

When the Nation Stood Still

Annual Human Rights Report 2017



May 2019

The Platform of Human Rights Organisations in Malta (PHROM) presents
'When the Nation Stood Still'.

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The Platform of Human Rights Organisations in Malta (PHROM) was established in 2014 as a not-for-profit Platform (VO/0970) gathering NGOs working for the promotion of improved human rights protection in Malta. PHROM's mission is to provide a national forum for human rights organisations in Malta to more effectively develop, promote and advocate for the values of human dignity and equality. The Annual Human Rights Report (AHRR) is the lead document in the provision of comprehensive information on the state of human rights in Malta. It is based on an inclusive and expert research methodology that seeks input from all PHROM's Member Organisations and other relevant stakeholders, so as to ensure it is truly comprehensive and representative of the voice of civil society organisations.

Together with information on legal and policy frameworks, the Report presents key areas of concern, provides technical recommendations and identifies those themes particularly relevant to the reporting year.

The Report is launched in the months following the reporting year, and can be downloaded at the specific project page at <http://www.humanrightsplatform.org.mt/publications/>

At time of writing, 36 human rights NGOs are PHROM Member Organisations.

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The views, opinions and/or findings contained within this report are those of PHROM itself and, unless otherwise stated, do not necessarily represent or reflect the views of all PHROM Member Organisations. Attempts have been made to make this publication as easy to read as possible.

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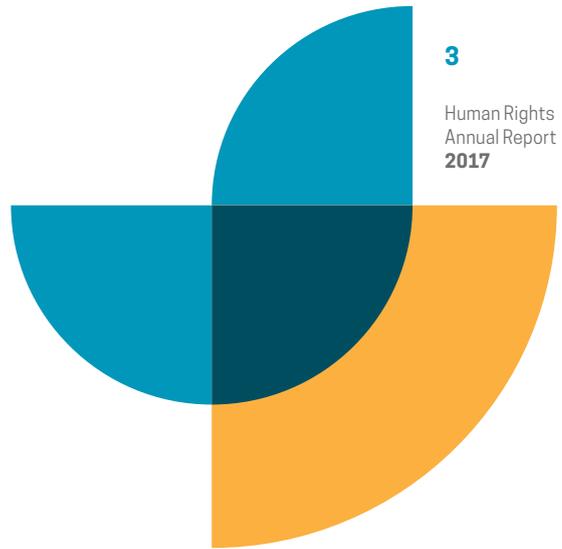
Project part financed by the Fund for Voluntary Organisations - Malta Community Chest Fund Foundation (MCCFF)



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On behalf of the Executive Committee of PHROM, I am extremely happy to present the 2017 Annual Human Rights Report. This publication has now become an annual achievement for the Platform, being the only report that comprehensively looks at and analyses Malta's human rights developments, triggers, and stakeholders. Year after year, we are gathering a wealth of data and knowledge that maps Malta's chosen path towards improved human rights protection for all persons in Malta. Cumulatively, the Annual Human Rights Reports are able to present notable trends in the way the nation, in its entirety, is tackling its most important themes, such as rights of women, migration, the environment, rule of law, access to justice, poverty and housing.

Clearly, the most important development of 2017 was the brutal assassination of journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia. Together with shocking the entire nation and international community, Ms. Caruana Galizia's murder triggered a number of important human rights milestones, as evidenced in the feedback provided by our Member Organisations in this present Report. The rise of informal groups of concerned persons and the increased focus on Malta's institutional challenges in effectively tackling problems with governance, rule of law and corruption are indicated by our Member Organisations as memorable developments in Malta's human rights environment in 2017.

2017 strengthened the trend we saw in previous years of issues of a social concern gradually rising to the top of our Member Organisations' priority lists. Homelessness, poverty and difficulties accessing social support emerged some years ago as relatively new concerns for Maltese human rights NGOs and, in 2017, were recognised as serious problems requiring immediate attention. Another trend that 2017 contributed to is the consolidation of human rights enjoyment

4 by Malta's LGBTIQ+ communities. The adoption of marriage equality legislation, the obvious legislative and social change pre-empted by the introduction of civil unions in 2014, celebrated a fantastic journey for equality – a journey initiated and made possible thanks to the unrelenting work of a group of NGOs, most of them Platform Member Organisations. We are now keen to see the translation of these legal measures into changes at the personal, family and social levels, and we're sure our Member Organisations will – once again – be at the forefront of these movements. Together with celebrating marriage equality legislation, we are eagerly looking forward to seeing its provision on gender mainstreaming further strengthened in the national context.

The 2017 Annual Human Rights Report is written within an exciting project financed by the Malta Community Chest Fund Foundation, the Human Rights Indicators Project¹. Through this project we are designing and implementing structured human rights indicators, based on existing European Union and United Nations models, that will enable us to map Malta's developments in a more scientific, rigorous and comparable manner. We are also hoping to encourage Government to also adopt an indicator-based model of human rights policy-making, as this would enable a more effective formulation of road-maps, policies, goals and strategies. Our 2018 Annual Human Rights Report will be based on this indicator methodology, as a pilot for future Reports.

Whilst we apologise for this edition's late publication, owing primarily to resource constraints we faced in mid-2018, we sincerely hope you find it useful and engaging.

Neil Falzon

*Head of Secretariat,
Platform of Human Rights Organisations in Malta*

¹ For more information see <http://www.humanrightsplatform.org.mt/projects/malta-human-rights-indicators-project/>

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The completion of this Annual Human Rights Report would not have been possible without the participation and valid contribution of PHROM's Member Organisations.

[aditus foundation \(Sec.\)](#)

[African Media Association Malta](#)

[Amputees4Amputees](#)

[Breaking Limits](#)

[Deaf People Association \(Malta\)](#)

[Din l-Art Helwa](#)

[DRACHMA LGBT and DRACHMA Parents](#)

[Fondazzjoni Mid-Dlam għad-Dawl](#)

[Foundation for Support and Shelter to Migrants](#)

[Gender Liberation](#)

[Gozo NGO Association](#)

[Gozo Youth Council](#)

[Inspire Foundation](#)

[Integra Foundation](#)

[Jesuit Refugee Service](#)

[Kunsill Studenti Universitarji \(KSU\)](#)

[Libya Foundation for Rehabilitation](#)

[Malta Federation of Organizations Persons with Disability](#)

[Malta Humanist Association](#)

[Malta LGBTIQ Rights Movement \(MGRM\)](#)

[Migrant Women Association Malta](#)

[National Foster Care Association and Gender Liberation](#)

[Organisation for Friendship in Diversity \(EC\)](#)

[PRISMS](#)

[Richmond Foundation \(EC\)](#)

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When
the Nation
Stood Still

Spark 15

St Jeanne Antide Foundation

Troupe 18:45

UpBeat Music House

Victim Support Malta (EC)

We Are

Why Not?

Women's Rights Foundation

YMCA Homeless



Research Methodology



General Note

As the Annual Human Rights Report (AHRR) 2017 is the fourth issue of the series, the developers of the AHRR have revised the status and the effect of the report based on the reactions and feedback from PHROM Member Organisations and other relevant opinion shapers. As AHRR is the first – and therefore the only – comprehensive overview of national human rights developments for any given year, PHROM decided to use a more scientific, detailed and extensive approach for the next years' reports.

During the writing of the 2017 AHRR substantial time and efforts were dedicated to the development of this new approach, but several unpredictable changes to the drafting committee resulted in the official publication happening months later than in previous years.

One of the major strengths of PHROM's Annual Human Rights Report (AHRR) lies in its research and drafting methodology, since it is based on and emerges from the collective voices of all PHROM's Member Organisations. Membership of the Platform continues to grow, although we are faced with a challenge that leadership within several Member Organisations – and therefore their relationship and commitment level with PHROM - have changed during recent months. This fluidity renders our AHRR research more complex and demanding, from a purely logistical perspective. Despite these difficulties, we believe PHROM remains important human rights NGO in Malta, with the potential to have nation-wide impact on various core human rights themes.

We consider the AHRR to be important not only because it is the only publication of its kind, in the sense that it is the only periodically issued document that gives a

comprehensive strong and robust voice to the ultimate beneficiaries of all PHROM's Member Organisations.

At the time of the 2017 AHRR, PHROM has 36 Member Organisations. Out of the 36 Member Organisations 18 (50%) answered the questionnaire used as part of the mapping phase of this AHRR.

Although the AHRR tries to compile all the points of views shared by its Member Organisations during the mapping exercise, we don't necessarily agree with all published opinions and statements. These quotes were shared with us in the replies to our questionnaire and their mentioning, selection or grouping are not intended to add or detract any meaning from the original statements.

