



DARI?

REFUGEE VOICES ON MAKING MALTA HOME

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The views expressed in this publication are those of the partner organisations and do not necessarily represent the opinion or position of UNHCR, whose contribution is acknowledged with gratitude, as it would not have been possible to implement this project without the Organisation's support.

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We also thank UNHCR for supporting 'Project Integrated'.





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Our work with refugees over the years has helped us to realise that refugee protection is about far more than just safety, although this is no doubt extremely important. It is also about the need to belong to a community where they can develop their potential and build their lives anew. From this perspective, a grant of protection is not the end of the road, but just one milestone in the refugee's journey in search of protection, in its fullest sense.

This publication documents refugees' experience of life in Malta, beyond the granting of protection, as they struggle to rebuild their lives. It sheds light on the specific challenges they face and helps us to better understand their needs and aspirations during this phase of their journey.

Dr. Katrine Camilleri - JRS Malta

The visits approach enabled us to catch a small glimpse of refugee realities in Malta. These are realities that are often either unseen or ignored, and it is an honour for us to bring them to light. What we have learnt, essentially, is that there is little comfort in relying on legal norms to guarantee refugee rights. Without individual support many refugees struggle with the most basic things: securing a home, finding a stable job, learning English or Maltese, making friends.

We hope that this report serves as a reminder that the call for an integration strategy is an urgent one, in order to ring about the social changes necessary to foster a truly inclusive and participatory society.

Dr. Neil Falzon - aditus foundation

This report attempts to carve a space for the voices of refugees to be heard. The findings of this report point to integration as a multi-faceted process that necessarily involves inter alia the State, service providers, local communities, citizens and refugees in a dynamic relationship. At its core, integration demands that State institutions be open to diversity, to different realities and needs. Integration requires equity in accessing rights, material resources, networks and support. And integration requires active participation, the opportunity and possibility for all voices to be represented and heard.

Crucially, we believe that a clear, open and accessible route to citizenship is fundamental to this process: actualising an open society.

Dr. Maria Pisani - Integra Foundation

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Terminology

For the purposes of this report, the term 'refugee' is used to include all forms of international protection regulated by European Union (EU) and Maltese law.

Where required to only refer to one category of persons (either persons recognised as refugees or beneficiaries of subsidiary protection), the context or use of specific terms shall clearly indicate this intention.

Executive Summary

Dari? presents data from around 80 visits conducted by JRS Malta, aditus foundation, Integra Foundation and UNCHR to refugee homes in 2015 and 2016. Part of a broader project supporting refugee integration, these home visits sought to talk to refugees about their integration experiences in Malta.

The interviews covered recently arrived refugees, as well as refugees who have been living in Malta for several years. We only interviewed refugees who left the open centres to live in private accommodation. The research looks at personal aspects of integration through a methodology that is entirely based on an informal approach centered on refugees and their voices.

Our data reveals a refugee community that is heavily reliant, and at times dependant, on its own resources to support its members' integration efforts. The vast majority of refugees we interviewed told us how their lives revolve around their co-ethnic communities. A primary source of valuable information on life in Malta, co-ethnic communities also hold a monopoly over social networks and activities, job-hunting and support structures. The data also reveals a sense of discomfort at this relationship on the part of many refugees, commenting on how it has the potential of fuelling insecurity, lack of privacy, and cultural homogeneity.

The vast majority of refugees we interviewed were either working during the interview period, or had worked since leaving the open centre. Although many refugees commented positively on the working conditions they experienced, several respondents also expressed dismay at challenges faced regularly at work: different treatment for equal work, bullying and harassment, unsatisfying jobs, lack of improvement potential/opportunity, job seasonality, and refusal of employers to register employment.

Concerns were also expressed at the quality of living conditions. Many of the respondents share their living spaces with several other refugees, with some households having over five persons in a relatively small space. Furthermore, our data reveals an extremely high level of accommodation mobility amongst refugees. These elements indicate difficulties they face in securing a home that meets their needs of stability, sustainability, and peace of mind.

The research indicates a relatively low level of interaction between refugees and Maltese people. Beyond day-to-day interactions at work and whilst shopping for groceries, engagement with Maltese people and – importantly – Maltese social and cultural life is extremely limited. Although many refugees attend the village festa, indicating the establishment of roots at an extremely local level, very few participate in other events and activities, quoting limited financial means and lack of information about such events.

The report ends with a series of recommendations, largely centered on our appeal to the Government to establish a national refugee integration policy. In the absence of clear direction, Malta will remain unable to offer refugees living here the dignified life they are entitled to. More importantly, Malta will continue to fail to recognise the presence of refugees within Maltese society: a presence that is vibrant, industrious and hopeful.

Essentially, *Dari?* (Maltese for *my home?*) invites refugees and Malta to question the extent to which the island has become a home for refugees. It is our hope that, by shedding a light on refugee life, this report will contribute to extending Malta's welcoming spirit to persons who have found shelter and safety here.

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Refugee integration in Malta

Between 2002 and 2013, Malta experienced an increase in the number of undocumented migrants arriving by boat from Libya, travelling in an irregular manner. Most of the migrants arriving during this time were from Sub-Saharan Africa, but more recently this route was used also by Syrian and Libyan asylum-seekers trying to escape their war-torn countries.

From 2014 to date, there was a marked decrease in the number of boat arrivals in Malta – 568 during 2014, 104 in 2015 and just 29 in 2016, compared to 2008 in 2013 – in spite of the fact that there was an overall increase in the number of persons entering Europe through the central Mediterranean¹. This decrease was offset by an increase in the number of so-called 'non-boat arrivals' applying for asylum, which rose from 347 in 2008, to 824 in 2014, 1,584 in 2015 and 1,619 in 2016. This category includes asylum-seekers arriving by air or sea – whether legally or illegally – as well as those who apply for asylum after they have been living in Malta for some time, whether legally or illegally. Most of these 'non-boat arrivals' were from Libya and Syria, with smaller numbers from Ukraine, Egypt and Nigeria.

The change in migration routes inevitably changed not only the demographics of the asylum-seeking population in Malta, but also the needs on the ground, at least to some extent, and the quality of institutional response required. These elements, and the challenges they pose, are clearly reflected in many of this report's findings.

A relatively high number of asylum-seekers arriving in Malta are granted international protection. Between 2002 and 2012, some 56% of the migrants who arrived in Malta by boat were granted international protection. Since 2012 the proportion of asylum-seekers granted some form of protection was even higher, with around 80% of all applicants granted some form of protection in 2012 and 2013, 63% in 2014, 86% in 2015 and 71% in 2016².

People granted protection in Malta are entitled to freedom of movement, and access to the labour market, education and health services. The extent of these entitlements is largely dependent on the person's asylum or migration status, with refugees enjoying the highest level of rights. Nevertheless, in practice many struggle to survive and integration remains problematic. This is largely due to difficulties accessing the labour market and/or securing stable employment and limited social support. High levels of racism, xenophobia and negative sentiment also act as an obstacle to employment and the enjoyment of basic rights. Research conducted by aditus foundation and UNHCR, and also by Integra Foundation and UNHCR on the basis of interviews with refugees confirmed these findings³.

Although it is true that in recent years there have been integration-related developments, such as improved access to social services and to healthcare, research conducted by JRS Malta and aditus foundation in 2016⁴, confirmed that many beneficiaries of protection still experience poverty and social exclusion.

Refugees in the community experiencing such challenges may approach mainstream service providers for assistance and support, however access to such services is often hampered by difficulties such as mistrust, language barriers and lack of resources. Individuals requiring specialised professional services or having refugee-specific needs, such as information, legal assistance or psychological support, would as a rule only be able to obtain them from NGOs.

