

FIDEM's International Women's Day Conference

Friday 8th March 2024 – Xara Lodge, Rabat

Speaker and Panellist bios



Dr Sabine Cabourdin

Lawyer & Founder at the FIDEM Foundation



Dr Sabine Agius Cabourdin is known for her vivaciousness in law and in every aspect of her life. Fluent in French, English, Maltese, Italian. Engaged in the business world from a young age, Sabine Agius Cabourdin's experience in negotiation and her scrutiny stem from her earlier days helping to run the family business. Eventually Sabine moved on to her own business venture running various commercial outlets between the ages of 16 and 25. Sabine then pursued her studies reading law at the University of Malta, after which she obtained a Bachelor of Arts in Legal and Humanistic Studies, Diploma in Notary Public and then a Degree in Law from the University of Malta in 2008. Until 2013 Sabine worked for a highly reputable Valletta law firm, after which time she decided to open up her own private boutique law firm in Malta. Established in 2013, Sabine's new firm works closely with a close-knit team of affiliate partners in order to provide a superior service. Carrying her business background with her wherever she goes, Sabine excels in her flexibility to save a deal or run through smooth negotiations for her clients. A thorough analysis of the various legal aspects at hand with the utmost respect to the word of the law are her prerogative. Every detail is carefully scrutinised with care and passion. Dr Sabine Agius Cabourdin specialises in commercial law. She is also the Director for a number of reputable companies in Malta, also engaging in bona fide work for several prestigious organisations, most notably the BOV Joseph Calleja Foundation where she is one of the Board's administrators. She is the Founder of the FIDEM Foundation.

Ann Marie Cassar

Director, Institute of Community Services at MCAST



As the director of the Institute of Community Services, Ann Marie is responsible for courses in Early years, Inclusive education, Vocational Education, Social care, Sports, Hairdressing, Beauty and Security Enforcement and protection; as well as the MCAST childcare centre and other community related areas. She is the Chairperson of the Institute Research Committee and other national boards working on research and national strategy.

Prof Carmel Borg

Associate Professor, Faculty of Education at the University of Malta



Prof. Carmel Borg heads the Department of Arts, Open Communities and Adult Education, at the Faculty of Education, University of Malta. An educator for over 30 years, the former Dean of the faculty currently researches, writes and lectures in curriculum studies, sociology of education, social-justice education, critical pedagogy, adult education for community development, and parental issues in education and beyond. In December 2022 he was awarded the National Order of Merit for his long-standing contribution to social justice in education and beyond.

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Helen Baker
HR Director at Betsson



HR Director at Betsson Group experienced in supporting the different business areas and implementing policies and procedures that not only ensure compliance but also promote fairness and transparency across all levels of the organisation.

Stephania Cuschieri
Assistant Director, Office of the Director General at the Ministry of Education



Stephania Cuschieri graduated with a BA (Honours) and PGCE followed by a MA in Educational Leadership and MSc in Career Guidance. A teacher by profession, she has taught in secondary state schools, and worked as Guidance Teacher, Assistant Head of School, and Education Officer – Service Provision Non-State Sector and Curriculum. She presently occupies the post of Assistant Director within the Office of the Director General Education Strategy and Quality Assurance.

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Ylenia Vella
Unit Manager, Jobseeker Advisory Services at Jobsplus



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Dr Anna Borg

Senior Lecturer at the Centre of Labour Studies, University of Malta



A senior lecturer and the former Director of Centre for Labour Studies at the University of Malta, Prof Borg is an experienced researcher in matters relating to gender equality between women and men in the labour market. Her main research interest focuses on work-life issues using theories of Gendered Organisations and theories of Hegemonic Masculinity. She has an interest in Gender and Social Policy issues; the issue of the Gender Pay Gap (GPG); Flexible Work Arrangements (FWAs) and Childcare, amongst others. She is the Coordinator of the Honours Degree Course in Work and Human Resources (HR) and the Diploma in Gender, Work and Society offered by the University of Malta.

