



Full Length Research Article

EUROPEAN MALTA YOUTH'S EMPLOYMENT CHALLENGES: FORECASTING SCENARIOS AND RESPONSES FOR YOUNG WOMEN AND MEN IN THE WORLD OF WORK

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received 09th November, 2014
Received in revised form
10th December, 2014
Accepted 18th January, 2015
Published online 27th February, 2015

ABSTRACT

This paper will be looking at The National Youth Employment Strategy 2015 which focuses on the 15-24 age group; a cohort which experienced a number of significant transitions both at the individual and institutional level. Focusing on the inter-relatedness and inter-dependency of economic and social policies, this Strategy aspires to develop a number of thrusts which address the challenges owing to macro- and micro- constraints. The aim is to design a holistic framework that yields both immediate and long-term returns.

Key words:

Youth,
Employment,
Work,
Training, EU.

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INTRODUCTION

Rationalising Youth Unemployment in Europe

Young people are a dynamic and heterogeneous social group deserving particular attention both at the national and European level, in a multiple of mutually reinforcing sectors, including employment, education and social welfare. This paper will be looking at The National Youth Employment Strategy 2015 which focuses on the 15-24 age group; a cohort which experienced a number of significant transitions both at the individual and institutional level. In 2010, the population of 15 to 24 year olds in the EU stood at 12.1% of the whole population (<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/portal/en>).

In Malta, the number of persons aged between 15 and 24 in 2010 stood at 57, 931 representing approximately 14% of the total population (http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Population_and_population_change_statistics). Focusing on the inter-relatedness and inter-dependency of economic and social policies, this Strategy aspires to develop a number of thrusts which address the challenges owing to macro- and micro- constraints.

The aim is to design a holistic framework that yields both immediate and long-term returns. The heterogeneity of young people and the fluctuating labour market are the main variables delineating a Strategy with multiple policy objectives that focuses on a compound group of policy clients. The target groups of the National Youth Employment Strategy 2015 include:

- Young job-seekers;
- Inactive Youth;
- Young people who are in the labour market.

The horizontal priorities characterising the vision of this Strategy include the successful integration of youth into employment, social and economic inclusion, adequate support and the acquisition of education attainment.

These priorities are also conveyed in the *European Union 2020 Strategy*, a number of European Union council conclusions and resolutions and the respective national policies. To this effect Member States are committed to adopt concrete active labour market programmes targeted at those groups within society which are most at risk of becoming detached from the educational system and the formal economy.

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MATERIALS AND METHODS

The piloting of this Strategy has been construed within the international and national context surrounding the Maltese society. Central to this theme is the volatile environment in which young people interact, characterised by the worst economic crisis of the European Union, the effects of globalisation as well as the technological and demographic demands which societies around the world are requested to address. It is recognised that education, training and the acquisition of employability skills are an integral part of sustainable economic growth and social development. This reinforces the demand for young people to be equipped with the necessary knowledge and competencies required to adapt to a competitive and fluctuating labour market.

The priorities which the National Youth Employment Strategy concentrates on are the following:

1. Supporting school completion;
2. Encouraging educational attainment and formal validation;
3. Facilitating the successful reintegration into education, training or employment of young people who are disengaged or at-risk of being disengaged;
4. Providing the learning tools which ascertain that young people are equipped with the necessary employability skills;
5. Ensuring the sustainability of young people's entry into the labour market by addressing temporary, precarious and informal work arrangements.

The initiatives proposed in this paper are split into five main categories:

1. Renewed Youth-Centred Investment;
2. Early Intervention and Prevention;
3. Facilitating Transition between Education, Training and Employment;
4. Equal Access and Opportunities to Education, Training and the Labour Market;
5. Sustainability of Jobs.

This paper acknowledges that the entry patterns into the labour market and the choice of transition from school to further and higher education are dependent on a number of variables. These include:

1. Qualifications, Skills and Competencies attained through schooling and training;
2. Learning Experience in Compulsory Education;
3. Individual and Family aspirations;
4. Active Labour Market Programmes;
5. Social and demographic context;
6. Guidance and Counselling.

