



LITERACY IN MALTA

COUNTRY REPORT

CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

March 2016

This document has been published by the European Literacy Policy Network (ELINET).

The report was completed in 2016.

The contents of this publication may be reproduced in part, except for commercial purposes, provided the extract is preceded by a reference to "Elinet", followed by the date of publication of the document.

Main authors (in alphabetical order):

Charles Mifsud, Rositsa Petrova, Christine Garbe, Dominique Lafontaine, Gerry Shiel, Renate Valtin

Contributing authors (in alphabetical order):

Ana Arqueiro, Valeria Balbinot, Ariane Baye, Juliana Cunha, Maria Lourdes Trindade Dionísio, Claudia Fischer, Stéphanie Géron, Eithne Kennedy, Maija Koikkalainen, Maria Kovacs, Gudmundur Kristmundsson, Dominique Lafontaine, Gina Lemos, Heikki Lyytinen, George Manolitsis, Carmen González Martí, David Muscat, Fabio Nascimbeni, Lea Nieminen, Franziska Pitschke, Helin Puksand, Sari Sulkunen, Eufimia Tafa, Giorgio Tamburlini, Anne Uusen, Ariana-Stanca Văcărețu, Corina Volcinschi, Christina Wagner, Esther Wiesner

Coordinator of the ELINET-Project:

University of Cologne

Prof. Dr. Christine Garbe

Institut für Deutsche Sprache und Literatur

Richard-Strauss-Str. 2

50931 Köln – Cologne

Germany

christine.garbe@uni-koeln.de

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1 Introduction

This report on the state of literacy in Malta is one of a series produced in 2015 and 2016 by ELINET, the European Literacy Policy Network. ELINET was founded in February 2014 and has 78 partner organisations in 28 European countries¹. ELINET aims to improve literacy policies in its member countries in order to reduce the number of children, young people and adults with low literacy skills. One major tool to achieve this aim is to produce a set of reliable, up-to-date and comprehensive reports on the state of literacy in each country where ELINET has one or more partners, and to provide guidance towards improving literacy policies in those countries. The reports are based (wherever possible) on available, internationally comparable performance data, as well as reliable national data provided (and translated) by our partners.

ELINET continues the work of the European Union High Level Group of Experts on Literacy (HLG) which was established by the European Commission in January 2011 and reported in September 2012². All country reports produced by ELINET use a common theoretical framework which is described here: "ELINET Country Reports – Frame of Reference"³.

The Country Reports about Children and Adolescents are organised around the three recommendations of the HLG's literacy report:

- Creating a literate environment
- Improving the quality of teaching
- Increasing participation, inclusion (and equity⁴).

Within its two-year funding period ELINET has completed Literacy Country Reports for all 30 ELINET member countries. In most cases we published separate **Long Reports** for specific age groups (Children / Adolescents and Adults), in some cases comprehensive reports covering all age groups. Additionally, for all 30 countries, we published **Short Reports** covering all age groups, containing the summary of performance data and policy messages of the Long Reports. These reports are accompanied by a collection of good practice examples which cover all age groups and policy areas as well. These examples refer to the **European Framework of Good Practice in Raising Literacy Levels;** both are to be found in the section "Good Practice"⁵.

¹ For more information about the network and its activities see: www.eli-net.eu.

² In the following, the final report of the EU High Level Group of Experts on Literacy is referenced as "HLG report". This report can be downloaded under the following link: http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/school/doc/literacy-report_en.pdf.

³ See: <http://www.eli-net.eu/research/country-reports/>.

⁴ "Equity" was added by ELINET.

⁵ See: <http://www.eli-net.eu/good-practice/>.

2 Executive Summary

LITERACY PERFORMANCE DATA

Malta has started participating in international assessment first in PISA 2009+ (reading literacy of 15 year-old students) and then in PIRLS 2011 (reading comprehension of 10 year-old students). Malta also took part in PISA 2016 but the results will be available later this year. Therefore, the date provided in the report does not present changes of reading proficiency over time and it is based only the results of the latest reports.

In PIRLS 2011, students in Malta achieved a mean score on overall reading literacy (477) that was significantly below the EU-24 average of 535. Performance was lower on Literacy texts (470), compared with Informational texts (485), and about the same on the Retrieve & Inference (479) and Interpret, Integrate & Evaluate (475) process subscales. In Malta, 45% of students performed at or below the Low PIRLS benchmark on overall reading – the highest among the EU-24, where the average was 20%. Just 4% of students in Malta performed at the Advanced PIRLS benchmark, compared with an EU-24 average of 9%.

In Malta, the difference between the scores of students at the 10th and 90th percentiles on the PIRLS overall reading scale was 254 points, some 74 points above the EU-24 average of 180. This is indicative of a greater inequality of reading outcomes in Malta than on average across the EU-24, and may reflect students' varied experience with the language of the PIRLS test (English) at home and at school. In PIRLS 2011, girls in Malta achieved a mean score on overall reading literacy that was 18 points higher than boys. This difference exceeds the EU-24 average of 12 points in favour of girls.

Challenge: Fewer students in Malta than the EU-24 average were engaged daily or almost daily in strategies such as identifying main ideas of what they have read, making generalisations and inferences, describing the style or structure of the text, and determining the author's purpose or intention. This may require reconsideration of both the National Curriculum which deals with language education and teacher preparation. Language education methods which put increased emphasis on textual analyses are to be promoted. Language teachers are to be prepared to implement such strategies.

Results from PISA 2009

According to PISA 2009+ around 88% of 15-year old students in Malta speak Maltese at home and the rest use English. There is no information about the percentage of students and their reading performance based on the language/s they speak at home.

Malta performed 43 points lower than the EU average in PISA 2009+. The pupils whose proficiency level is below level 2 in Malta are 36.3% which is significantly higher than the OECD average of 18.8. The percentage of pupils who performed on level 5 and above is 4.5% which is lower than the OECD average (7.6%).

The Maltese educational system is comprised of different types of schools: state, private church and private independent. The overall performance of female students in reading across the schools is higher than that of male students attending the same school type.

According to PISA 2009+ girls in all the participating countries attained a significantly higher score in reading than boys. However, gender difference in reading performance in Malta was much higher than the EU countries average, 72 scale points compared to an OECD average of 39. The scores in reading varied significantly between schools. The results of girls in private schools were significantly higher than the EU and OECD averages. However, the mean scores in reading attained by male students attending private schools, female students in Junior Lyceums and students of both sexes in Church schools were similar to EU and OECD average reading scores. Male students in Junior Lyceums and students of both sexes Area secondary schools attained over 100 points less than their peers.

There is a difference of 105 points between the reading scores of pupils who were highly engaged in reading (top quartile), and those who were poorly engaged (bottom quartile). The students who were engaged in reading more often attained significantly higher reading scores in the PISA 2009+ test. The difference between the reading scores of the most and least engaged in reading students in Malta was relatively close to the EU average.

Challenge: For Malta a big gender difference in reading performance resulted for both 10 year-olds (PIRLS 2011) and for 15 year-olds (PISA 2009+). In PIRLS 2011, 16% of the Maltese pupils stated that they did not like reading. In PISA 2009+, 34% of the pupils reported that they did not read for pleasure outside of school, and 29.4% spend only 30 minutes or less per day in reading for enjoyment.

PISA findings have shown that reading for pleasure and reading performance are correlated (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2013). Therefore, it is necessary to develop more effective methods to increase the reading motivation of pupils, especially that of boys. All the stakeholders: families, teachers, schools and libraries require more support to promote the reading habits of students both at school and beyond.

KEY LITERACY POLICY AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT (AGE-SPECIFIC AND ACROSS AGE-GROUPS)

Creating a Literate Environment

The EU High Level Group of Experts on Literacy stated the following in relation to **creating a more literate environment**:

“Creating a more literate environment will help stimulate a culture of reading, i.e. where **reading for pleasure** is seen as the norm for all children and adults. Such a culture will fuel reading motivation and reading achievement: people who like to read, read more. Because they read more, they read better, and because they read better they read more: a virtuous circle which benefits individuals, families and society as a whole.” (HLG report 2012, p. 41).

Parents play a central role in children’s emergent literacy development. They are the first teachers, and shape children’s language and communication abilities and attitudes to reading by being good reading role models, providing reading materials, and reading to the child.

Schools play an important role in offering a literate environment for students. Schools may foster reading motivation and reading for pleasure in many ways. However, schools do not have sole responsibility. A broad range of actors may shape literacy motivation, from parents and peers to libraries. Particularly this is true in adolescence as it is a crucial phase in life where young people develop long-term *identities and self-concepts* related to reading and media use (Cf. ELINET Country Reports, Frame of Reference, pp. 29ff, 45f).

Pre-Primary Years

Creating a literate environment at home: The home learning environment, particularly in the first three years, is extremely important (Brooks et al. 2012). It determines the quantity and quality of interactions between the infant and the primary caregivers, who are the most powerful agents of language development, both receptive and expressive, in the context of everyday activities and experiences. During these years, experience-dependent creation of synapses is maximal. We know that the more words the children are exposed to, the more they can learn. Caregiver-child relations in their turn strongly influence the ability to learn, by influencing self-esteem, general knowledge and motivation.

According to PIRLS 2011 the number of students in Malta whose parents have positive attitudes towards reading (46.5%) is above the European average (35.3%). There are only 8% of the parents who do not like reading, which is significantly less than the European average (17.9%). The importance of parental attitudes to reading is shown by the fact that in Malta there are significant differences in reading performance at Year 4 between children whose parents like to read (average achievement 499) and those who do not (average achievement 460).

Challenge: One of the goals of the National Literacy Strategy (2014) is to “make provision for training courses for parents/caregivers to enable them to support the literacy development of their children”, and to implement “family-friendly measures to enable families to be included in the support and intervention process of children with learning and literacy difficulties” (Ministry for Education and

Employment, 2014d, p.16). The Strategy advocates for strengthening of literacy programmes within and outside schools. It seeks also to increase the involvement of parents and strengthen the role of libraries in the literacy development of children. In this regard a number of family literacy programmes have been implemented in recent years, like Aqra Mieghi/Read with Me. These serve also as parental education programmes in the area of literacy.

Children and Adolescents

Creating a literate environment in school: PIRLS 2011 showed that 89.7% of students in Malta were in classrooms which had class library, which was above the EU-24 average of 72.9% (ELINET PIRLS 2011 Appendix, Table H2). 48.7% of students were in classrooms which had more than 50 books, and which is above the EU-24 average of 32.1% (ibid.). Additionally, 75.1% of students were taken on a visit to the public library by their teachers at least once a month, compared to the EU-24 average of 65%. (Mullis et al. 2012a, exh. 8.13, p.240; EU averages from PIRLS 2011 database, s. Table H2 in Appendix C).

Challenge: In PIRLS 2011 about 10% of the students in Malta reported not having a classroom library or that an insufficient number of books was available (50% had less than 50 books).

The National Literacy Strategy (2014) promotes the importance of increased literacy projects, funded by the government and other sources in order to improve the quality of home and school libraries and to extend their access and use. One such project: "Aqra Kemm Tiflaħ" ("Mobilising classroom libraries") run by the National Literacy Agency is specifically intended to provide 100 books in Maltese and English to every Primary classroom.

Offering digital literacy learning opportunities in schools (and other public spaces, e.g. libraries): The National Literacy Strategy recommends that all stakeholders should be involved in the development of language and literacy through digital technologies. Increased training is being provided to teachers and parents to enable them to support their children in the use of digital technologies.

The eContent available for schools is to be adapted better to the needs of the learners and schools are to be supported to be able to do this. A pilot project involving one to one technologies, namely tablets has been implemented and reviewed.

Strengthening the role of public libraries: Students should be made more aware of the benefits using a library. A current programme is that of "Living libraries" which collaborates with formal and non-formal educational institutions. The project focuses on young people. People from different industries make presentations and the young people are encouraged to create living installations using audio-visual material based on different information sources as well as self-produced print (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014d, p. 43).

Improving literate environments for children and adolescents: Programmes, initiatives and examples: Reading to children is a predictor of their future literacy achievement. The Maltese government recognizes this and through the National Literacy Agency is extending the current early and family literacy programmes to increase awareness among parents about the importance of literacy skills in the early years. These programmes are aimed mainly at families with a low socio-economic status. They are intended to improve children's literacy and socio-emotional development as well as to encourage the involvement of parents and caregivers in the literacy development of their children (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014d, p. 10).

The National Literacy Agency of Malta is responsible for promoting and implementing the National Literacy Strategy for All in Malta and Gozo (2014). It collaborates with other government departments and non-governmental organizations to promote literacy as widely as possible. Some of the activities organised by the Agency are:

Aqra Miegħi/Read with Me is a literacy programme for families with children from 0 to 3 years. It is offered in 50 centres in Malta and Gozo⁶;

Seħer l-Istejjer/ The Magic of Stories is a family literacy programme intended for children of 4 to 6 years and their parents.;

Aqra kemm Tiflaħ seeks to provide attractive, high quality and high interest books to classroom libraries in primary and middle schools;

Aqra fis-Sajf/Summer Reading is a programme held during the summer in order to promote the love for reading while the students are not at school;

Reading Ambassadors is a programme which involves popular Maltese personalities who promote a love for reading in schools;

Reading Champions is a national contest for students from Middle schools. It encourages them to act as role models to their peers and to promote the importance of reading in both Maltese and English. Struggling readers who make an effort to read are rewarded too.

NWAR is an afterschool programme for children and their parents. The sessions are usually held at the local library or the local council.

Improving the Quality of Teaching

The quality of teaching consists of several aspects:

- the quality of preschool
- coherent literacy curricula
- high-quality reading instruction,
- early identification of and support for struggling literacy learners
- highly qualified teachers (cf. Frame of Reference for ELINET Country Reports).

Particularly crucial is the quality of teaching and of teachers, as the report *How the world best performing school systems come out on top* (McKinsey et al. 2007) states: "The quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers". In this regard one is to note recent developments in the preparation of teachers and their continuing professional development. As from 2016 all newly-qualified teachers in Malta will be required to obtain a Master's in Teaching and Learning (MTL). The continuing professional development of teachers will be managed by the Institute for Education of the Ministry for Education set up in 2015.

Pre-Primary Years

Improving the quality of preschool education: So far early childhood educators in Malta were expected to have 2 years of post-secondary relevant training at ISCED 4 (European Commission/

⁶ See: <http://aqrastorja.skola.edu.mt/>.

EACEA/Eurydice/Eurostat 2014, p. 101). As from 2015/2016 they will be expected to obtain a Bachelor degree, which involves either four years of University study or two years of University study for holders of the MCAST-BTEC Higher National Diploma in Advanced Studies in Early Years (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2014, p. 180).

Malta is one of the 13 countries referred to in the "Teaching reading in Europe" (2011) report which gave emergent literacy a very comprehensive coverage in their curricula. The Maltese guidelines for kindergarten education state that the child needs to develop a number of skills and concepts to be able to learn to read and write in both Maltese and English (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2015).

The Maltese early childhood settings offer the children both print-rich and digital environment which is stimulating the development of their language and literacy skills in a meaningful and purposeful context (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2015). The libraries in the classrooms are perceived as an integral part of the classroom environment and their role in children's literacy development is highly valued (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014b, p. 35).

Both the National Literacy Strategy and the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) recognise the importance of oracy as a precursor of literacy. Parents have an important role to play in this regard. The NCF states that by the end of the Early Years Cycle (Year 2): children should be able to use different forms of media for communication; should be able to engage with texts and be aware of the purpose and use of print materials; should be familiar with numbers, symbols and patterns and their use; should be aware of both language systems used in Malta; should know how to engage appropriately with digital literacy etc. (Ministry of Education and Employment, 2012, p. 22).

Children and Adolescents

Improving Literacy Curricula and Reading instruction in schools: In Malta, reading is taught as part of the language curriculum in Maltese and in English (Mullis et al. 2012b, Vol.1, exhibit 5, p. 30, 31). In the rationale for the current primary curriculum for English at Years 1 – 6⁷, it is stated that "the four language modes/skills should be integrated in an approach whereby every lesson should ideally incorporate listening, speaking, reading and writing", and teachers are advised to "use activities that promote receptive skills (Listening and Reading) which lead to productive skills (Speaking and Writing)".

The integration of language activities is also supported by the recommendation in the curriculum rationale to develop thematic and cross-curricular approaches whereby the following modes are to be integrated: linguistic (vocabulary and grammatical) structures, viewing and listening comprehension, speaking including intonation and pronunciation, reading, writing, and effective use of information technology.

During the secondary school years, literacy remains one of the primary themes within the National Curriculum Framework (2011) and language is still considered as the main instrument for this to happen. Therefore, all teachers are expected to recognise the importance of language and literacy competence in all subjects. However, the proportion of time allocated to the teaching of Maltese and English at secondary level is low when compared to the primary level. This is also due to the wide range of subjects which are included in the secondary school curriculum.

⁷ See: <https://curriculum.gov.mt/en/Curriculum/Years-1-to-6/Pages/default.aspx>.

The teaching in Malta is done mainly through predetermined curriculum content and textbooks. However, the teachers are at liberty to choose the teaching activities and methods (Key Data on Education in Europe). The areas which require further improvement and are identified by the National Literacy Strategy For All (2014) are the following:

- assessing the situation in literacy and drawing up action plans; promoting Balanced Literacy teaching and learning;
- providing more Reading Time developing literacy performance portfolio for students with literacy difficulties;
- developing Alternative Learning Programmes;
- extending school libraries;
- increasing the opportunities for capacity building and continuous professional development;
- promoting dyslexia-friendly schools;
- promoting programmes in Basic skills intended for young people;
- more effective use of new technologies and social networks in the teaching of literacy

Digital literacy as part of the curriculum for primary and secondary schools: Digital literacy is part of the curriculum in Malta. All schools are required to follow the National Curriculum Framework (2012). There are national strategies covering training measures for ICT in schools, digital/media literacy, e-skills development, training research projects in e-learning and e-inclusion. There are central steering documents for all ICT learning objectives. According to these official steering documents, students and teachers should use ICT in all subjects in class and for complementary activities. At secondary level ICT is also taught as a separate subject. In Malta ICT is integrated into the secondary school curriculum as a cross-curricular competence. Students are required to acquire skills related to email and programming, and to learn to recognize, to understand as well as to compare and to select useful information (Ministry of Education and Employment, 2012). Teacher education and continuing professional development courses are provided to educators (European Schoolnet, 2013).

Challenge: The National Literacy Strategy suggests that all stakeholders should be involved in the development of language and literacy through digital technologies. Increased training is being provided to teachers and parents to enable them to support their children in the use of digital technologies.

The eContent available for schools is to be adapted better to the needs of the learners and schools are to be supported to be able to do this. A pilot project involving one to one technologies, namely tablets has been implemented and reviewed (Ministry of Education and Employment, Malta (2015) Report on the Tablet's Pilot Study in Maltese Primary Schools).

Early identification of and support for struggling literacy learners: The State's School Psychological Services provides psycho-educational assessment and intervention service for students with regard to physical, mental, perceptual, emotional and behavioural difficulties. They collaborate with Child Development Assessment Unit on the assessment and identification of pupils with special needs (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2014). There are national benchmarking examinations at Year 6 for speaking, listening, reading comprehension and writing in both Maltese and English.

The Education Act (2013) states that the Minister shall ensure that the national policy on inclusive education is being applied in all schools, and that the resources, tools and facilities required are available, so that such an education may be given as effectively as possible. The Minister shall also

ensure that a) there exist specialised Centres of Resources, which support schools and colleges in the implementation of the policy of inclusive education by giving service to students who have specific learning difficulties, and b) other Centres, which provide education and training services to students with individual educational needs whose educational entitlement may be better achieved in such centres. (Part 5: §58 – 1 & 2).

