

NATIONAL SKILLS STRATEGY

2026 - 2035

Public Consultation

Summarised version

April 2026



NATIONAL
Skills
COUNCIL



GOVERNMENT OF MALTA
MINISTRY FOR EDUCATION,
SPORT, YOUTH, RESEARCH
AND INNOVATION



Funded by
the European Union



Contents

04 PAGE

Chapter 1: Introduction

06 PAGE

Chapter 2: The proposed Skills Strategy in Malta

09 PAGE

Chapter 3: The development process

24 PAGE

Chapter 4: Conclusion



Introduction

TURNING GLOBAL MEGATRENDS INTO OPPORTUNITIES FOR MALTA'S SKILLS SYSTEM

Skills are central to Malta's vision of enhancing citizens' quality of life, strengthening the country's economic and social foundations, and building a resilient, ambitious and dynamic future for all (Government of Malta, 2025). Across the globe, megatrends such as the net-zero transition, digital transformation, and demographic change are reshaping education and work. With a strategic approach to skills, Malta cannot only adapt to these shifts, but also leverage them as opportunities for sustainable growth, thereby contributing to the EU's Competitiveness Compass and advancing the Union of Skills.

Malta has successfully established core governance structures and policy frameworks to support effective skills development and use throughout the life course. As a result, the country has made significant progress in strengthening learning and enhancing the skills of the population. Over the past decade, the country has significantly reduced the share of early leavers from education and training (ELET), achieving one of the steepest declines in the EU. Enrolment in higher education continues to increase, surpassing the EU average and EU-level targets, and Malta is increasingly being seen as an attractive learning mobility destination in Europe (European Commission, 2024). Participation in adult learning has also risen, aided by incentives and improved



recognition of prior learning, and is now at par with EU-level targets (Eurostat, 2024; OECD, 2025).

Malta's labour market also makes intensive use of available skills, underpinned by strong employment outcomes and sustained labour demand. The country records one of the lowest unemployment rates in the European Union (2.7%, compared with an EU average of 6% in Q3 2025), indicating a very tight labour market (Eurostat, 2025^[5]). Labour demand is correspondingly high, with a job vacancy rate of 3.3% in Q4 2025 – surpassed only by Belgium and the Netherlands across the EU (Eurostat, 2025^[6]). Looking ahead, Malta is also projected to experience the highest employment growth in the EU by 2035 (Cedefop, 2024^[7]).

However, despite these improvements, persistent challenges remain. These challenges begin as early as compulsory education, with Maltese students scoring below the OECD average in mathematics, reading and science in the latest round of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) (OECD, 2023). This comparatively weak performance in skills continues well into adulthood, with 36% of adults in Malta having low levels of skills in comparison to the EU average of 25% in 2021 (OECD & European Commission, 2024; OECD, 2025). Without action, these skills gaps risk undermining Malta's productivity, innovation and competitiveness.

TOWARDS A COHERENT NATIONAL SKILLS STRATEGY FOR MALTA

In response to skills challenges, Malta has increasingly embedded skills-related objectives into national strategies, including Malta Vision 2050 and the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP). These strategies highlight reskilling and upskilling as effective policy levers to help Malta successfully adapt to global megatrends such as the digital and net-zero transitions (Government of Malta, 2025; European Parliament, 2025). In addition, the creation of the National Skills Council in 2023 further reinforced the centrality of skills policy in Malta (National Skills Council, 2025; OECD, 2025).

