

Assessing Retail Consumers' Perceptions and Attitudes Towards Crypto-Assets

THIS PAGE HAS BEEN INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

CONTENTS

Foreword	4
Methodology	6
Key Findings.....	7
Demographics.....	8
Main Findings	10
1 - General Understanding of Crypto-Assets	10
2 - Awareness of the Types & Uses of Crypto-Assets	18
3 - Expectations of Transparency, Security & Regulation	21
Conclusion and Way Forward.....	25

Foreword

On 3 January 2009, the pseudonymous Satoshi Nakamoto published "[Bitcoin: A Peer-to-Peer Electronic Cash System](#)", launching a wave of interest in a growing class of assets that has resulted in wide changes, opportunities and challenges to consumers, market participants and regulators.

A crypto-asset is a digital representation of value or a right that can be transferred or stored electronically using distributed ledger technology or similar technology.

Crypto-assets represent a digital innovation that can streamline capital-raising processes, enhance competition, and provide a more inclusive means of financing for consumers and SMEs. Crypto-assets can also be used as a means of payment and can present opportunities in terms of cheaper, faster and more efficient payments, in particular on a cross-border basis, by limiting intermediaries.

However, it is important to note that crypto-assets are generally characterised by elevated levels of risk, price volatility, and technological complexity. As a result, they may not be suitable for all investors, particularly those who do not understand the unique technological properties and risks underlying the asset class.

In June of 2023 the European Parliament published the [Markets in Crypto-assets Regulation \(MiCA\)](#), laying down transparency and disclosure requirements for issuers of crypto-assets, authorisation and supervision requirements for crypto-asset service providers, requirements for the protection of clients and measures to ensure the integrity of the European Single Market.

The Malta Financial Services Authority (hereinafter referred to as the "MFSA" or "the Authority") has already [implemented the MiCA framework into its supervisory processes](#), while remaining committed to catering for emerging or innovative business models as laid out in the [MFSA's Supervisory Priorities for 2026](#).

Within the current global financial landscape, consumers' investment choices are constantly evolving and the barriers for entering financial markets continue to lower, both for consumers and issuers. This concept offers new opportunities but also complexities and risks which cannot be overlooked.

Consumer protection is one of the core mandates of the MFSA, with consumer education being one of the pillars enabling its fulfilment. The Authority and National Competent Authorities of other Member States (NCAs) hold an important role in promoting investor protection against misleading commercial practices and maintaining the stability and integrity of financial markets.

During 2025, the Authority embarked on a research project to obtain insights into the public's awareness, attitudes, and behaviour regarding crypto-assets and related crypto services and products in Malta. This research is intended to assist the MFSA in

enhancing its insight with respect to consumers' understanding and awareness of crypto-assets.

The main objectives of this research were to:

- Measure general consumers' understanding of crypto-assets and their perceived benefits and risks;
- Understand whether the public is aware of the different types of crypto-assets and their potential uses;
- Gain insights into retail investors' expectations regarding transparency, security, and regulatory oversight in the crypto-asset market; and
- Reveal what may be drivers or barriers to purchasing or holding crypto-assets.

Overall, the research revealed that crypto-assets overcome the traditional gender and age barriers associated with finance, and respondents showed much enthusiasm for further advancements and innovations to come.

Simultaneously, the respondents reported a lack of knowledge surrounding the underlying technology, which could result in limited ability in understanding the risks pertaining to crypto-assets.

This report presents a summary of the key findings of this research.

Methodology

The purpose of undertaking this research was to gather evidence-based information to increase the Authority's understanding of consumers' attitudes, preferences, and behaviours within the context of crypto-assets.

During the third quarter of 2025, the MFSA engaged with a professional third-party provider to independently conduct the fieldwork of this research amongst a sample of four hundred (400) respondents. The eligible target respondents were aged between eighteen (18) and sixty-five years (65) and the research was conducted through an online questionnaire that was available in both English and Maltese. Data collection took place from November up to the beginning of December 2025. The study was carried out with a confidence level of ninety five percent (95%) and a margin of error of approximately five percent ($\pm 5\%$). Moreover, the sample was balanced across demographic criteria which included age, gender, level of education, and annual household income.

In order to ensure that the sample was representative of the general population, a quota was applied for key demographic variables including age and gender. However, soft quotas were also applied for education level and income thresholds. The questionnaire was available to respondents in both English and Maltese, mostly making use of closed ended questions.

The questionnaire was structured into four distinct sections:

- Demographics;
- General Understanding of Crypto-Assets;
- Awareness of the Types & Uses of Crypto-Assets;
- Expectations of Transparency, Security & Regulation.

Key Findings

The analysis of trends in investment decision-making is crucial for the Authority to understand the interplay between the current economic, financial and social dynamics, while also monitoring investors' levels of digital finance literacy. In carrying out this exercise, the Authority noted that:

- As outlined in Figure 3 of this report, 25% of the respondents primarily associate crypto-assets with digital instruments. Furthermore, while there is a strong association by the public between crypto-assets and the financial sector, many respondents (42%) also understand the distinction between crypto-assets and traditional financial instruments;
- Very few respondents (14%) are confident in their understanding of the underlying technology of crypto-assets, however many (43%) express interest in learning more;
- Respondents report high awareness of both the risks and the benefits of crypto-assets, although there are slightly more risks identified (94% identify at least one potential risk against 90% who identify at least one potential benefit);
- The majority of respondents (63%) consider a lack of knowledge to be a barrier to purchasing and holding crypto-assets;
- A significant proportion of respondents (66%) are not confident that they could identify a legitimate crypto-asset exchange, matching the number (58%) who report fear of fraud or scams as a barrier to purchasing and holding crypto-assets; and
- Most respondents (56%) report only trusting crypto-asset service providers that are clearly regulated and supervised, and even more (64%) state that clear regulations boost their confidence to invest.

It is evident that the MFSA, along with the National Competent Authorities of other European Union member states, have a significant power in shaping the future of crypto-assets.

Demographics

The following figures graphically represent the profile of the sample of consumers that participated in this survey in terms of gender, age, income and education. These factors were then used as a base to cross-refer with other subsequent questions in order to identify trends.

Figure 1: Sample Profile - Gender and Age

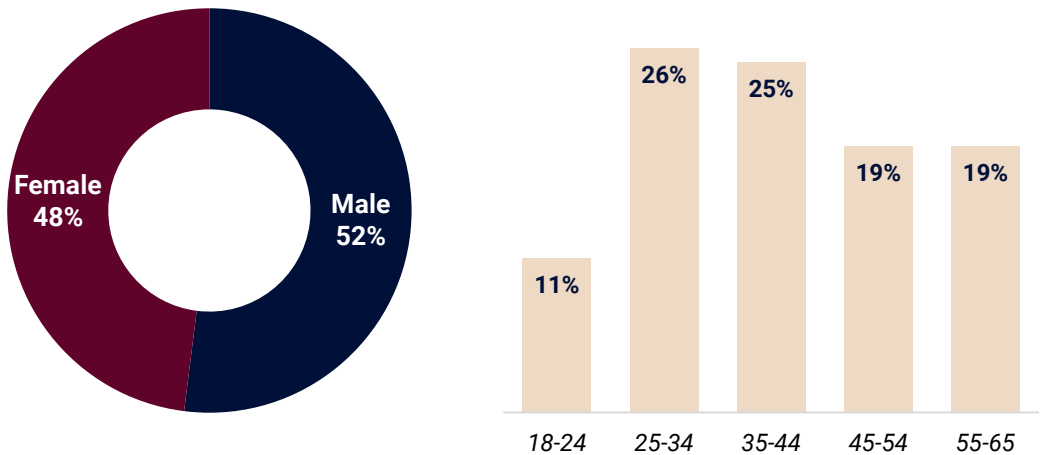
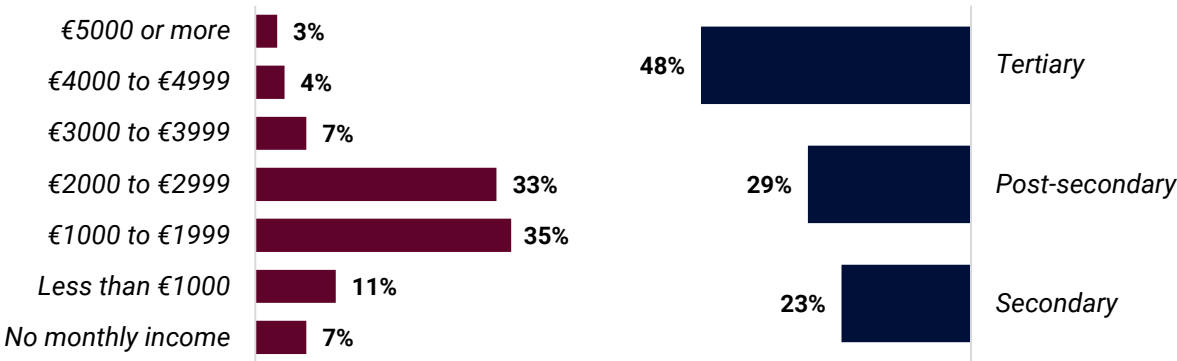