Challenge: It seems that although a solid and robust assessment regime is in place, further work needs to be done with regard to designing and implementing research-based, age-appropriate educational intervention, and better coordination among the relevant service providers. This would ensure that a larger number of students register the required educational progress.

The National Literacy Strategy for All (2014) seeks to enhance the literacy skills of Maltese learners. The main actions implemented include research groups to address areas of relevance, national reading campaigns, increased opportunities for reading time, and the use of new technologies in the teaching and learning of literacy.

The Strategic Plan for the Prevention of Early School Leaving in Malta seeks to extend the use of mobile technologies and e-learning in schools, in order to meet better the needs of students at risk of failure (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014b, pp. 24–25). It suggests also a school-based Alternative Learning Programme to be established for students whose learning needs are not catered for by the ordinary mainstream curriculum (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014b, p. 41).

Improving the quality of pre-service and in-service teacher education: From October 2016, teachers in Malta will be trained at Master's level. Besides knowledge of their subject, trainee teachers need to acquire professional skills. Their professional education includes both theoretical studies (the educational theory of teaching, psychology, etc.) and practical training in schools, the observation of teaching, and possibly some time spent assuming direct responsibility for it. Most countries specify a minimum period for professional training. The main model for minimum professional training, including in-school placements (in ECTS) in Malta is of 90 credits, the minimum in-school placements is of 30 credits. Other existing model including in-school placements (in ECTS) in Malta is of 60 credits, the minimum in-school placement is of 20 credits.

In Malta prospective teachers follow specific modules in reading and writing difficulties for young learners and for adolescents (Faculty of Education, University of Malta Course Programmes, 2015⁸).

Throughout the year CPD in literacy is organised for classroom and specialist teachers on a monthly basis by the National Literacy Agency. So far the provision of CPD in Malta has been somewhat sporadic and fragmenting. In 2015 an Institute of Professional Development in Education has been set up. This will seek to offer CPD on a systematic and structured basis in order to meet the actual needs of educators and educational administrators.

Challenge: When compared to the most European countries, early childhood educators in Malta have generally lower qualifications. Early childhood education in Malta needs more qualified teachers (in possession of at least a Bachelor degree). Moreover, the early childhood educators, who are already in employment, should receive additional professional development.

⁸ See: <http://www.um.edu.mt/educ/programme/UBEHPRE-2010-1-O>.

Research shows that it is beneficial to have male teachers working in early childhood education settings. Therefore, a concerted effort should be made to recruit more male early childhood educators (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2014).

There exists already a Quality Assurance Department (QAD) within the Ministry for Education, which seeks to ensure that educational standards are maintained in schools. The Quality Assurance function of the Council for the Teaching Profession is to be strengthened further.

Initial teacher education in Malta requires a more specific focus on literacy acquisition and development. Whereas, this is the case to some extent for the language areas and subjects, increased emphasis on literacy is to be put in the initial teacher education curricula for non-language areas and subjects. Specific attention needs to be given also to bilingual and plurilingual issues.

Improving the quality of literacy instruction: Programmes, initiatives and examples: Based on PIRLS 2011, 80.8% of the students in Malta were taught by teachers who implemented instructional practices to engage learning in “most lessons”, which indicates a high level of engagement in the Maltese classrooms. However, the proportion of students engaged in specific reading comprehension strategies is relatively low.

In 2011, pupils in Malta spent 891 hours per year on language and reading instruction at school when compared to the EU-24 average of 850 hours. Students in Malta spent 181 hours (about 20%) on instruction in the language of the PIRLS test, compared to an EU-24 average of 241 hours. In Malta, 37 instructional hours per year were spent on reading as part of the language programme, compared to the EU-24 average of 68. This EU-24 average is in itself low when compared to the averages of the United States and New Zealand (both 131 hours). Teachers in Malta reported allocating less time to the teaching reading across the curriculum and in reading classes (103 instructional hours per year) when compared to the EU-24 average of 147 hours (PIRLS 2011- (Mullis, Martin, Kennedy et al., 2012, p. 214, Exhibit 8.4). EU averages from PIRLS 2011 database (see ELINET PIRLS 2011 Appendix, Table I3). According to Mullis et al., response rates from teachers in Malta were lower than expected on items dealing with instructional time. However, the Maltese curriculum specifies that 15% of instructional time (in Years 1-4) should be spent on language/reading time in English and 15% in Maltese (Mullis et al., 2012, Vol. 1, Exhibit 6).

A number of recommendations put forward by the National Literacy Strategy (2014) have been or are in the process of being implemented. These include:

- more research needs to be conducted in the area of bilingualism and its implication of early literacy development in Malta;
- Literacy Teams led by a head of department in charge of literacy in consultation with the Education Officers for Maltese, English and Literacy and composed of class teachers, complementary and support teachers need to be set up within each College in Malta;
- the teams should use the Literacy Handbook procedures as a departure point and should also seek alternative ways of reaching their literacy targets;
- schools have to develop Literacy Action Plans;
- learners with literacy difficulties should be identified by the end of Year 3;
- Continuing Professional Development should be provided to all teachers, Learning Support Assistants and to the members of the Senior Management Team in order to prepare them for better planning, effective delivery and review of the implementation of the school-based literacy strategy.

Increasing Participation, Inclusion and Equity

The High Level Group of Experts on Literacy drew attention to persistent gaps in literacy, namely the gender gap, the socio-economic gap, and the migrant gap (HLG Final report 2012, pp. 46–50). These gaps derive from the reading literacy studies that repeatedly show unequal distribution of results among groups of children and adolescents (PIRLS, PISA).

Pre-Primary Years

Encouraging preschool attendance, especially for disadvantaged children: No child should be excluded from preschool because parents cannot afford to send their children to preschool/kindergarten institutions if they have to pay. Malta belongs to the half of the European countries where the entire period of ECEC is free. In April 2014, the entitlement to free ECEC provision was extended to all children of working/studying parents (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2014). Public kindergarten centres (attended by circa 98% of children) are also free of charge and even offer one glass of milk per child daily and one free portion of fruit or vegetables per week (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2014, p. 180).

Identification of and support for preschool children with language difficulties: The NCF National Curriculum Framework (2012) embraces diversity and promotes it through an inclusive environment. The NCF addresses the different needs of: gifted and talented learners; learners with special educational needs; learners with severe disabilities; learners from disadvantaged social backgrounds; learners from diverse social, cultural and linguistic backgrounds including children of refugees and asylum seekers. On-going support and professional development are provided for the teachers in order to ensure the provision of high quality education and a supportive infrastructure, providing the conditions and opportunities for learners to achieve their full potential and for teachers and administrators to implement the curriculum effectively.

A number of services for children with learning difficulties and disabilities are offered at school and within the community. These take the form of multidisciplinary assessment, statementing, complementary education, literacy enhancement programmes, and counselling. This policy seeks to ensure better integration and further development of the existing programmes. Courses building the child's language skills during daily routines and activities are also offered to parents, whose children are developing their language skills slower than the others (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2014).

Children and Adolescents

Support for children with special needs: Inclusive and special education in Malta is an educational priority. The regulations are reviewed frequently. Learning support is provided by LSAs. Specific training in this area is provided to class and support teachers. In 2007, the Student Services Department (SSD) in the Directorate for Educational Services (DES) was established. In 2008 service managers to administer the Inclusive Education Section, Special Education and Resource Centres and Psycho-Social Service were appointed. Learners with special needs are included at all levels of the educational system. Some of them manage to move also into tertiary education.

Support for migrant children and adolescents whose home language is not the language of school: In most of the Maltese state primary schools, complementary education and language teachers support the language learning of migrant learners in order to facilitate their social, cultural and educational integration. In the secondary sector some of them are given the opportunity to attend additional classes in Maltese and English or are assigned to a Core Competences Support Programme. Moreover, book-rich environments are promoted especially to learners and families lacking literacy materials at home (national literacy strategy).

In 2011, the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education (DQSE) set up a working group to develop a National Strategy addressing the different needs of migrant children with emphasis on language learning and identifying the particular communication problems which they experience. Some recommendations for work inside and outside the classroom were made and the children have the possibility to attend a year-long programme for developing basic language skills to help their integration in the schools. As a result of this a National Language Integration Unit was set up which engages language teachers for these specific purposes.

Preventing early school leaving: Under the Strategic plan for the Prevention of Early School Leaving in Malta, an Early School Leaving Working Group was established. The main objectives of the group are: to determine, coordinate and monitor services that address the needs of children and young people who are disengaged or at risk of disengaging in specific local conditions; ensure that pro-active preventive measures are in place; establish support mechanisms that parents, families and carers may require to better support children or young persons (Department of Curriculum Management, n.d.; Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014a). There are also annual, end-of-year examinations at secondary level.

Increasing participation, inclusion and equity for children and adolescents: Programmes, initiatives and examples

Programmes against poverty: The Maltese Education Strategy aligns all sectoral education strategies and policies. The aim of the strategy is to support educational achievement of children at-risk-of-poverty and from low socio-economic status, and to reduce the relatively high incidence of early school-leavers. It seeks to achieve this through:

- **Free Childcare Support Services** – since 1st of April 2014. The main beneficiaries of the scheme are working parents and parents who are still studying;
- **Breakfast Clubs for Children** – this is a complementary service offered to children one hour before the start of school (Employment Strategy, 2014 p. 65-66)

Moreover, Agenzia Sedqa, the National Social Support Agency, organises parenting skills courses, Inrabbu 'l Uliedna Aħjar, one for parents of children up to 10 years of age, and another one for parents of older children. Programmes promoting the literacy development of children through story-telling etc are also available for parents and caregivers (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014b).

Family literacy programmes for migrant parents: Parental involvement in the education of their children is considered to be an important factor for schools. This is especially the case for the parents of migrant children, who face many challenges. Schools are encouraged to organise specific programmes for the involvement of migrant parents. Some other schools organise meetings with community leaders. Many schools organise activities to promote multiculturalism in order to integrate better migrant students and their parents. For example one of the schools organises a multicultural

and a language awareness day. During these days children work on multicultural projects, which are then presented to the parents. Other strategies which are employed by schools to support and integrate migrant students and parents include: training of staff, learning support coordinators and assistants, mentors, school counselling, extra tuition in Maltese and English as a foreign language; integration programmes, classroom based initiatives, the Let Me Learn programme, sports activities, language clubs, guidance teachers, alternative learning programmes, etc. (UNHCR & Aditus, 2012).

Programmes to prevent early school leaving: In recent years a number of measures to prevent early school leaving as laid down by 'The Strategic Plan for the Prevention of Early School Leaving in Malta' have been implemented.

Challenges: The Strategic Plan for the Prevention of Early School Leaving in Malta suggested positive actions focused on making the school a positive and beneficial experience for all students. Such preventive measures are expected to have long-term effects. Some of them were:

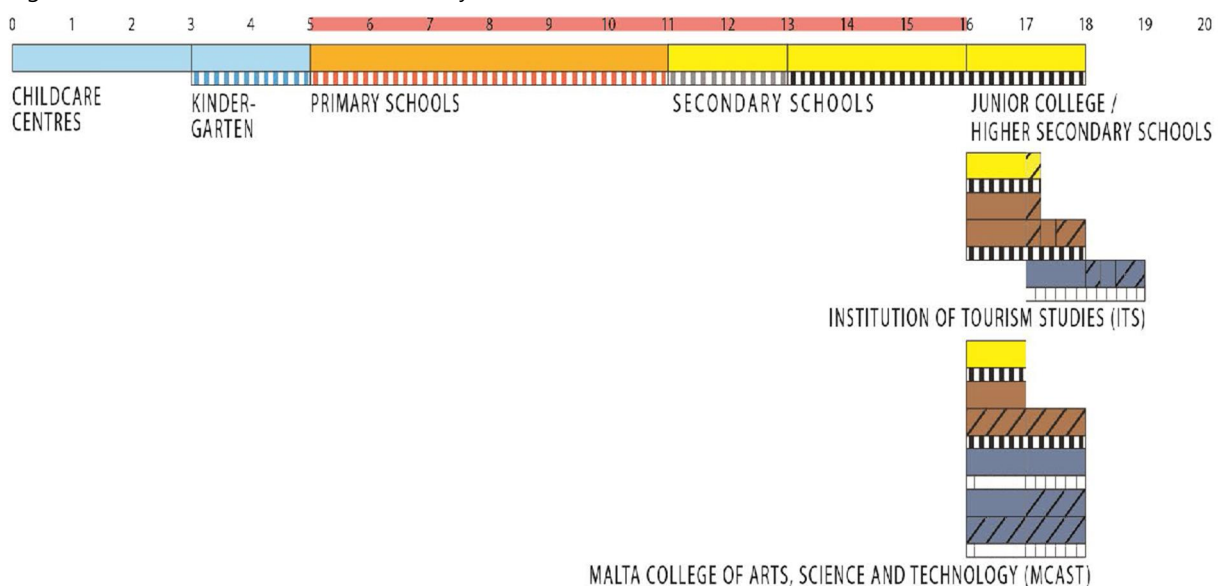
- providing free childcare;
- rendering schools relevant and of benefit for every student. Schools are to address the different needs of the students with different abilities, from different culture and of different ethnic origins;
- educating for and through diversity;
- meeting the needs of high achievers;
- creating caring community schools;
- supporting children at-risk through innovative teaching and learning tools, and school- and community-based solutions;
- developing e-Learning content to respond better respond to student learning needs;
- tapping mobile technology for increased student engagement. Tablets will be introduced as a teaching and learning tool in the Maltese classrooms;
- reintroducing vocational education in the secondary schools as an alternative learning path;
- providing of a good career guidance service, which will enable students to consider different learning possibilities and careers;
- strengthening the transition process across educational pathways;
- involving parents in the education of their children from an early age. Parental education is to be offered;
- supporting teachers to address the Early School Leaving challenges.

A number of these measures have been or are in the process of being implemented.

3 General Information about the Maltese Education System

Malta is an archipelago located in the central Mediterranean. The population is concentrated on the three main islands Malta, Gozo and Comino. A survey conducted by Sciriha and Vassallo (2001) indicates that Maltese is the first language for 98.6% of the Maltese population. However, 87% of the Maltese people claim to be proficient in English to various degrees – for example 31.7% of them state to use English well and 39.1% - very good. Maltese and English are used as a medium of instruction in different situations, and to varying degrees depending on the type of school (Michelli, 2001). Consequently, most of the Maltese pupils are able to understand and follow instructions in both languages to certain extent.

Figure 1: Structure of the Maltese School System⁹



The Maltese educational system promotes equity and quality as well as inclusive and free education to all from early childhood education and care to tertiary education in all state institutions. As from 2014 families with working parent/s are entitled to free childcare for children from the age of three months up to two years and nine months, provided by both state and private childcare entities. The school system has three main providers: the State, the Church and the Private sectors.

The Kindergarten centres are operated by the State, Church and Independent Schools and are for children between the ages of two years and nine months and five years. In 2013 the percentage of children from the age of four up to the beginning of compulsory school age attending Kindergarten reached 100%. Formal education in Malta is divided in four stages: early years (from 3 to 6 years), junior years (from 7 to 11 years), middle years (from 11 to 13 years) and secondary years (from 14 to 16 years). Most of the students (about 60%) attend State schools, around 30% attend Church schools and 10% attend the Independent schools. In the last three years of secondary school the students can opt to study one additional vocational subject. After completing their secondary education the

⁹ see Structure of European education systems, http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/facts_and_figures_en.php#diagram.

students are awarded a Secondary School Certificate & Profile (SSC&P) that recognizes and values formal, non-formal and informal education. Students may sit for advanced examinations that are a prerequisite for following the programmes available at the upper-secondary and the post-secondary levels¹⁰.

Even though Maltese students have positive attitudes towards schooling in comparison with their EU and OECD peers, only around 5% of them performed at or above proficiency level 5 on the reading literacy scale when compared to the 8% OECD average (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2013). The low achievement of Maltese ten year-olds in PIRLS 2011 (the mean reading score 477 was significantly lower than the EU average of 535) and that of 15 year-olds in PISA 2009+ (where the percentage 36.3 of low achievers in reading literacy was significantly higher than the EU average of 19.7) led to the development of the National Literacy Strategy for All (2014) and a complementary National Literacy Campaign. They target different sectors of society and aim to ensure that every one in Malta and Gozo is “provided with the best opportunities to acquire the required literacy skills” (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014b, p. 17). The National Literacy Strategy seeks to strengthen the already existing national programmes and to launch new programmes focused on literacy for all ages (e.g. The Aqra Miegħi/Read with Me (0-3 year olds); mobilizing home and classroom libraries; Reading Ambassadors; Reading Champions and Reading Buddies etc.). The National Literacy Agency was set up in 2014 to administer national wide literacy programmes in Malta and Gozo.

¹⁰ See: <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Malta:Redirect>.

4 Literacy Performance Data for Children and Adolescents

4.1 Performance Data for Primary Children

The performance data for primary children are derived from the PIRLS studies.

Inaugurated in 2001 and conducted every 5 years, **PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study)** is an assessment of pupils' reading achievement at fourth grade organized by the Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA). The survey was administered in 35 countries in 2001, 45 education systems in 2006, and 50 in 2011. PIRLS assesses different purposes for reading (literary and informational) and different reading processes (retrieve explicit information, make inferences, interpret and integrate ideas and information, examine and evaluate content, language, and textual elements). Both multiple choice and open-ended questions are used.

Combining newly developed reading assessment passages and questions for 2011 with a selection of secure assessment passages and questions from 2001 and 2006, PIRLS 2011 allowed for measurement of changes since 2001. PIRLS 2011 also examined the national policies, curricula and practices related to literacy in participating countries, and included a set of questionnaires for students, parents/caregivers, teachers, and school principals to investigate the experiences that young children have at home and school in learning to read, in particular their attitudes and motivation towards reading.

For all PIRLS data used in this report, detailed tables with data for all participating countries in ELINET are provided, together with the EU averages (see Appendix C: ELINET PIRLS 2011 Data, Appendix D: ELINET PIRLS 2001 and 2006 Data).

4.1.1 Performance and variation in reading: proportion of low and high performing readers

Pupils in Malta achieved an overall mean reading score of 477 in PIRLS 2011 (Table 17.1). This is significantly below the EU-24 average. Pupils in Malta had a lower mean score on literary texts (470) than on informational texts (485). They performed at about the same level on Retrieve & Inference (479) and on Interpret, Integrate & Evaluate (475) (Appendix Tables A2-A5).

Table 1: Overall Performance on PIRLS 2011 – Malta and EU-24 Average

| | Overall Reading – Mean Score |
|-------|------------------------------|
| Malta | 477 |
| EU-24 | 535 |

Significant differences (relative to the EU-24 Average) are shown in **bold**.

In Malta, 45% of the pupils performed at or below the Low benchmark on overall reading. This is the highest percentage of low achievers among the EU-24 countries. 4% of students achieved at the Advanced benchmark, which is less than half of the EU average of 9%.

