



Between Visibility and Bias

Migration Narratives in Malta's Media Landscape

National Research Report Malta
Prepared by



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MILD promotes the production of a more accurate media coverage regarding migrants, asylum seekers, refugees and racialised people through research, training and communication activities. The research was carried out by African Media Association Malta.

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Introduction

Malta's foreign-born population has risen from 3 % in 2000 to 21 % in 2024. The media ecosystem combines a public broadcaster, two legacy party stations, three daily papers and several high-traffic digital portals. Facebook remains the number one news gateway for 70 % of adults. Irregular sea arrivals peaking at 3 406 in 2016 and 3 113 in 2023 dominate migration coverage even though residence permits issued to non-EU workers vastly outnumber asylum claims. Editorial decisions are therefore pivotal in shaping public perception.

In the framework of the Project MILD (More Correct Information, Less Discrimination), this report presents the qualitative findings of a research conducted between June -August 2025. The research was conducted simultaneously in the four partner countries: Spain, Italy, Greece and Malta.

Within this European framework, the Maltese national research contributes to the shared effort to identify patterns of misrepresentation, raise awareness about racism and discrimination, and document good practices that support more ethical and inclusive media environments.

The Maltese research phase focuses on how migration and diversity are framed in national media and professional contexts. The study explores journalists' and stakeholders' perceptions of inclusivity, accessibility, organisational practices, and representation of migrant voices. It also highlights emerging challenges, opportunities, and examples of positive change.

Difficulties / Obstacles Met

- Scheduling challenges with journalists and media professionals due to workload and newsroom deadlines.
- A small number of interviews were interrupted and had to be continued in a second recording.
- Sensitive topics (racism, discrimination) sometimes led to cautious or brief responses.
- Two organisations opted to provide written responses rather than participate in a live interview.
- Minor transcription issues (e.g., automated captions, overlapping speakers in group interviews) required careful cleaning.
- Strict anonymity constraints limited the use of detailed institutional identifiers in the narrative.

General Evaluation of the Work Done

- The fieldwork achieved a balanced and diverse sample of 15 participants (journalists, editors, NGO staff, academics, an activist, and a faith leader).
- Data quality is solid: 13 semi-structured interviews and 2 written responses provided depth and breadth of perspectives.
- The agreed partner framework (six categories) ensured comparability with other countries, while sub-themes captured Malta-specific patterns.
- The analysis was systematic: transcripts were cleaned, coded to the framework, and aggregated using a completeness table and participant counts per category.

Limitations include a modest sample size, potential self-selection bias, and the fact that not every participant provided substantive input across all categories.

Building on these preparatory and fieldwork stages, the following section outlines the methodological approach used to collect and analyse data in Malta. It describes how

participants were selected, how interviews were conducted and transcribed, and how the data were coded thematically according to the MILD framework.

This process ensured that findings from Malta are both context-specific and comparable with those from other participating countries.

Research Methodology

Design and Participants

The Maltese research adopted a qualitative approach based on semi-structured interviews and written responses. The goal was to capture in-depth insights from professionals who directly or indirectly shape public narratives about migration and diversity. In total, 15 participants contributed to the study: 13 interviews (conducted via Zoom) and 2 written questionnaire responses. The sample represented a balanced mix of sectors including journalists and editors, academics, activists and NGO representatives, and a faith leader. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure inclusion of individuals with relevant expertise in the fields of media, communication, or social inclusion. All participants were informed about the study objectives and ethical safeguards, and each contribution was anonymised using participant codes (P1–P15).

Data Collection and Transcription

Each interview followed a common research guide provided by the MILD consortium, ensuring methodological coherence across countries. The questions explored themes such as access to media professions, institutional inclusivity, representations of migrants, and practices to counter discrimination or hate speech. All interviews were recorded with prior consent and later transcribed verbatim. The research team then performed a cleaning process to remove repetitions, fillers, and non-relevant exchanges. In cases where multiple speakers appeared in a single

interview (e.g., group sessions), individual contributions were clearly segmented to maintain analytical consistency.

Analytical Framework and Coding

The analysis combined the common partner framework with an inductive coding approach to identify Malta-specific nuances. The six agreed analytical categories were:

1. Commitment and Accessibility
2. Knowledge and Awareness
3. Prevention Policies
4. Cultural and Media Context
5. Racism in Mainstream Media
6. Best Practices and Proposals

Each transcript and written response were reviewed line-by-line, and relevant excerpts were coded under one or more of these categories. During the analysis, sub-themes naturally emerged within categories where several participants raised similar points; for instance, repeated references to “boat images” led to the sub-theme Visual Stereotyping, while recurring mentions of migrants’ lack of representation informed the sub-theme Invisibility of Voices. This approach allowed the team to retain the comparative structure set by the MILD framework while capturing Malta-specific thematic depth.

