- ONE OF US -

Towards full integration of refugee children in local schools
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The views expressed in this publication are those of JRS Malta and do not necessarily represent the opinion or position of the members of the project Core Team or of the project funders.

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These Principles were adopted by the Justice and Home Affairs Council in November 2004 and form the foundations of EU initiatives in the field of integration.

**CBP 1** 'Integration is a dynamic, two-way process of mutual accommodation by all immigrants and residents of Member States'

**CBP 2** 'Integration implies respect for the basic values of the European Union'

**CBP 3** 'Employment is a key part of the integration process and is central to the participation of immigrants, to the contributions immigrants make to the host society, and to making such contributions visible'

**CBP 4** 'Basic knowledge of the host society’s language, history, and institutions is indispensable to integration; enabling immigrants to acquire this basic knowledge is essential to successful integration'

**CBP 5** 'Efforts in education are critical to preparing immigrants, and particularly their descendants, to be more successful and more active participants in society'

**CBP 6** 'Access for immigrants to institutions, as well as to public and private goods and services, on a basis equal to national citizens and in a non-discriminatory way is a critical foundation for better integration'

**CBP 7** 'Frequent interaction between immigrants and Member State citizens is a fundamental mechanism for integration. Shared forums, intercultural dialogue, education about immigrants and immigrant cultures, and stimulating living conditions in urban environments enhance the interactions between immigrants and Member State citizens'

**CBP 8** 'The practice of diverse cultures and religions is guaranteed under the Charter of Fundamental Rights and must be safeguarded, unless practices conflict with other inviolable European rights or with national law'

**CBP 9** 'The participation of immigrants in the democratic process and in the formulation of integration policies and measures, especially at the local level, supports their integration'

**CBP 10** 'Mainstreaming integration policies and measures in all relevant policy portfolios and levels of government and public services is an important consideration in public policy formation and implementation.'

**CBP 11** 'Developing clear goals, indicators and evaluation mechanisms is necessary to adjust policy, evaluate progress on integration and to make the exchange of information more effective.'

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Malta’s population is becoming increasingly diverse. In 2011, out of a total population of 416,055 inhabitants, 20,086 (4.8%) were foreign nationals, representing an increase of 65.8% over 2005, where the number of foreigners stood at 12,112, or 3% of the total population. The proportion of foreigners nationals is highest in the younger age groups (National Statistics Office, [NSO], 2012) and is therefore especially noticeable within the primary and secondary school context: “One particular emerging phenomenon in Malta’s demographic fabric, which affects the education system, is the increase of immigrants in Malta - legally or otherwise.” (Ministry of Education and Employment, 2012)

In general, schools find it difficult to cater specifically for the needs of refugee children, who are expected “to follow the curriculum like Maltese children” with little or no support (Eurydice, 2007). The Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX) (http://www.mipex.eu/) noted that Malta’s education policy “leaves schools some of the least prepared in Europe for migrant children” (“Malta”, 2013).

This project, Promoting the Integration of Refugee Children in Maltese Schools through Awareness Raising, which is partly funded by the European Refugee Fund (2011) and the Children’s Foundation of the Malta Financial Services Authority, set out to obtain a deeper understanding of the experience of refugee children within local schools. Although they are not the largest category of migrant or foreign children attending school in Malta, our outreach activities in local schools made us increasingly aware of the particular difficulties refugee children face as they struggle to adapt to a new school environment and to integrate meaningfully within Maltese society.

The aim of the project, implemented between July 2012 and June 2013, was to improve the overall integration of refugee children within the Maltese education system, by raising awareness of their experience and advocating for better support and a coherent set of national and well-monitored policies. To this end, research was conducted with a view to gaining a deeper understanding of what refugee children, their families and their teachers are currently experiencing within the Maltese State school environment, as well as of what is being done to promote integration. The research consists of two parts: a review of existing literature and an interview-based study conducted among refugee children, their parents and their teachers. The study focuses on a variety of factors that contribute to integration within the school environment, including: policies; practices; language; cultural diversity; and parental involvement. It was complemented by the feedback obtained from participants who attended the workshops held during the final conference of the project on June 28, 2013.

This report, which outlines the research findings, seeks to highlight good practice and specific areas of concern, and makes a number of recommendations for improvement. Like others before it, the study indicated that most efforts to promote integration are the result of individual initiatives undertaken in specific schools. It also makes clear that, from the children’s perspective, friends and individual teachers are the most important sources of support. Most of the recommendations focus on the need for a clear policy on integration, as the lack of a coherent policy framework, combined with severely limited resources, training and support for schools and teachers dealing with this new reality, emerged as the major obstacles to integration. Although the study focused specifically on asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection, most of the recommendations apply equally to all children of diverse ethnic, linguistic, religious and cultural backgrounds attending local schools.

We hope that by providing insight into the challenges faced by refugee children this report will contribute to their improved integration in our schools and, ultimately, in Maltese society.

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1 For the purposes of this study, the term “refugee” refers to asylum seekers, refugees and beneficiaries of international protection - see section on Key concepts and terminology used in this report for further detail.
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Key concepts and terminology used in this report

In an immigration context the term integration is generally understood to be a dynamic, two-way process of mutual adaptation between host society and migrant (Common Basic Principles, 2004; “Migrant Integration,” n.d.).

Responsibility for integration does not rest with the host society alone nor indeed exclusively with migrants, but rather it is a common responsibility, shared by many actors including: the migrants themselves, the host government, institutions, and civil society.

Our understanding of the term envisages a process whereby a human being does not merely ‘fit into’ an already-existing society, but actively partakes in what constitutes this same society. Integration is not solely based on tolerance but also aims at creating “a more stable, safe and just society for all” in which every individual, with his or her own rights and responsibilities, has an active role to play. Such an inclusive society must be based on the principles of embracing – not coercing or forcing – diversity and using participatory processes that involve all stakeholders in the decision-making that affects their lives.

It is therefore akin to the concept of inclusion, put forward by advocates in the field of disability. In that context, advocates differentiate between ‘inclusion’, which implies that children with disability are educated in mainstream education settings alongside their nondisabled peers, where there is a commitment to removing all barriers to the full participation of everyone as equally valued and unique individuals’ and ‘integration’, which is understood to imply that that children with disability are placed in mainstream education settings with some adaptations and resources, but on condition that the disabled person and/or the learner with ‘Special Educational Needs’ labels can fit in with pre-existing structures, attitudes and an unaltered environment’ (“Integration is not Inclusion,” n.d.).

While there is an understandable reluctance among practitioners and researchers to encourage the existing tendency to interchange immigrant children with disabled children (see section I.3.1 below), primarily because their needs differ considerably and therefore must be dealt with differently, we felt that it is important to highlight at the outset that our understanding of the scope of ‘integration’ envisages the full participation of everyone as equally valued and unique individuals’.

An asylum seeker is a third country national or stateless person who has made an application for international protection in respect of which a final decision has not yet been taken by the competent national authorities.

A rejected asylum seeker is a third country national or stateless person whose application for international protection has been examined and rejected by a final decision of the competent authorities.

European and national law define international protection as refugee status or subsidiary protection. The granting of international protection across the EU is regulated by the Qualification Directive; which establishes a set of uniform standards regulating who qualifies for these statuses and lays down the minimum rights of holders. The provisions of the Qualification Directive were transposed into Maltese law through the Procedural Standards in Examining Applications for Refugee Status Regulations (2008).

According to the 1951 Convention and Maltese law a refugee is a person who, owing to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside his country of origin and is unable or, owing to such fear is unwilling, to return to it. Refugee status is the status given by a country to
In this report, the term **refugee** is used to refer to both asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection - i.e. both refugee status and subsidiary protection.

**Subsidiary protection** is a form of international protection given to those whose application for refugee status has been dismissed but who still face a real risk of serious harm if returned to their country of origin. ‘Serious harm’ is defined by law as: the death penalty or execution; torture or inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment; threats to life by indiscriminate violence in international or internal armed conflicts.

**National protection** refers to forms of protection granted by national authorities in terms of national law or policy. Within the EU, these types of protection are also known as ‘non-EU harmonised’ forms of protection, as they are particular to the country where they are granted and not regulated by uniform standards across the EU.

In Malta there is one form of national protection known as **Temporary Humanitarian Protection (THP)/Temporary Humanitarian Protection New (THPN)**, granted in terms of national policy. THP/N is granted on the recommendation of the Refugee Commissioner to asylum seekers whose application for international protection has been rejected. The Refugee Commissioner may recommend the granting of THP: where the applicant is a minor; where he considers that the applicant should not be returned to his country of origin on medical grounds; where he considers that the applicant should not be returned to his country of origin on other humanitarian grounds. THPN used to be granted to rejected asylum seekers who had been in Malta for a number of years and had not been removed due to no fault of their own; today the granting of THPN in new cases is suspended.

The term **tolerated stay** is used to refer to the situation of migrants whose presence and stay in Malta is acknowledged by the immigration authorities, although they have no formal legal right to stay and are therefore still subject to removal should this become possible. It is not a formal status established by law, but rather an administrative response to the reality that some migrants against whom a Removal Order has been issued cannot be returned to their country immediately due to logistical difficulties or other legal or practical obstacles. As their presence is acknowledged by the immigration authorities and they are granted a temporary permit to stay, these migrants cannot be considered to be in an irregular or illegal situation.

In this report the term **migrant/s** is used when reference is being made to more than one category of third country nationals present in Malta, as opposed to one specific category e.g. asylum seekers, beneficiaries of international and/or national protection and rejected asylum seekers.

Both European and national law make reference to **vulnerable persons**, however neither provides a clear or exhaustive definition of the term, providing instead inclusive lists of categories of persons who would be considered vulnerable due to a physical or psychological condition or the impact of traumatic personal experiences.

In terms of national policy “**Irregular migrants who, by virtue of their age and/or physical condition, are considered to be vulnerable are exempt from detention and are accommodated in alternative centres**” (Ministry for Justice and Home Affairs [MJHA] & Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity [MFSS], 2005, p. 11).

The categories of migrants considered vulnerable in terms of national policy include families with minor children, unaccompanied minors, persons with disability, persons suffering from serious or chronic illness or mental health problems, and pregnant women.

In order to implement this policy, AWAS operates two assessment procedures: one for unaccompanied minors, focused mainly on assessing claims to minor age, coordinated by the Age Assessment Team (AAT) and another, for vulnerable adults, coordinated by the Vulnerable Adults Assessment Team (VAAT). Neither assessment procedure is regulated by law or by publicly available rules. Both teams receive referrals from various sources and assess cases with a view to determining whether or not the individual concerned should benefit from early release in
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terms of government policy. Migrants released from
detention on grounds of vulnerability are placed in
Open Centres.

In terms of Maltese law, an **unaccompanied minor**
is a person under the age of eighteen who arrives
in Malta unaccompanied by an adult responsible for
him whether by law or by custom and includes any
minor who is left unaccompanied after he has entered
Malta. In practice the term includes all minors who are
without any adult care, whether they are entirely on
their own or travelling with minor siblings, and minors
who are with informal foster families. Unaccompanied
minors are sometimes referred to as **separated
children**.

**Dublin returnees** are persons returned to Malta
from other EU Member States in terms of the Dublin
Regulation, a legal instrument that determines which
EU Member State is responsible for examining an
asylum application.

The term **reception system** is usually used to refer to
the measures in place to provide material and social
support to asylum seekers throughout the asylum
procedure. Within the context of this report the phrase
‘reception’ is given a wider meaning: it refers to the
system in place for the reception and accommodation
of boat arrivals and other migrants in both closed and
open centres, and covers the period from arrival to
the moment when an asylum seeker or beneficiary
of protection leaves the Open Centre and moves
into independent accommodation. This period often
extends far beyond the formal end of the asylum
procedure.

The role of the **cultural mediator** is understood
differently across Europe. For the purposes of
this report, we adopted the description used by
Martin and Phelan (2010), which essentially states
that cultural mediators help service providers to
understand and be aware of cultural practices
which might have a bearing on the way users
approach the service. They are also a resource to
inform service users of their entitlements and the way
the system works and how it should be accessed. In
addition, they play an important role in empowering
service users by informing them and encouraging
them to voice their needs and concerns. Cultural
mediators can help service providers to monitor
the progress of their service users and ensure
that there is appropriate follow-up. When several
services are involved, they can also act as a point
of contact and a link between service providers and
their service users. It is the responsibility of cultural
mediators to create a space of dialogue in which
service providers and service users can establish an
effective and respectful relationship.

The role of a cultural mediator is different from that of an
**interpreter**, whose role is to bridge the language
barrier, by attempting to understand the intention of
the utterance and portraying it as faithfully as possible
in the other language (Mikkelsen, 2008).