Table 2: Performance by Overall PIRLS Reading Benchmarks 2011 - Percentages of Pupils – Malta and EU-24 Average

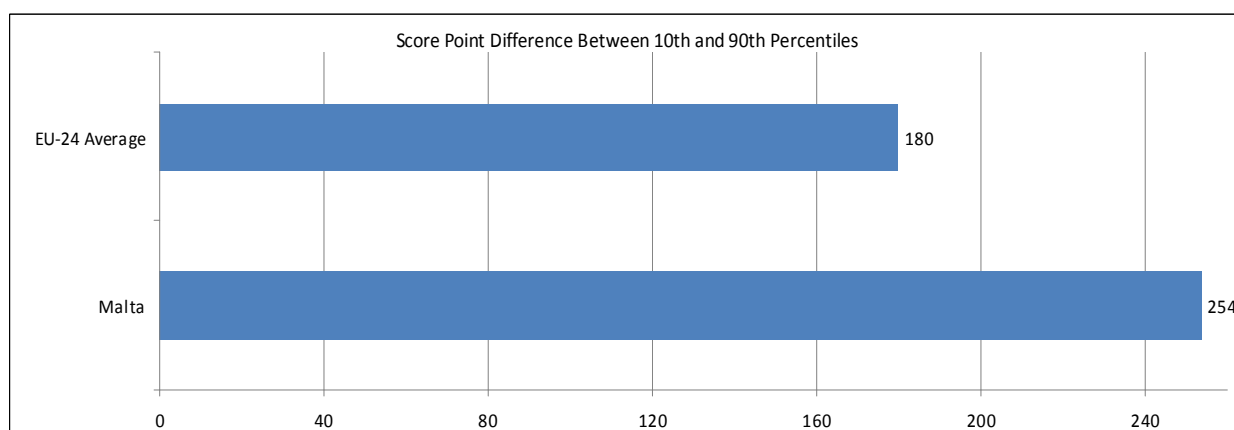
| | Below 400 | 400-475 Low | 475-550 Intermediate | 550-625 High | Above 625 Advanced |
|-------|-----------|----------------|-------------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|
| Malta | 22 | 23 | 32 | 19 | 4 |
| EU-24 | 5 | 15 | 36 | 35 | 9 |

Malta's standard deviation of 97 was 27 points higher than the EU-24 average indicating a much greater spread of achievement (Table 3). Among EU countries, Malta had the highest standard deviation. The difference between the scores of students at the 10th and 90th percentiles in Malta – 254 points – is 74 points above the corresponding EU-24 average of 180.

Table 3: Spread of Achievement – Standard Deviation, 10th, 90th Percentiles, and Difference between 90th and 10th Percentiles on Overall Reading – Malta and EU-24 Average

| | Standard Deviation | 10 th Percentile | 90 th Percentile | 90 th -10 th |
|--------|--------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Malta | 97 | 340 | 594 | 254 |
| EU Avg | 70 | 441 | 621 | 180 |

Figure 2: Score Point Difference between 10th and 90th Percentiles



Malta did not participate in PIRLS 2001 or 2006 so trends cannot be described.

Table 4: Trends in Performance 2001-2011 (Overall Scale)

| | 2001 | 2006 | Change (2006- 2001) | 2006 | 2011 | Change (2011- 2006) | 2001 | 2011 | Change (2011- 2001) |
|-----------------|------|------|---------------------------|------|------|---------------------------|------|------|---------------------------|
| Malta | - | - | - | - | 477 | - | - | 477 | - |
| EU Countries | 534 | 534 | 0 | 534 | 535 | 1 | 534 | 535 | 1 |

Significant differences in **bold**

4.1.2 Gaps in reading

As in every European country there are achievement gaps between different groups.

Parents' educational achievement

Students in Malta whose parent/s attended University or Higher Education achieved a mean score (552) that was 98 points higher than students whose parent/s completed Lower Secondary Education or below (454) (Table 5). The average difference across the EU-24 was of 76 points, indicating a relatively stronger relationship between parents' educational level and student performance in Malta.

Table 5: Percentages of Parents Whose Highest Level of Education was Lower Secondary, and Percentages who Finished University or Higher – Malta and EU-24 Average

| Level of Education | Lower Secondary or Below | | University or Higher | | Difference (Univ or Higher – Lower Sec) |
|--------------------|--------------------------|------|----------------------|------|---|
| | % | Mean | % | Mean | |
| Malta | 47 | 454 | 19 | 552 | 98 |
| EU-24 | 18 | 495 | 30 | 571 | 76 |

Statistically significant mean score differences in **bold**.

Language Spoken at Home

In Malta, 17% of pupils reported that they always spoke the language of the PIRLS reading test at home – this was much lower than the corresponding EU-24 Average (80) (Table 6). Eighty-three percent reported that they sometimes/never spoke the language of the test. The difference in achievement between students in Malta reporting that they always or sometimes/never spoke the language of the test was 26 score points – the same as the corresponding EU-24 average difference.

Table 6: Percentages of Students Reporting that They Always, Sometimes or Never Speak the Language of the PIRLS Test at Home, and Associated Mean Score Differences – Malta and EU-24 Average

| Language of the Test Spoken at Home | Always | | Sometimes /Never | | Mean Score Difference (Always – Sometimes/Never) |
|-------------------------------------|--------|------|------------------|------|--|
| | % | Mean | % | Mean | |
| Malta | 17 | 501 | 83 | 474 | 26 |
| EU-24 Avg | 80 | 541 | 20 | 519 | 26 |

Statistically significant mean score differences in **bold**.

Gender

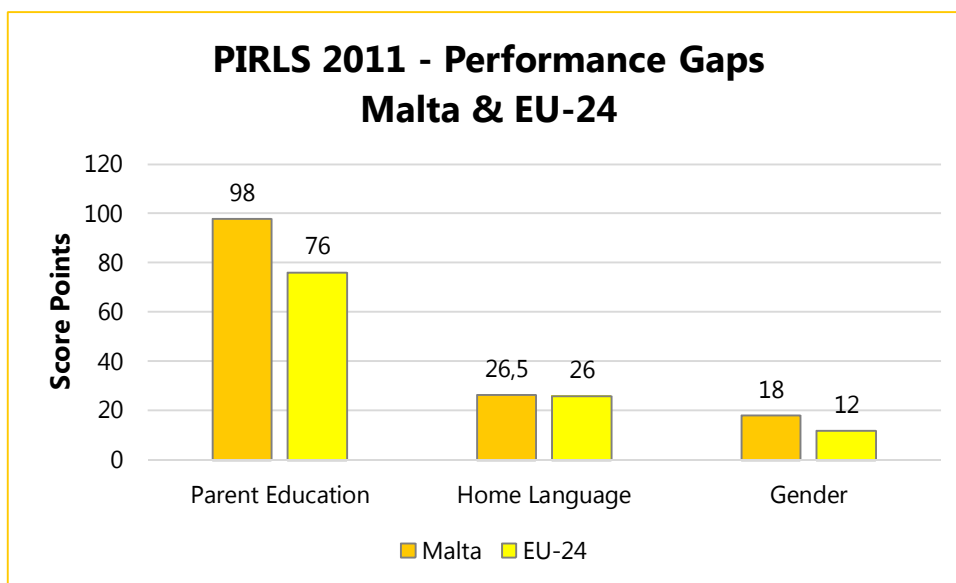
Girls in Malta achieved a mean score on overall reading that was higher by 18 than that of boys points in 2011. This was higher than the EU-24 average difference of 12 points (Table 7).

Table 7: Trends in Performance by Gender 2001-2011 (Overall Scale) – Malta and EU-24 Average

| | Malta | | | EU-24 | | |
|------|-------|------|------------|-------|------|------------|
| | Girls | Boys | Girls-Boys | Girls | Boys | Girls-Boys |
| 2011 | 486 | 468 | 18 | 541 | 529 | 12 |
| 2006 | - | - | - | 541 | 528 | 13 |
| 2001 | - | - | - | 542 | 525 | 17 |

Significant differences in **bold**

Figure 3: Performance Gaps in Malta and on Average across the EU-24 - Primary Level



Education: University – Lower Secondary or lower; Language: Language of test spoken always – sometimes/never; Gender: Girls – Boys.

Attitudes towards Reading

There was a difference of 63 points between the top and bottom quartiles of the Like Reading Scale in Malta in 2011 (Table 8). On average across the EU-24, the difference between students in the top and bottom quartiles of the Like Reading scale was 52 points, indicating a relatively stronger relationship between liking reading and performance in Malta.

Table 8: Mean Overall Reading Scores of Students in the Top and Bottom Quartiles of the PIRLS Like Reading Scale –Malta and EU-24 Average

| Like Reading | Overall Reading Score | | Difference (Q4-Q1) |
|--------------|-----------------------|-----------------|--------------------|
| | Top Quartile | Bottom Quartile | |
| Malta | 515 | 452 | 63 |
| EU-24 | 563 | 511 | 52 |

Significant differences in **bold**

Students in Malta in the top quartile of the Confidence in Reading scale achieved a mean score (533) that was 126 points higher than students in the bottom quartiles (407) (Table 9). The average difference across the EU-24 was of 80 points, indicating again a considerably stronger relationship between Confidence and performance in Malta.

Table 9: Mean Overall Reading Scores of Students in the Top and Bottom Quartiles of the PIRLS Confidence in Reading Scale –Malta and EU-24 Average

| Confidence in Reading | Overall Reading Score | | Difference (Q4-Q1) |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|--------------------|
| | Top Quartile | Bottom Quartile | |
| Malta | 533 | 407 | 126 |
| EU-24 | 570 | 490 | 80 |

National assessments: The End of Primary Benchmarks assessments are held annually by the Department of Curriculum Management. It provides information about pupils’ academic progress and the performance outcomes at the end of each scholastic year. It is administered on a national basis with students in Year 6 (10-11 year olds). The assessment consists of Speaking, Listening, Reading Comprehension and Writing Components in Maltese and English, and the Mental and Written components of Mathematics¹¹.

¹¹ See: http://curriculum.gov.mt/en/Benchmark/reports-presentations/Documents/benchmark_report_2014.pdf.

4.2 Performance Data for Adolescents

The performance data are derived from the OECD PISA study.

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) led by OECD¹² **assesses the skills and knowledge of 15-year-old students every three years in all OECD countries and** in a number of partner countries.

Since 2000, PISA has been testing students in reading, mathematics and science. The OECD assessment also collects information on students' backgrounds and on practices, motivational attributes and metacognitive strategies related to reading.

The PISA tests assess different aspects of reading literacy – retrieve information, interpret, reflect and evaluate on texts – and use a variety of texts – continuous (prose) and non-continuous (texts including graphs, tables, maps...). About half of the questions are multiple-choice, the other half open-ended (short or constructed answers). Results are reported on scales defining different levels of proficiency ranging from 1 (low performing) to 6 (high performing). Level 2 is considered as the level all 15 year-olds should reach, and will enable them to participate effectively to society. Since 2015, PISA has been administered on computers only in most participating countries.

The follow-up of students who were assessed by PISA in 2000 as part of the Canadian Youth in Transition Survey has shown that students scoring below Level 2 face a disproportionately higher risk of poor post-secondary participation or low labour-market outcomes at age 19, and even more so at age 21, the latest age for which data from this longitudinal study are currently available. For example, of students who performed below Level 2 in PISA reading in 2000, over 60% did not go on to any post-school education by the age of 21; by contrast, more than half of the students (55%) whose highest level was Level 2 attended college or university (OECD 2010, S. 52).

4.2.1 Performance and variation in reading: proportion of low and high performing readers

Malta participated in PISA 2009+ (in 2010) and in PISA 2015. All data presented below is from PISA 2009+.

Table 10: Reading performance in PISA 2009+

| | Mean | S.E. |
|-------|------------|-------|
| Malta | 442 | (1.6) |
| EU-27 | 485 | (0.6) |

Malta performed 43 points lower than the EU average in PISA 2009+.

Table 11: Percentage of low performing (below level 2) and high performing (levels 5 and 6) students - PISA 2009+

| | Below level 2 | Levels 5 and 6 |
|-------|---------------|----------------|
| Malta | 36.3% | 4.5% |
| OECD | 18.8% | 7.6% |

¹² See <http://www.pisa.OECD.org>.

The pupils whose modal proficiency level is below level 2 in Malta are 36.3% which is significantly higher than the OECD average of 18.8. The percentage of pupils who performed on level 5 and above is 4.5% which is lower than the OECD average.

4.2.2 Gaps in reading performance

Socio-economic status

“Family economic, social and cultural status is indisputably one of the predictors that influence attainment in reading” (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2013, p. 86). The data for Malta indicates that students with a high socio-economic and cultural status achieve higher results in reading than their peers with a low socio-economic and cultural status (correlation = 0.336).

Migration

Table 12: Percentage of students and reading performance by immigrant status – PISA 2009

| | Native students | | | | Students with an immigrant background (first- or second-generation) | | | | Difference in reading performance between native and students with an immigrant background | |
|-------|------------------------|-------|----------------------------------|-------|---|-------|----------------------------------|--------|--|--------|
| | Percentage of students | S.E. | Performance on the reading scale | | Percentage of students | S.E. | Performance on the reading scale | | Score dif. | S.E. |
| | | | Mean | S.E. | | | Mean | S.E. | | |
| Malta | 97.5 | (0.3) | 446 | (1.7) | 2.5 | (0.3) | 448 | (13.6) | 2 | (14.0) |
| EU-26 | 91.7 | (0.0) | 490 | (0.4) | 8.3 | (0.0) | 452 | (6.4) | 38 | (6.4) |

Significant differences between native and students with an immigrant background in **bold**

In Malta, the percentage of students with a migrant background is extremely low (2.5%). The gap between native students and those with a migrant background is of 2 score points, which is extremely low when compared to the EU countries average. However, this difference is so low that this result has to be considered with a lot of caution.

Languages spoken at home

According to PISA 2009+ around 88% of 15-year old students in Malta speak Maltese at home and the rest use English. There is no information about the percentage of students and their reading performance based on the language/s they speak at home.

Gender

According to PISA 2009+ girls in all the participating countries attained a significantly higher score in reading than boys. However, gender difference in reading performance in Malta was much higher than the EU countries average, 72 scale points compared to an OECD average of 39. The scores in reading varied significantly between schools. The results of girls in private schools were significantly higher than the EU and OECD averages. However, the mean scores in reading attained by male students attending private schools, female students in Junior Lyceums and students of both sexes in Church

schools were similar to EU and OECD average reading scores. Male students in Junior Lyceums and students of both sexes Area secondary schools attained over 100 points less than their peers.

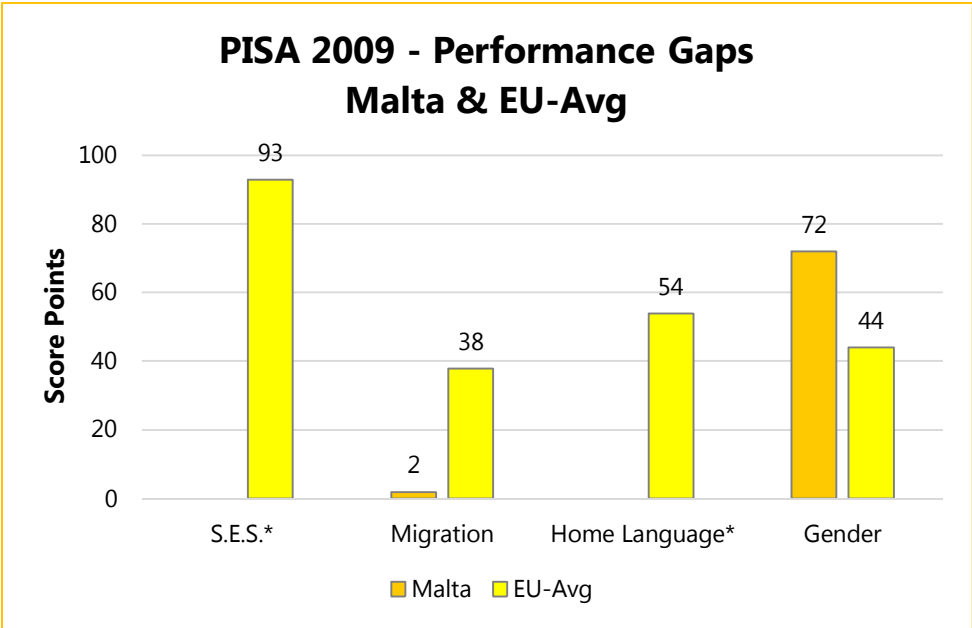
Table 13: Mean reading performance by gender, and gender differences – PISA 2009+

| | Boys | | Girls | | Difference (B – G) | |
|-------|------|-------|-------|-------|--------------------|-------|
| | Mean | S.E. | Mean | S.E. | Score diff. | S.E. |
| Malta | 406 | (2.3) | 478 | (1.9) | -72 | (2.8) |
| EU-26 | 463 | (0.5) | 506 | (0.4) | -44 | (0.5) |

Significant differences between boys and girls **in bold**.

The Maltese educational system is comprised of different types of schools: state, private church and private independent. The curricula and the languages of schooling vary depending on the type of school. The table 13 shows the 5th, 10th, 25th, 75th, 90th and 95th percentile scores on the reading scale categorized by gender and school type. The overall performance of female students in reading across the schools is higher than that of male students attending the same school type.

Figure 4: Performance Gaps in Malta and on Average across EU Countries - Post-Primary Level



SES: Top – Bottom quartile on PISA ESCS scale; Migration: Native – first/second generation immigrants; Language: Speaks language of the PISA test at home – speaks another language; Gender: Girls - Boys

Table 14: Spread of achievement. Percentile scores on the overall reading scale by gender and school type

| Percentile | Church school | | Junior Lyceum | | Area Secondary | | Private | |
|------------------|---------------|--------|---------------|--------|----------------|--------|---------|--------|
| | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | female |
| 5 th | 311 | 346 | 209 | 351 | 165 | 230 | 315 | 354 |
| 10 th | 354 | 390 | 241 | 384 | 206 | 277 | 363 | 406 |
| 25 th | 420 | 437 | 301 | 432 | 271 | 330 | 423 | 452 |
| 75 th | 537 | 562 | 392 | 547 | 425 | 441 | 550 | 584 |
| 90 th | 577 | 603 | 457 | 595 | 477 | 517 | 589 | 631 |
| 95 th | 594 | 633 | 497 | 617 | 512 | 551 | 609 | 646 |

There is no data available for Malta regarding the reading performance by gender according to PISA 2000-2012. The data presented below is from the MATSEC (The Matriculation and Secondary Education Certificate) English examination for the years 2005-2010. Table 15 “shows the proportion of male and female students who obtained a pass in English in two grade ranges (1-5 and 1-7), where 1 corresponds to the highest and 7 corresponds to the lowest pass grades” (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2013, p. 83).

Table 15: Percentage of passes in the MATSEC English examination

| Year | Grades 1-5 | | Grades 1-7 | |
|------|------------|---------|------------|---------|
| | Males | Females | Males | Females |
| 2005 | 41% | 43% | 50% | 51% |
| 2006 | 37% | 38% | 51% | 53% |
| 2007 | 38% | 39% | 53% | 53% |
| 2008 | 37% | 37% | 50% | 51% |
| 2009 | 41% | 42% | 50% | 50% |
| 2010 | 37% | 38% | 53% | 52% |

The female students performed slightly better than the males while sitting for the local examinations. However, the difference is not significant. A reason for the discrepancy between the results from MATSEC and PISA could be the different format used during the examinations (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2013).

Engagement and metacognition

Reading engagement and reading literacy

There is a difference of 105 points between the reading scores of pupils who were highly engaged in reading (top quartile), and those who were poorly engaged (bottom quartile). The students who were engaged in reading more often attained significantly higher reading scores in the PISA 2009+ test. The difference between the reading scores of the most and least engaged in reading students in Malta was relatively close to the EU average.