Data Collection and Structure of the Report

As in previous years a basic questionnaire was designed and distributed to all PHROM Member Organisations. The questions and the methodology were modelled on the feedback we had received. Due to a variety of reasons –time constraints, logistical problems and in some cases the unavailability of necessary decision makers—it was not possible to collect the perspectives of all PHROM Member Organisations. As a lessons learnt, we take with us the idea that for the next years, the questionnaire-based data collection activity needs to be strengthened with face-to-face in-depth interviews and also with a series of open PHROM meetings.

The list of questions (included in the Annex of this Report – 'Member Organisation Questionnaire') was formulated with the aim to understand the perspectives of our Member Organisations regarding human rights developments occurring throughout 2017. Besides asking to highlight human rights issues Member Organisations worked on during 2017 the Editing Committee was also interested in their capacity, level of activity and middle-/long-term strategies. We feel these are important dimensions to the questionnaire since they provide us with a clearer idea of the strengths and potential of Maltese human rights NGOs, as well as of the kind of difficulties they face. Looking at the answers to these questions over a number of years should clearly indicate the network's impact potential as well as recurring lacunae or – possibly - identify necessary interventions.

SUMMARY OF THE
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According to the Annual Human Rights Report covering 2016, ‘Protecting Human Rights, Curbing the Rule of Power’¹, the major human rights developments in Malta in 2016 were particularly significant.

Many Member Organisations observed sound developments in areas outside their direct spheres of activity. 2016 was the year when a number of new voices – entities who had never worked with refugees – emerged and spoke on behalf of refugee rights. Furthermore, important developments were made in 2016 in the field governance, migration, women’s rights, poverty, religious discrimination, LGBTIQ+ rights, the environment and hate speech.

Then, Member Organisations predicted the following as the main human rights challenges for Malta for 2017:

- good governance (including transparency within the government, institution-building and adoption of new laws);
- access to benefits for all persons with disabilities;
- increase in poverty among different social groups (e.g. women, homeless and elderly);
- inaccessibility to quality mental health services;
- increasing and unaddressed violence towards children and women;
- xenophobia, islamophobia;
- access to education for migrants having low levels of education;
- Panama papers.

¹ Platform of Human Rights Organisations in Malta (PHROM), Protecting Human Rights, Curbing the Rule of Power - Annual Human Rights Report 2016, <http://www.humanrightsplatform.org.mt/phromdocuments/2016ahrr.pdf>



International reports on Malta's performance

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Malta – despite its size, number of inhabitants and limited natural resources – remains a significant actor on the European and international levels, also within the human right sector: an active EU Member State; one of the countries at the forefront of Europe's migration/asylum discussion; LGBTIQ+ legal framework that exceeds the standards of most European countries; and, recently, a country experiencing unprecedented economic growth.

As such, it annually attracts the attention of international/European think tanks, funds, forums, networks, expert groups, and NGOs in the form of statements, reports, assessments, etc. These external perspectives, largely based on expertise and reputation, are essential in order to obtain regular input on national human rights developments and to present an honest comparison with international trends. This section of the Report compiles what we feel are the most important reports and statements on Malta's 2017 human rights developments, without engaging with analysing their content.

Gender gap – World Economic Forum

As the 2017 *Global Gender Gap Report*¹ states, the gender gap in Malta remains one of the highest in Western European countries. Measured as 93rd globally, receiving lower points than Cape Verde (89th), Brazil (90th), Senegal (91st) and Cyprus (92nd). On the other hand, the report states that Malta is just above the Global Weighted Average (calculated based on the number of inhabitants on each country).

“With an average gender gap of 25%, Western Europe remains the highest performing region in the Index in 2017. However, it is also one of the regions with the widest performance variation, seeing progress stall or even reverse across a number of countries this year. Western Europe is home to four of the top five countries in the

1 World Economic Forum, Insight Report The Global Gender Gap Report 2017, http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2017.pdf, p. 24.

Index – Iceland, Norway, Finland and Sweden – highlighting the continued progress of the Nordic countries in closing their overall gender gaps. At the bottom ranks of the region, four countries have a remaining gender gap of more than 30%: Greece, Italy, Cyprus and Malta. No country in the region has managed to fully close both its Educational Attainment and its Health and Survival gender gaps this year.”

Human Trafficking– GRETA

The Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA), in its *Report concerning the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings by Greece*² states that Malta – alongside with other countries – concluded bilateral agreements with Greece on police co-operation and/or combating organised crime, with the agreements containing provisions on combating human trafficking.

Racism and Discrimination - ENAR

The European Network Against Racism (ENAR) in its shadow report *Racism & Discrimination in Employment in Europe 2013-2017*³, reached a number of important conclusions in relation to Malta:

- there is a striking overrepresentation of third country national males in all types of informal work since 2013;
- women are highly overrepresented in domestic work;
- the National Statistics Office (NSO), service providers or more generally employers do not collect data on ethnicity or how this affects employment, education, income, health or other life outcomes in Malta;
- in 2016, Protocol 12 of the *European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms* on non-discrimination came into effect in Malta. However, the protocol has not been incorporated into the *Maltese European Convention Act*⁴ and hence cannot be enforced;
- the EU MIDIS II report⁵, published by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, found that 33% of Sub-Saharan African immigrants interviewed felt discriminated on the basis of their skin colour. In relation to employment, 20% of immigrant respondents declared having experienced discrimination on the basis of ethnicity or background when looking for work in the 12 months preceding the survey. Another 15% declared having experienced discrimination in the workplace.

2 Council of Europe, Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA), Report concerning the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings by Greece, 2017, <https://rm.coe.int/greta-2017-27-fgr-gre-en/168075f2b6>, p. 29.

3 European Network Against Racism (ENAR), Racism & Discrimination in Employment in Europe 2013-2017, <https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/librarydoc/enar-shadow-report-racism-discrimination-in-employment-in-europe-2013-2017>

4 European Union Act, Chapter 460 of the laws of Malta, 2003, available at <http://www.justiceservices.gov.mt/DownloadDocument.aspx?app=lom&itemid=8926&l=1>

5 European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey (EU-MIDIS II), 2017, <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2017/eumidis-ii-main-results>

Sustainability– Bertelsmann Stiftung

The Bertelsmann Stiftung (Bertelsmann Foundation) in *Malta Report – Sustainable Governance Indicators 2017*⁶ presents a carefully developed paper that focuses mainly on environmental issues, but also deeply analyses the social effects of migration, economic development and human rights:

- Malta continues to make steady, if slow progress, towards good governance. Over recent years it has introduced new measures to enhance accountability and transparency. Demands under the Freedom of Information Act⁷ have multiplied and the Ombudsman Office has been granted new areas of competence. All these have ensured greater scrutiny of the government;
- Malta's economy continues to thrive with historic low unemployment and positive ratings from credit agencies. It has reduced its public deficit and debt to GDP ratio, and is now well below EU thresholds in respect of budget-deficit regulations. Nonetheless, rampant tax evasion remains a problem and the government has announced new efforts to fight it;
- Economic development has, however, attracted its own problems. Environmental groups continue to express concern that all new investment projects eat into Malta's limited undeveloped areas, while social groups are pointing to a housing crisis for the most vulnerable due to rising rents caused by a foreign workforce influx and an increasingly successful residency scheme for foreigners;
- Unfortunately, public debate has focused mainly on land use, animal welfare and traffic issues while ignoring Malta's dwindling water resources and the high cost of its provision;
- It is only recently that Malta has begun to consolidate its policy approach to integration issues. Under the current government, the Ministry for Social Dialogue, Consumer Affairs and Civil Liberties is the ministry responsible for the integration of migrants. Meanwhile, the Agency for the Welfare of Asylum-Seekers is responsible for the provision of some services.

Human Rights

European Union Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA)

In *EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and its use by Member States*⁸, FRA refers to a case brought before a Civil Court concerning the requirement for women, but not men, to include their marital status when, for instance, registering a contract of sale with the Public Registry. The Court found that the requirement violated the constitution and the ECHR.

FRA commented September legislation that rendered marriage gender neutral, and commented on the possibility to introduce an 'X' gender marker in passports and

6 Bertelsmann Stiftung, Sustainable Governance Indicators 2017, 2017, http://www.sgi-network.org/docs/2017/country/SGI2017_Malta.pdf

7 Freedom of Information Act, Chapter 496 of the Laws of Malta, 2009, available at <http://www.justiceservices.gov.mt/downloaddocument.aspx?app=lom&itemid=8962>

8 European Union Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA), Fundamental Rights Report 2017, <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/annual-reports/fundamental-rights-2017>

identity cards. Furthermore FRA's research indicated a lack of attention to persons with disabilities' romantic and sexual relationships. In July 2017, the Maltese Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities conducted a quantitative survey on the rights of persons with disabilities regarding intimate relationships, marriage, family, parenthood, and questioned whether there is enough education on these matters. The survey looked at whether Malta is living up to its obligations under Article 23 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (respect for home and the family).

