

Malta

The Migrant Learners' Unit

Every year Malta registers a considerable amount of newcomer children in state schooling. The children come from both EU and Third Countries. Approximately 18% of the state school cohort are children with a migrant background (Data from SIS Q4 2021).

The Migrant Learners' Unit was set up in 2014 with the aim of supporting the inclusion of children coming from a migrant background in schools. The main remit of the unit can be divided into four:

- a) The registration of Third Country Children for state schooling
- b) The provision of an induction programme for children coming from a migrant background who cannot as yet communicate in the languages of schooling in Malta, i.e. Maltese and English
- c) The provision of supporting structures for more inclusive practices within education for migrant children and their families.

Registration for Schooling

The Migrant Learners Unit registers TCN students for state schooling. Over the past 3 years the MLU has registered 1800 new TCN students to access state schooling. (Data from MLU records). EU children accessing state schooling are registered at the colleges or schools.

Induction Programme

Some of the children coming from a migrant background and accessing schooling in Malta cannot as yet communicate in the languages of schooling (Maltese and English). The Ministry for Education and Sport (MEDS), through the Migrant Learners' Unit (MLU), provides an induction programme through which these children are supported to learn these languages in order to be able to access mainstream curriculum and benefit from it.

During the last four years over 2,609 children were supported by this programme (Data from MLU records Q4, 2021). The programme is run through classes in over 21 schools in Malta and Gozo and is addressed at learners in primary, middle and secondary level. This programme is co-financed through the Asylum and Migration Integration Fund (AMIF) through the LLAPSI+ project.

The MLU also leads other initiatives to support newcomer children and their families both in the learning the languages of schooling, in inclusive practices and settling down in the new country. These initiatives compliment and sustain the induction programme held in schools.

Services like free childcare, after school clubs like Break Fast Club, Klabb 3-16 or other services available in schools are also accessible for migrant families through MEDS.

Supporting structures for inclusion

The MLU fully regards ethnic, linguistic and religious inclusion as essential societal values amongst school-age migrant learners and their respective families.

The MLU supports families to access information and opportunities already present in the educational sector. The MLU has a website and a Facebook page, which is very active and continuously updated with the latest news and opportunities. However, the personalised support given through face-to-face or virtual meetings is also of cardinal importance. The nine (9) Community Liaison Workers support the family through all the processes from registration to schooling and beyond. Since this is a personalised service, the Community Liaison Workers (CLWs) have been trained to access the information and work with multiple agencies to support the families. CLWs support an average of 150 families monthly. The CLWs are part of an EU co-financed project.

The MLU's community liaison team builds healthy and meaningful linkages with migrant families and schools, with due regard to the delicate needs, specificities and sensitivities of a multicultural setting. The Community Liaison Team (CL team) supports the schools in their initiatives to build strong inclusive settings by eliminating cultural and language barriers that may hamper understanding and collaboration. The CL team also supports psychosocial professionals working in the colleges in reaching families who benefit from their services. The CL team work in linking the different ethnicities present in schools to participate more fully as a school community.

The MLU likewise maintains deep links with educational institutions run by minorities, NGOs and government agencies working in the field. Migrant students were and continue to be supported alike national students on an ongoing basis. MLU works with all the state colleges through both its administrative group, psychosocial team as well as through the community liaison team.

In its efforts to address effectively the needs of children and their families, the MLU runs various initiatives, including **after school initiatives** addressed to migrant learners such as the '**Language to Go**' **Summer Intensive language Course** for migrant learners in compulsory schooling who are still struggling with the languages of schooling. The aim of this course is to support the children in continuing their learning of languages during the summer break when otherwise, the children would not have any tuition available and loss of academic uptake may result. Over the last three years, the average number of participants for the 'Language to Go' course was 938 (MLU data, Q2 2021); This action is co-financed by the EU through the LLAPSI + project. It is planned that the Language to Go courses are run also in summer 2022.

Teacher Training and Resources

The MLU provides teacher training and resources to schools and induction classes. It has teamed up with various agencies both locally and internationally to provide such training and resources annually. Amongst the agencies are the European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML) as well as Erasmus + initiatives. Currently the MLU has 45 teachers working in induction classes

The MLU is also currently benefitting from a Structural Reform Support Programme held under the EU DG Reform auspices which will hold a functional review of the MLU at its educational provision to migrants.

Infrastructure and workforce

The MLU aims to achieve high quality services for children, including enabling infrastructure and qualified workforce, through ongoing training and management of cohorts working within the MLU including but not limited to:-

- (i) teachers working with induction groups,
- (ii) the community liaison team,
- (iii) the psycho-social team, and
- (iv) the administrative group.

Migrant Learners' Unit

March 2022

Links:

Website: <https://migrantlearnersunit.gov.mt>

Fb: migrantlearnersunitmalta