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Transdisciplinary solutions to
cross sectoral disadvantage
in youth (YOUNG-IN)

WG5



Working paper series

Youth-oriented policies beyond ideal-typical welfare regimes in Europe:

Situation and initiatives from the perspective of youth transition regimes

Malta

Sue Vella, Dr. sue.vella@um.edu.mt | University of Malta, Department of Social Policy & Social Work

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This WP series contributes to the main aims of YOUNG-IN and WG5 (Knowledge-based social investment policy for youth) by aiming to:

- 1) Describe today's situation of youth in our nine case countries based on characteristics perceived to be the most relevant by the literature of Youth Transition Regimes (YTR);
- 2) Give an overview of the main policy initiatives targeted at youth within key policy areas relevant for YTR.

This WP is structured as follows: Part I gives a harmonised comparative overview of the existing situation in the analysed nine countries in comparison with EU28 (the analyses cover period before Brexit, thus kept EU28 instead of EU27). Part II consists of nine chapters about youth-oriented policy initiatives in those countries in two recent decades across policy areas especially relevant for youth (education, labour market, social inclusion, participation and housing). Part III concludes with an executive summary that compares the countries' youth-oriented policy directions in the modified framework of YTR.

The structure and authorship of respective chapters are as follows (current chapter highlighted):

- ▶ Part I: A comparative introduction of situation of youth, Triin Lauri
- ▶ Part II: Country reports on youth oriented policies:
 - Youth-oriented policies in Bulgaria (BG), Veneta Krasteva
 - Youth-oriented policies in Switzerland (CH), Berihun Wagaw, Matthias Drilling, Semhar Negash
 - Youth-oriented policies in Estonia (EE), Anu Toots and Triin Lauri
 - Youth-oriented policies in Spain (ES), Francisco Javier Moreno-Fuentes, Pau Marí-Klose
 - Youth-oriented policies in Lithuania (LT), Daiva Skučienė, Natalija Mažeikienė
 - Youth-oriented policies in Latvia (LV), Anna Broka
 - Youth-oriented policies in Moldova (MD), Crismaru Mariana
 - **Youth-oriented policies in Malta (MT), Sue Vella**
 - Youth-oriented policies in Turkey (TR), Hande Barlin, Nilufer Korkmaz Yaylagul
- ▶ Conclusion, Anu Toots, Triin Lauri

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Brief Information on Malta

Malta is a Mediterranean archipelago between Sicily and North Africa, a parliamentary democracy and a member of the European Union (EU) since 2004. With a population of 493,600 in January 2019 and an area of 246 square kilometres, it is the EU's smallest member. Malta has a rich history, having had diverse rulers over the centuries including the pan-European Knights of St. John from 1530 and becoming a colony of Great Britain from 1813 until 1964. Malta became a republic in 1974 and its official languages are Maltese and English. Historically deeply Catholic, Malta has progressively become more secular and lifestyles are now broadly European.

The Maltese economy has, in recent years, enjoyed one of the highest growth rates in the EU, a fiscal surplus and very low unemployment, although as the European Commission points out in its 2020 Country Report, Malta also faces a number of sustainability challenges (European Commission, 2020a). Malta's population may be characterised by a number of broad demographic trends. Malta's fertility rate has steadily descended in recent decades and, at 1.26 in 2018, was the lowest in the EU and well below the replacement rate (Eurostat, 2019a). The share of children aged 0 to 14 is, at 13.9%, the fourth lowest in the EU and the share of those aged 65 and over, while at 18.8% is marginally below the EU average, has been the fastest growing share in all EU member states since 2008 (Eurostat 2019b). Levels of inward migration have steadily risen in recent years, from both EU and non-EU countries, and Malta has the highest share of immigrants in the EU of 46.3 immigrants per 1,000 inhabitants (Eurostat 2019c).

Part II. Main youth related initiatives in key policy areas: 2000 to 2020

2.1. Education policy beyond the lower secondary level

2.1.1 Policies against school drop-out, low achievement and NEET

In October 2000, the National Minimum Curriculum (NMC) was introduced to Malta, based on fifteen principles and ten objectives in the context of a commitment to social justice. The eighth principle on 'inclusive education' emphasised the need to 'invest most' in children at risk (MEYE, 1999).

School attendance remained on the policy agenda early in the new millennium. In 2005, a government-appointed task force submitted its considerations to the ministry responsible for education (Clark et al., 2005), and the authors contend that non-attendance was "an issue of increasing concern for schools, educational and student welfare organisations. Nonattendance is viewed as being among one of the key problems facing some schools." (2005, p. 7). However, rates of unauthorised absence have remained constant over the past two decades at around 4.5 days per pupil per year.

