



Cultural learning experiences and experiential learning paradigms for social and labor integration of disadvantaged young migrants:

Report #1 Group discussion with professionals working with young migrants

VisMedNet, Malta



Funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

1.Group Discussion : Professionals

General Description of the activity:

Location: Offices of Microfinance Malta, 212 Old Bakery St, Valletta, Malta

Dates: 1st and 17th of March

Tools used: Mobile phone for recording after obtaining verbal consent from participants.

VisMedNet organized two focus group sessions with professionals, as only some could attend the first session. In the first session, three participants attended the focus group discussion: A representative from Microfinance Malta, The African Media Association (AMAM) and Blue Door English.

The group discussions took place at the offices of **Microfinance Malta**, a small NGO aiming to fight poverty by assisting economically vulnerable businesses and people. They help migrants financially as they often face financial struggles when settling in Malta.

AMAM is a media organization that aims to promote issues relevant to the African perspective in Malta. It also strives to support migrants by providing them with life and media skills, digital literacy and support on matters of integration into Maltese society.

Blue Door English is a charity organization based on volunteer work. They focus on providing English language classes, literacy courses, and IT and life skills training.

During the second session, two participants from **Kopin** shared their experiences and knowledge. Kopin assists vulnerable groups in Malta, focusing primarily on migrant women and children. They advocate for migrants' and children's rights as they engage in Maltese and European policy dialogues.

The first focus group discussion occurred on the 1st of March 2023, and the second on the 17th of March 2023.

A total of 5 participants attended the two focus group discussions. The information regarding participants is summarized in table 1.

Table 1. Participant organizations in the two focus groups.

Organizations Represented	Session attended	Number of participants
Microfinance Malta	1st March	1

African Media Association	1st March	1
Blue Door English	1 st March	1
Kopin	17th March	2
Total Number of participants		5

Questionnaire and research procedures

VisMedNet finalized the questionnaire used for the focus group discussion with the help of Microfinance Malta to adapt the questions to the Maltese context. The questions were divided into four sections according to the topic. Section A focused on migrants’ experiences as they arrived in Malta. Section B focuses on migrants’ job skills, challenges with integration and finding employment. Section C centers on migrants’ experiences with homelessness and rooflessness. Section D addresses aspects that could better prepare migrants before they arrive in Malta. The questionnaire has a total of 22 questions and can be found in the appendix of this report.

Prior to beginning the focus groups, VisMedNet sought consent from participants to participate in the discussion and record the interviews. The recordings will not be used for any other purpose than to write the current report and will be deleted once the report has been submitted and revised. No names will be written in the report and the personal identity of participants will remain anonymous.

Summary of key topics discussed:

It is important to note that the organizations participating in the first discussion group work primarily (although not exclusively) with African migrants and the Middle East. Moreover, the discussion often focused on asylum seekers and people arriving by boat although the participants mentioned situations that other groups of migrants are facing.

Bonding during detention:

In the case of migrants arriving by boat, they are usually placed in detention for a few months. According to participants, the reality faced by migrants in detention is harsh and “quite traumatic to them. So, they tend to form groupings, they call themselves brothers while they are in detention. So, they actually form a community from that. And that is a very strong feeling that they develop.”

Finding work is a major motivation for migrants living in open centers and while they bond with people from the same cultural background, their main focus while at open centers is not to form friends but to find work: “Because I think if you’re so when people are going into

the open centers from detention, if they've managed to kind of have some people from a similar cultural background that they've already either come over on the boat with, or they've got some kind of pre experience with, then that bond is strong. But then in the same kind of background, you'll get people that are on their own, because they haven't had that. So, they could be of the same cultural background, but there's some, they, you know, they may not have come over at the same time, or they don't know them or whatever. And there's, so that could be on their own. And then I'd say it's so varied. I mean, you get some that will, as soon as they're open centers, they're going places, they're going to offices, they're really making this massive effort to try and kind of get all the information they can. But I think the motivating factor for that is work, you know, kind of, yeah, so it's not necessarily thinking about okay, like, I want to make friends. It's not, it's kind of motivated by work, you know, kind of like trying to get connected with people that can help them with that in those situations."