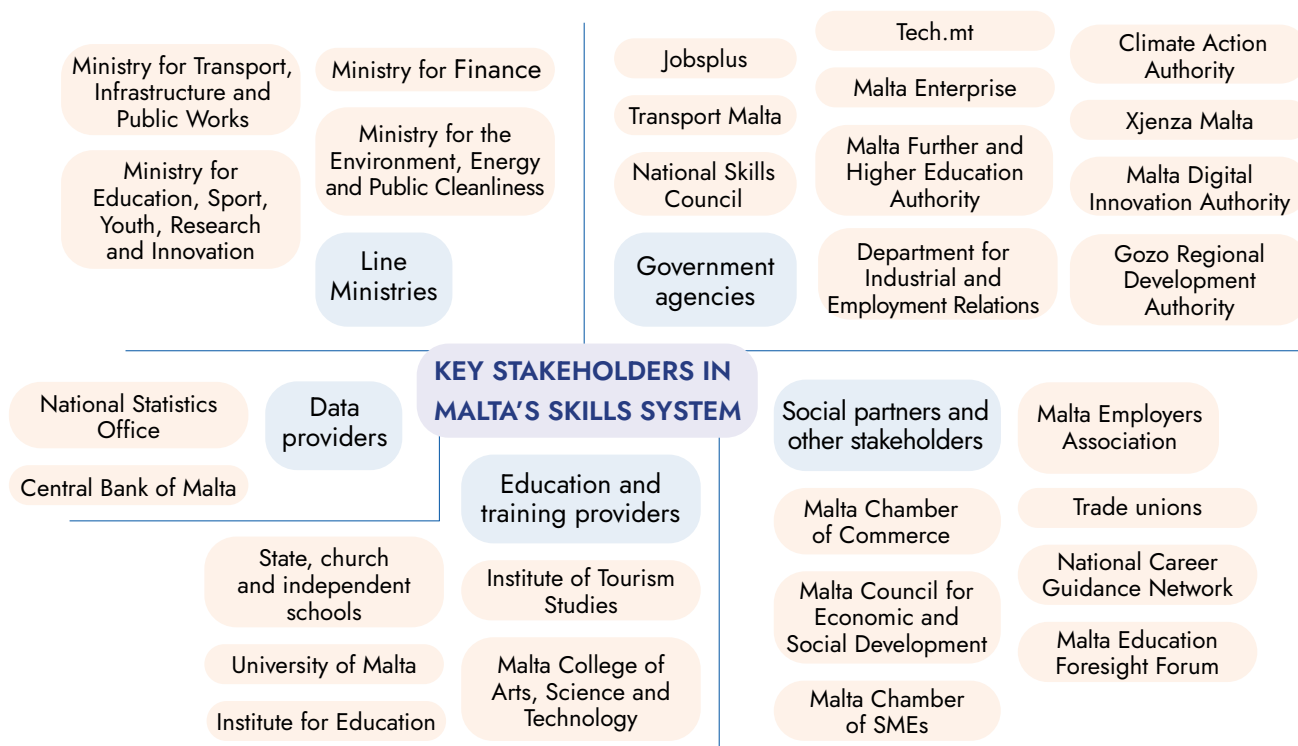
Building on these efforts, Malta formally launched in 2024 the development of a national skills strategy and a corresponding action plan for its implementation, requesting technical support from the EU. Until then, skills policy had not been addressed within a unified, strategic, and inclusive framework (OECD, 2025). Such a strategy is essential, given that skills policies are located at the intersection of education, labour market, industrial and other policy domains (OECD, 2019). A coherent skills strategy can provide a clear roadmap for achieving Malta Vision 2050, foster a shared agenda among stakeholders, and mobilise resources for timely reforms (OECD, 2019; OECD, 2024).

The proposed Skills Strategy in Malta

The development of the National Skills Strategy is funded by the European Commission through the Technical Support Instrument (TSI), with the technical assistance of the OECD Centre for Skills. It is led nationally by the National Skills Council. The project has engaged with multiple

government entities and stakeholders (see Figure 1.1) to identify skills gaps, formulate policy solutions based on international best practices adapted to local realities, and build consensus for reform.

Figure 1.1. Overview of key skills stakeholders in Malta’s skills landscape



Source: Questionnaire filled out by Malta; research and stakeholder consultations by the OECD Centre for Skills.

The project is well-aligned with EU policy priorities, including: the European Skills Agenda (Actions 1, 2, 3 6 and 12); the European Pillar of Social Rights (Principles 1, 3, 4 and 8); the 2030 Digital Compass 2030; the Council Recommendation on the 2023 Malta National Reform Programme on the provision of skills for the green transition; and EU investments through the European Social Fund+ to support initiatives for green skills (EUR 3 million) and scholarship schemes (EUR 6.75 million). In addition, the project also supports Malta in achieving EU headline targets, including achieving at least 60% of adults participating in yearly training, as well as the European Education Area targets on basic, tertiary and digital skills. Furthermore, the project advances EU recommendations from the European Semester and the European Year of Skills 2023, promoting the acquisition of green skills and improving the labour market relevance of education and training to reduce skills shortages and mismatches (OECD, 2025).

Each recommendation is shaped by three overarching objectives (OECD, 2025; TSI consultations of stakeholders, 2025):

