

One Voice



Official Voice of the National Federation for the disability sector

Issue 9 – January 2026

NOTHING
ABOUT US
WITHOUT US



ON MALTA'S RESPONSIBILITY

“Malta has made important strides toward equality, yet true inclusion is measured not by policy alone but by everyday experience. Our collective responsibility is to ensure that every person with a disability can access education, employment, transport, and community life without barriers.”

Credits and the President's Message:

One Voice is a magazine published by the Malta Federation of Organisations Persons with Disability (MFOPD).

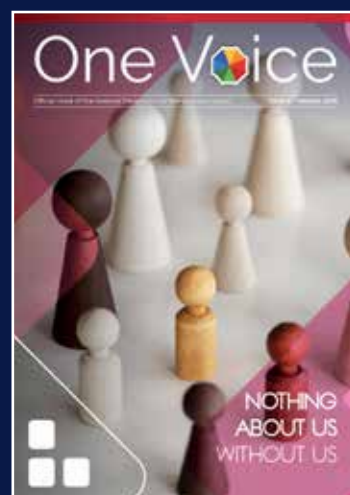
As its title implies, the magazine is the official, unified voice of Malta's civil society working in the disability sector. It portrays the mission and vision of the various Organisations active in this sphere as represented by their umbrella Federation.

One Voice

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Marthese Mugliette
President MFOPD



A TIME FOR REFLECTION

55 Years of MFOPD

Last year, 2025, marked a special milestone for MFOPD as we celebrated our 55th anniversary – a moment to look back with pride and forward with renewed purpose.

The world has changed, and so has the disability sector. Human rights are everyone's rights, and disability rights are human rights. In 2000, Malta enacted the **Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disabilities) Act**, a turning point that gave persons with disabilities in Malta the legal recognition they had long deserved.

Soon after came **Inclusive Education**, which reshaped our schools. When it was first introduced, it created a real wave of transformation in our education system. Students with disabilities began learning alongside their peers in mainstream classrooms with support where needed. Those were times of experimentation and discovery, of finding our way, but there was energy, hope, and a willingness to make it work — and many students thrived. Today, although we know more about inclusion, we are seeing worrying signs that some students are no longer thriving as they should.

Malta has since incorporated the **UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)** into national law,

yet progress on the ground remains slow. Persons with disabilities in Malta and Gozo continue to face barriers to education, employment, accessibility, and full participation in society. This became clear during our round-table conference **“Nothing About Us Without Us”**, held last October as part of our 55th anniversary celebrations.

Our reflections are clear:

- **Laws must be matched by action** — without implementation and accountability, they remain words on paper.
- **Inclusion must be genuine**, built on belonging, participation, and respect.
- **Persons with disabilities must be heard** — “Nothing About Us Without Us” must guide every decision.
- **Unity is our strength.** Our 45 member organisations together form one strong voice for change.

As we begin 2026, let us carry forward the spirit of reflection and renewal. MFOPD will continue to champion the rights, dignity, and full participation of all persons with disabilities in Malta and Gozo. The journey continues — and together, we will keep moving forward.



MALTA CONFERENCE ON SUPPORTED DECISION MAKING



Rabia Akça

The conference '**SUPPORTED DECISION-MAKING**' was addressed by Ms Camille Latimier, Director of Inclusion Czechia and Board member of Inclusion Europe. This conference held on the **24th April, 2025**, was the first of three events organised by MFOPD to celebrate its 55th anniversary.

Following are the key points from the Malta Conference on Supported Decision-Making (SDM):

1. IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATION:

- Communication is essential for supported decision-making.
- Without ways to express wishes, preferences, and feelings, decisions cannot be truly supported.
- Both high-tech (e.g., speech-generating devices) and low-tech AAC tools play a critical role.
- Families, schools, and communities must recognize and support various communication methods.

2. ROLE OF PERSONAL HISTORY:

- Understanding a person's history, habits, and identity is crucial.
- This information can be shared by the individual or by others who know them well.
- It helps in providing tailored and meaningful support.





3. ADVANCE PLANNING MECHANISMS:

- Tools to help people make long-term decisions about their lives (e.g., where to live).
- These mechanisms help in respecting autonomy and life goals.
- Examples from the UK, Canada, and other countries were mentioned.

4. CIRCLE OF SUPPORT:

- Support should not depend on a single individual.
- Trusted persons or circles of friends can provide diverse perspectives.
- Reduces the risk of abuse and promotes more balanced support.

5. PEER SUPPORT:

- Peer support models empower individuals through shared lived experiences.
- Particularly valuable for psychosocial disabilities but relevant for intellectual disabilities too.