Figure 1 above illustrates that the sample population is nearly equally split between male and female participants. The age distribution of the survey respondents was controlled in order to reflect the age distribution of the Maltese population¹, with most of the respondents (26%) aged 25-34 years old.

Figure 2: Sample Profile - Net Income and Formal Education



¹ National Statistics Office Malta, released 10/07/2025, "End of year population estimates by broad citizenship category, district of residence and single years of age: 2012-2024"

Figure 2 above outlines the breakdown of respondents by monthly net income and formal education. The majority (68%) earn between €1,000 and €2,999 after taxes, with a minority (14%) reporting higher income. Slightly fewer (11%) reported taking home less than €1,000, while even less (7%) reported no monthly income at all. The largest proportion of respondents (48%) completed Tertiary as their highest level of formal education, with almost all having completed at least Secondary education.

Main Findings

In this section, the Authority shall be outlining its observations, which are categorised in three main areas, namely:

- 1. General Understanding of Crypto-Assets;
- 2. Awareness of the Types & Uses of Crypto-Assets; and
- 3. Expectations of Transparency, Security & Regulation.

Across all sections, it was noted that response trends were not significantly affected by age and gender. The implication is that knowledge of crypto-assets is related more to personal interest than demographic characteristics. Where demographic differences were noted, these cases are highlighted within the figure.

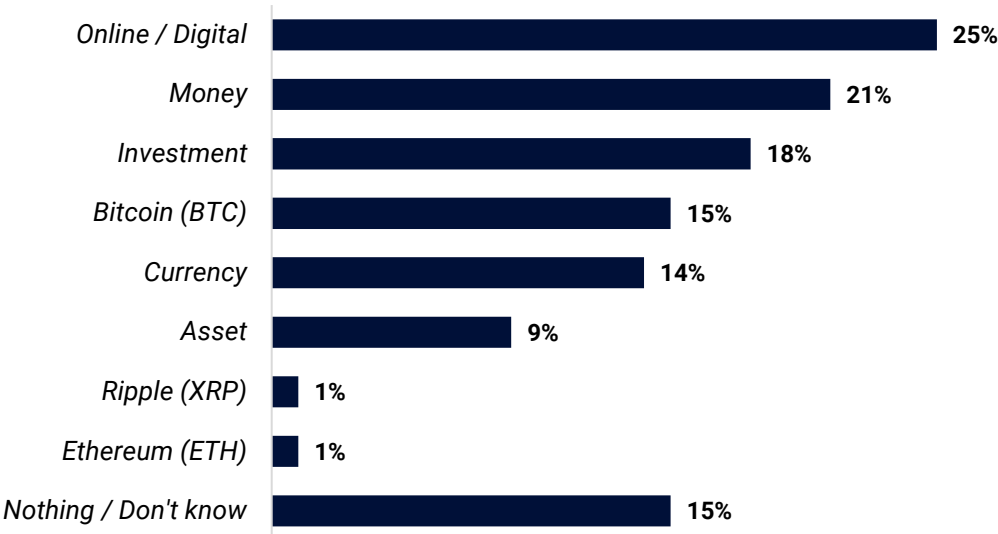
1 - General Understanding of Crypto-Assets

Respondents were asked to describe what comes to mind when they read the term “crypto-assets”, and the main themes captured from the responses are collected below.

From Figure 3, at least a quarter (25%) of Maltese residents use terms such as “online” or “digital” to describe crypto-assets. This is followed by perceptions of “money” (21%), “investment” (18%), and even “asset” (9%), with some responses describing them as a riskier form of financial instrument.

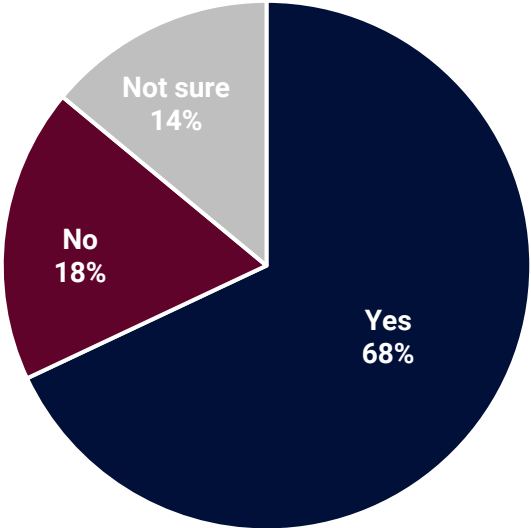
Bitcoin is the most frequently referenced example of a crypto-asset (15%), in comparison to other named cryptocurrencies such as Ethereum and Ripple (1%) by a large margin.

Figure 3: Terms Associated with Crypto-Assets (open-ended question)



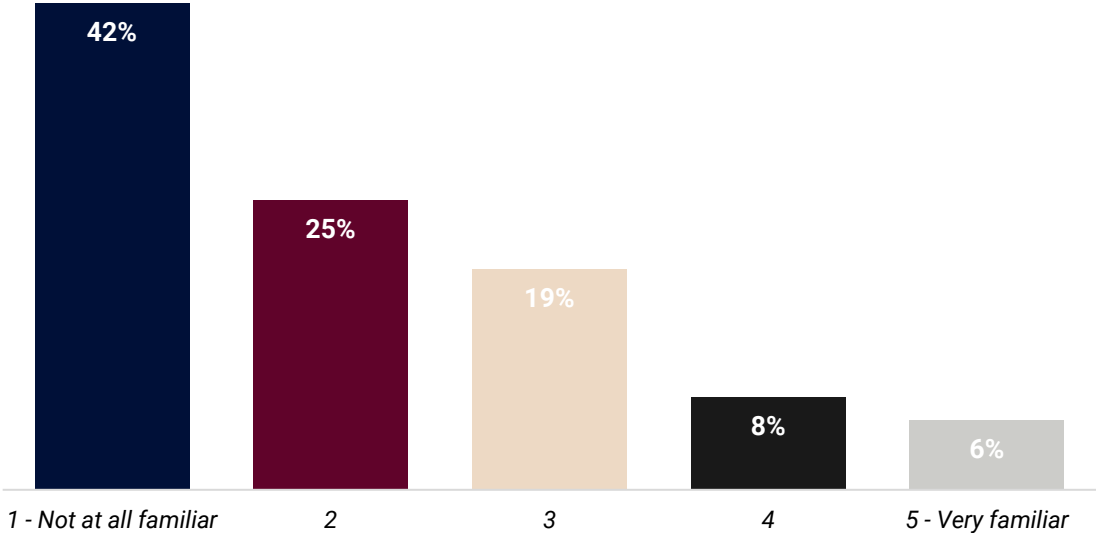
A notable portion of respondents (15%) do not have any associations with the term, indicating a gap in awareness for a part of the population.