These indicators highlight the significance of investing in programmes which combine employment policies with targeted interventions in other policy areas. It is recognised that for young people to have smooth transitions from schooling to employment at different periods in their life, there needs to be a collective commitment from all stakeholders. The risk factors of inefficiency in intervention are

considerable individual, economic and social costs translated in loss of output, lower economic growth, higher unemployment incidence, inferior competitive advantage, lesser earnings, precarious employment, lower quality of life, lesser sense of achievement and lower social cohesion. According to a Finnish report 'Prevention of social exclusion among the youth' (http://www.minedu.fi/lapset_nuoret_perheet/Osa-alueet/Nuoret/?lang=en), a young person who encounters situations of vulnerability throughout life, and as a consequence is permanently disengaged from the labour market, costs society approximately one million Euros before his or her 60th birthday (<http://www.koulutustakuu.fi/training-guarantee/>). This study indicates that investment in young people from an early age, as well as early intervention and prevention services are critical tools to ensure inclusion and curb the social and economic costs.

With youth unemployment in Europe reaching staggering highs, and with increasing economic demands shifting towards jobs which are more services, knowledge- and skills-intensive as opposed to low-qualified occupations (http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/Files/3052_en.pdf), European countries are expected to devise recovery and job-centred inclusive growth plans. Malta is not immune to these challenges and although figures indicate positive trends in youth unemployment when compared to the European Union 27 Member States, a number of constraints still remain. Being responsive to these challenges requires a forward-looking strategy which puts education, training and employment at the heart of national policies. This Strategy forecasts that the most effective entry path towards successful integration into the labour market lies in early intervention, basic education, vocational training or higher education, support schemes, apprenticeships, traineeships, entrepreneurship and alternance programmes between school and work. Whilst recognising the importance that States should give to labour supply, it is also critical that the demand side is addressed, by stimulating job creation, investing in new sectors to ensure diversification and ensuring that all social partners work towards enhancing the prospects of young people. Focusing on both demand and supply requires a multi-disciplinary approach where policy areas interact towards common objectives.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Overview of the economic and social context

Economies around the world are operating in environments characterised by uncertainties. Financial risks are producing significant spill-over effects to the real economy, in particular to the Euro area member states. Statistics indicate that several cross-country differences were recorded in the impact of the economic crisis with Southern Europe countries being more severely hit than other EU countries in terms of job losses. The outlook in youth unemployment at EU level is even more worrying with an overall increase of 7.7 percentage points from the 2008 EU28 rate (15.6% in 2008; 23.3% in 2013). Malta's youth unemployment rate stands at 13.0 per cent as compared to 12.2 per cent in 2008 (and 16.6 per cent in 2004) (NSO (2012)). Within the EU 28, youth unemployment suffered a sharper rise than the overall unemployment with the latter standing at an average of 11.0 % (2013) from the 2008

rate of 7.1 %, signifying a 3.9 percentage point increase. Malta's total unemployment rate registered the same levels as the 2007 rate with 6.5 % of the labour force being unemployed. This signifies an increase from the 2008 figure of 6.1 % and a successful drop from the 2009 and 2010 unemployment rates which stood at 6.9 % (<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/microdata/european-union-labour-force-survey>). These figures denote that the ratio of the youth unemployment rate to the adult unemployment rate is twice as much, highlighting young people's vulnerability in the labour market. The sensitivity of young people in employment may be due to several factors. These may include:

- Lack of experience, with young people competing with other job-seekers who have more employment experience;
- The mismatch between young people's skills and the skills needed by employers;
- An increased probability of temporary jobs and of non-renewal of temporary contracts;

The young generation is not to be perceived by governments as a lost generation, but rather as a generation which due to a number of macro-constraints needs supportive mechanisms to rise up again. In consequence, countries are urged to restore confidence in citizens and in young people in particular through a multi-pronged approach geared towards growth and resilience. The EU 28 employment rate of young persons as a percentage of the population in the same age group (15-24) has decreased from 37.5 per cent in 2000 to 32.3 per cent in 2013. A similar trend can be observed in the employment rate for young people in Malta with a decline from 52.8 per cent in 2000 to 45.9 per cent in 2013 (<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/microdata/european-union-labour-force-survey>).

