

The header image features a dark blue background with several interlocking gears in various colors (orange, red, green, purple). Each gear contains a white icon: a target, a person, a star, and a hand. The overall theme is technology, innovation, and research.

## Open Access: an opportunity for Malta

**Access to research results lies at the very core of the innovation economy but Malta is not yet up to speed when it comes to practicing Open Science. In this PSF report, commissioned by the Maltese government, a group of independent experts provide recommendations on transitioning the science system in Malta to an “open by default” setting. However, this must be undertaken in a way that is appropriate for the local Maltese context and its framework conditions, which is why the experts recommend a “phase-in” approach for open access to scientific publications, open/FAIR research data under the principle of “as open as possible as closed as necessary” and related actions on awareness raising, skills and training and support as well as career assessment. The experts envisage that this transition could be completed by 2025 and provide a timeline for doing so.**

The Maltese government asked the EU’s Horizon 2020 Policy Support Facility (PSF) for support in developing a tailor-made Open Access policy. The aim of this PSF Specific Support is thus to provide external advice and operational recommendations on defining the vision, goals and scope as well as implementation of a national Open Access policy, including open and FAIR (findable, accessible, interoperable and re-usable) research data. The resulting PSF report “Open Access: an opportunity for Malta”, developed by four independent experts, is based on background research, stakeholder interviews performed during the first country visit, two workshops (high level and expert) held during the second country visit, relevant initiatives and activities in similar countries and the EU level, the work of the previous PSF Peer Review on the Maltese Research and Innovation System as well as the experts’ collective expertise in the field of open access to scientific publications and research data. The activities were undertaken from July 2019 (kick off) to April 2020 (dissemination event).

### **Why open access?**

Scientists, innovative businesses and societal actors need access to scientific results in order to generate new scientific knowledge, ensure its industrial uptake and retain societal support for research and innovation. Better circulation of knowledge facilitated by open access to scientific publications and open/FAIR research data thus provide clear advantages for Malta as an outward looking island-based EU Member State.

### **What should be done?**

As per the request from the Maltese government, this report focuses on open access to scientific publications and open/FAIR data as two key aspects of open science. Furthermore, the report also addresses researcher assessment as well as skills, training, awareness and support. The key ambitions for Malta – supported by detailed recommendations for each section – are:

- transitioning Malta to immediate open access to scientific peer reviewed publications (primarily journal articles) by 2025. In order to do so the report proposes a variety of actions publishing articles open access, self-archiving and open access journals.
- Building up the necessary infrastructure (technical, legal, cultural) for FAIR research data management by 2025 under the principle of “as open as possible, as closed as necessary” in three distinct phases, starting from a voluntary phase through an open data pilot to an “open by default” system.
- Adopting research assessment measurements, which reflect and adequately reward open science practices.
- Systematically integrating open access in its Ph.D. training as well as systematically building up skills, competencies and training as well as support mechanisms for research data management, including open/FAIR data. The launch of the policy should be accompanied by a broad awareness raising campaign.
- After an initial phase where a working group for information exchange is sufficient, setting up a three-layered governance structure for policy implementation, consisting of a politically responsible steering committee, an executive committee for implementation and expert groups

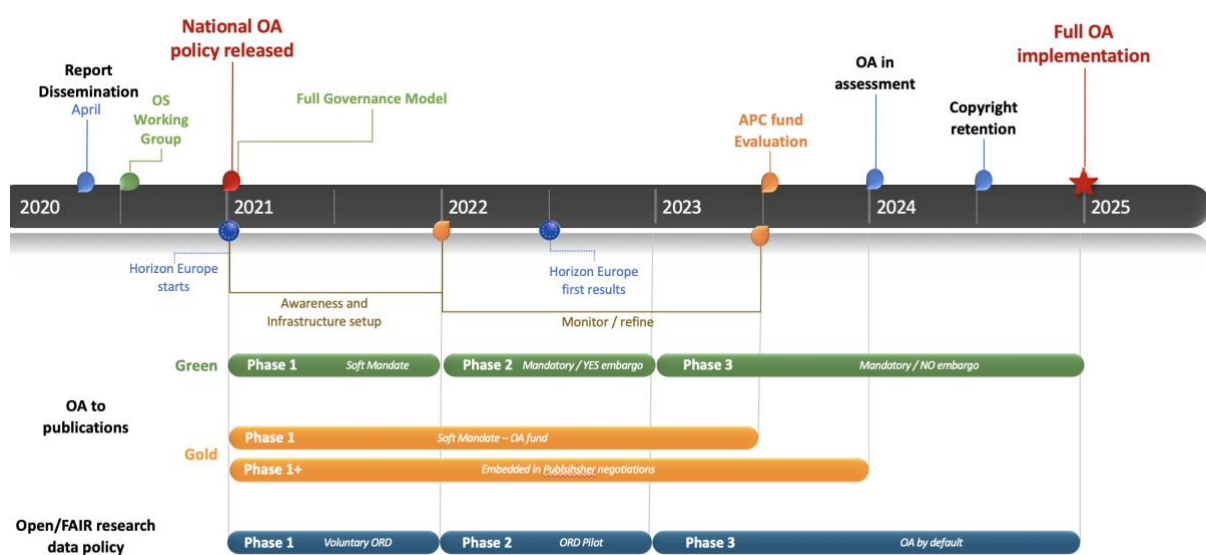
(as needed). The representation of the key stakeholders in the governance structure is key. The group also recommends to explore regional cooperation possibilities on open access.

Finally, the expert group provides a timeline with milestones for the implementation of the most important recommendations developed in this report, starting from the dissemination of the report, the launch of a national policy in the beginning of 2021, with full implementation by end of 2025.

### Where do we go from here?

Niels Stern, chair of the expert group sees a window of opportunity for Malta to seize the moment and develop an open access policy that aligns Malta with key European and global initiatives. He notes that the expert group has perceived readiness for further progress among stakeholders in Malta during the country visits. But implementing open access and open data requires resources. More funding for research and innovation was already stressed in the previous PSF peer review of the Maltese research and innovation system and some of this funding needs to be directed towards implementing open access to scientific peer reviewed publications and research data. Mr. Stern concludes that *real change will only happen when all stakeholders are willing to commit, invest and engage in the process. Now is the time to do so. Now is the time for Malta to exploit this great moment of opportunity united.*

### Timeline for implementing Open Access, Open/FAIR research data and related actions in Malta



### For further information:

[The PSF Specific Support to Malta – Final report](#)

[The PSF Specific Support to Malta. Recommendations for the Development of a National Policy for Open Access to publications, research data and related issues](#)

Seeking to improve the design, implementation and evaluation of research and innovation policies, the PSF provides expertise and practical support to Member States in a number of ways: Peer Reviews of national R&I systems, Specific Support to policy reforms, and project-based Mutual Learning Exercises to improve policy-making and implementation. It is founded under Horizon 2020 the EU's research and innovation programme with up to €20 million.