

Pre-Campaign Focus Group Report

LOW INCOME EMPLOYMENT PERSONS (LIEP)

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Introduction

This report presents findings of the qualitative analysis carried out on the data retrieved from the focus group held with sample low-income employment persons (LIEP) in Malta, at the time of the study, i.e. fieldwork conducted between October 2018 and January 2019.

The analysis was carried out on the basis of the indicators identified as relevant through the literature review exercise carried out for the purposes of this research study, namely:

1. Household and lifestyle, with special attention to income and consumption;
2. Financial literacy and capability, with attention to financial education;
3. Retirement capability, with attention to an analysis pension schemes; and
4. End-user engagement with awareness campaigns, with special attention to media and social media dissemination channels.

Moreover, the review of literature also enabled identifying mechanisms that transversally affect all these four main indicators, namely:

- a. Trends (identified within the cohort/s);
- b. Assets and resources (that one or more social cohort/s already possess/es or practice/s);
- c. Limitations (that limit the financial literacy and/or retirement capability of one or more social cohort/s);
- d. Communication vehicles (that are relevant to one or more social cohort/s when engaging with financial literacy and retirement capability).

These indicators and mechanisms will also be used to organize the structure of this report.

Household and lifestyle

Trends

The LIEP cohort manifested awareness of and concern about consumerist, materialist lifestyles in present times. Participants commented how such trends come at the expense of saving and sustainability. Participants juxtaposed such contemporary trends with more careful, conscientious and sustainable past trends in traditional Maltese culture as well as in the traditional cultures represented by LIEP migrants participating in the focus group:

“...a very materialistic world...”

“I grew up not too rich, but not poor either. We were good. I used to see my parents budgeting. They put money in the bank and don’t go spending it all.”

“Buy what you need to buy, not bury everything under the tile, as the Maltese saying (advocates)...”

There was also a general agreement that these trends are broadly pervasive in society, also due to external influences, primarily media:

“There is a lifestyle being promoted. It’s like it is a better life if you spend more. Go to more restaurants, to more bars, advertisement through media, TV... everything is infiltrated with these thoughts for that lifestyle.”

The focus group data also yielded evidence that the understanding of sustainability by this group goes beyond financial sustainability to include environmental and cultural concerns, thus indicating that participants sampled for the LIEP cohort perceive sustainability (and lack of it) in a relatively holistic and critical manner:

“We are living at our expense of natural and historic heritage...”

“Unfortunately now if you want an iPhone, you just go ahead buy it.”

Assets and resources

Data analysis identified a very limited number of practices among participants from the LIEP cohort that testify to financial and retirement literacy and capability. Data in this regard was limited to shopping lists:

“I also find it better to take a list with me at the supermarket because if not, I always end up buying more!”

Another asset associated with this cohort is family background:

“The type of family also counts. I grew up not too rich, but not poor either. We were good. I used to see my parents budgeting. They put money in the bank and don’t go spending it all.”

The interpretation of findings is hereby two-fold:

1. Participants’ exposure to family practices such as budgeting and saving endowed them with assets as a LIEP cohort; and simultaneously,
2. The research is showing that such family practices are an asset to financial and retirement literacy and capability.

Limitations

Data analysis however also revealed that there are aspects of family life that can inhibit financial and retirement capability. The related data makes reference to families of procreation, i.e. the family which LIEP representatives head, rather than the family context where LIEP representatives were brought up (family of orientation):

“The worst is when I take my wife shopping!”

“Xorta ta, bħala nisa ukoll inbatu. Filli għandek żewg pagi, and then you only have one wage, it isn’t easy.”

“Problema għax jien għaddejt minnha. Ifhimni, jien għaliġa affetwatni. Fili kont tajjeb imbagħad ġejna bil-paga tiegħi biss. Itini manteniment imma filli tkun qabel tippjana ħafna, tkun taf iktar kif tghix.”

Some data make reference to limitations to financial capability experienced in a conventional family setting (i.e. when heads of household live under the same roof). Negotiating and shared decision-making skills with other household members, especially those co-heading the household, emerge as skills required for enhanced financial literacy.

