

Fewer early school leavers but Malta could do better



Education Minister Evarist Bartolo yesterday launched an EU report on education and training in Malta.
Photo: Mark Zammit Cordina

Malta's early school leaving rate has improved but the country still ranks second highest in the EU after Spain, according to a report that evaluates education and training systems across Europe.

The rate dropped from 23.8 per cent in 2010 to 20.8 per cent last year, almost double the EU average, which stands at 12 per cent.

Education Minister Evarist Bartolo said the "ambitious target" was to drop the early school leaving rate to 10 per cent by 2020.

Technically, early school leavers are defined as those aged between 18 and 24 who have left compulsory education with less than five SEC exams to their name and are not attending an educational institution or undergoing training.

93% of university students find jobs

Beyond the overall score, Malta has a significant gender gap, with 23.2 per cent of male students leaving school early compared to 18.4 per cent of females, according to the Education and Training Monitor 2014 report launched yesterday.

What lies behind these figures is not immediately understood. For instance, the report shows that the government spent the equivalent of 5.9 per cent of the GDP in 2013, placing the country in a better position than the EU average of 5.3 per cent.

The report also notes expenditure increased by €32 million, or 8.5 per cent, on the previous year's budget, at a time when other countries were slashing budgets.

As for the challenges, the document earmarks three: the early school leaving rate remains high, basic skills-attainment is poor in comparison with other EU countries and the labour market requires more relevant vocational skills.

Statistics show that only 26 per cent of people aged 30 to 34 had attended university by 2013, which is low compared to the EU average of 36 per cent. The target is to reach 33 per cent by 2020.

On a more positive note, Malta has the highest rate of recent upper secondary graduates who have found jobs, with a rate of 90.8 per cent, compared to the EU average of 69.5 per cent. When it comes to university graduates, employability hits 93 per cent.

The report lists various measures taken by the government to address problems in education and training. These include the launch of the five-year national literacy strategy, the early school leaving strategy and the setting up of the new centre for entrepreneurship and incubation at the university.

Other initiatives include apprenticeship schemes launched in collaboration with the private sector and the setting up of childcare centres.

The full report, in two volumes, can be accessed at education.gov.mt.

Institute for teachers planned

The government is discussing the setting up of an institute that would provide continuous professional development for teachers.

Research and development director Frank Fabri confirmed the Education Ministry was having talks to establish the best way to go about setting up the institute that would build on teachers' training and induction courses.

The report notes that the government acknowledges the need for teachers to be equipped and be given the necessary support to address students' requirements, particularly to prevent early school leaving.

The government's focus is on providing teachers with the necessary skills to promote student-centred learning, making the education system

more inclusive.

“To do this, it plans to set up an institute providing continuous professional development for teachers, empower schools to apply for Erasmus+ funding for teacher training and review support services, providing teachers with more effective and focused support,” the report says.

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