



Understanding Youth Housing Aspirations in Malta: Insights from University and MCAST students

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Brian Micallef

Executive Summary

This study presents the results of a survey conducted with students from the University of Malta and MCAST during Freshers' Week 2025, focusing on their housing aspirations. The research addresses four main questions:

- (a) What are their housing aspirations and plans?
- (b) How informed are they about the property market and the process of buying?
- (c) How does owning a property feature in their life goals?
- (d) Have they started saving for a property?

A total of 1,198 students completed the survey although this study focuses primarily on the Maltese respondents.

The findings reveal that young people in Malta continue to aspire to homeownership, reflecting the country's long-standing culture of owning rather than renting. The results also suggest that the current trend of purchasing property individually, rather than jointly, is expected to persist. However, only a minority of respondents feel adequately informed about the property market or the home-buying process, highlighting a knowledge gap that may affect financial preparedness. This

concern is compounded by the perception among most participants that housing is unaffordable. While homeownership remains a significant life priority, other goals, such as career advancement and financial freedom to make desired purchases, often take precedence. Finally, results on savings were mixed but encouraging: 38% reported saving regularly for a property, 18% save irregularly and approximately one-quarter plan to begin saving once they complete their studies.

To further explore the determinants of saving behaviour, an econometric model is developed to assess how factors such as financial knowledge, aspirations, and socio-demographic characteristics influence the likelihood of saving for homeownership. The paper concludes with two key policy recommendations focusing on enhancing financial literacy and encouraging early saving habits.

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Understanding Youth Housing Aspirations in Malta:

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Brian Micallef¹

1. Introduction

In many European countries, young people today face significant challenges in achieving homeownership (European Parliament, 2025). Rising property prices, which often outpace wage growth, make saving for a down payment increasingly difficult. Limited financial literacy and uncertainty about the housing market further complicate decision-making. At the same time, shifting life goals – such as valuing flexibility, mobility, and diverse career paths – influence when and how young adults approach housing. Against this backdrop, the Housing Authority conducted a survey with University of Malta and MCAST students – prospective first-time buyers – during Freshers Week 2025 to understand better the housing aspirations of young adults in Malta.

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This study seeks to address the following research questions:

- (a) What are their housing aspirations and plans?
- (b) How informed are they about the property market and the process of buying?
- (c) How does owning a property feature in their life goals and priorities?
- (d) Have they started saving for a property?

This article is structured as follows. Section 2 presents the methodology used for data collection. Section 3 discusses the results, with subsections addressing each of the research questions outlined above, while Section 4 introduces a simple econometric model to examine the saving behaviour of young adults based on the survey findings. Finally, Section 5 concludes with key policy recommendations.

2. Methodology

The research instrument consisted of a short questionnaire distributed to students from the University of Malta and MCAST during Freshers' Week 2025, held between 29 September and 8 October.

The Housing Authority hosted a stand at both events. Alongside games, merchandise, and educational material, a prominently placed banner with a QR code directed students to the survey. Visitors to the stand were actively encouraged to participate. To further boost engagement, respondents were entered into a prize draw for a chance to win a set of JBL earbuds. Eight sets were awarded—one each day—with photos of the winners shared daily on social media.

In addition to demographic and socio-economic questions on nationality, age and relative family status, the questionnaire consisted of 9 questions, which are reproduced in table 1. The number of questions was largely

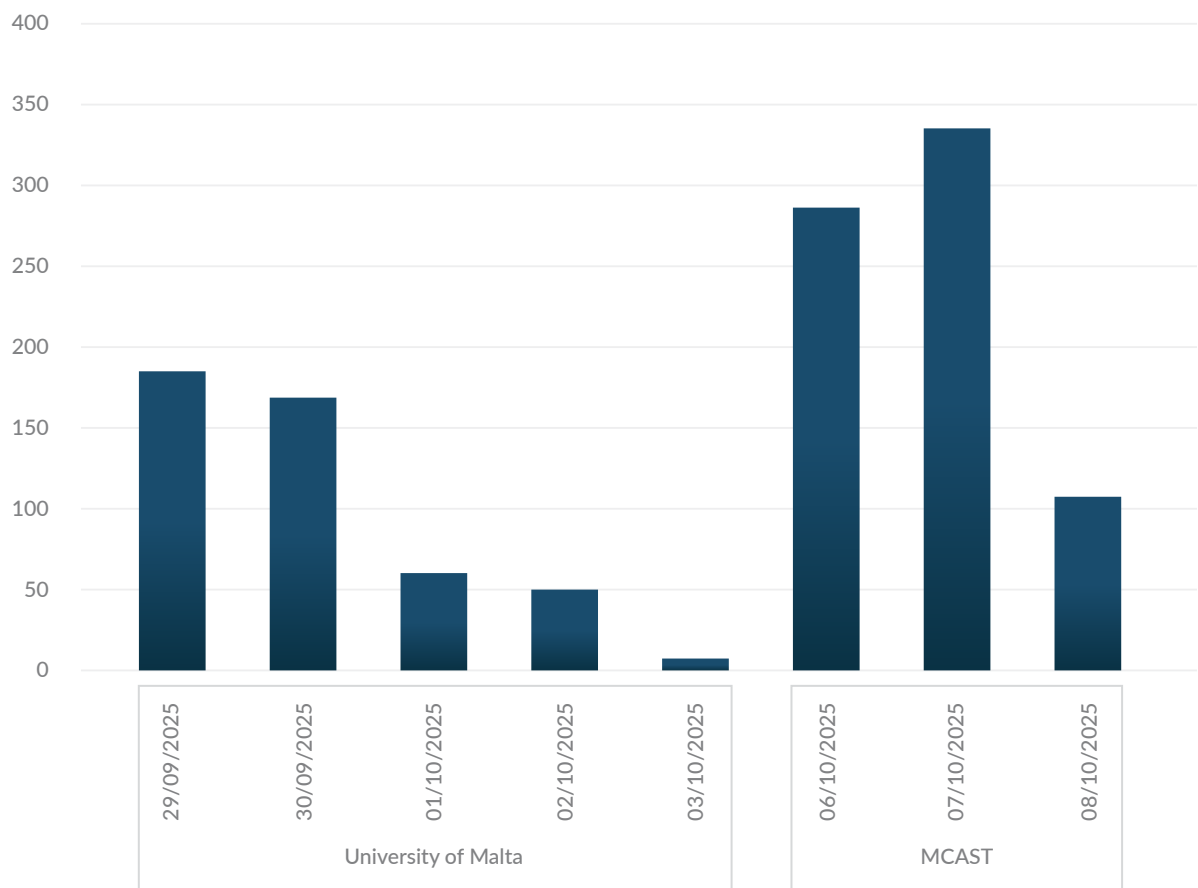
influenced by the need for completion within 1-2 minutes, as a longer questionnaire would likely have discouraged participation or produced low-quality responses.

