



Document #2130681

USDOS – US Department of State (Author)

2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Malta

MALTA (Tier 2)

The Government of Malta does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking but is making significant efforts to do so. The government demonstrated overall increasing efforts compared with the previous reporting period; therefore, Malta was upgraded to Tier 2. These efforts included prosecuting more traffickers, including for the first time jointly with prosecutions for financial crimes; identifying and assisting more potential victims, including a Maltese national and a child asylum-seeker; and providing protection services to all identified victims. The government adopted a new national strategy and action plan and sought the input of survivors in its anti-trafficking efforts. The government amended the criminal code to increase protections for vulnerable witnesses when giving testimony and enacted regulations to extend some safeguards against exploitation to temporary workers. However, the government did not meet the minimum standards in several key areas. The government investigated fewer trafficking cases, and it did not convict any traffickers in 2024. Gaps in victim identification persisted and identification of Maltese and child victims and among asylum-seekers remained inadequate. The government has never awarded restitution or compensation to any trafficking victims.

PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Increase efforts to vigorously investigate and prosecute trafficking crimes and seek adequate penalties for convicted traffickers.
- Formalize and fully implement the updated NRM.

- Ensure relevant staff and officials proactively identify trafficking victims, including Maltese nationals and especially among vulnerable populations, such as children, migrant workers, asylum-seekers, and individuals in commercial sex.
- Institutionalize victim-centered and trauma-informed anti-trafficking training for front-line officials, police officers, prosecutors, and judges with a focus on the use of psychological coercion and fraud as means of trafficking.
- Partner with civil society to identify and provide protection to trafficking victims.
- Institutionalize training for judges on the anti-trafficking law and the full range of penalties available.
- Improve effective leadership and prioritization of human trafficking within government ministries, as well as streamline anti-trafficking coordination and communication efforts among ministries.
- Take steps to address inappropriate penalization of victims solely for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked.
- Consistently enforce strong regulations and oversight of labor recruitment companies, including by enforcing the law prohibiting recruitment fees charged to migrant workers and holding fraudulent labor recruiters criminally accountable.
- Implement license controls and increase oversight of massage parlors and continue to increase screening for trafficking victims.
- Ensure trafficking victims have consistent early access to free legal aid.
- Increase awareness of and trafficking victims' access to damages and compensation, regardless of their nationality or residency status.

PROSECUTION

The government maintained mixed anti-trafficking law enforcement efforts.

Article 248A-G of the criminal code criminalized sex trafficking and labor trafficking, and it prescribed penalties of six to 12 years' imprisonment. These penalties were sufficiently stringent and, with respect to sex trafficking, commensurate with those prescribed for other grave crimes, such as rape.

In 2024, law enforcement initiated two investigations (one for sex trafficking and one for sex and labor trafficking), compared with nine investigations in 2023 and 12 in 2022. The government reported four investigations initiated in prior years remained ongoing. For the first time, the Vulnerable Victims Unit (VVU), which leads on human trafficking

investigations, worked with financial investigators to link charges for financial crimes, such as money laundering, to trafficking charges. The government initiated prosecutions against 12 suspects in 2024, compared with two prosecutions initiated in 2023 and six in 2022. Courts did not convict any traffickers in 2024, compared with one conviction in 2023 and one in 2022. The government did not report any investigations, prosecutions, or convictions of government employees allegedly complicit in trafficking crimes; however, official complicity in trafficking crimes remained a significant concern.

Perennial issues with rule of law, corruption, slow court proceedings, a backlog of court cases, insufficient judicial resources, and an understaffed police force continued to hamper prosecutions and convictions. The government did not provide anti-trafficking training to judges, and experts continued to report some judges dismissed trafficking cases or pursued crimes with inadequate penalties due to a lack of understanding of human trafficking. In its most recent evaluation round report, GRETA concluded the government's failure to convict traffickers with adequate penalties undermined efforts to combat human trafficking and provide victims access to justice.

