

Former Child Migrants - Malta

At the hearing of the Senate Community Affairs Reference Committee Inquiry into Child Migration to which C-BERS made a presentation, we were asked, and agreed, to provide more detailed information about the needs of former child migrants from Malta. A meeting of Maltese former child migrants was advertised via the C-BERS newsletter and eighteen Maltese men attended.

Participants attending the forum were asked to:

1. Identify issues that they thought might be useful in the light of the request from the Senate Community Affairs Reference Committee Inquiry into Child Migration
2. Identify the specific needs of former child migrants from Malta.

One former child migrant prepared a full paper for the meeting. With the agreement of all in attendance, this was read to the group. It was endorsed by the group as a coherent presentation that well represented the majority of views of those present and it was requested by the group that the intact document be forwarded as an attachment to any material that was sent to the Reference Committee (Appendix 2).

Participants raised a number of questions in relation to specific details about Maltese child migration. In the light of these questions, it was agreed that some basic data in relation to former child migrants from Malta should be provided alongside this summary. This is provided in Appendix 1. It was further agreed that the entire document be sent to all participants who attended the forum and that a further forum would be held within three months.

The following points are itemized as they were recorded on the white board at the forum. They have not been edited and simply represent the collected views of the individual men who were present.

1 Comments noted at the forum

- a) Many former child migrants have had confusing information about their rights to British citizenship given that Malta was a British colony.
- b) They have also been given conflicting information about their rights to claim ISS funding for travel and reunification.
- c) Maltese former child migrants were drafted at the same time as there was no recognition of their rights to Australian citizenship
- d) The child migrants worked at institutions such as Bindoon with no remuneration. As a consequence of this work, which took the place of study, many Maltese child migrants never learned to read and write and so remained illiterate.
- e) Just as with the British child migrants, a number of Maltese child migrants were abused in a number of ways.
- f) Some Maltese migrants did get some help from families and from the institutions and others did not. This has set up a strong feeling of unfairness.
- g) Maltese child migrants were often made to stop speaking and using their own language.
- h) Some men thought that the names of some Maltese migrants were not on the PHIND list.
- i) "There is too much discussion about what happened in the past and not enough focus on what needs to happen now". The men are getting older, many are dying and help is needed in the present
- j) It was noted that there were significant differences between the experiences of child migrants from the UK and from Malta:
 - Family were often involved in the migration of Maltese children
 - Maltese children were not generally made wards of the State - but they were often still unable to correspond with family
 - There was a sense of going to 'something better' and so there is a sense of shame in going back - it could be said that 'we didn't succeed'.
- k) The Maltese government clearly had an important part to play in the migration but so did the Catholic Church. However, the Maltese government has never publicly accepted any responsibility.
- l) "People here keep trying to cash in on our experience".

Supplementary Information

- m) Former child migrants from Malta wish to be known as pioneers who can hold their heads up high.

2. Expressed Needs

- a) Maltese former child migrants would like clarification about their rights as Maltese / British citizens.
- b) A chance to live in the country of birth
- c) Formal apology from the government(s) involved
- d) Counselling that is freely available
- e) A half way house in Malta for returning Former Child Migrants
- f) Financial support - monetary compensation for the traumas
- g) Liaison link with the Maltese government
- h) Support in learning - literacy
- i) Assistance in celebrating being Maltese
- j) Urgent attention to the needs because "we are running out of time"
- k) An interface between Maltese men and their families - CBERSS - and governments is urgently needed
- l) "The rights to travel should not have to be associated with a letter from a close relative"

Appendix One
Maltese Child Migration

The following information is derived from PHIND (The Personal History Index for Former Child Migrants to Catholic Homes 1938 – 1965) and has been provided by PHIND’s Manager, Mrs Josette Mathers, with the kind permission of the sponsoring religious organizations, the Christian Brothers, the Sisters of Mercy and the Sisters of Nazareth.

