



Immigration in Malta:

Integration through Education

A comprehensive analysis of the current immigration situation in Malta, with particular focus on further integrating irregular immigrants in our society, namely within the University of Malta.

This document was compiled by the KSU Social Policy Commission together with the invaluable help of the Immigration Focus Group which was specifically set up for such purpose.

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Table of Abbreviations

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| AFM | Armed Forces of Malta |
| AWAS | Agency for the Welfare of Asylum Seekers |
| EASO | European Asylum Support Office |
| HTV | Hal Far Tent Village |
| IELTS | International English Language Testing System |
| IRC | Initial Reception Centre |
| JRS | Jesuit Refugee Service |
| MEAE | Ministry for European Affairs and Equality |
| MHAS | Ministry for Home Affairs and National Security |
| NGO | Non-governmental organisation |
| PFWS | President's Foundation of the Wellbeing of Society |
| UNCHR | United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees |

Definitions

Asylum Seeker: As per the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, an asylum seeker is “[a] person who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it”.¹

Closed Centre: The preferred jargon used to refer to centres housing immigrants whose liberty is limited, is closed centres. The term ‘detention centres’ is still in use given that immigrants are technically detained from leaving these centres. There is no further information readily available on any distinction between the two, although one can refer to the section referring to JRS in Malta which gives a potential distinction based on the length of the procedure.

Migrant: According to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, “[w]hile there is no formal legal definition of an international migrant, most experts agree that an international migrant is someone who changes his or her country of usual residence, irrespective of the reason for migration or legal status. Generally, a distinction is made between short-term or temporary migration, covering movements with a duration between three and 12 months, and long-term or permanent migration, referring to a change of country of residence for a duration of one year or more”.²

Open Centre: According to the Ministry for Home Affairs and National Security, an “open centre is a key part of reception management, offering accommodation and facilitating access by service-users to mainstream services, such as free health and free education”.³

Initial Reception Centre: According to the Ministry for Home Affairs and National Security, the Initial Reception Centre is “the structure to implement this Government's policy not to

¹ United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (adopted 28 July 1951, entered into force 22 April 1954) 189 UNTS 137 (Refugee Convention).

² 'Definitions' (Refugees and Migrants, 2018) <<https://refugeesmigrants.un.org/definitions>>.

³ 'Open Centres' (Homeaffairs.gov.mt, 2018) <https://homeaffairs.gov.mt/en/MHAS-Departments/awas/Pages/Open-Centres.aspx>.

detain minors. Upon arrival, service users would undergo primarily age assessment and medical clearance and then proceed to an open centre”.⁴

Refugee: According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, “[r]efugees are persons who are outside their country of origin for reasons of feared persecution, conflict, generalized violence, or other circumstances that have seriously disturbed public order and, as a result, require international protection. The refugee definition can be found in the 1951 Convention and regional refugee instruments, as well as UNHCR’s Statute”.⁵

Chapter 1 - Introduction into Immigration

Original Concerns

On the 6th of August 2018, KSU’s Social Policy Office held a KPS meeting in the presence of a number of student organisations, all of which showed concern about the inhumane treatment of irregular immigrants when reaching the European border countries’ shores. It was propounded that innocent lives are being lost at sea and that importance is to be given to this issue and not merely focusing on improving the controlling measures that are currently in place. The highest priority should be to protect human life. Amongst all the issues that were discussed, numerous points were raised by the students on how to ameliorate the controlling measures relating to immigration, namely the following:

- A long-term open-door policy, with particular focus on irregular immigrants, would not work in Malta since the situation is already burdensome. However, Malta should provide humanitarian aid to immigrants, and process asylum applications based on the conditional support from other countries;
- An EU-wide platform should be created to make burden-sharing mandatory for all Member States whilst pointing out that such burden is to be shared amongst States equitably;
- EASO should start overseeing the processing of asylum applications from every single country, hence, granting them temporary residence until they are processed;
- A proper and efficient way of licensing should be granted to NGO boats; hence, this should lead to a quick, easy and safe way of registering. Clear and strict rules are to be maintained on how to apply for such a license;
- There should be lobbying for more funding when it comes to Frontex; and,
- The setting up of an educational framework to educate the Maltese population, allowing integration of immigrants into the Maltese society; and,

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ ‘Refugees and Migrants’ (N 2).

