

# MALTESE

## The Maltese language in education in Malta

2<sup>nd</sup> Edition



Regional Dossier series

The Maltese language in education  
in Malta

2<sup>nd</sup> Edition

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## Foreword

### *background*

Regional and minority languages are languages that differ from the official state language. The Mercator European Research Centre on Multilingualism and Language Learning uses the following definition for these languages, as stated in the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ECRML):

Regional and minority languages are languages traditionally used within a given territory of a state by nationals of that state who form a group numerically smaller than the rest of the state's population; they are different from the official language(s) of that state, and they include neither dialects of the official language(s) of the state nor the languages of migrants.

The Mercator European Research Centre aims to acquire, apply, and circulate knowledge about these regional and minority languages in education. An important means to achieve this goal is the Regional Dossier series: documents that provide the most essential features of the education system of regions with a lesser-used regional or minority language.

### *aim*

The aim of the Regional Dossier series is to provide concise descriptions of regional or minority languages in education, mainly in Europe but also in other parts of the world. Aspects that are addressed include features of the education system, recent educational policies, main actors, legal arrangements, and support structures, as well as quantitative aspects such as the number of schools, teachers, and pupils, and financial investments. This fixed structure allows easy comparison between the Regional Dossiers in the series.

### *target group*

The Regional Dossiers serve several purposes and are relevant for policymakers, researchers, teachers, students, and journalists who wish to explore developments in regional or minority language schooling in Europe. They can also serve as a first orientation towards further research, or function as a source of ideas for improving educational provisions.

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## ***link with Eurydice***

The Regional Dossiers follow the format of Eurydice – the information network on education in Europe – in order to link the regional descriptions with those of national education systems. Eurydice provides information on the administration and structure of national education systems in the member states of the European Union.

## ***contents***

Every Regional Dossier begins with an introduction about the region in question, followed by six chapters that each deal with a specific level of the education system (e.g. primary education). Chapters 8 and 9 cover the main lines of research on education of the minority language under discussion, and the prospects for the minority language in general and in education in particular, respectively. Chapter 10 provides a summary of statistics. Lists of (legal) references and useful addresses regarding the minority language are given at the end of the Regional Dossier.

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## Regional Dossier series

# The Maltese language in education in Malta

2<sup>nd</sup> Edition

**Lydia Sciriha**

*University of Malta*

### Summary

#### **Maltese and its status in education in Malta**

Maltese, or *il-Malti*, is a Semitic language closely related to Arabic in structure and morphology but is written from left to right and in the Latin script. When Malta became an independent state within the Commonwealth in 1964, the new Constitution highlighted the importance of Maltese by giving it both a national and an official status. Since 2002, Maltese has also been recognised as an official language within the EU. The systematic teaching of Maltese started in the early 20th century, and since 1946, Maltese has always been one of the core subjects in both primary and secondary education. Malta's current guiding educational framework, the National Curriculum Framework from 2012, does not outline a policy regarding the language of instruction, but does recognise the need for such a policy, and efforts have been undertaken to address these issues of entitlement, culture, and implementation. In response to the increasing numbers of pupils in Maltese schools whose first language is neither Maltese nor English, courses have recently been developed to teach Maltese as a foreign language.

#### **Maltese in educational research**

Educational research has shown that, in most schools, educators are aware of the need to introduce both Maltese and English at an early age and to create activities where both languages are used. The majority of State school educators focus on Maltese, while in Independent and Church schools, however, there is an emphasis on English. Research on Maltese in education is mainly carried out at the University of Malta. Maltese linguistics is also studied internationally, and the International Association of Maltese Linguistics was founded to serve as a platform to stimulate the study of Maltese and connect researchers interested in Maltese linguistics.

#### **Prospects for Maltese in Malta**

Malta has now become a country with a high non-Maltese population. It is therefore not surprising that spoken Maltese is slowly becoming less widespread, since English has de facto taken its place. Maltese does not have the same market value and power as its co-official language, English, and many migrants decide to come to work in Malta because they know that the language of communication will not present a barrier. If the Maltese language is to survive and be appreciated fully, it must be given more importance. This could be achieved by supporting migrants of all ages in learning the Maltese language in order to integrate effectively into Maltese society.

# Serje Dossier Reġjonali

## L-Ilsien Malti fl-edukazzjoni f'Malta

It-2<sup>ni</sup> edizzjoni

**Lydia Sciriha**

*L-Università ta' Malta*

### Sommarju

#### **Il-Malti u l-istatus tiegħu fl-edukazzjoni f' Malta**

Il-Malti hu lsien Semitiku li għandu l-għeruq tiegħu, l-aktar dawk strutturali u morfologiċi fl-Għarbi, iżda hu miktub mix-xellug għal-lemin bħal-Latin. Meta Malta saret Stat Indipendenti fi ħdan il-Commonwealth fl-1964, il-Kostituzzjoni l-ġdida tat importanza lill-Malti meta ngħata l-istatus kemm tal-ilsien nazzjonali kif ukoll ta' wieħed uffiċjali. Mill-2002 il-Malti ġie rikonoxxut ukoll bħala lsien uffiċjali fl-Unjoni Ewopea. It-tagħlim tal-Malti b'mod sistematiku beda fil-bidu tas-seklu għoxrin, u mill-1946 il-Malti dejjem kien wieħed mis-suġġetti ewlenin kemm fl-edukazzjoni primarja kif ukoll f'dik sekondarja. Il-qafas edukattiv li jiggwida t-tagħlim preżenti tal-Malti huwa d-dokument Il-Qafas tal-Kurrikulu Nazzjonali Għal Kulĥadd (2012). Dan id-dokument ma jagħtix politika speċifika dwar it-tagħlim partikolari tal-lingwa Maltija, iżda jirrikonoxxi dan il-bżonn. Fih saru sforzi biex jiġu diskussi temi bħad-dritt għat-tagħlim, il-kultura u l-implimentazzjoni tagħhom. Bħala reazzjoni għan-numru dejjem jikber ta' studenti fl-iskejjel Maltin fejn l-ewwel ilsien tagħhom la huwa l-Malti u lanqas l-Ingliż, korsijiet tal-lingwa Maltija ġew żviluppati biex huma jiġu mgħallma l-Malti bħala lsien barrani.

#### **Il-Malti fir-riċerka edukattiva**

Ir-riċerka edukattiva turi li, f'ħafna skejjel, l-edukaturi jifhmu l-ħtieġa li jintroduċu kemm il-Malti kif ukoll l-Ingliż minn età bikrija, u li jiġu mfasla attivitajiet fejn iż-żewġ ilsna jintużaw. Il-maġġoranza tal-edukaturi li jgħallmu fl-iskejjel Statali jagħtu importanza lill-Malti, filwaqt li fl-iskejjel tal-Knisja u dawk Indipendenti jagħfsu aktar fuq l-Ingliż. Ir-riċerka dwar il-Malti fl-edukazzjoni ssir l-aktar fl-Università ta' Malta. Il-Lingwistika Maltija hija studjata wkoll internazzjonalment, u l-Assoċjazzjoni Internazzjonali tal-Lingwistika Maltija tnediet biex isservi bħala pjattaforma ħalli tistimula l-istudju tal-Malti u gġib flimkien riċerkaturi fil-Lingwistika Maltija.

#### **Prospetti għall-Maltin f'Malta**

Malta żvilluppat f'pajjiż b'popolazzjoni mdaqqa ta' nies li mhumieq Maltin. Għaldaqstant, wieħed jifhem li l-Malti mitkellem qed jonqos għax l-Ingliż fil-fatt qed joħodlu postu. Il-Malti m'għandux il-valur ekonomiku u s-saħħa daqskemm għandu l-Ingliż, l-ilsien ko-uffiċjali mal-Malti. Ħafna immigranti jagħzlu li jiġu jgħixu f'Malta minħabba l-fatt li l-lingwa ta' komunikazzjoni mhux ser tkun ta' ostaklu għalihom, għax jafu bl-Ingliż. Sabiex l-ilsien Malti jibqa' jeżisti u jiġi apprezzat b'mod sħiħ, għandu jingħata aktar importanza. Wieħed jista' jagħmel dan billi jgħin lill-immigranti ta' kull età jitgħallmu l-ilsien Malti ħalli jintegraw b'mod effettiv fis-soċjetà Maltija.





## List of Abbreviations

<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>LOF</b>	Learning Outcomes Framework
<b>MATSEC</b>	Matriculation and Secondary Education Certificate Examinations Board
<b>MCAST</b>	Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology
<b>MEYR</b>	Ministry for Education, Sport, Youth, Research and Innovation (Ministeru għall-Edukazzjoni, l-Isport, iż-Żgħażaġġ, ir-Riċerka u l-Innovazzjoni)
<b>MQF</b>	Malta Qualifications Framework
<b>MTL</b>	Master's in Teaching and Learning
<b>NCF</b>	National Curriculum Framework
<b>NMC</b>	National Minimum Curriculum
<b>NSO</b>	National Statistics Office
<b>PGCE</b>	Postgraduate Certificate in Education
<b>P.G. Cert.</b>	Postgraduate Certificate in the Teaching of Maltese as a Foreign Language
<b>SEC</b>	Secondary Education Certificate (Ċertifikat tal-Edukazzjoni Sekondarja)



# 1 Introduction

## *language*

Maltese, or *il-Malti*, is a Semitic language closely related to Arabic in structure and morphology. However, unlike Arabic, Maltese is written from left to right and in the Latin script. Linguistically, the Arabs, who colonised Malta for slightly over 200 years (870–1090), left an indelible mark on the Maltese language. Subsequent colonisers, notably the Order of St John (1530–1798), the French (1798–1800), and the British (1800–1964), also influenced the language, as clearly evidenced by the number of Romance and English words in Maltese. According to Dalli (2002), approximately half of all Maltese words are of Italian origin (54%), while 41% originate from Arabic, and the remaining 5% are mainly derived from English. These findings align with Brincat's (2011) etymological analysis of the lexical entries in Joseph Aquilina's Maltese-English Dictionary (1987–1990). The analysis revealed that only 32.41% of the words are Semitic, while a significant 60.23% are non-Semitic words. Local formations on a Semitic or Romance basis make up 3.63% of the entries, and 3.72% of the words have unknown etymologies.

The Maltese archipelago consists of three islands – Malta, Gozo, and Comino (see [Figure 1](#)). The majority of the Maltese population resides in Malta, the largest of the three islands. Malta's total surface area is 246 square kilometres, with a distance from the north-west to the south-west of approximately 27 kilometres in an east-westerly direction. Malta is situated only 93 kilometres from Sicily and 288 kilometres from the North African mainland, with Gibraltar located 1,826 kilometres to the west. Despite its small size, Malta has several Maltese dialects spoken in various localities such as Senglea, Vittoriosa, Cospicua, Zejtun, and Marsaxlokk. The Gozitan dialect is prevalent on the sister island of Gozo.

Located in the heart of the Mediterranean region, Malta's strategic significance has played a crucial role in its tumultuous history. The island has been colonised by various powers over the years, including the Arabs (870–1090), the Normans (1090–1194), the Swabians (1194–1266), the Angevins (1266–1283), the Aragonese (1283–1530), the Order of St John (1530–1798), the French (1798–1880), and the British (1800–1964). Malta gained independence from Britain in 1964 and became a republic in 1974, ceasing to be a British military base in 1979. In 2004, Malta became a member state of the European Union (EU) and much to the surprise of the Maltese people, Maltese also became one of the official languages of the EU (Sciriha & Vassallo, 2006).

**Figure 1** Map of Malta.



*Note.* Adapted from TUBS (2012).

This Regional Dossier focuses *exclusively* on the Maltese language spoken by the residents of the Maltese archipelago and does not include information on its use or status in other countries where there is a significant Maltese migrant population, such as Australia with over 34,000 Maltese speakers (Cauchi, 2012) and the United States with around 39,000 (Joshua Project, n.d.).

## ***population***

Although censuses in Malta have been taken since 1842, these were not always conducted at regular intervals. However, upon becoming a full member of the EU in 2004, Malta was obligated to adhere to a European Parliament and Council regulation requiring the collection of population data. Since then, two censuses have been conducted in 2011 (NSO, 2014) and 2021 (NSO, 2023a). In this Regional Dossier, reference will also be made to the 2005 census (NSO, 2007) as it provides more data on language use.

The final report published by the National Statistics Office (NSO) provides a breakdown of Malta's population by gender, revealing a total population of 519,562, with 52% identifying as male and 48% female (NSO, 2023a). Moreover, according to the latest census conducted in 2021 (NSO, 2023a), a relatively high 20% of the total population has a migrant background, showing a 25% increase compared to the previous census from 2011 (NSO, 2014), the highest ever noted since censuses have been taken. Data from Malta's NSO show a significant population growth over the course of 110 years, with the population more than doubling from 211,564 in 1911 to 519,562 in 2021, making Malta the most highly densely populated country in the EU (NSO, 2023a).

