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PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARIAT
FOR REFORMS AND EQUALITY

Socialisation

Integration Mapping Research

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Summary

The activity of mixing socially with others.

Compass: Manual for Human Rights Education with Young People, Council of Europe



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A positive interaction does not require the absence of disagreement, but rather the resolution of issues where all parties of the interaction recognise each other's value in society and seek to create an understanding



1. Socialisation and the link between Migration, Socialisation and Belonging

1.1 Socialisation

Socialisation can have various meanings. In psychology, socialisation is broadly defined as a process whereby an individual learns to adjust to a group or society and to behave in a manner that is approved by that group or society¹. In sociology, it is seen as a process of developing one's capacities for human expression through social relationships².

In this report, the more colloquially used meaning of socialisation as “*the activity of mixing socially with others*”³ will be used throughout. References to socialisation will, therefore, refer to socialisation as one's rapport with society in general, meaning one's relationships within society, such as with neighbours, teachers, service providers and public institutions. This differs from the psychological and sociological perspective of socialisation, and will rather focus on the social interactions and relationships of migrants within their host society.

In the context of socialisation and migration, interactions are the daily processes by which migrants engage with one another, and with individuals and the overall host society⁴. Such interactions can occur

between individuals and between different groups of people, where individual and personal interactions of migrants represent an important aspect of engagement with civil society organisations and the state⁵.

A Council of Europe policy document builds on the premise that the desired socialisation of migrants consists of diverse positive interactions with other individuals and the wider society, where social cohesion, belonging and integration are achieved⁶. The term “*positive interactions*” refers to processes that help individuals build networks, which would in turn lead to relationships beyond mere tolerated co-existence. This includes stakeholders actively supporting the process by which migrants can build and strengthen positive and healthy social networks in their host society, which in turn creates a more cohesive society.

Some interactions, though with the positive intent to support the socialisation of migrants, may involve dialogue that leads to disagreement or conflict, but this can be a key aspect to interaction in some situations. A positive interaction does not require the absence of disagreement, but rather the resolution of issues where all parties of the interaction recognise each other's value in society and seek to create an understanding on the basis of mutual respect. These processes foster a sense of belonging as all parties work towards the integration of migrants into the host society.

1 Grusec, Joan E ; Davidov, Maayan, Integrating Different Perspectives on Socialization Theory and Research: A Domain-Specific Approach, 2010.

2 Nathan Rousseau, Society explained: an introduction to sociology, 2014.

3 Oxford University Press. Lexico.com

4 Council of Europe, Andrew Orton, Building migrants' belonging through positive interactions – A Guide for Policymakers and Practitioners, 2012.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

1.2 What is the Link between Socialisation, Migration, and Integration?

The issues of socialisation, migration and integration are heavily interlinked, where integration cannot be fully achieved without the successful socialisation of migrants, and vice versa. The aim of social cohesion in the context of integration can be supported through migrants' personal interactions in the ongoing process of socialisation⁷. Integration policy significantly affects the ways in which migrants are able to interact with their host country's society, and the subsequent perception the national population has of migrants. The extent to which migrants can form social connections and networks with the host society is a major indicator of their social inclusion and how successful socialisation and integration policy have been.

If migrants are granted the opportunities to engage in positive social interactions in all areas of their lives, such as in their neighbourhoods, workplaces, educational institutes and social spaces, it will foster a sense of belonging and social cohesion. Positive interactions between migrants and host communities build stronger cooperative relationships, which surpasses a relationship of merely tolerating one another⁸. A recent study found that positive attitudes towards migrants were linked to interactions and communication that build strong social ties, as opposed to the frequency of these interactions. It was found that whilst migrants have frequent interactions in the neighbourhood or at the market, this did not lead

to stronger community ties, whilst interactions at the workplace led to much stronger interpersonal ties⁹.

Without this interaction, migrants often live parallel lives to the citizens of their host society and have limited relationships with others in society. In the absence of interaction with each other, be them normal or otherwise, prejudicial sentiments and inaccurate stereotypes are likely to grow within the host society, which drastically undermines social cohesion, prevents migrants from enjoying their rights, and limits their opportunities to integrate into society¹⁰.

1.3 Actors Involved

1.3.1 The State and Policymakers

In any host country, the state, policymakers, and practitioners represent some of the main actors in the socialisation of migrants. Policymakers' actions, or lack thereof, at a local or national level can contribute to the undermining of migrant interactions and socialisations, influencing the possibility that such interactions occur, and the form of such interactions. Policymakers must, therefore, strategically promote positive interactions to foster and enhance the overall socialisation and integration of migrants into host societies if real social cohesion is to be achieved¹¹.

