

## Social Diversification in Malta

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### Abstract

The population in Malta has grown substantially in the past decade, mainly due to an increase in non-Maltese residents. Such rapid growth of migrant populations increases demands for public service provisions, including education. Further to the increased need for additional capacity and administrative demands faced by schools, educational practice needs to adapt to the new requirements for teaching and learning in the increasingly diverse educational environment. Yet, despite the increasing diversification of the Maltese general and student population, analyses of the composition and diversification of Maltese society and education are limited. The paper provides some new evidence about the changing structure of Maltese society to fill the gap by drawing on data from the 2011 and 2021 census of the Maltese population.

### Keywords

Malta, demographic change, diversification, migration

### Introduction

Increasing migration is a global trend with an incremental growth in the share of migrants in the past decade from 3.2% to 3.6% (McAuliffe & Triandafyllidou, 2021, p. 23). However, regional differences are evident, with Europe and Asia catering for the largest share of the international migrant population with 30.9% and 30.5%, respectively (McAuliffe & Triandafyllidou, 2021, p. 24). Moreover, differences in migration flows are also evident at regional level, with Switzerland (29%), Sweden (20%), Austria (19%), and Germany (19%) having the largest shares of migrants among their populations within Europe (McAuliffe & Triandafyllidou, 2021, p. 89).

The World Migration Report 2022 identifies the United States of America,

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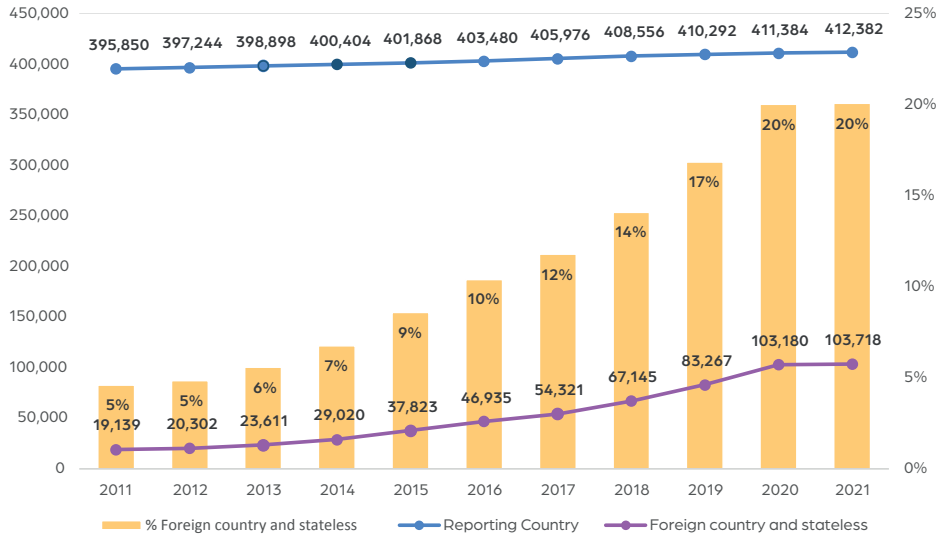
Germany, Saudi Arabia, the Russian Federation, and the United Kingdom as the key destination countries of international migration, while the main countries of origin are India, Mexico, the Russian Federation, China, and the Syrian Arab Republic (McAuliffe & Triandafyllidou, 2021, p. 25). It also indicates a trend towards more male migrants predominantly and increasingly of working age, while the share of younger migrants up to the age of 19 is decreasing (McAuliffe & Triandafyllidou, 2021, p. 25). However, it also stresses that international migration is a complex phenomenon influenced by economic, geographic, and demographic factors, amongst others, which influence the development of so-called migration “corridors” such as those witnessed between the United States of America and Mexico, or Turkey and the Syrian Arab Republic (McAuliffe & Triandafyllidou, 2021, p. 2). Moreover, various push and pull factors appear to have contributed to increasing international migration, such as economic opportunities, violent unrests or natural disasters, with the latter having had an increasing impact on migration patterns in recent years both internationally and within the European region (McAuliffe & Triandafyllidou, 2021).

Given the small size of Malta and the lower absolute figures of its population, including migrant residents, Malta, like other small states, tends to be overlooked in international comparative research on migration (Baldacchino, 2018; Grech, 2017). However, due to immigration regulations in the European Union, small island states like Malta and Cyprus that are located at its periphery have become not only “migration gatekeepers” experiencing a “disproportionate burden” (Mainwaring, 2014, p. 118) in terms of immigration, but have also been viewed as weak in dealing with this development due to their limited capacity (DeBattista, 2016). Yet, some research argues (Vella & Mintoff, 2024) that the ‘burden’ or ‘crisis’ discourse is constructed purposefully to keep unwanted migration, particularly illegal immigrants, out of the country while seeking to attract skilled labour to fill skills shortages or wealthy foreigners through the Malta Citizenship by Investment and Permanent Residence Programme.

As a result of these recent immigration patterns Malta’s population has grown substantially in the past decade by about a quarter (see Figure 1), from around 415,000 in 2011 to about 516,000 inhabitants in 2021 (EUROSTAT, 2023). While non-Maltese residents made up about 5% of the total population in 2011, they accounted for 20% of the total population in 2021. Thus, the share of Malta’s migrant population is comparable to other European countries with above-average shares of migrant residents, indicating that it deserves further attention on the specificities of its migrant population.

