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A Mediterranean challenge: the difficulties facing youth workers in integrating refugees in Malta

Gulia Rakhimova

gulchekhira.rakhimova@studio.unibo.it

The aim of this paper is to illustrate the geographical, demographic and legal contexts in which social workers and youth workers have to operate in responding to the problems facing young migrants and refugees in Malta. In addition, the paper will outline positive practices detailing what youth work has done to address some challenges. The paper includes a qualitative analysis of country-specific data and four case studies. The analysis is based on secondary sources as well as the author's own fieldwork and an internet-based questionnaire of youth workers and social workers in the field.

Keywords: transit migration, integration, youth work approaches.

Background

In our case Malta is seen as a transit country, so sometimes you start a project and halfway through, half the participants would have left the island for mainland Europe.

Social worker

Boat arrivals

Malta, a member state of the EU since 2004, is in the foreground of Europe's refugee crisis. Located in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea, between the northern coast of Africa and Italy, it offers less of a challenge in reaching European shores, yet the passage takes days and is increasingly dangerous, as passengers travel in overcrowded, unseaworthy smuggling boats. Between 2005 and 2015, some 17 000 asylum seekers entered Malta by this means (UNHCR 2016a). A tiny island has to face not only a tidal wave of arrivals, but also the increasing diversity that comes with it. Although boats heading to Malta usually depart from Libyan ports (Malakooti 2015), the people aboard may come from elsewhere. In the past decade, asylum seekers originated from more than 30 countries, most from Somalia, Eritrea, Nigeria, Sudan and Egypt, which makes Sub-Saharan Africa the second major source of migration to Malta after the EU (IOM 2016). In addition, the island has seen a steady increase in non-African flows since 2013, mainly associated with the humanitarian migration from war-torn Syria. Consistently, a large majority of asylum seekers have been men. Having said that, the past few years have witnessed diverse flows, among which were single women, unaccompanied minors, and families with children. In 2008, the year that recorded the highest number of arrivals, 22% of asylum seekers were identified as

unaccompanied minors, many coming from Somalia, Eritrea, Sudan, Syria and Libya (Malakooti 2015). According to the number of boys and girls accommodated in open centres in Malta between 2008 and 2014, the proportion of male unaccompanied minors was consistently higher. It is worth stressing here that irregular boat arrivals are not the only source of flows to Malta. In the last couple of years, for instance, some hundreds of Libyans and Syrians arrived by land, the majority of Libyan asylum applicants having entered Europe regularly (many had Schengen visas issued in the Maltese embassy in Tripoli) but overstaying their visas (IOM 2016).

Migration policy

In the wake of increasing forced migration from Africa, the management of irregular boat arrivals had become one of the central concerns of the Maltese authorities. When the first large group of asylum seekers (1 600 people) arrived in 2002, this was described as “clandestine migration” (NSO 2003). Up until 2014, boat arrivals had generally risen, with a peak in 2008 (2 775 people), but after this date, numbers fell starkly, and in the first half of 2016, only five people reached the shores of Malta (UNHCR 2016b).¹ The country’s migration policy has been predominantly reactive. Measures were taken to curb irregular migration in the first place, although most asylum seekers who arrived in Malta in an irregular manner eventually qualified for protection status. Arbitrary detentions of asylum applicants (up to 12 months) and irregular migrants (up to 18 months), including unaccompanied minors, families with children and elderly people, were commonplace (Hammarberg 2011). Until 2014, unaccompanied youngsters would usually be detained for an age assessment procedure that could take a few weeks, and in some cases months (IOM/UNHCR 2014), in overcrowded centres with no access to education, and some minors were housed with unrelated adults. Living in detention centres had a particularly negative effect on minors’ mental and physical well-being (JRS-Europe 2010) and the detention policy per se which “illegalised” asylum seekers in the eyes of the local public contributed to a xenophobic perception and attitude towards immigrants in Malta. Only in the past two years have the Maltese authorities relaxed the policy. Minors are no longer being taken to detention centres, following the 2014 report by the IOM-UNHCR joint technical mission endorsed by the President of Malta; instead, they are transferred to a so-called Initial Reception Centre which limits their movement for some time, while medical checks and age determination are carried out. Furthermore, Malta revoked the provision for automated and mandatory detention for all immigrants with the 2015 “Strategy for the Reception of Asylum Seekers and Irregular Migrants”. The UNHCR has basically viewed this as a step forward, but the remark was made that new policies are still too focused on tackling irregular arrivals (UNHCR 2016c).