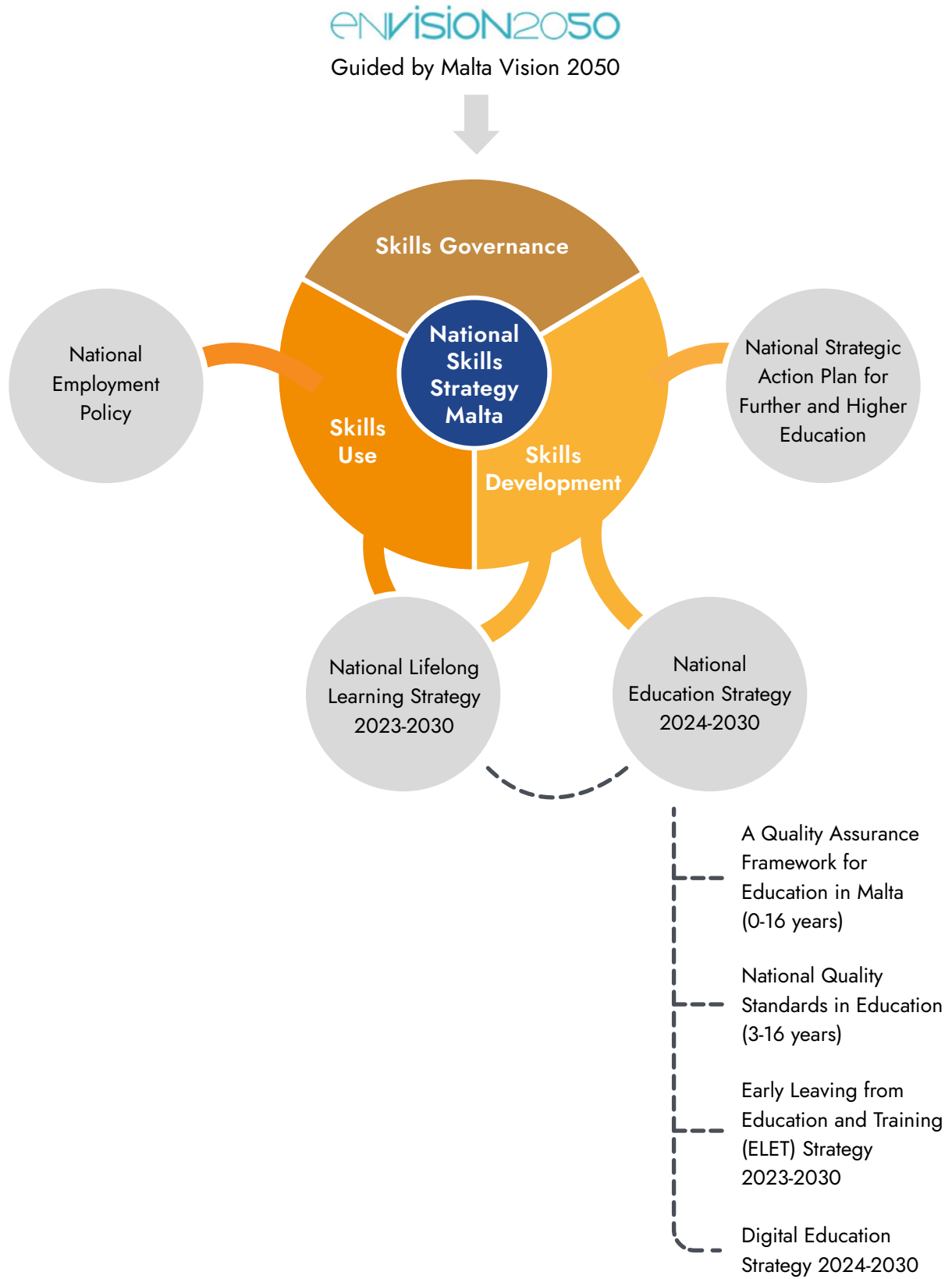
- **Developing future skills for the digital and net-zero transitions:** As Malta advances towards digitalisation and a net-zero economy, new skills are essential to maximise emerging opportunities and meet future workforce demands. To this end, the policy recommendations prioritise skills in areas such as environmental sustainability, digital and AI literacy, transversal skills, entrepreneurship, practical expertise, and research and innovation.

OVERARCHING OBJECTIVES

- 1 Developing future skills for the digital and net-zero transitions
- 2 Aligning the skills strategy with national priority and goals
- 3 Strengthening the skills of specific learner groups

- **Aligning the skills strategy with national priority and goals:** The recommendations have been verified for coherence with key Maltese policy documents, notably Malta Vision 2050, the Smart Specialisation Strategy, the National Education Strategy 2024-2030, the National Lifelong Learning Strategy 2023-2030, the National Strategic Action Plan for Further and Higher Education, and the National Employment Policy, among many others (see Figure 1.2). This alignment ensures coherence, avoids duplication, and promotes efficient use of resources.
- **Strengthening the skills of specific learner groups:** Providing tailored skills development opportunities for specific groups can help close skills gaps, promote equity, and make Malta's skills system more inclusive. The groups most at risk in Malta include adults with low education levels, learners from migrant backgrounds with low literacy in English and Maltese, persons with physical or mental disabilities, self-employed workers and small business owners, employees in declining industries (e.g. those affected by the shift away from fossil fuels), and older workers aged 50 and above.

Figure 1.2. Links between the National Skills Strategy and other strategic documents in Malta



The development process

The National Skills Strategy for Malta was developed through a structured and evidence-informed process combining research, analysis, and extensive stakeholder engagement. This approach ensured that the strategy is grounded in the realities of Malta's labour market, aligned

with national policy objectives, and informed by international best practices.

TIMELINE OF KEY ACTIVITIES

The strategy's development followed a clear sequence of activities over 2024 - 2026:

Date / Period	Key Activity
Early 2024	Awarded EU-funding through the European Commission's Technical Support Instrument. Project is led by the National Skills Council, with support from the OECD and European Commission.
Q3 2024	Kick-off stakeholder event , outlined the eight priority areas that the strategy will focus on
Q1 2025	Completion of the Analysis Report , synthesising Malta's skills system, labour market trends, and key challenges.
Q2–Q3 2025	Three multi-stakeholder workshops , engaging government, social partners, industry representatives, and civil society to validate findings and identify priority topics. Separate workshop targeting educators. One workshop including international best practices from Ireland, Latvia and the Belgium.
Q1–Q4 2025	A series of bilateral meetings held throughout with individual Ministries, training providers, and sector stakeholders to discuss specific needs and policy solutions.
Q3 2025	Drafting of policy recommendations , incorporating insights from the Analysis Report, stakeholder consultations and international best practices.
Q4 2025	Finalisation of the 30 evidence-informed policy recommendations forming the core of the National Skills Strategy.
April 2026	Launch of the National Skills Strategy for public consultation

NEXT STEPS



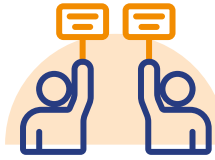
This combination of research, analysis, and consultations provided a robust evidence base that underpins the 30 policy recommendations, ensuring they are targeted, actionable, and aligned with Malta’s strategic objectives, including Malta Vision 2050 and the EU skills agenda.

