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**THE ROLE OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION FOR FOREIGN  
CHILDREN**

**An analysis of the school system in Malta and its current projects to enhance  
social inclusion of foreign children.**

Dissertation in: Cultural Anthropology and Migration Processes

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## PREMISE

*“Knowledge is power. Information is liberating. Education is the premise of progress, in every society, in every family.”*

- Kofi Annan

Education represents progress. But it reaches success only if extended to everyone, to every child, despite colour, religion, age, sexual orientation, or physical disability. Because if knowledge is reserved only to a certain elite, it will not be possible for real development to take place, anywhere. Accordingly, inclusivity is necessary and urgent because in a society, which is characterised by globalisation, multiculturalism and migrations, an inclusive school system embodies the key for development and growth. And access to an inclusive school system needs to be guaranteed to everyone.

However, the literature review I conducted to write this thesis led me to discover that inclusive education has always referred to the inclusion of children presenting any kind of physical disability. Accordingly, the aim of this project is also to broaden this perspective, and thus this term, to any category of vulnerable children, which are characterising the diversity in nowadays' school classes. The same importance and urgency must be addressed toward investing in education. Governments have the possibility and the resources to enhance the role of literacy and school, and to provide the means to everyone, involving new tools and beliefs, beginning by digital literacy and a culture of tolerance and solidarity.

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*“Education transforms lives.”*

- UNESCO

## INTRODUCTION

*“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”*

- Nelson Mandela

Education represents the key for a better future, and everyone should have access to it.

In particular, education should be granted in an inclusive and welcoming way to all the children who move to a foreign country in order to have higher standards of life, who aim at a brighter future, who leave everything they know for a completely new reality, often radically different.

Accordingly, literacy and education can be considered nowadays as fundamental instruments for everyone in order to have access to everything; from higher education to the job market, from social and political participation to travelling, from basic needs as paying taxes to specific actions like researching for a new vaccine.

Every country has the duty of enhancing the value of its own school system, since it represents one of the major sources of education of the future citizens and protagonists of the social, political, and economic life of that country.

However, the origin of the children should not serve as an obstacle for their participation, neither if they live in their country, nor, and even more so, if they move to a foreign destination. As a matter of fact, these children are going to be part of a community and will be the protagonists of the future decision-making process. Accordingly, it is in the duty and interest of that community to support and include them, to empower them and to ensure that they will have access to their fundamental rights, as education is. Ensuring this right means providing the access to a new world of knowledge, which is free from prejudices, religious beliefs, or radical ideologies, that may be used by families or communities to hinder their children from entering the school system.

A very recent but famous literary case expresses exactly the role that education has when isolated or vulnerable children manage to have access to it. “Educated”, a New York Times bestseller written by the American author Tara Westover, is a memoir of her life, which started between the mountains of Idaho in a Mormon survivalist family. The book, however, is not a book about religion, as she stated at the beginning of her work, but about the impact that having access to education had on her life, involving her family, the community she grew up in, religion and the first steps into a society which was completely different from what she has been taught since her birth.

Everything I had worked for, all my years of study, had been to purchase for myself this one privilege: to see and experience more truths than those given to me by my father, and to use those truths to construct my own mind. (...) An education is not so much about making a living as making a person.<sup>1</sup>

(Westover, 2018, pg. 345)

As she stated in the book, it is clear that her willing is to underline the function that education can have in someone's life, not only providing actual knowledge about history, maths, or science but the implicit skills that the school system teaches, such as the relationship with peers, the development of a critical thinking and an objective view of global phenomena. The social aspect of going to school and being included in school activities is at the heart of this thesis, as well as representing an important element in Westover's book.

Moreover, she highlights that education does not only matter in terms of achieving a diploma and being later employable, it is not only a mean to reach an objective, it is a process and also a matter of opening one's mind about how to behave in society and live one's life.

The decisions I made after that moment were not the ones she would have made. They were the choices of a changed person, a new self. You could call this selfhood many things. Transformation. Metamorphosis. Falsity. Betrayal. I call it an education.<sup>2</sup>

(Westover, 2018, pg. 371)

This is the final statement of Westover's memoir, a powerful example of the endless possibilities and opportunities that someone can encounter if having the means to access education. Possibilities and opportunities which are still not open to way too many children worldwide.

In the case that the right to education will not be protected, in fact, children will not be able to study and, consequently, they will not be able to express their opinions and problems, to be active citizens and to contribute to the development of their society. They will be powerless and marginalized, enhancing social issues like early dropouts, discrimination, sectoral poverty, illiteracy, criminality, bullying and many more.

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<sup>1</sup> Westover (2018), "Educated. A Memoir".

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

Not to mention all the potential which would be wasted and all the futures which would be stolen. Therefore, it is essential to provide an inclusive and welcoming framework for two main reasons: to respect and implement the right to education, and to support children while learning the new language and adapting to the new school system.

Because, as Bourdieu stated, “every human being – of any age – is a social actor” and should be considered as such (Bourdieu, 2003).

Through my dissertation, I would like to highlight the importance of education, and, most of all, the importance of having an inclusive and supportive access to education for all the foreign children who move to another country and will become part of the new community they settle in. I firmly believe that literacy and education provide children the primary instrument to feel part of the new community, which is literacy, the ability to read and write, speak and understand the new language. As a matter of fact, language gives foreign children the capacity to create social ties and, therefore, the means to feel included in that community. However, despite the focus would be on the importance of formal education, as the school system, for foreign children, I would also include other elements which are important as well and which come up beside the school system, such as informal education environments, involving cultural and familiar contexts.

Moreover, it is necessary to consider the elements that indicate when someone can be defined as socially included. Children grow up with an idea of inclusion which is itself a result of what their parents or their culture teach them, therefore it is important to consider that there might be more than one conception of inclusion, considering the different priorities that people have. Consequently, I would provide a general conception of social inclusion and then, identify what it means for the countries which are protagonists of the research that I will outline.

As a matter of fact, the second part of my thesis will be analysing education models available in Malta for foreign children, with the aim of understanding whether they can be evaluated as inclusive and supportive toward them and if the school system is concretely providing a helpful, equal and safe environment for all the vulnerable children who represent the future generation of that country.

The focus on Malta is the result of a volunteering project that I personally took part of during my Erasmus exchange in the island, which occurred during the fall semester of 2019. Thanks to Kopin, a local NGO, I volunteered as an English teacher in a school, which is tailored for foreign children who do not speak English and/or Maltese. During the time I spent in the school, I realized the value of the project and the fundamental support that it provides to foreign children and their families. It was mainly for this reason that I decided to research more on available education options, which could suit foreign children, both in Malta, in Italy and around the world.

Accordingly, my research will be divided in two main chapters. The first one will be the result of an academic review on literacy and education, on current and future models, aimed at establishing a complete framework of which are the academic opinions on the matter and how education is perceived in relation to language, knowledge and the cultural background. A focus on future perspectives will be delineated to stress the necessity of a flexible system, able to respond to the current situation, which is constantly changing due to worldwide phenomena such as globalization and migration.

Not to mention the latest issue of a global pandemic, which is considered to be the major threat in the history of education so far. The ongoing crisis will be only perpetuating and enlarging the gap, which was already present before, between those children who had access to education and those who were not as lucky. This has been happening mainly because of health, economic and technological issues, considering that in many countries of the world, it is not possible to have a computer, tablet or any other technological device in the house, available for children to attend online classes.

However, it seems that, for governments, there are other priorities, even if education represents one of the most powerful instruments for the future. In fact, around 258 million children, or the 17% of the global total, are still left behind.<sup>3</sup>

The second chapter will focus on Malta. I will firstly outline a general overview on the national situation regarding migration, lingering on the main countries of origin, the motivations behind their movement, and the modalities of arrival. I will later provide the national framework on education and on the school system, highlighting the current available education projects aimed at fostering social inclusion for foreign children, focusing on one program, the Language Induction Course. The final section of this chapter will be completely dedicated to social inclusion, what it means, what it requires, and what it leads to.

I decided to analyse social inclusion in Malta through personal experiences. In fact, I managed to find some contacts of young adults who moved to Malta when they were children or teenagers, and I conducted a series of interviews. The aim of these interviews was to highlight both positive and negative episodes and aspects of the Maltese school system, from the perspective of a foreign student. I will conclude my dissertation with future perspectives of education, taking into account the current global situation, affected by a new pandemic, migrations and climate disasters, to suggest that this moment would be a great opportunity for a change, for growth, and for development.

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<sup>3</sup> UNICEF GEM Report “*All means All*”, (2020).

## CHAPTER 1 – THE ROLE OF EDUCATION

### 1. EDUCATION AND LITERACY

It may seem surreal for some people to think that there are still so many children and adults worldwide who are not able to read or write. It may seem surreal because, for Western countries, literacy is one of the first instrument that children have access to, since it is fundamental in the development of a person and to create relationships with other members of society.

Despite the overwhelming feeling that people face when realizing their privilege, there are still so many children, and people in general, who confront illiteracy and, thus, lack of education in their life for several reasons, such as for geographical, cultural, or economic motives.

On one side, the geography approach plays a relevant role, in fact children may live too far or isolated from school, they may not have access to safe means of transport to reach the closest institute, or they may belong to nomadic communities that often move.

Culture also plays an important role, especially considering the gender gap in education, since there are still societies around the world that believe girls cannot attend school because their role in the family and community is only related to become wives and mothers, taking care of the house and future children.

However, the most spread reason is linked to economic matters. Accordingly, parents may need help from their children for work, because the family cannot afford children to attend classes for many years or cannot pay fees and school material, or they may need help from the older siblings in taking care of younger children and of the house while parents work.

Uneducated children represent an issue, for themselves and for the country they live in, as a matter of fact, they embody the future generation, part of the future decision-making process, future leaders, and protagonists of society. Consequently, providing them access to education is an imperative for current governments, so that they will not have to face a whole generation of illiterate adults in twenty years, and they will prevent both social and economic challenges.

Education, in fact, provides children not only academic knowledge and skills but also social feelings and attitudes, such as a sense of belonging to community, or simply a class, or a sense of commitment toward the objectives of that community, leading to the benefits of both. It is evident that school prepares children for the “real world”, through the support of different sets of values and rules that must be respected and that represent a smaller version of the actual society. In this way, children will be raised with a more solid background, which will help them facing future social issues.

“Illiteracy can also muffle the political opportunities of the underdog, by reducing their ability to participate in political arena and to express their demands effectively” (Sen, 2003). As Amartya Sen stated in his work<sup>4</sup>, education has an instrumental role, by teaching what will be needed to have an active role in the decision-making process, and a social role, by enhancing empowerment and dialogue.

Moreover, the access to literacy and education needs to be guaranteed following certain criteria, taking into consideration that children are not all the same. They differ for culture, origin, familiar background, language, religion, ethnicity, or simply personality or character. And these differences cannot be ignored. On the contrary, they need to be recognized, respected, and valued. Accordingly, providing an inclusive access to education is essential for the respect of all the differences that children represent, rather than conform them under the same set of rules and criteria.

Inclusion, in fact, cannot be achieved if it is perceived as a problem or an obstacle, rather than an opportunity for the community to thrive and improve. In order to reach this level of inclusion, discrimination based on gender, disability, origin or legal status should not represent a barrier for participation in education anymore.

The origin of children is the reason behind the discrimination that will be tackled throughout this research, considering that foreign children are often perceived as a problem that anyone is willing to handle. This perception is the result of historical and cultural images, but also of knowledge. As a matter of fact, it is very common that people misuse different words when speaking about migrants because they do not know the different meanings, or they simply do not care about using the specific terminology, enhancing the disrespect for them. When considering foreign children, it is necessary to set a clear distinction between intra-EU migrants, children from other European Union Member States, and third-country nationals, children coming from non-EU countries. Moreover, in order to understand the motives behind their migration and to comprehend their psychological status when arriving, it is fundamental to consider whether they are accompanied, unaccompanied, documented or undocumented. A third classification can be outlined from a time perspective, dividing first-generation migrants, children born abroad, and second-generation migrants, children whose parents were born abroad (Janta, Harte, 2016).

Spreading knowledge and awareness on the correct vocabulary to use when speaking, writing, or describing someone would represent a great improvement, a first step toward dignity firstly, and an inclusive education system, and thus, an inclusive society secondly.

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<sup>4</sup> “Development as capability expansion”, Sen, 2003.

It always comes back to knowledge and education, as keys to solve the issue.

### *1.1 The right to Education<sup>5</sup>*

Receiving an education is not only a matter of duty toward and investment for the future generations, it is a right every child has, despite their age, gender, origin, religious belief, or legal status. In the past century, many measures have been adopted to protect the right to education and the first and most significant legal document is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In 1948, with the implementation of this declaration, its article 26, together with article 28 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted later in 1989, defended the right to education as a fundamental right for every child.

Moreover, article 30 of the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families support the right to education for all migrant children, despite their legal status. However, this convention resents an issue, since only one out of four countries (almost all of which are the origin countries) have ratified it by 2018.

The right to receive an education is included in and protected by other legal instruments, such as the 1951 Refugee Convention, whose article 22 guarantees the equal treatment concerning elementary education; the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1976) defends the necessity of education for personal development and dignity in articles 13 and 14; and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979) stresses the necessity to eliminate discrimination against women in the field of education in article 10.

Three major legal instruments have been written specifically to protect the right to education, the 1960 Convention against Discrimination in Education, the 1994 Salamanca Statement and Framework for Actions on Special Needs Education, and the 1990 World Declaration on Education for All, which have been recently reinforced with the 2015 Resolution on the Right to Education in Emergency Situations and the Education 2030 Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action.

Furthermore, a particular framework goes beyond the support to the right of education, the Dakar Framework, in fact, stated that inclusion in education must be an integral feature of the set of strategies that will be implemented:

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<sup>5</sup> See Appendix 1 “The Right to Education” for the full texts of the articles.

The inclusion of children with special needs, from disadvantaged ethnic minorities and migrant populations, from remote and isolated communities and from urban slums, and others excluded from education, must be an integral part of strategies to achieve Universal Primary Education (UPE) by 2015. (The Dakar Framework, pg. 15-16)

The right to not being discriminated, in education as in general, is enshrined in the first two articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which state that “all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights” (article 1) and that “everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind” (article 2). Moreover, it is supported by other legal tools such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1996), the International Bill of Rights and, as mentioned before, in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1976).

The right to participation needs also to be taken into account considering the several benefits that children would have the opportunity to acquire. This right is enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and protected in particular by article 12, which states that:

1. States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.
2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.

The social benefits, that children would be able to have access to, could be firstly, participating in society, which would lead to a major development and empowerment of children and youth, who will be able to take more conscious and well-thought decisions for their lives. Secondly, knowledge would bring awareness about children’s rights, facilitating their relationships with local or national institutions and services. Finally, social participation would foster the passage from childhood to teenage and, thus, empower them in becoming “social agents of change” (UNICEF, Child Rights Toolkit, Module 3). However, it is relevant to mention that despite the presence of strong and widely ratified non-discriminatory legal instruments, the achievement of equality without discrimination, in

education as well as in society, it may be considered as one of the most urgent challenges that needs to be tackled nowadays. This urgency is represented within the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development<sup>6</sup>, in fact the 4<sup>th</sup> of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals focuses on quality education. In particular, the goal targets 4.5 and 4.7 highlight the necessity to provide an inclusive and equal access to education.

The former stating “(...) ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations”, and the latter

(...) ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including (...) human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution to sustainable development.

(4<sup>th</sup> Sustainable Development Goal, UN)

### *1.2 Academic review on Education and Literacy*

The right to education is much more than just going to school, it represents the possibility to empower children, who will be able to escape vulnerable conditions and to achieve their goals and their dreams. The importance of literacy and education, as well as the fundamental support in providing them to everybody, is extremely relevant when considering that they contribute to achieve the ability to access information. And having access to information has always meant that someone may have more chances to get an education. And education is power. Literacy, as the ability to write and read, has always represented power. Malinowski stated that knowledge provides power because it leads to changes and acts in the world, having the means to write and read gives access to information and knowledge, which represents the key for future opportunities, in particular the key to understand the value of those opportunities, embrace them and enrich oneself. It means having the capabilities to infer the best skills, resources and values from those opportunities and make them valuable. Literacy can, in fact, be easily considered as a cornerstone for freedom.

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<sup>6</sup> Sustainable Development Goals, “4. Quality Education”.

If knowledge is power, literacy is the key to the kingdom. For centuries, the ability to read and write has given power to those who possessed it, although access to book learning was often limited to a privileged minority. Today, by contrast, we inhabit a digital age in which written texts are more widely and democratically available than ever before. A prerequisite for access, however, is still the ability to comprehend and appraise those texts.<sup>7</sup>

(Vincent, 2000; Ippolito, Samson, Steele, 2008, pg. 1)

It provides the basic skills that people need to learn, to discover, to face society in a conscious way. As a matter of fact, one of the simplest reasons behind ignorance and a difficult access to a foreign language is represented by the lack of literacy.

Historically, literacy has always been used as a distinctive feature, a break to separate civilized populations from “savages”, who were considered as primitive tribes only because they had a different way of communication and did not evolve with the development of a writing system. The cultural evolution is represented by the fact that populations realized the potential unlimited duration of their culture, which could have been written down and transmitted for generations, without any misunderstandings or interpretations that may occur when speaking (Goody, Watt, 1962-3; Goody, 1968). Literacy, as mentioned above, has later been used as a political discourse, creating borders between those who embraced it and those who did not, establishing social clashes also within the same country, since they could not share the same code of communication (Bourdieu, 2003; Asad, 1980; Street, 2001).

Nowadays, literacy still have many roles, for some people it is still a reason for describing countries as developed and developing, in a colonialist sense of superiority and inferiority, for many others it embodies a fundamental tool that every child must have access to. In this sense having the ability to write and read represents a key pillar for having access to education and knowledge. An ability which must adapt to new and different circumstances, such as an always more tech-based society, that requires teaching the most used communication instrument nowadays, technological devices.<sup>8</sup>

The most important skill, in fact, is language, which is a fundamental tool to communicate and establish relationships with other members of society. It also provides the way to defend a person’s own identity, as speaking a certain language also means to communicate certain values.

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<sup>7</sup> “Introduction: Why adolescent literacy matters now” by Ippolito, Samson, Steele, 2008.

<sup>8</sup> The approach to this new language will be outlined later in this chapter.

Elinor Ochs expressed that children need to acquire specific social and cultural skills in order to actively participate, skills such as the way of thinking, feeling or acting. This reasoning does not only apply for children, as a matter of fact, acquiring a new language represents the beginning of a process of becoming active citizens in a community through socialization (Ochs, 1988).

Language, in this sense, can establish a border between those who share it, and share the identity beliefs, and those who are excluded because of not sharing those values or not being able to represent them, as for example people who suffer from autism or ignorant people<sup>9</sup>, who will therefore be discriminated. I will outline later the risk of discrimination and segregation in the school environment. In this way, language can also represent a political issue, used to highlight the differences with foreign people present in the national territory, to foment hate and gain political power.

Language, in fact, may represent a connection with a feeling of nationalism, especially when considering the attitude of certain people defending their language from foreign minorities present in the country, as a fundamental characteristic to belong to that nation. Gellner considered a homogeneous language as a fundamental prerequisite for the foundation of a modern state, which required a process of mass literacy as well with the common goal of a common language.

It is about a necessary denial, which will be leading to the affirmation of a national linguistic ideology and to the consolidation of the national state entity, due to the acceptance of a solidarity based on common linguistic roots. In this sense, the imposition of a standard national language (...) appears as an operation of civilization, of modernization of the ignorant masses, and not as a political action only.<sup>10</sup>  
(Biscaldi, Matera, 2016, pg. 91)

It is also because of these feelings, spread in every country, that I would like to highlight the fundamental importance of learning the language of the country someone decides to live in. It gives people the key to society, and the key to being accepted by a part of the population, who still feels “threatened” by anyone different and uses their diversities to insult and perpetuate hate.

It is relevant to mention that nowadays not everyone has the sufficient knowledge of the language, which is necessary to learn. In 2016, UNESCO reported in “If you don’t understand, how can you learn?”, that the 40% of the global population does not have access to education because of not speaking or understanding the language. It was also discovered that, in middle and high-income

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<sup>9</sup> As in “ignoring and not knowing”, not with the negative connotation that this adjective has nowadays.

<sup>10</sup> The translation was made by me.

countries, when students were taught in a language that was not their mother tongue, their results were 34% lower than the results of native students. It is possible to infer that language may represent a considerable obstacle, together with ethnicity and poverty.

Furthermore, communication, as deriving from knowing the language, is fundamental to create social ties, to take part in social activities, and to feel included and heard. To make people understand that different does not necessarily mean negative.

The capacity to express themselves is essential in being part of a community, either whether the person was born in that community or moved in it later. This capacity, as communication in general, represents the basis of modern society and for interaction, for the creation of social ties with other members of the community and for all those people and institutions who share the same language. As a matter of fact, it can be stated that talking is the fastest and easiest way of interaction and inclusion. However, I believe it is correct to mention that education systems may also lead to negative results, since, as ever social aspect, power has two faces of the medal. Accordingly, education can be used as a tool of control, for example authoritarian regimes can shape children's minds and, doing so, shape society with the principles of that regime.

Moreover, although it is well known that education should be equal and free for everyone, the school system still reflects nowadays social inequalities, a portrait which was already identified by Marx. As a matter of fact, when providing his view on education, Marx stated that the "myth of meritocracy" was merely a myth, considering that school segregation and private institutions were affecting the equal access to every student, sustaining the idea that the current education system was a honest reflection of social classes, and thus, class inequality.

Situations which are unfortunately still present in modern society.

### *1.3 Education and Literacy as tools for social inclusion and integration*

The access to literacy, and accordingly to education, is fundamental for integration and inclusion. They both provide what is necessary in order to be able to face a conversation, to understand other people, not only in terms of what they say, but especially considering who they are and where they come from, and to create social ties.

Inclusion and integration may represent the beginning, or continuum, of the fight against two main phenomena, which still occur in our modern society and education environment: school segregation and discrimination. Because they may be affected and influenced by other contexts, but they may also have their roots in school, where hate may spread, and bullying acts may be perpetuated.

These situations need to be recognized and addressed through not only specific projects, tackling diversity or the use of verbal and physical violence, but also through a more inclusive system of welcoming all children, despite their cultural background.

It is clear that discrimination and school segregation are connected between each other, fomenting their growth and expansion toward all those children who are perceived as diverse because of their origin, religion or physical ability.

Inclusive education, in fact, often relates mainly to disabled children and their ability, or inability, to have access to a mainstream education. They may present symptoms such as being blind or deaf, or mentally or physically handicapped. However, generally speaking, disability has always been stigmatized by society as abnormal and diverse, and thus, children who presented it needed to be separated from the mainstream education systems, through physical segregation in special needs facilities. The right to inclusive education for disabled children was supported in 2006 by the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, aiming at removing discrimination and providing equal opportunities in the committed countries. Nowadays, despite the progress of policymakers and activities of advocacy for disabled children's rights, the solution in many countries remains segregation, for economic or cultural reasons.

Another considerable kind of school segregation is the one which affects the Roma children, discriminated because of their ethnicity and origin. A survey on minorities in Europe showed that in Bulgaria, 27% of Roma children attended schools, where all the other students were Roma students<sup>11</sup>. In Hungary, this situation occurred in 50% of the cases (European Commission, 2019), where Roma children are disproportionally segregated in special schools because diagnosed with intellectual disabilities (Van de Bogaert, 2018).

The consequences of segregation may not often be considered at a broader and national level, as they should. Worldwide evidence, in fact, showed that the national level of segregation and the national level of inequality are strictly correlated, countries presenting high level of socio-economic inequality tend to have also high level of school segregation<sup>12</sup> (Dupriez, 2008). Moreover, the impact will be visible concerning attendance to higher levels of education, school segregation, in fact, acts as an obstacle for children to continue to secondary education (Crul, Schneider, 2009)<sup>13</sup>.

Furthermore, it is necessary to consider the current global school environment, highlighting that school segregation is still present, although with a different name. As a matter of fact, European countries, such as the Netherlands or Germany, still separate children with lower academic abilities,

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<sup>11</sup> Second Survey on Minorities in Europe, FRA, 2016.

<sup>12</sup> PISA data, School Segregation of Immigrant Students, 2016.

<sup>13</sup> Education of migrant children, Janta & Harte, 2016.

the majority of whom characterised by immigrant backgrounds, considering their difficulties in apprehending the language. In Amsterdam, for example, second-generation immigrant children, with Moroccan or Turkish origins, at the age of 12 were five times more likely than natives to enter lower secondary vocational school because of their previous results (Harte, Janta, 2016).

School segregation is also an urban issue, considering that immigrant families tend to settle in the same neighbourhood of their compatriots, where schools may present lower academic standards.

In countries belonging to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, more than two-thirds of immigrant students attend school, in which at least half of the totality are immigrant children as well (Harte, Janta, 2016). An inclusive education approach can represent the beginning of the solution, which needs to occur at a larger scale, because even where segregation does not occur anymore and children are physically in class, they may not belong from a social point of view.

It may happen considering the approach of the teachers and of the other children, but also due to the school curricula and textbooks. As a matter of fact, historically, diversity has always been depicted with a negative connotation or misrepresented, if not completely omitted. In this way, school material represented the basis for prejudice and stereotypes rather than an instrument of knowledge, which, especially nowadays, may help understanding cultural differences and creating a more solid and conscious sense of solidarity, appreciation, and openness, promoting cohesion and inclusion among children.

