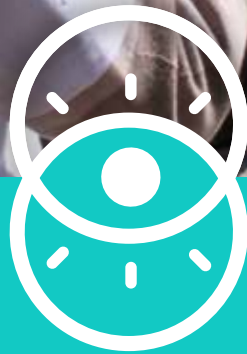


MALTA



I GET
YOU

Promoting best practices to prevent racism
and xenophobia towards forced migrants
through community building

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prevent racism and xenophobia
towards forced migrants through
community building**



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I GET YOU MALTA

National chapter no.6 of the European / Get You report

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Introduction

Malta, with an area of just over 316 km² and a population of around 434,403, of which 92.9 percent are native Maltese¹ is the most densely populated Member State of the European Union, and one of the most densely populated countries in the world. This factor, coupled with a predominantly Roman Catholic population and a history of colonisation and emigration, have contributed to the perception of forced migrants being considered as unwelcome intruders.

Since 2002, Malta has experienced the arrival of sub-Saharan forced migrants and asylum-seekers arriving irregularly from the Libyan coast. The joint Italian and EU led rescue operations in the Mediterranean, brought boat arrivals to Malta to a trickle, with the last boat to reach the Maltese shores, being in January 2015. Although arrivals through the Mediterranean Sea have come to a halt, there have been steady and increasing arrivals by plane, with a total of 1,928 in 2016, an increase of 4.6% from the previous year.² According to UNHCR, these asylum seekers originated mainly from Libya, Syria, Eritrea and Somalia. This new reality, which saw asylum seekers arriving in a regular manner and therefore not being detained upon arrival, has led to the need of an increase in services centred around integration.

Prejudice, misinformation and stereotypes between communities in Malta breed inequality, division and tensions. One of the essential aims of Community Building Initiatives (CBIs) is to make the members of the local community aware of the human behind the label, to bring out the similarities, to celebrate the differences, and to show that the things that unite us are far greater than those that divide us. CBIs offer far more than the much needed assistance with language, accommodation and employment.

The social and cultural interaction aspects of CBIs are critically important to foster understanding, lay the foundation for mutual engagement, and build trusting relationships in the Maltese society and the growing number of newcomers.

The aim of *I Get You* is to identify and promote best practices among different local and national CBIs working on the inclusion of migrants in the fabric of Maltese society and attempting to spread awareness and understanding throughout Malta on issues faced by forced migrants. Following the identification and mapping of 20 CBIs that are organised across Malta, a qualitative assessment of the most effective, diverse and representative CBIs was undertaken, in order to assess and identify best practices in raising awareness and creating common spaces of encounter. Through its own objectives, *I Get You* has also promoted the social inclusion of forced migrants in Malta by identifying the good work of CBIs and promoting best practices, thereby fostering hospitality and creating human bridges that break down the existing divisions.

1.1 CONTEXT: RACISM AND XENOPHOBIA TOWARDS FORCED MIGRANTS IN MALTA

In an ever-increasing reality of hostile and closed societies, with several far right groups in Europe on the rise, it is more necessary than ever to focus efforts on trying to bridge the gap between the European citizen, with a strong sense of nationalism, and the refugee fleeing conflict and dictatorship, often perceived as a threatening intruder.

While the social and political climate in Malta is not as tense as in other European countries, with

¹ National Statistics Office. NSO Malta. (2016)

² National Statistics Office. NSO Malta. News Release. (June 2017)

https://nso.gov.mt/en/News_Releases/View_by_Unit/Unit_C5/Population_and_Migration_Statistics/Documents/2017/News2017_098.pdf

no violent incidents or national protests taking place, and although the government in recent years has been more vocal about its zero tolerance towards xenophobia, sexism or any other type of discrimination, the reality on the ground is still one of concern. There is extensive research showing that a segment of Maltese society is still fearful of, and discriminatory towards, forced migrants. Refugees and beneficiaries of protection admitted feeling unwelcome and treated unfairly by the Maltese community.³ Although the law grants refugees and asylum seekers substantially more rights than third country nationals, the reality is that they are more vulnerable to discrimination and are less likely to access their rights.⁴

Forced migrants face discriminatory treatment across all spheres of society. African, and Arab migrants, for instance, are the two minority groups in Malta facing the most disproportionate levels of discrimination when it comes to access to housing.⁵ It is also common for visible minorities to be refused entry into bars and clubs, and to experience discrimination when using public transportation.⁶

