public service

Institute for the Public Services

IPS Journal 2026

Shaping a Public Service Culture towards a Service of Excellence



ISSUE 8 • Nov 2026

Contents

4 Acknowledgements
5 Foreword
6 IPS Storyboard
8 Contributor Bios
10 Articles

Dr Amy Colman

Prof. Leonie Baldacchino

Mr Charlie Farrugia

Mr Jonathan Vassallo

Ms Alison Debrincat Debono

Mr Mariano Formosa

Acknowledgements



Editorial Board

Dr Joyce Cassar
Dr Colin Borg
Prof. Frank Bezzina

Coordination Board

Mr Adrian Micallef
Mr Roberto Saliba
Dr David Parnis

The Editorial Board would like to acknowledge the assistance provided by the Department of Information (DOI).

This is a peer reviewed journal that involves a double review.

This edition of the IPS Journal was designed by Ms Amy Attard

Foreword

As we present the 2026 edition of our journal, the Institute for the Public Services (IPS) continues to serve as a meeting point between academic research and the daily realities of public administration. Each journal issue brings together scholars and public officers who share a common purpose: To gain a deeper understanding of the Public Service and identify opportunities for continuous improvement.

Over the past year, the Institute for the Public Services has built on the foundations laid in 2025. What initially began as a transformation of our research and training ecosystem has evolved into an integrated and evidence-informed way of working. Evidence now plays a central role in shaping programme design, identifying learning and development needs, and evaluating outcomes and impact.

Our focus has consequently broadened beyond identifying what public officers need to learn. We are increasingly examining how learning translates into improved performance, strengthens the delivery of public services, and ultimately enhances the quality of service experienced by citizens.

We have continued to strengthen our investment in our people, recognising the important contribution of everyone involved in supporting and delivering learning and development. This includes our tutors and administrative teams, as well as the directors and managers who play a key role in shaping and fostering a culture of learning within their respective ministries.

The articles featured in this edition reflect this same commitment to progress and continuous improvement. They encourage critical thinking, challenge established assumptions, examine ideas through evidence and data, and put forward practical recommendations for the way ahead.

We extend our sincere appreciation to all contributors, reviewers, and members of the Editorial and Coordination Boards for their valuable input, dedication and commitment in bringing this edition to fruition.

We invite you to read, question, and take these ideas back to your own workplace. A Public Service that learns continuously is one that serves continuously, and that remains our commitment.

IPS Storyboard

01 Building a Learning Public Service: The IPS in 2026

The Institute for the Public Services (IPS) remains at the heart of professional development within Malta's Public Administration. In 2026, our focus has been on turning ambition into structure: expanding opportunities for students, strengthening research, improving training and development and making quality learning available to every public officer.

02 Expanding Student Schemes

The IPS continues to strengthen its talent attraction strategy by diversifying employment opportunities and engaging with students across multiple academic disciplines, with a central focus on bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application. Through active participation in various student outreach initiatives and events, the IPS seeks to raise awareness of careers within the Public Service, while promoting the skills, competencies and professional opportunities.

In parallel, the IPS remains committed to promoting career development and professional progression through its career guidance services and scholarship opportunities, which collectively support the development of future public service professionals. Investing in human capital and strengthening workforce capabilities are increasingly important in the context of an evolving labour market and changing organisational demands.

03 Strengthening Research and Evidence

The IPS has continued to advance its research into the competencies and capabilities required by public officers, both in response to current demands and in anticipation of future workforce needs. The findings emerging from this research are informing the development of new training programmes and supporting Ministries in identifying and prioritising targeted learning interventions to maximise their effectiveness and organisational impact.

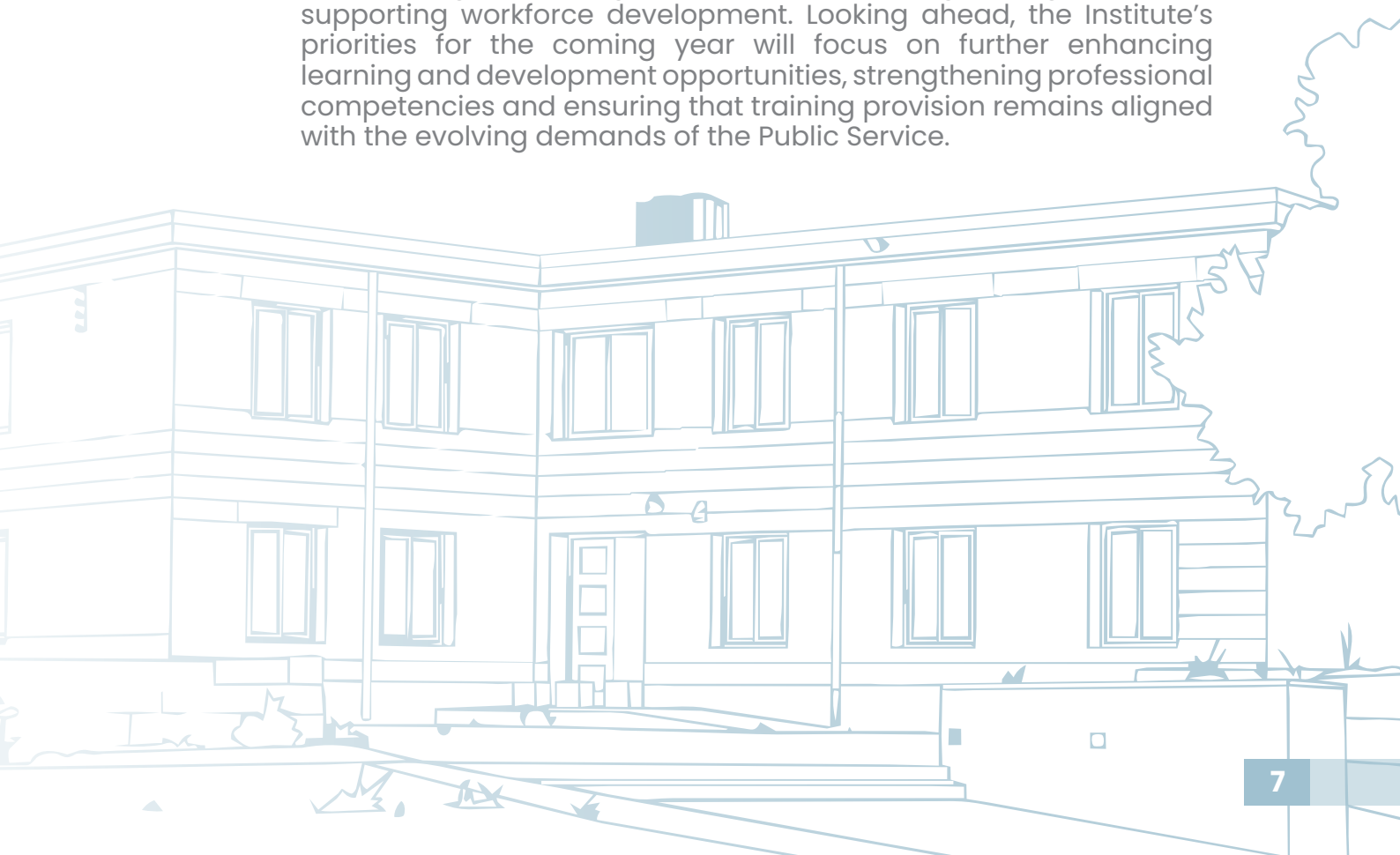
Furthermore, the IPS remains committed to supporting undergraduate and postgraduate research, particularly dissertations addressing strategic priorities and challenges relevant to public institutions and the wider community.

04 Learning Without Limits

The partnership with Coursera, established in 2025, has expanded learning and development opportunities for public officers by providing flexible, on-demand access to a wide range of courses offered by leading international universities and educational institutions. During 2026, the IPS has placed particular emphasis on increasing platform engagement and strengthening the integration of Coursera within its broader learning and development framework. These efforts aim to support public officers in developing structured and personalised learning pathways that combine internationally recognised educational content with locally designed training programmes, thereby ensuring that professional development remains aligned with both global knowledge and the specific competencies required within the Public Service.

05 Looking Ahead

As the Public Service continues to evolve in response to emerging challenges and changing societal needs, the IPS remains committed to adapting its strategic direction and strengthening its role in supporting workforce development. Looking ahead, the Institute's priorities for the coming year will focus on further enhancing learning and development opportunities, strengthening professional competencies and ensuring that training provision remains aligned with the evolving demands of the Public Service.



Contributor Bios

Amy Colman

Amy Colman is a Lecturer in the Department of Translation, Terminology and Interpreting Studies at the University of Malta, where she coordinates the Interpreting programme. She redesigned the Interpreting programme at the University of Malta in 2024 and launched three DegreePlus courses: Dutch for Beginners I & II, and Introduction to Interpreting.

She holds a BA in Translation and an MA in Interpreting from Vlekho – Hogeschool voor Wetenschap & Kunst in Brussels (now KU Leuven), and a Ph.D. in Translation Studies from KU Leuven. Her research focuses on directionality, translation evaluation in translator training and interpreting.

Leonie Baldacchino

Leonie Baldacchino was appointed Pro-Rector for Internationalisation, Enterprise & Outreach in July 2026. She holds a Ph.D. in Entrepreneurship from Warwick Business School (UK), an M.A. in Creativity and Innovation and a B.Psy.(Hons.) from the University of Malta. She is an Associate Professor at The Edward de Bono Institute for Creative Thinking and Innovation at the University of Malta, where she held the post of Director from 2013 to 2022. Professor Baldacchino is also the Programme Chair of the Entrepreneurship Special Interest Group and the Track Chair of the Entrepreneurial Cognition and Behaviour Standing Track at the European Academy of Management (EURAM), an Associate Editor at the Journal of Enterprising Communities (Emerald), an Editorial Board Member of the Journal of Strategic Change (Wiley), the OECD's country (Malta) expert on inclusive entrepreneurship, and a Fellow of the International Society for the Study of Creativity and Innovation (ISSCI).

Charlie Farrugia

Charlie Farrugia graduated from the University of Malta in 2009 with a degree in Architecture and Civil Engineering. He began his career in the private sector, where he gained hands-on experience in architectural projects and construction management, before transitioning to the public sector. With over a decade of experience, he currently holds a managerial position within the public sector. In addition to his professional experience, he holds a Master's degree in Sustainable Energy and has recently completed a Master of Business Administration. His primary areas of interest include design and construction, safety and total quality management.

Jonathan Vassallo

Jonathan Vassallo was appointed Permanent Secretary in September 2022 assuming responsibility for EU Funds in Malta. By 2024, his portfolio expanded to include Social Dialogue, Industrial and Employment Relations, Equality, and Reforms. In this capacity, he also led Malta's delegation to the Human Rights Committee during the Committee's review of the country's human rights practices. As from May 2025, Mr Vassallo was appointed as Permanent Secretary within the Ministry for European Funds and the Implementation of the Electoral Programme. Mr. Vassallo serves on various supervisory boards overseeing the implementation of financial instruments supported by European funding. He holds a degree in Public and Private Sector Management, with a specialisation in Public Policy, from the University of Malta.

Alison Debrincat Debono

Alison is a practitioner who brings cross-industry experience and enterprise-wide exposure gained through many years of working within various CEOs' offices, alongside recent HR experience, particularly in Training and Development. She has worked within the Marketing and Communications, Financial Services, and most recently the Property Development sector.

A graduate in Business Management, Alison has recently completed an International MBA and embarked on doctoral studies. In her current role in the private sector, she supports the CEO in the overall running of the business, with a primary focus on the reorganisation and restructuring of the Group, driving alignment and organisational effectiveness.

Mariano Formosa

Mariano Formosa holds an International Master in Business Administration from the Faculty of Economics, Management and Accountancy at the University of Malta. His research interests include commons governance, coastal and beach management policy, stakeholder dynamics and regulatory compliance. He has a particular interest in understanding how governance arrangements and enforcement mechanisms influence environmental outcomes and the sustainable stewardship of common-pool resources.

Bridging languages and cultures through public service translation and interpretation Assessing contemporary challenges and future perspectives for Malta

Dr Amy Colman

Abstract

The present article examines translation and interpretation within the realm of public service, with particular focus on public service translation (PST) and public service interpreting (PSI), collectively referred to as public service interpreting and translation (PSIT). It situates PST and PSI within a broad spectrum of public service environments, such as hospitals, legal settings, and educational institutions, and contends that equitable access to public services for users of diverse linguistic, cultural, and institutional backgrounds is upheld. This discourse adopts a conceptual and policy-oriented methodology, leveraging existing scholarly work and contextualising the analysis within the Maltese context. The article articulates aims, identifies challenges, and explores future perspectives to underscore that the lack of established PSIT systems in Malta constitutes a significant deficiency in public service provision, and advocates for the immediate academisation and professionalisation of the sector.

Keywords: Translation, interpreting, public service interpreting, public service translation, PSIT, Malta

Definitions and preamble

Translation and interpretation are two terms frequently used interchangeably, yet they represent distinct disciplines. Although a universal definition of translation has not been established, scholars generally conceptualise it as the process and product of transferring a written text from a source language into a target language, with the objective of accurately reproducing its meaning, style, and communicative effect within a different linguistic and cultural context. The translator's emphasis should be on achieving equivalence, meaning, contextual appropriateness, and functional use (Baker & Jones, 2024).

Translation encompasses a broad spectrum of text types, ranging from traditional written documents to audiovisual texts, such as subtitles.

Interpretation, or interpreting, is the spoken equivalent of translation, relying on real-time verbal expression. Consequently, it predates both written language and translation, and it is inherently ephemeral (Pöchhacker, 2015, p. 198). Interpretation can be categorised into various modalities; the primary modes being consecutive and simultaneous interpretation. Consecutive interpretation involves translating an utterance orally after the speaker has spoken, with or without the aid of notes. Conversely, as suggested by the term, simultaneous interpretation entails rendering an utterance in another language concurrently, with minimal latency. This mode typically necessitates specialised equipment, either fixed or portable. A variant lacking equipment is chuchotage, or whispered interpreting, derived from the French word for whispering, 'chuchoter'. This mode is often employed when only one or a few individuals require interpretation, commonly within informal or ad-hoc settings.

In institutional settings, such as plenary debates and meetings of committees and working groups within the European Union, simultaneous interpretation is predominantly utilised. Conversely, consecutive interpretation is commonly employed in bilateral meetings, press conferences, and missions where simultaneous equipment is unavailable.

It is also frequently used in public service contexts, such as judicial proceedings. Both translation and interpretation are fundamental human rights, enshrined in the Convention of Human Rights of the Council of Europe. In criminal proceedings within the European Union, the right to free translation and interpretation is explicitly stipulated by Directive 2010/64/EU. Moreover, the European Union actively promotes multilingualism; the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) specifies that EU citizens may communicate with institutions in any official EU language and receive responses in the same language or another official EU language of their choice

Beyond legal frameworks, and arguably more critically, the human dimension warrants consideration. Translation and interpretation facilitate effective communication and foster a secure environment where community members can develop and prosper amid increasing migration and demographic diversity. This is particularly pertinent to two specialised forms of translation and interpreting employed in public service environments: public service translation (PST) and public service interpreting (PSI). These practices converge within the scope of public service interpreting and translation (PSIT), which will be explored in the subsequent section as a vital aspect of contemporary public service delivery.

Public service interpreting and translation (PSIT)

Public service interpreting and translation (PSIT) serves as an overarching term encompassing both public service translation (PST) and public service interpreting (PSI). These services are frequently required by public service providers during interactions with users from diverse linguistic, cultural, and institutional backgrounds. PSIT is extensively needed across the globe, including in Malta.

PST, also known as community translation, enables written communication between government entities and the general public when stakeholders do not share a common language (Taibi, 2023, p. 106). It is characterised as "translation with a social mission" (ibid., p. 107). Examples of PST include the translation of medical reports, country-specific administrative and legal documents such as death and marriage certificates, as well as educational credentials, including degrees and transcripts.

Such documents are particularly challenging to translate due to their country-dependent nature and context-specific issuance. Consequently, they may contain terminology that lacks precise equivalents in the target language and culture. PSI constitutes a form of intercultural communication or mediation that facilitates oral exchanges between service providers and users who differ in language, institutional familiarity, and cultural expectations (Wadensjö & Gavioli, 2023, pp. 7-8). It is employed in various contexts, including legal settings such as police interrogations, as well as in asylum procedures, healthcare, education, and social services, where ensuring equal and equitable access to these essential services for all users is imperative.

Although it is among the oldest forms of interpreting, PSI has only recently been recognised as a distinct field of academic inquiry and a professional discipline (Valero-Garcés, 2023, p. 17). This delayed recognition may be partly attributable to terminological fragmentation, with terms such as liaison interpreting, and community interpreting used interchangeably.

Translation with a social mission.

— Taibi (2023, p. 107)

Currently, community interpreting is the most prevalent term used to describe this activity, along with PSI (ibid.).

Scholarly discourse in this domain posits that public service interpreting and translation (PSIT) is fundamental to surmounting language and cultural barriers within the public sector, as well as to fostering trust between service providers and users. It ensures equitable access for all citizens to vital public services such as education, healthcare, legal assistance, and social services in their most proficient and comfortable language. This facilitates comprehensive understanding of rights and obligations, thereby promoting fairness and equality. Effective communication between public officials and the community results in the delivery of high-quality services and enhanced assistance, whilst also preventing delays and misunderstandings. In sensitive environments such as courtrooms and hospitals, high-quality PSIT mitigates the risk of potentially fatal errors. In summary, PSIT significantly contributes to social integration, justice, recognition, and the effective provision of social and healthcare services, as well as to the execution of state and administrative functions (Štefková, 2025, p. 82).

The Maltese context

Translation and interpretation are extensively practised in multilingual nations such as Belgium and Switzerland, where they are mandated by law in numerous public service contexts. Countries with a longstanding tradition of translation and interpretation, including PST and PSI, have developed comprehensive training programmes. Additionally, they have established codes of ethics, guidelines, and registers for interpreters. An example is Norway, where public services depend on the National Registry of Interpreters managed by IMDi, the national authority for public sector interpreting. Canada and Australia are also prominent examples, with court interpreting as a recognised profession (Valero-Garcés, 2023, pp. 23-24).

Conversely, in Malta, the distinction between translation and interpreting — and even more so between PST and PSI — is often obscure to the general public. This ambiguity may stem from the relatively recent emergence of these disciplines. Prior to accession to the European Union, Malta had limited need for formal translation and interpretation, as the majority of the Maltese population was — and remains — fluent in both English and Maltese. The Maltese Constitution designates Maltese as the national language of Malta. Both Maltese and English are recognised as official languages; the administration can be addressed in either, and citizens are entitled to responses in their preferred language.

Before joining the European Union, Malta experienced fewer migration flows from both EU and non-EU countries, resulting in more modest linguistic demands. However, following EU accession, the influx of migrants from within the EU and beyond has increased. According to recent data from the National Statistics Office (NSO), by the end of 2024, 29% of Malta's population did not possess Maltese citizenship, including 8% EU citizens and 21% third-country nationals. This demographic change has driven a rise in the demand for translation and interpretation services from an into lesser-known and minority languages.

Significantly, institutional translation and conference interpreting for the European Union emerged as fully established academic disciplines following the establishment, in 2003, of the Department of Translation, Terminology and Interpreting Studies at the University of Malta. This department provides postgraduate courses in translation and interpretation, with particular emphasis on employment opportunities within the EU institutions. It is within this context that it is proposed that public service interpreting – which is critically needed in Malta – requires additional development and reinforcement. The University of Malta offers a diploma course in intercultural mediation; however, this programme is not language-specific and predominantly focuses on spoken communication and interpretation services for migrant populations.

