

Accessible, inclusive and enabling contexts for university students from refugee and migrant background

Carmel Cefai



L-Università ta' Malta
Centre for Resilience &
Socio-Emotional Health



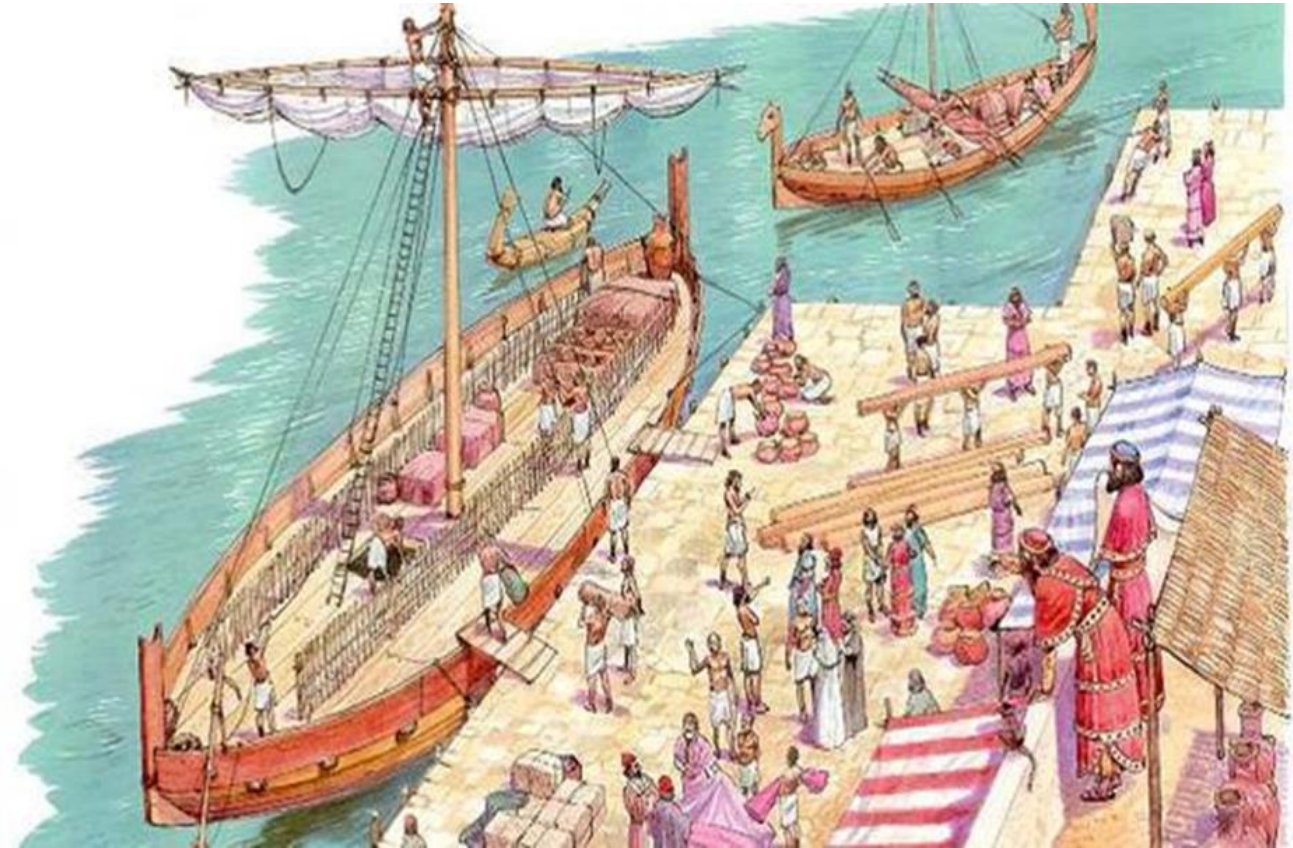
MALTA: an attractive and hospitable land since ancient times despite its scant resources