The 2005 Census (NSO, 2007) included two questions about (1) language use at home and (2) language proficiency in six languages (Maltese, English, Italian, French, German, and Arabic). In contrast, the most recent census (NSO, 2023a) asked respondents about (1) the main language they grew up speaking and (2) whether they were literate (i.e. whether they could read and write a simple sentence in one language).

Results from the 2005 census (NSO, 2007) on language use in the home domain revealed that 90.2% of the population aged 10 years and over reported Maltese as their main language of verbal interaction at home. Interestingly, 6% reported using English as their main language of interaction, while a small percentage (3%) chose another language that is neither Maltese nor English or reported speaking more than one language (NSO, 2007).

In the 2011 census (NSO, 2014), individuals aged 10 and over were asked to indicate their proficiency in a number of languages, including Maltese, English, Italian, French, German, and Arabic. The clear majority (93.2%) claimed they could speak Maltese fluently, with two-thirds of the respondents claiming to speak English well and 16.3% an average standard of English proficiency. The third and fourth most popular languages spoken were Italian (41.3%) and French (8.1%).

Results from the 2021 census indicate that Maltese (84.5%) and English (14.7%) are the main languages spoken by 10- to 19-year-old Maltese children and young adults since early childhood (NSO, 2023b). This is also the case for the 5- to 9-year-old age group, with the distribution being 75.9% for Maltese and 23.4% for English (NSO, 2023b). In terms of literacy, the census found that the overall literacy rate of the Maltese population aged 10 and over was 95.7% (NSO, 2023b). Moreover, the *Survey on the State of the Maltese Language* (NSO et al., 2021) focused on specific elements of language use at home. Data for this survey were collected in 2020 by the NSO, in collaboration with the National Council for the Maltese Language and the University of Malta's Department of Maltese. The sample population for this survey involved 1,025 respondents aged 18 to 80, all of whom were Maltese citizens.

The results of this survey revealed that 97% of the Maltese individuals reported Maltese as their first language (NSO et al., 2021; see [Table 1](#)), and also showed that Maltese and English were used in different contexts. Respondents were asked specific questions regarding their use of the language in each of the four language skills, namely speaking, listening, reading, and writing. The survey reports what percentage of respondents used Maltese

only or English only in these contexts, excluding participants who stated that they use both or other languages. With regard to speaking, the findings indicated that speaking Maltese in the home domain is to some extent person-oriented. The highest percentage of Maltese spoken at home was when interacting with parents (89%), while lower percentages were noted when speaking with partners (77%) and children (75%). In terms of listening to Maltese, when compared to speaking, even lower percentages were registered among those who listen to the radio (71%) and watch the "news and current affairs on TV" (64%) in Maltese. While the exclusive use of Maltese was relatively high for speaking and listening, the other two skills showed less Maltese-only language use. Written Maltese is not commonly used when writing emails (20%), informal letters (30%), or sending text messages (37%). Reading in Maltese is also not so frequent, with only 43% and 32% of respondents reading newspapers and leaflets in Maltese only, respectively. An even lower percentage stated that they read a book (23%) only in Maltese.

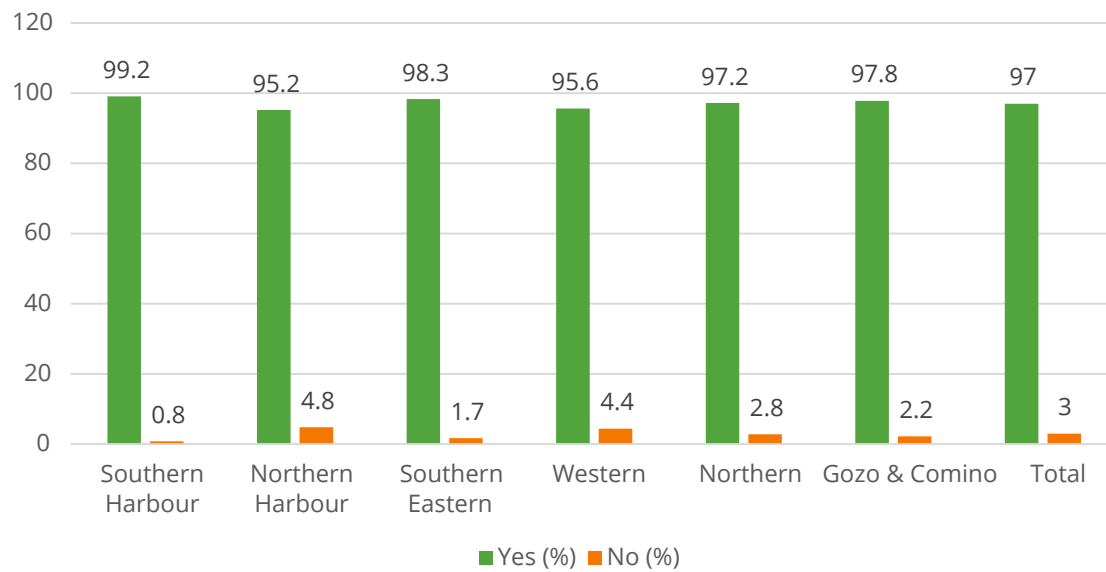
Further analysis of the *Survey on the State of the Maltese Language* (NSO et al., 2021) conducted in 2020 by district reveals that as a home language, Maltese is not equally strong across the Maltese islands. It is strongest in the Southern Harbour District (99.2%), followed by the Southern Eastern district (98.3%) and the Northern District (97.2%). It is least strong in the Western and Northern Harbour Districts at 95.6% and 95.2%, respectively. In Gozo and Comino, the two smaller islands considered as a district on their own, the use of Maltese as a home language stands at 97.8%. Table 1 and Figure 2 depict the geographical distribution of Maltese as a first language by district.

**Table 1** Number of people with Maltese as a first language by district.

First language	District						Total (%)
	Southern Harbour (%)	Northern Harbour (%)	Southern Eastern (%)	Western (%)	Northern (%)	Gozo & Comino (%)	
Yes	58,615 (99.2)	89,445 (95.2)	48,434 (98.3)	43,512 (95.6)	47,229 (97.2)	23,331 (97.8)	310,566 (97.0)
No	485 (0.8)	4,557 (4.8)	862 (1.7)	1,998 (4.4)	1,352 (2.8)	515 (2.2)	9,769 (3.0)
Total	59,100	94,002	49,296	45,510	48,581	23,846	320,335

Note. Data from NSO et al. (2021).

**Figure 2** Maltese as a first language by district.



*Note.* Data from NSO et al. (2021).

### *language status*

Although spoken for several centuries, Maltese only obtained official status through the Letters Patent of 16 August 1934 (Pace & Borg, 2017). Prior to that time, Italian was the official language and the language of the highly educated, commonly referred to as the "literati". As a result, most Maltese intellectuals tended to look down on speakers of Maltese since, to all intents and purposes, the local language was for them merely "the language of the kitchen".

When Malta became an Independent State within the Commonwealth in 1964, the new Constitution (Kostituzzjoni ta' Malta, 1964) highlighted the importance of Maltese by giving it both a national and an official status.

Chapter 1, Article 5 of the Constitution of Malta (Kostituzzjoni ta' Malta, 1964) lays down the official languages together with the status of Maltese as the national language and its use in different domains as follows:

(1) The National language of Malta is the Maltese Language.

(2) The Maltese and the English languages and such other language as may be prescribed by Parliament (by a law passed by not less than two-thirds of all the members of the House of Representatives) shall be the official languages of Malta and the Administration may for all official purposes use any of such languages: Provided that any person may address the Administration in any of the official languages and the reply of the Administration thereto shall be in such language.

(3) The language of the Courts shall be the Maltese language: Provided that Parliament may make such provision for the use of the English language in such cases and under such conditions as it may prescribe.

(4) The House of Representatives may, in regulating its own procedure, determine the language or languages that shall be used in Parliamentary proceedings and records. (p. 7)

Moreover, in 1994 the Maltese Government increased its efforts to protect and promote the national language by establishing a Maltese Language Review Board, despite the fact that the status of Maltese had been constitutionally protected for many years. Subsequently, in May 2001, this Board published the report *A Strategy for the National Language* (Maltese: *Strategija għal-Lingwa Nazzjonali*; Mifsud, 2001). Most of the recommendations in this report were later included in the Maltese Language Act of 2005 (Att dwar l-Ilsien Malti, 2005). Through the Maltese Language Act (2005), the National Council of the Maltese Language (Maltese: *Il-Kunsill Nazzjonali tal-Ilsien Malti*; hereinafter referred to as the *Kunsill*), was set up:

to promote a language policy and strategy for the Maltese islands and to verify their performance and observance in every sector of Maltese life, for the benefit and development of the national language and the identity of the Maltese people. (p. 3)

Article 5 of the Maltese Language Act (2005) states that the Council:

(1) shall promote the Maltese Language both in Malta and in other countries by engaging actively to foster recognition and respect for the national language;

(2) update the orthography of the Maltese language as necessary and, from time to time, establish the correct manner of writing words which enter the Maltese language from other tongues. (p. 5)

Maltese is not only an official language in the Maltese archipelago, but on 8 May 2002, two years before Malta became a member state of the EU, the Maltese language was also accorded official language status within the EU.

### ***status of language education***

For many decades, Maltese had been an overwhelmingly spoken language. It was only in 1920 that the standardisation of the writing system began, and four years later in 1924, the new orthography was officially approved (Cassola, 2013).

Moreover, the systematic teaching of Maltese started in earnest in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, even though in 1895 Mikiel Anton Vassallo had already proposed that Maltese should also be taught in schools. Dun Karm Psaila, the national Poet of Malta, even dedicated a poem to Mikiel Anton Vassalli, referring to him as "Missier l-Ilsien Malti" (the father of the Maltese language). Although primary education was available and free in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century,



there were relatively few primary schools and not many children were sent to school then. It was only after World War II, in 1946, that education became compulsory (Compulsory Education Ordinance, 1946). Since then, Maltese has always been a core subject taught to all children in both primary and secondary education.

Article 3 (Section (1) (a) to (g) and Section 2) of the Maltese Language Act (2005) emphasises the importance of Maltese in education and in society as a whole:

(a) Maltese is the language of Malta and a fundamental element of the national identity of the Maltese people.

(b) The Maltese Language is an essential component of the Maltese Language national heritage, being constantly developed in the speech of the Maltese people, distinguishing the Maltese people from all other nations and giving the same people their best means of expression.

(c) The Maltese State recognises the Maltese Language as a strong expression of the nationality of the Maltese, and for that purpose acknowledges its unique importance, and protects it from deterioration and perdition.

(d) The Maltese State shall make provision in such manner that the study of the Maltese Language in its linguistic, literary and cultural manifestations shall always be given primary importance in both State and other schools from the very first years of education of all Maltese citizens.

(e) The Maltese State shall promote through all possible means the widest use of the Maltese Language in education, broadcasting and the media, at the law courts, and in political, administrative, economic, social and cultural life.

(f) The Maltese State shall lead in the creation of all possible opportunities for the development of the National Language and to assert its merited dignity.

(g) The Maltese State recognises, within the wider context of the Maltese diaspora, that the Maltese Language should remain known by and considered as a binding element of the Maltese people.

(2) The provisions of this article shall not be enforceable in any court of law, but the principles therein contained are nevertheless fundamental to the safeguarding of the Maltese Language and it shall be the aim of the State to apply them and to comply therewith. (pp. 2–3)

## ***education system***

Unlike most countries in the EU, where compulsory formal education begins at the ages of 6 or 7, in Malta it starts at the age of 5 and ends at 16 (see [Education system in Malta](#)). Most children, however, attend pre-school from ages 3 to 5. The primary cycle lasts six years (ages 5–11), while the secondary cycle lasts five years (ages 11–16). The secondary cycle is divided into Middle Schools (ages 11–13) and Secondary Schools (ages 13–16). At the end of the secondary cycle (year 11), pupils take the Secondary Education Certificate examinations (SEC; Maltese: *Ċertifikat tal-Edukazzjoni Sekondarja*), which allows them to attend post-secondary education.

The grades achieved in the SEC correspond to the levels 1, 2, and 3 of the Malta Qualifications Framework (MQF), where levels 2 or 3 are required to pursue post-secondary education (Eurydice, 2023f). The MQF, established in 2009, includes 8 levels that provide neutral reference points for educational qualifications. Level 1 corresponds to a school leaving certificate and level 8 corresponds to a doctoral (PhD) degree. Depending on the grade pupils receive for the SEC examinations at the end of secondary school, they reach MQF level 3 (SEC grade 1–5) or MQF level 2 (SEC grade 6–7; Malta Further & Higher Education Authority, n.d.-b).

The educational reform outlined in *My Journey: Achieving through different paths* (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2016b) aimed to increase equity and inclusion by differentiating between the following three streams of secondary education: academic, vocational, and applied schooling. The aim of the reform was to increase the attractiveness of vocational education and training (VET) and was achieved by ensuring that all students were given access to academic, vocational, and applied learning optional subjects in secondary schools (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2016b). The introduction of the MQF also pushed for parity of esteem, since academic, vocational, and applied learning programmes now all lead to MFQ level 3. As a consequence, VET qualifications now also provide effective access to higher education (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2020).