Although of importance, this course constitutes only a minor component of public service interpreting (PSI) and completely overlooks public service translation (PST). It is evident that PST and PSI demand further scholarly and professional attention, as key public services encounter difficulties in recruiting qualified translators and interpreters.

The Law Courts exemplify a vital public service that relies heavily on PSI, yet faces a pronounced shortage of trained and qualified public service interpreters. In Malta, the language of the courts is Maltese, although cases may be conducted in English if all parties concur (Torpiano et al., 2021, pp. 101-102). In instances of disagreement, or if the case involves a different language, the court is obliged to appoint an interpreter (ibid.). The most frequently required language profiles for legal and court interpreters are listed on an official register, which is utilised by the police and judicial authorities. Nevertheless, it is important to underscore that there are no dedicated programmes or accreditation schemes for the training of these interpreters. Consequently, the list of legal and court interpreters includes individuals with language degrees, conference and sign language interpreters, refugees with training, interpreters recommended by embassies, legal professionals, and law students, some of whom are appointed on an ad-hoc basis (ibid., p. 102).

Research on PSI in other public service sectors is limited to a study on asylum interpreting (Sevasta, 2017) and one on healthcare interpreting (Doublet Meagher, 2019). This underscores the marginal status of PSI – and by extension PST – within Maltese academia and beyond, despite their essential role in ensuring an effective and resilient public service system. Advancing the academic field and professional recognition of public service interpreter training (PSIT) in Malta is imperative to address this deficiency, as elaborated upon in section 4.

Key services struggle recruiting interpreters.

The need for academisation and professionalisation in Malta

The arguments presented herein demonstrate how public service interpreting and translation (PSIT) safeguards the long-term sustainability of public services in Malta, particularly given the escalating forces of globalisation and increasing geopolitical pressures, which are likely to induce displacement and new migration patterns. However, PSIT in Malta remains substantially underdeveloped, lacking structured training pathways, regulatory frameworks, and effective institutional coordination. Consequently, the academisation and professionalisation of PSIT are imperative to ensure the delivery of high-quality services.

The professionalisation process faces several challenges. D'Hayer (2012) highlights issues such as the absence of a clear definition of the profession, the rising demand for translation and interpretation services for minority languages, the importance of stakeholder education, and the need for comprehensive training programmes supported by adequate funding and quality assurance mechanisms.

Furthermore, close collaboration and information exchange with academic institutions and practitioners across different countries are vital through international networks and platforms. Examples include the European Network for Public Service Interpreting and Translation (ENPSIT), the European Commission's Knowledge Centre on Translation and Interpretation (KCTI), and the European Masters' in Translation Working Group on PSIT and Training in Languages of Lesser Diffusion, as suggested by Hodáková (2025). To date, Maltese academia lacks formal framework agreements or memoranda of understanding to facilitate such collaborative efforts.

PSIT safeguards the long-term sustainability of public services.

The academisation and subsequent professionalisation of PSIT are heavily reliant on research initiatives. These efforts, in turn, inform the development of training programmes. While translation studies in Malta have a substantial body of research, the focus has predominantly been on literary works, audiovisual translation, and, to a lesser extent, terminology.

To the author's knowledge, no research has been conducted on public service interpreting and translation (PSIT) specifically within Malta. Existing research is limited to several studies in specific contexts, such as asylum interpreting (Sevasta, 2017), healthcare (Doublet Meagher, 2019), and legal and court interpreting (Torpiano, 2010; 2025).

Current research initiatives aim to identify the most critical public service sectors in Malta requiring PSIT services and to explore how academia and the public sector can collaborate effectively to provide targeted training and support to service providers and users.



Conclusion

Over the past twenty years, fuelled by Malta's accession to the European Union, translation and interpretation have established themselves as recognised academic and professional disciplines within Malta. Nonetheless, the primary focus remains on institutional translation and interpretation services designated for the European Union institutions. Conversely, public service interpreting and translation (PSIT), which are vital at the local level, continue to be insufficiently researched and regulated, with inadequate funding allocated to them.

As Malta's demographic composition continues to evolve, the demand for PSIT is expected to rise correspondingly. Consequently, sustained research initiatives aimed at the academisation and professionalisation of these critical services necessitate substantial institutional backing and financial investment. With the absence of targeted investments in training, research, and institutional frameworks, Malta risks exacerbating disparities in access to public services. Therefore, formal recognition of PSIT as both an academic discipline and a regulated profession is imperative to promoting equitable, efficient, and future-oriented public service delivery.



References

Baker, M., & Jones, H. (2024). In Other Words: A Coursebook on Translation (4th ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003440857-1

D'Hayer, D. (2012). Public service interpreting and translation: moving towards a (virtual) community of practice. Meta, 57(1), 235–247.

Doublet Meagher, G. L. (2019). Interpreting services in the Maltese healthcare context: An investigation. Master's dissertation, University of Malta.

Hodáková, S. (2025). The dynamics of public service interpreting and translation: specificities and challenges in education and professionalisation. FITISPos International Journal, 12(1), 23–36. https://doi.org/10.37536/FITISPos-IJ.2025.12.1.433

Pöchhacker, F. (2015). Interpreting. In F. Pöchhacker (Ed.), Routledge Encyclopedia of Interpreting Studies (pp. 198–200). Routledge.

Sevasta, J. (2017). Interpreting for asylum seekers: what needs to change? Master's dissertation. University of Malta.

Štefková, M. (2025). Step by step... Creating a community of practice for public service interpreting in Slovakia. Across Languages and Cultures, 26(S), 81–94. https://doi.org/10.1556/084.2025.01007

Taibi, M. (2023). Public service translation: Critical issues and future directions. In L. Gavioli & C. Wadensjö (Eds.), The Routledge Handbook of Public Service Interpreting (pp. 106–122). Routledge.

Torpiano, G. (2025). Legal Interpreting in Malta: An Ethnographic Study. Unpublished PhD dissertation. KU Leuven.

Torpiano, G., Salaets, H., & Flynn, P. (2021). A study on the impact of interpreter intervention in the Maltese Criminal Courts. The Interpreters' Newsletter, 26, 97–115. EUT Edizioni Università di Trieste.

Torpiano, G. (2010). Legal interpreting within a court context in Malta. Master's dissertation. University of Malta.[AC5.1]

Valero-Garcés, C (2023). General issues about public service interpreting. Institutions, codes, norms, and professionalisation. In L. Gavioli & C. Wadensjö (Eds.), The Routledge Handbook of Public Service Interpreting (pp. 17–31). Routledge.

Wadensjö, C., & Gavioli, L. (2023). Introduction. In L. Gavioli & C. Wadensjö (Eds.), The Routledge Handbook of Public Service Interpreting (pp. 1–14). Routledge.

Embedding Creativity and Innovation in Malta's Public Service

Abstract

The public service has traditionally prioritized procedural consistency, accountability, and compliance with established rules. While these characteristics remain fundamental to democratic governance, contemporary governance environments are increasingly characterized by rapid technological change, rising citizen expectations, fiscal pressures, and complex societal challenges, which necessitate more adaptive and innovative responses. This article discusses the growing significance of creativity and innovation within the Maltese public service and contends that these capabilities are no longer optional but essential for effective and resilient governance. The discussion differentiates between creativity as a skill involving the generation of novel and valuable ideas, and innovation as their implementation within organisational and policy contexts. Drawing on examples from Malta, including digital government initiatives, community-based service delivery, and Malta Vision 2050, the article examines how creative thinking and innovation can enhance public value, service delivery, and anticipatory governance. It further investigates the organisational and cultural conditions required to foster innovation within public institutions.

Keywords: Creativity, Creative Thinking, Innovation, Public Service

Prof. Leonie Baldacchino

Introduction

The public service has traditionally been associated with procedural consistency, accountability, hierarchy, and compliance with established rules. While these characteristics remain fundamental to democratic governance, contemporary public services operate in an environment marked by accelerating technological change, rising citizen expectations, fiscal pressures, and increasingly complex social challenges. Issues such as climate adaptation, digital transformation, demographic change, sustainability, and economic resilience cannot be addressed solely through traditional administrative routines (Brilhante & Romero, 2025; OECD, 2024; Unceta et al., 2019).

In this context, creativity and innovation are no longer optional attributes within the public service. They have become indispensable capabilities for governments seeking to remain effective, responsive, and resilient. Citizens increasingly expect public services that are accessible, user-centred, efficient, and digitally integrated.



Public officers are therefore being called upon not merely to administer procedures, but also to solve problems, anticipate future challenges, and design adaptive responses (OECD, 2024; Umbach, 2024).

Creativity in public services does not imply abandoning rules or acting without accountability. Rather, it refers to the ability to rethink existing assumptions, identify new approaches to persistent problems, and generate ideas that improve public value. Innovation goes one step further by translating these ideas into practical reforms, policies, services, or institutional mechanisms that produce tangible outcomes (Demircioglu, 2024; De Vries et al., 2016; OECD, 2024).

The Maltese public service has already embarked on several initiatives that reflect this evolving mindset, particularly in the fields of digital government, strategic foresight, and citizen-centred service delivery. Nevertheless, embedding creativity and innovation more deeply within administrative culture remains an ongoing challenge. This article argues that fostering these capabilities requires not only individual initiative, but also supportive organisational cultures, enabling leadership, institutional flexibility, and mechanisms that encourage experimentation and collaboration.

Creativity and Innovation

The terms creativity and innovation are frequently used interchangeably in management discourse, yet they represent distinct concepts. Creativity mainly pertains to the generation of original and useful ideas. Conversely, innovation concerns the practical implementation of these ideas to create value (Amabile et al., 1996). A significant distinction exists in their locus and timing: creativity predominantly occurs at the individual level, often serving as the initial catalyst for change. It is not an innate talent exclusive to a select few but a skill and cognitive ability present to varying extents in all individuals, which can be enhanced through practice and training (Mangion et al., 2025). Innovation typically manifests later and necessitates broader organizational engagement, including collaboration, implementation, institutional support, and widespread acceptance among systems and stakeholders (Goodman & Dingli, 2017; Lumsdaine & Binks, 2007).

Both creativity and innovation are frequently misunderstood within organizational settings, including the public service. Many individuals tend to associate creativity solely with arts and culture, and innovation with science and technology, thus neglecting their relevance to administration, governance, and policymaking.

Others recognize their importance within organizations but assume they are primarily the responsibility of specialized units such as communications, design, marketing, or digital innovation teams (Baldacchino, 2019).

While these qualities hold value across these areas, they are equally vital across all levels and functions of the public service. Creativity may be exhibited by frontline officers identifying inefficiencies in citizen interactions, managers proposing new coordination mechanisms, or policymakers envisioning alternative service models. Innovation would take place when these ideas are translated into value-added redesigned processes, digital systems, policy reforms, or new governance arrangements. Within the public service, creativity and innovation represent the capacity to transcend routine procedures and inherited assumptions to address challenges in more adaptive and effective ways.

Creativity and innovation can originate from internal or external sources (closed vs. open innovation: Felin & Zenger, 2014) and can be categorized as 'top-down' or 'bottom-up' (Saari et al., 2015). Demircioglu (2024) suggests a 2x2 typology of innovation sources comprising top-down-external, top-down-internal, bottom-up-internal, and bottom-up-external innovations.

> Creativity transforms ideas into meaningful change.

These phenomena may occur at various levels and degrees, ranging from incremental to radical (Coccia, 2017). Incremental innovation entails small yet meaningful improvements to existing procedures or services, such as streamlining bureaucratic steps in permit applications or digitizing administrative forms. Radical innovation involves more transformative shifts in policy design, institutional structures, or governance models. Such radical changes are less common in the public sector due to legal, political, and accountability constraints but remain significant during periods of major societal transition.

The level or degree of innovation is inherently contextual. What appears innovative in one setting may be routine elsewhere. This can be understood through the notion that 'newness' is relative: new to whom, where, and when? Some innovations involve introducing entirely new services into entirely new contexts. Others involve adapting existing practices to new environments (Lumpkin & Dess, 1996). For instance, technologies such as artificial intelligence, robotics, or predictive analytics may not be globally novel but their deployment within specific public-sector functions can constitute important contextual innovations. Conversely, simply repeating established procedures without reflection or adaptation signifies administrative continuity rather than innovation.

Examples of Creativity and Innovation in Malta's Public Service

Malta has attained significant progress in innovating its public service in recent years

An illustrative example of this progress is the expansion of digital government services through initiatives associated with the Malta Information Technology Agency (MITA) and related public-sector digitalisation programmes (https://mita.gov.mt/). The transition from paper-based administrative systems to integrated digital platforms has markedly transformed the manner in which citizens interact with government. Online portals, electronic submissions, digital identity systems, and remote access to services have collectively reduced administrative burdens and enhanced accessibility. Notably, these reforms are not solely technological enhancements; they also involve a creative redesign of administrative processes. In such instances, innovation occurs not merely by digitising existing bureaucracy, but by simplifying procedures and rethinking service structures from the citizen's perspective.

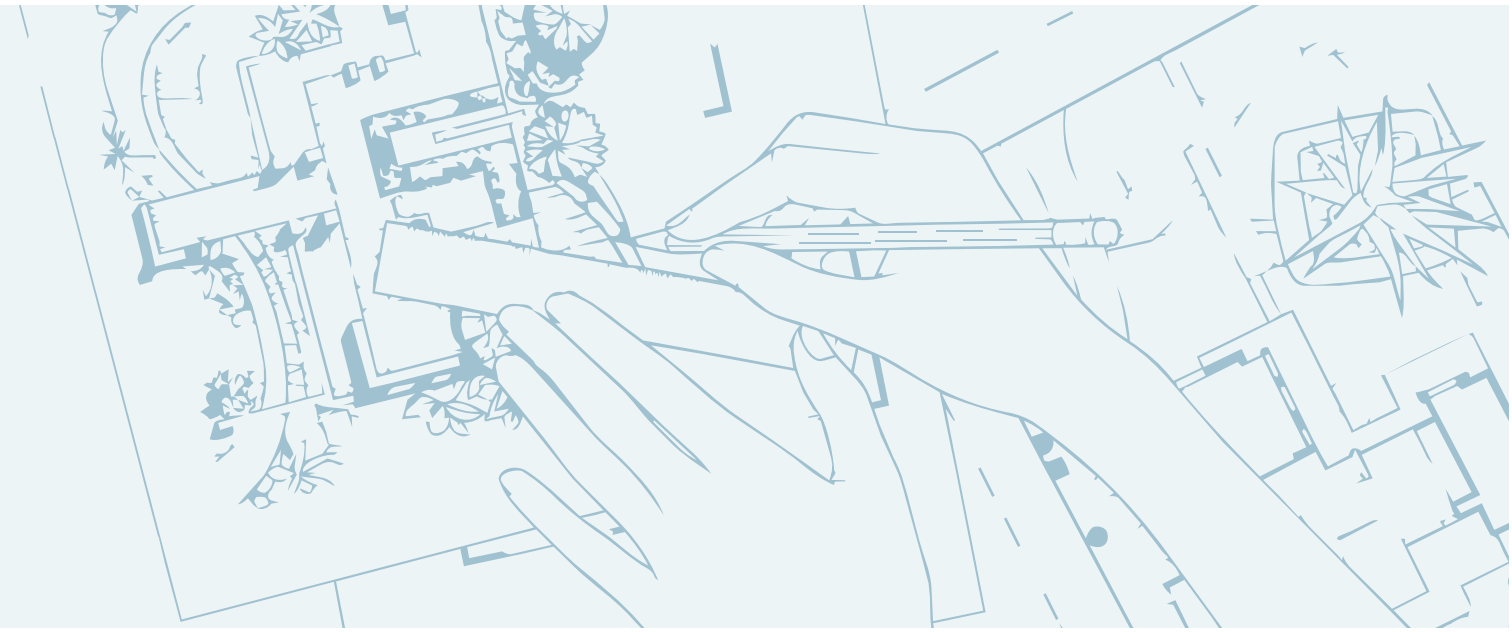
Another noteworthy example of creativity and innovation within the Maltese public service is Malta Vision 2050 (Government of Malta, 2024). This exemplifies strategic governance and institutional innovation by looking beyond short electoral cycles through foresight, systems thinking, and cross-ministerial coordination (Government of Malta, 2024; OECD, 2025; Umbach, 2024). By integrating economic, environmental, social, and technological priorities into a unified long-term framework, the initiative marks a transition from reactive administration toward anticipatory governance (Government of Malta, 2024; OECD, 2025).

However, stakeholders emphasize that such ambitious visions must be supported by clear implementation mechanisms, policy coherence, and measurable outcomes – specifically regarding sustainability, infrastructure pressures, and governance capacity (Flimkien għal Ambjent Aħjar, 2025; Malta Chamber of Scientists, 2025). Ultimately, while creative strategic vision is an essential starting point for public-sector innovation, its long-term credibility depends on effective execution and sustained public trust.

Embedding Creativity and Innovation in the Maltese Public Service

Creativity and innovation do not emerge automatically within organizations. Their development hinges significantly on organizational culture, leadership behavior, and interpersonal dynamics. While creativity primarily originates in individuals, innovation necessitates broader organizational support. Ideas must be recognized, cultivated, executed, and ultimately embraced across teams and institutions (Baldacchino, 2019). Accordingly, public-sector leaders bear a crucial responsibility in fostering environments where employees feel empowered to contribute ideas and constructively challenge prevailing assumptions.

A fundamental requirement is the existence of robust top-down support combined with bottom-up idea generation. In supportive environments, employees are more inclined to propose suggestions, collaborate transparently, and proactively engage in problem-solving efforts. Conversely, in settings where senior management adopts excessively rigid or fault-finding approaches, organizational climates may become defensive and risk-averse. In such contexts, innovative ideas are often dismissed prematurely, as 'blame cultures' discourage initiative (Baldacchino, 2019; Tidd & Bessant, 2014). Findings by Demircioglu (2024) indicate that internal bottom-up innovation is particularly vital for improving service quality, while effective leadership is crucial to mitigate any adverse effects of external top-down innovation efforts, which may be perceived as impositions and consequently resisted. Brilhante and Romero (2025) observe that middle managers also play a vital role in overcoming institutional inertia. Leaders at all levels should therefore actively promote experimentation and communicate that innovation is highly valued within the public sector.



Creativity and innovation inherently involve a degree of uncertainty and calculated risk-taking. Novel ideas cannot be assured of success, nor can their eventual acceptance always be anticipated (OECD, 2022). Public officials must therefore possess sufficient psychological safety to experiment without fear of disproportionate criticism should initiatives fail to produce the desired outcomes. Simultaneously, excessive or unmanaged risk-taking can be detrimental, rendering balance and responsible oversight essential (Baldacchino, 2019; Tidd & Bessant, 2014). Closely associated with this is the significance of trust, as it cultivates emotional safety within professional relationships and encourages employees to share ideas openly without apprehension of exploitation, ridicule, or unwarranted appropriation of their contributions (Baldacchino, 2019; Goodman & Dingli, 2017).

Another important but often overlooked factor is the provision of time and space for reflection and creative thinking.

