

Country profile

MALTA

Last profile update: August 2026 by Adrian Debattista and Dr Karsten Xuereb.

This profile was prepared and updated by Adrian Debattista and Dr Karsten Xuereb.
It is based on official and non-official sources addressing current cultural policy issues. The opinions expressed in this profile are those of the author and are not official statements of the government or of the Compendium editors. Additional national cultural policy profiles are available on: http://www.culturalpolicies.net.

The authors wish to thank Neville Borg for his sterling work on earlier versions of this profile.

If the entire profile or relevant parts of it are reproduced in print or in electronic form including in a translated version, for whatever purpose, a specific request has to be addressed to the Association of the Compendium of Cultural Policies and Trends. Such reproduction must be accompanied by the standard reference below, as well as by the name of the author of the profile. **Standard Reference**: Association of the Compendium of Cultural Policies and Trends, "Compendium of Cultural Policies and Trends," 26th edition 2026. Available under: <http:// www.culturalpolicies.net>. ISSN: 2222-7334.

Malta[1]

1. Cultural policy system 4

1.1 Objectives, main features and background 4

1.2 Domestic governance system 6

1.3 Cultural institutions 11

1.4 International cooperation 14

2. Current cultural affairs 19

2.1 Key developments 19

2.2 Cultural rights and ethics 21

2.3 Role of artists and cultural professionals 22

2.4 Digital policy and developments 24

2.5 Cultural diversity 29

2.6 Culture and social inclusion 47

2.7 Societal impacts of arts 49

2.8 Cultural sustainability 51

2.9 Other main cultural policy issues 52

3. Cultural and creative sectors 54

3.1 Heritage 54

3.2 Archives and libraries 59

3.3 Performing arts 61

3.4 Visual arts and crafts 62

3.5 Cultural arts and creative industries 63

4. Law and legislation 79

4.1 General legislation 79

4.2 Legislation on culture 88

5. Arts and cultural education 99

5.1 Policy and institutional overview 99

[1] **Author history:** Adrian Debattista is Director (Policy Development and Programme Implementation) at the Ministry for Arts, Culture & National Heritage. Dr Karsten Xuereb is Research Tech & AI Executive at Arts Council Malta.

5.2 *Arts in schools* 101
5.3 *Higher arts and cultural education* 105
5.4 *Out-of-school arts and cultural education* 106
5.5 *Vocational and professional training* 108

6. Cultural participation and consumption 110
6.1 *Policies and programmes* 110
6.2 *Trends and figures in cultural participation* 111
6.3 *Trends and figures in household expenditure* 113
6.4 *Culture and civil society* 114

7. Financing and support 117
7.1 *Public funding* 117
7.2 *Support programmes* 120
7.3 *Private funding* 124

1. Cultural policy system

1.1 Objectives, main features and background

Objectives. Malta's cultural policy direction is set by successive national cultural policy documents. The first *National Cultural Policy* (2011) framed culture as a driver of socio-economic development and prioritised improvements in cultural governance, international cooperation, and public participation. The second *National Cultural Policy* (2021) reframes culture around cultural rights, wellbeing and sustainable development, with an overarching commitment to "embracing culture for the wellbeing of all". The 2021 policy explicitly aligns with the 2005 UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and the principles of cultural diversity, creativity, innovation, widening participation, and citizens' cultural rights that underpin contemporary European cultural policy.

Main features. Malta operates a centralised cultural policy system in which the ministry responsible for culture leads policy formulation and budget allocation. Since 2025, this is the Ministry for Arts, Culture and the National Heritage (which succeeded the *Ministry for Culture, Lands and Local Government*; local government and lands were transferred to separate portfolios following the June 2026 general election). Other ministries contribute through related measures — the Ministry for Education and Sport on arts education and cultural participation, the Ministry for Tourism on cultural tourism, and the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs on cultural diplomacy. Public financing is allocated through the annual Budget Financial Estimates, with dedicated line votes for Public Cultural Organisations (PCOs), heritage institutions, ACM funding schemes and cultural events (see 7.1).

A defining feature of the governance model is the arm's-length management of cultural institutions. The *Arts Council Malta Act* (Cap. 542, 2015) reorganised the sector by reconstituting the former *Malta Council for Culture and the Arts (MCCA)* as Arts Council Malta (ACM) and by establishing autonomous PCOs, each with its own legal personality. Recent governance shifts include the National Centre for the Maltese Language established in 2023 with a mandate to promote and safeguard the language, including in digital contexts, and the transfer of the Malta Film Commission from the tourism portfolio to the culture ministry in November 2024 (the *Malta Film Fund*, renamed *Creative Malta*, had moved to the same ministry from January 2024). The establishment of the National Centre for the Maltese Language prompted public debate over consultation with the *Kunsill Nazzjonali tal-Ilsien Malti.*

Decision-making has historically been centralised, but recent reforms have introduced a degree of decentralisation and participatory engagement. The 2021 policy explicitly calls for

increased decentralisation to regional and local councils, operationalised through the six *Regional Cultural Strategies 2022–2027* launched in late 2022.

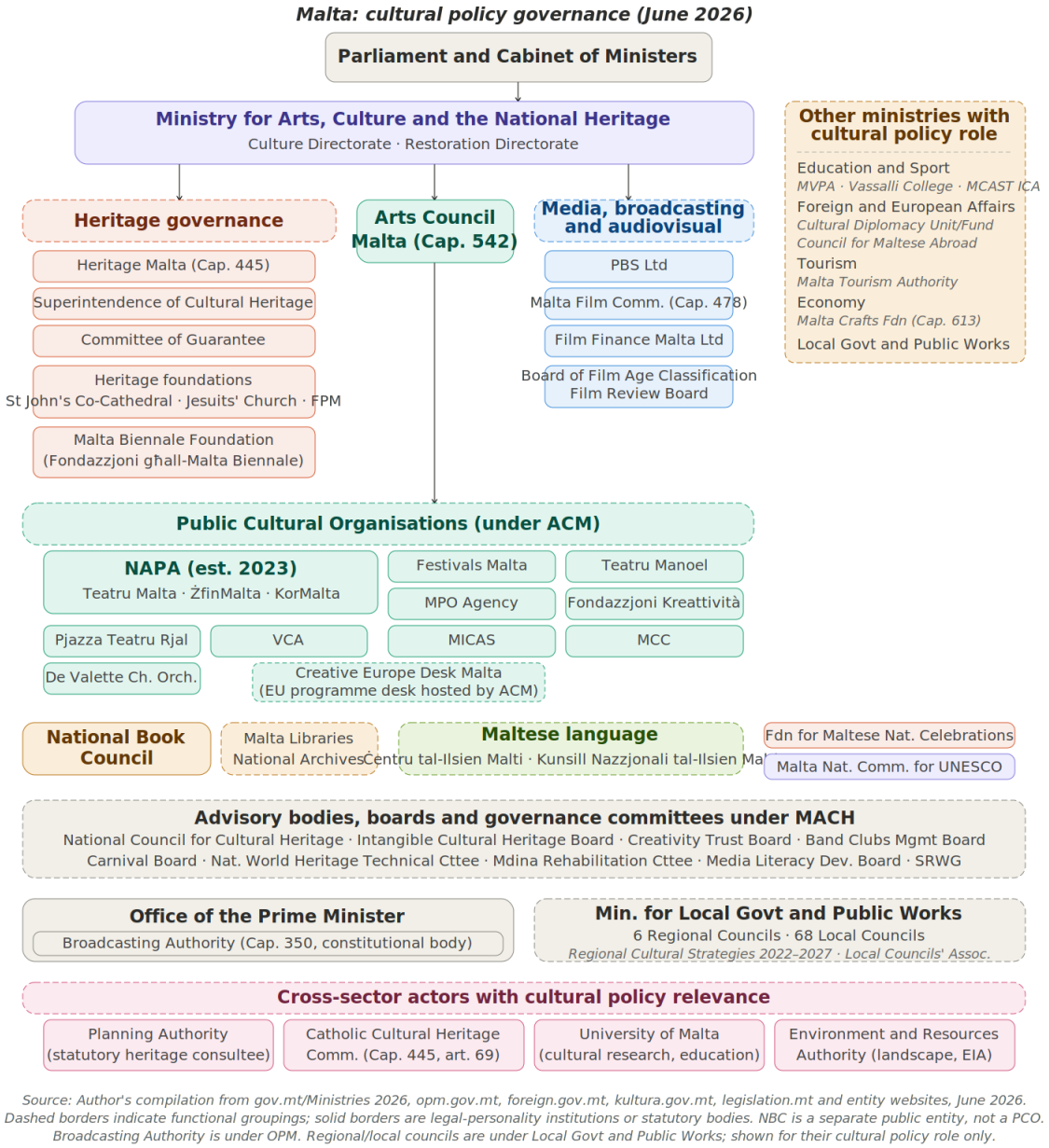
One key tool displaying growing decentralising is exhibited through Arts Council Malta (ACM) and the implementation of its cyclical strategies (2020, 2025, https://artscouncilmalta.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2026/04/ACM_26_Strategy2030_Abridged-EN_Digital.pdf 2030). *Strategy 2030* supports a closer relationship with the different parts of the cultural and creative landscape through governance, entrepreneurial, research, fair practice and community-oriented practices that interact with an international dimension. Professionalisation, wellbeing, the value of intangible and tangible heritage and AI are key focus areas of the strategy.

ACM has also established new participation mechanisms, including the *Sectoral Representative Working Group* (SRWG) set up across 2024–25 as a standing sounding board for policy, funding design and research. Final decision-making remains centralised, but the architecture now includes regional planning, sectoral consultation and arms-length institutions across most cultural-policy domains.

Background. Cultural-policy development in Malta has traced four broad phases. Until independence in 1964 cultural life was shaped by colonial-era institutions and ecclesiastical and political elites, with no formal cultural-policy framework. The first decades of independence saw the creation of a Department of Culture (1962), accession to the Council of Europe (1965) and the appointment of the first Minister with a culture portfolio (1966), alongside cultural-renewal movements including the *Moviment Qawmien Letterarju* (1967) and the founding of new arts-education institutions in the 1970s. The 1990s laid the foundations for arm's-length governance through the *National Archives Act* (Cap. 477, 1990, recast 2005), the establishment of the Malta Council for Culture and the Arts (MCCA) by Act VIII of 2002, the *Cultural Heritage Act* (Cap. 445, 2002, amended 2019 and 2024) and the related creation of Heritage Malta and the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage. The current phase — from the *National Cultural Policy* (2011) onward — has been characterised by structural reform (the 2015 reconstitution as ACM with its network of PCOs; the 2018 European Capital of Culture; the establishment of Festivals Malta in 2017; the Valletta Cultural Agency in 2019), expansion of cultural infrastructure (MUŻA in 2018; MICAS in 2024), consolidation in performing arts (NAPA in 2023), the response to COVID-19, and a sustained increase in public investment in culture (see 7.1).

1.2 Domestic governance system

1.2.1 Organisational organigram



Source: Author's compilation from gov.mt/Ministries 2026, opm.gov.mt, foreign.gov.mt, kultura.gov.mt, legislation.mt and entity websites, June 2026. Dashed borders indicate functional groupings; solid borders are legal-personality institutions or statutory bodies. NBC is a separate public entity, not a PCO. Broadcasting Authority is under OPM. Regional/local councils are under Local Govt and Public Works; shown for their cultural policy role only.

Source: Author's compilation from gov.mt, opm.gov.mt, foreign.gov.mt, kultura.gov.mt, legislation.mt and entity websites, June 2026. Dashed borders indicate functional groupings; solid borders are legal-personality institutions or statutory bodies.

1.2.2 National authorities

Cultural governance at national level is led by the Ministry for Arts, Culture and the National Heritage, which holds policy responsibility for cultural heritage, restoration, the arts, theatres, the Maltese language, the national archives, the national library, public broadcasting and the film industry. The Ministry's Culture Directorate and Restoration Directorate provide policy direction and oversight, and budgetary allocations are made through the annual Financial Estimates. Other ministries contribute through specific measures: the Ministry for Education and Sport on arts education and cultural participation; the Ministry for Tourism on cultural tourism; the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs on cultural diplomacy; and the Office of the Prime Minister on the Broadcasting Authority. Local government, which sat within the culture portfolio until June 2026, is now under the Ministry for Local Government and Public Works..

Arts Council Malta (ACM) is the central arm's-length agency, established under the *Arts Council Malta Act* (Cap. 542, 2015). ACM administers competitive funding (nineteen competitive schemes in 2026, delivered through approximately thirty individual calls) and operationalises national cultural policy through its current Strategy 2030, which succeeded the *Strategy 2025 "Care, Create, Flourish"* on its conclusion. ACM oversees a network of Public Cultural Organisations: Festivals Malta, Teatru Manoel, the Agency for the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra (the formal entity name for the MPO, established by Legal Notice 254 of 2022 under the Public Administration Act), Spazju Kreattiv / Centre for Creativity Foundation, Pjazza Teatru Rjal, Valletta Cultural Agency, MICAS, the Mediterranean Conference Centre, and — under the umbrella of the National Agency for the Performing Arts (NAPA) established in 2023 — Teatru Malta, ŻfinMalta and KorMalta. NAPA provides a unified legal and administrative framework for the three performing-arts companies while retaining their distinct artistic identities through three Artistic Directors; the public launch took place in February 2025. Following the June 2026 general election, several additional entities were placed under the ministry: the National Book Council, transferred from the education portfolio; the Fondazzjoni għall-Malta Biennale, established as a separate legal entity distinct from Heritage Malta; Film Finance Malta Ltd, supporting the financing of audiovisual production; and the De Valette Chamber Orchestra.

Heritage governance is led by Heritage Malta, the agency responsible for national museums, archaeological sites and the conservation of state-owned cultural assets, and the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage, the regulatory authority on heritage protection (see 3.1). Malta Libraries and the National Archives, established under the *Malta Libraries Act* (Cap. 511, 2011) and the *National Archives Act* (Cap. 477, 2005) respectively, hold the national documentary and bibliographic heritage. In the audiovisual sector, the Malta Film Commission administers production incentives and supports the film-servicing industry

under the *Malta Film Commission Act* (Cap. 478, 2005); since November 2024 it has fallen within the culture portfolio. PBS Ltd is the public-service broadcaster, regulated by the Broadcasting Authority constituted under the *Broadcasting Act* (Cap. 350, 1991). Following the June 2026 general election, the National Book Council was transferred from the Ministry for Education and Sport to MACH, consolidating books, publishing and literary policy within the culture portfolio for the first time.

The cultural rights framing of the *National Cultural Policy* (2021) has been translated into national-level practice through initiatives including ACM's *Right to Culture* resource pack and dedicated funding strand, and the *Charter for the Status of the Artist*, drafted by ACM, launched for consultation in June 2024 and endorsed by all eleven Public Cultural Organisations at the State of the Arts 2024 Symposium in October 2024 (see 2.3). Public-engagement practices have also been institutionalised at agency level: the Valletta Cultural Agency operates the Valletta Design Cluster on a community-membership model; Teatru Manoel runs the *TOI TOI Learning and Participation Programme*; Festivals Malta integrates accessibility and public calls into its programming; Heritage Malta has expanded multi-sensory and outreach programming; and the National Book Council — transferred to the culture portfolio from the Ministry for Education and Sport following the June 2026 general election — maintains annual stakeholder consultations linked to funding and strategy.

The Ministry's governance framework also includes a range of advisory bodies, boards and statutory committees: the National Council for Cultural Heritage, the Intangible Cultural Heritage Board, the Committee of Guarantee (all constituted under the *Cultural Heritage Act*), the Creativity Trust Board, the Band Clubs Management Board, the Carnival Board, the Board of Warrants for Conservators and Restorers, the European Film Awards Committee, the Festival Kanzunetta Maltija Consultative and Organising Committees, the National Festivities Committee, the National World Heritage Technical Committee, the Media Literacy Development Board and the Arts Council Malta Sectoral Representative Working Group (SRWG).

1.2.3 Regional authorities

Malta has no intermediate tier of regional government with legislative powers. Since the *Local Government Act* (Cap. 363, 1993) was substantially amended by Act XIV of 2019, the six Regional Councils — Gozo, Northern, Western, Eastern, Southern and Port — have been formally established as inter-local coordinating bodies composed of representatives of the local councils within each region. Their statutory remit covers waste management, regional services and inter-locality coordination; since 2022 they have also held a coordinating role in culture.

The Regional Cultural Strategies 2022–2027, launched at the end of 2022, were developed jointly by Arts Council Malta, the Local Government Division (which sat within the culture

ministry until the June 2026 general election and is now under the Ministry for Local Government and Public Works) and the Local Councils' Association, with each regional council leading the identification of regional cultural needs and priorities. The six strategies are tailored to each region but share common themes: developing local talent, increasing community cultural participation, and fostering innovation in heritage and the arts. The Gozo Regional Strategy positions the island for a future European Capital of Culture candidacy; the Northern Region promotes annual locality cultural plans; the Eastern Region prioritises library services and intercultural programmes; the Western Region focuses on artist–NGO–council collaboration; the Southern Region targets alternative-space community arts; and the Port Region focuses on harbour-area cultural infrastructure.

The strategies are accompanied by a *Region of Culture* programme launched in 2024, under which one region per year holds the title with a dedicated programme of events and partial dedicated funding. The Eastern Region held the title in 2024; Gozo holds the title for 2025 under the artistic theme *Common Ground*. The *National Cultural Policy* (2021) also lists "a culturally distinctive Gozo" as one of its priorities, supporting infrastructure and funding earmarked for the island. Regional councils continue to operate with modest financial and human resources and rely on central government, EU funds and partnership with national bodies for major projects.

1.2.4 Local authorities

Malta has 68 local councils — 54 in Malta and 14 in Gozo — established by the *Local Government Act* (Cap. 363, 1993). Local councils are democratically elected and operate under a unified central framework, with a block grant from central government and limited own-source revenue. Their cultural role has historically been confined to supporting *festi*, community celebrations, minor heritage maintenance and partnerships with band clubs and cultural NGOs.

The *National Cultural Policy* (2021) calls for greater devolution of cultural responsibility to local councils, including local-cultural-planning capacity, custodianship of local heritage assets and grassroots cultural-development funding. In practice, this has translated into several developments: targeted funding mechanisms such as annual cultural schemes administered by the Local Government Division (now under the Ministry for Local Government and Public Works)and Arts Council Malta; expanded guardianship-deed arrangements under the *Cultural Heritage Act* (Cap. 445) entrusting state-owned sites to local councils or local heritage NGOs subject to oversight by the Superintendence; capacity-building initiatives delivered by Arts Council Malta and the Local Government Division; and participation in the *Region of Culture* programme described in 1.2.3.

Local councils continue to face structural constraints. The National Audit Office report on the Workings of Local Government 2023 noted councils' "limited financial resources, mainly the allocation provided by Central Government," alongside liquidity and reserve pressures; the Council of Europe Congress 2024 monitoring report on Malta flagged limited own-source revenue, dependence on earmarked grants and constraints on managing human and administrative resources. The Congress's 2025 follow-up noted progress on training and capacity-building for local government. Until June 2026, coordination between national and local levels was facilitated by the co-location of local government and culture within the same ministry. Following the June 2026 general election, local government was transferred to the Ministry for Local Government and Public Works, and coordination now operates across two separate ministries, supported by the Local Councils' Association.

1.2.5 Main non-governmental actors

A diverse non-governmental cultural ecosystem complements the state and arm's-length sector (see also 2.3). Traditional community-culture organisations include the Għaqda Każini tal-Banda, the national federation of band clubs which represents 91 of Malta's 92 band clubs; *festa* and fireworks-factory associations; the Akkademja tal-Malti and Għaqda tal-Malti – Università on the Maltese language; and heritage trusts such as Din l-Art Ħelwa, Wirt Artna and Flimkien għal Ambjent Aħjar, which manage historical sites under guardianship deeds or operate as advocacy NGOs on planning and heritage policy.

In contemporary culture, the Malta Entertainment Industry and Arts Association (MEIA), founded in 2020, is the principal cross-disciplinary sector association representing performers, producers, technicians and other creative workers. The Malta Producers Association,and the Għaqda Każini tal-Banda participate alongside MEIA in ACM's Sectoral Representative Working Group. The Malta Society of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce, one of Malta's oldest cultural institutions, combines membership association with exhibition and educational programming.

Cultural NGOs operate within the framework of the *Voluntary Organisations Act* (Cap. 492, 2007), which requires registration with the Commissioner for Voluntary Organisations and provides for fiscal exemptions and eligibility for public grants. Cultural NGOs and registered cultural enterprises receive support through ACM's funding portfolio (see 7.2.3) and may benefit from the 150% tax deduction on corporate donations. Public cultural institutions are encouraged to collaborate with NGOs, both through co-productions and through the heritage guardianship-deed system. Religious organisations — particularly parish-level structures linked to band clubs and the *festi* — continue to play a role in traditional and community culture, alongside secular NGOs working at the intersection of arts and social inclusion.

1.2.6 Transversal co-operation

The *National Cultural Policy* (2021) calls for "strengthen[ing] cross-sectoral policies through an inter-ministerial cultural policy framework." There is no standing inter-ministerial committee, but cooperation operates on a policy- and project-basis across several axes.

National–local coordination. Prior to the June 2026 general election, the Local Government Division within the culture ministry coordinated with regional and local councils on cultural matters, including the design and implementation of the *Regional Cultural Strategies 2022–2027* (see 1.2.3) and the *Region of Culture* programme. Regular meetings between regional presidents, local-council representatives and Ministry officials underpin this coordination. Following the June 2026 restructuring, this coordination now operates across two separate ministries.

Public–civil society cooperation. ACM's *State of the Arts – Malta National Symposium* provided an annual platform for public-sector agencies and independent operators to discuss policy direction (2022-2024). The *Sectoral Representative Working Group* (SRWG), established in January 2025, brings together sector representatives to advise on policies, measures and initiatives affecting the cultural and creative sectors at national level.

Cross-sector and international integration. Malta Vision 2050 explicitly references cultural heritage and the arts as components of local community development. EU and Council of Europe cultural programmes — Creative Europe, Erasmus+, and Council of Europe heritage instruments — require cross-sector cooperation between cultural authorities, education, environment and planning bodies. The Creative Europe Desk Malta hosted by ACM facilitates participation in these programmes.

1.3 Cultural institutions

1.3.1 Overview of cultural institutions

Malta's public cultural infrastructure is anchored by the network of Public Cultural Organisations established under the *Arts Council Malta Act* (Cap. 542, 2015) and operating at arm's length under ACM oversight, alongside Heritage Malta, the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage, Malta Libraries, the National Archives, the Malta Film Commission, PBS Ltd and the Broadcasting Authority (see 1.2.2 for the full institutional map).

The network was initially constituted with seven PCOs and has since expanded to eleven through the addition of KorMalta, Teatru Malta and MICAS, and the 2023 reorganisation of the three performing-arts companies under the National Agency for the Performing Arts

(NAPA). Public cultural institutions interact with a substantial private and non-governmental sector — commercial galleries, independent theatres, film production companies, voluntary cultural organisations, band clubs and *festa* associations — which collectively shape Malta's cultural offer. Cooperation between public and independent actors is supported through ACM funding schemes (see 7.2.3), guardianship deeds for state heritage sites managed by NGOs, and the 150% tax deduction on corporate donations.

1.3.2 Data on selected public and private cultural institutions

Table 1: Cultural institutions, by sector and domain

Domain	**Cultural institutions** (subdomains)	**Public sector**		**Private sector**	
		Number (year)	Trend last 5 years (In %)	Number (year)	Trend last 5 years (In %)
Cultural heritage	Cultural heritage sites (recognised) *	n/a	n/a	2,361 (2021)	stable
	Archaeological sites * *	25 (2022)	stable	19 (2021)	-9.5% (vs 21 in 2016)
Museums	Museum institutions	22 (2024)	+4.8% (vs 21 in 2019)	n/a	n/a
Archives	Archive institutions	2 (2024)	0%	n/a	n/a
Visual arts	Public art galleries / exhibition halls	2 (2024)***	+100% (MICAS added 2024)	n/a	n/a
Performing arts	Scenic and stable spaces for theatre	28 (2017)	+12% (vs 25 in 2012)	50 (2017)	+6.4% (vs 47 in 2012)

	Concert houses	0	0	0	0
	Theatre companies	1 (2024)	0%	n/a	n/a
	Dance and ballet companies	1 (2024)	0%	n/a	≈53 (2013)
	Symphonic orchestras	2 (2024)	0%	0	0
Libraries	Libraries	57 (2021)	+1.8% (vs 56 in 2017)	n/a	n/a
Audiovisual	Cinemas	1 (2021)	0%	5 (2021)	0%
	Broadcasting organisations	2 (2024)	0%	6 (2024)	0%
Interdisciplinary	Socio-cultural centres / cultural houses	2 (2024)*****	+100% (Valletta Design Cluster operational 2021)	n/a	n/a

Source(s): Superintendence of Cultural Heritage, Heritage Malta, National Statistics Office Malta, Malta Libraries, Broadcasting Authority, and the *Spazji Teatrali* mapping exercise (Valletta 2018 Foundation, later transferred to Arts Council Malta).

* National Inventory of Cultural Heritage; figures include sites in state, private and ecclesiastical ownership. ** Public-sector figure refers to state-owned archaeological sites managed by Heritage Malta. Private-sector figure refers to state-owned archaeological sites entrusted to private organisations through guardianship deeds; the Superintendence estimates a total of approximately 1,353 archaeological sites across the islands. *** Refers to dedicated public art exhibition halls: MUŻA (operational 2018) and MICAS (operational 2024). **** Number of theatre venues, not theatre companies; 2017 data from the Valletta 2018 Foundation *Spazji Teatrali* mapping exercise. ***** Spazju Kreattiv at St James Cavalier and the Valletta Design Cluster.

1.3.3 Public cultural institutions: trends and strategies

Public cultural institutions in Malta have undergone substantial expansion and structural reform over the past decade. Total state allocations to culture grew from approximately

€27.1 million in 2013 to €138.7 million in the 2026 Financial Estimates — a cumulative nominal increase of roughly 411% — driven by the 2018 European Capital of Culture, capital investment in cultural infrastructure (MUŻA, MICAS, Valletta Design Cluster, Carnival Village), and a sustained rise in recurrent allocations to the PCO network and ACM funding schemes (see 7.1.3 for sectoral breakdown). The *National Cultural Policy* (2021) emphasises responsible use of expanding resources and calls for enhanced human and technical capacity within institutions.

Institutional restructuring under the *Arts Council Malta Act* (Cap. 542, 2015) devolved many responsibilities from the Ministry to autonomous PCOs with their own legal personality, reducing direct ministerial micro-management while introducing standardised arrangements on annual plans, public reporting and artistic independence. No major public cultural institution has been transferred to private ownership; the trend has been one of reconfiguration of public entities (the establishment of NAPA in 2023; the transfer of the Malta Film Commission to the culture portfolio in 2024; the establishment of the National Centre for the Maltese Language in 2023; and, following the June 2026 general election, the establishment of the Fondazzjoni għall-Malta Biennale as a separate entity and the transfer of the National Book Council from the education portfolio) rather than divestment.

The June 2026 general election prompted a further reconfiguration of the institutional landscape. The National Book Council, established in 2001 under Subsidiary Legislation 605.12 and historically operating within the education portfolio, was transferred to the Ministry for Arts, Culture and the National Heritage, consolidating books, publishing and literary policy within the culture ministry for the first time. Several new entities were also established under the ministry: the Fondazzjoni għall-Malta Biennale, giving the Malta Biennale a separate legal personality distinct from Heritage Malta; Film Finance Malta Ltd, supporting the financing of audiovisual production; and the De Valette Chamber Orchestra.

1.4 International cooperation

1.4.1 Public actors and cultural diplomacy

International cultural cooperation is led by the Ministry for Arts, Culture and the National Heritage in coordination with the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs. The Foreign Ministry administers a Cultural Diplomacy Fund of approximately €200,000 per year (Financial Estimates 2026, LV 5624), supporting bilateral cultural exchanges, showcases and external representation. Arts Council Malta supports international engagement through dedicated funding instruments including the *International Cultural Exchanges Scheme*, the *International Participation Scheme* and the *Mobility Guarantee Scheme* (see 7.2.3). In 2025 and

2026, Arts Council Malta boosted support to international exchange through continued and increased participation in platforms including the Venice Biennale for visual arts, the London Design Biennale, the Gwangju Biennale, Berlin and Cannes film festivals, the London Book Fair, the Tunis Book Fair and the Edinburgh Fringe. National arts organisations like the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra maintain a significant touring programme, and in 2026 Arts Council Malta enabled access to the Eurimages audiovisual programme supported by the Council of Europe.Local-level cultural diplomacy is channelled chiefly through town-twinning programmes administered under the *Local Government (Twinning) Regulations* (S.L. 363.141), of which the Committee of the Regions Malta profile records 58 active twinning agreements concluded by Maltese local councils, predominantly with Italian and other Mediterranean municipalities.

Malta does not operate a stand-alone national cultural institute on the model of the British Council or Goethe-Institut. The 2011 *National Cultural Policy* proposed the establishment of a Maltese Cultural Institute to pool resources across the culture, education, tourism and foreign-affairs ministries; this institute has not been established as of May 2026. The Council for Maltese Living Abroad, constituted under the *Council for Maltese Living Abroad Act* (Cap. 512, 2011) and chaired by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, advises on diaspora cultural affairs and supports Maltese language and heritage outreach among Maltese communities overseas. Arts Council Malta has been a full member of the European Union National Institutes for Culture (EUNIC) network since 2015 and convenes the EUNIC Malta cluster bringing together European cultural institutes and embassies based in Malta.

Foreign cultural institutes maintain an active presence in Malta. The Alliance Française de Malte-Méditerranée, Istituto Italiano di Cultura Valletta, the German-Maltese Circle, and other European institutes deliver language teaching and cultural programming; the British Council scaled back its in-country operations after 2007 but continues partnership-based engagement. Non-European cultural diplomacy is anchored by the China Cultural Centre, which opened in Valletta in 2003 as the first such centre in the Mediterranean, and the Mariam Al-Batool Islamic Cultural Centre. Italy, France and the Council of Europe have funded major heritage restoration and cultural cooperation projects with Malta through bilateral and multilateral instruments.

Since Malta has become a very multicultural reality over the past 20 years, also partly due to its membership of the European Union (EU), many ethnic communities in Malta engage in cultural diplomacy exercises with Maltese institutions and groups, while Maltese entities acknowledge and cooperate with these different cultural representations through economic, social, educational and artistic means.

Bilateral cooperation operates through cultural cooperation agreements (e.g. recently a Malta–Kosovo Memorandum of Understanding signed in 2024 covering arts, heritage management, training and joint projects), film co-production treaties (with Canada since

1997, with China since 2015, and Malta's participation in the Council of Europe Convention on Cinematographic Co-Production (revised, CETS 220)), and ad-hoc state-indemnity arrangements supporting major international art and heritage exhibitions hosted by Heritage Malta and MUŻA, in the absence of a formal *State Indemnity Act.*

1.4.2 European / international actors and programmes

Since Malta's accession to the European Union in 2004, EU cultural programmes have been a central instrument of international cultural cooperation. The Creative Europe programme (current cycle 2021–2027) supports Maltese organisations across cooperation, media and cross-sectoral strands; participation is supported nationally by the Creative Europe Desk Malta hosted by ACM. Erasmus+ supports mobility and training exchanges for cultural workers and emerging artists. Malta also contributes to EU-level policy: during its 2017 EU Council Presidency, Malta convened a Presidency conference on cultural diplomacy which fed into the Council Conclusions of 23 May 2017 on an EU strategic approach to international cultural relations, within the framework of Article 167 TFEU on EU cultural cooperation.

