

**National report for the fourth review and appraisal cycle of
the implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on
Ageing
and its Regional Implementation Strategy (MIPAA/RIS)
2018 – 2022**

MALTA

September 2021

Part I

Executive summary (by National Focal Points on Ageing)

This report is an overview of the progress of implementation of the MIPAA/RIS. A quantitative and qualitative approach was used in carrying out this evaluation. The **quantitative information** in this report is based on the research and reports carried out by the National Statistics Office, and other statistical information published or made available by different organisations and entities. The **qualitative information** was obtained through networking with different stakeholders. Different Ministries were asked to contribute to this report by providing information about any action taken and the impact of these actions in relation to MIPAA/RIS. To ensure as far as possible a bottom-up approach, consultation by email was held with a number of associations of older people and self-help groups and other stakeholders. Throughout this report one finds an overview of the progress done in the implementation of the commitments of the MIPAA/RIS. Amongst the major achievement since 2017 one finds:

- ❖ Improvement in social participation opportunities for older persons, including the increase in lifelong learning sessions for persons who would generally not be motivated to participate. This includes the lifelong learning sessions in Active Ageing Centres and in residential homes, increase in the number of centres of the University for the Third Age, and the introduction of a University of the Fourth Age.
- ❖ Improvement in independent living through the introduction of new services and the improvement of existent services which support older adults to continue living in the community with the necessary support.
- ❖ Improvement in addressing the psychosocial needs of older adults: including the introduction of the psychologist in the community and in residential homes and group discussion sessions with the psychologist.
- ❖ Increased awareness and training opportunities on digital literacy amongst older persons.
- ❖ Improvement in community mobility by means of the introduction of the Silver T service, which is a free transport service for older adults to enable them to run errands within the community they live in.
- ❖ Increased opportunities and incentives for training the national workforce in gerontology, geriatrics and dementia care competencies.

Considerable work was done to implement the recommendation of the MIPAA/RIS, and the Maltese Government in the coming years will continue to address:

- ❖ Issues of ageism and age discrimination, whilst expanding the legal definition of age to address both direct and indirect forms of discrimination.
- ❖ The specific concerns of older LGBTQ+, and the implications of their sexual identities on compromised citizenship in later life, as well as in the delivery of health care services.
- ❖ The recognition and awareness of elder abuse while also developing and implementing a nationwide strategy that empowers the public and older adults themselves to report abuse, and provide the necessary procedures and resources for a comprehensive response.

Conclusion:

Malta has been at the forefront in ageing policy and healthy ageing development. The government's vision is not only to increase life expectancy but also to 'add life to years' for current and future cohorts of older persons. In the last 20 years, Malta has made considerable improvement in not only addressing health related needs of older adults, but also in promoting their physical, psychological and social wellbeing, and enhancing opportunities to maximize the potential of older adults. The ageing population is a continually changing cohort of people and therefore the policy needs to evolve accordingly. The Maltese Government has issued a new National Strategic Policy for Active Ageing for the period 2021 till 2027, which is currently for public consultation. This policy aims to further improve the ageing sector in Malta and it takes into consideration the vast differences amongst this cohort. This includes:

- ❖ social inclusion that includes the contributions the contributions that older persons make to society. Examples include grandparenthood and volunteering;
- ❖ maximizing the potential of older adults by empowerment and enhancement of opportunities;
- ❖ education and lifelong learning to prevent social isolation;
- ❖ addressing healthy ageing and disease prevention;
- ❖ increasing and adapting services for a good quality of life in older age.

The new proposed policy targets issues related to diversity and inequalities, and further amplifies certain types that were mentioned in the first *National Strategic Policy*. This policy also gives priority to identifying

and addressing the needs of persons from minority groups, including LGBTIQ+, ethnic minorities, and persons in correctional facilities.