- As for the local closed centres, there should be more adequate conditions in place, with particular focus on having a mental health practitioner on call, and also having interpreters on site.

It was proposed by the student organisations present in the forum that a focus group on the ‘inhumane treatment of irregular immigrants’ should be set up to come up with a proper strategy to help save lives at sea due to the sensitivity of the issue. The aforementioned points all form part of the original concerns of the Social Policy Commission. With this being said, the main focus and concern of this policy paper shifted from the attempt to ameliorate the controlling measures imposed on immigrants upon arrival towards the integration of immigrants within our society. Particular importance has been given to the University of Malta due to the fact that KSU has a stronger influence at University level and can therefore implement change more effectively.

Committee

In light of the above, KSU’s Social Policy Office set up an Immigration Focus Group made up of a number of University students with a strong interest in migration and international affairs and who volunteered to work on further integrating immigrants within our society. The members of this Focus Group are:

- Naomi Bugre (Insite)
- Daniel Cassar (JEF Malta)
- Julia Cini
- Emma Grech

The Focus Group and its members kept one goal in mind throughout its work, which was that of integrating immigrants into the Maltese society both at University as well as on a national level. Both KSU and the focus group strongly believe that University students should be proactive, sparking change within the rest of Maltese society and leading within such society by example.

Main Focus of the Policy Paper

After discussing the concerns of the student body and meeting up with a number of stakeholders, KSU’s Social Policy Office together with the Immigration Focus Group decided that the main focus of this policy paper should be the social integration of immigrants within the University of Malta. Given the influence of KSU on campus, the concrete change which may potentially be made within University walls, and the example which may be set to Maltese society as a whole, KSU believed such matter should be followed through.

Chapter 2 - Pre and Post-Arrival

Challenges Faced Prior to University Entry (Point of Arrival)

Centres

When speaking in terms of irregular immigration, centres can refer to one of two legally distinct forms of habitation, namely a **closed centre** or an **open centre**. The first is an instrument designed to limit a person of his or her liberty for a limited period of time. The reason for keeping these migrants in custody is that they fall under provisions of the immigration act which necessitate further review of their situation.

The nature of an open centre, also referred to as an open reception centre by our law, is distinct in that the restrictions it places on residents are vastly different. An open centre is there to accommodate people rather than withhold them, and is open to asylum seekers, immigrants otherwise released from detention, and people who have received protection by the Maltese state. The largest of these open centres is the Hal Far Tent Village (HTV). There are three main models of open centres, namely those run directly by the government, those owned by the government but run by a third party, and privately run open centres receiving financial assistance from the government.

Conditions in both open and former detention centres, especially the latter, have caught the headlines over the last decade, with the length and form of the detention procedure, being found in violation of the European Convention on Human Rights. The detention procedure has also received strong criticism from the Human Rights council who disagreed with the form and duration of detention and with the military presence at closed centres.

A restructuring of the policies surrounding the procedure in 2015 has led to subjects spending less time in closed centres. This shift in the status of the immigrants in question has placed more pressure on open centres where the requisite aid and services leave much to be desired. This strain is clearly shown in statistics from the UNHCR, showing that the population of the open centres has increased exponentially between 2015 and 2017.

Living Conditions

The living conditions of migrants has been something that has always been heavily scrutinised by the media over time. It is important to note that only migrants with refugee status have the right to proper housing, so the next points are made in referral to that. There are three types of open centres in Malta:

- Those run directly by the government;
- Those owned by the government but sub-contracted to a third party; and,

- Those which are privately owned but receive financial aid from the government.

Such open centres house single males and females, families and unaccompanied minors. In 2018, the implementation of initial reception centres started in Hal Far and as part of the Marsa Open Centre Complex. The main goal for the opening of these reception centres was to prevent the detainment of minors, as well as providing age and health checks before providing them with accommodation at any of the open centres.⁶

It is seen to be extremely difficult to move out of the open centres for a number of reasons. Firstly, the immigrants are given a small sum of money a week, and must be at the open centres at a certain time three times a week to sign in. This therefore makes it harder for them to hold onto a job or to any classes, as if they do not attend this, they would not receive their allotted allowance for the week, which is ultimately what they live off. This sum, plus the money they get paid for work, which is usually minimum wage or less is not enough for the immigrant to move out of the open centres and start a living within a community, which makes it harder for them to further their studies or integrate in any way.

