

SECTION 2

FOREWORD



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Welcome to the Biennial Report 2023-2024. Since 1990, the Centre for Labour Studies (CLS) has published a publicly available biennial report, having previously issued an annual report since 1981. This latest edition highlights the dedicated work of the Centre's staff throughout 2023 and 2024.

As has become tradition, the report opens with articles contributed by CLS academic and research staff. These articles address timely and nationally relevant challenges, including an analysis of industrial relations in Malta, the role of trade unions in safeguarding migrant workers, the impact of caregiving and household responsibilities on fertility decisions, precarious work in Malta's higher education sector, and a review of work-related mental health and well-being in Malta.

At the core of the CLS's mission is its commitment to higher education. During the period under review, the Centre continued to offer four well-established part-time programmes of studies: the Diploma in Gender, Work, and Society (in collaboration with the Faculty for Social Well-being); the Bachelor in Work and Human Resources (Hons) (in collaboration with the Faculty of Economics, Management, and Accountancy); the

Bachelor in Occupational Health and Safety (Hons); and the Master in Lifelong Career Guidance and Development (together with the Faculty of Education). Despite an extensive marketing campaign, the CLS faced challenges in attracting sufficient applicants to reopen the diploma and master's programmes, prompting an exploration of innovative approaches to revitalise them. Additionally, local and international competition has affected enrolment in the Centre's two flagship bachelor's degrees, necessitating a strategic review of educational offerings. Nevertheless, during 2023 and 2024, the CLS provided education to eleven distinct cohorts of students. Notably, in the academic year 2024/25, the Centre introduced the Master of Science in Work and Organisational Behaviour (by research), which saw an overwhelming number of applicants, exceeding available resources—a testament to the CLS's commitment to academic innovation.

The period under review also saw several changes in the CLS's leadership and staff complement. The team grew in February 2023 when Dr Krista Bonello Rutter Giappone joined as a Research Support Officer. Krista has been a pleasure to work with and her impact is evident within this edition of the Biennial. In November 2023, the CLS welcomed back Professor Godfrey Baldacchino as Chair. A name synonymous with the Centre and Labour Studies, Professor Baldacchino's return was met with great enthusiasm by the entire staff. I would like to take this opportunity to extend my sincere gratitude to Professor Tanya Sammut Bonnici for her leadership as CLS Chair from July 2021 to November 2023. The month of November 2023 also marked the departure of Ms Stephanie Muscat, who had served as an administrator at the CLS for well over a decade. During her time at the Centre, Stephanie grew both academically and professionally, carrying out her work with diligence and dedication. However, every ending brings a new beginning, and the CLS was pleased to welcome Ms Elisa Kelly Caruana to the team. A particularly noteworthy staff milestone was achieved in September 2023, when Anna Borg was promoted to Associate Professor—an outstanding and well-deserved accomplishment.

A significant portion of this Biennial Report is dedicated to celebrating the Centre's achievements over the past two years. One section details the scholarly contributions of CLS academic and research staff, reflecting

the Centre's strategic commitment to maximising research output. This edition lists approximately 60 diverse publications, including peer-reviewed studies, book chapters, and reports for national and international bodies—an impressive accomplishment given the Centre's limited resources. Some of these publications stem from the CLS's role as part of Eurofound's Network of European Correspondents, further reinforcing the Centre's research impact.

Another key focus of this report is the CLS's outreach efforts, a fundamental pillar of its strategic plan. This section highlights a wide array of events organised by the Centre, collaborative projects, and staff participation in national and international conferences. Among the notable achievements during the period under review, the CLS signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the VSB Technical University of Ostrava, Czech Republic, fostering international collaboration. A tangible outcome of this partnership is the Centre's involvement in COLOSH, an Erasmus+ project aimed at enhancing institutions' readiness for international digital health and safety learning. The CLS also signed an MoU with the Occupational Health and Safety Authority (OHSA), leading to concrete cooperation, including opportunities for health and safety students to accompany OHSA officers on inspections and increased engagement of CLS academics in OHSA events. Additionally, the Centre organised several events, including two international ones: an international conference on the history of work in collaboration with the Work in Progress Seminar Series (WIPSS), and an event for European experts in worker participation in collaboration with the European Trade Union Institute (ETUI).

Despite these academic and institutional achievements, the period under review was marked by a profound loss for the CLS community. The sudden passing of Professor Ronald Sultana on 24 November 2023 was deeply felt by all who had the privilege of working with him. Ronald played a pivotal role in the establishment of the Postgraduate Diploma and, later, the Master in Lifelong Career Guidance and Development. In this edition of the Biennial Report, Professor Manwel Debono, who worked closely with him for many years, reflects on Ronald's invaluable contributions to the CLS and his lasting impact on career guidance in Malta. I encourage all readers to reflect on the remarkable legacy he leaves behind.

Looking ahead, the CLS has several projects in the pipeline. In terms of educational offerings, its undergraduate courses will be reviewed, with consideration given to meeting the current market needs of human resources and occupational health and safety practitioners. On the research front, the CLS will collaborate with the National Skills Council (NSC) to identify the skill requirements of Human Resource and Career Guidance practitioners. The ongoing partnership with the Occupational Health and Safety Authority (OHSA) is also expected to expand to include research collaboration. Additionally, research on the challenges faced by migrant workers in Malta is set to be published in 2025, with the CLS actively contributing to public discourse on the topic. The Centre also intends to continue exploring international opportunities for collaboration.

The CLS has been advocating for increased physical and human resources; however, progress in this area has been limited. Efforts to secure additional support will remain a priority. Meanwhile, academic staff will have the opportunity to enhance their skills and expand their professional networks through the COLOSH project. The CLS will also continue to promote its research and share its expertise by organising relevant events and engaging in outreach activities.

Finally, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my colleagues and friends, including the administrative members of staff, researchers, and lecturers contributing to the CLS. This publication is a testament to their hard work and dedication. While the workload was often demanding, the strong relationships within the team made the experience both rewarding and fulfilling. I look forward to the next two years with enthusiasm.

A special thanks also goes to Ms Alessia Zahra for her invaluable assistance in compiling this Biennial Report.

January, 2025