

# **Migration Narratives in Europe**

## ***A Social Media Intelligence Study***

*Country report for the Republic of Malta*

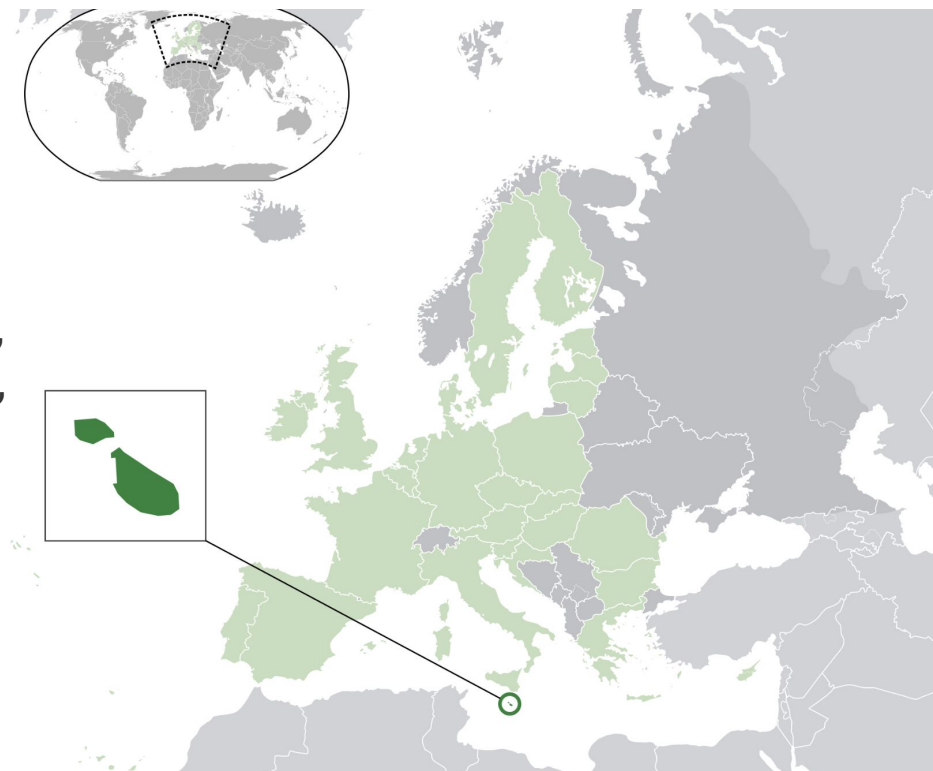


**A Bakamo Public**  **Project for the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung**

**- 2019 -**

## Context of the Maltese migration discourse

- Malta has been a member of the European Union since 2004, with a **population** of **429,344** in 2015.
- Located in the crossroads of the Mediterranean with over 7,000 years of colonial rule, the topic of migration has particular importance in Malta.
- The **number of asylum seekers** peaked in Malta in 2013, with **2,245 cases**, which **decreased to 1,840** by 2017. Malta currently hosts ~8 000 refugees, which is the second largest amount in the EU compared to local population size.\*
- The public social media **conversation in Malta around migration in one year consists of ~68,400 posts**. Compared to population size, the conversation on migration in Malta is the **third largest in the EU**.



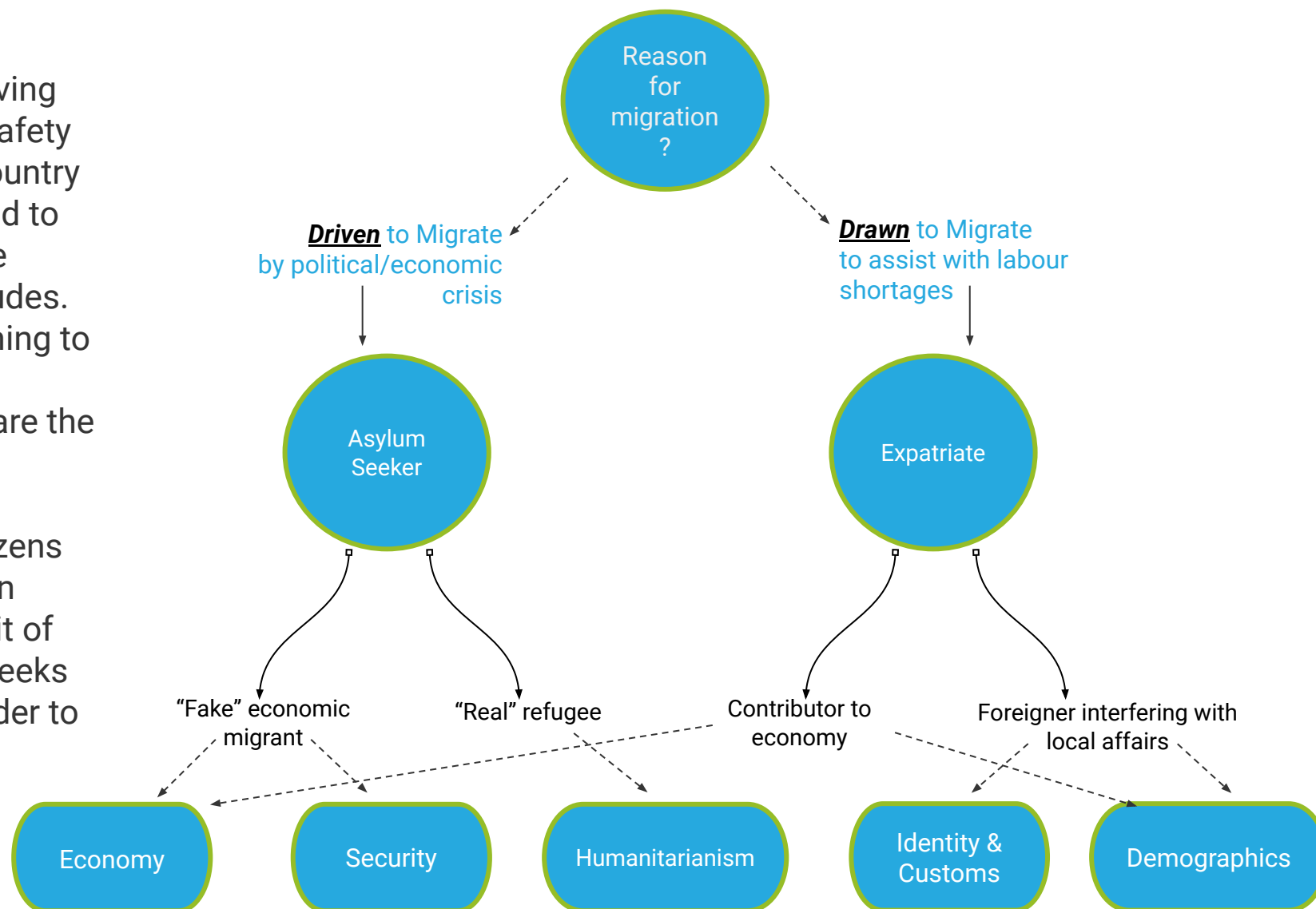
\*Source: [europarl.europa.eu](http://europarl.europa.eu)

# Migrant Types in Malta: *Asylum seekers & Expatriates*



**Asylum seekers** are usually persons arriving from the coast of North Africa seeking safety from persecution or serious harm in a country other than their own. These migrants tend to be linked to negative stereotypes and are subjected to racist and xenophobic attitudes. Currently, the Maltese government is aiming to curb the number of asylum seekers by strengthening international efforts to share the migration responsibility.

**Expatriates** are migrants (usually EU citizens or third-country nationals) who have been encouraged to migrate to Malta in pursuit of employment. The Maltese government seeks to attract more expatriate migrants in order to assist with labour shortages.





## Key Findings | MT

# How and where do Maltese people discuss migration in the social media space?

### Size of Pan-European Narratives

**Humanitarianism** is the largest narrative in Malta, and is often permeated with debates over “real” vs “fake” migrants. Issues around **security** and **identity and customs** are also widely discussed.

### Local Issues

With **limited resources** and a long **history of colonization**, Maltese feel at **constant unease** when discussing migration. This tends to **evolve** into a fierce desire to **protect Maltese sovereignty**.

### EU & Domestic Politics

Among **Pan-European** migration narratives, security appears the most frequently. The discussion on the **local narrative** of Maltese sovereignty is strongly influenced by references to the EU and other member states.

