

Coronavirus COVID-19 outbreak in the EU

Fundamental Rights Implications

Country: Malta

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1 Measures taken by government/public authorities

In Malta, on the 30th March 2020 (01:00hrs), 151 persons tested positive for covid-19, including two (2) recovered cases, three requiring intensive care and one in critical condition. No deaths have been reported. Live updates may be accessed at the [COVID-19 Malta Dashboard](#)¹, implemented by Public Health Officials working within the office of the Superintendent of Public Health and Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Directorate.

Prior to the outbreak of the virus in Malta, the government had been following the international situation closely and had already set up a website² and a helpline (111) for advice before the first case was announced. The first case of the Covid-19 virus was confirmed in Malta, on 7 March 2020.³ Since this point, those concerned they have contracted the virus, or need any other advice, have been requested not to attend health clinics, or the hospital emergency department, but to call the helpline.⁴ The Covid-19 Malta website provides information in both Maltese and English, with the latest updates, a timeline of developments as well as FAQs and a Fact Checker page.⁵ On 23rd March, a Legal Notice (LN) was issued, thus establishing the Self-Isolation of Diagnosed Persons Order. The LN stated that anyone having contracted the virus and persons residing in the same household must self-isolate for 14 days.⁶ This was accompanied by the Enforcement of the Order relating to Self-Isolation of Diagnosed Persons Regulations, which provides that breaching this isolation period, would subject the individual to a €10,000 fine.⁷ No measure of confinement or obligation to stay home for the whole population has been introduced at present.

The Prime Minister, Robert Abela, and Minister for Health, Chris Fearne, have been giving regular press conferences on updates of measures. The health authorities also release a briefing video daily, reporting on any new cases of the virus. These are always delivered in the Maltese language and complemented by sign language interpretation.⁸ The videos are transmitted live on social media and by the main news outlets.

On 15th March, the Migrant Health Liaison Office (under the Primary Healthcare department) disseminated materials about the virus to key stakeholders working with migrants, asking for them to be shared with clients, on social media and in open centres. These materials are available in English, French, Arabic, Somali, Tigrinya, Urdu and Bengali.⁹

On 10th March, a drive-through swabbing centre was opened in Hal Farruġ in order to increase testing capacity tests for Covid-19.¹⁰ Superintendent of Public Health, Charmaine Gauci, said the swabbing centre's location was chosen for its accessibility, as well as stating that the location, in is not a central location, which helps to limit the spread of the disease. A mobile testing unit is also available for those who cannot get to the centre, such as the elderly, and tourists.¹¹

With regard to restrictions to freedom of movement and travel bans, on 9th March 2020, Prime Minister Abela announced that all flights between Malta and Italy will be stopped, as well as the cruise liner

¹ www.covid19health.gov.mt

² Government of Malta, <https://covid19malta.info/>

³ Times of Malta, [Malta's first coronavirus cases are girl and parents](#), 7 March 2020.

⁴ Malta Today, [Coronavirus: who to contact for help and how to avoid catching the virus](#), 7 March 2020.

⁵ Government of Malta, <https://covid19malta.info/>

⁶ Legal Notice 99 of 2020, [Self-Isolation of Diagnosed Persons Order](#), 23 March 2020.

⁷ Legal Notice 98 of 2020, [Enforcement of the Order relating to Self-Isolation of Diagnosed Persons Regulations](#), 23 March 2020.

⁸ See for example: Malta Independent, [Watch: Three new cases of Coronavirus confirmed; no local transmission](#), 13 March 2020.

⁹ The materials were sent by email from the Migrant Health Liaison Office on 15 March 2020. They can now be accessed on Primary Health Care, [COVID 19 Multi-lingual Information Material](#), 2020.

¹⁰ Malta Today, [Coronavirus: Health authorities open new swabbing centre in Luqa](#), 10 March 2020.