Counting and Aggregation

To ensure consistency and transparency, a completeness table was used to record whether each participant provided substantive input for every thematic category. A participant was counted as

having contributed to a category if their response included a meaningful reference or reflection on that theme. Hence, while all 15 participants responded to the overall interview, not every participant was counted under each category; some offered brief or neutral remarks, while others provided in-depth contributions spanning multiple themes.

The final counts were aggregated across participants and presented visually to illustrate the distribution of thematic engagement across the Maltese sample.

Ethics and Data Protection

All interviews and written responses were conducted and stored following ethical and data protection standards consistent with the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Participants' identities and affiliations remain confidential, and no identifying information appears in this report. Direct quotations are anonymised and presented in *italics*, with references to participants denoted as (*P1, P2, ... P15*). Only the research coordination team at the African Media Association Malta had access to the original recordings and transcripts.

Main Findings

1. The Organisational Context

1.1 Overview of Participants' Professional Settings

The Maltese MILD sample reflected a diverse professional landscape. Among the fifteen participants, the majority were journalists or editors working in both mainstream and independent outlets. The group also included academics and researchers specialising in communication and media studies, NGO representatives engaged in advocacy and inclusion, an activist with field experience, and one faith leader involved in interreligious dialogue and social support.

This diversity ensured that the findings reflect the perspectives of actors positioned across the information chain from news production and policy advocacy to education and community engagement. While professional experience varied significantly, most participants demonstrated a long-standing involvement with migration-related issues or intercultural communication.

When asked about the presence of foreigners or people of foreign origin in their professional contexts, responses varied: some noted the increasing diversity within newsroom teams, university classrooms, and NGO networks, while others emphasised that in many Maltese media organisations, migrants remain *largely absent from staff structures*. Several journalists acknowledged that while migrants are often subjects of reporting, they are rarely part of the production teams.

"I don't think there are foreign journalists working in mainstream media here. Most newsrooms are still quite homogenous,"

This limited representation of foreign professionals reinforces the gap between media narratives about migration and the lived realities of diverse communities.

Perceptions of Access and Inclusivity
Across the interviews, participants commonly agreed that formal access to journalism is open, but practical barriers persist for foreigners or people with migrant backgrounds. Language proficiency, recognition of academic credentials, and informal hiring practices were repeatedly cited as obstacles.

"Even if someone with a migrant background wanted to work in the media, I'm not sure they would be given a chance unless they were already very established,"

From the quantitative data, 11 of the 15 participants agreed that foreigners face challenges in accessing the journalistic profession, with several explaining that these barriers are systemic rather than intentional. A few participants, mainly from the NGO and academic sectors, felt that interest among migrants to enter journalism is also limited, partly due to perceived inaccessibility or lack of mentorship.

Overall, inclusivity was described as aspirational, but underdeveloped organisations often support equal opportunity in principle but lack concrete mechanisms to put it into practice.

Internal Organisational Policies and Practices
When asked about existing policies facilitating access for foreigners, most participants stated that no formal guidelines or recruitment frameworks are in place. Some mentioned general equality or non-

discrimination clauses within institutional charters, but acknowledged that these are rarely operationalised.

“There’s goodwill, but not much structure behind it. It depends a lot on individual attitudes rather than institutional policy,”.

Regarding internal communication and language use, responses were moderately positive. The majority agreed that their organisations tend to use inclusive and respectful language, particularly within NGOs and academic environments. However, this inclusivity was less consistent in external communication for example, in how media outlets frame migration stories for the public. Training opportunities on diversity, equal opportunities, or anti-discrimination were limited or non-existent in most workplaces. A few NGO participants noted periodic awareness workshops, but journalists and academics largely reported no structured capacity-building in this area.

“We talk about diversity all the time, but there’s no actual training about it,”.

Workplace Climate and Awareness

When reflecting on the general awareness of racism and discrimination within their work environments, most participants acknowledged that awareness has improved in recent years but remains surface-level. Many linked this to Malta’s size and demographic structure, where close networks often replace formal mechanisms for addressing discrimination.

Only a few participants reported having heard of specific cases of racist behaviour within their professional settings, and those

were typically addressed informally rather than through official procedures.

“People are more careful with language now, but subtle forms of bias are still present. They just go unreported,”.

Overall, the organisational context across sectors reflects good intentions but insufficient formalisation awareness exists, but practical implementation of equality and inclusion policies remains uneven.

1.2 Knowledge and Awareness

General Awareness of Racism and Discrimination

Participants demonstrated a shared recognition that racism and bias exist within Maltese society, though not all considered it equally prevalent in their professional contexts. Across interviews, a common thread was the perception that public awareness has increased, particularly following EU-wide discussions about diversity and inclusion, but that media institutions have been slower to adapt internally.

