

Making the needs of migrant learners a priority

Over the past few years, Maltese schools have seen a rapid increase in the number of migrant learners. In July 2017 the number of migrant learners in our schools was 3,731 from a total population of 32,624 students. This means that more than 10 percent of the learners in Maltese primary state schools are currently non-Maltese.

Migrant learners come from all sort of different backgrounds and some of them do not speak Maltese nor English, our languages of schooling. The Migrants' Learners Unit, within the Ministry of Education and Employment, offers an induction course to newcomer learners who cannot communicate in Maltese and English, and who would therefore be unable to cope with the mainstream curriculum. The first objective of the unit is to ensure the emotional well-being of these children who have gone through

such a major change in their life. The second is to equip them with the linguistic skills that will enable their integration in the community. Induction classes are held on the same school premises of Maltese schools and the induction course is offered to all newcomer students and lasts for approximately one year.

Competence in the language of schooling is a precondition not only for integration but also for educational attainment. The induction programme thus acts as a form of intervention. It takes place for a limited period of time and is discontinued as soon as the learner is considered able to cope in the mainstream classroom.

In the near future the Unit plans to extend its services to areas such as the provision of additional language support to migrant learners who are already in mainstream schools and the possibility to attend social

activity classes where cohorts of Maltese and non-Maltese learners are invited to participate even during after school hours.

Intercultural education goes beyond passive coexistence. To create a truly inclusive education, a school must strive for equal opportunities and the right to participation for all. The Migrant Learners' Unit wants to equip migrant learners with the appropriate skills and language tools to be able to make use of these opportunities and access these rights.

The work being conducted by the Unit is made public via internet on migrantlearnersunit.gov.mt or the Facebook page Migrant Learners' Unit Malta.

Contributions and suggestions are welcome.