Table 16: Mean reading scores between students poorly engaged and highly engaged in reading – PISA 2009

| | Low quartile | | Top quartile | | Difference |
|-------|--------------|-------|--------------|-------|------------|
| | Mean | S.E. | Mean | S.E. | Mean |
| Malta | 456 | (3,8) | 562 | (3,1) | 105 |
| EU-26 | 444 | (0,8) | 543 | (0,8) | 99 |

Table 17: Strategies for understanding and remembering the text

| How do you rate the usefulness of the following strategies for understanding and remembering the text | Malta (%) | EU (%) | OECD (%) |
|--|------------------|---------------|-----------------|
| I concentrate on parts of the text that are easy to understand. | 49.7 | 49.9 | 50.8 |
| I quickly read through the text twice. | 53.4 | 33.4 | 32.9 |
| After reading the text, I discuss its content with other people. | 51.5 | 54.9 | 56.3 |
| I underline important parts of the text. | 69.4 | 72.7 | 73.7 |
| I summarise the text in my own words. | 67.3 | 74.0 | 73.5 |
| I read the text aloud to another person | 43.1 | 39.0 | 73.5 |

There are a number of strategies for understanding and remembering the text. Some are more widely used than others. The most popular strategies used by Maltese students were underlining important parts of the text (69.4%) and summarizing the text in one's own words (67.3%). The students reported that they were more likely to read through the text twice (53.4%) or to discuss the context of the text with other people after reading it (51.5%), than to read it aloud to another person (43.1%) (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2013).

Table 18: Strategies for writing a summary of the text

| How do you rate the usefulness of the following strategies for writing a summary of this text? | Malta (%) | EU (%) | OECD (%) |
|---|------------------|---------------|-----------------|
| I write a summary, check that each paragraph is covered in the summary, because the content should be included. | 57.0 | 54.2 | 54.8 |
| I try to copy out accurately as many sentences as possible. | 29.9 | 27.5 | 27.3 |
| Before writing the summary, I read the text as many times as possible. | 64.0 | 61.4 | 61.4 |
| I carefully check whether the most important facts in the text are represented in the summary. | 78.2 | 80.0 | 80.2 |
| I read through the text, underline the most important sentences and write them in my own words as a summary. | 76.9 | 76.4 | 76.7 |

The most popular strategies for writing a summary of a text used most frequently by Maltese students were checking whether the most important facts are carefully represented in the summary and underlining the most important sentences and writing them with their own words. The strategies of reading the text several times before writing the summary and copying directly from the text were used more often by Maltese students compared to other countries (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2013).

National assessments: Ninety schools took part in the end of Primary Benchmark study in 2014 (62 state, 22 private church and 7 private independent). Ninety-three percent of all Year 6 students completed all the reading, writing, listening and speaking tasks in Maltese and English and the mental and written components in Mathematics and achieved median marks of 79, 73 and 70 respectively. The overall performance of the pupils was better in Maltese than in English. In the reading comprehension component the median mark for Maltese was 24 points out of a maximum of 30 and a median mark of 22 points in English out of a maximum of 30. In the writing component the median mark was 20 out of 30 for Maltese and 17 out of 30 for English. Girls performed slightly better than boys in both English and Maltese (Department of Curriculum Management, 2014¹³).

¹³ See: http://curriculum.gov.mt/en/Benchmark/reports-presentations/Documents/benchmark_report_2014.pdf.

5 Policy areas

The High Level Group of Experts on Literacy (2012, p. 38) recommended that all EU Member States should focus on the following areas as they craft their own literacy solutions:

- 1) Creating a more literate environment;
- 2) Improving the quality of teaching;
- 3) Increasing participation, inclusion and equity (the term “equity” was added by ELINET).

The following parts refer to these three key issues, however some overlapping may occur.

In order to achieve as much comparability as possible across countries, quantitative and qualitative indicators for which information from international data are available are reported. Appendix A provides more information on criteria for the choice of indicators and the chosen indicators for the pre-primary age group. For each of these indicators Appendix B contains a table with numbers of the European countries participating in ELINET. Appendix C has been created using the international database for PIRLS 2011 – and contains separate tables for all information reported. If countries did not participate in PIRLS 2011, data for PIRLS 2006 are referred to. Appendix D offers this information for the PIRLS 2006 data.

5.1 Creating a literate environment for children and adolescents

The EU High Level Group of Experts on Literacy stated the following in relation to **creating a more literate environment**:

“Creating a more literate environment will help stimulate a culture of reading, i.e. where **reading for pleasure** is seen as the norm for all children and adults. Such a culture will fuel reading motivation and reading achievement: people who like to read, read more. Because they read more, they read better, and because they read better they read more: a virtuous circle which benefits individuals, families and society as a whole.” (HLG report 2012, p. 41).

Parents play a central role in children’s emergent literacy development. They are the first teachers, and shape children’s language and communication abilities and attitudes to reading by being good reading role models, providing reading materials, and reading to the child.

Schools play an important role in offering a literate environment for students. Schools may foster reading motivation and reading for pleasure by establishing school and classroom libraries, offering a wide variety of books and other reading material in different genres, providing sheltered and comfortable spaces for individual reading activities (like reading clubs), and not forcing children into having to express and exchange their individual (intimate) reading experiences.

However, schools do not have sole responsibility. A broad range of actors may shape literacy motivation, from parents and peers to librarians. Parents may provide role models and influence children’s attitudes towards literacy practices. Also, libraries have a vital role if they offer free books, especially for families who cannot afford to buy books. Regional or national campaigns may inspire children and their parents to engage in reading activities. (Cf. ELINET Country Reports, Frame of Reference, pp. 29ff.)

Adolescence is a crucial phase in life where young people develop long-term *identities and self-concepts* which include media preferences and practices (*media identity*). In this perspective, it is of great importance that families, schools and communities offer young people rich opportunities to encounter the *culture of reading* and develop a stable *self-concept as a reader/writer* and member of a literary culture. This includes access to a broad variety of reading materials (in print and electronic forms) and stimulating literate environments in and outside of schools; it also includes opportunities to get actively involved in engaging with texts, and communicating, reflecting on and exchanging ideas about texts with peers and ‘competent others’, such as teachers or parents (Ibid., pp. 45f).

5.1.1 Providing a literate environment at home

The **home learning environment**, particularly in the first three years, is extremely important (Brooks et al. 2012). It determines the quantity and quality of interactions between the infant and the primary caregivers, who are the most powerful agents of language development, both receptive and expressive, in the context of everyday activities and experiences. During these years, experience-dependent creation of synapses is maximal. We know that the more words the children are exposed to, the more they can learn. Caregiver-child relations in their turn strongly influence the ability to learn, by influencing self-esteem, general knowledge and motivation.

Several indicators are used to describe the literate home environment of very young children in this report, drawing on data from international sources (PIRLS) that are comparable across countries. It is important to acknowledge that some of the PIRLS data are self-reported and may be biased by social desirability and the ways in which questions are interpreted by parents within countries.

Parental attitudes to reading

PIRLS 2011 used the “Parents Like Reading Scale” according to their parents’ responses to seven statements about reading and how often they read for enjoyment. The figures are presented below with the percentage of students whose parents “like”, “somewhat like” or “do not like” reading” as reported by PIRLS 2011 (Mullis et al. 2012a, Exhibit 4.4 – Parents Like Reading, p. 120).

- Like: 46.5% (European average 35.3 %)
- Somewhat like: 45 % (European average 52.6 %)
- Do not like: 8% (European average 17.9 %)

(For an overview of European countries see table B1 in Appendix B).

The number of students in Malta whose parents have positive attitudes towards reading is above the European average. There are only 8% of the parents who do not like reading, which is significantly less than the European average (17.9%). The importance of parental attitudes to reading is shown by the fact that in Malta there are significant differences in reading performance at grade 4 between children whose parents like to read (average achievement 499) and those who do not (average achievement 460).

Home Educational Resources

Eighteen percent of parents in Malta reported having few home resources for learning, which is below the EU average of 25%. Similarly a 3 % gap between the EU average (25%) for many resources, and the Maltese average (22%) suggested that pupils in Malta had similar access to home resources as their European counterparts. The difference in achievement between pupils in Malta whose parents

reported having many home resources, and those with few resources was of 122 score points, which is 43 points higher than the corresponding EU-24 average difference of 79 points.

Table 19: Percentages of Pupils Whose Parents Reported Having Few or Many Home Resources for Learning, and Corresponding Mean Overall Reading Scores – Malta and EU-24 Average

| Level of Home Resources | Few Resources | | Many Resources | | Difference (Many - Few) |
|-------------------------|---------------|------|----------------|------|-------------------------|
| | % | Mean | % | Mean | |
| Malta | 18 | 425 | 22 | 547 | 122 |
| EU-24 | 25 | 495 | 25 | 573 | 79 |

Statistically significant mean score differences in **bold**.

Number of children's books in the home

PIRLS 2011 offers two sets of data concerning books in the home: The first refers to numbers of children's books in the home (based on reports by parents); the second refers to books in the home (regardless of whether they are children's books or not), as reported by students. A possible discrepancy might be explained by the difference in sources and questions.

The PIRLS 2011 database provides the figures below about the number of children's books in the home based on the report of the parents:

- 0-10 books: 3% (European average of 11.8%)
- 11-25 books: 9.8% (European average of 19.7%)
- 26-50 books: 27.7% (European average of 29.4%)
- 51-100 books: 33.6% (European average of 23.4%)
- more than 100 books: 25.9% (European average of 15.7%).

When compared to the European average, the availability of children's books in Maltese homes is significantly above the European average (for an overview of European countries see table B2 in Appendix B) for the bands of 51-100 books and more than 100 books.

In Malta, 8% of the students reported having 10 or fewer books at home, compared to the EU-24 average of 11% (Table 20). Ten percent of students reported having over 200 books, which is fewer than the EU-24 average (12%). The achievement gap between those with 0-10 books and those with 200+ books is 99 points, which is greater than the EU average of 82 points. (ELINET PIRLS Appendix C, Table E1).

Table 20: Mean Overall Reading Scores of Pupil with 0-10 Books at Home, and those with More than 200 Books – Malta and EU-24 Average

| Books in the Home | None or Few Books (0-10) | | More than 200 Books | | (More than 200 – None or few) Mean Score Difference |
|-------------------|--------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|--------------------|---|
| | Percent of Students | Mean Reading Score | Percent of Students | Mean Reading Score | |
| Malta | 8 | 390 | 10 | 489 | 99 |
| EU-24 | 11 | 482 | 12 | 563 | 82 |

Statistically significant mean score differences in **bold**.

Early Literacy Activity Scale

PIRLS 2011 reports the percentages of students whose parents (often, never or almost never) engaged in literacy-relevant activities with them before the beginning of primary school (Mullis et al. 2012a, exhibit 4.6 - Early Literacy Activities Before Beginning Primary School, p. 126). Nine activities are considered: reading books, telling stories, singing songs, playing with alphabet toys, talking about things done, talking about things read, playing word games, writing letters or words, reading signs and labels aloud.

The data for Malta are composite scores for all these activities below (for an overview of European countries see table B3 in Appendix C):

- Often: 44.7% (European average 40.7%)
- Sometimes: 53.9% (European average 57.4)
- Never or almost never: 1.4% (European average 1.9%).

This means that, in Malta there are less parents who never or hardly ever engage in the nine activities, compared with the EU 24 (2%). The Early Literacy Activity Scale correlates with later reading performance in grade 4.

The Early Literacy Activity Scale correlates with later reading performance in grade 4. The average reading score in Grade 4 of pupils who often engaged in these activities with their parents before the beginning of primary school was 507, as compared with 463 for pupils who sometimes engaged in these activities. These data demonstrate the importance of the time devoted to literacy-related activities in early childhood and their association with achievement in grade 4.

While the Early Literacy Activity Scale gives composite score, it is of interest to look at single items. If only the category “often” is considered, the percentage of pupils in Malta whose parents engaged in literacy-related activities with them before the beginning of Primary school is close to the European average:

- read books to them often: 52.6% (European average 58.4 %)
- told stories to them often: 53.5% (European average 51.5%)
- sang songs to them often: 53.4% (European average 50.6%)
- played games involving shapes (toys and puzzles) with them often: 61.0% (European average 63.5%).

(For more details and an overview of European countries see table B 4-B 7 in Appendix B).

Challenge: Reading to children is a predictor of their future literacy achievement. The Maltese government recognizes this and through the National Literacy Agency is extending the current early and family literacy programmes to increase awareness among parents about the importance of literacy skills in the early years. These programmes are aimed mainly at families with a low socio-economic status. They are intended to improve children’s literacy and socio-emotional development as well as to encourage the involvement of parents and caregivers in the literacy development of their children (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014d, p. 10).

Some of these programmes include NWAR, Klabb Ħilti, Id F’Id, Malta Writing Programme, Klabb Naħla and Klabb Arzella, Aqra Miegħi/Read with Me programme – promoting literacy education in the first years (0-3) and Aqra kemm tiflaħ - mobilising home and classroom libraries (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014d).

5.1.2 Providing a literate environment in school

Context for Malta/Challenge/Need for Action: For Malta a big gender difference in reading performance resulted for both 10 year-olds (PIRLS 2011) and for 15 year-olds (PISA 2009+). In PIRLS 2011, 16% of the Maltese pupils stated that they did not like reading. In PISA 2009+, 34% of the pupils reported that they did not read for pleasure outside of school, and 29.4% spend only 30 minutes or less per day in reading for enjoyment.

PISA findings have shown that reading for pleasure and reading performance are correlated (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2013). Therefore, it is necessary to develop more effective methods to increase the reading motivation of pupils, especially that of boys. All the stakeholders: families, teachers, schools and libraries require more support to promote the reading habits of students both at school and beyond.

Teaching reading resources used by teachers

The type of reading materials used by teachers for literacy instruction may have an impact on the motivation of students. PIRLS (2011) provides some data about this. In Malta 24% of students were taught by teachers who use a variety of children's books as a basis for reading instruction, compared with the EU average of 29%. Eighty-six percent of pupils in Grade 4 are taught by teachers who use textbooks as the basis for reading instruction, compared with an EU average of 70%. Sixteen percent of students were taught by teachers who used computer software as a basis for reading instruction, which is higher than the corresponding EU-24 average of 5%. Fifty-five percent of students used computer software as a reading supplement, compared with the EU average of 47% (Mullis et al. 2012a, exh. 8.12, p. 236, EU averages obtained from PIRLS 2011 database, s. Table H1 in Appendix C).

Availability and use of classroom libraries

As reported by the teachers, PIRLS showed that 89.7% of students in Malta were in classrooms which had class library, which was above the EU-24 average of 72.9% (ELINET PIRLS 2011 Appendix, Table H2). 48.7% of students were in classrooms which had more than 50 books, and which is above the EU-24 average of 32.1% (ibid.). Additionally, 75.1% of students were taken on a visit to the public library by their teachers at least once a month, compared to the EU-24 average of 65%. (Mullis et al. 2012a, exh. 8.13, p.240; EU averages from PIRLS 2011 database, s. Table H2 in Appendix C).

Challenge: In PIRLS 2011 about 10% of the students in Malta reported not having a classroom library or that an insufficient number of books was available (50% had less than 50 books).

The National Literacy Strategy (2014) promotes the importance of increased literacy projects, funded by the government and other sources in order to improve the quality of home and school libraries and to extend their access and use. One such project: "Aqra Kemm Tiflaħ" ("Mobilising classroom libraries") run by the National Literacy Agency is specifically intended to provide 100 books in Maltese and English to every Primary classroom.

5.1.3 Reading in a digital age

Digital technology in the primary classroom

A literate environment may also be created by incorporating digital devices into the school environment. According to teachers, 72.9% of students in Malta used a computer during the reading lessons, compared to the EU-average of 44.9% (ELINET PIRLS 2011 Appendix Table I6). 65.5% used a computer at least once a month to look for information, compared to the EU-24 average of 39% (ibid). 59.5% of students used computers to write stories or other text at least once a month as reported by their teachers, compared to the EU-24 average of 33.1%. Use of technology depended very much on the individual teachers (Firman & Camilleri, 2012).

Digital literacy, along with literacy and numeracy, is considered as one of the foundations of future learning (Ministry of Education and Employment, 2012, p. 51). Teachers are encouraged to help the students to develop their skills in digital literacy as from the Early Years. According to the National Curriculum Framework students should acquire the skills which allow them to use ICT freely for communication, work and leisure purposes.

Digital technology in the secondary classroom

Digital literacy forms part of the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) for Secondary schools. There are national strategies for ICT training in schools, digital/media literacy, e-skills development, training research projects in e-learning and e-inclusion. At secondary level, ICT is also taught as a separate subject (European Schoolnet, 2013). According to the National Curriculum Framework (2012, p.37) digital literacy “enhances the teaching and learning processes, the interaction among peers, and interactions between students and teachers. It is driven by the need for increased access to learning”. The students are expected to acquire basic ICT skills which involve the use of digital data sources, learning to work with data, communicating and presenting information through the use multimedia, working with email, using VOIP and video conferencing, communicating successfully with others etc. According to the NCF students should be aware also of the “social and ethical dimensions of digital technologies and learn to practice netiquette and online safety measures” (Ministry of Education and Employment, 2012, p. 37).

In Malta ICT is used in class also as a general tool for specific tasks in other subjects (European Schoolnet, 2013). At all grades use of ICT by teachers is higher than the EU average. 39% (EU 32%) use ICT in more than 25% of their lessons (p. 10). Teachers participated in professional development courses (42%) and students were engaged in ICT training provided by school staff (at grade 8: 37% (EU 51%), at grade 11: 30% (EU 44%) (p. 16). When compared to the EU, fewer students were in schools where ICT coordinators provided pedagogical as well as ICT support and there were relatively few incentives for teachers to use ICT (European Schoolnet, 2013, p. 18).

According to Survey of Schools in Malta more than half of students in all the grades (70%) used a school desktop/laptop for learning purposes at least once a week (EU 53%). Only 8% of grade 8 (EU 11%) and 17% of grade 11 students used their own laptop and more than half of students at grade 11 – 52% and 12% at grade 8; EU 28%) used their own mobile phone in lessons ‘at least weekly’ (European Schoolnet, 2013, p. 48). Over one third (37%) of all grades students used interactive whiteboards ‘at least weekly’, which is above the EU average (25%) (European Schoolnet, 2013, p. 63).

Challenge: The National Literacy Strategy suggests that all stakeholders should be involved in the development of language and literacy through digital technologies. Increased training is being provided to teachers and parents to enable them to support their children in the use of digital technologies.

The eContent available for schools is to be adapted better to the needs of the learners and schools are to be supported to be able to do this. A pilot project involving one to one technologies, namely tablets has been implemented and reviewed (Ministry of Education and Employment, Malta (2015) Report on the Tablet’s Pilot Study in Maltese Primary Schools).

5.1.4 The role of public libraries in reading promotion

Public libraries are an important agent in reading promotion. Maltese libraries are regulated by the Malta Library Act (2011). It seeks to ensure the high quality services of national, regional and local libraries and to “foster and strengthen reading habits and support literacy and other cultural activities and programmes for all age groups” (article 5a¹⁴)

Table 21 presents the percentage averages for Malta, the EU and the OECD with regards to a number of library related activities.