Malta has been a member of the Council of Europe since 1965 and is party to the European Cultural Convention since 1966. Heritage is a particular area of engagement: Malta has ratified the *Convention for the Protection of the Architectural Heritage of Europe* (Granada, 1985) and the revised *European Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage* (Valletta, 1992) (Malta hosted the signing of the latter) and joined the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Cultural Routes in 2023. Malta ratified the *European Landscape Convention* in May 2025 (in force 1 September 2025) after a 25-year interval since signature. Malta held the Chairmanship of the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers from May to November 2025, which included cultural-heritage themes alongside democracy and rights priorities. In the audiovisual sector, Malta participates in the European Audiovisual Observatory and acceded to Eurimages in January 2026, widening access to European film co-production support. In March 2026, Malta was among the first nine signatories of the new Council of Europe Convention on the Co-Production of Audiovisual Works in the Form of Series (CETS 230), signed at the Series Mania Forum in Lille. This is the first international legal framework dedicated specifically to independent co-production of television and streaming series, complementing CETS 220 and Malta's Eurimages membership.

Malta joined UNESCO in 1965 and is party to the *World Heritage Convention* (1972) (three inscribed properties), the *2001 Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage* (ratified 2021), the *2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* (ratified 2017), and the *2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions* (acceded 18 December 2006, entry into force 18 March 2007). Malta's UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage inscriptions include the art of the Maltese *Ftira* (2020),

Għana, Maltese folk music (2021), and a further inscription in 2024 reflecting renewed policy attention to living traditions. Malta is also a member of ICCROM and the Anna Lindh Foundation network and hosted the foundation's MED Forum in Valletta in 2016. The Maltese National Commission for UNESCO coordinates national implementation across the conventions.

At EU level, the European Media Freedom Act (Regulation (EU) 2024/900), the EU's principal instrument on media pluralism and editorial independence, became fully applicable in August 2025. Malta published implementing measures through Legal Notice 175 of 2025 (see 2.5.3 for detail on implementation and international assessments).

In 2026 Arts Council Malta strengthened its presence in the European Network of Cultural Centres (ENCC) by joining its board of governors.

Malta is engaged in additional regional initiatives including the Italy–Malta Interreg programme supporting cross-border heritage and arts projects, the CHORAL cultural-heritage cooperation project led by Heritage Malta, and participation in international heritage and arts networks (ICOMOS, IETM). The country is not part of a language-based cooperation area such as La Francophonie, but participates in cultural exchange and professional-skills programmes through Commonwealth frameworks as well as its cultural platforms.

1.4.3 NGOs and direct professional cooperation

Direct professional cooperation between Maltese cultural operators and international counterparts has expanded across the performing arts, music, visual arts and audiovisual sectors. Cooperation typically takes the form of co-productions, touring, exhibition loans, curated exchanges, residencies and presence at international professional platforms.

In the performing arts, Teatru Malta launched its Autumn/Winter 2023–24 programme from Opole, Poland, marking its first international theatrical co-production (*The Best European Show*). Independent companies access international circulation through ACM's *International Cultural Exchanges Scheme* and *International Participation Scheme* (see 7.2.3), supporting touring, festival participation and presentation at trade fairs. The Malta Philharmonic Orchestra has built international visibility through European tours — including 2022 performances at the Berliner Philharmonie and Vienna's Musikverein — and was invited to the Festival dei Due Mondi in Spoleto in 2025 with the opera *Hadrian*. The Orchestra also operates a regular international guest-artist programme.

In the visual arts, MICAS opened its inaugural programme in October 2024 with an exhibition by the Portuguese artist Joana Vasconcelos and has since established partnerships with international institutions for its 2024–26 programme. Heritage Malta and MUŻA participate

in international loan exchanges, including loans to and from major European institutions: a 2025 exhibition at Palais Lascaris in Nice featured artefacts from Malta's national collections of the Order of St John, and MUŻA contributed a Vittore Carpaccio drawing to a 2022–23 joint exhibition at the National Gallery of Art in Washington and the Doge's Palace in Venice. The Malta Pavilion at the Venice Art Biennale is curated through a competitive open call commissioned by Arts Council Malta.

In the audiovisual sector, Malta Film Commission and producers benefit from the film co-production treaty network described in 1.4.1, and Malta is a regular host of international productions under the film cash-rebate scheme. Malta's accession to Eurimages in January 2026 widens access to European co-production support. The Mediterrane Film Festival operates as a state-led international showcase, programmed annually since 2024.

In literature and publishing, the National Book Council supports international cooperation through translation grants, fellowships at international book fairs (Frankfurt, Bologna, Sharjah, Beijing), and the *Premju Nazzjonali tal-Ktieb* which includes a translation category. In creative-entrepreneurship training, the CASE Malta Programme (Creative and Social Entrepreneurship) launched by Arts Council Malta in 2024–25 in partnership with the international NGO *In Place of War* and the University of Manchester delivers certified training and mentorship to Malta-based creative practitioners. Higher-education partnerships, particularly through the University of Malta, and Maltese participation in the Anna Lindh Foundation network sustain professional and academic exchange across the Euro-Mediterranean. These initiatives support many other capacity-oriented programmes run by state agencies in favour of civil society such as the apprenticeship schemes, the investments in cultural organisations and the Creative Innovators and Platforms Fund run by Arts Council Malta.

2. Current cultural affairs

2.1 Key developments

Malta's recent and current cultural policy priorities have been set by the *National Cultural Policy* (2021), which replaced the 2011 policy and reframed culture around the right to culture, wellbeing and sustainable development, drawing on the 2005 UNESCO Convention and the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The policy was prepared through a working-group and public-consultation process and has been pursued with substantive continuity across the 2017, 2022 and 2026 general elections.

The policy framework has been operationalised through several enacted instruments and structural changes. Arts Council Malta's *Strategy 2025 "Care, Create, Flourish"* set six strategic areas anchored in cultural rights; it concluded in 2025, succeeded by Strategy 2030. The current strategy highlights the role of professionalism through development, education and increased capacity, fair practice, community, inclusion and wellbeing, advocacy and public investment, and acknowledging and addressing the possibilities and challenges posed by AI to the cultural and creative sectors.

The six *Regional Cultural Strategies 2022–2027* launched in 2022 mark the first systematic attempt to decentralise cultural planning to regional and local levels.

A national Charter for the Status of the Artist was endorsed by all eleven Public Cultural Organisations at the State of the Arts 2024 Symposium in October 2024 and provides a non-binding reference framework for subsequent policy and legislation. Institutionally, the Valletta Cultural Agency was set up in 2019 as the legacy body of Valletta 2018; the National Agency for the Performing Arts (NAPA) was established in 2023, bringing Teatru Malta, ŻfinMalta and KorMalta under a single administrative framework; and in November 2024 the Malta Film Commission was transferred from the Ministry for Tourism to the culture portfolio. The portfolio was re-named in 2025 from the *Ministry for the National Heritage, the Arts and Local Government* to the *Ministry for Culture, Lands and Local Government*. Following the June 2026 general election, which returned the Labour government under Prime Minister Robert Abela, the ministry was reconfigured as the Ministry for Arts, Culture and the National Heritage (MACH), with local government and lands transferred to separate portfolios. Dr Malcolm Paul Agius Galea was appointed Minister. The National Book Council was transferred from the education portfolio to MACH, and several new entities were established under the ministry, including the Fondazzjoni għall-Malta Biennale, the De Valette Chamber Orchestra and Film Finance Malta Ltd..

Public investment has expanded the institutional base. MICAS – the Malta International Contemporary Arts Space opened in October 2024 as Malta's first national contemporary art

museum; the Valletta Design Cluster became operational in 2021; and the Budget 2026 announced a Marsa Arts and Culture Hub, a Creative Art Spaces pilot, a further edition of the Malta Biennale and Malta's accession to Eurimages. Total state allocations to culture grew from approximately €27.1 million in 2013 to €138.7 million in the 2026 estimate — a cumulative increase of roughly 411% in nominal terms. The *National Cultural Policy* (2021) sets an aspirational target of 2% of total government expenditure for culture.

There have been a few significant reforms that have come about following sustained public debate. In the field of the environment, heritage NGOs and media coverage of the construction boom prompted amendments to the *Cultural Heritage Act* (2002, amended 2019 and 2024). With regard to artistic expression and censorship, pressure from the cultural sector led to the 2023 Bill to strengthen freedom of artistic expression, unanimously approved by Parliament, and to Legal Notice 177 of 2024 transposing the EU anti-SLAPP Directive. With regard to the role of public investment, sector criticism has been sustained regarding the Mediterrane Film Festival, whose 2024 edition was revised to approximately €5 million in public cost and which remains under parliamentary scrutiny following the 2024 National Audit Office report on Malta Film Commission governance.

More recently, the dynamic Maltese ecosystem has led to the ACM Strategy 2030 playing a pivotal role in shaping recent cultural policy in Malta by establishing a coherent framework that links sustainability with the professionalisation of the sector. Its emphasis on fair practices and governance is supporting a shift towards transparency, merit-based systems, and clearer standards for artistic labour, directly informing measures around contracts, payments, and workforce recognition. At the same time, its focus on public investment and the creative economy, including the facing of the challenges and opportunities posed by AI, has reinforced the need for structured funding mechanisms and long-term sectoral growth.

The Strategy's commitment to research and advocacy has strengthened evidence-based policymaking, while its prioritisation of wellbeing and community inclusion situates culture within broader societal value. Crucially, through internationalisation and skills development, it aims to position Maltese culture competitively abroad while nurturing local talent. Together, these focus areas aim to advance a more mature, resilient cultural ecosystem grounded in professionalism and strategic coordination.

2.2 Cultural rights and ethics

Cultural rights have moved from an implicit to an explicit reference point in Maltese cultural policy. While the *Constitution of Malta* does not name cultural rights as a distinct category, NCP 2021 calls for their inclusion in the Constitutional reform under discussion. In the absence of constitutional codification, cultural rights operate through a combination of fundamental-freedom provisions (Articles 41 and 42 on expression and association), sectoral legislation such as the *Cultural Heritage Act* (2002, last amended 2024), and Malta's commitments under international instruments including the UN Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Article 15), the 2005 UNESCO Convention and the 2003 UNESCO Convention on the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ratified in 2017).

Arts Council Malta has built an operational framework around the concept. *Strategy 2025* explicitly identified its mission as "driven by cultural rights" and translated this into the Right to Culture resource pack (2022), an *Arts Support Scheme – Right to Culture* (till 2026) and the 2023 International Cultural Policy Conference on cultural rights co-hosted with the Association of the Compendium of Cultural Policies and Trends. The Culture Pass for schoolchildren and the *President's Award for Creativity* extend rights-based reasoning into access and participation policy.In line with Strategy 2030, the rights-based, common good approach is supporting a shift from the conceptual to the practical. There has been a reinforcement of strategic focus on hardly-reached, under-represented and underserved communities.

Several recent reforms have shifted the balance between freedom of expression on the one hand and public-order / moral claims on the other. The decriminalisation of religious vilification in 2016 and the replacement of the censorship board with a non-censoring Film and Stage Age-Classification Board ended pre-publication restrictions in cinema and theatre. The *Media and Defamation Act* (2018) repealed the *Press Act*, abolished criminal libel and limited precautionary warrants in defamation cases. In 2023 Parliament unanimously approved the bill strengthening artistic expression, amending the *Criminal Code* and the *Electronic Communications Act* to specify that the law shall not hinder artistic, satirical or comic expression and raising the evidentiary threshold for prosecution to a "credible and realistic" threat. These reforms were prompted by cases in which criminal complaints were filed in connection with artistic and satirical expression.

The Constitutional protection of journalism is being addressed separately through the media reform process launched following the public inquiry into the assassination of Daphne Caruana Galizia. Legal Notice 177 of 2024 transposed Directive (EU) 2024/1069 on Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation. The transposition covers cross-border cases while domestic SLAPP cases which constitute the majority in Malta are not

covered by the legal notice, a gap criticised by the Council of Europe Platform to Promote the Protection of Journalism and the Coalition Against SLAPPs in Europe. The Directive's transposition deadline of 7 May 2026 has passed without extension of protections to domestic cases. International monitors, including ARTICLE 19 and the Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom, have welcomed the direction of reform while noting gaps in implementation and consultation. The European Media Freedom Act (Regulation (EU) 2024/900), the EU's principal instrument on media pluralism and editorial independence, became fully applicable in August 2025. Malta published implementing measures through Legal Notice 175 of 2025 (see 2.5.3 for detail).

A second strand of debate concerns the right to cultural heritage in the context of construction-led development. Heritage NGOs including Din l-Art Ħelwa and Flimkien għal Ambjent Aħjar have argued that communities hold a stake in their built environment and have lobbied for stronger planning safeguards. Amendments to the *Cultural Heritage Act* in 2019 and 2024 reinforced the regulatory role of the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage and recognised underwater cultural heritage. The *Public Domain Act* (2016) remains largely unimplemented a decade after enactment, according to NGO reporting.

The main actors shaping ethical and rights-related debates are: the Ministry for Arts, Culture and the National Heritage and its Culture Directorate; Arts Council Malta with regard to the CCIs, including professional standards and fair practice, and the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage for heritage matter; the Malta Entertainment Industry and Arts Association (founded 2020) as the principal sector association; heritage and free-expression civil society organisations and NGOs; and academic and media commentary.

2.3 Role of artists and cultural professionals

The status and conditions of artists have become a central concern of Maltese cultural policy. Three trajectories are distinguishable: artistic freedom, social and economic protection, and professional structures.

Artistic freedom has been consolidated in law. The *Media and Defamation Act* (2018) abolished criminal libel; the decriminalisation of religious vilification in 2016 ended the charge of blasphemy; and the *Cinema and Stage Age-Classification Regulations* replaced the pre-2012 censorship system with producer-led classification supported by a Guidance Board. The 2023 bill strengthening artistic expression, passed unanimously by Parliament, amended the *Criminal Code* and the *Electronic Communications Act* to clarify that the law shall not hinder artistic, satirical or comic expression and to require a "credible and realistic" threat for prosecution. The Council of Europe's 2023 report *Free to Create: Artistic Freedom in Europe* cited Malta's recent reforms among positive examples. Malta's European Court of Human

Rights loss in 2018 over the ban on the play *Stitching* contributed to the policy shift toward classification rather than censorship.

The social and economic dimensions have been addressed through a Charter and a series of fiscal and funding measures. The Charter for the Status of the Artist, drafted by Arts Council Malta in line with the 1980 UNESCO Recommendation on the Status of the Artist and informed by an EU Open Method of Coordination process, was launched for public consultation in June 2024 and endorsed in October 2024 at the State of the Arts 2024 Symposium. It is non-binding but provides a reference framework for legislation, policy and institutional practice across seven principles: artistic freedom; income, self-employment and access to finance; intellectual property; labour rights and collective bargaining; social security and taxation; skills development and fair practices; representation and mobility; and cultural infrastructure. All eleven Public Cultural Organisations under Arts Council Malta endorsed the document.

Fiscal measures have followed. Since base year 2022, a reduced 7.5% income-tax rate applies to artistic activity, below the 15% minimum rate. The 150% tax deduction on corporate donations to voluntary and public cultural organisations, in force since 2016, generated approximately €3.2 million between 2016 and 2021. Budget 2026 confirmed an enlarged screen-sector intervention, with Arts Council Malta administering a €2 million Screen Support Scheme from 2025 onward. ACM's 2026 funding portfolio comprises nineteen competitive schemes — streamlined from earlier years following a funding review aligned with Strategy 2030 — delivered through approximately thirty individual calls across multiple strands and rounds. These include the Apprenticeship Scheme (introduced in 2024 as ACM's first dedicated apprenticeship instrument for the creative sector) and the Culture and Health co-Fund jointly financed with the European Union.

Sectoral self-organisation has strengthened across both contemporary and traditional culture. The Malta Entertainment Industry and Arts Association (MEIA), founded in 2020 during the COVID-19 crisis, has become the principal cross-disciplinary association representing performers, producers, technicians and other creative workers. With the Malta Producers Association, the Malta Community of Illustrators and the Għaqda Każini tal-Banda, MEIA has participated in ACM's first Sectoral Representative Working Group established in 2025 and has advocated jointly for a sector rate card and structured consultation. MEIA's Budget 2026 recommendations ("Stabilise. Invest. Reform.") flagged continuing concerns about pay rates, late payments, transparency in public-sector commissioning, and access to affordable creative space.

In the field of traditional and community culture, the Għaqda Każini tal-Banda (the national federation of band clubs, founded as the Malta Band Clubs Association in 1947 and renamed in 1975) remains an independent representative body that engages directly with government

through formal channels; a 2025 memorandum of understanding with ACM consolidated joint delivery of band-club support schemes, including the National Opportunities Fund for band clubs and the Fund for the purchase of musical instruments for local Musical Societies. Other traditional-culture associations — including feast (*festa*) associations, fireworks factories' federations and language-related civil-society bodies such as Għaqda tal-Malti – Università and the Akkademja tal-Malti — participate in NGO–government fora and benefit from dedicated programmes such as the Artistic Financing for Feast Associations Scheme and the Health and Safety Standards in Fireworks Factories Fund, as well as targeted measures announced in subsequent budgets, including a €280,000 band-club bank-loan interest subsidy launched in November 2025. ACM has been working to extend financial support through banks to the sector in general.

Some priorities are evident across art forms. The 2023 establishment of NAPA consolidated state employment of performing-arts professionals; the 2017 Malta Visual and Performing Arts School and the Mikiel Anton Vassalli College (2018) anchor specialist secondary education; and ACM's International Cultural Exchanges Scheme and International Participation Scheme support outgoing mobility for artists representing Malta abroad, including at the Venice Art Biennale (Malta Pavilion since 2017) and the London Design Biennale. Intangible heritage practitioners have benefited from UNESCO inscriptions for *ftira* (2020), *Għana* (2021) and the Maltese village *festa* (2023).

2.4 Digital policy and developments

Based on the introduction and implementation of the current cultural and heritage legislation at the turn of the millenium, the most recent National Cultural Policy (NCP2021) reaffirms the need to extend the use of, and access to, digital tools in the cultural sector. This perspective was put into place through policies, strategies and campaigns across different sectors, including heritage, audiovisual services and libraries.

National funding programmes for culture, which are in the main those administered by Arts Council Malta (ACM), as well as others available through state ministries and agencies, support private efforts in the field of digitising material. One example is the case of the independent cultural organisation Magna Żmien. The latter's international appeal, particularly towards the Maltese diaspora in the UK, US, Canada and Australia, that reflects migration patterns in the twentieth century, has also drawn on funds and support from the ministry for foreign affairs and particular diplomatic offices.

The national agency Heritage Malta has sustained its investment in digitising the national inventory of Malta's numerous assets, that had received specific attention during the closure

of sites due to restrictions experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic between 2020 and 2021.

Other important players in the digitisation process include the national agency for stimulating and sustaining business ventures, namely Malta Enterprise, the Malta Film Commission, the University of Malta, the Public Broadcasting Service, private broadcasters and audiovisual companies. In the audiovisual field, the reference point in terms of observing a legislative framework remain the regularly reviewed EU Audiovisual Media Services Directive and the Digital Services Act.

In the field of cinema, digitisation has been a priority of Maltese exhibitors for more than a decade. Film distributors favoured exclusive digital distribution as from 2013. At the time, out of 37 screens only 5 were digital and significant investment was required for the digitisation process. Government supported the process through a cinema digitisation scheme investing EUR 500 000 to support the digitisation of 25 screens in Malta and Gozo.

Private entrepreneurs have entered the cultural sector by providing support for and initiating high-tech multi-media projects, many of which are targeted at tourists, thus recouping costs and generating significant income. It is worth highlighting the Hypogeum complex, consisting of a prehistoric underground burial site, and managed by Heritage Malta, that is one of the most important sites enjoying digital technology to protect its micro-climate and measure significant changes.

The Malta Centre for Restoration operates regular conservation schemes that include the use of new technologies to combine cost-effective project management with innovative documentation techniques.

With regard to the EU Artificial Intelligence Act (Regulation (EU) 2024/1689), most provisions apply from 2 August 2026 and Malta has designated the Malta Digital Innovation Agency (MDIA) as national AI regulatory authority (Legal Notice 226/2025) and the Information and Data Protection Commissioner (IDPC) for law-enforcement regarding AI (Legal Notice 227/2025). One result was the revised national AI strategy. ACM has developed its own actions as part of its Strategy 2030, including a multiannual €100K fund dedicated to AI-related policy, research and training.

As reported by Datareportal and the National Statistics Office, as of 2026, there were 511,000 internet users in Malta. Internet penetration stood at 93.5%. Malta was home to 375,000 social media users in 2026, equating to 68.7% of the total population. A total of 778,000 cellular mobile connections were active in Malta in 2026, with this figure equivalent to 142% of the total population.

Recently government initiated the adoption of Open Source Software (OSS) to aim for cost effectiveness and reliability. Malta has transposed the necessary telecommunications rules

and implemented TV digital switchover as part of Europe-wide process to improve the management of wireless frequencies. In 2026 Malta was the first country to launch a partnership with OpenAI to provide all citizens with free access to ChatGPT Plus for one year after completing an AI literacy course. This initiative aimed to empower citizens with the skills to use AI responsibly and effectively in their daily lives. The course, developed by the University of Malta, covers what AI is, its capabilities, and how to use it responsibly.

Ebooks and audiobooks are available at the national public library and all local libraries have been computerised. Users can access reading and listening material and catalogue information. These are connected to international databases, mainly through the Libby app, via the library website using library card numbers to search, book and renew borrowed books online. The National Library is digitising its own material, namely manuscripts that are out of copyright, including the extensive archives of the Order of the Knights of St John, old newspapers and sections of certain books can be accessed online.

As reported by ACM, since the 2010 and 2012 national budgets, the government introduced numerous fiscal benefits to encourage investments in digital technologies. This has been done to stimulate the indigenous growth of local game companies and attract existing professionals to shift from related industries.

In 2025, government launched the Video Gaming Gateway initiative. This offers financial assistance to innovative gaming projects. Basecamp, a dedicated incubator, set out to assist start-ups focused on video game development and esports. Furthermore, specialised visas were introduced for esports athletes, easing their ability to work and compete in Malta.

This is part of a wide range of initiatives designed to drive technological advancement, support local business growth, expand gaming and creative sectors, and encourage sustainable practices. Government announced the establishment of a dedicated unit focused on AI technology development to drive innovation through targeted funding and research in advanced systems. The introduction of a Digital Identity Wallet aims at allowing citizens and businesses to share their digital identities securely and efficiently. This app aims to streamline identity verification processes and strengthen digital interactions across sectors.

Malta positions itself as the Fintech hub. It pioneered a solid legislative framework in the Virtual Financial Assets, Blockchain and Cryptocurrency spaces, and provided a new framework for start-ups and established entities to register and certify their Distributed Ledger Technologies. Malta has garnered substantial experience regulating and overseeing the issuing of the appropriate licences since the enactment of the Virtual Financial Assets (VFA) Act (Chapter 590, Laws of Malta) in 2018.

Malta is encouraging gaming start-ups to test their products and systems in a sandbox environment. The Malta Financial Services Authority (MFSA) is creating its own sandbox and Fintech Hub Incubator. The University of Malta, together with the Malta Information & Technology Agency (MITA) has issued its own innovation hub.

The creative sector hasbenefitted from €15 million in EU funding that aimed at fostering cultural and artistic projects that drive economic activity, including digital elements. The sum of €1million in 2024 and €2 million were allocated to the Screen Support Scheme managed by ACM to support local film producers, also digitally, enhancing Malta's appeal as a destination for film production and contributing to job creation within the creative sector.

Public and private sector developments have attracted international projects to include Malta in their itineraries. These include Creative Europe projects such as in the case of the Art Explora festival.

Malta has implemented several fiscal measures to encourage the use of digital technology in culture, the arts, the audiovisual sector, and heritage. The 2025 Budget included these initiatives:

Tax Incentives: Government extended tax credits under the Get Qualified and Higher Educational Qualifications Schemes, supporting students pursuing advanced degrees, including those in digital arts and technology;

Funding and Grants: ACM continued to promote Maltese creativity internationally, with projects that combine cultural heritage and advanced technologies, such as AI;

Cultural Events and Accessibility: Initiatives like ACM's assessment of the accessibility of cultural sites together with the Commission Responsible for People with a Disability (CRPD) and the restoration of significant cultural sites by Heritage Malta are part of the broader strategy to integrate digital technology and enhance public engagement.

ACM is collaborating with regional and local councils to digitally map cultural infrastructure and accessibility through Participatory Geographic Information Systems (PGIS), following and improving on previous exercises associated with the European Capital of Culture held in Valletta in 2018, and looking forward towards Victoria 2031.

The Digital Decade 2030 targets are integral to Malta's social and economic structure, providing solutions for government, business and society, and a strong base for economic growth. Malta's digital transformation has maintained an upward trend in relation to the aims set out in Article 4 of the Digital Decade Policy Programme (DDPP) 2030 - digital skills, infrastructure including connectivity, digitalisation of businesses and digital public services.

This is demonstrated by Malta' strong positioning in the Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) in previous years and various national strategies placing digital as the driving force for

transformation leading to a better society and a thriving economy. The vision of Malta's national strategy, Malta Diġitali, lays the foundations for Malta's transition towards a more digitalised society and economy, leading to better public services, more productive businesses, and citizens who can harness the opportunities that digitalisation brings.

Initiatives have been implemented in recent years to incentivise individuals to attain at least basic digital skills. While maintaining an above EU-level for 2022 at 61% of the population having basic digital skills in comparison to the EU Average of 54%1, shortages and skills gap remain. Supply of ICT specialists and graduates remains low in comparison to the required demand, despite Malta having a slightly higher than EU average rate of 4.8% (in 2022) of the employed individuals (in comparison to EU average of 4.6%). The lack of digital skill availability is addressed by Malta's National eSkills Strategy 2022-2025: this provides a framework for evaluating existing and introducing new initiatives to promote basic and above basic digital skills and tools.

As part of national efforts at promoting digital literacy, the Digital Education Strategy 2024-2030 aims at:

Nurturing Digital Global Citizens**:** Introducing ICT and digital literacy in primary schools and continuing through secondary education;

Empowering Educators**:** Providing professional development opportunities and integrating technology into teaching practices;

Community Engagement**:** Involving guardians and creating alliances with experts to support digital education;

Enriching Digital Resources**:** Providing tablets and laptops to students and developing digital content.

Additionally, the Directorate for Digital Literacy & Transversal Skills offers various programmes and resources, such as the One Tablet per Child initiative, virtual reality headsets, and digital literacy workshops for students.

Within the field of literacy, the Education Exception provides rights holders with rights payments over the use of their published work in the public education system, thus ensuring compliance with the EU Digital Single Market Directive. It informs the Malta Reprographic Rights Organisation (MRRO) that grants a licence to educational establishments in Malta to reproduce extracts from published material in which copyright subsists. The National Book Council is responsible for the handing over of funds to the MRRO, which in turn distributes them to licensed publishers and authors registered in the scheme. With this agreement, publishers and authors are compensated a total of €100,000 on a yearly basis for a 10 per cent reprographic or digital use of each book published. In 2024, 17 publishing entities benefited from the Education Exception fund, which was disbursed to 789 authors.

2.5 Cultural diversity

2.5.1 National / international intercultural dialogue

Since joining the European Union in 2004, and following a series of financial and social reforms, Malta's resulting growing economic attractiveness has contributed to a significant increase in migration, leading to a more multicultural society. The population grew from 422,509 in 2013 to 550,693 by 2026.

Close to 50 different nationalities are represented in Maltese society, with a wide variety of South American, African and Southeast Asian citizens.

Malta has no legally recognised ethnic, linguistic or religious minorities. However, the rapidly growing migrant communities and mixed-heritage Maltese are minorities in effect. As noted by Damian Spiteri, with foreign nationals making up 22.2% of the population in 2025, policy plays a crucial role in supporting positive integration in the long-term.

As highlighted by Gellel, Arvanitidou and Rossi in an article for the project 'Living Together: Towards Understanding Each Other's Culture', carried out by the University of Malta, "the increase in the population of foreigners residing in Malta has multiple implications, particularly with regard to the social composition of the community and possibly its effect on social cohesion".

The State of the Nation survey*, reporting on aspects reflecting the national situation, also noted that between 2022 and 2026 one witnessed a steady decline in positive responses to the question 'Are you comfortable with the mix of cultures in our society?' The sustained influx of foreign nationals, both from Europe as well as Third Country Nationals, may contribute to a general sense of unease with growing multiculturalism. Young people aged between 26-35 are the most comfortable cohort with the mix of cultures in Maltese society, although there have been no significant shifts in perception.

Earlier, according to the 2020 Eurobarometer report, 62% of respondents stated that the main issue facing Malta was migration, followed by environment, climate and energy issues (37%), and rising prices and inflation (19%). The lMigrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX 2025 and 2020) https://mipex.eu/#:~:text=The Migrant Integration Policy Index %28MIPEX%29 is a,integration of migrants in all the countries analysed.reports that the public in Malta has fewer positive attitudes towards immigrants than on average in other European countries.

After a significant improvement in Malta's integration policies (+5 points) between 2014 and 2019, progress has since stagnated. The country's halfway favourable approach to integration is reflected in its consistent overall score of 48 on the 100-point MIPEX scale. The score is largely consistent across policy areas ranging from slightly unfavorable to halfway favorable.

Since 2023, Malta has been working on a new integration strategy to replace the first one, which was in effect from 2018 to 2023. In early 2025 Malta launched its second National Integration Strategy and Action Plan (2025–2030), following extensive public consultation in 2023 and building on its 2018–2023 predecessor. The strategy targets all migrants, including third-country nationals, beneficiaries of international protection, and future generations, with measures tailored by gender, age, sexuality, ability, employment status, and family situation. Key reforms include mandatory pre-departure orientation, faster access to services through legal amendments, expansion of the I Belong programme, and the introduction of digital integration tools.

Labour migration reforms initiated in 2025 aim to balance economic needs with worker protections, while broader efforts seek to professionalise integration through upgraded service delivery mechanisms. However, despite ambitious policies and wide consultation, restrictive nationality rules remain a significant barrier to long-term inclusion.

The National Cultural Policy 2021 (NCP 2021) emphasises the principle of the right to culture, stating that culture is "a dynamic force that can help negotiate integration and fight exclusion by engendering wellbeing for strong communities and a resilient cohesive society." NCP 2021 acknowledges the influence of the UNESCO Declaration on Cultural Diversity and the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions. NCP 2021 aims to develop more meaningful links between the creative economy and the cultural diversity within Maltese society.

There have been a number of further, recent developments. These include:

- The Malta Crafts Foundation took part in the 'NEXT – Young NEETs shaping EXpectations for the future of Europe' project. Discussions with the active participation of youths from across the partner countries, namely Bulgaria, Cyprus, Germany, Italy, Latvia, Poland, Portugal, and Malta focused on prejudice and stereotypes, pointing out how unaware we often are of the existence of certain biases we may have formed. The project is co-funded by the EU through the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) programme.
- Earlier ,Valletta's designation as the 2018 European Capital of Culture (ECoC) aimed to enhance community engagement in cultural development, drawing inspiration from the Baukultur concept in the 2018 Davos Declaration.

From the field of international cultural cooperation, Malta's participation in, and hosting of, a number of networks and meetings, has contributed to implementing policy aimed at fostering a positive context for cultural diversity. Among these are the Cultural Routes as recognised by the Council of Europe. In 2023 Malta joined the Enlarged Partial Agreement

and in 2025 closed its presidency of the Council of Europe by hosting sixteen routes at its final policy event.

The first Council of Europe cultural route to be established in Malta, the Phoenicians' Route, fosters intercultural dialogue in the Mediterranean through tourism, focusing on intangible heritage. It highlights the educational and social aspects of the Route, in Malta, as from 2017. The Route in Malta has collaborated with the Malta Mediterranean Literature Festival organized by Inizjamed, a cultural association dedicated to literature established in the early 2000s, connecting historical intercultural dialogue with contemporary cultural, artistic, and social needs. The same collaboration led to several Creative Europe, Erasmus and other projects focusing on cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue.

The collaboration has extended to the Local Councils Association, representing all localities in Malta and Gozo, the University of Malta and Heritage Malta, to highlight and initiate best practices and future recommendations for intercultural dialogue, European collaboration, and innovation in cultural and tourism activities in Malta.