¹ Data provided by UNHCR. Data for 2016 is valid as at end of November.

² Data provided by UNHCR. Data for 2016 is valid as at end of November.

³ aditus foundation and UNHCR, *Nitkellmu? Refugee Integration Perspectives in Malta*, December 2013, available at <http://aditus.org.mt/Publications/nitkellmu.pdf>; and Integra Foundation & UNHCR, *My Diversity: Age, Gender and Diversity Perspectives in the Maltese Refugee Context*, 2015.

⁴ Dr. Julian Caruana for JRS Malta and aditus foundation, *Struggling to Survive: an investigation into the risk of poverty among asylum-seekers in Malta*, October 2016, available at <http://aditus.org.mt/Publications/strugglingtosurvive.pdf>.

One of the main recommendations emerging from the *Nitkellmu?* report urged Government to adopt a national integration strategy:

“A national integration strategy should be established to provide a vision, direction and guidance as regards the process of settlement and integration of beneficiaries of protection in Malta. This would be important not only for defining the role of various government entities, but also as an entry point for shorter and longer term engagement by international organisations, non-government organisations and the refugee community.”

In June 2015 the Ministry for Social Dialogue, Consumer Affairs and Civil Liberties (MSDC) issued a public consultation on a framework document *Mind D Gap: Towards a National Migrant Integration Strategy 2015 – 2020*¹. The document states that “the Maltese Government has pledged to open society, to celebrate diversity, to recognise the social realities around it, to cherish Maltese identity without discrimination, to ensure equality and respect towards minority groups and above all, to safeguard the fundamental human rights and freedoms of all. It is Government’s belief that the current realities faced by migrants from third countries require immediate attention.”

Whilst this document was welcomed as a promising first step towards a comprehensive national integration strategy, Malta has not yet adopted such a strategy, with refugee and migrant integration largely approached on an ad hoc basis by public entities. Consequently, lack of vision, coordination and allocation of resources remain key obstacles faced by refugees as they engage with such entities and attempt to form part of Maltese social, economic and political life.

¹ Details of the consultation, together with the framework document, are available at http://socialdialogue.gov.mt/en/Public_Consultations/MSDC/Pages/Consultations/MDGIntegration.aspx.

Project Integrated

Background

‘Project Integrated’ is a joint initiative of JRS Malta, aditus foundation and Integra Foundation, implemented throughout 2015 and 2016. The project’s first year, which focused exclusively on facilitating the integration of beneficiaries of protection, was largely funded by UNHCR. In 2016 the three partner NGOs were able to sustain the project with the support of UNHCR and to broaden its scope to include also assistance with protection-related issues to migrants falling outside this category, thanks to the support from the Malta Community Chest Fund.

At the time of writing this report, plans for the 2017 phase of ‘Project Integrated’ were close to finalisation.

Aims and Objectives

‘Project Integrated’ is based on the fact that refugees require specialised attention and support in order for them to integrate in Malta. This on account of the realities of refugee experiences in host communities, as well as the challenges presented by a national context that lacks national policy direction in the area of migrant and refugee integration.

The project therefore seeks to address these challenges by adopting a targeted two-fold approach. On the one hand it aims to tackle the individual obstacles faced by refugees as they attempt to secure a dignified life and enjoyment of their fundamental rights. On the other hand, the project also aims to focus on institutional elements that are key to effective refugee integration with a view to rendering them refugee-sensitive in their approach and impact.

At the heart of the project is an eagerness to bring forward refugees’ experiences of integration, and for these to shape our own policies and services as well as our discussions with stakeholders and with broader Maltese society.

Project Activities

In order to achieve the above aims, the partner NGOs adopted an integrated approach in their activities, implementing the following:

1. Provision of in-depth legal and social work **support** to refugees. These individualised services targeted various areas, including: family reunification, social welfare, accommodation, documentation, education, employment, marital and civil status;
2. Provision of integration information and **basic support** such as CV writing and language skills;
3. Organisation of a series of **stakeholder meetings** with mainstream service-providers to identify issues of concern and formulate solutions. Throughout 2015 and 2016 meetings were held on Family Reunification, Documentation and Healthcare;
4. Organisation of **home visits** to refugee homes to elicit refugee integration experiences.

Home Visits

This present report focuses on the findings of the home visits conducted throughout 2015 and 2016. The methodology adopted for the home visits research was informed by an earlier project implemented by aditus foundation, with the support of UNHCR: 'Meet the Other' (MTO, 2011 – 2013)⁶. As part of MTO, over 150 international protection beneficiaries were interviewed, piloting the home visits methodology eventually adopted in 'Project Integrated'.

The findings from the MTO project were published in December 2013 in a report entitled *Nitkellmu? Refugee Integration Perspectives in Malta*⁷. In view of the methodological and substantive similarity between the home visits conducted under both 'Meet the Other' and 'Project Integrated', and with a view to comparative discussion, the findings of the *Nitkellmu?* report are referred to in this report.

Home Visits Methodology

Saving some minor changes to the questionnaire used during our interviews, the methodology adopted in the 'Project Integrated' home visits was based on that adopted in the above-mentioned 'Meet the Other' project.

This report is based on data collected through home visits conducted throughout Project Integrated 2015 and 2016. In this timeframe, representative of UNHCR also conducted a number of home visits. Since UNHCR used the identical questionnaire and also interviewed exclusively persons benefitting from a form of international protection, data collected from UNHCR interviews is also included in this report's analysis. Detailed figures are provided below.

Research Aims and Strategy

As with the MTO project, the home visits component of 'Project Integrated' was intended to fulfil two goals within the project's broader objective of supporting refugee integration. Through the home visits, we set out to:

1. Collect and analyse information about refugee integration experiences, from refugees themselves;
2. Share integration-related information with refugees.

Through the home visits we sought to engage in a qualitative investigation into the daily lives of refugees in Malta. It is important to note that the research was less interested in the formal, institutional and legal approach to integration and more in the refugees' experiences of their life in Malta.

Embracing the informal approach piloted by MTO, the home visits sought to conduct informal conversations with refugees, rather than formal interviews. Interviews were mainly conducted in the refugees' homes, allowing for a safe and community-based outreach wherein the researcher could also observe the home environment and context, thereby also including a participant observation element by way of methodology. Respondents also had the option of choosing an alternative location based on personal preferences. Whilst most interviews were conducted in homes, one interviewee chose to meet at a café as he did not want to speak about personal matters in front of his housemates, and another wanted to avoid disturbing the Maltese family he was living with.

⁶ For more information see <http://aditus.org.mt/our-work/projects/Meet-The-Other/>.

⁷ aditus foundation and UNHCR, *Nitkellmu? Refugee Integration Perspectives in Malta*, December 2013, available at <http://aditus.org.mt/Publications/nitkellmu.pdf>.

In some situations, the interview took place while the respondent carried on with his/her daily routine, including caring for children. This approach allowed the interviewers to reach persons who might not otherwise be accessible for such direct contact, including women with children.

Data collection was done by direct engagement with refugees through the use of a research tool – a questionnaire – composed of thematically gathered guiding questions. Being a semi-structured interview, it was not mandatory for refugees to reply to all queries, and interviewers were invited to adapt questions and flow according to the specific interview context and setting. This informal and open approach also provided space for the research participants to reflect and elaborate on issues considered important to them, rather than on the pre-conceived ideas and priorities of the researchers.

Consent and data protection forms were signed at the start of each interview.

