

Introduction

The Gender and Sexualities Conference 2026 took place on May 6–7, 2026, hosted by the University of Malta's Department of Gender & Sexualities in collaboration with the Maltese Human Rights Directorate, which falls under the Ministry for European Funds, Equality, Reforms and Social Dialogue. The two-day academic event was held at the Spazju Kreattiv (St James Cavalier) in Valletta. This edition brought together ambassadors, distinguished researchers, policymakers, artists and students.

The voices and perspectives derived from different countries across the globe, including Malta, Sweden, Ireland, the United Kingdom, Scotland, Greece, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, India, Pakistan, Italy, the United States of America, Belgium, Turkey, Nigeria, Canada, Hungary, Morocco, Austria, the Czech Republic, and Romania. This breadth of experience and knowledge was at the heart of what made this gathering so meaningful. Both presenters and audience members were exposed to differing perspectives and lived experiences. The conference provided a space for shared learning and exchange where dialogue and mutual learning took place.

The Department of Gender and Sexualities at the University of Malta

The Department of Gender and Sexualities was officially sanctioned by the University Council in November 2013. It is grounded in clearly defined theoretical frameworks, mainly feminisms, masculinities, and queer studies. At the heart of our approach is a firm commitment to intersectionality, which informs all aspects of our work. We actively engage with a wide range of identities and social positions, including—but not limited to—sex, gender, race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, health status, disability, marital status, and migrant or refugee status, in alignment with the principles outlined in the Council of Europe's Istanbul Convention.

Our department is built upon three core pillars that reflect our mission and extend our impact beyond the university setting.

These are:

- Research
- Teaching
- Activism and community engagement

Together, these pillars define our academic and public engagement as we work to shape critical understandings of gender and sexualities in contemporary society.

Departmental Strategy

Departmental members work to render the Department of Gender and Sexualities more viable in teaching, research, community engagement, activism and policy design. This involves both internal capacity building and external engagement, as will be delineated below.

1. Teaching

a. Curriculum Development

- Diversifying course offerings
- Interdisciplinary integration

b. Knowledge and skills transfer initiatives

- Attract international scholars: via VLEEC, ERASMUS (both already being done) as well as post-docs, with expertise in underrepresented areas (e.g., inter-sex studies, Indigeneity, feminist ecological studies, feminist economists, sex historians, etc.).
- Departmental members use similar pathways to teach abroad.

c. Inclusive Pedagogy

- Help train UM staff in Equity Diversity and Inclusion, LGBTIQ+ affirmative teaching, gender- sensitive assessment, inclusive language and texts, as well as diversity mainstreaming.
- Continue ensuring safe, affirming classroom spaces that encourage diverse voices and lived experiences.
- Staff members also form part of the University of Malta committees such as FREC, the Gender Equality and Sexual Diversity Committee, and Equity Committee where we help promote inclusive educational settings.

2. Research

a. The Department focuses on thematic research themes like:

- Gender-based violence
- Reproductive justice
- Queer and trans policy
- Social and public policy from a gender and sexualities perspectives
- Equity, diversity and inclusion in workplaces
- Gender, migration and politics
- Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.

b. Research Funding and Grants

- The Department actively pursues university as well as national and international funding schemes.
- Liaises with the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality, Human Rights Directorate as well as Ministries and Parliamentary Secretaries to finance MAs, PhDs, diplomas, micro credentials and research projects in gender and sexualities related areas.

c. Collaborative Networks

- Establishes contact with local and international NGOs, government, EU and Council of Europe bodies, embassies and international academic networks.
- Organizes and hosts conferences, seminars, webinars and public lectures to share research conducted by staff, guest staff and students.

d. Research Output and Dissemination

- This takes place via peer-reviewed departmental book series - such as Mapping the Rainbow (LGBTIQ+) and Shifting Structures (Gender and Women's Studies) - as well as Astarte Mediterranean Journal of Gender and Sexualities. These and other outlets provide academic staff, students and alumni with the opportunity to publish in both academic and public-facing outlets to influence discourse.
- Liaise with ministries to attract funding for bespoke research and courses.

3. Policy Design and Advocacy

a. Policy recommendations

- Staff take part in the Consultative Council for Women's Rights, as well as the LGBTIQ+ Consultative Council.
- The Department offers research-informed policy design and recommendations to government and civil society as part of our community engagement.
- It also provides gender impact assessments to entities which reach out to us.

b. Engagement with Policymakers

- Offer briefing papers, policy workshops, and consultations to ministries dealing with inclusion, health, education, human rights, and social welfare, among others.
- Participate in national policy forums and commissions.
- Provide evidence-based insights to the:
 - National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE)
 - The various departments which fall under the Human Rights and Equality Directorate
 - Ministry for Social Policy and Children's Rights
 - Commissioner for Gender-Based Violence and Domestic Violence
 - Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability
 - Agenzija Sappport
 - Consultative Council for Women's Rights
 - Ministry for Gozo among others.

c. Community-Engaged Research

- Co-create research and action projects with communities affected by injustice, especially related to gender and sexualities issues.
 - Translate research into advocacy tools, such as infographics, policy briefs, and media campaigns.
- ### d. Policy Curriculum Integration
- Train students, staff and policy makers in policy analysis, legislative advocacy, and programme evaluation.

4. Institutional Support

The Department also engages in:

- Strategic alliances with regional and global gender centres to enhance credibility and resource sharing. We also collaborate with media outlets and journalists to amplify gender and sexualities issues.
- Established an alumni network of gender and sexualities studies graduates in academia, NGOs, media, and government who can help provide mentorship and visibility to students studying gender and sexualities.
- By aligning its academic strengths and activism with Malta's social realities and European as well as the international policy environment, the Gender and Sexualities Department at UM is a national leader and regional reference point in gender and LGBTIQ+ education, research, and policy design.