General information

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4. The *first National Strategic Policy for Active Ageing: Malta 2014-2020* is now being replaced by a second national policy on ageing in Malta. *The National Strategic Policy for Active Ageing: MALTA 2021-2027* has been launched for public consultation in October 2021.

https://meae.gov.mt/en/Public_Consultations/MSCA/PublishingImages/Pages/Consultations/NationalStrategicPolicyforActiveAgeingMalta20212027/NSPAA%20DOC%20ENG.pdf

1. National Ageing situation:

An ageing population represents one of the most significant demographic and socioeconomic developments that Maltese society will be facing in the coming decades. At the end of the year 2019 the Maltese population was estimated to be 514,564, of which 126,158 were aged 60 years and over. This makes up 24.5% of the whole population, 18% of which were aged 65 years and over. Persons under the age of 18 made up 16 % of the total population (National Statistics Office, 2020).

During the past century the life expectancy in Malta has been on the increase. The life expectancy at birth in 2014 was 82.1 years (84.3 for females and 79.8 for males) (National Statistics Office, 2016).

Over the past decade the Maltese Government has launched the *National Strategic Policy for Active Ageing*, (2014-2020), the *National Strategy for Dementia in the Maltese Islands (2015 – 2023)*, the *National Minimum Standards for Care Homes for Older People*; *Guidelines for High Dependency Chronic*

Care Services for Older Persons; guidelines Residential Services for Persons Living with Dementia in Homes for Senior Citizens; and guidelines on Community-based and Outreach Services.

Malta has also a *National Strategic Policy for Poverty Reduction and Social inclusion 2014 – 2024* to strive to decrease the risk of poverty. Older adults are at a higher risk of poverty. In October 2021 the Maltese Government has launched the second *National Strategic Policy for Active Ageing: Malta 2021-2027* for public consultation.

The *National Strategic Policy for Active Ageing* (NSPAA) is based on the knowledge that older persons have a wide range of abilities and expectations. The policy aims to maximise the potential of older adults while supporting the vulnerable individuals who need more support, whether in the community or in long-term care. The *Maltese National Policy for Ageing: Malta 2021-2027* includes three key sections: social inclusion, healthy ageing and addressing diversity and inequality.

Objective 1 of the policy is social inclusion. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a huge impact on the well-being of older adults with the result that many older adults are now feeling socially isolated. The NSPAA is proposing measures which address issues of solitude, loneliness and social isolation. Other measures address financial security which, amongst others, includes also protection from financial abuse; civic engagement; and supporting the caregiving roles of older persons, both to other more dependent older adults as well as their contributions to the care of grandchildren. Lifelong learning in the third and fourth age, including learning opportunities to housebound older adults and older adults in residential homes, as well as the importance of information and communication technology, are measures that are addressed in the NSPAA. Active ageing hubs, transport and age-friendly communities are all measures which are being proposed so as to enhance social inclusion.

The second objective of the policy is related to Healthy Ageing. Several measures are being proposed which promote independent living and the active involvement of older adults in choosing what suits them best; ensuring accessibility to health services, promoting physical activity, and maintaining safety within the home and outdoors through adequate guidelines and age-friendly outdoor area designs. The NSPAA promotes initiatives which promote mental health well-being, provide for more holistic community care, and improve the quality of residential long-term care. The third objective focuses on addressing diversity and inequalities. It is interesting to note the increased attention that is being given to this aspect compared to the previous policy, including measures addressing issues related to gender, LGBTIQ, and

ethnicity. The NSPAA also addresses ageism and age discrimination, abuse and mistreatment, and adequate access to justice.

The implementation process of *the National Strategic Policy for Active Ageing* is to commence in 2022 and run till 2027. The implementation of the strategy is to be spearheaded by the Ministry for Senior Citizens and Active Ageing, but the Government is to set up an inter-ministerial Committee, chaired by the minister responsible for Senior Citizens and Active Ageing, to steer the process of implementation. The inter-ministerial committee will be responsible for implementing a plan of action with reasonable timeframes. The Maltese Government is also determined to include older persons, caregivers, and family members in the various phases of the implementation process.

Enhancing care and support for persons with dementia and their significant others is a priority for the Maltese Government. Over the past decade, a National Strategy for Dementia in the Maltese Islands (2015 – 2023) has been launched and several services have been developed to cater for the needs of this increasing proportion of the population. Community services that support independence and wellbeing of persons with dementia and their caregivers are being strengthened. One of the greatest achievements was the introduction of the Dementia Intervention Team (DIT), which provides a holistic community-based support service for persons with dementia and their caregivers. A holistic assessment of the caregivers' and care recipients' situation is carried out in the home, where the person with dementia is residing. Following an assessment, a care plan is tailor made for each case – which might include education and training; support, and advice on safety and coping strategies, for both the person with dementia and their caregivers. Ultimately, the main aim of the team of professionals is to enable people with dementia to continue actively ageing in the community and improve their quality of life.