Funding (*Per diem*)

Third party nationals who have applied for or received asylum or protected status are afforded a *per diem* allowance to cover daily expenses, the value of which depends on the payment status of the applicant. These allowances cease upon acquiring gainful employment. As of 2017, asylum applicants have been receiving a payment at 28 days of €130.48 if they are adults and €45.24 per child. Under the Maltese Social Security Act, as defined by Legal Notice, those awarded refugee status in Malta receive social security rights which are equivalent to those of Maltese nationals:

(iii) to have access to employment, social welfare, appropriate accommodation, integration programmes, State education and training, and to receive State medical care especially in the case of vulnerable groups of persons;

For those who do not receive any social security, a per diem allowance of €114.24 every 28 days is afforded.

Language Barriers Upon Arrival

The language one speaks is a very important factor when it comes to the education and integration of immigrants. For the purpose of this point, immigrants can be split into two groups:

⁶ 'Open Centres' (N 3).

- Those who arrive as infants or young children; or,
- Youths, young adults and adults.

As education in Malta is mandatory till age 16, it is much easier for children who are put into Maltese schools to learn the languages needed for education and integration within the Maltese community. The younger the child is the better, as s/he would be able to absorb the languages easier, instead of starting from scratch. Attending Maltese institutions from a young age and obtaining Maltese qualifications will ultimately make it easier for the immigrant to continue his education in Malta. This can be seen as the ideal model for integration through education, however, this is not the case most of the time. For immigrants coming in at an older stage but who still want to continue their education, the language barrier is seen as a big hurdle. The teaching of Maltese or English is not a requirement upon point of arrival in Malta. Improving living facilities for migrant communities may have a direct positive correlation on their performance in higher levels of education.

Challenges Identified in Accession to University

Education is undoubtedly an important tool not only for an individual to learn and grow, both academically and in various aspects of their life, but it is also an excellent tool that can be used in the integration process of third country nationals into University life. As students, a large amount of time spent on campus and both classroom and common spaces, can bring young people together to exchange ideas, cultures and perspectives on life. The focus group, through its meetings and discussions with various stakeholders, most notably youth organisation Spark 15, sought to identify and examine barriers to entry into the University of Malta. These barriers bring about the disadvantage of young people being excluded from the various positive aspects of university life and the right to pursue their academic ambitions on an equal footing with others.

Fees

The right to state education for asylum applicants can be found under Article 12 of the Refugees Act which states:

An applicant for international protection shall have access to state education and training in Malta and to receive state medical care and services.

The corollary to this is that mandatory education under Maltese law, namely primary and secondary school, is provided free of charge to applicants for international protection. As stated under the subsection entitled Funding (*per diem*), refugees are entitled to free education including at the University level, enjoying the same rights to no tuition fees as Maltese students. In addition, asylum seekers can also be exempted from fees at state

educational institutions, including the University of Malta upon the request for such an exemption

A major discrepancy between many of these third country nationals under legal protection and Maltese students, is the fact that the former often are not eligible for a students' maintenance grant and stipend which can be of great help to students. Although the grants do not immediately address a fee structure imposed by the University, they are often used to overcome natural financial impediments to studying at University including money spent on books and other ancillary costs. In the absence of such a grant, students must take on part-time work which can often be an obstacle to furthering their studies. The main barrier to obtaining the stipend and maintenance grant is that applicants must have resided in Malta for 5 years, a requirement which is not often met by the applicants in question.

Other fees which might be incurred by third country nationals seeking protection are those of the foundation preparatory courses for entering the University of Malta. Fees for these courses range from €6,600 for foundation studies in Business Studies, Science, Engineering and ICT, or Humanities, to €10,000 for Medical, Dental and Health Sciences.

Qualifications

Qualified individuals who further their studies at the University of Malta, whether their qualifications were obtained locally or abroad, have the advantage of being able to have their degrees recognised and to enter into higher level courses. It is a reality that some students who unfortunately fled their countries of origin do not have proof of study of their previous degrees.

