

Harnessing the wisdom and experience of older persons

"Older persons should not be viewed as welfare recipients, but as citizens with the same rights to a full, non-discriminatory life as people of all ages," declared [AGE President Dr Heidrun Mollenkopf](#). She also urged for the full development of the potential of older persons in their diversity, supporting their active participation in all areas of life.

From the moment we enter this world, our age becomes a yardstick by which we are measured. Unfortunately, this can result in unfair treatment solely based on our age, a phenomenon known as [ageism](#). This type of discrimination tends to manifest itself as we grow older, influencing how society perceives individuals during the life cycle until their later years. Older persons, all too frequently, find themselves subject to derogatory stereotypes, patronising treatment, or being unfairly labelled as a burden.

Each year on 1st October, the world comes together to celebrate the [International Day for Older Persons](#), a day dedicated to recognising and appreciating the invaluable contributions that older persons bring to our societies.

Demographic trends around the globe reveal a significant and ongoing shift towards an aging population. More people are living longer, a testament to advancement in healthcare and quality of life. A [substantial increase](#) in the number of individuals aged 65 years or older is predicted, with projections indicating a rise from 761 million in 2021 to a staggering 1.6 billion by 2050. This demographic shift includes a particularly rapid growth in the number of people aged 80 years or older.

Society's approach to longer life expectancy needs to be reviewed as realities are continuously changing. The increase in longevity brings [challenges](#) that may hinder the quality of life for older persons. These challenges include, among others, access to quality healthcare, affordable housing, and social inclusion. The challenges need to be addressed in order for older persons to benefit from the same opportunities as other members of society.

In light of this, the theme chosen by the United Nations for this year's International Day is ['Fulfilling the Promises of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights for Older Persons: Across](#)

[Generations.](#)’ This theme emphasizes the needs of older persons around the world, highlighting the importance of upholding their rights and addressing any infringements. It also underscores how fostering unity and fairness among different age groups can provide long-lasting solutions to fulfil the objectives of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The objectives of this year’s international day are to raise global awareness of human rights for older persons, encourage intergenerational collaboration, urge governments to improve their practices for the rights and participation of older persons and promote solidarity among generations.

Furthermore, there is a growing call for a [UN Convention on the rights of older people](#). Such a convention would provide a comprehensive framework to safeguard older persons’ rights and combat ageism, discrimination, and elder abuse, promoting an inclusive and age-friendly society. It would establish clear guidelines for preventing abuse, uphold dignity, autonomy, and access to justice, and raise awareness to shift societal attitudes and practices towards better treatment of older persons.

This convention not only aims to safeguard older persons’ rights but also recognises the importance of supportive environments, as exemplified by the [National Strategic Policy for Active Ageing in Malta \(2023-2030\)](#). Supportive environments play a pivotal role in assisting older persons in maintaining their activity levels and independence as they age. The National strategy is built upon three key themes: social inclusion, healthy aging, and addressing diversity and inequality. These themes reflect a commitment to creating an environment where older persons can thrive, participate fully in society, and enjoy their human rights. These themes align with the efforts to combat age discrimination.

[Age discrimination](#) is still prevalent. As individuals grow older, they frequently confront bias and unfair treatment solely due to their age. This form of discrimination not only unfairly restricts their opportunities but also violates their fundamental right to equality.

In Malta, the [National Commission for the Promotion of Equality \(NCPE\)](#) plays a crucial role in addressing age discrimination. The NCPE investigates complaints from individuals who believe

they have been victims of discrimination on the ground of age in employment, banking, financial institutions, and education.

In celebrating the International Day for Older Persons, we acknowledge the imperative to uphold human rights, dignity, and equality for older individuals. By addressing the challenges faced by older persons and recognising their invaluable contribution, we move closer to building more inclusive societies for people of all ages. It is a collective effort, a commitment to the values of justice and respect that transcend generational boundaries, and a recognition that the rights of older persons are the rights of us all.

The National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE) can be contacted on: 2276 8200, equality@gov.mt or NCPE's social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter - NCPE.Malta)

26th September 2023