EXPLORED THEMES

PERSONAL INFORMATION	COMMUNITY RELATIONS
EMPLOYMENT	FREE TIME AND SOCIAL ACTIVITIES
ACCOMMODATION	FUTURE ASPIRATIONS AND PLANS

Identification of Participants

The research only includes persons benefitting from either international or national protection. For ethical reasons, persons who were already receiving in-depth social work support from JRS Malta were excluded from the home visits research since it was felt that this might interfere with the social work care-plan designed and implemented by the responsible social worker.

All potential participants were identified from refugees visiting or benefitting from the services offered by the three partner NGOs JRS Malta, aditus foundation and Integra Foundation, as well as by UNHCR Malta. This means that all had existing experiences and relationships as service-users with one or more of the collaborating organisations. All potential candidates were listed in a database and contacted directly, usually by phone, by a representative of one of the organisations or an interpreter where required. During this contact, candidates were given information about Project Integrated and about the home visits research. They were then invited to participate and – where a positive response was elicited – appointments for the home visits were set. Some refugees declined to participate, whilst some refugees were not contactable.

The Interviewers

The interviews were always carried out by two persons, each representing one of the three partner NGOs. For each interview a Lead and a Supporting Organisation was appointed: the representative of the Lead conducted the interview whilst the representative of the Supporting took notes and recorded the data. Where required, an interpreter was also present.

All interviewers, and all interpreters, received relevant training prior to the home visits.

Data Collection and Analysis

During the interview, all data was manually recorded. It was then inputted into a database that was accessible by the research team. In order to respect data protection principles, at project termination (i.e. 31 December 2016) access to this data will be strictly restricted.

Research Challenges and Limitations

We have acknowledged the following research limitations:

- Research participants were identified from amongst refugees already known to the partner NGOs or UNHCR. The voices of other refugees, potentially persons who are suffering from increased social exclusion or who are unable to visit the partner NGOs or UNHCR, are missing from this research;
- The logistics required to organise a visit to a refugee home by two and at times three persons (where an interpreter was required) were time-consuming and resource-intensive. This was exacerbated in situations where the respondent's working hours were unpredictable or irregular, and where the only available times were outside working hours of the NGO interviewers;
- Many respondents expressed sentiments of research fatigue and were less willing to participate in the interview;
- The respondents are not representative of the entire refugee population in Malta, and no attempts were made for this to be so. Data ought to be interpreted in a qualitative manner, although the relevance of trends and patterns should not be ignored;
- The research did not include refugees receiving in-depth social work support, therefore excluding particularly vulnerable persons. As such, their lived realities and needs are not reflected in this report.

Home Visits Sample 2015-2016

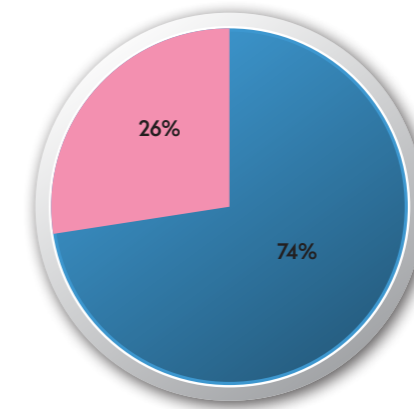
The partner NGOs carried out 43 home visits throughout 2015 and 2016, with UNHCR carrying out 39⁸. A total of 82 homes were visited, covering 87 refugees.

Although non-probability sampling was utilised to recruit research participants, attempts were made to secure a representation of refugee women, various nationalities and forms of protection. As mentioned above, the figures are in no way representative of the overall refugee population.

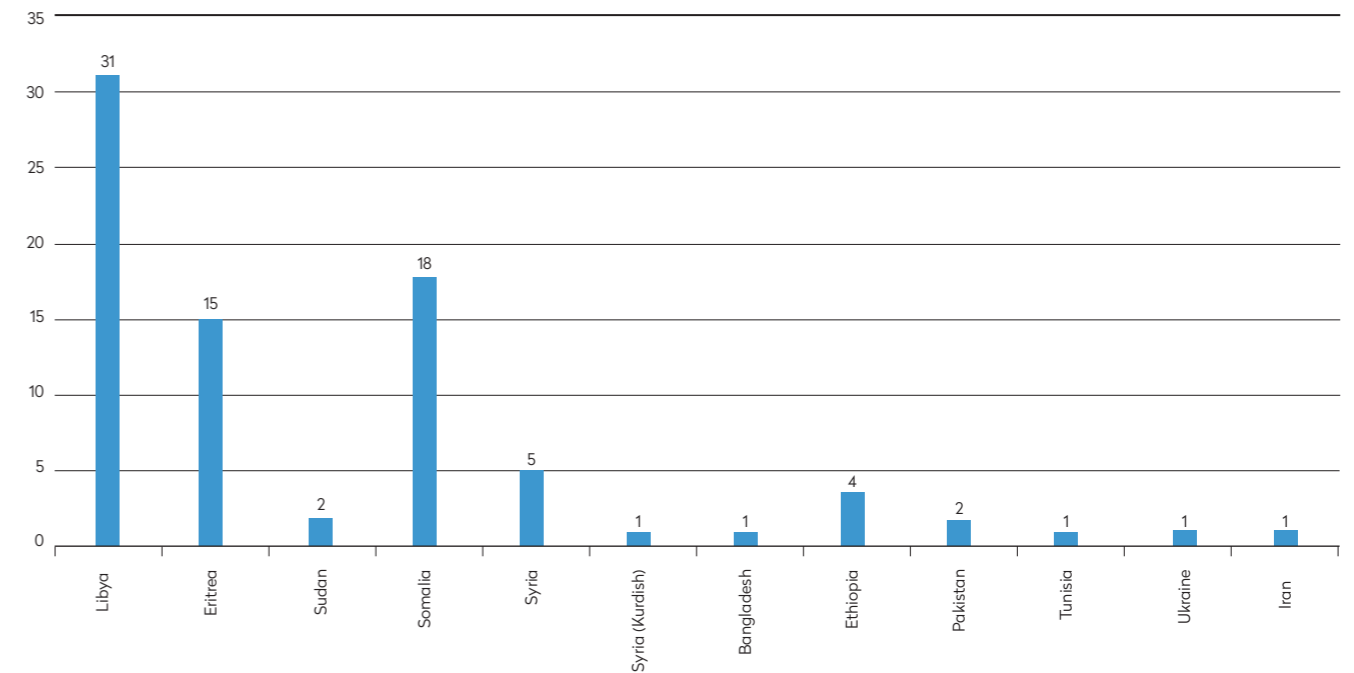
⁸ The 43 home visits covered 45 persons, since two couples were also interviewed. UNHCR's 39 interviews covered 42 persons, since they interviewed three couples. For data analysis the couples are treated as one respondent, since the couple would have been interviewed together.

