

## Educational Policies that Address Social Inequality

# Malta case study report 4 Changing Inclusive and Special Education

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## **Changing Inclusive and Special Education**

Over the past years Malta has embarked on a National Educational Reform process that started in the year 2000 with the creation of a new National Minimum Curriculum (NMC) entitled “Creating the Future Together” applicable to all education providers in Malta (State, Church and Independent schools) in three different levels of education (pre-primary, primary and secondary). This NMC is based on a belief in social justice and prescribes the implementation of inclusion (Principle 8), a concept which recognises the full range of educational interests, potential and needs of pupils, and has been said to mark a paradigm shift in the way Maltese society looks at education.

In 2001, the Minister of Education announced the adoption of a new policy for inclusive schools, aimed at the attendance of students with a disability in mainstream education, named “Inclusive Education Policy Regarding Students with a Disability”. The Minister also announced the establishment of a Review Board to carry out this measure.

Later on, in 2005, this reform process led to the publication by the Ministry of Education of a new Network Organisation for Quality Education in Malta entitled “For All Children to Succeed” (FACTS) which includes 10 separate review exercises of different aspects of the educational provision, ranging from early childhood education and inclusion to higher and tertiary education and lifelong learning, all of which had been completed in the previous years. These reviews also included the improvement of educational services for children with special needs. Policy measures regarding Inclusive and Special Education are also included in the National Action Plans on Poverty and Social Inclusion (2004-06 and 2006-08), and further measures have been projected for the following years.

According to Kevin Bonello, vice-president of the Malta Union of Teachers (MUT) (contacted by the Epasi Spanish team in mid-2007), “Maltese developments in the field of Special Education this year have been tremendous”.

A summary of some of the main initiatives/projects undertaken in the last years would include:

- Attendance of children with disabilities in regular schools
- Creation of individualised educational programmes (IEP) for these pupils, according to their particular needs;
- Creation of a certificate in education for Learning Support Assistants;
- Reform of former Special Schools into “Resource Centres”
- Project for establishing National Attainment Levels for students attending Resource Centres;
- Training for Early Intervention Teachers;
- Recruiting of Assistant Heads of Resource Centres;
- And a setting up of a curriculum which reflects the National Minimum Curriculum for these children.

Despite the significant amount of documents that describe and analyse the Educational System reform regarding Special Education, specific data on costs and government investment has not been found.

### **Inclusive Education**

The measure about the inclusion of students with a disability in mainstream education was set by the Minister for Education and developed by the Ministerial Committee on Inclusive Education, in charge of laying the necessary educational infrastructure and creating provisions for children with

diverse needs to be able to receive their educational entitlement in mainstream schooling. According to the European Anti-Poverty Network –Malta, this initiative targets 1,308 students recognised as having special educational needs. They are being educated across regular Kindergarten, Primary and Secondary schools and are supported by Learning Support Assistants (data for the 2006-08 period, in: [www.eapnmalta.org](http://www.eapnmalta.org)).

Along with inclusive schools, the Ministry created two bodies closely connected with the implementation of this policy: the Statementing Moderating Panel and the Statementing Appeals Board, whose main aim is to make sure that every student with disability has an individualised educational programme according to his individual needs.

The functions of these statementing bodies are to:

- Ensure that each school has done everything it could and should do to meet the needs of the student with special needs, within the resources already available in the centre;
- Gather and analyse trans-disciplinary assessment reports from various professionals (including educational, parental, medical, psychological, social, communicative, vocational, etc.) regarding a student's statement;
- Invite parents and professionals to discuss issues raised by the assessments presented to the panel;
- Seek active consultation with parents and, when appropriate, the students themselves in developing a statement;
- Establish the nature and level of educational support needed by the student being statemented;
- Submit statements to the Director General of Education for follow-up action and provision of the indicated educational support;
- Undertake periodic reviews of statemented students; and
- Prepare annual reports for submission to the Minister of Education

Two Statementing Moderating Panels have been set up to ensure that students do not suffer due to statementing delays, allowing frequent meetings to efficiently process applications. The creation of these bodies has been complemented by a change in the actors attending the statementing process. While NGOs used to be represented on the Statementing Board, the new Statementing Moderating Panel does not include representatives of these organisations. On the other hand, school personnel and parents – who usually complained about their exclusion from the statementing process - play a major role in the new context, since they are consulted by the Statementing Moderating Panel during its deliberations (from: New Policy on Inclusion of Students with a Disability).

