

NATIONAL OBSERVATORY FOR LIVING WITH DIGNITY

EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING AND WELLBEING IN MALTA AND BEYOND

A STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

National Observatory for Living with Dignity

**Early School Leaving and Wellbeing in Malta and Beyond
A Statistical Analysis**

The President's Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society
SAN ANTON PALACE
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This report was prepared by the National Observatory for Living with Dignity, as part of the President's Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society.

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Foreword from Her Excellency, the President of Malta



The phenomenon of early school leaving is inherently linked with the wellbeing of any society. It has been directly associated with social exclusion, poverty, unemployment, and a number of other negative consequences. It is therefore a significant factor in the work we must undertake to determine wellbeing.

Malta is no exception. Early school leaving remains an issue and represents a serious challenge to society at large. If not addressed appropriately, this situation will undoubtedly have significant repercussions on the future of our children and future generations.

It is important to acknowledge that progress has been made over the past years. Malta now has one of the fastest declining rates of early school leavers in the European Union. This positive pace has to be maintained, and to do this we need to understand the complex reasons why early school leaving remains a formidable challenge for policy makers.

Policies need to address a wide range of reasons why education remains persistently sidelined. Ranging from personal or family reasons to precarious socioeconomic situations these factors must be examined and understood, if we are to adopt policies that can mitigate their damaging impact. Policies must reflect evidence-based, comprehensive, cross-sectoral methodologies, and need to involve stakeholders from the wide ranging policy spectrum that impacts early school leavers and their wellbeing.

This study provides relevant evidence to help us understand the reasons behind early school leaving. It also aims to raise awareness about the consequences of this reality and the impact early school leaving has on wellbeing. My Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society will continue to support initiatives that work towards identifying, nurturing, and promoting wellbeing. It is to be hoped that the findings of this report shall be translated into better policies that benefit all of society, including those who are under-represented, minorities, and marginalised groups.

In this respect, I hope that these important insights are taken into consideration by politicians and policy makers, who have a mandate to secure the educational achievements and wellbeing of children and young people. It is important to secure the best future prospects of each and every one of them, with concurrent benefits for economic growth and social cohesion. Ultimately, it is especially important in breaking the cycles of depravation, poverty, and social exclusion to which early school leaving can so often lead.

Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca
President of Malta

A Message from the Director General



The President's Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society has a clear vision to promote wellbeing. We recognise human relationships as fundamental if meaningful wellbeing is to be nurtured. Within our ethos, the Foundation expresses its commitment to "offer its contribution for the wellbeing of society by creating the space to listen, explore, discuss, learn about, and research ways of enhancing human relationships, to become forces for meeting human needs while providing opportunities for each and every individual to develop their full potential within a society that is inclusive and supportive."

It is essential that our work promoting wellbeing goes hand in hand with attempts to facilitate the alleviation of obstacles to wellbeing. The National Observatory for Living with Dignity was born out of this premise, promoting a dignified life for all through a variety of means. These naturally include the objective of monitoring local progress in combatting social, economic, and cultural exclusion.

In its first research publication, the National Observatory for Living with Dignity has taken initial steps towards addressing one particular facet of social exclusion - that of early school leaving. The persistence of early school leaving is widely held to hinder wellbeing, as a social indicator of poverty and a barrier towards the achievement of each person's individual potential. The issue is complex, and requires in-depth analysis, further discussion, and collective efforts if it is to be addressed effectively. It is hoped that this publication will inform and spur on further policy and academic debate in this area, by means of its thoughtful examination of the fundamental and inextricable links between early school leaving and wellbeing.

This publication is particularly relevant in the current global and political climate, whereby the United Nations launched the Global Goals for Sustainable Development earlier this year. The work which has been undertaken by the President's Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society in Malta, through the National Observatory for Living with Dignity, aims to take one more step towards the goal of inclusive, quality, and equitable education for all, fostered within an environment where lifelong learning and wellbeing may simultaneously flourish.

Dr Ruth Farrugia
Director General
President's Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society

An Introduction from the Chairperson



Early school leaving is a complex educational, economic, and social issue with significant negative consequences for individuals, societies, and national economies. While Malta has been applauded for its fast declining rates of early school leaving, the country is still significantly above the EU average and above the rate of early school leaving in all other EU countries, bar one.

Due to inherited educational structures and prevailing social, economic, and labour market conditions, Malta is recently experiencing slower rates in decline of early school leaving and a slight increase in the number of females in the early school leaving bracket. One hopes that recent comprehensive measures included in the Malta National Reform Programme and Education

policies of recent years will contribute to the further decrease of the early school leaving rate in Malta, hopefully close to the ambitious target of halving the ESL rate from 20.4% to 10% by 2020.

This study aims to contribute to the ongoing analysis, debate, and efforts focused on the reduction of the early school leaving rate by providing relevant evidence for understanding potential links between early school leaving and various aspects of wellbeing. The study also sets out to identify the knowledge gaps that exist in this domain and to prepare background information for a potential second phase of the study, which would focus on conversations with early school leavers around issues flagged by the present study. Ultimately, we intend for this research to prepare the way for future applied studies of early school leaving.

We have embarked on this work because we sincerely believe that lifelong learning is in the best interest of us all. Equitable access to lifelong learning is integral to the social justice agenda that we uphold. Let us hope that this document will convince us that early school leaving is not and never can be in the best interest of a morally just and enabling society.

Prof. Carmel Borg
Chairperson
National Observatory for Living with Dignity

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1. Overview of the Previous Studies and Research Method

There is general agreement among scholars and policy makers that early school leaving represents an important educational and social issue that has many negative consequences on the individual, society and economic development. Early school leaving is a concept which is based on a widely accepted assumption that an individual needs to achieve a certain level of formal education in order to ensure access to personal, social, and economic security (Villalba, 2014).

The recognition that early school leaving has significant negative consequences is well documented through studies that describe socio-demographic characteristics of early school leavers. The majority of studies in this domain are focused on the exploration of socio-demographic factors that lead to early school leaving. Numerous studies demonstrate that males, immigrants, students from incomplete families and families with low socio-economic status, education and social class are much more likely to leave school early (Astone & McLanahan, 1991; Neild, Stoner-Eby & Furstenberg, 2008; Rumberger, 1995). A number of studies demonstrate a significant role of parenting practices (Blondal & Adalbjarnardottir, 2009; Fortin, Marcotte, Potvin, Royer & Joly, 2006) and parental expectations (Driscoll, 1999; McGrath, 2009) on early school leaving.

Research also shows that student achievement, particularly reading literacy and mathematical achievement (Curtis & McMillan, 2008; Hammond, Linton, Smink & Drew, 2007) significantly influence early school leaving, while a group of studies shows that school organization and structure, peer relations, and parental involvement also have an influence on student academic achievement (Lee & Burkam, 2003; Stewart, 2008). Based on a long-term involvement in studies of school drop-outs, Rumberger and Lim (2008) recognize students' individual characteristics and institutional characteristics as the main groups of factors that determine whether students drop out of high school.

The majority of studies are focused on circumstances and causes that influence early school leaving. Nevala and Hawley (2011, p. 151) provide a concise summary of this literature by concluding that early school leaving is "typically caused by a cumulative process of disengagement as a result of personal, social, economic, geographical, education or family-related reasons."

Studies in the domain of early school leaving are also focused on the labour market outcomes and the consequences that early school leaving has on income, tax revenue, public expenses and reduced GDP. Comparatively less research has been done to explore early school leavers' experiences in the workplace and in education, as well as the wellbeing of early school leavers.

Academic literature is focused largely on the employment, social and economic consequences of early school leaving and rarely addresses, in a systematic way, wellbeing as a consequence of early school leaving. For example, the key EU studies based in the European Quality of Life Survey (EQLS) that examine quality of life and wellbeing (Eurofound, 2012, 2013) do not include any remarks concerning early school leaving. Also, the main reports related to early school leaving (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Cedefop, 2014; Noorani, Balcon, Borodankova

& Czort, 2015) are focused on the causes, consequences and prevention of early school leaving but do not mention wellbeing and the overall social conditions of early school leavers before, and after, they leave formal education.

The recent wide-scale study of early school leaving conducted in seven EU member states, which included almost 20,000 participants (Kaye, D'Angelo, Ryan & Lőrinc, 2015), provides important information for policy-makers and expands the understanding of early school leaving. The study provides useful results regarding the trajectories of early school leaving by providing a profile of youth who leave formal education early, the reasons why they make this choice, how they perceive school, and what their future goals are. Similar to other recent studies, this study does not systematically address issues related to early school leaving and wellbeing, nor the fields where early school leavers require more support.

Previous studies that examine the impact of education on individual lives (Pallas, 2000) find significant positive effects of education attainment on many domains of life, including greater knowledge and cognitive development, higher socioeconomic status and better working conditions. Research also demonstrates a significant mediating influence of higher educational attainment on many other outcomes such as greater social and political participation, better psychological wellbeing and physical health, more stable family relations and better use of leisure time. However, some studies that apply rigorous control over the confounding effects of the participants' age, sex, minority status, and earnings fail to prove a strong association between higher educational attainment and subjective wellbeing (Witter, Okun, Stock & Haring, 1984).

Overall, the literature shows a lack of research about early school leaving and incongruent findings among some of the existing studies. Since early school leaving represents a significant educational and social problem, there is an evident need for a systematic exploration of associations between early school leaving, wellbeing and the overall living conditions of early school leavers. A better understanding of these relationships represents an important precondition for efficient prevention and mitigation of early school leaving.

There is evidently a need to address issues related to early school leaving and a strong interest among the national (MEDE, 2012, 2014) and international policy makers to reduce early school leaving and increase educational attainment of citizens in many of the EU member states (European Commission, 2010, European Commission/ EACEA/ Eurydice/Cedefop, 2014). Given the incongruent findings and the need to address the problem of early school leaving, this study aims to address the research gap related to early school leaving and wellbeing of early school leavers in Malta by focusing on their objective situation and perceptions of their actual living and working conditions.

This study is based on the recognition that early school leaving has significant negative influences on individuals, society and the economy. Since early school leaving represents a significant social problem, one of the main policy goals is prevention (MEDE, 2014) and a substantial reduction of the early school leaving rate to 10% in all of the EU member states by the end of this decade (European Commission/ EACEA/ Eurydice/Cedefop, 2014, p. 22).

Early leaving from education and training (ELET) has been conceptualized at the EU level and refers to 18 to 24 year-old “students leaving education or initial training before completing the upper secondary level” (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Cedefop, 2014, p. 139).

This definition is distinct from ‘drop-out’, the concept frequently used in North America to describe discontinuation of an on-going course. The concept has a narrow meaning since it includes only students who discontinue their ongoing courses rather than students who discontinue their formal education before they attain an upper secondary level (European Commission, 2011, p. 5).

An extensive review of the existing data sources in Europe shows that EU member states collect a large amount of data concerning early school leaving but that different states often use methodologies that prevent direct comparisons between different countries (Kaye, D’Angelo, Ryan & Lőrinc, 2014).

With regard to data availability in Malta, there is evidently a need to collect additional data that examines early school leaving. In addition to the lack of data, most EU surveys conducted in Malta include samples appropriate for the overall national estimates but are insufficient for sophisticated analyses that are necessary for comprehensive and systematic monitoring, and evidence-based policy decisions.

In recent years, an increasing number of surveys collect data regarding the age of youths at the time they left formal education (European Commission, 2012; European Youth Survey, 2014). Our study uses the widely accepted dichotomous measure of early school leaving for most of the analyses (18 to 24 year old participants with education at or below ISCED 2) but also uses the new, continuous measure that is expected to provide some additional insights into relationships between early school leaving and wellbeing.

Regarding the consequences of early school leaving, wellbeing is increasingly in the focus of policy makers, and increased wellbeing is a key policy goal (European Commission, 2010). Similar to the conceptualization of early school leaving, there are many different, competing and/or alternative measures of wellbeing. Studies in the United Kingdom provide an extensive approach and a wide variety of indicators of wellbeing (ONS, 2011; Randall, Corp & Self, 2014). There are also other measures, such as the ‘Wellbeing Index’ developed by Gallup-Healthways (Harter & Gurley, 2008), which are used as components of the OECD synthetic ‘Better Life Index’ (OECD, 2013). Many other countries are also developing their national indicators and measures of wellbeing. In addition to the different theoretical approaches, one of the main problems is the availability of data and the difficulties in measuring changes and creating more relevant and more reliable comparisons.

The EQLS was administered at the end of 2011 and at the beginning of 2012 by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound, 2012) in 27 EU and seven non-EU countries with a minimum sample size of 1000 in each country. The face-to-face survey targets 18-year-olds and over, and provides reliable national estimates of the quality of life. The survey contains 26 questions, which estimate subjective wellbeing, as well as an extensive set of questions related to deprivation, economic situation and socio-demographic characteristics of participants.

The set of wellbeing-related questions is based on the EQLS questionnaire that measures evaluative, eudaimonic and hedonic components of wellbeing; the three types of wellbeing which are used as the standard measures of the subjective wellbeing by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound, 2012) and these measures have been an integral part of the EQLS since 2007.

The EQLS measures of wellbeing originate from different theoretical approaches and provide a comprehensive representation of wellbeing (Eurofound, 2013). The first dimension, evaluative wellbeing, provides a cognitive evaluation of different aspects of people's lives based on the multiple discrepancies theory (Michalos, 1985, 2007) which claims that happiness and satisfaction are determined by the perceived gap between what one has and what one wants regarding finances, family, job, friendships, housing, area, recreation, self-esteem, health and education.

Short-term emotions or hedonic wellbeing are related to day-to-day feelings during a relatively short time period, and examines positive and negative emotions, vitality, social engagement and connections. Despite the possible cultural bias, this scale is considered to be a useful complementary measure of personal wellbeing (Eurofound, 2012; Ryan & Deci, 2001; Tennant et al, 2007).

Meaningfulness of life and perceived self-realization (eudaimonic wellbeing) examines how people are functioning and to what extent they are satisfied with various aspects of their daily life. This scale also examines self-perceived autonomy, social relationships and self-esteem (Eurofound, 2013, p. 7; Ryan & Deci, 2001).

In addition to the basic set of wellbeing-related variables, the EQLS contains a few overall measures of wellbeing including the World Health Organization's (WHO) Mental Well-Being Index (WHO-5) which measures psychological well-being during the two weeks preceding the survey. The scale was developed as a highly consistent selection of questions from a large WHO quality of life instrument that examines positive mood, vitality and general interests (Bech, 1998, 2001). In addition, the EQLS contains a Social Exclusion Index (Eurofound, 2012), which measures self-perceived social exclusion.

Research Objectives

The main objective of this study is to explore the impact of early school leaving on the wellbeing of individuals who leave school early, as well as to estimate some of the possible consequences that early school leaving may have on the early school leavers with regards to re-engaging in education, attaining knowledge and skills and increasing their educational attainment.

A second objective of this study is to examine working and living conditions that early school leavers encounter, and to estimate the association of such conditions with their wellbeing. To achieve this goal, the study examines associations between early school leaving and personal, social and economic characteristics of early school leavers based on a statistical analysis of the available data sources relevant

to this research problem. The study also aims to increase public awareness about often hidden, but very harmful, short- and long-term consequences of early school leaving on individuals and the entire society.

Key research questions that this study aims to address include:

- Are there any significant associations between early school leaving and different aspects of wellbeing including general evaluation of wellbeing, functioning in daily life and short-term satisfaction?
- Are there any significant associations between early school leaving, mental wellbeing and physical health?
- What are the work experiences, job characteristics and social status of early school leavers?
- What are the economic consequences of early school leaving?
- Are there any significant associations between early school leaving and living conditions?

One of the aims of the present study is to initiate and inform debates about the feasible measures that can address the complex set of problems that contribute to early school leaving. Since early school leaving is, to a large extent, determined by the specific economic and historical conditions of every society, the study also aims to propose some suggestions for future applied research studies focused on the specific issues and conditions in Malta.

Based on the analysis and review of the existing data sources, this study aims to identify the main gaps and to outline some of the directions for future studies that can contribute to the provision of the information relevant for policy measures aimed at tackling early school leaving.

Research Methods

To examine the consequences and factors that determine the wellbeing of early school leavers, this study examines different personal, socio-economic and labour market conditions based on administrative and survey data originating from the European Commission surveys that include participants from all European Union member states. This study includes 18 to 64 year-old participants from two European surveys with a focus on 18 to 24-year-old early school leavers with educational attainment below upper secondary education (ISCED 2). The main data source for this study is the 2012 European Quality of Life Survey (EQLS, 2013). The study also uses data from the 2010 Special issue of the Eurobarometer Wave that contains data concerning Mental Wellbeing relevant to this study. The administrative data for trend analysis of early school leaving were taken from Eurostat website resources (Eurostat, 2015).

Data Sources

The European Quality of Life Survey (EQLS) is conducted every four years to examine the objective living circumstances and feelings of EU citizens about

particular circumstances as well as about life in general. It collects data about employment, income, education, housing, family, health and work-life balance as well as subjective self-reported levels of happiness and life satisfaction. Data from this survey complement traditional indicators of economic growth and living standards. Face to face interviews are conducted, with a national sample of randomly selected representative sample of adults from each EU member state. The survey collects data regarding various aspects of quality of life, including; employment, income and deprivation, housing and local environment, family and social contacts, health, mental wellbeing, subjective wellbeing, happiness, life satisfaction and self-reported and social exclusion.