There were 310 child migrants from Malta: 259 of these were young boys and 51 were girls. They arrived between 1950 and 1965

Age Distribution of Maltese child migrants

Age	No.	Male	Female
4	5	4	1
5	8	3	5
6	11	6	5
7	12	9	3
8	25	19	6
9	33	23	10
10	36	30	6
11	52	49	3
12	45	42	3
13	38	36	2
14	29	24	5
15	9	7	2
16	7	7	0
	310	259	51

State of Destination

WA	303
SA	7

At a minimum 139 (45%) Maltese former child migrants left the institutions in Australia to go to their families who had become resident in Australia (often in another State), whilst another 15 (5%) at least returned to Malta, ie 50% of Maltese former child migrants were reunited with families.

Notwithstanding this relatively high level of family reunification (that is, relative to the British children), all Maltese children experienced separation from family and country of birth at an age when they could not give informed consent to such a separation. We urge the Senate not to discriminate on the basis of length of separation. Rather, the fact of separation should be considered as traumatic in its own right.

Appendix 2
Paper by J. Azzopardi

RE: Submission to the Senate Community Affairs
References Committee Inquiry into Child Migration

The Maltese child migrants and their needs.

Firstly madam chair I would like to express my thanks for organize this meeting, in many cases I know that you go beyond the call of duty to help out and your concern for the Maltese is much appreciated.

Reading through the transcripts of the senate public hearings that took place on the 6, 15, and 16 of February,

The needs of the Maltese where singled out as being different to that of ex UK child migrants.

If I may be permitted to highlight some facts what I think should be the way to go on this I appreciated.

Firstly we should be talking about then not now, then we where British subjects as many of the documentation from that time will show.

It would be very sad if the present governments would not see eye to eye on this.

The Maltese head of state then was a Governor appointed by the queen.

I have to agree that in many ways we are different in need because many of us had family that we knew in Malta and in many cases we still have.

Most cases a parent or parents where involved in the decision to come out here.

Their consent was given on the understanding that thy where sending us here to get a better education and with the hope of returning to Malta qualified in some field or other.

But because of the lack of care this did not happen, as we all know.

This and the fact the we were not wards of any state makes us different and does create different needs so far as to say that many of us would have been better off staying with our parents, a need to once again belong to our home land.

We where unable to correspond with our parents and there for our families where kept in the dark as to what was happening.

Many of us came from very close families who send us here to get better educations as I have already mentioned.

Supplementary Information

Different yes our parochialism is still strong but many of us find it hard to go back to our Birthplace because of shame, we have to be very careful here that we don't create some stigma that would label us as the lost children or such some quotes that many would be writers are trying to cash on at our expense, we did not live in the shadow of the cross we carried it.

The fact that the Maltese government has not yet recognized child migration is very sad indeed; maybe they too cannot face the shame that their sons and daughters had to go through,

And this is my point re stigma, we must tread carefully that we are seen as pioneers and not as some poor children that where sent to Australia because they where not wanted, it must be made known that our parents send us here with the best of intentions, that is of learning, and that what happened next was the callus making of the Christine brother, and under very hard circumstances we still able to hold our heads up high and say to the world that they may have taken away our childhood but our Maltese sprit is still in tacked..

Malta had lived under British rule for two hundred years right up to the 24 of September 1964, and it really makes me wonder how it is so difficult to establish if we have the same right as the British When Malta was still under British occupation.

Never the less I think that they are wrong in saying that we have no rights to the British government grant, for we can show that when we came out to this country we where British subjects and our nationality was classed as British.

As to our needs I would say that the only difference is that many of us came from parents, and not from orphanages and the need to make permanent contact and even maybe continue what life we have left in our own country, for those who wish too, should be looked at, without loosing any of the entitlements that would be otherwise coming to them from this country, let us not forget that the child migrant has contributed much to this country.

Those of us who come from orphanages in Malta are finding out that they where not so alone as they where led to believe, again no different than the British, many have found loved ones and find it hard now to not be able to spend their life with them.

So it would be only fare that a choice is given so as those who want to reside in their country of birth should be able to do so without lose or prejudiced.

(a) **In relation to government and non-government institutions responsible for the care of child migrants:**

As to who did the organizing from Malta I can safely say that the church was asked to approach the relevant parents, and it was through the church that the recommendation were made to the relevant authority's to continue the process of assessment.

Supplementary Information

No one got through unless the relevant parish priest approved it.