Table 1: Questionnaire

Aspiration and plans	Type
Which of the following best describes your housing aspirations?	Categorical
If you plan to purchase a property, I plan to do it:	Categorical
At what age do you realistically expect to move out of your parental home and live independently?	Open-ended
What type of dwelling do you aspire to purchase for your first property?	Categorical
Knowledge of the property market	Type
How well-informed do you feel about the Maltese property market and the process of buying a home?	Categorical
How do you perceive housing affordability for first-time buyers in Malta?	Categorical
In your opinion, how much do you think it costs to purchase the property you aspire to own in Malta?	Open-ended
Life goals	Type
Which of the following life goals are most important to you?	Categorical (multiple responses permitted)
Saving Behaviour	Type
Have you started saving for a property?	Categorical

A total of 1,198 students completed the survey, with an average completion time of 1.7 minutes per respondent. Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of responses over the data collection period. Overall, 39% of responses were collected from University of Malta students, while the remaining 61% were from MCAST students.

Figure 1: Breakdown of Responses by Day



3. Results

3.1 Socio-demographic characteristics

Figure 2 shows that 77% of respondents were Maltese, while international students accounted for 23%. Among the latter, 6% were from EU countries and 17% from non-EU countries.

Figure 2: What is your nationality? (N=1,190)

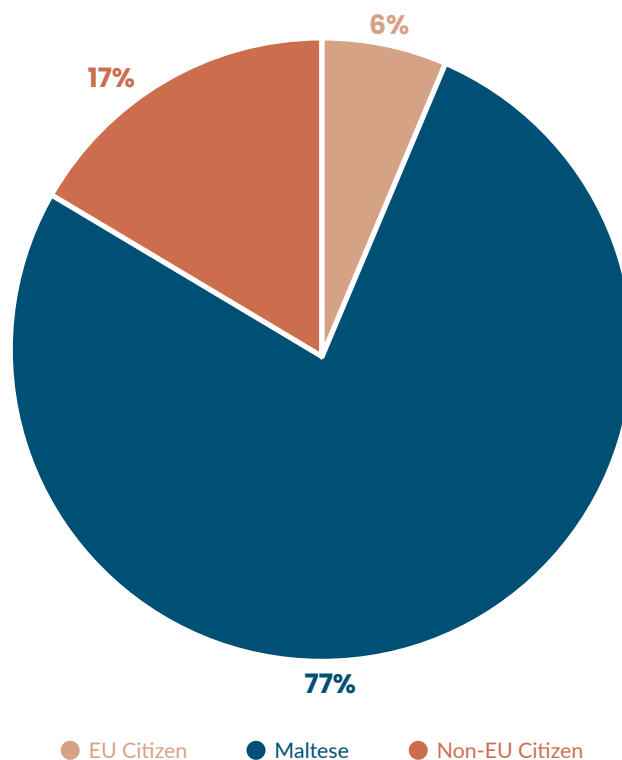


Figure 3 illustrates the age distribution of respondents. As expected, the majority were between 16 and 22 years old. On average, non-Maltese students were older than their Maltese counterparts, with the mean age of Maltese students at 20.2 years compared to 24.8 years for non-Maltese students. Among Maltese respondents, University students were on average older than their MCAST counterparts, with mean ages of 21.2 years and 19.5 years respectively.

Given the focus of this study on property in Malta, unless explicitly stated, the rest of this document will primarily emphasise the sample based on Maltese students.

Family status plays a significant role in shaping homeownership aspirations among young buyers. Those from more financially secure families often benefit from intergenerational support, which ease the burden of saving for a deposit and accessing credit. Conversely, individuals from less advantaged backgrounds may face greater financial constraints. Beyond financial factors, family expectations and cultural norms also influence attitudes toward ownership, independence, and household formation.

To better understand these dynamics, respondents were asked to self-assess their relative family status using a Likert scale ranging from 1 (least well-off) to 10 (most well-off). Figure 4 presents the results for Maltese respondents, with 74% rating their families between 5 and 8, which is broadly indicative of a middle to upper-middle-class background.

Figure 3: How old are you?

