

HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

ANNA CATANIA - EMN OFFICER



Happy 15th birthday to our Newsletter! This publication is now central to the Maltese EMN, and it is hard to imagine how our network would be without it. Thank you to our readers who have joined us on this journey and to our stakeholders, since it is thanks to our stakeholders' contributions that the newsletter's content and quality have improved since its inception in April 2010.

It is our valued Maltese experts and stakeholders who enable us to reply to EMN Ad hoc queries and studies in a timely manner, and to publish various articles on our Newsletter. This collaboration intensified during the Covid years, when we were requested to gather and submit data at EU level on a weekly basis, and to provide information and data to support policy making. All our EMN outputs have kept us grounded in the emergent realities and fast-changing migration developments.

We have gone a long way in widening our network with University of Malta academics and students. We organised conferences with their collaboration, thereby offering a platform and space for debate on evolving migration issues. We further developed the EMN asylum and migration glossary in the Maltese language. The Commission's primary aim was to provide agreed common definitions and understanding of the migration terms used by professionals, researchers, and students. In 2014, we printed our first manual EMN glossary terms, complete with Maltese translated terms.

We also had the privilege to present a set of books to the University of Malta Library, while we donated books to students reading for the Translation and Interpretation course over a span of 5 years.

We enhanced the EMN website, in particular by way of inclusion of digital versions of our EMN newsletters, as well as by means of images and reports from events and studies submitted by the Maltese National Contact Point.

We actively participated in meetings, workshops, and conferences abroad, while we organised our yearly national conferences and capacity building events.

Over the years, we all witnessed and experienced how the migratory arena has become increasingly challenging and complex. While it remained loyal to its main objective, i.e. to give the EMN visibility, our newsletter also gave a voice to programmes and activities undertaken by NGOs, academic institutions, and various ministerial and government agencies.

Above all, we remained loyal to our soul-searching vocation to contribute to better-informed migration discourse and newsworthy articles.

THE MIGRANT LEARNERS' UNIT OUTREACH PROGRAMME

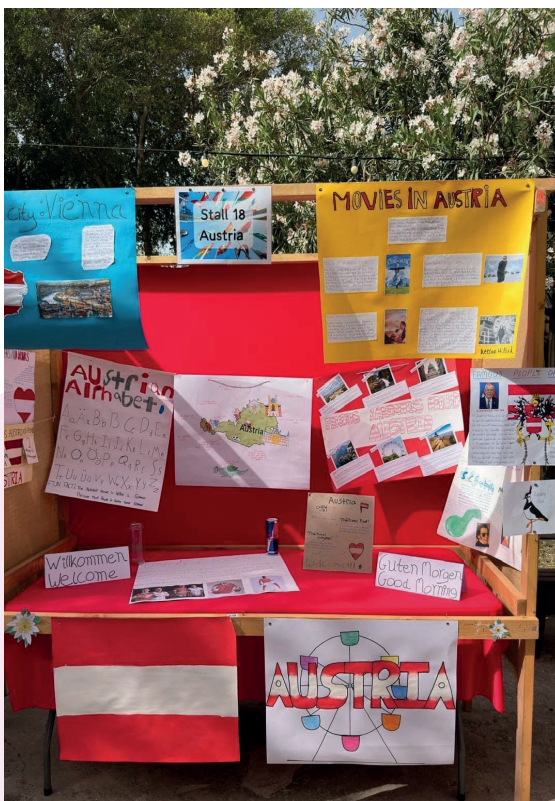
JANE FARRUGIA BUHAGIAR - EDUCATION OFFICER – MIGRANT LEARNERS' UNIT

Over the past months, the Migrant Learners' Unit has continued to strengthen the Community Liaison Team, which is an integral part of the outreach actions that the Unit holds. The team members hail from various national and ethnic backgrounds and they primarily aim to assist in establishing a link between parents, learners, and schools.