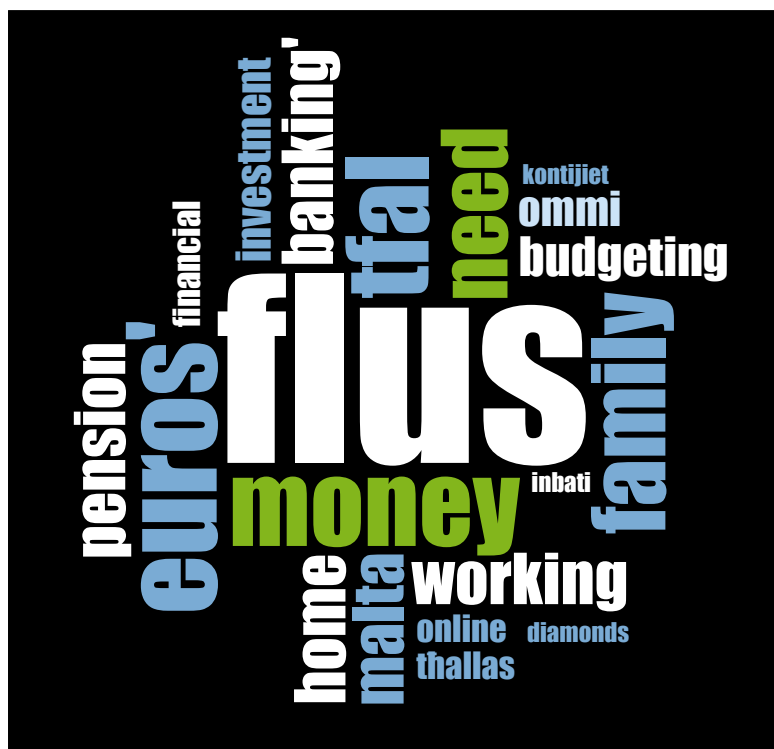
Most data made reference to limitations experienced in the case of family breakup, caused by abandonment, separation, divorce or death of a spouse. The data also show that both men and women are vulnerable to such limitations.

In analysis, it is also evident that although the expressed limitations are more related to financial and retirement capability (rather than literacy), they are underpinned by gaps in literacy. To explain better, LIEP representatives expressed their experiences of such limitations as outcomes that they were unprepared for, i.e. as outcomes they were not sufficiently literate about, if at all – at least not to the extent that they factored in earlier in their lives and contingently planned for. Only one participant said that she had made will provisions with her husband.

Communication

Figure 1 graphically presents the twenty (20) most frequent words found in the LIEP focus group data that was coded as related to household and lifestyle. The same analysis results are presented in table format in Table 1.

Figure 1
Word cloud - LIEP household and lifestyle
Twenty (20) most frequent words



These results inform on the vocabulary terms preferred by the sample representing the LIEP cohort to refer to items, concepts and practices related to the financial aspects of household and lifestyle.

Table 1
List - LIEP household and lifestyle
Twenty (20) most frequent words

Word	Length	Count	Weighted Percentage	Similar Words
flus	4	52	1.36%	flus
'Euros'	6	27	0.71%	'euros', 'euro', 'euros'
'money'	5	25	0.65%	'money'
tfal	4	25	0.65%	tfal
'family'	6	23	0.60%	'families', 'family'
'need'	4	21	0.55%	'need', 'needs'
Malta	5	17	0.45%	Malta
'working'	7	17	0.45%	'work', 'working', 'works'
'home'	4	17	0.45%	'homes', 'home'
'banking'	8	17	0.45%	bank, 'banking', 'banks'
'pension'	7	17	0.45%	'pension', 'pensionable', 'pensions'
'budgeting'	9	14	0.37%	'budgeting'
ommi	4	13	0.34%	ommi
'investment'	10	13	0.34%	'invest', 'investment', 'investments'
'financial'	9	11	0.29%	'financial'
'online'	6	11	0.29%	'online'
thallas	7	11	0.29%	thallas
'diamonds'	8	9	0.24%	'diamonds'
inbati	6	9	0.24%	inbati
kontijiet	9	9	0.24%	kontijiet

Moreover, they shed light on the quantitative relevance that each word had when the focus group discussion focused on household and lifestyle matters. In other words, on the frequency of the specific words tabulated above during the fieldwork with the sample of the LIEP cohort.