## **2. SOCIAL INCLUSION AND INTEGRATION**

*“Education shapes attitudes towards migrants, as well as their self-perception and sense of belonging.”*

-UNESCO

I believe it is necessary to linger on the concept of inclusion, and specifically of social inclusion, to understand what it really means and how it is usually achieved, stressing what makes someone feel included and what makes someone act towards achieving and promoting social inclusion in different environments.

Firstly, it is fundamental to understand the meaning of inclusion and why I am speaking about inclusion and not about integration, a concept which is often associated and mistaken. Despite the frequent misunderstanding between the two terms, both have a fundamental role when considering situations that involve different social actors, who have significant diverse backgrounds or belong to

minorities. The main goal of inclusion is that diversity is recognized, understood, and respected, included, and celebrated, in this way it will become the normality and people will not be judged by discrimination or be victims of any kind of injustices. Diversity will be embraced and welcomed, rather than further stigmatized.

### *2.1 Defining Inclusion and Integration*

Inclusion and integration are two approaches which have a similar objective, this is the main reason why they are sometimes interchanged. However, there are some significant differences that need to be outlined, which are the results of a literary debate.

Inclusion can be defined as the process of including someone or something in the old situation, adding their presence as a whole or adding a particular culture as a totality, without compromises or exceptions. Inclusion can relate to interculturalism, valuing and celebrating the diversity among people or cultures which are encountering, making, accordingly, foreign people feel more welcomed and accepted without fear of being judged or discriminated.

On the other hand, integration may be defined as “*the act of combining two or more things so that they work together*”, through a process of compromises and sacrifices that will lead to a new situation that involves and accept part of the two or more components. Integration can relate more to multiculturalism, which means that only certain people are accepted, or certain cultures are integrated. However, this happens only in part, as some features of some cultures are valued and approved over others, making foreigners feel conflicted regarding their actual acceptance into society and tolerance that local people have towards them.

Consequently, a wide debate<sup>14</sup> also arose concerning the distinction between interculturalism and multiculturalism. One of the main contributors to this debate is the philosopher Taylor, who sustained that in the case of multiculturalism, integration is meant to describe integration in society; whereas in the case of interculturalism, integration refers also to integration into the specific culture of that society. This means that foreign people are not only supposed to contribute for the development of the host society as a whole, as, for example, economic contributors, but they also have a significant position in protecting and helping the host culture to grow and thrive<sup>15</sup>. For the same reason, Taylor moved a critic toward multiculturalism, mainly basing on the negative phenomena that could implicitly derive from it, one of those being ghettoization. Ghettoization, also as a consequence of

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<sup>14</sup> I will proceed by outlining the main protagonists of this debate, Taylor, Habermas, and Kymlicka. However, a more detailed and in-depth analysis would be needed to fully comprehend the different positions regarding multiculturalism, identity, and recognition.

<sup>15</sup> “Interculturalism or Multiculturalism?”, Taylor, 2012, pg. 413-423.

school segregation, would only hamper more the inclusion of foreign people, who may potentially be more than welcomed in embracing the host country's values and costumes.

Moreover, Taylor has also focused his researches on the concept of identity and recognition, strictly connected with the concern of a society, which is composed by many and different cultures. He stated and supported that the idea of "first class" citizens and "second class" citizens should be eliminated and substituted by a politics of universalism, which should stand up for the dignity of every human being part of a specific society, protecting their civil and political rights and freedoms. Taylor explains that the "politics of recognition" is fundamental to be involved in the debate when speaking about identity, since the presence of a person, or group of people, who are culturally different may lead to an identity crisis for both the local and the foreigner. He supported this idea, basing on the fact that a person's own identity is shaped firstly by the person, but also by the surrounding society and by the people who compose this society. It is not an element based only on one's own experiences and interests, but it is also connected to the relationships people have and with their backgrounds. Accordingly, the presence of a multicultural society presumes the presence of people with different cultural habits and costumes, who have the partial power of shaping and recognizing the others' identity. This process may lead to a strengthening of one's own identity, but it could also lead to misrecognition or non-recognition, which could damage one's own self-perception.<sup>16</sup> History is full of examples that can support this idea of negative consequences, beginning from the role of women in society or the role of black people and indigenous communities. To avoid that this phenomenon may lead to worse perceptions and violent episodes, Taylor considered that "an adequate recognition is not only a kindness that we owe to our counterparts: it is a vital human need"<sup>17</sup> (Taylor, 1998, pg. 10). It is necessary to guarantee people their human dignity.

The German philosopher and sociologist Habermas also contributed to the development of the debate about recognition from a more liberal point of view, outlining the relationship between multiculturalism, ethics, and the neutrality of the rule of law in all societies, with the concept of "struggles for recognition in the democratic constitutional state"<sup>18</sup>. Accordingly, in opposition to Taylor's view, he considered the individual as the protagonist of the process of recognition, not as a community member, but as a single person, enhancing his support to universalism. He strongly supported the necessity of recognizing and respecting individual rights, over community rights, which do not hamper the fundamental necessity of individuals to recognize their belonging to a certain

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<sup>16</sup> "Multiculturalismo: Lotte per il riconoscimento", Habermas & Taylor, 1998.

<sup>17</sup> The translation was made by me.

<sup>18</sup> "Multiculturalismo: Lotte per il riconoscimento", Habermas & Taylor, 1998.

cultural group. In fact, a minimum of nationalism and patriotism must be present, for a legal community to be defined as such.

However, differently from Taylor, Habermas highlighted the difference between the role of women and feminism, and the indigenous groups and ethnic minorities' struggles in achieving recognition. As a matter of fact, on one side feminism fought for sex-based rights, challenging the role as well that men had in society, shaping accordingly their own self view. On the other side, minorities' emancipation movements did not necessarily affect the identity and self-perception of the majority culture, which could continue being safeguarded, letting the minority culture flourish on its own, with a spirit of peaceful cohabitation and tolerance.

Habermas also outlined a deep analysis on tolerance itself in relation to multiculturalism. He mentioned the idea of tolerance in connection with discrimination and religious communities, underlining the difficulties in establishing a compromise between different elements of different religious beliefs<sup>19</sup>. However, he extended this discourse to any other element that distinguishes two or more different cultures, such as gender equality or family practices, underlining the importance of a tolerant attitude, which is essential to promote dialogue and openness toward foreigners.

Finally, he also added the antiracist and antidiscriminatory elements, stating that tolerance toward diversity is also fundamental in achieving and advocating for equality and equity in a multicultural society (Habermas, 2003). Tolerance has to be, indeed, part of the discourse when speaking about social inclusion and integration, since, as stated above, it represents a positive attitude of solidarity and openness toward the other, the foreigner, the different.

Multiculturalism created a wide literature debate, in which also Kymlicka gave his strong contribution, considering different aspects. Firstly, he outlined that the challenge of multiculturalism derives from diverse situations, since cultural diversity in society presents many facades as results of different phenomena. A multicultural society may be, in fact, the result of a territorial occupation, migration, incorporation of indigenous communities, or colonization. Accordingly, basing on how the culturally diverse society developed, the rights and the presence of the minority group may be protected or hampered. He speaks about national minorities and ethnic groups, to distinguish them. Moreover, he argued about multiculturalism in terms of a moral dilemma that developed between the enhancement of national solidarity and, on the contrary, the risk of embracing diversity<sup>20</sup>. The clash between majority and minority rights, as a result of a significant presence of multiculturalism, has always been happening, since nation-states have been founded, borders have been drawn, and people

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<sup>19</sup> "Intolerance and Discrimination", Habermas, 2003.

<sup>20</sup> "Solidarity in diverse societies: beyond neoliberal multiculturalism and welfare chauvinism", Kymlicka, 2015.

started to migrate. These clashes have always been focused on language, regional autonomy, politics, or religion differences. And, accordingly, finding a solution that could balance the two entities has always been part of the debate within democratic countries. Kymlicka recognized two potential outcomes. On one side, in fact, multiculturalism would lead to the growth and development of strong national feelings within society, a rooted sense of nationalism which could be useful to safeguard the national heritage. However, it could also be threatened by the presence of different communities and their traditions, hampering the promotion of a national identity and its inheritance to the future generations. On the other hand, accepting and welcoming diversity may represent a risk because it would mean to introduce new unknown elements that may modify or eliminate traditions and elements of nationhood. This feeling of threat is rooted in the perception people have always had of the foreigner, which has always been embodied by someone who could either represent an economic threat or even burden, or a cultural threat, making it extremely difficult to develop contrasting feelings of solidarity and tolerance.

The major issue that resulted from this dilemma was based on the fact that, mainly in history, it has been solved by the “usual process of majoritarian decision-making within each state” (Kymlicka, 1995), without leaving space to the minority group to actually stand up for itself. The political philosopher suggested that a potential solution would be to integrate human rights with a specific section, dedicated to minority rights.

In particular, he stood in favour of “collective rights”, basing this opinion on two grounds. Firstly, since they can be in line with liberal democratic principles, so without conflicting with individual rights, and, secondly, since they may be distinguished in two categories, with different meanings. The first category could refer to an internal restriction, a situation in which the right of the group may limit the freedom of an individual member, in name of group cultural solidarity. The second connection could be made with an external protection, so when the minority group has the right to limit the actions of the majority economic or political power, considering their dependence on the latter. Kymlicka sustained that the second situation may be considered in line with individual rights, since the vulnerability of the minority group justifies its recognition and protection.<sup>21</sup>

Nowadays, multiculturalism has been perceived in the majority of the countries around the world. For this motive, UNESCO expressed its view about the phenomenon, stating that it “uses learning about other cultures to produce acceptance” and that interculturalism aims at “a way of living together through understanding of, respect for and dialogue between the different cultural groups”.

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<sup>21</sup> “Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights”, Kymlicka, 1995.

These statements can be translated in the school environment and in an already existing classroom. In a system that supports integration projects, children must adjust and adapt to the current setting. They will go to school with the local children, however they will be forced to leave “at home” part of their origins, culture, or religion. They will, later, be addressed in particular ways; they will be offered specific support projects to catch up with the class or to compensate missing knowledge or skills.

On the contrary, systems which support inclusion programs believe that all children are diverse between each other and that all of them, despite the differences, have the right to learn and to receive an education, without detaching from who they are or where they come from. Accordingly, inclusivity leads to a different approach, highlighting the duty of the teacher, of the school, and of the Education Ministry, to change the old setting and implement that change into a customised school system. This new system will be able to meet every child’s necessity, so that students will be participating in school, and not only going.

Moreover, inclusion is based on relationships, it is also for this belief that this thesis supports the idea of school as a fundamental environment for the inclusion of foreign children, as a matter of fact, through the scholastic year, children will not only learn useful contents but they will also be able to create social ties with children of their age.

## *2.2 Inclusion and Integration within the school environment*

*“The central message is simple: every learner matters and matters equally.”<sup>22</sup>*

-UNESCO

I will reckon the presence of both inclusion and integration projects since they are not to be considered as opposite to each other but, on the contrary, they are strictly related, which is why they are often interchanged.

Despite the difference in the level of acceptance of the diverse, the two approaches have a similar goal, which is to create the basis for a new setting that will involve all those children who are different in some way, for example for medical reasons or country of origin. However, it is needed to be highlighted that the level of acceptance has a huge impact, not only in the child who will feel more included, but also in the child who will welcome the other one. It is for this reason, and many more,

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<sup>22</sup> A Guide for Ensuring Inclusion and Equity in Education, (UNESCO Report, 2017).

that the dimension of inclusion needs to be underlined, since it represents why it is a better approach than integration, when considering foreign children's future. As a matter of fact, inclusivity embodies a better strategy both to ensure total participation and quality learning opportunities for everyone, in full respect of their diversity. As the Education 2030 Incheon Declaration quotes "No education target should be considered met unless met by all". This statement represents exactly the idea of inclusion as a commitment toward all children who have the right and dream to have access to quality education. Unfortunately a universal opinion on the establishment and implementation of an inclusive program does not exist yet, considering that children who need to be included belong to diverse groups, which vary depending on the country taken into consideration, especially taking into account the inclusion of foreign children.

However, despite the absence of a common response to inclusivity, there are several features which may be tackled with a similar approach, one of those already mentioned, which is school material, such as curricula and textbooks.

As a matter of fact, how can we imagine that anyone would feel incentivised to learn if they are not represented, or if they are misrepresented, in their own books?

A major issue, in fact, is the absence or distorted presentation of foreign children in textbooks, which is mainly due to the fact that migration, as a whole phenomenon, is not deeply tackled in school curricula (Nusche, 2009). It is quite evident that this lack of knowledge may have a huge impact on several grounds. Firstly, foreign children's self-esteem and feeling of belonging may be affected and so their chances of success in school, increasing the distance with native children and hindering the creation of social relations with their peers. Secondly, native children's view of diversity and, accordingly, of foreign children in their classrooms may be distorted, negative, and resentful, enhancing feeling of prejudices and stereotypes (Heckmann, 2008). These feelings may lead to act of bullying and violence against vulnerable children, UNESCO reported that one-third of them, between 11 and 15 years old, experienced bullying inside the school environment, reaching the 50% of children in countries such as the Philippines or Lithuania, recording the major risks against the LGBTIQI+ communities<sup>23</sup>.

School textbooks and curricula should adapt to modernity, to nowadays society and to global phenomena, distancing themselves from historical concepts and visions of the world, and embracing what globalisation is leading to. Diversity, interculturalism, religious neutrality in public schools should represent the basis for the future of education, for future curricula, addressing gender identity,

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<sup>23</sup> UNESCO, 2019.

sexual orientation, equality, and human rights. They are, in fact, an essential part of education, and thus, crucial for the promotion of inclusion (Fuchs, Bock, 2018).

Furthermore, a relevant and fundamental issue concerning inclusive education is represented by safe and accessible schools, from a physical and practical perspective. The infrastructure of the school, such as gender-divided bathrooms, or the actual way to the school, as a matter of fact, may represent an obstacle for many children, in particular for children with physical disabilities, belonging to minorities or living in vulnerable environments. In order to support and implement the idea of “leaving no one behind”, an important investment needs to be taken into account concerning the conditions of the way to school, such as the construction of child-friendly roads or school buses that accompany children to and from school. One of the main difficulties, in fact, is represented by a threatening or inexistent access to school facilities, which may present obstacles or potential danger for children, who are forced to go to school again.

In 2014, a study was carried out in 11 different countries of three diverse continents, reaching 7000 students, among them more than one-quarter of the girls answered that they almost never felt safe on their way to school. Another issue which involves mainly girls is a separate bathroom, whose lack represents a huge obstacle for the attendance in countries as Mali, Mauritania, or Senegal (Plan International, 2014).

These are only limited examples, which, despite their incompleteness, already underline the urgency and necessity to address the issue of practical inclusive schools, so that even the most vulnerable students can access formal education.

### **3. MODELS OF EDUCATION AND LITERACY**

As far as models of education are concerned, it is important to highlight the presence of two main types: formal education and informal education. They both, even if in different weights, are perceived as fundamental in the process of social inclusion of children. For an efficient result, as a matter of fact, in the case one of the two is missing, the development of the child will not lead to a complete inclusion, because of the potential lack of some capacities, not only from an academic perspective but mostly from a social point of view. The main features that differentiate the two models are the methods, the compulsoriness, the location, the participants, and the relationship between who teaches and who learns.

The method is completely different in terms of how the knowledge is provided and how teachers, mentors, or guides test whether that knowledge or the new skills are acquired. On one hand, formal

education requires a certain range of vocabulary, with specific terminology depending on the subject that is taught and it is necessary for students to learn that vocabulary because it represents the key to understand and assimilate the new notions. Teachers test students with oral or written examinations that require at least the ability to read and write and having studied and learned the content of the class. On the other hand, informal education may not necessarily need words to provide information, but actions or activities to reproduce what is required to be taught, it focuses on showing movements and skills which will be useful in particular circumstances. The mentors will test children with a practical test to examine whether they learned the movements or skills.

Formal and informal education are also different in terms of rights and law, considering that formal education is mandatory, while informal education is optional, even though sometimes highly suggested and incentivised. Formal education takes place in classrooms, schools, universities, informal education may take place in religious buildings, sport teams, music groups or other structures, outside the school environment.

Furthermore, the two models can be distinguished because in the former children are almost always divided into classroom with their peers whereas in the latter the groups can be composed by children of different ages and separated basing on other criteria such as gender, attitude, strength, language or religious beliefs. Also because of this division, the relationship among children and their relationship with the teacher or mentor will change accordingly, and issues may arise when these divisions are not respected or changed due to particular situations. A clear example could be when a student needs to repeat a scholastic year or when a foreign child is enrolled in school but does not know the language, and, consequently, will be assimilated in a classroom of younger children.

### *3.1 Models of formal education*

The school system perfectly embodies the model of formal education, based on a fixed program that will be outlined by a teacher to a class of peers in a public or private institution. It represents the first mandatory environment, in which children will come into contact between each other without choosing who to sit with, play with or spend every day with. Accordingly, the classroom setting brings together children with a quite broad range of backgrounds, and thus, it is a fundamental duty for teachers and policy makers to establish and promote a welcoming and safe space. Otherwise, the classroom setting may become a dangerous environment for vulnerable children, which may be victims of injustices or bullying.

In order for the school system to be safe and inclusive, some reforms need to be established, since the current system is not suitable anymore. Society, in fact, changes over time but some national school programs are unchanged since decades, or the changes are not influential or sufficient, in proportion to the speed or to the radical changes of local communities or entire cities. The educational syllabuses which are carried out in school need to be revised and to be adapted to the current social phenomena that characterize modern society, beginning by introducing new issues. The school system, in fact, cannot tackle anymore only “standard subjects” such as history, maths, science or arts, which are clearly fundamental, but not sufficient anymore to educate both young people and adults. The traditional subjects need to be flanked by civic education, addressing diversity, respect, human dignity, gender equality, discrimination, antifascism, financial education, sustainability, global citizenship, migration, and more elements which are essential to understand current society.

### 3.1.1 The role of teachers

*“An education system is only as good as its teachers.”*

-Joint Message on World Teachers’ Day

It is essential to outline the role that teachers play in education, since they are the ones shaping the future generations and empowering children so that they will be able to dream and aspire for a bright future.

It is for their central role, I firmly believe that the attention that the school system needs cannot only be dedicated to children, which are obviously the protagonists, however it should also focus on investing in and empowering teachers. They need to be qualified in their area of teaching and updated with the current social situation in their territory, in order to provide the most complete, inclusive, and customised education possible. As a matter of fact, every parent will always demand and claim that teachers must have the necessary skills and capabilities to be teachers, which it does not only mean that they know the subject that they will teach but also that they are people with dedication, values, passion and care about the wellbeing of differences, such as children with attention disorders, with physical disabilities or with migration backgrounds. They will claim that teachers will make their children feel welcomed, integrated, and taken care of, with the same patience and tact that they have for the rest of the children. Sometimes a little more attention will be required, for example in the case of foreign children who just arrived and may look or feel disoriented.

Teachers, to be considered as such, need to embody two elements, passion, and knowledge. The former is a vocation, someone has it or not, teachers will be valued as role models by their students, which means they will have to not only provide information but they should also engage, mentor and provoke their students and their critical thinking. The latter can be acquired and supported, it is a feature that can always be improved and expanded; therefore, it is fundamental that teachers will always be updated on new information, methods, approaches and social phenomena.

Concretely, it means that, despite the good intentions and the good hearts of the teachers, they need to be agents of change, and so they need to be qualified and trained, the lifelong learning projects must involve teachers and professors as well. They need psychological support, both for them and to approach children, cultural mediation skills, sensitiveness in situations involving children with different backgrounds or in vulnerable conditions. Accordingly, investments in teaching professional development is mandatory when considering development in education because teachers, as well as students, need to be heard and considered. Although, an inclusive approach should not belong to follow-up trainings, but, on the contrary, should be one of the core elements during the studies to become a teacher (Rouse, Florian, 2012).

However, these kinds of investments are often neglected by the governments, and teachers may feel abandoned and powerless in front of new difficult situations, which may include the presence of multilingual or multi-ethnic classes, and children who suffered from severe traumas.

In many European countries, this is not a future prediction but a reality, the 52% of teachers, in fact, stated that they felt having “insufficient support for managing diversity”, as mentioned in the UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report of 2019<sup>24</sup>.

Furthermore, diversity should not only be valued and respected, it should also be embodied. It is important, in fact, for children to see their diversity feature being represented in textbooks as well as in the teaching body. Accordingly, it is suggested that increasing the number of teachers with a foreign background may be an efficient strategy to reduce the existing gap between migrant children and the school, teachers, and native students (Nusche 2009; OECD 2014; Sirius 2014). It is well known, in fact, that teachers embody a role model that children have and may listen to, not only in terms of discrimination based on country of origin but based on many other differences.

A clear example can be a study that was carried out in Italy, which highlighted that girls mentored by teachers with implicit gender biases underperformed in math subjects and, therefore, chose less demanding secondary schools, as advised by those discriminating teachers (Carlana, 2019). The same

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<sup>24</sup> “Migration, displacement, and education: building bridges, not walls”, UNESCO GEM Report (2019)

teachers who should represent one of the key pillars of formal education. It is in the duty of the governments to highlight their role and empower them, considering their central position in the education of the future generations.

### 3.1.2 The gender gap in formal education

An important intersectional element of formal education for foreign children is the gender gap between girls and boys, which is still widely spread everywhere around the world, in more implicit or explicit forms. The gender gap among foreign children represents a considerate paradox, as a matter of fact, on one side girls are helped and supported by teachers and peers because they are perceived as more vulnerable and weak, on the contrary boys are seen as stronger, more independent, and consequently, without need of help, but at the same time targeted by teachers or bullies because of their attitude, often seen as challenging.

However, if considering gender equality from a cultural perspective, the situation is the opposite as the above mentioned. As a matter of fact, different cultures have different perspective of society, and thus, diverse ideas concerning the roles for girls and boys in society. Accordingly, girls will not have high expectations or ambitions in school because they know that their role is not to be educated but that it is focused on housework. On the contrary, boys are more aware of their active role as part of the family and, accordingly, of their necessity to receive an education, which will be fundamental in order to take better care of their family.

It is also relevant to consider the attitude that migrant girls and boys present toward education in general. Girls are aware of being at least one step back in comparison to their peer boys, who will always be a step forward and will always have an advantage over them in school, as in society. For this reason, girls tend to be more keen in spending more time doing homework or dedicating to school activities, since they know that they have to work harder to be at the same level of their peer boys, in a different way depending on the country they settle in.

This attitude may also be analysed as the result of migrant parents' behaviour toward their children, demanding higher standards and results from girls, who are also more controlled, and letting boys more free and expecting less from them (Lopez, 2003). However, it could also be the result of the teaching body's behaviour, who may establish a more antagonistic relationship with boys, even criminalizing them. A clear example can be the situation involving second-generation Latino and West Indian boys in Californian schools (Cammarota, 2004 and Lopez, 2003), with the result of their disengagement from the education system, which is perceived as disinterested in their future

(Valenzuela, 1999), or with their engagement in peers' groups, presenting delinquent or deviant behaviours (Suárez-Orozco and Qin, 2006).<sup>25</sup>

### *3.2 Models of informal education*

There is a whole world outside the school system. And a whole world of new opportunities and people with whom establishing social ties.

It is for this reason that I decided to include models of informal education in this research, since it is the other main environment, except school, in which children spend most of their free time. Family and the cultural background, religious communities and sport activities are the three settings that I took into consideration, which I believe are important to be mentioned when considering the possibilities of social encounters of foreign children. All of them, in fact, embody the free time of children, the moments in which they would be in contact with their peers, with other children who have the same religious beliefs, or with whom they share a particular passion, as a sport or hobby. I consider them very important especially from an education point of view, taking into account that many values and abilities are taught outside school's walls. Accordingly, informal environments, may have a strategic role, especially when they create the possibility of intercultural exchanges or when providing soft skills such as team working.

Informal education is not a fixed model with a specific curriculum, but a flexible setting which implicitly provides skills and knowledge, such as conflict resolution, stress management, intercultural cooperation, or it may help strengthen personal characteristics such as tolerance, curiosity, or respect. Social inclusion can be considered often as one of the key pillars of civil society, whose organizations and institutions advocate for supporting vulnerable people and working to achieve access to quality education for every child. Accordingly, NGOs and CSOs represent a valid and committed ally to governments in providing support to vulnerable people when national institutions may lack funds or human resources. Furthermore, they may also embody the beginning of a customised inclusive education, which may later be inserted in national curricula.

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<sup>25</sup> "The Female Educational Advantage Among Adolescent Children of Immigrants", Feliciano, 2012.