The Community Liaison Workers dedicate their time to supporting schools and families through face-to-face meetings in schools or learning centres, through online sessions, meetings, and through digital communication channels. They serve as a point of contact between the school and the learners' family and help to build a strong collaborative relationship within the school community.

On a day-to-day basis, each Community Liaison Worker assists schools, families and the MLU in tackling issues related to national or cultural differences, including by way of interpretation during school related meetings and the translation of school documents. Each officer facilitates communication between parents and school staff, and also encourages the participation of parents in the schooling of their child. Information dissemination initiatives are also implemented by the Unit, so that the beneficiaries may benefit better from the services offered.

An integral part of this team's work is the facilitation of cultural activities in collaboration with school staff and families. During the past months the Community Liaison Team has participated in various cultural activities organised by state schools in different colleges. These events aimed at raising awareness, recognising and celebrating the various cultures and heritage which each learner and family brings to the school community. Such events were recently held at:



- **St Clare College San Gwann Primary;**
- **San Gorg Preca College Marsa, Paola and Pieta Primary Schools;**
- **San Gorg Preca College Blata I-Bajda Middle School;**
- **St Theresa College Birkirkara Primary;**
- **St Thomas More College Zejtun Secondary School; and,**
- **The Gozo College and at the MLU Naxxar Induction Hub.**

Moreover, the Community Liaison Team also took part in the Public Service Expo 2024.

Currently the Community Liaison Team is made up of officers who can communicate in the following languages:

Albanian, Arabic, Armenian, Chinese, Russian, Serbian, Turkish, Ukrainian, and Urdu

The Migrant Learners' Unit and the Community Liaison Team can be reached by email on: m lu.meyr@gov.mt or by phone on 2598 1594/ 2712.

The Migrant Learners' Unit is part of the Department for Educational Services within the Ministry for Education, Sport, Youth, Research and Innovation.

<https://www.facebook.com/migrantlearnersunitmalta>
<https://migrantlearnersunit.gov.mt/en/Pages/About%20us/about-us.aspx>

ELLIE – AWAS THERAPY DOG

VERONICA VELLA AZZOPARDI - COMMUNITY RELATIONS COORDINATOR
MIGRANTS ADVICE UNIT (MAU), AGENCY FOR THE WELFARE OF ASYLUM SEEKERS



Ellie, a pure Golden Retriever nearing two years old, is now an integral part of the Agency for the Welfare of Asylum Seekers (AWAS.) Under the guidance of a professional dog trainer and behavioral expert, Ellie has become a beacon of energy and happiness wherever she goes, whether she visits the AWAS open centers or offices.

AWAS recognizes the numerous advantages that pet therapy can offer to individuals' physical and mental well-being. Engaging with animals has been shown to reduce stress, alleviate anxiety, and improve overall emotional health. With these benefits in mind, AWAS is committed to incorporating pet therapy into its programmes.

The advantages of having Ellie visit our open centers and offices are numerous, some of which are included below:

- ✓ Enhanced moods,
- ✓ Improved cognitive function,
- ✓ Better social interactions,
- ✓ Reduced agitation,
- ✓ Clarity of mind,
- ✓ Decreased levels of depression and anxiety,
- ✓ Alleviated loneliness and boredom,
- ✓ Increased energy levels.

Ellie visits all our open centres in which she offers numerous benefits to all our migrants including children, contributing to their emotional, psychological, and physical well-being. Overall, therapy dogs offer a unique and effective form of support, which include the following –

1. **Emotional Support:** Therapy dogs provide comfort and companionship, which can help reduce anxiety, stress, and feelings of loneliness. Their presence can be particularly beneficial for children experiencing trauma or undergoing medical treatment.
2. **Improving Social Skills:** Interacting with therapy dogs can enhance social interaction among children, especially those with social anxieties or disorders such as autism. Dogs can act as social catalysts, encouraging children to communicate and engage with others.
3. **Physical Health:** The presence of therapy dogs can motivate children to be more active. Activities such as walking and playing with the dog promote physical exercise and can improve overall health and coordination.
4. **Behavioural Benefits:** The responsibility of caring for a dog, even in small ways, can teach children about empathy, compassion, and responsibility. This can lead to improvements in behaviour and self-esteem.

