

# FAQs SIGMA 2025/26 – Employment-Related Permits for Highly Qualified Individuals in Malta

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## Contents

Section 1: Key Employee Initiative (KEI).....	2
What is the KEI permit?.....	2
Who is eligible to apply for KEI?.....	2
Examples of eligible jobs:.....	2
How long is a KEI permit valid?.....	3
Required documents for KEI applications:.....	3
Section 2: Specialist Employee Initiative (SEI).....	3
What is the SEI permit?.....	3
Who is eligible to apply for SEI?.....	3
Examples of eligible jobs:.....	3
Permit validity:.....	4
Required documents for SEI applications:.....	4
Section 3: EU Blue Card.....	4
What is the EU Blue Card?.....	4
Who is eligible to apply?.....	4
Examples of eligible jobs:.....	4
Permit validity:.....	4
Unemployment:.....	4
Required documents for Blue Card application:.....	5
Section 4: Common Questions.....	5
Can my family join me under these permits?.....	5
What is the appeal procedure?.....	5
What are employer obligations?.....	5
Practical tips for a successful application:.....	5

Comparison of KEI, SEI, and Blue Card.....	6
Section 5: Intra-Corporate Transferees (ICT).....	6
What is the ICT permit?.....	6
Who is eligible to apply for ICT?.....	6
What is the duration of an ICT permit?.....	7
What documents are required for an ICT application? .....	7
Can ICT permit holders bring family members? .....	7
Section 6: Updated Fees and Salary Thresholds (Effective August 2025).....	7
Section 7: Additional Links.....	8
Home Page.....	8
Online Portal.....	8
Employer's Portal Management Manual.....	8
Portal Management for Applicants Manual.....	9
Employment Related Permits.....	9
Clarification on Documents Required.....	9

## Section 1: Key Employee Initiative (KEI)

### What is the KEI permit?

The Key Employee Initiative (KEI) is a fast-track single work and residence permit for highly qualified third-country nationals (TCNs) employed in managerial or highly technical positions in Malta. It was introduced in 2016 and updated in 2024. Applications under KEI are processed within 5 working days.

### Who is eligible to apply for KEI?

Eligibility criteria:

- Must be a third-country national.
- Must hold an employment offer in ISCO Groups 1, 2, or 3 (e.g., managers, professionals, technicians).
- Must have relevant qualifications or at least 3 years' experience in the role.
- Minimum gross salary of €45,000 (effective August 2025) per year (excluding allowances/benefits).

#### Examples of eligible jobs:

- Chief Executives, General Managers
- IT Managers, Financial Managers
- Software Developers, Systems Analysts
- Engineers, Medical Doctors
- University Lecturers, Researchers
- Technicians in science/health sectors

#### How long is a KEI permit valid?

Vacancy advertisement requirement: Position must be advertised for a minimum of 2 weeks in the last 2 months before applying (effective August 2025).

First issue: 1 year. Renewal: Up to 3 years (subject to contract validity and eligibility).

#### Can my family join me under this permit?

**Yes.** Normally, non-EU nationals must live in Malta **at least 12 months** before they can apply to bring family members.

**🔑 But under the KEI permit, this rule is waived.**

Your family can join you **immediately** if you meet these conditions:

1. **You already have an Approval in Principle (AIP)** for your KEI residence permit.
2. **Income requirement:**
  - Minimum **€50,000 per year** (for you + 1 dependent).
  - Add **€6,000 per year** for every extra dependent.
3. **Health insurance** for each dependent, covering at least **€100,000**, valid in Malta and Europe.
4. **Private schooling:** if you have children of school age, you must apply to place them in a **private school** in Malta.

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✓ **In short:** Unlike other permits, KEI employees **don't need to wait 12 months** before applying for family reunification—as long as they meet the salary, insurance, and schooling requirements.

## Section 2: Specialist Employee Initiative (SEI)

### What is the SEI permit?

The Specialist Employee Initiative (SEI) is for highly qualified TCNs who may not meet KEI criteria but still qualify for specialist roles. Applications are processed within 15 working days.

### Who is eligible to apply for SEI?

Eligibility criteria:

- Must be a third-country national.
- Must hold a job offer within ISCO Groups 1, 2, or 3.
- Must hold MQF Level 6+ qualification or lower qualification with 3 years' relevant work experience.
- Minimum gross salary of €30,000 (effective August 2025) per year.

### Examples of eligible jobs:

- Sales Managers, Project Managers
- IT Specialists, Database Administrators
- Engineers (Mechanical, Civil, Electrical)
- Accountants, Business Analysts
- Lab Technicians, IT Support Technicians

### Permit validity:

Vacancy advertisement requirement: Position must be advertised for a minimum of 2 weeks in the last 2 months before applying (effective August 2025).

First issue: 1 year. Renewal: Up to 3 years (depending on contract validity).