Natalie Briffa Farrugia

Chairperson at the Vassallo Group



Before taking on the role of Chairperson of Vassallo Group, Natalie served as CEO of CareMalta Group and in 2018 was honoured as Malta Business Woman of the Year. She is Chair of the Care Homes Operators Business Section within the Malta Chamber of Commerce and a former Chairperson of the European Association of Housing and Services for the Ageing.

Dr Ann Bugeja

Lawyer, Senior Associate at GVZH



Ann heads the employment practice within the firm. She has advised a number of large companies in Malta on non-litigious employment law arising from day-to-day matters and more specific issues such as collective redundancies and protection of employees under the TUPE regulations.

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Abigail Agius Mamo
CEO at the Chamber of SMEs



Abigail Agius Mamo has occupied the position of Malta Chamber of SMEs CEO for the last 8 years. Her experience and expertise revolve around economic topics of competitiveness and sustainability of enterprises, especially SMEs. She is an experienced business representative and represents the interest of businesses on a number of high-level fora.

Christopher Vassallo Cesareo
President at the Malta Chamber



The managing director of the family-owned Domestica Limited, Chris served as a Council member of The Malta Chamber since 2013 before being appointed President last year. He is also the chairman of JA Malta Foundation, has served as vice chairman on the San Anton School Board and is a member of the Sovereign Military Hospitaller Order of St John of Jerusalem.

Dr Roberta Metsola,
President of the EU Parliament



Roberta Metsola was elected President of the European Parliament in January 2022. She was first elected to the European Parliament in 2013, becoming one of Malta's first female Members of the European Parliament. Metsola was re-elected in 2014 and then again in 2019. In 2020 she was elected as the First Vice-President of the European Parliament, becoming the first Maltese national to hold the post. She was responsible for the European Parliament's relations with national parliaments and for the Parliament's participation in the interreligious and non-confessional dialogue (Article 17 TFEU). Within the European Parliament, President Metsola was the EPP Group's Coordinator in the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs, between January 2017 and 2020. President Metsola was the Parliament's rapporteur on the European Border and Coastguard Regulation in 2019. She also co-authored the Parliament's own-initiative report on the need to protect journalists in the European Union from Strategic Lawsuits against Public Participation. Professionally she is a lawyer who has specialised in European law and politics. Prior to her election as a MEP, President Metsola served within the Permanent Representation of Malta to the European Union and later as the legal advisor to the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. In her student years, she campaigned actively for Malta's EU membership, and was active in various organisations, acting as the Secretary-General for the European Democrat Student organisation between 2002-2003. She completed an Erasmus exchange in France and graduated from the University of Malta and the College of Europe in Bruges. Born in 1979, Roberta Metsola is married to Ukko Metsola and is the mother of four boys.

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Ariadne Massa
Media Strategist at Media
Insiders



Media strategist at Media Insiders. Ariadne is the former Times of Malta head of news and an award-winning journalist with 20 years of experience in journalism. She set up Media Insiders in 2015.

Prof Marie Briguglio
Economist & Associate
Professor, FEMA at the
University of Malta



Prof. Marie Briguglio (BCom, BA Hons, MSc, PhD), is a resident academic at the Department of Economics in the University of Malta, author of over 60 peer-reviewed publications (<https://www.um.edu.mt/profile/mariebriguglio>), lead researcher on several collaborative public-sector research projects, including the Malta Wellbeing INDEX project and a multi-media writer. Her work deals with market-failure spanning the economics of the environment and the economics of happiness.

Hon Ivan Castillo
Shadow Minister for
Maritime Affairs, Social
Dialogue and the fight
against the rising cost of
living



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Hon Justin Schembri
Shadow Minister for
Education



Hon. Justin Schembri MP is a dynamic Maltese politician affiliated with the **Nationalist Party**. Elected to the House of Representatives in 2022 as he emerged as the standout candidate on the 8th District. He is the Opposition's Shadow Minister for Education and Trades. Justin is a teacher by profession, graduated with a B.A. Hons in Maltese followed by a Post Graduate Certificate. He also holds a Higher Diploma in Political Studies. A father to 12-year-old Lexi, he enjoys reading, watching Netflix, and running. His commitment is to bring forward the much-needed change within Malta's educational set-up to ensure schooling serves as a process encouraging a system that increase positive outcomes for all children and sustain their future. He is the author of several books published in the last decade.

