



Committee: Human Rights Council
Delegation: Malta

Topic: Countering disinformation

The Republic of Malta, a small island state at the crossroads of the Mediterranean, has long served as a bridge between regions, cultures and political blocs. The proliferation of social media and the internet has presented the country with numerous challenges related to disinformation, exacerbated by its highly polarised political environment. The political landscape is dominated by two major parties, the Labour Party and the Nationalist Party, which have shaped the country's two-party system since the Second World War.¹ This polarisation has, at times, created conditions in which disinformation can spread rapidly, affecting public discourse and undermining trust in democratic processes.

Disinformation in Malta has predominantly focused on political matters and has often manifested through coordinated campaigns targeting the media, including journalists, bloggers and activists, thereby challenging freedom of expression. In certain instances, disinformation has reportedly even been used by the government to obscure corruption, exacerbating public mistrust. The 2017 assassination investigative journalist and blogger Daphne Caruana Galizia, who exposed high-profile corruption scandals², remains a stark illustration of the severe consequences that disinformation can have in polarising society and fostering violence within the community. Her tragic death sparked extensive national and international debate regarding the protection of media freedom and the risks faced by journalists in the exercise of independent reporting. In connection with this case, a massive disinformation campaign was launched in 2021 through spoofed websites, fabricated articles and emails purporting to be from journalists reporting on the assassination of Daphne Caruana Galizia. The primary objective was to discredit the media and sow doubt on the prosecution's case against the individual accused of the murder.³ The persistent presence of deliberately misleading information on social media remains a substantial problem in Malta, undermining informed public discourse and democratic resilience.

Malta's current legal framework offers limited mechanisms specifically aimed at preventing further spreading of disinformation, with the Criminal Code incriminating the spread of fake news and hate speech. However, the consistent and effective enforcement of these provisions continues to be a challenge. In some instances, civil defamation laws have been used in ways that may inadvertently restrict public debate, including through Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs), rather than functioning as tools to counter disinformation. A research conducted by the Coalition Against SLAPPs in Europe (CASE) revealed that in 2022 Malta recorded 19.93 SLAPPs per every 100,000 inhabitants, the highest of all member states.⁴ These experiences illustrate that repressive measures alone are insufficient to address a complex and dispersed phenomenon such as disinformation.

¹ Wikipedia contributors. (2025, April 22). *Politics of Malta*. Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Politics_of_Malta

² Mallia, M. (2024). *Disinformation landscape in Malta*. EU DisinfoLab. https://www.disinfo.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/20241118_Disinformation-landscape-in-Malta-3-1.pdf

³ Borg, J. (2021, August 29). *Newsbook, Net, Repubblika latest victims of website spoofing*. Times of Malta. <https://web.archive.org/web/20240614132940/https://timesofmalta.com/article/newsbook-is-the-latest-victim-of-website-spoofing.896524>

⁴ The Daphne Caruana Galizia Foundation & Coalition Against SLAPPs in Europe [CASE]. (2023). *SLAPPs: A Threat to Democracy Continues to Grow: A 2023 report update*. <https://www.the-case.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/20230703-CASE-UPDATE-REPORT-2023-1.pdf>

Recognising these limitations, Malta has increasingly focused on complementary approaches, including the promotion of media literacy, public awareness campaigns and independent fact-checking initiatives, aimed at strengthening the resilience of citizens and institutions against misleading or false information. Maltese media played a central role in these efforts, establishing movements and non-governmental organisations dedicated to improving the quality of public information. Notable organisations include MedDMO, Times of Malta, The Shift News and Republikka.⁵ The Mediterranean hub of the European Digital Media Observatory (MedDMO) brings together journalists, media literacy experts and researchers from Malta, Greece and Cyprus to counter disinformation and foster a healthier information space.⁶ In 2022, Times of Malta, the country's oldest daily newspaper, partnered with MedDMO and has since created a section in their newspaper specifically designated to fact-checking. Republikka, a civil society movement promoting human rights and democratic accountability, has participated in legal inquiries related to past cases of government misconduct, originally exposed by Daphne Caruana Galizia, which led to criminal proceedings against several high-level officials.⁷ These initiatives collectively demonstrate Malta's commitment to strengthening societal resilience, promoting transparency and ensuring that accurate information underpins democratic governance.

Building on these national measures, Malta's leadership has increasingly emphasised the critical importance of countering disinformation to safeguard the integrity of democratic institutions, societal cohesion and public trust. In this context, Malta's Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Tourism, in collaboration with the Council of Europe, hosted a conference on building democratic resilience to disinformation, highlighting the country's commitment to media plurality and media literacy education, particularly among younger generations who are more susceptible to misinformation. Christopher Cutajar, Permanent Secretary at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Tourism of Malta, stressed that democratic resilience to disinformation is a core national security priority, requiring both protection of the information space and investment in citizens' skills to reinforce democratic culture.⁸ Furthermore, Ian Borg, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Tourism of Malta, underlined that disinformation represents "a deliberate attack on the information ecosystem that sustains free societies." He noted: "The threat of disinformation, supercharged by the internet and artificial intelligence, is global. No nation can act alone." He highlighted that multilateral solutions, grounded in cooperation and shared learning, are essential, including empowering individuals with media literacy and critical thinking as well as deepening engagement with digital platforms to mitigate harmful content.⁹