The 2010 Special issue of the Eurobarometer Wave 73.2 survey (European Commission, 2012) collected data concerning the mental well-being of EU citizens including problems in day-to-day life that had occurred during the four weeks prior to the survey and were due to emotional and physical health problems. The survey also collected data about participants' age at the end of their participation in formal education, their sex, current age, degree of urbanization and city size, possession of durable goods (entertainment electronics, Internet connection, and a car), financial difficulties during the last year, self-rated social position and internet use at home, at work, and at school. Besides, the survey examined job security, the extent to which the participants' current job adequately reflects their education and respect and recognition received at work. The survey was conducted in 2010 by the TNS Opinion & Social by request of the European Commission, and includes random selected samples of 27,304 EU citizens aged 15 years and over. The survey includes 500 randomly selected participants aged 15 years and over from Malta.

The study also includes data from the Canadian Work and Life surveys database (Livingstone & Raykov, 2011), which includes a large number of participants and provides the opportunity for the sophisticated analysis of the associations between low educational attainment and wellbeing. This data set is also used to cross-validate associations between income, disability, and demand for education on a much larger sample of survey participants. The Work and Lifelong Learning (WALL) data base includes representative, randomly selected samples of the Canadian population from the two last waves of this survey and includes a total of 11, 029 participants. The survey contains data regarding employment conditions as well as a wide array of lifelong learning related variables including formal and informal learning activities and education-job relationships (Livingstone & Raykov, 2011).

Statistical Analysis

The study applies data visualization techniques, exploratory analysis, inferential statistics and trend analysis. Since our study includes nominal and ordinal variables, in addition to standard inference statistics (analysis of variance, chi-square and t-tests), some of the key findings were additionally included in multiple logistic regression analyses to examine the possible confounding effects of the age and gender of the participants. The level of statistical significance in the tables included in this report is indicated as follows: *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, n.s. indicates that a statistic is not significant. It should be emphasized that the cross-sectional survey data that we used in this analysis do not permit inferences of causality but only of association.

Structure of the Report

To provide systematic answers to the questions that the study intends to answer, this report is organized into seven main sections. The first section contains a brief overview of the previous studies of early school leaving and a description of the research objectives, research methodology and data sources used in this study.

The second section includes the results of a systematic examination of associations between different aspects of wellbeing and early school leaving. This section is based upon the concept of wellbeing, which is applied in the EQLS, and provides the opportunity to compare results of a large sample that includes members from all EU Member States. This section examines early school leavers' general evaluation of wellbeing, their functioning in daily life (eudaimonic component of wellbeing) and their dominant emotions or short-term satisfaction (hedonic component of wellbeing).

The third section explores associations between early school leaving, mental wellbeing and physical health. Results presented throughout this section are based on the survey data collected in Malta, other European countries, and a large set of data collected in Canada, which provides the opportunity for an analysis of the long-term consequences of early school leaving.

The fourth section describes the economic consequences of ESL and examines early school leaving and deprivation (economic wellbeing). The section presents findings on the early school leaving, job characteristics and social status of people who leave education before completing lower secondary education. This section describes the employment experiences of 18 to 24 year-old school leavers and includes the core indicators of their labour market status as well as some data about their earnings, financial difficulties, job insecurity and expectations regarding their economic perspective.

The sixth section provides a description of early school leavers' living conditions and a basic profile of their social background that is often associated with youth decisions to leave school and engage in the labour market before they graduate from secondary school.

Finally, the report contains a summary of key findings and provides a preliminary set of recommendations which are related to the results from this study. This section also includes a number of examples of good practices that were successful in helping early school leavers lessen the hardships they experience in daily life to gain the skills required for quality employment and improvement of their overall wellbeing.

All sections of this study, where the data is available, include comparative results for Malta and other countries as a test of reliability of the identified associations, since the available data about wellbeing in Malta contains smaller samples of participants and a limited number of variables.

2. Early School Leaving and Wellbeing

Early school leaving and general evaluation of wellbeing

Results from this study show that there is a significant difference between people of various ages and educational attainment regarding their evaluation of various aspects of personal wellbeing. As **Table 1** shows, older participants with elementary or lower secondary education are significantly less satisfied with their health than their counterparts who attained upper secondary or higher education. The difference between younger, 18- to 24-year-old participants with different educational attainment regarding their satisfaction with health is not significant.

Table 1: Evaluation of wellbeing by age and educational attainment

	Evaluation of health	Your education	Your present job	Your present standard of living	Economic situation in the country	Your social life	Your accommodation	Your family life
18-24, ISCED 3-6	8.83	7.97	8.12	8.21	5.23	8.32	8.56	8.82
ISCED 0-2	8.87	6.65	7.39	7.06	4.27	7.92	8.32	8.67
25+, ISCED 3-6	8.51	8.06	7.89	7.49	5.25	7.68	8.19	8.40
ISCED 0-2	7.45	6.24	7.29	6.58	4.46	7.02	7.98	8.27
Total	7.87	6.83	7.61	6.92	4.70	7.30	8.08	8.35
F-test	26.599	50.315	4.303	16.621	6.911	11.198	2.216	1.849
Sig.	.001	.001	.005	.001	.001	.001	n.s.	n.s.

Source: European Quality of Life Survey, 2012.

In contrast, both young and older groups of people who left their formal education and training before they completed upper secondary schools are less satisfied with their education, present job and standard of living (**Table 1**). Lower educational attainment significantly limits access to quality jobs and higher incomes that determine personal standard of living, and as a result of their working and living conditions, both early school leavers and older participants with educational attainment below the upper secondary level are less satisfied with the national economic situation.

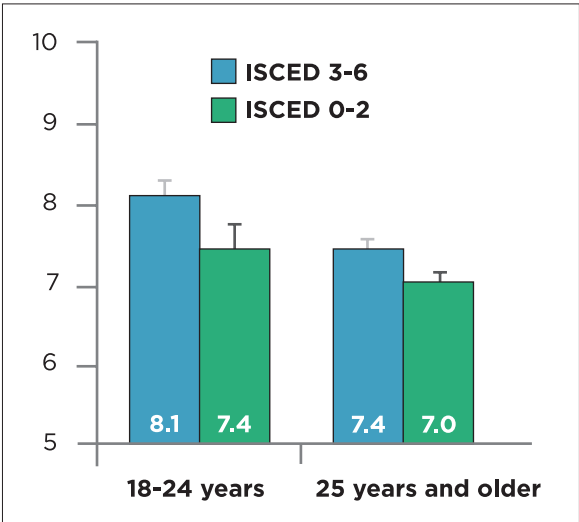
Finally, younger early school leavers are significantly less satisfied with their social life than the participants of the same age who have completed secondary or higher levels of education. Dissatisfaction with social life is even greater among older participants.

As the same table shows, all participants are highly satisfied with their accommodation and family life. In fact, there are no statistically significant differences between people with lower and higher educational attainment. However, older participants with lower educational attainment, in comparison to their counterparts with higher educational attainment, evaluate their accommodation and family life less favourably, but these differences are not statistically significant (**Table 1**).

As a result of the frequent issues that early leavers from education experience and their dissatisfaction with daily life, more often they feel less happy and satisfied with

their lives than their counterparts who have completed upper secondary or a higher level of education. As Figure 1 shows, younger participants are generally happier than older people with similar educational attainment, and this is consistent with other studies of wellbeing. There are also significant differences between people of similar ages and different educational attainment. People with higher educational attainment in each age group are happier than the participants who left education and training before completing secondary school. Statistical differences among analysed groups regarding their happiness are highly statistically significant ($F = 6.050, p < .001$).

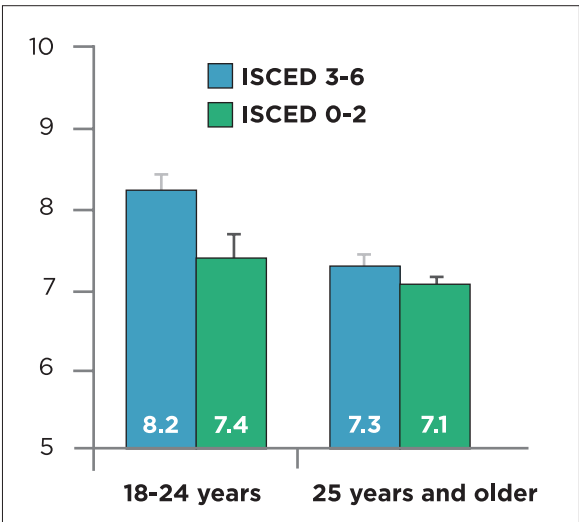
Figure 1: Happiness, age and educational attainment



Source: European Quality of Life Survey, 2012.

Consistent with the previous findings, the study also found that less-educated participants are, overall, less satisfied with their lives (**Figure 2**). This also confirms the previous findings indicating that older and less educated participants within each group are less satisfied with different aspects of their lives, and this difference is highly statistically significant ($F = 5.154, p < .002$).

Figure 2: Satisfaction with life by age and educational attainment



Source: European Quality of Life Survey, 2012.

Early school leaving and functioning in daily life

The analysis of eudaimonic wellbeing that describes “how people are functioning in their lives” (Eurofound, 2013, p. 7) also finds significant association between early school leaving and efficient functioning in daily life. As **Table 2** shows, both early school leavers and older participants with low educational attainment feel less optimistic than their counterparts who completed secondary or higher education. Almost half of them (44%) often feel pessimistic in comparison to only 14% of the same age youths with higher, secondary or higher educational attainment. Also, early school leavers, more frequently than other youths of the same age, experience time pressures and lack-of-time to do the things they really enjoy.

This study additionally shows that there are no statistical differences between early school leavers and younger people with higher educational attainment with regard to their perceptions of personal autonomy, evaluation of their own activities and recognition of their work by others.

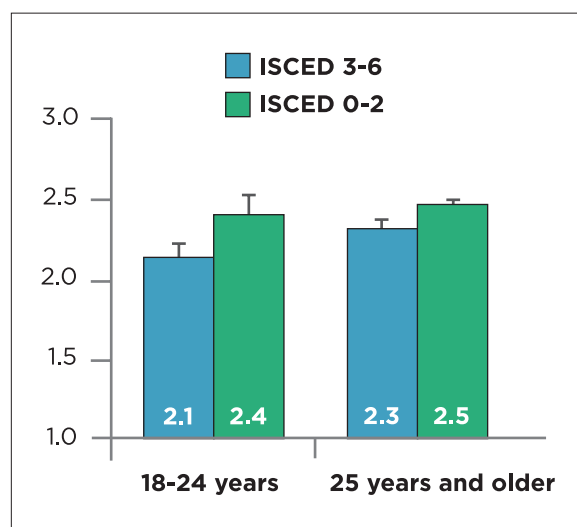
Table 2: Self-reported functioning in daily life by age and educational attainment

	I am optimistic about the future	I seldom have time to do the things I really enjoy	I generally feel that what I do in life is worthwhile	I feel I am free to decide how to live my life	I feel close to people in the area where I live	I feel left out of society	Life has become so complicated...	I feel that the value of what I do is not recognised...	People look down on me because of my job
18-24, ISCED 3-6	1.83	3.20	1.67	1.78	2.79	4.15	3.80	3.69	3.79
ISCED 0-2	2.26	2.87	1.95	1.80	2.65	4.08	3.38	3.48	3.47
25+, ISCED 3-6	2.28	2.87	1.90	2.02	2.49	3.95	3.61	3.42	3.78
ISCED 0-2	2.57	3.11	1.94	1.99	2.07	3.76	3.28	3.45	3.58
Total	2.44	3.04	1.92	1.98	2.24	3.85	3.40	3.46	3.64
<i>F-test</i>	13.017	3.248	2.115	2.193	18.857	5.631	8.068	.958	2.688
<i>Sig.</i>	.001	.021	n.s.	n.s.	.001	.001	.001	n.s.	.045

Source: European Quality of Life Survey, 2012.

This analysis also shows that early school leavers often feel socially excluded. More often than their counterparts with secondary or higher educational attainment, they feel left out of society, that their lives have become complicated. They also feel disoriented. Furthermore, a considerable number, 24%, believe that people look down on them because of their job.

Figure 3: The mean social exclusion index by educational attainment and age



Source: European Quality of Life Survey, 2012.

A supplementary analysis of the EQLS social exclusion index (**Figure 3**) additionally confirms that early school leavers, more than their counterparts with higher educational attainment, frequently feel socially excluded ($F = 4.320, p < .005$). This is more apparent in the group of younger participants, while differences between the older groups with different educational attainment are smaller.

Overall, results show significant associations between early school leaving, efficient functioning in daily life and social exclusion. The findings also demonstrate that the educational attainment and age of participants are strongly associated with their subjective wellbeing.

Early school leaving and short-term satisfaction (hedonic wellbeing)

According to a widely accepted theory of wellbeing (Eurofound, 2013), short-term or hedonic satisfaction is an integral component of wellbeing. Results presented in **Table 3** demonstrate that, in comparison to early school leavers, young people who complete upper secondary education more frequently reported positive emotions and feelings and more frequently felt calm, relaxed and cheerful. The results also show that older participants with higher educational attainment experience positive emotions more often than their counterparts who have completed elementary or lower secondary education (**Table 3**).

Table 3: Short-term satisfaction by educational attainment and age

	Hedonic		Hedonic/Eudaimonic		Eudaimonic			
	Positive emotion	Negative emotion	Vitality	Engagement	Loneliness			
	I have felt cheerful and in good spirits	I have felt calm and relaxed	I have felt particularly tense	I have felt down-hearted and depressed	I have felt active and vigorous	I woke up feeling fresh and rested	My daily life has been filled with things that interest me	I have felt lonely
18-24, ISCED 3-6	2.63	2.78	4.46	5.45	2.64	2.93	2.55	5.46
ISCED 0-2	2.75	3.10	4.17	5.19	2.54	2.63	2.82	5.32
25+, ISCED 3-6	2.99	3.23	4.59	5.29	3.02	3.02	2.98	5.35
ISCED 0-2	3.23	3.38	4.33	5.02	3.20	3.04	3.35	5.03
Total	3.11	3.30	4.40	5.12	3.09	3.01	3.19	5.15
F-test	6.354	3.734	2.771	5.333	6.713	1.355	10.446	5.876
Sig.	0.001	0.011	0.041	0.001	0.001	n.s.	0.001	0.001

Source: European Quality of Life Survey, 2012.

The same table also shows that early school leavers more frequently experience negative emotions; feel particularly tense, downhearted or depressed. Consistent with previous findings, a similar tendency is noticeable among older participants with lower educational attainment who also experience more negative emotions than those with higher educational attainment.

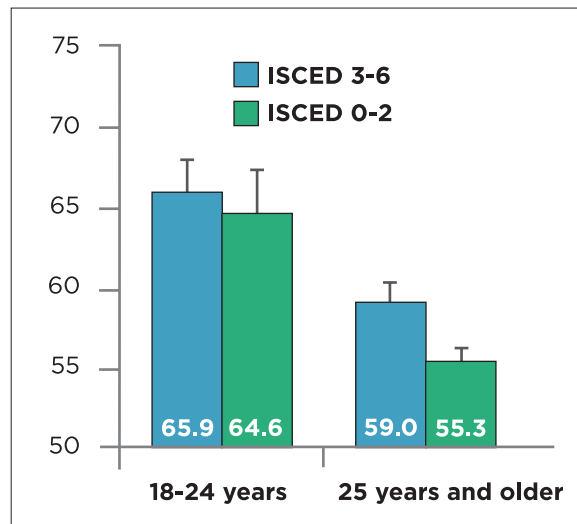
Contrary to the general pattern of responses, early school leavers are more frequently active and vigorous than their counterparts with higher educational attainment. Older participants with lower educational attainment less frequently

report feeling active and vigorous, and there are no significant differences between them and the participants with higher educational attainment of the same age. This finding can support the assumption that the impact of early school leaving is not always immediate and direct but, over time, may lead to a more rapid deterioration of health and wellbeing.

Finally, regarding the meaningfulness of daily life (eudaimonic component of wellbeing), early school leavers less often report that their life is full of activities and things that interest them and, more often than their counterparts with higher education, feel lonely (Table 3).

An analysis of the World Health Organization (WHO-5) index of mental wellbeing by age and educational attainment shows that early school leavers experience a lower level of mental wellbeing than their counterparts with higher educational attainment (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Mental wellbeing (WHO-5 index) by educational attainment and age



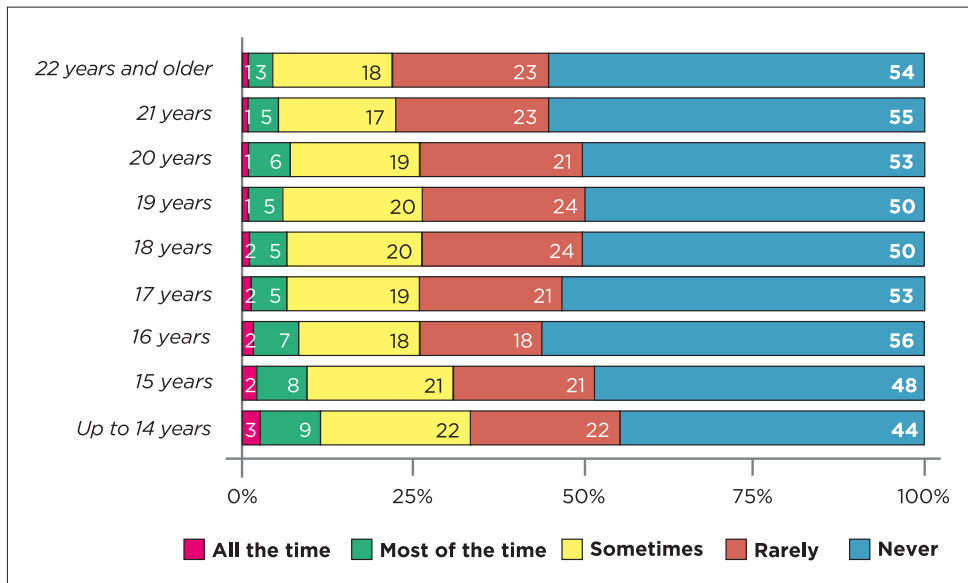
Source: European Quality of Life Survey, 2012.

