

Linguistic Mediation as Communicative Strategy in Malta: Empathy, Authority, and the Limits of Communicative Change

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Abstract: This qualitative study examines linguistic mediation as a professional and institutional practice within migration contexts, drawing on narrative data from a university-based mediation training initiative in Malta. While mediation is often framed as a neutral communicative tool that promotes empathy and inclusion, this study adopts a critical perspective, situating mediation within broader regimes of migration governance. Using thematic analysis of narrative data generated by public service professionals (n = 10), the study explores how participants reinterpret communication, authority, and engagement with migrants following structured, case-based pedagogical intervention. Findings indicate that mediation practices foster clarity, relationality, and professional reflexivity; however, these shifts may also function as forms of soft governance, rearticulating rather than transforming institutional power (Fassin, 2013; Foucault, 1991; Mezzadra & Neilson, 2019). The Maltese case illustrates how mediation can simultaneously enable inclusion and reinforce state frameworks of control. This study contributes to scholarship on intercultural communication, language policy, and migration governance by critically examining mediation as both a pedagogical and governance technology, while documenting how a structured professional training initiative can reframe institutional authority through the twin imperatives of empathy and civic responsibility.

Keywords: linguistic mediation; intercultural communicative competence; migration governance; CEFR

Introduction

When I arrived in Malta to deliver a series of lectures at the University of Malta as part of a Fulbright Scholar collaboration, I was struck by something I had not fully anticipated: I was teaching police officers how to communicate with migrants. Not enforcement protocol, not procedural compliance, but genuine, empathetic, intercultural communication. As an educator who has spent decades studying how language shapes relationships between institutions and the people they serve, I recognised immediately that what Malta had built was significant: a professional training initiative that treated communication not as a secondary administrative skill but as the primary instrument of humane and effective governance. That recognition is what provoked this study.

This experience, the surprise and the genuine hope of it, is what motivated me to write about it. Across Europe, as in other parts of the world, migration continues to reshape the communicative, ethical, and institutional demands placed on public service professionals. Linguistic mediation has emerged as a central construct for navigating this complexity, particularly through its articulation in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Companion Volume (CEFR-CV; Council of Europe, 2020). Mediation is frequently presented as a communicative bridge, an inclusive, humanising practice that facilitates understanding across difference. Yet, as scholars of migration governance remind us, practices framed as supportive or humanitarian frequently coexist with systems of surveillance, regulation, and control (De Genova, 2013; Fassin, 2013; Khosravi, 2019). This tension is especially visible in frontline institutional settings, where communication is not merely interpersonal but deeply embedded in state logics of authority.

This study examines a mediation training initiative implemented through the University of Malta's Diploma in Education for Cultural Mediation, a programme serving public service professionals, including officers from the Malta Police Force and civilian practitioners from education, banking, and social work. While the programme aimed to strengthen communicative competence and intercultural understanding, this article interrogates how mediation simultaneously operates within broader structures of governance, enabling inclusion while potentially reinforcing institutional authority. The study addresses three guiding questions:

(1) How do professionals define changes in their communication practices following mediation training?

- (2) How is institutional authority reframed through mediation practices?
- (3) To what extent does mediation transform or reproduce existing power relations?

By situating mediation within migration governance, this article offers a critical lens on a practice often assumed to be inherently positive (Council of Europe, 2020). It argues that mediation may simultaneously support inclusion and reinforce institutional authority (De Genova, 2013; Fassin, 2013; Yuval-Davis, 2011), and that recognising this duality is essential for developing more equitable and reflexive institutional approaches to migration in contemporary Europe.

Malta as a Migration Context

Malta provides a particularly compelling context for examining mediation within migration governance. As the smallest EU member state, Malta faces migration pressures that are disproportionately visible given its size, administrative capacity, and geographic position in the central Mediterranean (Mainwaring, 2019; Triandafyllidou, 2022). The country functions simultaneously as a frontline state, a transit point, and a destination (European Commission, 2015), navigating EU relocation mechanisms, humanitarian obligations, and domestic political debates about integration (Calleja, 2021; Mainwaring, 2019). These dynamics place significant communicative demands on frontline professionals who interact daily with migrants navigating complex legal, bureaucratic, and linguistic landscapes. In this environment, mediation is not merely a pedagogical tool, but a practical necessity embedded in the everyday functioning of state institutions.

