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Social Communication of Migrants through Everyday Life Practices in Malta

Günlük Yaşam Pratikleri Aracılığıyla Malta'daki Göçmenlerin Sosyal İletişimi

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Abstract

This study employs an ethnographic approach to examine the social communication processes of migrants in the Mediterranean island state of Malta. Data were collected over a two-year period through semi-structured interviews with thirty-five participants and participant observation in settings where migrants were actively engaged in social life and in neighbourhoods densely populated by migrants across the island, supplemented by online observation. The findings point out the forms of interaction migrants establish with both the local community and their own ethnic networks, the challenges they encounter, and the factors shaping these processes. Bilingualism emerges as both an opportunity and a barrier, with English serving as the primary social communication language, while knowledge of Maltese provides local and bureaucratic advantages.

The study highlights the significant influence of socioeconomic status on migrants' social communication experiences. Individuals facing socioeconomic disadvantages tend to have communication networks mainly confined to their ethnic communities. Based on these findings, the study recommends developing policies to enhance migrants' social inclusion and addressing online and offline narratives.

Anahtar Kelimeler:

göç, toplumsal iletişim, Malta, etnografik araştırma, günlük yaşam

Öz

Bu çalışma, Akdeniz'de bir ada devleti olan Malta'daki göçmenlerin sosyal iletişim süreçlerini etnografik bir yaklaşımla incelemektedir. Veriler, iki yıllık bir süre boyunca otuz beş katılımcıyla yapılan yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler ve göçmenlerin sosyal hayata aktif olarak katıldığı ortamlarda ve ada genelinde göçmenlerin yoğun olarak yaşadığı mahallelerde gerçekleştirilen katılımcı gözlemler yoluyla toplanmış ve çevrimiçi gözlemlerle desteklenmiştir. Veri toplama süreci, otuz beş katılımcıyla gerçekleştirilen derinlemesine mülakatlar ve iki yıl süren katılımcı gözlemlerle yürütülmüştür. Bulgular, göçmenlerin hem yerel toplum hem de kendi etnik ağlarıyla kurdukları etkileşim biçimlerini, karşılaştıkları zorlukları ve bu süreçleri şekillendiren faktörleri ortaya koymaktadır. Buna göre iki resmi dilli olmak hem bir fırsat hem de bir engel olarak öne çıkmakta; İngilizce temel toplumsal iletişim dili olarak kullanılırken Maltaca konuşmak göçmenlere yerel ve bürokratik avantajlar sağlamaktadır.

Çalışma, sosyoekonomik statünün göçmenlerin toplumsal iletişim deneyimleri üzerindeki önemli etkisini vurgulamaktadır. Sosyoekonomik dezavantajlarla karşı karşıya olan bireylerin iletişim ağlarının büyük ölçüde kendi etnik topluluklarıyla sınırlı kaldığı görülmektedir. Bu bulgular doğrultusunda, çalışma göçmenlerin sosyal katılımını artırmak ve çevrimiçi ve çevrimdışı anlatıları ele almak için politikalar geliştirmeyi önermektedir.

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Introduction

As with any social phenomenon, social communication encompasses all forms of communication, from interpersonal to mass communication. As Cherry (1957) noted as far back as the mid-20th century, communication has always been a social matter, and communication technologies have played a crucial role in sustaining daily life in the modern world. Today, digital information and communication technologies are used intensively in every area of social life and even in small settlements. With the digital transformation, the blending of online and offline environments in communication is expanding social communication to an extensive network, and it has an essential role in the emergence of more cultural interactions. There is a "blurring of borders between 'online' and 'offline', and the convergence of different modes for the ways individuals use resources, including language, to engage in various socio-cultural practices." (Bolander & Locher, 2020).

As a form of social communication in relation to all aspects of society's interactions, social communication includes shared, changed, or new values, practices, norms, language, and symbols. Göktuna Yaylacı (2012) points out that although individuals encounter people who are different from themselves at every stage of their lives, a genuinely intercultural encounter arises only and primarily through migration. Indeed, researchers' interest in migration in the early-period communication studies is noteworthy. For example, Chicago School researchers conducted cultural and communication studies of migrant settlements in Chicago, which received significant migration in the first half of the 20th century (Erdoğan, 2013).

Migration directly or indirectly requires social communication arrangements within society, which includes many dimensions from economy to culture. Over the past 25 years, international migration has significantly increased globally. The number of international migrants was 150 million at the beginning of the millennium and is estimated to reach 281 million by 2024 (McAuliffe & Oucho, 2024). This dramatic rise in numbers necessitates cooperation between the receiving society and migrants to ensure their interactions are inclusive.

In Malta[1], the number of migrants has been rapidly increasing in the last twenty years. In response, the country has implemented measures related to migration and integration. According to the European Commission (2024), Malta views migrants as a key factor for economic growth.

On the other hand, initiatives such as the Migrant Integration Strategy and Action Plan (Vision 2020), launched by the Ministry of European Affairs and Equality in 2017, and the I Belong program, launched in 2018, aim to improve migrants' familiarity with Maltese culture, history and native language. Additionally, the minimum requirements for migrants' long-term residence permits have become more accessible with the Maltese language and cultural orientation certificates (European Commission, 2018).

These steps, which aim to facilitate the integration process for migrants, are expected to contribute to social communication by promoting increased interaction

[1]The baseline of this study is the Mediterranean island of Malta, an EU member state (https://european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/eu-countries/malta_en).

between the receiving country and migrants. However, the concept of integration, which is to adapt to the majority culture and norms willingly, raises concerns about the possibilities of minority groups being unable to make a free choice (Somersan, 2004, p. 92). This indicates that organised programs alone are not sufficient to encourage or enhance migrants participation in social communication.

Increasing social interaction is a primary starting point for achieving equality in the receiving society. Migrants' daily activities provide a comprehensive understanding of various issues such as participation in communication, cultural interaction and communication barriers regarding social communication processes.