Remarkably, a considerable number of participants in this focus group were non-Maltese speakers. Notwithstanding this also reflects the economic migrant demographic in the country at the time of the study.

Financial literacy and capability

Trends

Representatives of the LIEP cohort showed evidence of financial literacy when they associated financial capability with long-term investments, such as bank deposits, real estate and entrepreneurship:

“Put them in the bank, buy bonds, you can property, you can buy diamonds.”

“Restaurant, open a hotel. I think it is better to buy these because nowadays prices are always rising and you will still see results.”

“Then again I see it better to invest this way (restaurant or hotel) seeing Malta is one of the most popular and visited country.”

“Being Maltese you can also inherit land and get a permit where you can build or you have a house, put it down and build flats.”

However, there is negligible evidence that research participants partake in such trends. Only one participant stated that she had first-hand experience of financial capability as an outcome of long-term planning involving making a will with her husband:

“My husband had decided to do a will before he passed away. It is very useful. Should my husband not have done his family would have interfered but we have a will in place so they cannot do anything.”

On a short-term basis, there is relevant evidence of daily practices that testify to financial literacy that is conducive to financial capability, such as using shopping lists, requesting reference letters for employment purposes and reaching out to authoritative entities for advice and support:

“I also find it better to take a list with me at the supermarket because if not, I always end up buying more!”

“...get a reference letter.”

“You can reach out the labour office and they will help for sure!”

There is also evidence of financial literacy within this cohort also in the way that research participants link the identified trends to the local Maltese, global and cultural context in the examples above - particularly when they discuss the potential of restaurants, hotels and real estate in contemporary Maltese economic context.

This interpretation is corroborated by evidence where participants once again linked trends in financial capability to broader social and cultural gender stereotypical roles. Indeed the focus group yielded data that point to patriarchy and glass ceiling trends as affecting differences in the financial capability between males and females:

“Usually the breadwinner is always the male. They work more hours.”

“The men work longer hours because mums have to stay home with the kids.”

Assets and resources

Data evidence indicates that formal and non-formal financial education features among assets and resources of representatives of the LIEP cohort. In the case of non-formal education, financial education emerged as involving proactive self-sought or experiential life-long learning, at times facilitated by open access digital technologies:

“I mean when I was studying for my A’ (Advanced) Levels in Home Economics, I learnt as well!”

“Eventually I had to seek out books, YouTube, open access colleges.”

“There is this one book that I really suggest ‘The richest man in Babylon’. It is a brilliant book based on ancient tax. Save always 10% to save.”

“Experiences from life teaches you how to control things and how you need to manage.”

Limitations

Data from the focus group indicate that in retrospective, participants who did not take subjects related to financial matters regret not being formally educated on financial and retirement matters:

“I had sciences so I was never exposed to such educational matters, pity!”

“I didn’t take home economics, I wish I did now.”

Other perceived limitations are linked to migrant status, thus drawing attention to the intersectionality between being in low-income employment and being a migrant:

“Unfortunately I am non-EU citizen and it is already difficult to open a restaurant.”

As suggested, earlier, there is also evidence that although participants are financially literate to the extent that they identify good financial opportunities in the contemporary Maltese context, they also acknowledge they have limited resources to partake in them – primarily due to their low income and financial asset bracket, as well as to rising cost of living. There is evidence these are experienced as intersecting with self-employed status, which is experienced as limiting financing by banks and trade union membership:

“Yes but I don’t have money to buy diamonds in the first place.”

“My rent from 330 euros a month went up to 550 euros, not only that but life in Malta has become too expensive. Every price has increased. Even ‘pastizzi’!”

“Impossible situation! Yes you need to lower your standards, but if I am working more whilst life is always getting more expensive.. what else is there really?”

