What Makes Working Migrants in Malta Thrive?
An Exploratory Sequential Mixed Methods Approach

Lanette Kristel Dela Cruz

A Master's Dissertation

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of

Master of Science in Psychological Studies of

University of Malta

July 2025

L-Università ta' Malta

FACULTY/INSTITUTE/CENTRE/SCHOOL Social Wellbeing

DECLARATIONS BY POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS

(a) Authenticity of Dissertation

I hereby declare that I am the legitimate author of this Dissertation and that it is my original work.

No portion of this work has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or institution of higher education.

I hold the University of Malta harmless against any third party claims with regard to copyright violation, breach of confidentiality, defamation and any other third party right infringement.

(b) Research Code of Practice and Ethics Review Procedures

I declare that I have abided by the University's Research Ethics Review Procedures. Research Ethics & Data Protection form code SWB-2024-00488.

As a Master's student, as per Regulation 77 of the General Regulations for University Postgraduate Awards 2021, I accept that should my dissertation be awarded a Grade A, it will be made publicly available on the University of Malta Institutional Repository.

Abstract

Migrant thriving remains underexplored, particularly in Malta, where the migrant population is growing rapidly. This study employed a three-phase exploratory sequential mixed methods design grounded in a critical realist paradigm to examine how working migrants define and experience thriving and the factors associated with it. In Phase 1, individual interviews with 12 working migrants were analysed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis. This yielded four themes: definition and phases of thriving, thriving domains, individual capitals, and contextual factors. These insights informed Phase 2, where a thriving instrument was developed through a structured process involving conceptual mapping, item generation, expert reviews, cognitive interviews, and pilot testing. Phase 3 comprised a survey with 436 working migrants to validate the instrument and examine emerging patterns. Findings showed about half were thriving across domains, while a third remained in the surviving phase. Thriving was highest in professional, personal, and relational domains, and moderate in financial and wellbeing domains. Group differences emerged by nationality, job position, sector, permit type, and age. Thriving positively correlated with hobby engagement, volunteering, and intention to stay, and negatively with work absences. Drive, self-care, and work-life balance predicted thriving, while cultural adaptability and the perceived presence of a "social connection ladder" culture—where advancement is seen as tied to personal relationships with management—negatively predicted it. Factor analysis confirmed the thriving domains and introduced strain adaptation as a distinct construct. The study offers practical insights to advance migrant wellbeing in research, policy, and practice.

Keywords: migrant thriving, working migrants, migrant wellbeing, critical realism, exploratory sequential mixed methods, reflexive thematic analysis, instrument development, exploratory factor analysis, Malta

Acknowledgements

This research would not have been possible without the support, guidance, and generosity of many individuals and groups.

First and foremost, I extend my heartfelt gratitude to my family for their unwavering encouragement, patience, and belief in me throughout this journey. I am especially grateful to my mother, whose support has been both my foundation and inspiration. As a working migrant herself, she has shown me the strength, resilience, care, and dedication that working migrants bring—not only to their communities but, most profoundly, to their families.

I am deeply thankful to my supervisor, Dr Gottfried Catania, whose insightful feedback, mentorship, and steady guidance have been instrumental in shaping this study. His patience, clarity, and encouragement were especially invaluable during times when I felt lost or uncertain, helping me navigate both intellectual and personal challenges. I am truly grateful for his commitment to my growth as a researcher.

To my managers and colleagues, thank you for your understanding, encouragement, and flexibility, which enabled me to balance the demands of work and research during this challenging period. Your support made a meaningful difference.

To my friends and fellow course colleagues, thank you for your encouragement, honest feedback, and for reminding me to keep going—especially during the most challenging moments. Your camaraderie and support have been deeply appreciated throughout this journey.

Finally, I am especially grateful to the working migrants in Malta who participated in this study. Your willingness to share your experiences and your passion for this topic reflect the very spirit of what this research seeks to honour. Your contributions gave this study its meaning.

To all of you—thank you.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Chapter 1: Introduction

Background

Malta has witnessed a significant influx of migrants in recent years driven by its geographical location and expanding economic opportunities. According to recent data from the National Statistics Office (NSO) (2024), foreign nationals comprised 28.1% of Malta's total population in 2023. This is considerably higher than the 5% makeup ten years ago. This marked increase in immigration highlights the need for studies to better understand the changing landscape of Maltese society.

Previous studies have extensively explored the stressors, vulnerabilities, and negative experiences of migrants during pre- and post-migration. While these contributions are valuable, there remains a scarcity of research focusing on the strengths, resources, and thriving experiences of migrants. Scholars have called for a shift toward migrant wellbeing research, arguing that enhancing migrant wellbeing can yield significant benefits—not only for migrants themselves but also for host societies (Hendriks & Burger, 2019).

Although psychological wellbeing has been widely measured using established scales, no tool has yet been developed specifically to capture migrant thriving. The migration context is distinct in various respects (Hendriks & Bartram, 2019), making migrant experiences a more complex realm to understand. To address this gap, the current study first explores how migrants make sense of thriving. Their perspectives can reveal the core elements that support or hinder this process and help guide the development of more relevant, context-specific measures.

To achieve this, this study adopts a mixed-methods approach. It begins with in-depth qualitative research to explore how migrants in Malta conceptualise thriving, followed by quantitative methods to test and refine these insights across a broader sample. This design lays

the groundwork for a robust, evidence-based framework for conceptualising migrant thriving, contributing both to academic literature and practical efforts to support migrant wellbeing.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research is to develop a deeper understanding of what enables working migrants in Malta to thrive. Specifically, it seeks to:

- establish a theoretical framework on how working migrants make sense of thriving in their lived contexts;
- identify the key factors influencing thriving;
- develop and validate a psychometric instrument based on the theoretical framework formed to quantitatively measure thriving;
- identify the predictors of thriving;
- generate actionable insights for working migrants and stakeholders (i.e., employers, policymakers, and service providers) to create and sustain environments that support working migrant thriving.

Research Questions

Creswell (2015) proposed that a mixed methods study should have three types of research questions: mixed methods, qualitative, and quantitative research questions. The latter questions were refined after identifying the relevant variables from the qualitative phase of the study.

Mixed methods research questions

1. To what extent can the thriving experiences and associated factors identified in the qualitative phase be measured across the broader working migrant population?
2. How does the quantitative data support or refine the theoretical framework developed from the qualitative phase?

Qualitative research questions

1. How do working migrants make sense of thriving in their context?
2. What factors do working migrants perceive as enabling or preventing their thriving experiences?

Quantitative research questions

1. How do working migrants score across the domains of thriving: professional, financial, personal, relational, wellbeing, and overall thriving?
2. How are working migrants distributed across the phases of thriving—stagnating/declining, surviving, thriving, settling—in each life domain?
3. Are there significant differences in thriving scores based on demographic and occupational variables: gender, nationality, age, length of stay, job sector, job position, type of residence permit, and level of education?
4. To what extent are lifestyle factors and migration decisions—sending remittances, engaging in hobbies, family presence in Malta, volunteering, intention to stay long-term, and duration of absences—associated with levels of thriving across domains?
5. To what extent do individual-level and contextual-level variables predict thriving among working migrants in Malta?
6. What are the most commonly reported barriers and enablers to thriving?

Research Design

Grounded in a critical realist paradigm, this study employed an Exploratory Sequential Mixed Methods Design, which followed three distinct phases: (1) qualitative exploration; (2) instrument development informed by the qualitative findings; and (3) using the developed instrument for a wider quantitative investigation. The qualitative data was analysed using

Reflexive Thematic Analysis, while the quantitative data underwent descriptive and inferential analysis, as well as factor analysis.

The Working Migrant Definition

This study focuses on the population of working migrants in Malta, as they represent the majority of the migrant population in the country. In 2021, 76.7% of migrants were in employment (NSO, 2022). In this context, the term working migrants refers to foreign-born individuals who migrated to Malta (both EU and TCN), possess legal authorisation to reside and work in the country, and are currently engaged in full-time employment or self-employment. For the purposes of this study, this remit also includes asylum seekers who are lawfully employed full-time (i.e., under a valid employer-sponsored Jobsplus employment licence); beneficiaries of international protection (either as full-time employees or, where lawful, as self-employed), and foreign-born individuals who migrated to Malta and subsequently acquired Maltese citizenship (either as full-time employees or self-employed). Only part-time workers were excluded, as the study centres on stable labour-market attachment. The operationalisation of *working migrants* was carefully considered, given the often arbitrary and context-dependent nature of migration-related terminologies.

The term *migrants*, technically defined by NSO (2022) as foreign-born individuals residing in Malta, is too broad for the purposes of this study, as it encompasses irregular/undocumented migrants who lack lawful access to the labour market, and other asylum seekers, whose access is restricted or deferred (Aditus Foundation, 2025b; Grech, 2021; Jobsplus, 2021). These groups still experience distinct challenges that warrant separate analysis (Debono & Garzia, 2016). *Economic migrants*, typically defined as those who relocate primarily for employment purposes, was also evaluated. However, this term does not adequately reflect the diverse motivations for

migrating—some of whom may have arrived as refugees or through family reunification, and only later entered the workforce. *Foreign workers*, a term used by Maltese institutions such as Jobsplus, although accurately describing employment status, fails to capture migratory experiences which are central to this study. The term must capture both legal participation in the labour market and the lived experience of migration. Therefore, the term *working migrants* was adopted as the most appropriate and inclusive descriptor.

The inclusion of asylum seekers who are lawfully employed and beneficiaries of international protection who have already entered the labour market and are currently working full time was considered in depth. Although their reasons for migration and initial experiences are acknowledged in this study to be more complex, their full-time participation in the labour market—together with their day-to-day work conditions, integration, and wellbeing—aligns with the phenomena the study seeks to explore. While the latter's rights and access to core welfare, healthcare, and education are in substantial parity with those of Maltese citizens, they must still obtain an employment licence from Jobsplus (Aditus Foundation, 2025a, 2025b, 2025c). Since they are legally working full-time, excluding them would risk introducing selection bias and weakening external validity for working migrants in Malta.

The extension of the working migrant definition to foreign-born individuals who eventually acquired Maltese citizenship (i.e., by naturalisation or through marriage), provided they are employed or self-employed full time, was also critically considered. This inclusion is based on the study's emphasis on the experience of migration and sustained participation in Malta's labour market rather than present legal status alone. Acquiring citizenship, while conferring rights in full parity with Maltese nationals (Leġiżlazzjoni Malta, 2025), does not erase prior migration histories or the ongoing dynamics of adaptation and cultural identity. For some,

citizenship may mark the consolidation of a life built in Malta; others may consider it a step within a longer process of settlement. Including naturalised or registered citizens avoids an artificial exclusion of workers who may continue to encounter migration-related phenomena such as credential transfer, language and integration challenges, homesickness, social seclusion, or racial discrimination. In this study, citizenship is deliberately treated as an additional legal-status category and recorded for subgroup and sensitivity analyses. These considerations allow differences in experiences associated with legal status to be examined rather than assumed.

Researcher Positionality

Positionality refers to the perspective and worldview a researcher brings to the research process, shaping motivations, decisions, and interpretations throughout (Goundar, 2025). From the outset, I acknowledged that my race, beliefs, values, and experiences position me as an insider in certain respects (Ozano & Khatri, 2018). As a female Filipino working migrant in Malta, I draw on this intersectional standpoint, as it brings a particular sensitivity in the ways I frame questions, choose methods and tools, relate to participants, and interpret findings.

Although I share certain experiences with the study population, I approached this research by deliberately shifting between an insider and an outsider—learner stance (Blaikie & Priest, 2019; Yip, 2024). I bracketed my assumptions—through reflexive note-taking, supervision, and peer debriefing—and worked from a posture of curiosity to understand participants' specific contexts. As a third-country national whose prior credentials were initially unrecognised and who worked in unrelated roles, I have long observed other migrants who appear to thrive, especially in their careers, and asked what practices, resources, or conditions enable that trajectory. This reflexive curiosity—grounded in a desire to learn how such thriving becomes possible—inspired the conceptualisation of this study. And by acknowledging different migrants

who seem to be thriving in their own respective way, I worked from the assumption that thriving may mean differently to different people; hence, the decision to approach this study with a qualitative exploration first, followed by a quantitative investigation to translate those insights into measurable and generalisable constructs.

To me, migrant thriving means being able to withstand, survive, grow, and bear fruit in a new environment to which one has been uprooted. I see it as an ongoing process and one that does not solely depend on one's own capacity to survive and fend for themselves. My own experiences as a migrant underscore that this process also depends on how conducive the new environment is: What resources are available and accessible? Does it welcome my presence and support my wellbeing, or does it impose constraints that only allow limited forms of survival and growth?

This belief and thought process oriented me toward critical realism, a research paradigm that distinguishes empirical experiences, observable events, and underlying mechanisms within complex sociocultural phenomena (Bhaskar, 1978). I have experienced how social systems shape everyday life and observed how other migrants navigate and make sense of those effects. I am committed to an approach that neither reduces thriving to abstract indicators nor treats personal stories as detached from structural conditions. Critical realism, therefore, offers a coherent path for me to engage with both the richness of individual experiences and the structural forces that shape them.

Dissertation Overview

This dissertation is divided into six chapters. Chapter 1 provides a brief introduction to the study. Chapter 2 presents a critical review of the literature, addressing key areas of research related to migrant wellbeing, the migration context in Malta, and the psychological wellbeing

frameworks and studies related to working migrants. Chapter 3 outlines the research paradigm, design, and methodology employed in this study. Chapter 4 presents the findings from both the qualitative and quantitative data, including a discussion on instrument development. Chapter 5 integrates and discusses the results from both strands of inquiry, while also drawing on supporting and contrasting literature. Finally, Chapter 6 concludes the dissertation by summarising the research, acknowledging the study's significance and limitations, and offering practical implications and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Migration continues to shape Malta's socio-economic fabric, yet the growing population of working migrants remains largely unexamined in terms of their capacity not just to adapt, but to thrive. Understanding their experiences requires a comprehensive review of the historical, demographic, and policy shifts that have shaped Malta's transformation from a country of emigration to one that is increasingly reliant on foreign labour. It is equally important to investigate how existing research, both locally and internationally, has conceptualised migrant wellbeing and integration.

This review is divided into three main discussions. First, it situates this research by describing Malta's working migration context including the key historical events of Malta's emigration-immigration shift, recent working migrant demographics, current policies on migrant employment, and the research studies carried out on working migrants in Malta. Second, it positions psychology within the realm of migration research by highlighting the role of psychological research in understanding migrant experiences. It also critically reviews recent international studies on migrant wellbeing by acknowledging their contribution and shortcomings in representing migrant experiences. Third, it demonstrates current understanding on thriving as a concept by discussing various definitions and applications. Other established psychological wellbeing theories, constructs, and instruments considered to be potentially relevant to this study are also illustrated. This chapter concludes by emphasising the gaps in the literature.

Malta's Working Migration Context: Demographics, Policies, and Current Trends

Capturing Malta's historical narrative on migration is crucial for understanding the current context of migration of foreign workers in the country. From a country that relied heavily on emigration between the 19th and 20th century (Attard, 1994) to one that is progressively becoming an immigration hub for various nationalities, it is important to explore how these shifts have shaped the current policies, socio-economic conditions, and integration experiences of working migrants in Malta today. This section discusses the key historical migration events in Malta, working migrant demographics, current policies on migrant employment, and recent studies on working migrants in Malta.

Key Historical Events Shifting Malta from Emigration to Immigration

Attard (1994) traced the emigration pattern of Malta by thoroughly providing key historical accounts. Malta's strategic geographical location made it a vital trading hub and a significant naval base in the Mediterranean which precipitated the French occupation in 1788-1800, followed by the British occupation from 1800-1964. The French occupation disrupted Malta's traditional trade routes and economic activities while the British restored them. However, the heavy reliance on the British military for employment resulted in its economic vulnerability, especially when the British reduced their presence. This, together with the growth of the Maltese population, resulted in unemployment and scarcity of resources. These economic pressures marked the beginning of Malta's emigration strategy.

In the early 20th century, the majority of the population emigrated to North Africa due to language and cultural familiarity, but this shifted after World War I when the Maltese government facilitated an organised emigration to English speaking countries such as the UK, Australia, and Canada (King, 1979). This organised emigration, where 5% of the population

emigrated per year, was the government's strategy to reduce Malta's population and bring it to an optimal number of no more than 250,000. Emigration remained a critical economic relief strategy until Malta gained independence from the UK (King & Connell, 1999). Since then, Malta's economy diversified into sectors including manufacturing, tourism, and shipbuilding, which decreased the unemployment rate and eventually transitioned Malta to a country of immigration as the country relies on migrant workers in the construction, hospitality, and entertainment sectors (Briguglio, 2016; Central Bank of Malta, 2015; Oglethorpe, 1983).

This trend continued as Malta joined the European Union (EU) in 2004, resulting in an economic boom, which attracted EU and third-country nationals (TCNs) to migrate for employment opportunities (Debono, 2021; Grech, 2017). Malta's EU accession eventually influenced the country's migration and integration laws as it strives to adhere to the EU standards (Debono, 2021) whilst still preventing the influx of migrant workers in saturated industries (Malta News Agency, 2024). The latter influence can be traced back to earlier efforts made by the Maltese government to monitor the number of inhabitants in the island. Being a small island in the Mediterranean Sea, spanning a surface area of 316 square kilometres with a population of approximately 574,250 as of December 2024 (National Statistics Office, 2025), Malta is considered as one of the world's most densely populated nations; hence, the lack of space is an important theme that influences the mentality of the Maltese people toward migrants (Debono, 2021). At present, foreign workers make up about one-third of Malta's workforce and play a critical role across almost every sector (Ministry for Home Affairs, Security and Employment, 2025).

Working Migrant Demographics

According to data provided by Jobsplus (personal communication, May 2025), the total number of full-time foreign workers in Malta as of December 2024 was 117,108, of which 82,561 are TCNs and 35,547 are EU nationals. TCNs are mostly dominated by Indian nationals, Filipinos, and Nepalese, while EU nationals are mostly comprised of Italians, Romanians, and Bulgarians.

These figures are consistent with data reported by EURES (2024), which noted a steady increase in employment-related migration from both EU and third countries. Specifically, the number of employed EU nationals (including EEA/EFTA and dependants) rose from 33,836 in December 2021 to 38,387 by May 2024, while the number of employed TCNs increased from 42,559 to 80,543 during the same period. These data sets demonstrate the growing presence of foreign nationals in Malta's workforce.

Malta's dependence on foreign labour plays a key role in maintaining a strong workforce that supports an economy which continues to outpace many other European countries, despite ongoing difficulties (Times of Malta, 2023a). Ongoing labour shortages and notable skill gaps across several sectors have further reinforced the need for migrant workers. Yet, while the growing presence of foreign labour is essential in addressing these shortages and driving economic progress, it also presents a range of associated challenges (KPMG, 2024).

One significant issue is the transitory nature of foreign workers' employment in Malta. Recent parliamentary data reveals that one in four foreign workers in Malta holds only temporary employment, with half leaving within a year, limiting their adaptation and commitment (Times of Malta, 2023b). This brief tenure hinders economic integration, reduces occupational mobility, and poses productivity challenges as companies face frequent turnover, discouraging investment

in employee training and perpetuating a cycle of underdeveloped workforce skills. Hence, it is crucial to examine and analyse the population statistics in order to gain further insight, especially when the influx of foreigners continues to rise (KPMG, 2024).

Current Policies on Migrant Employment

Malta's employment policies for foreign workers differentiate between EU nationals and TCNs, aligning with the EU Directives and national immigration laws (Mifsud, 2021). EU citizens benefit from the principle of free movement, which enables them to live and work in Malta without a work permit; however, they must register their employment with Jobsplus, Malta's employment service, to comply with local regulations (GVZH Advocates, n.d.).

Current employment regulations for TCNs are notably stricter, requiring them to obtain a Single Permit, which serves as both work and residence authorisation. This permit is dependent on a confirmed job offer and a labour market test, demonstrating that no qualified Maltese, EU, EEA, or Swiss candidate is available for the role (Identità, n.d.). Initially issued for one year, with an option to be renewed for up to two years, the Single Permit grants TCNs legal authorisation to live in Malta and work for a designated employer in a specific role. Should any of these conditions change or become inactive, the permit is no longer valid (GVZH Advocates, n.d.; Identità, n.d.).

Since their residence permit is tied to their work status, in the event that a TCN employee has their job terminated, they are required to find another employment and apply for a new Single Permit within the next 10 days. Failure to secure new employment and permit within this period necessitates the individual to leave Malta, as they would no longer have legal authorisation to reside in the country (European Trade Union Institute, 2023). However, TCNs may apply for a Long-Term Residence permit after five years of legal residence in Malta, which

offers greater rights, legal stability, and automatic five-year renewals. Yet access to this status remains limited, since the increasingly complex requirements include stringent integration measures such as high pass marks in language and culture exams, creating significant barriers to securing more permanent and flexible residency (Mifsud, 2021).

Recently, Malta implemented the Key Employee Initiative (KEI), Specialist Employment Initiative (SEI), and the EU Blue Card to attract highly skilled TCN workers. The KEI and SEI fast-tracks applications for managerial or technical roles that meet specific salary (€35,000 and €25,000 per annum respectively) and qualification requirements; whereas the EU Blue Card directive grants TCNs employment rights similar to EU nationals after a specified period (ACT Advisory Service Limited, 2025; Identità, n.d.).

Newly Proposed Labour Migration Policy in Malta

In January 2025, the Government of Malta published the Malta Labour Migration Policy to revise and consolidate the country's approach to labour migration, aiming to balance labour market needs with the protection and retention of TCNs (Ministry for Home Affairs, Security and Employment, 2025). The policy is guided by four principles: retention and stability, protection of employee rights and enhancing working conditions, aligning labour migration with labour market needs, and a skills-based approach to migration.

Key changes include potential hiring restrictions for companies with high TCN turnover rates and an extension of the grace period from 10 to 30 days, with a possible extension to 60 days upon justification. The new policy also introduces increased salary benchmarks for KEI and SEI applicants, raising thresholds to €45,000 and €30,000 per annum respectively. The proposed measures will be implemented in phases: the first and second phases will take effect on 1 August and 1 October 2025, respectively, while additional measures planned for 2026 will be announced

at a later stage. Several of these reforms align with long-standing recommendations from migrant-led and civil-society advocacy—particularly the Turning the Tables project (a migrant-led initiative coordinated by the Human Rights Directorate and compiled by Aditus Foundation)—calling for bank-based wage payments, streamlined and clearer procedures (including recruitment transparency), stronger compliance and enforcement at renewal, and relevant, accessible training programs (Aditus Foundation, 2024; Falzon, 2022; Grech, 2021).

Working Migrant Studies in Malta

In the past years, the studies carried out to investigate the working migrant population in Malta mainly focused on the challenges working migrants face. Debono (2021) extensively investigated extant literature and identified a range of difficulties they face including: barriers to employment access; underemployment and lack of work mobility; inadequate training opportunities: higher risk of poverty regardless of long working hours; higher health and safety risks; complicated relationships with superiors, clients, and colleagues; and low unionisation. This comprehensive synthesis is valuable in mapping systemic constraints, yet it remains largely descriptive and does not explore how migrants navigate or resist these conditions.

Some other studies have focused specifically on third-country nationals (TCNs), often addressing narrowly defined issues. For instance, Rossoni et al. (2022) explored gender, migration, and violence among TCNs accessing Malta's sexual health clinic, providing critical insight into the intersection of health and vulnerability, though its specialised focus limits its relevance to broader dimensions of wellbeing. Sommarribas and Nienaber (2021) offered a legal analysis of TCN mobility during the COVID-19 pandemic across Europe, which contributes to understanding institutional barriers, yet remains policy-centric and distant from lived experience. Lee and Lee (2015) employed a mixed-methods design to examine acculturative stress, coping,

and quality of life among TCNs in southern Europe, finding that higher stress and poor coping were linked to lower life satisfaction. While the study identifies key psychological barriers to wellbeing, it still frames migrant experience primarily through a deficit lens, rather than exploring the possibility of thriving or growth.

Some studies that included both EU nationals and TCNs focused on migrants working in specific sectors. Buttigieg et al., (2018) examined the integration of immigrant nurses into the healthcare system in Malta and identified issues such as language barriers and discrimination, offering a useful example of how institutional settings shape migrant wellbeing, although its sector-specific scope limits generalisability to other migrant groups. Grabska (2022) explored the lived experiences of migrant social workers practising in Malta using an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis and found that these workers face both professional and personal challenges including heavy workload, discrimination, communication difficulties, which provides valuable insight into the relational and emotional dimensions of migrant experience—elements highly relevant to understanding thriving. Grima (2021) investigated the migrant workers working in construction sites and identified the determinants that increase their health and safety risks at work, shedding light on physical wellbeing and occupational vulnerability, though it focuses more on risk than on how migrants actively navigate or overcome these challenges.

Noticeably, more recent studies focused on the experience of Filipino migrant workers. Debono and Vassallo (2019; 2020a; 2020b) carried out three studies. One was a quantitative analysis on the working conditions of Filipinos in Malta which were found as more difficult compared to other migrants in Europe (Debono & Vassallo, 2019). It was also found that they experienced higher job risk and safety issues, workplace discrimination, bullying, and

harassment. Another quantitative study identified the predictors of employment outcomes among Filipino workers and found that several personal factors (i.e., age, gender, education, expectations, etc) predict certain work-related outcomes (i.e., experience of discrimination, job satisfaction, and health and safety risk) (Debono & Vassallo, 2020b). This offers a helpful starting point for examining how individual characteristics shape migrant experiences, yet it does not extend into how these workers may actively cultivate positive experiences such as thriving. The third study utilised a qualitative analysis exploring the working and living conditions of Filipino live-in care workers in Malta (Debono & Vassallo, 2020a). This unveiled that they face higher levels of job precarity, employment contract issues, psychological burdens, and a lack of separation between personal and work life. This highlights the complexity of lived experiences in care work, though again emphasising vulnerability over agency or resilience. Finally, a qualitative study by Mifsud (2016) examined emotional labour among Filipino care workers from an anthropological perspective, offering a culturally nuanced view of affective work, though it focused more on emotional dynamics than on broader wellbeing.

More recent studies also investigated the experiences of migrant workers in Malta among certain nationalities. Horvat Cardona (2023) assessed the workplace health and safety of Serbians working in the construction industry in Malta which revealed greater risks and experiences of discrimination. While this adds important evidence of occupational vulnerability, it still remains focused on risk exposure without exploring coping or adaptive strategies. Lastly, Caruana (2023) explored the recent migration of Italians to Malta, focusing on their use and experience of language, schooling, and socialisation. Being the largest group of EU migrant workers in Malta, accounting for 12% of the population, Italians are found to maintain strong ties with their home country and they use Italian or English to communicate in Malta. Although the

Maltese language is essential for socialising with locals, the participants in the study did not consider it important as it is not deemed useful in the international context. Besides, they can effectively communicate with the use of the English language as well as Italian, given that many Maltese are familiar with the language. This study offers valuable insight into intercultural dynamics and linguistic adaptation, although it focuses more on identity maintenance and less on broader wellbeing or thriving.

The abovementioned studies reported a range of challenges migrants face, including precarious working conditions, limited mobility, discrimination, language barrier, safety risks, and emotional and psychological burdens—particularly among care, construction, and manufacturing workers. Despite these hardships, some groups, such as Italian migrants, navigated integration through linguistic and cultural familiarity, which highlights undeniable variation in migrant experiences shaped by occupation, nationality, and social context.

Policy research report on TCNs in Malta. The Justice & Peace Commission (2024) published a recent report examining the multifaceted role and experiences of TCNs working in Malta, while also highlighting their significant contribution to the economy through labour participation, social security contributions, and remittances. Despite their vital economic importance, TCNs frequently face challenges such as low wages—averaging 17% below the national average—job insecurity, exploitative employment conditions, and structural barriers that hinder access to better opportunities. Many are concentrated in low-productivity sectors and are often overqualified for their roles, reflecting a mismatch between their skills and employment. Additionally, systemic issues such as complex permit processes, limited mobility, and dependency on precarious contracts contribute to their economic vulnerability and social marginalisation. The report underscores the necessity for adopting a holistic "Beyond-GDP"

perspective that values the well-being and inclusion of TCNs as community members, advocating for policies that promote sustainable growth, social equity, and the dignity of work within Malta's evolving economic landscape.

Therefore, while identifying negative experiences and vulnerabilities is a necessity in migrant research, studies exploring migrants' strengths, wellbeing, and experiences of thriving in the local context should be given equal importance. Overemphasising migrants' weaknesses and vulnerabilities could potentially impose a subtractive view towards cultural diversity among the locals; in which, newcomers are perceived to be only taking away resources (i.e., social and welfare services and housing) without contributing anything into the community pot (Feddes et al., 2022). On the other hand, focusing and improving migrant wellbeing can encourage them to realise their own abilities, cope with the stresses brought by migration, work productively and fruitfully, and contribute to their new community (World Health Organisation, 2004). This perceptual shift is inspired by the positive psychology movement, which ignited the scientific study of human strengths and wellbeing to enhance flourishing, rather than merely treating mental illnesses (Seligman, 2000). This is where psychological research contributes to the growing body of migration literature.

Migration from a Psychological Perspective

Undoubtedly, immigration in the 21st century leads to greater diversity in major societies and this diversification of context creates new challenges for the integration of migrants and their receiving societies (American Psychological Association, 2022a; Putnam 2007). Hence, efforts from various field of practice, including psychology, are needed to overcome these challenges. This section discusses the role of psychological research in migration studies, the recent psychological research done internationally, and the gaps and criticisms among these.

The role of psychological research in migration studies

The American Psychological Association (2022b) recognised migration as an integral experience in all major societies; hence, theoretical and empirical research on the psychology of migration has to develop. The International Working Group on Migration identified four main ways in which psychological research contributes to a better understanding of migration—one of which is by examining the internal experiences of migrants (Schwartz et al., 2020). Thus far, literature on migrant health is dominated by the focus on risk factors and stressors with relatively little consideration given towards potential resources for coping and positive mental health (Raghavan et al., 2019). Consequently, researchers emphasised the need for migrant wellbeing research, claiming that by understanding and improving migrants' wellbeing, myriads of benefits can be reaped not only by the migrant population but by societies and natives as well (Hendriks & Burger, 2019).

Wellbeing has always been associated with a state of being happy. Subjective wellbeing research found that greater happiness results in individual and societal advantages such as economic, social, and health benefits (De Nevre et al., 2013). Hendriks and Bartram (2019) introduced happiness into the study of migration as they extensively reviewed emerging research findings on happiness and their potential contribution to migrants' wellbeing. This was an attempt to fill the blind spot in migration studies. However, researchers to date claim that wellbeing is more than happiness.

Ryan and Deci (2001) distinguished between two types of wellbeing: hedonic and eudaimonic. Hedonic wellbeing relates to the pursuit of pleasure, life satisfaction, and the avoidance of discomfort. In contrast, eudaimonic wellbeing focuses on meaning, purpose, self-realisation, and living in accordance with one's true self, with an emphasis on personal growth

and fulfilment. More recent studies, however, suggest that these two dimensions are not mutually exclusive, and advocate for an integrated approach that captures both the experiential (hedonic) and functional (eudaimonic) aspects of wellbeing (Huta & Waterman, 2014; Kashdan et al., 2008).

Ruggeri and colleagues (2020, p.2) defined wellbeing as the "combination of feeling good and functioning well; the experience of positive emotions such as happiness and contentment as well as the development of one's potential, having some control over one's life, having a sense of purpose, and experiencing positive relationships". Recent psychological research carried out in this regard used different facets and dimensions of wellbeing to measure migrants' mental health and psychological functioning.

Recent Psychological Research on Migrants

In Australia, researchers surveyed 1,446 migrants to predict flourishing and psychological distress by examining demographic, social, and psychological factors related to wellbeing (du Plooy et al., 2019). They used a Dual Continuum Model to predict flourishing and distress with the use of established psychometric measures. They found that factors that promote flourishing—such as identifying with being Australian and source of income—were not entirely related to factors that simply prevent distress. This outcome suggests that addressing migrant distress and promoting their wellbeing should be explored separately.

In Europe, data from the European Social Survey from 2002 to 2018 investigated 318,044 migrants' social wellbeing relative to reference groups in their destination country mainly by checking the role of income (Stranges et al., 2021). Additionally, this study examined if personal attitudes and feelings impact the link between income difference and migrants' wellbeing. Results indicated that when income gaps between migrants and locals or other migrants

narrow—and especially if migrants start earning more than these groups—migrants' life satisfaction tends to increase. Additionally, how migrants feel about their own economic situation and the general social and economic conditions of the country influences this link between income and well-being. However, the study's economic emphasis may risk overlooking non-material aspects of migrant thriving, such as belonging or personal development.

A study in Spain also compared the wellbeing of migrants and locals by exploring how it is impacted by employment and psychosocial working conditions (Bretones et al., 2020). Using data from the 7th Spanish Survey of Working Conditions, with a sample of 8,508 participants (90.87% natives and 9.13% migrants), the study identified key factors affecting well-being—autonomy, workload, social support, job insecurity—through confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modelling. Findings show that migrant workers report higher wellbeing than natives, despite worse working conditions. For migrants, only workload affected wellbeing, whereas for natives, workload, social support, and job insecurity were influential. The researchers attempted to explain these differences by implying that migrant workers have potentially cultivated more effective coping strategies for managing challenging work conditions compared to native workers. They may have demonstrated greater resilience or report fewer health issues, driven by a desire to appear healthy and productive within the economic system. However, this finding must be interpreted with caution since there was a clear disproportion in the sample size and they also relied on secondary data.

Interestingly, a study in the Netherlands aimed to distinguish between migrants' experience of thriving and merely surviving. Echa (2018) employed an ethnographic study among West African musicians by drawing from Bourdieu's concept of 'Forms of Capital'. Analysis highlighted the challenges migrants face—such as discrimination and racism—and

demonstrated how the participants overcome these obstacles through cultural capital, specifically through their musical skills, which enable them to thrive. However, the study's narrow focus on a specific artistic group limits its generalisability to broader migrant populations with different forms of capital or life contexts.

These studies provide valuable insights on how working migrants overcome challenges and thrive amidst them using their personal strengths, experiences, and coping strategies. Other studies on migrant wellbeing also explored group differences considering demographic variables and individual dispositions.

Research on group differences across demographic variables. Studies found that working migrants in different job sectors experience wellbeing in varied ways, shaped by their work conditions, time in the host country, and personal backgrounds. Many face mental health challenges such as stress, anxiety, and depression—especially those in manual jobs, domestic work, or long-term care, where conditions can be unsafe or unstable (Hoppe, 2011; Porru et al., 2014; Devkota et al., 2020). Gender also plays a role: women in domestic or care roles often rely on social networks and mobile support to cope, while men are more likely to feel pressure from financial responsibilities and being away from their families (Chib et al., 2013; Hussein, 2022). Migrants in low-status or precarious jobs often have little access to training or career progression, and even highly skilled migrants are frequently overqualified for the work they do, which leads to frustration and a sense of wasted potential (Spadavecchia & Yu, 2021; Pérez et al., 2012). Interestingly, those who are new to the host country sometimes report lower stress levels and more positive views of their situation than those who have been there longer, who may experience growing pressures over time (Aalto et al., 2014; van der Ham et al., 2014). Broader structural issues—such as legal barriers, lack of recognition for foreign qualifications,

and mismatch between education and job roles—further impact wellbeing negatively (Pérez et al., 2012). These results hint that the wellbeing of working migrants is influenced by a mix of personal, professional, and structural factors that vary widely depending on their job, background, and length of stay.

Research on wellbeing experiences considering individual dispositions. Past studies consistently show that emotional stability and extraversion predict better psychological health outcomes in migrant populations (Villagrasa & Izquierdo, 2018). Similarly, traits such as optimism, self-esteem, and resilience—collectively referred to as dispositional factors—have been shown to exert a stronger influence on wellbeing than circumstantial variables like income or length of stay (Bak-Klimek et al., 2014). Cultural empathy and open-mindedness further support smoother acculturation and improved self-perceived wellbeing, which highlights the interplay between personality and cross-cultural adaptation (Panicacci & Dewaele, 2017). Moreover, evidence of adaptive increases in conscientiousness among Polish migrants suggests that personality can evolve in response to migration challenges, reinforcing a eudaimonic orientation toward self-improvement and purposeful living (Boski, 2013). Despite methodological variations across these studies, their findings highlight the critical role of dispositions in promoting psychological health and thriving among migrants across diverse contexts.

Systematic reviews on working migrants' wellbeing. A systematic study was carried out to explore the negative mental health experiences working migrants encounter (Mucci et al., 2019). The review included 127 studies and results indicated an increased incidence of severe mental health issues, including psychosis, anxiety, and PTSD, among migrant workers, attributed to discrimination and family separation. Common issues such as depression, anxiety, substance

abuse, and poor sleep quality were often linked to marginalisation and harsh work conditions. Migrant workers frequently held dangerous, unhealthy jobs and faced verbal or physical abuse, leading to compromised life conditions.

In contrast, another systematic study explored the ‘healthy migrant effect’ or the ‘healthy immigrant effect’ (HIE) which posits that immigrants initially experience better health than native-born individuals, though this advantage fades with longer residency (Elshahat, 2022). This closely mirrors the past studies of van der Ham et al. (2014) and Aalto et al. (2014). While HIE research mostly emphasises physical health, this systematic review of 58 studies explored mental health (MH) changes in immigrants. They found mixed evidence for MH advantage but consistent evidence of MH decline over time. Although HIE theory highlights MH disparities, it does not fully explain their causes or provide guidance on improving immigrants' MH. Therefore, this prompts the need for further exploration of working migrants’ wellbeing.

Proculturation vs. acculturation. A recent study explored the experiences of Italian academic migrants in the United States, focusing on their process of proculturation and its impact on their self-concept and social representations of North American academic environments (Dryjansk, 2023). Proculturation is the dynamic and continuous process of reconstructing the self through interaction and dialogue with new cultural elements, emphasising meaning-making, negotiation of identity, and the integration of emotions and creativity in adapting to novel social contexts (Gamsakhurdia, 2018). Participants in the study, primarily mature adults with over a decade of experience in the US, frequently identified career achievements as significant accomplishments while highlighting immigration and adaptation challenges. Overall, the study found that respondents reported high life satisfaction, good health, and low perceived stress, suggesting they were thriving professionally. The findings also aligned

with prior research emphasising the role of realistic expectations in successful migration outcomes.

This study paved the way to a more nuanced approach of integration among migrants. While both proculturation and acculturation deal with one's adaptation to cultural changes, proculturation focuses more on the personal, creative, and emotional process of self-reconstruction; whereas, acculturation encompasses broader cultural and psychological adjustments at both individual and group levels (Berry, 1997). In other words, proculturation involves an ongoing subjective reconstruction of the self instead of being seen in a structural process or stages. Finally, proculturation involves dialogue and negotiation of meaning with new cultural elements, blending internal and external realities while acculturation includes a mutual adaptation which emphasises group-level interactions and cultural shifts.

Indeed, the migration context is distinct in various respects (Hendriks & Bartram, 2019) which makes working migrants' wellbeing a more complex realm to understand. One psychological concept that recognizes the importance of context is thriving.

Thriving

Porath and colleagues (2011) defined thriving as the psychological state which involves the joint experience of vitality and learning. Vitality refers to feeling energised and alive while learning connotes the continual process of improving and getting better; thus, people who are thriving experience growth and momentum. This joint dimension captures the definition that Ruggeri and colleagues (2020, p.2) gave to wellbeing: "the combination of feeling good and functioning well". Thriving has been applied to various settings including work, academic, and professional settings (Culshaw et al., 2022; Spreitzer et al., 2005). Different approaches to

thriving were applied in these settings since thriving is deemed to vary in context and to be embedded in context (Porath et al., 2011).

Among working migrants, thriving carries particular relevance. It enhances health, career initiative, and personal development, while also sustaining long-term wellbeing and work performance (Pfeffer, 2010; Porath et al., 2011; Spreitzer et al., 2005). In challenging migration contexts, thriving functions as a protective factor—buffering against stress and mitigating burnout (Maslach, 2003). Thriving signifies more than survival; it reflects an upward trajectory marked by resilience, self-determined goals, and engagement in meaningful pursuits (Carver, 1998; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Therefore, when migrants thrive, the benefits extend beyond individual flourishing—it can help improve integration, strengthen contributions to society, and produce enhanced organisational outcomes such as reduced turnover and healthcare costs.

At present, there is no psychometric measure specifically designed to assess how working migrants are thriving, nor is there a well-established theory that fully captures what enables them to thrive. However, several influential theoretical frameworks offer valuable insights into factors that contribute to their wellbeing and success. For instance, acculturation (Berry, 1997) and proculturation (Gamsakhurdia, 2018) explore cultural and identity adaptation. Social capital theory (Bourdieu, 1986) highlights the role of social networks; human capital theory (Becker, 1964) emphasises the use and development of individual skills and knowledge; and, ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) considers the various environmental systems shaping individual outcomes. Ryan and Deci's (2000) self-determination theory explores individuals' inherent growth tendencies and psychological needs—competence, relatedness, and autonomy—which they consider as basis for self-motivation and personality integration. Ager and Strang's (2008) Indicators of Integration framework also provides valuable

perspective as it conceptualises integration as a multidimensional, evolving process encompassing employment, social connections, language acquisition, and legal status. Originally developed for refugees, it offers a relevant and structured approach for examining how working migrants in Malta thrive over time, particularly when grouped by duration of stay.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs also provides a framework for understanding migrant thriving, particularly in relation to self-actualisation (Maslow, 1954). It may be assumed that once migrants' basic and safety needs are met—such as secure housing, employment, and legal protection—they are better positioned to pursue higher-level needs, culminating in self-actualisation. In this context, thriving can be closely associated with self-actualisation, as it involves personal growth, the realisation of potential, and a sense of purpose. For migrants, thriving might not only encompass adaptation to a new environment but also meaningful engagement, autonomy, and the opportunity to flourish.

Collectively, these theories can capture a wide range of working migrant experiences. However, they do not really explore the interplay between their subjective and actual experiences, being in and interacting with a new set of societal structures that could limit or hone their capacities. Hence, this study aims to explore how working migrants themselves define thriving and to identify the needs that underpin their wellbeing and development. In line with this aim, several established psychological wellbeing measures were also reviewed to guide the development of a new tool and to examine which psychological constructs are commonly associated with wellbeing in the broader literature.

Established psychological wellbeing measures

Diener's Flourishing Scale (2010), Ryff's Psychological Wellbeing Scale (1989), and the Comprehensive Inventory of Thriving (CIT) by Su et al (2014) are well-established tools that contribute to understanding psychological wellbeing and flourishing across various life domains. The Flourishing Scale highlights elements such as purpose, positive relationships, and engagement, while Ryff's scale delves into dimensions like autonomy, personal growth, and environmental mastery—concepts highly relevant for exploring how migrants adjust and pursue wellbeing in new settings. Similarly, the CIT provides a holistic measure of thriving by capturing physical, psychological, and social aspects of wellbeing, and has demonstrated strong reliability and validity across diverse cultural groups.

However, despite their broad applicability, these instruments were developed for general populations and do not adequately account for the unique challenges faced by migrants, often overlooking critical migration-specific dimensions such as legal status, structural barriers, and transnational relationships. As a result, while these scales provide a useful starting point for assessing wellbeing, they lack the contextual depth needed to fully capture what it means for migrants to thrive. Nevertheless, these scales hold promise in potentially informing or guiding the development of a new, more tailored scale for assessing thriving among working migrants.