“We’ve reached a stage where people are more conscious of what they say, but structural bias still finds its way into how stories are framed,”.

Most respondents described awareness in their work environments as “basic but improving.” Only a small minority felt that discussions on discrimination had become embedded in everyday professional culture. Some journalists observed that awareness is often reactive, triggered by incidents or controversies rather than ongoing institutional reflection.

From the quantitative grid, 12 out of 15

participants agreed that there is some level of awareness about racism in their workplace, but most noted that concrete mechanisms or training to translate awareness into practice remain lacking.

Language and Communication Practices

When asked whether organisations use inclusive and non-discriminatory language, most participants agreed this was partly true for internal communication, but less consistent in public outputs.

Many journalists said that inclusivity in language depends more on the individual editor or reporter than on institutional policy.

“It really comes down to who’s writing the story. There’s no standardised guideline on how to refer to migrants or sensitive issues”.

A few respondents from NGOs and academia mentioned intentional language policies, particularly in communications targeting youth and diverse communities. However, mainstream media actors admitted that while they try to avoid offensive terms, stereotypical framing especially around migration and crime still occurs, sometimes unintentionally. The absence of regular editorial discussions on inclusive reporting was a recurring concern. Several participants proposed that newsrooms adopt shared editorial guidelines.

Professional Training and Institutional Knowledge

When asked about training or workshops addressing equality, diversity, or anti-discrimination, nearly all participants reported no structured initiatives within their

institutions. This gap was particularly noted among journalists, who emphasised that professional development in Malta’s media sector is informal and often self-directed.

“Training doesn’t really exist unless you seek it yourself. Most people learn on the job,”.

NGO representatives, on the other hand, highlighted some positive experiences with EU-funded awareness projects or intercultural communication sessions, though these were short-term and not integrated into organisational systems. In general, respondents described a lack of institutional memory regarding diversity training, and new staff rarely receive orientation or resources on inclusive communication.

Perceptions of Institutional Respect and Equality

Nearly all participants agreed that respectful interpersonal relations exist in their workplaces regardless of background. However, they distinguished between personal respect and systemic equality, noting that friendliness does not automatically translate into equal opportunities or institutional sensitivity.

“People get along, yes, but that’s not the same as understanding privilege or discrimination”.

The distinction between individual goodwill and structural awareness was a major insight in this theme. Participants repeatedly said that while most colleagues show empathy, organisational leadership lacks the knowledge or initiative to embed diversity practices formally.

2. The Cultural and Media Context: Themes, Methods, and Voices in the Narrative on Migration

While the previous sections addressed internal practices and awareness within institutions, this part examines how migration and diversity are represented within Malta's media and communication landscape. It explores the themes, methods, and voices that shape public narrative, the narrative structures, visual methods, and thematic framing that shape how migrants and foreigners appear or fail to appear in public discourse in Malta identified through participant testimonies.

Across the interviews, participants consistently recognised the existence of dominant narratives surrounding migration in Malta, shaped primarily by national security and emergency discourses. Journalists and NGO representatives agreed that migration is often framed through political or humanitarian crises, leaving little room for everyday or success stories involving people of migrant background.

"When migration is covered, it's almost always linked to arrival, detention, or conflict. Rarely do we see migrants portrayed as neighbours, workers, or contributors,".

Several interviewees noted that this pattern is not unique to Malta but is intensified by the country's geographical positioning as a Mediterranean entry point. The media's heavy reliance on official sources such as government statements or military updates reinforces the institutional voice while

marginalising the perspectives of migrants themselves.

From the participants' perspective, the prevalence of such narratives reflects not only editorial priorities but also a lack of structural diversity in newsrooms, which limits alternative framings. The dominant narrative, therefore, sustains a sense of "us versus them", where migrants appear as outsiders to be managed rather than as part of Maltese society.

Visual Stereotyping

One of the most frequently discussed issues was visual representation, especially in photo and video coverage. Journalists acknowledged that imagery plays a powerful role in shaping public perception, and several expressed discomfort with the repetitive use of "boat images" to illustrate migration-related stories.

"Even when the article is about integration or education, you still see a photo of a dinghy full of people. It doesn't match the story, but it's what audiences expect,".

This recurring image of migrants arriving by sea has become symbolic shorthand for migration in the Maltese media. Participants described it as a form of visual stereotyping, which unintentionally reinforces fear, pity, or distance rather than familiarity and empathy. Some interviewees, particularly from the NGO and academic sectors, emphasised the need for visual diversity that reflects migrants' daily lives, professional contributions, and family interactions. They advocated for more deliberate editorial choices to avoid using visuals that perpetuate stereotypes.

