SAPPORT



ANNUAL REPORT 2024









Aģenzija Sapport, Malta Annual Report 2024

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ABBREVIATIONS

AAC	Augmentative and Alternative Communication
ACTU	Access to Communication & Technology Unit
CMS	Case Management System
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
CRPD	Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability
DDI	Directorate for Disability Issues
EASPD	European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disability
EAT	Electronic Assistive Technology
EOI	Expression of Interest
EPR	European Platform for Rehabilitation
ESC	European Solidarity Corps
ESN	European Social Network
EU	European Union
HR	Human Resources
ICL	Independent Community Living
ICLM	Independent Community Living Monitoring
IPS	Institute for the Public Services
ISP	Individual Support Plan
KA2	Key Action 2
LAMP	Language Acquisition through Motor Planning
LSM	Lingwa tas-Sinjali Maltija
MIV	Ministry for Inclusion and the Voluntary Sector
MOP	Manual of Procedures
NAPPI	Non-Abusive Psychological and Physical Intervention
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
PA	Personal Assistance
PAPT	Professional Advisory Prevention Team

People Assistance Schemes
Personal Budgets Assistance Scheme
Positive Behaviour Support
Protection of Minors' Act
Public Social Partnership
Quality Audit, Research and Innovation
Relationship & Sexuality Education
Supported Independent Living
Sign Language Interpreting
Standard Operating Procedure
Service Providers' Monitoring Team
Sonia Tanti Independent Living Centre
United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability
University of Malta

OUR MISSION

Agenzija Sapport is Malta's National Agency that offers and provides services, support and guidance to persons with disabilities, their support networks, and their communities.

OUR CAUSE

The Agency's cause is to serve as a catalyst agent in the implementation of the articles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Its goal is to collaborate with persons with disabilities to develop accessible services and resources that enable and empower them to fully exercise their rights and freedoms, overcome societal challenges, and reach equity in society.

OUR VALUES

- Deinstitutionalisation Fostering services that support persons with disabilities towards living independently within communities that leave no one behind.
- **Co-production** Where persons with disabilities and Agenzija Sapport work together to design, implement, and strengthen services.
- **Personal autonomy** Empowering persons with disabilities to lead their own lives with dignity and independence, with the rightful freedom to live.
- Accessibility Developing accessible services and resources that involve holistic accessibility. This means physical, cognitive, sensory, and information accessibility to ensure inclusion for all individuals.
- **Equity** Providing fair and personalised support to ensure that persons with disabilities can truly access equal opportunities.



It is no secret that we are living in challenging times. The world is changing and, unfortunately, it is the most vulnerable who disproportionately bear the brunt. Diversity, equity and inclusion are fast becoming dirty words, including on our very own European doorstep.

Since the inception of Malta's Inclusion Ministry, which I have been proud to lead since 2020, we achieved considerable milestones locally, which have not gone unnoticed abroad. At this juncture, however, our responsibility to be a beacon of hope to others near and far takes on added significance.

It was my immense satisfaction to see that the Agency's efforts towards making independent living in the community a reality, were recognised by the European Network on Independent Living. Ranking second out of 27 European Union (EU) Member States is no mean feat. I am grateful to to Agenzija Sapport CEO Oliver Scicluna and his team, not only for their tireless work, but for believing that this can actually be our reality.

This has been my vision all along – ensuring a paradigm shift within Maltese society. I was determined, as I had stated in Parliament and also at the United Nations, that community living was not to be merely a choice, but a right.

A right for persons with disabilities, to be placed on the same footing as persons without disabilities. We cannot offer segregated living options, just because we cannot do better.

Now Malta stands out, executing an operational model that mandates inclusion in both policy and practice. For this, we needed to ensure an appropriate budget. This has increased every year, allowing the Agency to not only run projects, but also carry out a process reorientation.

Personal assistance is now part of a wider reform rooted in the concept of personal budgets. Allowing choice and control for persons with disabilities, and peace of mind for their families.

The board tasked with relevant decisions was reimagined, while a strong legal framework is being guaranteed through legislation.

This complements another solid achievement co-designed by this Ministry and supported through the Agency – the reform of disability assistance payments, now no longer exclusionary, and instead assessed on the basis of internationally-recognised functional criteria.

Government pledged, Government delivered.

While we stand proud, we remain willing to share our achievements and expertise with colleagues far and wide. The Agency does this through projects and study visits that it conducts, in Malta and abroad. It is an honour when other countries come to us and follow our lead.

Bilaterally, at EU level, and in international fora such as the Union for the Mediterranean, the Agency's officials have flown Malta's flag and positioned the country as a beacon of stability and hope, in an ever-changing world.

I would like to thank each and every one of the Agency's employees for making this mission possible. Not only are they going above and beyond in serving our community. They are also making sure that we can go on being a light to guide others, in the hope of better times.



The year 2024 marked a pivotal chapter in Agenzija Sapport's journey, one defined by strategic clarity, service innovation, and a deepened commitment to co-production and community engagement. As CEO, I am proud to present this Annual Report, which captures the Agency's progress, resilience, and vision for inclusive support.

One of the most significant achievements this year was the establishment of our core values and the launch of the first phase of our strategic plan. These foundational steps have set the tone for a more unified and purpose-driven agency, guiding our decisions and shaping our culture.

We introduced several new services that respond to evolving needs within our community. These include Youth Work, the consolidation of Customer Support Services, and the launch of Deaf & Hard of Hearing Services, each designed to enhance accessibility and responsiveness. 2024 also marked the first full year of operation for our Intake Team, whose work has streamlined access to support and improved our initial engagement with service users.

Co-production became more embedded across the Agency, with collaborations between Administration and Projects Departments, Supported Independent Living and Human Resources Departments in the recruitment of part-time Support Workers. These efforts reflect our belief that inclusive planning leads to more effective and sustainable outcomes.

The Service Providers' Monitoring Service's evolvement from from the Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Department was another key development, aligning its structure with the broader scope of its work. Meanwhile, digitalisation continued to transform our operations, with multiple projects enhancing efficiency and data management across units.

We also launched a new community outreach programme through the Family Support Unit, strengthening our presence and impact at the grassroots level. Community-based services and interventions were also strengthened through the opening of Girasol community hub in Rabat and the launch of Holqa transition premises in Qrendi, both of which represent our commitment to inclusive spaces and transitional support.

Staff development and capacity-building remained central to the Agency's development commitments. Licenced employees also extended Non-Abusive Psychological and Physical Intervention (NAPPI) training to other stakeholders working within the disability sector, namely NGOs, sharing with them tools and knowledge for the benefit of both staff and service users. Proactive risk management initiatives that aligned our operations with legislative requirements were also undertaken. This included close collaboration with legal experts and the streamlining of data protection practices.

On the international front, joining the European Platform for Rehabilitation (EPR) significantly expanded our networking and knowledge-sharing opportunities, firmly positioning the Agency within a wider European context. Furthermore, we deepened our engagement through active participation in various EU-funded projects and study visits, most notably the 'Let's Talk About It!' project. This project, which explored the intersection of disability and sexuality, directly supports our newly introduced Sexuality Policy and aligns with the remit of the Professional Advisory Prevention Team (PAPT) in developing comprehensive sex education programmes.

Financially, in 2024 the Agency saw a 14% increase in its budget, rising to €35.3 million from €30.1 million in 2023, an affirmation of trust in our mission and capacity.

Looking ahead to 2025, we are preparing for key reforms, including the Personal Budget reform, and our involvement in the Directive of the European Parliament and Council on the Disability and Parking Cards, in collaboration with Directorate for Disability Issues (DDI) and Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD). We also anticipate the upcoming national conference about the importance of Individual Support Plan (ISP) for persons with disabilities, aiming to generate a healthy debate on gaps and practical solutions for all stakeholders involved with persons with disabilities through life. More commitment towards initiatives to push for deinstitutionalisation continue to also be on top of the agenda for Agenzija Sapport, with the development of further projects, with the Kirkop transition premises project marked to near completion. We also aim to broaden the scope of the Way to Work Programme, ensuring more inclusive employment pathways through the opening of the SkillUp Unit.

This report is a testament to the dedication of our teams, the strength of our partnerships, and the continued trust placed in us by the Government. Together, we continue to build a more inclusive and empowered society.



2024: A YEAR IN REVIEW

2024 was a year of growth, innovation, and stronger support for persons with disabilities and their families. From pioneering new services to enhancing community participation, Agenzija Sapport made meaningful strides in shaping a more inclusive society.

REFORM

- Personal Assistance Reform Steady progress on this milestone project continued throughout the year. The project was also shortlisted for the "Excellence in Communities Award" by the European Social Network (ESN).
- New Agency Values Introduced the new core values of the Agency: Deinstitutionalisation, Co-production, Personal Autonomy, Accessibility, and Equity.

NEW AND UPGRADED SERVICES

 Intake Service – This team's first year of operations transformed the way individuals and families engage with the Agency, providing a streamlined entry point of support.

- Social Workers in Day Services and Supported Independent Living Services – Introduced specialised workers dedicated to supporting persons with disabilities in Agency-run settings.
- Deaf & Hard of Hearing Services A milestone initiative broadening access to services and providing support to the Deaf Community, raising awareness, and strengthening Deaf culture education.
- Transition Service Empowering independent living in the community with minimal support, with the opening of the first transition premises in Qrendi – Holqa – aligned with the Agency's deinstitutionalisation strategy.



€35.3 MILLION BUDGET
A 14% INCREASE FROM 2023

- Youth Work Service Establishing the Youth Work
 Service to offer personalised support for young adults with
 disabilities to foster independence and inclusion.
- Service Providers' Monitoring Team Reinforced supervision of outsourced services by restructuring the NGO Department to offer more support to other stakeholders and service users making use of their services.

EMPOWERING FAMILIES AND YOUTH

 First Fathers' Support Group – Creating a safe space for fathers of children with disabilities to share and connect.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT

- Workplace Training New programme for public sector managers on supporting employees with disabilities.
- Sexuality Policy Training Widespread training to frontliners and professionals offered by specialised Agency trainers to ensure a unified approach to Relationship & Sexuality Education (RSE) policies and guidelines to educating and approaching service users.

ENHANCING INCLUSION IN WORK AND COMMUNITY

- Co-production in Recruitment Service users actively participated in hiring part-time Support Workers, demonstrating their expertise in identifying the needs of the service.
- Sharing Lives Service Shifted focus from service users' concept to members, embedding true co-production values.
- Service Users' Council Expanded across all 11 Day
 Centres, ensuring every service user is represented and
 has the opportunity to actively contribute to decisionmaking.

STRENGTHENING CARE AND SUPPORT

 Ottobock Malta Clinic – Re-introduced specialised seating assessments and related services through the Sonia Tanti Independent Living Centre.

ACCESSIBILITY AND EQUITY

- Wheelchair Accessible Vehicle Scheme Broadened the scheme's eligibility to include second-hand purchases of wheelchair accessible vehicles, renaming it "Grant on the Purchase of Second-Hand Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles".
- Agency Website Enhancements Key sections of the Agency's official website were made available in Maltese Sign Language, thanks to collaboration with the Agency's Sign Language Interpreters.

GROWTH AND PARTNERSHIPS

- Joined the European Platform for Rehabilitation as Observer Members.
- Collaboration with Agenzija Żghażagh Co-developing Malta's first National Youth Index.
- €35.3 million budget A 14% increase from 2023, underlining the Government's commitment to stronger investment in disability services.

Each milestone in 2024 represents more than an achievement – it reflects the Agency's mission to create a society where persons with disabilities live with dignity, autonomy, and opportunity.



SERVICES DATA

SERVICES	NUMBER OF SERVICE USERS IN 2023	NUMBER OF SERVICE USERS IN 2024
Intake Service	-	763
Social Work Services	2,364	794*1
Family Support Unit:		
Support groups for parents of minors with disabilities	29	14
Fathers' Workshop	17	6
Positive Parenting Courses	33	14
Super Sibs	33	29
One-to-one parent coaching sessions	12 (number of families)	41
Independent Living Monitoring Services	383	440
Occupational Therapy Service	132	135
Sharing Lives	231	352
Community Services (2023) – My Programme (2024)	105	99
Way to Work Programme	66 (since programme inception in 2022)	77 (since programme inception in 2022)
Day Services	500	450
Supported Independent Living Service	92	52* ²
Transition Services	-	3
NGO Services' ³ (residential services, day services and respite services)	730	527'4
Professional Advisory Prevention Service	-	19 (service users who attended one-to-one sessions on sexuality and relationship education)
Helpline	4,626 (number of tickets opened in 2023)	11,414 (number of tickets opened in 2024)

SERVICES	NUMBER OF SERVICE USERS IN 2023	NUMBER OF SERVICE USERS IN 2024
Accessibility Unit:		
Blue Badge	2,973 (number of Blue Badge documents issued in 2023, including new and renewed documents)	3,733 (number of Blue Badge documents issued in 2024, including new and renewed documents)
EU Disability Card	381 (number of EU Disability Cards issued Nov – Dec 2023)	4,686 (number of EU Disability Cards issued in 2024)
People Assistance Schemes:		
Empowerment Scheme	1,361 (approved applications)	1,354 (approved applications)
Vehicle Road License Exemption Scheme	761 (approved applications)	896 (approved applications)
Vehicle Registration Tax Exemption Scheme	149 (approved applications)	152 (approved applications)
Drive from Wheelchair Vehicle Grant	2 (approved applications)	2 (approved applications)
Grant on Modified, Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles	2 (approved applications)	16 (approved applications)
Sign Language Interpreting Services	43	55
Sonia Tanti Independent Living Centre	250	340
Access to Communication & Technology Unit	258	268

Table 1: Number of service users who benefitted from Sapport services in 2024

^{*1} The discrepancy between 2023 and 2024 figures is due to a shift in intake responsibilities. In 2023, the Social Work Team handled intake cases, including brief and terminated interventions, resulting in a higher count. In 2024, only cases directly supported by the Social Work team were included which required longer intervention.

 $^{^{*2}}$ Data for 2024 does not include HILA residence service users, which were included in the 2023 data.

^{*3} NGO Services went through a reform in 2024, now renamed to Service Providers' Monitoring Team

 $^{^{*4}}$ Data for 2024 does not include HILA respite service users, which were included in the 2023 data.



PERSONAL ASSISTANCE REFORM 2024

Agenzija Sapport's project on reforming personal assistance schemes targets youths and adults with disabilities. It forms part of the 2021-2030 National Strategy on the Rights of Disabled Persons. Developing the current related Independent Community Living (ICL) Scheme with the principles of independent living and self-directed support, is a key scope of this reform, including strengthened choice, control, and flexibility surrounding how persons with disabilities manage their use of personal assistance services. Ultimately, this project shall serve to lay the foundations for a personal budgets system for persons with disabilities in Malta.



WAS SHORTLISTED FOR THE EXCELLENCE IN COMMUNITIES AWARD BY ESN

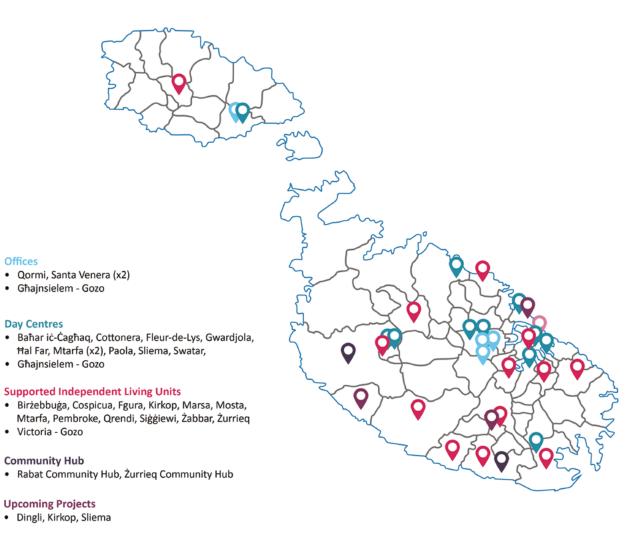


Since the inception of the personal assistance reform project towards the end of 2022, which was marked with a national stakeholders' working group, through to consultation on an international level and the launch of a related public consultation in 2023, the year 2024 saw work on major aspects as a result of such foundational preparations. Key milestones included:

- The creation of a reform implementation plan based on the feedback received through the aforementioned public consultation and the discussions of a related reviewing committee.
- The creation and publication of guiding documentation for personal assistance users, supporting persons and professionals, including a job description and a charter of rights and responsibilities.
- Numerous discussions with various stakeholders, contributing towards the development of guidelines related to the reformed Personal Budgets Assistance Scheme (PBAS), which document is planned to be finalised in 2025, and is aimed to serve as a key point of reference for the Agency, the PBAS Board, and the PBAS Appeals Board.
- Reviewing and submission of feedback on preliminary documentation pertaining to plans for legislation on personal assistance spearheaded by the DDI.

The project and its development gained international recognition, being presented at a workshop on independent living and inclusion in the community of persons with disabilities, organised by the European Commission and ESF+ in March 2024.

MAP OF SAPPORT PREMISES



KreAzzjoni

Offices

Day Centres

Valletta

Figure 1: Sapport premises locations, 2024



INTAKE SERVICE

The Agenzija Sapport Intake Team, established in late 2023, serves as the initial point of contact for persons with disabilities and the general public seeking access to Agency services or guidance.

Upon initial contact, the team conducts a preliminary assessment, which is normally followed by a home visit for a more comprehensive evaluation. Utilising tools like the Gateway Assessment and the self-administered World Health Organisation Disability Assessment Schedule (WHODAS) assessment, the team gains a deeper understanding of the individual's needs and circumstances. Based on these assessments, appropriate referrals are made to relevant services within Agenzija Sapport. There may be also instances where other services external to Agenzija Sapport are deemed to be better fitting to the person. As such, the Intake Team may also refer him/her to external services, depending on the need.

Prior to the formation of the dedicated Intake Team, these responsibilities were carried out by Social Workers. The establishment of this specialised team has significantly benefitted the Agency in several ways. Firstly, it has alleviated the workload of Social Workers, as reflected in presented data, allowing them to focus on their existing cases and service delivery. Secondly, it has enhanced service delivery for prospective service users by providing them with dedicated support and guidance throughout the initial assessment and referral process. This dedicated approach ensures a smoother and more efficient entry point for individuals seeking support from Agenzija Sapport.

2024 HIGHLIGHTS

A significant achievement of the Intake Team in 2024 was
the migration to a dedicated Case Management System
(CMS). This transition allowed the team to independently
record and track their interventions, no longer relying
solely on the Social Work Team's CMS. This independent
system strengthens the Intake Team's autonomy and

- streamlines communication and information sharing within Agenzija Sapport.
- Given their frequent interaction with persons with
 disabilities and their families, the Intake Team has proven
 instrumental in identifying gaps within existing services
 and emerging needs within the disability sector. By closely
 listening to the concerns, challenges, and aspirations
 of individuals seeking support, the Intake Team has
 gained valuable insights into the evolving needs of the
 disability community. This valuable information can be
 effectively communicated to relevant stakeholders within
 Agenzija Sapport, informing service development, policy
 adjustments, and ultimately improving the overall quality
 of support provided to persons with disabilities.

