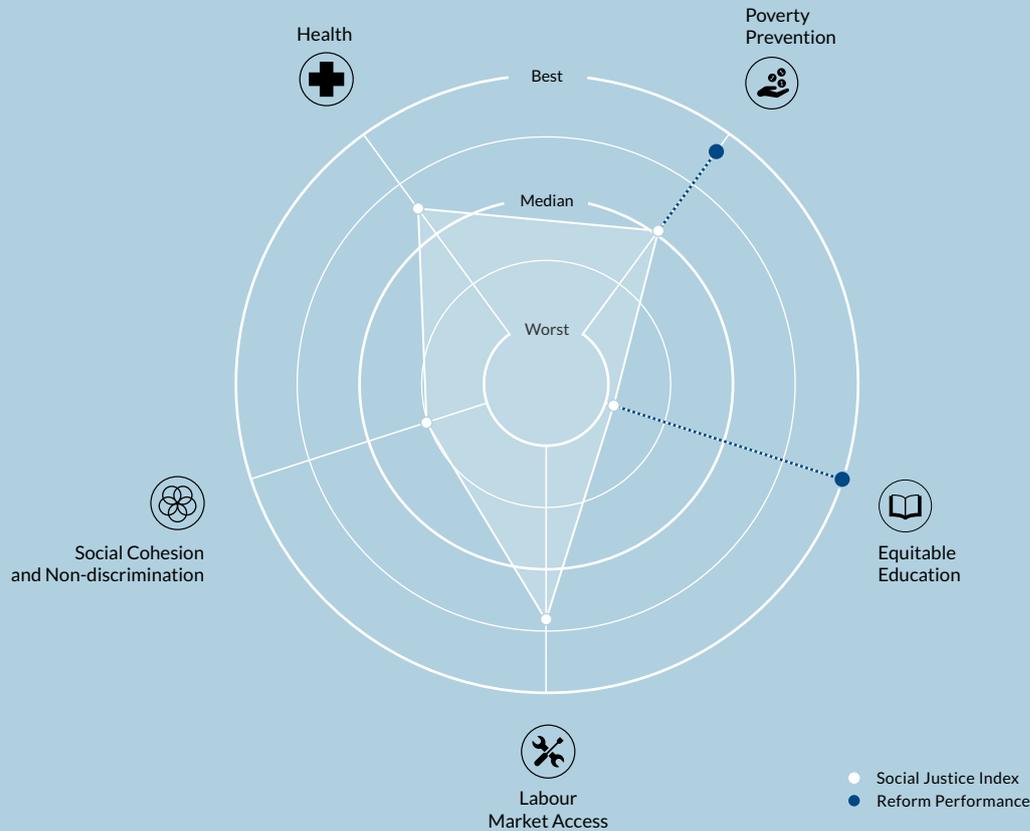


Findings by Country

 **Malta**

How does the country rank in the EU?



Overall Findings

Need Malta's overall need for policy reform was evaluated at 2.27, ranking the country 17th out of 23 assessed EU member states. The biggest challenge for Malta is reforming its educational system so as to ensure Equitable Education for its population. As stated in the 2015 Social Justice Index (SJI), Malta has one of the highest rates of young people dropping out of education and training. In fact, according to the experts, reducing the rate of early school leavers is the policy objective with the highest need of reform (2.83, rank 19/21). Though the need for policy reform with regard to Poverty Prevention (2.03, rank 15/27) and the improvement of Health (2.25, rank 11/20) was significantly lower, it was still higher than in most other EU member states.

Activity Malta is very active in introducing reforms overall (52%, rank 4/23), but especially regarding its most pressing issue of ensuring Equitable Education (68%, rank 1/22).

Overview of Reform Barometer Scores



Quality For the aforementioned reform of Malta's education system, a strong and positive impact is expected (0.75, rank 7/21). Furthermore, the experts anticipate that policies addressing poverty prevention will have an even stronger influence (1.37, rank 1/24).

Dimension Findings

 Poverty Prevention

Need The need for reforms addressing Poverty Prevention in Malta is relatively high (2.03), ranking the country 15th out of 27 assessed EU member states. This need is highest for refugees (2.27). One expert stated that Poverty Prevention has not yet addressed this group specifically. Three other experts stressed that more support programmes for refugees are required, and that it must be ensured they have the right to claim benefits and be legally employed.

Activity The activity rate for this dimension is comparatively high (52%), ranking the country 6th out of 27 countries. While little action was taken to prevent poverty for foreign-born people (0%) and refugees (14%), a considerable proportion of the required need was addressed for seniors (66%), the total population (69%), single parents (79%) and children (86%).

The experts reported that various measures have been undertaken. Schools have introduced ‘breakfast clubs’ so that working mothers can drop off their children early and have them provided with a meal. Free child care was introduced for children below the age of 3, while the number of day care centres was increased. Children’s allowances were raised for low-income families, and tax rates were lowered for low-income workers. In 2015, ‘in-work’ benefits were introduced for low-income families with both parents working, and this was extended to families with just one working parent in 2016. The idea is to give incentives for people to work while also supporting low-income families. Still, one expert criticized the fact that, instead of providing benefits, the minimum wage should have been raised. The minimum state pension was increased for seniors citizens, though a few experts stated that overall pensions are still inadequate.