Conclusion

The growing body of literature on working migrants offers an increasingly comprehensive view of their experiences within host societies. However, their strengths, contributions, and positive experiences remain underexplored—particularly within the local Maltese context. A clear theoretical and hermeneutic gap persists in understanding what it means for working migrants to thrive. This study aims to explore the strengths and thriving experiences

of Malta's working migrant population, with the broader goal of informing policies that could enhance these. The following chapter outlines the methodological approach adopted in this research.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter presents the philosophical foundation and the methodological approaches adopted in this study. It begins with a discussion of the research paradigm, followed by the research design, which introduces and justifies the implementation of an exploratory sequential mixed methods design. The chapter then demonstrates the three phases of the research: (1) the qualitative phase; (2) the instrument development and pilot testing phase; and (3) the quantitative phase. For each, details are provided on data collection, data analysis, instruments used, and participant information. The following sections of the chapter discuss ethical considerations and researcher reflexivity. Finally, the chapter concludes with a diagram to summarise the research process visually. This illustrates the sequence of steps and the integration of components in each phase of the study.

Research Paradigm

This study is underpinned by critical realism, a philosophical approach that is particularly well-suited to researching complex and socially embedded phenomena like migrant thriving. At its core, critical realism holds two main ideas: first, that there is a reality that exists independently of what we think or perceive (Bhaskar, 1978); and second, that our understanding of this reality is always influenced by our social, cultural, and historical context (Zachariadis et al., 2013). Consequently, given the imperfections of our senses and the influence of context, the "real" can only ever be perceived imperfectly (Bhaskar, 1978).

Critical realism suggests that reality can be understood on three levels (Bhaskar, 1975):

- The real: underlying structures and causes that may not be directly observable but shape outcomes, such as immigration laws, labour markets, or systemic discrimination.

- The actual: events that occur in the world, whether or not people notice or report them—for example, policy changes or a migrant being unfairly passed over for a promotion.
- The empirical: what individuals actually experience, perceive, or describe—such as a migrant saying they feel isolated at work or unsupported in their community.

This layered view of reality helps researchers explore not only what working migrants say about thriving, but also uncover the social forces that shape those experiences. And while there is a real world to study, we can only try to get closer to it through our research methods (Zachariadis et al., 2013). These methods require us to dig below surface-level experiences. While doing so, researchers are encouraged to be critical and reflective, while also striving for useful, reliable insights (Bhaskar, 1978).

The approach taken in this study reflects these values: it begins with migrants' own accounts of thriving (qualitative), analysed and interpreted to capture the underlying structures that influence them, and then tests whether these experiences and interpretations reflect broader trends or underlying conditions (quantitative) in order to produce practical insights and implications.

The work of Margaret Archer (1999) further strengthens this perspective. Archer introduced the idea of analytical dualism, which encourages researchers to look separately at social structures (i.e., institutions or laws) and individual agency (i.e., people's choices and actions), while also studying how the two interact over time. This is especially relevant when studying working migrants, whose daily lives are shaped by both structural constraints and personal strategies.

Apart from the ontological and epistemological fit that this paradigm offers, my decision to adopt critical realism is also shaped by my values as a researcher. Axiologically, this research is guided by the belief that inquiry should not only describe the world but also contribute to changing it for the better. Critical realism aligns with this value stance, as it supports research that is ethically engaged and oriented toward real-world impact (Bhaskar, 1998). My intention is for the findings of this study to inform policies, programmes, and workplace practices that enhance the conditions in which working migrants can thrive. By revealing both individual experiences and social structures, this research aims to generate knowledge that is academically robust, socially meaningful, and relevant to those working to improve the lives and conditions of working migrants.

Research Design

This research calls for a mixed methods approach to understand both the meaning of thriving and the patterns that shape it. To address the complex and under-studied nature of thriving among working migrants, this study employs a three-phase exploratory sequential mixed methods design, as outlined by Creswell and Plano Clark (2018). This design allows for the generation of qualitative insights, the development of a contextually grounded instrument, and the subsequent testing of that instrument in a broader population.

Figure 1

The Exploratory Sequential Mixed Methods Design

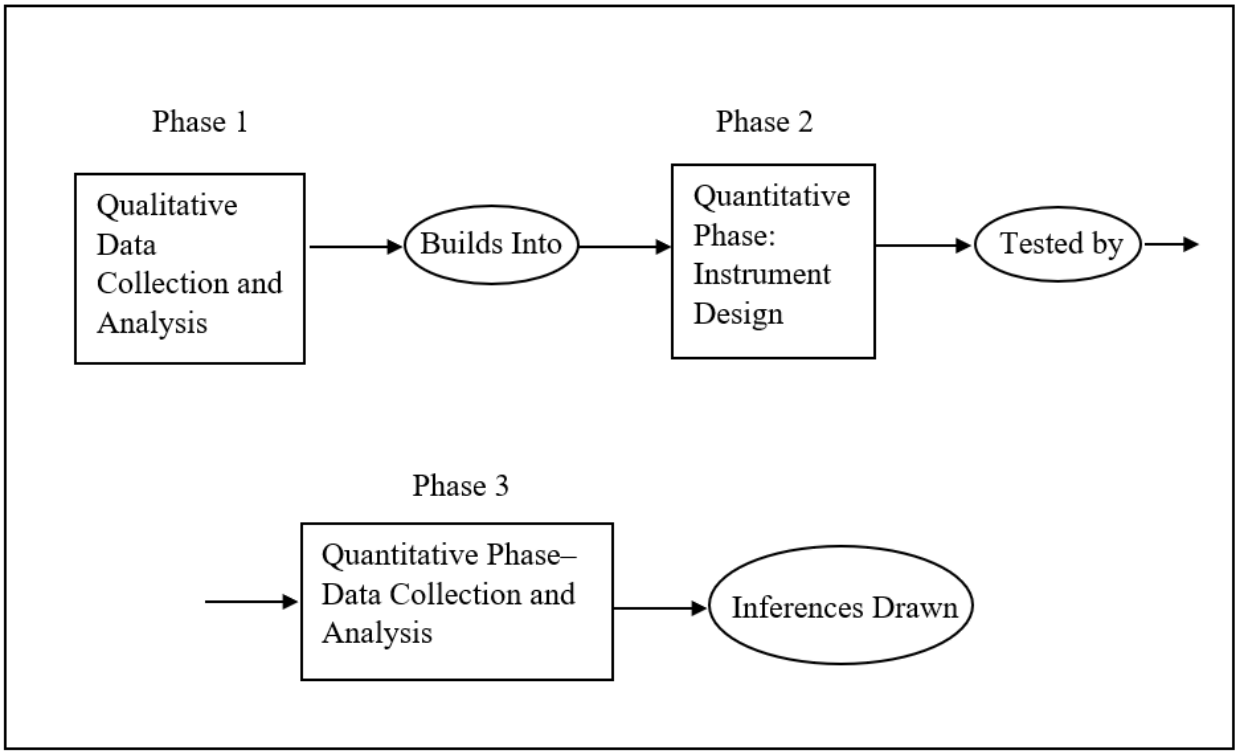


Figure 1 presents the sequence of phases in an exploratory sequential mixed methods design. The first phase involves a qualitative exploration to investigate how working migrants understand and experience thriving in their contexts. Through in-depth interviews and qualitative analysis, the phase also seeks to identify the factors that working migrants associate with thriving.

The second phase focuses on instrument development, translating the themes and factors identified in the qualitative phase into measurable constructs. This phase includes steps such as item generation, expert review, cognitive interviews and preliminary piloting to ensure that the developed instrument reflects both the conceptual clarity and cultural sensitivity needed for this study. By treating this as a distinct phase, the study ensures that the instrument is not only methodologically sound but also anchored in the qualitative findings to preserve its integrity.

The third phase involves quantitative methods and analyses to test the newly developed instrument and to examine the broader patterns found in the qualitative findings across the broader working migrant population. Specifically, this phase aims to examine the structure, reliability, and potential predictive value of the instrument. The results of these findings can contribute to a more generalisable understanding of working migrant thriving.

Creswell and Plano Clark's model was selected for its emphasis on methodological integration, procedural clarity, and philosophical coherence (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Research Methods

This section demonstrates the specific methods employed across the three phases of the study: qualitative research, instrument development and pilot testing, and quantitative research. For each phase, the procedures for data collection and analysis are described, along with information on participants, sampling strategies, and the tools or instruments used. The presentation of these discussions is structured to reflect the sequential design of the study.

Qualitative Research

The qualitative phase aimed at exploring how working migrants understand and define thriving within their contexts. This phase served as the foundation for developing a contextually grounded framework to guide subsequent instrument development.

Sampling and participant information. For this study, 12 participants were recruited using a combination of purposive and snowball sampling strategies. To be included, participants had to be foreign-born individuals residing in Malta, currently and legally working full-time, and perceived—by themselves or others—as thriving. In the initial phase of recruitment, invitation letters (see Appendix A) were sent via email to selected contacts within my professional and

personal network. Recipients were informed that they could simply disregard the invitation if they were not interested in participating.

Subsequent participants were recruited through referrals. I invited participants, colleagues, and acquaintances to refer individuals who met the recruitment criteria and were believed to have experienced a period of thriving while living in Malta. This snowball sampling process relied on subjective perceptions of thriving, which is consistent with the ontological position of this study—acknowledging that thriving is contextually interpreted and recognised within social relationships.

The final sample included participants of diverse nationalities: two Filipino, and one each from Romania, Greece, Turkey, Italy, Sweden, Serbia, Colombia, Brazil, Algeria, and China. The length of time they have lived in Malta ranged from 10 months to 11 years. Participants worked in a range of sectors, including iGaming, retail management, hospitality, healthcare, law, international affairs, pharmaceuticals, and marketing and recruitment. Table 1 presents the participants, their assigned pseudonyms, nationality, and job titles. Nationality is categorised as either EU or TCN to minimise the risk of participant identification.

Table 1

Qualitative Participant Information

	Name	Nationality	Job Title
1	Emrah	TCN	operations manager
2	Benjie	TCN	senior supervisor
3	Vikas	EU	software engineer
4	Erik	TCN	senior staff nurse
5	Garett	EU	software engineer
6	Laura	TCN	mechanical engineer
7	Markus	TCN	policy development specialist
8	Arlo	TCN	program assistant
9	Isabel	TCN	recruitment specialist
10	Frida	TCN	KYC analyst
11	Leo	EU	lawyer
12	Riko	EU	software developer

Data collection. Data were collected through face-to-face, semi-structured interviews, which provided a flexible yet focused framework for exploring participants' experiences. This approach provided participants the space to share their insights in depth, while still ensuring that core topics related to thriving were consistently addressed across interviews. Semi-structured interviews also facilitated comparisons between participants and supported the eventual identification of themes and subthemes (Smith & Osborn, 2008).

Each interview lasted between 45 and 60 minutes and was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Initial transcriptions were generated using Otter.ai, an AI-based transcription tool chosen for its compliance with GDPR data protection standards. All transcripts were then manually reviewed and corrected to ensure accuracy. Prior to the start of each interview, written informed consent was obtained from the participant (see Appendix B). An interview guide was used to support the flow of conversation and ensure alignment with the study's aims.

All audio recordings, transcripts, and consent forms were stored securely on a password-protected device and encrypted cloud storage, accessible only to the researcher. Data handling procedures complied with GDPR and institutional ethics guidelines.

Interview guide. The interview guide (see Appendix C) comprised a set of open-ended questions, divided into two main sections. The first section explored participants' motivations for migrating to Malta, their life before migrating, expectations upon arrival, and current lifestyle (i.e., daily routines, social connections, mental health, and experiences related to economic and career development). The second section focused on how participants understood and experienced thriving. This included questions on their personal interpretations of the term, moments when they felt they were thriving in Malta, experiences they experienced its opposite, and the traits or circumstances that supported or hindered their thriving. The guide also included questions on integration and adaptation to Maltese society, as well as reflections on identity, growth, and fulfilling their potential. Participants were additionally invited to share their views on what thriving means for the broader working migrant population.

The interview questions were informed by the review of relevant literature. For instance, questions on migration expectations were drawn from a local study on Filipino workers in Malta (Debono & Vassallo, 2020b) and a study on Italian academic migrants in the United States (Dryjanska, 2023). Questions related to economic experiences were shaped by European and Spanish studies (Bretones et al., 2020; Strangers et al., 2021), while those concerning mental health, integration, and adaptation were also based on both local and international research discussed earlier.

Participants' interpretations of thriving were explored by first presenting the word "thriving" printed on an A4 sheet and then asking them whether they were familiar with it. All

participants recognised the term and provided an initial interpretation. They were then invited to translate the word into their native language, using Google Translate if needed, and to relate the concept to their experience as working migrants in Malta. Some were also asked to compare it to their understanding or experience of thriving prior to migration. Follow-up questions included: 'What kinds of resources or characteristics help you thrive as a migrant?', 'What prevents you from thriving?', 'What advice would you give to new migrants in Malta?', and 'What would you say to migrants who feel that they are not thriving?' The interview concluded with a reflective question about whether they believe it is important for working migrants in Malta to thrive and why.

This in-depth exploration was aimed at eliciting participants' meaning-making processes around the concept of thriving and to lay the groundwork for developing a contextually grounded definition of thriving within their context.

All interviews were conducted in English, except for one which used a combination of English and Filipino. Given that participants were not native English speakers, the wording of the interview questions was kept simple and accessible to minimise language barriers. As Lune and Berg (2017) have argued, interviewers should use language that is clear and easily understood, ideally matching the respondent's linguistic level. To ensure accurate interpretation, follow-up questions and clarifications were used throughout; and, when participants experienced difficulty or confusion, questions were paraphrased or accompanied by illustrative scenarios (e.g., see Laura, in Appendix D).

Data analysis. Both deductive and inductive approaches were employed in this phase. The interview guide was developed deductively, informed by a review of existing literature on migrant wellbeing and thriving. In contrast, the analysis of interview data followed an inductive

approach, allowing for nuanced insights to be interpreted from participants' narratives without imposing a predetermined framework.

The data were analysed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA), as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2022). This six-phase approach supported a flexible yet rigorous method for identifying and interpreting patterns across the dataset. The process began with familiarisation, where each transcript was read and re-read, allowing for initial impressions and early analytic notes to be captured. The second phase involved generating codes, which are concise, meaningful labels assigned to parts of the data that appeared relevant to the research questions.

Consistent with the study's critical realist ontology and epistemology, coding was conducted with attention to two levels: the participants' subjective experiences and meaning-making, and the broader cultural and social structures embedded in them. For instance, one participant described how he navigated a prolonged three-month delay in receiving his work permit, during which he was legally prohibited from working (see Appendix E). This account was coded at both individual level (e.g., tenacity and assertiveness) and structural level (e.g., bureaucratic barriers to employment). This allowed a multi-layered insight to his experience. Furthermore, where applicable, the codes were also coded by assigning semantic and latent meanings. In total, this step generated 163 codes.

In the third phase, 17 initial themes were created by clustering related codes and examining potential patterns (see Appendix F). As Braun and Clarke (2006) argued, a theme represents a meaningful pattern in the data that is relevant to the research question; therefore, the research questions remained central throughout this stage. The fourth phase involved reviewing candidate themes, checking that they were coherent, adequately supported by the data, and reflective of the full dataset. In the fifth phase, themes were defined and named, ensuring

conceptual clarity and coherence. This included determining whether any subthemes existed and how these related to broader thematic categories. In the final analyses, four overarching themes were identified. The final phase involved writing the analysis, where findings were discussed and illustrated in relation to the existing literature and informed the creation of a quantitative instrument.

Rationale for using Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA). RTA maintains the method of thematic analysis for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Moreover, it is capable of answering various types of research question, specifically; those that are related to how people construct meanings (Braun & Clarke, 2019). RTA differs from other approaches of thematic analysis when it comes to the underlying philosophy and ways for theme development. It acknowledges and values the researcher's role in knowledge production. It holds that themes do not passively emerge in the data but are created via the intersection of the researcher's theoretical assumptions, their analytic skills and resources, and the data themselves (Braun & Clark, 2019). This approach aligns with my philosophical assumptions as a researcher.

Quality criteria. This section discusses the quality criteria employed in the qualitative part of this research. This was done to ensure rigour and trustworthiness (Fletcher, 2017). These criteria include ontological and epistemological alignment, credibility, dependability, and transferability of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maxwell, 2012).

Ontological and epistemological alignment. Ontological and epistemological alignment or appropriateness were addressed through the study's design and methodological choices. Critical realism posits a layered reality consisting of the empirical (observable experiences), the actual (events and conditions that occur, whether observed or not), and the real (underlying

structures and mechanisms) (Bhaskar, 1978). The use of an exploratory sequential design and semi-structured interviews allowed for an inquiry that reached across these layers. Participants were not only asked about their subjective experiences—such as how integrated they felt within the Maltese community—but also invited to reflect on the conditions and systems shaping these experiences. Their responses revealed both personal interpretations and insights into laws, policies, and institutional intentions behind integration, thereby supporting a layered and realist understanding of working migrant thriving.

Epistemologically, appropriateness was ensured through reflexivity, particularly by keeping a reflexive journal throughout the research process. This practice, informed by Archer (2007), helped my positioning as both a researcher and a working migrant, by illuminating how reflexive "internal conversations" mediate between personal concerns and structural contexts. This made me aware how my assumptions, biases, and emotions might influence data collection and interpretation. Although I share a similar context with my participants, I actively and continuously bracketed my own experiences to remain open to others' perspectives and meaning-making.

Credibility. Often regarded as the most essential criterion for qualitative rigour, credibility refers to the confidence that can be placed in the truth and interpretation of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, credibility was achieved through transparency in documenting methods, participant selection, measures, and data handling—all of which are available in the appendices. Efforts to represent participants' experiences as closely as possible to their intended meanings were supported by strategies such as peer debriefing, supervision, presenting verbatim participant quotes, and thick descriptions. These steps were also taken to enhance both the authenticity and depth of the interpretations.

Dependability. Dependability addresses the stability and consistency of findings over time and conditions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Transcripts were reviewed multiple times to enhance familiarity and ensure fidelity to participants' narratives. Coding was conducted iteratively, with regular checking and adjustment to ensure that codes remained grounded in the data. A detailed audit trail was maintained throughout the research process, outlining each step from data collection to analysis (see Appendix G), which provides transparency and methodological coherence.

Transferability. This criterion was also considered as an integral part of this study since it employed an exploratory sequential mixed methods design. Essentially, transferability refers to the extent to which the qualitative findings can be transferred to the larger group (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Since the purpose of the qualitative study was to eventually build a foundation for instrument-making that could be administered to the larger population, securing this quality criterion is critical. In this research, this was addressed by providing thick contextual descriptions with sufficient detail about participants and study settings. Furthermore, the participants' verbatim responses heavily informed the item generation of the instrument. Utmost care was also exerted to ensure that the qualitative analyses could provide concepts that could potentially be transformed into measurable constructs.

Instrument Development and Pilot Testing

Following the qualitative phase, quantitative research questions were written and refined based on the themes and analyses generated. These questions then guided the development of a structured instrument to measure thriving among working migrants in Malta, as well as the factors associated with it. The aim was to translate the participants' experiences and perceptions of thriving into a valid and reliable set of survey items for broader quantitative testing. This

process followed best practices in scale development (Artino et al., 2014; DeVellis, 2016; Griffiths et al., 2006), while remaining grounded in the specific context and conceptual framework established from the qualitative findings.

The development followed an eight-phase process beginning with a careful review of the qualitative themes or conceptual mapping. These were transformed into measurable constructs, ensuring that each construct retained its conceptual integrity while being formulated in a way that could be operationalised quantitatively. For example, the contextual theme "work-life balance" was converted into a measurable item "Malta's work culture promotes a work-life balance and I am currently experiencing it in my life," following guidelines for clarity and relevance (Stockemer, 2019).

Item generation followed a dual approach: most items were newly developed based on the qualitative findings, while a few items were adapted from established scales to reinforce construct validity and enable comparisons with related constructs. Specifically, selected items were adapted from the Comprehensive Inventory of Thriving (Su et al., 2014), the Flourishing Scale (Diener et al., 2010), and Ryff's Scales of Psychological Wellbeing (1989). Adopted items were marked in the survey and reviewed for consistency with the qualitative themes.

While the survey included a mix of positively and negatively worded items to avoid acquiescence bias, particular attention was paid to the clarity of negative phrasing to prevent confusion (Artino et al., 2014). For instance, a negatively worded item, "It is very hard for me to adjust to new places and cultures" was reviewed during cognitive interviews to ensure it was interpreted as intended.

An initial version of the instrument underwent expert validation, where an expert in psychology, research, and psychometrics assessed content relevance, clarity, and alignment with

the qualitative data. This was followed by cognitive interviews with five working migrants, based on the techniques described by Boeije and Willis (2013), which helped identify issues of wording, understanding, and interpretability from the respondent's perspective.

A second round of expert validation was conducted to ensure that the refined instrument continued to reflect the theoretical framework and construct dimensions established in the study. Finally, the revised instrument was then pilot tested with 11 working migrants. Basic statistical analysis was performed to examine item performance and assess internal consistency using Cronbach's alpha. Based on these results, further refinements were made—some items were removed to improve reliability and structure.

The steps undertaken reflect a systematic and evidence-based approach to instrument development (Boynton, 2004; Cook & Beckman, 2006; Griffiths et al., 2006). A more detailed discussion of item construction and psychometric properties is presented in the next chapter.

Quantitative Research

The third and final phase of the study involved the quantitative testing of the newly developed instrument with a broader sample of working migrants in Malta. This phase aimed at assessing the structure, reliability, and construct validity of the instrument while also answering research questions related to the measure, correlates, and predictors of thriving.

Participant information. Participants were recruited using a combination of purposive and snowball sampling strategies. Eligibility criteria mirrored the working migrant definition: respondents were foreign-born, legally authorised to reside and work in Malta, and currently engaged in full-time employment or lawful self-employment. The sampling frame therefore covered EU and TCN workers meeting these criteria. For clarity, this also included asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection, provided they were lawfully employed full

time. Foreign-born individuals who eventually acquired Maltese citizenship and are currently engaged in full-time employment or self-employment were also included. Only part-time workers, irregular/undocumented migrants, and asylum applicants without eligibility or licence to work were excluded. Working migrants who participated in the qualitative phase were also excluded in this study.

Invitations to participate were disseminated via social media platforms, migrant community networks, and professional contacts. Physical standard-sized business cards containing a QR code linking directly to the online survey were also disseminated (see Appendix H). These cards were distributed to professional and social contacts who might know a potential participant, and were also left in cafés, retail shops, salons, and barber shops to broaden outreach. Snowball sampling was employed by encouraging participants to share the survey with others who meet the inclusion criteria. Additionally, research collaboration requests were sent to various local companies, organisations, and entities across Malta through their HR or administrative offices (see Appendix I).

A total of 438 responses were received. However, two were excluded from the final dataset as they did not meet the inclusion criteria related to legal work status. The final sample comprised 436 working migrants representing a diverse range of nationalities, sectors, and backgrounds. The sample size target was planned using the Raosoft calculator (assuming 95% confidence level, 5% margin of error) to set a realistic recruitment benchmark. Given the non-probability sampling of this study, these figures served only for planning. Demographic data collected included age, gender, nationality, education level, length of stay in Malta, job sector, and type of residence permit. These variables supported both subgroup analyses and inferential comparisons. Table 2 presents the summary of the sample distribution.

Table 2

Respondent Distribution across Demographic Categories

		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	144	33
	Female	280	64.2
	Non-binary	3	0.7
	Prefer not to say	9	2.1
Nationality	Non-EU / TCNs	355	81.4
	EU	81	18.6
Age	18-31 years (young adulthood)	119	27.3
	32-41 years (established adulthood)	173	39.7
	42+ years (mid- to late adulthood)	144	33
Length of stay	0-2 years	94	21.6
	3-5 years	107	24.5
	6-9 years	142	32.6
	10+ years	93	21.3
Job sector*	Health and social work	89	20.4
	Accommodation and food services	48	11
	Administrative and support services	35	8
	Manufacturing	34	7.8
	Wholesale and retail trade	31	7.1
	Information and communication	27	6.2
	Others	172	59.9
Job position*	Professionals	136	31.2
	Service and sales workers	89	20.4
	Clerical support workers	63	14.4
	Managers or team leaders	54	12.4
	Plant and machine operators	30	6.9
	Elementary occupations	28	6.4
	Others	36	8.3
Type of residence permit*	Single Permit	268	61.5
	EU/EEA/Swiss Residence	72	16.5
	EU Family Member	30	6.9
	Long-term residence permit	25	5.7
	Others	41	9.4
Level of education (prior)	None	2	0.5
	Primary	3	0.8
	Secondary	84	19.3
	Tertiary (diploma or certificate)	92	21.1
	Tertiary (Bachelor degree)	181	41.5
	Postgraduate (Master's, PhD)	74	17.0
Level of education (after)	None	242	55.5
	Primary	2	0.5
	Secondary	16	3.7
	Tertiary (diploma or certificate)	91	20.9
	Tertiary (Bachelor degree)	45	10.3
	Postgraduate (Master's, PhD)	40	9.2

**Only the top 6 categories were presented in the job sector, job position, and type of residence permit. For the full distribution lists, see Appendix J. Level of education was assessed both prior to and after migration to Malta.*

Respondent characteristics. Demographic characteristics of the sample are summarised in Table 2. Most participants identified as female (64.2%), and the sample included both EU and non-EU nationals, with the majority being non-EU or third country nationals (TCNs) (81.4%, n = 355). This categorisation was used in later comparative analyses, as differences in the experiences of EU and TCN migrants emerged as a theme in the qualitative findings. Over 60 nationalities were represented (see Appendix K for the full list), with the largest groups being Filipino (n = 150, 34.4%), Serbian (n = 48, 11.0%), Indian (n = 30, 6.9%), Italian (n = 20, 4.6%), British (n = 16, 3.7%), and Macedonian (n = 15, 3.4%). These distributions broadly resemble the current national composition of Malta's working migrant population (Jobsplus, personal communication, 2025).

To explore developmental patterns in migrant thriving, respondents were grouped into three age categories based on established lifespan theories (Arnett, 2000; Erikson, 1959; Levinson, 1978; Super, 1990). Respondents were predominantly in established adulthood (n = 173, 39.7%). The most represented employment sectors were Health and Social Work and Accommodation and Food Services. In terms of job positions, the majority of respondents were employed as professionals, followed by service and sales workers. A wide range of residence permits were reported. Due to the small number of respondents holding certain permits, broader categories were created for analysis—for example, the Specialist Employment Initiative Permit, Key Employee Initiative, and EU Blue Card were grouped under Highly Skilled Employment Permits (n = 8, 1.8%). For additional job sector, role, and type of permit details, see Appendix J.

Education was assessed both prior to and after migration to Malta. The majority held a bachelor's degree before migrating. While more than half did not pursue further education after arriving, a notable 20% obtained a tertiary or diploma qualification in Malta.

Data collection. The finalised instrument was administered online using Google Forms, which allowed a wider reach and flexible participation. The survey included an informed consent blurb at the outset, the full thriving measure, and additional items measuring the hypothesised predictors and correlates of thriving. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. The survey could be completed in 10–15 minutes.

Instrument used. The final survey instrument comprised several distinct sections aligned with the study's conceptual framework. Five items assessed participants' perceived phase of thriving (i.e., surviving, stagnating, settling, or thriving), while 23 items made up the main thriving scale. Three individual-level subscales—personal, action-driven, and value-driven capitals—contained eight items each. Contextual factors were captured through two subscales: Malta's pro-thriving elements (eight items) and anti-thriving elements (six items). The latter part of the survey included lifestyle factors (e.g., volunteering, hobbies, intention to stay in Malta long-term), contextual variables (e.g., perceived challenges and enabling factors for thriving), and a series of demographic questions. Most items were presented on a five-point Likert scale, except for the initial thriving phase classification and some open- or categorical demographic questions. These are discussed in more detail in the following chapter. To account for response bias, eight items were negatively worded and were reverse-coded during data analysis.

The final thriving scale established high internal consistency, assessed using Cronbach's alpha (Ursachi et al., 2015): professional thriving ($\alpha = .77$), financial thriving ($\alpha = .87$), personal thriving ($\alpha = .77$), relational thriving ($\alpha = .83$), wellbeing thriving ($\alpha = .76$), and overall thriving ($\alpha = .88$).

Data analysis. Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS version 29. Descriptive statistics were computed to summarise the distribution, central tendency, and variability of all

measured variables. Tests for normality were conducted, and results indicated that the data did not meet the assumptions of normality. Given this, and the ordinal nature of the 5-point Likert scale used in the thriving instrument, non-parametric statistical tests were employed throughout the analysis.

Group differences in thriving scores across demographic and occupational categories (e.g., gender, job sector, type of residence permit) were assessed using Mann–Whitney U tests or Kruskal–Wallis H tests, depending on the number of comparison groups. Relationships between thriving and lifestyle factors were explored using Spearman's rank-order correlations.

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to identify significant predictors of thriving. This model included both individual-level variables (e.g., personal and value-driven capitals) and contextual-level factors (e.g., perceived integration and structural barriers). Assumptions of multicollinearity, linearity, and homoscedasticity were assessed to ensure the robustness of regression results.

Finally, to evaluate the structural validity of the newly developed thriving scale and the theoretical model, Exploratory Factor Analyses (EFAs) were conducted using principal axis factoring with Varimax rotation. The resulting factor structure informed further scale refinement and assessment of construct validity.

Validity and reliability. Ensuring the validity and reliability of the newly developed thriving instrument was a central priority in the quantitative phase of this study. Content validity was addressed through a rigorous instrument development process that included expert review at two stages. Experts in psychology, psychometrics, and research evaluated item relevance, clarity, and construct representation, which resulted in iterative refinements. This process ensured that the scale reflected both the conceptual dimensions of thriving derived from qualitative findings

and established theory (Boateng et al., 2018; Cook & Beckman, 2006). Additionally, cognitive interviewing with five working migrants was conducted during the instrument development stage. In this step, aligned with best practice in questionnaire design, the items were tested for item clarity, respondent burden, and interpretive accuracy (Boeji & Willis, 2013). This further enhanced the face and content validity of the scale. Construct validity was examined through exploratory factor analysis (EFA), which assessed the underlying structure of the scale and tested whether the items clustered into theoretically meaningful subscales.

To establish reliability, internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha for each subscale. Subscales demonstrating alpha coefficients above the generally accepted threshold of .70 were considered to have adequate internal consistency (Artino et al., 2014; Boynton, 2004; DeVellis, 2016). The detailed results of the reliability testing and factor analysis are presented in the next chapter, where the psychometric properties of the scale are examined in more depth.

These efforts helped shape an instrument that is not only methodologically sound but also carefully designed to capture the complexity of thriving in the working migrant population.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity was a vital and ongoing practice throughout this study. It involved actively acknowledging and examining how my own values, assumptions, and positionality shaped all stages of the research process—from conceptualisation to interpretation. As others have argued, reflexivity is not merely a technical step but a deeply ethical and epistemological stance that enhances the credibility, rigour, and transparency of qualitative inquiry (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Finlay, 2002; Teh & Lek, 2018). By foregrounding reflexivity, this study remained attuned to participants' experiences, enabling their meaningful interpretation and representation within the

research. Willig (2001) distinguished two kinds of researcher reflexivity: epistemological and personal.

Epistemological Reflexivity

Epistemological reflexivity entails critically examining how knowledge is produced throughout the research process—considering how the study's design, interview questions, and analytical methods shape what is discovered and how it is interpreted (Dowling, 2006; Willig, 2001). Following the guidance of Finlay (2002) and Maunders (2010), I reflected on the assumptions behind the theories and methods I used, and how these shaped the questions I asked and the way I interpreted the data.

Throughout the research, I remained aware of how my academic background, research experience, and linguistic choices impacted the outcomes. Importantly, my previous experience conducting both qualitative and quantitative research independently provided the necessary skills and confidence to integrate these approaches effectively—a quality highlighted by Creswell and Plano Clark (2018) as essential for high-quality mixed methods research. I applied this expertise by adhering to the principles and methodologies appropriate to each phase—such as avoiding positivism creep during the qualitative phase, carefully selecting statistical tests for the quantitative component, and being mindful about the terminologies used in the presentation of the qualitative and quantitative results.

Personal Reflexivity

Personal reflexivity involved continuous reflection on how my identity—as both a researcher and a working migrant in Malta—influenced the entire research process and outcomes (Willig, 2001). As Finlay (2002) and Teh and Lek (2018) posited, a researcher's background and emotional responses can shape how questions are framed, data are interpreted, and meaning is

constructed. Being both a researcher and someone who had gone through a similar situation helped me understand the context better and build trust with the participants. At the same time, it required a conscious effort to remain critically aware of my own assumptions. I maintained a reflexive journal throughout the study, documenting moments where personal experiences or emotional resonance might have shaped my interpretation.

For instance, when a participant described her early challenges with anxiety, depression, and loneliness upon arriving in Malta, I recognised these as familiar experiences. Rather than striving for detachment, I drew on my empathic understanding—aligning with the view that emotional engagement and reflexivity are not only valid but valuable during qualitative interviews (Ellis et al., 2011; Mason, 2002; Roulston, 2010). In that moment, I gently explored her coping strategies and the motivations she held at the time. This allowed me to honour her experience without redirecting the focus, and helped me bring the conversation back to the topic and the interview guide. Afterwards, I used my reflexive journal to process my automatic emotional reactions and examine how they may have influenced the interaction. This process continued during the quantitative phase and the integration of findings, where I reflected on how my choices—such as selecting variables or interpreting patterns—were shaped by my values and theoretical assumptions (see Appendix L).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical procedures for this study were addressed in two stages through submissions to the Faculty Research Ethics Committee (Social Wellbeing) of the University. The first ethics form, submitted on 6 May 2024, covered the qualitative phase and was processed *for records*, as no ethical risks requiring formal review were identified (see Appendix M). A second form was submitted prior to the quantitative phase to reflect updates to the procedures and the introduction

of the survey instrument. This submission was likewise processed *for records* (see Appendix N), in accordance with the committee's standard protocol.

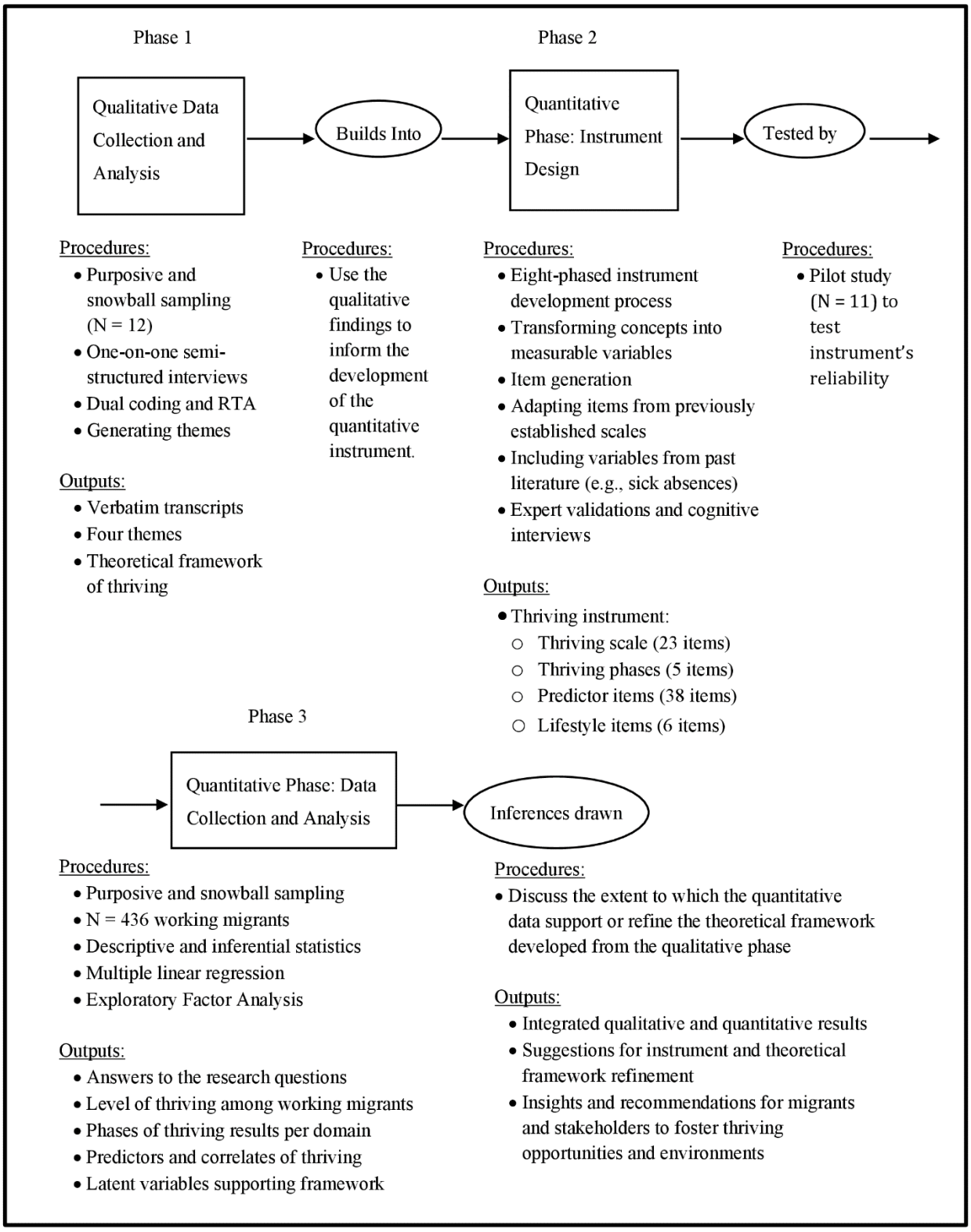
Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection, with clear explanations of the study's purpose, procedures, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequences (see Appendices B and O). Anonymity and confidentiality were strictly maintained, with all identifiable information removed during transcription and data handling. Data were stored securely in password-protected digital files, in compliance with GDPR regulations. Particular care was taken to ensure that participants were treated with sensitivity, respect, and autonomy throughout the research process. Participants were also invited to ask questions before and after the interview to ensure clarity and comfort. In an instance where a participant expressed challenges with emotional and mental health, contact information was provided for the Richmond Foundation, a Malta-based NGO offering emotional and psychological support services.

Summary of the Research Process

To provide a clear overview of the methodological progression, Figure 2 outlines the key phases, procedures taken, and outputs produced in this study. It illustrates how each stage—from qualitative exploration to instrument development and quantitative testing—was carefully structured to build insight cumulatively and meaningfully across the study.

Figure 2

Summary of the Research Process



In sum, this chapter outlined the philosophical foundations, methodological choices, and specific procedures that guided the research process. Rooted in a critical realist paradigm, the study employed an exploratory sequential mixed methods design to explore, construct, and test a grounded understanding of thriving among working migrants in Malta. Each phase was intentionally structured to generate meaningful, context-sensitive insights while ensuring methodological rigour and integration. The following chapter presents the results of this three-phase study.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

This chapter presents all the results found in this study. By still following the sequential nature of the design, this chapter begins with the presentation of the qualitative interpretations. The transformation of these findings into quantifiable constructs are then discussed in the subsequent instrument development section, which is then followed by the presentation of the quantitative findings. The chapter concludes with a diagrammatic summary of these results. To contextualise these findings, the discussion of the combined results, with supporting and contrasting literature, will be presented in the next chapter.

The Qualitative Results

Through a rigorous and iterative process of data analysis, this research formulated themes that inspired the development of an overarching framework of working migrant thriving. This section presents the qualitative findings that laid the foundation for the study's conceptualisation of thriving. Guided by Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA), four overarching themes were constructed. These themes include: (1) theoretical foundation: definition and phases of working migrant thriving; (2) identifying the thriving domains in the working migrant context; (3) mapping the individual capitals contributing to thriving; and (4) uncovering the socio-cultural mechanisms in Malta influencing working migrant thriving. Each theme is supported by a set of subthemes, which are then illustrated with selected verbatim excerpts to foreground participants' narratives.

Table 3

Table of themes

Themes	Subthemes
Theoretical foundation: definition and phases of working migrant thriving	Working migrant thriving definition The four phases of thriving
Identifying the thriving domains in the working migrant context	Professional thriving Financial thriving Personal thriving Relational thriving Wellbeing thriving
Mapping the individual capitals contributing to working migrant thriving	Personal capitals Action-driven capitals Value-driven capitals
Uncovering the socio-cultural mechanisms in Malta influencing working migrant thriving	Malta's pro-thriving elements Malta's anti-thriving elements

Theme 1: Theoretical foundation: definition and phases of working migrant thriving

This theme outlines how working migrants in Malta understand and define thriving. Participant responses—shaped by personal, cultural, and structural factors—were carefully reviewed and analysed to capture their perspectives. The following subsections present their definition of thriving and the phases they identified.

Subtheme 1.1: Migrant thriving definition. Drawing from participants' perceptions and experiences of thriving, a general definition was developed: *Migrant thriving is the intentional pursuit of growth and vitality in any life domain that migrants give importance to upon overcoming the initial adversities associated with migration.*

This definition reflects the shared patterns and meanings expressed by participants. It will be unpacked by breaking it down into the following components: (1) *intentional pursuit*; (2) *growth and experiencing vitality in any life domain that working migrants give importance to*; and (3) *upon overcoming the initial adversities associated with migration*.

Thriving is an intentional pursuit. Participant responses indicated that thriving is not a passive state but a conscious and ongoing process. As Arlo expressed, "trying to improve different areas of your life on a continuous basis, for me, this is thriving." His reference to "trying to improve something" highlights active engagement in behaviours, mindsets, and decision-making. Thriving, then, involves purposeful action and sustained effort toward meaningful goals. Garett further underscored the importance of commitment, "If you want to thrive, you need to commit to your goal. That's the only way".

Interestingly, several participants associated thriving not just with positive experiences but also with hard work and challenges. Arlo reflected on how his demanding job contributed to a sense of thriving, "It's challenging, it's stressful, but I felt like thriving; I felt like there was like an upgrade a little bit". Erik also shared, "I sometimes correlate the word with a little bit of struggle [...] if you're thriving in this specific moment, it's not always a bed of roses; there are always challenges". Leo connected thriving with sacrifice, "You thrive, somehow, you suffer, you do sacrifices for a goal". These accounts suggest that for many working migrants, thriving involves more than positive feelings—it requires the intentional exertion of effort and energy in pursuit of meaningful goals, often through adversity.

Thriving embodies growth and vitality in any life domain that migrants give importance to. Most participants expressed that thriving involves an upward or expansive movement in certain areas of one's life. As Vikas pointed out:

> Thriving, usually, is basically when a person is doing good in life in general [...] But it can also mean, thriving when you're in a bad situation [...] it's kind of like you can't go any lower, so from now on you just keep on expanding. (Vikas)

This expression of expansive movement implies that thriving is related to growth. Moreover, growth is felt or perceived when one's situation, skills, or resources improve. Participants linked growth to getting a promotion, acquiring new skills, securing financial stability, becoming a more positive person, developing meaningful relationships, and improved mental health. Most often, this growth is experienced with a sense of zest or vitality. Isabel expressed, "It's [thriving] sort of like full of hope [...] it gives you the trend of keep improving either your life or the things you want".