Figure 4: Familiarity with the term "crypto-assets"



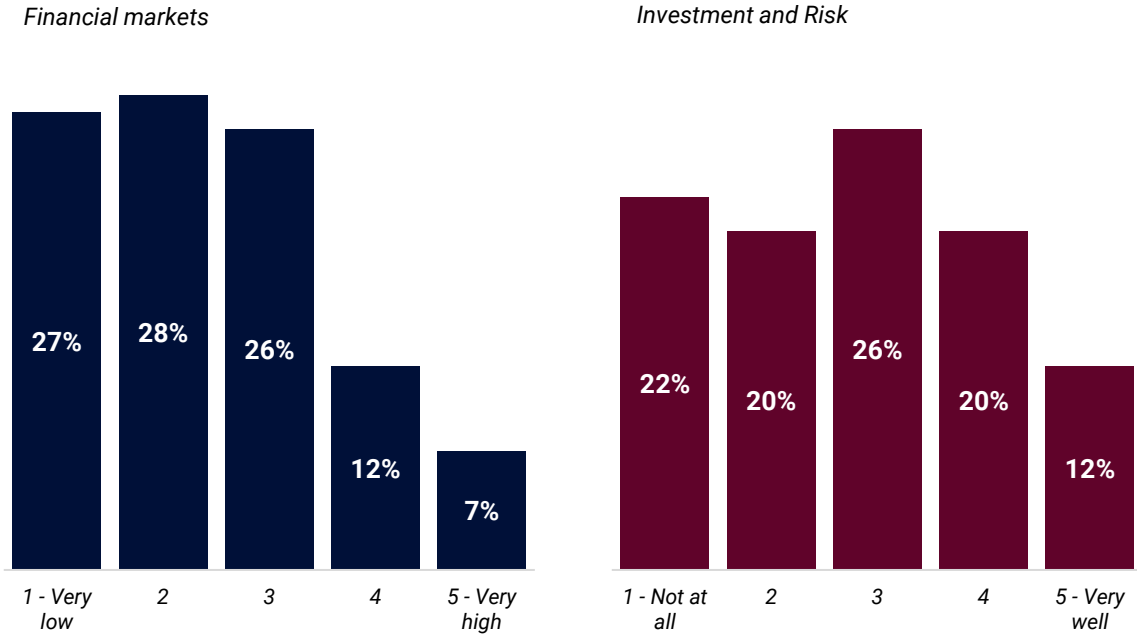
It is seen from Figure 4 that the majority (68%) of Maltese residents had already heard the term "crypto-asset" before taking the survey, however from Figure 5 it is seen that nearly as many (67%) are not that familiar with the technology that underlines such assets. When considering those who only completed Secondary education, more than three quarters (79%) report no or low familiarity with the underlying blockchain technology.

Figure 5: How familiar were respondents with how blockchain technology works



This is in line with the fact that blockchain technology employs techniques from computer networking and cryptography; concepts which can be difficult to understand for the average retail investor having no technical background.

Figure 6: General understanding of financial markets (e.g. investments or trading), and familiarity with the relationship between investment risk and potential reward



The majority of respondents (55%) report low or very low understanding of financial markets. Respondents who identified as female were more likely to declare a lower self-rated understanding, while male-identifying respondents make up the majority (70%) of those who reported a very high level of understanding.

The survey reflects a mixed understanding of the relationship between investment risk and potential returns, with a third (32%) reporting a confident understanding but more (42%) reporting low understanding. This indicates that levels of financial literacy among the Maltese population remains varied.

Respondents who report a high level of understanding of financial markets are more likely to have heard the term “crypto-asset” (90%) or declare that they are familiar with blockchain technology (40%).

As part of this survey, respondents were given four questions and provided a list of responses from which they could choose as many as applied. Two questions were regarding the current benefits and drawbacks of using or investing in crypto-assets, and another two questions were on incentives and disincentives for purchasing or holding crypto-assets in the future.

1. *What do you think could be some possible benefits of using or investing in crypto-assets?*
2. *What do you think could be some possible risks or downsides of using or investing in crypto-assets?*
3. *Which of the following would make you consider purchasing or holding crypto-assets?*
4. *Which of the following prevent you from purchasing or holding crypto-assets?*

Figure 7: Possible benefits of using or investing in crypto-assets (multiple-choice answers permitted for the respondents).

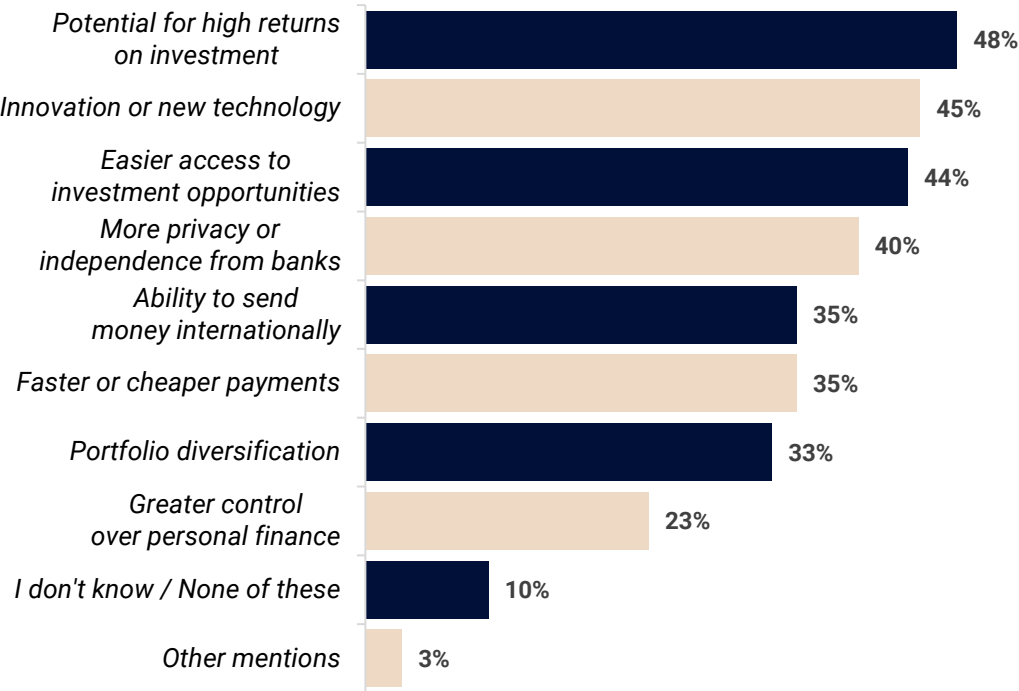
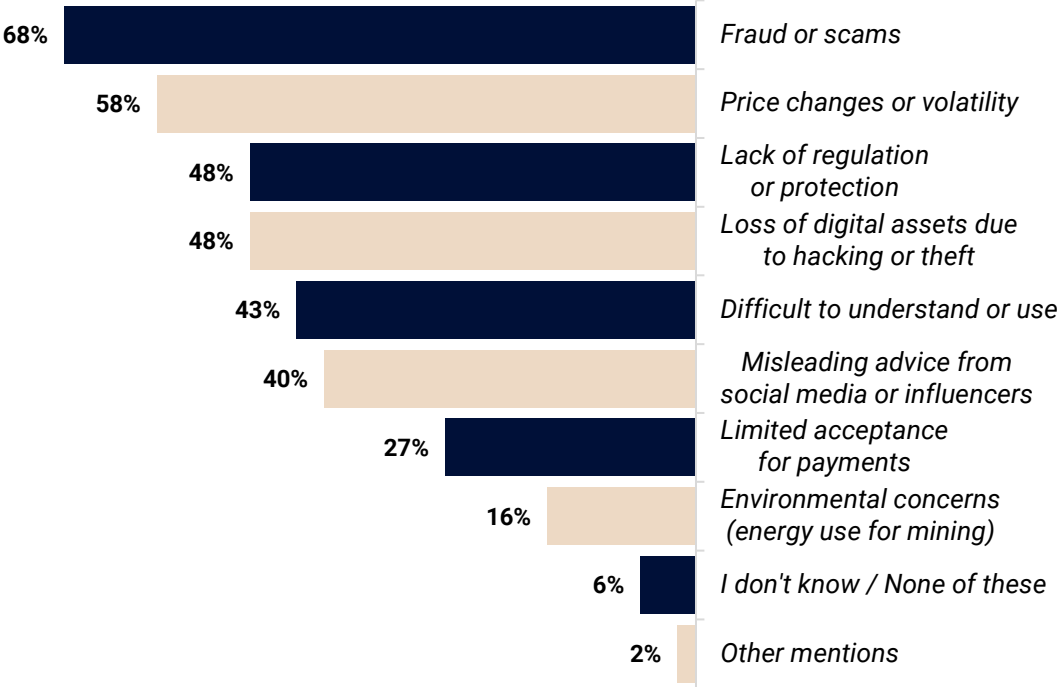


