

Adult learning in Malta

Insights into current participation,
content and forms of adult learning

Co-investigators (*in alphabetical order*)

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Preface

'Adult education', 'adult learning' and 'lifelong learning' are terms which are popular in public discourse today. Indeed they are carriers of notions which sound pleasant to the ear, and which easily garner widespread approval. Who is, after all, not in favour of a society which creates possibilities of learning for adults, which makes education readily accessible beyond compulsory schooling and which portrays it as a lifelong process? The popularisation of these terms, and of the notions they carry, while conducive to consciousness-raising and not negative per se, does conceal some dangers. One of these is when adult education is viewed exclusively as an instrumental tool, possibly also marketed as a product, and not as a means to improve one's quality of life, to form reflective citizens and to lead to even further opportunities for learning.

The study by Faculty of Education colleagues Carmel Borg, Peter Mayo and Milosh Raykov provides insights into the 'state of the art' of adult learning in Malta and presents comparisons with several countries worldwide, especially those in the EU. Numerous thought-provoking considerations emerge from the data provided, also in relation to the trends of early-school leaving in Malta. While it is indeed positive to see a number of encouraging patterns, including the participation in education-related activities in adult life, the study clearly shows that much is yet to be achieved locally, especially when taking into consideration variables such as gender and socio-economic status.

Borg, Mayo & Raykov's study also has the merit of providing indications of how one can be pro-active in this sector. It illustrates how locally in adult learning there is an interest in foreign languages and specialized subjects, such as science, in addition to basic and job-specific skills. Other transferable skills, such as problem-solving and working with others, are also viewed as important thereby hinting that, even

locally, there is the need for the sector to develop widely, in consonance with the concept of lifewide, besides lifelong, education. Furthermore, through the pilot study which complements the comparative data of their research, the authors highlight the fact that participants mention that they learn from Internet-mediated audiovisual sources, beside television and radio. These data are discussed in what, at the beginning of the study, is defined as the ‘dangers of an overly economic rendering’, thereby underlining that a balance is to be found between the demands of employment and the development of reflective and critical skills in learners. The latter is particularly important locally, especially in relation to what is often transmitted through the means of communication mentioned above.

This study is perfectly in line with the vision that the Faculty of Education has developed recently, summarised by our goal: Promoting an Educated Public in a Participatory Democracy. The recent restructuring of the faculty aims, in fact, to move beyond the faculty’s trademark Initial Teacher Education endeavours, of which it is proud, and engage more directly with the community it serves. This restructuring has led to the creation of the Department of Arts, Open Communities and Adult Education, one of the goals of which is precisely to research and tackle issues related to adult learning locally, as described in Borg, Mayo & Raykov’s study.

In conclusion, besides stressing the merits of this work as another milestone in the extensive body of research that the Faculty of Education has produced over the years, I feel that it provides an opportunity for those who are not necessarily experts in the field to obtain a concise and comprehensible picture of Adult Education in Malta and elsewhere today, supplemented by clear indications of where action needs to be taken.

Sandro Caruana

Dean, Faculty of Education
University of Malta

A message from the Directorate for Lifelong Learning and Early School Leavers

Towards the end of 2011 the European Council passed a *Resolution for a Renewed European Agenda for Adult Learning*¹, urging the European Commission to establish a proper focus on the role of adult learning. It also proposed better coordination between member states in the field of adult learning, and the sharing of good practices to facilitate peer learning between experts, policy makers and practitioners in adult learning. The Council also suggested that more research is carried out so that member states would be in a position to draft and implement evidence-based policies to promote adult learning. Finally, it also suggested that the Commission uses European funds so that a *Renewed Agenda for Adult Learning* would be implemented effectively across member states. One of the priority areas of this European Agenda for Adult Learning was precisely that of “improving the knowledge base on adult learning and monitoring the adult-learning sector.”²

The Ministry for Education and Employment published a *Framework for the Education Strategy for Malta 2014-2024*³. It set out four goals for education reform in Malta, the second one of which is, “increase participation in lifelong learning and adult learning”⁴. In order to be able to reach this goal the Ministry published a *Malta National Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020*⁵. One of the suggestions in this strategy is to “improve processes to collect data on Lifelong Learning practices.”⁶

1 European Council (2011) *Council Resolution on a renewed European agenda for adult learning*. 2011/C 372/01. Available from: http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.C_.2011.372.01.0001.01.ENG. [Accessed on 14.04.2016].

2 Ibid.

3 Ministry for Education and Employment (2014) *Framework for the Education Strategy for Malta 2014-2024*.

4 Ibid., p.3

5 Ministry for Education and Employment (2014) *Malta National Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020*.

6 Ibid., p.69

For the better implementation of the *European Agenda for Adult Learning* the European Commission appointed national coordinators in every member state to act as a point of reference. It also initiated a funding programme to enable every national coordinator to carry out a programme for the implementation of the Agenda at a national level. The Directorate for Lifelong Learning and Early School Leavers was identified as the National Coordinator for Malta. Research on adult learning and low skilled and low qualified adults is a priority in the implementation of the EU Agenda in Malta. Already some information is available through two different periodic surveys carried out by the National Office of Statistics (NSO), namely, the Adult Education Survey which is carried out every five years, and the Labour Force Survey which is carried out on a quarterly basis. We think that both surveys can yield critical information for the purpose of evidence-based policy making. Our collaboration with researchers from the Faculty of Education is an effort to delve deeper into the data gathered through the NSO surveys in order to provide us with much needed information about the needs of adult learners, and about the gaps between demand and supply. This is not a simple, market-oriented vision but one that is also inspired by a need to ensure equity in access to lifelong learning opportunities. We need information about prospective learners who are most likely to need adult learning opportunities. What are their learning needs, their aspirations and dreams? How can society help people to fulfil those aspirations? The more people live on the margins of society, the more we need to know about them in order to be able to approach them with realistic solutions, inspired by a vision for inclusive and equitable lifelong learning systems.

This research is the second one which the Directorate for Lifelong Learning and Early School Leavers has commissioned. We think that the research produced by Carmel Borg, Peter Mayo and Milosh Raykov is an excellent contribution towards evidence-based policies for equity of access. It will provide the Ministry for Education and Employment with invaluable data that will inform policy making and implementation. It also identifies other gaps that will need to be studied further in other research projects which the Directorate will be commissioning in the near future.

Mario Cardona

Director, Directorate for Lifelong Learning and Early School Leavers
Ministry for Education and Employment

Introduction

Adult education, as documented in the literature (see Mayo, 2007), occurred in different historical and ideological Maltese contexts. Adult Education means different things to different people in Malta and Gozo. It was traditionally associated with adult literacy and basic education in the period ranging from the last part of the 19th century to the early part of the 20th century, at a time when there was no mass public education. Throughout most of the 20th century, it was linked with *emigration* and involved literacy education, especially in the English language. The main purpose was to assist prospective emigrants in emigrating to settlement colonies such as the USA, Canada and Australia, formerly British colonies.

Vocational education, often with a strong agricultural bias, was also instrumental in this regard. Adult education was also associated with religious instruction and with social development. Social development was initially often promoted by institutions with a strong Catholic orientation and that followed the social teachings of the Catholic Church. This was certainly the case with MAS (Social Action Movement) from the mid-fifties onward (Mayo, 2007, p. 17). However, sporadic socialist initiatives were also to be found in the early part of the 20th century, particularly through the efforts of Manwel Dimech (Zammit Marmarà, 1997). Socialist and labour-oriented adult education made its mark in the 80s with the emergence of NGOs connected with the Labour Party and the General Workers' Union. Prior to that, we saw the emergence of an academy connected with Christian Democratic politics, strongly linked to the Nationalist Party. Other initiatives, such as the Centre for Labour Studies (originally called the Workers' Participation Development Centre), emerged in the early 80s primarily because of the experiments in self-management which the Labour government had introduced.

Links between local adult education providers and other agencies began to occur especially with regard to adult education providers connected with the Church, unions or the main political parties. The Konrad Adenauer Foundation, the Freidrich Ebert Stiftung and the German Bishops Conference were the most visible ones. (Caruana and Mayo, 2002, p. 62, Caruana, 2004) Trade unions also refined their provisions in adult education, establishing foundations. Malta's accession to the EU brought an increasing interest in adult education as several agencies and individuals began to compete for Grundtvig and Leonardo funding. Following Malta's accession, a number of initiatives in adult education, especially with regard to employability, began to emerge, relying for the most part on ESF funding.

The early 90s also saw the establishment of an important centre for vocational education, the Employment and Training Corporation, and the first Millennium decade saw the re-emergence of another Higher Education college, dedicated to vocational education - the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST) - which also attaches importance to adult vocational education. In this regard, it complements the University of Malta which traces its origins to 1592. This university has, for years, and especially since the late 40s and 50s, and more so since the 60s, been providing different kinds of university continuing education (Mayo, 2003). Its monopoly is however being challenged not only by MCAST, especially through its very recently-established University College, but by the increasing provision of degree programmes by the proposed Jordanian financed American University of Malta, Barts Gozo Medical School and Middlesex University's Malta campus. There are also institutes serving as franchise agencies for foreign universities, especially recognised and established UK universities. The European Graduate School is just about to start operating a hub centre in Malta. One can also avail oneself of globally marketed online programmes by a plethora of institutions, including universities. The available programmes are in such areas as Management, ICT, Training, Communications and Education (Mayo, 2007; Darmanin, 2009). One area which has expanded exponentially since the 70s is that of teaching English to foreigners, including foreign adults. The country surpassed England, a long time ago, as the most favoured destination for German students (Domas, 2004, p. 10).

In sum, while the struggle for a more emancipatory adult education features in the work of some NGOs, social movement activists (see Vincent Caruana, in Borg and Mayo, 2007, Borg & Formosa, 2013, Borg & Formosa, 2015, Brown, 2014) and in writings and talks by educationists (see, for instance, Wain, 2004, Borg and Mayo, 2006), the dominant form of adult education in this global Neo-liberal scenario, of which Malta forms part, is that of adult education for employability. Malta is

not very different from other European countries in this regard. The dominant EU discourse, concerning new basic skills (which, alas, do not include critical literacy), focusing on ICT and a variety of narrowly defined competences, is very influential in this regard. It drives the country's policy, not least through its funding mechanisms on which the country's adult education agencies seem to be heavily dependent.

This study

In a global context marked by increasingly complex and multidimensional requirements at work (OECD, 2013; Statistics Canada, 2013), many studies highlight the importance of core academic skills, such as literacy, numeracy and communication, for further learning. Recent focus on new basic skills (CE, 2001), including ICT skills, should in no way minimise the perennial importance attached to these three areas for the fulfilment of the basic tasks of being gainfully employed and, at the same time, capable of functioning as social actors, thus contributing directly to the sustained development of a democratic environment (Wain, 2004; English & Mayo, 2012). The increased labour market demand for high-level skills and the barriers to participation that many adults face, represent serious challenges for practitioners and policy makers in their attempt to provide flexible solutions and education and training that correspond to the interests of individuals and communities and to the needs of the labour market.

Given the global competition for the few high paying middle class jobs available, a study by Brown, Lauder & Ashton (2010) points at the dangers of an over economic rendering of adult learning, indicating that mere adult education and training for jobs do not always yield the desired results. The same authors challenge the taken-for-granted notion that the acquisition of greater education will lead to greater individual and national prosperity. They write, with regard to the USA, that the “fate of American workers is inextricably linked to a global auction for cut-priced brainpower that is weakening the trading position of many managers, professionals and technicians previously associated with individual success and a comfortable standard of living” (p.5). This global auction is sustained by an explosion of higher education worldwide. Also, they point to emerging economies, such as China and India, as bringing about a change characterised by the provision of a new global high-skill, low-wage workforce that is leading to a paucity of good

and financially rewarding jobs. The struggle for these few jobs will leave many highly qualified people disappointed, having to make do with underemployment, precarious living conditions and possibly poverty (Ibid.). 'Employability' does not necessarily and always mean 'employment' (Gelpi, 2002) or quality employment. This is not to say that the earlier claims for adult education and training, involving popular participation, do not measure up to present day reality. However, one has to tread warily with regard to the expectations one generates, keeping one's feet firmly on the ground and constantly monitoring the processes of learning involved and the claims made for it. One must also bear in mind that employability is only one of the aims of participation in adult education, albeit a quite common and legitimate one. The scope of adult learning participation is broad enough to comprise a whole range of purposes. Many of these, including those that are work related, exist outside the narrow framework of simply 'learning to produce' within conventional capitalist relations of production.

Regular monitoring of participation in adult education provides evidence regarding continually increasing levels of educational attainment and participation in all forms of adult education (Eurostat, 2015; OECD, 2014; UNDP, 2014). A significant number of studies also demonstrate a growing popular demand for, and motivation to obtain, higher levels of education. In many countries, however, this kind of data is not available (Bowlby & McMullen, 2002; Krahn & Taylor, 2005; Livingstone & Raykov, 2013). In Malta, it is only recently, and possibly because of EU membership, that these data are slowly becoming available, especially through the National Statistics Office.

The Adult Education Survey of 2011 yielded the following results:

- 46.8% of persons aged 25-64 participated in education and lifelong learning during 2011;
- Of participants engaged in education/Lifelong Learning (formal, non-formal and informal learning), men constituted 53% and 47% per cent were female;
- There is a declining participation rate as persons grow older;
- Participants in non-formal education constituted 34% of the 25-64 population;
- 109,803 learning activities were recorded and they primarily consisted of courses or on-the-job training;
- 60% of courses were job-related;
- 55,450 people participated in informal learning activities leading to knowledge acquisition. The majority fell within the 35-44 year bracket, while 17% were aged between 55 and 64;
- More than 50% of participants attended cultural events, e.g. live performances, cinemas and cultural site visits (the most popular).

While this information might appear sufficient to provide an indication of the growth of the field (as far as adult participation is concerned), it does not cover the whole gamut of adult education provision and participation in Malta, a substantial amount of which occurs outside the context of institutional learning (Mayo, 2007). Most of this provision is of a non-formal nature and we are aware of the well-rehearsed statements concerning the difficulties involved in measuring this type of adult education and learning.

Research problem

Several European (European Commission, 2015a) and international studies (OECD, 2014) demonstrate constantly increasing levels of involvement of adults in various forms of lifelong learning. In Malta, despite the numerous policy measures (e.g. MEDE, 2014), the 26.0% increased financial support to widen participation in tertiary education and increased involvement in lifelong learning, tertiary educational attainment in Malta is significantly below the EU average of 36.9% (European Commission, 2014a). According to a 2011 report, in comparison to the EU member states, Malta had the highest proportion (72.3%) of 25- to 64-year-old adults with educational attainment below the upper secondary level (ISCED 3), as well as a significant proportion (23.6%) of adults with educational attainment below the ISCED 2, lower secondary level (EURYDICE, 2011, p. 10). Recent reports (e.g. European Commission/ EACEA/ Eurydice, 2015) show that the number of 25- to 64-year-old adults in Malta with educational attainment below the upper or lower secondary level has declined to 59.4%, but it is still one of the lowest educational attainments in the EU. Only Portugal, with 60%, and Turkey with 68.1% of adults with educational attainment below the upper or lower secondary level have an overall attainment level similar to that in Malta, while all other EU countries, except Spain, Italy and Greece, have less than 30% of their adult population with a low educational attainment.

As will be indicated in this study, official statistics based on the European Union Labour Force Survey (EU LFS) suggest that the level of participation in lifelong learning in Malta is significantly below the EU average (European Commission, 2014b, p. 78). According to the Eurostat Labour Force Survey, in 2014, the participation rate of 25- to 64-year-olds in formal and non-formal education and training during the last four weeks preceding the survey was 7.1%. This rate of participation is significantly below the EU average of 10.7%, but several times lower than in many economically developed countries, including Denmark (31.7%), Sweden (28.9%), Finland (25.1%) and the United Kingdom with a participation rate of 15.8% (Eurostat, 2015). These statistics are quite partial given the well-

known difficulties involved in measuring forms of non-formal education. As far as adult education is concerned, a number of barriers to participation have been indicated including the lack of adequately prepared personnel to operate as educators in various sites, lack of demand by unions for paid education leave and lack of expertise in the area of prior learning assessment and recognition, and state of the art multimedia libraries, to name but a few (Mayo, 2010, 2012). The issue concerning a lack of enabling environments such as 'community learning centres' has also featured in the discussions (Mayo, 2013).

