers, establishing safe reporting and effective complaint mechanisms for migrant workers, strengthening oversight of private employment agencies, and protecting persons working in fishing boats, including through regular monitoring of their living and working conditions.

The report notes several factors which increase the vulnerability of asylum seekers and refugees to human trafficking in Malta, including difficulties in accessing employment and decent housing, the detention of unaccompanied children in immigration detention facilities, and disappearances of unaccompanied children from open reception centres. GRETA urges the Maltese authorities to ensure that when there are reasonable grounds to believe that an asylum seeker is a child, the person concerned is presumed to be a child and is granted special protection measures pending age verification. Moreover, GRETA asks the authorities to take actions for preventing and following up on any disappearances of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. GRETA also considers that the authorities should improve the social and economic integration of asylum seekers and refugees, notably their access to employment and vocational training.

The Maltese authorities acknowledge that women in prostitution and those working in “gentlemen’s clubs” and massage parlours are highly vulnerable to sexual exploitation. While welcoming the awareness-raising efforts aiming to prevent sexual exploitation of women, GRETA considers that the Maltese authorities should take additional measures to reduce the risk of exploitation of women and girls in prostitution and address the vulnerability of women working in “gentlemen’s clubs” and massage parlours, including by regulating these sectors through mandatory licencing and establishing effective monitoring mechanisms.

Furthermore, the authorities acknowledge the increased risk of persons with disabilities being targeted by traffickers, even though no victims with disabilities have been identified during the reporting period. GRETA considers that the Maltese authorities should conduct research into the vulnerabilities of persons with disabilities to human trafficking and provide information and training to professionals working with persons with disabilities on the risks of human trafficking faced by such persons.

Despite efforts being made to raise awareness on human trafficking and provide training to frontline actors, the report notes that the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) related to the identification of victims of trafficking are not well known among frontline officials and NGO staff. Further, labour inspections are rare due to inspector shortages, and there is no systematic vulnerability screening in immigration reception or detention centres. GRETA therefore urges the Maltese authorities to ensure that sufficient financial and human resources are made available to labour inspectors and that all asylum seekers and migrants in immigration detention and reception centres are screened for indicators of human trafficking. The authorities should also review the National Referral Mechanism and SOPs, in particular by introducing a multi-disciplinary approach to the identification of victims of trafficking, and ensure their application in practice through systematic dissemination. Moreover, GRETA calls on the authorities to ensure that pre-removal risk assessments prior to all forced removals from Malta fully assess risks of trafficking or re-trafficking on return.

The report notes some improvements made in the provision of assistance to victims of trafficking, such as the opening of a dedicated safe house for trafficking victims and the increase in the related state funding. However, victims experience difficulties in accessing the labour market, and there is limited funding to NGOs which provide legal and psychological support to victims. GRETA considers that the Maltese authorities should strengthen effective access to the labour market for victims of trafficking and their economic and social inclusion, provide adequate financing to NGOs to ensure the sustainability of their services, and increase the number of trained cultural mediators to bridge communication and build trust between victims and support providers.

While welcoming the efforts made to develop specialisation among police officers, prosecutors and judges to deal with human trafficking cases, GRETA is concerned by the excessive length of proceedings in such cases. Consequently, GRETA once again urges the Maltese authorities to ensure that the length of court proceedings in human trafficking cases is reasonable, in line with the case-law of the European Court of Human Rights. GRETA also asks the authorities to introduce as an aggravating circumstance the offence of human trafficking committed against a child, regardless of the means used.

In 2024, the Criminal Code was amended to extend special interviewing conditions to all children under the age of 18 and to specify that victims of sexual offences and vulnerable victims or witnesses must testify via video conference from a location outside the courtroom. During trials, victims of trafficking are more frequently interviewed via video conference. GRETA welcomes these improvements and invites the Maltese authorities to continue ensuring that protection measures are applied to prevent the re-traumatisation and intimidation of victims of trafficking during the investigation and criminal proceedings.

Traffickers increasingly use the internet to recruit and exploit victims, which is why the National Action Plan for 2024-2027 envisages conducting research into online recruitment and exploitation, as well as exploring partnerships with technology companies. The Maltese Safer Internet Centre promotes safe internet use and combats online sexual abuse, including through the promotion of the Child Web Alert hotline. GRETA considers that the authorities should develop further measures to prevent ICT-facilitated

human trafficking, including by enabling online covert operations to identify traffickers and gather evidence in human trafficking cases, investing in capacity building and digital tools for proactive investigations and strengthening co-operation with ICT companies and Internet service providers.

No victims of human trafficking have received compensation for damages during the reporting period. Therefore, GRETA urges the Maltese authorities to ensure that the collection of evidence about the harm the victim has suffered, including the financial gain from the exploitation of the victim, is part of the criminal investigation, with a view to supporting compensation claims in court, and to review the legislation to allow the use of confiscated assets to secure compensation to victims of trafficking. Further, GRETA repeats its recommendation to review the eligibility criteria for state compensation.

General information on trafficking in human beings in Malta (covering the period from 2021 until November 2025)

Entry into force of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings	1 May 2008
Evaluations by GRETA	First evaluation report (published on 24 January 2013) Second evaluation report (published on 16 March 2017) Third evaluation report (published on 10 November 2021)
Co-ordination of action against THB	• Anti-Human Trafficking Monitoring Committee (HTMC) • Inter-Ministerial Committee for the Mainstreaming of Human Rights (IMCMHR), preceded by the Anti-Human Trafficking Inter-Ministerial Committee until 2025 • Human Rights Directorate of the Office of the Prime Minister for Equality, Reforms and Social Dialogue (OPM-ES) • Anti-Human Trafficking Unit (ATU), preceded by the Human Rights Initiative Unit until 2025
National rapporteur	Human Rights Directorate of the OPM-ES
Specialised bodies	Vulnerable Victims Unit of the Malta Police Force
National strategy/action plan	• Sixth National Action Plan on Human Trafficking (2020-2023) • National Strategy on Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings in Malta (2024-2030), adopted in July 2024, and accompanying Action Plan for 2024-2027
Relevant legislation	• Criminal Code (Chapter 9 criminalises THB) • Victims of Crime Act • Subsidiary Legislation 217.07 (provides for a reflection period and residence permit for victims of THB) • Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme, Subsidiary Legislation 9.12
National Referral Mechanism (NRM)	Malta's National Referral Mechanism (NRM) has been in place since 2014.
Trafficking profile	Malta is a country of destination for trafficked persons. During the reporting period, sexual exploitation was the predominant form of human trafficking, followed by labour exploitation. All formally identified victims were adult women, originating primarily from Latin American countries.

I. Introduction

1. Malta was amongst the first countries to ratify the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (“the Convention”). Over the years, the Maltese authorities have taken a series of steps to develop a comprehensive legislative, institutional and policy framework to combat trafficking in human beings (THB), as well as to strengthen co-ordination between relevant actors and international co-operation. The authorities have made amendments to the Criminal Code and have criminalised the use of services of a victim of THB, with the knowledge that the person has been trafficked. National action plans for combating THB have been regularly adopted and a new Strategy for combating THB was adopted in 2024. The authorities have also set up a dedicated unit for victims of THB within the Agency Appoġġ (which is part of the Foundation for Social Welfare Services), and opened a safe house for victims of trafficking. However, after three rounds of evaluation, GRETA concluded that there were persistent gaps related to the identification of victims of trafficking, the criminal justice response to THB and victims’ access to compensation.

2. On the basis of GRETA’s third report, on 17 December 2021 the Committee of the Parties to the Convention adopted a recommendation to the Maltese authorities, requesting them to inform the Committee within a two-year period of measures taken to comply with the recommendation. The report submitted by the Maltese authorities was considered at the 34th meeting of the Committee of the Parties (21 June 2024) and was made public.

3. On 27 May 2024, GRETA launched the fourth round of evaluation of the Convention in respect of Malta by sending the questionnaire for this round to the Maltese authorities. The authorities submitted their reply to the questionnaire on 4 October 2024.

4. An evaluation visit to Malta took place from 9 to 12 December 2024 in order to hold meetings with relevant governmental and non-governmental actors, collect additional information and examine the practical implementation of adopted measures. The visit was carried out by a delegation composed of:

- Ms Antoaneta Vassileva, First Vice-President of GRETA;
- Mr Georgios Vanikiotis, member of GRETA;
- Mr Mesut Bedirhanoglu, Administrator in the Secretariat of the Convention.

5. During the visit, the GRETA delegation met Mr Jonathan Vassallo, Permanent Secretary of the Office of the Prime Minister for European Funds, Equality, Reforms and Social Dialogue (OPM-EES), as well as officials from the Human Rights Directorate of the OPM-EES, the Ministry for Health, the Foundation for Social Welfare Services (FSWS), including the Agency Appoġġ, the Social Care Standards Authority, the International Protection Agency, the Agency for the Welfare of Asylum Seekers (AWAS), the Department for Industrial and Employment Relations, Jobsplus, the Identity Malta Agency, the Victim Support Agency, the Legal Aid Agency, the Correctional Services Agency, and the Financial Intelligence Analysis Unit. Discussions were also held with Ms Victoria Buttigieg, Attorney General, representatives of the judiciary and the police. Further, the delegation met with representatives of the Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability and the Office of the Commissioner for Children.

6. The GRETA delegation held separate meetings with non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Meetings were also held with representatives of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

7. In the course of the visit, the GRETA delegation visited the safe house for victims of human trafficking and the emergency shelter for victims of domestic violence, run by the Agency Appoġġ, which can also accommodate victims of human trafficking, as well as the Safi Barracks Detention Centre for immigrants.

8. The list of the national authorities, NGOs and other organisations with which the delegation held consultations is set out in Appendix 3 to this report. GRETA is grateful for the information provided by them.

9. GRETA wishes to place on record the co-operation provided by the Maltese authorities and in particular by the contact person appointed to liaise with GRETA, Mr Michael Camilleri, Director of Human Rights Directorate of the OPM-EES, as well as Ms Alexia Manduca and Ms Maria Catania, managers at the Human Rights Directorate.

10. The draft version of the present report was approved by GRETA at its 54th meeting (30 June - 4 July 2025) and was submitted to the Maltese authorities for comments. The authorities' comments were received on 6 October 2025 and were taken into account by GRETA when adopting the final report at its 55th meeting (17-21 November 2025). The report covers the situation up to 21 November 2025; developments since that date are not taken into account in the following analysis and conclusions. GRETA's conclusions and proposals for action are summarised in Appendix 2.

II. Overview of trends and changes in the legislative, institutional and policy framework for action against human trafficking

11. Malta remains primarily a country of destination for victims of THB. According to statistics provided by the Maltese authorities, the total number of presumed victims of human trafficking identified in 2021-2024 was 62. Only 15 of them were formally identified as victims by the Maltese police, which indicates a decline compared to the previous reporting period.² All formally identified victims were women subjected to sexual exploitation, predominantly from Latin American countries. The presumed victims were also predominantly foreign women subjected to sexual exploitation, labour exploitation or both. Additionally, five persons were identified as presumed victims of THB for the purpose of forced criminality. Two children were among those identified as presumed victims.

12. As regards emerging trends, the Maltese Police reported a rise in the number of young women from South America, particularly Colombia and Venezuela, who are lured to Malta with false job offers and subsequently sexually exploited. Traffickers increasingly use the internet to advertise sex services, which are increasingly provided in private residences. There has also been an increase in presumed victims from Asian countries who seek assistance from the social services but do not want to report their cases to the police.

13. As regards legislative changes, in June 2023, a Technical Working Group on Criminal Justice and Legislative Amendments (CJLA WG)³ was established to discuss legislative amendments in fulfilment of the Government's Budgetary and Electoral Manifesto⁴ and GRETA's previous recommendations, in particular those concerning state compensation and criminalisation of THB⁵ (see paragraphs 106, 128 and 146). Furthermore, in February 2024, the Criminal Code (CC) was amended to extend special interviewing conditions to all children under 18 and strengthen the protection of all vulnerable victims of crime (see paragraph 128).

14. There have been several changes to the institutional framework for action against THB. While the Human Rights Directorate (HRD) of the OPM-ES serves as the national co-ordinator on human trafficking, the Anti-Human Trafficking Inter-Ministerial Committee (IMC), comprising representatives of relevant ministries, was established in July 2022 to identify anti-trafficking actions, ensure their implementation, and explore ways to improve coordination among ministries in the anti-trafficking field. The IMC met four times and discussed topics such as the implementation of anti-trafficking projects, the development of Malta's legislative and institutional anti-trafficking framework and the adoption of the new National Strategy for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings (2024-2030) and the accompanying Action Plan. In 2025, the IMC as well as all other inter-ministerial committees under the HRD were dissolved. They were replaced by the Inter-Ministerial Committee for the Mainstreaming of Human Rights (IMCMHR), composed of high-level representatives of 14 ministries, set up to co-ordinate state action on human rights issues, including action against human trafficking. The IMCMHR is chaired by the Permanent Secretary responsible for Human Rights. Its first meeting took place in October 2025. In their comments on the draft GRETA report, the Maltese authorities indicated that, as part of the IMCMHR, thematic working groups have been set up to strengthen efforts against human trafficking, including the National Referral Mechanism Multidisciplinary Working Group, the Education and Child Trafficking Working Group, and the Criminal Justice and Legislative Amendments Working Group.

² In the period covered by GRETA's third report (2017-2020), a total of 44 victims of human trafficking were formally identified: 5 in 2017, 35 in 2018, 0 in 2019, and 4 in 2020.

³ The CJLA WG is composed of the legal officers from the Human Rights Directorate (HRD), the Ministry for Home Affairs, Security, Reforms and Equality, the Ministry for Justice and the Reform of the Construction Sector, the Ministry for Finance and Employment, and the Ministry for Foreign and European Affairs and Trade. It convened for the first time on 19 June 2023 and held four more meetings in 2023 (on 3 July, 2 August, 5 and 18 September).

⁴ <https://maltadaily.mt/read-labour-party-reveals-full-manifesto-with-1000-electoral-proposals/>

⁵ See GRETA's third report on Malta, paragraphs 83 and 88.

15. The Anti-Trafficking Stakeholders Task Force, which previously co-ordinated anti-trafficking efforts at operational level,⁶ is no longer active. In 2021, the Human Rights Directorate (HRD) of the OPM-ES established the Anti-Human Trafficking Unit (ATU) (known as the “Human Rights Initiative Unit” until 2025) to co-ordinate anti-trafficking efforts at operational level among state authorities, NGOs and other stakeholders. At the time of GRETA’s visit, the ATU had two staff members dedicated to anti-trafficking action and the position of the ATU’s manager was vacant. In their comments on the draft report, the authorities indicated that a consultant had recently been engaged to support the ATU in implementing the Action Plan.

16. The Anti-Human Trafficking Monitoring Committee (HTMC),⁷ which existed at the time of the previous GRETA evaluation, was dissolved in 2021 and subsequently reinstated in 2022 to oversee the IMC’s work. Chaired by the Permanent Secretary of the OPM-ES, the HTMC includes high-level officials such as the Police Commissioner, Attorney General, State Advocate, relevant Permanent Secretaries, and the Director of the NGO Caritas Malta. It has met twice to discuss the progress made in the implementation of the National Action Plan for 2020-2023, national co-ordination and awareness campaigns, and the development of the new National Anti-Trafficking Strategy and Action Plan. As the highest-level decision-making body on anti-trafficking, the HTMC monitors national trends and responses in the anti-trafficking area but does not monitor the implementation of the new Anti-Trafficking Strategy and Action Plan. In their comments on the draft report, the authorities emphasised that, unlike the IMCMHR where only general updates are shared, the HTMC provides a confidential forum for in-depth discussion among key actors, with the aim of jointly addressing emerging challenges in the anti-trafficking area.

17. During the reporting period, Malta implemented its 6th National Action Plan on Human Trafficking (2020-2023). A progress report on the implementation of the National Action Plan was prepared by the HRD and presented to the HTMC.⁸

18. To deal with persistent challenges to victim identification, victims’ access to justice and the effective prosecution of traffickers and with a view to addressing the recommendations made in GRETA’s previous report, in 2022 the Government of Malta requested support from the European Commission under Regulation (EU) 2021/240 establishing the Technical Support Instrument (TSI) with a view to developing Malta’s first National Anti-Trafficking Strategy. Following an assessment, the European Commission agreed to fund the request and provide technical support in partnership with the Council of Europe through the project “Supporting Malta in the design and implementation of a new national Anti-Trafficking Strategy” (2022-2024).⁹ In the context of the project, four working groups were established, focusing respectively on the anti-trafficking framework, prevention and protection, prosecution and investigations, and international partnerships. These groups included representatives from state authorities, NGOs, the private sector, trade unions and academia. The draft Strategy which was prepared incorporated input from trafficking victims and survivors, particularly regarding their experiences with identification processes and support services. The project also developed tools for the implementation of the Strategy, including co-ordination guidelines and a monitoring and evaluation framework.