What makes Malta particularly instructive as a case study is not simply its geographic exposure to migration but its policy response to that exposure. Malta has institutionalised an education-based integration model grounded in linguistic competence and civic values, treating communication as a professional and civic competency rather than a supplementary administrative function. Its national integration strategies, *Integration = Belonging: Migrant Integration Strategy & Action Plan Vision 2020* (Government of Malta, 2017) and the *Integration Strategy and Action Plan 2025–2030* (Government of Malta, 2025), explicitly frame integration as a communicative achievement, built through dialogue and mutual recognition rather than imposed through compliance. The Diploma in Education for Cultural Mediation and the “I Belong” programme operationalise these goals by embedding CEFR-aligned

mediation into public service education, representing a distinctive model in which language pedagogy directly informs governance and public service delivery.

Contribution to the Field

This study advances scholarship in three key ways. First, it reframes linguistic mediation as a governance practice rather than solely a pedagogical or communicative tool. While mediation is widely promoted in language education (Council of Europe, 2020; Stathopoulou, 2015a, 2015b), its institutional functions within migration systems remain underexamined (Triandafyllidou, 2022). Second, it integrates critical migration studies into applied linguistics, demonstrating how communicative practices may both enable understanding (Byram, 1997; Kramsch, 2009) and reproduce structural power relations (De Genova, 2013; Fassin, 2013). This interdisciplinary bridge responds directly to calls for deeper theoretical engagement in mediation research (Stathopoulou, 2015b; Zotzmann & O'Regan, 2016). Third, it provides empirical insight into how frontline professionals interpret and enact mediation in a European migration context. The Maltese case offers a valuable lens for understanding how communicative practices intersect with state authority (Foucault, 1991), particularly in small-state contexts where migration governance is highly visible, and the stakes of communicative choice are immediately consequential (Calleja, 2021; European Commission, 2015; Mainwaring, 2019).

Together, these contributions position mediation as a complex, situated practice that warrants critical examination within contemporary migration regimes and offers a genuinely hopeful model for institutions willing to engage honestly with that complexity.

Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

The Rise of Mediation in Language Pedagogy

The CEFR-CV (Council of Europe, 2020) elevated mediation from a peripheral linguistic function to a central communicative activity. Mediation is the process by which a language user facilitates understanding between interlocutors who cannot communicate directly, creating bridges and helping to construct or convey meaning in contexts that require cross-linguistic and cross-cultural engagement. The CEFR identifies three domains of mediation: Mediating Text,

Mediating Concepts, and Mediating Communication. The Maltese initiative examined here draws primarily on Mediating Communication, in which professionals serve as linguistic and ethical intermediaries between the state and diverse migrant communities. Effective mediation requires sensitivity to social power, context, and emotion, demanding a critical balance of neutrality and empathy (Stathopoulou, 2015a, 2015b).

This pedagogical reorientation aligns with Byram's (1997) foundational model of intercultural communicative competence (ICC), which emphasises the ability to interpret, relate to, and critically evaluate cultural perspectives. Kramsch's (2009) notion of the multilingual subject, who inhabits a third space of continuous identity and meaning negotiation across languages and cultures, complements this view, emphasising that intercultural communication is not merely a skill set but a deeply relational and ethically charged human capacity. Both frameworks underscore what mediation requires of practitioners, not technical fluency alone, but the willingness to encounter difference with genuine openness.

Mediation as Ethical and Civic Practice

The intercultural communicative competence frameworks outlined above converge on a shared premise: mediation is not simply a linguistic skill but a civic and ethical practice central to sustaining pluralistic societies. When embedded in professional training for public servants, mediation becomes a technology of democratic engagement, or, as this study examines critically, a technology of governance whose uses depend on the institutional contexts in which it is deployed (Foucault, 1991).

Malta's Approach Stands Apart

Malta's approach stands apart. Rather than treating integration as compliance to be enforced or a threshold to be met, the University of Malta has institutionalised an education-based model that reframes authority through empathy and communication. The Diploma in Education for Cultural Mediation explicitly embeds CEFR-aligned mediation into professional training for police officers and migrant service providers, emphasising civic inclusion through dialogue rather than regulation (Government of Malta, 2017, 2025; Calleja, 2021; Vassallo Gauci, 2025). This comparative picture illuminates what makes Malta instructive. It is a small, resource-constrained state under acute migration pressure that, nevertheless, at the institutional level, has

committed to a pedagogical and communication-centered integration framework.