In fact cultural mediators can be necessary and useful
even where service users speak the same language
but come from a totally different cultural background
which impedes them from understanding the way the
system works and hampers their access to services.

A **detention centre** is a facility where persons held
in terms of the Immigration Act (Chapter 217 of the
Laws of Malta) are accommodated; **detention** implies
complete deprivation of liberty as opposed to mere
restrictions on movement. There are 4 detention
facilities currently in use: three in Safi Barracks
(Warehouse 1, Warehouse 2 and B Block) and one in
Lyster Barracks in Hal Far (Hermes Block).

An **open centre** is a collective accommodation
facility where migrants released from detention are
accommodated; other migrants, such as asylum
seekers arriving daily or returned to Malta in terms of
the Dublin Regulations could also be accommodated
there. Open Centre residents are not subject to
any restrictions on their liberty and they may leave
the centre whenever they choose. There are 8
Open Centres currently in use: Hal Far Immigration
Reception Centre, Hangar Open Centre, Hal Far Tent
Village, Hal Far Open Centre, Marsa Open Centre,
Balzan Open Centre, Dar Liedna and Dar is-Sliem.
Most Open Centres are administered by AWAS;
Marsa and Balzan Open Centres are administered
by NGOs. There are also a number of smaller
accommodation facilities run by NGOs.

**Resettlement** is defined as the transfer of refugees
from a country in which they have sought asylum to
another country that has previously agreed to admit
them as refugees, with the possibility of acquiring future citizenship.

It is one of three possible durable, or long-term, solutions for refugees (local integration, voluntary repatriation or resettlement) advocated by the United Nations Refugee Agency [UNHCR]. It may be the only possible durable solution, particularly where a refugee cannot integrate in the country where s/he sought asylum and there is no possibility of returning home safely and voluntarily in the foreseeable future. It is also a protection solution for refugees whose safety is at risk in the country of refuge. Most resettlement occurs from countries of first asylum in Asia and Africa, where there are large numbers of refugees who have lived in prolonged exile in camps, where the quality of protection they receive is poor and the prospect of integration almost non-existent.

Since May 2008, the United States of America, which is the world’s top resettlement country, has operated a Refugee Resettlement Program from Malta, which allows beneficiaries of international protection to be resettled in the U.S. This program is implemented in agreement with the Maltese Government, with the support of UNHCR and the International Organisation for Migration [IOM].

The term relocation is used to describe the transfer of beneficiaries of international protection from the EU Member State where they sought and were granted protection, to another Member State of the Union, which agrees to accept them and grant them legal status. Relocation is usually regarded primarily as an act of solidarity towards Member States experiencing strain because of migration, as opposed to a protection solution for refugees.
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Part I - Literature Review

I.1 Asylum seekers and refugees in Malta: reception and integration

Situated at the southernmost tip of Europe, just 290km from the North African Coast, Malta receives a relatively high number of asylum seekers for the size of its population. According to UNHCR, between 2008 and 2012 Malta received, on average, the highest number of asylum-seekers compared to its national population: 21.7 applicants per 1,000 inhabitants (UNHCR, 2013). “Perhaps nowhere are the consequences of the European Union’s one-size-fits-all immigration rules more apparent than in Malta, a tiny archipelago in the Mediterranean between Libya and Italy, which now has the highest ratio of immigrants per capita of any European Union member. Many of its immigrants are caught in a limbo, unable to find jobs or afford housing — and unable to move off the island” (Daley, 2012).

The vast majority of asylum seekers are so-called ‘boat arrivals’ – migrants arriving in Malta by boat from Libya, having travelled in an irregular manner (Jesuit Refugee Service [JRS] Malta, 2012). According to information obtained from the Office of the Refugee Commissioner, between 2008 and the first half of 2013 some 90.5% of those who sought asylum in Malta were ‘boat arrivals’. This has been the case since 2002, when Malta first experienced large scale arrivals of irregular migrants by boat.

In the decade that has gone by since, some 16,664 migrants arrived in Malta through this route. Most are from Sub-Saharan Africa: between 2002 and 2012, 5997 (by far the largest national group at 36%) were Somali, 2528 (15%) Eritrean, 999 (6%) Nigerian, 793 (5%) Sudanese and 626 (4%) Ethiopian (JRS Malta, 2012). Most of the arrivals are adult men; however annual arrivals always include a number of women and children, who may be accompanied by a parent or caregiver or unaccompanied.

For most, arrival in Malta comes at the end of an arduous journey across desert and sea. Many migrants have experienced war, ill-treatment, deprivation of liberty or other human rights violations in their country of origin and in the countries through which they transited (UNDOC, 2009; IOM, 2006; Human Rights Watch [HRW] 2009; JRS Malta, 2009 & 2012; Amnesty International, 2013).

Almost all migrants arriving by boat apply for asylum and a significant number are granted international protection. Some 56% of those who applied for protection in Malta between 2002 and 2011 were granted international protection. In 2012 the proportion was even higher, as 78% of all asylum seekers were granted international protection and a further 9% were granted provisional status (“Malta and Asylum,” 2013).

Upon arrival in Malta all are detained in terms of the Immigration Act. Those migrants granted some form of protection, whether national or international, are immediately released into the community. Those whose asylum applications are rejected remain in detention for 18 months; the only exceptions to this strict policy of mandatory detention are persons considered vulnerable “by virtue of their age and/or physical condition”, who are released from detention following an individual assessment of their situation (MJHA & MFSS, 2005).

Minors, whether unaccompanied or accompanied by parents or another adult caregiver, are released from detention in terms of this policy, following an individual assessment of their situation. With children who are visibly young release usually takes place within days or weeks of arrival. With children who are older the age assessment procedure, which consists of an interview and an X-ray of the bones of the wrist where the interview findings are inconclusive, often takes months (HRW, 2012, p. 42). Pending the outcome of age assessment procedures, children are
detained with adults without any special care, support or provision for their welfare and security, in centres administered exclusively by the Detention Service, which is made up entirely of personnel with a security background (JRS Malta, 2012; HRW, 2012).

Both the policy and conditions of detention have come under fire over the years from human rights groups and monitoring bodies (see among others: Committee for the Prevention of Torture of the Council of Europe, CPT, 2011; UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, 2010). In 2010, the European Court of Human Rights found that the detention of Khaled Louled Massoud, an Algerian migrant held for 18 months in detention for the purposes of removal, violated Article 5 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. The Court also found that Maltese law does not contain adequate guarantees against arbitrary detention.

Malta’s detention policies were the focus of a number of reports, most recently *Boat Ride to Detention: Adult and Child Migrants in Malta*. This report, released by Human Rights Watch in 2012, has a particular focus on the treatment of children urging Malta to treat those who claim to be children as such pending the outcome of age determination proceedings, and not detain them while their ages are assessed. The report also highlights the need for review of the widespread and automatic use of detention in all but the most exceptional cases, calling upon the authorities concerned to limit detention of migrants to exceptional circumstances and to bring detention policies in line with recognized human rights standards to which Malta subscribes, by executing fully, effectively and immediately the judgment of the European Court of Human Rights in *Louled Massoud vs Malta* (HRW, 2012).

Upon release from detention, migrants are placed in open centres, regardless of their legal status. Asylum seekers who are never detained are also placed in Open Centres if they do not have alternative accommodation. This category of asylum seekers would include those who arrive in Malta legally, those who are sent or returned to Malta in terms of the Dublin Regulation, as well as those who apply for asylum before they have been apprehended for illegal entry or stay (JRS Malta, 2012).

Migrants living in open centres are only granted a small daily allowance to cover food and transport. The exact amount depends on legal status, however allowances range from a minimum of €2.91 per day (allowance for Dublin returnees) to a maximum of €4.66 per day (allowance for beneficiaries of protection) (JRS Malta, 2010). Parents receive an additional allowance of €2.33 per day for each dependent minor child. Unaccompanied minors do not receive an allowance, but they are provided with food and assistance with transport.

Once they move out of open centres beneficiaries of international protection are entitled to social benefits, however, whereas refugees are entitled to the full range of benefits available to Maltese nationals, beneficiaries of subsidiary protection are only entitled to social assistance. Migrants with national protection and rejected asylum seekers with tolerated stay are not entitled to any form of financial support once they leave the centres (JRS Malta, 2012).

Conditions in open centres vary. In the larger open centres, the support provided is very limited and the conditions are basic. Most such centres are located in Hal Far, which is a relatively remote location, cut off from any Maltese town or village. While the accommodation in some centres is in buildings previously used as army barracks, in others residents are accommodated in containers sharing common sanitary facilities. Other smaller housing units for families are provided by Emigrants’ Commission, a Diocesan Commission of the Catholic Church in Malta, which provides accommodation for some 400 migrants and refugees in several towns and villages in Malta (http://www.mecmalta.com/emmcomm.html).

A report published by JRS Malta in 2012 indicates that the initial days after release from detention or arrival in Malta, in the case of asylum seekers who are never detained, are “particularly challenging for migrants as they seek to adapt to their new reality and navigate a system that is largely alien to them”. The need for services and support is particularly pronounced where they are resident in one of the larger open centres, where the staff to resident ratio is very low and the support provided is limited (JRS Malta, 2012).

Accommodation in open centres is not intended to
be permanent, however, many migrants, particularly if they have families, find it difficult to move to independent accommodation (JRS Malta, 2012).

Although these migrants are by no means the only ones present in Malta (NSO, 2011; Gauci, 2012) or the only asylum seekers, “national debate on immigration is almost completely dominated by the challenges presented by the annual influx of “boat people”… This category of immigrants is colloquially referred to somewhat pejoratively as “klandestini,” a term that refers to the “clandestine”, i.e. hidden, or irregular way in which they travel. In addition to the negative undertones of the nomenclature adopted, they are generally perceived as a burden on Malta’s very limited resources, taking what rightfully belongs to the Maltese, and presenting a threat to Malta’s social cohesion, security and economic stability” (Camilleri, 2008, p. 65)

Within this context, there is little, if any, focus on integration and, until today, Malta does not have a comprehensive national integration policy (Calleja & Lutterbeck, 2008; JRS Malta 2012). According to the Migrant Integration Policy Index [MIPEX] (2011) Malta ranks 28th out of 31 MIPEX countries reviewed (the 28 EU MS, Canada, USA and Norway) with regard to its policies relating to immigrant integration and its anti-discrimination law is one of the weakest in Europe (“Malta”, n.d.). Resettlement and intra-EU relocation of beneficiaries of protection, perceived as both necessary and desirable, are the major objectives of Malta’s diplomatic efforts in the area of immigration. Although there has been considerable support from the United States of America, which has resettled some 1,139 refugees since 2007 (“26 immigrants leave Malta to start new life in US, Poland”, 2013), the response from other EU Member States has been far from encouraging (see inter alia: Camilleri, 2012). In all some 1,830 persons were resettled or relocated between 2005 and 2012: 700 to other European Countries; 1,118 to the United States of America and 12 to other countries (“Malta Asylum Trends 2012”, 2013). The latest countries to agree to assist Malta through the European Union’s Relocation Project for Malta (EUREMA) and which have already accepted persons in need of protection include: Bulgaria, Denmark, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Spain and Switzerland (European Asylum Support Office, [EASO], 2012).

In spite of the overall reluctance among EU MS to put in place a system of mandatory ‘burden-sharing’, Malta insists, unrelentingly, that more needs be done to assist it in regards to its immigrant inflow (see inter alia: Caruana, 2012). Despite the availability of EU funds designated to assist with the migrant inflow (“Migrant Funds”, n.d.), many Maltese perceive the EU as being generally unsupportive and existing ‘burden-sharing’ agreements to be problematic, insufficient and fraught with delays (Debono, 2013), making it an area of contention and one which is played upon frequently by the local media.

The fact that the new ‘arrivals’ are seen as something only temporary - a ‘burden’ to be shared or ‘moved on’, has a negative impact in general on attitudes towards integration. It affects the general population’s willingness to engage in meaningful cultural exchange and hampers the ability to embrace the refugees as new and equal members of the Maltese society. Automatic detention upon arrival and the use of the term "illegal immigrant" when referring to asylum seekers who arrive by boat also add to the general perception of asylum seekers as “criminals” and further obstructs their integration.

This negative public perception of migrants is also linked to the perception of Maltese culture and identity. Over the years the Maltese identity has been constructed and highlighted as being linked largely to Europe; in so doing Malta has actively distanced itself from North Africa and the Middle East (Borg & Mayo, 2007). This aspect of the Maltese national identity is also reflected in the education system and evident in the Maltese curriculum, which is largely eurocentric (Gauci & Pisani, 2013; Calleja, Cauchi & Grech, 2010).