In 2014, a Strategic Plan for the Prevention of Early School Leaving was published (MEE, 2014). The strategy sets out an array of measures in respect of cross-sectoral governance and measures for prevention, intervention and compensation. The preventive measures span from early childcare, teacher training, parental involvement, to the reintroduction of vocational education in mainstream schools and supporting children. Intervention includes the setting up of early warning systems and intense support for children at risk, while compensation includes reintegration programmes for early school leavers.

2.1.2 Access to different tracks and levels

On completion of compulsory secondary school, students may choose to pursue academic post-secondary studies or vocational training. In respect of the latter, a paradigmatic change occurred in the year 2000, when the *Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology* (MCAST) was set up with ten Institutes to offer vocational and professional education for students preferring this route over the academic one. This allowed for the requirements of articles 3, 4 and 21 of the Education Act, "to ensure the existence of educational institutions accessible to all citizens", to be met (MEYE, 2000).

From September 2019, a reform called *MyJourney* allows secondary school students to choose between general, vocational or applied subjects as well as the core curriculum, thereby valorising different educational pathways. Commenting on this development, though, the European Commission praised the wider choice yet suggested that making such a choice at age 12 may deprive them of important competences for lifelong learning and may result in social and labour market exclusion later in life (European Commission, 2019).

2.1.3 Policies on educational quality

The NMC signalled a paradigmatic change that promoted lifelong learning and a stronger use of formative assessment, and it heralded further efforts to decentralise education and empower schools. A revised NMC framework was published in 2012, following broad consultation, which gave further impetus to quality education, a student-centred approach and different learning pathways, among other aims (MEE, 2012).

The first decade of the new millennium also saw the government move away from its sole role of operator towards that of regulator. In 2005, a landmark policy document entitled *For all children to succeed* was published by the then Ministry of Education, Youth and Employment (MEYE, 2005), based on the concept of quality education. It provided for the creation of colleges, or networks of schools, intended to improve the educational inclusion of all children, promulgated through the Education (Amendment) Act of 2006. In the same year, these colleges started to be set up and the full complement of ten was reached by late 2007.

One issue related to educational quality that the European Commission has highlighted is that of teacher motivation. More teachers in Malta than in the EU on average feel that their profession is undervalued; their performance is not appraised (except at the end of induction); and there is limited salary progression over the years (European Commission 2019). That said,

part of the effort to upgrade the profession and the quality of teaching has involved raising initial teacher education from bachelor level to master level (plus the traditional two years of teaching experience). This change occurred from 2018. Also, since 2018 supply teachers can participate in blended learning to upgrade their qualifications and become formally qualified teachers (European Commission 2019).

In 2012, the revised Education Act also created the National Commission for Further and Higher Education, tasked to foster educational excellence through, *inter alia*, accrediting programmes and institutions; quality assurance; and recognition of qualifications. NCFHE has created quality assurance frameworks and handbooks. The NCFHE also coordinates the Malta Qualifications Framework, which is referenced to the European Qualification Framework and defines levels of qualification in terms of the relevant knowledge, skills and competences.

2.1.4 Social support to learners

In Malta, education in state schools, MCAST and the University of Malta (undergraduate full- and part-time day courses) is free of charge for Maltese and EU/EFTA/EEA nationals. Part-time evening courses and postgraduate degrees incur a fee, unless such qualification is a requisite to practise a profession in which case tuition is free of charge. Shorter non-degree courses at MCAST, the university and the Institute for Tourism Studies are free of charge for Maltese and EU/EFTA/EEA students.

Short-course and undergraduate full-time Maltese/EU/EFTA/EEA students (who have resided in Malta for no less than five years before starting their studies) are paid a student maintenance grant by the state, with the grant being higher in high priority courses. These maintenance grants are not paid at the postgraduate level except to those who require the degree to exercise a profession. Undergraduate students who can prove hardship; who have a disability; are single parents; or students who live in out-of-home care receive a supplement to their maintenance grant. Parents whose children are in tertiary education receive an annual tax rebate until their child turns 23.

As undergraduate tuition is free of charge, scholarships are only available for postgraduate studies. A range of scholarships are available – for general postgraduate study in Malta or abroad, but also specific schemes for the arts, financial sector, and sports. Maltese students may also apply for Commonwealth Scholarships.

