

Analysis of the policy context addressing 25+ NEETs

COUNTRY REPORT – MALTA

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**IN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE PROJECT ‘LOST
MILLENNIALS – TRANSNATIONAL RESEARCH
NETWORK FOR THE EVALUATION OF INITIATIVES
TARGETING 25+ NEETS’**

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Project summary:

The project 'Lost Millennials' focuses on a regularly neglected group of the generation of Millennials: young people aged 25-29 neither in employment or education and training (25+ NEETs). This generation started their working life shortly after the economic crisis of 2008; perceiving uncertainty and lack of security for work and well-being, they are more likely to be inactive or in precarious jobs. The project's main objective is to contribute to the successful integration of 25+ NEETs into the labour market through increasing knowledge of the effects of employment initiatives on 25+ NEETs, building the capacity of stakeholders to perform impact studies, and thus improving the quality of labour market interventions. Partners will achieve this objective by creating a transnational research network, which will share know-how and good practices, the evaluations of governmental and community-based initiatives targeting 25+ NEETs, as well as the engagement of stakeholders to increase the policy-relevance of project results.

For more information, please visit our [website](#), contact us at lm.leadpartner@hetfa.hu and follow our [social media](#).

Iceland, Liechtenstein, and Norway fund the Lost Millennials project through the EEA and Norway Grants Fund for Youth Employment.

Implemented by:



Table of Contents

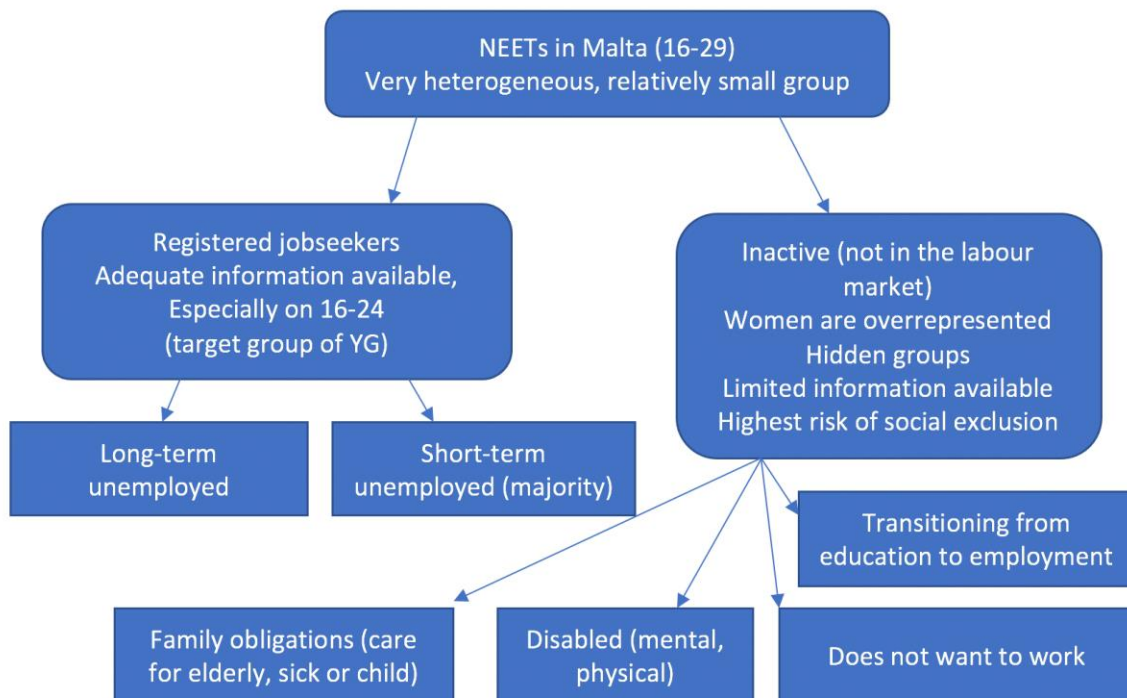
1. Introduction	4
2. Overall policy context	5
2.1. National policies targeting NEETs	5
2.2. EU-level employment policies and initiatives implemented in Malta.....	5
3. Institutional framework.....	6
4. Supply-side policies	7
4.1. Education and qualification	7
4.1.1. Compulsory education	7
4.1.2. Vocational Education Training (VET)	9
4.1.3. Higher education.....	10
4.1.4 Education and qualification policies targeting disadvantaged groups.....	10
4.2. Labour market policies	11
4.2.1. School to work transition, skills, competencies and employability.....	12
4.2.2. Internship, traineeship.....	12
4.2.3. Long-term unemployment.....	13
4.2.4. Salaries and minimum wage	13
4.2.5. Temporary employment	13
4.2.6. Undeclared work.....	14
4.2.7. Active and passive labour market policies.....	14
4.2.8. Gender inequalities.....	15
4.3. Entrepreneurship	15
4.3.1. Incentives	16
4.4. Work-life reconciliation policies.....	16
4.5. Health/ Social Insurance policies	17
4.6. Other supply-side policies.....	18
5. Demand-side policies.....	19

4.7. Incentives.....	19
4.8. Taxes.....	19
6. Orientation.....	19
7. Conclusions	20
8. References	22

1. Introduction

Compared to the EU average, young people in Malta have a lower level of education (however, trends are moving in positive directions) and a higher rate of employment. Malta’s economy, which had one of the most robust GDP growth rates in the EU during the last decade, strongly relies on a foreign workforce. The 2007/8 financial crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacted the economy and labour market. However, Malta is quickly rebounding and getting back on track with economic growth and high employment levels. Nevertheless, these crises point to a fundamental fragility and reinforce the importance of education, skills, employability, and adaptability as (young) people with a lower education level suffer the consequences more acutely. Active labour market policies, educational reforms for inclusion, and anti-poverty schemes introduced in the last 15 years aimed to decrease the risk of social exclusion for young people who are not in education or employment.