This negative public perception also affects the response to the increase in numbers of asylum seekers from the Middle East and Africa, including a noted rise in crimes motivated by racism towards irregular immigrants: “Many manifestations of racial and religious discrimination continued to be noted over the reporting period (2011-2012) in various spheres of life including employment, education, housing, health care, media, political participation, access to goods and services and the criminal justice
It is important, also, to note the growing levels of discrimination against Muslims in Malta, as noted in a recent newspaper article, “... the Muslim community is being generally homogenised with terms such as ‘Arab’, ‘North African’, and ‘illegal immigrant’, and that this general image is being played out against a national identity often described in terms of Roman Catholic roots.” (“Muslims Still Subject of Widespread Discrimination,” 2013)

The pressing need for Malta to work at eliminating discrimination was laid out in a recent editorial piece in The Times of Malta, written in response to the latest report by the European Network on Racism: “It requires a big effort at public education and institutional changes to Malta’s employment, housing, health and justice systems to ensure that racism, latent Islamophobia and xenophobia are eliminated.” (“Maltese Perceptions of Muslims,” 2013)

I.2 Education: a right and an obligation

Children’s right to education is protected by a variety of international conventions as well as by national law. In brief:

I.2.1 International legal instruments

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and other international human rights instruments uphold the right of every person to education. Article 26 of the Declaration states that: “Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory” and that “Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups”.

The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), both of which have been signed and ratified by Malta, affirm the right to education and bind State parties to work to progressively achieve this right in practice.

The 1951 United Nations Convention (The Geneva Convention) Relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol, prescribes that public education is one of the core rights to which a refugee is entitled. Article 22 states that “The Contracting States shall accord to refugees the same treatment as is accorded to nationals with respect to elementary education”. It prescribes moreover that they “shall accord to refugees treatment as favourable as possible, and, in any event, not less favourable than that accorded to aliens generally in the same circumstances, with respect to education other than elementary education and, in particular, as regards access to studies, the recognition of foreign school certificates, diplomas and degrees, the remission of fees and charges and the award of scholarships.”

I.2.2 EU Directives

Malta is a member state of the European Union, and is thus legally bound to transpose and implement legislation promulgated at EU level. EU directives have to be transposed into domestic law for them to become legally binding. The provisions contained therein must be transposed by the date indicated in the Directive. If they are not, then in certain circumstances the rights afforded by the Directive can be directly enforced by local authorities. Moreover, the interpretation of the law in the judgments handed down by the Court of Justice of the European Union is supreme, and must be respected and implemented in our local context.

There are a number of Directives which regulate the treatment of asylum seekers, beneficiaries of protection and even migrants awaiting return.

Council Directive 2003/9/EC of 27 January 2003 laying down minimum standards for the reception of asylum seekers [Reception Directive] obliges Member States to “grant to minor children of asylum seekers and to asylum seekers who are minors, access to the education system under similar conditions as nationals of the host Member State”.

[Qualification Directive], which regulates the treatment of beneficiaries of international protection, directs Member States in Article 27 to “grant full access to the education system to all minors granted refugee or subsidiary protection status, under the same conditions as nationals.”

Directive 2008/115/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 December 2008 on Common Standards and Procedures in Member States for Returning Illegally Staying Third-Country Nationals [Return Directive] stipulates in Article 17 that “minors in detention shall have the possibility to engage in leisure activities, including play and recreational activities appropriate to their age, and shall have, depending on the length of their stay, access to education.”

I.2.3 National legal framework

Different legal instruments provide for the education of children regardless of legal status. Other laws provide specifically for refugees, beneficiaries of subsidiary protection, asylum-seekers as well as those who are subject to removal proceedings.

Article 13(2) of the Refugees Act (2000) (Chapter 420 of the Laws of Malta) provides that asylum seekers “shall have access to state education and training in Malta and to receive state medical care and services”.

The rights of beneficiaries of international protection are elaborated upon in Subsidiary Legislation 420.07 - Procedural Standards in Examining Applications for Refugee Status Regulations, 2008, which transposes the Qualification Directive into national law. Regulation 14 refers to the rights of refugees and beneficiaries granted subsidiary protection status, providing that both are entitled to ‘State education and training’ and that their dependent family members in Malta also enjoy this right.

Subsidiary Legislation 217.12 (Immigration Act) Common Standards and Procedures for Returning Illegally Staying Third-Country Nationals Regulations, which transposes the Return Directive into national law, provides that minors subject to return procedures shall have access to education, even if they are in detention awaiting forced return. This right of access to education is however subject to the length of their stay; the law does not provide specific guidance regarding the interpretation of this provision.

Regulation 10(3) provides that a minor in detention ‘shall have access to leisure activities, including play and recreational activities appropriate to his age, and state education in Malta depending on the length of his stay’. Regulation 11(7) provides that in cases where an appropriate period for voluntary departure has been granted or removal has been postponed, the Principal Immigration Officer shall: ‘ensure that as far as possible a minor has access to state education in Malta depending on the length of his stay’.

I.2.4 Policy documents

In addition to these legal obligations, which guarantee access to educational institutions, several national and regional reports and policy documents highlight the importance of making education truly accessible and relevant to an increasingly diverse school population. On a national level the policy documents also provide further guidance on access to education, particularly for rejected asylum seekers or other migrants in an irregular situation.

Regional reports and policy documents

The 2008 EU Green Paper on education of children from migrant backgrounds states that “European education systems must continue to provide high quality and equitable education, while catering for the needs of a more diverse population. Education is key to integration and employability. The failure of the systems to meet this challenge may provoke deepening social divisions, cultural segregation and inter-ethnic conflicts”.

The 2012 INTEGRACE report, which was published by the Center for Democratic Studies in Sofia, Bulgaria, as part of an EU-funded project on the integration of refugee and asylum-seeking children in the education systems of EU Member States, stresses that the state should assume primary responsibility for the implementation of educational integration of refugee and asylum seeking children: “Based on well-established and international human rights and refugee law obligations, the establishment of the appropriate legal framework and the setting up of dedicated educational policies, strategies and programs is firmly a task of each national government”. ("INTEGRACE," 2012, p.24) It further notes however that for integration to succeed: “both
top-down and bottom-up approaches should be applied in a complementary manner. Governments should cooperate with all stakeholders… Efforts should be made to ensure that national policies and general recommendations are carefully implemented and systematically monitored at the local level”. (“INTEGRACE,” 2012, p. 387) It is interesting to note that the report recommends that schools be considered as key stakeholders, alongside NGOs, social foundations, church-based organizations, teachers’ networks, researchers and private bodies, even though usually part of the state structure.

The significant role of schools in the promotion of refugee integration is described well by the said report which affirms that: “Schools are not only educational institutions but also powerful agents for integration. Integration should involve learning the visible and invisible cultural rules, and social competences training. It should be approached as a two way process, allowing and encouraging the host society to embrace its factual plurality” (“INTEGRACE,” 2012, p. 388).

National policy documents
The proposed National Curriculum Framework [NCF], (Ministry of Education and Employment, 2011), promotes initial teacher education as well as ongoing opportunities for training and support in the use of pedagogies that are inclusive in nature and cater for diversity.

One of the six general principles on which the National Curriculum Framework is founded is the principle of Diversity, whereby the NCF acknowledges Malta’s growing cultural diversity and values the history and traditions of its people. It recognizes the heterogeneous nature of the community of learners, thereby acknowledging and respecting individual differences of age, gender, beliefs, personal development, socio-cultural background and geographical location. Learners’ identities, their language competence, intellectual abilities, aptitudes, interests and talents are recognized and supported accordingly through appropriate learning and teaching approaches. The NCF affirms that all children can learn, grow and experience success by:

* Respecting diversity in all its forms;
* Promoting an inclusive environment; and
* Recommending policies and practices that address the individual and specific needs of the learners and learning community.

The NCF aims to develop learners who are engaged citizens in constantly changing local, regional and global realities. They will need to:

* Respect diversity and value difference;
* Respect and promote Maltese culture and heritage
* Develop intercultural competence and appreciate their heritage within the Mediterranean, European and global contexts
* Work towards strengthening social cohesion and ensuring social justice
* Uphold social justice and democratic principles

This document has identified Intercultural Education as one of its five transversal themes, thus considering it as essential for the education of all students and for achieving the aims of education: “Intercultural Education promotes an inclusive educational culture and respect for diversity, allowing individuals to function across cultural divides, and offering a platform for children and communities to assert their culture and individuality with confidence” (p.46).

Principles of diversity and inclusion underpin the NCF, which emphasises student-centred learning and focuses on teaching methods that show learners how to learn. This approach implies that at all stages, learners of all aptitudes and competences should experience success as well as a level of challenge, and obtain the necessary support to sustain their effort. They need flexible learning programmes providing diverse learning experiences that cater for a wide spectrum of learners and allow for different rates of progression as children and young people work through their school years.

While the NCF embraces diversity and requires that this be promoted through an inclusive environment, it acknowledges that these obligations present challenges for the development of an appropriate curriculum and a classroom culture whereby all students are accepted and supported in achieving their full potential.

The NCF acknowledges that every learner has
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diverse needs to be understood and addressed. In this context, the curriculum should address the needs of learners from diverse social, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, including children of refugees and asylum seekers for whom the curriculum should include access to an educational programme which is embedded within an emotionally and psychologically supportive environment that respects their individual circumstances.

Appendix II (p.78) recognizes the reality at a local level which "involves students who have diverse social and cultural backgrounds including students of refugees and asylum seekers". It indicates that "support to this group of students includes access to education and transition for entry into mainstream schools, planning the educational programme for students according to the individual needs and year group, identifying strategies to overcome language barriers as well as emotional and psychological support."

Irregular Immigrants, Refugees and Integration, a policy document published by the Ministry for Justice and Home Affairs together with the Ministry for Family and Social Solidarity in January 2005, which deals specifically with the treatment of irregular migrants arriving in Malta by boat, directs the various ministries responsible to ensure that ‘all irregular immigrants, without discrimination on any ground, shall have access to food (as provided by MJHA), shelter and other welfare services including health (as provided by MHEC), education, job training and development of personal skills (as provided by MEYE)’. (MJHA & MFSS, 2005, p. 19)

I.3 Adapting to the new dynamic in Maltese classrooms

Current literature in the field of education points to a growing need for Malta to address the changing classroom, by putting in place specific policies to facilitate integration, as well as by creating the structures to implement policy and guarantee effective access to education in practice. This need is made more urgent by the new reality on the ground in local schools.

A 2012 report entitled An Early School Leaving Strategy for Malta, conducted by the Office of the Permanent Secretary within the Ministry of Education and Employment, highlights the integration of migrant children within local schools as an area of growing concern: "School leaders and teachers across the three sectors of education emphasize that there is an increasingly large number of children from migrant populations and that unless these children, and their parents, are supported with pro-active measures that allow them to integrate as quickly as possible, then (these) children or youths will be at risk of disengaging from the education system." (Office of the Permanent Secretary within the Ministry of Education and Employment, 2012, p. 63)

In an article published in 2013, Prof Mary Darmanin, from the Faculty of Education at the University of Malta, examines how Malta has developed ‘minimalist tolerance’ discourse and practices in its education of ethnic minorities and immigrants. Following interviews with college principals, Darmanin concluded that: "The school principal interviewed was ready to use her discretion to move from tolerance toward accommodation but she too is constrained by the policy context. What prevents the embracing of egalitarian tolerance is the education system which gives her the power to tolerate but not the duty to accommodate…The principal recognizes that the present situation in which she has more discretion and less guidance than she wants leaves her unable (and alone) to deal with the "challenge" of having a new group of minority ethnic and immigrant children in school." (Darmanin, 2013, p. 51)

Three years earlier, Calleja et al. (2010) found a lack of coordinated support on the ground: “the quality and quantity of support to ethnic minority students differed between colleges. While some colleges do not offer specific help which may help the ethnic minority students to integrate, other colleges quote more specific help such as ‘Russian Language Teacher’, ‘Language Support’ and ‘cultural mediators’. Nevertheless specific support is still the exception.”

Dr. Darmanin (2013) found that it is not just the practical response to the presence of migrant/ethnic minority children which is uncoordinated, but even the underlying “approach to ethnic diversity in Malta’s schools” that “lacks coherence”. She points out that in successive policy texts such as the National Minimum
Curriculum, there appear in different periods both a ‘celebratory’ approach of respect and recognition and a more ‘rights-based’ discourse of egalitarian tolerance. However, in spite of the fact that both approaches would seem to recognize the need to respond to this new reality, neither of these two discourses has led to any structures or programmes for ethnic minorities and immigrant children.