Refugee population

Of all the asylum seekers who have reached the shores of Malta since the turn of the century, less than 30% remain there (UNHCR 2016d). Among other reasons, this is because many people continued their journey into continental Europe, to countries such as Germany and Sweden, and some were transferred back to Malta under the Dublin rules (Malakooti 2015). In addition, resettlement programmes are in place to reduce Malta’s asylum pressure, the USA being the main resettlement country, taking 2 762 beneficiaries of protection compared to some hundreds relocated across the EU over the past decade (UNHCR 2016e). Yet, the peculiar character of Malta is determined by the fact that it is the EU’s smallest state and one of the most densely populated countries in the world, and the number of asylum applicants relative to the Maltese national population is so far the highest in the EU. Statistics on unaccompanied minors in Malta were not systematic and sometimes data provided by different albeit reliable sources are inconsistent. One possibility can be because some refugees going through age determination procedure would drop out at a later stage. Another possibility is that some unaccompanied youngsters voluntarily or involuntarily continue the journey into other countries. One of the social workers, for instance, raised concerns about child trafficking and that little attention was paid

¹ A sudden decrease in boat arrivals is associated with support from Italy. While some reliable news agencies refer to an informal agreement between the two states on bringing Malta’s intercepted boats to Italy, a better-supported claim is related to the Italian Navy’s operation Mare Nostrum, which involved search and rescue activities near Sicily.

to this issue in Malta. Indeed, on average two minors are reported missing each week (Hilmy 2014). Presumably, a few hundred remain in Malta.²

Housing

Accommodation centres for asylum seekers are largely concentrated in south-eastern localities, which creates a sense of immigrant segregation in Malta. The largest proportion of asylum seekers are accommodated in Hal-Far (roughly 60%) and Marsa (roughly 20%), where residents are predominantly single adult men (Suret il-Bniedem 2010). Vulnerable groups, including unaccompanied minors and families with children, are accommodated in separate, smaller accommodation centres. Residences catering for minors are Dar il- Liedna and Dar is- Sliem, which are managed exceptionally well compared to centres for single adult men. Observers from the International Commission of Jurists, for instance, described Dar il-Liedna as “an exemplary centre for Malta, well run, with sufficient resources at its disposal and where the care of the residents is a primary consideration” (ICJ 2011). In contrast, conditions in accommodation centres for adults (Hal-Far hangar, Hal-Far tent village and Marsa centre) have been cited as “extremely challenging”, with sub-standard sanitary provisions (ECRE 2015) and lack of physical security (Integra/UNHCR 2015), which can be explained but not justified by the fact that the centres are overwhelmed with high numbers of people that they have to accommodate. It is worth stressing here that unaccompanied youngsters aged 16 or over are sometimes being placed in these centres (ECRE 2015) as Maltese law allows that, and this in turn lowers their prospects for participation and integration and puts young people at higher risk of becoming involved in clandestine sectors. Around the Marsa centre, for instance, it is a common picture to see groups of young males literally doing nothing, unoccupied and unsupervised.

Free accommodation in open centres is given for up to one year, during which asylum seekers are supposed to take up employment and move into the community (Ministry for Home Affairs 2015). Likewise, unaccompanied young people move out of accommodation centres upon attaining the age of majority. However, problems such as lack of material support coupled with unstable employment prospects, landlords’ preferentialism based on race and ethnicity and discriminatory practices adopted by estate agents, verbal and non-verbal abuse by neighbours and landlords, and inability to report abuse, are some of the structural obstacles asylum seekers face in accessing community housing (Fsadni and Pisani 2012). Uncertain numbers of asylum seekers, including families with children, live in the community independently or with the support of NGOs and the Catholic church. Many opted for Malta’s developed towns in and around Valetta, Msida, and Bugibba, enabling them to live closer to areas with better connection to transport, work and service providers.