In this context, this study first evaluates the concept of social communication together with the migration phenomenon and examines the studies in the literature on the social communication processes of migrants. Then, the research findings on the social communication of migrants in the context of their everyday life practices are included. The research contributes to the literature in terms of understanding the relationships that migrants establish both with locals and with the receiving society on a larger scale while also shedding light on new research on the suggestions for shared practices of social life.

Literature Review

Social Communication

Defining social communication is difficult due to the cultural and social characteristics of the context in which it occurs, its historical background, power dynamics, and the actors involved. The literature on social communication has been enriched by numerous studies that may not provide a particular definition of social communication but have been conducted from diverse perspectives across various disciplines and periods. Nevertheless, certain theories or approaches have gained prominence in the social communication literature.

According to Habermas (2001), communication occurs at a social level and aims to achieve common meanings based on consensus through language, supported by validity claims such as *truth*, *rightness*, and *sincerity*. Accordingly, the process of social interaction is rational. The communication and relationships of individuals take place within the *social lifeworld*, which encompasses cultural values, social norms, language, and the world of meaning.

People communicate and interact in the formation of power relations and social life. Communication codes and meanings cannot be understood independently of their social context. Bargaining, conflict, or compromise occurs within the framework of power relations. According to Habermas's communication approach, interactions that take place through the use of symbols require an orientation toward achieving a common understanding. In Habermas's theory, rationality is idealised; human relations are reduced to these idealised communication activities (Erdoğan & Alemdar, 2005).

On the other hand, Grant (2003) highlights the dominance of the interaction paradigm in social communication models. Within this complexity, the motivation to understand the societal impact of mass communication plays a significant role. Consequently, the concept of interaction, alongside variables such as attitudes,

perception, and behaviour, takes centre stage in communication studies as well as in psychology and social psychology research (Erdoğan & Alemdar, 2005, p. 35).

Another prominent theory in social communication is symbolic interactionism, which builds on Mead's ideas. Symbolic interactionism emphasizes that individuals cannot be understood independently of society. Therefore, it focuses on micro-relationships and interactions rather than macro-scale processes. According to Mead, gestures play a crucial role in shaping the interaction process. Gestures can be seen as the starting point of social actions, and when a gesture evolves into a symbol representing a specific meaning, it becomes language (Mead, 1973, pp. 23-24).

Herbert Blumer (1969), one of the leading figures in symbolic interactionism, argued that meaning does not arise from the internal structure of an object but rather from the psychological elements of the individual; meaning is a social product. Symbolic interactionist researchers assert that while people live in a world of symbols, the meanings attributed to objects and events shape their understanding of social actions and behaviour (Gökulu, 2019).

On the other hand, becoming part of the network and avoiding exclusion from it requires significant effort (van Dijk, 2006). In this context, the communication dynamics of the network society provide a new foundation for discussions within the political economy of communication. Thus, social communication should be regarded as a fundamental component of democratic societies rather than as an abstract concept (Prodnik, 2014, p. 301).

The early perception of the Internet as an independent and free communication environment has given way to a reality where Internet communication has been rapidly commodified, with media monopolies influencing social communication through algorithms. In other words, the Internet has undergone a process of capital accumulation, contradicting its democratic potential. It has shifted from being a public sphere to a monopolised, private market (McChesney, 2013, p. 96).

Zıllıoğlu (2007) defines social communication as the totality of processes through which members of society establish connections as a result of shared activities. According to Zıllıoğlu, social communication can be categorised into three levels: interpersonal communication, communication between groups and organisations and societal-level communication.

The communication tools Cherry (1957) highlighted as central to modern cities have likely reached levels of interaction unimaginable in the mid-20th century. Digitalisation in communication technologies has further accelerated social communication processes. Nevertheless, Cherry’s assertion that gestures, writing, and speaking strengthen social relations and communication remains valid.

Communication processes in society are often analysed alongside cultural and historical dynamics, as well as the contexts of language and gestures (Niznikiewicz, 2013; Laulan & Escarpit 2016, p. 75). While culture and history are fundamental elements shaping society, the structures that convey and transmit these elements—language and gestures—play an equally vital role.

Migrants' Daily Life Practices and Participation in Social Communication

International migration is a multidimensional phenomenon influenced by various factors, including economic crises or instabilities, regional conflicts, climate crises, political instability or pressure, and a lack of social or cultural belonging in the country of origin. To better understand the complexity of migration and address its various dimensions, researchers have developed categories based on factors such as legal status (e.g., regular/irregular), primary motivation (e.g., labour, family, business), time horizon (temporary/permanent), and types of migration (e.g., forced migration, climate migration) (Pries 2001; de Haas et al. 2020; Şirin Öner, 2016; IOM, n.d.).

While these categories are vital for comprehending the increasing complexity of migration, advancements in transportation and communication technologies have further accelerated migration processes. These technologies have strengthened migrants' ties to their countries of origin, both online and offline while expanding micro- and macro-level communication opportunities in the receiving country. As a result, migrants' personal experiences have become more visible within the social context, offering valuable insights into social communication processes.

According to de Haas et al. (2020), it is unrealistic to perceive migrants solely as passive victims of capitalism or as entirely rational and autonomous individuals. A balanced approach is necessary to fully grasp the experiences, challenges, gains, and contributions of migrants in receiving countries. Migration categories, while helpful for analysis, also influence the daily lives of migrants and are often used as tools for implementing state policies.

According to Berger and Luckmann (2008), the existence of individuals in daily life depends on the communication they establish with others, and communication and language are fundamental tools in the establishment of social reality. Through these tools, meanings are (re)produced, questioned, or transferred to others. In this process, typifications play a crucial role in both the formation of meanings and the establishment of social interactions. For instance, categorizing someone as a "neighbour" or "teacher" influences the type of relationship formed with them, just as typifying someone as an "migrant" or "foreigner" significantly impacts their social communication and daily life practices.