Studies that use different methodological approaches within the EU LFS to measure participation in adult education demonstrate inconsistent findings regarding the participation rate of the Maltese adult population in lifelong learning. For example, the EU LFS 2011 found that the participation rate in adult education during the past four weeks, before data collection in Malta, was 6.4%. Meanwhile, the Adult Education Survey (AES) for the same year reported that 35.9% of the Maltese population has participated in adult learning during the previous year (Goglio & Meroni, 2014, Table A.2).

Similarly, the 2010 Continuing Vocational Training Survey (CVTS) found that 36% of employees in Malta were involved in various forms of continuing education. Despite the significant correlation between distinctive indicators of participation in lifelong learning (from $r = .367$ to $r = .750$), the percentage of explained variation of approximately 20% to 50% is rather low and requires further exploration. There is also an apparent lack of data on the key aspects of adult learning in Malta demonstrated in many of the comparative studies of adult education (see, for example, European Commission, 2014a, p.2). In addition, most of these studies are focused on the previous participation and engagement in lifelong learning during a relatively short period of time, usually four weeks to one year, preceding a particular study. This retroactive orientation at the level of participation in lifelong learning does not provide sufficient and adequate evidence for educational policy and practice that aim to widen access to educational opportunities and raise citizen participation in lifelong learning.

In the international literature there is a dearth of "pro-active" studies focused on the interest in future participation in lifelong learning. Also, the educational needs reported by both employees and employers are usually unknown or based on anecdotal rather than systematic and reliable studies. There is an evident paucity of studies that examine employers' opinions regarding education and skills that employees need in the so-called modern, 'knowledge-based' economy. This is also the case in Malta.

There is still too little known about the educational needs and challenges that Maltese citizens face in their attempt to engage in lifelong learning, and the preferable content and forms of lifelong learning. And even here, the term 'Knowledge Economy' or 'Knowledge Based Economy' (KBE) must, once again, be viewed with caution in that, as research from Canada shows, it is not necessarily the 'reality' people perceive it, or are made to perceive it, to be (Lavoie & Roy, 1998 in Livingstone, 2013, p.39). A large body of studies in the domain of lifelong learning demonstrates that a large proportion of adults, including older adults (Finsden & Formosa, 2011), in many countries, frequently participate in lifelong learning but also demonstrate wide variations regarding the participation of different social groups in the various forms of lifelong learning (see European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2015a).

Studies that examine barriers to participation in lifelong learning demonstrate a well-established pattern in this regard (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2015a; Livingstone & Raykov, 2013), but also demonstrate that different social groups face specific barriers; these would include people experiencing disabling environments, difficult work related timetables, women experiencing double work shifts (home and wage-work) and, in the case of Malta, the difficulties caused by projects concentrated in the larger island of the archipelago which prove inaccessible to inhabitants of the smaller island. Cases such as these and others require further, more sophisticated analysis that can serve as a sound base for practical measures that aim to widen participation in lifelong learning. A later table (Table 5) on participation by district can provide some preliminary considerations regarding the participation of people from the second largest inhabited island of the archipelago, Gozo.

Objectives

This study constitutes an extensive literature review with a focus on empirical studies in the domain of adult learning based on an inspection of the major databases that include information about different forms of lifelong learning in Malta (Baldacchino & Mayo, 1997; Mayo, 2007; Mayo, Pace & Zammit, 2008), the European Union (Milana & Holford, 2014) and other regions of the world.

Based on a comparative analysis of lifelong learning in countries with highly developed systems of adult education, this study examines the conceptual and practical issues related to lifelong learning and participation. It also sets out to: maximize the use of the existing data; identify the knowledge gaps in the domain of adult education; select indicators for an extensive applied empirical study that

accurately assesses the wide array of learning activities in Malta; provide data relevant to the achievement of national priorities regarding widening access to educational opportunities and increased participation in lifelong learning (MEDE, 2014); and examine conditions for mitigation of the consequences of early school leaving (MEDE, 2015).

Taking into account the identified major knowledge gaps and inconsistencies related to the evaluation of lifelong learning in Malta (Borg & Mayo, 2005), and the issues identified through the studies of international data regarding unmet demand for education (Livingstone & Raykov, 2013), the research project addresses the following questions:

1. To what extent do 18 to 64-year-old adults participate in various forms of lifelong, formal, non-formal and informal learning?
2. To what extent are members of different social groups (e.g. older than 45 years, low-income, low-educated, early school leavers) interested in participating in different forms of lifelong learning?
3. What content and forms of lifelong learning do 18- to 64-year- old adults prefer and what do they perceive as adequate support for participation?
4. To what extent are citizens informed and interested in submitting their work and other experiences for prior learning recognition (PLAR)?

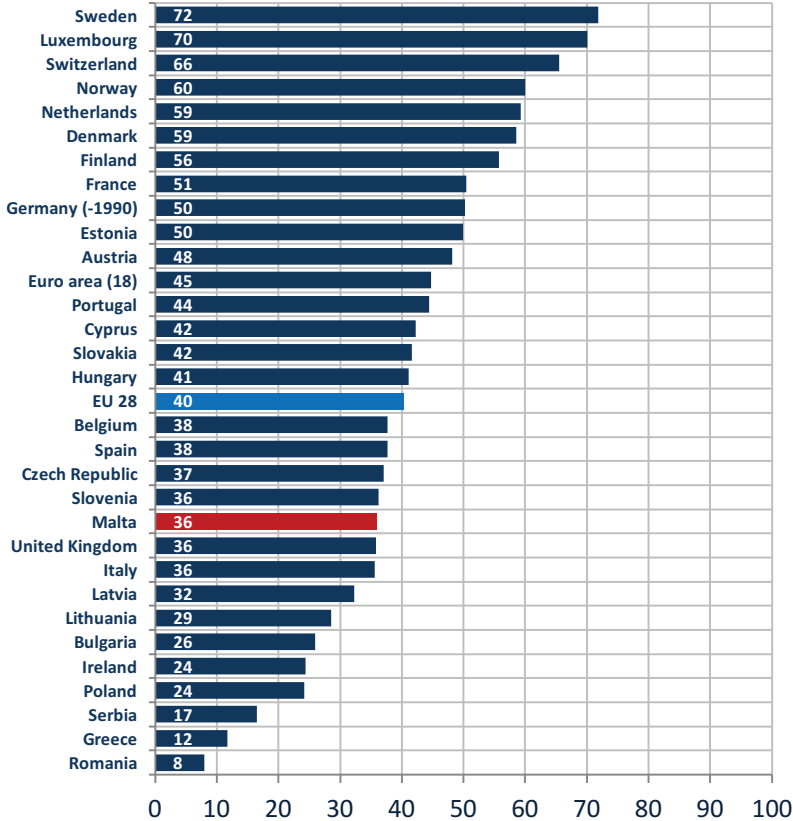
In answering the above questions, this study will be informed by research that demonstrates the significant role of adult learning for improved working and living conditions of people with lower levels of education and skills, by research that highlights the importance of adult learning for the empowerment of marginalized members of society (Boeren, Holford, Nicaise & Baert, 2012; Chisholm & Hasan, 2010; Field, 2009; Kickbusch, 2001; Singh, 1999) and by studies that equate adult education with the improved employability and enhanced performance of the entire labour force (Blossfeld, Kilpi-Jakonen, de Vilhena & Buchholz, 2014; Field, 2009; Morgan-Klein & Osborne, 2007; Romaniuk & Snart, 2000; Rubenson, 2006).

Results

Participation in adult education in Malta

Participation in adult education is very high in most economically developed countries. In the EU, on average, 40% of the population participates in a form of non-formal education while, in the industrial most developed countries, participation in adult education exceeds 50% (Figure 1). Regardless of the rapid growth and increased global participation in all forms of adult education, international comparisons of participation in adult education indicate that the current general level of participation in Malta (Mayo, 2010; MEDE, 2013) is below the EU average and significantly below the most industrially developed West European and North American countries (Desjardins, 2013; Kena et al., 2015; Livingstone & Raykov, 2013).

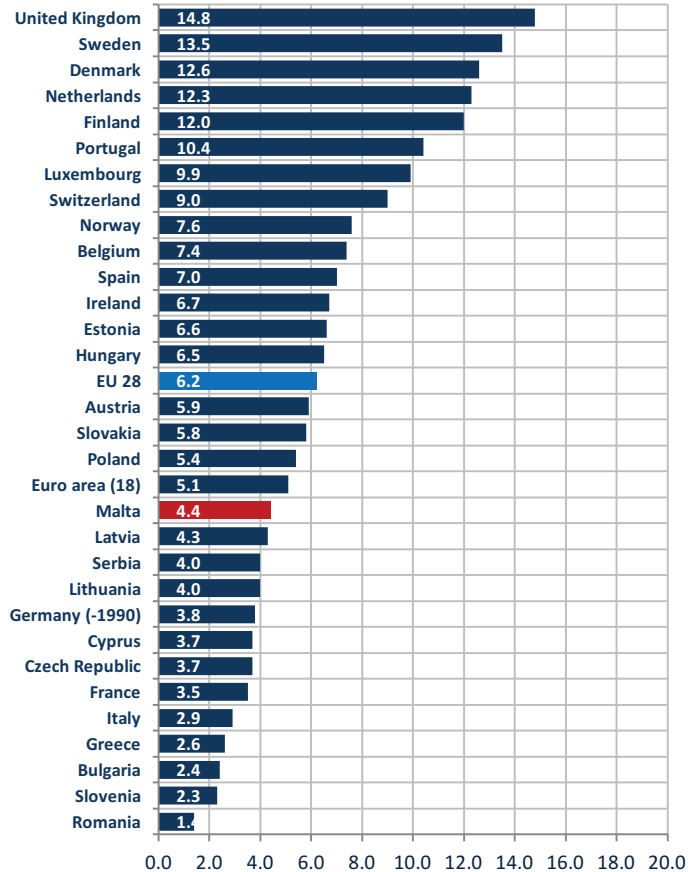
Figure 1: Total participation rate in formal or non-formal education and training in Europe



Source: Eurostat, 2015 (data from the 2011 AES survey)

Regarding participation in formal education (Figure FF2), the country lags behind other EU Member States. It surpassed countries such as Germany, France, Italy, Cyprus and Slovenia (the last two ranked as the most prosperous among the EU 2004 accession countries) but lagged far behind the UK and the Scandinavian countries and trails twelve other countries, including fellow 2004 accession countries such as Estonia, Hungary, Slovakia and Poland. As **Figure 2** shows, its 4.4 percentage is below the EU average of 6.2 %.

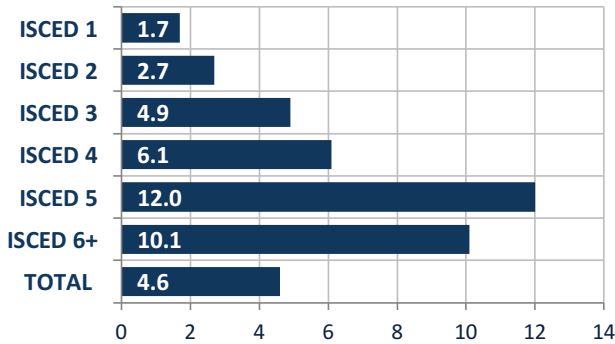
Figure 2: Total participation rate in formal education and training in Europe



Source: Eurostat, 2015 (data from the 2011 AES survey Table trng_aes_100)

According to this study, a focus on the development of viable adult education programmes that suit the educational needs of social groups underrepresented among participants in non-formal education (e.g. older low-income males with lower educational attainment) is one of the possible ways to widen participation in adult education in Malta. The link between 'take up' of formal education and personal educational history is clearly demonstrated in the figure captioned below (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Participation in formal education by educational attainment

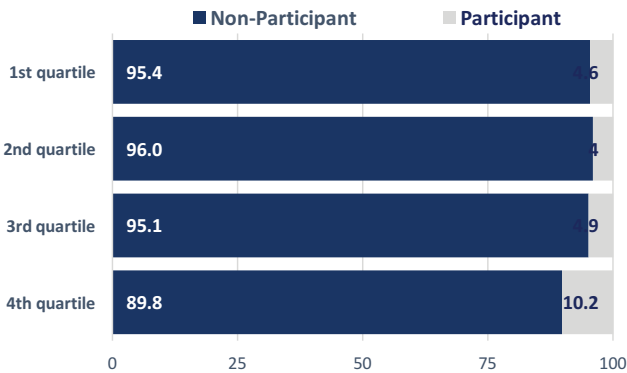


Source: NSO. LFS, 2014.

Participation in adult education and income

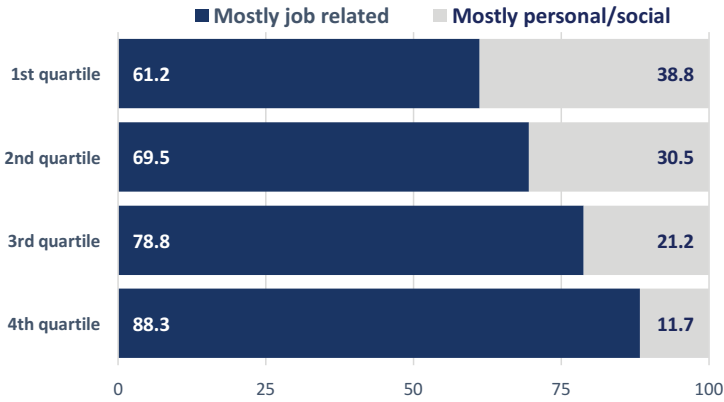
This study also established a link between income levels and ‘take up’ of adult education (Figure 4), highlighting ‘material deprivation’ as one of the main roadblocks to adult education.

Figure 4: Employment income and participation in education

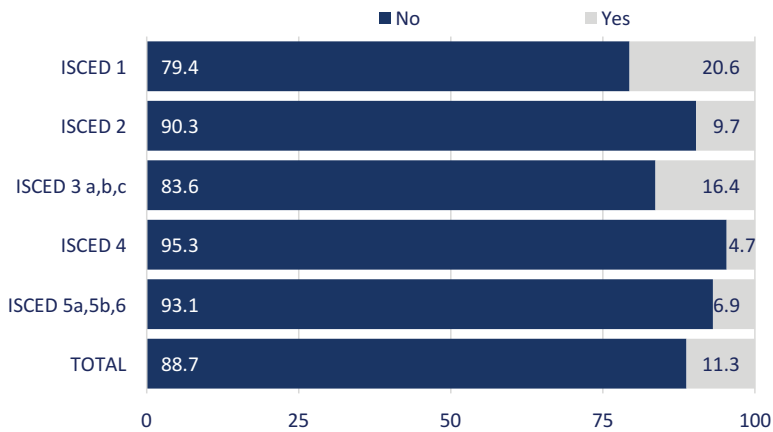


Source: LFS, 2014.

It is also important to note (Figure 5) that low-income participants are less frequently taking job-related education and this is probably associated with the employment status of older participants who frequently receive lower earnings or retirement income.

Figure 5: Income and type of education

Source: LFS, 2014. (Question: What was the purpose of the most recent taught learning activity?)

Figure 6: School dropout by educational attainment

Source: AES, 2011. (Question: Did you ever start a higher level of education ... but did not complete it?)

The analysis further shows (**Figure 6**) that school dropouts, participants who started a higher level of education but did not complete it, frequently participate in different forms of non-formal education. Contrary to expectations, many participants with the lowest educational attainment often try to compensate for their lack of formal education through participation in non-formal education.

As **Table 1** shows, school dropouts demonstrate a greater interest to continue their education. According to this study, they are 45% more likely to engage in non-formal education (1.45, CI 1.42 - 1.49, $p < .001$), 32% more likely to engage in formal education (1.32, CI 1.25 - 1.40, $p < .001$) and 26% more likely to engage in informal learning (1.26, CI 1.22 - 1.30, $p < .001$).

Regarding participation in lifelong learning, as measured by the Labour Force Survey (Eurostat, 2016, data for 2014), the country also lags behind other European countries (**Figure 7**). According to Eurostat (2016), lifelong learning refers to persons aged 25 to 64 who stated that they received education or training in the four weeks preceding the survey whether relevant or not to the respondent’s current or possible future job.