19. On 1 August 2024, the Cabinet of Ministers adopted the National Anti-Trafficking Strategy (2024-2030), accompanied by an Action Plan for the period 2024-2027. The Strategy outlines five priority areas: prevention, identification, protection, investigation/prosecution, and partnerships. Each includes one to eight strategic goals. The Action Plan includes concrete actions under each goal, such as establishing a National Referral Mechanism (NRM), legislative reforms to address GRETA’s previous recommendations, addressing child trafficking, engaging survivors in anti-trafficking activities, forming a dedicated police unit, enhancing financial investigations, facilitating access to temporary residence permits, and ensuring victims’ access to compensation. The Action Plan specifies the responsible institutions, timelines and

⁶ See GRETA’s third report, paragraph 21.

⁷ See GRETA’s third report, paragraph 21.

⁸ HRD, [Initiatives and the implementation of the national action plan. Final report 2020 - 2023](#), July 2024.

⁹ [Supporting Malta in the design and implementation of a new anti-trafficking strategy \(2022-2025\) - Action against Trafficking in Human Beings](#)

expected results. Each institution is supposed to fund the implementation of the actions under its responsibility from its own budget. Further, the HRD is allocated EUR 50 000 annually for anti-trafficking activities, which is mainly used for co-ordination, training and awareness-raising activities. In 2026, this amount was increased to EUR 75 000.

20. The 2024-2027 Action Plan includes measures to involve survivors of THB in anti-trafficking efforts, notably through the creation of an advisory panel composed of persons with lived experience of THB.¹⁰ In November 2024, as part of the previously mentioned TSI project, a meeting with survivors was organised to lay the groundwork for future collaboration. In their comments on the draft report, the authorities indicated that two additional meetings with survivors took place in 2025. The first, held on 25 April, focused on the challenges faced by survivors and included the collection of feedback on HRD's previous awareness campaign, with a view to improving outreach to victims and persons at risk. The second meeting, held on 25 July, was dedicated to discussing the structure and terms of reference of the survivor's advisory panel to be established. In addition, HRD staff working on anti-trafficking issues received specialised training to ensure a trauma-informed approach when engaging with survivors. GRETA stresses the importance of taking into account the experiences and views of victims and survivors to support the design and implementation of measures to prevent trafficking and protect victims, and refers to the ODIHR Guidance on establishing and maintaining National Survivors of Trafficking Advisory Councils as well as ICAT's Issue Brief on Ensuring Ethical Survivor Inclusion.¹¹

21. The HRD is responsible for monitoring the Action Plan's implementation and preparing progress reports in collaboration with relevant institutions through working groups. The Strategy provides for a mid-term and final evaluation, both intended to be outsourced to ensure independence and objectivity. The independent National Anti-trafficking Rapporteur which it is proposed to designate (see paragraph 22) is expected to play a central role in evaluating the Strategy.

22. One of the goals of the National Strategy is to clarify the roles of the National Co-ordinator and National Rapporteur on combating THB. Ongoing discussions include the potential creation of a National Human Rights Institution, which could also assume the role of National Rapporteur on combating THB. GRETA recalls its position on the need for structural separation between monitoring and executive functions to ensure an objective evaluation of anti-trafficking efforts, and stresses the importance of an independent evaluation of the implementation of the Strategy and National Action Plan as a tool for assessing the impact of the activities and for planning future policies and measures to combat human trafficking. GRETA welcomes the fact that the Maltese authorities are examining the possibility of designating an independent institution as National Rapporteur on combating THB and considers that they should take all necessary steps to ensure that this process is completed without delay.

¹⁰ Persons with lived experience are those who have first-hand experience of human trafficking.

¹¹ OSCE/ODHIR, [Guidance on establishing and maintaining National Survivors of Trafficking Advisory Councils \(NSTACs\)](#), 2024; ICAT, [Ensuring Ethical Survivor Inclusion](#), Issue Brief, 2025.

III. Addressing vulnerabilities to trafficking in human beings

1. Prevention of trafficking in human beings

a. Introduction

23. Prevention is crucial in combating human trafficking. Article 5 of the Convention therefore requires States Parties to establish and/or strengthen effective policies and programmes to prevent THB in co-ordination between relevant public agencies, non-governmental organisations and other elements of civil society. Such policies and programmes should have a particular focus on persons vulnerable to trafficking and professionals concerned with human trafficking, and shall include research, information, awareness-raising and education campaigns, social and economic initiatives and training programmes. In the development and implementation of prevention measures, States Parties are required to promote a human rights-based approach and to use gender mainstreaming and a child-sensitive approach, taking specific measures to reduce children's vulnerability to trafficking. Furthermore, Article 5 of the Convention requires States parties to take measures to enable migration to take place legally. In addition, Article 6 of the Convention places a positive obligation on Parties to adopt measures to discourage the demand that fosters all forms of exploitation of persons which leads to trafficking.

24. The Maltese authorities have identified construction, residential care, taxi services, domestic work and massage parlours as high-risk sectors for THB. Refugees, asylum seekers and migrant workers are particularly vulnerable due to language and cultural barriers that hinder their ability to seek help or understand their rights. Other at-risk groups include unaccompanied children, persons with disabilities, the homeless, ex-convicts, persons engaged in prostitution and Asian women employed as massage therapists.

25. One of the key strategic goals of the National Strategy is to increase capacities to address root causes of THB, reduce vulnerabilities and conduct targeted outreach and awareness efforts. This includes research on at-risk groups and root causes, promoting legal migration pathways, co-ordinating with sectors tackling poverty and early school leaving, collaborating with tech companies to combat online recruitment and exploitation, licensing and monitoring high-risk sectors (e.g. massage parlours), and enforcing regulation and oversight of recruitment agencies.

26. The HRD has implemented awareness campaigns on THB via different events, media appearances and social media posts.¹² In November 2023, it held a consultation with civil society and trade unions to refine awareness campaign materials. Since 2021, Malta has marked the UN World Day Against Trafficking in Persons (30 July) with its Blue Heart Campaign, including events such as illumination of state building facades in blue and survivors sharing their stories through an outdoor display. In 2025, the HRD collaborated with two media outlets: one aimed at informing the general public about the Blue Heart Campaign, and another focused on THB linked to online scams and digital crime. It also partnered with Malta International Airport to screen an awareness video in the non-Schengen area in July and August 2025. The HRD currently assesses the impact of the awareness campaigns through social media metrics and by consulting survivors. One of the objectives of the Anti-Trafficking Strategy (Objective 2.1.7) is to strengthen evaluation of awareness-raising measures. To this end, the Action Plan foresees developing a monitoring and evaluation framework in co-operation with the University of Malta or other academic institutions, including the use of surveys, hotline data and consultations with victims and survivors.

¹² Most awareness-raising material were published online for public access: see <https://humanrights.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Anyone-Can-Be-A-Victim.pdf>, <https://humanrights.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Are-You-a-Victim-of-Human-Trafficking.pdf>, <https://humanrights.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/When-Youre-Made-to-Work-Against-Your-Will.pdf>. For more details on awareness campaigns on human trafficking conducted in recent years in Malta, see Human Rights Directorate, [Initiatives and the implementation of the national action plan. Final report 2020-2023](#), July 2024.

27. Concerning research, in 2023, as part of the previously mentioned TSI project (see paragraph 18), a participative research study involving nine adult third-country nationals focused on the effectiveness of the victim identification and support system, and methods of recruitment into exploitation. It highlighted difficulties in obtaining a long-term residence permit, lack of awareness about victims' rights, and abusive practices by employment agencies.¹³ Another study,¹⁴ funded by the UK's International Programme Fund and conducted by IOM, used fieldwork and interviews with stakeholders and survivors to map trafficking risks and migration routes. In 2024, the Financial Intelligence Analysis Unit (FIAU), an independent government agency, published findings¹⁵ on the link between massage parlours and sexual exploitation, especially of Asian women working as massage therapists. GRETA welcomes the research conducted and invites the authorities to continue to undertake and support targeted research to identify groups vulnerable to THB and at-risk sectors as an evidence base for the development of future policy measures aimed at addressing vulnerabilities and preventing trafficking.

a. Measures to prevent the vulnerability of specific groups to trafficking in human beings

28. This section examines the preventive measures taken with regard to certain vulnerable groups on the basis of the information provided by the Maltese authorities as well as non-state actors. GRETA underlines that not every individual belonging to one of these groups is vulnerable to trafficking *per se*, there are usually additional vulnerability factors involved. The different groups selected should be viewed with due regard to the complexity and intersectionality of vulnerabilities to trafficking.

i. *Children and young people*

29. The prevention of child trafficking is part of a broader child protection agenda, which involves several institutions in Malta. The Directorate of Child Protection Services under the Foundation for Social Welfare Services (FSWS) and the Child Safety Service (CSS), within the Ministry for Education, Sport, Youth, Research and Innovation, collaborate in the protection of children's rights. Schools have established referral procedures for at-risk children, including trafficking cases. Upon referral, an investigation is launched and a care plan created. The legal framework mandates reporting of instances of child abuse, investigation and inter-agency collaboration between the FSWS, police, health and education services. The Maltese Safer Internet Centre also operates an online reporting system¹⁶ for illegal child-related online content, which received 3 336 reports related to child sexual abuse materials from January 2021 to June 2024.

30. As part of HRD's national campaigns on human trafficking (see paragraph 25), videos concerning child trafficking and technology-facilitated trafficking were disseminated online. The theme of the 2024 campaign was "Leave No Child Behind in the Fight Against Human Trafficking." Activities held between 8 and 31 July 2024 included the screening of a film ("The Sound of Freedom") by the Cross Culture International Foundation and a training session by IOM on child trafficking for the administrative staff of the Malta College of Arts, Science & Technology. Leaflets were also produced for schools, offering tips on online safety and indicators of online trafficking, aimed at parents, teachers and caregivers.

¹³ Kathryn Baldacchino, *The experience of identification and support by survivors of trafficking in Malta*. The findings of the research have not been published.

¹⁴ IOM, *Re-build: supporting survivors of trafficking in human beings*, February 2024.

¹⁵ FIAU, *Intelligence Factsheet: Strategic Analysis on Maltese Massage Parlours and their possible exposure to the sexual exploitation of women*, May 2024.

¹⁶ www.childwebalert.gov.mt

31. Children in or leaving residential care are particularly vulnerable to THB. The Social Care Standards Authority (SCSA) is the regulatory body for all social welfare services, including child residential facilities. It has issued standards for residential and office-based care for children in alternative care and has developed child-friendly versions of these standards to enhance accessibility.¹⁷ Pursuant to them, service providers are required to ensure smooth transition to independent living and maintain accessible complaints procedures. They also have an obligation to offer ongoing training and supervision to caregivers. Every year the SCSA conducts a Human Resources and Qualifications Exercise, auditing 25% of personnel files of service employees/volunteers for compliance with professional standards. In their comments on the draft report, the authorities noted that children in residential care and staff in those facilities have participated in an awareness-raising activity on human trafficking risks, organised by the Agency Appoġġ. Legislative amendments allow young people in care to remain in placement until the age of 21. The Directorate for Alternative Care within the FSWS ensures that an aftercare plan is drawn up for each child and that outreach services are offered to young people who choose independent living after the age of 18.

32. The SCSA's Inspectorate Unit conducts regular and unannounced inspections of social welfare services, such as the Agency Appoġġ, which include interviews with staff and service users in a private setting. It has seven assessors who have received training on THB. In 2021-2024, the SCSA conducted 7 252 inspections, of which 771 were specifically related to children. During the visits, the SCSA Inspectorate Unit has detected cases of neglect and abuse, but no instances of human trafficking. Foster parents are monitored and trained by the Directorate for Alternative Care.

33. Each child in alternative care is assigned a social worker from the Agency Appoġġ, independent of the facility where they live. If a child runs away from a residential facility, the police and social worker are notified to find and talk to the child to understand the reasons for their running away.

34. The Office of the Commissioner for Children monitors institutions for children in residential care, including centres for unaccompanied children and for children with disabilities. However, GRETA was informed that its capacity to effectively monitor such facilities is limited due to staffing shortages and the fact that it is not permitted to conduct unannounced visits. No trafficking cases have been detected or reported to the Office. The Office supports child participation through the Children's Advisory Board, established in December 2022 and comprising 20 children. As part of the previously mentioned TSI project, the Children's Advisory Board was involved in sessions on the prevention of child trafficking. The Office also organises awareness sessions and focus-groups in schools to educate children on their rights. The Office representative met by GRETA stressed the need for more frequent professional training and the development of child-friendly informational materials. The Office is currently working with the Legal Aid Office to produce such materials.

35. In July 2024, the Office of the Commissioner for Children, together with the HRD and the Commission on Gender-Based Violence and Domestic Violence (CGBVDV), formed a working group to explore the phenomenon of child marriage in Malta. Only a few cases have been identified so far, involving refugees, such as Syrians, and the marriages occurred before their arrival in Malta. The children are appointed child protection officers and even if the marriages are not recognised in Malta, the girls often continue living with the men to whom they were married.

¹⁷ These standards and their child-friendly versions are available at [Publications - Social Care Standards Authority](#). In contrast to community-based care (services embedded in the local environment) or family-based care (like fostering), office-based care refers more to the institutional or bureaucratic functions that support or supervise the child's placement, such as the administrative, case management, and supervisory roles performed by child protection professionals.

36. GRETA considers that the Maltese authorities should continue their efforts to improve the prevention of child trafficking, in particular by:

- ensuring regular and effective monitoring of child residential institutions by an independent body enabled to conduct unannounced visits and equipped with a sufficient number of trained staff to prevent abuse and exploitation of children;
- continuing providing training on human trafficking to child welfare professionals, teachers and other professionals working with children;
- continuing raising public awareness about the risks and different manifestations of child trafficking.

ii. Migrant workers

37. According to the 2021 National Census,¹⁸ foreign nationals, mostly migrant workers, make up 22.2% of Malta's population. Around 130 000 migrants reside in Malta, primarily third-country nationals from India, the Philippines and Nepal.¹⁹ Many work in low-paid jobs and sectors such as construction, hospitality and domestic work. It is reported that workers in care services (e.g., elderly care, live-in caregivers) are occasionally subjected to exploitation.²⁰ Further, there are concerns about the situation of migrants working on fishing boats, who do not need a single work permit because they live on the boats, which creates legal loopholes and risks of exploitation.

38. In recent years, Malta has not concluded any bilateral agreements with other countries to promote safe labour migration. Migrant workers often arrive through employment agencies.²¹ Many agencies reportedly charge recruitment fees or deduct wages, despite regulations prohibiting such practices.²² Civil society actors met by GRETA reported deceptive recruitment practices and debt bondage used by agencies as a means of control of migrant workers.²³ They also reported practices such as contract cancellations upon arrival and reporting migrants to the police for deportation. Some agencies allegedly cancel contracts post-arrival in order to bring more workers and collect more recruitment fees. GRETA was given examples of cases where upon arrival migrants found out that they had no jobs,²⁴ were forced to sign contracts requiring giving half of their salary to the employment agency or were threatened with fines for disclosing the contract to anyone. There are ongoing criminal investigations²⁵ into forged ID and residence documents by former Identity Malta officials. GRETA was also informed that exploitative practices also arise when migrant workers arrive directly from another Schengen country without a contract of employment or a housing contract.

¹⁸ National Statistics Office - Malta. (2023). Census of Population and Housing 2021: Final Report: Population, Migration and Other Social Characteristics Volume 1. National Statistics Office, Malta.

¹⁹ According to a Jobsplus labour market information statistics from the end of 2022, EU member states share 36% of total foreign employment in Malta and third country nationals share 63% of total foreign employment. See IOM, [Re-build: supporting survivors of trafficking in human beings](#), February 2024, page 21.

²⁰ See Malta's Justice and Peace Commission, Beyond GDP II: [Third-Country Nationals in Malta](#), December 2024; [Exploited and expendable: The hidden struggle of third-country nationals in Malta - Newsbook](#)

²¹ See IOM, [Re-build: supporting survivors of trafficking in human beings](#), February 2024, page 17.

²² See [Workers promised application 'fast-track' if they pay thousands](#).

²³ In May 2023, the Filipino authorities warned about the high risks of human trafficking for Filipinos being recruited to Malta by agencies ([Malta 'hotspot for trafficking'. Philippines authorities warn](#)). In December 2023, the Ambassador for the Philippines in Malta asked for a labour agreement with Malta that would help prevent immigration scams and the abuse of the Filipino workers. [Philippines wants its workers in Malta protected against abuse](#)

²⁴ According to a recent IOM study, a frequently mentioned practice is that multiple migrants are recruited for only one existing position. They are promised the same conditions but, in the end, only one gets the job and the rest function as a sort of back up. In those cases, migrants have obtained a legal status but no income but are still liable to pay back the debt. IOM, [Re-build: supporting survivors of trafficking in human beings](#), February 2024, page 18.

²⁵ [Two charged with money laundering, human trafficking in stolen identity scandal ; Magistrate upholds Jason Azzopardi request for inquiry into fake IDs claim](#).