Preparatory Classes – Foundation Year

Due to the difference in foreign education systems, most irregular immigrants will have to go through a foundation course to bring them at par with the level of education in Malta. This foundation course aims to act as a preparatory programme. This course must be done in conjunction with a number of other obligations such as working in order for them to have financial security. For some courses such as medicine there is a pre-foundation year and the requisite of an IELTS qualification. All this may come at a huge financial cost. The possibility for a stipend or maintenance grant could greatly assist many students.

Chapter 3 - Findings: Meeting with Stakeholders Concerned

Jesuits Refugee Service

The KSU Social Policy Office together with the Immigration Focus Group also met up with Dr. Julian Caruana from JRS to gain further insight into the immigration situation within

Malta. JRS is an international organisation which is found in more than 50 countries around the world whereby its mission is to advocate for, serve and defend asylum seekers. Within a University setting, they also help students with a rejected asylum seeker status. JRS, being the only non-governmental organisation (NGO) that has access to the open centres in Malta, offers various services, such as the following:

- Psycho-sociological services whereby they have 2 psychologists, 3 trainee counsellors and a nurse seconded by the government to assist the asylum seekers/refugees in this regard;
- Services of social work;
- Assisting asylum seekers/refugees in writing up their CV as well as finding a job and linking them to different employers; and,
- Assisting asylum seekers/refugees to seek educational opportunities, such as MCAST.

Learning English is fundamental to help those asylum seekers/refugees to integrate quickly into the Maltese community. Unfortunately, there is no compulsory nationwide service in place that has to do with teaching English to asylum seekers/refugees. In spite of this, JRS links them to various courses related to the English language, but JRS do not teach the basic English language as a standard service being offered to all open centres. As Dr. Caruana opined, if comprehensive English courses are to be offered, this must become a public service and it must not come from an NGO due to the limited resources that it has. Thus, this must become a fundamental part of the reception system. He went on to add that AWAS used to offer Maltese and English courses in open centres however, this was only a temporary project.

The Reality in Malta

We were also provided with a clarification as to the purpose of the different centres. The centres in Malta differ in various ways, as can be seen below:

- The Balzan open centre happens to be a collaboration between AWAS and the Church's Emigrants Commission;
- The rest of the open centres are managed directly by AWAS; and,
- The Marsa initial reception centre is a closed reception centre whereby refugees/asylum seekers are placed there until they get to the process of health screening. The closed centre is in fact, closed to the public. This was formerly known as a detention centre whereby they had to stay there until a maximum of 18 months. At the moment, Marsa has become an IRC whereby everyone passes through IRC and after 2 weeks, one is either sent to an open centre or to a detention centre.

Marsa – Closed Centre

The conditions in Marsa are not the most ideal due to the fact that they must live in communal rooms. In these rooms they have no furniture in which to keep their possessions, they are provided with 1 outfit and a pair of flip flops. Males and females are separated from each other in the following sections:

- Single males;
- Single females; and,
- Families.

Hal Far – Open Centre

This open centre is divided into various parts. What is known as HTV is dedicated solely to single males and single females. HTV does not have the most ideal conditions since people there must live in metal containers with a maximum capacity of 5 persons per container. The general conditions at HTV are very basic with communal showers and kitchens serving a large population and far too little showers to match the amount of people residing there. There is also a hygiene problem due to overpopulation and overcrowding. There is also a heat problem in the Summer months and vice versa in the Winter months. Fortunately, AWAS has a project underway of refurbishing HTV so as to be able to offer better conditions to them.

Balzan – Open Centre

This is an open centre mainly dedicated to families. With the high cost of living, it has become difficult for certain families to leave the open centre system and thus, they end up spending several years here. It seems that the latter is in fact, vetted by AWAS who grant such a concession when they encounter deserving cases.

Dar Liedna

This is an open centre which houses unaccompanied minors who would have arrived without a parent or guardian. Out of all the open centres, Dar Liedna has the best conditions since it is merely a home with a low staff to beneficiary ratio to care for the unaccompanied minors.

To date, AWAS does not offer the service of psychologists whereby they tend to refer directly to JRS if someone is experiencing mental health problems. AWAS does offer the service of social workers however, there does not seem to be enough for them to keep up with residents' needs. Thus, such social workers end up using a significant proportion of their time dealing with emergencies. Furthermore, people in open centres are meant to stay there for a

year however, there have been many cases that asylum seekers/refugees end up spending years.

