

Young migrant women: Promoting Integration and Mutual Understanding in Secondary Education European Fund for the Integration of Third Country Nationals

National Policy Review: Malta

EMCER (Euro-Mediterranean Centre for Educational Research)

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Introduction

The aim of this review of the policies related to migration in Malta is to provide an account of the contexts, albeit official and formal ones, through which migrants are perceived, and of the main discourses that shape their identities and their experiences of integration as migrants. The brief official descriptions of the different categories of migrants immediately differentiate between migrants in Malta. Generally these differentiations automatically arise from associations with their country of origin that stereotypically define their status as workers. National policies on migration clearly have a profound effect on the experiences of the integration of migrants. They also reflect the more socio-cultural attitudes of the Maltese that affect their personal everyday lives and give an indication of the particular challenges of migrants, the Maltese and of the relations between them.

The report includes a brief historical background of migration in Malta highlighting the fact that the Maltese themselves have their own particular histories of migration to other countries such as Australia, Great Britain, Canada and the USA and more recently to EU countries. It primarily focuses on educational and economic aspects of migration paying attention to related issues of employment. The policies presented in this report operate on a national level, but they are also heavily influenced by political positions related to migration and education emanating from the European Union and wider contexts.

Defining Migrants

Within the EU context, the term '**migrant**' or '**immigrant**' refers to individuals who were not born in the territory of the EU Member State where they reside, irrespective of whether they are third-country nationals¹ or citizens of another EU Member State, or of irregular status (Papademetriou, 2009). '**Undocumented migrants**' is a term assigned to those without a residence permit authorising them to stay in their country of destination. Very often they have been denied a passport and other official documents in their country of origin, due to war and other conflicts. They may also have been denied asylum protection, overstayed their visas or entered the country irregularly (Geddie, 2009).

In Malta, the term '**irregular immigrant**', often referred to as '**illegal immigrant**' refers to individuals who enter a country irregularly to seek employment, better economic opportunities or for other reasons. A number of 'irregular immigrants' are granted refugee status once they have been found to qualify for it due to persecution in their country. **Asylum seekers** are those who are outside their country of nationality owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion (Vassallo, 2006).

¹ Third-country nationals are locally defined as those individuals who are not citizens of the European Union (Department of Information, 2008). This is also the official term adopted by the European Union for any person who is not a citizen of the European Union within the meaning of Article 17 (1) of the Treaty of Amsterdam.

Migrant workers are defined as those workers who travel from one country to another for work as employees or self-employed in the country of destination. Migrant workers include both EU citizens and non-EU citizens moving from one country of origin to another (Farrugia, 2007).

Migratory contexts in Malta

Emigration on a large scale has been a feature of Maltese life since the early years of the nineteenth century. The Maltese had been invited by their rulers to pack and leave on many occasions. From the 1830s, thousands had left for the shores of neighbouring Mediterranean lands. The end of hostilities in 1918 then caused the departures of thousands more, this time to destinations such as North America, the United Kingdom and Australia. In the period just after the Second World War up until the years of the 1970s, organised and subsidised emigration became a basic policy for those who ruled the Maltese. Colonial and Maltese colonized administrations had vested political interests in depicting emigration as the only solution to problems of overpopulation and unemployment. The idea that emigration could save the Maltese from stark economic hardship (Attard, 1997) complimented the imperialistic view of Malta as essentially a “fortress colony” (Frendo, 1991), supporting colonial policies that ignored the educational and economic development of the local population. During the early 1980s, this emigration phenomenon has slowed down but simultaneously the country began to witness the first influx of returnees and overall one in four migrants came back for a total of 39,000 returnees between 1946 and 1996 (Amore, 2005). Immigration is a relatively recent phenomenon in the Maltese context and this is reflected in the lack of the term in official statistics. The National Statistics Office uses mainly the term ‘**returned migrants**’ and ‘**non-Maltese nationals**’, referring respectively to Maltese who are former emigrants returning to Malta and people of other nationalities settling in Malta (European Commission, 2004).

The foreign population living in Malta is composed in its majority by British nationals who have made of Malta their retirement home. The Permanent Residence Schemes have attracted people from overseas as it allows them to remain indefinitely in the country; they also gain from exemptions from customs duty and VAT, a flat 15% tax rate on all income and other benefits. In general, the government welcomes the introduction of overseas expertise and ideas especially in the tourism, manufacturing and catering sectors. Malta also has a Work Permit Scheme, giving permission to reside and work in the country for a definite period of time to migrants whose skills requested by the employer are locally absent or in short supply.