“Yes I can fight to work for an extra 2 hours or so a day, of course I can. But I know the rent will be up again soon.”

“They don’t give loans to self-employed, they won’t consider you. So if you’re forking out for a home, no problem. If you’re trying to build a business and trying your best you would be more motivated to try your best

Word	Length	Count	Weighted Percentage	Similar Words
flus	4	79	1.45%	flus
'banking'	8	44	0.81%	bank, 'banking', 'banks'
tfal	4	35	0.64%	tfal
'unions'	7	32	0.59%	'union', 'unions',
'trade'	5	30	0.55%	'trade'
'Euros'	6	29	0.53%	'euros', euro, euros, euros'
'money'	5	23	0.42%	'money'
'need'	4	21	0.39%	'need', 'needs'
'invest'	6	21	0.39%	'invest', 'investment', 'investments'
'working'	7	21	0.39%	'work', 'working', 'works'
ommi	4	18	0.33%	ommi
'diamonds;	8	16	0.29%	'diamonds'
Malta	5	16	0.29%	Malta
xogħol	6	16	0.29%	xogħol
'pension'	7	16	0.29%	'pension', 'pensionable', 'pensions'
'safe'	6	16	0.29%	'safe'
thallas	7	15	0.28%	thallas
'home'	4	14	0.26%	'homes', 'home'
'family'	6	14	0.26%	'families', 'family'
'managers'	10	13	0.24%	'manager', 'managers', 'manage', 'managed', 'management', 'managing'

Moreover, they shed light on the quantitative relevance that each word had when the focus group discussion focused on financial literacy and capability. In other words, on the frequency of the specific words tabulated above during the fieldwork with the sample of the LIEP cohort.

It is however to be noted that a considerable number of participants in this focus group were non-Maltese speakers. Notwithstanding this also reflects the economic migrant demographic in the country at the time of the study.

Retirement capability

Trends

Consumerist and materialistic trends discussed earlier in this report have been also associated with little or no retirement capability that is already affecting those of pension age.

“Buy what you need to buy, not bury everything under the tile...”

“...a very materialistic world...”

“... well I see it through my parents, they are struggling.”

In sum, short-term gratification was negatively correlated with retirement capability, particularly in the light of increased costs of living.

Assets and resources

As mentioned in earlier parts of this report, participants of the LIEP focus group identified a number of assets and resources that enhance financial capability. However, none of these were explicitly associated with retirement capability.

Limitations

Focus group participants identified a number of socio-demographic variables which they perceive as limiting retirement capability – namely, being a woman, losing a spouse due to separation, divorce or death, being a migrant, ill-health and living in a ageing society.

“Xorta ta, bhala nisa wkoll inbatu. Filli għandek żewg pagi, ‘and then you only have one wage, it isn’t easy’.”

“If I had to pass away, my husband won’t be getting my pension! I think if he can’t work for some reason, he will get some kind of benefit but not my pension.”

“How many years do foreigners have to pay their (33.27) to get some form of pension when they turn 65?”

“In addition there is cancer, spreading like wildfire. Will be live beyond the age of 65?”

“The age of population is always rising. Probably we won’t have any pensions by the time we’re older. Plus most of the workforce of today is foreign and blue-collar work is common - not even registered - which means they won’t be paying for the contribution.”

It is evident that most of these data excerpts point to dependency of state pension, the value placed upon it or its desirability.

Communication

Figure 3
Word cloud - LIEP retirement capability
Twenty (20) most frequent words



Figure 3 graphically presents the twenty (20) most frequent words found in the LIEP focus group data that was coded as related to retirement capability. The same analysis results are presented in table format in Table 3.

These results inform on the vocabulary terms preferred by the sample representing the LIEP cohort to refer to items, concepts and practices related to retirement capability.

