Demographic Situation

Malta’s population structure and the ongoing changes in its population composition is gaining importance in the political economic, social and cultural importance. Population growth through migration is closely being monitored and acted upon by policy makers inclusive of those working within the educational scenario.

The estimated total population of Malta and Gozo as at the end of 2016 stood at 440,433. The population of Malta accounts for 0.1 per cent of the total population of the EU.

Chart 1: Age Distribution of Malta’s Population
Malta covers just over 316 km and for statistical purposes is divided into 6 districts, which are, in turn, grouped into 3 regions: Gozo, Malta Majjistral and Malta Xlokk. Each district consists of a number of localities. The Northern Harbour District, Western District and Northern District together form the North Western Region (Malta Majjistral). The South Eastern District and Southern Harbour District together form the South Eastern Region (Malta Xlokk). The Gozo and Comino District is a Region in its own right.

Chart 2: Malta’ Demographic Distribution

Chart 3: Malta’s Population and Immigration Flows
The upward shift in immigration is also reflected in increases of foreign nationals’ participation in education. During academic year 2014/2015, foreigners accounted for 6.7 per cent of the total students enrolled in formal education. This resulted in an increase of 1.7 percentage points over the previous academic year. The majority of foreign students were EU nationals.

In 2016, the national employment rate was 69.6 per cent, only 0.4 percentage points away from the 70 per cent national Europe 2020 target. Significant increases in activity rates were noted between 2012 and 2016, especially among females. The unemployment rate in 2016 stood at 4.7 per cent, well below the EU 28 average of 8.6 per cent.

Chart 4: Employment and Unemployment Rate (%) by Gender
Young people not in employment, education or training (NEET) indicator has gained considerable importance both nationally and at EU level since decreasing unemployment, early school leaving and labour market discouragement is equivalent to better economic prospects for the younger generation. In 2016, the national NEET stood at 8.4 per cent, equivalent to a 1.8 % drop when compared to 2012.

**Languages**

According to the Maltese Constitution[7], the national language of Malta is Maltese, and the latter together with English are the official languages of the country. Local government can use either of these two languages. In the same way, anyone can address local government in Maltese or in English and receive an answer in the same language. The constitution also says, nonetheless, that the language of the courts is Maltese (except for exceptions to this that might be established by parliament) and that the house of representatives can decide which language or languages it uses.

Lastly, the Constitution lays down that the Maltese text of a law will prevail over the English one in the case of conflict between the two (all laws have to be framed in the two languages except where Parliament decides otherwise).

With Malta’s entry into the European Union, Maltese is now one of the official languages of the Union. This means that all laws and official documents of the Union have to be translated into Maltese; that Maltese citizens can address the institutions of the Union in Maltese and, if they do so, any reply they receive should be in the same language, and lastly that the Maltese representatives the institutions of the Union may use Maltese.

Fundamentally, Maltese is a Semitic tongue, the same as Arabic, Aramaic, Hebrew, Phoenician, Carthaginian and Ethiopian. However, unlike other Semitic languages, Maltese is written in the Latin
alphabet, but with the addition of special characters to accommodate certain Semitic sounds. Nowadays, however, there is much in the Maltese language today that is not Semitic, due to the immeasurable Romantic influence from our succession of (Southern) European rulers through the ages.

Malta has always had a multilingual nature and foreign language learning is a strength in its system which needs to be sustained. The wish to foster plural lingual and intercultural competences in the Maltese educational system is a response to European linguistic and cultural diversity and an increasing need for mobility and employability.

The Ministry for Education and Employment recognises the importance of linguistic diversity and supports language learning as a lifelong task, essential for economic competitiveness and inclusive societies.

In recent years, new groups of foreign nationals, whether seeking work, or as asylum seekers and refugees have vastly increased the number of languages spoken in Malta. In response to the increasing numbers of students in Maltese schools whose first language is neither Maltese nor English, courses have been developed in recent years to teach Maltese as a foreign language, in order to enable such groups to integrate in society. The Department of Quality and Standards in Education (DQSE), offers language support for migrant children, which takes the form of a six-week intervention programme consisting of partial or full withdrawal from schools, so that students can follow basic language courses in English and to a lesser extent in Maltese. The courses focus mainly on spoken interaction. The emphasis is on survival Maltese and English, so that these students can initiate their integration process within schools.

In the National Curriculum Framework for All (NCF 2012)[8], attaches great importance to the teaching and learning of languages. Languages are the first of the defined Learning Areas and communication in languages is described as “the ability to understand, express and interpret concepts, thoughts, feelings, facts and opinions in both oral and written form”. The NCF recommends that at least 30 % of the time during the Junior Years Cycle, the Lower Secondary Years Cycle and the Senior Secondary Years Cycle should be dedicated to the teaching of languages. All students attending secondary schools study at least one foreign language.[9]

**Religion**

The main religion in Malta is Roman Catholicism, in fact, most Maltese claim to be Catholic and participate in Catholic religious’ services. The Constitution of Malta also establishes Catholicism as the state religion, however freedom of religion is guaranteed as a constitutional right and is generally respected. There is evidence of increasing secularisation and minority religions are growing as further ethnic groups settle down on the island.

The Catholic religion is taught in classes but religion is not a compulsory subject. The National Curriculum Framework document (2012) had envisaged the introduction of Ethics as a separate subject for students whose guardians do not wish them to be educated in the Roman Catholic faith at school.

The Ethics programme is based on the promotion of moral values, development of attitudes and the sharing of experiences which are a common heritage to humanity. It educates learners to understand the nature of moral language, make sound and reflective moral judgments and live a lifestyle that corresponds with and reflects one’s moral values without focusing on a particular moral doctrine.
Its pedagogy emphasises group work, debates, presentations, critical thinking and creativity. The assessment of this subject is based on a blend of ongoing and summative assessment, including activities, projects and reflexive writing throughout the whole learning programme.

[1] News Release published by the National Statistics Office Malta on the 11th July 2017:

[2] Age distribution is calculated on the total population by single years of age as on 31 December 2016 (table 2) contained in the news release published by the National Statistics Office Malta on the 11th July 2017.

[3] Demographic data is available on StatDB on the National Statistics Office, Malta website as following:


[6] Data for this diagram has been obtained from information contained in the following news release published by the National Statistics Office (Malta) on 18th October 2017:

[7] The text can be consulted at:
http://confinder.richmond.edu [15] (section 5 [National Language] and section 74 [Legal Languages]).


[9] Language Education Policy Profile Malta 2015
http://education.gov.mt/en/resources/Documents/Policy%20Documents/Profil... [17]