GENDER

Male
Female

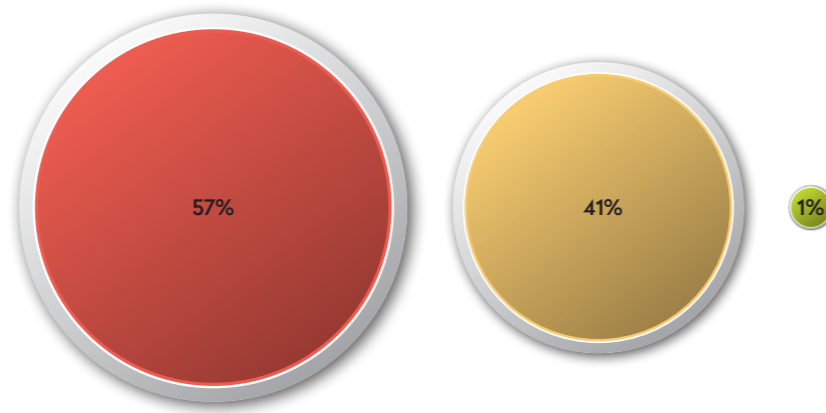


COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN



STATUS

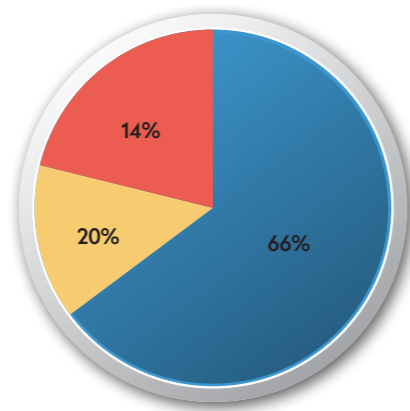
- Subsidiary ProtectionFemale
- Refugee Status
- Temporary Humanitarian Protection



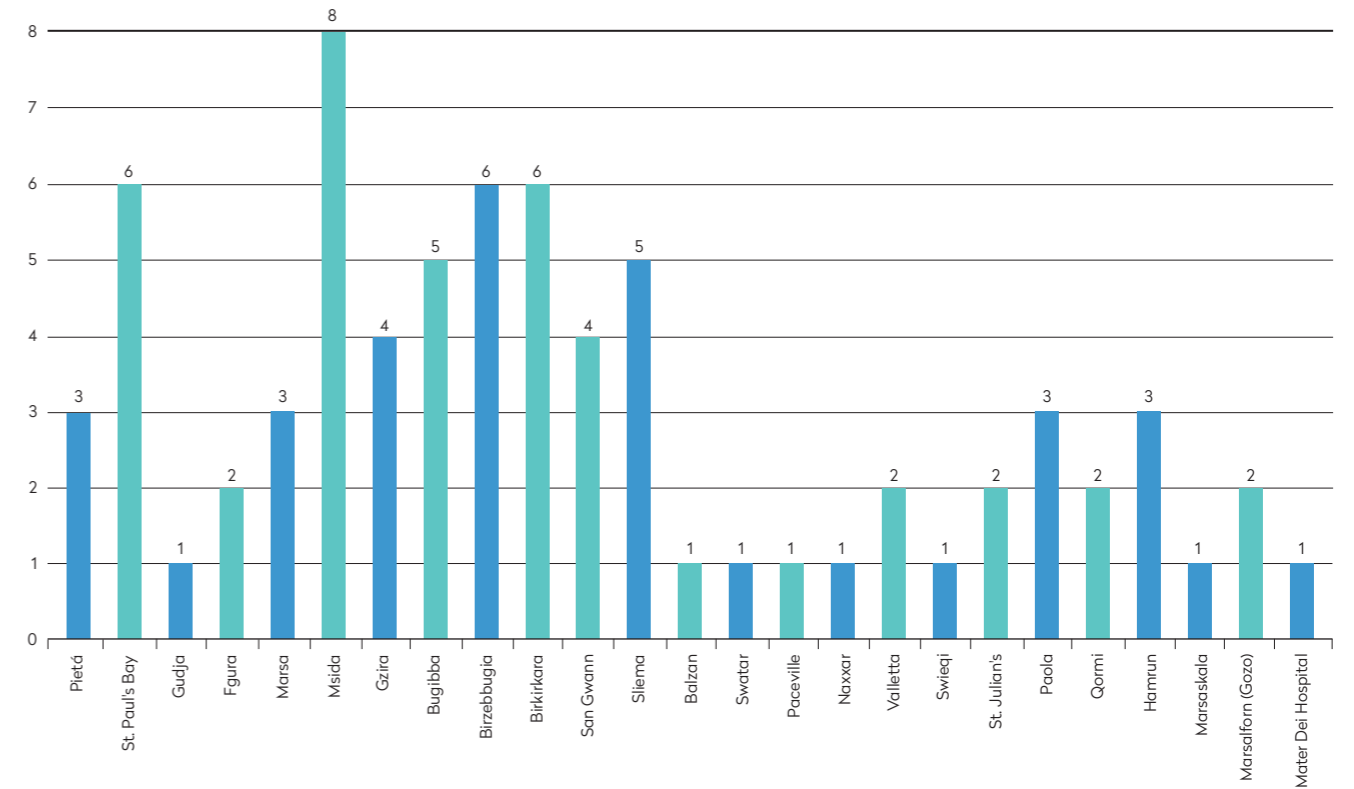
We also sought to identify refugees living in Malta for various lengths of time, in order to explore if and how integration or integration potential changes over time. Their address (locality) was also registered.

YEARS IN MALTA

- 1-3
- 4-5
- 6+



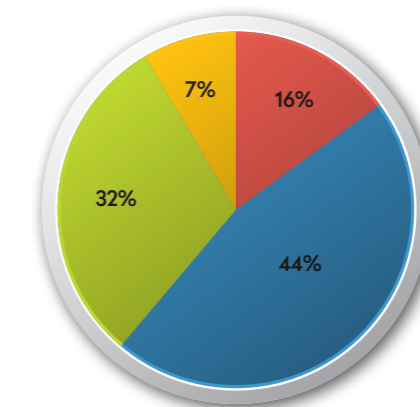
LOCALITIES



It was also useful to note the number of languages spoken by the respondents. Over 50% of respondents confirmed being able to communicate in either English or Maltese, together with their mother tongue.

LANGUAGES SPOKEN/UNDERSTOOD (including mother tongue)

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4+





Observations and Findings

The thematic headings below broadly reflect the approach adopted in our interviews. Each section provides a summary of the data gathered for each thematic heading, together with relevant comments by way of analysis.

Community Relations and Social Activities

Friends and co-ethnic communities

The data reveals that friends are of key importance in accessing useful information. The majority of those surveyed, particularly within the Eritrean and Somali communities, reported approaching members of co-ethnic communities to access employment opportunities, vocational training, accommodation, and/or for help with the English language. For example, 56% of respondents told us they relied on friends to secure their past or present jobs.

“One friend talk to her boss and after the boss said want one person and my friend talk to me and I then start to work.”

“When I was in the Open Centre I met a lot of Somali women, if I decided to go out from the Open Centre and find my own place, it was just because I already knew about an available room from a Somali guy who was leaving to go to America”

A number of participants reported that for new arrivals, friendship networks were particularly important as a first point of contact for people who were not familiar with the locality, procedures, entities and the general know-how. However, it was also noted by some participants that this closeness to and – at times – reliance on co-ethnic communities could potentially hamper integration in Maltese society.

Also, some participants reported an unwillingness to engage with their co-ethnic community due to a lack of trust, a desire for privacy or internal community divisions. We note that these latter observations were largely made by Libyan participants. Interestingly, the findings also suggest that persons who are generally more able to communicate and interact with Maltese persons, due to linguistic, cultural or other factors, are more readily able to decide to detach themselves from their communities. In our on-going activities we also note that some communities – particularly the Libyan refugee community – tend to be more internally fractured than others, possibly leading to a readiness, or need, of persons to detach. Whilst we acknowledge that further research is required explore these issues in more depth, the results point to some interesting observations.

“I try to avoid problems with some of the Libyans who are from a different tribe. I do not want to fight.”

“When we used to go to the park the children used to fight with other Libyans since they were bullied and insulted that they come from the Gaddafi regime.”

First of all, the findings highlight the heterogeneity within different ethnic communities, a 'one size fits all' approach to the refugee population as a whole, and indeed different ethnic groups, fails to capture the diverse realities and needs of any 'group'. With regard to the provision of information, the results also suggest the need for a multifaceted approach that may include, but certainly not be limited to, working directly with ethnic communities as co-producers, but also finding alternatives methodologies adopting different tools.