Table 3
List - LIEP retirement capability
Twenty (20) most frequent words

Word	Length	Count	Weighted Percentage	Similar Words
'pension'	7	25	1.14%	'pension', 'pensionable', 'pensions'
pensjoni	8	20	0.91%	pensjoni
flus	4	19	0.87%	flus
'working'	7	19	0.87%	'work', 'working', 'works'
'home'	4	19	0.87%	'homes', 'home'
'need'	4	16	0.73%	'need', 'needs'
'money'	5	14	0.64%	'money'
'investment'	10	13	0.59%	'invest', 'investment', 'investments'
'family'	6	13	0.59%	'families', 'family'
'Euros'	6	12	0.55%	'Euro', 'Euros'
tfal	4	11	0.50%	tfal
'diamonds'	8	9	0.41%	'diamonds'
Malta	5	9	0.41%	Malta
'financial'	9	8	0.36%	'financial'
'company'	7	7	0.32%	'companies', 'company'
repayment	9	7	0.32%	repayment, repayments
'overtime'	10	6	0.27%	'overtime'
difficult	9	6	0.27%	difficult, difficult'
ommi	4	6	0.27%	ommi
online	6	6	0.27%	online

Moreover, they shed light on the quantitative relevance that each word had when the focus group discussion focused on retirement capability. In other words, on the frequency of the specific words tabulated above during the fieldwork with the sample of the LIEP cohort.

Notably, a considerable number of participants in this focus group were non-Maltese speakers. Notwithstanding this also reflects the economic migrant demographic in the country at the time of the study.

End-user engagement with awareness campaigns

Trends

As results from data presented in earlier sections of this report, representatives of the LIEP cohorts associated the following contexts with

financial and retirement literacy: families, schools, communities, banks, social services and related government departments and trade unions.

Mobile phones were among trending technological devices identified by LIEP representatives, together with open access online platforms such as YouTube, as well as more traditional educational tools, such as books:

“...now if you want an iPhone, you just go ahead buy it.”

“...seek out books, YouTube, open access colleges.”

Assets and resources

Focus group participants did not explicitly identify assets and resources that would facilitate their cohort's engagement with an awareness campaign.

Notwithstanding, it can be inferred (from the analysis discussed earlier in this report) that representatives of the LIEP cohort valued formal and non-formal lifelong and experiential learning. Consequently, the following data are being suggested as informing on potential assets and resources to incorporate in an awareness campaign on financial and retirement literacy and capability:

“...in Home Economics, I learnt as well!”

“...books, YouTube, open access colleges.”

“Experiences from life teaches you how to control things and how you need to manage.”

Limitations

Focus group participants did not explicitly identify limitations that would inhibit their cohort's engagement with an awareness campaign.

Notwithstanding, it can be inferred (from the analysis discussed earlier in this report) that representatives of the LIEP cohort were concerned about long hours of paid work and house-bounding child-caring duties as limiting broader social experiences, particularly in the case of males and females, respectively:

“Usually the breadwinner is always the male. They work more hours.”

“The men work longer hours because mums have to stay home with the kids.”

Consequently, an awareness campaign’s reach would need to be broad and effective enough to penetrate the LIEP cohort in the light of the above.

Communication

Figure 4 graphically presents the twenty (20) most frequent words found in the LIEP focus group data that was coded as related to end-user engagement with awareness campaigns. The same analysis results are presented in table format in Table 4.

Figure 4
Word cloud - LIEP end-user engagement with awareness campaigns
Twenty (20) most frequent words



These results inform on the vocabulary terms preferred by the sample representing the LIEP cohort to refer to items, concepts and practices related to end-user engagement with awareness campaigns.

Table 4
List - LIEP end-user engagement with awareness campaigns
Twenty (20) most frequent words