Pupils can continue secondary general education at post-secondary (also called post-compulsory) education institutions (ages 16–18+) to obtain the matriculation certificate, which is required to enter tertiary education. Post-secondary education institutions offer either a general (academic) or vocational education track (Eurydice, 2023e). Vocational education at post-secondary institutions caters to pupils who have completed eleven years of compulsory general education and who want to specialise in a particular profession (Eurydice, 2023h).

In Malta, there are the following three types of pre-primary, primary, and secondary schools: State, Church, and Independent. During the academic year 2021/22, State-run institutions accounted for 58.9% of total enrolments, followed by Church schools at 27.7% and Independent schools at 13.7% (NSO, 2023c; see also [private and public](#)).

Adult education is offered by the State and private organisations. Through the Directorate for Research, Lifelong Learning and Employability, the State provides courses targeted at obtaining academic qualifications as well as recreational learning.

## *the National Curriculum Framework*

The National Curriculum Framework (Maltese: *Il-Qafas tal-Kurrikulu Nazzjonali* – NCF), which replaced the 1999 National Minimum Curriculum (Maltese: *Il-Kurrikulu Minimu Nazzjonali* – NMC), was officially launched on 14 February 2013 by the Director General for Quality and Standards in Education and the Minister of Education and Employment. The process to devise this NCF started in 2008, and in 2011, the draft documents of the NCF were up for consultation. The first document provides an executive summary of the framework (Ministry of Education, Employment and the Family, 2011a), while the second document presents the various components of the framework as well as the rationale for implementing it (Ministry of Education, Employment and the Family, 2011b). The third document discusses the three educational cycles, namely the early, primary, and secondary years (Ministry of Education, Employment and the Family, 2011c), and the final document details recommendations, implications, and the implementation process itself (Ministry of Education, Employment and the Family, 2011d). The *National Curriculum Framework for All* (Ministry of Education and Employment, 2012), which integrates the four consultation documents, came into force as from the academic year 2013/14.

*The National Curriculum Framework for All* (Ministry of Education and Employment, 2012) was Malta's first educational framework to allocate a minimum number of hours for subjects (Calleja, 2013). At the primary level, 30% of the time is allotted for the learning of languages, 15% for mathematics, 15% for science and technology, 5% for health and physical education, 5% for religious and ethics education, 10% for humanities and education for democracy, and 5% for visual and performing arts. The remaining 15% is reserved for school-based choices (Ministry of Education and Employment, 2012).

According to the Minister of Education, an important aspect of the NCF is that its flexibility allows each school to ensure it responds to its pupils' needs. All State schools implement this approach, whereas it is optional for Church and Independent schools (Calleja, 2013).

In 2022, the Ministry for Education, Sport, Youth, Research and Innovation (MEYR; Maltese: *Ministeru għall-Edukazzjoni, l-Isport, iż-Żgħażaġħ, ir-Riċerka u l-Innovazzjoni*) launched the National Curriculum Framework Review Board to provide strategic direction for the implementation of the NCF (National Curriculum Framework Review Board, 2022). Future efforts to improve Malta's educational system include the revision of the NCF in accordance with the National Education Strategy 2024–2030 (MEYR, 2024).

## *supporting the National Curriculum Framework*

The NCF is supported by the Learning Outcomes Framework (LOF), which serves as the keystone of compulsory education. By transitioning from syllabus-based curricula to teaching based on learning outcomes, compulsory education is focused less on the acquisition and assessment of knowledge alone, but rather centres around the development of knowledge, attitudes, and skills (Attard Tonna & Bugeja, 2016). Furthermore, the introduction of the LOF allows teachers the curricular autonomy to develop effective programmes that better address pupils' needs (Eurydice, 2023d).

Starting from the academic year 2018/19, the LOF is being implemented gradually (Eurydice, 2023d), with the framework expected to be introduced to the final year of secondary school (Year 11) during the academic year 2025/26 (National Curriculum Framework Review Board, 2022). Information on learning outcomes and syllabi organised by year and course can be found on the national curriculum website ([curriculum.gov.mt](http://curriculum.gov.mt)). The LOF, along with the NCF, will be revised to meet current and future needs as outlined in the National Education Strategy 2024–2030 (MEYR, 2024).

Further parallel initiatives in compulsory education include the following:

- The development and launch of *A National Literacy Strategy for All in Malta and Gozo 2014–2019* (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014), which promotes a policy of bilingualism and balanced biliteracy in Maltese and English.
- The development and launch of *My Journey: Achieving through different paths* (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2016b), which outlines reforms to increase equity and inclusion by introducing the following three streams of secondary education: academic, vocational, and applied schooling.
- The development and public consultation of *A National Literacy Strategy in Malta and Gozo 2021–2030* (Ministry for Education, 2021), which builds on the 2014 strategy and focuses on the importance of digital, multilingual, and balanced literacy for social inclusion.
- The development and launch of the *National Lifelong Learning Strategy 2023–2030* (MEYR, 2023b), which focuses on the improvement of educational opportunities for low-skilled and low-qualified adults.
- The development and launch of *A National Quality Assurance Framework for Education in Malta 0–16* (MEYR, 2023c), which outlines what educational quality assurance entails by focusing on inclusion and equity.
- The development and launch of the *National Quality Standards in Education 3–16* (MEYR, 2023d), which establishes national standards for the following three domains: educational leadership and management, learning and teaching, and ethos.

### ***language policy***

The current NCF does not outline a language policy regarding the language of instruction in Malta’s official bilingual context, while the previous NMC did stipulate Maltese as the language of instruction for some subjects and English for others. The fact that the new NCF does not include a specific language policy does not, however, mean that it has disregarded the establishment of parameters with regard to the language of instruction. The official document states that “the NCF recognises the need for clear direction on the language of instruction and assessment as part of a revamped national language policy” (Ministry of Education and Employment, 2012, p. 41). The NCF details that the policy needs to address (Ministry of Education and Employment, 2012):

- entitlement issues – students need to become proficient in Maltese, English and preferably in another language to ensure social, cultural and economic integration.

- cultural issues – the policy needs to recognise the rightful place of Maltese as an expression of our national identity, acknowledge the preference for English as the first language of a minority of our population, consider the multiple nationalities of students in schools, and overcome prejudices related to other languages and cultures.
- implementation issues – the use of language/s in different learning areas as well as what language will be used for assessment purposes should be addressed.
- professional issues – such a system requires teachers who are proficient in both English and Maltese. Similarly, resources in both Maltese and English need to be available for the system to work.
- economic issues – proficiency in English is a must to ensure competitiveness in a globalised economic environment. Similarly, knowledge of foreign languages for the fostering of international relations needs to be given due importance. (p. 41)

The NCF recommended that the Learning Outcomes Framework Board would be responsible for integrating recommendations made by the language policy committee into the LOF (Ministry of Education and Employment, 2012). Since then, several policies have been developed, such as *A Language Policy for the Early Years in Malta and Gozo* (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2016a), *A Language Policy for the Junior Years in Malta and Gozo* (MEYR, 2023a), and the *National Policy for the Teaching of Maltese as a Foreign Language in the Framework of Bilingualism and Plurilingualism* (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2019b).

### ***private and public***

In Malta there are the following three types of schools: State, Church, and Independent schools. During the academic year 2021/22, the majority of children (pre-primary, primary and secondary) attended free State schools (58.9%), while 27.4% went to government-dependent Church schools and 13.7% went to government-independent fee-paying Independent schools (NSO, 2023c). Church schools are government-dependent in the sense that the government pays an annual sum of money to support the recurrent expenditure of these schools after it appropriated vast amounts of church property. The total number of pupils enrolled in compulsory education during the academic year 2021/22 was 49,033, distributed as 55.1% in primary school and 44.9% in secondary school. When compared to the previous academic year (2020/21), a 0.4% increase in primary education and a 0.9% increase in secondary education were recorded (NSO, 2023c).

In the academic year 2021/22, a total of 58,377 pupils were enrolled in pre-primary, primary or secondary education, of whom 51.9% and 48.1% identified as male and female, respectively (NSO, 2023c). Pupils aged between 5 and 10 years accounted for 46.1% of the pre-primary, primary, and secondary school population, while those aged between 11 and 15 years accounted for 37.3%. State schools had the smallest average class size, while Church schools had the largest, especially at the Year 6 level, with an average of 23.8 pupils per class (NSO, 2023c).

The district with the highest number of grades offered (in pre-, primary, and secondary school) in the academic year 2021/22 was the Northern Harbour District (33.7%), followed

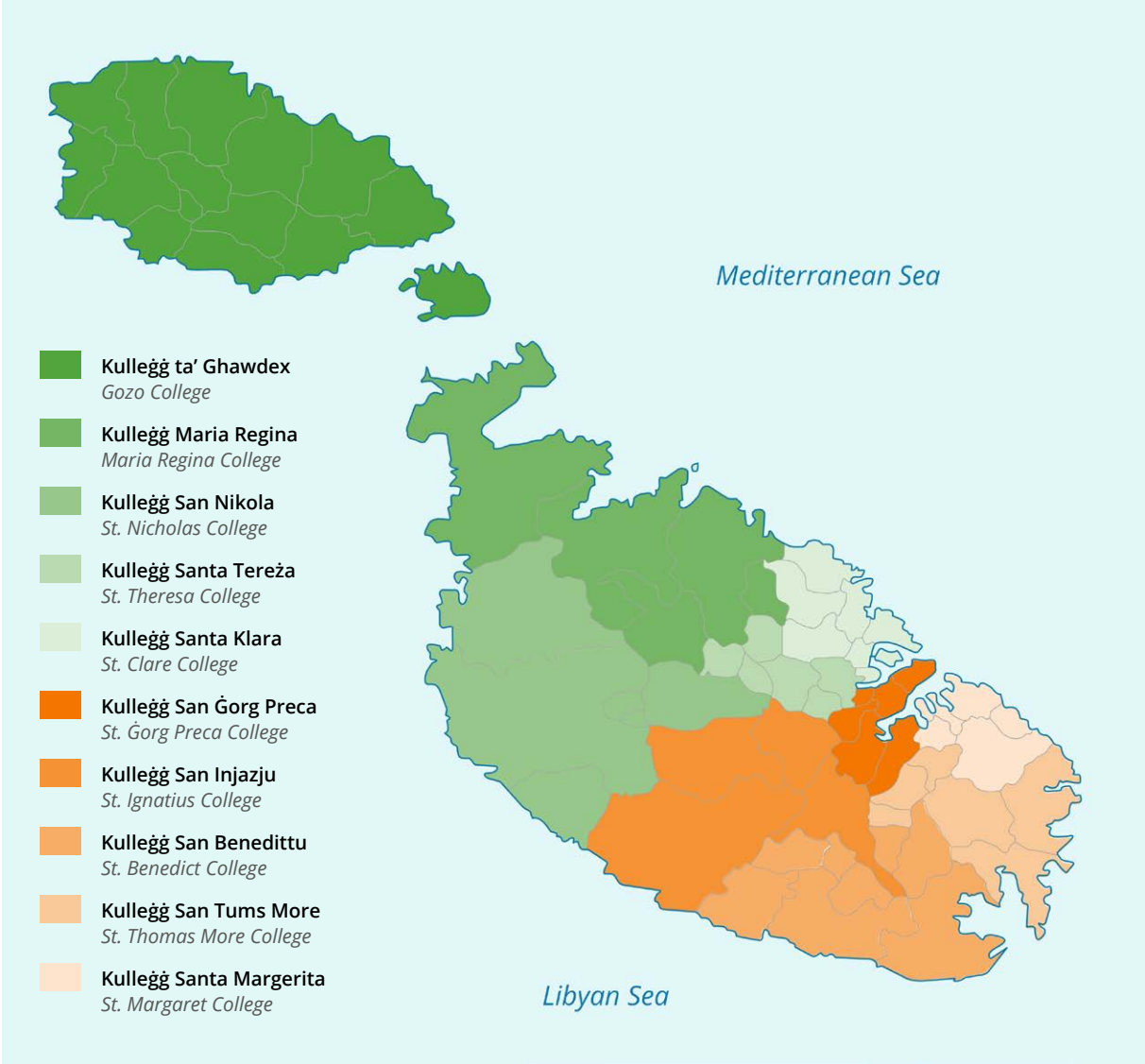
by the Southern Harbour District (18.9%). The majority of pupils attended schools in the Northern Harbour District (26.9%), followed by the Northern District (18.9%). In the academic year 2021/22, pupils with a migrant background accounted for 14.3% of the total number of pupils, registering a 3.2% increase over the previous academic year of 2020/21 (NSO, 2023c).

Following the establishment of school networks in 2006, State schools were organised into colleges, each including both primary and secondary schools in various locations. Prior to the implementation of the college system, pupils could opt to attend either junior lyceums or secondary schools depending on the results obtained on the junior lyceum entrance examination taken at the end of Year 6 of primary school (UNESCO-IBE, 2012).