Figure 8: Possible risks or downsides of using or investing in crypto-assets (multiple-choice answers permitted for the respondents).



Respondents associate a variety of potential benefits with using or investing in crypto-assets, with nearly half selecting the potential for high returns (48%), reflecting the perception of crypto-assets as a high-growth investment opportunity. However, slightly more (58%) recognise the financial risks linked to rapid and unpredictable market fluctuations which discourages them from engaging.

It was noted that 73% of the respondents who selected “potential for high returns on investment” as a potential benefit also selected “price changes or volatility” as a possible risk. This reflects that respondents broadly understand the relationship between investment risk and potential returns, however, there remains a significant proportion of investors (27%) who do not recognise that potential for high return comes with the risk of great loss reflecting the distribution shown in Figure 6.

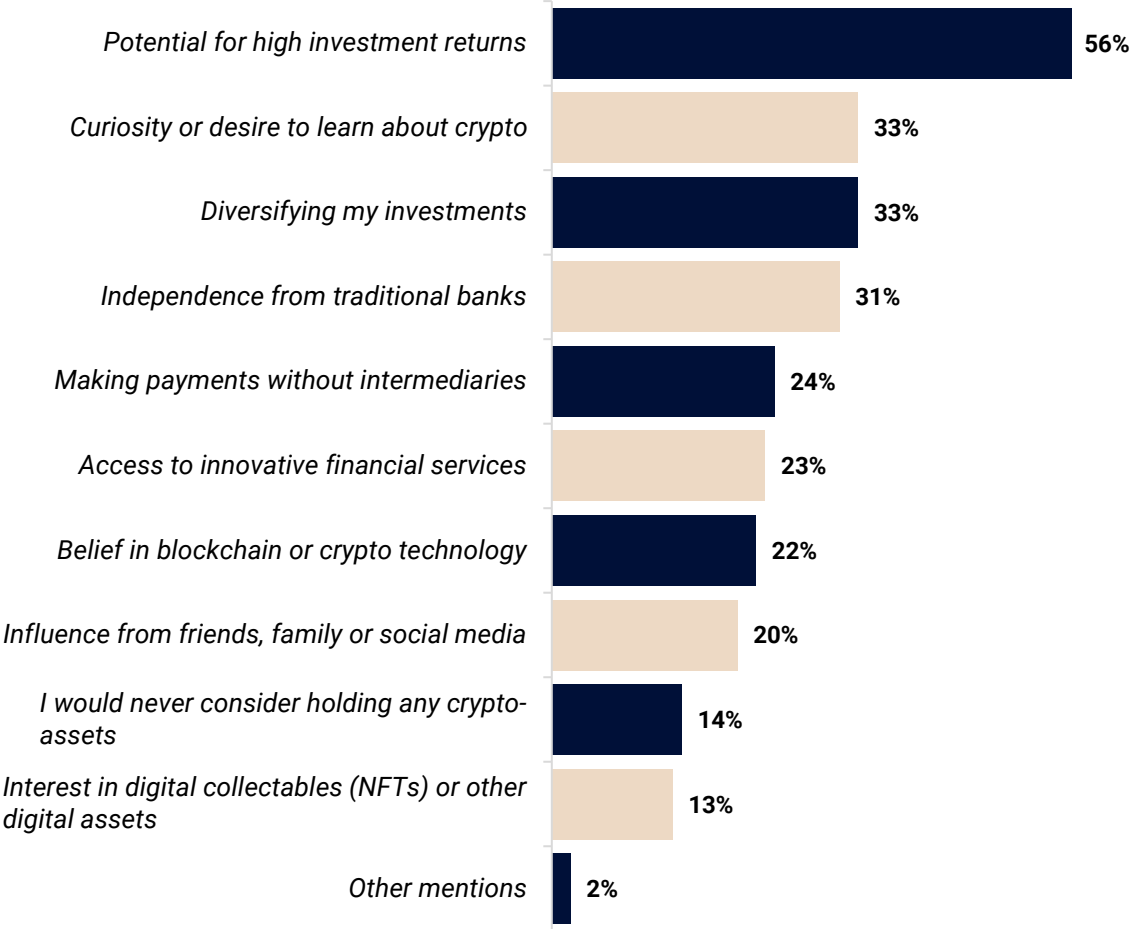
A lot of interest is shown for crypto-assets as an innovative technology (45%) that can unlock opportunities for investment (44%) and portfolio diversification (33%) for a wider audience, suggesting that crypto-assets are seen as a modern, more accessible way to the financial market. This new technology has also given rise to increased concern over fraud or scams (68%) reflecting widespread public awareness of the security challenges and fraudulent schemes in the crypto space. Many indicate that crypto-assets can be difficult to understand or use (43%) or express concern over misleading advice from social media or influencers (40%), highlighting the influence of knowledge gaps and external influence on investment decisions.

Many respondents also view this new technology as a way to increase their privacy and independence from banks (40%) and increase their control over their personal finances (23%), indicating that respondents value the autonomy and decentralised nature of crypto-assets. The ability to send money internationally and for less cost (35%) is also commonly selected, showing an appreciation for practical transactional advantages. Simultaneously, many also consider the lack of regulation (48%) to be a risk along with increased vulnerability to losing access to wealth due to hacking or theft (48%), suggesting that respondents are aware of both regulatory gaps and technological vulnerabilities in the crypto ecosystem. Few worry that not enough vendors accept payments in crypto-assets (27%) or express reservations regarding the potential environmental concerns (16%).

Other potential benefits mentioned include 24-hour market access for trading crypto-assets, while other mentioned risks include concern over software failure related to smart contracts, future regulatory uncertainty and a lack of long-term adoption if an application cannot be demonstrated for the underlying technology.

A small portion of respondents were unsure or could not think of any potential benefits (10%) or potential risks (6%).

Figure 9: What would make purchasing or holding crypto-assets more attractive (multiple-choice answers permitted for the respondents).