	Total intakes, 2024	Closed intakes, 2024	Cases referred to other Agenzija Sapport services, 2024
Children	294	239	120
Youth	166	145	61
Adults	303	248	103
Total	763	632	284

Table 2: Cases dealt with by Intake Team, January - December 2024

WAY FORWARD

The Intake Team will continue to serve as the gateway for prospective service users, offering tailored guidance and support. The focus remains on effectively linking individuals with services that best align with their unique needs, ensuring a person-centred approach and seamless access to Agenzija Sapport's support network.



SOCIAL WORK SERVICES

The Social Workers at Agenzija Sapport play a vital role in supporting persons with disabilities to lead fulfilling lives. Their work is multifaceted and holistic, beginning with in-depth needs assessments that consider the physical, emotional, social, and financial aspects of each individual's situation. These assessments inform the development of personalised support plans that ensure services are effectively tailored to each person's unique needs.

794 CASES

SOCIAL WORK SERVICES IN 2024



Furthermore, Social Workers advocate for the rights and inclusion of persons with disabilities within their communities, working with other governmental agencies, schools, and other social structures to remove barriers and ensure equal opportunities. They also provide essential emotional and psychological support to persons with disabilities and their families, helping them navigate complex challenges such as anxiety, grief, and life transitions.

The Agenzija Sapport Social Work Services are composed of three teams: Children's Team, Young Adults' Team, and Adults' Team, to reach further the specific needs of each cohort. Throughout their mission, Social Workers provide invaluable support to relatives of persons with disabilities. They offer emotional support by actively listening, demonstrating empathy, and guiding relatives on effective coping mechanisms.

Furthermore, Social Workers provide practical advice, such as assisting with accessing resources, navigating complex support systems, and understanding the legal rights of both the person with disabilities and their caregivers. They also facilitate family meetings to create a safe space for communication, sharing concerns, and developing strategies for supporting their relative with a disability. Importantly, Social Workers emphasise the importance of self-care for relatives, encouraging them to prioritise their own well-being to prevent burnout and maintain their own health.

Finally, Social Workers connect relatives with support groups, fostering a sense of community and shared understanding with other families facing similar challenges. This multifaceted support helps relatives effectively cope with the emotional and practical demands of caring for a family member with a disability, aligning with the principles of co-production and deinstitutionalisation.

COLLABORATION WITH SERVICE USERS

A fundamental principle of social work in the disability sector is collaboration with the service user. This means that the Social Worker works in partnership with the individual to:

- Identify their goals and priorities: The Social Worker actively listens to the individual's aspirations, dreams, and concerns. The individual's perspective is central to the decision-making process.
- Develop and implement support plans: The Social Worker and the individual work together to create a plan that reflects the individual's unique needs and preferences. The plan is not imposed on the individual but is developed collaboratively, emphasising co-production.
- Monitor progress and make adjustments: Through coordinating case reviews, the Social Worker regularly reviews the support plan with the individual to assess its effectiveness and make necessary adjustments. The individual's feedback is essential in ensuring that the plan remains relevant and beneficial.

By working in partnership with service users, Social Workers empower persons with disabilities to take control of their lives, make informed choices, and live independently and inclusively within their communities, supporting the vision of deinstitutionalisation.

2024 HIGHLIGHTS

 The three Social Work teams have successfully implemented a system within Agenzija Sapport where case reviews are now given more attention and are centrally coordinated by the Social Work teams themselves. This significant achievement has resulted in several positive outcomes. Firstly, it has ensured that all cases are reviewed regularly and thoroughly, identifying any emerging needs or concerns promptly. Secondly, it has fostered a culture of continuous learning and improvement within the Agency by allowing for the identification of areas for enhanced practice. Thirdly, the coordinated approach to case reviews has improved communication and collaboration within the Agency's services, leading to more effective and efficient service delivery. These regular reviews are proving to be invaluable in ensuring that individuals receive the most appropriate and timely support, ultimately improving their quality of life and wellbeing, in line with deinstitutionalisation.

- A significant achievement of the Social Work teams is their active role in facilitating support groups spearheaded by the Family Support Unit. This collaborative effort provides invaluable peer support and a sense of community for persons with disabilities and even the informal carers, promoting co-production.
- Social Workers played a crucial role in the personal assistance reform by proposing key amendments. This advocacy ensured that the reformed system better reflects the needs and preferences of persons with disabilities, prioritising accessibility, flexibility, and usercentredness. These proposed changes aimed to empower individuals to live more independently and fulfilling lives within their communities, supporting deinstitutionalisation.
- Furthermore, the Social Work teams have achieved a significant milestone with the recruitment of new Social Workers specifically dedicated to supporting persons with disabilities residing in the Agency's Supported Independent Living (SIL) units and attending Day Services. This strategic move ensures that these individuals receive specialised and consistent support tailored to their unique needs and circumstances, emphasising co-production and deinstitutionalisation.



	Children's Team	Young Adults' Team	Adults' Team
Active cases	198	154	253
Home visits	325	306	430
Office visits	55	107	114

Table 3: Interventions by the Social Work Services, January - December 2024

SOCIAL WORK SERVICE ACTIVE CASES

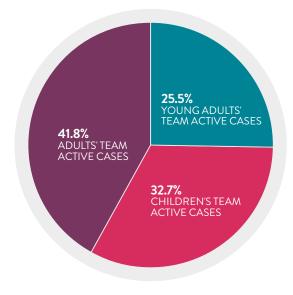


Figure 2: Active cases dealt with by the Social Work Services in 2024

WAY FORWARD

- Independent living project: The service will work alongside
 other services within the Agency on an upcoming project
 that shall focus on allowing young adults to experience
 living independently for a short period of time with
 the assistance of professional support. The aim is for
 these young adults to experience what it means to live
 independently within the community. This initiative will:
 - Provide a safe and supportive environment for young adults to develop essential life skills.
 - Foster confidence and self-reliance among participants.
 - Offer tailored professional support to address individual needs and challenges.
 - Promote the principles of co-production by involving participants in the planning and execution of the project.
- Collaboration for deinstitutionalisation which will include:
 - Partnering with governmental and NGOs to advocate for policy changes that support deinstitutionalisation.
 - Raising awareness on the importance of communitybased services and supports that enable persons with disabilities to live independently.
 - Encouraging the active participation of persons with disabilities and their families in the decision-making processes related to their care and support.

TESTIMONIALS

"Għalija tajjeb is-servizz tas-Social Work għax jgħin kemm lili u kemm lil missieri. Is-Social Workers sibnihom ta' gwida u sapport fejn naħdmu id f'id ma' xulxin, u fejn kien hemm bzonn, anke akkumpanjawna għall-appuntamenti. Is-Social Workers jisimgħu u kienu ta' għajnuna kemm għalija kif ukoll għall-ġenituri tiegħi, li huma kbar fl-età u ma jifilħux, f'mumenti meta kellna bzonn." **Warren, service user**

"Having a Social Worker is like having a friend or family member with you all the time who understands and supports you, and whatever you tell them, you will not be judged and will be kept to themselves." **Kate, service user**

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

Occupational therapy is a client-focused healthcare profession that aims to enhance health and well-being through meaningful activities. Its main goal is to help individuals participate in everyday tasks. Occupational Therapists collaborate with individuals and communities to improve their ability to engage in activities they want to, need to, or are expected to do, referred to as 'occupations'. This involves modifying the activity or environment to better support their participation (World Federation of Occupational Therapists, 2012).

The Occupational Therapy team within Agenzija Sapport follows persons with disabilities ranging between the ages of 16 and 60 years. The Occupational Therapists are community-based therapists utilising a community practice approach. Persons making use of the service can be either service users who are already benefitting from other Agenzija Sapport services or other persons with disabilities who are referred from the community. Persons with disabilities can be self-referred, or referred by their guardians, families or other professionals.

Service users who are not utilising Agenzija Sapport services are referred to the Intake Team, who then direct them to the most appropriate services. Intervention is provided based on the service users' needs and preferences, which may include their home, workplace, day service, office, or other community settings where they need to practice their occupations. Intervention also involves educating caregivers and professionals to enhance their skills, with the goal of increasing service users' level of independence.

2024 HIGHLIGHTS

In addition to one-on-one interventions, in 2024, Occupational Therapists delivered a wide range of training sessions aimed at enhancing staff competencies and promoting greater understanding of the profession.

63 REFERRALS

WERE RECEIVED BY THE OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY SERVICE IN 2024





These sessions included:

- NAPPI Training
- Autism and SPELL (Structure, Positive Approaches and Expectations, Empathy, Low Arousal, and Links)
 Framework
- Understanding Our Senses
- Occupational Therapy Practical Workshops
- Activity Analysis and Grading from an Occupational Therapy Perspective

These workshops served to build staff knowledge and skills, while also raising awareness of the scope and impact of Occupational Therapy.

Two notable training initiatives this year included:

- · An autism-focused session for police officers
- A workplace support training for public sector managers on supporting employees with disabilities

Both sessions were collaboratively designed and delivered in partnership with two individuals on the autism spectrum and the PAPT.

Occupational Therapists also continued their efforts to raise the profile of the profession within the Agency and in the wider community. Initiatives included the distribution of promotional bookmarks, participation in internal communication campaigns, and appearances on TV programmes. This awareness-raising strategy remains a key priority for the coming year.

Furthermore, the Occupational Therapists played a consultative role in service planning across the Agency. Their involvement ensured services were inclusive and tailored to the needs of persons with disabilities, addressing sensory, cognitive, and physical considerations. Their contributions supported the development of effective and accessible interventions.

In addition, the team carried out functional assessments in a variety of settings, including Dar Bjorn and the Adaptive Driving Centre within the Sonia Tanti Independent Living Centre (STILC) of Agenzija Sapport, to determine appropriate levels of support for service users. Occupational Therapists also supported professional development within the field. They mentored students from the University of Malta's (UOM) Faculty of Health Sciences and organised orientation sessions for Occupational Therapy students on placement. To further advocate for community-based practice, team members actively participated in national-level taskforces, conferences, and various Agency boards – contributing their expertise to both policy and practice.

TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT OF PROFESSIONALS

Throughout 2024, Occupational Therapists actively participated in various Continuous Professional Development (CPD) activities to maintain current knowledge and enhance their practice. These initiatives focused on positive, evidence-based approaches, as well as emerging tools and equipment in the field. Key highlights included:

- Recertification in NAPPI Training: Two Occupational Therapists were recertified in NAPPI in the UK, ensuring continued expertise in safe and respectful intervention techniques.
- Represented Agenzija Sapport at the EPR Annual General Meeting in Malaga, Spain. During the event, the Agency was officially recognised as an observer member of the EPR, strengthening its ties with European rehabilitation networks.
- Attended the first Occupational Therapy Europe Congress "Future-proofing Occupational Therapy" in Krakow, Poland. This event offered valuable insights into innovative practices and the future direction of the profession across Europe.
- An Occupational Therapist served as a facilitator for the Maltese group of persons with disabilities at the "It Starts

- with Me" EU project exchange in Sweden. Organised by Agenzija Sapport's Sharing Lives Service, this initiative focused on building leadership skills and promoting self-advocacy among service users.
- Participated in panel discussions in two seminars:
 "Designing Accessible Homes" organised by
 AccessibleEU, CRPD, the DDI, and the Faculty for
 the Built Environment within the UOM, and at "The
 Cognitive and Sensorial Accessibility: Key Design
 Approaches" seminar organised by the Agency.

These engagements not only strengthened the team's professional capabilities but also enhanced the Agency's role in national and international discussions around accessibility, inclusion, and best practices in Occupational Therapy.

135 PERSONS

WITH DISABILITIES BENEFITTED FROM THE AGENCY'S OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY SERVICE IN 2024

WAY FORWARD

Together with the Young Adults' Social Work Team and the Youth Work Team, the Occupational Therapy professionals continued their work on the Independent Living Project, aligned with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), the National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities, and Agenzija Sapport's Strategy. This project aims to support young adults with disabilities in developing skills for a more independent life. It also seeks to empower those who wish to transition into independent living in the community, enhancing their quality of life as adults with rights and responsibilities. Currently in the planning stage, the project is set to move into its implementation phase in 2025, providing young adults with the opportunity to experience independence while receiving support to build autonomy.



FAMILY SUPPORT UNIT

The aim of the Family Support Unit is to address the needs of families of persons with disabilities, as experience and current research has found that disability affects the family as a whole unit.

The weight of the disability is often aided through the person's social system, but it is just as important to ensure that the system is aided to be able to care for the person with the disability. This is done by imparting skills, knowledge, and social

191 INDIVIDUALS

BENEFITTED FROM FAMILY SUPPORT UNIT INTERVENTIONS DURING 2024



support to the person with disability and their families through the integral interventions of the Family Support Unit.

For 2024, the aims of the Family Support Unit were to continue supporting families and their relatives with disabilities. Through 2024, the team was able to further solidify innovative programmes and implement new concepts in conjunction with the emerging needs of persons with disabilities.

Such programmes included:

- · Positive Parenting programmes
- Workshops for fathers, parents, and siblings of persons with disabilities
- Support groups for parents, teen siblings, and fathers of persons with disabilities

The Department also provided one-to-one sessions and consultations on cases whereby persons with disabilities or their loved ones required guidance in navigating their respective social systems in conjunction with their key professionals.

In 2024, the Family Support Unit was able to provide over 41 one-to-one sessions, 14 Positive Parenting sessions, 25 different workshops, and 18 support group programmes.

Moreover, the Department proposed the first ever "Seminar for Professionals and Family Members of Children with Disabilities" and worked hard to see its fruition in March 2025. This highly anticipated seminar was worked upon diligently throughout 2024 to create a forum for professionals and parents to learn more about the needs of persons with

disabilities and the services available to support them. The seminar was envisaged to include various workshops offered to the attendees, which the team were able to produce with the support of other professionals involved.

2024 HIGHLIGHTS

- Support groups were created to provide aid specifically to fathers of children with disabilities.
- The introduction of a new format to the Sibling Workshops.
- The delivery of Parents' Support Group, to support the ever-increasing demands of being a parent and to make the service more accessible.
- Applying for a joint collaboration with an entity in Turin, Italy, in order to create a clear framework for support groups for siblings.
- Outreach to local councils, state schools and private schools.

WAY FORWARD

In addition to the highly anticipated "Seminar for Professional and Family Members of Children with Disabilities", the Family Support Unit has ambitious plans to expand its impact throughout 2025. Building on its commitment to innovation, the unit aims to launch a series of new intervention programmes specifically tailored to address the diverse and evolving needs of the Agency's service users and the wider community.

Key initiatives include the piloting of the Agency's first Adult Siblings Support Group and Acquired Disabilities Support Group. Furthermore, the Family Support Unit will introduce community outreach efforts to ensure that individuals who may not currently engage with the Agency become aware of the wide range of support available to persons with disabilities and their families.

TESTIMONIALS

"I love the Super Sibs sessions as everyone is free to talk and share experiences, and there is a non-judgemental atmosphere. The activities are great for my age and I am usually grouped with other kids in my age group. The session coordinators have such a positive attitude, and they always have a smile on their faces!"

Super Sibs participant

"As parents of two children with disabilities, the Positive Parenting Programme was an amazing first experience to meet other parents, able to discuss and share thoughts and methods applied. The programme provided us with the opportunity to become aware of different services available and to meet the professional team behind the programme. It opened up the confidence for us to reach out whenever help was required being family support, guidance, and additional services to help us continue our daily lives and routine."

Positive Parenting Programme participants

"It's not easy being the sibling of a person with disabilities, and we know that our daughter puts up with a lot and has to live with many compromises that other "typical" families don't have to face. There aren't that many outlets for her to just be herself and not "the sister of", so when the Super Sibs sessions came along, we signed her up immediately. She has always enjoyed them, and each time we ask her if she'd like us to sign her up for the next round of sessions, her answer is always an emphatic yes!"

Parent of Super Sibs participant



INDEPENDENT COMMUNITY LIVING MONITORING SERVICE

The Independent Community Living Monitoring (ICLM) Service within Agenzija Sapport provides essential support and follow-up to persons with disabilities who make use of personal assistance, and their families, in both Malta and Gozo.

In 2024, the ICLM team continued to oversee the Personal Assistance Subsidy Scheme, while supporting the initial implementation of the PA Reform. This reform is intended to bring the service in line with the principles of independent living and self-directed support, as outlined in the UNCRPD and national policy frameworks.

440 PERSONS

WITH DISABILITIES WERE SUPPORTED BY ICLM PROFESSIONALS IN 2024



Moreover, the positive effects of deinstitutionalisation meant that persons previously residing in residential placements, were able to return to the community through the support of personal assistance.

The service was also utilised to support families of children with disabilities in accessing personal assistants who aided in the complementary care of the children with disabilities, the continuation of therapeutic interventions and the promotion of equality.

2024 HIGHLIGHTS

To meet the growing demand, the ICLM team expanded to seven professionals and one team leader. Their work goes beyond administering the subsidy; the team takes a multidisciplinary approach, collaborating with other professionals to ensure service users receive holistic support. Team members also serve as key professionals safeguarding the rights of persons with disabilities – especially concerning accessibility, inclusion, and person-centred service delivery.

Throughout 2024, the ICLM team remained committed to promoting independence through co-production, ensuring that the voice, choice, and aspirations of persons with disabilities remain at the core of service design and delivery.

The ICLM team assumed responsibility for managing the waiting list previously overseen by the Intake Team. This shift provided greater visibility into the evolving needs of

beneficiaries and how these relate to the service's operations. With a clearer understanding of service gaps and priorities, the team was driven to develop and propose new, more efficient ways of working to cater to the high demand of its beneficiaries.

The number of service users in 2024 increased significantly from 338 in 2023. An additional 112 referrals were received from the Intake Team, with 48 referrals of families of minors with disabilities and 64 referrals of adults with disabilities. The majority of requests from adults with disabilities showed a positive acknowledgement of the efforts being made to ascertain persons with disabilities have the means to remain within the community.

Throughout the year, the ICLM team collaborated with a diverse range of stakeholders to improve the quality of life of beneficiaries. The team looks forward to building on these partnerships and continuing this collaborative approach in the year ahead.

The ICLM professionals were also able to pilot three new assessment tools with invaluable input from its beneficiaries and their caregivers, which meant that the service was refined to better address the needs of service users.

A feedback exercise was conducted, yielding over 200 responses from beneficiaries. The aim was to evaluate the effectiveness of the service and identify ways to enhance it further.

WAY FORWARD

In 2025, the ICLM team will be undergoing structural and organisational changes necessary to mirror the continuous work being carried out in relation to the PA reform. ICLM professionals are eager to implement these changes and to support more persons with disabilities in accessing the right to live independently within the community.