PRIORITY TOPICS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on OECD analysis and consultations with stakeholders, the project team identified eight priority topics at the start of the project to reflect Malta’s national priorities for skills policy (listed below). For each priority topic, the project team identified action areas for improvement in the Analysis Report, offering broad direction for Malta to take in addressing skills challenges

(OECD, 2025). Building on these action areas for improvement, 30 evidence-informed policy recommendations across the eight priority topics were developed (see Figure 1.3).

The recommendations address key challenges in Malta’s skills system and are informed by desktop research, consultations with government and non-government stakeholders through three stakeholder workshops and a series of bilateral meetings, and international good practices. These include lessons from EU Member States as well as selected comparison countries that share similarities with Malta, such as Singapore as a small island state. The priority topics and a summary of the recommendations is presented below.



01. UNDERSTANDING MALTA'S CURRENT AND FUTURE SKILLS NEEDS

Identifying skills needs through better assessment, forecast & foresight exercises



02. MAKING SKILLS INFORMATION ACCESSIBLE TO ALL THROUGH CAREER GUIDANCE

Improving the dissemination of skills information and strengthening career guidance services



03. EMPOWERING EDUCATORS AND SCHOOL LEADERS

Empowering educators and school leaders for future-ready education



04. EQUIPPING LEARNERS OF ALL AGES WITH SKILLS FOR THE FUTURE

Developing green, digital, and transversal skills across the life course



05. ENCOURAGING AND INCENTIVISING LIFELONG LEARNING

Encouraging and incentivising adults to participate in learning activities



06. SUPPORTING EMPLOYERS TO DRIVE LEARNING AND GROWTH

Incentivising employers to stimulate learning in their organisations



07. MAXIMISING MALTA'S TALENT

Making better use of available domestic and foreign talent



08. WORKING TOGETHER FOR A STRONGER SKILLS SYSTEM

Strengthening the governance, coordination, and implementation of the skills system

Figure 1.3. Overview priority topics and recommendations

PRIORITY TOPIC 1 – IDENTIFYING SKILLS NEEDS THROUGH BETTER ASSESSMENT, FORECAST & FORESIGHT EXERCISES

1. Establish the Malta Skills Observatory as a dedicated working group to oversee a coherent national approach to skills assessment and anticipation (SAA).
2. Design a national SAA methodology and strengthen strategic foresight capacity aligned with national policy frameworks.
3. Introduce sectoral and firm-level SAA methodologies to capture localised and industry-specific skills needs.

PRIORITY TOPIC 2 – IMPROVING THE DISSEMINATION OF SKILLS INFORMATION & STRENGTHENING CAREER GUIDANCE SERVICES

4. Launch a dynamic skills intelligence platform with regularly updated insights on evolving skills needs.
5. Publish the Employment & Skills Barometer every two years in partnership with Jobsplus to provide a more detailed analysis of skills trends in an accessible format.
6. Explore the introduction of a universal career guidance service for all individuals to support mobility and progression.
7. Strengthen parents’ involvement in career guidance through enhanced school engagement mechanisms.

PRIORITY TOPIC 3 – EMPOWERING EDUCATORS AND SCHOOL LEADERS FOR FUTURE-READY EDUCATION

8. Assess the feasibility of introducing individual learning accounts (ILAs) for education practitioners to strengthen continuous, self-directed professional development.
9. Develop a competency framework for education practitioners to strengthen professional standards and skills development.

10. Strengthen training for school leaders to improve leadership skills and promote a learning culture among school personnel.
11. Establish digital platforms and networks for informal learning among educators to regularly exchange best practices in pedagogy and assessment.
12. Implement targeted information campaigns to promote the teaching profession and prevent teacher shortages.

PRIORITY TOPIC 4 – EQUIPPING LEARNERS OF ALL AGES WITH SKILLS FOR THE FUTURE

13. Establish a future-focused skills museum to foster transversal skills through non-formal and informal learning.
14. Integrate green skills across all education and training levels to prepare the workforce for the net-zero transition.
15. Promote vocational education and training (VET) as a rewarding pathway for acquiring high-value digital and green skills.
16. Identify priority areas for specialised post-graduate qualifications to support the digital and green transitions.
17. Conduct an in-depth evaluation of Malta’s quality assurance system to streamline processes and ensure future readiness.