Public-sector workplaces frequently operate under considerable pressure, with managers and employees focused on immediate operational demands and 'fire-fighting' activities. Yet, creativity rarely flourishes in environments characterised exclusively by urgency and routine task completion. While deadlines can sometimes sharpen focus and productivity, opportunities for strategic reflection, learning, and idea development are also required (Baldacchino, 2019; Goodman & Dingli, 2017). Moreover, creativity and innovation are more likely to flourish when supported by formal institutional mechanisms that encourage open communication, collaboration, experimentation, and organisational learning. Policy Innovation Labs, cross-departmental task forces, and collaborative working groups can provide structured environments in which public officers may test ideas, share expertise, and develop solutions to complex policy challenges (Wellstead et al., 2021; Unceta et al., 2019).

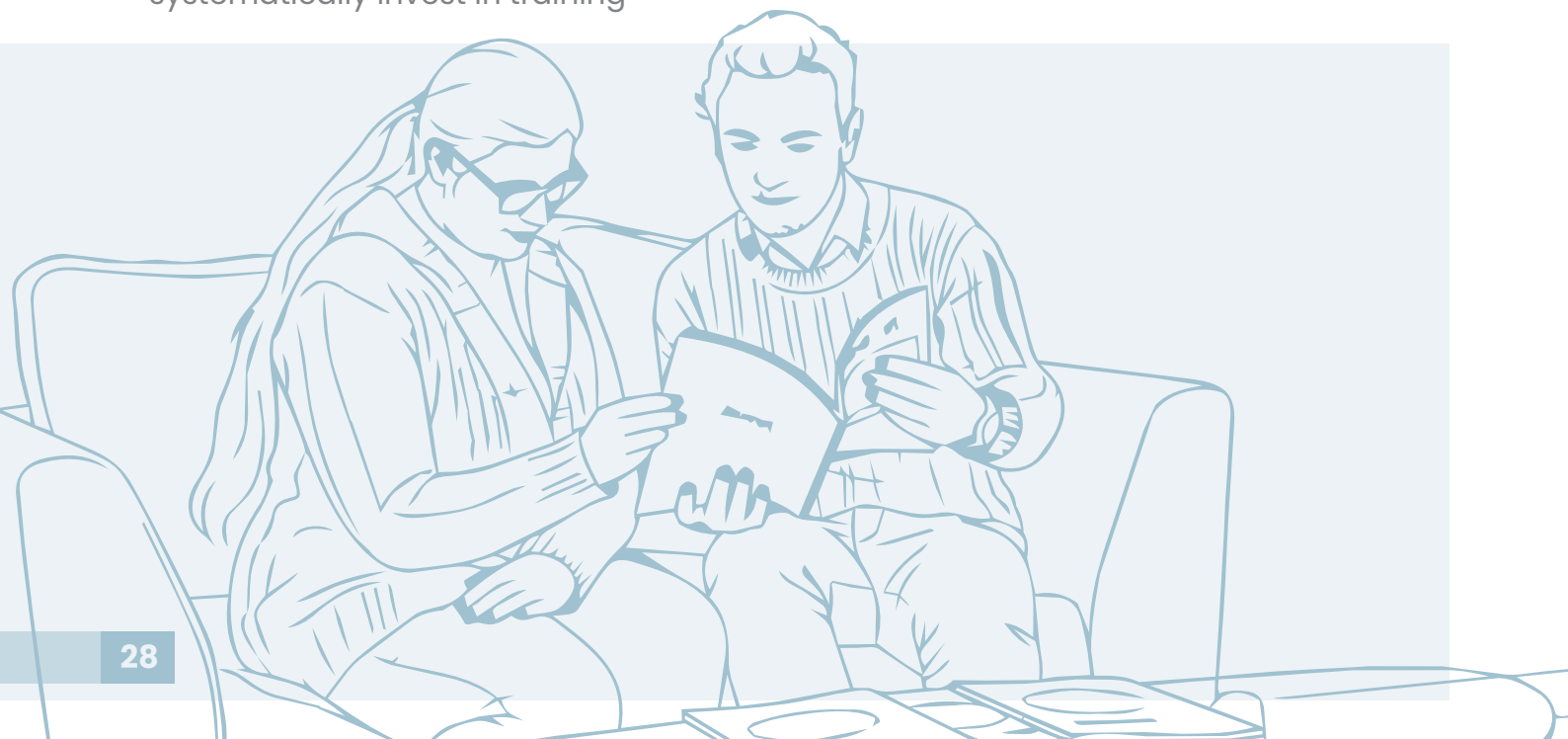
Such mechanisms are particularly important in the public service, which often operates within departmental silos that restrict communication and coordination across agencies. Cross-functional collaboration helps overcome these barriers by bringing together diverse professional perspectives and facilitating more integrated approaches to policymaking and service delivery (Brilhante & Romero, 2025). Innovation Labs and collaborative governance models have also been shown to strengthen citizen participation, enhance policy responsiveness, and encourage adaptive forms of public management (Unceta et al., 2019). In increasingly complex governance environments, such adaptive and collaborative mechanisms are becoming essential components of resilient and future-oriented public administration. Another consideration is that the public service frequently operates within complex legal, procedural, and accountability frameworks designed to ensure transparency, consistency, and the rule of law. While these safeguards remain essential, excessive bureaucratic rigidity can limit organisational adaptability, discourage experimentation, and slow policy responsiveness in rapidly changing environments (Demircioglu, 2024). One possible approach is the use of regulatory 'sandboxes' or pilot environments in which new ideas can be tested under controlled conditions before broader implementation (Brilhante & Romero, 2025).

Such mechanisms create opportunities for learning, evaluation, and iterative improvement while still maintaining oversight, accountability, and risk management. A final important note is that creativity and innovation require capabilities that extend beyond traditional administrative competencies. Public officers increasingly need 21st Century Skills including creative thinking, strategic foresight, digital literacy, and collaborative problem-solving. Training programmes and professional development initiatives should therefore encourage not only technical competence, but also creativity, critical thinking, and adaptability. Scenario planning and foresight tools are particularly valuable in helping public institutions prepare for uncertain futures. These approaches encourage officials to think beyond immediate operational concerns and consider long-term societal trends (OECD, 2025; Umbach, 2024). Programmes such as the Master in Creativity and Innovation offered by The Edward de Bono Institute for Creative Thinking and Innovation at the University of Malta are well-positioned to address these needs (Mangion et al., 2025).

> **Public-sector leaders bear a crucial responsibility**

Conclusion

The modern public service environment necessitates more than mere procedural competence. Public officials are increasingly expected to function as adaptable problem-solvers capable of responding innovatively to complex and evolving societal challenges. Consequently, creativity and innovation should not be regarded as optional enhancements or as concepts borrowed superficially from the private sector into government. Instead, they represent fundamental dimensions of effective and resilient public administration (Brilhante & Romero, 2025; OECD, 2024; Unceta et al., 2019). The Maltese public service has already exhibited significant progress in areas such as digital transformation, participatory governance, and strategic long-term planning. However, achieving deeper integration of creativity and innovation within institutional culture necessitates sustained effort. Several policy approaches may facilitate this goal. Given the importance of internal sources of innovation – particularly bottom-up ideas supported by top-down initiatives (Demircioglu, 2024) – Maltese public institutions should systematically invest in training programs aimed at developing relevant skills and competencies (Mangion et al., 2025) across all levels of employees and leadership. Simultaneously, acknowledging that open innovation constitutes a vital contributor to public service enhancement, initiatives such as Policy Innovation Labs (Unceta et al., 2019) could be established in Malta to address issues of national significance. Ultimately, the challenge for public administration is not to forsake procedure but to transcend it as an end in itself. Innovation thrives not solely through technological advancements but through people, relationships, and institutional mindsets. Effective governance requires a balanced approach, harmonizing accountability with adaptability, consistency with responsiveness, and stability with innovation. When successfully embedded, creativity and innovation can position Malta not merely as an efficient public administration but as an agile and forward-looking governance model capable of confronting the demands of an increasingly complex future.



References

Amabile, T. M., Conti, R., Coon, H., Lazenby, J., & Herron, M. (1996). Assessing the work environment for creativity. Academy of Management Journal, 39(5), 1154-1184.

Baldacchino, L. (2019). Creativity, entrepreneurship and innovation. In G. Baldacchino, V. Cassar, & J. Azzopardi (Eds.). Malta and its Human Resources: Management and Development Perspectives (pp. 187-215). Malta University Press.

Brilhante, L., & Romero, F. (2025). A literature exploration on challenges in open innovation in the public sector. Sustainable Futures, 9, 100904.

Coccia, M. (2017). Sources of technological innovation: Radical and incremental innovation problem-driven to support competitive advantage of firms. Technology Analysis & Strategic Management, 29(9), 1048–1061.

Demircioglu, M. A. (2024). Public sector innovation: Sources, benefits, and leadership. International Public Management Journal, 27(2), 190–220.

De Vries, H., Bekkers, V., & Tummers, L. (2016). Innovation in the public sector: A systematic review and future research agenda. Public Administration, 94(1), 146–166.

Felin, T., & Zenger, T. R. (2014). Closed or open innovation? Problem solving and the governance choice. Research Policy, 43(5), 914-925.

Flimkien għal Ambjent Aħjar (2025). Evaluation of Malta Vision 2050 document: Feedback response.

Goodman M. & Dingli, S. M. (2017). Creativity and strategic innovation management: Directions for future value in changing times. London: Routledge.

Government of Malta (2024). Malta Vision 2050.

Lumpkin, G. T., & Dess, G. G. (1996). Clarifying the entrepreneurial orientation construct and linking it to performance. Academy of management Review, 21(1), 135-172.

Lumsdaine, E., & Binks, M. (2007). Entrepreneurship from creativity to innovation: Thinking skills for a changing world. Trafford.

Malta Chamber of Scientists (2025). Feedback on the Malta Vision 2050.

Mangion, M., Baldacchino, L., & Dingli, S. (2025). Studying Creativity in the 21st Century at The Edward de Bono Institute. In The Palgrave Handbook of Applied Creativity in Global Higher Education (pp. 263-278). Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland.

OECD (2022). Tackling policy challenges through public sector innovation. OECD Publishing, Paris.

OECD (2024). Global Trends in Government Innovation 2024: Fostering Human-Centred Public Services. OECD Public Governance Reviews, OECD Publishing, Paris.

OECD (2025). Building anticipatory capacity with strategic foresight in government. OECD Publishing, Paris.

Saari, E., Lehtonen, M., & Toivonen, M. (2015). Making bottom-up and top-down processes meet in public innovation. The Service Industries Journal, 35(6), 325-344.

Tidd, J., & Bessant, J. R. (2014). Strategic innovation management. John Wiley & Sons.

Umbach, G. (2024). Anticipatory governance, strategic foresight and EU better regulation. Journal of European Public Policy.

Unceta, A., Barandiaran, X., & Restrepo, N. (2019). The Role of Public Innovation Labs in Collaborative Governance – The Case of the Gipuzkoa Lab in the Basque Country, Spain. Sustainability, 11(21), 6103.

Wellstead, A. M., Gofen, A., & Carter, A. (2021). Policy innovation lab scholarship: past, present, and the future – Introduction to the special issue on policy innovation labs. Policy Design and Practice, 4(2), 193–211.

Overcoming Barriers to Digital Upskilling: A case study of an insurance company in Malta

Ms Alison Debrincat Debono

Abstract

The digital transformation within financial services necessitates the development of workforce capabilities alongside technological investments. This research explores the structural and behavioural barriers to digital upskilling within a Maltese insurance company that functions as part of an international insurance group. A mixed-methods case study approach was adopted, incorporating an employee survey (n = 249), semi-structured interviews with senior leaders (n = 7), and an analysis of documents related to corporate and national digital frameworks.

The findings indicate that, although employees exhibit a fundamental level of digital confidence and a moderate motivation to participate in training, the advancement of digital capabilities is hindered by fragmented training structures, inadequate competency mapping, insufficient time allocation, and limited communication regarding learning pathways. Utilizing Kotter's change model, the ADKAR framework, and adult learning theory, the study posits that failures in digital upskilling predominantly stem from organizational misalignment rather than employee resistance.

This article makes a contribution to the emerging body of research on digital workforce transformation by demonstrating how gaps between strategy and practice impede sustainable capability development within regulated financial environments and in small-state contexts.

Keywords: Digital upskilling; Change management; Financial services; Organizational transformation; Malta; Workforce development.

Introduction

Digital transformation has fundamentally reshaped the structural landscape of financial and insurance institutions. Technological advancements such as artificial intelligence (AI), automation, cloud computing, and data analytics are redefining key processes including underwriting, compliance, customer engagement, and risk management (European Central Bank [ECB], 2023; Billing et al., 2021). Simultaneously, regulatory developments, notably the Digital Operational Resilience Act

(DORA) and the Artificial Intelligence Act, necessitate that financial entities demonstrate robust digital governance and operational resilience (European Commission, 2022, 2024).

Nonetheless, digital transformation extends beyond mere technological acquisition. An increasing body of research highlights that such initiatives often fail when organisational systems and workforce capabilities do not evolve synchronously with technological investments (OECD, 2021; PwC, 2019). The World Economic Forum (2021) estimates that nearly 60% of employees worldwide will require upskilling by the year 2030; however, many organisations lack coherent strategies to effectively facilitate digital learning.

Within Malta, national frameworks such as Malta Diġitali 2022–2027 and the National eSkills Strategy 2022–2025 emphasize the critical importance of developing digital competence (eSkills Malta Foundation, 2022). However, policy ambitions do not invariably translate into organisational practice.

Empirical research examining how financial institutions incorporate digital upskilling remains limited, particularly in small-state contexts marked by regulatory complexity and constrained labour markets.

This study investigates barriers to digital upskilling within a Maltese insurance company that is part of an international insurance group operating in Malta. It addresses two primary questions:
What structural and behavioural barriers impede effective digital upskilling?
How can change management theories inform the development of sustainable implementation strategies?

By integrating empirical evidence with organisational change theory, this research enhances the understanding of digital workforce transformation within regulated financial environments.

Digital Transformation and Organisational Capability

Digital transformation literature increasingly emphasizes the interdependence of technology and human capital. Billing et al. (2021) argue that digital investments fail to deliver sustainable value when workforce capability lags behind technological infrastructure. Similarly, the OECD (2021) contends that digitalisation without coordinated skills development exacerbates productivity inequalities and organisational vulnerability.

In financial services, transformation pressures are intensified by regulatory mandates. The ECB (2023) describes the sector as undergoing "profound digital transformation," yet legacy systems and skills shortages persist. Compliance regimes such as DORA impose operational resilience obligations that require workforce competence in ICT risk management (European Commission, 2022). Thus, digital skills become not merely efficiency enablers but regulatory necessities.



Conceptualising Digital Upskilling

Upskilling is generally characterized as the process of enhancing employees' competencies to address the changing requirements of the labour market (World Economic Forum, 2021). In corporate settings, Deloitte (2020) underscores that upskilling efforts must be congruent with strategic objectives and forward-looking workforce planning. PwC (2019) further contends that digital upskilling should be integrated into organizational culture rather than approached as sporadic training activities.
Theory of adult learning provides essential insights into engagement mechanisms. Recent studies highlight that factors such as autonomy, competence, and organizational support substantially affect motivation to participate in learning (Hein, 2025; Radovan, 2024). When training lacks contextual relevance or clear progression pathways, motivation tends to diminish.

Barriers to Digital Upskilling

Existing scholarly literature delineates several interconnected barriers, including the following:
Cultural and Structural Resistance
Financial institutions frequently operate within hierarchical and risk-averse cultures that impede experimentation (Hasan et al., 2024). Innovation may be regarded as destabilising rather than strategic.

Strategic Misalignment
Only approximately one-third of organizations systematically forecast future skill requirements (McKinsey & Company, 2020). In the absence of strategic foresight, training initiatives tend to be reactive and fragmented.

Time and Resource Constraints
Workload pressures substantially diminish participation in structured learning programs (OECD, 2020). When training is not accorded institutional protection, operational priorities tend to take precedence.

Communication and Pathway Ambiguity
A lack of transparency concerning skill progression pathways diminishes ownership and engagement (OECD, 2021).

These findings indicate that failures in digital upskilling are fundamentally rooted in organisational design issues, rather than being solely attributable to behavioural deficits.

Change Management as Analytical Framework

Kotter's (1995) Eight-Step Model conceptualises transformation as a phased process that necessitates urgency, coalition-building, communication of vision, and the cultural anchoring of change. Significantly, sustainable change requires the integration of new behaviours into organisational norms. The ADKAR framework (Hiatt, 2006) complements this approach by emphasising individual change stages:

Awareness, Desire, Knowledge, Ability, and Reinforcement. The endurance of behavioural change is contingent upon reinforcement mechanisms that institutionalise new competencies.

Collectively, these frameworks suggest that digital upskilling must proceed concurrently at the strategic, structural, and individual levels.

Research methodology

A mixed-methods case study design was utilized (Yin, 2018), guided by a pragmatic research philosophy (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Data collection included an online employee survey (n = 249; 79.8% response rate), seven semi-structured interviews with senior leaders, and document analysis of corporate strategic plans and national digital frameworks. Data analysis involved descriptive analysis of the survey data, while interview transcripts were subjected to thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Coding combined deductive theoretical categories (Kotter; ADKAR; adult learning) with inductive, context-specific insights. Ethical approval was secured, and confidentiality was rigorously maintained.

Results

Digital Confidence and Skill Distribution

Survey findings indicate that employees possess a baseline level of digital competence, but this competence is largely confined to routine tools rather than advanced digital capabilities. Approximately 68.7% of respondents reported confidence in using the digital tools required for their roles, particularly standard productivity software and communication platforms. However, qualitative responses and interview data suggest that this confidence does not extend to higher-level digital competencies, such as data analytics, automation, and emerging technologies.

This uneven distribution of digital competence reflects the distinction between basic and intermediate digital skills emphasised in national frameworks such as the ICT Competency Framework developed by the eSkills Malta Foundation. While basic digital literacy appears widespread within the organisation, more advanced competencies remain concentrated among specialised roles, creating internal capability disparities.

Several employees reported encountering digital tools they did not fully understand, indicating that digital exposure within the organisation has outpaced structured capability development. This suggests that digital transformation initiatives are introducing new technologies without simultaneously expanding workforce training mechanisms to support adoption.

These findings highlight that digital confidence alone does not equate to digital readiness. While employees may feel comfortable with existing systems, the absence of structured pathways for developing more advanced competencies limits the organisation's capacity to sustain deeper digital transformation.

Motivation and Managerial Encouragement

Employee attitudes towards digital learning have generally been affirmed as positive. More than half of the respondents (52.2%) expressed motivation to engage in digital skills training, and managerial encouragement received relatively high ratings (mean = 3.78). These findings challenge prevailing narratives that attribute employee resistance as the main impediment to organizational transformation.

Interview participants similarly underscored that employees are increasingly cognizant of the significance of digital competence, especially as automation, regulatory technology, and data-driven decision-making become more deeply integrated within financial services operations.

From the standpoint of adult learning theory, this pattern indicates that employees already demonstrate the motivation and readiness necessary for effective engagement in learning. Knowles (1980) posits that adult learners are more likely to participate when learning opportunities are perceived as relevant and directly applicable to their professional environment. In this context, the perceived relevance of digital skills appears to reinforce employee motivation. Nevertheless, despite this positive motivational baseline, participation in training programs remains inconsistent.

This discrepancy signifies that the primary barriers to digital upskilling are not rooted in employee attitudes but reside within organizational structures that inadequately translate motivation into sustained engagement in learning.