### 3.2.1 Family

One of the key roles in children's education and in connection to culture is played by the family or by the familiar circumstances overall. As a matter of fact, the way children act, speak and relate to other children, or people, happens firstly as a result of imitation, as a limited and imperfect reproduction of the code of behaviour of adults that surround them. This code of behaviour is the goal toward which children develop the way they speak and act (Brown, Chomsky), which can already have a huge impact on children, not only in terms of language, religion, beliefs but also in terms of aspirations, priorities, and social commitment. It is fundamental to consider both sides and roles that family may have, as a matter of fact it could be promoting inclusive education, but it may also lead to a negative outcome, resisting it. On one hand, parents are believed to act always in the best interest of the child, however sometimes it is not possible since parents themselves may be or feel excluded and not in the capacity to intervene in favour of their children, or because of other challenges such as timing availability or language barriers (Page, 2007). Moreover, considering the role of parents and families is relevant when analysing their role from a general perspective, as a matter of fact their approach toward inclusive education reflects their approach toward social inclusion. Accordingly, vulnerable children will be more likely to have parents, who may promote their inclusion in mainstream schools and curricula, rather than having them segregated in special facilities. On the contrary, a discriminatory attitude, which often belongs to families without vulnerable children, would not represent a potential openness toward inclusivity in education environments of any kind. Furthermore, they could adopt the "not in my backyard" approach<sup>26</sup> since they would not consider the social benefits of inclusion as actual benefits for their children, but on the contrary they may perceive it only as a psychological or financial cost or burden. This approach, as an example, is very supported and spread in Hong Kong and Germany, in the former the 59% of parents stated that, from their perspective, children with special needs disturbed other students (Sin, 2012), in the latter the 15% of parents feared the spread of negative behaviour among their children by imitating or conditioned by vulnerable children (Lohmann, 2018). The implementation of this approach will lead to consequences both on the attitude that children will have toward inclusivity in education, and in society in general, but also on parents of vulnerable children, who will feel that the best interest of their daughters and sons will be to attend school in special facilities. As a matter of fact, even though they will be separated from their peers, they will, at least, feel welcomed and supported without

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<sup>26</sup> Not in My Backyard Phenomenon (NIMBY), also called Nimby, a colloquialism signifying one's opposition to the locating of something considered undesirable in one's neighbourhood.

discrimination, and may have the opportunity of spending a child-friendly education in a quiet and respectful environment.

Furthermore, it is fundamental to consider the role of parents and families, since they embody the very first sphere in which children grow up and learn. Despite the differences concerning the diverse cultural or religious beliefs, parents are quite often those who teach their children how to speak, walk, behave, and relate to other people. Depending on their personal beliefs, in fact, children will have a relationship with society that will be very different, for example some children will not attend pre-school or secondary school as not considered important by the family or relevant for family's priorities and interests. This phenomenon is increasing always more and more, as stated by UNICEF, which, by April 2019, counted that at least 175 million children, half of the children around the world, have not been enrolled in pre-primary education, reaching one in every five children in low-income countries<sup>27</sup>.

### 3.2.2 Culture

It is important to be mentioned that language is not only limited to verbal expressions but relies also on gestures and practices, which sometimes represent the key to social norms that are not always taught by the school and that need to be acquired through interactions with native people. This feature of the language is not often considered but it is necessary to focus on it when speaking about inclusion of foreign people, and children in particular.

As a matter of fact, it can be underlined that having the means to speak is not solving the potential problem of interaction. Hymes considers important not only the ability to express themselves and communicate, but also the necessity to have other communication skills, such as the ability to comprehend the circumstances and, accordingly, understand what is appropriate to be said or how it is correct to behave in different contexts. These communication skills may be defined as the product of two elements: models of education, which provide rules of behaviour and linguistic codes, and the cultural background, which establishes the social frameworks in which those rules and codes will be applied.

I believe it is quite fundamental to outline the role of culture and the cultural context when speaking of the current education models. Accordingly, different cultures have different models that suit their lifestyle, beliefs, and needs. It is relevant to face the matter of culture when speaking about education since human behaviour is the result of the cultural context, in which the person is born or raised in,

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<sup>27</sup> "A world ready to learn. Prioritizing quality early childhood education", UNICEF Report, 2019.

and which influences how someone acts and how much someone is interested in getting an education. As a matter of fact, not in every society education is considered with the same relevance and importance. Sometimes it is given for granted, it may be seen as a burden or a limiting activity, as something imposed or forced by the family, society, or the government. On the contrary, some cultures and communities value education, which is perceived as a gift, as a privilege or as an essential opportunity to escape or improve the social conditions in which the person lives in.

Moreover, culture is essential to be taken into consideration because in different countries with different cultures, gestures or words may have other meanings, therefore it is fundamental to know the circumstances, to avoid misunderstandings or accusations of potential offences.

It can be inferred that language and communication have a strict correlation with culture. As well as behaviour and culture. This correlation is supported by Malinowski, who considered that formal school systems are needed, however children learn fluency and precision from using the language in the context of “native life”, highlighting, accordingly, the strict bond between language and culture.

In order to reconstruct the meaning of sounds it is necessary to describe the bodily behaviour of the men, to know the purpose of their concerted action, as well as their sociology. Speech here is primarily used for the achievement of a practical result. Secondly it also fulfils an educational purpose in that the older and better-informed men hand on the results of their past experiences to the younger ones.

(Malinowski, 1935, pg. 8)<sup>28</sup>

After fieldwork analysis, Malinowski expressed his idea of literacy as strictly correlated to culture and to the practical expression of it, which is fundamental to really catch the meaning of words and gestures. A very simple example that it is often considered to associate language and culture can be the way of writing, that people usually learn at an early stage. For example, the Arabic language starts to be written from right to left, in the opposite way of many western countries' languages. Consequently, it is very hard to imagine how difficult it can be for a child, but in reality, for everyone, to move to a foreign country and to enter a school system based on a different language, coming from an Arabic speaking country, or vice versa. It is evident that a language support system is necessary and fundamental.

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<sup>28</sup> “Coral Gardens and their Magic”, Malinowski, 1935.

However, the relationship between culture and literacy and between culture and language is not simple and linear, on the contrary it is subject to different interpretations: linguistic relativism, ethnoscience and speaking ethnography. The first theory affirms that language determines culture, organizing the world in different ways as if culture were a guide to social reality (Boas, Sapir). The second one considers language as a tool to have access to culture and to different world vision's accordingly, as a model to think culture (Matera, 2016). The last theory, instead, interprets language as an index for culture, as a function, which is to actively participate to society and human behaviour to produce acts in the world. Despite the debate, the relation between the two components is clear and fundamental to be taken into consideration when speaking about education and social inclusion.

### 3.2.3 Religious Communities

One component of culture which is necessary to outline is religion and the belonging to religious communities as an education environment. School may be considered as representing the public sphere of children's education, however, as stated before, it is not the only one.

Historically, religious beliefs have always accompanied children's education both in school and, mostly, in informal communities, with the aim of transmitting a certain set of values as code of behaviour. For example, many Indian religions teach the necessity of praying before any task or act, enhancing the importance of overcoming vulnerability, strengthening confidence and be ready for hard work, so to reach one's own objectives (Kapura, 2019)<sup>29</sup>.

Religion may also help to recover and to heal from physical and emotional distress, representing a safe environment to turn to when people are in vulnerable conditions. Dialogue and counselling can help reaching physical and mental health, as for example in cases of drug addiction or reintegration in society after being incarcerated. A study, "Religious Counseling as an Informal Education Approach in Rehabilitation of Drug Addicts"<sup>30</sup> showed the effects of spiritual training and religious therapy on drug addicts, stating that a religious approach as informal education toward their rehabilitation was effective, considering that the higher the religious faith was, the lower the level of drug addiction or abuse was (Noegroho, Sulaiman, Suryanto, 2018).

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<sup>29</sup> "Understanding the Meaning and Significance of Informal Education", Kapura, 2019.

<sup>30</sup> "Religious Counseling as an Informal Education Approach in Rehabilitation of Drug Addicts", Noegroho, Adhi Iman Sulaiman, Suryanto, 2018.

Belonging to a certain religious community shapes children from many points of view, as the perception of themselves and their future role in society and within the community, their relationship with children of the other sex, with older people, and with people of different religion, a proper dressing code, or even marriage costumes. Sometimes, belonging to a religious community may represent an obstacle, such as from a legal perspective, since some religious practices are not accepted by international law or, as a reaction, religious communities believe national laws are limiting their faith or interfering with family matters. A clear example is the practice of female genital mutilation, which can both be considered as a traditional and cultural practice to be protected from being criminalised, but it is also seen as a violation of fundamental human rights and, as such, must be condemned and abolished.

Moreover, religious beliefs may be intersected with gender inequality, considering that conservative families belonging to religious communities still believe women do not need to attend school as their role is to be focused on housework and taking care of children.

#### 3.2.4 Sport

The last, but not less important, feature of informal education that I would like to consider is sport, both present in school curricula and as a recreational activity.

As a matter of fact, I believe that physical education is part of the school program not only to provide some time outside the classroom and without frontal teaching, but also to provide knowledge in another form. Included in the name itself, Physical Education furnishes both information about different physical activities and sports, and soft skills such as teamwork, respect, self-confidence, or commitment. Both in school and outside, sport is a fundamental component of a child's development, it represents a bridge between different ethnicities or religious beliefs, bringing together children and entire communities (UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Sports for Development and Peace, 2003).

The diverse ways in which it is carried out and experienced has been leading to improvement in the field of international development, such as for operations of conflict management, humanitarian response, economic development or peace building (UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Sports for Development and Peace, 2003)<sup>31</sup>.

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<sup>31</sup> "Sports as a Tool for Development and Peace", UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Sport for Development and Peace, 2003.

### 3.3 Negative Consequences

As mentioned already before, the current models do not only present positive sides and good social effects. On the contrary, due to the constant social change, the education system is far from being described as inclusive and equal. Discrimination, whether implicit or explicit, has been always perpetuated basing on gender, ethnicity, physical disability, wealth, religion, legal status, gender identity and many other diversities. The current global phenomena of climate disasters, the increasing rate of international migration routes and the Covid-19 pandemic are enhancing more and more those differences among people. Rather than uniting them in the fight against climate change, war, famine, or health dangers, these global disasters are only enlarging the already existing gaps and resources allocation for people around the world. Accordingly, the negative consequences are visible in every sector of human life, such as the education environment. In fact, the lack of or weak inclusive education programs are both showing their effects in the school facilities and in society in general, both in explicit and implicit forms. From the formal education's point of view, some of the major issues are represented by dropouts and bullying, within the school walls and in the form of cyberbullying through social medias. From a social perspective, instead, discrimination can lead to several outcomes of any kind, from verbal to physical violence, social exclusion, loneliness, depression.

#### 3.3.1 The issue of dropouts

*“Early school leaving is equivalent to raising a wall between the individual and a future that would have represented the manifestation of the individual potential as well as fulfilling the childhood dreams.”*

-Dekkers & Claassen (2001)<sup>32</sup>

An important consideration needs to be done concerning dropouts, since one of the major reasons behind the choice of students, or of their parents, to leave school is that they do not find an inclusive, safe, and comfortable environment at school or they do not feel supported and incentivised to pursue their education path.

Several studies, in fact, highlighted that school dropouts represent *“the climax of a process of disengagement from school”* (Finn, 1989, Newmann, Wehlage and Lambord, 1992; Wehlage, Rutter,

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<sup>32</sup> “School Dropouts – A Theoretical Framework”, vol. 07, issue 1, pg. 21-27, Ungureanu, 2017.

Smith, Lesko and Fernandez, 1989), due to the relationship between students and teachers, students' background, familiar context, school inclusivity projects, or peers' attitude<sup>33</sup>.

It is important to mention that there is not an agreed definition of school dropout, varying from a two-weeks period of absenteeism to three years (Ivasiuc, 2010), which leads to a difficult analysis of the phenomenon, even if there are other different terms to indicate it, such as absenteeism and early school leaving. The former outlines "*the frequent and repeated absence of students from the curricular activities*" because of lack of motivation, uncomfortable studying conditions, health issues, forced labour or any other form of school pressure (Neamt, 2003)<sup>34</sup>. Basing on the Commission Staff Working Paper<sup>35</sup> of 2010, early school leaving refers to students who did not complete secondary school, or in general mandatory school, and thus who did not receive a final diploma or a similar level qualification.

Taking into account the reasons behind the dropouts, it is clear that they affect more children, who are already in a vulnerable position since the enrolment, such as foreign children.

A report from the UNHCR<sup>36</sup> (2019) stated that in 2017 in the European Union, twice as many foreign-born children, including refugees, as native students left school early, reaching the 25,4% of the totality, over the 11,4% of their European peers. The main reasons behind the dropouts are socio-economic inequalities, poverty, language barriers and psychological trauma.

The social consequences of dropouts are very similar to those that result from the lack of inclusive education, such as a large part of unemployed population, without possibilities of high level job positions, or without the means to provide their future children the best life opportunities.

Moreover, there could also be major psychological consequences, as depression, isolation, a sense of abandonment, alienation or dissatisfaction. Low levels of mental and physical wellbeing may also lead to severe consequences such as crime commitment or addiction to national programs of support, establishing a sense of dependency (Grossman and Kaestner, 1997; Rumberger, 1987; Witte, 1997)<sup>37</sup>.

However, if considering inclusivity and equality as key element that keep children in their classrooms and the lack of them as a central motive that pushes children to leave school, can they really be labelled as dropouts or they may also be considered pushed-outs, by the school, or pulled-outs, by their parents or families?

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<sup>33</sup> "School Dropouts – A Theoretical Framework", vol. 07, issue 1, pg. 21-27, Ungureanu, 2017.

<sup>34</sup> "School dropout for Roma children – myth and reality", UNICEF Romania, Ivasiuc, 2010.

<sup>35</sup> "Reducing early school leaving. Accompanying document to the Proposal for a Council Recommendation on policies to reduce early school leaving", European Commission, 2010.

<sup>36</sup> "Access to Education for Refugee and Migrant Children in Europe", UNHCR, UNICEF & IOM, 2019.

<sup>37</sup> "School Dropouts – A Theoretical Framework", vol. 07, issue 1, pg. 21-27, Ungureanu, 2017.

### 3.4 Future models

The pledge to leave no one behind seems to be more current than ever before. The commitment of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, contained in the fourth Sustainable Development Goal, highlights the urgency to provide access to equal and inclusive education for every child.

It seems quite evident that governments cannot keep providing always the same old school system, since, as every institution part of the development of a country, it is fundamental to ensure that school as well transforms with time and with social phenomena that occur within the country, and at a global level.

As a matter of fact, when the world changes, people change with it in the most suitable and best way available, and, thus, society and institutions. It is the definition of development. And it is fundamental also because otherwise the old system would not be compatible with modern society anymore, leading to potential negative consequences, such as the enlargement of inequality gaps already existing, or the creation of other disparities that could damage the children of nowadays and future children.

#### 3.4.1 The necessity of an updated system

*“We need to individualize teaching and learning: the system has to engage them, their curiosity, their individuality, their creativity. This is how you get them to learn.”*

-Sir Ken Robinson<sup>38</sup>

As mentioned before, current education systems are not fit for the future anymore, they are not able to respond to economic and cultural changes, which are affecting modern society.

This is the scenery for the future, a quite blurred scenery, since technology may change every known model, as well as the Covid-19 global pandemic, war and forced migration, or climate change disasters. I believe it is very important to react and respond to social changes, in particular in order to provide an updated and modern school system, from access modalities to curricula, from tuition fees to support for children with special needs, from inclusive textbooks to equal access without discrimination of any form.

However, it is also understandable that there are many variables, which make establishing and implementing reforms very difficult, mainly from an economic and cultural point of view. As a matter of fact, on one hand it is hard to prepare children for their future job market without knowing which

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<sup>38</sup> “Do schools kill creativity?”, Robinson K., 2006.

shape it will have; on the other hand, the protection of a national or regional cultural heritage will have to be promoted within a society, which is characterised always more and more by globalisation and multiculturalism.

The extreme urgency in taking action to include every child in the education system has been highlighted by the latest interview to Antonio Guterres, the UN Secretary General, who described education as “*the key to personal development and the future of societies*” (Guterres, 2020). This interview was also the occasion to launch the new global campaign entitled “Save Our Future”, which is aimed at bringing children back in the classroom with all the safety measures as soon as possible.

As the world faces unsustainable levels of inequality, we need education – the great equalizer – more than ever (...) We must take bold steps now, to create inclusive, resilient, quality education systems fit for the future. (...) Now we face a generational catastrophe that could waste untold human potential, undermine decades of progress, and exacerbate entrenched inequalities. The knock-on effects on child nutrition, child marriage and gender equality, among others, are deeply concerning.

(Guterres, 2020)<sup>39</sup>

In fact, the UN estimated that, due to the current global pandemic, more than one billion children worldwide has been affected, and, despite the adopted measures by most of the governments, still many are not involved in school activities due to the lack of technological devices, radios or televisions. In particular, the UN Secretary General stresses the dangerous exclusion of vulnerable children, such as those with physical disabilities, belonging to minority groups or economically disadvantaged communities. These children represented a failure of the system already before the pandemic, as a matter of fact, before January 2020, more than 250 million children were not engaged in any school activity.

The global campaign “Save Our Future” comes alongside with a policy brief, entitled “Education during COVID-19 and beyond”, which addresses four key areas:

- The necessity to suppress the transmission of the virus in order to be able to plan the best reopening of the schools.

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<sup>39</sup> Speech from the UN Secretary-General Guterres on Culture and Education during the Covid-19 pandemic (2020).

- More investments in the education sector, addressing the previous inefficient allocations of funds and reallocating them in a more efficient way.
- Planning and establishing a resilient education system, which will be able to provide equitable and sustainable learning environment.
- Adapting the education sector to global changes, rethinking modalities of teaching, curricula, and textbooks, so they will be more representative and inclusive.

Moreover, Mr. Guterres underlined the necessity of investment in a particular education sector, which is digital literacy and infrastructure, a theme which will be later analysed in detail. This investment is fundamental to evolve with the current global society and with the latest pandemic that affected everyone's life. It is urgent to re-learn how to learn, in a global situation, which is hiding a new obstacle toward inclusive education every day.

#### 3.4.2 A response to migration

*“Migration is an expression of the human aspiration for dignity, safety and a better future. It is part of the social fabric, part of our very make-up as a human family.”*

- Ban Ki-moon<sup>40</sup>

Migration and education affect each other, from different points of view but in a similar way, and the relationship between the two entities lies at the heart of this research. One of the scopes, in fact, is to realize how they affect each other and how it is important for both of them to understand the value and role of the other, and the accordingly necessity of adjusting them, so to guarantee the best environment.

Migration affects education mainly in terms of adjustments that will be needed, considering the potential heterogeneity of the classes, in different countries. Children with different backgrounds, with physical disabilities or diverse religious beliefs, will demand a customised curriculum that should include their representation and should be accessible for all of them. Moreover, migration will bring diversity and interculturality. Native and foreign children will interact, influencing each other, and sharing with each other their different cultural backgrounds. In this way, they will create or strengthen a prejudice-free, comfortable, and multicultural environment.

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<sup>40</sup> UN Press Release, 2013.

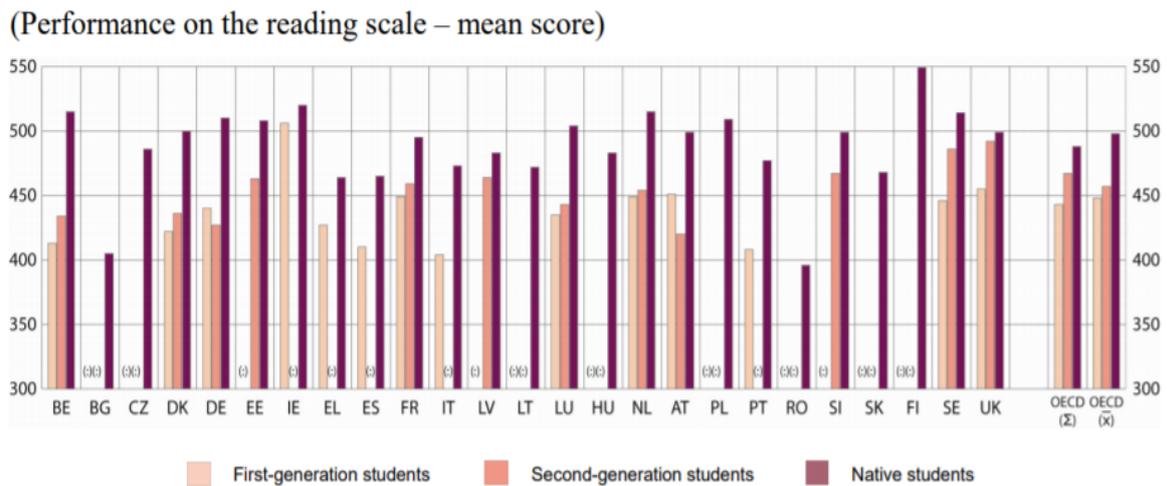
On the other hand, education affects migration in terms of reasons behind the movement. As a matter of fact, a large percentage of people who move to a foreign country is driven by the idea of finding a better future, which includes the possibility to attend a better school or receive a higher-standard education in general. The idea of having access to the education system which is better, in terms of resources, possibilities, and reputation, is one of the key motives behind the parents' decisions to leave their home country or to send their children to a foreign institution. Simply to grant or to have the possibility to achieve the best opportunities for a greater future. And to have the means to encounter and understand the value of a better life.

From a European point of view, the latest European Commission Green Paper, entitled "Migration and mobility: challenges and opportunities for EU education systems"<sup>41</sup>, deals exactly with this issue. The necessity to include every child in the school system, as a form of empowerment and investment for the future, should be a shared key priority for all the European Union Member States, considering that migration is affecting the whole Community and that quality education is one of the main goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The EU Commission Green Paper also focuses its attention on the diverse results achieved by native children and by foreign children, highlighting the gap in terms of reading and science performances, which are the ones that attract most of the attention. Educational disadvantage and underperformance are considered to be the results of issues involving language, expectations, role models, and knowledge in general.

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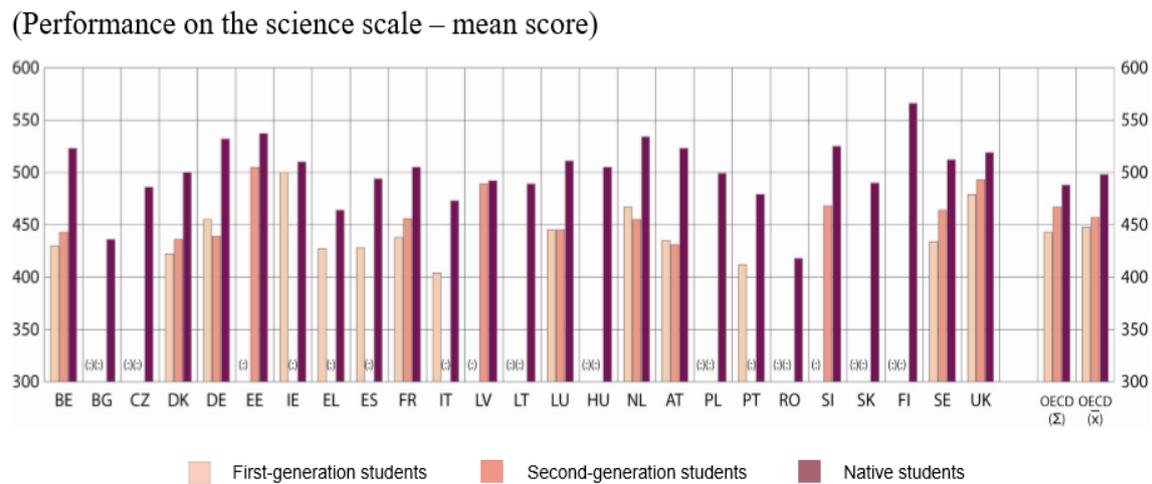
<sup>41</sup> "Migration and mobility: challenges and opportunities for EU education systems", European Commission Green Paper, 2008.

Figure 1. Differences in student performances in reading, by immigrant status and country.



Source: OECD PISA 2006

Figure 2. Differences in student performance in science, by immigrant status and country.



Source: OECD PISA 2006

From both Figure 1 and 2<sup>42</sup>, it is possible to evaluate that the performances of migrant children are lower, sometimes even drastically lower, than the proficiency of native children. The results are particularly evident in the analysis on reading abilities, in which, in some cases, first-generation migrant children reach only half of the abilities that native children have.

<sup>42</sup> "Migration and mobility: challenges and opportunities for EU education systems", European Commission Green Paper, 2008.

As a response to the data outlined above, I strongly believe that the role of migrant children in a national education system should be recognized and valued way more than it currently is. The always more and more present heterogeneity in education environments should be perceived as an incentive to promote and enhance the value of intercultural exchange and a reason to reform an old system, which was developed as a response to a definitely more homogeneous group of children. After the personal experience I lived, while teaching to foreign children, I believe that a potential strategy to recognize diversity and to respect and value it, it would be establishing an efficient approach based on two parallel paths. On one side children will learn the language, learn the main features of the culture, society, and costumes of the country they now live in. On the other side they will begin gradually to take part to normal classes with the other children, in this way they will have the means to communicate, to share their story and beliefs, and practice the new language with people of the same age, not only teachers, who may cause a problem of age difference that can block them. A similar approach is embraced and implemented by the Ministry of Education of Malta, which, since 2015, opened an Induction Language Center<sup>43</sup>, reserved to foreign children, who do not speak either Maltese or English.

### 3.4.3 The new language: technology

An important focus needs to be developed on what might shape the future of education, technology. It is quite visible that the digital world is affecting every sector of people's lives and it already has a role in the education field. Nowadays, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the importance of technology in education is clearer than it has ever been, since it has been providing the only way to continue the school curriculum in many countries.

Therefore, it is relevant to underline the necessity of ad-hoc programs that will teach children, but before teachers and professors, this new language. In this way, both educators and students will be empowered and will have access to a multitude of information and services that may be helpful in achieving their goals. Digital literacy must become part of school curricula in an equally distributed way, providing equipment, knowledge and internet connection to all students and teachers.

This necessity has been highlighted already in 2015 by the Qingdao Declaration, which recognized the expansion of the digital world and the relevance it could have in relation to education and learning activities (UNESCO, 2015). The same Declaration also underlined the gender gap in digital literacy,

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<sup>43</sup> I will refer to this project more in details in the next chapter dedicated to the Maltese education system.

stating that in the Arab States, Asia and the Pacific, the 17% of women were less likely to use internet, whereas the average raised to 25% when analysing African women's proficiency.