The other cultural routes present in Malta are the European Route of Ceramics, the Historic Cafés Route, the Saint James Way, the European Route of Megalithic Cultures and the European Route of Ceramics.

The year 2024 saw important developments regarding cultural and intercultural mediators in Malta. With regard to integration needs, the Human Rights Directorate addresses the integration needs that cultural mediators are addressing. Efforts highlight the importance of cultural mediators in helping migrants navigate challenges such as language barriers, socio-cultural differences, and discrimination. A Diploma in Education for Cultural Mediation has been established to train more individuals in this field.

The year 2025 saw Malta preside over the Council of Europe, addressing important elements in the diversity agenda through conferences, exchanges and joint projects.

Regarding healthcare, the Migrant Health Liaison Office has been training cultural mediators to assist in healthcare settings. These mediators help bridge communication gaps between migrants and healthcare providers, ensuring that cultural and linguistic barriers do not hinder access to medical services. The training program includes sessions, role plays, and assessments to prepare mediators for their roles.

Regarding campaigns, the Maltin Bħalek campaign is an online series by MaltaToday media group that features interviews with black and minority ethnic youths in Malta. The series sheds light on the experiences and challenges faced by these young individuals. The series includes interviews with various individuals from different walks of life, such as footballers, singers, nurses, student activists and call centre employees. It has been a powerful initiative

that highlights the importance of diversity and the need for greater understanding and acceptance in society.

The Cultural Commission of the Church in Malta, led by the Delegate for Culture, focuses on fostering intercultural dialogue and integration through several key initiatives. These include:

- Interdisciplinary Practice: Collaborating across various fields to create a holistic approach to cultural engagement;
- Interfaith Dialogue: Promoting understanding and cooperation between different religious communities;
- International Reach: Building connections with cultural and religious organizations worldwide;
- Intercultural Exchange: Encouraging the sharing of cultural practices and traditions to enhance mutual understanding

When the Papal visit of Francis I to Malta in 2022, the Cultural Commission worked with civil society and media partners to facilitate programmes for intercultural and interfaith dialogue including cultural and artistic components.

These efforts are part of the Church's broader mission to engage with the cultural sector and promote a path to beauty within the local context.

Furthermore, there are several notable examples of interfaith expression and dialogue in Malta. These include:

- Interfaith Children's Dialogue: Organised by the Malta Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society, this initiative creates safe spaces for children and young people from different faiths to come together and discuss how their faith helps them become better people. This programme aims to nurture a culture of dialogue and promote an inclusive society;
- National Interfaith Declaration: In 2019, during World Interfaith Harmony Week, a meeting of all faith leaders in Malta led to the signing of the first national interfaith declaration. This event was organised by Her Excellency Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca, the then President of Malta, to celebrate diversity and harmony between different religions and faith traditions.

* Marmarà, Vincent; Bondì, Lou. 2026, 2025, 2024. L-Istat tan-Nazzjon. Midsea Books

2.5.2 Education

Malta has several national initiatives aimed at promoting diversity and inclusive education. These initiatives include:

- A Policy on Inclusive Education in Schools**:** This policy, revised in 2022, aims to ensure that all learners have access to quality education, intervention, and support. It emphasises a whole-school approach to create conducive learning environments for all stakeholders, promoting equity, inclusion, and a sense of belonging.
- National Education Strategy 2024-2030**:** This strategy focuses on inclusivity, diversity, and personalised learning. It aims to empower students, educators, and institutions to thrive in the 21st century by fostering a culture of continuous improvement and innovation.

Diversity education is primarily administered by educational policymaking bodies, particularly the Ministry for Education and Sports (MEYR). This ministry is responsible for all publicly funded education in Malta. Given Malta's small size, the educational system is largely centralised, with no regional level of government.

However, there is a degree of decentralisation at the local level through the College system, which includes clusters of primary, middle, and senior schools managed by College Principals and the Council of Heads.

This structure allows for the development of projects and programs relevant to their school ethos, with the overall curriculum and funding are handled by central authorities. Diversity education is integrated into the general school curricula in Malta. The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) acknowledges and values Malta's cultural diversity, incorporating it into various subjects and learning outcomes.

This framework ensures that students learn about different cultures, histories, and traditions, promoting an inclusive and respectful environment. Additionally, the Policy on Inclusive Education in Schools emphasises a whole-school approach to creating inclusive learning environments. This policy encourages schools to develop practices that support diversity and equity, ensuring all students feel valued and included.

The main goals of diversity education programmes in Malta are multifaceted and aim to create an inclusive and equitable learning environment. The main objectives are to:

- Promote Tolerance and Respect**:** Encourage students to appreciate and respect differences in culture, religion, ethnicity, and other aspects of diversity;
- Foster Equality and Equity**:** Ensure that all students have equal access to educational opportunities and support, regardless of their background or abilities;
- Enhance Multilingualism**:** Support the learning of multiple languages to help students communicate effectively in a diverse society;
- Inform About World Cultures and Traditions**:** Educate students about various cultures, religions, and traditions to broaden their understanding and appreciation of global diversity;
- Promote Shared National Values and Identity: Strengthen a sense of national identity while recognising and celebrating the diverse backgrounds of all students.

Over the past few years there have been several initiatives by art and music schools in Malta that have aimed to introduce diverse artistic experiences and references into the general curriculum. Here are a few examples:

- Culture Pass**:** For several years this initiative by the Culture Directorate and Arts Council Malta (ACM) have encouraged schools to collaborate with artists on projects that integrate creative processes into the educational experience. It aims to expose students to various artistic disciplines and cultural perspectives, fostering creativity and appreciation for diverse artistic expressions;
- Arts in Schools Scheme: The Scheme forms part of the Council's commitment to engage educators and creative practitioners in dialogue and collaboration. The aim is to encourage students and educators to engage with the creative and cultural sectors and to explore innovative pedagogical approaches for the application of the arts in schools. The scheme is also in line with ACM's objective of advocating for a broader inclusion of creativity and the arts in education strengthening further 21st century education and skills.
- Diversity and Inclusion Projects: ACM supports projects that promote diversity and inclusion in the arts. These projects often involve showcasing the artistic works of local immigrant and national cultural minorities, providing students with a broader understanding of different cultural narratives and artistic traditions;
- Cultural and Creative Courses: Various courses offered by local art and music schools include modules on world cultures, contemporary art, and the contributions of cultural minorities. These courses aim to educate students about the rich tapestry of global artistic heritage and the importance of inclusivity in the arts.

There are several efforts in Malta to develop cultural citizenship through arts and cultural education. These initiatives aim to increase students' knowledge of human and cultural rights, citizens' rights and responsibilities, and understanding of different world religions and cultural influences. These include:

- Right to Culture Initiative**:** Led by Arts Council Malta, this initiative focuses on increasing awareness about inclusivity and supporting the implementation of cultural rights in everyday practice. It aims to ensure that everyone has the right to access, participate in, and enjoy culture, cultural heritage, and cultural expression;
- Intercultural Dialogue Projects**:** Arts Council Malta supports projects that promote cross-cultural understanding and the management of cultural diversity. These projects often include educational components that inform students about different world religions, cultural influences, and the importance of intercultural dialogue;
- Culturally Responsive Education**:** This approach uses the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and frames of reference of ethnically diverse students to make learning more appropriate and effective. It aims to create an inclusive educational environment that respects and values diversity.

These efforts are part of a broader strategy to foster cultural citizenship and ensure that students are well-informed about their rights and responsibilities, as well as the diverse cultural landscape within their society.

Efforts at diversity education aim to take into consideration the rapidly changing school population. In 2022-2023 migrant students totalled 6,125, rising to 8,379 by 2024. As per National Statistics Office (NSO) data for 2023, the largest communities were Italian (719), Syrian (452), Serbian (433), British (389), Libyan (322), Ukranian (305), Bulgarian and Indian (both 280), Chinese (207) and Romanian (188). Other nationalities include Hungarian, Nigerian, Pakistani, Eritrean, Colombian and Egyptian. Between 2022-2023, there was a total of 900 Arabic speaking students, including Tunisians, Palestinians and Sudanese.

Since 2023, as noted by the Media Pluralism Monitor, civil society organisations and the public have made use of opportunities for public engagement in cultural diversity awareness and familiarity. For instance, the NGO SOS Malta offered training in cultural diversity education for voluntary organisations and pupils. The Directorate for Research, Lifelong Learning and Employability under the Ministry of Education offers online media literacy courses.

A targeted course for senior citizens, formerly run by the Foundation for Global Human Dignity and the eSkills Malta Foundation, the latter now integrated into the Malta Digital Innovation Authority (MDIA), features sessions on website credibility and fact-checking. The African Media Association Malta covers media literacy as part of its human rights workshops. However, despite the existence of these ad hoc modules, critical media use remains a minor part in most media literacy education.

2.5.3 Media pluralism and content diversity

The European Media Freedom Act (Regulation (EU) 2024/900) became fully applicable in August 2025. Malta issued Legal Notice 175/2025 as implementing measure and established an Office for Advertising and the Media.

Historically, the Broadcasting Act of 1991 abolished the state monopoly over the media and liberalised the market. Subsequently, the two major political parties and the Catholic Church involved themselves in audiovisual production. The liberalisation also led to economic growth, with a significant increase in advertising revenue, and the provision of job opportunities for journalists and broadcasters at private and community stations. As reported by the Media Pluralism Monitor, the lack of oversight on matters of transparency remains an issue till today.

The media sector in Malta is diverse, encompassing public, commercial, and non-profit entities across traditional and new media. Mainly due to data accessibility and keeping in line with previously published international research, the Media Pluralism Monitor (MPM) for

2024 notes that the plurality of media providers indicator shows a much lower score than in MPM 2023, with 77% as opposed to 94%.

There are no rules on cross-media ownership. The two main political parties own the top radio stations, TV stations, and newspapers, while the Labour Party also has a digital native news website.

There is no single media authority to regulate such matters. The only prohibition is that nationwide radio or television services cannot own, control or be editorially responsible for community radio services, which are peripheral. There are no established concentration caps, except the provision that a single entity can at most control 1 nationwide radio service, 2 generalist TV service stations, 1 nationwide TV service, and 1 radio or TV service predominantly transmitting news and current affairs, as per the Broadcasting Act. The audiovisual market remains dominated by the public broadcaster and partisan TV and radio stations.

Given the limited data availability, the MPM 2024 plurality in digital markets indicator has a score of 86%, which is consistent with MPM2023. Maltese media are compelled to use dominant social media platforms due to their overwhelming popularity, in spite of diminishing, small returns to the media. Based on the limited internationally available data and the Broadcasting Authority's survey, Google and Meta's products are the main gateways to news for many people, and only the homepages of the *Times of Malta* and *Lovin Malta* compete with social media platforms. For instance, Facebook enjoys ad reach equivalent to two thirds of the total population. The figure for Facebook Messenger represented over half of the total population, while LinkedIn and Instagram had ad reach close to half of the population. Furthermore, competition law in Malta lacks media-specific provisions.

A 2023 Euromedia Ownership Monitor overview of the organisation and ownership structure is available through the 2025 country report.

In terms of the current regulatory framework, the media sector is regulated by the Broadcasting Authority (BA), which enforces the Broadcasting Act, the Electronic Communications (Regulation) Act, and the Media and Defamation Act. These laws govern licensing, ownership restrictions, and content regulation.

All party-controlled media employ Maltese as a primary language of communication, thus showing that politicians are aware of the efficacy of Maltese in reaching out to the largest possible number of people, while the electronic media outlet of the Catholic Church employs both English and Maltese. The market share of these outlets is quite considerable, although it varies with the support levels garnered among the general Maltese population by the entities (political parties and Church) using them as a platform.

Most media outlets have a director, a manager and/or board members who have Maltese citizenship, while most companies (including secondary and tertiary owners) are registered in Malta. A large segment of the independent media is privately-owned and provides mainly

content in English. Among these are the largest media outlets, combining print with online platforms. They hold large market shares and have legacy-outlets, such as *Times of Malta* and *The Malta Independen*t. The public broadcaster (TVM) still plays an important role in the Maltese media landscape through its television and radio channels and online platform; however, its political independence has been questioned. The intrinsic design of its governance structure makes it vulnerable to ideological interventions in its editorial policies from the part of the political party in charge. The State Media Monitor Global Dataset 2025 classification of PBS is of it being 'state-controlled', while the EC Rule of Law Report 2025 found 'no progress' on editorial independence.

Publishing via the Internet has led to significant changes to the media landscape in Malta. Journalists and opinion writers need not be associated with traditional print media. This has led to a number of individual bloggers as well as fledgling private news organisations which have achieved a significant following amongst the Maltese English-speaking public.

While acknowledging the importance of the Broadcasting Act, including provisions to prevent excessive concentration of media ownership by setting limits on the number of broadcasting licenses a single entity can hold, and the Media and Defamation Act, aiming to ensure transparency in media ownership and prevent conflicts of interest, there are concerns about the effectiveness of these regulations. The European Commission's 2025 Rule of Law report highlighted ongoing issues with media freedom and concentration in Malta. The report noted that there has been little progress in enhancing the independent governance and editorial independence of the public broadcaster, and there are still significant obstacles to media pluralism.

Another amendment to Malta's Broadcasting Act that was straightforward yet significant was enacted through the Broadcasting (Amendment) Act 2014 – Act No. XXXII. It ensures that the principle that 'freedom to broadcast and to receive broadcasts is guaranteed', as well as the principle that 'freedom of reception is guaranteed', and that 'freedom of retransmission in Malta of audiovisual media services from other Member States for reasons which fall within the fields co-ordinated by the (European Union Audiovisual Media Services) Directive is guaranteed', can be regulated in terms of the Broadcasting Act itself, while not being subjected to any other law. This amendment followed representations by the European Commission to the Government of Malta to ensure full compliance of Malta's legislation with the relevant European Union Directive.

The share of domestic versus imported media programs in Malta varies across different types of media.

Detailed, publicly accessible data on the exact share of domestic versus imported media programs is limited. Reports often highlight the need for more transparency and better data.

The MPM2024 political independence indicator reached the highest risk score ever at 84%, one percentage point higher than in the MPM2023. Furthermore, the independence of public

service media (97%), political independence of media (94%) and editorial autonomy (88%) are areas of particular concern. As attested by national and internationally comparative research, relatively high degrees of political polarisation and influence are rather widely accepted and tolerated. While enjoying market leadership, PBS continues to be embroiled in controversies regarding impartiality and public spending. It has retained its status as a state-controlled public broadcaster.

The score for social inclusiveness has entered the high-risk band according to the MHM2024. On the one hand, the situation is dire in terms of representation of minorities (97%) and gender equality in the media (82%). On the other hand, improvements were registered in media literacy (57%) and protection against disinformation and hate speech (65%). Courses on media literacy have contributed to this betterment. However, one should note that such courses are mainly focused on digital content production skills. Such courses are available in formal, non-formal, and informal education settings. Some target vulnerable groups, notably senior citizens. Two newsrooms run regular fact checking and disinformation monitoring initiatives.

The social inclusiveness score in the digital domain has remained constant between MPM2023 and MPM2024, at 58%. The gap between the digital and the overall score has widened slightly. Issues of gender imbalance, low visibility of minorities, and limited access to people with disabilities extend to the digital domain as well.

Malta has implemented a number of measures and policies to promote the diversity of cultural expression, especially in response to the challenges posed by technological disruption and the influence of streaming platforms. These include the Artistic Freedom Bill, approved in 2023, to enhance the freedom of artistic expression, protecting artists from prosecution and promoting broad cultural expression. It is also worth mentioning the Cultural Rights campaign, administered by Arts Council Malta to promote cultural rights and ensure diverse cultural expressions are supported. Funding, grants and efforts at enhancing the digital presence of Maltese cultural content extends to digital archives and online platforms.

There have also been regulatory measures. These include the Broadcasting Act, that includes provisions to ensure a quotas of local content are broadcast on television and radio. The Electronic Communications Act includes regulations that apply to digital platforms, ensuring they adhere to local content requirements and cultural policy. Additionally, international streaming services operating in Malta are subject to local content regulations.

With regard to freedom of speech, the media landscape contributes significantly to public discourse, information dissemination, and cultural expression. Both traditional media, including newspapers and television broadcasters, and digital platforms such as blogs and social media, are subjected to these regulations, which shape how content is created and shared.

Traditional media in Malta has historically faced challenges that stem from political influences and societal pressures. The struggle for editorial independence is an ongoing issue, as media outlets often find themselves navigating a delicate balance between ensuring compliance with censorship laws and fulfilling their duty to inform the public. Notably, the Maltese media has a responsibility to present diverse perspectives while adhering to legal guidelines that restrict certain types of expression. This regulation can lead to a hesitance in reporting controversial or sensitive topics, consequently impacting the overall landscape of public discourse.

With the rise of digital media, new opportunities and challenges have emerged in the context of censorship and freedom of speech. Online platforms provide a greater space for diverse voices and opinions, yet they also introduce complexities regarding regulatory oversight. Journalists and content creators are often confronted with the dilemma of self-censorship, as the fear of repercussions may hinder robust discussions on significant issues. Digital media's rapid evolution means that censorship laws must adapt to keep pace, influencing how information is conveyed and received in Maltese society.

The landscape of freedom of speech and censorship laws in Malta has been under significant scrutiny in recent years, particularly against the backdrop of global shifts toward either the protection or restriction of individual rights. Noteworthy court cases have emerged that challenge the existing frameworks safeguarding freedom of expression. For instance, a landmark ruling from the Maltese judiciary has underscored the importance of journalistic freedom, demonstrating the critical need to balance freedom of speech with legal accountability.

Legislative changes have also played a role in shaping the discussion around censorship. Government has introduced measures aimed at updating laws that address hate speech and online harassment, reflecting a growing concern about the implications of digital communication on public discourse. However, critics argue that some of these legislative reforms may inadvertently curtail freedoms, suggesting that the terms used to define unacceptable speech could be overly broad. This perspective raises alarms among activists who contend that increased censorship in the guise of regulation can impede genuine dialogue.

Public reactions to these developments have been mixed. On the one hand, calls for stronger protections for journalists and civilians have stressed the necessity for an environment where dissenting voices can be heard without fear of repercussion. On the other hand, segments of society express support for stricter regulations, arguing that they are essential in maintaining social cohesion. This division highlights the ongoing struggle to achieve a balance between safeguarding individual rights and upholding social order.

There exists a tension between state interests and civil liberties, leading to an atmosphere of uncertainty regarding the development of free speech. International trends indicate that many nations are grappling with similar dilemmas, suggesting that Malta's developments in

this area reflect a wider, ongoing debate on the importance of preserving democratic freedoms while addressing societal concerns.

In addition to grassroots activism, potential reforms in legislation could redefine the balance between public safety and individual expression. Engaging in constructive dialogue around these issues, along with gaining insights from international best practices, can help Malta navigate the delicate balance needed to protect both public order and freedom of speech. As the global dialogue on human rights and freedom of expression continues to develop, Malta must remain vigilant in ensuring that its laws promote, rather than hinder, effective communication and healthy debate.

A 2024 report by the Mediterranean Digital Media Observatory (MedDMO) and the University of Malta on the growing disinformation tactic of launching bogus copyright complaints submitted to Google against investigative journalists notes that Malta has long had a problem with its attitude towards journalism. It identifies its roots in the the polarised nature of its politics and poor understanding of the role of the press in society.

Many attempts to censor the media in Malta have been registerd over the past years. The report identifies examples from recent years including a major spoofing attack in August 2021, when counterfeit websites and false articles and emails purporting to be by journalists and other outspoken individuals flooded the information landscape. More recently, in May 2024, journalists were accused of forming part of 'the Establishment' that government claimed had taken over the institutions.

There is a significant number of strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs) filed in Malta, which is reported as the country having the highest number of these per capita in Europe. Government had transposed the EU anti-SLAPP directive stating that Malta was the first EU member state to do so, through a legal notice, bypassing parliament. However, issues with the published legislation emerged, including the fact that it provides no legal protection against domestic SLAPP cases, as noted by the 2025 report written by the partner organisations of the Council of Europe Platform to Promote the Protection of Journalism and Safety of Journalists. The Directive's transposition deadline of 7 May 2026 has passed; Malta's Legal Notice 177/2024 covers only cross-border cases. The Coalition Against SLAPPs in Europe named Malta "SLAPP Country of the Year 2024" and domestic cases remain unprotected.

Maltese sign language is recognised as an official language, and some news segments have sign language interpretation, but this is not universal. The Broadcasting Authority reporting contains no mention of media accessibility for people with disability or Maltese sign language. There is no specific legislation which covers access to the media for disabled people. Nevertheless, Article 9 and Article 21 of the Broadcasting Act refer to accessibility in its widest form and access to information.

Malta has no inclusion policy for TV and multimedia.

The latest Global Media Monitoring Project (2020) noted that minorities of non-Maltese background were visible or mentioned in only 10% of the cases, mostly in the celebrity, media, sport, social and legal contexts. There is a lack of data on the visibility of minorities, and a lack of willingness to collect that data.

The Arts Council Malta (ACM) Screen Support Scheme as elaborated upon in sections 3.5.3 and 7.2.3.

Malta features TV programmes and series dedicated to arts and culture that also have an online presence. A main example is Maltarti, a platform that provides comprehensive coverage of arts and culture in Malta, featuring content on national TV stations. It includes a range of programmes that highlight local artistic events, exhibitions, and cultural activities.

Campus 103.7 is a broadcast and online radio station managed by the University of Malta that produces programmes addressing educational, cultural and scientific content as the mainstay of its schedule. Its online archive is extensive and spans a great deal of its 25-year history.

Higher education and ad hoc training courses do exist to sensitise journalists and media professionals when addressing matters that impinge on cultural diversity. These include courses at the University of Malta and the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST).

2.5.4 Language

Malta's language landscape is characterised by its bilingualism, where the addition of English, to Maltese, as an official language is a remnant of the country's British colonial past. In general terms, Maltese is employed to communicate orally, especially in informal contexts, while English tends to be used more in writing. However, the use of the two languages can differ significantly across different sectors. For instance, English is favoured in tertiary education, while Maltese is much more prevalent in Parliament, the Law Courts, the religious sphere and broadcasting. As has been studied, the choice of language may also act as a differentiating social factor, with English being often associated with individuals pertaining to higher socio-economic sector or with a higher level of education.

Maltese Sign Language was officially recognised by the Parliament of Malta in 2016 through the Maltese Sign Language Recognition Act (CAP. 556).

In 2005, the Ministry for Education set up the National Council for the Maltese Language (*Il-Kunsill Nazzjonali tal-Ilsien Malti*) to address the needs and the development of the Maltese language. The Council is responsible for producing strategic positions on the protection and enhancement of the national language, including the promotion of Maltese literature.

There also exist other state bodies addressing the Maltese language. These include the Centre for the Maltese Language (*Iċ-Ċentru tal-Ilsien Malti*) and the National Book Council (*Il-*

Kunsill tal-Ktieb). The former (the Centre) has undertaken interesting exercises in addressing the role of Artificial Intelligence and language use with the University of Malta. The latter (the Council) focuses on publishing in Maltese as well as reading, and as from 2026 falls under the reconfigured ministry responsible for culture.

Maltese is the primary language by respondents to the State of the Nation 2024 survey (71.3%).* This data confirms earlier responses collected by the Centre for the Maltese Language and the University of Malta (2021). There are 7.6% of people who responded to this survey who said that English is their primary language. A little more than twenty percent of people consider both Maltese and English as their primary languages (20.3%).

According to the National Statistics Office (NSO) 2024 data about main languages spoken, Maltese is spoken by around 350,000 people, English by around 50,000, Italian by around 13,000, German by around 10,000, Arabic by around 8,500, French by around 4,500, while other languages by around another 60,000 people. Figures published in 2023 by NSO for 2022/2023 reflect the highest number of migrants coming from, among others, Italy (1,670), a combination of EU states (3,414), a combination of European countries (1438), Indian (777), Albanian (690), Filipino (545), Serbian (317), Bulgarian (245) and Nepalese (212). Insights are provided into efforts at integration through language learning in research carried out in 2019, 2021 and 2024.

One may get a sense of the rapid and significant changes experienced by school populations by comparing the following figures. In the 2012/2013 school year, the number of migrant pupils in Maltese schools stood at 1,890. In 2021/22, this number increased to 6,819 (NSO 2024). At the same time, the number of Maltese births is steadily decreasing since Malta has the lowest fertility rate in Europe (Eurostat, 2021). Maltese primary schools host the largest percentage of non-Maltese children, standing at 15% of the schools' population in 2020/21 (NSO 2023). This state of affairs is inevitably impacting schools both culturally and linguistically.

The diversity of school populations is a salient point in relation to access to education. Calleja, Ragonesi and Martinelli (2013) address the degrees of integration of Somali children in the Maltese educational system and argue that Malta's policies seem to be among the least favourable in Europe for migrant pupils. Contributing factors include the availability and implementation of policies that target the specific needs of newcomers, including funding and language support.

Azzopardi (2008) advocates for schools to respond to cultural differences by implementing a more inclusive discourse and understanding on multicultural issues; this could lead to deeper educational transformation and the development of cultural sensitivity. The setting

up of the Migrant Learners' Unit in 2014 has helped to overcome some barriers, particularly linguistic barriers, that impact the integration of migrants in Malta.

Malta's National Curriculum Framework (NCF) elaborates extensively on the European, global and intercultural dimensions within the educational system. The Department for Curriculum, Lifelong Learning, and Employability within the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education has initiated the Foreign Language Awareness Programme (FLAP) for primary school students in Years 3 to 6. Designed to cultivate an appreciation for foreign languages and cultures, FLAP aims to foster a positive attitude towards mobility and new experiences among students aged 7 to 11 years. Implemented by a team of teachers specialising in Italian, French, and German, the programme integrates language awareness activities into playful learning experiences.

The Institute for Education (IfE) is dedicated to promoting high-quality education for all educators and cultivating communities of learning excellence. It offers Initial Teacher Training and professional development programmes designs to incorporate, amongst others, principles of equity and social justice throughout all its programmes.

The Directorate for Learning and Assessment Programmes also conducts voluntary training sessions for educators in Global Education. IfE provides free, non-accredited sessions for educators to enhance their knowledge and skills in areas of personal interest. These sessions are also available to those undergoing Initial Teacher Training. Some modules are delivered in collaboration with Kopin, a Maltese NGO dedicated to sustainability. The following are some of the modules offered at the institute related to Global Education:

- The Influence of Narratives in the Multicultural Society
- Developing Intercultural Communication Capabilities
- Global Kids. Skills and Competencies needed to help our Kids to become Global Citizens
- Migration and Sustainable Development – Implication on Schools and Teachers
- Multiculturalism

The Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST) offers several Master in Vocational Education courses with various specialisations tailored to the needs of Vocational Education and Training (VET) professionals. This programme includes targeted compulsory modules designed to deepen understanding and application in critical areas of VET, including Embracing Cultural and Ethnic Diversity in VET (MQF Level 5). This 75-hour module explores how to integrate multicultural strengths into teaching practices. It focuses on developing cultural self-efficacy and effective intercultural communication skills. It also addresses macro-level factors such as government policies on migrant integration and economic challenges, preparing educators to foster inclusive and culturally sensitive learning environments.

Since 2017, Malta has been an active member of GENE, a European network comprising Ministries and Agencies tasked with national responsibilities for policymaking, funding, and support in Global Education (GE). https://education.gov.mt/public-bodies/early-years-languages-and-humanities-programmes-transversal/

The primary aim is to understand educators' perspectives, identify training opportunities, and adopt a holistic approach within schools and institutions to address global themes. In alignment with the NCF, GE encompasses social, economic, and environmental dimensions. The framework supports a cross-curricular integration of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and GE, inspired by the UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Schools are encouraged to systematically embed these themes across all formal curriculum areas and educational cycles.

GENE has directly funded 24 schools for projects linked to GE. Additionally, all schools receive curricular support through professional development sessions and administrative guidance, ensuring that school policies reflect GE values and principles. In-class support is also provided to help educators align formal education with global citizenship education. Furthermore, GENE's financial backing has supported the establishment of two Global Citizenship Education Centres in local schools, which enhance contemporary learning methodologies related to local, European, and global realities.

* * Marmarà, Vincent; Bondì, Lou. 2024. L-Istat tan-Nazzjon. Midsea Books

2.5.5 Gender

The National Cultural Policy (NCP 2021) adopts a proactive approach to identify and reduce barriers to enable greater and more equal participation in cultural life, regardless of gender, cultural background, age and sexual orientation, among others. Its research plan addresses the barriers that limit cultural participation and adopts a gender perspective to uncover inequalities.

In terms of governance, transparent criteria for the selection and appointment of leadership positions in relevant councils, commissions, agencies and public cultural organisations apply. Attention is given to increased sectoral representation and gender equality.

While there is still ample room for further female representation on boards and in top management positions, leadership at cultural institutions featuring key female positions and senior managerial positions provide a rather balanced representation. Examples include Arts Council Malta and its Sectoral Representative Working Group, the Valletta Cultural Agency, the Valletta Design Cluster, the National Agency for the Performing Arts (NAPA) and the Malta International Contemporary Arts Space (MICAS).

Gender issues in Malta are addressed in the programmes of the National Council of Women, established in 1964, and the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE).

There are no specific strategies to support women as professionals in the cultural labour market in the form of quota schemes or mainstreaming programmes.

As per National Statistics Office (NSO) data published in 2023, the number of females employed in 'arts, entertainment and recreation' as their main occupation was of 5,600, with 7,955 being males.

The importance of recognising Malta's increasingly diverse and multicultural workforce and the various aspects of its identities and needs is highlighted by the LGBTQI+ strategy for 2024-2027 particularly in relation to the need for cultural mediators.

Several factors contribute to the lower consideration of creative careers among girls in Malta. The following reflections are based on Perspectives on Cultural Participation in Malta 2017 commissioned by Arts Council Malta (ACM):

- Barriers to Participation: Girls and women face barriers such as time constraints, financial limitations, and traditional gender roles that limit their engagement in cultural activities;
- Lack of Awareness: There may be a lack of awareness about the diverse career opportunities available in the creative industries;
- Educational Gaps: While educational initiatives have been effective, there may still be gaps in integrating arts education comprehensively across all schools;
- Societal Expectations: Traditional societal expectations and gender roles can discourage girls from pursuing careers in the creative industries;
- Girls with a disability: This section of society may be experiencing a serious double bind, also in the arts.
- Educational Initiatives: Strengthening arts education in schools and creating programs that specifically encourage girls to explore creative careers;
- Mentorship Programmes: Establishing mentorship programs where successful women in the creative industries can guide and inspire young girls;
- Flexible Working Arrangements: Promoting flexible working arrangements to help women balance work, family, and creative pursuits;
- Awareness Campaigns: Running campaigns to raise awareness about the opportunities in the creative industries and to challenge traditional gender roles;
- Financial Support: Providing financial incentives, scholarships, and grants to support women pursuing careers in the creative industries;
- Gender Mainstreaming: The Maltese government has committed to gender mainstreaming, assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including policies and programs in all spheres;
- Equality for Men and Women Act (2003): This law combats discrimination and promotes gender equality across various sectors, including culture and the arts;

- Tax Incentives and Subsidies: Policies such as tax incentives for working parents, improved maternity and paternity leave, and subsidized childcare services support women's participation;
- Culture and Wellbeing Platform: This platform hosted by ARC Research & Consultancy promotes collaborations between healthcare practitioners and creative professionals to enhance wellbeing through cultural activities;
- Artworks Campaign: This campaign promotes diverse career pathways in the creative sectors, encouraging more women to pursue careers in the arts;
- Right to Culture Campaign: Aimed at spreading awareness about cultural rights, ensuring everyone, regardless of gender, has access to cultural activities;
- Apprenticeship Scheme: This scheme provides women with opportunities to gain practical experience and develop their skills in the creative industries;
- Diversity and Communities Initiatives: Programs focused on diversity and inclusivity, ensuring women from different backgrounds have access to cultural and creative opportunities;
- Migrant girls and women: support for their participation in cultural activity and free expression of cultural diversity, as in activities managed by Dance Beyond Borders in collaboration with various entities including ACM.