¹¹ Malta Today, [Coronavirus: Health authorities open new swabbing centre in Luqa](#), 10 March 2020.

between Malta and Sicily.¹² Further to this, on 11th March it was announced that all travel between Malta and Switzerland, Germany, France and Spain would be prohibited.¹³

On 11th March the policy on quarantine was also stepped up, from voluntary self-isolation to mandatory quarantine, whereby as from 11 March, arrivals from those four countries listed above, anyone who arrived from Italy in 14 days previous as well as anyone residing in the same residence has to observe mandatory quarantine for 14 days at home. The Prime Minister announced that spot checks would be made by the police¹⁴ and anyone failing to observe quarantine orders will be subject to a €1,000 fine every time the conditions are breached. On 12th March, a legal notice was issued, establishing the Enforcement of Directions relating to Quarantine Regulations under the Public Health Act.¹⁵

In the 11th March press release, the Prime Minister announced that the measures would include the withdrawal of work permits and possibly deportation for third country nationals found in breach of quarantine rules¹⁶ This rhetoric was later further stepped up when on the 17th March, Economy Minister Silvio Schembri stated that any foreigners who lost their jobs due to the crisis and businesses closing would be deported: “Charity begins at home. Our primary focus are Maltese and Gozitan workers. The moment foreign workers lose their job they will have to go back to their country.”¹⁷ Parliamentary Secretary for Equality and Reforms, Rosianne Cutajar distanced herself from the comments made by Minister Schembri, calling for “respect and empathy” for all workers.¹⁸ The Minister later apologised for his comments, stating that no work permits would be terminated.¹⁹ On 18th March, 20 NGOs in Malta released a statement, condemning the language used by the Minister, stating; “When the nation is facing such challenging times, words of support and encouragement are far more productive than careless talk of unemployment and deportations”.²⁰ In connection to this, on 19th March 2020, it was reported that Deputy Prime Minister (DPM) and Health Minister, Chris Fearne had asked EU member states for help and cooperation on illegal immigration during the Covid-19 crisis, stating; “The challenges of illegal immigration, now more than ever, cannot be carried by a single country or by very few nations, especially countries which already have strained health systems due to the Covid-19 crisis.”²¹ DPM Chris Fearne also stated that Malta will not leave people to die at sea and that we should go beyond the rhetoric by calling on Member States to put solidarity into practice.

The fine for failing to observe mandatory quarantine was later increased to €3000, with an amendment to Regulation 4 of the Enforcement of Directions relating to Quarantine (Amendment) Regulations²² On 13th March, measures were again amplified, and a Legal Notice was issued, establishing the Period of Quarantine (Extension of Countries) Order, providing that anyone returning to Malta from any country abroad, as well as anyone residing in the same household would be subject to the rules of the mandatory 14 day quarantine.²³ It was also announced that repatriation flights would be made available for Maltese nationals and residents in countries affected by the travel ban, which at that time covered

¹² Malta Today, [Coronavirus: Prime Minister announces travel ban to and from Italy](#), 9 March 2020.

¹³ Times of Malta, [Travel banned from another four countries, €1,000 fine if quarantine ignored](#), 11 March 2020.

¹⁴ Times of Malta, [Travel banned from another four countries, €1,000 fine if quarantine ignored](#), 11 March 2020.

¹⁵ Legal Notice 39 of 2020, [Enforcement of Directions relating to Quarantine Regulations, 12 March 2020](#).

¹⁶ Times of Malta, [Quarantine extended to arrivals to Malta from all countries](#), 14 March 2020.

¹⁷ Times of Malta, [Foreigners who lose jobs will 'go back to their country' - minister](#), 17 March 2020.

¹⁸ Malta Today, [Equality parliamentary secretary calls for 'respect and empathy' for all workers](#), 18 March 2020.

¹⁹ Malta Today, [Silvio Schembri apologises for 'unfortunate' foreign workers comments](#), 18 March 2020.

²⁰ Aditus Foundation, [Our community is as healthy as all of its members – NGO Press Release on the human rights of migrants in the current epidemic](#), 18 March 2020.

²¹ Malta Today, [Chris Fearne appeals for EU help on illegal immigration during Covid-19 crisis](#), 19 March 2020.

²² Legal Notice 72 of 2020, [Enforcement of Directions relating to Quarantine \(Amendment\) Regulations](#), 17 March 2020.