Furthermore, participants asserted that thriving differs from person to person. Since growth is experienced in diverse ways across various life domains, individuals may choose to prioritise one domain over others. As Riko shared, "That (thriving) means very different things to very different people". Additionally, Arlo enumerated the domains he began to prioritise:

> Now, I know that I need to prioritise, for example, the spiritual side, the social side, the financial side, the health side… well-being, the spiritual, social, financial, career, even family… family and social in general. So, for me, those are the aspects or the facets of life that I need to thrive in. (Arlo)

This suggests that if someone is not thriving in their career, it does not necessarily mean they are not thriving in other areas of life. It highlights that working migrants have the liberty to choose whichever life domain they choose to improve. Frida summarised this idea by stating, "thriving means when you can actually grow and enjoy the process of growing in the environment that you are in; and growing in whatever sense it means to you personally".

Thriving begins upon overcoming the initial adversities associated with migration. This reflects the shared experiences of working migrants upon arriving in a new country. Participants faced various challenges upon arrival including language barriers, cultural differences, economic difficulties, social isolation, discrimination, housing issues, legal or bureaucratic obstacles, job mismatch, and limited access to basic services and support networks. These adversities were experienced differently, with nationality being the most apparent factor. Erik expressed, “not all migrants are the same [...] not everyone has the privilege to study [...] not everyone has the same rights of residency [...] everyone experiences things differently”.

TCN participants reported more adversities relating to legal or bureaucratic obstacles. This was primarily due to stricter policies concerning TCN’s work permits, which also serve as their residence permits. Frida, a TCN working migrant, shared:

> The problem was obviously that I'm a third-country national, finding a job is more difficult [...] the whole Identity Malta procedure was very bad [...] it took months. I was afraid the employers were going to give up on me. I was afraid that I would not be able to live off of them because I'm not earning a salary [...] that is really difficult. (Frida)

In contrast, Riko, an EU national expressed, “I expected that I would have a really difficult time dealing with paperwork, and that turned out to not be so much the case. I worried a lot about it, but it turned out things are not really that hard here”. Vikas shared a similar experience and acknowledged his privilege being an EU national with free movement, “I got the advantage of being European as well”. However, both noted challenges related to house rentals.

Irrespective of the types of initial adversities faced, the participants described thriving as beginning once they start building a life in Malta. This idea suggests that thriving opportunities can be pursued once a certain baseline has been reached. Although these challenges are

experienced differently, the baseline can be secured by meeting the immediate basic needs new working migrants face (i.e., financial, housing, legal, and social needs). As Laura stated:

> At the beginning, it's more like you try to settle some things [...] because when you get here, you have maybe some economic issues. Maybe you don't find friends. Maybe you're not comfortable where you live. Maybe you don't know what to do here because maybe you are a bit shy. Maybe you used to do something back in your country but when you come here you don't find it. Like it happened to me [...] So when you start gathering all these things that maybe fulfilled your life, I think that's what thriving is. (Laura)

Participants expressed that once they acquire proper housing, a stable job, a sense of social connectivity, and basic knowledge about their local area, they can shift their energy and motivation towards other goals (i.e., a promotion, health and fitness, work-life balance, etc). This prioritisation of goals was also evident among TCN participants, who expressed the necessity of obtaining a work permit. Participants exhibited flexibility by accepting lower-skill jobs despite holding higher academic qualifications from their home country. Benjie, who holds a bachelor degree in hotel and restaurant management and managerial experience, expressed, “I was not expecting something bigger because you have to start from scratch [...] but, oh my God, I will never forget my first day. I was confronted by many dishes and pots. I was hired as a dishwasher”. These findings offer valuable insights into the fundamental needs of working migrants in Malta.

Subtheme 1.2: The four phases of working migrant thriving. To enrich the conceptualisation of migrant thriving, participants were asked what they perceived as its opposite. Their varied responses inspired the development of a framework that identifies four phases of working migrant thriving: *surviving, declining and stagnating, thriving, and settling*. It

is crucial to recognise that these phases are not fixed or sequential stages, but fluid experiences that working migrants may navigate in response to shifting life circumstances, available resources, support networks, and personal motivation.

Surviving. Participants referred to this phase as a period in which one's efforts and priorities are focused on meeting basic needs in order to maintain their existence in the face of challenges. Although this phase is often experienced during the first few days, weeks, months, or even years of their stay in Malta, it may also recur in specific life domains—even after the individuals have met their initial needs or experienced thriving. This is due to the ongoing emergence of challenges such as work-related stress, illnesses, the injury or death of a family member in the home country, homesickness, bureaucratic issues, relationship breakdowns, economic instability, or experiences of discrimination. Hence, this phase is characterised by a minimal focus on thriving since the priority is to cope, endure, and persist through present challenges. As Garett stated, "surviving is, meet at the end of the day, more or less, exactly as you were when you started the day; thriving is improving".

Declining and stagnating. Some participants described the opposite of thriving as a downward trend or a decline in certain aspects of their lives, including their motivation. For Erik this is marked by an inability to cope due to lack of control over persistent challenges, "No matter what you do, no matter how you try to be creative, no matter how many options you try to come up with, things are uncontrollable and everything just goes down south". Riko extended this view by emphasising the importance of a perceived sense of safety, "when they prevent you from feeling safe, when they prevent you from being in control of your own life, then that's the opposite of thriving".

Interestingly, some participants also characterised the opposite of thriving as *stagnation*—a state in which individuals stop exerting further effort after reaching a comfortable level, just a little beyond the survival phase. Emrah argued that remaining in one's comfort zone without striving for growth may lead to a decline, as it reflects a failure to adapt to a rapidly changing world, "For them, they think that they are stable but for me it's not stable because they are going down [...] the world changes very fast so we have to update ourselves". Similarly, Markus described stagnation as, "to give up, or not care anymore or just letting it be, if you just do the same, I would put that stagnation as the opposite [of thriving]".

Thriving. Participants described thriving as the intentional pursuit of growth and vitality across various life domains. Unlike *surviving*, which focuses on enduring challenges, or *declining*, which is marked by stagnation or regression, thriving is characterised by forward movement, fulfilment, and a sense of flourishing. This phase—typically pursued after surviving—includes both positive and challenging experiences, with the positive generally outweighing the negative. These experiences are closely tied to goal-oriented fulfilment and the sacrifices made in pursuit of such goals. Benjie expressed appreciation and gratitude as he reflected on his career trajectory in Malta, which began with a dishwasher position and progressed to a mid-level management position:

> I'm grateful, I'm happy, I'm satisfied. But I still want more [...] I don't limit myself. Sky's the limit. I told myself, as long as I can, as long as I am doing my job right, I know that there's still room for improvement [...] another door to open".

Benjie's experience of a thriving career was marked by positive emotion and a readiness to invest effort and energy to continue progressing. Conversely, as thriving was understood to be highly subjective and individualised, it was not limited to the conventional external markers of

success, such as career advancement or financial stability. Participants acknowledged the importance of internal markers of thriving, including personal development and emotional wellbeing. For instance, Vikas compared his idea of thriving with that of his friends':

> I think it's up to everyone to choose what they want to do with their lives. [...] I know some people, friends especially, that as much as we appreciate each other, we have very different mentalities. They are more laid-back. Their life is going to the beach and enjoying the sun. My life is, first, work. But I do understand that I can't say my life is better or your life is better. It's just… we expect different outcomes. So, both of us can be thriving. It's just in different aspects. (Vikas)

Latent interpretations of these results suggest that thriving is also closely related to autonomy or the freedom to set, direct, and pursue one's own goals. As Riko shared, "it [thriving] means that you have space to move in different directions in life". Essentially, autonomy empowers working migrants to take ownership of their lives and make decisions that align with their values, aspirations, and priorities. Unlike the *surviving* and *declining* phases, where individuals are merely reacting to challenges, the thriving phase in marked by a more proactive stance. In other words, working migrants gain the autonomy to decide which set of challenges or sacrifices to undertake in order to improve particular aspects of their lives.

Settling. This phase, as described by participants, reflects a state of stability, acceptance, and balance in certain life domains. While *thriving* is characterised by forward movement and growth, *settling* involves reaching a point where working migrants feel content with their current achievements and focus on maintaining progress rather than pursuing continuous improvement. For most participants, *settling* was perceived positively as a phase of rest and balance after periods of struggle or active growth. As Leo expressed:

> Right now, my priority is not anymore, my job [...] now that I've reached a position which is okay, I do not have them anymore, the ambitions… now that I've achieved a good position, it's not the end of the world, so it's fine… so now my priority is family because we are starting a new life with my fiancé.

Interestingly, participants indicated that purchasing a house or apartment is often one of the earliest signs of life settlement in Malta. Additionally, some participants who described themselves as having settled in Malta also reported being in long-term relationships with partners residing locally. For Isabel, her priorities shifted once she decided to settle in Malta, “My major priority is to save up for my home; because after I decided to settle down here and with a very stable relationship, I think it's not worth it to rent anymore”.

Although settling and stagnating may both involve a pause in growth or change, they differ in motivation, perception, and experience. *Stagnating* typically refers to an involuntary halt in progress, often resulting from limitations or a lack of motivation, and is associated with dissatisfaction or feeling ‘stuck’. *Settling,* by contrast, is a conscious decision to maintain stability and contentment without necessarily striving for more. Participants described this as a form of gratified contentment—a deep sense of fulfilment that emerges upon meeting one’s goals or needs. As Emrah expressed, “Always, I appreciate what I have… I don't live in the clouds… some people, they just want more, more, more… for me, as long as I am healthy, it’s okay… my career is also better now”.

Participants also highlighted how *settling* can be a temporary phase. Life circumstances, external pressures, or new aspirations may push individuals out of a settled state and into other phases, such as *surviving* or *thriving*. Riko expressed, “I don't think you should ever really be satisfied with something for too long. For too long!” This fluidity emphasises the dynamic nature

of migrant experiences, where settling is not a fixed endpoint but a phase that working migrants may revisit throughout their lives.

Interestingly, some migrants intentionally choose not to settle in Malta. Vikas noted that, for him and other working migrants, Malta is seen as a traverse country—a place where individuals stay temporarily before moving on to their next destination. As he expressed, “Malta is, from what I’ve seen myself and other people that I met, a place where people come to stay for a certain time but then they leave. Very few people actually settle down here”. For some migrants, reaching the peak of thriving opportunities in Malta may signal that it is time to move on to another destination.

The nature of thriving phases. Since the four phases—*surviving*, *declining and stagnating*, *thriving*, and *settling*—are not sequential stages but are fluid experiences, individuals may move back and forth between them depending on changing life circumstances, external pressures, or personal developments. Moreover, one may experience different phases simultaneously across various areas of life. For example, a working migrant might have a thriving career but a declining wellbeing. Similarly, one may be settled in one domain while actively striving to thrive in another. This perspective offers a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of migrant experiences as they navigate multiple roles, aspirations, and challenges.

Theme 2: Identifying the thriving domains in the working migrant context

This study established that thriving occurs across various life domains in the lives of working migrants. Participant responses enabled the identification and exploration of five key domains: professional, financial, personal, relational, and wellbeing.

Subtheme 2.1: **Professional thriving.** This domain refers to migrants' experiences of growth, success, and satisfaction within their professional careers or work environments. Some participants considered this central to their migration experience and one of the primary motivations for migrating. They highlighted career progression, skill development, and academic achievements as fundamental indicators of professional thriving. For Erik, achieving both of his career and academic goals gave him a sense of thriving and fulfilled his purpose for migrating:

> When I started working with the government and I got my master's degree at the same time, those were the moments I think that I was really thriving. I told myself, oh my god, this is it! I've reached my purpose here.

In this study, both EU nationals and TCNs gave importance to professional thriving, although their experiences of progression differed, mostly due to structural factors and migration status. EU nationals described a more linear career progression, while TCNs experienced a more fragmented path. A linear career progression is characterised by a straightforward upward trajectory, moving from one position to a higher one—typically within the same field or organisation—such as through promotions, increased responsibilities, and skill development. For instance, Leo, an EU national who began as an intern in a legal department, shared his progression, "I was given a team of two lawyers and then more, and then more, and then I was team leader, then promoted to assistant manager; now, I am a manager in the team".

In contrast, most TCN participants described a more lateral progression, often starting in lower-level jobs outside their expertise despite having qualifications from their home countries. This was primarily because securing a work permit is often their first priority. Additionally, Maltese labour laws mandate that local and EU nationals must be prioritised in job selection before considering TCNs. As a result, TCNs may initially accept lower-level or unrelated jobs

just to gain entry into the labour market. This leads to a more fragmented and unpredictable career path as they work towards transitioning into their desired field or position. For example, Laura, a TCN with a bachelor's degree in chemical engineering from her home country, initially worked as a barista in Malta. She shared her career trajectory, which took two years before she secured an engineering role:

> I used to be a barista… I was there since I arrived… It was like a year and a half working in coffee stores…. I started checking for pharmaceuticals that I thought was going to be the easiest way to go into the industry [...] the only position available was to be an operator. So, I was a bit confused if I should try it or not because I will be inside the industry, but still not my profession. And I tried to look for other positions and they were not available. I said, let's do it. And maybe once inside, it will be easier to change. So, I applied. After five, six months of interviews and process and Identity Malta, I finally got it. And I started as an operator. It was a bit difficult, the physical job. So, it's not easy for a woman to do it. And I was happy, to be honest. [...] It was like, 'okay, I'm an engineer, like on the top part, but I was starting from zero, but in the industry'. I said like, 'yes, I don't care. I don't care about this' [...] I was just there, seven months [...] because of my degree [...] I moved to the engineering department. (Laura)

In general, the professional thriving domain was considered by participants as the most visible marker of success and growth. It is typically expected that career progression will coincide with financial thriving. However, participants in this study viewed these as distinct domains.

Subtheme 2.2: Financial thriving. This domain captures working migrants' financial experiences related to their perceived economic stability. It involves achieving a sense of

security in managing finances, meeting basic needs, and having the capacity to plan for the future. Participants emphasised that financial thriving is not solely about wealth accumulation but also about the ability to navigate financial challenges, save for long-term goals, and experience freedom from financial stress. Although financial thriving is closely linked to professional thriving—since higher-level jobs typically generate more income—it ultimately depends on one's ability to manage finances effectively. Emrah compared his financial experiences before and after migrating, "Here [Malta], I learned a lot about managing money; so, I earn less than I used to but I am managing more things to do with it". This study therefore highlights the importance of financial management and subjective economic wellbeing in assessing financial thriving, rather than relying solely on fixed income levels.

For some participants, financial thriving also includes the ability to support family members back home. Benjie described enduring difficulties in Malta to provide for his family, "*Mahalaga sa akin, yung trabaho, kaya kong ma-support yung family ko*" (What is important to me is the job so I can support my family). Erik similarly shared his observations of Filipino working migrants he knows, "From someone who is a Filipino […] a breadwinner in the Philippines, […] sending money every month, […] it's a way for them to thrive". These responses reflect the experiences of some working migrants in Malta who prioritise the needs of others over their own. For them, success and fulfilment come from seeing their family or loved ones thrive.

Subtheme 2.3: Personal thriving. This domain refers to migrants' identity expansion and development. In essence, personal thriving is the process of learning, adapting, and evolving one's identity. Unlike the professional and financial domains which involve a more proactive goal-setting, personal thriving generally takes a more reflective and experiential approach.

Participants described it as a journey of self-discovery, where they learn to navigate new environments and redefine their sense of self. Isabel shared how moving to Malta helped her become more assertive about what she wants:

> My families and friends, they seem to be participating too much of my life. And after I started my life in Malta, I started to realise that even if I don't get married, it's fine. If I have a partner and we don't have plans for children, it's fine. Or if I want to go somewhere either by myself or with someone, it's fine. But when I was living in my country, I feel, if my parents or my friends, they don't agree, normally I don't make the changes or I don't go. (Isabel)

Moreover, Erik shared how moving to Malta contributed to his emotional growth. He recalled being more impulsive and rigid before migrating, and explained that living abroad helped him mature, “It has given me a lot of perspectives. I think I've emotionally grown. I've become more mature when it comes to making my choices”. This suggests that the participants’ personal thriving experiences involve negotiating between their former selves, shaped by their original culture, and an evolving self, influenced by new cultural norms and experiences. Emrah described how meeting new people from diverse cultural backgrounds changed him and his mindset:

> Try to meet with different people, different cultures—learn different things. I think now, I have more patience for a lot of things and I am trying to, more, understand other people. Because when I was in my country, I used to think that there is one truth. But now I feel, there are a thousand truths [...] not [for me] to give up, it's just, more respect. (Emrah)

Ultimately, the participants described personal thriving to consist of an initial discomfort, followed by reflection, adjustment, growth, and positive emotions related to personal

development. It requires and enables them to reflect on their strengths, weaknesses, tendencies, and capabilities. To experience this, working migrants are tasked to be self-aware, reflective, and to grow in alignment with their core values.

Subtheme 2.4: Relational thriving. This domain refers to the development and maintenance of meaningful relationships and a sense of belonging. Participants emphasised the importance of connections with friends, partners, colleagues, and their wider social networks. They not only rely on these relationships for support during challenges but also share meaningful experiences to enjoy life and foster growth. As Riko expressed, “I have friends that I meet once a month or so. That's always nice, but I've always kept a small group that I love to see every week, sometimes more. I try to just enjoy life together”.

Like the other domains of thriving, building and maintaining relationships requires immense work and sacrifices. Upon arriving in Malta, participants initially had few or no social connections. Some eventually formed meaningful friendships by proactively joining various group activities, others developed connections more spontaneously in everyday settings (i.e., at bus stops, work settings, social events, cafes). Participants described their current social circles as dynamic, often including people from diverse countries and consisting of different groups with varying levels of emotional closeness. They maintained a larger circle for social events alongside a smaller, more intimate group with whom they felt comfortable opening up with and relying on. As Garrett illustrated:

> I have a few very close friends. I actually tell them everything and I know that I can count on them. Then I have a bigger circle with people that are close to me, but I'm not going to count on them for whatever I'm going to need. They are friends, but not close friends. And then I have quite a lot of people that I know and that I can... “Hey, are you

going to go out for a coffee today, for a beer?" […] But I will not say everything. […] I know that they're going to be there for going out. (Garrett)

The participants also explained how they proactively allocate time and effort to join various social groups, meet up with friends and colleagues, and maintain constant communication with friends and family back home. As Arlo expressed, "I'm still in contact with them [family and friends abroad]. Some of them on a daily basis, some weekly [...] but there is regular communication between each other". He later on added, "I'm building it [social life] step-by-step, it's not really developed, I don't have so many people that I know here. But I'm building it step by step."

It is also important to note that most of the participants formed their initial friendships in Malta with mostly foreigners. Markus described this phenomenon, "There is an interesting fact here [Malta] that first, you have friends from everywhere in the first year, and then you go for the second year and half of the foreigners move out". Hence, over time, they tend to form more relationships with Maltese people.

Having serious romantic relationships also appeared to add meaningful experiences in this domain of thriving. Participants who have lifelong partners residing in Malta expressed a strong sense of relationship satisfaction and shared future plans to settle in the country. However, whether or not they have a romantic partner, some participants described a sense of family in Malta—formed through social and workplace contexts—which contributes to their experience of thriving and belonging.

Subtheme 2.5: Wellbeing thriving. This domain encompasses physical, mental, and emotional health. Wellbeing thriving is characterised by a state of balance and vitality, where working migrants feel healthy, energised, and capable of managing stress and challenges

effectively. Some of the participants regarded this to be the most important domain in their thriving experience as a working migrant—sometimes even more important than professional thriving. As Isabel shared:

> Since I've been working in Malta for a couple of years, I realised that—to achieve work and life balance, to have a family, to explore the rest of the world, and to enjoy life—is way more important compared to achieving career success. (Isabel)

This result also suggests that working migrants who prioritise career thriving over other domains may unintentionally overlook their overall wellbeing, leading to feelings of imbalanced. For example, Leo described how, during his initial years in Malta, his focus on career development involved considerable stress and sacrifices in his relationships and general wellbeing. Over time, however, he reached a point where career progression was no longer his primary focus; instead, he prioritised enhancing his physical, emotional, and relational wellbeing. For Leo, this shift has enabled him to enjoy life more fully.

Like personal thriving, wellbeing thriving can be understood as a continuous, lifelong journey that requires ongoing effort. It calls for working migrants to constantly reflect on their experiences, reassess their priorities and needs, and actively work to fulfil them. For example, Arlo realised that he prefers working in an environment that fosters support and encouragement rather than a toxic atmosphere. Consequently, he prioritised securing a job with a positive work culture over one that might offer higher income but entail overwhelming stress.

The same sentiment was also shared by other participants, who described work-life balance as a fundamental aspect of their wellbeing. They shared that this balance enables them to engage in other activities such as learning a new language, spending more time with friends, families, or partners, traveling, and dedicating sufficient time to physical fitness. Markus

expressed, “doing the gym more often […] because it's not only money, you know? It's also how you feel or what you can do”. For him, improving his physical wellbeing, feeling fit, and discovering his physical capabilities is a form of self-discovery that enhances his wellbeing.

Finally, the participants shared the importance of prioritising their mental health, especially after overcoming the stress and adversities associated with migration. They engage in self-care and self-regulation practices such as going for a walk, unwinding in nature, talking to trusted friends, going to therapy, and allocating substantial time for themselves. Furthermore, recognising one’s limits, setting boundaries, and getting enough rest are practised and shared by participants who regularly provide financial support to their families abroad. As Benjie expressed:

> Yung katawan mo may limit din, wag mo argabyaduhin. Pinagod mo yung katawan mo, ikaw din ang magsu-suffer sa huli […] Hindi naman ako palaging malakas, hindi ako palaging nandoon sa position. Kaya importante din na bigyan natin ng treat ang sarili natin. Kahit simpleng pagpunta sa salon. Kasi you deserve it—you work hard for your money and position […] mahalaga ang alagaan ang kalusugan, physically at mentally, kasi wala tayong lakas kung mahina ang katawan at isip natin.” (*Your body has its limits, do not overwork it. If you exhaust your body, you’ll be the one to suffer in the end […] I’m not always strong, and I won’t always be in this position. That’s why it’s important to treat yourself, even with something simple like going to the salon. You deserve it—you work hard for your money and your position […] it’s important to take care of your health, both physically and mentally, as we won’t have strength if our body and mind are weak.*) (Benjie)

This response suggests that working migrants who regularly provide financial support to their families engage in self-talk to justify prioritising their own needs over those of their families at times. Therefore, it is reasonable to say that a working migrant's role can somehow influence their experience of wellbeing thriving.

Nature of thriving domains. The domains of thriving—*professional, financial, personal, relational,* and *wellbeing*—reflect the holistic nature of human experience and life. Working migrants' ability to navigate these domains depends on their unique circumstances and priorities. This underscores the need to view thriving as a dynamic, context-dependent phenomenon rather than as isolated achievements measured solely by society's typical standards of success.

Theme 3: Mapping the capitals contributing to working migrant thriving

Participants were asked about the challenges they faced upon migrating and how they overcame them. They were also queried on how they navigate their daily lives as working migrants, their thriving experiences, the characteristics they believe support or hinder their thriving, and their advice to new and non-thriving migrants. Responses were analysed, which enabled this research to identify and map the inherent capitals migrants possess. These findings address the research question: *What factors do working migrants perceive as supporting or enabling their thriving?*

The term "capital" is used to emphasise that these resources—personal, action-driven, and value-driven—function as assets or forms of wealth that working migrants can leverage to thrive across various domains.

Personal capitals refer to the individual attributes, traits, and internal strengths or resources that migrants inherently possess or develop over time. *Action-driven capitals* involve

the behaviours, skills, and strategies that migrants actively use to achieve goals and overcome challenges. *Value-driven capitals* encompass the principles, beliefs, and values that guide working migrants' actions and decisions. Table 4 illustrates the capitals in each category.

Table 4

Working Migrant Capitals based on Categories

Personal capitals	Action-driven capitals	Value-driven capitals
Assertiveness	Planning and organisation	Discipline
Tenacity and grit	Choosing your battles	Respectfulness
Resilience	Dynamic goal setting	Positivity
Adaptability	Managing expectations	Gratified contentment
Creativity	Learning and education	Valuing challenging work
Industriousness	Pursuing career alignment	Pursuing the joy of life
Emotional and cultural intelligence	Self-care practices	Flexibility to start at entry-level roles
Openness	Drive	Faith

Subtheme 3.1: Personal capitals. Personal capitals represent qualities that are considered internal, dispositional, and personality-driven. Participants exhibited these capitals as stable yet dynamic, meaning they exist within themselves but can grow or evolve through experience and learning. They influence how working migrants navigate and respond to challenges, adapt to change, and thrive. These capitals involve assertiveness, tenacity and grit, resilience, adaptability, creativity, industriousness, emotional intelligence, and openness.

Assertiveness. Assertiveness refers to the ability to appropriately express ideas, feelings, and boundaries while still respecting others' rights (Pfafman, 2020). It involves communicating openly, honestly, and respectfully without being passive or aggressive. Participants exhibited assertiveness in various ways: requesting a raise or a promotion, voicing their needs and

experiences at work, contacting relevant authorities (i.e., Identità) to seek updates and expedite work permit processing, and speaking up about experiences of discrimination.

For instance, Benjie realised that his supervisor at his first job in Malta was giving him fewer shift hours compared to his colleagues, resulting in a low income that barely covered his basic needs. Benjie spoke up, stating that he would not earn anything if the situation continued. In response, he was accused of laziness and being soft— remarks tied to perceptions of his gender expression. As Benjie expressed, “I feel the energy that they don’t like me, but I’m always trying my best to do my job”. He continued to raise concerns about the unfair treatment until management transferred him to a different hotel, where he was treated fairly. Benjie stated, “I feel at home. They’re very happy [with me]. They accept me for who I am”. His assertiveness appeared to support his thriving experience.

Tenacity and grit. Grit and tenacity reflect perseverance and determination in the face of challenges, though they differ slightly in scope: grit involves sustained passion and effort toward long-term goals despite setbacks or slow progress (Duckworth et al., 2007), while tenacity focuses on maintaining action and energy to overcome immediate obstacles (Baum & Locke, 2004). Participants exemplified both grit and tenacity by refusing to give up, even in the face of challenges, and remaining committed to their short- and long-term goals. Short-term goals often pertain to survival needs such as obtaining a work permit and securing suitable rental accommodation. Arlo recounted experiencing discrimination when searching for an apartment due to his nationality, but chose not to be discouraged and instead focused on his goals, “I had a vision in mind, I had the specific goal. I didn't focus on the issue […] my goal back then is to get the residence, have the housing authority, and applying for the work permit”.

Meanwhile, since grit pertains to long-term goals, participants exhibited it more clearly when working towards thriving and settling. For instance, Markus' long-term aspiration is to buy his own house and settle in Malta. However, as a TCN, he faced additional requirements and bureaucratic hurdles simply due to not being an EU citizen. Markus expressed, "I'm going to pay my taxes. You're going to make it harder […] You can make it as hard as you want […] I'm going to surpass whatever obstacle you put in front of me". Some participants also shared that having gone through earlier, more difficult experiences made them more equipped to face future challenges. As Vikas put it, "it's kind of like, if I survived that, nothing can stop me now".

Resilience. Resilience is defined as the process of adapting well when faced with adversity, tragedy, trauma, threats, or stress (American Psychological Association, n.d.). The participants exhibited resilience, not only from bouncing back from the initial challenges of migration, but also throughout their ongoing experiences as migrants, as they encounter challenges related to employment, legal permits, relationships, identity, and more. Some participants also traced their current resilience from past challenges, describing those experiences as important to how they now cope. As Frida expressed, "I'm very stress resilient because I've seen a lot […] it's just, once you survive certain things in life, you just become, not numb, but basically, the stress resilience, that's what helps me thrive".

Since this study defines thriving as a process of growth and experiencing vitality upon overcoming adversities, resilience appears to be a central attribute among working migrants who are thriving in any domain. For many participants, thriving was regarded as a non-negotiable task for all working migrants since they left their home country to pursue a life that they seem fit. As Isabel expressed, "if they decided to go to a new place, I think one of their major tasks is to

achieve their goals and to make their life better and better. Otherwise, it doesn't make any sense of just suffering, isn't it?"

Adaptability. Adaptability refers to a person's capacity to regulate their psychological and behavioural responses in order to engage constructively with new, changing, or uncertain environments (Martin et al., 2013). Participants exhibited adaptability in the ways they navigated unfamiliar cultural and social landscapes after relocating to Malta. This involved a degree of flexibility—both mental and behavioural—as they adjusted to their new surroundings in ways that supported both survival and the possibility of thriving. Their accounts reflected intentional efforts to learn about the local context, make sense of new norms, and find ways to coexist within them. As Isabel reflected, "I need to accept the fact that if I live in a different country, I need to learn as much of the knowledge, and also the culture, people's preferences in Malta". This personal capital is interpreted as important in supporting working migrants' thriving.

Creativity. Participants highlighted creativity as an important component in their thriving experiences. This was reflected in different ways—some described it as a form of flexible thinking that helped them view situations from multiple angles to discern how to best approach challenges. Erik described this process as "wearing different hats". Other linked creativity to resourcefulness, using what was available in their environment in imaginative ways to meet their goals. For Markus, creativity stood out as the most essential trait he relies on to thrive, "Creativity, I think that's the main thing. There is a lot of YouTube tutorials, there is a lot of books […] you need to be creative; you need to be imaginative and think about things that could go wrong". For him, creativity is not only about innovation but also about preparation—thinking ahead and imagining what might go wrong as a way to prepare for potential setbacks.

Some participants who reflected on periods when they were not thriving pointed to a lack of creativity or difficulty in adapting familiar practices to a new context. For instance, Frida shared, “when I'm not thriving […] I would like to be more physically active for my health and for my mental health […] and the fact that I'm not able to do that in the terms that I'm used to.” In her home country, cycling had been her main form of physical activity and emotional regulation. However, due to Malta’s urban infrastructure and her experiences of negative attitudes toward cyclists, she found it difficult to maintain this habit—leading to physical inactivity and feelings of sadness: “I do get a bit depressed and sad that I'm not able to do that here.” In contrast, Arlo navigated similar constraints through a more creative approach. Finding the gym both financially inaccessible and socially uncomfortable, he invested in home workout equipment and designed his own routines—adapting his fitness practices to suit his new environment.

Industriousness. Industriousness, understood as being hard-working (Oxford English Dictionary, n.d.), was reflected in many participants’ accounts of how they pursue goals and maintain their day-to-day life. For some, this trait was cultivated early on. Benjie recalled selling iced candies in primary school to afford small things he wanted: “they [parents] don’t give me everything, I have to work for it.” To him, this valuable trait taught him to value hard-work in order to thrive. In contrast, some participants reflected on how a lack of motivation—what they described as “laziness”—hindered their sense of thriving. Garett expressed, “Currently, my laziness has overcome everything”. Vikas also linked his non-thriving moments to this, though he approached it differently, “I tend to always look for the process that takes the less time because I want to work less. So, for me, everything is about efficiency.”. In this sense, working

smart—rather than simply exerting effort—was described by some as a way to keep progressing toward their goals while avoiding burnout or feeling overwhelmed.

Emotional and cultural intelligence. Participants conveyed emotional intelligence in how they approached and made sense of their challenges. Both Riko and Erik reflected on the emotional maturity they developed through their migration experience, which they felt enabled them to make more thoughtful decisions. Benjie, for example, described learning not to suppress or avoid difficult emotions, "allow yourself to feel that way, allow yourself to experience that moment […] '*wag mo siyang takbuhan* (don't run away from it) […] you have to face it".

Cultural intelligence was also evident in how participants learned to engage with both locals and other foreigners in Malta. The cultural awareness they developed informed how they navigated social interactions and managed their expectations—skills that supported their experience of thriving. Riko, for instance, shared what he learned from interacting with the local Maltese people, "they [Maltese] let you know when they like you and when they don't; they let you know what's going on inside them and it's something that in a lot of cultures, you might not be prepared for".

Participants also emphasised the importance of immersing and learning the culture of individuals from diverse nationalities living in Malta. For Markus, learning how people from different cultures think and act played was central to his personal growth:

> Dealing with a lot of different people from different parts of the world makes you grow [...] Look how they do this. Why are they doing this? [...] Living with other people is what gave me the best part of my personal growth. (Markus)

Openness. For some participants, curiosity and openness to new experiences motivated them to migrate to Malta. They described a longstanding desire to engage with new cultures and

connect with people from diverse backgrounds. For Leo, Malta's multicultural environment was one of the most compelling reasons for relocating. Others identified openness as a foundational quality in their ability to thrive. Isabel reflected that being open to new experiences enables her to explore her potential and expand her capabilities. Similarly, Garett shared that confronting his current challenges requires stepping outside his comfort zone and embracing new social and personal experiences, "Now, to be honest, I'm trying to challenge myself; I'm trying to challenge talking to people, meeting new people, doing things I haven't done." In this way, openness was described as a form of capital relevant to both surviving and thriving among working migrants.

While these personal capitals are presented as distinct subthemes, participants' narratives revealed that many of them are closely interrelated. For example, tenacity, grit, and resilience often co-occurred, reflecting a shared underlying capacity for endurance and perseverance. Similarly, adaptability and creativity frequently operated together as flexible strategies for navigating challenges. These overlaps suggest that such traits should not be viewed as entirely distinct capitals.

Subtheme 3.2: Action-driven capitals. Action-driven capitals are considered goal-oriented, practical, and outward-focused which require intentional effort and purposeful action. Unlike personal capitals, which reflect more inherent traits, these capitals are manifested through intentional behaviours and decision-making processes. These include planning and organisation, choosing your battles, setting realistic goals, managing expectations, learning and education, pursuing career alignment, self-care practices, and drive. Participants described using these strategies to navigate their circumstances, enhance their situations, and thrive in the domains they prioritise.

Planning and organisation. Many participants emphasised the role of planning and organisation in navigating and surviving challenges, particularly during the initial stages of their migration to Malta. Some engaged in research beforehand and joined social media forums to gain insight and prepare. Laura highlighted the importance of connecting with people already living in Malta to better understand essential tasks such as securing accommodation, finding employment, and integrating into the community. Beyond initial settlement, participants also applied planning and organisation as part of their thriving strategies. For example, Leo, Emrah, and Erik structure their lifestyles with the goal of saving money and achieving financial stability. Meanwhile, Arlo and Isabel organise their daily routines to create space for activities that support their wellbeing. Both mentioned planning and preparing meals in advance as a practical way to maintain a balanced and healthy lifestyle.

Several participants highlighted the importance of effective time management, such as allocating specific periods for work, rest, learning, and socialising. These practices not only supported the achievement of their goals but also fostered a sense of stability and control over their lives. This action-driven capital helps offer structure in their lives, which is essential in mitigating the uncertainties inherent in migration. By being organised, participants were able to optimise opportunities while reducing stress and unpredictability—challenges particularly more pronounced for TCN working migrants. For instance, Frida noted that gaining knowledge about Malta's bureaucratic processes as a TCN significantly improved her transition and experience compared to her initial migration attempt.

In contrast, Garett, an EU national, shared that planning and preparing for future scenarios had caused him considerable stress in the past. As a result, he learned to take a step back and adopt a more flexible approach by accepting opportunities as they arise. As Garett

explained, “I am just going with the flow. Whatever comes to me, I just say yes. A new relationship, a new job, a new opportunity. Unless it's going to be something really extreme like changing my life upside down”. It is important to note that at the time of the interview, Garett did not consider himself to be thriving, although he recalled experiencing thriving during his initial years in Malta. This suggests that this action-driven capital may hold importance in sustaining thriving.

Choosing your battles. Past research on working migrants in Malta has highlighted the various tensions and challenges they face in relation to work conditions, social integration, and cultural adaptation. Participants in this study emphasised the importance of strategically deciding which challenges to confront and which to overlook or avoid. This selective approach shows their awareness of personal resources, energy levels, and emotional wellbeing.

The “battles” identified include frustrations with Malta’s urban environment, limited natural spaces, probationary job policies, delays and inefficiencies in work permit procedures, and a general distrust toward certain institutions and authorities. For instance, Isabel reflected on a workplace incident that led her to question aspects of the local culture

> I had that period of time if I should leave the country, or if I should stop, or if I should change to an NGO, because I want to work in a system with more transparency […] then I decided that I won't be able to find a place or make myself to fit in a place which I think is better than Malta. So, I decided to accept the fact that this is what it is. It's appreciation, it's not corruption or bribery. (Isabel)

By carefully choosing their battles, participants avoided becoming overwhelmed by constant tension and conflict. They exhibited self-awareness, flexibility, and an active process of thought reframing and energy allocation. This selective engagement helped conserve emotional

and mental resources critical for their survival, thriving, and settlement in Malta. In contrast, those who struggled to let go of situations or conditions they found undesirable—but beyond their influence—were less likely to thrive. As Frida shared, “I have a certain way that I think how things should look like, and if they're not exactly like that, I become frustrated and I stop thriving”. Her challenge in letting go of unwinnable “battles” was described as limiting her ability to thrive.

Dynamic goal setting. Several participants described a reflective, adaptive, and dynamic approach to goal setting, characterised by a continual process of reassessment rather than a fixed or linear trajectory. This approach involved regularly evaluating their needs, desires, and areas of focus, while taking into account the changing context of their environments. Participants engaged in continuous reflection to assess their current circumstances, set goals that aligned with their personal aspirations, and adjusted these goals in response to new challenges and opportunities.

For example, Laura initially set the goal of securing a job in Malta related to her professional field. After achieving this, she expanded her focus to joining a sports group connected to a passion she had nurtured back home. Through this involvement, Laura discovered a new interest in teaching the sport to children, which led her to shift her goal toward becoming a part-time trainer. This change reflected both her evolving interests and the opportunities that arose. Over time, she further refined her goal by planning to open additional classes to reach more students. Throughout this journey, Laura continuously reassessed her skills, aspirations, resources, and opportunities. This dynamic process of goal setting was described as important in her experience of thriving.

Managing expectations. Managing expectations was a key strategy participants used to navigate the uncertainties and challenges of migration and integration. This involved adjusting their personal, social, and professional expectations to better align with the realities of life and work in Malta. Participants noted that maintaining realistic expectations helped them avoid unnecessary frustration and disappointment.

For instance, Riko had low expectations to connect with people in Malta as he considered himself selective. This outlook allowed him to remain open and appreciate the interactions he had with those he met. Over time, Riko found a few individuals he connected deeply with, and by not setting up high expectations from others, he avoided unnecessary disappointment and stress. Similarly, some participants applied this approach in professional settings. Emrah, who held a managerial role in his home country, lowered his expectations for rapid career advancement upon arriving in Malta. He began working as a sales assistant in retail, which gave him time to adapt to the local job market. Eventually, he earned a promotion to management. By aligning his expectations with the opportunities he found, he described building a stable and rewarding career over time.

Learning and education. The role of learning and education featured prominently in participants' accounts. Many relied on their educational backgrounds from their home countries to secure work in Malta that aligned with their skills and experience. Most participants had completed undergraduate degrees prior to migrating, which facilitated entry into familiar professional fields. However, this may not reflect the broader migrant population in Malta, where many are employed in sectors such as construction or transportation, which may not require tertiary qualifications. For some, pursuing further education in Malta played a meaningful role in their thriving experiences.

For example, Erik pursued postgraduate studies both locally and abroad to deepen his expertise. This ongoing education not only created opportunities for career progression but also fostered a sense of personal growth and confidence. In his case, education appeared to support his professional and personal thriving.

For some participants, engaging in learning opportunities outside their comfort zones fostered a sense of fulfilment. Isabel, for instance, enrols in postgraduate programs that are not related to her field and commits to learning a new skill every year, such as swimming or playing the piano. Similarly, Riko shared plans to learn new languages, starting with one of the most difficult ones, as a way to build confidence and prepare himself for mastering easier languages in the future. Other participants described engaging in local training or courses as a way to support their integration in Malta. Markus, for instance, emphasised the value of the iBelong Programme and Maltese language courses in helping him feel more settled. For him, these programmes increase his sense of life settlement in the country. Lastly, participants who described themselves as financially thriving often linked this to a form of financial literacy—suggesting that knowledge and education in money management played a role in their thriving experience.

Pursuing career alignment. Pursuing career alignment was another critical strategy employed by participants to navigate their circumstances and thrive. This involved seeking work that resonated with their skills, values, and long-term aspirations. For those who placed strong importance on purpose and meaning in their careers, this action-driven approach appeared to support not only professional fulfilment but also personal wellbeing.

Benjie, for example, explored various roles before securing his current position as a senior supervisor in the hospitality industry. He shared that the role holds personal value for him

because it allows meaningful connection with others and opportunities to help—giving his daily work a deeper sense of purpose. For Benjie, this fulfilment extends beyond professional thriving. Conversely, participants who initially struggled to align their careers with their interests and expertise faced further challenges. Laura recalled distress in her first job in Malta, which did not align with her qualifications. However, as she moved into a role that better matched these, she expressed a greater sense of thriving.

Self-care practices. One of the most evident action-driven capitals highlighted by participants was the deliberate practice of self-care. Participants described engaging in various activities to maintain both physical and mental wellbeing, including going to the gym, running, playing sports, eating healthily, and ensuring adequate rest to recharge. Isabel, for instance, makes it a point to dedicate at least one day a week entirely to herself. For Leo, prioritising exercise and finding enjoyment in daily life has become a vital strategy to reduce stress and prevent burnout.

Beyond physical routines, participants also emphasised the importance of showing kindness to oneself through setting boundaries, taking time to unwind in nature, seeking therapy, and striving for work-life balance. Garett, for example, initially aimed to secure a high-level leadership role upon arriving in Malta. However, after observing the intense pressure such positions entailed, he made a conscious decision to slow down and prioritise personal time and wellbeing. Based on participant responses, this action-driven capital plays an important role in all the phases of thriving.

Drive. Drive—or what some participants referred to as "energy"—was described as an internal motivation to persevere and pursue goals. This force often stemmed from personal aspirations for a better quality of life, professional growth, or meaningful self-development.

Several participants shared that a lack of motivation was one of the primary barriers to thriving. While the desire to engage in activities or pursue goals was present, the absence of energy or drive often led to feelings of stagnation or decline. As Frida reflected, “I have a lot of hobbies, I am sad that I’m not energetic enough to pursue them all […] a lot of my hobbies were put aside because I was not in the right mind”.

Although drive originates internally, participants framed it as an action-driven capital—something that must be actively cultivated and sustained through intentional effort. Maintaining motivation required continuous engagement, and participants described various strategies to fuel this energy. These included celebrating small wins, regularly reflecting on progress, keeping goals in focus, and intentionally taking breaks to recharge. For many, this ongoing investment in motivation was seen as essential to sustaining their capacity to thrive.

Subtheme 3.3: Value-driven capitals. Value-driven capitals describe the underlying principles that guide migrants' decisions—principles often grounded in personal philosophy, cultural values, and ethical beliefs. These are not merely abstract ideals but active forces that shape behaviour, influence priorities, and offer a sense of meaning and direction. For many participants, these values provided both the why behind their actions and the motivation to persist through challenges. In this study, value-driven capitals were reflected in expressions of discipline, respectfulness, positivity, gratified contentment, valuing challenging work, pursuing the joy of life, flexibility to start at entry-level roles, and faith.

