



THE HOUSING
LANDSCAPE

Beyond Walls: A Long-Term Perspective of Social Housing in Malta

Dr Dylan Cassar
Department of Sociology
University of Malta

Not just brick and mortar...



- Housing is more than the brick and mortar...
- Housing is the relationship between people and place.
- Housing is *lived*.

Photo: Matthew Mirabelli

1943–1964 The early days
of social housing

Post-World War II housing reconstruction

- WWII's urban destruction creating displacement and homelessness.
- Government requisitioned private property to house the homeless.
- The start of a reconstruction effort in Valletta and the Three Cities.
- The first social housing tenements being built at the end of the 1940s.



Form No. 6.

The War Damage Commission,
Malta. 19

Date February, 1947.

TO: Mr. Joseph Stivala,
156, Flat 7, St. Nicholas Street,
Valletta.

TAKE NOTE that the War Damage Commission have issued to the
Treasurer of the Government of Malta an AUTHORIZATION (No. 134/46)
in which you are described as the

PAYEE

in respect of the sum of Seven pounds,
(£7-0-0),
due to you as final settlement of a claim for COST OF WORKS
and/or TEMPORARY WORKS compensation for war damage occurring
in the following developed tenement:—
156, Flat 7, St. Nicholas Street,
Valletta.

A draft for this amount will be transmitted to you by the TREASURER
OF THE GOVERNMENT OF MALTA in due course.

CLAIM No. 26380/1448/45
PZ/ *WHS*

Quintus Pace
SECRETARY.

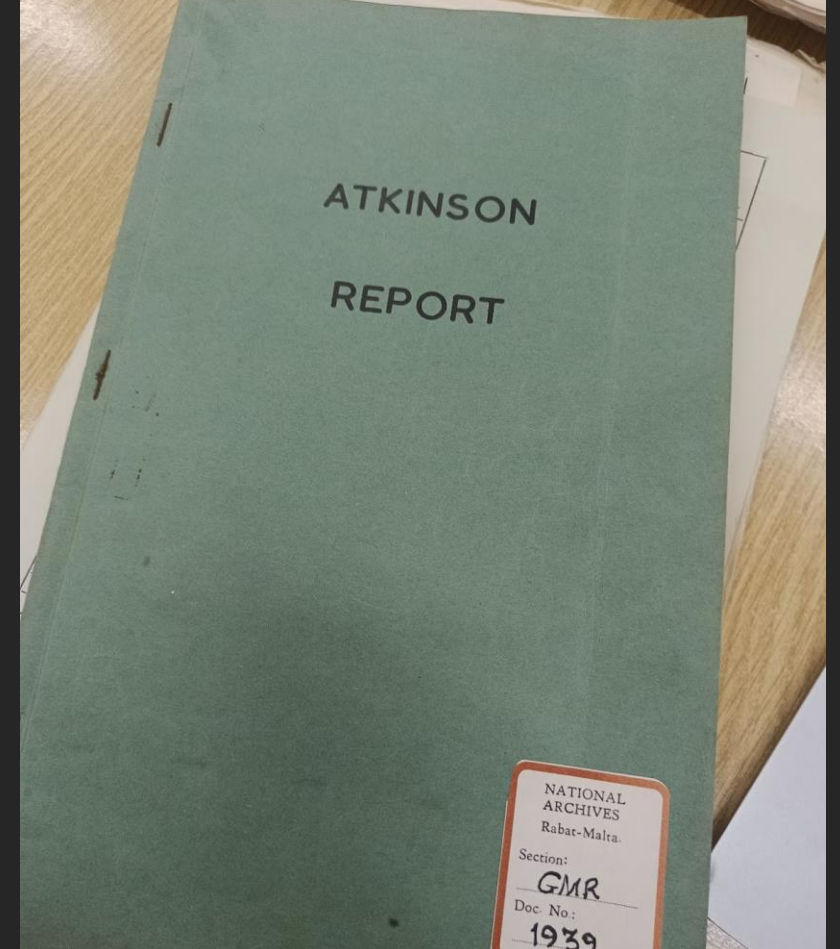
Letters and correspondence from the mid-1940s from the archives of the War Damage Commission.
Source: Housing Authority archives

Mandraġġ 'slum clearance' project

- A decision in 1950 to tear down the Mandraġġ tenements to make way for government housing.
- The project of the Mandraġġ remains one of the earliest projects of social housing built by government.