2.5.6 Disability

The National Cultural Policy 2021 (NCP 2021) prioritises increasing cultural access and widening participation, including regarding disability. One of the main areas given attention is open and accessible community spaces. Related to that, the importance of community-based activity is highlighted by the 2030 Strategy issued by Arts Council Malta (ACM).

Furthermore, NCP 2021 also commits to look beyond simple access to culture for people with disabilities as consumers or in terms of therapeutic intervention. Inspired by the Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability) Act (Cap. 413) and the framework of the EU Work Plan for Culture (at the time 2019-2022) establishing an ecosystem supporting cultural and creative professionals and European content, NCP 2021 commits to look at increasing the participation of creatives with disabilities so that they and their work are equally represented and visible across the sectors.

ACM has initiatives aimed at increasing inclusivity and supporting the implementation of cultural rights. The Right to Culture resource pack is designed to raise awareness about inclusivity and support the implementation of cultural rights in day-to-day practice.

ACM has highlighted the need for accessible theatre venues and spaces, ensuring that performers and audiences with disabilities have full access. This includes making stages, dressing rooms, and other facilities accessible.These efforts are part of a broader

commitment to integrate culture into national development and ensure that everyone, regardless of their abilities, can participate in and enjoy cultural activities.

The Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD) collaborates with ACM putting into practice policy for further collaboration, as set out in the NCP 2021). One important collaboration concerns the assessment of accessibility in cultural venues, starting with public cultural ones. The research supporting these actions includes: CRPD. Access for All. Design Guidelines. 2011, 3rd edition and Spazji Teatrali: A Catalogue of Theatres in Malta and Gozo (commissioned by ACM).

There are a small number of impactful cultural organisations that target the direct participation of people with disabilities in the arts. These include Opening Doors and Villabianca.

2.6 Culture and social inclusion

The National Cultural Policy (NCP 2021) prioritises participation, development of cultural rights, cultural socialisation and cultural inclusion, taking into consideration various social groups including senior citizens. Importantly, during a year in which provisions for arts education were reduced in the state primary sector in Malta due to the ongoing pandemic, the policy also 'reaffirms the principle that access to cultural education is a cultural right' and advocates for stronger partnerships between schools, artists and cultural institutions.

Apart from its objective of making access to cultural activities and education in the arts available to all children in schools, research has reflected on the NCP 2021's position striving to increase cultural access by ensuring 'that everyone, whoever they are, irrespective of sex, racial or ethnic origin, age, disability, sexual orientation or religious belief, and from whichever walk of life they set out from, has access to culture and the arts, and the benefits and wellbeing they generate.'

Social inclusion has been highlighted by the Regional Cultural Strategies 2022 – 2027 targeting regional cultural development.

Government has launched a strategy to facilitate the integration of non-Maltese into Maltese society. The Integration Strategy and Action Plan for 2025 to 2030 was launched by the parliamentary secretariat for reforms and equality, following a public consultation in 2023. The new strategy considers demographic changes since the 2017 strategy. Among the 41 measures outlined is the restructuring and reform of the national integration strategy named I Belong. The programme is being expanded to start the integration process before non-Maltese arrive in Malta, and more educational institutions are to participate.

The strategy aims to strengthen the Human Rights Directorate's mandate, raise awareness of the benefits of integration and diversity, and provide reliable, up-to-date information on key aspects of integration. It is being financed by both national and EU funds, costing around €6 million. The strategy should be complementing the 2025 labour migration policy.

African Media Association Malta is active in promoting the engagement of African migrants to Malta across various generations with the local context in terms of different communities on the Island, including traditional, local ones and their cultural expressions, as well as economic and social realities.

Cross Culture International Foundation (CCIF) enhances cross-cultural communication within diverse communities living in Malta through intergenerational, intercultural, interracial and interreligious dialogue. The foundation builds cultural harmony, understanding and wellbeing of citizens through cultural and artistic expressions as a means of promoting solidarity and social cohesion. It spearheads interventions aimed at enhancing cross-cultural communication and exchange programmes. It provides training on cultural issues, improves intercultural interactions and fosters cultural partnerships with other NGOs in the same field.

Refugee Week is a growing global movement whose purpose is to amplify voices and celebrate the contributions, creativity and resilience of refugees through the arts, community and cultural activity. Refugee Week Malta is a grassroots festival produced by Dance Beyond Borders, a duo collective led by Julienne Schembri and Deborah Falzon aimed at creating, facilitating and producing dance opportunities for people to embrace their diverse stories and unite through dance and the arts. The festival has been endorsed by Counterpoints Arts, the coordinators of Refugee Week UK, and is supported by: Arts Council Malta; Association for Justice, Equality and Peace; Medina Asset Management, Risk Cap International Ltd and Team Humanity Norway.

These actions take place in relation to general integration efforts and various initiatives promoting social inclusion. There are also embryonic cultural enterprises in Malta that address social access, inclusion, and solidarity through partnerships in the cultural sector. While social enterprises do not exist due to pending legal implementation, a few ventures do operate in ways that may be identified with this definition.

Outside the cultural and creative sectors, there are several reports and strategies focused on social inclusion in Malta that still impinge on the sector. One key document is the National Strategy for Poverty Reduction and Social Inclusion 2025-2035, which outlines various initiatives and policies aimed at addressing poverty and promoting social inclusion. This strategy includes detailed analyses and recommendations on issues such as affordable housing, education, and support for disadvantaged groups.

Another important document has been the National Strategic Policy for Poverty Reduction and Social Inclusion 2014-2024, which provided a long-term strategic direction for tackling poverty and social exclusion through a participatory and partnership approach.

2.7 Societal impacts of arts

The national cultural policy (NCP 2021) acknowledges the shortcomings of its predecessor and states that it supports horizontal and coordinated policy approaches that connect culture and non-sector areas, including human rights, rights of persons with disability, the elderly and migrant integration. This objective is critical for development in the fields of socially engaged arts and related pedagogical projects. Its sustainable and effective implementation is an area under discussion.

According to NCP 2021, an effective way of achieving policy crossovers is by working with different ministries and establishing 'a national platform for arts and wellbeing' to 'advocate for arts and heritage in community, health and social practices' and address societal challenges like racism.

The process of integrating the arts and creative educational services into communities and different institutional contexts like health care can be facilitated by organisations involved in working with and advocating for the rights of different people affected by discrimination. Several organisations, including those that have contributed to efforts abetting the social impacts of the arts, take an active part and lead the process of societal integration, many times by focusing on specific communities and seeking to support diversity within the same groups. For instance, community theatre space Teatru Salesjan teamed up with UNHCR and JRS Malta for a series of workshops aimed at helping female asylum-seekers from West Africa ease into Maltese society.

Through the Department of Arts, Open Communities and Adult Education at the University of Malta, Acting on the Margins: Arts as Social Sculpture (AMASS) was a seminal arts-based action research project that aimed to create concrete opportunities for people to come together and accompany artists as agents in creative projects and interpretations. This multidisciplinary project considered a wide field of disciplines and through participatory approaches it used practical methods from the field of service design to explore the role of the arts in mitigating societal challenges, aiming at capturing, assessing and harnessing the societal impact of the arts and further generate social impact through policy recommendations.

It identified existing and innovative productions, experiments and case studies from the perspective and the physical positioning of European countries 'on the margins' in the underserved northern, southern, western and eastern regions. It set up 35 experiments in

these peripheries to investigate the educational effects of the STEAM model on integrating the arts with science through participatory and multidisciplinary approaches. The challenges addressed by AMASS included the future of work in creative, cultural and other sectors, radical ideologies and extremism, societal polarisation and stratification, lack of civil society participation, populism and migration.

The project was implemented between 2020 and 2023 by 6 universities from Malta, Czechia, Hungary, England, Sweden and Finland and 2 civil society organizations from Portugal and Italy. It received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme.

Intersectional challenges facing many individuals, particularly those with a migrant background, affect their daily lives, protection status and the possibility of meeting targets they set themselves. Research following an Age, Gender and Diversity (AGD) approach conducted in Malta (UNHCR and Integra Foundation, 2014) has sought to understand the multifaceted characteristics of different individuals, rather than recognise them collectively as beneficiaries.

This research recognised the fact that the refugee population is heterogeneous, and includes persons with disabilities, women, children and individuals with different sexual orientations and/or gender identities. Employing a bottom-up approach, the research found that traditional group identifications can be misleading and showed how one's refugee status (and associated risks) is further complicated by other factors like age, gender, disability and LGBTQI+ status. The research concluded that individual circumstances among refugees are varied and that, consequently, service providers 'need to exercise caution when targeting interventions based on assumptions about categorisation of people of concern.' A similar caution clearly needs to be exercised in the cultural sector.

The arts have a significant impact on Maltese and Gozitan society, enriching cultural identity, fostering community engagement, and promoting social inclusion. Here are some general, key aspects of this impact:

- Cultural Identity and Heritage: The arts play a crucial role in preserving and promoting Malta's rich cultural heritage. Traditional crafts, music, and festivals are celebrated and passed down through generations, helping to maintain a strong sense of identity.
- Social Inclusion: Various cultural initiatives aim to promote inclusivity and community engagement. Projects often focus on social access, inclusion, and solidarity, ensuring that diverse groups can participate in and benefit from cultural activities.
- Community Cohesion: Cultural events and activities bring people together, fostering a sense of community and shared experience. Festivals, public art projects, and community workshops create spaces for social interaction and collective celebration.

2.8 Cultural sustainability

Adopting a general perspective of cultural sustainability matters, one may note that various needs have been identified in terms of cultural policy issues. Singling them out, one may identify issues of inclusion, accessibility, the need of a horizontal approach to policymaking with community arts practice at its core, greater attention paid to local, regional and national dimensions, sustained funding, and greater relevance to non-arts policy areas.

Broader needs have been identified in terms of better international connectivity, a more nuanced instrumentalisation of the arts, the adoption of short-term, medium-term and long-term perspectives, improved financing of culture, a stronger relationship between programmes for collaboration and funding supported by cultural institutions, and more effective internal and external communication. Training and practice in policy skills, strategising skills and a better use of technology aimed at addressing the digital divide are also important needs in the sector.

In terms of the environmental impact of culture, Malta is in an early phase of devising policy and applying it through funding schemes, programming and other initiatives. Arts Council Malta (ACM) has identified and supports such action, for instance through the Regional Cultural Strategies, though a great deal remains to be done. Cultural organisations and individuals have started to include environmental sustainability into their operations, particularly in the light of funding at a European level, made available by the European Commission and continental platforms and support schemes, that require measures such as the calculation and reduction of operational carbon footprint to be taken to be rewarded financially.

Below are some of the salient practices in cultural sustainability in Malta and Gozo:

- Regional Cultural Strategies: The Regional Cultural Strategies for Malta and Gozo emphasise the importance of cultural sustainability by promoting local cultural activities, preserving heritage, and fostering community engagement. These strategies aim to decentralise cultural activities, making them more accessible and inclusive.
- UNESCO-recognised Intangible Heritage, Village Feasts and the traditional ‘ftira’: Traditional village feasts, or 'festi', are central to the cultural life in Malta and Gozo. These events not only celebrate religious and cultural heritage but also contribute significantly to the local economy by attracting tourists and supporting local businesses. Efforts have been made to balance the economic benefits with the need to protect cultural and natural resources. The UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage was ratified by Malta in 2017 after being approved by the Maltese Parliament with Motion 450.

- Sustainable Tourism: There is a growing focus on sustainable tourism practices that protect cultural heritage while promoting economic development. This includes initiatives to manage tourist flows and ensure that cultural sites are preserved for future generations.
- Community Involvement: When successful, cultural sustainability in Malta and Gozo is driven by strong community involvement. Local councils, NGOs, and cultural practitioners collaborate to implement cultural strategies and projects that reflect the unique identities of their regions.

2.9 Other main cultural policy issues

There are a number of policy issues and debates worth addressing. They include the following:

- The gap identified in a collection of innovative qualitative and quantitative research exercises may lead to the identification and evaluation of cultural projects and processes that could support further and more effective measures abetting inclusivity. Subsequently, a concise best practice guide to research and evaluation at national, regional and local level may be assembled. This may include a clear statement of principles to underpin practice and case studies.
- Reliable and replicable methodologies for monitoring and evaluation may be developed and piloted through collaborative means while more practical toolkits for cultural operators may be assembled to illustrate positive approaches and methods, identifying their strengths and weaknesses in relation to different types of socially engaging practices.
- The dissemination of good practice in research and evaluation may be introduced across programmes that address socially inclusion community arts practice and mainstreamed into project design processes. It may be important to challenge exclusionary and discriminatory attitudes and to make the values of inclusiveness and solidarity a priority in cultural policy on the basis of solid research. The cultural, social and educational sectors can contribute significantly to this task, as have Maltese partners with their European counterparts.
- Inclusive policy making needs to go beyond drawing attention to unitary categories like race discrimination, class or gender. Rather, it acknowledges the wide range of power dynamics that make for a more intersectional analysis of social, political and even historical contexts. This inclusivity will only be possible if strategies adopted by cultural institutions promote a transversal and intersectional approach. Sectors that may have not received sufficient attention till now, including the elderly, and the

benefits of social prescribing of the arts, may be addressed through this holistic approach. Indeed, social prescribing and civic engagement are now being practised.

- There is a need to support cultural inclusion actions that are transdisciplinary, transgenerational, transcultural and transnational. Cultural actors in Malta need to acknowledge that a significant degree of cultural activity that has had social impact has not always been supported through funding sources that are dedicated specifically to arts and culture. Therefore, a review of the impact of the cultural contribution to sustainability across different sectors may inform improved programme and project funding design in the future. This perspective is key to the cyclical funding reviews Arts Council Malta engages in regularly.
- Cross-sectoral collaboration is a major challenge when trying to adopt a reciprocal approach wherein each sector actively participates in the various steps of the working process. Addressing this challenge calls for training, capacity building and professional development. It needs to involve different NGOs in the field of culture and social work, including ethnic minority groups, religious minority groups, migrants, people with reduced mobility and children, amongst other groups.
- Providing access to a broad cultural education may contribute to raising awareness and learning about differences and commonalities between cultures. It is especially important to reach persons whose circumstances make them a target for those who adopt exclusionary attitudes through various interconnecting discriminatory modes. The recognition that persons belong to various social groups may assist policy makers to avoid generalisations about power relations when developing strategies. It is not a matter of creating new hierarchies in which dominant and oppressed identities are merely reversed. Only by promoting more nuanced understandings of identities can policy begin to reflect a truly participatory attitude towards cultural access.

3. Cultural and creative sectors

3.1 Heritage

Heritage features prominently in most of the strategic objectives of the National Cultural Policy 2021 (NCP 2021), namely governance, access, professional develop in relation to the cultural and creative sectors (CCS), and efforts towards the protection and promotion of cultural heritage, within a framework of sustainability. Malta's heritage has long been central to Malta's social and political agenda, partly in view of its impact on the tourism sector.

The Superintendence of Cultural Heritage (SCH) is the regulator of cultural heritage as outlined in the Cultural Heritage Act of 2002. The Cultural Heritage Act was last amended in 2024, reinforcing the Superintendence's regulatory role and extending recognition to underwater heritage Its mission is to fulfil the duties of the State in its function as the statutory regulator of cultural heritage, by ensuring the protection and accessibility of Malta's cultural heritage. Its duties include carrying out monitoring of ongoing restoration works; authorising and carrying out surveillance over archaeological investigations and monitoring on land and at sea; compiling a National Inventory of cultural objects, both immovable and movable as well as intangible heritage; carrying out surveillance of import/export and movement of cultural heritage; advising and coordinating with the national planning authority for urban and rural development when reviewing planning applications related to development which may affect cultural heritage.

It also advises government, the minister, government entities, NGOs and the public on all matters affecting cultural heritage, including restoration and conservation and underwater cultural heritage; promotes and conducts research in cultural heritage fields, including the National Research Agenda.

There are plans for the effectiveness and operational capacity of the of existing national frameworks for UNESCO matters to be carefully examined and reformed. The National UNESCO Commission and the UNESCO World Heritage Applications Steering Committee are to be reviewed and placed on a sounder operational footing to be effective and as inclusive as possible.

The Committee of Guarantee has been set up through the Cultural Heritage Act to ensure and facilitate the collaboration between the different agencies that have direct or indirect responsibility for the protection and management of the cultural heritage sector. It is also responsible for advising the government on the National Strategy for Cultural Heritage. NCP 2021 calls on the Committee of Guarantee to review areas of weakness in the current planning framework that have resulted in the loss of cultural heritage, and to make practical recommendations to address these systemic weaknesses.

NCP 2021 calls for planning laws and other forms of legislation that are known to impact heritage protection to be reviewed and if necessary amended. A Review Commission

composed of cultural heritage and legal experts should be established to undertake a holistic review of existing laws.

NCP 2021 also calls for serious consideration of the establishment of specialised magistrates and judges who are purposely trained to handle cases involving cultural heritage. Certain existing tribunal procedures are known to fail in the protection of cultural heritage assets and have fallen short of implementing the precautionary principle. A specialised judiciary has become critical in addressing Malta's cultural heritage now facing unrelenting and unprecedented pressures.

Heritage Malta is the national government agency, set up in 2002 under the provisions of the Cultural Heritage Act, entrusted with the management of national museums and heritage sites and their related collections in Malta and Gozo, including three UNESCO World Heritage Sites, one of which is a serial inscription consisting of six sites.

Malta ratified the *European Landscape Convention* on 26 May 2025 (in force 1 September 2025), after a 25-year interval since signature, bringing landscape protection and public participation principles into the international framework that informs heritage and place-based policy. Over the coming years Heritage Malta aims to keep investing in research about individual sites, how they relate to their context as well as other contemporary sites in Malta and the Mediterranean; adopt a visitor-centred museology approach in all museums and cultural heritage sites; convert the traditional museum into a community space and cultural resource; promote the alternative use of heritage venues for exhibitions, events and other cultural activities in order to broaden visitor participation and strengthen the links between cultural heritage and the arts; establish the Collections Management System for the national collection of intangible and tangible artefacts; improve the physical and intellectual accessibility of collections, sites and museums; exhibit and support the digitisation resources to promote the collection of intangible cultural heritage in line with national requirements and international obligations; increase the intellectual accessibility to cultural material and encourage creative ideas on experiencing cultural heritage; increase the use of digital and online media for the enjoyment, use, promotion and marketing of Malta's cultural heritage heritage to enhance cultural tourism; facilitate access to cultural heritage through alternate methods including mobile educational collections in venues such as schools, hospitals, correctional facilities and other public spaces; create, promote and implement outreach programmes to enrich educational curricula with the aim to make museums an extension of the classroom; craft museums' learning role around individual visitor needs.

The Superintendence of Cultural Heritage (SCH) has been publishing the major discoveries made during since its establishment in 2003. Publications present an overview of the most significant archaeological discoveries made in the Maltese Islands and span all the archaeological and historical periods from Prehistory to the British Period.

National projects which are located along the coast or underwater in Maltese territorial waters require guidance from the Superintendence to ensure cultural heritage is not

negatively impacted. With increasing tourism, the search for alternative energy resources, and the need for the refurbishment of coastal areas for safety reasons, coastal site management becomes critical and the threat to underwater cultural heritage must be mitigated. Climate change, increased sea water levels and temperature rises also affect the coastal and underwater cultural heritage. The SCH has been engaging the public on adaptive strategies and presenting at conferences to highlight sites which are at considerable risk.

The Underwater Heritage Team at the SCH visits underwater areas of archaeological sensitivity and coastal areas to assess any potential concerns. It collaborates with other entities to address strategies for the future. Location of Works and Terms of Reference (TORs) are issued for all planning permit applications including those for national projects which take place in areas underwater where potential archaeological or historical features, sites, or artefacts may be impacted. These TORs provide developers with the guidance required to ensure potential archaeology in the sediment on the seabed is not impacted; furthermore, conditions and restrictions are officially issued to ensure cultural heritage preservation. Several articles in the Cultural Heritage Act 2002 (as amended, Cap 445), namely Articles 44 to 48, outline legislation that pertain to underwater cultural heritage to conserve historical and archaeological underwater heritage.

To further protect cultural assets and share data, the SCH regularly updates the National Inventory's structure through a re-categorisation of all existing entries finalises and standardises operating procedures. This process facilitates data capture and analysis for both SCH the public. In 2023 the first batch of immovable property was published in the National Inventory after 9 years' work. The entity's work on the National Inventory had the following goals: revise the attributes collected and published on each property in the Inventory; standardise and consolidate terminology, tying in with the Movable Inventory; go through the entire Inventory of 2,552 existing properties; translate the data on every property into the revised format whilst checking the validity and accuracy of the data; continue with the data capture exercises; outline new thematic exercises to be undertaken; study and analyse collected data to compile the results; and propose for inclusion in the National Inventory those assets which are worth protecting.

In 2021 and 2022 the SCH signed agreements with Esri to focus on the development of spatial data for use as a platform on which to make readily available cultural heritage data and streamline workflows and work processes. In 2023 the focus was directed towards the streamlining of work process through a GIS platform. The SCH and associated national entities have gained access to technical support and training programmes.

The Catholic Cultural Heritage Commission (CCHC) was set up by a Decree issued in 2002, in line with article 69 of the Cultural Heritage Act, Chapter 445 of the Laws of Malta. It aims to helps the Episcopal Conference with its advice and its activity in safeguarding and promoting the cultural patrimony of the Catholic Church in Malta. The Commission fulfils the functions and exercises the competencies established by the Laws of Malta. The CCHC works in

collaboration with other State entities in the sector, primarily the Superintendence for Cultural Heritage.

Considering a longer perspective, most heritage issues addressed in the late 1990s were already related to the difficulties encountered in the conservation and protection of Malta's vast number of sites and other historically valuable buildings, particularly from acts of vandalism. The introduction of low-cost airlines in 2006 heightened the debate about mass tourists and whether Malta should diversify its tourism market to cater for niche and cultural tourists.

The protection of Malta's heritage grew in importance leading to the Heritage Act of 2001 that split the state-run Museums Department into two structures dealing with regulation on the one hand and operations on the other. As noted, the SCH assumes responsibility for regulation while Heritage Malta operates state-owned cultural sites.

Heritage Malta has concentrated on structural projects co-financed by the EU. Foremost among these was the ERDF archaeological conservation project at the Mnajdra and Ħaġar Qim Archaeological Complex, Ġgantija, St Paul's Catacombs and Tarxien, the Għjan Tuffieħa Roman Baths, Ta' Bistra Catacombs, Fort St Angelo, and the relocation of the National Museum of Fine Arts.

Private cultural heritage foundations such as Fondazzjoni Patrimonju Malti and Fondazzjoni Wirt Artna assist in the restoration of heritage sites and curate exhibitions of historical and artistic importance following the governmental policy to transfer neglected properties to such organisations through the Guardianship Deed mechanism.

NCP 2021 proposes the heritage sector ensure the adoption of the latest techniques and the most updated knowledge in heritage conservation. It calls for the provision of a fresh outlook on the past to appeal to all sections of the population, especially children and young people, as well as to international visitors to the Islands.

Therefore, interpretation should be historically sensitive as well as innovative in its presentation and appreciation of heritage. Training in heritage conservation and management remain crucial to balance the conservation needs of sensitive artefacts and sites with the pressures of a demanding national and international audience.

ACM supports investments in the traditional 'festa', now recognised by UNESCO as intangible cultural heritage, through a special fund. The Artistic Heritage Scheme contributes to the national cultural landscape by supporting band clubs, fireworks factories, and feast associations invest in the necessary support structures. Initiatives supported safeguard and promote the diversity of artistic and cultural expression in Malta, to lead to regeneration, creativity, and innovation founded on artistic heritage.

The tax incentives currently available under the National Heritage Donations Rules are intended to promote donations ultimately intended for research, conservation or restoration, education or the exhibition of cultural heritage. Tax deductions are applicable

for qualifying donations made to the SCH, Heritage Malta, Fondazzjoni Patrimonju Malti or other qualifying non-governmental cultural heritage organisations. Additional incentives are being proposed to further promote the donation of funds by businesses and private individuals to ensure the protection and accessibility of Malta's cultural heritage.

Discussions are underway to introduce specific legislation within the Cultural Heritage Act with which to observe the Outstanding Universal Value of Valletta, declared UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1980.

Valletta Management Plan

The Valletta Management Plan (VMP) is a strategic framework developed to preserve and enhance Valletta's status as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Launched in December 2023, the plan aims to safeguard the city's historical and cultural heritage while promoting its sustainable development. The plan is structured into seven chapters, focusing on:

1. Valletta's Value as a World Heritage Site, analysing the city's unique cultural and historical significance.
2. Property and Buffer Zone, defining the areas to be protected and managed.
3. Objectives of the Management Plan, outlining goals aligned with UNESCO's "five Cs" of World Heritage Convention: credibility, conservation, capacity building, communication, and communities.
4. Current Issues, identifying challenges such as gentrification, conflicts between residential and commercial interests, and the need for sustainable tourism management.
5. Conservation Measures, proposing strategies to maintain and restore the city's architectural and cultural assets.
6. Action Measures, detailing initiatives for medium- and long-term implementation.
7. Monitoring and Evaluation, establishing mechanisms to assess the plan's effectiveness.

A key concern addressed in the plan is the threat of gentrification. The plan emphasises the importance of maintaining a balance between preserving cultural heritage and fostering a dynamic urban environment.

To facilitate the plan's implementation, a working committee was established in July 2024. This committee includes representatives from the Valletta Local Council, the Valletta Cultural Agency, the Ministry for Arts, Culture and the National Heritage, the Ministry for Tourism, the Police Force, the Malta Tourism Authority, and the Cleaning and Maintenance Division. The committee's objectives are to enhance maintenance, order, security, and accessibility within Valletta.

The VMP represents a comprehensive effort to ensure that Valletta's rich cultural heritage is preserved for future generations while adapting to contemporary needs and challenges.

Intangible Cultural Heritage

Malta protects and promotes its intangible cultural heritage (ICH) through a combination of legislation, national initiatives, and international commitments. Malta has adopted a legal and institutional framework whereby Malta ratified the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2017, committing to preserving traditions, oral expressions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, and traditional craftsmanship. The SCH is the government body overseeing cultural heritage protection, including intangible aspects. The National Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage helps document and recognise cultural practices to ensure their safeguarding.

Malta adopts key areas of protection and promotion. These include its traditional festas, namely village feasts dedicated to Catholic patron saints, featuring processions, fireworks, and band marches, safeguarded as a core part of Maltese identity. Another is 'għana', traditional folk singing, a recognised form of Maltese oral tradition. Efforts are made to keep it alive through festivals and documentation. Another consists of crafts and artisanal skills, including traditional crafts like lacemaking ('bizzilla'), filigree, and boat building (for instance regarding the Luzzu fishing boat. Culinary traditions are another area. The Maltese village 'festa', 'għana' and the traditional bread 'ftira' have been inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

Since 2018, the Heritage Passport gives free access to Heritage Malta sites to children and two accompanying adults, and senior citizens, a policy initiative that together with open days encourages access to the sites.

3.2 Archives and libraries

Libraries and archives in Malta are supported through a mix of government funding, EU initiatives, and independent organisations. Regarding national support, the National Library of Malta (Bibliotheca) in Valletta is the central repository of Malta's historical and legal documents. It is managed by Heritage Malta and supported by the government. It holds a vast collection of manuscripts, rare books, and legal deposits.

The Malta Libraries are a government entity overseeing public libraries and archives. They manage the National Library and the Public Library Network, including regional and local libraries. They provide digital services, including e-books and online catalogues.

During 2022, the Digitisation Studio continued to scan newspapers and books from the National Library collection. In 2023, 26,921 new images were captured as per readers' demands. The digital images of the requested material were sent via WeTransfer. Apart from

the work carried out for researchers, the Studio scanned 277 volumes from the library's collections, totalling 89,242 images.

In 2023, another library was inaugurated at Casa San Paolo Elderly Home in Buġibba which forms part of the Care Malta elderly homes complement. The aim is for the elderly to find it easier to borrow books from the comfort of their residence rather than venture outside. New book purchases were catalogued and added to the collection so that the elderly residents and staff could make use of this library.

The National Archives of Malta preserve historical and administrative records of the country, offer research services, digital archives, and public access to official records, and are supported by government funding and international collaborations.

Public and Academic Libraries consist of the University of Malta Library which consists of the main academic library in the country, supporting students and researchers, provides access to digital resources and international research networks and receives funding from the university and government.

The Public Library Network includes regional and local libraries across Malta and Gozo, offers lending services, community events, and literacy programmes, funded by local councils and the government. EU and international support consist of cultural & heritage grants whereby Malta benefits from EU funding for digitisation projects, conservation, and educational programs, while libraries and archives participate in EU-wide initiatives for heritage preservation. Malta is involved in international library and archive preservation programmes that include UNESCO. The Notarial Archives Foundation is a non-governmental organisation working to restore and preserve historical notarial documents which relies on donations and EU grants. Some private institutions and religious organisations maintain important historical collections: these may collaborate with national institutions for research and preservation.

The Registry and Archives at the SCH houses data collected from the early 1900s to the present day covering the workings of the then Museums Department. They include correspondence regarding planning application files, as well as research, drawings, plans, and photographs documenting archaeological and historical sites. They are used for investigative research by staff and open to those who obtain permission to access files for the purpose of higher studies. Thousands of photographs, slides and videos of all excavations are being reviewed, categorised, and digitised to ensure they are preserved for future access by internal staff and public researchers. While upgrading the Registry and Archives, additional archaeological and historical site locations were plotted, and relevant details were added on the SCH GIS portal to enhance the level of information made available to staff and the public.

3.3 Performing arts

The performing arts in Malta operate through a mixed economy of state, arms-length and independent producers. The state's principal vehicle is the National Agency for the Performing Arts (NAPA), established in 2023 within Arts Council Malta to consolidate three Public Cultural Organisations under a single administrative framework: Teatru Malta (founded 2017 as the national theatre company), ŻfinMalta (founded 2014 as the national dance company) and KorMalta (the national choir). The consolidation aimed to reduce duplication in support functions and standardise terms of engagement for artists. Spazju Kreattiv at St James Cavalier remains Malta's national centre for creativity and the principal contemporary performance and cinema venue. Teatru Manoel (1732), among Europe's oldest working theatres, presents opera, theatre, dance and the Valletta International Baroque Festival (founded 2012). Pjazza Teatru Rjal, the open-air theatre designed by Renzo Piano on the site of the bombed Royal Opera House, opened in 2013. Following the June 2026 general election, the De Valette Chamber Orchestra was established under MACH as a new performing arts entity alongside the Agency for the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra.

Festivals are a major delivery mechanism. Festivals Malta, the dedicated agency launched in 2017, operates an annual calendar of more than 160 events across 11 festivals and 5 national celebrations, including the Malta International Arts Festival, Notte Bianca, the Three Palaces Festival, the Valletta Early Opera Festival and the ŻiguŻajg International Arts Festival for Children and Young People.

Independent producers and various NGOs receive project-based support through Arts Council Malta's funding schemes, including the *Arts Support Scheme*, *Theatre Spaces Support Scheme* (introduced in 2024 to address chronic venue and rehearsal-space shortages), *Apprenticeship Scheme*, *Training and Development Support Scheme* and *Programme Support Scheme*. ACM's 2017 *Spazji Teatrali* mapping exercise documented Malta's performance spaces and underpinned the subsequent venue-support measures.

Recent policy debate has centred on three issues: precarity in freelance performance careers, addressed through the 2024 Charter for the Status of the Artist and ongoing MEIA advocacy on rate cards and late payments; the absence of a dedicated mid-scale lyric venue, which the Marsa Arts and Culture Hub announced in Budget 2026 is intended to address; and the regional distribution of performance opportunities, partially addressed through the Regional Cultural Strategies 2022–2027. Bureaucratic obstacles to grassroots performance have eased: the bank guarantee required for outdoor music events in unlicensed venues under 750 square metres was reduced from €11,000 to €5,000 in 2018, and the *Cinema and Stage Age-Classification Regulations* place classification responsibility with producers rather than a censoring board.