Discipline. Participants described discipline as a vital element in achieving both their long-term aspirations and day-to-day goals. It was expressed through self-regulation, delayed gratification, letting go of unhealthy habits, and a sense of ownership over one's choices and responsibilities. For example, Leo spent his initial years in Malta saving diligently, investing in

property, and concentrating intensely on his work—often at the expense of a social life. Years later, having reached financial stability and a higher career position, he now enjoys the rewards of that discipline, taking a more balanced approach that prioritises health, wellbeing, and personal relationships.

Discipline was also reflected in participants' conscious decisions to resist social distractions—particularly the prevalent party culture in Malta. Vikas, Riko, and Frida spoke about how some working migrants spend much of their free time and income on parties and nightlife. In contrast, they intentionally chose to allocate their energy and resources elsewhere. As Vikas explained:

> It's very easy, if you're making even the minimum amount of money, to start spending it on beach, party, drinks, or even good food. I would say that's the biggest trap that most or half of the migrants who are trying to make a life here […] you're just living pay cheque to pay cheque or going out to party. It's kind of like a sedation, I would say. (Vikas)

Riko extended this sentiment by reflecting on how the party culture in Malta can easily lead working migrants toward potentially harmful behaviours, such as substance use and gambling. Similarly, Garett noted, "thankfully, I didn't start anything like gambling or substances." These reflections highlight how discipline, in the form of self-restraint and intentional decision-making, may function as a protective factor. For many participants, it was not only essential in maintaining focus on their goals but also in navigating the distractions and pressures of their new environment. As such, discipline can be considered an important element in sustaining long-term thriving.

Respectfulness. Participants highlighted the value of maintaining a respectful attitude toward Maltese culture and its people, seeing it as an essential part of adapting and integrating

into the country. This value-driven capital appeared to shape how they navigated cultural differences and positioned themselves within the local context. Emrah reflected on this by saying, “I respect their culture. Of course, there are things that I don't agree, but I don't think I have a right to complain about it. Because this is my decision to come here, not to change their culture”. Similarly, Isabel emphasised the importance of appreciating and enjoying the local culture, arguing that working migrants should relinquish any sense of entitlement. She noted that resisting or refusing to accept the culture could lead to internal conflict and suffering.

Positivity. Participants frequently emphasised the importance of maintaining a positive mindset regardless of their circumstances. This value-driven capital manifested in various ways. Emrah described himself as a naturally happy person, which he believes contributes to his ability to thrive across different areas of life. Laura and Leo demonstrated positivity in the face of challenges, recognising that setbacks and failures are part of life and should be embraced as learning opportunities. For Arlo, cultivating a positive attitude and surrounding himself with positive energy were described as essential tools for navigating life’s difficulties and sustaining his sense of thriving.

Gratified contentment. Participants described an emotional state marked by gratitude and deep satisfaction with their current circumstances. They acknowledged that, although they might not possess everything they desire, they experience a sense of peace and appreciation for what they do have. For example, Erik shared that maintaining a grateful attitude, even amidst challenges, can ultimately support one’s ability to thrive:

> There's always something to be happy about and something to be thankful about no matter what the challenges are. I think that will really help a person to thrive […] if you

are thankful for the small things, for the small wins that you have, I think it makes a lot of difference. (Erik)

It is important to highlight that participants who expressed gratified contentment, while appreciative of their current circumstances, still actively set and pursue both short- and long-term goals to sustain or enhance their lives. For instance, Arlo shared, “I feel like I'm thriving, not with the same pace that I want for now, but every day I wake up, I have something to do, I'm achieving new things”. This illustrates participants’ views that embracing gratitude, even amidst challenges, supports their ability to thrive.

Valuing challenging work. Frida and Benjie highlighted the importance of valuing challenging jobs, viewing them as valuable opportunities for growth and meaningful contributions to their personal development and wellbeing. Both reflected on their early work experiences in Malta as pivotal to their thriving journeys. Frida shared, “moving to Malta and working a very difficult job actually healed my anxiety and depression.” Despite the job’s demands, she deeply appreciated it because it encouraged her independence and established a routine that included visiting the beach after work. Similarly, Benjie advised new working migrants and those struggling to thrive to embrace their work wholeheartedly, regardless of how difficult it may be. He expressed, “*iyong pagiging in the dishwasher, niyakap ko siya ng buong-buo […] there are people saying, dishwasher ka lang. It's not “lang” for me, minahal ko yun […] and it makes me complete kung sino ako ngayon* (being a dishwasher, I embraced that fully […] there are people saying, you’re only a dishwasher. It’s not “only” for me, I loved it […] and it makes me complete whoever I am today)”. Benjie viewed this challenging role as meaningful to his personal thriving.

Pursuing the joy of life. For many participants, thriving went beyond material success or professional achievements; it was fundamentally about finding joy in life. This capital helped explain why they prioritised relationships, hobbies, and passions as essential parts of their journey. Participants believed that happiness and fulfilment were crucial for holistic thriving, influencing their wellbeing, social connections, and personal growth. Laura exemplified this by dedicating engaging in sports, which allowed her to connect with others and nurture her passion. Similarly, Emrah shared that he makes time to celebrate small moments of joy—whether exploring Malta's natural beauty or spending quality time with loved ones. The participants embody this capital by intentionally carving out time for meaningful activities, nurturing relationships, and staying engaged in hobbies to maintain a balanced and fulfilling life.

Flexibility to start at entry-level roles. The participants' flexibility to begin in entry-level positions reflected their pragmatism and humility, illustrating why they were willing to accept roles that did not initially match their qualifications. They viewed taking on entry-level jobs as a necessary step to gain experience, integrate into Malta's labour market, and work towards their long-term ambitions. Leo described how accepting an internship position helped him build a professional network and gain valuable insight into the local job market.

The participants engaged in motivational self-talk, reminding themselves of their goals and purpose. As Benjie expressed, "kailangan ko mag-start dito, kailangan kong mapagdaanan ito, kasi I will not be on the top if hindi ko mapagdadaanan kung ano yung nasa baba (I need to start here, I need to go through this because I will not get to the top if I don't start from the bottom)." This willingness to adapt appeared to support participants in moving beyond merely surviving to truly thriving, using these roles as stepping stones. They exemplified this value

through humility, maintaining a growth mindset, embracing learning opportunities, and focusing on long-term goals rather than immediate status.

Faith. Faith, whether religious or spiritual, was seen as a deeply personal and grounding value-driven capital. It helped explain why some participants maintained hope and resilience despite uncertainties; they believed their faith gave them strength, purpose, and a sense of control in unpredictable circumstances. Benjie shared how his faith helped him stay optimistic and navigate difficult times with peace. The participants expressed this capital by attending church, participating in faith-based communities, praying, and reflecting on their beliefs to stay centred. Emrah shared that he still prays every night, a practice he cultivated even before moving to Malta. Faith offered participants not only solace but also a sense of hope and empowerment that could help them thrive amidst challenges.

Theme 4: Uncovering the socio-cultural mechanisms in Malta influencing working migrant thriving

This theme explores the complex socio-cultural mechanisms in Malta that shape the experiences of working migrants across the thriving phases. It further illuminates the research question regarding enablers of thriving and addresses the final qualitative research question: *what barriers or challenges do working migrants experience that hinder their capacity to thrive?* Grounded in the principles of critical realism, it highlights how the cultural fabric, social norms, and institutional practices in Malta create enabling or constraining conditions for migrant thriving. These mechanisms are not seen as static but evolve in response to broader socio-economic and bureaucratic trends. Analyses of participant responses enabled this research to categorise these mechanisms into pro-thriving and anti-thriving elements, as illustrated in Table 5.

Table 5

Malta's Pro-Thriving and Anti-Thriving Elements

Pro-thriving elements	Anti-thriving elements
Cultural foundations	Structural barriers
Safety and accessibility	Social tensions
Structural support	Environmental and operational constraints

Understanding these mechanisms is essential, as they establish opportunities and limitations faced by working migrants in Malta. These mechanisms influence how they interpret their experiences and guide their decision-making. This theme illuminates systemic forces at play and provides a comprehensive view of the structural, cultural, and individual factors that define the working migrant experience.

Subtheme 4.1: Malta's pro-thriving elements. Malta's pro-thriving elements highlight Malta's cultural foundations, safety and accessibility, and structural support. These elements are seen to create opportunities for professional and financial growth, social connection, personal development, and enhanced wellbeing. Participants reflected on these elements as factors in their decisions to migrate and stay in Malta.

Cultural foundations. Cultural foundations include people's warmth and openness, a laid-back work environment, an increasingly diverse society, an English-speaking nation, and a good quality of life. Participants expressed appreciation for the warm and open culture of Malta as a Mediterranean island. For example, Emrah noted his preference for residing in Malta rather than other European countries with more reserved social demeanours, as this openness facilitated easier integration and the formation of meaningful relationships. Furthermore, integration and

accessibility were perceived to be enhanced by Malta's predominantly English-speaking environment, which some participants identified as a crucial factor in their decision to migrate.

Notably, most participants described Malta's work environment as more laid-back compared to other countries, which they believed supported their ability to thrive professionally while maintaining a balanced lifestyle. This comparison was often drawn from their prior experiences and potential career opportunities. Within the healthcare sector, Erik observed that Malta imposed a relatively lighter workload compared to his previous country of employment. Similarly, Arlo remarked, "I love the work-life balance. I feel like the work here is chill if I compare it to other cities where I used to work." Some participants attributed this atmosphere to a lower level of competition in certain sectors. Markus elaborated:

> Obviously, if I went to a more competitive market like Germany or UK, I would have a higher skill set. But, why? Do I really need to push myself to the limits and beyond? Here, the life is good. I get it, the market is not great. Sometimes we have things that could be better and people are happy with having the middle. But I see that as an opportunity. If everyone is reaching 6, I can do the 8 and still have a good life. While in other countries I see people pushing, especially in America. In Europe we are overall more fine. I had opportunities to go to America or Canada and I don't think I need that much. (Markus)

Additionally, participants highlighted Malta's increasingly diverse population as beneficial to their sense of integration and belonging. Beside getting immersed in different backgrounds and cultures, the presence of numerous nationalities alleviated the pressure on migrants to fully assimilate into local customs and traditions. Leo explained:

> The good thing, that there are so many foreigners that you can completely ignore the traditions, their customs. I don't like many traditions… I don't like their customs [...] the fact that, probably more than one quarter of the population is foreign allow you to live in a society which is more multicultural […] the traditions aren't that strict, some of them may continue to follow, but you don't feel it. (Leo)

This result offers a novel perspective for working migrants' sense of integration in host countries, especially in those countries that are pervasively and increasingly becoming diverse.

Safety and accessibility. Participants also considered Malta to be a safe country to live in compared to other countries. This sense of safety allowed them to move freely and confidently around the island—whether going for a run, walking home late at night, or simply exploring new areas. For many, this freedom appeared to foster a strong sense of wellbeing. As one participant shared, feeling physically safe helped them feel more at ease and more in control of their daily life. However, Emrah noted that, while Malta still felt generally safe, there had been changes over time, "Life is comfortable and safe here, actually five years ago it was safer than now".

In addition to physical safety, participants also appreciated the accessibility that came with living in an EU country. Malta's membership in the European Union and the Schengen Area made travel across Europe possible for many working migrants—often for the first time in their lives. Laura spoke about the impact this had on her personal development, "It was something that, not even back in my country I imagined it was going to be possible. I used to be like, 'oh, it could be so nice to travel around the world'. And so, I did it".

Malta, being an island country, appears to support participants' wellbeing by providing access to the sea and relatively warm weather compared to its European counterparts. To some participants, this is one of the reasons why they choose to stay in the country despite the presence

of other challenges. They expressed how walking outside or going to the sea helps relieve their stress and improves their mental health.

Structural Support. Participants recognised Malta's structural support in terms of having myriads of job opportunities, having access to public healthcare and mental health resources, and the presence of integration programs. The abundance of job opportunities provides working migrants to acquire a job that they feel secure and happy about. Isabel expressed, "I got to know that Malta is actually bigger than I thought. There are actually lots of opportunities compared to my home country". This sense of opportunity appeared to support both professional and financial thriving.

Access to public healthcare and mental health resources was also highlighted as essential to wellbeing. Several participants shared experiences where either they or their loved ones had accessed these services free of charge. For many, this was a considerable improvement compared to the situation in their countries of origin, where such services might be expensive or inaccessible.

Finally, participants found integration programs such as the iBelong program beneficial to their sense of belonging and integration. Several participants joined this program to learn about Maltese culture and learn the language. As Markus stated, "The iBelong project is amazing. They give you amazing background on culture, amazing background on the language". Arlo also brought up the Lifelong Learning programmes which offer various skill and language courses which are also accessible to working migrants. Taken together, these structural supports—employment opportunities, accessible healthcare, and integration-focused education—appeared to provide a foundation that enabled many participants' thriving experiences.

Subtheme 4.2: Malta's anti-thriving elements. Participants also reported several barriers to thriving in Malta, including structural obstacles, social tensions, and environmental or operational constraints. These elements were experienced as sources of stress, limitation, and disconnection, and, for some, contributed to thoughts of leaving the country.

Structural barriers. Participants described a range of structural barriers that impeded their ability to thrive in Malta. These included bureaucratic laws and procedures, housing problems, and nationality-based limitations. Bureaucratic procedures, particularly those related to residence permits under Identità, were frequently cited as sources of stress. Participants reported issues such as unresponsiveness, prolonged processing times, and inconsistent or unclear requirements. These challenges affected both TCNs and EU nationals. For example, Vikas, an EU national, shared:

> I had to go to Identita Malta to get my card. I didn't get a letter in five months. I went to ask them, went through all the procedures, we tried to be nice. They told me they already sent me the letter. Why didn't I get it? And that's it, no notification, it is what it is. (Vikas)

Housing and rental conditions were also widely reported as an apparent barrier. Participants expressed concern over the rising cost of rent, often describing it as unaffordable relative to their income. Arlo shared that half of his salary goes to rent, "I cannot sustain myself with this salary, especially with rent. I think this is the most challenging part about Malta". Riko expressed how he underestimated the cost of moving to Malta as he was not aware of the amount renters have to pay to secure an apartment, "You have to pay, first a deposit, and then the agent's fee, which was new to me". Beyond affordability, some participants experienced discrimination from landlords or agents, particularly those from African countries. In terms of purchasing

property, concerns were raised about access to housing for both migrants and Maltese citizens. Isabel remarked:

> I don't think this is a fair price, not only for expats but also for Maltese. What if their children want to have their own house? It's becoming really, really difficult even for a local to secure their own housing, so I don't think this is helpful. (Isabel)

For third-country nationals, legal restrictions linked to their residency status were particularly challenging. Since TCN's right to live in Malta is solely based on their work status, they face insurmountable stress when a certain aspect of their job gets threatened or becomes uncertain. Participants explained that leaving a toxic workplace, for instance, was not a viable option unless another job had already been secured. In other circumstances, when they get fired or made redundant, the ten-day grace period is usually not enough for them to find a job and have their employer submit a new application to Identità. Frida shared her experience during a period of redundancy:

> Months before it was announced that we were made redundant, my husband was actually very, very sad and frustrated with his job to the point that he would get really, really mentally down for it. So, we planned that he would quit his job and find something better, find something more suitable. And basically, they then announced that we were made redundant. And then it turned out that we were actually out of work during the same period of time. Which is obviously, everything is hitting you at once. Losing a job is difficult on its own, but when both of you lose a job as third country nationals in Malta, that is a whole other story. (Frida)

Such circumstances place migrants in a highly vulnerable position and are perceived to pose serious risks to their wellbeing. These structural constraints were described as hindering their ability to thrive and potentially contributing to experiences of decline or stagnation.

Social tensions. Participants described several social dynamics that hindered their capacity to thrive in Malta. These included Malta's social connection game, discrimination towards foreigners, and transparency and trust issues towards local service providers. A number of participants referred to what they perceived as a "social connection game" in Malta—where progression, particularly in professional settings, was seen as dependent on personal contacts rather than merit. This dynamic appeared to be linked to feelings of exclusion, frustration, and demotivation. Vikas explained, "There's a certain limit that you reach in Malta when you're trying to thrive. Because after a certain level, everything is about contact. And then you have to play a social game that I'm not quite fond of". Such sentiments may discourage working migrants from seeking higher-level roles or advancing further in their careers, as they perceive the system to be opaque or exclusionary.

Participants also shared experiences of discrimination, a kind of social tension that impacted their wellbeing and sense of belongingness. Erik shared that, although most of the locals he encountered were warm and friendly, he still receives negative treatment from others, "I also met a lot of locals that were not so nice to me. Of course, I experienced being told to go back to my country. And I think that's not only me. I think a lot of people have experienced that".

Some participants shared how particular encounters with local authorities and service providers led them to feel uncertain or mistrustful. These accounts were often rooted in personal experiences of feeling misled or taken advantage of, especially in the context of being perceived

as a foreigner. Leo expressed that although the people are warm, some of them try to trick foreigners. Similarly, Garett observed, “I know about things happening. And people taking advantage of other people [...] depending from what country you are coming”. These experiences can lead migrants to become more cautious and less open when engaging with locals, potentially impeding social integration. Over time, such tensions may not only affect working migrants’ capacity to thrive, but may also influence broader community cohesion and wellbeing.

Environmental constraints. While participants appreciated Malta’s Mediterranean landscape and climate, many expressed frustrations with the island’s growing environmental challenges and overpopulation. A recurring concern was the visible presence of rubbish in public spaces, which Emrah, Isabel, and Garett described as disappointing and disheartening, especially given their initial expectations of a clean and scenic environment. Frida also shared her frustration with the lack of pedestrian-friendly infrastructure in certain areas, describing how some streets had poorly maintained pavements or none at all, making walking unsafe or unpleasant. She further reflected on the limited availability of green and public spaces where individuals and families could relax and connect with nature. Frida reasoned:

> I think that could be way better is the public spaces, the infrastructure as a whole. That definitely needs to be better, because I think a lot of people have mental health issues, obesity issues, serious health issues, because they're not spending enough time moving around. (Frida)

Participants described these environmental constraints as everyday stressors that undermined their sense of wellbeing and comfort, particularly for those who associated outdoor activity with coping and self-care.

Summary of the qualitative research results

The qualitative research phase provided a conceptual framework for working migrant thriving. A definition was developed along with the four phases of thriving: *surviving, stagnating and declining, thriving,* and *settling*. It was also established that thriving can manifest in five domains: professional, financial, personal, relational, and wellbeing thriving. These phases and domains are not static nor linear stages but are fluid and multi-directional, which reflects the complexity of working migrant experiences. Finally, this section addressed two overarching themes explaining how working migrants in Malta thrive. One theme encompasses individual capitals—personal, action-driven, and value-driven—while the other highlights Malta's pro-thriving elements, including cultural foundations, safety and accessibility, and structural support. It also identified the barriers to thriving as Malta's anti-thriving elements: structural barriers, social tensions, and environmental and operational constraints.

Instrument Development

The instrument development phase represents a critical bridge between the qualitative and quantitative components of this mixed-methods study by ensuring that the final survey tool was empirically grounded in participants' lived experiences while also suitable for statistical examination. This section discusses the instrument-making process and the structure of the survey instrument; and it also answers the first mixed methods research question: *To what extent can the thriving experiences and associated factors identified in the qualitative phase be measured across the broader working migrant population?*

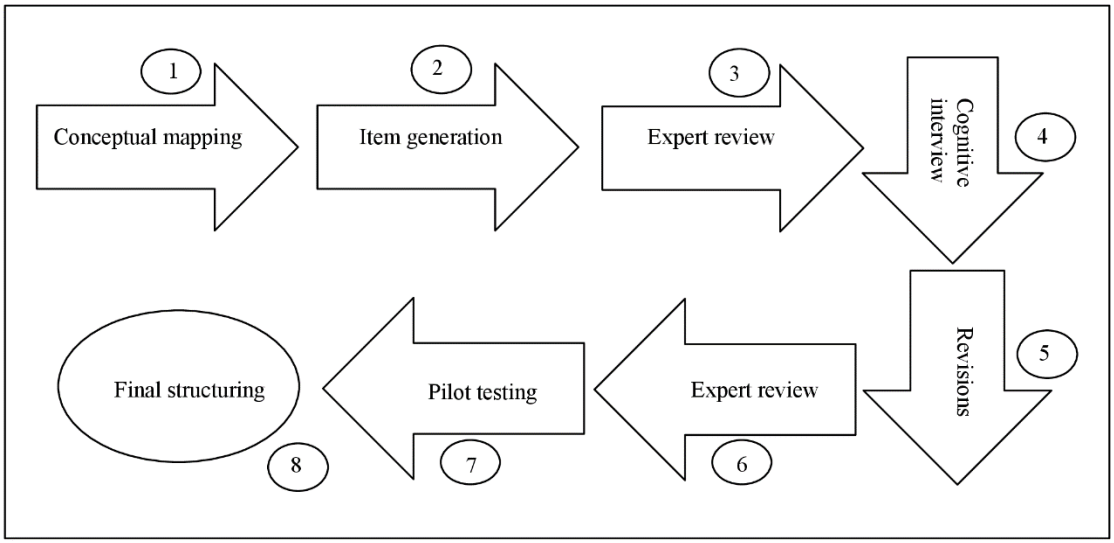
Overview of the instrument development process

Figure 3 illustrates the overview of the instrument development process: (1) conceptual mapping; (2) item generation; (3) first expert validation; (4) cognitive interviewing; (5)

revisions; (6) second expert validation; (7) pilot testing; and (8) final structuring. Since these steps were already discussed in the previous chapter, this section focuses on the crucial steps that led to the formation of the instrument—conceptual mapping, item generation, and pilot testing.

Figure 3

Overview of the Instrument Development Process



Conceptual mapping. The theoretical framework developed in the qualitative analysis was thoroughly reviewed to map the relevant constructs and variables for the quantitative study. The quantitative research questions formulated also guided the conceptualisation and operationalisation of the concepts developed. This process indicated that the quantitative instrument must include: (1) a scale to measure the level of thriving across all domains; (2) items that could indicate which thriving phase (stagnating/declining, surviving, thriving, settling) migrants experience within each domain; (3) items to assess working migrants' individual capitals (personal, action-driven, and value-driven capitals); and (4) items that explore migrants' experiences of the contextual factors identified (Malta's pro-thriving and anti-thriving elements).

In addition to the qualitative findings, relevant academic literature and context-specific issues concerning migrants in Malta were reviewed. This led to the inclusion of a section addressing lifestyle factors and migration-related decisions. Items in this section explored aspects such as sick absences, intention to remain in Malta long-term, and reasons for considering departure. These additions aimed not only to enable a broader exploration of migrant experiences but also to generate practical inferences and actionable insights for stakeholders to address working migrant-related issues discussed earlier.

Item generation. Guided by the conceptual map, draft survey items were developed. For the thriving scale, five items were originally created for each thriving domain, inspired by the experiences and characteristics participants associated with each domain during the interviews. For example, the professional thriving items included dimensions such as liking one's job, perceived career progression, and the opportunity to utilise one's skills. Efforts were made to preserve participants' language and perspectives, with several items directly derived from verbatim quotes. For instance, the statement "*I have extra money to save*" was adapted from participants' narratives and included under the financial thriving scale. To enhance readability and respondent comprehension, most of the participant responses were transformed into simpler statements. For example, the item for self-care read, "*I take care of myself regularly*". This item was developed after reviewing numerous accounts pertaining to self-care practices.

To ensure both theoretical rigour and contextual relevance, previously validated instruments—such as the Comprehensive Inventory of Thriving (2014), Diener's Flourishing Scale (2010), and Ryff's Psychological Wellbeing Scale (1989)—were consulted during item development. These measures are grounded in established theories of wellbeing and have demonstrated strong psychometric properties across diverse populations. Selected items were

rephrased into simplified language to minimise potential language barriers, given that most working migrants are non-native English speakers.

During this stage, a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree” was selected for item measurement. This scale was chosen for its balance between offering sufficient response variability and minimising respondent burden (Joshi et al., 2015). It enables participants to express varying degrees of agreement without the complexity or fatigue often associated with longer response formats. Additionally, the 5-point scale is widely adopted in psychological and social science research, which enhances comparability with existing studies and supports the reliability and validity of the instrument.

In addition to the measurable Likert-scale items, five categorical items were developed to identify the specific thriving phase migrants experience within each domain. Each item prompts respondents to select the option that best reflects their current situation. For example, the professional domain item asks, “How would you describe your career development in Malta?” with the following response options: (1) *I am taking any job just to survive* (surviving); (2) *I feel stuck in my career and I am not improving* (stagnating); (3) *I am learning new skills and working toward better opportunities* (thriving); and (4) *I have reached a level I am happy with and want to maintain* (settling). These items and response categories were carefully reviewed to ensure that they accurately reflect the theoretical definitions and conceptual meanings underlying each thriving phase.

First expert validation. The initial set of items was reviewed by an expert in psychology and research methodology. This stage focused on evaluating each item's clarity, relevance to the concept of migrant thriving, and cultural appropriateness for the target population. Feedback from this review guided early improvements to item wording and structure

Cognitive interviewing. Following expert input, cognitive interviews were conducted with five working migrants to explore how they understood and interpreted the draft items. This step provided insight into how participants processed each question, revealing areas of ambiguity, misinterpretation, or language complexity. Their feedback was essential for identifying practical and linguistic issues that may not have been evident during expert review.

Revisions. Based on feedback from the cognitive interviews, several items were revised to enhance clarity and ensure closer alignment with participants' lived experiences. Revisions focused on simplifying language, improving phrasing, and ensuring that each item captured the intended meaning without bias or confusion.

Second expert validation. The revised items were then reviewed again by another expert to assess the quality of the modifications and to confirm the instrument's readiness for pilot testing. This second round of validation helped ensure that the refined items met content validity standards and reflected both theoretical rigour and real-world applicability.

Pilot testing. To assess the instrument's clarity, internal consistency, and technical performance, a pilot test was conducted with 11 respondents from the target population. These participants completed the full online survey on Google Forms. Informal feedback suggested that the survey was clear and accessible, and the overall structure was well-received.

Reliability analysis using Cronbach's alpha indicated acceptable to excellent internal consistency across the thriving domains. Based on these results, one item per domain was carefully reviewed and removed to optimise both internal consistency and conceptual alignment. The final reliability coefficients in the pilot study after removing one item were as follows: professional thriving ($\alpha = .829$), financial thriving ($\alpha = .927$), personal thriving ($\alpha = .772$), relational thriving ($\alpha = .847$), and wellbeing ($\alpha = .830$). The overall composite scale for thriving

demonstrated strong reliability (α = .859). These results can only be considered as indications, given the very small size of the sample. Due to the same limitation, exploratory factor analysis was not feasible at this stage. However, the reliability statistics provided preliminary evidence supporting the internal coherence of the instrument. Full SPSS outputs are included in Appendix P.

Survey Instrument Structure

The final survey instrument was carefully constructed to align with the study's conceptual framework. Its structure followed a sequential format, beginning with broad assessments of migrant thriving and progressing toward more specific constructs such as demographic information. A detailed outline of the full instrument, annotated with the qualitative concepts from which each item was derived, is provided in Appendix Q.

The first part focused on thriving phases, where participants selected one of four statements, each corresponding to a distinct thriving phase—surviving, stagnating/declining, settling, or thriving—that best described their current experience in Malta. This set of items set the context for understanding where participants positioned themselves along the thriving continuum.

The second section comprised the thriving scale, which included 23 items across the five domains of thriving—professional, financial, personal, relational, and psychological wellbeing—and including an overall thriving domain. The five original domains contain four items each, while the overall thriving consists of three. The inclusion of this overarching domain in the quantitative phase was a deliberate decision to provide a measure of participants' general sense of thriving. An example item reads "I made a life here [Malta] that I really like." These

composite items served as a useful summary indicator to complement the domain-specific scores.

The third part of the instrument focused on individual capitals—personal, action-driven, and value-driven—each represented by eight items. These scales were designed to measure psychological and behavioural capacities that could potentially serve as predictors of thriving. The items reflected constructs such as emotional regulation, adaptability, resilience, and self-care, all of which were grounded in the qualitative narratives.

The fourth section assessed contextual factors through two subscales: Malta's pro-thriving elements (eight items) and anti-thriving elements (six items). These were designed to measure participants' perceptions of the local environment, including supportive factors (e.g., access to integration programmes, multicultural openness) and structural barriers (e.g., housing difficulties, bureaucratic challenges). These subscales were informed directly by the qualitative themes.

The fifth section addressed lifestyle and migration decisions. Participants reported behaviours such as volunteering, remittance-sending, hobbies, absences, family presence in Malta, and intention to remain long-term. Additionally, participants answered open- and multiple-response questions regarding the most helpful factors in thriving, the biggest challenges, and the reasons they might leave Malta in the future. These responses were later thematised during data cleaning to facilitate quantitative analysis.

The final section gathered demographic information, including age, gender, nationality, education level, work sector, type of residence permit, and length of stay in Malta. These variables enabled subgroup analyses and helped contextualise patterns within the main outcomes.

In summary, the instrument development phase served as a vital bridge between the qualitative and quantitative parts of the study. It translated rich, real-life insights from working migrants into a structured survey that could be tested on a larger scale. Every section of the instrument was carefully designed to reflect the narratives and experiences gathered in the first phase of the study, while also ensuring it met research standards for clarity, reliability, and validity. This process helped integrate the qualitative and quantitative elements and provided a strong base for the statistical analyses that followed.

Quantitative Phase Results

This section presents the results of the quantitative phase of the study, organised according to the research questions. The analysis includes both descriptive and inferential statistics, which examines how working migrants in Malta score across the thriving domains, how thriving differs across groups, how lifestyle and migration decisions relate to thriving, and what predicts thriving. Finally, this section presents the factor analysis undertaken to confirm the structure of the instrument and the theoretical framework of thriving in general.

Levels of Thriving Across Domains

This section addresses the question*: How do working migrants score across the domains of thriving (professional, financial, personal, relational, wellbeing, and overall thriving)?* Table 6 presents the mean, standard deviation, and verbal interpretation for each domain.

Table 6

Thriving Scores by Domain

Domain	Mean (*SD*)	Verbal Interpretation
Professional Thriving	3.70 (0.74)	High
Financial Thriving	3.12 (0.89)	Moderate
Personal Thriving	3.81 (0.67)	High
Relational Thriving	3.98 (0.66)	High
Wellbeing Thriving	3.34 (0.75)	Moderate
Overall Thriving	3.40 (0.88)	Moderate

Table 6 presents the respondents' level of thriving across the six domains. The highest mean score was observed in the relational domain (M = 3.98, SD = 0.66), followed closely by personal domain (M = 3.81, SD = 0.67) and professional domain (M = 3.70, SD = 0.74). This suggests that the working migrants in the study generally experience positive perceptions and a sense of growth in their social relationships, personal development, and work-related fulfilment.

In contrast, respondents reported moderate scores in the financial domain (M = 3.12, SD = 0.89), wellbeing domain (M = 3.34, SD = 0.75), and overall thriving domain (M = 3.40, SD = 0.88), suggesting more ambivalent perceptions in these areas and highlighting the need for improvement.

Thriving Phases Distribution

This section addresses the research question: *How are working migrants distributed across the phases of thriving—stagnating/declining, surviving, thriving, and settling—in each life domain?*

Table 7

Distribution Across Thriving Phases by Domain

Domain	Stagnating/Declining	Surviving	Thriving	Settling
	n (%)	*n (%)*	*n (%)*	*n (%)*
Professional	70 (16.1%)	24 (5.5%)	240 (55)	102 (23.4)
Financial	20 (4.6%)	157 (36%)	208 (47.7)	51 (11.7)
Personal	61 (14%)	120 (27.5%)	178 (40.8)	77 (17.7)
Relational	32 (7.3%)	108 (24.8%)	186 (42.7)	110 (25.2)
Wellbeing	21 (4.8%)	147 (33%)	205 (47)	63 (14.4)

Table 7 presents how participants are distributed across the four identified thriving phases within each domain. A clear pattern emerges wherein around half the of respondents reported that they are thriving in all domains. Specifically, in the professional domain, over half of the respondents (55%) are in the thriving phase, indicating they are actively pursuing growth in their careers. A further 23.4% are settling, suggesting they are satisfied with their current professional status and do not feel the need for further change. However, 16.1% are stagnating or declining, signalling a worrying trend of professional regression or inability to cope, while 5.5% are merely surviving. These results highlight both a strong orientation toward professional growth and the presence of a vulnerable group needing targeted support.

In the financial domain, 47.7% of respondents report thriving, reflecting active efforts to improve their financial circumstances. However, a substantial proportion (36%) are in the surviving phase, meaning they are only just coping financially. The smaller proportions report being in the settling (11.7%) and stagnating/declining (4.6%) phases.

The personal domain presents a fairly optimistic picture, with 40.8% of respondents thriving and 17.7% settling, indicating that a majority are either actively engaging in personal growth or are content with their current level of development. Nevertheless, 27.5% are merely

surviving, and 14% are stagnating or declining, highlighting that a considerable segment of the respondents may be struggling with intrapersonal relationship and development.

In the relational domain, 42.7% are thriving, and 25.2% are settling, suggesting that most working migrants are either expanding their social connections or are content with the relationships they have established. Only 7.3% are in the stagnating/declining phase, indicating that social regression or disconnection is relatively uncommon. However, 24.8% are surviving, suggesting that social integration and lack of social support remains a challenge for a notable minority.

For the wellbeing domain, 47% are thriving, reflecting proactive efforts to enhance their mental and emotional health, while 14.4% are settling, indicating contentment with their current state of wellbeing. However, one-third (33%) are merely surviving, and 4.8% are in a state of stagnation or decline, indicating that while wellbeing is relatively strong for many, there remains a significant group requiring additional psychological or community support.

Group Differences in Thriving

This section answers the research question: *Are there significant differences in thriving scores based on demographic and occupational variables: gender, nationality, age, length of stay, job sector, job position, type of residence permit, and level of education?* Given the violation of normality assumptions (see Appendix R), the following analyses employed nonparametric statistical tests.

Table 8

Group Differences in Thriving Scores by Gender

Thriving Domain	*H*	*df*	*p*
Professional	1.20	3	.754
Financial	0.66	3	.882
Personal	3.64	3	.303
Relational	4.55	3	.208
Wellbeing	6.67	3	.083
Overall	2.00	3	.572

A Kruskal–Wallis H test was conducted to examine whether thriving scores differed significantly across gender groups (male, female, non-binary, and prefer not to say) within each of the six domains. The analysis revealed no statistically significant differences in thriving scores across any of the domains. These findings suggest that levels of thriving were comparable among participants of different gender identities.

Table 9.1

Group Differences in Thriving Scores by Nationality (EU vs TCNs)

Thriving Domain	Mean	SD	*p*
Professional	11,536	-2.77	.006**
Financial	11,040	-3.27	.001**
Personal	14,094	-2.80	.780
Relational	12,281	-2.08	.037*
Wellbeing	13,829	-0.53	.590
Overall	12,471	-1.86	.059

*Note: * p <0.05, ** p <0.01*

Table 9 shows the results of the Mann–Whitney U test comparing thriving scores between TCNs and EU nationals across six domains. Statistically significant differences were observed in three areas: professional domain (U = 11,536, p = .006), financial domain (U = 11,040, p = .001), and relational domain (U = 12,281, p = .037).

Table 9.2

Mean Differences in Thriving Scores by Nationality (EU vs Non-EU or TCNs)

Thriving Domain	Nationality	N	Mean	SD	*p*
Professional	Non-EU	355	3.66	.730	.006**
	EU	81	3.90	.770	
Financial	Non-EU	355	3.06	.855	.001**
	EU	81	3.40	.997	
Relational	Non-EU	355	3.95	.665	.037*
	EU	81	4.14	.636	

*Note: * p <0.05, ** p <0.01*

Descriptive statistics revealed the mean differences in thriving scores by nationality, with EU participants consistently reported higher scores than their Non-EU or TCN counterparts in the professional, financial, and relational domains. No significant differences were found in personal, wellbeing, or overall thriving domains. These findings suggest that EU membership status may be associate with advantages in specific areas of thriving, particularly those related to work, financial stability, and social relationships.

Table 10.1

Group Differences in Thriving Scores by Age Categories

Thriving Domain	*H*	*df*	*p*
Professional	3.43	2	.180
Financial	1.38	2	.503
Personal	3.80	2	.150
Relational	0.62	2	.734
Wellbeing	13.41	2	.001**
Overall	2.39	2	.303

*Note: ** p <0.01*

A Kruskal–Wallis test was conducted to examine whether thriving scores varied significantly across the three age categories: young adulthood (18–31), established adulthood (32–41), and mid- to late adulthood (42+ years). Of all thriving domains, only the wellbeing domain showed a statistically significant difference ($H = 13.41$, $p = .001$).

Table 10.2

Mean Differences in Thriving Scores by Age Categories

Thriving Domain	Age	N	Mean	SD	*p*
Wellbeing	18-31 years (young adulthood)	119	3.22	.739	.001**
	32-41 years (established adulthood)	173	3.27	.756	
	42+ years (mid- to late adulthood)	144	3.51	.720	

*Note: ** p <0.01*

Further analysis indicated that participants in mid- to late adulthood (42+ years) reported higher wellbeing thriving scores (M = 3.51, SD = 0.72) compared to those in established adulthood (32–41 years; M = 3.27, SD = 0.76) and young adulthood (18–31 years; M = 3.22, SD = 0.74). This finding suggests that individuals in mid- to late adulthood experience greater wellbeing-related thriving than their younger counterparts.

Table 11

Group Differences in Thriving Scores by Length of Stay

Thriving Domain	*H*	*df*	*p*
Professional	2.47	3	.410
Financial	2.60	3	.458
Personal	0.59	3	.900
Relational	10.2	3	.796
Wellbeing	2.21	3	.529
Overall	2.54	3	.468

Length of stay in Malta was grouped into four categories: 0–2 years, 3–5 years, 6–9 years, and 10 or more years. Results from the Kruskal–Wallis H test indicated no statistically significant differences in thriving across any of the six domains. This suggests that the duration of residence in Malta does not significantly influence working migrants' levels of thriving.

Table 12.1

Group Differences in Thriving Scores by Job Sector

Thriving Domain	*H*	*df*	*p*
Professional	17.23	14	.244
Financial	27.09	14	.019*
Personal	12.72	14	.548
Relational	13.10	14	.518
Wellbeing	16.52	14	.283
Overall	30.42	14	.007**

*Note: * p <0.05, ** p <0.01*

Table 12.1 presents group differences in thriving scores across job sectors. Respondents reported working in a diverse range of industries, which were grouped into 14 sectors based on standard employment categories (see Table 12.2 for the full list). The Kruskal–Wallis H test revealed statistically significant differences in financial thriving ($H = 27.09$, $p = .019$) and overall thriving ($H = 30.42$, $p = .007$) across job sectors, while differences in the professional, personal, relational, and wellbeing domains were not statistically significant.

Table 12.2

Mean Differences in Thriving Scores by Job Sector

Thriving Domain	Job Sector	N	Mean	SD	*p*
Financial	Construction	15	3.37	.994	.019*
	Manufacturing	48	3.54	.846	
	Accommodation & Food Services	31	3.49	.634	
	Wholesale & Retail Trade	13	3.62	.845	
	Transportation & Storage	35	3.84	.735	
	Administrative and Support Services	89	3.78	.661	
	Health and Social Work	18	3.74	.739	
	Education	27	3.83	.854	
	Information & Communication	23	3.74	.720	
	Financial & Insurance Activities	23	3.82	.719	
	Professional, Scientific & Technical Activities	9	3.92	.695	
	Public Administration & Defence	19	3.96	.662	
	Arts, Entertainment & Recreation	10	3.73	.721	
	Other services	42	3.77	.711	
Overall	Construction	15	3.28	1.075	.007**
	Manufacturing	34	3.23	.708	
	Accommodation & Food Services	48	3.20	.937	
	Wholesale & Retail Trade	31	3.00	.769	
	Transportation & Storage	13	3.31	.615	
	Administrative and Support Services	35	3.26	.983	
	Health and Social Work	89	3.52	.880	
	Education	18	3.70	.807	
	Information & Communication	27	3.68	.854	
	Financial & Insurance Activities	23	3.13	.919	
	Professional, Scientific & Technical Activities	23	3.36	.963	
	Public Administration & Defence	9	3.89	.471	
	Arts, Entertainment & Recreation	19	3.47	.696	
	Other services	10	3.23	1.155	

*Note: * p <0.05, ** p <0.01*

As shown in Table 10.2, higher financial thriving scores were observed among those who are working in the public administration (*M* = 3.96, *SD* = .662), professional and technical sectors (*M* = 3.92, *SD* = .695), and transportation (*M* = 3.84, *SD* = .735). In contrast, the lowest scores were found among those working in construction ((*M* = 3.37, *SD* = .994) and accommodation and food services. (*M* = 3.49, *SD* = .634). When it comes to overall thriving, working migrants in public administration (*M* = 3.89, *SD* = .471), education (*M* = 3.70, *SD* =

.087), and information and communication (M = 3.68, SD = .854) reported the highest scores. Comparatively lower scores were observed in wholesale and retail trade (M = 3.00, SD = .769), financial and insurance activities (M = 3.13, SD = .919), and accommodation and food services (M = 3.20, SD = .937). These findings suggest that job sector plays a meaningful role in the economic and overall thriving experiences of working migrants in Malta.

Table 13.1

Group Differences in Thriving Scores by Job Position

Thriving Domain	*H*	*df*	*p*
Professional	25.01	7	< .001**
Financial	26.80	7	< .001**
Personal	3.62	7	.882
Relational	6.09	7	.529
Wellbeing	6.26	7	.510
Overall	10.51	7	.161

*Note: ** p <0.01*

The Kruskal–Wallis H test revealed significant differences in professional thriving (H = 25.01, p < .001) and financial thriving (H = 26.80, p < .001) across job positions, while no significant differences emerged in personal, relational, wellbeing, or overall thriving domains. Descriptive statistics were consulted to further investigate these differences.

Table 13.2

Mean Differences in Thriving Scores by Job Position

Thriving Domain	Job Sector	N	Mean	SD	*p*
Professional	Managers	54	3.73	.863	< .001**
	Professionals	136	3.89	.681	
	Technicians and Associate Professionals	15	3.70	.613	
	Clerical Support Workers	63	3.76	.665	
	Service and Sale Workers	89	3.52	.759	
	Plant and Machine Operators, and Assemblers	30	3.42	.643	
	Elementary Occupations	28	3.43	.807	
	Other positions	21	3.83	.775	
Financial	Managers	54	3.33	.969	< .001**
	Professionals	136	3.35	.916	
	Technicians and Associate Professionals	15	2.80	.959	
	Clerical Support Workers	63	2.92	.820	
	Service and Sale Workers	89	2.87	.799	
	Plant and Machine Operators, and Assemblers	30	3.04	.707	
	Elementary Occupations	28	3.06	.893	
	Other positions	21	3.29	.891	

*Note: ** p <0.01*

Table 13.2 demonstrates the mean differences in the professional and financial thriving scores considering job position. For professional thriving, significantly higher scores were found among professionals or those who work as doctors, pharmacists, engineers, lawyers, IT specialists, developers, marketing specialists, or content writers (*M* = 3.89, *SD* = .681). Higher scores were also found among those in other positions, including self-employed, freelancers and craft workers (*M* = 3.83, *SD* = .775), and those who work as clerical support workers (*M* = 3.76, *SD* = .665). Relatively low scores were found among plant and machine operators (*M* = 3.42, *SD* = .634) and from elementary occupations or those who work as cleaners, laborers, and packers (*M* = 3.43, *SD* = .807). When it comes to financial thriving, professionals (*M* = 3.35, *SD* = .916) and managers (*M* = 3.33, *SD* = .969) scored the highest; whereas service and sale workers (*M* = 2.87, *SD* = .799) and technicians and associate professionals, or those who work as medical technicians or IT support, scored the lowest (*M* = 2.80, *SD* = .959).