Locally, there are a number of ministries, government agencies and institutions involved in migration policy

7 Council of Europe, Andrew Orton, Building migrants' belonging through positive interactions – A Guide for Policymakers and Practitioners, 2012.

8 Ibid.

9 IMREF, Understanding Relations between Local Communities and Transit Migrants in Gao and Agadez, 2021, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/IMREF_Understanding%20Community-Migrant%20Relations%20in%20Gao%20and%20Agadez_Report.pdf.

10 Council of Europe, Andrew Orton, Building migrants' belonging through positive interactions – A Guide for Policymakers and Practitioners, 2012.

11 Ibid.

directly, such as the ministries responsible for home affairs and justice. Whilst the ministry proposes legislation and issues government policies in the area of migration, it is the agencies and institutions that implement and interpret such legislation and policy, whilst also formulating their own policies that regulate their work.

A key actor in the legal process of migration is the Expatriates Unit of Identity Malta, responsible for issuing residence documents to migrants¹². With regard to refugees, the International Protection Agency (IPA) is responsible for receiving, processing and determining applications for international protection in Malta.¹³ The Agency for the Welfare of the Asylum Seekers (AWAS)¹⁴ is another key actor in the asylum process, implementing national legislation and policy concerning the welfare of asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection in Malta, including managing reception facilities. AWAS also provides information programmes regarding employment, housing, health, welfare and education, and promotes government schemes related to resettlement voluntary returns¹⁵.

While other ministries, such as the ministries responsible for health, social welfare, housing and education are not directly responsible for immigration matters, their legislation and policies directly affect the everyday lives of migrants.

1.3.2 Non-Governmental Organisations

Other key stakeholders in the area of migrant integration and socialisation are non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working with, or led, by migrant communities. These NGOs directly assist migrant communities in furthering the enjoyment and protection of their rights, and acting as advocates for reform in policy and legislation. Furthermore, they could be key partners with government stakeholders in the implementation of the government's integration policy.

1.3.3 International Organisations

In addition to NGOs and national organisations, there are many international organisations that work in the area of migrant and refugee rights. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)¹⁶ works to improve aspects of the Maltese asylum system, monitoring access to protection and asylum conditions in Malta, and advocating for an inclusive and sensitive asylum system and legislation. The International Organisation for Migration (IOM)¹⁷ has a number of projects and programmes in the area of refugee and migrant rights and integration, including promoting awareness-raising campaigns which are a key aspect of socialisation as misinformation can lead to the social exclusion and discrimination of migrants.

12 Identity Malta Website: <https://www.identitymalta.com/unit/expatriates-unit/> <accessed 29 April 2022>.

13 International Protection Agency Website: <https://homeaffairs.gov.mt/en/MHAS-Departments/International%20Protection%20Agency/Pages/Refugee.aspx#Background> <accessed 29 April 2022>.

14 AWAS Website: <https://homeaffairs.gov.mt/en/MHAS-Departments/awas/Pages/AWAS.aspx> <accessed 29 April 2022>.

15 Ibid.

16 UNHCR Website: <https://www.unhcr.org/mt/> <accessed 29 April 2022>.

17 International Organisation for Migration Website: <https://malta.iom.int/who-we-are> <accessed 29 April 2022>.

A notable barrier to migrant socialisation is the absence of necessary skills to access education, the labour market and subsequently to engage in intercultural social interactions



2. Socialisation of Migrants in Malta

2.1 Patterns and Problems

Migrants often have to rebuild their social networks when moving to a new country, which can be a challenging task. In addition to the lack of social connections, and the cultural shock they may experience, their ability to form new social connections and engage in intercultural socialisation can be significantly hindered through language barriers, as many migrants in Malta cannot understand nor speak Maltese or English very well¹⁸. In addition to the fact that language barriers act as an obstacle to socialisation, they also have the effect of hindering the understanding of necessary information regarding the asylum process, access to documentation, and the ability to access education and the labour market¹⁹. This situation is exacerbated by the physical isolation of migrants in open centres and isolated communities with limited opportunities to improve language skills or engage in intercultural socialisation.

A notable barrier to migrant socialisation is the absence of necessary skills to access education, the labour market and subsequently to engage in intercultural social interactions. These include illiteracy, a lack of IT skills, and, as previously mentioned, language barriers. Illiteracy is extremely prevalent amongst asylum seekers and refugees, impacting the likelihood of individuals considering pursuing education in Malta. As working and surviving are the main priorities of migrants, there are less incentives to attend literacy courses, in addition

to the financial and time commitments which reinforce this idea²⁰. Lack of employment is often seen as a key factor in social exclusion and, as seen above, refugees often face obstacles due to level of English, appropriate skills and qualifications and racism.

