



Combating racial discrimination



Maria Theresa Portelli

Tomorrow is the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. What can we do to fight this phenomenon?



Racism in Malta

Eurobarometer results for 2012 showed that 53% of the Maltese consider discrimination on the basis of ethnic origin as widespread in Malta. Similarly, a qualitative study carried out in 2011 by the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE) delineated various experiences of racial discrimination and harassment in various areas, including employment, housing, healthcare, education and other services. Moreover, another study by NCPE carried out in 2012, 'Immigrant and Ethnic Minority Groups and Housing in Malta', confirmed that persons labelled as 'black', 'African', 'Arab' and 'Muslim' tend to face disproportionate levels of discrimination in accessing housing. In such cases, widespread racism and xenophobia grounded in stereotypical beliefs had a direct impact on migrants and ethnic minorities living in Malta and the experiences of housing discrimination.

Results confirmed that migrants and ethnic minorities living in Malta are not aware of their rights or ways to seek remedies for damage suffered

with regard to accessing housing and experiencing racial discrimination. Hence, the results of these studies highlight the need for further action to be taken in order to combat discrimination on the basis of race and ethnic origin.

The International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

Tomorrow, we mark the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. On this day in 1960, police opened fire and killed 69 people peacefully demonstrating against apartheid "pass laws" in Sharpeville, South Africa. The notorious pass-books were a repressive tool to control the movements of black South Africans. The United Nations General Assembly called on the international community not only to commemorate that tragedy, but also to work together to combat racism and discrimination wherever they exist.

Racial and ethnic discrimination still occur on a daily basis, hindering progress for millions of people around the world. Racism and intol-

erance can take various forms – from denying individuals the basic principles of equality to fuelling ethnic hatred that may lead to hate speech and hate crime – all of which can hinder the potential and development of persons and communities.

Hence, all forms of racist attitudes and behaviour are unacceptable. It is illegal to violate the dignity of a person or treat a person less favourably on the ground of race/ethnic origin. This means that the race/ethnic origin of an individual should not determine their treatment in relation to employment, social security, healthcare, education, financial services and the provision of other goods and services.

The National Commission for the Promotion of Equality and Racial Equality

By respecting diversity, the effect of discrimination is minimised and equal treatment is encouraged. The National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE) stresses that embracing diversity leads to respecting differences between individuals and combating prejudice.

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Since June 2012, the promotion of equality on the basis of racial or ethnic origin in employment as well as education and vocational training became an area covered by NCPE. In addition, NCPE's remit also covers the elimination of discrimination on the ground of race/ethnic origin in the provision of goods and services and their supply. To this end, persons who are discriminated against on the ground of racial or ethnic origin in employment, education and vocational training, as well as the access to and supply of goods and services can seek assistance from NCPE and lodge a complaint with the Commission for further investigation.

NCPE also provides training on diversity, equality and non-discrimination to any entity, department or organisation which requests it. These sessions raise awareness on equality and related subject matters and sensitise the audience for an equal environment.

NCPE encourages anyone who feels discriminated against or who would like more information to contact the commission on 2590-3850, email equality@gov.mt or through Facebook on 'National Commission for the Promotion of Equality'.