The following chart illustrates the composition of NEETs in Malta.



2. Overall policy context

2.1. National policies targeting NEETs

In 2021, the NEET rate in Malta (for the age bracket 15-29 years) was 9.9 per cent (while the EU average was 13.1 percent).¹ Malta has no national (or regional) strategy targeting NEETs (or 25+ NEETs), but several national policies regarding education, employment, economy, and social inclusion mention or target young unemployed or NEETs. Typically, however, those policies target the under 25s.

Malta does not have a dedicated youth employment strategy but has the *National Employment Policy* for 2021-2030,² which refers to youth employment and NEETs. There is no overarching strategy or plan for entrepreneurship/youth entrepreneurship in Malta. The Malta Chamber of Commerce, Enterprise and Industry prepared a strategy, "*Economic Vision for Malta 2020-2025*,"³ covering entrepreneurship and enterprises, which in some parts, is applicable to 25+ NEETs.

2.2. EU-level employment policies and initiatives implemented in Malta

The *European Employment Strategy (EES)* initiatives implemented in Malta cover:

1. The *inclusion of non-EU citizens* as third-country nationals (TCN) who can work and legally reside in Malta if they receive a single permit;⁴
2. *Youth Employment support* through the *Youth Guarantee Scheme*;
3. *Social economy and inclusive entrepreneurship* through the *2022 Social Enterprise Act*;⁵
4. *Long-term unemployment* treated by a set of Active labour Market schemes and provisions; and
5. *Public Employment Service* in Malta was founded in 1990 and restructured in 2016 (Jobsplus).⁶

Besides the existing policies and schemes in-line with the EES, the *National Employment Policy 2021-2030* contains direct reactions to the *European Semester 2020 Malta Country Report*.⁷ The Policy responds to the following assessments of the European Commission: (1) There are no schemes in place to support the retention of foreign workers, and the relatively short length of stay of qualified foreign nationals; (2) The low labour-market participation of older people aged 55-64 as being a 'structural

¹ Eurostat (2022c)

² Ministry for Finance and Employment (2021)

³ Malta Chamber of Commerce, Enterprise and Industry (2020)

⁴ [Expatriates Unit | Identity Malta Agency](#)

⁵ [Social Enterprise Act](#)

⁶ Public Employment Service [History](#)

⁷ European Commission (2020)

challenge' for the Maltese labour market; (3) The uptake of upskilling and reskilling schemes among low-skilled workers remains relatively low; and (4) Undeclared work remains an issue in Malta.

Malta's most recent *National Reform Program under the Europe 2020 Strategy*⁸ also refers to several employment-related measures implemented in the last two years. The European-level *Youth Employment Initiative (YEI)*, funded by the *European Social Fund* and targeting NEETs in the member states, is granted to the regions experiencing high youth unemployment rates. Because of this condition, Malta is not eligible for YEI funding.⁹ Malta's *Youth Guarantee Scheme* implements the European-level *Youth Guarantee Initiative (YGI)*. The Scheme, developed in 2014 targeting young people aged 15-25,¹⁰ is funded by the European Social Fund and operated by Jobsplus. Based on expert consultation, Malta is extending the current Youth Guarantee initiatives to cover the wider age bracket up to 29 years.

3. Institutional framework

The policies, which form the basis of further legislation, are prepared and coordinated by the relevant ministries (i.e., Ministry for Finance and Employment; Ministry for Education, Sport, Youth, Research and Innovation,¹¹ Ministry for Inclusion and Social Wellbeing), their relevant units and institutions. Depending on the core aim of the strategy, different organisations contribute to the strategy development and implementation, such as the Malta Chamber of Commerce, Enterprise and Industry, Malta Enterprise,¹² MCAST,¹³ Jobsplus,¹⁴ and Agenzia Zghazagh.¹⁵

Since Malta is a small country (the population is approximately 500,000), the state administration itself is relatively small, too. As one of the ministerial experts mentioned during an interview: 'of course, there is inter-ministerial coordination, but it means that I call the person in the other ministry, whom I know.'

Within the ministries, dedicated units or departments coordinate and monitor the development and implementation of different policies. Policies and strategies are developed based on careful situational analysis as described in the introduction parts explaining the applied methodology, as well. According to one ministerial expert, the policies are 'research-based'. Ministries draft policies with the broad

⁸ Ministry for Finance and Employment (2022)

⁹ Ministry for Education and Employment (2014a), pp36

¹⁰ Ministry for Education and Employment (2014a)

¹¹ The name of the Ministry for Education changed in the last few years several times, until 2021 Employment belonged to the Ministry of Education, now it belongs to the Ministry of Finance (and Employment) I refer to the name of the Ministry as it was at the time of the preparation of the different documents.