United States Department of State

As the *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2017*⁹ developed by the United States Department of State; Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor states:

- The most significant human rights issues included the killing of a prominent investigative journalist and alleged corruption at senior government levels. The government took steps to investigate prosecute and punish officials who committed violations, whether in security services or elsewhere in the government.
- There were no reports that the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings.
- On October 27, the court acquitted three detention service officials charged with the involuntary homicide of a Nigerian migrant in 2011.
- On Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment: The constitution and/or law prohibit such practices, and there were no reports that government officials employed them.
- Prison and Detention Centre Conditions: There were some reports of substandard conditions in prisons or detention centres for the general population, and poor conditions in detention centres for some irregular migrants persisted.
- Life in detention centres or prefabricated housing units at open centres for irregular immigrants could be uncomfortable, particularly in the summer months, due to persistent heat.

Amnesty International

As Amnesty International states in its report on 2017/2018¹⁰:

- Marriage rights were extended to same-sex couples through the marriage equality legislation approved by Parliament in July;
- Abortion still remained prohibited in all circumstances;
- New information emerged regarding the 2013 shipwreck in which many Syrian refugees died. It exposed Italy's reluctance to assist the Maltese authorities in rescuing the boat in distress;

9 United States Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2017, <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/277437.pdf>

10 Amnesty International, Amnesty International Report 2017/18 The State of the World's Human Rights, 2017, <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/POL1067002018ENGLISH.PDF>

- Malta denied permission to disembark to three Libyan asylum-seekers who were rescued within its search and rescue region;
- The authorities admitted 168 asylum-seekers under the EU relocation programme, a higher number than they had committed to.

Early Parliamentary Elections – Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE)¹¹

Following an invitation from the Permanent Mission of Malta to the OSCE and based on the recommendation of a Needs Assessment Mission, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) deployed an Election Assessment Mission (EAM) for the 3 June 2017 early parliamentary elections.

According to the Mission's report, the elections were held in a professional and efficient manner, with electoral stakeholders expressing confidence in most stages of the process. The campaign was competitive, but was dominated by the two leading political parties. It took place against the backdrop of public protests and calls by the opposition for the Prime Minister's resignation over allegations of corruption and misconduct concerning several senior political figures and their family members.

Together with these general comments, the report also mentioned the following:

- The campaign was vivid, but characterised by a confrontation between the two parliamentary parties to the detriment of substantive debate. Small parties and independent candidates enjoyed little visibility, apart from on social media. Pervasive allegations of corruption, together with strikingly negative rhetoric, led many OSCE/ODIHR EAM interlocutors to describe the campaign as 'exceedingly aggressive'.
- Legislation does not contain temporary special measures to promote the political participation of women, as recommended in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) General Comment 23¹². Of the 211 candidates, only 42 were women. Consideration could be given to encouraging women's political participation through the introduction of temporary special measures. According to the Malta LGBTIQ+ Right Movements (MGRM), seven self-declared members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex community, including one transgender candidate, stood in the elections.
- The media landscape is pluralistic, but editorial independence and the public's ability to access a wide range of views are negatively impacted by the two leading political parties' ownership of major media outlets. These are used as vehicles for promoting their political interests. Public trust in the media ranks amongst the lowest in the EU.
- Freedom of expression is enshrined in the Constitution and generally respected. However, according to many OSCE/ODIHR EAM interlocutors, libel suits are

11 Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE), Republic Of Malta Early Parliamentary Elections 3 June 2017, OSCE/ODIHR Election Assessment Mission Final Report, 2017 <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/malta/348671?download=true>

12 CEDAW General Recommendation No. 23, Political and Public Life, 2017, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/453882a622.html>

regularly filed to influence critical media coverage. Contrary to previous OSCE/ODIHR recommendations, insult and defamation remain criminal offences and courts have used preventive asset-freeze mechanisms against journalists, provoking criticism from the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media over a possible chilling effect on free speech.

Asylum Seekers and Migrants

European Asylum Support Office (EASO)

EASO's *Annual Report on the Situation of Asylum in the European Union 2017*¹³ provides the following information:

- The Marsa Initial Reception Centre, where asylum-seekers were detained without formal order upon arrival for a period of seven days to conduct medical checks and identification, has now been opened following a change in policy;
- New age-assessment procedures were introduced in Malta, with the establishment of three phases, each one with a different assessing panel.

European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE)

The updated report for 2017¹⁴ presents the following developments:

- Asylum-seekers now automatically receive, along with the decision and the interview notes, the assessment memo explaining in details the motivation of the decision. This constitutes a real improvement in the applicants' rights to access their file and access effective remedy;
- According to NGOs assisting asylum-seekers, the Refugee Commissioner started using the accelerated procedure in relation to nationals of safe countries, resulting in their claims being declared inadmissible;
- In 2017, due to the very small number of boat arrivals, only 43 asylum-seekers were detained in the course of the year. Almost all of them were released after two or three months, following the first review of their detention. According to the authorities, the average period of detention was 56 days. NGOs remain concerned about access to effective remedy for detained applicants.

European Commission's European Migration Network (EMN)

EMN's annual report for 2017¹⁵ comments that:

- Public employment services-provider, Jobsplus, started accepting applications for part-time employment from third-country nationals who are already in possession of a Single Work Permit or an Employment Licence;

13 European Asylum Support Office (EASO), *Annual Report on the Situation of Asylum in the European Union, 2017*, <https://www.easo.europa.eu/sites/default/files/Annual-Report-2017-Final.pdf>

14 European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE), *Country Report Malta, 2017*, <https://www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/malta>

15 European Commission's European Migration Network (EMN), *Annual Report on Migration and Asylum, 2017*, https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/00_annual_report_on_migration_2017_highres_en.pdf

- Efforts to avoid ‘social dumping’ and erosion of labour standards: political parties and trade unions signed a national agreement¹⁶ on the minimum wage, to preserve wage relativities and industrial relations, while addressing social inequalities.
- Identification mechanism/ referrals: Six Member States appear to have introduced mechanisms that enable the identification of asylum applicants who may be vulnerable. For example, in 2017, Malta introduced a preliminary vulnerability assessment for all new applicants for international protection which is carried out by non-medical practitioners for the purpose of identifying vulnerable persons.
- Integration through socio-economic participation: integration into the labour market
- After a broad and comprehensive public consultation Malta opened the network of Job Brokerage Offices¹⁷ in order to facilitate third-country nationals’ access to the labour market and tackle the problem of irregular work and exploitation of migrant workers.

Letter to from the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights to the Minister for Home Affairs and National Security of Malta¹⁸

Although the Commissioner complimented the Minister on certain developments regarding the Hal Far migrant reception centre, he underlined that further developments are needed. The Commissioner noted:

- It should be transitional accommodation, but since the lack of affordable housing, many continue to live in the reception centre. This is an obstacle to migrant integration, and may generate tension with the local population.
- Distinctions concerning access to social security benefits between refugees and beneficiaries of other forms of international protection should be removed.
- Improve migrants’ access to legal employment
- Satisfied with first migrant integration strategy. Stresses importance of family reunification. Specifically regarding to beneficiaries of subsidiary protection, people that are not entitled to family reunification; since it is an unfair assumption that people with subsidiary protection stay in Malta only temporarily.
- Access of long-term residents to citizenship is another major factor of migrant integration.

Access to the labour market – Jobsplus Annual Report 2017¹⁹

In 2017, the Jobseekers’ Advisory Services launched outreach services targeting two groups of jobseekers which were not being reached. One aims to outreach

16 National Agreement on the Minimum Wage <https://meae.gov.mt/en/Documents/Press%20Releases/2017/National%20Agreement%20on%20the%20Minimum%20Wage.pdf>

17 Ministry of Education and Employment, Job Brokerage Offices Consultation Document, 2016, <https://jobsplus.gov.mt/resources/publication-statistics-mt-mt-en-gb/fileprovider.aspx?fileId=1729>

18 Letter of Mr. Nils Muiznieks – Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights to Mr. Michael Farrugia Minister for Home Affairs and National Security of Malta, 2017 <https://rm.coe.int/letter-to-mr-michael-farrugia-minister-for-home-affairs-and-national-s/168077#9e>

19 JobsPlus, Annual Report 2017, 2017, <https://jobsplus.gov.mt/resources/publication-statistics-mt-mt-en-gb/publications/fileprovider.aspx?fileId=2954>

and offer guidance and support to job changers (these are clients who are already in employment but would like to find alternative employment), and the other to outreach and offer guidance to beneficiaries of subsidiary protection and other migrant groups.

Jobsplus also established a working group with NGOs which aims to discuss and, where possible, tackle issues relating to migrants and employment. The same group also aims to facilitate service enhancements and increase collaboration with migrants.