The Malta Police Force (MPF) investigated human trafficking cases primarily through the VVU and a specialized human trafficking investigation unit. The Attorney General's (AG) office was responsible for prosecuting all trafficking cases and maintained an SOP with the MPF to coordinate on investigations. The AG had three prosecutors that specialized in trafficking cases. The government continued to provide trafficking-specific training to police and immigration officials on victim identification, best practices for successful prosecutions, evidence-based investigations, handling digital evidence, and the pursuit of financial crime investigations in tandem with human trafficking. The government did not report participating in any new bilateral or multilateral law enforcement partnerships during the reporting period, although INTERPOL reported Malta was involved in a large-scale operation in June 2024.

PROTECTION

The government increased victim protection efforts.

In 2024, the government identified 36 potential trafficking victims, compared with 18 in 2023 and 14 in 2022. Of the 36 potential victims, traffickers exploited 20 in sex trafficking, 12 in labor trafficking, two in both sex and labor trafficking, and two in unspecified forms of trafficking. For the first time in several years, the government reported identifying one Maltese labor trafficking victim and one child sex trafficking victim. Of the 36 potential victims, police formally identified 10 trafficking victims and continued to assess some of the remaining cases; this compared with six formal victims identified in 2023. Law enforcement entities did not

engage in consistent proactive victim identification efforts in some communities highly vulnerable to trafficking.

The government had an NRM to coordinate victim identification and referral to services, but it was not fully operational during the reporting period. The 2024 – 2030 national strategy and action plan included provisions to strengthen, formalize, and implement an updated version of the NRM. In the absence of a fully operational NRM, front-line officials used various agency specific victim identification protocols. The MPF continued to utilize the national standard referral procedures to systematically refer victims to *Agenzija Appogg*, a government agency within the Foundation for Social Welfare Services (FSWS) that provided assistance to trafficking victims. In 2024, *Agenzija Appogg's* Human Trafficking Service updated its identification screening tool to assess potential trafficking victims who self-identified or were referred by an entity other than the police. However, the lack of a uniform protocol resulted in uneven service provision; enforcement-focused entities, such as labor inspectors and immigration authorities, generally first referred potential victims to the police, while social service agencies often referred potential victims directly to *Agenzija Appogg*. Government officials expressed reluctance to collaborate with civil society on victim identification efforts, hindering such efforts among vulnerable populations. Trafficking victims could only be “formally” identified by the police vice squad, a decision that could not be challenged; however, staff from *Agenzija Appogg* could be present during the police assessment interviews, and victims were not required to file a police report to receive services, though this was not always the case in practice. FSWS continued to advocate for potential victims’ referral to *Agenzija Appogg* regardless of whether there was sufficient evidence for a criminal case against the trafficker.

Immigration officials reported screening asylum-seekers upon their arrival, although NGOs expressed concern the screenings were not robust. The Agency for the Welfare of Asylum Seekers (AWAS), which provided shelter and services to asylum-seekers, had a vulnerability assessment team that screened asylum-seekers for trafficking indicators with an identification protocol tool and referral protocol form, and the International Protection Agency (IPA) also screened asylum-seekers for trafficking indicators when they submitted requests for international protection, in partnership with civil society. In 2024, IPA identified one unaccompanied child who had been a sex trafficking victim prior to her arrival in Malta; the child received services from AWAS. Police continued to screen for sex trafficking indicators among individuals in commercial sex; however, the lack of interpreters hindered their efforts.

The government reported all identified potential victims received some form of assistance in 2024, such as medical care, psycho-social support, and safe accommodation. FSWS continued to coordinate with the police,

legal aid, and health services to provide care to victims. The government provided €216,050 (\$224,818) for victim care in 2024, an increase compared with €190,146 (\$197,863) in 2023 and €157,755 (\$164,157) in 2022. The government dedicated services available to both foreign national and Maltese victims, and once victims were referred to care, specialized social workers at FSWS assessed the long-term needs of each victim; assistance could include shelter, food, psychological counseling, interpreters, cultural mediators, and medical and legal aid appointments, as well as assistance with obtaining legal status and job searches. FSWS operated one specialized shelter which could accommodate up to nine residents at a time; the shelter hosted 11 victims and one accompanying child in 2024. While rooms were separated by sex, the shelter accommodated both men and women, which experts assessed often made sex trafficking victims feel unsafe and undermined victim recovery. Victims who declined accommodation in the shelter could still receive other services and assistance from *Agenzija Appogg*. The Child Protection Agency was designated as the responsible agency for vulnerability assessment and interagency coordination for child victims, including formal written procedures for police interaction and coordination requirements. There were no specialized trafficking shelters available for children, but unaccompanied child trafficking victims could stay in foster homes or AWAS centers for unaccompanied children seeking asylum.