This decrease can be mainly attributed to the increased participation of young people in education following compulsory schooling. Sectors which register a high share of youth labour supply are 'Wholesale and Retail Trade; Repair of Motor Vehicles and Motorcycles', 'Manufacturing', 'Professional, Scientific and Technical Activities', 'Administrative and Support Service Activities', 'Public Administration and Defence; Compulsory Social Security' and to a lesser extent 'Education', 'Construction' and 'Information and Communication'. Albeit the positive trends across the EU, policy makers across Europe are called to intensify their efforts in designing and implementing specialised measures focusing particularly on this group which is disengaged both from education and the formal economy, and that are at a higher risk of poverty and social exclusion. The NEET population is generally heterogeneous and this is to be addressed when designing policies specifically targeted at this cohort. Research conducted by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions suggest that the largest subgroup of the NEET population is those youth who are conventionally unemployed. Other young people, not in education, employment or training include youth with a disability, young people who are chronically ill and young carers. Other sub-groups include young people who may not necessarily be vulnerable who are engaged in other activities outside the formal economy (<http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/pubdocs/2012/54/en/1/EF1254EN.pdf>). Not withstanding the heterogeneity of the NEET population, there are

several risk factors which make certain subgroups more vulnerable than others. *Eurofound* indicates that young people with a low level of education are three times more likely to become NEET when compared to others. Moreover, the study indicates that the probability of young people to become NEET increases by 17% when their parents would have experienced unemployment. The study also suggests that young people with a low household income and youth living in remote areas are more likely to become NEET (<http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/emcc/labourmarket/youth.htm>).

Official data from the National Statistics Office indicates that some differences can be noted when analysing the youth unemployment ratio by district. The ratio is defined as the number of unemployed in the 15 to 24 age bracket as a percentage of the labour force (*employed + unemployed*) in the same age bracket. This divergence calls for a concerted effort at national and local level to address the particular needs of young people through a targeted approach. Data on income and living conditions underlines the connection between active participation in the labour market and risk-of-poverty or social exclusion. In effect, data for 2010 indicates that in the EU 27, 55.4 % of the 18-24 age cohort who were classified as unemployed were at-risk of poverty or social exclusion. In Malta, the rate stood at 47.3 % (<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/microdata/european-union-labour-force-survey>). Subsequently, nation states are to ensure that young people are adequately protected through policy responses which promote active labour market programmes and support mechanisms that lead to both economic and social empowerment. It is hence critical that comprehensive action is taken to ensure recognition of the human and social capital, where inequalities are swapped for social integration.

Securing Access to the Labour Market

The labour market is critical in sustaining the development of young people. As societies around the world are undergoing a demographic transition, it appears that the formal economy is heading towards sound educational infrastructure embedded with skills and competencies as requested in a competitive knowledge-based society. A study which projects skill demand and supply up to 2020 by the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) suggests that the supply of those with medium-level qualifications, mainly vocational, will form the majority with 50 per cent of the European labour force in 2020. The projections highlighted in the study also suggest that it is likely that countries register an increase in demand for persons with high and medium qualifications even in occupations which were traditionally attributed to lower skills. As a result the demand for people in the labour market with low or no formal qualifications will decline. It is estimated that the share of jobs necessitating high-qualifications will increase from 29 per cent in 2010 to approximately 35 per cent in 2020, whereas the share of jobs requesting low qualifications will decrease from 20 per cent to less than 15 per cent (http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/Files/3052_en.pdf). A recent study commissioned by *Union Haddiema Maghqudin* indicates that the skills gap between Malta and the EU27 is expected to be halved by 2020, from 26 per cent in 2000 to 14.6 per cent in 2020. The study projects that unless Malta takes proactive measures, the skills

shortcomings will not be overcome until 2045. (Union Haddiema Maqghudin, 2012). As indicated in Figure 5, Eurostat data denote that education attainment is a key determinant to employability. Figures covering the period 2004-2009 suggest that for the EU27, in 2004 the employment rate for persons with lower than upper secondary education stood at 60.2 per cent. In 2009, this rate went down to 53.3 per cent. In contrast, for persons with upper secondary and post-secondary attainment (non-tertiary), the employment rate registered an increase from 67.6 per cent in 2004 to 76.7 per cent in 2009. The same upward trend is registered for the employment rate of persons having a tertiary education attainment with 81.8 per cent in 2004 to 83.8 per cent in 2009.