During the period of Malta’s entry into the EU, concerns for the potential influx of other EU citizens coming to work in the country after accession and competing with nationals in the job market were a central issue of interest to the general public, the media, politicians and trade unions. Malta’s negotiations with the EU on free movements of persons secured it a special deal allowing for restrictions in case of a big influx of EU workers into the country to be adopted unilaterally, while ensuring that Maltese citizens can move freely to seek work in other EU countries from the first day of membership. During a period of seven years after membership, Malta can apply safeguards on the right of EU nationals to work in the country. Malta has been a full member of the European Union since 2004 and now, as part of the Schengen zone, has removed immigration controls to facilitate freedom of movement between EU Member States. As a result, the number of migrant workers, especially those originating in the East of Europe, is steadily increasing (General Workers Union, 2000).

Studies, data and information regarding the working conditions of migrant workers in Malta are very limited. Current local debate about migrant workers tends to focus on “irregular” immigrants, an issue which has been increasing in importance since 2002 with the rise in number of Sub-Saharan migrants. Migrant workers are over- or under- represented in specific sectors and occupations. This is mainly influenced by the skills that these workers hold. Third-country nationals are issued a



working permit in order to address a local specific skill shortage. Legal migrant workers who are third-country nationals are generally over-represented in highly skilled positions such as engineers, technicians and doctors. Workers from Romania, Poland and Bulgaria could easily find employment in the tourist and entertainment sectors in Malta, often as a direct result of their Nordic looks and their willingness to work for less than the minimum wage. Regular migrant workers are also employed in other sectors of the economy, such as in the case of Malta Shipyards Ltd. in the recent past, while a number of other foreign workers are being brought over to Malta for temporary employment, or to be employed in the retail sector. Some foreign workers who hold a temporary work and residence permit in Malta remain in the country illegally on the expiry of the permit, complicating the situation of irregular migrant workers in the country.

Migrant workers who are refugees, under humanitarian protection or as asylum seekers are automatically given a temporary work permit. These are usually over-represented in low skilled and elementary jobs, such as in construction or else working as cleaners. Others coming from Eritrea and generally have good employment trades, are hard workers and are more represented in occupations such as electricians, mechanics, welders and spray painters (Farrugia, 2007). However the jobs they take in Malta do not reflect their actual skills and work experience.

The presence of migrant workers is often considered a threat by the Maltese. Migrants are also feared by the Maltese people because of the substantial cultural, traditional, religious and language differences (General Workers Union, 2000). The most pervading fear, by workers and their representatives, is that the employment of immigrants might have an adverse effect on the working conditions of the Maltese workers. Moreover, elements of racism that are being felt among the Maltese population and the negative perceptions of the Maltese towards irregular immigrants are also probably affecting the latter's working conditions. Migrant workers officially have the same rights and working conditions as nationals, yet they, together with many irregular migrant workers accept atrocious working conditions, decreasing the hope that the employers will cease from continuing with abusive employment. Although migrant workers have the same official rights, they are often perceived as being irregular or illegal migrant workers (Beraki Mekonen, 2006). This situation does not help these workers to gain the dignity they deserve. Indeed, irregular migrant workers are often employed in the same employment as Maltese workers but at far lower rates and conditions.

Irregular immigration to Malta has been the major issue dominating Maltese public debate over the past few years. One can identify three types of irregular immigrants – there are those who enter the country legally but remain beyond their authorised stay, those who arrive in Malta without the proper documentation and others who arrive in an irregular manner either voluntarily or after finding themselves in distress at sea and saved by Maltese coast guard authorities.

As a result of its geographic position, at the crossroads of the Mediterranean and on the threshold of Europe, Malta is experiencing a steady influx of irregular immigrants and asylum seekers. Up to the year 2000, Malta received approximately 50 – 60 migrants per year, most of them coming through North Africa and claiming asylum upon arrival (Amore, 2005). In 2001, the estimated immigrant population in Malta as a percentage of the total population was at 0.1%². Despite this relatively small number, a crisis discourse in relation to migrants has gripped the frame of mind of a substantial number of Maltese citizens. This discourse contributes towards the proliferation of anxiety, which is based on a perceived deficiency to 'cope' with migrants. Along the years, the number of migrants is steadily increasing, with 2,775 new arrivals in 2008 compared to 1,702 the

² Source: Eurostat, Population and social conditions, demography, New Cronos (data obtained in February 2004) and Eurostat, *European social statistics - Migration* (2002).



year before (Sammut, 2009). This number in the majority represents those arriving by boat from North Africa.

