

## **Finding empowerment through voluntary work**

*'Equality for women is progress for all'* is the theme chosen by the United Nations to celebrate this year's International Women's Day. Countries perform better, register progress and draw on a complete range of talent and skills when they promote equal opportunities and women's full participation.

In today's society, the participation of women is becoming increasingly evident in various spheres, including the economic, political, cultural and social spheres. The latter spheres are manifested in the voluntary sector. Indeed, women are evident in their active participation in voluntary work. Their work is considered as an added value and an essential element in developing both individual and society. It is about giving without expecting monetary returns. However, undeniably work in this sector does empower both women and men with skills, tools, self-development and self-satisfaction. Women actively involve themselves in the diverse fields, ranging from voluntary work in the health and caring sector, in church and religious institutions to the various NGOs lobbying and working on equality issues, including also the environment and crisis intervention.

Acknowledging this involvement, official figures released by the National Statistics Office show that in 2012 there were a total of 14,240 females (7.8%) who involved themselves within a voluntary organisation or another entity. This figure outnumbered that of males with 13,690 (7.6%) who in 2012 dedicated their time in a voluntary organisation or another entity. Therefore, these figures show that women are more likely to involve themselves in voluntary work.

But how many hours do women spend in voluntary work? The National Statistics Office estimates that in 2012 males spent an average of 24 hours of voluntary work while females spent 19 hours in a typical month. This figure may implicate that women spend less hours of voluntary work in a month. This may be due to other commitments, such as paid employment or caring responsibilities which are still carried out mainly by women.

Volunteering offers an opportunity for women to take up positions of responsibility in the respective organisation. Women have been seen to develop



their work within the organisation and reaching roles of leadership in their communities, especially in spheres which are mainly dominated by males. Therefore, voluntary organisations should continue to promote and recognise women's talents and skills, and their contributions and leadership giving them equal visibility with men.

In this context, empowering women to participate in community life across all sectors has its benefits for women themselves, to enhance their knowledge, skills, and experiences, and for society at large by building stronger communities and improving the quality of life of everyone. Moreover, it is society at large that is benefitting mostly from the active and selfless involvement of women in voluntary work. This results in progress within our communities on various levels, fostering effective equality within an empowered society.

For further information on matters related to equality, contact the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE) on 2590 3850, [equality@gov.mt](mailto:equality@gov.mt) or on Facebook.