39. According to media reports,²⁶ Malta is among several countries being advertised by migrant smuggling networks as an entry point into Europe. Reportedly, Vietnamese nationals pay substantial sums to smugglers to enter Malta legally, primarily through student visas, before travelling onwards to other European countries where they are subjected to exploitative working conditions in order to repay the substantial debts incurred for their journey. According to one such report,²⁷ of the 265 Vietnamese students granted visas to study at the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST) since 2021, only two have returned to Vietnam. In their comments on the draft report, the authorities stated that the figures cited in media reports do not accurately reflect the number of Vietnamese students granted visas to study at MCAST. They also highlighted measures in place to prevent the misuse of student visas, including due diligence checks of agencies before they are authorised to bring students to Malta for study purposes, a 1 000-euro tuition fee deposit before the visa process begins, and individual admission interviews to verify that applicants genuinely intend to study. The authorities further noted that the MCAST monitors student attendance, and that cases where foreign students abscond, withdraw or fail to continue (reported to be around 10%) are promptly communicated to the Identity Malta for the withdrawal of the relevant visa or residence permit.

40. According to statistics provided by the authorities, since 2021, the Department for Industrial and Employment Relations (DIER) has conducted 166 inspections of employment agencies, 148 of which involved inspections to verify compliance with legal requirements for operating premises. In that period, eight license applications were rejected, and one court case is ongoing against an employment agency for regulatory breaches.

41. The National Anti-Trafficking Strategy highlights that the Single Work Permit system²⁸ under Subsidiary Legislation (S.L.) 217.17 ties residence status to employment, increasing the vulnerability of migrant workers and discouraging abuse reporting. Though legally third country nationals can change jobs without justification, Public Employment Services (Jobsplus) representatives reported that employers often delay giving them the required termination form. Without this document, employees cannot legally transfer to a new employer. In some cases, employers have demanded payment in exchange of a termination form. Once the form is submitted to the Identity Malta Agency, migrants have only 10 days to find new employment. In some cases, single permit applications submitted after the 10-day period have been accepted but this is discretionary.²⁹ The time pressure forces many migrants to apply to an employment agency and/or take on any available job, which increases the risk of ending up in an exploitative work environment.

42. To mitigate labour exploitation risks, a law was adopted in 2022 to ensure minimum wage for platform workers (e.g., gig economy, ride-hailing, delivery services). Workers in these industries are now legally considered employees, entitled to sick leave, insurance and other workplace protections. Further, new Employment Agencies Regulations were introduced in April 2024, requiring all temporary work agencies and outsourcing agencies to be licensed by June 2024 and banning recruitment fees.³⁰ Additional 2025 law mandates equal wages for directly hired and outsourced workers performing equivalent jobs.³¹

²⁶ See [Inside the people smuggling routes which Vietnamese are using to reach the UK | ITV News](#)

²⁷ [Malta not a people-smuggling route, Vietnam's ambassador says](#)

²⁸ The single permit is a temporary permit that allows third country nationals to legally reside and work in Malta for a period exceeding six months. To apply for a single permit, one must have an offer of employment from a Maltese employer. The permit is specific to the employer and the designation as listed on the residence document. Any changes occurring in either of these render the permit null and void. [Expatriates Unit Non-EU Nationals - Change of Designation or Employer - Identità](#)

²⁹ [Expatriates Unit Change of Designation or Employer - Change of Employer - Identità](#)

³⁰ <https://legislation.mt/eli/ln/2023/270/eng>, [The Employment Agencies Regulations 2023 | GVZH](#)

³¹ ['Equal Pay for Work of Equal Value' New Regulations Announced](#)

43. In January 2025, the Maltese Government launched the second Integration Strategy and Action Plan (2025-2030).³² One of its objectives is amending S.L. 217.17 to grant third country nationals a 30-day grace period in case of losing their job, extendable to 60 days subject to proof of sufficient financial resources. Other measures include preventing abusive contract termination by limiting the number of third-country nationals a company can hire, supporting legal migration pathways, and encouraging retention and integration of third-country nationals through various services, such as legal aid and employment support. The Strategy also proposes mandatory pre-departure online courses on Maltese laws and culture. In 2024, IOM implemented a project funded by the European Commission to help develop this system, which is expected to improve integration of migrants and reduce their exploitation.³³ Several of these measures are also reflected in the Malta Labour Migration Policy, published in February 2025, which specifies that the pre-departure courses should be operational by January 2026.

44. GRETA was informed of awareness initiatives conducted by trade unions, government agencies, such as Jobsplus, the DIER and the Migrant Advice Unit of the Agency for the Welfare of Asylum Seekers (AWAS), NGOs and international organisations to inform migrant workers of their rights, labour law and risks of trafficking and exploitation.

45. While welcoming the recent legislative amendments and awareness-raising activities to improve the protection of migrants' rights and prevent their exploitation, GRETA notes that labour law enforcement remains weak due to insufficient control in high-risk sectors and employment agencies. Additionally, many of GRETA's interlocutors stressed the need for more proactive and multilingual outreach to inform migrants of their rights and support mechanisms. Therefore, referring to GRETA's Guidance Note on combating trafficking for labour exploitation³⁴ and the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers Recommendation to Member States CM/Rec(2022)21 on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings for the purpose of labour exploitation,³⁵ GRETA urges the Maltese authorities to take additional steps to prevent trafficking for the purpose of labour exploitation, in particular by:

- reviewing the legislative framework on the employment of migrant workers to prevent abusive contract termination by their employers and provide them with more time to find new employment following the early termination of their employment contract;
- establishing safe reporting and effective complaint mechanisms for migrant workers;
- strengthening oversight of private employment agencies, including temporary work agencies and outsourcing agencies;
- establishing co-operation with countries of origin of migrant workers to explore ways to address the deceptive recruitment practices and debt bondage of employment agencies in countries of origin, and to disseminate accurate information about working in Malta;
- taking additional measures to protect persons working in fishing boats, including through regular monitoring of their living and working conditions.

³² <https://humanrights.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Integration-Strategy-and-Action-Plan-2.pdf> Debating the new Migration Policy - Advisory21. For information on the first Migrant Integration Strategy and Action Plan, see GRETA's third report on Malta, paragraphs 66-67.

³³ [First Step: Pre-Departure Integration Measures \(PDIMs\) in Malta - Human Rights Directorate](https://rm.coe.int/guidance-note-on-preventing-and-combating-trafficking-in-human-beings-/1680a1060c)

³⁴ <https://rm.coe.int/guidance-note-on-preventing-and-combating-trafficking-in-human-beings-/1680a1060c>.

³⁵ <https://rm.coe.int/booklet-preventing-and-combating-trafficking-in-human-beings-for-the-p/1680aa08ef>.

46. GRETA also considers that the Maltese authorities should take steps to prevent abuses of the system of student visas, paying particular attention to Vietnamese students.

47. Further, GRETA considers that the authorities should systematically provide information to students who are third-country nationals and migrant workers in a language they can understand about the risks of THB for the purpose of labour exploitation and where to access support.

iii. Asylum seekers and refugees

48. Compared to the situation at the time of the previous GRETA visit to Malta, the number of asylum applications has decreased considerably: from 2 410 in 2020 to 440 in 2024.³⁶ At the time of GRETA's visit in December 2024, 190 asylum seekers were held in immigration detention or accommodated in open reception centres, and 200 lived in the community. In 2023, the main countries of origin of asylum applicants were Syria (119), Bangladesh (116), Sudan (75), Libya (33), and Ukraine (30). There were 52 children amongst the asylum seekers.³⁷

49. The Agency for the Welfare of Asylum Seekers (AWAS) manages open reception centres.³⁸ Families and vulnerable applicants can stay at such centres for up to one year. Other asylum seekers are provided with accommodation for six months, which may be extended if they are considered to be vulnerable or face significant challenges. The vulnerability assessment is conducted by AWAS staff (see paragraph 89). Access to employment remains an issue for asylum seekers, especially for nationals of "safe" countries who are barred from access to work for the first nine months of their stay in Malta³⁹ and, as a result, many are forced into irregular jobs. A 2021 report⁴⁰ by the NGOs JRS and Aditus Foundation found that asylum seekers left open reception centres without improved skills or job prospects. They face obstacles in accessing decent housing due to exorbitant rent prices and discrimination, resulting in homelessness.⁴¹ Only refugees receive full social benefits, whereas subsidiary protection holders⁴² are entitled to "core welfare benefits", which means limited unemployment support.⁴³

50. Malta's Integration Strategy and Action Plan for 2025-2030 provides for measures to improve access to health care, education, employment and housing for all migrants, including international protection beneficiaries. It also aims to promote the "*I Belong*" programme, launched in 2017 as part of the previous Strategy, the aim of which is to help migrants meet long-term residence status requirements through language and cultural training.⁴⁴

³⁶ [Statistics | Eurostat](#)

³⁷ 99% of applications submitted by Bangladeshi in 2023 were rejected on the grounds that Bangladesh is considered a safe country, while the rejection rate for Syrian asylum seekers in 2023 was 9%. Asylum Information Database, [Country Report: Malta, 2023 update](#), 31 December 2023, pages 8 and 9.

³⁸ There are six reception centres in Malta: five are run by AWAS and one by an NGO. Asylum Information Database, [Country Report: Malta, 2023 update](#), 31 December 2023, page 110.

³⁹ Asylum-seekers can work immediately unless they come from a "safe country of origin," in which case they must wait nine months. Asylum-seekers' employment licences are tied to employers' names. This limits employment opportunities to those employers willing to undergo the documentation procedure and creates situations of dependency that often give rise to risks of exploitation and abuse. Beneficiaries of international protection are entitled to access the labour market under the same conditions as Maltese nationals. Asylum Information Database, [Country Report: Malta, 2023 update](#), 31 December 2023, pages 115 and 168.

⁴⁰ JRS and Aditus Foundation, [In Pursuit of Livelihood: An in-depth investigation of asylum-seekers' battle against poverty and social exclusion in Malta](#), December 2021.

⁴¹ Times of Malta, "[Migrants end up homeless as centres overflow](#)", 2 July 2020. The data shows that, in the first six months of 2023 the social welfare agency Appoġġ handled 667 cases of homelessness, of which 369 were non-Maltese nationals. Newsbook, "[Social cases double between 2012 and 2022](#)", 12 March 2024.

⁴² Most asylum seekers obtain subsidiary protection. For example, in 2023 the number of persons given a refugee status was 18 while the number of persons given a subsidiary protection was 241. Asylum Information Database, [Country Report: Malta, 2023 update](#), 31 December 2023, page 10.

⁴³ Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, [Letter](#) to the Minister for Home Affairs, National Security and Law Enforcement of Malta, CommHR/NM/sf 043-2017, 14 December 2017.

⁴⁴ For more information on this programme, see GRETA's third report on Malta, paragraph 66.

51. In 2022 and 2023, information sessions on human trafficking risks and indicators were conducted in AWAS reception centres under the “All Equal: Supporting Victims of Human Trafficking” project, in collaboration with FSWS, the Correctional Services Agency and the HRD.

52. Following the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation on 24 February 2022, Malta activated the 2005 Temporary Protection for Displaced Persons Regulations⁴⁵ on 8 March 2022. By June 2024, 2 062 Ukrainians had been granted temporary protection, with 1 533 (including 412 children) still holding valid temporary protection certificates.⁴⁶ This status allows access to education, employment, health care and social services. Most Ukrainian refugees live in the community; no specific accommodation is allocated in asylum reception centres, and no compensation is provided to private hosts.⁴⁷ The International Protection Agency (IPA), which is the national authority responsible for examining asylum applications, distributes information leaflets in English⁴⁸ to persons who come to collect their temporary protection certificate. The Ukraine Community Crisis Centre Malta, established in 2022, provides support to newly arrived applicants.

53. With the decrease in the number of asylum seekers, the number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children has also dropped (15 in 2024). AWAS is responsible for the care of these children. It assigns them social workers to assist during the asylum process and refers them to the child protection services to obtain a temporary care order from the court. GRETA was informed that since 2023, the appointment of legal guardians has improved significantly. This progress is attributed to amendments made in December 2021 to the Reception Regulation (S.L. 420.06), as well as to the acceleration of judicial and administrative procedures.⁴⁹

54. However, the detention of unaccompanied children in immigration detention facilities persists.⁵⁰ In January 2024, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) found Malta in violation of Articles 3, 5 and 13 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) for detaining an unaccompanied child together with adults for 225 days in 2021-2022.⁵¹ In another case, six unaccompanied children were detained together with unrelated adult men in the so-called “China House” detention centre in Hal Far for over 50 days in 2022-2023. They were identified as unaccompanied children only after meeting two lawyers of the NGO Aditus foundation, who informed AWAS. On 12 January 2023, the ECtHR issued an interim measure ordering Malta to ensure that these children were provided with conditions that were compatible with Article 3 of the ECHR and with their status as unaccompanied minors.⁵² GRETA was informed by civil society organisations that despite declining sea arrivals,⁵³ almost all new arrivals are detained, and those from “safe” countries, such as Morocco, Algeria, Sudan and Bangladesh, may remain for up to 18 months in the detention centre after their asylum application is rejected. In view of the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum, in April 2024 Malta amended⁵⁴ the Reception of Asylum Seekers Regulations to allow for the detention of children and other vulnerable applicants (families and women) under certain conditions and remove a previous provision obliging the immediate release of vulnerable applicants. GRETA stresses the importance of ensuring compliance with international standards on the rights of the child, in particular as regards the deprivation of children’s liberty as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time.

⁴⁵ <https://legislation.mt/eli/sl/420.5/eng>

⁴⁶ Asylum Information Database, [Temporary Protection Malta](#), 2023, page 5.

⁴⁷ Asylum Information Database, [Temporary Protection Malta](#), 2023, pages 11 and 12.

⁴⁸ <https://maltafugeecouncil.org.mt/Ukraine-Info-FAQs-published-by-the-International-Protection-Agency>

⁴⁹ https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/malta/asylum-procedure/guarantees-vulnerable-groups-asylum-seekers/legal-representation-unaccompanied-children/#_ftn2, Asylum Information Database, [Temporary Protection Malta](#), 2023, page 113.

⁵⁰ See GRETA’s third report on Malta, paragraph 190.

⁵¹ European Court of Human Rights, [A.D. v. Malta](#), 12427/22, 17 January 2024.

⁵² https://aditus.org.mt/european-human-rights-court-orders-malta-to-release-children-from-detention/#.Y8_p7XbMLIU

⁵³ For instance, at the end of 2023, AWAS was accommodating 211 persons in its five reception centres of a total capacity of 2,199. Asylum Information Database, [Country Report: Malta, 2023 update](#), 31 December 2023, page 109.

⁵⁴ Legal Notice 87 of 2024 - [Reception of Asylum Seekers \(Amendment\) Regulations](#), 2024.

55. Delays in age assessment have been a reason for prolonged detention of unaccompanied children. GRETA was informed that there had been significant improvements in age assessment as a result of an increase in the staff capacity of the assessment team.⁵⁵ Still, the procedure may take several months during peak arrivals, delaying the appointment of guardians and transfers to AWAS' open centre for unaccompanied children.

56. Unaccompanied children not in detention are housed at the open centres Hal Far Tent Village or Dar il-Liedna, run by AWAS. Regulation 15 of the Reception Regulation (S.L. 420.06) allows those aged 16 years or over to be placed with adults, which raises risks of abuse.⁵⁶ The National Anti-Trafficking Strategy aims to improve age assessments and child-friendly accommodation.

57. GRETA was informed that some unaccompanied children have gone missing from AWAS centres, though data are lacking. In April 2025, the UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances criticised Malta's failure to track and investigate disappearances and the absence of a co-ordinated response protocol among relevant authorities.⁵⁷

58. Awareness sessions on THB and access to FSWS support services were held in AWAS centres in 2022 and 2023, co-ordinated by the Human Rights Directorate under the "All Equal" project.

59. GRETA urges the Maltese authorities to strengthen their efforts to prevent asylum seekers and refugees from becoming victims of trafficking in human beings, in particular by:

- ensuring that when there are reasonable grounds to believe that an asylum seeker is a child, the person concerned is presumed to be a child and is granted special protection measures pending age verification. This includes prompt separation from any unrelated adults and transfer to appropriate accommodation;
- taking actions for preventing and following up on any disappearances of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and ensuring that all such cases are registered promptly and thoroughly investigated.

60. Further, GRETA considers that the Maltese authorities should:

- improve the social and economic integration of asylum seekers and refugees, notably their access to employment and vocational training, to prevent them from becoming vulnerable to exploitation and THB;
- continue to raise awareness of asylum seekers and refugees of their rights and the risks of human trafficking, including recruitment and abuse through Internet/social networks.

⁵⁵ See also <https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/malta/asylum-procedure/guarantees-vulnerable-groups-asylum-seekers/identification/>.

⁵⁶ Asylum Information Database, *Temporary Protection Malta*, 2023, page 111.

⁵⁷ Committee on Enforced Disappearances, *Concluding observations on the report submitted by Malta under article 29, paragraph 1, of the Convention*, CED/C/MLT/CO/1, 4 April 2025, paragraphs 25 and 26.

iv. Vulnerabilities related to the gender dimension of human trafficking and of persons engaged in prostitution

61. During the reporting period, all 15 formally identified victims of human trafficking in Malta were women exploited in prostitution (one victim was also subjected to labour exploitation).