Problems faced

- Asylum seekers are granted a per diem of 100-130 EUR/month which is there to cover little things such as transport. However, this is nothing compared to the cost of living in Malta. Furthermore, the per diem is based on the amount of times they sign in to prove that they are living in the open centres;
- As for those refugees/asylum seekers who are under the age of 16, they have the advantage of being able to go to school in Malta. However, those over the age of 16 encounter issues when it comes to their education;
- Employment prospects for them are quite low due to the language and qualifications barriers which in turn, makes it very difficult for them to cope with the rent which is rising to an all-time high; and,
- Racism and lack are both prevalent issues which factor negatively a lot in the lives of these asylum seekers.

Ministry for Home Affairs and National Security (MHAS)

The immigration focus group has also met up with Dr. Roberta Buhagiar, Migration Coordinator at the Ministry of Home Affairs and National Security, who provided us with a further diagnosis of the problem pertaining to immigration in Malta.

General Overview

Last Summer, the amount of arrivals which Malta encountered was well beyond our yearly average. In fact, the Maltese government had to take immediate action in this regard by undertaking 3 ad hoc relocations which turned out to be a success despite the fact that they occurred outside a legal framework, as a result of an ad hoc political agreement between some heads of Government in Europe.

Reality

The biggest challenge that lies within the subject of immigration is the fact that there is no prospect of winning votes when it comes to an election and hence, the topic in itself and any proposed reform brought forth results in resistance by the public at large. In spite of this, in Malta, we have understood that we need immigrants in our country because they are doing work that the Maltese don't want to do. Therefore, the Maltese population has become more accepting when it comes the foreigners who live amongst them.

Recent Headlines

Over the summer, hundreds of migrants from sub-Saharan countries were found living in horrible conditions, such as a cow-shed, whereby this hit the news headlines. Dr. Roberta Buhagiar explained that the migrants found living in such conditions were in actual fact, from Italy and not even Malta's responsibility in terms of international protection. Due to the Schengen system, many migrants whose residence permit has been issued by Italy are travelling to Malta in search of employment and a better life. Many are being employed by the Maltese who prefer migrants from Italy over the migrants who have a residence permit in Malta due to the fact that they are willing to accept any conditions (since the living conditions are not adequate at all in Italy).

Main Challenges and Proposed Changes

In view of the above paragraph, the constant challenge which Malta faces has always boiled down to capacity as well as lack of resources. The Ministry believes that it is more of a question of improving migration management in this regard. Housing in itself is one of the main issues because only people with refugee status have a right to housing and not those who have subsidiary protection as they are limited and have no entitlements. The Ministry is currently exploring ways of strengthening its current capacity and mechanisms which are related to immigration in general. The first of which being AWAS, which shall be undergoing a number of changes in 2019, including:

- Potential increase in staffing;
- Improving the situation in the reception centres; and,
- Improving the policies relating to care and support which are currently in place.

The Ministry, together with the Parliamentary Secretariat for Reforms, Citizenship and Simplification of Administrative Processes, has also recently launched a new policy regarding Specific Residence Authorisation. Such immigrants would have been living in Malta for a number of years with no prospect of going back to their country. There are then situations where a specific category of immigrants is granted specific residence authorisation but with limitations. This was deemed to be quite a receptive measure whereby NGOs have welcomed it and it will most probably bring considerable change.

Integration in Malta

Integration-wise, the Ministry has started implementing measures in line with the MEAE Integration Strategy, e.g. the Specific Residence Authorisation policy. The Maltese

government is very much interested in exploring further integration measures and improving the situation. Actually, the Integration Unit within MEAE has been recently inaugurated. Their job is to implement the integration strategy whereby further plans and measures of helping immigrants to integrate themselves into the Maltese society are in the pipeline. One such measure is that of offering nation-wide integration courses which will be starting very soon.

NGO Boats

The Maltese government is not against the principle of rescue at sea, or against NGOs operating vessels engaged in rescue at sea. However, NGOs vessels must be properly licensed, equipped and insured to carry out such activities. Anyone working in these NGO boats must be fully-trained in this regard. There have been situations where NGO boats have been tweeting their positions just off the territorial waters of Libya whereby smugglers have been taking advantage of this. The smuggling network have been using migrants to finance their terrorism network due to the fact that coordinates are being made public.