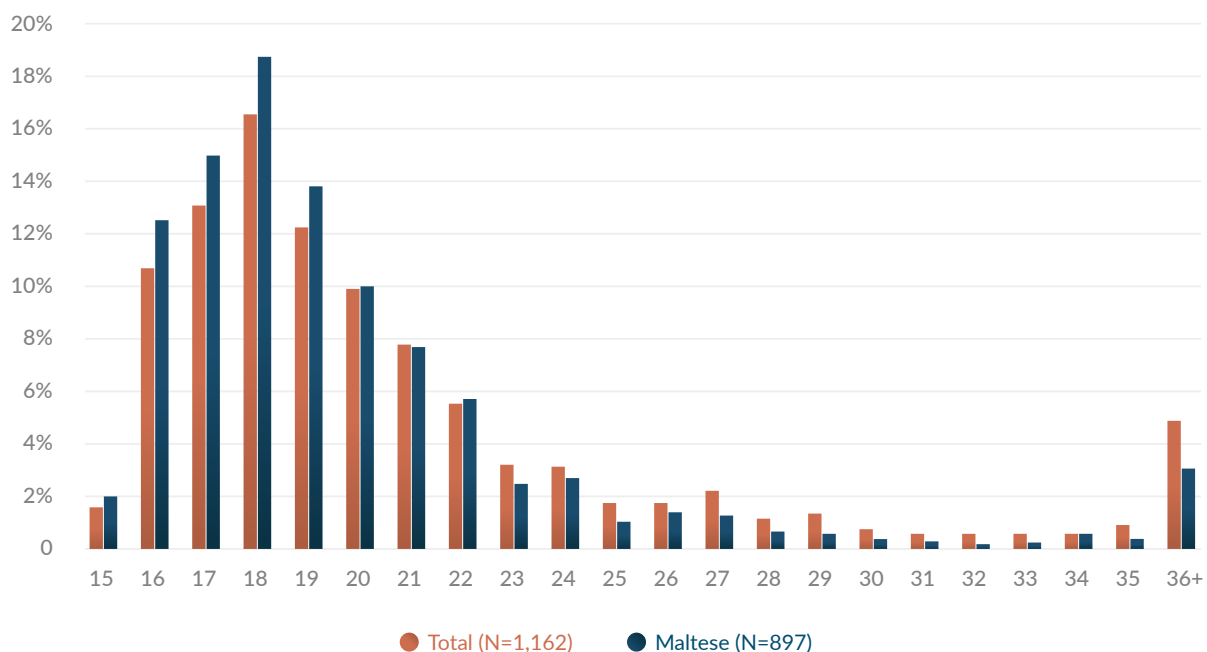
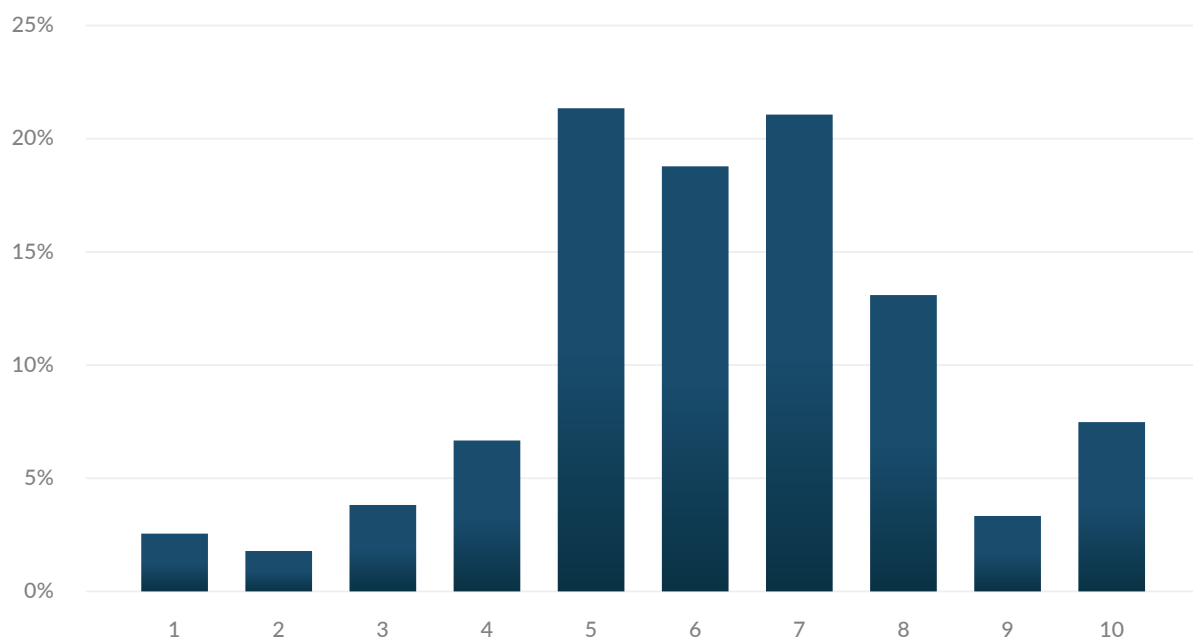


Figure 4: Self-assessed relative family status (MT sample, N=906)



3.2 Housing aspirations and plans

Most Maltese respondents (57%) expressed an interest in purchasing a property, while 6% reported already owning one (see fig. 5). This is not surprising given Malta's strong culture of homeownership. Around 20% indicated that they had not yet considered the issue, likely reflecting their relatively young age, while 6% stated that they plan to move abroad. Only 7% identified renting as their preferred housing tenure.

When asked whether they intended to purchase alone or with a partner, 49% of respondents stated a preference to buy on their own (see fig. 6). This mirrors current trends among first-time buyers, around half of whom purchase individually (Micallef and Schembri, 2025), suggesting that this pattern is likely to persist. Meanwhile, 45% reported planning to buy with a partner.

Among younger respondents, aged 15 to 22, the average intended age of leaving the parental home was 25 years. This is notably lower than the current estimate of 29 years in 2024 (Eurostat, 2025), with data from the

Housing Authority's First-Time Buyers scheme also indicating an average age of 29 years. This finding also contrasts with international studies on delayed adulthood, such as Karagiannaki (2024) for the UK, where high property prices are often cited as a contributing factor. While differences may be influenced by the fact that younger respondents may not fully anticipate the realities of independent living, this gap warrants continued monitoring.

In terms of dwelling preferences, most respondents plan to purchase an apartment, with about one-third expressing a preference for a house (see fig. 7). Specifically, 39% favoured a flat, 13% a penthouse, and 12% a maisonette. The share of those preferring a house is significantly higher than the proportion of first-time buyers who purchased houses in recent years (Micallef and Schembri, 2025).

Figure 5: Which of the following best describes your housing aspirations? (MT sample, N=913)

