

Bulletin on the Signs of the Times:

Education, Media and Culture

August – November 2025

Stories

In relation to **Education, Media and Culture**, three main themes led the news between the months of August and November 2025, these are: (1) **The City of Victoria**; (2) **Education for Older Students with Disabilities** and (3) **Challenges for Local Artists**.

The first story set in this bulletin relates to the investment of, and the cultural recognition for, **the city of Victoria** in Gozo. In November it was reported that this city was shortlisted for the title of the European Capital of Culture for the year 2031, following a meeting at the Valletta Design Cluster. The European Capital of Culture is a title given to European cities for a year, in which the elected city is set to organise a series of cultural events with a focus on European culture. This title provides elected cities the opportunity to raise their visibility and reputation on a larger scale, therefore generating a number of social, cultural and economic benefits. Bids for this title were also submitted for the city of Vittoriosa. Following this shortlisting, Victoria is set to present an application to a panel of experts from the European Commission where a cultural programme and long-term strategies for the social, cultural and economic development of the city will be presented. The panel of experts is also expected to visit the city as part of the application process. During this process, Victoria is set to compete with a city in Spain. The European Capital of Culture for 2031 is set to be decided by September of 2026. In the same month, geological and geotechnical studies which are currently being carried out in the land within and around Ċittadella were also reported. The aims of these studies will be to determine the nature of the terrain, especially in sensitive areas where clay is present, and they will help to determine what measures will need to be carried out to minimise the damage which can be caused by geological movements.

The second story set relates to **education for older students with disability**. In August, the *Times of Malta* reported that parents of older teens with intellectual disabilities experienced uncertainty about whether their children would be able to attend the Wardija Resource Centre due to delays in their admission process, which they described as lacking in transparency. These parents also noted that the resource centre was one of the few limited choices they had for their children to further their education. Additionally, spaces available within the resource centre were also limited, further narrowing down their choices. In the same month, the Education ministry and the Ministry for Inclusion and the Voluntary sector introduced the educational *Life Map* programme which is aimed towards people with disabilities who are aged 16 and over. This programme will be based on three pathways: (a) continued education and personal development, (b) vocational training and employment transition and (c)

community participation and creative engagement¹. While some of the services in this programme are already being provided at the Wardija Resource Centre, a new facility in Pembroke will also help to accommodate more students, in the light of the growing demand. However, the Malta Federation of Organisations Persons with Disability (MFOPD) claimed that the nature of the programme went against the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) as it encouraged greater segregation between people with disabilities and the rest of society. Additionally, the MFOPD argued that the *Life Map* programme was introduced without a consultation process with the relevant stakeholders.

The third story set relates to the **challenges faced by local artists**. In September, the Malta Entertainment Industry and Arts Association (MEIA) launched a position paper titled: *Towards Fair Pay for Performing Artists in Malta*, which highlighted the need for better working conditions and structures for artists. The position paper proposed an action plan mainly aimed at introducing fairer pay for different artists and a more standardised systems of pay to ensure this fairness. This paper was launched following research which revealed a number of issues which artists face in their work, including inconsistent pay and absent or informal written work contracts. Another, new challenge for artists which was reported on the news is the use of AI in the national media. In the light of this challenge, in October, the MEIA and *Solidarjetà* worked in collaboration with the Public Broadcasting Services (PBS) to introduce policies and guidelines aimed at promoting the responsible use of AI whilst protecting artists' jobs. However, in the following month, artists expressed their disappointment when the music video for the Junior Eurovision song contestant Eliza Borġ was created using generative AI. The artists felt that the use of AI did not only deprive artists of opportunities to create their own productions but also lowered the artistic standards for national broadcasters. They felt that Maltese audiences deserved to view productions which were high in quality and which showcased local talents.

Commentary

Victoria's shortlisting for the European Capital of Culture for 2031 is an honourable position for Gozo to be in, as it helps to showcase and boost appreciation for our national heritage, cities and localities, not just at the national level, but even in Europe. The efforts to obtain the title of European Capital of Culture can also encourage the authorities, NGOs and other stakeholders to make greater efforts in safeguarding the heritage and cultural aspect of Victoria. Therefore, the geological studies being carried out to protect the *Ċittadella* from terrain movements are commended and encouraged. The implementation of the recommendations which are expected to be outlined by these studies is also encouraged, in order to truly protect this built heritage. Such pro-active measures and studies which serve to restore and protect our heritage and assess possible damages to them are also encouraged for other sites of cultural and historical importance, particularly for dilapidated structures.

The Wardija Resource Centre and the new facility in Pembroke have been greatly needed for students with disabilities who are leaving mandatory education, especially when considering the increased demand by families. The *Life Map* programme is also hoped to teach these students the necessary skills to find employment or to create their own income. However, such specialised

¹ [Life Map: A Post-Secondary Programme for Students with Disabilities](#)

programmes risk further isolating these students, especially from their peers, rendering them more invisible to society. Therefore, more efforts to improve the inclusivity of these students, both in mandatory and further education are needed to reduce the segregation of these students within the education system and, in the long run, within the employment sector and the community.

The position paper launched by MEIA and the research it was based on helped to shed light on the challenges which artists face in the creative sector, highlighting the precarious nature of their work. The use of AI in generating writing, music and visual productions creates an added challenge for artists to face in an already challenging sector, where their work is being replaced, if not plagiarised, by AI systems. Therefore, there is a need for the relevant authorities and ministries to recognise these challenges and, in collaboration with artists and other relevant stakeholders in the creative sector, formulate policies and guidelines which will provide more structure and protection as well as fairer wages for our local artists.

Reflection

The inclusion of students with disabilities, both in mandatory education and beyond is important in order to help them integrate and participate in our society as well as provide them with greater opportunities in employment. Additionally, their presence in mainstream and further education also improves their visibility in society, as it helps increase awareness for fellow students.

There is a need for greater appreciation and recognition for local artists, and their work needs to be viewed and treated as seriously as work in other sectors. However, this recognition can grow, not just by promoting the arts to the general public, but also by implementing protective structures which push for fairer pay and better working conditions for artists, therefore elevating their status in society. Additionally, with the growing challenges introduced by AI, the need to support local artists has grown further, therefore greater efforts must be made to protect their work and provide them with more stability and security in their jobs.

Follow-Up

- Church schools are encouraged to continue their efforts in making their education more accessible and inclusive to students with intellectual disabilities and children who are neurodivergent.
 - The provision of training for educators and leaders of schools on the learning needs of these students is also encouraged in order to increase awareness and further promote accessibility and inclusivity in schools.
- The Church is encouraged to continue to support different artists and cultivate its appreciation for different art forms, not just through the churches and feasts but also through different activities and initiatives organised by the Church and its entities.

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