²³ Legal Notice 63 of 2020, [Period of Quarantine \(Extension of Countries\) Order](#), 13 March 2020.

Germany, Spain, Switzerland and France.²⁴ On 20th March, another Legal Notice was issued, extending the travel ban to and from all countries, with the exception of cargo flights and ships, humanitarian and repatriation flights.²⁵

In addition, with regard to travel restrictions, there have been two instances with cruise ships being denied entry. On 6th March it was announced that a cruise ship that went into self-quarantine after a former passenger contracted the virus had not been allowed to dock in Malta. The Medical Association of Malta (MAM) and the Malta Union of Midwives and Nurses (MUMN) raised alarm and threatened to order industrial action if the ship was allowed to berth in Malta.²⁶ It was confirmed by the Port Health Authorities that the vessel had been refused entry before the unions went public. In addition, on 13th March it was reported that a cruise ship with around 1000 Italian passengers with one complaining of symptoms associated with Covid-19 was denied entry by the Maltese authorities.²⁷

On 12th March, a Legal Notice was issued, the Closure of Schools Order, which provided that all schools, childcare centres and the university would be closed for a week (until 20th March)²⁸, in an effort to contain the spread of the virus. The Prime Minister announced in a press release that the parents would be able to take leave to take care of their children and that the elderly would be able to get two months' worth of medication in advance.²⁹ As regards leave for parents, it was not clarified whether this referred to sick leave, vacation leave or whether this would be paid. On 17th March, a further Legal Notice was issued, extending the period of closure for schools, childcare centres and other educational establishments until further notice, as would be announced by the Superintendent of Public Health.³⁰

With regard to the closures of various services, a number of Legal Notices have been issued in this regard: On 17th March, the Closure of Places Open to the Public Order was enacted, ordering the closure of all bars, restaurants, cafeterias, snack bars, cinemas, gymnasiums, museums, exhibitions, clubs, discotheques, night clubs, open-air markets, indoor swimming pools, national swimming pool, gaming premises including controlled gaming premises, bingo halls, casinos, gaming parlours, lotto booths and betting shops. Delivery services were nonetheless permitted.³¹ This LN was amended on 18th March with a further legal notice, adding massage parlours to the list of closures.³²

On 23rd March, two further Orders were issued: the Closure of Non-Essential Retail Outlets and Outlets Providing Non-Essential Services Order³³ which orders the closure of stores selling of clothing, sportswear, jewellery, hand bags and leather goods, costume jewellery and accessories, footwear, non-prescription eye-wear, perfumeries, beauty products, haberdasheries, soft furnishings, souvenir shops, discount stores, luggage shops, toy shops, hobby shops, furniture shops, florists and vaping shops, and the Suspension of Organised Events Order³⁴ which orders “suspension of all organised events, including all cultural, recreational, entertainment, sporting and religious events and exhibitions in public or private places.”

²⁴ Times of Malta, [Air Malta to operate three repatriation flights on Saturday](#), 12 March 2020.

²⁵ Legal Notice 92 of 2020, [Travel Ban \(Extension to all Countries\) Order](#), 20 March 2020.

²⁶ Malta Today, [Coronavirus: Cruise liner denied entry after nurses and doctors warned of industrial action](#), 6 March 2020.

²⁷ Malta Independent, [Cruise liner with sick passenger on board denied entry by Maltese authorities](#), 13 March 2020.

²⁸ Legal Notice 41 of 2020, [Closure of Schools Order](#), 12 March 2020.

²⁹ Times of Malta, [Coronavirus: Schools, childcare centres, university to shut down for a week](#), 12 March 2020.

³⁰ Legal Notice 77 of 2020, [Closure of Schools \(Extension of Period of Closure\) Order, 17 March 2020](#).

³¹ Legal Notice 76 of 2020, [Closure of Places Open to the Public Order](#), 17 March 2020.

³² Legal Notice 82 of 2020, [Closure of Places Open to the Public \(Amendment\) Order](#), 18 March 2020.

³³ Legal Notice 95 of 2020, [Closure of Non-Essential Retail Outlets and Outlets Providing Non-Essential Services Order](#), 23 March 2020.