These statements demonstrate Malta's leadership commitment to combining national initiatives with international collaboration to create a resilient information ecosystem. It supports increasing investment in transparent data-sharing systems, digital literacy programmes and encouraging social media companies to adopt clearer mechanisms for identifying and mitigating

⁵ Mallia, M. (2024). *Disinformation landscape in Malta*. EU DisinfoLab. https://www.disinfo.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/20241118_Disinformation-landscape-in-Malta-3-1.pdf

⁶ Mediterranean Digital Media Observatory. (2023). *MedDMO at a glance*. MedDMO. <https://meddmo.eu/about-us/meddmo-at-a-glance/>

⁷ Mallia, M. (2024). *Disinformation landscape in Malta*. EU DisinfoLab. https://www.disinfo.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/20241118_Disinformation-landscape-in-Malta-3-1.pdf

⁸ Council of Europe. (2025, September 17). *Malta conference explores how to build democratic resilience to counter disinformation*. Council of Europe. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/freedom-expression/-/malta-conference-explores-how-to-build-democratic-resilience-to-counter-disinformation>

⁹ Council of Europe. (2025, September 17). *Malta conference explores how to build democratic resilience to counter disinformation*. Council of Europe. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/freedom-expression/-/malta-conference-explores-how-to-build-democratic-resilience-to-counter-disinformation>

harmful disinformation. Malta seeks the inclusion of these priorities in the committee's final resolution.

Topic: The implications of plastic pollution on human rights

Plastic pollution poses significant challenges for Malta due to its unique geographical position, which offers both opportunities and vulnerabilities. As a popular tourist destination in the heart of the Mediterranean, tourism has evolved into a major sector of the Maltese economy, contributing substantially to the country's GDP.¹⁰ However, the benefits of this industry are increasingly offset by environmental pressures, including elevated levels of litter, light pollution and the decline of wildlife in certain areas of the island.¹¹ Endangered marine species, including sea turtles and seals, are particularly vulnerable to ingestion or entanglement in plastic debris, undermining biodiversity and ecological resilience.¹² All in all, tourism has become one of the leading contributors to pollution in Malta.

Marine pollution and the degradation of the sea ecosystem are a pressing concern for Malta, with direct implications for sustainable development, ecological integrity and human well-being. Data collected from Maltese beaches and coastlines on marine litter collected between 2017 and 2018 indicate a clear predominance of plastic items in comparison to wood, metal, glass, paper, cloth and others. Cigarette butts, plastic bags and bottles were identified as the most common plastic items.¹³ The presence of macro- and microplastics negatively impacts Malta's economy, particularly sectors reliant on clean coastal environments, including tourism and fisheries. Tourists are often deterred by the increasing accumulation of plastic debris on beaches, while simultaneously contributing to the problem, leading to a decline in tourism revenue. Local fisheries are also affected, as debris and microplastics disrupt marine habitats, threatening the sustainability of traditional fishing activities and the communities that depend on them.¹⁴

The environmental degradation caused by plastic pollution further exacerbates human rights concerns, as citizens' access to a clean, safe and healthy environment is compromised. According to Eurostat, in 2023, over a third (34.7%) of Malta's population reported that pollution, grime, or other environmental issues had affected their household - the highest share of the population reporting such problems among all EU member states.¹⁵ However, this issue is multidimensional and responsibility cannot be attributed solely to the tourism sector. In 2021, Eurostat conducted a survey on recycling performance in EU member states, which revealed that Malta had the lowest recycling rate for plastic packaging in the European Union, recycling just 21% of its plastic packaging.¹⁶ The combination of these factors underscores the need for comprehensive domestic

¹⁰ Jachimowicz, P., Klik, B., & Osińska, A. D. (2024). *Plastic Pollution in Paradise: analyzing plastic litter on Malta's beaches and assessing the release of potentially toxic elements*. *Toxics*, 12(8), 568. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11359196/#sec1-toxics-12-00568>

¹¹ Attard, N. (2021, September 27). The cost of tourism on the environment. BirdLife Malta. <https://birdlifemalta.org/2021/09/the-cost-of-tourism-on-the-environment/>

¹² Miller, K., Santillo, D., & Johnston, P. (2017). *The Presence and Impact of Plastic Litter in the Mediterranean Sea: Greenpeace Research Laboratories Technical Report (Review) 05-2017*. Greenpeace Science Unit. <https://www.greenpeace.to/greenpeace/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/GRL-TRR-05-2017-plastic-litter-in-the-Mediterranean-June-2016.pdf>

¹³ Environment & Resources Authority [ERA]. (2021). *Single-Use Plastic Products Strategy for Malta: 2021-2030 Rethink Plastic*. In era.org.mt. <https://era.org.mt/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Single-Use-Plastics-Strategy.pdf>

¹⁴ Malta Independent. (2013, August 11). *EEA warns on dangers of marine litter*. The Malta Independent. <https://www.independent.com.mt/articles/2013-08-11/news/eea-warns-on-dangers-of-marine-litter-2302410752/>

¹⁵ Eurostat. (2025, September 1). *12% of EU population reported pollution in their area*. Eurostat. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/ddn-20250901-1>

¹⁶ Cummings, J. (2023, October 24). *Malta was worst recycler of plastic packaging in EU in 2021*. Times of Malta. <https://timesofmalta.com/article/malta-worst-recycler-plastic-packaging-eu-2021.1062939>

and international measures to address the complex economic, environmental and human-rights implications of plastic pollution.