6. COMMUNITY NETWORKS:

- Social and cultural contexts matter (e.g., strong community roles in Latin America).
- Churches, schools, and community organizations can contribute to the support network.

7. FORMAL SUPPORT ARRANGEMENTS:

- Sometimes third parties (e.g., banks) require formal documentation of decision-making arrangements.

- In many countries, this is facilitated through notaries rather than courts to reduce complexity.

8. LEGAL RECOGNITION OF SDM:

- Supported decision-making statutes are appearing in legislation across the globe.
- Examples include British Columbia, Ireland, Austria, and Bulgaria.

“Families, schools, and communities must recognize and support various communication methods.”



9. FINANCIAL DECISION-MAKING:

- Often a major barrier; concerns about property, banking, and harm.
- Mainstream legal tools (like trusts or protected accounts) can be adapted.
- Examples from Israel, Colombia, and Canada were shared.

10. CONTINUUM OF SUPPORT:

- People may move between levels of support depending on need and capacity.
- SDM is preferred over substituted decision-making (like guardianship).

- Few tools to manage high-risk or complex situations.
- Missing infrastructure and sustainable funding for system-level implementation.

12. WAY FORWARD:

- Need to bridge the gap between law and practice.
- Build national infrastructure for SDM.
- Focus on creating lasting, systemic change rather than isolated programs.



- Some call substituted mechanisms “facilitated decision-making” to reflect a rights-based approach.

11. CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTATION:

- Resistance to change due to cultural attitudes and lack of political will.
- Sectors like healthcare, justice, and finance are slow to adapt.
- Disconnection between law, policy, and actual practice.
- Lack of inclusion for people with high support needs.

“Often a major barrier; concerns about property, banking, and harm.”



Personal Assistance for persons with disabilities in Malta

The Status Quo and the Way Forward

Prepared by:
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Commissioned by:
Malta Federation of Organisations
Persons with Disability (MFOPD)

FEBRUARY 2024





PERSONAL ASSISTANCE:

A CORNERSTONE OF INDEPENDENT LIVING FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Personal Assistance is not simply a service; it is a fundamental tool that enables and empowers persons with disabilities to live independently, participate fully in society, and exercise real choice and control over their lives. Rooted in human rights principles and strongly affirmed by Article 19 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), Personal Assistance shifts the focus away from dependency and charity, and places autonomy, dignity, and self-determination at the centre of support systems.

This is why, year after year, we have not only ensured an increase in the State budget aimed at independent and community living services – including Personal Assistance – but ensured that it is firmly anchored into both national policy and, in a more lasting manner, our laws.

What Is Personal Assistance?

Personal Assistance is best understood as support that is chosen, directed, and controlled by the disabled person, providing assistance as required in daily life, whether related to personal care, work, education, parenting, social participation, or community involvement.



OUR
MINISTRY'S
COMMITMENT
REFLECTS A
FUNDAMENTAL
PRINCIPLE.

Crucially, Personal Assistance must be based on an individual needs assessment, taking into account the person's life situation, aspirations, and preferences. There is no "one-size-fits-all" model. What matters is that the support adapts to the individual, not the other way around.

Article 19 of the UNCRPD is clear: States Parties must ensure that persons with disabilities have access to a range of community-based support services, including Personal Assistance, to support living and inclusion in the community and to prevent isolation or segregation.

These principles ensure that Personal Assistance remains a tool for empowerment.

Strengthening Independent Living in Malta and Gozo

Nationally, recent developments demonstrate a growing recognition of the importance of Personal Assistance as a pathway to independence. Guided by *Objective 10 of Freedom to Live – the National Disability Strategy for 2021–2030*, the Ministry for Inclusion and the Voluntary Sector has been investing in Personal Assistants to ensure that persons with disabilities truly have the freedom to live independently.

Additionally, in October 2023, following stakeholder consultation that included guidance from the European Network on Independent Living (ENIL), we launched a public consultation document that tied Personal Assistance Reform to laying the foundations for a wider system of Personal Budgets in Malta and Gozo.

This framework is about more than support. It becomes a powerful enabler of independent living and full participation in society.

The draft Personal Assistance Act, and the draft Bill enshrining the Personal Budget Assistance Scheme (PBAS) Board into law, are now open for public consultation. This legislation confirms the right to Personal Assistance under the UNCRPD and strengthens accountability, quality, and transparency. With over 300 adults already benefiting from state-subsidised support, the proposed legislation introduces clear safeguards for both disabled people and personal assistants. These reforms show how rights-based policies, shaped through meaningful consultation and involvement of all stakeholders, can drive real change.

To fulfil our commitment, the voices of persons with disabilities must remain central, guided by the principles of choice, control and human rights.