Atkinson Report, and the Rental Housing Scheme



- In 1955, a housing expert, Anthony G. Atkinson was commissioned to draft a report on housing.
- Several recommendations, amongst which was a 'Rental Housing Scheme' and for the state to take a leading role.
- The Rental Housing Scheme: one of the earlier propositions of *mass* social housing provision.

The rise of the Housing Estate

- In 1957, a new concept of social housing was devised: the housing estate.
- Santa Lucija as a 'housing estate' *par excellence*.
- The construction of the first few social housing flats in the new housing estate started in 1957.



Aerial photo of Santa Lucija in the early 1960s.
Source: Housing Authority archives and Department of Information



Aerial photo of Santa Lucija in the mid-1970s.
Source: Housing Authority archives and Department of Information

1965–1984: The high-water
mark of state activity in housing

The background of the slide is a sepia-toned photograph of a city skyline. Two prominent church spires are visible in the upper half of the image. The spire on the left is topped with a cross, and the one on the right is a tall, slender needle. Below the spires, a dense cluster of multi-story buildings with various architectural styles fills the lower half of the frame. A large, white, stylized quotation mark is positioned in the upper left quadrant, partially overlapping the sky and the buildings.

“

housing. Against the background of a booming economy following Independence in 1964, fuelled by tourism and industrialisation primarily through foreign investment, the housing problem became more acute. This would put pressure on the government for more significant interventions. Peaking in 1969, the economic boom and associated inflation pushed property prices upwards (possibly due to land speculation),⁸⁰ which rose significantly faster than wages. These developments were particularly problematic for those on the lower-income scales. This was exacerbated by the conversion of properties into holiday flats, guest houses or hotels to accommodate tourists and an influx of expatriates in search of high-end accommodation, which meant that the construction industry was concentrated on the provision of such accommodation to the detriment of residential dwellings.⁸¹

Housing estates in all electoral districts

In 1967, a large programme of housing estates in all electoral districts:

- Government-constructed units reached a peak of more than 2,600 units in 1975.
- Requisitions of privately-owned properties reached a peak of 3,500 units in 1973.



Photo: Matthew Mirabelli



*Aerial photo of housing estate in San Gwann.
Source: Housing Authority archives*



*Aerial photo of a housing estate in Qrendi in the 1970s.
Source: Housing Authority archives*