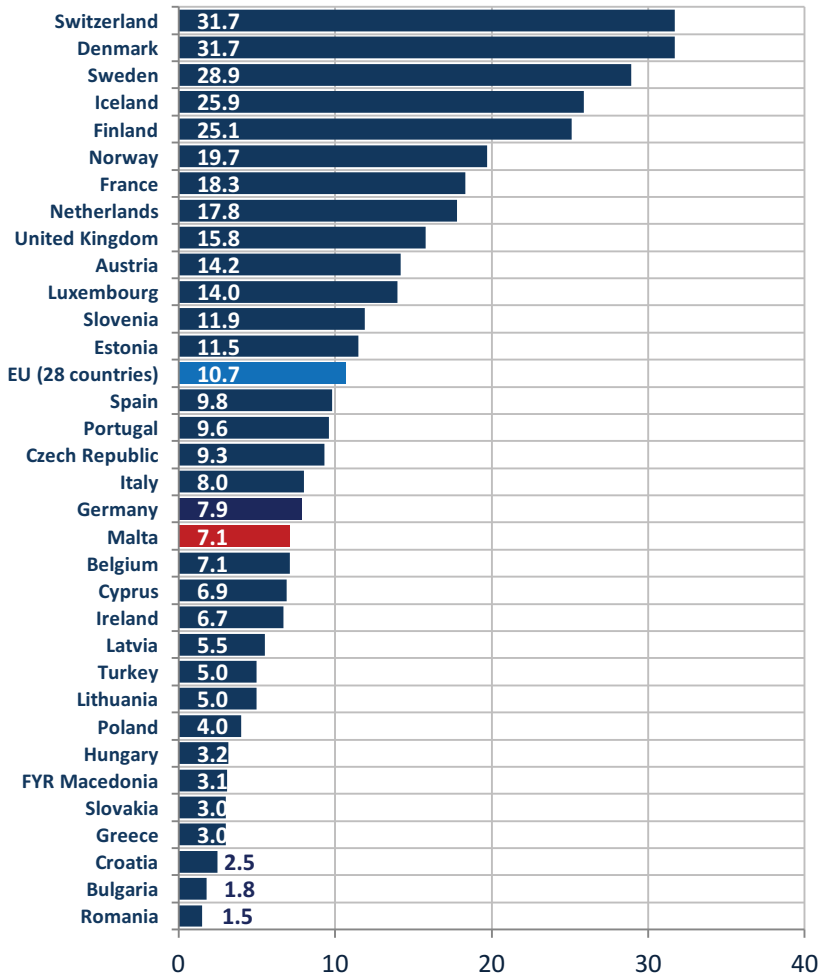
Table 1: School dropout and participation in adult education

	Total (%)	Sig.	Odds Ratios	Lower 95% C.I.	Upper 95% C.I.
FORMAL EDUCATION					
<i>During the last 12 months, have you been a student or apprentice in formal education?</i>	4.4	.001	1.32	1.25	1.40
NON-FORMAL EDUCATION					
<i>During the last 12 months have you participated in any of the following activities with the intention of improving your knowledge or skills in any area (including hobbies)? [Courses, Seminars or workshops, Guided on-the-job training, Private lessons]</i>	34.2	.001	1.45	1.42	1.49
JOB RELATED NON-FORMAL EDUCATION	39.7	.001	1.31	1.25	1.36
INFORMAL EDUCATION					
<i>Other than the activities discussed earlier, have you deliberately tried to learn anything at work or during your free time to improve your knowledge or skills during the last 12 months?</i>	24.4	.001	1.26	1.22	1.30

Source: NSO. AES, 2012.

The participation rate in lifelong learning in Malta is higher than in 14 other European countries, including, for example, Cyprus, Ireland and Latvia, but slightly below Germany (7.9%), Italy (8.0%) and the European average of 10.7%. The participation rate in several Scandinavian countries and the UK (15.8%) is significantly higher than in Malta. Data indicate that participation in formal education is still low and primarily job-related.

Figure 7: Participation in lifelong learning in Malta and other European countries



Source: Eurostat 2016 (Total participation in lifelong learning in 2014)

Participation rates in adult education in Malta and the EU

One might argue that the culture that enhances such participation has a short history in Malta, with the country not having similar traditions to those enjoyed by, say, the Scandinavian countries where key figures such as Nikolaj Frederik Severin Grundtvig (Rasmussen, 2013) have, for the most part of the previous and present centuries, enjoyed iconic status at a very popular level, serving as sources of inspiration for adult and youth participation in non-formal learning settings and projects (in the Scandinavian cases, also through participation in the Grundtvig and Kolde inspired Folk High Schools); the closest inspiring national icon seems to be Martin Buber in Israel. The Maltese concern until recently has been formal education and often in the conventional 'lock-step' manner.

As **Figures 8, 9 and 10** demonstrate, overall participation in formal or non-formal education and training in Malta is slightly below the EU average (in 2011, 35.9% vs. 40.3%) but the participation rate in formal education and training is proportionally significantly lower than in the other EU Member States (in 2011, 4.4% vs. 6.2%).

Figure 8: Participation in formal or non-formal education and training in Malta and the EU [%]

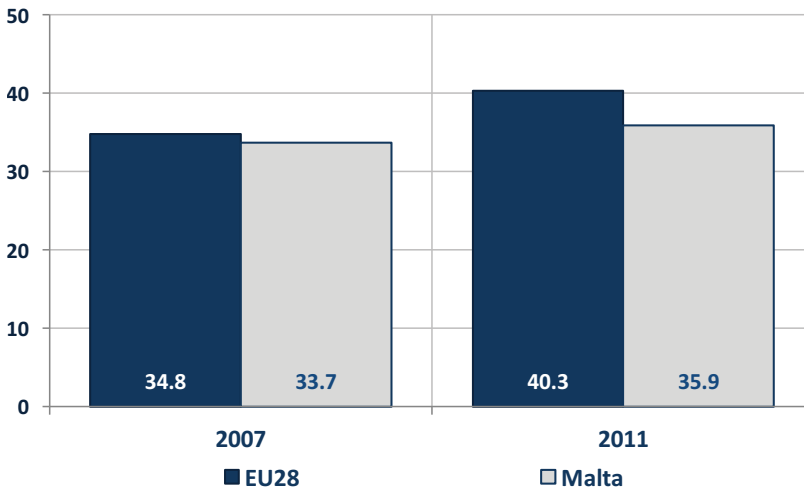


Figure 9: Participation in formal education and training in Malta and the EU [Total %]

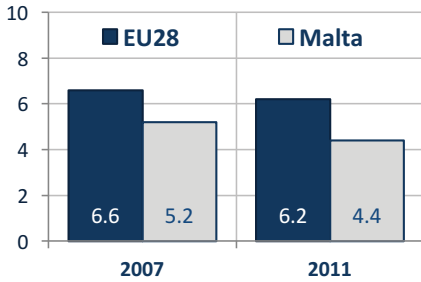
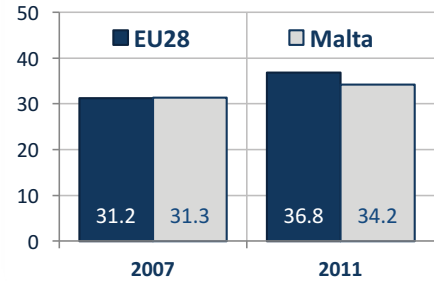


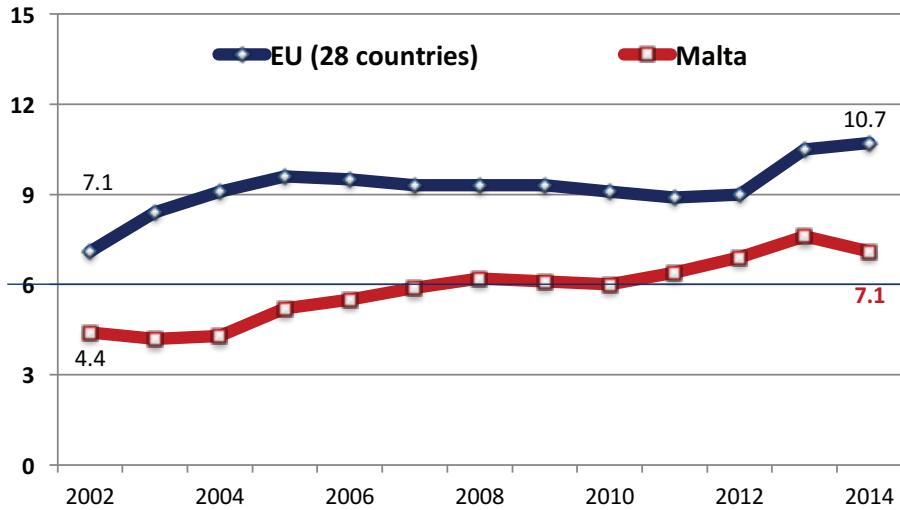
Figure 10: Participation in non-formal education and training in Malta and the EU [Total %]



Source: Eurostat, 2015.

Overall, based on results from the EU and the Malta Labour Force Survey (Figure 11), during the past 14 years, participation in lifelong learning in Malta has gradually increased. This figure also demonstrates an increasing trend of participation that is slightly faster than in the other EU member states. Results from the same large-scale survey indicate that female participation in lifelong learning in Malta has significantly changed over the past decade. Traditionally low, female participation in adult education in Malta has significantly increased over the previous decade and, based on the LFS survey data, female participation in lifelong learning since 2010, is slightly higher than male participation.

Figure 11: Participation rate in lifelong learning (Total %)

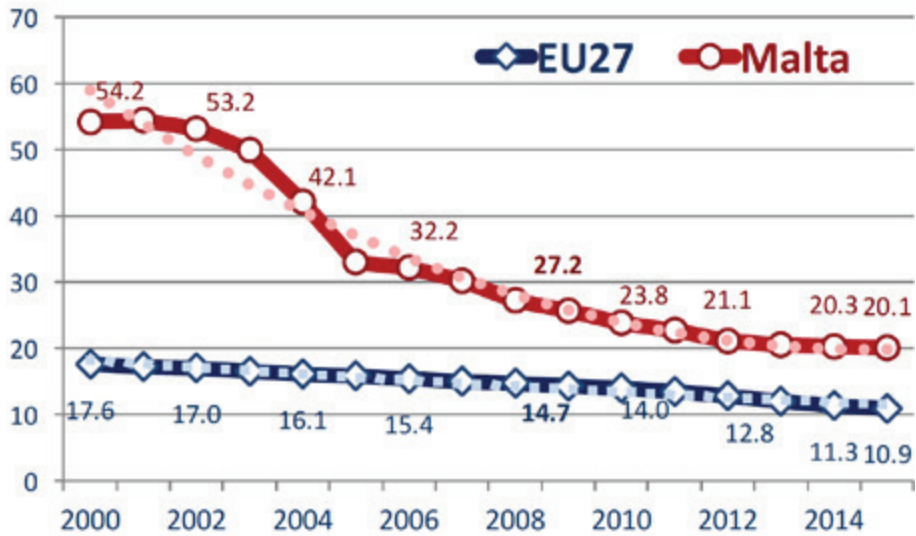


Source: Eurostat, 2015.

The identified trend is undoubtedly related to the recent, significantly increased participation in the labour force among younger, 18 to 25-year-old, females. Their participation in the labour force significantly exceeds participation rates of females in other EU countries (Raykov & Borg, 2015).

In addition, the current trend of early school leaving among females in Malta is probably related to their increased participation in lifelong learning. Overall, as **Figure 12** indicates, the percentage of early school leavers in Malta, despite the progress registered in the last ten years, as indicated below, was still hovering around the 20.1% mark in 2015, well above the EU's 10.9% average for the same year (Eurostat, 2016). According to Eurostat (2016), early school leaving is defined as the percentage of the population, aged 18-24, with, at best, lower secondary education and who were not in further education or training during the last four weeks preceding the survey. Lower secondary education refers to International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) 2011 level 0-2 and for data from 2014 onwards and to ISCED 1997 level 0-3C short for data up to 2013 and this indicator is based on the EU Labour Force Survey. As with its European counterparts, Malta faces an 'Early School Leaving' phenomenon that is predominantly male, although female early school leavers are on the increase.

Figure 12: Trend of early school leaving in Malta and the EU (Total %)



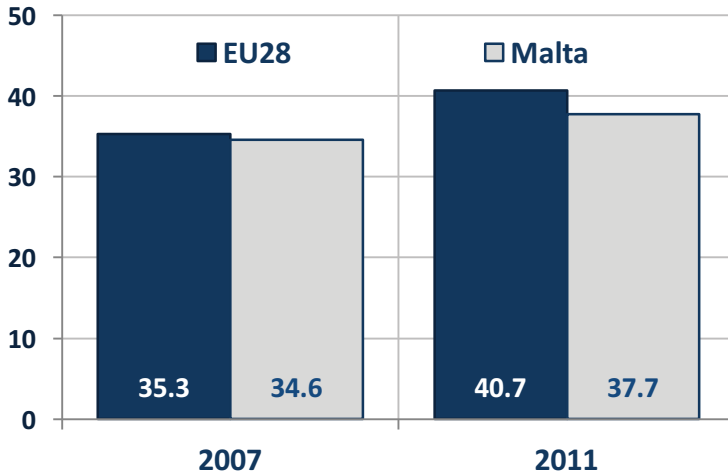
Source: Eurostat, 2016.

The situation led the present Government to embark on the strategies aimed at preventing, intervening and compensating for early school leaving (MEDE, 2012). In the area of prevention, early education and care, supporting children at risk, vocational education in secondary schools, flexible transition pathways, teacher training and relevant curricula are being targeted. Early warning systems and support networks for children at risk are the main intervention strategies. In the area of compensation, the main action focuses on reintegration programmes.

Participation in adult education by gender

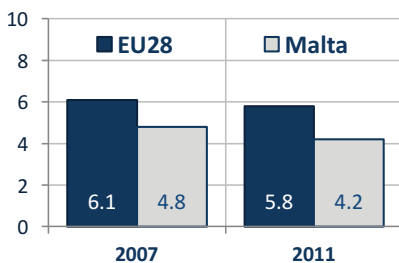
The existing AES data, with regard to male and female participation in adult education, demonstrates that males in Malta lag significantly behind the EU average with regard to formal education (Figure 13). In contrast, males in Malta participate to a similar extent in non-formal education as their counterparts in the other EU Member States. In both cases, that is formal and non-formal education, a slightly increased gap between male participation in Malta and the EU 2007 and 2011 is evident (Figures 14 and 15).

Figure 13: Participation in formal or non-formal education and training in Malta and the EU (%)



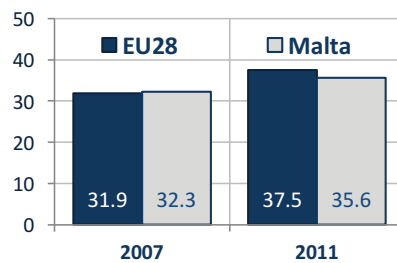
Source: Eurostat, 2015.

Figure 14: Participation in formal education and training in Malta and the EU [Males %]



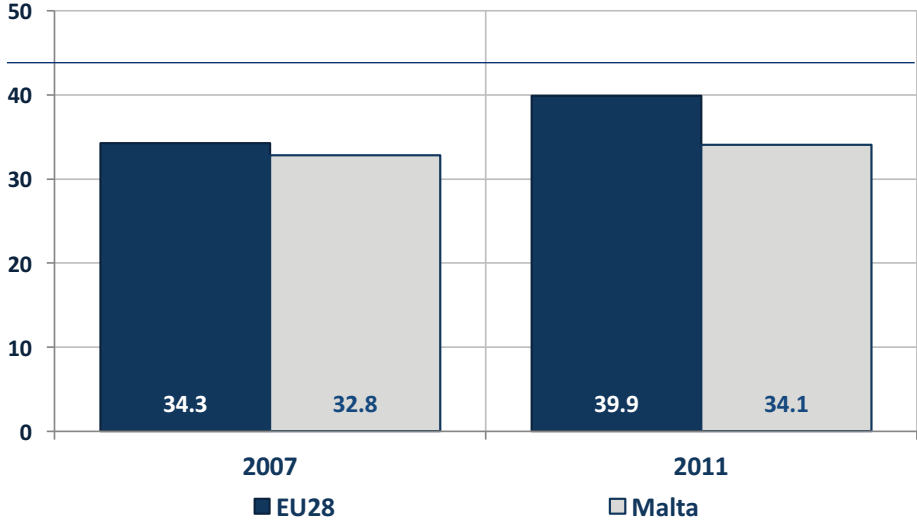
Source: Eurostat, 2015.