Women's Rights – European Commission Justice and Consumers Directorate

In 2017²⁰ Malta broadened a free childcare scheme for children whose parents work or are in education. The scheme provides an incentive for mothers to return to work or to remain in formal employment and aims *“to make work pay, especially for mothers with lower levels of education and skills and a lower earning bracket”*. The report also commented how in Malta women account for less than 10 % of board members.

LGBTIQ+ rights – International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA)

ILGA-Europe reported²¹ that a trans activist was the target of transphobic social media posts in October. Minister for Education Evarist Bartolo later commented on Facebook that *“...these attacks are absolutely unacceptable”*. The organisation also noted that on 12 July, the Family Court approved the first adoption by a same-sex couples since the introduction of the 2014 Civil Unions Act.

Equality – The National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE)

In its annual report²² the NCPE noted that employment rates for women continued to rise in 2017. At the third quarter of the year, female employment reached 55.6%. In the previous year it stood at 52.7% (2016) and 51% (2015). It underlined that there still remains gender inequality in relation to professional status and occupation.

The report also notes that the government expanded its programme to offer ethics classes as an alternative Roman Catholic instruction in public schools, and initiated discussions with various denominations to introduce voluntary classes in Islam and possibly other minority religions in public schools.

20 European Commission, Directorate Justice and Consumers 2018, Report on equality between women and men in the EU, accomplished in 2017, <https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/950dce57-6222-11e8-ab9c-01aa75ed71a1>

21 ILGA-Europe – the European Region of the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association, Malta, 2017, <https://www.ilga-europe.org/sites/default/files/2017/malta.pdf>

22 The National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE), Annual Report 2017, 2017, https://ncpe.gov.mt/en/Documents/Our_Publications_and_Resources/Annual_Reports/Annual_Report_2017.pdf

The assassination of Daphne Caruana Galizia

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On 16th October Malta had to face one of its biggest crises in recent history, following the murder of journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia.

Daphne Anne Caruana Galizia was a Maltese journalist, writer, blogger, and anti-corruption activist who reported on political and current events in Malta. In particular, she focused on investigative reporting into government corruption, nepotism, patronage, allegations of money laundering, and organised crime. On 16th October 2017, Caruana Galizia was killed in a car bomb attack just outside her home.

Caruana Galizia's national and international reputation was built on her regular reporting of misconduct by Maltese politicians and politically exposed persons. Her personal blog, the *Running Commentary*, was set up in 2008 and continued writing until just before her death in 2017. It was one of the most popular websites in Malta regularly attracting over 400,000 views – more than the combined circulation of the country's newspapers. She was also a regular columnist with *The Sunday Times of Malta* and later *The Malta Independent*, and the founding editor of *Taste and Flair*, monthly lifestyle magazines distributed with *The Malta Independent on Sunday*.

Caruana Galizia was internationally well-known and generally considered to be one of the most respected investigative journalists in Europe. In 2017 *Politico* referred her as one of "28 people who are shaping, shaking and stirring Europe"¹.

She was among the first few journalists internationally to learn of the Panamanian companies before the Panama Papers leak of April 2016. She was the first person to break news of high status politicians' involvement in Panama-gate, hinting that the

¹ Politico, The 28 people who are shaping, shaking and stirring Europe, 2017, <https://www.politico.eu/list/politico-28-class-of-2017-ranking/>

Maltese government Minister Konrad Mizzi, the Prime Minister Chief of Staff, Keith Schembri and also his wife Michelle Muscat had connections with Panamanian and New Zealander companies.



Caruana Galizia was relentlessly harassed and intimidated for her work and opinions. The front door of her house was set on fire in 1996, family dogs had their throats slit, were poisoned and shot. Years later, her neighbour's car was burned, probably in a misdirected attack. In 2006, two stacks of car tyres were placed next to the family house, doused with petrol and set alight, but the fire was stopped before it took. According to her son Matthew Caruana Galizia, death threats were almost a daily occurrence. These took the form of phone calls, letters, notes pinned to the front door, text messages, emails, and comments on her blog.

Her controversial blog posts also resulted in several protracted legal battles. By the time of her death, she was involved in legal proceedings with twelve persons, in 42 different libel suits. Caruana Galizia had reportedly filed a police report saying that she was being threatened about two weeks before her death.

At around 3 PM on 16 October 2017, Caruana Galizia died in a car bomb attack on her leased Peugeot 108, while she was driving just outside her home. The explosion left the vehicle scattered in several pieces across nearby fields. Her remains were found by her son Matthew, 80 meters away from the blast site. He wrote on Facebook: *"I looked down and there were my mother's body parts all around me."*

The car bomb attack was condemned by Prime Minister Joseph Muscat, who stated that he "will not rest before justice is done." President Marie Louise Coleiro Preca, Archbishop Charles Scicluna and a number of politicians also expressed their condolences or condemned the murder. Opposition leader Adrian Delia called her death "the collapse of democracy and freedom of expression" and stated that "[the country's] institutions have let us down". The President of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker, and the European Commission condemned the attack in the strongest terms possible. The President of the European Parliament Antonio Tajani called the death a "tragic example of a journalist who sacrificed her life to seek out the truth." Gerard Ryle, director of the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, stated that the organization is "shocked" by Caruana Galizia's death and "is deeply concerned about freedom of the press in Malta." Pope Francis sent a letter of condolence, saying he is praying for the journalist's family and the Maltese people. A plenary session of the European Parliament was held on 24 October 2017, with MEPs observing a minute's silence. Several members of Caruana Galizia's family attended the session at the hemicycle in Strasbourg. The press room at the European Parliament building was renamed in her honour.

On 22 October 2017, the Civil Society Network organised a protest demanding justice in Valletta. Thousands of protesters demanded justice in the aftermath of the assassination and called for the immediate resignation of the Police Commissioner and the Attorney General.

In December 2017, three men were arrested in connection with her murder. At the writing of this report (November 2018) “more than two” Maltese nationals were identified as suspected masterminds².

On 17th April 2018, a consortium of 45 journalists from 18 news organisations, including The Guardian, The New York Times, Le Monde and the Times of Malta, launched ‘The Daphne Project’, a collaborative effort to complete Caruana Galizia’s investigative work. The investigation involves different foreign professionals: United States Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), three Europol officials and a forensic investigation team from the Netherlands.

2 Independent, ‘More than two’ Maltese nationals identified as Caruana Galizia murder masterminds, 2018, <http://www.independent.com.mt/articles/2018-11-18/local-news/More-than-two-Maltese-nationals-identified-as-Caruana-Galizia-murder-masterminds-report-6736199528>



Major Human Rights Developments in 2017

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As the responding PHROM Member Organisations stated, in 2017 there were some remarkable major and some partially important national human rights developments.

Probably the most important development in 2017 is the legalisation of marriage equality. The voting procedure in the Parliament was the reinforcement and levelling to equal the former civil unions regime (technically equal to marriage in all but name, with the same rights and obligations including joint adoption rights). The enactment made Malta the 15th nation in Europe, and 25th world-wide to legalise marriage equality. Significantly, the European region of the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA-Europe) ranked Malta 1st in terms of LGBTIQ+ rights out of 49 observed European countries, and this ranking has been upheld ever since. At the evening when the introduction of gay marriage was approved Prime Minister Dr. Muscat said to the Times of Malta¹ that the vote showed that society had reached “*an unprecedented level of maturity. We can all say we are equal.*”

We are extremely happy to see Malta adopting marriage equality legislation. It is our firm belief that all persons should be entitled to access and enjoy the right to marry and found a family, irrespectively of their sexual orientation, gender identity or other innate characteristic. (PHROM Member Organisation)

From a technical point of view, Malta’s marriage equality legislation is a minor change but in the longer term it has the potential of changing the methodologies of human rights NGOs, as well as their general perception. This mainly human

1 Times of Malta, July 12, 2017, Watch: Marriage Equality Act approved with Edwin Vassallo voting against <https://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20170712/local/marriage-equality-act-approved-with-edwin-vassallo-voting-against.653120>

rights NGOs, most of them PHROM Member Organisations, played an extremely active role in the adoption of this legislation and, more broadly, in the overall improvement of LGBTIQ+ rights in Malta.



After publishing the Panama papers, and especially after the assassination of Daphne Caruana Galizia several non-registered, technically unprofessional but extremely active NGOs came into life in Malta.

Kenniesa² is a civil society organisation promoting integrity and transparency whilst encouraging the fight against corruption in Malta and the EU. Kenniesa also recognises the need to promote the importance of press freedom in Malta, which is the group has made it its priority to support independent investigative journalists through its activism efforts and beyond. It has been organising campaigns against corruption, requesting justice for Daphne Caruana Galizia and for the investigative stories she had exposed. Kenniesa is platform that wants to give a voice to the future generation of Malta.