Results of this analysis also demonstrate that older participants with lower educational attainment experience significantly lower mental wellbeing than their counterparts with higher educational attainment (7.468, $p < .001$). This finding additionally confirms other results from the study which indicate that early school leaving has enduring negative effects on the wellbeing of people with lower educational attainment.

3. Early School Leaving, Mental Wellbeing and Health

There were also apparent differences between the early school-leavers and the participants who left school later with regard to their mental wellbeing (**Figure 5**). More than 10% of people living in EU member states who stopped their formal education before age 15 years reported that all of the time, or most of the time, they have experienced some emotional problems within the four weeks prior to the survey. This is in contrast to a much smaller number of people (4% to 6%) who ended their education at age 21 or 22 and experience frequent emotional problems (Pearson Chi-Square = 299.510, $p < .001$).

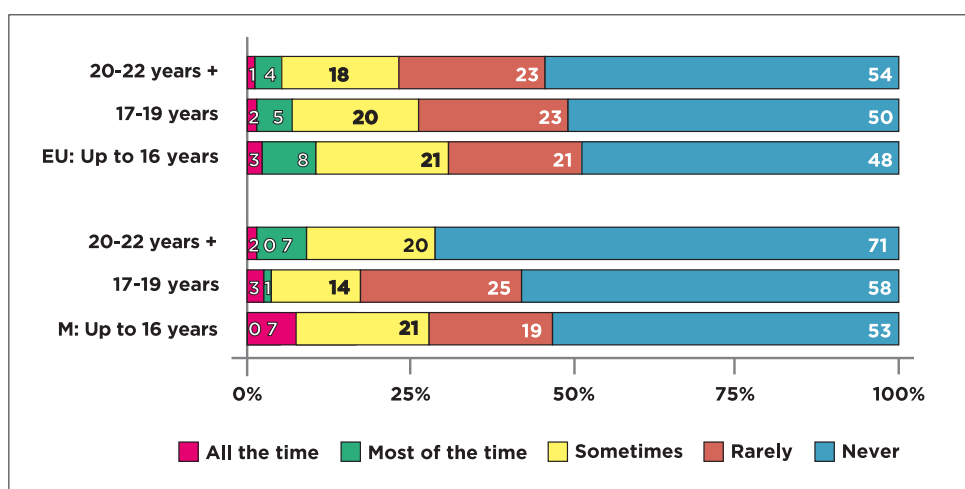
Figure 5: Self-rated emotional problems in the EU (%)



Source: Survey of mental wellbeing in Europe, 2010. [Total %, EU]

A comparison of mental problems in the EU and Malta (**Figure 6**) indicates that the incidence of emotional problem in Malta is lower than in the other EU Member States. The same Figure also shows that people who ended their education early, at or before the age of 16, in Malta as well as in the other EU countries, experience intense emotional problems (all the time or most of the time) more often than people who left education later.

Figure 6: Emotional problems by country and early school leaving



Source: Survey of mental wellbeing in Europe, 2010

The study also shows many other differences regarding mental wellbeing between participants in this study who ended their education early and the participants who continued their formal education for a longer period of time. In general, all participants in this study more frequently report positive rather than negative feelings (**Table 4**).

However, people who ended their formal education earlier report negative emotions more frequently than those who ended their education later. As the comparison of the incidence of various emotions shows (**Table 4**), people who ended their education early more frequently feel tense, ‘so down in the dumps that nothing could cheer them up’, depressed, worn out and tired than their counterparts who continued their formal education to attain a diploma or degree. Also, less frequently, they feel full of life, calm or peaceful, feel lots of energy, and feel less happy than others who continued their formal education for a longer period of time. As the same table shows, all chi-square tests are highly statistically significant.

Table 4: Mental wellbeing in EU and early school leaving

Mental health feelings...	All the time	Most of the time	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Chi-square
... full of life	13.4%	44.1%	28.1%	11.1%	3.4%	775.342***
... particularly tense	2.5%	11.4%	39.7%	29.8%	16.6%	180.689***
... ‘down in the dumps’	1.0%	5.2%	19.9%	29.6%	44.3%	561.536***
... calm/peaceful	11.2%	52.4%	26.5%	8.2%	1.7%	334.164***
... lots of energy	9.9%	42.1%	31.9%	12.8%	3.4%	897.735***
... depressed	1.3%	6.4%	24.4%	33.3%	34.6%	417.028***
... worn out	1.9%	10.4%	38.6%	28.7%	20.3%	320.262***
... happy	11.8%	47.4%	30.3%	8.4%	2.1%	430.849***
... tired	3.2%	16.1%	54.9%	20.1%	5.6%	251.800***

Source: Survey of mental wellbeing in Europe, 2010. Legend: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

A different type of analysis that compares the means of participant responses (analysis of variance) shows almost identical results and indicates that people in EU Member States who ended their formal education early less frequently report positive and more frequently report negative emotions than their counterparts who ended education later. As results presented in **Table 5** illustrate, participants in EU who ended their education early less frequently feel full of life, calm or peaceful, feel ‘lots of energy’, and feel less happy. They more often feel particularly tense, ‘so down in the dumps that nothing could cheer them up’, depressed, worn out and tired than their counterparts who continued their formal education to attain a degree and diploma. All differences identified through this analysis are considerable and F-values are statistically significant ($p < .001$).

Table 5: Mental wellbeing in EU by the age when people ended their formal education

Mental health feelings...	16 years	17-19 years	20-22 years+	F
... full of life	2.66	2.47	2.28	277.557***
... particularly tense	3.44	3.43	3.53	23.131***
... 'down in the dumps'	3.95	4.09	4.28	219.999***
... calm/peaceful	2.47	2.37	2.26	114.244***
... lots of energy	2.81	2.51	2.43	334.379***
... depressed	3.80	3.94	4.06	126.174***
... worn out	3.44	3.53	3.68	113.550***
... happy	2.54	2.42	2.29	149.693***
... tired	3.01	3.10	3.15	36.408***

Source: Survey of mental wellbeing in Europe, 2010. Legend: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Further analysis shows very similar differences in Malta between people who have left their formal education early and those who have continued their formal education for a longer period of time (**Table 6**). As a result of the relatively small sample of participants from Malta, this analysis found less consistent differences between people who ended their formal education early and those who continued their education for a longer period. However, the results and the overall trend are very similar to the results obtained from the large EU sample. Maltese people who ended their education later more frequently experience positive emotions and report feeling 'full of life', more often feel they have 'lots of energy', and more frequently feel happy. In contrast, people who ended their education early more often feel negative emotions, feel 'so down in the dumps that nothing could cheer them up', feel more depressed, and more tired than their counterparts who continued their formal education for a longer period. The identified differences are considerable and F-values are statistically significant ($p < .001$).

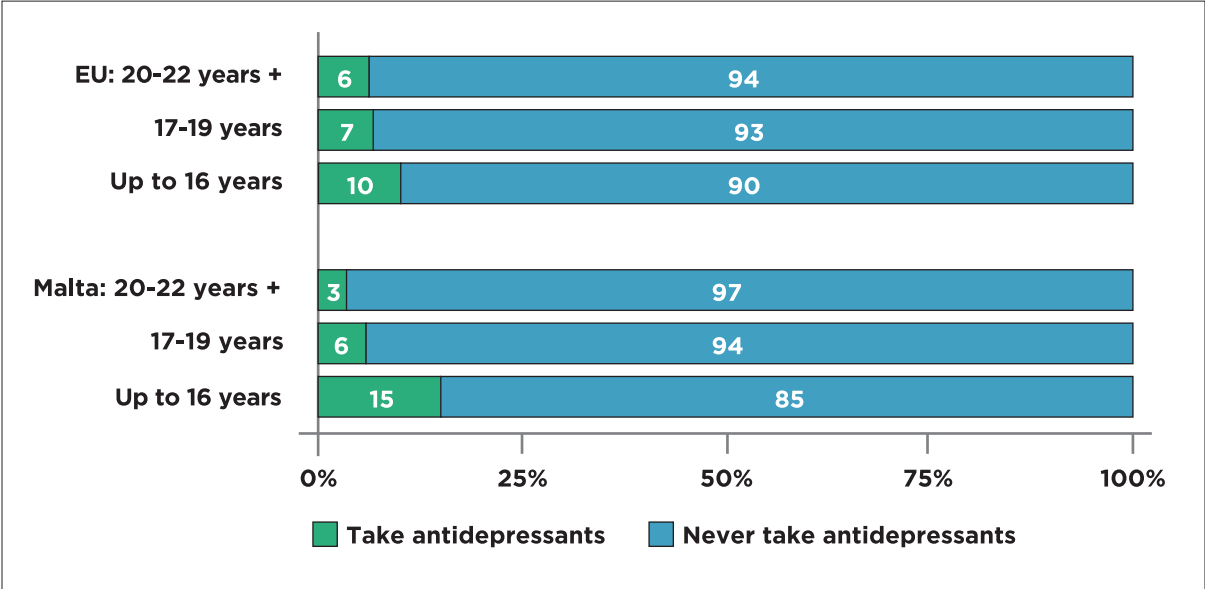
Table 6: Mental wellbeing in Malta by the age when people ended their formal education

Mental health feelings...	Up to 16 years	17-19 years	20 years or more	F
... full of life	2.49	2.24	2.16	5.229**
... particularly tense	3.37	3.45	3.38	.184
... 'down in the dumps'	3.92	4.10	4.42	6.704***
... calm/peaceful	2.43	2.42	2.21	1.443
... lots of energy	2.70	2.40	2.34	6.474**
... depressed	3.60	3.98	3.98	6.985***
... worn out	3.76	3.78	3.79	.034
... happy	2.43	2.20	2.28	3.290*
... tired	2.95	2.93	3.17	2.081

Source: Survey of mental wellbeing in Europe, 2010. Legend: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

In addition, the study also found significant variations regarding the use of antidepressants (Figure 7). Approximately 8% of the entire sample reported taking antidepressants more or less regularly. There are apparent and statistically significant differences between people who left their formal education at different ages.

Figure 7: Depression and the age when people ended their formal education



Source: Survey of mental wellbeing in Europe, 2010.

People who left education before age 16 in Malta and other EU countries reported taking antidepressants more frequently (15% in Malta and 10% in other EU states) than people who left formal education later (in Malta 3% and in other EU countries 6%). The most frequent reason for taking this medication for approximately half of both groups was anxiety and depression. A significant percentage (30%) of participants reported taking anti-depressants to cope with chronic pain but the number of people who left school later less frequently take this medication because of pain. A small number of participants who reported taking antidepressants, approximately 6% of early school-leavers and about 12% of participants who left formal education later, reported taking anti-depressants to enhance their performance. It is likely that, as a response to frequent emotional, mental and health-related problems, people who left formal education early more often take this type of medication.

The fact that people who end their formal education early more frequently report mental health problems deserves to be the focus of more studies, evidence-based policies and actions that can mitigate the serious and long-lasting consequences of early school leaving, since depression represents a serious mental health problem and has significant individual and social consequences (McLeod, Uemura & Rohrman, 2012; Thompson, Barnsley & Dyck, 1999; Turney, 2012).

Results from this analysis based on the EU Survey of Mental Health (European Commission, 2012) demonstrate that people who ended their formal education earlier report negative emotions more frequently than those who ended their education later (Table 7).

Table 7: Mental wellbeing in EU by the age when people ended their formal education

Mental health feelings...	Up to 16 years	17-19 years	20 years and up	F
... full of life	2.66	2.47	2.28	277.557***
... particularly tense	3.44	3.43	3.53	23.131***
... 'down in the dumps'	3.95	4.09	4.28	219.999***
... calm/peaceful	2.47	2.37	2.26	114.244***
... lots of energy	2.81	2.51	2.43	334.379***
... depressed	3.80	3.94	4.06	126.174***
... worn out	3.44	3.53	3.68	113.550***
... happy	2.54	2.42	2.29	149.693***
... tired	3.01	3.10	3.15	36.408***

Source: Survey of mental wellbeing in Europe, 2010. Legend: * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001.

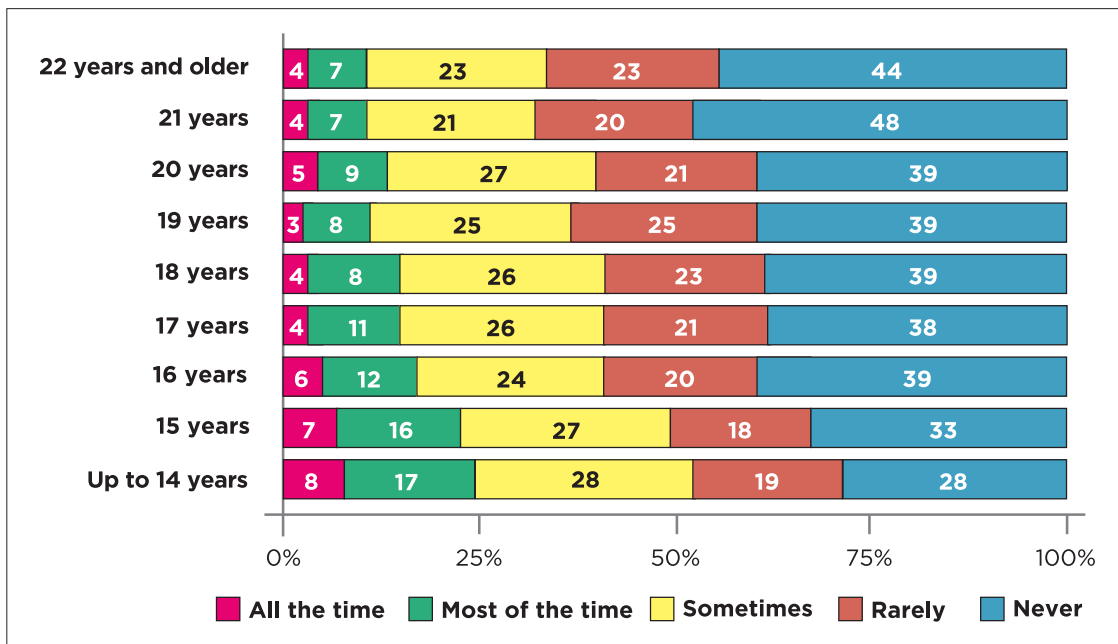
A comparison of various emotions by the age when people ended their formal education in all EU countries (**Table MWB2**) shows that people who ended their education early, more often than their counterparts who continued formal education to attain a diploma or degree, feel depressed, “so down in the dumps that nothing can cheer them up”, particularly tense, worn out, and tired. Also, they less often feel full of life, calm or peaceful, feel lots of energy, and feel happy than the people who continued their formal education for a longer period of time. As the same table shows, all chi-square tests are highly statistically significant.

Early exit from formal education and physical health

The analysis of the data from the survey of Mental Health in Europe is consistent with other studies (European Commission, 2012) and shows that Malta is among a small group of EU countries least affected by emotional and health-related problems.

Overall, there are noticeable differences in all EU countries regarding physical health between those who left their formal education early and the people who left school later (Figure 8). More than one quarter (28%) of people living in EU countries who stopped their formal education before the age 14, and a similar number who stopped their education when they were 15, reported that all of the time, or most of the time they experience some health-related problems. In contrast, a much smaller number of people (4% to 6%) who ended their education at age 21 or 22 experience frequent health-related problems (Pearson Chi-Square = 299.510, p < .001).

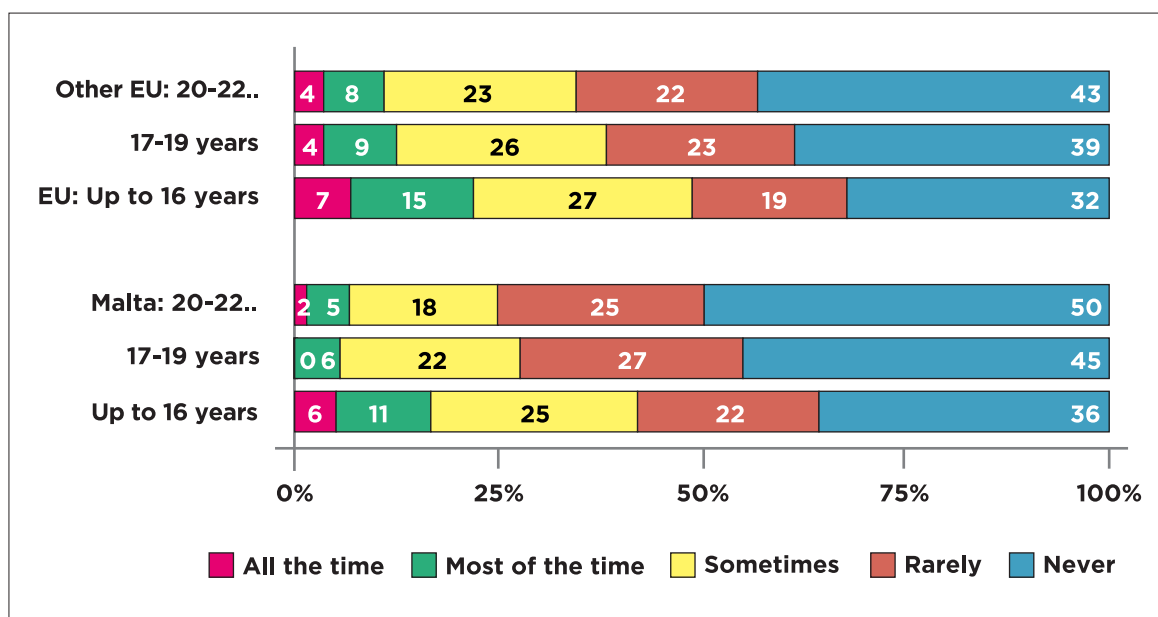
Figure 8: Self-rated physical health in the EU (Total %)



Source: Mental wellbeing in Europe Survey, 2010.