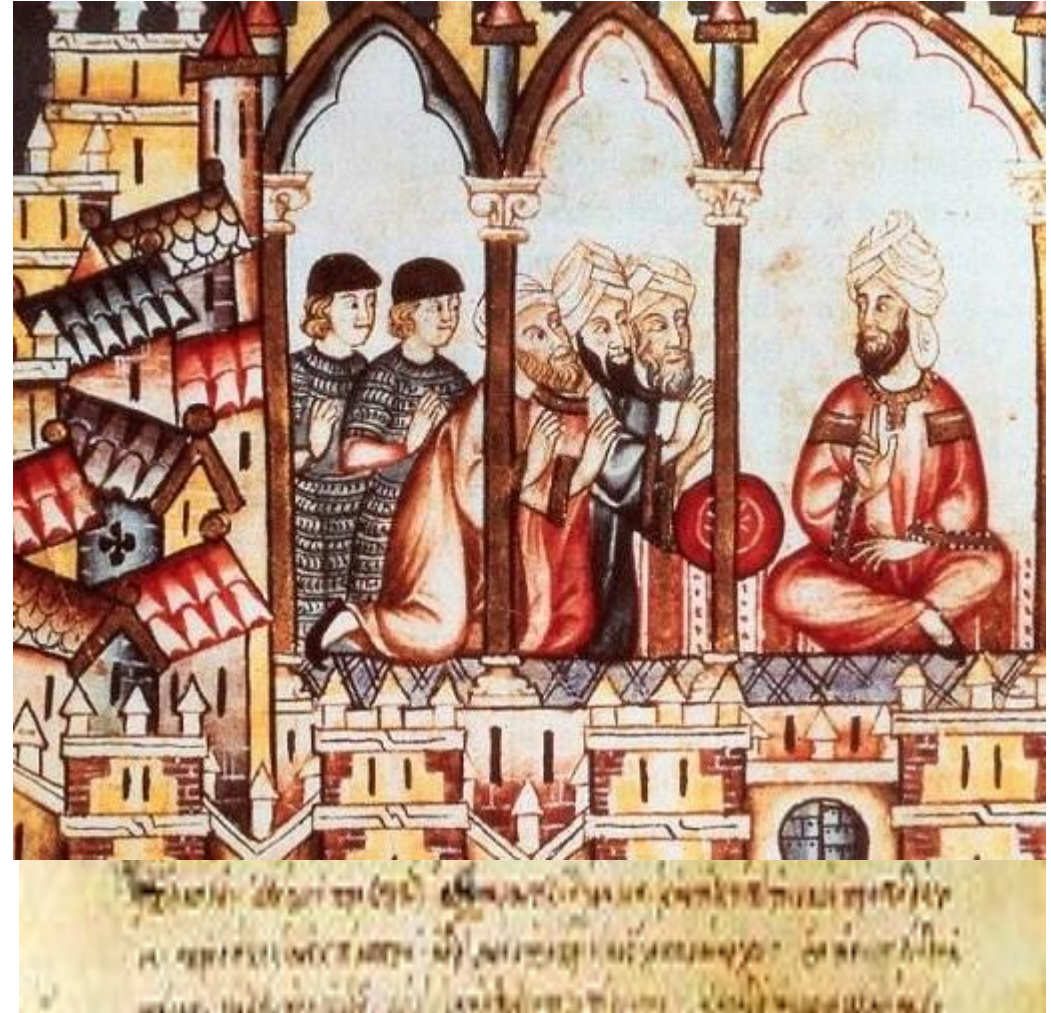
Malta hanina hobza u sardina



2000 years ago first visitors from Middle East



1000 years ago arrival of the Aghlabid Arabs



Followed by 1000 years of Europeans



Followed by tourists and expats...