Since 2014, Breakfast Clubs have operated in state primary schools for students whose parents are in employment to have a healthy breakfast and play with other children before lessons start.

No dormitories are available for students in Malta, given the short distances involved in travelling to educational institutions. However, full-time students from the sister island of Gozo who are studying in Malta are entitled to a quarterly grant of €500 to help cover transport and accommodation costs.

Table 5 below tabulates these key aspects of education policy in terms of Busemeyer's (2014) theoretical framework on decommodification and stratification in education and training.

Educational commodification is low. As noted in (1) above, public expenditure per student has continued to rise over the years and is among the highest in the EU, although educational attainment differs markedly among students in public, Church and private schools, suggesting a strong Matthew Effect and a degree of stratification.

Table 5: Education Policies

	Low stratification	High stratification
High commodification		
Low commodification	<p>Early childcare, free of charge to working parents since 2014</p> <p>Free-of-charge tuition at all levels, including tertiary; high expenditure in PPS</p> <p>Re-establishment of VET College in 2000 and mainstreaming of VET option in secondary school in My Journey reforms of 2019</p> <p>Post-sec/undergrad student maintenance grants AND supplementary hardship grants</p>	<p>Educational attainment differs significantly between public, Church and private schools (as per PISA 2018 findings)¹</p>

Source: Busemeyer, 2014 (pg: 29-33)

2.2. Labour market policy for youth

2.2.1. Unemployment protection (PLMP)

Social security in Malta has two main branches – contributory and non-contributory benefits, as set out in the Social Security Act (Cap. 318 of the Laws of Malta), which in 1987 consolidated all prior social security legislation and has been regularly updated since. All persons between the age of 16 and retirement must be insured (and pay contributions) as employed, self-employed or self-occupied, unless in full-time education or training, or in receipt of a pension or social assistance. The Act also provides for the accreditation of contributions for numerous groups.

A young person who was in employment and has paid the requisite number of contributions can benefit from Unemployment, Sickness or Injury Benefit should these situations occur. Entitlement to unemployment protection depends on the contributory record, one's availability for work, and registration with Jobsplus (Malta's public employment service). Youths who meet the eligibility conditions are entitled to the Unemployment Benefit for a maximum of 156 days (similarly to adults). These conditions require that the youth concerned is registered

in Part 1 of the Jobsplus register (and is immediately available for work or training) and has paid a minimum of 50 weekly social security contributions, of which at least 20 were paid in the two years before application. Persons in difficult circumstances receive a supplement – the Special Unemployment Benefit – after a means test.

Receipt of the Unemployment Benefit by anyone under 23 depends on that person's participation in the Youth Guarantee scheme, as referred to in the next section.

2.2.2. Active labour market policy (ALMP)

Unemployed youth in Malta are eligible to participate in a range of ALMPs, which increased in scope and number after Malta's accession to the EU. Many are co-financed ESF and ERDF projects. Youth can participate in a range of training courses provided by Jobsplus, whether short-term or dual training, such as apprenticeships and traineeships. Wage subsidies are available to employers who recruit disadvantaged jobseekers, though only those aged 24 and over¹. Youth can benefit from guidance services and tools and participate in various workshops under the Youth Employment Programme, co-financed by the EU². Since 2015, the Youth Guarantee Scheme, also co-financed by the EU, provides training and work exposure to youth not in education, employment or training; revision classes for those needing to resit Level 2 or 3 examinations; and summer courses in ICT³. In its assessment of the Youth Guarantee Scheme in Malta, the Employment Committee of the EU praised the scheme yet noted that coverage remains low and outreach among those facing 'multiple barriers' is necessary (European Commission, 2020b).

2.2.3. Industrial and other labour relations

Employment in Malta is regulated under the *Employment and Industrial Relations Act (EIRA)*, Chapter 452 of the laws of Malta which sets out conditions of work, protection of wages, industrial relations and other related matters. *Young Persons (Employment) Regulations (S.L. 452.92)* were promulgated in 2003 by means of legal notice, and again revised in 2007 and 2012. Employers cannot employ youth under 16 unless they have the prior written permission of the Director of Education. These regulations set out the terms and conditions that apply to the employers of young people. Particularly when employing adolescents, employers must: ensure their working time does not exceed eight hours per day or 40 hours per week; give the young employee a break of at least 30 minutes after four and a half hours of work; that the youth concerned does not work between 10 p.m. and 6 a.m. unless with serious justification; that the daily rest between one day and another is not less than 12 consecutive hours, and that there are two rest days per week, including Sunday.