Table 14.1

Group Differences in Thriving Scores by Type of Residence Permit

Thriving Domain	*H*	*df*	*p*
Professional	15.57	7	.029*
Financial	20.99	7	.004**
Personal	1.84	7	.968
Relational	12.51	7	.085
Wellbeing	5.60	7	.587
Overall	10.95	7	.141

*Note: * p <0.05, ** p <0.01*

A Kruskal–Wallis H test was conducted to determine whether statistically significant differences existed in thriving scores across different types of residence permits. Results revealed significant group differences in both professional thriving ($H = 15.57$, $p = .029$), and financial thriving, ($H = 20.99$, $p = .004$), while no significant differences were found in personal, relational, wellbeing, or overall thriving domains.

Table 14.2

Mean Differences in Thriving Scores by Type of Residence Permit

Thriving Domain	Job Sector	N	Mean	SD	*p*
Professional	Single Permit	268	3.64	.730	.029*
	EU/EEA/Swiss Residence	72	3.85	.740	
	EU Family Member	30	3.68	.685	
	Highly Skilled Employment Permits	8	4.16	.625	
	Long-Term Residence Permit	25	3.53	.869	
	Foreign-born who acquired Maltese citizenship	15	4.07	.554	
	Humanitarian-Type of work permit	9	3.89	.501	
	Other types of permits	9	3.83	1.111	
Financial	Single Permit	268	3.03	.832	.004**
	EU/EEA/Swiss Residence	72	3.40	.992	
	EU Family Member	30	3.29	.980	
	Highly Skilled Employment Permits	8	3.56	.563	
	Long-Term Residence Permit	25	2.95	.951	
	Foreign-born who acquired Maltese citizenship	15	3.43	.908	
	Humanitarian-Type of work permit	9	2.56	.845	
	Other types of permits	9	3.31	.890	

*Note: * p <0.05, ** p <0.01*

Table 14 illustrates the mean differences in professional and financial thriving considering the type of residence permit. Those with highly skilled employment permits, or holders of the Specialist Employee Initiative Permit, Key Employee Initiative (KEI), and the EU Blue Card – Single Permit for Highly Qualified Employment (*M* = 4.16, *SD* = .625), and foreign-born individuals who later on acquired Maltese citizenship (*M* = 4.07, *SD* = .554) scored the highest in both professional and financial thriving.

It is also important to note that those who hold a humanitarian-type of work permit, or the type of work permit granted towards refugees and asylum seekers, scored comparatively high among others in the professional domain. In contrast, working migrants who hold a long-term residence permit (*M* = 3.53, *SD* = 869) and those with humanitarian-type of work permit (*M* = 3.03, *SD* = 3.53), scored the lowest in the financial domains of thriving respectively.

Table 15

Group Differences in Thriving Scores by Level of Education (Pre- and Post-Migration)

	Thriving Domain	*H*	*df*	*p*
Pre-migration	Professional	0.92	5	.969
	Financial	10.4	5	.064
	Personal	3.46	5	.630
	Relational	4.95	5	.422
	Wellbeing	2.81	5	.730
	Overall	3.23	5	.664
Post-migration	Professional	8.25	5	.143
	Financial	1.94	5	.858
	Personal	6.08	5	.299
	Relational	6.35	5	.274
	Wellbeing	5.61	5	.346
	Overall	8.41	5	.135

Kruskal–Wallis tests were used to assess whether thriving scores differed significantly according to working migrants' levels of education attained before and after migration. As shown in Table 15, no statistically significant group differences were found across any of the six

thriving domains for either pre-migration education ($p > .05$) or post-migration education ($p > .05$). These findings suggest that, within this sample, educational attainment—whether obtained prior to or following migration—did not significantly influence working migrants' experiences of professional, financial, personal, relational, wellbeing, or overall thriving.

Taken together, the analyses of group differences revealed that several demographic characteristics influenced how working migrants experienced different domains of thriving. Notably, significant differences emerged based on nationality, age, job sector, job position, and type of residence permit—particularly in professional, financial, and relational domains. In these areas, TCNs, younger age groups, and those employed in lower-ranking sectors or more precarious job categories generally reported lower levels of thriving. In contrast, no significant differences were found across any of the thriving domain scores based on gender, length of stay, or level of education (both pre- and post-migration).

Thriving and Lifestyle Factors

This section answers the research question: *To what extent are lifestyle factors and migration decisions—sending remittances, engaging in hobbies, family presence in Malta, volunteering, intention to stay long-term, and duration of absences—associated with levels of thriving across domains?*

Table 16

Correlations Table between Thriving and Lifestyle Factors and Migration Decisions

Variable	Professional	Financial	Personal	Relational	Wellbeing	Overall
1. Professional	–					
2. Financial	.448**	–				
3. Personal	.551**	.438**	–			
4. Relational	.363**	.351**	.557**	–		
5. Wellbeing	.440**	.508**	.592**	.417**	–	
6. Overall	.567**	.602**	.635**	.501**	.644**	–
7. Sending money abroad	-.015	-.075	.072	-.091	.061	-.015
8. Volunteering	.039	.009	.126**	.158**	.083	.097*
9. Intention to stay long-term	.230**	.147**	.229**	.118*	.110*	.353**
10. Sick absences	-.133**	-.117	-.097*	-.045	-.238**	-.118*
11. Other absences	-.117**	-.076	-.058	-.059	-.128**	-.073
12. Hobbies and interests	.225**	.286**	.266**	.277**	.270**	.281**
13. Having a family in Malta	-.019	.048	-.033	.043	-.002	.028

*Note: * p <0.05, ** p <0.01*

To explore the associations between lifestyle factors, migration decision, and working migrant thriving, a series of Spearman's rho correlations were conducted. As shown in Table 16, significant associations were found between these variables and various thriving domains. Intention to remain in Malta showed small but consistent positive correlations with all six thriving domains, including overall thriving (r = .11 to .35, p < .05 to p < .001), indicating that migrants with stronger intentions to stay long-term tend to report moderately higher levels of thriving. Similarly, engaging in hobbies and interests demonstrated small-to-moderate positive correlations with all domains: professional (r = .23), financial (r = .29), personal (r = .27), relational (r = .28), wellbeing (r = .270), and overall thriving (r = .28), all significant at p < .001. These findings suggest a meaningful relationship between active personal engagement and thriving outcomes.

Volunteering was weakly but significantly related to personal (r = .13, p = .008) and relational (r = .16, p = < .001) thriving, suggesting only a modest association. Conversely, sick absences were negatively and weakly correlated with professional (r = –.13), financial (r = .12), personal (r = .10), wellbeing (r = –.24), and overall thriving (r = –.12), indicating that poorer

health or increased medical leave is modestly associated with diminished thriving. Other types of absences were also negatively associated with professional ($r = –.12$, $p = .015$) and wellbeing thriving ($r = –.13$, $p = .007$). Interestingly, neither sending remittances nor having family in Malta showed significant associations with any thriving domains. These findings highlight that psychosocial and future-oriented factors may play a more influential role in shaping the working migrant thriving experience than structural or financial obligations alone.

Predictors of Thriving

This section addresses the research question: *To what extent do individual-level and contextual-level variables predict thriving among working migrants in Malta?* To identify the key predictors of thriving, multiple linear regression analyses were conducted separately for each thriving domain. Prior to running the models, relevant assumptions—linearity, normality, homoscedasticity, and multicollinearity—were examined. Visual inspection of histograms, scatterplots, and normal probability plots indicated that these assumptions were sufficiently met to proceed with standard multiple linear regression. The models included both individual-level factors (i.e., personal, action-driven, and value-driven capitals) and contextual-level factors (i.e., Malta's pro- and anti-thriving elements).

Table 17

Regression Analysis: Predictors of Professional Thriving

Predictor	B	Std. Error	*p*	Interpretation
Individual				
Industriousness	.168	.054	.002	Positive predictor
Valuing challenging work	.134	.043	.002	Positive predictor
Gratified contentment	.119	.055	.033	Positive predictor
Drive	.111	.038	.003	Positive predictor
Cultural adaptability	-.085	.031	.007	Negative predictor
Managing expectations	-.082	.034	.016	Negative predictor
Flexibility to Start at Entry-Level Jobs	-.082	.036	.023	Negative predictor
Faith	-.079	.031	.012	Negative predictor
Contextual				
Access to Jobs and Support Services	.077	.036	.031	Positive predictor
Social connection ladder	-.064	.030	.026	Negative predictor

A multiple linear regression was conducted to examine which individual and contextual factors predict professional thriving. The overall model was statistically significant, accounting for approximately 47% of the variance ($R^2 = .47$, $p<.001$). Several predictors emerged as significant, though all demonstrated small effect sizes based on their standardised beta weights. Among individual characteristics, industriousness ($\beta = .17$, $p = .002$), drive ($\beta =.11$, $p = .003$), valuing challenging work ($\beta = .13$, $p = .002$), and gratified contentment ($\beta = .12$, $p = .033$) positively predicted professional thriving, suggesting that individuals who scored higher on these traits tended to thrive more in professional contexts. At the contextual level, access to jobs and support services ($\beta =.08$, $p = .031$) also emerged as a positive predictor.

Conversely, some predictors were negatively associated with professional thriving. These included cultural adaptability ($\beta = -.09$, $p = .007$), managing expectations ($\beta = -.08$, $p = .016$), flexibility to start at entry-level jobs ($\beta = -.08$, $p = .023$), faith ($\beta = - .08$, $p = .012$), and the social connection ladder ($\beta = -.06$, $p = .002$). These findings suggest that, within this sample,

these individual traits and contextual factors are linked with diminished working migrants' experiences of professional thriving.

Table 18

Regression Analysis: Predictors of Financial Thriving

Predictor	B	Std. Error	*p*	Interpretation
Individual				
Dynamic goal setting	.121	.059	.042	Positive predictor
Self-care	.103	.048	.033	Positive predictor
Drive	.100	.045	.027	Positive predictor
Cultural adaptability	-.110	.037	.003	Negative predictor
Contextual				
Work-life balance	.155	.043	< .001	Positive predictor
Environmental pollution	.108	.041	.008	Positive predictor
Cultural diversification	.094	.046	.041	Positive predictor
Access to jobs and support services	.088	.042	.038	Positive predictor
Lack of public area access	.073	.037	.047	Positive predictor
Rental and housing costs	-.245	.047	< .001	Negative predictor
English-speaking culture	-.117	.054	.029	Negative predictor
Social connection ladder	-.085	.036	.018	Negative predictor

The result of the multiple linear regression examining the predictors of financial thriving showed a statistically significant model, accounting for 48% of the variance in financial thriving scores ($R^2 = .48$, $p < .001$), indicating a large effect size. Among the individual-level factors, several variables were significant. Cultural adaptability emerged as a negative predictor ($\beta = –.11$, $p = .003$), whereas dynamic goal setting ($\beta = .12$, $p = .042$), self-care ($\beta = .10$, $p = .033$), and drive ($\beta = .10$, $p = .027$) were positive predictors. These findings suggest that setting goals, practising self-care, and maintaining motivation are linked to enhanced financial thriving among working migrants, whereas higher cultural adaptability, in this context, may be associated with reduced financial thriving.

At the contextual level, several positive predictors were identified, including work-life balance ($\beta = .16$, $p < .001$), cultural diversification ($\beta = .09$, $p = .041$), and access to jobs and

support services (β = .09, p = .038). Interestingly, environmental pollution (β = .11, p = .008) and lack of public area access (β = .07, p = .047) appeared to be a positive predictor of financial thriving as well, which warrants further investigation. In contrast, negative predictors of financial thriving included the English-speaking culture (β = –.12, p = .029) and social connection ladder (β = –.09, p = .018). As expected, rental and housing costs emerged as the strongest negative predictor of financial thriving (β = –.25, p < .001).

Table 19

Regression Analysis: Predictors of Personal Thriving

Predictor	B	Std. Error	*p*	Interpretation
Individual				
Assertiveness	.133	.036	< .001	Positive predictor
Pursuing joy	.110	.037	.003	Positive predictor
Valuing challenging work	.095	.034	.006	Positive predictor
Faith	.094	.025	< .001	Positive predictor
Self-care	.082	.032	.011	Positive predictor
Contextual				
Cultural friendliness	.084	.084	.005	Positive predictor
Work-life balance	.081	.029	.006	Positive predictor
Integration programs	.068	.028	.016	Positive predictor

The overall regression model tested for personal thriving was statistically significant (R^2 =.59, p < .001), explaining approximately 59% of the variance, indicating a large effect size. Eight predictors emerged as significant contributors to personal thriving. Among individual-level predictors, assertiveness (β = .13, p < .001), pursuing joy (β = .11, p = .003), valuing challenging work (β = .10, p = .006), faith (β = .09, p < .001), and self-care (β = .08, p = .011) were all significant positive predictors of personal thriving. In terms of contextual factors, cultural friendliness (β = .08, p = .005), work-life balance (β = .08, p = .006), and access to integration programs (β = .07, p = .016) also emerged as significant positive predictors of personal thriving.

Table 20

Regression Analysis: Predictors of Relational Thriving

Predictor	B	Std. Error	*p*	Interpretation
Individual				
Pursuing joy	.148	.047	.002	Positive predictor
Planning and organisation	.127	.047	.007	Positive predictor
Openness	.118	.046	.011	Positive predictor

The overall regression model for relational thriving was statistically significant, accounting for approximately 34% of the variance (R^2 =.34, $p < .001$). Among the predictors, three individual-level variables emerged as significant positive contributors: pursuing joy (β = .15, p = .002), planning and organisation (β = .13, p = .007), and openness (β = .19, p = .011). These findings suggest that greater openness to others and one's environment, effective planning and organisation, and actively seeking sources of happiness are associated with enhanced interpersonal relationships.

Table 21

Regression Analysis: Predictors of Wellbeing Thriving

Predictor	B	Std. Error	*p*	Interpretation
Individual				
Emotional intelligence	.164	.040	< .001	Positive predictor
Self-care	.139	.035	< .001	Positive predictor
Resilience	.131	.036	< .001	Positive predictor
Pursuing joy	.131	.131	.001	Positive predictor
Drive	.122	.032	< .001	Positive predictor
Planning and organisation	.090	.041	.028	Positive predictor
Cultural adaptability	-.062	.027	.022	Negative predictor
Contextual				
Work-life balance	.078	.031	.013	Positive predictor
Cultural friendliness	.065	.032	.041	Positive predictor
Challenges with administrative processes	-.051	.023	.047	Negative predictor

The overall regression model for relational thriving was statistically significant, accounting for approximately 34% of the variance (R^2 =.34, $p < .001$). Several individual-level predictors emerged as significant. Emotional intelligence ($\beta = .16$, $p < .001$), self-care ($\beta = .14$, $p< .001$), resilience ($\beta = .13$, $p < .001$), pursuing joy ($\beta = .13$, $p = .001$), drive ($\beta = .12$, $p < .001$), and planning and organisation ($\beta = .09$, $p = .028$) were all positive predictors of wellbeing thriving. In contrast, cultural adaptability emerged as a negative predictor ($\beta = –.06$, $p = .022$), which calls again for further exploration.

Among contextual variables, work-life balance ($\beta = .08$, $p = .013$) and cultural friendliness ($\beta = .07$, $p = .041$) were significant positive predictors, while challenges with administrative processes negatively predicted wellbeing thriving ($\beta = –.05$, $p = .047$). This finding suggests that difficulties with administrative procedures are linked to lower wellbeing among working migrants.

Table 22

Regression Analysis: Predictors of Overall Thriving

Predictor	B	Std. Error	*p*	Interpretation
Individual				
Gratified contentment	.177	.056	.002	Positive predictor
Assertiveness	.130	.045	.004	Positive predictor
Drive	.123	.038	.001	Positive predictor
Self-care	.116	.041	.005	Positive predictor
Dynamic goal setting	.105	.050	.037	Positive predictor
Cultural adaptability	-.105	.032	.001	Negative predictor
Contextual				
Cultural diversification	.137	.039	< .001	Positive predictor
Work-life balance	.134	.037	< .001	Positive predictor
Cultural friendliness	.103	.037	.006	Positive predictor

A multiple linear regression was conducted to examine which individual and contextual factors predict overall thriving. The overall model was statistically significant, accounting for

approximately 62% of the variance ($R^2 = .62$, $p < .001$). Nine predictors emerged as statistically significant. Among individual-level factors, gratified contentment ($\beta = .18$, $p = .002$), assertiveness ($\beta = .13$, $p = .004$), drive ($\beta = .12$, $p = .001$), self-care ($\beta = .12$, $p = .005$), dynamic goal setting ($\beta = .11$, $p = .037$), were all positive predictors of overall thriving, indicating that higher levels of these attributes are associated with greater experiences of overall thriving. Again, cultural adaptability ($\beta = -.11$, $p = .001$) was identified as a negative predictor. At the contextual level, cultural diversification ($\beta = .14$, $p < .001$), work-life balance ($\beta = .13$, $p < .001$), and cultural friendliness ($\beta = .10$, $p = .006$) were significant positive predictors.

Across all models predicting the various domains of thriving—professional, financial, personal, relational, wellbeing, and overall—both individual and contextual factors emerged as significant contributors, generally exhibiting small to moderate effect sizes. Despite these modest effect sizes, the findings provide a nuanced understanding of how individual dispositions, personal efforts, and cultural and structural supports jointly contribute to thriving.

Reported Barriers and Enablers

This section addresses the research question: *What are the most commonly reported barriers and enablers to thriving, and how do they relate to migrants' reasons for staying or leaving Malta?* Participants responded to a series of categorical survey questions, each permitting the selection of a single response from a predefined list, with an option to provide an alternative answer under "Other (please specify)." These write-in responses were subsequently thematised and categorised during data cleaning to enable inclusion in the quantitative analysis. For conciseness, only the top three responses for each question are presented in Table 23; the full set of responses can be found in Appendix S.

Table 23

Frequencies of Participants' Self-Reported Challenges and Support in Malta

Questions and Answers	*N*	*%*
Reason for leaving Malta		
Better job opportunities abroad	131	31.7
Challenges with Malta's administrative processes (e.g., work permit, skill pass, getting a permanent residency)	88	20.2
High cost of living	81	18.6
Biggest challenge faced in Malta		
Economic issues (low salary, high cost of living)	126	28.9
Bureaucracy (e.g., application processes, skill pass)	75	17.2
Housing (cost, processes, discrimination)	57	13.1
Biggest contributor to growth in Malta		
Good work-life balance	121	27.8
Friendly and welcoming culture	97	22.2
Safety and accessibility	73	16.7

Note: $N = 436$

Table 23 provides a focused snapshot of the primary challenges faced by the respondents; alongside the factors they consider most beneficial for their growth. Regarding reasons for leaving the country, the most frequently cited response was better job opportunities abroad (31.7%), followed by challenges with Malta's administrative processes such as obtaining work permits and residency (20.2%), and high cost of living (18.6%). Notably, some respondents indicated their intention, "to retire in my home country", reflecting that their stay in Malta is primarily work-related; while others stated, "not planning to leave Malta", signifying a lifelong commitment to settle in the country.

In terms of the biggest challenge faced in Malta, nearly a third of respondents (28.9%) identified economic issues—including low salaries and high living costs—as their primary concern. This was followed by frustrations with bureaucracy (17.2%) and housing-related problems (13.1%), reflecting the earlier reasons cited for leaving Malta. Additionally, other notable responses, though not included in the top three, included homesickness and social tensions such as discrimination. It is also noteworthy that some respondents specified their

answer and wrote “all of the above”, suggesting that multiple challenges are significantly experienced in their migrant lives.

Regarding factors that facilitated growth while living in Malta, the majority of respondents identified a good work-life balance (27.8%), followed by friendly and welcoming culture (22.2%), and safety and accessibility (16.7%). Other notable responses included integration programs and the presence of social and cultural networks including friends, partners, and supportive colleagues.

Ultimately, the patterns observed in these responses suggest that, although economic and bureaucratic challenges remain persistent barriers to thriving, factors such as social support, safety, and good work-life balance function as important enablers for working migrants in Malta.

Examining the Fit Between Quantitative Findings and the Qualitative Framework

This section addresses the final mixed methods research question: *How does the quantitative data support or refine the theoretical framework developed from the qualitative phase?* To investigate the relationship between the quantitative findings and the qualitative framework, exploratory factor analyses (EFA) were conducted on the core components of the framework: thriving domains, individual capitals, and contextual factors.

All EFAs yielded a significant Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity ($p < .001$), and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) values exceeded the recommended threshold of .50, indicating sampling adequacy for factor analysis. Factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 were retained, guiding the identification of latent dimensions within each construct. To clarify the factor structure further, rotated component matrices using Varimax rotation were generated. These are presented in the following tables to illustrate the factor loadings.

Table 24

Exploratory Factor Analysis of Thriving Domains

Thriving Domain Items	1	2	3	4	5
Factor 1					
Per 1: I feel that I am improving as a person. [c]	**.677**	.195	.219	.343	-.050
Per 2: I am happy to see the changes in myself.	**.677**	.177	.270	.167	-.088
Well 3: I feel healthy emotionally and mentally.	**.647**	.281	.174	.114	.468
Per 3: I know my purpose in life.	**.628**	-.020	.308	.146	.196
Well 4: There is balance in my life.	**.602**	.340	.145	.232	.190
Well 2: I feel healthy physically.	**.599**	.295	.075	.072	.349
Per 4: I can succeed if I try my best. [a]	**.551**	.103	.237	.208	-.012
Factor 2					
Fin 2: I have extra money to save.	.236	**.847**	.153	.177	-.012
Fin 4: I have extra money to invest for the future.	.324	**.812**	.112	.084	-.010
Fin 1: I feel financially secure.	.267	**.794**	.112	.185	.032
Fin 3: I have problems paying for my expenses. *	-.115	**.682**	.123	.236	.339
Factor 3					
Rel 2: There are people I can trust to help me. [a]	.166	.192	**.822**	.104	.039
Rel 1: There are people who appreciate me as a person. [a]	.155	.136	**.784**	.196	.048
Rel 3: My relationships are supportive and make me happy. [b]	.233	.247	**.762**	.076	.067
Rel 4: I make an effort to build and keep relationships that matter to me.	.320	-.088	**.650**	.051	.014
Factor 4					
Prof 2: I can learn new skills at work.	.309	.138	.063	**.763**	-.162
Prof 3: In my job, I use the skills I am good at. [a]	.127	.110	.222	**.708**	.141
Prof 1: I like my job.	.384	.143	.108	**.694**	-.031
Prof 4: I am not improving in my career. *	.064	.212	.051	**.685**	.212
Factor 5					
Well 1: I cannot handle stress well.*	.157	.057	.047	.063	**.842**

Note. Extraction method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation method: Varimax with Kaiser normalization. KMO = .887; Bartlett's Test of Sphericity, $p < .001$. Items are grouped by their highest loading factor. Asterisks indicate negatively worded items that were reverse-coded prior to analysis. Superscript letters indicate item sources: [a] CIT Scale, [b] Diener et al., [c] Ryff's Psychological Well-being Scale.

Table 24 demonstrates the EFA result for the thriving domain items, which yielded five interpretable components, each representing a distinct dimension. Factor 1 revealed factor loadings of all personal thriving items, alongside three wellbeing items, indicating that these items are moderately correlated and measure a common latent construct. Collectively, these

items pertain to personal growth and sense of wellbeing, such as self-improvement, mental and emotional health, and life balance.

Factor 2 represented financial thriving, including items related to financial security, savings, and investment. These items clustered distinctly, thereby supporting the theoretical validity of financial thriving as a separate construct within the broader thriving framework. Factor loadings were particularly strong, mostly for items Fin2 and Fin4 (.847 and .812, respectively).

Factor 3 captured relational thriving, comprising items reflecting perceived appreciation, trust, support, and effort in relationships. Factor loadings exceeded .65, indicating a cohesive construct that reflects the quality and reliability of interpersonal connections. Factor 4 included items related to professional thriving, such as job enjoyment, skill utilisation, and learning opportunities, further supporting the validity of professional thriving as a distinct construct within the framework.

Unexpectedly, Factor 5 consisted only a single wellbeing item, “I cannot handle stress well.” Ideally, this factor would have included the other wellbeing items that loaded with the personal thriving items. This warrants further investigation, as this item may represent an inverse or strain-related aspect of wellbeing, such as coping difficulties or reduced self-efficacy.

Table 25

Exploratory Factor Analysis of Individual Factors

Individual Capital Items	1	2	3	4	5	6
Factor 1						
PC2: Tenacity	**.773**	.075	.119	.089	.134	.174
PC6: Industriousness	**.660**	.334	.085	-.102	.125	.168
PC3: Resilience	**.508**	.302	.108	.289	.070	.076
PC1: Assertiveness	**.531**	.147	.521	.137	-.107	-.176
VDC1: Discipline	**.501**	.156	-.004	.153	.167	.414
ADC1: Planning and organisation	**.478**	.088	.296	.069	.448	-.021
PC7: Emotional intelligence	**.472**	.210	.456	.200	.149	.042
Factor 2						
ADC5: Learning and education	.185	**.647**	.165	.093	.099	.030
PC8: Openness	.249	**.617**	.235	.166	.076	-.029
ADC6: Pursuing career alignment	.080	**.589**	.148	.029	.072	.035
VDC2: Respectfulness	.112	**.618**	-.100	.004	.174	.315
VDC5: Valuing challenging work	.337	**.492**	.169	.006	-.193	.438
VDC4: Gratified contentment	.224	**.406**	.419	.054	-.057	.412
Factor 3						
VDC6: Pursuing joy	.066	.233	**.807**	.067	.155	.168
ADC7: Self-care	.126	.097	**.681**	.088	.172	.223
Factor 4						
VDC3: Positivity	.107	.041	.229	**.808**	-.003	.118
ADC8: Drive	.264	-.058	.103	**.771**	-.024	.090
PC4: Cultural adaptability	-.109	.266	-.088	**.651**	.095	-.207
Factor 5						
ADC4: Managing expectations	-.025	-.036	.137	-.067	**.737**	.205
ADC3: Dynamic goal setting	.268	.408	.021	.055	**.595**	-.131
ADC2: Choosing your battles	.361	.337	.103	.154	**.594**	.072
Factor 6						
VDC8: Faith	.195	-.030	.176	.045	.098	**.726**

Note. Extraction method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation method: Varimax with Kaiser normalization. KMO = .885; Bartlett's Test of Sphericity, $p < .001$. Items are grouped by their highest loading factor.

The EFA conducted on individual-level variables yielded a six-factor solution, as opposed to a three-factor structure identified in the qualitative analysis—namely, personal capitals, action-driven capitals, and value-driven capitals. Factor 1 comprised items such as tenacity, industriousness, resilience, assertiveness, discipline, planning and organisation, and emotional intelligence. This factor appears to reflect a broader construct of self-directed personal agency or self-mastery. Factor 2 encompassed openness, respectfulness, pursuit of career

alignment, learning and education, valuing challenging work, and gratified contentment. These traits suggest an orientation toward growth fulfilment. While gratified contentment had a slightly higher loading on Factor 3 (.419) than on Factor 2 (.406), the difference is negligible (.013). Furthermore, the loadings of the other items on Factor 3 are substantially higher (.807 and .681), indicating that Factor 3 represents a much stronger and more cohesive theme. In contrast, the loading of gratified contentment is more comparable to the other Factor 2 items (e.g., .406 to .647, .617, .589, etc.). Therefore, both the content and the loading pattern support its retention within Factor 2.

Building on this distinction, Factor 3 was primarily characterised by self-care and pursuing joy, indicating a unique construct related to self-regulation and restoration. In contrast. Factor 4 comprised positivity, drive, and cultural adaptability—elements that collectively reflect adaptive positivity and flexibility coping mechanisms.

Factor 5 showed strong loadings on managing expectations, dynamic goal-setting, and choosing your battles, suggesting a latent construct reflecting strategic agencies. Finally, Factor 6 was characterised by a single robust loading on faith, distinguishing it as a separate construct. Although it did not load with other factors, its retention is warranted based on its conceptual significance and empirical distinctiveness.

Notably, two items—creativity and flexibility to start at entry-level roles—did not load meaningfully on any factor and were therefore excluded from further interpretation. This outcome may suggest either weak alignment with the overarching latent constructs, suggest a need to refine the survey item wording, or reflect context-specific irrelevance within the migrant thriving model under investigation.

Table 26

Exploratory Factor Analysis of Contextual Factors

Malta's Pro-Thriving and Anti-Thriving Items	1	2	3
Factor 1			
MPT2: English-speaking culture	**.752**	-.064	.034
MPT4: Diverse culture	**.691**	-.213	.052
MPT1: Friendly culture	**.685**	-.246	-.287
MPT6: Access to nature	**.665**	.071	-.319
MPT5: Sense of safety	**.662**	.040	-.124
MPT8: Integration programs	**.578**	-.294	-.061
MPT3: Work-life balance	**.575**	-.470	-.045
MPT7: Access to jobs and support	**.525**	-.577	.075
Factor 2			
MAT5: Social connection ladder	-.119	**.700**	.180
MAT1: Administrative processes	-.019	**.678**	.225
MAT3: Discrimination due to race	-.253	**.562**	.264
MAT2: High rental and housing costs	.054	**.509**	.507
Factor 3			
MAT4: Environmental pollution	-.122	.221	**.803**
MAT6: Lack of environmental access	-.146	.207	**.802**

Note. Extraction method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation method: Varimax with Kaiser normalization. KMO = .869; Bartlett's Test of Sphericity, $p < .001$. Items are grouped by their highest loading factor.

Based on the EFA results presented in Table 26, three distinct factors emerged from the contextual variables, rather than the original two-dimension concept of Malta's pro-thriving and anti-thriving elements. Nevertheless, this finding remains broadly consistent with the theoretical framework, which differentiates positive or supportive cultural enablers from structural barriers. As illustrated on the table, Factor 1 retained the Malta's pro-thriving elements: friendly culture, English-speaking environment, work-life balance, diverse culture, and perceptions of safety and accessibility.

Factor 2 comprised four items from Malta's anti-thriving elements, including challenges with administrative processes, housing difficulties, and experiences of social tension and discrimination. This factor aligns closely with themes identified in the qualitative phase.

Notably, the two items related to environmental constraints did not load onto this factor; rather, they formed a separate component—Factor 3—suggesting that participants perceived physical environmental limitations as a distinct and unique barrier to thriving, separate from social or structural challenges.

In summary, the exploratory factor analyses conducted across thriving domains, individual capitals, and contextual factors illuminated the latent structures embedded in the data. This analytic step facilitated the identification of underlying dimensions that offer a statistical perspective through which to assess the robustness and coherence of the proposed conceptual model. Overall, the observed factor loading patterns largely corroborated the thematic framework developed during the qualitative phase, reinforcing the conceptual distinctions among different domains of thriving and their associated predictors. Notable discrepancies—such as the emergence of novel groupings or the exclusion of low-loading items—offered valuable refinements that could help sharpen the model's theoretical clarity. Consequently, the integration of these quantitative findings with the initial thematic framework yielded a deeper, more nuanced understanding of migrant thriving.

Summary of the Results

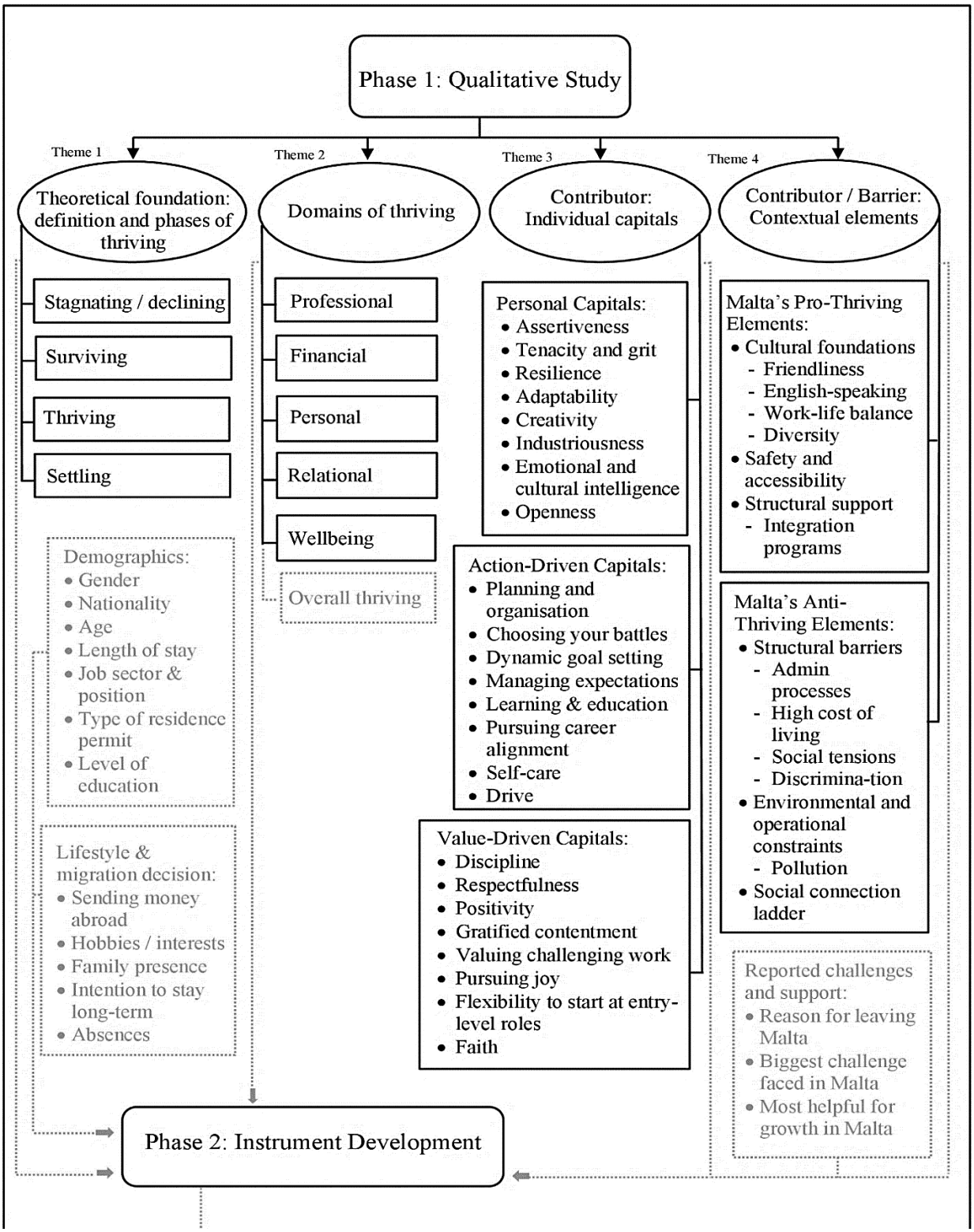
Taken together, the results from the quantitative strand provide strong empirical support for the conceptual framework developed during the qualitative phase. The patterns observed across thriving domains, predictors, and latent factors closely mirrored the themes derived from participants' narratives—recognising that migrant thriving is shaped by both individual circumstances and broader structural conditions.

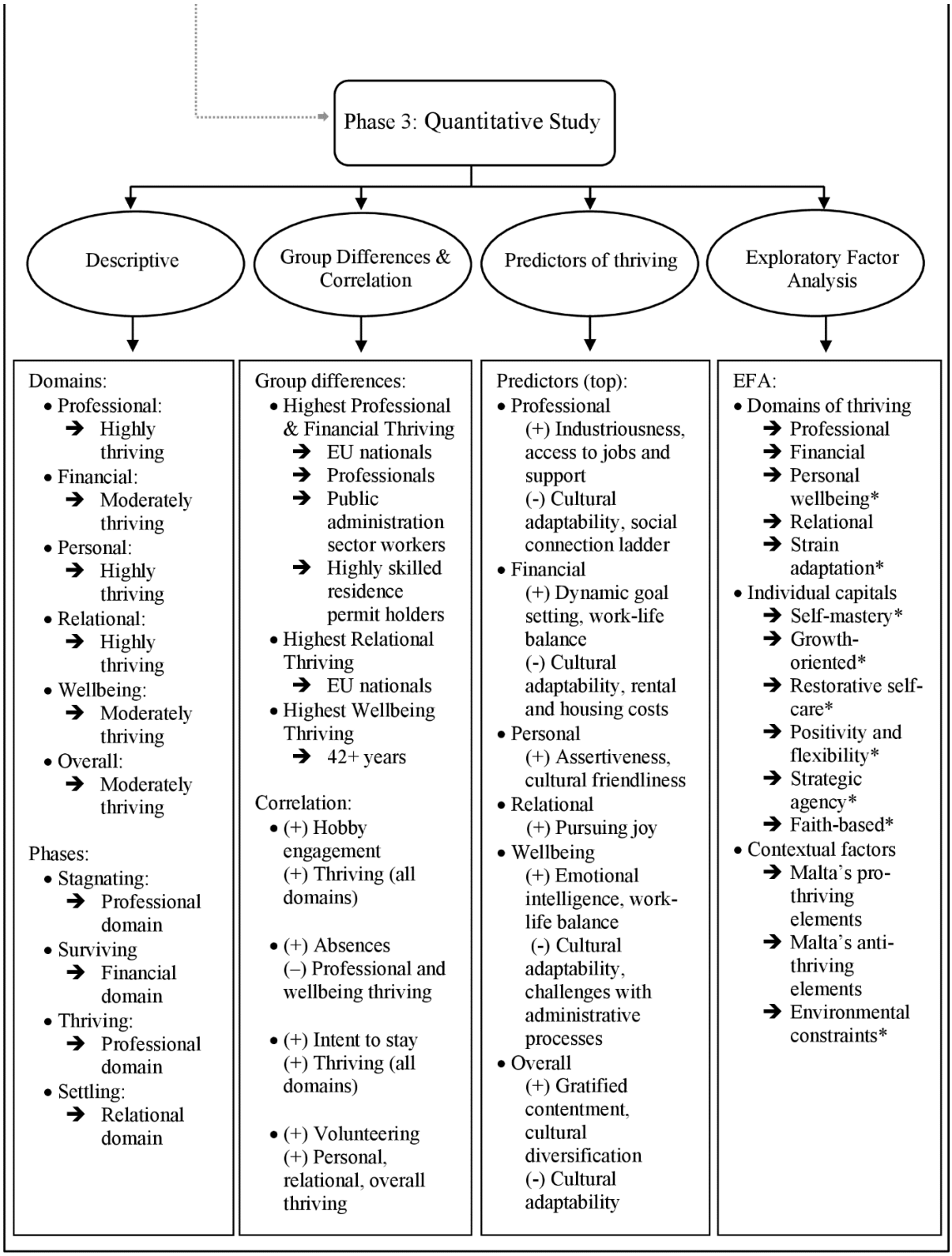
Figure 4 presents a comprehensive diagram summarising the main findings from all phases of this study—qualitative, instrument development, and quantitative phase. Elements

introduced during the instrument development phase are depicted in dotted lines. In the quantitative section, only the highest-scoring groups are displayed in the group differences area, while the predictors section features the top individual and contextual predictors based on the highest standardised regression beta values, including both positive and negative associations. Additionally, the asterisks in the exploratory factor analysis (EFA) diagram denote tentative terms of the new constructs that emerged from the factor loadings, which serve as refinements to the original theoretical model.

Figure 4

Summary of the Exploratory Sequential Mixed Methods Results




Phase 3: Quantitative Study
Descriptive
Group Differences & Correlation
Predictors of thriving
Exploratory Factor Analysis
Domains:
• Professional:
➔ Highly thriving
• Financial:
➔ Moderately thriving
• Personal:
➔ Highly thriving
• Relational:
➔ Highly thriving
• Wellbeing:
➔ Moderately thriving
• Overall:
➔ Moderately thriving
Phases:
• Stagnating:
➔ Professional domain
• Surviving
➔ Financial domain
• Thriving:
➔ Professional domain
• Settling:
➔ Relational domain
Group differences:
• Highest Professional & Financial Thriving
➔ EU nationals
➔ Professionals
➔ Public administration sector workers
➔ Highly skilled residence permit holders
• Highest Relational Thriving
➔ EU nationals
• Highest Wellbeing Thriving
➔ 42+ years
Correlation:
• (+) Hobby engagement
(+) Thriving (all domains)
• (+) Absences
(–) Professional and wellbeing thriving
• (+) Intent to stay
(+) Thriving (all domains)
• (+) Volunteering
(+) Personal, relational, overall thriving
Predictors (top):
• Professional
(+) Industriousness, access to jobs and support
(-) Cultural adaptability, social connection ladder
• Financial
(+) Dynamic goal setting, work-life balance
(-) Cultural adaptability, rental and housing costs
• Personal
(+) Assertiveness, cultural friendliness
• Relational
(+) Pursuing joy
• Wellbeing
(+) Emotional intelligence, work-life balance
(-) Cultural adaptability, challenges with administrative processes
• Overall
(+) Gratified contentment, cultural diversification
(-) Cultural adaptability
EFA:
• Domains of thriving
➔ Professional
➔ Financial
➔ Personal wellbeing*
➔ Relational
➔ Strain adaptation*
• Individual capitals
➔ Self-mastery*
➔ Growth-oriented*
➔ Restorative self-care*
➔ Positivity and flexibility*
➔ Strategic agency*
➔ Faith-based*
• Contextual factors
➔ Malta's pro-thriving elements
➔ Malta's anti-thriving elements
➔ Environmental constraints*

Chapter 5: Discussion

This chapter discusses the integrated findings of this study in the light of existing literature. It begins by examining the developed definition of thriving within the working migrant context, followed by an exploration of its domains and phases. Group differences in thriving are extensively analysed across each domain, supported by insights from existing literature and qualitative narratives. The chapter subsequently addresses the associations between personal lifestyle, migration decisions, and thriving, followed by its individual and contextual contributors. Finally, it concludes with a discussion on the validation of the working migrant thriving framework achieved through exploratory factor analysis.

The working migrant thriving definition

Derived from the qualitative analysis of participant narratives, working migrant thriving is defined as the intentional pursuit of growth and vitality in life domains migrants give importance to after overcoming initial migration challenges. It aligns with Porath et al.'s (2011) concept of thriving as a combination of vitality and learning, and reflects critical realist views that thriving emerges from the interaction of personal agency and external context. From this perspective, thriving extends beyond observable outcomes to include deeper generative mechanisms that enable or restrict migrant agency.

The notion that thriving is pursued only once foundational needs are secured aligns with Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which posits that individuals must first attain safety and stability before engaging in growth and self-actualisation (Maslow, 1943). For TCN qualitative participants, securing a standard work residence permit was viewed as a fundamental need; without legal stability, opportunities for growth were perceived as largely inaccessible. Consequently, the thriving definition proposed in this study extends existing conceptualisations

by emphasising that it is not solely a psychological accomplishment, but rather a dynamic process that is shaped—and potentially constrained—by the wider cultural and structural conditions of the host society.