In his paper *Responding to the needs of the asylum-seeking child in the Maltese educational system*, Dr Victor Martinelli, (2006) from the Faculty of Education at the University of Malta, states that “the children of immigrants need to be considered as a permanent feature of the school system in which they are being offered an education, in this way ensuring that all necessary support be made available to them and that a long term plan be drawn up.” He points out that the fact that some immigrant children stay only briefly hinders the motivation for a proactive response to their needs (Martinelli, 2006, p. 159).

The view of immigrant children as being a new yet permanent feature within the school system is something that Malta is still working to adjust to, as has also been pointed out in the ENAR Shadow Report for Malta for 2011-2012: “little progress has been made in adapting school structures and processes to meet the needs of an ever-increasing heterogeneous student cohort. The examples of best practices are due to the initiatives of individuals rather than a specific policy drive.” (Gauci & Pisani, 2013, p. 23) The need for coordinated programmes and support, implemented as part of a coherent policy framework, was also made in the 2012 report, An Early School Leaving Strategy for Malta: “Research underlines that despite these high numbers the State is not recognizing the importance of providing more specialised resources which would help the integration of these students [ethnic minorities] in the different school communities.” (Office of the Permanent Secretary within the Ministry of Education and Employment, 2012, p. 18)

Various studies indicate that migrant and refugee students often require extensive support in the initial days following their placement in local schools. In a study on the experience of refugee children in local schools, conducted in 2007, Camilleri (2008) notes that: ‘Attending school in Malta, although perceived as an overall positive experience, could be hard to endure initially; although possibly more pleasant for some, adaptation can be a near nightmare for others’. He concludes that at this initial stage “providing ad hoc individualised support can be beneficial to the child’s learning, to some extent, as all students in this study testified… particularly … in the initial phase where the child needs to acquire fluency in a new language and to adjust to new methods of teaching and learning” (p. 76).

In addition to educational support, “newcomer pupils, especially those who do not speak the language, benefit from orientation programmes, to overcome initial barriers linked to the disruption in their education and their families’ conditions of settlement”. (Niessen & Huddleston, 2010). Providing support at this initial stage is fundamental because, as indicated in the said Handbook: “Obstacles that go unaddressed at an early stage can compound difficulties later in life, while opportunities seized early on can lead to new and better learning and job opportunities” (p. 130). In addition to this initial support, there is also need for ongoing support, with a view to ‘helping children cope with trauma (see Ajdukovic & Ajdukovic, 1993; Deykin, 1999), supporting academic adjustment and establishing positive parent-teacher relationships’ (Szente, Hoot &Taylor, 2006 - cited in Camilleri, 2008, p. 76).

The literature reviewed indicates that on the national level a policy framework geared towards providing support to facilitate integration would need to address the following issues, outlined below, at various stages of the child’s school experience:

**I.3.1 Pre-entry school assessment**

The recommendation put forth to all EU Member States in the INTEGRACE report (2012) is to have high, uniform standards for assessments of prior learning and orientation programmes to ensure that newcomer pupils enter the school at the appropriate level.

One trend highlighted in the European handbook on integration, which was repeatedly reported upon in the literature on research carried out on the Maltese education system, is the tendency to interchange immigrant children with disabled children (Calleja et al., 2010; Gauci & Pisani, 2013). The Handbook
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suggests that if a child has an immigrant background he or she is more likely to be placed on a lower ability track than a peer with similar standardised test scores: “The biases that explain this disadvantage are the use of subjective teacher recommendations, tracking at an early age, a multitude of different school types and the possible misdiagnosis of immigrant or ethnic students as "special needs".” (Niessen & Huddleston, 2010, p.133). This is especially problematic given that their needs and areas of concern differ considerably. Moreover, Calleja et al. argue that this tendency reinforces the invisibility of the migrant child.

I.3.2 Language
The issue of language is of huge significance because of the barrier it can create between teachers/administrative staff and parents, and also between teachers/administrative staff and the children within the school. Both the research published by Ministry for Education and Employment (2012), as well as the feedback received during the consultation process on the draft NCF [cited in the said report and quoted below], highlighted the need for early intervention as regards language support and stressed that it should not be considered optional, but essential to the integration process and the success of the newly arrived immigrant child within the education system:

"[State] colleges should have an intensive fast track Maltese and/ or English program that is provided to such a student (and to his or her parents) to ensure that the student reaches a basic understanding of Maltese and/ or English, as the case may be, in the shortest time possible … [given] the increasing number of learners coming from ethnic minorities, there is a need for a proactive strategy directed to ensure that the education system will cater for such students…. " (Ministry for Education and Employment, August 2012).

Studies on the impact of the migratory experience on educational performance indicate that one of the biggest hurdles to effective language learning is the lack of availability of support at all levels ("INTEGRACE," 2012).

I.3.3 Cultural exchange and intercultural education
One of the findings of the INTEGRACE research project is that: “It is key that there is the provision of intercultural education aimed at creating spaces for sharing cultural experiences and creating mutual respect and understanding between children with different backgrounds is also of key importance”. ("INTEGRACE," 2012)

Following research conducted on a national level Calleja et al. (2010) also conclude that: “Schools should foster an environment wherein different ethnicities and cultures are recognized and cherished, and have the logistical means (interpreters, cultural assistants. etc.) to achieve such goals”.

In their research and that of others it is noted that there is a growing trend towards activities celebrating diversity within the school calendar, but this is usually a token event (Darmanin, 2013; Pisani et al., 2012; Calleja et al., 2010). In 2010, Calleja et al. state: “much of what is being done is sporadic; initiatives are often initiated by individuals out of personal interest…there is no real policy effort by the educational authorities to promote initiatives that celebrate diversity and encourage cultural exchange and enrichment”.

I.3.4 Children’s background
Critical issues related to integration and support with adjustment to a new school environment for refugee children are highlighted in the 2012 ENAR Shadow report (Gauci & Pisani, 2013) and require a certain level of awareness and sensitivity: “Young asylum seekers face particular problems due to the specific nature of forced migration. Their experiences as asylum seekers often mean that they will have experienced trauma in fleeing their homeland and in crossing borders. In Malta many of these children will have also spent some time in detention. The challenges of coming to terms with loss, living in a new country, learning a new language, and starting a new school (perhaps their first schooling experience) are experienced simultaneously.” (Gauci & Pisani, 2013, p. 24)

In a study on the school experience of refugee children, conducted in 2007, Camilleri (2008) highlights the impact of the experience of flight on the children interviewed: “The children commented about their great fear during the journey across the sea, and for many also across the desert, where their safety
was highly at risk and their lives severely threatened. After arrival in Malta, the traumatic journey is followed up by other difficult experiences including detention, which is a difficult experience and exacerbates the sense of loss that runs through their life history – not only of their land and the culture they left behind but also of their freedom and above all their human dignity.” (p.75). He also underscores the considerable instability and insecurity which characterizes their lives in Malta, which to some extent is offset by the ‘overwhelming sense of hope for a better future’ which permeates their narratives.

Moreover, his findings suggest that integration and adjustment are facilitated where children are able to be honest about who they are and to share their experiences with their peers: ‘One way to learn about the experience of immigrant children and facilitate their adjustment is through story-telling. Teachers can listen to newcomers and help them tell their stories. The children and adults interviewed found that sharing their stories was enjoyable, cathartic, and affirming… Beyond the benefits for the immigrant child, the personal stories of immigrants and refugees are also educational and beneficial for other children to hear (Allan & Toffoli, 1989). Storytelling and listening also can be a school wide project’.

I.3.5 Parental involvement

The need for schools to have systems in place to assist parental involvement has been explicitly laid out by European Commission’s Handbook on Integration (Niessen & Huddleston, 2010). Elsewhere in Europe, as Kendall, Gulliver & Martin (2007) found in their research based in the U.K.: “this gap between asylum seeker and refugee parents’ knowledge of the education system emerged as a main issue. Some asylum seeker and refugee parents lacked information of the education system including how to access it, available support mechanisms, rights and entitlements and teaching and learning methodology” (Kendall et al., 2007).

Research carried out by Eurydice (2009) concluded that, “the involvement of parents in their children’s education is widely recognized today as a crucial element of integration and school success”, and sets out three basic measures to ensure a good exchange of information between schools and immigrant families, namely: “publication of written information on the school system in the language of origin of immigrant families; the use of interpreters in various situations in school life; and the appointment of resource persons such as mediators to be specifically responsible for liaising between immigrants pupils, their families and the school.” This comparative research indicates that Malta is the only country out of the 31 to not have put any policies in place to facilitate communication between schools and immigrant families (See fig 1.1).

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also emphasizes the important role that parents play in their child’s education and warns of the increased likelihood that, due to language and cultural obstacles, parents of immigrant students may participate less in school activities and that this may consequently result in a lasting negative effect on their children’s education. Some of the reasons for this lack of participation are explained: “International surveys confirm that immigrant parents have high hopes for their children’s education, but face numerous barriers to participation. These include limited financial resources and ‘insider’ knowledge of the education system, feelings of being unwelcome in an unknown school environment, language barriers and different cultural expectations for the family’s role in education process. Schools can facilitate the relationship between parents, but also support children, who may find themselves in the role of interpreter or explainer between parents and teachers” (Niesson & Huddleston, 2010, p.142).

The ENAR Shadow report also highlights the need for more information for parents and their children in order to facilitate the integration process (Gauci & Pisani, 2013).

I.3.6 Teacher training

With specific reference to the area of teacher training, the INTEGRACE report (2012) states that: “Training teachers in intercultural education is crucial for promoting diversity in schools and society as an asset and opportunity for mutual benefit”. ("INTEGRACE,” 2012, p.389)

In his study on Multicultural Teaching Competencies among School Teachers in Malta, Vassallo found that there is a real need for more programmes in cultural competency skills for all student teachers and across all areas of the National Curriculum Framework (Vassallo, 2012), as local schools become increasingly diverse. Heads of schools from St Theresa College Msida Primary and St George Preca College Pieta’ Primary, which participated in the JRS Outreach Programme during the academic year of 2012/13, indicated that there are students from around 17 nationalities in each of these schools.

I.4 Examples of good practice in Malta

Notwithstanding the lack of institutional structure or policy to accommodate cultural diversity within state schools, it should be noted that much is being done in Malta both by individual teachers and principals with the willingness and initiative to prioritize cultural diversity in their schools.

In addition, a number of NGOs, including: SOS Malta, KOPIN and JRS Malta, are working to promote a greater appreciation of cultural diversity. In 2012/3 the SOS Malta project “Youth Upbeat” carried out 24 interactive workshops with young people from schools across Malta and Gozo with a view to raising awareness and understanding to help promote positive integration through music, dance and drama (“Youth Upbeat”, 2013; Carabott, 2013).

JRS Malta has an ongoing school outreach programme, which began in 2004 through an EU-funded project entitled “Saħħa fid-Diversità”. For the past nine years the programme has been offered to all state and non-state secondary schools; it was extended to all primary schools in Malta and Gozo in 2011. Although various activities are organized as part of this programme, at its core is the focus on facilitating encounters between refugees and school children. This programme is implemented with the support of the Curriculum Management and eLearning Department within the Department of Education.

The activities offered include sharing of personal experiences by refugees, role plays, panel discussions involving experts in the field of migration and cultural activities such as traditional drum music, ethnic food tasting and hair braiding. (“School Outreach Programme”, n.d.)

Over the years the programme has grown through the implementation of a number of projects, including “The Art of Storytelling” (2011/2012) and “Promoting the Integration of Refugee Children in Maltese Schools through Awareness Raising”, of which this research study forms part.

The ‘Art of Storytelling’ project, implemented in the academic year of 2012 – 2013, targeted primary school children by means of a children’s story book entitled “Kidane – Ġrajja ta’ Tama / Story of Hope”. A resource pack for teachers was developed as part of this project to facilitate the use of this book in the classroom to effectively reach out to children of various ages. Activities organised around the publication include: a theatrical performance, an exhibition, and a variety of workshops.

There have also been initiatives in individual schools...
aimed at addressing diversity issues in order to raise awareness of the increasingly heterogeneous nature of the communities within schools and society at large. At least six schools visited by JRS Malta during the academic year of 2012/2013 held either a diversity week or ongoing activities. One example is the ‘Living Diversity’ club set up by Personal and Social Development and Guidance (PSD) Teachers at St Thomas Moore College, Girls’ Secondary St Lucia. The club is open to all students on a voluntary basis and organises an experiential activity around different cultural themes during break times, in addition to two diversity events at school level.

Although these initiatives are significant, the finding of the research carried out by Calleja et al., (2010), Zammit, (2012), and Falzon, Pisani and Cauchi I., (2013), indicate that multicultural celebrations and activities are largely centred around language, food or international symbols like flags, and are usually ‘one-off events’ rather than regular activities which are integrated into the overall school environment.

CONCLUSIONS

※ Education is universally acknowledged as a right, and is the responsibility of the state and its schools. Schools in Malta should thus be empowered and given appropriate guidance to make education truly accessible and relevant for all.