Malta has a minimum wage, adjusted annually for cost of living, which stood at €9,325 per annum in 2020. The only age distinctions that apply for those under 18 concern the minimum

¹ <https://jobsplus.gov.mt/schemes-jobseekers/a2e-scheme>

² <https://www.youth.org.mt/?m=youths>

³ <https://jobsplus.gov.mt/schemes-jobseekers/youth-guarantee-scheme>

wage, which is slightly lower for those aged 17 (€8,973) and for those aged under 17 (€8,825). The standard working week in Malta is 40 hours, irrespective of age. The national minimum varies slightly by sector, and Wage Regulation Orders exist that regulate conditions in 31 different sectors.

There has been public pressure to raise the minimum wage for a number of years, particularly by Caritas Malta and other NGOs. A modest increase of €3 per week in the second and third year of employment was introduced from 2017, along with the important provision that low wage earners on a definite contract, affected by these wage increases, cannot be replaced (without good cause) by another person for up to one year after their definite contract expires. This measure should help the 'churning' of young people recruited on precarious contracts.

Since Legal Notice 427 of 2002 on *Part-time employment regulations*, part-time workers cannot be treated less favourably than full-time ones, and are to enjoy pro-rated benefits such as annual leave. Again, this measure is likely to benefit young people, who are most likely to work on a part-time basis early in their career.

The EIRA upholds the concept of equal pay for work of equal value, irrespective of differences of, say, sex or age. Discrimination at work is prohibited under the EIRA. This refers to any distinction, exclusion or restriction on the basis of sex, colour, disability, religious belief, political opinion, trade union membership, marital status, pregnancy or potential pregnancy. Discriminatory treatment must not occur at any point, from advertising a job, selection, pay and other working conditions, or termination. When an employee alleges discrimination to the Industrial Tribunal, it is the employer who bears the onus to disprove. In addition to the Tribunal, aggrieved persons may also apply to the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality for complaints regarding unequal treatment; the Commission's responsibilities are set out in Chapter 456 of the laws of Malta, entitled *Equality for Men and Women Act*.

The EIRA also regulates hiring and firing. There are no special hiring and firing provisions for youth.

Health and safety at work is the remit of the Occupational Health and Safety Authority, set up as a regulator and inspectorate in 2000 (Cap. 424 of Laws of Malta) to promote and safeguard workers' wellbeing. The Act covers all workplaces and sectors, public and private. Legal Notice 36 of 2003 sets out the general provisions to implement the health and safety legislation, including the responsibilities of employers and employees. As already noted, Legal Notice 91 of 2000 includes provisions to protect employees aged under 18 at work.

Table 7 below tabulates measures for young people, in line with the theoretical framework of Pohl and Walther (2007). As may be seen, employment policy for young people addresses issues both from a structural and individualising perspective as well as a preventive and compensatory one. While there have been some activity across instruments, labour market services have been the main focus across ALMP measures

Table 7: Active Labour Market Policies

	Compensatory	Preventive
Structure-related	Subsidies to employers who recruit young people who have already participated in Youth Guarantee/Work Exposure scheme/ Traineeship Scheme.	Mainstreaming of vocational education as outlined in section on Education.
Individualising	Short-term or dual-training courses provided by PES. Youth Guarantee Scheme (12-week work placements plus training for NEETs)	Employment advisory service by PES. Youth Guarantee Scheme ('Preventive' (revision) classes at secondary level or vocational college; ICT summer courses)

Source: Pohl and Walther, 2007

2.3. Social welfare policy

2.3.1. Access and eligibility to social assistance

When it comes to non-contributory benefits, such as the means-tested Social Assistance, it is only the head of household who is eligible. Unless the youth concerned is the head of household, he or she cannot claim social assistance or rent subsidy.

2.3.2. Access and eligibility to social services

Age in and of itself is not a criterion for access to social housing, but rather housing need as explained in 2.4 below; young single people do not rank highly on the consideration of housing need. A number of shelters exist in Malta, including YMCA. Counselling and social work services are offered free of charge by the statutory Foundation for Social Welfare Services as well as by other NGOs, such as the Church's Cana Movement that provides marriage preparation courses. Free legal aid is available for anyone who needs a lawyer but cannot afford one, irrespective of age. Public transport for full-time students is slightly discounted but otherwise there are no age-related transport provisions for young people.

Table 8 below tabulates current social provisions in terms of the framework of Chevalier (2016; 2018). While recognising the impact of free tuition and universal student grants in terms of equalising access to higher education, prevailing policies suggest a continued expectation of family maintenance after reaching majority (or until such time as the young person concerned becomes a head of household or single parent).