Another major barrier to the socialisation, belonging and integration of migrants into Maltese society is the social perceptions of migration and the commonly negative and misinformed sentiments associated with migrants. One way this has presented itself is with the differing experiences of the ‘*migrant*’, who is commonly perceived as having few economic resources, versus the wealthy ‘*expat*’, which is typically reserved for migrants with more economic resources, usually EU nationals²¹. Despite the fact that both groups may emigrate from their country in search of a better or different life, education or employment, the resources and societal treatment of “*expats*” is significantly better than that of other migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. This leads to the ‘*othering*’ of refugees and asylum seekers, contributes to the inequalities they face, and prevents their socialisation and integration²².

In 2015, the Ministry for Social Dialogue, Consumer Affairs and Civil Liberties (MSDC) launched the Mind

18 UNESCO, *Protecting the Right to Education for Refugees*, 2017.

19 Kopin, *Adult Migrant Education in Malta*, 2015.

20 aditus foundation, *Education 2021, Turning the Tables*, Human Rights Directorate, 2021.

21 Ministry of Social Dialogue and Civil Liberties, *Malta: Perceptions about TCN and Immigration in Malta*, 2015.

22 Alexander Frame, *Rethinking Migrant Socialisation in the Light of Critical Intercultural Communication: Proposals to Favour the Integration Process in France*, 2019.

D Gap project, and produced a framework document *Towards a National Migrant Integration Strategy 2015-2020*²³. As part of the consultation process, the Ministry of Social Dialogue and Civil Liberties in Malta commissioned a research project which included the carrying out of a survey.

In the survey, 44.4% of the respondents revealed that they do not know any person of a foreign nationality who lives in Malta by name. It also showed that those who had recent contact with a migrant generally had more positive perceptions of migrants and their social integration, and this was especially true for those who were on a first-name basis with a migrant²⁴. Conversely, those who were against the social integration of migrants were generally unsure of the meaning of integration and had little to no contact with the migrant community²⁵.



Source: Maltatoday, How unfamiliarity breeds contempt on migration and integration, 2015

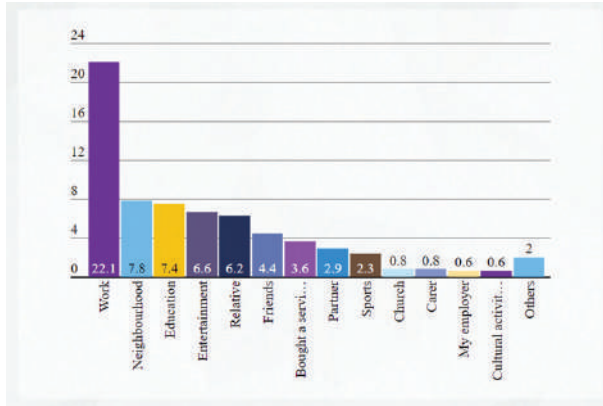
The results from this survey highlight the importance of supporting the social interactions of migrants and Maltese nationals to, in turn, dismantle negative social perceptions and enhance migrant integration and belonging²⁶. Unsurprisingly, the survey found that the most common social interaction came in the form of work, followed by within the neighbourhood and education.

23 Ministry for Social Dialogue, Consumer Affairs and Civil Liberties, *Mind D Gap: Towards a National Migrant Integration Strategy*, 2015, https://meae.gov.mt/en/Public_Consultations/MSDC/Documents/2015%20-%20Integration/MSD_Report%20booklet_JF_rev4.pdf.

24 Ministry of Social Dialogue and Civil Liberties, *Malta: Perceptions about TCN and Immigration in Malta*, 2015.

25 Ibid.

26 Ministry for Social Dialogue, Consumer Affairs and Civil Liberties, *Mind D Gap: Towards a National Migrant Integration Strategy*, 2015, https://meae.gov.mt/en/Public_Consultations/MSDC/Documents/2015%20-%20Integration/MSD_Report%20booklet_JF_rev4.pdf;



Source: Maltatoday, How unfamiliarity breeds contempt on migration and integration, 2015

There is often a lack of motivation for participation in interaction with migrants, an issue that policymakers must address to increase the opportunities for positive interactions. Although the workplace is the most common area of interaction, it is important to support socialisation in other areas, to avoid exacerbating the isolation of those who are not employed, such as stay-at-home mothers.