### Discussion Tone

People demonstrate a **conversational tone** when sympathizing with the struggles of migrants. However, **conversations become more passionate** when discussing migration in the context of **economy, security, and identity and customs**.

### Conversation Channels

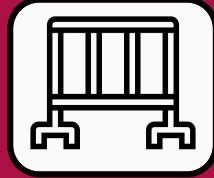
The majority of the discussion takes place on **Twitter**, and politicians' and news sites' Twitter handles trigger the highest engagement.



# Pan-European Narratives: *The Maltese Context*



Pro-migrant commenters believe Malta has a **humanitarian obligation** to aid migrants crossing the Mediterranean. In contrast, anti-migrant Maltese only support the provision of **aid to those migrants which Malta has an explicit obligation to assist**.



While anti-migrant voices focus on **smuggling**, human trafficking, and increases in local violent **crime**, pro-migrant voices highlight the **security issues migrants have to face**.



Anti-migrants commenters fear an increase in migration will lead to a **loss in Maltese identity and social cohesion**. Pro-migrant voices often **praise both expatriates and asylum-seeking migrants for adding value to Maltese society**.



While pro-migrant voices **praise migrants for the vital role they play in easing labour shortages** and contributing to the broader economy, anti-migrant voices emphasize the **long-term risk associated with relying so heavily on foreign workers**.



Both pro and anti-migrant voices engage in passionate conversations while discussing the potential economic consequences of migrants in Malta, especially in the context of **limited resources and space**.

# + *Pan-European Narratives in Malta*



---

1.





# The shape of the migration discourse

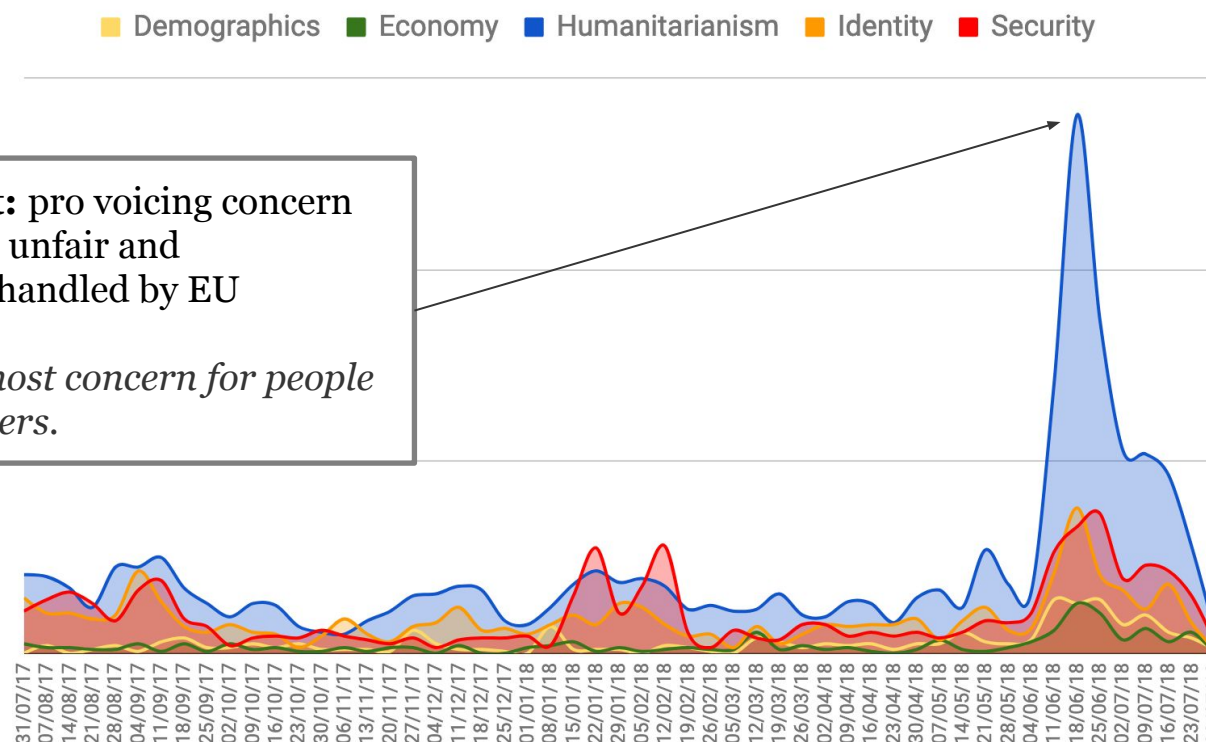
While public social media in Malta reflects **a society divided in opinion**, it is clear that migration is one of the most important issues facing Malta at the moment.

Tension within the three strongest narratives, *humanitarianism*, *security*, and *identity and customs*, likely reflect the influence that Malta's long and complex history with **colonization** has had on modern thinking and beliefs.

**Results:**  
~68,400

**Pro and anti-migrant voices present in Life Line event:** pro voicing concern and need to assist refugees while anti voices insisting situation unfair and unreasonable to Malta--not their responsibility and should be handled by EU

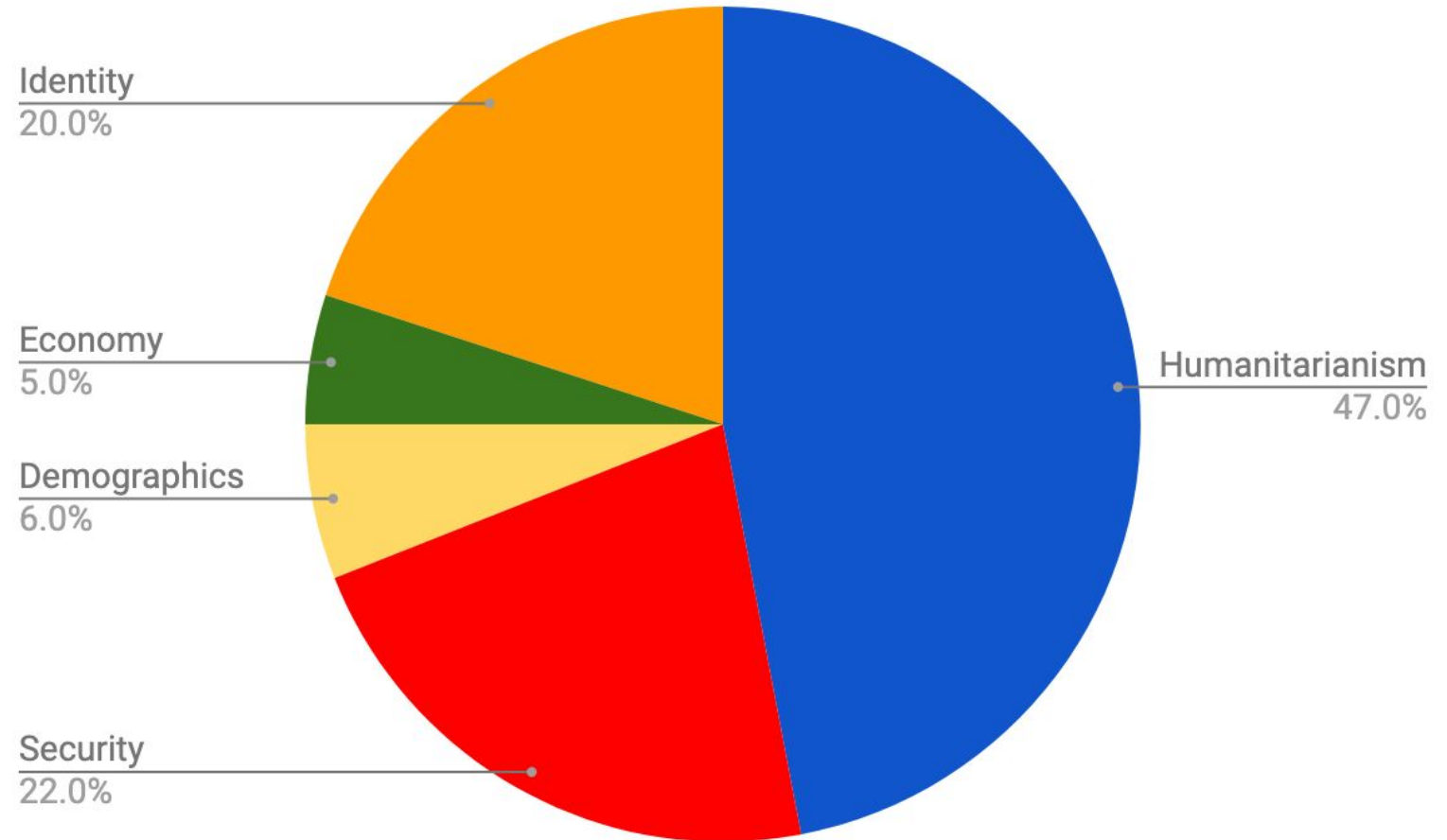
*MaltaToday says that the **feeling of 'invasion'** is the topmost concern for people when they were asked about asylum seekers.*





# Divided Views on Humanitarianism Drive Debate

**Humanitarianism** is the strongest narrative in the migration discussion, followed by **security**, and **identity and customs**.