**Figure 1**

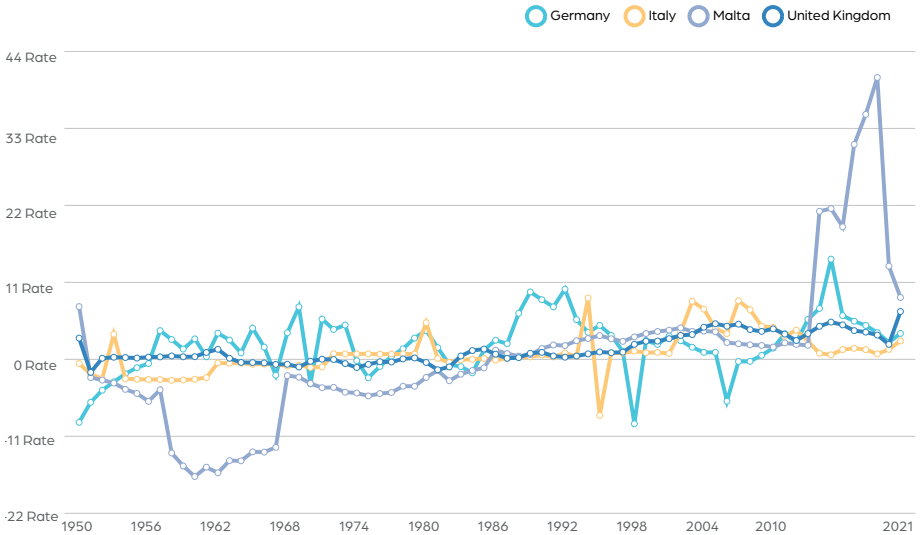
*Population of Malta on 1st January between 2011 and 2021 by broad group of citizenship*



Source: EUROSTAT, migr\_pop2ctz

**Figure 2**

*Estimated Net Migration Rate in 1950–2021 – Comparison between Malta, Italy, Germany and the United Kingdom*



Source: UN DESA, 2024, Latest data upload on 12 July 2024 ([https://www.migrationdataportal.org/dashboard/compare-geographic?c=470\\_276\\_826\\_380&i=9731&r=&s=&t=1950\\_2021](https://www.migrationdataportal.org/dashboard/compare-geographic?c=470_276_826_380&i=9731&r=&s=&t=1950_2021))

Historically, Malta was a country of strong labour emigration between the late 1940s and 1980 due to a projected limited economic potential (Grech, 2017; see Figure 2). However, subsequent economic expansion led to a reversal of this trend with a return of Maltese emigrants and an increase in immigration, particularly those of retirement age (Grech, 2017; Calzada et al., 2023). Moreover, colonial, political, and sociocultural ties (Fenech & Seguna, 2020); EU accession (Mainwaring, 2014); immigration and citizenship regulations (Vella & Mintoff, 2024), and an increased labour demand as a result of economic growth have served as particular pull factors for immigration to Malta (Fenech & Seguna, 2020; Grech, 2017; Vella & Mintoff, 2024). Considering the population size of Malta, this has led to a considerable diversification of the Maltese population with net migration rates well above those of Germany, Italy, or the United Kingdom (UN DESA, 2024; see Figure 2). This substantial and rapid increase in diversification of the Maltese population deserves further attention since

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it has impacted public perception (Kalweit & Grech, 2023; Mayo et al., 2022) and public service provision, including education (Camilleri Grima & Mantellato, 2022).

Negative public perceptions of migration and migrants is evident in public discourse, with news reports of hate speech, racism, and racially motivated crimes having increased in Malta in recent years (Arena, 2019; AP, 2019; Azzopardi, 2021; Borg, 2019; Carabott, 2020; Debono, 2020; Diacono, 2019; Hudson, 2020; Times of Malta, 2020; Vella, 2020). This has even led the Prime Minister to announce the combatting of hate speech as one of the country's priorities for 2022 (Times of Malta, 2021). Moreover, these negative sentiments against migrants do not stop at the school gates, with Bezzina and Vassallo (2019) reporting the struggle of school leaders with intolerant attitudes of parents and the wider community, which is hindering their work in integrating migrant learners. This is supported by Fsadni and Pisani (2012) and Sammut et al. (2017), who raise concerns about parents of migrant learners feeling discriminated against and their family values and traditions not always respected, especially within community and social services. Moreover, a study by Cefai et al. (2019) on the attitudes of school students towards migrant children in Malta confirms that this public perception also impacts school children's attitudes, with negative sentiments increasing as children grow older.

The increase in Malta's resident population has also increased demands on the education system, particularly in terms of additional capacity and the need for educational practice to adapt teaching and learning to cater for increasingly diverse educational environments. Particularly in terms of capacity, Sultana (1997) argued that Malta's education system has been characterized by a delayed development and expansion, with primary education having been made compulsory only in 1946 and secondary education in 1970. Much of this delayed expansion, he suggests, may be explained by Malta's colonial status as well as the British administration's and the Church's interests to maintain power and control over the resident population (Sultana, 1997). However, he claims that since 1970, Malta's educational expansion has been considerable and compares well with similar colonial and island nations (Sultana, 1997). He also reminds that part of this expansion is due to private education provision by church and independent schools alongside public provision through state schools (Sultana, 1997). While private educational provision by church and independent schools accounted for a little less than one third of compulsory school students in the 1990s (Sultana, 1997), in 2022 they accounted for over

40%, with 27.4% in church schools and 13.7% in independent schools (NSO, 2022).

This expansion and diversification in Malta's education sector is important for two reasons, namely regarding the differences that may be observed between the different school sectors in terms of educational achievement and regarding the specific educational enrolment patterns, particularly in terms of socio-economic background of students (Sultana, 2022). Indeed, international tests like PISA indicate lower academic achievement among state school students compared to students of church or independent schools, while the share of migrant students is highest among state schools and lowest among church schools (Sultana, 2022). This "achievement gap" (Sultana, 2022) requires reflections and action in terms of effective and inclusive educational practices not least in view of the increasing number of non-Maltese residents absorbed predominantly by the state school sector. Such action involves identifying effective ways of adopting multicultural education that includes all children in the classroom (Camilleri Grima & Mantellato, 2022) and strengthening the resilience of those most vulnerable (Cefai et al., 2015). To achieve that, educators need to be familiar with and sensitive to the background of their students as well as empowered to teach in multicultural classrooms. While a good share already indicates that they feel confident in doing so, 34.9% of teachers do not feel sufficiently confident to cope with the challenges of a multicultural classroom, and 38.3% are not sufficiently confident to adapt their teaching to the cultural diversity of their students (TALIS 2018. Malta Report, n.d., p. 75).