Migrants arrive to Malta without knowing the harsh realities they will face and struggle with crushing disappointment:

There isn't much information available to migrants in their origin countries about life in Europe and what to expect, they come with ideas that Europe is rich and that there is plenty of work. According to Kopin, they have some NGOs working on this matter (informing migrants about the realities of migration in Europe) in West and East Africa, about "the risks of leaving one's country, undocumented and going through all their journey, and also all the challenges of integrating in Europe."

They might hold assumptions from an early age about Europe as an ideal destination, informed by films, media, social media: "...they have assumptions...from people who tell them lies on social media or friends who have been here who don't tell them the truth. But they don't know about the reality here. They are very much most of the time disappointed, they have these illusions... And they just don't hear what's going on and they're very often disappointed...They don't think of detention, they don't think of [long-term] unemployment. Forget about racism, they've never heard of that. And these are the things that really hit hard..."

Denial plays a role in generating unrealistic expectations and they often don't read about the realities of migration or the countries to which they will migrate:

Moreover, the desperate situation that migrants face in their home countries leads to seeking migration as an option without much consideration of the harsh realities migrants face: "If I were to be in a desperate situation, I don't think I would really look into what are the challenges? And what are the pitfalls, and, and all the stuff, I would just want to leave and build this hopeful picture, that it will be better, and then that's it. This is my impression

that I get in those types of situations. One would not necessarily be searching for the negative aspects.”

Some migrants live in denial and refuse to believe anything negative they hear about the harsh realities of migration: “...they don't believe what it is said negatively. It is a mental [issue] yes, it is a mental process that rejects everything that is negative. So, they just take the good that's why they go on social media to look at the nice pictures from...they will not use internet to go and read about the country”

“They should be prepared for having a hard time...for not being welcome. Now, I don't know if it is in general or just in the Maltese context. Maltese, in general, don't like foreigners, so they should be prepared not to be welcome. So that is kind of a hard thing for any human being. And then build that resilience because it is important...”

Resources to support migrants are overwhelmed:

“All of the resources that were mainly targeted to asylum seekers, all of those resources that are able to, accommodate people from any background, are completely overwhelmed, because now that we've got not only the difficulties that our asylum seekers are facing, all of a sudden, you've got a huge amount of third country nationals, encountering abuse on levels that we don't think, that we ever imagined could happen”

Lack of information:

Misinformation is also a problem for migrants coming from other regions such as South Asia and South America:

“But maybe we should add that we're talking about people coming from the African continent. If we talk about people coming from Pakistan or India, and South America as well, they often go with agencies. [They] pay a fortune to be told the wrong things... So up to 10,000, [euros] they pay and get promised, they will get a salary of 2000, that living costs are very low. So, they calculate and they think, okay, I can bring my family easily with all the money I get, and then they come to reality, with a salary of 800, if they have the papers [required for renting] and a rent of 750.”

Misinformation creates special problems for asylum seekers:

For asylum seekers and those needing refugee status, misinformation is a big problem because they are often not well prepared for their asylum-seeking interviews. They don't

know what they need to ask for, they don't know their rights and they don't know how to ask for their rights: During their first interview "...they don't have access to a lawyer at that time. They are on their own, and they're not prepared to face the interviewer and the interviewer is a nasty person who asks questions in order to [deny] the documents. So that's where they all mostly fail" they tell contradictory stories, and that record is kept. "In Malta they [those with asylum status] are quite lucky because they can work" but in the case of those who could qualify for asylum seeking status but have a bad first interview, they miss out on those opportunities.

Moreover, the asylum applications take a long time to process: "Well, if I had to, first of all compare what is happening now, with a few years ago, I think the system of asylum applications has worsened. The service being provided by the agency is of low quality. There are by now it's standard, that applications are not processed before two years"

How they find information about services that can help them in Malta:

Migrants rely more heavily on word of mouth than on the internet or digital tools. Their main source of information comes from other migrants, friends, or people assisting them. For example in Blue Door English: "oftentimes, someone will come in, take lessons with us and then say, like, 'Hey, my friend is also interested in coming', and it's usually either someone of the same nationality, usually the same gender as well...because of the language barrier, it makes a lot of sense to have a community who actually understand what you're saying [and they rely on that community for information]"

"Well, there's definitely word of mouth...once people are in the centers. So, there's these welfare teams that are in the open centers now. Which is, but that's just one person at each center, which is positive, but it is just not enough. [There might be 1 person for 1000 people].