Fragmented Training and Weak Competency Mapping

One of the most significant findings concerns the fragmented nature of existing digital training initiatives. The quality of training received relatively low ratings (mean = 2.65), and only 26.9% of employees believed that training opportunities were designed for different skill levels. Furthermore, only 24.1% of respondents reported awareness of clear digital skill development pathways within the organization.

Interview evidence confirmed that, while various training initiatives exist, they are often ad hoc and inconsistently coordinated between departments. Responsibility for digital skills development appears dispersed among Human Resources, Information Technology, and individual business units, resulting in fragmented ownership and limited strategic coherence.

This lack of structured competency mapping hinders employees from understanding how digital learning activities contribute to long-term career progression. Without clearly defined competency levels or learning pathways, training initiatives risk being perceived as isolated events rather than elements of a coherent capability-building strategy.

From a strategic perspective, this fragmentation highlights a critical misalignment between organisational ambition and operational implementation. While corporate strategies emphasize digital transformation and workforce capability development, these priorities have not yet been translated into a systematic digital skills framework at the organisational level.

> **Workload pressures inhibit adult learning.**

Time Constraints as Structural Barrier

Time availability emerged as one of the most significant barriers to digital upskilling. Employees reported limited opportunity to engage in training during working hours, reflected in the low mean score for this item (mean = 2.17). Many respondents indicated that training activities must compete with operational responsibilities, which are typically prioritised in performance expectations. This finding aligns with OECD research demonstrating that workload pressures frequently inhibit participation in adult learning programmes, particularly in highly regulated sectors where operational demands are intense. Interviews further revealed that digital training is often perceived as optional rather than institutionally prioritised. In the absence of protected learning time or formal integration into performance management systems, employees must rely on discretionary effort to pursue training opportunities. This structural constraint significantly undermines the sustainability of digital upskilling initiatives. Without institutional mechanisms that protect learning time, even motivated employees struggle to maintain consistent participation in training programmes.

Strategy–Practice Misalignment

Perhaps the most significant insight emerging from the study is the misalignment between strategic digital ambitions and local operational practices. Corporate strategic documents emphasize digital transformation, data capabilities, and talent reinforcement as central pillars of organisational competitiveness. However, empirical evidence from the case organisation indicates that digital skills development at the local level remains largely informal and weakly institutionalised. Interviews confirmed that the organisation lacks a dedicated digital skills framework or structured competency mapping system, relying instead on a general training policy that does not specifically address digital capability development. This misalignment represents a classic strategy–practice gap, where high-level strategic commitments are not translated into operational systems capable of supporting organisational change. As a consequence, digital transformation initiatives risk remaining symbolic commitments rather than becoming embedded organisational capabilities.

Theme	Evidence from Findings	Organisational Implication
Digital Confidence vs Advanced Skills	68.7% of employees confident in routine digital tools but limited exposure to analytics and automation	Workforce has baseline digital literacy but lacks advanced capabilities required for digital transformation
Employee Motivation	52.2% motivated to engage in digital training; managerial encouragement relatively strong	Employee resistance is not the primary barrier to upskilling
Fragmented Training Structures	Training quality rated low (mean = 2.65); programmes not aligned with different skill levels	Absence of coordinated capability development strategy
Lack of Skill Pathways	Only 24.1% aware of clear digital skill progression pathways	Weak competency mapping limits workforce planning
Time Constraints	Limited opportunity to train during working hours (mean = 2.17)	Operational pressures restrict participation in learning

Table 1: above summarises the principal organisational barriers identified through survey and interview findings.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that barriers to digital upskilling predominantly stem from weaknesses in institutional design rather than employee resistance. From the perspective of the ADKAR change management framework, employees seem to have advanced through the initial stages of organisational change. Awareness regarding the importance of digital skills is apparent, and a significant proportion of employees exhibit willingness to engage in learning. However, the later stages of change, particularly Knowledge, Ability, and Reinforcement, remain underdeveloped. Fragmentation in training hampers the development of knowledge and practical competence, while the lack of systematic feedback mechanisms diminishes reinforcement. Without effective reinforcement processes, newly acquired skills are unlikely to be integrated into routine organisational practices.

A similar pattern is observed when the findings are examined through Kotter's organisational change model. Although elements of urgency and strategic vision may exist at the corporate level, the process of embedding change within the organisational culture appears incomplete. Digital learning continues to be peripheral to operational priorities rather than embedded within core organisational systems.

This study thus extends existing literature on digital transformation by illustrating that motivation and managerial encouragement alone are insufficient to sustain workforce capability development. Structural alignment among strategy, organisational processes, and learning systems is imperative.

The findings are particularly pertinent within small-state financial environments such as Malta, where constraints in the labour market limit the availability of specialised digital talent. In such contexts, organizations cannot rely solely on external recruitment to develop digital capabilities. Instead, internal workforce development becomes a vital strategic resource.

Consequently, digital upskilling should not be regarded merely as discretionary training but as an essential component of organisational infrastructure that supports digital transformation and ensures regulatory resilience.

In small-state financial environments, where regulatory demands are heightened and external talent pools may be limited, the development of internal capabilities becomes strategically vital. Therefore, digital upskilling must be reconceptualised as organisational infrastructure rather than optional training.



Conclusion

Digital transformation within financial services necessitates a systematic approach to workforce capability development. This study demonstrates that although employees exhibit foundational readiness and managerial support is present, structural deficiencies hinder sustainable digital upskilling. Key obstacles include fragmented training design, inadequate time allocation, poor communication of pathways, and a misalignment between corporate strategy and local implementation. The integration of change management frameworks with structured competency mapping and institutional reinforcement mechanisms is essential. For Maltese financial institutions operating within a dynamic regulatory environment, digital upskilling must evolve from sporadic interventions to an integrated organisational capability.

References

Billing, F., De Smet, A., Reich, A., & Schaninger, B. (2021). Building workforce skills at scale to thrive during—and after the COVID-19 crisis. McKinsey & Company.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3(2), 77–101.

Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2018). Designing and conducting mixed methods research (3rd ed.). Sage.

Deloitte. (2020). Closing the skills gap in financial services. Deloitte.

eSkills Malta Foundation. (2022). National eSkills strategy 2022–2025. eSkills Malta Foundation.

European Central Bank. (2023). Digital transformation in financial services. European Central Bank.

European Commission. (2022). Regulation (EU) 2022/2554 on digital operational resilience for the financial sector (DORA). European Commission.

European Commission. (2024). Artificial intelligence act. European Commission.

Hasan, H., [add co-authors]. (2024). Organisational barriers to digital transformation.

Journal of Digital Strategy, 12(1), 45–62.

Hein, V. (2025). The relationship between perceived leader support and autonomous motivation to learn. Human Resource Development International.

Hiatt, J. (2006). ADKAR: A model for change in business, government and our community. Prosci.

Knowles, M. (1980). The modern practice of adult education: From pedagogy to andragogy. Cambridge Books.

Kotter, J. P. (1995). Leading change: Why transformation efforts fail. Harvard Business Review, 73(2), 59–67.

OECD. (2020). Workforce development in SMEs. OECD.

OECD. (2021). OECD skills outlook 2021. OECD.

PwC. (2019). Upskilling for the digital world. PwC.

Radovan, M. (2024). Workplace flexibility and participation in adult learning. Sustainability, 16(14).

World Economic Forum. (2021). The future of jobs report 2021. World Economic Forum.

Yin, R. K. (2018). Case study research and applications (6th ed.). Sage.

Rent Regulation Reform – A Stakeholders' Perspective

Perit Charlie Farrugia

Abstract

This study examines the impact of Malta's 2020 rent reform and its 2024 amendment on rental prices, market dynamics, and stakeholder experiences, utilizing an interrupted time series analysis and semi-structured interviews. The results indicate that although both reforms resulted in short-term rent stabilization, they did not modify the long-term upward trends driven by substantial supply and demand pressures. The 2020 reform precipitated a significant immediate decline in rents, whereas the 2024 amendment had a comparatively minor effect, with prices increasing again subsequent to both interventions. Feedback from stakeholders reveals a mixed impact: tenants experienced enhanced security and transparency but continued to encounter affordability challenges, whereas landlords and agents expressed concerns regarding increased regulation, diminished flexibility, and disincentives to invest. Furthermore, weak enforcement mechanisms limited the overall effectiveness of these reforms. The study advocates for the implementation of more robust enforcement measures and structural reforms to enhance market functioning. It underscores the importance of balancing tenant protections with incentives for landlords to foster a sustainable and equitable rental market.

Keywords: Rent regulation, rental market, stakeholders, interrupted time series, policy, landlord, tenant

Introduction

In recent years, the escalation of housing costs coupled with a contraction in the rental supply has defined the landscape of Malta's private rental market. Over the past decade, a notable increase in the number of foreign workers, along with limited housing stock, has exerted sustained pressure on housing demand. Given Malta's limited geographic size and high population density, even relatively modest shifts in demand can induce immediate effects on rental prices. Consequently, policymakers face an ongoing dilemma: how to maintain affordability and safeguard tenant security without discouraging investment or destabilizing the market.

It was within this framework that the Maltese government enacted the Private Residential Leases Act (Cap. 604) in January 2020. This legislation represented a substantial reform of the private rental sector. Its primary aims were to regulate lease agreements, promote transparency, strengthen protections for tenants, and introduce a measure of rent stability. Key provisions included a 5% annual cap on rent increases under the same lease, mandatory registration

of leases, minimum lease durations, statutory notice periods, and the establishment of structured dispute resolution mechanisms. Subsequent amendments enacted in 2024 further refined the framework by tightening enforcement mechanisms, extending compliance deadlines, and broadening protections to arrangements previously outside formal regulation. These reforms were implemented amidst a context of rapid rental inflation. Between 2013 and 2019, rental prices in Malta increased by more than 40% (Ellul, 2020). More recently, the Global Property Guide (2024) reported continued double-digit growth in advertised rents. These developments have disproportionately impacted lower- and middle-income households, foreign workers, and young tenants entering the market. The prevalence of short-term leases and frequent rent revisions has, in many instances, contributed to further price escalations.

Literature Review

Housing is widely recognized as a merit good, essential for wellbeing, social participation, and economic stability. Frischmann (2012) suggests that infrastructure-like resources such as housing generate broad societal value and may justify public intervention when markets fail to deliver equitable outcomes. From this perspective, regulation becomes necessary when affordability constraints threaten social cohesion and widen inequality. Nevertheless, considering this scenario, designing effective interventions is challenging. Regulatory interventions must strike a careful balance: they should address inequities and instability without introducing market distortions that would subsequently reduce supply, discourage maintenance, or ultimately harm the very households they are meant to protect.

Early Legislative Measures (1473–1931)	
1473	First known rent controls in Mdina restricted rent increases for owner-occupied dwellings
1530 - 1798	Knights of St John established a Rent Tribunal to determine "fair rent" for houses and shops
1929 - 1931	Urban Rent Regulation Act (1929) and Urban Regulation Ordinance (1931, now Chapter 69) capped rents at 40% above 1914 rent prices
Wartime and Post-War Adjustments (1941–1979)	
1941	Furnished property rents limited to 3.5% of 1939 market value
1944	Dwelling house rent set at 3% of land value + 3.25% of building cost
1949	Housing Act empowered requisition of private properties to tackle post-war housing shortages
1959	Housing (Decontrol) Ordinance introduced to de-regulate some dwellings and stimulate rentals
1979	Rent increases were restricted to inflation adjustments after 15 years, and rents could never exceed double the original rate. Lifelong protection, with the additional right to transfer the lease causa mortis
The 1995 Reform	
1995	Act XXXI of 1995 - excluded all new lease agreements from Chapter 69 provisions
The 2020 Reforms	
2020	Private Residential Leases Act (Cap. 604) of 2019 - reintroduced minimum lease standards, registration requirements, and limited rent increase guidelines
2021	Extension of Act's Applicability to leases entered into before January 2020 if they were still in force or renewed after January 1, 2021
2024	Act XX of 2024 - Several amendments to Cap. 604

Table 1: Historic Outlook of Rent Regulation Reforms in Malta

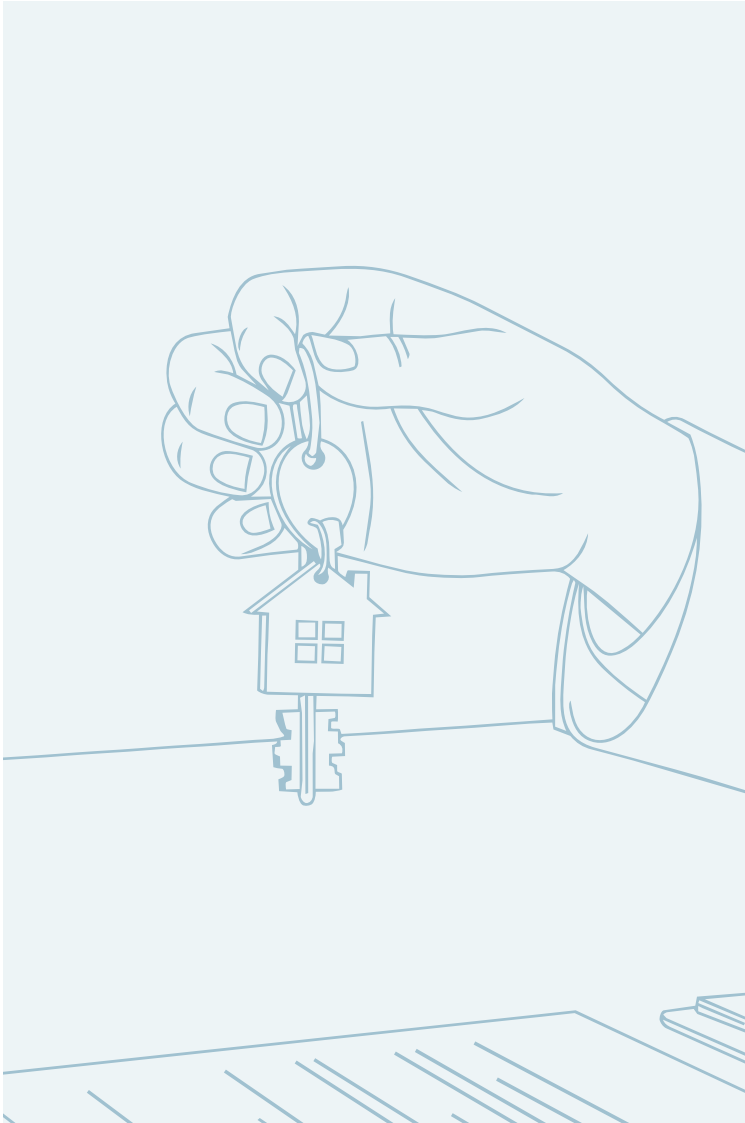
First-Generation Rent Control

Early models of rent control were typically characterised by strict rent freezes and indefinite security of tenure. While often introduced with the intention of protecting tenants during periods of crisis, these systems attracted significant criticism in the academic literature. Scholars such as Friedman and Stigler (1946) and Lindbeck (1972) argued that rigid controls distorted market incentives, discouraged investment, and reduced maintenance. Over time, such policies were associated with housing deterioration, lower mobility, and, in some cases, the development of informal or shadow rental markets.

Malta's own historical experience with rent regulation reflects many of these well-documented challenges as indicated in Table 1. Under Chapter 69 of the Laws of Malta, rigid rent controls and extensive security of tenure were introduced. While these measures provided stability sitting tenants, landlords became increasingly reluctant to lease properties under such restrictive conditions, leading to a steady contraction of the formal rental market (Housing Authority, 2021; Xerri, 2017). By the end of the twentieth century, the system was widely viewed as economically unsustainable and in need of reform.

In response, Malta liberalised new leases through Act XXXI of 1995. Contracts signed after 1995 were excluded from the earlier protections, allowing rents to be freely negotiated.

This shift revitalised the market, encouraging investment and expanding rental supply. However, it also created a dual structure. Tenants under pre-1995 agreements retained indefinite protections, while those entering the market after liberalisation operated within a fully market-driven framework (Housing Authority, 2021). As the years passed, the liberalised segment became increasingly sensitive to fluctuations in demand—particularly during periods of rapid economic growth and increase in foreign workers.





Well-designed regulation can improve affordability outcomes



Second-Generation Rent Control

The 2020 rental reform can be situated within a broader international movement towards what scholars often describe as "second-generation" rent control. Rather than imposing strict freezes, these frameworks aim to moderate rent growth while preserving market incentives. Arnott (1995; 2003) differentiates between overly restrictive first generation models and what he terms "good" rent control—measures that are transparent, predictable, and limited in scope. Similarly, Basu and Emerson (2003), along with Stiglitz (1987), argue that carefully calibrated interventions can address market imperfections such as information asymmetries or imbalances in bargaining power without reproducing the distortions associated with earlier systems. Lind (2001) suggests that moderate, well-designed regulation can improve affordability outcomes while maintaining incentives for long-term supply.

Empirical evidence from across Europe countries illustrates both the potential and the limitations of these approaches. In Catalonia, Abel, Carrer et al. (2024) document measurable rent reductions following the introduction of caps, although they also note adjustments in supply. In Germany, Deschermeier, Haas et al. (2020) report modest improvements in affordability under the Mietpreisbremse, while Breidenbach, Eilers et al. (2022) highlight loopholes that limited the law's practical effectiveness.

Research from Lyon by Bonneval, Goffette-Nagot et al. (2022) identifies rent reductions but raises questions about potential impacts on housing quality. Taken together, these studies suggest that outcomes depend heavily on policy design, enforcement capacity, and prevailing market conditions.

At the same time, scepticism persists. Sims (2007), examining deregulation in Massachusetts, finds that lifting controls encouraged investment and property maintenance, implying that even moderate constraints may dampen incentives. Lindbeck's (1972) famously stark warning—that rent control is "the most efficient technique presently known to destroy a city—except for bombing"—continues to echo in debates about long-term distortions. Although second-generation systems are generally considered less disruptive than earlier models, critics caution that unintended consequences—such as reduced supply or strategic behaviour by landlords—may still emerge over time.

Methodology

In light of this theoretical and comparative framework, Malta's recent reforms give rise to significant empirical research inquiries. Has the 2020 regulatory framework attenuated the escalation of rental prices? Has it enhanced tenant security without deterring investment? Are there any unintended consequences emerging? Moreover, how do various stakeholders evaluate the effectiveness of these reforms?

To investigate these questions, this study employs a mixed-methods approach. Quantitatively, an Interrupted Time Series (ITS) analysis was conducted utilizing monthly rental data spanning from July 2015 to June 2025. This methodology facilitates the assessment of price trends preceding and succeeding the January 2020 intervention. ITS is a commonly used technique in policy evaluation, particularly when reforms are nationwide and a comparable control group is unavailable (Lopez Bernal, Cummins et al., 2017).

Complementing this, semi-structured interviews were conducted with key stakeholders within the rental sector to facilitate a qualitative assessment. This approach enables the collection of lived experiences, practical implementation challenges, and perceptions regarding the market's evolution (Mason, 2018; Kvale and Brinkmann, 2015). Such qualitative findings provide valuable depth and context, assisting in the interpretation of quantitative patterns and unveiling effects that may not be immediately apparent through statistical data alone.