The aim of the college network system is to improve “the quality, standards, operation, initiatives and educational achievements in State schools” (Profiles Enhancing Education Reviews, 2022). The network system was designed to incorporate State boys’ and girls’ schools and aims to offer equal educational experiences and services in a continuous process starting from pre-primary to secondary education. This organisational shift aimed to reform the educational system from a top-down bureaucracy into communities in which educators and parents could collaborate for the benefit of pupils. By the end of 2007, all Maltese State schools were grouped into 10 autonomous regional colleges (Cutajar et al., 2013; see Figure 3).

Regarding non-State schools, until 1991, parents sending their children to Church schools paid tuition fees. However, following a Church-State agreement on the devolution of Church property to the State, which was signed by the Holy See and Malta on 28 November 1991, these religious schools no longer require tuition fees. Instead, the government pays the salaries of all the Church schools’ teaching and non-teaching staff. The implementation of this Agreement was formalised in 1992 through the Ecclesiastical Entities Properties Act (Att dwar Propjetà Ta’ Entijiet Ekklesjastiċi, 1992). Monetary contributions are, however, requested by the administrators of these schools to help cover costs related to teaching tools and the general upkeep of the school. Entry into such schools is by means of a ballot system at the primary level. On account of this new system, Church schools now enrol a diverse pupil body from various socio-economic backgrounds.

**Figure 3** Distribution of State-maintained Maltese colleges.



*Note.* Adapted from TUBS (2012); college data from Migrant Learners' Unit (n.d.).

There are fewer Independent schools than Church schools, with most Independent schools having been established in the last two decades or so, although some schools were set up earlier. While both Church and Independent schools are considered non-State institutions of learning, unlike Church schools, Independent schools charge tuition fees. Parents of children who attend Independent schools tend to belong to the professional and business classes (Cilia & Borg, 1997). Independent schools are not aided financially by the State, but the government has introduced tax rebates to parents whose children attend such schools.

## ***bilingual education forms***

Malta is officially bilingual in Maltese and English. The predominant use of either of these two languages is to some extent dependent on the type of school one attends. Studies by Sciriha (1997, 1998) revealed that the language of instruction in State schools and, to a lesser extent, in Church schools is overwhelmingly Maltese, whereas English-based instruction is a feature of Independent schools.

Although both English and Maltese are spoken in schools, there is a preference for one language over the other depending on the type of school. Maltese seems to be the favoured language in State schools, both within the classroom as a language of instruction and outside lessons. In independent schools, lessons are in English, with the exception of Maltese, and pupils tend to communicate in a mixture of English and Maltese outside class, based on their home language or peers' language preferences (Government of Malta, n.d.).

## ***administration***

The MEYR is responsible for all State schools and provides financial support to Church schools. Moreover, the State regulates the curriculum for all schools' academic content. Article 5 of the Education Act (Att dwar l-Edukazzjon, 2019) stipulates that:

5. It shall be the right of the State –
  - a) to implement the Framework for the Education Strategy for Malta;
  - b) to implement the National Curriculum Framework of studies for all schools at pre-compulsory and compulsory education level and the national minimum conditions for all schools;
  - c) to establish the national minimum conditions for all schools and ensure adherence by licence holders to such conditions;
  - d) to secure compliance with the National Curriculum Framework of studies; and
  - e) to ensure the provision of quality inclusive and equitable education by all providers in the education sector:

In addition to English and mathematics, Maltese is a core subject in the curriculum of all primary and secondary schools in Malta and is a requirement for entry to further education institutions.

Regarding the use of the two official languages at the University of Malta, the *Comprehensive Guidelines for the Use of Languages at the University of Malta* was adopted by the University Senate in 2021. This document addresses the following themes (University of Malta, 2021):



- The University's language of instruction is English, which should be used in all teaching, especially when foreign students are present.
- For undergraduate programmes, the language of instruction and assessment is English. Exceptions are areas concerning the study of other languages, and the University Senate can also approve units in Maltese or other languages.
- For postgraduate programmes, dissertations must be written in English. Exceptions are dissertations concerning the study of other languages, which should be accompanied by English executive summaries.
- All PhD students are encouraged to write an extended abstract of their theses in Maltese for increased visibility and dissemination. (pp. 11–12)

### ***inspection***

The functions and duties related to the inspection of education by the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education (Maltese: *Direttorat Għal Kwalità u Standards f'l-Edukazzjoni*) within the MEYR are outlined in the Education Act (2019) through Articles 16(1) to (2) and 17(1) to (2).

Article 16 of the Education Act (2019) stipulates that an independent and autonomous department is responsible for regulating pre-compulsory and compulsory education. Regulation takes the form of establishing, monitoring, and assuring standards and quality in all educational services and programmes. Article 17 stipulates that authorised officers have the power of entry and of inspection, and may enter any educational facility without prior notice to inspect and report on all educational aspects mentioned in the Education Act (2019). Educators must cooperate and provide the necessary information and access to officers.

The Director General of the Directorate is responsible for employing education officers and other officers to inspect and audit the quality in all schools.

### ***support structure***

The Education Act (2019) article 11(1) states that “There shall be a Division of Education, composed of Departments which shall be listed in the Schedule, as the Minister may determine from time to time”.

Article 12 (1) of the Education Act (2019) stipulates the functions of the Division of Education) and its functions to support schools, such as:

12. (2) (r), provide and allocate the resources, human and otherwise, services, and learning tools, both of a pedagogical, psychosocial, managerial and operative nature and other ancillary support tools, as required in State schools and State educational institutions. (Chapter 605)

Assessment of activities related to all subjects, including Maltese, is carried out by the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education through its education officers. This Directorate is also responsible for distributing textbooks and conducting in-service training courses for teachers.

Furthermore, the National Council of the Maltese Language, or the **Kunsill**, was established in 2005 through the Maltese Language Act (2005). Prior to the establishment of the Kunsill, it was the Academy of Maltese (Maltese: *Akkademja tal-Malti*) – previously known as the Maltese Writers’ Group (Maltese: *Għaqda tal-Kittieba tal-Malti*) – that endeavoured to cultivate and nurture the Maltese language. The Maltese Writers’ Group began the process of standardising Maltese orthography in 1920. More recently, the Kunsill has made significant decisions regarding Maltese orthography. As outlined in Article 5(2) of the Maltese Language Act (2005), “The Council shall also update the orthography of the Maltese Language as necessary and, from time to time, establish the correct manner of writing words and phrases which enter the Maltese Language from other tongues”.

It is important to note, however, that the remit of the Kunsill goes beyond issues regarding the standardisation of the Maltese orthography, and also includes proposals related to Maltese language policy (Maltese Language Act, 2005):

4. (1) There shall be a body, to be known as the National Council of the Maltese Language, having the aim of adopting and promoting a suitable language policy and strategy and to verify their performance and observance in every sector of Maltese life, for the benefit and development of the national language and the identity of the Maltese people. (Article 4, p. 3)

Furthermore, the Kunsill is a full member of the European Federation of National Institutions for Language (EFNIL), and the Maltese Language Act (2005) stipulates that:

5. (4) The Council shall establish and maintain regular and frequent contacts with local, national and international organisations which have functions similar to or complementary to those functions of the Council and establish exchanges of views and resources with them. (Article 5(4), p. 6)

The resources utilised by the Kunsill are diverse and include, among others, those related to education, orthography, and children’s songs in Maltese (see *References and further reading* for a list of books).

### *Maltese as a foreign language*

To facilitate the integration of the ever-increasing number of pupils whose first language is neither Maltese nor English into society, courses have been developed to teach Maltese as a foreign language. Support offered to migrant children by the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education (DQSE) takes the form of a 6-week intervention programme. This programme consists of pupils following English and, to a lesser extent, Maltese language

courses while they are partially or fully absent from their regular schooling. With a special focus on spoken interaction, the programme's main aim is to help these pupils integrate more quickly into the school system (Council of Europe, 2015, p. 24).

### *migrant learners' unit*

During the academic year 2021/22, a total of 50,023 pupils were enrolled in pre-primary, primary, and secondary education. Among these pupils, 85.7% held Maltese citizenship, 5.7% held EU citizenship, and 8.6% held non-EU citizenship (NSO, 2023c). Migrants from countries other than the EU are also known as Third Country Nationals.

To support the integration of children with migrant backgrounds into schools, the Migrant Learners' Unit (MLU) was established in 2014. The main remit of the unit can be divided into the following three aspects (Migrant Learners' Unit, 2022):

- a) The registration of Third Country Children for state schooling;
- b) The provision of an induction programme for children coming from a migrant background who cannot as yet communicate in the languages of schooling in Malta, i.e. Maltese and English;
- c) The provision of supporting structures for more inclusive practices within education for migrant children and their families.

All the classes at the MLU adopt the Year 3 (Maltese as a Foreign Language) syllabus, which aligns with level A1 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. It should, however, be noted that there is a discrepancy in the level of difficulty between this syllabus and the Maltese SEC syllabus, both of which are used in mainstream schools. The Maltese SEC syllabus is understandably more demanding than the Maltese as a Foreign Language syllabus.

From 2019 to 2021, the MLU facilitated the enrolment of 1,800 new Third Country National pupils in state schooling (Migrant Learners' Unit, 2022). As some of these children may not yet be proficient in the language of instruction, the MLU, in collaboration with the MEYR, offers a 1-year induction programme to provide them with basic access to the mainstream curriculum. Between 2018 and 2021, over 2,609 children were supported by this programme (Migrant Learners' Unit, 2022). The induction programme is implemented in over 21 schools across Malta and Gozo, catering to pupils in primary, middle, and secondary school. This programme is co-financed by the Asylum and Migration Integration Fund (AMIF) through the LLAPSI+ project (Migrant Learners' Unit, 2022).

## 2 Pre-school education

### *target group*

Children aged 3 to 5 years may attend pre-school education. Kindergarten classes are available to all children and are provided by the three main stakeholders in education provision services, namely, State, Church-run, and Independent schools. Attendance is high, with over 90% of pre-school aged children attending kindergartens and childcare centres (Eurydice, 2023a).

### *structure*

State pre-school classes are available in most localities and are free of charge. Children are registered in schools at the earliest when they turn 2 years and 9 months. Pre-school education, though not compulsory, is the first step towards preparing children for primary education (Eurydice, 2023b).

### *legislation*

Since school attendance is not compulsory until the age of 5 years, there is no law that enforces parents to send their children to pre-school centres. Article 4 (2d) of the Education Act (2019, p. 5) states that “it shall be the duty of the State to ensure that there exist early childhood education and care centres”. Such centres are available in all three types of schools (i.e. State, Church, and Independent).

### *language use*

In State schools, and to a slightly lesser extent in Church schools, the language used by the teacher during group activities and in individual interactions with children is generally Maltese, although English words are also used. The linguistic environment is different in Independent schools, where English is more likely to be the language of communication, although some children do interact with their peers in Maltese.

A study conducted by the National Literacy Agency on language use in early childhood education classrooms concluded that educators in most schools are aware of the need to introduce both Maltese and English at an early school age and develop activities that involve both languages (Vella et al., 2018).

Moreover, this study provides data on the amount of time allocated to each official language; educators in State schools dedicated more time to Maltese, while those in Church schools were more inclined to use English (Vella et al., 2018).

Interestingly, there were also differences between colleges, with a more prevalent use of English in colleges in the northern and central areas of Malta, while Maltese was more widely used in colleges in southern areas. Educators also code-switch to facilitate young children’s learning (Vella et al., 2018).

**teaching materials**

At the pre-school education level, there is no formal teaching, and children learn elementary numeracy and literacy skills through play. In pre-school sessions, children are exposed to numerous books and teaching materials in both Maltese and English through storytelling. Kindergarten educators employ both languages during these sessions, with English becoming increasingly common in view of the rise of multicultural classrooms and it being a lingua franca. Educators choose specific books based on their pupils’ interests.

Materials and resources are chosen and/or compiled by educators. There is no set list of titles used at this education level.

**statistics**

In the academic year 2021/22, total enrolments were subdivided as follows: State schools 72%, Church schools 10.3%, and Independent schools 17.7% (NSO, 2023c). Children in Kinder 1 start school at 2 years and 9 months of age, while Kinder 2 pupils are 4 years old.

**Table 2** Number of pupils in pre-primary education by district in the academic year 2021/22.

	Southern Harbour	Northern Harbour	South-Eastern	Western	Northern	Gozo & Comino	Total
Kinder 1 (2 years 9 months)	773	1,381	873	697	931	340	4,995
Kinder 2 (4 years)	711	1,346	626	602	775	289	4,349
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,484</b>	<b>2,727</b>	<b>1,499</b>	<b>1,299</b>	<b>1,706</b>	<b>629</b>	<b>9,344</b>

*Note.* Data from NSO (2023c).