A comparison of health-related problems in the EU and Malta (Figure 9) also shows that the incidence of health-related problems in Malta is lower than in other EU member states. The study also shows that people who ended their education early in Malta and other EU member states (at or before the age of 14), experience intense (all the time, most of the time or sometimes) health-related problems (42% vs. 34%) more often than their counterparts who ended their education later.

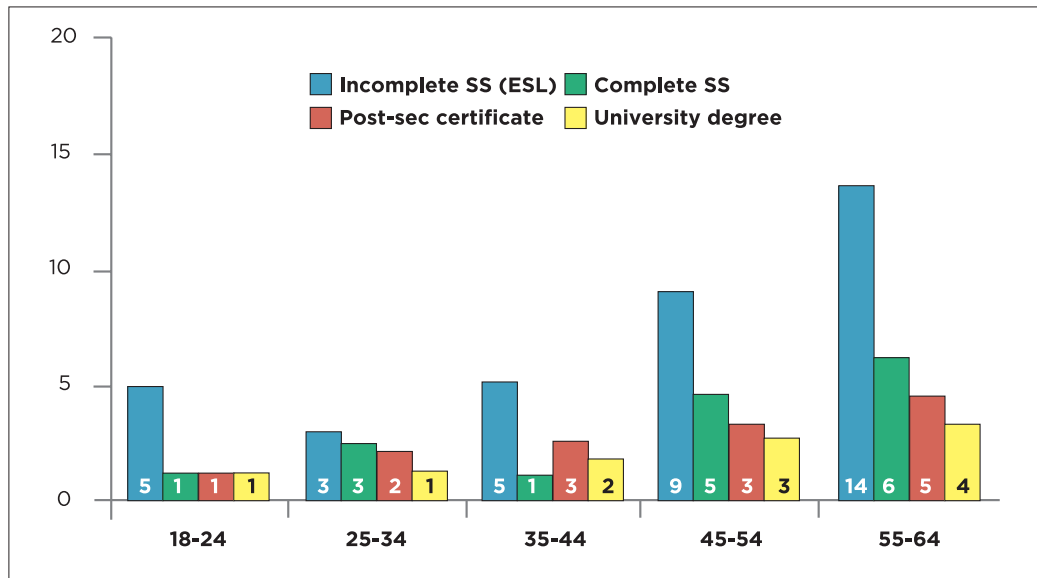
Figure 9: Physical health



Source: Source: Mental Wellbeing in Europe Survey, 2010.

Further analysis based on the WALL data (**Figure 10**) shows that employees who end their education early more frequently report poor health, and this difference is significant among employees of all age groups.

Figure 10: Self-reported health



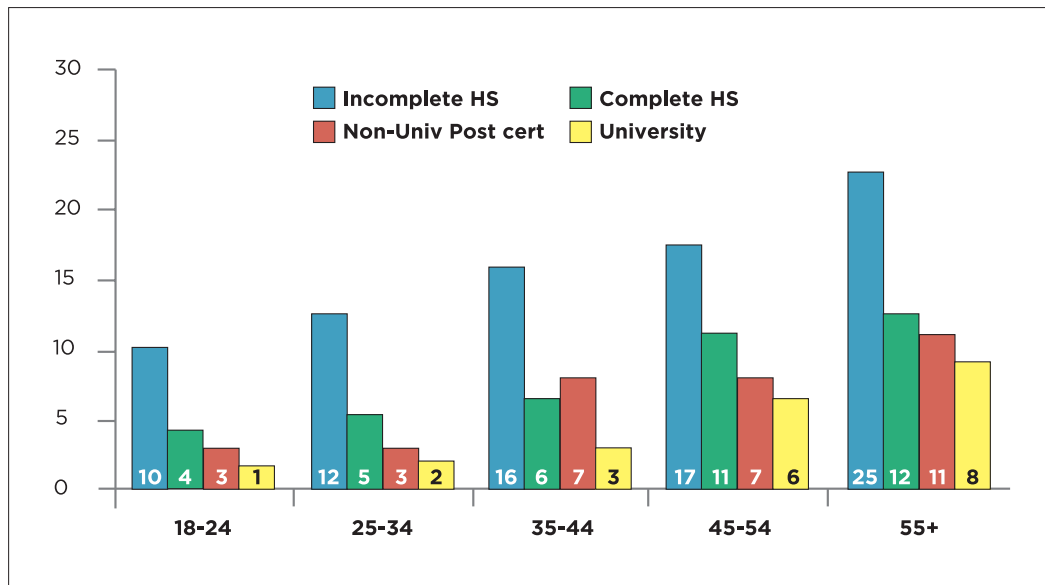
Source: WALL, 2010.

It is important to note that employees of all ages who ended their formal education without obtaining a secondary school certificate more frequently report poor health, and this difference increases with their age. The results indicate that health-related problems, in a relatively small number of cases, may contribute to the early exit from formal education since young, 18 to 24 year old, employees more frequently (5% vs. 1%) report poor health. As is well attested in the literature, (World Health Organization, 2011; Chandola, Ferrie, Sacker & Marmot, 2007) self-reported health deteriorates with age, and this study confirms the previous research findings. In addition to this, the study shows that self-reported health significantly and more quickly deteriorates among people of low educational attainment (Pearson Chi-Square = 175.259, $p < .001$). The rapid deterioration of self-reported health is strongly associated with lower subjective wellbeing (Steptoe, Deaton & Stone, 2015).

Low income earned by early school leavers and high job insecurity are very likely to contribute to lower wellbeing of people who leave their formal education early.

In addition, as **Figure 11** shows, a significantly greater number of employees with incomplete secondary school in all age cohorts report a disability. The pattern of disability is similar to the self-reported health, but the incidence of the self-reported disability is much higher than the incidence of poor health.

Figure 11: Self-reported disability by age and educational attainment



Source: WALL, 2010.

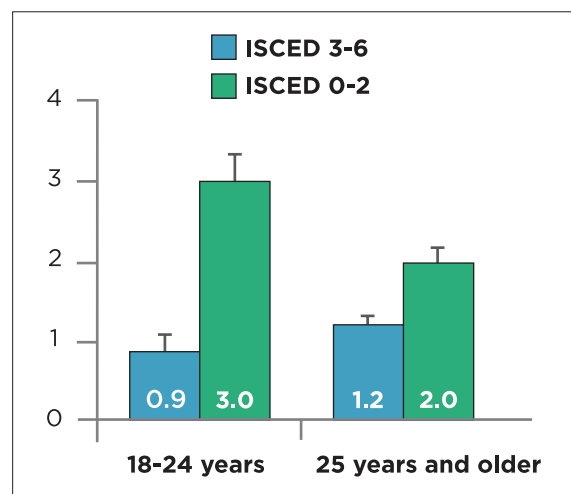
For example, in the youngest, 18 to 24 age group, 10% of employees with incomplete secondary school report a disability in comparison to only 1% of university graduates. The number of employees who report a disability progressively increases with age and in the oldest, 55 to 65 age group, 25% of employees without a secondary school diploma report a disability in comparison to 8% of university graduates of the same age. The differences regarding self-reported disability, age and educational attainment in this study are highly significant (Pearson Chi-Square = 258.698, $p < .001$) and confirm results from other studies that show that with ageing, the number of people who report a disability significantly increases (Sprangers et al, 2000; Steptoe, 2006). Generally, the study shows that people with low educational attainment much more frequently report a disability and that the development of disabilities over the course of life is much more rapid in groups of people with lower educational attainment.

4. Early School Leaving and Deprivation

In addition to mental wellbeing, living conditions and economic situation significantly determine people's wellbeing. The second part of this study explores working and living conditions that early school leavers face at work and in their daily life. This section contains data about the level of deprivation that early school leavers face and describes early school leavers' employment experience, which significantly determines people's overall quality of life and wellbeing.

A more detailed analysis of the economic situations experienced by people with different educational attainment (**Figure 12**) indicates significant differences regarding deprivation experienced in daily life. The European Quality of Life Survey (EQLS) deprivation index, which is based on six different indicators, shows that early school leavers on average have a deprivation index of three in contrast to the participants of the same age with higher educational attainment who reported an average deprivation index of 0.9. There are similar but slightly smaller differences between the older groups of participants with lower and higher educational attainment. An analysis of the means of the EQLS deprivation index by educational attainment and ages shows that all differences are statistically significant ($F = 17.919$, $p < 001$).

Figure 12: Early school leaving and deprivation (The EQLS deprivation index)



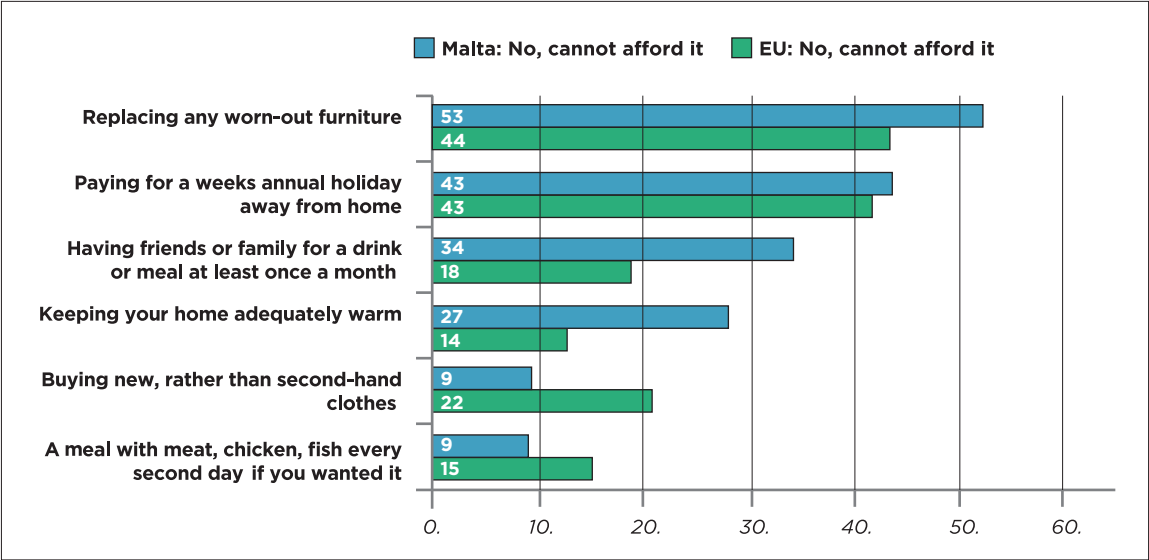
Source: European Quality of Life Survey, 2012.

A comparison of deprivation in Malta and the other EU Member States based on the available indicators shows mixed results (**Figure 13**). There are almost identical proportions of early school leavers in Malta and other EU countries who cannot afford to pay for a week-long annual holiday (42.6% vs. 43.4%). However, a greater number of early leavers in Malta more frequently face difficulties replacing worn-out furniture (53% vs. 44%) and a significantly greater number of people in Malta cannot afford to socialize with friends or family (34% vs. 18%) and to keep their homes adequately warm (27% vs. 14%).

In contrast, a significantly smaller number of people in Malta than in the other EU countries cannot afford to purchase new clothes (9% vs. 22%) or a nutritious meal every second day (9% vs. 15%).

All differences regarding deprivation, except the self-reported ability of paying for a family vacation, are statistically significant. Despite the more favourable situation regarding access to the basic necessities in Malta, there is much room for improvement, particularly regarding better environmental conditions for learning and the opportunity for people to expand their cultural horizons through travel.

Figure 13: Deprivation in Malta and the other EU Member States



Source: European Quality of Life Survey, 2012.

In contrast to the overall situation regarding deprivation in Malta and other EU countries, early school leavers and their families are much more frequently deprived of satisfying their basic needs (**Figure 14a**). Early school leavers in comparison to the same age group with higher educational attainment (**Figure 14b**) twice as frequently experience difficulties replacing any worn-out furniture (78% vs. 41%), are five times more frequently unable to afford an annual family’s holiday (65% vs. 13%) and three times more frequently unable to afford to socialize with friends or families at least once a month (47% vs. 15%). Particularly large differences exist with regard to their financial capability to satisfy basic human needs, including keeping their homes adequately warm, purchasing new clothes and having a nutritious diet. Almost half of early school leavers, nine times more frequently than young people with higher educational attainment, cannot afford to keep their homes adequately warm (45% vs. 5%). A smaller percentage, but more than nine times greater proportion, of early school leavers cannot afford to purchase new clothes (19% vs. 2%). In addition, approximately one in five of early school leavers or almost twice as many as their counterparts who completed secondary or higher education cannot afford a nutritious meal (17% vs. 9%).

Figure 14a: Deprivation among 18-24 year old early school leavers

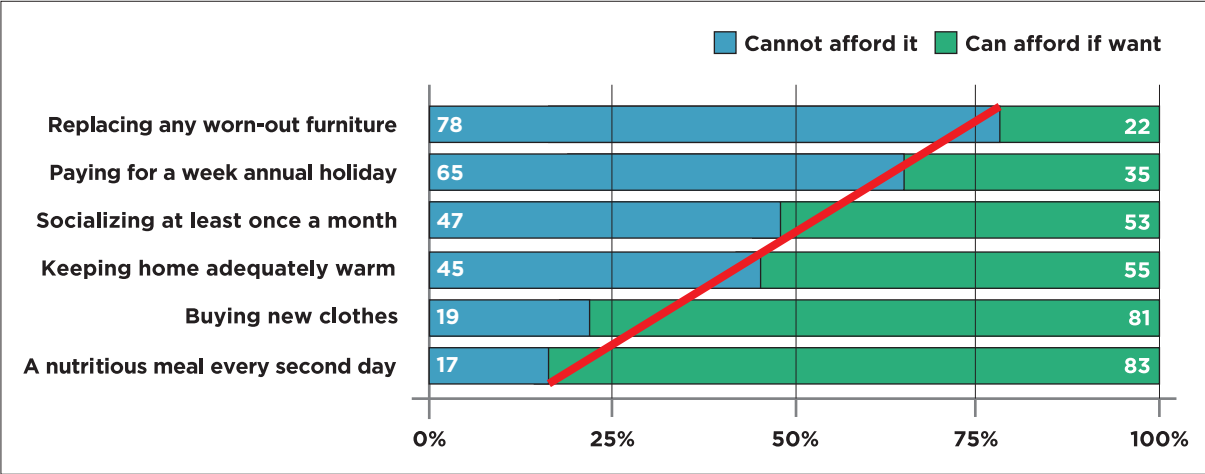
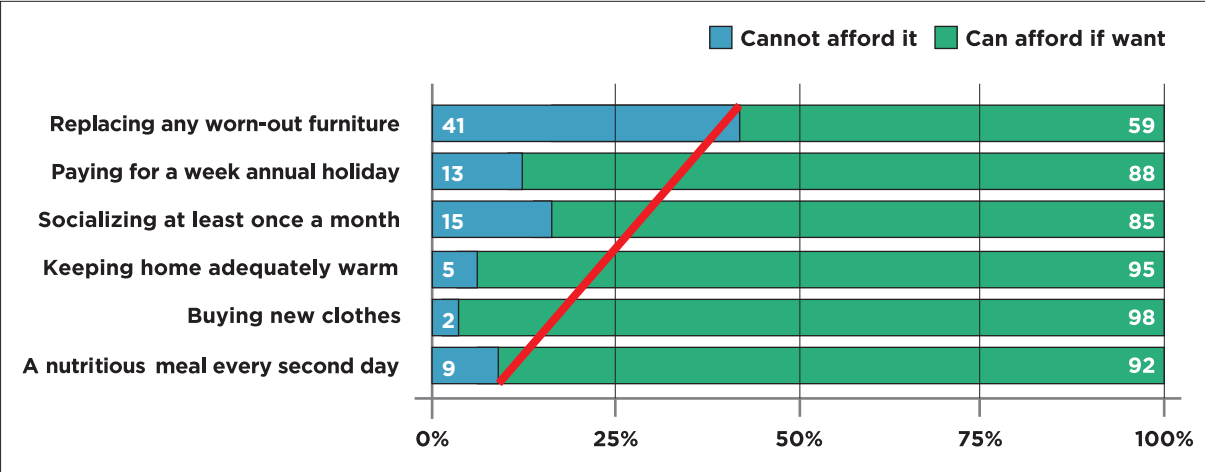


Figure 14b: Deprivation among young participants with higher educational attainment



Source: European Quality of Life Survey, 2012.