Persons arriving by sea and landing in Malta every year on their way to Europe go through a bureaucratic system which determines their status and categorizes them according to their need of assistance. Those deserving asylum are given full protection, while others who are refused admission to Malta are issued with a removal order in terms of the Immigration Act after they have been apprehended for irregular or illegal entry or stay. These people are detained until they can be removed from national territory (Scicluna, 2006). The dominant view is that given Malta's high population density the disproportionate influx of immigrants over the last few years, put significant demands on a small island³. Some claim that the total number of applications should be considered in relation to the total population of the country concerned so that the stability and well being of the Maltese society are not affected (Scicluna, 2006).

Legislation

Maltese laws for immigration generally follow EU legislation. EU nationals and citizens of a number of other countries do not require a visa, only a valid passport or an ID card to enter the country. As pointed out earlier, immigrants are required to apply for a work permit, an exception to EU in order to safeguard the Maltese labour market. The main legislative instruments that regulate the life of immigrants are the Citizenship Act, the Immigration Act and the Refugees Act (Republic of Malta, 1964; 2001; 2008).

Before 2002, in the absence of national mechanisms to deal with claims of asylum seekers, applications for Refugee Status in Malta were received, processed and determined by the United Nations High Commissioner in Rome. The Refugees Act (Republic of Malta, 2001) came into force in Malta on the 1st October 2001, defining the rights and duties of asylum seekers and refugees. Irregular immigrants who are duly recognised as refugees have the right to work and are also eligible to receive social assistance, free medical care, free education and a Convention Travel document (Vassallo, 2006).

Malta has also signed and ratified a number of agreements with different countries affecting its policies towards irregular immigrants, such as the European Agreement on the Abolition of Visas for Refugees, the UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime, the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, and the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air. Apart from its EU commitments, Malta is also a Member of the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), and fully committed towards fulfilling its international obligations in terms of reception and assessment of asylum seekers (Ministry of Justice and Home Affairs and Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity, 2005). Malta also actively participates in regional fora, such as the Home Affairs Ministers of the Western Mediterranean Forum and the Cooperation Process in the Western Mediterranean. These aim to promote effective cooperation through Foreign Ministers on questions of common concern, including irregular migration issues, in order to identify solutions to political and security issues of mutual interest.

Policies

The goal of Malta's security policy is to safeguard the freedom and territorial integrity of the Maltese Islands, and the ability of its people to pursue their legitimate interests. In fact, Malta's objectives in dealing with the problems posed by irregular migration are clear-cut and they are to ensure that the national interest is safeguarded, included enhanced security measures and border control (United

³ As an example, in 2002, the asylum ratio per 1000 inhabitants in Malta relating the number of applicants registered was at 0.89 (European Commission, 2004).



Nations – Alliance of Civilizations, 2007). However, these objectives also target the fair, just and humane treatment of irregular immigrants; that standard procedures and practices in dealing with asylum seekers are established; and that the social inclusion of asylum seekers and the subsequent integration of those eligible for refugee status is encouraged.

The safe return of irregular immigrants who wish to go back to their home country is also supported. In parallel, compulsory repatriation of those who have no right to stay in Malta forms an integral part of Malta's migration management policy. Asylum seekers who have exhausted all legal remedies to their application under the Refugees Act are considered to be prohibited immigrants in terms of the Immigration Act and are detained in custody until such time as they are removed from Malta. Effective channels of cooperation have also been built with those countries offering resettlement schemes to those granted asylum status in order to facilitate the transfer of such people from Malta to their new adoptive country (Scicluna, 2006).

Integration

Legal immigrants in Malta enjoy full security and the few ethnic communities that exist are fully integrated and benefit from all that is available to the Maltese (Vassallo, 2006). The main groups of immigrants, identifiable as distinct groups in Malta, who are active are involved in ethnic associations, self-help networks, religious groups and children's schools activities.