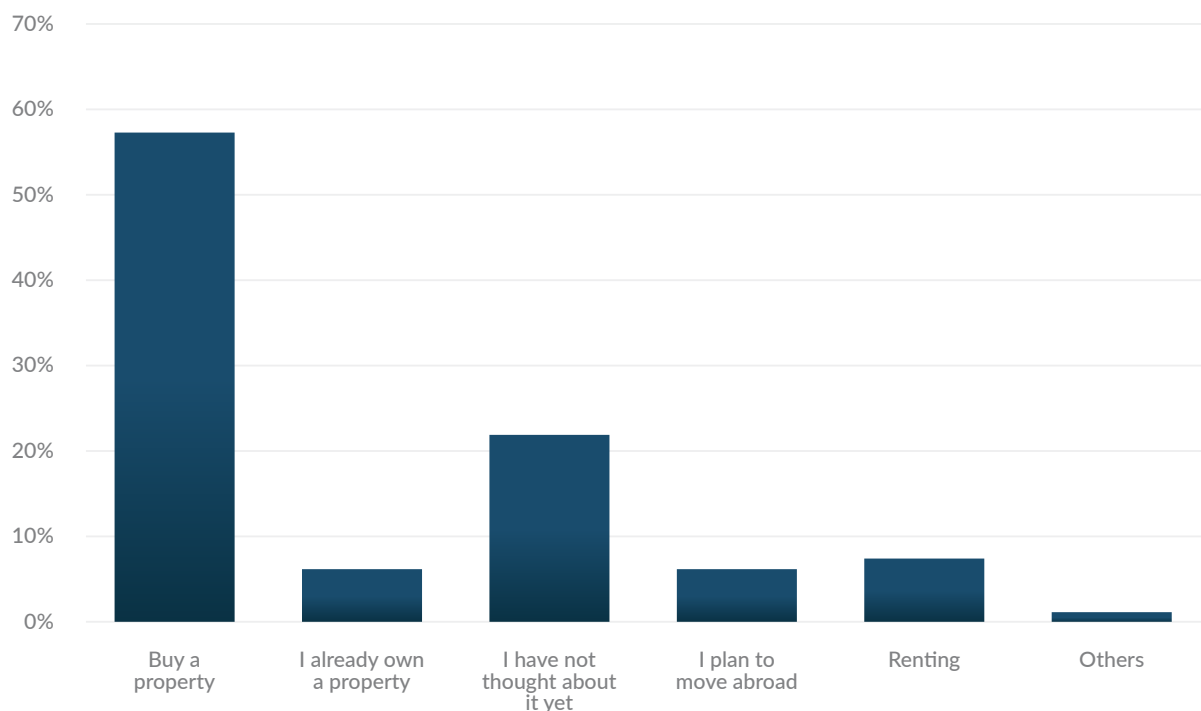


Figure 6: If you plan to purchase a property, with whom? (MT sample, N=914)

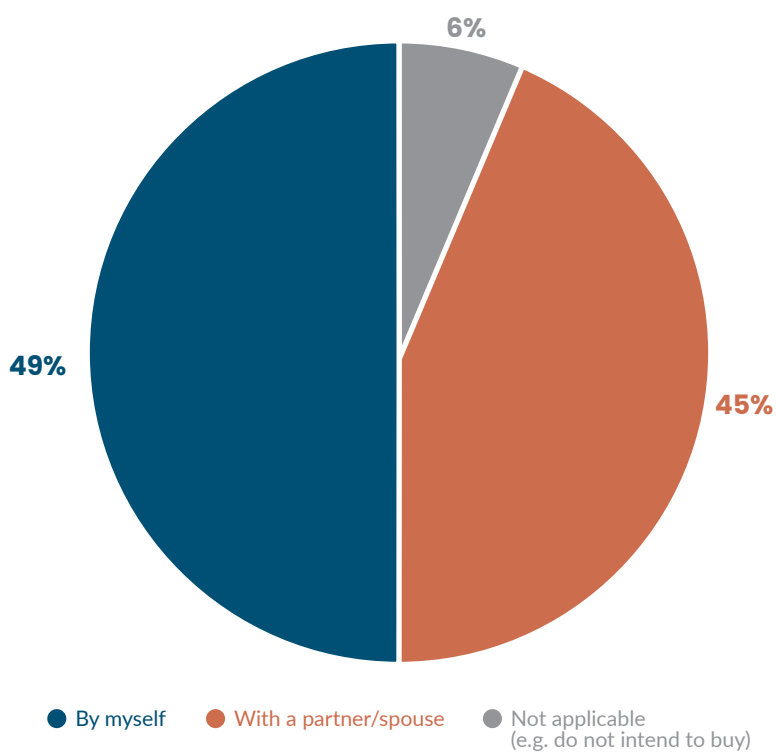
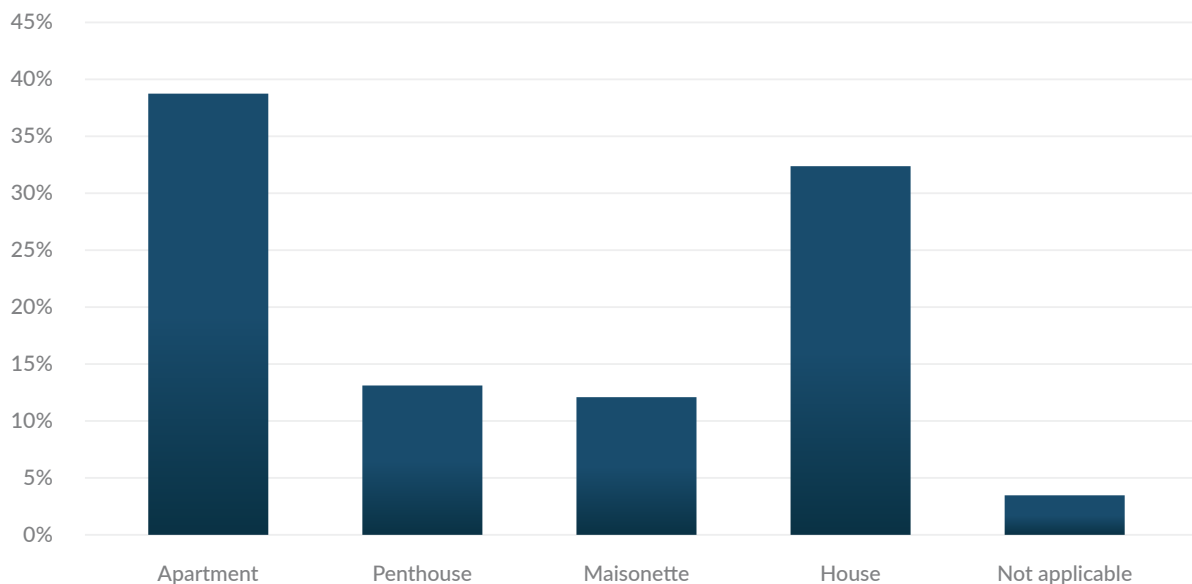


Figure 7: What type of dwelling do you aspire to purchase? (MT sample, N=904)