Table 21. Library use for reading activities

| Never visited a library for these activities | Malta (%) | EU(%) | OECD(%) |
|--|-----------|-------|---------|
| To borrow books to read for pleasure | 40.3 | 47.9 | 47.5 |
| To borrow books for school work | 41.2 | 35.8 | 36.2 |
| To work on homework | 38.1 | 49.6 | 47.4 |
| To read magazines | 44.1 | 59.7 | 58.0 |
| To read for fun | 38.5 | 57.2 | 55.4 |
| To learn things | 37.5 | 51.2 | 50.5 |
| To use the internet | 37.2 | 51.5 | 48.5 |
| No library is available at school | 2.8 | 11.1 | 9.8 |

Cooperation between secondary schools, families, libraries and other agents in literacy promotion for adolescents

Students should be made more aware of the benefits using a library. A current programme is that of “Living libraries” which collaborates with formal and non-formal educational institutions. The project focuses on young people. People from different industries make presentations and the young people are encouraged to create living installations using audio-visual material based on different information sources as well as self-produced print (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014d, p. 43).

Challenge: One of the goals of the National Literacy Strategy (2014) is to “make provision for training courses for parents/caregivers to enable them to support the literacy development of their children”, and to implement “family-friendly measures to enable families to be included in the support and intervention process of children with learning and literacy difficulties” (Ministry for Education and

¹⁴ See: <http://education.gov.mt/en/education/malta-libraries/Documents/ML%20-%20Malta-Libraries-Act-2011.pdf>.

Employment, 2014d, p. 16). The Strategy advocates for strengthening of literacy programmes within and outside schools. It seeks also to increase the involvement of parents and strengthen the role of libraries in the literacy development of children.

5.1.5 Improving literate environments for children and adolescents: Programmes, initiatives and examples

The National Literacy Agency of Malta is responsible for promoting and implementing the National Literacy Strategy for All in Malta and Gozo (2014). It collaborates with other government departments and non-governmental organizations to promote literacy as widely as possible.

Family literacy programmes

Family literacy programmes should complement school literacy programmes. They should be targeted to the needs of specific groups (especially low-income families and ethnically diverse groups). They “seeks to improve child literacy and socio-emotional development, while also developing the parents’ capacity to support their child’s reading ability, for example through dialogic reading programmes” (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014d, p. 23).

Challenge: Existing programmes should be reviewed on a regular basis and the development of new initiatives is to be encouraged.

The National Literacy Agency organises a number of family literacy programmes. These include the Aqra Miegħi/Read with me programme for 0 to 3 year-olds and their parents, the Seħer I-Istejjer/The Magic of Stories programme for 4 to 7 year olds and their parents, and the NWAR afterschool programme for children and their parents. The sessions are usually held at the local library or the local council¹⁵.

Community-Wide Initiatives

Klabb 3-16 is an after-school programme for children of that age group, run by the Foundation for Educational Services. It provides children with homework support and other extra-curricular activities. The service is offered also during the school and summer holidays.

Initiatives to foster reading engagement among children and adolescents

The National Literacy Agency organizes the following literacy programmes. These include:

Aqra Miegħi/Read with Me¹⁶ is a literacy programme for families with children from 0 to 3 years. It is offered in 50 centres in Malta and Gozo. The programme seeks to involve parents and demonstrates to them how they can become involved in the literacy development of their children. Sessions on a weekly basis are led by a trained coordinator, who introduces the families to stories, nursery rhymes and other fun literacy and numeracy activities suitable for these age groups. The sessions are in either Maltese or English;

Seħer I-Istejjer/ The Magic of Stories is a family literacy programme intended for children of 4 to 6 years and their parents. The primary objective of this bilingual programme is to promote a love of books among children through the involvement of their parents. Parents are shown how to share

¹⁵ See: <http://aqrastorja.skola.edu.mt/>.

¹⁶ See: <http://aqrastorja.skola.edu.mt/>.

books with their children. One hour sessions are held in a literacy rich environment. The sessions are in either Maltese or English;

Aqra kemm Tiflah seeks to provide attractive, high quality and high interest books to classroom libraries in primary and middle schools;

Aqra fis-Sajf/Summer Reading is a programme held during the summer in order to promote the love for reading while the students are not at school;

Reading Ambassadors¹⁷ is a programme which involves popular Maltese personalities who promote a love for reading in schools;

Reading Champions is a national contest for students from Middle schools. It encourages them to act as role models to their peers and to promote the importance of reading in both Maltese and English. Struggling readers who make an effort to read are rewarded too.

5.2 Improving the quality of teaching

To improve the quality of teaching, important aspects need to be considered:

- the quality of preschool
- coherent literacy curricula
- high-quality reading instruction
- early identification of and support for struggling literacy learners
- highly qualified teachers (cf. Frame of Reference for ELINET Country Reports).

Especially crucial is the quality of teaching and of teachers, as the McKinsey report "How the world best performing school systems come out on top" (McKinsey et al. 2007) states: "The quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers." (McKinsey et al. 2007)

5.2.1 Quality of preschool

While early childhood education has long been neglected as a public issue, nowadays early childhood education and care (ECEC) has been recognized as important for "better child well-being and learning outcomes as a foundation for lifelong learning; more equitable child outcomes and reduction of poverty; increased intergenerational social mobility; more female labour market participation; increased fertility rates; and better social and economic development for the society at large" (OECD 2012 *Starting Strong III*, p. 9). In all European countries pre-primary education is an important part of political reflection and action.

The EU High Level Group of Experts on Literacy stated:

"Increasing investment in high-quality ECEC is one of the best investments Member States can make in Europe's future human capital. 'High quality' means highly-qualified staff and a curriculum focused on language development through play with an emphasis on language, psychomotor and social development, and emerging literacy skills, building on children's natural developmental stages." (High Level Group Report, 2012a, p. 59).

While there is no international or Europe-wide agreed concept of ECEC quality, there is agreement that quality is a complex concept and has different dimensions which are interrelated. In this report we

¹⁷ See: <http://aqrastorja.skola.edu.mt/>.

focus on *structural quality* which refers to characteristics of the whole system, e.g. the financing of pre-primary education, the relation of staff to children, regulations for the qualifications and training of the staff, and the design of the curriculum. There are some data concerning structural quality, but there is a lack of research and data about process quality, practices in ECEC institutions, the relation between children and teachers, and what children actually experience in their institutions and programmes.

Annual expenditure on pre-primary education

According to Eurostat (2014, Figure D3), the total public expenditure per child in pre-primary education as a percentage of GDP in Malta is 0.5%. The range is from 0.04% in Turkey and 0.1% in Ireland to 1.01% in Denmark (for an overview of European countries see table D1 in Appendix B).

Ratio of children to teachers in pre-primary school

According to the information published in Key Data on Early Childhood (2014) the strictest regulations are applied for working with infants. The teacher: child ration for Malta is one teacher with up to three children under one year of age, up to five children under 2 years and up to 6 children under 3 years of age. However, the ratio increases significantly when the children enter kindergarten (after turning 2 years and 9 months). The ratios in the kindergarten groups are: one teacher for every 15 children under the age of four and one teacher for every 20 children under 5 years (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2014).

Table 22. Ratio of children to teachers in pre-primary school in Malta*

| Age of Children | Children per Carer |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| 0 to 12 months | 3 |
| 13 to 24 months | 5 |
| 25 to 36 months | 6 |
| Mixed Group ⁵ | 6 |

***Carer to Child Ratios** (Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity, 2006, p. 4).

Percentage of males among preschool teachers

There are very few male early childhood educators in Malta. In fact according to PORDATA (2014) only 0.7% of the early childhood educators in Malta are males¹⁸.

Preschool teachers' qualifications

So far early childhood educators in Malta were expected to have 2 years of post-secondary relevant training at ISCED 4 (European Commission/ EACEA/Eurydice/Eurostat 2014, p. 101). As from 2015/2016 they will be expected to obtain a Bachelor degree, which involves either four years of University study or two years of University study for holders of the MCAST-BTEC Higher National Diploma in Advanced Studies in Early Years (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2014, p. 180).

¹⁸ See: <http://www.pordata.pt/en/Europe/Females+as+a+percentage+of+teachers+and+academic+staff+total+and+by+level+of+education-1736>.

Challenge: When compared to the most European countries, early childhood educators in Malta have generally lower qualifications. Early childhood education in Malta needs more qualified teachers (in possession of at least a Bachelor degree). Moreover, the early childhood educators, who are already in employment, should receive additional professional development.

Research shows that it is beneficial to have male teachers working in early childhood education settings. Therefore, a concerted effort should be made to recruit more male early childhood educators (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2014).

Preschool language and literacy curriculum

The design of the kindergarten curriculum is an important aspect of quality. Therefore it is included in this section and not in the next section "Literacy curricula in schools". It also takes into consideration that young children have learning needs than are sometimes different to those of school children. Pre-school programmes should focus on developing children's emergent literacy skills through playful experience rather than systematic training in phonics or teaching the alphabet. There is no evidence that systematic instruction of reading in preschool has any benefit for future learning (Suggate 2012).

Fostering the development of emergent literacy skills through playful activities is an important function of pre-school institutions, providing a basis for formal literacy instruction in primary school. We consider the following to be key components: oral language development, including vocabulary learning and grammar, familiarisation with the language of books (e.g. through hearing stories read and told), being engaged and motivated in literacy-related activities, experiencing a literacy-rich environment, developing concepts of print, and language awareness.

Malta is one of the 13 countries referred to in the "Teaching reading in Europe" (2011) report which gave emergent literacy a very comprehensive coverage in their curricula. The Maltese guidelines for kindergarten education states that the child needs to develop a number of skills and concepts to be able to learn to read and write in both Maltese and English (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2015). In this context, children are encouraged to participate in activities which contribute to the development of their pre-reading (e.g. auditory and visual discrimination, left to right orientation) and pre-writing skills (e.g. draw lines that are straight and smooth, hand-eye co-ordination; holding skills) (Attard, 2002, pp. 17–18).

Both the National Literacy Strategy and the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) recognise the importance of oracy as a precursor of literacy. Parents have an important role to play in this regard. The NCF states that by the end of the Early Years Cycle (Year 2): children should be able to use different forms of media for communication; should be able to engage with texts and be aware of the purpose and use of print materials; should be familiar with numbers, symbols and patterns and their use; should be aware of both language systems used in Malta; should know how to engage appropriately with digital literacy etc. (Ministry of Education and Employment, 2012, p. 22).

The main objectives for the First Years (0-3) presented in the National Literacy Strategy are:

- recognising the importance of oracy as a precursor to literacy;
- promoting programmes which encourage parents to be more involved in the literacy development of their children;
- promoting book-rich environments;
- improving the early screening and intervention programmes;
- providing more opportunities for professional development of staff.

Some of the main tenets of the National Literacy Strategy for the Early Years (Kindergarten 1 to Year 2) are:

- oracy is precursor to literacy and meaningful dialogue between adults and children should be promoted;
- Balanced Literacy teaching and learning is to be promoted;
- more opportunities for reading time in Maltese and English are required;
- parents should support their children's use of Maltese and English;
- the literacy development of the students should be a priority for all the teachers in the school;
- each school should establish clear policies for the teaching of literacy for Maltese and English through the support of Literacy Support Teachers, Heads of Department of Literacy, Maltese and English, and Education Officers for the Early Years, Literacy, Maltese and English" (Ministry of Education and Employment, 2014, p. 34-35).

Improving early language and literacy screening and training

Currently there is systematic assessment of children in order to identify language development problems. Screening of language skills is achieved by the implementation of the "Record of Development and Progress at Kindergarten Level", which is a formal evaluation/assessment tool (Eurydia (2012). Malta: Early Childhood Education and Care (EURYDICE¹⁹).

5.2.2 Literacy curricula in schools

Curricula provide a normative framework for teachers and a guideline for their teaching aims, methods, materials and activities. However one should keep in mind that there is a difference between the intended curriculum, as outlined in official documents, and the implemented curriculum – what actually happens in the schools.

Primary schools curricula

The Maltese early childhood settings offer the children both print-rich and digital environment which is stimulating the development of their language and literacy skills in a meaningful and purposeful context (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2015). The libraries in the classrooms are perceived as an integral part of the classroom environment and their role in children's literacy development is highly valued (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014d, p. 35).

Reading for pleasure

The Maltese curriculum "considers the development of a positive attitude to language learning as essential, as it encourages students to appreciate the value of reading as a pleasurable and enriching experience and activity" (Firman & Camilleri, 2012, p. 397).

¹⁹ See: https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Malta:Assessment_in_Programmes_for_Children_over_2-3_years.

Contents of literacy curricula

The Eurydice report "Teaching Reading in Europe" offers a broad range of information about the content of reading literacy curricula and official guidelines (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2011). In order not to duplicate this work only two aspects were addressed in the ELINET country reports whose importance might not yet be acknowledged and therefore might be missing in the literacy curricula and official guidelines: explicit instruction of grapheme-phoneme correspondences (phonics), and reading strategies.

Explicit instruction of grapheme-phoneme correspondences

Instruction in grapheme-phoneme correspondences is strongly emphasised in all grade levels. In the early years of primary education, the following appear as key learning outcomes in the Programmes for English:

- Start to develop sound-symbol correspondence (1.2.4, Year 1);
- Begin to use knowledge of initial letter and relate sound and picture cues to predict words in text (1.2.7, Year 1);
- With support, begin to use different strategies for word identification (picture cues, initial letters, sounding out, onset and rime, syllabification and sight words) (2.2.7, Year 2);
- With support begins to demonstrate knowledge of the use of different strategies for word identification (sounding out, use of sound-symbol relationships, use of common letter patterns and word parts, syllabification with word segmentation) (3.2.4, Year 3);
- Demonstrate gradual awareness and efficiency in using a variety of strategies when encountering difficult text (use sounding out, common letter patterns, knowledge of known parts of words) (4.2.5, Year 4);
- Apply knowledge and use word identification strategies appropriately and automatically when encountering an unknown word (sounding out, letter-sound correspondence, common letter patterns, syllabification with word segmentation). (5.2.4, Year 5).

The continuing focus on grapheme-phoneme correspondences throughout the primary grades may be linked to the provision of instruction in basic reading skills in two languages (English and Maltese), with the acquisition of basic skills taking longer for both.

The Eurydice Reading report (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2011, Figure 1.2, p. 56) notes the omission of a small number of phonics skills at primary level in Malta, including progression in recognising words from long to short, using knowledge of letters and sounds while writing, understanding that the same sound can have different spellings, and repeated practise of reading aloud. The current English curriculum includes use of knowledge of letters and sounds while writing (albeit not before Year 5).

Teaching of reading strategies in primary schools

While literacy instruction in the early years is more focused on code-based skills, in later stages it is important to develop and foster a wide range of comprehension strategies with all children. Explicit teaching of comprehension strategies is effective for improving reading comprehension among readers with different levels of ability. These strategies include:

- Drawing inferences or interpretations while reading text and graphic data;
- Summarising text and focusing selectively on the most important information;
- Making connections between different parts of a text;
- Using background knowledge;

- Checking/monitoring own comprehension;
- Constructing visual representations;
- Pupils reflecting on their own reading process (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2011, p. 55).

According to the Eurydice report, Teaching Reading in Europe (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2011, Figure 1.4, p.60) the only two strategies of the above mentioned which are not referred to in the Maltese curriculum are making connections between parts of a text and monitoring own comprehension.

In Malta, reading is taught as part of the language curriculum in Maltese and in English (Mullis et al. 2012b, Vol.1, exhibit 5, p. 30, 31). In the rationale for the current primary curriculum for English at Years 1 – 6 (see <https://curriculum.gov.mt/en/Curriculum/Years-1-to-6/Pages/default.aspx>), it is stated that “the four language modes/skills should be integrated in an approach whereby every lesson should ideally incorporate listening, speaking, reading and writing”, and teachers are advised to “use activities that promote receptive skills (Listening and Reading) which lead to productive skills (Speaking and Writing)”.

The integration of language activities is also supported by the recommendation in the curriculum rationale to develop thematic and cross-curricular approaches whereby the following modes are to be integrated: linguistic (vocabulary and grammatical) structures, viewing and listening comprehension, speaking including intonation and pronunciation, reading, writing, and effective use of information technology²⁰.

The English curriculum at primary level includes the following reading comprehension skills:

- Year 1: With teacher support begin to participate in reading very simple books with illustrations (1.2.8)
- Year 2: With support, uses pictures to construct ideas (2.8.8); With support, begins to answer questions on text (responds to literal questions) (2.2.10)
- Year 3: With support, demonstrate competence in reading comprehension strategies (begin to identify main ideas and key words, demonstrate ability to respond to literal questions, with support begin to respond to inferential questions) (3.2.8)
- Year 4: Demonstrate competence in reading comprehension strategies (as Year 3 and identify and explain words that enhance the meaning of a text, respond by referring to relevant parts in the text, begin to deduce meaning from texts) (4.2.8)
- Year 5: use a wide range of monitoring and adjusting strategies to aid comprehension (identify main ideas and key words, with support discuss figurative language, skim texts for different purposes, make inferences based on implicit information from a text, provide justification for inferences by returning purposefully to the text) (5.2.9)
- Year 6: use a wide range of and adjusting strategies to aid comprehension (as year 5 and with support, demonstrate ability to make evaluative responses) (6.2.9).

Literacy curricula in secondary schools

During the secondary school years literacy remains one of the primary themes within the National Curriculum Framework (2011) and language is still considered as the main instrument for this to

²⁰ The Maltese curriculum at primary level includes the following reading comprehension may be found, in Maltese, here: <https://curriculum.gov.mt/en/Curriculum/Years-1-to-6/Pages/default.aspx>.

happen. Therefore, all teachers are expected to recognise the importance of language and literacy competence in all subjects. However, the proportion of time allocated to the teaching of Maltese and English secondary level is low when compared to primary level. More time is allocated to natural and social sciences and to foreign languages.

The teaching in Malta is done mainly through predetermined curriculum content and textbooks. However, the teachers are at liberty to choose the teaching activities and methods (Key Data on Education in Europe).

Challenge/need for action: The areas which require further improvement and are identified by the National Literacy Strategy for All (2014) are the following:

- assessing the situation in literacy and drawing up action plans; promoting Balanced Literacy teaching and learning;
- providing more Reading Time developing literacy performance portfolio for students with literacy difficulties;
- developing Alternative Learning Programmes;
- extending school libraries;
- increasing the opportunities for capacity building and continuous professional development;
- promoting dyslexia-friendly schools;
- promoting programmes in Basic skills intended for young people;
- more effective use of new technologies and social networks in the teaching of literacy.

5.2.3 Reading Instruction

While most literacy researchers have clear concepts about effective literacy instruction, we do not know much about what is actually going on in classrooms in Malta or other European countries. In order to describe the practice of reading instruction we would need extensive observational studies. However, there are only rare observational studies (Philipp 2014). There is a noteworthy shortage of data on actual reading instruction in school. Only PIRLS offer some data for primary schools, albeit based on self-reports by teachers (PIRLS) which might not be valid and may be biased by social desirability.

In PIRLS 2006, fourth-grade reading teachers reported about instructional materials, strategies and activities. In a latent class analysis Lankes and Carstensen (2007) identified 5 types of instruction:

- Type 1: Teacher-directed instruction in the whole class without individual support;
- Type 2: Individualized child-centred instruction, seldom whole-class instruction;
- Type 3: Whole-class instruction with little cognitive stimulation and little variety in methods, without individual support;
- Type 4: Variety of methods with high individual support;
- Type 5: Highly stimulating whole-class instruction with didactic materials.

There were significant differences between countries concerning these types of instruction (Lankes and Carstensen 2007). Also, the analysis of PIRLS 2011 teacher self-reports revealed differences between the approaches to reading instruction in European countries (Mullis et al. 2012a, Tarelli et al. 2012). However, Malta was not included in this analysis.