The largest group of foreigners living in Malta are Maltese emigrants or descendants of Maltese emigrants returning to Malta or citizens of other EU member states, with British expatriates being the main group. Other groups of interest are the historical Indian community, the 'Arab-Muslim' community, predominantly constituted by Libyans, and the smaller Nigerian and Albanian communities. The majority of the Indians belong to a well-established and respected business community and have integrated fully in the Maltese society while retaining their roots. The 'Arab-Muslim' community in Malta is made up of about 3000 individuals, many of whom are now Maltese citizens. Although the Muslim minority in Malta enjoys tolerance, freedom and hospitality, the community faces also some degree of prejudice and unfair generalisations. Prejudice and racism are mostly directed at Libyans in Malta and often extended to all Arab-looking people living in or visiting the country. At government level the countries entertain good relations, yet the general attitudes of Maltese versus Libyans have degenerated over the past years. The general perception of Arabs in Malta is based on the typical stereotype as a male in his twenties who comes to Malta for a short stay and who is either a criminal or a potential criminal (Amore, 2005).

A general dearth in academic studies in the field of immigration in Malta does not allow for a deep understanding of the level of civic participation of the various groups and the dynamics of their engagement in Maltese life. The Maltese authorities assist regular immigrants to re-establish contact, and, where possible, reunite with family members residing in other countries. One has to mention the Emigrants Commission, Dar l-Emigrant, which has been set up in 1950 due to the huge exodus of Maltese to foreign lands, with the aim of offering help to those who intended to settle abroad. This non-governmental, non-profitable organisation is still active by offering free services, counselling and protection to all those affected by migration including immigrants, refugees and tourists. It also houses associations related to immigrants, helps with language courses, provides useful contacts and organises social, cultural and religious activities at regular intervals.

Irregular immigrants very often encounter difficulties during their stay in Malta, difficulties concerning their integration in the Maltese society because of differences of culture, language, lack of job skills and lack of funds to meet their basic daily needs. They also often face the challenge of being understood and accepted by the Maltese, considering the prejudices born of ignorance and misunderstandings which are present in the Maltese society (Scicluna, 2006). Irregular immigrants,



whether they are asylum-seekers or economic migrants, have no right to civic or political participation in Malta. They are usually detained upon arrival in closed centres and the temporary limit to detention for asylum seekers is a maximum of 18 months while waiting for an answer on their application. If this period is exceeded, they are then moved to an open centre. Some non-governmental organisations have strongly argued that this policy is wrong. They suggest that after a short period of detention, that is, a maximum of two weeks, the immigrants are received in open centres or in some form of community-oriented model (Scicluna, 2006).

Several reports on detention conditions for foreigners have been made public, but only a few of the NGOs are able to take action in this field. This is largely due to their lack of resources, but also to the fact that they have no legal standing unless they are affiliated with international NGOs such as Amnesty or the Red Cross (International Federation for Human Rights, 2004). A number of local NGOs specialising in migration matters such as the Migrants' Commission of the Catholic Church, Jesuit Refugee Service, Malta Red Cross Society, Islamic Welfare Fund, Moviment Graffiti, the Third World Group and The Peace Lab regularly provide support to immigrants living in detention centres. Unfortunately this support often depends on volunteer work and a number of organisations are obliged to cease their activities because of insufficient funding.

In its annual report for 2006 analysing racial discrimination and racial crime data, the EU agency responsible for the monitoring of racism and xenophobia (EUMC) said Malta is still not implementing two important EU directives in this field. These are the Racial Equality Directive and the Employment Equality Directive. Although Malta is in the process of transposing the two EU directives related to racism, they are still in draft form. According to the report, Malta also lacks an adequate mechanism for the collection of official criminal justice data on racism and xenophobia and hence no official data is available on racist violence and crime in the country (Camilleri, 2006).

The EU integration index also demonstrates that migrants in Malta are explicitly exposed to nationality discrimination. Although the law is enforced by giving harsher penalties to those who discriminate deliberately, only a narrow range of sanctions is available. Complainants receive legal aid, but the country does not inform residents of their rights as victims or ensure that legislation or public bodies do not discriminate (Migration Integration Policy Index, 2007). Reports in the media about racial incidents directed towards immigrants in Malta also resurface from time to time. A local minor political party, Azzjoni Nazzjonali, has a consistent policy of deterrence and repatriation of migrants. It stresses that the mechanism of voluntary burden sharing between Member States can only alleviate some of the pressure in the short-term, serving as an inducement for ever-increasing waves of irregular immigrants to the shores of Europe (Azzjoni Nazzjonali, 2009). A number of Maltese representatives in the European Parliament have also put forward proposals to regularise migration through this burden sharing discourse (Busuttil, 2008). The labelling of migrants as a 'burden' further stigmatises them. The FRONTEX⁴ mission, which is responsible for coordinating the activities of the national border guards in ensuring the security of the EU's borders with non-member states, similarly continues to reinforce and proliferate discourses of exclusion. The institution of the church in Malta, on the other hand, as communicated through the Archbishop's Curia, raises awareness of the human tragedy involved in the journey of these immigrants when fleeing their countries, and stresses that we are obliged to safeguard their fundamental right to life. The State is urged not to concentrate solely on the repatriation of these persons who seek asylum but also to safeguard their security and avoid situations which endanger their health and security (The Archbishop's Curia, 2009).