## 3 Primary education

### *target group*

Malta is one of the few countries in the EU where compulsory schooling commences at the age of 5 (Eurydice, 2023i). State, Church, and Independent primary schools cater to children aged 5 to 11.

### *structure*

The average class size for all primary schools is 17.7 pupils per class. Malta's Education Act (1988, 2019) provides the general framework for education. All teaching programmes developed by the schools need to be in line with the NCF and the LOF.

Due to Malta's official bilingualism, both Maltese and English are formally taught from Year 1, with the core subjects being Maltese, English, and mathematics. Malta is the only country that allocates more time to the compulsory teaching of mathematics (19%) than the time allocated to the language of instruction (15%; Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, 2009).

The national end-of-primary benchmark examination in mathematics, Maltese, and English takes place at the end of Year 6. In the 2019 session, 86 schools (62 State, 20 Church, and 4 Independent) participated in these examinations (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2019a).

### *legislation*

Article 4 (2e) of the Education Act (2019) states that "it shall be the duty of the State to provide for education of children of compulsory school age" (p. 5), and Article 6 (e) states that "it shall be the duty of every parent of a minor to ensure that the minor attends school on each scholastic day during all the period of compulsory school age [...] unless the minor has a good and sufficient cause to be absent from school" (p. 6).

The NCF states that, at the primary education level, children are entitled to a stimulating, happy, safe, and caring educational environment. This level of education builds on early childhood experiences and aims to promote the development of their full potential in all aspects of learning. The junior years also strive to pave the way for the development of skills and lifelong learning, which provide the groundwork for secondary education (Ministry of Education and Employment, 2012).

Three broad learning outcomes are identified in the NCF for the junior years, which are for pupils to develop themselves as (Ministry of Education and Employment, 2012):

- learners who are capable of successfully developing their full potential as lifelong learners;
- learners who are capable of sustaining their chances in the world of work; and
- learners who are engaged citizens who are able to secure social justice in constantly changing local, regional and global realities. (p. 57)

The MEYR is primarily responsible for education in Malta, and local councils are expected to ensure the safety of all school children in the vicinity of schools.

### *language use*

At the primary education level, State school pupils receive one lesson in English language and one in Maltese language daily. Maltese and English are both official languages and are used as languages of instruction.

### *teaching materials*

Textbooks are provided free of charge to schoolchildren in State schools, which are funded by the government. Subjects taught in Maltese have Maltese-based textbooks. Most textbooks are in English and are bought from foreign publishing houses. Some textbooks have been produced by Maltese publishers for the primary education level in subjects such as Maltese (e.g. *Senduq Kuluri Aħdar* [Chest Colours Green], *Senduq Kuluri Blu* [Chest Colours Blue], *Senduq Kuluri Orangjo* [Chest Colours Orange], by Merlin Publishers), social studies, history, geography, and music.

### *statistics*

According to statistics on education provided by the NSO (2023c), during the academic year 2021/22, a total of 27,039 pupils attended primary schools. State schools had the smallest average class size, while Church schools registered the largest average class size, especially in Year 6 with 23 pupils per class (NSO, 2023c).

In the academic year 2021/22, 51.9% of pupils enrolled in pre-primary, primary, and secondary education identified as male. The age bracket with the highest percentage of enrolled pupils was between 5 and 10 years, accounting for 46.21%, followed by those aged 11 to 15 years at 37.23% (NSO, 2023c).

**Table 3** provides the Maltese benchmark results from the 2019 examination session. These results were selected because, unfortunately, the speaking component of the more recently published examination results (2021) was not assessed due to COVID-19 restrictions. It is important to note that some of candidates were absent due to COVID-19 for one or more of the components of this benchmark examination, resulting in a total of 3,316 candidates sitting all exams in all four language skills, which is lower than the total number of candidates who took at least one exam in one component (e.g. 3,455 for speaking and 3,318 for writing).

**Table 3** National results for Maltese from the end of primary benchmark examination in 2019.

Skill	Number of pupils	Min. mark	Max. mark	Median mark	Mean mark
Speaking (20%)	3,455	0	20	17	16.2
Listening (20%)	3,448	0	20	16	15.4
Reading (30%)	3,332	0	29	19	18.3
Writing (30%)	3,318	0	29	16	15.1
Complete exam	3,316	2	95	69	65.6

*Note.* Data from Ministry for Education and Employment (2019b).

The Northern Harbour district has the highest pupil population (8,936) and the corresponding highest number of schools (32). **Table 4** provides a breakdown of the population and number of schools at the primary education level by district.

**Table 4** Number of primary school pupils and schools by district in the academic year 2021/22.

District	Number of pupils	Number of schools
Southern Harbour	5,358	23
South-Eastern	3,278	14
Northern Harbour	8,936	32
Western	3,288	14
Northern	4,194	13
Gozo & Comino	1,985	15
Total	27,039	111

*Note.* Data from NSO (2023c).



## 4 Secondary education

### *target group*

In Malta, secondary education lasts 5 years. Compulsory education was introduced in 1946 (Compulsory Education Ordinance, 1946), requiring Maltese children to attend school until the age of 14. However, it was not until 1970 that secondary education became accessible to all, with the establishment of area secondary schools. This ensured that even children who did not pass the 11+ examinations to enter lyceums or grammar schools would not remain in primary schools until the age of 14, but would rather attend secondary schools. Furthermore, in 1971, compulsory education was extended until the age of 16.

### *structure*

Secondary education in Malta is provided by State, Church, and Independent schools. In accordance with the NCF, secondary education, similar to primary education, is structured around learning areas and not specific subjects, as was the case in the previous NMC. These learning areas include languages (Maltese as the mother tongue, English as a second language, and foreign languages depending on pupils' choice), mathematics, science, technology education (including design and technology, and digital literacy), health education (physical education and sports; personal, social and health education; and home economics), religious education, ethics, history, geography, social studies, environmental education, citizen education, and arts education (art, music, dance, and drama).

At the end of Form 5 (Year 11), pupils are required to sit the SEC examinations, which are administered by the University of Malta's Matriculation and Secondary Education Certificate Examinations Board (MATSEC). Candidates who obtain the SEC are entitled to pursue further post-secondary education (see *Vocational education* and *Higher education*).

At the upper secondary level, the following three main institutions offer general education: the Higher Secondary School, the Ġ. F. Abela Junior College (attached to the University of Malta), and the Sir M. Refalo Centre for further studies in Gozo. These institutions offer a 2-year academic programme leading to the matriculation certificate (MQF 4) awarded by the University of Malta, which serves as an entry requirement for tertiary education (UNESCO-IBE, 2012).

The matriculation certificate is based on the premise that pupils seeking admission to university are more likely to develop into mature individuals if they have a broad educational background that includes both humanities and the science areas. To obtain this certificate, pupils are required to sit examinations in six subjects from various areas. The

choice of subjects includes a language, a humanities or a business subject, mathematics or a science subject, and any two additional subjects of their choice. The sixth subject is Systems of Knowledge. A matriculation certificate is a requirement for admission to the University of Malta (n.d.-c).

## *legislation*

The Maltese Education Act (2019) provides the framework for secondary education, with Article 4(2e) stating that “it shall be the duty of the State to provide for education of children of compulsory school age” (p. 5).

At the core of the NCF are the concepts of transition and building upon a solid foundation of primary education. The NCF states that the transition from primary to secondary school should be smooth and offer progression to support children as they learn to take on more responsibility. The framework stresses the importance of personal development and highlights that it is at this stage that pupils need to strive for certification to have access to further and higher education. By completing their secondary education, pupils are entitled to certification, which includes the Secondary School Certificate and Profile (SSC&P) and the Secondary Education Certificate (SEC), both of which are recognised by the Malta Qualifications Council (Ministry of Education and Employment, 2012).

## *language use*

### *lessons in the Maltese language as a core subject*

The number of Maltese language lessons as a subject varies according to the pupil's grade level. In the first 2 years of College Middle Schools, State school pupils receive a total of five Maltese language lessons per week. The number of lessons in this language, however, decreases to 3, 4, and 4 per week in Years 9, 10, and 11, respectively, in College Secondary schools (see Table 5).

**Table 5** Number of lessons in Maltese as a subject per week in College Middle and Secondary Schools.

	College Middle Schools		College Secondary Schools		
	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11
Average no. of lessons per week	5	5	3	4	4

*Note.* Data from Eurydice (2023g).

**Table 6** provides a breakdown of pupils who sat the Maltese examination and the grades (ranging from 1 to 7) obtained at the end of secondary education (Year 11). Pupils have the option to sit either Paper A or Paper B. Although the subject syllabus for both Papers A and B is identical, the only difference between these two papers is that Paper B is easier than Paper A and weaker students tend to opt for Paper B. As a result, the highest grade achievable for Paper A candidates is Grade 1, while Paper B candidates can obtain up to Grade 4. Grades 6 and 7 are also considered passing grades, but only candidates who achieve Grades 1–5 are allowed to continue their studies in the subject at a higher level (intermediate/advanced). Candidates who receive a Grade U (unclassified) are not considered to have passed the examination. The results from the June session in 2022 reveal that about one quarter of pupils who sat the Maltese examination did not pass and obtained Grade U (see **Table 6**).

**Table 6** Final SEC examination results for Maltese from the June 2022 session.

Paper A									
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	U	Absent	Total
141	470	515	496	311	-	-	139	32	2,104
Paper B									
-	-	-	284	239	236	195	537	218	1,709
Number of candidates									
141 (3.70%)	470 (12.33%)	515 (13.51%)	780 (20.46%)	550 (14.42%)	236 (6.19%)	195 (5.11%)	676 (17.73%)	250 (6.65%)	3,813 (100%)

*Note.* Data from MATSEC Examinations Board (2022).

### **teaching materials**

Textbooks primarily focus on aspects of Maltese grammar and orthography and are usually developed and produced by the education officers specialising in the subject. Since the syllabus in Maltese also includes literature, teachers are required to teach set literary texts, including works by Maltese poets, novelists, and playwrights, which are state-funded.

Some textbooks for other subjects are available in both Maltese and English. For example, in the subject of religion, books such as *L-Aventura ta' Hajti* (My Adventure), *Id-Dinja ta' Ġo Fija* (The World Within Me), and *Intom id-Dawl tad-Dinja* (You Are the Light of the World), all published by Beacon Media Group, are available in both languages. History is another subject where textbooks are available in both Maltese and English, such as *Storikus 1* and *Storikus 2*, both published by Merlin.

## statistics

During the academic year 2021/22, the average class size in secondary schools was approximately 19 pupils per class. State schools had the smallest class sizes, while Church schools had the largest average class size, particularly in Year 8 with around 23 pupils per class (NSO, 2023c).

Table 7 provides a breakdown of the number of pupils in secondary schools based on the type of school and year of schooling. In total, there were 21,994 pupils across all 5 years of secondary schooling. The highest number of pupils attended State schools (11,920), followed by Church schools and Independent schools with 7,472 and 2,602 pupils, respectively.

**Table 7** Number of pupils in secondary education by school type in the academic year 2021/22.

	State	Church	Independent	Total
Year 7	2,341	1,502	556	4,399
Year 8	2,453	1,495	551	4,499
Year 9	2,445	1,516	540	4,501
Year 10	2,274	1,495	486	4,255
Year 11	2,407	1,464	469	4,340
Total	11,920	7,472	2,602	21,994

*Note.* Data from NSO (2023c).

## 5 Vocational education

### *target group*

Vocational education is for post-secondary students who have already completed 11 years of mandatory schooling.

### *structure*

A variety of courses and qualifications that lead to a trade profession are offered by the Institute of Tourism Studies (ITS), the Institute for Conservation and Management of Cultural Heritage, and the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (Maltese: *Il-Kulleġġ Malti tal-Arti, ix-Xjenza u t-Teknoloġija* – MCAST). These State-run institutions provide 1-year, 2-year, and 3-year programmes. Vocational education programmes lead to five different qualification levels, which correspond to MQF 1–5 (Malta Further & Higher Education Authority, n.d.-a). Upon completion of VET level 5, equivalent to MQF level 5, graduates receive a VET higher diploma. The MCAST offers both vocational and higher education courses, including 1-year foundation and intermediate certificate programmes (UNESCO-IBE, 2012). At the MCAST, levels 1 to 7 of the MQF can be obtained depending on the chosen course, preparing students for the job market or further studies (Eurydice, 2023h).

Admission requirements vary depending on the chosen course, and next to a certain MQF level other qualifications, such as high grades in a specific subject, can apply (Eurydice, 2023h). The websites of the [ITS](#) and [MCAST](#) list their entire course programmes.

### *legislation*

Vocational education, as part of post-secondary non-compulsory education, is regulated under the Further and Higher Education Act of 2021 (Att dwar l-Edukazzjoni Avanzata u Ogħla, 2021). The Act outlines the role of the Malta Further and Higher Education Authority, formerly known as the National Commission for Further and Higher Education. Article 3(2) of the Higher Education Act (2021) states that:

The Authority shall endeavour to achieve the following objectives and policies:

- a) licence and regulate further and higher education providers in Malta;
- b) promote and uphold quality education; and
- c) advise the Government on any matter which is connected with further and higher education.