Critical Migration Studies and Communicative Governance

From a critical perspective, communicative practices are never politically neutral. Rather, they are embedded within broader structures of governance (Fairclough, 1995). Migration scholars have demonstrated that humanitarian, educational, and communicative practices can function as instruments of migration control, shaping compliance and normalising state authority (De Genova, 2013, 2017; Mezzadra & Neilson, 2019; Yuval-Davis, 2011). Inclusive practices may coexist with exclusionary structures, producing, as Anderson (2021) describes, a persistent tension between methodological openness and structural bordering. These insights require scholars of language education to look beyond what mediation enables at the interactional level, attending carefully to what it reproduces at the structural level.

Within this framework, mediation can be understood as a dual practice. It is communicative in that it facilitates understanding, reduces conflict, and supports relational engagement, and it is regulatory in that it shapes expectations, guides behaviour, and reinforces institutional legitimacy. This duality is central to the analysis that follows (Rose, 1999).

Theoretical Bridge: Mediation as Governance Technology

Bridging pedagogy and governance requires recognising mediation as simultaneously a communicative and a governmental practice. The CEFR frames mediation as a relational, meaning-making activity that supports mutual understanding, yet when situated within migration systems, mediation becomes intertwined with state objectives. Communicative clarity, empathy, and perspective-taking, the core elements of mediation, can serve to humanise interactions, but they can also facilitate smoother implementation of institutional procedures (Rose, 1999).

This duality reflects what Foucault (1991) describes as the “conduct of conduct,” in which power operates not only through coercion but also by shaping the conditions under which individuals understand and respond to institutional expectations. From this perspective, mediation becomes a hinge between interpersonal communication and broader governance logics. It is essential, therefore, to analyse not only what mediation enables but also what

it reproduces. A professional who mediates more empathetically has not simply become a better communicator. Within a governance framework, that professional has also become a more effective instrument of institutional authority, one whose softened approach may secure compliance more reliably than overt enforcement, and with considerably less political friction (Foucault, 1991; Rose, 1999).

This critical positioning does not negate the genuine value of mediation training, and I want to be clear about that, because the work I witnessed in Malta was genuinely transformational for the participants who engaged with it seriously. The point is not that mediation is suspect, it is that institutions cannot treat mediation as a substitute for structural reform, and that practitioners who engage with it critically are far better positioned to use it for genuine good than those who understand it only as a set of communication techniques (Foucault, 1991; Rose, 1999).

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative interpretive design using narrative data generated through structured, case-based pedagogical interventions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The goal was not to measure mediation training outcomes in a summative sense but to explore how professionals conceptualise communication, authority, and institutional practice after engaging with mediation principles. This design privileges depth and interpretive richness over statistical generalisability, which is appropriate given the exploratory and context-specific nature of the inquiry.

Participants

Ten participants (n = 10) took part in the study: five officers from the Malta Police Force, drawn from units including immigration, community policing, and financial crime, and five civilian professionals working in education, banking, and social work. All participants were enrolled in the University of Malta's Diploma in Education for Cultural Mediation. Their professional roles placed them in regular contact with migrants and multilingual communities, making their responses to mediation training directly relevant to the governance questions this study addresses.

Pedagogical Approach and Assessment Design

The course emphasised experiential learning through case-based analysis, reflective journaling, and role-play simulations linked to CEFR-CV mediation descriptors. These activities were designed to help officers and professionals reinterpret authority through empathy, paraphrasing, and relational engagement rather than solely through enforcement. Participants were invited to describe moments of linguistic or cultural friction in their professional environments and to reinterpret those moments through a mediation framework emphasising empathy, clarity, and shared agency.

The formal assessment was structured as a capstone activity integrating theoretical knowledge from the CEFR-CV with participants' professional experiences. Four tasks guided participants from conceptual understanding to applied practice: (1) defining linguistic mediation and identifying five key principles applied to specific workplace challenges; (2) conducting a case study analysis of a real or hypothetical communication barrier encountered by a migrant in their professional context; (3) crafting a dialogue demonstrating at least three mediation strategies; and (4) designing a linguistic mediation toolkit with five concrete tools grounded in CEFR principles and course content. This design reflects the course's core commitment to mediation as both a communicative skill and a civic responsibility (Byram, 1997; Kramsch, 2009).