In Malta figures suggest that the employment rate for the three categories ranged from 85.9 per cent (2008) for individuals with lower than upper secondary education; 88.1 per cent (2009) for persons with upper secondary and post-secondary education; and 97.8 per cent (2009) for those with tertiary educational attainment. As indicated in Figure 6, for individuals aged 15-24 who were unemployed, out of the total of 13.7 per cent, 18.5 per cent (17.4% - male; 20.2% - female) had pre-primary, primary and lower secondary education (levels 0-2); 8.9 per cent (8.7 male; 9.3 female) had upper secondary and post-secondary, non tertiary education (levels 3 and 4); and 7.7 per cent (8.9% - male; 6.9% - female) had a first and second stage of tertiary education (levels 5 and 6). Education and training are major drivers in achieving social and economic objectives. As Malta's *National Strategic Reference Framework* (2007 – 2013) states:

'the underlying basis for this Strategic Objective is to support an increased employment rate by providing quality education for all, complemented by strengthened labour market structures. ... On the other hand, strengthened labour market structures facilitate labour market integration.' (<http://nso.gov.mt/en/Pages/NSO-Home.aspx>)

It is acknowledged that for current and future labour market demands to be addressed sustainably both individuals and states are to focus on the micro and macro constraints which may inhibit the desired outputs needed in a knowledge-based competitive economy. As Figure 7 indicates there are various socio-economic determinants which play a significant role in shaping the choice architecture of a particular person. On the one hand, there are the micro-constraints which depend on the person's aspirations, perception of the role they occupy within the society they are embedded in, family environment, social capital, educational attainment, and other personal characteristics. On the other hand, there are the macro-constraints which are influenced by the national, European and international economic climate, demographic and technological changes, labour market regulations, as well as institutional and support structures of the respective country. A sustainable employment strategy which has long-lasting effects thus entails that different policy sectors plough through the complexity of integration in the labour market, taking into account the socio-economic milieu and the measures which are to be taken both on a micro- and in a wider context. Whilst in the former level, strategic actions are to be targeted towards a behaviour change through public policy; the latter depends on the liaison between various players who have a significant

role in ensuring that the overall economic and societal dimensions affecting employability prospects are addressed. Access to employment is strongly associated with education attainment and the transition from school to work. Notwithstanding, a successful strategy entails that individuals not only enter the formal economy, but are capable of retaining their occupation and move the employment ladder in forthcoming years. For youth to be competitive and adept, initial education and lifelong learning are to converge, recognising that employment outcomes are dependent on continuous skills development. It is recognised that to address skill mismatch and to strengthen the capacity for job mobility, actions are to be taken to ensure that young people are equipped with both specific skills (qualifications) and transversal skills (generic skills). Participation in lifelong learning is a means towards the acquisition of new skills and competencies needed for individuals to deal with changing labour market demands, and for industries to respond to new market trends. Societies which acknowledge that preparation for work is a continuum of education and training adhere to the conviction that constant investment in education and training is valuable both for the employee and the employer, as well as for the economy as a whole.

This principle entails a coordinated approach where the three tiers are at play; State, industry and individuals are active participants in ensuring that society is equipped with the necessary competencies needed to anticipate demands. Individuals who do not possess the skills needed in the formal economy become more vulnerable to labour market change and to the likelihood of improved job mobility. Societies have a crucial role in tapping the potential of persons by creating the support structures needed to encourage individuals to be innovative and productive. Institutions are to be endowed with modernised tools and the resources needed to address changing demands. Early intervention and preventive services, guidance, counselling and skills matching are instrumental in identifying and amending possible threats of disengagement from the labour market. Moreover, societies are to invest in emerging industries which have an economic potential for growth and are to be a driving-force in offering opportunities for flexible working arrangements and continuous skills development. Such opportunities may include apprenticeships and traineeships. When these forces interact, the chances for economic and employment growth are broadened.

Young people's perception on the effectiveness of the measures and the actions that need to be taken to meet the forecasted challenges and to enhance employability is instrumental in designing the National Youth Employment Strategy 2015. The analysis which young participants made when drafting the Strategy were:

1. Young people feel that 'training opportunities' exist and are on the increase (namely, those offered by the Employment and Training Corporation (ETC) amongst other) but according to them, they do not always seem to be having the desired effect in getting them into the labour market quick enough. The school leaving certificate that is detailed with the achievements of students not only at formal but in other aspects is a step in the right direction.