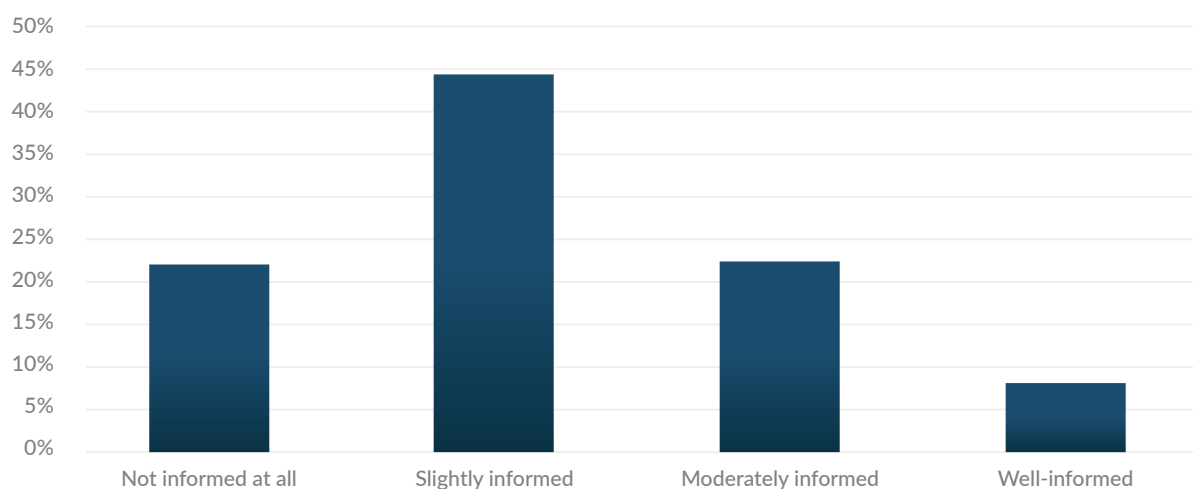
3.3 Awareness about the housing market and the process of buying

Almost 70% of respondents reported that they do not feel well informed about the Maltese property market or the home-buying process (see fig. 8). Within this group, 23% stated that they are “not informed at all,” while a further 46% considered themselves “*slightly informed*.” By contrast, 23% described themselves as “*moderately informed*,” and fewer than 10% selected the “*well-informed*” option.

This general lack of awareness is also reflected in respondents’ perceptions of property values (see fig. 9). When asked to estimate the cost of purchasing their aspired property, answers varied widely. To avoid bias, this was framed as an open-ended question rather than a multiple-choice one. While roughly half of the respondents provided figures in line with prices typically paid by first-time buyers — generally in the range of €175,000 to €400,000 (Micallef and Schembri, 2025) — the remainder showed significant discrepancies. For example, around 10% of students estimated prices below €50,000, while 5% reported figures exceeding €1,000,000. Only 3% admitted to having no idea of property prices, but the extreme values suggest that many still lack a clear sense of market realities.

There also appears to be a correlation between self-reported knowledge and the accuracy of price estimates (see fig. 10). Respondents who claimed to be “*not informed at all*” or “*slightly informed*” were overrepresented among those who entered implausibly low figures (below €50,000) or stated that they had no idea of property values. Conversely, those who placed property values between €250,000 and €400,000 were more likely to be “*moderately*” or “*well-informed*.”

Figure 8: How well-informed do you feel about the Maltese property market and the process of buying? (MT sample, N=906)



Despite this knowledge gap, respondents hold strong views on affordability (see fig. 11). More than 60% believe that housing for first-time buyers is “*not affordable at all*,” while a further 30% consider it only “*slightly affordable*.” By contrast, just 6% described housing as “*moderately affordable*” and only 3% as “*affordable*.” This points to a widespread perception of inaccessibility, even among those who may not yet have a precise understanding of current market dynamics.

Figure 9: Expected property price value (MT sample, N=831)

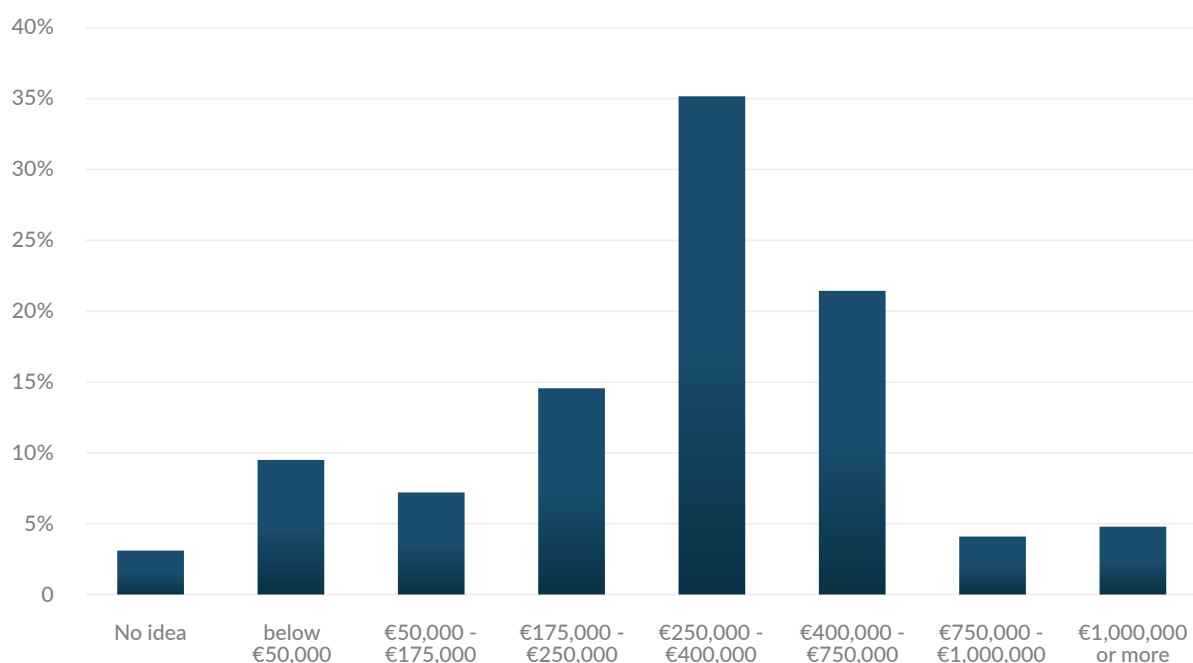


Figure 10: Expected property price by awareness levels (MT sample, N=802)