Selective Empathy

A subtler but important theme that emerged was selective empathy, the tendency to humanise certain groups of migrants more readily than others. Participants noted that public sympathy often depends on nationality, gender, or religious identity, with European or Ukrainian migrants portrayed more positively than African or Middle Eastern ones.

"There's a double standard. Some groups are described as 'refugees fleeing war,' while others are 'illegal migrants,' even when their stories are similar,"

This differentiation reflects a broader hierarchy of empathy shaped by cultural proximity, religious bias, and political discourse. Several participants linked this to Malta's broader social context and historical relationship with Europe and the Mediterranean.

While some journalists admitted that these biases may be unconscious, others believed they are influenced by editorial pressures or assumptions about audience preferences. This indicates a need for editorial reflection and training to counteract such biases and promote more balanced storytelling.

Invisibility of Voices

Perhaps the most striking pattern across interviews was the invisibility of migrant voices in mainstream Maltese media.

Participants unanimously agreed that migrants are rarely invited to speak for themselves in news coverage, and when they are, their voices often appear as isolated soundbites rather than sustained narratives.

"You'll have a migrant speaking for two seconds, and then the rest of the story is taken over by politicians or police,"

This invisibility was interpreted as both a representation issue and an access issue. Migrants may not always be accessible to journalists due to language barriers or lack of trust, but several participants argued that journalists rarely make the effort to establish connections or build long-term relationships with migrant communities.

A few respondents mentioned encouraging examples such as community radio initiatives or feature stories that foreground personal experiences. Yet these remain the exception rather than the rule.

Overall, this invisibility contributes to a narrow and incomplete portrayal of migration, where migrants appear as objects of reporting rather than as subjects with agency and expertise.

Alternative Frames

Despite these challenges, several participants identified emerging examples of positive change.

Independent journalists, academic projects, and civil society initiatives have begun experimenting with alternative frames focusing on collaboration, shared community life, and mutual learning between Maltese and migrant residents.

"You can see a small shift in independent media and social campaigns where migrants are portrayed as contributors through art, food, or sports. It's still minimal, but it's happening,"

Examples included youth-led podcasts, cross-cultural storytelling workshops, and NGO-media collaborations that prioritise migrants' perspectives. These efforts, while limited in reach, demonstrate that alternative narratives are possible when inclusion is intentional, and resources allow for deeper storytelling. Participants suggested that amplifying these initiatives and integrating them into mainstream editorial agendas could gradually reshape public perceptions.

3. The Prevention Policies and the Production of Alternative (or Generative) Narratives

3.1 Media and Civil Society Organisations: Comparing Strategies

While the previous section focused on how migrants are represented in the Maltese media landscape, this section explores how media and civil society actors attempt to prevent hate speech, promote inclusion, and produce alternative narratives. It highlights areas of convergence and difference in their approaches, as well as the challenges that shape their capacity to foster long-term change. Participants across sectors agreed that the prevention of hate speech and the promotion of inclusive communication are increasingly recognised as important issues in Malta, but they also stressed that systematic strategies are rare. Both journalists and NGO representatives identified individual initiative as the main driver of inclusive practice, rather than structured institutional policies.

"There's a lot of good will, but no formal policy. It's more about who happens to be in the newsroom or what the editor believes in,"

This means that while isolated actions occur, they often remain ad hoc and depend on personal awareness or external project funding rather than long-term institutional commitment.

Media Sector: Fragmented Awareness and Limited Structures

From the perspective of media professionals, Maltese newsrooms tend to rely on informal editorial ethics rather than explicit anti-discrimination guidelines. Some editors and journalists mentioned the existence of internal codes of conduct that prohibit offensive language, but these are rarely linked to broader frameworks such as diversity standards or anti-racism principles.

"There's no newsroom policy saying how we should write about migrants. Everyone just uses their judgment,"

Only a few participants recalled having seen social media moderation policies or internal reminders about handling user-generated hate speech, typically when a public controversy forced organisations to act. Even then, responses tended to be reactive rather than preventive, focusing on deleting offensive comments instead of addressing their root causes through education or engagement.

Journalists highlighted the absence of training or continuous professional development on inclusive communication. As a result, awareness varies widely depending on individual exposure or interest.

"You have people who really care and others who have no clue. There's no standard practice,"

Civil Society: Structured but Project-Dependent Efforts

In contrast, civil society organisations (CSOs), including NGOs and faith-based groups, tend to operate with more explicit missions around inclusion, human rights, and social dialogue.

Representatives from organisations such as MOAS and SOS Malta explained that their communication teams consciously avoid sensational or divisive narratives, opting instead for storytelling that humanises migrants and focuses on shared humanity.

“We always double-check language and imagery before publishing anything. The aim is to remind people that migration is about people, not numbers.”