Looking ahead, the team will undertake a prioritisation exercise aimed at addressing urgent cases more effectively and reducing waiting times for applicants.



TESTIMONIALS

"This service has improved my general physical and mental well-being in many ways, since I am also working full-time, and my health restricts me from being fully independent. I have different conditions which prevent me to do certain tasks on my own, but I have found a good routine on a weekly basis with my personal assistant so I can manage well my duties and responsibilities without added stress. It is reassuring that with the aid of this service, I am able to continue contributing to my family and society in general."

Christine Mifsud, mother & service user

"Personal assistance is crucial for me as a person with physical impairment. This service helps me to perform daily tasks that might be physically challenging. It supports me in performing household chores or errands that might be limited due to my impairment. The service makes a significant difference in creating independence, confidence, and a sense of dignity for many people including myself. It improved my overall quality of life."

Vanessa Cassar, service user



YOUTH WORK SERVICE

Youth Workers play a crucial role in supporting young people with disabilities to reach their full potential. They act as mentors, facilitators, and advocates, empowering young people to develop essential life skills, build self-esteem, and actively participate in their communities.



WERE HELD AS PART OF THE NEEDS ANALYSIS Recognising the growing need for such specialised support, Agenzija Sapport established a dedicated Youth Work team in the last quarter of 2024. Comprising two Youth Workers, the team is focused on delivering personalised support to young adults with disabilities, fostering their independence and inclusion.

2024 HIGHLIGHTS

 The creation of the Youth Work team was driven by the results of a comprehensive Needs Analysis. This analysis gathered qualitative insights from professionals across various Agency services, as well as directly from young adults with disabilities. These findings offered a clearer understanding of their aspirations and specific support requirements, forming a solid foundation upon which the Youth Work team can build its initiatives.

> The team also spearheaded the development of a structured training programme on youth work principles and best practices. This programme will be delivered to professionals across Agenzija Sapport, aiming to strengthen the implementation of youth work methodologies and enhance service delivery across the Agency.



WAY FORWARD

Looking ahead, the primary goal is to further integrate and consolidate the role of Youth Workers within Agenzija Sapport. This will include the design and rollout of innovative youth work programmes that are dynamic and responsive to the evolving needs of young adults with disabilities, ensuring meaningful opportunities for growth, inclusion, and empowerment.





SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETING SERVICE

Interpreting services play a crucial role in facilitating communication across various aspects of daily life, thereby supporting Malta's alignment with the UNCRPD. These services span across multiple sectors, including, but not limited to, education, employment, healthcare, legal settings, social engagement, and leisure activities. They are available to all hearing-impaired individuals who use Maltese Sign Language.

55 SERVICE USERS

AND 6 ENTITIES BENEFITTED FROM A TOTAL OF 2,256 HOURS OF INTERPRETING DURING 2024

SAPP

Agenzija Sapport offers the service of Sign Language Interpreting (SLI) between Maltese Sign Language (Lingwa tas-Sinjali Maltija¹ – LSM) and spoken language (Maltese and English) and vice-versa, across Malta and Gozo.

Offering a personalised service to all their service users means that each Sign Language Interpreter takes time to understand the context, the situation and the individuals where interpretation is required to ensure the highest service-user accessibility and satisfaction.

Number of service users	55
Number of hours of interpreting	2,256
Number of appointments attended by interpreters	1,290

Table 4: Service provision by Sign Language Interpreters, January – December 2024

Out of the service users in 2024, a good number of hours were provided to 11 students in different schools and colleges ranging from pre-kindergarten to tertiary education. Over 1,200 appointments were attended by the interpreters in 2024, mostly including interpreting for adult service users within the community during medical or healthcare appointments, court or legal sessions, employment-related events, training, courses, and personal appointments.

The service provision in 2024 was again supported by the service of five contracted interpreters, who contributed 144 hours of service, totalling 53 interventions out of the totals cited in Table 4.

The scope of interpreting services has continued to evolve, with increasing demand extending beyond traditional one-to-one, in-person interpreting. There continues to be a rise in requests for sight translation, both from text to LSM and vice versa, as well as for remote interpreting through online platforms. These services have enabled users to actively participate in initiatives that may have otherwise been inaccessible, including local, international, and online projects, and conferences. Additionally, in certain cases, Sign Language Interpreters have accompanied service users abroad to provide support for personal matters.

2024 HIGHLIGHTS

Undoubtedly, the most significant highlight of 2024 for the SLI team was the Service Users' Day. The SLI team truly adopts the Agency's mission statement of co-production not just in everyday assignments but also on a larger scale such as this, now a yearly held event. Deaf service users are asked to be directly involved by providing feedback on how to improve service provision and work alongside Sign Language Interpreters to enhance the quality of the service provided.

Following a detailed analysis of service user feedback, several consultations were held between the SLI team and management to plan strategic investments and identify the most effective path forward for the continued growth and development of the SLI service, both in terms of quality and capacity, for the year 2025.

As part of the professional development programmes, the interpreters benefitted from various training opportunities and study visits in Greece and Iceland, together with other interpreting opportunities for Deaf People's Association Malta members in Romania, Estonia, Germany, and Spain.







WAY FORWARD

 Building on 2024 progress: The operational plans for 2025 represent both a continuation and further development of initiatives undertaken in 2024. These plans have been shaped by valuable feedback from Deaf service users and key stakeholders, including the Deaf People Association Malta and the Kunsill tal-Lingwa tas-Sinjali Maltija.

- Strengthening interdisciplinary outreach: The team
 will continue outreach efforts with professionals and
 organisations to promote interdisciplinary collaboration
 and ensure earlier awareness and access to interpreting
 services. These initiatives will be carried out in partnership
 with Deaf service users.
- Staff mobility and best practice exchange: Through
 Erasmus+ staff mobility opportunities, the team aims to
 gain further insights into best practices in interpreting
 services across Europe. This will help guide future service
 expansion in alignment with both the 2025 operational
 plans and the action plan based on service user feedback.
- Ongoing engagement and collaboration: Plans are underway to organise another Service User Day to maintain open channels of communication and ensure continued feedback on service quality. Additionally, the team is committed to offering further opportunities for LSM learning and deepening collaboration with the Deaf community.

¹LSM was declared an official language of Malta in 2016.

TESTIMONIALS

"The SLI service provides my child with access to a language which is always fully accessible to him should he decide he needs it in one or more situations as he progresses through his school years..."

Parent of service user

"I have been booking the services of SLI for the past four years so I can communicate with my colleague who is Deaf. When we have important internal meetings or sessions with clients, we always book the Sign Language Interpreters, so my colleague can participate in the session... As a team, we rely a lot on the service as interpretation makes our work possible and it gives the opportunity to my colleague to have good access to communication wherever we go."

Service user

DEAF & HARD OF HEARING SERVICES

The primary aim of this new service is to complement the existing SLI Service. The team is dedicated to working closely with stakeholders within the Deaf community to ensure that the service evolves in a co-productive manner, reflecting the true needs and aspirations of the community.

The Deaf & Hard of Hearing Services were introduced in the last quarter of 2024, a step forward in the Agency's commitment to providing comprehensive support to the Deaf Community.

2024 HIGHLIGHTS

- Awareness sessions and Deaf culture education: Planning
 of awareness sessions and educational programmes
 on Deaf Culture and Sign Language in schools and
 workplaces. These sessions aim to foster a more inclusive
 and understanding environment for Deaf individuals.
- Basic Sign Language teaching: Planning of basic sign language courses to young learners and employees of Agenzija Sapport, as well as teams that include Deaf Persons. This initiative is designed to bridge communication gaps and promote inclusivity.
- Assistive technology in SMART homes: Plans to incorporate assistive technology for the Deaf into a SMART home concept. This innovative approach aims to enhance the quality of life for Deaf individuals by leveraging modern technology, in collaboration with a major stakeholder.

WAY FORWARD

The team's focus in 2025 will be on engaging in consultations with the Deaf Community and other stakeholders. These consultations will provide valuable insights and ideas that will shape the future development of the services. The main goal is to ensure that these initiatives are not only relevant but also impactful, meeting the evolving needs of the community.

AĠENZIJA SAPPORT INTRODUCED THE DEAF & HARD OF HEARING SERVICES

TO PROVIDE MORE COMPREHENSIVE SUPPORT TO THE DEAF COMMUNITY



SONIA TANTI INDEPENDENT LIVING CENTRE

The Sonia Tanti Independent Living Centre continues to be a beacon of support, information, and guidance for persons with disabilities and their families. Its mission is to empower persons with disabilities to lead independent lives within the community through the use of mobility equipment, adaptive driving, and assistive devices.

OTTOBOCK MALTA CLINIC WAS REINTRODUCED IN 2024, DELIVERING 62 SERVICE USER APPOINTMENTS



2024 HIGHLIGHTS

1. Enhanced Mobility Services

In 2024, STILC provided over 213 wheelchair and seating assessments and reviews, ensuring that service users received personalised solutions tailored to their needs. These include the specialised assessments for custom contoured seating being provided in collaboration with Ottobock. Occupational Therapists and Physiotherapists supported service users to achieve, maintain, or regain their independence through the Wheelchair and Seating Clinics.

2. Adaptive Driving Programme

The Adaptive Driving Assessment Clinic provided 127 service user appointments for assessments using the centre's state-of-the-art driving simulator. Additionally, the Adaptive Driving Motoring School provided driving lessons on modified vehicles totalling 431 driving lessons to persons with disabilities, helping them gain the confidence and skills needed to drive safely. A further 65 car inspections were carried out by the adaptive driving team.

3. Information Sessions

A number of sessions were held between different units and services within Agenzija Sapport, therapists providing services within STILC, and other therapists working within the Allied Health Directorate. The aim of these sessions was to increase awareness, enhance cohesiveness, and foster collaboration among the various teams. These efforts are crucial in ensuring a unified approach to supporting persons with disabilities.

4. Collaboration and Partnerships

The STILC team strengthened its partnerships with local and international organisations, including Ottobock and other mobility equipment providers. These collaborations have enabled the team to offer a wider range of services and resources to its service users.

5. Re-introduction of the Ottobock Malta Clinic

After a year-long absence, 2024 marked the reintroduction of the Ottobock Malta Clinic. The collaboration resumed with a two-day clinic in January, offering specialised seating assessments and related services. Initially, an agreement was reached to hold two clinics during the year. However, due to growing demand, this was extended to a total of 12 clinic days throughout 2024. In total, 62 service user appointments were scheduled during the year.

213	Wheelchair and seating assessments and reviews
127	Service user appointments by the Adaptive Driving Assessment Clinic
431	Driving lessons by the Adaptive Driving Motoring School
65	Car inspections
12	Number of clinic days by Ottobock Malta Clinic
62	Service user appointments held by Ottobock Malta Clinic

Table 5: Services provided by STILC, January - December 2024

WAY FORWARD

The STILC remains steadfast in its mission to empower persons with disabilities to lead independent, meaningful, and enriched lives. The achievements of the past year would not have been possible without the unwavering dedication of the team, the collaboration of all partners, and the trust and support of the community who jointly continue to build a more inclusive future.





ACCESS TO COMMUNICATION AND TECHNOLOGY UNIT

The Access to Communication and Technology Unit (ACTU) is the national unit that offers both Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) and Electronic Assistive Technology (EAT) services. The aims of these services are to provide clinical assessments, recommendations, support initial implementation, as well as technical and training support for communication aids.

ACTU services are provided to persons with:

- · Complex communication needs
- Physical and /or sensory difficulties
- · Speech, language and communication needs
- · Learning disabilities

Support is also given to the families of the service users. Appointments vary from clinic visits, telehealth appointments, and site visits to the home, school, hospital, workplace, residence, or day centre, according to the need.

Another service provided by ACTU is the Information Day service. This service aims to provide consultation sessions to therapists and their service users who do not meet the eligibility criteria for the full ACTU service but require advice on AAC or EAT needs. Furthermore, professionals who want to view equipment or software, or discuss EAT or AAC solutions, can book an appointment for the Information Day.

The service has six pathways which include:

- Profound and Multiple Disabilities
- · Adults with Learning Disability
- Acquired Conditions
- Gozo
- Professional Requests in Malta
- Professional Requests in Gozo

ACTU was involved in a number of research initiatives during the year. This is necessary to advance the field of assistive technology both on a local and international level, such research projects included an Erasmus+ project and projects with UOM.

ACTU utilises a transdisciplinary approach to service delivery together with models of practice pertaining to the field of AAC, Assistive Technology, Occupational Therapy and Speech and Language Therapy. The assessment process utilised is in line with international practices as also highlighted by the World Health Organisation. Service delivery also includes educating the families and professionals to upskill others with a view to increasing capacity building across the country and across different populations. This is necessary to ensure that recommendations yield successful outcomes.

128 NEW REFERRALS

WERE RECEIVED BY ACTU IN 2024: 94
NEW REFERRALS WERE FOR AAC AND EAT
SERVICES; 34 WERE NEW REQUESTS FOR
INFORMATION DAY APPOINTMENTS

2024 HIGHLIGHTS

1. Training

ACTU provided training to a number of professionals and caregivers as per table below:

56 Lang	C Implementation in Schools guage Acquisition through or Planning (LAMP) TU training for Embrace	
56 Lang Mot	guage Acquisition through or Planning (LAMP)	
Mot	or Planning (LAMP)	
9 10	TU training for Embrace	
a AC		
12 Grid	3 training with Smartbox Ltd	
/4	sition training for Tarxien ondary school	
4 AA0	C Q&A Clinic (Gozo)	
	rdian Angel training with _ABS	
22 AA	C Goal Setting	
50 Gua	rdian Angel training	
/	achat Customisation training Liberator Ltd	
20 AA0	C Implementation Strategies	
	achat Customisation training Liberator Ltd	
	ΛΡ Implementation training Liberator Ltd	
15 with	trolling Electric Wheelchair Eye Gaze Communication Aid kshop with SR Labs	
20 EAT	EAT equipment overview	
20 scho	rnative Pencils session for ool-based Occupational rapists	

Table 6: Training sessions held by ACTU, January – December 2024

241 PARTICIPANTS ATTENDED TRAINING HELD BY ACTU IN 2024 SAPPORT SAPPORT

2. Collaboration with other organisations

- Two ACTU therapists continued to participate in the European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disability (EASPD)'s Person-Centred Technology Member Forum of which Agenzija Sapport is a member. One of the therapists continued her role of Co-Chair of this forum and was later also elected to EASPD's Board with a portfolio for person-centred technology.
- ACTU also continued its collaboration with the Malta Trust Foundation which provides funds for AAC and EAT solutions.
- ACTU continued to strengthen its professional relationship with the Speech and Language Department within the Ministry for Health, with ongoing collaboration with the AAC Division focused on building the capacity of therapists.



- ACTU has also been collaborating with the school-based Occupational Therapists within the Ministry for Health and together they have identified training needs for this group of therapists, with further collaboration planned for 2025.
- Further collaborations with different suppliers. In 2024, these included:
 - One visit from Liberator Ltd's international manager Mark Street, who visited ACTU to demonstrate the new range of devices, participate in assessments and update and repair existing service users' devices.
 - A visit by Adam Waits from Smartbox Limited to demonstrate the range of products, provide training on their products, and participate in assessments.
 - Three visits by Andrea Bordignon from SR Labs (Italy), representing Tobii Dynavox communication aids. These visits allowed for support with assessments, training for therapists, support in the implementation of device recommendations, and a demonstration of Home Brace wheelchair driving technology.

268 SERVICE USERS

BENEFITTED FROM ACTU SERVICES
IN 2024



 ACTU began a project to build capacity in Guardian Angel Resource Centre. This started off with a questionnaire to identify educators' skills and knowledge needs in the area of AAC. This exercise was followed by a bespoke training session provided by two therapists and an evaluation of such training. Data gathered during the project so far will be used to further develop the project in 2025.

3. Projects

The ACTU team is currently participating in an Erasmus+ project titled "The Emergence of the IFIP Europe". This initiative aims to develop a robust network of inclusion practitioners and create an online one-stop-shop for education professionals to access and share best practices in inclusive education.

In 2024, two ACTU therapists took part in United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) 30-year celebration of the Salamanca Statement in Paris. They also attended two study meetings – one held in Budapest in May and another in Stockholm in October – further strengthening international collaboration and knowledge exchange.

As part of the project, ACTU is leading two key work packages:

- Work Package 2 focused on content creation
- Work Package 4 dedicated to networking and community building

4. Equipment

Throughout 2024, ACTU focused heavily on expanding its inventory by acquiring new equipment. As part of this initiative, the team also began developing an online equipment library, which will serve both as a reference resource and a loan system. This digital library is expected to launch in 2025.

Additionally, new equipment was procured for the Speech and Language Centre, including a range of mid-tech and high-tech AAC tools – primarily mainstream tablets adapted for communication support.

5. Appointments

A total of 268 service users were seen by ACTU last year (Table 7).

Service	Number of service users seen
AAC	210
EAT	28
Information Day	30
Total	268

Table 7: Number of service users seen by ACTU services, January – December 2024

A total of 772 appointments were offered by the team in 2024. 139 of these appointments were cancelled to be rescheduled or the service users did not attend for appointments without a given reason. 633 appointments were carried out. The rate of cancellations and non-attendance for appointments is of 18%, which continues to be high despite measures put in place to minimise this. Several factors contribute to this rate, including illness of the child or parent, transportation challenges, and work-related commitments of the parents.

Service	Number of appointments offered	Number of appointments carried out
AAC	620	510
EAT	56	49
Information Day	96	74
Total	772	633

Table 8: Number of appointments offered and carried out by ACTU, January – December 2024

TECHNICAL SUPPORT

27 appointments were offered for technical support. This was a 22% increase from last year. 72 hours were spent on

customisation of devices by the ACTU technical officer. This was also supported by additional hours from interns on the Institute for the Public Services (IPS) scheme who are supporting the team in management of equipment, customisation, and resource development.

633 <u>APPOIN</u>TMENTS

WERE CARRIED OUT BY ACTU SERVICES, JANUARY - DECEMBER 2024

WAY FORWARD

- ACTU will continue to prioritise enhancing service accessibility by streamlining internal processes and restructuring its operations to reduce waiting times for individuals referred to the service.
- ACTU therapists will continue to attend CPD to ensure up-to-date knowledge of new equipment and assessment and interventions in the field of AAC and EAT.
- Collaboration with Smartbox Ltd, SR Labs and Liberator Ltd will continue, ensuring that therapists remain informed about current products and that local AAC users receive the best possible support.
- The team will launch a new initiative for young adults who
 use AAC called "CommUnity: Mix and Mingle". This is
 a co-creation initiative which will focus on building and
 nurturing a community for AAC users.
- ACTU is currently organising an Erasmus+ mobility opportunity for therapists, aimed at supporting their ongoing professional development.
- Professional training sessions for staff at Inspire, Guardian Angel and Sannat Primary School are being planned for delivery in 2025.