The domains and phases of thriving

The qualitative findings further outlined five life domains relevant in a working migrant's life—professional, financial, personal, relational, and wellbeing. Each unfolds across four experiential phases: surviving, declining/stagnating, thriving, and settling. Surviving is characterised by a focus on coping, wherein working migrants concentrate primarily on meeting basic needs and enduring immediate challenges. Declining or stagnating occurs when difficulties persist or intensify, resulting in feelings of being stuck or experiencing a lack of progress. In contrast, thriving reflects a phase in which individuals actively pursue growth and fulfilment. Finally, settling represents a period of consolidation, where working migrants perceive stability and contentment in their current circumstances without necessarily striving for further advancement. These phases can occur concurrently across different life domains. For instance, a working migrant may be thriving financially while experiencing decline or stagnation in the relational domain.

Using the newly developed thriving instrument, this study assessed the phases in which respondents located themselves across domains. Quantitative analysis revealed that nearly half of the 436 respondents reported thriving across all domains, with professional thriving reaching 55%. In other words, approximately half of the participants were actively pursuing growth in their professional, financial, personal, relational, and wellbeing domains. However, it is important to note that around one-third of respondents indicated that they were only merely surviving, particularly in the financial, wellbeing, and personal domains, indicating ongoing

struggles in these areas. These findings align with previous studies that have examined the mental health challenges faced by working migrants (Mucci et al., 2019), as well as research suggesting that migrants' perceptions of their economic situation are closely related to their sense of wellbeing (Stanges et al., 2021).

Across the five domains, respondents reported experiencing the most stagnation or decline in the professional and personal domains, with 16% and 14% respectively. These individuals commonly expressed feeling stuck in their careers and experiencing persistent self-doubt. Intrapersonal challenges appear particularly salient within migrant communities, as individuals navigate the complexities of acculturation—a process that can prompt shifts in identity, including changes in cognition, mindset, values, self-esteem, cultural orientation, and patterns of attitude and behaviour (Cormos, 2022). In the qualitative study, while some participants experienced these changes positively, as exemplified by Isabel, findings from the quantitative study suggest that some working migrants may perceive these changes as overly unfamiliar, thereby posing challenges to their process of identity consolidation.

In the settling phase, respondents reported feeling settled the most in the relational domain and least in the financial domain. This suggests that, while emotional and social bonds may stabilise over time, long-term financial security remains unattainable for many.

When levels of thriving were measured, the results indicated high levels of thriving in the personal, relational, and professional domains, with relational thriving reported as the highest. In contrast, financial, wellbeing, and overall thriving levels were moderate, with financial thriving emerging as the lowest. This suggests that across all domains, working migrants experience the greatest struggles related to financial security. These findings are consistent with those of Debono (2021), who reported that migrants are at a heightened risk of poverty. The observed

patterns also align with the qualitative findings, in which participants frequently described a sense of personal growth and belonging, despite ongoing challenges related to financial stability and emotional wellbeing.

Group Differences in the Experience of Thriving

Across all demographic and occupational variables examined, only nationality, age, job sector, job position, and type of residence permit demonstrated group differences in the experience of thriving. These differences were most pronounced in the professional and financial domains, where nationality, job position, and type of residence permit were found to play a particularly significant role.

Professional and financial thriving

Respondents who are EU nationals, occupy professional positions (e.g., doctors, engineers, lawyers, developers, or marketing specialists), or hold highly skilled employment permits (i.e., the Key Employee Initiative, Specialist Employment Initiative, or the EU Blue Card) reported the highest levels of professional and financial thriving. In contrast, holders of long-term residence permits were found to thrive the least in the professional domain and exhibited comparatively low levels of financial thriving—ranking just above holders of humanitarian-type work permits, who reported the lowest financial experiences.

From a psychological perspective, this result can be interpreted through the lens of self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), which posits that individuals thrive when their psychological needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness are fulfilled. For these working migrants, competence needs are met as they are able to apply their skills and expertise within their professional roles. This is in stark contrast to their counterparts—primarily TCNs—who are more likely to experience job mismatch and precarious working conditions (Justice & Peace

Commission, 2024). Relatedness needs are often fulfilled through the development of professional networks and relationships. Furthermore, autonomy needs are addressed as their positions typically afford them decision-making authority, flexibility, and a sense of security and self-sufficiency.

This result also reflects the structural and systemic advantages and disadvantages inherent in Malta's labour and migration systems. EU nationals benefit from freedom of movement, enabling them to live and work in Malta without requiring a work permit (GVZH Advocates, n.d.). In contrast, TCNs face considerably stricter employment regulations, as their residence permits are typically contingent upon their job status (Mifsud, 2021).

This difference can be further elucidated by the qualitative findings of this study, where EU nationals described experiencing a more linear career progression—an upward trajectory characterised by advancement from one position to a higher one. In contrast, TCNs depicted a more fragmented career path, often involving lateral moves as they prioritise obtaining a residence permit by entering the labour market, regardless of the job position or sector. Beyond deprioritising professional thriving, TCNs frequently face additional challenges such as low wages, job insecurity, and structural barriers that hinder access to better opportunities (Justice & Peace Commission, 2024). These opportunities are also hindered by the lack of recognition of foreign qualifications (Pérez et al., 2012) and the labour market test—a procedure that requires employers to demonstrate the absence of qualified local or EU workers before hiring TCNs.

It is noteworthy—and somewhat concerning—that holders of long-term residence (LTR) permits tend to report the lowest levels of professional thriving and the second-lowest levels of financial thriving. Given the stricter and more prolonged process involved in obtaining an LTR permit (Mifsud, 2021), working migrants often prioritise fulfilling the requirements for this

permit, even if it entails remaining in roles with limited opportunities for professional growth. Several TCN participants in the qualitative study described securing this permit as a crucial milestone, necessary for acquiring greater rights and flexibility in their residency status. This suggests that some TCNs, despite holding the qualifications needed for higher-level positions, may prioritise residential stability over professional and financial advancement. Furthermore, considering that more than half of the respondents reported having at least one family member or life partner residing in Malta, it is plausible that LTR holders also prioritise obtaining this permit as a means of securing the stability required to facilitate family reunification.

Holders of humanitarian-type work permits—such as asylum seekers and refugees who are beneficiaries of international or subsidiary protection—were found to thrive the least financially. Omilusi (2025) explored refugees' experiences in Malta and reported that, despite being employed, many face significant economic challenges due to their engagement in low-paid, low-skilled, and precarious jobs with limited security, often in sectors such as construction, refuse collection, or domestic work. Additional factors, including language barriers, low levels of formal education, and cultural and social obstacles—such as discrimination—further restrict access to better employment opportunities and contribute to persistent financial hardship.

Single Permit holders—who represent the majority of respondents—were found to be the third least financially thriving group. This group primarily comprises TCNs working in low-wage sectors such as construction, retail, and hospitality, where wages are averaging to 17% below the national rate (Justice & Peace Commission, 2024). In the qualitative study, participants described how they and other migrants often rely on loans or financial support from family members abroad to cover migration-related expenses, with much of their initial earnings spent on repaying these debts. Financial struggles are compounded by limited job mobility, as

changing employers requires reapplying for a new Single Permit, leaving some migrants without work or salary for up to three months. In contrast, TCNs holding highly skilled employment permits occupy specialised and higher-paid roles with faster permit processes and greater financial opportunities. This contrast underscores how residence permit type and skill-match and mismatch shape the financial realities of working migrants in Malta.

In terms of job sectors, respondents employed in public administration were found to thrive the most financially. They also reported the highest levels of overall thriving. Furthermore, those employed in professional and technical sectors—such as legal, consultancy, and other specialised professions—ranked a close second in financial thriving. These results suggest that these sectors may provide greater financial remuneration, benefits, and stability compared to others.

Respondents employed in the construction sector were found to thrive the least financially, which is particularly concerning given that previous studies have also highlighted the significant challenges they face regarding health and safety risks, as well as experiences of discrimination (Grima, 2021; Horvat Cordona, 2023). On the other hand, those employed in wholesale and retail trade, as well as accommodation and food services, showed the lowest levels of overall thriving. Qualitative accounts echoed these patterns, with participants in professional roles often expressing a sense of autonomy, pride, and long-term planning, while those who worked in retail and hospitality described a previous experience of constant precarity, lack of upward mobility, and emotional exhaustion. These patterns highlight a strong link between job sector, financial stability, and overall experiences of thriving.

Relational and wellbeing thriving

EU nationals were found to thrive more in the relational domain compared to TCNs, suggesting they experience greater support from trusted individuals who value and appreciate them. Qualitative participants highlighted the importance of maintaining relationships from their home country and forming new connections in Malta with both locals and fellow migrants. The quantitative findings suggest that TCNs face greater challenges in building meaningful relationships, which aligns with past research showing that locals tend to have a more welcoming attitude towards EU nationals over non-Europeans (Sammut & Lauri, 2017). In the recent Eurobarometer survey published in 2023, 76% of the Maltese respondents stated that immigration of people from outside the EU evokes negative feelings in them (European Commission, 2023). Valentim (2022) argued that this preference is shaped more by perceived cultural similarity than by race or ethnicity. In other words, EU nationals may form better relationships with the Maltese as they were perceived to be more culturally similar to them compared to non-EU nationals.

TCNs may also face greater challenges in maintaining relationships with family and friends from their home country. Unlike EU nationals, who benefit from geographic proximity and freedom of movement, TCNs face greater barriers to travel. This includes higher costs and additional legal employment verification requirements in their countries of origin, such as the Philippines, wherein overseas workers are required to register and present updated verified contracts before leaving the country (POLO Rome, n.d.). Several TCN participants in the qualitative study mentioned returning home only rarely, as travel is expensive and often necessitates extended absences from work. In situations such as a family member's serious illness, they may prioritise staying in Malta to earn additional income rather than spending on

airfare and other costs. Furthermore, difficulties with family reunification applications, as highlighted by the Justice & Peace Commission (2024), can deepen feelings of disconnection among TCNs.

Meanwhile, respondents aged 42 and above reported the highest levels of wellbeing thriving, while those aged 18–31 reported the lowest. Referring to Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1954) and Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), wellbeing improves as individuals secure stable employment, housing, and social ties over time. Older migrants may have had more opportunity to adjust and fulfil these needs, whereas younger migrants are often still navigating instability and cultural adaptation. Several qualitative participants described prioritising wellbeing through exercise and therapy, though several noted that Malta's limited green spaces and walking infrastructure negatively impacted their emotional and psychological health.

No significant group differences were found in thriving experiences based on gender, length of stay, or education level. This contradicts previous research suggesting that women might report higher wellbeing or relational thriving due to stronger social networks (Chib et al., 2013; Hussein, 2022), and that length of stay influences stress and outlook among migrants, wherein newcomers were found to have a higher tolerance to stress and a more positive outlook (Aalto et al., 2014; van der Ham et al., 2014). Similarly, education level did not appear to shape thriving outcomes, diverging from findings linking it to work-related experiences such as discrimination, job satisfaction, and health risks (Debono & Vassallo, 2020b). These discrepancies may reflect differences in measurement approaches across studies. Notably, no group differences were observed in the personal thriving domain, suggesting that opportunities for personal growth may be uniformly accessible or constrained across demographic groups.

Overall, these findings broadly align with previous research in Malta, indicating that migrants' work, relational, and societal integration experiences are largely shaped by their occupation, nationality, and broader cultural and social contexts.

Personal Lifestyle, Migration Decisions, and Thriving

The qualitative study identified several personal lifestyle choices that were further examined in the quantitative phase. Engaging in regular hobbies—ideally four to seven times a week—and intending to stay long-term in Malta are both positively correlated with all six domains of thriving, including overall thriving. These behaviours reflect underlying psychological mechanisms that support wellbeing and adaptation in a migration context.

Regular hobbies function as protective health behaviours, offering routine, stress relief, and a sense of purpose, which bolster emotional and physical resilience (Taylor, 2012). Meanwhile, long-term settlement intentions reflect psychological commitment and future orientation, fostering stability, perceived control, and long-term goal setting, as highlighted by the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). Broader frameworks such as Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and Social Capital Theory (Bourdieu, 1986) suggest that both hobbies and long-term settlement intentions help working migrants embed themselves in meaningful social and environmental contexts, reinforcing sustained thriving while also benefiting the labour market by reducing turnover and improving stability.

Volunteering was found to be positively correlated with personal, relational, and overall thriving. According to Role Theory (Biddle, 1986), taking on meaningful social roles such as volunteering can enhance self-concept and strengthen social integration, both of which are crucial for personal growth and relational satisfaction. In contrast, both sick leave and other absences were negatively correlated with professional and wellbeing thriving, likely reflecting

health vulnerabilities or workplace stressors that disrupt consistent engagement. From the perspective of Conservation of Resources Theory (Hobfoll, 1989), these absences may indicate a depletion of personal resources—such as energy, time, or emotional stability—impeding an individual's ability to sustain wellbeing and productivity. Additionally, working migrants may perceive such absences as a threat to their career progression.

Individual Capitals, Contextual Factors, and Thriving

Narratives from qualitative participants illustrated how individual capitals and contextual factors can either facilitate or impede their thriving. Quantitative analysis further identified which of these capitals and factors significantly predict thriving across various domains. Among individual capitals, drive—defined as sustained motivation—positively predicts professional, financial, wellbeing, and overall thriving. In contrast, cultural adaptability was unexpectedly found to negatively predict these outcomes.

Drive functions as a motivational engine, fuelling goal pursuit in both career and economic spheres while enhancing wellbeing and the overall experience of thriving. This was echoed in participants' reflections, where several emphasised that a lack of initiative or 'laziness' was perceived as a major contributor to their experiences of stagnation or decline.

Cultural adaptability, while conventionally regarded as a positive adjustment trait, was found to negatively predict professional, financial, wellbeing, and overall thriving. This counterintuitive result may reflect the costs of over-adaptation or internalised pressure to conform. Several qualitative participants shared that they preferred not to fully adopt local cultural norms and traditions. They valued cultural diversification, as it reduced the pressure to conform. This aligns with the theory of proculturation (Gamsakhurdia, 2018), which emphasises identity negotiation and warns against the psychological strain of unidirectional assimilation.

This finding warrants further investigation, particularly given that cultural adaptability showed no significant association with personal and relational thriving.

Individual capital—specifically self-care—and the contextual factor—specifically work-life balance—both emerged as significant positive predictors of financial, personal, wellbeing, and overall thriving. Qualitative participants who experienced work-life balance described feeling greater control over their time. This allowed them to pursue personal goals, maintain relationships, and engage in self-care. Self-care highlights the importance of consistently maintaining physical and emotional resources amid migration-related challenges. By engaging in restorative activities that fuel both body and mind, working migrants are able to support their daily functioning and manage stress more effectively (Mahoney, 1997; Shapiro et al., 2007).

Resilience and emotional intelligence also emerged as positive predictors of wellbeing thriving. This aligns with previous research indicating that dispositional traits such as optimism, self-esteem, and resilience have a stronger impact on wellbeing than circumstantial factors like income or length of stay (Bak-Klimek et al., 2017). Additionally, assertiveness was found to positively predict personal and overall thriving. This was reflected in the qualitative data, where one participant persistently addressed workplace discrimination until they were relocated to a more respectful and fairer environment.

Pursuing joy, along with effective planning and organisation, emerged as positive predictors of both relational and wellbeing thriving. This suggests that individuals who actively engage in enjoyable activities and manage their time well tend to experience stronger interpersonal relationships and a greater overall sense of wellbeing. Qualitative narratives supported this, with participants describing how they intentionally schedule time for work, meal preparation, exercise, and socialising. Additionally, openness to new experiences and ideas was

also associated with better relationships. Interestingly, while faith positively predicted personal thriving—consistent with previous findings (Villani et al., 2019)—it was negatively associated with professional thriving. This may suggest that reliance on faith alone, in the absence of structural support, could limit proactive career advancement.

Other positive predictors across various thriving domains include industriousness, dynamic goal-setting, and gratified contentment. These findings suggest that thriving is closely linked to sustaining motivation and nurturing positive dispositions and values through both everyday routines and intentional, purposeful actions.

Beyond work-life balance, other contextual enablers of thriving were identified, including cultural friendliness and access to employment and services. These cultural and structural supports not only mitigate the challenges associated with migration but also expand opportunities for migrants to activate their internal capacities and explore new possibilities. Likewise, cultural diversification was positively associated with financial and overall thriving, while participation in integration programmes corresponded with higher personal thriving, suggesting its benefits to personality and identity consolidation. Together, these findings underscore how inclusive environments and targeted support mechanisms can significantly facilitate working migrant flourishing.

Conversely, certain factors acted as barriers to thriving; for example, high rental costs significantly limited financial thriving, while administrative burdens curtailed wellbeing thriving. These findings suggest that systemic constraints are associated with migrants' ability to cope and prosper. The presence of a social connection ladder—where promotions and favourable career progressions are perceived to be awarded to those with personal ties to decision-makers—also hinders professional and financial thriving. As Markus explained in the interview, he lost interest

in pursuing career advancement upon witnessing this practice within his company. Interestingly, environmental pollution emerged as a positive predictor of financial thriving—a paradoxical result that warrants further investigation. This may reflect the concentration of economic opportunities in urbanised, industrial areas where pollution levels are higher but job availability is greater.

Collectively, these findings further support the philosophical assumption of this study. Aligned with the critical realist paradigm, working migrants' experiences of thriving can be understood as layered phenomena, where observable outcomes are shaped by deeper, often hidden, generative mechanisms such as institutional policies, power relations, socio-economic structures, and locals' perceptions

The Working Migrant Thriving Framework

The exploratory factor analysis empirically validated the working migrant thriving framework developed in the qualitative phase by identifying five of its distinct components. It retained the distinction of financial, relational, and professional domains, while merging personal and wellbeing items into a combined personal wellbeing facet that encompasses intrapersonal processes alongside physical, emotional, and mental health and life balance. A novel finding emerged, revealing that a single wellbeing item related to stress constituted a distinct component. This highlights the importance of differentiating strain-related adaptation from general emotional health in future models.

Strain adaptation may refer to working migrants' capacity to manage and adjust to ongoing psychological, occupational, and socio-cultural stressors stemming from both work and migration experiences. Unlike general wellbeing, which focuses on outcomes like emotional health and life balance, strain adaptation captures the active processes by which individuals

maintain functioning and regain stability amid chronic pressures. This domain is particularly crucial for working migrants facing compounded stressors such as job insecurity, acculturative strain, and systemic exclusion. Recognising strain adaptation as a distinct construct highlights the essential adaptive work required to sustain thriving in challenging environments. If further explored, this novel finding may offer a valuable insight to the existing theoretical framework of migrant thriving.

Exploratory factor analyses of individual capitals expanded the initial threefold framework into six nuanced components, tentatively identified as self-directed agency, growth orientation, emotional self-regulation, adaptive positivity, strategic adaptation, and faith. This refinement captures the complex interplay of internal traits and adaptive strategies that migrants employ to thrive. Similarly, the exploratory factor analysis of contextual factors evolved from a two-fold to a three-dimensional model encompassing cultural support, structural constraints, and a distinct environmental barrier dimension. It will be interesting to explore how these dimensions could predict the new strain adaptation domain of thriving.

Together, these findings validate the thematic framework while emphasising the multifaceted nature of migrant thriving. They also highlight the necessity of recognising strain adaptation and environmental context as separate, critical dimensions.

Conclusion

This chapter justifies the proposed definition of working migrant thriving and offers a comprehensive view of how migrants experience thriving across various life domains and phases. It examines group differences by referring to prior research, psychological theory, and qualitative narratives. It sheds light on the unique challenges faced by TCNs compared to their EU counterparts—particularly in career advancement, financial stability, and relational

integration. The roles of regular hobbies, intending to stay in Malta long-term, volunteering, and taking sick and other absences were also demonstrated. Furthermore, the chapter identifies the enablers of thriving—such as drive, self-care, and work-life balance—as well as consistent barriers, including cultural adaptation, social connection ladder, and high cost of living. Finally, it presents a validation of the working migrant thriving framework and introduces novel domains and structural refinements to advance theoretical understanding.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Introduction

This chapter begins with a summary of the entire study, followed by a discussion of its significance and practical applications derived from the findings. It also addresses the study's limitations and offers directions for future research.

Summary

This study employed an exploratory sequential mixed methods design to investigate the thriving experiences of working migrants in Malta. In Phase 1, one-on-one interviews with 12 working migrants were conducted to explore how they define and experience thriving. Using the six phases of Reflexive Thematic Analysis, four overarching themes were identified: a theoretical framework of thriving (including definitions and experiential phases), domains of thriving, individual capitals, and contextual factors. Thriving was conceptualised not as a uniform state but as a purposeful, dynamic process of growth and vitality across life domains that migrants prioritise after overcoming initial migration challenges. Grounded in a critical realist paradigm, the study acknowledged that thriving arises from the complex interaction between individual agency and broader structural and cultural forces, including migration policies, employment conditions, and social inclusion. A key contribution of this study is the introduction of four experiential phases—surviving, declining/stagnating, thriving, and settling—which may coexist across multiple life domains. This model offers a richer, more nuanced understanding of migrant experiences, enabling both individuals and institutions to better identify and support migrants at different stages of their journeys.

Building on these insights, Phase 2 focused on the development of a thriving instrument based primarily on the qualitative results. This phase followed eight steps: conceptual mapping

of qualitative constructs, item generation, first expert review, cognitive interviews, revisions, second expert review, pilot testing, and final instrument structuring. Conceptual mapping involved translating qualitative insights into measurable and quantifiable constructs. Items were generated by drawing from participants' verbatim responses and adapting select items from established psychological scales whilst ensuring accessibility by using simple, clear language. Expert reviews were conducted by professionals in psychology and research, while cognitive interviews were carried out with five working migrants. Pilot testing with 11 working migrants established the internal consistency of the instrument and informed its final structure.

In the final phase, the instrument was quantitatively tested with a sample of 436 working migrants to validate the emerging framework and assess patterns across the broader population. Quantitative findings revealed that, while many thrive professionally, financial and wellbeing challenges remain widespread. Significant group differences were found based on job sector, residence permit type, age, and nationality, with EU nationals and highly skilled workers generally reporting more favourable outcomes. Gender, length of stay, and level of education showed no notable differences. Personal lifestyle factors—such as regular engagement in hobbies, volunteering, and planning for long-term settlement—were positively linked to thriving. In contrast, sending money abroad and having a family member living in Malta showed no significant association.

The study also identified key individual and contextual predictors of thriving. Drive, self-care, and work-life balance emerged as consistent significant enablers, while cultural over-adaptation and perceived social connection ladder acted as barriers. The thriving instrument was statistically validated through exploratory factor analysis, resulting in a practical, multidimensional tool with potential applications in research, policy, and workplace

interventions. A novel domain—strain adaptation—was also identified, capturing the ongoing effort required to maintain functioning amid systemic pressures. Crucially, the study challenges static or overly individualistic conceptions of migrant success, advocating instead for a broader, more human-centred understanding of thriving that includes personal growth, social belonging, and overall wellbeing. Ultimately, this research paves the way for more equitable, holistic, and locally grounded approaches to migrant wellbeing, encouraging a shift from survival-focused frameworks toward models centred on growth and flourishing.

Significance of the Study

In this section, the significance of this study is articulated across theoretical, structural, and individual levels.

At the theoretical level, the research advances the conceptual understanding of migrant wellbeing by proposing a phased, multidimensional framework of thriving, grounded in both lived experiences and empirical validation. By moving beyond static or singular notions of success, this domain- and phase-specific perspective offers a more nuanced and empathetic account of how migrants navigate complex realities, where progress in one domain may coexist with challenges in another. By reconceptualising migrant thriving in this way, the study contributes to the literature by bridging psychological perspectives with sociological and structural insights. Moreover, it introduces novel constructs—such as strain adaptation—that enrich existing frameworks and open new avenues for future research. This integrative approach also supports the development of more tailored, contextually meaningful interventions, policy responses, and support structures—particularly for migrant groups often reduced to binary classifications such as ‘vulnerable’ or ‘well-integrated.’

At the structural level, this study demonstrates how broader systems—such as permit regimes, labour market segmentation, social hierarchies, workplace cultures, economic precarity, and administrative barriers—shape working migrants' capacity to thrive. It illustrates how residence permit types, job sectors, and policy contexts influence access to stability and opportunity, offering insight into how institutions can either enable or constrain migrant thriving. These findings underscore the need for policy reforms that address deeper structural inequalities within Malta's migration and employment systems, particularly for third-country nationals. The study further emphasises the importance of building inclusive, transparent, and equitable systems that support long-term migrant thriving—not only as an ideal, but through concrete, evidence-based practices.

At the individual level, the study also empowers working migrants by framing thriving as a dynamic, ongoing process that unfolds across life domains and experiential phases. It affirms the complexity of their lived realities—highlighting that challenges in one area need not invalidate growth in another. This perspective helps counter harmful self-comparisons, especially when others appear to progress more rapidly. Rather than feeling discouraged by setbacks, migrants are encouraged to recognise areas of continued growth and resilience. The study also highlights personal enablers such as drive, self-care, and work-life balance, inviting individuals to strengthen internal resources that sustain wellbeing. Importantly, it introduces the idea that cultural over-adaptation may come at a psychological cost, reaffirming the value of maintaining cultural identity and resisting pressure to fully assimilate. The validated thriving instrument offers a practical tool for self-reflection, enabling migrants to assess their current experiences and make more intentional, empowered decisions moving forward.

Practical Applications

Drawing on the findings of this study, the following practical implications are recommended for key stakeholders—including policy-makers, employers, NGOs, national agencies—and for working migrants themselves. These actions aim to foster long-term migrant thriving across life domains.

In terms of policy and governance, evidence-based migration policies should be designed around the domain-phase model of thriving. This approach encourages a shift away from focusing solely on legal or employment status, addressing instead the real-world challenges migrants face, such as financial instability, relational disconnection, and wellbeing strain. Integration indices used by governments and international bodies should incorporate these thriving domains and phases to promote a more multidimensional understanding of migrant wellbeing. In addition, cross-sector collaboration among policy-makers, employers, educators, and NGOs is essential to co-create sustainable environments that support diverse forms of growth, resilience, and stability.

Within employment and labour contexts, reforms to employment permit systems are needed—particularly for TCNs—to promote job flexibility and career mobility, mitigating stagnation caused by employer-dependent structures. Safeguards must also be implemented in precarious sectors such as construction, retail, and hospitality to ensure fair wages, occupational safety, and access to transparent grievance mechanisms. At the same time, workplace environments should foster drive and growth orientation by providing clear pathways for skills development, career progression, and fair, transparent hiring and promotion practices.

To support wellbeing and social inclusion, stakeholders should develop support services that reflect all five thriving domains—professional, financial, personal, relational, and

wellbeing—enabling long-term flourishing rather than just short-term survival. Work-life balance and self-care should be promoted through labour laws, public health programs, and workplace practices that help migrants preserve their emotional and physical resources. Inclusive cultural policies must also be encouraged, moving beyond assimilation-based models to embrace pluralism and support coexisting identities. Moreover, validated thriving assessment tools should be integrated into the operations of national agencies, NGOs, and community organisations to monitor migrant wellbeing and guide adaptive, targeted support services.

Practical implications also exist for working migrants themselves. Migrants can benefit from familiarising themselves with the four phases of thriving—surviving, declining, thriving, and settling—to better interpret their lived experiences and access the most relevant forms of support. Engaging regularly in leisure or recreational activities can help strengthen emotional resilience and manage stress. Migrants are also encouraged to set meaningful personal and professional goals, maintain motivation despite adversity, and prioritise self-care practices such as rest, balanced nutrition, and emotional regulation. Time management should be approached intentionally to support a healthy balance between work, rest, and personal growth. Taking on socially meaningful roles, including volunteer work, can enhance confidence, a sense of purpose, and community belonging. Affirming one's cultural identity while resisting pressure to assimilate is another important aspect of thriving, as is developing emotional intelligence and assertiveness to advocate for one's needs and sustain healthy relationships. Migrants should also aim to minimise avoidable work absences, recognising their cumulative impact on both wellbeing and progress. Above all, thriving should be understood as a dynamic and flexible process that requires resilience and adaptability, rather than perfection or a fixed endpoint.

By embedding these recommendations into policies, workplace practices, and personal strategies, stakeholders can move beyond survival-focused approaches and actively cultivate conditions where working migrants are empowered to thrive in meaningful, sustainable ways. This shift holds value not only for migrants themselves but also for the broader social and economic wellbeing of the host society.

Limitations

While this study provides a comprehensive examination of working migrant thriving, several limitations warrant consideration. First, the qualitative phase involved interviews with participants aged 24 to 41, keeping the perspectives of both younger and older migrants unexplored. Additionally, most participants were unmarried and childless; despite efforts to recruit parents, their demanding schedules limited their participation. Second, although the quantitative sample broadly reflected Malta's working migrant population in terms of EU and third-country national ratios and nationality diversity, imbalances existed within subgroups—particularly regarding gender, nationality, and residence permit types. These disparities may have affected group comparisons, potentially affecting the precision of observed differences.

Third, thriving phases in the quantitative survey were measured using a single item per domain to minimise respondent burden and enhance completion rates. While this approach reduced complexity, it may have limited the richness and nuance of measurement. Fourth, this study focused exclusively on working migrants, thereby excluding vulnerable or marginalised groups such as undocumented individuals, those engaged in informal work, or those with limited legal or linguistic access to formal systems. Consequently, the experiences of migrants facing the most severe structural barriers may not be fully captured. Fifth, although the sample size was adequate for planned analyses, the cross-sectional design restricts the ability to infer causality.

Furthermore, the use of non-random sampling techniques limits the generalisability of the findings, as the sample may introduce selection bias. Reliance on self-report measures may have also introduced potential social desirability bias and subjective interpretation of items.

Finally, while the newly developed thriving instrument was rigorously grounded and validated within this context, its applicability remains specific to this setting and would benefit from further testing across diverse cultural and national contexts to enhance generalisability.

Directions of Future Research

This study represents an important initial contribution to the empirical exploration of migrant thriving. One key direction involves further investigation of the strain adaptation domain, which emerged as a distinct construct in the current factor analysis. Researchers are encouraged to develop new survey items grounded in qualitative narratives that reflect how migrants cope with and adjust to chronic socio-economic and psychosocial stressors. Subsequent psychometric evaluation—including assessments of internal consistency and exploratory or confirmatory factor analysis—will be essential to determine whether strain adaptation constitutes a standalone life domain within the framework of working migrant thriving.

Another important avenue relates to forthcoming policy changes. As of 1 August 2025, Malta will implement new regulations affecting TCN working migrants. These measures aim to balance workforce demands with enhanced worker protections to promote fair labour practices. These reforms are expected to positively influence thriving of working migrants. However, raising the annual salary benchmarks of SEI and KEI applicants may decrease the number of thriving working migrants, given that these groups currently experience the highest levels of professional and financial thriving among all working migrant groups. Consequently, future research following the implementation of these regulations is strongly encouraged.

Researchers are also urged to examine working migrants' perceptions of integration and their lived experiences beyond traditional acculturation theories. Concepts like proculturation may offer more flexible, inclusive models that recognise adaptation as a two-way, evolving process. Longitudinal research is especially recommended to track how migrants shift between the phases of surviving, declining, thriving, and settling across life domains. This would help identify key transition points and the personal or contextual factors that influence them.

Researchers may also test the predictive validity of the thriving instrument by examining its association with job performance, employee retention, promotion rates, work engagement, organisational commitment, or participation in upskilling and integration programmes. Exploring these relationships would underscore the practical utility of the framework within workplace, policy, and community contexts. Additionally, refining the tool with a scoring system and user-friendly design could enhance its practical utility in workplace, community, and policy settings. Finally, future research should consider expanding the scope of participants. This study focused on formally employed migrants, excluding undocumented individuals, those in informal employment, or others outside the labour market. Including these voices would lead to a more inclusive and comprehensive understanding of what it means to thrive as a migrant.

Conclusion

Psychological research plays a vital role in deepening our understanding of migrant wellbeing—not only by documenting challenges but by exploring what it truly means for migrants to thrive and flourish in new environments. This study was guided by the belief that the more working migrants thrive, the greater their capacity to contribute meaningfully to the societies in which they live. By recognising that thriving spans multiple life domains and unfolds

through distinct experiential phases, we can develop strategies that are not only practical and evidence-based but are deeply aligned with migrants' lived realities.

This understanding can also empower working migrants to build on their strengths and prioritise self-care—an aspect often overlooked, as many focus on supporting their families back home, sometimes at the cost of their own wellbeing. This study offers strategies and resources that can enable them to thrive and contribute to society.

Yet, much like mental health, thriving must not be seen solely as an individual pursuit. It is fundamentally shaped by broader structural, societal, cultural, and relational conditions. Finally, this study promotes a more nuanced view of integration—one that allows working migrants to engage in ways that feel authentic to them, fostering mutual growth, dignity, and genuine coexistence.

References

Aalto, A., Heponiemi, T., Keskimaki, I., Kuusio, H., Hietapakka, L., Lamsa, R., Sinervo, T., & Elovainio, M. (2014). Employment, psychosocial work environment and well-being among migrant and native physicians in Finnish health care. *European Journal of Public Health*, *24*(3), 445–451. https://doi.org/10.1093/eurpub/cku021

ACT Advisory Services Limited. (2025). *Changes to the labour migration policy effective 1 August 2025*. ACT Advisory Services. https://www.act.com.mt/articles-publications/changes-to-the-labour-migration-policy-effective-1-august-2025/

Aditus Foundation. (2025a). *Malta: Access to education.* Asylum Information Database (AIDA), European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE). https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/malta/content-international-protection/employment-and-education/access-education/

Aditus Foundation. (2025b). *Malta: Access to the labour market.* Asylum Information Database (AIDA), European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE). https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/malta/reception-conditions/employment-and-education/access-labour-market/

Aditus Foundation. (2025c). *Malta: Health care.* Asylum Information Database (AIDA), European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE). https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/malta/content-international-protection/health-care/

Ager, A., & Strang, A. (2008). Understanding integration: A conceptual framework. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, *21*(2), 166–191. https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fen016

Ajzen, I. (1991). The theory of planned behavior. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 50*(2), 179–211. https://doi.org/10.1016/0749-5978(91)90020-T

Akokuwebe, M. E., Likoko, S., Osuafor, G. N., & Idemudia, E. S. (2023). Determinants of life satisfaction among migrants in South Africa: an analysis of the GCRO's quality of life survey (2009-2021). *BMC public health, 23*(1), 2030. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-023-16868-1

American Psychological Association. (n.d.). *Resilience*. In APA Dictionary of Psychology. Retrieved July 17, 2025, from https://dictionary.apa.org/resilience

American Psychological Association. (2022a). *Psychology's role in advancing population health* (Policy statement, pp. 1–5). https://www.apa.org/about/policy/population-health-statement.pdf

American Psychological Association. (2022b). *Contemporary immigration: Theoretical perspectives. In Contemporary immigration: Theoretical perspectives* (pp. 3-19). American Psychological Association.

Archer, M. S. (1999). *Being human: The problem of agency.* Cambridge University Press.

Archer, M. S. (2007). *Making our way through the world: Human reflexivity and social mobility*. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511618932

Arnett, J. J. (2000). Emerging adulthood: A theory of development from the late teens through the twenties. *American Psychologist, 55*(5), 469–480. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.55.5.469

Artino, A. R., La Rochelle, J. S., Dezee, K. J., & Gehlbach, H. (2014). Developing questionnaires for educational research: AMEE Guide No. 87. *Medical Teacher, 36*(6), 463–474. https://doi.org/10.3109/0142159x.2014.889814

Attard, L. (1994). *Emigration and the Maltese economy.* Malta: Progress Press.

Bak-Klimek, A., Karatzias, T., Elliott, L., & MacLean, R. (2017). The Determinants of Well-Being among Polish Economic Immigrants. Testing the Sustainable Happiness model in Migrant population. *Journal of Happiness Studies, 19*(6), 1565–1588. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-017-9877-7

Bhaskar, R. (1975). *A realist theory of science* (1st ed.). Leeds Books.

Bhaskar, R. (1978). *A realist theory of science* (2nd ed.). Harvester Press.

Bhaskar, R. (1998). *The possibility of naturalism: A philosophical critique of the contemporary human sciences* (3rd ed.). Routledge.

Becker, G. S. (1964). *Human capital: A theoretical and empirical analysis, with special reference to education.* University of Chicago Press.

Berry, J. W. (1997). Immigration, acculturation, and adaptation. *Applied Psychology: An International Review, 46*(1), 5–34. https://doi.org/10.1080/026999497378467

Blake, C. (2021). *Exploring the working conditions of Filipino workers in the manufacturing sector in Malta* (dissertation). Retrieved from https://www.um.edu.mt/library/oar/bitstream/123456789/83970/1/21BWHR002.pdf

Boateng, G. O., Neilands, T. B., Frongillo, E. A., Melgar-Quiñonez, H. R., & Young, S. L. (2018). Best practices for developing and validating scales for health, social, and behavioral research: A primer. *Frontiers in Public Health, 6*(149). https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2018.00149

Boeije, H., & Willis, G. (2013). The Cognitive Interviewing Reporting Framework (CIRF). *Methodology, 9*(3), 87–95. https://doi.org/10.1027/1614-2241/a000075

Boski, P. (2013). A psychology of economic migration. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, 44*(7), 1067–1093. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022112471895

Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In J. G. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education* (pp. 241–258). Greenwood Press.

Boynton, P. M. (2004). Administering, analysing, and reporting your questionnaire. *BMJ, 328*(7452), 1372–1375. https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.328.7452.1372

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Braun, V., & Clark, V. (2013). Teaching thematic analysis: Overcoming challenges and developing strategies for effective learning. *The Psychologist, 26*(2), 120-123.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2019). Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. *Qualitative Research in Sport Exercise and Health, 11*(4), 589–597. https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676x.2019.1628806

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2022). *Thematic analysis: A practical guide*. SAGE Publications.

Baum, J. R., & Locke, E. A. (2004). The relationship of entrepreneurial traits, skill, and motivation to venture growth. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 89*(4), 587–598. https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.89.4.587

Biddle, B. J. (1986). Recent developments in role theory. *Annual Review of Sociology, 12*, 67–92. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.so.12.080186.000435

Bretones, F. D., & González, M. F. (2020). Employment and psychosocial working conditions of migrants and natives in Spain. *Spanish Labour Review, 29*(3), 45–59. https://doi.org/10.1111/slr.2020.293

Briguglio, L. (2016). *The Maltese Economy: Structure and Performance.* Lecture, University of Malta; Msida.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design.* Harvard University Press.

Buttigieg, S. C., Agius, K., Pace, A., & Cassar, M. (2018). The integration of immigrant nurses at the workplace in Malta: A Case Study. *International Journal of Migration Health and Social Care, 14*(3), 269–289. https://doi.org/10.1108/ijmhsc-06-2017-0024

Caruana, S. (2023). An overview of research on the recent migration of Italians in Malta. *Italiano LinguaDue, 1*. https://www.um.edu.mt/library/oar/handle/123456789/111186

Carver, C. S. (1998). Resilience and thriving: issues, models, and linkages. *Journal of Social Issues, 54*(2), 245–266. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.1998.tb01217.x

Central Bank of Malta. (2015). *The Maltese economy: Structure and performance*. Retrieved from: https://www.um.edu.mt/__data/assets/pdf_file/0010/329657/Financial_Sector.pdf

Chib, A., Wilkin, H. A., & Hua, S. R. M. (2013). International migrant workers' use of mobile phones to seek social support in Singapore. *Information Technologies and International Development, 9*(4), 19–34. https://itidjournal.org/index.php/itid/article/view/1122.html

Cook, D. A., & Beckman, T. J. (2006). Current concepts in validity and reliability for psychometric instruments: Theory and application. *The American Journal of Medicine, 119*(2), 166.e7–166.e16. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amjmed.2005.10.036

Cormoș, V. C. (2022). The processes of adaptation, assimilation and integration in the country of migration: A psychosocial perspective on place identity changes. *Sustainability, 14*(16), 10296.

Creswell, J. (2015). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches.* Pearson Education Inc.

Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2018). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.

Culshaw, M., Silander, H., Mortier, T., & Yatczak, J. (2022). Are they thriving or just surviving? moving beyond graduation and grades to measure success in students. The *American Journal of Occupational Therapy, 76.* https://doi.org/10.5014/ajot.2022.76s1-po121

Debono, M., & Garzia, C. (2016). *Labour market integration of asylum seekers and refugees: Malta.* Publications Office of the European Union. https://www.um.edu.mt/library/oar/bitstream/123456789/21899/1/Malta-AHR_LMIntegrationOfAsylumSeekers_RefugeesMay2016_Final.pdf

Debono, M., & Vassallo, M. (2019). Working conditions of Filipino workers in Malta. Journal of Migration Research, 22(1), 34–45.

Debono, M., & Vassallo, M. (2020a). Labouring behind closed doors: The working and living conditions of Filipino live-in care workers in Malta. *Uncertainty and Challenges in Contemporary Economic Behaviour,* 195–215. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-80043-095-220201015

Debono, M., & Vassallo, R. (2020b). Predictors of Employment Outcomes among Filipino Workers in Malta. *Xjenza Online, 8*(1), 16-31. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.7423/XJENZA.2020.1.02

Debono, M. (2021). Migrants and the challenge of decent work in Malta. *e-Revista Internacional de la Protección Social, 6*(2), 272-293.

De Neve, J., Diener, E., Tay, L., & Xuereb, C. (2013). The objective benefits of Subjective Well-Being. *SSRN Electronic Journal.* https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/Delivery.cfm/SSRN_ID2306651_code944452.pdf?abstractid=2306651

DeVellis, R. F. (2016). *Scale development: Theory and applications* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.

Devkota, H. R., Bhandari, B., & Adhikary, P. (2020). Perceived mental health, wellbeing and associated factors among Nepali male migrant and non-migrant workers: A qualitative study. *Journal of Migration and Health, 3,* 100013. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jmh.2020.100013

Diener, E., Wirtz, D., Tov, W., Kim-Prieto, C., Choi, D.-w., Oishi, S., & Biswas-Diener, R. (2010). New well-being measures: Short scales to assess flourishing and positive and negative feelings. *Social Indicators Research, 97*(2), 143–156. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-009-9493-y

Dowling, M. (2006). Approaches to reflexivity in qualitative research. *Nurse Researcher, 13*(3), 7–21. https://doi.org/10.7748/nr2006.04.13.3.7.c5975

du Plooy, D. R., Lyons, A., & Kashima, E. S. (2019). Predictors of flourishing and psychological distress among migrants to Australia: A dual continuum approach. *Journal of Happiness Studies, 20,* 561-578.

Dryjanska, L. (2023). Proculturation shaped by social representations of academic migrants from Italy to the United States. *Frontiers in Psychology, 14.* https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1173915

Duckworth, A. L., Peterson, C., Matthews, M. D., & Kelly, D. R. (2007). Grit: Perseverance and passion for long-term goals. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 92*(6), 1087–1101. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.92.6.1087

Echa, P. I. (2018). Capital is key: A case for migrants' cultural capital. *International Journal of Migration and Border Studies, 4*(1/2), 125. https://doi.org/10.1504/ijmbs.2018.091212

Ellis, C., Adams, T. E., & Bochner, A. P. (2011). Autoethnography: An overview. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research, 12*(1), 10. https://doi.org/10.17169/fqs-12.1.1589

Elshahat, S., Moffat, T., & Newbold, K. B. (2022). Understanding the Healthy Immigrant Effect in the Context of Mental Health Challenges: A Systematic Critical Review. *Journal of immigrant and minority health, 24*(6), 1564–1579. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10903-021-01313-5

Erikson, E. H. (1959). *Identity and the life cycle: Selected papers.* International Universities Press.