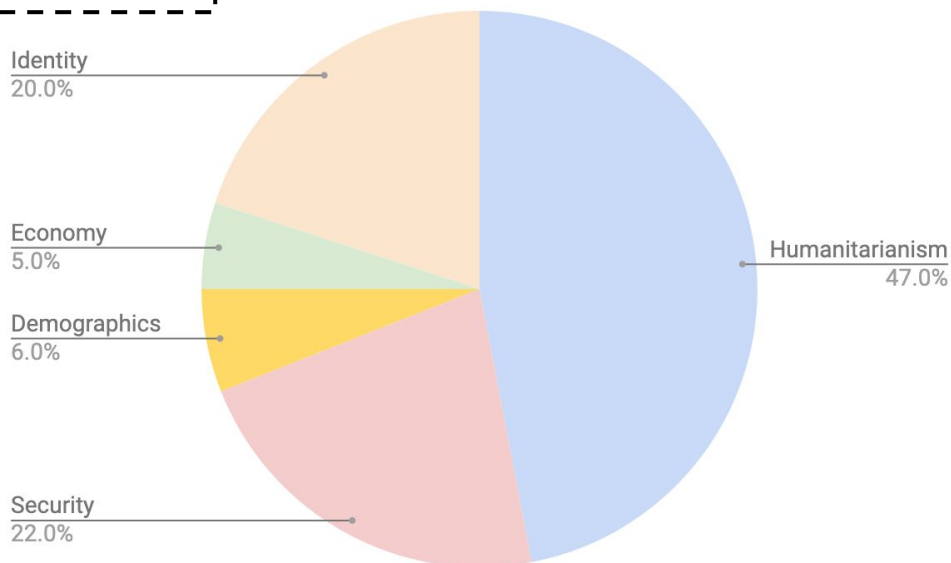
# Pan-European Narratives | MT

## Demographics (1)

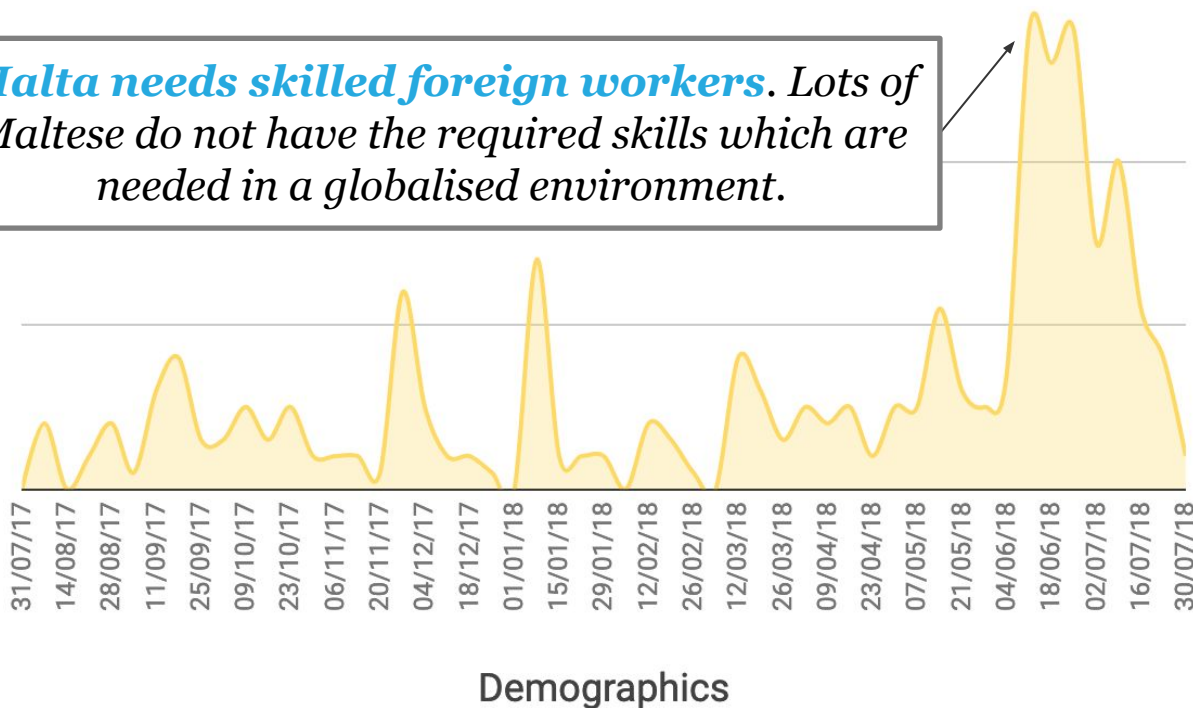
Pro-migrant voices emphasize how expatriate *and* asylum seeking migrants **have long been vital components of the Maltese workforce**.

In contrast, anti-migrant voices emphasize the long-term **risk associated with relying so heavily on foreign workers to mitigate labour-supply shortage**. Anti-migrant comments tend to discuss expatriate migrants in the context of economic growth and labour shortages, whereas asylum seeking migrants are discussed in the context of the long-term consequences of failed integration.

**Results:**  
**~4,500 (6%)**



**Malta needs skilled foreign workers.** Lots of Maltese do not have the required skills which are needed in a globalised environment.



# Pan-European Narratives | MT

## Demographics (2)

### ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

Long-term risks of building an economy based on unpredictable foreign labour supply has been overlooked in Malta

*The administration **[has] not** created any new sectors or **attracted new industry**, and so was left with **no choice but to depend on foreign labour to keep the economy from grinding to a halt.***

*The **dash for economic growth without considering the consequences on society**, with widening gaps of inequality, social **issues of migration and foreign workers**... has caused a “**reckless and amoral culture of waste.**”*

Malta doesn't need migrants from Africa to help with labour shortages

*The **EU doesn't need immigration to supply labour market.** Millions of Greeks, Spaniards and Italians are unemployed*

### PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

Both expatriate and refugee migrants provide relief for local labour shortages

*"If we are to sustain our economy, **for our country to grow** at the rate it's growing, **we need an influx of foreign migrants,**" he said.*

*They'd still be building the damn railway if they hadn't had **cheap immigrant labour.***

*There are almost 43,000 foreign workers in Malta and the Cabinet has **approved plans to bring thousands more from non-EU countries as it seeks to pre-empt a labour shortage problem.***