³⁴ Legal Notice 101 of 2020, [Suspension of Organised Events Order](#), 23 March 2020.

As the elderly are one of the most at-risk groups with regard to contracting the virus, some measures have been put in place for this group. On 12th March it was announced that 140,000 elderly persons enrolled within the Pharmacy Of Your Choice scheme³⁵ would be able to receive a two-month stock of medicine in an attempt to limit them attending health centres and pharmacies.³⁶ It was also announced on 13th March, that until further notice, visits to all homes for the elderly and persons with disabilities, whether run by the state, the church or the private sector, would no longer be permitted. The same announcement also prohibited visits to the prison.³⁷ This has not yet been regulated by law. A helpline was launched to assist those elderly persons who do not have family to support them in the purchase of groceries and medicines³⁸.

On 24th March, the Times of Malta published an article which outlined the contingency plan for migrant centres, reporting that isolation centres have been set up in the case of a coronavirus outbreak. Centres are being disinfected regularly and employees have been provided with protective equipment. The article states that migrants residing in the centres have expressed concern about hygiene conditions at the open and detention centres and say they cannot practise social distancing as well as stating that they have not always been given updated information.³⁹ UNHCR Malta has produced guidance in several languages in consultation with the Public Health Authority,⁴⁰ as well as, establishing a Facebook group for asylum seekers and refugees. Additionally, in cooperation with the Agency for the Welfare of Asylum Seekers (AWAS), UNHCR is developing information in six languages about the possible impact of a complete lockdown, to be distributed through channels such as WhatsApp and Facebook.⁴¹

The health authorities are currently in the process of translating further information booklets into a number of languages for distribution. A multilingual information leaflet in 5 languages, entitled ‘Stay at Home’, was disseminated to stakeholders and open centres. The health authorities have been in communication with Transport Malta and Local Councils to tackle the issue of crowding at bus stops and in queues.

Even prior to the outbreak of Covid-19 in Malta, trade unions in Malta were calling for paid leave for those in quarantine.⁴² On 13th March, the General Workers’ Union (GWU) again insisted on its position, stating that “the GWU believes that at this delicate stage there is the need for greater collaboration, consultation, and dialogue between employers and unions... the GWU has received various complaints from workers who were sent home on quarantine leave and were informed this was unpaid leave or deducted from their vacation or sick leave” and that “it is unacceptable for workers to shoulder the financial burden of this leave.”⁴³ In response, in the press release the Prime Minister stated; “But here I appeal to unions, I understand the importance of trade unionism in Malta, but when we are facing a public health crisis I appeal that trade unionism doesn’t become militant.”⁴⁴

Quarantine leave in the private sector is being covered by grant of €350 for every employee on quarantine leave. Prior to the travel ban, quarantine leave was not being granted to those who still decided to proceed abroad to affected countries, after certain dates and notwithstanding the health authorities’ advice to refrain from doing so.

³⁵ The Pharmacy of your Choice scheme is a national pharmaceutical service which meets the needs of more than 150,000 outpatients who benefit from medicines and pharmaceutical devices which are given for free by the Government.

³⁶ Malta Today, [Coronavirus: Elderly enrolled within the POYC scheme to receive two-month medicine stock](#), 12 March 2020.

³⁷ Times of Malta, [Coronavirus: Visits to old people's homes and the prisons stopped](#), 13 March 2020.

³⁸ <https://www.gov.mt/en/Government/DOI/Press%20Releases/Pages/2020/March/16/pr200499.aspx>

³⁹ Times of Malta, [COVID-19 contingency plan for migrant centres](#), 24 March 2020.

⁴⁰ UNHCR Malta, [COVID-19 Guidance for Asylum-Seekers & Refugees in Malta](#), 12 March 2020.

⁴¹ Times of Malta, [COVID-19 contingency plan for migrant centres](#), 24 March 2020.

⁴² TVM News, [GWU, UHM insist on paid leave for workers quarantined due to Coronavirus](#), 2 March 2020.

⁴³ Malta Today, [GWU insists quarantine leave should be paid](#), 13 March 2020.