SUPPORTED INDEPENDENT LIVING SERVICE

The Supported Independent Living Service offers persons with disabilities the opportunity to live in accommodations within their communities. The service's goal is to empower individuals through person-centred planning, supporting their autonomy, inclusion, and self-determination. At the heart of SIL's approach is ensuring that persons with disabilities can engage in self-advocacy, actively participate in community life, and make decisions about their own futures.

2024 HIGHLIGHTS

- Travel opportunities for service users: 10 service users requested to travel abroad for short breaks, experiencing fun travel opportunities. They visited countries including Italy, Austria, and Spain. The service users were also involved in choosing the staff members who would accompany them on their trips themselves.
- Involvement in recruitment: Two service users were actively involved in the recruitment process for new parttime Support Workers, demonstrating their expertise in identifying the needs of the service.
- Educational advancement: Two service users began an educational programme at MCAST and have been successfully integrating into the course while acquiring new skills to enhance their independence.
- Introduction of Crisis Intervention Guidelines: SIL
 management developed guidelines on crisis intervention
 for on-call personnel and backup management on-call.
 Upgrades were introduced in relation to the process of
 sharing information to the Backup Management Team
 to enhance the decision-making process during on-call
 situations.
- Recruitment and service growth: The management team made significant strides in recruitment to support the growth of the leadership team, including introducing the role of part-time Support Executives.

IN 2024, THE SIL SERVICE FOCUSED ON STRENGTHENING THE FACTORS THAT FOSTER SERVICE USER AUTONOMY, DECISION-MAKING PARTICIPATION, AND COMMUNITY INCLUSION





52 SERVICE USERS

BENEFITTED FROM SIL SERVICES IN 2024



An Expression of Interest (EOI) was also issued for leadership personnel to perform ISP duties on a more individual level. This expansion has enabled more one-to-one work with service users in the afternoons and weekends, and improved service monitoring outside of core hours.

- Staffing and service user ratio assessment: A
 comprehensive review of the staff to service user ratio
 was carried out, involving input from an Organisational
 Psychologist and consultations with both employees and
 service users through focus groups.
- Contract monitoring transfer: The responsibility for monitoring the business contract with HILA Homes was transferred to the Service Providers' Monitoring Department, ensuring consistency in the monitoring process.

- Transition to Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) cloud:
 The service started its transition to PBS cloud, adopting it as the main system for reporting and managing incidents related to behaviour of concern. This project is aimed at increasing the efficiency in monitoring of behaviour of concern across residences.
- New business contract for additional support: The service embarked on a new business contract, which provided additional contracted Support Workers. This contract allowed the creation of a reliever roster to help sustain the daily operations of the service. A contract for nursing services was also introduced to assist the safe dissemination of medications across residences.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT

- Completion of First Aid and Food Handling courses: Nine service users successfully completed First Aid and Food Handling courses, further developing their skills to support independent living both in the community and at home.
- Leadership team training: The SIL leadership team
 participated in various training sessions throughout the
 year, including Supervision Training, CMS Training, and
 Crisis Intervention Training. These efforts helped enhance
 their understanding and execution of specific service goals.
- One-to-one coaching for leadership team: The service launched one-to-one coaching sessions for the leadership team, providing an opportunity for tailored skill development on an individual level.
- Middle management training: Three Senior Service
 Executives received specialised training focused on
 middle management, with an emphasis on "Implementing
 Objectives and Fostering a High-Performance Culture."
- Training for Senior Support Workers: Senior Support Workers participated in role-specific training covering leadership, helping skills, mentoring, stress management, and resilience-building.

- Job shadowing in Finland: Two management team members visited various services within KVPS Service Foundation in Finland as part of a job shadowing opportunity, gaining insights into services working toward deinstitutionalisation.
- Deinstitutionalisation seminar for leadership team:
 A seminar on deinstitutionalisation was organised for the SIL leadership team, providing a space to identify challenges, celebrate successes, and plan for future deinstitutionalisation processes.

WAY FORWARD

The SIL Service is committed to ensure that persons with disabilities have the opportunity to live in the community, with the required support that aligns with their unique needs and preferences. This means the service will focus on expanding opportunities for independent living setups, as well as improving residences that cater for individuals requiring higher levels of support, including those with behaviours of concern. In the year ahead, the service will focus on:

- Advancing deinstitutionalisation by promoting empowering practices, offering individualised services, supporting community re-integration, and delivering co-produced services for persons with disabilities currently residing in group homes.
- Continue developing specialised training programmes for staff, in collaboration with the Training Department, to enhance team cohesion and professional growth.

2024 HAS BEEN A YEAR OF GROWTH, REFLECTION, AND CHANGE.

THE SIL SERVICE WAS INSTRUMENTAL IN EMPOWERING SERVICE USERS AND CREATING INCLUSIVE, SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENTS WHERE PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES CAN THRIVE.

- Digitalisation of processes to improve the efficiency of daily procedures.
- Finalising the refurbishment at the Fgura residence in collaboration with the service users who will be living there, ensuring that the improvements reflect their needs and preferences through a co-production approach.

TESTIMONIAL

"This year has been a year of achievements for me. I was introduced to budgeting, sex education, and how to use my laptop. I have also started to do my chores such as doing my shopping list and budget my weekly funds to do my shopping from the supermarket, cleaning my room, and doing my laundry. I also have a reward system at home and at school, so that when I achieve all my weekly goals, I can get myself a reward. Thanks to this reward system, I started to budget better and save some money every month."

Alexandra, Dar il-Fjuri



SERVICE PROVIDERS' MONITORING TEAM

The Service Providers' Monitoring Team (SPMT) oversees the implementation and management of Public Social Partnership (PSP) contracts between NGOs and the Ministry for Inclusion and the Voluntary Sector (MIV), as well as a contract between Agenzija Sapport and a private company.

In 2024, the previously known NGO Department changed its name to Service Providers' Monitoring Team. This change was part of a whole exercise to strengthen the role of the team in line with its scope of monitoring service provision of outsourced services.

The team continues to monitor and provide support to homes, respite services, and day programmes under their responsibility, ensuring that service users and their families receive appropriate support and fully benefit from the services provided.

The monitoring of the business contract between Agenzija Sapport and HILA Homes was also shifted to SPMT's remit to ensure consistency in monitoring across outsourced services.

2024 HIGHLIGHTS

- A new monitoring tool was developed by the team, emphasising on aspects highlighted in the UNCRPD.
 This tool was crucial to bring consistency in reporting.
 The team also increased the frequency of scheduled
 visits, as well as unannounced spot checks across various
 services under its remit. These visits aimed to engage with
 service users, identify areas for improvement, and provide
 recommendations for enhancing both the service and the
 quality of life of the service users.
- The SPMT continued to assess referrals for new service users in need of urgent residential placements in NGO homes and/or private entities, as well as those requiring respite services or day programmes. Case reviews for

- residential service users were regularly conducted to ensure that individuals received support through a personcentred plan, helping them work towards their goals and aspirations.
- The team conducted approximately 250 assessments for new service users seeking to access services such as respite within NGOs and/or private entities, reducing the assessment waiting time to less than two months. Several persons with disabilities and their families were supported through emergency respite services during times of crisis and consequent follow-up of situation with the involved professionals to identify a sustainable long-term plan in line with the individual's best interest.
- A feedback survey was distributed to service users and their families to collect feedback on the quality of the services they are receiving, as well as to provide an opportunity for suggestions on service improvement.
- In line with the UNCRPD and the principles of deinstitutionalisation, the SPMT held several meetings with NGOs in relation to how each service can implement deinstitutionalisation practices. Several PSPs were reviewed and renewed with this concept in mind. In collaboration with the Agency's PAPT, NGOs were also offered training on dealing with behaviour of concern.
- Additionally, the team updated the eligibility criteria for residential placements at Dar Bjorn. The team also developed a pathway on how residential vacancies are to be filled in, along with the finalisation of prioritisation checklists to guide the team in decision-making.

PSP Agreement	Service Provider	Number of service users covered with PSPs and business contract in 2024	
Dar I-Arcipriet Degabriele	Fondazzjoni Nazareth	10	
Dar Madre Tereża / Dar San Frangisk	Fondazzjoni Nazareth	10	
Dar Nazareth	Fondazzjoni Nazareth	10	
Dar il-Wens	Fondazzjoni Wens	23	
Dar Merhba	Fondazzjoni Wens	16	
Dar L-Abilità	Fondazzjoni Wens	4	
Dar Arka	Fondazzjoni Arka	15 +2 respite beds	
Dar il-Ġublew tal-Ħniena	Fondazzjoni Arka	5	
Dar Madonna ta' Pinu	Fondazzjoni Arka	5	
Akkwarell	Dar tal-Providenza	3	
Dar Pirotta	Dar tal-Providenza	12	
Shalom	Dar tal-Providenza	5	
Żerniq	Dar tal-Providenza	4	
Dar Bjorn – Żebbuġ	ALS Malta Foundation	30	
Dar Bjorn – Qormi	ALS Malta Foundation	13	
Dar il-Kaptan Respite	Dar il-Kaptan	220	
Dar il-Kaptan Day Programme	Dar il-Kaptan	229	
Malta Autism Centre	-	40	
Embrace Diversity	Embrace Diversity Organisation	50	
HILA Dar Santa Rosa – Residential	HILA Homes Ltd.	16	
HILA Casa Apap Bologna – Residential	ĦILA Homes Ltd.	24	
HILA Casal Nuovo – Residential	ĦILA Homes Ltd.	3	
Total		527 ⁴	

Table 9: Existing agreements and number of service users in 2024

 $^{^{*\}mathrm{I}}$ This total excludes the service users of the 2 respite beds at Dar Arka.



WAY FORWARD

- The SPMT shall continue to promote independent living within the community and make recommendations in support of deinstitutionalisation, primarily through putting forward a proposal for a reform in PSP's structure.
- Case reviews, planned visits, and spot checks will continue
 to be conducted regularly across the services monitored
 by the SPMT to ensure that the services meet required
 standards and align with PSP / contract and UNCRPD
 principles and that service users are satisfied with the
 service being provided.
- Launch new PSPs in collaboration with MIV to expand respite services for persons with disabilities.
- Develop respite guidelines to assist professionals when guiding service users and their families in accessing respite services.
- Implement a review of the assessment tool used to determine the support level for individuals referred, ensuring it is more thorough and comprehensive, as well as the development of a matching assessment tool to be utilised when there is a vacancy for a residential placement.



TRANSITION SERVICE

In 2024, Agenzija Sapport launched the Transition Service, an innovative project aimed at empowering individuals to live independently in the community with minimal support, in line with the Agency's deinstitutionalisation strategy. This programme marks a significant milestone in the development of services, fostering autonomy, personal growth, and integration into the wider community.

The Transition Service provides persons with disabilities the opportunity to live in a fully equipped apartment for a predetermined period, during which time they receive personalised, person-centred training and guidance designed to develop essential life skills. The programme's key areas of focus include:

- · Informed decision-making
- Household management: skills such as cleaning, maintenance, and organising a living space
- Daily routine establishment: creating and maintaining schedules that promote productivity and well-being
- Money management and budgeting: training on financial planning, budgeting, and handling daily expenses
- Cooking and meal preparation: the preparation of healthy and budget-friendly meals
- Community mobility and integration: navigating public transportation, accessing community resources, and building social connections
- · Handling emerging situations

2024 HIGHLIGHTS

 Launch of Holqa premises: Agenzija Sapport launched these premises in Qrendi, which will be utilised for transitional placements where persons with disabilities will have a time-framed placement to simulate community living, and in the interim, learn skills that would facilitate the transition into supported independent living.

3 PERSONS

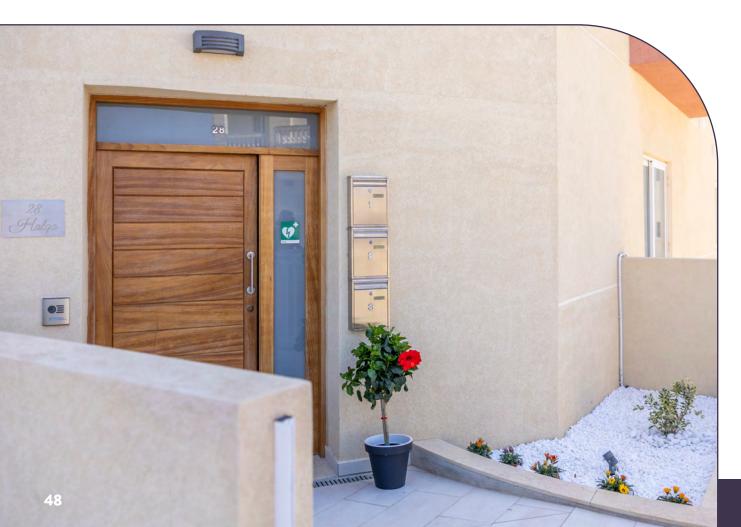
WITH DISABILITIES WERE ASSISTED BY THE TRANSITION SERVICE IN 2024





- Three participants were assisted by the programme in 2024: During its first year of operations, the Transition Service supported individuals residing in Agenzija Sapport residential set-ups who demonstrated readiness to transition into the community. Two individuals began temporary placements at Holqa apartments in Qrendi, where they enhanced their independent living skills.
- One individual was being prepared to move into their permanent home, marking a significant achievement for the programme with a focus on skills development and co-production during the refurbishment process.

The participants received support from a multidisciplinary team of professionals, including Occupational Therapists, Social Workers, Youth Workers, and Personal Assistants funded by the ICL fund. This collaborative approach ensured comprehensive care and targeted skills development.



PROGRAMME HIGHLIGHTS

- Duration and living arrangements: Participants lived in supervised yet independent settings for a defined period, with living arrangements tailored to their individual progress and readiness.
- **2. Skill development:** The programme delivers extensive training to foster independence, including personalised interventions and recommendations from professionals in various disciplines.
- Future planning: Participants collaborated with Personal Assistants and professionals to develop sustainable plans for housing, employment, and long-term community living.
- 4. Holistic support: The service integrated community resources, ensuring participants could confidently engage with public services, social networks, and cultural opportunities.

CHALLENGES AND LEARNINGS

While the programme achieved significant milestones, it also highlighted areas requiring attention:

- · Addressing individual barriers to independence
- Enhancing participant engagement through tailored activities and support plans
- Strengthening collaboration with external services to broaden support network

WAY FORWARD

In 2025, the Transition Service will focus on building upon the foundation established in 2024 to ensure the programme's sustainability and effectiveness.

Key objectives include:

- Finalising the foundations of the service: Establishing clear roles, responsibilities, and expectations among all stakeholders through the creation of the Manual of Procedures (MOP).
- Strengthening connections: Enhancing collaboration with both internal services and community-based resources to ensure comprehensive support for participants.
- Expanding outreach: Identifying additional individuals who could benefit from the service and broadening its reach to include more participants.
- Refining service structure: Continuously evaluating and adapting the programme to address emerging needs, improve participant experiences, and enhance long-term outcomes.
- Enhancing training opportunities: Offering more tailored training opportunities, including digital and financial literacy, employment readiness, and health and safety training.

The Transition Service represents a vital step towards creating an inclusive society where persons with disabilities can achieve independence and integration. A more inclusive future can be achieved by prioritising person-centred approaches, fostering collaboration, and addressing challenges proactively.

TESTIMONIAL

"In this past year living at Holqa, I have learned how to clean, buy groceries, and cook for myself. It has been a positive learning experience."

Service user



MY PROGRAMME

My Programme is a personalised service designed to support individuals in achieving their unique goals and aspirations through interventions within the community. This approach ensures tailored interventions and ongoing evaluation to meet the specific needs of each service user.

The main objectives of the programme are:

- · Promoting individual growth and development
- Fostering independence and self-confidence
- Offering a support system that evolves with each service user's needs within the community.

2024 HIGHLIGHTS

2024 saw My Programme move to the SIL Directorate, identifying this service as a pillar service that supports persons with disabilities to remain living in the community and lead a good quality of life. Such approach is in line with the Agency's strategy of deinstitutionalisation.

99 SERVICE USERS

MADE USE OF MY PROGRAMME SERVICES IN 2024



- The reshaping of the service in line with the restructuring: This started off in 2023, and continued to be implemented through the reviewing of each case with the aim of establishing whether the individual would continue to benefit from the service or may benefit from other services. Further emphasis was given to ensuring that each service user has a realistic ISP, in line with UNCRPD principles, which can be translated into effective interventions. This reviewing exercise involved several professionals from different teams. Such ISPs are entirely done in collaboration with the service users and their family, the key Support Worker, and the professionals involved.
- New workflow for My Programme and Social Work teams: These two teams established a workflow to facilitate the collaboration and communication across their respective professionals. The service faced and observed several challenging situations during interventions, highlighting the complexity of addressing diverse needs. In these instances, the My Programme team promptly engaged in discussions with the professionals responsible for the service users' care. By working collaboratively, strategies and solutions were developed that ensure every individual continues to benefit from the programme in a meaningful way.
- Launch of new community hub: On 16th May 2024,
 "Ġirasol" in Tal Virtù, Rabat, was officially opened. This
 community hub is equipped with accessible facilities so
 that different professionals from Agenzija Sapport can
 carry out sessions with persons with disabilities according

- to their individualised plan. This hub has been crucial to expanding the type of interventions held by the Support Workers in a space different from the home environment.
- Family meetings: A series of meeting were held to gather feedback on how the service is performing and how it can be improved. This aligns to the Agency's approach of co-production, where persons with disabilities share a leading role in shaping the services they receive. During the reviewed period, My Programme has seen significant progress, with many service users reaching personal milestones. These achievements reflect the strength of the team's commitment to fostering growth, confidence, and independence.
- Collaboration with Sharing Lives: Through collaboration
 with the Sharing Lives team, service users from My
 Programme had the opportunity to participate in a
 co-production activity, being part of the planning,
 organisation, and execution of the activity. This
 opportunity gave space to further support the service
 users in the socialising and leisure aspects of their lives.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT

- Emotional Intelligence
- Decision-Making in Crisis
- · Activity Analysis Training

THE COMMITMENT TOWARDS
CONSTANT ENHANCEMENT OF THE
SERVICE WILL SEE THE TEAM WORKING
TOWARDS THE INTRODUCTION OF
NEW DIGITALISATION MEASURES
TO IMPROVE WORKING PROCESS,
FURTHER INVESTMENT IN STAFF
DEVELOPMENT AND SOLIDIFICATION
OF THE ROLE OF PROFESSIONALS
WITHIN THE TEAM AS FACILITATORS
AND MENTORS



TESTIMONIAL

"Working with Agenzija Sapport has been a transformative experience for both myself and the service users I support. Joining My Programme has given me the opportunity to contribute to a service that empowers individuals to develop essential skills for independent living within their communities. The sense of accomplishment that comes from witnessing service users grow and achieve goals they once thought unattainable, is unparalleled. Agenzija Sapport has broadened my understanding of disabilities and instilled in me the importance of inclusive efforts to foster a sense of belonging for everyone. This journey has been incredibly rewarding, and I am proud to be part of a team that makes such a significant difference in people's lives."