This insight also raises our concerns in relation to those persons whose dependence on their communities might be prejudicial to their personal physical or psychological safety.

Activities and Free Time - general

When asked for lists or examples of activities engaged in during free time, respondents indicated weekend walks, meeting friends at Church or at the Mosque, visiting eachothers' home and going out for a coffee and to chat. Female participants without children reported that they spend most of their time at home, going out only to purchase food items. It is interesting to note that a small – yet significant – number of respondents mentioned the village festa as the main local event they attend regularly.

Notably, forming friendship networks was seen as playing a vital role in making people happy and improving their overall personal wellbeing. Respondents also told us that, together with making them feel happy, friends and friendship networks also alleviated boredom and depression, and made them feel hopeful about their future lives in Malta.

Tying in with the above comments made in relation to the central role played by community relations, in terms of increasing integration potential by providing valuable – at times unique – sources of information and 'access' (employment, education, procedures, etc.), comments made under this heading emphasise the idea that the establishment of stable and sustainable refugee communities supports refugee integration through their quasi-institutional role and by providing a feeling of belonging, care and normalcy. This observation is acutely underlined through comments provided by some respondents in relation to the on-going resettlement process:

"I lost my friends, they left to America, I am alone, the only girl in this house, I don't have any jobs, I don't speak English so well but I can understand. I feel alone here, I can't go out, my mind is burning, I cannot sleep at night, I think about my children in Ethiopia, I cry, I cry always."

It seems that the resettlement process appears to be disrupting, at least at some level, the establishment of these stable co-ethnic communities, potentially contributing to isolation of some refugees. This finding also highlights the need to develop relationships beyond the immediate friend and/or ethnic community. Efforts to 'bridge' social capital to other ethnic groups – including the 'Maltese' – not only multiply access to resources, but also strengthen support mechanisms and enhance broader community relations.

Respondents noted that in the absence of daily activities, they find themselves trapped in long periods of unstructured time experiencing a profound sense of boredom, futility and loss of self-confidence.

We were also interested to note how several respondents spoke extremely positively of the indirect personal benefits gained from participating in education and employment activities. Attending English and other classes first and foremost develops specific skills, but also provides opportunities for developing friendships and networks, the latter representing valuable information and access channels as well as enhancing self-esteem, sense of well being and happiness.

Activities and Free Time – women with children

Together with the above comments, we are keen to make additional specific observations regarding the situation of refugee women⁹.

Refugee women reported lack of childcare opportunities and of support to pay childcare costs as barriers to them attending training courses and employment.

"I have to say that is very difficult for me because I have no time and no one to care for my children. I think this would be a very useful thing for Somali people to do but at this time we are not. Perhaps in the future."

Some respondents – benefitting from refugee status – who wanted to study or work said they were unaware of their entitlements to childcare services, and that they had no way of obtaining information on this.

In cases where respondents were living with their spouses or partners, the childcare responsibility rested with the women, and there did not seem to be much sharing of tasks in these arrangements. This was reported also in situations where the men were not working. Difficulties presented by limited access to childcare were exacerbated for single mothers and respondents within this category spoke of the difficulties they had experienced in finding the support they needed in order to access education and employment. For many women the only option was to rely on informal childcare arrangements, for example through family members or friends.

Difficulties securing childcare services, and obtaining information thereon, are barriers to refugee women accessing education and employment. Linking this observation to those made above about how education and employment activities also contribute to integration by developing relationships, networks and feelings of wellbeing, further underlines the gendered process of exclusion, more specifically, the risk of personal and social isolation faced by refugee women.

Maltese Community and Local Events

Most respondents told us that they did not have any Maltese friends, or that if they did have any these were kindled through their workplace. Some refugees also reported positive relationships with Maltese landlords or neighbours, commenting that these often provide them with assistance, gifts for their children, food, and sometimes also conversation. Furthermore, Libyan and Syrian refugees underlined their feelings of being 'similar' to Maltese people, finding them to be polite and kind. They also noted feeling comfortable and enjoying a sense of community in the presence of Maltese people.

The majority of the respondents said they had never actively participated in community events that were not organized by their co-ethnic communities. Many respondents associated local events with spending money, expressing a preference to not attending or participating. Others mentioned that they were not aware of how to access information on local events. Over and above issues related to basic survival, the findings appear to demonstrate how a lack of financial resources also contributes to social exclusion and the fragmentation of community relations. This isolation, further reinforced by a lack of information would appear to reflect a worrying trend towards social disintegration.

Aside from employment-related activities, respondents told us that the main activity during which they interact with Maltese people is shopping for groceries. Specifically, many interviewees mentioned shopping at LIDL supermarkets and buying fruits and vegetables from small grocery shops. This finding not only draws attention to the (albeit mundane) rituals shared across the different ethnic groups living in Malta, but may perhaps offer some imaginative opportunities to enhance integration opportunities. The supermarket may offer an interesting space to explore commonalities and shared experiences.

⁹ For more on the gendered approach and relevant findings, see Integra Foundation & UNHCR, *My Diversity: Age, Gender and Diversity Perspectives in the Maltese Refugee Context*, 2015.

Racism and Discrimination

A portion of our interview with refugees was dedicated to experiences of racism, hate speech, hate crimes and discrimination. Beyond attempting to understand the extent of these experiences, our questions were keen to elicit the respondents' reactions to them in terms of actions taken, personal impact and contextualization.

On the basis of the responses received, it can be said that refugees regularly experience racism, and in various locations. Respondents mentioned facing discrimination on buses, in the street, from private and public service providers and in relation to employment.

Respondents who had experienced discrimination and/or racism commented on their understanding of their positioning within Maltese society. They perceived themselves as having a low status in society, with this low status making them vulnerable to stigmatization. The discrimination and/or racism experiences left them feeling incompetent and inadequate, with a heightened sense of insecurity and anxiety. This comment underlines these emotions, also hinting at a sense of deprivation and loss of control over one's past, present and future:

“There are always problems with immigrants, we always annoy local population, and we are their problem. Immigrants are discriminated against and used only in dirty jobs. Only as cleaners, to collect rubbish... Immigrants are paid worse but we accept that because in our homeland we earn even less.”

“At the bank, for example, there are two lines - one for foreigners and one for Maltese.”

“Once someone threw a bottle at me from his car while I was going back home from the work, I managed to avoid it...but then it happened to my friend as well, he was badly wounded. I decided to not go out after 7pm, never. I am scared.”

One respondent admitted to denying his refugee status, preferring to introduce himself as a tourist. This, combined with references to 'immigrants' above, suggests that notions of 'race' intersect with broader categories of identity such as social class and legal status, influencing not only societal perceptions, but also treatment. One may also reflect on how such perceptions of 'race', wherein 'black' is often also synonymous with 'immigrant', mediates access to resources, including, for example, employment, housing, and public transport

Again, the responses from female respondents provided further insight into the particular challenges faced by refugee women. Women wearing headscarves reported challenges securing employment:

“I have been fired many times because of my headscarf. I lost my job as a cleaner because of my code of dressing.”

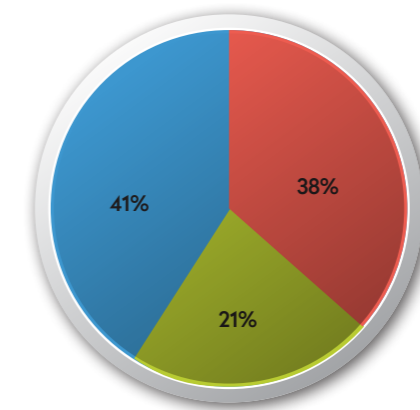
“Once I was in Valletta walking and I was wearing the hijab. Some white guys came to me and spit at me.”