### **Individualised Educational Programmes (IEP)**

The policy document “Inclusive Education – Support to Students with Disability” stipulates that for every student with a disability an Individualised Educational Programme (IEP) needs to be prepared according to his individual needs, and in consultation with, among others, the class teacher and parents. The document describes an IEP as “A concise and practical written plan, developed for a student with a disability, which describes the modifications and adaptations for a student's educational programme and the services necessary to ensure full access to educational entitlements according to the National Curriculum. Some students require small adaptations and minimum levels of support while others with more complex needs may require detailed planning for educational modifications, adaptive technologies, or health care plans. The IEP ensures that, whatever the level of support required, each school is to ensure that the student's needs are taken into serious consideration. In this sense, the IEP is a primary tool for ensuring equal opportunities, as regards the National Curriculum, for students with special educational needs because of disability” (from: New Policy on Inclusion of Students with a Disability).

## **Professional Training - Certificate in Education for Learning Support**

Due to the ambitious character of the inclusive education policy, its effectiveness has requested the development of a wide range of key factors, including specialised personnel and training provision; concretely:

- professional training for school personnel to prepare IEPs;
- training for schools' management teams to embrace the notion of inclusion and incorporate subsequent measures in the School Development Plan;
- the setting up of a cadre of Inclusion Co-ordinators, specialised teachers who may identify and assist vulnerable students from an early stage, co-ordinate the provision of classroom support for students with a disability and assist schools to develop the capability of IEPs preparation and review;
- producing Learning Support Assistants/Facilitators to help educate these pupils with special needs across the curriculum.

Measures have been taken in order to ensure that staff is efficiently trained. The Division of Education stated that all categories of personnel who support students with a disability at the classroom level should follow a University tailor-made course leading to a "Certificate in Education for Learning Support". The Certificate was designed for all the Learning Support Assistants to be fully trained and qualified to support students with special needs to receive their educational entitlement.

According to the Ministry of Education, the Facilitator has the following responsibilities and duties: (from: Annual Reports of Government Departments – 2004 / Education Division)

### ***Learning Support:***

- Supports and collaborates with the class teacher and other colleagues in the education of all pupils in class and, in particular, pupils with special educational needs so that individual curricular needs are catered for;
- Fully participates in the development, implementation and review of an individualised educational programme (IEP) for pupils with special educational needs including recording and reporting progress of such IEPs on a regular basis;
- Helps in the preparation of educational materials and plays an active part in all the components of the instructional and educational process in class;
- In collaboration with the class teacher, participates in the observation, assessment and documentation process of the performance and behaviour of included learners as well as in their respective individual transition programmes as they move through the educational levels;
- In collaboration with specialists, teachers and parents, promotes an inclusive community of learners where all pupils are valued and respected.

### ***Personal Support:***

- Supports pupils with special needs in their personal care and hygiene needs;
- Seeing to the mobility, posture and seating needs of pupils as required (subject to the international guidelines on weightlifting and wheelchair pushing);
- Ensures the maximum educational benefit and safety for individual pupils by providing them with assistance during physical education, games, excursions and therapy sessions, as well as normal feeding during breaks and at other times as required;

Other measures related to specialised staff provision in regular school had to do with providing personnel to stand-in for Facilitators absence (due to illness or emergency leave) to ensure that

students with a disability are not forced to remain at home. Another new provision consists of a transition programme for students with a disability who are moving from primary to secondary education and from secondary to post-secondary opportunities.

### **Reform of Special Schools into Resource Centres**

Recent changes in the Maltese inclusive education and special education sector also include transforming former Special Schools into “Resource Centres”. Such reform consists on the organisational restructurisation of special schools that cater for children with acute special needs, including more resources for teachers in Resource Centres and a more efficient distribution of these resources; and the centralisation of services offered to children with disabilities. The reform also considers the setting up of a curriculum which reflects the National Minimum Curriculum for these children, as well as training for Early Intervention Teachers and recruiting of Assistant Heads for these Resource Centres.

