

Education, Training, Life-Long Learning and Capacity Building

1. Lifelong learning is a key dimension in *The National Strategic Policy for Active Ageing: Malta 2014 - 2020*. This policy states that “whilst governments are encouraged to support a rationale that reinstates lifelong learning in values of social levelling, social cohesion, and social justice, Local Councils should be awarded a clearer role in planning, coordinating and financing late-life learning”. Furthermore, Malta’s definition goes one step further and the policy adds that “Frail and/or housebound older persons, elders living in residential and nursing homes, as well as family relatives and volunteers who take care of frail elders, should not be excluded from lifelong learning opportunities. Policy on older adult learning should not promote activities at the expense of older and more defenceless people - namely, older adults who experience some level of physical and cognitive issues”.
2. *The National Strategic Policy for Active Ageing: Malta 2014 - 2020* included three recommendations as far as older adult learning are concerned: (i) Supporting local councils in taking a leading role in the provision and coordination of late-life learning initiatives in their community, also through partnerships with the private and voluntary sector; (ii) employing a ‘wide participation agenda’ in older adult learning through outreach strategies that attract older adults who would not generally be motivated to participate in traditional educational provision, and (iii), improving learning opportunities in long-term care so that all older persons, irrespective of health status, have an opportunity to engage in learning activities. All three recommendations have been fulfilled by the State.
3. The State does meet the needs and interests of older persons as far as late-life learning is concerned. Opportunities for older adult learning are present in a number of public funded Active Ageing Centres and Community Centres throughout Malta. It is hoped that by the end of 2020 all Active Ageing Centres and Community Centres will include a range of activities for late-life learning.
4. The special measures and specific considerations that should be considered are with reference to homebound older persons who tend to experience a range of disabilities that preclude them from exiting their residences. In this respect, the State is in consultation with the University of Malta to launch learning programmes for this sector of older persons through the university’s radio station schedule for February 2020.
5. Non-State parties, such as the private sector, have a responsibility to make available a range of learning opportunities to their clients, especially in the area of long-term care. Although private care homes for older persons do provide a range of activities for their clients, most events can be put under the umbrella term of ‘non-meaningful activities’, and hence, do not subscribe as learning opportunities. In this respect, the University of Malta, which is subsidised by the State, is reaching out to private companies to enlist their employees in complimentary tertiary programmes, such as the Higher Diploma in Gerontology and geriatrics, where one key learning output revolves around the principles, aim, and objectives of educational gerontology.
6. *Best practices*. At the forefront of innovative policy initiatives securing improved levels of social participation included the transformation of Day Centres for Older Persons into Centres for Active Ageing that fulfil the role of ‘lifelong learning hubs’. Whilst in previous decades, Day Centres served a more ‘passive’ function, at present centres have been transmuted into Centres for Third Age Education that enable members to indulge in the

study of local archives, Maltese history, computer and tablet understanding, art appreciation, drama sessions, tai chi, horticulture, and even dance classes. Parallel to such learning activities one also locates nationwide complimentary learning modules on information and communication technology for persons aged 60-plus. Malta's University of the Third Age is also a vibrant community of older learners and receives public funds. Finally, Malta is the first country to establish Universities of the Fourth Age whose objective is to provide residents in care homes and long-term care facilities with a range of learning opportunities so that no one, even older persons with dementia, is left behind in the national lifelong learning impetus. *Challenges.* Despite authentic efforts on behalf of the State and the University of Malta, the local record in pre-retirement learning needs to improve. The educational system that spends some 18 years, and substantial financial capital, to prepare citizens for the world of work, but simply a couple of afternoons (if lucky) to leave it, is clearly biased against older persons. Much more efforts and information campaigns are required so that a promising percentage of incoming retirees participate in pre-retirement learning prior to exiting the labour market.