No victims of discrimination or racism commented on having approached official entities to seek redress or support.

Interestingly, when asked on impressions about relations between refugees and Maltese people, respondents were almost equally divided, tending towards a more positive approach.

HOW DO YOU VIEW RELATIONS BETWEEN REFUGEES AND MALTESE?

Legend for the pie chart:
■ Generally positive (Red)
■ Mixed (Green)
■ Generally negative (Blue)



“Maltese are good people.”

“Maltese people don't like immigrants. I hear my friends say this, and it is also my experience.”

“It depends on the individual – many Maltese are nice and some are not. When they take the time with you then the relationship is very good.”

What clearly emerges from the totality of these responses, including the additional comments provided by respondents, is the centrality of individual relations and experiences over general impressions and perceptions.

There appears to be a duality of experiences dominating refugee life. On the one hand, the impersonal environment is generally perceived to be unwelcoming and negative. This also includes elements of this impersonal sphere that are directly affected by persons either with whom no personal relation is established – such as bus drivers, commuters and passers-by – or with whom there exists an imbalanced power relation – such as employers and landlords. On the other hand, the personal environment is often perceived to be friendly, supporting and understanding. This is generally seen in comments made about colleagues, local grocers, and neighbours.

Religion

Most of the interviewees commented positively that they enjoy religious freedom and the ability to practice their religion in Malta. For many, religion represents an instrument for social cohesion having a role in the integration process: it provides a feeling of home, a sense of belonging, and transmits a sense of security and mutual support.

On the other hand, for some respondents religion and religious activities are part of their private sphere of life, for various reasons: no time to go to the Mosque or to Church; a wish to steer clear of a ghetto-like situation; a willingness to be perceived as beyond a member of an ethnic community. The latter point was explained by respondents as relating to a desire to be perceived as an individual, instead of as a 'refugee' or a 'migrant'. It is also a reminder that ethnic and religious communities at times differ, where persons from the same ethnic community might adhere to different religions, and different ethnicities might form part of the same religious community.

Our interviews also revealed a couple of cases of refugees who faced religious discrimination or intimidation at work:

"I pray quickly during the stops of the garbage truck when I am working. Or I pray in secret during the lunchtime, far from my colleagues, who are always pissed off because of my religion. Once the boss called me in his office because of this. I could lose my job."

The comment also indicates the absence of guidance for employers managing a multicultural workplace, and faced with increasingly varied demands relating to religious holidays, practices, uniforms and dress codes.

"At school my son had a problem with bullying since he is Muslim. He said that they teased him that he is ISIS. The school dealt with this problem and now it is good."

Healthcare

The vast majority of interviewees confirmed that they were able to access public health services without any significant problems.

"When I am sick I got to Floriana Health Centre. I always get a good service."

"I go to Floriana Health Centre. My wife is receiving good health care for her pregnancy."

In relation to the women we interviewed, most had given birth at least once while in Malta. They reported positive experiences, commenting on very good support provided by health professionals.

Yet together with an overall positive assessment of access to and quality of healthcare services, respondents expressed

concern in relation to situations involving mental health problems. Refugees suffering from conditions such as depression, anxiety or trauma claimed to have encountered difficulties securing specialized support for their situations. They reported that these difficulties were faced from the moment of their arrival in Malta.

Further gaps were noted in relation to information activities on health education, particularly in relation to sexual and reproductive health.

Mobility

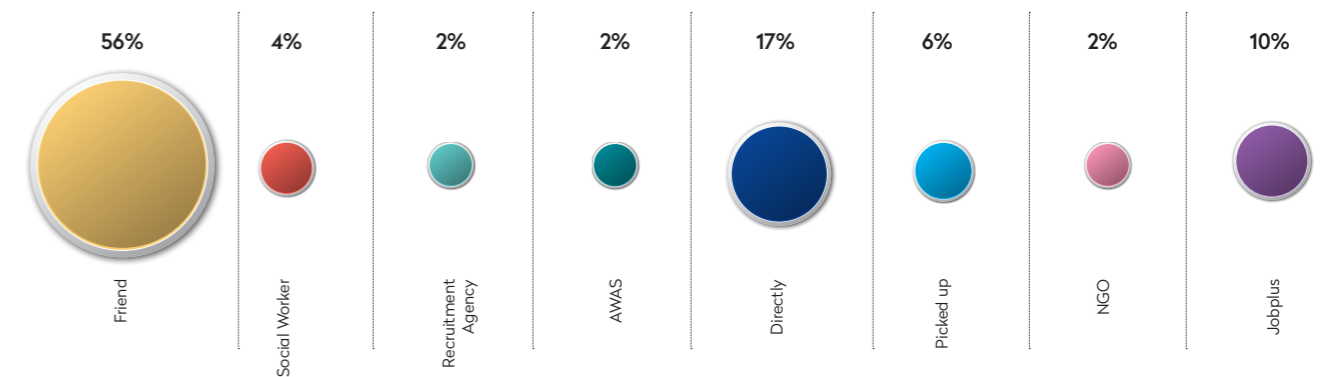
Most interviewees confirmed that they rely on use of public transport to make their way around Malta, with very few refugees renting or owning a car.

Many commented that this reliance on the public transport system impeded their autonomy and independence, especially in relation to seeking and securing employment. Some refugees also referred to cases of discrimination or exclusion experienced on buses. For example, one respondent mentioned that other people on the bus preferred to stand rather than sit next to him. Another interviewee said she felt she was invisible when people just walked around her as she stood in the middle of the bus aisle with her pushchair, with nobody making space for her to place her pushchair out of the way.

Employment

A major finding under this sub-heading is directly linked to comments made above in relation to the central role played by the co-ethnic community in the individual's integration progress. The below figures indicate how, of the respondents who were employed at the time of the interview, 56% found their jobs through referrals or support from friends. The second highest percentage (8%) relates to individuals directly approaching potential employers on their own initiative, closely followed by refugees receiving support from Jobsplus¹⁰ (5%).

HOW DID YOU FIND YOUR JOB?



These figures reinforce the observations made above regarding the dependence of refugees on their communities.

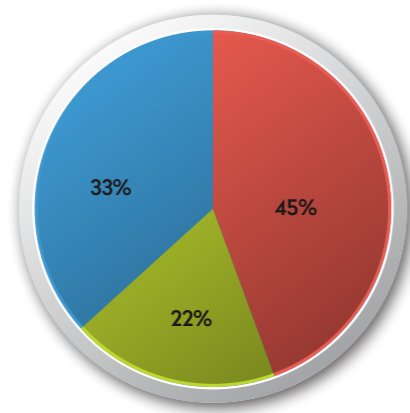
¹⁰ Jobsplus is a public corporation tasked with providing a public employment service and training persons to improve their skills to find employment. For more information visit <https://jobsplus.gov.mt/>.

Overall, respondents presented mixed comments about their working environments. Whilst 33% of working respondents commented negatively on their working conditions, 45% spoke positively of their work and relations with their employers. The negative responses focused their comments on excessively long hours, impossibility of benefitting from sick or injury leave, verbal abuse by colleagues and being underpaid (or not paid) for work done.

“Not good. The work is not what I want to do and people are often rude and order me around.”