PRIORITY TOPIC 5 – ENCOURAGING AND INCENTIVISING ADULTS TO PARTICIPATE IN LEARNING ACTIVITIES

18. Complement existing awareness-raising initiatives with a comprehensive national campaign to promote lifelong learning.
19. Strengthen existing incentives for adult learners, increasing benefits or easing eligibility criteria for target groups to encourage training in areas of skills shortage.
20. Increase uptake of recognition of prior learning (RPL) and validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) services, particularly for disadvantaged groups.



Strong skills governance

08



Anticipating skills needs

01



Skills information and career guidance

02

Empowering educators and school leaders



03

Future skills for all



04

Adult learning and upskilling



05

Learning driven workplaces



06

Better use of talent



07

PRIORITY TOPIC 6 – INCENTIVISING EMPLOYERS TO STIMULATE LEARNING IN THEIR ORGANISATIONS

21. Assess the feasibility of introducing legislation for training during working hours, training leave and payback clauses.
22. Strengthen in-house training within enterprises through the provision of practical tools for workplace learning.
23. Match readily-available trainers with enterprises – particularly SMEs to ensure reliable access to expertise.

PRIORITY TOPIC 7 – MAKING BETTER USE OF AVAILABLE DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN TALENT

24. Provide user-friendly information and targeted support to help firms particularly SMEs to adopt workplace productivity practices.

25. Support enterprise leaders and managers to promote strategic foresight and workplace innovation, and stimulate demand for higher-level skills.
26. Enhance validation systems to enable the effective use of skills card systems and examine the feasibility of extending their application and integrating them into existing digital platforms.
27. Develop a certificate recognising transversal skills to strengthen workers' employability.
28. Conduct a study on the causes, scale and socio-economic impact of brain drain to inform policies for talent retention and attraction.

PRIORITY TOPIC 8 – STRENGTHENING THE GOVERNANCE OF THE SKILLS SYSTEM

29. Strengthen skills coordination to better align skills supply and demand in the thematic areas of Malta's Smart Specialisation Strategy
30. Regularly review action plans and strengthen reporting mechanisms to ensure the strategy remains a living, responsive document.



01. IDENTIFYING SKILLS NEEDS THROUGH BETTER ASSESSMENT, FORECAST & FORESIGHT EXERCISES

Skills assessment and anticipation (SAA) exercises provide essential intelligence on current and future skills needs, enabling policymakers to address mismatches and design targeted interventions contributing to Malta's competitiveness. In Malta, strengthening national SAA capacity is a top priority, as existing initiatives are fragmented and inconsistent, contributing to over-qualification, underutilised human capital, and reduced productivity.

1. Establish the Malta Skills Observatory as a dedicated working group to oversee a coherent approach to skills assessment and anticipation (SAA). It is recommended that Malta establish the Malta Skills Observatory, a dedicated SAA working group that is led by the National Skills Council and includes key government and non-government stakeholders. Tasked to strengthen coordination and governance of skills intelligence, the group is expected to meet regularly and deliver tangible outputs to guide evidence-informed policy and education planning.

- 2. Design a national SAA methodology and strengthen strategic foresight capacity to identify skill needs in line with national policy frameworks.** It is recommended that Malta implement a unified national SAA methodology and strengthen strategic foresight in government to anticipate skills needs, improve labour market responsiveness, and guide long-term education and workforce planning in line with Malta Vision 2050 and Malta's Smart Specialisation Strategy.
- 3. Introduce sectoral and firm-level SAA methodologies to provide more nuanced, localised assessments of skills demand.** It is recommended that Malta complement national-level SAA with sectoral and local analyses to capture sectoral and firm-level skills needs, particularly within the Smart Specialisation priority areas and emerging fields linked to the net zero and digital transitions. Strengthening stakeholder engagement and investing in national registers can improve data quality and efficiency.



02. IMPROVING THE DISSEMINATION OF SKILLS INFORMATION & STRENGTHENING CAREER GUIDANCE SERVICES

Malta provides strong career guidance through schools and adult learning centres, but many adults remain unaware of available services, and skills information is fragmented and underused by guidance professionals. Improving the accessibility, timeliness, and relevance of skills intelligence is essential to help learners and key stakeholders make informed decisions and support workforce development for the digital and net-zero transitions.

4. Launch a dynamic skills intelligence platform to disseminate timely, regularly updated insights on evolving skills needs. It is recommended that Malta consolidate its career guidance and skills information into a single, interactive digital platform, offering labour market data and SAA results alongside user-friendly tools for skills assessment. The platform could offer dynamic, tailored interfaces for both the general public and career guidance professionals. To maximise accessibility, it could be made available in mobile-friendly formats and include multilingual features.