Figure 15: Participation in non-formal education and training in Malta and the EU [Males %]



The 2007 gap between the EU average for female participation in non-formal education (**Figure 16**) and the corresponding statistic from Malta was quite small, widening significantly by 2011 (**Figure 17** and **18**). In both cases, the provisos regarding the measurement of non-formal education apply.

Figure 16: Participation in formal or non-formal education and training in Malta and the EU (%)



Source: AES, Eurostat, 2015.

Figure 17: Participation in formal education and training in Malta and the EU [Females %]

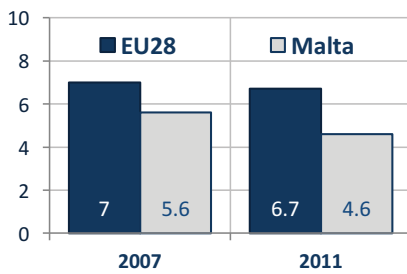
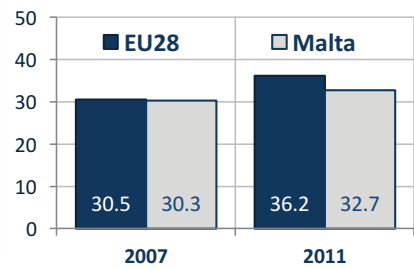


Figure 18: Participation in non-formal education and training in Malta and the EU [Females %]



Source: Eurostat, 2015.

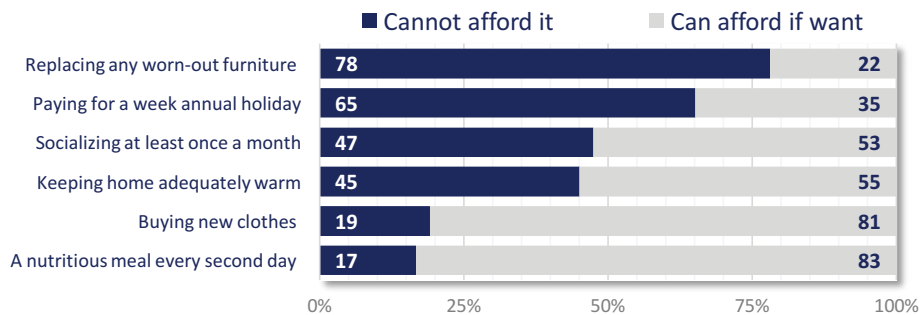
Access to adult education

Education policy and practice in Malta are focused on widening access to adult learning, particularly among low-income citizens with lower educational attainment (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2015a). The EU and National Strategy for 2020 set the following targets:

- Fewer than 15% of 15-year-olds under-skilled in Reading, Maths and Science [In 2012, the figures stood at 45% (reading PIRLS); 37% (Mathematics); 59% (Science in TIMSS)]
- The rate of early leavers from education should be below 10% [The figure stood at 20.4% in 2012]
- At least 40% (33%) of people aged 30-34 with higher education [The figure stood at 26.1% in 2012]
- At least 15% of adults should participate in lifelong learning [The figure stood at 7.0% in 2012]

With these established goals in mind, current efforts are being directed at programmes that provide basic literacy, numeracy and communication skills for citizens with low educational attainment and MQF levels 1 and 2 (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2015b).

Figure 19: Material Deprivation and Educational Attainment

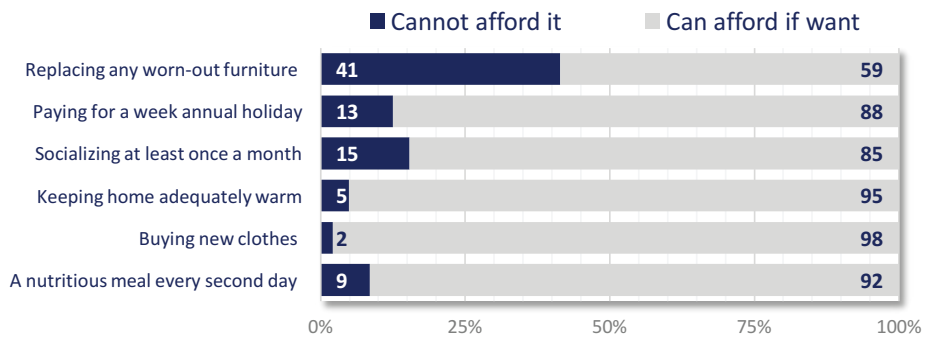


Source: EU QLS, 2012; 18-24 years-old participants with lower secondary or elementary education

In addition to the educational background of their parents, material conditions that participants experience strongly influence their educational attainment. Results from the EU Quality of Life Survey (QLS) demonstrate that people with lower secondary education, much more frequently, experience different forms of material deprivation.

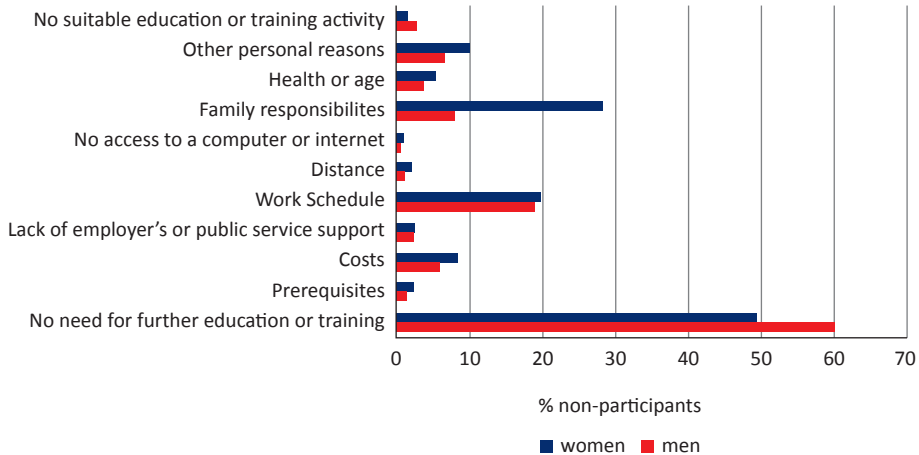
As **Figures 19** and **20** show, participants with lower educational attainment, much more frequently than the participants with upper secondary education, cannot afford to replace a piece of their home furniture (78% vs. 41%), to pay for short holidays (65% vs. 13%) or to socialize with friends and family at least once a month (47% vs. 15%). In addition, and more directly related to conditions for learning, they cannot keep their homes adequately warm (45% vs. 5%), buy new clothes (19% vs. 2%) or afford a nutritious meal every second day (17% vs. 9%)

Figure 20: Material Deprivation and Educational Attainment



Source: QLS, 2012; 18-24 years-old participants with secondary or tertiary education

In addition to the other factors that influence engagement in adult education, results from the National Statistics Office study (Figure 21, adapted from NSO, 2013, p. 6) demonstrate that a considerable number of participants believe that they do not need further education or training or face difficulties engaging in adult education because of their work schedule, family responsibilities or cost associated with participation in education. As the same figure shows, women more frequently experience difficulties in participating in education due to their family responsibilities, other personal reasons and the cost of training.

Figure 21: Barriers to participation in education and training by sex

Source: Figure adapted from NSO. (2013). Adult Education Survey: 2011. *News Release 114*, p. 6.

Overall, as **Figure 22** shows, family responsibilities and their schedule are the most important obstacles to participation that approximately one-third (32%) of the survey participants face. Cost, health and age as well as some 'other personal reasons' represent significant barriers for a large number of people to engage in adult education.

Participants' highest level of education or training and their family background

Logistic regression (**Table 2**) and figures based on the data from the 2011 Adult Education Survey (NSO, 2011) demonstrate that participants from families where the father has a tertiary degree are more than 7 times (Odds=7.445) more likely to attain a university degree.

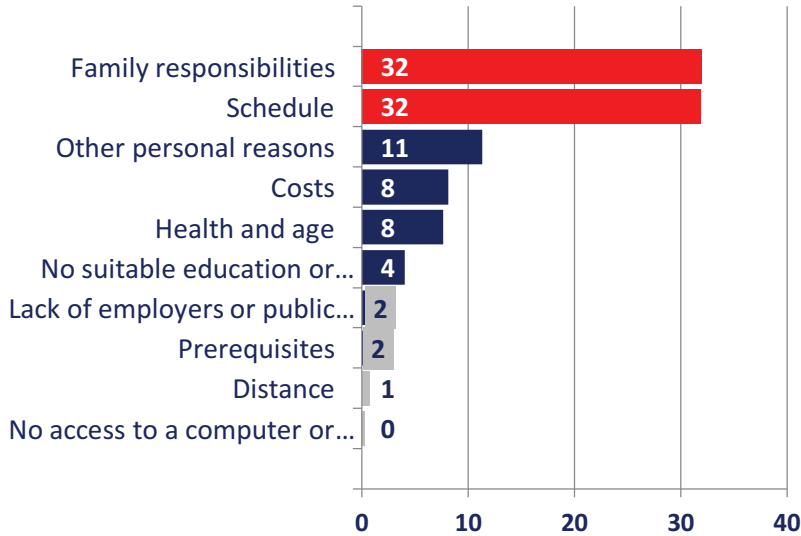
Table 2: Educational attainment and family background

	Father				Mother			
	Sig.	Exp(B)	Lower 95% CI	Upper 95% CI	Sig.	Exp(B)	Lower 95% CI	Upper 95% CI
At most lower secondary	.001	1			.001	1		
Upper secondary	.001	4.509	4.347	4.678	.001	5.026	4.793	5.271
Tertiary	.001	7.445	7.152	7.750	.001	7.752	7.337	8.190

Source: AES, 2011. (Educational attainment of parents or guardians)

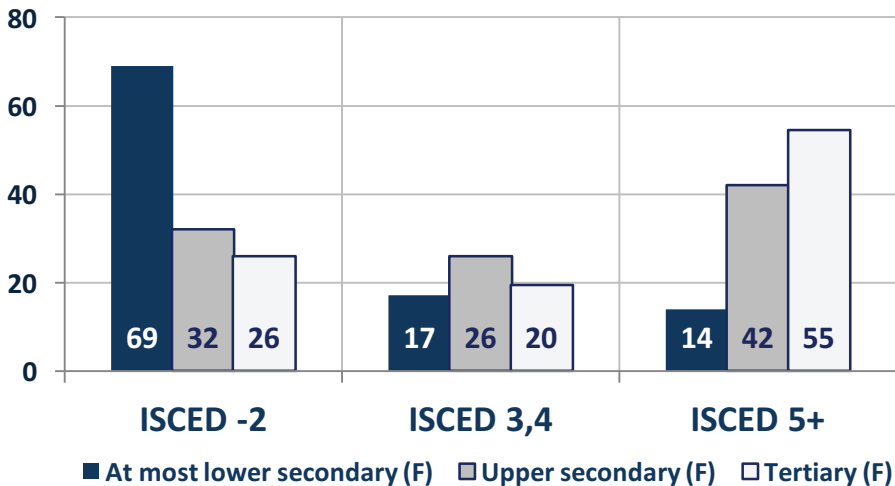
Similarly, participants from families where the mother has a tertiary degree are almost eight times (Odds=7.752) more likely to attain a university degree. This result indicates that the mothers' educational attainment has an even stronger influence on the educational attainment of their children. **Figures 23** and **24** also demonstrate strong associations between participants' educational attainment and educational attainment of both, father's (**Figure 23**) and mother's (**Figure 24**) highest level of education or training.

Figure 22: The most important barriers to participation in adult education



Source: NSO, AES 2011. [Question: Among these reasons, which is the most important?]

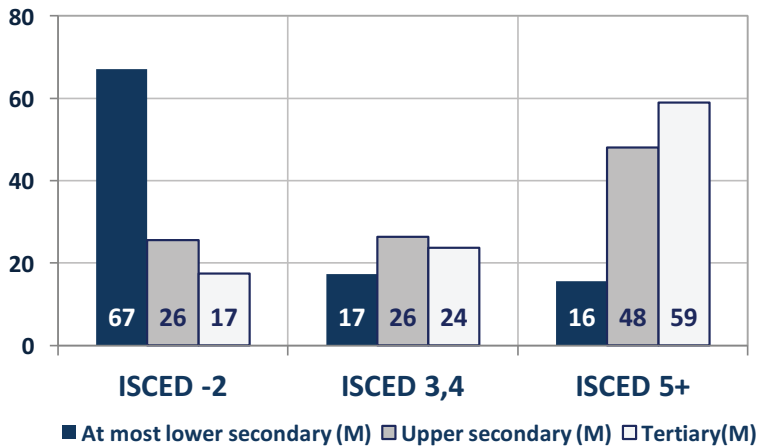
Figure 23: Participants' highest level of education and their family background (father's or male guardian's highest level of education)



Source: AES, 2011, Chi-Square Tests = 19887.46, $p < .001$.

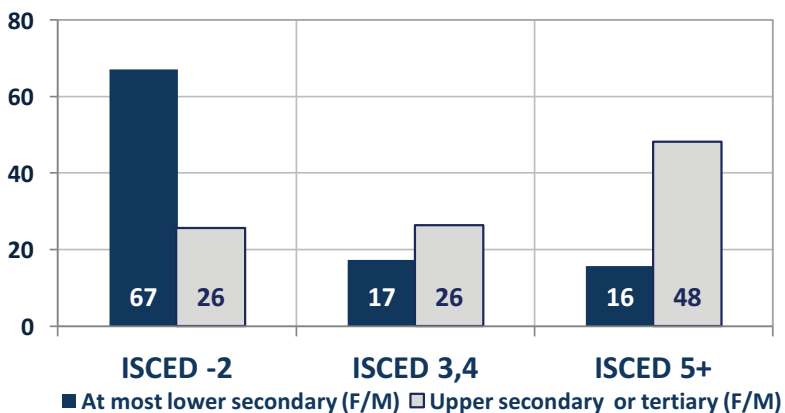
Comparisons of first generation students and students from families where either mother or father has a tertiary degree show similar results (**Figure 25**) that first generation students are approximately six times (Odds = 6.803, CI 6.560 - 7.055, $p < .001$) (**Table 3**) less likely to attain a university degree.

Figure 24: Participants' highest level of education and their family background (mother's or female guardian's highest level of education)



Source: AES, 2011, Chi-Square Tests = 13655.3, $p < .001$.

Figure 25: Participants' highest level of education and their family background (father's or mother's highest level of education, first generation)



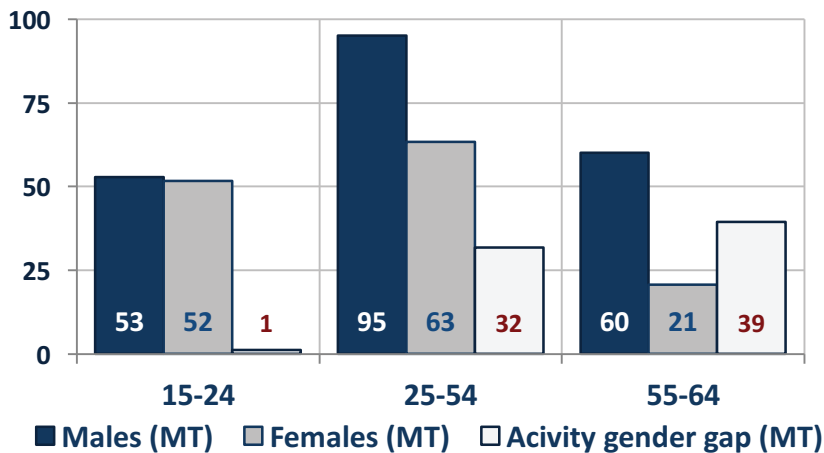
Source: AES, 2011, Chi-Square Tests = 14690.3, $p < .001$.