※ Malta lags behind other EU countries in the area of integration and its education policy leaves schools some of the least prepared in Europe to deal with migrant students.

※ There is minimalist tolerance and appropriate policies are lacking: the focus is currently on tolerating, not accommodating.

※ There is a lack of coherence: any positive actions are undertaken by individuals on their personal initiative and are not part of a consistent or systematic policy initiative.

※ There is the need to shift Malta’s mindset as regards migrant children, so that they may be regarded as a permanent, not a transient, feature of the Maltese education system.
**II.1 Data Collection**

The goal of this research is to gain a deeper understanding of the experience of refugee children and their families within the education system in Malta. The research also aims to identify good practices and make relevant recommendations for improved integration of refugee children in local schools. A qualitative research method was therefore chosen for the purpose of this study as this allows for a deeper insight into issues affecting the integration of refugee children in schools. The outcomes shed light on good practices in the sampled schools and allow for concrete suggestions for improvement. In line with areas covered in the literature review, the interview process explored those elements that contribute to successful integration.

The research, based on set questionnaires, was conducted through semi-structured interviews with a purposive sample of children, parents and teachers. The study was designed in consultation with a core team of professionals working in areas pertinent to the research, who provided input towards participant selection, questionnaire development and feedback.

Participants were selected, according to pre-established criteria agreed upon by the Core Team, from among beneficiaries of international protection attending state schools in Malta. According to the statistics obtained from the department of eLearning and Curriculum Management there were 385 Third Country Nationals (TCNs) including refugees and asylum seekers attending state schools in Malta and Gozo in the academic year 2012/2013. Specific statistics with regard to refugee children attending state schools was not available at the time the research was conducted, as the statistics currently available do not differentiate between TCN students on the grounds of legal status. However, from a superficial assessment based on indicators such as nationality, it would appear that in fact only a small number of these TCNs are likely to be asylum seekers or beneficiaries of subsidiary protection.

The researchers relied on the close contact JRS Malta has with the refugee community for the identification of the sample. Although there were limitations, due consideration was given to interviewees’ nationality, religion, age, sex, mode of arrival, legal status, as well as their experience within the Maltese education system, with a view to having as diverse a sample as possible.

A total of fifteen in-depth, individual interviews were held with five children and their parents, and five teachers. Interviews were conducted at length, particularly with the children and emphasis was placed on listening to their voice, as they are the ultimate focus of this research and those who can provide the most concrete evidence of what they are experiencing within the school context. The second set of interviews was with teachers who are in closest contact with the children interviewed. In primary schools, class teachers were selected for the interview, while in secondary schools, the choice fell on class and PSD or guidance teachers. The last set of interviews focused on parents and their experience with the education system in Malta.

Interviews with children and their teachers were held in the school the child currently attends. Interviews with parents were carried out in the family’s private residence whenever possible in order to obtain a holistic view of the child’s lifestyle. In cases where this was not possible, interviews were held at the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) premises in Birkirkara.

The questionnaires were developed in collaboration with the core team of professionals including JRS staff (see Annex). Questions were selected based on JRS experience in the field and professional input from members of the core team who have experience in similar areas of research.
All the interviews were recorded and authentic transcriptions were used to capture all that was relayed as truthfully as possible. The researchers’ personal observations were also noted during interviews, allowing for a clearer idea of what truly happens on a daily basis in the schools visited.

II.1.2 Data Analysis

The main source of data was collected from interviews carried out as previously described with a number of different subjects. Questionnaires were formulated, together with the core team, to ensure uniformity amongst all participants and to make the data collected more reliable. The interviews were carried out in the same format, that is, with one researcher acting as the interviewer and the other recording what was being said by the interviewee. Each interviewee was interviewed individually.

Once all interviews were administered, the researchers transcribed the data gathered in detail. The outcomes of this research are based on an analysis of the information collected through these interviews. Samples of answers from various questionnaires with the different subjects were used as evidence to substantiate points brought up in the findings section of the report.

When analyzing the data, the main emphasis was on ensuring that the voices of those interviewed, especially those of the children, were represented as faithfully as possible. This was done bearing in mind the fact that it is impossible to completely eliminate subjectivity from the analysis of qualitative data. To this end, voice recording and authentic transcriptions were used to capture as truthfully as possible all that was relayed.

The recommendations at the end of the report are based on the findings of this research.

II.2 Participants

Due to the parameters of the fund, the project focused on asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection; rejected asylum seekers, beneficiaries of national protection and other third country nationals were excluded.

In view of the fact that the aim of the project was to document the experiences of children through interviews, it was decided at the outset that the focus should be on children aged 10 and over. As explained earlier, we attempted to identify as diverse a sample as possible in terms of ethnic and linguistic origin, religion, length of stay in Malta, legal status and other factors, within the limitations imposed by the parameters of the fund and the nature of the research.

The diversity of the children’s sample was as follows - names have been changed to protect confidentiality/privacy:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Admitted since</th>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Mode of arrival</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>F</td>
<td>Meryem</td>
<td>Eritrean</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>2011 Yr 6</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>Regular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>John</td>
<td>Nigerian</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>2002 Kg 1</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Irregular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Eden</td>
<td>Eritrean</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>2013 Fm 2</td>
<td>Orthodox</td>
<td>Irregular</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Mussie</td>
<td>Eritrean</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>2004 Kg 1</td>
<td>Christian</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Ahmed</td>
<td>Kurdish</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>2003 Kg 1</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>Irregular</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The parents of the children and five teachers (class teachers, guidance and/or personal and social development teachers) also took part in the study.
II.3 Ethical Considerations and confidentiality

Prior to commencement, the project aims and methodology, including ethical considerations, received overall approval by the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education, Floriana. Written consent for participation and use of data collected during interview was also obtained from adult members of each participant’s family – parent/guardian – after a full explanation of the implications was provided. All participants’ personal information has been kept anonymous, be they adults or children with names changed to fictitious ones to safeguard the identity of those interviewed.

II.4 Shortcomings of the study

The sample chosen was varied but rather small. It was difficult to get a varied sample, particularly with regard to nationality, since many of the children who qualified for inclusion in this project by virtue of their legal status were too young to participate in the research. Some parents were also not willing or available to participate in the study for various reasons while others did not qualify to take part in the study because of their legal status. This limited the number of nationalities which took part to three. Somali refugees are unfortunately not represented in this study, in spite of the fact that they make up the majority of the asylum seeking population. Researchers were bound by time constraints, which also set limitations to how many people could actually be interviewed.
Part III: Findings

General observations

The findings of this study largely confirm the findings of earlier studies on the integration of migrant and refugee children in the Maltese education system, highlighted in the literature review above.

The children who participated in the study had been in Malta for varying lengths of time. Two of the five children were born in Malta and another arrived in Malta when he was four years old - all three of these participants entered school in Kinder 1 and always attended school here. The other two participants had been in Malta for six months and just over two years respectively; the former arrived in Malta at the age of 11 and the latter at the age of 8.

It is clear from the interviews with the children, their parents and their teachers that those children who were either born in Malta or arrived here when they were very young and always attended school in Malta face fewer challenges in terms of academic and social adaptation than those who arrive in Malta and start school when they are older. In the words of one of the participants’ father, whose son arrived in Malta when he was four years old together with his older brother and always went to school in Malta: “since they were young they didn’t face big challenges – the initial adjustment was a bit tough… For children … who come to Malta when they are older – it is hard”.

However, the results also indicate that even the category of refugee children and their families who have been in Malta for years, and would generally be regarded as ‘settled’, face a number of difficulties within the school environment.

This said, it is also clear from the interviews conducted that an individual’s experience is not determined only by external or contextual factors, such as the amount of support provided or the length of time a person has been in Malta, but also by internal or intrinsic factors particular to the individual, such as social or academic difficulties and the individual’s willingness to integrate.

III.1 Adapting to the new dynamic in Maltese classrooms

Whereas for some teachers the child participant in this study was the only child from a migrant background in the class, in other cases the class was far more diverse. One particular teacher described a class of 10 students where there were students of at least four different ethnic origins, two different religions and varying levels of fluency in English and Maltese. From the feedback received from participants at the Final Conference of the project and from our observations during school outreach visits, such diverse classrooms are becoming increasingly common particularly in areas where there is a relatively high concentration of foreign nationals usually as a result of the greater availability of accommodation for rent at reasonable prices. An example of such an area is St. Paul’s Bay, amongst others.

While it is clear from the interviews conducted that for some teachers even having one child from a migrant or refugee background in the class is a novel and challenging experience, for those who have to deal with a class as diverse as that described above the experience can be somewhat overwhelming, particularly as, from their responses, it is clear that teachers are expected to adapt without much support.

This section examines the way teachers and schools respond to the presence of refugee students, as well as the way in which refugee students and their families deal with the challenges of adapting to a new school environment. The questions we asked mainly concerned the individual child participant, however teachers and school administration staff
whom we interviewed often highlighted other, broader, challenges they faced when dealing with an increasingly diverse school population.

As these factors inevitably impact, to a greater or lesser extent, the experience of refugee children in school, we included them in this section.

III.1.1 In school: the teachers’ perspective

During the interviews with teachers, the immediate response to questions regarding the children’s integration was that the refugee children they taught in their classes were no different from all the other children; they had been completely accepted by their peers and they were generally happy and well-settled at school.

From their perspective, the idea that a student was properly integrated seemed to mean they would be treated as ‘normal’; any sort of ‘special’ treatment, or the fact that the child stood out in any way that signified a ‘difference’, was seen as negative, the assumed goal being that the new student would blend in and become ‘just like the others’. The fact that difference was seen in such an entirely negative light was reiterated by various teachers and administrators. The underlying theme reflected in the phrase, “we don’t treat him/her any different than the other children” was a recurring mantra; in minimizing the difference, the child would become ‘normal’ and just like Maltese children.

In most cases the teachers referred to one or more different factors in support of their view that the children had integrated, including: that the children were fluent in Maltese; that they had Maltese friends in school; that they had never, to anyone’s knowledge, been bullied or harassed because they were from a different ethnic background; and the fact that they were coping academically.

How do you see him as regards integrating into the school? “As far as I can see it is not a problem, he has friends and seems to be doing ok.” (PSD teacher)

In another case, the student interviewed had only recently come to Malta and was just starting school, but the fact that she had made very caring friends was seen to be a sign that she was integrating well, although concern was expressed by various subject teachers, who were not so sure she was coping academically.

The ultimate measure of integration, from this standpoint, is that the child “…is just like any other child in the class room” (class teacher) and is able to relate socially with peers.

In the one instance where this was not the case, as the student was shy and reserved, this was of concern to the teacher who was in the process of seeking special support:

“My class is so diverse it [integration] happens all the time. However he doesn’t integrate. He knows what he has to do and he just does it. Even during group work – he does what is assigned but he is socially weak. He works academically, but does not integrate socially. The others integrate better. He is bright academically. I wish I could help him socially but don’t know how to. In fact, I suggested he attends Nurture Group.”

III.1.2 In school: the institutional response

Although the study did not set out to assess the institutional response to the new reality in local classrooms, the research conducted did yield some insight in this regard.

The research indicated that refugee children attending local schools have a number of particular needs. Many of these needs are especially acute during the initial months following arrival in Malta, however others subsist throughout.

None of the schools we visited had any specific programmes in place to facilitate the integration of refugee students, however a PSD teacher from one school mentioned a programme in that particular school aimed at assisting new students: “the school has a policy to help new students whoever they are and whatever their nationality. Children are linked to a guidance teacher”.

Apart from this one initiative, overall, the participants’ responses indicated that from an institutional perspective, little, if any, effort was made to adapt school structures, which emerged as somewhat inflexible, to the individual needs of children of diverse linguistic, ethnic or religious backgrounds, who were
expected to fit into the existing arrangements and make do as best they could, in spite of the obvious challenges.

Thus, as will be seen in the section on language, to date little or no effort is made on an institutional level to meet the obvious need of newly-arrived refugee or foreign children to learn Maltese or English. Individual teachers at times attempt to address this need, but these efforts fall short of a systematic, institutional response.

The same is true also of support required for the child to reach the required standard in other areas of the curriculum or to deal with homework. One teacher of a newly arrived student explained that: “Initially she had problems with homework, but she settled down. She tries but is below average. She needs help in Maths but gets no complementary support as it is not offered in Year 6. Maths methods are very different to what she was used to.” The teacher of another newly arrived student also identified a need for support and said that in her view: “Klabb 3-16 could be of help for her with her homework. She would surely benefit from help with homework.” However, in spite of the fact that in both cases the need for support is quite obvious, there is no system in place to ensure that these needs are assessed and children are provided with the support they need.

