Malta has one of the lowest level of students’ attainment of civic education in Europe, with disparities linked to the gender gap, socio-economic status and types of school. Since March 2018, there is ambition to reinforce and strengthen citizenship education due to lowering the voting age to 16, giving the right for young people to vote in national and European elections. Despite the government taking several steps through its National Framework for Education Strategy (2014-2024) to give young people and adults the necessary skills and attitudes to be active citizens, the lack of resources, tools, and training are problematic and Malta needs to continue to implement a coherent civic education curriculum across the board in all schools.
1. Ensuring that people acquire civic and intercultural competences

Maltese students’ involvement with civic education continues to be among the lowest in the European Union. As measured by the 2016 IEA International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS), the average civic knowledge score for Malta’s 14-year-olds was the second lowest among participating EU countries. The ICCS also highlighted major disparities in civic knowledge with girls scoring better than boys, students with parents whom have a higher socio-economic status and students attending independent and church schools also with a higher level of civic knowledge.

Figure 1: Mean Civic Knowledge Score. Comparison 2009 and 2016

Source: International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) 2016, National Report Malta, P.36

It is worth noting that since March 2018, Malta has become the second country in the EU to have lowered the voting age to 16, giving leeway to the paramount importance of strengthening citizenship education to ensure citizens would be able to think critically and make informed decisions when voting in national and upcoming European elections. As of today, citizenship education in Malta works on a cross-curricular theme and is widely defined. It is either integrated into compulsory (e.g. social studies, personal, social and career development) or optional (e.g. ethics or religious education) subjects, as well as depending on school level and school type (e.g. church, independent or public schools).

In 2013 the Maltese government adopted a National Framework for the Education strategy 2014-2024. The document suggests major reform in the primary and secondary education system with the objective of improving students’ learning experiences by encouraging creativity, critical literacy, entrepreneurship and innovation at all levels¹. However, divergence occurs between curriculum content and teaching practices for citizenship education. According to our members, the lack of critical thinking skills and alternative pedagogies for teaching civic education, along with inadequate teachers and educators’ training in schools translate into a weaker content for citizenship education. As such, one of the few national programmes that supports schools to develop extra-curricular activities in the field of civic and intercultural competences is called Ekoskola². This Maltese programme provides children with the opportunity to get involved in education for sustainable development. However, as our members have pointed out this initiative remains driven by actors operating outside of the school framework.

For inclusive education, a new policy in schools has been drafted and aims to be launched during the scholastic year 2018/2019 together with a National Inclusive Education Framework³. Similar to a whole school approach, this policy aims at bringing the concept, values and principles of Inclusive Education into the realm of responding positively

Validation of NFIL

Inspired by the European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning published by Cedofop in 2015, the National Commission for Further and Higher Education (NCFHE) was officially launched in 2012 with the mission to consolidate its effort in implementing the National Strategy on non-formal and informal learning⁷. Co-financed by the European Social Fund (ESF), in 2017 the National Commission for Further and Higher Education signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with Jobsplus and the Institute of Tourism Studies to carry out assessments over various trades aimed at validating skills and competences obtained through work-based, non-formal or informal learning and to issue partial certifications or awards⁸.

CASE STUDY
Promoting social justice through arts

Solidarity Overseas Service Malta (SOS Malta) is a charity dedicated to assisting socially disadvantaged groups in improving their quality of life by providing support services and opportunities to implement development and change. SOS Malta also encourages advocacy on behalf of social causes and promotes models of good care and practice. In 2012-2013, SOS Malta developed a one-year project called Youth Upbeat, which aimed to raise awareness and promote integration with young people, refugees and persons with subsidiary protection by providing opportunities for interaction and awareness-raising through the use of culture and performing arts as a tool for social cohesion.

During one year, six cultural ambassadors all having refugees or subsidiary protection status were trained to work with young people as part of the project to share aspects of their culture as well as their personal stories through 26 interactive workshops with around 500 young people aged 13 to 14. These interactive workshops treated issues such as perceptions, relationships, difficulties, positive experiences, culture through role plays, conversations, music and dance. Furthermore, 12 young people interested in performing arts took part in a live-in performing arts weekend together with the cultural ambassadors, culminating in a final performance for the general public in Malta. In this performance, participants performed traditional stories from Eritrea, Somalia and Malta using language, music and performance to bring these stories together under the theme of unity and integration. This cultural evening also launched the documentary and a photographic exhibition regarding the project. Through identifying common interests in music, dance and drama, this project was successful in promoting awareness, tolerance and understanding between Maltese society and beneficiaries of International Protection further promoting their integration in Malta.

2. Enhancing critical thinking and media literacy, particularly regarding the use of the internet and social media

According to our members, civil society is at the forefront for running anti-fake news and hate speech in the country. For example, Shift News⁹, a self-funded independent news portal runs a campaign called Disinformation watch. This is made up of a series of articles which analyses the news and highlights the facts. The Shift News along with a number of NGOs keep tabs on the government and Malta’s political party news portals. They attempt to hold these news portals accountable by highlighting and reporting any fake news as well as start national discussions. Another example is the series of workshops aimed at raising awareness of hate speech as well as empowering people that SOS Malta held, along with the #stopHate campaign meant to tackle hate speech and the spreading of fake news.

Our members have stressed the need to bring in a culture of critical engagement and action into citizenship education, along with tackling educational socio-cultural challenges transversally through an inter-disciplinary approach. The need to strengthen citizenship education could be met with cross-sector cooperation between the different educational sectors, in particular between schools and the sector of civil society which is composed of organizations involved in medium to long-term programmes linked to building active citizens through acquiring transversal skills. Furthermore, the lack of teaching social justice and participatory attitude in formal education has been highlighted by our member as problematic for reaching citizenship education, reinforced by the current political discourse on migration and inclusive education. Our members have stressed the need to take a holistic approach for teaching practices along with training of educators towards inclusive education.

(source: http://www.sosmalta.org/youthupbeat)

**Recommendations**

- Develop a coherent curriculum for citizenship education along with horizontal cross-sector partnerships with schools on activities linked to civic and intercultural competences
- Increase teachers and educators training, tools and resources for citizenship education
- Develop critical thinking and alternative pedagogies for teaching civic and citizenship education
- Enforce public-private partnerships in the fight against fake news and hate speech
- Shifting political priorities towards sustainable funding for citizenship and civic education
This Monitor is a contribution to further examine the relationship between citizenship and lifelong learning experiences and policy outcomes in and outside of the classroom in various European countries. Mapping the different approaches that SOLIDAR Foundation members have taken in promoting EU values in relation to citizenship education and lifelong learning for greater democratic participation of citizens, the outcomes will be disseminated towards European and national policy-makers and offers an array of best practices to collect, use and transfer among networks. The SOLIDAR Education and Lifelong Learning Forum will further work on the topic and develop a long term sustainable advocacy strategy for CSOs towards national and EU-wide authorities to influence the debate and revision of national curricula and education systems.

Through its member and partner organizations, SOLIDAR Foundation engages citizens in EU decision making processes, empowers people through lifelong learning and VET, and voices their concerns to the EU institutions by carrying out active lobbying, project management and coordination, policy monitoring, research and awareness-raising.

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With contributions from SOLIDAR Foundation member SOS & partners