"[UNHCR is trying to work] on a document that will be given out when people go into detention. So basically, when people arrive on the boat, and they step on land, that there's, a leaflet that everybody's given. UNHCR is allowed to be there when the boat arrives, so I think what they envision doing is that in that moment, they're going to try and [hand out the leaflet]. But obviously, it's hugely difficult because [of the many languages] there needs to be. And if people don't read...

Necessary information for migrants:

"They need proper information on how the asylum system works with a visual and easy to follow explanation, with a step-by-step guide. And someone explaining what your rights for working in Malta are"

"There was a [training] from JRS where they explain your rights of working in Malta...and they were taking questions, and if the answer was too complicated or they didn't know they provided their numbers and said, 'call us and we'll discuss it more' and I really wish that everyone could have that, in every language, orally explained, able to ask questions"

In terms of which format would work best to deliver important information: “you were saying which format would work the best and I think maybe all...a video you can watch it over and over again but also a physical paper for people who can read, and they can keep it”

“So, it's basically access to services, I think it's just a massive thing, like we've dealt with on interviews in the open centers. And, you know, people didn't, they don't know what services are available. They don't know what they've got access to. Right. They don't know that they've got rights, so it is a massive kind of hole of knowledge about what services are there for them. Even the ones that are there that maybe are not enough, they don't even know that they're there”

“One of the main issues here is that upon arrival, there is no independent source of information that they can access. Both at the arrival and reception center. And in detention centers, access to servers for civil society is extremely limited. And it's, it's not available to any asylum seeker who arrives here

Regarding information about paperwork:

“They don't go online, because online, they don't know where to go. You have a huge barrier, [in terms of] language, they look online and get instant Maltese or English. [One thing they do have] in [the] detention [centers] is two lawyers, who work pro bono. JRS and Aditus. These are the two NGOs that can support them with legal services. And so that's how they receive some information about what they need. But that information they can receive only after having been through the detention. And in the first interview, where everything is actually decided [they don't have that information yet].” Moreover, the lawyers cannot talk to everyone and inform everyone.

“From a point of view of the paperwork and things, I think it's just that from day one, the issue is that because there's not the support there. So, there's not the advice, there's not the access to legal support. So, when people are going through the first steps of the process, they're not properly prepared. They don't understand what the process is. They haven't got access to a translator. So, there's all of these steps. So that first application, when they have could have a very strong valid case, because they haven't got that support, they may put a weak one in, and then they're basically in the system for three years, then then, you know, they may get rejection, when actually they've got a very strong case if they've got the support. But then if they not if they don't ever link in with that support, then, you know, we have”

They have access to a leaflet written by the government but some of them don't understand the document or have trouble understanding the written language. "They are just waiting for someone to talk to them. Like, you know, this is what you have to do now, but in a gentle manner, that doesn't happen in the center."

Important gaps in knowledge, lack of systematization and no adequate channels to present information to migrants in an accessible manner:

"So, it's basically access to services, I think it's just a massive thing, like we've dealt with on interviews in the open centers. And, you know, people didn't, they don't know what services are available. They don't know what they've got access to. They don't know what they've got rights for, so the map is a massive kind of hole of, of knowledge about what the services are, even the ones that are there that maybe are not enough, they don't even know that they're there"

There is no systematized access to information, there might be different NGOs or services for migrants but there is nothing that collects that information and presents it to migrants in a way that they can easily understand and follow up. There might be different initiatives, and projects, or even tools to help migrants as well. However, they are all scattered around.

Migrants don't always make use of digital tools:

"I can answer that with a bit of experience because when I was a volunteer teacher, I tried Duolingo, they came out with Duolingo for schools, basically, you could sign up some students, and then you could kind of watch their progress and check and see and even line up what they practice maybe on the bus with what you're teaching in class, and I thought that was a great idea. The problem was that I had Eritrean students, and there's no Duolingo, which teaches English in the language of Eritrea. And so, I could give it to the one Arabic student or the Arabic speaker, because there is an English Duolingo but taught in Arabic. Yeah. So, it ends up excluding some of the students, frankly, the students who did speak they, they didn't, I would give them the code and they wouldn't use the app"