However, participants also emphasised that these efforts are often project-based and temporary, dependent on European or national funding cycles. Once a project ends, communication campaigns often lose visibility, and staff trained in inclusive messaging may move on to other initiatives. Despite this, CSOs appear more intentional than media outlets in producing alternative narratives for example, through public exhibitions, short documentaries, and community-based podcasts that feature migrants as active narrators rather than passive subjects.

“We involve migrants in designing our messages; they tell their own stories.”

Comparative Insights: Opportunities and Gaps

The contrast between the two sectors highlights both opportunities and structural gaps:

- Media organisations have a broader public reach but lack policy frameworks, training, and accountability mechanisms for inclusive reporting.
- Civil society actors possess strong ethical awareness and community trust but struggle with visibility, funding continuity, and access to mainstream platforms.

Bridging these two domains through collaborative journalism, joint campaigns, and training exchanges emerged as a key recommendation from participants. Several interviewees suggested that NGOs could support journalists with contextual expertise and community access, while media professionals could help NGOs amplify their messages to wider audiences.

“If we could combine the professionalism of journalists with the empathy and access NGOs have, the impact would be huge.”

3.2 Exemplary Case 1 – Ethical Journalism and Editorial Responsibility: Insights from Media Professionals in Malta

Background

One of the most significant findings from interviews with Maltese journalists and editors concerns the ethical responsibility of media professionals in shaping migration narratives. Several participants reflected on the tension between journalistic independence and structural constraints such as editorial policies, time pressures, and audience expectations. Their testimonies reveal how journalists in Malta navigate a complex media landscape marked by public sensitivity to migration

issues and limited diversity within newsrooms. As one editor explained:

"When migration stories break, the pressure is to publish quickly, not necessarily to get the whole story right. Context takes time and time is what we rarely have."

Another journalist described the emotional toll of working within restrictive newsroom environments:

"We try to report fairly, but sometimes the framing or the headline is changed later. It's frustrating when the final version doesn't reflect your intention."

These reflections highlight the daily ethical balancing act between professional standards, editorial expectations, and the public's appetite for quick, emotive headlines.

Communication Strategy and Interventions

The interviews revealed several informal but meaningful strategies that journalists use to preserve integrity and inclusivity in their reporting:

- Contextual framing: Striving to provide social and historical background when reporting migration stories.
- Language awareness: Deliberately avoiding dehumanising terms like "illegal migrants."
- Source diversification: Actively seeking perspectives from migrants, NGOs, and social experts to challenge single-story narratives.
- Editorial dialogue: Initiating internal newsroom discussions on bias and fairness.

One participant shared:

"Sometimes you have to fight for a single line in a story that changes its tone — like replacing 'illegal' with 'undocumented.' It seems small, but it matters."

Another noted:

"You learn to push gently. Over time, editors start to listen when you insist on fairer wording or balance in photos."

These individual-level practices, while not formally institutionalised, represent subtle yet powerful interventions that contribute to more responsible journalism.

Impact and Good Practice

The interviews demonstrated that journalists who consistently apply inclusive principles build stronger relationships with their audiences and sources.

"When you show respect in your reporting, people open up more even those who are usually sceptical of the media," said one reporter.

Examples of good practice include:

- Publishing human-interest stories that highlight migrant contributions to Maltese society.
- Producing long-form interviews where migrants speak in their own voice.
- Collaborating with civil society for accurate data and context.

These efforts reflect an emerging culture of ethical awareness in Maltese journalism, one that recognises the link between accuracy, empathy, and credibility.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

Despite these positive examples, journalists still face multiple barriers:

- Editorial pressure to focus on sensationalism or controversy.
 - Limited newsroom diversity, leading to underrepresentation of migrant perspectives.
 - Lack of structured training on anti-racist communication and inclusive reporting.
- Audience resistance toward stories perceived as too sympathetic to migrants.

As one participant observed:

"Sometimes the problem isn't bad intentions, it's that journalists are overworked and undertrained on how to talk about race and migration responsibly."

Even so, these professionals demonstrate that ethical journalism is not only possible but essential to building social trust. Their reflections embody the MILD project's aim: to foster *More Correct Information, Less Discrimination* through integrity, context, and care in media storytelling.

3.3 Exemplary Case 2/ SOS Malta (Solidarity Overseas Service)

SOS Malta – Building Social Awareness and Inclusive Narratives

SOS Malta offers a localised and community-centred approach to inclusion. This case demonstrates how Maltese civil society organisations can contribute to preventing hate speech and promoting intercultural understanding by engaging directly with communities, educators, and the media.

Background

SOS Malta is one of the country's most active NGOs in the fields of social inclusion, migration,

and development education. Its work combines advocacy, research, and public engagement to promote solidarity and equal opportunities across communities. In the context of the MILD research, SOS Malta's representative shared insights on how the organisation uses communication to foster respectful public dialogue around migration and diversity.