In PIRLS 2011 principals and teachers provided some information on language and reading instruction. Concerning the **instructional time spent on language and reading**, the following results are of interest.

Based on PIRLS 2011, 80.8% of the students in Malta were taught by teachers who implemented instructional practices to engage learning in “most lessons”, which indicates a high level of engagement in the Maltese classrooms. However, the proportion of students engaged in specific reading comprehension strategies is relatively low.

In 2011, pupils in Malta spent 891 hours per year on language and reading instruction at school when compared to the EU-24 average of 850 hours. Students in Malta spent 181 hours (about 20%) on instruction in the language of the PIRLS test, compared to an EU-24 average of 241 hours. In Malta, 37 instructional hours per year were spent on reading as part of the language programme, compared to the EU-24 average of 68. This EU-24 average is in itself low when compared to the averages of the United States and New Zealand (both 131 hours). Teachers in Malta reported allocating less time to the teaching reading across the curriculum and in reading classes (103 instructional hours per year) when compared to the EU-24 average of 147 hours (PIRLS 2011- (Mullis, Martin, Kennedy et al., 2012, p. 214, Exhibit 8.4). EU averages from PIRLS 2011 database (see ELINET PIRLS 2011 Appendix, Table I3). According to Mullis et al., response rates from teachers in Malta were lower than expected on items dealing with instructional time. However, the Maltese curriculum specifies that 15% of instructional time (in grades 1-4) should be spent on language/reading time in English and 15% in Maltese (Mullis et al., 2012, Vol. 1, Exhibit 6).

Activities of teachers to develop student’s comprehension skills and to engage them

Among adolescents in most European countries there are remarkable gaps in reading achievement - equivalent to almost three years of schooling - between students with good knowledge of reading strategies and those who have a limited knowledge of strategies, including metacognitive ones. There is a similar gap concerning the level of engagement. In view of these results it is of interest to look at the reports of teachers concerning reading strategies and engagement.

PIRLS 2011 provides information on the frequency with which teachers in Malta engage students in specific reading comprehension activities. The following are the percentages for Malta and the EU-24 average of students in Grade 4 who engaged in specific comprehension activities ‘every day or almost every day’ (ELINET PIRLS 2011 Appendix, Table I1):

- Locate information within the text: 37% (EU-24 = 65.5%);
- Identify main ideas of what they have read: 40.8% (EU-24 = 55.5%);
- Explain or support their understanding of what they have read: 47.3% (EU-24 = 61.6%);
- Compare what they have read with experiences they have had: 29.3% (EU-24 = 34.7%);
- Compare what they have read with other things they have read: 23.1% (EU-24 = 22.4%);
- Make predictions about what will happen next in the text: 26.2% (EU-24 = 22.4%);
- Make generalisations and inferences: 15.4% (EU-24 = 36.5%);
- Describe the style or structure of the text: 12.5% (EU-24 = 22.7%);
- Determine the author’s perspective or intention: 9.9% (EU-24 = 21%).

Source: PIRLS 2011 database. See Mullis et al. 2012a, Exhibit 8.8, p. 226 for data for ‘at least weekly’, s. also Table I.1 in Appendix C.

PIRLS also assessed which instructional practices teachers use to engage students in learning (for an overview of responses in Malta and other European countries S. Table I.2 in Appendix C). PIRLS 2011 demonstrates that students whose teachers used instructional practices to engage students learning in most lessons (items: summarizing the lesson's goals, relating the lesson to students' daily lives, questioning to elicit reasons and explanations, encouraging students to show improvement, praising students for good effort, bringing interesting things to class) had higher scores in reading than those with such practices used in only about half the lessons or less (Mullis et al. 2012a, exh. 8.6, p.220).

On an instruction to engage students scale, the mean score for Malta was 10.3 (equivalent to using engagement strategies in most of the lessons), compared to an EU-24 average of 9.8 (also equivalent to using strategies in every, or almost every lesson).

Challenge/need for action: Fewer students in Malta than the EU-24 average were engaged daily or almost daily in strategies such as identifying main ideas of what they have read, making generalisations and inferences, describing the style or structure of the text, and determining the author's purpose or intention. This may require reconsideration of both the National Curriculum which deals with language education and teacher preparation. Language education methods which put increased emphasis on textual analyses are to be promoted. Language teachers are to be prepared to implement such strategies.

Digital literacy as part of the curriculum for primary and secondary schools

Digital literacy is part of the curriculum in Malta. All schools are required to follow the National Curriculum Framework (2012). There are national strategies covering training measures for ICT in schools, digital/media literacy, e-skills development, training research projects in e-learning and e-inclusion. There are central steering documents for all ICT learning objectives. According to these official steering documents, students and teachers should use ICT in all subjects in class and for complementary activities. At secondary level ICT is also taught as a separate subject. In Malta ICT is integrated into the secondary school curriculum as a cross-curricular competence. Students are required to acquire skills related to email and programming, and to learn to recognize, to understand as well as to compare and to select useful information (Ministry of Education and Employment, 2012). Teacher education and continuing professional development courses are provided to educators (European Schoolnet, 2013).

5.2.4 Early identification of and support for struggling literacy learners

Effective assessment tools upon entry to primary school will help teachers identify literacy skills from the very beginning of formal education. Regular formative assessment throughout primary school will ensure that literacy problems do not continue to go unrecognised, and that students receive the support they need through education that matches their learning needs. This should prevent children leaving school with unrecognized literacy problems (EU High Level Group of Experts on Literacy 2012a, p. 67).

Standards as basis of assessment of reading difficulties

Standards of reading achievement allowing teachers, parents and school leaders to understand the rate of progress of learners and to identify individual strengths and needs should be integrated in the curriculum and should be the basis of assessments. The High Level Group pointed out that there is a need to establish minimal standards of literacy achievement (benchmarks) for each grade, and to

administer regular tests based on these standards, to allow for identification of struggling readers/writers (EU High Level Group of Experts on Literacy 2012a, p. 43).

All EU countries have defined learning objectives in reading to be reached at the end of primary and secondary education cycles. However, only a few Member States, including Malta, have detailed standards (benchmarks) at each grade (school year) which form the basis of assessments allowing for early identification of reading difficulties and subsequent allocation of attention and resources. These standard-based assessments allow teachers and school leaders to judge children's progress and to target additional reading support.

Screenings for reading competence to identify struggling readers

National tests for monitoring schools and/or the education system are the only types of tests organised in Belgium (Flemish Community), Spain, Luxembourg and Iceland. In Belgium (French Community), Denmark, Malta, the United Kingdom (England) and Liechtenstein, most national tests serve the purpose of identifying individual learning needs. The latter two types of national tests are organised right from the beginning of schooling and mostly not beyond compulsory education promotion of pupils annually (KMK, 2013: 230).

The school psychological services provide psycho-educational assessment and intervention service for students with regard to physical, mental, perceptual, emotional and behavioural difficulties. They collaborate with Child Development Assessment Unit on the assessment and identification of pupils with special needs (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2014). There are national benchmarking examinations at sixth grade, for speaking, reading and writing in both Maltese and English.

Furthermore, under the Strategic plan for the Prevention of Early School Leaving in Malta, an Early School Leaving Working Group was established. The main objectives of the group are: to determine, coordinate and monitor services that address the needs of children and young people who are disengaged or at risk of disengaging in specific local conditions; ensure that pro-active preventive measures are in place; establish support mechanisms that parents, families and carers may require to better support children or young persons (Department of Curriculum Management, n.d.; Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014b). There are also annual, end-of-year examinations at secondary level.

Challenges: It seems that although a solid and robust assessment regime is in place, further work needs to be done with regard to designing and implementing research-based, age-appropriate educational intervention. This would ensure that a larger number of students register the required educational progress.

Supporting struggling literacy learners

Number of struggling readers receiving remedial instruction

PIRLS (2011) offered some data concerning issues of remedial instruction in primary schools.

It is considered that 18.9% of students in fourth grade in Malta require remedial reading instruction (PIRLS, 2011). 10.9% of students in this age group receive remedial reading instruction (ELINET PIRLS 2011 Appendix, Table K1). On average across the EU-24 countries, 18.1% of students in Grade 4 were

identified by their teachers as requiring remedial teaching, while 13.3% are identified as being in receipt of such teaching.

In Malta, 44.8% of students in fourth grade performed at or below the PIRLS low benchmark on overall reading (ELINET PIRLS 2011 Appendix, Table A6). Therefore, the percentage of students in Malta who received remedial reading instruction was considerably below the average percentage reported on PIRLS. Students who were still experiencing reading difficulties at the end of Grade 3 receive a statutory action plan developed by the school.

Kinds of support offered

It is crucial that teachers provide support measures to help struggling readers. European Countries differ widely in their approaches, from in-class support with additional support staff (reading specialists, teaching assistants or other adults) working in the classroom together with a teacher, to out-of-class support where speech therapists or (educational) psychologists offer guidance and support for students with reading difficulties.

In PIRLS 2011, teachers reported that 63% of students in Malta are in classes where the teacher arranges for students who are struggling readers to receive specialised professional support (Table 23). The corresponding EU average was lower at 55%. Fifty-two percent of students in Malta were in classes whose teachers waited to see if performance improved with maturation, which was higher than the EU-24 average of 37%. A majority of students in Malta (73%) were taught by teachers who spent more time working on reading individually with a student who fell behind, though this was notably less than the EU-24 average (90%). Finally, 96% of students in Malta and 97% on average across the EU-24 were taught by teachers who asked parents to provide additional support to a student who fell behind in reading.

Table 23: Percentages of Students in Classrooms Where Teachers Engage in Specified Activities to Support Students Who Begin to Fall Behind in Reading, Malta and EU-24 Average

| | Malta (Yes) | EU-24 Average (Yes) |
|--|----------------|------------------------|
| I have students work with a specialised professional | 63.3 | 55.2 |
| I wait to see if performance improves with maturation | 51.6 | 36.6 |
| I spend more time working on reading individually with the student | 72.7 | 90.1 |
| I ask the parents to help the students with reading | 96.3 | 96.9 |

Source: ELINET PIRLS 2011 Appendix, Tables K5-K8.

PIRLS 2011 provides information about additional staff and availability of support persons for reading. In PIRLS 2011, teachers reported that 28% of students in Malta were in classes where there is always access to specialised professionals to support students with reading difficulties, compared with an EU-24 average of 25% (Table 24). Fifty-one percent of students in Malta were in classrooms where there was access to a teacher aide, while less than 1% are in classrooms where there is access to an adult/parent volunteer. The corresponding EU-24 averages were 13% and 3%. Therefore, teachers in Malta, when compared to the EU-24 average, had similar access to specialised professionals, more access to teacher aides, and less access to adult volunteers.

Table 24: Percentages of Students in Classrooms with Access to Additional Personnel to Work with Children with Reading Difficulties, Malta and EU 24 Average

| Access to... | Malta | | | EU-24 Average | | |
|--------------------------|--------|-----------|-------|---------------|-----------|-------|
| | Always | Sometimes | Never | Always | Sometimes | Never |
| Specialised professional | 28.0 | 48.1 | 23.9 | 24.9 | 41.8 | 33.3 |
| Teacher aide | 50.9 | 21.8 | 27.3 | 13.2 | 33.6 | 53.2 |
| Adult/parent volunteer | 0.9 | 3.3 | 95.8 | 2.8 | 17.5 | 79.7 |

Source: ELINET PIRLS 2011 Appendix, Tables K2-K4

Individual or small-group intensive instruction by reading specialists is essential when tackling reading difficulties. Malta is among the 8 European countries (the other are: Ireland, the United Kingdom, and the five Nordic countries) where teachers could request the help of specialist reading teachers to assist them in the classroom while tackling pupils' reading difficulties. In Malta, the classroom teachers were supported by 'Literacy Support Teachers'. They were not required to hold special literacy qualifications, however, they were obliged to participate in professional in-service training (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2011, p. 14)

There were services for students with special needs, and curricular adaptations were made to support learning (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2014). In addition, support and alternative arrangements for national examinations are provided to students with learning needs. In school transitions and at secondary school graduation, guidance was offered to both the student and their parents. Teacher support was also offered to students to help them finish their secondary studies and in transition to further education or employment (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2014).

Children with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities are also referred to in the National Literacy Strategy (2014). It proposes:

- the three-tiered referral system, involving the class teacher, school-based and external professionals to support a wider spectrum of learning difficulties which should be covered by the specific learning difficulties services;
- that multisensory teaching is promoted;
- that intensive literacy courses over an identified period of time should be offered to students with severe literacy difficulties;
- that families should be more involved in the support and intervention process of children with learning difficulties;
- that public libraries should offer more reading materials and software which is appropriate for learners with reading difficulties.

Support for struggling readers – a legal right?

The Education Act (2013) states that the Minister shall ensure that the national policy on inclusive education is being applied in all schools, and that the resources, tools and facilities required are available, so that such an education may be given as effectively as possible. The Minister shall also ensure that a) there exist specialised Centres of Resources, which support schools and colleges in the

implementation of the policy of inclusive education by giving service to students who have specific learning difficulties, and b) other Centres, which provide education and training services to students with individual educational needs whose educational entitlement may be better achieved in such centres. (Part 5: §58 – 1 & 2).

Also, it is stated in the Education Act (2013) that the Directorate for Educational Services shall in conjunction with schools and colleges provide the resources required for inclusive and special educational programmes and for other schemes related to individual educational needs (Part 2: §11 - 2).

Challenge: Strengthening remedial support

The National Literacy Strategy for All (2014) seeks to enhance the literacy skills of Maltese learners. The main actions implemented include research groups to address areas of relevance, national reading campaigns, increased opportunities for reading time, and the use of new technologies in the teaching and learning of literacy.

The Strategic Plan for the Prevention of Early School Leaving in Malta seeks to extend the use of mobile technologies and e-learning in schools, in order to meet better the needs of students at risk of failure (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014b, pp. 24–25). It suggests also a school-based Alternative Learning Programme to be established for students whose learning needs are not catered for by the ordinary mainstream curriculum (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014b, p. 41).

5.2.5 Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and Continuous Professional Development (CPD) of Teachers

Entry requirements for Initial Teacher Education

In Malta, admission to initial teacher education involves a secondary school leaving certificate, general entry requirements for tertiary education, language proficiency test, and other specific selection criteria. According to European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, (2013, Fig. A5, p. 32), a third of all European countries (including Finland, Italy, Lithuania and Scotland) have specific selection methods such as satisfactory performance in a specific aptitude test or interviews in which candidates are asked about their motives for becoming teachers.

Students applying to read for a Bachelor of Education at the University of Malta need to have obtained the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) certificate (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2013, p. 32). Due to specific linguistic requirements, language proficiency tests are included in the selection procedures for tertiary education in Malta (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2013).

Challenge: There exists already a Quality Assurance Department (QAD) within the Ministry for Education, which seeks to ensure that educational standards are maintained in schools. The Quality Assurance function of the Council for the Teaching Profession is to be strengthened further.

Level of qualification and length of the required training for primary teachers

Table 25 shows the proportions of Grade 4 students taught by teachers in Malta with varying qualifications in PIRLS 2011. 10% of Grade 4 students had teachers who completed a Postgraduate University Degree; 69% had teachers who completed a Bachelor's Degree or equivalent, but not a Postgraduate Degree; 11% had teachers who completed post-secondary education, but not a

Bachelor's Degree; and 10% had teachers with only secondary education. The EU-24 average for the last category is 6%.

Table 25: Percentages of Students Taught by Teachers with Varying Educational Qualifications

| Highest Qualification | Completed University Post-grad Degree | Completed Bachelor's Degree or Equivalent | Completed Post Secondary Education but not a Degree | No Further than Upper Secondary |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------------|---|---|---------------------------------|
| Malta | 10 | 69 | 11 | 10 |
| EU-24 | 27 | 53 | 14 | 6 |

Source: PIRLS 2011 Database (see Mullis et al., 2011, Exhibit 7.1, p. 188, and Appendix C, Table J1).

Malta requires Primary teachers to have a Bachelor's degree which involves four years of study. Typically, Primary teachers' education routes are through a four-year university Bachelor's degree programme in primary education. In ten European countries – Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Germany, France, Iceland, Portugal, Slovakia and Slovenia – initial education for Primary teachers is at Master's level and usually takes five years. In recent years an increase in the minimum length of initial teacher education can be noted for many countries (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2013, Fig. E2, p. 112). As from October 2016, Malta will also embark on a Master's route for the initial teacher education of both Primary and Secondary teachers.

In Malta, the initial teacher education of prospective primary teachers includes courses specifically dedicated to tackling reading difficulties (a module on Reading and Writing Difficulties for Young Learners)(European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2011, p. 100). There are also reading-related programmes which are organised by the University of Malta; a one-year certificate course for specialist reading teachers; an 18-month postgraduate certificate course in assessment and support for learners with dyslexia; and a Master's in Literacy (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2011). The minimum time allotted to in-school placements during ITE in Malta is 375 hours. There is considerable variation in Europe. For prospective Primary teachers, this time ranges from 40 hours in Latvia to 900 hours in Austria (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2013, Fig. 2.6, p. 102).

Length of preparation of secondary teachers

Secondary teachers in Malta should also obtain a Bachelor's (4 years). In almost half of the countries, two different ITE models offering the same professional options coexist. Trainee teachers may follow a professional route from the start (the so-called 'concurrent' model of ITE) or begin with the academic study of their subject before specialising as teachers (the 'consecutive' model). ITE may last longer for those who prefer to qualify as teachers after a first standard academic (non-teaching) degree (as in Bulgaria, Croatia, Lithuania, Hungary, Romania, Finland, the United Kingdom, and Iceland). However, the concurrent and consecutive routes through of ITE have the same length of time in Ireland, Latvia, Malta, Poland, Slovenia, Montenegro, and Norway. The minimum total duration of ITE for work in general lower secondary education is usually between four and six years. Minimum level and total duration of ITE for work in lower secondary education (ISCED 2), and the minimum length of professional training (including in-school placements) is of 4 years in Malta (European Commission, 2015, p. 32).

Besides knowledge of their subject, trainee teachers need to acquire professional skills. Their professional training includes both theoretical studies (the educational theory of teaching, psychology,

etc.) and practical training in schools, the observation of teaching, and possibly some time spent assuming direct responsibility for it. Most countries specify a minimum period for professional training. The main model for minimum professional training, including in-school placements (in ECTS) in Malta is of 90 credits, the minimum in-school placements is of 30 credits. Other existing model including in-school placements (in ECTS) in Malta is of 60 credits, the minimum in-school placement is of 20 credits.

The induction phase is offered in addition to the professional training provided during ITE. It usually lasts one school year, except in Hungary and Malta where it lasts two years. Since 2000, an induction phase has been introduced in Malta (2010/11). In countries with a compulsory induction phase, mentoring is most often prescribed for fully qualified first-time teachers. It is also prescribed for newcomers to teaching in Malta. Since 2000, mentoring systems for newly-qualified teachers have been implemented in Malta (2012/13) (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2011, p. 44).

The role of literacy expertise in Initial Teacher Training

Important teacher competences are a) the assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of each individual student they teach, b) selection of appropriate instructional methods and c) instruction in an effective and efficient manner. These topics should therefore be addressed in teacher training. Knowledge/skills in reading instruction for prospective primary and lower secondary teachers of reading are included in central guidelines for ITE, 2009/10 (CITE 2) as well as generic skills or methodology for teaching reading is incorporated in ITE (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2011).