Similarly: "We did a digital literacy class last semester that was based off of smartphones, I'm sure you also I know you do stuff with computer classes and things and I know that almost everybody who comes through uses social media almost obsessively, but still [resist/avoid] using phones for from sort of formal purposes or educational purposes. It's somewhat of a barrier. We've known that there's some difficulties there, even like making a Google doc on your phone and typing some information or changing the color or whatever is it? It took a little while. So, it kind of opened my eyes to the fact that maybe that's why using an app is difficult, but I think it's I think there's a lot of potential there. Because everyone's walking around with the phone. And I'd love to be able to send like a little activity

or something, for example on the bus many of them ride the bus for hours and could use the time to study, I haven't figured out how to encourage them to do that"

"Actually, most of our projects are on digital literacy...and so the idea is to transmit or pass the skill of being digital" It is challenging as many don't know how to open a gmail address or use social media accounts created by their friends. "They know how to use social media and period. So, we are actually doing things from learning how to send an email address and then what's actually an email and where it is located on your phone. How can you find it to show it to someone and send it to someone if you are asked, 'What is your email address?' And then from there we can go to Google Drive, how to use documents before even starting any other things, because everything starts from there. So, we have a lot of all these small workshops that we do. But it's really a problem...people they just don't know how. [Some of them come from places where] you don't have the internet or if you have it for maybe one hour a day, now it is available in more and more places but some of them come from places without internet."

Cultural differences and employability, challenges of integration:

Some migrants face cultural differences when it comes to how to behave in the workplace or how to seek jobs. Some of them, for example, don't use handshakes and sometimes for potential employers it comes across as unprofessional. Employers have expectations about how migrant workers should behave, they speak from a position of dominance and for them it is not a matter of integration but rather migrants assimilating into the work culture in Malta.

"We worked with jobs plus and it was very enlightening for me, employers speak from a position of dominance, in that case is not a two way process, it is expected that the migrants will adapt without giving them time for them to learn about what is expected from them, so it is pretty much very hard you just have to do it period, you don't have the time to learn or to understand."

Many Muslims suffer from being unable to pray during work breaks, they have problems during Ramadan, "they try to adapt because job is important. They have problems as well with communication at work, some will say hello to everyone and no one is answering or saying hello back and that is hard for migrants to understand", it is perceived by them as a personal response against them.

The government has set up a course on cultural mediation and courses for companies on cultural awareness. It is a good idea and would benefit the companies who take them, however "companies don't always want to make that effort".

“So many workplaces expect people to fit in from day one, whoever that is, yeah, even if you’re white, and whatever, this, this is across the board, which is unrealistic, to be honest. So there has to be a bit of both sides.”

Some of the participants stated that making sure people obtain fair employment should be prioritized: “in the hierarchy of needs, like the most basic needs that you need, like food and water, and then, like satisfaction and what you’re doing. I would say that integration is a really, really important thing. But if first and foremost, you don’t have a job that gives you money to eat, [then it is hard to meet any other needs]. So, I think, as far as initiatives go, just making sure people have fair employment, and then if they make friends at work, that’s a great thing. But you know, just making sure that people are treated fairly.”

Potential ideas

In detention centers migrants are not allowed to use their phone but it would be helpful to have a clear pathway and structured information before they get out of detention centers of what steps they can take next.

In Open centers if you provide courses that are not related to employment “you might not receive enough attention. I am a little bit desensitized when it comes to delivering training in open centers because you get the feeling that nobody is interested...because they have the perception that they are being mistreated and that everybody who goes there is representing the government. [But maybe courses on finding employment and cultural aspects of job search could be of interest for people in open centers but it may take some time to help them understand you don’t represent the government.]. **So, create something that is related to employment, and then you add maybe other things there, but you really have to be something that you know, it can be tangible.**”

With regards to a skill matching project by AMAM, “If there was something like that happening at the open centers very early on, kind of when people first come into the centers, if there’s some kind of skills matching, that wouldn’t be [very good]...I think it goes down to the accessibility of services and tools and resources that are available, because, for example, if there was one place, which everybody knew that you could go to where you can access all of these things, certainly is this idea of kind of a one stop shop that’s been spoken about for like a decade or whatever. But I think perhaps if there was something like that online [it would be good]. So, it’s literally like a base page where all of these resources that different organizations have put together all there is with regards to services for migrants. That doesn’t exist yet.