## *language use*

In vocational educational institutions, while most textbooks are in English, the language of instruction is generally Maltese with frequent occurrences of code-switching. Since Maltese is the dominant language in these institutions, informal interaction among students and the teaching staff primarily takes place in Maltese.

## *teaching materials*

Although the language of instruction for most subjects is Maltese, textbooks are mostly in English. At this education level, textbooks are not provided by the State, as is the case for State primary and secondary schools. It is, however, important to note that all post-secondary students are given a state-funded monthly stipend that enables them to purchase their textbooks and other materials related to their chosen course. Many textbooks used in these institutions are similar to those used in English-speaking countries, with the exception of Maltese-based textbooks that are written by Maltese specialists in the discipline.

## *statistics*

**Table 8** provides a breakdown of post-secondary students who were enrolled in vocational and general orientation courses. In the academic year 2021/22, a total number of 9,610 students were enrolled, similar to the previous year. The majority of post-secondary students (88.9%) were aged 20 years and younger (NSO, 2023d).

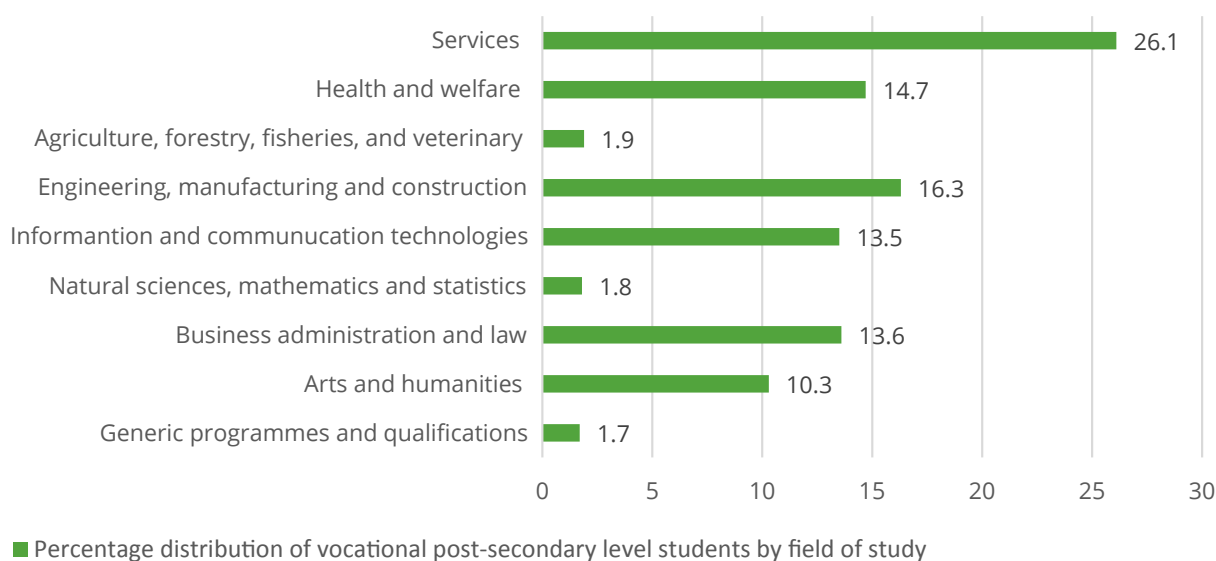
During the academic year 2021/22, 86.2% of post-secondary students were enrolled in State-run institutions. The student population was split almost evenly between general orientation (48.4%) and vocational orientation (51.6%). **Figure 4** shows that the most popular field of study among vocational students was services (26.1%), followed by engineering, manufacturing and construction (16.3%), health and welfare (14.7%), and business, administration and law (13.6%; NSO, 2023d).

**Table 8** Number of post-secondary students by academic year, institution type, and course type in the academic years 2019/20, 2020/21, and 2021/22.

Type of institution	Academic year									Change	Percentage change
	2019/20			2020/21			2021/22				
	General	Vocational	Total	General	Vocational	Total	General	Vocational	Total		
State	3,640	4,413	8,053	3,665	4,582	8,247	3,486	4,795	8,281	34	0.4
Church	778	-	778	779	-	779	765	-	765	-14	-1.8
Independent	352	437	789	363	219	582	399	165	564	-18	-3.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,770</b>	<b>4,850</b>	<b>9,620</b>	<b>4,807</b>	<b>4,801</b>	<b>9,608</b>	<b>4,650</b>	<b>4,960</b>	<b>9,610</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>-</b>

*Note.* Data from NSO (2023d).

**Figure 4** Percentage distribution of vocational post-secondary level students by field of study in the academic year 2021/22.



*Note.* Adapted from NSO (2023d).

## 6 Higher education

### *structure*

Higher education in Malta includes both general/academic post-secondary education and tertiary education. State, Church, and Independent institutions are all service providers at post-secondary level and run 2-year courses leading to the MATSEC, which is the university entry qualification.

Degree programmes are mostly run by the state-funded University of Malta, but there are also private institutions that offer degree programmes by foreign universities (e.g. the University of London). The University of Malta enrolls the highest number of students in degree courses, while the MCAST offers programmes that eventually lead to bachelor's and master's degrees (i.e. first degrees). This chapter focuses only on those courses specialising in Maltese that are offered by the University of Malta.

It is also important to note that within the University of Malta, the Institute of Maltese Studies promotes Maltese culture and identity through its research and also runs a master's programme in Maltese Studies. Through a combination of courses in the first 2 years (4 semesters) and specialist study through a thesis in the third year, the degree provides a cross-disciplinary perspective on various aspects of Maltese affairs (University of Malta, n.d.-b).

### *legislation*

The Further and Higher Education Act (Att dwar l-Edukazzjoni Avanzata u Ogħla, 2021) outlines the role of the Malta Further and Higher Education Authority, which was previously known as the National Commission for Further and Higher Education. Article 3(2) states that:

The Authority shall endeavour to achieve the following objectives and policies:

- a) licence and regulate further and higher education providers in Malta;
- b) promote and uphold quality education; and
- c) advise the Government on any matter which is connected with further and higher education.

Undergraduate courses offered by the University of Malta, the MCAST, and the ITS are funded by the government of Malta and are free of charge for Maltese and EU citizens. Full-time postgraduate programmes are funded by the government as well if they lead to a professional qualification, such as the teaching warrant (Eurydice, 2023c).



## *language use*

At the tertiary level, Maltese proficiency is one of the entry requirements, but it is important to note that the language of instruction for subjects other than Maltese is English. Outside of lectures, Maltese is the dominant language of communication within these institutions.

Although Maltese as a discipline may also be studied as an optional subject in both post-secondary and tertiary institutions, the entry requirements to such institutions require the SEC qualification in Maltese. Post-secondary level courses include the study of Maltese literature and language/linguistics. Students may opt to study Maltese at intermediate or advanced levels based on their career preferences. Some university courses require an advanced level in Maltese, as is the case for students wishing to follow the programme leading to the Bachelor of Laws (LLB) and Master of Laws (LLM). Moreover, students wishing to study Maltese at degree level are also required to obtain their advanced level in the subject by the second year of post-secondary education.

## *teacher training*

Up until 1972, and prior to the establishment of the Faculty of Education in the late 1970s, the training of teachers for both primary and secondary education was provided by two training colleges: one for men (St Michael's) and the other for women (Mater Admirabilis). From 1972 until 1974, teachers were trained at the Malta College of Education and later at the Department of Educational Studies at MCAST (1974–1978). Since then, teaching qualifications have been obtained through programmes run by the Faculty of Education at the University of Malta.

The BA (Hons) in Early Childhood Education and Care is designed for individuals who plan to teach at the kindergarten level only. In contrast, the Master's in Teaching and Learning (MTL) is required for those who wish to teach at both the primary and secondary education levels. Additionally, the Faculty of Education offers the Postgraduate Certificate in the Teaching of Maltese as a Foreign Language (P.G. Cert.) for individuals with an MTL degree or a first cycle degree and a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE). Holders of first cycle degrees and a PGCE can teach at the secondary level.

### ■ *pre-school training*

The BA (Hons) in Early Childhood Education and Care aims to equip students with the necessary knowledge, skills, and values to work with children between the ages of 0 and 7 years. The programme exposes students to various pedagogical models to address teaching and learning situations in early years settings. It aims to form attitudes and character, instil a comprehensive understanding of theories of learning, development, and play, develop one's ability to understand children's perspectives through their ways of communication, and train students to prepare curricular activities and experiences that enhance inquiry, participation, and interaction.

In addition to the theoretical aspect, the programme also includes two field placements that provide students with the possibility to apply the theories and pedagogies they have learnt in an early childhood education setting. The practicum allows students to demonstrate their ability to prepare and plan activities that are based on the children's interests, as well as exhibit their professional attitude, development, and commitment (University of Malta, n.d.-a).

### ■ *primary training*

To be employed as a teacher at the primary level, it is necessary to obtain the MTL. Previously, the Faculty of Education offered a degree programme leading to B.Ed (Hons) in primary education. In primary education, generalist teachers are responsible for teaching several subjects in the curriculum, including Maltese.

### ■ *secondary training*

Teachers at the secondary education level are specialist teachers in one or two subjects. Previously, there were two pathways to becoming a secondary school teacher, namely (1) obtaining a B.Ed. (Hons) degree or (2) specialising in two subjects or one subject by following the respective BA or BA (Hons) degree programmes and then completing a 1-year PGCE run by the Faculty of Education to qualify as a teacher. Nowadays, all prospective teachers must obtain the MTL after completing their undergraduate studies to be able to teach in either primary or secondary schools.

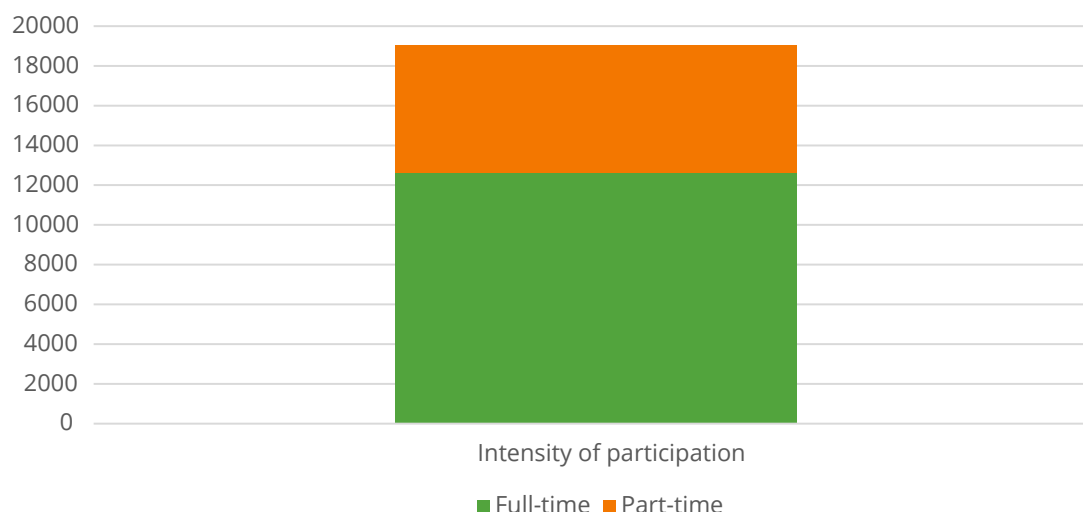
### ■ *in-service training*

In-service training courses for all teachers are compulsory and are organised annually by the MEYR. These courses typically take place at the end of the academic year or just before the start of the academic school year in September. The sessions are conducted in Maltese for teachers of the Maltese language.

## ***statistics***

During the academic year 2021/22, there were 11,053 students who identified as female and 7,982 as male enrolled in tertiary courses. **Figure 5** provides an overview of the number of full-time (12,624) and part-time students (6,411).

**Figure 5** Tertiary level students by participation in the academic year 2021/22.



*Note.* Data from NSO (2023d).

**Table 9** provides a breakdown of graduates by Faculty/Institute with Maltese as an area of study. The Certificate of Proof Reading in Maltese, the BA and BA (Hons), and the MTL in Maltese are more popular choices among students who identify as female than male. Only three master's students and one PhD student (Faculty of Arts) graduated in March 2023.

**Table 9** Breakdown of graduates with Maltese as an area of study by faculty/institute and gender (March 2023 and November 2023).