Word	Length	Count	Weighted Percentage	Similar Words
'pension'	7	16	0.90%	'pension', 'pensionable', 'pensions'
'working'	7	16	0.90%	'work', 'working', 'works'
'need'	4	15	0.84%	'need', 'needs'
'money'	5	14	0.78%	'money'
'invest'	6	13	0.73%	'invest', 'investment', 'investments'
'family'	6	13	0.73%	'families', 'family'
bank	4	12	0.67%	'bank', 'banks'
Malta	5	11	0.62%	Malta
'home'	4	10	0.56%	'homes', 'home'
'diamonds'	8	9	0.50%	'diamonds'
flus	4	9	0.50%	flus
'financial'	9	8	0.45%	'financial'
'company'	7	7	0.39%	'companies', company
'Euros'	5	7	0.39%	'Euro', 'Euros'
'repayment'	9	7	0.39%	'repayment', 'repayments'
'union'	5	7	0.39%	'union'
'saving'	6	6	0.34%	'save', 'saved', 'saving'
'trade'	5	6	0.34%	'trade'
'living'	6	5	0.28%	'live', 'living'
'manage'	6	5	0.28%	'manage', 'managed', 'management', 'managing'

Moreover, they shed light on the quantitative relevance that each word had when the focus group discussion focused on end-user engagement with awareness campaigns. In other words, on the frequency of the specific words tabulated above during the fieldwork with the sample of the LIEP cohort.

It is however to be noted, that a considerable number of participants in this focus group were non-Maltese speakers. Notwithstanding this also reflects the economic migrant demographic in the country at the time of the study.

Main conclusions and recommendations

Culture

Analysis of the research data showed that LIEP cohort experience literacy and capability in financial and retirement matters as threatened by pervasive consumerist and materialistic trends.

On the other hand, participants manifested sensitization to a traditional culture characterized by conscientiousness and sustainability, to which they attributed value. This comprises non-formal or basic primary school knowledge learnt orally and/or from primary group settings, such as family, communities and close friends.

Moreover, the research yielded evidence engagement with more contemporary channels of financial education, such as recently published books and online open access sources.

Thus, it is being recommended that elements of traditional culture and basic education that are linked to enhanced literacy and capability in financial and retirement matters are used as campaign content in a revived manner that emphasizes value of such content as still relevant in contemporary times. Such content can include idioms, sayings, customs and rituals.

In this regard, it is also being recommended that, since the LIEP cohort in Malta includes migrants, the said campaign content should draw also on traditional components (idioms, sayings, customs and rituals) of indigenous cultures represented in the migrant sub-cohorts of the LIEP cohort. Data from the National Statistics Office should be obtained to inform about the nationalities represented in the LIEP cohort at the time of the campaign in Malta.

It is likely that despite differences in nationalities and cultures, there will be idioms, sayings, customs and rituals based on the same or similar principles. Consequently, campaign content that brings out overlaps between Maltese traditional cultural knowledge and the traditional cultural knowledge of the identified nationalities within the LIEP cohort would enrich the campaign by adding an inclusionary dimension that fosters integration.

Family

The research also identified family as a relevant variable that has ambivalent potential. Families of orientation where financial literacy is a non-formal component of socialisation are assets. Negotiating and shared decision-making skills with other household members, especially those co-heading the household, emerge as skills required for enhanced financial literacy and capability.

Family breakup (also due to death of a spouse) was associated with limitations, although the analysis showed that apart from being a financial and retirement limitation in itself, family breakup is the context where the lack of financial and retirement literacy becomes manifest.

Consequently, it is being recommended that the campaign content includes content on contingency planning and its value. Family breakdown and death of a spouse / partner may be used as scenarios where a certain level of financial independency, making wills and prenuptial agreements are exemplified as recommended proactive measures and best practices.

Communication

Due to the incidence of economic migrants in this cohort and the preference of using English terms that resulted from the analysis, it is highly recommended to include content in English in the campaign for this cohort.

Analysis of the research data identifies the family as the context with which they associate discussion on financial and retirement matters. Consequently, it is likely that members of the LIEP cohort are more likely to find campaign content that is contextualized within family environs as familiar, accessible and understandable. On a smaller scale, reference was also made to more formal organizations such as banks, trade unions and state support services.

As explained earlier, participants indigenous community and traditional ways of living, speaking and thinking. Therefore, communications that draws on this kind of cultural capital is also likely to be familiar, accessible and effective with the LIEP cohort.

Schools, community spaces, banks and state offices are contexts that LIEP representatives associated with financial and retirement literacy, together with online open access platforms. Therefore, it is being recommended to disseminate campaign content using these spaces.