The results strongly indicate that many early school leavers face deprivation that severely impairs their capacity to learn and achieve academic success. Additional social programmes that support learning and participation in lifelong learning are essential for the reduction of the high early school leaving rate in Malta and in other EU Member States. All differences regarding deprivation between early school leavers and participants with higher educational attainment are robust and highly statistically significant.

An almost identical pattern of deprivation by educational attainment and ages exists in the other EU Member States, and all differences are highly statistically significant. Multivariate analysis that includes control for the possible confounding effects of the participants’ age, gender and the country of origin shows that the identified association is directly related to early school leaving and lower educational attainment.

Figure 15a: Deprivation of older participants with lower educational attainment

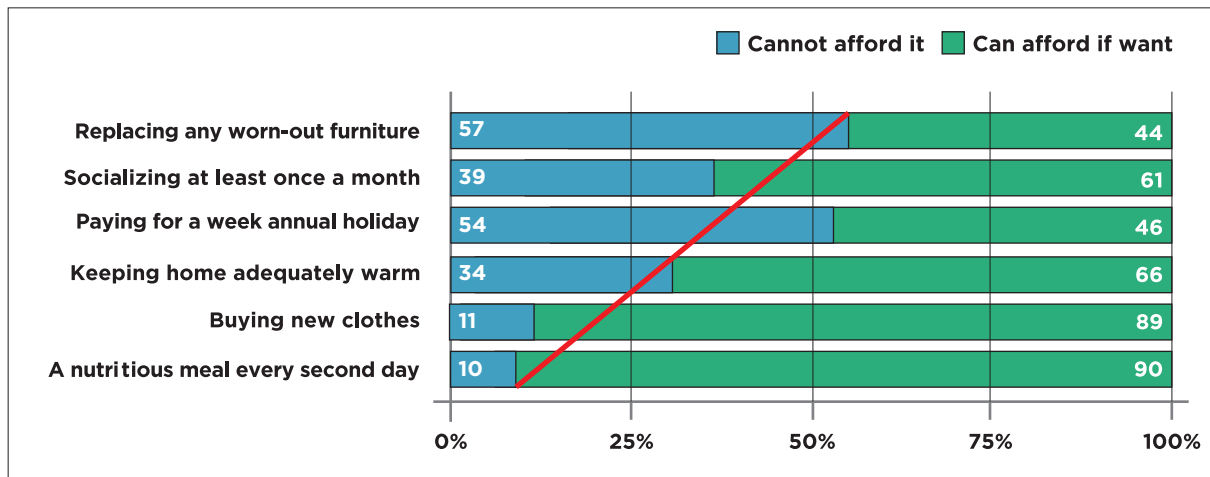
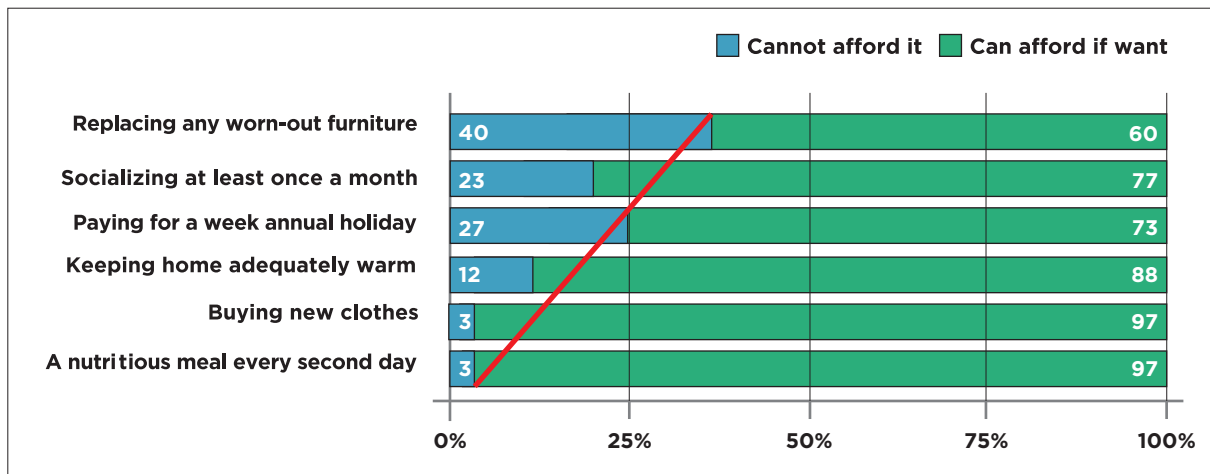


Figure 15b: Deprivation of older participants with higher educational attainment



Source: European Quality of Life Survey, 2012.

The study also shows a similar but less intense pattern of deprivation among older participants with different levels of education and demonstrates that they are more frequently deprived of satisfying their basic human needs than their counterparts with higher educational attainment (**Figure 15a**).

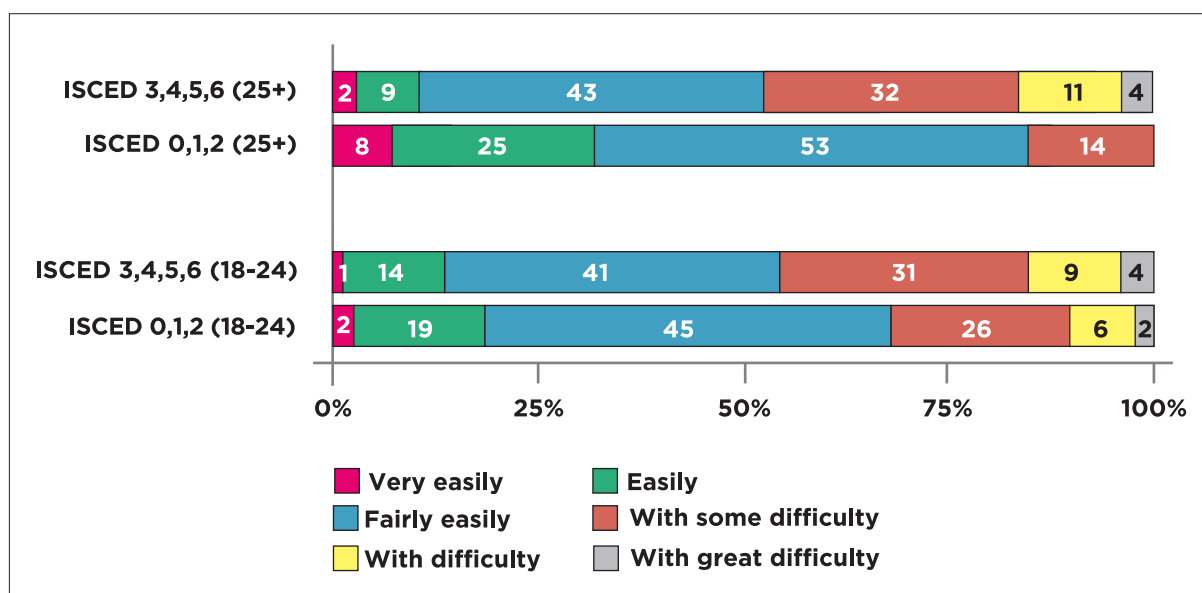
In comparison to the same age group, participants with higher educational attainment (**Figure 15b**) two times more frequently experience difficulties replacing any worn-out furniture (57% vs. 40%) and more frequently cannot afford to socialize with friends or families at least once a month (39% vs. 23%). Also, more frequently, they cannot afford to pay for a family holiday (54% vs. 27%), and they cannot afford to keep their homes adequately warm (34% vs. 12%). Consistent with the previous finding, older participants with lower educational attainment cannot afford to purchase new clothes (11% vs. 3%) or to have a nutritious diet (10% vs. 3%).

The results demonstrate that early exit from education and training has a long-term impact on people’s wellbeing and significantly impairs their capacity to re-engage in adult education since many of them face difficulties in satisfying their basic needs and living under conditions which are necessary for learning and academic achievement.

Early school leaving and self-reported financial situation

Deprivation is closely associated with, and caused by, the participants’ financial situation and their capacity to **satisfy basic human needs**. Further analysis shows that (**Figure 16**) younger participants without upper secondary education more often than participants of the same age with higher educational attainment have difficulties “to make ends meet” (47% vs. 14%).

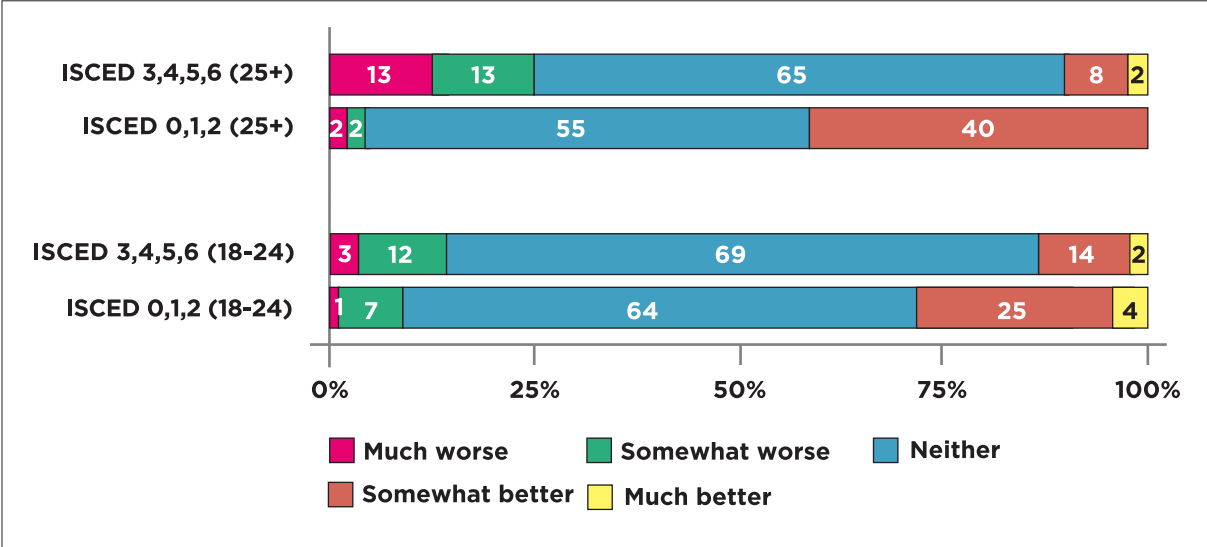
Figure 16: Self-reported financial situation by age and educational attainment



Source: European Quality of Life Survey, 2012.

When asked to compare their financial situation to the situation of most people in the country (**Figure 17**), early school leavers (26%) more frequently felt that their financial situation is worse than the situation of others. In contrast, only 4% of participants of the same age with higher educational attainment feel the same. Similarly, older participants with lower educational attainment (15% of them) also believe that their situation is worse than the situation of others in the country.

Figure 17: Self-perceived financial situation



Source: European Quality of Life Survey, 2012.

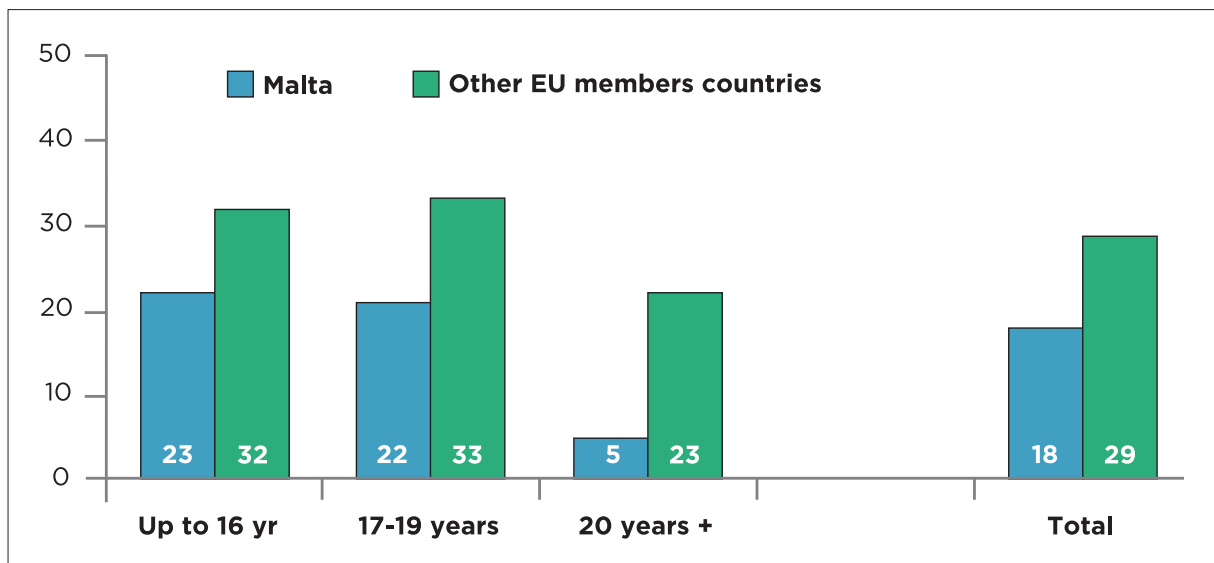
5. Early School Leaving, Job Characteristics and Social Status

Educational attainment is closely related to job characteristics and it is realistic to expect that early school leavers, due to their low educational attainment, experience less favourable working conditions. This study shows that with regards to job security, and feelings about rewards for their efforts, there are significant differences between early school-leavers and those who left school later.

Overall, 82% of employees in Malta believe that their job security is not under threat in comparison to a much smaller number, 71% of employees, living in the other EU countries who feel that their job is secure (**Figure 18**). In contrast, as the same figure shows, employees who left school early much more frequently feel that their job security is under threat (Pearson Chi-Square = 118.652, $p < .001$).

On the whole, the number of employees who believe that their job security is under threat in Malta is significantly smaller than in the other EU countries and there are significant differences regarding employees' perception of job security in both Malta and the other EU member states. As Figure 18 shows, all employees in Malta (Pearson Chi-Square = 5.942, $p < .05$) and the other EU countries (Pearson Chi-Square = 117.093, $p < .001$) who left school earlier more frequently feel that their job is not secure.

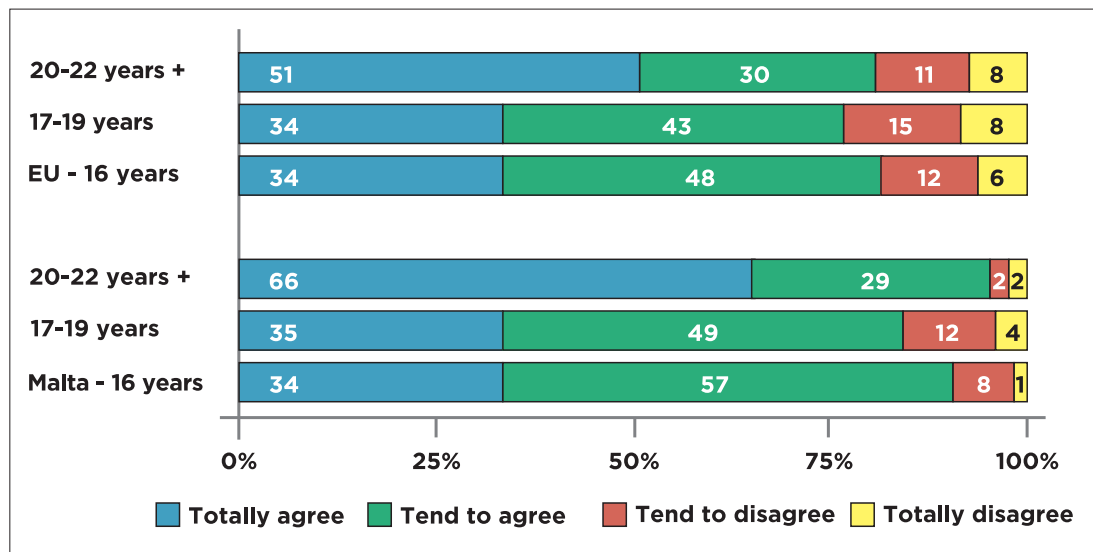
Figure 18: Early school leaving and self-reported job insecurity



Source: Survey of mental wellbeing in Europe, 2010.

An even greater difference exists regarding how participants feel about their job and education (**Figure 19**). Only one third (34% and 35%) of people who left their education early believes that their job adequately reflects their education and training; this is the same as the percentage of people who feel this in other EU member countries.