Researcher Positionality

As the Fulbright Scholar who designed and delivered this course, I occupied a dual role as both educator and researcher. This positionality brought significant advantages, such as sustained access to participants over time, shared investment in the programme's success, and contextual familiarity that enriched my interpretive analysis. It also introduced limitations, principally the possibility that participants shaped their written responses in ways they believed the instructor expected or valued. I addressed this by analysing written case responses produced as formal assessments rather than solicited research data, which reduced but did not eliminate the social dynamics inherent in instructor-researcher roles.

Data Analysis

Data were analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Coding focused on patterns related to communicative adaptation, representations of authority, and institutional reflexivity. Themes were developed iteratively,

moving between individual responses and the emerging pattern-level picture, with attention to both explicit statements and underlying assumptions embedded in participants' narrative accounts. Three major themes emerged from this process, presented below.

Findings

Three major themes emerged from the analysis: (1) reframing authority through communicative clarity; (2) relational authority and de-escalation; and (3) institutional reflexivity within structural constraints. These themes illustrate how participants reinterpreted their professional communicative roles following mediation training, while also revealing the institutional limits on that reinterpretation.

Theme 1: Reframing Authority Through Communicative Clarity

Participants consistently described a decisive shift toward clearer, more accessible communication. They reported replacing technical or bureaucratic terminology with simplified explanations, visual supports, or step-by-step guidance, framing this shift as a way to reduce confusion and actively support migrant understanding. One immigration officer described a change that was small in form but significant in consequence. He reported that he stopped using the term "persecution" in official encounters and replaced it with the explanation "danger or harm in your home country," noting that this paraphrase produced both better comprehension and a measurably different relational dynamic, one characterised by mutual respect rather than procedural distance.

A financial crimes officer described a parallel transformation: "I now explain first: 'We ask this to protect you and our banking system.' This approach builds trust and cooperation rather than defensiveness." This reframing of procedural compliance as a shared protective interest, rather than an institutional imposition, illustrates precisely the kind of attitudinal shift the programme aimed to produce.

While these adaptations genuinely promote inclusion, they also serve institutional aims. By making procedures more understandable, professionals secured smoother compliance and reduced resistance. This approach reflects a key tension in communicative governance: clarity is both humanising and instrumental. It supports migrants' comprehension while simultaneously

reinforcing institutional expectations and facilitating the efficient execution of state procedures.

In this light, communicative clarity works in two ways: it helps people understand, but it also supports institutional goals, a dynamic noted in analyses of soft governance that shape behaviour through relational rather than coercive means (Rose, 1999).

Theme 2: Relational Authority and De-escalation

Participants, particularly police officers, described mediation as a tool for de-escalation in high-stakes encounters. They emphasised relational strategies, including active listening, acknowledging emotions, and demonstrating patience, as operationally effective alternatives to authoritative commands. One community policing officer articulated a fundamental shift in his professional orientation: “I no longer treat every incident as a law-and-order issue. I ask about cultural norms. I approach situations with less force and more understanding.” Another officer described using mediation to “create space for the person to speak,” observing that this relational opening frequently resolved situations that might otherwise have escalated to enforcement action.

These accounts illustrate how authority can be exercised through relational means without being relinquished. Rather than relying on coercion, professionals used communication to guide behaviour and maintain institutional control. From a Foucauldian perspective, this is a textbook instance of soft governance, authority enacted through subtle, interpersonal techniques rather than overt enforcement (Foucault, 1991). The softening is real; the authority is not dismantled. While participants experienced these strategies as genuinely empowering and ethically progressive, the mechanisms they describe also serve to make institutional authority more palatable and less confrontational, which is, simultaneously, a more humane and more effective governance technology.

That said, I want to resist a purely cynical reading. When an officer puts down the metaphorical baton and picks up the willingness to listen, something genuinely different happens in that encounter for the migrant on the other side of it. The ethical quality of the interaction changes, even if the power asymmetry persists. This matters. What a critical analysis demands is honesty about the limits of that change, not a dismissal of its value.