2. Young people feel they have to struggle repeatedly with 'employers' perceptions'.
3. Young people feel that employers are not giving them enough opportunity, time and trust for them to settle down.
4. Employers want young people who have 'experience' but the young aspirants feel they are not given the opportunity to gain that required experience.
5. Young people feel that it is also imperative to take note and exercise caution to avoid circumstances that may lead to young people on short term and unsecured contracts of work which may potentially lead to precariousness.
6. Those young people who have low levels of literacy feel that another very important issue is the challenge they come across when it comes to reading, maths and writing amongst others. This is a massive barrier to overcome when it comes to looking for a job. Young people also felt that their own personal narrative is another card that needs to be laid on the table. Whilst most, if not all, young people go through a series of emotional, psychological and intellectual transformations, the scars, namely, dysfunctional families, history of bullying or abuse, drug and alcohol addiction, and gambling,
7. haunt their employment opportunities, directly or indirectly, as they affect their self-esteem.
8. Young people have also floated the idea that there seems to be a skills mismatch between what they are learning at school and the qualities needed when they come to the employment market. Some young people have also expressed their concern that even with further education, it is taking them considerable time to find a job and pursue the career of their choice. More effort needs to be invested in communicating with potential employers on the intensity of field work placements. It is the right time to engage employers more directly in the area of post-secondary, higher and tertiary education.
9. Young people also feel that important elements that should factor into this strategy are: new products and services, improved access to information, more tailor made support packages and administrative responsiveness.
10. Young people feel that in general they have a good channel of communication going with the Employment and Training Corporation (ETC).
11. Young people are interested in exploring and capitalizing on their skills. They are particularly interested in being encouraged to unpack the qualities and skills they have and this can be done if liaison between the education and employment sectors is strengthened.

CONCLUSION

Council Recommendation to establish a Youth Guarantee

In December 2012, the European Commission released the Youth Employment Package, with the aim of addressing the challenging situation faced by European youth. This package includes the Youth Guarantee Recommendation which was adopted in April 2013. It establishes that '*young people (up to age 25) receive a good-quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within a period*

of four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education'. The Youth Guarantee is one of the reforms aimed at addressing existing structural and cyclical bottlenecks which young people experience in their transition from education to work. It is nonetheless recognized that for the Youth Guarantee to be effective and sustainable it is to be complemented with a comprehensive strategic framework, which focuses on early intervention and prevention; access to services; development of skills and competences; and job creation. It is acknowledged that the estimated costs attached to the implementation of the Youth Guarantee are much lower than the costs linked to inaction. Inactivity of young people and disengagement from the education system and the labour market can lead to long-term scarring effects. To this effect, Member States are called to take action to ensure that the reforms address the risks of inter-generational cycle of detachment and social exclusion.

Malta submitted its Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan which includes several initiatives targeting the heterogeneity of the NEET category. The National Employment Policy published in 2014 puts focus on youth, highlighting the phenomena behind NEETs through an analysis of this group, and recommending a number of measures aimed at incentivising young people to be integrated in the education system or the labour market. (Ministry for Education and Employment, Malta, 2014).

Malta's Strategic Recommendations

The proposed recommendations are split into five categories:

- Renewed Youth-Centred Investment;
- Early Intervention and Prevention;
- Facilitating Transition between Education, Training and Employment;
- Equal Access and Opportunities to Education , Training and the Labour Market;
- Sustainability of Jobs

Renewed Youth-Centred Investment

The National Youth Employment Strategy calls for Government to adopt a youth-centred investment approach. This involves mainstreaming youth related issues in all policies and policy implementation measures at both national and local level to assess the impact of policy decisions on the lives of young people. Accordingly, it is recommended that "youth proofing" of all policy decisions and policy implementation measures are included in all policy proposals at both national and local level. Through this process, young people are to be actively consulted and given a voice in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of policies. It is also recommended that 'youth budgeting' is conducted to ensure that young people's needs are adequately reflected in national budgets. In line with Malta's strategic priorities in a European context, it is to be ensured that the Public Employment Service takes the necessary steps to continue exploring the possibility of utilizing European Social Funds targeted at young people. Research on young people needs to be strengthened in particular in the economic, social and educational sectors. To this effect, it is recommended that

Aġenzija Żgħażaġh liaises with different stakeholders to ensure that evidence-based decision-making is reinforced. Structured dialogue with young people on several cross-cutting themes should also be the basis of research to ensure that the measures adopted and the needs of youth converge.

Early Intervention and Prevention

The formation of skills and aptitudes is a life-cycle process and it is to be ensured that all young people are given the opportunity to have a strong start. It is acknowledged that the social costs of low performance and exclusion are higher than early intervention, preventive and referral services. Not all children have a level playing field, and it is recommended that early intervention services are strengthened to ensure that a targeted approach is adopted giving particular attention to those children who require additional support. For this to be achievable, it is crucial that educational services at different levels and welfare services are to be designed and coordinated jointly, in order to ensure that the inclusion of children and their families is safeguarded.