⁴ European Agency for the Management of International Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union.



In December 2003, the Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity took responsibility for refugees and asylum seekers in Malta and for developing an integration programme (Vassallo, 2006). The Ministry is responsible for the social welfare (food, shelter, financial entitlements, medical coverage, education and job opportunities) of all irregular immigrants, irrespective of whether these people have been recognised as refugees, have been granted humanitarian status or are still without some form of official status. The Ministry concentrates on service provision and policy development, with the role of overseeing and developing the integration processes which begin in open centres. Three priority areas of intervention – accommodation, health and education, have been set up, together with new open centres for refugees and asylum seekers. The Management of Open Centres also has the responsibility of developing links with the Ministry of Education, Youth and Employment and with other entities regarding the formulation of programmes that focus on the development of language, national culture, history and institutions, education and job training opportunities and the development of personal skills. Centres hosting families, unaccompanied women with children and pregnant women are also responsible in liaising with the Education authorities regarding the schooling of young children. Unaccompanied minors are given access to educational and training opportunities through their integration in existing education institutions and ad hoc in-house training courses specially designed for immigrant minors, including the teaching of English, national and European culture. A Refugee Service Area has also been set up, providing social welfare services within closed accommodation centres, particularly with vulnerable adults and unaccompanied minors, families with minor children and pregnant women. An NGO Forum has been developed, acting as the focus for collaboration between the Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity and the NGOs working with asylum seekers. Together with the Dutch agency COA, the Ministry is developing a system of integration / repatriation and service agreement (Ministry of Justice and Home Affairs and Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity, 2005).⁵

In keeping with the EU's Framework For The Integration Of Third-Country Nationals, Malta formed part of the EUNET Integration Network between 2006 and 2008. This transnational project for the integration of third-country nationals, targeting immigrants of non-EU states, allowed the sharing of knowledge, experiences and best practices of integration amongst various partner organisations in the Netherlands, Germany, Denmark, Portugal and Malta. It also led to the setting up of a new NGO called TSN (Third country national Support Network) Malta which aims to provide support, advocacy and service to third country nationals living in Malta (SOS Malta, 2010). There has also been an ongoing campaign providing information and promoting better understanding of the worldwide problems of refugees in general, and irregular immigration to Malta in particular (Scicluna, 2006). Its aim is to raise civic awareness about the problems, obligations and the need for compassion and understanding of irregular immigrants.

Education policies

Each Member State within the EU retains full control in establishing its school systems and school curricula, provided it is applying the principle of equality and prohibiting discrimination. Directive 77/486/ EEC from the European Commission however states that EU Member States must offer free tuition to children and workers who are nationals of another EU Member State, including the teaching of the official language of the host state, the training of teachers for this purpose, and the promotion of the mother tongue and culture of the country of origin. Furthermore, a resolution on Educating the Children of Migrants, adopted by the European Parliament since April 2, 2009, recommends that additional financial and administrative support should be provided to legal migrants by trained staff who also understands the mother tongue of the migrants. It is also recommended that ghetto-type schools and special classes should be avoided and children should be allocated to classes based on educational level and individual needs (Papademetriou, 2009).

⁵ A number of other initiatives concerning the integration of irregular immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers are listed in Appendix I at the end of this review.