Main obstacles to integration

Given that in the past couple of years many fewer people have crossed the Mediterranean for Malta, the issue the island has to face today is not migration, but integration (when not repatriation or resettlement). But at present, there exist no comprehensive national integration programmes for asylum seekers in Malta (Vassallo 2016), even though in 2015, the Ministry for Social Dialogue, Consumer Affairs and Civil Liberties proposed a framework integration strategy which could be relied upon for the next five years. With no comprehensive national strategy, integration is based upon the EU’s minimum protection standards and ad hoc initiatives by state agencies or civil society organisations. Yet, policies are not fully fledged to encourage permanent settlement: no programmes, except some language training, are in place to foster the integration of non-citizens. Prospects of obtaining permanent residency or naturalisation are uncertain.

In the absence of national integration measures, recent years have seen initiatives taken up by non-state agents as well as Malta’s youth agency (Agenzija Zghazagh) to improve the resilience of asylum-seeking children and youth. With a new youth policy of Malta (2015-2020), youth workers are further encouraged to create social cohesion and participation of asylum seekers aged between 13 and 30. Not only NGOs with youth-work experience, such as the Integra Foundation and Organisation for Friendship in Diversity, but also those primarily assisting the migrant community and/or socially disadvantaged groups, have involved young asylum seekers in their activities. In addition to practice, research in the field has intensified recently in an effort to engage in dialogue with asylum seekers and

² See Annex: number of asylum applicants identified as unaccompanied minors between 2008 and 2015.

look at some issues (housing, employment, social engagement and so on) from their perspective. Both practitioners and researchers seem to duly recognise the problems young asylum seekers are facing, but cannot act on them due to financial, legal and policy constraints. The question remains how practitioners and researchers can interact better with policy makers to influence changes in the asylum system.

So far social inclusion and education have been the main focus of integration activities, although engaging unaccompanied minors as well as families with children in long-term planning can be difficult, since many consider Malta a transit country (IOM/UNHCR 2014). Moreover, levels of literacy of asylum-seeking children and youth who arrive in Malta are usually lower, some are not able to communicate in English (Ministry for Education and Employment 2014) and this, coupled with a lack of interpreters, creates barriers to effective communication with them. Communication is indeed a huge issue when it comes to the asylum process itself, as the traditional approach is to provide asylum seekers with information sheets and leave it to them to sort it out. As a consequence, many asylum seekers are not able to grasp some aspects of the system and navigate through all the bureaucracy (Pisani 2013). Notably, it appears that appointed social workers work to help disattached children with some bureaucracy, in particular with the ID obtainment (Integra/UNHCR 2015).

Furthermore, the lack of legal status may limit individuals' access to services, material support and the formal labour market. In this sense, beneficiaries of international protection, including refugees and subsidiary protection holders, are "legally privileged" compared to irregular (read: rejected) asylum seekers.³ In Malta, many status-less asylum seekers can neither return to unsafe countries of origin nor can they receive travel documents to move elsewhere. And this sub-group of migrants, as Pisani puts it (2012), is "the elephant in the room": although generally excluded from the job market, they take up casual, underpaid jobs and serve as the country's cheap labour force (Ministry for Education and Employment 2014). Research has revealed that the absence of work places an emotional and psychological burden on younger adults as they are unable to send remittances to their families back home (Integra/UNHCR 2015).

Last but not least, xenophobia, racism and social alienation of immigrant communities affect asylum seekers' experiences on different levels. According to Maltese opinion polls (Eurobarometer 2015; UNHCR Malta 2012) many see migrants as a threat and challenge to their society. Yet, attitudes of the local population towards migrants may vary depending on the age, gender and nationality of the latter. North Africans, for instance, seem to face less prejudice and discrimination from the national population. At the same time, prejudice may come not only from the Maltese, but also other ethnic groups within the migrant community, considering the heterogeneity of Malta's asylum-seeker population. Furthermore, interviews with a sample of asylum seekers of different ages found that the local population is less likely to give material and practical support to younger migrants compared to those in their late 40s or older (Integra/UNHCR 2015).

All in all, the analysis above has attempted to describe the realities youth workers and social workers face working with young people of asylum-seeking backgrounds. Below are four case studies that detail short-term and long-term solutions taken by youth work in responding to some problems. This helps to illustrate the positive role of youth work in supporting asylum seekers, the diversity of working practice and the common limitations impacting on the projects.

