

60+: Leading an active life

A dramatic change has occurred in recent decades in the composition of the world population. As estimated by the World Health Organisation (WHO), almost 700 million people are now over the age of 60. By 2050, two billion people – over 20% of the world's population - will be 60 or older.

Malta is no exception! At the end of 2013, around a quarter of the Maltese population was aged 60 years and over. These statistics speak for themselves. Marking the International Day of Older Persons, October 1st, is significant to raise awareness on pertinent issues that affect older persons. It was in December 1990 when the United Nations General Assembly designated this International Day to constantly give the required attention to cater to the particular needs and challenges that are being faced by many older people.

It is also important to recognise the essential contribution that older men and women continue to make to the functioning of society. This is where **active ageing** comes to life whereby society embarks on a process of optimising opportunities that lead to the enhancement of the quality of life as people age. In fact, active ageing allows people to realise their potential, contribute their utmost to society and aims at extending healthy life expectancy.

Three pillars for active ageing

Active ageing is safeguarded when equal opportunities are provided to older persons by challenging age discrimination and related stereotypes. In fact, combating ageism is also being addressed in the National Strategic Policy for Active Ageing 2014-2020 launched by the Government in 2013. Moreover, the main themes within this policy also promote active participation in the labour market, participation in society and independent living.

Promoting **active ageing in employment** is considered as one of the greatest achievements that is being brought about by the demographic change. In fact, official statistics show that the number of older women and men workers is increasing. Improving job opportunities for older people can benefit individuals financially through increased income and future pension entitlements as well as in less quantifiable ways such as improved well-being and self-esteem. On-going education and training initiatives are essential to update the older workers' skills and help them combine their existing knowledge and competencies with the rapidly evolving needs of the labour market.

The **active participation in society, older persons** contribute their time, energy and experience to active citizenship initiatives, voluntary organisations and community groups as well as within the family such as the crucial role they play as carers of grandchildren and often even of other dependent elderly relatives. National Statistics Office figures show that between 2013 and 2014 an increase was registered in the amount of persons who are 65 years and over, and are involved in voluntary work. The facilities that contribute to increasing the social participation of older persons are also outlined in the National Strategic

Policy for Active Ageing 2014-2020. These range from Day Centres to the University of the Third Age. Despite such opportunities, older people face many barriers to their continued involvement in their communities. These may include a lack of opportunities to keep up-to-date with technological changes, lack of information, reduced social networks and loss of confidence and self-esteem.

Ensuring independent living for older persons is essential when considering measures that maximise healthy life years for women and men and that reduce the risk of dependency through the implementation of health promotion and disease prevention. Accessible housing and transport as well as support services in the community can aid older persons to stay autonomous and participate actively in society.

Preventing age discrimination

The National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE) works to ensure equality for older persons in employment, education and vocational training as well as in banks and financial institutions. In order to safeguard equal treatment, 'age' should not be used as a decisive criterion for assessing, for example, whether an older person is fit for a certain job or not; or whether s/he should be enrolled for a course or vocational training. It is only when a justification is clearly given that age requirements can only be specified and asked for in jobs or in education/vocational training. Equality on the basis of age curbs negative age-related stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes towards older persons and instead highlights the invaluable contribution that older persons make.

NCPE receives and investigates complaints of persons who are discriminated due to their age, whether in the labour market, in education or vocation training or in banks and financial institutions. NCPE can be contacted on 25903850, equality@gov.mt or on Facebook.

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