Workers and asylum seekers

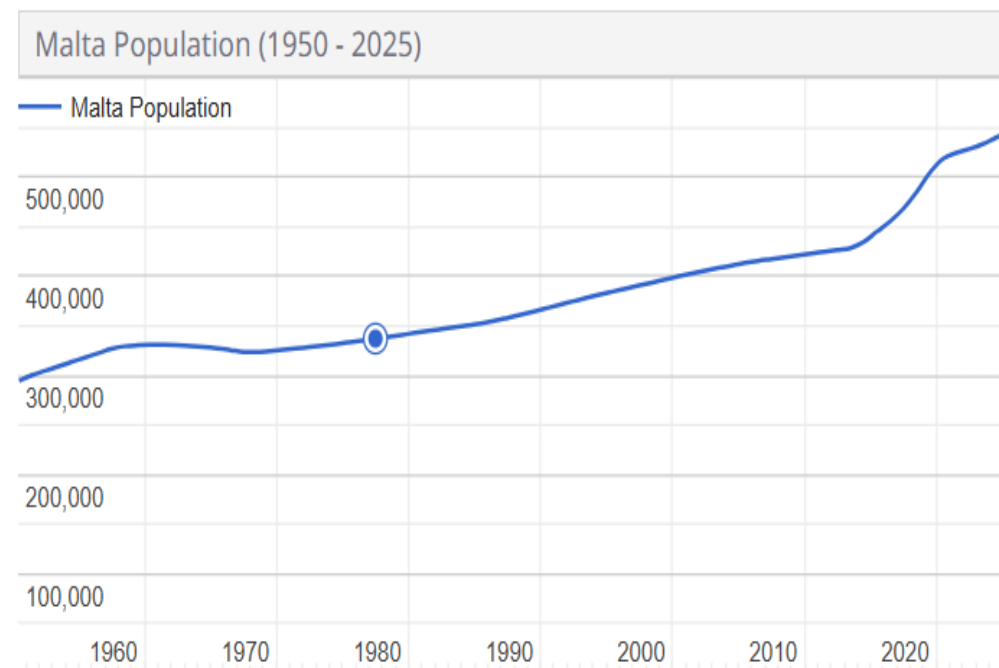


Significant increase in population growth in recent years

- Migration has become the main driver pushing up Malta's population figures in the last decades, rather than natural increase (declining births)
 - Recent survey (Oct 25): overpopulation top concern
- The number of migrants living in Malta more than doubled over last decade, representing about 30% of current total population: 7% EU; 24% TCN
 - **2024:**
 - Number of refugees and asylum seekers in Malta was around 9600 from Subsaharan and North Africa, Middle East and Ukraine, decrease since 2019
 - Malta received a total of 528 applications, including 444 first application

Malta Population (LIVE)

547,304



Children and young people from a migrant background

- Children and young people from a MB living in Malta make up 12% of school age population
- **Welfare of children and young people is one of the main issues of this movement of people**
 - linguistic and cultural barriers, lack of access to educational, psychological, social and medical services, difficulties in social inclusion.
 - **heightened risk for mental health problems such as post-traumatic stress, depression and anxiety (eg OECD, 2018; Cefai et al, 2019)**
 - 2 tiered reality: refugees and asylum seekers vs economic migrants (Cefai et al, 2019)



Challenges to follow and complete higher education: “*an underrepresented equity group*”

Accessibility Issues

- **interrupted education** and exposure to different educational systems, which may not recognise or complement each other
- **language issues** and requirements such as language skills to follow programme of studies and entry requirement for proficiency in the language/s of host country
- **inflexible entry requirements**, which do not always make allowance for prior learning experiences, and lost opportunities due to forced displacement
- **lack of resources**, particularly in families from low SES with no previous exposure to higher education and low aspirations

Challenges to follow and complete higher education: “*an underrepresented equity group*”

Difficulties in completing programme successfully, with higher rates of attrition:

- **lack of tailored academic and social services**, such as mentoring programmes, academic support and programme differentiation
- **financial** and accommodation issues
- **linguistic barriers**, lack of access to services and resources, acculturation issues, social exclusion and mental health issues