(b) The need for a formal acknowledgment and apology by Australian governments for the human suffering arising from the child migration schemes;

So the Christian brothers have apologized is this suppose to make us feel good, all it dose is acknowledge the fact of all the wrong that has been done, and the only one that benefit from an apology is the perpetrators.

And now the government is about to do the same.

An apology dose not make one forget what happened, nor dose it pay for all the hurt that been put on us.

But further urges one to go on and fight for justice.

(c) Provide counseling or any other services that were designed to reduce or limit trauma caused by the removal of these children from their country of birth and deportation to Australia;

Many of The Maltese child migrants arrived in this country with the help of both the government of Malta and Australia, and the Catholic Churches of both country's, contrary to what has been written so far.

In many cases this was to be a short stay of time so as that child could finish their education.

We know now that did not happen.

We also know that instead, the Maltese child migrant suffered sexual physical and mental abuse.

We know that many have gone to Malta and found that any relatives still living are old and frail and found it very hard when it came time to leave not knowing if they will ever see their loved ones again. Such a case has already happened Madam chair, as you know.

Those of us who came here from families and not institutions have made our acquaintances and found them in some cases to be just what we needed. Although one can only be saddened by the fact that so much time has been lost, siblings that we left behind as young as six months are now grown man and woman, so much has been lost that can never be made up.

Unfortunate are those who made acquaintances and have found that they where not as welcome as they would have liked it to be.

Many lives's have been destroyed and cannot be reconstructed again ever.

For those who find the need for counseling let it be available as freely as it is now, but that should not be the only compensation that one receives.

Supplementary Information

Surly the fact that we now have shown the harsh life we encountered as children in this country make us eligible for a lot more than just counseling and unification.

I would argue too that those who came from parents could hardly be classed as wards of the state, and that is my point, which put us in the category of slave labors.

So the need for a half way house is evident.

The majority of us has had counseling some for many years; long before any establishments where created that is before C-BERS or any others that are now trying to get on the act, many cases do it with reluctance, for some it helps. And some find no real benefit, in fact it only stairs up a lot of emotions that none of us like to go through over and over again.

And let me say that a lot of money is being spend for these services, I don't want to be unkind but this money only fills up the pockets of the psychiatrists and psychologists and social workers, when this money could be given to those in real need for such things as every day living.

I personally think that the way to go is to firstly reunite those Maltese that are still looking for their loved ones. And see if the Australian government can come to some arrangement as to how we can liaison with the Maltese authorities to Establish a half way house if need be.

- (d) **Measures of reparation including, but not limited to, compensation and rehabilitation by the perpetrators; and**
- (e) **Whether statutory or administrative limitations or barriers adversely affect those former child migrants who wish to pursue claims against individual perpetrators of abuse previously involved in their care.**

The next important is to work toward a compensation package for lost wages abuse sexual physical and mental, pain and sufferings lack of education, and our long separation from our loved ones, I say the list could go on and on, but I am sure that from the submissions that the senate has, the pattern is that we now need to be compensated in monetary terms, and that further counseling and education at our age group dose not hold much in a way of obtaining a profession, we are at an age that we no longer regarded as employable, and many of us have had enough with no future prospect in site.

I would like to put it to this meeting if I may that both the Senate and C-BERS LOOK INTO WAYS OF OBTAINING SUCH COMPENSATIONS

We have the wrong end of the deal because we have always thought that what is happening is happening for all, but I guess I was wrong, so I would like to suggests that we have our own representatives to LIAISON with C-BERS, and the government, in many cases there are questions about the Maltese that can be answered on the spot, but because there are no Maltese present things get delayed.

Supplementary Information

It has always been a bit of a worry to me that no child migrant sits on any of these committees, and I DO THINK THAT THIS SHOULD BE LOOKED AT.

The inquiry has been trying to establish how we stand on the statues of limitations, may I say here that the only statue of limitation that the senate should be looking at is the one that is in the hands of the creator or if you are like me a none believer in such things, than in hands of fait, for none of us are getting any younger and the urgency must be shown in this context while there still some of us left and the statutory of limitation run out for eternity.

In conclusion, I would like to thank you for given me the opportunity to speak and put these ideas to all and would like to hear what any one else has to contribute.