However, studies providing an overview of the changing demographic in Malta and its impact on education are limited. Recent studies on the diversification of Maltese society and education focus on the impact of immigration on economic growth (Grech, 2017) or the cost of housing (Micallef et al., 2022); the particularities of small states and civil society organisations to cater for increasing migration (Kalweit & Grech, 2023); reflections on the need for a critical pedagogy and a critical Southern European sociology of education (Mayo et al., 2022); comparative analyses of adult education for migrant learners (Brown, 2021; Brown et al., 2021); or studies of the experience of particular migrant communities, such as the Italian (Caruana & Pace, 2021) or Libyan communities in Malta (Gandolfo, 2022). It is for this reason that this paper focuses on providing an overview of the social diversification of Maltese society in the past decade to fill this research gap.

## Methodology

The analysis of the social diversification of Maltese society in the past decade is based on data collected through the census carried out in Malta in 2011 (NSO, 2014) and 2021 (NSO, 2023). It is based on aggregated data made available in the reports, which precludes fine-grain analysis by age, gender, nationality, time of arrival in Malta, or locality of residence. Such data would have provided deeper insights into the specific situation of the compulsory school-age population and any geographical differences within the country, which may result in a differential impact between state colleges (i.e., state schools in compulsory education located in different regions of the country). Consequently, further research using microdata obtained by the National Statistics Office is recommended to provide a more in-depth analysis on this subject. Yet, the objective of the present research was to obtain a general understanding of the change in the demographic profile of the Maltese resident population in the past decade by comparing the data from both datasets.

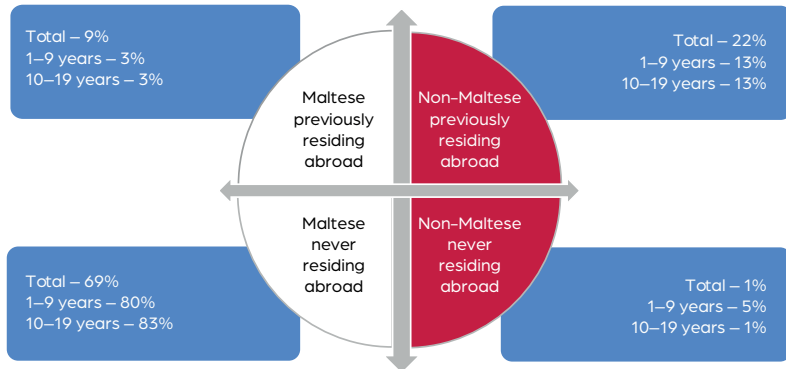
## Results

### *Profile of the Resident Population*

Migration experiences are generally associated with individuals holding a nationality that is different from the one of the host country. Yet, in 2021, about 22% of the resident population in Malta did not hold Maltese citizenship, while 31% of the population reported to have previously resided abroad (see Figure 3). This suggests that a considerable share of Maltese citizens has some form of migration experience, namely 9% of the total population (NSO, 2023, p. 141). It is also noteworthy that there is a non-negligible share of non-Maltese residents which has been born in Malta, namely 1% of the total population, and that the share is higher among the population of compulsory school age, with 5% of the 0–9-year-olds and 1% of the 10–19-year-olds in Malta not holding Maltese citizenship and never having resided abroad (NSO, 2023, p. 141; see Figure 3).

**Figure 3**

*Population by Type of Citizenship and Residence Abroad, 2021*



Source: National Statistics Office Malta, released 16/02/2023, *Publication, Census of Population and Housing 2021: Final Report: Population, migration and other social characteristics (Volume 1)*, p. 141. (Adapted by author)

That means nationality and migration experience cannot be conflated. Research as well as educators need to reflect on and cater differently to the needs of children from different cultural backgrounds and with different migration experiences, as also highlighted by Cefai et al. (2015). The above statistics also show that a share of non-Maltese residents may have established families in Malta and that their share appears to be increasing considering the higher share of non-Maltese residents never having resided abroad in the 0–9 compared to the 10–19-year-old cohorts.

### **Country of Citizenship**

In 2011 nearly two thirds of non-Maltese residents held a citizenship from an EU member state (60%) or another European country (7%), while another 8% were citizens of an African or Middle Eastern country (NSO, 2014, p. 116). Overall, the five most populous nationalities of non-Maltese residents were British (33%), Somali (5%), Italian (5%), Bulgarian (4%), and German (4%), and they constituted half of all non-Maltese residents in 2011 (NSO, 2014, p. 116). In comparison, in 2021 the share of non-Maltese residents from EU member states (35%) or other European countries (24%) had declined to make up less than 60% of all non-Maltese residents, and nationals of Asian origin (16%) by far outnumbered nationals of African or Middle Eastern origin (5%) (NSO, 2023, p. 124). Moreover, the five most populous nationalities of non-Maltese residents were Italian (12%), British (9%), Indian (7%), Filipino (7%) and Serbian (5%), and they constituted 39% of all non-Maltese residents in 2021 (NSO, 2023, p. 124).



**Table 1**  
*Non-Maltese Population by Main Citizenship, 2011 and 2021*

| <b>Citizenship</b>       | <b>2011</b> | <b>2021</b> |
|--------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| EU Member States         | 60%         | 35%         |
| Other European Countries | 7%          | 24%         |
| Africa / Middle East     | 8%          | 5%          |
| Asia                     | n.d.        | 16%         |
| Other countries          | 25%         | 21%         |

*Source: National Statistics Office Malta, released 21/01/2014, Publication, Census of Population and Housing 2011: Final Report, p. 116; National Statistics Office Malta, released 16/02/2023, Publication, Census of Population and Housing 2021: Final Report: Population, migration and other social characteristics (Volume 1), p. 124. (Adapted by author)*

It is evident that the share of British migrants in Malta has declined considerably between 2011 and 2021. Moreover, it is notable that the percentage of migrants to Malta from other European Union member states has increased from 27% in 2011 (excluding nationals of the United Kingdom) to 35% in 2021, and this appears to be mainly due to immigration from Italy. Thirdly, immigration from Asia has increased considerably since 2011, particularly from India (7%) and the Philippines (7%), while immigration from Africa and the Middle East has relatively decreased. This suggests a further increase in cultural and religious diversity in Malta in the past decade. Moreover, it appears that, apart from an overall substantial increase in the non-Maltese resident population from 5% to 20% between 2011 and 2021, the non-Maltese resident population has diversified over the same period. Indeed, the share of the five most populous nationalities among non-Maltese residents decreased from 50% to 39% between 2011 and 2021, which may be attributed to the relative decrease in the share of British citizens among the non-Maltese resident population. This may be due to the declining colonial influence in Malta (Sultana, 1997) as well as the impact of Brexit in 2020, resulting in changes in immigration and employment regulations for British nationals or economic ties between Malta and the United Kingdom. Thus, the historically strong ties between the United Kingdom and Malta, or migration "corridor", as termed by McAuliffe and Triandafyllidou (2021), appear to have diminished and been replaced by increased diversification.