Table 3: Educational attainment and family background

	Sig.	Exp(B)	Lower 95% CI	Upper 95% CI
At most upper secondary	.001	1		
Tertiary education	.001	6.803	6.560	7.055

Source: AES, 2011. (Combined educational attainment of parents or guardians)

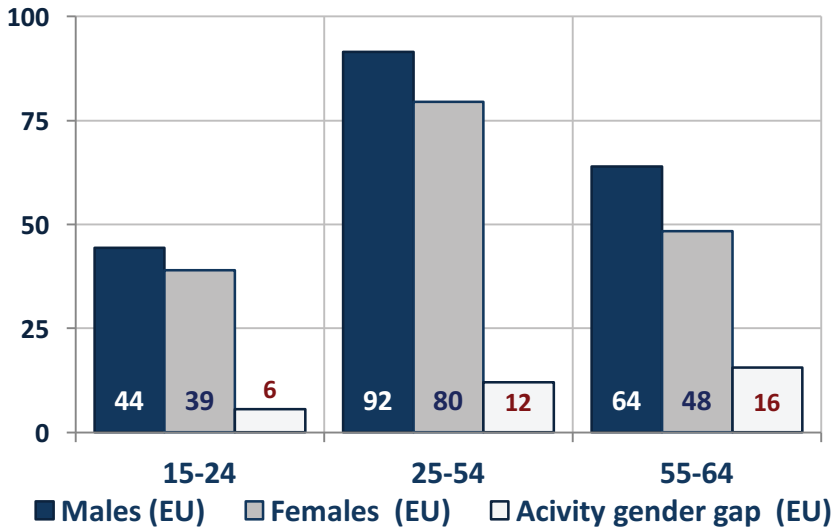
An additional significant obstacle for involvement in adult education among 15 to 24 year old youths in Malta is their high participation in the active labour force (Figure 26) that is much higher than in other EU Member States (Figure 27).

Figure 26: Labour force activity rate in Malta by gender and age group

Source: Figure is based on the most recent LFS data (NSO, 2015).

According to the recent Labour Force Survey (NSO, 2015), more than half of males (53%) and a similar percentage of females (52%) in Malta are employed and this is much higher than the rate of employment in the other EU Member States where only 44% of males and 39% of females in the 15 to 24 age group are employed.

Figure 27: Labour force activity rate by gender and age group, the EU member states

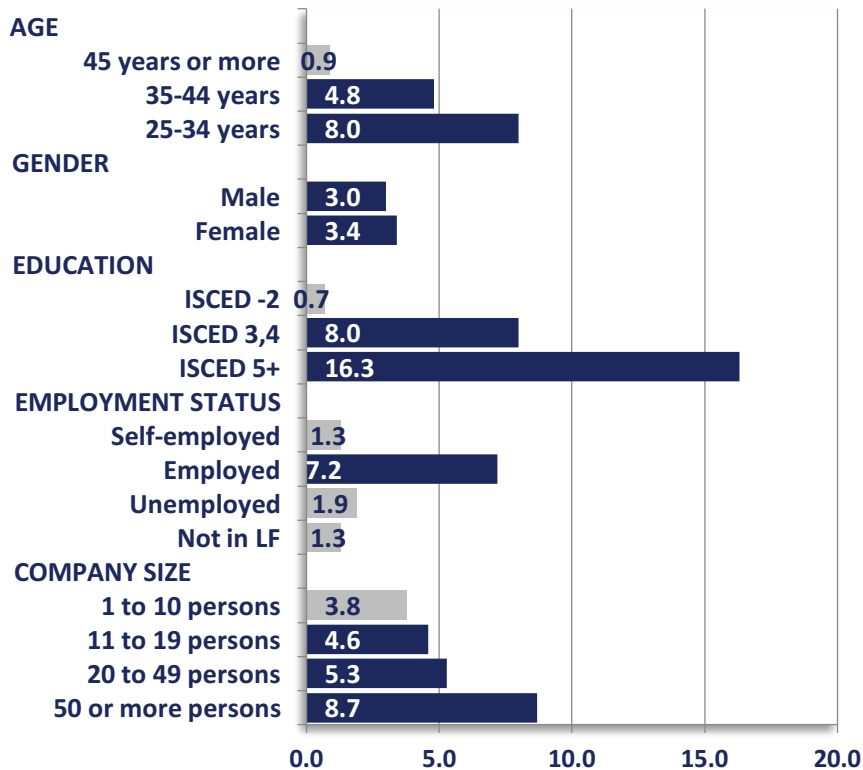


Source: Figure is based on the most recent LFS data (NSO, 2015).

The profile of participation (see **Appendix 1**) shows significant variations regarding the age, gender and educational attainment of participants as well as their employment status and the size of the company.

A separate analysis (**Figure 28**) shows that the highest participation rates have younger, 25 to 34 year-old participants, (8.0%) and these have a tertiary education (16.3%). Also, employees (7.2%) participate in formal education more frequently than self-employed (1.3%), unemployed (1.9%) and others not in the labour force (1.3%).

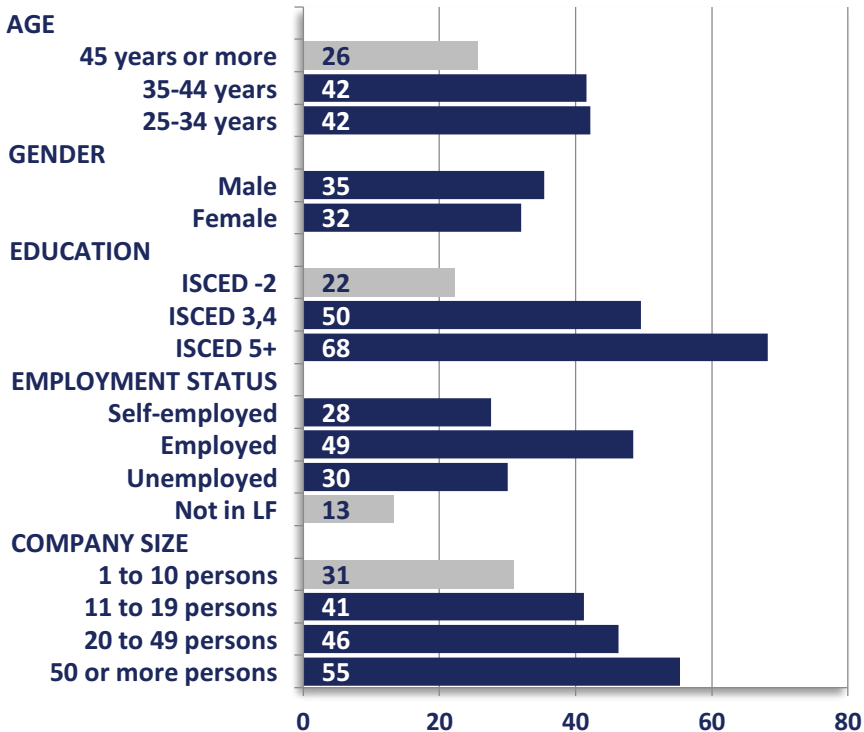
Figure 28: Participation in formal education by age, gender, educational attainment, employment status and company characteristics



Source: AES, 2011 [Question: During the last 12 months, have you been a student or apprentice in formal education?]

As **Figure 29** shows, participation rate in non-formal education (34.2%) is much higher than participation in formal education (4.4%). There is apparently a similar pattern of participation as in formal education but the variations between different social groups are significantly smaller. As the same figure shows, a higher participation rate is evident among younger, 25 to 44-year-old participants (42%) than among 45-year-old and older participants (26%). However, the difference between these groups is approximately 60%, in contrast to the participation in formal education where the difference between older and younger participants is five to ten times greater.

Figure 29: Participation in non-formal education by age, gender, educational attainment, employment status and company characteristics

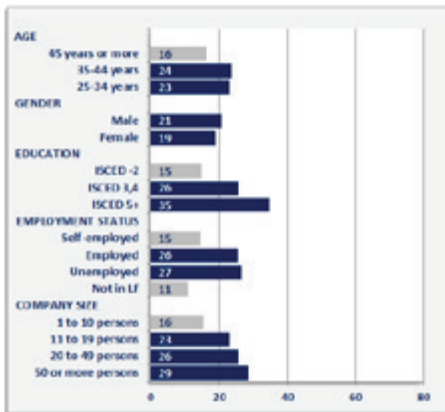


Source: AES, 2011 [Question: How many non-formal education and training activities have you participated in over the last 12 months?]

Similarly, participation in non-formal education is approximately two to three times greater among people with upper secondary (50%) and a university level of education (68%), than among people with an education level at or below the lower secondary level (22%), but these differences are more than ten times greater in the domain of formal education. The study shows that employment status and the size of the company also significantly influence participation in non-formal education. Employees in large companies more frequently participate in non-formal education but again, the differences between them and self-employed, unemployed and employees in smaller companies are significantly smaller.

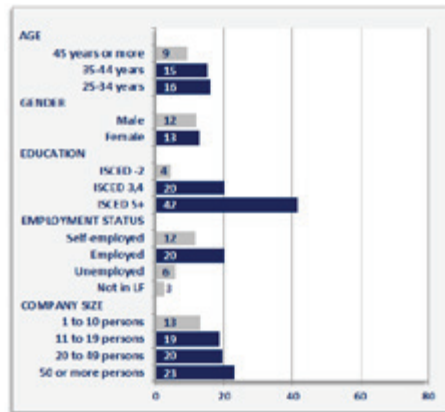
Participation rates in different forms of short-term courses (19.9%), seminars or workshops (12.9%) as specific forms of non-formal education also demonstrate that highly educated, younger and employed participants working in larger companies are more likely to receive this type of education (**Figures 30 and 31**). Yet again, as the same figures show, in comparison to participation in formal education, the variations between different groups of participants are much smaller.

Figure 30: Participation in courses by age, gender, educational attainment, employment status and company characteristics



Source: AES, 2011 [Question: Courses]

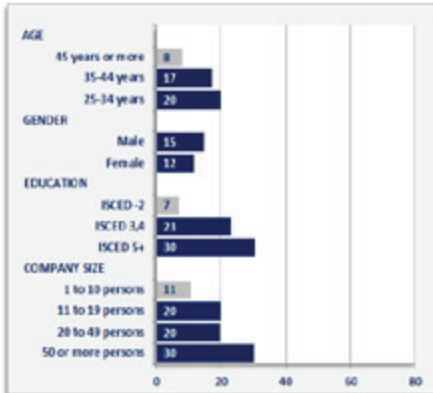
Figure 31: Participation in seminars or workshops by age, gender, educational attainment, employment status and company characteristics



[Question: Seminars or workshops]

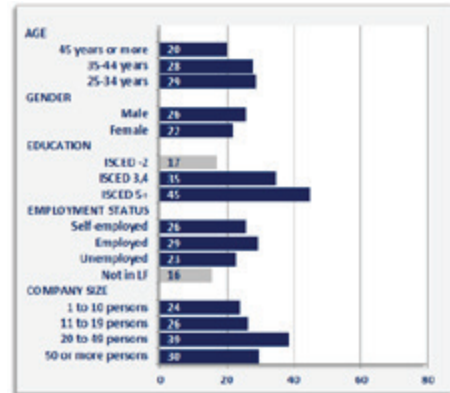
Figure 32 shows a relatively low participation level in guided on-the-job training (13.5%) among all groups of participants in the Adult Education Survey. This form of participation in adult education is significantly lower than in the other countries where participants are much more frequently involved in learning-by-doing and learning from their co-workers and supervisors (OECD, PIAAC Survey, 2013).

Figure 32: Participation in guided on-the-job training by age, gender, educational attainment, employment status and company characteristics



Source: AES, 2011 [Question: Guided on-the-job training]

Figure 33: Participation in informal learning by age, gender, educational attainment, employment status and company characteristics



Source: AES, 2011 [Question: Participation in informal learning]

Support for large employers and self-employed who employ other people, as well as a wide promotion of this valuable form of non-formal education, is a viable approach which can lead to the increased participation of employees in this form of non-formal education.

Participation in informal learning (**Figure 33**) is the most evenly distributed form of adult education but some differences similar to the other forms of participation still exist. The differences regarding the age of participants and their employment status are much smaller than in any other form of adult education and males participate slightly more in this form of learning than females. However, involvement in formal learning as measured by the 2011 EU Adult Education Survey is significantly lower than in the other international studies such as PIAAC, Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (OECD, 2013) and WALL, Work and Lifelong Learning Survey (Livingstone & Raykov, 2013). It should be noted that, in comparison to participation in formal and non-formal education, a relatively large number of self-employed and unemployed people participate in this form of learning since this indicates their motivation to learn. Support for this form of participation in adult education through recognition of prior experience and learning can probably lead to greater participation and an increased level of the overall educational attainment.

Geographically, the highest adult participation rate in formal education was registered in the Western districts, with the Southern Harbour region registering the lowest participation rate in formal education (Table 4).

Table 4: Participation in formal education by district of residence

District of residence	Sig.	Adj. Odds Ratio	Lower 95% C.I.	Upper 95% C.I.
Northern District	.001	1		
Southern Harbour	.001	.77	.73	.81
Northern Harbour	.001	.91	.88	.95
South Eastern	.001	.86	.82	.91
Western	.001	1.15	1.10	1.20
Gozo and Comino	.001	.80	.75	.85

Source: LFS Malta, 2014.

The situation is significantly different in the context of non-formal education, with the Southern Harbour registering the highest take-up in the foregoing sector (Table 5). Learners participating in non-formal educational pursuits reported personal and social reasons as the main purpose for their most recent learning activity.

Table 5: Residence and participation in non-formal education

District of residence	Sig.	Adj. Odds Ratio	Lower 95% C.I.	Upper 95% C.I.
Northern District	.001	1		
Southern Harbour	.001	1.11	1.04	1.18
Northern Harbour	.190	1.04	.98	1.10
South Eastern	.268	.96	.90	1.03
Western	.010	1.09	1.02	1.16
Gozo and Comino	.018	.90	.83	.98

Source: NSO. LFS, 2014.

Multiple logistic regressions that control the interaction effects between participation in non-formal education and the reported salary level, educational attainment, gender, age and district of residence demonstrate significant and independent associations between participation and the participants' socio-

demographic characteristics. According to this analysis (**Table 6**), participants in the 35 to 44 years age group are approximately 47% more likely (adjusted odds = 1.471, CI 1.026 - 2.110, $p < .036$) to participate than the participants in the oldest (55+) age group. Also, females are approximately 29% more likely (adjusted odds = 1.289, CI 1.066 - 1.557, $p < .009$) to participate in non-formal education as defined by the Labour Force Survey.

Table 6: Participation in non-formal education (multiple logistic regression results)

	Sig.	Adjusted Odds	Lower 95% C.I.	Upper 95% C.I.
AGE				
55+	.224	1		
18-24	.194	1.314	.870	1.984
25-34	.346	1.194	.826	1.727
35-44	.036	1.471	1.026	2.110
45-54	.177	1.298	.889	1.894
GENDER				
Male		1		
Female	.009	1.289	1.066	1.557
EDUCATION				
ISCED 1	.000	1		
ISCED 2	.584	1.340	.471	3.815
ISCED 3	.057	2.793	.968	8.056
ISCED 4	.046	2.963	1.018	8.622
ISCED 5	.001	5.841	1.986	17.176
ISCED 6+	.004	4.763	1.657	13.695
DISTRICT OF RESIDENCE				
Northern District	.194	1		
Southern Harbour	.401	1.187	.795	1.773
Northern Harbour	.724	1.070	.735	1.556
South Eastern District	.279	.793	.521	1.207
Western District	.959	.989	.658	1.488
Gozo and Comino	.600	.896	.593	1.352
SALARY				
The lowest salary (1st qt)	.000	1		
Below the average (2nd qt)	.511	.902	.664	1.226
Above the average (3rd qt)	.498	.901	.666	1.219
The highest salary (4th qt)	.006	1.524	1.127	2.060

Source: NSO. LFS, 2014. (Question: During the previous 4 weeks have you attended any courses, seminars, conferences or private lessons outside regular education? Additional variables include in this analysis are: salary, education, gender, age and district)

This analysis also shows that educational attainment is probably the most influential factor that determines participation in adult education since participants with ISCED 4, ISCED 5 and ISCED 6 are respectively 3 (adjusted odds = 2.963, CI 1.018 - 8.622, $p < .046$), 5.8 (adjusted odds = 5.841, CI 1.986- 17.176, $p < .001$) and 4.8 (adjusted odds = 4.763, CI 1.657 - 13.695, $p < .004$) times more likely to participate in this form of adult education than the participants with the lowest, ISCED 1 level of educational attainment. The study also shows that the participants with the highest self-reported salary are approximately 50% more likely to participate in non-formal education (adjusted odds = 1.524, CI 1.127 - 2.060, $p < .006$) than the participants with the lowest salary level.

