



Integrating Immigrant Children into Schools in Europe

Country Reports



INTEGRATING IMMIGRANT CHILDREN INTO SCHOOLS IN EUROPE

MALTA

NATIONAL DESCRIPTION – 2003/04

The national contributions contained on this CD-Rom and on the Eurydice website formed the basis for the comparative study on the integration at school of immigrant children in Europe. Each contribution has exactly the same structure with four main sections entitled as follows:

- 1) National definitions and demographic context of immigration
- 2) Measures offering school-based support to immigrant children and their families
- 3) Intercultural approaches in education
- 4) Evaluation, pilot projects, debates and forthcoming reforms

Contributions are available in English and, in the case of some countries, in French.

1. NATIONAL DEFINITIONS AND DEMOGRAPHIC CONTEXT OF IMMIGRATION

1.1. National Definitions and Legislative Sources

Malta has never been a destination for immigrants to work and settle in. Within the Maltese context, immigration is a comparatively recent phenomenon, to the extent that the term is not found in official statistics. The National Statistics Office uses the terms 'returned migrants' and 'non-Maltese nationals'. The former refers to Maltese nationals returning to Malta after having emigrated to another country. The term 'non-Maltese nationals' refers to persons of other nationalities settling in Malta. In their majority, these settlers are British nationals who make Malta their retirement home. The fact that English is the second language in Malta has facilitated this inflow of British nationals. There is also an inflow of migrant workers, who are given a work permit for a definite period when the skills requested by the employer are locally absent or in short supply. The work permit may be renewed. Migrant worker means any person who carries out or has carried out an activity in Malta as an employed or self-employed person, and who is a citizen of an Agreement State ⁽¹⁾.

The main legislative instrument that regulates immigration is the Immigration Act, which was first enacted in 1970. The original act has undergone several amendments since then to meet changing national and international circumstances. There is also the Maltese Citizenship Act (1964), which has undergone a number of amendments, the most recent in 2000. Most notably the amendments were made to address dual citizenship.

A more recent phenomenon is clandestine migration of people from the southern shores of the Mediterranean to Europe. These immigrants apply for refugee status to the Refugee Commissioner in Malta. The Refugee Act (2001), which incorporates the obligations assumed by Malta under the 1951 UN Convention and the 1967 Protocol, both relating to the Status of Refugees, provides the framework for procedures and policies regarding refugees and asylum seekers. Persons recognised as refugees and those granted humanitarian protection are granted a residence permit and a work permit when requested. In the case of unaccompanied children under 18 years of age, local legislation comes into effect, and the state assumes the role of guardian of such children.

Children born in Malta after 1 August 1989 do not acquire Maltese citizenship, unless at least one of their parents is a Maltese citizen.

1.2. Rights to Education and to Support Measures

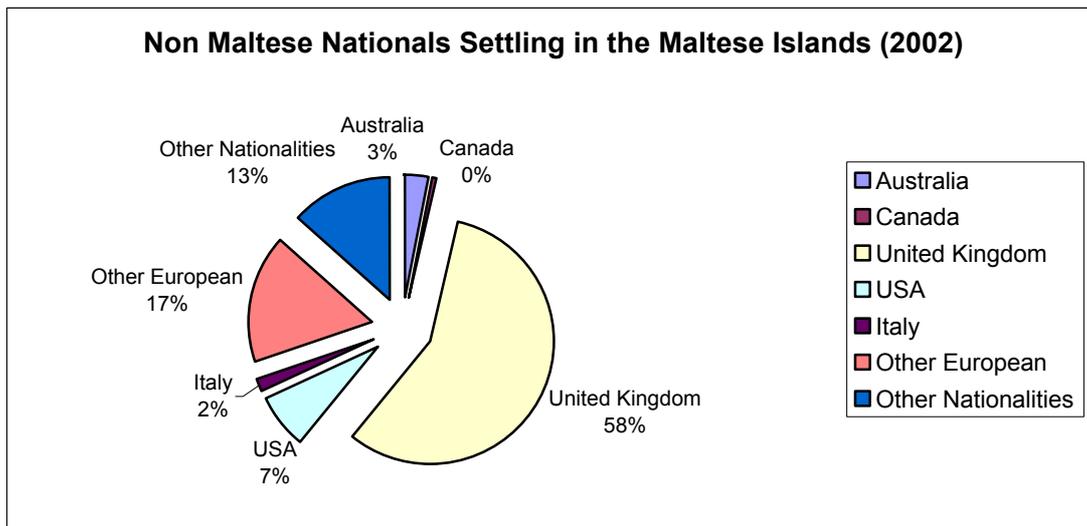
Legal notice 259/2002 entitled 'Migrant workers (Child Education) regulations' defines 'children of migrant workers' as any child residing in Malta for whom school attendance is compulsory under Maltese law and who is a dependent of a migrant worker'. The legislation has become operative as from October 2003. All children of migrant workers within the compulsory school age group (5 to 16 years) will be provided with the school-based measures contemplated in the legislation, among them support for the learning of any of the official languages. The legislation also provides for the teaching of the language and culture of the country of origin of immigrant children.