In PIRLS 2011, teachers reported about their areas of specialisation in their formal education and training (Mullis et al. 2012a, exh. 7.2, p. 190). In Malta, 65% of the fourth grade students had teachers with an educational emphasis on language, 62% had teachers with an emphasis on pedagogy/teaching reading, and 16% had teachers with an emphasis on reading theory. On average across the EU-24, 74% of the fourth grade students had teachers with an educational emphasis on language, 59% had teachers with an emphasis on pedagogy/teaching reading, and 30% had teachers with an emphasis on reading theory (PIRLS 2011 Database).

Challenge/need for action: Initial teacher education in Malta requires a more specific focus on literacy acquisition and development. Whereas, this is the case to some extent for the language areas and subjects, increased emphasis on literacy is to be put in the initial teacher education curricula for non-language areas and subjects. Specific attention needs to be given also to bilingual and plurilingual issues.

Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

All teachers of years 1 to 3 in Malta followed in-service training on the teaching and assessment of literacy core skills. Various courses/workshops on reading- related subject matter or methods are offered to all teachers. Over 90% of the teachers attended CPD sessions (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2011, p. 94).

Mandatory CPD attendance for 3 training programmes of short duration per school year. Time structure of CPD programmes:

"All school-based teaching staff must participate in three Professional Development Sessions (PDS) of two hours each after school hours spread over the scholastic year. The College Principal or Head of School or the teaching staff has the opportunity to choose

the theme of their PDS and attendance is remunerated. Furthermore, each school is assigned one afternoon per term, during school hours, to organise a School Development Plan session. School-based teaching staff is also required to take part in a one day-long School Development Plan session devoted to the audit, review and formulation of the School Development Plan. This school development day is held during full days and students do not attend school on this day. Teachers, if called upon to do so, also attend in-service training (INSET) held over three days in July or in September. Such courses are held every year but teachers may also opt to attend voluntary courses organised by the Education Directorates. Teachers are given a certificate of attendance for both compulsory and voluntary courses" (Eurypedia Reports on CPD).

In all countries analysed, teachers teaching reading-related subjects attended CPD activities voluntarily (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2011). The CPD plan at school level for teachers in general lower secondary education (ISCED 2), according to central regulations, 2013/14, is compulsory in Malta. In those countries in which a formal CPD plan is compulsory, developing it in practice may be the responsibility of the following the school management team or board, the school head as in Malta. Incentives to encourage teachers in general lower secondary education (ISCED 2) to take part in CPD, according to central regulations, 2013/14 in Malta include promotions (advancement to a different occupational grade) and financial incentives: salary increases and/or additional allowances (within the same occupational grade). In Malta these incentives are linked to the acquisition of further formal qualifications, such as those obtained as a result of (academic) specialisation, a research-based Master's degree, or a PhD.

Time spent on professional development related to literacy

No data are available concerning the participation rate of teachers in literacy-related professional development, with one exemption. In PIRLS 2011 teachers were asked how much time they had spent on professional development in the area of literacy in the two years before the study. In Malta, 19% of the students have teachers who spent 16 hours or more (EU-24 average: 18%), 58% had teachers who spent some time but less than 16 hours (EU-24 average 53%), and 23% had teachers who spent no time (EU-24 average 29%) (Mullis et al. 2012a, exh. 7.4, p. 196). These figures show a relatively high engagement by Malta's teachers in professional development.

The data for Malta and for the EU-24 average are given in table 8.16.

Table 26: Percentages of Students with Teachers Allocating Varying Amounts of Time to Professional Development Related to Reading in the Last Two Years – Malta and EU-24 Average

| | More than 35 hours | 16-35 hours | 6-15 hours | Less than 6 hours | None |
|-------|--------------------|-------------|------------|-------------------|------|
| Malta | Not available | 19 | 58 | Not available | 23 |
| EU-24 | 9 | 9 | 25 | 28 | 29 |

Source: PISA 2011 database (see Mullis et al., 2012a, Exhibit 7.4, page 196, and Table J4 in Appendix C).

Challenge: So far the provision of Continuing Professional Development in Malta has been somewhat sporadic and fragmented. In 2015 an Institute for Professional Development in Education was set up. This will seek to offer Continuing Professional Development on a systematic and structured basis in order to meet the actual needs of educators and educational administrators.

5.2.6 Digital literacy as part of initial teacher education

Digital literacy is a core component of all initial teacher education programmes in Malta. It is featured as stand-alone study-units within the initial teacher education curriculum or integrated across areas at the primary level and across subjects at the secondary level (Faculty of Education, University of Malta Course Programmes, 2015²¹).

Challenge: As from 2016, one-to-one technologies, namely tablets, shall be introduced in primary schools. This will necessitate specific Continuing Professional Development programmes to upgrade the skills of teachers in the use of these technologies in the classroom.

5.2.7 Improving the quality of literacy teaching for children and adolescents:

Improving the quality of Early Years Education

The National Literacy Strategy (2014) provides recommendations to ensure the improvement of the quality of education in all stages. Some of the suggestions stated in the policy are:

- more research needs to be conducted in the area of bilingualism and its implication of early literacy development in Malta;
- Literacy Teams led by a head of department in charge of literacy in consultation with the Education Officers for Maltese, English and Literacy and composed of class teachers, complementary and support teachers need to be set up within each College in Malta;
- the teams should use the Literacy Handbook procedures as a departure point and should also seek alternative ways of reaching their literacy targets;
- schools have to develop Literacy Action Plans;
- learners with literacy difficulties should be identified by the end of Year 3;
- Continuing Professional Development should be provided to all teachers, Learning Support Assistants and to the members of the Senior Management Team in order to prepare them for better planning, effective delivery and review of the implementation of the school-based literacy strategy.

Early identification of and support for children and adolescents with literacy difficulties

The State's School Psychological Services provides psycho-educational assessment and intervention service for pupils and pupils with special needs due to physical, mental, perceptual, emotional and behavioural difficulties. These collaborate with the Child Development Assessment Unit on the assessment and identification of pupils with special needs (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2014). Furthermore, under the Strategic plan for Prevention of Early School Leaving in Malta, an Early School Leaving Working Group has been established. The main objects of the group are: to determine, coordinate and monitor services that address the needs of children and young people who are disengaged or at risk of disengaging in specific local conditions; ensure that pro-active preventive measures are in place; establish support mechanisms that parents, families and carers may require to better support children or young persons (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014b, p. 17).

In Malta a number of services for children with learning difficulties and disabilities are offered at school and within the community. These take the form of multidisciplinary assessment, statementing,

²¹ See: <http://www.um.edu.mt/educ/programme/UBEHPRE-2010-1-O>.

complementary education, literacy enhancement programmes, and counselling. This policy seeks to ensure better integration and further development of the existing programmes.

Assessment standards and methods in Malta are prescribed by the language/reading curriculum (Mullis et al. 2012, Vol.1, exhibit 7, p. 33). At the time of writing, a learning outcomes framework covering all subjects at primary level has been posted on the internet for consultation. Outcomes are only available from Level 5 (Grades 3-4) onwards. At Level 5 for English, there are outcomes for speaking and listening, language awareness and production, reading, literature and writing. Examples of learning outcomes in reading at Level 5 include²²:

- I can read silently on my own and demonstrate understanding, e.g., by answering comprehension questions;
- I can read and understand a wide range of age-appropriate texts across genres, independently and in groups;
- I can use a range of strategies to aid comprehension and find the required information in the text.

Firman and Camilleri (2012) point out that checklists are currently available to teachers to diagnose difficulties in Maltese and English, when a student is not making sufficient progress or is lagging behind. The outcomes of the checklists are designed to identify students' strengths and weaknesses and determine the nature of the support required. Complementary education (support) teachers and literacy specialists jointly plan a programme of intervention. Three checklists are available:

- Checklist 1 focuses on the development of early literacy and emphasises phonological awareness;
- Checklist 2 continues to focus on phonological awareness, but has higher levels of attainment regarding reading and spelling, and
- Checklist 3 consolidates skills that allow children to read unfamiliar texts in both Maltese and English.

Students who have not reached the expected level by the end of Grade 3 are referred for a full assessment of their difficulties. According to Firman and Camilleri, such assessments include word reading, prose reading and comprehension, free writing, and other tests to investigate the possibility of dyslexia. Students who are still experiencing reading difficulties at the end of Grade 3 receive a statutory action plan developed by the school for Grade 4. In addition to a complementary learning teacher, a team of literacy support teachers and dyslexia specialists support the classroom teacher in determining the appropriate programmes for a student with reading difficulties. Children with severe reading difficulties can access the services of a full-time or part-time learning support assistant during school hours.

Pre-service and in-service teacher training

In Malta prospective teachers follow specific modules in reading and writing difficulties for young learners and for adolescents (Faculty of Education, University of Malta Course Programmes, 2015²³). Throughout the year CPD in literacy is organised for classroom and specialist teachers on a monthly basis by the National Literacy Agency.

²² See: Source: <http://www.schoolslearningoutcomes.edu.mt/en/subjects/english/level/5>.

²³ See: <http://www.um.edu.mt/educ/programme/UBEHPRE-2010-1-O>.

5.3 Increasing participation, inclusion and equity

The High Level Group of Experts on Literacy drew attention to persistent gaps in literacy related to gender, socio-economic status and migration (HLG Final report 2012, pp. 46–50). These gaps derive from the reading literacy studies that repeatedly show unequal distribution of results among groups of children and adolescents (PIRLS, PISA).

The **socio-economic gap** in literacy refers to the fact that children and adolescents from disadvantaged families have lower mean performance in reading than students from more advantaged families. However, the degree to which family background relates to the reading literacy performance varies from one country to another even in Europe. Family background measured as parents' educational level and/or occupation or measured as economic, social and cultural status is one of the most important predictors of reading literacy performance. Family background also explains some of the performance differences between schools.

The **migrant gap** refers to unequal distribution of learning outcomes between the native students and immigrant students who in most countries have lower levels of performance in reading than the native students. In many countries the migrant gap is associated with the socio-economic gap but this explains only a part of it, because the migrant gap is also associated with home language differing from the language of instruction at school which increases the risk of low performance in reading. It is noteworthy that even language minorities with high status in the society (and above-average socioeconomic background) show below average performance if the language of school is not supported at home, which signals the importance of a good command of the language used at school.

Another alarming gap in reading literacy in many countries is the **gender difference**, which is more vital for adolescents than for children. In all PISA studies, 15-year-old girls outperformed boys in reading in all the European countries, and boys are frequently overrepresented among the low performers. PISA 2009 results showed that these differences are associated with differences in student attitudes and behaviours that are related to gender, i.e. with reading engagement, and not gender as such. Therefore the gender gap is also related to growing up in a family or in a school environment that values reading and learning and considers reading as a meaningful activity.

To achieve fairer and more inclusive participation in literacy learning we need to close these gaps, which already start in early childhood, by supporting children, adolescents and adults "at risk". The groups of students "at risk" must have access to language screening and flexible language learning opportunities in school, tailored to individual needs. Furthermore early support for children and adolescents with special needs is necessary.

In the section below we address the following questions:

- Compensating socio-economic and cultural background factors;
- Support for children with special needs;
- Promoting preschool attendance, especially among disadvantaged children;
- Provisions for preschool children with language difficulties;
- Support for children and adolescents whose home language is not the language of school;
- Preventing early school leaving;
- Addressing the gender gap among adolescents (might be more).

This section refers to children and adolescents who out of different reasons can be considered as a group “at risk” (from disadvantaged homes, those whose home language is not the language of school, or those with “special needs”). The focus is on preventing literacy difficulties among members of these groups. There is a certain overlap with the topic “Identification of and support for struggling literacy learners”, dealt with in the section, “Improving the quality of teaching”, which is concerned with those who have already developed literacy difficulties (s. 5.2.4).

5.3.1 Compensating socio-economic and cultural background factors

The child’s **socioeconomic and cultural background** has a strong impact on literacy. Material poverty and educational level, particularly of the mother, are well-recognized main factors influencing literacy (World Bank 2005, Naudeau et al. 2011). Socio-economic background also influences biological risks to children, by determining early exposure to risk factors and increased susceptibility (Jednoróg et al. 2012). The primary language spoken at home also influences literacy development (Sylva et al. 2004).

In order to describe the socioeconomic and cultural factors that influence emergent literacy, several indicators were used which stem from international surveys, thus providing comparability across Europe (for more information concerning the concepts and indicators s. Appendix A).

Gini index

The Gini index is the most commonly used measure of inequality, and represents the income distribution of a nation’s residents with values between 0% (maximum equality) and 100% (maximum inequality). In the European countries participating in ELINET the range is from 22.6% in Norway to 35% in Spain (for an overview of European countries see table A1 in Appendix B). With 27.1% Malta is close to the European average.

Child poverty

An indicator of child poverty is the percentage of children living in a household in which disposable income, when adjusted for family size and composition, is less than 50% of the national median income (UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre 2012). The range is from 4.7% in Iceland to 25.5% in Romania (for an overview of European countries see table A2 in Appendix B). With 8.9% Malta is in the middle of the distribution.

The proportion of children (under the age of 16) with low income in Malta is 19%; which is higher than the population as a whole in the European Union (15 percent). This percentage rises for children in single parent households where 35% are in or at risk of poverty and 55% of single-parent families in Malta can be classified as having a ‘low income’ (EPASI Country report Malta, 2008).

Mother’s education level

The PIRLS 2011 database offers information about mother’s level of education referring to ISCED levels. The figures for Malta are presented below and point to a high level of education, compared with the average figures for the European countries participating in PIRLS (shown in parentheses) (for an overview of European countries see table A3 in Appendix B).

- No schooling: 0.3% (0.6%)
- ISCED 1: primary education: 2.3% (5.3%)
- ISCED 2: Lower secondary education: 54.3% (16.7 %)
- ISCED 3: Upper secondary education: 18.1% (36.1%)

ISCED 4: Post-secondary non-tertiary education: 5.1% (7.1 %)
ISCED 5B: Tertiary education (first stage) with occupation orientation: 6.9% (9.5%)
ISCED 5A: Tertiary education (first stage) with academic orientation 8.3% (13.9%)
BEYOND: 4.3% (10.1%)
Not applicable: 0.7% (0.9%).

Teenage mothers

According to the UNFPA The State of World Population 2014 report the Adolescent birth rate per 1000 women aged 15-19 between 1999 and 2012 for Malta is 17% (the data refers only to a part of the country or has been adjusted)²⁴.

Single parent

According to Eurostat (2012, Figure A 7), in Malta the percentage of children living mainly with a single parent is 5.3%. The range for the European countries participating in ELINET is from 1.4% in Croatia to 30% in Denmark (for an overview of European countries see table A5 in Appendix B).

Migrant parents

In 2011 Malta had a total of 20,000 foreign citizens which is 4.9% of the total population. Half of these non-Maltese residents are the citizens of another EU member state while the other half consists of citizens of countries outside the EU (Eurostat, July 2012, *EU Citizens living in another Member State accounted for 2.5% of the EU population in 2011*). In 2011-2012 scholastic year there were approximately 706 Third Country National students in the primary and secondary schools in Malta (369 in the State Schools and 337 in the Non-State sector, 27 in Church Schools and 310 in Independent Schools) (UNHCR & Aditus, 2012).

According to the most recent unofficial data provided by the government, there are approximately 3,763 foreign students in the primary and secondary schools in 2015-2016 scholastic year (2042 in the State Schools, 61 in Church schools and 1660 in the Independent schools). Approximately 925 non-Maltese children are attending kindergarten classes in Malta.

Primary language spoken at home different from language used at school

According to PIRLS 2011 (Mullis et al. 2012a, exhibit 4.3 - Students Spoke the Language of the Test Before Starting School, p. 118), the proportion of children speaking a different language at home from the one used at school is the highest in Malta, at 55.5% (for an overview of European countries see table A7 in Appendix B). However, there is quite significant performance gap in reading competence at grade 4 between children who spoke the language of the test before starting school (mean reading score 513) and those who did not speak the language (mean reading score 459).

Challenge: According to PIRLS 2011 and PISA 2009+ Malta has a very high percentage of pupils who speak a different language at home from the languages used at school (55%). Additional support is being provided to these children through the provision of language support teachers, either at the school of the child or in a regional hub. An Early Years Language Policy has been drawn up to provide guidance to early childhood educators. This is to be disseminated widely and put into practice in the coming years (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2015).

²⁴ See: http://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/EN-SWOP14-Report_FINAL-web.pdf.

5.3.2 Support for children with special needs

Not only children from culturally disadvantaged families are “at risk” in their literacy development but also those with very low birth weight and severe prematurity, factors that are associated with developmental disabilities, including reading and writing disabilities. Also cognitive and sensory disabilities must be considered.

Very low birth weight and severe prematurity

According to PERISTAT (2010, Figure 7.11, p.149) the percentage of live births with a birth weight under 2500 grams in Malta was 6.5%. The range is from 3.0% in Iceland to 8.8% in Cyprus (for an overview of European countries see table E1 in Appendix B).

According to the same source (PERISTAT 2010, Figure 7.14, p.155) the percentage of live births with a gestational age <32 weeks is 0.8% in Malta (with a range from 0.7% in Iceland to 1.4% in Hungary). The percentage of live births with a gestational age between 32 and 36 weeks was 6.4% (with a range from 4.5% in Lithuania to 7.5% in Hungary (for an overview of European countries see table E2 in Appendix B).

Cognitive or sensory disabilities

Inclusive and special education in Malta is an educational priority. The regulations are reviewed frequently. Learning support is provided by LSAs. Specific training in this area is provided to class and support teachers. In 2007 the Student Services Department (SSD) in the Directorate for Educational Services (DES) was established. In 2008 Service Managers to administer the Inclusive Education Section, Special Education and Resource Centres and Psycho-Social Service were appointed. Learners with special needs are included at all levels of the educational system. Some of them manage to move also into tertiary education.

In 2009, the Student Services Department published proposals for special school reform, according to which four special schools were modified into resource centres: one primary, two secondary and one for young adults. Each centre is incorporated within a college and aims to offer services to mainstream schools, as well as providing full-time education for a small number of learners with complex needs (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2014, pp. 29–30).

5.3.3 Promoting preschool attendance, especially among disadvantaged children

The benefits of attending preschool institutions have been proven in many studies. The duration of attendance is associated with greater academic improvement (Mullis, Martin, Foy, & Drucker, 2012).

According to European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Eurostat (2014, Figure C1 p.62), Malta reaches the European benchmark for at least 95% of children between age 4 and the start of compulsory education participating in ECEC (for an overview of European countries see table C1 in Appendix B). However, OECD Family Database (2014) offers more differentiated figures of participation rates at age 3, 4 and 5. According to 2010 statistical data, the participation rate is 100% for 5-year-olds, 97.6% for 4-year-olds, and 83.0% for 3-year-olds (OECD 2014) (for an overview of European countries see table C2 in Appendix B).

On average internationally there is a positive relationship between the length of preschool education attendance and the average reading score in grade 4, as PIRLS 2011 data show (Mullis et al. 2012a, Exhibit 4.7, p. 128. These are the figures for Malta:

- 3 years and more: 11% (average reading score 490)
- Between 1 and 3 years: 86% (average reading score 481)
- 1 year or less: 3% (average reading score 496)
- Did not attend: 1% (average reading score no data)

(For an overview of European countries s. table C3 in Appendix B).

The length of ECEC attendance does not correlate to reading achievement results of fourth graders in the Czech Republic, France, Malta, Austria and Finland (Key data on ECEC p. 70).