It is difficult to know when to target people, before they leave, once they have arrived: “if I had to choose one point, not because it’s the best, but simply because it’s the most pragmatic, I would say on arrival.”

“Probably, I mean, like videos like a tick tock probably, or something like that. Y. I think it’s got to be in a format that people go into, like stumble across, I don’t think the majority of people aren’t actively going to be looking for it... little information snippets.”

“I’ve heard that there is access to a phone now at least [in detention centers] I mean, if there could potentially be some kind of video, they just stick a video on, but it’s got phone numbers to call or some sites that are useful”.

Appendix:

1. Questionnaire

Questions for session with professionals

Section A

1. After being released from detention do you see that migrants bond more with people of the same nationality, other migrants, locals or do they prefer to stay alone?
2. In your experience, what kind of information do you think migrants seek before coming to Malta and after coming to Malta? Do they know about their rights in the EU, cultural differences, how to find employment, Maltese history and culture?
3. How do they obtain this knowledge? Word of mouth? Digital means?
4. Migrants face a lot of paperwork to apply for their status, work permits and so on. What do you think are the biggest challenges young migrants are facing?
 - a) Difficult type settings in the forms?
 - b) Language barriers?
 - c) Illiteracy?
 - d) Other?

5. Where do young migrants seek help in these cases?
6. Do you provide assistance to young migrants with such paperwork?
7. What challenges do young migrants face when learning the language (English) in Malta? Are there entities or apps for them to use that are effective in helping them learn the language?

Section B

8. In your experience, what are the expectations young migrants have when they arrive in Malta?
9. How do cultural differences affect migrants' employability or integration into Maltese society?
 - a) Are there any means to help migrants on this respect?
10. Do you have any experience or memories of something that helped young Migrants find employment or integrate into Maltese society?
11. Since you work with migrants do you see a barrier/trust issue between migrants and aid agencies/NGO's?
 - a) If so, what do you think is the reason?
 - b) What could be done in general to improve this?
12. To your knowledge, do migrants have any work experience when they arrive here?
 - a) If so, have they been trained in their country or did they achieve these skills/profession during their travels?
13. What percentage of young migrants find a job where their skills/profession is valid?
14. What are the biggest obstacles for young migrants to find and keep employment?
15. What do you know about technological or digital tools accessible to young migrants that facilitate their integration into the job market or life in their host country?

16. How often do migrants use these tools?

Section C

17. How often do young migrants face the experience of homelessness such as living with friends, after being released from detention? If so is this for a time period

1. less than 1 month
2. more than 1 months
3. more than 3 months

18. How often do you think young migrants experience being roofless? If so is this for a time period

- a. less than 1 month
- b. more than 1 months
- c. more than 3 months

19. Facing being homelessness/roofless goes often with depression and/or substance abuse.

Have you come across such cases? If so, would you say that there are more of less cases than 5?10? years ago?

Section D

20. What are some typical situations for which young migrants need to be prepared for when they arrive in Malta?

21. In your opinion, what is the best way to prepare them for that?

- a) Through a course?
- b) In written form?
- c) Through audio or video?
- d) In what language?

22. Is there anything you would like to add/share with regards to this topic?



Cultural learning experiences and experiential learning paradigms for social and labor integration of disadvantaged young migrants:

Report #1 Group discussion with young migrants

VisMedNet, Malta



Funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

1.Group Discussion: Young Migrants

General Description of the activity:

Location: Offices of African Media Association, 212 Old Bakery St, Valletta, Malta

Dates: 4rth of March

Tools used: Mobile phone for recording after obtaining verbal consent from participants.

VisMedNet organized a focus group session with young migrants living in Malta with the assistance of the African Media Association (AMAM). The group discussions took place at the offices of the African Media Association who lent their space for the meeting. The group of migrants came from mainly african countries and two from India.

The first focus group discussion occurred on the 4rth of March 2023.

A total of 7 participants attended the focus group discussion.

Questionnaire and research procedures

VisMedNet used the template questionnaire created for the focus groups with young migrants. Prior to beginning the focus groups, VisMedNet sought consent from participants to participate in the discussion and record the interviews. The recordings will not be used for any other purpose than to write the current report and will be deleted once the report has been submitted and revised. No names will be written in the report and the personal identity of participants will remain anonymous.