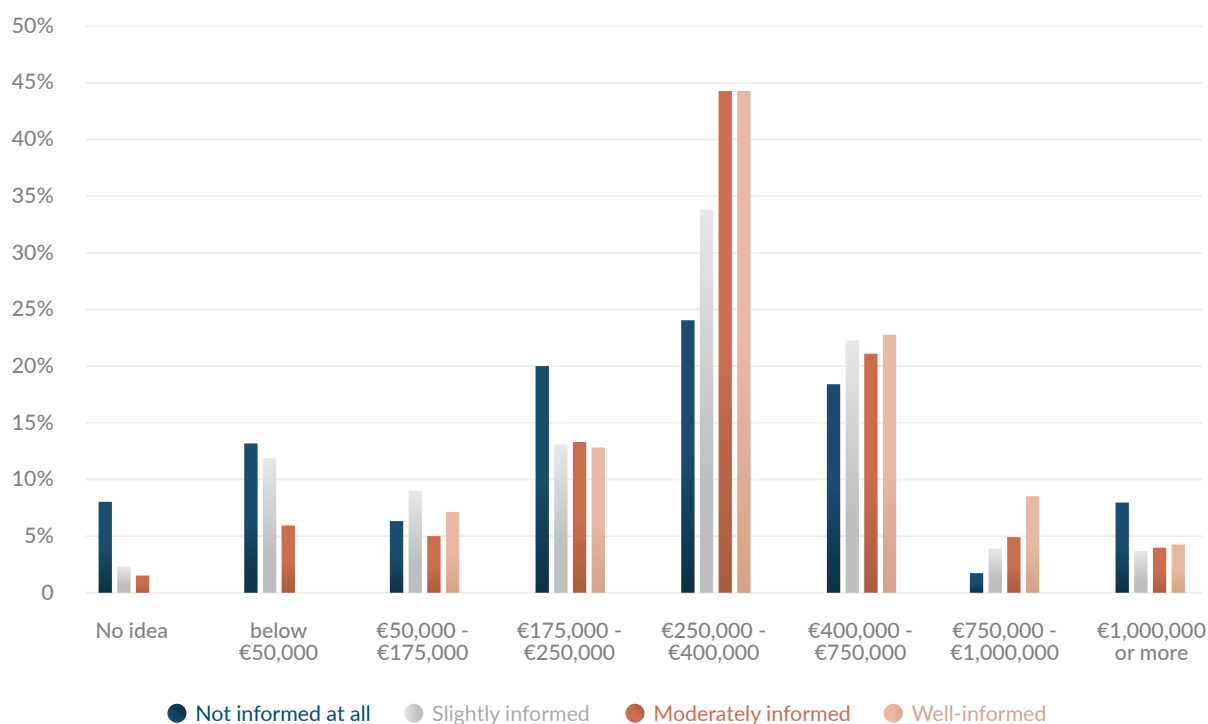
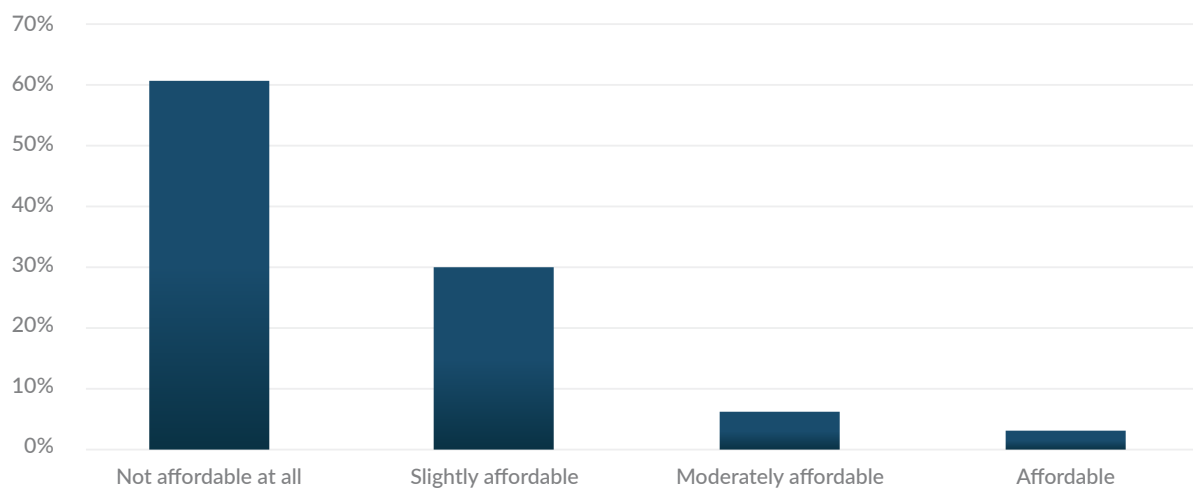


Figure 11: How do you perceive housing affordability for FTBs in Malta? (MT sample, N=896)



3.4 *Life Goals and priorities*

Respondents were invited to identify their key life goals and priorities. This line of questioning stems from the recognition that the aspirations of today's youth are evolving in ways that may diverge from those of earlier generations. In a context shaped by rapid technological change, increased exposure to consumer culture, and shifting social norms, young people may place greater emphasis on lifestyle choices, personal experiences, and career advancement (Bauman, 2007; Inglehart, 2018). Such changing aspirations can have important implications for saving behaviour, financial planning, and long-term objectives such as homeownership, highlighting the need to better understand the values that underpin these priorities.