2.2 Policies and Practices

One crucial aspect that affects the socialisation of migrants in Malta is the policy of detaining large numbers of migrants and asylum seekers which consequently bars any form of positive interaction with the local community. Detainees are completely isolated from Maltese society and face complete social exclusion. Malta's harsh detention policy was found to fuel *“the perception of these people as criminals and the levels of racism*

*and xenophobia among the general population”*²⁷.

Furthermore, the seclusion of refugees and asylum seekers in open centres, such as the Hal Far open

- 27 European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, Third report on Malta, 2007. Malta's detention regime as again called into question by the Council of Europe's anti-torture Committee that called on Malta to improve the treatment of detained migrants in 2021, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/cpt/-/council-of-europe-s-anti-torture-committee-calls-on-malta-to-improve-the-treatment-of-detained-migrants>.

CASE STUDY: Specific Residence Authorisation

A tangible example of how government policy can affect the socialisation of migrants by barring them from any form of social activity in Malta is the amendment of the Specific Residence Authorisation (SRA) Policy. The 2018 SRA Policy granted residency to migrants who had been through the asylum process unsuccessfully and who, unable to return to their country of origin, had been working and residing in Malta for an extended period of time. The policy was amended in 2020 and effectively disallowed any new applications from January 2021.

The SRA Policy was based on the premise that it would help in *“reducing social exclusion among migrant communities and recognising the efforts of those migrants who are actively contributing to our society”*. The recent rescinding of the SRA for new applicants represented a regressive change in Maltese policy and migrants who could have fallen into the eligibility criteria find themselves without having the opportunity to become regular.

Refugees and persons with subsidiary protection are granted the same right to access the labour market as Maltese nationals





As mentioned above, although persons with protection have access to employment, there are still significant difficulties including appropriate language and professional skills

centres, render it increasingly difficult for migrants to engage in positive social interactions in Maltese society. These centres run the risk of developing into ghettoised communities and will severely undermine any state integration efforts and jeopardise prospects of social cohesion due to the fact that the migrant residents have extremely limited positive interactions with the local community²⁸.

2.2.1 Labour Market Access

Barriers in accessing the labour market and lack of employment are often seen as key factors in social exclusion. Any policy to promote social cohesion needs to ensure that migrants residing in Malta have equal access to employment with regard to recognition of qualifications, access to training, employment conditions, and salary. They need to be aware of their rights and protected from exploitation.

Refugees and persons with subsidiary protection are granted the same right to access the labour market as Maltese nationals²⁹. Persons with SRA, Temporary Humanitarian Protection and Temporary Protection

also have access to the labour market. Third-country nationals need to be granted a single work permit in order to be able to residence and work in Malta. A new policy disallows asylum seekers originating from safe countries to access the labour market before 9 months from the logging of their application with IPA. The same policy prohibits rejected asylum seekers from safe countries from accessing the labour market altogether³⁰.

As mentioned above, although persons with protection have access to employment, there are still significant difficulties including appropriate language and professional skills, qualifications and racism. Furthermore, although migrants are required to pay taxes on their income, they are excluded from many social welfare benefits that Maltese nationals may benefit from, such as pensions and employment insurance³¹.

The European Network Against Racism (ENAR) have highlighted that many non-EU migrants face difficulties in the recognition of their qualification. The process of validating their documents may take up to five or six months, and those who work in professions that require warrants to work must go through an additional process

28 Fondazzjoni Suret il-Bniedem, Housing Asylum Seekers, <https://www.pfcmalta.org/uploads/1/2/1/7/12174934/housasyseekers.pdf>.

29 Regulation 20(c), Procedural Standards for Granting and Withdrawing International Protection Regulations, S.L 420.07.

30 Jobsplus, Employment Licences Unit Guidelines for Clients January 2021, <https://jobsplus.gov.mt/resources/fileprovider.aspx?fileId=26854>.

31 ECRE, aditus foundation, *Asylum Information Database, Country Report: Malta*, 2021 <accessed 29 April 2022>.

before they are able to become employed³². UNHCR Malta has also recognised the difficulties faced by migrants in the labour market, also citing the barriers they face in the recognition of their academic or professional qualifications, and the negative responses they face during the process of such recognition.

2.2.2 Gender

Women can be the main drivers of social cohesion between migrant and host communities, whilst at the same time are generally excluded from social cohesion due to societal expectations and prejudices regarding their perceived roles in society, both in the country of origin and of destination³³. As a result, they are more likely to be excluded from the community and from developing interpersonal ties, reducing their access to decent work, education and health care, as well as exposing them to violence and trafficking³⁴.