No child should be excluded from preschool because parents cannot afford to send their children to preschool/kindergarten institutions if they have to pay. Many countries provide at least one year of free pre-primary education. Malta belongs to the half of the European countries where the entire period of ECEC is free. In April 2014, the entitlement to free ECEC provision was extended to all children of working/studying parents (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2014). Public kindergarten centres (attended by 70 % of children) are also free of charge and even offer one glass of milk per child daily and one free portion of fruit or vegetables per week (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2014, p. 180).

5.3.4 Provisions for preschool children with language problems

Literacy competence strongly builds on oral language proficiency, word knowledge, and syntactic knowledge. Measures must be taken by governments and institutions to ensure that children with poor language development (second-language speaking children and those from a low socio-cultural background, as well as others who experience difficulty in learning language) acquire adequate levels of oral language in kindergarten, preschool institutions and in school. It should be ensured that at age 4 at the latest all children are diagnosed in their oral language proficiency, and that there are obligatory courses for children falling behind in their acquisition of language competence. The aim should be that all children entering school can speak the language of the school so that they can profit from reading instruction.

As suggested by Teaching and reading in Europe (p. 161) teachers should identify children at risk as early as possible using checklists, the Whole School Approach to reading literacy/Core competences or Complementary Education (Remedial Education). Complementary teachers offer support to students encountering difficulties both in- and outside the classroom. Special support is provided for dyslexic students in the transition from primary to secondary schools.

The NCF National Curriculum Framework (2012) embraces diversity and promotes it through an inclusive environment. The NCF addresses the different needs of: gifted and talented learners; learners with special educational needs; learners with severe disabilities; learners from disadvantaged social backgrounds; learners from diverse social, cultural and linguistic backgrounds including children of refugees and asylum seekers. On-going support and professional development are provided for the teachers in order to ensure the provision of high quality education and a supportive infrastructure, providing the conditions and opportunities for learners to achieve their full potential and for teachers and administrators to implement the curriculum effectively.

A number of services for children with learning difficulties and disabilities are offered at school and within the community. These take the form of multidisciplinary assessment, statementing, complementary education, literacy enhancement programmes, and counselling. This policy seeks to ensure better integration and further development of the existing programmes. Courses building the child's language skills during daily routines and activities are also offered to parents, whose children are developing their language skills slower than the others (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2014).

5.3.5 Support for children and adolescents whose home language is not the language of school

There are few policies concerning the education of migrants in Malta, but the new National Framework for the Education Strategy in Malta states that schools should cater for every child irrespective of gender, religion, race, ability and beliefs, but should also set as one of its aims the promotion of the potential of each learner through individualized attention and support (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014a).

In most of the Maltese state primary schools, complementary education and literacy support teachers support the language acquisition of migrant learners in order to facilitate their social, cultural and educational integration. In the secondary sector some of them are given the opportunity to attend additional classes in Maltese and English or are assigned to a Core Competences Support Programme. Moreover, book-rich environments are promoted especially to learners and families lacking literacy materials at home (national literacy strategy).

In 2011, the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education (DQSE) set up a working group to develop a National Strategy addressing the different needs of migrant children with emphasis on language learning and identifying the particular communication problems which they experience. Some recommendations for work inside and outside the classroom were made and the children have the possibility to attend a year-long programme for developing basic language skills to help their integration in the schools. As a result of this a National Language Integration Unit was set up in 2015 which engages language teachers for this purpose.

The Strategic Plan for the Prevention of Early School Leaving, together with the Framework for the Educational Strategy in Malta, identifies "Educating for and through diversity" as one of their strategic goals. The following intervention methods are suggested:

- devising appropriate teaching plans;
- introducing teaching and learning resources that reflect a range of cultures, social perspectives and dimensions;
- providing migrant students and their families with the necessary support to build up their self-confidence and self-esteem in the host culture and society;
- developing procedures to ensure that migrant minors are registered in a school and are given the necessary induction support (including cultural orientation and language support);
- providing teachers with the necessary training and support services to be able to work successfully in a diverse classroom (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014b, pp. 21–22).

In PIRLS 2011, 58% of students in Grade 4 in Malta reported that they sometimes speak a language other than the test language (English) at home, while 25% reported that they never speak the test language at home. Corresponding EU-24 averages are 17.3% and 3% respectively. These statistics

reflect the use of Maltese as an everyday language in children’s communities, and the use of English in formal situations in school, even though both Maltese and English are official languages, and both are taught at school.

Language at home

Table 27²⁵ shows that around 88% of Maltese 15-year old students speak Maltese; whereas, most of the remaining 12% speak English.

Table 27

| What language do you frequently speak at home? | Malta (%) | EU(%) | OECD(%) |
|--|-----------|-------|---------|
| Native language | 87.9 | 89.2 | 90.0 |
| Another language | 12.1 | 10.8 | 10.0 |

The National Literacy Strategy recommends that:

- Migrant parents are provided with information about childcare and schooling options and are encouraged to enroll their children as soon as possible in order to enhance their integration and literacy development.;
- Language support classes should be small, so that they create a safe environment where the learner can recover from the culture shock of the mainstream class;
- Literacy support teachers and mainstream teachers should also communicate with each other about the children, and literacy teaching should be interdisciplinary, multicultural, interactive, and linked to past experiences;
- Literacy skills should be taught by providing them a context and a meaningful real life purpose (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014d, p. 51).

Since 2013, better integration of migrant pupils has also been promoted through various projects, i.e. CCOAST (Core Competences On-line Assessment Tool); RESS (Reading and Spelling Software in English) and LLAPSI (Language Learning and Parental Support for Integration). The CCOAST project aims to provide an on-line literacy core competence assessment tool in both English and Maltese. It also aims to facilitate integration of migrant learners by providing schools and stakeholders with an initial literacy assessment. The software can also be used to track the on-going literacy development of the learners throughout their schooling years.

The RESS project is related to the CCOAST project, and provides software for teachers to help to improve the reading and spelling skills of their students in the English language. Both CCOAST and RESS are co-funded through the European Fund for the Integration of Third Country Nationals and came to an end in June 2015.

The LLAPSI projects provide personnel who support migrant learners and their families in language learning to enable them to access the mainstream curriculum. There were three LLAPSI projects, through which a number of Language Support Assistants were required to support migrant learners in schools and educational centres. A number of parent leaders were recruited to work with the learners’ parents or caregivers, providing information about the education system, and helping them to support and participate in their children’s schooling (Eurydice, 2014).

²⁵ Retrieved from: <https://researchanddevelopment.gov.mt/en/Documents/PISA%202009+%20Malta%20Report.pdf>.

The National Literacy Strategy for All focuses on the range of literacy skills required to ensure competence in Maltese and English. In order to develop dual literacy skills, where learners can switch freely between the Maltese and English languages, learners need to be provided with specific learning opportunities that will help to ensure proficiency in both languages. They should also have access to learning materials in both languages to engage in meaningful tasks and within a range of subject-specific contexts as appropriate. The National Literacy Strategy for All supports dual literacy and seeks to ensure that it is fully embedded within the education system in Malta (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014d, p. 29).

Challenge: Maltese schools are increasingly experiencing an intake of migrant children for a number of reasons: war and economic migration. Some of these do not know the languages of schooling in Malta, either Maltese or English. This provides the education authorities, school and teachers with an ongoing challenge on many levels. Such migrant children are to be supported and integrated within the school through the provision of additional language support and resources.

5.3.6 Preventing early school leaving

Literacy provision and participation in secondary schooling: What is the rate of early school leavers?

One important, but certainly not sufficient, precondition for raising performance levels in literacy for adolescents is literacy provision during secondary school years, as functional literacy is mainly acquired in school. Therefore, the provision of secondary education for all adolescents and the prevention of early school leaving may serve as indicators for the opportunities of adolescents to improve their literacy performance, especially related to functional literacy.

The duration of compulsory education in Malta is 11 years. Children start school when they are 5 years and compulsory schooling ends at 16 years (Eurydice Facts and Figures, 2014). According to the Education and Training Monitor (2015) for Malta, the early school leaving rate in 2014 is 20.4, down from 22.7% in 2011. The EU average in 2014 was 11.1%, down from 13.4% in 2011. There is no specified target value of the early school leaving (ESL) rates by Malta for 2020.

According to ISCED 1-6 there were 52.6% of students in the 15-24 years age group in some form of education in 2011, which was below the average EU-27 of 61.9%. This percentage is a decreasing trend, as in 2012 it stood at 44.7%. With regard to the percentage of 18 year olds in education in 2011, Malta with an average of 51.6% performed well below the EU-27 average of 80.7%. This percentage decreased further to 40.7% in 2012. In 2009 it stood at over 70%.

In the period 2010-2020, Germany, Lithuania and Malta are expecting the most significant decline in the population of young people aged 10-14 with a rate of 12 % each, followed by Austria (8.8 %), Liechtenstein (6 %), Netherlands and Poland (around 5 %).

In Malta, the Ministry of Education has created a specific directorate to implement, coordinate and monitor policies to combat ESL (European Commission, 2013, p. 33). A social work support service is provided in all state colleges focusing primarily on absenteeism. All school staff must report pupils who are habitual absentees. Intervention measures, involving the pupil and his/her family, aim to tackle the obstacles that prevent the student from attending school. This involves school staff to collaborate with social support workers, counsellors, the school management team, guidance teachers, educational psychologists, prefects of discipline, career guidance and youth workers. Social workers

also liaise with services external to the Directorate for Educational Services (DES) on behalf of their clients. In addition, an outreach programme is held yearly with students who are not planning to sit for their secondary education certificate. These pupils are contacted either by the social worker or/and a trainee career advisor. 'One-to-one' interventions are held with the student to formulate an individualised programme concerning his/her career path. National agencies such as the Agenzija Żgħażaġħ, the Foundation for Educational Services (FES), Youth Inc and the Employment and Training Corporation (ETC) collaborate with the colleges in order to offer appropriate programmes to early school leavers (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014b, pp. 38–39).

Furthermore, social workers work closely with parents of habitually absent pupils to support them and to help them understand the importance of education as well as to act as a direct link between the home and the school environment. The role of the social support workers includes parental education, like domestic management. This has proved to be successful as the relationship of trust established with the parents has brought a decrease in absenteeism especially in primary state schools (European Commission, 2013, p. 42).

The Framework for the Education Strategy for Malta 2014-2024 seeks to reduce the gap between different schools and to support educational achievement of children at-risk-of-poverty and from low socio-economic status as well as reduce the number of early school-leavers and raise levels of student attainment in further, vocational and tertiary education. (Eurydice, 2014).

Furthermore, the Strategic Plan for the Prevention of Early School Leaving in Malta presents several ways of tackling the segregation of students. These include:

- the flexible progression pathways from secondary education to different further and higher education institutions;
- involving parents, especially those with low-socio-economic status;
- and setting up Learning Support Zones in secondary schools (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014b).

5.3.7 Addressing the gender gap among adolescents

The Framework for the Education Strategy for Malta 2014-2024 lists reducing gaps in educational outcomes, between boys and girls, among others, as one of its main objectives. The strategic pillars for policy development include student-centred learning, equal educational opportunities, and the measurement of achievements and gaps in the context of European targets (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014a, pp. 3–4).

In PISA 2009+ study, Malta had by far the largest scale point difference between girls and boys, with a difference of 72 scale points compared to the OECD average of 39 scale points. In the PIRLS 2011 study, girls in Malta scored 18 scale points more than boys on the English test and 25 scale points more than boys on the Maltese test.

The National Literacy Strategy is not gender neutral. The gender mainstreaming of such a strategy is important to ensure equity and increased effectiveness. Gender desegregated data should allow us to identify the different issues boys and girls contend with, in the field of literacy. Interventions are to be targeted accordingly (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014d, p. 29).

5.3.8 Increasing participation, inclusion and equity for children and adolescents: Programmes, initiatives and examples

Programmes against poverty

The Maltese Education Strategy aligns all sectoral education strategies and policies. The aim of the strategy is to support educational achievement of children at-risk-of-poverty and from low socio-economic status, and to reduce the relatively high incidence of early school-leavers. It seeks to achieve this through:

- **Free Childcare Support Services** – since 1st of April 2014. The main beneficiaries of the scheme are working parents and parents who are still studying;
- **Breakfast Clubs for Children** – this is a complementary service offered to children one hour before the start of school (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014c, pp. 65–66).

Moreover, Agenzia Sedqa, the National Social Support Agency, organises parenting skills courses: one for parents of children up to 10 years of age, and another one for parents of older children. Programmes promoting the literacy development of children through story-telling etc are also available for parents and caregivers (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014d).

Family literacy programmes for migrant parents

Parental involvement in the education of their children is considered to be an important factor for schools. This is especially the case for the parents of migrant children, who face many challenges. Schools are encouraged to organise specific programmes for the involvement of migrant parents. Some schools organise meetings with community leaders. Many schools organise activities to promote multiculturalism in order to integrate better migrant students and their parents. For example, one of the schools organises a multicultural and a language awareness day. During these days children work on multicultural projects, which are then presented to the parents. Other strategies which are employed by schools to support and integrate migrant students and parents include: training of staff, learning support coordinators and assistants, mentors, school counselling, extra tuition in Maltese and English as a foreign language; integration programmes, classroom based initiatives, the Let Me Learn programme, sports activities, language clubs, guidance teachers, alternative learning programmes, etc. (UNHCR & Aditus, 2012).

Policies / programmes to prevent early school leaving

The Strategic Plan for the Prevention of Early School Leaving in Malta suggests positive actions focused on making the school a positive and beneficial experience for all students. Such preventive measures are expected to have long-term effects. Some of them are:

- providing free childcare;
- rendering schools relevant and of benefit for every student. Schools are to address the different needs of the students with different abilities, from different culture and of different ethnic origins;
- educating for and through diversity;
- meeting the needs of high achievers;
- creating caring community schools;
- supporting children at-risk through innovative teaching and learning tools, and school- and community-based solutions;

- developing e-Learning content to respond better respond to student learning needs;
- tapping mobile technology for increased student engagement. Tablets will be introduced as a teaching and learning tool in the Maltese classrooms;
- reintroducing vocational education in the secondary schools as an alternative learning path;
- providing of a good career guidance service, which will enable students to consider different learning possibilities and careers;
- strengthening the transition process across educational pathways;
- involving parents in the education of their children from an early age. Parental education is to be offered;
- supporting teachers to address the ESL challenges.

6 References

- Attard, M. (Ed.). (2002). Guidelines and Suggestions for the Implementation of the Curriculum in Kindergarten. Retrieved from http://curriculum.gov.mt/en/Curriculum/Kindergarten/Documents/Guidelines_%20Kindergarten.pdf.
- Department of Curriculum Management. (n.d.). End of Primary Benchmark Report. Retrieved from <http://curriculum.gov.mt/en/Benchmark/General-Information/Pages/default.aspx>.
- Education Act. (1988). Education Act. Retrieved from <http://www.justiceservices.gov.mt/DownloadDocument.aspx?app=lom&itemid=8801>.
- European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education. (2014). *EDUCATION FOR ALL - Special Needs and Inclusive Education in Malta – External Audit Report*. Retrieved from <https://education.gov.mt/en/Documents/Special%20Needs%20and%20Inclusive%20Education%20in%20Malta%20%20C2%AD-%20External%20Audit%20Report.pdf>.
- European Commission. (2015). *The Teaching Profession in Europe*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.
- European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice. (2011). *Teaching Reading in Europe: Contexts, Policies and Practices*. Brussels, Belgium. Retrieved from http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/thematic_reports/130EN.pdf.
- European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice. (2013). *Key Data on Teachers and School Leaders in Europe*. Retrieved from http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/key_data_series/151en.pdf.
- European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice. (2014). *Key Data on Early Childhood and Care in Europe - Eurydice and Eurostat Report - 2014 Edition - Federal Statistical Office (Destatis)*. Brussels. Retrieved from <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/3217494/5785249/EC-01-14-484-EN.PDF>.
- European Schoolnet. (2013). *Survey of Schools: ICT in Education*.
- Eurydice Facts and Figures. (2014). *Compulsory Education in Europe 2013/14*. Retrieved from http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/facts_and_figures/compulsory_education_EN.pdf.
- Firman, C., & Camilleri, R. (2012). Malta. In I. V. S. Mullis, M. O. Martin, C. A. Minnich, K. T. Drucker, & M. A. Ragan (Eds.), *PIRLS 2011 encyclopaedia. Educational Policy and Curriculum in Reading (Vol. 2 L-Z, pp.)*. (Vol. Volume 2: L-Z and Benchmarking Participants, pp. 395–406). International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA). Retrieved from http://timssandpirs.bc.edu/pirls2011/downloads/PIRLS2011_Enc-v2.pdf.
- Michelli, S. (2001). Language attitudes of young generation in Malta. *Vienna English Working Papers*, 10(2), 30–54.
- Ministry for Education and Employment. (2014a). Framework for the Education Strategy for Malta 14-2024: Sustaining Foundations, Creating Alternatives, Increasing Employability. Retrieved from <https://education.gov.mt/strategy/Documents/BOOKLET%20ESM%202014-2024%20ENG%2019-02.pdf>.

- Ministry for Education and Employment. (2014b). *Strategic Plan for the Prevention of Early School Leaving in Malta*. Retrieved from <http://education.gov.mt/ESL/Documents/School%20Leaving%20in%20Malta.pdf>.
- Ministry for Education and Employment. (2014c, May). The National Employment Policy. Retrieved from <http://education.gov.mt/employment/Documents/EMPLOYMENT%20POLICY%20DOC%20sml.pdf>.
- Ministry for Education and Employment. (2014d, June). A National Literacy Strategy For All In Malta And Gozo 2014-2019. Retrieved from <http://education.gov.mt/en/Documents/Literacy/ENGLISH.pdf>.
- Ministry for Education and Employment. (2015). A Language Policy for the Early Years in Malta and Gozo - A Language Policy for the Early Years Consultation Document. Retrieved from <https://education.gov.mt/en/Documents/A%20Language%20Policy%20for%20the%20Early%20Years%20Consultation%20Document.pdf>.
- Ministry for Education and Employment, D. for Q. and S. in E. R. and D. D. (2013). *PISA 2009+ Programme for International Student Assessment. Malta Report*. Retrieved from <https://researchanddevelopment.gov.mt/en/Documents/PISA%202009+%20Malta%20Report.pdf>.
- Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity. (2006). *National Standards for Child Day Care Facilities*. Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity. Retrieved from <http://www.snapadministration.com/snapdatafiles/files/ETC/633488648114023750.pdf>.
- Ministry of Education and Employment. (2012, December). The National Curriculum Framework for All. Retrieved from <https://education.gov.mt/en/Documents/A%20National%20Curriculum%20Framework%20for%20All%20-%202012.pdf>.
- Mullis, I. V. S., Martin, M. O., Foy, P., & Drucker, K. T. (2012). *PIRLS 2011 Encyclopedia Vol. 1 & 2: Education Policy and Curriculum in Reading*. TIMSS & PIRLS International Study Center, Lynch School of Education, Boston College Chestnut Hill, Ma, USA and IEA Secretariat Amsterdam, the Netherlands: International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA). Retrieved from <http://timssandpirls.bc.edu/pirls2011/international-results-pirls.html>.
- PORDATA - Females as a % of teachers and academic staff: total and by level of education - Europe. (n.d.). Retrieved 21 December 2015, from <http://www.pordata.pt/en/Europe/Females+as+a+percentage+of+teachers+and+academic+staff+total+and+by+level+of+education-1736>.
- Sciriha, L., & Vassallo, M. (2001). *Malta: A linguistic landscape*. s.l.
- UNHCR, & Aditus. (2012). *Research Report: Integration in Education of Third Country Nationals*. Retrieved from <http://aditus.org.mt/Publications/fesreport.pdf>.