This is particularly worrying in the case of children who arrive in Malta when they are older, and whose needs for educational support are likely to be greater. Children are placed in an age-appropriate class without any form of prior assessment of their educational level or of the support they would need to be able to reach the required academic standard. As one parent, already cited earlier, pointed out: “Older children go to school with no support; they are put in age appropriate classes – some kids don’t know the language, they wouldn’t have gone to school for a while. That is very hard. An after school club would help.”

In the case of one student we interviewed, who was expected to sit for mid-yearly exams within three weeks of starting school in Malta, no allowance was made for the fact that she could hardly speak the language, much less meet the required academic standard.

With regard to religious education, all the schools visited adopt the same ‘policy’: all schools in Malta teach the roman catholic religion. Children practising different religions have one of the following two options:

(i) Remain in the classroom while their peers have their religion lesson and do anything they please quietly; or
(ii) Join other non-Catholic children from other classes in another room and do anything they want under supervision.

“Children who don’t follow Religion stay in the class. During mass they either stay at the back or in a class together.” (class teacher)

Parents explained that more often than not, they were aware of the religion taught and the values passed on in schools. Most of the parents interviewed for this study are comfortable with their children sitting through the religion class offered by the school, but do not allow them to follow the lesson.

However, concerned not to confuse their child, two of the five sets of parents interviewed had requested that their son/daughter not attend Catholic religious instruction. The parents were under the impression that the administration understood these concerns and that their children were sitting elsewhere during those lessons. In both cases, this perception was false and the children were both attending the lessons regularly. In both cases it was noted by the teachers that ‘they seem to really enjoy the lesson’ and ‘even often participate in the class’. It is not known whether or not the teachers were aware of the explicit wishes of the parents or if it had been a lack of communication between the administrative staff and the teachers that resulted in this situation.

In one case a parent who knowingly placed her son in religion class, did come across a time of difficulty, as her branch of Christianity was not that of Catholicism and at a certain age this did surface as a serious source of confusion for her son. But believing that their lives were now in Malta, she allowed her son to continue and become, as she puts it, more fully Maltese.

“He is baptised. He does Religion at school but I
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don’t practice. He was confused when we started attending an African church. The two beliefs confused him as he was raised as a Catholic. He was an altar boy too...so when I exposed him to another religion it affected him.” (parent)

III.1.3 In school: the children’s perspective
All of the children interviewed said that they were doing well at school and that, by and large, they felt no different from the other children.

One child, who according to his own account had no problems at school as he was born in Malta and always attended school here, did however mention that some other new, foreign students were being targeted and bullied in school:

“Some students joke that I’m black but I’ve never been teased, bullied or picked on. Some boys are teased because of their [skin] colour or because they are different. I can’t stand it; I stick up for them. One boy used to be picked on because he was different. I try to stand up for them. Sometimes I get into trouble because I step in when I shouldn’t. Now I try to keep my place. The school controls bullying. We get ‘after schools’, ‘exclusions’. I see a big change now in this regard....bullies are taught to be friends. There is this Chinese boy who is picked on because he doesn’t know Maltese. I look out for him a little; but there are people in the school who keep a close eye on him. He had a harsh life; he lives away from his family with a guardian”.

The teachers interviewed confirmed this child’s account and said that although, to their knowledge, the child participating in the study had never been bullied or otherwise targeted on account of his migrant background, other children were: “there is another boy who is ...maybe half Tunisian and he is really targeted as regards bullying at school”. In their view the main problem is that: “the students are not very tolerant of children who do not know Maltese”. There is a new boy from China for example who is having a difficult time and is very quiet. He knows no Maltese at all”.

From the perspective of most of the children interviewed, the single greatest source of help and support at school are their friends. This is particularly true of those children who arrived in Malta when they were older, however the importance of having good friends was also stressed by other interviewees who have been here longer.

Asked how he feels at school and what he likes about it, one interviewee who has always attended school in Malta said: “I’m happy at school, have lots of friends. I am very accepted….School is fun. I have friends who are there for me”.

The two girls who arrived in Malta when they were older both stated that they were helped to settle into school by teachers and friends:

Can you think of someone who helped you settle into the school? Was there a teacher or a friend? My friends helped me. Did you ever feel like you need to speak to a counsellor? No, my friends, if there is a problem we sit together and talk.

When asked about measures implemented to integrate refugee children in the school, the teacher of one of these girls, who arrived in Malta less than a year before the research was conducted, said that the child ‘has buddies, but they chose this role themselves’. The two children who have taken on this role ‘have been helping her even in her work’.

In spite of the overwhelming importance of these friendships inside the school, the study indicated that both the children’s and their families’ contact with their Maltese friends outside school is extremely limited.

The study also explored the extent to which refugee children and their families had “integrated” into the wider Maltese community within the school context, i.e., their participation in events related to school, friends, social and leisure activities. Questions posed to the children covered friendships, out of school activities, group projects, etc. The female students said they had good friends inside school, but that they seldom met out of school; the boys, on the other hand, meet their Maltese friends regularly at the football playing field. This said, it cannot but be noted that all of the boys participating in this study had been in Malta for many years, whereas the girls had been in Malta between six months and two years at the time the research was conducted.
In **summary**, the interviews revealed:

- Limited understanding of what constitutes and contributes to integration
- Negative perception of difference - for most teachers the main indicator of integration is that the child blends in and is ‘just like the others’
- Automatic placement in an age-appropriate class without any prior assessment of individual learning needs or educational history
- Limited effort and/or ability to respond to the needs of an increasingly diverse student population
- Friends and individual teachers are the main source of support for new students

### III.2 Language

From the interviews conducted it is clear that the language barrier greatly hampers the refugee child’s integration and well-being. As will be seen later in the section on parental involvement, it also blocks communication between the school and the parents and hinders parents’ efforts to follow their child’s educational progress.

Although the participants in the study were extremely diverse, both in terms of their linguistic background and in terms of the length of their stay in Malta – and intentionally so – the barrier language brings with it was brought up by all those interviewed, even if they had been in Malta for many years, albeit in different contexts.

Some of the children interviewed, particularly those who arrived in Malta more recently, mentioned how difficult it is/was for them to be placed into a school, to be faced with a new system and not to be able to speak the native language and make themselves understood. As was mentioned earlier, one child participant, who himself had no problem because of language, highlighted the difficulties faced by another child, a Chinese boy, who is picked on because he cannot communicate as he does not know either English or Maltese.

The parents interviewed also highlighted language as a major difficulty for their child, particularly in the initial days after admission into school. One parent explained that: ‘At the beginning, the first four or five months they had a language problem. After that it was ok, once they started to learn English and Maltese. They had to learn them… Maybe lessons after school might have helped them…. For children who are older – who come to Malta when they are older – it is hard. Some children in the neighbourhood come to ask Mussie and Kidane for help. Older children go to school with no support; they are put in age appropriate classes – some kids don’t know the language, they wouldn’t have gone to school for a while. That is very hard. … I find that the language barrier is the biggest issue!’

The father of one of the girls interviewed, who had arrived in Malta less than a year before the research was conducted identified language as the major difficulty his daughter faced: ‘the language is the problem. She is the only girl who is not Maltese in the class. There is too much Maltese at school’. She faced this difficulty, in spite of the fact, according to her father, ‘she communicates in English. She can understand and say what she needs and wants. She also reads in English.’

On the other hand, the father of the other girl who participated in the study highlighted the fact that she could communicate in Maltese as a major advantage: ‘The thing about her is she is able to communicate - it’s wonderful’.

After being thrown into the deep end, their only means to survive was to do their utmost to learn Maltese or English. Once this hurdle was overcome their life became much easier.

The teachers interviewed also stressed the difficulties faced by students who cannot communicate in Maltese and/or English.

Speaking of a girl who had only been in Malta for a few months at the time the research was conducted, her teacher said that: ‘Participation is hard in class because of the language barrier. It is not a personal
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issue though, the issue is in the school as there are some children who don’t/can’t speak English and this therefore creates a barrier with Eden. She might not feel involved.”

On the other hand, another girl’s teacher highlighted the fact that she could speak both English and Maltese as a positive factor that helped her to cope both academically and socially in the class. The teachers interviewed also highlighted the challenges posed by having to use different languages of instruction in order to communicate effectively with children of different linguistic backgrounds in the same class.

One teacher whose class of ten children includes students from at least four different ethnic backgrounds stated that: “Language is a major difficulty as my class is very diverse. One year I had to do Maltese in English because of a Russian boy.”

Another teacher said: “the trouble is when someone does not know Maltese you have to explain everything again in English and the other students get bored and start to make noise and it is hard to get them to settle again.”

It is clear from the responses obtained, that those children who come to Malta knowing little or no Maltese and English are those who are most vulnerable. They are the ones who are most likely to be socially marginalized, and who would feel least accepted. This barrier isolates the children and unless they have someone to guide them through the day at school, the whole experience can be very daunting.

On the other hand, school teachers seem to be of the opinion that those children who can communicate well, especially in Maltese, find it easier to make friends and lead a healthier social life, which in turn leads to a better performance at the academic level. This was the case for one of the students interviewed who was born in Malta, was fluent in Maltese and had been in the Maltese education system since he first started school.

It was positive to note that participants found support from fellow migrants: children living in the same neighbourhood offered support to new ‘additions’ to the neighbourhood, who actively sought out their help. The help provided includes: help with homework, translating notes for parents and the like.

In summary, the interviews revealed:

- Language barrier seriously hampers the child’s social and academic integration and well-being
- Children who speak Maltese adapt much better within State schools
- Schools do not have the capacity to deal with linguistically diverse student populations effectively

III.3 Cultural exchange

In all cases, the children interviewed were not given the opportunity in their current school to make a formal presentation about their own culture and country. One boy said that he had given a presentation about his country during an event at one of the schools he attended previously.

Another participant explained that her peers asked her some questions about herself on the first day of school, but apart from that information was only requested for bureaucratic purposes: “Only on the first day of school, kids asked me where I was from and I told them.”

**Do your friends ask you about where you lived?**
Yes, but only on the first day. **Has your teacher ever asked you?** Once the head called me to get information for a file.

One boy remarked however, that he was not too interested in talking about his country of origin, primarily because of the negative perception of both his country, Nigeria, and the African continent among his peers: “I’m not too interested in talking about Nigeria. Kids don’t know about Nigeria except that it’s hot and there is suffering in Africa... and that there are snakes. It’s not like that! In Africa there are villages and cities.”
Not one of the families spoken to had been invited into the school to speak about their culture or country. However, every single one of the parents interviewed said they would be more than happy to come into the school and share some things about their country and heritage.

If the school were to ask you to come into the school and tell the students something about your culture would you? Of course! I would go into the school now, no problem!

During the interviews with the teachers, specific questions regarding opportunities for children to share something about their country of origin were asked. In many cases the response corroborated what the families stated. In the words of one Guidance Teacher: “It [diversity] is not tackled as a whole school but I do know that in PSD they can share; but we do nothing official!”

Two PSD teachers interviewed said that they do cover topics about difference, but that it was up to the individual student to speak if he or she wanted to. When asked about the topic of diversity in the classroom, two of the teachers pointed out that they had understood the topic of “diversity” as meaning diversity in abilities: “Actually to be honest my idea of diversity is more as regards academic diversity. Different mental ability you know. That was my idea of diversity.”

In another case, however, a primary teacher indicated that because more than half of the students in her class were not practicing Catholics, during periods leading up to religious festivals (e.g., Easter week) she allowed those students to write about a festival that they celebrated. It should be noted that in this particular school posters relating to celebrating diversity were observed on the walls, even if none of the students mentioned it.

The feedback from a couple of the teachers interviewed was that it could be a good idea to have some form of cultural exchange and that it could allow for more tolerance, understanding and awareness. In the words of one teacher:

“It is good for the students because it’s a reflection of outside, and teaches them to be more tolerant.”

From the findings of this research it was clear that schools can do more to acknowledge and better support their refugee pupils. While the initiative shown by individual teachers and schools is to be encouraged, it falls short of a comprehensive or consistent approach to cultural exchange.

In summary, the interviews revealed:

- Cultural diversity within a given class or school is not viewed as an asset but a shortcoming
- Lack of policies promoting initiatives for exchange of cultural information and/or celebration of diversity
- Any initiatives are sporadic and undertaken out of personal interest

III.4 Children’s Background

As was indicated above, in the section on cultural exchange, the overall impression obtained from the interviews with the children is that there was only limited interest in their lives outside of the classroom, apart from the collection of data for bureaucratic purposes.

This was confirmed by the responses of the teachers to the questions on their awareness of the past and present life of the child in their care, which made clear that those working with children in the school setting had little or no knowledge of the child’s background or religion.