Awturi³ is a youth activist group coming to life after the murder of Daphne Caruana Galizia. The group says that the absence of students in protests was enough of a reason to push a few students to form their own youth activist group. Its aims are to speak out in favour of good governance, the rule of law and constitutional reforms that would strengthen Maltese democracy. To do so, it ran a blog analysing relevant news stories, aided with the maintenance of the Daphne memorial in Valletta, and campaigned against corruption and for press freedom. At the time of writing this report, Awturi is no longer operational, but PHROM is informed that its members continue to invest their efforts and gained expertise in other initiatives with similar aims.

Occupy Justice Malta⁴ is also an informal group of people, led by women, who claim to have had enough of a political system that allows politicians and those in authority to act with impunity. They want to live in a fair and equitable society where institutions function properly and without favour. They say they also want to show to their present and future children that ethics, principles and civil responsibilities are more important than making money. The group is keen on teaching next generations how to understand the difference between right and wrong, and how to hold political parties accountable for their actions.

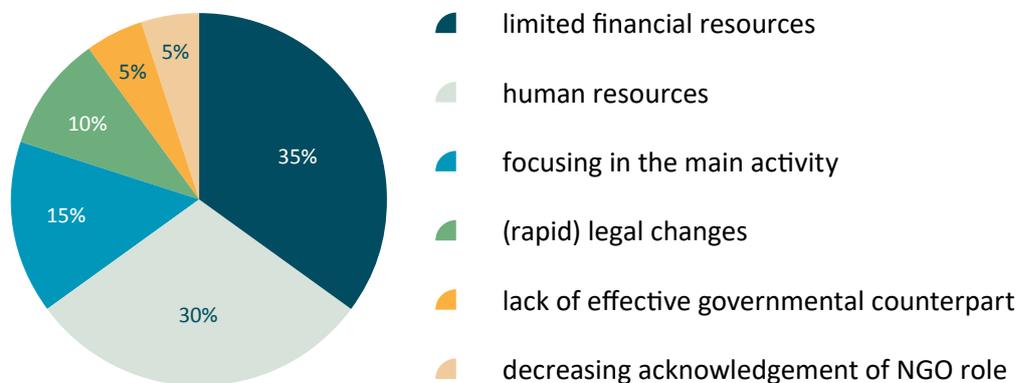
Interestingly, Panamagate and related governance issues were 2016's most significant human rights developments identified by PHROM's Member Organisations and these – together with the assassination of Daphne Caruana Galizia and the governance-related concerns it raised– remained the same for 2017.

2 Il-Kenniesa is active on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/Il-Kenniesa-143608709537025/>

3 Awturi is active on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/AwturiMalta/>

4 Occupy Justice Malta is active on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/occupyjusticemalta/>

Table 1: What were your main challenges in 2017?

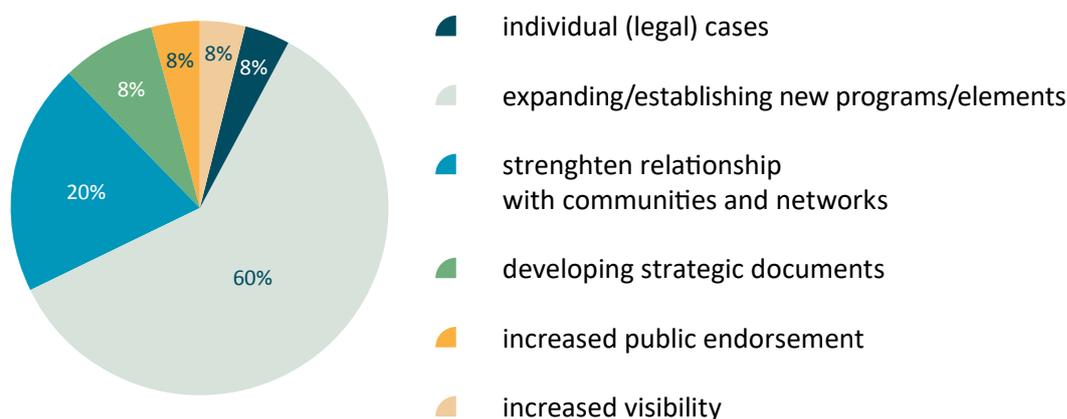


In 2017, the number of PHROM members increased. PHROM Member Organisations identified the limited, insufficient or unreachable funds and lack of human resources as their biggest challenges throughout 2017. A minor but also very important detail is that in some cases human resource challenges were not only associated with employees but also staff at the management level.

“We experienced a change of management and change of board members in 2017 so many challenges were due to relevant adjustments.”
(PHROM Member Organisation)

The smallest NGOs –those which have no or only one permanent staff member – reported that in 2017 it was extremely difficult for them to focus on their main activity and follow their original mission statement.

Table 2: In 2017, what were your main successes?



28 As one of the PHROM Member Organisations noted,

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“Funding to sustain core services [is a challenge]...funding in Malta is unfortunately project based with short-term targets and outputs.”

This statement seems to reflect a recurring trend, as the vast majority of respondents reported the increase or the establishment of a ‘programmes’, sub-programmes or programme elements as a key success in 2017.

From a strategic point of view, it is clear that to strengthen or even to establish networks and alliances are essential in order to gain more visibility and impact. This was reported by one fifth of respondents, indicating that PHROM Member Organisations have embraced this need, and that more effort – and therefore extra support – is needed for it to be fulfilled.

PHROM Member Organisations’ success stories can be categorized into two groups. The first group gathers stories having a bigger and more solid effect reaching beyond the NGO’s own sphere of operations:

“Convincing government to endorse a position paper on mental health reform and strategy.”

“Engagement with LGBTIQ+ community, launching the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP).”

“Expansion on the global scene by helping to establish two international networks.”

“Innovative practices in adult education and urgent services in the area of mental health.”

“Proposed changes are presumably accepted by the government.”

“Building a Strategy and Manifesto guidelines.”

On the other hand, the second group refers to very concrete success stories of initiatives maintained and implemented by NGOs:

“Expansion of survivor-led SOAR Service which is fully run by survivors. It is active in prevention work; advocacy; peer-to-peer support; youth-focused educational work; start-up of a social enterprise; plan to set up a national hub.”

“Setting up of Dar Esther – supported accommodation for vulnerable pregnant young women and mothers.”

“Large number of family caregivers of mentally ill persons guided and supported throughout the year.”

“Running of two community-based family support centres reaching five localities.”

“Ongoing discussions are providing members and other amputees in Malta with a sustainable service in relation to prosthetic legs.”

“Planting trees.”

“Set up a neighbourhood watch scheme in Madliena. Publishing of informational videos.”

“Provision of legal and psychotherapeutic services to 24 victims of sexual assault and rape. Provision of emotional support (counselling and psychotherapy) services to 86 other victims of crime.”

“With the project Migrant Skills Register, placing over 50 migrants in employment.”

“Stronger presence in law courts, some legal victories (individual cases), increased public endorsement (some sectors)”

Table 3 and 4: Working conditions of NGOs

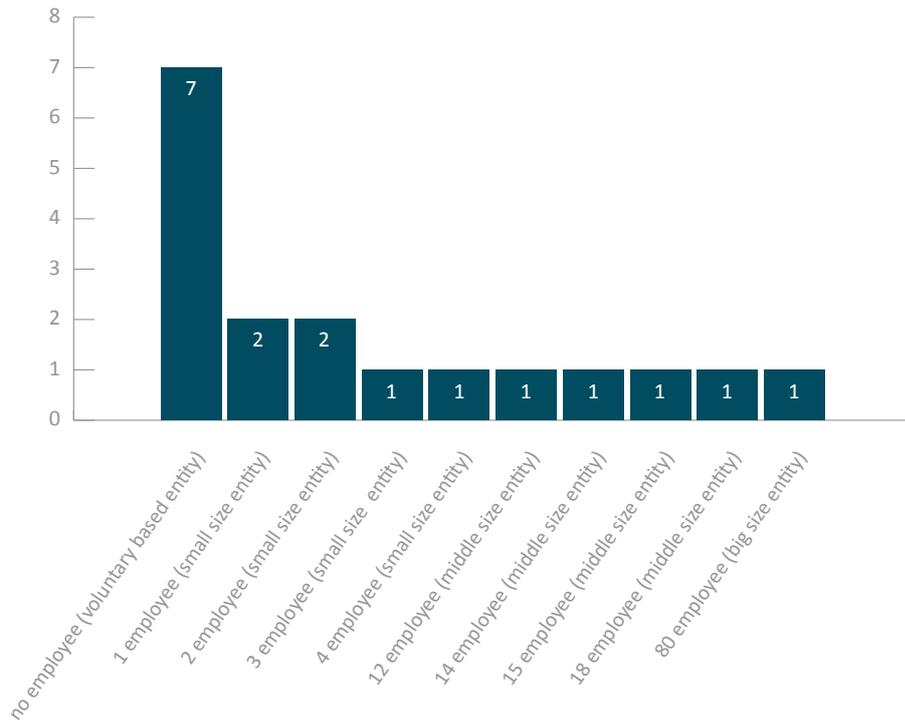
Based on the answers received for the questionnaire the average PHROM Member Organisation has eight employees, works with 53 volunteers and implements primarily social/community-based activities. Yet these average numbers are misleading. These very high numbers come from the fact that one NGO (probably one of the biggest in Malta) works with 80 employed staff members and together with the second and third biggest respondent NGOs works with more than 850 volunteers.

