

## **Discrimination in the access to housing is both illegal and socially harmful**

In the context of media reports of discrimination in the access to housing, the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE) highlights the importance of addressing racism and religious-based discrimination through actions at both the legal and social levels.

The NCPE is aware that many residents in Malta who are of minority race/ethnic origin, or belong to minority religions, experience discrimination when accessing goods and services particularly by being denied access when seeking to rent accommodation. According to Legal Notice 85 of 2007, this form of discrimination is categorically illegal.

The NCPE has among its functions the power to investigate reports of discrimination and harassment in the sphere of goods and services, including in the access to housing. Harassment on the basis of race/ethnic origin may also amount to a criminal offence.

Those who experience racism and religious-based discrimination in the access to housing are encouraged to report their case to the NCPE so that it can be investigated. We know that most cases of discrimination in the access to housing go unreported due to lack of awareness about one's rights, fear of reporting and a sense of helplessness. In this regard, the NCPE looks forward to the enactment of the Equality Bill since this would strengthen legal provisions against discrimination, including discrimination in the access to housing. The new equality framework would establish a Human Rights and Equality Commission (HREC) that, in such and other cases, can impose sanctions against those found guilty of discrimination, order remedial actions and award compensation to victims.

However, the law alone, even if strengthened, can never be enough to address racism and religious-based discrimination in the access to housing since these discriminatory acts reflect broader attitudes of hostility and disrespect towards certain social groups. To eradicate these harmful social attitudes there needs to be a concerted effort from the institutions, the media and the whole of society aimed at ensuring that everyone is valued equally and treated with respect, something that forms the very basis of a democratic society.