The Dementia Helpline has also been introduced. This is a 24 hour helpline manned by qualified and experienced nurses who work with persons with dementia. The Helpline is there to answer any questions related with the condition and support is also offered via printed material and referral to other services.

Three new dementia activity centres have also been established in different localities in Malta and Gozo. Significantly increasing the number of persons who can benefit from this service which was originally only given via the centre at Saint Vincent de Pau long-term care facility. Moreover, two of these centres offer also night shelter service for persons with dementia. The Telecare on the Move scheme was also introduced as a pilot project for persons with dementia. This service offers the faculty of GPS tracking,

geo-fencing, 24 hour call centre and 2-way communication. This service is highly subsidised by the Maltese Government.

Training of informal caregivers is also important and therefore a 10-week dementia programme for caregivers of persons with dementia is regularly organised by St Vincent de Paul long-term care facility. This programme trains caregivers in the biopsychosocial aspects of dementia. Further details regarding this programme can be found at this link: <https://activeageing.gov.mt/dementia-course-for-informal-caregivers/?lang=en>

Social, Economic and Political Situation

In Malta, there are strong community and family ties which promote protection and social inclusion of older adults. Malta has a welfare state, a social protection system which includes social insurance, and social and health care services. The social insurance aims to safeguard the citizens' income by providing a comprehensive system of basic security and income benefits which guarantee an acceptable standard of living which includes a retirement pension. Health services in Malta are highly developed. The Government provides a comprehensive health service to all Maltese residents that is delivered free of charge. This service includes preventative, investigative, curative and rehabilitative services in health centres and hospitals. These services are funded by the state.

Malta's public finance sustainability has been improving in recent years, thanks to prudent fiscal policy, strong growth, and favourable financing conditions. Indeed, the consistent improvement in the fiscal position allowed Malta to gain fiscal headroom, supported by the sustained strengthening of the institutional capacity in Malta's fiscal framework.

In spite of several reforms, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a negative impact on the economy and public finances in Malta. The effect of this pandemic distinguishes itself from previous crises because the declines in demand were also complemented with supply disruptions. This called for a number of measures enacted by the Government to support the economy and ensure no lasting damage is sustained after the pandemic, which in turn could jeopardise public finance sustainability. In this setting, the build-up of public savings in the last few years proved to be quite opportune and allowed the Government to provide the necessary support without putting financial stability at risk. Additionally, following the prudent approach adopted in recent years together with the strong growth, and the favourable financing

conditions, the economy was able to absorb a short-term increase in borrowing, particularly with favourable financing conditions.

Once the pandemic subsides, the pace of the increase in debt is expected to slow down and be reversed to avoid any feedback loop between higher public debt and borrowing costs. This shall be achieved by reducing the fiscal deficit in a gradual, orderly manner, which takes into account the need to continue providing some counter-cyclical support to the economy. The sequencing of deficit-reduction involves a phasing out of temporary support measures once the health crisis abates and restrictions on mobility and economic activity are lifted. Provided that the economic recovery gains momentum, a cyclical improvement in the public finances is expected to support the elimination of the deficit over time.

Malta has one of the lowest unemployment rates in Europe (Eurostat, 2021), and the country has experienced a steady increase in its employment rate. Employment Rate in Malta was 74.20 percent in the first quarter of 2021 (Trading Economics, 2021).

2. Method:

A quantitative and qualitative approach was used in carrying out the evaluation of the actions taken in the Maltese islands towards the implementation of the Madrid Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA) and the subsequent UNECE Regional Implementation Strategy (RIS).

This report is based in the context of the local culture, traditions, and economic, political, religious and social situations. The ever changing Maltese society is a mixture of ingrained customs and traditions which are strongly affected by modernisation in technology and constantly influenced by events and the way of life in Europe and neighbouring countries. It is against this background that this report is being compiled.