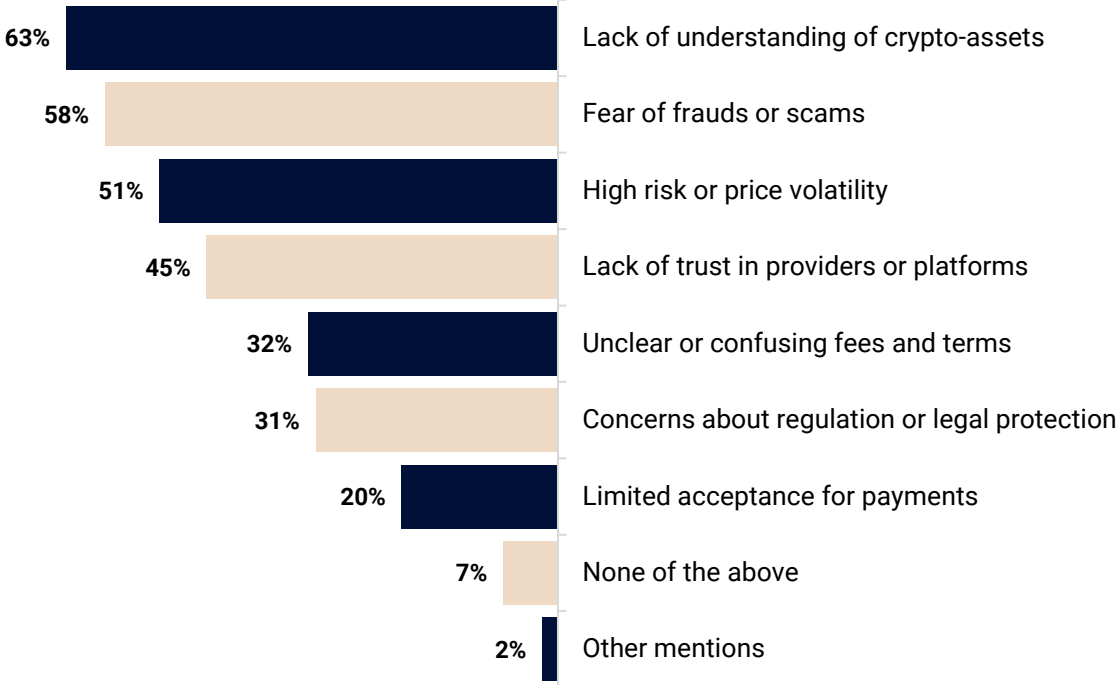
Most respondents indicate the potential for high investment returns (56%) and the opportunity to diversify their investments (33%) as an incentive for future purchases, suggesting that strategic investment considerations will be influential factors. Further, nearly a third express a desire for independence from traditional banks (31%) and the ability to make payments without intermediaries (24%), highlighting the appeal of decentralisation and direct control over financial transactions.

At the same time, curiosity or a desire to learn about crypto (33%) is also commonly selected, followed closely by access to innovative financial services (23%) and belief in blockchain or crypto technology (22%). This suggests that educational considerations, as well as interest in engaging with emerging technologies and alternative financial systems, will also play a large role in growing the user base of crypto-assets.

Social influences also play a role, with 20% mentioning the influence of friends, family, or social media, indicating that personal networks and online information can shape attitudes toward crypto-assets. A smaller portion of respondents report interest in digital collectables or NFTs (13%).

A small but non-negligible portion of respondents (14%) stated that they would never consider holding any crypto-assets.

Figure 10: What prevents people from purchasing or holding crypto-assets (multiple-choice answers permitted for the respondents).



Respondents highlighted several key factors that prevent them from purchasing or holding crypto-assets. The most frequently mentioned barrier is a lack of understanding of crypto-assets (63%), indicating that knowledge gaps remain a major obstacle to adoption. Fear of fraud or scams is also prominent (58%), reflecting widespread concern about security risks in the crypto market.

High risk or price volatility (51%) and lack of trust in providers or platforms (45%) are additional deterrents, showing that both market instability and confidence in service providers influence decision-making. Around one-third of respondents point to unclear or confusing fees and terms (32%) and concerns about regulation or legal protection (31%), highlighting the importance of transparency and regulatory safeguards in encouraging participation. A smaller number of respondents cite limited acceptance for payments (20%) or reported no barriers at all (7%).

It is noted that more respondents expressed that they would never purchase or hold crypto-assets compared to those who reported having no particular reservations about making such transactions.

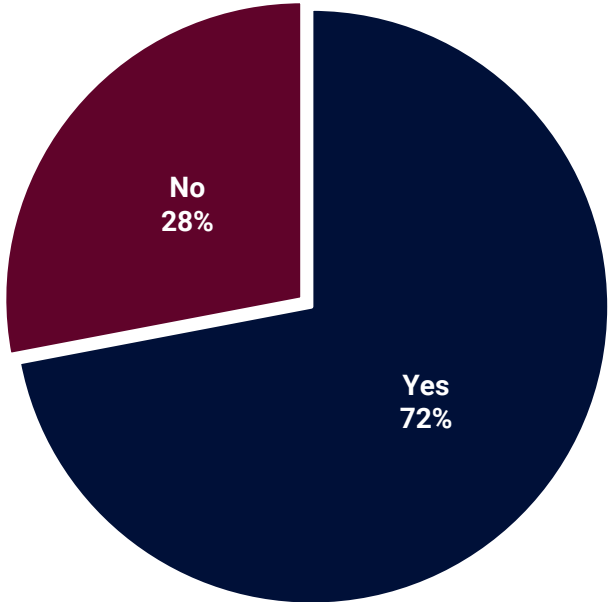
This section shows that respondents see crypto-assets as innovative financial instruments with practical and investment utility, however detailed knowledge and confidence are limited. Financial incentives, social influence, and technological

innovation drive interest in crypto-assets, but limited trust in providers and unclear fees or protections deter further engagement. Despite the perceived benefits, knowledge gaps, security concerns and perceived risk are shown to be major obstacles to adoption.

2 - Awareness of the Types & Uses of Crypto-Assets

Following the assessment of the respondents' general understanding of and attitudes towards crypto-assets, the Authority sought to assess the awareness of the varied offerings of crypto-assets and their distinct applications.

Figure 11: Awareness of different types of crypto-assets



A crypto-asset is broadly defined, hence it covers many applications from stablecoins (Electronic Money Tokens and Asset Reference Tokens) which attempt to achieve a relatively stable value by referencing a fiat currency or commodity, to cryptocurrencies whose value is primarily driven by market supply and demand, to Non-Fungible Tokens (NFTs) that use blockchain technology to ensure authenticity and provenance² in a world of infinite digital copies.