Persons recognised as refugees and those granted humanitarian protection are entitled to have access to state education and training (the Refugees Act, Act XX of 2000).

(1) 'Agreement means an agreement between states or between groups of states to which Malta is a party, reciprocally granting to citizens of such states or their dependents the right to enter, remain and reside in and leave the country of such state, to move freely within such states for such period as may be established in the agreement and to work or establish, provide and receive services therein; and 'Agreement State' and 'citizen of an Agreement State' shall be construed accordingly; and where a state is a party to such an Agreement subject to modifications and adaptations, a citizen of an Agreement State shall also be subject to such modifications or adaptations as may be prescribed' (Legal Notice 259, 2002).

1.3. Demographic Information

In 2002, non-Maltese residents represented 2.6 % of the population. During the same year, 533 non-Maltese nationals settled in Malta (see table below for their origins). The majority (57 %) of these non-Maltese settlers were British nationals. Since Malta is a small island, with very short distances between towns and villages, one cannot delineate settlement patterns similar to those in larger countries, where one may find a large community of immigrants within a city suburb. However, the National Statistics Office observes that during 2002 a majority of non-Maltese settlers took up residence in the North Harbour District. This District incorporates thirteen towns and suburbs.



During the 2002/03 school year there were about 165 children of non-Maltese nationality, representing 30 different nationalities, attending state schools (ISCED 0, 1&2). They comprised 0.4 % of the total pupil population of about 43 200. During 1998/99 and 1999/2000 the number of immigrant pupils in state pre-primary, primary and secondary schools was 498 and 583 respectively. However, these figures have to be interpreted with some caution since some of the children may have dual nationality, being children of returned Maltese migrants.

The National Statistics Office currently collates only data regarding non-Maltese nationals settling in Malta (i.e. non-Maltese settlers). Data regarding refugees, asylum seekers, immigrant workers and illegal immigrants are not available.

2. MEASURES OFFERING SCHOOL-BASED SUPPORT TO IMMIGRANT CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES

There is no special provision as yet for children of immigrants. They are integrated into schools and are not deemed to be children with special needs. The formulation of educational policy for immigrant children is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education (see section 4 for planned future initiatives). The Education Division, the central authority responsible for education across the whole country, carries out the implementation of the policy. Central government provides the funding for the education of migrant children in state schools within the budget for education provision.

The education authorities are actively setting up the operational framework for the implementation of the measures envisaged in the legislation.

2.1. Reception and Guidance

The enrolment of children of refugees and irregularly resident immigrants in mainstream schools is co-ordinated centrally by an Education Officer, who also offers consultative support to schools admitting these children.

The enrolment of children of migrant workers is not co-ordinated in the same way as that of refugee children. Generally these children go to enrol directly in the school in the locality if children are of pre-primary and primary school age. The head of school then informs the Department of Operations. Children wishing to enrol in lower secondary education have to register with the Department of Operations and are then assigned to a secondary school on the basis of the place of residence of the migrant family. Secondary schools take students from designated catchment areas (a number of localities). This is the current state of affairs. These may change following the introduction of measures envisaged in the legislation.

2.2. Integration into School Learning

Pupils and students have always been accepted by and integrated into Maltese schools, even though no special or specific arrangements were in place. This is partly due to the fact that English is taught in Maltese schools from an early age, most lessons are carried out in English and also because all teachers can communicate in English.

It is envisaged that children who do not understand Maltese or English would be given support in the learning of one of the official languages. The actual form such support would take is still not finalised (see section 4).

2.3. Support for the Language, Culture and Religion of Origin

This kind of support is currently being developed (see section 4).

2.4. Adaptation of Daily School Life

There are no measures of this kind. Heads of school are responsible for dress code within their school. All schools in Malta have a school uniform. State schools do not provide meals during the school day. Pupils bring with them their home-prepared lunch.

2.5. Access to School Services and Special Financial Assistance

All children attending state schools are eligible for support from the Educational Welfare Service. From pre-primary up to the end of compulsory education Maltese children are not entitled to any financial aid in connection with their education.