The most fundamental form of interaction in daily life is face-to-face social communication, which involves various and constant exchange of meanings (Berger & Luckmann, 2008). While online and mobile communication has created a hybrid mode of interaction in contemporary life, face-to-face communication remains irreplaceable in its importance. However, face-to-face communication can pose challenges for migrants, particularly regarding social interaction. Migrants may adopt a standardised and organised communication style, often different from their own cultural and social norms, to achieve acceptance, recognition, and shared meanings.

As Goffman (2014) argues, individuals construct their identities in social contexts by adhering to societal norms and expectations. This process may be more challenging for migrants, as fully understanding and conforming to these norms and expectations requires a shared basis of meaning that may not always exist in the receiving society.

Moreover, the production and interpretation of meanings are influenced by various aspects beyond communicative elements. These include not only the interactions between migrants and the settled members of the receiving society but also the role of migration regimes. Migration regimes are systems that can be examined at macro levels such as national and international migration policies, regulations, international organisations that advocate for migrant activities, historicity, and at micro levels such as cultural norms (Horolets et al., 2021; Amorosi 2022, p. 25; Williams, 2012).

Horolets et al.'s (2021) study, which explores the role of macro-scale migration regimes in migrants' everyday practices, reveals that migrants position themselves in social interaction processes in response to stereotypical prejudices encountered in public spaces, such as those where they go to relax. In this context, the roles that Goffman (2014) defines as action patterns that individuals can play in certain situations based on the social context can emerge prominently in the public space of a person's everyday life together with the migrant identity. Consequently, migrants may engage in social interactions that align with societal expectations of their position.

Migrants face communication and cultural barriers, difficulties such as longing for family and social networks, and challenges in building new social positions in unfamiliar environments. These factors drive them to strengthen ties with their countries of origin by leveraging technological opportunities. The integration of transportation, digital information, and communication technologies into daily life practices has profoundly transformed migrants' social communication processes, especially during this era of peak connectivity. Transnational migration, a subset of international migration, focuses extensively on the role of these technologies in migrants' lives. Technological advancements have enabled migrants to visit their hometowns more frequently, travel greater distances, maintain constant contact with family and friends, and preserve their transnational identities (de Haas et al., 2020, p. 12).

Pries (2001), in his examination of migrants' daily life practices, emphasizes the critical role of communication technologies. These technologies provide a wide range of opportunities, such as facilitating the flow of information within transnational social spaces (e.g., networks that inform migrants about job opportunities), establishing social support networks (e.g., systems that help migrants integrate and settle), and enabling financial support mechanisms (e.g., money transfers that sustain economic ties with transnational countries).

Beyond these uses, technology has also created new employment opportunities for migrants. The International Labour Organization (2021) report highlights two types of digital labour platforms: online web-based platforms and location-based platforms. It notes that the role of these platforms in the economy was significantly amplified during the COVID-19 pandemic, with many migrant workers employed in app-based delivery services across various countries. However, while migrants often seek these roles for better economic and social opportunities, job opportunities in receiving countries are frequently based on physical capacity rather than education, social skills, or work experience. As a result, migrants may view such platform-based jobs as temporary solutions (Newlands, 2022; Bonhomme & Muldoon, 2024).

Thus, the daily life practices of migrants are shaped by different variables, such as the availability of residence and work permits, compared to those of settled members of the receiving society. In his work on daily life practices, de Certeau (2008, pp. 51-52) observed that the consumption practices of different social groups vary depending on power relations. Within this framework, migrants may develop creative practices as tactics to navigate and respond to power dynamics in the receiving country.

An Overview of Daily Life Practices of Migrants in Malta

Since joining the European Union, Malta has become an increasingly attractive destination for migrants, for both economical and societal reasons. The presence of English as an official language, Malta's warm climate, and its vibrant atmosphere due to language schools and tourism make it an appealing destination for many migrants. Additionally, regulations and business models that create opportunities in the local economy have contributed to a rapid increase in the migrant population in recent years. Thus, as of 2022, migrants accounted for 25% of the island's population (NSO Malta, 2024).

In this context, migration significantly impacts the country's health and social systems. With the increasing number of migrants, several social integration programs and public awareness campaigns have been implemented, positioning Malta as an example for other countries in addressing migration challenges (WHO, 2024). Notably, the emphasis on integration in Malta's official programs for migrants, such as the *I Belong*, warrants attention. While integration is defined as migrants voluntarily — without coercion — adopting the culture, social norms, and values of the majority, a critical perspective questions whether minorities truly have any option other than conforming to the majority (Somersan, 2004, p. 92).

Despite its adoption in the international migration literature—and even though many approaches suggest it is a two-way process—the concept of integration in academic literature is quite controversial (Şirin-Öner, 2016, p. 18). The term 'integration' can be interpreted and applied in various contexts, including among the general public, media, politics, and social sciences. Wieviorka states that these different contexts pose a risk to understanding the concept. The concept of integration, which was previously attributed to groups vulnerable to marginalisation or exclusion in society, is now almost always associated with migrants. On the other hand, the sociology of integration often ignores the social contexts of migrants, evaluating them mainly through problems of social disruption. Factors preceding migration and the process of migrants' arrival in the receiving country are rarely considered when discussing their integration into society (Wieviorka, 2014).

Therefore, the legal regulations, programs, and campaigns regarding migrants in Malta provide a critical framework for understanding the dimensions of integration's political and social communication. Migration is always complex, and it is difficult to understand new and different forms of social communication in the destination country. However, the motivation for migration, the obstacles encountered during the migration process, and the conditions after arrival significantly shape how these challenges are experienced. Notably, for forced migrants in Malta, the detention centre process—which they sometimes describe as akin to imprisonment—presents particularly complex

communication difficulties with both government officials and local people (Grech, 2019).