62. The Maltese authorities consider women in prostitution and those working in “gentlemen’s clubs” and massage parlours as highly vulnerable to sexual exploitation. As noted in paragraph 0, in 2024, the FIAU examined the links between illicit massage businesses and human trafficking. It established that 47% of massage parlour workers were Asian, mainly Chinese and Thai, and 34% were Maltese. The report highlights red flags of trafficking and underlines the need for heightened awareness and concerted efforts. One of the objectives of the new National Anti-trafficking Strategy is to tackle sexual exploitation, including in massage parlours, adult entertainment and other areas, through their licencing and strengthened oversight.

63. Prostitution and the purchase of sex are legal in Malta. However, loitering or soliciting in public for the purpose of prostitution is a criminal offence under the White Slave Traffic (Suppression) Ordinance. In its third evaluation report on Malta, GRETA raised concerns about reports that possible victims of THB for sexual exploitation, including children,⁵⁸ were punished for the offence of loitering or soliciting in a public place for the purpose of prostitution, while being under the control of their traffickers.⁵⁹ During the fourth evaluation visit, GRETA was informed of several cases where women from Latin American countries who were allegedly coerced into sex work were prosecuted for loitering or soliciting clients (see paragraph 86). GRETA stresses that lack of proactive identification amongst persons engaged in prostitution increases the risk for victims of trafficking being prosecuted and punished. Furthermore, the criminalisation of persons engaged in prostitution for loitering or soliciting increases their dependence on exploitative intermediaries and may deter them from seeking assistance from authorities due to fear of prosecution. As a result, access to essential support services is reduced, and traffickers are able to operate with greater impunity.

64. Several awareness activities conducted during the reporting period targeted sexual exploitation of women. In July 2022, the FSWS held the “Stand Up Against Human Trafficking” conference, focused on prevention of sexual exploitation and outreach and support services for victims.

65. Further, in 2022-2023, the Agency Appoġġ delivered information sessions on THB and available assistance to prisoners and staff in the female section of Corradino Correctional Facility, the only prison in the country. At the time of GRETA’s visit, there were 55 female inmates, most of whom were imprisoned for drug- or fraud-related offences, but some were convicted for prostitution-related offences. According to feedback collected by Appoġġ social workers, many struggle to leave prostitution due to addictions or difficulties to find another employment due to stigma. The NGO Dar Hosea supports female prisoners through educational programmes on protection from abusive situations and assistance to find employment.

66. In October 2020, the FSWS and the HRD launched a support programme for persons engaged in prostitution, offering individual action plans involving psychosocial support, health-care referrals, referral to shelters for the homeless and preparation for court trial if needed. Awareness sessions were held with professionals who might encounter persons in prostitution, such as social workers and primary health-care professionals. However, only four women enrolled in the programme. The government’s current Electoral Manifesto commits to strengthening this programme. The NGO Dar Hosea also provides a drop-in

⁵⁸ Under Article 35 of the CC of Malta, the age of criminal responsibility is established at 14 years. As a result, children aged between 14 and 18 may be held criminally liable for offences such as loitering or soliciting in a public place for the purpose of prostitution. Such conduct is punishable by a term of imprisonment not exceeding six months, as provided under Article 7(2) of the White Slave Traffic (Suppression) Ordinance.

⁵⁹ See GRETA’s third report on Malta, paragraph 110.

centre offering immediate assistance and access to medical, legal and educational services, mainly supporting women in street prostitution.

67. While welcoming the awareness-raising efforts, GRETA is concerned about the lack of oversight and regulation of massage parlours, a key risk area for human trafficking for sexual exploitation, and the low enrolment in the support programme for persons engaged in prostitution. GRETA considers that the Maltese authorities should take additional measures to address the gender dimension of trafficking in human beings, in particular by:

- reducing the risk of exploitation of women and girls in prostitution, which may be exacerbated by the criminalisation of loitering or soliciting in public. This should include strengthening the existing support programme and/or developing exit programmes for those wishing to leave prostitution, and raising awareness among persons in prostitution about the risks of human trafficking and the support services available to victims;
- addressing the vulnerability of women working in “gentlemen’s clubs” and massage parlours, particularly third-country nationals, including by regulating these sectors through mandatory licencing, establishing effective monitoring mechanisms, and implementing safeguards such as transparent labour contracts, secure payment systems, and accessible mechanisms for reporting coercion and exploitation. Operators who fail to comply with these requirements should be subject to appropriate sanctions.

v. Persons with disabilities

68. Persons with disabilities⁶⁰ are not expressly mentioned in the Council of Europe Anti-Trafficking Convention, but their vulnerability to human trafficking is documented in reports issued by GRETA and other international bodies. Amongst the factors which render persons with disabilities vulnerable to THB are dependence on caregivers or support systems, limited access to information and resources, difficulty communicating or advocating for themselves, stigma and discrimination, as well as lack of or limited access to the labour market and decent work.⁶¹ Reference can also be made to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women’ (CEDAW) General recommendation No. 38 (2020), which states that women and girls with disabilities are a group particularly vulnerable to being trafficked, and calls on States to provide them with special economic and social support.⁶²

69. No trafficking victims with disabilities were identified in Malta during the reporting period. The authorities acknowledge their increased risk of being targeted by traffickers, but there is no research or data on this issue. The 2024-2027 Anti-Trafficking Action Plan includes a commitment to study these vulnerabilities. A planned court reform is expected to help improve disability-related data collection.

70. Agency Support is Malta’s national agency providing services to persons with disabilities. It offers residential care, daycare centres and community-based support. For example, the Agency’s Sonia Tanti Independent Living Centre helps persons with disabilities and their families to lead an independent life within the community. Employment measures include a hiring quota and job coaching via the Public Employment Services (Jobsplus). Further, the Housing Authority prioritises people with disabilities for the provision of social housing.

⁶⁰ According to Article 1 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.

⁶¹ See OSCE, *Invisible Victims: The Nexus between Disabilities and Trafficking in Human Beings*, March 2022, page 16.

⁶² CEDAW, [General recommendation No. 38 \(2020\) on trafficking in women and girls in the context of global migration](#), paragraphs 40 and 55.

71. Most persons with disabilities live with their families. Agency Support's social workers check on them if any abuse is reported, and its finance and monitoring teams oversee the proper use of disability allowances and call the police in case of crime suspicion. However, they do not maintain statistics on cases referred to the police or other authorities.

72. Persons with disabilities who cannot live independently or with their families are housed in small community homes managed by the Agency Support, also accessible to asylum seekers with disabilities. There are 39 such homes, housing a total of 357 residents. Easy-read versions of regulatory standards are available for service users. These homes, along with daycare and community services, are monitored by the Social Care Standards Authority (SCSA), which conducts regular and complaint-based inspections. The SCSA conducted 1 544 inspections related to disability services (251 in 2021, 317 in 2022, 345 in 2023 and 631 in 2024). The SCSA has not detected any trafficking cases but has detected physical abuse by residential staff in two recent cases, which are pending in court. Most complaints received concerned discrimination in accessing services. Staff working with persons with disabilities have not received any specific training on human trafficking.

73. The Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) also investigates disability-related discrimination complaints, submitted via in-person visits, phone, SMS, the CRPD's website or social media platforms. The CRPD has not received any THB-related complaint.

74. GRETA considers that the Maltese authorities should conduct research into the vulnerabilities of persons with disabilities to human trafficking and implement prevention measures, including the provision of information and training to professionals working with persons with disabilities on the risks of human trafficking faced by such persons.

vi. LGBTI persons

75. GRETA emphasises that, in general, LGBTI people are at greater risk of becoming victims of trafficking, particularly because they are often marginalised in society and excluded from their families, making them ideal targets for traffickers looking for people with less protection. They also face difficulties in accessing the labour market, as employment opportunities are scarce for those who identify outside the traditional gender binary, leading them to work more in the informal economy (including prostitution) or even to accept abusive job offers. In addition, there is a significant proportion of LGBTI people among homeless people, and LGBTI people can be victims of discrimination by the authorities and services, making them less likely to file a complaint or ask for help.⁶³

76. The Maltese authorities indicated that none of the victims of THB identified during the reporting period were subjected to exploitation on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender identity. AWAS representatives met by GRETA noted that one of the vulnerable groups detected among asylum seekers were transgender persons some of whom had experienced rape or were forced into prostitution in Libya to earn enough money to fund their journey. Such cases are reported to the police and the persons concerned are provided with counselling.

77. The LGBTI Hub in Paola offers a range of services, including the Gender Well-being Clinic (GWC), psychosocial support, and quarterly HIV testing. Several NGOs provide helplines, counselling, legal aid and peer support for LGBTI persons. The Rainbow Support Service, operated by the Malta LGBTIQ Rights Movement (MGRM) through a public-social partnership, receives government funding to assist LGBTI persons and their families. Through a funding scheme managed by the Housing Authority, the MGRM has been granted use of a residential building, which will be converted into a second-stage shelter for LGBTI persons.

⁶³ See: <https://lac.iom.int/en/blogs/lgbtqi-victims-human-trafficking> and <https://content/uploads/2019/02/272968.pdf>.

<https://2017-2021.state.gov/wp->

78. GRETA considers that the Maltese authorities should take steps to prevent the vulnerability of LGBTI persons to trafficking in human beings, including through information and awareness-raising activities on the risks of THB and where to seek assistance, in close co-operation with civil society organisations.

2. Measures to protect and promote the rights of victims of trafficking

79. Chapter III of the Convention provides for a series of measures to protect and promote the rights of victims. In the first place, it is of paramount importance to identify victims of trafficking correctly as identification enables them to benefit from the other measures and rights contained in the Convention. Pursuant to Article 10 of the Convention, States Parties shall ensure that the authorities competent to identify victims of trafficking have persons trained and qualified to perform the identification, and that these authorities collaborate with relevant support organisations in the identification process. Further, Article 12 of the Convention sets out the assistance measures which States Parties must provide to trafficking victims. Paragraph 7 of this article requires Parties to ensure that services are provided taking due account of the special needs of persons in a vulnerable position as well as the rights of children. Given the relevance of victim identification and assistance to the thematic focus of the fourth evaluation round of the Convention, this part of the report examines the application of these two provisions. Other provisions of Chapter III of the Convention, which have been examined in detail by GRETA during the previous evaluation rounds, are discussed in the chapter of the report entitled “Follow-up issues”.

a. Identification of victims of THB

80. As explained in GRETA's third report,⁶⁴ Malta's National Referral Mechanism (NRM) has been in place since 2014. It outlines the stakeholders involved in victim identification and referral and is accompanied by a list of indicators for victim identification and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) explaining the steps to be taken, from identification to assisted voluntary return of victims. According to the NRM, only the Police's Vulnerable Victims Unit (which replaced the Police Vice Squad) can formally identify victims of THB. The Agency Appoġġ staff may be present during police interviews with presumed victims of THB and NGO staff are also occasionally allowed to attend such interviews to assist the police. However, GRETA observed that the SOPs are not well known among frontline officials and NGO staff. The Maltese authorities applied for EU funding (TSI project) to revise the NRM, but the application was reportedly not approved.

81. The Agency Appoġġ uses an identification tool to assess presumed victims who contact the Agency or are referred to it by entities other than the police. Its social workers also conduct outreach in areas known for prostitution and massage parlours and have detected one presumed trafficking victim who was referred to the police.

82. In the reporting period, several capacity-building initiatives were conducted for frontline actors to improve their knowledge of THB. The Malta Police launched a training programme on THB indicators and referral of potential cases, with contributions from IOM, IPA and the NGO JRS. Labour inspectors of the DIER were trained on THB by IOM and the European Labour Authority (ELA) in 2022. In 2023, under the “All Equal” project, FSWS trained police officers, health care staff, social workers and the staff of AWAS on THB indicators. In January 2024, the Ministry of Health's Migrant Health Liaison Office launched a training programme including a one-hour training module on THB, which was followed by 646 health-care workers in 2024. Nonetheless, GRETA was informed that most of the training is project-based and a more systematic approach to training is needed.

⁶⁴ See GRETA's third report on Malta, paragraphs 162 and 164.

83. As noted in paragraph 65, there is one prison in Malta, the Corradino Correctional Facility. Since 2022, training on THB has been conducted for prison staff. GRETA was informed that the initial screening of new detainees for THB indicators is carried out by trained correctional officers and medical personnel, with additional interviews by social workers and psychologists within three days after admission. Confidential reporting mechanisms are available to detainees to report abuse and exploitation.

84. During the HRD's awareness campaigns (see paragraph 25), hotlines⁶⁵ through which victims of THB can self-identify and ask for support were promoted. Further, information sessions on THB were conducted in 2022 by the Agency Appoġġ in immigration reception centres with the assistance of AWAS' cultural mediators.

85. As noted in paragraph 11, the number of formally identified victims of THB has considerably decreased compared to the previous reporting period. GRETA was informed that women from Latin American countries coerced into sex work were prosecuted for loitering or soliciting clients, and subsequently deported.⁶⁶ NGOs also flagged cases of Colombian women exploited by traffickers as drug mules, who were convicted of drug trafficking. Since 2021, the staff of the Correctional Services Agency have identified two presumed THB victims amongst prisoners. One case involved a foreign woman convicted of trafficking for sexual exploitation, who disclosed to prison staff that she had been coerced by her husband into committing the offence. The second case concerned a woman convicted of drug importation. Both women received support from prison social workers and psychologists and were offered assistance in contacting a lawyer. However, they remained in prison until the completion of their sentences, and the authorities have no information on whether they consulted lawyers about the possibility of reopening their cases.⁶⁷

86. GRETA was also informed by the Office of the Attorney General about a recent case in which five women from Latin American countries were apprehended by the immigration police and convicted of loitering and illegal presence in Malta. They later informed their lawyer that they had been forced into prostitution. The lawyer reported the matter to the police, who subsequently identified them as THB victims, and they were issued residence permits on that basis. However, their initial convictions were not cancelled. Based on their testimonies, THB investigations were launched in 2022 (see paragraph 121). This case highlights the need for regular training on THB indicators, trauma-informed approaches and the non-punishment principle for all police officers, particularly immigration police, to strengthen their ability to identify signs of human trafficking.

87. According to NGOs met by GRETA, police officers often treat cases of labour exploitation that are reported to them as labour disputes. Fear of deportation prevent migrant workers from reporting abuse (see paragraph 38). Further, labour inspections are rare due to inspector shortages. DIER, responsible for inspecting working conditions, has only nine inspectors for 325 000 employees in Malta.⁶⁸ Jobsplus has a team of 10 inspectors responsible for checking the existence of employment contracts. The authorities noted that whenever Jobsplus inspectors have information that the employees are third-country nationals, inspections are conducted jointly with the Immigration Police. GRETA notes that the presence of immigration officers during inspections risks deterring victims from coming forward due to fear of deportation. A lack of trust in the police, often grounded in negative experiences of victims in their countries of origin, and poor knowledge of their rights among migrants contribute to underreporting.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ These hotlines are emergency services number (112), the number of social welfare services (179), Malta Police Forces' Crime Stop Number (119), and the VSA's National Support Line for Victims of Crime, which was set up in March 2023 (116 006).

⁶⁶ See also IOM, [Re-build: supporting survivors of trafficking in human beings](#), February 2024, page 22.

⁶⁷ GRETA was told by the Attorney General that in such situations, victims can ask for presidential pardon or institute constitutional proceedings for violation of their rights due to lack of effective investigation. In that case the Constitution Court can annul the conviction, and the offence would be cleaned from their criminal record.

⁶⁸ [NSO Malta | Labour Force Survey: Q4/2024 - NSO Malta](#)

⁶⁹ See also IOM, [Re-build: supporting survivors of trafficking in human beings](#), February 2024, pages 5 and 22.

88. As noted in paragraph 48, there has been a significant decrease in the number of asylum seekers arriving in Malta. Many migrant boats rescued by NGO vessels are taken to Italy because the migrants refuse to disembark in Malta.⁷⁰ In 2020, Malta concluded a Memorandum of Understanding with Libya aimed at combating irregular migration and human trafficking, which was renewed in 2024. An alert system allows Libyan coastguards to intercept boats heading toward Malta and return them to Libya. Reports that vessels which had already entered Malta's Search and Rescue (SAR) zone were intercepted and taken back by the Libyan authorities have drawn widespread criticism due to ongoing human rights violations in Libya.⁷¹ A 2023 a UN fact-finding mission to Libya documented numerous crimes, including human trafficking and sexual slavery, committed by the Libyan government or state-affiliated actors against migrants.⁷² In July 2024, the UN Human Rights Committee raised deep concerns about numerous reports of potential violations of the right to life and *non-refoulement* of migrants, the Memorandum of Understanding signed between Malta and Libya, and reports that NGOs conducting search and rescue operations faced sanctions and vessel confiscations.⁷³ According to UNHCR, Libya does not meet the criteria for being designated as a place of safety for the purpose of disembarkation following rescue at sea and States should refrain from returning any persons rescued at sea to Libya.⁷⁴ GRETA is concerned that the co-operation with the Libyan authorities results in an increasing number of migrants being returned to Libya where they face high risks of serious human rights abuses in detention centres, including slavery and sexual exploitation. In their comments on the draft report, the authorities underlined the importance of co-operation with Libya to address irregular migration, dismantle smuggling networks and reduce the risk of loss of life at sea. They also stated that Malta has not carried out any pushbacks to Libya and that, to their knowledge, interceptions by the Libyan coastguard have occurred only in waters under Libya's responsibility. In this context, GRETA refers to the report of the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights on the impact of externalised asylum and migration policies on human rights. The report recommends that existing externalisation activities be thoroughly reviewed to assess any direct or indirect adverse impacts on human rights, and that such activities be modified to eliminate these impacts. It also calls on member states to abstain from supporting other countries' border control activities in ways that may result in people facing torture, inhuman or degrading treatment or other serious human rights violations, or conflict with any peremptory norm of international law.⁷⁵

89. GRETA was informed that professionals from AWAS and IPA received training from the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA), including on identifying victims of THB. AWAS and IPA reportedly detected possible THB cases among asylum seekers during the reporting period, though no concrete numbers were provided. Initial assessments by AWAS upon disembarkation are limited to visible vulnerabilities, such as unaccompanied children or persons with disabilities. There is no systematic vulnerability screening in reception or detention centres because the AWAS assessment team is severely understaffed. At the time of GRETA's visit, only two assessors were available, one of whom was on maternity leave. As noted in GRETA's previous report,⁷⁶ in 2019, with support of EUAA, a team of 13 persons was tasked with assessing all asylum seekers. However, this support ended in late 2023.⁷⁷ As for IPA's vulnerability assessments, they rely mainly on obvious signs or applicants' self-disclosures.