International cooperation is structured through ACM's International Cultural Exchanges Scheme, the Mobility Guarantee Scheme and Teatru Manoel's bilateral programmes; in June 2025 the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra was invited to the Festival dei Due Mondi in Spoleto with the opera *Hadrian*.

3.4 Visual arts and crafts

Visual arts infrastructure in Malta has expanded substantially in the recent years. The Malta International Contemporary Art Space (MICAS) opened in October 2024 within the restored 17th-century Ospizio complex on the Floriana fortifications, becoming Malta's first dedicated contemporary-art museum. MUŻA – the Malta National Community Art Museum, opened in 2018 at the Auberge d'Italie as a Valletta 2018 legacy project, holds the national collection and has shifted the curatorial frame from chronological art history to a community-museum model.

The Malta Biennale, a Heritage Malta initiative delivered through MUŻA in partnership with Arts Council Malta, was launched in 2024 with patronage from the President of the Republic and UNESCO. Its first edition (March–May 2024) presented over 100 artists from 35 nations across 21 historic sites in Valletta, the Three Cities and Gozo's Cittadella, with 14 national and thematic pavilions and themes addressing the Mediterranean, post-colonialism, womanhood and piracy. The second edition (11 March – 29 May 2026) is curated by Rosa Martinez; Budget 2026 confirmed a further edition. The Malta Biennale is now governed by the Fondazzjoni għall-Malta Biennale, established as a separate entity under MACH following the June 2026 general election.

Malta has maintained a national presence at the Venice Art Biennale since 2017. Malta also exhibits at the London Design Biennale. Independent commercial galleries — notably Valletta Contemporary and Christine X Art Gallery — supplement public infrastructure, alongside the historic Malta Society of Arts which has hosted artist residencies in partnership with Arts Council Malta.

The visual-arts policy framework rests on the *Artists' Resale Rights Regulation* (2006) (Subsidiary Legislation 415.3), which grants authors of original works an inalienable royalty on each resale, and on ACM funding schemes including the *Arts Support Scheme*, the *Movable Artefacts International Participation Scheme* and the *Artistic Heritage Scheme*. Sector debate has focused on the under-development of the contemporary collection and on questions of stewardship raised by demolition of Modernist buildings (discussed further in 3.1 and 4.2.2).

The crafts sector is supported by the Malta Crafts Foundation, established under the *Malta Crafts Act* (Cap. 613), through training, certification and the *Premju Ġieħ l-Artiġjanat Malti* award. Crafts are also covered by ACM's general schemes and by the *Cultural Heritage Act* (2002) provisions on intangible heritage.

3.5 Cultural arts and creative industries

3.5.1 General developments

Malta has a statistical framework for defining and analysing the culture and creative industries (CCIs). The National Statistics Office (NSO) collaborates with Arts Council Malta (ACM) and other entities to map and measure the economic contribution of cultural and creative sectors (CCIs).

Malta aligns its classification of CCIS with international frameworks like the UNESCO Framework for Cultural Statistics (FCS) and the EU's Cultural Statistics guidelines set out by Eurostat. The sectors are generally grouped into: Heritage & Museums, including archaeology, archives, libraries, and cultural heritage sites; Visual Arts, including painting, photography, and sculpture; the Performing Arts, including theatre, music, dance, and live performances; Literature & Publishing, including books, magazines, and digital publishing; Audiovisual and Media, including film, television, radio, and video games; Design & Creative Services, including graphic design, fashion, and architecture; Digital Creativity, including software, gaming, and interactive media; and Crafts & Artisan Products, including handmade goods and traditional crafts.

The NSO regularly conducts surveys on cultural participation, employment, and the economic impact of CCIs. Key reports include the Cultural and Creative Practice Survey, assessing levels of activity in terms of cultural practice; the Cultural Participation Survey, analysing engagement with cultural activities; data that can inform reports about the CCIs and its relation to economic indicators, chiefly focusing on employment and value-added contributions of the CCIs.

Eurostat data is very useful and reliable in providing comparative figures within the EU.

In terms of policies and strategies, the National Cultural Policy (NCP 2021) and the regular strategies published by Arts Council Malta (ACM), inform the funding managed by ACM and other entities in terms of support and incentives through programmes, projects, schemes, organisational support, incentives via financial tools including tax incentives, training and capacity building initiatives, education programmes and campaigns. The Creative Economy Strategy (2012) had set the path towards aiming for economic growth and sustainability through the cultural and creative industries (CCIs), focusing on innovation and entrepreneurship. Malta's Digital Innovation Strategy (2022-2027) supports digital transformation in the CCIs, particularly in gaming, audiovisuals, and digital arts.

Tax incentives and financial support are also made available through the Malta Enterprise schemes that provide financial aid and tax credits for creative startups. The Malta Film

Commission administers tax rebates on international film production of up to 40%, while R&D and innovation grants support digital and tech-based creative industries.

In terms of infrastructure and capacity building, the Valletta Design Cluster, overseen by the Valletta Cultural Agency, the legacy project of Valletta 2018, European Capital of Culture acts as a hub for creative startups, coworking, and networking. Esplora Interactive Science Centre, run by Xjenza Malta, the national agency for science, supports STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics) projects. Spazju Kreattiv is Malta's national centre for creativity, hosting exhibitions, performances, and residencies, and supporting many creative collaborations, including a children's arts programme and festival. There also exist structures that support start-ups and training through incubators and mentorship programmes for creative entrepreneurs including at the University of Malta and Malta Enterprise.

While the Malta Film Commission (MFC) has spearheaded the development of the film services industry, in 2024 the National Audit Office (NAO) identified a series of shortcomings in the transparency and accountability of its governance and financial structures. Its audit led to an evaluation and assessment of the structure to improve its positive impact on both the industry as well as local film production.

The MFC was established by the Malta Film Commission Act in 2005 to strengthen the film industry in Malta. The Act establishes the board, which is appointed by the minister responsible for the film industry and is composed of five members, including a chairperson. The minister appoints also the film commissioner, as a board member. The MFC board generally assists the commissioner with adoption of measures aimed at ensuring that the approved policies and initiatives are translated into concrete action plans. The board also advises the minister on policy matter, integration of local resources, international collaborations and the development of a comprehensive skills training strategy.

The National Cultural Policy (NCP 2021) notes that new forms of cultural engagement became more pronounced during and following the COVID-19 global pandemic. However, further developments in the digital infrastructure are required to ensure that cultural content emerging from Malta gains digital accessibility. The policy set out to facilitate a collectively sourced and publicly supported online platform for different forms of artistic and cultural live performances, eBook libraries, museum virtual tours and talks, as well as offering opportunities to support artists and projects through donation, subscription and pay per view models. It also considered licensing cultural content from the creators on behalf of the public, both as a support mechanism for creative businesses and as a support for households.

The Malta Communications Authority (MCA) introduced the eCommerce Strategy 2022-2025 in recognition of the surge in e-commerce and technological advancements. This strategy built on previous efforts and provides policy direction to further e-commerce, both in number and in the level of service offered. It sought to leverage the Digital Malta Strategy to

strengthen the digital economy, focusing on creating a regulatory framework that supports an open, fair, and sustainable e-commerce ecosystem. The strategy emphasised awareness and education initiatives to accelerate uptake, build capacity, and encourage excellence.

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Malta's cultural and creative industries (CCIs) encounter several challenges. These include:

- Confronting fragmented governance: The division of the CCIs across multiple ministerial portfolios complicates the formulation of cohesive policies, as areas like film, arts, crafts, and publishing fall under different jurisdictions;
- Bureaucratic Obstacles: Despite progress, the CCIs face fragile systems and bureaucratic hurdles, exacerbated by inconsistent leadership accountability;
- Lack of Corporate Governance: Many Maltese SMEs, often very small and sometimes personally or family-run, operate without formal structures, leading to unstructured decision-making processes. This absence of corporate governance can hinder strategic planning and long-term sustainability;
- The key achievements include a stable economic showing in relation to stable employment and wealth contribution figures, as per figures and research published by the National Statistics Office (NSO) and Eurostat over the past few years.

Other achievements have included growing international recognition. This has taken different forms. Companies like Stargate Studios have gained global recognition in the field of film production. By participating in international festivals like the Venice Biennale for art, the London Design Biennale and the Gwangju Biennale for visual art, the Maltese CCIs have garnered greater international attention.

The recognition of excellence rewards various successful and inspirational initiatives in the CCS. Prize-giving initiatives are organised by a number of public and private entitites involved in the CCS, including the Premju għall-Arti (Arts Award) organised by Arts Council Malta, the Architectural Heritage Awards by Din l-Art Ħelwa cultural heritage NGO recognising excellence in architectural heritage conservation and restoration, the National Book Prize by the National Book Council honouring the best literary works published in Malta, the Premju Francis Ebejer Award for the best original Maltese play and Premju Ġieħ l-Artiġjanat Malti recognising excellence in the crafts by the Malta Crafts Foundation.

Growth in the CCIs relies on collaboration. Collective effort from artists, institutions, public entities, and private stakeholders is growing and being further coordinated. One such sign of exchange of good practice and joining forces in research, advocacy and campaigning is the support Arts Council Malta (ACM) extends to platforms and networks representing the CCIs. One such structure is the Malta Entertainment Industry and Arts Association (MEIA). It advocates for the CCS, connecting agencies, fostering dialogue, and championing equity. MEIA tackles artists' rights, in ways that are complementary to efforts by ACM in terms, for instance, of the Charter of the Status of the Artist and pertinent measures of a social, economic and cultural nature. MEIA dedicates resources to its organisational capacity

through the hosting of seminars, conferences and other platforms for exchange. Together with the Malta Producers' Association (MPA), it has advocated for a rate card establishing standardised remuneration guidelines for the CCIs.

MEIA, MPA, the Malta Community of Illustrators and other individual members and Public Cultural Organisations (PCOs) were the first members of the Sectoral Representative Working Group established by ACM to obtain advice in a structured, regular way from representatives of the CCS.

ACM has collaborated with In Place of War in running the CASE programme focusing on capacity building, knowledge and skills that enable opportunities for growth and support creative practitioners in their professional practice. The programme is open to Maltese creatives or those living and working in Malta. The CASE programme is an international training and development programme for creative practitioners using social enterprise methods, developed through long-term collaboration with leading grass-roots cultural organisations from around the world. It is certified by the University of Manchester, UK.

Dedicated incubation or business acceleration services catering specifically for the creative subsectors do not yet exist in the Maltese islands. Generalpurpose incubators such as the Kordin Business Incubation Centre (KBIC) and the Centre for Entrepreneurship & Business Incubation at the University of Malta are available but are not tailored to the creative sectors.. The Valletta Design Cluster provides co-working spaces and makers spaces for cultural operators at very affordable rates but is not intended as an incubation centre. Earlier in 2023, INDIS Malta launched the Ta' Qali Incubation centre which, based on publicly available information, is merely providing spaces for workshops. The National Cultural Policy (NCP 2021) does not mention business incubation. However, ACM Strategy 2025 introduced the need for incubators, while Strategy 2030 supports more research into creative hubs and spaces. ACM's Creative Innovators and Platforms Fund (CIP), which replaced the earlier Creative Industries Platform, provides a phased incubation pathway - from seed research grants through capacity building to three-year operational funding - partially addressing this gap.

Currently, creatives wishing to develop their practice and ideas into monetiseable products and services can access support services offered by structures and entities geared towards traditional businesses. Local creatives have expressed frustration at their inability to engage successfully with these entities. This may be related to a lack of know-how in navigating these channels. Indeed, entities and structures' understanding of CCS is often limited and reductive. Much advocacy work is done in this regard by ACM.

Entities like Malta Enterprise, Business Enhance, Trade Malta and INDIS are traditionally geared towards bigger industries such as manufacturing, pharma, IT and tech, and financial services and may feel remote to creatives. This, in part, is also because CCIs are rarely featured as strategic priority areas for these entities. This does not create a welcoming

climate for cultural operators. This includes operators engaged in tech-intensive businesses such as gaming, film or CGI (computer-generated imagery).

There still is a lacuna in creative entrepreneurship that may be hindering the development and growth of the entire sector. While other strategies aimed to alleviate and address this need, such as an Artist in Residence programmes and job shadowing, do exist, Malta still lacks the development of structures where operators can acquire entrepreneurial skills, research and develop new products and services, establishing a business incubation programme for CCIs that allows for a more structured, focused and equitable access to such resources.

There have not been major changes with regard to employment and other economic indicators. While, on the one hand, this scenario may indicate limited improvement, on the other, the resilience shown by the CCIs, in no small part related to the support provided by the state primarily via ACM, amidst and following the COVID-19 pandemic, and the general tough economic climate, particularly following war in the Ukraine and the Middle East, and turbulent US policies towards the EU, attest to strengths inherent to the sector. Malta's economic stability, stemming in non-CCIs industries, particularly construction, financial services, adult gaming and tourism, has extended its positive impact to the CCIs, especially in relation to the fields of cultural and heritage-oriented tourism, education and research, and spillovers related to the fields of film, music, digitisation, gaming and design. For detailed statistics see here.

As per Eurostat figures published in 2026, cultural employment in Malta reached the figure of 16,800 persons in 2025, up from 15,700 persons in 2024 and 9,400 persons in 2016. This represents an increase of 1,100 persons (+7.0%) over the past year and 7,400 persons (+78.7%) since 2016, pointing to sustained long-term growth in the cultural and creative sectors. In broad terms, cultural employment accounts for approximately 5% (5.1%) of Malta's total employment, based on the Labour Force Survey employment levels of around 337,000 persons. While this estimate should be treated as indicative, it demonstrates that cultural activities constitute an important component of Malta's labour market.

The largest component of cultural employment in 2025 was classified as "Other NACE activities", employing 6,800 persons, followed by:

- Printing and reproduction of recorded media: 1,900 persons
- Advertising and market research: 1,600 persons
- Other professional, scientific and technical activities: 1,600 persons
- Creative, arts and entertainment activities: 1,400 persons
- Libraries, archives, museums and other cultural activities: 1,100 persons
- Programming and broadcasting activities: 900 persons
- Motion picture, video, television and music activities: 800 persons.

A notable feature of the data is that a substantial share of cultural employment is recorded outside traditionally recognised cultural industries. This reflects a wider trend whereby creative and cultural occupations are increasingly found across different sectors of the economy, extending the contribution of cultural skills beyond the arts and heritage sectors alone.

The *National Cultural Policy* (2021) draws on principles of the 2005 UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, to which Malta acceded on 18 December 2006 (entry into force 18 March 2007). . It does so in recognition of the fact that the CCIs are very significant for inclusive economic growth, reducing inequalities and achieving the goals set out in the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.

At the time of the publication of NCP 2021, the CCIs accounted for 7.9% of total gross value added (GVA), exceeding the direct contribution of the construction and civil engineering sector and the accommodation and food services sector. It also created 12,000 jobs and played a key role in propelling the sustainable development goals (SDGs) by incorporating people-centred values and sustainability across their economic, social and environmental objectives.

The development of the first creative economy strategy in 2012, led to important policy developments that positioned CCIs as pillars of economic development. With new investments directed towards creative start-ups and new policy competences such as design and video games, CCIs managed to perform positively in terms of a developing sector.

Nevertheless, the gaps in the economic performance of different sub-sectors were widening.

Between 2015 and 2017 the CCIs grew. However, by excluding the creative business services sub-sector, the more traditional CCS registered an annual average decline of 4.1%. A more significant and related decline in relative terms was also recorded in the arts.

These developments were, however, reflective of the performance in the film industry, primarily artistic services rendered to the film industry. The decline in the arts did not persist in 2017 when the sub-sector registered a strong growth of 19.4% in GVA. This represented the strongest growth among the sub-sectors of the CCIs in that year but only led to a partial recovery following the previous year's decline. (Economic Policy Department, 2019).

Employment in the CCIs increased by a significant annual average rate of 6.8% over those two years. Notwithstanding the decline in GVA in the arts, the sub-sector registered the strongest growth in employment of 12.0%. The research by the Economic Policy Department at the time (2019) suggested that despite the overall strong performance over the years, the CCIs were yet to mature. There was scope to further strengthen the indirect contribution of the CCIs, particularly the linkages with the various other industries in Malta.

3.5.2 Books and press

The National Book Council (NBC) provides institutional support to the book industry, including funding, organising events, and promoting books and reading. It publishes resources such as author's manuals to educate authors about copyright, publishing, and the market. As from 2026 it falls within the responsibility of the Ministry for Arts, Culture and National Heritage, following several years being part of that for education. The Publishing Entities survey tracks the number of new book titles published annually, helping to monitor and support the growth of the publishing industry and inform policy and strategy. In 2022, 545 new book titles were published, marking a 5.2% increase from the previous year.

The total number of ISBN numbers assigned in 2024 increased, with a total of 1,127 as compared to 871 in 2023. The amount of ISBNs assigned to books published on online platforms such as Amazon also increased in 2024.

Maltese publishers are actively involved in discovering new voices, nurturing talent, and promoting Maltese literature both locally and internationally. They work closely with authors to ensure high standards in book production and marketing.

One of the most notable tools for promoting the publishing sector is the Malta Book Festival. It is held annually, and features book launches, presentations, meetings with local and international authors, seminars, panel discussions, and events for children and students. Together with the festival, the NBC holds the Literary Contest of Novels for Youth, and other national and regional events, workshops, and contests, together with the National Book Prize to encourage Maltese literature.

Arts Council Malta (ACM) operates the Newspapers Support Scheme to support the quality assurance of content related to arts, culture, and heritage in print newspapers. Print newspapers face a challenging situation with limited financial and human resources, diminishing readership and tough competition from the digital world. Part of the scheme supports linguistic services for print newspapers in the Maltese language. Newspapers published in Maltese benefit from financial support towards linguistic development including orthography and improvement of journalistic expression in terms of style, clarity, syntax, and semantics. Elements like conciseness, political correctness, clear articulation, and analytical thinking are addressed professionally and in line with international standards.

Another part of the scheme supports expenditure for the creation of regular arts, culture, and heritage content designed to disseminate knowledge to readers about cultural aspects via features, articles and pictorial material in view of promoting events and projects to attract new audiences. In this way print-based media in Malta is encouraged to feature recognition towards the importance of arts, culture, and heritage as seminal contributors to citizens' wellbeing in contemporary society.

In 2024 the criteria marking the level of protection of freedom of expression as per the Media Pluralism Monitor identified a low-risk score of 28%, namely 10 percentage points higher than in 2023. This increase reflects a stalled reform process, the gap between proposed safeguards and international good practice standards, as well as continued risk of strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs). Malta's media reform has somewhat stalled, with Malta announced as the SLAPP country of the year 2024 by the Coalition Against SLAPPs in Europe.

Freedom of expression is protected by Article 41(1) of the Constitution and the ongoing media reform includes plans to establish further safeguards for journalists' sources. Fines for moral damages in cases of civil proceedings for defamation are capped according to the Constitution of Malta.

3.5.3 Audiovisual and interactive media

Malta acceded to Eurimages in January 2026, enabling Maltese producers to access European film co-production support for the first time.

Malta was among the first nine signatories of the Council of Europe Convention on the Co-Production of Audiovisual Works in the Form of Series (CETS 230), signed at the Series Mania Forum in Lille on 26 March 2026; this is the first international legal framework specifically for television and streaming series co-production.

The Malta Film Commission (MFC) was set up in 1999 and legally established by the Malta Film Commission Act in 2005. The MFC is responsible for promoting, developing, and supporting the audiovisual industry in Malta. This includes providing financial incentives, facilitating the work of qualifying productions, and showcasing Malta's locations and skilled labour. It offers financial incentives, including cash rebates for qualifying productions. These incentives aim to attract international productions to Malta. In 2024 the main financial support to local productions shifted to Arts Council Malta (ACM). The MFC runs the Opportunity for All programme, which focuses on the continuous professional development of established crews and the induction of new crew members into the industry. It manages key film production facilities, including the Malta Film Studios and Fort Ricasoli, and provides assistance with location scouting and acquiring filming permits.

ACM managed a EUR7 million investment in 2025, including €2 million dedicated to screen support. It supports Maltese productions gain international exposure by providing funding and opportunities to network and exhibit their work abroad. Through support programs, and the Charter for the Status of the Artist, it aims to provide stronger protection for creatives. ACM runs and supports educational, networking, workshopping and capacity building initiatives to foster talent and skills development within the audiovisual field in combination with other fields of the CCS.

The Malta Entertainment Industry and Arts Association (MEIA) and the Malta Producers' Association (MPA) are actively involved in advocating for the audiovisual industry in Malta. MEIA advocates for fair practices, equity, and accountability and emphasise the need for transparent governance, financial responsibility, and respect for the local creative community. It calls for depoliticised governance and merit-based leadership across all cultural institutions. It demands equity in payment systems and reduced bureaucratic hurdles for disbursing funds from public institutions. It recommends policies and actions to identify affordable and accessible creative spaces and studios.

The MPA works to enhance the audiovisual industry and its resources in Malta, ensuring professionals in the sector enjoy a competitive and advantageous environment. It speaks out on behalf of the interests and rights of Malta's audiovisual producers and service providers. It is involved in policy advocacy to create a supportive environment for the audiovisual industry.

The gaming industry, including video games and esports, is a significant contributor to Malta's gross domestic product (GDP). It is projected to contribute around 1% of the national GDP and create between 2,200 to 3,000 jobs over the next decade. The industry has seen a substantial increase in the number of gaming operators based in Malta, which has led to job creation and opportunities for local talent. Initiatives like Malta's Vision for Video Games Development and Esports and the introduction of a €10 million venture capital fund are designed to boost the tech and gaming sectors. The Malta Gaming Authority (MGA) regulates and supports the gaming industry, ensuring a stable and attractive environment for both local and international companies. Malta has become a hub for game development and esports, attracting major companies and hosting significant events like Playcon, which further boosts its international profile.

3.5.4 Music

Malta's music ecosystem comprises a single state orchestra, a national choir, a substantial band-club movement, a network of festivals and a private commercial sector spanning classical, popular and electronic music. The Malta Philharmonic Orchestra (MPO) is Malta's only professional orchestra. Founded in 1968 as the Manoel Theatre Orchestra, it became the National Orchestra of Malta in 1997 and was rebranded as the MPO in 2008 following an expansion of the players' complement. The MPO averages more than one concert per week and tours internationally, including a 2025 invitation to the Festival dei Due Mondi in Spoleto with the opera *Hadrian*. KorMalta is the national choir, consolidated within NAPA from 2023.

The festival calendar is delivered chiefly by Festivals Malta and by Teatru Manoel. The Malta Jazz Festival, founded in 1990 by Charles 'City' Gatt, has hosted internationally recognised performers including Wayne Shorter, Chick Corea and Diana Krall; the Valletta International

Baroque Festival (2012), the Three Palaces Festival and the Valletta Early Opera Festival complement the classical programme. The Malta International Organ Festival reached its twelfth edition in 2025. Popular and contemporary music are programmed through Notte Bianca (annually since 2006), the music routes of village *festi*, and a substantial private commercial circuit.

Traditional music is structured around the Għaqda Każini tal-Banda (the national federation of band clubs, founded 1947, renamed in 1975), which represents 91 of the 92 band clubs across Malta and Gozo and acts as the principal civil-society interlocutor on behalf of the *każini*. A 2025 memorandum of understanding with Arts Council Malta consolidated the joint delivery of band-club support; the Fund for the purchase of musical instruments for local Musical Societies and the National Opportunities Fund operate alongside a €280,000 bank-loan interest-subsidy scheme launched in November 2025. Maltese folk song (*għana*) was inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2021.

Specific instruments and measures supporting the music sector include the ACM *Call for Proposals for Original Musicals in the Maltese Language (2022–2026)*, *Radio New Talent* for emerging artists, the VAT reclaim on a one-time purchase of a musical instrument, the reduced 7.5% income-tax rate for creative practitioners, and the ACM partnership with Sound Diplomacy (2024) on a national music and night-time economy strategy. The Malta Eurovision Song Contest and related national-song platforms are programmed by Malta's public-service broadcaster.

Sector criticism in recent years has focused on the lack of dedicated mid-scale music infrastructure, the absence of a sector-specific music policy, and remuneration conditions for freelance musicians — concerns reflected in MEIA's Budget 2026 recommendations and partially addressed by the Marsa Arts and Culture Hub announcement.

3.5.5 Design and creative services

Arts Council Malta (ACM) offers support to the sector through generalist funding schemes. These funds aim to enhance local production capabilities and increase access to resources. The Malta Development Bank (MDB) provides the SME Guarantee Scheme for Culture and Creative Sectors (SGS-CC) to enhance access to bank finance for SMEs involved in cultural and creative activities. This scheme offers loans ranging from €10,000 to €1,000,000 with favourable terms. The Malta Entertainment Industry and Arts Association (MEIA) advocates for fairness, equity, and accountability within Malta's creative sectors. They push for better resource allocation, fair payment structures, and support for creative spaces. MEIA also emphasises the need for research and policy development to establish fair wage regulations, make creative spaces more accessible and affordable to unlock talent and foster innovation,

and provide legal and financial advisory services to assist creative professionals in navigating regulatory challenges.

Higher education institutions in Malta play a significant role in supporting the development of design through various programmes and initiatives. The University of Malta offers a range of design-related courses through its Faculty of Media and Knowledge Sciences and the Faculty for the Built Environment. These programmes cover areas such as graphic design, digital arts, architecture, and urban design, providing students with the skills and knowledge needed to excel in the design industry.

The Malta College of Arts, Science & Technology (MCAST) provides specialised courses in creative arts, including graphic design, interactive media, and product design. Its Institute for the Creative Arts focuses on practical training and industry collaboration to ensure students are well-prepared for the job market. The Institute of Tourism Studies (ITS) offers programmes that integrate design principles into tourism and hospitality, such as interior design for hotels and restaurants. This helps students understand the importance of design in creating appealing and functional spaces.

Higher education institutions in Malta often collaborate with local and international design firms, providing students with opportunities for internships, projects, and real-world experience. This helps bridge the gap between academic learning and industry requirements. Universities and colleges in Malta are involved in research projects addressing design and innovation. These projects often receive funding from national and international bodies, fostering a culture of creativity and experimentation.

The current debate on architectural failures in Malta revolves around several key issues:

- The Demolition of Modernist Buildings: One of the most contentious topics is the proposed demolition of modernist buildings designed by Richard England, such as the HSBC branch in St. Julian's. Heritage activists argue that these buildings are architectural landmarks and should be preserved, while others, including England himself, have expressed no objection to their demolition.
- Evolving Built Identity: There is an ongoing discussion about whether Malta's built environment is evolving or losing its identity. Architects and designers have debated the stark contrast between traditional village cores and the modern, towering apartment blocks that are becoming more common. This has led to concerns about preserving Malta's heritage while accommodating modern development;
- Planning and Design Quality: The planning process in Malta has been criticised for focusing too much on short-term gains rather than long-term vision. There are calls for a more strategic approach to urban planning that involves local councils and NGOs from the outset. Additionally, there is a push for better design quality in public and private spaces to ensure they reflect Malta's values and heritage;
- Public Space and Connectivity: There is a growing emphasis on reclaiming public spaces and making them more accessible and user-friendly. Projects like the Msida

Park Project aim to address issues such as connectivity, pollution, and noise without disrupting current uses of spaces.

3.5.6 Cultural and creative tourism

The National Cultural Policy (NCP 2021) emphasises the importance of cultural tourism in enhancing Malta's cultural heritage and creative industries. The policy aims to integrate culture into the broader tourism strategy, promoting Malta as a destination rich in cultural experiences.

The National Tourism Strategy 2021-2030 focuses on sustaining recovery since the COVID-19 pandemic and contributing to a resilient tourism sector. It highlights the value added of cultural and creative tourism by stressing the diversification Malta's tourism offerings and attracting high-value visitors.

Malta hosts a variety of cultural events and festivals throughout the year, such as the Malta International Arts Festival, traditional feasts ('festas'), large-scale concerts and the annual white night (Notte Bianca). These events help add attraction to tourists and showcase Malta's rich cultural heritage that often serves as visually and environmentally attractive settings.

Greater effort needs to be made to improve infrastructure and accessibility to cultural sites, ensuring that tourists can easily explore and enjoy Malta's cultural attractions.

Arts Council Malta (ACM) has collaborated with Sound Diplomacy to integrate measures that support music and night-time entertainment into tourism strategies and their implementation.

The Catholic Church in Malta plays a significant role in cultural tourism, both in the light of its close connection with the Knights of St John (1530-1798) as well other historical, cultural and spiritual meanings. Malta has a rich Christian history dating back to the arrival of St. Paul in AD 60. This history is reflected in numerous churches, cathedrals, and religious sites that attract tourists. Some of the most notable sites include St. John's Co-Cathedral in Valletta, also featuring two paintings by Caravaggio, the Collegiate Church of Saint Paul's Shipwreck, and the collection of religious sites and artefacts in Mdina and Rabat, as well as Gozo. These sites are not only places of worship but also architectural and artistic treasures. Malta is a key destination for faith-based tourism, especially during significant religious events. For example, the Jubilee Year from December 2024 to January 2026, themed Pilgrims of Hope, has seen Malta hosting various liturgical celebrations and pilgrimages. The Catholic Church in Malta organises numerous cultural events and festivals, including those related to Lent, Carnival and Christmas. These events are vibrant displays of local culture, attracting both locals and tourists.

Cultural tourism may contribute in a significant way to the juncture Malta's tourism industry finds itself at. The traditional quantitative approach has shown its limits, as seen in the

challenges of environmental degradation, urban overcrowding, a rising cost of living and a decline in tourist expenditure when inflation is factored in.

A strategic shift towards sustainable, competitive, quality-focused tourism has been advocated by various quarters. For instance, the Malta Chamber's 'Rediscover' (2021) document offers a detailed road map for change.

Central to this strategy is the need to align with the changing expectations of tourists who increasingly seek authentic and unique experiences. In response, the Malta Chamber initiative suggests offering journeys that immerse visitors in the rich culture and heritage of Malta, catering to the desires of today's discerning tourists.

By prioritising the development of local talent and skills, the initiative seeks to elevate the uniqueness and the quality of interactions and services that tourists encounter during their stay. A significant challenge that the strategy addresses is balancing the need for development with the imperative of sustainability. The Rediscover vision calls for a tourism model that is responsible and respectful of Malta's unique environmental and cultural assets. This balance is key to preserving the island's appeal for future generations while ensuring that current tourism practices are environmentally and culturally sustainable.

Malta belongs to three Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe, which highlight the country's rich cultural heritage and its connections with other European cultures.

The regional dimension plays an important part in mobilising resources addressing cultural tourism. Gozo as national Region of Culture in 2025, as European Region of Gastronomy in 2026 and bidding for European Capital of Culture in 2031 is encouraging the region to develop a multiannual and multidisciplinary programme that explores and combines traditional and contemporary practices across various cultural and creative disciplines such as dance, music, theatre, visual arts, cinema, literature, cultural heritage, architecture, and gastronomy. The programme aims to attract visitors, including tourists, throughout these years by celebrating Gozo's unique cultural identity. The concern about unbridled development in the field of construction is real and needs addressing.

Through Arts Council Malta (ACM), Malta has developed cultural strategies for each of its six regions: Gozo, Northern, Eastern, Western, Southern, and Ports. These strategies share overarching themes of talent development, audience involvement, and historical heritage innovation. Each region's strategy includes priorities that promote cultural and creative tourism by highlighting the unique traditions, talents, and historical elements of each locality. These complementary strategies are designed to enhance Malta's cultural tourism offerings, making the regions more attractive to both local and international visitors.

In terms of regional preparations for the hosting of international cultural happenings that may attract international attention, the combination of heritage assets and creative activity is a key contributor to the development of strategies and their implementation. Traditionally speaking, compared to cultural heritage management in Malta, Gozitan heritage assets enjoy

a relatively better social context within which to function significantly in terms of the value assigned to them as intangible cultural heritage as defined by the Faro Convention. The island has had the comparative advantage over Malta of still being able to offer a relatively high level of wellbeing and quality of life for its citizens, which however has been under stress over the past few years due to overdevelopment.