Theme 3: Institutional Reflexivity Within Structural Constraints

A third theme involved increased reflexivity about the institutional sources of communication breakdown. Participants recognised that misunderstandings often stemmed from systemic barriers, such as complex procedures, rigid protocols, and limited linguistic resources, rather than from migrants' deficiencies or unwillingness to communicate. One residency officer articulated this with particular clarity: "The issue is not the migrant's lack of English. It is our institution's lack of flexibility." A civilian professional reflected with equivalent directness: "We expect migrants to adapt to us, not the other way around."

This reflexivity represents a meaningful and important attitudinal shift. It repositions the communication problem from the migrant's supposed inadequacy to the institution's structural assumptions, a reorientation with significant implications for how institutions design their procedures, train their staff, and evaluate their own effectiveness. However, participants also expressed frustration with the structural constraints that bound their capacity for meaningful change. These constraints, including limited time, heavy caseloads, and organisational expectations that prioritised efficiency over relational engagement, were real. While mediation fostered awareness of institutional limitations, it did not equip participants with the positional authority or organisational resources to challenge or transform those structures. Reflexivity without structural leverage remained, for most participants, a form of professionally productive but institutionally contained awareness (Fairclough, 1995; Rose, 1999).

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that mediation training reshapes professional communication in meaningful and, in many cases, genuinely humanising ways. Participants described adopting clearer, more accessible language, engaging in active listening, and demonstrating greater patience and empathy in their professional encounters. These shifts resonate with the CEFR-CV's conceptualisation of mediation as a relational, meaning-making practice (Council of Europe, 2020) and with intercultural communication frameworks that emphasise perspective-taking, reflexivity, and the ethical dimensions of cross-cultural encounter (Byram, 1997; Kramsch, 2009).

However, when examined through a critical lens, these communicative shifts reveal deeper institutional functions. The move toward clarity and simplification, while supportive of migrant understanding, simultaneously facilitates smoother compliance with institutional procedures. Similarly, the use of relational strategies for de-escalation, particularly among police officers, illustrates how authority can be exercised through interpersonal techniques rather than overt enforcement, aligning with Foucault's (1991) analysis of governmentality, where power operates through subtle, relational means that guide behaviour while appearing neutral or benevolent.

The Maltese context amplifies these dynamics in instructive ways. As a small state with limited administrative capacity and high migration visibility, Malta relies heavily on frontline professionals to enact state authority in everyday interactions (Mainwaring, 2019; Calleja, 2021). Mediation training equips these professionals with communicative tools that can genuinely humanise encounters. Yet it does not alter the structural conditions that already shape migrant experiences, such as legal frameworks, resource constraints, or institutional hierarchies. This fact echoes broader critiques from migration studies that humanitarian or inclusionary practices often coexist with, and sometimes reinforce, exclusionary structures (De Genova, 2017; Mezzadra & Neilson, 2019; Yuval-Davis, 2011).

What the Maltese model demonstrates, and what this study documents empirically, is that communicative investment produces substantive professional transformation. The officers and civil servants who completed this programme did not merely acquire new communication techniques; many reported reconceptions of their professional identity, from procedural authority to relational facilitation, from compliance-oriented engagement to trust-building dialogue. That shift is real, and it has measurable consequences for the quality of interactions between institutions and the migrant communities they serve.

The appropriate critical response to these findings is not to dismiss Malta's model as merely sophisticated governance but to recognise it as both genuinely valuable and genuinely incomplete, and to use that recognition as the basis for demanding more: more structural reform, more migrant voice, more institutional accountability, and more honest conversation about what communicative improvement alone can and cannot achieve.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings carry several concrete implications for policy and professional practice. First, mediation training can meaningfully enhance frontline professionals' capacity to engage constructively with migrants, particularly in contexts characterised by high linguistic and cultural diversity. Policymakers should consider integrating CEFR-aligned mediation competences into professional development frameworks across public service sectors such as policing, education, banking, and social services, rather than treating mediation as a supplementary or specialised skill reserved for a few designated translators.

Second, institutions should resist treating mediation as a substitute for structural reform. While communicative improvement reduces misunderstandings and humanises encounters, it cannot compensate for systemic barriers such as complex procedures, limited translation resources, or rigid bureaucratic protocols. The reflexivity this programme produced in participants is genuinely valuable, but many lacked the structural authority and organisational support to act on it in meaningful ways. Policymakers should pair mediation training with institutional changes that address these barriers directly, redesigning procedures with multilingual users in mind, allocating professional interpretation resources, and creating institutional channels for frontline feedback.