⁷⁰ For example, one week before the GRETA visit, a boat carrying 83 people, mainly from Bangladesh, Egypt, and Pakistan, arrived off the Maltese coast. However, the disembarkation process took two days, as those on board initially refused to disembark in Malta.

⁷¹ In 2022, the European Centre for Constitutional and Human Rights (ECCHR) and Sea-Watch filed a Communication to the International Criminal Court calling for an investigation of Prime Minister Robert Abela and his predecessor Joseph Muscat, among others, of the commission of crimes against humanity against migrants and refugees who have been intercepted at sea and systematically returned to and detained in Libya. ECCHR, [Interceptions at sea and returns of migrants and refugees to Libya constitute a crime against humanity](#), 30 November 2022.

⁷² Human Rights Council, [Report of the Independent Fact-Finding Mission on Libya](#), 3 March 2023.

⁷³ Human Rights Committee, [Concluding observations on the 3rd periodic report of Malta](#), paragraphs 22 and 23. See also the following media reports: <https://timesofmalta.com/article/just-give-fuel-ngo-claims-malta-stopped-migrants-rescue.1024484> (10 April 2023), <https://searchandrescue.msf.org/news/malta-non-assistance.html> (17 October 2023).

⁷⁴ UN High Commissioner for Refugees, [UNHCR Position on the Designations of Libya as a Safe Third Country and as a Place of Safety for the Purpose of Disembarkation Following Rescue at Sea](#), September 2020.

⁷⁵ CoE Commissioner for Human Rights, [Externalised asylum and migration policies and human rights law](#), September 2025.

⁷⁶ See GRETA's third report on Malta, paragraph 172.

⁷⁷ Asylum Information Database, [Country Report: Malta, 2023 update](#), 31 December 2023, pages 24 and 25.

90. GRETA's delegation visited the Safi Barracks immigration detention centre, where around 200 migrants were held at the time of the visit, of whom 90 were undergoing asylum procedures, while the others were subject to return procedures. An information booklet is available in several languages in the centre. It includes contact details of relevant organisations but lacks details on the steps of the asylum procedure. UNHCR staff visit the centre to inform asylum seekers of their rights and the procedure, but they are not allowed to meet persons who have not applied for asylum. A draft Memorandum of Understanding to extend UNHCR access to all new arrivals remains pending. To address the information gap, UNHCR, in co-operation with the Maltese authorities, has developed a leaflet explaining the asylum procedure. UNHCR staff, together with cultural mediators, attend all disembarkations to assist with registration and distribute the leaflet. GRETA was informed that two NGOs are allowed to visit the detention centre (Aditus Foundation and JRS). They must provide the name and immigration number of the individuals they wish to visit, with each visit being limited to six persons in detention.⁷⁸ Interviews are conducted in small containers under surveillance, which hampers trust-building. According to NGOs, victims of trafficking are afraid to disclose their experiences, fearing it may harm their asylum claims. In their comments on the draft report, the authorities stated that Malta fully respects EU asylum law, which does not grant UNHCR staff access to all newly disembarked persons, some of whom may choose voluntary return after being informed of their rights.

91. The new National Strategy and Action Plan against THB includes measures to strengthen victim identification and referral. These include developing a new NRM based on a multidisciplinary approach, training frontline professionals (e.g. social workers and migration officials), increasing outreach in high-risk sectors, reinforcing labour inspections by Jobsplus and DIER, and sensitising interpreters to THB issues. Further, noting that no child victims of THB were identified during the reporting period, the National Anti-Trafficking Strategy also aims to improve their detection and to set up formal procedures for their identification and referral under the NRM.

92. While welcoming the efforts to raise awareness on human trafficking and the training provided to frontline actors, GRETA is concerned by persistent barriers to the identification of victims of THB. Failure to proactively identify victims of THB and to apply the non-punishment provision discourages victims from reporting their exploitation to the authorities due to fear of prosecution and deportation. Therefore, GRETA urges the Maltese authorities to take additional steps to proactively identify victims of trafficking, and in particular to:

- ensure that sufficient financial and human resources are made available to labour inspectors to carry out inspections and outreach work with a view to detecting cases of THB for the purpose of labour exploitation, paying particular attention to at-risk sectors, such as construction, cleaning, domestic work, care work, fishing, massage parlours and adult entertainment, and developing specific guidelines for each at-risk sector to facilitate the identification of victims of trafficking;
- screen all asylum seekers and migrants in immigration detention and reception centres for indicators of THB and enable specialised NGOs with experience in identifying and assisting victims of trafficking as well as UNHCR staff to have regular access to facilities for asylum seekers and detained migrants. These NGOs should be able to communicate with asylum seekers and detained migrants in appropriate and confidential conditions in order to proactively identify victims of trafficking;

⁷⁸

There were two visits from NGOs and UNHCR in 2022, 23 in 2023 and 24 in 2024.

- take measures to ensure that the implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding with Libya does not result in breach of Malta's obligations under the Convention to identify victims of THB, including, if necessary, by reviewing or suspending the Memorandum;
- ensure that pre-removal risk assessments prior to all forced removals from Malta fully assess risks of trafficking or re-trafficking on return, in compliance with the obligation of *non-refoulement*. In this respect, reference is made to GRETA's Guidance note on the entitlement of victims of trafficking, and persons at risk of being trafficked, to international protection.⁷⁹

93. Further, GRETA considers that the Maltese authorities should:

- review, as provided in the National Action Plan, the National Referral Mechanism and the Standard Operating Procedures, in particular by introducing a multi-disciplinary approach to the identification of victims of trafficking, and ensure their application in practice through systematic dissemination;
- step up their efforts to ensure that victims of THB who have been exploited in criminal activities are identified to prevent violations of the non-punishment provision;
- provide systematic training to professionals who may come into contact with THB victims (especially law enforcement officials but also prosecutors, labour inspectors, social workers, health-care workers, child-care workers, asylum officials, migration officials) on the identification of victims of trafficking (especially child victims of trafficking) and the procedures to be followed.

b. Assistance to victims

94. The Agency Appoġġ remains the main provider of support to trafficking victims through its dedicated anti-THB team comprising five staff (one manager, one service leader, two social workers and one support worker). As noted in GRETA's previous report,⁸⁰ the services provided to victims of THB by the Agency Appoġġ include accommodation, material support, legal and personal counselling, interpretation, help with residence/work permits and job searches, and accompaniment to court and medical/legal appointments. Each victim is assigned a social worker.

95. The Agency Appoġġ assisted 17 victims of THB (including 2 new victims) in 2021, 20 (including 8 new victims) in 2022, 20 (including 6 new victims) in 2023, 27 (including 12 new victims) in 2024 and 20 (including 8 new victims) in 2025 (until June).⁸¹ Of them, 37 were formally identified victims referred by the Police Victim Support Unit while the others were presumed victims referred by other state authorities, international organisations (mainly IOM) and NGOs (see statistics in the Appendix 1).

96. As noted in GRETA's third report,⁸² there is a dedicated safe house for trafficking victims, operational since April 2021, which was visited by GRETA. It has four bedrooms and can host up to nine residents (women, men and their children). Since its opening, no male victims have been accommodated. Stays are limited to nine months, but can be extended in exceptional circumstances. Victims who work are expected to financially contribute to the costs of their stay. The authorities noted that the contribution is a symbolic amount and aims to promote financial responsibility. The safe house provides very good living conditions, but its remote location may make commuting difficult for working residents. The house

⁷⁹ <https://rm.coe.int/guidance-note-on-the-entitlement-of-victims-of-trafficking-and-persons/16809ebf44>.

⁸⁰ See GRETA's third report on Malta, paragraph 181.

⁸¹ By way of comparison, Appoġġ assisted 28 victims of trafficking in 2017, 48 in 2018, 48 in 2019 and 25 in 2020.

⁸² See GRETA's third report on Malta, paragraph 180.

is a semi-open facility with set return times, surveillance cameras and security rules, which are explained to residents upon admission. During the week, a social worker is present during the day and a security guard at night. On weekends, a security guard is present only at night. GRETA was informed that as a result of that, an external person had access to the shelter upon invitation by one of the victims. In their comments on the draft report, the authorities indicated that as of the beginning of 2025, a security guard is present at all times outside regular office hours.

97. At the time of GRETA's visit, no victims were accommodated in the safe house. GRETA was informed that it had accommodated three victims in 2021, five in 2022, six in 2023 and 14 in 2024. Additionally, two children of victims stayed in the safe house in 2023 and 2024. The victims identified in 2024 were mainly women from Latin American countries who had been subjected to sexual exploitation. After their testimonies were recorded, they returned to their countries of origin via IOM's voluntary return programme (see paragraphs 118 and 121).

98. The Maltese authorities spent EUR 172 166 on assistance to THB victims in 2021, EUR 183 146 in 2022, EUR 190 146 in 2023, and EUR 216 050 in 2024. These amounts covered staff salaries, victim health care, and running costs, security and renovations of the safe house. In addition, rent for the safe house totalled EUR 86 400 over 2021-2024.

99. GRETA also visited the emergency shelter for victims of domestic violence and their children, which has a capacity of 12. It is run by the Agency Appoġġ and employs 10 support workers. The shelter accommodated three presumed victims of THB in 2023 and one in 2024. Two of the presumed victims were Colombian women who had arrived in Malta to work as escort girls. They were placed by the police in the emergency shelter rather than in the safe house because the police were not certain if they were victims of THB, and left Malta shortly after testifying. One of the presumed victims was a Filipino woman who was possibly a victim of labour exploitation, but she filed a domestic violence complaint.

100. In addition to the assistance provided by the authorities, several NGOs, such as Victim Support Malta, JRS, Aditus Foundation and the Women's Rights Foundation provide legal and psychological support to victims of THB. However, most NGOs receive little or no public funding.

101. A barrier in victim support is the lack of trained interpreters. Many frontline workers rely on translation apps such as Google Translate. To address this gap, IOM trained seven cultural mediators (covering 10 languages) on THB under the Re-Build project (implemented until February 2024). These mediators assist frontline services providing legal, medical and psychosocial support to victims of THB.

102. Civil society actors met by GRETA pointed out that victims' access to the labour market was problematic. Although victims receive work permits and assistance to access employment by Jobsplus, limited language skills often delay or prevent employment.

103. While welcoming the above-mentioned improvements in the provision of assistance to victims of THB, GRETA considers that the Maltese authorities should take further measures to ensure that the assistance provided to victims of trafficking complies with the requirements of Article 12 of the Convention, in particular by:

- strengthening effective access to the labour market for victims of THB and their economic and social inclusion through the provision of vocational training, language courses and job placement, raising awareness among potential employers, and the promotion of micro-businesses, social enterprises and public-private partnerships;
- providing adequate financing to NGOs to ensure the sustainability, range and quality of the services delivered by them to victims of THB;

- increasing the number of trained cultural mediators to bridge communication and build trust between victims and support providers.

3. Substantive criminal law and procedural law

104. The Convention places on States Parties a series of obligations aimed at enabling the effective prosecution of traffickers and ensuring that they are punished in a proportionate and dissuasive manner. As the implementation of these provisions of the Convention was examined in detail by GRETA during the preceding evaluation rounds, given the focus of the fourth round, particular attention is paid to the notion of “abuse of a position of vulnerability” and its application in case-law. Further, GRETA has decided to examine as part of the fourth evaluation round the application of Article 19 of the Convention on the criminalisation of the use of services of victims of trafficking.

a. Notion of “abuse of a position of vulnerability” in the law and case-law

105. Abuse of a position of vulnerability is an integral part of the international legal definition of trafficking in human beings and is central to any understanding of trafficking.⁸³ It is one of the means by which trafficking acts are committed and is relevant to all forms of trafficking and all exploitative purposes. Abuse of a position of vulnerability occurs when “an individual’s personal, situational or circumstantial vulnerability is intentionally used or otherwise taken advantage of, to recruit, transport, transfer, harbour or receive that person for the purpose of exploiting him or her, such that the person believes that submitting to the will of the abuser is the only real or acceptable option available to him or her, and that belief is reasonable in light of the victim’s situation.”⁸⁴

106. There have been no changes to the criminalisation of trafficking in adults under Article 248A of the CC and trafficking in children under Article 248D of the CC.⁸⁵ As noted in paragraph 13, a Working Group was set up to prepare legislative amendments reflecting the recommendations made by GRETA in its third report. GRETA was informed that a consensus was reached within the Working Group on two proposals: amending Article 248D of the CC to recognise THB against children as an aggravating circumstance, regardless of the means, and including a definition of “child” as a person under 18 years of age within Article 248D.

107. The CC of Malta defines “abuse of a position of vulnerability” as a means of committing trafficking in adults (Article 248A) and as an aggravating circumstance in child trafficking cases (Article 248D). Article 248A of the CC defines “position of vulnerability” as a situation where a person has no real or acceptable alternative but to submit to abuse. Further, the commission of a human trafficking offence against a vulnerable person (adult or child) within the meaning of Article 208AC of the CC is considered as an aggravating circumstance under Article 248E of the CC. Article 208AC defines a “vulnerable person” as “any person under 15 years, persons suffering from a physical or mental infirmity, or any other person considered by a court to be particularly at risk of being induced into cooperating with the offender or into surrendering to the offender’s will due to the person’s age, maturity, health, pregnancy, disability, social or other conditions, including any situation of dependence, as well as the physical or psychological consequences of the offence on that person.” Despite the fact that the definition of “vulnerable person” in Article 208AC of the CC refers to persons under 15 years, the Maltese authorities have pointed out that all persons under 18 are treated as vulnerable persons for the purpose of the anti-trafficking provisions of the CC.⁸⁶

⁸³ See UNODC Issue Paper *Abuse of a position of vulnerability and other “means” within the definition of trafficking in persons*, United Nations, April 2013, page 3.

⁸⁴ UNODC [Guidance Note](#) on “abuse of a position of vulnerability” as a means of trafficking in persons in Article 3 of the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime.

⁸⁵ See GRETA’s second report on Malta, paragraphs 133-137 and GRETA’s third report on Malta, paragraph 87.

⁸⁶ See GRETA’s second report on Malta, paragraph 135.

108. The Maltese authorities have indicated that vulnerability factors include poor physical or mental health, inability to speak Maltese or English (the two official languages of Malta), prior involvement in prostitution, poverty in the country of origin, which renders a person more susceptible to fake job offers in Malta, document confiscation by traffickers, irregular immigration status, high recruitment fees paid to employment agencies, and dependency on employers for residence/work permits. Prosecutors reportedly ask victims about their economic and social status in their country of origin, motives for coming to Malta, and discrepancies between promises and actual conditions in order to identify vulnerability factors.

109. The Maltese authorities referred to the Court of Criminal Appeal's judgment of 6 January 2023 in *Police vs Bin Han case*, known as the "Leisure Clothing factory case".⁸⁷ This case concerned the exploitation of nine Vietnamese workers and one Chinese worker in a clothing factory. On 21 March 2022, the Court of Magistrates acquitted two defendants of human trafficking.⁸⁸ However, following an appeal by the Attorney General, on 6 January 2023, the Court of Criminal Appeal found both of them guilty of trafficking for the purpose of labour exploitation and sentenced each to six years' imprisonment.⁸⁹ The company exploiting the workers was convicted to pay a EUR 200 000 fine, and all related assets of the company and the defendants were forfeited. The Court noted that the victims came from impoverished backgrounds, had taken out loans to pay the recruitment fees and were misled by deceptive contracts. Just before leaving for Malta, they were given a second contract with worse conditions, but having already paid significant fees, they had no choice but to accept it. The court concluded that this constituted an abuse of their position of vulnerability.

110. The Office of the Attorney General noted that prosecutors are trained to recognise signs of vulnerability, though no specific guidance exists on applying the concept of "abuse of a position of vulnerability".

111. GRETA considers that the Maltese authorities should ensure that children (i.e. all persons under the age of 18) are recognised and treated as vulnerable persons for the purposes of the anti-trafficking provisions.