This argument is a double-edged sword whereby on the one hand, we have the willingness to save migrants at sea (which was the main cause of concern when drafting this policy paper) and on the other hand, we have those opting not to feed into the terrorism network at the cost of leaving innocent lives suffering at sea. The majority of the members of such focus group feel that nothing should take precedence over saving an innocent life and thus, some sort of balance should be found in such an argument. Thus, a midway should be found between saving lives as well as stopping smugglers from taking advantage of migrants at sea for their personal use. After all, NGO boats are there for a reason whereby the operation must be undertaken as adequately as possible to avoid feeding into the terrorism network.

MEP Dr Miriam Dalli

The KSU Social Policy Office also met up with MEP Dr. Miriam Dalli so that she could furnish us with information on the work that she has done within the EU when it comes to immigration. In fact, MEP Dr. Miriam Dalli had quite a lot to say about the position paper which she has very recently drafted.

The proposal for an Asylum and Migration Fund will eventually replace the current Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the purpose of which is to provide financial aid for the execution of the asylum and migration acquis. In addition to this, the European Commission is suggesting to allocate a budget of 10.4 bn EUR to assist Member States in managing migratory flows.

MEP Dr. Miriam Dalli has expressed that in order to allow for proper integration of migrants and refugees, actions and measures must come from a central and community level. In fact,

communities are to be equipped with the necessary skills to make sure there exists inclusivity and dignity for all, including through education, language training, civic orientation courses as well as other actions promoting equality and social inclusion.

In the position paper, she has stated that the policies in place need to create a midway between providing security, allowing legal channels for economic migrants and controlling the number of people a country can host. Apprenticeship and internship schemes as well as policies aimed towards tertiary and vocational education can all lead to long-term benefits and thus, these should be implemented.

MEP Dr Roberta Metsola

The KSU Social Policy Office also met up with MEP Dr. Roberta Metsola, who opined that participation of all actors involved in society is crucial; emphasising the fact that integration measures for all legally residing third-country nationals should promote inclusion. MEP Dr. Roberta Metsola emphasised that local and regional authorities play an important role in this integration process. Moreover, emphasis was placed on the fact that hosting Member States must offer refugees support and opportunities to integrate and build a life in their new society; including accommodation, literacy and language courses, inter-cultural dialogue, education and professional training, and also effective access to democratic structures in society. Furthermore, it was highlighted that refugees have both rights and obligations in the host Member States. Hence, respect for the values upon which the Union is built must be an integral part of the integration process. MEP Dr. Roberta Metsola suggested that better recognition of foreign qualifications is one practical way of ensuring that third-country nationals already present in the Union can integrate better.

Roundtable Discussion

After a roundtable discussion was organised last September by the PFWS, which the KSU Social Policy Office attended, a number of points emerged:

- The University of Malta administration has someone specialized in taking care of the aspect of migration at the university which is already a step towards the right direction since this helps such refugees/asylum seekers in various ways;
- Out of the refugee students studying some sort of course at the University of Malta, there has already been 1 success story. The student has managed to earn a degree in IT where his journey all started with him having to do a foundation course; and,
- Refugee students encounter the following problems:
 - A language barrier;
 - Religious issues;
 - Jobs prospects; and,

- Lack of documentation

Spark 15

KSU, together with the focus group, have met up with Spark 15, an organisation of 15 youth refugees from different countries. Its aim is to help refugee and migrant youths to attain full integration within the Maltese communities. Many of its members are doing a course at the University of Malta and thus, it is one of their goals to become more student-oriented and involved within the university community. Luckily, the University of Malta administration has already assisted these migrant/refugee students in various ways, namely by waiving the fees attributable to the foundation as well as the pre-foundation courses which are necessary for their level of education to be at par with the level of education in Malta. Subsequently, this would equip them with the necessary expertise to help them read for any degree or postgraduate qualification at the University of Malta. Thus, the KSU Social Policy Office has been doing its utmost to help them in this regard by aiding these students to achieve the following:

- Meeting up and communicating with the members of Spark 15 on a regular basis;
- Including Spark 15 in the students' mailing list;
- Inviting Spark 15 and its members to all university events, such as the KSU #BeActive Sports Festival 2018 and the Christmas gathering; and,
- Making the welfare fund available to the refugees/asylum seekers to subsidise the university books which are needed for them to fulfil their course requirements.