Third, Malta's model offers a replicable template for nations seeking ethical and human-centred alternatives to punitive enforcement. Its success rests not on exceptional resources but on a clear philosophical commitment to the belief that civic belonging is built through communication, not imposed through compliance. Nations managing significant migration flows would benefit from examining this model and considering how CEFR-aligned mediation training could be adapted to their own professional development contexts.

Finally, mediation training should be accompanied by critical reflection on how communicative practices intersect with power, authority, and migrant rights. Programmes that combine CEFR-aligned skill development with critical pedagogy and governance literacy will produce professionals capable not only of mediating more effectively but of advocating for the structural changes that would make mediation genuinely transformative rather than merely palliative.

Limitations

This study has several limitations that must be acknowledged transparently. The small sample size ($n = 10$) limits the breadth of perspectives represented, and the reliance on written narrative responses produced within a course assessment context may not capture the full complexity of participants' communicative practices in actual professional encounters. Participants may have shaped their responses in ways they considered professionally or academically appropriate, introducing a social desirability effect that could not be fully controlled.

The study lacks longitudinal data, making it difficult to assess whether the attitudinal and communicative shifts described by participants endure beyond the programme context or translate into sustained behavioural change over time. The analysis focuses exclusively on professionals' perspectives, limiting the ability to evaluate mediation's impact from the standpoint of the migrants most directly affected by these institutional interactions, which is a significant gap that future research must address. Finally, as the Fulbright Scholar who designed and delivered the course, I occupied a dual instructor-researcher role that introduces positionality considerations, which, while addressed methodologically, cannot be eliminated from the interpretive process.

Future Research

Future research should longitudinally examine mediation practices to assess whether the communicative and attitudinal changes produced by training endure and translate into observable improvements in migrant-institution interactions at the encounter level. Comparative studies across EU member states, attending systematically to how different governance contexts, policy orientations, and national histories shape the function and limits of mediation, would significantly advance the field.

Research that incorporates migrant perspectives directly and centrally would provide a more complete and ethically honest understanding of how mediation affects experiences of inclusion, authority, and institutional navigation from the vantage of those most directly affected. Ethnographic studies within institutions could reveal how mediation training interacts with organisational cultures, informal power dynamics, and institutional incentive structures in ways that narrative data alone cannot capture.

Additional directions may include: the integration of trauma-informed communication principles for professionals working with refugees and survivors of violence; the ethical implications of emerging AI translation tools and their relationship to the professional role of the human mediator; and the development of modular, sector-specific mediation micro-credentials that would allow broader professional access to this training without the two-year commitment of a full diploma programme. Malta's model warrants sustained scholarly attention, not as an idealised case but as a situated experiment in using language pedagogy as a governance reform strategy, one whose contradictions and possibilities deserve rigorous, ongoing examination.

Conclusion

This study examined linguistic mediation within a professional training initiative in Malta, grounded in the CEFR-CV and implemented through a sustained Fulbright Scholar collaboration with the University of Malta. The programme produced meaningful communicative and attitudinal change in participating officers and civilian professionals: enforcement became engagement, procedural language became accessible dialogue, and institutional authority was exercised through empathy rather than coercion. These shifts are neither trivial nor cosmetic; they represent genuine reconceptions of professional identity with real consequences for the quality of interactions between migrants and institutions.

At the same time, this study demonstrates that mediation does not fundamentally alter the structural conditions that shape migrant experiences. Instead, it reconfigures how authority is exercised, functioning as a form of soft governance that stabilises institutional power while appearing neutral or supportive. Recognising mediation's dual role, as both an inclusionary practice and a governance technology, is not an argument for abandoning it. It is an argument for engaging with it honestly, with clear-eyed awareness of its limits, and with genuine commitment to the structural reforms that communicative improvement alone cannot deliver.

Malta's education-based integration model, anchored in empathy, multilingual competence, and civic responsibility, offers a compelling and replicable framework for professional development in migration contexts. The lived narratives of officers who now ensure procedural dignity and of community workers who rebuild institutional trust affirm that mediation is not a soft skill but an essential professional and civic competency. By investing in

communicative empathy and intercultural competence, institutions can promote dignity, equity, and belonging, not by replacing structural reform, but by creating the relational conditions in which reform becomes imaginable, and in which human dignity is something practised, not merely promised.

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