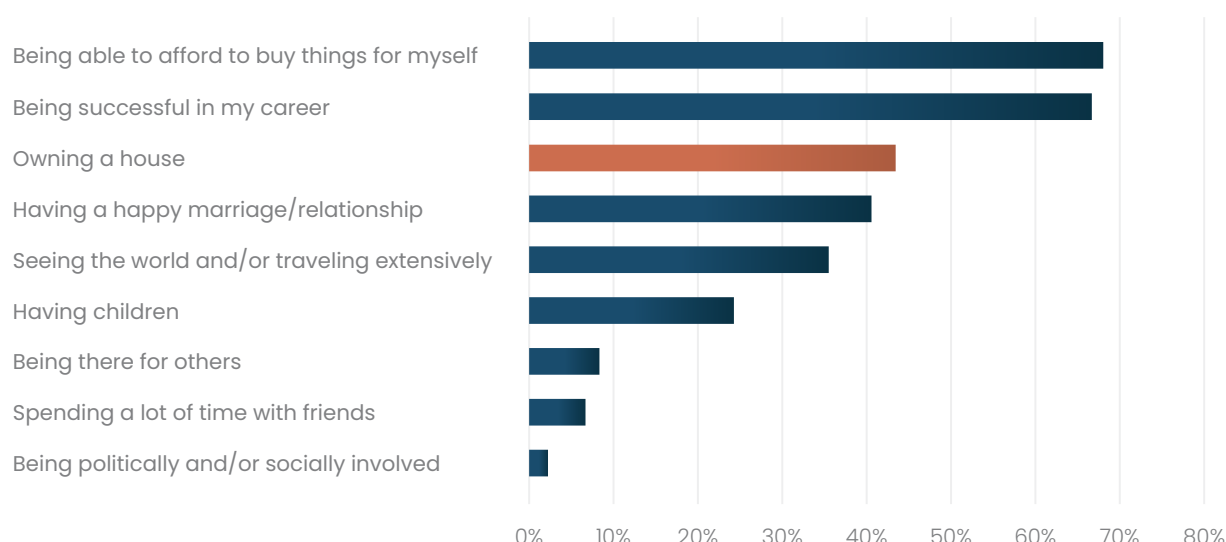
To capture this, students were presented with a closed-ended question, allowing them to select up to three options from a list of nine. These options, adapted from Headey (2008), were grouped into three broad dimensions: career and consumption, family and personal relationships, and social or political engagement. It is important to note that some of these priorities may be complementary, while others may be in conflict with one another.

The results reveal that material aspirations and career success dominate the outlook of young Maltese respondents (see fig. 12). The ability to buy things and career success were the two most frequently chosen goals, each selected by roughly two-thirds of participants. Owning a house emerged as the third most popular choice, though only 43% of Maltese respondents considered it among their top priorities – a striking result given Malta's traditional culture of homeownership. This suggests that, while housing remains important, it may be competing with other forms of consumption and lifestyle goals in shaping savings behaviour. Alternatively, these priorities may be viewed as complementary: a successful career and financial security are often seen as prerequisites for purchasing a home. From this perspective, the top three choices reflect a coherent cluster of objectives centred on self-sufficiency, sustainable income, and long-term housing stability.

Family-related aspirations featured further down the list. Around 40% of respondents identified a happy marriage or relationship as a priority, while a slightly lower share prioritized travelling extensively. Notably, only about a quarter of students identified having children as a key life goal. This finding is particularly relevant for Malta, which already records one of the lowest fertility rates in Europe, and highlights the potential long-term demographic implications of shifting youth preferences.

At the bottom of the ranking were goals related to social or political involvement. Fewer than 10% of respondents selected these options, suggesting limited interest in collective action or civic engagement relative to individual or lifestyle-oriented aspirations.

Figure 12: Prioritization of life goals (MT sample)



3.5 Saving for property

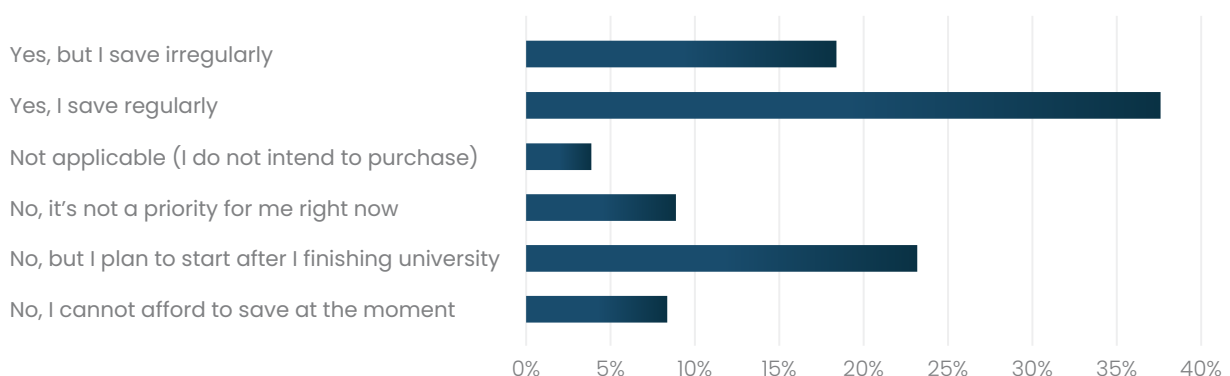
A key objective of this research is to gain a deeper understanding of the saving behaviour of young adults. This is particularly important given the need to accumulate sufficient funds for the down payment and other property-related expenses, such as notarial fees, taxes, and furnishing costs (Micallef, 2023).

The findings reveal a mixed but somewhat encouraging picture (see fig. 13). Around 38% of respondents reported that they are saving regularly to purchase a property, while a further 18% indicated that they save occasionally, though not consistently. Taken together, this suggests that just over half of respondents have already started to put money aside for a future home.

Another 23% stated that, although they are not saving at present, they plan to begin once they finish their studies. The latter highlights the role of life stage and income expectations in shaping saving behaviour. By contrast, 8% of respondents explained that they are currently unable to afford to save, while a further 9% noted that saving for housing is not a priority for them at this stage in life.

Overall, these findings suggest that while a significant share of young people recognise the importance of saving for homeownership, there are also clear financial and attitudinal barriers that prevent others from doing so.

Figure 13: Have you started saving for a property? (MT sample, N=911)



4. An econometric model of saving determinants for property

The determinants of saving behaviour for homeownership described in Section 3.5 were examined using binary logistic regression models. The dependent variable takes the value of 1 if respondent has started saving for a home and 0 otherwise.²

Two model specifications were estimated:

Model 1: $Y_i=1$ if the respondent saves regularly or irregularly.

Model 2: $Y_i=1$ if the respondent saves regularly only.

Formally, the logit model can be expressed as:

$$\ln \left(\frac{\Pr(y_i=1)}{1-\Pr(y_i)} \right) = \alpha + \beta_1 \text{Info}_i + \beta_2 \text{Age}_i + \beta_3 \text{FamStatus}_i + \beta_4 \text{Partner}_i + \beta_5 \text{Aspire}_i + \varepsilon$$

where:

Info_i is a categorical variable capturing how informed the respondent is about the housing market (reference = “not informed at all”).