According to the results of a UNHCR survey, an alarming 57.6 percent do not think that a mixture of lifestyles and cultures such as those brought about by forced migrants, are a positive contribution, which enriches society. The majority of respondents also felt that refugees and migrants coming to Malta should change their ways to be more like other Maltese citizens. The Maltese respondents answered that their contact with refugees/ migrants happens “at work” (36.4 percent), “on the street” (34.2 percent), “in a shop” (9.8 percent) and “on a bus” (2.7 percent) amongst others.⁷

Segments of the Maltese population, argue that the Arab culture is in conflict with other cultures, and presents a number of potentially insuperable challenges. It is believed, that the Arab culture is backwards and underdeveloped, implying that contact with Arabs could hold the Maltese back.⁸ A survey conducted by the Maltese Government, shows that most Maltese do not appreciate the value of cultural diversity. Forced migrants are viewed as temporary residents, in transit for a few years, and are not considered as people who can aspire for full membership in Maltese society.⁹

Not surprisingly, forced migrants and ethnic minorities appear to show a lack of trust in the Maltese authorities. The limited number of complaints lodged by forced migrants has been attributed to the limited powers of the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE).¹⁰ According to a study by the Commission itself, 85% of interviewees belonging to a “minority ethnic group” did not report instances of racial or ethnic discrimination to the authorities, because they believed that the situation would remain unchanged.¹¹ Currently NCPE’s remit only allows it to investigate reports of discrimination. It can, at present, only issue a recommendation. For the time being, decisions issued by the NCPE are not enforceable.

A further obstacle to integration, is the fact that Malta’s situation, with no policy on integration, is a unique one because only beneficiaries of international protection can one day aspire to become Maltese citizens. Persons who do not qualify for international protection, but who are still considered vulnerable, are granted a

3 UNHCR & Aditus. *Meet the Other Preliminary Findings: Report on Integration Research Project*. Malta: UNHCR. (2012)

4 Gauci, J. P. *ENAR Shadow Report: Racism and related discriminatory practices in Malta*. (2011). <http://cms.horus.be/files/99935/MediaArchive/publications/shadow%20report%202010-11/18.%20Malta.pdf>

5 Pisani, M., & Fsadni, M. *I’m Not Racist, But... Immigrant and Ethnic Minority Groups and Housing in Malta - A Research Study*. (December 2012) [https://ncpe.gov.mt/en/Documents/Projects_and_Specific_Initiatives/I_m_Not_Racist/imnrb_research\(1\).pdf](https://ncpe.gov.mt/en/Documents/Projects_and_Specific_Initiatives/I_m_Not_Racist/imnrb_research(1).pdf)

6 ECRI REPORT ON MALTA, (fourth monitoring cycle), published on 15 October 2013, available at <https://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/ecri/Country-by-country/Malta/MLT-CbC-IV-2013-037-ENG.pdf>

7 UNHCR. *What do you think? : A report on public perception about refugees and migrants in Malta*. Malta: UNHCR. (2012) http://www.unhcr.org.mt/charts/uploads/resources/read/files/5_what_do_you_think_ppr_2012_unhcr_.pdf

8 Sammut, Gordon & Jovchelovitch, Sandra & Buhagiar, Luke Joseph & Veltri, Giuseppe & Redd, Rozlyn & Salvatore, Sergio. *Arabs in Europe: Arguments for and Against Integration*. (2017). <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/pac0000271>

9 Ministry for Social Dialogue, Consumer Affairs and Civil Liberties. *Towards A National Migrant Integration Strategy 2015 – 2020 Framework Document*. (June 2015).

10 The National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE) is the official body in Malta to promote equality of treatment for all persons without discrimination on the grounds of sex/gender and family responsibilities, sexual orientation, age, religion or belief, racial or ethnic origin, and gender identity, gender expression or sex characteristics.

11 National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE). *Underreporting of discriminatory incidents in Malta drawn up under the Strengthening Equality Beyond Legislation Project*. (2010).



📷 People hold hands as part of 'Nilqghu il-Barrani' (Welcome the Foreigner) which has seen the Emigrants Commission in Malta led by Fr Alfred Vella turning to parishes to host asylum seekers in Malta. (*I Get You* / JRS Malta)

temporary form of humanitarian protection (THP).¹² Other forced migrants whose claim for asylum has been rejected, and for whom deportation is not a possibility, are only given very temporary documents, which can be withdrawn at the complete discretion of the authorities.¹³ The Maltese reality sees a considerable number of mainly sub-Saharan Africans who have been in Malta between four to ten years, with the majority of them contributing to the economy and some of whom have children attending Maltese schools, who have limited rights. In addition, this population lives in fear that they could be deported back to their countries at any moment.