The Division of Education is currently providing training courses for all levels of personnel in Resource Centres, and is offering distance learning opportunities for a number of personnel who are interested in pursuing courses of studies in a specific area of special educational needs.

### **Project for establishing national Attainment Levels**

Finally, a research project has been launched to examine and analyse the attainment levels obtained by students in Resource Centres and establish National Attainment Levels for children with acute special needs.

### **Outcomes, Evaluation and Official Recommendations**

General evaluation of the Maltese Educational System Reform regarding Inclusive and Special Education seems positive so far, since most measures reviewed above were recommended by several education experts in reply to a survey from the Epasi Spanish team (including Marisa Scerri, Director of Policy Development and Programme Implementation from the Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity; Raymond Camilleri, Director of Curriculum Management from the Education Division; and Kevin Bonello, vice-president of the Maltese Union of Teachers).

According to these sources, the impact of these initiatives are or will be reflected in the following benefits:

The inclusion of pupils with a disability in regular schools has helped these students to integrate better with their fellow students as well as helping them in understanding and learning in a more effective manner.

Measures addressed at staff training, and concretely the design of a Certificate for Learning Support Assistants has resulted in better facilitation of lessons and better focused teaching for students with special needs.

The transformation of Special Schools into Resource Centres and the creation of National Attainment Levels for these centres imply more resources for teachers in Resource Centres; an increase in efficiency in the distribution of resources; more efficient network services; detailed and professional guidelines for Special School Teachers and increase in efficiency and professionalism in the Early Intervention Programme.

In general terms, the whole reform has resulted in a better service for children with disabilities, new schemes of work and resources available for teachers and an increase in efficiency in resource administration for the benefit of students, parents and teachers.

However, the provision of some of these measures has been criticised either for lacking the proper coordination for their correct implementation or for not reaching all the population that needs them.

The main report of the National Action Plan on Poverty and Social Inclusion 2004-06 noted that, although “The Education Division provides classroom learning support by facilitators to students with a disability, promoting inclusion in the mainstream education, this service is not attracting the number of professional trained personnel required and the cadre of facilitators lacks an effective central co-ordination mechanism”. The document states that The Ministry of Education would conduct a review of Inclusive and Special education to analyse service provision (in: [http://ec.europa.eu/employment\\_social/social\\_inclusion/docs/nap\\_incl\\_2004\\_mt\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/social_inclusion/docs/nap_incl_2004_mt_en.pdf)).

The recently created Commissioner for Children – Malta, explained in a 2006 report that “there is currently no rehabilitation programme for children and young people with ‘very’ challenging behaviour in Malta. Children and young people with these problems usually end up in Mount Carmel Psychiatric Hospital, often being admitted to adult wards. If they commit crimes they end up in the Young Persons Unit of the Corradino Correctional Facilities. Both institutions are seen to be inappropriate for children and young people with such behaviour” (from: Report for ENOC Annual Meeting, Developments and Achievements September 2005 – August 2006). One of the aims of the Commissioner has been to put forward a set of proposals of how children and young people with very challenging behaviour could be helped and assisted in a dignified manner, since the Maltese services, including the Education System, were not offering solutions to address the rehabilitation of this specific population with special needs.

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## Appendix 1. Structure of Maltese Education System (3 to 18 years)

Stage	Age level	Length	Type of school providing this education
Pre-Primary	3 to 5	2 years	Kindergartens attached to Primary Schools
Primary	5 to 11	6 years	Primary Schools
Secondary-Orientation cycle	11 to 13	2 years	Junior Lyceum; General Area Secondary Schools; 'Opportunity schools'
Upper Secondary-Specialisation cycle	13 to 16	3 years	Upper-Secondary School
Tertiary	16 to 18	2 years	Sixth Form-Upper Lyceum; Vocational Schools

### *Pre-School Education (3 to 5)*

Pre-primary education is co-educational, full time and provided in kindergarten centres that are attached to primary Schools and fall under the responsibility of the Head of the primary School. Although attendance at this level is voluntary, about 95 percent of the national student population aged between 3 and 5 years attend.