Faculty/Institute	Female	Male	Total
Faculty of Arts/Certificate of Proof Reading	52	14	66
Faculty of Arts/BA	5	-	5
Faculty of Arts/BA Hons	20	7	27
Faculty of Arts/MA	1	2	3
Faculty of Arts/PhD	-	1	1
Faculty of Education/MTL	8	5	13
Faculty of Education/P.G. Cert. (Maltese)	3	1	4
Faculty of Education/P.G. Cert. Diploma in Education (Maltese)	1	-	1
Faculty of Media and Knowledge Sciences/Bachelor	1	-	1
Institute for European Studies/Bachelor Hons	-	1	1

*Note.* Data for Faculty of Arts/MA, Faculty of Arts/PhD, Faculty of Education/MTL, Faculty of Education/PG Cert. (Maltese), and Faculty of Education/PG Cert. Diploma in Education (Maltese) from University of Malta (2023a); data for Faculty of Arts/Certificate of Proofreading, Faculty of Arts/BA, Faculty of Arts/BA Hons, Faculty of Media and Knowledge Sciences/Bachelor, and Institute for European Studies/Bachelor Hons from University of Malta (2023b).

## 7 Adult education

### *structure and language courses*

Adult education is part of the lifelong learning sector, which is regulated by the Education Act of 1988 (Att dwar l-Edukazzjon, 1988). Since the 1980s, the State has offered adult education programmes through the Department of Further Studies and Adult Education, and currently does so through the Directorate for Research, Lifelong Learning and Employability. This directorate was previously known as the Adult Learning Unit within the Directorate for Lifelong Learning (Eurydice, 2022).

Courses typically run from October to May, with a duration of approximately 32 weeks, alongside shorter courses of 14 weeks (Lifelong Learning, n.d.).

All courses are held in the evenings at schools and local council premises. These courses are for adults who either wish to improve their academic qualifications (e.g. those who did not complete primary and/or secondary education) and, concomitantly, their job prospects, or those who would like to learn new subjects for their own personal satisfaction.

The Directorate for Research, Lifelong Learning and Employability offers several courses in the Maltese language. Some courses are specifically targeted at Maltese nationals who would like to obtain qualifications at SEC and/or advanced level in Maltese, while other courses focus on improving conversational skills for non-Maltese nationals residing in Malta.

Although the majority of privately-owned language schools in Malta primarily cater to foreign students, most of whom wish to learn English, there are also some language schools that offer Maltese courses. Fees for such courses vary from one school to another.

In addition, the University of Malta's Department of Maltese has been offering the Post Graduate Certificate in the teaching of Maltese as a Foreign Language (P.G. Cert.) for university students since 2005.

Furthermore, the Department of Maltese (Faculty of Arts, University of Malta) and the National Council for the Maltese Language organise a 1-year fee-paying certificate course in proofreading in Maltese (Maltese: *Ċertifikat għall-Qari tal-Provi bil-Malti*). This course aims to enhance individuals' written skills in their native language, and offers basic Maltese courses to students with no prior knowledge of the language.

## language use

In general, evening classes in Maltese are run by the State in collaboration with the Kunsill, as well as the Department of Maltese (University of Malta) and the Faculty of Education (P.G. Cert.). Moreover, some private language schools offer a few courses in Maltese.

## statistics

Table 10 provides a breakdown of data for individuals who attended classes in *Maltese for Foreigners* and *Basic Maltese* run by the Directorate for Research, Lifelong Learning and Employability in the academic year 2021/22.

**Table 10** Data for Maltese language courses for foreigners by age group and gender in the academic year 2021/22.

Data for 2021/22	Age group								Total	Overall total	
	15–19		20–24		25–39		40 and over				
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	
Maltese for Foreigners	3	2	4	5	70	162	62	163	139	332	471
Basic Maltese	1	2	2	2	17	33	85	39	105	76	181

*Note.* Data from Dr A. Vassallo (Directorate for Research, Lifelong Learning and Employability, personal communication, April 4, 2023).

## 8 Educational research

The majority of research on various aspects of the Maltese language has been conducted since the 20<sup>th</sup> century, mostly by Maltese scholars such as Professors Ġuże Aquilina, Albert Borg, and Manwel Mifsud, all linguists and professors of Maltese in the Department of Maltese at the University of Malta. Interestingly, non-Maltese scholars such as Professors Bernard Comrie and Thomas Stolz have also been intrigued by Maltese and have written books and papers on the language. Moreover, a significant amount of scientific research on Maltese has been conducted not only by academics at the University of Malta but also by undergraduate and post-graduate university students. Some foreign students, mostly from Europe, have also written on aspects of the Maltese language. These studies and dissertations can be found in the University of Malta's Melitensia library, which stores all publications related to Malta and the Maltese language. Furthermore, the National Library of Malta and the Gozo Public Library serve as repositories of books and manuscripts published in Malta. This is in accordance with the Malta Libraries Act of 2011 (Att dwar il-Libreriji, 2011), which stipulates that two copies of all works published in Malta should be deposited in these two libraries.

Maltese is also being studied internationally. For this purpose, the International Association of Maltese Linguistics (Maltese: *Għaqda Internazzjonali tal-Lingwistika Maltija* – GħILM) was founded on 19 October 2007 during the first conference on Maltese linguistics (Universität Bremen, 2007) at the University of Bremen. The aim of the association is to promote the study of Maltese and establish other university centres for the language outside Malta, which will, in turn, lead to networking between scholars and researchers from diverse backgrounds (Universität Bremen, n.d.-b).

The first centre was established in 2012 at the University of Bremen in Germany through a contract signed by the rectors of the University of Malta and the University of Bremen. The Malta Centre focuses on the research, description, and dissemination of Maltese using adequate scientific methods and instruments, as well as providing organisational and logistical support for corresponding projects (Universität Bremen, n.d.-b). In a subsequent agreement (2022), "a new local branch was set up in addition to the branch of the Malta Centre in Germany" (University of Malta, 2022).

Furthermore, the Kunsill has also published several books on Maltese orthography, bilingualism, and the use of Maltese computer fonts.

The International Association of Maltese Linguistics, based at the University of Bremen, hosts an expanding collection of resources, including journal articles and students' theses (Universität Bremen, n.d.-a). Resident Maltese academics have written many books and papers on Maltese language and literature and regularly organise talks, seminars, and conferences on the Maltese language.

## 9 Prospects

Over the past few years, important changes have occurred in the education system in Malta. State primary and secondary schools, which were previously separated, have been grouped together in colleges. Moreover, a new NCF (Ministry of Education and Employment, 2012) that promotes lifelong learning policy and strategy has come into force. The NCF introduced an element of flexibility in that it allows schools to allocate five English and four Maltese lessons per week or vice versa according to the needs of their pupils (Ministry of Education, Employment and the Family, 2011c) More recently, the introduction of the LOF (Eurydice, 2023d) has given teachers more autonomy.

Despite these significant changes, it is important to note that Malta has now become a country with a high non-Maltese population. According to Martin (2018), there were 43,000 workers with migrant backgrounds in Malta in 2018 and as many as 115,449 in 2021 (Vella, 2023), with more arriving since then. This increase consists of the following two streams: a stream of non-Maltese individuals coming from around the world, primarily Europe, to work in Malta due to rapid economic growth, and a second stream of "irregular" migrants (Vassallo & Sciriha, 2020). It is not surprising that the rise in the non-Maltese population has led to a decrease in the use of spoken Maltese, with English becoming more dominant. While Maltese language courses are offered in the adult education sector and systematic efforts to aid children's integration into the Maltese education system are in place within the MLU, there has been a notable change in linguistic expectations in Malta. The Maltese people no longer urge their fellow citizens to speak Maltese, as was the case years ago, but it is now migrants who expect the Maltese people to accommodate them by speaking English (Vassallo & Sciriha, 2020). As a result, the use of Maltese is slowly declining, even though it is a crucial element of the Maltese identity. Regrettably, the Maltese language is not always held in high regard by some of the migrants living in Malta and at times also by the Maltese people themselves. Vassallo and Sciriha (2020) contend that it seems that because of tourism and economic success, "the Maltese language is experiencing a drastic meltdown" (p. 45).

Over the years, the legal status of Maltese had steadily increased. It became one of the official languages in 1934 when Malta was still a British colony, a national and official language when Malta became an independent state in 1964, and one of the EU's official languages in 2004. The value of maintaining a "distinct" language was reinforced when Malta joined the EU, with its strong policy to nurture minority languages on the one hand, and on the other, to support national languages of its member states irrespective of their size. Sociolinguistic studies clearly showed that the Maltese people embraced the growing importance of their native language (Sciriha & Vassallo, 2006).

The future of Maltese is, unfortunately, being negatively affected by pressures resulting from significant and rapid changes in Malta's demographic structure. Currently, the prospects for Maltese are bleak due to major competition from English, a global language. Maltese lacks the same market value and power as its co-official language. As a result, many migrants who come to Malta do so because they will be able to use English for communication, even if they are not proficient speakers of the language. Consequently, these migrants choose not to learn Maltese and opt instead to solely use English (Borg, 2023; Vassallo & Sciriha, 2020).

The negative impact of these trends on the Maltese language has quickly become apparent. If the Maltese language is to survive and be appreciated fully, it must be given more importance. From an educational perspective, this could be achieved by supporting migrants of all ages to learn the Maltese language in order to integrate effectively into Maltese society. This is extremely important if, as the current minister of finance anticipates, Malta's population is projected to increase to 800,000 by 2040 (Borg, 2023).



## 10 Summary of statistics

Statistics related to pupil and teacher populations were sourced from the Malta Education Statistics published by the NSO, while population data were obtained from the 2021 Census report published by the NSO (2023a). Moreover, data on first language use were obtained from the report published on the *Survey on the State of the Maltese Language* (NSO et al., 2021).

Data on the student population and graduates in Maltese in March 2023 and November 2023 were obtained through the University of Malta's website. The structure of the Maltese education system was sourced from Eurydice (2023i).

**Table 11** Number of people with Maltese as a first language by district.

First language	District						Total
	Southern Harbour (%)	Northern Harbour (%)	Southern Eastern (%)	Western (%)	Northern (%)	Gozo & Comino (%)	
Yes	58,615 (99.2)	89,445 (95.2)	48,434 (98.3)	43,512 (95.6)	47,229 (97.2)	23,331 (97.8)	310,566 (97.0)
No	485 (0.8)	4,557 (4.8)	862 (1.7)	1,998 (4.4)	1,352 (2.8)	515 (2.2)	9,769 (3.0)
Total	59,100	94,002	49,296	45,510	48,581	23,846	320,335

*Note.* Data from NSO et al. (2021).

**Table 12** Number of pupils in pre-primary education by district in the academic year 2021/22.

	Southern Harbour	Northern Harbour	South-Eastern	Western	Northern	Gozo & Comino	Total
Kinder 1 (2 years 9 months)	773	1,381	873	697	931	340	4,995
Kinder 2 (4 years)	711	1,346	626	602	775	289	4,349
Total	1,484	2,727	1,499	1,299	1,706	629	9,344

*Note.* Data from NSO (2023c).

**Table 13** National results for Maltese from the end of primary benchmark examination in 2019.

Skill	Number of pupils	Min. mark	Max. mark	Median mark	Mean mark
Speaking (20%)	3,455	0	20	17	16.2
Listening (20%)	3,448	0	20	16	15.4
Reading (30%)	3,332	0	29	19	18.3
Writing (30%)	3,318	0	29	16	15.1
Complete exam	3,316	2	95	69	65.6

*Note.* Data from Ministry for Education and Employment (2019b).

**Table 14** Number of primary school pupils and schools by district in the academic year 2021/22.

District	Number of pupils	Number of schools
Southern Harbour	5,358	23
South-Eastern	3,278	14
Northern Harbour	8,936	32
Western	3,288	14
Northern	4,194	13
Gozo & Comino	1,985	15
Total	27,039	111

*Note.* Data from NSO (2023c).

**Table 15** Number of lessons in Maltese as a subject per week in College Middle and Secondary Schools.

	College Middle Schools		College Secondary Schools		
	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11
Average no. of lessons per week	5	5	3	4	4

*Note.* Data from Eurydice (2023g).

**Table 16** Final SEC examination results for Maltese in the June 2022 session.

Paper A									
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	U	Absent	Total
141	470	515	496	311	-	-	139	32	2,104
Paper B									
-	-	-	284	239	236	195	537	218	1,709
Number of candidates									
141	470	515	780	550	236	195	676	250	3,813
(3.70%)	(12.33%)	(13.51%)	(20.46%)	(14.42%)	(6.19%)	(5.11%)	(17.73%)	(6.56%)	(100%)

*Note.* Data from MATSEC Examinations Board (2022).

**Table 17** Number of pupils in secondary education by school type and year of study in the academic year 2021/22.

	State	Church	Independent	Total
Year 7	2,341	1,502	556	4,399
Year 8	2,453	1,495	551	4,499
Year 9	2,445	1,516	540	4,501
Year 10	2,274	1,495	486	4,255
Year 11	2,407	1,464	469	4,340
Total	11,920	7,472	2,602	21,994

*Note.* Data from NSO (2023c).

