**Definition of the Target Groups**

Several categories of disadvantaged learners exist, who although not officially recognised as learners requiring special needs’ support, are in fact provided with support measures to help them in their educational experience. These include children from families with socio-economic and personal challenges; immigrant children (accompanied or unaccompanied); and children of asylum seekers or given refugee status.

**Specific Support Measures**

Support measures specific for children from families with socio-economic disadvantages include the provision of guidance and counselling services by qualified school personnel and from the Education Directorates’ Psycho-Social Services as offered by the Student Services Department. Such learners may also be provided with additional educational material at a subsidised rate or free of charge such as photocopies, lunches, uniforms and transport for school outings.

In March 2014 a Child Supplement was introduced by the Ministry for the Family and Social Justice. This supplement aimed to address child poverty by awarding an allowance apart from the normal children’s allowance to families earning less than €11,000 a year whose children are under 23 years and still live in the family home and to single-parent families earning less than €9,000. Families need to meet a number of conditions to be eligible for this Child Supplement, such as ensuring that if the child is under 16 he/she attends school regularly with an attendance of more than 95%, have regular medical check-ups, and also attends cultural and sports activities. For children over 16 years of age, the conditions specify that they need to be enrolled and regularly attend a post-secondary educational institution, are registering for work, or are in training programmes such as the Youth Guarantee programme [1] which ensures that school leavers who are not in education are trained to continue with their post-secondary education or better trained for the work market. If families do not satisfy these conditions, the allowance would be deposited into a bank account in the child’s name and can only be used for the child’s education and training. This benefit for the first three children in the family is of €400 annually for each child and €200 each for the subsequent children in families with more than three children. This measure’s implementation involves collaboration between the Ministry for the Family and Social Justice and the Ministry for Education and Employment.

Another measure is aimed at the integration into mainstream schools of immigrant minor children, the children of asylum seekers or of refugees. Refugees under the age of eighteen who arrive in Malta unaccompanied by adult relatives are considered as learners at risk. Support measures are aimed at eliminating or reducing the educational disadvantage that such students experience due to linguistic, social and cultural barriers. Supporting measures include the following:
1. Social workers who prepare care plans to help such children integrate in mainstream institutions and to prepare individual transition programmes;
2. Specific language support for such children to learn Maltese and/or English;
3. The raising of classmates’ awareness of the child’s native language, customs, beliefs and ethnic diversity in order to facilitate the child’s inclusion in class;
4. Liaison with non-educational social welfare institutions to ensure that such children and their families enjoy the basic living requirements.
5. Continuous evaluation of such children within the Maltese education system and society at large.

**Home Tuition and Hospital lessons**

Learners who are absent from school for a prolonged period of time are provided with home tuition. This aims to provide the learner with continuous education and to minimise the ill effects of being away from school and to help the student reintegrate back in school at the appropriate time.

This service is available for learners who are diagnosed as being chronically ill (non-contagious), have a medical condition which causes them to be away from school for not less than four weeks, are staying at home recovering from an injury or medical surgery, or not attending school due to school phobia.

Hospital classes are also available for learners having a prolonged stay in a Maltese hospital, providing that such activity is not deemed harmful to the learner or the educator. Both the home tuition and the hospital classes cover the teaching of the basic subjects of Maltese, English and Mathematics.

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