A number of measures cited in this Strategy aim to target specifically those young people who are neither in education, nor in employment or training. It is recognized that children and young people who are at risk of social exclusion as a result of various characteristics may find it even harder to participate actively in further and higher education, and the formal economy. Whilst acknowledging the developments which took place in the past years with the recruitment of different professionals in the education sphere who offer support and assistance to children requiring particular attention, it is recommended that the multi-disciplinary approach is strengthened. Professionals representing different sectors will coordinate to assist the child, whilst devising an assessment of the care plan of the particular child. It is proposed that a mentor is appointed to ensure that a holistic approach is adopted when relating to the child. Both the child and the legal guardians need a point of reference to relate to, and it is thus necessary that the teacher and the mentor are equipped with the necessary information to make sure that the child is adequately followed.

The role of the community in ensuring that young people are given the necessary opportunities to succeed is vital. To this effect, the concept of ACCESS which brings together different social services should be extended. Parents and families of young people who come from vulnerable backgrounds, who have multiple problems or who require additional protection are to be given specialized support services. At community level, an increased investment is to be dedicated towards professionals working in the social development field who are equipped to assist the young person and the family needing targeted support. It is recommended that a case manager is appointed to ensure that the programmes devised by the different entities which the young person may come across are tailor-made to the specific needs.

Transition from education to work entails that young people are given the necessary information to choose the route to their career. A recent Eurobarometer study indicates that when asked how useful it would be to receive information about the skills that are likely to be needed in the future job market, 92

per cent Maltese respondents aged 15 to 24 compared to 81 per cent in the EU27 answered that it would be 'useful'. The notion of career and life planning blends with the provision of the Personal and Social Development (PSD) lessons in schools. Teachers are to work in partnership with the Employment and Training Corporation, the Cooperatives Movement as well as Malta Enterprise to ensure that young people are given the relevant information on the career prospects, the skills and competencies needed in the labour market and the forecasted emerging industries. A *Youth Skills Inventory* should be established to ensure that traineeship programmes are matched with the skills and aspirations of the young people who are registering for formal employment. Traineeship programmes are an important tool for the development of employability skills.

The Eurobarometer Survey 'Employment and Social Policy' indicates that 84 per cent of Maltese respondents who have completed a traineeship stated that the traineeship helped them to get a permanent job. This rate is significantly higher than the EU27 rate which stands at 44 per cent (European Commission, 2011). Qualified youth workers are to become statutory in key service delivery points. In collaboration with the Youth and Community Studies Department within the University of Malta, training should be provided to those individuals who are already working with young people. The advent of Youth Cafés provides an opportunity for the further enhancement of informal guidance and information services. Aġenzija Żgħażaġh is encouraged to collaborate with other entities and the social economy to ensure that young people are given access to information through an informal environment. This concept should be broadened and extended to different parts of Malta.

Facilitating Transition between Education, Training and Employment

For this Strategy to be truly effective, it is imperative that educational institutions work closely with the labour market and the community. Integration of social and economic policies is fundamental to yield results which are sustainable and which leave a positive impact on the cohort of the population this Strategy aims to target. Partnership between the public employment service provider, training organizations, the industry, schools, further and higher educational institutions and the social welfare agencies is to be strengthened. Coordinated support is at the heart of this Strategy because it leads to a more comprehensive approach focusing in a multi-disciplinary manner on the individual needs of the young person. The education system plays a pivotal role in ensuring that young people are equipped with the necessary skills and competencies to compete in a fluctuating labour market. Technological advances and increased access to information have changed the role which educators have in the classroom. Authorities are to ensure that gaps are eliminated between the updated National Curriculum Framework and its implementation at grass-roots level. It is further proposed that teachers are given the necessary space to develop flexible teaching methods as opposed to rigid forms of teaching which stifle creativity. Furthermore, more student-centred blended learning is to be used in the classroom with interactive and flexible modalities of learning. Employers coming from

different occupational sectors are to be invited to classrooms to discuss with the students the nature of the sector and the skills and competencies needed to work in the sector. Colleges are organising a series of exploration visits in places of work to familiarise students with the working life through an applied learning environment. Guidelines should be designed to ensure that the goals of these programmes are being met.