Photo: Matthew Mirabelli



LUQA

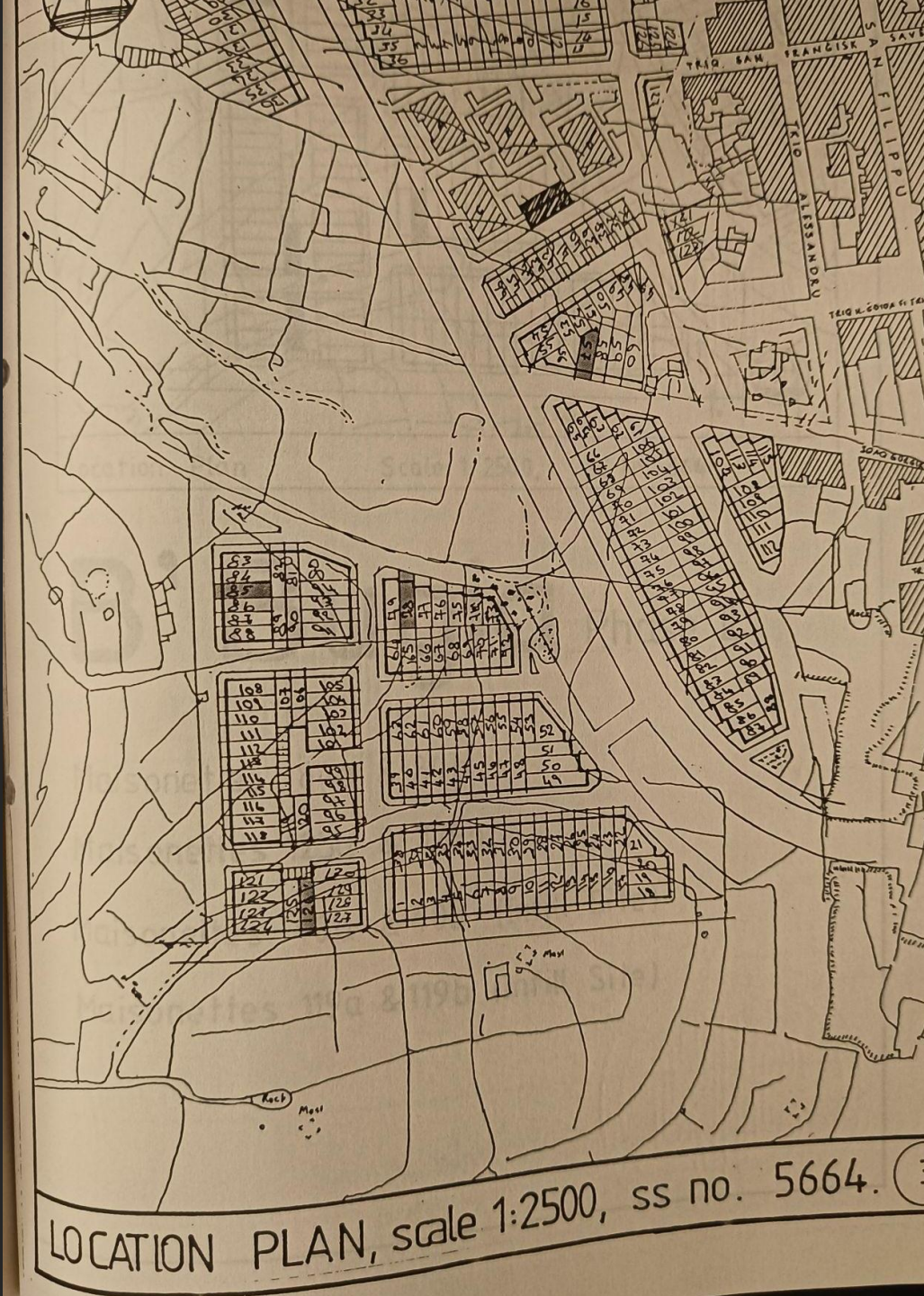
Social Housing in Luqa, 'Hal Farruġ' (Wied in-Noġor Street, Masgar Street), built as barracks pre-war and inaugurated/sold as social housing in the early 1980s. Photos: Matthew Mirabelli