According to this study, a focus on the development of viable adult education programmes that suit the educational needs of social groups underrepresented among participants in non-formal education (e.g. older low-income males with lower educational attainment) is one of the possible ways to widen participation in adult education in Malta.

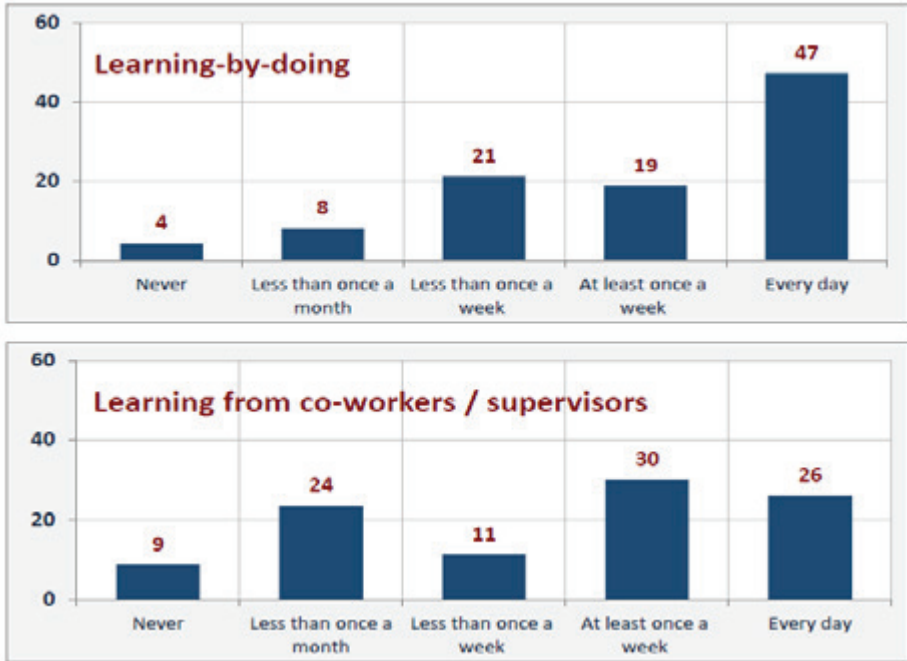
Preferred forms and content of lifelong learning

According to a recent study (Raykov, 2015), a large number of people with low education attainment (ISCED 1 or ISCED 2) are involved in informal learning at their place of work. As **Figure 34** shows, almost half (47%) of employees with lower educational attainment intensively learn at work on a daily basis while an additional 40% are also involved in learning, but less frequently, at work. According to this study, only 12% of the participants in this large-scale study report infrequent (less than once a month) learning or lack of any participation in learning. As the second part of the same figure shows, in addition to learning-by-doing, a significant number of people (56%) with lower educational attainment are frequently involved in learning from their co-workers and/or supervisors.

This study also indicates potential dissonance between formal education provision and pedagogical preferences. The data below indicates hands-on, learning-by-doing as the preferred pedagogical tool of people with low educational attainment (early school leavers) participating in informal learning.

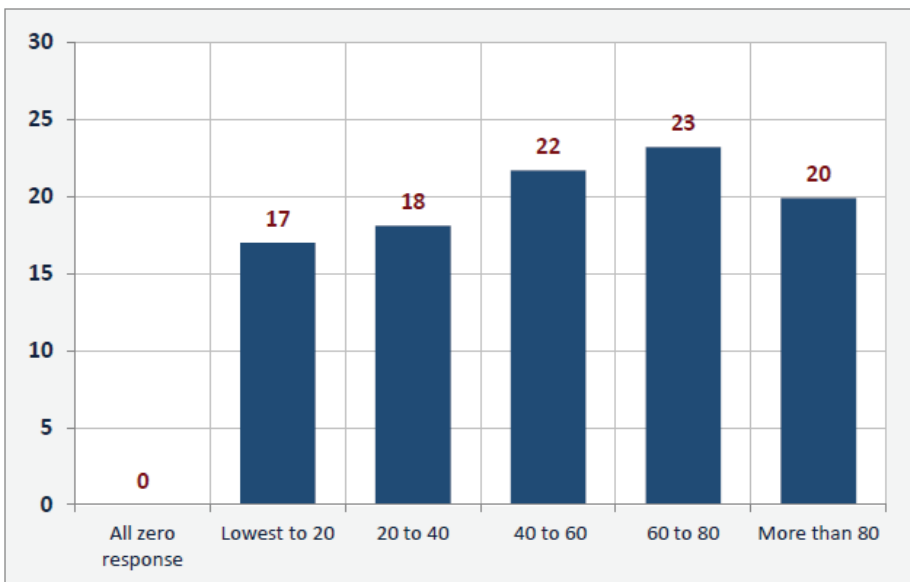
Overall, PIAAC results demonstrate (**Figure 35**) that the great majority of people with low educational attainment are interested in learning (readiness to learn index), but many of them face barriers that prevent them from engaging in adult education.

Figure 34: Early school leaving and participation in informal learning



Source: Raykov, ECER 2015.

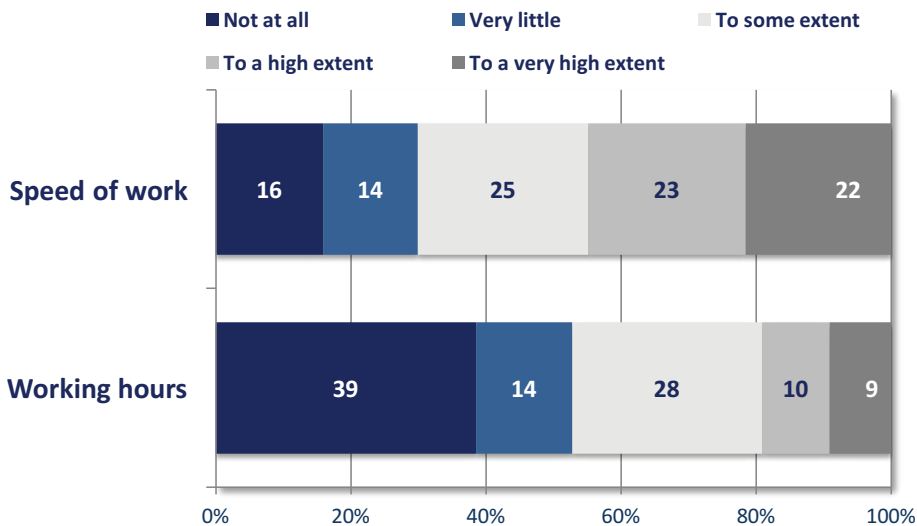
Figure 35: Index of early school leavers' 'readiness to learn'



Source: PIAAC, 2012.

In addition to time constraints that employees face when contemplating adult education, most of those with ISCED 1 or 2 have low control over work. As **Figure 36** shows, people with low educational attainment have limited possibilities for engagement in adult education since a substantial number have no control (39%) or limited control (42%) over their work. In addition to this, a large number of people with low educational attainment cannot control the speed of their work. This leads to fatigue and decreases their capability to engage in education. Results from this large-scale survey demonstrate the important role of working conditions for widening participation in adult education.

Figure 36: Control over work and the possibilities for engagement in adult education



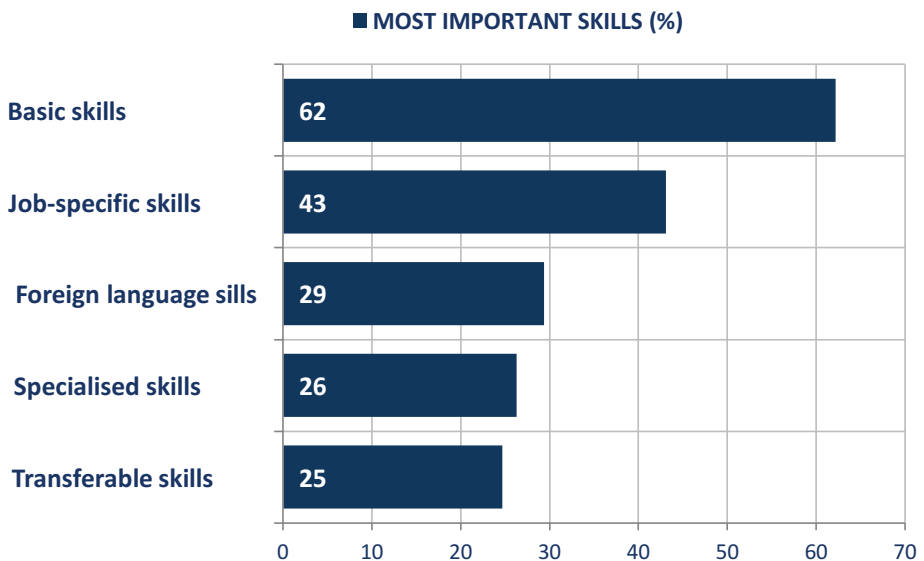
Source: PIAAC, 2012.

Preferences regarding the content of lifelong learning in Malta

One of the main education policy goals in Malta and the EU is to widen participation in adult education and to increase the current participation from 7% to 15% (European Commission, 2010; MEDE, 2014). One of the main preconditions to achieving this goal is to understand the values and interests of the particular social groups and their evaluation of the content of education. Also, it is important to understand the favourable forms of participation in adult education since these forms would most likely be feasible for the potential participants.

Results from the recent large-scale European survey (**Figure 37**) of lifelong learning, which includes a sample of participants from Malta, shows that almost two-thirds (62%) of adults in the EU consider basic skills, such as reading, writing and numeracy, as important. A significant number of adults (43%) highly value job-specific skills (e.g. to become an engineer, accountant, hairdresser, nurse, mechanic). In addition to the basic and job-specific skills, approximately one quarter of adults in Malta are interested in learning foreign languages (29%), specialised subjects such as science (26%), or transferable skills such as problem-solving and working with others that they can use in different jobs (25%).

Figure 37: In your opinion, which of the following are the most important skills that education provides?

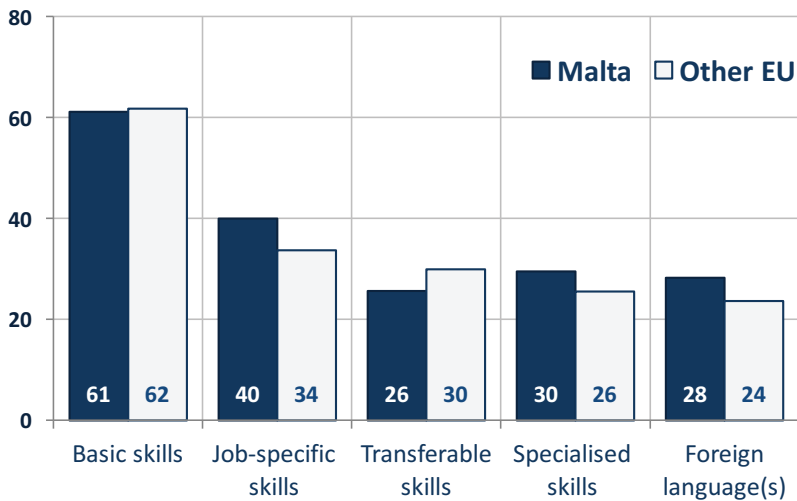


Source: EP, 2014. (Question: In your opinion, which of the following are the most important skills that education provides?)

A comparison of the participants from Malta and the other EU countries (**Figure 38**) regarding the evaluation of the most important skills that education provides shows a very similar pattern but also some differences that reflect the specific needs of adult learners in Malta. Participants from Malta as well as from the other EU countries perceive basic skills, including reading, writing and numeracy, as the most important (61% vs. 62%) provision of education.

Regarding educational attainment, people with lower educational attainment, who left formal education before the age of 19, highly value learning of basic skills such as reading, writing and numeracy, while half of the people who left formal education before the age of 15 highly value learning job-specific skills that can help them gain rewarding employment (Table 7).

Figure 38: Opinions about the most important skills



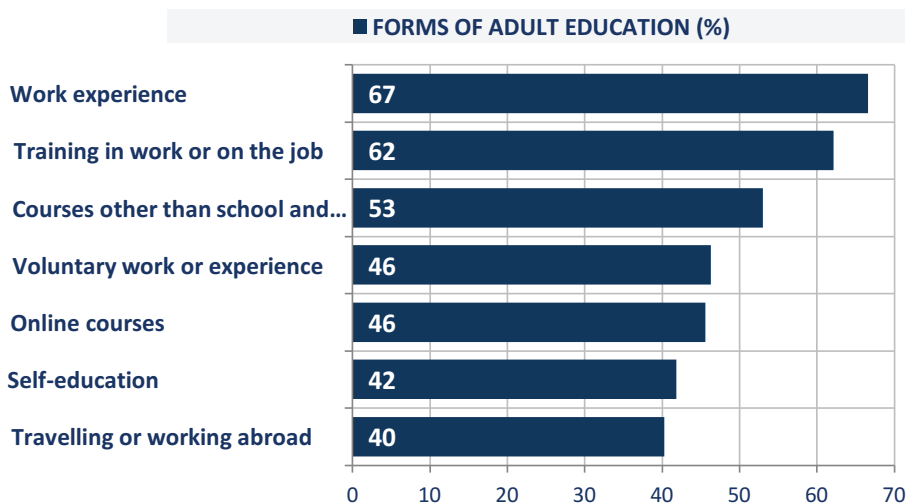
Source: EP, 2014. (Question: In your opinion, which of the following are the most important skills that education provides?)

For the design of the adult education programmes, it is also important to understand which forms of lifelong learning adults perceive as helpful in obtaining skills outside formal education (outside schools, vocational education and training and university).

Table 7: The most important skills by educational attainment

	Basic skills e.g. reading and writing, numeracy	Job-specific skills e.g. to become an engineer	Foreign language skills	Specialised skills in specific subjects e.g. science	Skills which can be used in different jobs
-15 years	61.4%	50.8%	28.8%	22.0%	17.4%
16-19	64.8%	39.2%	32.6%	26.0%	26.4%
20 years+	57.0%	41.9%	22.1%	33.7%	31.4%
	62.2	43.1	29.4	26.3	24.7

Source: European Parliament, 2014.

Figure 39: Perceived learning opportunities outside of formal education

Source: EP, 2014. (Question: Where or how would you be able to obtain these skills outside of formal education?)

According to the 2014 EP survey (Figure 39), participants in Malta perceive learning through “work experience” (67%) and “training in work or on the job” (62%) as the most viable form of adult learning outside of formal education. In addition, a significant number of participants believe that they can obtain skills through voluntary work (46%) and through online courses (46%). A smaller but considerable number of adults are interested in predominantly individual forms of learning such as self-education (42%) and learning through travelling and working abroad (40%).

In comparison to other forms of adult education (**Table 8**) people with the lowest educational attainment, who have left formal education before the age of 15, are most interested in education to gain work experience (65%) and to get “training in work or on the job” (57%). Similarly, people with the highest educational attainment are also highly interested in learning through work experience (71%) and training in the work (62%) but, in contrast to people with the lowest educational attainment, they are significantly more interested in online courses (60% vs. 38%) and learning through travelling or working abroad (58% vs. 29%).