However, the picture in Malta is not completely bleak and progress towards a future free from discriminatory or xenophobic attitudes is being made. A Human Rights and Integration Directorate

was set up in 2015, having as one of its main objectives to regularly meet with representatives of migrant groups and organisations, to understand their concerns, with the aim of taking up these issues with the entities concerned. In the words of its Director, "We're in favour of 'inter-culturalism'. We don't want to have communities sitting side by side; we want them to mix, and to be a part of the evolving Maltese identity."¹⁴ In recent years, there has also been the creation of a Forum for Integration Affairs made up of representatives of community leaders from various non-EU countries living in Malta. In addition, in 2015 the Government of Malta also launched a White Paper Consultation on the setting up of a Human Rights and Equality Commission. Additionally, Malta ratified *Protocol 12 of the European Convention on Human Rights* providing for a general prohibition of discrimination.¹⁵

¹² The rights of persons having been granted temporary humanitarian protection (THP) are based on national policy and are not laid down by statute. This form of protection is granted on an ex gratia basis, when applicants are found not to be eligible for asylum or subsidiary protection, but are considered to be in need of protection on medical or other humanitarian grounds

¹³ Temporary humanitarian protection national (THPN) was also introduced as an additional form of local protection in 2010 on an ex gratia basis, to persons who have lived in Malta for at least four years and who can prove that they have made efforts to integrate in Maltese society.

¹⁴ *Malta Today*. (November 2015). "Failure to integrate is not an option." Interview with Silvan Agius, director of the Human Rights and Integration Directorate. http://www.maltatoday.com.mt/news/interview/59743/failure_to_integrate_is_not_an_option_silvan_agius#.WVNd1OnRbIX

¹⁵ The Protocol removes the current limitation in the application of Article 14 (non-discrimination) of the Convention and guarantees that no-one shall be discriminated against on any ground by any public authority. <http://www.equalitylaw.eu/country/malta>

Methodology

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JRS Malta implemented the methodology after attendance at the first Steering Committee Meeting by identifying CBIs all over Malta. These CBIs were working closely with forced migrants, with the aim of combating and preventing racist and xenophobic behaviour through encounter and social inclusion. After doing this initial identifying research, a total of 20 CBIs were selected. At that point, the next stage of the process involved supporting these 20 CBIs to complete the mapping questionnaire. General criteria for the questionnaires were developed by the Steering Committee and covered quantitative aspects of the CBIs such as, but not restricted to, the number of participants, geographic coverage, the services being offered, sustainability of the initiative, and legal status of the forced migrants assisted.

Through interviews and meetings with the staff of every CBI, JRS Malta, obtained a clear and detailed picture of the services offered, and the activities organised. Visiting each CBI allowed for a more in depth understanding of how each organisation operated, and turned out to be a valuable networking exercise.

After having obtained a clear picture of what was being offered by the CBIs, the next phase of the research involved the qualitative assessment of the initiatives, based on a clear set of criteria, in accordance with the Delphi method.¹⁶ Basing themselves on the outcome of the mapping results, the group of professionals, all experts in their respective fields, established 10 criteria by which to assess the best practices. The criteria agreed upon were: Interaction & Encounter, Participation, Awareness Raising, Education, Support & Service Provision, Interculturalism, Dignity, Hospitality, Sustainability and Innovation.

Using these qualitative criteria and defined indicators, an evaluation was undertaken through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with, in most cases, three members of the CBI; a staff member, a member from the local community, and a refugee or forced migrant. Constantly keeping the 10 criteria as guidelines, an in-depth assessment was carried out with 9 out of the 20 CBIs originally mapped in Malta during this qualitative phase of the research.

¹⁶ The Delphi Method attempts to make effective use of informed intuitive judgment in long-range forecasting. The Delphi technique in its simplest form solicits the opinions of experts through a series of carefully designed questionnaires interspersed with information and opinion feedback. A convergence of opinion has been observed in the majority of cases where the Delphi approach has been used. <https://www.rand.org/topics/delphi-method.htmlw>

Data Findings

3.1 SUMMARY OF QUANTITATIVE RESULTS FROM MAPPING PHASE

The CBIs identified, which were geographically spread across the whole country, offer a wide range of services and activities, varying from language and employment assistance, cultural and social activities, as well as accompaniment. Although the initiatives were to be found all over the island, there was however a concentration of activities in the centre and north of Malta.