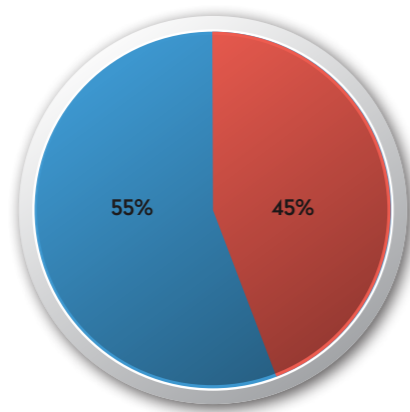
WHAT IS THE WORKING ENVIRONMENT LIKE?

Positive
Negative
Mixed/Neutral



ARE YOU SATISFIED WITH YOUR PAST/PRESENT JOB?

Yes
No



“I would like to be a mechanic. This is what I used to do in Eritrea.”¹¹

“I like my job, but I would like to further my education and more training opportunities.”

With regard to overall job satisfaction, respondents were not too distantly divided. 45% expressed positive emotions, whilst 55% negative ones. Those respondents that provided further comments emphasised their wish to be regularly employed (i.e. legal), to be able to work additional hours and to receive further training.

WHAT IS THE WORKING ENVIRONMENT LIKE?

ANY	INTERPRETER
BANK CLERK	IT
BUS DRIVER	MACHINE OPERATOR
CHILDCARER	MECHANIC
CIVIL ENGINEER	NGO WORKER
COOK	NURSE
DENTIST/DOCTOR	PHARMACEUTICAL INDUSTRY
DRIVER	RADIOLOGIST
ELECTRICIAN	OFFICE WORK
FASHION BUSINESS	SECURITY GUARD
HAIR DRESSER	SHOP OWNER
HOTEL RECEPTIONIST	SINGER/MUSICIAN
HUMAN RIGHTS LAWYER	SOCIAL WORKER

Table 12 is a straightforward reminder that refugees share personal and professional aspirations to the same extent as host communities. Whilst we appreciate that this might be an obvious statement, we nonetheless feel it is pertinent to stress that policy-making should not rely on acquired assumptions, in this case that refugees are a useful workforce to fill national labour shortages. Instead, policy-making ought to be truly consultative in the way ideas are formulated, shaped, moulded, adopted and finally implemented. The data in Table 12 represents aspirations of a better future, goals that have the potential to transform refugees into more active, involved, committed and responsible members of Maltese society.

In terms of engagement with relevant institutions, the vast majority of respondents confirmed to have visited Jobsplus offices. This is not surprising since, together with its job-seeking and training role, Jobsplus issues refugees with work permits.

¹¹ The respondent was working as a part-time dishwasher at the time of the interview.

Accommodation

The move from an Open Centre to a community-based form of accommodation is one of the first steps towards establishing closer ties with the Maltese community. This not only in terms of the physical move itself, from a refugee-oriented accommodation modality to a more community-based one, but also since it requires a level of engagement with landlords, property agents, neighbours and, in some cases, co-tenants. It indicates willingness, although not necessarily ability, to work towards financial and social independence.

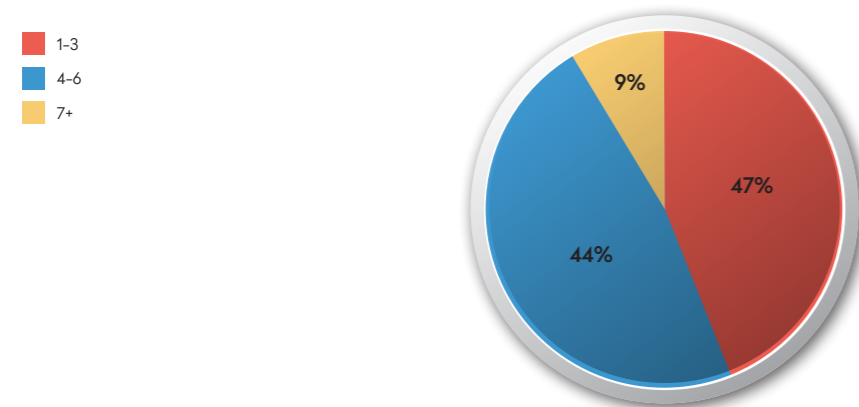
Private accommodation also carries with it the need to have access to regular, stable and sustainable financial resources to cover rent and other living expenses. The data from the interviews reveals that the move to private accommodation is not always a straightforward one.

The vast majority of respondents rent from Maltese persons. One refugee owns his own apartment, whilst two others rent (or sub-rent, it is not clear) from other refugees or migrants. Two-thirds of respondents had experienced up to two accommodation moves (including the departure from an Open Centre), whilst the remaining third had experienced between three to five moves. One person had moved home six times. Coupled with data from Table 5 above, showing the duration of stay of respondents, it can be said that the population is quite mobile in terms of accommodation modalities.

Whilst the vast majority of respondents lived in apartments, mention was also made of hotels – particularly following return from another EU Member State, converted garages and being homeless for some time.

There is a clear trend amongst refugees to share living spaces.

HOUSEHOLD PERSONS



We do not know the details of the living arrangements of all respondents, especially in terms of responsibility for paying rent, bills and other living expenses. Yet it is clear that sharing a living space – generally an apartment – with up to six persons can place a heavy strain on co-tenants. Some respondents expressed worry at those times when their cotenants are unable to contribute, and one person foots the entire bill, whilst a single mother mentioned security fears related to having too many men living with her and her son. Furthermore, as also highlighted in the *Struggling to Survive* research, the quality of living spaces available to refugees tends to be inferior, exacerbated by numerous persons sharing it.

Echoing findings from the *Struggling to Survive* research, most respondents told us they face serious difficulties making ends meet. The main challenges mentioned include:

- social welfare benefits that are insufficient to cover rent, bills, food and other living expenses;
- all parents agreed on the added financial difficulties they face in relation to their children, mentioning food and also clothing and school expenses;
- unpredictable or additional expenses, such as those related to health;
- increasing rent prices, forcing persons to change apartment.

“Most importantly is to pay rent. After that of course food. But it is not easy.”

“We get around €560 per month from social security. The rent is €550 a month without water and electricity. That’s why the kids get a shower only once a week.”

A small number of respondents confirmed having received financial support from friends (locally or overseas) or from NGOs.

Five respondents had approached the Housing Authority before our interview, three of whom in order to apply for alternative housing¹². The vast majority of respondents told us that they had not heard of the Housing Authority before the interview.

Future and Aspirations

“Dreams can be big. But because of my situation I have to think small.”

In the short term, most refugees told us that their goals are to meet urgent and proximate needs such as getting a job, securing a better job, making friends, finding out about the area they live in and learning English.

Longer-term aspirations appeared to be more diverse and less focused on the immediate and functional aspects of integration. For many respondents, the priority for their future is to be “happy and safe”, for their families to be secure and for their children to be able to have the same opportunities as Maltese people. On a personal level, younger respondents talked about the importance of getting into educational programmes.

A small number of interviewees said they wanted to be lawyers and social workers in order to help other refugees. Additionally, a considerable number of respondents talked about future aspirations in terms of moving to a different country, including the United States of America.

Many respondents underlined the fact that integrating in Malta should be based on principles of choice and freedom, as perceived key elements of an approach that promotes equality and long-term solutions.

“You are not a hero cause you want to be but because you have to be.”

“Thank goodness I came to Malta, cause it is over.”

“I would like to get citizenship in Malta. I want to live here, but if I can’t then I want to live in another country.”

¹² The Housing Authority is the public entity responsible for social housing. In terms of its Mission Statement “the Authority intends to take a holistic approach through the provision of various schemes and initiatives targeting those who are most in need of its assistance.” Only recognised refugees are entitled to apply for alternative housing as well as for a rent subsidy.



Conclusion and Recommendations

A number of general observations may be made on the basis of the data and comments made above under the thematic subheadings. Further below, recommendations made by the partner NGOs are presented.