Gozo seems to still enjoy another comparative advantage, namely its natural geographic identity which marks Gozo from Malta and distinguishes many levels of cultural life on the island. The geography of the island predates any formal or informal regional boundaries defining governance, giving Gozo a natural sense of identity and belonging that has nurtured a close, roots-inspired, bottom-up approach to cultural, religious and popular life. A Ministry for Gozo has been in place since the end of the 1980s, with great consistency and stability afforded by the size of the jurisdiction, only later supported by the formation of local councils (1993) and regional ones.

ACM has collaborated with Sound Diplomacy to develop a strategic mapping exercise into Malta's music and night-time economy (NTE) to be followed by an economic impact assessment. Improved and coordinated governance through an NTE Department and NTE Committee in the guise of a music office and a collective association in Malta.

Priorities identified include facilitating small-scale events whereby addressing organisational difficulties, identifying affordable on-street promotional spaces, identifying possible dedicated music venues, suitable infrastructure in existing venues, rehearsal spaces for both amateurs and professionals including Church or band clubs, championing environmental sustainability initiatives, collaborate with the Malta Tourism Authority (MTA) to establish a music tourism strategy, collaborate with pertinent stakeholders to draft a master plan / strategy for the music and NTE sector, support artists to access public, private and international funding, lobby with government to address areas of its competence including achieving coordinated and well communicated infrastructural projects and public events as well as ensuring a legal / financial level playing field and completing sound regulations, support artists in developing skills including financial and legal, and/or gaining eased access to them, support professionalisation of artist managers, support the development of a musicians union to protect artists' value, support adherence to industry associations, support local collaboration, support adherence to international networks, and develop a music export office branch.

ACM is advocating for clarity in regulating NTE, better enforcement, mapping exercises, the application of agent of change principle and soundproofing in relation to venues that are located inside residential areas and neighbourhoods, closer collaboration with local and tourism business community, closer collaboration with residential and music community (musicians, service providers, audiences) in order to enhance the quality offer aimed at

improving visitor satisfaction, in line with sustainable development guidelines set out by the tourism strategy for Malta. Links to the Maltese festa being recognised as UNESCO intangible heritage and the local musical traditions, including band clubs, may be sought.

ACM provided feedback to the Valletta Management Plan (VMP) consultation in 2024, calling for the VMP to address the music and NTE scene in the capital city. The feedback addresses the 5Cs, namely credibility, conservation, capacity building, communication and communities identified by UNESCO as principles to help guide the sustainable management of World Heritage Sites with an eye to establishing good practices and preserving sites for future generations. Special reference is made to capacity building and communities.

While the music element, together with other related aspects of cultural expression, is referred to indirectly by the VMP as part of the intangible heritage of the city as well as an attraction for visitors, its management on the basis of local traditional good practice and international best practice should be acknowledged and implemented.

The main observations are listed below:

- Reference to existing legal frameworks and related subsidiary legislation regulating sound should be made

Current situation

Subsidiary Legislation 441.07 establishes trading licence regulations in Malta, and states that no commercial activity located in an urban area is permitted to play live or amplified music or cause disturbance to neighbours between the hours of 11.00 p.m. and 9.00 a.m., and between 1.00 p.m. and 4.00 p.m. The legal notice 161 of 2022 is an addition to the Subsidiary Legislation 441 and provides an extension of business hours. It extends the playing of music in commercial premises from 11.00 p.m. to 1.00 a.m. on some streets of Valletta (including Merchants Street, Old Bakery Street, Old Theatre Street, Republic Street, South Street, St. Lucia Street and Strait Street). The legal notice indicates that the volume of such music must be kept at a moderate level, without including any concrete sound levels, and that no music can be played outdoors after 1.00 a.m. Legal notice 163 of 2022 then added Archbishop Street and St. Ursola Street to the list.

MTA issues permits to allow catering establishments to play amplified music. Although the licensing process for catering establishments permitted to play amplified music is detailed and accessible, it does not include maximum sound levels and no authorisation of this type could be found for other establishments such as concert venues in Malta.

- Greater clarity to be established regarding event permitting and organisation recommended.

Current situation

Valletta attracts public and private events, as well as religious and community ones, and thrives off its renewed revived character. However, greater clarity, and ensuing coordinating, in the permitting and organisation of events, is recommended. The aim is to improve the quality of the events and satisfy the needs of the various communities that inhabit or visit Valletta. Although several legal documents provide information about entertainment events in Malta, the regulations are incomplete. Malta lacks an exhaustive and accessible regulations guide including all types of events licences, their requirements, hours of operation and fees. In addition, the stakeholder engagement conducted to establish Malta's National Cultural Policy 2021 also highlighted that private promoters struggle to access venues and spaces during the Summer months to organise events, and that the calendar of events run by the government and nonprofits compete against each other, which reduces the opportunities for private promoters to promote music events.

- Agent of Change Principle to be introduced

Consider introducing the Agent of Change policy to allow existing venues to maintain their average dB(A) (when established) regardless of any new builds, repurposed spaces or developments. The Agent of Change principle places the responsibility for mitigating the impact of sound-generating activity on the person or business responsible for the change. Implementing such a principle, along with establishing clearer sound regulations, would help address several issues and concerns associated with night time sound, as well as protect existing venues from new residential developments, and ensure that new venues are built with soundproofing in mind - all of which will ultimately protect the music and NTE in the long term.

4. Law and legislation

4.1 General legislation

Malta's cultural field operates within a general legal framework rooted in the Constitution of Malta (1964) and a mixed common-law and civil-law tradition inherited from British colonial rule and Continental influences. The framework operates at four interrelated levels: constitutional provisions safeguarding freedoms and cultural heritage; primary legislation enacted by Parliament; subsidiary legislation issued as Legal Notices; and directly applicable European Union regulations and directives. As a European Union Member State since 2004, Malta has progressively transposed the EU acquis across all areas of general legislation reviewed below — public finance, social security, taxation, labour law, copyright, data protection and language policy — with EU law taking precedence over conflicting domestic provisions.

Culture is not treated as a separate legal domain in most general legislation; rather, cultural workers, organisations and institutions are subject to the same general rules as other actors. Where cultural specificities require adjustment, sector-specific instruments (see 4.2) supplement the general framework. Recent developments, including the 2023 amendments to the Criminal Code and the Electronic Communications Act strengthening protection for artistic expression, and the Charter for the Status of the Artist (2024) endorsed by all eleven Public Cultural Organisations as a non-binding normative benchmark, illustrate the current direction of reform.

4.1.1 Constitution

The *Constitution of Malta* (1964) contains several provisions that bear directly on the cultural field. Article 8 provides that "the State shall safeguard the landscape and the historical and artistic patrimony of the Nation," establishing heritage protection as a constitutional duty of the State. Article 5 designates Maltese as the national language and recognises both Maltese and English as official languages, with Maltese as the language of the courts. Article 41 protects freedom of expression, including freedom to receive and impart ideas without interference — the constitutional anchor for artistic freedom, journalistic freedom and academic freedom; restrictions are admitted only on the grounds set out in Article 41(2) (defence, public safety, order, morality or decency, the rights and freedoms of others, and the prevention of contempt of court). Article 42 protects freedom of assembly and association, enabling cultural associations, unions and advocacy groups to operate.

Cultural rights are not yet enumerated as a distinct constitutional category. The *National Cultural Policy* (2021) calls for their inclusion in the Constitutional reform process under discussion, and the government pledged in September 2022 to enshrine freedom of the press in the Constitution as part of the media reform package that followed the public inquiry into the assassination of Daphne Caruana Galizia. Neither amendment has been enacted as of July 2026. A broader constitutional reform bill introduced in May 2025, which aimed to expand the Constitutional Court and address judicial retirement, failed to secure the required two-thirds majority, with the opposition seeking to tie its support to wider institutional reforms including the independence of the public broadcaster. Only one measure passed being the establishment of a Commissioner for the Standards of the Judiciary, requiring only a simple majority.

The 2023 amendments to the *Criminal Code* and the *Electronic Communications Act* operate at sub-constitutional level but extend the practical protection afforded by Article 41 to artistic, satirical and comic expression.

4.1.2 Allocation of public funds

Public expenditure on culture is allocated annually through the Budget Speech and the Financial Estimates published by the Ministry for Finance and Employment. The principal budget holder is the Ministry for Arts, Culture and the National Heritage, within which the Culture Directorate provides policy direction and oversight. The legal framework for budgetary discipline is the *Fiscal Responsibility Act* (Cap. 534, 2014) and the *Public Finance Management Act* (Cap. 601, 2019), which establish budgeting, accountability and reporting standards across the public sector.

Sector-specific allocation mechanisms operate under enabling legislation. The *Arts Council Malta Act* (Cap. 542, 2015) constitutes Arts Council Malta as the principal arms-length funder for the arts and authorises the Council to administer competitive funding schemes; the Council publishes its scheme portfolio annually (nineteen competitive schemes in 2026, delivered through approximately thirty individual calls). The *Cultural Heritage Act* (Cap. 445, 2002, amended 2024) establishes Heritage Malta and the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage, each with its own budget line. The *Malta Libraries Act* (Cap. 511, 2011) and the *National Archives Act* (Cap. 477, 1990, 2006) establish budgetary autonomy for those national bodies. The *Malta Film Commission Act* (Cap. 478, 2005) underpins Malta Film Commission allocations; since November 2024 the Commission has fallen under the culture portfolio following the transfer from the Ministry for Tourism.

Public procurement by cultural agencies is governed by the *Public Procurement Regulations* (S.L. 601.03) and overseen by the Department of Contracts. The same regulations govern

competitive grants disbursed under EU State Aid rules, including the *de minimis* threshold applied to most ACM individual-artist schemes.

Local government allocations for culture flow through the *Local Government Act* (Cap. 363, 1993, recast 2019), which assigns local councils competence over local cultural events and minor heritage maintenance and provides for an annual financial allocation from central government. The *Regional Cultural Strategies 2022–2027* operate within this framework, with central funding directed to regional councils for cultural projects.

EU co-financing is a substantial complement to domestic allocation: the European Regional Development Fund co-financed MICAS and other capital infrastructure projects; Creative Europe is accessed through the Creative Europe Desk Malta hosted by Arts Council Malta. Budget 2026 announced Malta's accession to Eurimages for film co-production support. Unlike some European jurisdictions, Malta does not operate a dedicated national-lottery fund earmarked for culture; private donations are incentivised instead through the 150% tax deduction on corporate donations (see 4.1.4).

Discretion in ministerial allocation is constrained by sector legislation but remains substantial within the annual Estimates cycle; the 2024 National Audit Office report on the Malta Film Commission identified shortcomings in transparency and accountability in large-event spending, prompting ongoing parliamentary scrutiny.

4.1.3 Social security frameworks

Social security in Malta is governed by the *Social Security Act* (Cap. 318, 1987), a single contributory-and-non-contributory scheme administered by the Department of Social Security. It applies generally to employed and self-employed persons. There is no artist-specific social security regime; cultural workers participate in the same scheme as other workers, paying Class 1 contributions (employees) or Class 2 contributions (self-employed) and accessing the same benefits — sickness, injury, invalidity, maternity, unemployment, contributory and non-contributory pensions, and assistance benefits.

Two structural features create particular pressure for cultural workers, most of whom are self-employed or work in intermittent project-based engagements as identified in the Cultural and Creative Practice Survey 2024. First, unemployment benefit eligibility under the *Social Security Act* requires a minimum number of paid contributions and is calibrated to standard employment patterns; self-employed creatives in between projects can fall outside the qualifying window. Second, contributory benefit rates for the self-employed (Class 2 contributors) are calculated on a different basis from those for employees (Class 1 contributors), which has implications for invalidity, sickness and maternity entitlements at the lower end of the contribution scale. The state's COVID-19 Wage Supplement (2020–2022),

administered by Malta Enterprise, was extended to self-employed cultural workers and demonstrated that the system can be calibrated for the sector, though only as an emergency measure.

The Charter for the Status of the Artist (2024) identifies social security and taxation as one of its seven principles and calls for review of unemployment-benefit contribution criteria for intermittent workers, parity in maternity and invalidity benefit treatment for self-employed creatives, and recognition of artistic apprenticeships and residencies as qualifying activity. The Charter is non-binding and no legislative amendments to Cap. 318 have been enacted as of May 2026. ACM's research function and the Charter framework provide the basis for further sectoral consultation.

Cross-cutting frameworks indirectly support cultural workers. The *Voluntary Organisations Act* (Cap. 492, 2007) allows volunteers in cultural NGOs limited exemption from contribution liability for in-kind work. The Equality Act (in draft) and the *Equal Treatment in Employment Regulations* (S.L. 452.95) extend anti-discrimination protections relevant to cultural workplaces. The European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan frames Malta's domestic-reform commitments.

Sector advocacy on social security is led by the Malta Entertainment Industry and Arts Association (MEIA) and the Malta Producers Association. MEIA's Budget 2026 recommendations called for a contribution-credit mechanism for periods between projects and for portability of social-security entitlements across short-term engagements, drawing on the EU Open Method of Coordination work on artists' status. No artist-specific pension scheme exists; the universal contributory pension applies.

4.1.4 Tax laws

The general tax framework is the *Income Tax Act* (Cap. 123, 1948), the *Income Tax Management Act* (Cap. 372) and the *Value Added Tax Act* (Cap. 406, 1998). Personal income tax is progressive; corporate tax is set at 35% with a full-imputation system that allows shareholder refunds. VAT is charged at a standard rate of 18%, with reduced rates of 7% (accommodation), 5% (books, e-books, certain printed matter, admission to museums and cultural events) and a zero rate for selected supplies including exports.

Several culture-specific instruments operate within this framework. The reduced 7.5% income-tax rate for creative practitioners, introduced by Legal Notice for base year 2022, applies to income from artistic activity (theatre, dance, music, literature, visual arts and other defined categories) and represents a substantial reduction from the standard minimum rate of 15%. The 150% tax deduction on corporate donations to voluntary cultural organisations and Public Cultural Organisations, in force since 2016, generated approximately €3.2 million

in donations between 2016 and 2021. The VAT reclaim on a one-time purchase of a musical instrument provides a fiscal facility for individual musicians. The *Tax Deduction on Fees paid for Cultural and Creative Courses* recognises private investment in arts training.

The audiovisual sector is supported by the film cash rebate scheme, administered until 2024 by the Malta Film Commission and offering up to 40% on qualifying Malta spend. Since 2025, the Screen Support Scheme (€2 million in 2025) administered by Arts Council Malta supports local production through a separate instrument. The Get Qualified Scheme and Higher Educational Qualifications Scheme provide tax credits for individuals pursuing creative and other qualifications.

Heritage-property tax measures include the VAT and stamp-duty schemes for the restoration of properties in Urban Conservation Areas, properties scheduled under the *Cultural Heritage Act*, or built before 1925; the first-time-buyer scheme (made permanent in Budget 2026) and accelerated depreciation on qualifying digital investments are general measures with cultural-sector application.

The *Duty on Documents and Transfers Act* (Cap. 364) and the *VAT Act* together govern transactions in artworks and cultural property. Voluntary organisations registered with the Commissioner for Voluntary Organisations under the *Voluntary Organisations Act* benefit from income-tax exemption on activity in furtherance of their statutory purposes.

Author royalties have been the subject of an NBC reform proposal seeking income-tax exemption on royalty payments and a 200% tax refund for publishers on royalties paid to authors; the proposal was issued for public consultation in 2020 but has not been enacted as of May 2026. The income tax rate paid by authors on royalties has been reduced from 15% to 7.5%. MEIA and the Malta Producers Association have continued to advocate for further fiscal measures to address late-payment cycles and to recognise project-based working patterns.

4.1.5 Labour laws

Employment in Malta is governed by the *Employment and Industrial Relations Act* (Cap. 452, 2002), which consolidates earlier legislation and implements the relevant EU acquis on employment standards, working time, equal treatment, transfer of undertakings, fixed-term work and part-time work. The Act applies to all employees, including those engaged by Public Cultural Organisations and private cultural employers. Self-employed creative workers fall outside its core employment-rights provisions but are covered by *Subsidiary Legislation 452.95 – Equal Treatment in Employment Regulations* on discrimination and by general civil-law contract rules.

The Department for Industrial and Employment Relations (DIER) administers the Act, enforces statutory employment conditions and registers collective agreements. The Industrial Tribunal adjudicates disputes. The *Health and Safety at Work Act* (Cap. 424, 2000) applies to all workplaces, including performance venues, studios and film sets; sector-specific guidance has been developed for fireworks factories and stage production.

Public Cultural Organisations under Arts Council Malta engage employees largely on terms aligned with general public-sector frameworks, including collective agreements negotiated by the central government with the public-service unions. Arts Council Malta itself operates as an arms-length entity with its own pay scales for non-public-service categories.

A defining feature of the cultural sector is the prevalence of self-employment, freelancing and short fixed-term engagements, with corresponding gaps in employment protection. Collective bargaining coverage in the cultural and creative sectors is limited; few sub-sectors have recognised trade unions, freelance creatives are largely outside the collective-bargaining infrastructure, and only 35.9% of performing artists surveyed by Culture Venture reported regularly signing a written agreement before work begins. MEIA and the Malta Producers Association have advocated for a sector rate card, model contracts and standardised payment terms to address chronic late-payment cycles. The Charter for the Status of the Artist (2024) identifies labour rights and collective bargaining as one of its seven principles and calls for recognition of representative associations of self-employed creative workers as social partners.

Volunteer engagement in cultural NGOs is regulated by the *Voluntary Organisations Act* (Cap. 492, 2007), which requires organisations engaging volunteers to register with the Commissioner for Voluntary Organisations, to ensure volunteers and to maintain clear roles distinguishing volunteers from employees. Many band clubs, feast committees and amateur theatre groups operate under this framework.

The employment of foreign nationals in the cultural sector is governed by the *Immigration Act* (Cap. 217) and processed through Identità (formerly Identity Malta). Specific work permits exist for performers and crew of short-term productions, including film and audiovisual projects under the cash-rebate scheme; specialised visas for esports athletes were introduced in 2025 as part of the Video Gaming Gateway initiative.

The *National Minimum Wage Order* applies across the economy. Sector-specific evidence on remuneration is provided by the Culture Venture research underpinning MEIA's *Towards Fair Pay for Performing Artists in Malta* (2025) position paper, which found that 22.6% of performing artists surveyed reported they are "not always paid" and a further 3.1% reported being "never paid"; only 35.9% regularly sign a written agreement before work begins; and just 10% reported being satisfied with their income. MEIA has subsequently established a

Fair Pay Working Group to pilot Malta's first sectoral rate card, beginning with theatre. In parallel, MEIA has criticised the €250 screening fee paid to local filmmakers at the 2025 Mediterrane Film Festival — set against the festival's approximately €5 million in public funding — as illustrative of the imbalance between public-sector investment in international visibility and remuneration of resident creative professionals.

4.1.6 Copyright provisions

Copyright in Malta is governed by the *Copyright Act* (Cap. 415, 2000), most recently amended by Act No. XXXV of 2023. Malta follows the *droit d'auteur* tradition characteristic of continental Europe, granting authors economic and moral rights in original literary, artistic, musical, audiovisual works and databases. As an EU Member State Malta has progressively transposed the EU copyright acquis into Cap. 415 and subsidiary regulations.

Key EU instruments transposed include: Directive 2001/29/EC (InfoSoc) on copyright in the information society; Directive 2004/48/EC on enforcement, transposed through the *Enforcement of Intellectual Property Rights (Regulation) Act* (Cap. 488, 2006); Directive 2011/77/EU extending performer and sound-recording protection to 70 years, transposed by the *Extension to Term Protection (Neighbouring Rights) Regulations* (2014); Directive (EU) 2019/789 on online transmissions of broadcasting organisations and retransmissions; and Directive (EU) 2019/790 on copyright in the Digital Single Market (DSM), transposed in June 2021 by the *Copyright and Related Rights in the Digital Single Market Regulations* (2021), which supplement Cap. 415 with provisions on press-publisher rights (Article 15) and platform liability (Article 17), text-and-data-mining exceptions, and contract-adjustment rights for authors and performers. The Marrakesh Treaty for visually impaired persons was transposed through Directive (EU) 2017/1564 implementing regulations.

Royalty collection in Malta is structured around the *Control of the Establishment and Operation of Societies for the Collective Administration of Copyright Regulations* (S.L. 415.05). The Performing Right Society (PRS for Music) operates through a local agent; the Malta Authors and Composers Society represents Maltese authors and composers. The *Artists' Resale Rights Regulation* (S.L. 415.3, 2006) grants visual artists an inalienable royalty on resale (see 3.4 and 4.2.4).

The *Public Lending Right* scheme administered by the National Book Council since 2014 (extended to the University of Malta Library in 2021) remunerates authors, editors, translators, illustrators and photographers for borrowings from public libraries; the 2025 annual allocation was approximately €80,000.

Criticism of the DSM transposition was voiced by the National Book Council in July 2021, which described it as incomplete and shortsighted; the NBC has proposed a comprehensive

reform package including an Education Exception contract for use of works in public education, income-tax exemption on royalty payments, and a 200% tax refund for publishers on royalties paid. The reform has not been enacted as of May 2026.

The *Criminal Code* (Cap. 9, Title IV) and the *Enforcement of Intellectual Property Rights (Regulation) Act* (Cap. 488) provide for criminal and civil enforcement; the Police Central Investigation Bureau handles copyright-infringement cases.

4.1.7 Data protection laws

Data protection in Malta is governed by the *Data Protection Act* (Cap. 586, 2018), which gives effect to and supplements the General Data Protection Regulation (Regulation (EU) 2016/679) and the Law Enforcement Directive (Directive (EU) 2016/680). The supervisory authority is the Office of the Information and Data Protection Commissioner (IDPC), which enforces GDPR compliance, handles complaints and cooperates within the European Data Protection Board.

Cultural organisations engaging with personal data — ticketing operators, museums, libraries, broadcasters, audience-research bodies — operate within the same framework as other controllers and processors. The framework affects audience-database management, mailing lists, online-content services, image rights for performers and visitors, and the management of historical and archival records containing personal data.

Sector-specific tensions arise particularly around (i) the balance between public access to archival records and personal-data protection — addressed in part by the *National Archives Act* (Cap. 477, 2006) provisions on access and embargo, (ii) academic and journalistic exemptions under Article 85 GDPR, transposed through Cap. 586, and (iii) the use of biometric, locational and image data in interactive and immersive cultural experiences. The *Processing of Personal Data (Education Sector) Regulations* and similar subsidiary instruments establish sector-specific rules of relevance to arts education.

4.1.8 Language laws

The language framework rests on Article 5 of the Constitution, which designates Maltese as the national language and recognises both Maltese and English as official languages, with Maltese as the language of the courts. The *Maltese Language Act* (Cap. 470, 2004) establishes the *Kunsill Nazzjonali tal-Ilsien Malti* (National Council for the Maltese Language) with responsibility for the promotion, standardisation, orthographic regulation and lexicographical development of Maltese.

Language provisions of relevance to culture include: the *Broadcasting Act* (Cap. 350, 1991) and its subsidiary regulations on Maltese-language content quotas for public-service

broadcasting; the *Code of Organization and Civil Procedure* (Cap. 12), which has provided for Maltese as the language of judicial proceedings since 1934; and curriculum frameworks under the https://education.gov.mt/Ministry for Education and Sportsprescribing Maltese as the medium of primary education and bilingual provision in secondary education.

Malta signed the *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages* in 1992 but has not ratified it; the Government's *2021 National Cultural Policy* does not commit to ratification. There is no statutory minimum-language requirement for theatre, cinema or live performance, but cultural-policy instruments — including the ACM *Call for Proposals for Original Musicals in the Maltese Language (2022–2026)*, the *Newspapers Support Scheme* and the National Book Council's Maltese-language literary prizes — incentivise Maltese-language production.

4.1.9 Other areas of general legislation

Several other general laws bear on the cultural field. The *Competition Act* (Cap. 379, 1994) and the Malta Competition and Consumer Affairs Authority framework apply to cultural undertakings engaged in economic activity, including festivals and ticketing operators. The *Criminal Code* (Cap. 9) contains provisions relevant to artistic expression — notably on obscenity, hate speech, incitement and threatening communications, all amended by the 2023 artistic-expression reform to require a "credible and realistic" threat for prosecution where the expression at issue is artistic, satirical or comic.

The *Public Domain Act* (Cap. 564, 2016), designating certain land and coastal areas as inalienable public domain with cultural-landscape implications, remains largely unimplemented as of 2025. The *Development Planning Act* (Cap. 552, 2016) and the *Environment Protection Act* (Cap. 549, 2016) govern heritage and landscape decisions, including assessments by the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage and the Environment and Resources Authority.

Legal Notice 177 of 2024 transposed the EU anti-SLAPP Directive (Directive (EU) 2024/1069), of particular relevance to journalists, commentators and satirists. The proposed *Equality Act and Human Rights and Equality Commission Act* remain under parliamentary discussion.

4.2 Legislation on culture

4.2.1 General legislation on culture

Formal cultural legislation in Malta dates to the mid-1920s, when the British colonial government issued a short set of ordinances, passed by the Antiquities Protection Act of 1925, and other pieces of legislation to establish the National Library, the National Archives and local libraries. Below is an outline of how current regulations evolved.

The Ordinance on Public Libraries (1937) was codified as Chapter 92 of the Laws of Malta and later amended several times between 1955 and 1981. However, it was repealed and replaced by the *Malta Libraries Act* (Act VII of 2011), which came into force on 1 August 2011. This newer legislation modernised the legal framework for public libraries in Malta, establishing Malta Libraries as the national authority responsible for the management and development of public libraries, including the National Library and regional branches.

Previously, Act IV of 1990 regulated the National Archives. It established the National Archives as a statutory body and laid out its responsibilities, including the preservation, management, and accessibility of Malta's documentary heritage. While there may have been amendments or updates to its provisions over time, principally in 2006, the core legislation remains the legal foundation for the operation of the National Archives.

The Environment Protection Act (2001) re-enforced efforts to protect and conserve landscapes, including historic centres, through the establishment of an authority to advise the ministry responsible for culture. It was repealed and replaced by the *Environment Protection Act* (Chapter 549), which came into effect in 2016. This newer legislation established the Environment and Resources Authority (ERA) as the national body responsible for environmental regulation and protection. The 2016 Act significantly expanded the scope of environmental governance in Malta, aligning it with EU directives and modern sustainability principles.

The Malta Council for Culture and the Arts Act (2001) introduced a structure that replaced the Department of Culture, created in 1987, to administer and fund creative events, including an annual arts festival. Subsidiary legislation under the act was in turn updated by the *Arts Council Malta Act* (2015). The 2015 Act established Arts Council Malta as the new national agency for cultural development, replacing the Malta Council for Culture and the Arts. Its purpose was to modernise and expand the role of the national cultural body, aligning it more closely with contemporary cultural policy goals, including broader socio-economic development through the arts. This transition also involved a restructuring of governance and operations, granting Arts Council Malta a wider mandate and more autonomy, including oversight of various Public Cultural Organisations.

Subsidiary Legislation 542.01 Cinema and Stage Age-Classification Regulations were introduced following amendments in 2012 to modernise the classification system for films and stage productions. They were governed under the Malta Council for Culture and the Arts Act, and now under the Arts Council Malta Act. The regulations did the following:

- Shifted responsibility for classifying stage productions from a state-appointed board to the producers/directors themselves;
- Established a Theatre Guidance Board to assist with age classification when requested;
- Created a Board of Film Age-Classification for cinema, which is responsible for classifying films and publishing the criteria and justifications for each classification;
- Introduced a Review Board to handle appeals regarding film classifications.

Subsidiary Legislation 444.02 Creativity Trust Order established a charitable trust known as the Creativity Trust, with the aim of supporting Malta's cultural and creative industries.

The Malta Crafts Act (Cap. 613) addresses the crafts sector in Malta. The sector is supported and regulated through a combination of institutional frameworks and general cultural policy instruments, including the Malta Crafts Foundation, which operates under the Ministry for the Economy.

In the media sector, the Broadcasting Act of 1991 has assured the right for plurality and the democratic right for information, besides guaranteeing the need for qualitative, educational programming. It has been amended and updated over time to reflect changes in the media landscape. These include the expansion of subsidiary legislation to regulate emerging areas in broadcasting, and ongoing updates to align with EU directives, particularly the Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD). The Broadcasting Authority's remit has been extended to include online video-sharing platforms and on-demand services, distinguishing between linear (traditional TV) and non-linear (streaming) content.

The Cultural Heritage Act (2002, last amended 2024) provides the legal framework for the protection, preservation, and management of Malta's cultural heritage.

The Malta Arts Scholarships Scheme aims at providing more opportunities to support individuals who are exceptionally talented in the creation and/or promotion of the expressive arts.

In Malta, there is no single, overarching "Censorship Act." Instead, content regulation is governed through a combination of laws and regulatory frameworks that collectively define the boundaries of acceptable expression across various media:

- The Broadcasting Act (Chapter 350) plays a central role in regulating television and radio content. It prohibits material that is obscene, offensive, or incites hatred or

violence. The Broadcasting Authority is responsible for enforcing these standards and has the power to issue fines or sanctions for violations;

- For cinema and theatre, the Cinema and Stage Age-Classification Regulations (Subsidiary Legislation 542.01) require that all productions be assigned an age classification. This responsibility lies primarily with the producers and directors, though classification boards provide oversight and guidance;
- The Press Act (as Chapter 248, repealed, now article 33 of Act XI of 2018) governs printed media and includes provisions against libel, defamation, and hate speech. While it does not impose direct censorship, it sets legal limits on what can be published, particularly in relation to personal reputation and public order;
- The Criminal Code (Chapter 9) also contains relevant provisions. These include laws against hate speech, incitement to violence, and the distribution of obscene material. Although blasphemy laws have been largely repealed, other restrictions remain in place to protect public morality and safety.

Additionally, Malta has laws aimed at protecting minors from harmful content, particularly in media and online environments. These laws ensure that children are shielded from material deemed inappropriate for their age.

Recent openness regarding censorship supports the progressive and liberal European agenda, rather than suppressing it as is happening in other states across Europe. However, the specification of more artistic rights in expression, which on the surface may seem to strengthen and protect the artist, could lead to the weakening not only of freedom of creative thought and expression, but even of the broader freedom of expression, based on the distinction between artistic expression and other forms of expression.

The Charter of Status for the Artist issued by Arts Council Malta in 2024 is non-binding but may help influence legislation in terms of providing a dynamic framework of reference for any legislation, policy or initiative that will have an impact, direct or indirect, on the cultural and creative sectors.

Table 2: International legal instruments implemented by Malta in the cultural field

Title of the instrument	Status for Malta
European Cultural Convention (Council of Europe, 1954)	Ratified 1966
Florence Agreement on the Importation of Educational, Scientific and Cultural Materials (1950)	Acceded 1968
European Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage (London, 1969)	Ratified 1971

UNESCO Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (1972)	Ratified 1978
Convention for the Protection of the Architectural Heritage of Europe (Granada, 1985)	Signed and ratified 1990
European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (Strasbourg, 1992)	Signed 1992; not ratified
European Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage (revised) (Valletta, 1992)	Ratified 1994
Second Protocol to the Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict (1999)	Acceded 2004
European Landscape Convention (Florence, 2000)	Signed 2000; ratified 26 May 2025 (in force 1 September 2025)
UNESCO Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage (2001)	Ratified 2021
UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003)	Ratified 2017
UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005)	Acceded 18 December 2006; in force 18 March 2007
UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006)	Ratified 2012
UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property (1970)	Not party as of May 2026
Council of Europe Convention on the Co-Production of Audiovisual Works in the Form of Series (CETS 230, 2026)	Signed 26 March 2026; not yet ratified
First Protocol to the Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict	2025

4.2.2 Legislation on culture and natural heritage

In 2002, and most recently amended in 2024, Parliament passed the Cultural Heritage Act to promote improved management, conservation and restoration of national cultural heritage. It guarantees greater public accessibility and appreciation of Malta's cultural treasures and ensures cultural and educational benefits for future generations.