¹² The country's economic development agency

¹³ The Malta College of Art, Science and Technology (responsible for VET). <https://www.mcast.edu.mt>

¹⁴ Public Employment Service <https://jobsplus.gov.mt/about/history>

¹⁵ National Youth Agency <https://youth.gov.mt>

involvement of the relevant experts and stakeholders in various ways, using interviews, focus group discussions, expert meetings, and public events. All the policies are subject to public consultation; the final versions are prepared based on the feedback received. However, the reports on the contributions and changes are not public. The policies are not subject to further expert reviews.

4. Supply-side policies

4.1. Education and qualification

Malta regulates education through the *Education Act*¹⁶ and subsequent amendments. The Ministry for Education, Sport, Youth, Research and Innovation is responsible for the administration, organisation and financial resources in state schools at all levels of education.

The overall strategy for the Maltese education system is described in the '*Framework for the Education Strategy for Malta 2014-2024*',¹⁷ including compulsory, vocational and tertiary education. The policy aims to (1) Reduce the gaps in educational outcomes between boys and girls and between students attending different schools, decrease the number of low achievers and raise the bar in literacy, numeracy, and science and technology competence, and increase student achievement; (2) Support educational achievement of children at-risk-of-poverty and from low socioeconomic status, and reduce the relatively high incidence of early school-leavers; (3) Increase participation in lifelong learning and adult learning, and (4) Raise levels of student retainment and attainment in further, vocational, and tertiary education and training.

4.1.1. Compulsory education

Compulsory education between the ages of five and 16 consists of a six-year programme in Primary schools (age level five to 11) and a five-year programme in Lower Secondary schools (age level 11 to 16).¹⁸ Post-secondary education is provided by a two-year programme in Upper Secondary school (age level 16 to 18)¹⁹ and by two to four-year programmes in Vocational Schools (age level 16 to 20).²⁰ The University of Malta provides tertiary education (ages 18+). State education is free of charge from pre-primary up to tertiary level.²¹

¹⁶ EDUCATION ACT. Chapter 327. ACT XXIV of 1988

¹⁷ Ministry for Education and Employment (2014b)

¹⁸ Pupils receive 'School leaving certificate' and if sit for 'O-level' exam, results in intermediate or advanced level

¹⁹ 'A-level' exam at the end, also entrance for tertiary education

²⁰ Diploma at the end

²¹ Based on: Education System Overview. [Education System Overview – Malta Union of Teachers](#)

The *Education Act* guarantees equal and universal access to public education.²² The Ministry for Education and Employment prepared the *Respect for All Framework*²³ in 2014, which provides context for education policies by defining the core values of the education system. Also, in 2014, the *Migrant Learners' Unit*²⁴ was established, which aims to include newly arrived learners.²⁵ In 2019, the Ministry published the *National Inclusive Education Framework*,²⁶ which defines the potential barriers to inclusion in schools (attitudinal, language and cultural, physical and environmental, training, systemic and organisational, and curricular) and draws different scenarios to overcome the barriers to achieve inclusion in schools. The resulting *Policy on Inclusive Education in Schools*²⁷ (2019) aims to maximise the potential of all learners while anticipating, valuing and supporting diversity and learner differences and involving all stakeholders.

Educational guidance and counselling in schools are important elements of strengthening employability early, and the *National School Support Services (NSSS)*,²⁸ established in 2009,²⁹ provides these elements. As described in its Mission Statement: 'The National School Support Services (NSSS) strives to enhance the holistic development of ALL children. NSSS provides equitable and high-quality services focusing on the physical, social, emotional, psychological, cultural, and behavioural development within an inclusive-oriented culture, aimed at eliminating challenges and barriers, to help children reach their full potential.'³⁰

Malta decreased the rate of early school leavers from 33.0 per cent in 2005 to 11.1 per cent in 2021, coming close to the EU's benchmark of 10 per cent.³¹ Early school leaving remains a central issue in Maltese education policies, the '*ELET 2020-2030*'³² strategy tackles this challenge. The target group of the policy may cover (potential) NEETs, especially learners who escape the system; learners who cannot find a placement; learners who confront the system; learners who find it difficult to adapt after

²² The Education Act reinforces the State's commitment towards providing a quality holistic education for all citizens without any distinction of age, sex, belief or socio-economic background, by ensuring accessibility to primary and secondary schools, special schools for children with individual educational needs, and learning institutions to all.

²³ Ministry for Education and Employment (2014c)

²⁴ [Migrant Learners' Unit](#)

²⁵ Before the pandemic, relative to the size of the resident population, among the European Union member states Malta recorded the highest rates of immigration.

²⁶ Ministry for Education and Employment (2019b)

²⁷ Ministry for Education and Employment (2019a)

²⁸ <https://education.gov.mt/en/NSSS/Pages/Main.aspx>

²⁹ It was established based on the recommendations of the policy document, see in references: Ministry of Education, Youth and Employment (2007)

³⁰ <https://education.gov.mt/en/NSSS/Pages/Main.aspx>

³¹ Eurostat (2022 d.); and Gauci, T. M. (2021) (pp 4)

³² A holistic and Inclusive Approach to Tackle Early Leaving from Education and Training (ELET) in Malta, Ministry of Education, Directorate for Research, Lifelong Learning and Employability (2020b)

transition; learners who disengage due to parenting, family issues, or work obligations; and learners who disengage due to multiple disadvantages possibly due to health or psychological issues. 'The policy aims to consolidate and develop strategic actions that continue to target the decrease of early school leaving in Malta by developing research-based strategic prevention, intervention, and compensation actions for students most at risk of early school leaving.'³³