The size of the initiatives varied, with the smallest being made up of one member of staff and one volunteer, and with the largest functioning with two members of staff and five volunteers. While there is always the presence of one staff member – with the exception of one CBI run entirely on a voluntary basis by members of the refugee community – what is prevalent was the strong presence of volunteers and interns.

Having an informal and local set-up, 50% of the organisations utilise a grassroots approach. The rest of the initiatives evaluated rely heavily on foundations and private benefactors to run their programmes.

The countries of origin of the beneficiaries varied considerably, from Syrians and Libyans who arrived recently, to other nationalities like Somalis, Eritreans and West Africans, who already lived in Malta for a number of years.

The age of the refugees and migrants participating in activities and benefiting from the services offered also varied. The findings show, that 60% of the initiatives in fact, had the 26 to 65 age group as an intended target. Three of the CBIs targeted school children, and one of the 20 initiatives was specifically directed at adolescents and young adults.

📷 Mohammed from Mali and Father Mintoff pose at the Peace Lab initiative. (*I Get You* / JRS Malta)





"I have been a member of a small Christian Life Community group for several years. Through a Jesuit priest, the idea of working with the children of a refugee family recently reunited in Malta was presented. These children needed immediate support with schoolwork and English language acquisition to progress in school. I had recently retired and now had the energy for volunteering.

At the beginning, I was intrigued with the idea of working with 2 or 3 of the family's children. It quickly enlarged to 5 children. Initially, one day a week was scheduled. Immediately it became clear that more time was needed and within the month, we were meeting 3 and then 4 afternoons a week. I was also tutoring the two oldest children to focus on the level testing that was on the horizon, which meant an additional afternoon every Friday!

I sought out a friend who owns a bookstore, who assisted me in finding appropriate study materials. The entire entry area at home has been transformed into a study room with tables, chairs and bookshelves filled with support materials for the children's studies. I also attend the children's parent-teacher meetings to glean information and assist with communication. As a result of my relationship with the Syrian family, I have also studied up on the Muslim religion.

My neighbours have dropped by the house and have seen what my family and I are doing with the children. I can say that, that was a positive impact on the neighbourhood. In general, though I feel the Maltese people have been slow to embrace the refugees who have come to live in Malta, however I know that once Maltese people get to know these transplanted people and families they will be open to welcome them.

Through this project, I have learned to live each day to the fullest. I have had to let go of some things around the house, and in my life, realizing that there are more important and meaningful things in life."

Consistent with Malta's strong religious presence, half of the CBIs identified were run by Christian communities and organisations.

Seven of the initiatives, offered support related to integration, like language classes, access to education and employment assistance. Three other initiatives chose to accompany migrants and refugees, offering a welcoming space where to share experiences and common concerns. An informal place, where one can have a chat and have their questions answered. Three more initiatives mapped, targeted school children from secondary schools across the island. Their objective was to raise awareness about human rights in general, and the issues faced by refugees in particular, putting a face, and giving a human touch to the figures and percentages quoted in the media. Two faith-based communities, with guidance from two long established organisations working with

refugees and migrants, chose to take the concept of hospitality to another level, 'adopting' refugee families, by including them into their daily routines, thus offering an insight into Maltese society, and the beginning of a friendship.

Multicultural awareness and intercultural leisure activities were organised by four different organisations. The initiatives, sought to find common ground and to celebrate diversity between the refugee and the local community, choosing to centre the activities around nature, film, food and music.

One CBI, which stood out from the others, was Spark 15. Spark 15 is made up primarily of youths from the refugee community, having as its primary aim to offer support to, and advocate for, other refugees and migrants.

It is evident from the CBIs evaluated, that in these past years, there has been an increase in services and activities related to integration. Throughout most of the CBIs identified, it is clear, that essential and basic support related to integration, particularly with regards to language, employment assistance, and cultural adjustment, seem to be covered rather well. Another aspect given priority by some of the CBIs mapped, is awareness raising in schools such as the CAM School Awareness Raising Programme.

3.2 RESULTS OF THE QUALITATIVE PHASE

Here is a breakdown of the results from the findings from the qualitative interviews JRS Malta conducted with participants from 9 CBIs. Mostly, we have seen that collaboration between CBIs and forced migrants themselves is imperative to success as well as to move away from traditional models of service provision. Given Malta's unique context, we have also witnessed the strength of religious organisations in helping to support forced migrants.