A more realistic picture is that almost 40% of the respondents have no employed staff members, one-third (33,4%) are small entities with one to four employees and one-fifth (22,4%) can be described as a middle-sized entities. In terms of volunteers the picture is very similar to that of employees: 16,7% of respondents do not have one single person, 50% have one to six volunteers, whilst 18,6% had 10 to 30. It is worth underlining that these figures are relevant to 2017.

On the other hand, responses reveal that PHROM has two Member Organisations with no employed staff members and also without (active) volunteers. In their concrete case, it is clear that PHROM should deeply analyse if there is a possibility to assist them with a consultation, technical support or any other form of assistance in order to reactivate them, if appropriate.



NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES



NUMBER OF VOLUNTEERS

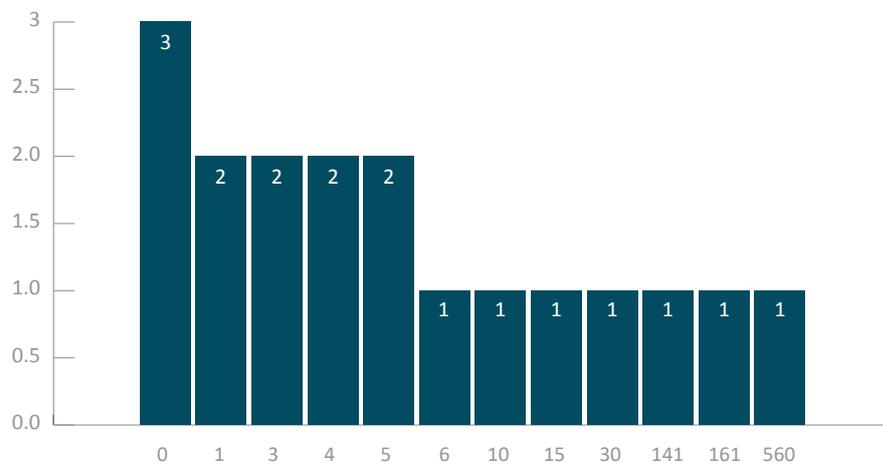




Table 5: Field of activities

Many of PHROM's Member Organisations have been active for several decades and have been focusing on a broad variety of targets, communities and issues. It is interesting to note that one of PHROM's largest Member Organisations (in 2017 with 18 employees and 560 volunteers) is one of Malta's oldest NGOs, inaugurated in 1991. Precisely one-third of the respondents claimed that their area of work is not only national but also international.

When asked for their three top areas of work for 2017, a majority of Member Organisations provided the following:

- social/community based activities;
- awareness raising campaigns; and
- political advocacy.

Notably, precisely half of the respondents claimed that in 2017 they submitted a proposal on changing an existing law, new legislation or policy. PHROM is also keen to underline that the adoption of marriage equality legislation, broadly seen as the major positive human rights development in 2017, could have not taken place without the clear and sound support of a group of human rights NGOs, many also PHROM Member Organisations.

Based on the provided responses, PHROM observes that it is also obvious that there are fields not or not sufficiently covered by human rights NGOs in Malta:

1. Research is not listed in the top three activities undertaken by PHROM's Member Organisations, although many of them actually include research⁵. In this regard, we note that most of the research done by PHROM's Member Organisations tends to focus only on those issues related to everyday work, with no evidence of research conducted into Malta's general human rights approach, policies, frameworks, etc.

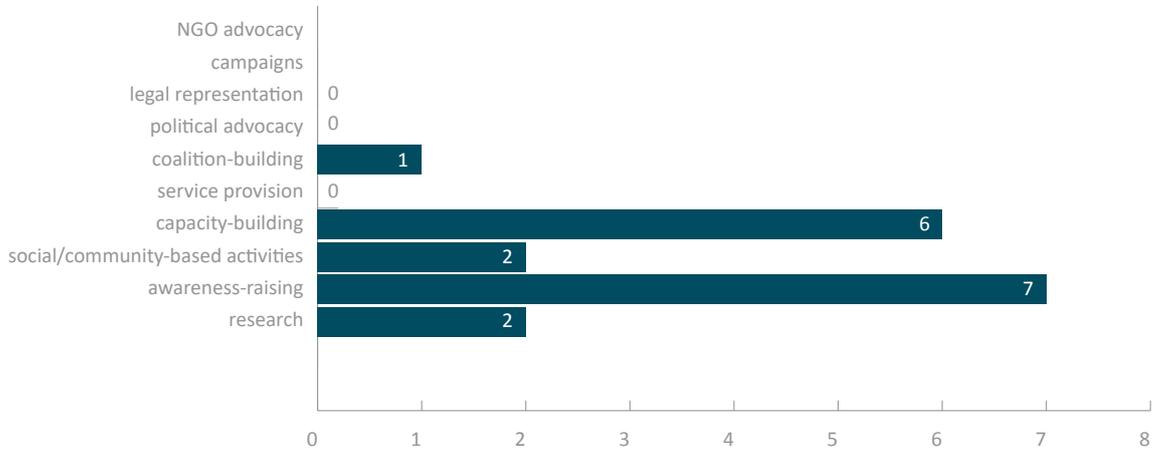
It is therefore relevant for PHROM to question whether there is a need for a think tank type entity working mainly with research and developing policy recommendations for the national level.

2. Coalition-building was mentioned specifically by aditus foundation – unsurprisingly, since it performs the task of PHROM Secretariat, with network management being a key responsibility. During the mapping exercise it was also clear that a strong, well organized and at the same time supportive coalition is essential to the Maltese NGO system, including those active on other fields than human rights. It might be also worthy to

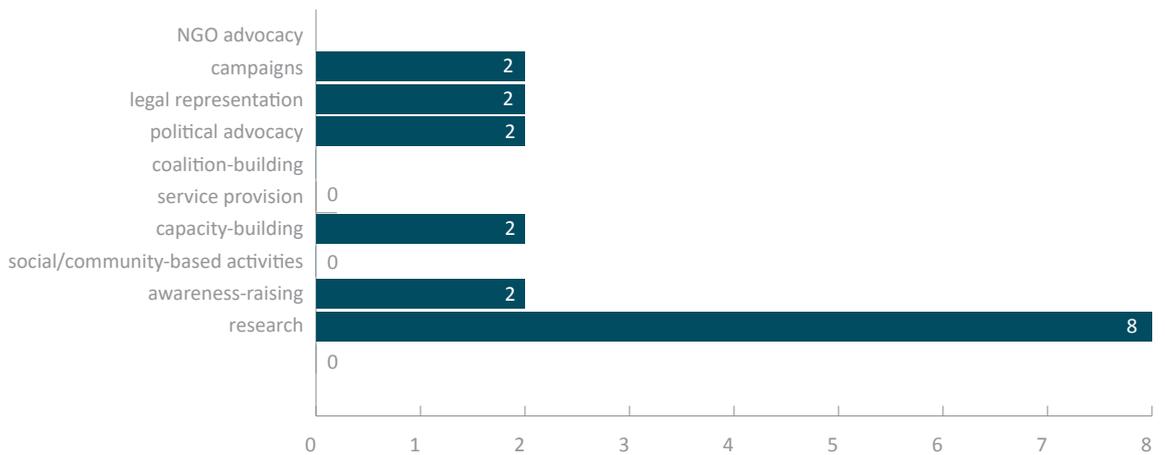
⁵ See, for example, the joint research publications of aditus foundation, Jesuit Refugee Service Malta and Integra Foundation at <http://aditus.org.mt/publications/>.