Moreover, it is proposed that the familiarisation programme for students in their secondary school years is split into three cycles:

Cycle I: General Information and guidance;

Cycle II: Development of soft skills needed for participation in the labour market;

Cycle III: Job exposure in an area of the students' preference.

Participation of young people in non-formal activities is to be recognised. For this purpose, it is recommended that post-secondary institutions provide a school-leaving certificate to all students attending a programme, listing the modules studied and the participation in non-formal activities. Involvement of young people in the voluntary sector is to be strengthened. It is acknowledged that the experience acquired from participation in voluntary work increases the employability prospects. For this purpose, it is suggested that educational institutions both at compulsory and further and higher education strengthen their collaboration with the voluntary sector to ensure that young people are given the opportunity to participate in training programmes with voluntary institutions. Participation is to be accredited accordingly. Malta Enterprise and the industry are to be involved in the design of programmes and qualifications which involve the skills and abilities needed for entry to the labour market. Flexibility of skills and competencies are instrumental to be competitive in the global formal economy, and schools must keep abreast with the changing traits needed in the specific sectors.

A scheme focusing on Youth Entrepreneurship is to be developed. This programme shall be aimed at promoting entrepreneurship amongst young people, providing training and supporting youth in preparation for entrepreneurship and setting up of cooperatives. The role of the Malta Enterprise in business, entrepreneurship, competitiveness and innovation is central. This Strategy recommends that collaboration is strengthened between different stakeholders to ensure that entrepreneurial education and incentives to foster an entrepreneurial market are offered. A systematic channel of communication between Malta Enterprise and education institutions at different levels, as well as the Employment and Training Corporation should be created. The aim will be to forecast potential industries and to anticipate the competencies and skills needed to meet the demands of the industry. It is essential that the Malta Enterprise through its various projects, continues to present young people with innovative start-up programmes, advisory services, mentoring and grants to assist them in their entrepreneurial venture. Flexible labour markets require employees who are equipped with the necessary aptitude skills to enter the formal economy and to perform at par with other competitors. It is to be ensured that graduates

are prepared for their entry into the labour market. For this purpose, it is suggested that employers work in tandem with MCAST and the University of Malta to plan courses' contents. In addition, relevant work placements should be offered in the duration of the course to enhance work-based learning. An important ingredient in modern labour markets is continuous training and the development of a life-long learning aptitude. This is also instrumental in the transitions from school to work, and in job-to-job transitions. To this effect, it is suggested that supported action programmes are devised to incentivise the industry to assist young employees to study and/or work abroad. Through these opportunities, labour mobility would be facilitated and adaptability in fluctuating labour markets enhanced.

Equal access and opportunities to education, training and the labour market

A guiding principle in this Strategy is that all young people should have equal access and opportunities at all stages of their life to education, training and employment. Schemes targeted specifically at incentivizing young people to follow education or training are to be strengthened. The Directorates of Education are called upon to adopt a unified approach towards identifying these young people. A specialised programme focusing on the development of vocational education, for youth of compulsory schooling age is to be devised. Opportunities for progression to higher levels following completion of compulsory learning should also be discussed by the Directorate responsible for compulsory education and MCAST, ITS and Youth.Inc. For authorities to understand the complete dimension of absenteeism, there should be a national data collation system which measures the rate of absenteeism at state, church and independent schools. Moreover, it is to be ensured that all schools responsible for collecting data use the same definition and the same means of interpretation.

The Research and Development Department and the Student Services Department within the Ministry responsible for education together with the National Commission for Further and Higher Education and the Employment and Training Corporation are to engage in a tracer study which follows and guides young people from compulsory schooling to the age of twenty-four. Presently the tracer study analyses the situation of fifth-formers as they leave compulsory education. This study is to be extended with the aim of having a longitudinal analysis of young people on their transition following compulsory education. For this to be possible, it is understood that discussions with the Commissioner for Data Protection should be held to make the necessary legal amendments to ensure that such dissemination of data is abiding by the set law. Engaging young people to be active citizens entails a commitment from institutions to identify the links between vulnerability and attainment. It is understood that lack of educational attainment leads to lesser possibilities of skills and competencies needed to adapt to the fluctuating labour market. Furthermore, lack of attendance at school and low performance reduce the probability of social mobility later on in life. School authorities are to ensure that absenteeism rates are minimized through the strengthening of school and community support services which give individualized

attention to the student and the family. Young people who fall out of the education system are to be given an opportunity of a second-chance education. Whilst acknowledging the education reforms which should be having a positive impact on the drop-out rate and the rate of people not in education, employment and training, it is recommended that life-long learning initiatives and tailored programmes to young people are strengthened. The Ministry responsible for Education together with the relevant stakeholders involved in the employment industry is encouraged to give due consideration to the accreditation of informal and non-formal learning. This should include validation of skills acquired through non-formal activities or on the place of work. For this purpose young people should be encouraged at different stages of their life to be involved in various non-academic activities which give them the opportunity to build skills as well as foster intra-personal and inter-personal relationships.