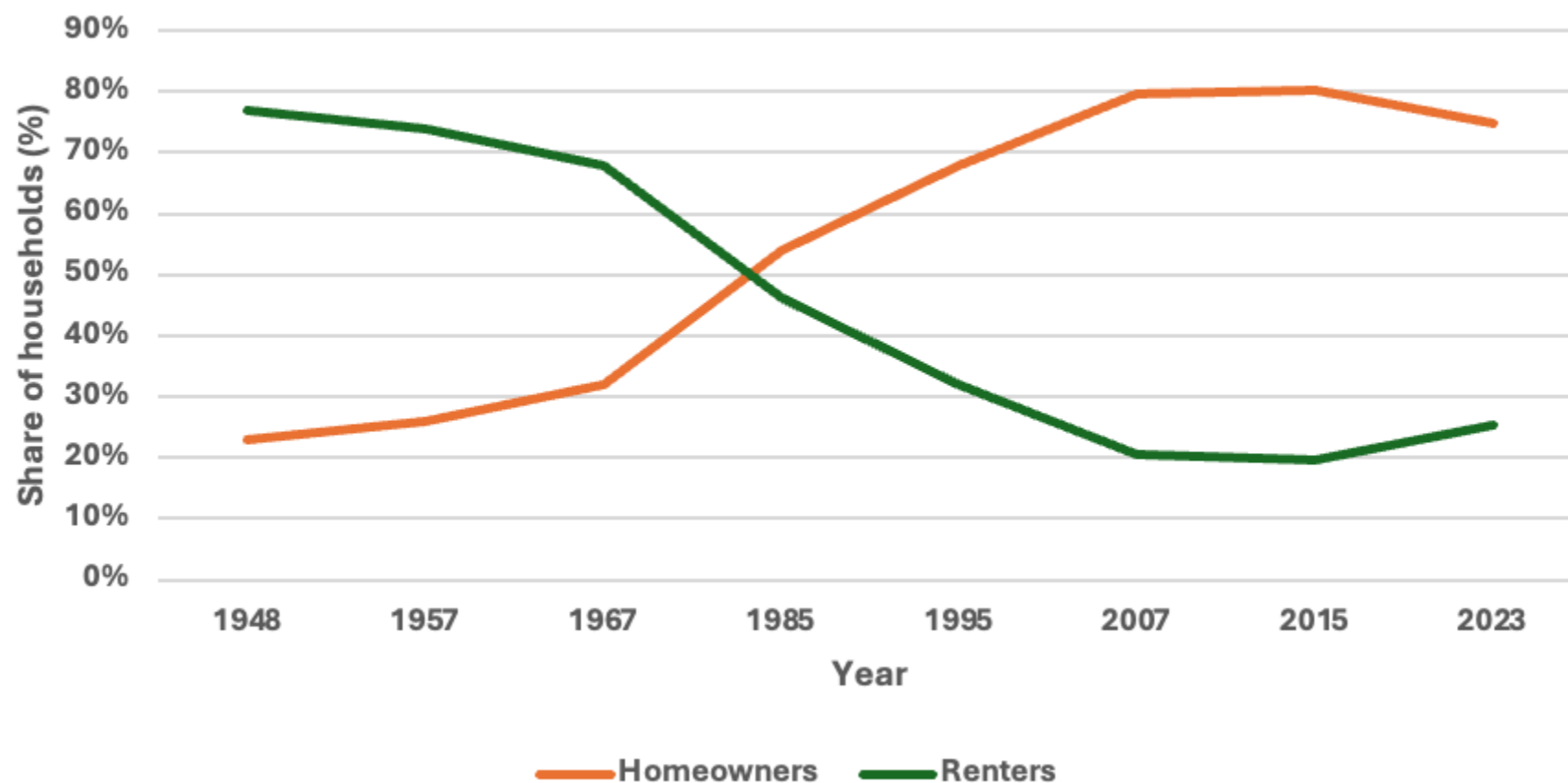
The homeownership drive



- The state also embarked on a programme of homeownership, providing plots as part of the homeownership schemes (HOS).
- This was supported by easy credit through Barfincor Ltd., later Lohombus Corp.
- By 1980, a shift away from direct building of rental housing towards the HOS schemes. About 7,000 plots were allocated in the 1970/80s.