### *Primary Education (5 to 11)*

Primary schooling marks the beginning of compulsory attendance; it is co-educational and lasts for 6 years. Classes never exceed 30 pupils, and the school size varies from small centres with less than 100 students to larger schools with approximately 800 students (including Kindergarten pupils). The core subjects at this level are Maltese, Maths, Science, Social Studies, Religious Education, Physical Education and the Expressive Arts. Recent years (2000-2007) have seen the gradual introduction of technology education at the primary level. Streaming is practised during the last 2 years. At the end of year 6 (at the age of 11) students generally sit for a qualifying national examination and proceed to secondary education.

### *Secondary Education (11 to 16)*

Secondary education is available for students who successfully complete primary education, and consists of a 5 year period divided into a 2-year orientation cycle and a 3-year cycle of specialisation. In the first 2 years classes may have up to 30 students, while in the last 3 years classes may not have more than 25 pupils. State and Church secondary schools are single sex, and most schools have a population of less than 550 students.

Secondary studies can be provided by 3 type of centres: those pupils who pass national examinations at the end of primary are admitted into Junior Lyceums, which are schools for higher achievers, while the other students go into General Area Secondary Schools (since 1994/95, the first cycle in Area Secondary Schools is of 3 instead of 2 year duration, while the second cycle consists of 2 years). There is also a special provision for low achievers ('Opportunity schools') who receive a simplified and less demanding type of secondary education.

At the end of year 5 of secondary, pupils sit for the Matriculation Secondary Education Certificate (MATSEC), which enables successful students to move on to tertiary education (Upper Lyceums/Sixth Form) and which leads to access to University. In addition, after 3 years of secondary schooling, students can opt to go to Trade Schools (a system which leads either to employment or to further technical education and training through apprenticeship schemes). Students in Trade Schools sit for local craft-level examinations, and some attempt to get UK-based City and Guilds certificates. Following the reform of the Trade School sector, Trade School students are also encouraged to sit for the MATSEC examination.

Malta is among the EU countries with the highest share of early school leavers (followed closely by Spain), however a higher share of early school leavers in both Malta and Spain attained at least the lower secondary level, rather than only primary (Commission of the European Communities, 2006). While the share of young people with upper secondary education has increased comparatively little



in many countries in Europe some countries, Malta has made considerable progress in the recent past.

*Post Secondary –Tertiary- Education (16 to 18)*

More than 54 percent of Maltese students continue with their education and training after the age of 16. Following the compulsory school cycle, post-secondary education leads both to the academic route and the vocational route (secondary students can choose to proceed through Sixth Form to University, or to one of the several specialised Vocational Schools and to employment). Vocational courses range from technical studies (mechanic, wood-working, etc) to public sectors (tourism, health care, nautical, agricultural) and private sectors (hairdressing, beauty therapy and secretarial studies). Students in the post-secondary sector may also receive financial stipends, apart from free tuition. The State Post-Secondary sector is presently made up of the Junior College, which is administered by the University of Malta, and one other school at Naxxar.

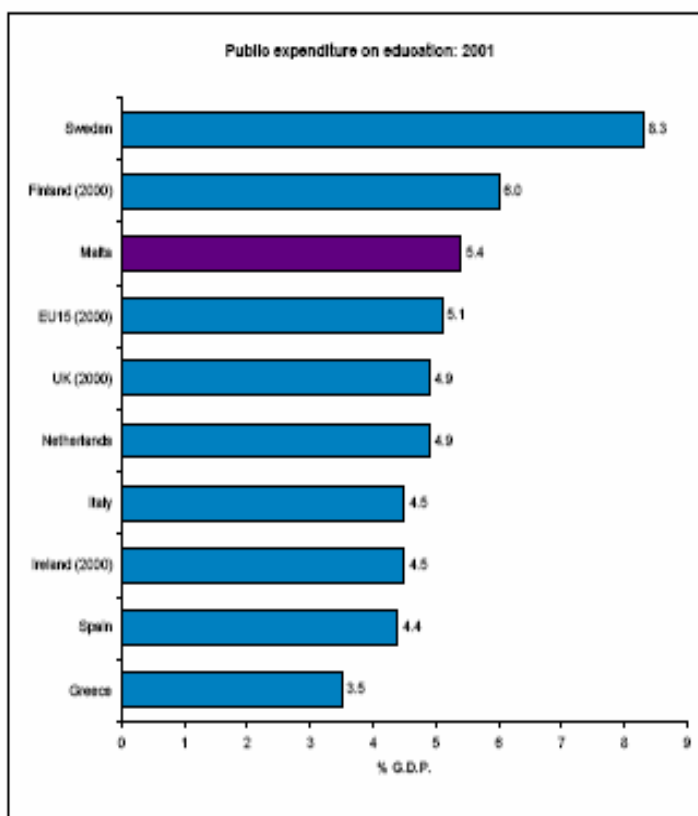
## Appendix 2. Maltese Educational Statistics