The Legal Aid Agency could represent low-income crime victims in a broad spectrum of litigations, defense, and advocacy; however, the government reported referring only two trafficking victims to its services in 2024, while most victims were referred to NGO lawyers instead. Law enforcement endeavored to conduct discreet interviews with potential victims to protect their identities and ensure their safety. To avoid re-traumatization, the government provided victims with protections, including the option to testify via video conference, the absence of the alleged trafficker in court, accompaniment to court by a social worker, and victim support sessions before and after court hearings. In 2024, the government amended the criminal code to allow recorded testimony of children and vulnerable witnesses to be admitted as evidence in criminal trials, reducing the number of times victims must appear in court. GRETA had previously expressed concern that the length of criminal proceedings negatively impacted victims, who could experience re-traumatization through repeated confrontations with alleged traffickers. The government stated victims could receive protection services regardless of their agreement to cooperate with law enforcement; however, only victims who cooperated could receive work permits and residency, and some services were difficult to access without a valid residence card. The government reported 12 victims participated in investigations and criminal justice proceedings in 2024. The law provided victims a two month reflection period to recover and contemplate participation in criminal justice proceedings. Foreign victims who cooperated with law enforcement were entitled to a renewable six month residence permit, police protection,

legal assistance, and the right to obtain flexible work permits; the government issued residence permits to two victims in 2024. The government could grant refugee status to victims as an alternative to removal to countries where they may face hardship or persecution; the government did not grant refugee status to any victims in 2024.

The government could grant a maximum of €23,300 (\$24,246) of compensation to victims from state funding; however, the government has never reported issuing compensation to trafficking victims. The AG instructed prosecutors to seek restitution routinely in trafficking prosecutions; however, courts have never reported awarding restitution to any victims. Victims could file civil suits seeking a maximum of €10,000 (\$10,406) in damages; the government has never reported awarding damages to any trafficking victims. GRETA urged the government to review the eligibility criteria for state compensation and add the concept of restitution for trafficking victims to training programs for judges and prosecutors. The government did not have a legal provision to ensure victims were not inappropriately penalized solely for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked. Amendments to the criminal code in 2024, however, allowed courts to choose not to impose punishment on children coerced to commit crimes.

PREVENTION

The government increased prevention efforts.

The Human Rights Directorate (HRD) was responsible for coordinating national anti-trafficking efforts, as well as implementing the NAP, coordinating data collection, and reviewing policy and practice. The Anti-Human Trafficking Inter-Ministerial Committee (IMC) functioned as the national rapporteur and was responsible for strengthening national cooperation and monitoring anti-trafficking efforts. The Human Trafficking Monitoring Committee (HTMC), a cabinet-level body, oversaw the work of the IMC and was responsible for adopting the NAP and monitoring its implementation. The HTMC met twice in 2024, including a joint meeting with the IMC. In July 2024, the HRD adopted a new national anti-trafficking strategy for 2024 – 2030, which included a new NAP for 2024 – 2027. The new NAP included objectives to address gaps in prosecution and victim identification and assistance, as well as a framework for monitoring and evaluating implementation. Authorities and NGOs continued to report a lack of effective leadership, corruption allegations, and insufficient prioritization of human trafficking, which hindered progress.

In 2024, the government allocated €50,000 (\$52,029) to the HRD for prevention efforts, including NAP implementation and raising public awareness, and approximately €60,000 (\$62,435) to the Victim Support Agency (VSA) for awareness and prevention efforts. The government conducted various awareness campaigns, including multiple events and

conferences, to inform the general public on trafficking indicators and how to report potential trafficking crimes to authorities. The government published most awareness raising material online for public access. The government reported seeking input from civil society and survivors on anti-trafficking policies and programs. In November 2024, the HRD co-organized a meeting with survivors to discuss the potential creation of a survivor advisory council. FSWS continued to operate a 24-hour hotline for individuals in need of social services and referral to care, including potential trafficking victims, and the VSA operated a hotline for victims of crime, including trafficking; the government did not report identifying or assisting any trafficking victims via the hotlines.