Karen Demicoli
Director General, Ministry
for Economy, Enterprise &
Strategic Projects



Ms. Karen Demicoli's career in the Maltese Public Service commenced in 2003 as a Principal in the Ministry for Health, the Elderly and Community Care. In 2011, she was appointed Director (Policy Development, EU and International Affairs) within the same Ministry. In 2014, Ms. Demicoli joined the Office of the Prime Minister – Energy and Projects as Director (International Affairs and Programme Implementation). During this period, besides the policy and project coordination aspects related to the area under the Ministry's remit, Ms. Demicoli was also responsible to oversee the Ministry's preparations in relation to the Maltese Presidency of the Council of the European Union. In 2017, Ms. Demicoli was appointed, Director (Strategy and Support) in the Ministry for Tourism. She served in this role until 2020, when she was appointed Director General in the Ministry for Tourism and Consumer Protection. Throughout this period, Ms. Demicoli contributed in steering the industry through the challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic and the drafting of a new National Tourism Strategy. Upon her appointment as Director General in the Ministry for the Economy, Lands and EU Funds in April 2022, which has since been now redesigned as Ministry for the Economy, Enterprise and Strategic Projects, she shifted her focus on economic development and the digital economy. Throughout her career, Ms. Demicoli served on various Government boards and committees and represented Malta in various European Union and international meetings. Ms. Demicoli holds a Master's Degree in Public Policy and a first Degree in Sociology.

Melanie Casha Sammut
Director at the Ministry of
Education



Ms Casha Sammut was recently appointed as Director for the new Directorate for STEM and VET Programmes, within the Ministry for Education, Sport, Youth, Research and Innovation. After a number of years as a Primary teacher, in 2011 she took on the role of the Education Officer for Primary Mathematics. Together with a team of Heads of Department and Maths Support Teachers, they offered support, in varied ways, to all primary schools in Malta. They also sought to reach out to different stakeholders, through different collaborations, initiatives and projects. The aim was always Quality Mathematics Education for all. Ms Casha Sammut holds a Masters in Comparative Research in Education from the University of Malta, and is currently a Doctoral student at Loughborough University (UK). Through her doctoral research project, she is looking into the learning experiences of primary students who are gifted and talented in Mathematics in mixed-ability Year 5 and Year 6 classrooms in Malta.

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Judith Valletta
Director & Operations
Manager at the FIDEM
Foundation



A qualified radiographer by profession, Judith is the secretary and board member of Fidem Foundation as well as the operations manager of Wignacourt Museum. A childhood friend of Dr Sabine Agius Cabourdin, Judith has been with Fidem since its inception. Together Judith and Sabine share a joint passion for making a positive impact on society.

Prof Marceline Naudi
Associate Professor,
Faculty for Social
Wellbeing, University of
Malta



A social worker by profession, her practice (in England, Ireland and Malta) included work with children and young people in care and their families, ex-offenders, homeless people, persons with mental health support needs and survivors of domestic violence. She is a member of the Department of Gender and Sexualities and further contributes to teaching and supervision of student research within several other University Departments on gender issues, violence against women and other anti-oppressive issues (LGBTIQ, ethnicities, disabilities) at Diploma, Bachelor, Master and Doctoral level. She was the Scientific Co-ordinator of the European Observatory on Femicide which was launched on the 1st of March 2018 and was hosted by the University of Malta until January 2020. She has contributed to research and reports for several EU projects and Institutions, such as FRA and EIGE, on the issues of gender and violence against women among others. She is Regional Editor for Europe of the Journal on Gender Based Violence, and recently co-edited a special issue. She is an activist in gender equality and violence against women, as well as wider human rights issues. She served as the Chairperson of the Commission on Domestic Violence (Malta) from 2006 to 2010 and as a member of the Gender Equality and sexual diversity Committee of the UM for many years.

Sabrina Borg
FIDEM Service User



Sabrina graduated from the University of Malta with a Degree in Inclusive education. At four years of age, she lost her father. At the age of 14 she began working for a vegetable vendor. Although she held a variety of occupations, she was always interested in working in the school system. She worked towards a degree after leaving a situation of domestic violence and studied for a diploma when she was homeless. She smiled through every challenge and aspired higher because she knew how valuable she was. A willing person achieves her goals.