Interaction and Encounter

Most of the CBIs opened their doors and offered their services very regularly, making it possible to create a relationship with the forced migrants. Regular encounters and flexibility in the support offered, helps to build a certain degree of trust. The staff member of one CBI, which lends to migrants struggling financially, with the aim of helping them live a dignified life, in the hope, of becoming self-sufficient, notes how sometimes migrants who would initially approach the CBI for financial assistance, would return seeking advice or information on other issues.

On a less positive note, there was regrettably, in most of the CBIs, very little interaction with the broader local Maltese community. When this did occur, it happened occasionally, therefore not allowing the possibility to initiate friendships. CBIs saw that the barrier to making this happen is that places and activities, where it is possible to come together naturally, are still not available. Some acknowledged that rather than creating initiatives and activities in parallel, exclusively for refugees, it would be more beneficial to include refugees in already existing initiatives targeted at the local population.

Participation

During the interviews, the participation of volunteers in all CBIs interviewed seemed to be instrumental in the successful running of the different services and activities offered. CBIs had a greater impact in the local community because of the energy and dedication that volunteers provided. Most of the volunteers we met, spoke of a humbling experience and how they had received more than they had given. Most of the volunteers stressed the importance of training and support, as this would allow them to better understand their role and would avoid pitfalls such as getting too emotionally involved or overstepping the boundaries.

Awareness Raising & Education

Since the CBIs varied in size, structure and financial resources, only very few could engage in education and awareness raising. Those CBIs which prioritised education, chose to focus on children and youths, as it was felt that the younger generation would be more responsive and more likely to bring about change. This meant that there was no awareness raising targeted at the general public, aside from the sharing of experiences of the volunteers with their immediate circle of family and friends.

Support & Service Provision

It emerged through the research that a majority of the CBIs were still focusing on providing basic, but essential services directly related to increasing a person's chances of integrating. This is a reflection of the Maltese context, where not enough is being done by the Government, and there is still a heavy reliance on civil society, to provide basic reception and integration services to forced migrants. This is because the government and social service authorities have not acknowledged that refugees and other seekers of protection are in Malta to stay. Once this happens, more effective services and support can be offered to those who require it, and CBIs can focus more energy on inclusion, hospitality and relationship building. CBIs expressed that ideally, they would avoid a charity based approach, adopting instead, a strategy where forced migrants are active participants in shaping the goals and activities of your initiatives in order to establish relationships based on equality rather than on dependency. Such services we saw in Malta included English

classes at the Third Country National Support Network, accommodation and holistic support provided by Communities of Hospitality and employment assistance from Integra – Dinja Waħda.

The findings also revealed, none of the CBIs specifically targeted their activities and initiatives to vulnerable groups, like single mothers or young children with a forced migration background. These two groups of the forced migrant population seem to have been somewhat overlooked, despite the need for greater support and services. Although they were not directly excluded, since most initiatives were available to the general refugee and migrant population, there was no focus on their particular needs.

Interculturalism

While CBIs in Malta expressed the importance of interculturalism through the interviews, we saw few that were actively fostering this value through their initiative because of the focus on service provision or a slight reluctance to be open to true cultural dialogue. They saw how interculturalism seeks to restore social cohesion, trust, and a feeling of belonging. Once people attain some sense of security and independence, they would then be in a better position to dedicate some of their time to understanding the complexities of this new society they are living in, enabling them to begin relations, which may with time lead to friendships. CBIs expressed that they would like to emphasise interculturalism more in the future to embrace and respect aspects of both cultures.

Hospitality & Dignity

All the migrants interviewed spoke of how all the CBIs, in one way or another, made them feel welcome and respected. Of how the friendly environment, allowed them to be themselves, without the fear of being judged because of the colour of their skin, or the way they are dressed. Both staff and volunteers of all the CBIs, mentioned how they were respectful of, and attentive to, cultural differences.

Sustainability & Innovation

During the interviews, many CBIs recognised that it is crucial to organise initiatives and offer support systematically, and over a long period of time, in order to create trust and develop relations, which will in turn help to combat racism and xenophobia. From the research, we discovered

that several organisations struggle to secure funding, therefore making it impossible to sustain initiatives in the long term.

Another major hurdle effecting the success, growth, and continuity of some CBIs, is their reliance on volunteers as an integral part of their services and activities. In spite of the fact that without them certain initiatives would be very limited, dependence on volunteers and interns does not allow for long term planning, due to the lack of consistency and long-term commitment of some volunteers.