Results

Quantitative Assessment

Validating the Data

Prior to estimating the impact of the reforms, it was essential to verify the reliability of the rental data utilized in the analysis. A Pearson correlation test was performed using month-on-month changes in two official indicators: the "Actual rents paid by tenants" component of the Harmonised Index of Consumer Prices (HICP), published by Eurostat, and the Rent component of the Retail Price Index (RPI), published by Malta's National Statistics Office. The results indicated an almost perfect correlation between the two series ($r = 0.997$, $p < 0.05$). This strong correlation provides reassurance that the data are robust and appropriate for the subsequent Interrupted Time Series (ITS) analysis.

The 2020 Intervention

An ITS analysis was then conducted to examine the effects of the January 2020 rent reform on average rental prices. Monthly data covering the period from July 2015 to June 2025 were used and analysed. The regression produced an R^2 value of 0.9326, indicating that the model explains a very large share of the variation in rental prices over time.

The results obtained are provided in the table and graph below:

	Coefficients	P-value	Lower 95%	Upper 95%
β0 - Intercept	4.6209	1.439E-190	4.6008	4.6410
β1 -Pre-reform trend	0.0020	5.23423E-09	0.0014	0.0027
β2 -Immediate level shift post-reform	-0.0561	5.77521E-05	-0.0828	-0.0295
β3 -Change in slope after reform	0.0041	5.91137E-18	0.0033	0.0049

Table 2: Regression Statistics - January 2020 reform

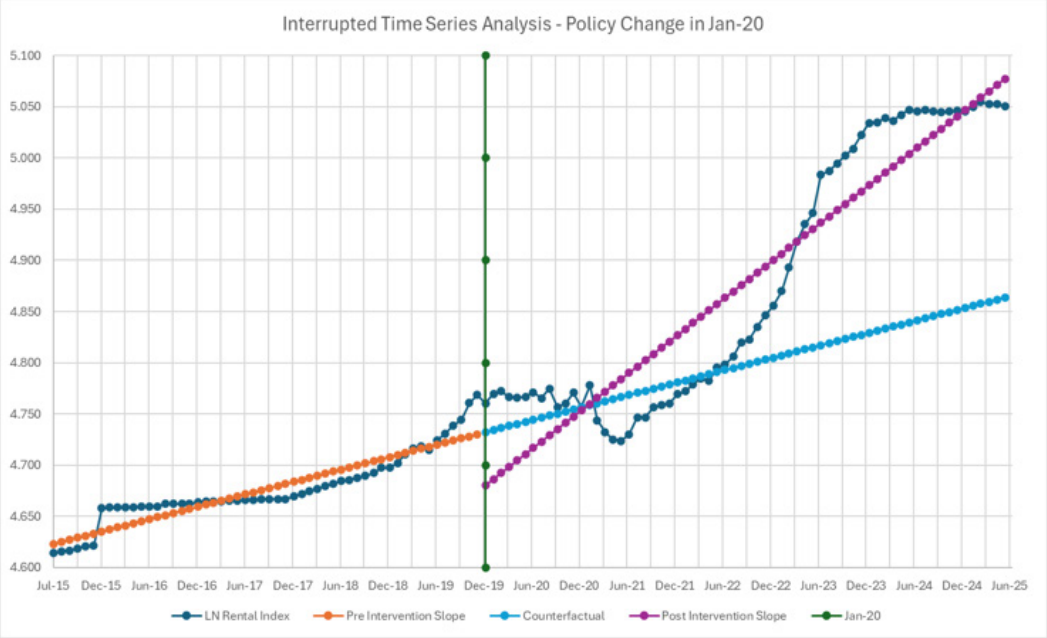
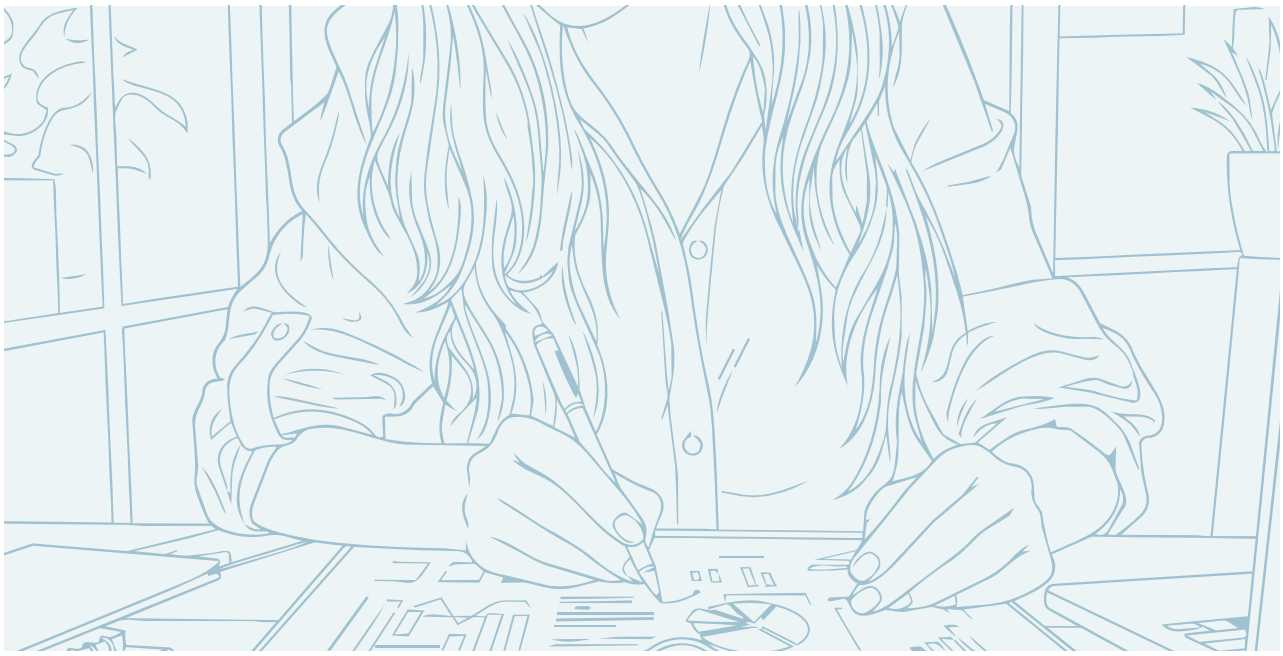


Figure 1: Interrupted Time Series - January 2020 reform



Using the results from the regression model in Table 2,, rents were increasing steadily before January 2020 at an average rate of roughly 0.2% per month ($p < 0.001$). This consistent upward movement reflects the structural pressures discussed earlier: strong demand, labour migration, and limited housing supply.

With the introduction of the 2020 legislation, the model detects an immediate and statistically significant drop in average rents of about 5.6% ($p < 0.001$). This suggests that the reform had a short-term corrective effect. The decline may reflect anticipatory reactions by landlords, temporary uncertainty in the market, or adjustments in pricing strategies following the introduction of rent caps and mandatory contract registration.

However, this decline proved temporary. After the initial drop, rental growth resumed — and at a faster rate than before. The monthly growth rate increased by an additional 0.41 percentage points ($p < 0.001$), resulting in a combined post-reform growth rate of approximately 0.61% per month. As indicated in Figure 1, the counterfactual projection — that is, the estimated path rents would have followed without the reform — shows that actual rents remained below the projected level until December 2020. From January 2021 onwards, however, rental prices began exceeding the counterfactual trend.

Taken together, these findings suggest that the 2020 reform acted more as a short-term shock absorber than a lasting moderator on rent inflation. While it generated an immediate correction, it did not fundamentally alter the underlying upward trajectory. The post-reform acceleration may reflect adaptive behaviour by landlords, including higher initial rents for new contracts — a pattern consistent with second-generation rent control frameworks discussed in the literature (Arnott, 2003; Lind, 2001).

The 2024 Amendments

A second ITS model was estimated to evaluate the September 2024 amendments. Given their recent introduction, the analysis focused on a shorter period (January 2024 – June 2025). The model again demonstrated strong explanatory power (R^2 = 0.8964). The obtained regression results are shown in Table 03 below:

	Coefficients	P-value	Lower 95%	Upper 95%
β0 - Intercept	5.0315	4.61E-42	5.0279	5.0351
β1 -Pre-reform trend	0.0021	2.27E-05	0.0014	0.0028
β2 -Immediate level shift post-reform	-0.0048	0.0339	-0.0091	-0.0004
β3 -Change in slope after reform	-0.0010	0.0242	-0.002	-0.0002

Table 3: Regression Statistics - January 2020 reform

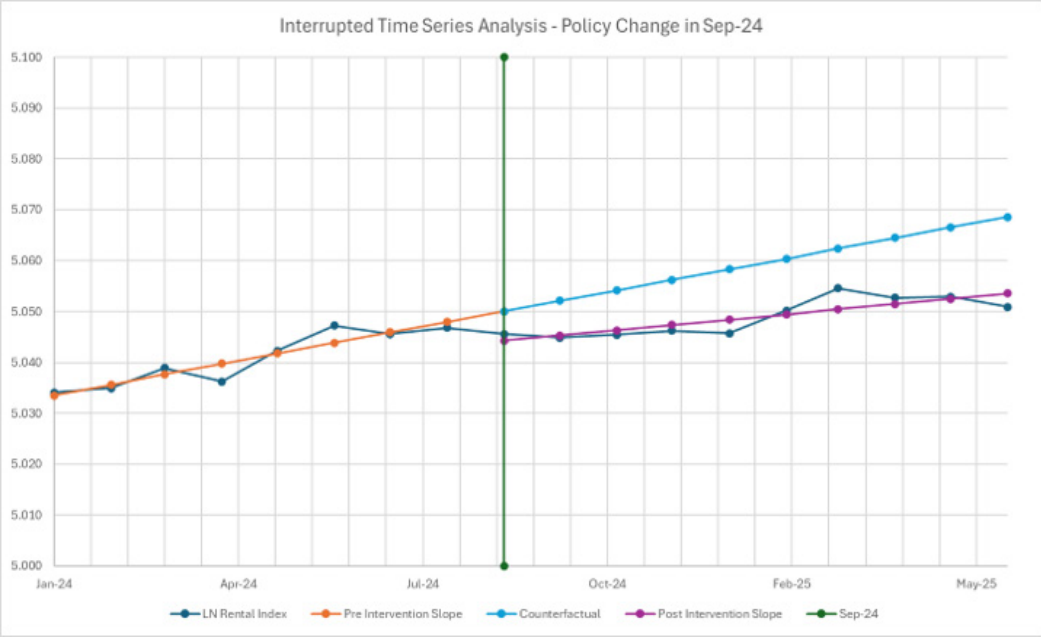


Figure 2: Interrupted Time Series - September 2024 amendments

Before the amendments, rents were rising at approximately 0.21% per month ($p < 0.001$), indicating continued upward pressure.

The amendments were associated with an immediate decline of around 0.48% ($p < 0.05$). Although smaller than the adjustment observed in 2020, the effect remains statistically significant. More notably, the slope coefficient turned negative. Monthly rental growth slowed by roughly 0.10 percentage points ($p < 0.05$), reducing the post-amendment growth rate to about 0.11% per month.

Interpreting these results graphically, as indicated in Figure 2, , the 2024 amendments appear — unlike the 2020 reform – appear, at least in the short term — to have exerted both an immediate and ongoing moderating effect. Counterfactual projections indicate that rents have remained consistently below their projected path due to this slower growth rate.
Although the post-amendment observation window is still limited, early indications suggest that the refinements may have strengthened enforcement credibility and clarified regulatory expectations, thereby enhancing their effectiveness.



Malta in a European Perspective

When placed alongside Germany, Spain, and the EU-27 average — where cumulative rental growth over a comparable period was around 20% — Malta's increase of over 50% stands out, as shown in Figure 3 below.

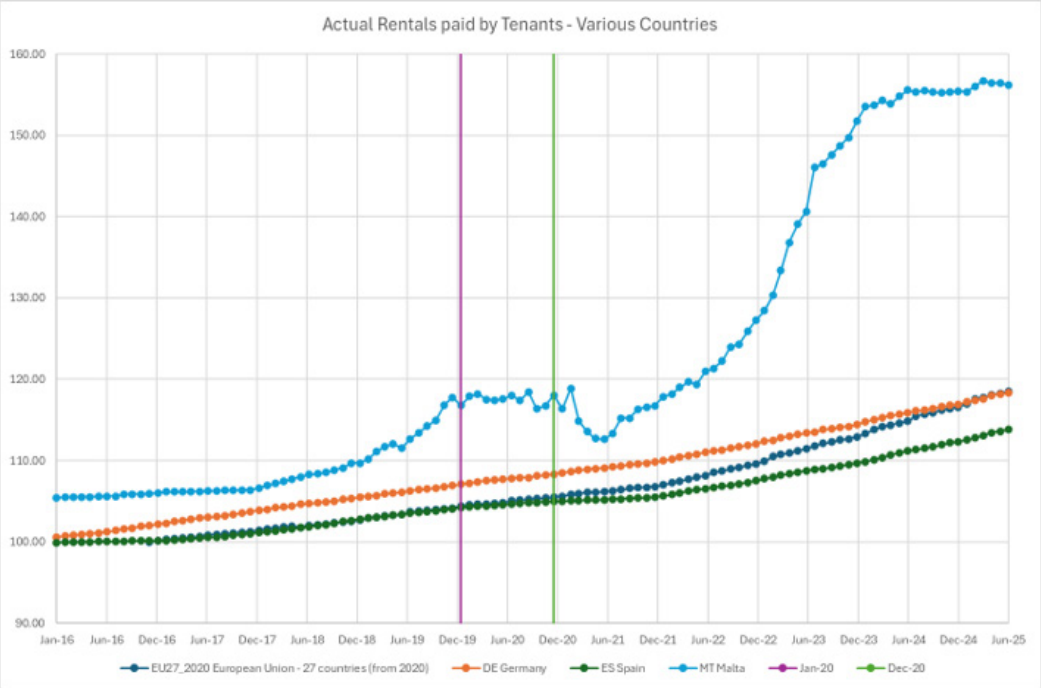


Figure 3: HICP Index - Actual Rentals paid by Tenants - Various Countries

This comparison highlights the particular characteristics of Malta's housing market. Limited land availability and strong increase in foreign labour, amplify price pressures. Malta's rental dynamics therefore appear more intense than those observed in larger European markets.



Qualitative Assessment

The semi-structured interviews enriched the quantitative results by elucidating how reforms are perceived in practical application. Participants were selected from among tenants, landlords, estate agents, policymakers, and regulators. The discussions revealed ten broad themes.

Affordibility

A consistent theme across interviews was that rents continue to rise. Policymakers emphasised that the 2020 reform was not primarily intended to address affordability directly, arguing that affordability concerns are better targeted through subsidy schemes.

Tenants frequently described increasing financial strain. Many reported spending more than 30% of their income on rent. Some spoke of moving into smaller properties or sharing accommodation to cope with rising costs. Whilst affordability depended heavily on income levels and household composition, expanding housing supply is essential to ease price pressures.

Tenancy Security

Most participants agreed that security of tenure has improved. Mandatory notice periods and automatic renewal provisions were widely cited as positive developments.

However, some tenants still expressed feelings of insecurity, particularly where they believed landlords had found ways to circumvent procedures. Landlords, on the other hand, generally viewed the Adjudicating Panel as a useful mechanism for resolving disputes, particularly in cases involving unpaid rent or property damage. Automatic renewals were seen by some landlords as disproportionately favouring tenants.

Supply and Market Dynamics

Demand for rental property remains strong. Some interviewees raised concerns about landlords exiting the long-let market, although others argued that tighter short-let regulations reduce incentives to shift to short-term rentals.

Several landlords reported temporarily pausing listings following the 2020 reform, but most eventually returned to the market.

Lease Duration and Contracts

Most contract agreements are for a duration of one year, often reflecting the one-year validity of many residence permits. Opinions differed on whether minimum durations should be extended. Some advocated for longer terms, such as three years, to enhance stability, while others stressed the importance of contractual freedom.

Lease registration and clarity of contractual terms were frequently mentioned, both as improvements and as sources of administrative burden for landlords.

Tenant Behaviour

Tenants still feel they have a weak bargaining power, particularly in areas where rental demand is high. However, tenants are becoming more and more aware of their legal rights. Despite this, fear of retaliation or eviction still discourages some tenants from initiating disputes with the adjudicating panels

Landlord Behaviour

Landlords described becoming more selective, often requesting references and, in some cases, deposits exceeding one month's rent. Some interviewees alleged instances of regulatory circumvention, including dual contracts or false declarations of termination. Pricing strategies were occasionally described as a screening tool to manage perceived risk.

Implementation Challenges

Administrative burdens emerged as a common concern. Registration procedures were described as bureaucratic, and participants called for simplification procedures. Slow dispute resolution by the adjudicating panel were highlighted as ongoing constraints.

Equity and Discrimination

Some tenants reported experiences of discrimination, including reluctance by landlords to rent to certain nationalities. Landlords argued that the current framework leans too heavily in favour of tenants and does not sufficiently safeguard their interests.

Policy Success and Positive Outcomes

Despite criticisms, many stakeholders acknowledged that the reform provided an improvement over the pre-2020 conditions. Mandatory contract registration has enhanced transparency and improved data availability, potentially reducing tax evasion. Automatic renewal provisions and adjudication mechanisms were widely viewed as beneficial.

Several participants credited the reform with strengthening tenant protections and contributing to homelessness prevention.

Suggested Improvements

Interviewees proposed a range of potential refinements. These included that rent caps between tenancies become indexed to inflation, an increase in the established minimum contract duration, third-party deposit holding schemes, licensing of landlords, vacant property taxes, simplification of registration systems, strengthening the powers of the Adjudicating Panel, and expediting eviction procedures in clear cases of non-payment.

Public education initiatives and minimum quality standards of properties available on the market were also recommended.

Discussion

Affordability

The 2020 Residential Leases Act introduced a 5% cap on annual rent increases within ongoing contracts and a mandatory minimum one-year lease. These were not designed to bring greater structure and predictability to the market.

The ITS findings show that the reform had a clear immediate impact: average rents fell by 5.6% following its introduction. However, this decline proved temporary. Rental growth resumed shortly afterwards, and while the 2024 amendments produced another downward adjustment (around 0.48%), upward pressure soon re-emerged. This trajectory aligns closely with what second-generation rent control theory would predict. Such frameworks are generally intended to smooth rent increases and reduce volatility rather than permanently suppress price growth (Arnott, 1995; 2003; Lind, 2001).

The stakeholder interviews reinforce this interpretation. Tenants consistently described ongoing affordability strain. Many reported allocating more than 30% of household income to rent, often adapting by moving to smaller units, relocating to less expensive areas, or sharing accommodation. Policymakers, by contrast, emphasised that the reform was never intended to reduce rents directly. Instead, its purpose was to stabilise and formalise the market, with affordability to be addressed through targeted subsidies and broader housing policy measures.

Security of Tenure

Mandatory written contracts, automatic renewal provisions, minimum lease durations, and statutory notice periods have introduced greater clarity and security into rental agreements. Administrative data showing rising renewal rates and longer average lease durations suggest that these changes are having tangible effects.

This mirrors findings from other European contexts, such as Berlin and Catalonia where moderate regulation has improved continuity and reduced insecurity among tenants (Breidenbach et al., 2022; Abel et al., 2024.

Nevertheless enforcement issues were highlighted. Some tenants reported questionable termination notices or the use of dual contracts to circumnavigate legal provisions. These accounts echo concerns raised in earlier literature: legal rights do not automatically translate into tenant protection without the presence of a strong regulatory authority and enforcement (Turner & Malpezzi, 2003).