## **Gender**

Analysing the gender distribution in the total population data from the census carried out in 2011 shows that the distribution was gender-balanced, with 50% being male and 50% female. In comparison, non-Maltese residents had a slightly higher share of males (52%) than females (48%) (NSO, 2014, p. 111). This gender imbalance among the non-Maltese resident population has increased, with data from the census carried out in 2021 showing that 59% of non-Maltese residents were male compared to 41% female, while the gender profile of the Maltese resident population remained gender-balanced (NSO, 2023, p. 116). Stronger male domination in migration aligns with international findings (McAuliffe & Triandafyllidou, 2021). However, while 52% of international migrants are male (McAuliffe & Triandafyllidou, 2021, p. 3), it is evident that migration to Malta is considerably more male-dominated.

Significant differences are also evident when analysing the gender profile of different nationalities. Based on data from the census carried out in 2011 (see Table 2), non-Maltese residents holding Russian, German, Bulgarian or British citizenship were predominantly female, while Somali, Italian, Eritrean, Serbian or Swedish nationals residing in Malta were mainly male. Data from the census carried out in 2021 (see Table 3) shows a similar pattern, with non-Maltese residents of Bulgarian, British or Filipino citizenship having higher shares of females compared to Italian, Albanian, Indian, Syrian, Libyan or Nepalese nationals, who were predominantly male. Overall, there appear to be particular gender patterns in the immigration from different countries and regions, with nationals from EU member states or other European countries outside the EU being more gender-balanced, while immigration from Asia, Africa and the Middle East seems to be mainly male-dominated

**Table 2**  
*Population by Type of Citizenship and Gender, 2011*

| <b>Citizenship and sex</b>            | <b>Males</b> | <b>Females</b> |
|---------------------------------------|--------------|----------------|
| British                               | 48%          | 52%            |
| Somali                                | 75%          | 25%            |
| Italian                               | 72%          | 28%            |
| Bulgarian                             | 47%          | 53%            |
| German                                | 46%          | 54%            |
| Russian                               | 24%          | 76%            |
| Eritrean                              | 69%          | 31%            |
| Serbian                               | 59%          | 41%            |
| Swedish                               | 56%          | 44%            |
| Other EU Member States                | 46%          | 54%            |
| Other European Countries              | 46%          | 54%            |
| Other Citizenship                     | 57%          | 43%            |
| <b>Total of non-Maltese residents</b> | <b>52%</b>   | <b>48%</b>     |

*Source: National Statistics Office Malta, released 21/01/2014, Publication, Census of Population and Housing 2011: Final Report, p. 116. (Adapted by author)*

**Table 3**  
*Population by Type of Citizenship and Gender, 2021*

| Citizenship and sex                   | Males      | Females    |
|---------------------------------------|------------|------------|
| Italian                               | 63%        | 37%        |
| British                               | 56%        | 44%        |
| Indian                                | 70%        | 30%        |
| Filipino                              | 40%        | 60%        |
| Serbian                               | 58%        | 42%        |
| Bulgarian                             | 51%        | 49%        |
| Libyan                                | 66%        | 34%        |
| Nepalese                              | 64%        | 36%        |
| Albanian                              | 81%        | 19%        |
| Syrian                                | 66%        | 34%        |
| Other EU Member States                | 52%        | 48%        |
| Other European Countries              | 55%        | 45%        |
| Other Citizenship                     | 67%        | 33%        |
| Stateless                             | 61%        | 39%        |
| <b>Total of non-Maltese residents</b> | <b>59%</b> | <b>41%</b> |

Source: National Statistics Office Malta, released 16/02/2023, *Publication, Census of Population and Housing 2021: Final Report: Population, migration and other social characteristics (Volume 1)*, p. 124. (Adapted by author)

### **Age Profile**

Since research suggests that migrants tend to be more often of working age (McAuliffe & Triandafyllidou, 2021), this paper also investigated any changes in Maltese society in this regard. No considerable differences were evident in the average age of Maltese and non-Maltese residents in 2011, with 40.5 years and 40.6 years respectively (NSO, 2014, p. 115). However, when comparing the average age of Maltese and non-Maltese residents residing in Malta and Gozo considerable differences were evident. While in Malta non-Maltese residents (39.6 years) were slightly younger than Maltese residents (40.4 years), in Gozo the opposite was evident, with non-Maltese residents being considerably older (53.9 years) than Maltese residents (41.2 years; NSO, 2014, p. 115). When comparing this to data from the census carried out in 2021, it is evident that the average age of non-National residents in Malta has decreased considerably (34.9 years), while that of Maltese nationals has increased (43.6 years). This

is in line with international migration trends, which indicate that the share of international migrants of working age is increasing (McAuliffe & Triandafyllidou, 2021), which may be in response to an aging population in the receiving countries. Moreover, while the age difference of non-Maltese residents in Malta (34.4 years) and Gozo (42.1 years) is still notable for non-Maltese residents in Gozo being considerably older compared to those residing in Malta, the age difference between non-Maltese and Maltese residents in Gozo diminished (42.1 years and 44.2 years respectively; NSO, 2023, p. 120).