Furthermore, it is important to remind that technology already plays an important role in relation to education, concerning the support provided to children with special needs, such as those children who show physical disabilities. A clear example could be the three-dimensions printer, which provides Braille note-takers for blind children or closed-circuit television for partially sighted children.

Another important feature that technology enhances is the establishment of social relations between peers outside the school environment. In fact, it can be stated that the introduction of social medias has changed the way people approach and create social ties, for some aspects in a positive way and for others in a negative one.

On one side, it is possible to affirm that social networks are very useful in terms of spreading information, organizing events like political protests or social gatherings, eliminating the physical distance and engaging people who would not participate in person. On the other side, it gives people the possibility to hide behind a computer, or any other technological device, and behaving without a sense of responsibility. Anonymity provides, in fact, the chance to speak, act, insult, instigate violence or perpetuate verbal offences without the risk of facing the consequences of one's own actions or words that may lead to concrete episodes of bullying, or better, cyberbullying.

The spread of social medias and the more frequent use of technologies in general among young people have had an impact also on different aspects of education. One feature that is deeply affected is represented by the relationship student-student, student-teachers, student-parents, and parents-teachers (Miller, 2019)<sup>44</sup>. As a matter of fact, these connections are not only established and limited within the school environment anymore, but they can be expanded through emails or social medias. In this way the formal boundaries of the relationship, that characterize them when usually speaking of education, would be overtaken by a different form of respect, privacy, approach, and language.

In Trinidad a study showed that the possibility of having an online conversation with the teachers, through social medias, had a positive impact when considering children who may have issues in learning formal and academic English. As a matter of fact, through the online platforms, children were free to use the local dialect, and, as a result, being able to engage more with the lessons and their homework (Sinanan, 2019)<sup>45</sup>.

Social medias can also be used as a bridge between teachers and parents, who always feel excluded from the educational activities that children carry out when they are in school. In many circumstances

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<sup>44</sup> "Come il mondo ha cambiato i social media", Miller, 2019.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

and different countries, the existence of online groups for parents led to a higher sense of inclusion and participation in one's children's life.

However, there are also many adults, both teachers and parents, who are still debating about the role that technology and social media have in children's lives. On one side adults believe that the tech world represents a threat and a distraction, on the other side it is considered as an opportunity. The former support the idea that education must be provided in the formal and classic way, through frontal lessons in classrooms with textbooks, believing that everything else represents a distraction or something which is not necessary for the learning process. The latter, on the contrary, see the potential in the new technologies, which are always more developed. From this point of view, adults believe that social medias and online education projects may embody a key instrument to provide a lifelong learning plan and to include more children in school activities.

Nevertheless, as mentioned before, the issue is represented by the fact that social medias as informal educational tools are not to be considered accessible if teachers and children do not know how to appropriately use them. Technological and media literacy must be part of school curricula, considering the role that the digital world already has in society nowadays, and considering the role it will have in the future. Especially taking into account that viewing media and tech literacy as a form of social literacy has become the normality, since it embodies one of the circumstances in which children are quite free from their parents' control and can develop their own way of engaging and interacting with peers and with other people (Clark, 2013 and Boyd, 2014)<sup>46</sup>.

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<sup>46</sup> "Come il mondo ha cambiato i social media", Miller, 2019



## CHAPTER 2 – EDUCATION IN MALTA

### 1.MALTA

Malta is a small archipelago, composed by three main islands Malta, Gozo, and Comino, located in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea, between Italy, Libya, and Tunisia. The official languages are Maltese and English, and the most spread religion is Catholicism. It achieved independence from the United Kingdom in 1974 and became part of the European Union in 2004, adopting soon after the Euro as national currency.

Malta represents the smallest EU Member State, but, at the same time, it has the highest rate of population density within the Union, and one of the highest in the world. This is also the result of the fact that the archipelago has always been at the crossroads of migration. Many different populations, in fact, spent some time in the islands, Greek, Romans, Arabs, French and British, to mention some. The location has always been an attractive side of the country, since it would have been a strategic position in case of war and trade situations.

Despite the history of migration and the fact that the Maltese population of nowadays is very diversified in terms of ethnicity and origin, the national migrant integration strategy does not reflect it as expected, considering that it started to be developed very recently and that the reputation of the country does not reflect a feeling of openness toward foreigners.

“Irregular Immigrants, Refugees and Integration”<sup>47</sup> was the first policy document to be outlined, which occurred only in 2005, after the outburst of boat arrivals. Accordingly, the first institution of the Ministry for Social Dialogue, Consumer Affairs and Civil Liberties (MSDC) happened only in 2013.

Regardless of the legal delay in approaching and supporting foreign people in Malta, the flows of arrival never seemed to lessen. In fact, by July 2020, the country counted 514.564 people living between Malta and the other two main islands, Gozo and Comino. The National Statistics Office (NSO) published this data in the News Release of the 10 July 2020, in occasion of the World Population Day<sup>48</sup>. The document also highlighted the raise of the net foreign population<sup>49</sup> during

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<sup>47</sup> “Irregular Immigrants, Refugees and Integration”, 2005, Government of Malta.

<sup>48</sup> World Population Day is celebrated on the 11<sup>th</sup> of July. It was established by the UN to focus attention on the urgency and importance of population issues.

<sup>49</sup> The net foreign population is the result of immigration less emigration.

2019, reaching 20.343 people, 12.355 of whom are third-country nationals<sup>50</sup> and 7.489 are EU citizens. In both cases men represented the majority of the population.<sup>51</sup>

Furthermore, in order to understand better the circumstances and the social context in Malta, it is relevant to mention the attitude and approach that the country has always had toward social issues, such as family matters, religion or migration. Basing on the idea that the country is very devoted to the Catholic Church, it is not surprising that the position of the government is often related to religious beliefs or statements. Major symbols of the above mentioned conservative political line are the positions on divorce and abortion, the former only legalised in 2011, the latter still illegal under any circumstances. The only exception, still unusual to associate, is the freedom and positive attitude toward the LGBTIQI+ community. Malta, in fact, tops first in the Rainbow Index<sup>52</sup> within the EU for the fifth year in a row with a score of 89%<sup>53</sup>.

As far as the attitude of the Maltese population toward migration flows is concerned, the situation may appear contradictory. In fact, despite the high emigration rates that characterised Maltese society during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the social understanding and acceptance of immigration flows did not develop accordingly. Many reasons and thoughts lie behind this mindset and disposition toward immigrants, the main ones are economical, physical space-related issues, cultural, and political. It is well known, in fact, that unwelcoming feelings toward foreign people have been spreading around Europe, mainly because of political communication and ideologies, especially if those foreign people come from African or Middle East countries, or in an illegal way.

Consequently, many elements need to be taken into account, such as the fact that the archipelago is very limited in dimensions and living areas, leading to an extremely high population density. Not to mention that the boom of arrivals caught the country unprepared, both practically and mentally, to welcome huge amounts of people coming from very diverse countries, and often illegally.

### *1.1 A national Overview on Migration*

Malta has always been very connected to migration flows, however, until the 1990s, these movements were only associated with emigration, toward Australia, Canada, and the UK. The situation changed

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<sup>50</sup> A Third-Country National (TCN) is a person who is not a citizen of the European Union within the meaning of Art. 20(1) of TFEU and who is not a person enjoying the European Union right to free movement, as defined in Art. 2(5) of the Regulation (EU) 2016/399 (European Commission).

<sup>51</sup> "Population change - Demographic balance and crude rates at national level." (Eurostat, 10<sup>th</sup> July 2020).

<sup>52</sup> The Rainbow Index is an EU annual benchmarking tool, used to measure the LGBTI+ equality laws and policies.

<sup>53</sup> "Rainbow Europe 2020" Executive Summary, ILGA Europe.

after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the outburst of violence and civil conflicts in Eastern Europe in the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Consequently, many people decided to flee.

Furthermore, in the early 2000s, the immigration rates increased due to boat arrivals. Recently, in fact, the immigration flow toward the island has been raising due to economic, environmental or conflicts issues, transforming the country in an even more multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic and multi-religious society. The Directorate for Citizenship and Expatriate Affairs highlighted the presence of foreign people, who originate from more than one hundred countries.

It is also necessary to take into consideration firstly the high number of Maltese citizens who are married to foreigners, and secondly asylum seekers or beneficiaries of other forms of humanitarian protection, who often arrive crossing the Mediterranean Sea.

Accordingly, since 2005, Malta started to develop a strong National Strategy in order to welcome foreign people and to establish projects of social inclusion for adults and children. Nevertheless, the Ministry for Justice and Home Affairs expressed the general worries for the vulnerability of the country, which could be challenged by the new wave of arrivals:

Malta is definitely much more vulnerable than other European countries when it comes to irregular migratory flows. Moreover, the Maltese islands are characterized by size (316 km<sup>2</sup>), a high population density of 1200 person/km<sup>2</sup> and a build-up area of 23%. These characteristics not only reflect the country's physical restrictions but result in a range of social, cultural and environmental challenges.

(Government of Malta, 2005, pg. 6)<sup>54</sup>

In order to regulate the new inflows many programs were established and implemented. In 2015, one of the main ones led by the MSDC, entitled "Mind D Gap", involved a public consultation. This discussion began with the feedbacks of many social components, as civil society organizations, individual citizens, or governmental institutions, and led to the draft of the Framework Document "Towards a National Migrant Integration Strategy 2015-2020"<sup>55</sup>.

Moreover, together with this publication, other measures were taken. In 2015, a new branch of the MSDC was established, the Human Rights and Integration Directorate (HRID), which carried out many relevant initiatives, such as the organization of the Forum for Integration Affairs, holding many

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<sup>54</sup> "Irregular Immigrants, Refugees and Integration". Ministry for Justice and Home Affairs & Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity, 2005.

<sup>55</sup> "Dari? Refugee Voices on making Malta Home.", December 2016, JRS Malta, Integra and Aditus Foundations.

Inter-Ministerial Committee on Integration meetings, and established tight relationships with the Migrant Learners Unit (MLU). The HRID is mainly focused on supporting foreign communities and advocating for their civil liberties, integration, and minority rights. It also enhances legislative proposals and policy frameworks which will be presented to the human rights agenda of the Government. A specific branch, the Integration Unit, will be instituted to review the daily implementation of the Strategy and Action Plan, and, thus, the progress of migrants' integration in Maltese society.

One of the central projects for social integration is called "I Belong". Foreign people can have access to it through a formal and explicit request, since there is the conviction behind that it is a very important decision in someone's life, and thus, it requires a formal recognition and process. The Integration Unit will take care of accepting or refusing the request of everyone, since the project is open to every migrant in the national territory, including asylum-seekers, who may be residents in closed centres. The project involves two phases, the first one consists of achieving a language certificate of both English and Maltese, the basic cultural details, and an assessment regarding qualifications, skills and work experience; the second stage is reserved for the people who want to apply for a permanent residence status. It requires the attendance to a course focused on cultural, social, and economic history and environment of Malta, and a higher level of the Maltese language. Consequently, they will be able to apply for a formal job and will be able to support their family and become part of the national economy. They will be supported by networks of migrant communities, trained cultural mediators, and national integration initiatives.

Later in 2017, the Government outlined the first national "Migrant Integration Strategy and Action Plan. Vision 2020", which embodied an important tool for the Local Councils to strengthen their cooperation and action, responding to the always more diverse communities, which they were representing. The main principles at the basis of this strategy plan were mainly six: using inclusive vocabulary and promoting diversity; enhancing the local dialogue; organizing social event and gatherings to foster a sense of community; promoting the involvement of migrant communities; committing toward the implementation of the strategy plan; and participating in integration and anti-racism projects. The Vision 2020 has as principal objective the integration of people and communities at a local level, in order to enhance the integration at a national and EU level<sup>56</sup>.

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<sup>56</sup> "Local Integration Charter and Action Plan", Government of Malta, 2020.

## *1.2 Foreign Children*

Despite the general overview, the focus of this research is dedicated to foreign children, which are not defined as immigrant considering that some of them do not perceive Malta as their final destination, but only as a leg of their journey. Depending on their origin and motive of their arrival and stay in Malta, they may be defined in different ways, children of migrant workers, asylum-seekers, refugees, foreigners.

It is quite evident, in fact, that beginning for the vocabulary used to indicate those children, or foreign people in general, people already show their personal attitude toward them, showing them respect and dignity, or contempt. There have always been different attitudes toward different people, based on knowledge, experiences, prejudices or ignorance. For this reason, foreign people, and accordingly foreign children, in a national territory may be perceived as “elite” and “non elite” foreigners. Respectively, the formers involve British citizens, European families, or businesspeople and diplomats, the latter refer to all the other people, people who most probably did not choose to move but were forced to by war, famine or natural disasters.

Without considering the colloquial and discriminatory distinction between “class A” and “class B” people, foreign children embody a large group of the foreign population in Malta. Basing on the data of the National Statistics Office, by the end of 2018, foreign children represent the 12% of children in Malta, an increase of almost two points since the year before. In the scholastic year 2017/2018, Maltese schools counted 56.715 students, among whom 3.499 were children from other EU Member States and 2.767 came from non-EU countries. It has been recorded that the number of foreign children, as the number of foreign people in general, arriving in Malta has been raising since 2005 and, as stated above, it does not seem to stop.

It is for this motive that it was considered necessary as a national duty to implement appropriate measures to welcome and integrate those children. Accordingly, in September 2011, a working group was established by the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education (DQSE) and composed by some of its members and other representatives of the Directorate for Educational Services (DES), Colleges and the non-national sector. The aim of the working group was to institute a National Strategy, tailored to respond to all the diverse needs of the foreign children present on the island, in particular addressing the necessity of learning the language. The acquisition of and fluency in English and Maltese are fundamental in the process of learning in school and in the approach to society. The working group, accordingly, highlighted the essential role of projects aimed at teaching the languages by including foreign children through different activities. The promotion of multiculturalism is at the

basis of these activities in many schools spread in the national territory, with the aim of embracing the differences and value them, making children and their families feel accepted and part of the community. The encouragement of multiculturalism in the school environment leads to positive outcomes not only for foreign children, as stated before, but also for Maltese children, or native children in general, who will come closely into contact with diverse traditions, cultures, cuisines and religions, enriching their cultural baggage and their perspectives.

However, in relation to foreign children, the teaching activities are not always to be considered as easy. As a matter of fact, the provision of language education may represent a challenge for teachers and curricula developers, considering that a deep understanding of children's backgrounds, the ability to teach Maltese as a foreign language, and a sensitive approach to an heterogeneous class represent fundamental skills that need to be acquired and considered as core values. This necessity leads to the importance of investing in lifelong learning programs, which need to be tailored for teachers in relation to the social circumstances of their country of belonging, or of the country they teach in.

It is important to mention that the relevance of lifelong learning activities does not only regard Malta, but also many other European countries, which may be affected in similar ways in terms of potential political consequences in relation to immigration and the current social context<sup>57</sup>.

Moreover, the European Statistics on Income and Living Conditions published that the 23% of the 0-17 aged children in Malta were at risk of poverty or social exclusion, a slightly higher percentage in comparison to the foreign adults' population. As a matter of fact, it is quite redundant to mention that children represent the most vulnerable category, and despite the fact that they may be guaranteed more protection than adults, it is still less relevant than having the opportunity of advocating for oneself.

### *1.3 Countries of Origin*

The origin of the foreign population in Malta is an aspect that I wanted to take into account, in order to understand whether the phenomenon of discrimination and classification of it was present in the country. As a matter of fact, as mentioned above, racism is a global phenomenon, and the classification of racism is very spread as well. Moreover, I was also curious to discover whether school segregation was present because of a natural process, which led to the establishment of urban neighbourhoods inhabited by people from the same country of origin.

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<sup>57</sup> "Language Rich Europe Trends in Policies and Practices for Multilingualism in Europe", Extra, G. and Yagmur, K. (2012).

According to the national census, which was carried out in 2011 by the UNHCR, the 32% of the 20.624 foreigners living in Malta were British citizens, followed by large groups of Somali and Italians (5%), Bulgarians and Germans (4%), Eritrean, Russians and Serbians (3%)<sup>58</sup>. Recently the origin of foreign people is slightly different, as a matter of fact the group is currently also including Syria, Libya, and West African countries. Unfortunately, the information and data available for the past years are based only on estimates, considering that the next official national census will be held next year.

Figure 3. Students enrolled by ISCED level and broad groups of nationality: academic years 2012/2013-2016/2017

Table 2.6 Students\* enrolled by ISCED level and broad groups of nationality: academic years 2012/2013-2016/2017 ...

Nationality region	ISCED 0	ISCED 1	ISCED 2	ISCED 3	Total
	2016/2017				
<b>Total</b>	<b>9,224</b>	<b>25,751</b>	<b>12,376</b>	<b>8,120</b>	<b>55,471</b>
Europe	8,838	24,771	12,011	7,890	53,508
of which:					
Maltese	8,130	23,106	11,300	7,534	50,070
Other EU	639	1,448	603	291	2,979
Non-EU	67	219	108	65	459
America	29	71	39	28	167
Africa	216	502	154	73	945
Asia	136	384	161	115	796
Australia	-	18	4	c	24
Unknown	7	5	7	12	31
<b>% foreigners of total students</b>	<b>11.9</b>	<b>10.3</b>	<b>8.7</b>	<b>7.2</b>	<b>9.7</b>
	2015/2016				
<b>Total</b>	<b>9,451</b>	<b>25,137</b>	<b>12,320</b>	<b>8,543</b>	<b>55,451</b>
Europe	9,060	24,121	11,966	8,347	53,494
of which:					
Maltese	8,497	22,546	11,385	8,043	50,471
Other EU	510	1,403	500	257	2,670
Non-EU	53	172	81	47	353
America	23	68	45	20	156
Africa	233	546	141	57	977
Asia	120	345	152	108	725
Australia	5	19	5	c	32
Unknown	10	38	11	8	67
<b>% foreigners of total students</b>	<b>10.1</b>	<b>10.3</b>	<b>7.8</b>	<b>5.9</b>	<b>9.0</b>
	2014/2015				
<b>Total</b>	<b>9,217</b>	<b>24,604</b>	<b>12,311</b>	<b>8,904</b>	<b>55,036</b>
Europe	8,813	23,767	11,987	8,708	53,275
of which:					
Maltese	8,354	22,585	11,514	8,470	50,903
Other EU	416	1,067	422	214	2,119
Non-EU	43	135	51	24	253
America	16	58	33	13	120
Africa	217	469	112	50	848
Asia	92	295	169	121	677
Australia	5	9	c	c	19
Unknown	74	6	8	9	97
<b>% foreigners of total students</b>	<b>9.4</b>	<b>8.3</b>	<b>6.5</b>	<b>4.9</b>	<b>7.5</b>

\* excluding special schools

Note: c confidential figure - 3 or less reported counts.

Source: Statistics on Pre-Primary, Primary and Secondary Formal Education (2012/2013 - 2016/2017)

<sup>58</sup> "Language Education Policy Profile", Malta, 2015.

As showed by Figure 3<sup>59</sup> above, it is possible to notice at a first glance that the number of foreign students has increased from 2014 to 2017. By the scholastic year of 2016/2017, in fact, there were 55.471 students enrolled in the national school system, and 5.401 of them were foreigners, 2.979 were EU MS citizens and 2.422 were third country nationals.

By the scholastic year 2017/2018 the main countries of origin slightly changed, Italian children represented the largest group with 964 students, followed by British and Libyans, respectively 842 and 591 children, and Bulgarian and Serbian, who were 379 and 336 children.<sup>60</sup>

As it can be seen by Figure 4<sup>61</sup>, migration movements changed over years, accordingly, modifying the demography of the Maltese school system.

Figure 4. Total students aged 0-17 enrolled in formal education by nationality: academic year 2017/2018

**Table 7. Total students aged 0-17 enrolled in formal education by nationality: academic year 2017/2018**

<b>Number of students<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>63,182</b>
Maltese	56,542
Foreign	6,604
... of which:	
Italian	964
British	842
Libyan	591
Bulgarian	379
Serbian	363
Unspecified	36

<sup>1</sup> excluding special schools and reception classes

Source: *Tourism and Education Statistics, NSO, 2019*

#### 1.4 Why do they move?

The reason behind any migration is one of the most interesting sides of the movement, it is basing on this belief that I wanted to dedicate some space to analyse the main motives of foreign people, who decided to move to Malta.

<sup>59</sup> "Statistics on Pre-Primary, Primary and Secondary Formal Education", NSO Malta, 2018.

<sup>60</sup> NSO, World Children's Day 2019.

<sup>61</sup> "Teaching English as a Foreign Language: 2018", NSO Malta, 2019.

Malta is often called as one of the pearls of the Mediterranean Sea, because of its amazing location and beautiful sea. It is perceived as a paradise island for young people, where it is very easy to find a decent job and live in a relaxing and easy-going environment. However, Malta represents a lot more than just a vacation destination, both for migrant workers and, especially, for asylum-seekers. For the formers, it embodies a great opportunity to earn more money than they would in their home country, facilitated by the Schengen Area Agreement, which allows to move and work in any other EU MS. Malta, in fact, embodies a great opportunity for young people, who just completed their studies, to move there and earn a lot of money with a respectable job in a shorter period of time than it would take in their home country.

For the latter, the situation is very different. The island represents one of the many idyllic gates to the European Union, and thus, an idyllic gate toward hope, life, and a brighter future. This ideal is considered to be worth risking and covering the distance between Africa and Europe, for example entrusting traffickers or unsafe boats. Aiming at a better life is the second major motive behind the presence of foreign people and families in Malta, which lies exactly in the middle of the journey from North Africa to Europe and to the European Union.

### *1.5 Who are they arriving with and how?*

An important element that needs to be taken into consideration is the way foreign people arrive in the destination country, which will have a huge impact in their integration and future life there. As a matter of fact, people still react differently whether the new population is composed by the so-called class A or B foreigners, and, consequently, they will welcome them or hamper their social inclusion, basing on their country of arrival or legal status.

Accordingly, foreign children can be divided in different categories in many ways, especially in terms of modalities of arrival. More specifically, I believe it is important to mention who children arrive with and in which way, whether they arrive by plane or by boat and, especially, whether they arrive legally or undocumented. In the occasion of the World Refugees' Day, the NSO released a publication focused on boat arrivals and sea rescues occurred in 2019. 43 boat landings were counted, carrying 3.405 people, the 93% from Africa and the rest from Asia.<sup>62</sup>

As far as undocumented arrivals in the first half of 2020 are concerned, by the 30 June, the UNHCR registered 1.699 people rescued at sea, representing an increase of the 33% in comparison with the sea arrivals of the same period in 2019, which were 1.276. Among the 2020 rescues, adult men

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<sup>62</sup> National Statistics Office, World Refugee Day: 20 June 2020.

represent the 69% of the total, the 24%, instead, is composed by unaccompanied and separated children, followed by adult women, who are the 24% and accompanied children, only the 2%. The 395 unaccompanied and separated children, the 35% more compared to the 2019 total (293), mainly originate from Sudan (27%), Somalia (23%), Bangladesh (18%) and Cote d'Ivoire (7%).<sup>63</sup>

As far as the other majority of foreign people present in the territory, which are mostly third country nationals, the NSO counted approximately 7.489 people by the end of 2019. They mainly arrive by plane or by ferry, in the case of Italian people who cross the Mediterranean Sea from Sicily. They are helped by the fact that Malta lies within the Schengen Area, which allows EU MS' citizens to move freely, travelling only with their Identity document.<sup>64</sup>

## 2. THE MALTESE SCHOOL SYSTEM

The importance that a country give to its children is definitely reflected in and represented by its education system, which is the first and principal environment that children encounter and in which they establish their first social ties outside their family. It is for this reason that the second part of the chapter will be dedicated to the analysis of the school system in Malta, in order to review its structure, its positive and negative sides.

(It is important to have access to) education to ensure that all children, young people and adults have the opportunity to obtain the necessary skills and attitudes to be active citizens and to succeed at work and in society. This should not be hindered by differences in socio-economic, cultural, racial, ethnic, religious, gender and sexual status.

(Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014, pg. 1)<sup>65</sup>

This is the primary goal of education and the core of the school system in Malta, which can be divided into four age brackets, that share the same objectives:

- Pre-primary (ages 3 - 5)

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<sup>63</sup> UNHCR Malta Factsheet, 30 June 2020.

<sup>64</sup> The free movement of persons is a fundamental right guaranteed by the EU to its citizens under Article 21 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

<sup>65</sup> "Framework for the Education Strategy for Malta 2014-2024: Sustaining foundations, creating alternatives, increasing employability", Ministry for Education and Employment of Malta, 2013.

- Primary (ages 5 - 11)
- Secondary (ages 11 to 18)
- Tertiary education

Schooling is compulsory between the ages of 5 and 16, whereas non-compulsory education is divided into pre-compulsory and post-compulsory (kindergarten and post-secondary/tertiary education).<sup>66</sup>

Children may, then, be enrolled in three different kind of schools, depending on their personal preference: state schools, Church schools<sup>67</sup> and independent or private schools. They differ in terms of administration but also in terms of offers, as a matter of fact state schools provide free tuition, transport, and books, children only must purchase their school uniform. For the other two types of school the situation is different. As a matter of fact, after a donation, Church schools only supply free transport, but parents must buy books and uniforms for their children. As far as independent and private schools, the only free service is the transport, which is possible under a Government scheme. Moreover, there are also four specific inclusive institutes for children who present special needs and require tailored attentions, which are led by specialist teachers who have particular tools and resources to assist children who need support.