The public consultation is open until **Friday, 20 February 2026**. Documentation is available in Standard, Plain Language and Easy Read formats: <https://www.gov.mt/mt/publicconsultation/Pages/2026/L-0001-2026.aspx>

**Minister Julia Farrugia,
Ministry for Inclusion & the
Voluntary Sector**



GOVERNMENT OF MALTA
SOCIAL CAUSES FUND

BUILDING A EUROPE WHERE EVERY CHILD BELONGS: THE CALL FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION



The second conference to mark MFOPD's 55th anniversary took place on the 25th April, 2025 in Gozo with the topic 'Inclusive Education – understanding Article 24 of the UNCRPD. This conference was addressed by Mr Milan Šveřepa, Director of Inclusion Europe.

Mr. Milan Šveřepa delivered a powerful presentation on the importance of inclusive education. His message was clear: *education is not just about learning facts—it is about belonging, growth, and humanity.*

Across Europe, there are more than 20 million people with intellectual disabilities and their families. Yet far too many still experience segregation in schools and isolation in communities. Mr. Šveřepa called for an end to this separation, urging governments and educators to make inclusion the foundation of every learning environment.

"School is where the future of our children starts," he reminded the audience. "It's where they learn what we value, how to live together, and how to belong."

He explained that inclusive education is not only a human right, but also the starting point of equal participation in society. When children learn together, they learn empathy, collaboration, and respect for differences—skills that matter more than ever in today’s fast-changing world.

Šveřepa emphasized that true inclusion requires more than simply placing children

Despite progress, data show the road ahead is long. Over 530,000 children with intellectual disabilities in Europe still attend special schools, and 18,000 are not in education at all. Only 29% of people with disabilities aged 30–34 have completed tertiary education, compared to 43% of those without disabilities. Such disparities have a lasting impact on employment and quality of life.



with disabilities in mainstream classrooms. It calls for **systemic change**: adapting teaching methods, curricula, and school organization to meet diverse needs. “One size does not fit all,” he said. Teachers need the time, training, and tools to support every learner.

Parents and self-advocates shared touching testimonies illustrating both the progress and challenges of inclusion. One mother from Slovakia noted that inclusion helped her daughter develop crucial social skills and confidence. Another parent, Sue Swenson—President of Inclusion International—spoke of her son Charlie:

“He learned how to be himself and how to have others respect him. Did he pass a test? No. Did he learn how to be himself? Absolutely.”

Inclusion Europe’s message was hopeful and pragmatic: change is possible when schools embrace diversity as an opportunity rather than a challenge. Countries must ensure inclusive education **at every stage of life**—from early learning to lifelong education—supported by proper funding, teacher training, and community engagement.

As MFOPD continues to champion the rights of persons with disabilities in Malta, this presentation served as a timely reminder that **inclusive education is not a privilege—it is the key to an inclusive society.**

“Education is where belonging begins,” said Šveřepa. “And belonging is what makes us human.”



MFOPD'S 55TH ANNIVERSARY – ROUND TABLE CONFERENCE:

The final event marking the 55th anniversary of the Malta Federation of Organisations of Persons with Disability (MFOPD) was the Round Table Conference entitled “Nothing About Us Without Us”. The guest speaker was Ms. Gunta Anca, Vice President of the European Disability Forum (EDF).



GOVERNMENT OF MALTA
SOCIAL CAUSES FUND

The event was attended by representatives from **NGOs**, the **Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD)**, **Agenzija Sapport**, the **Directorate for Disability Issues (DDI)**, representatives from the **Ministry for Inclusion and the Voluntary Sector**, the **University of Malta**, and several representatives from **ministries forming part of the Inter-Departmental Coordination Committee (IDCC)**. Both the **Minister for Inclusion and the Voluntary Sector** and the **Opposition Spokesperson** were present. The discussion was moderated by **Professor Andrew Azzopardi**.

“Nothing About Us Without Us”

Opening Remarks

In his introduction, Prof. Azopardi highlighted that the phrase “*Nothing About Us Without Us*” has been part of the disability rights discourse for many years, and it is essential that it continues to be heard and practiced. He commended the participation of representatives from various ministries and departments, noting that such collaboration bodes well for future progress.

Address by Ms. Gunta Anca

Ms. Anca’s keynote address was highly anticipated, especially by NGOs. Her message resonated strongly with participants, who expressed appreciation for having a European-level voice articulating the same principles they have long advocated.

She emphasized the importance of **mainstreaming disability issues**, stressing that **every ministry and institution carries responsibility** for inclusion. “No one can say, *this is not about me*,” she said, reminding participants that persons with disabilities require access to every aspect of life — education, transport, employment, and beyond.