Rebecca Fsadni, My Programme employee



SHARING LIVES

Sharing Lives provides persons with disabilities the possibility to have a social contact with a volunteer, engage in group activities with their peers, and participate in cultural, sports and other non-formal educational programmes. The projects are implemented both locally and abroad, which means that instilling participation and visibility of persons with disabilities is not only promoted within the Maltese community but also at a European level.

Since its launch in 2017, the Sharing Lives service has moved towards more project-led initiatives and gathered a considerable portfolio of diverse projects and programmes. These creative spaces have proved to be consistently effective to empower persons with disabilities to socialise with others, make new experiences, and learn new skills.

2024 HIGHLIGHTS

- Sharing Lives believes in the potential of people and embodies the values of co-production and community development that is inclusive and sustains the growth of each individual and communities alike. In so doing it has changed perceptions of what persons with disabilities are capable of and pushed the boundaries of limiting beliefs of what is perceived as possible. In 2024, the team's commitment to these values led to a decision to call persons with disabilities making use of the service as members instead of service users. This reflects better the service's ideology and methodology of creating activities and projects together with its members and not for them.
- During the year under review, a Youth Worker has been involved with Sharing Lives. This collaboration has complemented perfectly the work done so far and provided an added quality to the projects and interventions done with the youth members.
- One social contact between a member and a European Solidarity Corps (ESC) volunteer led to the creation of an original song – The Moment.





Figure 3: Sharing Lives snapshot in 2024

- Activities included: life skills programme, Project Arch

 a mixed ability group of young people engaged in
 community work; regular thematic or seasonal parties such
 as Christmas Party and Hawaiian Foam Party; Cooking
 Circle; BBQ Night; Youth Group; Social Groups; Learn to
 Create a craft programme; and gardening workshop.
- Sharing Lives has collaborated with both public and private entities from diverse fields namely Lands Authority, Fishing Club, Heritage Malta, Gebla, MERCS Malta, the Malta Council for the Voluntary Sector, St Philip Local Band Club (Haż Żebbuġ), Hypnotic Dancers, Kinetic Dance Academy, Root81 Restaurant, and Colour My Run Malta.
- Other activities were carried out in collaboration with other Agency services namely My Programme, Way to Work Programme and Day Services, including Music Bingo Night, and a 90's dance party in Gozo.
- Sharing Lives worked with 41 volunteers, out of which 28 remained active. These add to a total of 139 people who volunteered with Sharing Lives since 2017.
- The service also offered volunteering experiences to four young people from Europe through the ESC, an EU-funded project. Together with these ESC volunteers, Sharing Lives managed to create several creative activities. These were the Mural Project, Music Programme, WE Can – Short Video Production, Move to Groove (Outdoors Sports Programme), and Latino Nights.



IT STARTS WITH ME!

Sharing Lives's work through EU-funded projects continued and even extended its work to bigger scale projects such as the Key Action 2 (KA2) project in Cooperation Partnerships. The latter project called "It Starts With Me!" involved six different organisations around Europe committed to working with persons with disability to empower them with leadership skills and group facilitation. At least eight members have benefitted directly from the leadership programme so far, four of whom have already participated in a mobility in Sweden where they delivered some workshops. The project also aims at creating an accessible research platform on leadership among persons with disabilities.

In 2024, two young people participated in another youth exchange called Youth in Crime in Norway, where they presented the situation of youth crime and policies in Malta.

WAY FORWARD

Sharing Lives will continue to evolve and invest in its members through empowerment, co-production, and peer leadership. The service shall establish the parameters of what being a member of Sharing Lives entails. It is also planned to hold the second Annual General Meeting, during which the setting up of the first working committee composed of persons with disabilities and volunteers shall be established. Candidates for this committee shall be elected by other members.

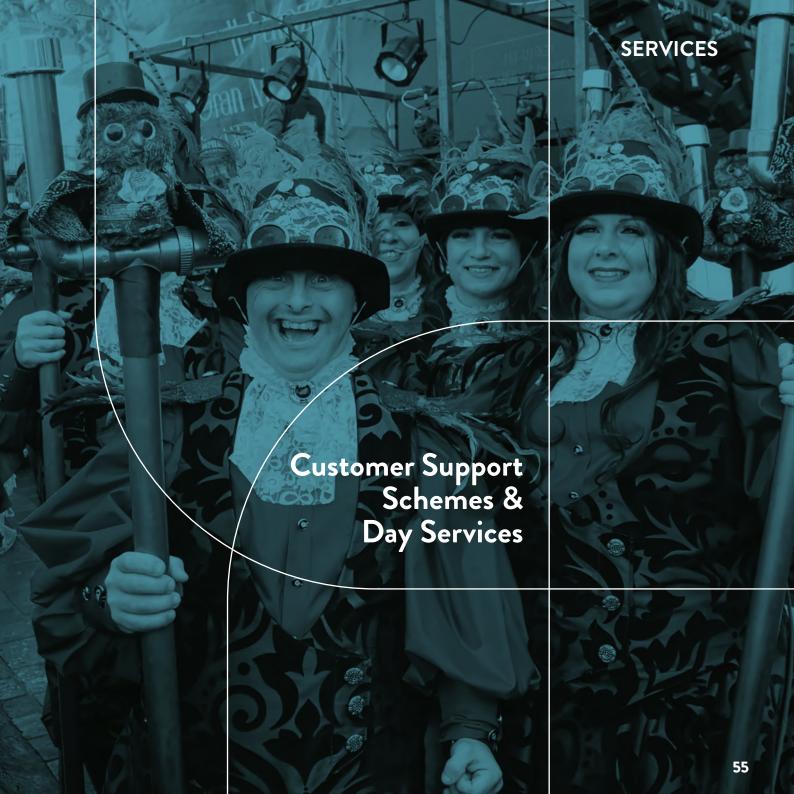
The committee's role will be to direct and support the Sharing Lives team in the activities being implemented during the year, prioritising projects initiated by members and volunteers. Moreover, in 2025 the leadership programme will be running independently of the KA2 project and empowering new members to potentially nominate themselves for the committee. Additionally, the focus on supporting volunteers with several trainings and team buildings will be enhanced. The team shall also be working on a project to develop a youth hub through a co-productive approach.



TESTIMONIAL

"I am happy with the experience of Sharing Lives. I really enjoy myself. It changed my life. I feel comfortable sharing my own experiences with others, with the staff of Sharing Lives and even with other members who attend the activities like me. I don't want to change anything of Sharing Lives."

Clayton Bayliss, Member





DAY SERVICES

The aim of the Day Services within Agenzija Sapport is to provide service users with spaces to develop diverse skills through varied programmes, opportunities to promote self-advocacy, and opportunities for community inclusion.

450 SERVICE USERS

BENEFITTED FROM DAY SERVICES IN 2024



2024 HIGHLIGHTS

1. Service users

2024 was characterised by opportunities to promote service user self-advocacy and active contribution to Day Services through their input to the Service User Council. Over the past year, the Service User Council expanded to all 11 centres, ensuring that service users across the service have the opportunity to make their voice heard. In May, the five centres involved in the Service User Council at the time organised a full day event at San Klement park in Zabbar. The success of this event led to the planning of an event in early 2025 that will include all the service users within Day Services.

Another notable event for Day Services, was the participation in the Carnival festivities in Valletta by the service users and staff of Hal Far Day Centre, through a professionally led and choreographed dance.

KreAzzjoni is another important pillar of Day Services. For the second year, KreAzzjoni was open for two weeks between April and May, on Notte Bianca in October, and for five weeks before Christmas. Over 80 service users from across all 11 centres actively contributed to this initiative, together with skilled staff and artists who supported service users in creating the items. Besides the space in Valletta, KreAzzjoni was also represented in a number of markets including the Public Service Expo, Family Fest in San Klement, Rabat Sacrum, Villa Rundle in Gozo, and Natalis Notabilis. Moreover, through KreAzzjoni, service users in different centres were involved in the creation of tokens and awards for Premju Socjetà Gusta, the National Blood Donation Centre Awards, and the Malta Association of Social Workers Social Work Awards.





Collaborations with various entities continued throughout this year. Through the collaboration with Special Olympics Malta, over 80 athletes participated in bocce and swimming disciplines in the Special Olympics National Games. A further 150 athletes participated in the MATP showcase as part of these games.

2. Staff

Recognising the importance of employee dedication and motivation in delivering high-quality services, Day Services continued to invest in staff development through a range of training opportunities. In addition, the service held its first-ever Away Day, bringing together all employees and management for a day focused on strengthening communication, fostering team spirit, and boosting motivation.

MORE THAN

80 SERVICE

USERS PARTICIPATED IN
BOCCE AND SWIMMING DISCIPLINES
AS ATHLETES DURING THE SPECIAL
OLYMPICS NATIONAL GAMES



3. Other projects

To maintain high standards of service, Day Services must continually evolve to meet local needs and address any service gaps. Over the past year, the Day Services management team conducted a comprehensive evaluation of the current service, leading to a proposed reform aimed at enhancing its effectiveness and responsiveness.

Furthermore, this year was also marked with the acquisition of the Paola Day Centre premises, which through its modernisation and repurposing, will serve to provide new opportunities within the service, collaboration with other entities, as well as reach more persons with disability.

In addition, Day Services was entrusted with two new Budget Measures: the establishment of an Elderly Day Centre and the launch of an Afternoon Service. These initiatives aim to provide more tailored support for older persons with disabilities already attending Day Services, while also extending access to individuals on the waiting list through the new afternoon service.

WAY FORWARD

The primary focus for 2025 will be on enhancing service quality through the implementation of the Day Services reform. This process will be reinforced by the planning and roll-out of the Budget Measures allocated to the Day Services team.

In the coming year, Day Services will also continue to build on the achievements of 2024, with a renewed focus on growth, visibility, and service quality. KreAzzjoni will further strengthen its presence as a brand by participating in additional markets and extending operating hours during spring, the weeks following Notte Bianca, and the Christmas season. Greater participation in national events, such as the Carnival festivities, will also enhance community engagement and outreach.

CUSTOMER SUPPORT

The Customer Support Services are the main point of contact for persons with disabilities who make use of the Agency's services, their support networks, prospective applicants / prospective service users, and other stakeholders reaching out to Agenzija Sapport.

Operating under the Customer Support, Schemes, and Day Services Directorate, the remit of the Customer Support Services is based on four main functions:

- The Agency's reception areas
- The Agency's Helpline Freephone Servizz.gov 153 (ext. 05)
- The public telephone line 22568000
- The generic mailbox on the email address: sapport@gov.mt

All communication is treated with the utmost attentiveness and confidentiality. From addressing simple queries to collaborating with other teams regarding requests that require follow-up, the Customer Support team strives to ensure that each and every interaction is welcoming, professional, and helpful. Beyond its direct customer support role, the services also maintain a clear and current picture of customers' requests and opportunities for the Agency to plan developments based on the recorded demand.

2024 HIGHLIGHTS

 One of the main milestones in 2024 has been the integration of the reception and Helpline sections into one Customer Support team. This has enabled the Department to maximise the use of its resources for enhanced efficiency and effectiveness. Staff members were trained to skilfully use the consolidated systems and to provide information and assistance regarding the range of services and schemes offered by the Agency.

6,390 VISITORSWERE ASSISTED AT THE AGENCY'S

WERE ASSISTED AT THE AGENCY'S RECEPTION AT THE HEAD OFFICE IN SANTA VENERA IN 2024





11,414 HELPLINE TICKETS

WERE OPENED IN 2024, TOTALLING 26,699 TICKETS SINCE ITS LAUNCH

4,500 EMAILS

WERE RECEIVED AND ADDRESSED ON THE AGENCY'S GENERIC MAILBOX IN 2024



- A full digitalisation of the pertinent telephony system in collaboration with the Agency's Operations Department has significantly modernised the services' workflow.
- Furthermore, enhancements by Servizz.gov to Freephone 153, have made reaching Agenzija Sapport easier.
- Systems related to the recording of statistics in relation to all aspects of the Customer Support Services were also enhanced to enable strengthened monitoring of the demand for the service and interactions with customers.
- Meeting the needs of internal customers is also a recognised aim, and 2024 has seen the commencement of a yearly internal survey upon which plans for improvement can be based.
- The team was also strengthened through the appointment of a Customer Support Leader.

WAY FORWARD

Throughout the coming years, developments to the Customer Support service will continue being aimed towards ensuring that the experience is a positive and efficient one for all customers. Amongst other plans, internal and external stakeholder awareness, communication, and collaboration will be prioritised, with a view to ensure that customers can be guided regarding the aspects most queried about in a proactive manner. The Customer Support team will continue striving to exceed the expectations of all customers.



ACCESSIBILITY UNIT

The Accessibility Unit incorporates two of Agenzija Sapport's main applications-based services, the EU Disability Card and the Blue Badge.

1. The EU Disability Card

The EU Disability Card certifies that the holder is a person with disabilities. It is a document that allows persons with disabilities to apply for a number of services and benefits.

This document may also be used when one is travelling to one of the following countries within the EU – Belgium, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, Italy, Slovenia and Romania.

In 2024, evaluation processes that led to the drafting and finalisation of a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) stipulating the processing of EU Disability Card applications, took place. This happened simultaneously with planning and preparations for an enhanced assessment process and for enhanced communication of application outcomes. Implementation of the strengthened process is set to commence as of January 2025.

Out of the 4,686 EU Disability Cards issued between January and December 2024, there were 4,649 new applications and 37 renewal applications.

2. The Blue Badge

The aim of the Blue Badge, which is a legal document, is to facilitate community access for persons with disabilities by authorising them to park the vehicle in which they are travelling in a communal reserved parking bay for Blue Badge holders.

As part of its remit, the Accessibility Unit works in collaboration with the CRPD's Enforcement Unit in relation to its remit surrounding legal enforcement and helping in the curbing of abuse and misuse of the Blue Badge.





Furthermore, the Accessibility Unit also liaises with Transport Malta in relation to Personalised Reserved Parking applications, facilitating medical assessment services with regard to the pertinent eligibility assessments guided by the eligibility criteria set by the Transport Malta legal notice 113/24.

4,792	Applications received
2,466	Applications for new Blue Badges
2,326	Applications for Blue Badge renewals
3,733	Blue Badges issued

Table 10: Data for Blue Badge applications, January - December 2024

3,733 BLUE BADGES

INCLUDING NEW AND RENEWED DOCUMENTS, WERE ISSUED IN 2024



2024 HIGHLIGHTS

- Procedural enhancements: These included adjustments and improvements to the relevant database, which also consisted of the introduction of an official letter pertaining to the outcome for each application, continuous revision and adjustments of the filing system, and the initiation of the storing process.
- The drafting and finalisation of key SOPs: These were the
 result of meetings and discussions held with the relevant
 national entities, whereby the consolidation of the related
 formalised processes is to be enhanced following proposed
 changes. Collaboration with the CRPD's Enforcement
 Unit was ongoing and foundations were laid for enhanced
 synergy along the years to come.
- The Accessibility Unit was also introduced to the Agency's CMS. A record of Blue Badge applications received, starting from the year 2024, is now maintained on this database.

WAY FORWARD

During the coming year, the Accessibility Unit aims to further leverage digitalisation to enhance its operations and service delivery. A key area of focus will also involve preparations for the implementation of the Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the European Disability Card and the European Parking Card for Persons with Disabilities, in collaboration with the DDI and the CRPD.

PEOPLE ASSISTANCE SCHEMES

The People Assistance Schemes (PAS) unit incorporates schemes that provide financial assistance, which together with other Agenzija Sapport services, enable and empower persons with disabilities to live independently and be included in the community.

1. Empowerment Scheme

Agenzija Sapport operates the Empowerment Scheme which provides financial assistance to persons with disabilities, enabling them to purchase assistive equipment. The scheme also offers subsidies on individualised transport services to persons with disabilities who are not able to make use of public transport and would need to go to work, attend a post-secondary education institution, or attend sports training whereby the applicant is enrolled under a registered sports club / organisation.

EMPOWERMENT SCHEME REFORM

RIFORMA FL-ISKEMA TAL-EMPOWERMENT

UPDATE

A valid medical certificate instead of the medical report is accepted.

AĠĠORNAMENT

Jigi accettat certifikat mediku validu minflok rapport mediku.

2256 8000 Malta – 2156 9909 Ghawdex (Gozo) schemes.sapport@gov.mt

www.sapport.gov.mt



inklużjoni

1,354 APPLICATIONS

WERE APPROVED BY THE EMPOWERMENT SCHEME BOARD IN 2024





The Empowerment Scheme is run by a Board that includes a number of professionals who meet once a month to assess and evaluate all applications received during that period.

Out of the 1,392 applications received by Agenzija Sapport between January and December 2024, 37 applications were refused as the applicants did not meet the eligibility criteria.

Funds claimed during 2024 amounted to €686,003, which also included funds approved during 2023 but claimed during the year under review.

Number of Empowerment Scheme applications	Category	Other comments
987	Hearing aids	
65	Transport services	including 27 renewal applications and 38 applications related to new cases
340	Assistive equipment	including specialised wheelchairs, hoists, pressure relief mattresses, motor scooters, prostheses, recliners, stair climbers, specialised mobility walkers, standing frames, specialised sit-to-stand aids, car modifications, repairs of equipment

Table 11: Applications received by Agenzija Sapport for Empowerment Scheme by category, January – December 2024



2. Vehicle Road Licence Exemption Scheme

The Vehicle Road Licence Exemption Scheme allows persons with disabilities or their parents (carers) to be either partially or fully exempted from paying the annual road licence.

This scheme is operated in collaboration with the Ministry for Finance. Once the application process with Agenzija Sapport is finalised, the application is submitted to the Ministry for Finance for consideration by the pertinent Board. The decision letter granting exemption from payment of the road licence is issued by the Ministry for Finance.

Out of the 914 applications received by Agenzija Sapport for the Vehicle Road Licence Exemption Scheme between January and December 2024, 18 applications did not qualify for this scheme as the eligibility criteria were not met.

896 ELIGIBLE APPLICATIONS

FOR THE VEHICLE ROAD LICENCE EXEMPTION SCHEME WERE APPROVED AND GRANTED THE EXEMPTION BY THE MINISTRY FOR FINANCE

152 ELIGIBLE <u>APPLICATIO</u>NS

FOR THE VEHICLE REGISTRATION TAX EXEMPTION SCHEME WERE APPROVED AND GRANTED THE EXEMPTION BY THE MINISTRY FOR FINANCE

3. Vehicle Registration Tax Exemption Scheme

The aim of this scheme is to provide support and financial assistance to persons with disabilities and their families to acquire a means of transportation suitable for their needs and be exempted from paying the vehicle registration tax.