On the other hand, although Malta's migrant integration policies are not entirely ineffective, they present significant shortcomings. Malta ranks 23rd out of 28 MIPEX (Migrant Integration Policy Index)[2] countries in terms of anti-discrimination policies. The MIPEX report highlights that migrants in Malta face numerous obstacles in accessing fundamental rights, opportunities, and security, attributing this mainly to the weak implementation of definitions in Maltese law. Furthermore, the report indicates that Maltese policies fail to encourage local people to view migrants as equals in everyday life (Solano & Huddleston, 2020). In this context, Malta's new and more inclusive steps in "integration" policies—despite the concept's controversial nature—can potentially transform social communication processes.

Methodology

Research Design

This study aims to discuss the relationship between migrants' social communication and daily life activities and their perceptions of local attitudes towards them in the receiving society.

Patton (2015, p. 169) notes that although ethnographic research has traditionally relied on participant observation and intensive fieldwork, the emergence of the internet and social media has transformed the concepts of participation and being in the field. While participant observation provides a depth of understanding that cannot be achieved through interviews, it is also a labour-intensive and costly method (Patton, 2015, p. 75). Accordingly, this research employed both traditional participant observation and fieldwork methods, as well as observation within social media environments.

Additionally, in ethnographic research, conducting interviews and observations with the same participants is not a methodological necessity; these methods can be applied separately or in combination, depending on the context and the research questions (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, pp. 3–4).

Traditional participant observations were conducted by the researcher between 2023 and early 2025. These focused on public spaces in the Northern Harbour and Northern regions of Malta (NSO Malta, 2025), where migrants are heavily engaged in daily life. These included places of worship, ethnic celebrations, artistic events, and exhibitions organised by various migrant groups. Everyday activities were also observed in public spaces such as parks, shopping malls, cafés, and bars, and detailed field notes were taken. A substantial proportion of these notes reflected interactions with labourers, including taxi drivers, barbers, construction workers, and service personnel.

Online observations were conducted across a range of digital platforms, including local and migrant Facebook groups, the Malta subreddit on Reddit, and WhatsApp groups of specific ethnic communities. These platforms were selected because they constitute significant spaces where migrants exchange daily life information and share their

[2]The Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX) is a global instrument that assesses migrant integration policies across a wide range of countries. See “What is MIPEX,” https://www.mipex.eu/what-is-mipex

experiences. Observations in these digital environments complemented traditional fieldwork by offering additional insights into migrants' everyday interactions and communication practices.

It addresses the following questions, which are directly related to everyday practices:

- What is the primary language used by migrants in their daily lives
- What activities do they typically engage in throughout a typical day?
- What are the reasons migrants choose to reside in their current towns, and how do they interact with their neighbours?
- Where do migrants shop, and what are their reasons for choosing these locations?

Sampling and Data Collection

The population of the research consists of migrants aged 18 and over who have resided in Malta for at least six months and are proficient in English. For the study, purposeful and snowball sampling methods, both non-probability sampling approaches, were employed for semi-structured interviews. As advocated by Böke (2010, p. 125), this approach ensured that individuals meeting predetermined characteristics were included in the sample group, while fostering an open communication process based on trust with individuals reached through the snowball sampling method.

Data were collected through both semi-structured interviews and participant observation. Data collection commenced with interviews with four initial participants who met the predetermined criteria. Each participant was asked to refer the researcher to another individual meeting the same criteria. Each participant was also encouraged to introduce the researcher to individuals with differing migration experiences. This approach aimed to enrich the data. In total, thirty-five interviewees were reached through the referrals provided by the initial four participants.

In qualitative research, sample size is determined by data saturation, the homogeneity of the participant group, the research objectives, and the research questions. Guest et al. (2006, pp. 75–79) demonstrate that data saturation is often achievable with a relatively small number of interviews (approximately 12 individuals) in homogeneous groups, although sample size varies according to group heterogeneity, context, research aims, and data diversity. Patton (2015, p. 470) likewise notes that there are no definitive rules for sample size in qualitative research; rather, it depends on what is to be learned, the study's purpose, significance, usefulness, reliability, and the resources available. Creswell (2013, p. 157) states that 20–30 participants are generally sufficient for grounded theory studies, while a case study may be adequately supported by as few as five participants. Creswell further emphasises that qualitative research prioritises depth over generalisation and that, in ethnographic studies, data are collected until saturation is reached.

In this study, no new themes emerged after the 30th interview, and the data began to repeat themselves, indicating that saturation had been attained. Nevertheless, as access to additional participants was facilitated through established trust, interviews continued, resulting in a total of thirty-five participants. This not only strengthened the dataset but also enhanced the representation of diverse migration experiences.

Limitations

The findings of this study are based on the experiences of thirty-five adult migrants who had lived in Malta for at least six months and were fluent in English. Therefore, the results cannot be generalised to the entire migrant population in Malta. Instead, the aim is to support the transferability of the findings, as emphasised in qualitative research, which refers to their potential applicability to other contexts with similar circumstances (Shenton, 2004, p. 63; Patton, 2015, p. 1032).

The study reflects the experiences of participants who met the specified criteria and were recruited through snowball sampling. This limitation is consistent with the nature of qualitative research, which seeks to provide an in-depth understanding of participants' everyday social communication practices rather than broad representativeness.

While limited to the island of Malta, this empirical study offers a contribution to the literature on the everyday communication practices of migrants, particularly in smaller EU countries. Furthermore, the findings have the potential to enrich intersectional scholarship on communication and migration by providing insights into migrants' social communication processes. It is hoped that these insights may also inform policymakers and civil society in understanding the challenges migrants encounter.

The summary table of interview data from this study has been made publicly available on the OSF (Open Science Framework) platform, with the aim of supporting other researchers and fostering potential collaborations in similar studies.