In Malta, the right to education to all children of compulsory school age irrespective of their immigration status is considered to be implicit. This is because there is no impediment to the enrolment of children who do not have legal residence status in the country. The lack of specific policies regarding education access to immigrant children is striking in the local context. Yet, it is generally understood that equality of access to the educational system must be ensured by the educational community without discrimination on the grounds of ability, gender, religion, race or socio-cultural and economic background. A sense of social justice and solidarity should be cultivated within students throughout the educational process. To this respect, the fundamental values of love, family, respect, inclusion, social justice, solidarity, democracy, commitment and responsibility are promoted in the National Minimum Curriculum in two of its sections (European Commission, 2007) and several of its objectives and principles stress on the need of guaranteeing equal opportunities for everyone, irrespective of race, country of origin, political views, colour, religious beliefs, gender, age and physical or mental ability (National Minimum Curriculum, 1999). It is acknowledged that society is becoming increasingly multicultural and as a result the education system should enable students to develop a sense of respect, cooperation and solidarity among cultures. Principles which foster respect for cultural diversity and multicultural dialogue through education have also been advocated by a number of Maltese educators and researchers (Borg and Mayo, 2006; Borg and Mayo, 2007; Camilleri, 2007; Mayo, 2007; Mercieca, 2007; Azzopardi, 2008; Bartolo, 2008; Camilleri and Camilleri, 2008; Galea, 2008).

At policy level, there is no discrimination against refugee students and asylum seekers regarding education provisions. They are assimilated in the system and are treated like any other student. If they would need extra help, they are withdrawn from their classroom and given lessons by a support teacher, a strategy which is applied to all students irrespective of their race (The Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice, 2004). A number of measures have also been adopted by the Education Directorates to aid in the integration of migrants. It is often argued that mother tongue support will improve the development and learning ability of children with a mother tongue different from the language of instruction, and also cement their sense of identity. To this respect, in fulfilment of Legal Notice 259 of 2002, which concerns the teaching of the language and culture of migrant children, the Education Directorates have liaised with the respective Embassies and lessons are held there every Saturday. The Department of Further Studies and Adult Education also organises courses in basic skills to anyone who applies and there are specialised courses targeting immigrants or foreigners married to Maltese (European Commission, 2004). One must also mention that since English is one of Malta's official languages, some immigrant children are enabled to integrate easily with Maltese children.

There are no specific educational policies that give direction to the processes of integration of migrants to be engaged by schools. Most of the immigrant children in Malta are mainly included in Government schools, and some also attend Church schools. Schools hosting immigrant children enact assimilationist practices that expect migrant children to fit existing schools cultures (Camilleri, 2007). Policies regarding the involvement of parents in their children's education have yet to be introduced but they are expected to be defined in the near future as a result of an increase in the number of immigrant pupils.

Initial teacher education in Malta is committed to an intercultural approach as it recognises that one of the challenges of the intercultural approach in education systems lies in the ability of teachers and other staff to ensure that it becomes operational (European Commission, 2004). A number of INSET programmes provided by the Ministry are also organised for teachers, to undertake on a voluntary basis, throughout the course of their career. The approach taken is that of the development of an intercultural approach via certain subjects like the language of instruction, foreign languages,



geography, history, social studies and religious education. Having said that, teachers do not seem to be prepared to deal with the cultural diversity of their students (Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice, 2004), and to take advantage of the cultural differences of students for educational purposes.

Muslim immigrants can also choose to attend a private Muslim school in Malta, Mariam al Batool, whose standards are recognised by the state and has the cooperation and assistance of the Education Ministry. Since it is primarily a Maltese school, the National Minimum Curriculum is followed, but the teaching of Islam and of the Arabic language are also offered, with the aim of maintaining the identity of children of the Muslim community in Malta and enhancing tolerance and mutual respect between Muslims and other faiths (Amore, 2005). It needs to be mentioned that at policy level, in schools there is no discrimination against refugees, asylum seekers and the children of migrant workers regarding religious practices. However, following an agreement between the Holy See and the Government of Malta, in 1989, the only religion that can be taught is the Catholic Religion. Immigrant students not practising this religion are exempted from religious classes and some schools allow them to go to the library instead. All Muslim girls (and not just those attending the Muslim school) are allowed to wear the headscarf and are exempted from physical education during their religious observation of fasting during Ramadan. An independent Catholic school which hosts five Muslim female students who are non-Maltese nationals allows them to wear trousers instead of their kit during their sports lesson (Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice, 2004).

Education policies and gender equality

State and independent primary schools in Malta, together with a minority number of Church schools, are co-educational. In the lower secondary level, with students typically aged between 11 and 16 years, state and church schools are single-gender. The reasons for this are mainly administrative. It is considered that it is too expensive to duplicate sex-orientated curriculum equipment and other services in all schools, and that the reform will mean a radical change in the intake of schools as well as in staffs. However, there are also traditional and social reasons for this (Zammit Mangion, 1992).