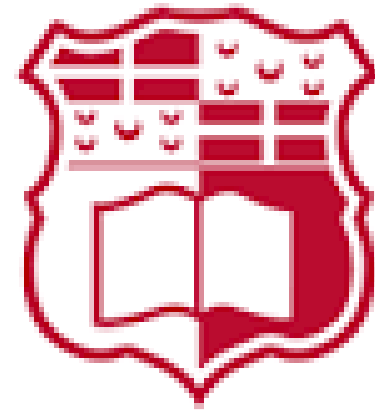
Tandem (2019)
study with
university
students from
migrant
background in
southern
Europe

Challenges mentioned by UM students:

- lack of concrete higher education measures in top-level policy documents
- relatively high tuition fees for those without official humanitarian protection
- restriction of some programmes to local and European students
- lack of adequate admission preparation to address academic skills mismatch or having to repeat programmes such as foundation years
- bureaucratic procedures such as visa and work permit

University of Malta (UM): Inclusion and Diversity

- *“The creation of an inclusive university for an inclusive society . . . to strengthen, develop and synergize the intersections of gender, race, ethnicity, disability and other spheres of diversity in Maltese society”* (UM Strategic Plan for 2020–2025)
- Over the past years, UM has taken various initiatives to facilitate access and support the participation of underrepresented, marginalised groups, and students with disability
 - recognition of prior non-formal learning.
 - waiving of registration fees for asylum seekers and refugees
 - setting up Committee on Race and Ethnic Affairs (CREA) to monitor and address issues related to race and ethnicity
 - opening of Equity Office (equality, inclusion and diversity)



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A policy to broaden access to HE amongst students from a migrant background



Developed by a working group composed of academic and administrative staff, students and external partners such as NGOs



Based on review of existing policies and good practices, consultations with various bodies and staff at the UM, and presentations by invited guests on issues like language requirements, recognition of prior learning, student accommodation, visa permit and stipend.




Feedback on draft policy provided by key entities and individuals in the area at the University of Malta

POLICY:

A. Attracting and recruiting students from a migrant background

A1. Outreach in schools and communities

- reaching out to potential students in schools, communities and migrant centres
 - **organising orientation visits on campus**
 - informing secondary and post-secondary students from MB about opportunities for them in HE in Malta
 - **information on the different and varied programmes offered, the multicultural nature of the UM, the policy on Recognition of Prior Learning, and the Flexible Entry Pathway recommended in the policy.**
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POLICY:

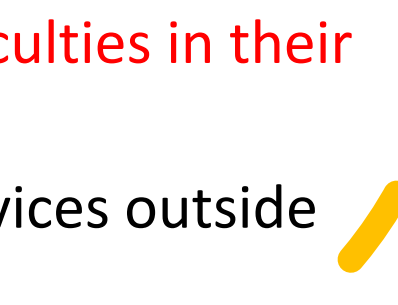
A. Attracting and recruiting students from a migrant background

A2. Flexible entry pathways


- flexible entry pathways to allow for a broader intake of students from MB, including lower qualifications and flexibility in language requirements
- extension of RPL policy to students 18–22 years, whilst ensuring necessary supports to cope with studies
- exemption from application and course tuition fees for all applicants from a refugee background
- preparatory admission courses, which include academic writing and English language courses
- classes in the Maltese language, to help give cultural and academic confidence to students
- procedures to facilitate timely evaluation and recognition of qualifications from different countries
- new programmes which may be particularly attractive for students from MB, in terms of both course content and structure (e.g. programmes tapping on multiple intelligences)

POLICY:
B. Improved support systems to enhance the learning experience of students from a MB