- 5. Publish the Employment and Skills Barometer in partnership with Jobsplus to provide a more detailed analysis of skills trends in an accessible format.** It is recommended that Malta publish the barometer every two years to summarise skills and employment trends, using data collected by the NSO and Jobsplus in addition to employer surveys. The barometer could also include labour market trends derived from national, sectoral and local SAA exercises.
- 6. Explore the introduction of a universal career guidance service for all individuals to support job mobility and progression.** It is recommended that Malta introduce a centralised service that offers free, personalised career guidance support to all individuals regardless of their profile or employment status. Existing providers may play a role in delivering these services according to their target groups (e.g. Jobsplus for jobseekers). It is important for Malta to promote the service as an accessible, lifelong resource available throughout individuals' learning and working lives.
- 7. Strengthen parents' involvement in career guidance through enhanced school engagement mechanisms.** It is recommended that Malta strengthen parental engagement in career guidance by enhancing the ExploreMore platform – including by linking it to the dynamic skills intelligence platform (see Recommendation 4) and real-time labour market insights from SAA exercises (priority topic 1). Malta could also expand outreach through multiple familiar channels, as well as integrating career guidance into parent-focused school events throughout the schooling journey.



03. EMPOWERING EDUCATORS AND SCHOOL LEADERS FOR FUTURE-READY EDUCATION

Developing future-ready and transversal skills is a central priority in Malta's education system. However, challenges remain, particularly in relation to teacher shortages in certain areas. Addressing these requires building an innovative and resilient educator workforce and strengthening school leadership, supported by structural reforms to teacher salaries, curriculum overload and rigid assessment practices.

- 8. Assess the feasibility of introducing individual learning accounts (ILAs) for education practitioners to strengthen continuous, self-directed professional development.** It is recommended that Malta pilot ILAs or alternative tools such as training vouchers to promote teachers' autonomy in their training choices and participation. Eligible training offers could prioritise training in skills for innovative pedagogy, digitalisation, and the net-zero transition.
- 9. Develop competency frameworks for education practitioners to strengthen professional standards and skills development.** It is recommended that Malta develop a competency framework that integrates subject expertise and pedagogical skills, structured across progressive levels of complexity. It is important to describe competences in clear, observable, and action-oriented terms, directly linked to everyday school activities such as teaching, learning, and assessment.
- 10. Strengthen training for school leaders to improve leadership skills and promote a learning culture among school personnel.** It is recommended that Malta introduce structured, accessible leadership training



programmes for school leaders, solidifying their understanding of their roles in promoting teacher training and introducing them to evidence-based practices that foster a culture of learning in schools.

- 11. Establish digital platforms and networks for informal learning among educators to regularly exchange best practices in pedagogy and assessment.** It is recommended that Malta enhance existing platforms used by teachers, such as Eskola, to provide virtual spaces for peer mentoring, community discussions, and the exchange of pedagogical practices supporting the acquisition of skills for the digital and net-zero transitions.
- 12. Implement targeted information campaigns to promote the teaching profession and prevent teacher shortages.** It is recommended that Malta complement past and existing awareness raising initiatives by launching an information campaign targeted to non-traditional audiences such as career changers, as well as young parents and their children. The design of the campaign could be enhanced by a study examining barriers to entry into the teaching profession and factors attracting potential applicants.

04. EQUIPPING LEARNERS OF ALL AGES WITH SKILLS FOR THE FUTURE

Malta is increasingly prioritising the development of future-ready skills in compulsory education and is seeking to further reinforce these skills across the life course. Developing a strong foundation for green, digital and transversal skills in childhood, and providing opportunities to develop these skills in adulthood, can help Malta build a future-ready workforce capable of thriving in rapidly changing labour markets.

13. Establish a future-focused skills museum to foster transversal skills through non-formal and informal learning. It is recommended that Malta establish a future-focused immersive space for learning, with an emphasis on developing transversal skills such as creativity, innovation, and critical thinking. This space could be promoted as a resource that is open to learners of all ages.

14. Integrate green skills across all education and training levels to prepare the workforce for the net-zero transition. It is recommended that Malta conduct a comprehensive mapping of how green skills are currently embedded in educational curricula to identify further opportunities for integration. Malta could also incorporate green skills into educator competency frameworks and training, as well as national education standards.

15. Promote vocational education and training (VET) as a rewarding pathway for acquiring high-value digital and green skills. It is recommended that Malta implement targeted information and awareness-raising initiatives to improve perceptions of VET, working closely with

career guidance services. This could include bringing VET role models into schools, providing accessible information on jobs for the digital and net-zero transitions, and promoting participation in skills competitions.

16. Identify priority areas for specialised post-graduate qualifications or awards¹ to ensure a steady supply of skills for the digital and net-zero transitions. It is recommended that the NSC, in partnership with relevant ministries and the thematic committees (recommendation 29), use the results of SAA exercises from the Malta Skills Observatory to identify priority skilling areas. In developing new qualifications, it is important to promote a co-creation approach between higher education institutions and employers, as well as collaborate with career guidance services to encourage uptake among learners.

17. Conduct an in-depth evaluation of Malta's quality assurance system to streamline processes and strengthen future-readiness. It is recommended that Malta consult regulatory bodies, educational institutions, employers and learners to examine key process issues, as well as identify opportunities to integrate future skills into quality assurance frameworks. The study may produce evidence-informed recommendations on the way forward, complemented by guidance on how to implement the recommendations in practice.

¹ In Malta, awards are certifications for programmes with less than the required number of ECTS credits to be considered a qualification at a specific MQF level. Awards are equivalent to micro-credentials and are also known as short courses (MFHEA, 2024).