For a CBI to achieve maximum impact, a close collaboration between members of the CBI and forced migrants is essential. The ideal scenario would be one where members of the CBI, who are familiar with the local context, and the forced migrants themselves, who know where they came from and what they would like to achieve, come together to work out what type of support is required, in order to find the best way forward.

Inspiring Community Building Initiatives

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The next section will highlight the CBIs considered to be best practices, when weighted against the established criteria.

INTEGRA – DINJA WAHDA

Integra's, Dinja Waħda drop in centre offers much more than the basic and essential services of language and employment support, indispensable for independence and self-reliance. The community centre, operating with very little funds and relying mainly on interns and volunteers, provides a friendly environment where everyone is welcome. Apart from activities such as film nights, food festivals and visits around the island, the centre also organises group discussions on varying topics, giving importance to people's identities, and allowing them the space to remember and share, who they are and where they come from.

What is striking about this initiative is that here dedication and creativity go a long way. The centre and its volunteers, provide the much-needed space for forced migrants to be themselves, whilst at the same time supporting them to gradually adapt to, and learn about, this new country they some day hope to call home. "It has been an anchor for me and has given me a place from which to grow and be happy in Malta," a refugee who frequents the centre regularly, had to say about the CBI. The initiatives offered by the Dinja Waħda centre can also be considered innovative in the way they foster interaction and encounter, because the safe spaces they offer to refugees and migrants is not a common occurrence in Malta.

THIRD COUNTRY NATIONAL SUPPORT NETWORK (TSN)

Country National Support Network (TSN) values individual people's participation and contribution

MOHAMMED



REFUGEE FROM LIBYA, INTEGRA – DINJA WAHDA

I came from Libya to Malta in the summer of 2014. After a couple of months in Malta, I travelled to Germany. I returned from Germany to Malta in July of 2015. I liked the people in Malta. They were friendly. The Germans were not accepting of me, the Maltese were.

The first time I came to Integra, was because friends recommended it. The three girls who were running Integra at that time were wonderful. They organised many activities and amazing projects that I enjoyed: photography around Valletta, going to the aquarium, food nights, talking about our different cultures and movie nights. The more friends I made at Integra, the more I enjoyed being there. I felt very welcome at the centre, and I began to visit several times per week.

After returning to Malta from Germany, I was happy to be back. Many things here are similar to Libya. I was able to get a job as a cook at McDonalds. I have worked at McDonalds for almost 2 years. Once living and working in Malta I applied for refugee status, which I received.

I feel a part of Malta because people are friendly and nice to me. It is because of the acceptance by the people of Malta that I chose to stay here. It is the most important thing – the Maltese people are good. Some of my co-workers at McDonalds are Maltese. We talk at work and sometimes go out to eat together at the end of our shift.

very highly, with all the participants of the CBI coming from a migration background. This CBI is the first national network of third country national organisations working for the welfare and integration of third country nationals in Malta. TSN's focus on empowering different migrant communities is a valuable strength because it equips people with tools to help them feel more included in society in order to actively and positively contribute. TSN Malta believes that there is no one better than the migrant communities to advocate for equal rights and opportunities for themselves and their members. It is for this reason, that it committed to a 12-month programme, where the focus was to bring together members from 16 different refugee and migrant organisations. The overall aim of the initiative is to enable the migrant communities to further develop their skills as trainers and peacebuilders. This is achieved through weekly sessions focusing on education, social tools, volunteering, conflict resolution and strategic planning.

The value and reach of this CBI are immeasurable, in that, all the participants have the potential to eventually become trainers themselves, and in turn offer support and guidance to the other members of their community. In the words of one of the Sudanese community leaders, "TSN is unique, as it allows the members to continue to bring their problems to the group, where they discuss, share ideas and solve problems together." An immediate and tangible outcome of the mentoring and capacity building initiatives, was the creation of the Sudanese Migrant Association. The support of the CBI was instrumental in providing the Sudanese community with the backing they required to establish their very own organisation.

