

## About the NGOs in Malta: definitions and brief statistics

The Voluntary Sector in Malta is largely rooted in the work carried out by the Catholic Church, but it has evolved over the years to include organisations that promote the social, economic, political and environmental development of the country. For several years the sector was regulated through provisions which were scattered in several laws and it has survived with very little regulation. To better promote and develop the voluntary sector, a general legal framework was enacted in 2007 and amended a few weeks ago, through the Voluntary Organisations Act. The Act contains important definitions, such as the definitions of: “voluntary organisation”, “non-profit making organisation” and “the social purpose of an organisation”. Such definitions are necessary as different countries use different terms to define voluntary organisations and their main objects, reflecting the diverse institutional and legal structures regulating the voluntary sector in various jurisdictions. (Zammit Alessia, University of Malta, ‘NGO legislation in Malta in comparative perspective’)

### Definition 1:

“A voluntary organisation is an organisation which is created or established -

- (a) for any lawful purpose;
- (b) as non-profit making; and
- (c) is voluntary” (Chapter 492, Voluntary Organisations Act, Malta, Cap. 16

(<http://www.justiceservices.gov.mt/DownloadDocument.aspx?app=lom&itemid=8958&l=1>)

### Definition 2:

“ Voluntary organisations are independent and autonomous of the Government and such organisations shall have their status respected by the Government at all times.” (Chapter 492, Voluntary Organisations Act, Malta, Cap. 16

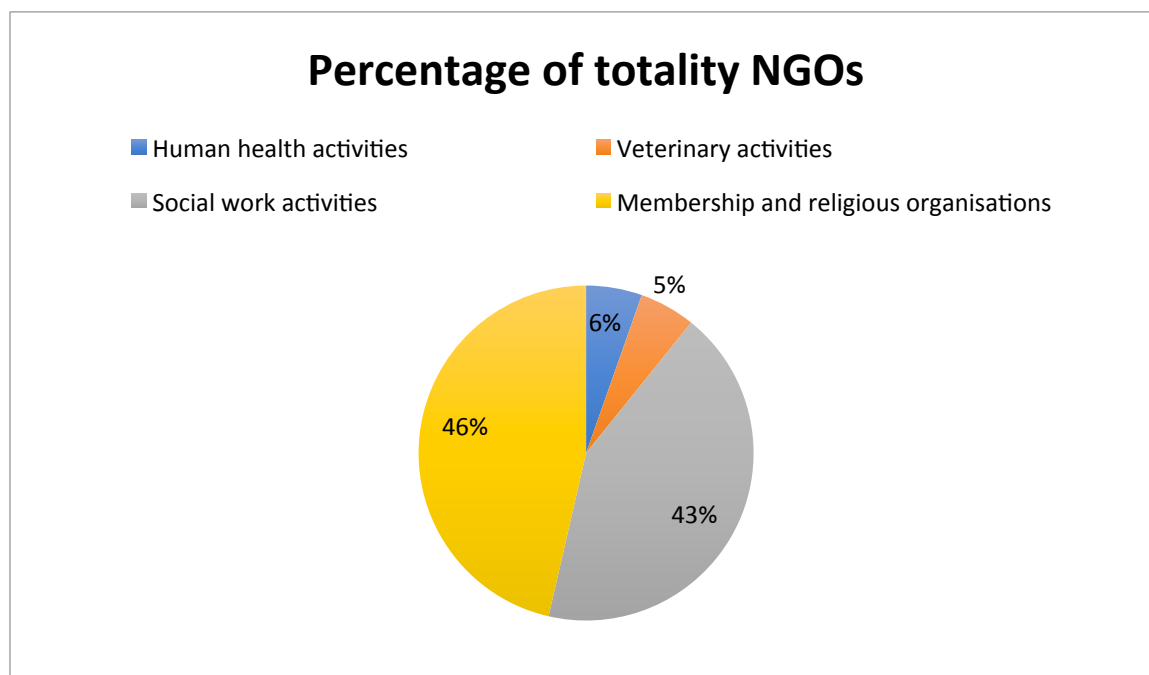
(<http://www.justiceservices.gov.mt/DownloadDocument.aspx?app=lom&itemid=8958&l=1> )

**Definition 3:**

The Office of the Commissioner for Voluntary Organisations in Malta was set up by the Voluntary Organisations Act in 2007 with the task to strengthen the voluntary sector through various initiatives with the specific aim of promoting the work of VOs as well as encouraging their role as partners with the government in various initiatives. All voluntary organisations may apply for enrolment under the Voluntary Organisations Act. Voluntary Organisations are not obliged to enrol. The following criteria need to be met in order for a Voluntary Organisation to be enrolled: “Established by a written instrument; Established for a lawful purpose, that can be a social purpose or any other purpose which is lawful; Non-profit making; Voluntary; Independent of the State.” (The Government Portal, ‘Voluntary Organisations’ (<https://integration.gov.mt/en/SocialIssues/Pages/Organizations.aspx>))

In the local scenario nearly all NGOs are managed and very often manned by volunteers. The term ‘voluntary organisations’ emphasises the choice to associate for a common purpose and some donation of one’s time and labour - at least of the board members or organisers.

The total number of current registered NGOs on the Maltese islands is that of 1,479. The following is the distribution of sectors in percentage.



Source: National Statistics Office, Malta.

**Table 1:** *Distribution of NGOs in Malta by main activity.*