There seems to be an overall sense of isolation in the way refugees lead their lives in Malta, this being the cumulative result of a number of factors. Financial difficulties created by various elements – the seasonal nature of available jobs, personal and contextual limitations to accessing the labour market, relatively low income levels, insufficiency of social welfare benefits and soaring rent and living expenses – require refugees to prioritise gainful employment over other activities or engagements. At times this prioritisation is also to the exclusion of education and training activities, thereby limiting potential for personal growth and job mobility/improvement.

In many cases, social activities – highlighted by respondents as central to their overall wellbeing – are the first to suffer. Beyond bilateral small-scale activities (e.g. walks, coffees, conversations) and inter-community meetings (mainly at a place of worship), interaction with mainstream social activities remains extremely limited. Whilst it is possible to link this to financial limitations, or to some degree to the perception of the need to have financial means to attend such activities, respondents also revealed a lack of awareness as to the what, where, when and who of social activities in Malta. Interestingly, none of the respondents commented on Local Councils or any other local entity in terms of organising or promoting social or other activities within localities.

“I know the Local Council since it is there that you pay your parking fines.”

Yet despite this feeling of isolation, we are keen to underline those responses that referred to the village festa as the local event drawing them out of their homes, hinting at a sense of proximity with the extremely local community, or at least to a curiosity towards such a feeling.

This isolation is also evidenced in the limited interaction happening between refugees and Maltese people. Outside the scope of the workplace, for which respondents provided mixed comments, interaction with Maltese people seems to be limited to that which is necessary or immediate – landlords, shop-keepers, neighbours. On the one hand, it is straightforward to explain the absence of social networks and circles by relying on the nature of refugee movements.

On the other hand, some elements from the research raise valid questions as to why this refugee-specific reality is almost a constant: languages spoken by most respondents include either English or Maltese (with around 40% of respondents speaking three or more languages), 34% of respondents have been living in Malta for four or more years and around 40% commented positively on relations between refugees and Maltese persons. Clearly, reliance on refugee flight patterns does not sufficiently explain this scenario.

We also noted a sense of isolation from public institutions, beyond those refugees are required to engage with, such as Jobsplus in order to procure a work permit. As mentioned above, Local Councils did not feature in any of the interviews, whilst important entities relevant to refugee integration such as the Agency for the Welfare of Asylum-Seekers (AWAS)¹³, Aġenzija APPOĠĠ¹⁴, and the Housing Authority only obtained minor references. It is possible that this low level of engagement is a result of limited individual need to benefit from services offered by these public entities, yet in view of the social and personal difficulties refugees are known to experience¹⁵, the entities' limited presence may be questioned.

¹³ AWAS is the public entity responsible for implementing national legislation and policy relating to refugee welfare. In terms of Regulation 6(2) of Subsidiary Legislation 217.11 (Agency for the Welfare of Asylum-Seekers Regulations, July 2009), the Agency shall, amongst others, “provide particular services to categories of persons identified as vulnerable...provide information programme to its clients in the areas of employment, housing, education, health and welfare services...act as facilitator with all public entities responsible for providing services to ensure that national obligations to refugees and asylum-seekers are accessible...”, available at <http://www.justiceservices.gov.mt/DownloadDocument.aspx?app=lom&itemid=9566&l=1>.

¹⁴ Aġenzija APPOĠĠ is the “National Agency for children, families and the community, safeguards and promotes the wellbeing of these persons through the development and provision of psycho-social welfare services.” For further information see <http://fsws.gov.mt/en/appogg/Pages/welcome-appogg.aspx>.

¹⁵ Some references are made in this report, yet much more in-depth evidence is available in the *Struggling to Survive* research.

Confirming findings in the *Struggling to Survive* research, the above comments are more acute in relation to refugee women. The particular experiences of refugee women, largely shaped by cultural elements, confirm even deeper feelings of isolation, detachment, and helplessness. These experiences and feelings are more intense in situations involving children, where refugee women carry the primary – and often exclusive – duty of care. Coupled with institutional challenges in securing childcare services, refugee mothers seem unable to engage in any activity other than caring for their children, particularly education and employment.

The above comments ought to be contextualised within the research finding that the vast majority of respondents did not consider leaving Malta to search for a better place for themselves and their families. Whilst some respondents admitted to having attempted to settle in other EU Member States⁶, and others wished to be resettled to the US, the majority replied to queries about their futures in terms of opportunities they would like to see made available to them and to their families. (e.g. to work more, to study, to change job, to learn about Malta).

Most gathered data seems to confirm that respondents are in fact not dedicating their resources and energies to moving on, but rather to staying and building safe and stable homes. The informal networks and structures created within the various communities – although potentially limiting and unsafe for some individuals – generally serve the purpose of providing tools necessary to progress from day to day by finding a job, learning English or Maltese, being referred to a particular office or entity for assistance, etc.

Whilst it is not excluded that these feelings and reactions are nothing more than products of the need to survive, it is nonetheless acknowledged that refugees are in fact attempting to make Malta home – albeit in isolation.

Recommendations

On the basis of the data and assessments presented in this report, JRS Malta, aditus foundation and Integra Foundation are presenting the following Recommendations. We underline our willingness to cooperate with the relevant authorities to further discuss and – where relevant – assist in their implementation. We also note that many Recommendations are dependent on Recommendation 1, yet also that others may be implemented within a much shorter time frame:

1. The Ministry for Social Dialogue, Consumer Affairs and Civil Liberties should follow-up the commitment it expressed in the 2015 framework document, and adopted with urgency an inclusive national integration strategy that takes into account the specific realities faced by refugees.
2. Integration courses should be offered to all refugees. These should be delivered in a language and format that is understood by refugees, and as soon as possible after protection is confirmed by the Office of the Refugee Commissioner. As a minimum, these courses should cover:
 - a. Statuses and related rights and obligations;
 - b. Administrative procedures for basic services such as employment, housing, social welfare benefits, documentation, etc.;
 - c. Possibility of resettlement;
 - d. Details of public and private entities offering services to refugees;
 - e. Maltese history, geography and society.
3. In designing information-delivery sessions – including integration and other relevant courses – the authorities are invited to be imaginative in the manner information is delivered, including through exploring possibilities of working hand in hand with refugee communities.

⁶ To be returned to Malta in terms of EU legislation.

4. Courses in English and/or Maltese should be made effectively accessible to all, from as early as possible following their arrival. This entails reviewing fee/exemption structures and course hours.
5. A Refugee Consultative Council should be established within the Ministry for Social Dialogue, Consumer Affairs and Civil Liberties, emulating the LGBTIQ Consultative Council model, in order to develop a national action plan, proposed amendments to legal provisions and address relevant policy areas.
6. Local Councils and other local entities (e.g. AĊĊESS, LEAP, etc.) should be encouraged to play a more active role in reaching out to refugee members of their communities, in order to promote integration at its more direct and community level. The gendered aspects of social isolation require special attention: Local Councils can take on a more central role in reaching out to female refugees (see also below).
7. A gendered approach towards refugee integration should ensure that the particular context of refugee women is acknowledged and given due attention. In particular, regard should be given to increasing employment potential of refugee women by granting access to childcare services (irrespective of whether persons are asylum-seekers, recognised refugees, beneficiaries of subsidiary protection or beneficiaries of national protection), extending childcare hours and exploring possibilities of increasing available spaces in particular localities.
8. Efforts at combating racism, discrimination and hate speech should be stepped up in order to address attacks against refugees and help foster in this population the sense of security necessary for effective integration. Concerted efforts need to be made to encourage reporting of racist acts, wherein victims are provided with the necessary support and protection.