3. Legal and institutional frameworks for safeguarding the rights of beneficiaries of protection are relatively developed (1951 Geneva Convention / UNHCR; Common European Asylum System). In contrast, international legal standards applicable to irregular migrants are limited to international human rights law, but the thing is: human rights are universal – the national legal systems are not; as a result, the response to irregular migration is not coherent and in many countries irregular migrants are seen through the lens of the criminal law.

Case studies

Case A: Youth empowerment and participation

Project title	Spark15 (refugee and migrant youth organisation)
Organisation(s)	UNHCR; Integra Foundation; Organisation for Friendship in Diversity
Key thematic area	Youth empowerment
Keywords	Resilience, self-sufficiency, networking
Focus group(s)	Refugee and migrant youth
Their role	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▣ Proposed the project (initiators)▣ Participated in planning and organisation (contributors)▣ Participated in the activity itself (beneficiaries)

Background

2015 saw the start of Global Refugee Youth Consultations, which aimed to engage young people in the discussion on issues relevant to them and their communities. The idea behind the consultations is that refugee youth are best placed to express problems unique to them and to take the lead in redesigning the way these issues are addressed. The project involved UNHCR-NGO national consultations in 22 different countries since September 2015 and concluded with a three-day global consultation in Geneva in June 2016, where the findings from national consultations were discussed. Not only had young refugees an opportunity to engage in a structured forum with relevant stakeholders, including state agents and civil society organisations, but they also had opportunities to network with like-minded peers. This was exactly the case of Spark15, a new youth organisation in Malta formed by 15 young refugees following their meet-up at the UNHCR-NGO national consultations. Today, Spark15 is the first youth organisation in Malta led by young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds, with the technical assistance and office space provided by local organisations, such as the Organisation for Friendship in Diversity, the Integra Foundation and UNHCR Malta. Membership of the organisation has not been consistent, as some members have left for other countries whilst new members have joined.

Challenge

The young people did not know each other before the consultations, but the meeting gave them a real opportunity to begin working together. They hope to gain legal recognition soon and act as a pressure group to advocate for the rights of migrant and refugee youth in Malta. The group identified the main challenges they plan to address in this regard, including: (a) limited prospects for family reunification; (b) the lack of financial assistance; (c) risk of deportation; (d) limited access to education; (e) limited access to job market; (f) difficulties obtaining documentation; (g) integration and discrimination; (h) limited or unaffordable healthcare.

Description of implemented activities

The right to right information: At present, Spark15 is working on the creation of an information bank which would serve as a reference point for young asylum seekers who seek accurate information on rules and procedures concerning their migration status. This will include such areas as education, employment, healthcare and documentation. As mentioned in the previous section, the asylum process is generally confusing, but through crowdsourcing, information and practical instructions can be gathered from peers who have already gone through a process. It is planned to involve other stakeholders, including government agencies and NGOs, as well.

Overcoming language barriers: The young people have different levels of English, from beginner to advanced. Some are planning to enrol in the university, which requires an IELTS certification, but the

preparation course and examination fees are not really affordable. English classes are being organised by volunteers from the University of Malta to help the young people improve their language skills.

Establishing contacts with other communities: Meetings and co-operation with other refugee communities is on the organisation’s agenda. One meeting was held this summer, where Spark15 shared its experience with the Sudanese community. Apart from this, the young people are taking part in different sports and social activities involving non-refugee youngsters, organised by an international school in Malta.

Communication

One of the aims of the organisation is to reach out to other concerned young people and expand the network in the future. So far, word of mouth through migrant communities has worked well. But it is even better when young people meet up somewhere and friends bring their friends.

Social media is believed to be one of the spaces where many young people are present, so Spark15 set up a Facebook page to reach out to the youth and a wider public: [goo.gl/z6HA7H](https://www.facebook.com/goo.gl/z6HA7H). In addition, a short introductory video has recently been filmed to inform the refugee and Maltese youth about the organisation.

A news article about Spark15 was published on Times of Malta, one of the most popular news agencies in the country: [goo.gl/xDiAmk](https://www.timesofmalta.com/goo.gl/xDiAmk). In this article, two members of the organisation advocate for the education of young refugees as the key to integration. This sparked a heated debate between migrants and the Maltese in the comment section of the article.