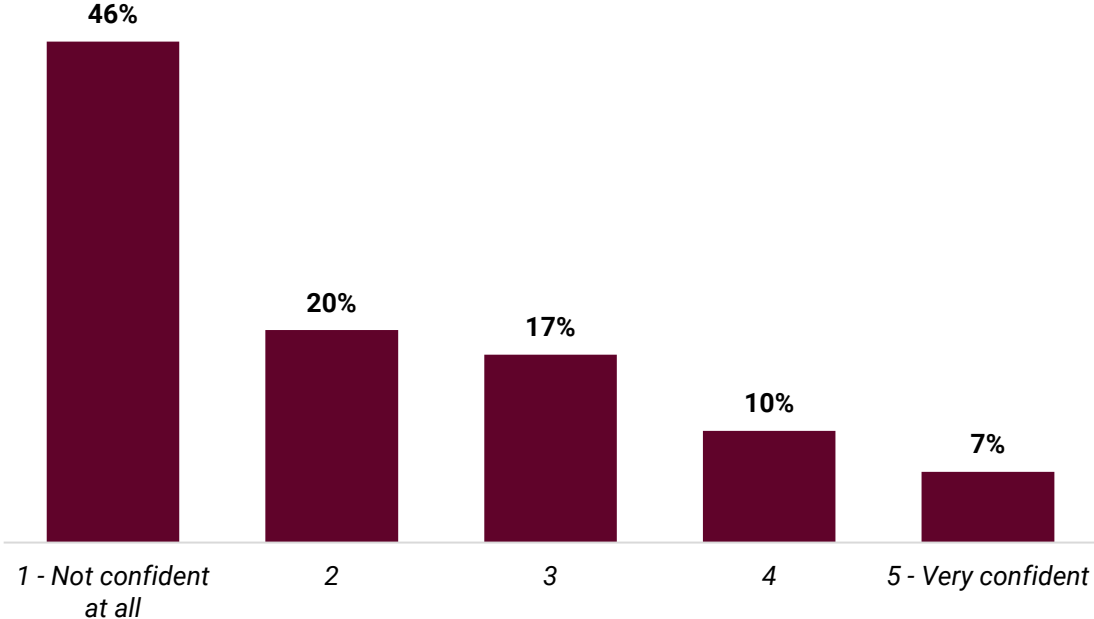
From Figure 11 it can be seen that awareness of these different types of crypto-assets is already widespread within the Maltese islands, however, more than a quarter of respondents (28%) had no prior knowledge of this diversity, indicating that while

² Ehrenberg and King, "[Blockchain in Context](#)".

awareness is relatively high, the public may still have a limited understanding of the broader crypto-asset ecosystem.

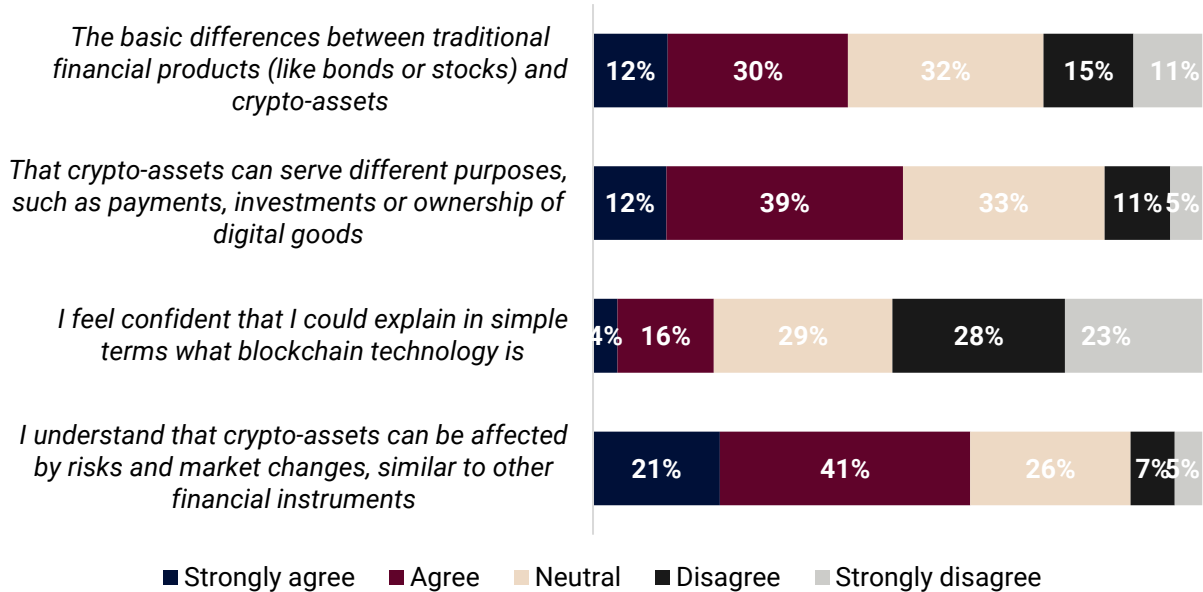
It was noted that knowledge of the different types was higher amongst younger age groups and gradually declined with age, and when considering education, nearly one in four respondents with tertiary education reported awareness of the different kinds of crypto-assets.

Figure 12: Confidence in identifying a legitimate crypto-asset exchange



It is seen in Figure 12 that the majority of respondents (66%) are less than confident in their ability to correctly identify a legitimate crypto-asset exchange, indicating that many people may struggle to distinguish between the platforms of trustworthy service providers and potential fraudsters. Should there be any doubt regarding the licence of a service provider, investors are encouraged to make use of the [Financial Services Register](#) provided by the MFSA or public registers made available by other NCAs.

Figure 13: How much did respondents agree with the following statements about the use of crypto-assets



As part of this survey, respondents were presented with a list of four statements regarding their understanding of crypto-assets, how they differ from traditional financial instruments, their familiarity with the underlying technology and the market exposure of these products. The results are presented in Figure 13.

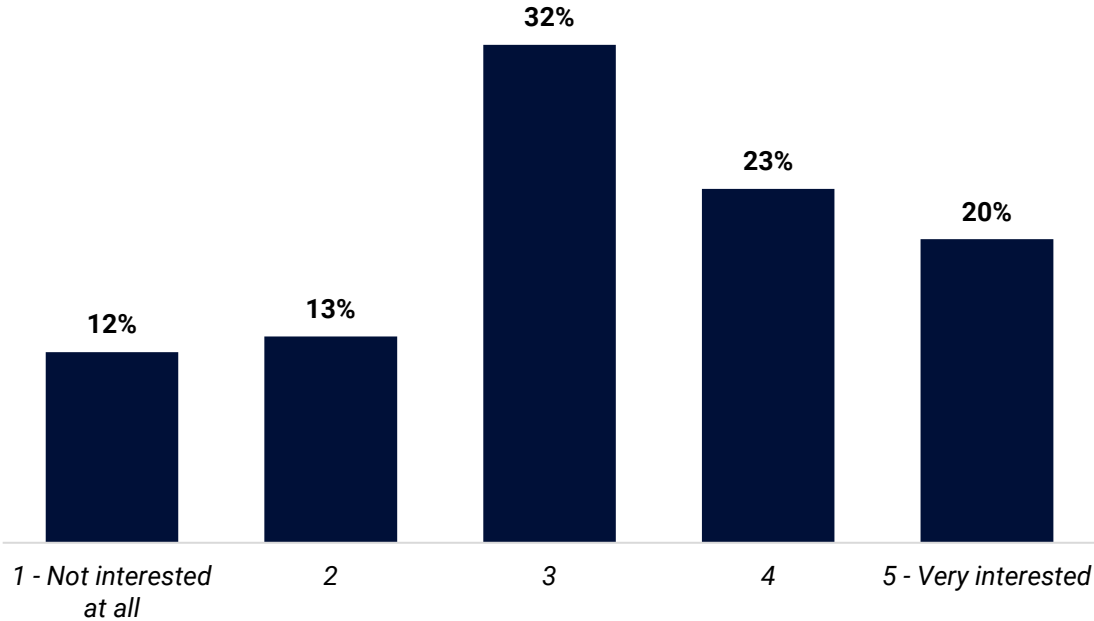
A considerable proportion of the respondents (42%) report a moderate to high level of understanding of the basic differences between traditional financial products and crypto-assets. This indicates that there is significant room for education on the distinctions between traditional and crypto-based investment options.

Half of respondents (51%) are aware that crypto-assets can serve different purposes, such as payments, investment or ownership of digital goods. A third (33%) remain neutral, indicating a level of uncertainty regarding the versatility of crypto-assets.

Confidence in the understanding of blockchain technology is low among recipients, with the majority (51%) indicating that they would not be able to explain it in simple terms.

The majority of respondents (62%) understand that crypto-assets can be affected by risks and market changes, similar to other investments. This suggests that despite some uncertainty, there is high awareness of the investment risks associated with crypto-assets.