Furthermore, Malta also provides three different alternatives for tertiary education: University of Malta, Malta College for Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST), and The Institute of Tourism Studies (ITS). As far as the main one is concerned, which is the national University, it is free of tuition for EU nationals and EU Long-Term Residents, who, moreover, receive a stipend and an allowance to be encouraged to pursue the studies. In 2018, there were 11.000 students enrolled at the University and almost 650 of them hail from 77 different countries.

Finally, the Ministry for Education supports Lifelong Learning projects and activities for adults, as part of the national Continuous Development Program, which is led by the Maltese Training Corporation. As a matter of fact, the Directorate for Research, Lifelong Learning and Employability within the Ministry for Education and Employment (MEDE) is based on the idea that learning should be a “lifelong journey for everyone”.

As far as the quality of Maltese education, the rates are very high. As a matter of fact, beside international schools which refer to diverse curricula, the Ministry for Education adopted the British

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<sup>66</sup> Regional Statistics Malta, 2020.

<sup>67</sup> It refers to the Catholic Church.

curriculum for the majority of the schools on the national territory. Education in Malta is perceived as an investment for economic growth, to foster productivity and to enhance the political development of the Maltese population, in order to contribute to personal growth and reduce the national social inequalities. Consequently, to achieve these objectives, the Maltese government invests over 5.9% of the GDP in education, merely above the average EU MS' spending. In 2014, the Ministry for Education and Employment published a new Framework for the Education Strategy for Malta 2014-2024, addressing all educational levels, from pre-primary school to adult learning, and all socio-economic sectors, without any distinction based on culture, ethnicity, religion, gender or sexual status. It is based on four main goals, which are coherent with the European and global guidelines:

- Reducing gender gaps in educational attainments among different institutes and raising the general bar in literacy, numeracy, science, and technology competence.
- Supporting children at risk of poverty and with low socio-economic backgrounds in achieving higher levels of education and reducing the early school leavers rate.
- Increasing the participation in adult learning and lifelong learning activities.
- Increasing the learning attainment in further, vocational, and tertiary education and training.

Moreover, this Framework represents one of the major tools in promoting inclusive education and in replacing educational arrangements with more comprehensive ones, enabling young people to achieve formal qualifications as a basis for future lifelong learning activities and providing diverse curricula to increase education engagement rates.<sup>68</sup>

The Maltese education system relies on two main pillars, equity and quality, both essential in promoting inclusive policies and free education for everyone, from kindergarten to university, and in every institute, which may be the Church, the State or the private sector. Furthermore, a core principle of Maltese education is the promotion of multilingualism, to enhance the value of the national culture and language, and, at the same time, encourage a sense of belonging toward the European and global community. Accordingly, the Ministry of Education believes school to be a great environment for children to apprehend the value and importance of multilingualism and of living in a multi-ethnic society, as Malta already is since decades. The national official languages are, in fact, both Maltese and English, which embody on one side a sense of local and national identity and, on the other side, a colonial heritage which provides access to the world society. The social bilingualism is reflected in

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<sup>68</sup> “Framework for the Education Strategy for Malta 2014-2024: Sustaining foundations, creating alternatives, increasing employability”, Ministry for Education and Employment, 2013.

the education system, as a matter of fact Maltese is taught as a form to preserve the national heritage and to enhance the national history and literature, however English is fundamental as well in order to fully benefit from all the teaching and learning activities, especially if the personal aim is to pursue tertiary education. As stated by the Ministry itself, language education strives “to develop an awareness of the nature of language and language learning, of literature and literature learning, as well as widening their personal, social and cultural understanding” (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2012). It is also due to the investment in language education that Malta ranks in the top half of the EU ranking for foreign languages teaching and learning activities, together with the Netherlands and Estonia.

The National Literacy Strategy for All (2014-2019) embodies a significant framework for national education, stressing the importance of consolidating classic and digital literacy, among all the education levels. As a matter of fact, recent studies (PIRLS, TIMSS, PISA) show that the national rate is below the average, with girls outperforming boys in all the analysed areas<sup>69</sup>. Moreover, an objective of this strategy is also to recognize cultural diversity and celebrate it, by acknowledging the presence of different ethnicities, which require to be included by a friendly and open environment. However, literature shows that there is an overall lack of coherent training provided to teachers, who are therefore not ready and professionals to teach in multi-ethnic classrooms (Calleja, 2010).<sup>70</sup>

(...) to 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.

(Ministry for Education and Employment, 2012, pg. 41)<sup>71</sup>

Accordingly, a specific National Literacy Strategy for third country nationals was drafted and published in 2013, aiming, in fact, at supporting foreign people in learning to communicate their needs and to participate actively in society. The NLS for third country nationals specifies some recommendations, in order to reach the most efficient and effective outcome:

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<sup>69</sup> “Education for All, Special Needs and Inclusive Education in Malta”, European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2014.

<sup>70</sup> “Integration in Education of Third Country Nationals”, Foundation for Educational Services, 2012.

<sup>71</sup> “A National Curriculum Framework for All”, Ministry for Education and Employment, 2012.

- Providing migrant parents all the necessary information about childcare and schooling.
- Encouraging migrant parents to enrol their children as soon as possible so to enjoy the integration and literacy development they need.
- Setting up small language support classes so that children will benefit from the attention they require.
- Establishing an interdisciplinary, multicultural, and interactive literacy teaching.
- Fostering the literacy practice of the family and community of the child who is learning so to provide a complete and inclusive educational experience.
- Coordinating literacy teaching with the Health Department in case children present Speech and Language pathologies so to intervene in situations of necessity.
- Supporting parents in promoting literacy at home through different strategies and skills.
- Strengthening the relationship between the Directorate for Lifelong Learning (DLL) and the Agency for the Welfare of Asylum Seekers (AWAS) to include migrants living in the community in literacy teaching activities.

Furthermore, one of the main challenges that the Maltese school system needs to tackle involves early school leavers, who are people between 18 and 24 years of age “who do not have at least the equivalent of Secondary Education Certificate (SEC) passes (grades 1 to 7) in five different subjects and who are not in education or training”.<sup>72</sup> In 2010, the ESL rate for Malta was 24.8%, it decreased to 23.6% in 2011 and reached 22.6% in 2012. However, in 2013, even if it decreased to 20.9%, Malta still represented the second highest rate among EU MS, way above the EU average of 11.9%, counting specifically a 23.2% of male students in opposition to 18.4% of female students<sup>73</sup>. It is evident that the prevention of the raise of the national ESL rate is quite urgent and necessary, accordingly, it is likewise urgent to adopt coherent measures to respond to this already well spread trend among an always more heterogeneous group of students.

As a response to this urgency, in 2014 the Ministry for Education and Employment created a monitoring unit, aimed at assessing and analysing the strategic plan outlined for the prevention of early school leaving in the national territory. The goal of the strategy was to reduce the national rate to 10% by 2020 with different measures, such as more attention to early childhood education activities, promoting school as more meaningful, supporting children at-risk with tailored inclusive

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<sup>72</sup> National Statistic Office, Malta, 2010.

<sup>73</sup> “Education for All. Special Needs and Inclusive Education in Malta”, European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2014.

projects, introducing more vocational education in secondary school, involving the family and the community, and increasing career guidance. For foreign children, a specific TCN Coordinator was appointed, with the role of improving their integration process and supporting them along all their school path. Teachers were offered additional language training, reading and spelling software and other materials to support language teaching activities for foreign children and their families.<sup>74</sup> Moreover, as another strategy to enhance and support young people during their studies, the Ministry for Education enacted a system of stipends and grants, to hinder early school leaving in higher education. This financial support is provided in many ways, such as the initial grant, the one-time grant, the stipend, the supplementary allowances, the single parents' grant, Summer Special Stipends and Topup Stipends.

Another risk that the current school systems around the world face, including Malta, already outlined in the previous chapter, is school segregation. As a matter of fact, the presence of separate facilities for special needs children and for foreign children, have both positive and negative effects. The necessity of ad-hoc buildings and accesses, on one side, is fundamental to allow children with physical disabilities of any kind to enjoy their right to quality education. On the other side, the social effects of being separated from their peers can lead to dramatic consequences, such as a future marginalization or exclusion in society and in the job market.

The situation is very similar when taking into consideration foreign children and the recent project of the Induction Language Course<sup>75</sup>. The attendance of this course is to be considered essential for an effective future integration in the mainstream school, especially reflecting on the necessity of learning Maltese. On the contrary, however, children may feel excluded or considered differently, giving the ILC a negative connotation. Overall, considering the average duration of the course, I personally believe it represents a great compromise in terms of project and time, children are supported in learning the two languages with peers in the same situation and they would soon be attending mainstream classes with Maltese children.

## *2.1 Foreign Children and Education*

As mentioned above, foreign children in Malta may present different features, in terms of motives of their arrival, legal status, or family situations.

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<sup>74</sup> "Education for All. Special Needs and Inclusive Education in Malta", European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2014.

<sup>75</sup> The Induction Language Course will be defined later and broader, considering its relevance to the thesis.

Children of migrant workers, for example, are all those children, whose parents moved to Malta for economic and working reasons, and for them, under Maltese law, school attendance is compulsory.<sup>76</sup> Moreover, the Legislation 217.12 of the Immigration Act states that “*A minor in detention shall have access to (...) state education in Malta depending on the length of his stay*” (Regulation 10 (3)) and that it needs to be “*ensure(d) that as far as possible a minor has access to state education in Malta depending on the length of his stay*” (Regulation 11 (7)).

It shall be the duty of the State to take appropriate measures to ensure that free tuition is given to children of migrant workers in a State school in order to facilitate their initial reception in the educational environment and the school system of Malta as the host State, including, in particular, the teaching ... of the official languages of Malta.

(Ministry for Justice, Culture and Local Government, 2003)<sup>77</sup>

Furthermore, the situation of children of foreigners that obtained the residence in Malta, including children under the Malta Residence 6 Visa Programme (MRVP) is regulated by the Education Act (Chapter 327).

As far as asylum seekers are concerned, article 13(2) of the Refugees Act protects their right to have access to state-funded, free of tuition, education and further training, up to when they will be 15-16, which is also the cut-off date for secondary education for Maltese students. Article 13 is, then, complemented by the Reception Regulations, which state the entitlement of asylum-seeking children to have granted the same education system as Maltese children. This rule may be postponed only for up to three months after the asylum application’s submission, and up to a year only in the case “where specific education is provided in order to facilitate access to the education system.”<sup>78</sup> Asylum-seeking children also have the opportunity to attend language classes and other leisure activities, which are offered by many NGOs, who have the authorization to enter the reception centres. The same rule is applied when foreign children present any form of physical or learning disability, accordingly, they will be treated in the same way as Maltese students and will be offered the same support, resources, and teachers, as when they apply for tertiary non-mandatory education.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Subsidiary Legislation 327.220 Migrant Workers (Child Education) Regulations.

<sup>77</sup> Migrant Workers (Child Education) Regulations (Subsidiary legislation 217.11) Malta; Ministry for Justice, Culture and Local Government, Laws of Malta, 2003.

<sup>78</sup> Provison to Regulation 9(2) Reception Regulations.

<sup>79</sup> “Integration in Education of Third Country Nationals”, Foundation for Educational Services, 2012.

Due to recent arrivals, which are always more frequent, the Ministry for Education realized the necessity to review the Maltese school system, in order to respond to the heterogeneity of the classrooms and to the children's needs. As a matter of fact, a large number of foreign children do not have the sufficient knowledge of English, not to mention Maltese, to face efficiently the school path. One of the main news is the urgency of teaching Maltese as a foreign language. The NCF recognizes Malta as an always more and more multicultural society, and thus, it is necessary to teach the language as the first fundamental step for the social inclusion of foreign people so to facilitate their access into the school and working environment. As a response to the more heterogeneity of the students, the Framework for the Education Strategy for Malta 2014-2024 specified some tailored measures of intervention, like:

- Developing guidelines for the best integration strategy for student and their families, including multicultural teaching and learning resources.
- Supporting foreign children and their families along all the educational path, in particular in overcoming situations of insecurity, bullying or discrimination due to their origins, religion or culture.
- Ensuring that foreign children are enrolled in school and have all the necessary information for an efficient and complete educational experience, including language and cultural support.
- Providing teachers training and support service, so that they will be able to respond to the classroom diversity and everything that the particular situation may lead to.<sup>80</sup>

In case children do not speak neither Maltese nor English, since 2015 they have the opportunity of attending an Induction Language Course, which can be depicted as one of the main projects of inclusive education in Malta, and will be later delineated in details.

In mainstream schools, so state, church, and independent schools, the situations are slightly different, both in terms of demography, numbers, and curricula. The latter, in fact, is always more and more criticised, in terms of not being in line with the classrooms. As a matter of fact, during the scholastic year 2017/2018, the 11% of the students were foreign children, but in 2019 the rate increased by 16.5% in comparison to the precedent scholastic year. The majority of those children, approximately the 55.8% were EU nationals.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> "A strategic plan for the prevention of Early School Leavers in Malta", Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014.

<sup>81</sup> National Statistics Office, Malta, 2020.

Figure 5. Number of students enrolled in formal education by academic year and nationality

Nationality	Academic year		Change	Percentage change
	2016-2017	2017-2018		
<b>Maltese</b>	50,265	50,442	177	0.4
<b>Other EU</b>	2,983	3,499	516	17.3
<i>of which:</i>				
Italian	739	920	181	24.5
British	767	813	46	6.0
Bulgarian	307	344	37	12.1
Romanian	123	167	44	35.8
Swedish	139	155	16	11.5
<b>Non-EU</b>	2,394	2,767	373	15.6
<i>of which:</i>				
Libyan	627	571	-56	-8.9
Serbian	224	336	112	50.0
Syrian	220	306	86	39.1
Russian	199	200	1	0.5
Ukrainian	104	116	12	11.5
<b>Unspecified</b>	32	7	-	-
<b>Total</b>	55,674	56,715	1,041	1.9

<sup>1</sup> includes students attending pre-primary, primary and secondary education

Source: Pre-Primary, Primary and Secondary Formal Education: 2017/2018, NSO, 2020

Figure 5<sup>82</sup> shows the heterogeneity of Maltese school classes, always more and more composed by foreigners, either EU citizens or Third Country Nationals.

Accordingly, teachers and school professionals, in all types of schools, express their worries and the necessity to update the national curriculum, depicting it as an urgent matter, as stated by the Headmaster of a secondary school.

(...) we have to adapt (the curriculum). I believe this. For an education system to work you have to look at the students in front of you. Keep in mind the curriculum. Ok yes, but your main aim is for the person in front of you to find the talent – to get the best – to help her get her best! You know?

(Head, State Secondary School, 2012)<sup>83</sup>

<sup>82</sup> “Statistics on Pre-Primary, Primary and Secondary Formal Education”, NSO Malta, 2018.

<sup>83</sup> “Integration in Education of Third Country Nationals”, Foundation for Educational Services (FES), 2012.

As mentioned above, one of the main challenges of the Maltese school system is the spread phenomenon of early school leavers. However, I believe that the ESL rate for foreign children is even more emphasized because of more factors, which may hamper their success in school. The attendance and potential inclusion of foreign children in the school systems, in fact, largely depend on the parents and on the government, the former because of the job contract they have and the latter because of the permits that they may guarantee to foreign families. The potential legal obstacle is a critical condition that may lead to psychological stress on the family and on the student, who, accordingly, may focus less on school activities because their education may be perceived as meaningless in that particular familiar circumstances.

The coming and going [is a problem], yes. We might have 6, 8 foreign students in a class and suddenly they decide to go back...we have only had a few who have been here a long time. I mean, coming to think of Eastern European, they don't seem to stay here for long – it also depends on their parents.

(State Secondary School Teacher, 2012)<sup>84</sup>

From this short intervention of a secondary school teacher, it is clear that the establishment of an ad hoc curriculum is very hard to plan and implement due to the instability of some families, and thus, of some children. Their presence in class, in fact, may be interrupted in any moment the family decides to move to another country for legal or working reasons. For the Ministry for Education appears to be a very risky investment, considering that many children are not expected to stay in school longer than a semester or an academic year.<sup>85</sup>

It is also important to mention that this situation does not occur in every kind of institution. As a matter of fact, from the same report it has been stated that in the case of independent schools, foreign children are more constant, mainly thanks to the socio-economic stability of their parents, which is more considerable than the stability of children, who attend state or church school, as it can be inferred by the following statement.

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<sup>84</sup> "Integration in Education of Third Country Nationals, Foundation for Educational Services" (FES), 2012.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

In my case, most of the students I have in class have been in Malta for several years or have been here all their life. They have integrated quite well and have friends; they have adapted to the system and participate in class just like the others.

(Independent Secondary School Teacher)<sup>86</sup>

## *2.2 Projects of Inclusive Education*

Inclusive education is perceived as a key pillar for Maltese school system, a fundamental approach which is based on entitlement, diversity, continuation of achievement, learner-centred learning, quality assurance, and teacher support. These six principles guarantee a strong basis for a coherent approach toward inclusive education activities. Moreover, the National Curriculum Framework emphasises the importance and relevance of social justice and democratic principles as equality and inclusion, as key pillar for the education system in Malta.<sup>87</sup>

Malta has become a multi-cultural society and (...) all schools should be in a position to provide children and their parents with language support in Maltese and English so that they achieve a basic working knowledge of these languages at the earliest possible in order to allow them to integrate quickly.

(Ministry for Education and Employment, 2012, pg. 4)<sup>88</sup>

Despite the delay in approaching migration and the effects that this phenomenon had on Maltese society, several projects have been developed and implemented in order to guarantee the most inclusive and welcoming environment for foreign children in the island.

As mentioned before, the principal and tailored program for inclusion in school is the Induction Language Course. Since 2015, the Migrant Learners Unit, in cooperation with the Ministry for Education and Employment, offers the opportunity to every foreign child, who do not speak English or Maltese, to attend school in the Naxxar Induction Hub for a delimited period.

The Induction Language Course is a program available for children who need to learn both languages, it is structured as a primary and secondary school, both present within the same building in Naxxar,

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<sup>86</sup> "Integration in Education of Third Country Nationals, Foundation for Educational Services" (FES), 2012.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> "A National Curriculum Framework for All", Ministry for Education and Employment, 2012.

and it provides classes of Mathematics, Art, and Crafts, along with the other fundamental subjects and socio-cultural competences. The only difference from the mainstream school is that the final objective is to make children feel confident and quite fluent in Maltese and English, before actually teach them mainstream subjects with the sole scope of providing information. The attendance to this course usually lasts one academic year unless children still present significant lacks at the end. One year was set as an efficient period in order to provide valuable support to foreign children, but at the same time, without separating them for too long from their native peers, which are fundamental to encounter and to establish connections with, in order to fully integrate.

The objectives of the Language Induction Hub are mainly providing the basis and the support to learn the two official national languages, but also ensuring the emotional and mental well-being of the students, and providing them the communication skills necessary for a complete and healthy integration in society. Considering the major goal of the program, which is to reach inclusivity and foster the integration of foreign students in mainstream schools, measures are taken so that the service can be accessed by every child. As a matter of fact, school material is provided by the school and transportation is organized by the Ministry for Education and Employment, when children live far from Naxxar. Thanks to these measures, during the first year of implementation, which was 2015/2016, almost 250 foreign children attended the courses offered. As of 2018, around 500 foreign children were enrolled in the program, which is every year specifically tailored for their needs.<sup>89</sup>

Moreover, in the case foreign young people move to Malta and they have already completed mandatory school in their home country or in any other country, they need to undertake a special course if they want to proceed with tertiary education in Malta. In the case their home country does not provide the grades equivalence, student will have to attend a revision course, to prove their abilities and knowledge in some subjects and take the O-Levels<sup>90</sup> exams at the end of it. Otherwise they may proceed in attending the 6<sup>th</sup> Form program, which is tailored to prepare student to access University and the other higher education institutes.

Furthermore, outside the formal school system, many other projects, both led by the government and by local NGOs or civil society organizations, have been arranged to support even more the social inclusion of foreign children and their families in local communities.

An important project is the “LLAPSI+” project, which stands for Language Learning and Parental Support for Integration, it is led by the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education and co-funded by the European Union’s Migration Funds. As the name anticipates, the aim of the project is

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<sup>89</sup> Migrant Learners Unit, 2018.

<sup>90</sup> Ordinary-Levels exams.

to furnish migrant learners enrolled in school a further support, facilitating their inclusion and participation in mainstream institutes. Moreover, it is based on the provision of support and awareness initiatives to parents or relatives of foreign learners, valuing their role in their children's education.

The project was developed in three different branches: the first one, LLAPSI 1, was carried out in the Qormi Centre and in some schools over the national territory, and it was co-funded through the European Refugee Fund; LLAPSI 2 and 3 were carried out later and they were co-funded by the Integration Fund for Third Country Nationals and the Refugee Integration Fund.<sup>91</sup>

In addition, a relevant project is also “ADMIN4ALL – Supporting Active Inclusion of Disadvantaged Migrants in Europe”, which is focused on supporting the socio-economic inclusion of migrants in many different EU countries, including Malta. The two-years project, which was implemented between 2018 and 2019, was aimed at enhancing the abilities of the local governments in developing and promoting sustainable and inclusive strategies for migrants' successful and complete integration. The program is financed by the European Commission, in particular by the Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, which has the objective of strengthening the role of immigration and maximising the benefits of a successful integration of migrants. The methodology of this project is based on a series of activities, trainings, peer mentoring and international exchanges, involving all the countries, which are implementing the same project around Europe. Accordingly, they share their good and successful practices in providing effective services and support to migrants. Moreover, “TandeEm: Towards Empowered Migrant Youth in Southern Europe” is another pertinent regional project, which lasts two years and it is enacted in Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Malta, and Spain. The main objective is to target migrant youth, both in formal and non-formal education environments, and to fight stereotypes, intolerance, prejudices, and exclusion, through different activities that will be carried out in both circumstances. The project is funded by the Asylum, Migration, and Integration Fund of the European Commission (AMIF), with the contribute of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the European University Association (EUA) and the Comunità Religiosa Islamica Italiana (COREIS).<sup>92</sup>

Finally, projects of Inclusive Education are planned and supported by religious communities and organizations, such as the Jesuit Refugee Service, which is an international NGO that operates also in Malta. Their education programmes are mainly four, all with the key objective of guaranteeing and supporting the right to education for every child. The first one is the Integration Priority Track (IPT), which is based on four different programmes for four different age groups. Two of them are

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<sup>91</sup> Ministry for Education, 2015.

<sup>92</sup> IOM Malta, May 2018.

dedicated to children and their support consist of an English language course, educational materials (such as textbooks and crafts materials), and assistance in purchasing hardware material such as a laptop. The second project is focused on assisting primary school age children while doing their homework, it is still a developing project, but they already established a network of people who could benefit from it. The third program is based on a financial support for disadvantaged families, who live in particularly vulnerable conditions and whose parents are not able to work properly due to particular circumstances, such as serious illnesses, single-parent households or physical disabilities. This environment does not transmit the best and most efficient setting for children to achieve their potential, but with a small but significant sum of money they can lift some of the burden. The last project is a language course, which takes place in the Open Centre for every resident, and include every person who want to learn and does not have the means to do it differently because of lack of childcare while attending the classes, or, regarding mainly children, very low or inexistent level of literacy, or transport issues.

Furthermore, the Jesuit Refugee Service, in collaboration with Kopin, the organization I have volunteered with, recently have organized a fundraising run to finance an Education Support Programme, which will include the provision of textbooks, technological devices, examination fees, and mentorship. This project is aimed at financially supporting refugees and migrant children, so to protect their right to education and guarantee them a quality access to the school system. The goal of the run was to collect €15.000, however more than €40.000 were donated.

### **3. SOCIAL INCLUSION**

The main purpose of my research was to highlight the importance and relevance of having access to an inclusive education system, which needs to be tailored to respond to always more multicultural societies and to foster social inclusion. I believe it is relevant to define social inclusion, before proceeding with the analysis of the Maltese current situation.

The World Bank considers social inclusion as “*the process of improving the terms on which individuals and groups take part in society—improving the ability, opportunity, and dignity of those disadvantaged on the basis of their identity*” (World Bank, 2013). As a matter of fact, as stated above, people nowadays may be excluded by society because of endless motives, which could be nationality as well as poverty, religion, or physical disability. It is against this trend that the World Bank embraced social inclusion in its two key pillars: ending extreme poverty and boosting shared

prosperity, through a strategy based on assessing the most suitable tools, leading high-profile researches, designing tailored actions, and perfecting its mechanisms.

Another relevant actor in fighting for the social inclusion of everyone, leaving no one behind, is the European Union. Accordingly, the EU Youth Strategy<sup>93</sup> against social exclusion and poverty among young people has the main objective of hampering the rise of these trends. The strategy is based on three main pillars, engage, connect, empower, and it involves different sets of actions such as:

- Creating more equal opportunities for young people both in education and in the labour market.
- Supporting acts of active citizenship, solidarity, and sociality among young people.
- Helping youth in realising their full potential.
- Encouraging cross-sector approaches to hamper social exclusion.
- Standing for the development of a sense of intercultural awareness and fight against prejudice.
- Promoting access to quality services, such as e-inclusion and social services.