This scheme is operated in collaboration with the Ministry for Finance. Once the application process with Agenzija Sapport is finalised, the application is submitted to the Ministry for Finance for consideration by the pertinent Board. The decision letter granting exemption from payment of the vehicle registration tax is issued by the Ministry for Finance. Out of the 153 applications received by Agenzija Sapport for the Vehicle Registration Tax Exemption Scheme between January and December 2024, one application did not qualify for this scheme as the eligibility criteria were not met.

4. Drive-from-Wheelchair Vehicle Grant

The aim of this scheme is to provide further support and financial assistance to persons with disabilities and their families to acquire a means of accessible transportation suitable for their needs.

This scheme offers a one-time grant of 20% on the cost of vehicles which are strictly drive-from-wheelchair, costing up to ${\in}60,\!000$ in value. This means that the vehicle shall have an electric ramp at the back from which a wheelchair user can access it with the wheelchair and position themselves in front of the steering wheel to drive the vehicle.

2 APPLICATIONS

WERE RECEIVED AND QUALIFIED FOR THE DRIVE-FROM-WHEELCHAIR VEHICLE GRANT IN 2024

€6,040 WERE CLAIMED

AS PART OF THE DRIVE-FROM-WHEELCHAIR VEHICLE GRANT IN 2024





16 APPLICATIONS

WERE RECEIVED AND QUALIFIED FOR THE SECOND-HAND WHEELCHAIR ACCESSIBLE VEHICLES GRANT IN 2024

€20,291 WERE CLAIMED

AS PART OF THE SECOND-HAND WHEELCHAIR ACCESSIBLE VEHICLES GRANT IN 2024

Grant on the Purchase of Second-Hand Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles

The aim of this scheme is to provide support and financial assistance to persons with disability and their families to acquire a means of accessible transportation suitable for their needs.

This scheme offers a one-time grant of 10% on the cost of the vehicle that is modified with a wheelchair accessible ramp and/or lift, costing up to €25,000 in value.

2024 HIGHLIGHTS

 A continuation of the Empowerment Scheme's reform implementation, building upon the developments initiated during the previous year. With a view to strengthen the allocation of the Empowerment Scheme budget, and through consultation with professional associations, further enhancements to the scheme's criteria are planned for implementation in 2025, with the pertinent changes reflected in the application form and the professional report. The reform also saw the appointment of new Empowerment Scheme Board members.



- A widening to the criteria of one of the Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles schemes to ensure that more persons with disabilities could benefit. The relevant scheme was renamed to Grant on the Purchase of Second-Hand Wheelchair Accessible Vehicle. It now also covers wheelchair accessible vehicles that are purchased secondhand.
- The PAS team was strengthened with the appointment of two Coordinators, with each having a focus on schemes related to the purchase of assistive equipment and to schemes related to financial assistance pertaining to personal means of transportation.

WAY FORWARD

The PAS service remains committed to strengthening communication and collaboration with both internal and external stakeholders. The aim remains to enhance service efficiency while providing meaningful support to applicants with disability-related costs to the fullest extent possible whilst enabling choice, autonomy, and independent living in the community.

WAY TO WORK PROGRAMME

The Way to Work Programme is designed to assist persons with disabilities by equipping them with essential skills required for gainful employment. By focusing on both soft skills and practical job-readiness techniques, the programme empowers participants to thrive in their careers and daily lives.

The Way to Work Programme, launched in 2022, continued to play a pivotal role in supporting persons with disabilities in strengthening their skills and improving their employability abilities. The programme aims to complement existing services and initiatives within the sector and within the Agency, by enabling persons with disabilities to gain confidence, seek employment, and live more independently.

In 2024, the Way to Work Programme maintained its commitment to providing individuals with the tools, knowledge, and support they need to succeed in the workplace while enhancing their overall quality of life.

Way to Work Programme key training modules include:

- Personal hygiene
- · Money and time management
- Self-confidence
- Positive attitude
- Reliability, integrity, and taking initiative
- Different work environment and possible adaptations
- Safety skills and emergency planning
- Legal rights
- · Flexibility and adaptability
- Technology adaptations
- Use of public transport
- Job-seeking skills including writing of résumé and interview preparation





2024 HIGHLIGHTS

- Provided group training and individual sessions tailored to each participant's needs.
- Offered exposure to real-life work settings through site visits in different work sectors and environments.
- Collaborated with other professionals from different organisations to enhance the training experience and have experts passing on the training.
- Provided information sessions for parents and guardians to promote awareness of the benefits of employment for persons with disabilities and what support can be provided.
- Updated training sessions for the benefit of the participants in order to receive the most relevant and effective support.
- In December 2024, six participants received their Certificate of Participation for having successfully completed group training, making this the 5th certification of the Way to Work Programme.

Number of participants	
41	Participants in group training and individual support in Malta
5	Participants in group training in Gozo
5	Participants in individual sessions in Gozo
26	Parents who attended informative training sessions

Table 12: Number of Way to Work beneficiaries since the Programme's inception in 2022

1. One-to-one support

Individual support continued to be a part of the Way to Work Programme. These one-to-one sessions are tailored to address specific needs of participants, whether they are job-seeking or already employed. The personalised guidance offered includes:

 CV writing: Assistance in writing résumés that highlight skills and experience.

- Job-seeking skills: Helping individuals navigate the job market, apply for positions, and prepare for interviews.
- Money management: Providing advice on budgeting, saving, and managing finances.
- Office skills training: Practical training in office settings, including using office software, performing administrative tasks, and participating in other handson practices depending on their abilities and likings.

2. Mobilities & staff development

In April 2024, two staff members from Way to Work participated in an Erasmus+ Train-the-Trainer mobility in Valencia, Spain. This provided an excellent opportunity for staff to develop their skills to provide more effective training.

Other trainings received include:

- Neurodivergence in the Workplace
- Developing Employability for Autistic People in Europe
- Cognitive and Sensory Accessibility Design
- Epilepsy Awareness
- Marketing & Multi-Agency Training

3. Staff development through Day Services exposure

In 2024, the Way to Work Programme underwent a management transition, which brought in fresh ideas and new opportunities. One of the opportunities was the exposure of staff to the operations within day centres. Staff spent several weeks working alongside Day Services team, gaining first-hand experience of the daily running of various programmes. This exposure was beneficial in several ways:

- · Broadening staff experience and knowledge
- Strengthening collaboration between services
- Sharing knowledge and insights to improve service delivery of both services
- Understanding better the needs of the individuals, ensuring the team can offer more holistic and person-centred services



WAY FORWARD

As we move into 2025, the Way to Work Programme is set to expand its offerings to meet emerging needs within society. Upcoming plans include:

- Expanding programme offerings: While continuing
 to focus on supporting persons with disabilities in
 strengthening their skills and improving their employability
 abilities, the Way to Work Programme will broaden its
 scope to include more services that focus on developing
 life skills and independent living skills.
- Meeting societal gaps: The team will aim to bridge gaps in the existing services for persons with disabilities by addressing a wider range of needs and increasing access to support services.
- Increasing community integration: the team will enhance partnerships with local community organisations to create more opportunities for persons with disabilities.



PROFESSIONAL ADVISORY & PREVENTION SERVICE

The Professional Advisory & Prevention Team works to fulfil the aim of changing culture and providing the adequate tools needed for Agency personnel to achieve best practices in service provision. During 2024, the focus was on the dissemination of basic knowledge regarding PBS, Active Support, human rights and UNCRPD, relationships, and sexuality. Additionally, the focus was on co-production and the move towards deinstitutionalisation, which needs to be affected in several small steps to prepare current service users to live independently.

2024 HIGHLIGHTS

One of the key priorities in 2024 was to reduce injuries related to behaviours of concern by providing training to as many personnel as possible. To support this goal, the team introduced new training initiatives, including the extension of NAPPI training to more staff and contracted personnel. The approach was designed to maximise accessibility and minimise scheduling challenges, ensuring broader participation across the workforce.

1. Training

- NAPPI: The NAPPI team also started disseminating training to NGOs which have public-private partnerships with the Agency, aiming to increase knowledge and disseminate the basic core principles beyond the Agency's remit. The NAPPI team, consisting of nine trainers, also had recertification in the UK, where they discussed difficulties and challenges encountered.
- ISP Training: PAPT worked on an ISP format and prepared training for all personnel to explain the ISP process and how such ISPs could be filled out in a person-centred manner. A total of nine groups attended such training. The training is also based on the concept of co-production, whereby service users

- are fully involved and participate in the process while focusing on deinstitutionalisation.
- Resource development and delivery of initial training for contract workers: PAPT developed resources and delivered a two-day initial training course for foreign contract workers who were new to working with disabilities. The course served as an introduction to several topics related to working with disabilities.
- Co-production and training for police officers and public officers' managers in collaboration with Occupational Therapists: This training has been ongoing, with sessions happening in 2024 and other trainings planned for 2025. Furthermore, other entities have requested trainings, being planned for delivery in 2025.

302 EMPLOYEES

GOT CERTIFIED IN NAPPI IN 2024

26 NAPPI TRAINING COURSES

WFRF DFI IVFRFD IN 2024



 Four Profile Trainings were also delivered, providing very specific training to 21 personnel from the Agency and from SIL services who had identified severe behaviours of concern of a service user. This facilitated the functional understanding of the behaviour while also better defining the behaviour, making timely intervention more plausible. Several consultations with management regarding behaviours of concern and the way forward in terms of information dissemination were also held.

2. Relationships and Sexuality Education Programme Report 2024

The aim of the RSE programme is to support and educate individuals about sexual health, relationships, and personal well-being. This report outlines the key activities and outcomes achieved in 2024, detailing the team's sessions, resource development, and collaborative efforts with staff and parents.

- Resource development for one-to-one sessions:
 Significant progress was made in building resources
 and materials for one-to-one sessions. These resources
 are designed to aid trained professionals within the
 Agency, ensuring they have relevant and up-to-date
 tools to guide discussions. Additionally, preparations are
 underway for the digital sharing of these materials with
 other internal professionals to broaden the reach and
 impact of the programme.
- One-to-one sessions: A total of 19 service users engaged in 113 one-to-one sessions focused on sexuality and relationship education. These sessions were tailored to meet individual needs, ensuring that service users received personalised support in their educational needs regarding sexuality.
- Sexuality Policy training for Agency personnel: 34 groups across the Agency participated in Sexuality Policy Training, impacting 414 personnel. This initiative



- provided all staff with essential knowledge on RSE policies and guidelines, enabling a unified approach to educating and approaching service users.
- Development of the RSE guidebook: The creation of a comprehensive RSE guidebook was initiated, encompassing detailed session plans and resource materials. The guidebook covers various topics related to RSE. It is intended to provide staff who have followed training with structured frameworks for delivering RSE content and responding to service users' needs effectively. Topics may be utilised as a full course or as one-off topics according to need.
- Resource building for parents: Initial resources aimed at parental involvement in RSE were developed. These materials are designed to help parents understand the importance of educating their children about relationships and sexuality. By supporting parents in their educational journey, the PAPT team aims to create a well-rounded approach to personal safety and respectful relationships for the next generation.
- Training materials for staff: Resources aimed at staff training were built, offering practical tools and tips on how to engage with service users regarding RSE topics. This resource is instrumental in enhancing staff confidence and competence when approaching sensitive discussions.
- Development of the RSE staff booklet: A dedicated RSE booklet for staff was created, providing practical tips on how to approach service users with sensitive conversations related to sexuality and relationships. This booklet will serve as a handy reference for staff, ensuring they can support individuals in an informed and respectful manner.
- Consultations with Management: Several consultations with management were conducted, focusing on RSErelated behaviours and identifying strategies for moving forward. These discussions provided valuable insights into the current state of RSE delivery and highlighted areas for future improvement, including better information dissemination to service users.

414 MEMBERS OF STAFF

ATTENDED SEXUALITY POLICY TRAINING IN 2024

19 SERVICE USERS PARTICIPATED IN 113 ONE-TO-ONE SESSIONS FOCUSING ON SEXUALITY AND RELATIONSHIP EDUCATION IN 2024

- Impact and outcomes: The activities outlined above have had a significant impact on both the service users and the staff involved in the RSE programme. Key outcomes include:
 - Increased knowledge and awareness of sexual health and relationships among service users
 - Improved training and resources for staff, enabling them to approach RSE topics with greater confidence and expertise
 - Enhanced engagement of parents in supporting their children's RSE journey
 - Stronger collaborative efforts between management and staff in addressing and implementing RSErelated policies and behaviours
- Challenges and next steps: While the programme has achieved substantial progress, there are ongoing challenges, such as:
 - Expanding the digital sharing of resources and ensuring all staff have access to the latest materials
 - Continuing to engage parents and ensure they are adequately supported in their role



 Reviewing and refining the RSE content to ensure it remains relevant and effective in meeting the needs of service users.

3. Other initiatives

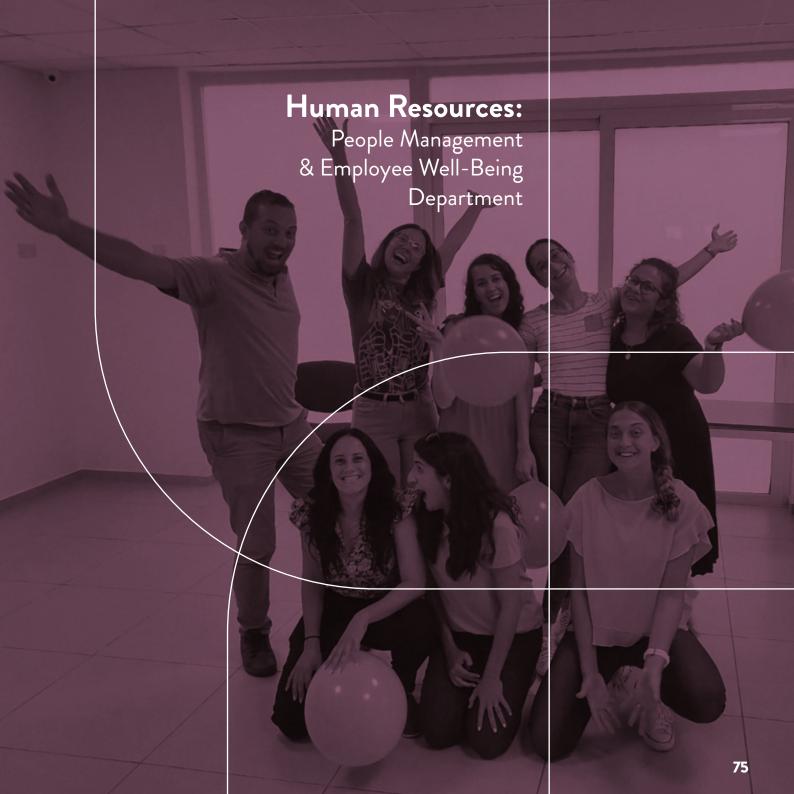
- PBS Cloud setup and training for leadership teams in residences: PAPT received approval to acquire the license for PBS Cloud a digital system for recording and analysing incident reports. The cloud-based system needed to be set up to include Maltese services and their users. The setup was done by PAPT, followed by relevant training on the system's usage for the leadership teams of the SIL services. Training was given to five residences, with two residences becoming fully fledged active on the PBS Cloud by the end of the year.
- "Let's Talk About It!" Initial visit, follow-up of accreditation process, and follow-up of programme: The initial visit from the Italian and Greek partners of this EU co-funded project, was held in 2024, with plans to deliver the actual training in 2025. Follow-up of the processes and delivery of needed materials were done throughout the year.
- International opportunities: PAPT members were involved in two visits. One was a transnational visit to services in Finland, where the team representatives explored evidenced practices being used in the country. They gathered some innovative ideas, which will be adapted to the Maltese context and utilised with staff and service users. A PAPT member also attended a one-day conference in Brussels titled "Access to Sexual and Reproductive Rights for People with Disabilities: Challenges and Perspectives in Education". Through this initiative, networks and connections were built with other countries following the same process of creating sexuality training for persons with disabilities.
- PAPT was also involved in debriefing and post-incident review sessions with the Human Resources (HR)
 Department, attending around 25 sessions with staff who had been injured due to behaviours of concern.



WAY FORWARD

In 2025, the focus will be on completing key initiatives and expanding the team's impact through new and existing projects. Planned actions include:

- Completion of the "Let's Talk About It!" project, including the accreditation of train-the-trainer qualifications for team members.
- Finalisation of RSE workbooks, with a focus on delivering comprehensive training to staff on sexuality and relationships.
- Collaboration with the Training Department to provide coaching and mentoring training in Active Support.
- Collaboration with the Training Department to deliver debriefing training for selected facilitators.
- Development and restructuring of new EU projects, focusing on Easy Language, sexuality, behaviours of concern, trauma, and artificial intelligence.
- Delivery of specialised training through EU projects for PAPT members, aimed at enhancing their knowledge and skills, thereby increasing the value and impact of training provided.





HUMAN RESOURCES: PEOPLE MANAGEMENT & EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING DEPARTMENT

The Human Resources Department plays a central role in supporting Agenzija Sapport's mission by aligning people strategies with organisational goals. In 2024, the Department continued to prioritise the development of a resilient, skilled, and motivated workforce through effective talent management, inclusive HR policies, and a strong emphasis on employee well-being. By fostering a positive and supportive work environment, HR remained focused on enabling staff to thrive and deliver high-quality services across the Agency.

2024 HIGHLIGHTS

1. Payroll

A new collective agreement for all employees at Agenzija Sapport was officially signed on 5th June 2024, covering the period from 2022 to 2027. This agreement marks a significant milestone in enhancing the working conditions and remuneration packages of employees within the Agency. The updated terms, negotiated to reflect the evolving needs of the workforce, include improved salaries and allowances aimed at recognising the invaluable contributions of the Agency's staff in supporting persons with disabilities across Malta.

2. Training

Training opportunities	150
Requests for study leave	45
Requests for claim for CPD	40
Requests for qualification allowance	10

Table 13: Staff development claims, January - December 2024

In 2024, Agenzija Sapport employees participated in over 150 learning and development opportunities, ranging from training courses and webinars to local and international conferences and seminars led by respected experts in the field.

Furthermore, during the same period under review, the Staff Development Unit received and approved more than 45 requests of



study leave, over 40 requests for claim for CPD and more than 10 requests for qualification allowance.

As part of the Department's continuous commitment to meet the Agency's Strategic Framework, the HR Department also launched a Staff Development Framework together with the revision of an updated Staff Development Policy, in line with the new collective agreement covering the years 2022-2027. The Staff Development Unit also worked on the digitalisation of training data and moving forward into 2025, all data and certification related to training will be uploaded on the digital Shireburn Portal.