The **quantitative information** in this report is based on the research carried out by the National Statistics Office, on reports published by the same office, together with statistical information published or made available by different organisations and entities, including the Active Ageing and Community Care, Eurostat, and different Ministries.

The various policies, legislations, programmes and services were taken in consideration, paying attention to the effects of their implementation on the country's population, especially the older persons. Valuable information was retrieved electronically through government websites and websites of different organisations.

The **qualitative information** was obtained through networking with different stakeholders. Different Ministries were asked to contribute to this report by providing information about any action taken and the impact of these actions in relation to MIPAA/RIS. Questions were sent to different Ministries through the Policy Development and Programme Implementation of the Ministry for Senior Citizens and Active Ageing. Each Ministry coordinated the collection of information from key persons. The consultation was carried out also with key stakeholders such as the commissioner for older persons.

To ensure as far as possible a bottom-up approach, considering that older adults are the main stakeholders, they were involved by gathering their views and perspectives about the situation of ageing in Malta and of the aspirations and needs of Malta's older adults. Consultation by email was held with a number of associations of older people and self-help groups, as well as union sections of pensioners, the Foundation for Social Welfare Services, the Commissioner for Older Persons, the Commission on Gender-Based Violence and Domestic Violence, the National Council for Women, the National Council for the Elderly, and to all local councils. For this purpose questions were sent to different entities to gather their written feedback. The questions were focused about the achievements during the last 20 years in empowerment of older persons, protecting older persons' enjoyment of all human rights and dignity, recognizing the potential embedded in the employment of older workers and developing labour market strategies, and how thinking, feeling and dealing with ageing has changed in the last 20 years. Replies were received from several entities and were included in this report.

Part II: 20 years of MIPAA/RIS

Recognizing the potential of older persons

1.1 What has been done to empower individuals to realize their potential for physical, mental and social well-being throughout their lives and to participate in and contribute to society

according to their capacities, needs, and desires along the RIS-commitments 1, 2, 8, 9 and 10 and the goals of the Lisbon Ministerial Declaration?

Developing and implementing socially responsible and future-oriented economic and financial strategies:

A stable economic situation in old age is essential for older adults to reach their potential. Since the late 1970's, Malta has a pensions system based on ongoing contributions by the employer and the employee during the working life of the individual. The rate of the Retirement Pension depends on the average of contributions paid and on the pensionable income earned from gainful occupation in the last eleven years prior to retirement.

Increases in life expectancy along with lower fertility rates create pressures on the financing of age-related expenditure, especially with respect to the pension system, which in turn may negatively impact the sustainability of public finances. Thus, in order to countervail the impact of an ageing population on public finances and to address both adequacy and sustainability challenges to the pension system, through the 2007 pension reform, the Government has legislated for a gradual rise in the pensionable age from 61 years to 65 years.

Statistics emanating from the EU-SILC survey show that households with no dependent children and with at least one person above the age of 65 are more likely to be at risk of poverty. The adequacy of pensions can play a key role in preventing older citizens from falling below the poverty line. In the Budget for 2019, the Government announced that every pensioner, irrespective of whether one is receiving a contributory or a non-contributory pension (namely beneficiaries of retirement pensions, widows' pensions, invalidity pensions, as well as old age pensions) shall be benefitting from a weekly €2.17 increase in his or her pension. The objective of this measure is to address the adequacy of pensions and improve the distribution of wealth. This measure is expected to have a positive impact with respect to the overall at-risk-of poverty rate, which is estimated to decline by around 0.16 percentage points (Ministry for Finance, April 2019).

Several measures have been introduced in the years 2020 and 2021 to better support ageing individuals, these include, but are not limited to:

- Cost of Living Adjustment increase together with a further overall increase for a total of €7 per week in pension for all pensioners;

- An increase in the tax exemption for pensioners and married couples in receipt of only one pension;
- An increase in pension for those public service or public sector employees who despite having enough social security contributions did not opt to retire at the age of 61 so as not lose the percentage increase which previously was awarded only to private sector employees;
- Cost of Living Adjustment for all pensioners with a further increase in the overall pension for a total increase of €5.00 per week to all pensioners;
- A further increase in the tax exemption limit for pensioners and married couples in receipt of only one pension;
- Persons born before 1962 who do not qualify for a pension when considering paid contributions after the age of 19 will be re-assessed to also take into consideration the paid contributions before the age of 19. If the required minimum number of contributions to be paid are reached, then a reduced pension will be awarded.

Several initiatives in favour of older persons were announced in the budget for 2022 which include:

- Social security pensions will increase by €5 weekly inclusive of €1.75 COLA;
- Over a 5 year period, taxable income will exclude pension income. This is aimed at pensioners with additional income following retirement age;
- The maximum amount of exempt pension income will be increased up to €14,318
- The Carer at Home subsidy was again increased from €6,000 to €7,000. This scheme allows older persons to engage a carer of their own choice and continue to live in their community instead of being admitted into a long-term care facility;
- The Helper of your Choice subsidy rate was further increased from €5.50/hr to €7/hr. This will provide a further incentive to senior citizens to engage a helper of their own choice.

Fostering effective consultations with, and involvement of, older persons and their representatives at the national, regional and local levels in designing policies.

Involvement of older adults themselves in developing policies is considered important for the Maltese Government. In October 2020 a public consultation webinar about the national political strategy for active ageing 2021-2027 was set up. The aim is to pursue a policy that strengthens and improves inclusion and the quality of life of older persons in the community and in residential homes, and one that encourages

and incentivizes increased participation by the elderly in our society. Unfortunately, this could not be held in person due to the pandemic which might have limited participation from a number of persons who are not IT literate. Several key players in the elderly sector took part in this webinar and there were also 4 different workshops. These were: Employment; Participation in Society; Independent, healthy and secure living in the community; and Ensuring dignity, autonomy and empowerment in care homes and long-term facilities for older persons.

In June 2021 a webinar about Active Ageing was organised by the Active Ageing and Community Care during which several initiatives and future plans in relation to active ageing were showcased, followed by discussion workshops. The themes of the workshops were digital access; lifelong learning; projects in the community to foster social participation; and active ageing opportunities in long term care. Several older adults and other stakeholders participated in these workshops and a plan of action was devised together with the Chief Executive Officer of the Active Ageing and Community Care to implement several recommendations put forward during the workshops.

One of the recommendations put forward in the digital access workshop was to promote digital access amongst older persons to make them understand the benefits of IT in their daily life. This recommendation, coupled with the fact that the theme for the international day for older persons in 2021 was Digital Equity for all ages, gave rise to a national campaign during which a video has been produced and workshops were held in different regions of the Maltese Islands to facilitate discussions about digital access, difficulties encountered, and what could be done to overcome these difficulties. These workshops included collaboration between different entities including the Ministry for Senior Citizens and Active Ageing, local councils, the Malta Information Technology Agency, Tech.mt, ICTforElderly, FITA, and the Ministry for Gozo.

The National Council for the Elderly (KNA) brings together those Associations / Organisations that give some form of service to the elderly in order to act as a forum between them and the Government, and safeguards the interests of elderly persons who are not members of some Association/Organisation.

Promoting a positive image of older persons, acknowledging their contributions to society.

A lot of work is carried out to maintain and enhance the quality of life and wellbeing of older people who are still living within the community while promoting independence, autonomy and dignity. The elderly

are encouraged to participate actively in our elderly hubs, where they can meet other elderly people, and participate in the activities and other informative sessions that are organized.

A yearly event is held to celebrate older persons who show exceptional contribution in the field of Active Ageing, with nominations open to the general public and where awards are presented to different categories such as for work in the cultural sector, for solidarity between generations, sports initiatives, and other areas. These categories change from year to year.