Efficient and well-developed actions to face social exclusion are always more and more urgent, especially in the current society, which is even more hit by a global pandemic that is enlarging the already existing social gaps and inequalities. Therefore, it is urgent to consider the central role that children have nowadays, as future of our society. They need to be protected and their future needs to be safeguarded, so that they can, in fact, take part in society, make a future for themselves and access education. In this way, they will be able to support and promote multiculturalism, demolishing stereotypes and prejudices, and embracing a solidarity spirit and approach to the reality of the current society. However, in order to do so, children need to be given the instruments to comprehend diversity and the beauty of it, not as something to avoid and fight, but to embrace and value.

And these instruments are enshrined in education.

In order to comprehend in the best and most complete way the concept of social inclusion, the Social Inclusion Index is a great tool to do it, considering that it measure the level of each country, monitoring, confronting and developing every EU MS in terms of anti-poverty strategies.

The Social Inclusion Index is an EU monitoring instrument, which was created exactly to prevent the increase of the poverty rate and to examine the total community and national extents of social inclusion rates. It is divided into many sections, based on priorities and urgencies, which embody

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<sup>93</sup> “The EU Youth Strategy”, Council Resolution, 26 November 2018

different indicators. Obviously, the final objective is to eradicate poverty, reducing the totality of social exclusion. Among the primary indicators, some stand out as very relevant to this research, such as:

- Early leavers from education and training,
- Employment gap of immigrants,
- Child well-being.

Moreover, there are also a few secondary indicators that could suit:

- Persons with low educational attainment
- Low reading literacy performance of pupils.

It is clear that also at the EU level, investing in children and investing in education is considered to be very urgent and fundamental for the future of the whole community. Investing in a supported and quality childhood automatically means creating the basis for a brighter future, enriched with more opportunities. In this way, children will be less likely to grow up in vulnerable, marginalised, and unhealthy conditions, reducing the rate of social exclusion and, accordingly, poverty.

Already in 2013, the European Commission published a Recommendation for EU MS, which was combined with the Social Investment Package, entitled “Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage”<sup>94</sup>. The Commission Recommendation was based on three key pillars: access to adequate resources, access to affordable quality services, children’s rights to participate. The very first recommendation states that it is fundamental to “tackle child poverty and social exclusion through integrated strategies that go beyond ensuring children’s material security and promote equal opportunities so that all children can realise their full potential” (European Commission, 2013). Moreover, the fifth recommendation is focused on the protagonists of this research, vulnerable children. It says, in fact, that it is fundamental as well to:

Ensure a focus on children who face an increased risk due to multiple disadvantage such as Roma children, some migrant or ethnic minority children, children with special needs or disabilities, children in alternative care and street children, children of imprisoned parents, as well as children within households at particular risk of poverty, such as single parent or large families.

(European Commission, 2013)

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<sup>94</sup> “Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage”, Commission Recommendation, (2013/112/EU), 2013.

The Commission Recommendation is addressed directly to the EU MS with key elements, which, in relation to the subject of this thesis, are:

- A major improvement in access to affordable early childhood education and care services,
- A major improvement in access to quality services that are essential to children (including radical elimination of school segregation, enhancement of access to health, housing, and social services),
- A major improvement in supporting children's participation in extra-curricular activities, in services, and decisions affecting children (including social services, education, and alternative care).

After having taken into account the definition of social inclusion at a global and EU level, it is understandable what it refers to. Consequently, it is possible to proceed and to focus on the country I took into consideration for my personal research and in the area of concern, education. Malta embodies an island at the crossroad of migration, where society has always reflected a multi-ethnic and multicultural spirit. This heterogeneity never represented something new, however, in the past 15 years the government needed to tackle this increasing diverse environment from every perspective, including, as mentioned already in the previous paragraphs, the school system, with which I personally came into contact during my exchange period there.

### *3.1 My volunteering activity in the Induction Hub*

During the fall semester of 2019, I had the opportunity of spending five months in Malta, for an Erasmus+ exchange, studying at the Law Faculty of the University of Malta.

Moreover, thanks to the university class schedule and my personal interest in volunteering, I decided to look for a project for the five months I would have spent there, which could connect my passions and my academic path. I researched for organizations focused on social support, integration of foreign people or education for children, and I encountered Kopin.

Kopin – empowering communities – is a Maltese NGO, focused on three main issues: fighting poverty in Ethiopia, providing support to refugees in Malta, and offering activities on global and development education. They offered me the chance to volunteer as an English teacher with other young people in a school for foreign children. Later I discovered this school to be the so-called Induction Hub, where induction language courses are offered to children, who are not fluent neither in Maltese, nor in English. My role would have been to schedule, plan and give lessons to different

classes in the Hub, focused on English grammar rules or vocabulary, often combined with social topics like diversity or bullying. The project seemed very interesting to me since the beginning, accordingly, in November, together with the other volunteers, we began to plan the sessions for the children. I took actively part in the project for the last two months of my exchange period, holding a total of six classes with another volunteer from Australia, Laura.

During the lessons, I could see the different attitudes children had toward us and the topics we were proposing, some of them seemed to understand the importance of learning English and participated during the activities we proposed, some of them were more shy and some of them were not really easy to engage.

Overall, the experience was incredible, it was short but really valuable. I could notice many things during those short 45-minutes classes that led me to think about this thesis. At the beginning, for example, I could notice the new children, who were more silence and would not participate, or those children who would sit next to their compatriot so that they could speak their language when they would not know how to express themselves in English. It may seem meaningless, but it made me think about the importance of having someone to talk to and who would understand. And about the importance of having a common language as the key element to establish a connection.

Accordingly, it was during those lessons that I began to realize how valuable was what stood in front of me, how devoted the teachers seemed while engaging every single student and making them realize how fundamental school would be for their future. It was very inspiring, and it made me think about how relevant these projects are nowadays, considering the heterogeneity of school classrooms, not only in Malta but everywhere.

Independently from the fact that it is a voluntary or forced migration, people moving has been happening for decades and it has been affecting national societies for as the same time. I tried to imagine the difficulties people, and children in particular, may have to face when they move to a foreign country, where they do not understand their peers, nor everyone in general. I soon realized the impactful role that the school system has in their life, providing them with knowledge of the language first and a quality educational curriculum later. Not to mention the possibility to begin social relations with their peers in a safe environment, as the school walls. It gives them the key to a world of possibilities. Accordingly, I started to read and research about the topic, about the importance of literacy and language, about education systems around the world, lingering on the current school system in Malta.

### *3.2 An Interview to Migrant Youths in Malta*<sup>95</sup>

It is fundamental, for the scope of this thesis, to not only analyse the positive sides of the school system in Malta, but to also consider the criticisms and the negative consequences it may have led to. For this reason, I thought that the best way to understand the current social situation and the educational possibilities, which are offered to foreign children, was to directly ask them.

These interviews were fundamental in understanding whether the opportunities for foreign children to get access to the education system were sufficient, available for everyone, and actually inclusive. Accordingly, I decided to interview young adults, who moved to Malta when they were children and attended some years of mandatory school there<sup>96</sup>.

The initial project was to directly go back to Malta for a short period of time over the summer and lead the interviews in person. I thought, in fact, that it would have been the best option to get to know the people, to create more confidence and to establish a personal relationship with them. However, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, it was not possible, so the interviews have been led remotely, through videocalls. Consequently, the process resulted to be slower and more detached than expected, but I believe the reason behind it is the modality of the interviews, rather than lack of interest or trust.

The results, on the contrary, were very interesting, significant, and relevant to the scope of the interview itself and to the analysis I am developing. As a matter of fact, the interviewed were very honest both in terms of criticisms and in highlighting the positive sides of their personal experience in school. However, it is important to be stated that not everyone answered every question. Firstly, because I led the interview in a more informal way (considering that the conversation was already detached because of the screen) and, secondly, because I stated since the beginning that they could have answered as long as they were comfortable in sharing their life experiences.

The people I interviewed are young adults, from 18 years old to 28 years old, who moved to Malta during their childhood or teen hood. I met three of them when I was personally in Malta for my Erasmus exchange and then, I contacted the others through them and thanks to their acquaintances.

Their countries of origin are mainly European, with some exceptions involving North America and Africa. I decided to include this element, in order to be able to confront the place of birth and Malta, in terms of cultural differences, religion and language.

Most of the people I talked to only knew English before coming to Malta, however only three of them attended a Maltese language course (outside school), since it was considered irrelevant or not

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<sup>95</sup> See Appendix 2 “An Interview to Migrant Youths in Malta” for the full list of questions and answers.

<sup>96</sup> In reality a few of the interviewed attended only a Revision Course or 6<sup>th</sup> Form before entering Junior College or University. However, I considered their experiences as relevant since attendance to these programs is mandatory if a student is willing to pursue with higher education in Malta.

necessary. On the other hand, one of the interviewed stated something I do agree with, “(...) although if I had known Maltese it would have made learning considerably easier as, although lessons were meant to be delivered in English, they were in Maltese for the most part” (Former Student, 2020). In fact, despite both English and Maltese are official languages, school activities are not carried out in the same amount for both. “I was also told on my very first day at school to learn Maltese to make it easier for teachers and other students to talk to me” (Former Student, 2020) - this is what someone experienced.

Moreover, knowing only one of the two languages is not sufficient to integrate completely in society, and to have full access to opportunities and services. Many of the people I interviewed supported this idea, thinking that “(...) maybe achieving higher fluency in Maltese at such a young age would have made me feel more accepted as a part of Maltese society in the long run (...)” and that -“(...) it is great for children, they need to learn Maltese if they arrive at an early age” (Former Students, 2020).

A second section of the interview was focused on school participation, involving questions regarding school material, teachers, classmates, and parents. The results were quite surprising, considering that the majority did not receive any support in terms of tailored material in their own mother tongue, and so, easier to comprehend at the beginning. Nor they were not offered any Maltese language course to integrate their lacks and catch up with their peers.

As far as the relationship with teachers and professors is concerned, opinions were very diversified. Many stated that they noticed a different approach and behaviour toward foreign students; on one hand they were helped and assisted more, on the other hand they were ignored and not considered. Asking about which criticism they would do, someone answered:

(...) Once I have been told by teachers at the end of the lesson to remind them to talk in English, in front of the whole class, which glanced at each other in annoyance. It was very humiliating, and it is not my job as a student to tell the teacher to communicate with every one of their students.

(Former Student, 2020)

Furthermore, it seems there are relevant differences if the kind of school is taken into account. As an example, someone expressed it clearly when I asked if they perceived teachers were behaving differently with them and with the other foreign students, and also if their classmates were showing a positive and welcoming attitude or not.

In the government school very much so, they were racist towards me, refusing to translate the lesson for me even though they were fluent in English, the head of school was no better. In the private school I was treated equally, the head use to make all the foreign students meet every month and we discussed how we felt and if something was bothering us. Her and the teachers always helped us feel included and part of the school.

(Former Student, 2020)

The relationship with classmates was also described both in very positive terms and with a negative connotation. However, just a few blamed it on their country of origin and their different cultural backgrounds, stating that there had been a few episodes of racism and bullying but limited to one-time comments, which were not even taken into consideration. Furthermore, many observations were made in relation to the presence or absence of other foreign students in their classes, specifically of other compatriots. The presence of someone that could speak their mother tongue was repeatedly stated as extremely valuable and helpful, especially at the beginning. Personally, I believe these ambivalent answers were also the result of children's own personality, attitude toward school and toward their peers.

One of the questions, which I was more interested about was whether they participated in lectures or workshops focused on diversity, migration, or multiculturalism. And whether they would be considered as helpful or, on the contrary, uncomfortable. Considering the heterogeneity of Maltese society and, accordingly, of Maltese classes, I would have expected more positive responses. The answers, however, were quite different. The majority of the people I talked to did not experience any kind of school-led activity aimed at raising awareness on cultural diversity and acceptance, and some of the few who did attend one were not really satisfied or comfortable. "I felt the opposite of included, because it was only with foreign children, it did not make any sense" and "Sometimes they felt forced, like they were just done out of obligation to fulfil the requirements of the curriculum" (Former Students, 2020), these are only two examples to underline the general feeling.

Nevertheless, many also considered fundamental and relevant for these activities to be held and spread among students, in order to fight a social feeling of detachment, mistrust and racism. In fact, when I asked whether they would have appreciated them, they stated "I feel they are very necessary, especially in Malta as people here tend to be very xenophobic and racist" and "Acceptance is necessary and so there should be such classes in order to prepare the students for future interactions" (Former Students, 2020).

I think that nowadays projects to raise awareness on these very sensitive topics are fundamental to be included in the educational curricula, since an early age. In fact, the school environment is one of the most common places where bullying acts take place. Accordingly, involving children in long-term activities aimed at developing a sense of acceptance and appreciation of the differences could be the key to reduce episodes of verbal violence, physical attacks and, in the long run, maybe institutional discrimination. Despite always more and more activities on globalisation, cultural diversity, and anti-racism are planned and organized, bullying in school is still very ordinary. Sometimes the main problem is that bullying acts are not explicit and easily punishable.

Student institutions outside the school were not as accepting and even if on the surface they were multiculturally welcoming, they had an obvious preference for local students as foreigners never got picked to participate in their programs. Children are not idiots though. We recognise institutional xenophobia when we are living as outsiders every day.

(Former Student, 2020)

Sometimes, instead, the issue is that students cannot rely on adults' figures, such as professors or headmasters. One of the people I interviewed said that "figures of authority were inept at handling bullying regardless" and many others shared this opinion (Former Student, 2020).

There is one particular person, whom I talked to that really impressed me, giving me many episodes of the personal daily life in school and those of siblings. This testimony was very impactful because while describing one particular event, one sentence was said, which summarises perfectly this thesis.

I remember vividly one of the girls took me aside during the trip, she was from my secondary school, she said "I want to apologize if I was ever racist to you, I was young, I had no idea what I was doing". And I remember telling her "*no, no you were never racist, just uneducated*". (...) A lot of times I spent in the toilet eating my lunch alone cause its Nigerian stew with a lot of spice and everyone in class would complain when the scent was strong. I had to beg my mum to stop giving me that food.

(Former Student, 2020)

A third section of the interview was focused on highlighting the good aspects and the criticism concerning the school system in Malta. Answers were given both concerning the school

curricula, and regarding inclusivity and discrimination matters. The most relevant responses, highlighting the positive sides of the Maltese school systems were not that many. Nonetheless, one project was very interesting and coherent, the Buddy System. One person, among those I interviewed, lived in first person this experience.

During the second year of 6<sup>th</sup> form the school established the buddy system for foreigners: they would be introduced the school and everything, see the school, how it works. And to empathise with other foreign students, I was asked to be the guide since I was a foreigner as well.

(Former Student, 2020)

Among the other good notes, the variety of lessons and the freedom of choosing them was one of the most shared. Furthermore, one person wanted to highlight that “the students and institutions were accepting. I was given equal opportunities as the local students. I got to represent Malta at events, things like that” (Former Student, 2020).

On the other hand, the number of critics was definitely higher than the appreciation comments. I noticed that many of them were referred directly to the school system, to the professors and to the headmaster, “teachers weren’t understanding in the first few months that I came from a completely different country”, or “I hated how the teachers refused to translate some lessons in English” (Former Students, 2020). This seemed to be a very recurrent issue, many of the people I talked to share the experience of lessons that were supposed to be carried out in English and at the end were held in Maltese because it was easier for the majority of the students to comprehend. “The fact that English-language subjects with English-language textbooks were taught in Maltese, (together with) the heavily culturally biased syllabus in every subject” and “some classes were taught in Maltese when the material is in English as Maltese children had trouble understanding concepts in English” are clear examples (Former Students, 2020).

Furthermore, one major critic, shared by many interviewed, was the Maltese people’s mindset. They sustained, in fact, that the racist and xenophobic attitude was not only limited to events happening in school, but, on the contrary, it was based on social ideas. Accordingly to this statement, one of the answer was “I wish some locals would stop being racist towards foreigners, the whole countries economy survives on foreigners and tourists”, and that one of the solutions could be “educating everyone from kindergarten on race, equality, and acceptance” (Former Students, 2020).

Finally, the issue of discrimination based on the country of origin was also intersected with episodes of discrimination based on physical disabilities, since I had the chance of speaking to two siblings who both suffer from different physical disabilities. One of the two told me that a big improvement would be to “be more helpful. I do not like how they treat disabilities. I have Prader–Willi syndrome, and sometimes I cannot walk far as my balance is not great and they say that cannot provide transport” (Former Student, 2020).

The last questions of the interview were referred to the Induction Language Course (ILC), whether they knew it and what did they think about it. With only one exception, nobody knew about it, probably considering that it is a very recent project. After explaining what the project consists of, which are the objectives, and how it is developed, the answers were almost unanimous. The only person that was doubtful about the success and efficiency of the ILC sustained the idea by saying

:

I think it is a good idea however it encourages foreign students to stick with one another and not branch out to integrate with local kids. This could be detrimental to their ability to learn Maltese as they would not be forced to use it outside class.

(Former Student, 2020)

Other people, who were interviewed, considered it as a great idea “as it would help foreign students to properly integrate into Maltese schools and society as a whole”, that “(...) it would be a lot more useful being fluent in Maltese and English as those are the two main languages here, it would open up a lot more opportunities here for foreign students”, and that “it is a fantastic idea that should have been introduced much earlier. I believe it is a big step in the right direction” (Former Students, 2020).

To conclude, I am very satisfied with the results of these interviews, the people I reached out to were able to present both the qualities and the flaws of the Maltese school system and of their personal experiences as foreign students. From their answers, although a modest representation of the foreign students who experiences school in Malta, it is possible to infer that progress has been made in terms of programs to facilitate school inclusion, despite the country of origin. Nevertheless, these testimonies also highlight the necessity of continuing pursuing access to quality education for every child, despite the language spoken or the religion followed.

Many improvements have been reached but they are still not enough. As stated at the beginning, the key to solve discrimination within the school walls, and in society and institutions, is exactly within the school walls, through education.

## CONCLUSIONS

From literature review, in-depth analysis of the current models, and direct concrete experiences, the aim of this thesis was to furnish a complete framework about the fundamental role that literacy and education have in the everyday life of everyone, and to provide an overview on which are the available opportunities for foreign children when it comes to inclusive education.

From the first chapter of this dissertation, it is possible to infer that literacy represents a key element at the basis of communication and social relations, almost everywhere around the world. Accordingly, literacy must be available to everyone, considering the role it has, in order to access a wide number of opportunities and to relate with other people. Not only in the context of formal education, but in the everyday life, involving informal education activities, sport, religious communities, and society as a whole.

Furthermore, considering education from a legal perspective, it has been outlined that always more and more conventions are protecting the right to education and to safe access to a quality school system for every child around the world. It is very valuable and precious that, legally, steps ahead are taken and implemented. Progress, in fact, can already be noticed, in comparison to the beginning of the century, and I believe it is fundamental to continue in this direction, as the world changes.

As far as the country analysis is concerned, it is fundamental to highlight that not only Malta offers specific projects for inclusion and integration, inside and outside the school environment for foreign children, as outlined widely in the second chapter. In fact, accordingly, many other countries have similar projects, such as Italy, Poland, Afghanistan, Argentina, and many more, each of them with different features, considering that they are, for the majority of the cases, tailored for the heterogeneity of their national education environments.

In Italy, a great organization, which focuses on integration projects for foreign children is Programma Integra. It works with schools and institutions to organise different kind of events, aimed at promoting social inclusion for migrant children, establishing a network between migrant communities and social professionals. In Italy, moreover, the Insert Pro Migrants project and the Never Alone project support a valid system of welcoming and help to migrant families, and in particular children, in integrating within the school environment.

The Polish Ministry of Education, on the other side, included in the tailored programs for foreign children a special section, which is dedicated to children with special needs and with a migration background, so to provide the most comfortable school experience.

A considerable importance is also dedicated to the learning of the new language which can be seen as easier for children, but cannot be taken for granted, when talking about teenagers. In some countries (such as Ireland, Luxembourg or Finland), a specialist agent is hired only to prepare national reports concerning the differences among the languages of foreign children and the difficulties they may encounter when learning the new languages, and brochures in the foreign languages that could be helpful to families.

A concrete example of first attempts of integration is also visible in Argentina, where the positive results can be perceived in society. Even though at the beginning school segregation was the only option, this special school still represented a safe space for vulnerable children, in particular students with migration backgrounds and belonging to the transgender community.

Furthermore, there are also international projects, which can be adopted by many countries, cooperating toward the main goal of school inclusion for foreign children. One of these valuable projects, which already led to positive outcomes, is the E-course, that is focused on “enhancing the participation and learning performance of migrant and refugee children in primary school education” (European School Heads Association, 2017). It is adopted by and implemented in Germany, Greece, Italy, France, and Cyprus, and it has been helping teachers and school staff to address the particular needs that foreign children may have with tailored tools and educational resources.

As I mentioned before, it is very important to pursue total inclusion in every country, considering the effects in case it will not happen. I already stated within the introduction of this dissertation, that the consequences of marginalised and neglected children not only affect their own future, but also the future of the society and of the country they live in. As a matter of fact, the presence of illiterate children, and future illiterate adults, will lead to many social issues, which will be more difficult to tackle and solve, such as a slower economic growth, due to the lack of high-skilled employees. However, negative consequences may derive also from personal conditions, which, if taken singularly, may cause damage to the single individual, and if taken as a collective, may harm society and the whole country. These singular consequences may be unemployment, and thus poverty and low quality of life, low self-esteem and marginalization, intergenerational devaluation of literacy and education, and unhealthy life, considering that they will not be able to access many services, due to a lack of information. From these examples of the main effects, it is clear that investing in inclusive projects is in the best interest of the child, as well as in the best interest of society. Otherwise the results may be irreversible.

In fact, a very relevant reflection, which needs to be highlighted, focuses on future perspectives. It is well established that the access to quality education was already challenged by lack of resources or capabilities, insufficient investments, cultural biases, and familiar issues. Moreover, currently, the school system is threatened by a major and global circumstance, the Covid-19 pandemic. As a matter of fact, since the beginning of 2020, most of the children were forced to stay home, without the opportunity to attend classes, to meet with their peers, and to keep up with the educational program.

However, the effects of the interruption of lectures during the first half of the year were not only limited to the interruption itself. In fact, the most consistent repercussions have been perceived over the summer and with the beginning of the new scholastic year. Accordingly, in many countries around the world, the rate of school dispersion, school dropouts or early school leavers have increased dramatically. Currently, as a consequence, the major urgency for all the countries, which are experiencing the increase of these trends, is to adopt measures and strategies aimed at involving the highest number of children and to include all of them in the school program.

Basing on all previous information and trends, it can be stated that, in order to reach total inclusivity, reforms and change must happen. Firstly, larger investments in schools and teachers should be allocated, so to provide safe and quality buildings for children, and to offer them the best quality of education professionals, enhancing lifelong learning programs. Secondly, subjects and programs should be adapted to current society, including topics, which, in the past, were considered “inappropriate” to be taught in school, because of religious taboos or because they were cultural phenomena that did not involve certain communities. Nowadays, children will have access to that information through the internet, accordingly, it may be in their best interest, that teachers explain them the basic knowledge of civic education, politics, sexuality, or cultural diversity. Thirdly, I think that a major attention should be dedicated to children. In particular, to which children are part of the national schools, so to analyse their backgrounds and understand to which systems and costumes they were used to and comfortable with. I think that each country should focus on the composition of the classes, understanding from which other countries children come from, or which religion do they follow, so to provide the best quality education to every student.

Inclusivity means also give importance to this kind of analysis, this kind of attention, this kind of dedication to value the children in schools, to make them feel represented, to understand their differences but, at the same time, guaranteeing them the same treatment and opportunities.

Because, at the end, even though migration is one of the oldest human phenomena, it seems like people and governments are not used to it yet and are not ready to embrace every aspect and consequence deriving from it, preferring to address other national issues.

The focus on Malta is just an example of a European country, which has never been very welcoming toward foreigners, due to several different factors, and whose consequences, for the majority negative, are visible in society and within the school walls.

However, despite this difficulty, or this mindset, considering that global major events, which have an impact on every country, are happening almost on a daily basis, involving climate disasters, a global pandemic, wars, and a broad economic crisis, it could be the right moment to actually make a change within the system, the attitude, and the mentality, in order to approach it differently.

In order to stop leaving children behind.

## APPENDIX

### Appendix 1 – The Right to Education

#### The Universal Declaration of Human Rights

##### Article 26

- (1) Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.
- (2) 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, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.
- (3) Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.

#### The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

##### Article 28

1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity, they shall, in particular:
  - (a) Make primary education compulsory and available free to all;
  - (b) Encourage the development of different forms of secondary education, including general and vocational education, make them available and accessible to every child, and take appropriate measures such as the introduction of free education and offering financial assistance in case of need;
  - (c) Make higher education accessible to all on the basis of capacity by every appropriate means.
  - (d) Make educational and vocational information and guidance available and accessible to all children.
  - (e) Take measures to encourage regular attendance at schools and the reduction of drop-out rates.
2. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that school discipline is administered in a manner consistent with the child's human dignity and in conformity with the present Convention.
3. States Parties shall promote and encourage international cooperation in matters relating to education, in particular with a view to contributing to the elimination of ignorance and illiteracy

throughout the world and facilitating access to scientific and technical knowledge and modern teaching methods. In this regard, particular account shall be taken of the needs of developing countries.

#### The International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families

##### Article 30

Each child of a migrant worker shall have the basic right of access to education on the basis of equality of treatment with nationals of the State concerned. Access to public pre-school educational institutions or schools shall not be refused or limited by reason of the irregular situation with respect to stay or employment of either parent or by reason of the irregularity of the child's stay in the State of employment.