When analysing the age profile of different nationalities residing in Malta in 2011, significant differences were evident, with a Pearson chi-square p-value of 0.000 (see Table 4). Out of all non-Maltese nationals residing in Malta, approximately 12% are up to 19 years old, while about 20% are 60 years or older. However, Eritrean, Russian, and Serbian nationals are significantly younger than other non-Maltese, while British and Swedish nationals are significantly older than other non-Maltese residents. This is in line with the research by Calzada et al. (2023) and likely linked to residence regulations and the portability of pension benefits within the European Union. Statistically significant differences in the age profile of different nationalities residing in Malta are also evident based on census data from 2021, with a Pearson chi-square p-value of 0.000 (see Table 5). While about 13% of all non-Maltese nationals residing in Malta are up to 19 years old, 7% are aged 60 years or over. Syrian, Libyan, Serbian and Bulgarian nationals are significantly younger than other non-Maltese nationals residing in Malta, with 42%, 32%, 15% and 15% respectively being up to 19 years old. In comparison, British nationals residing in Malta continue to be significantly older than non-Maltese residents of other nationalities, with well over one third of British nationals residing in Malta (35%) being 60 years or older.

Overall, the findings indicate that the share of non-Maltese residents aged up to 19 years old has increased slightly from 12% to 13%, while the share of non-Maltese residents aged 60 years or older has decreased considerably from 20% to 7% between 2011 and 2021. This may be due to the decrease in the share of British nationals among the resident population, given that these are significantly older than non-Maltese residents of other nationalities. At the same time, the opposite trend is evident among Maltese residents, with a slight decrease (from 22% to 19%) in the share of up to 19 years old between 2011 and 2021, and an increase (from 24% to 30%) in the share of individuals aged 60 and older. Thus, while the share of the working age population among non-Maltese residents has increased from 68% to 80% between 2011 and 2021, it decreased

among the Maltese resident population from 55% to 51% over the same period. This is in line with international research (McAuliffe & Triandafyllidou, 2021), suggesting that international migrants are predominantly and increasingly of working age. However, while in international comparison the share of younger migrants up to the age of 19 is decreasing (McAuliffe & Triandafyllidou, 2021, p. 25), it has remained relatively stable in Malta.

**Table 4***Population by Type of Citizenship and Age Group, 2011*

| Citizenship and age group             | up to 19 years old | 60+ years old |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------|---------------|
| British                               | 8%                 | 46%           |
| Somali                                | 15%                | 1%            |
| Italian                               | 10%                | 15%           |
| Bulgarian                             | 14%                | 2%            |
| German                                | 12%                | 19%           |
| Russian                               | 19%                | 2%            |
| Eritrean                              | 21%                | 0%            |
| Serbian                               | 18%                | 4%            |
| Swedish                               | 14%                | 24%           |
| Other EU Member States                | 11%                | 13%           |
| Other European Countries              | 14%                | 5%            |
| Other Citizenship                     | 13%                | 5%            |
| <b>Total of non-Maltese residents</b> | <b>12%</b>         | <b>20%</b>    |

Source: National Statistics Office Malta, released 21/01/2014, *Publication, Census of Population and Housing 2011: Final Report*, p. 116. (Adapted by author)

**Table 5**  
*Population by Type of Citizenship and Age Group, 2021*

| Citizenship and age group             | up to 19 years old | 60+ years old |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------|---------------|
| Italian                               | 11%                | 6%            |
| British                               | 9%                 | 35%           |
| Indian                                | 6%                 | 0%            |
| Filipino                              | 6%                 | 1%            |
| Serbian                               | 15%                | 2%            |
| Bulgarian                             | 15%                | 7%            |
| Libyan                                | 32%                | 4%            |
| Nepalese                              | 1%                 | 0%            |
| Albanian                              | 7%                 | 1%            |
| Syrian                                | 42%                | 1%            |
| Other EU Member States                | 11%                | 7%            |
| Other European Countries              | 15%                | 5%            |
| Other Citizenship                     | 14%                | 3%            |
| Stateless                             | 55%                | 1%            |
| <b>Total of non-Maltese residents</b> | <b>13%</b>         | <b>7%</b>     |

Source: National Statistics Office Malta, released 16/02/2023, Publication, *Census of Population and Housing 2021: Final Report: Population, migration and other social characteristics (Volume 1)*, p. 124. (Adapted by author)

### **School-Age Population**

Data on the school age population consolidate the picture of the differences in age profile of non-Maltese residents. Overall, non-Maltese residents mainly originate from EU member states (35%), other European countries (24%), Asia (16%) or Africa or the Middle East (5%) (NSO, 2023, p. 124). However, the main nationalities of non-Maltese students in compulsory education are Italian, British, Syrian, Serbian and Libyan (see Table 6). This confirms that residents of Asian origin are more often of working age, rather than compulsory school age and that specific analysis of the diversity of the school-age population is needed to better understand the diversification in the education sector compared to society at large. At the same time, Table 6 shows considerable fluctuations in the number of students of each nationality enrolled each year, with considerable decreases in the number of British and Libyan students and considerable increases in the number of Chinese students, suggesting notable challenges for educators to accommodate the continuous diversification of the school population.

**Table 6**  
*Number of Students<sup>1</sup> Enrolled by Academic Year and Citizenship*

| Citizenship        | Academic year |               | Change              | Percentage change |
|--------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------------|-------------------|
|                    | 2020–2021     | 2021–2022     | 2021–2022/2020–2021 |                   |
| <b>Maltese</b>     | <b>49,954</b> | <b>50,023</b> | <b>69</b>           | <b>0.1</b>        |
| <b>Other EU</b>    | <b>3,257</b>  | <b>3,342</b>  | <b>85</b>           | <b>2.6</b>        |
| <i>of which:</i>   |               |               |                     |                   |
| Italian            | 1,121         | 1,123         | 2                   | 0.2               |
| Bulgarian          | 378           | 345           | -33                 | -8.7              |
| Romanian           | 225           | 233           | 8                   | 3.6               |
| Hungarian          | 165           | 176           | 11                  | 6.7               |
| French             | 164           | 176           | 12                  | 7.3               |
| <b>Non-EU</b>      | <b>4,833</b>  | <b>5,010</b>  | <b>177</b>          | <b>3.7</b>        |
| <i>of which:</i>   |               |               |                     |                   |
| British            | 785           | 670           | -115                | -14.6             |
| Syrian             | 517           | 604           | 87                  | 16.8              |
| Serbian            | 533           | 527           | -6                  | -1.1              |
| Libyan             | 590           | 499           | -91                 | -15.4             |
| Chinese            | 185           | 254           | 69                  | 37.3              |
| <b>Unspecified</b> | <b>3</b>      | <b>2</b>      | <b>-1</b>           | <b>-33.3</b>      |
| <b>Total</b>       | <b>58,047</b> | <b>58,377</b> | <b>330</b>          | <b>0.6</b>        |