Summary of key topics discussed:

The topic of studies was a recurrent theme in the discussion as many have sought employment and a continuation of their studies and to obtain certification that might open other job opportunities for them. Three of them have attended MCAST, a vocational education institution.

Unmet expectations regarding employment and difficulties of finding employment:

“I didn’t expect that it would be so hard to find a job for a teenager at least. Because we’re not going to do anything big. We’re just going to do some part time jobs or whatever. But it’s still very hard to find them. I didn’t expect that. I thought it was going to be easy. But it’s not.”

“I really expected that to find a job it would be easier. However, it turns out that there are available jobs but only in particular areas if you are healthy, and you can use your muscle you can find work, exploited work, let's say, and you can work, you gain salary, comparable to where you come from, it could be a big amount, but it is not as it's set by the regulation of this country. And also, it is very hard to find in your area of interest. For example, if you study it and have a degree, sometimes you end up working in something totally different from what you studied. And if you persist to find something relatable to what you study. So you just lump it and try to find anything available on your door.”

“I don't know. I never managed. At first I was thinking probably I was not having the proper document. And then when I got it, it became worse. Because as soon as I go for the interview, and they just see the working permits, the document, that's the end of the story. I've searched for a job for two years. I already started with JobsPlus. I went to Gozo. So when I said I searched for a job, I screened for a job really, when JobsPlus cannot help you get a job, then you know that there's just no hope for you. It was so bad that when I see people who don't even have O level and they are working, I was not looking for any specific job, I was looking for even just cleaning jobs. I got to a point okay, [where I thought] probably because I don't have a good certificate to work with. Then I did a security course. And I got the license, never worked with it...So, I can't really tell you, if I was not even called for an interview to see what they can offer. So this year I went back to school to secure a diploma, I am just hoping to see how it goes.”

“Notice that the requirements that you can see for the job [is that they ask] preferably for a Maltese person. That is a big problem here. And I understand that not everyone knows English here. But we also need to work with something.”

“In Malta, 'who do you know?' is more important than what you know. And sometimes, luckily, you will end up doing more advantageous because of the people that you know, because they recommend you to go to some place and you will find it easier for you. But sometimes if you just follow the legal procedure, applying for a job and submitting CVS, you will not even go to an interview.”

They did not expect racism:

“Yeah, one thing I didn't expect is like, people being rude to you just because you have a different skin color. In school, especially in school. I go to school, and it's just, I'm sick of it. Now. I am so sick of it.”

“It's a big problem here. In Malta the discrimination you know? So, they do not say [things] direct[ly] at you, but you are feeling how they treat you. So, there is some discrimination...in work, in the street, even sometimes in public bus.

“I think when we talk about racism, we should look at the whole picture. Racism is something that is not unique to Malta or whatever. But the thing is, when you have a law, you know that if someone acts and discriminates against you, you go to the law, and you ask for your right and you get it, then it is something. But unfortunately, here in Malta is like almost systematic, by the system itself, you know, the system itself is racist...you don't trust the system anymore...you don't even go to police...So it is I think more of implementation of [the] law. We need it here...Because the system if you go and see them, the Maltese constitution, they denied racism and everything. But then when you come to implementation, there is a big thing. There is a lack of implementation of [the] law. What we suffer from is lack of implementation itself.”

Prior knowledge about Malta:

Some of them did not know anything about Malta when arriving here. In one case he didn't know there was a country called Malta until he arrived on the island, he had to learn about Malta and laws upon arrival.

“By the pictures that look like all flowers and happiness. But when you get here you realize that there are thorns on the flowers as well. So it was like that experience. And we came during the COVID time. So it was even harder. And we were forcefully put in a hotel. And for one day we had to give 100 Euros...But the thing is that we got the vaccination. We had everything. We just wanted to go to our house. My father had a house already. Okay, he was just ready for us to come here. But when we came, they put us in the hotel. And then we had to pay 1400 euros for 14 days. And that only included breakfast nothing else.”