Findings

Table-1: Demographics of Participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Country of Origin	Duration in Malta	Perceived income
P1	Female	35	Scotland	13 years	Low
P2	Male	37	Finland	5 years	Middle
P3	Female	38	Slovakia	10 years	Upper-middle
P4	Male	35	Egypt	11 years	Upper-middle
P5	Male	37	Nepal	8 months	Low
P6	Female	32	Italy	9 years	Upper-middle
P7	Male	30	Syria	7 years	Middle
P8	Female	25	Tunisia	2 years	Low
P9	Female	33	England	5 years	Upper-middle
P10	Female	32	Türkiye	4 years	Upper-middle
P11	Male	34	Greece	6 years	Middle
P12	Female	32	USA	One year	Low
P13	Male	39	Brasil	6 years	Middle
P14	Male	44	Spain	6 years	High
P15	Male	53	USA	3 years	Middle
P16	Male	43	Denmark	16 years	Middle
P17	Female	31	Colombia	10 months	Middle
P18	Male	39	Portugal	5 years	High
P19	Male	50	Greece	4 years	Upper-middle
P20	Male	45	Serbia	8 years	Middle
P21	Male	59	Morocco	33 years	High
P22	Male	40	Serbia	9 years	Middle
P23	Male	56	Syria	33 years	Middle

P24	Male	29	India	7 months	Middle
P25	Male	40	Denmark	6 years	Low
P26	Male	19	Türkiye	One year	Low
P27	Male	28	Russia	One year	Middle
P28	Male	29	Gambia	15 years	Low
P29	Female	72	England	19 years	Upper-middle
P30	Female	40	Philippines	2 years	Low
P31	Male	36	Morocco	2 years	Low
P32	Male	46	Philippines	6 years	Middle
P33	Male	36	Algeria	3 years	Low
P34	Female	33	Ukraine	2 years	Middle
P35	Male	41	Netherlands	15 months	High

A pseudonym was assigned to each interviewee to ensure anonymity and encourage more open expression during the interviews (see Table 1). As stated above, a total of thirty-five individuals participated in the study. At the start of each interview, participants were asked about their preferred pronouns, which were taken into account in the findings.

The participants' countries of origin reflect considerable geographical diversity, illustrating the multinational and heterogeneous character of Malta's migrant population. Their countries of origin can be divided into two groups: European Union (EU) and non-EU countries. EU countries (10) included Finland, Slovakia, Italy, Greece (2), Spain, Denmark (2), Portugal, and the Netherlands. Non-EU countries (25) included Scotland, England (2), Egypt, Nepal, Syria (2), Tunisia, Türkiye (2), the United States (2), Brazil, Colombia, Serbia (2), Morocco (2), India, Russia, Gambia, the Philippines (2), Algeria, and Ukraine.

Most participants (twenty-five) indicated a non-EU country of origin (see Table 2). However, four of these participants also held an EU passport. Accordingly, the majority (twenty-one) required a residence permit, as is necessary for non-EU citizens to live in Malta.

Table-2: Citizenship Status of Participants

Citizenship Status	Pseudonyms (Country of Origin)
EU Citizen (only)	P2 (Finland), P6 (Italy), P18 (Portugal), P19 (Greece), P35 (Netherlands)
	P3 (Slovakia), P11 (Greece), P14 (Spain)
	P16 (Denmark)
Non-EU Citizen (only)	P5 (Nepal), P9 (England), P10 (Türkiye), P12 (USA), P17 (Colombia), P24 (India), P26 (Türkiye), P27 (Russia), P30 (Philippines), P31 (Morocco), P33 (Algeria), P34 (Ukraine)
	P7 (Syria), P13 (Brazil), P20 (Serbia), P22 (Serbia), P32 (Philippines)

Citizenship Status	Pseudonyms (Country of Origin)
	P1 (Scotland), P4 (Egypt), P28 (Gambia)
	P29 (England)
Dual (EU + Non-EU)	P8 (Tunisia), P15 (Venezuela)
	P25 (Denmark)
	P21 (Morocco), P23 (Syria)

To gain insights into the socioeconomic status of the interviewees and understand their self-perceptions, they were asked, "How do you evaluate your income status?" Most interviewees (twenty-one individuals) described their income as middle or upper-middle, while ten assessed it as low. Only four participants regarded themselves as having a high income.

To understand the interviewees' experiences as migrants thoroughly, they were individually asked about their professions, both in their country of origin and in Malta. ISCO[3] was used as a reference for classifying the interviewees' professions. Almost half of the participants (seventeen individuals) fall into the manager or professional group. Two interviewees are students, while one person is retired, and fifteen participants are workers/labourers in Malta.

Social Communication of Migrants in Daily Life

Most Frequently Used Language in Everyday Life

A significant number of participants are multilingual. Notably, only four interviewees among all participants were native English speakers, and none of them spoke another language. The most frequently used language in daily life among the migrant participants is English.

For those who maintain family ties in Malta or frequently engage in online video calls with their family members, their native language often comes second in usage. Additionally, the professional work life of the participants who speak more than two languages plays a crucial role in determining the language they use most often in daily life. Notably, participants whose housemates are from their own country of origin or ethnicity tend to identify the language they use most as their "home and work languages". Some participants expressed their efforts to learn Maltese, but experienced difficulty understanding the language. Among the interviewees, two participants who have lived in Malta for over thirty years are fluent in Maltese.

[3]International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO) is a a classification that provides a framework for providing internationally comparable occupation data. Find more: https://ilostat.ilo.org/methods/concepts-and-definitions/classification-occupation

Various participants' narratives indicate that knowledge of Maltese is perceived as a significant advantage for migrants in Malta. P21 (Moroccan) explained that he got along well with most of the Maltese he knew, and that a small minority exhibited racist attitudes, but he could cope with this because he spoke Maltese. He believed that Maltese had helped him establish harmonious relationships, even with difficult people.