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Claudia Calleja

Times of Malta Journalist



Claudia Calleja is a Times of Malta journalist specialising in human interest stories. Her passion lies in giving a voice to the people behind the news. She is married and has a six-year-old daughter - who further drives her interest in highlighting women-related issues.

Vanessa Macdonald

PR & Media Consultant



Vanessa worked as a journalist for a few decades, and was responsible for the newspaper's business publications, which dealt with financial and economic issues. She has written for various magazines, dealing with everything from entrepreneurship and finance to human interest. Over the years, she was also head of communications for a bank, a telecommunications company, and two regulators; she is now a volunteer in that role with NGO Din l-Art Helwa. She has moderated dozens of conferences over the years, on a variety of economic topics.

Kenneth Farrugia

CEO at the Bank of Valletta



Kenneth Farrugia is the Chief Executive Officer of Bank of Valletta Group. He sits on the Bank's Board of Directors, chairs the Executive Committee and is a member of several management committees. Mr Farrugia is also a director on the Board of Directors of BOV Fund Services Limited, BOV Asset Management Limited and MAPFRE MSV Life plc. Mr Farrugia began his career at Bank of Valletta in 1985 and has occupied various executive positions covering the bank's asset management, retail banking and credit business areas. Over the course of his career, he has also held various financial services related industry positions, including Chair of the Malta Asset Servicing Association, Board Member of the European Fund and Asset Management Association, Chair of Finance Malta, Malta's national promotional body for the financial services industry as well as Chair of Malita Investments plc, which is listed on the Malta Stock Exchange. Kenneth Farrugia is an alumnus of Harvard Business School having completed the General Management Programme.

Rachael Blackburn

Head of Culture at APS Bank



Rachael Blackburn has a career spanning over 25 years, with management experience in both the public and private sectors. Amongst other positions, she was a Management Trainer in the UAE (2002-2006), a Senior Executive at the Malta Council for Science and Technology (2009-2016), and Director at Explora (2016-2019), before joining APS Bank as Change Management Specialist in 2019. In 2021, Rachael was appointed Head of Culture at APS Bank, responsible for brand and marketing, corporate culture change management, CSR and voice of the customer. She graduated B.Ed. (Hons) (2001) and M.A. in Creativity and Innovation (2009).

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Sarah Curmi

Audit & Assurance
Business Leader at
Deloitte



Sarah has over 30 years of experience in audit supported by a two-year term in Financial Advisory. She has significant experience working overseas and collaborating with other Deloitte member firms. She has been a partner since 2008 and is currently the Audit & Assurance Business Leader for Deloitte Malta. Over the years, Sarah has led the audits of a number of public and private entities engaged in a variety of industries but has specialised in Financial Services with clients encompassing insurance, banking and asset management. She is also responsible for managing a number of client relationships at Deloitte Malta and, as a result, has significant experience in the oversight and delivery of a broad range of service offerings. Sarah also sits on Deloitte Malta's Executive Committee, a position she has occupied since 2014.

Hon Graziella Attard Previ
Opposition spokesperson
for Equality, Human & civil
Rights and Children's
rights



Audrey is a PhD researcher and part-time lecturer at the Department for Youth and Community Studies, Faculty for Social Wellbeing, University of Malta. Her research focuses on the lived experiences of young people in Malta who are classified as NEET (not in education, employment or training). Audrey is an educator by profession, with a Master's degree in Adult Education and postgraduate training in systemic family psychotherapy. She has worked extensively in state secondary schools as teacher and as school leadership team member. Audrey has also worked in the Adult Education sector, where she has helped design and implement courses for adults and young people seeking employment opportunities. Audrey is a writer, and has penned a number of works of fiction in Maltese, including acclaimed works for children. Audrey has recently co-authored an adventure story for children in Maltese with the aim of providing professionals working with children a platform wherefrom to start safe conversations about abusive home situations and how to deal with them. She is currently Commissioner on Gender-based Violence and Domestic violence.