4.1.2. Vocational Education Training (VET)

Malta has two vehicles to raise awareness among young people on VET. The *National Vocational Education and Training Policy*³⁴ (introduced in 2015), and the *Malta College for Art, Science and Technology (MCAST) Strategic Plan 2022-2027*.³⁶ The *National Vocational Education and Training Policy* is to expose the VET sector,³⁷ while the *MCAST Strategy* aims to widen the awareness and appreciation of vocational and professional skills among parents and guardians.³⁸ It also makes programmes more flexible and accessible through varying modes of implementation and information technology.³⁹

Both policies aim to strengthen work-based learning (WBL). The National VET Policy makes numerous recommendations,⁴⁰ including

- legislation and policy review;
- current apprenticeship and WBL schemes' reviews of labour market needs;
- the launch of a new regime of quality-assured apprenticeship scheme;
- establishing an assistive service to micro and small businesses to encourage apprentices and interns; and
- the involvement of all stakeholders in developing new WBL scheme.

Both policies aim to match skills supply with the employers' demand (and future demand). The second strategic goal of the *National Vocational Education and Training Policy* is to give an adequate response to the labour market. Recommendations under this goal include

- close cooperation of stakeholders to create proactive responses to planned and unplanned industry needs;
- Increased involvement of the private sector in course design;

³³ Ministry of Education, Directorate for Research, Lifelong Learning and Employability (2020b), pp 13.

³⁴ Ministry for Education and Employment (2015a)

³⁵ MCAST is one of the two institutions responsible for implementing VET in Malta

³⁶ Malta College for Arts, Science and Technology (2021)

³⁷ Strategic goal 8

³⁸ Measure 93

³⁹ Measure 25

⁴⁰ Strategic goal 12

- VET providers to work hand in hand with Malta Enterprise to identify projects or potential investors and develop training responses to respective demands;
- VET providers to partner with representatives of small businesses;
- VET is to be used for retraining and up-skilling of workers in shrinking sectors;
- VET courses are to be **developed and promoted among NEETs** with particular attention to ‘aging’ sectors;
- create sector and job-specific marketing plans for VET.

4.1.3. Higher education

The University of Malta provides free tertiary education (ages 18+). As described in the situation analysis of the *Higher Education Strategy for Malta 2015-2024*,⁴¹ the trends are promising. There is increased participation and attainment, a reducing gender gap, increased participation by underrepresented groups in higher education, and the relevance of tertiary education to the individual and the labour market is increasing, too. The first goal of the Strategy is to

- increase the number of young people attaining the entry qualification into higher education by facilitating the transition between vocational and academic-oriented higher education programmes;
- support and encourage individuals to return to education alongside employment, including through distance learning and e-learning;
- widen the provision of higher education and attract foreign education providers to Malta to cater for a diverse student body and attract foreign students to Malta; and
- ensure sustainable funding mechanisms to support higher education institutions and students.⁴²

The *Higher Education Strategy for Malta*⁴³ refers to the Malta Chamber of Commerce, Enterprise and Industry recommendations to give greater consideration to knowledge, skills and competencies that contribute to the labour market when developing curricula.⁴⁴ The *Get Qualified Initiative 2017-2023*⁴⁵ (managed by the Malta Enterprise) supports the individuals’ personal development to achieve qualifications and certifications required by industry.

4.1.4 Education and qualification policies targeting disadvantaged groups

The *National Strategy for Lifelong Learning (2020 - 2030)*⁴⁶ targets marginalised populations, including:

- those with migrant backgrounds;

⁴¹ Ministry for Education and Employment (2015b)

⁴² Ministry for Education and Employment (2015b), (pp 22.)

⁴³ Strategic goal 4

⁴⁴ Ministry for Education and Employment (2015b), (pp 27.)

⁴⁵ [Get Qualified 2017-2023 | Malta Enterprise](#)

⁴⁶ Ministry of Education, Directorate for Research, Lifelong Learning and Employability (2020a)

- individuals who have been out of education and training pathways;
- those who lack basic skills or are unemployed;
- individuals living below or at the poverty threshold; or
- people living with physical or psychosocial disabilities.

Besides other goals, the policy promotes re-entry and re-training in the education system for young unemployed people.

The *National Literacy Strategy for All in Malta and Gozo (2021-2030)*⁴⁷ aims to further reduce the number of socially excluded individuals because of the lack of or a low level of literacy skills.

The *Framework for the Education Strategy for Malta 2014-2024* supports the educational achievement of at-risk-of-poverty and low socio-economic status children by reducing the relatively high incidence of early school-leavers.⁴⁸

The *National Vocational Education and Training Strategy* suggests several measures to help vulnerable students, including studying the challenges of low-income and other vulnerable students,⁴⁹ measuring retention and completion rates of vulnerable and marginalised students,⁵⁰ and introducing individual-based support and guidance through VET for vulnerable students and students with learning difficulties or disabilities.⁵¹

The *Higher Education Strategy for Malta* recommends research on gender differences in subject choices and higher education attainment; improvement of career education; incentives for females to take up careers in STEM-related subjects.⁵²

4.2. Labour market policies

Compared to education policies (considered preventative from a NEET's point of view), labour market legislation and policies focus less on vulnerable youth and NEETs. In the last decade, Malta's unemployment rate for all workers (including young workers as a separate category) has remained significantly below the EU average.⁵³ While Malta's *National Employment Policy 2021-2030*⁵⁴ identifies

⁴⁷ Ministry of Education (2021a)

⁴⁸ Strategic goal 2

⁴⁹ Measure 3

⁵⁰ Measure 10

⁵¹ Measure 16

⁵² Strategic goal 2

⁵³ Eurostat (2022a)

⁵⁴ Ministry for Finance and Employment (2021)

young and vulnerable populations as targets of the policy, it does not contain measures that explicitly target (25+) NEETs. However, the policies described below are relevant to and impact (25+) NEETs.