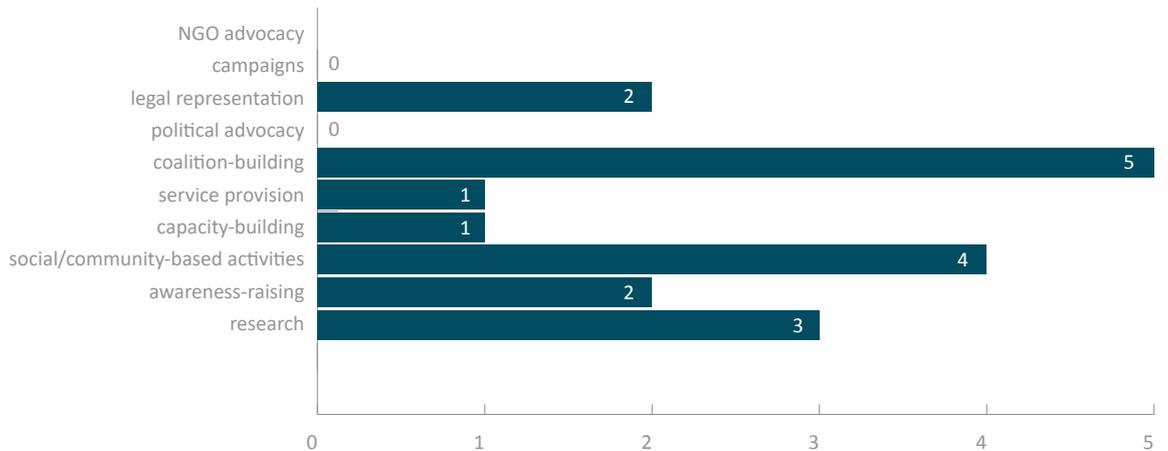
THE MOST IMPORTANT ACTIVITY



THE SECOND MOST IMPORTANT ACTIVITY



THE THIRD MOST IMPORTANT ACTIVITY



discuss the possibility of strengthening the roles of PHROM and of the Malta Council for the Voluntary Sector in terms of providing technical support to human rights NGOs (amongst others) in the areas of:

- a. knowledge and the IT background to initiate crow-funding activities,
- b. strengthening partnerships to build social base and embeddedness, and
- c. building public trust and recognition towards all type of NGOs.

3. Human rights advocacy was mentioned as a key activity only by two Member Organisations – which is rather a sign that coalition building, general NGO advocacy and political advocacy could be strengthened.

Table 6: NGO service provision

78% of respondents declared being service providers, and only a smaller part (28%) do this based on an agreement with the Government. The offered services vary in a wide range but a big part – altogether almost 40% – relates to social work or social activities. Although some PHROM Member Organisations offer medical help and training services, they didn't mention it among the first 3 priorities.

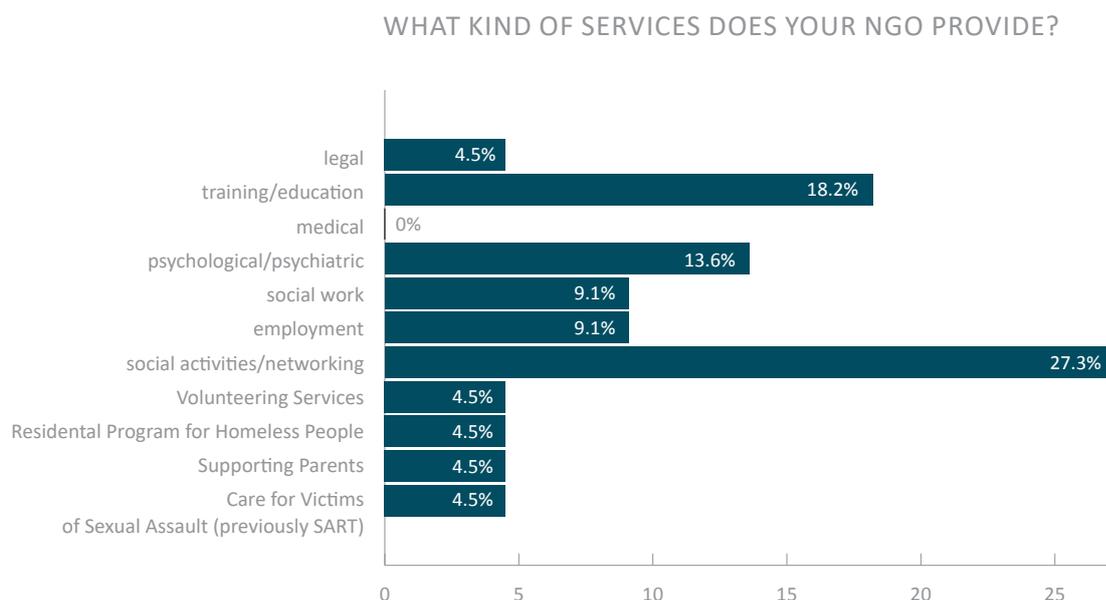
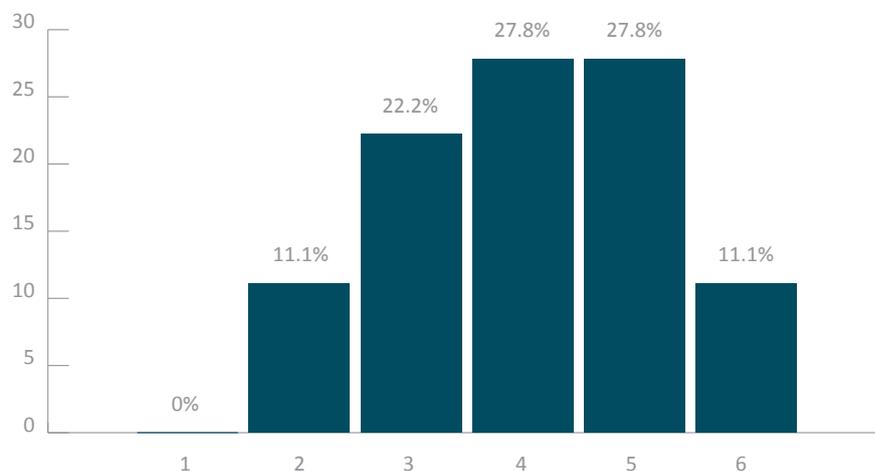


Table 7: NGOs and the Government of Malta

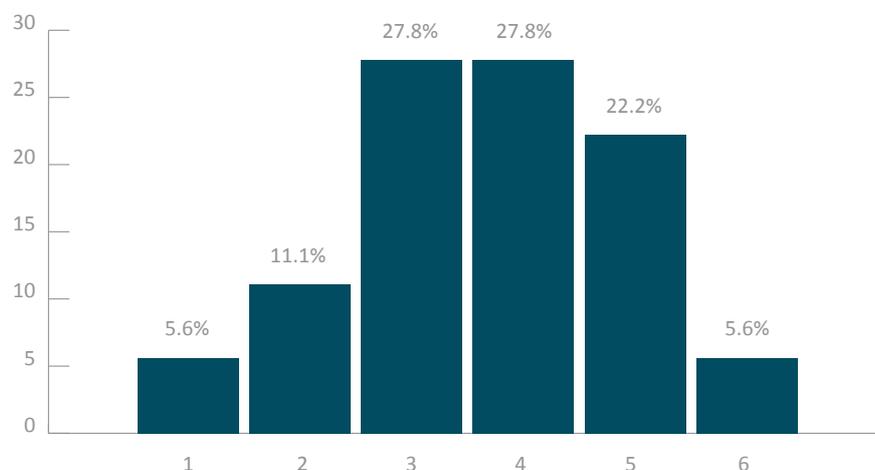
From the replies provided by the responding NGOs, it can be said that that PHROM's Member Organisations enjoy a high degree of independence from the Government and the general relationship is consolidated and based on mutual respect. Nevertheless, Member Organisations underlined their wish for more recognition, attention and regular meetings with different units of Government.



WAS YOUR WORK GENERALLY RESPECTED BY THE GOVERNMENT?



WERE YOUR DISCUSSIONS WITH GOVERNMENT IN-DEPTH AND EFFECTIVE?



On a scale from one to six (where 'one' means 'not at all' and 'six', fully) the respondent NGOs rated three as average and 4.05 as weighted average⁶ their thoughts about the level of respect their work enjoyed by the Government. More importantly, no Member Organisation rated 'zero' – meaning that the expectable minimum was achieved in terms of relations with the Government.

⁶ Weighted average is an average in which each observation in the data set is assigned or multiplied by a weight before summing to a single average value. In this process, each quantity to be averaged is assigned a weight that determines the relative importance of each quantity. Example: when calculating simple average each number counts equally in the calculation, meanwhile in a weighted average, those numbers occurring more often (having more effect) count more than others.

But if we examine the content behind the above-mentioned statements the picture immediately becomes more detailed. For the question whether their discussions with the Government were in-depth and effective, respondent Member Organisations provided lower ratings: three in average and 3.6 as weighted average. From this point of view, it looks like the Government should aspire for not only more meetings with human rights NGOs, but also for more effective, in-depth and targeted collaborations.