Similarly, P4 (Egyptian) noted that after realising that Maltese society was not homogeneous, he better understood local differences through Maltese, and that it also facilitated his daily work and bureaucratic procedures.

P7 (Syrian) reported that he spoke Arabic, English, Italian, and Maltese fluently, emphasising that Maltese provided a clear advantage in his restaurant business dealings with customers and business partners.

P16 (Danish), a maintainer, mentioned that despite his limited knowledge of Maltese, he found it useful in communicating with local people on construction projects and in neighbourly relations.

Participant observations indicate that the fact that English is one of Malta's official languages has a dual impact on migrants. While English offers a significant advantage for everyday communication, it is also considered one of the most significant obstacles to learning Maltese. Although learning Maltese is not mandatory for daily life or work, it provides flexibility for migrants; however, this can limit their ability to engage with local communities and their sense of belonging in social matters.

In fieldwork, many non-EU migrants described Maltese as a very difficult language. In contrast, migrants who spoke Arabic or were native Arabic speakers stated that they found it easier to understand the language due to its similarity to Arabic.

Both interviews and participant observations suggest that, for migrants, speaking Maltese is instrumental in facilitating daily tasks and bureaucratic procedures.

Where They Choose to Live

The primary considerations influencing respondents' choice of residence include affordability, proximity to work, a safe environment, social ties, and the residential locations of family members. Additionally, socioeconomically disadvantaged interviewees, in particular, often highlight the rapidly increasing rents on the island as a significant concern. For example, P5 (Nepali), who shares an apartment with eight friends in Luqa, pays €200 monthly rent—a relatively low accommodation fee for anyone living in Malta. P5 notes that 50–60% of his income is allocated to household expenses.

Similarly, P24 (Indian) lives with four people and pays a lower rent. One of P24's priorities is to connect with the Indian community at the Temple of Peace on weekends, which is why they live in Gzira.

In the participant observations, it was noted that migrants who are manual workers in Malta spend most of their time in a small area if their place of residence and workplace are close together. Regardless of their economic situation, many are not concerned about which town they live in as long as their rent is affordable and they can continue working. Their primary focus is often on saving as much of their income as possible if they plan to

move to another EU member country at the first opportunity or even return permanently to their home country.

Due to their economic circumstances, participants with greater flexibility in choosing where they live generally prefer locations close to the workplace, safe, and convenient for accessing social and shopping venues. Conversely, personal preferences and circumstances—such as challenges in finding a pet-friendly apartment or a desire for peace, quiet, or a green environment—may lead some high-income participants to choose Gozo or the less central parts of the island.

Another important aspect of residential choice is proximity to family members and social support networks. For example, P21 (Moroccan, Maltese citizen) resides in Birzebbuga to stay close to his wife's family, while P16 (Danish-British) notes that he lives near his nephew to offer support.

Observations indicate that, despite the island's small size, migrants distinctly refer to certain areas as slums. Two localities were singled out. Some view towns like Marsa and Hamrun as dangerous, rather than merely affordable, describing these areas as places where *problem-causing* migrants reside. These locations are also a topic in certain stand-up comedy routines, where migrants make up most of the audience, and comedians joke about these areas, as noted during participant observations. On the other hand, some university students, whether EU or non-EU citizens, choose to live in these locations, because the rents are more affordable and close to the city centre.

Interaction with Neighbours

The findings from the interviews indicate a wide range of interactions between participants and their neighbours, from very close relationships to minimal interaction. Approximately one-third of the participants (eleven) reported interacting with their neighbours very often, while the same number indicated they had limited interaction. Thirteen participants noted that they did not interact with their neighbours except in cases of necessity.

Those who had strong interactions with their neighbours emphasised friendship. Social support is a prominent aspect of these relationships, with participants mentioning the importance of helping one another in times of need, similar to a family dynamic. P29 (British), who has been living in Malta for nineteen years, stated, “Not financially, but they can support me emotionally when I need it.”

Participants with limited interaction had a general idea of their neighbours. They usually knew enough about each other to recognize where they were from or exchange phone numbers, but they did not establish a friendship. They greeted one another and engaged in superficial conversations. For instance, P11 (Greek) mentioned that even in emergencies, he would prefer to call a friend rather than his neighbours.

The participants’ experiences varied based on their culture, the attitudes of their neighbours, and their place of residence. Limited neighbourly interaction is primarily mentioned in areas where many international resident neighbours are emphasised. For instance, some interviewees, P13 (Brazilian), stated they had no opportunity to establish neighbourly relations because the neighbouring apartments were converted into Airbnb

rentals or were leased for short periods. P13 also noted that his local neighbours seemed unwelcoming towards him, which he attributed to his non-EU status.

Participant observations indicate that migrants who share the same house or live close to fellow citizens often meet their social support needs through these networks. At the same time, the cultural and social differences between sending and receiving societies significantly influence the relationships migrants establish with people in their local area. This finding is illustrated in the interview with P24 (Indian), who explained that in his culture the principle is to prioritise family first, followed by neighbours, and then society.

Additionally, neighbourly relationships are often perceived as more supportive in towns with a high proportion of local residents or in areas characterised by family-oriented households. For example, P4 (Egyptian), who has lived in Malta for over ten years and speaks Maltese, stated that his neighbours are Maltese and that they share a strong bond. He mentioned, humorously, that he learns all the local gossip from his elderly neighbours.

Typical Day Activities

A significant portion of the interviewees evaluate daily life activities on the island seasonally as summer and winter time. Participants spend more time at home outside of work hours in the winter. In the summer, they socialize more with friends and participate in outdoor activities.