<sup>1</sup> Includes students attending pre–primary (excluding childcare), primary and secondary education only. Source: National Statistics Office Malta, released 25/10/2023, NR187/2023: Pre–Primary, Primary and Secondary Formal Education: 2021–2022. (Adapted by author)

### **Religious Affiliation**

This increased diversification has also contributed to cultural and religious diversity (see Table 7). Of the population aged 15 and over, 83% reported to be Roman Catholic, 4% affiliated to Islam, 4% were Orthodox Christian, 2% of other Christian denominations, 1% Hindu and 1% Buddhist. Moreover, 5% indicated not to have any religious affiliation. However, migrants of different nationalities appear affiliated to different religions. Bearing in mind the specific age profile of different nationalities and the main nationalities of non–Maltese students in compulsory education, with higher shares of Libyan and Syrian as well as Serbian and Bulgarian nationals being of compulsory school age (see Tables 4 and 5), this religious diversity is also likely to be increasingly making itself felt in compulsory schools, with a stronger presence of students from Muslim or Orthodox Christian families.



**Table 6**  
*Number of Students Enrolled by Academic Year and Citizenship*

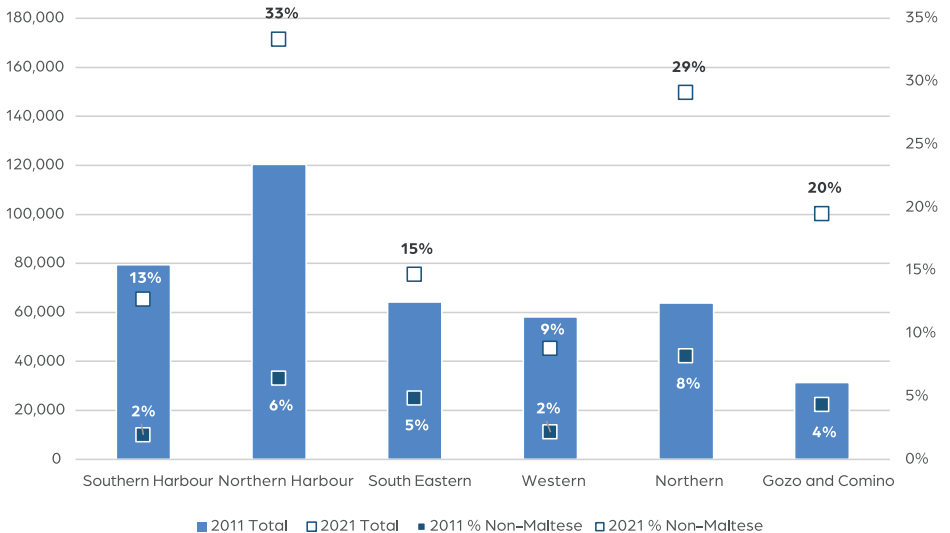
| Citizenship and religion | Roman Catholicism | Islam | Orthodoxy | Hinduism | Church of England | Protestantism | Buddhism | Judaism | Other religious groups | No religious affiliation |
|--------------------------|-------------------|-------|-----------|----------|-------------------|---------------|----------|---------|------------------------|--------------------------|
| Maltese                  | 96%               | 1%    | 0%        | 0%       | 0%                | 0%            | 0%       | 0%      | 0%                     | 2%                       |
| Italian                  | 80%               | 1%    | 1%        | 0%       | 0%                | 1%            | 0%       | 0%      | 1%                     | 15%                      |
| British                  | 22%               | 2%    | 1%        | 1%       | 42%               | 5%            | 0%       | 1%      | 1%                     | 25%                      |
| Indian                   | 34%               | 4%    | 3%        | 50%      | 0%                | 3%            | 0%       | 0%      | 3%                     | 2%                       |
| Filipino                 | 93%               | 1%    | 0%        | 0%       | 0%                | 3%            | 0%       | 0%      | 0%                     | 2%                       |
| Serbian                  | 4%                | 1%    | 87%       | 0%       | 0%                | 0%            | 0%       | 0%      | 0%                     | 7%                       |
| Bulgarian                | 12%               | 3%    | 72%       | 0%       | 0%                | 1%            | 0%       | 0%      | 0%                     | 11%                      |
| Libyan                   | 6%                | 91%   | 0%        | 0%       | 0%                | 0%            | 0%       | 0%      | 0%                     | 2%                       |
| Syrian                   | 4%                | 92%   | 1%        | 0%       | 0%                | 0%            | 0%       | 0%      | 1%                     | 1%                       |
| Nepalese                 | 2%                | 1%    | 1%        | 78%      | 0%                | 1%            | 13%      | 3%      | 0%                     | 1%                       |
| Albanian                 | 28%               | 46%   | 8%        | 0%       | 0%                | 0%            | 0%       | 0%      | 0%                     | 17%                      |
| Other EU Member States   | 41%               | 1%    | 16%       | 0%       | 1%                | 9%            | 0%       | 1%      | 0%                     | 30%                      |
| Other European Countries | 10%               | 20%   | 47%       | 0%       | 0%                | 3%            | 0%       | 1%      | 0%                     | 16%                      |
| Other Citizenship        | 28%               | 37%   | 5%        | 1%       | 1%                | 4%            | 8%       | 3%      | 1%                     | 13%                      |
| Stateless                | 24%               | 55%   | 7%        | 1%       | 0%                | 2%            | 1%       | 1%      | 0%                     | 7%                       |
| Total                    | 83%               | 4%    | 4%        | 1%       | 1%                | 1%            | 1%       | 0%      | 0%                     | 5%                       |