05. ENCOURAGING AND INCENTIVISING ADULTS TO PARTICIPATE IN LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Encouraging adult learning in Malta is crucial to equip workers with skills for the digital and net-zero transitions, but motivation remains largely driven by external rewards. Many adults may therefore perceive little immediate need to upskill, especially in the context of a tight labour market. Participation is also constrained by logistical barriers, such as time pressures, highlighting the need for flexible, accessible learning pathways, particularly for disadvantaged groups with lower educational attainment.

18. Complement existing awareness-raising initiatives with a comprehensive, integrated national campaign to promote lifelong learning. It is recommended that Malta prepare a comprehensive nationwide campaign to promote lifelong learning, targeting diverse audiences with tailored messaging and multiple communication channels. To ensure inclusivity, the campaign could collaborate with trusted intermediaries and highlight flexible, accessible skilling opportunities that address barriers and emphasise the benefits of continuous upskilling.

19. Strengthen existing incentives for adult learners by increasing benefits and/or easing eligibility criteria for target groups to encourage training in areas of skills shortage. It is recommended that Malta review its range of existing incentives and explore how to increase the value of subsidies, offer more time allowance, and ease eligibility criteria for select sectors and disadvantaged groups. It is important to inform decisions on eligible sectors and target groups by the results of SAA exercises, with particular attention to skills needed for the digital and net-zero transitions.

20. Increase uptake of recognition of prior learning (RPL) and validation of non-formal and informal learning (VINFL), with a particular focus on disadvantaged groups. To maximise the impact of Malta's RPL initiatives, it is recommended to increase visibility and uptake – especially among disadvantaged adults – and scale up outreach in key sectors. Data collection and assessing outcomes is essential to ensuring these services effectively support access to education, training, and labour market opportunities.



06. INCENTIVISING EMPLOYERS TO STIMULATE LEARNING IN THEIR ORGANISATIONS

Employers are crucial in addressing Malta's skills challenges by providing relevant, high-quality training that supports both individual career development and firm adaptability to digital and net-zero transitions. However, many Maltese employers, particularly SMEs, face constraints such as limited time, resources, and concerns over employee turnover, resulting in below-average training provision compared with the EU27. Strengthening employer engagement in adult learning is therefore essential to close skills gaps, enhance workforce capabilities, and boost Malta's competitiveness.

21. Assess the feasibility of introducing legislation on training during working hours, training leave, and payback clauses. It is recommended that Malta undertake feasibility studies on introducing legislation mandating training during working hours, prioritising transversal, digital, and green skills. In parallel, it could help to explore a training leave policy with a wage replacement scheme to support employers in shouldering costs. To safeguard employer investments, Malta may also assess the feasibility of introducing payback clauses, defining eligible training

and including provisions for insolvency and extra-judicial settlement.

22. Strengthen in-house training within enterprises through the provision of practical tools for workplace learning. It is recommended that Malta equip enterprises with practical tools to assess training needs, such as accessible self-assessment instruments tailored to SMEs. Malta can also encourage low-cost forms of non-formal and informal workplace learning, such as job rotation and mentoring, by raising awareness of their benefits and available incentives.

23. Match readily available trainers with enterprises – particularly SMEs – to ensure reliable access to expertise. It is recommended that the NSC collaborate with the Chamber of SMEs to identify enterprises with training needs but that lack the necessary expertise to deliver training. These enterprises could then be matched with available trainers who can provide training during working hours. Malta could also explore establishing partnerships with foreign training providers to increase the supply of additional trainers and introduce international expertise.



07. MAKING BETTER USE OF AVAILABLE DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN TALENT

Developing relevant and advanced skills is essential, but their effective use in work and society is equally important to maximise economic and social returns. For Malta, ensuring full utilisation of both domestic and foreign workforce skills is vital for competitiveness, particularly given the country's high projected employment growth and focus on smart specialisation areas. Opportunities remain to strengthen skills use, including expanding management capabilities, enhancing enterprise capacity for innovation, and increasing retention levels of highly qualified professionals.

24. Provide user-friendly information and targeted support to help firms – particularly SMEs – adopt workplace productivity practices.² It is recommended that Malta provide a comprehensive suite of resources (e.g. diagnostic tools, information sheets) through a centralised online platform. This could be complemented by mentoring and coaching for managers and HR personnel, as well as financial subsidies to engage external experts in organisational management and innovation. Peer learning networks could further reinforce these efforts.

² Workplace productivity practices are defined as practices that aim to improve work organisation and job design (e.g. teamwork, autonomy, task discretion, mentoring, job rotation, applying new learning), as well as management practices (e.g. employee participation, incentive pay, training practices, flexibility in working hours) (OECD, 2019; OECD, 2021; Johnston et al., 2002). For a more detailed discussion, please consult Recommendation 24 in Chapter 2.



25. Support enterprise leaders and managers to promote strategic foresight and workplace innovation, and stimulate demand for higher-level skills.

It is recommended that Malta provide targeted training in innovation management and strategic foresight to encourage enterprise leaders and managers to integrate creativity and entrepreneurship into daily operations. This may be complemented with mentorship and networking opportunities to build capacity in developing growth strategies, emphasising the creation of demand for high-skilled roles aligned with the digital and net-zero transitions.