Participation in civil life yields benefits both to the individual and to the wider society. Aġenzija Żgħażaġh together with educational authorities and voluntary organisations are to collaborate to ensure that young people are encouraged to participate. A targeted out-reach approach should be adopted with those youths who are less motivated to voluntarily participate owing to their vulnerable life circumstances. This paper adheres to the principle that all young people should be empowered to take an active part in society and to succeed. However, it is recognized that not all young people begin their route to active participation from the same starting position. There are young people who from birth are reared in circumstances which put them at a disadvantage when compared to their peers, whereas others experience vulnerability at a later stage. This Strategy recognizes that the State is to intervene to ensure that these young people are not entrapped in a system which hinders their development. Increased attention should be given to young people who are in care to ensure that they are given the opportunities needed to succeed both in their educational attainment and in employment.

Young people who are victims of domestic violence, abuse or who have experienced family breakdown, trauma or a mental health problem are susceptible to facing difficulties in their educational attainment and employability prospects. As a result, a programme specifically designed for youth who are facing these problems which may hinder their life chances, should be designed, focusing on therapeutic services, mentoring, second-chance education, and work-exposure. Measures taken to support persons with disability are to be strengthened. The National Youth Employment Strategy encourages the public sector to be a model of good practice in this respect through more active measures towards supported employment. It is acknowledged that presently there are a number of EU co-funded projects which work towards providing opportunities for people who are in a vulnerable situation. One of the schemes is 'Bridging the Gap' which is designed to support participants in the transition period from unemployment to employment, whilst offering an allowance of 80 per cent of the minimum wage for the duration of the work exposure scheme. These projects are to be pursued, and specific family-friendly measures should be adopted which focus on the specific needs of the individual, aiming to turn

barriers into opportunities for participation. The National Employment Policy recognises that there are a number of shortcomings which need to be addressed to ensure that persons with disability are engaged into the labour market. A number of schemes and programmes are subject to the availability of ESF funding, leading to lack of continuity, at the expense of the participation of persons with disability who are willing to be active in the labour market. To this effect, the National Employment Policy recommends that short-term schemes and programmes are replaced with long-term policies. (Ministry for Education and Employment, Malta, 2014).

Young people who are in correctional facilities should be provided with the necessary education, training and job exposure to give them the opportunity to reintegrate into society. Currently, the Employment and Training Corporation in collaboration with the Corradino Correctional Facility is providing courses to these people, as well as providing them with the technical assistance to develop their manual skills through the construction of workshops. The Employment and Training Corporation also provides the Bridging the Gap Scheme, the Work Trial Scheme and the Cooperative Agreement signed with Caritas Malta towards providing training and placements for former convicts and former substance abusers. It is argued that this momentum is maintained and that with the collaboration of social welfare agencies, these individuals are assisted following their acquittal to be reintegrated into society. It is further suggested that MCAST opens its doors to the residents of Corradino Correctional Facility who wish to pursue their studies or training. Migrant youth potential should be evaluated and assessed.

It is recognised that young people coming from a migrant background should be assisted, including through the recruitment of culture mediators, acting as mentors. In collaboration with non-governmental organisations and the national entities, a scheme should be developed to help young immigrants with the necessary language, cultural and other skills they may need to move on in life. It is also vital that through this scheme, these young people are assisted in developing their portfolio and curriculum vitae. The Ministry responsible for Employment is encouraged to further develop the concept of ACCESS focusing specifically on young people. Through a one-stop-shop centre, young people will be followed by a number of professionals including youth workers who will assist them in the provision of services involving amongst others training, job search and social assistance. Such concept is to be developed and investment in youth and community workers maximized, aiming at assisting young people to engage in society and to build a trusted relationship. Front liners are to be adequately trained to ensure that they understand the benefits of young people's participation and provide them with the needed information and tools to effectively support these individuals.

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