She underlined that NGOs must be **meaningfully involved**, not represented tokenistically. “No single individual can fully understand what a group of persons with disabilities needs,” she added.



Ms. Anca outlined **four essential steps** for achieving *meaningful* involvement:

- 1. EARLY** – Involvement must begin at the planning stage, not after decisions are made. Consulting persons with disabilities early allows for better, more informed outcomes.
- 2. RESOURCED** – While voluntary work is valuable, expecting persons with disabilities to contribute without remuneration is unfair. Adequate funding is essential to enable proper participation.





3. INFLUENTIAL – Disability organisations should have the capacity to issue clear recommendations, provide feedback, and genuinely influence decisions.

4. ONGOING – Consultation should be continuous, not a one-time exercise.

Ms. Anca also referred to the challenge of “pocket organisations” that governments sometimes rely on for convenient, uncritical consultation. She cautioned that such practices result only in *tick-box consultation* rather than true engagement.

Reflections on Malta

In her reflections on Malta, Ms. Anca acknowledged the many positive initiatives underway but noted that not all are equally effective. Referring to the **LifeMap 16+ programme**, she stressed that before inclusion can be achieved, **participation** must first be

enabled — particularly in mainstream education and community life.

“Inclusion means being part of the community,” she said. “Not a community of persons with disabilities, but the broader community — alongside parents, siblings, friends, and neighbours.”

Addressing the topic of **institutionalisation and deinstitutionalisation (DI)**, Ms. Anca acknowledged that DI can be complex and initially expensive but insisted that its long-term benefits are invaluable. She challenged the notion that living in an institution can be acceptable:

“Think about being in hospital — do you feel at home there? An institution is the same. It’s a place to live, but not a life.”

Key Points Raised During the Discussion

- The urgent need to work collectively towards **deinstitutionalisation**.

“Inclusion means being part of the community,”

- Persistent **shortages in human resources** within the sector.
- Long-standing challenges in **inclusive education**, leaving parents frustrated that their children are not adequately prepared for independent living.
- NGOs often learning about initiatives from the **media**, without prior consultation — a clear breach of the “*Nothing About Us Without Us*” principle.



- Reference to **Article 12 of the UNCRPD** and the need to support persons with intellectual disabilities in understanding and expressing their own will, rather than making decisions for them.
- Families often receive a diagnosis and are then **left without guidance or support**. It was noted that delivering such life-changing news should be the role of a **multidisciplinary team**, not a bereavement nurse.
- **Mount Carmel Hospital** should never be an option for persons with challenging behaviour.
- NGOs in **Gozo** reported being consistently overlooked, as initiatives launched in

Malta rarely extend to the island.

- **CRPD** acknowledged frustrations about accessibility and confirmed ongoing discussions with **Transport Malta** and the **Planning Authority**, while lamenting the lack of engagement from other ministries.
- Participants noted a cultural problem of **“working in silos”**, hindering true mainstreaming and collaboration.
- Concerns were raised about the **lack of clarity and consistency** regarding what “inclusion” truly means and the direction of educational reform.
- Strong criticism of the **Life-Map programme’s development without consultation**, calling it “unacceptable” that CRPD and NGOs learned about it from the press.
- A significant **gap between policy and practice**, with insufficient monitoring, accountability, and enforcement.
- The **system treats the label, not the person**, and there is an entrenched mentality of “it’s good enough,” leading to stagnation.
- **Trust** was identified as essential to progress — to move from *“us and them”* towards genuine partnership.

- Ongoing **difficulty in attracting and retaining professionals** in the sector, highlighting the need for better support and recognition.

Conclusion

In closing, Ms. Anca reminded participants that **inclusion is about life itself**, not just about persons with disabilities. She acknowledged the wide range of topics discussed — education, employment, deinstitutionalisation — and praised the dedication of many working for positive change.

She urged greater **unity** within the sector and proposed focusing on **one issue at a time**, working collaboratively with the authorities to achieve tangible, lasting improvements in the lives of persons with disabilities.





KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE MEETING WITH THE MINISTRY FOR THE FAMILY (LUXEMBOURG) AND INFO-HANDICAP

1. STRONG POLITICAL WILL AND COORDINATION

- The Luxembourgish government shows clear commitment to disability inclusion, with political will described as:
“In Luxembourg, if they sign or notify something, they do it with conviction.”
- “No one should be left behind” is the national motto guiding policy.
- Disability is a priority for the current government.
- Civil society, especially the national umbrella organisation (Info-Handicap), is consulted *before* major decisions are made.
- There is ongoing coordination between the Ministry for the Family and other ministries.
- A Ministerial Committee — comprising representatives from various ministries — meets regularly to ensure UNCRPD implementation within each ministry.
- In the framework of the national action plans, every Ministerial Committee meeting is followed by a consultation with Info-Handicap, the national umbrella organisation for the disability sector and other representatives from the civil society, as well as persons with disabilities.