Table 8. Social benefits

<p>Individualised</p>	<p>Non-means tested student maintenance grants for post-secondary and undergraduate students, with a supplementary allowance in case of hardship. (These grants, however, are not of a magnitude to permit independent living outside the parental home exclusive of other income or own property).</p> <p>Youth who meet the eligibility criteria for unemployment benefit may claim it in their own name, irrespective of family income/still living at home. (However, if they are under 23, they will have had to first complete the Youth Guarantee scheme).</p>
<p>Familialised</p>	<p>While the age of 16, for all intents and purposes, confers adult rights (e.g. to trade, to marry, to refuse health treatment, to vote in local elections), Chapter 16 of the Civil Code of the Laws of Malta requires parents to continue to maintain children who are no longer minors but who are in 'full-time education, training or learning' and are under the age of 23.</p> <p>A Children's Allowance is paid to each family residing in Malta with children in their full care and custody, who are either (a) under 16 or (b) aged up to 21 and are studying but for some reason not entitled to a maintenance grant, or who are registering for work for their first time.</p> <p>Annual tax rebate for families whose children are in full-time education, up to the age of 23.</p> <p>In respect of social/unemployment assistance, youth can only claim it if they are the 'head of household'. Access to unemployment benefits for otherwise eligible youth are – in the case of those below 23 – dependent upon completion of the Youth Guarantee Scheme.</p> <p>There is no housing allowance for young people in Malta (except for an annual €2000 allowance for full-time students from the sister island of Gozo who are studying in Malta).</p>

Source: Chevalier, 2016

2.4. Housing policy

Housing policy in Malta has long been biased towards home ownership. Home ownership rates have crept up gradually over the years, such that in 2018, 81.6 per cent of households owned their own home (of whom three quarters had no outstanding loan or mortgage). Of the remainder, 6.8 per cent rented at market value while 11.6 per cent rented for free or at a reduced price (Eurostat, 2020u).

2.4.1. Access to public housing

Persons who cannot afford to buy or rent property on the open market may apply for social housing (that is, renting a government-owned property at low rent) or for a rent subsidy to rent in the open market. However, waiting lists for social accommodation are long, standing at 2,604 applicants in March 2020 (Parlament, 2020), and far outstrip supply. Between 2013 and 2019, only 10 new units were added to the social housing stock (Parlament, 2019). The few properties that become available are allocated on a points basis, with priority being given to greater need such as single parents, persons with disability or persons leaving domestic violence. Young people without compelling evidence of need are most unlikely to be eligible for social housing.

In January 2020, a €10 million government investment in affordable rental housing was promised by the Parliamentary Secretary for Social Housing. This project will see the construction of 118 apartments targeted at people who do not qualify for social housing but who find existing rental prices unaffordable. Rental prices will be fixed for five years (Abela, 2020).

2.4.2. Access to and affordability of commercial housing

The Housing Authority in Malta operates a number of different schemes that assist with the purchase or rent of one's home. There are no age thresholds for persons who are engaged, married or custodial parents, or who are disabled. In the case of a modest grant towards the construction or completion of one's first home, however, single people must be at least 24. An equity sharing scheme is also available but only for people aged over 40 who cannot get a sufficient bank loan in view of their age.

Recognising the housing affordability problem, in the Budget for 2020, the government announced that persons under 40 years of age and on low income were to become eligible for an interest-free loan of up to €17,500 to cover the requisite 10 per cent deposit when taking out a mortgage, which would be repayable over 15 years.

The payment of stamp duty is a further burden on house buyers on low income. For many years, first time buyers were exempt from paying stamp duty for the first €150,000 of a property's value; in 2020, this threshold was raised to €175,000.

A means-tested subsidy exists for persons on low income who rent from the private sector. The relevance of this subsidy declined over the years as rental prices rose. In 2019 the rates were revised upwards (Galea, 2019) though they are still low considering current prices; for instance, the maximum annual benefit for a single person is €3,600, while the average price for a one-bedroom apartment is close to €10,000 per annum.

The Private Residential Leases Act (Cap. 604) was introduced in 2020 to reform and regulate the private rental market. Private rental contracts are now to be registered with the Housing Authority, and among other provisions, the law stipulates that prices can only be revised once a year and cannot go up by more than 5 per cent. The law also specifies termination criteria. There was opposition to the law by various landlords, who threatened to withdraw their properties from the market, however, the impact has yet to be seen.