The exclusion of women from male-dominated places of positive interactions, such as places of work and sports events, generally make them feel more isolated and may lead them to believe that they are not welcome or viewed positively by the local community³⁵.

The Maltese government offers a free childcare scheme for parents / guardians who work or are

pursuing full-time education. This applies to families where all parents are working and paying social security contributions, and parents who are pursuing education that results in a recognised qualification³⁶. In many cases with migrant families, women assume the full-time caretaker role, and are unable to qualify for this scheme, furthering the social isolation of migrant women. Maltese and foreign mothers live separate and parallel lives, without realising their shared experiences as mothers, and migrant mothers do not have as many opportunities to form networks with other mothers³⁷. The exclusion of migrant women who are full-time caretakers from accessing the childcare scheme decreases their chances to expand their skills and social networks in pursuing an education or getting a job. If these were available to full-time parents, migrant women would have vastly more opportunities for intercultural social interaction with Maltese women in educational institutions and in the workplace.

2.2.3 Education

For all children and young adults, education represents one of the most important opportunities for positive interactions and socialisation. This is especially true for migrant children, who arrive in the host country with limited or no social networks, but who often face barriers in accessing education.

All beneficiaries of international protection are granted access to free and compulsory state education until 16 years of age, and are entitled to apply to the post-secondary school and then the University of Malta

32 ENAR Shadow Report (2018), Racism & Discrimination in Employment in Europe 2013-2017 https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/library-document/enar-shadow-report-racism-discrimination-employment-europe-2013-2017_en.

33 IOM, Integration and Social Cohesion, Global Compact Thematic Paper, 2017, https://www.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd1486/files/our_work/ODG/GCM/IOM-Thematic-Paper-Integration-and-Social-Cohesion.pdf.

34 UNDP, Promoting empowerment, inclusion and social cohesion on International Migrants Day, 2021, <https://www.undp.org/blog/promoting-empowerment-inclusion-and-social-cohesion-international-migrants-day>.

35 IMREF, Understanding Relations between Local Communities and Transit Migrants in Gao and Agadez, 2021.

36 Ministry for Education Malta, A Guide to the Free Childcare Scheme: <https://education.gov.mt/freechildcare/Documents/FCS%20leaflet%202020.pdf> <accessed 29 April 2022>.

37 Information provided by an NGO case worker, 2022.

under the same conditions as all other third-country nationals regarding application procedures and fees³⁸. Under Article 13(2) of the International Protection Act³⁹, and also the Reception Regulations⁴⁰, asylum seekers are also granted access to free state-funded education and training under the same conditions as Maltese nationals. This includes primary and secondary education up to the age of 16. The Migrant Learners' Unit within the Ministry for Education and Employment is mandated to promote the inclusion of 'newly arrived learners' into the education system through the provision of information about the Maltese education system⁴¹. The governmental 'I Belong' programme run by the Intercultural and Anti-Racism Unit offers English and Maltese language courses and cultural and social orientation to facilitate integration. These services are available to all migrants, including asylum seekers⁴².

In previous years, the Department of Education followed a strict policy that all children must attend school, which meant that the registrations of most migrant children were accepted, regardless of their parents' residence status in Malta. However, more recently, undocumented migrant children face difficulties in accessing education, which drastically affects their socialisation in Malta, and the formation of their social networks. Unaccompanied minors, and children of

38 ECRE, aditus foundation, *Asylum Information Database, Country Report: Malta*, 2021 <https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/malta/content-international-protection/employment-and-education/access-education/> <accessed 21 April 2022>.

39 Article 13(2) of the International Protection Act, CAP 420 of the Laws of Malta.

40 Reception of Asylum seekers Regulations, S.L. 420.06.

41 Migrant Learners Unit Website: <https://migrantlearnersunit.gov.mt/en/Pages/About%20us/about-us.aspx> <accessed 29 April 2022>.

42 Human Rights Directorate, I BELONG courses: <https://humanrights.gov.mt/en/Pages/Intercultural%20and%20Anti-Racism%20Unit/I-Belong-Courses.aspx> <accessed 29 April 2022>.

CASE STUDY: Impact of Covid-19

The Maltese Superintendent of Public Health used her powers under the Public Health Ordinance to detain migrants arriving by boat for an indefinite period during Covid-19. Furthermore, migrants were not allowed to disembark from rescue vessels for over 3 months with the pretext of the public health concerns.