Source: National Statistics Office Malta, released 16/02/2023, *Publication, Census of Population and Housing 2021: Final Report: Population, migration and other social characteristics (Volume 1)*, p. 166. (Adapted by author)

### Diversification Within Malta

Diversification is also witnessed within Malta, with significant concentrations of migrant residents in the Northern Harbour and Northern region as well as in Gozo (see Figure 4), which has been further influenced by internal migration patterns of Maltese residents in the past decade (see Figure 5), with Maltese nationals withdrawing from the Northern Harbour region and appearing to have relocated in neighbouring regions, particularly the Northern region. A similar pattern appears to be evident from the Southern Harbour region towards the South-Eastern region. As a result, some regions of Malta, and with them the public schools catering for these localities, have witnessed not only considerable increases in their total student population, but also increases in the cultural and religious diversity of their student population (see Figure 6).

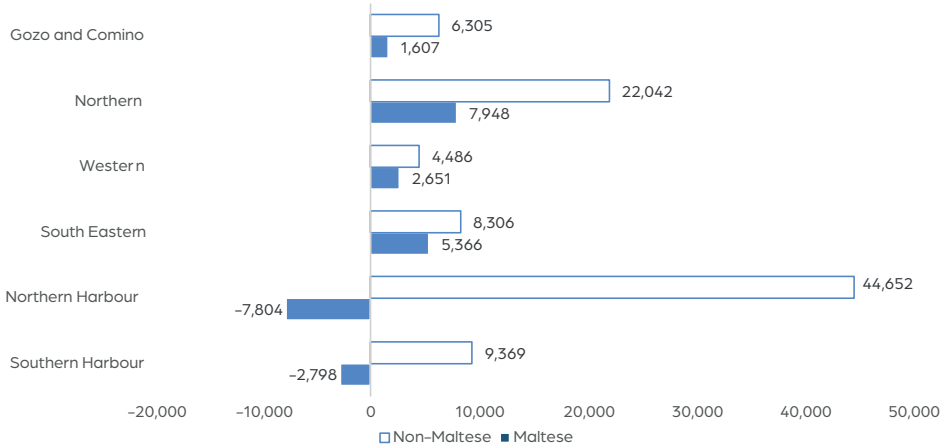
**Figure 4**  
*Total Population by Type of Citizenship and Locality 2011 and 2021*



Source: National Statistics Office Malta, released 21/01/2014, *Publication, Census of Population and Housing 2011: Final Report*, pp. 111–112; National Statistics Office Malta, released 16/02/2023, *Publication, Census of Population and Housing 2021: Final Report: Population, migration and other social characteristics (Volume 1)*, pp. 116–118. (Adapted by author)

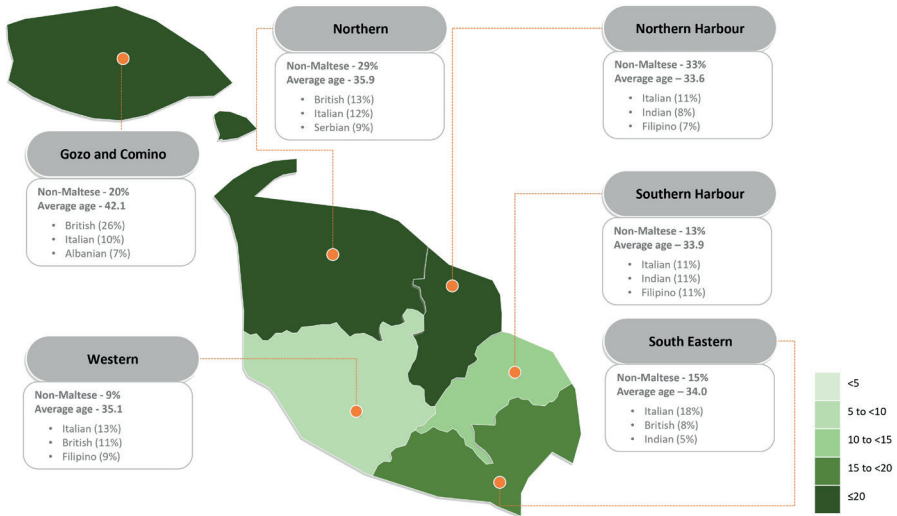
**Figure 5**

*Population Changes Between 2011 and 2021 by Type of Citizenship and District*



Source: National Statistics Office Malta, released 21/01/2014, Publication, *Census of Population and Housing 2011: Final Report*, pp. 111–112; National Statistics Office Malta, released 16/02/2023, Publication, *Census of Population and Housing 2021: Final Report: Population, migration and other social characteristics (Volume 1)*, pp. 116–118. (Adapted by author)

**Figure 6**  
*Population by Type of Citizenship and District 2021*



Source: National Statistics Office Malta, released 16/02/2023, *Publication, Census of Population and Housing 2021: Final Report: Population, migration and other social characteristics (Volume 1)*, pp. 116–118, 120–122, 124. (Adapted by author)

## Discussion

The findings show that Malta has not only witnessed a considerable increase in its migrant population, which contributed to the overall substantial increase of its total population from around 415,000 in 2011 to about 516,000 inhabitants in 2021 (EUROSTAT, 2023), but that the migrant population has diversified considerably in the past decade. While the share of British residents decreased, immigration increased from other European countries as well as from Asia. This suggests an ongoing decrease in colonial influence in line with research by Sultana (1997) and, thus, the diminished relevance of the historical migration “corridor” between the United Kingdom and Malta, which may have been further facilitated by changing residence conditions, employment regulations or pension mobility for British nationals following Brexit in 2020.