4.2.1. School to work transition, skills, competencies and employability

The *My Journey - Equitable Quality Education for All Strategy* (2016)⁵⁵ focuses on the evolution of the secondary school system to ensure that learners have successful transitions to the different levels of education or employment.

The *National Curriculum Framework*⁵⁶ (2012) defines the skills, competencies and knowledge that Maltese learners should gain during their studies within the education system. The framework '*aims to achieve the assurance that by the end of compulsory education, learners will have acquired the necessary knowledge, skills, competences, attitudes and values that stimulate them to view lifelong learning as part and parcel of their development as individuals and as citizens of our country, of the European Union and the world.*'⁵⁷

The *National Employment Policy 2021-2030* contains several recommendations related to employability and skills development. These recommendations include the development of transversal skillset certification,⁵⁸ greater recognition of workplace learning and prior learning through revamped skill cards,⁵⁹ high quality and timely responses from education and training institutions to future skill requirements,⁶⁰ and encouragement of lifelong learning and upskilling.⁶¹

4.2.2. Internship, traineeship

The *Work-Based Learning and Apprenticeship Act* (2018)⁶² provides regulations for governing and administering accredited training programmes for work placements, apprenticeships and internships for vocational education and training purposes, including framework contracts for traineeship and apprenticeship.

Several incentives managed by Jobsplus promote traineeship and apprenticeship by employers. For example, employers benefit from tax deductions when offering an apprenticeship or a work placement

⁵⁵ Ministry for Education and Employment (2016), "My Journey - Equitable Quality Education for All". Government of Malta. Last downloaded on 12/05/2022 from: [Equitable Quality Education for All](#)

⁵⁶ Ministry for Education and Employment (2012) (pp vii)

⁵⁷ Ministry for Education and Employment (2012) (pp vii)

⁵⁸ Recommendation 4

⁵⁹ Recommendation 8

⁶⁰ Recommendation 9

⁶¹ Recommendation 10

⁶² AN ACT to regulate Work-Based Learning and Apprenticeships within the context of a Vocational Educational and Training Programme. Act III of 2018.

within the *Tax Incentive Scheme*.⁶³ The *Traineeship Scheme*,⁶⁴ managed by Jobsplus, provides job seekers with initial vocational training (pre-employment training) that helps individuals obtain the knowledge, skills and competence required to find and retain employment.⁶⁵

The *National Employment Policy 2021-2030* recommends fostering participation in traineeship and apprenticeship programmes⁶⁶ and establishing a centralised internship and placement agency.⁶⁷

The *Economic Vision for Malta 2020-2025*, prepared by the Chamber,⁶⁸ recommended that the Ministry for Education and MCAST should undertake the appropriate action, including the provision of (further) fiscal incentives to small and medium enterprises (SMEs), to increase demand and supply for apprenticeship and work-based learning opportunities.

4.2.3. Long-term unemployment

Several active and passive labour policies tackle long-term unemployment in Malta. The *National Employment Policy (2021-2030)* contains only one recommended measure targeting the long-term unemployed. This limitation stems from the situational analysis of the Policy: '*According to Jobsplus data, the number of registered long-term unemployed by September 2020 dropped to just 642 persons, of which 50.5 per cent are between 50 and 64 years of age, 44.0 per cent are between 25-49, and the remaining 5.1 per cent (33 persons) fall within the 15-24 age cohort.*'⁶⁹

4.2.4. Salaries and minimum wage

The *Employment and Industrial Relations Act*⁷⁰ regulates the national minimum wage. In 2022, Malta's weekly national minimum wage for full-time employees over 18 is 182.86 EUR (176.05 EUR for 17-year-olds and 173.21 EUR for 16-year-olds).⁷¹ There are no special regulations for (25+) NEETs.

4.2.5. Temporary employment

In Malta, the *Temporary Agency Workers Regulations*⁷² regulates temporary employment. The share of temporary work contracts is below the EU average in Malta. As a percentage of the total number of

⁶³ [Tax Incentive – Apprenticeship and Work Placement \(LN 179 of 2014\)](#)

⁶⁴ [Traineeship Scheme - Applications Accepted until end June 2022](#)

⁶⁵ eligibility: 20-64 years

⁶⁶ Recommendation 11

⁶⁷ Recommendation 21

⁶⁸ Malta Chamber of Commerce, Enterprise and Industry (2020)

⁶⁹ Ministry for Finance and Employment (2021) (pp. 65.)