Age_i is a continuous variable for the respondent’s age.

FamStatus_i is a categorical variable ranging from 1 (least well-off, reference) to 5 (most well-off).³

Partner_i is a categorical variable that takes the value of 1 if the respondent plans to purchase alone (reference), 2 if they plan to purchase with a partner, and 3 if not applicable (e.g., they already own a property or do not plan to purchase).

Aspire_i is a binary variable equal to 1 if the respondent aspires to purchase a property, 0 otherwise.

² Technical details are available in Hosmer et al. (2013).

³ The original 10-point scale was consolidated into 5 categories to ensure that each category contained a sufficient number of observations. This aggregation does not affect the overall results or conclusions.

The coefficients are interpreted in terms of their effect on the log-odds of saving. The results are reported in Table 2.

The results suggest that respondents who are more informed about the housing market are significantly more likely to save than those who reported being *“not informed at all”*. This relationship is statistically significant at conventional levels across both model specifications, underscoring the importance of information and awareness in shaping saving behaviour.

As expected, age is positively associated with the likelihood of saving, and this relationship is statistically significant at the 1% level. This finding is consistent with life-cycle theories of saving, which posit that saving propensity tends to increase with age as individuals approach key life transitions, such as finishing tertiary education or independent living.

Table 2: Regression results

	Model 1 Savings (Total)	Model 2 Savings (Regular)
Informed about housing market		
Not informed at all	(b)	(b)
Slightly informed	0.36 **	-0.01
Moderately informed	0.54 **	0.43 **
Well-informed	0.53 *	0.60 **
Age		
	0.09 ***	0.08 ***
Relative family status		
1	(b)	(b)
2	-0.48	-0.60
3	-0.44	-0.42
4	-0.71 *	-0.60
5	-0.39	-0.18
Plan to purchase with		
Alone	(b)	(b)
With partner	-0.40 ***	-0.43 ***
Not applicable	-2.03 ***	-1.74 ***
Aspire to purchase		
	0.27 *	0.14
Constant	-1.19 **	-1.57 ***
Observations	879	879
LR chi2	89.65	77.96
Prob > chi2	0.00	0.00
Pseudo R2	0.074	0.067

* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Interestingly, respondents who plan to purchase a property with a partner are less likely to save than those intending to purchase on their own. A similar pattern is observed among those who selected “not applicable,” a group that likely includes individuals who already own property or have no plans to purchase in the future. Both findings may suggest that individual responsibility for saving is diluted when the purchase decision is shared or deemed irrelevant.

The relationship between homeownership aspirations and saving behaviour is more nuanced. In Model 1, where the dependent variable includes both regular and irregular savers, aspiring to purchase a property has a positive, though weakly significant association with saving (at the 10% level). However, in Model 2, which restricts the dependent variable to regular savers only, the relationship is not statistically significant. This suggests that while aspirational factors may motivate some form of saving activity, they do not necessarily foster consistent or disciplined saving habits.

Finally, relative family status does not emerge as a statistically significant determinant of saving behaviour in either model. This may suggest that, within this relatively young and homogeneous sample, personal attitudes and informational factors play a stronger role in shaping saving intentions than perceived family financial background.

5. Conclusion

This study is based on a survey conducted among students from the University of Malta and MCAST during Freshers' Week 2025, exploring their housing aspirations and attitudes towards homeownership. A total of 1,198 responses were collected. Given the focus on property ownership in Malta, the analysis focuses primarily on Maltese respondents, who accounted for about three-quarters of the total sample.

Before presenting the findings, it is important to acknowledge some research limitations. First, the target population consisted solely of University and MCAST students and is therefore not representative of the entire youth population. In particular, the study does not capture the experiences of young people who did not continue their studies and instead entered the workforce directly after secondary school. This group may have different life goals and housing expectations compared to the sample surveyed. Second, the study relied on non-probability sampling, which limits the extent to which the findings can be generalised. It is also likely that, even within the University and MCAST populations, certain groups, such as students beyond their first years of study or those whose lectures did not require them to be on campus, are underrepresented in the sample. Nonetheless, the relatively large number of respondents provides a strong basis for analysis and offers valuable insights. Finally, the survey could only include a restricted number of questions due to practical constraints. While it would have been beneficial to incorporate additional items, including open-ended questions, to explore attitudes in greater depth, doing so would likely have led to lower response rates or reduced response quality.

The findings reveal that young people in Malta continue to aspire to homeownership, reflecting the country's long-standing culture of owning rather than renting. However, only a minority of respondents feel adequately informed about the property market or the home-buying process, highlighting a gap in knowledge that may affect financial preparedness. Despite this, most respondents think that housing is not affordable. While homeownership remains a relatively high life priority, other goals, such as career advancement and financial freedom to make desired purchases, often take precedence. Finally, results on savings were

mixed but encouraging. While 38% reported saving regularly for a property, a further 18% save on an irregular basis. Additionally, around one-quarter indicated that they plan to begin saving once they complete their studies.

The results also suggest that the current trend of purchasing property individually rather than with a partner is likely to continue. The average planned age for leaving the parental home is around 25 years, notably lower than the estimated figure of 29 years in 2024. However, given the general lack of knowledge about the buying process, younger respondents may not fully anticipate the realities of independent living.

Two key policy recommendations emerge from these findings. First, there is a need to strengthen financial literacy initiatives, including educational materials and outreach campaigns to raise awareness of the property market and the costs of purchasing. In support of this goal, earlier this year the Housing Authority published a step-by-step guide and launched an online portal to help first-time buyers navigate the market more effectively.⁴ However, further outreach and awareness-raising efforts remain essential to ensure that young people are well-informed and better prepared for the transition to homeownership. Second, policies should be designed to encourage saving from an early age, for instance through matched savings schemes, youth-targeted financial products, or incentives that reward consistent saving behaviour. Together, these measures could help bridge the gap between aspiration and attainment in the housing market for Malta's younger generations.

⁴ <https://firsthome.mt/>

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Malta Housing Authority

22 Pietro Floriani Il-Furjana,
FRN1060, Malta

Tel: +356 2299 1000
www.housingauthority.gov.mt