COMMUNITIES OF HOSPITALITY

Communities of Hospitality, is a JRS Malta initiative, where local faith-based communities are encouraged to take up the invitation to make hospitality an integral part of their lives, as individuals and as communities, by welcoming forced migrants. The initiative complements existing JRS projects focusing on promoting integration through advocacy, service provision and support to access services. The different faith based communities, volunteer their time to support and accompany forced migrant families, under the guidance of JRS Malta. The Maltese volunteers offer assistance with issues related to integration. Some offer assistance with school work, others familiarisation with the migrants' neighbourhood and the Maltese way

of life. The different groups of volunteers opened their homes to the forced migrant families, making them feel at home. These welcoming and friendly encounters gave the migrants a sense of belonging and created the basis for new friendships.

Jacqueline, a volunteer involved, described her motivation for participating: "It was time to reach out beyond my immediate world and into the wider community." Although very little was done in terms of education and awareness raising, besides the training with the volunteers directly involved, a certain level of insight of the hardships faced by forced migrants, was conveyed in small ways, through the volunteers' conversations with family and friends. Communities of Hospitality was evaluated as one of the top CBIs, because this initiative goes beyond solely providing assistance and services to people, and allows forced migrants and locals the time and space to get to know one another in a familiar setting. The ongoing support and training provided to the volunteers, also helps to strengthen the relationship between staff and the volunteers, thereby increasing the likelihood of a longer-term commitment of the volunteers.

SPARK 15

The initiative undertaken by Spark 15, a small, recently founded youth refugee organization, is as necessary, as it is innovative. Having as an objective to encourage other young refugees to become active participants and agents of inclusive societies, this group of young refugees from Eritrea, Palestine, Somalia and Libya, is the first of its kind in Malta. "We named ourselves Spark 15 because we are a small idea that can become big," said the president Hourie Tafech.

Dedicating their free time to advocating for refugee integration in Malta, the members of Spark 15, believe that education and employment are key elements in enabling the social inclusion of refugees in Malta. Mohammed Hassan, one of the founding members, is confident that Spark 15 has the right motivation and insight necessary to encourage dialogue between refugees and local youth. "It cannot be done through traditional and formal ways, but by organising events, music sessions and sports activities, which will attract members from different communities, to be and work together," he explains. While not a community building initiative in a strict sense, Spark 15 is considered a promising practice with great potential, as it is refugees themselves, who speaking from first hand experiences, are taking control of their future, laying the foundations

to rebuilding their lives, whilst serving as a source of inspiration and hope to the refugee community in general.

CENTRE FOR MISSIONARY ANIMATION (CAM) *School Awareness Raising Programme*

A faith based organisation, CAM School Awareness Raising Programme invests time and energy in reaching out to young people, with the aim of creating a counter narrative to the discourse of invasion and loss of identity, put forward by some media and politicians. A total of 40 seminars, reaching between 2,000 to 3,000 fifteen year olds, were organised throughout the scholastic year. More often than not, the seminars would have been the first time that most of the students present, would have had the opportunity to listen to, and interact with, a refugee. This enriching opportunity, to share the same space, and learn about the

refugee's traditions and culture, as well as their hopes and fears, does away with the labels and the stereotypes, stressing the reality, that we are all human first. The coordinator of the programme believes so strongly in the value and impact of such an initiative, that even without secured funds, he is determined to continue the activities the next scholastic year. According to Sunday, a refugee from Nigeria, participating in the initiative, "young people are the most effective way to effect the community long term."

With its emphasis on encounter, participation and raising awareness, the CAM School Awareness Raising Programme, has been identified as another promising practice – while also not strictly a defined CBI. This is because it is fundamental in dispelling the fear and the misconceptions, which are considered to be among some of the most challenging obstacles to social inclusion.

MARCELLE



PROJECT COORDINATOR, THIRD COUNTRY NATIONAL SUPPORT NETWORK

"I think that migrants face a lot of difficulties in society. First of all you lose your family networks, your welfare, your social networks. You find different kinds of barriers. There is language, social integration, access to education and employment. And these needs, these barriers, tend to be overlooked by governments and other institutions.

My interaction with migrants is not just on a professional level because also my husband is from Ghana. I did not understand migration as much as when I myself migrated, to Belgium in 1997. And I remember the struggles I went through. I had a child who was going to school, I could not explain in English to the teacher, because everybody spoke French or Flemish. I had to get help from my neighbours. It was then that I realised what it means to lose everything that is familiar to you.

Even on a professional level, it was not a possibility for me to work in physiotherapy in Belgium. You feel like your status has dropped. And you are like a child starting to learn about your environment again. When I went to Belgium, one of the things that I craved was the Maltese music, Maltese feasts and the fireworks. The interesting thing is that before I had never missed these things.