112. Further, GRETA once again urges the Maltese authorities to introduce as an aggravating circumstance the offence of THB committed against a child, regardless of the means used.

b. Investigation, prosecution and sanctions

113. In its third report, GRETA urged the Maltese authorities to strengthen the proactive investigation of THB cases, require consideration of allocation of specialist financial investigators to every THB case, and ensure that court proceedings are conducted within a reasonable timeframe.⁹⁰

114. In October 2023, the Police Vice Squad investigating THB cases was replaced by the Vulnerable Victims Unit. The Unit comprises an assistance commissioner of police, a superintendent, four investigators and 16 supporting police officers. It investigates sexual offences, child abuse and THB. At the time of GRETA's visit, two investigators were working on THB cases.

115. Since October 2021, as part of a general reform of prosecution policy, the Attorney General's Office (AGO) has taken over the prosecution of all THB cases and plays a more direct role in the investigations. According to the Attorney General, this change has led to an improvement of the efficiency and promptness of investigations and prosecutions. The AGO currently has three prosecutors specialised in THB. SOPs were drafted to guide co-ordination between the AGO and the police.

⁸⁷ See GRETA's second report on Malta, paragraph 78.

⁸⁸ Court of Magistrates, Case 1128/2014 Police vs Bin Han, 21 March 2022.

⁸⁹ Court of Criminal Appeal, Case 1128/2014 Police vs Bin Han, 6 January 2023.

⁹⁰ See GRETA's third report on Malta, paragraph 92.

116. In 2023, a judge was assigned to handle all THB cases. Since then, this judge has participated in several seminars on human trafficking, held in Malta (2022), Budapest (2023), Krakow (2023), Strasbourg (2024) and Lisbon (2025). GRETA welcomes this development, which should enable the development of specialisation on the adjudication of THB cases.

117. As noted in GRETA's previous report, police officers receive training on THB as part of their induction course and in-service training. The AGO periodically holds training sessions on THB for prosecutors. For example, in April and August 2023, 18 staff members of the AGO received in-house training on migrant smuggling and THB. The authorities also referred to a number of training activities attended by prosecutors in Malta and abroad, including a training session on the investigation and prosecution of THB cases delivered by Council of Europe experts in March 2023 in Malta and an OSCE workshop on technology-facilitated THB held in May 2023 in The Hague.

118. In 2021-2024, four THB cases were investigated: two cases in 2022 concerning sexual and labour exploitation of two Colombian and three Venezuelan women, two in 2024 involving two Brazilian women subjected to sexual and labour exploitation, seven Colombian women subjected to sexual exploitation, and one Venezuelan woman. In 2025, three cases involving sexual exploitation and forced criminality were investigated, involving eight victims, including one child (seven Colombian nationals and one Maltese national).⁹¹ The number of persons prosecuted for THB was 6 in 2022, 2 in 2023, 12 in 2024 and 2 in 2025.⁹²

119. The Maltese authorities provided information on seven cases of THB adjudicated in 2021-2025. One of them (*Police vs Bin Han*) was already described in paragraph 109. In the second case, *Police vs Robert Attila Majlat*, after multiple appeals since 2019,⁹³ two men were sentenced in December 2023 to, respectively, 10 and 9 years' imprisonment, with asset confiscation, for having trafficked two Hungarian women for the purpose of sexual exploitation. The third case, *Police vs Lin Han*, which was described in GRETA's third report,⁹⁴ concerned the sexual exploitation of three Chinese women in a massage parlour. In that case an initial five-year sentence from 2020⁹⁵ was overturned in February 2022 for breach of the procedural rules.⁹⁶ On 13 February 2025, the defendant was sentenced to one year's imprisonment, suspended for three years, for brothel running. In the fourth case (*Police vs Kevin Amato*), also described in GRETA's third report,⁹⁷ the accused, a police officer charged with assisting a trafficker in obtaining visas for foreign women for sexual exploitation, was acquitted of all charges on 23 June 2021.

120. The other three cases are new. In *Police vs Gera and Zhang*, which concerns sexual exploitation in a massage parlour, the Court of Magistrates convicted the defendants and sentenced them to seven years' imprisonment in 2020.⁹⁸ However, the case was returned to the Court of Magistrates in June 2024 due to lack of clarity in the judgment.⁹⁹ The second case involved a company director sentenced to two years' imprisonment for labour exploitation in a restaurant.¹⁰⁰ In the third case,¹⁰¹ in September 2025, the acquittal of a Pakistani national was overturned following an appeal by the Attorney General, and the

⁹¹ By way of comparison, there were 16 investigations in 2017-2020.

⁹² By way of comparison, four persons were prosecuted in 2017, nine in 2018, and two in 2020 as of the date of GRETA's evaluation visit.

⁹³ Court of Magistrates, [Case 511/2017 Police vs Robert Attila Majlat](#), 22 November 2019 (in Maltese); Court of Criminal Appeal, [Appeal No 330/2019 Police vs Robert Attila Majlat](#), 1 September 2020 (in Maltese); Court of Magistrates, Case 511/2017 Police vs Robert Attila Majlat, 19 January 2021; Court of Criminal Appeal, Case 511/2017 Police vs Robert Attila Majlat, 14 February 2023; Criminal Court, Case 511/2017 Police vs Robert Attila Majlat, 1 December 2023. On this case, see also GRETA's third report on Malta, paragraph 98.

⁹⁴ See GRETA's third report on Malta, paragraph 92.

⁹⁵ Court of Magistrates, [Case 111/2013 Police vs Lin Han](#), 24 September 2020. See GRETA's third report, paragraph 100.

⁹⁶ Court of Criminal Appeal, Case 193/2020 Police vs Lin Han, 24 February 2022.

⁹⁷ See GRETA's third report on Malta, paragraph 102.

⁹⁸ Court of Magistrates, Case 490/2017 Police vs Winston-Joseph Gera u Tianxia Zhang, 16 December 2020.

⁹⁹ Court of Criminal Appeal, Case 490/2017 Police vs Winston-Joseph Gera u Tianxia Zhang, 20 June 2024.

¹⁰⁰ The case was reported in the media on 24 July 2024. The publication of the name and personal details of the perpetrator was banned by the Court. No judgement is available online.

¹⁰¹ Court of Criminal Appeal, Appeal no. 660/2012/1/2 [Police vs Zia Ul Noor](#), 17 September 2025.

defendant was sentenced to six years' imprisonment and a fine of EUR 5 000 for trafficking persons for the purpose of labour exploitation in his restaurant.

121. The Attorney General reported that, in line with GRETA's recommendations, the AGO encourages the Police to assign dedicated financial investigators to THB cases. As a result, two of six THB cases prosecuted since October 2021 also include money laundering charges. In one case, charges were filed in May 2024 against a Brazilian-Italian couple for the exploitation of two women lured to Malta under false job promises. The victims were forced into prostitution and house-cleaning. The Italian defendant had prior convictions of similar crimes in Italy. The authorities froze EUR 95 617 of their assets. In the other case, charges were brought in August 2024 against seven Maltese and two Romanian nationals for exploiting seven Colombian women and one Venezuelan woman in prostitution.¹⁰² The victims returned to their countries of origin through the Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) programme implemented by IOM. Judicial proceedings in both cases are ongoing.

122. The FIAU's Intelligence Analysis Section conducts financial analysis of money laundering cases where the proceeds of crime are suspected to be from human trafficking offences. Some of its staff members have participated in specialised training, including a simulation-based exercise by the OSCE. Since 2021, the FIAU has sent 64 intelligence reports to the Police involving suspected money laundering linked to THB or sexual exploitation offences (15 in 2021, 13 in 2022, 15 in 2023, and 21 in 2024). Of these, 27 were supplemental reports with new information connected to previous cases. In 2024, the FIAU held several bilateral meetings with the Police, Identity Malta and Jobsplus to strengthen co-operation. In 2023, it analysed massage parlours for links to THB and sexual exploitation (see paragraph 0) and in May 2024, it issued a guidance document¹⁰³ providing red-flag indicators to help financial institutions detect trafficking-related activities.

123. Malta did not participate in any Joint Investigation Teams (JITs) in THB cases during the reporting period. However, law enforcement cooperated with Europol in a case involving a trafficker believed to be in Madrid facilitating the transfer of Colombian victims to Malta.

124. GRETA remains concerned about the excessive length of criminal proceedings in THB cases. For example, in the *Lin Han case* the investigation began in 2012, charges were pressed in April 2016, and the case was terminated in February 2025. The *Leisure Clothing Factory case* lasted from 2015 to 2023, and in another case detected in 2004 (*Raymond Mifsud*),¹⁰⁴ the defendant was convicted in February 2017. The Maltese authorities noted that a number of reforms are currently being implemented to address this issue, including digitalisation of the justice system, magisterial inquiry reform, and changes to committal proceedings.¹⁰⁵ Further, the AGO has proposed establishing an operation oriented inter-agency task force on THB to enhance co-ordination, similar to the model used for financial crime.

125. While welcoming the efforts made to develop specialisation among police officers, prosecutors and judges to deal with THB cases and the increased focus on the financial aspects of THB, GRETA is concerned by the excessive length of proceedings. Recalling the recommendation made in its third report, GRETA once again urges the Maltese authorities to ensure that the length of court proceedings in human trafficking cases is reasonable, in line with the case-law of the European Court of Human Rights (related to Article 6, paragraph 1 of the ECHR) and the standards set by the European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice (CEPEJ).¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² [Nine charged with trafficking South American women after police bust prostitution ring](#)

¹⁰³ FIAU, [Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery Guidance and Typology Report for Malta](#), May 2024.

¹⁰⁴ See GRETA's third report on Malta, paragraph 102.

¹⁰⁵ In the system of magisterial inquiries, magistrates (judges) are responsible for conducting preliminary investigations into certain offences. Committal proceedings, used primarily in common law systems, are a stage in the criminal justice process where a lower court determines whether there is sufficient evidence for a case to proceed to trial in a higher court, typically for more serious offences.

¹⁰⁶ <https://rm.coe.int/cepej-2018-26-en-rapport-calvez-regis-en-length-of-court-proceedings-e/16808ffc7b>

126. Furthermore, GRETA considers that the Maltese authorities should continue strengthening the capacity of police officers, prosecutors and judges to deal with THB cases through the provision of regular training.

c. Protection of victims from intimidation

127. In its third report, GRETA urged the Maltese authorities to strengthen the protection of vulnerable victims and witnesses of THB and to ensure that all child victims, including those over 16, are granted special protection measures.¹⁰⁷

128. In response to GRETA recommendations, the CC was amended in February 2024 to extend special interviewing conditions under Articles 391 and 646¹⁰⁸ to all children (i.e. all persons under 18). These include the recording of testimonies for use as evidence at trial and limiting questioning to a single session, except in exceptional cases. Under Article 646(2) of the CC, children who provide audio- and video-recorded testimony are not required to testify in person at trial. Pursuant to a new provision in Article 346, any police interview of a child, a victim of a sexual offence or a vulnerable victim or witness shall be audio-video recorded, and the recordings shall be admissible in court. Further, a new provision added to Article 646 specifies that victims of sexual offences or vulnerable victims or witnesses testifying in person must do so via video conference from a location outside the courtroom.

129. Beyond legislative improvements, civil society actors reported improved courtroom practices. Victims are reportedly more frequently interviewed via video conference, and judges are increasingly mindful of avoiding re-traumatisation, including restricting inappropriate questions by the defence during cross-examination. All THB victims identified in 2024 were interviewed via video conference during trials.

130. No victim of THB has been granted protection under the Witness Protection Programme.

131. As noted in GRETA's previous report,¹⁰⁹ pursuant to Articles 14 and 17(1) of the Victims of Crime Act, a children's advocate with expertise in family law shall be appointed to assist and represent the interest of a child victim of THB in civil proceedings. Even if the number of such advocates was recently increased from three to five, it remains limited and they continue to work part-time, mostly in alternative care proceedings. The Commissioner for Children has recommended appointing advocates in additional contexts, such as for unaccompanied children or children in conflict with the law. GRETA was informed that awareness of the possibility to appoint a children's advocate is low among judicial actors, and the advocates have received no training on how to interact with children.

132. GRETA welcomes the legislative amendments expanding special interviewing conditions for THB victims and invites the Maltese authorities to continue ensuring that protection measures are applied to prevent the re-traumatisation and intimidation of victims of trafficking during the investigation and criminal proceedings. This should include ensuring that there is a sufficient number of adequately trained persons, such as children's advocates and support persons, to guide and assist child victims of trafficking during court proceedings.

¹⁰⁷ See GRETA's third report on Malta, paragraphs 120 and 140.

¹⁰⁸ For more details on these provisions, see GRETA's third report, paragraphs 117 and 136.

¹⁰⁹ See GRETA's third report on Malta, paragraph 138.

d. Criminalisation of the use of services of a victim

133. Article 248F(2) of the Maltese CC criminalises the knowing use of the labour or services of a trafficked person. The offence is punishable by 18 months to five years of imprisonment.

134. In the case described in paragraph 118 concerning sexual exploitation of seven Colombian women, two of the defendants were also charged with the offence of knowingly using the services of trafficked persons.

135. GRETA considers that the Maltese authorities should carry out targeted information campaigns to raise awareness of the criminalisation of the use of services of victims of THB.

IV. Addressing human trafficking facilitated by information and communication technology (ICT)

136. Countries monitored by GRETA have reported an increased use of information and communication technologies (ICT) for recruiting and controlling victims of trafficking. In 2022, GRETA conducted a study to assess the extent to which technology impacts trafficking and explore the operational and legal challenges that states face in detecting, investigating and prosecuting online and ICT-facilitated trafficking.¹¹⁰ As highlighted by the study, the impact of technology is particularly acute in relation to the recruitment and exploitation of victims, including their control throughout the different stages of the trafficking process. This study highlighted a number of challenges to the identification, investigation and prosecution of THB cases due to the high volume of online activities and the associated high volume of digital evidence, the use of encrypted communications, nicknames and aliases, and the time-consuming process of acquiring evidence from private companies and/or other jurisdictions. At the same time, anti-trafficking stakeholders are using technological innovations to prevent human trafficking, protect victims, and prosecute traffickers. It is therefore essential to invest in human capital and technological tools to harness the potential of ICT for effectively combating human trafficking.

137. The Maltese Police has observed an increase in ICT-based practices that heighten trafficking risks, such as job advertisements on social media and commercial sex services promoted on dating sites. To address this, the new National Action Plan for 2024-2027 envisages research into online recruitment and exploitation and exploring partnerships with tech companies.

138. Digital literacy education is embedded in Malta's primary and secondary school curricula, and addresses online safety and abuse. The Directorate for Digital Literacy and Transversal Skills, within the Ministry for Education, Sport, Youth, Research and Innovation, runs initiatives aimed at promoting digital media literacy of children and their parents. The Maltese Safer Internet Centre with its project BeSmartOnline promotes safe internet use and combats online sexual abuse, including through the promotion of the Child Web Alert hotline (see paragraph 29). The Maltese Safer Internet Centre, which is partially funded by the EU, has been active since 2010 and is co-ordinated by FSWS. It involves key stakeholders, including the Office of the Commissioner for Children, the Directorate for Early Years, Languages and Humanities, and the Police's Cybercrime Service. In June 2022, the Safer Internet Centre project BeSmartOnline, in partnership with the Human Rights Directorate, produced a leaflet to raise awareness among parents about the dangers of grooming and human trafficking. The Commissioner for Children also runs workshops on digital rights, which included in 2024 a session on online child trafficking.

¹¹⁰ Paolo Campana, Online and Technology-Facilitated Trafficking in Human Beings, Council of Europe: <https://rm.coe.int/online-and-technology-facilitated-trafficking-in-human-beings-full-rep/1680a73e49>, published in April 2022.

139. The FIAU, in its 2024 guidance on THB (see paragraph 122), drew attention to online payment methods used by traffickers, such as virtual currencies and third-party payment processors by traffickers. It also emphasised the importance of open-source intelligence in identifying trafficking networks in Malta. The new National Action Plan (2024-2027) includes measures to strengthen intelligence-led investigations through digital evidence and improve identification of victims recruited and exploited online.

140. Police officers investigating THB cases cooperate with the Cybercrime Service of the Police. In the reporting period, the Vulnerable Victims Unit submitted to the Cybercrime Service 14 requests for monitoring online activities related to THB (four in 2022, five in 2023 and five in 2024). The Cybercrime Service also receives international reports on online child sexual exploitation. Suspected THB cases are referred to the Vulnerable Victims Unit. GRETA was informed that the work of cybercrime officers is mainly reactive. Current legislation permits online covert operations only in drug trafficking and money laundering cases. In THB cases, officers may engage covertly online solely for identifying victims, not for interacting with suspects.

141. The University of Malta co-ordinated the EU-funded DISRUPT project (2023-2025), which involved partners from four other EU countries (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria and Italy) and focused on enhancement of digital-led investigations, prosecutions and judicial responses for dismantling child trafficking chains.¹¹¹ The project included training for law enforcement and legal professionals. As part of the project, a roundtable on the use of digital evidence in combating trafficking was held in early 2024, followed by a two-day training session in Brussels in October 2024 on innovative digital approaches to address trafficking. In addition to this project, in May 2023, Maltese officials participated in an OSCE regional workshop on technology-facilitated trafficking in The Hague.