Figure 14: Reported interest in learning more about how crypto-assets and blockchain technology work



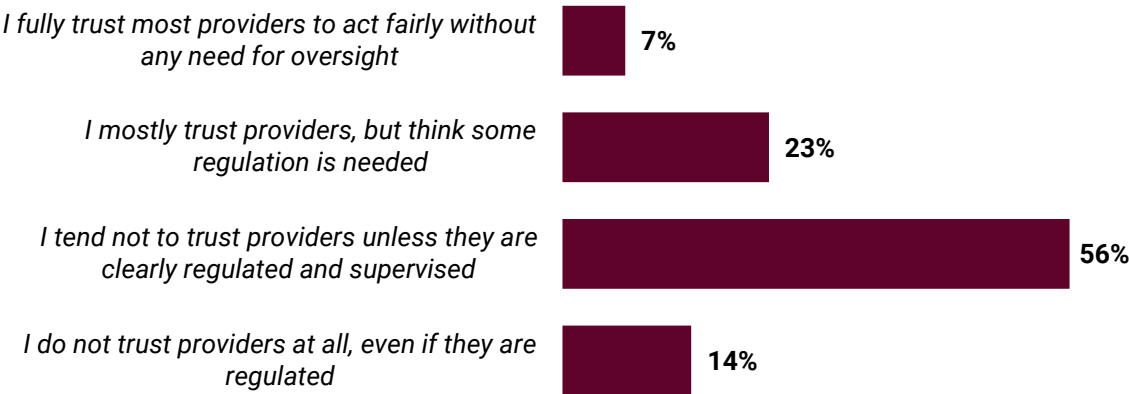
In Figure 14, many respondents (43%) express active interest in learning more about crypto-assets and blockchain technology, potentially indicating that such technologies will continue to be relevant in the future. Nearly a third of respondents (32%) are neutral to the statement, indicating that while they may not seek out more information, they may be receptive to education campaigns carried out by the Authority in the future.

3 - Expectations of Transparency, Security & Regulation

Through this survey, the Authority set out to understand consumer attitudes and perspectives on regulatory oversight and supervision by national authorities such as the MFSA, and to learn the impact of regulatory initiatives in terms of individual trust, confidence and willingness to invest in crypto-assets.

To gauge the general public’s confidence in crypto-asset service providers, respondents were presented with four statements and asked to select the one that best aligned with their level of trust in said providers. The statements and results are presented in Figure 15.

Figure 15: Level of trust in crypto-asset service providers

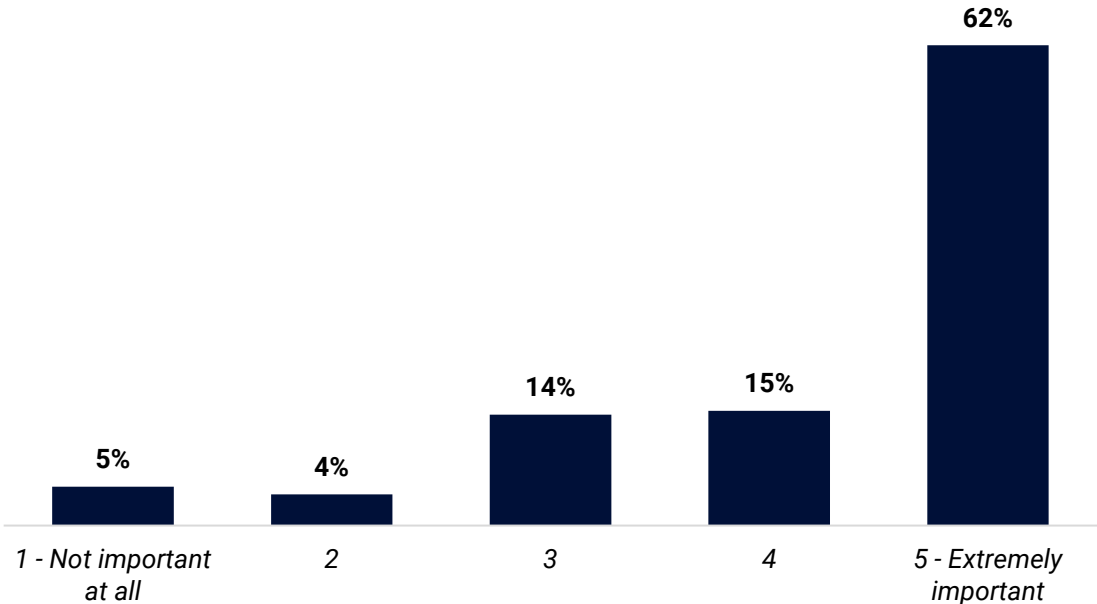


More than half of respondents (56%) indicate that they do not trust providers unless they are clearly regulated, while nearly a quarter (23%) have more trust in providers but still believe that some regulation is needed. From these responses, it is understood that the vast majority (79%) are of the opinion that some measure of regulation is required in the crypto-asset market for ensuring trust in providers.

From the remaining respondents, while some (7%) report full confidence in providers to act fairly, twice as many (14%) feel that no amount of supervision will result in them trusting providers.

Survey participants were next asked to rate how important they believe it is that crypto-asset companies are regulated or licensed by an NCA. A strong majority (77%) believe regulation by an NCA to be important, with the largest proportion (62%) of respondents finding such regulation to be extremely important for the crypto-asset market.

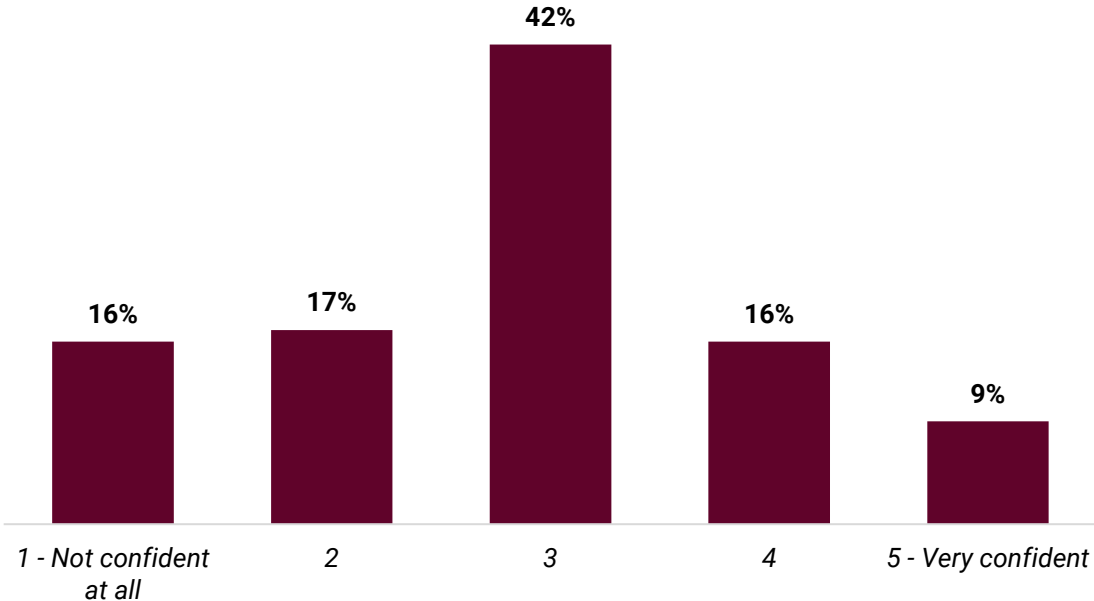
Figure 16: Perceived importance of regulation by national authorities in crypto-markets



Conversely, less than a tenth of respondents (9%) feel that the involvement of national authorities is of little or no importance.