At inception, it provided for the following entities to take over from the previous Department of Culture:

- the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage, to (a) establish, update, manage and publish a national inventory of cultural property; (b) exercise surveillance over cultural property; (c) excavate and monitor excavations and (d) advise the Minister responsible for Culture;
- Heritage Malta, responsible for ensuring that museums and other heritage property on the sister islands are conserved, restored, administered and managed in the best way possible;
- the Committee of Guarantee, created to enable and facilitate the collaboration between the different agencies with direct responsibility for the protection and management of the cultural heritage sector; and
- the National Archives, laid down by the National Archives Act of 1990, ensure that all documents of a public nature, which are no longer in use for the purpose of administration, shall be properly preserved and made reasonably accessible to the public for the purpose of study and research. In 2006, the National Archives and the Libraries Department became two separate entities. Through the National Archives Act (Cap. 477) the National Archives became a government agency intended to protect written memory. Moreover, a Council for National Archives was created in the same year, under the aegis of the Ministry of Education.

Malta has a legal framework aimed at protecting and managing its public and natural spaces. At the core of this framework is the Environment Protection Act (Chapter 549), which establishes the Environment and Resources Authority (ERA). This Act provides the foundation for environmental governance in Malta, including the protection of natural habitats, landscapes, and biodiversity. It also outlines procedures for environmental impact assessments and encourages public participation in environmental decision-making.

Complementing this is the Development Planning Act (Chapter 552), which regulates land use and spatial planning through the Planning Authority. This legislation governs zoning, development permits, and the designation of public open spaces and green areas, ensuring that development is balanced with environmental and community needs.

Another key piece of legislation is the Public Domain Act (Act XXV of 2016). This law designates certain lands and coastal areas as part of the public domain, meaning they are preserved for public use and environmental protection. It places restrictions on the privatisation or development of these areas, reinforcing their role as shared national assets. However, till 2025, it has not been implemented yet.

Additionally, the Flora, Fauna and Natural Habitats Protection Regulations (S.L. 549.44) implement EU directives related to Natura 2000 sites. These regulations are crucial for the protection of endangered species and natural habitats, and they govern activities within protected areas to ensure ecological integrity.

4.2.3 Legislation on performance and celebration

Performance and Theatre Regulation

Malta's regulation of public performance dates to the Public Theatres Regulations of 1899. These regulations established procedural norms for theatres licensed as such, including safety, licensing, and operational standards. In response to censorship matters gaining significant attention in the public space and a 2009 human rights case concerning freedom of expression, government initiated a review of classification systems as part of the 2011 National Cultural Policy. This led to reforms in how stage and film productions have been classified.

Therefore, under Subsidiary Legislation 542.01, producers of stage productions are now empowered to assign their own age classifications. A Guidance Board, appointed by the minister responsible for culture, supports this process by:

- Drafting and updating classification guidelines;
- Providing recommendations upon request;
- Receiving and reviewing public complaints about stage content.

Public Celebrations and Festi

Public celebrations, including traditional festi, are subject to local council regulations, public order laws, and event permitting. While Malta does not impose direct censorship on festi, standards of decency, such as appropriate attire and conduct, are often enforced under public morality and safety laws.

For outdoor events and parties, organisers previously had to provide a substantial €11,000 bank guarantee. This requirement has been lifted for small-scale events, easing access for DJs and grassroots cultural organisers. Permits are still required, and Arts Council Malta provides guidance on compliance and good practice.

Religious and Sacred Spaces

Performances in churches or religious venues are subject to ecclesiastical approval. While not governed by civil censorship laws, the Catholic Church in Malta may restrict or prohibit non-religious music or performances in sacred spaces. This is typically handled through internal church policy rather than state regulation.

Fiscal Incentives

Artists and musicians may benefit from targeted fiscal support. Notably, Value-Added Tax (VAT) may be reclaimed on a one-time purchase of a musical instrument, providing financial relief for professional or aspiring musicians.

Censorship and Freedom of Expression

While Malta has moved away from formal censorship, content in public performances is still subject to the following legal instruments:

- Broadcasting Act (Cap. 350) – for televised or streamed performances.
- Criminal Code (Cap. 9) – for obscenity, hate speech, or incitement.

Article 33 of Act XI of 2018 has taken the place of the Press Act (Cap. 248), which has been repealed, to address matters related to the media. These laws aim to balance freedom of expression with public decency and safety. The shift from censorship to classification and guidance reflects a broader alignment with European human rights standards.

4.2.4 Legislation on visual arts and crafts

The legal frameworks surrounding the visual arts and crafts sectors are relatively limited but include several important provisions that reflect a commitment to preserving cultural identity and supporting creative professionals. While there is no single, comprehensive law dedicated exclusively to visual arts or crafts, various legislative instruments and policy measures contribute to the regulation and promotion of these fields. These include the following:

The *Malta Crafts Act* (Cap. 613, 2020) provides the legislative framework for the crafts sector in Malta, including provision for a national Crafts Register and ministerial designation of recognised crafts. The Malta Crafts Foundation, established in 2021 under the framework of Cap. 613, is a public entity under the Ministry for the Economy dedicated to the preservation, promotion and sustainability of Maltese artisanal products and skills, including training, certification and marketing support for artisans. While the Foundation sits within the economy portfolio, crafts also fall under the broader cultural policy framework: the *Cultural Heritage Act* (Cap. 445) covers intangible cultural heritage, which includes traditional crafts, and Arts Council Malta's funding schemes and development programmes are open to craftspeople as part of the wider cultural and creative sectors. Craftspeople operating as self-employed or small businesses are subject to general economic and employment legislation, including the *Employment and Industrial Relations Act* (Cap. 452), VAT and tax regulations, and health and safety standards.In the visual arts, the Artists' Resale Rights Regulation, enacted in 2006, introduced key legal protection for artists. This regulation grants the author of a

copyrighted work of art the right to receive royalty on any resale of that work, provided it occurs after the first transfer of ownership. This resale right is unalienable and cannot be waived, even in advance, ensuring that artists continue to benefit from the increasing value of their work in the art market.

Regarding the movement of artworks and crafts across borders, Malta adheres to EU regulations on the export and import of cultural goods. These rules are designed to prevent the illicit trafficking of cultural property and to ensure that significant works of art and heritage items are not removed from the country without proper authorisation. Exporting certain artworks or crafts may require a license, particularly if the item is deemed to have historical or cultural significance. Similarly, the importation of artworks is subject to customs and cultural heritage controls, especially if the items originate from outside the EU.

In terms of religious context, while there is no specific legislation restricting the creation or display of visual art or crafts in religious settings, informal norms and ecclesiastical guidelines may influence what is considered appropriate, particularly in churches or sacred spaces. Artworks intended for religious use or display may be subject to approval by church authorities, especially if they are to be installed in heritage-listed or consecrated buildings.

Together, these legal and policy instruments form a meaningful framework that supports the development, protection, and ethical circulation of visual arts and crafts in Malta, while also respecting cultural and religious sensitivities.

4.2.5 Legislation on books and press

The objects and reasons of the Act No. XI of 2018 - Media and Defamation Act are the updating of the laws on defamation, the abolition of criminal libel and the introduction of a new civil remedy for slander. The Act includes various provisions which strengthen freedom of the media by seeking to avoid disproportionate restrictions on journalists in actions in libel whilst protecting the victims of libel and slander. It also encourages increased use of alternative means of dispute resolution such as the right of reply, voluntary clarifications, mediation and other practical means of avoiding libel litigation or the protraction thereof.

The Act includes consequential amendments to the Criminal Code that retain some of the criminal offences formerly provided for in the Press Act. The bill also introduces an amendment to the Code of Organisation and Civil Procedure to prohibit the issue of precautionary warrants in defamation cases. The Bill also abolishes the crime of defamation which shall henceforth only be a civil tort.

The Ordinance on Public Libraries has been in existence since 1937, as expressed in Chapter 92 of the Laws of Malta. It was amended several times between 1955 and 1981, while the Act IV of 1990 regulated the National Archives. In 2004, the Local Councils' Public Libraries

Development Committee was created, with the aim of helping to coordinate the administration of local and regional libraries. An Online Public Access Catalogue was installed in all libraries to make tracking books easier and more efficient.

In 2006, according to new legislation, the National Archives and the Public Libraries Department became two separate entities, and a National Archives Council was created for consultative reasons but was not given executive power. It has been agreed that the Councils make an annual contribution for the provision of new material.

In 2011, the Malta Libraries Act was enacted to establish a new legal entity under the responsibility of the National Librarian to ensure the collection and conservation of Malta's documentary heritage for present and future generations, to maintain and develop Malta's libraries and to encourage reading for study, research, self-development and lifelong-learning information and leisure purposes.

The Public Lending Rights scheme is a remuneration scheme which benefits authors, editors, translators, illustrators and photographers whose books are available to borrow from all public libraries. The scheme was introduced in 2014, and in 2021 it was widened in scope by including a remuneration for books borrowed from the University of Malta Library. As of 2025, the fund allocated €80,000 annually, and payments are issued quarterly to all subscribers. In the case of a book having more than one author, editor, translator, illustrator or photographer, payment is divided equally between the parties.

In 2024 Legal Notice 177 of 2024 on Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation Order, allowed the transposition of Directive (EU) 2024/1069 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 April 2024 on protecting persons who engage in public participation from manifestly unfounded claims or abusive court proceedings (hence, 'Strategic lawsuits against public participation', or SLAPP).

4.2.6 Legislation on audiovisual and interactive media

In 2005, the Malta Film Commission was legally established through Chapter 478 for the promotion, development and support of the audiovisual industry, including the film servicing industry, in Malta, through the office of the Film Commissioner. Since 2014, cash rebates for filmmakers have been introduced and increased, making the financial guidelines more attractive to the film industry. Qualifying productions are required to present a provisional application to the Malta Film Commission, including a detailed projection of the Malta budget for the production. A variety of productions apply, provided that they are all or partially produced in Malta.

Since 2024 the funding of the film industry focusing on local production has been shifted from the Malta Film Commission to Arts Council Malta.

The age-classification of films was carried out by the Film Board as stipulated in S.L. 542.01 of 2012 under the Arts Council Act as per Legal Notice 416 of 2021, as amended by Act XV of 2015 and Legal Notice 387 of 2020.

All policy regulations related to broadcasting in Malta are the responsibility of the Malta Broadcasting Authority. Formal laws are enacted through Parliament. The Broadcasting Act of 1991 (amended several times since) stipulates that public broadcasting in the Maltese islands should provide high-quality programming across a full range of public tastes and interests. The most recent amendments are carried in Act XVI of 2018 Cap. 350.

On 1 January 2001, the Malta Communications Authority was set up to liberalise and regulate telecommunication services. This was done through the Malta Communications Authority Act Cap 418 of 2000. It has been regularly amended since.

The European Media Freedom Act (Regulation (EU) 2024/900), a directly applicable EU regulation covering media pluralism, editorial independence, state advertising and public service media governance, has applied in Malta since August 2025. Malta's implementing measures are set out in Legal Notice 175 of 2025; see 2.5.3 for detail on implementation status and international assessments.

4.2.7 Legislation on design and creative service

The Patents and Designs Act , Cap. 417 Act XVII of 2000, amended in 2023, applies to patents and design. It provides protection for the protection of designs and models of manufacture. The Act defines 'designs' as the appearance of the whole or a part of a product resulting from the features of a series of elements conducive to distinguishing identities. A design is considered to display individual character if the general impression it has on the informed user differs from the overall impression produced by any other design which has been made available to the public before the date of filing of the application for registration or, if priority is claimed, before the priority date. A design right is protected for a period of five years from the date of filing of the application and is renewable for one or more periods of five years each up to a total term of 25 years.

The Building Regulation Act Cap. 513 addresses the construction of buildings and related matters.

The Digital Content and Digital Services Contracts Regulations, 2021, was published by means of Legal Notice 406 of 2021 on the 29 October 2021 and came into force on 1 January 2022. The purpose of these Regulations is to transpose Directive (EU) 2019/770 of the European Parliament and of the Council on certain aspects concerning contracts for the

supply of digital content and digital services. These regulations, lay down common rules on certain requirements concerning contracts between traders and consumers for the supply of digital content or digital services, in particular, rules on:

- the conformity of digital content or a digital service with the contract;
- remedies in the event of a lack of such conformity or a failure to supply, and the modalities for the exercise of those remedies, and
- the modification of digital content or a digital service.

5. Arts and cultural education

5.1 Policy and institutional overview

The Ministry for Education and Sports plays a significant role in arts and cultural education. It is responsible for various initiatives and programmes that support the development of skills and talents in the arts. It is responsible for the learning of arts-related subjects, including practice and appreciation, throughout compulsory education. It oversees the Malta Visual and Performing Arts School (MVPA), a specialised institution that offers secondary school students an opportunity to focus on various art forms while continuing their academic education.

The school provides education in five primary art forms: visual arts, dance, drama, media, and music. Students can choose one primary art form but also receive rotating lessons in the other four throughout the year. MVPA follows a dual pathway approach, balancing artistic education with core academic subjects. This allows students to develop their artistic talents without compromising their academic proficiency. The school has a yearly intake of 48 students from across Malta, selected through referrals and auditions. In visual arts, students explore various practices including craft, design, and digital art. In drama, they engage in creating, rehearsing, and performing. Media arts involve using technologies creatively, while music focuses on listening, composing, and performing. Dance includes practical experiences in ballet, contemporary dance, Latin, and other genres. The MVPA aims to nurture young artists by providing a comprehensive education that integrates both artistic and academic learning.

The Malta Arts Scholarships Scheme provides opportunities for individuals to further their studies in fields such as fine arts, design, photography, fashion, architecture, dance, music, theatre, film, and creative writing.

The University of Malta plays a significant role in arts and cultural education through its various faculties and departments. The Faculty of Arts offers a wide range of undergraduate and postgraduate programs in areas such as theatre, music at the School of Performing Arts, literature, history, philosophy, and languages. It also supports research and creative activities in the arts. The Department of Arts, Open Communities & Adult Education focuses on engaging different sectors of society through cultural, political, and artistic education. It promotes local and international research and offers programs that connect visual, theatrical, and musical practices with broader social contexts. The Master of Arts in Social Practice Arts and Critical Education is designed for professional artists, theatre practitioners, and arts educators who want to integrate their creative work with critical educational theories and community settings.

The Malta College of Arts, Science & Technology (MCAST) provides vocational education and training in Malta, including arts and cultural education. The Institute for the Creative Arts offers a variety of programmes at different levels, from introductory certificates to master's degrees. Courses include art and design, media, performing arts, fashion and photography. Advanced diplomas and Bachelor's degrees are available in areas such as cultural heritage skills, digital design, and performing arts. Bachelor's degrees are available in fields like animation, creative media production, fine art, graphic design, and interactive digital media. Master's programmes exist in conservation, creative media and enterprise, and product design.

Thehttps://culture.gov.mt/ Ministry for Arts, Culture and National Heritage oversees various programmes and initiatives related to the cultural sector, providing resources for artists and cultural organisations. The Culture Directorate ensures the governance role of the ministry responsible for culture. It provides policy direction and advice on arts, heritage, and audiovisual matters, and manages programmes like the Culture Pass scheme supporting the arts in schools.

The recent discussion in Malta about setting up an arts conservatory, managed by Arts Research & Consultancy (ARC) and Arts Council Malta (ACM), revolves around the formation of the Academy of the Performing and Visual Arts. This initiative aims to enhance the infrastructure and support for arts education and practice in Malta. Key points of the discussion include:

- Sector Mapping: ACM has been conducting a sector mapping exercise to identify gaps and opportunities within the arts and cultural education landscape in line with Strategy 2030. This helps in understanding the needs and potential areas for development;
- Strategic Goals: The initiative aligns with the strategic goals outlined in ACM's Strategy 2025 (concluded 2025; succeeded by Strategy 2030), which focused on increasing accessibility to cultural and creative activities, fostering international collaborations, and enhancing the professional development of artists — priorities carried forward under Strategy 2030;
- Public Consultation: There has been extensive public consultation to gather insights and feedback from various stakeholders, including artists, educators, and cultural organisations. This collaborative approach ensures that any developments will address the real needs of the community;
- Funding and Sustainability: Discussions also cover funding mechanisms and long-term sustainability of the conservatory. This includes exploring various funding sources and ensuring that the conservatory can operate effectively and continue to support the arts sector in Malta.

Focus has shifted towards greater attention being given to professionalisation in the arts and contributing to a sustainable cultural and creative industries (CCIs) to which education and training may be linked successfully. While self-improvement and appreciation of the arts remain important and the main reason why the education system maintains its commitment, there has been more attention paid to economic and employment aims. This shift aligns with broader economic and employment goals, ensuring that education and training in the arts are not only about personal enrichment and appreciation but also about preparing individuals for successful careers in the CCIs.

Research and discussions highlight that arts education now increasingly aims to equip students with skills that are valuable in the workforce, such as creativity, critical thinking, and collaboration. This approach helps to foster a more robust and economically viable creative sector, linking education and training directly to employment opportunities and economic growth. While the intrinsic value of the arts and the importance of self-improvement remain central, the added focus on economic and employment outcomes reflects a more holistic understanding of the role of arts education in society.

The Training and Development Support Scheme is one such initiative aimed at fostering professional growth and promoting an entrepreneurial culture among creative professionals. Additionally, the National Education Strategy 2024-2030 emphasises the role of education in supporting Malta's socio-economic progress and preparing individuals for the modern economy.

Arts Council Malta runs the Training and Development Support Scheme to strengthen skills and professional growth within the cultural and creative sectors through short-term training opportunities. It is divided into two strands: Strand 1 (18+), which supports continuous professional development for artists, cultural operators, and students, and Strand 2 (ages 8–17), which focuses on nurturing young creative talent through training, international exposure, and participation in platforms such as festivals or workshops. Overall, the scheme aims to enhance artistic excellence, build capacity, and foster a more sustainable and professional creative sector in Malta.

5.2 Arts in schools

Artistic education in Malta's schools is quite comprehensive and aims to integrate arts into the broader educational framework. Artistic subjects such as visual arts, music, drama, and dance are integrated into the national curriculum. These subjects are taught from primary through secondary education, trying to ensure that students have continuous exposure to the arts. Institutions like the Malta Visual and Performing Arts School (MVPA) offer specialised education in various art forms, including visual arts, dance, drama, media, and music. MVPA provides a dual pathway, balancing artistic education with core academic subjects. Many schools offer extracurricular programmes and clubs focused on the arts. These activities

provide additional opportunities for students to explore and develop their artistic talents outside the regular curriculum. The ministry for education, along with ACM, supports various initiatives and programmes aimed at enhancing arts education. This includes funding for arts projects, professional development for teachers, and resources for schools.

ACM promotes careers in the arts starting from school level through the Art Works campaign.

The Culture Pass initiative by ACM ensures that every secondary school student in Malta experiences at least one artistic production per year. These productions are created by professional artists and presented through a curated programme. *Il-Premju tal-President għall-Kreattività* is managed by the Office of the President and ACM and recognises and supports organisations working with vulnerable and disadvantaged groups. It aims to increase their engagement in creativity and arts-driven projects. The Creative Communities fund supported community-led creative and artistic activities, primarily targeting local communities. It provides opportunities for training, research, and the development of artistic projects, encouraging active participation in the arts. The Arts Education scheme offered financial support for arts education projects, helping schools and educational institutions to integrate arts more effectively into their curricula.

There is a relatively significantly large private sector providing tuition and training in the arts across different art forms. They are required to be registered with the Malta Further & Higher Education Authority.

As of 2026, these include 13 dance schools, 2 arts schools (including design), 4 make-up and hairdressing, 3 performing arts, and 2 dedicated to audiovisuals. Furthermore, there are up to 50 music tutors, some of which provide certification.

The Malta Society of Arts was established in 1852 and is Malta's oldest institution for the promotion of the arts and crafts including through numerous educational pathways.

Providers of courses in education and training in the arts contribute to cultural and economic development. They help preserve and promote Malta's rich cultural heritage, its appreciation and understanding, fostering a sense of identity and community. By providing professional training and education, these providers help equip individuals with the skills needed to succeed in various creative fields, thereby contributing to economic growth. Arts education supports the holistic development of students, enhancing their creativity, critical thinking, and emotional intelligence.

This is essential for personal growth and can positively impact other areas of learning. With a focus on professionalisation, arts education providers ensure that students are prepared for careers in the cultural and creative sectors (CCS). This includes not only artistic skills but also business and entrepreneurial skills necessary for a sustainable career. National

initiatives and programmes aim to make arts education accessible to all, ensuring that diverse groups can participate and benefit from creative learning opportunities.

As reported in research commissioned by Arts Council Malta (ACM), the value of the arts and creativity in education is often promoted in national policies and curricular frameworks in Malta. Arts education and creativity are important both for students who aim to specialise in the arts later in life as well as when contributing towards forming an essential part of an inclusive curriculum that can guarantee the educational entitlement of each child. In parallel, arts teachers are entitled to the provision of appropriate resources, learning spaces and professional development opportunities that support them in their work with students.

The amount of time dedicated to arts education in Malta varies depending on the type of school and educational level. Some data indicates that the arts play a more dominant role in curricula in independent schools, non-formal settings specialised in the arts and in a secondary state school specialised in arts education. In the state sector, exposure to arts education in the primary sector is inconsistent while students in state middle schools are generally offered specific arts subjects for half a year. Most students in their later years of compulsory education only study the arts if they choose them as optional subjects.

The COVID-19 pandemic affected various aspects of teaching and learning the arts over a two-year period. Official instructions about social distancing and online modalities affected pedagogies in the arts. For example, some music lessons were carried out in students' regular classrooms instead of a specialised music room, and this meant that students were not exposed to actual instruments during this period. Peripatetic arts teachers employed in the state primary sector were often instructed to replace other teachers in the primary sector, leading to a loss of educational entitlement of affected students. In some schools, arts facilities were either not used during this period or used for other purposes.

The availability of arts rooms and other resources varies a great deal. Most schools in compulsory education that were visited during this study were found to have adequate facilities for arts education, though some inconsistencies between different arts subjects were also noted. Problems associated with insufficient or inappropriate resources (such as old instruments in music classes) and spaces for learning were more in evidence in the performing arts (particularly dance) than the visual arts. Staff in a secondary state school specialised in arts education reported various problems related to the poor condition of spaces for learning in their school, particularly for the performing arts.

A number of stakeholders flagged perceptions of low status for arts subjects in educational settings, particularly in formal education. Causes identified included lack of understanding of specific subject requirements by school authorities and/or policymakers; lack of

consultation; parents' and guardians' attitudes towards the arts; insufficient time allocated to the arts; and a greater importance granted to other subjects in the school curriculum.

A good percentage of students who responded to the questionnaire of the research carried out at the University of Malta on behalf of ACM stated that arts lessons make them feel creative (57.5%) and happy (46%). Students' attitudes towards online teaching and learning in the arts were mixed: 24.7% of respondents reported being dissatisfied with their experience; 20.7% felt satisfied. Notably, 27.6% stated they did not attend online lessons. Some stakeholders reported a shortage of teachers in some sectors (music, for example) and related difficulties in increasing the number of lessons. Continuous professional development and upskilling in all sectors of the educational system emerged as essential to ensure that teachers remain innovative in their pedagogies.

The national cultural policy (NCP 2021) also refers to statistics published by the National Statistics Office (NSO) in 2014 that indicated that about 10 000 students, most under 17 years of age, had received some form of instruction in drama, dance or music from 188 schools teaching performing arts. At the time, these schools employed 400 full-time and part-time teachers. In the light of these figures, the policy noted that a process of regularisation was required to secure licensing, quality assurance and accreditation across the private sector in arts education.

European statistics from 2021 show that the apportionment of time for Expressive Arts (Visual and Performing Arts) in the early years cycle accounts for two hours per week which takes only 5% of overall instruction time, and that teachers can decide to dedicate more time to particular subjects if they believe it will benefit their pupils. Moreover, in Maltese state secondary schools, no arts lessons are offered to pupils who opt out of art or music as optional subjects.

It is further noted that in middle and secondary schools, the presence of a stronger staff complement of arts teachers is highly necessary. Such shortages could be due to the status or general perceptions about the arts, as one stakeholder commented: 'To date, through my full time profession within formal secondary education, I am aware that the common perception of heads of schools and parents is that arts subjects are 'less important' than other academic subjects.'

The first national cultural policy issued in 2011 (NCP2011) acknowledged the value of arts and cultural education and dedicated a chapter to creative education.* NCP 2011 coincided with the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) issued in 2012 and reflects relatively contiguous developments in arts education. When put into the context of the specific cultural, educational and social factors at the time, together with the status of the arts as well as data about arts education, one may note how educational practices in Malta have not

lived up to the expectations set out by these documents. Furthermore, the policy documents were limited in their outlook on the aims of arts education.

The NCF includes brief references to the role of arts education, alongside other general areas such as humanities and science and technology. In the section dedicated to visual and performing arts, the framework notes that this learning area, including art, music, drama and dance, provides opportunities for learners to be 'creative and imaginative, to experience enjoyment and inspiration, and to develop skills in the visual and performing arts.' This section refers to the transferability of skills gained in arts education to different areas of learning, but it does not expand on the social, political and civic dimensions of the arts.

While the idea that students enjoy themselves while engaging in creative activities is certainly important, there is a risk that linking arts education exclusively to enjoyment might relegate all creative domains to mere distractions from whatever is generally perceived to be more 'serious' or crucial to children's educational development. Such conclusions about the 'peripheral' or subservient nature of arts education could be further strengthened with suggestions that the arts exist 'to underpin and enrich learning in other curriculum areas.'

The fourth priority of NCP2021 recommends improving artistic and cultural education in compulsory education as well as promoting an interdisciplinary approach in school curricula. It recommends representing diverse forms of cultural expression and the inclusion of arts education as a cross-curricular area that runs through the wider educational framework. Special emphasis is made on arts education acting as a pillar of STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics). It also advocates for the introduction of 'the role of community cultural mediators at local government level who can facilitate creative activity to reflect the more diverse cultures in our communities.'

In principle, this is in line with Article 10 of UNESCO's 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, which states that parties should 'encourage and promote understanding of the importance of the protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions, inter alia, through educational and greater public awareness programmes.'

*Malta Parliamentary Secretariat for Tourism, the Environment and Culture. 2011. National Cultural Policy 2011.

5.3 Higher arts and cultural education

On a European level, as reported in 2012, the introduction of new national benchmarks such as the Learning Outcomes Framework (LOF) should be accompanied by additional training for teachers. In many European countries, generalist teachers teach the arts in primary

schools while secondary arts teachers are usually specialised in an artistic discipline. In Malta, while generalist primary teachers may teach the arts, this is usually the responsibility of specialist arts teachers. Pre-service teachers for younger students receive some training in arts pedagogies at the University of Malta (UM), while more specialised arts education courses are also offered by its Faculty of Education.

The undergraduate route into teaching previously offered at UM has been replaced by a variety of full-time and part-time Master in Teaching and Learning degrees in art, music, drama and dance. At this level, Master students are recruited after specialising in an art subject at undergraduate level and are trained to become professional educators through the delivery of both theoretical and practical study units. Teacher training is also offered at the Institute for Education (IfE), set up in 2015. The IfE offers a Master of Education to those who wish to obtain a specialised Master teaching degree in the arts.

Unlike their larger counterparts, small entities usually do not have the resources to invest in an education department and also face difficulties in monitoring budgets for educational initiatives. This might explain why the full potential of educational programmes in local museums and heritage sites has not been exploited, although Heritage Malta, the national agency responsible for heritage, invests in educational programmes revolving around school visits and thematic activities and in-service training related to museum education. The national cultural policy (NCP2021) calls on public cultural organisations (PCOs) and heritage institutions to engage further in the provision of cultural education. It encourages PCOs and heritage institutions to set up action programmes with colleges and schools in order to facilitate creative interactions with works in national collections.

Funding schemes introduced by Arts Council Malta (ACM) have helped to boost creative projects in schools and simultaneously provide employment to creative practitioners through collaborations between artists and educators. The Kreattiv funds supported artistic collaborations and residencies across compulsory education across various art forms. In the two-year period 2019-2020, two thirds of projects funded through Kreattiv were conducted in state schools (15 out of 22), while the rest were distributed among church and independent schools.

The Arts Education Scheme introduced in 2021 supported arts education through funding from early years to tertiary education. This scheme was introduced to boost the arts education sector during the pandemic while supporting cross-sectoral collaborations.

5.4 Out-of-school arts and cultural education

Specialised schools in the non-formal state and independent sectors included in the 2022 study commissioned by Arts Council Malta (ACM) all offer a variety of well-maintained rooms for specific uses, resources and courses to their students. Problems associated with budgetary requirements were not very much in evidence, though one of the state non-formal

schools reported problems with IT equipment for staff while a manager in a private school referred to lack of state support. In contrast with schools in compulsory education, facilities for dance students in the non-formal sector are abundant and complement the variety of dance courses available for students.

Already the first national cultural policy (NCP2011) notes that in parallel to formal education, both government and the private sector provided a range of other educational services like foundation courses in the arts.* At the time, the policy underlined the fact that advancement in the various disciplines depended on 'the individual institutions and on the character of the individual disciplines' and that there was 'no coordinated approach to assisting students in synchronising their academic and artistic development', while '[f]ormal educational services in the practice-based arts range from the sporadic to the non-existent.'

Band clubs in local communities contribute significantly to the field of non-formal music education. Its value is addressed in the national cultural policy of 2021 (NCP2021), while ACM regularly launches funds focusing on strengthening the work carried out by band clubs.

Artivisti is a collaborative programme between Arts Council Malta and Aġenzija Żgħażagħ that supports young creatives (typically aged 18–25) through an extended mentorship process combining artistic practice with civic engagement. It provides participants with guidance, skills development, and opportunities to create socially engaged artistic projects, encouraging them to use art as a tool for critical thinking, active citizenship, and community impact, while fostering non-formal learning and creative collaboration.

Apprenticeship Scheme is a funding initiative by Arts Council Malta aimed at strengthening professional development within the cultural and creative sectors through structured, work-based learning. It supports both organisations hosting apprentices and creative practitioners engaging in apprenticeships, with a focus on mentoring, skills transfer, and the enhancement of technical and vocational competencies, thereby contributing to the long-term professionalisation and sustainability of the sector.

There is a fund for musical tuition for young people in band clubs, managed by Aġenzija Żgħażagħ, the national youth agency, within the Ministry for Inclusion and Social Wellbeing and the Parliamentary Secretariat for Recreation, Sport and Voluntary Organisations, with the collaboration of the Għaqda Każini tal-Banda (association of band clubs). These clubs offer music lessons and loan musical instruments to children in various towns and villages. Recent research notes that there are deep and strong links between local band clubs and primary schools, with scope to strengthen them further. They compare well as inclusive entities dedicated to the training of young musicians.

However, the number of students in local band clubs has been decreasing when compared to the relatively large numbers that existed in the post-Second World War period. At the time of the National Statistics Office (NSO) Band Club Participation Study (2014), there were slightly more than 2,000 students in the 86 band clubs across Malta and Gozo. By 2017 there were slightly less than 1,500, with roughly 2 males to 1 female.

In Malta, there are various options for students looking for music education in non-formal settings. The best-known school is the Malta School of Music, which offers music programmes and opportunities for individual learners and aims to help students achieve high standards in playing proficiency, performance, creativity, and musicianship. The school was established in 1975 and employs established musicians as teachers. Each year The school accepts around 200 new students annually and also offers external students the possibility of forming part of the school's Children Choir or Community Choir. The school is part of the Mikiel Anton Vassalli College (MAVC) and forms part of the Visual and Performing Arts Schools under the Directorate for Research, Lifelong Learning and Innovation, offering courses for beginners up to advanced level.

Another state-owned institution is the Villabianca Centre for Music and the Arts. It offers music lessons and music therapy to children and young people with disabilities. A memorandum of understanding was signed between the Malta Trust Foundation and the MAVC Malta School of Music within the Education Ministry to address this need. The two sides cooperate on initiatives to support children who lack access to music and the arts and engage local musicians and international music therapists.