“I think unless you come to Malta, then you know the picture, but [if] you are outside of it, I don't think you know the picture. For me, I thought that it's part of Italy. And then when I came here, I immediately thought that 'no, this is not the right place for me'. Unfortunately, I've [have] been [here] since. I've been living here but I came here by boat. Unfortunately, I found very hard circumstances. But when I came here the shock multiplied by 200. Luckily I [was] introduced to local people who really helped me out to maneuver, find education. I cannot generalize this because my case is probably something unique. Now I found my way to the university, and I'm studying at university. Now I'm graduating this year with an engineering degree. But then when I'm at university and look at my counterpart, I see there is almost no existence of any migrant background student. And from my experience, I understand why there is that because it is very, very not hard, extremely hard to follow in your education degree. And also there is only a limited opportunity, limited thing that you can do. Only you can do hardware if you have muscle. And unfortunately, if you are a man, even gender plays a big part here. If you are a woman, it's very, very, very hard to find a job... Malta is still considered to be a European country but plays by third [world] country

national law and regulation. Nothing different. Like, for example, I've been to Libya [and the situation is similar to Malta]. I saw it like almost you can compare it to Tunisia, it's almost comparable.

Studying in Malta:

Studying in Malta is not easy without documentation but MCAST (Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology) a vocational education institution offers courses where students can register without providing migration documents. At least 5 of the 7 participants have sought education in Malta, two on a secondary level and others on university/vocational education level. Obtaining stipends for education is possible through the help of social workers but government regulations are perceived by them as arbitrary and inconsistent.

“First when I came here, I was passionate and eager to pursue and further my education. And then I found this social worker [who] told me that there is this opportunity. And she brought me a booklet [to study in MCAST].” They didn't require documentation. “I have benefited from the government as I have a stipend to pay for my school fee...who you know makes a difference because once there was this big conference in Malta and I was asked to speak, I was sitting next to the Minister of education and the miracle happened”

Another participant shared a similar experience of being helped by a social worker to get a stipend to register at MCAST the first time she registered for a course, however she is trying to go back to study and is facing more challenges : “Even when I got the admission to the University in 2018, I still wasn't eligible for the stipend, but the social worker, she did everything. I didn't even have a bank account at that time and I received the stipend. I have five years here and now with all the [migration] documents, now they ask for my school certificate, they didn't before, they ask me for my school certificate to register. I have the level three and the level four and then you are insisting I bring the school certificate to register.”

“Me and my brother, we didn't get anywhere...But we did get into summer courses. And my brother got into an employment course. And then he also got a job. But only for a few hours. After [a while] they stopped calling him. But I didn't have anything. So I also started some summer courses...”

On finding NGO's that assist them or information to integrate and make a living in Malta:

They find information from word of mouth and from scattered information on the internet. One of the participants illustrates how if you are interested in studying you must visit the university websites for yourself and find all the information that you need, it is written on the websites.

“Most of the time nobody tells you about anything, but because I was having a lot of challenges at the open center, they kept referring me”

“First of all Malta is very small... if you live here for the first month [you hear] from your friend because when you come here, you find friends that already lived here before you, you get to know all the information that you need. However, like it is up to you to take it to the next level, if you are for example and Ngo, most of them are operating on a charity basis, you don't expect anything from it, it's like something that is like a handout. If they [can] help you it is an asset that you should consider, but the big part is on you, if you for example, wanted to study at the university, that if like you said, if you just went to the University website, you will see like if you are a mature student, there is this there is this form you should follow. If you are a minor or a teenager, you will do this mainly that everything is written....it is up to you that for example, if you want to study I think the system will not hinder you, at the same time it will not pave the way for you. It gets up to you if you want to study in Malta, you can do whatever and it is achievable if you persist.. No one would deny you because of your background not to enter or admit to a course. Never in my case. It's a matter of persistence”

Disappointment with youth and migrant workers as the supply of helpers is lower than the demand for help:

“Youth workers and NGO workers, they're overwhelmed with work. That's for sure. And because of that, they can't really help people the way they want to, they promised you but they don't live up to”

“They don't have the resources ...almost everything that has to do with NGO here is hard, because they don't get support from the government, the resources are very, very, very limited [compared] to the demand that they are getting...So for me, I keep saying, do it yourself before going there know...it's easier when somebody is happy to finish up what you've already started.”