Table 8: Preferred forms of adult education in Malta and educational attainment

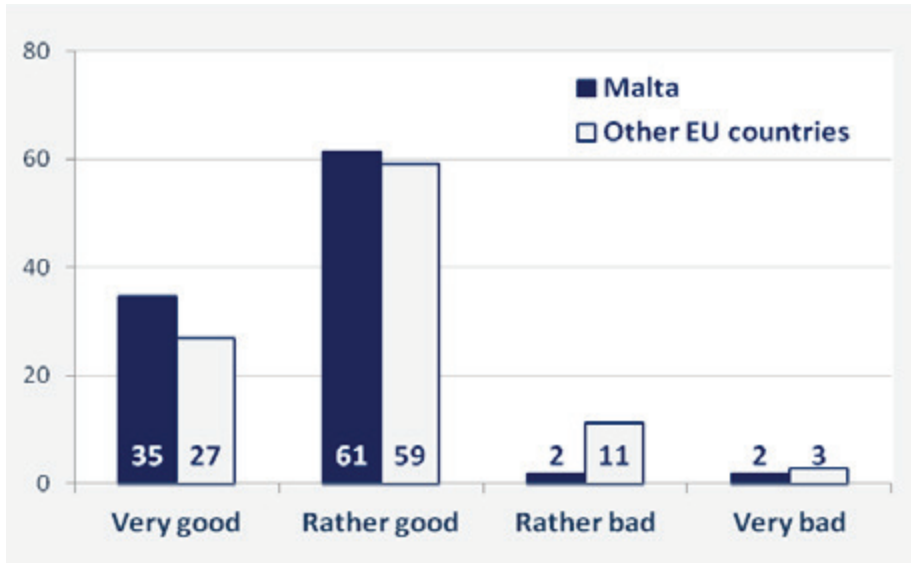
	Work experience	Training Courses in work or on the job	Courses other than school or vocational education	Voluntary work or experience	Self-education	Online courses, non-formal education	Travelling, living or working abroad
15 years	65%	57%	44%	41%	38%	38%	29%
16-19	66%	65%	52%	46%	42%	45%	40%
20 years +	71%	62%	66.7%	54.8%	46.4%	60%	58%

Source: EP, 2014. (**Question:** Where or how would you be able to obtain these skills outside of formal education?)

International studies of attitudes towards education demonstrate high interest in, and demand for, education in many economically developed countries. In contrast to most other European countries, there is an apparent lack of relevant data regarding the interest in adult education in Malta. A survey of attitudes towards European policies, the 2020 strategy in Europe (European Commission, 2010), provides some indications regarding attitudes towards education but cannot replace the need for a comprehensive study that examines issues related to adult education in Malta.

One of the 2020 goals is that at least 40% of the population, aged 30 to 34 years, should have a higher education degree or diploma. Participants in this study were asked about this percentage. Overall, half of all EU participants in this study (51%) indicated that this number is “about right” but, in Malta, a significantly higher percentage of the participants (62%) agreed with this statement. Furthermore, two-thirds (66%) of the people in Malta and approximately half (54%) of those in other EU countries agree with the EU2020 goal that the number of young people leaving school with no qualifications should fall to 10%.

Figure 40: Evaluation of adult education in Malta and the other EU member states



In addition to several other favourable evaluations of education in Malta, the participants in this study positively evaluate the adult education programme. As **Figure 40** shows, almost all (96%) participants from Malta positively evaluate adult education while only 4% of participants report negative attitudes towards adult education. Statistical analysis confirms that the attitudes towards adult education in Malta are much more positive than in the other EU Member States (Chi-square = 11,223.11, $p < .001$).

Despite the relatively limited sample size, the results from this study confirm well-established facts that overall educational attainment in Malta is significantly lower than in most European countries. According to this survey (**Table 9**), the average age at which young people stop their full-time education in Malta is 17.7 as opposed to approximately 20.1 years in the rest of Europe. In some of the economically developed countries, such as Sweden, Denmark and Finland, young people stop their full-time education at the age of 24 or 25.

Table 9: How old were you when you stopped full-time education?

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
France	927	19.93	4.708	.155	19.63	20.24
Belgium	942	19.55	5.251	.171	19.21	19.88
The Netherlands	951	20.70	5.262	.171	20.37	21.04
Germany (West)	935	19.65	4.728	.155	19.35	19.95
Italy	879	19.09	7.432	.251	18.60	19.58
Luxembourg	411	20.13	4.832	.238	19.66	20.60
Denmark	919	25.06	7.897	.261	24.55	25.57
Ireland	916	19.69	5.758	.190	19.32	20.06
Great Britain	923	18.44	4.785	.158	18.13	18.75
Northern Ireland	289	17.95	4.341	.255	17.45	18.45
Greece	856	19.49	6.272	.214	19.07	19.91
Spain	880	18.14	5.737	.193	17.76	18.52
Portugal	879	15.32	6.363	.215	14.90	15.75
Germany (East)	501	19.22	4.218	.188	18.85	19.59
Finland	914	23.59	9.247	.306	22.99	24.19
Sweden	967	25.82	10.009	.322	25.19	26.45
Austria	855	20.16	6.065	.207	19.76	20.57
Hungary	1001	18.84	5.150	.163	18.52	19.16
Malta	445	17.69	6.322	.300	17.10	18.28
Total	25170	20.11	6.653	.042	20.03	20.19

The 2014 EU Survey of lifelong learning provides data relevant to the provision of adult education services in all EU Member States. In this survey, two thirds (65%) of the participants from Malta perceive basic skills as the most important domain of adult education. Also, almost the same number of people who have incomplete secondary or elementary education have similar positive attitudes towards the value of basic skills (67%). In addition, they, more frequently than those with higher educational attainment, perceive job-specific skills as an important area of life-long learning (51% vs. 42%). In contrast, a significantly greater number of participants with higher, upper secondary or tertiary education (31% vs. 17%) are interested in transferable skills or specialized skills in specific subjects, for example, science

(34% vs. 22%). It is also interesting to note that people with incomplete secondary or elementary education are slightly more interested in learning foreign languages (30% vs. 22%).

This survey demonstrates that most of the participants see teachers as the most important influence in education. Approximately 70% of participants believe that teachers' ability to engage and motivate students is the most important factor in determining student achievement. A lower number, 55% of all participants, believe teachers' expertise and subject knowledge is an important factor in educational attainment. A smaller number of participants, one-third, believe that learning environments that stimulate students are important. Participants who left school later reported significantly more frequently (43% vs. 30%) that they perceive this factor as highly influential.

A similar proportion of participants of all groups provided similar suggestions for improvements in education. Most of them, 55%, believe that a teacher's ability to engage and motivate should be improved and a considerably smaller proportion (approximately one-third) believe that teachers' subject knowledge and ability to ensure an orderly environment should be improved. A significant number (58%) of the participants having the highest educational attainment believe that practical work experience or organization can significantly contribute to the improvement of education in Malta. With regard to knowledge, there was a strong interest among all participants in job specific training (53%), transferable knowledge (53%), and basic skills (50%). It should be taken into consideration that participants with higher educational attainment demonstrated the greatest interest in transferable knowledge that can be used to find jobs.

Finally, this study examined the financial situation of participants. It demonstrates that people with educational attainment at the ISCED 1 and ISCED 2 levels in Malta more frequently experience difficulties in paying bills. They also more frequently believe that they are in the lower level of the social hierarchy. Regarding social class, more than half (57%) of people with educational attainment at the ISCED 1 and ISCED 2 level identify with the working class in contrast to one quarter (25%) of participants with higher educational attainment.

In addition to the previous findings, this study shows that computer-based learning is not a feasible form of education for older people and those with lower educational attainment. Only 30% of ISCED 1 and ISCED 2 reported using the Internet frequently in contrast to approximately 90% of participants with higher educational attainment. Also, people with low educational attainment rarely

use the Internet at their place of work or other places, indicating a low level of computer-related skills. In total, only 32% of people with low educational attainment use the Internet; an additional third have never used the Internet and the remaining third have no access to the Internet. Additionally, the study shows that a very small number of people with lower educational attainment have a positive attitude towards online education. The fact that a significant number of them perceive teachers as highly important factors in education indicates a preference for learning through direct contact with teachers who are able to understand students' difficulties and can help them.

This study also demonstrates significant differences between people with low educational attainment and other participants with regard to general attitudes towards education. A small number of people with low educational attainment (28%) perceive trade schools as very good in comparison to almost half (48%) of participants with higher educational attainment. Also, a relatively small number of people with low educational attainment (31%) agree that education provides the necessary job-related skills in comparison to over half (56%) of participants who have a higher education. Those with low educational attainment more frequently have negative attitudes towards vocational and higher education. In contrast, they perceive adult education courses much more positively; 63% in this group believe that adult education is very good in comparison with 25% of participants with higher educational attainment.

Pilot study and concluding remarks

The main objective of this study is to provide relevant and reliable information necessary for evidence-based decision making related to supporting wider participation in different forms of lifelong learning. Based on the empirical findings, this study aims to propose a number of measures, which are likely to widen access to educational opportunities and increase participation in lifelong learning, particularly among members of disadvantaged social groups and those who demonstrate an unmet demand for work-related education and training.

In addition to the analysis of the large-scale national (LFS and AES data) and international (EP data) surveys, this study also includes a pilot survey of adult participants from Malta. They were interviewed by phone in order to collect some preliminary data related to their participation in a wide variety of different forms of adult education. The semi-structured interview was based on the Work and Lifelong Learning WALL (Livingstone & Raykov, 2012) and PIAAC (OECD, 2013) surveys. The survey was translated into Maltese and converted into an online survey that was used as a base for computer-assisted telephone interviews.

The participants were randomly selected from publicly available phonebooks and the study was approved by the institutional ethics review board. This component of the study included 28 participants who agreed to be interviewed or to take the online survey. The phone interviews, interview notes and the online collected data were used for this section of the report.⁷

⁷ We would like to acknowledge research assistance from the Faculty of Education post-graduate students Louise Chircop and Tania Borg.

This study was conducted to examine the feasibility of some new or additional questions or variables which are not available in the standard national system of indicators related to adult education. The aim of the pilot study was not to generate national estimates of participation in adult education but rather to examine the preliminary validity of new questions and general patterns of responses and characteristics of participation in adult education.

Most of the participants were employed and only a few were involved or intended to continue their formal education as students in an educational institution. In contrast, a significant number of participants in this pilot study reported that they are taking different forms of accredited courses on a part-time basis. Regarding non-formal and informal learning, the majority of participants mentioned that they learn 'a lot' and acquire work-related skills through their paid work, their work at home as well as through their participation in voluntary activities.

Participants with higher education attainment, for example a degree in accounting, mentioned that in their occupations they feel "out-dated" if they do not take additional courses. Another participant, a nurse, mentioned that her profession requires continuing professional development (CPD) and that nurses "have to do continuous courses". Employers often organise courses for their employees and their support is perceived as very convenient for CPD because of the many barriers to their participation in adult education. It was also obvious that the participants who use computers at work have more opportunities for learning and organized training than the other interview participants.

More than half of the interviewed participants mentioned their involvement in different forms of employment-related informal learning. Most of them reported learning about new job-related tasks, computers and new equipment. In addition, a significant number, almost half of the participants, learn about financial management, employment conditions and health and safety.

Regarding the PIAAC question concerning how often they learn from co-workers or supervisors, more than half of the participants mentioned that they learn from them every day or at least once a week. A significantly smaller number of participants, approximately one third, stated that they rarely or never learn from their co-workers or supervisors. For a number of participants "learning from their supervisors and co-workers" was perceived as a "normal" part of daily routine. The pattern of responses from the interviews is, despite the small sample, similar to the results obtained through large-scale surveys such as PIAAC (OECD, 2013).

A similar pattern of responses was identified with regard to learning-by-doing. The frequency of the intensive, daily learning-by-doing is in contrast with the results obtained through official surveys, and indicates that there is a need for the collection of a larger set of indicators that can provide a comprehensive overview of participation in different forms of adult education.

One of the important findings of this pilot study is that a considerable number of the participants mentioned that they (deliberately) try to learn something about their work on their own in order to improve their knowledge or skills. Regarding this question, it is important to note that for a considerable number of participants with lower educational attainment, this question was not intelligible and, therefore, several participants required an additional explanation. This indicates that there is a need to examine the issue in more detail in order to determine the most appropriate formulation of this question to ensure that it is suitable for people with lower education attainment.

Regarding the methods of learning, approximately half of the participants stated that they acquired knowledge through individual learning, while a third mentioned training provided by their employers. A smaller number indicated that they acquired knowledge as a combination of working individually and learning with their co-workers and supervisors.

Regarding the sources for informal learning, most participants indicated the Internet and family members. A relatively small number of participants reported learning from books. It is interesting to note that several participants mention that they learn from audiovisual sources (YouTube) as it is flexible and allows them to learn at a time that is convenient for them. A small percentage of participants also reported that their main source of informal learning comes from television and radio. Some of them mentioned that they do not read books or newspapers but watch television or listen to the radio. Several older participants said that they often learn about computers from their children. In addition, they also mentioned learning about mobile phones, the Internet and computers from their children and grand-children. This indicates that there is a lot of inter-generational learning.

The interviews also identified a significant number of participants who wanted to participate in formal or non-formal training but, due to various reasons, were not able to do this. The main theme that emerged from the interviews was that most of the participants were interested in adult education (formal and non-formal

learning), but several participants indicated that they face various barriers to engaging in adult education. The most frequent barriers to participation were family obligations and the cost of training. Both male and female participants often indicated that their need to take care of their children is probably the most significant obstacle to participation. Some of those who were not able to participate also mentioned a heavy workload (e.g. “I have too much on my plate”).

A number of participants, employed in jobs that require a low level of skills, indicated a lack of interest in learning. In addition to their family commitments, a small number of the participants mentioned that they were not able to find courses in the country that matched their interests (e.g. courses such as micro biology) and that the major obstacle for taking courses abroad was the lack of financial resources for studying abroad. A small number of participants who were interested in specific courses indicated that they needed to wait for the number of participants required for the organization of a course.

Since one of the major barriers to participation in adult education for the majority of participants is their work schedule, it is obvious that employers' support and the flexible schedule of adult education courses are likely to facilitate wider participation in adult education.

Regarding the factors that can increase participation in adult education, the pilot study found indications that a relatively large number of adults demonstrate an interest in prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR) and that this practice would very likely contribute to their increased interest and participation in adult education.

Approximately two-thirds of the participants in this pilot study in Malta demonstrated interest in PLAR. The proportion of participants who are interested in PLAR is even greater than the proportion of participants interested in PLAR that was identified in a much more extensive international study (Livingstone, Raykov & Turner, 2005).

A significant number of the participants interested in PLAR believe that they already have knowledge and skills and, therefore, they would like to obtain accreditation for their prior learning. Most of the participants who are interested in this type of assessment are motivated by the fact that their knowledge and skills would be recognised. Several participants were not aware of the opportunities for PLAR or did not understand the concept of prior learning assessment. This

finding demonstrates that there is a clear need to design and test any question related to the increasingly complex content and terminology in education. The participants' responses also indicated that they would be interested in this form of participation if it does not require complicated administrative procedures. The common response from the participants was that they would engage in PLAR if the procedure is not too complicated. A participant in the study stated, "If it is too complicated, it is not worth doing."

Overall, the pilot study indicated that there is a considerable interest in PLAR, primarily among younger employed participants. The study also indicated that there is a need for the use of appropriate simple language that most people interested in this form of participation in adult education can understand. The study also found that older participants are less interested in PLAR, but many from this age group regret that they did not have this opportunity earlier in their lives.

Recently identified barriers that stand in the way of participation in lifelong learning include the 'stipends system' at University which was introduced by the Nationalist Government in 1987 to replace the former wage linked to the 'Worker-Student' scheme (Mayo 2012; Mayo, 2013) in university education. This system of funding clearly discriminates against students on the basis of age since those enrolled in full-time courses, over the age of 30, are excluded from the funding. This measure also fails to take into consideration the needs of people at different ages to continue their studies. The measure often adversely affects persons, usually women, who interrupt their studies because of family concerns, particularly caring for children in their early years. They often wish to return at a later age (often in their 30s) to take up further studies, including those that will enable them to rejoin the labour market (e.g. the Post-Graduate Certificate in Education course, now to be converted, with the four year B.Ed. course, into a Master's in Teaching and Learning, which would allow them to take up teaching). Needless to say, single parents are the hardest hit in these circumstances. This situation alone provides a strong case for the introduction of means testing with regard to student funding. (Mayo, 2007, p. 63)

Apart from funding, the issue of alternative entry qualifications also needs to be considered. The introduction of the 'maturity clause' in 1987 was commendable. The country, probably through an independent body, must, however, develop effective procedures for the proper evaluation of alternative qualifications (including alternative learning experiences). This would enable potential participants, who do not possess the formal entry qualifications, to gain proper

recognition for what they have learnt through alternative routes. This recognition should provide them with access to the courses offered by the University, including evening ones. Once again, the country requires expertise in the much-debated area of the Accreditation of Prior Learning. (Mayo, 2007, p. 63) The University has recently appeared resistant to providing holders of non-postgraduate diplomas in, say, adult education with the chance to engage in a bridging programme which, in the absence of a first degree in the area, would allow them to proceed to a professional-cum-academic Master's degree in the same field. This specific MA course is made available to all those in possession of a good first degree in any area.

