

Celebrating Older Human Rights Champions - International day of older persons 2018

In 1990 the United Nations General Assembly designated 1 October as the International Day of Older Persons. In view that 2018 marks the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, this year's theme chosen by the United Nations for this day is 'Celebrating Older Human Rights Champions', marking the importance of this Declaration and reaffirming the commitment to the equal enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms by older persons.

The National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE) considers the celebration of older human rights champions as vital to society's development. In this context, NCPE works to safeguard equality on the ground of age and to combat ageism and related discrimination. In fact, NCPE investigates complaints of persons who deem they are victims of discrimination on the ground of age as per NCPE's remit. Moreover, training and raising of awareness are carried out in order to promote the important role of older women and men in society.

Through changing demographics across the world, almost 700 million people are now over the age of 60, and by 2050, 2 billion people, over 20 per cent of the world's population, will be 60 or older. Similarly, projections indicate that Malta will be one of the fastest ageing countries in the EU with 18.8% of the Maltese population being 65+ in December 2016, and an old-age dependency ratio that is expected to increase further in the coming years, with the share of the 65+ set to reach 31.2% by 2060.

This significant share of the population in Malta and worldwide is an essential contributor to the functioning of society if adequate guarantees are in place. Different groups of older persons are active members in the community, participating in various roles in many areas of life.

Particularly, older persons in Malta are more likely to be involved in formal voluntary activities than their younger counterparts for the benefit of society at large. In addition, older men are more likely than their younger counterparts and than older women to participate in initiatives

of active citizenship including participation in activities related to political groups, associations or parties, including attending any of their meetings or signing a petition.

Apart from active participation in voluntary sectors, active ageing also entails the active participation of older persons in paid employment. Some older persons continue working in paid employment after reaching 65 years with persisting gender gaps resulting in fewer women in this age cohort in the labour market due to cultural and social realities of past years. Challenging persistent stereotypes on the grounds of gender and age is thus crucial by safeguarding equal opportunities for older workers, who generally have significant experience, know-how and practice.

The effect of equal opportunities, or the lack of it, to access employment, education and other resources throughout the lifecycle cumulates in old age and older women more than older men can face inequalities on intersecting grounds. In fact, women in Malta are more likely than their European counterparts to be inactive due to family/caring responsibilities while the main reason for inactivity for older women across the EU28 is retirement.

In effect, older persons, particularly older women, are also important contributors in the family, not only as carers of dependent relatives, but also as a source of support for family members. Their contribution in the family, as well as in other spheres in the community, is generally not valued in economic terms but it is instrumental not only for the affected individuals but also for social cohesion.

Active ageing policies recognise and promote the important contribution of older persons in society while promoting the support structures and care required to enhance their autonomy and independence. Fostering active ageing is fundamental to ensure that not only years are added to life, but also that life is added to years, combating isolation, passivity and abuse. Removing the barriers that exclude or discriminate older persons promotes opportunities to continue participating in society, fostering a society for all ages.

This year's international day of older persons commemorates the older human rights champions who were born around the time of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. NCPE, along with other national and international entities celebrating these champions, aims to raise the visibility of older persons as active contributors in society through equal respect and acknowledgement for their commitments and dedication.

For further information, contact NCPE on 2590 3850, equality@gov.mt or on Facebook.