The data has also shown that migration is a complex phenomenon, with a considerable share of Maltese having previously resided abroad and a

non-negligible share of non-Maltese having been born and raised in Malta, particularly among those of primary school age. This shows that migration and citizenship cannot be conflated. Indeed, in view of Malta's historically strong labour emigration (Grech, 2017), further attention is needed on the experiences of returning Maltese nationals and, particularly, the experience of those returning Maltese of school age. Moreover, further research is required into the experiences of non-Maltese migrants as well as non-Maltese born in Malta. This is particularly important to ensure the inclusion of these diverse groups of children in the classroom by adopting effective multicultural education meeting the needs of all children (Camilleri Grima & Mantellato, 2022) and strengthening the resilience of those most vulnerable (Cefai et al., 2015).

Migration patterns to Malta appear to be comparable to international migration patterns, with migrants being predominantly male and of working age (McAuliffe & Triandafyllidou, 2021). Indeed, the average age of non-Maltese residents in the past decade decreased from 40.6 years in 2011 to 34.9 years in 2021, while the average age of Maltese residents increased from 40.5 years in 2011 to 43.6 years in 2021. Moreover, in the past decade the share of the working age population among Maltese residents decreased, while it increased for non-Maltese residents, suggesting that immigration may be filling labour shortages resulting from an aging Maltese population.

Yet, while migration patterns to Malta are comparable to international migration patterns, notable differences can be observed. While 52% of international migrants are male (McAuliffe & Triandafyllidou, 2021), 59% of migrants in Malta are male, suggesting an even stronger male domination of migration to Malta than in international comparison. Moreover, specific patterns are evident in the gender profile of migrants from different regions of origin, with migration from European countries being overall more gender-balanced, while migration from Asia, Africa and the Middle East appears to be particularly male-dominated. Specific patterns are also evident in the age profile when comparing migration from different regions of origin, with non-Maltese residents of Middle Eastern origin and from South-Eastern Europe being considerably younger, while British residents are considerably older.

This specific age profile of non-Maltese residents also influences the compulsory school-age population, with non-Maltese nationals making up 16.7% of the compulsory school age population and the main nationalities of non-Maltese residents being Italian, British, Syrian, Serbian and Libyan

students. Given the specific religious affiliation of different nationalities, this has also contributed to cultural as well as religious diversity in compulsory education, with a stronger presence of students from Muslim or Christian Orthodox families making their presence felt. In view of that, it is important to empower educators to effectively address this cultural and religious diversity in compulsory education, bearing in mind that over a third of teachers do not feel sufficiently confident to cope with the challenges of a multicultural classroom or to adapt their teaching to the cultural diversity of their students (TALIS 2018. Malta Report, n.d., p. 75).

At the same time, considerable fluctuations can be noted in the number of students of each nationality enrolled each year, with considerable decreases in the number of British and Libyan students and considerable increases in the number of Chinese students between the academic years 2020–2021 and 2021–2022. This not only indicates that further research is required on the profile of migrant students in compulsory education in Malta, but also suggests considerable challenges for and support required by educators to accommodate the continuous diversification of the school population.

Finally, the data indicated a diversification within Malta of the migration patterns of Maltese and non-Maltese residents between different districts in Malta. This has led to significant concentrations of migrant residents particularly in the Northern Harbour and Northern region as well as in Gozo. As a result, these regions and the public schools catering for these have witnessed not only substantial increases in their school populations, but also higher levels of cultural and religious diversity, and they should therefore receive particular attention and support.

## Limitations and Recommendations for Further Research

The present paper was based on an analysis of data collected through the census carried out in Malta in 2011 (NSO, 2014) and 2021 (NSO, 2023). This may have resulted in limitations, such as possible underrepresentation of non-Maltese residents due to specific sampling used or possible lack of acceptance to participate in the data collection. Moreover, due to possible deviations in data collected, revisions in the methodology or results made available, the comparability of the data between the census of 2011 and 2021 may be limited. It should be noted that data analysis was based on aggregated data made available in the reports, which precludes fine-grained analysis, particularly

of data related to individuals of compulsory school age. Such data would have provided deeper insights into the specific situation of the compulsory school age population, any geographical differences within the country that may result in a differential impact between State colleges, that means state schools in compulsory education located in different regions of the country or specific enrolment patterns in State, Church or Independent Schools in view of concerns raised by Sultana (2022) regarding the enrolment and achievement gap between the different school sectors. Further research using microdata obtained by the National Statistics Office is recommended to provide a more in-depth analysis on this subject. Moreover, further research is recommended on the experiences of returning Maltese nationals, specifically of those returning Maltese of school age as well as into the experiences of non-Maltese migrants and non-Maltese born in Malta. This is particularly important to ensure the inclusion of these diverse groups of children in the classroom.

## Conclusions

The analysis of available data from the census carried out in Malta in 2011 and 2021 has shown that migration is a complex phenomenon and that immigration patterns have shifted and diversified. Specifically, among the compulsory school age population, a non-negligible share of Maltese students previously resided abroad while some non-Maltese students have been born and raised in Malta, particularly among those of primary school age and their specific needs are not sufficiently investigated or addressed. Immigration patterns have shifted, with larger immigration from EU member states and other European countries as well as from Asia, while immigration from Africa and the Middle East has decreased relatively. This is due to the decreasing presence of UK citizens in Malta, indicating a decrease in this migration 'corridor', likely due to the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union and its impact on residence regulations as well as pension mobility. The increasing presence of migrants from Asia is in line with international migration patterns, which show that India is the main country of origin of international migrants. Findings also indicate that the Maltese population is getting older, while non-Maltese residents are getting younger. However, while being younger than Maltese residents, non-Maltese residents are mainly of working age rather than compulsory school age. Moreover, immigration appears to be male-dominated, far more so in Malta than internationally, which may be due to the ageing population of Malta and the resulting labour demand. The predominance of males among non-Maltese residents is particularly evident among migrants from Asia, Africa and

the Middle East, while migration from EU member states and other European countries outside the EU is more gender-balanced or female-dominated, which may be linked to different residence regulations. Overall, the diversification of the Maltese population has increased cultural and religious diversity in Malta, with significant concentrations of migrant residents particularly in the Northern Harbour and Northern region, which appear to have further influenced internal migration patterns of Maltese residents in the past decade.

## Notes on Contributor

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