#### The 1951 Refugee Convention

##### Article 22

##### Public education

1. The Contracting States shall accord to refugees the same treatment as is accorded to nationals with respect to elementary education.
2. The Contracting States 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

#### The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

##### Article 13

1. The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to education. They agree that education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity and shall strengthen the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. They further agree that education shall enable all persons to participate effectively in a free society, promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations and all racial, ethnic or religious groups, and further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

2. The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize that, with a view to achieving the full realization of this right:

- (a) Primary education shall be compulsory and available free to all;
- (b) Secondary education in its different forms, including technical and vocational secondary education, shall be made generally available and accessible to all by every appropriate means, and in particular by the progressive introduction of free education;
- (c) Higher education shall be made equally accessible to all, on the basis of capacity, by every appropriate means, and in particular by the progressive introduction of free education;
- (d) Fundamental education shall be encouraged or intensified as far as possible for those persons who have not received or completed the whole period of their primary education;
- (e) The development of a system of schools at all levels shall be actively pursued, an adequate fellowship system shall be established, and the material conditions of teaching staff shall be continuously improved.

3. The States Parties to the present Covenant undertake to have respect for the liberty of parents and, when applicable, legal guardians to choose for their children schools, other than those established by the public authorities, which conform to such minimum educational standards as may be laid down or approved by the State and to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions.

4. No part of this article shall be construed so as to interfere with the liberty of individuals and bodies to establish and direct educational institutions, subject always to the observance of the principles set forth in paragraph I of this article and to the requirement that the education given in such institutions shall conform to such minimum standards as may be laid down by the State.

#### Article 14

Each State Party to the present Covenant which, at the time of becoming a Party, has not been able to secure in its metropolitan territory or other territories under its jurisdiction compulsory primary education, free of charge, undertakes, within two years, to work out and adopt a detailed plan of action for the progressive implementation, within a reasonable number of years, to be fixed in the plan, of the principle of compulsory education free of charge for all.

#### The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

#### Article 10

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in order to ensure to them equal rights with men in the field of education and in particular to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women:

- (a) The same conditions for career and vocational guidance, for access to studies and for the achievement of diplomas in educational establishments of all categories in rural as well as in urban areas; this equality shall be ensured in pre-school, general, technical, professional and higher technical education, as well as in all types of vocational training;
- (b) Access to the same curricula, the same examinations, teaching staff with qualifications of the same standard and school premises and equipment of the same quality;
- (c) The elimination of any stereotyped concept of the roles of men and women at all levels and in all forms of education by encouraging coeducation and other types of education which will help to achieve this aim and, in particular, by the revision of textbooks and school programmes and the adaptation of teaching methods;
- (d) The same opportunities to benefit from scholarships and other study grants;
- (e) The same opportunities for access to programmes of continuing education, including adult and functional literacy programmes, particularly those aimed at reducing, at the earliest possible time, any gap in education existing between men and women;
- (f) The reduction of female student drop-out rates and the organization of programmes for girls and women who have left school prematurely;
- (g) The same Opportunities to participate actively in sports and physical education;
- (h) Access to specific educational information to help to ensure the health and well-being of families, including information and advice on family planning.

## Appendix 2 – An Interview to Migrant Youths in Malta

### The Questions

How old are you?

Where are you originally from?

How old were you when you moved to Malta?

Why did you move? (family reasons, school, parents' job)

Which language (or languages) do you speak at home?

Did you know either Maltese or English before coming to Malta?

Did you attend any language course in Malta?

Did you feel confident enough in at least one of the two languages when you began school?

How old were you when you began school in Malta?

Did you go directly to the mainstream school?

Which kind of school did you attend? (state, church, private)

Did the school in Malta give you some tailored material at the beginning? (ex. Written material in your mother tongue)

Did the school offer a language course to support your school attendance?

Did you feel teachers were making an effort to support you?

Did you have the impression they were behaving differently with you or with the other foreign students?

How was the relationship with your classmates?

Were there other foreign students?

Were there other students of your nationality?

Did you recall some specific class activities on diversity, migration, multiculturalism or similar?

If yes: In your opinion, how were they handled?

Were they managed by an outside organization or by your teacher?

If no: In your opinion, are they necessary? Would you feel more comfortable?

Do you feel represented in the school curricula/textbooks?

Did you suffer from any bullying act or verbal violence due to your origin within the school environment?

If yes: How did the teacher/headmaster react?

If not: Did you witness one?

How was the communication between the school and your parents handle?

Did your parents speak English or Maltese?

How did the school handle the communication with your parents?

What would you think would help you to feel more part of the community?

Which critics would you make?

What did you like?

What did you not like?

Did you hear about the Language Induction Course?

If not: The Induction Hub is the school for children who need to learn both Maltese and English before being enrolled in mainstream school. It is structured as a primary school and provides classes of Mathematics, Art, and Crafts. The only difference is that the final objective is to make children feel confident and quite fluent in Maltese and English. The attendance usually lasts one academic year unless children still present significant lacks at the end.

What do you think about it?

The Answers

**Interview Number 1 – August 19, 2020**

How old are you?

22.

Where are you from?

*Spain.*

How old were you when you moved to Malta?

16.

Why did you move?

*To study in English, and to study mathematics. There are good courses in Malta, and I knew the country already because I have been here many years for holiday.*

Which language (or languages) do you speak at home?

*Spanish.*

Did you know either Maltese or English before coming to Malta?

*Yes, English.*

Did you attend any language course in Malta?

*Not really, I never felt like I needed it.*

Did you feel confident enough in at least one of the two languages when you began school?

*Yes.*

How old were you when you began school in Malta?

16.

Did you go directly to the mainstream school?

*Yes, I did a revision course and 6<sup>th</sup> form in Gozo, because it had an easier and faster access than in Malta (main island).*

Which kind of school did you attend? (state, church, private)

*State.*

Did the school in Malta give you some tailored material at the beginning? (ex. Written material in your mother tongue)

*Everything was in English.*

Did the school offer a language course to support your school attendance?

*No, but I did not need it anyway.*

Did you feel teachers were making enough effort to support you?

*Yes.*

Did you have the impression they were behaving differently with you or with the other foreign students?

*Not really.*

How was the relationship with your classmates?

*Cool, I never felt out of place, I felt good with the environment. It just took a little bit to realize how things work because the system was different, in Spain is more school-like with lectures but in Malta is more university-like with class schedule.*

Were there other foreign students?

*In the revision course there were two more foreigners, in the 6<sup>th</sup> form I was the only one in the class but there were more classes with other foreigners.*

Were there other students of your nationality?

*Yes, in the revision course, one.*

Did you recall some specific class activities on diversity, migration, multiculturalism or similar?

*Yes, in 6<sup>th</sup> form there was project to integrate foreign children through art, they asked us to paint something from our country, together with all the other foreign students.*

If yes: In your opinion, how were they handled?

*I felt the opposite of included, because it was only with foreign children, it did not make any sense.*

Were they managed by an outside organization or by your teacher?

*By the school.*

If no: In your opinion, are they necessary? Would you feel more comfortable?

*It is good but they should not try too much otherwise kids would feel overexposed, leading to the opposite effect.*

Did you suffer from any bullying act or verbal violence due to your origin within the school environment?

*No, no problems in integrating since the very beginning, I was hanging out with Maltese guys, they always spoke in English.*

How was the communication between the school and your parents handle?

*It was ok, good.*

Did your parents speak English or Maltese?

*Enough English.*

How did the school handle the communication with your parents?

*Sometimes I needed to translate for mum and sometimes got communication in Maltese and needed to have it translate by someone.*

What would you keep?

*During the second year of 6<sup>th</sup> form the school established the buddy system for foreigners: they would be introduced the school and everything, see the school, how it works. And to empathise with other foreign students, I was asked to be the guide since I was a foreigner as well.*

Did you hear about the Language Induction Course?

*No.*

What do you think about it?

*I think it is great for children, they need to learn Maltese if they arrive at an early age.*

## **Interview Number 2 – August 22, 2020**

How old are you?

20.

Where are you originally from?

*Serbia.*

How old were you when you moved to Malta?

*1 year old.*

Which language (or languages) do you speak at home?

*Serbian, English, Maltese.*

Did you know either Maltese or English before coming to Malta?

*No.*

Did you attend any language course in Malta?

*No.*

Did you feel confident enough in at least one of the two languages when you began school?

*Yes, I mean I was very young, I did not know.*

Did you go directly to the mainstream school?

*Yes.*

Which kind of school did you attend? (state, church, private)

*State.*

Did the school in Malta give you some tailored material at the beginning? (ex. Written material in your mother tongue)

*No.*

Did the school offer a language course to support your school attendance?

*No.*

Did you feel teachers were making an effort to support you?

*Yes.*

Did you have the impression they were behaving differently with you or with the other foreign students?

*Yes.*

How was the relationship with your classmates?

*Good.*

Were there other foreign students?

*Yes.*

Were there other students of your nationality?

*Yes.*

Did you recall some specific class activities on diversity, migration, multiculturalism or similar?

*No.*

If no: In your opinion, are they necessary? Would you feel more comfortable?

*I would not mind.*

Do you feel represented in the school curricula/textbooks?

*Yes.*

Did you suffer from any bullying act or verbal violence due to your origin within the school environment?

*No.*

If not: Did you witness one?

*No.*

How was the communication between the school and your parents handle?

*In meetings.*

Did your parents speak English or Maltese?

*English.*

How did the school handle the communication with your parents?

*Good.*

What would you think would help you to feel more part of the community?

*Not dividing children just because they are foreigners.*

Which critics would you make?

*Everyone is the same.*

What did you not like?

*The different classes due to the race.*

### **Interview Number 3 – August 23, 2020**

How old are you?

*21 years old.*

Where are you originally from?

*South Africa.*

How old were you when you moved to Malta?

*16.*

Why did you move?

*I moved due to family reasons (my father is British and was unable to renew his visa), as well as the prospect of receiving better education/qualification in Malta.*

Which language (or languages) do you speak at home?

*English.*

Did you know either Maltese or English before coming to Malta?

*Only English.*

Did you attend any language course in Malta?

*No, as I was not advised to and did not have the free time.*

Did you feel confident enough in at least one of the two languages when you began school?

*In English yes, although if I had known Maltese it would have made learning considerably easier as, although lessons were meant to be delivered in English, they were in Maltese for the most part.*

How old were you when you began school in Malta?

*17.*

Did you go directly to the mainstream school?

*I attended an O level revision course, so no.*

Which kind of school did you attend? (state, church, private)

*State school.*

Did the school in Malta give you some tailored material at the beginning? (ex. Written material in your mother tongue)

*No as the written material was already all in English.*

Did the school offer a language course to support your school attendance?

*No.*

Did you feel teachers were making an effort to support you?

*No, apart from my English and psychology teachers.*

Did you have the impression they were behaving differently with you or with the other foreign students?

*Yes, as they would become annoyed at times when asked to repeat what they had said in English.*

How was the relationship with your classmates?

*Good for the most part, although I did not become close with any of them as they spoke in Maltese with their other friends which ostracised me.*

Were there other foreign students?

*Yes.*

Were there other students of your nationality?

*No.*

Did you recall some specific class activities on diversity, migration, multiculturalism or similar?

Yes.

If yes: In your opinion, how were they handled?

*Poorly as the only example was in only in one of my classes where I had to explain to my teacher and class the difference between an illegal immigrant and a migrant as they were teaching that they are the same thing.*

Were they managed by an outside organization or by your teacher?

*By a teacher.*

If no: In your opinion, are they necessary? Would you feel more comfortable?

*I feel they are very necessary, especially in Malta as people here tend to be very xenophobic and racist.*

Do you feel represented in the school curricula/textbooks?

*No.*

Did you suffer from any bullying act or verbal violence due to your origin within the school environment?

*Yes, as most people asking me outright why I'm not black and being told to go back to my own country whenever I brought up an issue or criticism relating to Malta.*

If yes: How did the teacher/headmaster react?

*They did not witness it and so did nothing.*

How was the communication between the school and your parents handle?

*The only time there was communication between my teachers and parents was a letter home reprimanding me for any lessons I had missed.*

Did your parents speak English or Maltese?

*Only English.*

How did the school handle the communication with your parents?

*Poorly in my opinion.*

What would you think would help you to feel more part of the community?

*Being included and accepted by the local Maltese in regard to public events and access to information in general.*

Which critics would you make?

*Maltese people are very xenophobic. For seminars and important meetings with students to be conducted in English as although all students and teachers understood English, foreign students for the most part did not understand enough Maltese.*

What did you not like?

*As everyone speaks Maltese, often times at seminars, meetings or in class I would be unable to understand anything and when they translated into English, they omitted key details such as times /dates or key explanations.*

Did you hear about the Language Induction Course?

*No*

What do you think about it?

*This sounds like a very good idea as it would help foreign students to properly integrate into Maltese schools and society as a whole.*

#### **Interview Number 4 – August 23, 2020**

How old are you?

*20.*

Where are you originally from?

*England.*

How old were you when you moved to Malta?

*14.*

Why did you move? (family reasons, school, parents' job)

*Family wanted a change. I moved to Australia first then to Malta.*

Which language (or languages) do you speak at home?

*English.*

Did you know either Maltese or English before coming to Malta?

*English fluently.*

Did you attend any language course in Malta?

*No.*

Did you feel confident enough in at least one of the two languages when you began school?

*Yes.*

How old were you when you began school in Malta?

*14.*

Did you go directly to the mainstream school?

*Yes.*

Which kind of school did you attend? (state, church, private)

*Church.*

Did the school in Malta give you some tailored material at the beginning? (ex. Written material in your mother tongue)

*No.*

Did the school offer a language course to support your school attendance?

*No.*

Did you feel teachers were making an effort to support you?

*No.*

Did you have the impression they were behaving differently with you or with the other foreign students?

*Yes.*

How was the relationship with your classmates?

*Barely any. I made 1 or 2 friends in the beginning, but the others behaved as if I was an alien.*

Were there other foreign students?

*No, there was one but not in my class and they had been in Malta for most of their life.*

Were there other students of your nationality?

*Yes, the one mentioned above.*

Did you recall some specific class activities on diversity, migration, multiculturalism or similar?

*No*

If no: In your opinion, are they necessary? Would you feel more comfortable?

*Yes, and yes as I would feel less like I didn't belong there.*

Do you feel represented in the school curricula/textbooks?

*No.*

Did you suffer from any bullying act or verbal violence due to your origin within the school environment?

*Not bullying directly but every day I was made to feel laughed and talked about in a way that was intended to be behind my back but I could see it happen even though I didn't understand the language. For example, eye contact and other body language.*

If yes: How did the teacher/headmaster react?

*They did not know.*

How was the communication between the school and your parents handle?

*The headmaster was amazing and the only person in the school who asked me personally how I am doing and handling the change. They even gave me the needed special treatment for example in exemption from a class.*

Did your parents speak English or Maltese?

*Yes, both English fluently.*

How did the school handle the communication with your parents?

*Very well. By email as well as them coming into school.*

What would you think would help you to feel more part of the community?

*Classes in English and other students actually trying to be friends with you instead of ignoring you or treating you like an alien.*

Which critics would you make?

*Teachers weren't understanding in the first few months that I came from a completely different country and was never used to the amount of homework that was due the very next day and was in fact given a red card by one teacher. The situation was reported by my parents to the headteacher and I was given a green card the same week.*

What did you like?

*I liked the variety of lessons and activities.*

What did you not like?

*Once I have been told by teachers at the end of the lesson to remind them to talk in English, in front of the whole class, which glanced at each other in annoyance. It was very humiliating, and it is not my job as a student to tell the teacher to communicate with every one of their students. That is what they are paid for. I was also told on my very first day at the school to learn Maltese to make it easier for teachers and other students to talk to me.*

### **Interview Number 5 – August 24, 2020**

How old are you?

*19. I turn 20 in less than 2 weeks though.*

Where are you originally from?

*Hungary.*

How old were you when you moved to Malta?

*7.*

Why did you move? (family reasons, school, parents' job)

*Economic reasons. My parents could not find jobs in my country and they got ones in Malta.*

Which language (or languages) do you speak at home?

*Hungarian with my parents. A mix of English and Hungarian with my younger brother.*

Did you know either Maltese or English before coming to Malta?

*Some basic phrases in English.*

Did you attend any language course in Malta?

*No.*

Did you feel confident enough in at least one of the two languages when you began school?

*No.*

How old were you when you began school in Malta?

*7.*

Did you go directly to the mainstream school?

*Yes.*

Which kind of school did you attend? (state, church, private)

*Private primary school (but in the last year I transferred to a state one since my family moved to Gozo). Church Secondary school. State Sixth Form.*

Did the school in Malta give you some tailored material at the beginning? (ex. Written material in your mother tongue)

*They gave me material for English which was less advanced than what the class was doing in the beginning. I was omitted from other classes apart from maths until I was proficient enough in English. I was attending most classes normally after a couple of months. I was omitted from Maltese classes for most of primary school.*

Did the school offer a language course to support your school attendance?

*No.*

Did you feel teachers were making an effort to support you?

*Yes. I was sent to a private school initially to make sure of that.*

Did you have the impression they were behaving differently with you or with the other foreign students?

No.

How was the relationship with your classmates?

Good.

Were there other foreign students?

*Sometimes. They usually only stayed for a year in primary. There were more long-term foreigners in higher level institutions.*

Were there other students of your nationality?

Never.

Did you recall some specific class activities on diversity, migration, multiculturalism or similar?

*At primary level I do not remember. At secondary, yes.*

If yes: In your opinion, how were they handled?

*Relatively well. Sometimes they felt forced, like they were just done out of obligation to fulfil the requirements of the curriculum.*

Were they managed by an outside organization or by your teacher?

Both.

If no: In your opinion, are they necessary? Would you feel more comfortable?

*I never saw them as being meant for me, I thought they were meant for the other students to make them more tolerant to multiculturalism and foreigners like me. Sometimes they felt excessive since I felt that most of the students were accepting. Once they invited a man who migrated from somewhere in Africa to talk to us about his life. That was the only such activity that left any impact on me.*

Do you feel represented in the school curricula/textbooks?

*Almost all characters in our books were white and from Western society, so in that sense, yes.*

Did you suffer from any bullying act or verbal violence due to your origin within the school environment?

No.

If not: Did you witness one?

*No.*

How was the communication between the school and your parents handle?

*Good.*

Did your parents speak English or Maltese?

*English, yes. Maltese, no.*

How did the school handle the communication with your parents?

*Well. Communication was available in both languages.*

What would you think would help you to feel more part of the community?

*If people took me seriously when I speak Maltese and did not call me “Ingliza”. I am not even English.*

Which critics would you make?

*I cannot think of any constructive criticism, sorry. I have gotten too used to the system and how it treats me to be able to criticise its inherent flaws. Indoctrination at its finest.*

What did you like?

*The students and institutions were accepting. I was given equal opportunities as the local students. I got to represent Malta at events, things like that. Made me feel like I was accepted as a part of the community and country.*

What did you not like?

*Student institutions outside the school were not as accepting and even if on the surface they were multiculturally welcoming, they had an obvious preference for local students as foreigners never got picked to participate in their programs. Children are not idiots though. We recognise institutional xenophobia when we are living as outsiders every day.*

Did you hear about the Language Induction Course?

*Never.*

What do you think about it?

*It sounds like a good cause. I was thrown right into the system and it worked for me though. When children are that young their mind is like a sponge and they pick up languages much faster. I think it*

*was good for me personally to be integrated directly into mainstream schooling system. It made me feel less like an outsider and I made friends quickly that stayed with me for years. One of the hardest things for me when I had to leave my country was that I had to leave my friends behind, it impacted my mental wellbeing a lot. I developed trust issues and saw no point in opening up to people that I was just going to have to leave eventually anyways. If I had spent only one year at such an institution before having to leave the new friends I made again, that would have devastated me mentally and emotionally even more. Looking back on it now, it was much better for me personally that I was just thrown right into the system. It made the transition a lot faster. But maybe achieving higher fluency in Maltese at such a young age would have made me feel more accepted as a part of Maltese society in the long run, though I have some doubts if it would have amounted to anything.*

### **Interview Number 6 – August 25, 2020**

How old are you?

*I am 18 years old.*

Where are you originally from?

*I am from South Africa.*

How old were you when you moved to Malta?

*I was about 12 years old when I moved to Malta.*

Why did you move? (family reasons, school, parents' job)

*I moved because of the violence in my home country, my parents wanted to bring up my sister and I in a safer environment.*

Which language (or languages) do you speak at home?

*I speak English. It is my first language.*

Did you know either Maltese or English before coming to Malta?

*Yes, I already knew English.*

Did you attend any language course in Malta?

*I did not, but everyone around me was speaking in Maltese.*

Did you feel confident enough in at least one of the two languages when you began school?

*I was the only foreigner in my class, so I felt very insecure at first.*

How old were you when you began school in Malta?

*I was 12 when I began school.*

Did you go directly to the mainstream school?

*I went directly to secondary school when I moved here.*

Which kind of school did you attend? (state, church, private)

*The first school I attended here was a government school, I attended that school for the first year I was living in Malta. Then I went to a private school after for three years.*

Did the school in Malta give you some tailored material at the beginning? (ex. Written material in your mother tongue)

*Sometimes but not all the time, there were a lot of newsletters and school notes they refused to translate in English for me whilst I was attending the government school. When I went to the private school, I always got translations.*

Did you feel teachers were making an effort to support you?

*Not in the government school, in the private school the teachers were amazing and made sure I felt comfortable.*

Did you have the impression they were behaving differently with you or with the other foreign students?

*In the government school very much so, they were racist towards me, refusing to translate the lesson for me even though they were fluent in English, the head of school was no better. In the private school I was treated equally, the head use to make all the foreign students meet every month and we discussed how we felt and if something was bothering us. Her and the teachers always helped us feel included and part of the school.*

How was the relationship with your classmates?

*In the government school my relationship with my classmates was horrible, they never included me, spread rumours about me and I was even bullied by one of them. In the private school they started*

*talking to me immediately and made me feel welcomed, needless to say I've made friends for life from the private school.*

Were there other foreign students?

*In the government school yes but not in my class. I was the only one. In the private school there were many and a few in my class. Italian, British, South African, Polish, Spanish, and French.*

Did you recall some specific class activities on diversity, migration, multiculturalism or similar?

*Yes. Once I had to do a presentation explaining my experience here as a foreigner and being a South African in a Maltese school to little kids from primary.*

Did you suffer from any bullying act or verbal violence due to your origin within the school environment?

*Yes, I witnessed bullying and experienced verbal bullying the first year I attended a school.*

Did your parents speak English or Maltese?

*They speak English.*

How did the school handle the communication with your parents?

*The first school I went to, they barely made any effort to inform my parents about newsletters, events, consent forms etc. But the second school was the opposite they always informed my parents about everything.*

What would you think would help you to feel more part of the community?

*I think it is a mindset, how open you are to foreigners attending school. Being open to it and being open to befriending a foreigner instead of judging them for their appearance or ethnicity is very important.*

Which critics would you make?

*I wish some locals would stop being racist towards foreigners, the whole countries economy survives on foreigners and tourists. I hope some locals could become more understanding and less judgmental.*

What did you like?

*I loved the diversity in the second school I went too, and how the teachers and everyone would always make sure we were ok, so grateful I attended that school and made amazing memories.*

What did you not like?

*In the first school I did not like how closed minded the local students were, how they immediately outcasted me and assumed things about me before actually getting to know me. I hated how the teachers refused to translate some lessons in English, some teachers were also racist towards foreigners.*

Did you hear about the Language Induction Course?

*No.*

What do you think about it?

*I love it. I think it would be a lot more useful being fluent in Maltese and English as those are the two main languages here it would open up a lot more opportunities here for foreign students.*

### **Interview Number 7 – September 2, 2020**

How old are you?

*20.*

Where are you originally from?

*Germany.*

How old were you when you moved to Malta?

*16.*

Why did you move? (family reasons, school, parents' job)

*My mum already lived here.*

Which language (or languages) do you speak at home?

*German/English.*

Did you know either Maltese or English before coming to Malta?

*English yes Maltese no.*

Did you attend any language course in Malta?

*No English was fine as it is taught in school well in Germany.*

How old were you when you began school in Malta?

*16.*

Did you go directly to the mainstream school?

*Yes 6th form.*

Which kind of school did you attend? (state, church, private)

*State.*

Did the school in Malta give you some tailored material at the beginning? (ex. Written material in your mother tongue)

*No.*

Did the school offer a language course to support your school attendance?

*No.*

Did you feel teachers were making an effort to support you?

*Somewhat but not all and the most annoying thing is that they just took Maltese the whole time and then in the last 5 minutes, they explain it to me in English.*

Did you have the impression they were behaving differently with you or with the other foreign students?

*Yes, we got into less trouble.*

How was the relationship with your classmates?

*Cold sadly very cold.*

Were there other foreign students?

*Yes, there were.*

Were there other students of your nationality?

*Yes, one other student.*

Did you recall some specific class activities on diversity, migration, multiculturalism or similar?

*No. I mean not really.*

Did you suffer from any bullying act or verbal violence due to your origin within the school environment?

*I was called Nazi once, but I wouldn't classify that as bullying and it only happened once.*

How was the communication between the school and your parents handle?

*No communication.*

Did your parents speak English or Maltese?

*English.*

What would you think would help you to feel more part of the community?

*It is not so much about me; it is more about the school system in Malta. It stresses people out for no reason and instead of bringing smart minds together you mindlessly do tasks and write-ups that push people away from their creative ideas and the one's of their peers which isn't really helpful for their own future.*

Which critics would you make?