Teachers, be they class teachers, guidance teachers or PSD teachers made it known on a number of occasions that those in direct contact with the children were given no information about these matters. Yet the school administration would have the received information about the child’s legal status, religious beliefs or any details about their previous schooling experience.

From the interviews it was immediately apparent that the few facts that the teachers working directly with the children were aware of often seemed to have
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come to their attention almost by chance.

In the case of a particular girl, the teacher explained how: “One time during guided reading she shared that she lived in Norway before she came to Malta. She shared her experience. She speaks of Norway as her country of origin.” The same teacher had little or no idea of the child’s religious background, as the child never spoke about it and it seemed no one asked her: “I think she is Muslim, I’m not too sure as she never spoke about it.”

Similarly, with regard to another girl, her guidance teacher knew of some personal and family issues, as the child had approached her for support and divulged some information about her personal situation: “A teacher advised her to go to the Guidance Teacher if she needed help. She did come herself. She spoke to me about Sudan. She also told me that her mum is in Sweden and that she wants to go there too. She is however very conscious of the fact that she missed a number of years of school when she was in Sudan. … We are not aware of what religion she follows.”

In the case of one of the boys, too, his teacher was not aware of what religion he followed. When asked he said: “I think I asked him once it is some kind of Christian denomination”.

It is quite telling that some teachers were surprised to learn that they had a refugee child within their classroom. Some of the teachers we spoke to explained that they believed they would be able to deal with the situation better if they did not know anything about the child’s background, for they explained that in this way the child, leaving his/her past behind, could be more readily integrated into the Maltese school system. They also said they feared that this new information may make them treat the child differently.

One teacher did however concede that ‘actually maybe it is good to be aware of certain things because we may then as teachers be more careful with our words and how we speak about certain groups in the context of the classroom’. The same teacher explained that he had an experience with another student of his who was facing family problems and ‘since finding out this new information I treat him differently now’.

From the interviews conducted it is clear that many of the children interviewed had gone through, and in some cases still were going through, very difficult experiences, which would need to be taken into account by teachers in order to be able to understand, support and educate the child effectively.

We noted from the interviews that one factor which would seem to be taken into account, at least in some cases, is financial difficulty.

Two parents interviewed, both of whom had been in Malta for a relatively short time, expressed appreciation that the school administration took the family’s financial constraints into account and tried to support them as much as possible. One father commented: “I know that certain materials she needs at school are provided by the school (for Art) so that she has things here at school like everyone else.” Another commented about the expenses involved but expressed gratitude for the support received: “Here in Malta there is always costs, one, two, three… euros always for outings, gym costs are expensive. In the case of my two oldest children, if there is no school and they do nothing they will get nervous…. There is a good teacher – in this school, it goes all the way up, to the administrators. Nice administration. One example is regarding a trip to Gozo, the head offered to assist her so that she could go with the rest of the children. He also helps with small payments, I always pay back when I have the money.”

While this is undoubtedly extremely positive, the interviews revealed other factors which would ideally be taken into account and/or addressed even within the school context such as:

- Difficult living conditions: “We have two rooms, eight people, it is difficult with homework. I oversee them but there are so many distractions that it is better to do their home works on their beds. We stayed in Ħal Far for six months and that was very hard, no privacy. I would go every time with my wife and children and stand guard outside the toilet, because it is shared by everyone.”
- Missing out on schooling: “The last four years she was absent from school, so she has a lot to catch up on. She used to go to school in Eritrea (till Grade 3) and she was good especially in Maths. In Sudan I couldn’t send her to school.”
- Separation from family members: “She hasn’t seen her mum since 2007. She has another brother whom we have never seen. I hope (and so does Eden) to meet them soon. They miss
‘One of us’

‘What do you miss from Eritrea? I miss my grandma.’

Disrupted lives: “Yes in Saudi Arabia I went to a school, like a religious school. Then I lived and went to school in Norway for one year before we came here.”

III.5 Parental Involvement

The interviews conducted revealed two specific factors hampering parental involvement, namely: language difficulties and the lack of clear information on the education system and how it works, as well as about school rules, regulations and services. The research also indicated the possibility that cultural norms regarding the role of women could pose an obstacle in some cases, however no firm conclusions could be reached in this regard.

As explained earlier in Section III. 2, the language barrier is a major obstacle not just for the children but also for their parents, affecting their involvement in their children’s education and their communication with their children’s teachers.

While one of the parents stated that the school sent information in English, as a rule written communication was exclusively in Maltese. One mother interviewed, who could speak though not read Maltese, explained that: ‘Letters from school are in Maltese. Long ones are hard to make out. I would prefer English. People at work or friends translate for me so I never asked to have them translated to English. I deal with it myself.’ In some cases the approach was inconsistent, with parents occasionally receiving school notices in English and at other times in Maltese.

Teachers and administrators confirmed that material for parents was sent out in English only occasionally and not systematically. There was no apparent concerted effort to ensure that parents not fluent in Maltese would be aware of the content of these notices, even if it was clear to the teachers we interviewed that the refugee parents did not always understand what was being communicated to them. One teacher in fact commented that: “Circulars are given in Maltese but at times they are given in English however, they [the parents] still find it hard to understand.”

For some of the parents the language obstacle regarding school communication was overcome by the fact that their children, who were able to understand Maltese, translated the notices. One of the boys’ father explained that: “Yes, we receive notes in Maltese sometimes and sometimes in English. The boys can translate them for us.” In other cases, such as that cited above, the families would turn to a Maltese neighbour or friend for help.

This approach on the part of refugee parents could give the message to school staff that the fact that their children, who were able to understand Maltese, translated the notices. One of the boys’ father explained that: “Yes, we receive notes in Maltese sometimes and sometimes in English. The boys can translate them for us.” In other cases, such as that cited above, the families would turn to a Maltese neighbour or friend for help.

As explained earlier in Section III. 2, the language
elder brother) were keen to follow and support their children in their schooling and whenever possible would attend Parents’ Day. In many cases, this fact was also acknowledged by school staff, who cited it as a positive factor enhancing the child’s progress and integration.

“She is lucky because her father is very supportive, he follows her a lot… Her dad is very supportive and eager. He attends Parents’ Day.”

“His mother is very involved and takes initiative, she takes school very seriously”.

In one case where all contact was with the child’s eldest brother, the teacher lamented the parent’s lack of involvement and stated unequivocally that: “Parents need to involve themselves more in their children’s education. They need to come over more to meetings and involve themselves”.

However, in this particular case, although both parents were unable to understand Maltese or English, an interpreter was not brought in, and the responsibility of communicating with the school fell on the oldest child, who was admittedly fluent in both languages. Although he does his best, this is a heavy burden for him to bear, since he has eight younger siblings, and he is not always able to attend parents days due to his work.

Another recurring trend among the participants in this study with regard to parental involvement in school activities was the mothers’ limited involvement in their children’s education. In two of the families interviewed, the mother (for reasons mainly of lack of knowledge of English and Maltese) did not have any direct contact with the school. In another, cited above, neither parent had any contact with the school. In these three cases, if there was a Parents’ Day or meeting, it was the father or a sibling who would attend and speak on behalf of the children. In the other two cases the children were only accompanied by one parent - in one case the mother and in the other the father - and in both these cases the sole parent was highly involved in the child’s schooling. In fact, we only interviewed a mother in one out of five cases selected for this research, and in this case she was the child’s sole carer.

One interesting finding from interviews with students, parents and teachers was that the Maltese education system was never explained to parents. There was no set orientation plan in place aimed at foreign parents, even if, as in one case, the school population was made up of a very high number of foreign students. No specific allowances were made at school level where a new foreign student was concerned. The parents and students were as much as possible, intentionally in many cases, treated exactly the same as a Maltese student would be treated.

One father who commented specifically on this lack of orientation expressed a willingness to support other children and their families: “No one explained the Maltese schooling to me. … I am willing to help out with other children – I can act as a communicator to facilitate their learning”.

### III.6 Teacher training

A recurring issue highlighted by the teachers and aligned to current research (Vassallo 2012) was the need for more specialized training. None of the teachers felt they were adequately prepared for dealing with ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity in
their classrooms. In the words of one teacher: “Not much is done to help teachers teach diversity. My speciality is History and I found myself teaching in a primary school! A teacher needs to learn to adapt.”

Although B.Ed (Hons) courses include modules that focus on diverse ways of teaching and learning, students are rarely, if ever, exposed to the reality teachers face in their everyday lives. Dealing with a class of children with diverse needs, diverse cultures and traditions is already challenging; doing it all without any background knowledge or training renders it even more so. Teachers of refugee children more often than not are faced with a new experience and deal with it as best they can.

Besides introducing new modules at University level, teachers also suggested ongoing training to help them meet the needs of today’s ever-changing society. In-service training courses which tackle cultural diversity and intercultural management could be an asset, for instance. One of the teachers interviewed commented that: “Teaching Practice is limited – teacher training doesn’t give you the real picture. Being in a class everyday is different.”

Teachers and even administrative staff lacked the appropriate resources to support those with a diverse cultural and/or linguistic background within the school. This both in terms of teaching curricular subjects as well as in terms of dealing with issues of diversity and tolerance within the school environment.

One teacher who taught a very diverse class explained that: “one year I had to do Maltese in English because of a Russian boy. I adapt Social Studies to English. It would have helped if we had a book/resource in English to accommodate these children.”

Another teacher, working on PSD with early secondary school students, suggested having: “some kind of flyer with few words, even like a poster that is around which tackles some of these words that kids use but do not really know the meaning of. Something to tackle the things we see on TV etc. because race and reference to other religions does come up in the classroom even if there is no one in the classroom that is of colour or a refugee it comes up and sometimes as a teacher you don’t always know the best way to deal with it so some kind of flyer or in-service for teachers would be helpful.”

In summary, the interviews revealed:

- Teachers felt they were not adequately prepared for dealing with ethnic and linguistic diversity
- B.Ed. Hons courses need additional modules on dealing with diversity in class and promoting intercultural education
- Teachers require ongoing training and support to deal with the new dynamic in their classes and to make education truly relevant and accessible for all
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Part IV: Recommendations

In the light of the findings of this research, JRS Malta makes the following recommendations for the improved integration of refugee children in local schools.

It should be noted that, although these recommendations refer to refugee children, many of these recommendations apply not only to refugee children, but also to other children from diverse ethnic, linguistic, cultural or religious backgrounds attending local schools:

**Policy framework**

**Major challenges highlighted by research:**

- No clear and systematic policy aimed at integrating refugee students in local schools; any actions taken are the initiative of individual teachers and/or schools acting in an uncoordinated manner with very little support.
- Little effort is made to adapt school structures, which emerged as somewhat inflexible, to the individual needs of students of diverse linguistic, ethnic or religious backgrounds, who were expected to fit into the existing arrangements and make do as best they could, in spite of the obvious challenges.
- Limited understanding of what constitutes integration, which may be summarized as the belief that difference is negative and same is ‘normal’, thus discouraging rather than celebrating diversity and promoting assimilation rather than inclusion.

**Recommendations:**

1. Develop a clear policy on how to effectively manage the ‘factual plurality’ within local educational institutions and promote integration of refugees and other children from diverse cultural, linguistic and ethnic backgrounds within the local education system through:
   - The creation of structures and services to support and facilitate the integration of refugee children and other children of diverse ethnic and linguistic backgrounds in local State schools
   - The provision of training and ongoing support to teachers and school administrations who are charged with addressing the educational needs of each individual within a linguistically, ethnically and culturally diverse school population
   - The development of resources and provision of training to enable teachers to promote appreciation of diversity and to educate for inclusion and active citizenship within an increasingly diverse society

2. Develop a concrete action plan to implement the policy in practice, identifying clear goals and objectives and establishing specific and measurable targets together with the time-frame within which they are to be reached, in order to allow for proper evaluation.

**KEY PRINCIPLES:**

- Every child, regardless of legal status, has an inalienable right to education.
- Education should meet individual educational needs and lead to/promote individual empowerment and integration within the school and within the wider community.
- Primary responsibility for creating laws, policies, strategies and programmes that make education truly accessible and facilitate the integration of refugee children in local schools rests with the State.
- Schools, refugee communities and civil society should be involved in the development and evaluation of policies, strategies and programmes related to the integration of refugee children.
(3) Assign a focal point within the Ministry responsible for overseeing the implementation of the policy and action plan on integration within local schools.

(4) Establish a core group comprising stakeholders from various backgrounds, including also refugees and migrants, with the responsibility to evaluate the implementation of the policy in the light of the established targets and to make recommendations for improvement if required.

Structures for diversity

Major challenges highlighted by research:

- Schools lack the resources to put in place specific measures to facilitate the integration of refugee students and other students from migrant backgrounds and to allow them to share and practice their religious faith and culture.
- The lack of a clear policy supported by structures for implementation leaves integration to chance and makes it wholly dependent on the individual initiative of teachers and school administrators on the one hand and refugee children and their families on the other.