The organisation has recently launched an official webpage: [goo.gl/Feo0wE](https://www.goo.gl/Feo0wE).

Funding

As yet there has been little funding, but the young people are exploring funding opportunities.

Evaluation

It is too early to evaluate the organisation’s impact on local realities, yet Spark15 is a groundbreaking project. Before the UNHCR-NGO consultations, these young people had to face the realities of the asylum process individually, perhaps taking things for granted and not being able to call for changes in policies and practices which challenge them. As a group, they first of all support and inspire each other. As a group, they feel more influential and more accepted, build partnerships and networks, support other communities and are supported themselves. Through the consultation process, where the young were simply given a voice, they were encouraged to think inquisitively and act independently. They are empowered to plan and enact change in their communities – that puts them in the role of leaders, rather than just receivers of services. A brilliant example of refugee youth empowerment.

Case B: Building child-friendly spaces

Project title	Volunteering activities with children (part of “The Citizens Are Speaking”)
Organisation(s)	Cross Culture International Foundation
Key thematic area	Non-formal education
Keywords	Single mothers, child engagement activities, intercultural dialogue
Focus group(s)	School children living with families
Their role	<input type="checkbox"/> Proposed the project (initiators) <input type="checkbox"/> Participated in planning and organisation (contributors) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Participated in the activity itself (beneficiaries)

Background

The focus group of this project relates to children who live with their families originating from two different countries in the same region in Africa. The children were born in Europe, in Malta or a country where their parents resided prior to Dublin transfer. Most children have learned Maltese and English at school and can communicate rather well in both languages, and most do not speak their parents' native languages. One child learned Maltese during family child care while her mother was at work. The children stay in a multi-family residential house in the community, where all residents are asylum seekers. The location of the residence is central and is close to school and service providers (NGOs, volunteers, church supporting the families). Most parents are single mothers and almost all of them work full-time, sometimes also during the weekends. All parents work in low-skilled jobs, mainly in cleaning services.

Challenge

With their parents often working long hours, the children did not usually have the opportunity to pursue extracurricular activities. Moreover, they did not have a common area for study and leisure, so they would stay outdoors, on the streets. One room in the building was available for this purpose, but it was in desperate need of repairs and refurbishment. In addition to turning this room into a study space, a challenge was set to engage children in literacy and language-enhancing activities.

Description of implemented activities

Renovation was carried out by volunteers, including the organisation's workers and professionals, who helped upgrade broken windows. A drab, unlivable room was turned into a warm and cosy space with a big table, chairs, and a few cabinets for books and stationery. The extracurricular activities were carried out during the Maltese scholastic year, on weekdays, with each session lasting about two hours. Young volunteers from the community were invited to help children out with after-school activities, especially homework. This involved reading, writing in English and Maltese, painting, colouring books and team games.

Funding

Initially, this initiative was part of a bigger project sponsored by the Europe for Citizens programme, which duly covered renovation costs. A total 120 hours of volunteering activities with minors from an asylum-seeker background were planned and carried out within the project. The organisation did not want to terminate collaboration with the families and decided to continue activities at its own cost. As a consequence, weekly hours of activities were reduced.

Communication

The organisation communicated with the parents by phone but reached out to them through the Catholic church.

At the end of "The Citizens Are Speaking" project, the organisation held a press conference, which brought together different stakeholders, including the President of Malta and other authorities, representatives of NGOs, citizens and migrants. Along with other outcomes of the project, the results of volunteering with children were presented as a video. Several migrants were invited to share their stories regarding their experiences in Malta. The conference gained massive coverage in the media, and certain issues raised by migrants were included in media publications.

Evaluation

The project as a whole has opened up the way for dialogue with the migrant community; particularly in the case of volunteering activities with children, the volunteers learned first-hand the issues faced by migrant parents, including insufficiencies in living conditions and the lack of legal status resulting in limited access to benefits. At the end of the scholastic year, feedback from parents was collected, all of which was positive. Parents believed that extracurricular activities helped children to do better at school. In addition, while children were under the supervision of the volunteers, single mothers could

get a little time to themselves. It has been agreed that the activity will be renewed and more attention will be paid to the English language and computer skills.