Table 9 below tabulates the various housing measures available in Malta in terms of Olsen (2013). Home ownership rates are high in Malta and owning a home remains the aspiration of most young people – not only for sociocultural reasons but also because property is possibly the most attractive investment at the moment and for those able to obtain a mortgage is equivalent in outlay to rental prices. As noted, the Maltese rental market is a dualistic and highly commodified one, with a small public sector with very low rents, which has not grown for years, while private-sector rents have soared.

Table 9: Housing

	Universal access	Selective/targeted access
High commodification		<p>Means-tested rent subsidy on open market.</p> <p>Interest-free loan of up to €17,500 to assist with 10% down payment for people taking mortgage.</p> <p>Reduction in stamp duty payable by low-income first-time buyers.</p>
Low commodification	Legislative reform in 2020 to regulate private rent increases (but not to control initial rent levels).	

Olsen (2013)

2.5. Health policy

2.5.1. Access to public health care

Public healthcare in Malta is universal, and all young people in Malta are entitled to primary and hospital care. In general, the vast majority (95%) of Maltese youth report feeling in good or very good health, though the figure is higher for the fifth income quintile (97%) than the first (91%). 99 per cent of youth reported that they did not have an unmet medical need in the preceding 12 months (Eurostat, 2017). That said, three areas would seem to be of particular relevance to young people in Malta; these are mental health, obesity and alcohol consumption.

Concerning mental health, rates of reported depressive symptoms among young people aged 15 to 29 are lower in Malta (4.1%) than the EU28 average (5.1%), yet they are still of concern. Similar to other EU states, rates are higher among those with low education. They are also higher for young women than young men; the prevalence of depressive symptoms among young women with tertiary education in Malta was, at 6.6%, among the highest in the EU. This is almost double the corresponding rate for young Maltese men.

In its *Mental Health Strategy 2020 – 2030*, government notes with concern the 2013/14 findings in the WHO's international *Health Behaviour* survey that 15 year olds in Malta, especially female, are quite a lot more likely to feel low or nervous more than once a week than the average for the other 48 countries surveyed. The strategy puts forward a vast array of measures, including the need to review services for children and young people, and to improve training of educators on identifying and responding to issues of mental health and wellbeing.

The second area of concern is obesity. In 2014, Maltese youth between 15 and 29 were the most obese in the EU. This is true of all age cohorts except for those between 20 and 24, where Malta places second after Ireland. Since the promulgation in 2000 of the *Broadcasting Code for the Protection of Minors*, advertisements that encourage frequent eating or the replacement of balanced meals with confectionery or snack foods have been banned (MOJ, 2010). In 2012, a national strategy entitled *A Healthy Weight for Life 2012-2020* was published (Superintendence of Public Health, 2012). The Strategy puts forward a wide array of actions to promote awareness, healthy eating and physical activity. The Malta Sports Council operates various sports facilities and training programmes, including many targeted at youth.

The third area of concern is alcohol consumption. Although Malta's overall alcohol consumption is below the EU average, weekly consumption among 15 to 29 year olds is at 41.9 per cent the highest in the EU. The rate rises with education, such that 50.7 per cent of those with tertiary education drink at least once a week. The rate is considerably higher for young male graduates than females (Eurostat 2020t). The *National Alcohol Policy 2018 – 2023* (MFCSS, 2018) points out some encouraging trends. Drawing on ESPAD studies⁴, it notes that among 15 to 16 year olds, alcohol consumption over ten times in the preceding 30 days had decreased from 20 to 11 per cent among this cohort between 1995 and 2015. However, heavy episodic drinking in the prior 30 days still stood at 47 per cent, and drunkenness at 15 per cent. A range of measures, including legislative, enforcement and awareness raising, are spelled out in the strategy, with a particular focus on preventing underage drinking.

2.5.2. Public health and awareness raising

The Maltese National Youth Agency (*Aġenzija Zgħazagħ*) was set up in 2010 to coordinate and oversee youth policy. It currently forms part of the Parliamentary Secretariat for Research, Innovation, Youth and Sport (PSRIYS). National Youth Policies have been drawn up since 1993. The fifth such policy was launched in 2015, entitled *Towards 2020: A shared vision for the future of young people* for youth between 13 and 30 years old (PSRIYS, 2015). One of the action programmes in this policy addresses youth health and wellbeing. The policy sets out various initiatives to support healthy lifestyles, including raising awareness of healthy eating, physical exercise, emotional wellbeing, sexual health, overcoming addictive behaviour, and confronting all forms of bullying.

