



Strategic Partnership in Adult Migrant Education: Perspectives from
Mediterranean and Baltic Sea Regions
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Policy Recommendations for the Maltese context



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Policy recommendations for the Maltese context

Information about the context

Despite the common perception that migrant populations in Malta are made up mainly by people arriving from the MENA region, data shows that migrants in Malta are primarily European citizens: according to the Ministry for Education and Employment (MEDE), in 2014, there were 23,643 foreigners living and working in Malta, of which about 51% were citizens of the European Union (EU), while 49% were third country nationals (TCNs).

Maltese immigration law has been widely criticised from humanitarian organisations in the past years because it provided for the detention for migrants who would be entering the country irregularly, irrespective of their request for asylum or level of vulnerability. However, during the past two years this situation has improved as a result of the transposition of the Directive 200/115 of the European Union, as known as *Return Directive*. The first step of this process was the abolition of detention for unaccompanied minors and families with minors (put in action as by 23 February 2014); then, in November 2015, the Ministry launched a new governmental strategy¹, which foresees the replacement of Closed Centres with Initial Reception Centres (IRCs), where migrants will be medically screened and interviewed by pertinent authorities during the first seven days after their arrival in the country.

Integration of TCNs

Even if migration is not a new phenomenon for the island, it is still possible to find some barriers to the full integration of foreigners in Maltese society. The Migrant Integration Policy Index² for 2015 labelled Malta as a slightly unfavourable environment to the integration of migrants. The overall score obtained is 40/100, ranking the country 33rd out of 38 countries. The index is the result of the analysis of indicators related to different fields. If one observes the results in the specific fields, Malta received the lowest scores in the fields of educational opportunities (19/100), political participation (25/100) and access to nationality (34/100).

One of the major challenges for Malta seems to be the lack of an integration policy, even though the Ministry for Social Dialogue, Consumer Affairs and Civil Liberties (MSDC) is currently working on it.

One of the first issues to be tackled should be the accessibility of information. During the past years the debate on the bureaucratic process moved around the idea of the creation of a *one-stop-shop*. Such service would make easier for migrants to acquire information about their duties and rights in the country. A first attempt in this direction was realised in 2014, when the MSDC in collaboration with the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) launched the *Integration Portal*³, a website providing all the necessary information for TCNs to settle in Malta. However, it

¹ Ministry for Home Affairs and National Security, Strategy for the reception of asylum seekers and irregular migrants, 9 November 2015

² Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX), www.mipex.eu/malta, accessed: 20 April 2016

³ Available at <http://integration.gov.mt/en/Pages/Home.aspx>, accessed: 20 April 2016

has become evident that the use of digital technology, combined with the availability of a single language creates some difficulties for some of the beneficiaries to use the tool.⁴

Educational policies

During the past years, civil society organisations (CSOs) suggested to do away with Malta's systematic detention regime, which by many is considered a human rights' and migration law violation, and to convert detention centres into *orientation centres*, in order to provide migrants with useful information about living and working in Malta, but also to provide them with basic knowledge that might be useful to access the labour market (such as language training, digital literacy).

Courses providing basic skills are actually offered by a number of NGOs and other voluntary organisations to migrants residing in Open Centres⁵. According to the National Strategy⁶ developed by the MEDE, TCNs living in the community have the same rights as Maltese citizens to enrol in educational courses offered by governmental entities, private organisations and non-formal education providers. However, TCNs who are not refugees have to pay fees for educational services. It is important to note that fee payments are not means-tested.

The importance of education for the integration of migrants has been widely underlined by different governmental authorities, but also by national and international organisations working in the field. This notwithstanding it seems that educational opportunities are not well advertised and/or are not designed in an attractive manner for TCNs living in the country.

The lack of courses tailored to the needs of migrants, combined with working schedule of adults and potential cost barriers, lead to a low level of attendance to the courses provided.

In order to plan a specific educational policy targeting adult migrants it has to be kept in mind that often Malta is not a country of final destination: many foreigners spend only some time on the island and then move again. This leads to the need of educational opportunities providing knowledge that can easily be exported and applied to different contexts.

Since qualification system is different across EU countries, it would be useful to use recognition tools able to validate skills acquired in different contexts, both formal and non-formal.