Case C: Intercultural dialogue⁴

Project title	Youth Upbeat
Organisation(s)	SOS Malta; Agenzija Zghazagh
Key thematic area	Intercultural dialogue
Keywords	Social inclusion, cultural awareness, performing arts
Focus group(s)	Young refugees and subsidiary protection holders
Their role	<input type="checkbox"/> Proposed the project (initiators) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Participated in planning and organisation (contributors) <input type="checkbox"/> Participated in the activity itself (beneficiaries)

Background

Although at a political level successful integration is associated with linguistic proficiency and participation in the labour market, for asylum seekers it would appear more sensible to gain a feeling of acceptance and belonging within their host community in the first place. In Malta, where a large number of asylum seekers live in Marsa and Hal-Far open centres or have settled in certain localities, thus creating ethnic enclaves, acceptance can hardly be achieved without giving an opportunity for them to interact and build social bonds with the host community; as a result, racism and xenophobia have become two of the barriers for the integration of young people.

Challenge

The present project aimed to provide opportunities for social interaction between the migrant community and locals, which would enable Maltese youngsters to understand and appreciate the cultural diversity in their country and learn how Maltese society can benefit from such diversity.

Description of implemented activities

Six cultural ambassadors from the focus group were trained to work with young people as part of the project to share aspects of their culture as well as their personal stories within 26 interactive workshops. Approximately 500 Maltese locals aged 13-14 participated in the activity. These workshops were highly interactive and discussed such issues as perceptions, relationships, challenges, positive experiences and culture through role plays, conversations, music and dance. In addition, 12 youngsters participated in a live-in performing arts weekend together with the cultural ambassadors, culminating in a final performance for the general public. Participants performed traditional stories from Eritrea, Somalia and Malta. Also, a documentary and a photographic exhibition about the project were launched during the intercultural night.

Funding

The project was co-financed through the European Refugee Fund, but the budget was quite limited and the organisers could not afford more material and equipment such as props and costumes or better-quality musical instruments.

Communication

The team reached out to participants and ambassadors through personal networks, word of mouth, visits to concerned communities and through Facebook.

4. The case is based on feedback from a social worker and the report was published at: [http://cdn02.abakushost.com/agenzjazghazagh/downloads/YU_Lessons_learned\[2\].pdf](http://cdn02.abakushost.com/agenzjazghazagh/downloads/YU_Lessons_learned[2].pdf).

Evaluation

The organisation consistently evaluated the success or challenges faced during the implementation of activities. The workshops were a real success in teaching the Maltese youth about migrants' cultures and realities. Notably, the workshops reached students who are otherwise hard to reach, including those with behavioural or learning difficulties and others with disabilities. The handouts facilitated the process of learning, and the use of different languages was appreciated by the participants and helped to establish an immediate connection. The live-in event, which involved the preparation and performance of folktales, opened the way for informal dialogue between the participants. Feedback from participants suggests that the project helped the Maltese youth to open their minds towards their peers coming from a migrant background. Many mentioned that they learned things they would never have thought of before. It is worth noting here that sometimes it was difficult to engage the cultural ambassadors in the work, not because of a lack of interest on their part, but due to their limited availability – the young people would need to apply for settlement or have other employment.

Case D: Engaging youth through sports (research-oriented project)⁵

Project title	Engaging youth through non-formal education and sports
Organisation(s)	Organisation for Friendship in Diversity; Integra Foundation
Key thematic area	Youth engagement
Keywords	Non-formal education, sports, age, gender and diversity-sensitive approach
Focus group(s)	The migrant and refugee youth
Their role	<input type="checkbox"/> Proposed the project (initiators) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Participated in planning and organisation (contributors) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Participated in the activity itself (beneficiaries)

Background

Previous research has revealed an interest and demand for sports activities among young refugees and migrants. This pilot activity attempted to examine the impact of organising separate team sports events with migrant and refugee young people using non-formal education.

Challenge

The main goal of the activity was to engage the youth in an organisational process to pursue a positive sports event, while also encouraging individual personal development and non-formal learning. In addition, the research attempted to evaluate young people's opportunities for engagement with mainstream sports activities in Malta.

Description of implemented activities

The implementation involved three levels of engagement with the focus group, including: (a) group conversation to identify what sports activities participants would be interested in pursuing; (b) face-to-face conversation to gain more insights about individuals' interests and experiences with mainstream sports activities in Malta; and (c) collaborative organisation of four football tournaments where the refugee and migrant youth played the dominant role.