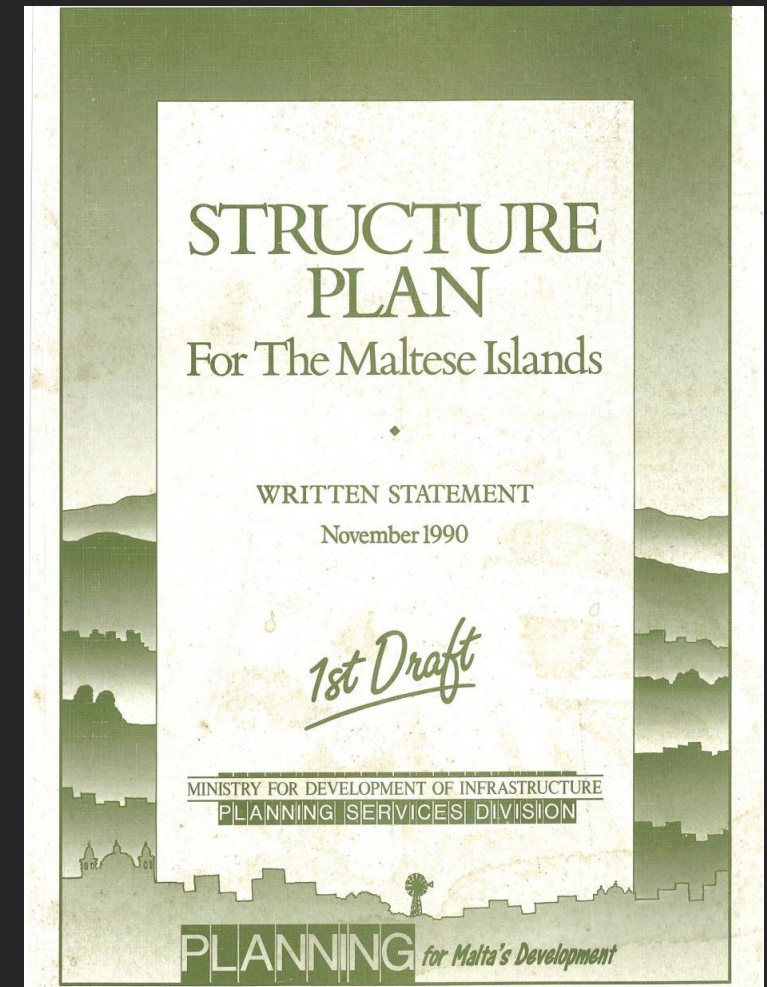
Long-Run Housing Tenure Trends in Malta (1948–2023)



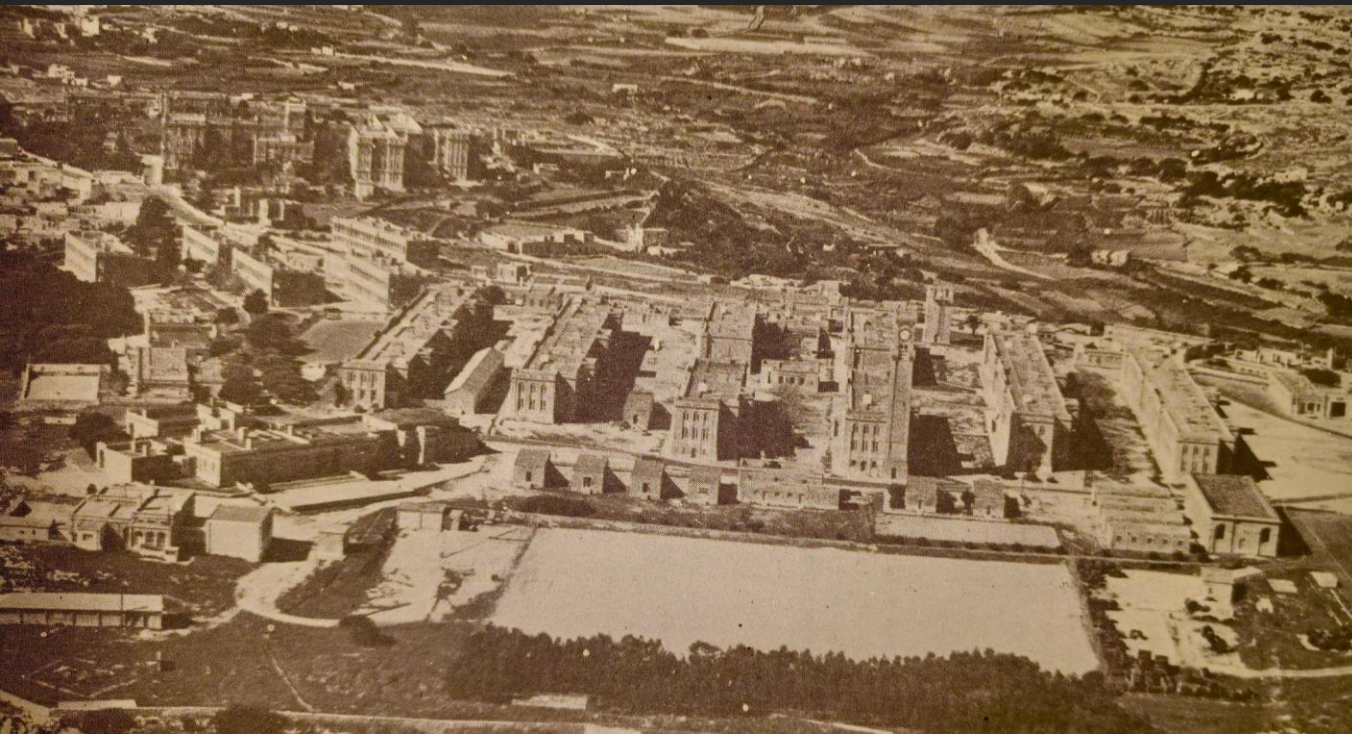
1985 – 2004 Towards an
alternative approach to social
housing in Malta: A (re-)turn to
targeted social housing