The efforts of *Aġenzija Zgħazagħ* are complemented by the various campaigns by the Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Directorate, particularly on the topics of smoking cessation, obesity, drink driving and sexual health.

⁴ See <http://espad.org/report/country-summaries#malta>

Table 10: Health policies

	High (universal) access	Low (status-related; i.e. student, employee) access
High commodification	Services at private hospital, sometimes made necessary by public hospital waiting lists. Out-of-pocket expenditure is rising.	Public psychological therapy for young people is very limited (although treatment for serious mental illness is available). Private sector therapy is costly and, thus, income-dependent.
Low commodification	National health service, universal and free of charge Public health campaigns and healthy lifestyle support	

2.6. Active citizenship

The National Youth Policy also encourages and supports young people to be active citizens participating at the national and international level. It includes a number of actions to create new spaces for youth participation, to reach out particularly to various groups of marginalised youth and empower their active participation in society.

2.6.1. Regulations of youth involvement in decision making

There is no comprehensive Youth Law in Malta.

The Office of the Commissioner for Children, set up by law in 2003 (Cap. 462 of the Laws of Malta), has as one of its principles that children (until the age of 18) and their families are to be 'provided with opportunities to participate in decisions that affect them and in defining, planning and evaluating services to children'.

Voting among youths was the third highest in the EU in 2017, after Austria and Italy; Flash Eurobarometer 455 found that 78 per cent of young people had voted in the three years preceding 2017 (European Commission, 2017). 85 per cent believe that voting is a moral obligation (European Commission, 2013). In 2015, the Local Councils Act (Cap. 363) was amended to give 16 and 17 year olds the right to vote in local council elections. A national dialogue was then started on bringing down the voting age from 18 to 16; in 2018 this was introduced, so youth from the age of 16 upwards can now participate in national elections and referenda. They cannot, however, be elected as Mayors of Local Councils before turning 18 years of age.

2.6.2. Programs on advancing youth citizenship and political participation

When it comes to political participation, there have been mixed opinions on lowering the voting age. While enfranchisement is an excellent principle, lowering the age to 16 may cause some concern in view of the bipartisan and increasingly acrimonious nature of Maltese political dialogue. Political participation which is not tempered by association in other settings that transcend party lines may reinforce existing social divisions.

According to Flash Eurobarometer 375 (European Commission, 2013), Maltese youth were, at the time of the survey, the most likely to be politically active (yet less likely than the EU average to participate in other settings, as illustrated in Table 11 below). Such participation has only declined since 2013 and the gap with the EU average has widened. Furthermore, although youth in Malta have the highest voting turnout in Europe, only 10 per cent state that they would ever consider running for political office – the second lowest score after Hungary.

Table 11: Youth participation, 2013 and 2017, Malta and EU average

Organisation	2013		2017		Change 2017 over 2013	
	Malta	EU27	Malta	EU28	MT	EU28
Sports club	25	35	11	29	-14	-6
Youth club	19	22	7	20	-12	-2
Cultural organisation	13	14	6	15	-7	-1
Local community organisation	12	15	5	13	-7	-2
Political organisation	14	5	5	7	-9	+2
Human rights/global development	5	8	1	7	-4	-1
Environmental	6	7	1	5	-5	-2
Other NGO	:	:	9	12	:	:
None of these	44	44	62	47	+18	+3

Sources: Flash Eurobarometer 375; Eurobarometer 455
(:) did not feature in Eurobarometer 375

Thus, a number of entities have been set up to give a voice to young people and encourage their participation, and the voting age has been decreased to 16. Alongside these reforms are concerning figures from the Eurobarometer that suggest a sharp decline in youth engagement in sports, cultural, political and other collective associations.

Table 12. Active Citizenship

High involvement	Setting up of Office for the Commissioner of Children. Setting up of Agenzija Zghazagh (National Youth Agency) Voting in national and local elections from age 16.
Low involvement	

Conclusion

Youth policy in Malta can be described as unisectoral. Although the fifth national youth policy is in effect, it is hard to find mainstreamed targets and input/outcome analysis across policy areas by age cohorts. Traditionally, social policy in Malta has been largely familialistic in nature, although from the 1990s and especially after EU accession, a growing focus on gender equality and women's labour market participation has challenged the assumptions, and organisation, of many areas of social policy. Rapid progress in women's educational and employment outcomes have closed important gender gaps among young women and men and have redistributed life chances and individual entitlements.