2. INCLUSIVE EDUCATION PRACTICES

- Education is compulsory until age 16 (soon to be 18), but students can continue at their own pace beyond this age if needed.
- Progression is tailored: students, including those with disabilities, are not rushed and can repeat years as necessary.
- Assistants for Pupils with Special Educational Needs (not referred to as LSEs like in Malta) work closely with specialist teachers (EBS) and support students with disabilities in daily educational and social activities.

- There are no union-related issues regarding support staff in schools because these assistants are not classified as teachers.

3. TRANSITION FROM SCHOOL TO EMPLOYMENT

- A dedicated agency is responsible for supporting students with disabilities as they transition from school to employment even if they were in school in one of the competence centres for pupils with disabilities.

4. MONITORING ACCOUNTABILITY

- Unlike Malta, Luxembourg does not have a CRPD mechanism per se. Instead, the national umbrella organisation (Info-Handicap) is empowered to investigate disability-related issues. Official organizations like the CCDH (Human

Rights Commission) and the CET (Centre for Equal Treatment) are in charge of the control of the implementation of the convention.

- Info-Handicap, other representatives of the civil society and persons with disabilities are deeply involved in evaluating national-level disability policies, working alongside external auditors with regards to the national action plans.

5. ACCESSIBILITY AND LEGAL ENFORCEMENT

- Accessibility is under the responsibility of the Ministry for the Family.
- Info-Handicap plays a leading role in advocacy and is a primary stakeholder in any governmental discussions alongside one of their member associations

(ADAPTH).

- The accessibility law in Luxembourg is taken very seriously: newly built structures that are not accessible can legally be demolished. Also existing public spaces and buildings must be put in conformity with the law.

6. PERSONAL ASSISTANCE

- Luxembourg has yet to introduce a Personal Assistance scheme.
- Advocacy for such a system is currently being led by the ALS community and Info-Handicap.
- ALS representatives were surprised to learn that, in Malta, the ALS community opted for the creation of residential homes, whereas in Luxembourg their push is for full community living with the necessary supports, PA included.





**MFOPD's summary with policy implications
and recommendations for Malta, drawn
from the Luxembourg model:**



INSIGHTS FROM LUXEMBOURG: IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MALTA'S DISABILITY POLICY

1. POLITICAL COMMITMENT AND STRUCTURAL COORDINATION

Luxembourg Practice:

- Political will is strong and consistent.
- Cross-ministerial coordination ensures that disability issues are mainstreamed.
- A Ministerial Committee oversees UNCRPD implementation within each ministry.
- Civil society (Info-Handicap) is systematically consulted *before* decisions are made.

Implications for Malta:

- Malta should institutionalise stronger **inter-ministerial coordination** through a similar Ministerial Committee on Disability.
- **Civil society engagement** needs to be elevated from consultation-after-decisions to consultation-at-policy-formation stage.

Recommendations:

- Set up a National Disability Steering Committee with representation from all ministries and NGOs (possibly coordinated through MFOPD).

- Formalise **mandatory pre-legislative consultation** with the national disability platform on any disability-related policies or laws.

2. INCLUSIVE EDUCATION FRAMEWORK

Luxembourg Practice:

- Education is not rushed; students progress at their own pace beyond age 16 if needed.
- Dedicated assistants (not teachers) support students with disabilities, ensuring union issues are avoided.



Implications for Malta:

- Malta's use of LSEs, who fall under teacher structures and unions, may cause friction and limit flexibility.
- The education system should adopt a more **individualised pace model**, especially for students with disabilities.

Recommendations:

- Reevaluate the **LSE framework** and consider introducing *Assistants for Pupils with Special Educational Needs* as a parallel, non-teaching support profession.

- Ensure **non-teaching support staff** (for care, mobility, communication) are present in every school.
- Amend education policy to allow greater flexibility for students with disabilities in scholastic progression.

3. TRANSITION FROM SCHOOL TO EMPLOYMENT

Luxembourg Practice:

- A specialised agency supports the transition from education into employment for students with disabilities.

(ITPs) from the age of 14 onwards for students with disabilities.

4. MONITORING, EVALUATION, AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Luxembourg Practice:

- The national umbrella organisation investigates rights violations and evaluates disability policy alongside external auditors and official bodies.