Market Dynamics and Behavioural Responses

Traditional critiques of rent control often warn of supply contraction or market withdrawal (Basu & Emerson, 2003; Lind, 2001). In Malta, there is little evidence of a large-scale exit from the long-term rental market. In fact, the number of registered leases increased between 2020 and 2024. Nevertheless, landlords clearly adapted. Many adjusted their behaviour: setting higher starting rents, screening tenants more carefully, or favouring one-year contracts to retain flexibility. These responses are not unusual. International experience suggests that under second-generation rent control systems, landlords frequently adjust margins that remain unregulated rather than exit the market entirely (Breidenbach et al., 2022; Abel et al., 2024).

The COVID-19 pandemic further complicated market dynamics. The temporary shift of short-term tourist accommodation into the long-term rental sector increased supply and, in some cases, improved quality standards. This episode illustrates how external shocks interact with regulatory frameworks. Policy outcomes cannot be understood in isolation; they are shaped by broader economic and institutional conditions.

Lease Duration and Contract Terms

The minimum one-year lease reflects Malta's labour market realities, particularly for third-country nationals whose residence permits often run for twelve months. Tenants generally expressed a preference for longer or even open-ended leases, valuing stability and predictability. Landlords, meanwhile, preferred flexible terms and the ability to respond to changing market conditions.

Policy Effectiveness and Unintended Outcomes

Applying McConnell's (2010) framework — which evaluates policy success in terms of programmatic achievement, stakeholder support, and durability — the 2020 reform shows clear institutional progress. It formalised a previously opaque market, improved transparency through mandatory registration, and created clearer dispute resolution mechanisms. However, outcomes are uneven. While procedural fairness and transparency improved, affordability remains a persistent challenge. Administrative burdens continue to be a source of frustration for some landlords. There are also unintended consequences. Tenants increasingly rely on registered contracts to access employment and social entitlements, which heightens the importance of compliance. At the same time, some

landlords have attempted to circumvent rules through dual agreements or fake termination notices.

These patterns underscore a recurring theme: regulatory credibility hinges on enforcement. Without consistent enforcement, legal frameworks risk regulatory effectiveness (Stiglitz, 1987).

Conclusion

Malta's 2020 rent reform constitutes a significant, though partial, progression towards stabilising the private rental market. The implementation of the Residential Leases Act resulted in a short-term moderation of rental prices, and preliminary evidence from the 2024 amendments suggests the potential for more sustained suppressive effects. The reform enhanced transparency, clarified contractual obligations, and improved security of tenure — outcomes broadly aligned with academic literature on moderate rent regulation (Arnott, 2003; Lind, 2001).

Nonetheless, imbalances between supply and demand continue to exert upward pressure on rental prices. Enforcement deficiencies and adaptive behaviours by stakeholders have further hindered the full achievement of policy objectives.

Comparative evidence from other European countries indicates that second-generation rent control measures can reduce volatility and promote stability; however, they are unlikely to entirely prevent rent increases in high-demand markets (Abel et al., 2024; Breidenbach et al., 2022). The Maltese experience corroborates this conclusion.

Therefore, evaluating policy success necessitates a multidimensional perspective. The reform strengthened governance and formalised market practices. Economically, however, affordability issues persist as significant. Security of tenure was improved for tenants but often opposed by landlords. Stakeholder perspectives highlight an ongoing tension between tenant protections and landlord flexibility.

Achieving a balanced approach will require ongoing refinement of the regulatory framework, the enhancement of enforcement mechanisms, and complementary measures—including targeted rent subsidies, expanded housing supply, and planning reforms that facilitate the construction of smaller rental units.

Ultimately, Malta's experience demonstrates that rent regulation is an adaptable, evolving instrument rather than a static remedy. When meticulously designed and effectively enforced, rent regulation can enhance predictability, fairness, and stability. Nonetheless, its long-term efficacy relies on sustained institutional capacity and continuous adaptation to external factors such as housing planning policies and the presence of foreign workers in the labour market.

References

ABEL, J., CARRER, R. and LUQUE, J., (2024). The perverse effects of rent control in Catalonia. [conference paper] Presented at: 5th International Workshop on Rent Control, Tarragona, Spain, June 2025. Available at: https://housing.urv.cat/5th-internationalworkshop-on-rent-control/.

ARNOTT, R., (1995). Time for revisionism on rent control? Journal of Economic Perspectives, 9(1), pp.99–120.

ARNOTT, R., (2003). Tenancy rent control. Swedish Economic Policy Review, 10(1), pp.89–121.

BASU, K. and EMERSON, P.M., (2003). The economics of tenancy rent control. The Economic Journal, 113(486), pp.39–54.

BONNEVAL, L., GOFFETTE-NAGOT, F., and ZHAO, Z., (2022). The impact of rent control: Investigations on historical data in the city of Lyon. Growth and Change, 53(4), pp.1646–1667. https://doi.org/10.1111/grow.12584

BREIDENBACH, P.; EILERS, L. and FRIES, J., (2022). Temporal dynamics of rent regulations – The case of the German rent control. Regional Science and Urban Economics 92(C).

DESCHERMEIER, P., HAAS, H. and MENSE, A., (2020). The effect of rent controls on rental prices and market dynamics in Germany. European Journal of Housing Policy, 20(2), pp.254–281.

ELLUL, R., (2020). Long-term housing rentals in Malta: A look at advertised listings, Policy Note 02/2020. Valletta: Central Bank of Malta.

FRISCHMANN, B.M., (2012). Infrastructure: The social value of shared resources. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

FRIEDMAN, M. and STIGLER, G.J., (1946). Roofs or ceilings? The current housing problem. Irvington-on-Hudson: Foundation for Economic Education.

GLOBAL PROPERTY GUIDE, (2024). Malta's Residential Rental Market Q1 2024. [online] Available at: https://www.globalpropertyguide.com/europe/malta/price-history

HOUSING AUTHORITY, (2021). Residential Rental Study – 1st Edition. Floriana: Housing Authority.

KVALE, S., and BRINKMANN, S., (2015). InterViews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing. 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.

LIND, H., (2001). Rent regulation: A conceptual and comparative analysis. European Journal of Housing Policy, 1(1), pp.41–57.

LINDBECK, A., (1972). The Political Economy of the New Left: An Outsider's View. New York: Harper & Row.

LOPEZ BERNAL, J., CUMMINS, S. and GASPARRINI, A., (2017). Interrupted time series regression for the evaluation of public health interventions: a tutorial. International Journal of Epidemiology, 46(1), pp. 348–355.

MASON, J., (2018). Qualitative researching. 3rd ed. London: SAGE.

MCCONNELL, A., (2010). Policy success, policy failure and grey areas in-between. Journal of Public Policy, 30(3), pp.345–362.

PRIVATE RESIDENTIAL LEASES ACT (2019) (c. 604). Valletta: Government of Malta

SIMS, D.P., (2007). Out of control: What can we learn from the end of Massachusetts rent control? Journal of Urban Economics, 61(1), pp.129–151.

STIGLITZ, J.E., (1987). The causes and consequences of the dependence of quality on price. Journal of Economic Literature, 25(1), pp.1–48.

TURNER, B. and MALPEZZI, S., (2003). A review of empirical evidence on rent control. Swedish Economic Policy Review, 10(1), pp.11–56.

XERRI, K., (2017). Maltese law of letting and hiring: Lessons from the past and solutions for the future. Revista Electrónica de Direito, [online] 3(Nordm), pp.1–20. Available at: https://cij.up.pt/en/red/previous-editions/2017-nordm-3/maltese-law-of-letting-and-hiring-lessons-from-the-past-and-solutions-for-the-future/.

The impact of EU Funding on Maltese Public Service

Mr Jonathan Vassallo

Abstract

Since Malta's accession to the European Union in 2004, EU funding has facilitated substantial capital investments and has concurrently contributed to the reform of planning, management, and the delivery of public services. This article critically examines the organisational and behavioural impacts of key EU financial instruments, including the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), the Cohesion Fund, and the Technical Support Instrument, on administrative routines, institutional capacity, and governance practices within the Maltese Public Service.

The paper delineates how EU membership has propelled the institutionalisation of specialised structures for fund management, reinforced programme governance and oversight mechanisms, and influenced fundamental administrative functions such as public procurement, auditing, and performance evaluation. Over more than two decades, EU funding has contributed not only to the rapid development of strategic infrastructure and administrative systems but also to demonstrable improvements in education, workforce skills, labour market participation, and social inclusion—particularly among vulnerable groups.

These initiatives have supported the preservation and valorisation of national heritage, enhanced service delivery and administrative preparedness, and bolstered financial accountability and environmental compliance. Although challenges related to implementation complexities and administrative burdens persist, these are inherently associated with the requirements of compliance, transparency, and sound financial management. Overall, EU funding has served as a transformative catalyst, embedding results-based management, fostering inter-institutional coordination, and promoting citizen-centred service standards within Malta's public administration.

Key words: EU funding; Malta; public administration; cohesion policy; governance; accountability

Introduction

Malta acceded to the European Union (EU) in 2004 and, since then, has been a significant beneficiary of EU funding instruments. Over the period 2004–2027, Malta is estimated to receive approximately €2.4 billion in net EU funding allocations. These resources have been channelled through key instruments, including the ERDF, the ESF+, the CF, and more recently the NextGenerationEU recovery instrument, alongside capacity-building tools such as the Technical Support Instrument (TSI).

At the EU level, cohesion policy and related instruments are explicitly designed not only to promote economic convergence but also to strengthen administrative capacity, improve governance, and support structural reforms across Member States, as consistently highlighted by the European Commission, the OECD, and the European Court of Auditors. In the Maltese context, EU funding has contributed to job creation, business competitiveness, and economic growth, while also supporting improvements in education and skills, labour market participation, and social inclusion, thereby enhancing citizens' overall quality of life (European Commission, n.d.-a).

However, the impact of EU funding extends beyond socio-economic outcomes. Malta's sustained engagement with EU financial instruments reflects a broader process of alignment with EU policy priorities, including digital transformation, environmental sustainability, social cohesion, and institutional effectiveness. In line with EU regulatory frameworks and performance-based funding models, the absorption of EU funds has required the adoption of more structured planning systems, strengthened coordination mechanisms, and enhanced monitoring and evaluation practices within the public administration.

EU conditionality and compliance requirements, particularly in areas such as public procurement, state aid, audit, and financial control, have not only enabled the delivery of infrastructure and services but have also progressively reshaped administrative practices, decision-making processes, and the operational behaviour of the Maltese Public Service. The increasing emphasis on transparency, accountability, and results-based management has contributed to the institutionalisation of new administrative norms that extend beyond individual projects and programmes to influence the broader governance culture.

Against this backdrop, this article examines how EU funding has acted as a driver of administrative transformation in Malta. It explores the mechanisms through which EU financial instruments have shaped organisational routines, strengthened administrative capacity, and supported reforms that directly affect how public services are planned, managed, and delivered to citizens.



Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach. It commences with the analysis of official European Commission documents, including Malta's 2021–2027 Partnership Agreement, the Recovery and Resilience Facility country documentation, and outputs from the Technical Support Instrument, alongside documentation from the Maltese government and programme-level records. Subsequently, it incorporates a targeted review of secondary materials, including analyses by the OECD on public procurement and administrative capacity, as well as audit-related materials from the European Court of Auditors. Additionally, the study features case examples from specific projects and schemes implemented in Malta to demonstrate the impact of EU funding on public service operations, administrative routines, and institutional behavior.

Primary sources encompass Malta's Partnership Agreement for 2021–2027, the Recovery and Resilience Facility documentation, programme implementation reports, fiches of funded projects, and institutional descriptions of the public entities involved in programming, coordination, implementation, auditing, and reform support. The analysis relies exclusively on publicly available documentary evidence, foregoing interviews or internal administrative data.

Results

Considering the 2021–2027 programming period as a foundational reference, Malta is poised to receive significant support from the European Union. Under the framework of Cohesion Policy, the European Commission approved a financial allocation of €817 million (European Commission, 2022a) to Malta, aimed at fostering a more competitive, inclusive, environmentally sustainable, and technologically advanced economy. Concurrently, Malta's amended Recovery and Resilience Plan is financed by grants totaling €328 million through the Recovery and Resilience Facility (European Commission, n.d. -b). These financial resources are complemented by other EU instruments, such as the Technical Support Instrument, and should be regarded as components of a comprehensive multi-fund framework rather than isolated allocations.

Funds from previous programming periods, toge ther with the allocations for 2021–2027, have thus functioned as a strategic reserve for public investment. In Malta's official 2021–2027 programming documents, this support is explicitly linked to digitalization initiatives across the public sector, health sector digitalization, environmental sustainability, workforce skills development, labor mobility, and enhanced access to services.

Furthermore, these documents emphasize the importance of synergy between Cohesion Policy funds, the Recovery and Resilience Plan, the Technical Support Instrument, InvestEU, and other European Union instruments.

Malta is poised to receive significant EU support.

Institutional Mechanisms for Managing EU Funds

One of the most discernible institutional impacts of European Union (EU) funding has been the establishment and strengthening of specialised entities that facilitate access to, and ensure compliance with, EU programmes. Servizzi Ewropej f'Malta (SEM) is officially designated to provide information and assistance regarding EU-related policies, legislation, and funding opportunities. Its officially published roles include advising organizations and citizens, supporting private non-profit entities and local governments with application processes, and offering guidance on the implementation of EU-funded projects (Servizzi Ewropej, n.d.).

This institutional evolution extends beyond SEM alone. Malta's 2021–2027 Partnership Agreement (European Commission, 2022c) states that the Strategy and Implementation Division within the ministry responsible for European funds oversees the programming of EU-funded initiatives. Simultaneously, the same ministry functions as RRP Coordinator and National Coordinating Authority for the TSI. Furthermore, the document identifies the Planning and Priorities Coordination Division as the Managing Authority for ERDF, ESF+, CF, and JTF, characterizing this centralized structure as a means to foster synergies and develop expertise in managing EU funds.



This developmental trajectory aligns with broader EU-level and OECD perspectives regarding the evolution of public procurement systems (OECD, 2023). OECD analyses underscore significant reforms undertaken in Malta to bolster procurement governance, including efforts aimed at achieving greater professionalization, enhancing support mechanisms, and developing a more robust performance framework. Although there remain areas for further enhancement, as is typical of evolving systems, these developments reflect an ongoing process of institutional growth rather than indicative of structural deficiencies.

At the European Union level, the European Court of Auditors has consistently underscored the significance of administrative capacity as a fundamental element for achieving effective competition and ensuring compliance in procurement processes. In the context of Malta, this emphasis has manifested in ongoing efforts to develop technical expertise, enhance procedural rigor, and align national systems with best practices established by the European Union.

Overall, Malta's framework for managing EU funds has transitioned from a merely compliance-focused structure to a more advanced and capable system. Instead of simply adding administrative layers, the country has progressively fortified the public service's capacity to operate in a more specialised, structured, and performance-oriented manner, thereby illustrating a clear pattern of continual improvement and institutional resilience.

Infrastructure and Public Service Readiness

EU funding has also exerted direct operational effects through extensive infrastructure projects that enhanced service readiness and national capacity. In the water sector, the Water Services Corporation executed the Cohesion Fund project "Towards a Net Zero Impact Water Utility, ensuring Integrated Water Resource Management," with a publicly disclosed project cost of €89.5 million. This initiative addressed the production and treatment of drinking water, distribution, sewage collection and treatment, as well as the polishing of treated effluent for reuse. It also involved investments in trenching, pipelaying, desalination upgrades, energy-efficient equipment, and enhancements to wastewater networks. Earlier Cohesion Fund investments had already transformed wastewater treatment infrastructure, including a €68 million investment in a new urban wastewater treatment plant at Ta' Barkat, the construction of a new pumping station at Rinella, upgrades to the Xgħajra pumping station, the development of a new wastewater gallery, and the installation of a submarine outfall. This infrastructure completed the Sewage Master Plan and addressed the residual wastewater that had previously been discharged untreated at sea. In the health sector, a notable example is the Mater Dei Hospital Oncology Centre, an ERDF-supported project with a cost of €48.8 million. The centre, developed as an extension of Mater Dei Hospital, replaced Sir Paul Boffa Hospital as Malta's main facility for oncology services and treatment, providing advanced cancer-treatment facilities within a comprehensive care setting.

> **EU funding enhanced national capacity**



Additionally, education and training have benefited from EU-funded investments. The TRAKE Complex at the University of Malta received over €31 million in ERDF support for laboratories, seminar and conference rooms, study spaces, and research infrastructure. This development has resulted in the employment of more than 65 full-time-equivalent researchers in upgraded research facilities, the involvement of 38 postgraduate students conducting research utilizing EU-funded equipment, and the undertaking of 127 research studies.

At a different level of the education system, EU funding supported investment in 76 vocational education and training laboratories across 13 secondary state schools in Malta and Gozo, as well as new infrastructure at MCAST, including a management information system already in use by students and staff. Regarding social inclusion within education, the ESF project "Adding Value: Nurturing Learning Journeys at the MCAST Foundation College," with a cost exceeding €9.3 million, was designed to provide flexible teaching methodologies, innovative technologies, and mentoring for vulnerable students. It also aimed to identify barriers faced by socially excluded individuals and to establish support structures for long-term inclusion (Fondi.eu., n.d.). Environmental and waste-management infrastructure serve as additional concrete examples. The Hal Far multi-material recovery facility

records a Cohesion Fund investment of €13.36 million, intended to collect various waste streams for preparation, storage, reutilization, and export, thus reducing the volume of waste sent to landfills. Cohesion Fund investments also targeted the rehabilitation of closed landfills, the establishment of a Mechanical and Biological Treatment Plant in northern Malta, and the expansion of waste separation and collection services across the Maltese Islands, aiming to enhance recovery and recycling rates in compliance with EU legislation. Urban regeneration and heritage restoration are similarly linked to public service readiness, particularly when these projects necessitated coordination among ministries, heritage organizations, local authorities, and tourism agencies. The implementation of the Cittadella Masterplan in Gozo, for instance, involved the restoration of principal public buildings, the rehabilitation of public spaces, and pertinent infrastructural works, while initiatives such as MUŻA and other heritage investments exemplify how ERDF support extended administrative responsibilities into conservation, visitor management, and public accessibility (Fondi.eu., n.d.).

Digital modernization constitutes one of the most conspicuous aspects through which European Union funding has transformed public administration. The European Commission has acknowledged that, through the planned investments outlined in the Recovery and Resilience Plan (RRP), Malta's institutional resilience would be bolstered via reforms and investments that promote the digitalisation of public services, thereby enhancing the delivery and accessibility of digital public services, including those within the maritime sector.

The investment program titled CONVERGE, covering the period 2014–2020, is associated with the €55 million RRP initiative aimed at expediting the digital transition through strengthening policy frameworks and further investing in the digitalisation of public services and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

This administrative impact is also evident in the nature of ESF projects that Malta implemented under the category of institutional capacity. Official programme reports enumerate projects aimed at enhancing the skills of personnel at the National Audit Office, developing a new ICT system and data-warehouse capabilities at the National Statistics Office, providing geomatics scholarships for public administration through the Planning Authority, and augmenting public sector capacity in cultural and creative administration via Arts Council Malta. These examples are significant because they demonstrate that EU funding extended beyond infrastructure development; it also financed the skills, systems, and organizational reforms necessary for a more technologically adept public administration.