Hal Far Outreach Group

KSU has also successfully reached out to this student group comprised of University students whereby their mission is to help the refugees/asylum seekers residing within the Hal Far Open Centre to integrate with the rest of society by organising various initiatives/activities for them. The KSU Social Policy Office has made it a point to place such refugees/asylum seekers as a focal point in their mission to work on improving integration of immigrants in in Malta, particularly at the University of Malta. The KSU Social Policy Office has done so in various ways, including the following:

- Meeting up and communicating with the members of the Hal Far Outreach Group; and,
- Inviting the immigrants residing within the Hal Far Outreach Group to University events, such as the KSU #BeActive Sports Festival 2018 and the KSU x University Chaplaincy Christmas Party. When it comes to the KSU #BeActive Sports Festival 2018, the group managed to form 2 football teams whereby about 15 immigrants joined us for the football tournament.

Chapter 4 - Recommendations

Language

In a bilingual community like the Maltese Islands, we use our languages in different ways. Which is the most important language for a migrant to learn to properly integrate and make the most out of his/her potential? For integration, the most pertinent language is Maltese - this is the way most Maltese persons are comfortable communicating between themselves. Therefore, when it comes to integration within communities, Maltese is what is needed. If anyone wants to get an education, especially at university level: most lectures and exams require an excellent command of the English language. English is also a universally used language, so if the migrant chooses to exercise his right of freedom of movement within the European Union, English is the language to open the portal to Europe.

For some students' a good command of the Maltese and English language is a difficult struggle which may be an obstacle to his/her integration within, not only the University, but also society. While the requirement of the IELTS course can therefore be understood in this context, this does not mean that this is enough for persons to be able to easily grasp what is being said both in a formal classroom setting or in an informal discussion outside the classroom walls. Neither does the IELTS help students to learn or communicate in Maltese, our country's national language.

A "buddy system" could be a good first step to give students the opportunity to either begin learning or to practice both English and Maltese. A good step forward would be language teachers volunteering to give Maltese classes to students, even in an informal manner, in order to communicate in Maltese in a basic manner and understand frequently used colloquial phrases such as "*mela!*".

Visibility of Minority Groups and Individuals

Throughout our consultations and discussions, it became prevalent that although a number of students on campus come from a number of racial, religious and cultural minorities, many of these groups are under represented both amongst student organisation bodies as well as activism and discussion forums on campus. Students who may be entering university and who are third country nationals with an irregular status and sometimes without the presence of their family may be subjected to overwhelming loneliness. The absence of familiar faces, languages, religious beliefs or other cultural ties may cause students to shy away from activities on campus for fear of not feeling like they belong.

This focus group wishes to encourage minority groups to organise and to participate in not only KPS but in activities on campus. It has also come to our attention that certain religious feasts or significant days for certain nationalities are celebrated on campus. An example of this is the celebration of Omani day, or communal gatherings of prayer and celebration during both Ramadan and the Eid. We are delighted with this and wish to see an increase in the visibility of these events and for the dissemination of their information in order to reach students who may would like to join in these activities. This would also be a good opportunity for local students to encounter and experience diversity in a meaningful way, to understand the university values of acceptance and peace and to bring understanding between different groups of persons in a brotherly (and fun) fashion.

Active Participation

Given the increasing number of immigrant students on campus, there is significant underrepresentation of immigrant individuals on campus. This focus group believes that active participation of immigrant students as well as their contribution on various levels at University will contribute to enriching our campus as well as Maltese society in general. Through greater input by individuals from the immigrant community from various backgrounds, the collective student voice can become both more inclusive as well as more effective, considering the reality of many rather than that of the few.

For such active participation to occur, it is important to identify hurdles faced by Maltese students in general in becoming active on campus, with possibly further obstacles faced by migrant newcomers who wish to enter the student organisation scene. The more this University encourages activism, both directly and tacitly, the more both local and immigrant students will feel empowered to contribute and to making a difference. Methods of encouraging and effectively increasing student participation in general merit a separate study, however, this focus group strongly encourages student organisations to discuss such problems and continue working to further encourage students to make their voice heard on campus.