Quality The quality of the above-mentioned reforms is scored very highly (1.37, rank 1/24), in particular with regard to young people (1.69, rank 2/24) and single parents (1.45, rank 1/23). The assessment of how refugees will be affected is divided: While one expert claims that refugees should also benefit from the policy changes, two experts voice concern that more measures directly addressed at refugees are required. Though the overall judgment is very positive, one expert comments: “Reforms tend to target specific aspects and not take a holistic approach. Poverty is not only an issue of financial income, but also of health, education and employment opportunities.”¹

Equitable Education

Need In the 2015 SJI, Malta is given a score of 4.70 out of 10 in the dimension of Education, ranking it 27th out of 28 EU member states. Only Slovakia receives a lower score. Hence, the experts assess the need for reforming the Maltese educational system as being very high. The experts put a special emphasis on the need to improve early and pre-primary education, with one suggesting that a national strategy should be introduced.

The highest need for action in a single policy objective was attested as reducing the rate of early school leavers (2.83, rank 19/21). Whilst being the group at the highest risk of poverty, refugees are also poorly integrated into the Maltese education system. The experts assessed the need for reform here to be at 2.67 (rank 16/18). Equally high is the need to ensure the independence of learning success from a person’s socioeconomic background (rank 15/21). One expert comments: “At all levels of the educational system, there seems to be some need to address the needs of those children coming from poor socioeconomic backgrounds. These children feature significantly among the low-achievers in the Maltese educational system, particularly at the end

¹ Suzanne Gatt, Department of Early Years and Primary Education, Faculty of Education, University of Malta, Msida

of primary school.”² The need for reform addressing the quality of teaching from early education to secondary schooling is comparatively high, as well (2.67–2.80, rank 20–22).

Activity According to the experts, many pressing challenges are being addressed through government actions (68%). In fact, Malta is assessed to be the most active country in the dimension of Equitable Education. The activity rate is particularly high for the policy objective of reducing the rate of early school leavers, where 100 percent of the need is being addressed. To reduce the number of early school leavers, Malta has introduced an ‘Alternative Learning Programme’ which targets students who are falling behind on their studies and are at risk of becoming or are de facto early school leavers. The programme allows students to take academic courses as well as vocational training.³

Malta is also very active regarding the policy objectives of equal opportunities (72%, rank 4/25), quality of teaching (65%, rank 3/22) and independence of learning success from children’s socioeconomic background (68%, rank 1/21). In advancing these objectives, a ‘National Curriculum Framework’ which identifies learning areas and cross-curricular themes was introduced in 2013. It was followed up in 2015 by the ‘Learning Outcomes Framework’, which is setting specific learning goals for each educational level. While the introduction of free child care centres is primarily targeted at incentivising parents to work, they also provide early and pre-primary education. Furthermore, preschool teachers are now trained up to degree level in order to increase the quality of their teaching. At the tertiary level, more evening and online courses are provided in order to allow people with other professional, social or family commitments to study flexibly.

The activity rate is lower with regard to the integration of refugees (58%), but still quite high when compared to other EU member states (rank 4/18). As an example of a specific measure taken by the government for this policy objective, experts report that a yearlong language class is being offered to selected non-English-speaking students, teaching them English, Maltese and the local culture.

Quality The overall quality of these reforms is scored highly by the experts (0.75, rank 7/21). A very positive influence is expected from improving equal opportunities (1.03, rank 6/18) and ensuring independence of educational success from a student’s socioeconomic background (1.33, rank 2/16). The impact of the reforms on the quality of teaching is assessed as being slightly lower (0.72, rank 6/15). However, it has to be pointed out that the decision to train preschool teachers to degree level was very well received by the experts, and is expected to improve the quality of the educational experience for young children (1.00).

As for the ‘Alternative Learning Programme’ and other activities addressing the rate of early school leavers, the experts are quite critical, assessing the quality as being rather low (0.40, rank 8/17). One expert wrote: “The Alternative Learning Programme keeps students in school but does little to improve their basic key competences and entice them to stay on at school at

² Victor Martinelli, Faculty of Education, University of Malta, Msida

³ MEDE Annual Report 2014 <https://www.gov.mt/en/Government/Publications/Documents/Annual%20Reports/2014/MEDE%20Annual%20Report%202014.pdf>

post-secondary level.”⁴ A second expert added: “I do not think that addressing the problem in the last year of schooling is going to have any positive effect on the students’ ability to sit for their examinations successfully. This is an issue that has its roots in the students’ primary and early-secondary education.”⁵

The lowest scores are given to the initiatives addressing the integration of refugees (0.26, rank 6/15) because not all refugees are being offered the described courses and the real impact of such classes is questioned by the experts.

Health

Need In the area of Health, Malta scores a respectable 7 out of 10 in the 2015 SJI, ranking it 11th out of 28 countries, or just behind the UK, France and Germany. The experts assess the need for policy reform in the health sector at 2.25 (rank 11/20). The highest deficits are found in the quality of health care (2.67, rank 20/22) and the sustainable and fair financing of the Maltese health system (2.67, rank 17/20).

The need for reforms is rated lower regarding the efficiency of the health system (2.00, rank 4/20), the accessibility and range of health services (2.00, rank 7/19) and unmet needs for medical help (1.67, rank 7/17).

Activity As for the most pressing issues of improving the quality of health care and the financing of the health system, little action has been taken to address the perceived need (38 and 0%, respectively).

The policy objective with the highest activity rate is the improvement of public health (57%, rank 19/24). Regarding this objective, the ‘Non-communicable Disease Strategy’ was introduced in 2010. On the one hand, it sets priorities for common diseases, predominantly cardiovascular illness and diabetes; on the other, it also includes programmes addressing health promotion and disease prevention for the forthcoming years. Furthermore, Malta adopted its first ‘National Cancer Plan’ in 2011.

⁴ Suzanne Gatt, Department of Early Years and Primary Education, Faculty of Education, University of Malta, Msida

⁵ Victor Martinelli, Faculty of Education, University of Malta, Msida