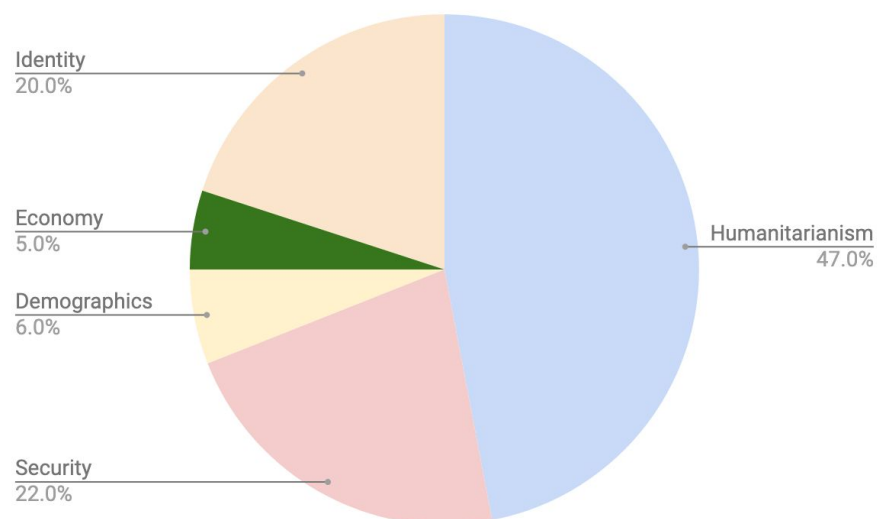
# Pan-European Narratives | MT

## Economy (1)

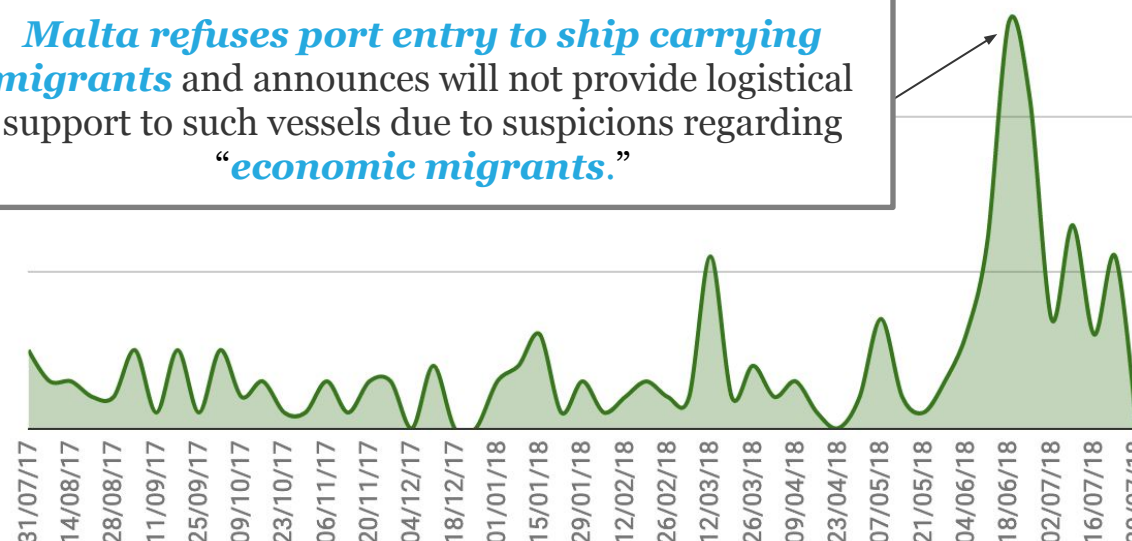
Malta is the **smallest EU member state**, and is also **one of the most densely populated**.<sup>\*</sup> With limited resources and space, both pro and anti-migrant voices engage in passionate conversations while discussing the potential economic consequences of migrants.

**Asylum-seeking migrants** are discussed in the context of placing strain on limited Maltese resources – a belief justified by creating a distinction between “real” migrants and “fake” migrants. In contrast, **expatriate migrants** are seen as stimulating economic growth through supplying labour, though some question if this growth benefits local Maltese workers and families.

**Results:**  
**~3,200**  
**(5%)**



**Malta refuses port entry to ship carrying migrants** and announces will not provide logistical support to such vessels due to suspicions regarding “**economic migrants**.”



Economy

<sup>\*</sup>Source: [https://integrafoundation.files.wordpress.com/2015/09/mp\\_malta\\_13july2016\\_0.pdf](https://integrafoundation.files.wordpress.com/2015/09/mp_malta_13july2016_0.pdf)

# Pan-European Narratives | MT

## Economy (2)

### ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

Malta can't afford to take *any* migrants

*Ppl from **Malta** and Sicily can't take any more migrants..**literally**. **Where we live is overcrowded af**. And [bc of] **influx [in] population** our rents have gone up in 2 years to ridiculous levels.*

Economic gains from *expat* labour does not benefit local Maltese

*Dr Delia **questioned** whether **economic growth [based on expats' contribution]** was **translating into concrete benefits** for **local workers** and their families, warning of a "culture of consumption" diminishing workers' dignity and quality of life.*

### PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

*Expat* labour drives economic growth

*Expats' are often cited as the reason why Malta is turning into a concrete jungle but **most of the foreigners I know are restoring old buildings** and not tearing them down...*

*Asylum seekers* fill jobs Maltese don't want

*Until they go back to their country, we insist on associating African migrants with all the filth under the Maltese sun, **forgetting that many of them are picking up our own rubbish**.*

## ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

### Asylum seekers are a financial burden to Malta

*The **ghetto that has taken shape in our Marsa**, constituted of **immigrants from Africa** mostly.*

*Mass immigration is totally unsustainable and places an **unacceptable burden on our public services**. Now an 85-year-old man has died waiting in A&E because of 'dangerous overcrowding'. **When will politicians wake up to the human cost of our open borders?***

### Most migrants are “fake” economic migrants

*I'm not against Africans fleeing Africa, **i'm against the illegal trafficking of illegal economic migrants from Africa for the benefit of business.***

***European countries** should **help migrants fleeing persecution**, but **economic migrants** who do not follow proper channels and come here illegally **should be sent back**, in line with international law, Prime Minister Joseph Muscat said on Sunday.*

*What caused these problem to happen are these people that **liberals like to call refugees**. But in fact may be **only 20 % of the people coming here are actually refugees**. The others are illegal migrants, **opportunists**, people wanting a better life. Well, who doesn't want a better life?!*

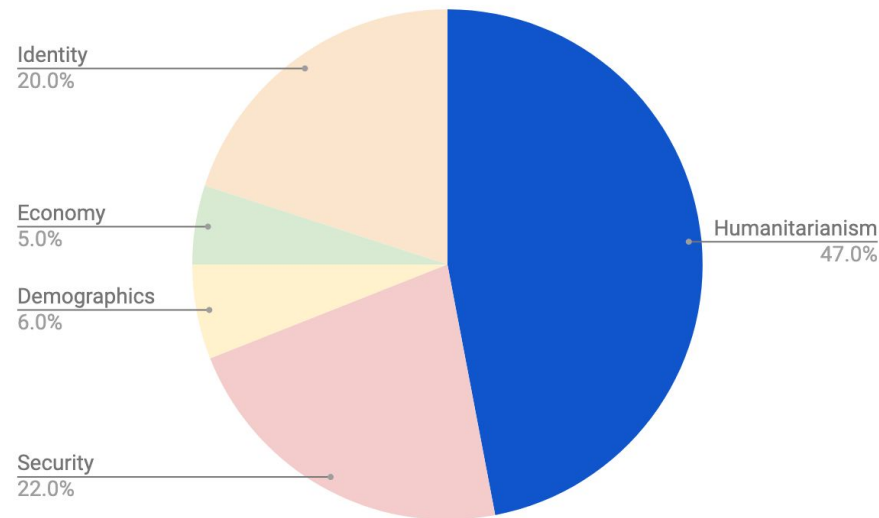
# Pan-European Narratives | MT

## Humanitarianism (1)

Humanitarianism is the **largest narrative** in the Maltese migration conversation and consists of strong pro and anti-migrant voices.

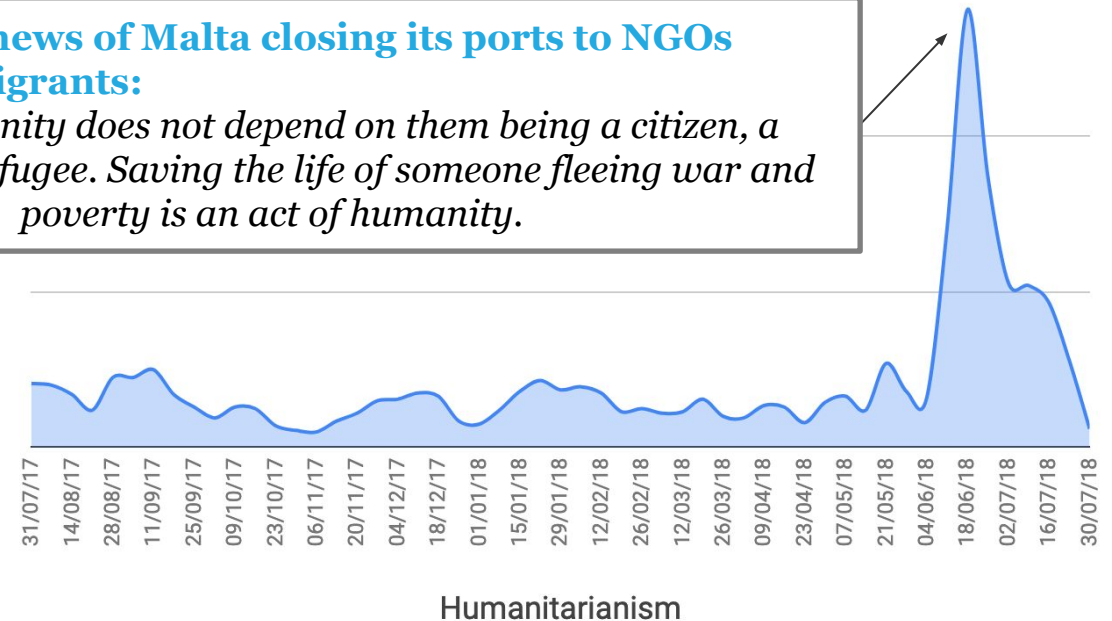
- Pro-migrant commenters believe **Malta has an obligation to provide aid** to migrants crossing the Mediterranean, and also sympathize with the challenges faced by asylum seekers in Malta.
- Anti-migrant commenters only support the **provision of aid** to those **migrants** which Malta has an **explicit obligation to assist**. These users also believe **assisting NGO vessels** that are transporting migrants actually **harms “real” asylum seekers**.