* *Malta Parliamentary Secretariat for Tourism, the Environment and Culture. 2011. National Cultural Policy 2011.

5.5 Vocational and professional training

The national cultural policy (NCP2021) acknowledges the achievements of recent years to improve arts and cultural education in Malta. Particular reference is made to the establishment of the Malta Visual and Performing Arts School (MVPA) in 2017 that offers secondary level students the opportunity to pursue the arts in their educational itinerary. The MVPA is a national school that offers five art forms as its primary focus of study. These are: art, dance, drama, media and music. The Gozo Visual & Performing Arts School (VPA) forms part of the Mikiel Anton Vassalli College (MAVC) and both schools are important stakeholders in arts education since they contribute to the development of professionals.

The quality of arts teaching and learning is linked to teachers' confidence in teaching art. The importance of teachers' confidence is especially true in early years and the primary sector, in which generalist teachers may include some aspects of the arts in their teaching. In their comparative study on primary teachers' self-confidence in teaching arts and crafts in Malta and Finland, argue that prospective primary level teachers often Gatt and Karppinen (2014) enter universities with anxieties towards the teaching of arts and crafts as a result of poor experiences in the field. The research findings show that courses in the arts and crafts offered during teaching degrees as well as prior teaching experiences help prospective primary teachers develop more positive attitudes towards the arts. The importance of

continuous professional development is therefore linked to the possibility of deepening the artistry of teachers.

Arts students who would like to further their studies in international institutions can also apply for a scholarship through the Malta Arts Scholarships Scheme within the Ministry for Education and Sports(MEYR). While supporting this scheme, NCP2021 notes that even more financial support is needed to address the capacity building of the cultural and creative sectors (CCS). It advocates for financial support to be offered to talented children, under the age of 16, who are accepted into prestigious schools abroad and whose needs cannot be met by local organisations or local tutorship.

One of the available providers in drama is the Malta School of Drama and Dance which supports students in their creative needs and abilities related to drama and dance. The school offers courses in various areas, including musical theatre, flamenco, ballet and freestyle dance.

Other forms of tuition in drama are available in different schools. The Malta Society of Arts in Valletta offers courses to 10-15 year olds. The Helen O'Grady Drama Academy offers drama classes to different ages, from very young children to adults. Private tuition, including that provided by private schools Masquerade, Stagecoach and Hoi Polloi use Trinity syllabi and examination methods. A number of other schools similarly cater for international syllabi.

Other events for children, schools and families contribute to the local cultural calendar. Stagecoach Theatre Arts School organises a Summer Short Play Festival while *ŻiguŻajg*, organised by *Spazju Kreattiv*, the national cultural hub, and a member of ASSITEJ International Association of Theatre for Children & Young People, organises an annual programme of international events aimed primarily at children.

6. Cultural participation and consumption

6.1 Policies and programmes

In line with Strategy 2030, Arts Council Malta (ACM) manages several programmes and campaigns that seek to encourage cultural participation. These initiatives are complementary to one another. These are some of the main initiatives:

- Art Works campaigns for considering a career in the arts;
- Right to Culture addresses ACM's efforts in the CCIs in a transversal manner, addressing different aspects pertinent to access, participation and promotion;https://artscouncilmalta.gov.mt/funding-and-grants/arts-support-scheme-right-to-culture-3/
- Culture Pass scheme focus on arts education in order to enable greater access to, and participation in, the arts across different levels of students starting from early education.

ACM holds regular public consultations, through initiatives like Kunsillkafè, aimed at promoting dialogue and discussion among artists, cultural operators, and the public, and webinars and information sessions, regularly held to provide updates and gather feedback from stakeholders, as part of its broader strategy to foster a vibrant cultural scene in Malta.

During the annual Malta Book Festival, the National Book Council offers a €20 voucher initiative to encourage book purchases. This voucher can be used to buy books at the festival, making it more accessible for people to explore and enjoy new literature. The festival typically features a wide range of books, from exhibition catalogues and collected papers to workbooks and activity books.

Malta has several literacy campaigns and programs aimed at improving literacy skills across different age groups. These include the following:

- National Literacy Agency (NLA) programmes include the Aqra fis-Sajf summer reading campaign that encourages children to continue reading during the summer months. This programme is organised in collaboration with the Foundation for Educational Services (FES) and Malta Libraries; Read with Me (Aqra Miegħi) is an early literacy programme for children aged 0 to 3 and their parents; Footballers' Read and Write Programme (Bil-Qari u l-Kitba Niskorja) combines football and literacy to engage children in reading and writing activities; Reading Recovery is an intervention programme designed to help children with the lowest literacy achievement in their early years; Nwar Family Literacy Programme is an after-school programme for primary school pupils who need additional support with their literacy skills; Reading Ambassadors promotes reading through public figures who act as ambassadors for literacy; National Readathon (Qaritona Nazzjonali) is a nationwide reading event to encourage reading among all age groups; The Magic of Stories (Seħer l-Istejjer) is a

family literacy program for children aged 4 to 7; and the national spelling bee held to celebrate the European Day of Languages.

- The national heritage agency, Heritage Malta, offers special incentives for both young people and students and the elderly through its passport schemes.
- The Family Multisite Pass is designed for families and allows entry for two adults and two children. It provides access to a variety of sites. Heritage Malta often offers discounts and special promotions, such as extended opening hours and reduced prices during certain periods.

6.2 Trends and figures in cultural participation

Table 3: People who participated in or attended a certain cultural activity during the last 12 months in Malta (in % of the population, over 3 available years)

	2021	2022	2023
Activities heavily subsidised by the state			
Theatre			
Opera performances			
Zarzuela			
Dance			
Concerts of classical music			
Libraries	13 567	25 140	
Museums	394 088	935 176	1 350 817
Monuments			
Cultural centres			
Activities without large public subsidies			
Cinema		**460 244**	**594 087**
To read books not related to the profession or studies			
In paper format (Usually use)			
In digital format (Usually use)			
Directly on the Internet (Usually use)			
To listen to music (Usually listen)			
on a computer or directly on the Internet		48 258	76 428
To read periodic publications (Usually read)			
Directly on the Internet		37 847	44 431

To watch videos (Usually watch)			
Directly on the Internet		121,509	125,211
To watch television (Usually watch)	93%	90%	88%
Directly on the Internet			
To listen to the radio (Usually watch)	54%	61.1%	64.4%
Directly on the Internet			
To play videogames (Usually play)		62,151	66,361
To use computer for entertainment or leisure (Usually use)			
Internet for entertainment or leisure (Usually use)			

Source(s): Malta Libraries Annual Report 2022 , Malta Libraries Annual Report 2023 , Heritage Malta Annual Report 2023 , NSO Cinema Statistics 2023 , NSO ICT Usage by Households 2023 , NSO ICT Usage by Households 2022, Broadcasting Authority Annual Report 2021 , Broadcasting Authority Audience Survey June 2022

Table 4: People who have carried out artistic activities in Malta in the last 12 months by type of activity, in % of total population, period 2021-2023

	2021	2022	2023
Writing			
Painting or drawing			
Other visual arts			35 156
Photography			25 419
Making videos			
Designing web pages			
Drama			
Dance and ballet			
Playing an instrument			13 696
Singing in a choir			

Source(s): Cultural & Creative Practice Survey 2024

6.3 Trends and figures in household expenditure

Table 5: Household cultural expenditure by expenditure purpose, 2022-2023[2]

Items (Field/Domain)	Household expenditure (in million EUR and percentages)				Average per capita expenditure (EUR)	
	2022	%	2023	%	2022	2023
I. Books and Press						
Books						
Press						
II. Cultural Services						
Cinema, theatre and others						
Museums, libraries, parks and similar						
Photographic services						
III. Audiovisual equip-ment and accessories						
Support for recording image, sound and data						
Audiovisual equipment and accessories						
Musical instruments						
IV. Subscriptions of television, information processing						
Rental and subscriptions of radio and television						
Subscriptions of radio and television					177.82	174.35
Rental of cultural equipment and accessories						
Information Processing and Internet						
Material for information processing						
Mobile devices						
Mobile and Internet services						
TOTAL						

Source(s): Malta Communications Authority Annual Report and Financial Statements 2023

[2] Disaggregated household cultural expenditure data is not separately published in NSO Household Budgetary Survey outputs as of June 2026.

6.4 Culture and civil society

The national cultural policy 2021 identifies civil participation and mutual integration as key elements in weaving a strong community-oriented fabric in contemporary Maltese life.

Band clubs in Malta ('każini tal-banda') are integral to Maltese culture and community life. These clubs, found in nearly every town and village, serve as free music schools, providing instruments and tuition at no cost. They play a crucial role in organizing local events, especially the vibrant village feasts, and foster a sense of community and cultural pride. Historically, band clubs were also centers for social movements and change. Today, they continue to nurture musical talent and community spirit, making them a cherished part of Maltese heritage.

As noted in research on the impact of the EU youth strategy 2019-2027, religious youth groups play a significant role in the performing arts, including theatre, drama, and music, with a strong social purpose. These groups use performances to creatively express their faith and address local social issues such as poverty, inequality, and mental health. By staging plays and musical events, they raise awareness and inspire community action. Additionally, these activities provide a nurturing environment for young people to develop their talents, build confidence, and form meaningful connections. This integration of arts and social purpose helps cultivate a sense of responsibility and active citizenship among youth. This sector also makes good use of the existing theatre spaces in Malta.

The national youth agency, *Aġenzija Żgħażagħ*, plays a pivotal role in empowering youth through culture, arts, and European collaboration. Initiatives like the *Artivisti* programme, in partnership with Arts Council Malta, support young artists by providing mentorship, training, and opportunities for creative expression. These programmes encourage social responsibility and active citizenship through the arts. Additionally, *Aġenzija Żgħażagħ* fosters European collaboration by participating in and organising international projects, enabling Maltese youth to engage with their peers across Europe, exchange ideas, and develop a broader cultural perspective. This holistic approach nurtures talent and promotes cultural enrichment.

The Scouts in Malta provide invaluable opportunities for both boys and girls to develop essential life skills. Through activities that promote teamwork, leadership, and community service, scouts foster social interaction and personal growth. Music plays a significant role in their programmes, with many groups incorporating singing, instrument playing, and musical performances into their activities. This musical element not only enhances creativity but also strengthens bonds among members. By participating in these diverse activities, scouts in Malta build confidence, learn responsibility, and contribute positively to their communities.

Community arts in Malta play a vital role in fostering social cohesion, mental wellbeing, and cultural identity. Through initiatives like public art projects, theatre productions, and festivals, community arts bring people together, promoting inclusivity and empathy. These activities provide a platform for creative expression and critical thinking, enhancing the cultural fabric of Maltese society. Additionally, community arts contribute to mental health by reducing stress and promoting emotional resilience. Programmes supported by Arts Council Malta, such as art therapy workshops and outreach initiatives, further highlight the importance of the arts in enhancing community wellbeing.

The Malta Gay Rights Movement (MGRM) significantly contributes to culture and the arts by promoting LGBTQI+ visibility and acceptance through creative expression. MGRM organises events like Pride Marches, which feature performances, art exhibitions, and cultural activities that celebrate diversity. It helped organise EuroPride in 2023 in Malta. These initiatives provide a platform for LGBTQI+ artists to showcase their talents and share their stories, fostering a more inclusive society. Additionally, MGRM collaborates with local and international artists to raise awareness about LGBTQI+ issues, using the arts as a powerful tool for social change and community engagement.

Subcultures in Malta play a significant role in enriching the island's cultural landscape. Tattoo artists, for instance, contribute to the vibrant art scene with their unique and expressive designs. In the music realm, Malta boasts a diverse array of sub-genres, from traditional folk music to modern electronic beats. Festivals like the Glitch Festival and venues like The Garage nurture and showcase the island's dynamic music scene.

Illustrators also hold a special place in Malta's cultural fabric. The Malta Community of Illustrators (MCOI) brings together talented artists, promoting illustration as a powerful communicational tool. Their annual showcases highlight the best of Maltese and Malta-based illustration, fostering a sense of community and artistic growth.

The figures below accessed from the National Statistics Office quantify the number of respondents identifying their internet use with a type of activity that is described as civil and political participation for 2025 (https://nso.gov.mt/ict-usage-by-households-2022/)

Table 4. Main activities for internet use

Demographic profile	Activity				
	Communication	Access to information	Civic and political participation	Professional life	Other online services
Sex:					
Males	229,999	212,440	47,154	49,527	198,751
Females	194,521	184,404	37,640	37,133	165,030
Age group:					
16-24	48,418	45,847	8,973[u]	19,869	43,391
25-34	108,255	103,630	21,390	31,057	99,637
35-44	101,771	96,980	19,995	21,439	94,483
45-54	73,022	69,149	16,393	9,735[u]	64,491
55-64	51,657	48,219	9,830[u]	:	37,789
65-74	41,397	33,018	8,213[u]	:	23,989
Total	**424,520**	**396,844**	**84,794**	**86,660**	**363,781**
			% internet users[1]		
Sex:					
Males	98.7	91.2	20.2	21.3	85.3
Females	99.3	94.2	19.2	19.0	84.3
Age group:					
16-24	100.0	94.7	18.5[u]	41.0	89.6
25-34	100.0	95.7	19.8	28.7	92.0
35-44	100.0	95.3	19.6	21.1	92.8
45-54	99.4	94.1	22.3	13.2[u]	87.8
55-64	95.5	89.1	18.2[u]	:	69.8
65-74	96.9	77.3	19.2[u]	:	56.2
Total	**99.0**	**92.6**	**19.8**	**20.2**	**84.9**

[1] Includes only persons who used the internet within three months prior to the surveying period (refer to Table 2).
[u] Under represented - between 20 and 49 sample observations
: Unreliable - less than 20 sample observations.
Notes:
1. Totals may not add up due to rounding.
2. Refer to Methodological note 4 for more information on internet activities.

NSO Malta | ICT Usage by Households: 2025 - NSO Malta
https://nso.gov.mt/ict-usage-by-households-2023/
https://nso.gov.mt/ict-usage-by-households-2022/

The Commission for the Rights of People with Disability collaborates with different civil society, state and private partners to further the participation of people with a disability in cultural and civil life.

State, Church and civil society organisations address and promote the integration of minorities into society, including members of migrant populations, on a regular basis through programmes and initiatives.

7. Financing and support

7.1 Public funding

Malta's public expenditure on culture is captured in the annual Financial Estimates published by the Ministry for Finance and Employment and in sector accounts compiled by the National Statistics Office (NSO). Eurostat's Classification of the Functions of Government (COFOG) division 08 ("Recreation, culture and religion") provides the standard European comparator; within it, cultural services (COFOG 08.2) most closely approximates the Compendium's scope. However, Maltese COFOG data combines cultural services with recreation and sport, and the boundary between central-government line votes for culture and those for related portfolios (tourism, education, Gozo) requires interpretation. The figures in Tables 6 and 7 below are compiled from the Financial Estimates and cross-checked against the ACM Annual Reports and the NSO/Eurostat COFOG cultural-services data.

The total culture-related estimate for 2026 stands at approximately €138.7 million (recurrent and capital combined), up from an estimated €125.4 million in 2025 (+10.6%) and €27.1 million in 2013 — representing cumulative growth of roughly 411% over thirteen years. These figures include the film cash-rebate allocation (€25 million in 2026), which constitutes the single largest capital line vote and substantially inflates the headline total. Excluding the film rebate, the culture estimate is approximately €113.7 million.

7.1.1 Indicators

Malta's public culture expenditure can be measured in two manners. The standard European comparator is COFOG 08.2 ("cultural services") as reported by the National Statistics Office (NSO) under the ESA framework. On this basis, general government expenditure on cultural services stood at €194.9 million in 2024 (current prices), up from €150.1 million in 2022.

Using NSO end-of-year population estimates, the key indicators for the most recent available year (2024, COFOG cultural services) are as follows:

- **Public culture expenditure per capita:** approximately €339 (population: 574,250). This compares with €277 per capita in 2022 and €64 in 2013.
- **Public culture expenditure as a percentage of GDP:** approximately 0.84% (nominal GDP 2024: c. €23.1 billion).
- **Public culture expenditure as a percentage of total public expenditure:** Eurostat data for 2023 show Malta allocating 2.6% of total general government expenditure to cultural services, among the higher shares in the EU. At the

broader COFOG 08 level ("recreation, culture and religion"), Malta stood at 1.5% of GDP in 2023, above the EU average.

A calculation based on the government's Financial Estimates, addressing only budget line votes directly assigned to culture, adds up to €138.7 million for 2026 (estimate) and €125.4 million for 2025, equivalent to approximately €236 and €218 per capita respectively, and around 1.5% of total government expenditure.

The overall trend is one of sustained growth as per capita cultural expenditure rose from €64 in 2013 to €339 in 2024 on the COFOG basis, possibly driven by the Valletta 2018 legacy, expanded recurrent subventions to national cultural entities, new institutions (e.g. MICAS, NAPA), heritage capital investment, and broadened arts and audiovisual support schemes. Interpreting year-on-year changes requires caution, as one-off capital and programme cycles can significantly impact annual totals.

Sources: NSO News Release NR-2024-016 (October 2024); NSO News Release NR-2024-241 (December 2024); NSO population estimates; Eurostat COFOG tables; Financial Estimates 2025 and 2026 (Ministry for Finance); Creative Economy Working Group (historical series).

7.1.2 Expenditure on government level

Malta is a unitary state with one tier of central government and sixty-eight local councils; there is no regional or provincial government. The overwhelming majority of public cultural expenditure is therefore central-government expenditure, allocated through ministerial line votes in the Financial Estimates. Local councils receive a block grant under the *Local Government Act* (Cap. 363) and may allocate a portion to local cultural events (principally *festi*, community celebrations and minor heritage maintenance), but local-government spending on culture is not separately reported in a consolidated national figure.

Table 6: Public cultural expenditure by level of government, 2013 and 2026 (EUR millions, current prices)

Level of government	2013	2026 estimate	Change (EUR m)	% change
Central government — recurrent	19.2	88.9	+69.7	+363%
Central government — capital	7.9	49.8	+41.9	+530%
Central government — total	**27.1**	**138.7**	**+111.6**	**+411%**
Local government	n/a	n/a	—	—
Total	**27.1**	**138.7**	**+111.6**	**+411%**

Source: Author's compilation from Financial Estimates 2026 and 2025, Financial Estimates 2013.

7.1.3 Expenditure per sector

Public cultural expenditure in the Financial Estimates can be mapped to four broad categories: heritage (including archaeology, restoration, archives, UNESCO, intangible heritage, crafts, language bodies); arts (performing and visual arts, music, carnival, arts education, ACM and its PCOs, festivals); media and audiovisual (broadcasting, film, libraries, books, digital games, press); and interdisciplinary (VCA, cultural diplomacy, cultural education, Valletta 2031 candidacy, innovation prizes). The film cash-rebate allocation (capital LV 7256) dominates the media/audiovisual capital line.

Table 7: Public cultural expenditure by sector, 2025 and 2026 (EUR millions, current prices)

Category	2025 recurrent	2026 recurrent	2025 capital	2026 capital	2026 total	Share of total (%)
Heritage	19.1	25.3	12.6	17.3	42.6	30.7
Arts	31.7	35.6	5.3	5.0	40.6	29.3
Media and audiovisual	20.1	21.6	30.5	27.5	49.1	35.4
Interdisciplinary	5.7	6.4	0.3	0.0	6.4	4.6
Total	**76.6**	**88.9**	**48.7**	**49.8**	**138.7**	**100.0**

Source: Author's compilation from Financial Estimates 2026 and 2025. Categories are derived from the line-vote descriptions and ministerial portfolio assignment; classification judgements are the author's.

The largest single recurrent line vote is Heritage Malta at €10.05 million (2026), followed by PBS Ltd (public-service obligation) at €8.6 million and the Valletta Cultural Agency at €4.5 million. In the arts category, the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra (€3.8 million plus €250,000 Music Academy), Festivals Malta (€3.2 million), Pjazza Teatru Rjal (€2.64 million), MICAS (€2.5 million recurrent plus €1 million capital), NAPA (€2.3 million, up from €1.6 million), and Arts Council Malta itself (€2.425 million) are the principal recurrent recipients. The Malta Biennale allocation rose from €250,000 (2025) to €2.35 million (2026), reflecting Heritage Malta's investment in the second edition. Band Club Premises capital rose from €100,000 to €900,000.

Media/audiovisual expenditure is dominated by the film cash-rebate scheme (€25 million capital, reduced from €28 million in 2025) and PBS Ltd. The Malta Film Commission recurrent allocation was halved from €3.8 million to €1.8 million, partly reflecting the transfer of screen-production funding to ACM's Screen Support Scheme (€2 million under "Creative Malta / Screen Malta").

7.2 Support programmes

7.2.1 Strategies, programmes and other forms of support

Public support for culture is delivered through a layered system of central-government allocations, arms-length funding, institutional programming and EU co-financing.

At the strategic level, the *National Cultural Policy* (2021) identifies public investment as one of its pillars and sets an aspirational target of 2% of total government expenditure for culture. Arts Council Malta's *Strategy 2025 "Care, Create, Flourish"* operationalised this through six strategic areas; the succeeding Strategy 2030 maintains the rights-based framework. The six *Regional Cultural Strategies 2022–2027* extend programme support to regional and local levels through the Regional Cultural Cooperation Programme.

ACM administers nineteen competitive schemes in 2026, delivered through approximately thirty individual calls across multiple strands and rounds, with a combined recurrent allocation from government budget lines of approximately €7.4 million — up from €5.41 million in 2024, driven mainly by the expansion of the *Investment in Cultural Organisations* scheme (from €750,000 to €1.55 million) and the enlarged *Screen Support Scheme* (from €900,000 to €2 million). A funding review aligned with Strategy 2030 has streamlined the portfolio from earlier years. The schemes span the full cycle of artistic production — from research and development (*Artistic Research and Development Scheme*) through creation (*Arts Support Scheme*, *Screen Support Scheme*) and international circulation (*International Cultural Exchanges Scheme*, *International Participation Scheme*, *Mobility Guarantee Scheme*) to audience development (*Culture Pass*, *Arts in Schools*, *Right to Culture*). ACM's *General Budget Guidelines* set the evaluation criteria; all competitive schemes operate under EU *de minimis* State Aid rules.

Festivals Malta programmes a calendar of eleven festivals and five national celebrations (see 3.3 and 3.5.4) and in 2026 launched the Large Scale Events Support Scheme to contract private delivery partners.

EU structural and investment funds have co-financed major capital infrastructure: MICAS (ERDF 2014–2020), the Valletta Design Cluster (ERDF), Heritage Malta digitisation projects and Carnival Village facilities. The Creative Europe Desk Malta hosted by ACM facilitates participation in Creative Europe cooperation and media strands; Budget 2026 announced Malta's accession to Eurimages for film co-production and distribution support. The Culture and Health Co-Fund jointly financed with the EU represents a newer cross-sectoral funding instrument.

7.2.2 Artist's funds

There is no single dedicated artist's fund in Malta in the manner of, say, the Nordic or Benelux artist-salary schemes. Instead, artists access support through ACM's general and sector-specific funding schemes (7.2.3), through fiscal measures (4.1.4), and through the institutional employment provided by the eleven Public Cultural Organisations (see 2.3 and 3.3).

The principal competitive arts fund is the *Arts Support Scheme*, ACM's flagship open-call instrument supporting individuals, groups, registered entities and voluntary organisations to develop and present artistic projects across all art forms (the Financial Estimates retain the historical budget-line name "Malta Arts Fund" for the associated allocation, currently €450,000 in 2026). For a number of years the Arts Support Scheme was complemented by its access-focused strand, the *Arts Support Scheme – Right to Culture*, which earmarks funding for community-access projects. Other schemes most directly targeted at individual artists include: the *Micro Grant*, providing one-time capacity-building support of up to €5,000 for creatives who have not received ACM funding in the preceding three years; the *Artistic Research and Development Scheme*; the *Training and Development Support Scheme* in two strands (18+ and 8–17); the *Apprenticeship Scheme* (launched 2024), matching early-career creatives with established practitioners for a twelve-month full-time placement funded at €18,000 per apprentice; and the *Young Artist Development Programme (Artivisti)*, run jointly with Aġenzija Żgħażagħ.

Multi-year programme funding for organisations employing artists is delivered through the *Investment in Cultural Organisations* scheme (€1.55 million in 2026, up from €750,000; the Financial Estimates use the former budget-line name "Cultural Partnerships Agreements"). The *National Fund for Artistic Excellence* (€150,000) supports outstanding individual projects and professional development.

The Charter for the Status of the Artist (2024) calls for the introduction of an income-smoothing mechanism for artists between projects and for reform of unemployment-benefit qualifying criteria to accommodate intermittent work patterns (see 4.1.3). Neither measure has been legislated as of May 2026. The COVID-19 Wage Supplement (2020–2022) demonstrated that the social-protection system can be calibrated for cultural workers, but only as an emergency measure.

Fiscal supports functioning as de facto artist's funds include: the reduced 7.5% income-tax rate for artistic activity (from base year 2022), the VAT reclaim on a one-time purchase of a musical instrument, and the *Get Qualified Scheme* tax credits for arts-related qualifications.

7.2.3 Grants, awards, scholarships

ACM's competitive grants are the principal mechanism. The *Arts Support Scheme* is the flagship instrument, supporting artistic projects across all art forms from individuals, groups, registered entities and voluntary organisations. In 2024, ACM's combined scheme and programme allocation totalled approximately €5.41 million; by 2026 the portfolio comprised nineteen competitive schemes, streamlined through a funding review aligned with Strategy 2030. Key schemes beyond those discussed in 7.2.2 include the *Arts Support Scheme – Right to Culture*, the *Artistic Heritage Scheme*, the *Restoration Funding Scheme*, and the *Creative Innovators and Platforms Fund* (CIP), a phased instrument supporting creative enterprises through seed funding, capacity building and multi-year operational support (succeeding the earlier Creative Industries Platform; the Financial Estimates line vote historically titled "INVEX").

Sector-specific grants include: the *Screen Support Scheme* (€2 million from 2025, administered by ACM under "Creative Malta / Screen Malta"), the *Call for Proposals for Original Musicals in the Maltese Language (2022–2026)*, and the *Health and Safety Standards in Fireworks Factories Fund* (€200,000 in 2026).

Awards include *Il-Premju għall-Arti* (the national arts prize, managed by ACM), the *President's Award for Creativity* (managed jointly by the Office of the President and ACM, at €120,000 per year), and the National Book Council's literary prizes including the *Premju Nazzjonali tal-Ktieb*.

Scholarships and bursaries with direct cultural-sector application include: the *Arts Scholarship Fund* (€350,000 in 2026, administered by the Ministry for Education), the *Band Music Traineeship Scheme* (€100,000), bursaries under bilateral cultural agreements (€60,000, administered by the Ministry for Education), and the *Malta Arts Fund* scholarship component. The *Sabbatical for Artistic Research Grant* provides artists with funded time for research and professional development.

Heritage-related grants flow through Heritage Malta's internal budget for the *Improvements at Museums and Historical Sites* capital programme (€2.5 million in 2026) and through ACM's *Restoration Funding Scheme*.

Grants from outside the state budget include Creative Europe cooperation and media grants accessed through the Creative Europe Desk Malta, the EEA and Norway Grants (applied to Heritage Malta projects in the 2014–2021 cycle), and a newly launched *Culture and Health Co-Fund* jointly financed with the European Union.

7.2.4 Support to professional artists'

Direct state support to professional artists' associations is modest and flows through two principal channels: the *Investment in Cultural Organisations* scheme (covering both Malta and Gozo strands, totalling €1.55 million in 2026) and the Creative Innovators and Platforms Fund (CIP), which supports creative enterprises through a phased seed-to-scale pathway.. The Investment in Cultural Organisations scheme provides multi-year programme funding to established organisations, which may include umbrella associations and federations alongside production companies, theatre groups and cultural NGOs.

In the traditional-culture field, state support flows through schemes co-managed with sector federations rather than through block grants to those federations themselves. The Għaqda Każini tal-Banda, representing 91 of Malta's 92 band clubs, jointly administers the *National Opportunities Fund for band clubs* and the *Fund for the purchase of musical instruments for local Musical Societies* under a 2025 memorandum of understanding with ACM. A €280,000 bank-loan interest-subsidy scheme was launched in November 2025 to support band-club renovation and infrastructure. The *Artistic Financing for Feast Associations Scheme* and the *Health and Safety Standards in Fireworks Factories Fund* perform an analogous role for *festa* associations and fireworks factories respectively.

Support to cultural NGOs is delivered indirectly through the 150% tax deduction on corporate donations to voluntary cultural organisations and through the Creative Innovators and Platforms Fund.

The Malta Entertainment Industry and Arts Association (MEIA), the Malta Producers Association and the Malta Community of Illustrators participate in ACM's Sectoral Representative Working Group but do not receive institutional block grants from the state. MEIA has operated primarily on membership fees and project income since its founding in 2020. The Malta Society of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce receives a dedicated annual subsidy of €230,000 (2026) through a specific Financial Estimates line vote, reflecting its historical role as Malta's oldest arts institution and provider of exhibition and educational facilities.

The *Voluntary Organisations Act* (Cap. 492) provides the legal framework under which cultural associations register and benefit from fiscal exemptions and eligibility for public grants. Registered organisations may also apply for Creative Europe cooperation grants through the Creative Europe Desk Malta.

The Charter for the Status of the Artist (2024) calls for the strengthening of representative associations as social partners in sectoral consultation on pay, working conditions and cultural infrastructure. No statutory collective-bargaining framework for the cultural sector has been enacted as of May 2026.

7.3 Private funding

Private funding for culture in Malta derives from four main sources: corporate sponsorship, individual philanthropy, box-office and earned income, and property-related investment in heritage settings.

The principal fiscal incentive for private giving is the 150% tax deduction on donations to culture, available to companies donating to voluntary cultural organisations or Public Cultural Organisations registered with the Commissioner for Voluntary Organisations. Between 2016 and 2021, approximately €3.2 million in donations were channelled through this mechanism. No systematic time-series data on private cultural giving beyond this estimate is publicly available.

Corporate sponsorship is most visible in festival programming and in institutional partnerships. MICAS has recruited a network of cultural supporters including private companies; the Malta Biennalesecured partnerships with the Malta Tourism Authority, Bank of Valletta, Mapfre Middlesea and Malta International Airport. Festivals Malta and Teatru Manoel operate mixed-funding models combining government subvention with box-office revenue and commercial sponsorship. The Malta Philharmonic Orchestra draws on both its government allocation and corporate partnerships. The *Malta Society of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce* combines its state subsidy with membership fees, venue hire and earned income.

Box-office and earned income are structurally constrained by the small domestic market. Malta's resident population of over half a million limits the commercial viability of large-format cultural production, making state subvention essential for most performing-arts and visual-arts institutions. Tourism — with 2.2 million visitors in the first seven months of 2025 — provides a supplementary audience base, particularly for heritage sites (Heritage Malta), MICAS and festival programming, but ticket-revenue data for cultural institutions is not separately reported in consolidated public statistics.

Philanthropic foundations with a cultural dimension include the Fondazzjoni Patrimonju Malti (which receives a €260,000 government allocation alongside private donations), the St John's Co-Cathedral Foundation (which combines a €33,000 state capital subvention with entrance-fee revenue from one of Malta's most visited heritage sites), and smaller trusts. Crowdfunding for cultural projects has grown modestly but no sector-specific data is available.

Heritage-property tax schemes (see 4.1.4), including VAT and stamp-duty relief for qualifying restoration, indirectly mobilise private capital for cultural-heritage preservation, though the volume is not publicly quantified.

Internationally, the absence of a national cultural foundation or endowment fund distinguishes Malta from several larger European comparators. The *National Cultural Policy (2021)* calls for the development of additional mechanisms to leverage private and international funding for culture but does not commit to the establishment of an endowment or a lottery-funded cultural trust.