Results and evaluation

The three levels of engagement listed above represent a youth-centred approach that eventually facilitated a dialogue with youngsters, in which they were comfortable to express their feelings of helplessness and powerlessness in influencing some aspects of their life in Malta. Some reasons why the

5. The case is based on Integra Foundation/UNHCR (2015), "My Diversity: Age, Gender and Diversity Perspectives in the Maltese Refugee Context".

youngsters would not give sports a try include fear of discrimination and unfair treatment based on racial prejudices, the lack of role models (mentors), and language barriers. Nevertheless, the youngsters are generally enthusiastic about participation in football tournaments and some would even take it up as a future career. Overall, the research encourages greater participation of young migrants and refugees in sports activities and suggests that the government authorities consider advancing sports infrastructure near the main accommodation centres.

Conclusions and key recommendations

Notwithstanding the general optimism about the relative pause on arrivals in Malta, this may just be an “eye of the storm” moment. So long as socio-political instabilities in the southern neighbourhood of Europe continue, people will be unlikely to stop fleeing the affected areas and Malta is still one of the closest “gates” to Europe. Meanwhile, it is time to learn from past experiences and seek more proactive approaches addressing the reception and settlement of asylum seekers, simultaneously.

At EU level, this could start by responding to the lack of burden-sharing mechanisms and linking burden-sharing to protection: relocation programmes could be one of the key solutions to help Malta and other Mediterranean states to improve their reception capacities. Moreover, inadequacies of the Dublin system must be addressed – it is arguably easier to integrate those who wish to remain in a country – yet, many asylum seekers who managed to reach mainland Europe are transferred back to Malta.

At a national level, integration should be a major focus for policy making. In addition, attention must be paid to improving information and consultation mechanisms (such as consultations with NGOs) with the participation of practitioners, researchers, policy makers and planners, and, where relevant, asylum seekers themselves, to generate better policy outcomes.

The following recommendations are proposed with regard to youth work:

- Create opportunities for young people to engage in structured dialogue and reflect on their experiences in the host state.
- One size does not fit all: try to segment the needs of the youth according to their age, gender, legal status, nationality, and then address their situations accordingly.
- Actively involve asylum seekers in planning, monitoring and evaluation of activities.
- Funding seems never to be enough. Consider creative fund-raising options to become a self-sustainable organisation, rather than relying on public funds and individual donors.
- Have a communication plan/strategy. If the general public and focus group show a low interest in an activity, perhaps the message was not communicated effectively. Marketing is not only for profit-oriented organisations.
- Co-operate with the press to raise awareness about activities, at the same time facilitating locals’ and policy makers’ understanding of realities facing young migrants and refugees.
- Try to reach out to disattached and unsupervised youth through visiting their communities. Otherwise, they will be left out.
- Regularly evaluate projects. Ask participants, ask employees, ask the public. Improve.
- More co-operation, networking and transparency at an organisational level.

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ANNEX

Year	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Number of unaccompanied minors residing in open centres in Malta								
Male	73	143	127	120	141	207	96	n/a
Female	38	89	76	93	102	110	29	n/a
Total	111	232	203	213	243	317	125	n/a
Source: Malta’s National Statistics Office demographic reviews published between 2010 and 2016. https://nso.gov.mt/en/publicatons/Pages/Publications-by-Date.aspx (accessed 14 November 2016)								
Number of asylum applicants considered to be unaccompanied minors in Malta								
Male	20	35	5	25	90	290	50	30
Female	5	10	0	0	15	45	5	0
Total	25	45	5	25	105	335	55	30
Source: Eurostat. Asylum applicants considered to be unaccompanied minors by citizenship, age and sex, last update: 21 September 2016. http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=migr_asyunaa&lang=en (accessed 14 November 2016)								
Number of first time asylum applicants aged 14 - 34, Malta								
Total	275	145	10	75	170	435	110	85
Source: Eurostat. Asylum and first-time asylum applicants by citizenship, age and sex. Annual aggregated data (rounded), last update: 5 October 2016, http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/submitViewTableAction.do (accessed 14 November 2016)								

n/a = not available