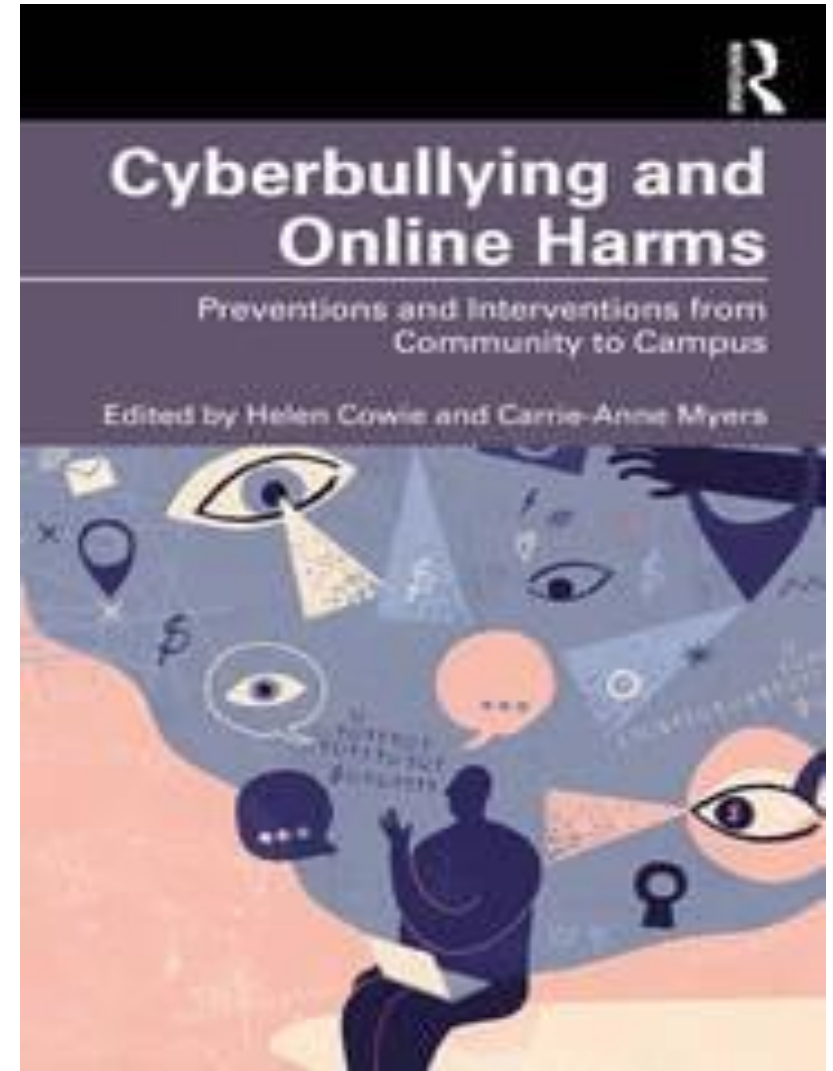
A one-stop shop responsible for the coordination of services and support systems for students with a MB

- support with application, registration, visa, financial issues and accommodation;
 - access to technological equipment and online communication
 - guide on the various types of support students can obtain during their course of studies
 - liaison with admin and academic staff about matters related to access and inclusion
 - support to students experiencing difficulties in their studies to prevent drop out
 - reference list of services including services outside university.
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Policy:
B. Improved
support systems
to enhance the
learning
experience of
students from a
MB

- academic and psychosocial support and mentoring
 - strengthening UM's international and intercultural ethos, emphasising the benefits of diversity
 - safe spaces against bullying, harassment, and discrimination
 - stipend for all groups of refugees (including asylum seekers and temporary humanitarian protection)
 - inter-faith centre, extended library hours and childcare facilities
 - more active and influential involvement by students from a MB
 - staff training in diversity and inclusion
 - support in the transition to the world of work
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- Cefai, C. (2023) Accessible, inclusive and enabling contexts for university students from a refugee and migrant background. In H. Cowie and C. Myers (editors) *Cyberbullying and Online Harms :Preventions and Interventions from Community to Campus*. Routledge



THANKS!