**Table 18** Number of post-secondary pupils by academic year, institution type, and course type.

Type of institution	Academic year									Change	Percentage change
	2019/20			2020/21			2021/22				
	General	Vocational	Total	General	Vocational	Total	General	Vocational	Total		
State	3,640	4,413	8,053	3,665	4,582	8,247	3,486	4,795	8,281	34	0.4
Church	778	-	778	779	-	779	765	-	765	-14	-1.8
Independent	352	437	789	363	219	582	399	165	564	-18	-3.1
Total	4,770	4,850	9,620	4,807	4,801	9,608	4,650	4,960	9,610	2	-

*Note.* Data from NSO (2023d).

**Table 19** Breakdown of graduates with Maltese as an area of study by faculty/institute and gender (March 2023 and November 2023).

Faculty/Institute	Female	Male	Total
Faculty of Arts/Certificate of Proof Reading	52	14	66
Faculty of Arts/BA	5	-	5
Faculty of Arts/BA Hons	20	7	27
Faculty of Arts/MA	1	2	3
Faculty of Arts/PhD	-	1	1
Faculty of Education/MTL	8	5	13
Faculty of Education/P.G. Cert. (Maltese)	3	1	4
Faculty of Education/P.G. Cert. Diploma in Education (Maltese)	1	-	
Faculty of Media and Knowledge Sciences/Bachelor	1	-	1
Institute for European Studies/Bachelor Hons	-	1	1

*Note.* Data for Faculty of Arts/ MA, Faculty of Arts/ PhD, Faculty of Education/ MTL, Faculty of Education /P.G. Cert. (Maltese), and Faculty of Education /P.G. Cert. Diploma in Education (Maltese) from University of Malta (2023a); data for Faculty of Arts/ Certificate of Proof Reading, Faculty of Arts/ BA, Faculty of Arts/ BA Hons, Faculty of Media and Knowledge Sciences/ Bachelor, and Institute for European Studies/Bachelor Hons from University of Malta (2023b).

**Table 20** Number of post-secondary and tertiary level students by academic year and gender.

Education level	Academic year			Change 2021/22 – 2020/21	Percentage change
	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22		
Male					
Post-secondary	4,681	4,758	4,869	111	2.3
Tertiary	7,497	7,497	7,982	485	6.5
Total	12,178	12,255	12,851	596	4.9
Female					
Post-secondary	4,939	4,850	4,741	-109	-2.2
Tertiary	9,933	10,839	11,053	214	2.0
Total	14,872	15,689	15,794	105	0.7
Total					
Post-secondary	9,620	9,608	9,610	2	-
Tertiary	17,430	18,336	19,035	699	3.8
Total	27,050	27,944	28,645	701	2.5

*Note.* Data from NSO (2023d).

**Table 21** Participation in the end of primary benchmark examination in the academic year 2019/20 by school type and gender.

Type of school	Total eligible population	Total eligible population within participating schools			Representative percentage
		Female	Male	Total	
State	2,557	1,203	1,354	2,557	100
Church	1,325	574	476	1,050	79.2
Independent	537	17	54	71	13.2
Private Candidates (second session)	-	17	28	45	-
Total	4,419	1,811	1,912	3,723	84

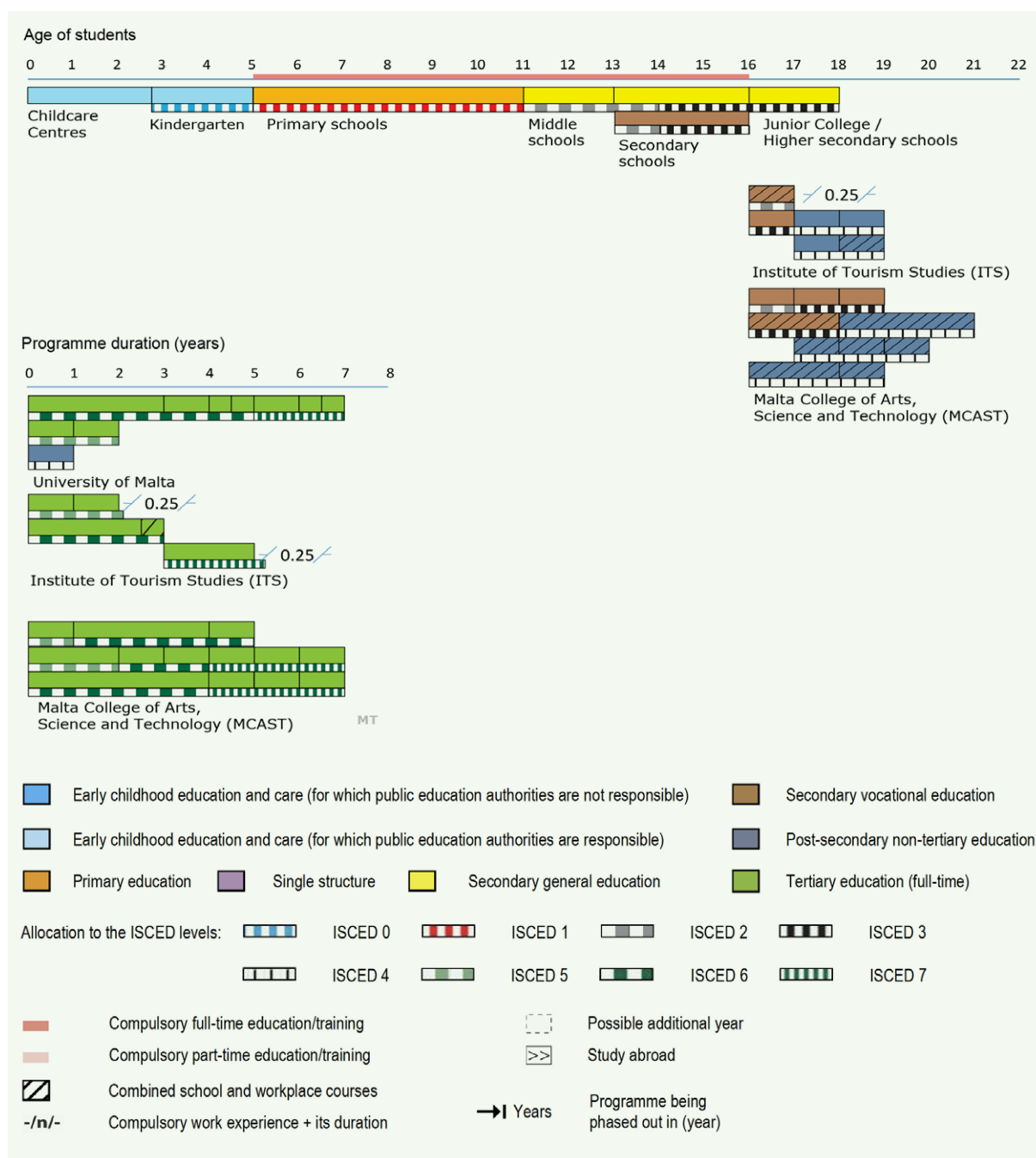
*Note.* Data from Ministry for Education and Employment (2019a).

**Table 22** Data for Maltese language courses for foreigners by age group and gender in the academic year 2021/22.

Data for 2021/22	Age group								Total	Overall total	
	15–19		20–24		25–39		40 and over				
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	
Maltese for Foreigners	3	2	4	5	70	162	62	163	139	332	471
Basic Maltese	1	2	2	2	17	33	85	39	105	76	181

*Note.* Data from Dr A. Vassallo (Directorate for Research, Lifelong Learning and Employability, personal communication, April 4, 2023).

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*Note.* Reprinted from European Commission, European Education and Culture Executive Agency, and Eurydice (2023, p. 24).



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## About this Regional Dossier

### *author biography*

*Lydia Sciriha*, PhD, is professor of linguistics at the University of Malta. She previously served as director of its Language Laboratory Complex from 1987 to 1993. Sciriha has been a visiting professor at 11 universities in Europe and as a professorial fellow in Melbourne, Australia. She has been awarded the Canadian Commonwealth Scholarship, the British Council Scholarship, the Marquis Scicluna Senior Fellowship, and the Commonwealth Academic Fellowship. Sciriha has authored, co-authored, and edited 16 books and numerous scientific papers.

### *previous edition*

The first edition (2013) was written by Prof. Lydia Sciriha and reviewed by Prof. Mario Vassallo (University of Malta).



## Other websites on minority languages

### **Mercator European Research Centre**

[www.mercator-research.eu](http://www.mercator-research.eu)

Homepage of the Mercator European Research Centre on Multilingualism and Language Learning. The website contains the Regional Dossier series, the Wiki on Minority Language Learning, publications, information on current activities and projects, and many links to relevant websites.

### **Mercator Network**

[www.mercator-research.eu/en/about/partnerships/](http://www.mercator-research.eu/en/about/partnerships/)

General information about the Mercator European Network of Language Diversity Centres.

### **European Commission**

[www.education.ec.europa.eu/focus-topics/improving-quality/multilingualism/linguistic-diversity](http://www.education.ec.europa.eu/focus-topics/improving-quality/multilingualism/linguistic-diversity)

The website of the European Commission gives information about the EU's support for language diversity.

### **Council of Europe**

[www.conventions.coe.int](http://www.conventions.coe.int)

*European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages* (1992) and *Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities* (1995). European Treaty Series 148 and 157, Strasbourg.

### **Eurydice**

[www.eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu](http://www.eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu)

Eurydice is the information network on education in Europe. The site provides information on all European education systems and education policies.

### **European Parliament Committee – supporting analyses database**

[www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/en/home](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/en/home)

In this database, you will find research papers produced by the European Parliament's research service. A study for the CULT Committee, conducted by the Mercator European Research Centre, was published in 2017: *Minority Languages and Education: Best Practices and Pitfalls*.

### **NPLD**

[www.npld.eu](http://www.npld.eu)

The Network to Promote Linguistic Diversity (NPLD) is a European-wide network working in the field of language policy and planning for Constitutional, Regional and Small-State Languages (CRSS) across Europe.

**FUEN**

[www.fuen.org](http://www.fuen.org)

The Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN) is the umbrella organisation of the autochthonous, national minorities/ethnic groups in Europe and represents the interests of European minorities at the regional, national, and European levels.

**ELEN**

[www.elen.ngo](http://www.elen.ngo)

The European Language Equality Network (ELEN) is a non-governmental organisation that has as its goal the promotion and protection of European lesser-used (i.e. regional, minority, endangered, indigenous, co-official, and smaller national) languages, to work towards linguistic equality for these languages, and multilingualism, under the broader framework of human rights, and to be a voice for the speakers of these languages at all levels.

**YEN**

[www.yeni.org](http://www.yeni.org)

Youth of European Nationalities (YEN) is the largest network of youth organisations of autochthonous, national, and linguistic minorities in Europe.



## About the Mercator European Research Centre

### *mission & goals*

The Mercator European Research Centre on Multilingualism and Language Learning, hosted by the Fryske Akademy, addresses the growing interest in multilingualism and endeavours to promote linguistic diversity within and outside Europe. The Mercator European Research Centre focuses on research, policy, and practice in the fields of multilingualism and language learning. Through the acquisition, application, and circulation of knowledge regarding language learning at school, at home, and through cultural participation, the Mercator European Research Centre aims to provide for language communities' increasing need to exchange experiences and to cooperate, not only in the European context but also beyond the borders of Europe. Although the main focus lies in the field of regional and minority languages, immigrant languages are also topics of study.

### *partners*

The Mercator European Research Centre is the leading partner of the European Mercator Network, which was initiated by the European Commission in 1987. The Mercator Network partners are the following: Mercator Media, hosted at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David; Mercator Legislation, hosted at the CIEMEN Foundation; the Centre de Recerca en Sociolingüística i Comunicació (University of Barcelona); the Institute for Slavic and Baltic languages, Finnish, Dutch and German (Stockholm University); and the HUN-REN Hungarian Research Centre for Linguistics (HUN-REN NYTK). The Mercator European Research Centre also works closely with a large number of research organisations and universities. This cooperation includes partners in the province of Fryslân and other parts of the Netherlands, as well as partners across Europe and beyond. The main funding body of the Mercator European Research Centre is the provincial government of Fryslân. The EU and regional authorities in Europe also regularly fund projects and activities.

### *research*

The research activities of the Mercator European Research Centre focus on various aspects of bilingual and trilingual education such as language proficiency in different languages, interaction in the multilingual classroom, and teacher qualifications for working in a multilingual classroom. Latest developments look at how educational models for minority languages can also cater for pupils with a migrant background. Whenever possible, research is carried out in a comparative perspective. Results are disseminated through publications and conferences, often in collaboration with the Mercator European Research Centre's partners.

## ***conferences***

The Mercator European Research Centre organises conferences and seminars on a regular basis. The main target groups are professionals, researchers, and policymakers from all member states of the Council of Europe and beyond. Themes for the conferences are assessment, best practices, educational models, development of minimum standards, teacher training, and the application of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

## ***contact***

For general enquiries, please contact us at [mercator@fryske-akademy.nl](mailto:mercator@fryske-akademy.nl).

For enquiries about our Regional Dossier series, please contact the editors at [mercator-regionaldossiers@fryske-akademy.nl](mailto:mercator-regionaldossiers@fryske-akademy.nl).



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