⁷⁰ Employment and Industrial Relations Act, National Minimum Wage (Amendment), National Standard Order, 2017

⁷¹ [National Minimum Wage](#)

⁷² TEMPORARY AGENCY WORKERS REGULATION. LEGAL NOTICE 461 of 2010.

employees (age 15-64 years), temporary employees were 7.5 per cent in the third quarter of 2021 (while the EU average was 14.5 per cent).⁷³

The *National Employment Policy 2021-2030* provides several recommendations to tackle temporary employment, including the reduction of seasonal employment in Gozo through the full credit of national insurance contributions; the development and implementation of a regulatory and licensing framework for temporary work agencies; support to unions and workers in temporary labour migration programmes to exercise their freedom of association; integration of unions and worker organisations into the governance processes of temporary labour migration programmes; and the collection and publication of more data on temporary labour migration programmes.⁷⁴ These policy recommendations do not explicitly address young people or (25+) NEETs.

4.2.6. Undeclared work

There is no policy tackling the problem of undeclared work. However, the working conditions of undeclared workers (many of them food couriers) in Malta have received attention and engendered significant public debate.⁷⁵ A 2021 investigation by the *Department for Industrial and Employment Relations* (DIER) found that the employment conditions of local food couriers were not in line with the law. DIER's report determines that more proactive enforcement of existing laws is necessary to promote decent working conditions and social justice for all workers; where necessary, the government should clarify the grey areas in industrial relations legislation.⁷⁶

4.2.7. Active and passive labour market policies

The *Employment and Training Services Act*⁷⁷ (2018) regulates active labour market policies, which Jobsplus implements. Based on their Personal Action Plan (PAP),⁷⁸ registered unemployed persons may receive career guidance, alternative employment, job search assistance, short courses, work exposure schemes and traineeship.

The *Social Security Act*⁷⁹ (1987) regulates provisions for unemployed persons. Unemployment benefits for registered jobseekers are available depending on social security contributions and on the claimant's financial circumstances (*unemployment and special unemployment benefits*) to a maximum of 156 days. Registered jobseekers who have not paid social security contributions are entitled to *unemployment*

⁷³ Eurostat (2022b)

⁷⁴ Recommendations 33-40

⁷⁵ Press Release by the Maltese Government [PRESS RELEASE BY THE MINISTER WITHIN THE OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER](#)

⁷⁶ [The growth of an underclass](#)

⁷⁷ Employment and Training Services Act. ACT XXXIX of 2018.

⁷⁸ [Personal Action Plan](#)

⁷⁹ Social Security Ac. Act X of 1987.

assistance, subject to means testing of their financial circumstances. Those incapable of working may be eligible to receive *social assistance* (also subject to means testing). People with subsidiary protection status are eligible for *subsidiary unemployment assistance*.

The 'Making Work Pay Scheme'⁸⁰ (introduced in 2015) aims to address the poverty trap by making the prospect of being in employment more attractive than being dependent on social benefits through benefit tapering.⁸¹

4.2.8. Gender inequalities

The *Employment and Industrial Relations Act*⁸² regulates protection against discrimination and gender equality (part IV). The *National Employment Policy 2021-2030* recognises that '*despite registering significant progress in female participation rates, gender equality remains a challenge in Malta, particularly concerning the gender pay gap.*'⁸³ The policy also notices that '*a further factor is the underrepresentation of females in STEM subjects, which are integral to these sectors. It is also notable that if the education, health, and social work activities are grouped, this raises the GPG for these sectors to 30.7 per cent: given that the share of females in these sectors is far higher than that of males. This links to the notion of "feminised jobs" resulting from what the ILO refers to as occupational gender stereotyping; this perception of roles within this sector being female roles can lead to these being undervalued in terms of wage determination.*'⁸⁴ The policy makes several recommendations to tackle this issue: incentivising industry-led training programmes for women who are re-entering the labour market, focusing on STEM careers and launching female entrepreneurship schemes.⁸⁵

4.3. Entrepreneurship

The *Malta Enterprise Act*⁸⁶ and the *Small Business Act*⁸⁷ regulate Enterprises and entrepreneurship. None of these mentions young people but promotes entrepreneurship and enterprises in many ways.

The *Economic Vision for Malta 2020-2025*, prepared by the Malta Chamber of Commerce, Enterprise and Industry, promotes entrepreneurship on the policy level. The *National Youth Policy 2021-2030* (targeting young people between 16-25) promotes entrepreneurship among young people under the 5th strategic

⁸⁰ [Consultation Document Making Work Pay](#)

⁸¹ Tapering refers to the gradual reduction of benefit income when a beneficiary takes-up work. This transition should help beneficiaries to adapt and re-integrate back in the labor market without fearing cash flow problems in the event of redundancy.

⁸² Employment and Industrial Relations Act. Chapter 452. Act XXII of 2002.

⁸³ Ministry for Finance and Employment (2021) (pp 107.)

⁸⁴ Ministry for Finance and Employment (2021) (pp 215.)

⁸⁵ Recommendations 17 and 18

⁸⁶ Malta Enterprise Act. Chapter 463. Act VII of 2003.

⁸⁷ Small Business Act. Chapter 512. ACT XI of 2011.

goal: 'Engage and work with the private and corporate sectors in developing and implementing initiatives that facilitate further education and training, upskilling, entrepreneurship and employment opportunities for young people.' None of these policies targets (25+) NEETs.