Implications for Malta:

- Malta's CRPD Monitoring



Implications for Malta:

- There is a gap in structured transition planning post-secondary education.

Recommendations:

- Establish a **national transition support agency** or service to coordinate employment pathways for young persons with disabilities.
- Introduce mandatory **Individual Transition Plans**

Committee must be more visible, better resourced, and engage NGOs as true watchdogs.

Recommendations:

- Reform and reinforce the **CRPD Monitoring Committee** to include rotating NGO representatives and clear investigative authority.
- Involve MFOPD and other disability organisations in **periodic external audits** of



national disability policy implementation.

5. ACCESSIBILITY ENFORCEMENT

Luxembourg Practice:

- Accessibility laws are enforced strictly — even allowing for the demolition of non-compliant new buildings.
- Accessibility is under the remit of the Ministry for the Family, ensuring cohesive planning.

Implications for Malta:

- Enforcement remains weak despite a legal framework.
- Accessibility is often seen as technical rather than rights-based.

Recommendations:

- Empower the **Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD)** with legal authority to halt or reverse planning permits for inaccessible developments.
- Position accessibility within the **remit of a central coordinating ministry** (e.g., Ministry for Social Policy) to better enforce compliance.

6. PERSONAL ASSISTANCE MODEL

Luxembourg Practice:

- No formal personal assistance scheme exists yet, but strong pressure from the ALS and Info-handicap community is growing. The Ministry of Family is currently preparing a law on personal assistance and personal budget.

- Emphasis is on *community living with support*, not residential solutions.

Implications for Malta:

- Malta's ALS community has taken a residential route, which may conflict with Article 19 of the UNCRPD (right to live independently and be included in the community).

Recommendations:

- The co-design of the Personal Assistance Reform should be carried out with the full participation of persons with disabilities and their representative NGOs
- Encourage **community-based support models** instead of institutionalisation, in line with CRPD principles.

AN ISLAND FOR EVERYONE

AN ARTICLE ABOUT THE ACCESSIBILITY IN MALTA



ABOUT OUR THESIS

Our research, titled 'Improvement of the accessibility and inclusivity of Maltese infrastructure', focused on the infrastructure and accessibility bottlenecks in Malta. Sara lived in Malta for six months and noticed that the infrastructure is inaccessible in many parts of the country. She enjoyed her time in Malta and was inspired to research this subject. Midway through our research, we visited Malta again to experience the situation firsthand and conduct interviews with experts, including the MFOPD and several municipalities. Although the focus of our research was accessibility, we also examined infrastructure, public transport, and car use and parking. In this article, we will concentrate on accessibility by discussing several issues and corresponding solutions.

With our findings, we hope to contribute to a concrete and implementable plan for a more inclusive mobility structure in Malta.



This article is based on the final thesis research of Merel and Sara from the Netherlands, written as part of the bachelor Built Environment –

Mobility at the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences.

ACCESSIBILITY ISSUES

During our research and visit to Malta, we noticed several things. Below, we present some of our findings:

SIDEWALKS

Sidewalks are often uneven and poorly maintained. Loose stones are frequently present, making it difficult to walk on the sidewalks, especially for people with reduced mobility. They are also often very narrow (sometimes less than 90 cm wide) and contain obstacles that block the sidewalk, such as garbage bags or low, overhanging balconies.

ROADWORKS

Roadworks can create dangerous situations. For example, holes in the roads are sometimes left uncovered, no barriers are placed around, and people walk close to excavators where debris is flying around. Moreover, workers do not always wear protective equipment such as helmets or hearing protection.



GARBAGE COLLECTION SYSTEM

From Monday to Saturday, people can put out a type of domestic waste every day. As a result, waste is present on the streets six days a week. Besides attracting pests, such as rats and mice, this also negatively affects the accessibility of the sidewalks.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT

The bus system is the most important form of public transportation, the system is often inaccessible in terms of physical accessibility, but also in terms of reliability. The bus is often late or inconsistent because of traffic jams. It is often unclear when the bus will arrive, which causes people who are reliant on the public transport to have problems to get from A to B.

BUS STOPS AND INFORMATION

Bus stops often lack essential information. People with visual impairments are unable to know which bus is at the stop because of lack of auditory information and accessible visual

information, such as braille or easily readable texts.

BOARDING CHALLENGES

The bus stops often do not have enough space for the buses to drive up to the side of the sidewalk, which causes a big gap between the platform and the bus itself. This makes it difficult to get into the bus, especially for people with a physical disability or restraint mobility.