"We focus on helping people see how inclusion benefits everyone, not just migrants,".

SOS Malta's approach places strong emphasis on awareness-raising and capacity building, working closely with journalists, educators, and local institutions to address prejudice and misinformation.

Communication Strategy and Interventions

SOS Malta's communication work operates through educational campaigns, community projects, and strategic media collaborations. Key elements of its strategy include:

- Media literacy training: Supporting educators and youth to critically understand migration narratives.
- Awareness campaigns: Running projects such as *"I Belong"* and *"Voices of Inclusion"*, which highlight real migrant stories through digital and traditional media.
- Partnerships with local news outlets: Promoting responsible coverage by providing context, data, and human stories to journalists.
- Intercultural dialogue initiatives: Hosting workshops and public events that bring Maltese residents and migrants together for joint storytelling activities.

Through these activities, SOS Malta acts as a mediator between migrants, communities, and the media, helping to translate lived experiences into accessible, balanced narratives.

Impact and Good Practice

Participants described SOS Malta as a key bridge-builder between sectors. Its initiatives have increased public understanding of migration as a social and developmental issue rather than a crisis. Through its engagement with schools, local councils, and community centres, the organisation also ensures that its work reaches diverse audiences beyond traditional media consumers.

"The point is not to change headlines, but to change attitudes especially among young people,".

Notable examples of good practice include:

- Local radio collaborations featuring migrant and Maltese youth co-hosts.
- The use of participatory storytelling to counter stereotypes.
- Workshops for journalists and students on inclusive language and representation.
- These actions contribute to a broader culture of prevention, where communication is seen as a proactive tool for social change rather than a reaction to hate speech.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

Despite its success, SOS Malta faces similar structural barriers to other NGOs:

- **Project dependency:** Activities often tied to short-term funding calls.

- **Visibility gap:** NGO-led narratives rarely receive the same amplification as mainstream media stories.
- **Engagement fatigue:** Maintaining momentum in public awareness work requires continuous innovation.

Nevertheless, the organisation's sustained commitment to inclusion and cooperation with journalists represents a replicable model for combining education, communication, and civic engagement in small national contexts like Malta.

3.4 Exemplary Case 3 – Migrant-Led Journalism and Inclusive Storytelling: The Case of a Community-Based Media Platform

Background

Among the journalists interviewed, one recurrent theme was the importance of migrant-led initiatives in reshaping media narratives and expanding representation. A particularly significant example emerged from a discussion of a community-based online platform established and managed by migrant journalists in Malta.

The initiative was founded to address the limited portrayal of migrant communities in mainstream Maltese media and to create space for alternative perspectives, community stories, and intercultural dialogue. While most of its content is published in Turkish, selected posts and features are shared in English through social media, fostering broader accessibility and engagement across linguistic boundaries. The platform's mission reflects a growing effort among migrant journalists in Malta

to promote ethical, inclusive, and human-centred reporting.

As one participant explained, such initiatives aim to “*offer the stories that are missing*” those that highlight everyday experiences, contributions, and resilience rather than crisis-driven depictions.

Communication Strategy and Interventions

The platform operates through digital journalism, social media updates, and community-driven storytelling.

Its communication strategy focuses on:

- Countering exclusionary narratives by presenting migrant voices as credible sources rather than subjects of stories.
- Promoting intercultural understanding through stories of work, culture, and integration.
- Ethical visual representation, avoiding imagery that reinforces pity, victimisation, or fear.
- Collaborative approaches, where journalists and community members co-produce content that reflects shared realities.

The platform serves as an example of how digital media can be used to democratise information and shift public conversation from polarisation to participation.

Impact and Good Practice

Interview data suggest that this form of journalism has become an essential space for intercultural dialogue and visibility.

By documenting community experiences and highlighting stories of collaboration,

the initiative offers a model of inclusive journalism that prioritises authenticity and empowerment.

It also provides a reference point for future media collaborations between Maltese and migrant journalists, fostering exchange and mutual respect.

Examples of good practice include:

- Featuring community success stories that counterbalance negative stereotypes.
- Encouraging young migrant contributors to engage in journalism as civic participation.
- Sharing bilingual content on social platforms to expand audience reach and understanding.

Through these practices, migrant-led journalism in Malta contributes to the *More Correct Information, Less Discrimination (MILD)* vision by expanding the range of voices represented in the public sphere.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

Despite its achievements, the platform operates within structural and contextual limitations:

- Language barriers limit readership beyond the migrant community.
- Resource constraints restrict the consistency of publication.
- Limited visibility within mainstream Maltese outlets reduces opportunities for collaboration and influence.

Nevertheless, the experience demonstrates how migrant journalists can act as agents of change within the media landscape.