Culture Sharing

Culture is an integral part of society and our individual identity. It is a unique concept which is both formed by society and shapes the society it forms part of. This focus group believes that more can be done for students to gain a better understanding of various cultures. Through such understanding, further bridges may be built between students of different cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, a process of better culture sharing does not insinuate that Maltese culture should be lost in the process. It should be taken as an opportunity for local and immigrant students to discuss and educate themselves both on Maltese and international culture. Amongst initiatives discussed were the organisation of social events where local and migrant students could mingle, such as a 'speed dating' event where students are matched up with someone from a completely different background. Clearly, such a process cannot be

planned or rushed, however, we hope to see a campus where cultures are discussed and shared, rather than compromised in their entirety or seeing students from different cultures segregate themselves completely.

Segregation between University Students

This focus group believes that segregation between University students is a reality, as the number of international students increases but students are still seen to be mingling with their own groups, rather than forming ties with others. This is something innate in human nature, however, this focus group would encourage an approach where more connection is made between different groups, with more positive interaction, rather than segregation based on unfounded fear, prejudice or an us versus them mentality.

We strongly believe that University students have a significant role to play, through small steps which may be taken in daily life. Something as simple as speaking to a student who is sitting alone or striking up a conversation with the person queuing in the canteen, can work to make connections or start friendships with people outside one's normal group. Student organisations can also identify different groups or segregated individuals within their following. Furthermore, faculties may also identify ways to encourage better connections between local and immigrant students.

Chapter 5 - Conclusion

Way Forward

All students face new challenges upon leaving University and starting their career. In our globalised world, interaction with foreigners is inevitable, and social groups often find themselves having to either integrate or be somehow cornered to. This is where resistance and occasionally, underlying racism come into play. The general perception towards foreigners, particularly concerning but not limited to their employment, has always been one of general hostility. A person's country of origin sometimes is seen as a greater defining factor over other characteristics, work ethics, or even qualifications. Unfortunately, the amount of cases concerning xenophobic harassment, slurs or hate speech are also on the rise and can particularly affect immigrant individuals.

Through this position paper, KSU's Immigration Focus Group calls for further and more effective integration of immigrants on University Campus, and better conditions for immigrants in general, particularly concerning recent revelations of inhumane treatment and living conditions. The aim of the focus group was to go beyond simple discussion. This policy paper, rather than being the end product of the group's work, shall act as an initiation of the work to be carried out. KSU's Immigration Focus Group has therefore drawn up a plan of action concerning the next steps to be taken.

Firstly, the KSU Immigration Focus Group in conjunction with other stakeholders, intends on addressing concerns faced by locals regarding immigration. Whilst xenophobic slurs, hate speech and harassment or crime related to racism can never be tolerated, it is neither fair nor realistic to completely ignore concerns arising from locals with regarding to a steady increase in immigrants from various backgrounds. Therefore, this focus group wishes to meet with further stakeholders, including representatives from civil society, political parties, and students, in order to be able to consult a full spectrum of opinions or positions, to make an informed choice on the most effective way forward.

Secondly, this focus group strives to promote the humane treatment of immigrants and affirms the need to respect their dignity and human rights, whilst making students and staff alike aware of the integration process involved. Malta is seeing an influx of immigrants from different economic, social and geographic backgrounds. With this being said, exploitation of workers, racial harassment, or living in subpar conditions can never be accepted. Mutual respect between the immigrant community and the local community is key for Maltese society to move forward as one.

Thirdly, this group seeks to address the issue of active participation of immigrant students on campus, as well as preventing the segregation of groups. As previously mentioned, encouraging local students to become active on campus is already seen as a challenge, so it is notable that immigrant students face different but significant obstacles to contributing through their active participation at the University of Malta.

KSU will continue to meet with stakeholders with the aim of identifying further challenges faced and setting clear and effective steps to address them. Once these steps have been taken, further updates will follow. It is the hope of KSU and the Immigration Focus Group that such meetings will be fruitful, and lead to real change on the University campus.

Chapter 6 - Bibliography

Legislation

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