The Structure Plan and a (re-)turn to targeted social housing

- The 'small state' spirit of the Structure Plan (1990) manifested in social housing policy, too. The Plan argued for "the progressive phasing out of social housing which [...] creates ghettos of social stigma, represents a heavy burden on scarce public sector finances, and generally distorts the housing market."
- The "new approach to social housing" would be strictly "confined to genuinely needy households whose 'need' is regularly monitored and where 'social' households generally blend with all others in the private sector market."



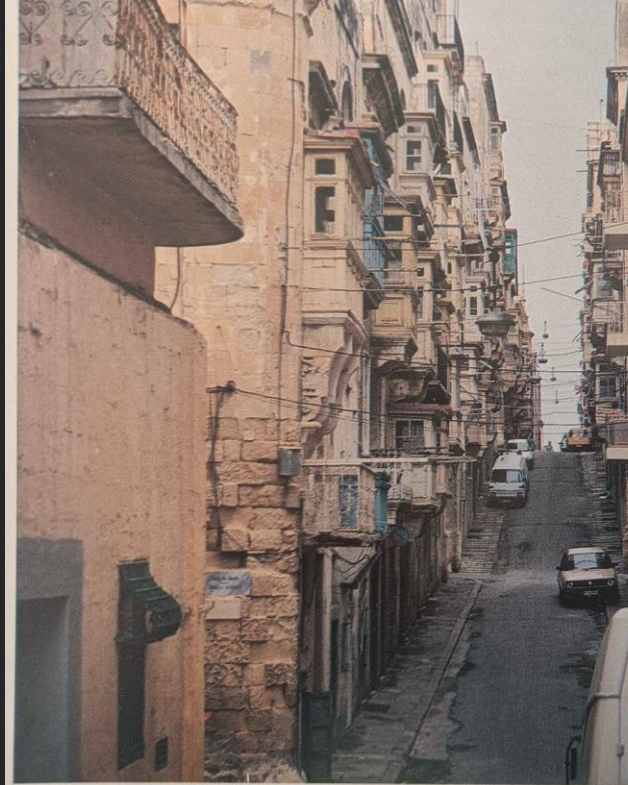
Winding down HOS and requisitions



- HOS was wound down in the 1990s in a context where concerns about land use were intensifying.
- Requisition powers were removed in 1995, coupled with the de-requisitioning exercise of the housing stock.
- Social housing now almost entirely reliant on the building of *new* housing by government, and regeneration of ex-British services premises.



Bidu tal-progett f'Santa Liena, Bormla.



Programm ta' tnehhija ta' kerrejjet fil-Belt, Bormla u l-Hamrun.