Their initiatives not only diversify perspectives but also challenge dominant narratives, showing that inclusion begins with who tells the story.

4. Proposals & Recommendations

The analysis of interviews and written responses revealed both convergence and divergence among Maltese stakeholders working in or around media communication. While participants came from different professional backgrounds including journalists, editors, civil society actors, faith leaders, and academics their reflections converged around a shared recognition: racism and exclusion in media narratives persist, but can be countered through awareness, collaboration, and ethical storytelling.

The following key findings summarise the main insights from the Maltese context, followed by targeted recommendations for policy, practice, and education.

4.1 Key Findings

4.1.1 Persistent Structural and Cultural Biases

Across interviews, participants described a media landscape still dominated by crisis-driven narratives and institutional perspectives. Migrants continue to be portrayed through lenses of emergency, dependency, or otherness. Visual representation remains limited, with repetitive imagery (e.g., boats, borders, crowds) reinforcing stereotypes. Even where empathy is expressed, it is often selectively

extended to some groups (e.g., Ukrainians) more readily than others (e.g., sub-Saharan Africans).


These patterns reflect deeper structural issues, including the lack of diversity within Maltese newsrooms and insufficient interaction between journalists and migrant communities.

4.1.2 Gaps in Organisational Policies and Professional Standards

Only a few organisations have formal anti-hate speech or diversity communication policies.

Most journalists rely on personal ethics or editorial judgment, while NGOs integrate inclusion more systematically but within project-based frameworks that lack continuity. There are no standardised newsroom guidelines or regulatory expectations related to anti-racism in communication, leaving a gap between goodwill and implementation.

Journalists noted that while ethical awareness is increasing, there are few institutional policies to support inclusive reporting leaving much of the responsibility to individual initiative.



“Everyone agrees hate speech is wrong, but there’s no shared definition of what that means in practice.”

4.1.3 Limited Visibility of Migrant Voices

A key recurring concern is the absence of migrant perspectives from public communication.

Migrants are often spoken about but not spoken to, resulting in an incomplete

understanding of their experiences and contributions. Civil society initiatives (such as SOS Malta) and emerging migrant-led or inclusive journalism platforms are working to address this through direct storytelling, but these remain on the margins of mainstream coverage. The invisibility of migrant expertise also means migrants are rarely consulted as knowledge holders, even in areas where they are directly affected by policy or public debate.

4.1.4 Promising Practices and Micro-level Innovation

Despite structural limitations, there are islands of innovation that demonstrate what inclusive communication can look like:

- Journalists and editors are developing more ethical approaches to reporting migration, prioritising accuracy, fairness, and inclusive language.
- SOS Malta continues to build inclusion through education and media literacy initiatives.
- Migrant-led media platforms, such as the community-based initiative highlighted in this research, contribute by amplifying underrepresented voices and countering stereotypes.

These examples show that change is already happening in small but impactful ways often driven by individuals or organisations committed to rethinking traditional narratives.

4.1.5 Need for Collaboration and Training

Most participants expressed interest in cross-sector collaboration between journalists,

academics, and NGOs. They highlighted a need for joint workshops, mentoring, and shared editorial resources to build a common understanding of inclusive communication.

"We all want to do better, but we rarely sit together to talk about how,".

4.2 Recommendations

Policy-Level Recommendations

1. **Develop national media diversity and inclusion guidelines** to standardise language, imagery, and editorial approaches regarding migration and minority representation.
2. **Integrate anti-discrimination frameworks** within professional and public broadcasting standards, ensuring accountability.
3. **Support long-term funding** for NGO–media collaborations that promote ethical storytelling and counter hate speech.

Professional and Organisational Recommendations

1. **Encourage newsroom-level policies** on hate speech moderation, inclusive sourcing, and fair visual representation.
2. **Establish continuous training** for journalists, editors, and communication officers on anti-racism, unconscious bias, and intercultural reporting.
3. **Foster media-NGO partnerships** for content co-creation, offering migrant communities more opportunities to participate in shaping narratives.
4. **Create professional incentives** (awards, fellowships, funding calls) for inclusive and balanced reporting on migration.

Educational and Capacity-Building Recommendations

- 1. Embed media ethics and diversity modules** in journalism and communication curricula at tertiary level.
- 2. Encourage experiential learning projects** that bring journalism students together with migrant communities.
- 3. Promote media literacy programmes** for the general public especially youth to help audiences critically assess biased or misleading narratives.

Cross-Cutting Recommendations for the MILD Project and EU Stakeholders

- 1. Strengthen transnational knowledge sharing** between project partners to replicate successful practices.

- 2. Facilitate local follow-up workshops** after the report dissemination to turn insights into practical action plans.
- 3. Use research findings to inform future policy dialogues** on diversity, representation, and hate speech prevention at the European level.