With regard to honours degree courses, there has also been a traditional reluctance to make these degrees accessible to those who cannot afford to undertake full-time studies. Only BA General degrees were, for a long period, made available in the evening and these degrees preclude people from furthering their studies at the University for a Higher degree unless a qualifying course is undertaken. There were times when certain departments prevented students from taking these exams in their specific area. At present the faculties of Arts and especially Science have been reluctant in recent years to offer even a BA General degree in the evening save for the occasional course in Gozo. The University of London has, for years, been making its Honours courses available to adult students either on a part-time/evening basis or through its external service. A good many Maltese (studying in Malta) have benefited from the latter opportunity, including some who later became established professors at the University of Malta. There seems to be no legitimate academic reason why degree courses at the honours degree level should not be made available to adult Maltese students as evening university continuing education courses. Happily, B.A. Honours evening degree courses in three areas, Theology; Work and Human Resources and Youth Studies are now available. One hopes that these are the first of many programmes offered in the evening at Honours degree level to adults who cannot afford full time studies. The range of provision available is still quite restricted. (Mayo, 2003, 2007)

Other barriers include the unavailability of a proper extension service at the University of Malta and the non-existence of a locally relevant virtual university which, given Malta's small state condition and its particular characteristics (Baldacchino & Farrugia, 2002; Bacchus, 2008; Baldacchino, 2012; Mayo, 2010), should ideally be linked to the country's only existing university or its vocational counterpart, MCAST. The latter is a public institution which has been given the right to confer degrees and also comprises a number of colleges including, as indicated earlier, a university college.

Barriers also arise through the inability of unions to press for paid educational leave in their negotiations with employers (Wain & Mayo, 1992), although the current political climate in this period of hegemonic Neoliberal globalisation has placed the unions on the back foot in this regard and they are more likely to press for opportunities for the 'retooling' of labour skills (Baldacchino & Mayo, 1996) and vocational reorientation courses in an age when people are working beyond 60. This is because of the demographic factors that point to an aging population; over the 20th Century the population of Malta has nearly doubled, from 211,564 in 1911 to 416,055 in 2011 and, at the end of 2010, nearly a quarter of the total population, or 98,547 persons, were 60 years old and over. (Formosa, 2013, p. 91) There is also the alarming prospect of pensions becoming an individual rather than a social responsibility (Mayo, 2007).

While on the subject of older adults, private old people's homes are mushrooming as elderly persons constitute a lucrative market (Findsen & Formosa, 2011). And yet, these homes provide barriers to learning in the context of lifelong adult education, since they employ only nurses, health assistants and the occasional visiting doctor while cultural animators or adult educators are rarely to be seen (Mayo, 2007). Malta needs to ensure that a cadre of trained people is provided in the area of Educating Older Adults so that these people can be employed at old people's homes to ensure that these places become hives of activity that can have a salutary effect on the lives of their residents. The residents would thus be viewed as active and not passive beings, active citizens at a period in their life when access to citizenship learning and action is denied them. Government homes (e.g. St Vincent De Paule) can serve as initial models in this regard. (Mayo, 2007, p. 57)

Other barriers also exist at the local level. There is the failure of most local councils (some did occasionally collaborate with NGOs in the area - Caruana, 2004, p. 64) to give pride of place to adult community education in their activities. Admittedly some have provided the odd course in ICT in their community, the odd literacy course in concert with an NGO or a crafts-based programme,⁸ as indicated previously, but little else. Local councils can, for instance, play a prominent part in the development of the local School as Community Learning Centre (SCLC) (Mayo, 2013a) and in the fostering of a community education culture. The major stumbling block here is financial but, we would suspect, also, a lack of knowledge of the field of adult community education. We wonder whether the budget for local councils ought to be increased by a substantial amount to be reserved for

8 <https://www.gov.mt/en/Government/Press%20Releases/Pages/2015/Sept/05/pr151949.aspx>

educational programmes and to be allocated and spent solely for that purpose. The Malta Labour Party promised such a development in its discussion document on education, produced a year ahead of the 2008 elections which it lost, although it was not clear then how one would ensure that the extra funding is allotted solely and exclusively for educational purposes. (Mayo, 2007, pp. 56-57)

Prospective community programmes can be developed in connection with the SCLC in the specific locality. Projects would include the development of a viable and attractive community library, on the lines of the one opened, well over a decade ago, at Fgura, and an IT centre (both could be part of the service provided by SCLC), the latter intended to serve as a means to bridge the 'digital divide.' The councils could also help set up child care facilities to ensure that both women and men can avail themselves of these opportunities. So would elderly persons who often serve as child minders in lieu of such facilities (this is common in a small state where distances are short and parents can avail themselves of much more trusted family members in this regard). Local councils can also help set up community/people's museums which can serve as learning sites. (Mayo, 2007, p. 59).

One of the barriers to adult learning in museums and other cultural centres in these islands is the lack of personnel serving as educators in these contexts. We tend to equate teaching and learning only with established educational institutions such as schools, universities etc. But there are other sources of 'public pedagogy' which require educators to help and pro-actively engage in attracting people to these sites. The lack of investment in audiovisual technology, especially in the larger national museums, is another stumbling block.

On another note the lack of provision of state of the art multimedia libraries in various localities, with well prepared librarians, is another stumbling block to adult participation in learning.

While the idea of developing schools as multipurpose learning sites is an important one in small states, one must ensure that significant changes to the sites (not cosmetic ones) are made to make the environment one that is conducive and attractive to adult learners. People with low schooling achievement or school 'drop outs' are the ones most likely to resist efforts at attracting them towards adult learning. It is important, therefore, that the environment is one that does not smack of a 'traditional school classroom' but one that accommodates adults. Furthermore, people involved in running after-school programmes for adults

must have a good grounding in either adult education or community learning to ensure that the pedagogical approach is not that associated with conventional schooling and which probably had an alienating effect on the person during his or her schooling days. Where possible, an extensive network of sites can be developed. Ideally, participants in these programmes should be encouraged to teach courses in the area in which the person is proficient so that the person will be both teacher and learner at the same time. For instance, one who works in the catering trade and who is functionally illiterate can undertake literacy classes and at the same time teach catering classes.

The idea of being a teacher as well as a learner can boost the person's self-esteem and enable the person to view the learning/teaching setting in a different light. One would thus avoid the stigma attached to adult literacy learning in a small community where everyone knows each other and is under the spotlight; an effective means of managing intimacy (Baldacchino & Mayo, 1996). For example, the highly literate educator can himself/herself take a computer literacy class etc. In short, this would be a project that avoids the traditional deficit model associated with conventional adult education, one of the reasons why, for instance, Portugal avoided a mass literacy campaign immediately following the 1974 Carnation revolution (Melo, 1985). Changing the pronoun in Chaucer's famous phrase, describing the Clerk, in *The Canterbury Tales*, 'gladly will they learn and gladly teach.' And all this in a programme, we would add, that highlights both their strengths and needs. It would be interesting to see whether the deficit model constitutes a barrier to participation for those being surveyed or interviewed in this study. This has ramifications for the participation of all adults in education programmes, especially migrant adults seeking to integrate into Maltese society. Research from nearby Italy and other Mediterranean countries indicates the problem of confining programmes to forms of what Italians call *assistenzialismo*

Adult educators should not regard incoming migrant groups as "deficits"; the programs and experiences provided should be those in which the members of all ethnic groups involved, including the ethnic groups to which the adult educators belong, are conceived of as "subjects" and not as "objects."
(English & Mayo, 2012, p. 176)

On an even more positive note, the scramble for EU funds is leading to innovative ways of carrying out adult education in Malta and this can serve to provide opportunities for adults from different backgrounds to engage in adult education. University has been very much involved in the professional preparation of adult

educators first at diploma level and more recently at MA level. This can provide the country with a cadre of well prepared adult educators in both the theoretical and the practical aspects of adult education. They have been encouraged to use their imagination in devising projects for their practicum and this can serve the country in good stead.

The EU's discourse, thus far, has, save for some social democratic trappings, reflected an excessively economic view of lifelong learning. This view sits comfortably with the dominant neoliberal scenario, one which shuns the collective dimensions of learning in favour of one underlined by the politics of 'responsibilisation' and which sees people as adapting to the world, rather than problematising it with a view to changing it. The major challenge for Malta, as elsewhere, is to strike a balance between the demands of employment and the demands for the development of a genuinely democratic public sphere with criticality and problem-posing at its core. This would have implications for the types of adult learning, some perhaps already in existence (e.g. blogging and other uses of digital technology), that need to be valorised and promoted. It remains to be seen whether this research will confirm this consideration that ought to constitute an important feature of the incoming data analysis. The prospects for future policy in this regard are good, judging from the recent National Lifelong Learning Strategy.

A cursory reading of the draft strategy document, produced by the Ministry of Education and Employment, would suggest that it follows other EU driven documents, being ostensibly economic with the emphasis on competitiveness and 'employability'. This is reinforced by the fact that the 'employability' issue is foregrounded in the document. Nevertheless, a more careful reading would indicate that it also highlights the *social dimension* of learning. It incorporates such issues as the overdue need to develop schools as community learning centres (Mayo, 2014), making a multifunctional use of this resource in a small country in which the cost per capita of resource duplication is high when compared with that for larger countries; and funds for this prospective initiative have been secured to assist the LL strategy task force in implementing this idea, initially through a pilot project. Most importantly, the draft document recognises the sterling work of NGOs (MEDE, 2014, pp. 72-75) in the adult education field, even arguing for further support in this area. It attaches due importance to the role which local councils (municipal councils in every locality) can play in this regard (MEDE, 2014, p. 40). Furthermore, it focuses on areas of social difference including the concerns of men, women, the elderly and the disabled (MEDE, 2014, pp. 34-37). It conceives of their

situation within the context of community development and action programmes, and in the context of coordinated communal learning strategies and networks. It tackles the role that adult education can play in the context of immigration (adult education, consisting of adult literacy programmes, historically played an important role in Maltese emigration) and offers guidelines for adult education to contribute to “facilitate the integration of migrants in Maltese society” (MEDE, 2014, p. 72). It extends the notion of difference from the social to the bio-centric with its emphasis on a green component lying at the core of a national LL strategy, all within the context of lifelong and adult learning for sustainable development. (MEDE, 2014, p. 76)

The document is also rooted in the present, pragmatically highlighting some of the most forward looking initiatives on the islands, such as the university’s recent Liberal Arts & Sciences venture (MEDE, 2014, p. 56), consisting of the provision of mainly public courses for adults. This course smacks of an extension University Continuing Education programme. It does so at a time when the Liberal Arts area is being subjected to blistering attacks elsewhere (Giroux, 2014; Zakaria, 2015). It also proposes turning one of the public broadcasting channels into an important outlet for adult and general public education.

Furthermore, it sheds light on local research in the field, most of it published internationally, from books to papers in peer reviewed journals. A substantial part of this research is highly critical of the Neoliberal turn in the LL discourse (see Wain, 2004a, 2004b; Walters *et al*, 2004; Borg & Mayo, 2004, 2005). It even called for the setting up of a department of adult education at University, an idea which recently came to pass, as of October 2015⁹ - quite a remarkable occurrence at a time when community oriented departments of adult education are fast becoming an extinct species at universities in the Anglophone world. This well crafted document provides a clarion call for participation in lifelong learning, a process of democratic participation that, we would argue, renders it an important source of reference when analysing the data already at hand and about to be secured.

Based on the results from this study, in addition to the general measures focused to widen participation in adult education by the entire adult population, some targeted programmes and other measures should be focused on older age group, 45 years and over, people with lower educational attainment, self-employed,

9 The recently set up Department of Arts, Open Communities and Adult Education, Faculty of Education, University of Malta

unemployed, people not in the labour force as well as employees in small companies. Results demonstrate that in Malta, employer support plays a crucial role for participation in adult education. The study shows that most participants in formal education were financially supported by their current or future employers.

Overall, besides efforts to increase participation in all forms of adult education, short-term courses, seminars and workshops deserve particular attention since this form of education, in collaboration with employers' support for training, is probably the most promising way to widen participation in adult education. Results indicate that unemployed and people not in the labour force rarely attend seminars and workshops, but this form of adult education can significantly increase their employability and enhance their motivation for participation in adult education.

Considering the indications from our previous studies, it would be expected that measures aimed at improving and supporting lifelong learning could have broad effects on general levels of participation. To date, identified preferred modes of informal learning (Raykov et al., 2005) and the influence that membership in professional and trade organizations (Raykov & Livingstone, 2014; Livingstone & Raykov, 2006) has on the level of participation in work-related informal learning indicate some of the ways in which lifelong, work-related learning can be more widely implemented.

This study is expected to provide an array of evidence, and suggest some solutions, which can improve organization and conditions for learning for the majority of employees, regardless of their educational and socioeconomic background. Furthermore, it is expected that the collective dimension of learning, a feature of some of the best traditions in adult education and, especially, adult community education, will come to the fore when examining the collected data, although one should not underestimate the power of an individualising and atomising ideology that has been holding sway for quite a few decades, an ideology inextricably intertwined with the Neoliberal ideology that is market oriented and places the emphasis on consumer choice. And yet, the literature in adult education, and adult community education (Ledwith, 2005) has shown time and time again that communal habits and longings are not to be underestimated and have served as sources of resistance, intended or otherwise, to the dominant ideology. Closely knit communities such as those in small island societies often fashion attitudes to learning in adulthood that can go against the grain of individualising learning experiences.

Results from the study demonstrate substantial variations regarding participation in various forms of adult education among different countries as well as variations in the level of participation of different social groups. This extensive variability of participation requires constant monitoring as well as in-depth studies focused on challenges specific for a society. At the current stage, there is an apparent lack of evidence regarding the profile of participants and non-participants in different forms of adult education in Malta. Thus, future research studies will need to focus on the exploration of this issue.

There are different conceptualizations of adult education and various methodological approaches. There is a lack of comprehensive studies that examine a wide range of adult learning-related activities as well as different forms of adult education and factors that determine participation in adult education. In addition to the predominantly quantitative approach to the exploration of adult education, mixed method and comparative approaches to exploring the complex domain of adult education can provide applicable results. This exploration would also offer the possibility to better understand and create policies to address some of the main issues in the domain of adult education.

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Appendix

Summary table that shows profiles of participation in formal education, different forms of non-formal education and informal learning in Malta (%)

	Formal Education	Non-formal education	Seminars or work- shops	Courses	On-the-job training	Informal Learning
AGE						
45 years or more	0.9	26	16	9	8	20
35-44 years	4.8	42	24	15	17	28
25-34 years	8.0	42	23	16	20	29
GENDER						
Male	3.0	35	21	12	15	26
Female	3.4	32	19	13	12	22
EDUCATION						
ISCED -2	0.7	22	15	4	7	17
ISCED 3,4	8.0	50	26	20	23	35
ISCED 5+	16.3	68	35	42	30	45
EMPL. STATUS						
Self-employed	1.3	28	15	12	5	26
Employed	7.2	49	26	20	25	29
Unemployed	1.9	30	27	6	1	23
Not in LF	1.3	13	11	3	0	16
COMPANY SIZE						
1 to 10 persons	3.8	31	16	13	11	24
11 to 19 persons	4.6	41	23	19	20	26
20 to 49 persons	5.3	46	26	20	20	39
50 or more pers	8.7	55	29	23	30	30
TOTAL	4.4	34.2	19.9	12.9	13.5	24.2

Source: AES, 2011.

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