However, participants who also consider weekday and weekend activities, focus on work as their primary activity during the week. A tiny portion (three people) work remotely, and two do hybrid work. Interviewees who start the weekday with work continue the day by spending time with their pets or families. At the end of the working hours, they engage in relaxing activities, such as reading books, watching movies, and spending time on social media.

While only a limited number of interview participants reported working remotely, field observations suggest that remote workers are quite common in the Maltese labour market. These individuals stated that they could manage their time according to their own needs, while others reported spending part of their working hours in cafés. During six months of daily morning observations at four cafés located at the intersection of the Msida and Gżira districts, where many migrants reside, the researcher noted that the same people arrived at similar times each morning, mostly ordered the same food and drinks, and left around noon. The fact that the majority of these people were migrants was evident both from the researcher's one-on-one conversations and from their accents. Furthermore, there was a widespread perception that remote work was essential to their life on the island and that they sought to take advantage of the opportunities the island offered in this way.

Participants who leave mainly socialising to the weekends engage in activities such as attending parties, nightlife, visiting the beach, and meeting with friends and fellow citizens on the weekends. Only two interviewees state that they regularly support or continue to support NGOs as volunteers.

Almost all participants who face socioeconomic disadvantages prefer to spend long periods of time with their families (online or offline) on weekends, meet friends in local cafés, or socialize in public spaces such as parks and beaches.

However, some individuals use their rest time for extra work or overtime. For example, P5 (Nepali), who works as a waitperson, states that he wakes up at 04:30, gets ready, and makes a video call to his family before leaving home, as he needs to catch public transportation for work by 06:00. In the shared house where P5 lives with people from his ethnic community, residents take turns cleaning and preparing meals each day. P5 does not view this responsibility as an extra burden; instead, he looks for additional work during his free time. Occasionally, they explore new places with friends on their days off. This situation highlights that some participants have minimal personal space at home because of economic constraints.

Similar narratives emerged during participant observations. It is common for migrants, particularly those from Southeast and South Asian countries who live with fellow countrymen or ethnic groups, to cook for everyone at home and organise the cleaning of common areas. These migrants often prepare their own meals for economic reasons and regularly share household responsibilities to manage living arrangements in shared spaces.

Respondents with children tend to focus their days more on family and childcare, whether their families are in Malta or not. Many participants mention regular video calls with family or friends in their country of origin. These interactions occupy a significant amount of time in the daily lives of migrants and serve to maintain ties while keeping them updated on news from their home countries.

Shopping

For the vast majority of participants, belonging to their own ethnic community was not a determining factor in choosing a store; findings showed that low prices and product variety were the two most important criteria. However, some participants expressed a preference for ethnic stores as a way to access familiar products. For example, P24 (Indian), speaking on behalf of six Indian friends present during the interview, emphasised their preference for Indian stores, saying, "These stores only have what we're looking for."

Participant observations and conversations with migrants in public spaces suggested a more visible sense of ethnic solidarity among Balkan migrants; this tendency was linked to the belief that "it's better for our people to make a living." Participants from Serbia (P20 and P22) stated that they preferred supermarkets selling Serbian products, with P20 even choosing *Serbian-style* brands for clothing. Observations also revealed that Serbian, Bosnian, Macedonian, and Montenegrin migrants frequently preferred to spend time in cafes and bars owned or staffed by Balkan migrants as part of their daily routines.

However, in meeting their daily needs, this group, like other participants, considered price affordability the primary criterion.

Another factor for meeting daily needs is proximity, though free public transportation allows some low-income interviewees to make large periodic purchases. On the other hand, only a few participants (four) mentioned shopping at local grocery

stores or farmers' markets for their daily needs. Participant observations confirm that migrants overwhelmingly prefer supermarkets over local shops. Those who do shop locally tend to continue visiting these shops, because they have become familiar with the shop owners over time.

Some findings unique to the small, warm-climate island are also noteworthy. One such finding is that online delivery services are rarely mentioned for daily needs other than meal orders, with these apps being mostly preferred during cold weather or when transportation is challenging. This pattern was illustrated by P8 (Tunisian), who explained that she did not order online even though she did not cook much at home, noting that she shopped from nearby shops.

Another notable finding is the prevalence of clothing shopping from abroad. Many participants expressed interest in in-store fast-fashion retailers; however, those who find Malta's clothing options limited often shop for clothing when visiting their country of origin or other countries. Some participants also prefer online fast-fashion retailers.

Observations indicate that both locals and migrants in Malta show little interest in charity and thrift shops, which appeal not only to low-income individuals but also to those interested in ecological sustainability and unique fashion styles.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study evaluates the social communication processes of migrants in Malta in the context of daily life practices. Migrant social communication encompasses all forms of cultural, social, economic, and political activities in the receiving country and determines the extent of interaction between migrants and the receiving society. Social communication is established through communication networks of migrants with their own communities and the receiving society, including local people and other migrants. This study explores how migrants in Malta participate in social communication through their social environments and daily life practices, as well as the challenges they face. Language, as one of the primary instruments of social communication, is essential not only for daily activities but also for creating or transforming shared social values. Many migrants in Malta use English as the language of social communication. In fact, for some of them, the fact that English is the other official language along with Maltese is one of the reasons why migrants prefer the island.

Limited knowledge of Maltese constrains migrants' ability to establish closer relationships with the local community and to understand social life in all its dimensions. The study's findings indicate that migrants who learn the language gain significant advantages not only in everyday communication but also in bureaucratic processes. This demonstrates that, despite the advantages offered by English in a bilingual context such as Malta, Maltese proficiency remains a decisive factor for integration. Therefore, the study confirms that, as Gauci and Vella (2022) emphasise, learning Maltese strengthens migrants' sense of social belonging and their practical mobility.