3. Staff well-being and family friendly measures

In line with the Collective Agreement, the HR Department launched the Remote and Extended Remote Working Policy. In 2024, the Department received and approved 92 applications for remote working from employees working in different sections of the Agency. Additionally, the Department also received and approved 29 requests for reduced hours and 35 requests for flexitime.

4. Recruitment

As a public sector entity, the Agency follows the provisions of Directive 7.3 "Delegation of Authority to Effect Recruitment, Promotions and Industrial Relations in the Public Sector entities" to cover recruitment processes. Moreover, guidelines and best practices issued by the People and Standards Division are adopted to ensure fair and transparent processes based on the principle of meritocracy.

Out of the 122 calls issued between January and December 2024, 69 were new calls, whilst a further 53 calls were reissued.

Calls Issued	
Internal	54
External	68

Table 14: Calls issued, January - December 2024

A total of 109 internal promotions were performed during 2024. Additionally, a total of 15 IPS students were engaged through the Institute of Public Service.

122 CALLS WERE ISSUED BY THE HR DEPARTMENT IN 2024

75 NEW EMPLOYEES

WERE ENGAGED IN 2024

In line with the Protection of Minors' Act (POMA), Agenzija Sapport makes sure that all employees recruited within the Agency achieve POMA clearance. Such checks are logged with the Courts of Malta through the Agency's lawyer. A total number of 110 employees where registered during 2024.

In the final quarter of 2024, the Recruitment Unit launched a new project aimed at streamlining and enhancing the recruitment process for both applicants and HR professionals. The HR Department collaborated closely with the Change Management, Operations, and Strategic Marketing & International Relations Departments to develop this initiative. To support the implementation, training sessions, and liaison meetings were held with professionals from the Indigo hiring platform, setting the groundwork for the programme's rollout in early 2025.

5. Onboarding

The HR Department also oversees the onboarding process for new recruits, ensuring each employee receives dedicated one-on-one support. During this session, new staff members sign their contract and job description, complete required documentation, and are given an introductory briefing by HR personnel. This meeting covers key procedures, use of the Shireburn Indigo system, insurance details, clocking processes, and other essential information, complementing the guidance outlined in the Employee Handbook.



The onboarding session also provides a space for new recruits to ask questions and clarify any concerns, helping to ensure a smooth start to their journey with the Agency.

6. Staff complement

Male employees	145
Female employees	482
Total number of employees	627

Table 15: Agenzija Sapport staff complement as at 31 December 2024

7. Expressions of Interest

In 2024, the HR Department issued 13 EOIs, covering the following areas:

- Overtime for Professionals 2 EOIs
- SIL Service Support Workers to accompany service users on a trip to Sicily – 1 EOI
- Mentoring for a Voluntary Project under the European Solidarity Corp – 1 EOI
- Responsibility Allowance 2 EOIs
- Overtime for Professionals with Sharing Lives 1 EOI
- EOIs for Support Workers with Sharing Lives 1 EOI
- Professionals in Grade D (was Grade 9) or higher within ICL – 1 EOI
- Health and Safety Representatives 3 EOIs
- Counselling Sessions 2024 1 EOI

8. International representations

Through its membership in the Federation of European Social Employers, Agenzija Sapport is actively represented on the Federation's Board through a member of the HR team, strengthening the Agency's engagement at a European level. The Federation brings together employers and unions representing social services workers across Europe. This membership enables the Agency to stay informed about emerging employment-related issues within the EU and provides a platform to voice shared concerns on a broader scale.

Participation in the Federation also offers opportunities to exchange best practices with peer organisations across Europe. Agenzija Sapport has been invited to contribute its own experiences, including strategies for managing behaviours of concern and effective staff onboarding. These exchanges encourage member organisations to reflect on and refine their own practices, while also considering the adoption of innovative approaches, such as the integration of AI in HR and service delivery, proven effective in similar contexts across Europe.

Moreover, through the Federation, the Agency has been invited to participate in an EU project together with other countries to discuss musculo-skeletal disorders and psycho-social risk, when working within the social sector. The project is still at application stage.

In 2024, the HR Department also initiated its representation on the Workforce Development and HR Member Forum within the EASPD.

WAY FORWARD

Looking ahead to 2025, the HR team shall focus on consolidating and finalising ongoing digitisation projects, with a strong emphasis on ensuring that HR data is managed efficiently and effectively. A new hiring module will be launched to streamline recruitment, selection, and onboarding, creating a more seamless experience for both candidates and the organisation. In parallel, the performance management module will be piloted with a selected group of employees, marking an important step towards fully digitalising this process.

The HR team will also continue to strengthen initiatives designed to upskill the Agency's workforce, further enhancing employee competencies and knowledge. At the same time, well-being, talent management, and the advancement of strategic HR practices will remain central to the Department's agenda, reflecting the team's commitment to fostering an engaged, capable, and future-ready workforce.





QUALITY AUDIT, RESEARCH & INNOVATION DEPARTMENT

The Quality Audit, Research & Innovation (QARI) Department aims to ensure all aspects of Agenzija Sapport's operations adhere to the highest standards, are informed by robust research, and continually evolve to meet the needs of all stakeholders, placing persons with disabilities at the heart of its objectives.

1. Quality assurance and service auditing

The QARI Department enhanced its quality assurance and service auditing practices to support the Agency's mission of excellence. In 2024, new software implementation facilitated the standardisation and optimisation of auditing processes. A comprehensive Quality Assurance Framework is under continuous development and adaptation, supporting the introduction of innovative feedback mechanisms to improve service user and stakeholder satisfaction. The Department completed detailed analyses and provided actionable insights to drive continuous improvement across all service areas.

2. Risk management

Proactive risk management remained a priority, protecting the well-being of all stakeholders and safeguarding the Agency's reputation. The Department effectively managed compliance issues, implementing strategies, coordinated with legal experts, to align operations with legislative requirements. These efforts minimised potential liabilities and reinforced the resilience of Agency operations.

3. Research and development

Research and development initiatives focused on streamlining data collection processes and enhancing



centralised data accessibility. Collaborations with academic institutions, through numerous projects and partnerships, fostered meaningful knowledge exchange and exciting developments within Malta's disability sector. These strategic alliances are redefining data-driven strategies for service enhancement and informed decision-making and supporting creative projects to enhance accessibility and quality of life for persons with disabilities. The QARI Department also played a key role in reviewing reports and research requests relevant to the Agency's operations, ensuring the rights of persons with disabilities are considered at all levels by applying ethical protocols and controls.

4. Policy and procedure review and development

The Department made significant progress in policy and procedure development, creating guidelines for developing organisational governance documents to ensure standardisation and compliance. Numerous policies were reviewed to reflect regulatory compliance and best practices. Revisions and drafting of new SOPs strengthened governance and accountability. Collaborative policy analysis with stakeholders facilitated meaningful updates that emphasised transparency and accessibility.

5. Other projects

The QARI Department revised and launched a streamlined framework for data protection practices across the Agency, ensuring compliance with GDPR legislation.

Four University students contributed to a multi-method quality assessment of Agency services and the review of numerous policies for simplification and improved accessibility. Their involvement proved invaluable in achieving the Department's objective of accessible and transparent information while providing them significant experience within the disability sector.

Developing adequate service quality and feedback mechanisms remained a priority. With the implementation of new cloud-based software, the Department will collaborate with all stakeholders to pilot a new feedback system, due for full launch in 2025.





Guidelines to Organisational Governance Documents: Policies, Processes & Procedures.

Guidelines Version No: 1.1

Owner: QARI Section: Compliance

Issued On: Revised On: February 2024 May 2024



73 INTERNAL POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

WERE REVIEWED, DEVELOPED, AND CONSULTED ON IN 2024, ENSURING COMPLIANCE AND DATA-DRIVEN PRACTICES

The QARI Department also established key partnerships, notably with the UOM's Faculty of Engineering on the MASCOT Project (developing a smart and sustainable inclusive workstation designed by and for persons with disabilities in manufacturing settings) and with Agenzija Żghażagh to create Malta's first national youth index. This latter project will support Agenzija Sapport and other partners in gathering data to inform future planning and service development.

2024 HIGHLIGHTS

- Represented Agenzija Sapport as a member of the core group established by the MIV to determine the best methods to streamline national disability-related data to improve policy and strategy development.
- Represented Agenzija Sapport as a speaker during the European Social Network's "Social Service Transformation and Resilience Working Group" session in Rome to present the Agency's achievements, challenges, and goals related to data collection and CMS for data-driven decision-making and policy development.
- Implemented comprehensive software to streamline QARI Department operations (quality audits, risk management, stakeholder engagement, and compliance).
- Represented Agenzija Sapport at the Chartered Quality Institute's annual Quality Live 2024 conference in

- London, gaining insights on quality assurance best practices and networking with professionals in various fields.
- Commenced three internal quality audits with outputs to be reported in 2025.

WAY FORWARD

- Completing the implementation and maximising the use of cloud-based software across the Agency will be a priority, focusing on staff training and system optimisation to improve quality management processes.
- Continuing to identify research needs through stakeholder consultations and developing comprehensive project proposals for review, approval, and implementation to enhance data-driven decision-making.
- Organising regular meetings and consultations with stakeholders to create engagement surveys to help assess participation and gather valuable feedback, thus improving service quality.
- Establish streamlined data management processes and implement new data collection tools and methodologies to ensure efficient data handling and reporting across the Agency.
- Strengthening partnerships for collaborative research projects will be emphasised, particularly by involving persons with disabilities as primary stakeholders and participants.
- Focusing on developing tools to review current policies quickly, analyse gaps, improve accessibility, and draft new policies to increase accountability and professional culture within the Department.
- Finalising and launching the Whistleblower Policy and framework to enhance the Agency's accountability and provide precise reporting mechanisms for stakeholders.
- Conducting service quality audits and risk assessments will be integrated into the Quality Management System framework, with scheduled audits and evaluations to improve services based on stakeholder feedback continuously.





OPERATIONS DEPARTMENT

Beyond the direct management of ICT, Projects, and Health & Safety the Operations Department acts as the reference point for all other departments, thanks to its holistic knowledge of the Agency's daily workflows, service delivery frameworks, and long-term strategic priorities, ensuring that the Agency's services operate smoothly and effectively.

2024 HIGHLIGHTS

Throughout 2024, the Operations Department:

- Coordinated and provided operational support across the Agency, ensuring smooth interaction between different units.
- Actively engaged with a wide network of internal and external stakeholders, ensuring alignment of objectives, compliance with regulatory standards, and the efficient flow of information.
- Streamlined Agency-wide processes, helping departments set and achieve practical targets while fostering a culture of efficiency and accountability.
- Supported the Agency's leadership in translating strategic objectives into tangible operational outcomes, bridging policy with day-to-day reality.

The Department has become pivotal in driving cultural change within the Agency, particularly promoting digitalisation, sustainability, and safety across all levels. This role ensures that operations are not simply reactive but part of a forward-looking approach that contributes to the overall mission of Agenzija Sapport.

1. ICT

The ICT section underwent significant improvements during 2024, focusing on efficiency, proactivity, and modernisation. The team reorganised the first line of support to respond more effectively to staff needs while simultaneously adopting a proactive approach in preventing and mitigating technical issues.

Key milestones include:

- Modernisation of infrastructure: Replacement of over 100 laptops and other devices that were due for upgrade to meet current cybersecurity standards.
- Enhanced connectivity: Upgraded ICT infrastructure across different premises with an investment of over €20,000, improving speed, reliability, and service continuity.
- Team growth: The Department expanded by two additional members, strengthening its capacity to handle growing demands.
- Digital transformation: Initiated a wider digitalisation process in partnership with several Agency services, aiming to replace manual processes with streamlined, technology-driven solutions. This process involves continuous consultations with different teams, research into market solutions, procurement, and hands-on implementation.

The ICT team also played a critical role in Agency-wide projects, including:

- Drafting and reviewing technical specifications for tender processes.
- Providing ongoing technical consultancy and support during implementation phases in collaboration with external suppliers.

Importantly, digitalisation is no longer isolated within ICT but is being promoted Agency-wide through the Operations Department, ensuring that all services move strategically in this direction.

2. Projects

The Projects function experienced one of its most active years, adopting a more structured and proactive approach to how projects are designed, executed, and managed. A key shift has been the decision to manage most project design, implementation, and project management inhouse, ensuring cost-effectiveness, consistency, and accountability.

Highlights from 2024 include:

- Monitoring of three major projects commissioned through tendering, with emphasis on quality control and adherence to deadlines.
- Infrastructure assessments at all Agency premises, focusing primarily on the electrical supply and setup due to the increased demand on energy capacity across facilities.
- Strategic refurbishments: The Department moved away from piecemeal maintenance and towards comprehensive refurbishments whenever possible, ensuring long-term sustainability of the Agency's facilities.
- Major ongoing projects: Two important projects are underway in collaboration with Project Green (Pembroke SIL unit and Paola Day Centre.

Additionally, work commenced on over five major new projects scheduled for 2025, alongside several medium-sized initiatives.

Looking ahead, the Agency has acquired four new premises requiring total refurbishment, representing an estimated investment exceeding €4 million over the coming years. This signals a very busy period ahead for the Projects Department, which will continue to spearhead sustainable, timely, and high-quality project delivery.

3. Health & Safety

The H&S Department maintained its daily vigilance over workplace risk management while reinforcing a long-term strategy that aims to embed safety awareness into the culture of the Agency. In 2024, the Department intensified its focus on responsibilising every member of

staff by promoting active engagement with H&S matters and ensuring compliance across different sites.

Efforts continue to balance reactive interventions to manage day-to-day risks with a structured plan toward sustained improvements in workplace health and safety standards.

WAY FORWARD

The Operations Department remains an essential driver of Agenzija Sapport's strategic direction and daily functionality. By coordinating ICT, Projects, and H&S, while also performing its own wider operational functions, the Department ensures that innovation, efficiency, safety, and service quality are upheld across all areas of the Agency.

The year 2025 is projected to be particularly demanding, with an ambitious agenda of new refurbishments, digitalisation initiatives, and major infrastructure projects. With its strengthened teams and proactive approach, the Operations Department is well positioned to continue guiding Agenzija Sapport through this important phase of growth and transformation.





CHANGE MANAGEMENT DEPARTMENT

In 2024, Agenzija Sapport reaffirmed its commitment to its core mission: to support persons with disabilities in achieving social equitability and to serve as a catalyst for implementing the UNCRPD.

The Change Management Department played a pivotal role in translating this mission into action, driving a series of strategic and cultural reforms aimed to strengthen the Agency's foundations and prepare it for the future.

2024 HIGHLIGHTS

2024 began with a renewed focus on disseminating the Agency's cause and mission across all levels. This was not merely a communication exercise but a deliberate effort to embed purpose into every layer of the organisation. In parallel, the Department led a collaborative process to define a new set of Agency values. These values were co-created with internal and external stakeholders and designed to reflect the principles of inclusion, autonomy, and accessibility that underpin the Agency's work.

To better understand the challenges and opportunities associated with change, the Change Management team conducted a series of visits to various service teams. These meetings provided a valuable opportunity to engage directly with staff, listen to their experiences, and identify both obstacles and areas for growth. This approach built on the Gap Analysis conducted in 2023, which had highlighted several areas requiring attention. In 2024, the Department began addressing these gaps in collaboration with relevant stakeholders, ensuring that solutions were grounded in real operational needs.

One of the most significant initiatives of the year was the launch of a structured Job Analysis exercise in partnership with the HR team. This process led to the redesign of the Service Executive role, including updated job descriptions and a revised nomenclature that better reflects the role's responsibilities and

service context. The exercise not only clarified expectations but also aligned the role more closely with the Agency's strategic objectives.

Digital transformation was another key theme in 2024. The Agency's performance management and hiring processes were successfully moved online, streamlining workflows and improving accessibility. Exit interviews continued to be conducted, providing valuable insights into staff experiences and informing retention strategies. In collaboration with the Directors, the team also implemented a new operational plan that was more digitised and aligned with the Agency's





evolving strategy. Strategy Days were organised to bring teams together, reflect on progress, and prepare for the next phase of transformation.

The Change Management Department also contributed actively to the PA Reform, ensuring that internal structures and processes were aligned with the evolving needs of service users. This included supporting the implementation of the new strategy and laying the groundwork for future reforms. Additionally, the Department begun its work on a Positive Risk Assessment framework, designed to support innovation while maintaining service quality and safety.

Other achievements included:

- Two away-days for Senior Management were organised to discuss pressing items that the Agency is working towards mainly deinstitutionalisation, working together across departments and drafting the MOP for the Deinstitutionalisation Board.
- The Change Management team attended four team meetings within Day Services and six within SIL Services to discuss deinstitutionalisation and the way forward, listening to possible challenges both from an operational and a practical perspective. Tailor-made support meetings were also held with Leaders, Coordinators, ISP and Programme Executives, Senior Support Workers and Support Workers who were finding obstacles in implementing the strategy.
- Several discussions were held with the HR Department to support, update and implement HR processes.
- Eight support meetings were held by the Change Management team with Senior Executives of SIL and Day Services, in collaboration with the HR team.

WAY FORWARD

Operational plans shall be designed and supported by the introduction of metric gauges, enabling more precise monitoring and accountability. The Change Management Department will continue its involvement in the PA Reform,

OUR VALUES:

DEINSTITUTIONALISATION CO-PRODUCTION PERSONAL AUTONOMY ACCESSIBILITY EQUITY

expanding the Job Analysis exercise to other grades and roles. A new Digital Exit Interview System, enhanced with artificial intelligence, will be introduced to provide deeper insights into staff experiences and trends.

Looking ahead to 2025, the Department is focused on deepening the cultural transformation initiated in 2024. A series of culture programmes will be launched to embed the newly defined values into everyday practice and reinforce a shared sense of purpose across the Agency. The current strategic phase will be concluded, and a new one will be initiated, reflecting the Agency's commitment to continuous improvement and responsiveness to emerging needs.

The year 2024 was one of listening, learning, and laying strong foundations. As Agenzija Sapport moves into 2025, the Change Management Department remains committed to guiding the Agency through meaningful transformation, always with the mission of equity and inclusion at its core.





ADMINISTRATION, MAINTENANCE & EU FUNDS DEPARTMENT

The Administration, Maintenance & EU Funds Department plays a vital role in ensuring the smooth operation, upkeep, and continuous improvement of the organisation's facilities and resources, while efficiently managing administrative processes and EU funding opportunities.

2024 HIGHLIGHTS

1. Administration & Maintenance

One of the key objectives of the Administration & Maintenance Unit in 2024 was to strengthen its proactive approach by placing greater emphasis on preventive maintenance and planned overhauls of the organisation's premises. This transition aimed to enhance reliability, manage costs more effectively, and ensure durable, high-quality facilities for both staff and service users.