European Trade Union Institute. (2023). *Report on the social security rights of short-term third-country national migrant workers.* Retrieved from https://www.etui.org/sites/default/files/2023-05/17-Malta-Report%20on%20the%20social%20security%20rights%20of%20short-term%20third-country%20national%20migrant%20workers_2023.pdf

Falzon, N. (2022). *Turning the Tables: Compendium of recommendations* [Report]. Human Rights Directorate, Government of Malta. https://humanrights.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Compendium-of-Recommendations-Publication.pdf

Feddes, A. R., Van Emmerik, A. a. P., Arjangi-Babetti, H. J., Bosdijk, S., Klawitter, L., Macdougall, A. I., Romers, A. H., Tsaousoglou, S., & Doosje, B. (2022). (Not) in my backyard! Threat perceptions, psychological well-being, and collective action against refugee settlement. In *American Psychological Association eBooks* (pp. 45–62). https://doi.org/10.1037/0000294-003

Finlay, L. (2002). “Outing” the researcher: The provenance, process, and practice of reflexivity. *Qualitative Health Research, 12*(4), 531–545. https://doi.org/10.1177/104973202129120052

Fletcher, A. J. (2017). Applying critical realism in qualitative research: Methodology meets method. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology, 20*(2), 181–194. https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2016.1144401

Gamsakhurdia, V. (2018). Proculturation and self-concept reconstruction among migrants. *International Journal of Migration Psychology, 11*(3), 556–571. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1354067X19829020

Goundar, P. R. (2025). Researcher positionality: Ways to include it in a qualitative research design. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 24*. https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069251321251

Grabska, M. (2022). *The lived experiences of migrant social workers practicing in Malta* (dissertation). Retrieved from https://www.um.edu.mt/library/oar/handle/123456789/122235

Grech, S. (2021). *Turning the Tables: Employment* [Report]. Human Rights Directorate, Ministry for Equality, Research and Innovation, Government of Malta. https://humanrights.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Employment-Publication-1.pdf

Griffiths, A., Cox, T., Karanika, M., Khan, S., & Tomás, J. M. (2006). Work design and management in the manufacturing sector: development and validation of the Work

Organisation Assessment Questionnaire. *Occupational and Environmental Medicine, 63*(10), 669–675. https://doi.org/10.1136/oem.2005.023671

GVZH Advocates. (n.d.). *Employment of foreign workers in Malta.* Retrieved from: https://gvzh.mt/services/practice-areas/employment-industrial-relations/employment-foreign-workers/

Grech, A. G. (2017). Did Malta's accession to the EU raise its potential growth? A focus on the foreign workforce. *Journal of Economic Integration, 32*(4), 873–890. https://doi.org/10.11130/jei.2017.32.4.873

Grima, P. (2021). *Determinants that increase health and safety risks for migrant construction workers in Malta* (dissertation). Retrieved from https://www.um.edu.mt/library/oar/handle/123456789/116017oai:www.um.edu.mt:123456789/116017

Hendriks, M., & Bartram, D. (2019). Bringing happiness into the study of migration and its consequences: What, why, and how? *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies, 17*(3), 279-298.

Hendriks, M., & Burger, M. (2019). Unsuccessful Subjective Well-Being Assimilation Among Immigrants: The Role of Faltering Perceptions of the Host Society. *Journal of Happiness Studies.* https://doi:10.1007/s10902-019-00164-0

Hobfoll, S. E. (1989). Conservation of resources: A new attempt at conceptualizing stress. *American Psychologist, 44*(3), 513–524. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.44.3.513

Hoppe, A. (2011). Psychosocial working conditions and well-being among immigrant and German low-wage workers. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, *16*(2), 187–201. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0021728

Horvat Cardona, M. (2023). *An assessment of workplace health & safety in the construction industry: the case of Serbians working in Malta.* (dissertation). Retrieved from https://www.um.edu.mt/library/oar/handle/123456789/122072oai:www.um.edu.mt:123456789/122072

Hussein, S. (2022). The global demand for migrant care workers: drivers and implications on migrants' wellbeing. *Sustainability*, *14*(17), 10612. https://doi.org/10.3390/su141710612

Huta, V., & Waterman, A. S. (2014). Eudaimonia and its distinction from hedonia: Developing a classification and terminology for understanding conceptual and operational definitions. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, *15*(6), 1425–1456. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-013-9485-0

Identità. (n.d.). *Non-EU Nationals Employment in Malta*. Retrieved from: https://identita.gov.mt/expatriates-unit-non-eu-nationals-employment-in-malta/

Jobsplus. (2021). *Employment Licences Unit: Guidelines for clients*. https://jobsplus.gov.mt/media/pvhaduix/guide.pdf

Joshi, A., Kale, S., Chandel, S., & Pal, D. K. (2015). Likert Scale: Explored and Explained. *Current Journal of Applied Science and Technology*, *7*(4), 396–403. https://doi.org/10.9734/BJAST/2015/14975

Justice and Peace Commission. (2024). *Beyond GDP II: Towards a new Malta wellbeing framework.* https://jp.church.mt/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Beyond-GDP-II-1.pdf

Kashdan, T. B., Biswas-Diener, R., & King, L. A. (2008). Reconsidering happiness: The costs of distinguishing between hedonics and eudaimonia. *The Journal of Positive Psychology, 3*(2), 219–233. https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760802303044

King, R. (1979). Post-war migration pattern and policies in Malta with special reference to return migration. *European Demographic Information Bulletin*, *10*(3), 108–128. https://doi.org/10.1007/bf02917864

King, J. R., & Connell, J. (1999). Small worlds, global lives: islands and migration. In *Pinter eBooks.* http://ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BA43256917

KPMG. (2024). *Malta Economic Outlook.* Retrieved from https://assets.kpmg.com/content/dam/kpmg/mt/pdf/2024/03/malta-economic-outlook-march-2024-updated.pdf

Lee, C. C., & Lee, V. C. (2015). A study of acculturative stress, coping and quality of life among third country nationals (TCNs). *Journal of Neurology and Neuroscience, 9*, 11–12. https://doi.org/10.21767/2171-6625-C2-010

Leġiżlazzjoni Malta. (2025). *Maltese Citizenship Act, Cap 188*. https://legislation.mt/eli/cap/188/eng/pdf

Levinson, D. J. (1978). *The seasons of a man's life.* Knopf.

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry.* SAGE Publications.

Lune, H., & Berg, B. L. (2017). *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences* (9th ed.). Pearson.

Mahoney, M. J. (1997). Psychotherapists' personal problems and self-care patterns. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice, 28*(1), 14–16. https://doi.org/10.1037/0735-7028.28.1.14

Malta News Agency. (2024). *New economic migration policy to protect workers.* Retrieved from https://www.maltanewsagency.com.

Martin, A. J., Nejad, H. G., Colmar, S., & Liem, G. A. D. (2013). Adaptability: How students' responses to uncertainty and novelty predict their academic and non-academic outcomes. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 105*(3), 728–746. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0032794

Maslach, C. (2003). Job burnout: New directions in research and Intervention. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 12*, 189–192.

Maslow, A. H. (1954). *Motivation and personality.* Harper & Row.

Mason, J. (2002). *Qualitative Research* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Ltd.

Maunders, J. (2010). *How do therapists make sense of their reactions towards clients: An interpretative phenomenological analysis* (Professional Doctorate thesis). Retrieved from http://roar.uel.ac.uk/1598/1/2012_DClinPsych_Maunders.pdf

Maxwell, J. A. (2012). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach (3rd ed.).* SAGE Publications.

Ministry for Home Affairs, Security and Employment. (2025). *Malta labour migration policy: Implementation of the Malta labour migration policy* [Implementation document]. Government of Malta. https://jobsplus.gov.mt/media/0c3ppzjb/malta-labour-migration-policy-implementation-doc-jul-2025.pdf

Mifsud, I. (2021). Long term residency rules in Malta: an undefeatable obstacle course for Third-Country nationals? In *Springer eBooks* (pp. 205–221). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-66115-1_9

Mucci, N., Traversini, V., Giorgi, G., Tommasi, E., De Sio, S., & Arcangeli, G. (2019). Migrant Workers and Psychological Health: A Systematic Review. *Sustainability*, *12*(1), 120. https://doi.org/10.3390/su12010120

National Statistics Office (NSO). (2022). *Labour market situation of migrants and their immediate descendants: 2021* (News Release 185/2022). https://nso.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/News2022_185.pdf

National Statistics Office (NSO). (2024). *Contrasting population dynamics*. Malta National Statistics Office. https://nso.gov.mt/contrasting-population-dynamics/

National Statistics Office (NSO). (2025). *World Population Day*. Malta National Statistics Office. https://nso.gov.mt/population/world-population-day-11-july-2025/

Neubauer, J. (2024). Envisioning futures at new destinations: Geographical Imaginaries and migration aspirations of Nepali migrants moving to Malta. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *50*(12), 3049–3068. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183x.2024.2305281

Oglethorpe, D. E. (1983). *The Maltese economy since independence: The impact of structural change, policy responses, and economic performance.* (dissertation). Retrieved from https://theses.gla.ac.uk/6623/7/1983Oglethorpephd.pdf

Omilusi, M. (2025). Exploring Refugees' Survival and Coping Mechanisms within the Framework of Migrant Integration and Malta's Immigration Policy. *Migracijske i etničke teme, 41*(1), 7-37. https://doi.org/10.11567/met.2025.1

Panicacci, A., & Dewaele, J. (2017). 'A voice from elsewhere': acculturation, personality and migrants' self-perceptions across languages and cultures. *International Journal of Multilingualism, 14*(4), 419–436. https://doi.org/10.1080/14790718.2016.1273937

Pérez, E. R., Benavides, F. G., Levecque, K., Love, J. G., Felt, E., & Van Rossem, R. (2012). Differences in working conditions and employment arrangements among migrant and non-migrant workers in Europe. *Ethnicity and Health, 17*(6), 563–577. https://doi.org/10.1080/13557858.2012.730606

Pfafman, T. M. (2020). Assertiveness. In V. Zeigler-Hill & T. K. Shackelford (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of personality and individual differences* (pp. 263–269). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-24612-3_1044

Pfeffer, J. (2010). Building sustainable organizations: The human factor. *Academy of Management Perspectives, 24*, 34–45.

POLO Rome. (n.d.). *Overview of the Overseas Employment Certificate (OEC) for returning OFWs*. Retrieved from:

https://polorome.freshdesk.com/support/solutions/articles/31000167019-overview-of-the-overseas-employment-certificate-oec-for-returning-ofws

Porath, C., Spreitzer, G., Gibson, C., & Garnett, F. G. (2011). Thriving at work: Toward its measurement, construct validation, and theoretical refinement. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, *33*(2), 250–275. https://doi.org/10.1002/job.756

Porru, S., Elmetti, S., & Arici, C. (2014). Psychosocial risk among migrant workers: what we can learn from literature and field experiences. *La Medicina del lavoro*, *105*(2), 109–129.

Putnam, R. D. (2007). E pluribus unum: Diversity and community in the twenty-first century the 2006 Johan Skytte Prize Lecture. *Scandinavian political studies*, *30*(2), 137-174.

Raghavan, R., Coope, J., Jamwal, S., & Pendse, T. (2019). Reflections on the use of mental health resilience concepts in migration and global mental health. *International Journal of Mental Health*, *48*(4), 299-308.

Rossoni, I., Gauci, D., Gauci Farrugia, A., & Padovese, V. (2022). Gender, migration and violence among third country nationals accessing the Sexual Health Clinic in Malta. *Journal of the European Academy of Dermatology and Venereology*, *36*(9), 1623–1631. https://doi.org/10.1111/jdv.18222

Roulston, K. (2010). *Reflective interviewing: A guide to theory and practice.* SAGE Publications.

Ruggeri, K., Garcia-Garzon, E., Maguire, Á., Matz, S., & Huppert, F. A. (2020). Well-being is more than happiness and life satisfaction: a multidimensional analysis of 21 countries. *Health and quality of life outcomes, 18*, 1-16.

Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist, 55*(1), 68–78. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.55.1.68

Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2001). On happiness and human potentials: A review of research on hedonic and eudaimonic well-being. *Annual Review of Psychology, 52*, 141–166. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.52.1.141

Ryff, C. D. (1989). Happiness is everything, or is it? Explorations on the meaning of psychological well-being. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 57(6), 1069–1081. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.57.6.1069

Sammut, G., & Lauri, M. A. (2017). Intercultural relations in Malta. In R. Berry, J. Phinney, D. Sam, & P. Vedder (Eds.), *Mutual intercultural relations* (pp. 231–248). Cambridge University Press.

Schwartz, S. J., Walsh, S. D., Ward, C., Tartakovsky, E., Weisskirch, R. S., Vedder, P., Makarova, E., Bardi, A., Birman, D., Oppedal, B., Benish-Weisman, M., Lorenzo-Blanco, E. I., Güngör, D., Stevens, G. W. J. M., Benet-Martínez, V., Titzmann, P. F., Silbereisen, R. K., & Geeraert, N. (2019). The role of psychologists in international migration research: Complementing other expertise and an interdisciplinary way forward. *Migration Studies, 10*(2), 356–373. https://doi.org/10.1093/migration/mnz054

Seligman, M. E. P., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2000). Positive psychology: An introduction. *American Psychologist, 55*(1), 5–14. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.55.1.5

Shapiro, S. L., Brown, K. W., & Biegel, G. M. (2007). Teaching self-care to caregivers: Effects of mindfulness-based stress reduction on the mental health of therapists in training. *Training and Education in Professional Psychology, 1*(2), 105–115. https://doi.org/10.1037/1931-3918.1.2.105

Smith, J. A., & Osborn, M. (2008). Interpretative phenomenological analysis. In J. A. Smith (Ed.), *Qualitative psychology: A practical guide to research methods* (2nd ed., pp. 53–80). SAGE Publications.

Sommarribas, A., & Nienaber, B. (2021). Migration and mobility of third-country national labour workers to and inside Europe during the COVID-19 pandemic – a legal analysis. *Comparative Migration Studies, 9*(1). https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-021-00229-1

Spadavecchia, C., & Yu, J. (2021). Highly-Skilled Migrants, Gender, and Well-Being in the Eindhoven Region. An Intersectional analysis. *Administrative Sciences, 11*(3), 72. https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci11030072

Spreitzer, G. M., Sutcliffe, K., Dutton, J., Sonenshein, S., & Grant, A. M. (2005). A socially embedded model of thriving at work. *Organization Science, 16,* 537–549.

Stranges, M., Vignoli, D., & Venturini, A. (2021). Migrants' subjective well-being in Europe: does relative income matter? *European Societies, 23*(2), 255-284.

Stockemer, D. (2019). *Quantitative methods for the social sciences: A practical introduction with examples in SPSS and Stata*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-99118-4

Su, R., Tay, L., & Diener, E. (2014). The development and validation of the Comprehensive Inventory of Thriving (CIT) and the Brief Inventory of Thriving (BIT). *Applied Psychology: Health and Well-Being*, *6*(3), 251-279. https://doi.org/10.1111/aphw.12027

Super, D. E. (1990). A life-span, life-space approach to career development. In D. Brown & L. Brooks, *Career choice and development: Applying contemporary theories to practice* (2nd ed., pp. 197–261). Jossey-Bass.

Taylor, S. E. (2012). *Health psychology* (8th ed.). McGraw-Hill.

Teh, Y. Y., & Lek, E. (2018). Culture and reflexivity: systemic journeys with a British Chinese family. *Journal of Family Therapy*, *40*(4), 520–536. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-6427.12205

Times of Malta. (2023a*). Labour shortages in Malta: An economic perspective.* Times of Malta. https://timesofmalta.com

Times of Malta. (2023b). *Addressing HR Challenges of foreign workers in Malta*. Retrieved from https://timesofmalta.com/article/addressing-hr-challenges-foreign-workers-malta.1062333

Ursachi, G., Horodnic, I. A., & Zait, A. (2015). How reliable are measurement scales? External factors with indirect influence on reliability estimators. Procedia Economics and Finance, 20, 679–686. https://doi.org/10.1016/S2212-5671(15)00123-9

Valentim, J. P. (2022). Immigration through a cultural prism: Characteristics and challenges. In F. M. Moghaddam & M. J. Hendricks (Eds.), *Contemporary immigration: Psychological perspectives to address challenges and inform solutions* (pp. 163–182). American Psychological Association. https://doi.org/10.1037/0000294-009

van der Ham, A. J., Ujano-Batangan, M. T., Ignacio, R., & Wolffers, I. N. (2015). The dynamics of migration-related stress and coping of female domestic workers from the Philippines: An exploratory study. *Community Mental Health Journal, 51*(1), 14–20. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10597-014-9777-9

Villagrasa, P. J. R., & Izquierdo, A. L. G. (2018). The price of working abroad: Well-being among immigrant and native workers. *Ansiedad Y Estrés, 24*(2–3), 125–130. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.anyes.2018.08.001

Villani, D., Sorgente, A., Iannello, P., & Antonietti, A. (2019). The Role of Spirituality and Religiosity in Subjective Well-Being of Individuals with Different Religious Status. *Frontiers in Psychology, 10*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.01525

Willig, C. (2001). *Introducing Qualitative Research in Psychology: Adventures in Theory and Method.* Buckingham: Open University Press.

World Health Organization. (2004). *Promoting mental health: Concepts, emerging evidence, practice* (Summary report). https://iris.who.int/bitstream/handle/10665/42940/9241591595.pdf

Zachariadis, M., Scott, S., & Barrett, M. (2013). Methodological Implications of Critical Realism for Mixed-Methods Research. *MIS Quarterly*, *37*(3), 855–879. http://www.jstor.org/stable/43826004

Appendix A: Qualitative Participant Recruitment Email

Dear _____

Warm Greetings!

How are you today? I trust you are well.

I am Lanette, a Master of Science in Psychological Studies student at the University of Malta. I am currently doing a research study entitled, Shedding Light on Thriving: A Mixed-Methods Approach on Thriving among Working Migrants in Malta.

I am writing to **invite you to participate** in the first part of my study which would involve a one-on-one, face-to-face interview with me. This will take approximately 45 – 60 minutes. In this interview, you will be asked about your experiences as a migrant and your perception of thriving. Your input is valuable and would be highly appreciated. A more detailed information about the study and participation can be found in the attached **Information Sheet.**

Should you be interested to participate, kindly respond to this email so we can schedule an interview which will be held at a place convenient to you.

Please note that **your participation is voluntary**. You may choose to refuse or ignore this email without providing any reason.

Thank you very much for your time.

Best Regards,

Lanette Kristel Dela Cruz

Appendix B: Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form (Qualitative)

Participant Information Sheet

Introduction

My name is Lanette Kristel Dela Cruz and I am a part-time student at the University of Malta, reading for a Master of Science in Psychological Studies. I am presently conducting research as part of my dissertation titled, "**Shedding Light on Thriving: A Mixed Methods Approach to Thriving among Working Migrants in Malta".** This is being supervised by Dr Gottfried Catania. The aim of my study is to explore what makes working migrants in Malta thrive and how well they are thriving.

What will taking part involve?

Any data collected from this research will be used solely for purposes of this study. Should you choose to participate, you will be asked to participate in a **one-on-one, face-to-face interview** scheduled at a convenient time and location between you and the researcher. The interview will take **approximately 45 – 60 minutes**. You will be asked open-ended questions about your perception and experiences of thriving. Before the interview, you will be provided information about the study and your rights as a participant. To confirm that you agree in the terms of participating, you will be requested to sign a consent form and a copy will be given to you. Your valuable insights will help this research in understanding migrant thriving.

Participation in this study is entirely **voluntary**; in other words, you are free to accept or refuse to participate, without needing to give a reason.

You are also **free to withdraw from the study at any time**, without needing to provide any explanation and without any negative repercussions for you. Should you choose to withdraw, any data collected from you will be erased as long as this is technically possible (for example, before it is anonymised or published), unless erasure of data would render impossible or seriously impair achievement of the research objectives, in which case it shall be retained in an anonymised form.

If you choose to participate, please note that there are no direct benefits to you; and, your participation does not entail any known or anticipated risks.

What happens to the data during and after the interview?

Data will be collected through use of an audio recording device during the interview. The audio recording will then be transcribed and **anonymised** by assigning participants random pseudonyms. Some excerpts from the interview may appear in the final report and paper but no names or any identifiable details will ever be used.

The data collected will be treated confidentially in a pseudonymised form. The transcripts, signed consent forms, and recordings of the interview will be stored in a password-protected folder saved on the University's official cloud platform and is only accessible to the researcher and supervisor.

Please note also that, as a participant, you have the right under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and national legislation to access, rectify and where applicable ask for the data concerning you to be erased.

All data collected will be stored in an anonymised form upon completion of the study. Following publication, the recordings will be erased within 24 months of the study's completion.

Participant's consent

- ☐ I hereby declare to have read the information about the nature of the study, my involvement and data management.
- ☐ I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study and my questions have been satisfactorily answered.
- ☐ I understand that, under national legislation and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), I have the right to access, rectify and, where applicable, ask for the data concerning me to be erased.
- ☐ I have been provided with a copy of the information sheet and understand that I will also be given a copy of this consent form.
- ☐ I understand that should I have any further queries, I can contact Ms Lanette Kristel Dela Cruz on lanette.dela-cruz.18@um.edu.mt or Dr Gottfried Catania on gottfried.catania@um.edu.mt.
- ☐ I agree to participate in this research study.

MARK ONLY IF APPLICABLE

- ☐ I agree to this interview being audio recorded.
- ☐ I do not agree to this interview being audio recorded.

_____ _____

Participant's name (in block) and signature

LANETTE KRISTEL DELA CRUZ

_____

Date

Appendix C: Qualitative Research Interview Guide

List of Questions – Part I:

1. Can you briefly describe your life before you migrated?
2. What motivate your decision to migrate to Malta? What was the goal if any?
    a. Did you have any specific role at that time? (i.e., parent supporting children, supporting parents and siblings, in search for self-growth)
3. Can you describe your initial experiences in Malta right when you migrated?
    a. Maybe the first months, first year, or the first two years?
4. What expectations did you have before moving to Malta?
    a. How did these expectations align with your actual experiences??
5. Can you describe your lifestyle?
    a. Your mental health?
    b. Your economic experiences? Challenges and opportunities and how you dealt with them?
    c. Your routine if any?
    d. Your social engagements? Your family life or personal relationships after migrating to Malta? Home family contact?
    e. Your career/job/profession?
6. What are your main priorities now?
    a. What were priorities when you first arrived in Malta?

Part II:

7. Are you familiar with the word thriving?
        i. [show them a laminated paper with the word ‘thriving’ written on it]
        ii. [ask them if this word exists in their native language and what does it indicate]
        iii. [use Google translate to give them the word in their native language]
    b. How do you make sense of the word thriving?

8. Can you tell me about a period in your life here in Malta when you felt that you are thriving?
    a. What about in other countries, if you worked elsewhere?
9. What do you consider to be the opposite of thriving?
    a. Can you describe what it looks like for you?
10. What kind of resources or characteristics do you think you have that make you thrive as a migrant?
    a. What stops you from thriving?
11. Can you describe a specific crisis or significant challenge you faced in Malta and how you managed to overcome it? How did this experience influence your sense of thriving?"
12. Which types of support and resources in Malta have been most beneficial to you?
    a. What have been problematic or unhelpful?
13. How have you adapted to the Maltese customs and traditions (i.e., language, practices, mentality)?
    a. How has this affected your identity?
    b. What cultural practices from your home country do you continue to follow?
    c. Scale of 1 – 10, how integrated are you with the Maltese community? How involved are you?
14. Do you believe it is important for migrants in Malta to thrive in life?
    a. Why or why not?
15. Do you feel like you are maximizing your potentials, capabilities, talents in Malta?
    a. Can you tell me more about it?
16. In what ways have you experienced personal growth or change since moving to Malta?
    a. How do you set and achieve your personal goals? Any future aspirations?
17. What advise can you give to new migrants in Malta?
    a. What about to those who are not thriving?

Is there anything else that we did not discuss which you would like to share? Maybe a unique experience, realization, or philosophy?

Appendix D: Transcript Snippet

Interviewer: I see. But what about when it comes to migrant life? How do you think this is related to migrants like you or like us?

Laura: Quite tricky.

Interviewer: It's okay. There is no right or wrong answer. It's just what comes to your mind.

Laura: I don't know what to reply. Maybe can you try asking a bit different?

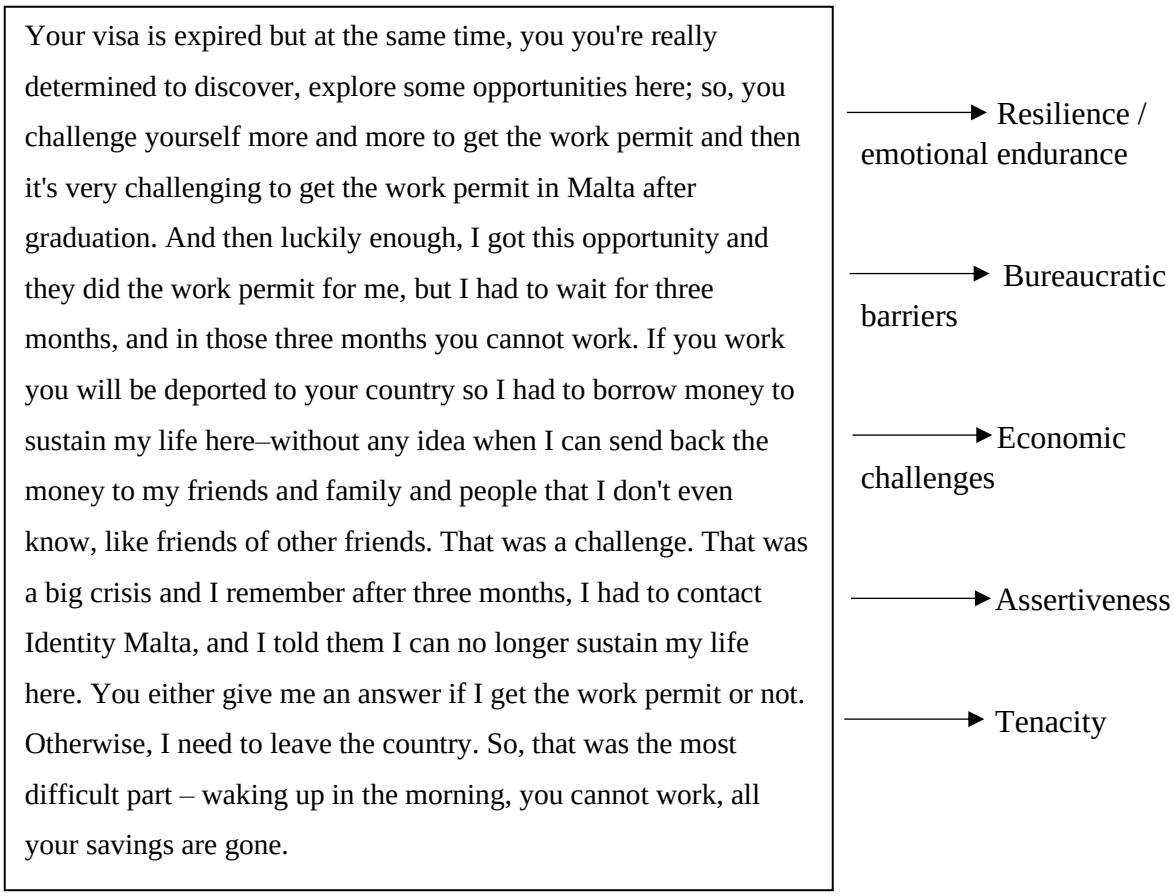
Interviewer: Yes, of course. For example, you are a migrant here in Malta, how can you say that you are thriving?

Laura: Okay. I think it can start maybe with the, how can I say, like independence somehow. Because when you come here, you need a lot of help from people. It's not easy to do it by yourself. I don't mean that you need to be independent all your life. It's not that. It's just that you need to ask for help in many situations. And even sometimes it helps a lot that you get a lot of contacts because they will help you with everything. So, at the beginning it's more like you try to settle some things. But after some time, you need to go forward and settle more and more things if you want to stay here. So, I think it becomes more when you feel that you are more settled. More relaxed with your daily life. Because when you get here you have maybe some economy issues. Maybe you don't find friends. Maybe you're not comfortable where you live. Maybe you don't know what to do here because maybe you are a bit shy. Maybe you used to do something back in your country but when you come here you don't find it. Like it happened to me. So, when you started gathering all these things that maybe fulfilled your life, I think that's how you… That's what thriving is.

Interviewer: I see. And can you describe a point in your life here in Malta when you felt that you were thriving?

Laura: I think it's related to my sport. Because like I mentioned, it's something that I was never looking for but it was always in my mind. So, when it happened at the beginning it was only assisting. So, it was like okay yes, it's happening slowly but it's happening and now it's like wow.

Appendix E: Dual Coding



Appendix F: NVivo Codes and Initial Themes

Code names	Files	References
Coping mechanisms	0	0
ceasing the opportunity of being in Malta already to earn a relatively higher income	2	2
celebrating wins	2	2
choosing your battles - reframing thoughts and attitude	12	23
coped by seeking help from friends	9	13
enduring difficulty just to provide financial support for the family	1	1
faith practice	2	4
gratified contentment	4	5
lowering expectations	5	7
Malta has limited resources which encourage migrants to be creative	4	4
motivational self-talk, 'I need to start from the bottom to rise to the top'	8	10
sublimation	1	1
'try to enjoy life'	5	8
Life settlement in Malta	5	8
Malta is a traverse town	6	8
Malta's anti-thriving elements	0	0
crisis experienced - dealing with bureaucracy	8	17
crisis experienced - language barrier	1	1
difficulty finding a job as a third-country national	3	5
disappointment - Malta's urban landscape	6	10
EU citizenship as a privilege	9	25
experienced discrimination or unfair job treatment	3	6
immigration border issue	1	3
Learning Maltese has its perks	1	2
Malta's housing problems	9	21
Malta's lack of job security	3	10
Malta's slow work pace raises frustration	4	5
Malta's social connection game	5	7
Malta's social problems	2	5
Maltese language as a hindrance to job promotion	1	2
overpopulation	5	6
transparency and trust issues with local services	4	5
Malta's pro-thriving elements	0	0
Malta as an English speaking country	2	2
Malta is relatively safe compared to other countries	4	6
Malta offers job opportunities	9	13
Malta upholds a good quality of life	1	1
Malta's healthcare	3	4
Malta's increasingly diverse society is helpful to migrants	8	9
Malta's mental health resources	3	6
Malta's migrant integration program	4	6
Malta's schengen status allow migrants to travel around the EU	3	3

the laid-back Maltese culture makes it easier to thrive	8	10
Migrants' personal and social capital	0	0
academic pursuit in home country	8	9
adulting early	3	3
emotional and internal strength	4	4
hardworking or used to hard work	2	2
having a part-time job	2	2
hope brought by faith	1	2
intercity migration	7	7
interest in the field or passion started at an early age	2	3
luck	1	1
mastery in current job due to acquired experience or education from home country	10	13
regaining confidence by overcoming limitations	4	4
serendipitous career opportunity upon organic recognition of talent	2	3
successful career progression in home country	3	4
talent as a capital	2	2
Proculturation	0	0
engaging in transnational social practices	4	4
identity - exploration and expansion	11	25
sense of international citizenship	3	3
subjective sense of integration	12	14
Sense of adaptation and belonging	0	0
adapted a Maltese mentality	2	2
adapted a Maltese way of speaking	2	2
adapted a Maltese work ethic	2	2
detachment from the cultural practices of home country	2	2
identification to home country community in Malta	2	4
identification with the migrant population	2	3
proactive participation in local events and cultural practices	5	6
sense of belongingness at work	6	9
sense of belongingness in the Maltese community	7	18
sense of belongingness in various communities	4	4
Social relationships	0	0
continuous family and friend contact from home country	6	8
dynamic and international social connectivity	11	23
feeling of family in Malta	5	5
romantic relationship	8	20
Subjective financial experiences	0	0
economic challenges	7	23
money is not the motivation to migrate to Malta	2	5
money is the motivation to move to Malta	4	5
sense of financial security from the job	3	7
Support	0	0
feeling supported by colleagues	3	3
feeling supported by fellow countrymen in Malta	1	1
feeling supported by the employer	2	2

feeling supported by the government	4	4
feeling supported by the local Maltese people	3	3
Thriving attributes (negative)	0	0
anti-thriving attribute - lack of motivation	5	7
anti-thriving attribute - laziness	3	3
anti-thriving attribute - negativity	4	5
anti-thriving attribute - timid or self-effacing	3	3
Thriving attributes (positive)	0	0
adjusted to Maltese people's direct communication style	5	6
eagerness to learn	9	16
effective financial management	3	4
flexibility to start at entry-level despite having expertise	7	13
having an ultimate goal	6	13
openness and respect to people from various cultures	6	9
openness to experience	9	16
thriving attribute - adaptable	8	10
thriving attribute - assertiveness	12	16
thriving attribute - curiosity	2	2
thriving attribute - dedication to job	2	3
thriving attribute - discipline - delayed gratification	6	11
thriving attribute - discipline - giving up unproductive habits	2	2
thriving attribute - discipline - not to be swayed by the party culture in Malta	5	10
thriving attribute - discipline - ownership and accountability	2	2
thriving attribute - education	4	8
thriving attribute - emotional intelligence	3	3
thriving attribute - internal locus of control	6	7
thriving attribute - logical	3	5
thriving attribute - not scared of failure	1	1
thriving attribute - planning and organization	9	17
thriving attribute - positive mindset	5	7
thriving attribute - resilience	7	14
thriving attribute - resourceful or creative	5	15
thriving attribute - respectful attitude	4	6
thriving attribute - setting realistic goals	4	7
thriving attribute - tenacity	12	20
thriving attribute - values and respects difficult job	2	3
Thriving definition	0	0
belief that growth is ever-constant	9	12
belief that migrants have to help each other	1	1
belief that not thriving is related to rest and self-care	1	2
belief that thriving has a starting point	2	2
belief that thriving is a non-negotiable for migrants	9	11
belief that thriving is different for everyone	4	5
belief that thriving is related to challenges	4	7
belief that thriving is related to goal and reality alignment	4	5
belief that thriving is related to sense of freedom	3	3

belief that thriving is related to sense of security	4	7
belief that thriving requires an upward movement or expansion	6	6
belief that thriving requires hardwork	1	1
belief that thriving starts when you start building a life in Malta	6	14
belief that thriving stops when comfort and security are reached	2	3
opposite of thriving - depression	5	7
opposite of thriving - dysfunction	1	2
opposite of thriving - lack of control or uncertainty	3	4
opposite of thriving - overwork or burnout	1	1
opposite of thriving - sense of failure	1	1
opposite of thriving - shyness	1	1
opposite of thriving - stagnation	5	7
opposite of thriving - work is impacting other aspects of life negatively	1	1
perception of growth serves as a motivation to thrive further	3	3
presence of struggles amidst thriving	1	1
surviving - coping	2	5
Thriving facets	0	0
facets of thriving	1	1
thriving - career	10	19
thriving - cultural and social knowledge	5	10
thriving - general knowledge (Codes)	1	1
thriving - language or communication skill	4	6
thriving - personal values	4	5
thriving - relationship	4	5
thriving - subjective happiness	4	5
thriving - wellbeing	6	12
Thriving manifestations	0	0
career progression in Malta	10	14
culture fit	6	12
job fit	10	15
migrants' sense of contribution to Malta	8	12
potentials are being maximized (Codes)	4	4
potentials are not yet maximized	7	8
sense of fulfillment from giving	1	3
volunteering	2	5
Wellbeing	0	0
creative expression	6	11
seeking online therapy abroad	1	2
self-appreciation	1	2
self-care and self-regulation	9	30
subjective positive mental health is related to moving to Malta	5	6
subjective positive mental health is related to work flexibility	6	9
unwinding in nature	7	14
work-life balance routine	10	30
z - uncategorized	0	0
Moved to Malta for academic pursuit	6	8

Appendix G: Audit Trail

1. Conceptualisation and Planning
    - February 2024: Identified the research problem. Existing literature predominantly focuses on migrant vulnerabilities, with limited exploration of what enables them to thrive. Notably, there is no existing scale tailored to capture migrant thriving.
    - March 2024: Engaged in an extensive literature review. Considered alternative constructs such as life satisfaction and job performance, but found them reductionist and lacking the ability to capture social and structural realities. Thriving emerged as a more dynamic and holistic concept.
    - 27 March 2024: Supervisory meeting. Advised to draw on positive psychology as a perspective, but not as the overarching framework.
    - 30 March 2024: Finalised the working definition of "working migrants"
2. Research Proposal and Ethical Approval
    - 12 April 2024: Submitted research proposal.
    - 15 April 2024: Developed initial qualitative interview guide based on literature.
    - 02 May 2024: Received approval from the Board of Studies.
    - 05 May 2024: Revised interview guide to broaden scope; finalised information sheet, consent form, and recruitment email.
    - 06 May 2024: Submitted FREC application and received acknowledgment to proceed with qualitative data collection.
3. Qualitative Phase
    - June – July 2024: Recruitment initiated via email invitations and referrals. Inclusion criteria: legally residing, full-time workers in Malta, perceived as thriving. Excluded part-time workers due to differing priorities.
    - July 2024: Concern regarding lack of diversity in sample (e.g., marital status, age). Made additional efforts to include participants with children through expanded snowball sampling but no interested working migrant reached out.

- August – September 2024: Conducted face-to-face, semi-structured interviews. Audio recorded and transcribed using Otter.ai, followed by manual review. Reflections and field notes recorded in a reflexive journal after each interview.
- September – October 2024: Immersed in data through repeated listening and reading. Initial memos written.
- November 2024: Coding was carried out using NVivo software. A dual coding approach was applied, attending to both personal and structural/cultural dimensions, as well as semantic and latent meanings within the data. A total of 163 codes were generated from the 12 interview transcripts. These codes were then clustered into 17 thematically meaningful groups to identify and review initial candidate themes. The research questions were revisited during this stage to refine the thematic organisation and ensure alignment with the study's aims. In seeking to understand how participants made sense of thriving, all related codes were re-examined to identify patterns and conceptual commonalities. This process led to the development of a working definition of migrant thriving, including its phases and domains. A similar process was undertaken in analysing the enabling and constraining factors associated with thriving. Participants described a range of personal resources, which were conceptually grouped into three categories. Meanwhile, contextual influences were reviewed and categorised based on function, with each factor interpreted as either an enabler or barrier to thriving, depending on how it was experienced and described.
- December 2024 – February 2025: Wrote up qualitative results. Initially struggled with articulating analytic interpretations but later embraced an active interpretive stance. Used verbatim quotes to support analysis and claims.

4. Instrument Development and Pilot Testing
    - February 2025: Mapped qualitative themes into measurable constructs and refined quantitative research questions.
    - March 2025: Initially faced challenges transitioning from the qualitative to quantitative phase. Sought supervision and professional advice. Reminded of the goal of this research and learned to value both phases. Started constructing items

by translating participant narratives into statements answerable by a Likert-scale. Reviewed and adapted items from established scales where appropriate.

- April 2025: Conducted expert review. Performed cognitive interviews with five working migrants to ensure clarity and cultural fit. Revised accordingly. A second expert review was conducted. Created the survey on Google Forms. Pilot tested with 11 working migrants. Internal consistency assessed via Cronbach's alpha using SPSS. Removed one item per domain to improve reliability.
- 05 May 2025: Submitted second FREC form with the developed instrument for record-keeping.

5. Quantitative Phase
    - May 2025: Launched online survey. Disseminated via social media, QR-coded business cards, and outreach to organisations and HR departments. Flyers were also distributed in cafés, shops, and salons with staff permission.
    - June 2025: Collected 438 responses; 436 met inclusion criteria. Analysed using SPSS: descriptive statistics, non-parametric tests, correlations, regression analysis, and exploratory factor analysis. Organised results based on research questions.
6. Integration and Interpretation
    - July 2025: Triangulated qualitative and quantitative findings. Interpreted results through the lens of critical realism. Contextualised insights using previous literature. Reflected on personal positionality and its impact on interpretation. Derived practical implications and recommendations for future research.

Appendix H: Quantitative Participant Recruitment Channels

Social Media Post

Hi friends! I need your help.

I'm still collecting survey responses for my Master's research on the thriving experiences of working migrants in Malta, and I cannot do this without your support.

If you are a foreign worker employed full-time here in Malta, I would be so grateful if you could take 15 minutes to answer the online survey. ✅

Here's the link: https://bit.ly/3GP9L2b

Every response brings me closer to understanding and representing the experiences of working migrants. This research really depends on your input, and I'd truly appreciate every bit of time and effort you're willing to give. 🙏 My goal is for this research to eventually help inform more supportive practices, policies, or conversations that recognise the real-life experiences and strengths of working migrants in Malta.

To those who have already answered the survey — thank you so much! 🙌 I am so grateful for your time and support!

Also, if you can suggest any Facebook groups or communities where I can share this to reach more people, please comment or message me. I'd really appreciate your help in spreading the word — every bit of help counts! ❤️

Thanks again and take care!

Whatsapp Invite Message

Hello! 👋

🌟 I am Lanette, a Master's student in Psychological Studies at the University of Malta. I am approaching migration research from a psychological perspective 🔍 to explore the thriving experiences of working migrants, and I am seeking your contribution in this study. 🎓👩‍🎓

🌍 If you are a foreign national, living and working full-time in Malta 🇲🇹 I am inviting you to participate in my research study!

Foreign nationals who also obtained Maltese citizenship are also welcome to participate.

The online survey only takes 15-20 minutes to complete. 🌟

✨ Your valuable input in this study will be highly appreciated.

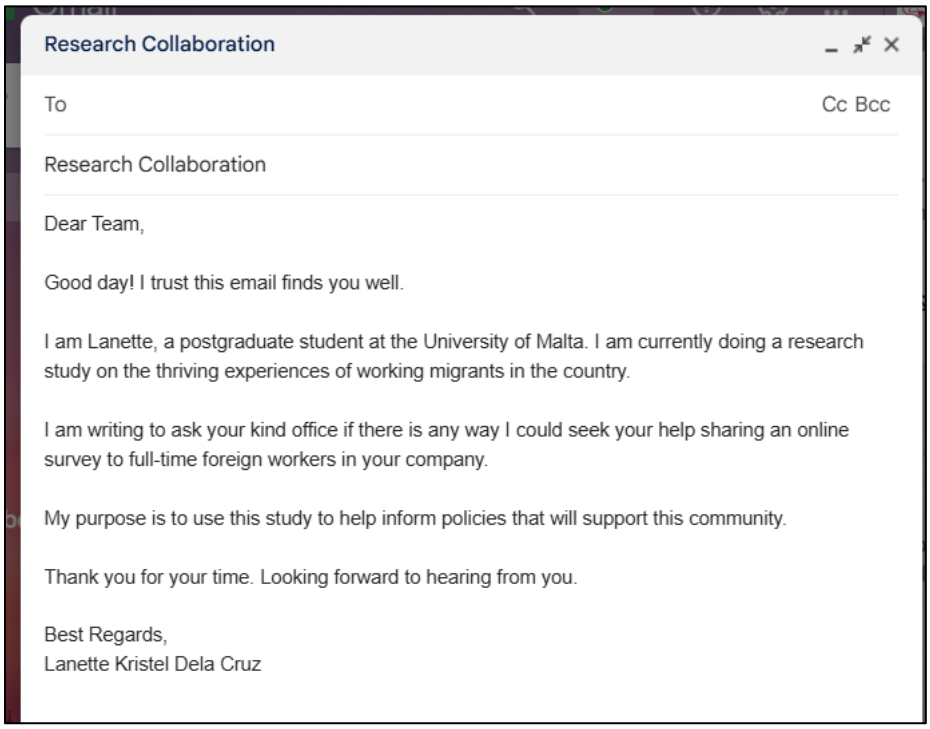
Click the link below to participate and share your experiences!
https://bit.ly/3GP9L2b

20:22 ✓

QR Code Cards

Appendix I: Quantitative – Research Collaboration Invite

Email Template sent to HR and administrators:



Research Collaboration

To

Cc Bcc

Research Collaboration

Dear Team,

Good day! I trust this email finds you well.