Services need to be there, individual services, but we should empower the community to start catering for itself. Wherever we go to, we need to make it a home for ourselves, but also contribute to that community and that place.

For example with the Sudanese Migrant Association, there are volunteers who are teaching about the values and the culture of Sudan. But at the same time, they also want integration. They also want the people to learn Maltese and English. So there is a balance between, I have my identity, I have a cultural identity, I come from a country and a certain culture, but now I am here, there is also a culture here. And I really saw this, I visited the place and I met the leaders of the organization and I saw this willingness to give and take."

Policy Recommendations

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The research conducted by *I Get You* shows that the majority of the CBIs in Malta focus on providing basic, but essential services directly related to increasing a person's chances of integrating, such as the provision of English classes and employment support. However, NGOs and civil society organisations do not possess the resources and the capacity to plan and implement systematic and long-term integration programmes on a national level for refugees and forced migrants. JRS Malta believes that such tasks fall under the responsibility of the government, as well as responsibility for the successful integration and acceptance of forced migrants by the local population.

Only when the government takes up these responsibilities, CBI's will be able to shift their focus to other activities, on proper community building, encounter and on interculturalism. The outcome of *I Get You* shows that with adequate support and awareness raising programmes, the refugee and the local population can better understand each other, thereby creating a richer society, where everyone's rights are truly respected.

In order to progress towards this direction and based on the experience of *I Get You*, JRS Malta has elaborated a set of recommendations for the Maltese government.

- **Support Civil Society Organisations, both financially to ensure sustainability and continuity, as well by providing physical spaces from where to operate.** In order for the Civil Society to be able to carry on offering long term support, as well as for the recently founded and small organisations to further extend their initiatives in order to effect change, there needs to be continued commitment by the Government.
- **Collaborate and provide assistance to the numerous migrant organisations, in order to**

better understand their needs. Nobody is in a better position than refugees and migrants to advocate for the improvement of services and equal access to rights, as these issues impact them directly. Initiatives such as Third Country National Support Network and Spark 15 are positive examples of forced migrants' empowerment and commitment to integration into the Maltese society. Such initiatives should be supported and involved in the development of integration policies.

- **Develop intercultural education programmes to give people the competence to relate to people who are different to themselves and to see others as an opportunity to learn, rather than as a threat.**
- **Mainstream issues such as cultural diversity and human rights, by including them in the national curriculum.** Our research shows that there is still an important lack of knowledge in the Maltese society about who refugees are and why they had to flee their countries. This feeds the perception of being invaded by migrants and leads to xenophobia and racism. Local communities must be educated about ethnic minorities and their culture and learn how to value what we have in common instead of stopping at the differences. Programmes for young people, such as the School Awareness Raising Programme of the Centre for Missionary Animation are good practices that the government should take as example.
- **Provide training to refugees and migrants on their rights, as well as their obligations.** Integration, is a complex two-way process which apart from requiring a clear understanding of the refugees' culture, also necessitates the adoption of some of the core values of the local population, with the hope of living together in a society where everyone's rights are respected and where everyone feels at home.



📷 Heidi (L) teaches English to forced migrants as part of a CBI in Malta. (Still taken from the Maltese / Get You video: Denis Bosnic / JRS Europe)

- **Encourage and support local councils which are generally accessible to, and in direct contact with, refugees and migrants, to invest in projects involving sport, art and culture, where the local and the refugee/migrant populations can come together.** The findings reveal a relatively low level of interaction and encounter between refugees and Maltese people. Beyond the day-to-day interactions at work and with the next door neighbour, engagement with Maltese social and cultural life is extremely limited. Initiatives such as Integra – Dinha Waħda, Communities of Hospitality and Spark 15 try to create spaces of encounter and can be taken as examples for future activities.
- **Set up the Human Rights and Equality Commission to ensure people's rights are truly safeguarded, and trust in the institutions is restored.** As evidenced in the report, most incidents of discrimination go unreported, as victims of abuse have no trust in the authorities.
- **Adopt a National Migrant Integration Strategy.** In order for real integration to take place, refugees and migrants require the possibility to access their rights without unnecessary delays. This in turn, necessitates a clear understanding across all government departments of their rights and entitlements. This is only possible if there is a clear national strategy. A sense of security for their future and that of their children, is also fundamental in order for the refugee to become a full and active member of society.



Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) is an international Catholic organisation with a mission to accompany, serve and advocate for the rights of refugees and others who are forcibly displaced.

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