In response to the pressing challenge of plastic pollution, Malta is actively pursuing measures to minimise its impact at both national and international levels. Central to the country's legislative framework is the Environment Protection Act, which establishes governmental responsibilities for the prevention of marine pollution, the safeguarding of biodiversity and the sustainable management of coastal areas. This statute also created the Environment & Resources Authority (ERA), which is tasked with collecting, holding and making environmental information publicly accessible. It monitors waste exports, maintains the national waste inventory and tracks data related to air pollutants.¹⁷ Notably, ERA has recently introduced a new measure to combat plastic pollution, called the Single-use Plastic Products Strategy. Its goal is to ensure the protection of the environment and human health from plastic pollution by reducing consumption of single-use plastic products and increasing the quantities of single-use plastic waste recycled.¹⁸

These national measures reflect Malta's commitment to international cooperation under its membership in the Barcelona Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean, which serves as a legal framework for The Mediterranean Action Plan of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP/MAP). Malta ratified the treaty in 1977, thereby becoming an active participant in the MAP system, which promotes regional coordination and the development of an integrated institutional and legal framework to ensure sustainable management of Mediterranean marine and coastal resources.¹⁹ The Barcelona Convention and its Protocols constitute a sophisticated multilateral framework that supports the sustainable use of marine and coastal environments, while enhancing knowledge on the interactions between development and environmental protection in the region.²⁰ This holds profound importance for the Republic of Malta, given its central location in the Mediterranean and its direct exposure to the severe impacts of climate change and marine plastic pollution.

In this context, Malta constantly emphasises the significance of data-driven policy coherence and transboundary collaboration in addressing environmental pollution.²¹ Many government officials highlight that addressing plastic pollution is a priority not only for environmental protection but also for securing sustainable livelihoods, protecting public health and ensuring intergenerational equity. Environment Minister Miriam Dalli states that “engaging families and children in sustainability is crucial for fostering a culture of environmental responsibility”. Furthermore, the Minister emphasises the need for more public events that would raise awareness about pollution and “educate and inspire collective action towards a greener Malta”.²²

While these represent only a selection of the measures undertaken, they reflect Malta's broader and enduring commitment to multilateralism, sustainable development and the protection of human rights. Malta remains dedicated to fostering resilient institutions and evidence-based

¹⁷ National Statistics Office [NSO]. (2023). *Environment and Resources Authority (ERA)*. National Statistics Office Malta. <https://nso.gov.mt/environment-and-resources-authority-era/>

¹⁸ Environment & Resources Authority [ERA]. (2021). *Single-Use Plastic Products Strategy for Malta: 2021-2030 Rethink Plastic*. In era.org.mt. <https://era.org.mt/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Single-Use-Plastics-Strategy.pdf>

¹⁹ United Nations Environment Programme [UNEP]. (n.d.). *Who we are*. UNEP/MAP. <https://www.unep.org/unepmap/who-we-are>

²⁰ United Nations Environment Programme [UNEP]. (n.d.). *Who we are*. UNEP/MAP. <https://www.unep.org/unepmap/who-we-are>

²¹ Government of Malta. (2025, July 26). *Malta reaffirms its commitment to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* [Press release]. [https://www.gov.mt/en/Government/DOI/Press Releases/Pages/2025/07/26/PR251343en.aspx](https://www.gov.mt/en/Government/DOI/Press%20Releases/Pages/2025/07/26/PR251343en.aspx)

²² Government of Malta. (2025, June 2). *Ambjent Għalik: Hundreds visit funfair at ECOHIVE Academy* [Press release]. [https://www.gov.mt/en/Government/DOI/Press Releases/Pages/2025/06/02/pr250952en.aspx](https://www.gov.mt/en/Government/DOI/Press%20Releases/Pages/2025/06/02/pr250952en.aspx)

policies that can most effectively mitigate plastic pollution and its far-reaching impacts on both people and ecosystems.

Looking ahead, Malta believes that the international community must intensify coordinated efforts to address plastic pollution through strengthened data-sharing mechanisms, harmonised regional monitoring systems and capacity-building initiatives tailored to small island and coastal states. Malta further advocates for the advancement of circular economy practices, the reduction of single-use plastics at source and increased support for environmentally sound waste management infrastructure in vulnerable regions. The country urges the Committee to endorse enhanced education and public-awareness initiatives, recognising the role of societal engagement in reducing pollution at its source. Through these collective actions, Malta aims to ensure that no community is left behind in the global transition towards a cleaner, healthier and more sustainable environment.