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Integration of Migrants

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1. Introduction

This submission is considering the questions in the White Paper “Towards the Establishment of the Human Rights and Equality Commission”:

Is the approach proposed by the White Paper suitable in your view? Why? What is missing? What needs to be stronger?

I believe the formation of an independent human rights commission to hold Maltese society and Government accountable and to ensure that human rights are protected is a suitable action.

With regard to answering the other questions, I will primarily focus on human rights of migrants and asylum seekers primarily that of facilitating economic and social integration.

2. What is missing? What needs to be stronger?

While the Integration Directorate is mentioned, it is not entirely clear what the tasks of this directorate will be, that is what is meant by addressing economic, social and cultural rights. Therefore, I would like to make some suggestions relating to the tasks such a directorate could undertake.

2.1 Education

2.1.1 Minors

It is essential that minors are given, not only an equal opportunity to get education but also a level foundation which they can build on. While living in Berlin I found that although migrant children had equal opportunities to learn in school often they started with a disadvantage. This is typically for two reasons.

First often the parents do not speak German at home making it difficult for the children to learn as quickly as other children can even when they are at a kindergarten level, potentially marking them for life; the second aspect can also be found among many German families with no migration background but is unfortunately stronger among migrant families, that is, parents’ difficulty in assisting their children with their homework. While in some cases this has some cultural background, often this is a problem resulting from parents’ lack of education.

In order to ensure that this does not happen in Malta, I recommend taking a multi-pronged effort.

1. Offering children assistance to catch up with other children (focusing on Maltese, English and Mathematics)
2. Assisting parents to help their children
3. Preparing teachers to be able to assist children that might have difficulty
4. Having specific programs for older minors to have a more focused teaching program to be able to catch up with others.

2.1.2 Adults

2.1.2.1 Adults with only basic or no education

Many migrant families came to Germany between the 50s & 80s and were engaged in labour intensive jobs that did not require any education. Unfortunately, there was no effort done by the state to teach German or offer any other educational assistance to these migrants because it was assumed that the migrants would stay a few years and return to their home country.

As of the early 2000s the Government has been offering unemployed migrants an integration course that comprises of a German course up to level B2.1 and a brief course on German history and culture.

I recommend a similar more intensive program as an alternative to detention and while an individual is still seeking employment. This program should focus on teaching Maltese, English and a range of electives, either to prepare individuals for higher education or to gain skills required in the labour market.

Offering such a program will prepare the individuals for the labour force while also occupying the individual, giving goals to aspire to rather than only waiting for their status approval (which is out of their control).

This would be a state investment in these individuals but would be best run by non-profit agencies in partnership with for Government and for profit educational institutions.

2.1.2.2 Adults with Higher Education background

Recognition of qualifications achieved in third countries needs to be facilitated. If qualifications do not meet the required standards, a way should be found to be able to top up these qualifications and gain recognition.

2.2 Economic integration

Facilitating economic integration would need to be done in collaboration with state institutions such as Malta Enterprise, ETC and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs among others.

The principal behind this is that, migrants who are often viewed as a burden to the nation could become an economic driving force. This would not only be in the form an additional labour force which is needed as more baby boomers retire but also giving migrants the possibility to become business owners and job creators. In addition to investment in education, investment into turning asylum seekers into business owners would transform them from a liability to an asset. This would need to be a combined effort.

On the one hand programs need to be created that facilitate entrepreneurship and the creation of start-ups among migrants.

On the other hand trade deals would be closed with, if at all possible, the countries of origin or neighbouring countries with the same language even if only among minority groups. Kenya and Djibouti could be an example, Djibouti has a Somali majority ethnic group and Kenya has a small Somali minority. Relations with these nations could offer

economic advantages to both sides while also potentially turning migrants into an asset in collaborating with these nations. This could potentially offer migrants from these nations a higher standing and more acceptance in our society.

2.3 Social integration

2.3.1 Housing

While finding accommodation for asylum seekers, particularly if asylum seekers are no longer detained, is difficult, it is important to avoid temptation of using large locations (such as the Marsa open centre) to accommodate as many as possible. The risk here is twofold. First, migrant ghettos are formed slowing the process of entering Maltese society by making migrants stick together. Secondly, because migrants are made to live in close proximity to each other, individuals who might be frustrated, depressed addicted or suffering from any other psychological issues might influence and/or cause others to also feel depressed or frustrated and might also lead to occasional squabbles or for some even addiction.

While there are economies of scale to be gained by using large complexes to accommodate asylum seekers this is not the best solution for migrants and locals. A better solution would be to have pre-arranged temporary accommodation for families and individuals and then allow migrants to seek their own place with a set budget per individual so that say two or three individuals might rent a place and live together in local communities. This financial assistance could be paid as long as the individual is not employed. This could allow individuals to choose where they would like to live, with whom and hopefully have a higher chance to integrate in the local community.

One possibility for temporary accommodation until someone finds their own accommodation would be to enlist households who might have a spare room available and be willing to accommodate one or two individuals for a set period of time in exchange for a set fee. This could work in a similar way to how foreign students are often accommodated with families. There might not be thousands of households willing to do this but even 100 might make a difference and this could also facilitate cross cultural communication and social integration.

2.3.2 Programs

Programs could be created that facilitate conversations across cultures. A program such as “adopt a family” could see Maltese families building relationships with migrant families, dining together and learning from each other. While the majority of Maltese might not necessarily feel they can do much to help migrants, some might find such a program a simple way to show hospitality and build friendship.

3. Conclusion

A branch of the Human Rights and Equality Commission focusing on integration is essential to ensure that migrants that choose to stay in Malta have a chance to integrate and make a valuable contribution to Maltese society. Education / training and the opening of business opportunities to migrants would be an integral part in facilitating this integration.