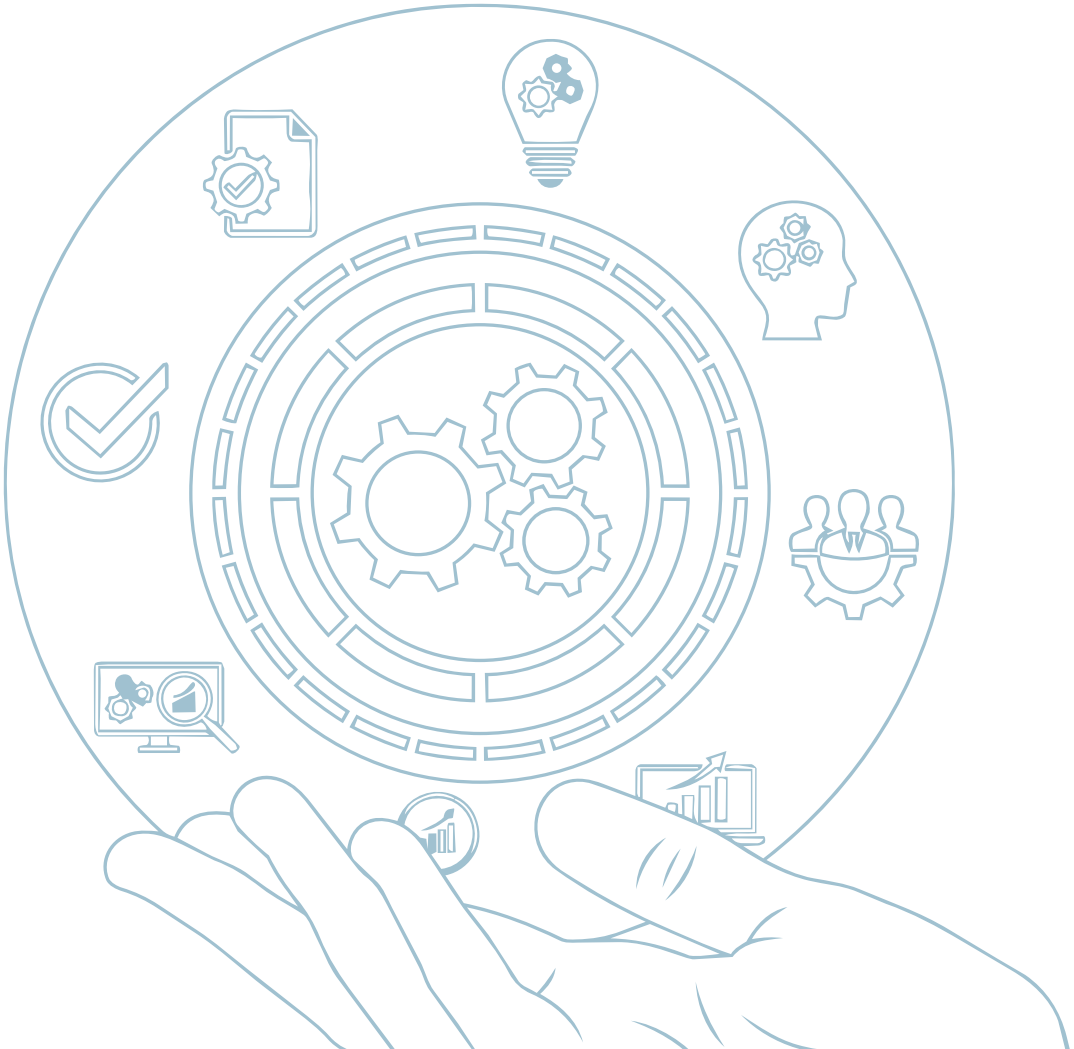
Malta has additionally made extensive use of the Technical Support Instrument and its predecessor, the SRSP. To date, Malta has benefited from 44 projects funded by the TSI or SRSP, encompassing areas such as comprehensive expenditure review, digitalisation of the maritime industry, reform and capacity-building within the environmental regulatory body, digital strategy formulation for the justice sector, sustainable development initiatives, insolvency, and the enhancement of integrity and transparency frameworks.

Twenty-six (26) of these projects have already been successfully completed (European Commission, 2022b).

Further specific examples of TSI support include assistance in the development of Malta's Sustainable Development Strategy, which entailed capacity-building workshops and activities focused on identifying priorities, interconnections, and trade-offs. The project yielded targeted policy recommendations in key areas aligned with the Sustainable Development Strategy, notably the sustainable blue economy and regulatory impact assessment. Malta also employed TSI support in the design and implementation of a new anti-trafficking strategy.

EU funding has further enhanced financial governance and accountability by implementing for traceable requirements expenditures, auditable procedures, and reinforced ex ante and ex post controls. Malta's Internal Audit and Investigations Department (IAID) includes a dedicated EU Funds Audits Directorate, formally designated as the official Audit Authority for EU funds and the Certification Body for EU Agricultural Funds in Malta. This exemplifies how EU directives have been embedded into enduring administrative frameworks.

The overall Maltese control environment adheres to a similar paradigm. IAID provides a functionally independent role encompassing appraisal, consultancy, and investigative functions for the government, dedicated to optimizing the utilization of public funds. Its mission and organizational structure explicitly incorporate the EU Funds Audits Directorate and the Financial Investigations Directorate.



The latter also serves as Malta's Anti-Fraud Coordinating Service and as the designated liaison with OLAF, engaging in joint investigations related to EU funds and in the quarterly reporting of irregularities (IAID, n.d.).

The procurement aspect is equally significant. According to the OECD's review of Malta's public procurement system, the Department of Contracts is responsible for procurement procedures and ex ante vetting processes (OECD, 2023).

Furthermore, EU funding has strengthened environmental governance by establishing environmental compliance as a requisite for public investment, rather than an optional supplementary measure.

At the level of the RRP, the Commission identifies Malta's green-transition challenges including greenhouse-gas reduction, transport decarbonisation, congestion, energy efficiency in buildings, and improved waste and water management. This indicates that climate and environmental criteria are incorporated into the rationale for reform and investment, rather than merely added during implementation.

The project examples above demonstrate how this has been translated into administrative practice. Water-sector projects necessitate long-term utility planning, wastewater-network upgrades, desalination efficiency measures, and treated-effluent reuse. Waste-management projects, such as the Hal Far facility and earlier MBT, landfill rehabilitation, and waste-separation interventions, embed circular-economy and landfill-diversion objectives into their implementation processes. Consequently, these projects have expanded not only physical infrastructure but also the compliance, monitoring, permitting, and reporting functions of the involved public authorities.

Furthermore, EU funding has influenced the manner in which the public service communicates with citizens and stakeholders. SEM is explicitly mandated not only to provide information on EU funding opportunities but also to keep citizens and organisations informed about EU strategies, policies, rights, and obligations. Additionally, it manages Europe Direct Valletta, which is supported by the European Commission as part of the broader Europe Direct network.

At the programme level, regarded as integral components of the programme's delivery plan. For instance, in 2021, the authorities organised a roaming photographic exhibition under the "Europe in My Region" campaign, showcasing 16 EU-funded projects across 12 localities in Malta and Gozo. This exemplifies how EU funding has not only transformed internal procedures but has also institutionalised new outward-facing engagement, visibility, and feedback mechanisms related to public investment.



Discussion

The evidence demonstrates that EU funding has exerted a multifaceted and progressively transformative influence on the Maltese Public Service, extending from targeted project financing to deeper organisational, cultural, and behavioural shifts. Four interrelated themes emerge in understanding this impact. First, it incentivises Modernisation and Strategic Alignment. EU funding frameworks, particularly those advanced by the European Commission, embed conditionalities, performance indicators, and strategic priorities that actively incentivise Member States to align with evolving European standards in governance and service delivery. In Malta's case, digitalisation targets under the Recovery and Resilience Facility have accelerated the adoption of interoperable systems, strengthened cybersecurity frameworks, and promoted user-centric digital platforms.

Importantly, these mechanisms have contributed to a shift in administrative mindset. Public service entities are increasingly oriented towards measurable outcomes, strategic foresight, and performance tracking. This has fostered a more proactive and innovation-friendly environment, where continuous improvement is embedded within institutional practice.

Second, it has supported the building of administrative capacity. EU funding has played a central role in strengthening Malta's administrative capacity.The compliance, reporting, and audit requirements associated with EU instruments have driven the development of specialised expertise across financial management, procurement, environmental governance, monitoring, and evaluation functions.

This trajectory aligns with broader European and OECD perspectives, which emphasise administrative capacity as a cornerstone of effective public governance. In Malta, the evolution of entities such as SEM and the Managing Authorities illustrates how capacity-building has been institutionalised. These bodies now operate not only as programme administrators but as centres of expertise, supporting knowledge transfer, methodological consistency, and the professionalisation of public administration.

Third, EU funding has encouraged Citizen-Centred Service Models. EU funding has reinforced a stronger focus on citizen outcomes and inclusivity. Increasingly, public services are assessed on their ability to deliver tangible, user-oriented benefit, ranging from accessible digital services to improved infrastructure and social inclusion measures.

In parallel, initiatives supported by the European Union concerning communication and engagement have enhanced transparency and participatory processes. Public authorities are now anticipated to engage more systematically with stakeholders, disseminate information effectively, and monitor user satisfaction. These practices have fostered a more responsive and accountable public service, thereby reinforcing trust and strengthening the interface between citizens and the state.

Furthermore, EU funding has transformed the public administration

into an entity capable of managing increased complexity with a sustained growth mindset. Similar to any system undergoing rapid transformation, the expansion and increased sophistication of EU funding frameworks have introduced additional procedural layers of complexity.

Commentary at both the European Union and national levels, including observations by the European Court of Auditors, emphasizes the importance of continuously refining administrative processes to ensure efficiency, accessibility, and value for money.
Within the Maltese context, these dynamics are most accurately characterized as features of a maturing system rather than inherent structural limitations. The growing emphasis on compliance, transparency, and performance signifies elevated governance standards and more robust safeguards. As administrative capacity continues to develop, these processes are being progressively streamlined, contributing to a more balanced and effective environment for implementation.





Conclusion

EU funding has played a pivotal role in shaping and modernising Malta's public service landscape. Far from representing purely financial transfers, EU funds have acted as strategic and transformative instruments, driving administrative reform, strengthening institutional capacity, and embedding governance practices aligned with European standards of efficiency, accountability, and inclusivity. Over time, Malta's public administration has demonstrated a clear trajectory of development, moving towards a more structured, professionalised, and performance-oriented system. The integration of EU-driven frameworks has not only enhanced service delivery but has also contributed to a more resilient and adaptive governance model. Looking ahead, the continued alignment of national reform priorities with EU policy frameworks, supported by structured funding instruments and robust evaluation mechanisms, positions Malta to build further on these gains. Sustained progress will depend on the public service's ability to consolidate these advancements, streamline processes where necessary, and continue internalising the strategic and operational norms promoted through EU funding. In this regard, EU funding can be seen not only as a catalyst for change, but as a long-term enabler of a public administration that continues to evolve from strength to strength.

References

European Commission. (n.d.-a). EU budget in Malta. European Commission Representation in Malta. https://malta.representation.ec.europa.eu/strategy-and-priorities/eu-budget-malta_en

European Commission. (2022a). EU cohesion policy: €817 million to Malta to support a more competitive, inclusive, green and digital economy. Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy. https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/whats-new/newsroom/16-09-2022-eu-cohesion-policy-eur817-million-to-malta-to-support-a-more-competitive-inclusive-green-and-digital-economy_en

European Commission. (n.d.-b). Malta's recovery and resilience plan. Recovery and Resilience Scoreboard. https://reforms-investments.ec.europa.eu/maltas-recovery-and-resilience-plan_en

European Commission. (2022b). Supporting reforms in Malta (TSI 2022). https://reforms-investments.ec.europa.eu/supporting-reforms-malta-tsi-2022_en

European Commission. (2022c). Partnership agreement with Malta – 2021–2027. https://commission.europa.eu/publications/partnership-agreement-malta-2021-2027_en

Fondi.eu. (n.d.). List of beneficiaries. Fondi.eu. https://fondi.eu/important-documentation/reference-documents/list-of-beneficiaries/

OECD. (2023). Public procurement in Malta: Building capacity and managing risks. OECD Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1787/d64e5e05-en

Servizzi Ewropej f'Malta. (n.d.). Servizzi Ewropej f'Malta (SEM). https://sem.gov.mt/

Internal Audit and Investigations Department (IAID). (n.d.). Financial Investigations Directorate. https://iaid.gov.mt/en/the-department/financial-investigations-directorate/

Reclaiming the Commons: Stakeholder Dynamics and Beach Governance in Malta

Mr Mariano Formosa

Abstract

Malta's beaches are currently facing a governance crisis whereby commercial interests may potentially supersede environmental conservation and equitable access for the public. This article delineates the primary findings of a qualitative MBA dissertation that investigates how competing stakeholder interests influence beach governance along Malta's 230-kilometre coastline. Utilizing eight semi-structured stakeholder interviews and a systematic content analysis of seventy-two newspaper articles published between 2020 and 2025, the research identifies six interconnected governance challenges: institutional fragmentation, exclusionary decision-making processes, the dominance of tourism-led economic growth, escalating environmental pressures, systemic capacity deficiencies, and contested visions for reform. The findings demonstrate that governance failure in Malta is not attributable to deficiencies in legislation but rather to power imbalances and political-economic constraints. Consequently, the article offers actionable recommendations aimed at policymakers and public officials.

Keywords: beach governance, commons management, stakeholder participation, coastal policy, Malta, public administration, institutional fragmentation, environmental governance



Introduction

Every summer, Malta' s beaches become arenas of contest. Deckchairs creep across boundaries that were, until recently, public sand. Kiosk extensions inch into communal space. Boating activity gradually restricts swimming zones. These incremental encroachments may appear trivial in isolation, but they represent a systemic pattern: the slow erosion of beaches as shared public goods in favour of commercially organised spaces. For public officers working across planning, environmental protection, tourism management, and local governance, this pattern poses a fundamental administrative challenge.

Malta' s beaches are best understood through the lens of commons governance: a theoretical tradition demonstrating that communities can manage shared resources sustainably through appropriate institutional design (Ostrom, 1990). Malta' s coastline, spanning approximately 230 kilometres across three inhabited islands, exhibits the classic characteristics of a common-pool resource: it is finite, ecologically sensitive, subject to rivalry in use, and formally guaranteed as public property, yet increasingly vulnerable to de facto exclusion through commercial concessions, infrastructure placement, and spatial appropriation (Agrawal et al., 2023).

The governance stakes are considerable. Tourism contributes approximately 15% of Malta' s GDP (MTA, 2024), with much of that activity concentrated along the coast. In 2025, Malta recorded approximately 4. 0 million inbound tourist arrivals, generating around 25.4. 4 million bed nights, compared to a resident population of roughly 519, 519,000 (NSO, 2026). Sandy beaches, which account for an estimated 2% of the total coastline by length, bear a disproportionate share of this pressure.

This article draws on the findings of the dissertation Reclaiming the Commons: Stakeholder Dynamics and Beach Governance in Malta, an MBA research project submitted to the University of Malta. The findings are presented here specifically for practitioners in public administration, with the aim of translating academic research into actionable governance insights.

Literature Review

Early debates concerning the governance of commons were dominated by Hardin's (1968) seminal work, 'Tragedy of the Commons', which posited that shared resources would inevitably be overexploited as rational individuals seek to maximize private benefits. Hardin's model assumed conditions of open access and predicted that sustainability could only be achieved through privatization or centralized state control. Subsequent scholarly research revealed that this pessimistic conclusion was based on a fundamental conceptual error: Hardin conflated open access regimes with common property systems, in which access is managed by well-defined user groups (Cox et al., 2010).

Ostrom's (1990) empirical investigations significantly redefined the debate by demonstrating that communities possess the capacity to develop robust institutional arrangements for the sustainable management of common-pool resources. Through comparative case studies, she identified key design principles—including clearly delineated boundaries, collective decision-making processes, and graduated sanctions—that differentiate resilient commons from those that have failed. Contemporary scholars have expanded this analysis by emphasizing how power asymmetries influence governance outcomes beyond institutional design (Agrawal et al., 2023).

Furthermore, Agrawal (2003) underscored that effective governance of commons depends not only on institutional rules but also on the political and socioeconomic contexts within which these rules are implemented. This finding bears particular relevance for small island states such as Malta, where structural economic reliance on tourism constrains the policy options available to governance actors. Recent scholarship has further explored how state enforcement capacity, community participation mechanisms, and multi-level governance arrangements interact to determine whether formal protections for commons translate into substantive results (Partelow, 2018; Pita et al., 2021).

In the Mediterranean context, recent research emphasizes that the transition to sustainable governance is often hindered by the "real-estateisation" of coastal zones, wherein speculative property markets and short-term rentals redefine the commons beyond traditional tourism pressures (Papadaki, 2024; Ruggieri & Calò, 2022). Specifically, in Malta, the transformation of coastal villages such as Marsascala exemplifies how overdevelopment and the resulting infrastructural strain frequently surpass formal governance efforts, thereby underscoring the necessity for comprehensive social impact assessments that consider the complexities of the "Blue Economy,"

migration, and local quality of life (Agius & Briguglio, 2021). Additionally, effective implementation in these areas is often impeded by "institutional fragmentation," characterised by insufficient enforcement capacity and a lack of policy continuity amid changing administrations, which hampers the meaningful integration of local community needs into top-down coastal strategies (IUCN, 2024). Beaches serve as multifunctional, accessible, and symbolically significant spaces where recreation, ecological processes, economic activities, and cultural meanings converge. Although beaches are generally considered public property under the law, practical exclusion frequently occurs through commercial concessions, infrastructure development, and spatial appropriation, leading to tangible barriers despite formal assurances. From a contemporary commons perspective, beaches are best regarded as 'new commons' (Hess, 2008): resources defined not solely by biophysical scarcity, but also by contested social relations and power asymmetries. Management of beaches in Malta involves a complex, multi-institutional framework.

The Malta Tourism Authority (MTA), Environment and Resources Authority (ERA), Planning Authority (PA), Lands Authority, Transport Malta, Environmental Health Directorate, Law Enforcement Systems Agency (LESA), Local Councils, Malta Ranger Unit, the Cleaning and Maintenance Division, and the Police each possess distinct and partial mandates. Tourism development exerts unique pressures on coastal commons through infrastructure expansion, increased visitor influx, and related service provision requirements (Gormsen, 1997). Malta's Mediterranean climate exacerbates seasonal fluctuations, with peak summer periods resulting in significant overcrowding, waste accumulation, and ecological stress. The concept of carrying capacity—differentiating physical, environmental, and social thresholds—serves as a valuable framework for understanding these pressures (Lucrezi et al., 2015), although its practical application in management remains a subject of ongoing debate.

“Protecting beaches from overtourism is impossible if the country's economic strategy relies on increasing the number of tourists each year. In 2024, Malta received 5.5 tourists per resident; unsurprisingly, residents' needs and voices are drowned out.” (NSO, 2024).

Methodology

This research adopted a qualitative methodology integrating two primary methods: semi-structured interviews and newspaper content analysis. Eight semi-structured interviews were conducted with purposively selected participants representing the principal stakeholder groups involved in beach governance: government regulatory authorities, environmental NGOs, local councils, and academic experts. Purposive sampling was employed to ensure institutional diversity and depth of relevant knowledge rather than statistical representativeness (Saunders et al., 2016). Interviews were conducted either in person or via video calls, typically lasting between 30 and 45 minutes, and were audio-recorded with the informed consent of participants.