In practice, this resulted in the complete and indefinite isolation of the rescued migrants and detainees from all communication with the outside world, including their family, NGOs, the media and legal advisors. Conditions within the detention centres and on board the vessels out at sea were reported as deplorable, with reports of known positive Covid-19 cases remaining with those who had not been infected, and no space to maintain social distancing. In a visit to Malta in 2021, The Committee for the Prevention Against Torture had noted that the living conditions, regimes, lack of due process safeguards, treatment of vulnerable groups and some specific Covid-19 measures undertaken were so problematic that they may amount to inhuman and degrading treatment.

This situation highlighted the vulnerability of migrants during global crises., as being amongst the most vulnerable to social isolation.

In this case, an unaccompanied minor needs a legal guardian to apply for asylum on their behalf, to authorise the registration in educational institutions



undocumented migrants, are disproportionately affected by the implementation of a new requirement for both parents having valid residence permits in Malta in order to register their child in primary or secondary education⁴³. This is also problematic when a child's parents change their residence status mid-way through the scholastic year or course, as these children were often denied the right to sit end of term exams.

Furthermore, it was reported that many of the teachers that were offering languages courses for migrants in open centres were not given adequate training and did not have access to adequate structures to effectively tackle the issues faced in the classes⁴⁴. This may act as a barrier to integration, which also spills out into local schools that host children from migrant backgrounds. It was found that in certain districts, the population of children with a migrant background at school ranges from 50% to 70% of the whole student population, with some schools hosting as many as 38 different nationalities⁴⁵.

2.2.4 Unaccompanied Minors

The socialisation opportunities for unaccompanied minors are often heavily impacted due to flaws and backlog in the asylum system. In this regard, any unaccompanied minor in Malta must be appointed with a legal guardian who would have the legal authority to care for the minor. In this case, an unaccompanied minor needs a legal guardian to apply for asylum on their behalf, to authorise the registration in educational institutions and to carry out any activity that would need

parental approval.

The ineffectiveness of the system designated to assign legal guardians to unaccompanied minors has resulted in the extremely long delays for the appointment of legal guardians⁴⁶. When these minors are aged 15 to 17, the delays in the system means they are unlikely to be appointed a guardian before they become adults⁴⁷. This affects their ability to register for many educational courses in Malta, excluding those offered by NGOs.

The delays in the appointment of legal guardian result in unaccompanied minors being excluded from pivotal education, socialisation and network building.



This may act as a barrier to integration, which also spills out into local schools that host children from migrant backgrounds



43 Information provided by an NGO case worker, 2022.

44 Times of Malta, Teachers schooling migrants to help them integrate not given the right training, 2018: <https://timesofmalta.com/articles/view/teachers-schooling-migrants-to-help-them-integrate-not-given-the-right.684377> <accessed 29 April 2022>.

45 Ibid.

46 ECRE, aditus foundation, *Asylum Information Database, Country Report: Malta*, 2021 <https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/malta/reception-conditions/employment-and-education/access-education/> <accessed 29 April 2022>.

47 Information provided by an NGO case worker, 2022.

Policymakers and state actors are responsible for developing skills for interaction between migrants and members of Maltese society. Interacting with those who differ from you can be extremely difficult, for migrants and nationals alike. This may be due to varying customs or cultural norms which causes them to act in different or unfamiliar ways. It may also be due to the anxiety and uncertainty that migrants and refugees face when moving into a new country. This can often result in misunderstanding and conflict where misinformation arises leading to negative perceptions of the other party.

Intercultural communication skills are key to effectively communicate and facilitate positive interactions⁴⁸. Early support and building of positive relationships in the host community can assist the migrant to regain a sense of control and belonging. Furthermore, with regards to refugees and displaced persons, the possibility to connect with diaspora communities is of particular importance. However, it must also be kept in mind that some refugees might not want to make connections with their diaspora community or other refugee communities due to their personal circumstance.

A wide range of spaces, places, services and occasions can provide opportunities for initial encounters and ongoing social interactions and relationship building to occur. Everyday activities, such as going to work, the park or public buildings, and special events such as local festivals, can provide these opportunities. Interactions may also occur out of shared interests, experiences and concerns, such as parenting, sport, neighbourhood improvement or concern, and even food. Many policies

limit the potential for these encounters to take place, with segregated neighbourhoods, support services and public buildings providing different services on certain days to different groups. These locations for interactions can be redesigned to initiate new opportunities and create new spaces to facilitate interactions and migrant socialisation⁴⁹.

Positive interactions for migrants must help empower migrants, building their confidence, skills, access to opportunities, and help strengthen their social networks. Positive interactions must enable Maltese society to treat migrants with respect, and also recognise their important contributions. It is key that policymakers focus on inclusive migration and asylum policies, as well as migrant integration, as they can heavily influence the presence and nature of these interactions. It is clear that positive intercultural interactions are a key part of changing public perceptions and the inclusion and acceptance of migrants into Maltese society⁵⁰.