⁴⁴ Lovin Malta, [Abela Says Police ‘Factually Incorrect’ On Lack Of Instructions For Quarantine Enforcement, And Issues Warning Against ‘Militant’ Trade Unionism](#), 12 March 2020.

On 18th March, the government announced a “mini budget” of €1.8 billion to mitigate the effects of the virus. Key measures covered by this include: “the Government to pay companies €350 per employee on quarantine leave; Government will cover additional two months leave for parent who has to stay at home to take care of the children as a result of school closures with an €800 per month benefit; A company registering 25% less sales will benefit from 1 day per week per employee. This amounts to around €37 per week, equivalent to around €147 per month per employee. Measure is capped at €800 per month; A business that was asked to close as part of the Covid-19 measures will get 2 days of assistance per week per employee. This is equivalent to €300 per month per employee; A Maltese or EU citizen who becomes redundant will get €800 per month as unemployment benefit.”⁴⁵ With this announcement, the Prime Minister also stated that Malta will no longer accept applications for work from unskilled third-country nationals “with immediate effect.”⁴⁶ None of these measures have yet been regulated by law. Persons with disabilities who to their medical condition are unable to continue working will also be entitled to a €800 per month. Persons who lose their employment, and who were previously not benefitting from the rent subsidy, can now benefit from the rent subsidy. In the case of individuals already benefitting from rent subsidy, this will be increased.

A further concerning development with regard to the government response to the crisis, was the sudden refusal to see clients by the entity that processes residence permits and visa applications, Identity Malta.⁴⁷ It was reported on the 11th March that the offices remained closed with “no official reason” but no one had been alerted to the measure, with some people having been queuing outside since 5am.⁴⁸ In a video posted on Facebook, also by the Malta Independent, a man is interviewed, who stated that he had been queuing for his visa renewal since 4.30am with no notification that staff would not be attending to clients and says that he was told by Identity Malta employees that the reason for this is because foreigners may have the Coronavirus.⁴⁹ On 16th March, Identity Malta published a note on Facebook to clarify what different groups should do with regard to residence and work permits, namely to use the online application platform where possible and new decisions on applications submitted by applicants who are not in the Maltese territory will not be accepted until further notice.⁵⁰ Identity Malta has confirmed that following news of the initial COVID-19 cases in Malta, there was a sudden increase in demand for Identity Malta’s services and employees who come in contact with the general public became concerned about the spread of the coronavirus disease. In the employees’ and public interest, Identity Malta Agency was already taking the necessary precautionary measures to safeguard their wellbeing. Personal protective equipment, including gloves and face masks, were distributed to all the staff as well as hand sanitizers. Apart from this, Identity Malta had already devised a contingency plan in different phases, respecting government and health authority’s advice. As a matter of fact, new operating procedures for the Expatriates and Central Visa Units were introduced on Monday 16th March, whereby arrangements were made to facilitate services online as much as possible. Furthermore, plans were already in place to have a nurse stationed at the Expatriates Unit from 12th March onwards in order to screen the public, and to continue with the installation of desk top protective screens.

On the morning of 11th March 2020 staff reporting to work were greeted in large numbers and grew hesitant, deciding not to open for normal service before talking to the management. Identity Malta was not informed of this spontaneous decision or any other planned industrial action, and neither was the

⁴⁵ Malta Today, [Robert Abela announces €1.8 billion rescue package to mitigate coronavirus crisis](#), 18 March 2020.

⁴⁶ Malta Today, [Robert Abela announces €1.8 billion rescue package to mitigate coronavirus crisis](#), 18 March 2020.

⁴⁷ Malta Independent, [Updated \(2\) - Identity Malta to remain open but customer care services to be provided online](#), 11 March 2020

⁴⁸ Malta Independent, [Updated \(2\) - Identity Malta to remain open but customer care services to be provided online](#), 11 March 2020

⁴⁹ Malta Independent via Facebook, [Coronavirus fears: Identity Malta offices remain shut](#), 11 March 2020.