**Results:**  
**~32,000 (4%)**



**In response to news of Malta closing its ports to NGOs transporting migrants:**

*A person's dignity does not depend on them being a citizen, a migrant, or a refugee. Saving the life of someone fleeing war and poverty is an act of humanity.*





# Pan-European Narratives | MT

## Humanitarianism (2)



### ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

Selective humanitarianism: We will assist those migrants who *actually* need help

When it comes to **those fleeing persecution**, or war, we should not only allow them in, but also proactively help them get out of harm's way. **On the other hand**, there are others, who make up the majority of migrant arrivals today, who are **economic migrants** - people who are not being persecuted, but are simply looking for a better life.

The responsibility of humanitarian assistance rests with the EU and its member states, not Malta alone

**Malta** says that it **is abiding by its international obligations** and that in refusing safe harbour to people stranded at sea, **Italy is violating its legal and humanitarian obligations.**

### PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

All migrants suffer and need assistance

The...alleged differences between refugees fleeing from war and economic migrants...**both [face] similar situations [hardships] due to the political contexts.**

Helping those in need of refuge is **not a burden**, but rather, a **responsibility**. We are all #humans, and we must support each other. The problems in the world are #war and hatred, not the people who run from it. #WorldRefugeeDay

# Pan-European Narratives | MT

## Humanitarianism (3)



### ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

NGO vessels are not saving lives, they are human traffickers

*Yall should stop picking up migrants from the shores of Libya. And also wtf you get migrants from Tunisia!! It's a safe place no war. **As a nation we are only obliged** to take them in if they re in our 12 mile radius. Not opl picked up by ngo s from libya. You are the traffickers!*

Assisting rescue boats harms migrants in the long-run

*I have been saying for a log time now that **the EU should stop spending funds on rescue missions** and instead use the same funds to **blockade the North African coasts with warships, to stop these boats**, overflowing with people, from being able to come out in the first place. **THEN and only THEN, may we see an end to all these deaths by drowning.***

### PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

If Malta does not aid NGO vessels, there will be dire consequences

*Whatever your opinion on refugees, solidarity, Malta's capacity and integration...**you surely cannot be happy with anyone dying in the Mediterranean!***

*The 17 **NGOs insisted** the government's decision to **close Malta's ports** inevitably **meant more people would die** attempting to reach a safe harbour.*

Maltese have a duty, as Catholics, to assist those in need

*He said he **prayed** that whoever had the power and the authority... **understood that when one welcomed those who were in danger of death – one did not condemn them to death or to slavery** – and would be **blessed.***

# Pan-European Narratives | MT

## Humanitarianism (4)

### ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

Migrants complaining about discrimination are prejudice too

*A lot of immigrants and minorities are against same sex marriage, and are angry at racism. **You can't complain about bigotry while embracing it.***

### PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

Maltese treatment of migrants is unjust and cruel

*[**Corrupt security practices** only] serve to generate a false sense of security among elements of Maltese society, while serving to **marginalise** and exclude other members of Maltese society, specifically **ethnic minorities**.*

***Exploitation, Discrimination, Violence** ... Just a few of the risks **faced by migrants**... They must be treated fairly. It's in everyone's interest.*

*Let's not beat around the bush. **Racial profiling** is happening in Malta, it's **discriminatory**, illegal, and a violation of basic human rights.*

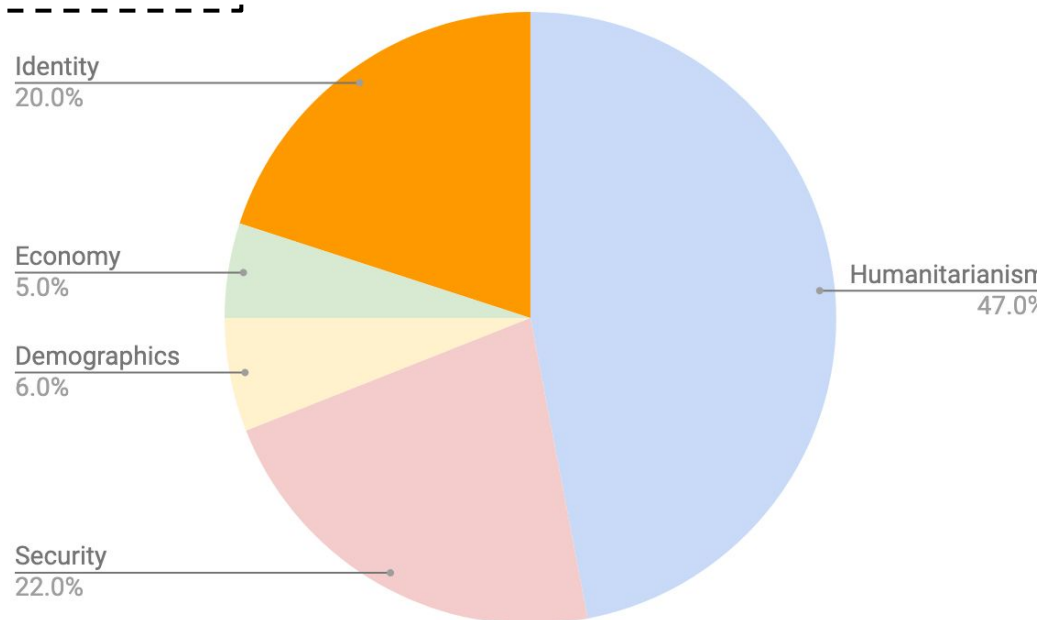
# Pan-European Narratives | MT

## Identity and Customs (1)

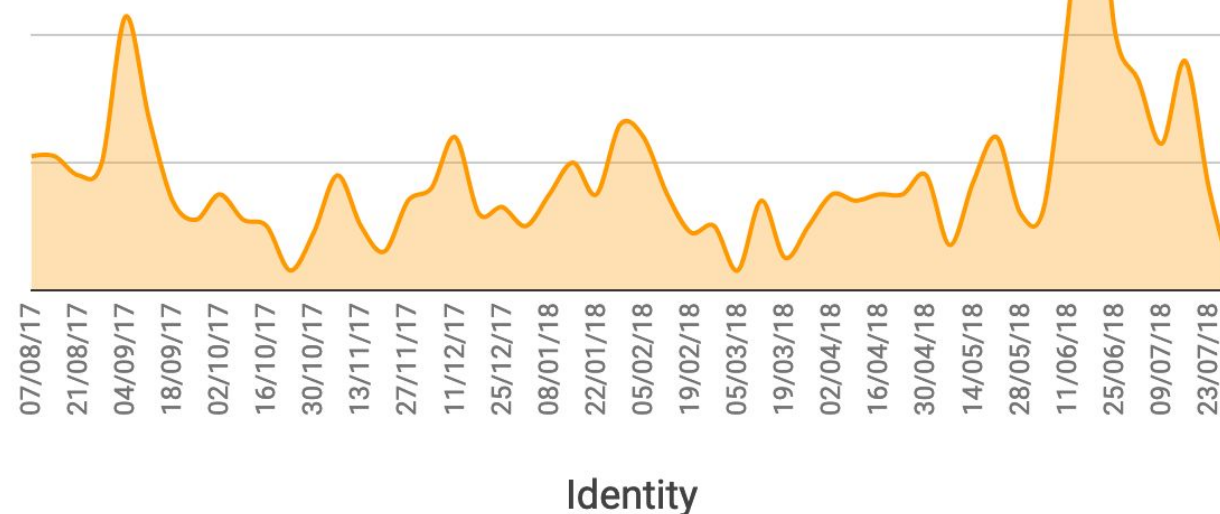
Many Maltese citizens express **unease** towards **both expatriate** and **asylum seeking migrants** – a feeling rooted in Malta's relatively recent release from colonialism.