48 Council of Europe, Andrew Orton, Building migrants' belonging through positive interactions – A Guide for Policymakers and Practitioners, 2012.

49 Ibid.

50 Ibid.

3. Best Practices of Socialisation, Integration & Recommendations

3.1 Future Recommendations

In establishing a coherent policy or programme to encourage and enhance the social connections between migrants, refugees and the Maltese communities a number of factors need to be kept in mind. In order for effective socialisation, there needs to be certain basic services and arrangements in place that support newly-arrived migrants and refugees for them to have a greater sense of motivation to become part of their new community⁵¹. A well-equipped system that provides basic integration resources and specialised support services is necessary in order to make connections in the host community. A number of factors can affect a migrant's interaction with the host community on arrival and could become barriers to the building of networks; these include lack of language fluency, health conditions, psychosocial issues, age and gender, and their lack of family.

In the long-term, access to services should be on the same level and quality as that provided to nationals, reinforcing the reality that migrants are effectively part and parcel of the local community.

3.1.1 General Recommendations to Support the Socialisation of Migrants

- Ensure that unaccompanied minors are appointed a legal guardian expeditiously.

- Establish migrant resource centres or information desks in the social security offices across Malta.
- Mainstream access of migrants to public services, such as Identity Malta.
- Increase of awareness-raising and anti-xenophobia campaigns by the national equality body or equality directorate.
- Implement a capacity building programme on migrant integration for the staff of national and local authorities.
- Support research and analysis projects aimed at improving existing migrant integration policies and programmes.
- Increase government support to partners and stakeholders that assist migrants, such as NGOs, migrant-led organisations and volunteers.
- Have available pre-departure information for migrant workers to ease transition into Malta.

3.1.2 Social Initiatives

- Encourage and support local festivals, cultural and sports events with themes that encourage intercultural participation and celebrate diversity in the local community.
- Support events and activities at community centres with different communities to facilitate positive interactions.
- Support charities that offer material aid in order for them to provide inclusive services for both migrants and locals experiencing poverty.

⁵¹ UNHCR, Integration Handbook for Resettled Refugees, <https://www.unhcr.org/handbooks/ih/social-connections/promoting-integration-through-social-connections>, <accessed 29 April 2022>.

3.1.3 Education

- Allow for the universal access to education for all children, irrespective of their, or their parents', legal status in Malta.
- Implement a national migrant education strategy across all primary, secondary and tertiary educational institutions, including training courses for academic and non-academic staff.
- Promote diversity in national libraries by stocking a wider range of books relevant to different cultures.
- Reform of educational syllabus in primary and secondary schools to raise awareness and discussion on refugees, migrant integration and positive social interactions between migrants and nationals.
- Provide clear and up-to-date information in different languages on the educational system, schooling options and expectations for migrant parents.
- Promote the active involvement of parents with literacy courses for adult migrants.
- Introduce an effective mechanism for persons with protection to access university and higher education.

3.1.4 Gender

- Offer language and vocational training specifically targeting migrant women together with supporting measures, such as childcare, during the training.
- Create the environment in which public and private employers can utilize the skilled labour potential of migrant women.
- Set up infrastructures to advise women with regard their rights, including employment and maternity rights.
- Extend eligibility criteria for free childcare scheme to include migrant women seeking employment.

3.1.5 Labour Market Access

- Promote labour market integration of migrants and private sector engagement.
- Introduce incentives for employer to employ refugees and persons with subsidiary protection.
- Establish a specialised body to assess the skills of refugees in order for them to access skilled labour employment.
- Introduce a system of vocational testing for migrants and refugees in order for them to access employment.
- Allow for change in employment without the risk of the migrant becoming undocumented.
- Establish a strong anti-exploitation framework which would include inspectors, complaint systems and protection for exploited workers.
- Allow for asylum seekers and undocumented migrants from safe countries to access employment.