Table 8: NGOs self-impression

For the first time in the Annual Human Rights Report research methodology, Member Organisations were asked to give their impressions about their own work – at least a short, not too detailed comment on how they perceive their operations, impact and effectiveness. In relation to 2017, the vast majority (over 60%) of respondents are satisfied with their own performance, and only 17% felt that they did not contribute to human rights developments in Malta.

The answers to the question “*how did you contribute?*” picture a very detailed and also very colourful scene. The different PHROM Member Organisations felt that they contributed in the following fields:

“Concrete dialogue with government, part of relevant national coalitions (formal or informal), legal representation led to policy/legal changes.”

“Rights of victims and survivors of domestic violence and their children; rights of family caregivers of mentally ill persons; right to support access of vulnerable.”

“Equality legislation.”

“Hate Speech, online support service for youth, project on bullying, food security.”

“Food & shelter for all & social security.”

“Through drama certain situations were addressed and presented to the audience.”

“Advocacy for Gender-based and Domestic Violence Act, especially Article 25.”

“Support for victims of sexual violence.”

“We endorse all press releases denouncing abuses on migrants, in particular Africans.”

“Advocating for the inclusion of migrants in service provision – now they are included as employees within the Directorate for Integration and Human Rights.”

“To help break down social stigma and prejudice against families with LGBTIQ+ members, and by building dialogue with church leaders to reduce discrimination.”

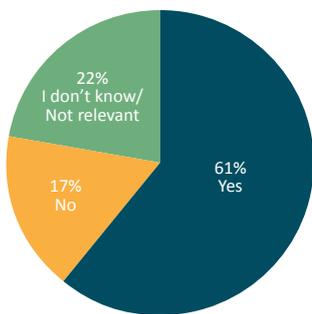
“Change in government policy regarding fostering and Care Orders issued.”

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Together with the opinion of these NGOs the questionnaire also wanted to shed light on the view of the organisations' beneficiaries. In relation to 2017, it turned out that only around the half of the respondents regularly compile feedback from their clients, beneficiaries, or members of their target groups.

DID YOUR ACTIVITIES CONTRIBUTE TO ANY OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS DEVELOPMENTS MALTA EXPERIENCED?



DO YOU REGULARLY CHECK THE SATISFACTION LEVELS OF YOUR BENEFICIARIES?

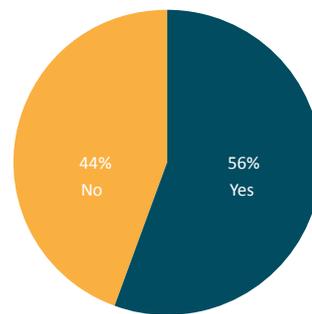
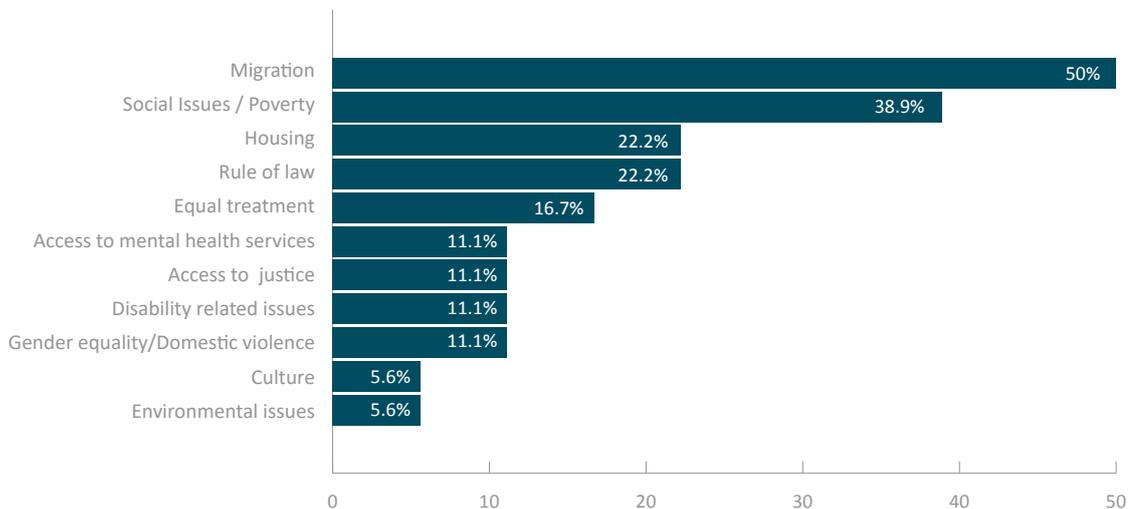


Table 9: Malta's main human rights challenges in the coming years?

Most of the respondent NGOs selected issues somehow relating to their daily operations, with one notable thematic exception. Half of the responding NGOs indicating that migration (specifically, migrant integration) will be a human rights challenge in the coming years. Poverty and social issues also seem to concern most organisations, particularly if housing issues are understood to be part of social challenges.

MAIN CHALLENGES IN THE NEXT YEARS



Conclusion

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2017 was an extremely important year, not only for those who were active in the field of human rights but for every person living in Malta.

In this year the Parliament reinforced the equalisation commenced through the former civil unions regime. The enactment made Malta the 15th nation in Europe, and 25th world-wide, to legalise marriage equality. The Family Court also approved the first adoption by a same-sex couple since the introduction of the 2014 Civil Unions Act.

This legislative change could have never happened without the persistent, coordinated and uncompromising work of NGOs. It is also remarkable that this progress is thanks to not only those NGOs who have been advocating for LGBTIQ+ rights for decades, but also to those organisations whose general field of work is generally independent from gay rights.

Malta's gender gap still remains one of the highest in Western European countries, yet it is positive to note that some measures were taken by the Government to support families. A free childcare scheme was broadened for children whose parents work or are in education

In 2017, representation of women in Parliament remained very low, with little information available on how this will be improved in the future. In the early election, out of the 211 candidates, only 42 (19,9%) were women and finally out of the 67 elected MPs only seven are women. This is two less than the previous legislature, amplifying Malta's rank as the second lowest (after Hungary) for female representation out of all the European Union Member States.

A National Children's Policy was developed by the Ministry for the Family, Children's Rights and Social Solidarity. The significant document advances Malta's efforts at safeguarding and promoting the rights and general wellbeing of children. It is also important to underline that this document was developed with the active involvement of the final beneficiaries, the children. On the other hand, PHROM remains concerned that 2017 saw no change in the situation in civil society where there is no NGO focusing specifically and exclusively on children's issues.

Environmental groups continued to express concern at the large-scale projects eating into Malta's Outside Development Zones (ODZ), while several civil society organisations pointed to a housing crisis for the most vulnerable due to rising rents. Interestingly, despite an increase in the level of activism related to the protection of the environment, such issues have not yet been fully integrated into a human rights discourse. It is also notable that Malta's activism on environmental issues has focused mainly on land use, animal welfare and traffic issues while ignoring Malta's dwindling water resources and the high cost of its provision.

As with the 2016 AHRR, the vast majority of PHROM Member Organisations believed the biggest challenge for 2017 was refugee/migrant integration. Several developments occurred throughout 2017, including:

- Malta denied permission to disembark three Libyan asylum-seekers who had been rescued within its search and rescue region;
- living conditions in detention centres remained problematic and of concern;
- the Office of the Refugee Commissioner started using the accelerated procedure in relation to asylum-seekers hailing from countries listed as being 'safe', resulting in their claims being declared inadmissible;
- Positively, Malta admitted 168 asylum-seekers under the EU relocation programme, a higher number than it had committed to;
- the Marsa Initial Reception Centre (IRC), where asylum-seekers were detained upon arrival without formal order was opened following a change in policy;
- new age-assessment procedures were introduced; asylum-seekers now automatically receive, along with the decision and the interview notes, the assessment memo explaining in details the motivation of the decision;
- Job Brokerage Offices were opened in order to facilitate third-country nationals' access to the labour market.

Furthermore, respondent NGOs remained concerned that migration was often used in political quarrels on national and international levels.

In 2017 Malta had to face one of its biggest crises in recent history, following the murder of journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia. She was an internationally-known journalist, writer, blogger, and anti-corruption activist who reported on political and

current events in Malta. In particular, she focused on investigative reporting into government corruption, nepotism, patronage, allegations of money laundering, and organised crime. For PHROM's Member Organisations, her death was not only an inexplicable and horrifying crime that shocked a nation and the whole of Europe, but also a sign that Malta needs to engage more effectively on issues of rule of law, transparency, anti-corruption and good governance. The fact that the names of the masterminds have not been published, and possibly not yet been discovered, hinders Malta's ability to process and overcome this incident. NGOs, international bodies and citizens continue to demand more effort, more transparency and more respect in this case.