142. Malta is a party to the Council of Europe Convention on Cybercrime (Budapest Convention). It signed the Second Additional Protocol to the Convention on Cybercrime on enhanced co-operation and disclosure of electronic evidence in June 2023, but has not yet ratified it.

143. While welcoming the steps taken by the Maltese authorities to promote children's online safety, GRETA considers that the authorities should develop further measures to prevent ICT-facilitated human trafficking, including by enabling online covert operations to identify traffickers and gather evidence in human trafficking cases, investing in capacity building and digital tools for proactive investigations and strengthening co-operation with ICT companies and Internet service providers.

144. Furthermore, GRETA invites the Maltese authorities to ratify the Second Additional Protocol to the Convention on Cybercrime on enhanced co-operation and disclosure of electronic evidence.

V. Follow-up topics specific to Malta

1. Compensation

145. In its third report, GRETA urged the Maltese authorities to make efforts to guarantee effective access to compensation for victims of THB, including by ensuring victims' access to legal assistance and free legal aid, including compensation in judicial training, allowing the use of confiscated assets for compensation to victims, removing the maximum limit of EUR 10 000 for moral damages, and reviewing the eligibility criteria for state compensation.

146. The legal framework for compensation, described in GRETA's third report,¹¹² remains unchanged. As noted in GRETA's third report, Maltese legislation does not allow compensation to injured parties through funds derived from confiscated criminal assets. Further, pursuant to S.L. 9.12 on Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme Regulations, which regulates state compensation, the Attorney General has a wide discretion in deciding whether to grant compensation and determining its amount. For example, the Attorney General can reject an application or reduce the amount of compensation on the grounds that the victim failed to take, without delay, all reasonable steps to inform the authorities of the crime or to co-operate with the authorities for the purpose of bringing the perpetrators to justice, or that the conduct of the victim, his/her character or way of life make it inappropriate to grant any or a full award (Articles 10 and 11 of S.L. 9.12). Furthermore, while there is no legal obligation to wait until the end of criminal proceedings or bring a civil case against the offender, Article 11 (b) of S.L. 9.12 allows the Attorney General to reject a compensation request on the ground that the applicant failed to produce proof that legal action against the offender to claim compensation "has proved to be fruitless". As highlighted in GRETA's third report, waiting until the end of judicial proceedings to claim state compensation is not a realistic option for applicants as, pursuant to Article 4, paragraph 3, of S.L. 9.12, the application for the state compensation should be submitted not later than one year after the violent intentional crime was committed, whereas judicial proceedings usually take more than one year. The recommendations of GRETA's third report concerning state compensation were discussed in the Technical Working Group on Criminal Justice and Legislative Amendments (CJLA WG). However, no draft amendments were submitted to Parliament.

147. As in the previous reporting period, no victims of THB have received compensation through either criminal or civil proceedings. The AGO stated that charge sheets for trafficking offences routinely include a reference to Articles 15A and 28H of the CC, which provide for victim compensation. Regarding state compensation, the AGO highlighted the need for improved training of legal professionals.

148. The Victim Support Agency (VSA), established in 2021, offers victims of crime emotional support, legal advice and court accompaniment. Staffed by 25 professionals (police, social workers, psychosocial specialists), the VSA has assisted 4 320 victims of crime, including six victims of THB who were assisted in 2024 to apply for state compensation. However, all six applications were rejected as applicants did not meet the eligibility criteria.

149. The new National Action Plan (2024-2027) outlines several measures to enhance access to compensation, including developing a dedicated training module for legal professionals, issuing clear guidelines for judges on prioritising victim compensation during trials, and assessing the potential for legislative reforms to allow the use of confiscated assets for victim compensation.

¹¹² See GRETA's third report on Malta, paragraphs 73-82.

150. Recalling the recommendations made in its previous reports, GRETA once again urges the Maltese authorities to make efforts to guarantee effective access to compensation for victims of THB, in line with Article 15 (4) of the Convention, including by:

- ensuring that the collection of evidence about the harm the victim has suffered, including the financial gain from the exploitation of the victim, is part of the criminal investigation, with a view to supporting compensation claims in court;
- enabling victims of trafficking to effectively exercise their right to compensation, by ensuring access to legal assistance and free legal aid;
- reviewing the legislation to allow the use of confiscated assets to secure compensation to victims of THB;
- removing the maximum limit of EUR 10 000 of compensation for moral damages;
- reviewing the eligibility criteria for state compensation (S.L. 9.12) with a view to making it available to all victims of trafficking when the offence was committed in Malta, regardless of their nationality, residence status, conduct, character or way of life, and ensuring that it is not conditional on failure to obtain compensation from the perpetrator. Further, the limit of EUR 23 300 should apply to one victim, and not to a group of victims.

151. Furthermore, GRETA considers that the Maltese authorities should:

- build the capacity of lawyers to support victims in claiming compensation;
- include compensation in training programmes for judges and prosecutors, encouraging them to use all the possibilities the law offers to uphold compensation claims by victims of THB and requiring courts to state, where applicable, why compensation is not considered.

VI. Conclusions

152. Since the publication of GRETA's third report on Malta on 10 November 2021, progress has been made in a number of areas covered by that report.

153. The Government adopted a National Anti-Trafficking Strategy (2024-2030), with an accompanying Action Plan which contains measures addressing previous GRETA recommendations. The Criminal Code was amended to extend special interviewing conditions to all children under 18 and to strengthen the protection of all vulnerable victims of crime. Further, legislative amendments were adopted to improve the protection of migrants' rights and prevent their exploitation. Efforts have also been made to develop specialisation among police officers, prosecutors and judges to deal with THB cases. National awareness campaigns on THB have been conducted through various events, media appearances and social media.

154. GRETA welcomes these positive developments in Malta. However, despite the progress achieved, some issues continue to give rise to concern. Some recommendations made repeatedly by GRETA in its preceding reports have not been implemented or have been only partially implemented. In this report, GRETA once again urges the Maltese authorities to take action in the following areas:

- Compensation (Article 15 of the Convention). The Maltese authorities should guarantee effective access to compensation for victims of THB by providing them with access to legal assistance and free legal aid and by ensuring that the collection of evidence about the harm suffered by the victim is part of the criminal investigation. The authorities should also review the eligibility criteria for state compensation with a view to making it available to all victims of human trafficking when the offence was committed in Malta.
- Criminalisation of THB (Article 18 of the Convention). The Maltese authorities should introduce as an aggravating circumstance the offence of THB committed against a child, regardless of the means used.

155. Given that these recommendations have been made repeatedly, their priority implementation is requested and will be followed up as part of the monitoring of the implementation of the Convention.

156. As regards the thematic focus of the fourth evaluation round, which is on vulnerabilities to trafficking in human beings, the authorities have acknowledged the vulnerabilities of refugees, asylum seekers, migrant workers, unaccompanied children, persons with disabilities, the homeless, ex-convicts, persons engaged in prostitution and Asian women employed as massage therapists. Measures to address and prevent such vulnerabilities have been included in the National Anti-Trafficking Action Plan for 2024-2027 as well as in other strategic documents and programmes aimed at facilitating access of vulnerable persons to education, employment, health care and support services, including Malta's Migrant Integration Strategy and Action Plan for 2025-2030.

157. While welcoming the measures taken by the Maltese authorities to prevent human trafficking through measures addressed at vulnerable groups, GRETA has identified a number of areas of concern which require further action. The following issues should be addressed as a matter of priority:

- prevent trafficking of migrant workers, in particular by reviewing the legislative framework governing their employment to prevent abusive contract termination and provide them with more time to find new employment following the early termination of their employment contract, establishing safe reporting and effective complaint mechanisms, strengthening oversight of private employment agencies, establishing co-operation with countries of origin of migrant workers, and protecting persons working in fishing boats, including through regular monitoring of their living and working conditions;

- taking actions for preventing and following up on any disappearances of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, and ensuring that all such cases are registered promptly and thoroughly investigated;
- ensure that when there are reasonable grounds to believe that an asylum seeker is a child, the person concerned is presumed to be a child and is granted special protection measures pending age verification, including prompt separation from any unrelated adults and transfer to appropriate accommodation;
- reduce the risk of exploitation of women and girls in prostitution, which may be exacerbated by the criminalisation of loitering or soliciting in public, regulate “gentlemen’s clubs” and massage parlours through mandatory licencing, establish effective monitoring mechanisms, and implement safeguards such as transparent labour contracts, secure payment systems, and accessible mechanisms for reporting coercion and exploitation.

158. Moreover, the authorities should improve the identification of victims of trafficking by ensuring that sufficient financial and human resources are made available to labour inspectors to carry out inspections and outreach work with a view to detecting cases of THB for the purpose of labour exploitation, paying particular attention to at-risk sectors. The authorities should screen all asylum seekers and migrants in immigration detention and reception centres for indicators of THB, enable specialised NGOs and UNHCR staff to have regular access to these centres, and ensure that the implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding with Libya does not result in breach of Malta’s obligations under the Convention.

159. GRETA welcomes the steps taken by the Maltese authorities to promote children’s online safety. In order to address the routine use of ICT to recruit and exploit victims of trafficking, the authorities should enable online covert operations to identify traffickers and gather evidence in human trafficking cases and invest in capacity building and digital tools for proactive investigations, as well as strengthen co-operation with ICT companies and Internet service providers.

160. GRETA invites the Maltese authorities to keep it regularly informed of developments as regards the implementation of the Convention. GRETA trusts that there will continue to be a political commitment in Malta to sustain the efforts to combat all forms of human trafficking by following the human-rights based approach of the Convention and looks forward to continuing the dialogue with the Maltese authorities and civil society.

Appendix 1

Table with statistics on victims and cases of THB in Malta in 2021-2025

The data presented in the table is not directly comparable across States Parties to the Convention due to variations in the methodologies used for data collection

Indicator		Years										
		2021		2022		2023		2024		2025 (up to 30 June)		
Number of identified victims ¹¹³		Presumed victims (PV)	Formally identified victims (FIV) ¹¹⁴	PV	FIV	PV	FIV	PV	FIV	PV	FIV	
		8	0	12	5	14	0	12	10	14	0	
Sex / age	Women	7	0	9	5	13	0	11	10	11	0	
	Men	1	0	3	0	1	0	1	0	2	0	
	Children (0-17)	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	
Type of exploitation	Sexual	1	0	1	5	6	0	4	9	6 ¹¹⁵	0	
	Labour ¹¹⁶	5	0	7	0	4	0	5	0	6	0	
	Sexual and labour	1	0	2	0	3	0	2	1	2	0	
	Forced criminality	1	0	2	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	
Nationality	Maltese	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
	EU	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	
	Non-EU	8	0	12	5	12	0	12	10	14	0	
Victims supported by Agency Appoġġ		PV	8 (2 new victims)		12 (5 new victims)		14 (6 new victims)		12 (4 new victims)		14 (8 new victims)	
		FIV	9 (0 new victims)		8 (3 new victims)		6 (0 new victims)		15 (8 new victims)		6 (0 new victims)	
Number of investigations	Cases	0		2		0		2		3		
	Victims	0		5 (all women)		0		10 (all women)		8 (7 female, 1 male)		
	Perpetrators	0		6 (2 women, 4 men)		0		12 (3 women, 9 men)		2 (all men)		
	Type of exploitation	0		sexual/ labour		0		9 sexual and 1 sexual/ labour		7 sexual and 1 sexual/forced criminality		
Number of prosecution	Cases	0		3		1		2		2		
	Prosecuted individuals	0		6 (5 Maltese, 1 Colombian)		2 (1 Maltese, 1 Uzbek)		12 (7 Maltese, 2 Romanians)		2 (1 Italian, 1 Syrian)		

¹¹³ These figures include both persons who have been formally identified as victims of human trafficking by the Malta Police Force and presumed victims registered by FSWS and receiving assistance provided for victims of human trafficking.

¹¹⁴ Victims identified by the Malta Police Force.

¹¹⁵ One of these cases included attempted child trafficking.

¹¹⁶ Including domestic servitude. Some victims may have experienced multiple types of exploitation.

						2 Brazilians, 1 Italian)	
	Victims		0	5	6	7	4
	Type of exploitation		0	sexual	n.a. ¹¹⁷	9 sexual and 1 sexual/ labour	2 sexual/labour
Number of convictions (persons)	Sex	Women	1	0	4	0	0
		Men	1	0	3	0	1
	Nationality	Maltese	0	0	n.a.	0	0
		EU	2	0	n.a.	0	0
		Non-EU	0	0	n.a.	0	1
	Type of exploitation	Sexual	2	0	n.a.	0	0
		Labour	0	0	n.a.	0	1

117

n.a. : not available.

Appendix 2

List of GRETA's conclusions and proposals for action

The position of the proposals for action in the text of the report is shown in parentheses.

Topics related to the fourth evaluation round of the Convention

Prevention of trafficking in human beings

- GRETA welcomes the research conducted and invites the authorities to continue to undertake and support targeted research to identify groups vulnerable to THB and at-risk sectors as an evidence base for the development of future policy measures aimed at addressing vulnerabilities and preventing trafficking (paragraph 27).

Measures to prevent the vulnerability of specific groups to trafficking in human beings

Children and young people

- GRETA considers that the Maltese authorities should continue their efforts to improve the prevention of child trafficking, in particular by:
 - ensuring regular and effective monitoring of child residential institutions by an independent body enabled to conduct unannounced visits and equipped with a sufficient number of trained staff to prevent abuse and exploitation of children;
 - continuing providing training on human trafficking to child welfare professionals, teachers and other professionals working with children;
 - continuing raising public awareness about the risks and different manifestations of child trafficking (paragraph 36).

Migrant workers

- Referring to GRETA's Guidance Note on combating trafficking for labour exploitation and the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers Recommendation to Member States CM/Rec(2022)21 on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings for the purpose of labour exploitation, GRETA urges the Maltese authorities to take additional steps to prevent trafficking for the purpose of labour exploitation, in particular by:
 - reviewing the legislative framework on the employment of migrant workers to prevent abusive contract termination by their employers and provide them with more time to find new employment following the early termination of their employment contract;
 - establishing safe reporting and effective complaint mechanisms for migrant workers;
 - strengthening oversight of private employment agencies, including temporary work agencies and outsourcing agencies;
 - establishing co-operation with countries of origin of migrant workers to explore ways to address the deceptive recruitment practices and debt bondage of employment agencies in countries of origin, and to disseminate accurate information about working in Malta;

- taking additional measures to protect persons working in fishing boats, including through regular monitoring of their living and working conditions (paragraph 45);
- GRETA considers that the Maltese authorities should take steps to prevent abuses of the system of student visas, paying particular attention to Vietnamese students (paragraph 46);
- GRETA considers that the authorities should systematically provide information to students who are third-country nationals and migrant workers in a language they can understand about the risks of THB for the purpose of labour exploitation and where to access support (paragraph 47).

Asylum seekers and refugees

- GRETA urges the Maltese authorities to strengthen their efforts to prevent asylum seekers and refugees from becoming victims of trafficking in human beings, in particular by:
 - ensuring that when there are reasonable grounds to believe that an asylum seeker is a child, the person concerned is presumed to be a child and is granted special protection measures pending age verification. This includes prompt separation from any unrelated adults and transfer to appropriate accommodation;
 - taking actions for preventing and following up on any disappearances of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, and ensuring that all such cases are registered promptly and thoroughly investigated (paragraph 59);
- GRETA considers that the Maltese authorities should:
 - improve the social and economic integration of asylum seekers and refugees, notably their access to employment and vocational training, to prevent them from becoming vulnerable to exploitation and THB;
 - continue to raise awareness of asylum seekers and refugees of their rights and the risks of human trafficking, including recruitment and abuse through Internet/social networks (paragraph 60).

Vulnerabilities related to the gender dimension of human trafficking and of persons engaged in prostitution

- GRETA considers that the Maltese authorities should take additional measures to address the gender dimension of trafficking in human beings, in particular by:
 - reducing the risk of exploitation of women and girls in prostitution, which may be exacerbated by the criminalisation of loitering or soliciting in public. This should include strengthening the existing support programme and/or developing exit programmes for those wishing to leave prostitution, and raising awareness among persons in prostitution about the risks of human trafficking and the support services available to victims;
 - addressing the vulnerability of women working in “gentlemen’s clubs” and massage parlours, particularly third-country nationals, including by regulating these sectors through mandatory licencing, establishing effective monitoring mechanisms, and implementing safeguards such as transparent labour contracts, secure payment systems, and accessible mechanisms for reporting coercion and exploitation. Operators who fail to comply with these requirements should be subject to appropriate sanctions (paragraph 67).

Persons with disabilities

- GRETA considers that the Maltese authorities should conduct research into the vulnerabilities of persons with disabilities to human trafficking and implement prevention measures, including the provision of information and training to professionals working with persons with disabilities on the risks of human trafficking faced by such persons (paragraph 74).

LGBTI persons

- GRETA considers that the Maltese authorities should take steps to prevent the vulnerability of LGBTI persons to trafficking in human beings, including through information and awareness-raising activities on the risks of THB and where to seek assistance, in close co-operation with civil society organisations (paragraph 78).