*Less focus on exams, rather spread out the stress on relevant tests instead of one big exam. No writing in class, notes are to be supplied or be in the book so that everyone has the same notes and the same chances to succeed, also classes should not be about taking notes. They should be about creating a creative story or example around the subject to make the students actually memorize everything needed in the exam, here multimedia can be useful too but a good public speaker can create images with their mouth.*

Did you hear about the Language Induction Course?

*No.*

What do you think about it?

*Might be a good idea but nothing for older students.*

### **Interview Number 8 – September 4, 2020**

How old are you?

*19.*

Where are you originally from?

*Serbia.*

How old were you when you moved to Malta?

*14.*

Why did you move? (family reasons, school, parents' job)

*My mother got a promotion, so she had to move.*

Which language (or languages) do you speak at home?

*Serbian.*

Did you know either Maltese or English before coming to Malta?

*English.*

Did you attend any language course in Malta?

*No.*

Did you feel confident enough in at least one of the two languages when you began school?

*In English yes.*

How old were you when you began school in Malta?

*15.*

Did you go directly to the mainstream school?

*Yes.*

Which kind of school did you attend? (state, church, private)

*State.*

Did the school in Malta give you some tailored material at the beginning? (ex. Written material in your mother tongue)

*Only in English but I understood.*

Did the school offer a language course to support your school attendance?

*No.*

Did you feel teachers were making an effort to support you?

*Yes, they thought we were all the same. Some of them were a little bit stricter to the foreigners but only in some cases.*

How was the relationship with your classmates?

*Good, but people were divided in groups based on their country of origin.*

Were there other foreign students?

*Yes.*

Were there other students of your nationality?

*Yes, that was also very helpful.*

Did you recall some specific class activities on diversity, migration, multiculturalism or similar?

*I don't recall anything; everything was pretty much fine.*

If yes: In your opinion, how were they handled?

*It was all handled pretty good, just some little misunderstandings but not really connected to origin country.*

Did you suffer from any bullying act or verbal violence due to your origin within the school environment?

*I did not feel like I was criticised for my nationality.*

How was the communication between the school and your parents handle?

*It was good, no problems with that.*

Did your parents speak English or Maltese?

*Both speak English, no problems regarding that.*

How did the school handle the communication with your parents?

*It was good.*

What would you think would help you to feel more part of the community?

*I think putting people that have the same nationality in one group would be much better because you can dedicate all your time to them. And I think that it is the only thing that they should add and*

*change. Since Malta is a very popular destination for people to move, because of many job opportunities, so that would be helpful. There are many big minorities.*

Did you hear about the Language Induction Course?

*No.*

What do you think about it?

*It would be very good for people who do not speak English. I think that today since all literature is in English, everybody should speak English and it is like the world language so everyone in this world should speak English and be able to communicate with everybody.*

### **Interview Number 9 – September 9, 2020**

How old are you?

*I am 18 years old.*

Where are you originally from?

*Poland but I lived in England for most of my life.*

How old were you when you moved to Malta?

*I was 16 years old.*

Why did you move? (family reasons, school, parents' job)

*My parents wanted a change of scene. We wanted to move to a country where English was still spoken and where the weather was nicer.*

Which language (or languages) do you speak at home?

*I speak Polish at home.*

Did you know either Maltese or English before coming to Malta?

*I spoke English before moving.*

Did you attend any language course in Malta?

*I took advanced level Spanish and Italian intermediate in my matsec course.*

Did you feel confident enough in at least one of the two languages when you began school?

*I felt comfortable in English and Spanish.*

How old were you when you began school in Malta?

*I was 16.*

Did you go directly to the mainstream school?

*Yes.*

Which kind of school did you attend? (state, church, private)

*A public sixth form.*

Did the school in Malta give you some tailored material at the beginning? (ex. Written material in your mother tongue)

*No.*

Did the school offer a language course to support your school attendance?

*No.*

Did you feel teachers were making an effort to support you?

*Not really.*

Did you have the impression they were behaving differently with you or with the other foreign students?

*They spoke English with us, making it difficult to blend in with the other students since they usually communicated in Maltese. For instance, while the teacher and other Maltese students were laughing the foreign students would not participate since they were not included in the conversation.*

How was the relationship with your classmates?

*Mostly non-existent. I did not get to know most of my classmates.*

Were there other foreign students?

*Yes.*

Were there other students of your nationality?

*Not in my year. There was one Polish girl in the year below.*

Did you recall some specific class activities on diversity, migration, multiculturalism or similar?

No.

Would you feel more comfortable?

*I think that the Gozitan society struggles with accepting foreigners and I do not blame them since we are coming to their island not knowing the primary language being spoken, Maltese. However, acceptance is necessary and so there should be such classes in order to prepare the students for future interactions.*

Do you feel represented in the school curricula/textbooks?

*I do not need to be represented since this is their country and my Polish history is not really related to Maltese history.*

Did you suffer from any bullying act or verbal violence due to your origin within the school environment?

No.

If not: Did you witness one?

No.

How was the communication between the school and your parents handle?

*Normally.*

Did your parents speak English or Maltese?

*English.*

How did the school handle the communication with your parents?

*Normally.*

What would you think would help you to feel more part of the community?

*Learning Maltese. Which I am currently trying to do.*

Which critics would you make?

*Regarding teaching itself it is not done well since the students are being given notes and usually the teachers themselves are not teaching anything substantial. Students pay teachers outside of school to get taught properly and that is not what a free school system should look like.*

What did you like?

*I liked the freedom that the school system gave me as well as the overall traditions of the Gozitan societies.*

What did you not like?

*Throughout my whole school experience here I did not make practically any Gozitan friends.*

Did you hear about the Induction Language Course?

*No.*

What do you think about it?

*That would be very helpful in integrating foreign students into the Maltese society, so I highly approve of it.*

#### **Interview Number 10 – September 10, 2020**

How old are you?

*28.*

Where are you originally from?

*Bulgaria.*

How old were you when you moved to Malta?

*10.*

Why did you move? (family reasons, school, parents' job)

*Parents' job.*

Which language (or languages) do you speak at home?

*Bulgarian.*

Did you know either Maltese or English before coming to Malta?

*No.*

Did you attend any language course in Malta?

*No.*

Did you feel confident enough in at least one of the two languages when you began school?

*No.*

How old were you when you began school in Malta?

*10.*

Did you go directly to the mainstream school?

*No.*

Which kind of school did you attend? (state, church, private)

*At first private, 2 years later I entered mainstream state.*

Did the school in Malta give you some tailored material at the beginning? (ex. Written material in your mother tongue)

*No, but the private school had a Bulgarian teacher who helped me at the beginning.*

Did the school offer a language course to support your school attendance?

*Absolutely none. I was straight-up exempted from Maltese language subjects in the state school and there was no effort to get me to understand better.*

Did you feel teachers were making an effort to support you?

*Some of them, yes.*

Did you have the impression they were behaving differently with you or with the other foreign students?

*Yes.*

How was the relationship with your classmates?

*Heavily negative at the very beginning. A little better later but it was never the same as it had been in a Bulgarian school.*

Were there other foreign students?

*Not in my class or year.*

Were there other students of your nationality?

*Yes, one younger and one older one.*

Did you recall some specific class activities on diversity, migration, multiculturalism or similar?

*No.*

If no: In your opinion, are they necessary? Would you feel more comfortable?

*I would have probably felt even less comfortable by having that attention brought on myself as the only foreigner in the classroom.*

Do you feel represented in the school curricula/textbooks?

*No.*

Did you suffer from any bullying act or verbal violence due to your origin within the school environment?

*Yes.*

If yes: How did the teacher/headmaster react?

*They never knew.*

How was the communication between the school and your parents handled?

*Reasonably smoothly.*

Did your parents speak English or Maltese?

*Some English.*

How did the school handle the communication with your parents?

*By speaking to them.*

What would you think would help you to feel more part of the community?

*Giving foreign children ESL lessons and Maltese as Second Language lessons (which I believe exists now).*

Which criticisms would you make?

*At the time I went to state school in Malta (2003 – 2007) there was zero provision made for non-Maltese students. Nowadays it seems that there have been a number of different programs implemented to help.*

What did you not like?

*The small-mindedness of students and teacher, the heavily culturally biased syllabus in every subject, the fact that English-language subjects with English-language textbooks were taught in Maltese, which did not even have the vocabulary for such subjects (e.g. Biology. Physics).*

Did you hear about the Language Induction Course?

*Yes.*

What do you think about it?

*I think it is a fantastic idea that should have been introduced much earlier. I believe it is a big step in the right direction.*

### **Interview Number 11 – September 11, 2020**

How old are you?

*19.*

Where are you originally from?

*England.*

How old were you when you moved to Malta?

*7.*

Why did you move? (family reasons, school, parents' job)

*Job promotion allowed for flexibility of location, as such parents decided to move to Gozo for better quality of life for themselves and children.*

Which language (or languages) do you speak at home?

*English.*

Did you know either Maltese or English before coming to Malta?

*English.*

Did you attend any language course in Malta?

*As such no, however I did have extra lessons at school for Maltese as well as attending some private lessons for a couple years.*

Did you feel confident enough in at least one of the two languages when you began school?

*Yes, English.*

How old were you when you began school in Malta?

*7.*

Did you go directly to the mainstream school?

*Yes, Vajringa Primary in Gozo.*

Which kind of school did you attend? (state, church, private)

*State.*

Did the school in Malta give you some tailored material at the beginning? (ex. Written material in your mother tongue)

*Some subjects were already taught in English, for the first two years I had supplemented texts in English for subjects normally taught in Maltese.*

Did the school offer a language course to support your school attendance?

*Extra Maltese lessons in place of other less important lessons and Maltese class.*

Did you feel teachers were making an effort to support you?

*Yes.*

Did you have the impression they were behaving differently with you or with the other foreign students?

*No.*

How was the relationship with your classmates?

*Good, however communication in Maltese was difficult as students tried to communicate with me in English to improve their own English.*

Were there other foreign students?

*Yes.*

Were there other students of your nationality?

*Yes.*

Did you recall some specific class activities on diversity, migration, multiculturalism or similar?

*Not specific activities, however topics were covered in Social Studies class.*

If yes: In your opinion, how were they handled?

*Pretty okay however they were taught as part of curriculum, so no specific pressure was placed on them outside learning concepts for exams.*

Were they managed by an outside organization or by your teacher?

*Teacher.*

Do you feel represented in the school curricula/textbooks?

*My country did rule Malta, so it does tend to come up in history.*

Did you suffer from any bullying act or verbal violence due to your origin within the school environment?

*Not really outside a few specific insults during confrontations (example: "go back to England").*

If yes: How did the teacher/headmaster react?

*Figures of authority were inept at handling bullying regardless.*

How was the communication between the school and your parents handle?

*Pretty well for the most part except for certain cases when they forgot to send an English translation of a letter. However, I account that to negligence over malice.*

Did your parents speak English or Maltese?

*English.*

What would you think would help you to feel more part of the community?

*If I was not immediately identifiable as north European. Apart from that I have no problem integrating with locals.*

Which critics would you make?

*Subtle racism, nothing major however still noticeable. Especially when hearing locals speak about you in Maltese.*

What did you like?

*Specifically, nothing, after the first few years everything felt normal. Like I was just another kid living here.*

What did you not like?

*Some classes were taught in Maltese when the material is in English as Maltese children had trouble understanding concepts in English. This proved detrimental to me as I had the opposite problem.*

Did you hear about the Language Induction Course?

*No.*

What do you think about it?

*I think it is a good idea however it encourages foreign students to stick with one another and not branch out to integrate with local kids. This could be detrimental to their ability to learn Maltese as they would not be forced to use it outside class. Apart from that they would miss out on a lot of the local mannerisms and traditions that distinguish true integrated speakers from fluent speakers.*

## **Interview Number 12 – September 13, 2020**

How old are you?

*24 years old.*

Where are you originally from?

*Canada.*

How old were you when you moved to Malta?

*6 years old.*

Why did you move? (family reasons, school, parents' job)

*New life, new beginning.*

Which language (or languages) do you speak at home?

*English / Maltese.*

Did you know either Maltese or English before coming to Malta?

*I knew English only.*

Did you attend any language course in Malta?

*I did do private lessons in my earlier days to help with my Maltese skills.*

Did you feel confident enough in at least one of the two languages when you began school?

*Yes.*

How old were you when you began school in Malta?

*6 years old.*

Did you go directly to the mainstream school?

*Yes.*

Which kind of school did you attend? (state, church, private)

*State.*

Did the school in Malta give you some tailored material at the beginning? (ex. Written material in your mother tongue)

*No not really, I asked when I did not know something.*

Did the school offer a language course to support your school attendance?

*No, it did not.*

Did you feel teachers were making an effort to support you?

*I guess it's hard to remember the earlier days when I needed help the most.*

Did you have the impression they were behaving differently with you or with the other foreign students?

*My upbringing was very different, I was very respectful, kind and well-mannered so naturally teachers did favour me; however, this did cause issues with other students.*

How was the relationship with your classmates?

*Not always the best, used to be left out a lot because I was a foreigner.*

Were there other foreign students?

*Not really, not until much later years.*

Were there other students of your nationality?

*No.*

Did you recall some specific class activities on diversity, migration, multiculturalism or similar?

*No.*

If no: In your opinion, are they necessary? Would you feel more comfortable?

*It would have helped.*

Do you feel represented in the school curricula/textbooks?

*No.*

Did you suffer from any bullying act or verbal violence due to your origin within the school environment?

*Yes.*

If yes: How did the teacher/headmaster react?

*They did not really do much especially since the principal also bullied me and gave me issues too.*

How was the communication between the school and your parents handle?

*Through letters, sometimes only written in Maltese making it hard for my mom to understand at times.*

Did your parents speak English or Maltese?

*Mostly English.*

What would you think would help you to feel more part of the community?

*Have teachers understand that not all students are the same nor come from the places. All have different experiences so when children ask or reach out for a little extra explanation on topics, it would be nice if they did not shut the child down in front of everyone.*

What did you like?

*Not a lot honestly, school was not an enjoyable experience for me in general.*

Did you hear about the Language Induction Course?

*No.*

What do you think about it?

*I think it sounds great.*

### **Interview Number 13 – September 13, 2020**

How old are you?

*18.*

Where are you originally from?

*Nigeria.*

How old were you when you moved to Malta?

*13.*

Why did you move? (Family reasons, school, parents' job)

*Family reasons.*

Which language (or languages) do you speak at home?

*English and Yoruba.*

Did you know either Maltese or English before coming to Malta?

*English.*

Did you attend any language course in Malta?

*Maltese for foreigners, a bit of French.*

Did you feel confident enough in at least one of the two languages when you began school?

*No.*

How old were you when you began school in Malta?

*13.*

Did you go directly to the mainstream school?

*Yes.*

Which kind of school did you attend? (State, church, private)

*Church.*

Did the school in Malta give you some tailored material at the beginning? (Ex. Written material in your mother tongue)

*No.*

Did the school offer a language course to support your school attendance?

*No.*

Did you feel teachers were making an effort to support you?

*Yes, they tried.*

Did you have the impression they were behaving differently with you or with the other foreign students?

*In some classes like maths, yes.*

How was the relationship with your classmates?

*Normal, I did not really make any close friendship throughout secondary school, I didn't really bond with anyone, only with 2 girls from the same secondary and we only got close in 6<sup>th</sup> form.*

Were there other foreign students?

*In the whole school we were 6, but I was the first.*

Were there other students of your nationality?

*No.*

Did you recall some specific class activities on diversity, migration, multiculturalism or similar?

*During environmental studies we paced a little on migration. We once had a video on racism in Malta. I remember at 14/15 I still had no idea what racism was because really in my school, I was not bullied but just ignored. I remember crying after that video and the teacher were sorry that I had to see that, and they tried to explain what it's about.*

If yes: In your opinion, how were they handled?

*More like a job than really trying to make students understand.*

Were they managed by an outside organization or by your teacher?

*Teachers.*

If no: In your opinion, are they necessary? Would you feel more comfortable?

*I would yes, it depends on the subject as I said maths teachers were savage.*

Did you suffer from any bullying act or verbal violence due to your origin within the school environment?

*Not really, it wasn't allowed in our school but in the beginning a lot of gossip on why I do braids and have them coloured and others couldn't, which the head of the school talked to me about and I had to not wear colour but I told her, doing braids is what my hair can handle, its more comfortable for me. I always felt ignored or not fitting in, alone in group works or the teacher had to find me a partner, I was just the black girl. Until I got to 6<sup>th</sup> form, where I opened more, more freedom, I joined many activities and really was popular. I went to Norway, Sweden, Paris and I got picked all the time, I sang all the time for the school, I was at the school council, and the key word here is that I found more people like me. We were like 20, from Algeria, Poland, Italy, Philippines, Sweden. I made friends with foreigners and a few Maltese, but I think it made me more accepted. The teachers liked me, most of them. I remember being asked again to apply to another trip to Paris because they loved to have me there. My trip to Paris and Strasbourg really shocked people as I feel like most kids in secondary school probably thought I had no papers, like I was a refugee, so being picked to go to the EU parliament and being the only foreigner in the group made a difference. I remember vividly one of the girls took me aside during the trip, she was from my secondary school, she said "I want to apologize if I was ever racist to you, I was young, I had no idea what I was doing". And I remember telling her "no, no you were never racist, just uneducated". She saw what I didn't see, my school was a church school so the girls had to be behaved but it was a toxic period for me, a lot of times I spent in the toilet eating my lunch alone cause its Nigerian stew with rice and grilled chicken filled with a lot of spice and everyone in class would complain when the scent was strong. I had to beg my mum to stop giving me that food, because this is not Nigeria, where eating a piece of turkey or chicken with your hand is condoled without being laughed at. Although I never felt like I fit in, I would say I did a bit because living in the UK for 3 years helped me a lot, if I was coming straight from Nigeria, with a strong Nigerian accent, and Nigerian slangs, I think I would have been 10 times worse. I'm*

*not going to lie to you if I was a shy, not outspoken girl, if I didn't stand up for myself most of the time and push myself out there, to make friends, to be seen, cause I'm really energetic and bubbly, and also if I wasn't getting good grades, I think I would have been 10 times worse in 6<sup>th</sup> form, because no one would care. I enjoyed 6<sup>th</sup> form because I took the opportunities that were more than secondary and pushed myself out there. Secondary school here in Malta is toxic and my 13 years old sister is going through it too, and she's not me, she's her, I had to argue a lot with some teachers like maths or complain when they won't translate to English. I think balance has to be made so young children won't hate school. I know in Malta it is different than Gozo, there in public school there are more foreigners than here so my case will be different. The worst part is when my 5-years old sister asked me why she is brown and everyone else is white, like what do I say, so really the feeling of being left out is from the roots. She never fitted in primary school, the other sister might fit because she is young and the kids in her year are young too, but no stage of the education process is easy. Also, I just realised it was not until I moved here that I knew what racism was, and because we were so sheltered from our parents. When I was in Nigeria, I could not say it.*

If yes: How did the teacher/headmaster react?

*They get tired of you complaining and send you for counselling, later no one takes you seriously and you yourself give up.*

How was the communication between the school and your parents handle?

*My mum or dad did not complain, because I did not tell them much. Also, to make them feel what? Sad that they wanted to give us a better education, life by moving here? So, I just endure it.*

Did your parents speak English or Maltese?

*English.*

How did the school handle the communication with your parents?

*Only during Parents' Day and it was casual.*

What would you think would help you to feel more part of the community?

*I think educating everyone from kindergarten on race, equality, and acceptance.*

Did you hear about the Language Induction Course?

*No.*

What do you think about it?

*Sounds good.*

**Interview Number 14 – September 15, 2020**

How old are you?

*18.*

Where are you originally from?

*Wales.*

How old were you when you moved to Malta?

*10.*

Why did you move? (family reasons, school, parents' job)

*To have more support from the family for my condition.*

Which language (or languages) do you speak at home?

*Welsh and English.*

Did you know either Maltese or English before coming to Malta?

*I knew English but I did not know Maltese.*

Did you attend any language course in Malta?

*No.*

Did you feel confident enough in at least one of the two languages when you began school?

*Yes.*

How old were you when you began school in Malta?

*10.*

Which kind of school did you attend? (state, church, private)

*State.*

Did the school in Malta give you some tailored material at the beginning? (ex. Written material in your mother tongue)

*No.*

Did the school offer a language course to support your school attendance?

*No.*

Did you feel teachers were making an effort to support you?

*No.*

Did you have the impression they were behaving differently with you or with the other foreign students?

*Yes.*

How was the relationship with your classmates?

*Quite good.*

Were there other foreign students?

*No.*

Were there other students of your nationality?

*No.*

Did you recall some specific class activities on diversity, migration, multiculturalism or similar?

*No.*

If no: In your opinion, are they necessary?

*Yes.*

Would you feel more comfortable?

*Yes.*

Do you feel represented in the school curricula/textbooks?

*No.*

Did you suffer from any bullying act or verbal violence due to your origin within the school environment?

*Yes.*

If yes: How did the teacher/headmaster react?

*They did not really care as they said it was my fault and said to go back to my country.*

How was the communication between the school and your parents handle?

*Good.*

Did your parents speak English or Maltese?

*Yes, they speak English.*

How did the school handle the communication with your parents?

*Good.*

What would you think would help you to feel more part of the community?

*Support disability and be more helpful.*

Which critics would you make?

*To be more positive and to do more practical work.*

What did you like?

*It is good to learn and they take it easy.*

What did you not like?

*I do not like how they treat disabilities. Like autism and autistic when they cannot speak. I have Prader–Willi syndrome, I can eat food all time and my tummy is always hungry. Autistic cannot speak when they have tantrums or any other disability, they tend to shout and hurt them. They might have troubles, or they may get bullied, the bullies tend to give them time out or if they are foreigner, they tend to say go back to your country. Sometimes I cannot walk far as my balance is not great and they say that cannot provide transport, but I get tired easily and my road isn't good.*

Did you hear about the Language Induction Course?

*No.*

What do you think about it?

*Good.*

**Interview Number 15 – September 15, 2020**

How old are you?

*18.*

Where are you originally from?

*Wales.*

How old were you when you moved to Malta?

*13.*

Why did you move? (family reasons, school, parents' job)

*To have support from family.*

Which language (or languages) do you speak at home?

*Welsh and English.*

Did you know either Maltese or English before coming to Malta?

*No, only English.*

Did you attend any language course in Malta?

*No.*

Did you feel confident enough in at least one of the two languages when you began school?

*No.*

How old were you when you began school in Malta?

*13.*

Did you go directly to the mainstream school?

*Yes.*

Which kind of school did you attend? (state, church, private)

*State.*

Did the school in Malta give you some tailored material at the beginning? (ex. Written material in your mother tongue)

*No.*

Did the school offer a language course to support your school attendance?

*No.*

Did you feel teachers were making an effort to support you?

*Not at all.*

Did you have the impression they were behaving differently with you or with the other foreign students?

*No.*

Did you suffer from any bullying act or verbal violence due to your origin within the school environment?

*Yes. They hurt me as I can't speak to them verbally, but I use a device with my eyes.*

How was the communication between the school and your parents handle?

*Good.*

Did your parents speak English or Maltese?

*English.*

How did the school handle the communication with your parents?

*Good.*

What would you think would help you to feel more part of the community?

*If they treat me with respect and be friendly as I cannot speak like the others, they can be more patient with me.*

Which critics would you make?

*For them to be more positive and respect disability.*

What did you like?

*I liked how my sister stood up for me.*

What did you not like?

*I did not like how they treated me.*

Did you hear about the Induction Language Course?

*No, I did not.*

What do you think about it?

*Good.*

### **Interview Number 16 – September 22, 2020**

How old are you?

*I'm 20 years old.*

Where are you originally from?

*Spain.*

How old were you when you moved to Malta?

*16.*

Why did you move? (family reasons, school, parents' job)

*I came with my family because of my parents' work.*

Which language (or languages) do you speak at home?

*Spanish.*

Did you know either Maltese or English before coming to Malta?

*No.*

Did you attend any language course in Malta?

*Yes, English.*

Did you feel confident enough in at least one of the two languages when you began school?

*No.*

How old were you when you began school in Malta?

*16 years old.*

Did you go directly to the mainstream school?

*Yes.*

Which kind of school did you attend? (state, church, private)

*State.*

Did the school in Malta give you some tailored material at the beginning? (ex. Written material in your mother tongue)

*No, but they contact the Spanish teacher to explain me everything.*

Did the school offer a language course to support your school attendance?

*Yes.*

Did you feel teachers were making an effort to support you?

*Yes.*

Did you have the impression they were behaving differently with you or with the other foreign students?

*Not really.*

How was the relationship with your classmates?

*It could have been nicer.*

Were there other foreign students?

*Yes.*

Were there other students of your nationality?

*No.*

Did you recall some specific class activities on diversity, migration, multiculturalism or similar?

*No.*

If no: In your opinion, are they necessary? Would you feel more comfortable?

*No, I don't think it is necessary.*

Do you feel represented in the school curricula/textbooks?

*Yes.*

Did you suffer from any bullying act or verbal violence due to your origin within the school environment?

*No.*

How was the communication between the school and your parents handle?

*I was their google translator.*

Did your parents speak English or Maltese?

*Absolutely not.*

How did the school handle the communication with your parents?

*Using the Spanish teacher help and mine.*

What would you think would help you to feel more part of the community?

*I think the only problem was the racist students.*

Which critics would you make?

*More acceptance on the students' side.*

What did you like?

*Teachers attention when I had any problem.*

What did you not like?

*The students' behaviour.*

Did you hear about the Induction Language Course? *No*

What do you think about it?

*It is quite interesting, but I don't think that the Maltese language have to be that important being a small country, but I understand that is important for them in a cultural way.*



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