Maltese children do not pay any school fees. Children of migrant workers will be given free tuition. (This is subject to a reciprocity agreement between Malta and the country of origin in the case of non-EU citizens). This provision has become operative as from October 2003 and effective as from 1 May 2004. Currently, the Ministry of Education provides free education to refugee children and also to children who are not legally resident in Malta.

2.6. Language Tuition for Parents and Families

The Department of Further Studies and Adult Education organises voluntary literacy courses in both basic Maltese and English for those immigrants wishing to learn either or both of the two languages. These courses are organised in the evening and are held in schools in the locality.

2.7. Information to Parents

There are currently no such measures specifically designed for immigrants.

3. INTERCULTURAL APPROACHES IN EDUCATION

3.1. Curriculum and School Activities

One of the main aims of the National Minimum Curriculum is to provide an educational experience that promotes certain fundamental values among students. One of these values is the respect for others and for the right of other people to enjoy freedom, peace, and security. The education system seeks to develop in pupils and students a sense of respect, co-operation and solidarity among cultures.

The National Minimum Curriculum is underpinned by fifteen principles that include an orientation to the above-mentioned values as well as references to them. The most direct reference to the value of celebrating differences is made in the principle 'Respect for Diversity'. The pedagogical approach must be 'based on respect for and the celebration of difference'. The curriculum also underscores the aspect of an inclusive education. It reiterates that 'society has a moral responsibility to affirm diversity if it believes in the broadening of democratic boundaries, in the fostering of a participatory culture...' (Ministry of Education, Creating the Future Together – National Minimum Curriculum 1999). These basic values are translated into the educational objectives of curricula at different levels of education.

In this regard, one of the objectives of pre-primary education in the realm of the child's socio-emotional development is to enhance the 'ability to trust others, appreciate difference, co-operate and respect the rights of others'.

Students can opt to take European Studies as from the third year of lower secondary education. This subject looks at Europe through five main themes: power and people; economic development, demography and social realities; Europeans and their environment and cultural heritage.

Other subjects such as geography, home economics, religion and social studies tackle various topics related to multiculturalism and immigrant populations. The teaching of languages at secondary level includes a cultural component as well as general information about the country.

3.2. Teacher Training

Initial teacher education tackles intercultural approaches in education and schools through the sociology of education. Sociology of education covers multi-ethnic issues as linked to education: e.g. children of refugees, or of returned migrants – and raise issues such as their rights, the need for the system to be aware of differences in culture, in religious beliefs, in language. The study units are obligatory. It is more consciousness-raising than anything else. The Faculty of Education also encourages students to carry out research on such issues.

4. EVALUATION, DEBATES AND FORTHCOMING REFORMS

4.1. Evaluation

The measures or approaches described in sections 2 and 3 have not yet been subject to evaluation.

4.2. Debates and Forthcoming Reforms

As highlighted in the opening sentence, Malta has never experienced an inflow of migrant workers together with their families; hence the demand for the provision of education services for children of migrant workers was non-existent. As a member of the EU, Malta assumes its share of responsibility regarding the inflow of migrant workers. In the context of this new responsibility the Maltese education authorities are developing the provisions for children of migrant workers.

- Tuition fees: Maltese children attending state schools do not pay any tuition fees. This facility will be extended to children of immigrant workers who are within the compulsory school age group. Children of immigrant workers will also benefit from all other facilities provided free to Maltese pupils/students.
- Language Policy: Malta has two official languages – Maltese and English. To facilitate the integration of immigrant children into both the school environment and the wider society, these languages will be taught to these pupils. During school hours, pupils will have access to the teaching of the English or Maltese language according to their needs, through a withdrawal system.
- Language and Culture of Country of Origin: the State will take measures within reasonable limits to facilitate the eventual re-integration of the children of immigrant workers into their Agreement States of origin. Schools will provide immigrant children with tuition in the language and culture of their country of origin. This will take place outside school hours. The Department of Student Services and International Relations will be managing this measure, supported by the Department of Curriculum Management.

Although the relevant legislation is in place the measures for immigrant children are still at the drawing board stage. Their implementation will probably take place by May 2004. The state will seek the co-operation of the country of origin of an immigrant worker to provide tuition in the language and culture of that country. The Department of Student Services and International Relations has been entrusted with the task of establishing links with the countries of origin of immigrant workers in order to initiate co-operation in implementing this measure.

The Education Division, through its directorates, will provide the support required by schools. The Department of Curriculum Management will provide support in the area of language teaching. The Department of Student Services and International Relations will establish contacts with the countries of origin of immigrant workers. Through these channels it should be able to provide teaching of the national language and culture of the country of origin of immigrant workers.