Figure 19: Your current job adequately reflects your education and training

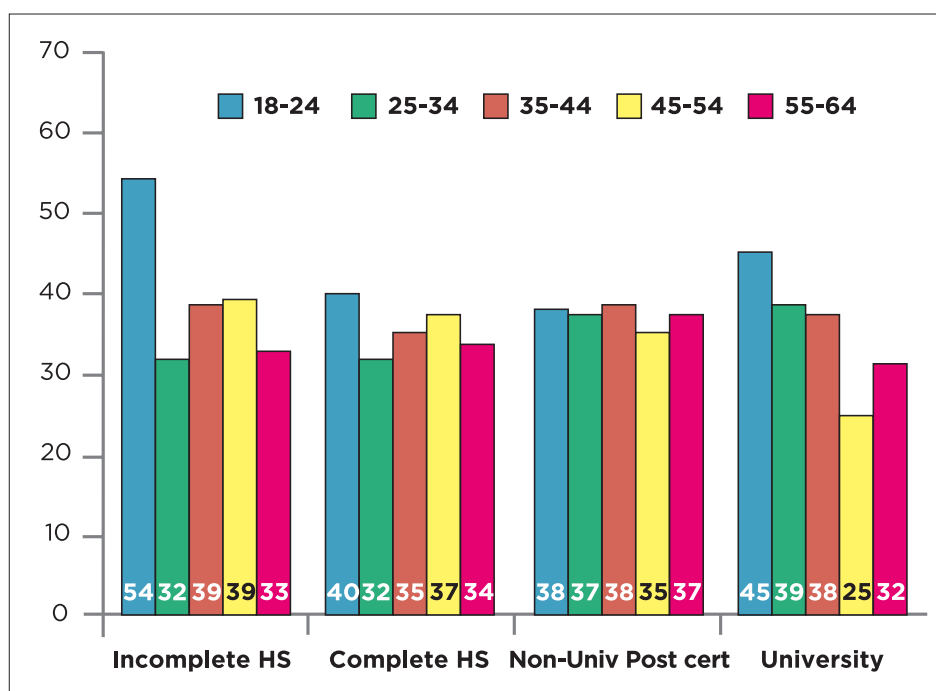


Source: Survey of mental wellbeing in Europe, 2010.

In contrast, employees in other EU member states who ended their education when they were 20 years or older in the EU (51%) and Malta (66%), feel (totally agree) that their current job adequately reflects their education and training.

Additional analysis from the large-scale Work and Lifelong Learning survey shows similar results and a similar pattern exists concerning the perceived likelihood of losing a job or business (Figure 20). Results demonstrate that the youngest employees who ended their education earlier without earning a secondary school certificate most frequently believe that they can lose their job or business (Pearson Chi-Square = 39.795, $p < .001$).

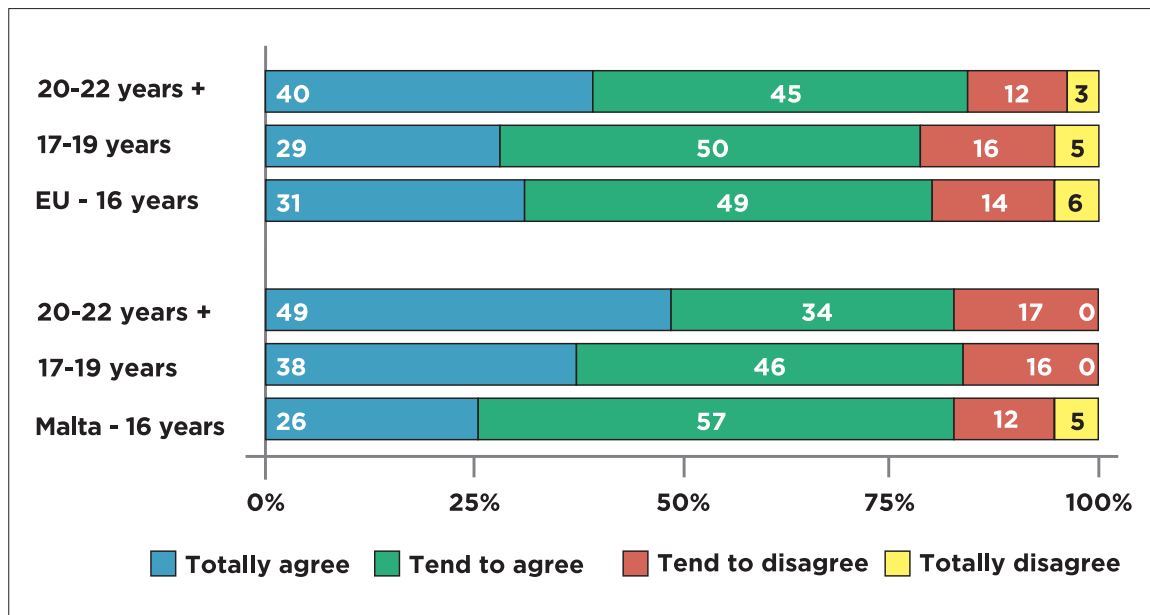
Figure 20: The perceived likelihood of losing a job or business



Source: WALL, 2010.

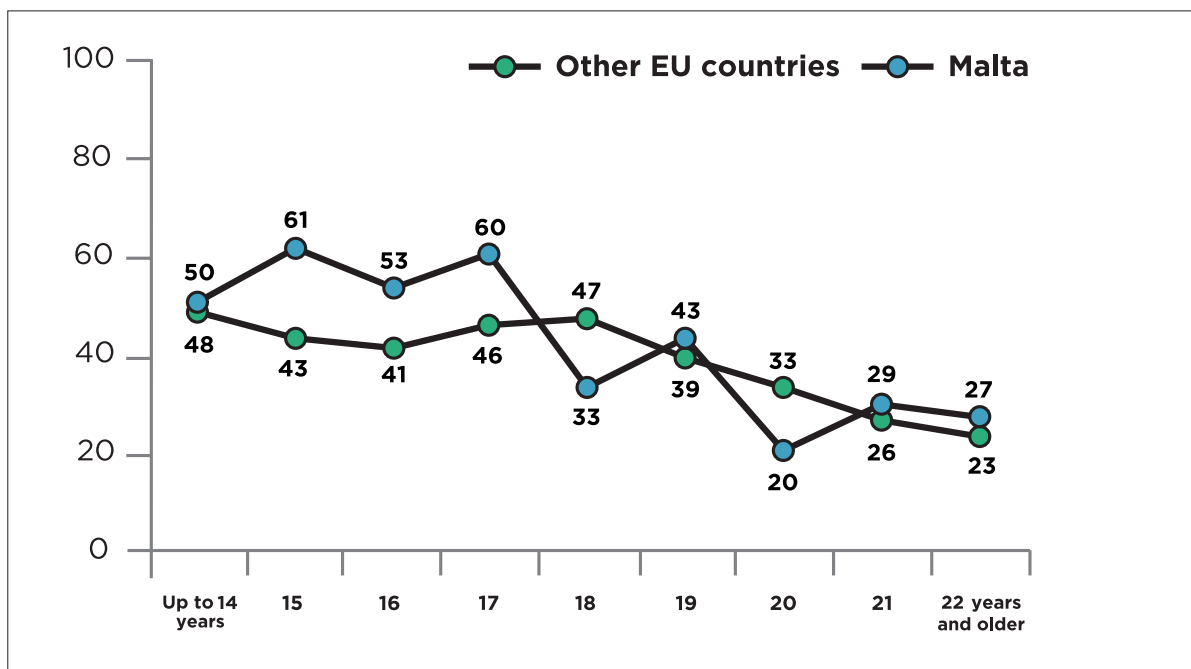
Similarly, when asked if they feel that they receive deserved respect and recognition for their efforts at work, only one quarter (26%) of employees in Malta who left formal education before the age of 16 reported that they do (Figure 21). In contrast, 49% of participants who left school later, at the age of 20 or more, feel that they receive adequate respect and recognition at work (Pearson Chi-Square = 12.554, $p < .05$). The differences in the other EU member countries were smaller but statistically highly significant (Pearson Chi-Square = 154.573, $p < .001$).

Figure 21: The time when participants stopped full-time education and respect at work



Source: Survey of mental wellbeing in Europe, 2010.

Figure 22: The time when participants ended formal education and financial difficulties



Source: Survey of mental wellbeing in Europe, 2010.

Regarding financial difficulties reported by the participants from all EU member states (**Figure 22**), almost 50% of the participants who left school earlier frequently reported difficulties paying their bills at the end of the month in comparison to approximately one quarter of participants who left school when they were 21 years old.

A more detailed analysis of this survey shows that one in seven of the EU survey participants (14.1%) who ended their formal education when they were aged 14 or younger experience difficulties paying their bills most of the time and this difference is statistically highly significant (Pearson Chi-Square = 1004.233, $p < .001$).

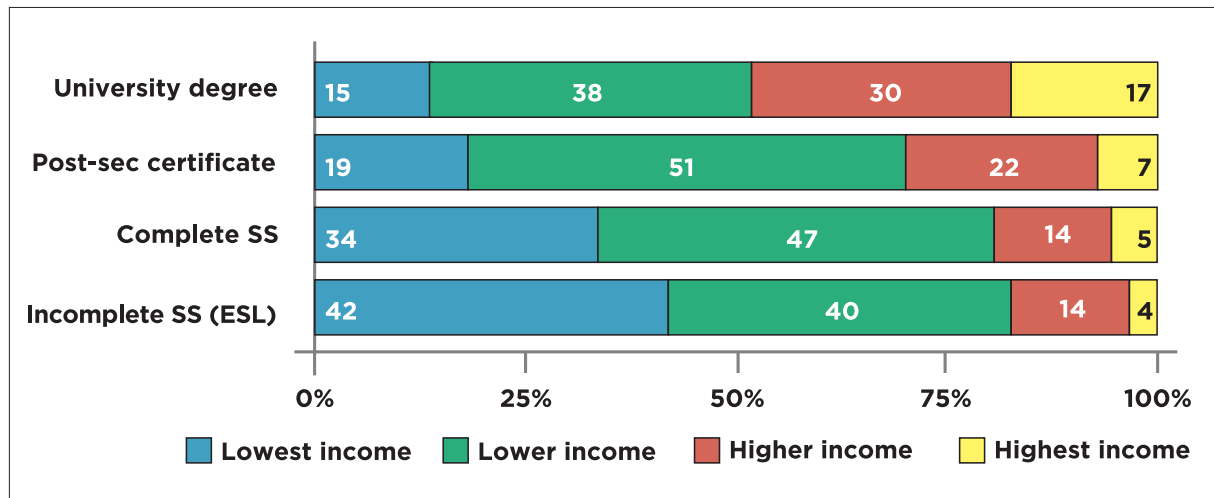
An additional analysis also shows that a greater number of the survey participants in Malta who ended their formal education earlier frequently report financial difficulties (Pearson Chi-Square = 16.345, $p < .003$). These include more than half (52%) of the participants who ended their formal education at the age of 16 and 45% of participants who left formal education before the age of 19. In contrast, only a quarter (26%) of participants who left formal education after the age of 20 experience similar financial difficulties. There are evidently some variations caused by the relatively small number of participants (500) in the sample of the Maltese population.

Early leaving from education and personal income

This section of the study investigates the quality of employment, working and living conditions of employees 18 years of age and older who participated in a large-scale survey of Work and Lifelong Learning in Canada. The selected, currently employed, participants in this study were grouped by age in five groups; 18 to 24 years, 25 to 34 years, 35 to 44 years, 45 to 54 years, and 55-64 years. Their educational attainment was defined as incomplete secondary education (early school leavers), high school diploma, post-secondary (non university) certificate and university degree, which includes both undergraduate and post-graduate levels.

Results of this study show significant negative effects of lower educational attainment or early exit from formal education on the employment and income of people who stop their formal education early. As is well attested, the personal income of those with varying levels of educational attainment is significantly different. This study (**Figure 23**) confirms these results and shows that almost half (47%) of those participants with a university degree earn above average income; only 15% of them are in the lowest-income bracket.

Figure 23: Personal income by educational attainment



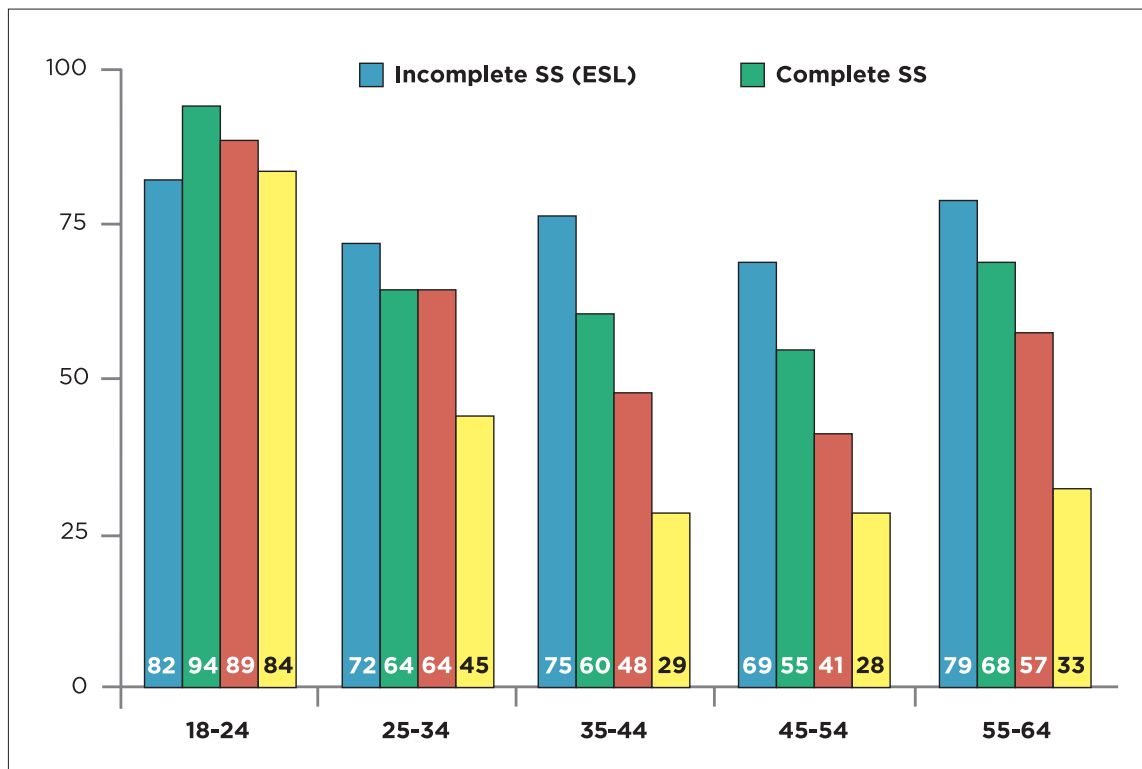
Source: WALL, 2010.

In contrast, four out of ten (42%) of those who did not complete secondary school are in the lowest-income group, and less than 20% receive an above average income (Pearson Chi-Square = 560.788, $p < .001$). Household income differences between people with varied levels of educational attainment is even greater than that of personal income, and this difference is highly statistically significant (Pearson Chi-Square = 850.140, $p < .001$).

The analysis of income by educational attainment and the age of employees indicates that, in the group of 18 to 24 year olds (**Figure 24**), more than three quarters (82%) of employees who ended their education early were in the group that received the lowest personal income (Pearson Chi-Square = 497.962, $p < .001$). The income differences by education are much higher among female employees with incomplete secondary education. Among female employees with low educational attainment, almost two thirds (62%) earn the lowest income and only 2% are in the highest income group (Pearson Chi-Square = 452.972, $p < .001$).

Figure 24 also shows the influence of educational attainment and the age of employees on their personal income. Among 18 to 24 year olds who attained less than secondary education (early school leavers), four out of five (82%) are in the lowest quartile regarding their personal annual income. In the same age group, those with higher educational attainment also earn lower incomes, probably as a result of this longer engagement in education, postponed entry into the labour force and shorter tenure that results from the late start of their employment. As expected, the income level of other groups significantly increases with age and tenure, and most of those with higher educational attainment quickly surpass their counterparts who stopped their education early. For example, in the 55-64 age group, eight out of ten people (79%) who ended their education early without completing their secondary education are in the lowest-income group in comparison with 33% of university graduates whose earnings are significantly below the average.

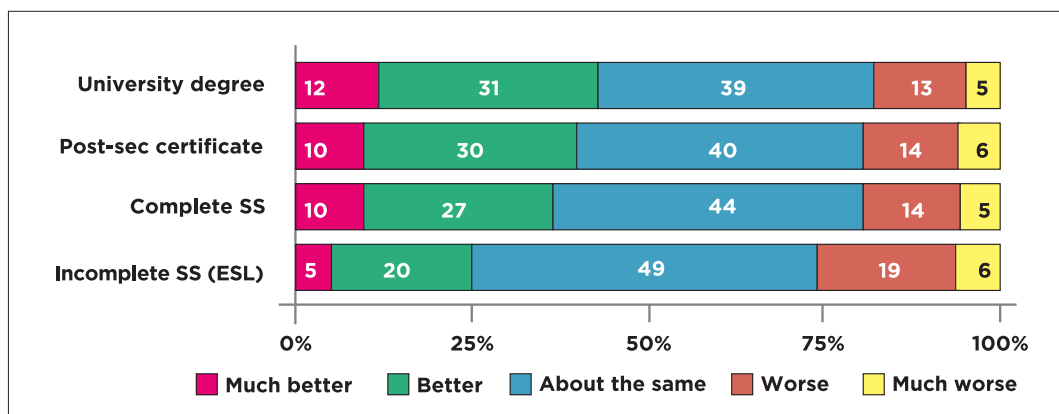
Figure 24: Personal Income, age and educational attainment



Source: WALL, 2010.

It appears that, at the beginning of their career, people who stop their education early receive some income that alleviates their personal and/or family financial situation, but this has long-lasting consequences on their life-time income and quality of life. The results indicate that people who stop their education early are often destined to remain in low quality employment. The literature shows that youths who stop their formal education early tend to be from families with lower education and income, and the opportunity to obtain even the lowest income at a young age, despite some inconsistent findings, is probably a motivator for some youths to exit early from formal education and engage in paid work.