Identification of victims of THB

- GRETA urges the Maltese authorities to take additional steps to proactively identify victims of trafficking, and in particular to:
 - ensure that sufficient financial and human resources are made available to labour inspectors to carry out inspections and outreach work with a view to detecting cases of THB for the purpose of labour exploitation, paying particular attention to at-risk sectors, such as construction, cleaning, domestic work, care work, fishing, massage parlours and adult entertainment, and developing specific guidelines for each at-risk sector to facilitate the identification of victims of trafficking;
 - screen all asylum seekers and migrants in immigration detention and reception centres for indicators of THB and enable specialised NGOs with experience in identifying and assisting victims of trafficking as well as UNHCR staff to have regular access to facilities for asylum seekers and detained migrants. These NGOs should be able to communicate with asylum seekers and detained migrants in appropriate and confidential conditions in order to proactively identify victims of trafficking;
 - take measures to ensure that the implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding with Libya does not result in breach of Malta's obligations under the Convention to identify victims of THB, including, if necessary, by reviewing or suspending the Memorandum;
 - ensure that pre-removal risk assessments prior to all forced removals from Malta fully assess risks of trafficking or re-trafficking on return, in compliance with the obligation of non-refoulement. In this respect, reference is made to GRETA's Guidance note on the entitlement of victims of trafficking, and persons at risk of being trafficked, to international protection (paragraph 92);
- GRETA considers that the Maltese authorities should:
 - review, as provided in the National Action Plan, the National Referral Mechanism and the Standard Operating Procedures, in particular by introducing a multi-disciplinary approach to the identification of victims of trafficking, and ensure their application in practice through systematic dissemination;
 - step up their efforts to ensure that victims of THB who have been exploited in criminal activities are identified to prevent violations of the non-punishment provision;

- provide systematic training to professionals who may come into contact with THB victims (especially law enforcement officials but also prosecutors, labour inspectors, social workers, health-care workers, child-care workers, asylum officials, migration officials) on the identification of victims of trafficking (especially child victims of trafficking) and the procedures to be followed (paragraph 93).

Assistance to victims

- GRETA considers that the Maltese authorities should take further measures to ensure that the assistance provided to victims of trafficking complies with the requirements of Article 12 of the Convention, in particular by:
 - strengthening effective access to the labour market for victims of THB and their economic and social inclusion through the provision of vocational training, language courses and job placement, raising awareness among potential employers, and the promotion of micro-businesses, social enterprises and public-private partnerships;
 - providing adequate financing to NGOs to ensure the sustainability, range and quality of the services delivered by them to victims of THB;
 - increasing the number of trained cultural mediators to bridge communication and build trust between victims and support providers (paragraph 103).

Notion of “abuse of a position of vulnerability” in the law and case-law

- GRETA considers that the Maltese authorities should ensure that children (i.e. all persons under the age of 18) are recognised and treated as vulnerable persons for the purposes of the anti-trafficking provisions (paragraph 111);
- GRETA once again urges the Maltese authorities to introduce as an aggravating circumstance the offence of THB committed against a child, regardless of the means used (paragraph 112).

Investigation, prosecution and sanctions

- Recalling the recommendation made in its third report, GRETA once again urges the Maltese authorities to ensure that the length of court proceedings in human trafficking cases is reasonable, in line with the case-law of the European Court of Human Rights (related to Article 6, paragraph 1 of the ECHR) and the standards set by the European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice (CEPEJ) (paragraph 125);
- GRETA considers that the Maltese authorities should continue strengthening the capacity of police officers, prosecutors and judges to deal with THB cases through the provision of regular training (paragraph 126).

Protection of victims from intimidation

- GRETA welcomes the legislative amendments expanding special interviewing conditions for THB victims and invites the Maltese authorities to continue ensuring that protection measures are applied to prevent the re-traumatisation and intimidation of victims of trafficking during the investigation and criminal proceedings. This should include ensuring that there is a sufficient number of adequately trained persons, such as children’s advocates and support persons, to guide and assist child victims of trafficking during court proceedings (paragraph 132).

Criminalisation of the use of services of a victim

- GRETA considers that the Maltese authorities should carry out targeted information campaigns to raise awareness of the criminalisation of the use of services of victims of THB (paragraph 135).

Addressing human trafficking facilitated by information and communication technology (ICT)

- While welcoming the steps taken by the Maltese authorities to promote children's online safety, GRETA considers that the authorities should develop further measures to prevent ICT-facilitated human trafficking, including by enabling online covert operations to identify traffickers and gather evidence in human trafficking cases, investing in capacity building and digital tools for proactive investigations and strengthening co-operation with ICT companies and Internet service providers (paragraph 143);
- GRETA invites the Maltese authorities to ratify the Second Additional Protocol to the Convention on Cybercrime on enhanced co-operation and disclosure of electronic evidence (paragraph 144).

Follow-up topics specific to Malta

Overview of trends and changes in the legislative, institutional and policy framework for action against human trafficking

- GRETA welcomes the fact that the Maltese authorities are examining the possibility of designating an independent institution as National Rapporteur on combating THB and considers that they should take all necessary steps to ensure that this process is completed without delay (paragraph 22).

Compensation

- Recalling the recommendations made in its previous reports, GRETA once again urges the Maltese authorities to make efforts to guarantee effective access to compensation for victims of THB, in line with Article 15 (4) of the Convention, including by:
 - ensuring that the collection of evidence about the harm the victim has suffered, including the financial gain from the exploitation of the victim, is part of the criminal investigation, with a view to supporting compensation claims in court;
 - enabling victims of trafficking to effectively exercise their right to compensation, by ensuring access to legal assistance and free legal aid;
 - reviewing the legislation to allow the use of confiscated assets to secure compensation to victims of THB;
 - removing the maximum limit of EUR 10 000 of compensation for moral damages;
 - reviewing the eligibility criteria for state compensation (S.L. 9.12) with a view to making it available to all victims of trafficking when the offence was committed in Malta, regardless of their nationality, residence status, conduct, character or way of life, and ensuring that it is not conditional on failure to obtain compensation from the perpetrator. Further, the limit of EUR 23 300 should apply to one victim, and not to a group of victims (paragraph 150);

- GRETA considers that the Maltese authorities should:
 - build the capacity of lawyers to support victims in claiming compensation;
 - include compensation in training programmes for judges and prosecutors, encouraging them to use all the possibilities the law offers to uphold compensation claims by victims of THB and requiring courts to state, where applicable, why compensation is not considered (paragraph 151).

Appendix 3

List of public bodies and civil society actors with which GRETA held consultations

Public bodies

- Permanent Secretary of the Office of the Prime Minister for European Funds, Equality, Reforms and Social Dialogue
- Ministry for Health
- Human Rights Directorate (under the Office of the Prime Minister for European Funds, Equality, Reforms and Social Dialogue)
 - Human Rights Initiatives Unit
- Office of the Attorney General
- Police
 - Vulnerable Victims Unit
 - Cyber Crime Unit
- Court Services Agency
- Foundation for Social Welfare Services
 - National Social Welfare Agency (Agency Appoġġ)
 - Directorate of Child Protection Services
- State Service Provider for Persons with Disabilities (Agency Sapport)
- Social Care Standards Authority
- International Protection Agency
- Agency for the Welfare of Asylum Seekers
- Department for Industrial and Employment Relations
- Jobsplus
- Identity Malta Agency
- Victim Support Agency
- Legal Aid Agency
- Correctional Services Agency

-
- Financial Intelligence Analysis Unit (within the Ministry for Finance)
 - Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability
 - Office of the Commissioner for Children

Intergovernmental organisations

- International Organization for Migration (IOM)
- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

Civil society organisations

- Aditus Foundation
- Dar Hosea
- General Workers Union (trade union)
- Jesuit Refugee Service
- Malta Emigrants Commission
- UHM Voice of the Workers (trade union)
- Women's Rights Foundation

Government's comments

The following comments do not form part of GRETA's analysis concerning the situation in Malta

GRETA engaged in a dialogue with the Maltese authorities on a first draft of the report. A number of the authorities' comments were taken on board and integrated into the report's final version.

The Convention requires that “the report and conclusions of GRETA shall be made public as from their adoption, together with eventual comments by the Party concerned.” GRETA transmitted its final report to the Maltese authorities on 12 December 2025 and invited them to submit any final comments. The comments of the authorities, submitted on 19 February 2026, are reproduced hereafter.

OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER
EQUALITY, REFORMS AND SOCIAL DIALOGUE



Human Rights Directorate

UFFIĊĊJU TAL-PRIM MINISTRU
UGWALJANZA, IR-RIFORMI U D-DJALOGU SOĊJALI

Direttorat għad-Drittijiet tal-Bniedem

19th February 2026

Dear Ms. Nestorova,

I acknowledge receipt of your letter dated 12th December 2025, enclosing the final report adopted by the Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA) concerning the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings by Malta following the fourth evaluation round by GRETA.

On behalf of the Human Rights Directorate (HRD) and the relevant Maltese authorities, I wish to thank GRETA and the Secretariat for their thorough evaluation and constructive engagement throughout this process.

In accordance with Article 38, paragraph 6, of the Convention and Rule 14 of GRETA's Rules of Procedure, we greatly appreciate the opportunity to provide final comments. Please note that Malta's comments can be found below, with references to the relevant paragraphs of the report, in line with your instructions.

Paragraph 29: Malta would like to clarify that the prevention of child trafficking is part of a broader child protection agenda, which involves several institutions in Malta. The Directorate of Child Protection Services under the Foundation for Social Welfare Services (FSWS) and the Child Safety Service (CSS), National Students' Wellbeing Services (Wellbeing Services), within the Ministry for Education, Sport, Youth, Research and Innovation (MEYR) collaborate in the protection of children's rights. Schools have established referral procedures for at-risk children, including trafficking cases. Following a referral through school procedures, the case is assessed by the Child Safety Service (CSS), National Students' Wellbeing Services (Wellbeing Services) MEYR. Where the case merits an investigation, CSS NSWS MEYR reports it to the Directorate of Child Protection Services within the Foundation for Social Welfare Services (FSWS), which then conducts the investigation and, where necessary, develops a care plan. The legal framework mandates reporting of instances of child abuse, investigation and inter-agency collaboration between the FSWS, police, health and education services. The Maltese Safer Internet Centre also operates an online reporting system for illegal child-related online content, which received 3,336 reports related to child sexual abuse materials from January 2021 to June 2024. It should be noted that Child Safety Services (CSS) do not carry out investigation but assesses the case and report to FSWS if the case merits an investigation. The investigation is carried out by FSWS.

Paragraph 41: When delays in the submission of termination forms do occur, one of the duties of Public Employment Services (Jobsplus) is to actively follow up with the employer to ensure that the termination form is submitted in line with Article 40 of Chapter 594 of the Laws of Malta.

Paragraph 49: Malta would like to clarify that in accordance with EU Directive 2013/33/EU, applicants for international protection may be granted access to the labour market no later than nine months from the lodging of their application, provided that no first-instance decision has been taken and that any delay is not attributable to the applicant. Furthermore, in the case of applicants originating from countries designated as “safe”, the Maltese authorities aim to issue a first-instance decision within the nine-month period to adhere to the timeframe established in the Directive.

Paragraph 50: HRD would like to clarify that one of the objectives of Malta’s Integration Strategy and Action Plan (2025-2030) is to support the improvement of mainstream services of living conditions and well-being of migrants through efficient documentation procedures, education programmes, housing support, health services, and labour market integration including better working conditions, matching of skills and upskilling. A key pillar of Malta’s integration governance framework is the national integration programme known as the “*I Belong*” Programme. As part of this programme, and in line with the Malta Labour Migration Policy, on 5th January 2026 the *I Belong Pre-Departure Integration Programme* was launched, and this service includes an excellent opportunity which introduces anti-trafficking information to economic migrants prior to arrival in Malta, besides continuing and strengthening the provision of information at all existing stages of the programme.

Paragraph 60: Malta would like to note that Jobsplus provides unemployment support (i.e. advisory service, free training courses), in line with EU Directives to migrants including asylum seekers, individuals with subsidiary protection and refugees.

Paragraph 72: The Maltese Government would like to refer to the work of Aġenzija Sapport, specifically the Agency’s efforts in promoting independent and community living, in addition to residential services. In this regard, deinstitutionalisation is a core pillar of the Agency’s agenda. Initiatives include the Transition Service which is a pilot project supporting individuals in residential settings to move towards independent community-based living, alongside ongoing reviews of practices, projects, and eligibility criteria in line with this shift.

Paragraph 87: Malta would like to clarify that labour inspections are carried out on an ongoing basis throughout the year. The Labour Compliance Unit within Jobsplus carried out 3,630 inspections in 2021, 5,110 in 2022, 5,314 in 2023, and 5,471 in 2024. Over the same period, the number of recorded infringements rose from 2,434 in 2021 to 5,169 in 2022 and 5,877 in 2023, before decreasing to 3,445 in 2024. As such, the characterisation of inspections as ‘rare’ may not fully reflect current practice but rather should be attributed to capacity constraints.

Paragraph 89: The Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD) is currently in the process of recruiting a TCN with extensive experience in working with refugees and persons with disability to strengthen links with refugee authorities and affected communities.

Paragraph 92: Malta would like to clarify that Article 248E(6) of the Criminal Code is applied for victims of THB, thus no punishment is given to victims of such crimes.

Paragraphs 107 and 111: Malta would also like to draw attention to the recommendation provided in paragraph 111. In link with this, Malta would like to refer to paragraph 107 of this report for context. Paragraph 107 highlights the way in which the Maltese authorities ensure that children are recognised and treated as vulnerable persons for the purposes of the anti-trafficking provisions: "Article 208AC defines a

“vulnerable person” as “any person under 15 years, persons suffering from a physical or mental infirmity, or any other person considered by a court to be particularly at risk of being induced into cooperating with the offender or into surrendering to the offender’s will due to the person’s age, maturity, health, pregnancy, disability, social or other conditions, including any situation of dependence, as well as the physical or psychological consequences of the offence on that person. ” Despite the fact that the definition of “vulnerable person” in Article 208AC of the CC refers to persons under 15 years, the Maltese authorities have pointed out that all persons under 18 are treated as vulnerable persons for the purpose of the anti-trafficking provisions of the CC.”

Paragraph 118: It should be mentioned that three *more* individuals were arraigned in court for sexual exploitation on 14th December 2025.

Paragraph 130: Kindly note that no one required protection under the Witness Protection Programme.

Paragraph 146: Malta would like to clarify the following points:

- (1) Confiscation only takes place when the proceedings are definitively over and there is a finding of guilt.
- (2) Once assets are confiscated, they become property of the State.
- (3) Should a THB victim be compensated under [the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme Regulations \(Subsidiary Legislation. 9.12\)](#), the money paid to the victim would essentially be from State property.
- (4) Since confiscation takes place at the end of criminal proceedings, victims would have to wait until the very end of proceedings to obtain compensation from confiscated assets. This process frequently spans several years, by which time the victims may have already departed Malta. Under the current system, compensation, if applied for under the Scheme, can be granted irrespective of whether proceedings are ongoing or not.

Furthermore, the Maltese Government notes that, when issuing decisions on compensation, the Attorney General operates in a manner comparable to the First Hall of the Civil Court when adjudicating a *culpa aquiliana* claim, with primary emphasis on the assessment of *damnum emergens*. The proposal in question is based on an unfounded assumption that written justification is not provided. Preventing the Claims Officer from deciding applications in accordance with existing legislation would necessitate, at least in part, decisions based on equity. In the Maltese legal system, equity is admissible only before the Small Claims Tribunal and not before the First Hall of the Civil Court. Given the limited number of compensation claims submitted annually, it may reasonably be argued that the current system has not yet been afforded sufficient opportunity for a comprehensive evaluation. In proceedings before the First Hall of the Civil Court, where an ordinary claim for damages remains available to victims and is not subject to time-barring when damages arise from a criminal offence, the burden of proof rests entirely on the claimant. By contrast, the current legislative framework is more favourable to victims, as it enables the Claims Officer, acting as adjudicator, to invite applicants to strengthen their claim through the submission of additional evidence. This procedural safeguard is not available in ordinary civil proceedings. Moreover, the applicable time limits and eligibility criteria for submitting applications are clearly set out in Subsidiary Legislation 9.12. The Attorney General has no discretion to accept applications that do not satisfy the requirements established under this legislation.

Paragraph 151: It should be noted that such training is already provided in relation to prosecutors.

Appendix 2: Concerning the ‘Notion of “abuse of a position of vulnerability” in the law and case-law’ in Appendix 2, Malta would like to once again highlight, as per previous comments, that Maltese authorities

ensure that children are recognised and treated as vulnerable persons for the purposes of the anti-trafficking provisions.

Should any further clarifications, supplementary information, or supporting documentation be required, the Maltese authorities remain at GRETA's disposal. The Government of Malta reiterates its full commitment to maintaining an open and constructive dialogue with GRETA and the Council of Europe, and to continuing its close cooperation in the effective implementation of the Convention.

Yours sincerely,

Annalise Desira
Director Policy
Human Rights Directorate
Office of the Prime Minister, Equality, Reforms and Social Dialogue
Malta