⁵⁰ Identity Malta via Facebook, [COVID-19: Change in Expatriates & Central Visa Units Service Provision](#), 16 March 2020.

trade union representing them. Without further ado, Parliamentary Secretary Hon. Alex Muscat, Identity Malta's management and trade union representatives met with the Expatriates' Unit staff in order to address their concerns and to explain in detail the precautionary measure the Agency was taking. Employees were reassured that Identity Malta was taking all the necessary protective measures and resumed with normal service immediately after the meeting was concluded.

As the COVID-19 outbreak progressed, Identity Malta Agency started offering limited services, making its services available online wherever possible with skeleton staff manning its offices and the remaining working remotely from home. Depending on the turn of events, Identity Malta will continue to act on the government and public health authority's advice and will communicate any new decision which will affect the rendering of normal services. Finally, Identity Malta Agency reiterates its commitment in offering a quality public service and to assist the public according to their needs, whilst safeguard its employees' wellbeing and the general public's health interests.

2 Impact of the outbreak on certain national or ethnic communities

There are no official statistics available concerning xenophobic speech, acts of harassment, and violent attacks against the following since the beginning of the Coronavirus Covid-19 outbreak. However, comments about certain communities can be found on social media and accompanying newspaper articles, especially due to the fact that most of the cases in Malta, thus far, are foreign nationals. For example, two comments on the same article⁵¹ concerning a case of Covid-19 in an individual from Northern Italy reflect xenophobia;

“This is thanks to the EU because of free movement. Why he didn't went home to infect his country instead of coming to live here and infecting us. All the infected persons are foreigners who decided to come and live here. If they stayed in there respective country nothing would have happened here” [sic]

“Very irresponsible of him not to self-quarantine. As soon as he recovers, send him back to Northern Italy”

In addition, some opinion pieces and interviews have been published in the national news outlets that have alluded to racism and xenophobia in connection to the Covid-19 outbreak. In “The Skinny”, a blog that is published online by MaltaToday newspaper, there was a piece from 12th February 2020 (prior to any cases in Malta) entitled “I can see how such a pandemic can lead to racist attitudes towards the Chinese...”.⁵² The blog posts take a question and answer format, with one from this post as the following;

“Yes, I can see how such a pandemic can lead to racist attitudes towards the Chinese to intensify even further. It certainly happened in our neighbouring Italy, a country that we're keen to emulate, but only when it comes to its more negative aspects, it seems.”

On 28th February 2020, also prior to the first case of Covid-19 in Malta, the Malta Independent published an interview with sociologist, Michael Briguglio.⁵³ In the interview, he discusses the issues surrounding social media in connection to the Coronavirus, one of which is racism. He stated that “when such issues

⁵¹ Both comments were taken from a selection from the comments section of: Times of Malta, [Malta's first coronavirus cases are girl and parents](#), 7 March 2020.

⁵² Malta Today, The Skinny: [I can see how such a pandemic can lead to racist attitudes towards the Chinese...](#), 12 February 2020.

⁵³ Malta Independent, [Coronavirus 'infodemic' a 'social media spectacle' - Maltese sociologist](#), 28 February 2020.

arise an ‘enemy’ always has to be constructed. Some people feel safe by blaming others”.⁵⁴ The article also quoted a comment from a “local, elderly” Facebook user - “all illnesses always originate from Asia or Africa.”⁵⁵ The Malta Independent also published an editorial article about the controversy surrounding the Shakespeare play Othello, which referred to serious issues of racism in Malta, including in connection to the Coronavirus – “It is found in the way foreigners are blamed for bringing disease into Malta, and how it will surely be ‘some black guy’ to bring the Coronavirus to Malta.”⁵⁶

As highlighted above, there have been concerning comments made by senior members of government regarding migrant workers, including threats of deportation for third country nationals who lose their jobs during the crisis.⁵⁷ NGOs condemned such statements in a press release.⁵⁸

2 Impact on privacy and spread of disinformation

On 20th March, the Office of the Information and Data Protection Commissioner (IDPC) issued a press release about the Processing of personal data in the context of COVID-19.⁵⁹ The statement affirmed that health data is a special category under the GDPR and that the GDPR provides for appropriate legal basis to process personal data in the context of epidemics without the obligation to obtain consent of the data subject. The statement reads: “The IDPC encourages all controllers to comply strictly with the instructions provided by the public health authorities to prevent the spread of the COVID-19, including any processing of personal data as necessary in compliance with national laws. It is equally important that appropriate measures are applied to secure processing operations to achieve the right balance between the need for processing health data and the rights of data subjects.”⁶⁰