Figure 25: Expected change in income and benefits



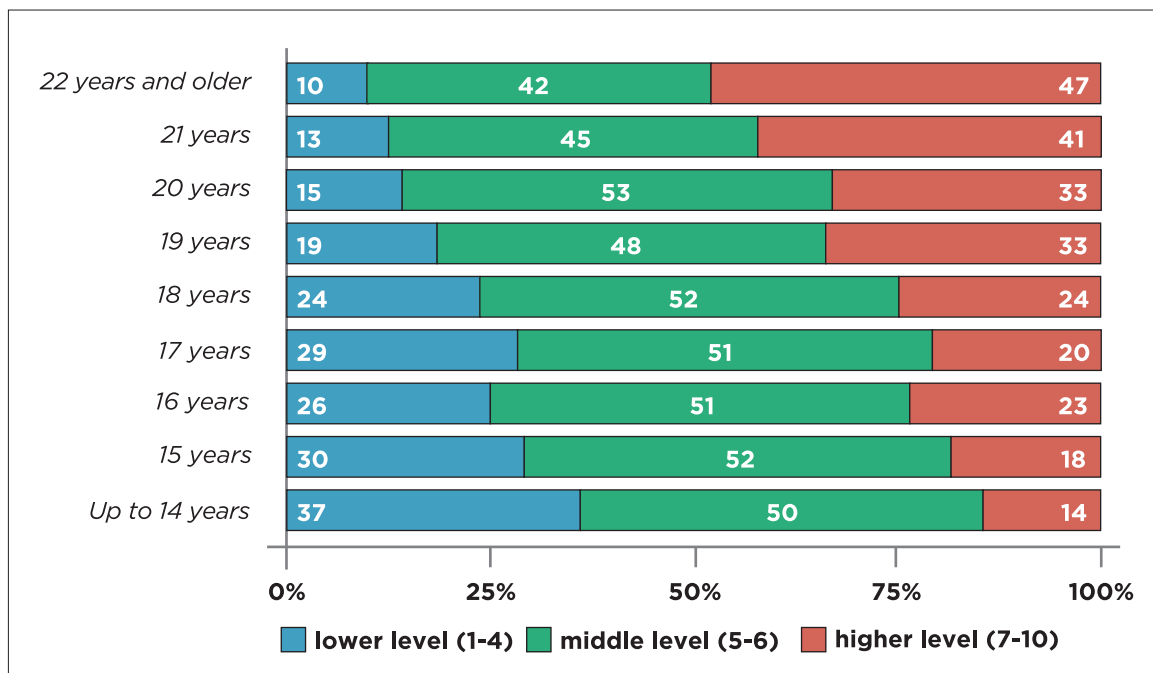
Source: WALL, 2010.

As **Figure 25** shows, in addition to the apparently lower income, people who stop their formal education earlier more frequently feel that their income and benefits are worse than they have been in the recent past (Pearson Chi-Square = 181.242, $p < .001$).

Early school leaving and self-perceived social status

The study also shows that there is a statistically significant difference regarding self-perceived social status between those who ended their formal education earlier and those who continued their formal education for a longer period (**Figure 26**). More than 40% of EU members who ended their formal education when they were 21 (41%) and 22 (47%) years or older believe that they have the highest status in society, in contrast to only 14% of participants who left formal education at or before the age of 14 and 18% of participants who left their formal education at the age of 15 (Pearson Chi-Square = 2399.500, $p < .001$).

Figure 26: The time when participants ended formal education and perceived social status



Source: Survey of mental wellbeing in Europe, 2010.

A similar tendency is evident in Malta where participants, who ended their formal education earlier, more often believe that they belong to the lower strata of society, in contrast to the participants who left their formal education later, at the age of 21 or older (Pearson Chi-Square = 105.662, $p < .006$).

6. Early Exit from Formal Education and Living Conditions

The type and quality of employment and income that people with lower educational attainment or their families receive have a significant impact on their living conditions, resources for learning and overall access to goods and services relevant to their quality of life and education.

There are significant discrepancies regarding the availability of various electronic devices to people with different educational attainment. For example, regarding the ownership of a DVD player, 51% of those who stopped formal education early, at 14 to 15 years of age, reported owning a DVD player in contrast to approximately 82% of participants who stopped formal education between 21 to 22 years of age and this difference is statistically significant. With regards to CD players, the results were similar: 41% of those who stopped formal education early reported owning a CD player but this number is much higher (78%) among participants who ended their formal education later.

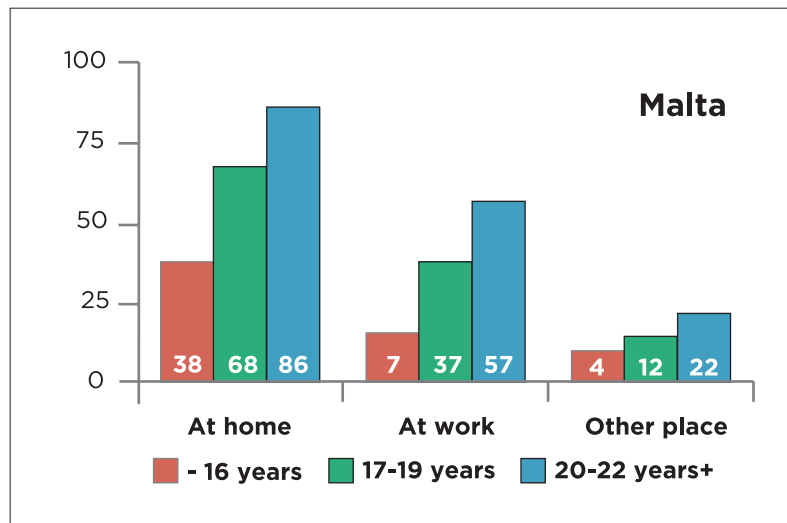
There is also a significant difference regarding car ownership. Slightly more than half (55%) of those who stopped formal education when they were 14 years of age reported owning a car in contrast to approximately 80% of people who stopped their formal education at the age of 21 or 22.

An even greater difference exists with regard to computer ownership and access to the Internet. Only 28% of the participants who ended their formal education early, when they were 14 to 15 years of age, possess a computer in comparison with more than 80% of those participants who stopped their formal education after age 20. Access to the Internet is similar, ranging from 23% among those who stopped formal education early to more than 80% of people who stopped formal education when they were 20 or 21 years old.

In addition to the differences regarding the ownership of a computer and access to the Internet, further analysis shows extensive differences regarding internet usage at home and at the place of work and other places, between people who ended their education early, before the age of 16, and participants who continued their education for a longer period of time.

As **Figure 27** shows, a very small number of people in Malta who ended their formal education when they were 16 or younger use the Internet at home (38%), at work (7%) or at some other place (4%). Also, only 7% of people who ended their education earlier use the Internet in their homes frequently (two or three times a week) in contrast to 86% of people who ended their formal education when they were 20 or older. Furthermore, there is an even greater difference regarding Internet use at their place of work; only 7% of people who ended their education early use internet at work daily and only 1% of them frequently use the internet. In contrast, almost half (47%) of participants who left formal education after the age of 20 reported using computers on a daily basis at the workplace. In addition, 62% of people who left formal education before the age 16 never use the Internet at home and 93% of them never use the Internet at their place of work and this significantly limits their potential for involvement in lifelong learning.

Figure 27: The time when participants stopped formal education and use of the Internet

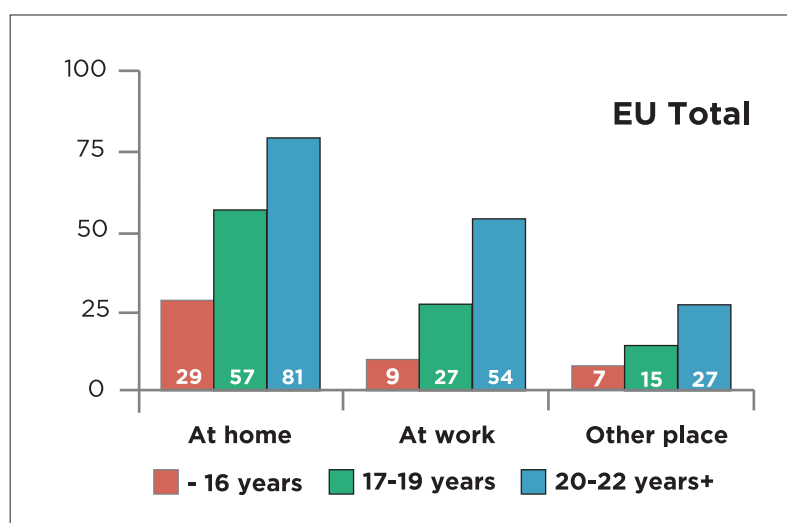


Source: Survey of mental wellbeing in Europe, 2010. [Malta, %]

Overall, the pattern of Internet use regarding the time when people leave school in Malta and the other EU member states is similar. However, the incidence of Internet use at home in Malta is higher than the average Internet use at home in the other EU countries. As **Figure 28** shows, the difference regarding Internet usage at home in Malta and the other EU member states is consistently higher regardless of the time people completed their formal education.

Internet use at some other places in the other EU countries is slightly higher than in Malta, probably as a result of less frequent ownership and the efforts that different societies make to increase access to the ICT and computer-related skills. All differences regarding the Internet use in Malta and the other EU member states, by the time people ended their formal education, are statistically significant.

Figure 28: The time when participants ended formal education and use of the Internet



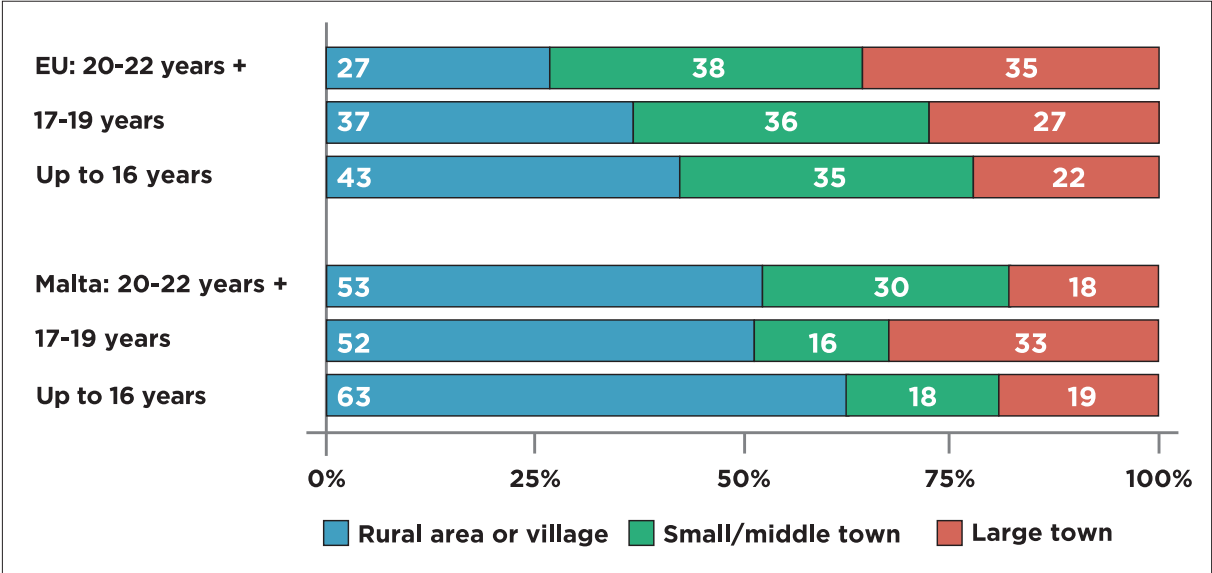
Source: Survey of mental wellbeing in Europe, 2010. [Total %]

This study shows that regarding the ownership of goods and access to services that are important for education and quality of life, people who end their formal education early are more often deprived. This is the fact that is probably most closely associated with their overall wellbeing, and the possibility that they may engage in further education.

There are significant differences regarding the type of community in which people in Malta and in EU member states reside. As **Figure 29** shows, almost two thirds (63%) of people who ended school early in Malta and 43% of people in other EU countries reside in rural areas or villages. All these differences are statistically significant (Pearson Chi-Square = 12.050, $p < .017$ in Malta and Pearson Chi-Square = 504.961, $p < .001$ in the other EU countries).

The type of community where people live also reflects home ownership. People who ended their formal education earlier more frequently reside in rural communities where home ownership is more frequent. In contrast, there is a significant difference regarding the number of those paying for an apartment or a house. People who ended their formal education earlier rarely acquire and report paying for an apartment or a house (13.3%). In contrast, people who ended their formal education later, at the age of 20 to 22, almost three times more frequently (36%) acquire and pay for real estate than those who ended their education early.

Figure 29: The time when participants stopped full-time education by types of community



Source: Survey of Mental Wellbeing in Europe, 2010 [Malta].

In addition to the previous findings, the fact that a large number of people who ended their formal education early reside in relatively distant areas from educational and commercial centres indicates that they probably face greater difficulties regarding access and commuting to school and work, which limits them from continuing formal education.

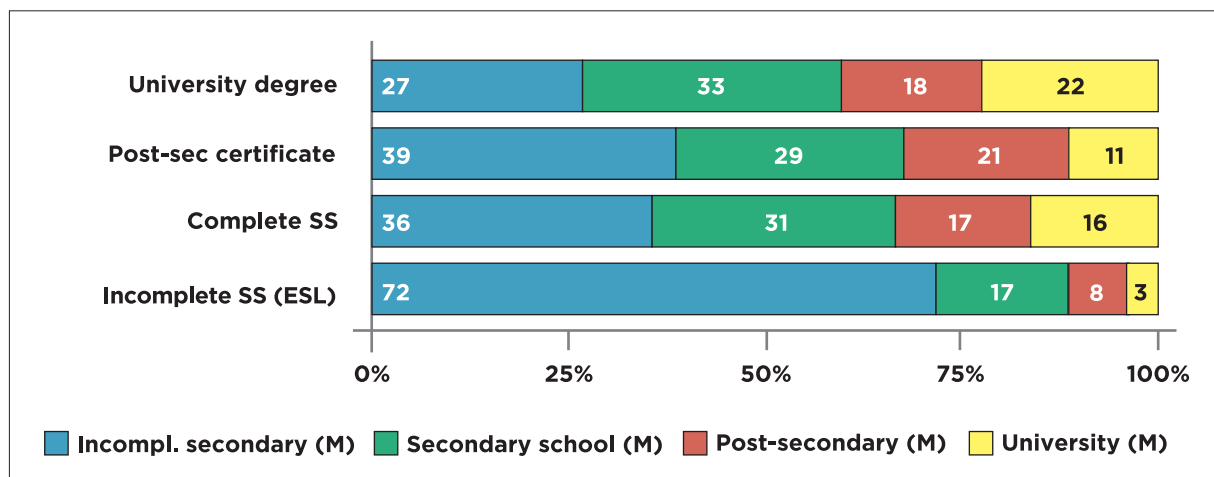
Social background of early school leavers

To examine some of the possible factors associated with early exit from formal education, this study explores associations between early school leavers' social background, parents' educational attainment and educational attainment of their children based on the large-scale Canadian survey of Work and Lifelong Learning (WALL), which provides appropriate data for this type of analysis.

The analysis shows that the educational attainment of both parents is significantly associated with early exit from formal education. For example, as **Figure 30** shows, 72% of employees with low educational attainment (elementary or incomplete secondary education) have mothers with the same educational attainment, 8% of them obtain a post-secondary certificate and only 3% of them obtain a university degree. Contrasting this, 22% of employees whose mothers have a university degree obtain this level of education, and additionally, 18% attain a post-secondary qualification (Chi-Square = 752.630, $p < .001$).

According to results from this study, fathers' educational attainment is also significantly associated with the education of their children (**Figure 30**). Among employees with low educational attainment (elementary or incomplete secondary school), 74% are from families where the father has not completed secondary school, and only 6% of employees from such families obtained a university degree. In contrast, 30% of employees with a university degree are from families where fathers have a university degree.

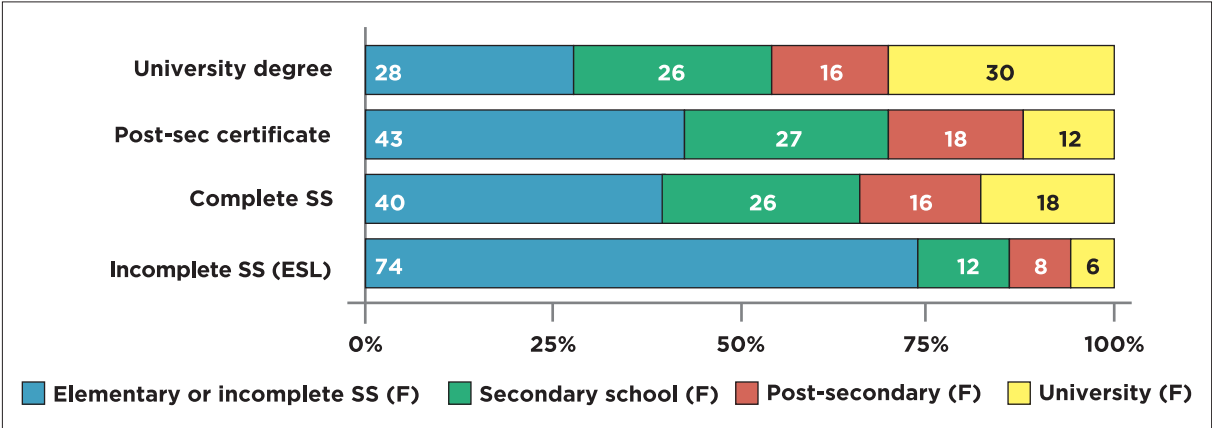
Figure 30: Early school leaving and mother's educational attainment



Source: WALL, 2010.