Respondents were also asked to rate their level of confidence in current regulations and safeguards to provide enough protection for crypto-asset investors and holders. The largest proportion of respondents (42%) feel neutral in this regard, suggesting uncertainty about the effectiveness of existing safeguards.

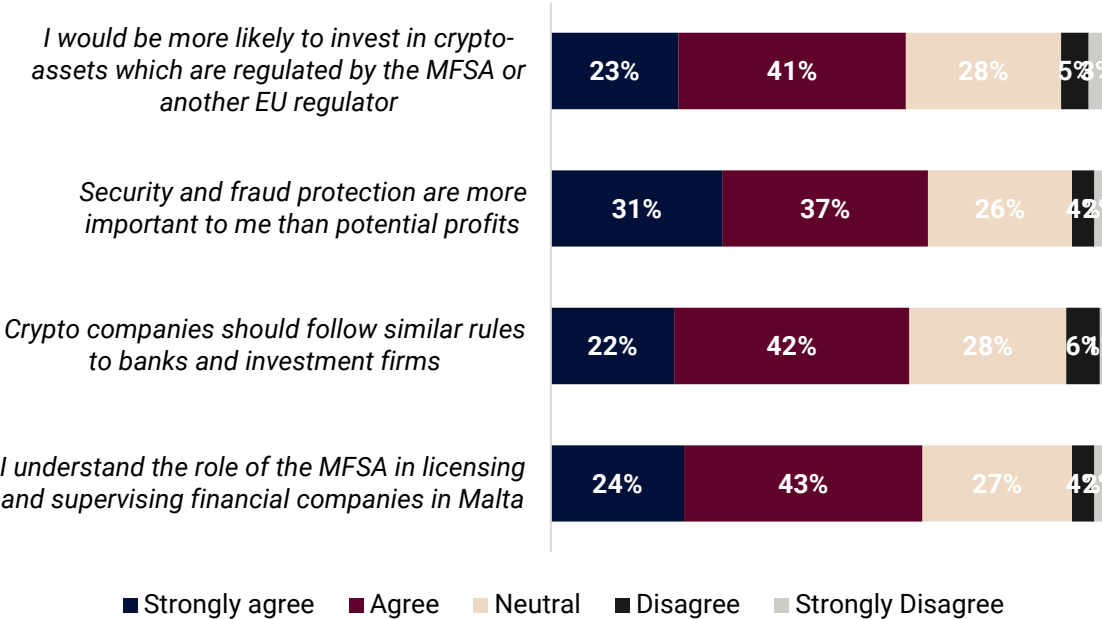
Figure 17: Level of confidence in existing regulations and safeguards



Merely a quarter (25%) of the respondents feel either confident or very confident in the existing safeguards and levels of protection. Conversely, the rest (33%) express complete or partial lack of confidence in the protection provided under current rules.

Furthermore, respondents were given four statements related to their attitude towards regulation, regulatory priorities and the MFSA itself.

Figure 18: Level of agreement with the following statements relating to national financial regulators



Two thirds of respondents (64%) agree with the statement that supervision by NCAs reassures investors and results in greater market participation. Only a small portion of the sample (8%) feel that such oversight is unnecessary or unwelcome.

When questioned on priorities, the majority of respondents (68%) agree that protection is of greater importance than potential profits, indicating that risk management and trust play a central role in investment decisions within the crypto-asset market.

There is wide agreement across the sample (64%) that crypto-asset service providers should be issued rules similar to those for banks and investment firms. This appears to reflect strong public support for holding crypto-asset service providers to the regulatory standards established for other financial service providers.

Most respondents (67%) report understanding the role of the MFSA in licensing and supervising financial companies in Malta, whereas only a small subset (7%) disagree or strongly disagree about understanding the Authority’s role. This indicates that the public is broadly aware of the role and duty of the MFSA in the Maltese financial sector.

Conclusion and Way Forward

This research illustrates that public awareness of crypto-assets is relatively high, with common associations to money and investments. Despite this, familiarity with blockchain technology and understanding of the difference between crypto-assets and traditional financial instruments remains low to moderate. The Authority observes that this may increase investors' exposure to unfair practices or misleading information.

While there is widespread awareness of the different types of crypto-assets, confidence in identifying legitimate crypto-assets remains low, with fear of fraud and scams remaining a barrier to adoption. While awareness of scams such as wash-trading or counterfeiting is important to the health of the financial market, re-enforcing the Authority's commitment to effective regulation and supervision of crypto-assets and providers, as well as increased focus on consumer education initiatives relating to scam and fraud avoidance are key drivers for increasing consumer confidence in the market.

Overall, this survey suggests that while understanding of the functionality and risks of crypto-assets is limited, there is great interest from the public to learn more and a desire for regulatory intervention.

In summary, while general awareness of crypto-assets is high, understanding of mechanisms, risks, and practical use is limited. Adoption is shaped by perceived benefits, knowledge gaps, risk awareness, and confidence in security and regulation. Education, clear guidance, and robust regulatory oversight are essential to fostering trust, supporting safe participation, and promoting wider adoption of crypto-assets.

The Authority remains committed to safeguard and protect the interests of the public, especially the vulnerable investors who would require further outreach and additional educational initiatives.

In this regard, the Authority is engaged in monitoring and ensuring issuers and regulated service providers include clear and accurate disclaimers in product offerings as well as fair and not misleading financial promotions. Furthermore, as part of its supervisory engagement with licence holders, it actively drives improvements in the quality of information available to investors, including sustainability-related disclosures and risk factors, promoting higher standards of transparency and accountability, supporting investor confidence and informed decision-making.

With the objective of empowering consumers in Malta across all life stages, the Authority is engaged in a series of educational initiatives aimed at advancing the overall level of financial literacy. These efforts form part of a sustained and strategic approach and include national awareness campaigns leveraging both traditional and

digital media, complemented by active participation in television programmes, radio segments, podcasts, and other media platforms to broaden outreach and engagement. In parallel, the Authority regularly delivers community-based financial literacy workshops, either independently or in collaboration with strategic stakeholders, ensuring that key financial concepts and responsible decision-making practices are accessible to diverse audiences. These initiatives increasingly place emphasis on emerging areas such as digital finance, crypto-assets, and fraud prevention, ensuring that consumer education remains relevant and responsive to evolving market risks.

In relation to fraud and scam prevention, the Authority issues timely warnings whenever instances of scams or the provision of unauthorised services are identified, with the aim of informing and protecting as many consumers as possible. Individuals who believe they may have been victims of a scam or fraudulent activity are encouraged to submit a report, thereby contributing to the Authority's efforts to safeguard others and enhance overall market awareness. Consumers who wish to learn more can visit the dedicated section of the MFSA Website ([Scams, Warnings and Reporting - MFSA](#)) to access information on identifying potential scams and fraud, or to report any marketing suspected of being part of a fraudulent financial activity.

Furthermore, the MFSA engages which other stakeholders such as the Office of the Arbiter for Financial Services and the Malta Police Force, to embark on initiatives aimed at raising awareness and resilience against financial crime. These include educating the public about different forms of scams, how to identify them and where to report them.

Lastly, the Authority acknowledges that the relevant stakeholders, including crypto-asset service providers, have a fundamental role to play in bridging the gap in consumer education. In this context, industry players are encouraged to utilise the insights provided within this report to design financial products and services that are transparent and tailored to the needs and knowledge levels of their target markets, as well as to provide information to their clients on the risks relating to scams and how these can be avoided.

Malta Financial Services Authority

Triq L-Imdina, Zone 1

Central Business District, Birkirkara, CBD 1010, Malta

communications@mfsa.mt

www.mfsa.mt