Photo: Annual Report 1993
Housing Authority

Urban Regeneration

2005–2024 Towards a mixed
model of social housing

The social housing stock: leveraging the private sector

- The Housing Authority continued its programme of building new housing in the early 2000s, but this practically comes to a halt in 2011, and the social housing stock depletes further.
- To replenish the social housing stock, *Skema Kiri* was unveiled, incentivising private property owners to rent out their property.
- A noticeable shift that sought to leverage the private sector in the provision of social housing.



Photo: Matthew Mirabelli

Focus turns to urban regeneration and adequate living



L-Awtorità tad-Djar tghin lil YMCA b
Shelter għall-Minuri

- Attention given to the adequacy of housing and urban conditions.
- In 2010, the regeneration of social housing estates in government-owned housing.
- A long-standing project of lift installation in social housing blocks.

Photo: Annual report 2007/08
Housing Authority



Proġett ta' *Sheltered Housing* fi Triq il-Kapuċċini ġewwa l-Furjana

Photo: Annual report 2006/07 Housing Authority

A mixed model of social housing provision

The new model of social housing provision in the mid-2010s was characterised by three dimensions:

- firstly, and urgently, was to raise the social housing stock
- secondly, to improve the social housing stock
- thirdly, to extend the remit of support beyond the residualist conception of social housing

Raising the social housing stock

- In 2015, a new building programme of social housing apartments.
- The extension of *Skema Kiri*, later *Nikru Biex Nassistu*, to raise further the stock of social housing.
- Social housing no longer allocated and treated as a “life-long donation” and driven by the needs of the applicant.



Photo: Matthew Mirabelli

Specialised housing and repair work

- The Authority also continued the programme of 'specialised housing', including new housing concepts such as intergenerational housing.
- Projects of regeneration of housing estates intensified, including repair works within dwellings and condominiums, and the installation of lifts.



Dar Bla Hitan in Birgu was inaugurated in November 2023. This is one of the specialized housing projects designed for inmates in the final months of their sentences, facilitating their reintegration into society. For these projects, the Authority repaired dilapidated dwellings and launched a design competition, inviting architects to propose rehousing solutions.

Source: Housing Authority

Beyond the safety net: Affordable housing

- Beyond providing a safety net to those in poverty, the Authority also introduced schemes for those who still require support with their housing, under the umbrella of 'Affordable Housing'

Affordable Housing

 | Services | Affordable Housing



Quo Vadis? Key Questions for the Future

- *For whom?*
- *By whom?*
- *How, and under which conditions?*



Photo: Matthew Mirabelli

For whom is it?



Necessitates attention to societal change, and recognition of new realities and challenges.

- i. An ageing society, and the various needs of the elderly
 - ii. Family breakdowns, individualism, and new family forms
 - iii. Marginalised communities, such as people leaving prison, and youth in residential care.
- Migrants are not merely temporary workers, but a permanent feature of our society.

Who provides housing?

- Between state, market, and third sector
- Social enterprises, cooperatives, limited- or non-profit housing organisations

Photo: Atkinson Report

101. Building societies are not the only way of encouraging home-ownership. Government itself may build housing for rent-purchase, owning and possibly maintaining the house until the loan and interest charges have been paid. (Such schemes are particularly suitable for families with limited means who are nevertheless willing to pay slightly more than the monthly rent to become a home-owner in time). Housing societies may be set up by social organisations, trade unions, etc. for the building of homes for rent-purchase (or for rent) financed from their own funds supplemented by loans from Government, a bank, an insurance company or building society. Cooperative housing associations may be set up on roughly similar lines. All

the

How, and under which conditions?

- *Form* of housing: Diversified stock of housing that fulfils different needs and aspirations in society?
- *Quality* of housing: Security, affordability, adequacy

Institutional framework



a social economy

(Social) housing and social impact

- To make social housing policy is to put people and communities at the centre, and to integrate them meaningfully into policy decisions.
- This requires careful, systematic, scientific assessment of the social impact of social housing policy.



Photo: Matthew Mirabelli



THE HOUSING
LANDSCAPE

Thank You