### Can my family join me under these permits?

**Yes.** Normally, non-EU nationals must live in Malta **12 months** before applying to bring family.

**🚫 But for SEI permit holders, this rule is waived.**

Your family can join you **right away** if:

1. You already have an **Approval in Principle (AIP)** for your SEI permit.
2. You earn at least **€50,000 per year** (for you + 1 dependent), plus **€6,000 extra** for each additional dependent.
3. Each dependent has **health insurance** covering at least **€100,000** in Malta and Europe.

4. For school-age children, you apply for **private schooling** in Malta.
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✓ **In short:** With the SEI permit, you don't need to wait 12 months before bringing your family—if you meet the income, insurance, and schooling requirements.

## Section 3: EU Blue Card

### What is the EU Blue Card?

The EU Blue Card is a residence and work permit for highly qualified non-EU nationals. It allows mobility within the EU after certain conditions are met.

### Who is eligible to apply?

- Must be a non-EU national.
- Must hold a valid employment contract in Malta.
- Must have higher education degree or equivalent experience.
- Minimum salary: at least 1.5 times Malta's average gross annual salary.

### Examples of eligible jobs:

- IT professionals, Software Architects
- Medical Specialists, Engineers
- Senior Researchers, University Professors
- Highly skilled Managers, Financial Experts

### Permit validity:

Valid for 1–2 years depending on employment contract. Renewable if criteria remain satisfied.

### Unemployment:

What happens if I become unemployed while holding a Blue Card?

- If you lose your employment, you have three (3) months to find a new job.
- If the three months lapse and you still haven't found employment, your EU Blue Card will be withdrawn, and you would be required to leave Malta.
- Extension: If you have held a Blue Card for more than 2 years and 6 months, this grace period is extended to six (6) months.

### Can my family join me under this permit?

Yes. Family reunification is allowed for spouse, minor children, and dependent adult children. Their residence permits are linked to the main applicant's permit, and may they apply provided that the sponsor has at

least had an Approval in Principle letter issued as a result of his own application for a residence permit in Malta.

## Section 4: Common Questions

### What is the appeal procedure?

If refused, applicants have the right to appeal:

1. Refusal letter provides detailed reasons.
2. Appeal must be submitted to the Immigration Appeals Board within the deadline.
3. Supporting documents may be submitted.
4. Appeals Board reviews and issues a decision.

### What are employer obligations?

- Provide valid employment contract meeting salary thresholds.
- Ensure offered position is genuine.
- Report termination of employment to Identità.
- Provide supporting declarations if required.

### Practical tips for a successful application:

- Ensure qualifications are recognised by MQRIC.
- Verify contract meets salary requirements.
- Submit clear reference letters with contact details.
- Secure valid accommodation before applying.
- Check health insurance covers hospitalisation and is valid for at least 6 months.

## Comparison of KEI, SEI, and Blue Card

Feature	KEI	SEI	Blue Card
Salary threshold	€45,000	€30,000	1.5 × national average salary
Processing time	5 working days	15 working days	Varies
Qualification requirement	Degree or 3 yrs exp.	MQF 6+ or 3 yrs exp.	Higher education degree
Permit validity	1 year,	1 year,	1–2 years,

renewable up to 3	renewable up to 3	renewable for up to 3
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## Section 5: Intra-Corporate Transferees (ICT)

### What is the ICT permit?

The Intra-Corporate Transferee (ICT) permit allows managers, specialists, and trainee employees working in multinational companies outside the EU to be temporarily transferred to entities belonging to the same corporate group in Malta. It is part of the EU ICT Directive.

### Who is eligible to apply for ICT?

Applicants must:

- Be a third-country national.
- Already be employed by a company outside Malta that is part of the same corporate group as the host company in Malta.
- Be offered a transfer as a:
  - Manager – directing a department, team, or unit.
  - Specialist – possessing specialised knowledge essential to the company.
  - Trainee employee – university graduates undergoing professional development.
- Have been employed with the sending company for at least 3–12 months (depending on the role).
- Have a valid employment contract with the sending company.

### What is the duration of an ICT permit?

- Managers and specialists: Up to 3 years.
- Trainee employees: Up to 1 year.
- ICT permits cannot be renewed beyond these maximum periods.

### Can ICT permit holders bring family members?

Yes. Family reunification is allowed for spouse, minor children, and dependent adult children. Their residence permits are linked to the main applicant's permit, and may they apply provided that the sponsor has at least had an Approval in Principle letter issued as a result of his own application for a residence permit in Malta.

## Section 6: Updated Fees and Salary Thresholds (Effective August 2025)

- **KEI:** Minimum salary €45,000/year | New application €600 | Renewal €150 per year
- **SEI:** Minimum salary €30,000/year | New application €600 | Renewal €150 per year
- **Blue Card:** Salary =  $1.5 \times$  national average | New application €600 (Year 1) + €150 (Year 2) | Renewal €150 per year
- **ICT:** No fixed salary threshold | New application €300 | Renewal €200 per year

## Section 7: Additional Links

### Home Page



### Online Portal





### Employer's Portal Management Manual



### Portal Management for Applicants Manual



### Employment Related Permits



### Clarification on Documents Required



### Checklists:



### Blue Card:



### Intra-Corporate Transfers:

