

# **Office of the Commissioner for Older Persons**

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**Annual Report 2021**



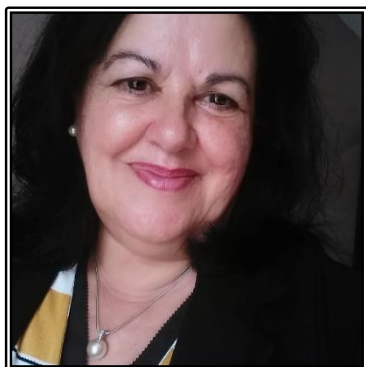
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## FOREWORD – Message from the Commissioner for Older Persons

Dr Mary Vella MD MMCFD



We welcomed the new year 2022, with the hope for a better future. 2021 ended with the Omicron and Delta variants of Covid 19 combining to produce a high number of cases, but we started a new chapter with the new year, hopeful that the world will put the worst of the pandemic behind it in 2022. As Office of the Commissioner for Older Persons, we started 2022, reflecting on the previous year, reviewing all that had been achieved and making plans for the future. Throughout 2021 Covid 19 continued to pose so many challenges, however our core values have helped us to keep on track when times were difficult and hard. We had to adjust to changes

and commit to continue with our aim for the benefit of our ever-increasing elderly population. Statistics issued by Malta Statistics Office show that > 20% of the population of Malta is over 65 years old. An ageing population is one of the most significant demographic and socioeconomic developments that the Maltese society is facing. This is the result of declining fertility and mortality levels, advances in health care, health care which is easily accessible to all and major improvements in life expectancy and healthy life years during which older persons spend a considerable amount of time in relatively active years following retirement.

2021 was a year as different as 2020, where we had no choice but to continue to adjust to the everchanging new reality. It started and ended in the same way, with a race to prevent Covid 19 infections, with the vaccination campaign in full swing to bring cases down, protect health systems and save lives with the rolling out of highly effective and safe vaccines and with the booster vaccination towards the end of the year. It was challenging, hard and stressful, with the vaccination campaign giving us hope of regaining a normal, balanced and content life as much as possible. During 2021, our country and especially the elderly continued to face a number of challenges, the first being the continued fight against Covid 19 Pandemic. Any mitigation measures, guidance and advice, had to be continuously updated according to the actual situation at that particular moment in time, especially with the emergence of new variants. With the Pandemic still raging on throughout 2021, the virus continued to wreak havoc in everyone's life and creating unprecedented challenges throughout all sectors of society, the elderly population being the worst affected. Many elderly people had to self-isolate leading to several negative mental, psychological and social consequences. During these difficult times health care providers had the duty and responsibility of providing elderly people especially those in residential care with the necessary holistic care to cope with any suffering they were susceptible to.

Covid 19 pandemic continued to pose so many challenges throughout 2021, but in spite of the setbacks and limitations, the Office of the Commissioner for Older Persons continued with our commitment and dedication to ensure that the rights and interests of older persons are safeguarded at all times. As we all know our ageing population is not a homogenous category and varies considerably; indeed, we become increasingly diverse as we age. Rather than portraying the rising number of older persons in a homogenous way and perceiving them as a burden, uniformly frail,

vulnerable and dependant, we are committed in breaking away from the traditional outlook that equates later life with physical and cognitive infirmity and instead strive hard towards the celebration of older generations, transforming the ageing society from one of dependency to active participation and ageing, thus increasing dignity, independence and autonomy later in life. Whilst living independently in the community is ensured by the government through the provision of a range of support services, the needs of frail older persons are not neglected. The Office of the Commissioner for Older Persons commits itself towards achieving a society for all ages and ensuring that our nation adopts measures that will transform Malta into an age-friendly nation and a society for all ages. It is a society in which the respect, equality, independence, participation, care, self-fulfilment and dignity of older persons is pursued at all times.

As Commissioner, without overlooking the needs of the most vulnerable and at risk sectors of the older population, I not only discourage dependency in old age but wholeheartedly promote a sense of empowerment amongst older persons. The large majority of older persons in Malta are healthy, physically active and intellectually sharp. Advances in healthy life years, whilst improving the wellbeing of older persons will also act as a catalyst to extend working lives, though older person are not only spending a considerable number of years actively participating in the formal labour market, but are also engaging in other unpaid activities, that may range from care provision for family members to volunteering, to social participation whilst living healthy, independent and secure lives as they age. Caring for family members include sick or dependent relatives or grandchildren.

Social participation later on in life goes beyond taking up hobbies and following leisurely pursuits. The term refers to active participation in social, economic, cultural, spiritual and civic activities for the benefit of the community in general. It is for this reason that the Office of the Commissioner for Older Persons encourages older persons to remain active and that everyone according to his own potential and capabilities strive to continue to contribute towards their families, towards society and towards their country. By keeping social contact, psychologically they are going to feel better and their quality of life will improve, since they feel they are still needed, have something to offer and as such they have a scope in life. These social contacts will help in the fight against solitude, which as the Office of the Commissioner for Older Persons, we feel is a harsh reality which is given its due importance among other measures, by creating more awareness. It is of paramount importance that to combat solitude everyone must play their role including the community, the Church, NGOs and the families. It is our collective responsibility to address this issue together and provide meaningful contact among one another. By combatting loneliness, we will prevent exclusion, poverty, loss of autonomy and psychological distress, thus improving the lives of our elderly making sure that no one is socially excluded and that everyone is integrated in society, thus ensuring a good quality of life.

The Office of the Commissioner for Older Persons believes in not solely adding years to life but in parallel adding life to years and its priority is for older persons to stay safe, as healthy and independent as possible and to lead lives that have value, meaning and purpose. It is always guided by the general principle that the best interests of older persons are paramount. By tackling prejudice, inequality and discrimination, we want to see Malta where respect for the rights and dignity of older persons is a reality in all areas of life, where ageism and age discrimination is a thing of the past and where a positive view of ageing and of older persons prevail.

This report covering the year 2021, evidences how the functions and obligations were fulfilled by the Office of the Commissioner for Older Persons during this year of continued challenge and

change, and demonstrates the extensive work carried out by a minimalistic team composing of the Commissioner and a Senior Principal with no supporting staff throughout most of this particular reporting year. This annual report sets out a broad vision for the Office of the Commissioner which will continue to work closely with entities to raise standards, to coordinate services, as well to continue raising awareness about ageing healthily and actively. The Commission's role is to continue to highlight the needs of older persons and the country's responsibility to respond to the reality of an ever-increasing elderly population in our society so that the values of social justice and equity prevail. Many new challenges lay ahead, some created by the pandemic and if there is anything that 2021 has taught us is that we have overcome many challenges before and are all resilient in our own ways. It has also taught us that our health, both physical and mental is what matters most, thus the importance of keeping our mental wellbeing and physical health in check. It has taught us to be grateful for what we have and how important it is to practise solidarity and altruism towards everyone around us, especially towards the elderly and vulnerable individuals who live alone. Everything can and will change; essentially, we have to look at this pandemic and understand what worked and what did not. It is of utmost importance to use this negative episode in our lives created by the pandemic as a learning experience for the future and for the benefit of all. Finally a warm and heartfelt thank you goes to all those who contributed to our work in ways big and small during 2021.

## **Introduction**

The Commissioner for Older Persons is established by Act of 15<sup>th</sup> October 2016 , Chapter 553 of the Laws of Malta, the Commissioner for Older Persons Act. This report covers the performance of this Office from 1<sup>st</sup> January till 31<sup>st</sup> December 2021 and is being drawn up in accordance with this Act.

## **Role of the Commissioner**

The Law empowers the Commissioner for Older Persons to promote and safeguard the interests of older persons and investigate any alleged breaches or potential infringements of the human rights of older persons, the promotion of such rights as well as the protection and monitoring of the compliance with the United Nations Principles for Older Persons.

The CFOP has the duty to inter alia promote the highest standards of health, education, leisure, recreational facilities and social services for older persons in line with the relative approved standards and to ensure that all measures are taken by the relevant authorities to prevent and address poverty and social exclusion and any related issues among older persons. The Commissioner will also raise awareness about the potential, capabilities and contributions of older persons and combat age discrimination, prejudices, or harmful behaviour in their regard.

The Commissioner will encourage best practices in the treatment of older persons and is also expected to identify the needs of older persons, their families, carers and voluntary bodies working in the field of geriatric care and promote policies, encourage research and best practices, as well as collaborate with local and international entities in order to achieve these goals.

The Commissioner is also responsible to monitor government departments or agencies addressing older persons' needs and keep under review the adequacy and effectiveness of any legislation relating to and affecting the interests of older persons.

## **Functions and Duties**

The terms of reference of the Commissioner for Older Persons are laid down in the Commissioner for Older Persons Act, Chapter 553 of the Laws of Malta. These are reproduced below.

(1) The Commissioner shall have the following functions:

(a) to promote and advocate human rights and interests of older persons, and the need to safeguard those rights and interests;

(b) to promote opportunities for, and the elimination of discrimination against, older persons;

(c) to encourage best practices in the treatment of older persons;

(d) to keep under review the adequacy and effectiveness of any legislation relating and affecting the interests of older persons;

- (e) to advocate for adequate support and services to carers of the older persons;
  - (f) to monitor and examine the impact of any decision taken by any body, entity or authority on the human rights and interests of older persons;
  - (g) to promote the protection of older persons from any kind of abuse, harm, ill-treatment, neglect and exploitation of any form;
  - (h) to promote the highest standards of health, education, leisure, recreational facilities and social services for older persons in line with the relative approved standards in place from time to time;
  - (i) to ensure that all possible measures are taken by the relevant authorities to prevent and address poverty and social exclusion and related issues among older persons; and
  - (j) to promote compliance with the United Nations Principles for Older Persons adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 16 December 1991, the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing adopted by the United Nations during the Second World Assembly on Ageing (8-12 April 2002), and with such other international treaties, conventions or agreements relating to older persons as are or may be ratified or otherwise acceded to by Malta.
- (2) The Commissioner may issue guidelines on best practices in connection with any matter relating to the interests of older persons and in doing so the Commissioner may carry out any consultation which may be required or necessary.

## **Guiding Principles**

The Commissioner shall be guided by the following general principles:

- (a) the best interests of older persons are paramount;
- (b) all older persons are to be treated with dignity, respect and fairness;
- (c) older persons with disability and, or disadvantaged social circumstances should enjoy the same quality of life as all other older persons;
- (d) older persons and their families are to be provided with opportunities to participate in decisions that affect them and in defining, planning and evaluating services to older persons; and
- (e) government, families and communities share the responsibility for the promotion of the development and well-being of older persons.



## Strategic Approach

The Office aims to achieve this mission through empowerment, advocacy, influencing policy, monitoring relevant developments and best practices and through working in partnerships and facilitating synergy within an all-inclusive society.

## Priorities

Ending ageism and age discrimination

Stopping the abuse of older persons

Enabling everyone to age well

## Ultimate Vision

The ultimate vision is that, of an all-inclusive society wherein older persons are fully empowered and encouraged to use their health to remain active and that everyone according to their own potential and capabilities, strive to continue to contribute towards their families, towards society and towards their country. Thus, the sustainability and prosperity of the social community at large will be positively enhanced.

## Mission

The mission of the Office of the Commissioner for Older Persons is to promote and safeguard the interests of older persons so that they can benefit from a better quality of life through the maximisation of their potential.

## **Composition of the Office of the Commissioner**

At the start of this particular reporting year, the Office of the Commissioner was composed of Dr Mary Vella as Commissioner, a personal assistant, a senior principal, and an administrative assistant on a contract for service basis. The Administrative assistant 's contract expired on the 1<sup>st</sup> February 2021 and the Personal Assistant's contract expired on the 4<sup>th</sup> June 2021. Both the PA and the Administrative assistant were not replaced when their contract expired. In February, a Senior Manager joined our Office as per approved HR plan, however after ten weeks she left, having been appointed a Director in another Ministry. Up till the end of this reporting year, the Commissioner's Office was still without a Senior Manager to coordinate and manage the activities and administrative function of the Office of the Commissioner, assist, and advice the Commissioner in the execution of her functions as established by the Commissioner for Older Persons Act.

Ms Claire Aquilina, Senior Principal, has thus been the only other member of the Office throughout most of the year. Together we have worked on the vision and the business plan, in order to identify the necessary HR capacity required to pursue the functions of the Commissioner, as mandated by the current legislation. Furthermore, we also estimated the budget needed, in order to identify the shortfalls and ask for the necessary financial and HR resources to implement our mandate. With just the Commissioner and a Senior principal as staff, we have done our best, and together continued with our commitment and dedication towards older persons, carrying out all the necessary work ensuring as much as possible that the functions and obligations of Office of the Commissioner could be fulfilled according to Law.

Issues of extreme importance and which need attention are lack of human resources and finances and although we had approved HR plans in place, the Office of the Commissioner for Older Persons does not have legal personality and as such does not have the ability at law to issue call for applications for the recruitment of necessary staff. Besides according to our budgetary allocation, we do not have necessary funds to cover wages for any new employees.

At the end of this reporting year the organisational set up was:

Dr Mary Vella      Commissioner

Ms Claire Aquilina   Senior Principal

## **The Council for Older Persons**

As per Act for Commissioner for Older Persons, the Council for Older Persons is appointed by the Minister to assist the Commissioner.

The Council is composed of the Commissioner, who is also the Chairperson, and six other members appointed as follows:

- (a) One person appointed by the Minister for Family Children's Rights and Social Solidarity,
- (b) One person appointed by the Minister responsible for Health,
- (c) One person appointed by the Minister responsible for Education,
- (d) One person appointed by the national Commission for Active Ageing, and
- (e) Two persons appointed by the National Council for the Elderly.

The Council was at the start of the year composed of Dr Mary Vella (Chairperson) and the following members:

Profs Marvin Formosa,  
Dr Brian Farrugia,  
Mrs Mary Farrugia  
Mr Charles Farrugia,  
Mr Peter Paul Bonnici,  
Mr Joseph Baldacchino /Ms Olympia Galea.

Mr Joseph Baldacchino had submitted his resignation and Ms Olympia Galea was appointed in March 2021 in his stead.

The composition of the Council for Older Persons was reconfirmed as of 20<sup>th</sup> July 2021 being responsible for the performance of all its functions for a period of one year. Mr Charles Farrugia, tendered his resignation on the 9<sup>th</sup> September 2021 and was replaced by Mr Joe Vella Caruana at the end of November 2021 by Hon. Michael Farrugia. Ms Olympia Galea, also tendered her resignation on the 1<sup>st</sup> November 2021. In view of this up to the end of this reporting year, the Council remained one member less than when originally constituted. In both cases the Ministry was informed immediately as soon as we received the resignations. Due to the restrictions imposed and in view of mitigation measures because of Covid 19, and also because of inability to meet physically in our small premises, regular contact through digital means or by telephone calls was held with various members of the Council, besides the usual Council meetings held through TEAMS.

The role of the Council is an advisory one and all members brought with them diverse specific expertise and experience relevant to the issue of older persons.

## **Premises**

During the year 2021, work continued on the new premises in Farsons Street, Hamrun. A series of meetings were held on site, among which with Mr Matthew Vella, Permanent Secretary; Mr Michael Mizzi, Head of Office; Mr Andre Schembri, AACC Operations Manager. Also we had various onsite meetings with technical persons both from the contractors' part and from our Ministry. Here we would like to thank in particular Dr Degabriele, CEO AACC for his support in providing such technical persons.

## **Finance**

During 2021, the Office of the Commissioner for Older Persons worked on an annual budget of €140,000 that was supplied by the central government. This was just sufficient to cover the wages and rent for the new premises. Once additional funds are secured, the Office of the Commissioner would be in a position to finance activities, projects and initiatives that are deemed beneficial for older persons and essential to the functions of the Office of the Commissioner. Furthermore, the Office is still in the process of recruiting staff. These concerns were brought and discussed with

senior officials from MSCA but no further funds were allocated to the Office of the Commissioner for Older Persons in this reporting year's budget.

## Performance

The main areas of performance which the Office of the Commissioner for Older Persons has undertaken during this reporting year include:

Awareness Raising and Media Participation

Influencing Policy and Legislation

Collaboration with other entities

Investigation of Complaints and Providing Advice and Guidance

Work on Tackling Elderly Abuse

Reaching Out

Webinars, Seminars, Conferences, Meetings and Other Events

## Raising awareness and the Media



Programme on ONE Television discussing how budgetary measures affected older persons (2 November 2021)

During this reporting year, education and awareness raising were ongoing through the media. The Commissioner participated in various television and radio programme and wrote various articles where she explained in detail the role and objectives of the Office of the Commissioner for Older

Persons and how one can ask for help and guidance. Below is a list of some of the issues concerning older persons that the Commissioner has discussed and created awareness about:



1 Provided education and public information to promote the role and work of the Commissioner and how the Office could be of service to the general public.

2 Creating awareness about the rights of older persons.

3 Speaking about the importance of a healthy and active lifestyle, keeping in check our physical and mental wellbeing.

4 The importance of disease prevention and early diagnosis throughout the lifecycle, by making use of free regular investigations and screening programmes.

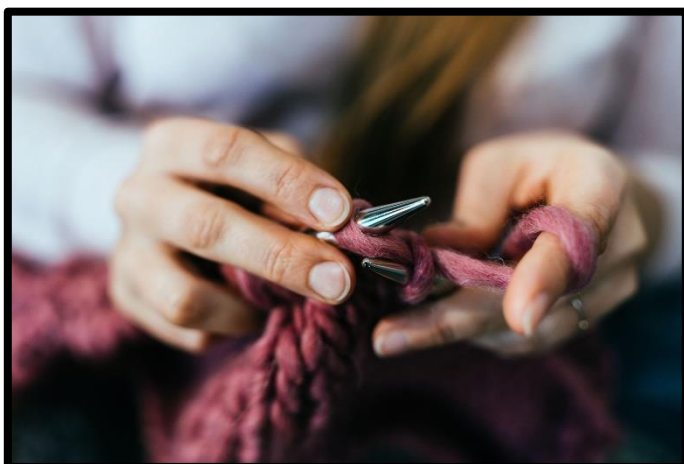


5 Speaking about the importance of regular eyesight (visual acuity) checks, since visual impairment can be a major cause of falls in the elderly with associated higher morbidity.

6 Advice on what can be done to prevent falls in the elderly to reduce the risk of fractures from these falls.

7 Polypharmacy and the Appropriate Use of Medication.

8 Speaking about active participation in the labour market, in the voluntary sector or providing care to family members.



9 Psychological benefits of social participation which goes beyond taking up hobbies and following leisurely pursuits. The term refers to active participation in social, economic, cultural, spiritual and civic activities for the benefit of the community in general.

10 Solitude and loneliness and what can be done to combat these realities.







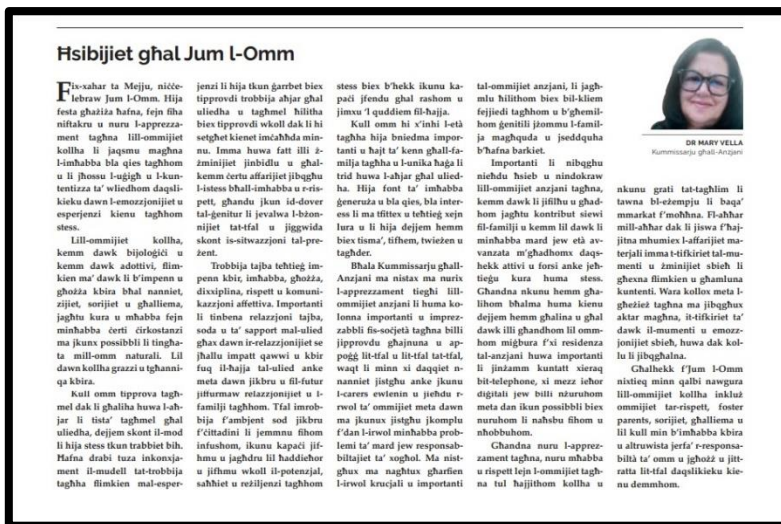
14 Elder Abuse and where and how one can ask for help.

15 Raising awareness about breast cancer during the Pink October campaign, encouraging a proactive approach towards self-checking behaviour.

During this reporting year the Commissioner continued regularly writing in newspapers articles of interest to older persons namely;

Is-Solitudni u L-Eskluzjoni Soċjali - 20/4/2021

Hsibijiet Ghal Jum L-Omm - 8/5/2021



Elder Abuse Is A Social Reality - 11/6/2021

15 Ta Gunju: Jum Iddedikat Għall-Għarfien Kontra L-Abbuż Fuq L-Anzjani - 15/6/2021







## Influencing Policy and Legislation

Throughout 2021, the Office of the Commissioner continued scrutinising and influencing a wide range of policy and practice to improve the lives of older persons. The Office regularly takes part and provides feedback on various public consultations and European commission documents concerning older persons. We also provided to other Entities/ Ministries feedback, assistance including setting up of focus groups and recommendations in the drawing up of policies, strategies, documentation and legislation concerning the rights of older persons, ensuring that the best interests of older persons are safeguarded. Besides forming part of a high level managerial meeting discussing “A Social Vision for Malta 2021-2030-2050”, as Commissioner for Older Persons attended and took part in various public consultation meetings amongst which those discussing;

Poverty and Social Exclusion, Domestic Violence, Abuse and Exploitation.

Also formed part of a panel discussing Ageing in Malta.

<b>Feedback provided on the following:</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>SQWP 27 Jan - Draft Council Conclusions on Mainstreaming of Ageing in Public Policies</b></li> <li>• <b>Green Paper On Ageing</b></li> <li>• <b>Council Conclusions on Mainstreaming Ageing in Public Policies</b></li> <li>• <b>Request for feedback in preparation for Malta’s Proposed National Statements (UN General Assembly, 76th session)</b></li> </ul>	Policy Development and Programme Implementation (MSFC)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>National report on The Regional Implementation Strategy (RIS) for MIPAA (Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing) for the UNECE Region</b></li> </ul>	National Focal Point for Ageing for Malta
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Public Consultation on Thematic Areas underpinning Malta’s National Post Pandemic Strategy</b></li> </ul>	Post Pandemic Consultation (MRIC)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Public Consultation on the Social Regulatory Standards – Residential Services for persons living with dementia</b></li> </ul>	Social Care Standards Authority (MSCA)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Public Consultation on the National Strategic Policy for Active Ageing, Malta 2021 – 2027</b></li> </ul>	MSCA

## **Collaboration with other entities – Working through participation**

The Commissioner continued holding regular meetings with different Commissioners and organisations that are directly or indirectly involved with older persons, to discuss the needs of this sector of society and to share ideas and visions so as to strengthen our work in favour of older persons, and also to improve their quality of life. Also, to hear about their experiences, concerns and any changes they envisage that would make Malta a better place to grow older. Separate meetings were held with other Commissioners, namely:

Commissioner for the Rights of Persons with Disability

Commissioner for Mental Health

Commissioner for Children

Commissioner for the Promotion of Equality

Commissioner for Domestic Violence

Besides Commissioners the Commissioner also met with other CEOs and Representatives of Entities amongst them –

Dr Alistair Degaetano: discussing the Bill entitled AN ACT to provide for the protection of vulnerable in particular older adults and adult persons with disability from harm and abuse and to provide protection and services to vulnerable adults at risk and to intervene in court proceedings relating to vulnerable adults and to enable Malta to ratify an international Convention relating to the international protection of adults.

Mr John Busuttil, Director Global Issues: discussing possible membership of international organisations and attendance to events.

Representatives from National Council for Older Persons

Dr Josianne Cutajar, CEO SVPR

Dr Renzo Degabriele, CEO (AACCD)

The aim of the ongoing collaboration with the CEOs of SVPR and AACCD is to ensure that the best possible care and service is being provided to the residents.

Ms Nora Macelli (St Jean Antide Foundation)

Representatives from Appogg

Police Domestic Violence Unit

Mr Brian Farrugia (Victim Support Agency)

Meetings were held with these entities and organisations in order to find ways how to liaise with these organisations in order to maximise resources and join efforts in such a crucial field of work as domestic or gender based violence involving older persons. Besides standard procedures to be followed in case of domestic violence and/or neglect were also discussed.

As the Office of the Commissioner for Older Persons we hold meetings and communicate regularly with different Faculties from the University of Malta especially the Department of Gerontology to cooperate and work together especially in the field of Research.

These meetings were held in order to identify ways for mutual co-ordination and co-operation between the Office of the Commissioner and these entities. This, besides finding ways how to share our knowledge and experience and work together for the best interests of older persons.

Regular meetings and communication were held with other stakeholders and these meetings, with other NGOs, agencies and entities will continue throughout the forthcoming year.

## **Investigation of Complaints/Requests for Advice or Guidance**

Since its inception our Office has always been dedicated in offering guidance and advice and doing our best to help our elderly population. The Office of the Commissioner for Older Persons has during 2021, continued to receive a number of requests asking for advice or guidance on issues relating to older persons and has also received a number of complaints from or on behalf of older persons. Complaints have reached the office either directly by the complainant speaking to the Commissioner or via telephone, letters, email or an sms. Complaints have been received from persons alleging breach of human rights on their own behalf, a family member or person for whom they were caring either formally or informally. Complaints referred to both the public and private sector as well as to domestic settings. The Office of the Commissioner received many queries relating to the outbreak of Covid 19 with many older persons seeking advice or clarification on guidance. Other concerns relating to Covid 19, were related to quarantine-imposed conditions or to mitigation measures when visits to the older persons in residential homes was stopped. We also had cases where we provided support to older persons in care homes, helping to resolve disputes with care providers.

Complaints were also made regarding road works and uneven pavements which the older persons find very disturbing and which they see as an impediment to their active lifestyle. Another concern was the problem of older persons having to wait outside banks, postal offices and health centres in the hot summer months without any protection from the sun. Other cases of a sensitive nature were about domestic violence, neglect and abuse of older persons. It should be highlighted that any allegation which was brought to our attention, even though some are complex, are immediately investigated. Each individual case, whatever the issue or concern, is meticulously looked into and assessed by the Commissioner. At times, cases are rediscussed with the individuals concerned or their relatives where they are offered advice as to how to proceed or where to seek assistance depending on the nature of the case under review. When necessary, that particular complaint was directed to the relevant authority which has the capacity to look into and resolve that particular matter. All complaints were investigated in a confidential and timely manner and the Commissioner always ensures that the complainant is informed of the outcome of the investigation. As the circumstances of everyone who contacts our Office are different, the assistance and support provided is tailored to reflect people's individual needs.

The support provided when dealing with these cases provides useful insight into the challenges faced by older persons, helping to guide and shape our work, whilst also identifying issues that need to be worked on, or raised with other stakeholders.

## **Commissioner's work in tackling Elderly Abuse – A Social Reality**

### **Zero Tolerance to Abuse**

One of the functions of the Commissioner is to promote and advocate human rights and interests of older persons and the need to safeguard those rights and interests. Even though the responsibilities of the Commission are wide and varied, due attention is given to the problem of elder abuse. It is becoming increasingly important to continue educating and raising awareness on the occurrence of abuse, neglect and exploitation of vulnerable older persons. The key to prevention and intervention is the ability to recognise the warning signs of its occurrence and increasing awareness of this social reality among the elderly themselves and the public in general. Everyone should be able to recognise the different forms of abuse, be familiar with the rights of older persons and know when and where to turn to, when in need of help, support or guidance. The Office of the Commissioner for Older Persons is committed to help persons suffering from different forms of abuse, be they emotional/psychological, physical, abandonment/neglect, financial or any other form. Through the Office, we create awareness on this social problem which most of the time remains hidden and unnoticed behind closed doors, since most of the time older persons fear the consequences of seeking help particularly if the perpetrator is a family member or their sole carer.

Throughout this reporting year the Commissioner continued receiving cases of neglect, abuse and even domestic violence involving older persons. Each case is meticulously looked into by the Commissioner. We collaborate and work together with AACCD, Appogg social workers, with the Police DV Unit, Victim Support Agency and also with the Commission against Domestic Violence. In case of any alleged negligence or abuse in residential or nursing homes, the Commissioner works with The Social Care Standards Authority so that any reported neglect or abuse is investigated and addressed, ensuring that the best interests of the older persons are safeguarded at all times.



When and if necessity dictates, we even liaise with other necessary relevant and competent authorities like professionals from Mater Dei, to investigate and resolve that particular case.

As Office of the Commissioner for Older Persons we continued throughout the year with our awareness campaign and we focus a lot on education. Through the media, we inform the general public and the elderly of their rights and when and where to seek help and support. They are also informed about the services offered by the Government and other NGO's.

With the ageing of today's population, however, there is the potential that elder abuse will increase. As Commissioner for Older Persons, besides having the aim of promoting, advocating and safeguarding human rights and interests of older persons, we strive to eradicate age-based discrimination. Negative attitudes towards old age and stereotypes depicting older people as weaker, less worthy and a burden to society may be a breeding ground for elder abuse. As such positive attitudes towards older persons should be encouraged by providing meaningful interactions between older adults and young people through intergenerational programmes, especially but not only in education. Besides the work carried out throughout the year, during the month of June, the 15<sup>th</sup> being World Elder Abuse Awareness Day, we continued raising awareness on this social problem which is a violation of human rights, encourage its reporting, give guidance and promote avenues for seeking help.

Two articles were written in English and Maltese and published in local newspapers, namely:

Elder Abuse Is A Social Reality

15 Ta Gunju: Jum Iddedikat Ghall-Gharfien Kontra L-Abbuż Fuq L-Anzjani



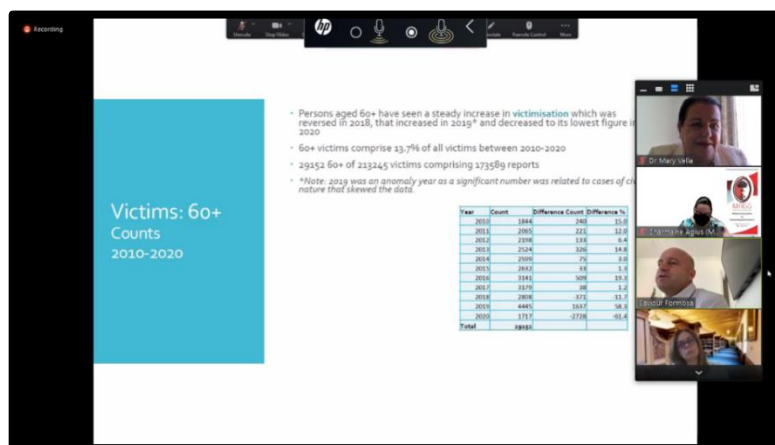
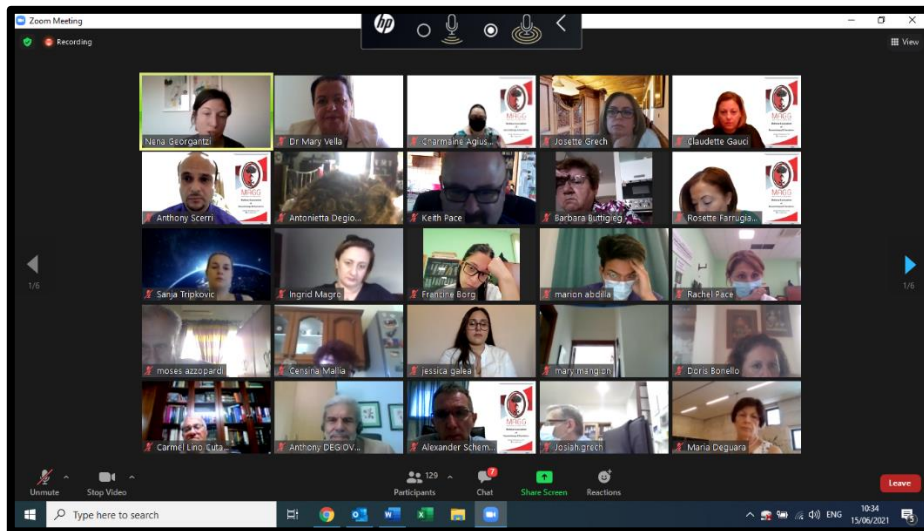
Articles written by Dr Vella on the occasion of World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (15<sup>th</sup> June)

The Commissioner also took part in full feature radio programmes discussing Elderly Abuse namely:

Newsline on the 15<sup>th</sup> June and on

Radju 103 on the 17<sup>th</sup> June

The Commissioner for Older Persons was also one of the key speakers during a Webinar hosted by MAGG on Elder Abuse to recognise that elder abuse exists and to put a concrete way forward on addressing this important issue.



As Office of the Commissioner for Older Persons we will continue to do our best to create awareness and educate not only older persons, but the public in general about these social realities concerning older persons.

The Law empowers the Commissioner for Older Persons to promote and safeguard the interests of older persons, investigate any alleged breaches or potential infringements of the human rights of older persons, promotes such rights and protects and monitors the compliance with the United Nations Principles for Older Persons.

However according to Commissioner for Older Person's Act 14.(2) the Commissioner shall not carry out investigations concerning specific, individual conflicts between older persons and their guardians or any other matter that falls within the competence of any court or tribunal established by law.

Data on Domestic violence is collected from:

Agenzija Appogg – from data obtained from Appogg Yearly Report 2021, there were 134 cases (33 male and 101 females) of new & re-contact cases of domestic violence involving persons aged 60 years and over;

Malta Police –from data obtained in the year 2021, there were 198 cases of victims of domestic violence, of which 113 were females and 85 were males.

This data is collected to get a better understanding of which services are being sought and also to get a clearer picture of the situation in our country, to know what more can be done in this field so that victims are helped and supported when they reach out for guidance and help. With this information we will be able to improve services in relation to older persons' abuse and also work on a coordinated approach with all stakeholders involved.

## **Conferences, Meetings, Seminars and Other Events**

Between January and December 2021, the Commissioner was invited to attend and participate in a number of webinars, activities and events organised by various Government entities and NGOs both local and foreign, as listed here under. The Office of the Commissioner also sought out ways of building networks and working in partnership with stakeholders coming from various sectors whether public, private, church or social in order to facilitate synergistic action. All the activities listed below were attended by the Commissioner herself to help raise the profile of the Office of the Commissioner and emphasise the importance of working for the benefit of the ever-increasing elderly population in Malta. Participation enables the Commissioner to assess current relevant and important issues affecting older persons, besides gathering useful information and enhancing networking with other national entities.

5 <sup>th</sup> January 2021	Meeting with Ms Andreana Friggieri, Commissioner for Domestic Violence
15 <sup>th</sup> January 2021	Physical and Mental Wellbeing seminar by Dr Nicholas Briffa. Wellbeing is the experience of health, happiness and prosperity. It includes having

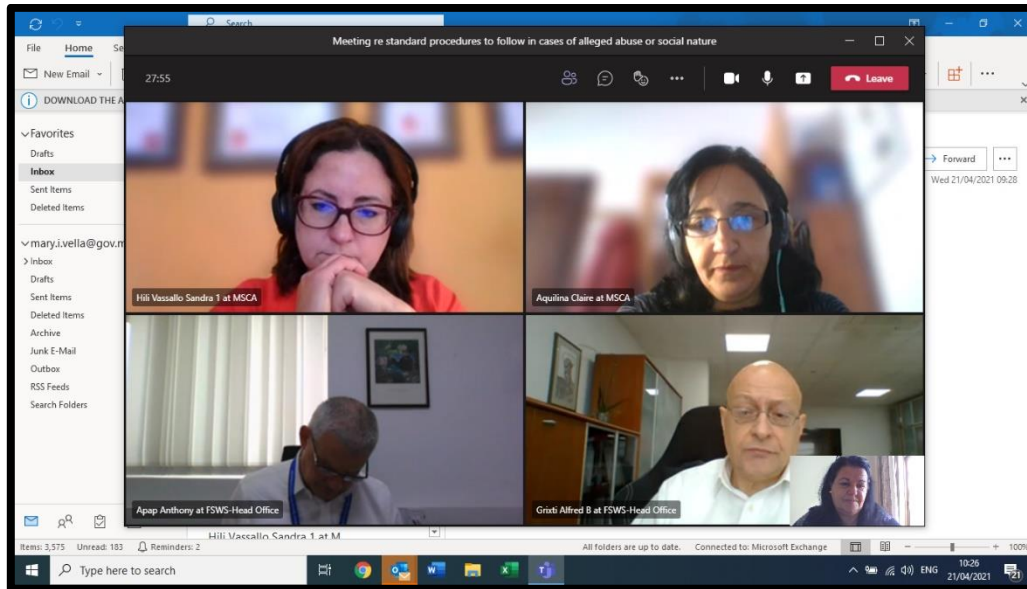


	good mental health, high life satisfaction and a sense of meaning and purpose. More importantly, wellbeing is just feeling well.
26 <sup>th</sup> January 2021	Meeting with Hon Michael Farrugia re the Office of the Commissioner for Older Persons.
29 <sup>th</sup> January 2021	Stakeholders Consultation Meeting in relation to Malta’s Sustainable Development Strategy 2020-2050. The Commissioner actively participated and provided constructive feedback during the meeting.
1 <sup>st</sup> February 2021	Consultation Meeting on a Social Intelligence Research Project on Older Persons’ Wellbeing Post Covid 19, together with Dr Maria Pace and Dr Maria Aurora Fenech. Participation and feedback given during this meeting held to discuss research methodology and tools.
4 <sup>th</sup> February 2021	High level Management Meeting - The objective of the meeting was to initiate discussions with a view to developing a vision document for the social sector for the medium to long term, focusing on the social care dimension.
12 <sup>th</sup> February 2021	Stakeholders Consultation Session in relation to Malta’s Sustainable Development Strategy 2050 and Action Plan 2030 focusing on Quality of Life and Wellbeing.
25 <sup>th</sup> February 2021	Gemma Webinar, “The Pension System in Malta: Where Should We Be Heading”, discussing how the pension system in Malta is to further evolve to ensure adequacy, sustainability and solidarity.
2 <sup>nd</sup> March 2021	NCPE Conference, “Il Pandemija tal-Covid 19 u l-Ugwaljanza bejn is-Sessi”.
4 <sup>th</sup> March 2021	MUESAC Webinar “Soċjeta Ugwali, Soċjeta Shiha” treating the current EU efforts to promote gender equality.
12 <sup>th</sup> March 2021	Site visit at new premises with Mr Matthew Vella (Permanent Secretary) and Mr Michael Mizzi.
16 <sup>th</sup> March 2021	Meeting with Dr Alistair Degaetano discussing vulnerable adults and older persons and The Protection of Vulnerable Older Persons Bill.
25 <sup>th</sup> March 2021	Meeting with the Commissioner for Children, Commissioner for Rights of Persons with Disability, Dr Alistair Degaetano, Dr Bernard A. Busuttil, Director at CRPD discussing separate legal personality and how it will effect each entity.
29 <sup>th</sup> March 2021	Meeting with Dr Maria Aurora Fenech discussing how the Office of the Commissioner for Older Persons can collaborate together with MAGG and the University Gerontology Department in areas of research and also to identify ways for mutual coordination and cooperation.
8 <sup>th</sup> April 2021	Meeting with Ms Nora Macelli, CEO, St Jeanne Antide Foundation (Sjaf) regarding the problems of vulnerable older persons who may also have a longstanding history of mental health problems living in severe neglect

and squalor and sometimes also being the victims of other forms of abuse.

21<sup>st</sup> April 2021

Meeting with Mr Alfred Grixti ,CEO FSWS, Mr Alan Apap, Director FSWS, Ms Nora Macelli, CEO SJAF, Dr John Cachia, Commissioner Mental Health.



The meeting was held to find ways how to liaise together in order to maximise our resources and efforts. Also discussing standard procedures to be followed in cases of domestic violence and neglect.

29<sup>th</sup> April 2021

Gemma Webinar discussing the Pulse survey, Household Financial Management, tracking how Maltese households have been managing their finances during the COVID-19 pandemic.

30<sup>th</sup> April 2021

Meeting with Mr John Busuttill, Director General Global Issues, MFEA was held to seek information about initiatives and fora on aging and elderly persons at international and European level. Possible membership of, or attendance at such events and organisations, was also discussed.

30<sup>th</sup> April 2021

International Federation of Ageing Webinar on "How to Enhance Smart Living and E-health Care Need for Old People"

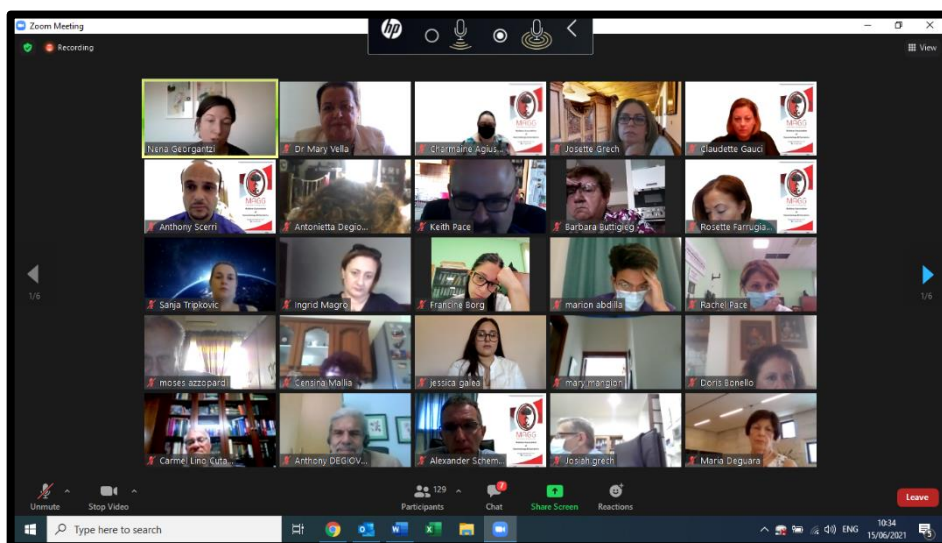
7<sup>th</sup> May 2021

International Federation of Ageing Webinar on how civil society contributes to the promotion, protection and advancement of human rights. Civil society organizations play a crucial role in helping to inform UN decision-making processes and UN advocacy activities.

8<sup>th</sup> May 2021

Article "Hsibijiet ghal Jum L-Omm" which was published in a local newspaper on the occasion of Mothers' Day, as a sign of appreciation to all mothers.

- 12<sup>th</sup> May 2021 Meeting with Hon. Dr Michael Farrugia, Minister for Senior Citizens and Active Ageing, regarding the new premises and human resources.
- 14<sup>th</sup> May 2021 International Federation of Ageing Seminar on "Social Justice, Racial Harmony and the Contributions of Older People".
- 26<sup>th</sup> May 2021 Meeting with Dr Natalia Muscat Advocate at SCSA discussing legal issues and laws concerning older persons.
- 27<sup>th</sup> May 2021 NCPE Online Annual Conference discussing equality and stereotypes in different types of media
- 27<sup>th</sup> May 2021 Gemma Webinar, "Understanding the Pension System".
- 11<sup>th</sup> June 2021 Active Ageing Conference organise by AACCD
- 14<sup>th</sup> June 2021 The Commissioner had a full feature radio programme Newline discussing the problem of elder abuse and giving information and guidance on how and where to seek help.
- 15<sup>th</sup> June 2021 World Elder Abuse Awareness Day - The Commissioner was a key speaker during a webinar organised by MAGG giving a presentation titled, "Shedding Light on Elder Abuse: Recognising and Tackling the Unseen Problem".



- 17<sup>th</sup> June 2021 Radju 103, The Commissioner was the sole speaker during a full feature radio programme regarding Elder Abuse.
- 5<sup>th</sup> July 2021 A social Vision for Malta 2035 - discussing Poverty and Social Exclusion.
- 6<sup>th</sup> July 2021 A social Vision for Malta 2035 - the Commissioner was a member of the panel discussing Ageing
- 9<sup>th</sup> July 2021 A social Vision for Malta 2035 - discussing Violence Abuse and Exploitation.

29<sup>th</sup> July 2021

3<sup>rd</sup> Gemma Webinar “Scams and Frauds” discussing how a scam works and how it can be spotted.

3<sup>rd</sup> August 2021

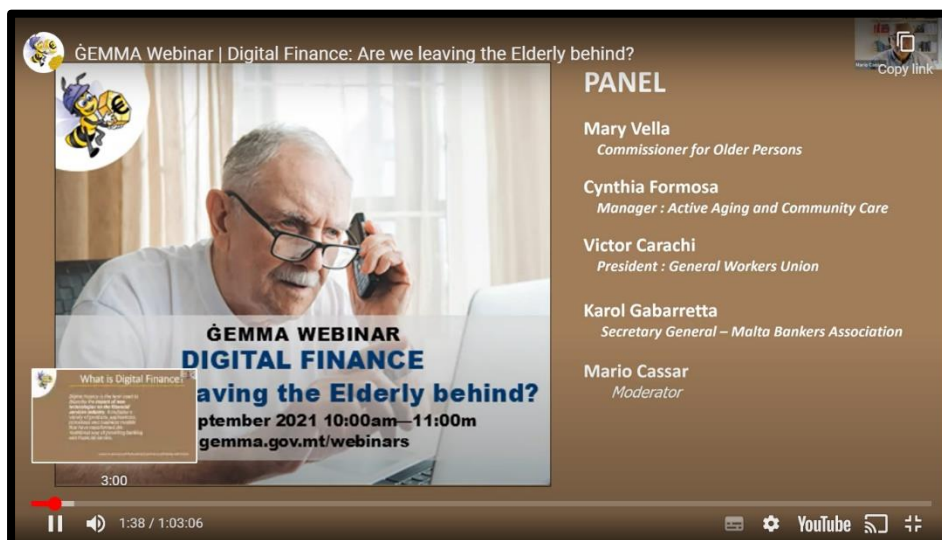
Presentation of Annual Report to Hon. Dr Michael Farrugia, Minister for Senior Citizens and Active Ageing.



6<sup>th</sup> August 2021

International Federation of Ageing Webinar “Social Isolation and Loneliness among Older Persons” especially the significant impact the outbreak of Covid 19 has had on older people’s long-term health and well-being.

13 <sup>th</sup> August 2021	International Federation of Ageing Webinar on “Ageing in Place, a Prototype for an age friendly city”. Taking as models, cities that are age-friendly which encourage active ageing by improving opportunities for health, participation, and security, ultimately helping to enhance quality of life as people age. In practical terms, an age-friendly city adapts its structures and services to be accessible to and inclusive of older people with varying needs and capacities.
20 <sup>th</sup> August 2021	Strategy Day during which the Commissioner delivered a presentation regarding the work of the Office of the Commissioner A presentation was given by the CEO of each entity and department falling under SCSA
27 <sup>th</sup> August 2021	International Federation of Ageing Webinar “Population Ageing and Urbanisation; Ageing Better In Cities”, speaking about how life is unpredictable and the rapid population ageing that is being seen around the globe requires innovative and creative solutions, including increased investment in the development and implementation of age-friendly communities. Countries have begun to recognize this crucial need and are working towards the creation of communities that foster safe and healthy ageing for all.
3 <sup>rd</sup> September 2021	International Federation of Ageing Webinar on “Advancing Senior Care - Everyone’s ageing journey is different”. Insights and experiences can help seniors and health providers to navigate challenging circumstances and sudden changes. Focusing on advocacy and education in delivering the best possible care for seniors in a respectful way.
15 <sup>th</sup> September 2021	International Federation of Ageing Webinar; “Creating a World for All Ages”. Ageism, one of the most prevalent forms of stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination is a complex and growing public health issue. Ageist attitudes are widespread globally, and examples of age-based discrimination can be found in social norms and multiple policy areas including health and social services, employment, education, and infrastructure. The UN Global Report on Ageism explored the impacts of ageism and found that not only are one in two people ageist against older persons, but older persons that do experience ageism are at higher risk of a shorter lifespan, poorer physical and mental health, and slower recovery from disability and cognitive decline.
21 <sup>st</sup> September 2021	An article titled “21 <sup>st</sup> September, World Dementia Day” was published to raise awareness and challenge the stigma associated with dementia.
23 <sup>rd</sup> September 2021	The Commissioner participated in a Financial Literacy Programme in collaboration with AACCD, Gemma, VSA and HSBC.



- 30<sup>th</sup> September 2021 Dr Mary Vella (Commissioner) formed part of the panel organised by Gemma discussing “Digital Finance; Are We Leaving The Elderly Behind? Is the pursuit of digital finance strategies leaving a vulnerable portion of the population behind?”
- 30<sup>th</sup> September 2021 The Commissioner attended the Dementia Awards Ceremony.
- 1<sup>st</sup> October 2021 October 1st is the annual celebration of the **United Nations International Day of Older Persons** (UNIDOP). The Commissioner participated in an event of The International Federation on Ageing, in collaboration with the NGO Committee on Ageing at the United Nations Vienna. A panel of global experts on ageing and human rights along with Ambassador Dr. Wolfgang Mückstein, spoke about developing a person centered, human rights approach to ensure digital equity including adequate policies, access, digital literacy, and safety for individuals of all ages.
- 1<sup>st</sup> October 2021 The Commissioner had an article titled “Ageing in Malta” published in a local newspaper.
- 8<sup>th</sup> October 2021 International Federation of Ageing Webinar; titled “Framing Strategies and Addressing Ageism and Elder Abuse on the Public Agenda”
- 15<sup>th</sup> October 2021 Pink October is a global effort during the month of October to raise awareness about breast cancer which is one of the most common forms of cancers especially in females. The Commissioner met a group of women and as a doctor, spoke about knowing what to look out for, as this would help each one of us ensure that cancer could be identified early, resulting in better prognosis.





- 15<sup>th</sup> October 2021 International Federation of Ageing Webinar - “Maintaining the Dignity and promoting the Rights of Older Persons”.
- 18<sup>th</sup> October 2021 Webinar on the Impact of Covid 19 and the Social Care workforce. In this webinar the Retention and Sustainability of Social Care Workforce (RESSCW) research team presented findings from the first wave of their survey, which ran from April to June 2021, and explored the various implications and cumulative impact of living and working through the COVID-19 pandemic on the workforce, organisations and the wider health and care systems.
- 21<sup>st</sup> October 2021 The Commissioner participated in an information session organised by the Victim Support Agency. The main objective was to raise awareness on Victim Rights and the services offered by the Agency in case any person falls Victim of a Crime or comes across another person who ended up as a victim of a crime.
- 28<sup>th</sup> October 2021 Participated in a Gemma Webinar discussing Private Pensions,
- 5<sup>th</sup> November 2021 International Federation of Ageing Webinar on Ageism and Attitudes about Ageing. Adapting a new look at aging and elderhood—one that values elderhood as much as any other stage of life, and that respects the life experience and contributions of older adults.
- 10<sup>th</sup> November 2021 Online 15<sup>th</sup> Global Conference on Ageing entitled “Rights Matter”.
- 11<sup>th</sup> November 2021 The Commissioner participated in The National Commission for the Promotion of Equality Online Conference to mark Equal Pay Day 2021.
- 12<sup>th</sup> November 2021 Awards Presentation of “Premju Anzjanita Attiva”, held under the auspices of the President of Malta. The Commissioner attended this event which is organised to celebrate the positive impact that each nominee leaves in the field of Active Ageing and is an appreciation for the work and commitment done in various fields ensuring an active and independent life for the benefit of the individual and of the Maltese society. Following this event, the Commissioner wrote an article which

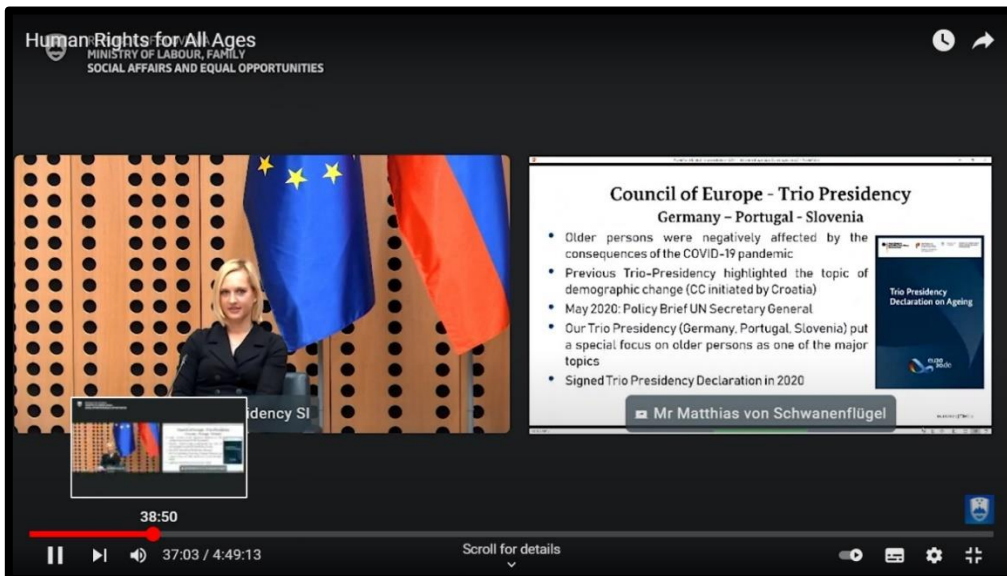
was published in a local newspaper titled; “Anzjanita Attiva u Premju Anzjanita Attiva”

16<sup>th</sup> November 2021 The Commissioner participated in a Fraud Information Session together with representatives from Gemma, CRPD, AACCD, MFCS, DSS and HSBC during International Fraud Awareness Week (14<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> November 2021)

17<sup>th</sup> November 2021 Dr Mary Vella (Commissioner) chaired the Selection Board for SVPR Employee of the Year Awards.



18<sup>th</sup> November 2021 High Level International Conference; “Human Rights for All Ages: Promoting a Life Course Perspective and Intergenerational Cooperation to Combat Ageism”.



“Human rights for all ages” Conference held on 18<sup>th</sup> November 2021.



23<sup>rd</sup> November 2021 Health in all Policies information session organised by the Social Determinants of Health Unit within the Office of the Superintendent of Public Health.

30<sup>th</sup> November 2021 Presentation of SVPR Employee of the Year Awards.

3<sup>rd</sup> December 2021 The Permanent Secretary, Ministry for Senior Citizens and Active Ageing organised an event to discuss a 5-Year Strategy for the Public Service.



5<sup>th</sup> December 2021 The Commissioner attended and delivered a short speech during a ceremony organised by Nanniet Malta. The event was carried out in front of the monument dedicated to all Maltese & Gozitan Grandparents (Nanniet), originally unveiled in 2018, situated at the Upper San Anton Gardens, in Attard.

17<sup>th</sup> December 2021 International Federation of Ageing Webinar on “How Innovative Technologies impact the Ageing Industry”, discussing how the foundation of human connection is shared positive experiences, and how the COVID-19 pandemic has made it additionally clear that being comfortable with innovative technologies is a vital requirement for older adults.

## CONCLUSION - Way Forward

As can be seen from this report, in its third year, the Office of the Commissioner for Older Persons continued to report further progress in the implementation of its role emanating from the Commissioner for Older Persons Act being responsible for the promotion and protection of the rights and interests of older persons in Malta and Gozo. 2021 has continued to be challenging and difficult, but we welcomed 2022 full of enthusiasm and energy, focussing on our plans for the year ahead and hoping to deal with all the setbacks and difficulties that come our way.

As to Covid 19, based on what we know so far, the most likely scenario is that Covid 19 virus will continue to evolve but the severity of the disease it causes will reduce over time as immunity increases due to vaccination and infection.

Throughout the period of reporting, the Commissioner continued building networks and working in partnership with other stakeholders coming from various sectors in order to facilitate synergistic action. We continued building liaisons with a wide spectrum of key actors who may be directly or indirectly involved in the issue of older persons in Malta and Gozo and hope to continue with our collective effort of work. If there is anything that the Pandemic has thought us is that we not only can work together, but we need to, and must work together if we want to achieve results for the common good. We believe that for the benefit of our elderly population we have to work as a team with everybody involved.

As Office of the Commissioner for Older Persons, we shall continue with our plans where we will continue to reach out as much as possible to our elderly population. We need to continue working on our final aim, remove social and economic barriers and in other cases provide the necessary support and assistance for older persons to be able to continue living independently in the community. As a society we need to continue working hard so that every person is respected and is held in equal regard irrespective of their age or vulnerability. We want to see and will continue working in this regard to see an all-inclusive society where respect for the rights and dignity of older persons should prevail and where we should recognise the essential contribution that older persons make to the functioning of societies.

The setting up of the role of the Commissioner for Older Persons in 2016, was a very important step as a promoter and guardian of our elderly population and it is fair to say that in spite of being very short of staff with just the Commissioner and a senior principal throughout most of this reporting year, the Office has carried out sterling work and made great strides. However, looking ahead from the progress accomplished to date, we have to accept the fact that the Commission can grow further, not simply through the mere replenishment or addition of resources, both human and financial though these are of utmost importance, but also through a qualitative improvement in its autonomy and independence.

Fortifying the independence of the Office of the Commissioner for Older Persons would mean strengthening the Commission as a promoter and guardian of the human rights and interests of older persons in Malta, besides being in a better position to tackle discrimination for our members of society.

Dr Mary Vella

Commissioner for Older Persons.