A significantly smaller number of employees (28%) from families with fathers who hold a university degree do not complete secondary school (**Figure 31**). Overall, a father's educational attainment is strongly associated with the educational attainment of their children, and this association is highly statistically significant (Pearson Chi-Square = 845.728, $p < .001$).

Figure 31: Early school leaving and father’s educational attainment



Source: WALL, 2010.

Based on results from this analysis and other similar studies (Livingstone & Stowe, 2001), parents’ education is strongly associated with the educational attainment of their children. In addition, this analysis shows a tendency towards a stronger association between a child’s educational attainment and the educational attainment of their fathers.

The study confirms findings of several other research studies indicating that children from families with low socio-economic status, where parents have low educational attainment, are at a greater risk of stopping their formal education before they obtain a secondary school diploma (Astone & McLanahan, 1994; Battin-Pearson et al, 2000; Luyten, Bosker, Dekkers, & Derks, 2003). The efforts to prevent early school leaving of this group of students are very likely to contribute to the reduction of early exit from formal education.

7. Summary of Findings and Concluding Remarks

Results from this study, which is based on the existing data sources on early school leaving in Malta, demonstrate strong associations between early school leaving and many aspects of wellbeing, including poor subjective evaluation of different aspects of **personal life, less efficient functioning** in everyday life and **frequent experiences of negative emotions**.

With regard to the subjective evaluation of wellbeing, it is evident that early school leavers, regardless of their age, are less happy and less satisfied with their lives than their counterparts with higher educational attainment.

Also, early school leavers feel **less optimistic** about their future and experience **time pressures and lack of time** to do the things they enjoy more frequently than other people of the same age. In addition, findings demonstrate that early school leaving is strongly associated with greater feelings of **social exclusion**.

This study, as well as other research reports (European Commission, 2012), shows that, at the population level, people in Malta are less affected by emotional and health-related problems than those in the other EU countries. However, the analysis demonstrates that early school leavers in Malta, as well as in other European countries, more often than the other people of the same age but with higher educational attainment, experience **emotional problems, feel less happy and less frequently feel calm, peaceful or full of life**.

The study also indicates that early school leavers more frequently than their counterparts of the same age with higher educational attainment report problems regarding **physical health**. The supplementary data analysis shows similar tendencies and demonstrates that early school leavers more frequently report various forms of disability. **The gap regarding health and disability is statistically significant and noticeably widens with ageing**.

In the context of other results from this study and the review of the literature, it is likely that the low income earned by early school leavers, their high job insecurity and less favourable living conditions contribute to the rapid deterioration of physical health, the deterioration of their capability and lower wellbeing.

Comparisons of **deprivation**, based on indicators from the European Quality of Life Survey (the EQLS deprivation index), demonstrate that younger, 18 to 24 year-old participants more often than the older participants experience deprivation. The study shows that people in Malta more often cannot afford to replace any worn-out furniture, socialize with friends or family and keep their homes adequately warm. On the contrary, people in Malta less frequently experience difficulties in satisfying their basic needs. A significantly smaller number of people in Malta than in the other EU countries cannot afford to purchase new clothes or to afford a nutritious meal at least every second day. The level of deprivation is also apparent among older participants with lower educational attainment but **the intensity of deprivation** in this age group is lower than among younger early school leavers.

Deprivation is closely related to precarious work and various difficulties, and this study shows that early school leavers, more often than their counterparts with

higher educational attainment, face financial difficulties, perceive their situation as worse than the situation of other people in the country, frequently have difficulties “making ends meet”, and are rarely optimistic regarding the improvement of their current situation.

Overall, a significantly greater proportion of employees in Malta than in the other EU countries (82% vs. 71%) believe that their job is secure. It is particularly noticeable among employees with higher educational attainment, since only 5% of them feel that their job is insecure. In contrast, a much greater number, **almost a quarter of employees who left education early before age 16, believe that their job is insecure.**

In addition, only a quarter of employees in Malta who left school early feel that they receive adequate **respect and recognition at work** in comparison to almost half of the employees who ended their formal education at age 20 or later. The same study shows a smaller but statistically significant difference in other European countries.

Furthermore, this study confirms findings from many other studies that **early school leavers experience serious financial difficulties** and receive significantly **lower incomes**, and it shows that **the income differences increase during their working life**. The greatest difficulties regarding income are experienced by the youngest, 18 to 24, and the oldest 55 to 64 year-old employees with low educational attainment.

This study also found that people who end their formal education early **are more often deprived** in regard to the ownership of goods and access to services than people of the same age who completed secondary school or higher education. Results show that early school leavers have limited access to various electronic devices relevant for education, including computers and the Internet.

As a result of their educational attainment, working and living conditions, the majority of early school leavers believe that their **status in society** is low. This type of belief is often associated with low self-esteem and lack of self-confidence that, together with limited access to education and training-related resources, significantly restricts their capacity to re-engage in formal education.

The type and quality of employment and the low-income level of employees with lower educational attainment have a significant impact on their unfavourable living conditions and limited access to goods and service, which together contribute to their poor wellbeing and the reduced capacity to re-engage in formal education.

A report of the Network of Experts in Social Sciences of Education and Training (Dale, 2010) provides an overview of the selected measures that can reduce early school leaving. This list includes preventative, school based, and student focused interventions, and compensatory and special measures focused on some of the high-risk social groups. The suggested measures are based on the identified factors that contribute to students’ disengagement from schools, including factors related to school and curriculum, family, and the students’ individual characteristics (Dale, 2010, p. 25). All suggested measures require significant time, effort, resources and wide popular and political support. Some of the measures are focused on the systemic, structural reform of schooling, and require radical structural reforms of schooling and the provision of comprehensive social and educational services to

students with the aims of eliminating the compositional effects of schools, and reducing socioeconomic segregation and large differences among schools.

School-based interventions are focused on re-engagement and support for students at risk of early school leaving, which are expected to increase rates of school completion (Lamb & Rice, 2008). Distinct from other strategies, the main focus of this approach is on increased school completion that indirectly leads to the reduction of early school leaving.

The proposed set of measures contains applicable interventions that intend to improve student engagement and increase rates of school completion through the development of supportive school cultures, school-wide and student-focused strategies, and through focus on the needs of specific groups of students who are at greater risk of school leaving.

In another study, the same authors (Rice & Lamb, 2008) offer explicit suggestions for the implementation of the identified strategies from the inclusion of preparatory, planning and need assessment activities to the specific empirically proven strategies to promote student connectedness, increase their responsibility, and increase expectations. Also, they suggest additional interventions focused on the elimination of personal obstacles and hands-on training that can motivate students to remain in school.

Successful strategies for reduction of school leaving in Ontario, Student Success and the Achieving Excellence strategies (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015, 2014), are based on a similar approach which is focused on increasing graduation rates through supporting the achievement levels in school with a large number of disadvantaged students. Current efforts are focused on the provision of high-quality course options inside and outside the classroom and qualified one-on-one support for students who need additional help to learn. This strategy mobilizes different stakeholders, including communities, employers, colleges, universities and training centres in order to provide regular and alternative learning options to meet students' interests and support their learning. This initiative includes support for "dual credit programs" that allow students to earn credits towards a high school diploma through college, apprenticeship, and university courses.

The Achieving Excellence strategy is unique because of the focus on the wellbeing of students and the exclusive focus on increased graduation, rather than the previously dominant focus on the reduction of the drop-out rate. As an illustration of this new orientation, the Achieving Excellence strategy repeatedly underlines "graduation rate" while there is not a single reference to "school drop-out," a term that has dominated debates about education in this country for decades. This direction indicates a greater orientation focused on prevention and support for learning than on interventions aimed at mitigating the consequences of early exit from formal education.

In addition to the wellbeing of students and the need of industry for a highly educated labour force, current efforts are motivated by the economic incentives of the reduced cost of leaving school. It was estimated that, in Canada, early school leaving reduces student lifetime income by approximately \$100,000, increases the total public cost for social assistance by nearly \$969 million per annum, significantly

reduces costs of the justice system (\$350 million per year) and reduces health care costs by more than \$8,000 per annum for each student who drops out of school (Olena, 2009).

Similar expectations regarding the economic benefits of reduced early school leaving exist in Malta. According to the National Reform Programme, decreased early school leaving rate is expected to significantly increase employment and GDP by 0.86% by 2020 (Ministry for Finance, 2015a) and there are significant efforts and support to achieve the established policy goals.

In addition to the school-based strategies, Rice & Lamb (2008) suggest several student-focused strategies that include student case management, mentoring, welfare and targeted financial support, targeted assistance for skill development, various forms of tutoring, supplementary or out-of-school-time programs, project- and creative arts-based programs, and programs to improve students' social skills.

This approach, as well as many policy documents and scholars (European Commission/ EACEA/ Eurydice/ Cedefop, 2014; Oomen & Plant, 2014; Nevala & Hawley, 2011; Watts & Sultana, 2004), indicate an important role of the career guidance services for reducing early school-leaving. Nevala and Hawley (2011) emphasize the important role of the intensified **professional guidance provision** for the prevention of early school leaving and, without any serious analysis of this type of service and the overall situation that students at risk of early school leaving face, attribute a significant part of early school leaving to "lack of support and guidance" (Nevala & Hawley, 2011, p. 151).

This harsh judgement is in contrast with the well-documented studies of the international career guidance policies (Watts & Sultana, 2004), particularly in small states where, in addition to the expanded duties and increased workload, career guidance counsellors face additional difficulties specific to small states (see Sultana, 1998; 2010). Instead of unsubstantiated accusations, there is an obvious and much more important need for resourcing and expanding career guidance services.

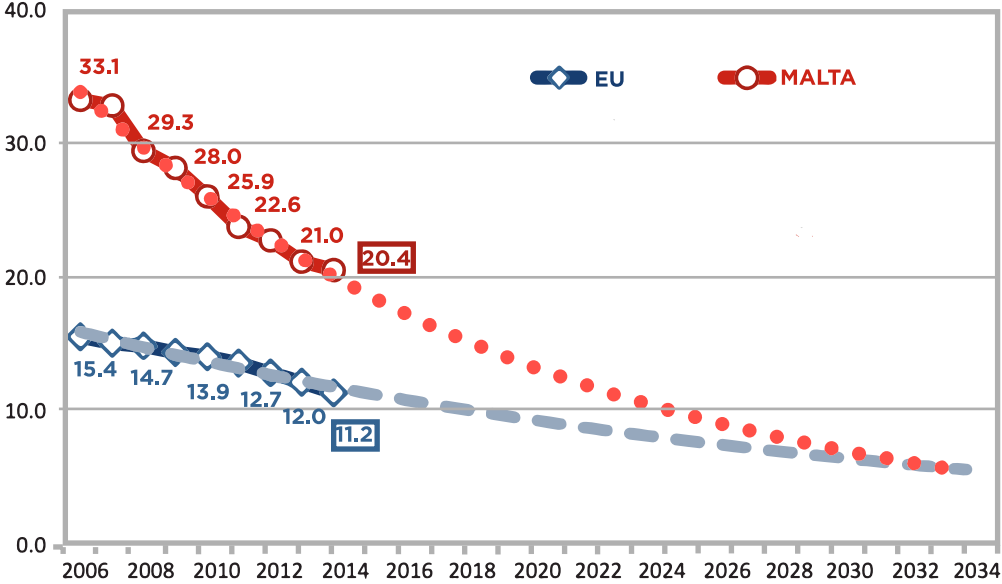
In the light of results from this study concerning wellbeing, which demonstrates that early school leavers experience serious financial difficulties, deprivation, and struggle to obtain the necessary conditions for learning, it seems particularly important to further support and reinforce career guidance services. This support must focus particularly on social workers in schools assisting students at risk of early school leaving, dealing with students' everyday issues that have detrimental effects on their academic success.

Among **student-focused interventions**, an important area is the orientation to the development of resilience as a preventative strategy, which can help students cope or adapt to hardship often experienced by those at risk of early school leaving in their daily life and at school (Luthar, Cicchetti & Becker, 2000). A body of research studies (Cefai & Camilleri, 2011; Cefai & Cooper, 2009; Cefai, Cooper Camilleri, 2008), generated by the Centre for Resilience and Socio-Emotional Health at the University of Malta, provides evidence-based strategies for the development of students' resilience and social and emotional health. This offers a highly valuable resource for the development and implementation of this type of intervention, with the objective of reducing early school leaving and improving student wellbeing.

A prediction based upon the data from the past ten years indicates that the early school leaving rate in Malta is most likely to continue the declining trend, although by a slightly lower rate than during the previous decade (**Figure 32**). Based on this analysis it seems that, should the current context persist, it is likely that by approximately 2020 the early school leaving rate in Malta could be expected to drop to 13%-14%, and by 2025 to reach the target rate of 10%.

This is an optimistic prediction since the most-recent figures in Malta and other EU countries indicate a deceleration of the current trend in Malta, and a tendency towards a more rapid reduction of the early school leaving rate in the other European countries. The data series is relatively short for a precise prediction, but it is certain that the acceleration of the current trend requires some additional measures to reduce the still very high early school leaving rate in Malta.

Figure 32: Trend of ESL in Malta and the other EU Member States



Source: Eurostat, 2015.

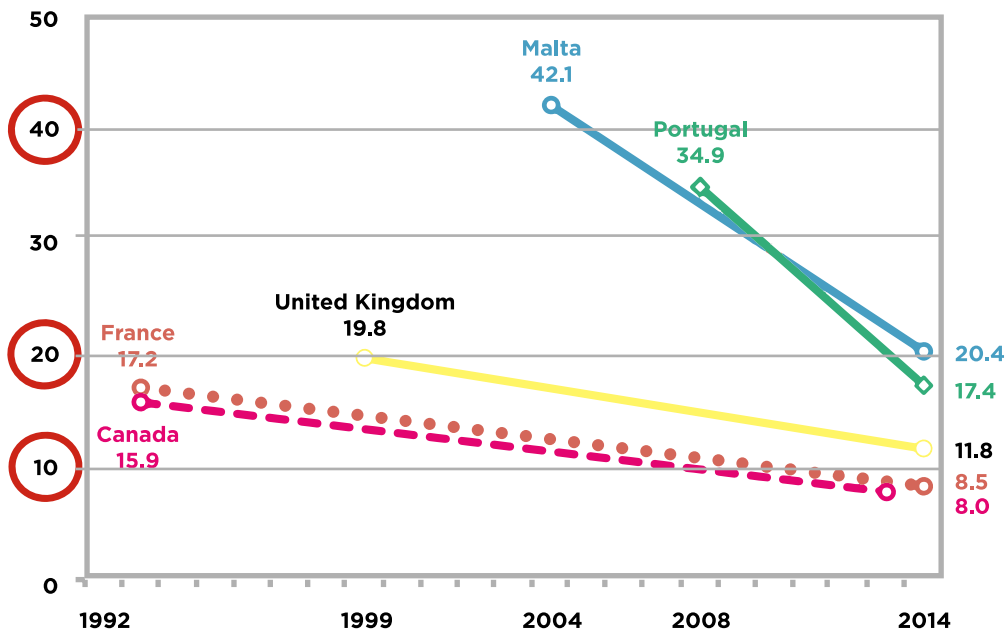
An additional trend analysis of the early school leaving rate in Malta and some of the other EU countries (**Figure 33**) provides complementary evidence relevant to the prediction of school leaving trends. This analysis of the early school leaving trends in the countries where the early school leaving rates were significantly reduced shows that a 50% reduction of school leaving rates requires considerable time.

On average, in countries selected for this analysis, 13.65 years were required to reduce the early school leaving rates by half - ranging from 6 to 21 years (**Figure 33**). For example, in Portugal and Malta, two countries with exceptionally high but rapidly declining rates of early school leaving, it required almost a decade to reduce the ESL rate by half. To reduce the ESL rate from 34.9% in 2008 to 17.4% in 2014, it required 6-7 years in Portugal, and it took approximately 10 years in Malta to reduce the ESL rate by half (from 43.1% in 2004 to 20.4% in 2014).

The same figure indicates that an even longer period of time is required to reduce moderately high rates when compared to extremely high rates of early school

leaving. In contrast to Portugal and Malta where the ESL rates were dramatically reduced during a relatively short period of time, to reduce the ESL rate by half required approximately 15 years in the UK, 20 years in Canada, 21 years in France and an even longer period in Spain.

Figure 33: Time required for 50% reduction rate of early school leaving rate



Source: Eurostat, 2015.

This analysis suggests a need for sustained and additional efforts to deal with the challenging issues associated with early school leaving. The current rate, which is significantly higher than in most of the other countries within the region, indicates that some additional measures and the new forms of interventions are required for further reduction of the still very high rate of school leaving in Malta.

Applied research studies can certainly provide valuable contributions to existing efforts to reduce early school leaving. In addition to the efforts to identify factors that contribute to early exit from formal education, new research directions that focus on the increasing graduation rate and prevention of early leaving are likely to make a contribution to current efforts to minimize early leaving from formal education. The efforts in this domain should be focused on the specific national situation, and student academic achievement as it is defined by national standards.

Some additional research directions, which are likely to contribute to the current efforts to reduce early leaving from education and training in Malta, include a focus on the identification of the capacity of those with low educational attainment to re-engage in formal education, and to gain the skills, knowledge, and credentials that will improve their prospects in the labour market.

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