Anti-migrant commenters fear that the growing number of both expatriate and asylum seeking migrants is changing the very fabric of Malta's identity. However, pro-migrant voices often praise both expatriates and asylum seeking migrants as adding value to Maltese society.

**Results:**  
**~13,400 (20%)**



So it's taken 1 million non-English speaking people here for gov't to finally acknowledge that their **multicultural & diversity scheme is not working**





# Pan-European Narratives | MT

## Identity and Customs (2)

### ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

Influx in migration threatens local identity and social cohesion

### ANTI-REFUGEE VOICES

Maltese **society and culture** has **felt threatened by alien influences since time immemorial**. The more so during the last couple of decades where **unwanted** and **unwelcome illegal immigrants** were being encouraged to come here by NGO's and other entities who **chose to ignore** the **apprehension** that the **local populace expressed** at the **continuous landings**.

### ANTI-EXPAT VOICES

It's a stance **influenced** by **Malta's relatively recent emancipation from colonialism** – the idea that **we shouldn't allow foreigners**, particularly northwesterly Europeans with their air of superiority and condescendence, **to meddle in our affairs**.

### PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

Migrants enrich the local community

**Celebrate** Hume's rich **diversity and culture** at the Hume **#RefugeeWeek** Celebration.

Migrants are already part of the Maltese identity and culture

Friday night's line-up is completed by **Refugees for Refugees**, a **band of ten musicians** under the leadership of the Belgian oud player Tristan Driessens. The band's members are **actual refugees** originating from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan and the region of Tibet.

# Pan-European Narratives | MT

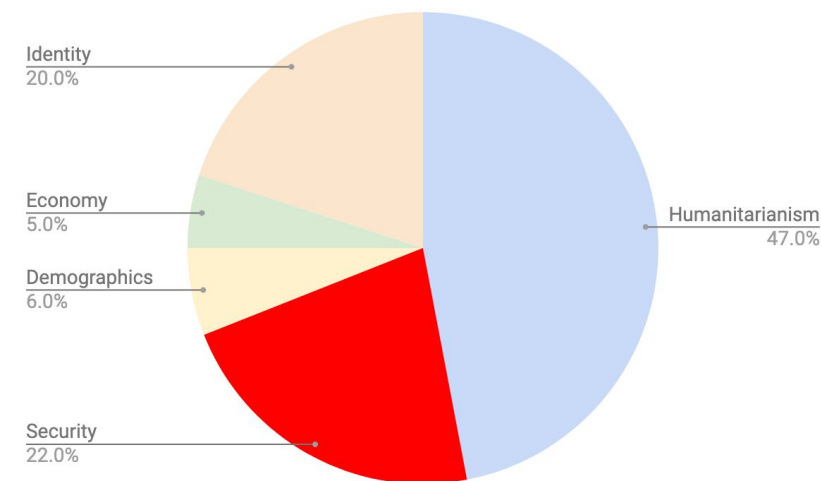
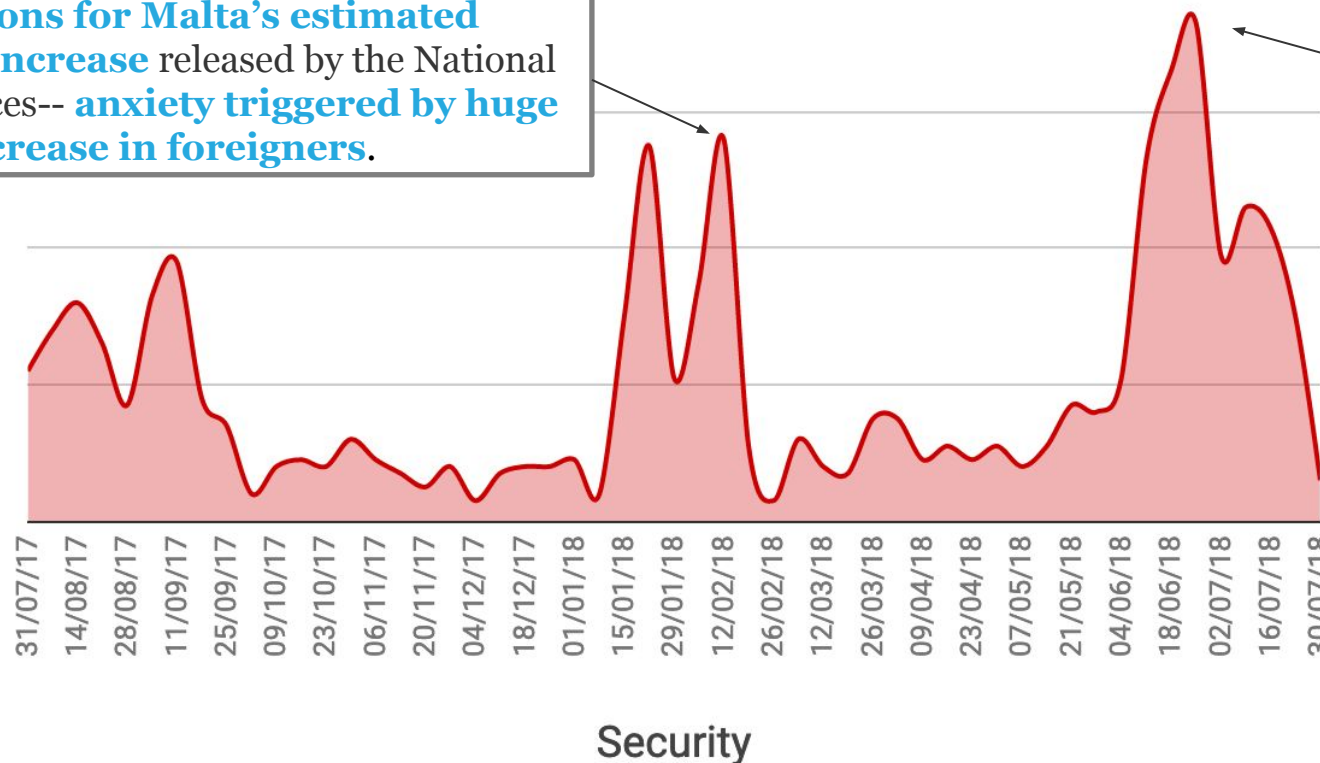
## Security (1)

A large portion of Malta's public social media conversation discusses **asylum-seeking migrants as a security concern**. Anti-migrant commenters fear local crime and violence will increase when migrants, mainly from Africa, flood the shores of Malta. Pro-migrant commenters believe harsh and discriminatory security measures (carried out by Maltese security officials) will create additional security risks in society. Both pro and anti-migrant conversations debate the implications of various international agreements concerning migration.

**Results:**  
~15,300  
(22%)

**Projections for Malta's estimated population increase** released by the National Statistics Offices-- **anxiety triggered by huge increase in foreigners.**

**Malta closes its ports to NGO-operated vessels, also trapping those currently docked inside:**  
*Independent.com.mt- Updated: Another battle between Malta, Italy brewing on yet another ship with migrants*





# Pan-European Narratives | MT Security (2)



## ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

Uncontrolled flow of migrants will increase crime and violence

*Actually wake up and realise that **taking so many immigrants** on an **already overpopulated little island** is going to **cause problems**...we cannot take ANY illegal immigrants.*

***Concern over lawlessness in Marsa [a town heavily populated by migrants]** has grown in recent weeks, and **hundreds of people took part in a solidarity walk** yesterday morning aimed at **bringing dignity back to the town.**"*

Fear of *African nationals* and *Arabs*

*They first unfurled a banner saying 'Stop Human Trafficking' before **hurling insults** [that] ranged from "**we don't like black people**" to "**black people want to kill us.**"*

## PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

Migrants are less likely to engage in criminal activity compared to locals

***There is no large-scale migration crisis in Europe now.** Instead, what we're seeing are domestic political crises in which the theme of **migration is exploited by demagogues.***

*The **immigrant crime rate** is **lower than the native-born crime rate** yet here he goes with the 'alien minor' crap, using that poor family as a political prop. Prick.*

Migrants are subjected to high levels of discrimination and racism

*In 2006 these **racists tried to burn down our family home** while we slept. Now my mother is dead and the racists are winning. **There is a real risk that the migrants will be murdered by a mob.***



### ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

Safety can only be achieved through strict security and legal policies

*If **their presence** is a **threat to our security**, we must **not let them in**. They will only **change our country to the hellhole they came from** anyway.*

Only the EU has the capacity *and* the legal obligation to fix the migration crisis

*A reminder for @Europarl\_EN and the #EU to seriously prioritise #migration and ensure solutions that work. This is **not an issue for #Malta** or #Italy alone. **Yet others are just taking a backseat.***

***Malta** is **neither the competent nor the coordinating authority** in this case. **Malta will observe prevailing laws.***

### PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

Harsh security measures create additional security risks

***Integration** is not about us being nice. It's **about pursuing the national interest**. If **migrants feel unprotected in society** – whether it's because there's legal discrimination or because the law is a dead letter given rampant discrimination – they will **seek protection in other ways**.*

*In close communities, crimes are less likely to occur against friends and neighbours. **Seeing a community as the enemy** - whether it's the Maltese community or the migrant community - **is not helpful in terms of hostility and crime.***

# + *Local Issues in Malta Around Migration*



---

2.