PARKING

Parking takes a big part of the available public spaces in Malta, often having parking options on both sides of the street. The already narrow streets have less space, and this causes the sidewalks to be narrow. The sidewalks oftentimes inaccessible, especially for wheelchair users. In our research we discovered that Malta has a noticeable car culture, and that any initiatives to make neighborhoods more accessible and livable by removing even a couple of parking spots caused uproar by the surrounded residents. With this knowledge we knew that it would not be easy to make changes around the parking habits.

SOLUTIONS

After researching the current situation and its challenges, we began exploring possible solutions to make Malta more accessible. During our brainstorming, we realized that no single change would be enough on its own; everything is connected, and improvements must happen step by step.

Creating more accessible infrastructure requires more space on the streets, which means removing some parking spots. Our research showed that this cannot be done all at once. Given the pushback to earlier initiatives, we concluded that a phased and interconnected plan is the only realistic way to create meaningful change and improve accessibility.

BEACHES

In 2021, there were eighteen beaches in Malta and three in Gozo that had one or more features of an “accessible beach”. To improve accessibility, each beach should be equipped with as many of these features as possible.



OUR PLAN

To create wider sidewalks and a more livable city, we propose a multi-phase parking plan. First, paid street parking is introduced, combined with free parking garages within walking distance, encouraging drivers to stop parking directly at their destination.

After several years, the next phase adds Park and Ride locations just outside busy areas, while the city garages become paid facilities, making a Park and Ride the more attractive option. As fewer people drive into congested zones, streets become less crowded, and buses can stay on schedule. Reduced street parking also opens opportunities to redesign public space for pedestrians and accessible bus-stops. Simultaneously, we recommend using apps like NaviLens and Be My Eyes, which support a wide range of users, especially people with visual impairments, by helping them navigate construction areas and access general information.

Our research has provided us with valuable insights and ideas, while also reminding us that such changes are not easy to implement.

If you have any questions about our work, feel free to reach out to us by email. vanderhammerel@gmail.com

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Since 2010, the European Commission organizes the Access City Award, in collaboration with the European Disability Forum, to reward EU cities that are prioritizing accessibility for persons with disabilities.

Accessibility is a master-key that opens the door to the city's services, buildings and spaces, so persons with disabilities can take the lead of their lives, live independently and fully participate in the community.

Cities are key actors to ensure accessibility, as they have a direct impact on our everyday life and needs as citizens. A city is accessible when persons with disabilities can, for instance:

- go around the streets and enjoy public areas, such as parks and playgrounds.
- get in public buildings like hospitals, town halls, libraries, and sports halls.
- get the bus, tram and metro to go to work or meet friends.
- communicate with the local administration in person, by phone or online.
- get information in ways that they can read and understand.

ACCESS CITY AWARD 2026

We are excited to announce that Zaragoza won the Access City Award 2026!

The awards handed for this year's edition:

1st prize winner: Zaragoza (Spain)

2nd prize winner: Valencia (Spain)

3rd prize winner: Rennes (France)

Special Mention for Accessibility in Housing:
Salzburg (Austria)