In 2024, the Administration & Maintenance Department completed the following projects:

- Birzebbuga residence Full electrical rewiring, new kitchen with appliances, refurbishment of living and outdoor areas, painting and finishing. Cost: €28,000.
- Mosta residence Installed air conditioning, furnished three bedrooms and common areas, full painting and finishing. Cost: €30,000.
- San Ġwann residence Interior painting, air conditioning, new internal doors and furniture, kitchen with appliances, and outdoor upgrades. Cost: €20,000.
- Head Office Minor refurbishments including new reception desk, office furniture, creation of an additional small boardroom, and office repainting. Cost: €25,000.
- Dar il-Fjuri, Gozo Finishing and painting works in two apartments and installation of blinds on 23 apertures. Cost: €9,000.





1,269 INTERVENTIONS

L- 2024 also Administrative & Maintanana Document

In 2024, the Administration & Maintenance Department carried out key upgrades across several day centres in Malta and Gozo to enhance functionality and user experience.

Works included:

- Installation of five interactive touchscreen displays at Cottonera, Paola, and Gwardjola Day Centres
- Provision of 25 lockers and modernisation of pottery room apertures at Fleur-de-Lys Day Centre
- Refurbishment of outdoor ponds at Hal Far and Fleurde-Lys Day Centres
- Installation of blinds and procurement of 100 new chairs
- Upgrades to lounge seating and main entrance doors at Paola and Swatar Day Centres

These improvements contributed to better service quality and overall facility standards throughout the year.

Maintenance interventions by the team included:

- 1,041 general maintenance interventions
- 174 interventions for electrical and plumbing works
- 54 interventions for air conditioners

1.1 Issuance of Requests for Quotations (RFQs)

The Administration & Maintenance team issued approximately 1,000 RFQs to procure various goods and services. These included appliances, furniture and fittings, general office supplies and consumables, as well as specialised items such as electrical and plumbing supplies.

1.2 Travel

In 2024, the Administration team facilitated 115 travel arrangements for Agenzija Sapport employees and service users, working closely with various departments to ensure smooth coordination.

Funding	Cost
National	€37,259
EU / ESN / EASPD	€63,095

Table 16: Funds used for duty travel, January – December 2024





Destination country	Number of staff / service users
Jordan	1
Austria	5
Italy	10
Croatia	2
Sicily	7
Iceland	4
Belgium	17
UK	11
France	2
Spain	8
Scotland	3
Hungary	2
Greece	9
Romania	4
USA	1
Germany	1
Estonia	6
Finland	10
Poland	1
Belgrade	2
Denmark	1
Ireland	4
Portugal	2
Sweden	2
Total	115

Table 17: Number of travel arrangements coordinated by the Administration team, January – December 2024



WAY FORWARD

- To enhance efficiency, transparency, and accountability, all administrative and maintenance requests will be handled exclusively through the introduction and streamlining of online systems starting in mid-2025.
- Through co-production with service users, full refurbishment works will take place in a number of premises including the Kirkop and Fgura SIL units.
- A number of Day Centre facilities will undergo targeted upgrades to improve infrastructure, accessibility, and service experience.
- A comprehensive CCTV upgrade will be rolled out to ensure all Day Centre units are equipped with modern security systems, reinforcing safety for both service users and staff.

2. EU Funds

Erasmus+ and KA1 staff opportunities:

Following accreditation as a sending organisation for Erasmus+ KA1 in 2022, Aġenzija Sapport applied for funding and in 2023 received €131,000 for mobility opportunities for staff covering the 2023-2024 period. In 2024, Aġenzija Sapport received a further €250,000

for mobility opportunities for staff for the 2024-2025 period. To date Agenzija Sapport has successfully sent over 100 members of staff on these mobilities.

2023-2024 mobilities:

Girona, Spain Tallinn, Estonia Bologna, Italy Cagliari, Italy Sandefjord, Norway Reykjavik, Iceland Valencia, Spain Tampere, Finland

2024-2025 mobilities:

Athens, Greece

Erasmus+ and KA2 opportunities:

During the period under review, Agenzija Sapport worked on a number of projects.

Completed projects:

 Beyond Disability: A project with partners from Italy, Ireland, and Malta aimed to create an accredited training to assist professionals to apply their areas of expertise with persons with disabilities. The project actions culminated in the delivery of training in 2024 and will be closed in 2025.

Project value: €30,000 Project status: completed

Let's Talk About It: A project with partners from Italy,
Greece, and Malta which focuses on the creation of
accredited training to assist professionals to provide sex
education to persons with disabilities and the creation
of tools to assist in the delivery of such training.
In 2024, the training modules were drafted and
accredited. Delivery of training and a multiplier event
are planned for 2025.

Project value: €60,00 Project status: initiated





 Inclusive Practices: A project with partners from Sweden, Malta, Spain, Netherlands, UK, and Hungary, focusing on the sharing of best practices in relation to inclusion. Agenzija Sapport provided expertise through the ACTU. ACTU staff made numerous contributions through blogs and interventions during international visits.

Project value: €40,000

Project status: approved for initiation in 2025

 It Starts with Me!: A project with partners from Spain, Sweden, Slovenia, Greece, and Italy, centred on a number of workshops run by persons with disabilities aimed to pilot a number of questionnaires.

Project value apportioned to Aġenzija Sapport: €5,750

Project status: initiated

 Same Chance: A project with partners from Malta, Portugal, and Ireland, aiming to create employment opportunities for persons on the autism spectrum through research.

Project value: €250,000

Project status: approved for initiation in 2025

European Solidarity Corps

Throughout 2024, Aġenzija Sapport has retained its accreditation for the ESC and has successfully closed the 2023-2024 agreement and disbursed €60,000 with a total of 5 volunteers who implemented their volunteering placement in Malta within the Sharing Lives project. A further €60,000 has been allocated for 2024-2025 period. A total of four volunteers were hosted in Malta during 2024.



WAY FORWARD

More KA1 mobility opportunities will be coordinated for Agency employees. The team will also initiate the process to send learners (Agenzija Sapport service users) on KA1 adult mobilities hence further exploiting mobility opportunities under the Erasmus+ programme. Additional KA2 and Horizon programme opportunities will be explored to further expand the Agency's use of EU funding.





STRATEGIC MARKETING & INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS DEPARTMENT

The Strategic Marketing & International Relations Department plays a key role in showcasing Agenzija Sapport's work and strengthening its connections both locally and on an international level.

In 2024, the team ensured clear and consistent communication with stakeholders, strengthened the Agency's visibility through targeted campaigns, and represented the organisation in key international networks. Interventions included the coordination of media coverage, supporting public awareness initiatives, managing internal communications, and fostering relationships that created new opportunities for international collaborations.

135 MEDIA PROGRAMMES

ATTENDED BETWEEN
JANUARY – DECEMBER 2024



2024 MARKETING HIGHLIGHTS

1. Campaigns:

- Agency's mission, cause and values
- Seminars by ACTU
- Cupi's Spoon
- Blue Badge
- Family Support Unit workshops
- Sapport Helpline
- KreAzzjoni
- Empowerment Scheme reform

2. Publications:

- EU Disability Card information booklet
- Family Support Unit information booklet
- Message and voice-banking
- PA Job Description
- Personal Assistant User's Charter of Rights and Responsibilities

3. Training development and delivery:

- Event management training
- Media training

4. Website accessibility:

The Agency's website accessibility features were enhanced through a project in collaboration with the SLI whereby pertinent sections of the website were recorded and made available in sign language.

170,894 WEBSITE PAGE VIEWS

IN 2024

SOCIAL MEDIA FOLLOWERS
AS AT DECEMBER 2024:

FACEBOOK: 15,466 INSTAGRAM: 1,232 LINKEDIN: 441 X: 108

Great communication begins with connection

Sapport Intranet: As part of a strategy to improve internal communications, the team worked to plan and design the Agency's first intranet. Research included various meetings, questionnaires with the Agency's management team, and collaboration with the Agency's ICT team.

The main aim of the intranet is to ensure that all employees receive complete, accurate and reliable information at the right time, also providing a platform on which the Agency's numerous teams can share information across the Agency while improving the corporate information flow.

Over 25 Communications Ambassadors were appointed, thus being the bridge between their respective team and the rest of the Agency. This project is set for completion and launch in 2025.



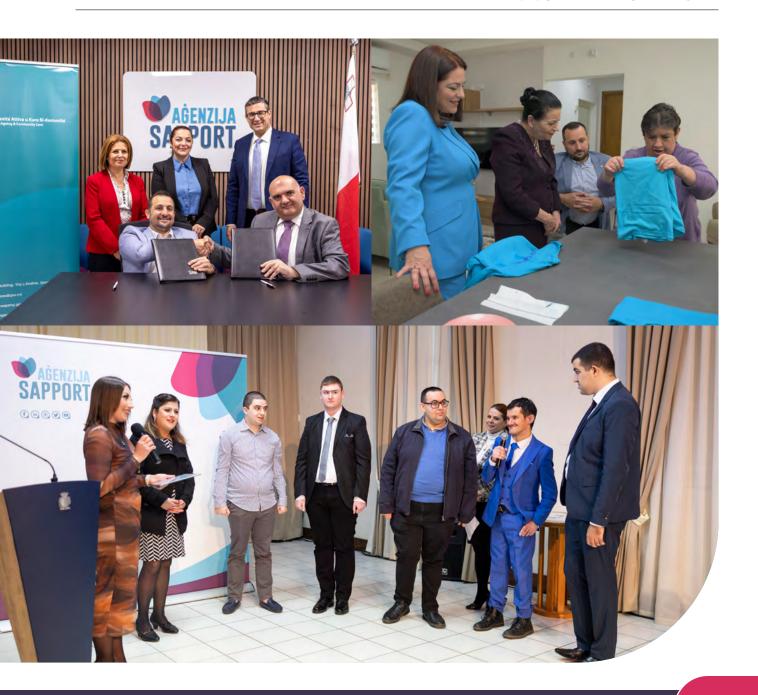




EVENTS 2024

January	Junior College Careers Expo
February	Launch of Empowerment Scheme Reform
	Seminar: Cognitive & Sensorial Accessibility – Key Design Approaches
March	Workshop: Cognitive & Sensorial Accessibility – Neuroscience in Design
	De La Salle Career Expo
	LAMP seminar
April	Way to Work Programme certification
~ Y'''	Signing of agreement with Active Ageing & Community Care Department
May	Signing of agreement with Lands Authority – transfer of Paola site
	Launch of Ġirasol community hub
May	Hosting of visit by H.E. the President of Malta
	Public Service Expo
	Launch of Holqa transition premises in Qrendi
June	Signing of collective agreement
luly	Cupi's Spoon gastro competition
De La Salle Career Expo LAMP seminar Way to Work Programme certification Signing of agreement with Active Ageing & Community Care Department Signing of agreement with Lands Authority – transfer of Paola site Launch of Ġirasol community hub Hosting of visit by H.E. the President of Malta Public Service Expo Launch of Holqa transition premises in Qrendi Signing of collective agreement	Signing of agreement with Xjenza Malta
August	Signing of agreement with Voice for Inclusion Gozo
	Freshers' Week – Giovanni Curmi Higher Secondary
Santanahan	Special Olympics National Games
September	Signing of agreement with Agenzija Żghażagh
	Signing of PSP renewal – Dar il-Kaptan
	Freshers' Week – MCAST
October	Freshers' Week – Junior College
	Visit to Kirkop transition premises
	Careers Fair at San Anton School
November	Sharing Lives volunteers' appreciation night
	Signing of agreement with Lands Authority – Sliema premises
December	Way to Work Programme certification

Table~18: Events~coordinated~or~supported~by~the~Strategic~Marketing~&~International~Relations~team, January~-~December~2024









2024 INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS HIGHLIGHTS

The International Relations function within this team serves to build bridges and facilitates networking on an international level.

Main highlights include:

- Joining the EPR as observer members.
- The PA Reform Project being shortlisted for the Excellence in Communities Award by the ESN.
- Signing a partnership agreement with the ESN to host the European Social Care Conference 2026 in Malta.
- Joining the Workforce Development and HR Member Forum of EASPD.
- Having a member of staff voted for and appointed a Board member of EASPD with person-centred technology portfolio.
- Continued collaboration with international entities and experts on the personal assistance reform.
- Participation in the 2nd Regional Conference of the Socio-Economic Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in the Mediterranean Region held in Jordan.
- Attending the COSP 17, including an address during a side event on "The right to work and employment for persons with disabilities in low and middle income countries".

International opportunities attended by Agenzija Sapport employees and service users in 2024 include:

- Participation by two Maltese persons with disability at the Cupi's Spoon semi-final and final gasto competition in Croatia, with one placing second place in the cooking category.
- Participation in a working group on service quality coordinated by ESN.
- Attendance by Sapport professionals on various study visits, include a Peer Learning Visit to Health Services Executive in Ireland on supported independent living.



WAY FORWARD

In 2025, the Strategic Marketing & International Relations Team will place a strong emphasis on innovation. Media outreach will be expanded with the launch of a podcast designed to reach a broader and more diverse audience than traditional channels. Campaigns will be more targeted, results-driven, and regularly evaluated, while opportunities for co-production will be actively enhanced.

A key milestone will be the finalisation and launch of the new intranet, providing a central hub for communication and resources. Another major highlight will be the planning and delivery of a national conference in December 2025.

The year ahead will also see strengthened partnerships and deeper collaboration with international networks, ensuring maximum value for Agency employees through the sharing of best practices. These efforts will continue to reinforce Agenzija Sapport's standing as a trusted service provider and a leader in the sector.

IN 2025

THE STRATEGIC MARKETING & INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS TEAM WILL PLACE A STRONG EMPHASIS ON INNOVATION.



FINANCE & PROCUREMENT DEPARTMENT

The Finance & Procurement Department is tasked with overseeing the Agency's comprehensive financial governance and procurement functions. Its remit encompasses all accounting transactions, financial analysis and reporting, budget allocation and control, as well as treasury management. The Department also manages the drafting, publication, and evaluation of tenders, and the administration of calls for quotations.

All departmental activities are conducted in strict compliance with statutory obligations, including the Fiscal Responsibility Act, the Public Procurement Regulations, and other relevant legislation. The members of the Finance and Procurement Department are dedicated to delivering accurate, timely reports and to serving as a key support function for all other departments within the Agency.

Analysis of the financial results for the year demonstrates that the Agency continues to expand both its services and its resource capacity. Over the period under review, there was an increase in service user requests, particularly for personal assistance, community-based services, and subsidies for assistive equipment. Consequently, both operational and capital expenditures rose accordingly.

Aligned with its strategic plan, the Agency required a new injection of funds. This necessitated that the Finance and Procurement Department manage financial resources with heightened efficiency and effectiveness, ensuring transparency, accountability, and optimal value for money.

2024 HIGHLIGHTS

1. Government Grants

In order to maintain a sustainable service, the Agency required additional Government investment for the disability sector, which increased over the previous year. In 2024, €35.3 million were received in government grants, programmes and initiatives and capital grants. This represents a significant Government investment, marking a 14% increase over the previous year.

€35.3 MILLION WERE RECEIVED

IN GOVERNMENT GRANTS, PROGRAMMES AND INITIATIVES AND CAPITAL GRANTS IN 2024, AN INCREASE OF 14% OVER THE PREVIOUS YEAR



	2022 €	2023 €	2024 €
Government subvention	22,000,000	22,950,000	24,750,000
Other grants	7,767,460	8,006,618	10,582,181
Total	29,767,460	30,956,618	35,332,181

Table 19: Government subvention and other grants, 2022 - 2024

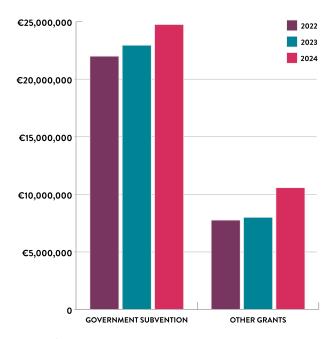


Figure 4: Government subvention and other grants, 2022 – 2024

2. Recurrent Expenditure

The operational and administrative expenses of the Agency are split in cost centres for the following main services provided:

- Day Centres
- SIL Units
- Community Services
- Social Work
- ICL
- Access to Communication and Technology Unit
- Administration, Human Resources, Finance and Office of the CEO
- Marketing
- Client Schemes

Figure 5 displays operational expenses for 2023 and 2024, mainly comprising payroll, transport, residential and respite services, contractual costs, and client schemes. In 2024, expenses rose by 14.2%, largely due to increased spending on community-based user schemes for personal assistance and equipment. Payroll grew by 4.8% owing to Collective Agreement adjustments and staff expansion. The Agency also invested in IT systems to enhance service delivery. The Agency also continued to implement the Budget Measures and Electoral Manifesto Proposals through ring-fenced funding.

OPERATIONAL EXPENSE

INCREASED BY 14.2% IN 2024

	2023 €	2024 €
Payroll	16,815,594	17,624,466
Operational Expenditure	12,705,919	16,260,250
Administrative Expenditure	1,301,631	1,314,565
Total	30,823,144	35,199,281

Table 20: Recurrent expenditure and payroll, 2023 - 2024

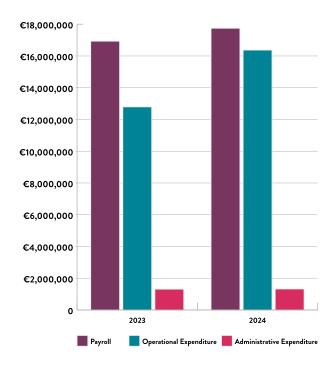


Figure 5: Recurrent expenditure, 2023 - 2024

The Finance Department ensures compliance with Public Procurement Regulations, Directive 9, Internal Policies, and other regulations. Agenzija Sapport used all government grants efficiently to deliver maximum value to service users.

3. Procurement

The Procurement unit procures supplies, works, and services in accordance with legislation and regulations, and develops related policies and procedures. In 2024, it managed a wide range of procurement activities – from large tenders to direct orders – following the approved annual plan. The unit also oversees supplier relationships, contract documentation, and compliance, and achieved centralisation of all contracts and documents during the year. It continues to support and guide other departments and users. During the year this unit also introduced new procurement methods to ensure more appropriate tenders and contracts.

4. Capital Expenditure

The Agency used government capital grants to invest in procurement of assets, advancing works on the Kirkop SIL premises, the STILC, and Mtarfa projects. Funds were also committed to complete several other projects in the Agency's properties spread across Malta and Gozo, while other improvements and equipment and IT infrastructure updates were made throughout the year.

WAY FORWARD

Looking ahead to the coming year, the Agency will focus on equipping staff with the skills required for a rapidly evolving environment. A comprehensive training programme in emerging technologies will be launched, with a Key Performance Indicator of at least 80% of staff completing certified modules in digital transformation and AI applications. The Procurement Department will introduce innovative procurement methods aimed at reducing tendering time frames and increasing efficiency for implementation of contracts.

Furthermore, the Agency will implement a streamlined reporting and transacting system, targeting a reduction in administrative processing times. Collectively, these initiatives will strengthen operational efficiency, transparency, and the Agency's capacity to deliver value-driven services.



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