Recommendations:

(1) To put in place the structures and assign the resources necessary to implement the policy framework described above, which should include as a minimum:

   (a) The development of an orientation/induction programme for new students and their families, to be implemented by individual schools or by a centralised unit within the department;
   (b) The development and implementation of intensive language training for new students during the initial weeks following admission into school;
   (c) The creation of a team of trained cultural mediators or the allocation of resources to contract the services of trained cultural mediators to facilitate communication between schools and students and their parents;
   (d) The creation of a multi-lingual database providing common resources translated into different languages for use by schools;
   (e) The creation of common assessment and profiling tools for use by schools;
   (f) The development of support programmes, such as after school programmes providing homework support or extra support in specific subjects, for students who are finding difficulty reaching the required academic standard or coping with school work;
   (g) The development of materials and resources for teachers to use in the class;
   (h) The provision of ongoing training and support for teachers, particularly those in schools with large numbers of students of different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds.

Any policy framework aimed at promoting the integration of refugee children must address the following issues, which emerged as major challenges from the research conducted:

Pre-entry assessment

Major challenges highlighted by research:

- Refugee children applying for admission in local schools are usually placed in an age-appropriate class without any prior assessment of their learning needs and very little knowledge of their personal history

Recommendations:

(1) Establish clear and uniform standards for assessment of refugee children's educational needs prior to admission into school.

(2) Conduct an individualized assessment of each child applying for admission into school with a view to obtaining a record of the child's educational history to date, identifying educational and other needs for support, including in the area of language, and determining the level at which the child should enter the education system.

(3) Ensure that the outcomes of the assessment are shared with the parents and the teachers who will be working directly with the child in order to enable them to develop tailored language programmes, support the child effectively and guide the child and parents where and how to access any support available - e.g. Klabb 3-16 for homework support, etc.

Initial support and orientation

Major challenges highlighted by research:

- Newly admitted refugee children and their families are not systematically provided with...
information about the education system in a language they understand, or with orientation to enable them to navigate their way in a new and largely alien system

Children are not systematically provided with the social and academic support they require particularly in the initial days of their school experience

**Recommendations:**

1. Develop a standardised induction/orientation programme for newly admitted students and their families, aimed at explaining the education system and how it works in practice, clarifying expectations and providing information about where and how to obtain further information and ongoing support.

2. Develop and disseminate information materials (e.g. leaflets) in different languages aimed at assisting refugee children and their parents to understand the education system better and providing information about where and how to access support if necessary.

3. Ensure that all children applying for admission and their families benefit from the induction/orientation programme prior to starting school.

4. Build on existing good practice (or goodwill) and establish initial support systems within each school where refugee children are placed, such as:
   - a ‘buddy’ system where peers support a new refugee child to settle in the new school
   - a system where children are linked to a guidance teacher who follows up on them regularly and refers them to the services and support they require.

**Language**

**Major challenges highlighted by research:**

- Language acquisition is a decisive factor for adaptation and integration – children who are not fluent in English or Maltese find it more difficult to adapt socially and academically and their well-being is at risk.
- The communication between teachers and school administrators on the one hand and students and their parents on the other is limited or non-existent.
- Teachers face difficulties dealing with children of different linguistic backgrounds in the same class.

**Recommendations:**

1. Prioritise language acquisition in the first few weeks following admission, through an intensive language training programme in Maltese and/or English for new students, following an initial assessment of their linguistic ability.
2. Use the outcomes of the initial assessment regarding language ability to design appropriate language support programmes.
3. Organise language classes for parents, with the possibility for children to get extra language classes or homework support for subjects where the child needs extra assistance – e.g. Maltese – at the same time.
4. Use the services of interpreters or cultural mediators both for initial orientation as well as to facilitate communication with students, during initial phase and later for as long as required.

**Parental involvement**

**Major challenges highlighted by research:**

- Most parents are keen to follow their children’s educational progress, but their involvement is often hampered by their lack of understanding of the school system and language barriers

**Recommendations:**

1. Encourage refugee parents to be involved in their child’s education by highlighting the importance of their involvement and support during the initial orientation/induction programme, following up with them regularly regarding their child’s progress as well as regarding any support required, and showing them that their opinion is valued.
2. Ensure that initial orientation/induction is provided in a language that the patents understand, through the use of cultural mediators and/or interpreters.
3. Use the services of interpreters or cultural mediators for meetings with parents and children, both during initial phase and later, as required.
4. Translate standard information brochures or notes on the education system generally as well as on the particular rules and regulations applicable in the school attended by the child into different languages, to ensure that parents who do not read Maltese can understand them.
(5) Ensure that important information is passed on during the school year, e.g. change in pick up time due to a shorter school day, notifications regarding activities, etc., is relayed to parents through an interpreter or a cultural mediator if the written communication cannot be provided in a language they understand.

(6) Encourage refugee parents to form part of existing parent networks.

(7) Encourage the formation of support networks between parents, targeting in particular parents of refugee children and other children of immigrant origin, where there are none already in place.

Student background

**Major challenges highlighted by research:**

- Divided views among teaching staff regarding the necessity or value of information regarding the child’s background - some not convinced it is necessary for them to know child’s background, while others believe it will help them promote the child’s integration.
- No system in place to collect data / information about the child’s background in order to create a profile including information on migration process, possible traumas, educational background, with a view to addressing child’s needs for assistance and support in a more holistic manner.
- The presence of refugee children in a class could be a way to increase understanding and awareness among peers of the refugee experience, thus facilitating their integration.

**Recommendations:**

(1) Meet with family and student immediately following admission to discuss the pre-entry assessment, if one was carried out, or to create a profile of the child’s background if one was not, in order to identify the child’s educational and other related needs.

(2) Create an integration and support plan on the basis of the initial profile/needs assessment, together with the parents and the teachers working directly with the child.

(3) Meet at least once during the academic year to evaluate the child’s progress especially during the first years following admission and after for as long as the child requires additional support.

(4) Create space in classroom/school life for refugee children to tell their stories in an atmosphere of respect in order to promote understanding of their situation and further their integration.

Cultural exchange – Intercultural Education

**Major challenges highlighted by research:**

- There is very little formal and systematic opportunity for students and their families to share their experience or provide information about their country and culture – in a way that it is acknowledged and celebrated.
- Although appreciation and exploration of cultural diversity is encouraged by the new national curriculum framework, in practice in some of the schools we visited the presence of children from diverse cultural backgrounds is not perceived as an asset nor is this diversity celebrated.
- Diversity is highlighted, celebrated or discussed in sporadic, one-off events, rather than regularly as part of an ongoing programme in different areas of the curriculum.

**Recommendations:**

(1) Mainstream intercultural education by training teachers to address issues of diversity and include it in all aspects of the curriculum.

(2) Support teachers in their efforts to engage students on issues of cultural diversity by preparing and disseminating materials for teachers to use in the class to discuss issues relating to cultural diversity in different subjects.

(3) Ensure that schools, particularly those with ethnically, culturally and religiously diverse student populations, make issues of diversity an integral part of the curriculum and school culture throughout the school year.

(4) Further encourage schools to supplement this by organising activities on cultural diversity, involving parents in the organisation and implementation of these activities.

(5) Document and disseminate current good practice in order to facilitate the promotion of similar activities in other schools.
Teacher training

Major challenges highlighted by research:

- Teachers feel inadequately prepared to deal with diversity issues within the class and to effectively educate children in classes where the student population is extremely diverse.
- Teacher training does not provide enough insight into the challenges faced in the classroom or how to deal with them effectively.
- Teachers do not have sufficient resources, information or preparation to deal with the issues they are faced with on a daily basis.
- Ongoing or in-service training would also be helpful in this regard.

Recommendations:

1. Include new modules on dealing with diversity in teacher training courses at the University of Malta.
2. Provide ongoing training and support for teachers through the development and dissemination of materials that will enable them to mainstream intercultural education and include it in different subject areas of the curriculum and help them to tackle diversity issues with students.


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ANNEX - Questionnaire: Parents

**Introductory Questions**

How long have you been in Malta?

How long has ______________ been attending school in Malta?

Did he/she attend any other school before the one he/she is at now?

**Inclusion at School**

What can you say about ________’s initial school experience?

What/who helped him/her? What/who hindered him/her?

Have you seen any changes in your child’s behaviour since he/she started school?

Do you feel ____________ is happy at school?

Does he/she talk about school? In what way?

How did your child settle? What could have helped/made it easier?

Are you happy with Maltese schooling?

Are there any difficulties you feel the children face?

Do your children have other Maltese friends from outside the school?

**School Practices**

How are your child’s beliefs catered for?

What is his experience regarding this?

What do you expect your child to achieve from schooling in Malta?

How would you rate your child’s ability when it comes to communicating at school, such as the language used in the classroom, as well as communicating with friends and teachers?

If relevant, how do you think the school can include your child better?

What are the three things you like best about your child’s/children’s learning?

What three things concern you most?

How would you rate your children’s overall academic performance in homework?

Has he/she ever been involved in a class/group project?

**Cultural Beliefs**

What type of values does your child learn at school?

How does this conform to your values at home?

Have you ever needed to speak to any teacher about your child and your culture?

How was it dealt with? What actions were taken?

**Parental Involvement**

How do you feel if you need to approach the school to talk to your child’s teachers or head of school?

Do you attend Parents’ Days? What is your experience of them?

Do you receive any communication from the school regarding your child’s progress or other issues that arise at school?

Are you able to read and understand what is explained in the letters that are sent from school?

If you are not able what could be done to help you?

What do you think the school could do to best welcome non Maltese students and families?

Have you ever had any contact with other parents?

Have you ever been asked into the class to speak about your culture?

**Concluding Question**

Do you have any other comments to add?

Is there something important we didn’t mention you’d like to add?
ANNEX - Questionnaire: Students

**Introductory Question**

How old are you?

Which country do you come from?

Can you tell me something about where you come from?

Did you go to school there? If so can you say something about it?

What do you miss most about your country?

How long have you been in Malta?

How long have you been attending this school?

**Adapting to a new life at school**

Do you remember how you felt when you found out you were coming to this school?

Can you talk to me about it?

How has your time in this school been?

What helped you?

What do you like?

What do you enjoy doing at school?

Do you remember who you first met?

Who did you play with in the playground?

Who are your friends?

What has been the most difficult thing for you to deal with up to now?

Do you experience language as a barrier to communicate with those around you?

Who do you turn to for help at school?

When you speak to your friends, what language do you usually use?

What about with your family?

Do you have any friends at school?

**Outlining good practises at school**

How do you feel at school now?

Did things change from the time you started going to school?

What do you like about this school?

Are there things you would like to see as different or to change?

Are you happy going to school?

What would you like to change? What could make it better?

Do you get on well with other children at school?

Do you get on well with your teachers?

How would you describe your teacher?

Do you ever meet or talk with the head or assistant heads?

Who do you turn to in difficulties?

Do you have friends at school?

Did you find it easy to make friends?

When do you see your friends?, e.g. do you meet them outside school or go to their house?

Do you have any other Maltese friends who don’t come to school?

Are there children in your class who don’t know Maltese?

Are other children friendly?

Did you ever see anyone being teased?

Have you ever been teased?

Have you ever had the chance to talk about where you come from and why you and your family had to leave? If so, to whom? How did it make you feel?

Does anyone at school ever ask you about your country/hometown?

Are you comfortable speaking about yourself?

Do your teachers ever ask you about where you come from?

Have they ever asked about how life in your country is?
Is there anyone who you feel has helped you to adapt to school?

Do you ever feel you need to talk to anyone when you have difficulties? Do you keep it to yourself, speak to a friend, teacher, guidance staff, school counsellor?

How did you learn a new language/s (Maltese/English)?

What is your most favourite subject? Why?

What is your least favourite subject? Why?

What do you do best in at school?

Are there any subjects you are exempted from (you don’t go with your class for)? What do you do at the time? Do you get any extra help?

What happens in Religion lessons?

Who are you with?

What do you do?

**Concluding Question**

What do you wish to do when you grow up?

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**Teacher interview questions**

**Introductory question**

What is your understanding of diversity in the classroom?

**Inclusive education questions**

How do you view the student’s integration in the classroom and school life at large?

Does he/she have the chance to express his/her culture?

Does he/she benefit from the school?

Do you think it is benefiting the school having this student attending the school? If so in what ways?

**School Related Questions**

How would you rate the student’s overall academic performance when it comes to his/her achievements and his/her participation in class?

Has the student experienced racist or discriminatory actions as far as you are aware of?

Do you ever speak to his/her parents?

Are there any suggestions or comments that you would like to share with us?