4.3.1. Incentives

- The *Malta Enterprise*⁸⁸ (the country's economic development agency) is responsible for promoting foreign investment and industrial development in Malta. It provides several support schemes for start-ups.⁸⁹
- The *Erasmus for young entrepreneurs*⁹⁰ provides practical and financial assistance to new entrepreneurs who spend time with experienced host entrepreneurs in another EU country and learn first-hand how to manage a small or medium-sized business (SMEs).
- Malta Enterprise manages the *Kordin Business Incubation Centre* (KBIC), which is a hybrid technology-oriented style incubator. KBIC provides a cost-effective business environment and a professional image with managerial expertise geared to small business needs.⁹¹
- *MCAST Entrepreneurship Centre*⁹² was established in collaboration with Kordin Business Incubation Centre (KBIC) and Malta Enterprise. The Centre offers a framework for ideas to thrive and encompasses a series of activities that address the needs of MCAST students and alumni.
- The *Centre for Entrepreneurship and Business Incubation at the University of Malta*⁹³ aims to help entrepreneurs transform their ideas into market- and investor-ready ventures.
- The *Malta Microsoft Innovation Centre* (MIC)⁹⁴ supports start-ups through facilities, software and hardware devices, business training, and promoting tech skills.
- *Junior Achievement-Young Enterprise* (JA-YE)⁹⁵ complements classroom learning by offering learning-by-doing programmes at primary, secondary, post-secondary, and tertiary levels.
- The *Business First*⁹⁶ service provides information and assistance regarding administrative procedures for entrepreneurs.

4.4. Work-life reconciliation policies

The *Protection of Maternity (Employment) Regulations (2004)*⁹⁷ and the *Parental Leave Entitlement Regulations (2003)*⁹⁸ regulate maternity rights and parental leave. A pregnant employee is eligible for

⁸⁸ [Malta Enterprise |](#)

⁸⁹ [Support Measures and Other Services | Malta Enterprise](#)

⁹⁰ [Erasmus entrepreneurs: business exchange in Malta](#)

⁹¹ [Start-up Support & Facilities](#)

⁹² [MCAST Entrepreneurship Centre set up at KBIC | Malta Enterprise](#)

⁹³ <https://www.um.edu.mt/cebi>

⁹⁴ [MIC Microsoft Innovation Centre \(Malta\) | WEgate - European gateway for women's entrepreneurship](#)

⁹⁵ [JAYE Malta Foundation](#)

⁹⁶ [Business First](#)

⁹⁷ Protection of Maternity (Employment) Regulations. Legal Notice 439 of 2003.

⁹⁸ Parental Leave Entitlement Regulations. Legal Notice 225 of 2003.

maternity leave⁹⁹ for an uninterrupted period of eighteen (18) weeks. The employer pays the first fourteen (14) weeks, and the weeks beyond that are paid by social security as maternity benefits.¹⁰⁰ Both male and female workers have the individual right to be granted unpaid parental leave in case of childbirth, adoption, fostering or legal custody of a child to enable them to take care of the child for a period of four months.¹⁰¹

Under the *Free Childcare Scheme* (introduced in 2013), the government provides free childcare for children aged three months to three years if both parents are employed or in education. The childcare service is provided directly through government services or registered childcare centres.¹⁰² In addition, several free of charge school services also support employed parents and provide high-quality care for children.

The first strategic goal of the *Early Childhood Education and Care National Policy Framework for Malta and Gozo (2021)*¹⁰³ is equal and equitable accessibility of childcare services (from 3 months of age) for all, especially those at risk of exclusion.

The *National Employment Policy 2021-2030* encourages participation in the labour force through high-quality early learning and care, focusing on night care.¹⁰⁴ As the policy notes, free childcare has been a major success in Malta's labour market and the main driving force behind the increased women's participation rate. The incentive will support childcare centres opening in the evening or at night to allow shift workers to send their children to early learning and care.

The *Employment and Industrial Relations Act* regulates part-time employment. The *National Employment Policy (2021-2030)* recommends fostering participation in the labour force through flexible working solutions,¹⁰⁵ and equivalence of overtime and part-time for tax purposes.¹⁰⁶

4.5. Health/ Social Insurance policies

The *Health Act (2013)*¹⁰⁷ regulates health services, and the *Social Security Act (1987)*¹⁰⁸ regulates social insurance contributions and benefits in Malta.

⁹⁹ The weekly rate is 182.83 EUR in 2022. [Skeda tar-Rati tal-Benefiċċji](#)

¹⁰⁰ [Maternity Leave](#)

¹⁰¹ [Parental Leave](#)

¹⁰² [Free Childcare Scheme](#)

¹⁰³ Ministry of Education (2021b)

¹⁰⁴ Recommendation 14

¹⁰⁵ Recommendation 15

¹⁰⁶ Recommendation 20

¹⁰⁷ Health Act. Chapter 528. Act XI of 3013.

¹⁰⁸ Social Security Act. Act X of 1987.

Practically, Malta's National Health Service provides universal coverage. All residents covered by social security legislation or a humanitarian exemption are entitled to access a comprehensive basket of publicly-provided health services. The Ministry of Health is the main provider of public health care services, with the private sector complementing provisions, particularly for primary care and outpatient services. The National Health Service is tax-financed. Malta has among the highest out-of-pocket (OOP) expenditures for health services in the European Union, driven by spending on private primary and outpatient specialist services.¹⁰⁹

The *Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability) Act*¹¹⁰ (2000) provides equal rights for people with disability in employment. The ninth objective of the *Freedom to Live - Malta's 2021-2030 National Strategy on the Rights of Disabled Persons*¹¹¹ focuses on work and the employment of persons living with disabilities.

Jobsplus' *Inclusive Employment Services Unit*¹¹² has specific schemes to support persons with disabilities.