AWAS reported conducting awareness sessions in its reception centers for asylum-seekers. However, in its most recent report, GRETA urged Maltese authorities to be more proactive in providing asylum-seekers with informational materials on the rights of trafficking victims, as well as the services and assistance measures available and how to access them. In July 2024, the government renewed an MOU with the Government of Libya as well as Frontex and the European Border and Coast Guard Agency to manage illegal migration from Libya. Civil society reported state and non-state actors in Libya committed severe human rights abuses, including sex and labor trafficking, against many of the migrants and refugees returned to Libya, including inside detention centers.

Fraudulent labor recruitment remained a significant concern. In January 2025, the government announced a new labor force migration policy that aimed to increase protections against exploitation for foreign workers. The Employment and Industrial Relations Act (EIRA) regulated labor recruiters and required recruiters to have a license. The EIRA prohibited worker paid recruitment fees, though many agencies illegally charged such fees. To address this, the Employment Agencies Regulations, effective April 2024, gave the government the option to prohibit recruitment companies from operating if they charged a recruitment fee, withheld identity documents, or impeded freedom of movement and job transfers. Additionally, the Temporary Agency Workers Regulations, effective January 2025, extended these protections to workers employed through temporary and outsourcing agencies. The government reported labor authorities conducted inspections of employment agencies; a 2024 Auditor General report concluded labor inspectors responsible for implementation of employment laws took a lenient approach toward compliance and did not effectively enforce the law. Foreign workers and asylum-seekers could not change employers without prior government permission, as work permits were tied to a specific employer, increasing their vulnerability to trafficking. The government prohibited convicted traffickers from being selected for public contracts. NGOs continued to report a lack of oversight and regulation on the licensing of massage parlors, which had a higher likelihood of sex trafficking occurring, though government officials said that labor inspectors had increased inspections

of massage parlors. The government did not make efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex acts. The government did not provide anti-trafficking training to its diplomatic personnel.

TRAFFICKING PROFILE:

Trafficking affects all communities. This section summarizes government and civil society reporting on the nature and scope of trafficking over the past five years. Human traffickers exploit domestic and foreign victims in Malta. Maltese women and children are vulnerable to sex trafficking, and labor traffickers exploit Maltese men and women. Sex traffickers exploit foreign women and children, and labor traffickers exploit foreign men and women. Authorities note a rising trend in female sex trafficking victims from South America, particularly Brazil, Colombia, and Venezuela. Women from Southeast Asia working as domestic workers; foreign women working in massage parlors; and women from Central and Eastern Europe, Russia, and Ukraine working in nightclubs are vulnerable to trafficking. Migrant workers, refugees, and asylum-seekers residing in Malta, especially unaccompanied children, are vulnerable to trafficking in the country's informal labor market, including in the construction, hospitality, and domestic work sectors. Migrants who set sail from Libya are subjected to extortion, torture, human trafficking, and rape by militias or traffickers while awaiting passage to Europe.

ecoi.net description:

Annual report on trafficking in persons (covering April 2024 to March 2025)

Country:

Malta

Source:

[USDOS – US Department of State](#) (Author)

Published:

29 September 2025

Original link:

<https://www.state.gov/reports/2025-trafficking-in-persons-report-107/>

Document type:

Periodical Report

Language:

English

Available on ecoinet since:

30 September 2025

Document ID:

2130681

Austrian Red Cross	Wiedner Hauptstraße	Contact
Austrian Centre for	32, 1041 Wien	Imprint & Disclaimer
Country of Origin and	T +43 1 589 00 583	F.A.Q.
Asylum Research and	F +43 1 589 00 589	Data Protection Notice
Documentation	info@ecoinet	
(ACCORD)		

ecoinet is run by the Austrian Red Cross (department ACCORD) in cooperation with Informationsverbund Asyl & Migration. ecoinet is funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Austrian Ministry of the Interior and Caritas Austria. ecoinet is supported by ECRE & UNHCR.