I am Lanette, a postgraduate student at the University of Malta. I am currently doing a research study on the thriving experiences of working migrants in the country.

I am writing to ask your kind office if there is any way I could seek your help sharing an online survey to full-time foreign workers in your company.

My purpose is to use this study to help inform policies that will support this community.

Thank you for your time. Looking forward to hearing from you.

Best Regards,
Lanette Kristel Dela Cruz

Cover Letter that HR and administration offices disseminated:

My name is Lanette, and I am a postgraduate student in Psychological Studies at the University of Malta. I am conducting a research study to explore the thriving experiences of working migrants in Malta.

If you are:

- ✓ a foreign national (EU or non-EU) working full-time in Malta, or
- ✓ a foreign national who has obtained Maltese citizenship and is employed full-time…

…I invite you to answer an online survey.

The survey is completely anonymous, voluntary, and takes approximately 10 minutes to complete.

Your participation will contribute to a better understanding of the experiences and strengths of working migrants and help inform policies that support this community.

To participate, please click on the following link: https://bit.ly/3GP9L2b

Thank you very much, and I wish you a wonderful day!

Appendix J: Full Distribution Lists

Job Sector

	Frequency	Percentage
Construction	15	3.4
Manufacturing (factories, food processing, product assembly)	34	7.8
Accommodation & Food Service (hospitality and restaurant industry)	48	11
Wholesale & Retail Trade (shops, supermarkets)	31	7.1
Transportation & Storage (transportation companies, airport, couriers)	13	3
Administrative & Support Services (office maintenance, cleaning, clerical, security)	35	8
Health & Social Work	89	20.4
Education	18	4.1
Information & Communication (tech jobs)	27	6.2
Financial & Insurance Activities (banks, accounting, insurance)	23	5.3
Professional, Scientific & Technical Activities (legal, consultancy, engineers, architects, other specialised professions)	23	5.3
Public Administration & Defence (government or public sector workers)	9	2.1
Arts, Entertainment & Recreation (iGaming companies, events, sports, culture, leisure, creative)	19	4.4
Other Services (any other personal services not listed above; self-employed)	10	2.3
Others (not mentioned)	41	9.6

Job Position

	Frequency	Percentage
Managers (CEOs, directors, senior officials, department heads, team leaders)	54	12.4
Professionals (doctors, nurse, pharmacists, engineers, teachers, lawyers, IT specialists, marketing, content writers, developers))	136	31.2
Technicians and Associate Professionals (Medical technicians, IT support, legal assistants)	15	3.4
Clerical Support Workers (Secretaries, administrative assistants, data entry clerks)	63	14.4
Service and Sales Workers (Retail workers, customer service, waiters, security guards, game presenters)	89	20.4
Plant and Machine Operators, and Assemblers (Factory workers, machine operators, drivers)	30	6.9
Elementary Occupations (Cleaners, laborers, messengers, packers)	28	6.4
Other positions (craft workers, freelancers, armed forces)	21	4.8

Type of Permit

	Frequency	Percentage
Single Permit (Standard work and residence permit for non-EU nationals)	268	61.5
EU/EEA/Swiss Residence Registration (For EU/EEA/Swiss nationals)	72	16.5
EU Family member	30	6.9
Highly Skilled Employment Permits	8	1.8
Long-Term Residence Permit	25	5.7
Foreign-born individuals who received a Maltese citizenship	15	3.4
Humanitarian-type of work permit	9	2.1
Other types of permits	9	2.1

Note: Categories made for the purpose of this study: Highly Skilled Employment Permits (Specialist Employee Initiative Permit, Key Employee Initiative, EU Blue Card – Single Permit for Highly Qualified Employment); Humanitarian-type of Work Permit (Work permit issued by Jobsplus for asylum seekers and other special cases, Beneficiary of International Protection for refugees or individuals with subsidiary protection status); Other types of permit (Nomad Residence Permit, Withdrawal Agreement (UK), Family Reunification Residence Permit, Startup Residence Programme Permit, Exemption under National Legislation – Residence Permit)

Appendix K: List of all Nationalities

	Frequency	Percentage
Albanian	3	0.7
American	4	0.9
Australian	1	0.2
Bangladeshi	1	0.2
Bosnian and Herzegovinian	2	0.5
Brazilian	4	0.9
British (United Kingdom)	16	3.7
Bulgarian	1	0.2
Canadian	1	0.2
Chilean	1	0.2
Chinese	3	0.7
Colombian	14	3.2
Croatian	2	0.5
Cuban	1	0.2
Danish	1	0.2
Dutch	3	0.7
Egyptian	2	0.5
Filipino	150	34.4
Finnish	5	1.1
French	2	0.5
Gambian	1	0.2
German	3	0.7
Ghanaian	1	0.2
Greek	1	0.2
Hungarian	9	2.1
Indian	30	6.9
Indonesian	1	0.
Italian	20	4.6
Japanese	2	0.5
Jordanian	1	0.2
Kazakhstani	1	0.2
Latvian	4	0.9
Lithuanian	2	0.5
Macedonian	15	3.4
Malaysian	1	0.2
Maltese (Acquired)	4	0.9
Moroccan	1	0.2

Nepalese	13	3
Nigerian	2	0.5
Pakistani	3	0.7
Palestinian	1	0.2
Peruvian	1	0.2
Philippine	5	1.1
Polish	8	1.8
Portuguese	3	0.7
Romanian	4	0.9
Russian	3	0.7
Serbian	48	11
Sierra Leonean	2	0.5
Slovak	1	0.2
Slovenian	1	0.2
Somali	1	0.2
South African	6	1.4
Spanish	4	0.9
Sri Lankan	1	0.2
Sudanese	1	0.2
Swedish	3	0.7
Tunisian	2	0.5
Turkish	4	0.9
Ukrainian	3	0.7
Zambian	2	0.5

Appendix L: Reflexivity

Journal entry: 04 September 2024

- Third interview. He mentioned that he treats Malta as a traverse town. I initially reacted in a cautious way. I was taken aback. I realised I had an expectation or assumption that thriving migrants are fully integrated in the Maltese culture and have no concrete plans of leaving the island. But I learned to welcome this experience of thriving by others.

Journal entry: 03 March 2025

- Writing the instrument items makes me reflect more on the qualitative results. I find it extremely challenging to transition from a qualitative mindset to a quantitative one. I feel like I am reducing my participants' experiences when I try to transform their complex narratives into measurable constructs, especially when I think about measuring thriving and assigning labels. I need to take a pause. I realise I am too attached and caught up in the qualitative realm that I feel like I cannot approach the next step somewhat objectively.
- Supervision really helps! I really need to measure thriving levels; otherwise, how can we describe and make broader inferences? I can also adopt items from established scales.

Journal entry: 16 June 2025

- I find it really strange that adaptability and faith appeared to be negative predictors of thriving. I really expected it to be otherwise. I ran and re-ran the tests. Made sure everything was encoded well. Checked the instrument, the survey form, and the raw data. Tried different regression tests. I need to bracket this and be more objective and welcoming of what the data is telling me.

Appendix M: Ethical Clearance for the Qualitative Research

L-Università ta' Malta

Lanette Kristel Dela Cruz <lanette.dela-cruz.18@um.edu.mt>

The status of your REDP form (SWB-2024-00488) has been updated to Acknowledged

form.urec@um.edu.mt <form.urec@um.edu.mt> 6 May 2024 at 10:43
To: lanette.dela-cruz.18@um.edu.mt

Dear Lanette Kristel Dela Cruz,

Please note that the status of your REDP form (SWB-2024-00488) has been set to *Acknowledged*.

This status change was accompanied by the following explanation/justification: *Dear Lanette Kristel Dela Cruz, Your research ethics application has been received. As indicated in the Research Ethics Review Procedures, REDP forms which have no self-assessment issues are kept for record and audit purposes only. Hence, research may commence. Kindly note that FREC will not issue any form of approval as the responsibility for the self-assessment part lies exclusively with the researcher. Regards, SWB FREC*

You can keep track of your applications by visiting: https://www.um.edu.mt/research/ethics/redp-form/frontEnd/.

This email has been automatically generated by URECA. Please do not reply. If you wish to communicate with your F/REC please use the respective email address.

Appendix N: Ethical Clearance for the Quantitative Research

Lanette Kristel Dela Cruz <lanette.dela-cruz.18@um.edu.mt>

The status of your REDP form (SWB-2024-00488) has been updated to Acknowledged

1 message

form.urec@um.edu.mt <form.urec@um.edu.mt> 9 May 2025 at 12:24
To: lanette.dela-cruz.18@um.edu.mt

Dear Lanette Kristel Dela Cruz,

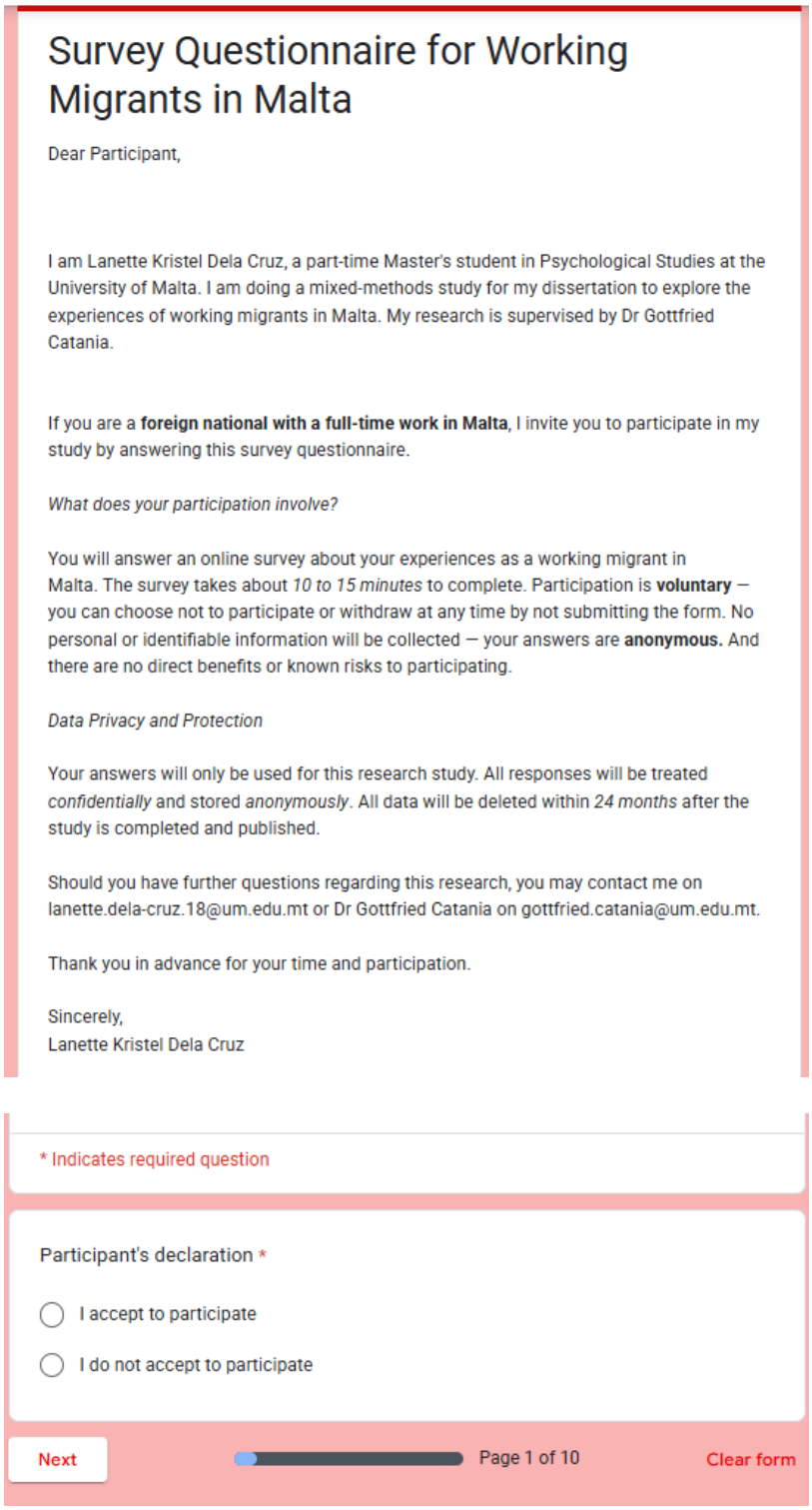
Please note that the status of your REDP form (SWB-2024-00488) has been set to *Acknowledged*.

This status change was accompanied by the following explanation/justification: *Dear Lanette Kristel Dela Cruz, Your research ethics application has been received. As indicated in the Research Ethics Review Procedures, REDP forms which have no self-assessment issues are kept for record and audit purposes only. Hence, research may commence. Kindly note that FREC will not issue any form of approval as the responsibility for the self-assessment part lies exclusively with the researcher. Regards, SWB FREC*

You can keep track of your applications by visiting: https://www.um.edu.mt/research/ethics/redp-form/frontEnd/.

This email has been automatically generated by URECA. Please do not reply. If you wish to communicate with your F/REC please use the respective email address.

Appendix O: Quantitative Information Sheet and Consent Form



Survey Questionnaire for Working Migrants in Malta

Dear Participant,

I am Lanette Kristel Dela Cruz, a part-time Master's student in Psychological Studies at the University of Malta. I am doing a mixed-methods study for my dissertation to explore the experiences of working migrants in Malta. My research is supervised by Dr Gottfried Catania.

If you are a **foreign national with a full-time work in Malta**, I invite you to participate in my study by answering this survey questionnaire.

What does your participation involve?

You will answer an online survey about your experiences as a working migrant in Malta. The survey takes about *10 to 15 minutes* to complete. Participation is **voluntary** — you can choose not to participate or withdraw at any time by not submitting the form. No personal or identifiable information will be collected — your answers are **anonymous.** And there are no direct benefits or known risks to participating.

Data Privacy and Protection

Your answers will only be used for this research study. All responses will be treated *confidentially* and stored *anonymously*. All data will be deleted within *24 months* after the study is completed and published.

Should you have further questions regarding this research, you may contact me on lanette.dela-cruz.18@um.edu.mt or Dr Gottfried Catania on gottfried.catania@um.edu.mt.

Thank you in advance for your time and participation.

Sincerely,
Lanette Kristel Dela Cruz

* Indicates required question

Participant's declaration *

- ◯ I accept to participate
- ◯ I do not accept to participate

Next Page 1 of 10 Clear form

Appendix P: SPSS Outputs of Cronbach's Alpha

Reliability coefficients of the domains during pilot testing:

1. Professional Thriving

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.812	.812	5

Item-Total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Prof1	15.73	5.818	.396	.710	.829
Prof2	15.36	4.855	.689	.743	.749
Prof3	15.45	4.073	.720	.759	.738
Prof4	15.55	5.473	.460	.610	.815
Prof5	15.73	4.818	.788	.795	.725

2. Financial Thriving

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.947	.951	5

Item-Total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Fin1	14.36	10.055	.774	.	.955
Fin2	14.27	8.218	.866	.	.932
Fin3	14.27	7.418	.917	.	.925
Fin4	14.36	8.055	.894	.	.927
Fin5	14.36	8.055	.894	.	.927

3. Personal Thriving

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.700	.716	5

Item-Total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Per1	16.73	4.018	.408	.738	.676
Per2	16.82	4.364	.108	.371	.772
Per3	16.64	3.455	.688	.816	.582
Per4	17.00	2.400	.650	.821	.556
Per5	16.82	2.964	.570	.813	.597

4. Relational Thriving (since the difference is not that big, item will be removed to keep a uniform number of items per domain)

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.850	.869	5

Item-Total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Rel1	16.91	4.891	.750	.	.808
Rel2	16.91	4.891	.750	.	.808
Rel3	17.00	3.800	.783	.	.785
Rel4	17.09	3.891	.628	.	.847
Rel5	17.18	5.164	.556	.	.845

5. Wellbeing

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.658	.681	5

Item-Total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Wel1	15.55	2.073	-.155	.	.830
Wel2	15.73	1.218	.774	.	.438
Wel3	15.73	1.418	.510	.	.564
Wel4	15.73	1.218	.774	.	.438
Wel5	15.45	1.273	.418	.	.610

6. Overall Thriving

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.859	.856	3

Item-Total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Thri1	7.91	1.091	.807	.816	.733
Thri2	7.91	1.691	.557	.347	.946
Thri3	7.82	1.164	.879	.838	.656

Reliability coefficients of the domains during the final quantitative study:

Professional:

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.772	.778	4

Financial:

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.867	.864	4

Personal:

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.774	.777	4

Relational:

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.825	.822	4

Wellbeing:

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.763	.764	4

Overall:

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.879	.879	3

Appendix Q: Annotated Survey Instrument

Part 1: For each of the following questions, select the statement that best describes your current situation in Malta. *(These questions are designed to locate which phase working migrants are at in each domain)*

1. How can you describe your career progression in Malta? → *professional domain*
   - (A) I am taking any job just to survive. → *surviving*
   - (B) I feel stuck in my career and I am not improving. → *stagnating/declining*
   - (C) I am learning new skills and I am working for better opportunities. → *thriving*
   - (D) I have reached a level I am happy with and want to maintain. → *settling*

2. How is your current financial situation? → *financial domain*
   - (A) I can only pay for my needs, and do not have extra money. → *surviving*
   - (B) I have problems with money and it is just getting worse. → *stagnating/declining*
   - (C) I am managing my money well and I am actively saving for the future. → *thriving*
   - (D) I feel financially stable and do not worry much about money. → *settling*

3. How can you describe your current relationship with yourself? → *personal domain*
   - (A) It is okay most days but I still struggle sometimes. → *surviving*
   - (B) I feel stuck and unsure about myself most of the time. → *stagnating/declining*
   - (C) I am getting to know myself more and I continue to grow. → *thriving*
   - (D) I am comfortable with myself and I do not feel the need for big changes → *settling*

4. How will you describe your relationships / support systems? → *relational domain*
   - (A) I have some support but I still feel like I am alone most of the time. → *surviving*
   - (B) My relationships are not improving or are getting worse. → *stagnating/declining*
   - (C) I have meaningful, supportive relationships that are growing bigger or stronger. → *thriving*
   - (D) I feel good with my current relationships, even if they are not actively growing. → *settling*

5. How do you feel about your mental and emotional health? → *wellbeing domain*
   - (A) I am managing but I still feel stressed and tired most of the time. → *surviving*
   - (B) My mental health is getting worse and I feel stuck. → *stagnating/declining*
   - (C) I take care of my mental health and try different ways to feel positive. → *thriving*
   - (D) I am happy with my mental and emotional health even without putting much effort. → *settling*

Part 2: Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements based on your experience as a working migrant in Malta. *(Measuring thriving in each domain)*

[1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree]

professional domain

1. I like my job.
2. I can learn new skills at work.
3. In my job, I use the skills I am good at. [a]
4. I am not improving in my career. *

financial domain

5. I feel financially secure.
6. I have extra money to save.
7. I have problems paying for my expenses. *
8. I have extra money to invest for the future.

personal domain

9. I feel I am improving as a person. [c]
10. I am happy to see the changes in myself.
11. I know my purpose in life.
12. I can succeed if I try my best. [a]

relational domain

13. There are people who appreciate me as a person. [a]
14. There are people I can trust to help me. [a]
15. My relationships are supportive and make me happy. [b]
16. I make an effort to build and keep relationships that matter to me.

wellbeing domain

17. I cannot handle stress well. *
18. I feel healthy physically.
19. I feel healthy emotionally and mentally.
20. There is balance in my life.

overall thriving

21. My life is growing in Malta.
22. I made a life here that I really like. [c]

Part 3.1: Indicate your level of agreement with these statements:
(Measuring Personal Capitals)

1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree

1. I speak up for my needs and ideas. → *assertiveness*
2. I stay focused on my goals, even when it's hard to do so. → *tenacity / grit*
3. I recover quickly after problems or challenges. → *resilience*
4. It is very hard for me adjust easily to new places and cultures. * → *adaptability*
5. I find new ways to handle daily life and problems. → *creativity*
6. I work hard to achieve my goals. → *industriousness*
7. I can understand and manage my emotions. → *emotional intelligence*
8. I enjoy trying new things and ideas. → *openness*

Part 3.2: Indicate your level of agreement with these statements:
(Measuring Action-Driven Capitals)

1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree

1. I am quite good at managing my responsibilities every day. [c] → *planning and organisation*
2. I decide carefully which problems to focus on. → *choosing your battles*
3. I adjust my goals when my situation changes. → *dynamic goal setting*
4. I try not to expect too much from people or situations. → *managing expectations*
5. Learning new things is important to me. → *learning and education*
6. I look for jobs that match my skills and interests. → *pursuing career alignment*
7. I take care of myself regularly. → *self-care*
8. It is very hard for me to stay motivated to reach my goals. * → *drive*

Part 3.3: Indicate your level of agreement with these statements:
(Measuring Value-Driven Capitals)

1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree

1. I stick to my plans even when it's hard. → *discipline*
2. I respect other culture and people. → *respectfulness*
3. It is very hard for me to stay positive and see challenges as chances to grow. * → *positivity*
4. I feel thankful for what I have while working for more. → *gratified contentment*
5. I see hard work as a chance to improve. → *valuing challenging work*
6. I make time for things that make me happy. → *pursing joy*
7. I am open to starting with small jobs to grow. → *flexibility to start at entry-level roles*
8. My faith or beliefs give me hope and strength in hard times. → *faith*

Part 4.1: Indicate your level of agreement with these statements:
(Measuring Malta's pro-thriving elements)

1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree

1. The friendly and open attitude of people in Malta makes me feel welcome. *(Cultural – Friendliness)*
2. The English-speaking culture in Malta helps me integrate easily. *(Cultural – English-speaking)*
3. Malta's work culture promotes a work-life balance and I am currently experiencing it in my life. *(Cultural – work-life balance)*
4. Malta's multicultural society makes it easier for me to fit in. *(Cultural – diversification)*
5. I generally feel safe walking and traveling around Malta compared to other countries. *(Safety & Accessibility – sense of safety)*
6. Access to nature in Malta, like the sea, improves my mental and physical health. *(Safety & Accessibility – access to nature*)
7. I find it is easy to find jobs and support services in Malta. (*Structural Support – Jobs and support)*
8. Integration programs (for example, the iBelong program) in Malta help me feel more connected to the Maltese culture. *(Structural Support – Integration programs)*

Part 4.2: Indicate your level of agreement with these statements:
(Measuring Malta's anti-thriving elements)

1. I find Malta's administrative process (i.e., residence permit, contracts, applications) slow and stressful for me. *(Structural Barriers – Administration processes)*
2. I think Malta has high rent and housing costs which makes living in Malta hard for me. *(Structural Barriers – high rental and housing costs)*
3. I have been treated unfairly in Malta because of my nationality or background. *(Social tensions – racial discrimination)*
4. I feel like the environmental pollution in Malta reduces my quality of life. *(Environmental constraints – pollution)*
5. It's hard for me to get better jobs in Malta without connections. *(Social Tensions – connection ladder)*
6. I think Malta has limited public spaces and walking areas which makes it harder for me to stay active. *(Environmental constraints – lack of environmental access)*

Part 5: Answer the following questions which reflects best for you: *(Inquiring about lifestyle factors and migration decision)*

1. Since moving to Malta, have you participated in any voluntary activities? → *volunteering*
   - No, I have not volunteered.
   - No, but I would like to participate or volunteer
   - Yes, I did volunteer previously, but not anymore.
   - Yes, I am an active volunteer.

2. Do you plan to stay in Malta long-term (next ten years or more)? → *long-term intention*
   - Yes
   - No
   - Undecided

3. If you plan to leave Malta, what is the main reason? → *reason for leaving Malta*
   - **Options**:
     - Better job opportunities elsewhere
     - High cost of living
     - Lack of integration or belonging
     - Challenges with Malta's administrative processes (or added requirements like the Skill Pass)
     - Other: _____ (optional)

4. What is the biggest challenge you face as a working migrant in Malta? → *most challenging*
   - **Options**:
     - Bureaucracy (e.g., application processes, Skill Pass)
     - Housing (e.g., cost, discrimination)
     - Economic issues (e.g., low salary, higher cost of living)
     - Social tensions (e.g., discrimination, networking)
     - Environmental issues (e.g., pollution, overcrowding)
     - Career progression (e.g., lack of opportunities)
     - Homesickness
     - Other: _____ (optional)

5. What has helped you grow the most while living in Malta? → *most helpful in Malta*
   - **Options**:
     - Friendly and welcoming culture
     - Safety and accessibility
     - Integration programs (e.g., iBelong program)
     - Good work-life balance
     - Support from social or cultural networks
     - Successful career
     - Other: _____ (optional)

6. Aside from my job, I also have other interests or hobbies that I engage in: → *hobby engagement*

- Never
- Rarely (once a year)
- Occasionally (2-5 times a year)
- Sometimes (once a month)
- Regularly (1-3 times a week)
- All the time (4-7 times a week)
-

7. In the past three months, I have missed work due to sickness for: → *absence due to sickness*

- 0 day
- 1-4 days
- 5-9 days
- 10 or more days

8. In the past three months, I have missed work due to other reasons other than sickness for: → *absence due to other reasons*

- 0 day
- 1-4 days
- 5-9 days
- 10 or more days

9. Which statement is true to you: → *sending money abroad*

- I never send money to family or relatives abroad.
- I only send money occasionally to family or relatives abroad.
- I send a small amount of money every month to family or relatives abroad.
- I send most of my salary every month to family or relatives abroad.

10. Do you have an immediate family (parents, siblings, children, or a life partner) living in Malta: → *having a family in Malta*

- Yes
- No

---

*Negatively worded items

[a] – items from CIT (Su et al., 2014)
[b] – Items from Flourishing (Diener et al., 2009)
[c] – items from Ryff Scales of Psychological Wellbeing (Ryff, 1989)

Appendix R: Tests of Normality for Thriving Scores

Tests of Normality (Shapiro-Wilk)

Tests of Normality

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Prof_thri_total	.125	436	<.001	.968	436	<.001

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

Tests of Normality

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Fin_thri_total	.087	436	<.001	.983	436	<.001

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

Tests of Normality

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Per_thri_total	.133	436	<.001	.967	436	<.001

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

Tests of Normality

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Rel_thri_total	.168	436	<.001	.929	436	<.001

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

Tests of Normality

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Well_thri_total	.101	436	<.001	.982	436	<.001

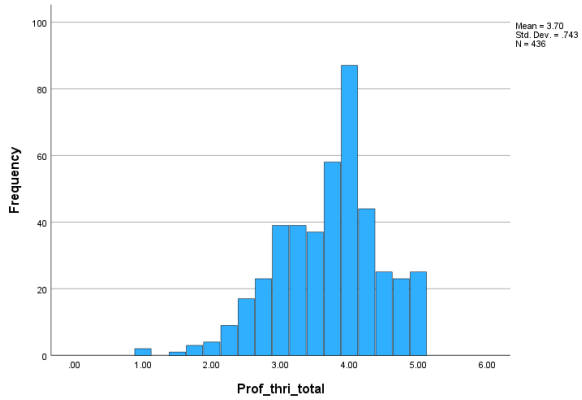
a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

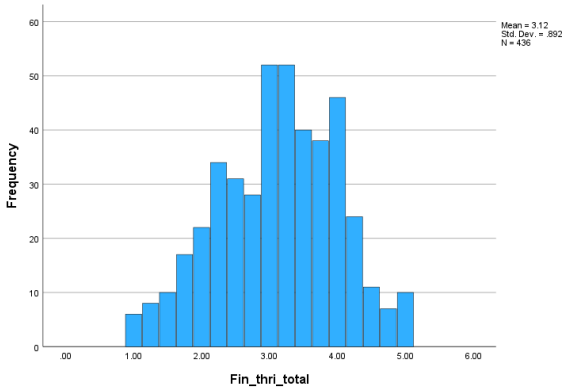
Tests of Normality

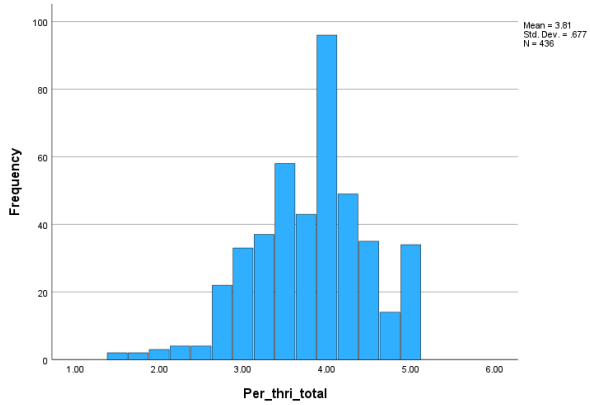
	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Overall_thri_total	.143	436	<.001	.963	436	<.001

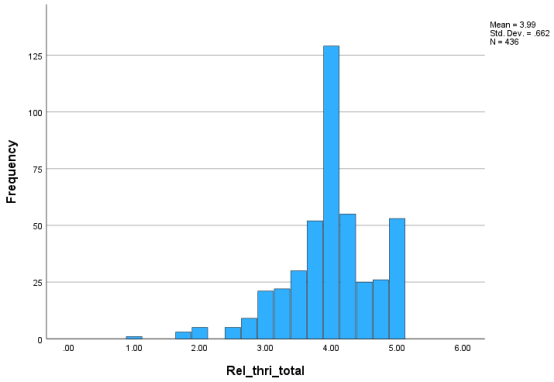
a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

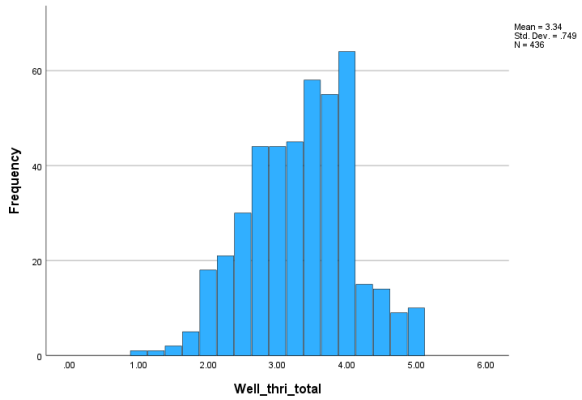
Histograms

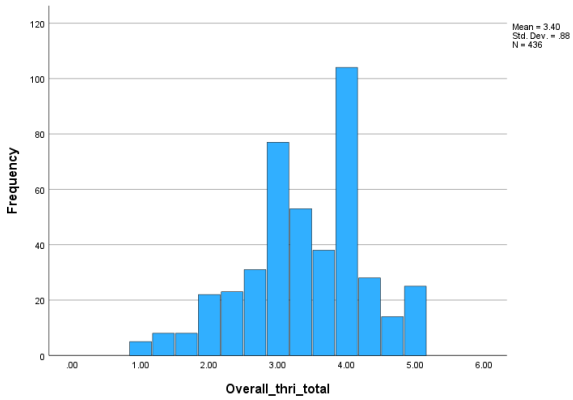

Mean = 3.70
Std. Dev. = .743
N = 436
Frequency
Prof_thri_total


Mean = 3.12
Std. Dev. = .892
N = 436
Frequency
Fin_thri_total

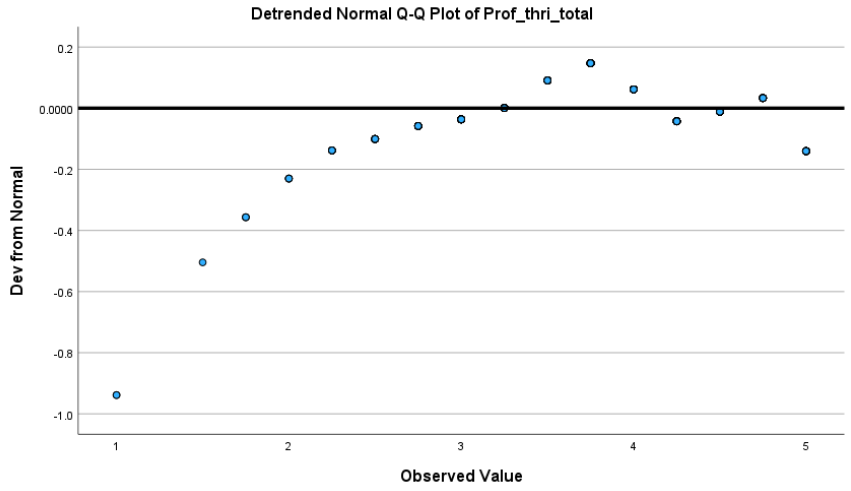

Mean = 3.81
Std. Dev. = .677
N = 436
Frequency
Per_thri_total

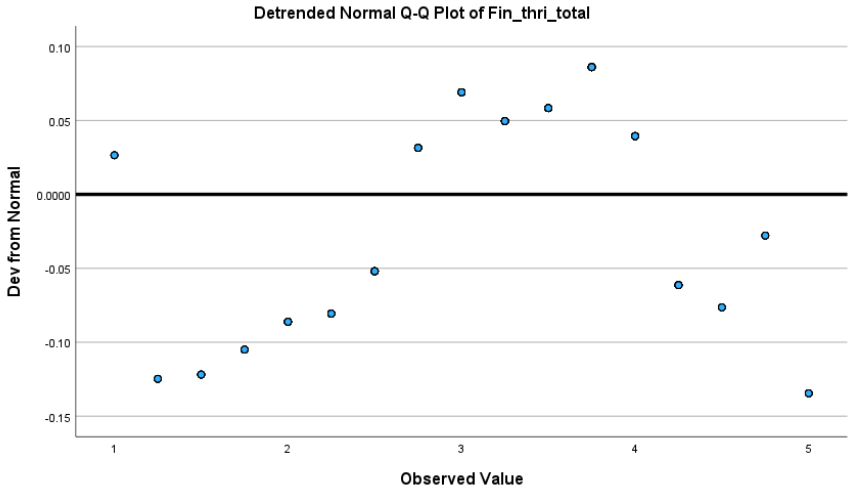

Mean = 3.99
Std. Dev. = .662
N = 436
Frequency
Rel_thri_total

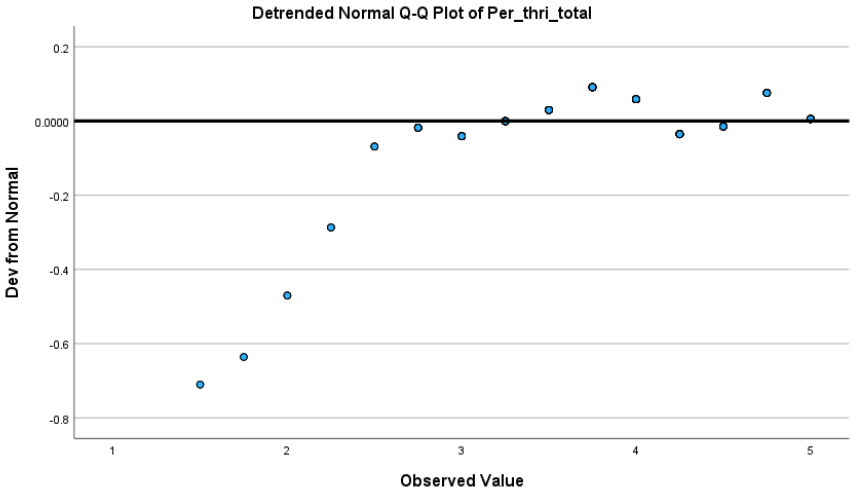

Mean = 3.34
Std. Dev. = .749
N = 436
Frequency
Well_thri_total

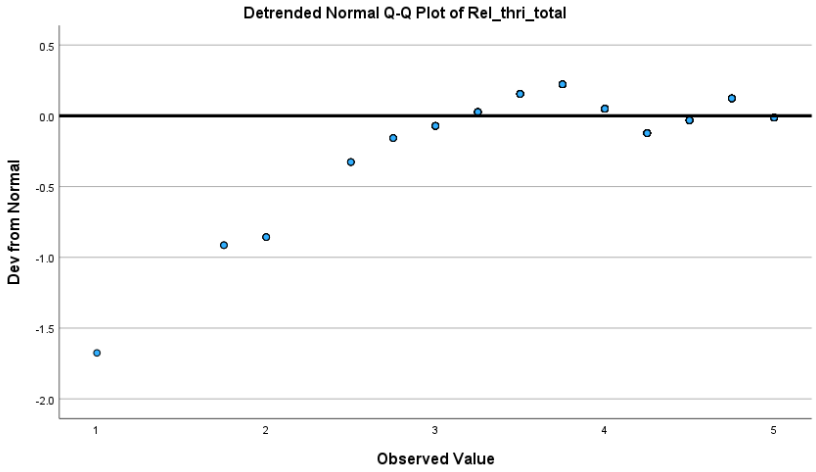

Mean = 3.40
Std. Dev. = .88
N = 436
Frequency
Overall_thri_total

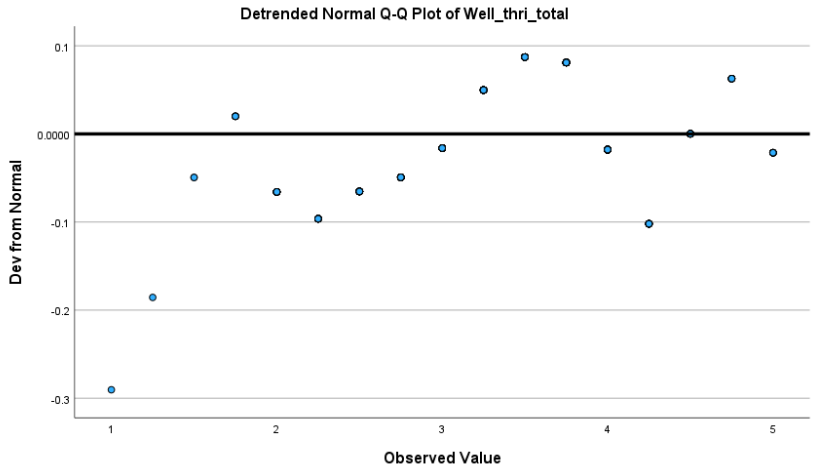
QQ Plots

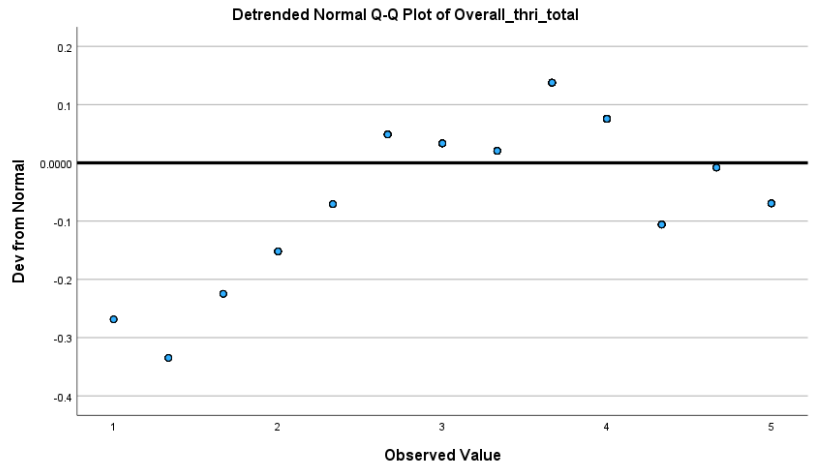

Detrended Normal Q-Q Plot of Prof_thri_total
Dev from Normal
0.2
0.0000
-0.2
-0.4
-0.6
-0.8
-1.0
1
2
3
4
5
Observed Value


Detrended Normal Q-Q Plot of Fin_thri_total
Dev from Normal
0.10
0.05
0.0000
-0.05
-0.10
-0.15
1
2
3
4
5
Observed Value


Detrended Normal Q-Q Plot of Per_thri_total
Dev from Normal
0.2
0.0000
-0.2
-0.4
-0.6
-0.8
1
2
3
4
5
Observed Value


Detrended Normal Q-Q Plot of Rel_thri_total
Dev from Normal
0.5
0.0
-0.5
-1.0
-1.5
-2.0
1
2
3
4
5
Observed Value


Detrended Normal Q-Q Plot of Well_thri_total
Dev from Normal
0.1
0.0000
-0.1
-0.2
-0.3
1
2
3
4
5
Observed Value


Detrended Normal Q-Q Plot of Overall_thri_total
Dev from Normal
0.2
0.1
0.0000
-0.1
-0.2
-0.3
-0.4
1
2
3
4
5
Observed Value

Appendix S: Full List of Self-Report Answers to Barriers and Enablers

Reason for Leaving Malta	N	%
Better job opportunities abroad (lack of opportunities here)	138	31.7
Challenges with Malta's administrative processes (i.e., work permit, housing, skill pass, getting a permanent residency, corruption)	88	20.2
High cost of living	81	18.6
To go back to their own country or retire	33	7.6
Not planning to leave Malta	24	5.5
Environmental constraints	18	4.1
Lack of integration or belonging	18	4.1
Other reasons (health constraints, racism, inability to work anymore, lack of safety related to drugs, lack of quality of life, to study, move to a more developed country)	18	4.1
All of the above	10	2.3
Not conducive to raise a family or retire in Malta	8	1.8

Biggest Challenge Faced in Malta	N	%
Economic issues (low salary, higher cost of living)	126	
Bureaucracy (i.e., application processes, skill pass)	75	17.2
Housing (cost, process, discrimination)	57	13.1
Homesickness	50	11.5
Career development (lack of opportunities)	40	9.2
Environmental constraints	39	8.9
Social tensions (discrimination, lack of belonging, corruption, rudeness, nepotism, lack of support from the government)	37	8.5
All of the above	11	2.5
None of the above	1	0.2

Most Helpful for Growth in Malta	N	%
Good work-life balance	121	27.8%
Friendly and welcoming culture	97	22.2%
Safety and accessibility	73	16.7%
Successful career (career progression, high salary)	72	16.5%
Support from social or cultural networks (including family, partners, employers)	42	9.6%
Integration programs (i.e., iBelong program)	9	2.1%
Strength found in self	7	1.6%
Others (access to nature, getting a long-term residency, access to education)	8	1.8%
Nothing helped	7	1.6%