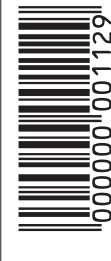




Anna Mallia
Oil, oil, and oil **pg 12** ▶



STUBBORN



GOVERNMENT STEAMS AHEAD WITH HIGHER ENERGY TARIFFS **page 5** ▶

THE GREAT ESCAPE

'THOUSANDS' OF ASYLUM SEEKERS HAVE LEFT MALTA

JAMES DEBONO

THE government claims to have no clue on how many irregular migrants are

still in Malta, after their application for asylum was turned down by the Commissioner for Refugees.

A total of 3,241 requests for asylum were turned down in the past six years,

but what happens to this category of immigrant afterwards remains a mystery.

When asked to state the number of failed asylum seekers who have been in Malta for more than a year, a spokesperson for the Ministry of Justice and Home Affairs said that "this statistic is not available."

Because while the government deported 5,192 immigrants from the 11,273 asylum seekers who came to Malta in the last six years, informed sources told this newspaper that thousands of asylum seekers have left the island – both legally, and illegally.

MaltaToday is reliably informed that asylum seekers, both rejected or those given temporary humanitarian (or subsidiary) protection, have been issued with travel documents by the government which gave them temporary leave from the island.

But once these asylum seekers arrive on mainland Europe, they seldom return back to Malta where they see no hope of making a living, or integrating into the community.

"Travel documents are given to asylum seekers for a temporary visit abroad, say

to visit family members. They seldom come back," a source privy to applications for these documents, said.

Other sources confirmed that failed asylum seekers and those given temporary protection also manage to 'slip through the net' by once again being smuggled out of Malta, and into Italy.

But experts who spoke to this newspaper said asylum seekers who do not wish to re-enter the trafficking cycle again have an official means of leaving the island.

They first ask for permission for short-time travel, for example one week, using a Convention Travel Document, to visit relatives in another EU state. This is especially possible for both refugees and persons with temporary humanitarian status as laid down in the Refugee Act.

NGOs or residential homes can also support their application in their wish to travel abroad, with contacts made with their relatives. The relatives may also have to issue an official invitation, if for example the person is under-18.

The authorities then issue a UNHCR travel document, valid for one week, after which the **pg 5** ▶

Government has no idea how many asylum seekers who were not given protection are still in Malta - many of them have left the island.



PHOTOGRAPHY BY GILBERT CALLEJA

BULGARIA

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