4.6. Other supply-side policies

Within the *Work Programme Initiative Scheme*,¹¹³ Jobsplus, in collaboration with the private sector, assists long-term unemployed individuals to re-enter the labour market. This initiative consists of three phases: profiling, training and job placements. The target age group is 25+ years unemployed registered for more than 6 months.

Jobsplus offers a *Childcare Subsidy*¹¹⁴ (EUR 1.50 per hour) on childcare services for the days & times during which a parent/guardian is attending a Jobsplus training course.

The *Work Exposure Scheme*¹¹⁵ at Jobsplus facilitates transition into employment by providing jobseekers with initial hands-on training to help individuals obtain the knowledge, skills and competencies required to find and retain employment (for 20-64-year-olds).

¹⁰⁹ <https://eurohealthobservatory.who.int/countries/malta>

¹¹⁰ Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability) Act. Chapter 413. Act I. of 2000.

¹¹¹ Ministry for Inclusion and Social Wellbeing (2021)

¹¹² [Inclusive Employment Services](#)

¹¹³ [Work Programme Initiative](#)

¹¹⁴ [Childcare Subsidy Scheme](#)

¹¹⁵ [Work Exposure Scheme - Applications Accepted until end June 2022](#)

5. Demand-side policies

4.7. Incentives

The *Access to Employment Scheme*¹¹⁶ provides employment aid to enterprises in Malta and Gozo to promote the recruitment of the more challenged job seekers and inactive people. This scheme facilitates the integration of job seekers and inactive people in the labour market who are 24 years old and over, and have been unemployed for six or more months.

4.8. Taxes

The *Tax Incentive benefit*¹¹⁷ consists of a tax exemption on employment income which may be claimed by way of a tax credit. It applies to individuals who complete the relevant higher education course of studies in 2018 or later.

6. Orientation

As mentioned above, Jobsplus provides career guidance services as an element of the Active Labour Market Policies. The services do not explicitly tackle young people or NEETs. Career guidance and counselling for students are also offered at the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST), the Institute of Tourism Studies, Junior College, Higher Secondary, and the University of Malta. The *Special Education and Resource centres* provide learners with special needs, including orientation guidance and transition support.¹¹⁸

The *National Employment Policy 2021-2030* recommends¹¹⁹ improving career guidance and advice provisions by launching a strategy on **career guidance for young people** and suggests that career advice for employees must be provided by the state. *'The Government identified the need to develop a new long-term strategy encompassing lifelong career guidance and the need to develop national policies in this area.'*

The second Strategic Measure of the *Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020-2030* is to establish an independent guidance unit, together with stakeholders, to support adults on educational opportunities in a learner-centred, neutral manner.

¹¹⁶ [Access to Employment Scheme](#)

¹¹⁷ [Tax Credit on Higher Educational Qualifications | Malta Enterprise](#)

¹¹⁸ [Resource centers](#)

¹¹⁹ Recommendation 12

7. Conclusions

Preventive and intervening policies with direct or indirect impact on (25+) NEETs in Malta cover the most important fields and tackle the most challenging areas. These documents are publicly available, well structured, and related to each other (and build on previous policies' learnings). The policy documents are not subject to expert reviews (realistic situational analysis, the relevance of recommendations, synergies with other strategies, etc.). However, expert evaluations of the *implementation and impact* of previous strategies and policies are available on some topics. Strategies and policies are developed with the broad involvement of experts and relevant stakeholders in public consultations. However, it is not obvious how the public's feedback is considered and incorporated into the final versions of policies.

The government of Malta does not allocate defined or specific budgets to implement distinct employment-related strategies. The national annual budget allocates undefined global resources to entities responsible for the application of strategies, and those entities draw from those funds to implement programmes. This lack of defined appropriation for implementation creates an opaque system for monitoring and tracking the financial frameworks for various policies and strategies.

Malta's public policies do not explicitly focus on youth unemployment and NEETs. Since the country experiences high employment levels, these are not burning public issues. However, education-related policies (which are crucially important as preventive measures and interventions from the NEETs aspect), focus on inclusion, employability, equal opportunities, reducing disadvantages, increasing educational attainment, developing labour market skills and competencies, and preventing early school leaving. These strategies and policies have proved effective and are impactful. Between 2005 and 2020, Malta almost *tripled the share of its population in tertiary education*. In 2017, Malta reached its national 2020 by halving *the rate of early school leavers*. The participation in *life-long learning is increasing*, with Malta exceeding the EU 27 average in recent years.¹²⁰ The *literacy rate* in Malta has also increased from 86.93 per cent (1986) to 99.3 per cent (2018).¹²¹ Malta's robust employment-related policies stood the test of crisis during the COVID-19 pandemic. Two and a half years after the emergence of the pandemic, Malta continues to have one of the lowest unemployment rates in the European Union even after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Despite Malta's growth and advancement, there is room for improvement. In many education-related indicators, Malta still performs under the EU average.¹²² In the employment sector, undeclared work, precarious work, the guarantee of equal pay for equal work, decent and safe working conditions for all,

¹²⁰ Gauci T. M. (2021)

¹²¹ [Malta - Literacy rate 2018 | countryeconomy.com](#)

¹²² [Education and Training Monitor 2020](#)

and extensive introduction of flexible working arrangements remain essential challenges. On the provisions' side, those excluded from the labour market quickly get 'left behind' with hardly enough income for a decent life. Provisions tackling poverty and social exclusion need fine-tuning to better respond to the diversity of needs and situations.

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