The Maltese Government is committed to promoting gender equality in all areas and levels of the Maltese society. One of its main objectives concerns the equal access of education and training, at every level, for both women and men. Increased importance has been given to life skills education, particularly on aspects of responsible behaviour, family relationships, human relationships, preparation for marriage, for employment, and for civic and social duties. Gender training for teachers and kindergarten assistants is provided both at the initial levels and in in-service courses. Programmes for parents on parental skills also include education on gender equality and educational programmes offered to them to address the career choices of their children are free of sex bias.

Nevertheless, research has highlighted the fact that some of the teaching materials and textbooks used in Maltese schools portray gender stereotypes (Infoservice Adult Education, 2006). To this respect, the project FETE (Facilitating Equality Through Education) has recently been developed with the aim of analysing the current education policies and identify their strengths and weaknesses in relation to equality. This is a project composed of four partner entities from three countries, including Malta, wherein the Curriculum Department and e-learning within the Directorates for Education and the Faculty of Education of the University of Malta have participated. Textbooks and national curricula have also been reviewed in order to assess whether they needed to be revised or substituted. In the Maltese case, policymakers, teachers and students were sensitised through a number of disseminated material and training to raise awareness on the need to correct the gender roles and stereotypes that form part of the formal education process (Infoservice Adult Education, 2006). Educational activities and practices related to sexualities in boys and girls secondary schools



are scarce and limited to sexual health issues during some Personal and Social Development lessons and greatly influenced by Catholic perspectives about sex. (Cassar 2007).

Concluding Remarks

This report reveals contradictions in the way migrants are perceived, understood and treated in Malta. Some discourses generated by particular organisations supporting migrants conceive of migrants as persons entitled to human and citizen rights irrespective of their country of origin. These contrast and challenge institutional systems and structures that differentiate and categorise migrants according to intersections of nationality, race, ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status and age. Constructed distinctions between migrants have given rise to terminologies and publicized terms that determine their social status and label them 'refugees', 'asylum seekers', 'clandestines', 'irregular/regular', and/or 'illegal'/'undocumented' migrants. Hierarchical differentiations determine migrants' unequal access to resources, autonomy, freedom of movement, decision-making power, material goods, services, status, discretionary time⁶, food, medical care, personal autonomy, education, safety from physical coercion, assault and work opportunities.

National politics reflect the official and general public attitude that migration and particularly irregular migration is one of the greatest problems in Malta. Political debate on immigration is still focused on matters of border control with little discussion on integration matters and civic participation. These cultural and political attitudes towards migrants reproduce self-protective mentalities and practices. This is particularly reflected in educational approaches that welcome migrant children in state schools on condition that they are willing to shape their identities according to a Maltese mainstream culture. Such politics of assimilation also reflect resistance to cultural hybridisation in Malta.

⁶ Discretionary time refers to the timing of processing migration permits and that of determining the migrants' status. This time differs across migrants across migrants according to their country of origin and / or political status.



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Appendix I

Some initiatives worth mentioning

Aġenzija Appoġġ renders its services to asylum seekers through an open centre, covering both the basic and social needs of these individuals, aiming to build a sense of community between asylum seekers themselves and empower them to become self-sufficient and independent, as well as being integrated into the Maltese society.

PASSI (Prepare Asylum Seekers and Society for Integration) is a European Union Programme Equal Project to promote the integration of asylum seekers into the labour market, fight discrimination and identify the good practices on multicultural and intercultural work.

EQUAL is a European Social Fund Community Initiative with one of its priorities being to help refugees gain access to labour markets, and help those facing repatriation with education and training which will be useful to them in their home country.

COPE – Coordination and Provision of welfare services in closed centres is a pilot project with the aim of supporting, assisted by funding from the EU, the processes of ensuring that Malta would have a modern network of reception centres.

OIWAS – Organisation for the integration and welfare of asylum seekers manages open centres and has contributed in the devising of a policy of immigration. It also provides the services of professionals like those of social workers, aims towards developing further social services in closed centres and identifies European funds.

An **UNHCR-Malta Country Agreement** has been signed with the purpose of officially opening an UNHCR office in Malta. In this way, the UNHCR can carry out its international protection and humanitarian assistance functions in favour of refugees and other persons of its concern in Malta. (I would present these as an Appendix.)