At the time of writing, there have been two reports of disinformation being spread online through social media. The first one concerned a photo being shared online of an ambulance outside The Strand and Hotel Kennedy Nova in Gzira and was accompanied with a claim that paramedics had entered one of the hotels wearing hazmat suits.⁶¹ The claim was proven to be fake, and the Strand hotel requested the photo be taken down. The second instance involved Facebook page *4Malta*, which had published “exclusive” news on the evening of 12th March, that an official within the Office of the Prime Minister had been speaking of 35 new cases of the Coronavirus in Malta.⁶² The post was shared several times on Facebook and since been removed. A government spokesperson stated that the claim was “completely fake”.⁶³

Daily briefings are conducted by the Superintendent of Public Health, Daily bulletins, Press briefings by Health Minister and PM. Website updated daily www.covid19health.gov.mt; www.covid19malta.info; helpline 111 including support for mental well being with translation/interpreter support if required and various other helplines . A wide communication public health campaign including social media presence is being rolled out led by the Public Health Authority in close collaboration with the Department of Information and Office of the Prime Minister

⁵⁴ Malta Independent, [Coronavirus 'infodemic' a 'social media spectacle' - Maltese sociologist](#), 28 February 2020.

⁵⁵ Malta Independent, [Coronavirus 'infodemic' a 'social media spectacle' - Maltese sociologist](#), 28 February 2020.

⁵⁶ Malta Independent, [TMID Editorial: Othello controversy - What about the real racism?](#), 2 March 2020.

⁵⁷ Times of Malta, [Foreigners who lose jobs will 'go back to their country' - minister](#), 17 March 2020.

⁵⁸ Aditus Foundation, [Our community is as healthy as all of its members – NGO Press Release on the human rights of migrants in the current epidemic](#), 18 March 2020.

⁵⁹ Office of the Information and Data Protection Commissioner, [Press Release: Processing of personal data in the context of COVID-19](#), 20 March 2020.

⁶⁰ Office of the Information and Data Protection Commissioner, [Press Release: Processing of personal data in the context of COVID-19](#), 20 March 2020.

⁶¹ Times of Malta, [Coronavirus: fake claims on social media over case at Gzira hotel](#), 10 March 2020.

⁶² Times of Malta, [Authorities debunk 'fake news' of 35 fresh coronavirus cases](#), 12 March 2020.

⁶³ Times of Malta, [Authorities debunk 'fake news' of 35 fresh coronavirus cases](#), 12 March 2020.

also to dispel fake news and the spread of false information. . Strong intersectoral collaboration is in place.

So far, there have been no official announcements regarding the use of data for surveillance/tracking purposes by public authorities.

As mentioned above, the Malta Independent had published an interview with sociologist Michael Briguglio prior to the outbreak of the virus in Malta, which discussed the issues concerning social media with regard to the Coronavirus.⁶⁴ He stated that “many people seem to value quick information over expert information” and referred to social media as a “spectacle”.⁶⁵ He also stated that “it is worrying that some people seem to be showing more trust to people ‘yelling’ on Facebook than authorities who have a scientific basis.”⁶⁶

Government has invested in a wide reaching information campaign with regular daily press briefing and updates (including in sign language); online updates (www.covid19health@gov.mt; www.covid19malta.info) and a strong media presence on various media, as well as the 24/7 helpline, with repeated calls to the general public by the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Health to listen to the experts rather than to social media and speculation.

⁶⁴ Malta Independent, [Coronavirus 'infodemic' a 'social media spectacle' - Maltese sociologist](#), 28 February 2020.

⁶⁵ Malta Independent, [Coronavirus 'infodemic' a 'social media spectacle' - Maltese sociologist](#), 28 February 2020.

⁶⁶ Malta Independent, [Coronavirus 'infodemic' a 'social media spectacle' - Maltese sociologist](#), 28 February 2020.