(Source: National Statistics Office)

17. Public expenditure on education: 2001

Country	2001
Greece	3.5
Spain	4.4
Ireland (2000)	4.5
Italy	4.5
Netherlands	4.9
UK (2000)	4.9
EU15 (2000)	5.1
Malta	5.4
Finland (2000)	6.0
Sweden	8.3

Source: National Accounts, N80  
Eurostat



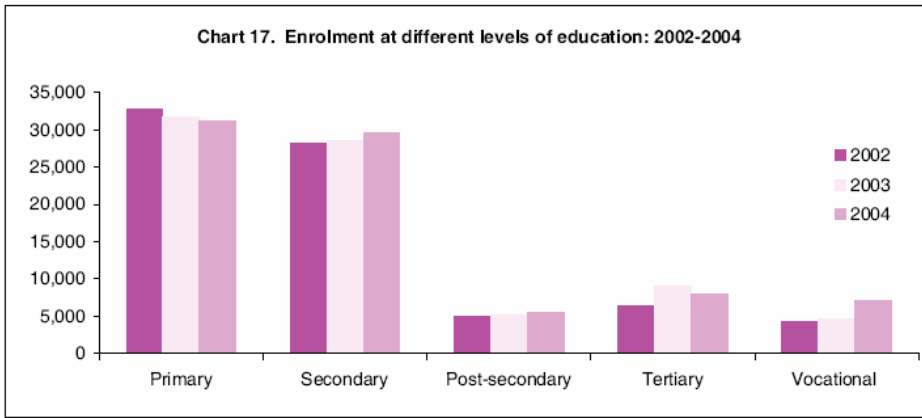
### Definition:

Public expenditure on education as a percentage of the total Gross Domestic Product.

## Enrolment at different levels of education (2002-2004)

Level	Primary	Secondary	Post-secondary	Tertiary	Vocational*
<b>2002 Total</b>	<b>32,717</b>	<b>28,126</b>	<b>4,973</b>	<b>6,362</b>	<b>4,262</b>
Males	16,946	14,302	2,705	3,159	2,764
Females	15,771	13,824	2,268	4,173	1,026
<b>2003 Total</b>	<b>31,708</b>	<b>28,560</b>	<b>5,169</b>	<b>9,006</b>	<b>4,635</b>
Males	16,454	14,443	2,298	3,888	3,168
Females	15,254	14,117	2,871	5,118	1,467
<b>2004 Total</b>	<b>31,064</b>	<b>29,540</b>	<b>5,479</b>	<b>7,955</b>	<b>7,041</b>
Males	16,084	14,988	2,318	3,515	5,063
Females	14,980	14,552	3,161	4,440	1,978

\* Including post-secondary vocational courses. Vocational education comprises technical institutes, trade schools, the Institute of Tourism Studies, the Kindergarten Assistants' Training Centre and MCAST from (2001)



**Percentage of early school-leavers\* (2002-2004)**

Year	Males	Females	Total
2002	53.0	50.9	52.0
2003	51.7	48.2	50.0
2004	45.2	39.9	42.6

\*'School-leavers' refers to persons between 18-24 years who have achieved lower secondary school level or less and who are not in further education. This indicator has been calculated as a percentage of the total population in the same age bracket.