Veronica Vella Azzopardi, the Community Relations Coordinator, explained that “By introducing Ellie, we’re not only providing therapeutic support but also helping the migrants who are in our centers to gradually get used to the European cultural norms, where dogs and cats are cherished members of our families. Nonetheless, migrants may become agitated around dogs for several reasons, due to past experiences, the traumas they encountered on their migration journey and often afraid because of rooted cultural differences. Understanding these factors can help in addressing the concerns of migrants and ensuring they feel safe and comfortable in new environments where dogs are present.”

Moreover, Ms Vella Azzopardi stated that,



“In the future, we plan to expand our efforts by adopting a variety of animals specifically for therapeutic purposes. We believe that integrating different types of animals into our therapy sessions will not only enhance the therapeutic outcomes but also bring joy and comfort to those we serve. AWAS is excited about the potential of this program and is dedicated to exploring all avenues to make it a successful and enriching experience for everyone involved.”

ON THE GROUND!

JUNE 2024 EMN CAPACITY BUILDING EVENT

EVERY INDIVIDUAL'S CONTRIBUTION IS IMPORTANT FOR MALTA'S MIGRATION AND ASYLUM SYSTEM TO FUNCTION EFFECTIVELY.
ANNA CATANIA - EMN OFFICER

This year's EMN capacity building event organised by the Maltese EMN National Contact Point was more than just an inspirational networking experience. It gave added value to the professional and personal growth of participants and organisers alike.

Dr Joseph St. John, a senior officer at the Ministry, delivered a presentation about Malta's irregular migration and international protection framework. The presentation aimed to give an overview of the migration and asylum processes falling under the remit of the Ministry.

Armed Forces of Malta officers Captain Mark Mercieca and Captain Rick Dimech delivered very informative presentations concerning the various safety protocols and procedures implemented during Maritime Search and Rescue operations, while Police Inspector Chris Abela, a senior official from the Immigration Police, delivered an interesting presentation on the various migration-related tasks relating to the Malta Police Force.

Mauro Farrugia, Chief Executive Officer at the International Protection Agency (IPA) spoke about challenging behaviour among migrants, and the need to understand it. His experience was evident in the insights he gave to all attendees, while he emphasised the impact of trauma on behaviour.

These sessions delivered information about Malta's migration and asylum frameworks, which place participants' role in the migration system in context.

The second session focused on the reception services and policies implemented by the Agency for the Welfare of Asylum Seekers (AWAS). The dedication and enthusiasm of the AWAS officers transpired in the course of their presentations. Clyde Bonnici, Dar il- Liedna Coordinator, gave a detailed description of the care given to unaccompanied minors at Dar il- Liedna. while Nikita Cassar, Unit Leader Services Unit, spoke about the intake of migrants as well as the services given to those residing in the community. She discussed the challenges posed by liaison with stakeholders working for different entities, who have different mission statements. Loraine Bartolo, Unit Leader UMAS Protection Services Unit, spoke about the disembarkation process when unaccompanied minors arrive in Malta, and how these minors are allocated at the centres according to age. This presentation was followed by Dr Ahmed Othman's very interesting intervention. The Othman, a Welfare Officer at AWAS, gave a detailed explanation of the Migrant Advice Unit (MAU) managed by AWAS – a service given to migrant adults.

A noteworthy development in AWAS centres is the recent introduction of Animal Therapy, which helps beneficiaries adapt to European cultural norms. Dr Othman said that Ellie, the therapeutic dog at AWAS, not only provides therapeutic support to centre residents, but also to AWAS staff.

The main objective of this year's event was to provide recruited officials from the Agency for the Welfare of Asylum Seeker (AWAS) with information about the various entities working with migrants and asylum seekers. The event was designed to help officers contextualising the role of AWAS and their specific role within the Maltese administrative framework.

