



Mind D Gap: Together we can make a difference (Consultation)

Karen Mamo

I wish to congratulate the Ministry for this splendid and very much needed initiative. A 20 year lag is substantial, however if policy is continuous, I am sure this will have positive effect in the long run.

1) Integration:

I believe that for a successful integration it is important to focus on perceptions and the role they play in forming people's judgments and 'stereotypes'. Perceptions are a mental short cut our brains have to do to save time, but also to be more 'efficient' to pass a judgment. Nonetheless, they sometimes constrain us to look at a specific issue/person from a screen, filled with previous recollections, stories and prejudices we could have encountered throughout our lives. It is important to find the right activities to smoothly integrate TCN and the Maltese. I believe integration is a 2 way process, as the local population has to reconsider its way of looking at 'others', especially different skin coloured people or culturally diverse.

2) Education

It is important to have a continuous education policy that speaks to TCN and the Maltese on the advantages of having a mixture in society and the endless possibilities of fruitful cooperation. One simple thing, food, is a great opportunity to learn about the other whilst taste delicious dishes. Education should not only be limited to schools, but should also be extended to the workplace, local church, community centres. Making sure to reach as many people / of different ages / social class as possible. Unfortunately, children at school are thought integration and intercultural dialogue as a subject, when in reality this should come from the heart and from the positive prospect of enriching your self through dialogue. Moreover, when going back home, children are exposed to certain comments and ideas which contrast that which is learned in school.

Education for TCN is also very important. I wish to see greater skills profiling of migrants and opportunity to learn English and specific job related skills. However, I am sure TCN have a baggage of knowledge which we are unfortunately losing. It is a pity to see young TCN wasting away collecting rubbish or cleaning the streets. These individuals should be given the opportunity to succeed and unlock their full potential. Moreover, we are missing on the fact that they speak a variety of languages which are slowly but constantly gaining more widespread speakers. This is also a serious

brain drain.

The University of Malta- a policy of integration and also the need to change the general culture of contempt needs to be addressed. This is the highest academic institution of the country and as such should have a general framework of how to educate the Maltese, whilst offer more opportunities for TCN to attend courses and contribute to the islands research portfolio.

Books - rarely children in schools are given multi-cultural books or books that speak of other nationalities.

3) Visibility

Featuring TCN in a negative way, is a hobby the media seems to hold dearly and which 'right wing' extremists return to when their arguments dry out. It is now high time TCN are featured on TV programmes, invited to participate in civil society events and included in various activities. Importantly this should not be done as a token or occasionally, but should become a standard practice of radio, TV and entertainment businesses. When considering that TCN football players are quite accepted and loved by the Maltese, it is easy to see how exposure in the right places makes it easier for TCN to integrate. Another possible idea could be for the media to consider omitting reference to nationality / name / village, when reporting a crime. This would lessen comments and perceptions that TCN commit most crimes or specific nationality or place of origin is linked with crime. Detailing age and gender should be more than enough for the general public. Living in a small community, naming and shaming by the media (especially in cases where the accused has yet to appear before the court), is detrimental to the individual but also to initiatives of integration and peaceful cooperation of a country's citizens.

4) Political

It is now high time Partit Laburista, Partit Nazzjonalista and Alternattiva Demokratika have a close look at their candidates and affiliated persons. Whilst I believe in freedom of speech, public figures such as politicians should take good care of their comments posted online and on social media. They hold a strong influence on the general public and as such should make sure they are not sowing threads of hatred and mistrust. They have the key to educate people on the positive outcomes of integration and inter-cultural dialogue. Although TCN do not hold a vote, Political parties, entrusted by the people to work for the well being of the country have a moral duty to maintain a peaceful environment, whilst restrain from accusing TCNs of being the ailment of Malta's possible troubles.

I hope my long email was not exhaustive, but I come from a conflict resolution and Mediterranean security background and wish to see a true change in peoples attitude towards the 'other'.