# Local Issues | MT

## Maltese Sovereignty

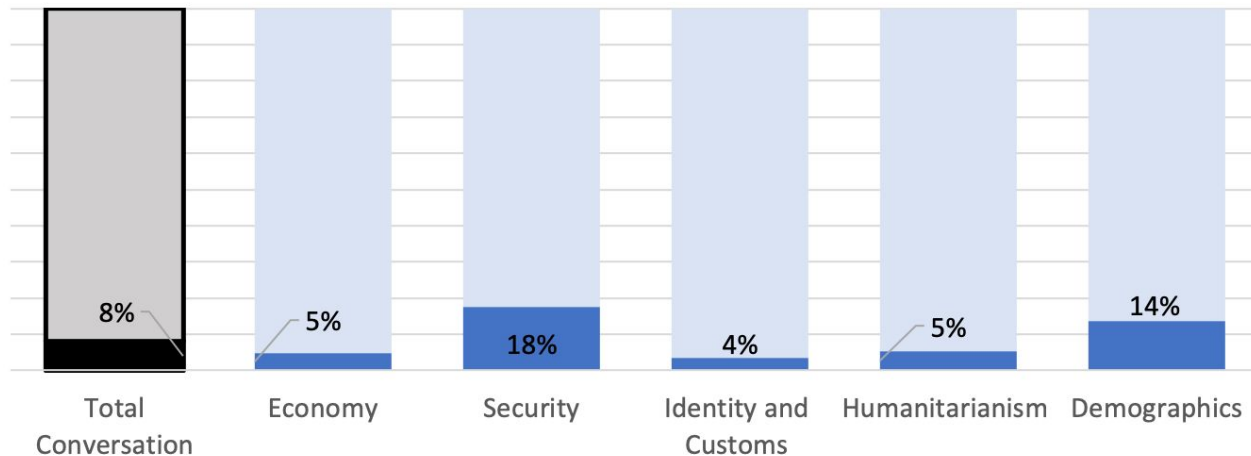
With limited resources, dwindling space, and a complex history of colonization spanning at least five millennia, an underlying feeling of insecurity and threat persists throughout the entire migration discussion in Malta. Such experiences translate into feelings of patriotism and a fierce desire to protect Maltese sovereignty when discussing migration.

*Italy was right to say the boat disobeyed the rules but it was wrong to tell them to head to Malta instead. **We're a sovereign country and nobody should dictate what we can and cannot do.***

*"I thank Spain PM Sanchez for taking in Aquarius after **Italy broke international rules** and caused a standoff," Muscat said on Twitter. "Malta will be sending fresh supplies to the vessel. We will have to sit down and discuss how to prevent this from happening again. **This is a European issue.**"*

*Muscat said that in the Lifeline case, "**tiny Malta**" had done what the **European Union had never succeeded in doing**, when it managed to get the support of eight other member states who agreed to each take a number of migrants.*

**Threats to security and demographics** are the central concern in this local narrative. EU policies are often being discussed to emphasize the importance of maintaining independence while achieving international cooperation and solidarity.



■ Share of comments within the narrative in the context of Maltese sovereignty



# + *Migration in the Context of European- and Domestic Politics*



---

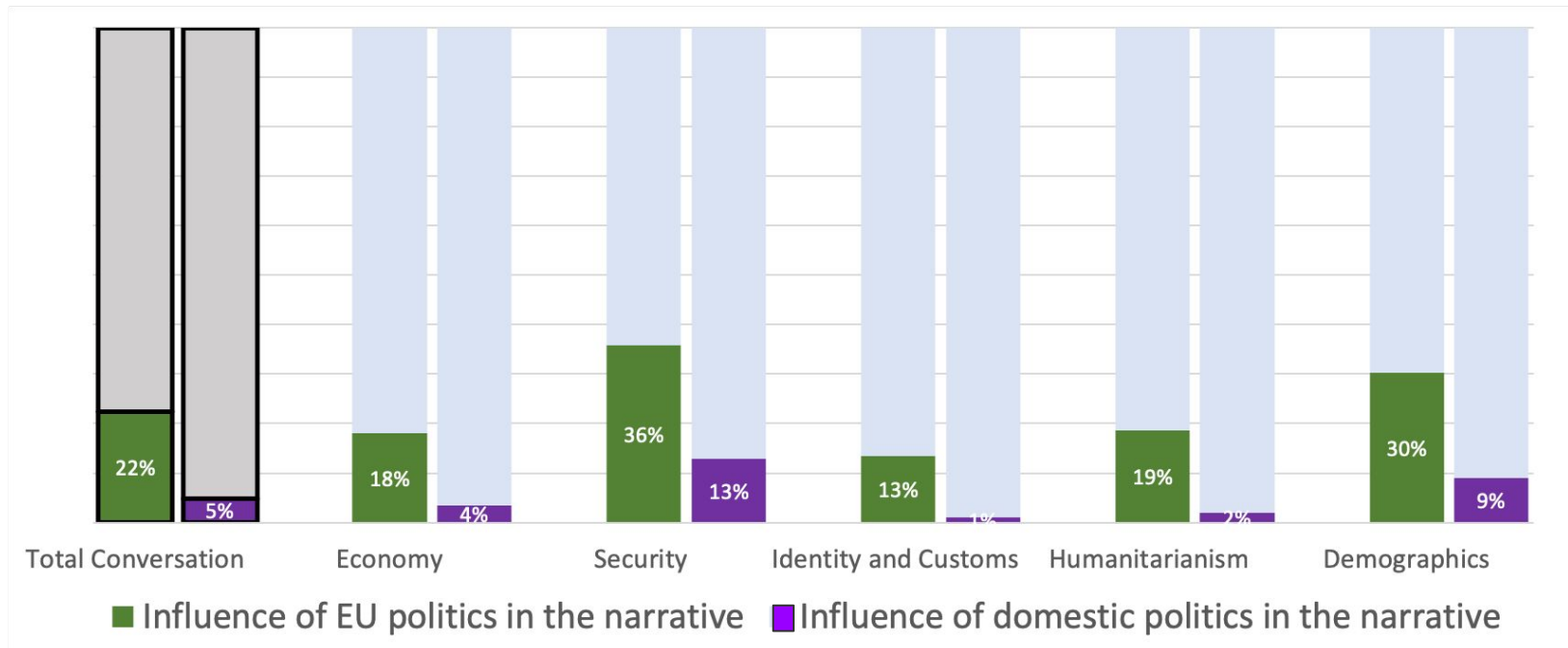
3.

# European and Domestic Politics Context within Narratives | MT

## Migration Discussion Often Without Politics

Among Pan-European narratives, political references are seen the most in **security**. Many Maltese believe that Malta does not have the **capacity** or the **legal obligation** to fix the migration crisis--believing instead that the onus sits with the EU and its member states to find a solution to the current crisis.

Apart from its' various burdens and opportunities, **Maltese people perceive that migration poses a threat to their independence**, too. The discussion on this local narrative of Maltese sovereignty is strongly influenced by references to the EU and other member states.