“they're only on a voluntary basis. So maybe someone who works for two to three months, they will be replaced with someone else. It was very difficult to find something solid concrete to follow on. And also, like, for example, let's understand the fact that Malta is very new to migration, when you speak to France, UK or somewhere else is totally different.”

Lack of systematic access to information, identifying needs is key:

“There’s a lack of information about the roles of those entities [NGO’s]. And that’s what’s coming out here.”

“There is nowhere in the world, there is no place where you just go ask and they’ll give you all the information, you have to be specific and you go exactly where you want to go. If you want to get educated, you know that very thing you do you have to go to what you have to identify your needs, according to that need to get served.”

“In my case, after my detention I did everything to know where I was, and to set my feet on the terrain, so the first thing I searched for was to continue my studies at university level...I later searched for jobs and registered in JobsPlus

Language difficulties:

Language is a barrier for some as they might not be able to search for an education

“I think for the education service in Malta. You have to have, like, background education. But for the people who want to start fresh, so he don’t know anything, like he want guidance, he wants social worker, here to get social worker it is a main problem here, Because you face problems language, so you don’t know, so how you going to search?”

“For example, blue door helped me to do some course in english”

“In my case [I learned English mainly self taught] but when I started MCAST... I remember the teacher gave me extra notes. And I follow YouTube’s and other channels to educate, but then there is no particular [services] for migrants, they are based all on NGOs for example, this blue door, they are doing a lot of job to help but it’s all from volunteer [work] not from government support.”

Some of them have used apps like Google Translate to get by when they speak little english.

Some of the MCAST students have taken courses on Maltese at the university. They also teach academic English, which some find hard as their English is basic level.

“From my experience I come from an Arabic speaking country and learning Maltese was not easy but like it’s very helpful the language. When you learn a language it is considered an asset, it is better knowing than not knowing...”

For the participants attending secondary level education, they feel like outsiders because other classmates speak Maltese around them and don’t speak english.

Language can be a means of exclusion and makes them feel excluded.

Experience in a government integration programme called “I belong”:

There is a programme called “I belong” and they teach Maltese, through different stages. Migrants must apply for it, it is mostly destined for Third Country Nationals but sometimes it might be open for refugees and asylum seekers. It is from the Human Right Directorate, with two levels, that is relevant to third country nationals to obtain long-term residence. They teach about Maltese culture and history. One participant taking the course was taking it with the hopes that it would help him obtain residence, however, he learned that it was geared mostly for TCNs.

Perceptions of the course: “You can actually understand what people are saying about you in Maltese”

“The person who is interested in that will learn, it is very important sometimes when you live in the country to know what is going around, even if you don’t want to delve into it”

Integration in Malta:

“The system is the challenge. I think it is easy to integrate yourself. But when it comes to anything related to the system, then you feel that what I did is rubbish. For example, nowadays, I can speak the language perfectly with my local friends, I can enjoy going to local bars with my friends and everything. But then when I need to change my ID card, the system will tell me that, listen, you are a migrant, even after 10 years, yeah, so it’s kind of no matter how hard you going, always the system will try to tell you listen, you’re here so it’s kind of you know, systematic for them”

Needs:

Guidance and accessible information on key procedures to find employment and study in Malta.

“Any knowledge or information that, for example, we struggle or have turned to find, we should make sure that this never happened to someone else. So let’s say formalize this all document and put an agenda flyers or an application that one can go there formation is knowledge and powerful once you know the information you can act upon that providing information it solves a lot of problems many people are there because of lack of information, lack of awareness, they tend to end up in in very not pleasant situation. And also sometimes people are like for example, if you want to further education, you might entice him to start from a higher college degree but because you don’t know you will end up starting from ground base.”

“People just need guidance, someone to tell them, You know what they do? Not most of us but, you know, some of us are, you know, they know what they do go to college, so, you

know, you know, but other people they don't know nothing, you know, I know I know most of them now."

"I think the more people need this is real life information like once you come here at first for example you will come with big dreams and fancy ideas about Europe and everything first I think people need to be made aware of their situation, you are remote This is not what you expect. For example, you have all these challenges and also you have these advantages since you know that you already have these challenges, you start programming your mind to the challenge, but if you don't know that there is challenge you will end up in Mount Carmel [a mental health hospital]."