5. Conclusion

The Maltese experience shows that despite its small scale and limited resources, change is possible through intentional collaboration, ethical commitment, and the empowerment of diverse voices. Preventing hate speech and promoting inclusive narratives require not only policy tools but also human connection, empathy, and education, the very values that underpin the MILD project's mission across Europe.

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Annex 1

Interviews framework



Semi-structured interview grid

PERSONAL DATA

What gender do you identify with?

1. Female
2. Male
3. Non-binary
4. I prefer non to define myself

What is your or your family's country of origin?

How old are you?

1. 18-30
2. 31-45
3. 46-60
4. 61-75

QUESTIONS

1. Commitment and accessibility

- a. Within your professional context, are there any foreigners or people of foreign origin?
- b. How does the organisation where you work promote equal opportunities and the presence of foreigners and people of foreign origin?
- c. Do you think there is a problem with the access of foreigners, people of foreign origin or people with a migrant background to the journalistic profession? If so, what do you think are the main causes?
- d. Within your professional context, are there policies which facilitate access to the profession for foreigners or persons of foreign origin?
- e. Have specific interventions been promoted to prevent/counteract hate speech on the social platforms of the organisation/media where you work?
- f. Could you describe 3 actions that contribute to a non-discriminatory working environment?

2. Knowledge and awareness

- g.** Do you think there is sufficient awareness in your work environment about the existence of racism in our country and how this can affect information?
- h.** Have you been informed about any instances of racist discrimination within your work context?
- i.** In your opinion, do all workers of your organisation feel respected and valued, regardless of their background or reference?

3. Prevention policies

- j.** How does your newspaper/organisation actively foster dialogue and mutual understanding between employees of different national origins?
- k.** What is your newspaper/organisation's commitment to recognizing and valuing different individual and cultural backgrounds?
- l.** In your opinion, does your organisation use 'inclusive' and non-discriminatory language in its internal communication? And in external communication?
- m.** Are training sessions and workshops on equal opportunities and the prevention of all forms of discrimination planned within your workplace?

4. The cultural and media context

- n.** Looking at the media landscape, what are, in your opinion, the narratives that feed stereotypes towards migrants, refugees and people with a migration background?
- o.** What are the issues on which media narratives about migrants, refugees and racialised groups in general tend to focus? What are the most recurrent stereotypical narratives? Is there anything new compared to the past?
- p.** Does the problem of invisibility of the voices of foreigners or people of foreign origin in media narratives persist in your opinion?
- q.** Do you have information regarding possible good practices that may be promoted by traditional media, anti-racist movements and civil society organizations about monitoring and addressing misinformation and producing alternative narratives of migrants, refugees and racialized groups?

Free to decide if making the following questions only to antiracist activists and alternative media

- r.** How much and how is racism reported in the mainstream media? Is it recognised as a structural problem?
- s.** In your organisation and more generally in the world of antiracist activism, is there or is there not a deficit in the ability to define effective communication strategies and relevant alternative narratives? If yes, how could one concretely intervene to fill this deficit?

Annex 2 List of Interviewed Media/Organizations

NAME OF MEDIA / ORGANISATION TYPE	DESCRIPTION / CATEGORY	NO. OF INTERVIEWS
Malta Haber	Migrant-led online news platform	2
Times of Malta	National newsportal	1
Amphora Media	Independent journalists / editors	2
MCAST	Tertiary education institution (Media & Journalism Department)	1
MOAS (Migrant Offshore Aid Station)	NGO working on humanitarian and migration issues	1
SOS Malta	NGO Involved in inclusion and community projects	2
Faith –Based Organization	An organization promoting social integration and dialogue	1
University of Malta	Research and academic institution	1
Independent Researcher	An academic researcher	1
Independent Activist	Civil society activist working on media and migration	1
Faith Institution Representative	Religious organization representative	1
Malta Today	National online news portal	1
TOTAL		15



Between Visibility and Bias: Migration Narratives in Malta's Media

Landscape is realised within the Mild – More correct Information Less Discrimination project. MILD promotes the production of more accurate media coverage of migrants, asylum seekers, refugees and racialised people through research, training and communication activities. The report offers an analysis of the forms of stereotyping, discrimination and racism present in the media and policies to date, with a view to promoting accurate information about racialised people and/or those with a migrant background.



AMAM: The African Media Association Malta (AMAM) is a media NGO founded in 2014 with the aim to positively portray migration through various online media forms including podcasts, video clips, articles and social media presence. AMAM addresses root causes of migration. It promotes social inclusion, human rights, respect, equal opportunities, and citizen journalism. AMAM aims to enhance migrant's media and digital literacy skills and advocates for the representation of minorities in the Maltese media landscape.



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