Tools like the *Skills Portfolio* seem to be good for this, since they focus on the abilities of the person more than on the qualifications reached. In addition, it would be recommendable to establish a common recognition system for non-formal learning opportunities, in order for migrants to have recognised abilities learned in contexts other than formal educational institutions. These measures should be taken at the European level, in view of the eventual

⁴ It is worth noting that Kopin had been involved in the One-Stop-Shop consultation process launched by the IOM. Kopin had then recommended to set up regional physical residents' centres which would provide services to all residents, not solely to migrants, in terms of, inter alia, ID or passport applications, job market, information concerning the educational system, and health system related matters. Kopin's argument was that creating such services for foreigners only would be counter-productive to inclusion efforts as Maltese citizens could regard OSS services to migrants as better than those they could access themselves.

⁵ Open Centres (OCs) are managed by the Government's Agency for the Welfare of Asylum Seekers (AWAS) and provide asylum seekers with a one year service agreement for the provision of accommodation.

⁶ Ministry for Education and Employment, A National Literacy Strategy for all in Malta and Gozo, 14 June 2014

relocation of people across the EU, but also to have stronger recognition in case of voluntary or forced return or the relocation of asylum seekers outside EU borders.

At national level, there is the need of more coordination when it comes to the integration of migrants, which should entail a process of preliminary mapping of all the existing opportunities. Back in 2014, the National Employment Strategy⁷ recognised the need to invest in the education of TCNs in order to fill the gaps generated by excess of demand. This need has been underlined again by the National Literacy Strategy, however, there is still a lack of concrete measures fostering such a process. The strategic planning of educational opportunities offered to migrants should start at the grass-roots' level, involving not only the different communities and migrant organisations, but also the active participation of the employers who should invite their workers to improve their knowledge in order to increase their productivity and efficiency. Moreover, there is the need of fostering the dialogue among the different organisations providing educational opportunities.

The involvement of the different actors should be followed by reforms of the bureaucratic system, in order to make it easier for employers to hire TCNs, but also to ease the process for workers to acquire the needed documents. This will also have positive effects to the fight against black labour, widely promoted by worker unions. The complexity of the bureaucratic system, mainly based on the will of employers to provide an employment licence, can lead to situations of subjugation of the workers, which can result in abuse, discrimination and dependency.

A necessity that has been underlined by some stakeholders is that the Maltese context is lacking teachers specifically trained to teach adults. Teachers' available to teach adults are either voluntary or teachers trained to teach children and youth. Providers of educational services to asylum seekers should clearly identify the main aim of the service provided, thus keeping separate educational activities and assessment of trauma. The latter has to be provided by trained experts, whilst teachers should be informed about the eventual effects of trauma on learning processes.

The lack of trained teachers for adults can limit the quality of educational opportunities offered: the wrong approach will make the course less meaningful for the students, thus resulting in low levels of attendance.

The approach that should be used in order to teach adults, especially with migration background, should be highly participatory and take into consideration the socio-demographic, educational and professional background of the students. It is deemed useful to involve the students' respective peers in order to continue the learning process outside of the educational institution. In order to ensure that the courses offered are tailored to the needs of the students a constant monitoring effort should be made by the providers. With the help of European institutions, such providers should also embark on the exchange of good practices with their European peers, in order to improve the existing practices at the Maltese level.

⁷ Ministry for Education and Employment, The National Employment Policy, 01 May 2014

Summary of the recommendations

EU LEVEL:

- Development of a common recognition system based on the skills acquired in different contexts.
- Improving opportunities of exchange of good practices for education providers and teachers.

NATIONAL LEVEL:

- Mapping of existing opportunities in order to foster the dialogue among the different actors.
- Develop a strategic plan in order to avoid the repetition of courses and increase the attendance.
- Identify a single authority coordinating the single initiatives.
- Involving different actors in order to develop a strategic plan for education, including migrant associations and communities and employers. This will make learning significant for the students and the different economic actors.
- Improving the communication system in order to make the bureaucratic process more clear and accessible for TCNs.
- Provide basic skills' courses for migrants residing in close and open centres, in order for the time spent there to be fruitful.
- Increase professional training opportunities for adult education providers, in order to increase the quality of educational services offered. Such training should also provide specific skills to teach TCNs, like diversity trainings and innovative teaching methods.

PRACTITIONERS⁸:

- It is necessary to clearly distinguish the provision of educational services and the assessment of trauma.
- It would be necessary to involve teachers specifically trained to teach adults, in order to use the right approach for the specific group of students.
- The approach used for teaching should take in consideration the background of the students and should be highly participatory.
- Development of consistent teaching materials, which allow the students to link the learning experience with everyday routine and working reality, thus improving the efficiency of the learning process.
- Community learning would be a useful instrument to motivate students in the learning process.
- Ensure a continuous monitoring process that will ensure the quality of the service provided.
- Exchange of good practices with different realities of the EU.

⁸ The term refers to NGOs, Adult Learning Centres, Professional or Vocational Schools

References

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