In relation to the parameters of this study, the nature of policy change across a number of areas suggests a few points for consideration. Education in Malta is not highly commodified (Busemeyer, 2014, in that education is free of charge for all young people through to and including undergraduate studies. Furthermore, a universal student grant is available to support post-secondary and tertiary students, even if such grants do not suffice for independent living. That said, to some extent a dualism has opened in the educational sector, as according to PISA measurements the educational attainment of students in independent (high-fee) schools is significantly above that of students in public schools (Camilleri, 2020). A Matthew Effect clearly applies. When it comes to employment policy, a broad array of preventive and compensatory schemes and services operate mainly at the individual level, although a structural employment subsidy scheme is also available (Pohl & Walther, 2007). Social security benefits are largely familialised (Chevalier, 2016 and except for instances where the young person concerned is head of household or a single parent, there are few benefits payable to youth. The contribution-based unemployment benefit, too, is now also contingent upon completion of the Youth Guarantee. Turning to housing (Olsen, 2013), the market is highly commodified (high home ownership rates and a dualised rental market with private rents beyond the scope of most young people's wages); public support is limited and selective, that is, means-tested. Health care for young people is not commodified in that access to primary and hospital care is free of charge, although public waiting lists often necessitate a turn to the private sector. Lastly, the National Youth Agency lists among its priorities the fostering of active citizenship among youth, and the age for voting in national and local elections has recently been brought down to 16.

As elsewhere, young people still face a number of challenges. To focus only on three, these pertain to youth with low educational attainment; accessing the housing ladder; and associational life.

Youth with low educational attainment continue to face the enduring problems of labour market exclusion, 'churning' or long-term unemployment. As noted, despite relatively high expenditure on education, Malta has a high level of early school leavers and weak outcomes in reading, maths and science. Furthermore, educational outcomes differ greatly by institution, with lower outcomes in state than in church or independent schools.

The policy responses to this issue have been of both a structural and individual nature (Pohl and Walther, 2007), even if educational inequalities appear to still be rising. On the structural side, effort has been made to provide alternative and relevant educational routes for young people who are not necessarily inclined to pursue post-secondary education. The impact of allowing such choice at the age of 12 on the capacity for lifelong learning, as the European Commission points out, has yet to become clear. Other structural initiatives have included the use of co-financing to provide employer subsidies to recruit disadvantaged jobseekers, which include unemployed young people. Reforms to the curriculum, to quality assurance and teacher training are all structural initiatives aimed to increase the quality and inclusivity of education. Structural initiatives are matched with individualised ones, where young jobseekers are obliged to participate in active labour market measures such as guidance and training. While investments and to a lesser extent compensation are occurring, it would seem that further preventive work to close the performance gap between educational sectors is needed, with intense individualised support given to children at risk of educational exclusion as at young an age as possible. Support of young jobseekers without social security contributions is still familialistic, that is, dependent upon the responsibility of the family to maintain their children where necessary.

Another major and emerging problem is access to the housing ladder by young people on low to middle incomes. Housing in Malta, like social care more broadly, has typically been a familialised issue, with parents helping their children onto the housing ladder. Rising house prices and supply shortages are making this increasingly difficult. Structural responses have been mixed; borrower-based measures, intended to prevent suboptimal lending, have made it somewhat harder for those on low incomes to access a mortgage at the same time as rental markets are beyond their reach. Social accommodation stock has not been augmented in years, while the private rental market is from 2020 more strictly regulated. The impact of these measures is yet to be seen. From an individualist perspective, rental subsidies have been modestly increased yet cannot bridge the affordability gap for the most vulnerable.

Lastly, the low and declining levels of youth participation in associational life are of concern and require in-depth study. While the educational curriculum and the National Youth Policy aim to encourage youth to be active, involved citizens, and set out a number of actions in this regard, they do not yet seem to be having the desired effect. As the architects of tomorrow's social and political life in Malta, young people are to be more actively encouraged and supported to reach out across familial, political, cultural and ethnic lines to ensure a more cohesive future for the country.

Table 11. Summary tables characterising current policies affecting youth in Malta

Education

	Low stratification	High stratification
High commodification		
Low commodification	*	

Active labour market policies

	Compensatory	Preventive
Structure-related	*	*
Individualizing	*	*

Benefits

Individualised	
Familialised	*

Housing

	Universal access	Selective/targeted access
High commodification		*
Low commodification		

Health

	High (universal) access	Low (status-related) access
High commodification		
Low commodification	*	

Active Citizenship

High involvement	*
Low involvement	

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