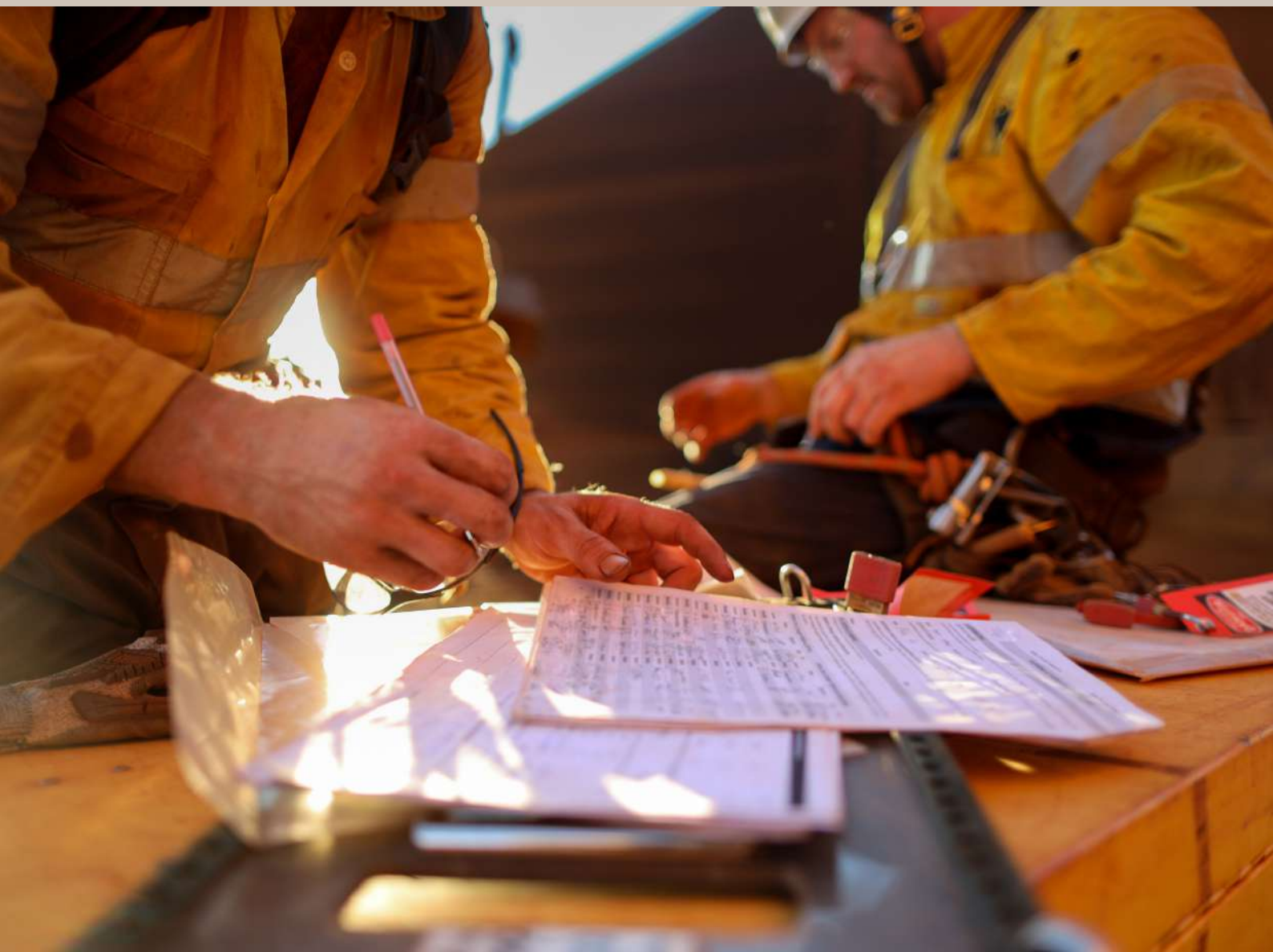
3.1.6 Visibility

- Establish programmes that encourage contact between Maltese and migrants in local communities that would affect the perceptions of each other in a positive way.
- Make information services reliable and easily accessible to Maltese in order to combat misconceptions that may exist regarding migration and migrant communities in Malta.
- Expose the local community to the life stories of migrants to combat the dehumanisation of migrants and to create a more welcoming community.
- Encourage national media outlets to mainstream migrants to participating in radio and TV programmes, not solely as “migrants” but as members of a community with a skill, expertise, or opinion.

3.1.7 Proposed Policy & Legislation Reform

- Remove automatic detention for migrants who enter the country irregularly.
- Reintroduce SRA or an alternative that grants migrants a path to regularisation after living and working in Malta for a period of time.
- Reintroduce the right to work for asylum seekers from safe countries on arrival.
- Facilitate access to citizenship for migrants and persons with international protection.
- Amend the legislation regulating single work permits in order to allow for better protection for migrant workers.

Amend the legislation regulating single work permits in order to allow for better protection for migrant workers



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GOVERNMENT OF MALTA
PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARIAT
FOR REFORMS AND EQUALITY



Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund 2014-2020

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Sustainable Management of Migration Flows





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