Transcripts were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis framework, facilitated by NVivo 15 qualitative data analysis software. Coding was carried out iteratively, incorporating deductive codes derived from commons governance theory along with inductive codes that emerged from participant narratives.

The analysis generated an initial set of 47 codes, which were subsequently refined into six principal themes.
A supplementary method involved newspaper content analysis. A corpus of 72 articles was systematically selected from Malta Today (29 articles; 40.3%), Times of Malta (27 articles; 37.5%), and The Malta Independent (16 articles; 22.2%), covering the period from 2020 to 2025. Articles were identified through keyword searches and selected based on criteria related to beach management policies, access conflicts, environmental incidents, enforcement failures, and stakeholder disputes. The analysis of the articles focused on their primary communicative intent.

All participants provided written informed consent prior to data collection. Ethical approval was obtained from the Faculty Research Ethics Committee (FREC). Confidentiality was preserved through the anonymisation of participant identities, encrypted data storage, and secure retention of physical documentation.

Results and Findings

Thematic analysis identified six interconnected governance challenges. Table 1 provides an overview of these themes and their core challenges.

Theme	Key Governance Challenge
Fragmented Governance Architecture	Multiple authorities with overlapping mandates and no single coordinating entity, creating enforcement gaps and accountability vacuums.
Exclusionary Decision-Making	Consultation occurs too late to be meaningful; local councils and communities are systematically sidelined from substantive decisions.
Economic Primacy over Common Good	Tourism and commercial interests structurally dominate policy, producing gradual commercial encroachment and access inequity.
Environmental System Under Pressure	Beach erosion, water quality incidents, and habitat degradation driven by development pressure and weak protective enforcement.
Capacity Deficits Across the System	Seasonal staffing, training gaps, siloed data systems, and limited financial resources constrain effective management.
Contested Visions of Reform	Deep divergence between stakeholders on whether a unified Beach Management Unit or a statutory Coastal Management Plan offers the path forward.

Table 1: Six Core Governance Themes

Fragmented Governance Architecture

Institutional fragmentation was the most consistently identified governance challenge. Participants described a system in which multiple authorities each share part of jurisdiction but coordination is generally absent. The real-world consequences are not merely administrative inconvenience as they produce enforcement vacuums that are readily exploited. When no single authority holds unambiguous jurisdiction, operators can exploit definitional ambiguities and jurisdictional overlaps to circumvent individual enforcement notices. Affected parties are passed between agencies that each disclaim responsibility, and the absence of a lead authority means that no entity is compelled to resolve the impasse. The result is a de facto permissiveness: not a deliberate policy choice, but an institutional default that consistently favours the status quo over enforcement. Lack of coordination was prevalent in the Marsascala gabbana case in 2023 : an operator circumvented a Lands Authority enforcement notice by adding wheels to a structure, reclassifying it as 'mobile'. Residents were passed between the Police, the Lands Authority, and the Planning Authority, with each claiming the issue fell outside its remit.

“Various authorities… it does not, unfortunately, fall under a single rule. In other EU countries, a municipality is entirely responsible for the beach. In Malta, the swimming zone is designated by Transport Malta and so on and so forth.” (Interview Participant, Regulatory Authority, 2024)

Institutional fragmentation does not operate in isolation; it directly shapes who holds power in governance processes and on what terms affected communities can participate in decisions about shared coastal resources.

The following theme examines how this translates into the exclusion of local councils and civil society from substantive governance choices.

Exclusionary Decision-Making

Formal consultation mechanisms are present within Malta's planning and environmental governance systems; however, the research indicates that these mechanisms systematically fail to facilitate meaningful participation for local councils and civil society actors. The primary issue is not the absence of consultation, but rather its timing. A participant from the Local Council observed that entities are consulted too late, often at the final stages, after procedures have already been established. When consultation takes place subsequent to substantive decisions, it becomes performative—merely fulfilling procedural requirements without providing a genuine opportunity to influence outcomes. This condition is termed 'participation without power' by the research.

An additional challenge, described as a participation paradox, exacerbates the issue. Public authorities exhibit reluctance to involve the public, citing considerations of cost and time. Civil society organisations acknowledge the difficulty in maintaining engagement beyond initial grievances. Consequently, this mutual disengagement results in governance decisions being confined to a narrow institutional elite, thereby undermining public legitimacy.



Economic Primacy over the Common Good

Participants consistently depicted a governance environment wherein the interests of the tourism industry hold significant political influence, systematically superseding environmental and social considerations. The research characterizes this phenomenon as a form of governance capture, not in terms of corruption, but in the sense that institutional processes are continually shaped by the expectations and interests of economically dominant entities.

The encroachment of commercial activities upon public beach areas exemplifies this effect. A representative from the Local Council described this as a gradual process: deckchairs progressively occupy traditionally free zones; kiosk extensions subtly extend into public space; boat traffic incrementally restricts swimming regions. Media coverage documented a specific instance at Għajn Tuffieħa, where a beach bar enlarged seating onto public beach areas, publicly presenting the expansion as 'doing it for the public'.

Environmental System Under Pressure

Significant and escalating environmental pressures on Malta's coastal ecosystems have been documented across three distinct sub-themes. Concerning water quality, participants observed that, despite Malta's overall high compliance with EU bathing water standards, localized contamination incidents have increased, primarily associated with patterns of coastal development and stormwater drainage capacity.

Regarding beach erosion, a representative from a regulatory authority highlighted that sandy beaches constitute approximately only 2% of Malta's coastline by length, rendering erosion particularly significant. Much of the damage is attributable not solely to natural processes but also to historic infrastructure decisions that disrupted natural sand movement patterns several decades ago. Concerning habitat pressures, Natura 2000 sites continue to face a persistent discrepancy between formal legal protection and effective enforcement.

Capacity Deficits Across the System

Three inter-related capacity deficits were identified. First, on staffing, an academic expert participant offered a pointed diagnosis: beach supervisors are primarily students recruited for summer employment. Without training, they lack understanding of the environment or the damage being done. This reflects systemic underinvestment in professional beach management capacity.

Second, the seasonal boundary of management creates predictable windows of non-enforcement that can be, and the research suggests are, strategically exploited. Third, despite multiple agencies conducting environmental monitoring, there is no integrated coastal information system. One regulatory participant described the institutional culture candidly:

"If there is no access, and unfortunately, personalities come in. Competition in personalities comes in, and data is not shared easily, even though we are supposedly under the same boss, the government."

Contested Visions of Reform

Two principal reform visions emerged across interviews. Five of eight participants proposed a unified Beach Management Unit — a single authority with comprehensive jurisdiction over beach regulation, concession management, enforcement, and resource allocation. The remaining three favoured a statutory Coastal Management Plan setting binding principles for all relevant entities. Civil society participants additionally raised community-based management as a viable model for specific sites.

Across all reform visions, one precondition was consistently identified as decisive: political will. A regulatory authority participant stated plainly: 'The biggest challenge is political will; it's not about red or blue... If there is the political will to really do something, it happens.' Newspaper content analysis corroborated all six interview-derived themes, confirming that beach governance challenges are recurrent rather than exceptional.

Discussion

The findings hold specific implications for the approach of public officers toward coastal governance, regardless of the particular entity they serve. Three analytical insights warrant particular attention. First, the research identifies a pattern of performative compliance — situations in which regulatory procedures are adhered to formally but do not yield the substantive outcomes they aim to achieve. Permits are issued; conditions are attached; compliance is documented; enforcement, however, does not follow. This is notionally distinct from non-compliance: the governance structure is present, but its functional efficacy is absent. Public officers should assess the systems within which they operate not solely for procedural adherence but also for effectiveness: are the formal steps taken genuinely connected to the management outcomes they intend to secure? The gradual commercial encroachment documented at sites such as Għajn Tuffieħa exemplifies this discrepancy: planning conditions attached to commercial concessions specified spatial limits for seating; however, progressive expansion of beach bar infrastructure into public beach areas persisted over successive seasons without eliciting enforcement action. Permits were in place, and conditions were recorded — the form of governance existed — but the mechanism linking documented compliance to substantive enforcement was lacking.

Secondly, the coordination deficit documented in the research constitutes a public management challenge prior to being a legal issue. While legislative reform may ultimately be necessary, considerable progress can be achieved through effective public management initiatives: establishing operational protocols between agencies, creating shared monitoring dashboards, and designating lead authorities for specific beach sites. The failure of shared data systems exemplifies this challenge: ERA, Transport Malta, and the Environmental Health Directorate each conduct independent coastal monitoring, yet no integrated platform consolidates this data into a unified situational awareness. Consequently, enforcement decisions made by one agency may be uninformed by environmental monitoring data possessed by another. As a result, an enforcement officer from LESA arriving at a beach site lacks systematic access to water quality readings recorded by ERA the previous week, nor to erosion data logged by Transport Malta. This fragmentation of information is not a technical issue, as the data exists and the technical means for sharing it are available; it is a product of institutional culture and political will—conditions that effective public management is well equipped to address.

Third, the timing issue related to consultations has a straightforward administrative remedy. In current practice, consultations generally occur at the final stages of decision-making, subsequent to the determination of substantive choices. Repositioning consultation to the initial stages by engaging Local Councils and civil society actors during the scoping and design phases would require organizational commitment but remains well within the discretionary authority of senior public officials. Currently, the sequence is consistent: legislative drafts governing beach concessions are circulated for comment after the overarching policy framework has been established; concession renewals are advertised with spatial conditions and operational parameters already defined; enforcement protocols are communicated to Local Councils after decisions have been finalized within regulatory agencies. By the time stakeholders are formally invited to contribute, the decision architecture is fixed. Moving consultation to earlier stages involves engaging Local Councils, community representatives, and civil society actors before beach concession boundaries are drawn, before enforcement responsibilities are allocated among agencies, and before management priorities are set for the season.



Practically, this could take the form of annual pre-season governance forums for each major beach site, involving responsible authorities and community representatives to review the previous season's performance, identify emerging concerns, and set priorities for the upcoming year. This approach requires no legislative changes; it is a management decision within the existing discretionary authority of senior public officials and would constitute a meaningful structural shift from the current participation-in-decision-making practice without power.

These findings align with broader scholarship on commons governance. Ostrom (1990) identified collective choice arrangements and governance structures that permit affected parties to participate in rule modification as foundational principles for sustainable commons management. The Maltese case illustrates the consequences of this principle being systematically absent. Contemporary scholarship by Agrawal et al. (2023) further emphasizes how power asymmetries influence governance outcomes: the dominance of commercial interests in Maltese beach governance exemplifies this dynamic.



Conclusion

Malta's beaches are publicly owned, constitutionally protected, and governed by a robust formal regulatory framework. Nevertheless, in practice, the governance of these shared resources is characterized by fragmented authority, delayed consultation, commercial encroachment, seasonal enforcement vacuums, and the systematic marginalization of community voices. The discrepancy between formal commitments and practical implementation constitutes the core finding of this research.

This discrepancy is not primarily attributable to deficient legislation. Rather, it stems from institutional design choices, resource allocation decisions, cultural norms within public agencies, and the structural advantages possessed by economically powerful actors over broader public interests. These are precisely the conditions that public administration aims to address.

Table 2 sets out a phased reform roadmap addressed to public officers and policymakers engaged in coastal governance. The recommendations are sequenced by urgency and feasibility within existing institutional constraints.

Reclaiming the commons initiates with the reestablishment of governance procedures responsible for overseeing shared resources in alignment with the public interest. The tradition of commons governance persistently identifies that the prerequisites for success encompass explicitly delineated boundaries, proportionate sanctions, substantial participation, and legitimate coordinating authority (Ostrom, 1990). Presently, none of these conditions are comprehensively realized within Malta's existing beach governance framework, although each remains achievable through persistent dedication and proactive measures by public authorities in close cooperation with the central government.

Timeframe	Recommended Action for Public Officers
Immediate	Publish concession maps, enforcement logs, and boundary conditions for all managed beaches. Transparency is the lowest-cost, highest-impact reform available to public administrators.
Short-term	Establish a formal inter-agency coordination mechanism — at minimum a standing technical committee — bringing together the Local Councils, MTA, ERA, Planning Authority, Lands Authority, LESA, The Police, The Malta Rangers Unit, The Cleansing and Maintenance Division and Transport Malta around a shared beach governance agenda.
Medium-term	Legislate a statutory Coastal Management Plan setting binding standards for concession allocation, carrying-capacity thresholds, environmental monitoring, and public access corridors.
Medium-term	Reform consultation processes so that Local Councils are engaged at the design stage of beach-related regulations and concession renewals, not merely notified after decisions have been made.
Ongoing	Invest in a shared coastal data platform accessible across all agencies, ending the current situation in which environmental monitoring data remains siloed within individual directorates.
Ongoing	Professionalise beach management through year-round staffing, accredited training, and career pathways, moving from a model dependent on seasonal student labour to one with institutional memory and regulatory expertise.

Table 2: Phased Reform Roadmap for Public Officers

References

Agius, K., & Briguglio, M. (2021). The Blue Economy and coastal development: Lessons from Marsascala, Malta. Journal of Coastal Research, 37(4), 112–125.

Agrawal, A. (2003). Sustainable governance of common-pool resources: Context, methods, and politics. Annual Review of Anthropology, 32, 243–262.

Agrawal, A., Erbaugh, J. T., & Pradhan, N. (2023). Commons and the challenge of global governance. Nature Sustainability, 6(5), 529–537.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3(2), 77–101.

Cox, M., Arnold, G., & Tomás, S. V. (2010). A review of design principles for community-based natural resource management. Ecology and Society, 15(4), 38.

Gormsen, E. (1997). The impact of tourism on coastal areas. GeoJournal, 42(1), 39–54.

Hardin, G. (1968). The tragedy of the commons. Science, 162(3859), 1243–1248.

Hess, C. (2008, July). Mapping the new commons [Paper presentation]. 12th Biennial Conference of the International Association for the Study of the Commons, Cheltenham, UK.

IUCN. (2024). Coastal governance and institutional fragmentation in Mediterranean islands. International Union for Conservation of Nature.

Lucrezi, S., Saayman, M., & van der Merwe, P. (2015). An assessment tool for sandy beaches: A case study of South African Blue Flag beaches. Ocean & Coastal Management, 116, 32–46.

Malta Tourism Authority. (2024). Malta tourism market profile 2023. MTA.

National Statistics Office. (2024). Malta in figures 2024. NSO.

National Statistics Office. (2026). Inbound tourism: Annual summary 2025. NSO.

Ostrom, E. (1990). Governing the commons: The evolution of institutions for collective action. Cambridge University Press.

Papadaki, M. (2024). The "real-estateisation" of the Mediterranean coast: From tourism to speculative commons. Mediterranean Geography Review, 12(1), 45–60.

Partelow, S. (2018). A review of the social-ecological systems framework: Applications, methods, modifications, and challenges. Ecology and Society, 23(4), 36.

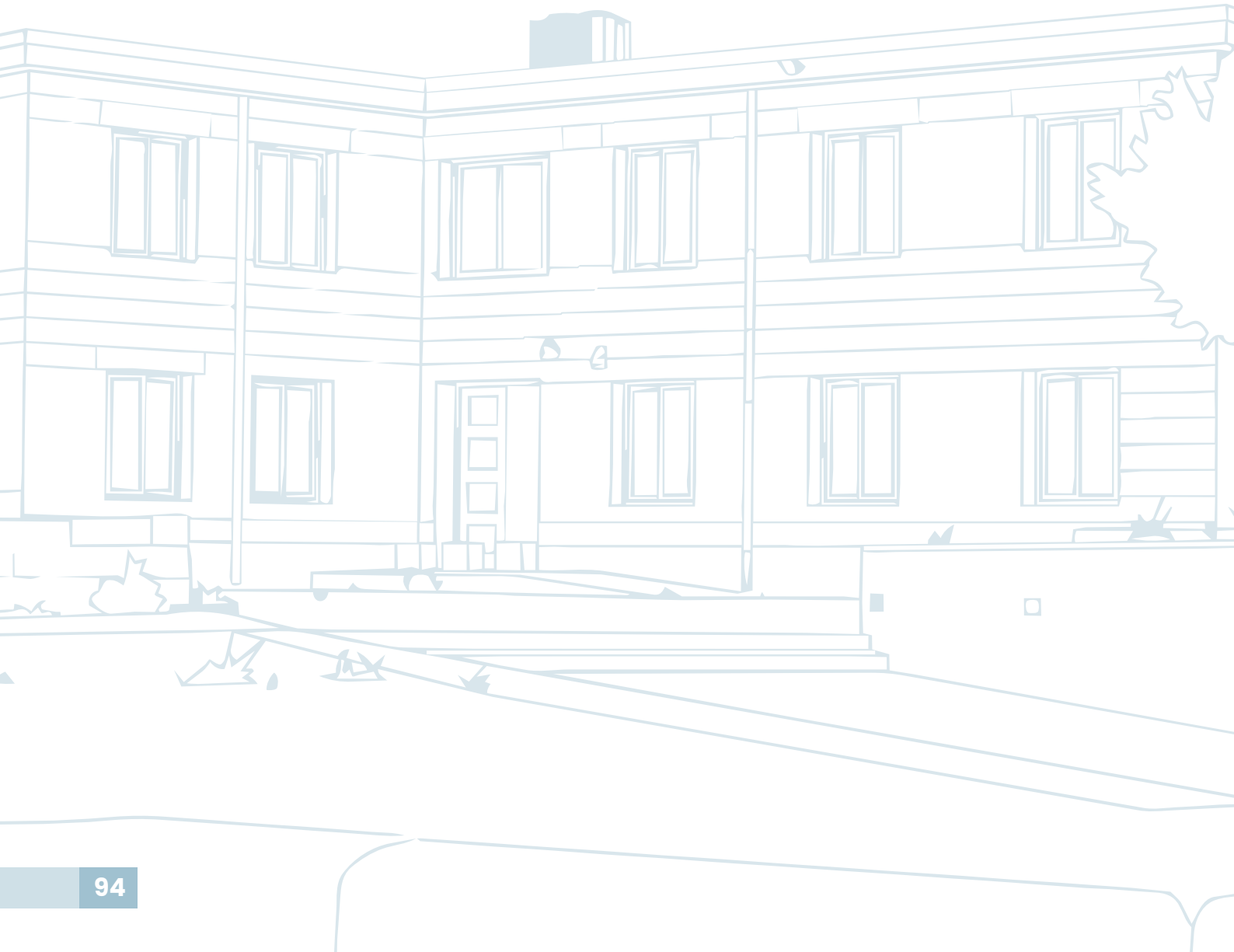
Pita, C., Thwaties, R., & Hyder, K. (2021). Multi-level governance and the sustainability of coastal commons. Marine Policy, 129, 104523.

Ruggieri, G., & Calò, P. (2022). Coastal tourism and the short-term rental market: A spatial analysis of the Mediterranean basin. Sustainability, 14(9), 5210.

Saunders, M., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. (2016). Research methods for business students (7th ed.). Pearson.

public service

Institute for the Public Services



GET IN TOUCH

EMAIL

ips@gov.mt

PHONE

2200 1884

ADDRESS

Institute for the Public Services, The Bastion of San Salvatore, Sa Maison Road, Floriana