At the same time, the temporal and spatial organisation of migrants in Malta also plays a critical role in their social communication. As Erdoğan (2011, p. 163) states, communication occurs within socially defined time, and the organisation of time by standardizing it creates social time. Migrants organize their daily lives on the island

seasonally or on weekends and weekdays. Their participation in outdoor activities tends to increase during the summer months, while they spend more time at home in winter, engaging in family-oriented activities. These seasonal differences reflect the flexible approaches of migrants to the climatic and cultural dynamics specific to Malta. However, migrants in Malta sometimes spend their weekends with their families and friends in their country of origin on long online video calls. This reflects their desire to maintain strong connections with their country of origin while nurturing close family ties.

On the other hand, migrants' social communication experiences are closely tied to their socioeconomic status. Socioeconomic status plays a significant role in shaping migrants' choice of residence, working hours and conditions, and level of participation in social life. Similarly, working conditions and opportunities to engage in social activities, particularly those that foster new social networks, also influence changes in socioeconomic status. Limited participation in social communication processes due to socioeconomic constraints often reinforces existing inequalities, perpetuating the migrant's social position over time.

As this study reveals, socioeconomically disadvantaged migrants are more likely to remain within limited communication networks, relying on interactions within their ethnic groups to strengthen social ties. This finding is consistent with the symbolic interactionist perspective, which emphasises that social meanings and relationships are constructed through everyday interactions (Mead, 1973; Blumer, 1969).

Economic challenges, such as low wages, the need to save money, or the obligation to transfer cash to family members in the sending country, often drive these migrants to share housing with members of their ethnic community and divide domestic responsibilities in Malta. However, low-paid migrants with long working hours are often concentrated in the service sector, particularly in areas such as accommodation and food service/delivery (OECD, 2020). This concentration of interactions within ethnic boundaries, combined with challenging work conditions, limits opportunities for broader social communication, expanded social networks, and job opportunities.

In this context, de Certeau (2008, pp. 54–55) argues that the powerless – here, sociologically disadvantaged migrants – create space in everyday life by developing tactics to counter structural constraints imposed by the strategic control of powerful institutions. Practices such as house-sharing, collective saving arrangements, or reliance on ethnic stores among socioeconomically disadvantaged migrants in Malta can be seen as examples of such tactics.

In contrast, migrants with socioeconomic advantages have more significant opportunities to participate in social activities, interact with Maltese people, and expand their social networks. The neighbourhoods where migrants live also play a critical role in shaping their social communication experiences. Socioeconomically disadvantaged migrants often reside in areas with lower living costs and higher ethnic diversity. At the same time, those with greater resources may have access to neighbourhoods that provide more opportunities for integration into the broader society.

However, the challenges in social communication are not solely due to economic difficulties or language barriers. Cultural differences and contrasting social norms also emerge over time, adding complexity to the communication process. On a small island

like Malta, these differences can become particularly pronounced in geographically close but socially distinct areas. While ethnic communities with strong solidarity can provide crucial social support, they can also create a sense of exclusion in broader social interactions. This reflects Habermas's (2001) concept of the lifeworld, in which cultural values and social norms both structure communication and shape social interactions.

This dynamic is further reflected in everyday practices, such as shopping preferences. The finding regarding everyday shopping preferences aligns with Göktuna Yaylacı's (2012, p. 227) research on Turkish migrants in Belgium, as these migrants tend to visit supermarkets in search of product variety and affordable prices. In addition, socioeconomically disadvantaged individuals, particularly those whose social networks primarily comprise compatriots in similar circumstances, are often motivated to support their ethnic communities through their shopping habits, frequently preferring to buy from shops owned by fellow compatriots. This practice intensifies ethnic communication within these groups and limits their interaction with others outside the community.

Almost none of the participants mentioned considerations regarding consumption patterns, such as supporting local production, ecological goods, or labour rights. This suggests their shopping habits align with widespread consumer culture norms and reflect a lack of interest in social issues. Furthermore, the low level of participation in volunteer activities among migrants indicates a reluctance to engage with local social issues. These findings highlight a complex interplay between economic and social motivations that shape everyday practices while also underscoring the limited engagement with social concerns within these communities.

Furthermore, although participation in civil society has the potential to enhance migrants' engagement in social communication, only a small proportion of migrants volunteer or contribute to the activities and programmes of civil society organisations. A significant proportion remain reluctant to engage with social issues in the receiving country, highlighting a gap in social inclusion.

This research provides a detailed framework for migrants' social communication processes due to the adoption of an ethnographic approach – and the observation of online communities for almost two years. It was observed that non-EU migrants subject to data collection throughout the research were concerned about their identities being disclosed and had significant concerns about their residence permits. Many non-EU migrants stated that they did not feel secure regarding their social and work rights. One of the most important reasons for this is that migrants who have a residence permit with an employer are limited to ten days to change employers (Identita Malta – Expatriates Unit, 2024). Therefore, it can be said that this situation is always an issue on the table for non-EU migrants' participation in social interaction processes in Malta.

Non-EU citizens describe themselves as more disadvantaged than EU citizens regarding access to job opportunities. Both interviews and participant observations show that EU citizens also confirm this view. As a result, daily life practices become clear through socioeconomic status, social networks and, on a large scale, international practices and policies. These findings align with research indicating that EU and EEA immigrants with free movement rights enjoy a more favourable environment in Malta. In

this context, non-EU immigrants face greater social pressure and more restrictive policies compared to EU citizens (Pace, 2021).

In light of all these discussions, the following recommendations are made for researchers, policymakers and civil society:

• Current research on migrants from communities and groups living in Malta and participating least in social interaction processes can be conducted to identify situations where social inclusion is decreasing.

• Migrant narratives that are difficult to discover offline can be revealed by focusing on online migrant communities.

• Existing policies that will increase social interaction can be improved, or new policies can be developed in line with in-depth research that will allow a better understanding of the experiences of migrants, especially non-EU migrants, to be better understood.

• Civil society organisations can more effectively include migrant communities, networks, or individuals in projects that increase social interaction

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