26. Enhance validation systems to enable the effective use of skills card³ systems and examine the feasibility of extending their application and integrating them into existing digital platforms.

It is recommended that Malta examine how to improve its validation system to support the effective expansion of the skills cards into other sectors. It is important to coordinate with the thematic committees mentioned in Recommendation 29 to define sector-specific skills and standards and determine the validity periods for the skills cards. Malta could also consider integrating the skills cards into existing digital infrastructure, such as BlockCerts via e-ID, to improve cost-efficiency and user familiarity.

27. Develop a certificate recognising transversal skills to strengthen workers' employability and support skills-based hiring practices.

It is recommended that Malta explore the development of a process to assess and validate transversal skills that aligns with existing national frameworks. The process should draw on a variety of assessment methods to recognise transversal skills acquired in schools, workplaces, volunteering, and community activities

28. Conduct a study on the causes, scale and socio-economic impact of brain drain to inform policies for talent retention and attraction.

It is recommended that Malta undertake a comprehensive study to assess brain drain, examining both push (factors driving emigration) and pull (factors attracting workers abroad) factors using multiple data sources (e.g. graduate tracer surveys, migration registers, stakeholder consultations). Based on these findings, Malta could consider developing a talent repatriation strategy with incentives such as tax breaks, as well as a diaspora engagement strategy.

³ Skills cards are tools that capture formal, non-formal, and informal learning outcomes through standardised assessments, promoting a skill-based approach to hiring. They help strengthen skills utilisation by verifying individuals' skills for work in specific industries and linking them to sectors with labour shortages (OECD, 2023; ILO, 2023). For a more detailed discussion, please consult Recommendation 26 in Chapter 2.

08. STRENGTHENING THE GOVERNANCE OF THE SKILLS SYSTEM

Effective implementation of Malta's National Skills Strategy requires coordinated engagement across government, industry, and civil society, yet Malta has scope to strengthen strategic capacity, inter-ministerial coordination, evidence-informed policymaking, and implementation compared with EU peers.

29. Strengthen skills coordination to better align skills supply and demand in the thematic areas of Malta's Smart Specialisation Strategy.

It is recommended to consider assigning additional functions to existing thematic committees (sector-specific), set up in relation to the Smart Specialisation Strategy through a clearer and more formalised mandate for skills-related coordination. Under this approach, the thematic committees could be formally tasked with addressing both demand- and supply-side dimensions of skills policy within their respective sectors, drawing on evidence from skills assessment and anticipation (SAA) exercises (see Recommendations 2 and 3). This would represent an expansion of their current advisory

role, moving beyond strategic discussion to include structured input on skills needs, training provision and workforce development, while remaining aligned with the objectives of the Smart Specialisation Strategy. Where relevant, Industry Skills Alliances could be established in other strategic sectors of the Maltese economy where thematic committees do not yet exist, particularly in line with the Malta Vision 2050.

30. Regularly review action plans and strengthen reporting mechanisms to ensure that the strategy remains a living document and supports effective and responsive implementation.

It is recommended that Malta adopt shorter, regularly renewed action plans with clear timelines for each policy recommendation, monitored through a designated contact point in the National Skills Council. Minor ad-hoc adjustments could be agreed upon with stakeholders to ensure responsiveness to evolving labour market needs, while ensuring timely delivery.



Conclusion

Malta is increasingly adopting a forward-looking approach to national strategies, aimed at strengthening economic sectors and preparing the country for long-term social and economic development. Central to the success of these strategies is the availability, development, and effective use of skills. A strong and adaptable skills base underpins productivity, innovation, and competitiveness across all sectors, which is why skills development is rightly positioned as a national priority.

The recommendations presented across the eight priority topics offer a practical and evidence-informed roadmap for strengthening skills assessment and anticipation, improving access to high-quality guidance and learning opportunities, empowering educators, supporting adult learners, engaging employers, making better use of domestic and foreign talent, and reinforcing governance and coordination. They reflect extensive consultation with national stakeholders and alignment with Malta's strategic policy goals, including Malta Vision 2050 and the EU's wider skills agenda.

Effective implementation of the National Skills Strategy will require sustained commitment, strong coordination across ministries and institutions, and continued engagement with social partners, employers, training providers, and civil society. These requirements are embedded within the Strategy itself, particularly under Priority Topic 8, which focuses on governance and collaboration to support delivery. An Action Plan for the implementation of each policy recommendation will be developed to ensure effective implementation.

The National Skills Council is committed to ensuring that this Strategy remains a living document. Through ongoing monitoring of external developments and internal dynamics, the Council will regularly review progress and, where necessary, propose adjustments to ensure the recommendations remain relevant and responsive to Malta's evolving needs. In doing so, the Strategy will continue to serve as a dynamic framework that supports Malta in building a resilient, inclusive, and future-ready skills system.

The National Skills Council invites you to participate in the public consultation process by submitting any feedback on how to make this Strategy serve as a framework to build a future-ready skills system.