# + *Discussion Tone in Malta*



---

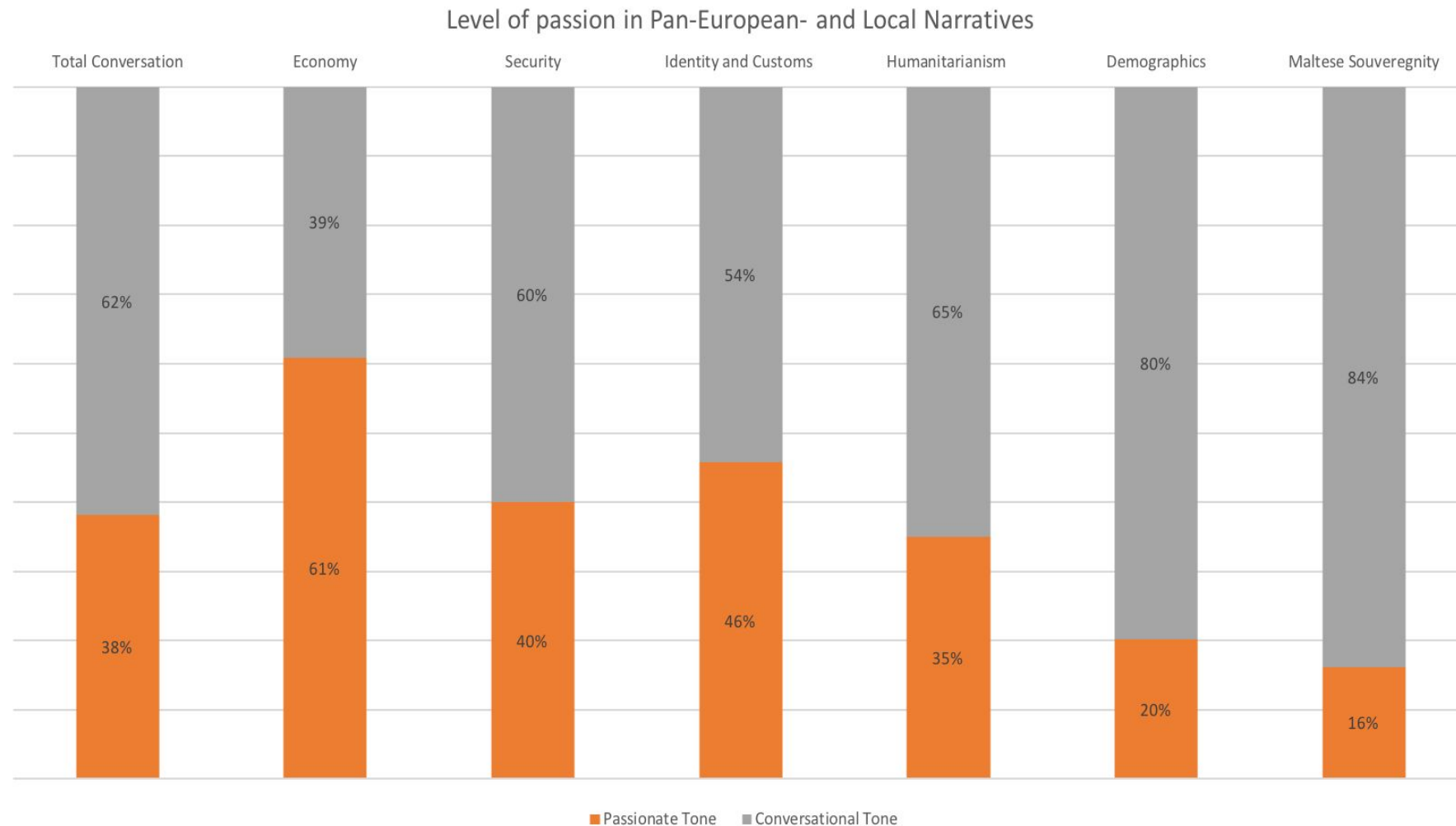
4.



# Sentiment Analysis | MT

## Migration Discussion With Conversational Tone

The discussion in Malta around migration is **divided**. People demonstrate a conversational tone when it comes sympathizing with the struggle of migrants. However, there tends to be an increase in passion when discussing migration in the context of economy (limited resources), security (constantly under threat), and identity (erosion of identity).



# + *Conversation Channels*



---

5.

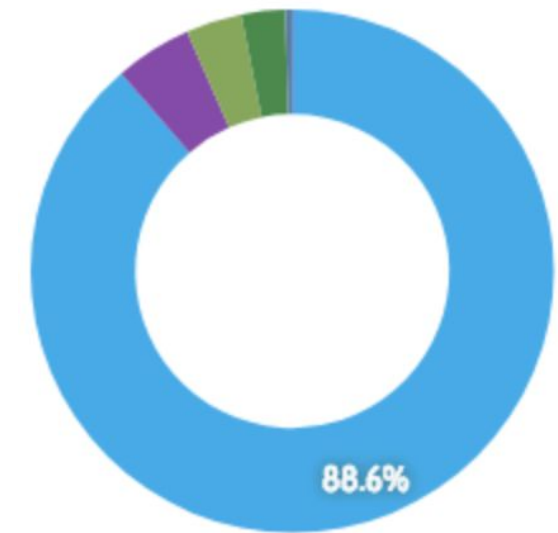
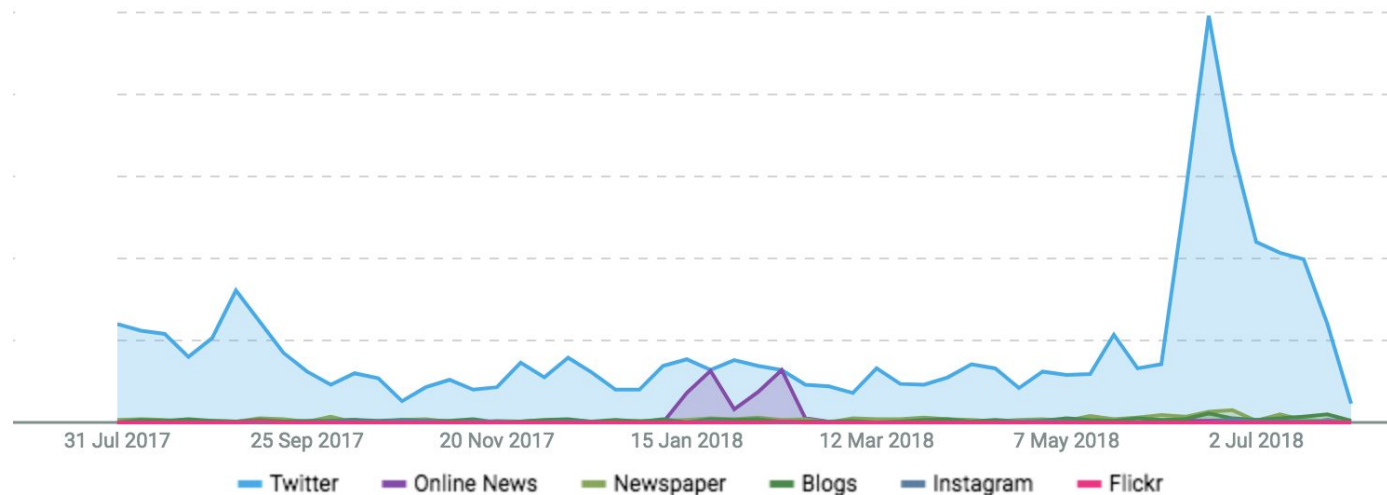


## Channel Distribution | MT

# From the Analysed and Publicly Available Data, Twitter Dominates the Debate

When it comes to addressing migration in the public online sphere, people in Malta most often get to **Twitter** to share their views. This platform captures almost **90% of the public conversations**, while the rest is divided between online news and newspaper sites, and blogs.

**Results:**  
**68 400**



- Twitter
- Online News
- Newspaper
- Blogs
- Instagram
- Flickr

# Most Influential Authors | MT

## Politicians And News Sites Trigger Highest Interest



Local politicians and organisations focusing on migration trigger the highest engagement on Twitter.

Most Influential Authors on Twitter	Description
Miriam Dalli MEP (@Miriamdalli)	Labour MEP
Joseph Muscat (@JosephMuscat_JM)	PM of Malta (Labour)
EASO (@EASO)	EU asylum support office

Apart from Maltese news sites, migration-focused organisations and government channels trigger most of the Maltese and international interest in regards to migration.

Most Influential Websites	Description
timesofmalta.com	Daily newspaper rank: 8
gov.mt	Government website rank: 10
lovinmalta.com	Online guide to malta, rank 52
newsare.net	Russian-connected news aggregator