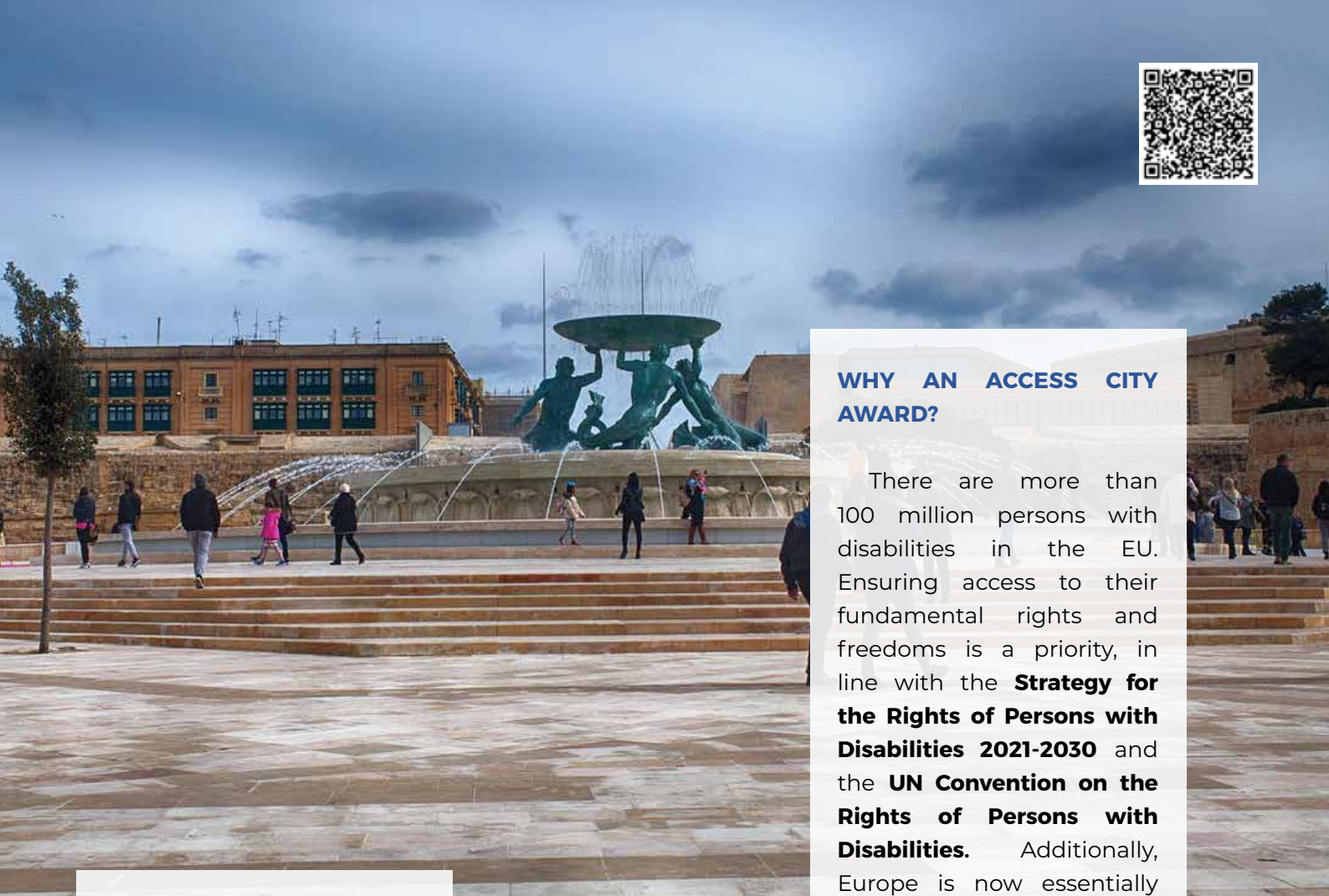
Special Mention for Accessibility in Emergency Preparedness: Valencia (Spain)

Special Mention for Information and Communications Technology: Piacenza (Italy)

These cities have shown strong leadership in creating accessible and inclusive urban environments – from public spaces and transport solutions to public facilities and services accessible for persons with disabilities.

Discover how they are leading the way to make Europe accessible, through our newsletter.

The winners were announced on 5 December 2025 at an exciting award ceremony during the European Day of Persons with Disabilities conference organized by the European Commission together with the European Disability Forum.



Over the past 16 years, 77 cities have been awarded, including 16 1st prize winners among them. **Vienna (Austria), received the prestigious 1st prize award in last year's edition of the Access City Award.**

The Awards

The successful applicants have to demonstrate a coherent approach to accessibility and an ambitious vision in tackling accessibility in the city.

The winner and runners-up will receive a monetary prize:

1st place: EUR 150 000

2nd place: EUR 120 000

3rd place: EUR 80 000

The EU Jury may decide to **award other Special Mentions** if there are cities that have done exceptional work in a particular key area of accessibility, the current context and the cities' related accessibility initiatives, or other specific highlights of the applications.

WHO CAN APPLY?

The Access City Award is open to all EU cities of over 50 000 inhabitants urban areas composed of two or more towns with a combined population of over 50 000 inhabitants, if they are in EU countries with fewer than 2 cities with over 50 000 inhabitants.

WHY AN ACCESS CITY AWARD?

There are more than 100 million persons with disabilities in the EU. Ensuring access to their fundamental rights and freedoms is a priority, in line with the **Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030** and the **UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**. Additionally, Europe is now essentially an urban society, with seven out of ten EU citizens living in towns and cities.

This award remains a key example of the Commission working hand in hand with other government levels to turn this commitment with citizens with disabilities a reality across the EU.

The Access City Award is an EU initiative that

- **recognizes efforts by cities** to become accessible for persons with disabilities.
- **promotes equal access to urban life** for persons with disabilities.
- **allows local authorities to promote** and share their best practices.



SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN MALTA & GOZO

Towards inclusive employment

Prepared by:
Dr Lara Bezzina

Commissioned by:
**Malta Association of
Supported Employment (MASE)**

July 2025



ON LEADERSHIP AND FUTURE VISION

“As a nation, we must continue to move from awareness to action — designing services, infrastructure, and opportunities that anticipate diverse needs from the start. Building an inclusive Malta is not only a social obligation; it is a statement about the kind of country we choose to be for future generations.”



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