Older persons are encouraged to use their skills and knowledge for the benefit of society. Several projects are continuously implemented to encourage older persons' active participation in society. In 2021 a new project named school grannies was launched. This project has been implemented in one locality as a pilot project. Older persons are identified to be near the primary and middle schools to greet children to school and assist the community police to guide transport, as well as assist children in crossing the road. This project encourages interaction between children and older adults. Moreover, the older adults are given a token remuneration for the service delivered. The Active Ageing and Community Care is continuously trying to engage older adults in several initiatives such as swimming sessions held in collaboration with Sports Malta in the National Pool. The AACC organises yearly sports days for all members of Active Ageing Centres and residents in residential homes. This had to be missed in 2020 due to the pandemic, however in 2021 this has resumed for residents in residential homes by keeping residents in smaller bubbles. Sports days for older adults in collaboration with schools are also being discussed, and hopefully will be held if the pandemic remains under control. Exercise sessions involving different sport disciplines adapted for seniors have been introduced in Active Ageing Centres for older adults to have the opportunity to try out different sports in a fun and enjoyable way. In the year 2021 fishing sessions have been started for members of Active Ageing Centres. The idea was to offer male oriented activities since men are less likely to participate in organised social activities. However, these sessions attracted several females as well, some of which used to enjoy fishing, and some who enjoyed the new experience.

In Active Ageing Centres several senior citizens are engaged against payment as tutors to deliver educational sessions to other older persons. Other older adults are encouraged to actively participate through the organisation of special events or activities. For example, some members of Active Ageing Centres organise tracking for other members, including providing information of interest about particular areas. Others have been delivering line dancing sessions to their peers during COVID-19, when sessions delivered by tutors had to be stopped.

The Active Ageing and Community Care has set up a committee to plan and implement intergenerational programmes. Several intergenerational initiatives are being coordinated to improve dialogue between generations and promote sharing of skills and ideas. Some of these programmes are being implemented as part of the schools' curriculum, during which older adults discuss certain themes with students. Examples of such themes and discussion include the sharing of past traditions and the changes that are occurring in our society. During the pandemic such intergenerational programmes had to be held online, however this still enabled discussions between different generations. The Active Ageing and Community Care is collaborating with a post-secondary college and with FSWS to encourage students to teach digital skills to older persons. Moreover, the intergenerational committee has started discussions with several post-secondary institutions to include teaching digital skills to older adults as part of the Systems of Knowledge project. Other projects included collaborations with a post-secondary school as part of the diversity programme. This collaboration included older adults participating in photography classes with students and putting up an exhibition. It involved a visit to the Malta National Library, workshops led by an artist which encouraged discussions about music and fashion throughout the years, as well as sessions during which seniors gave Tai Chi sessions to adolescents.

The Active Ageing and Community Care in collaboration with the Education Department has published a book for 12-year-old children. The book is a fictional story about a widowed older man who is experiencing loneliness and abandonment by his children. The book shows the urge of his children to sell his home and have him admitted in a residential home, while the older person wants to continue living in his own home. The book includes interactive activities that encourage reflection about the man's feelings and decisions, whilst inviting young children to reflect on any actions which they might take in such a circumstance. The book is available online for free to all year 5 students and is going to be used during Personal Development and Career Development (PSCD) lessons.

Fostering work and volunteering of younger and older persons in intergenerational settings

The Agency for Community and Therapeutic Services (ACTS) works towards combatting poverty and social exclusion. ACTS is guided by the *National Strategic Policy for Poverty Reduction and for Social Inclusion*, as well by the principles of community development. Social welfare professionals work with their respective communities' members to identify and mobilise community resources towards those who need

support. Through combined efforts from residents and other stakeholders, it strives to strengthen community potential and achieve the targeted outcomes. Community social development is nurtured through an integrated multi-disciplinary professional approach. Social work, social mentoring, community development work, parenting, and therapeutic interventions are the most common interventions of ACTS's work, which sum up to an agreed individualized care plan. To remain abreast with the changing needs, community services are enhanced with detailed client assessment, routine outcome measures, and participatory approaches which include both stakeholders and service users. Such an approach will ensure that services are continuously tailored to the situation. Furthermore, on both local and national level, ACTS works towards setting in place mechanisms that stimulate the wide participation of the local stakeholders. These mechanisms contribute to the analysis and generation of solutions to problems deriving from poverty and social exclusion and to create better policy implementation structures. A case in point is a thematic network where social welfare professionals working with senior citizens meet regularly to discuss common issues and good practices. Such network is hosted by ACTS and meets every two months. Community based projects have an important role in the work carried out by ACTS. These projects are beneficial to create opportunities for community members to work together for the benefit of the most vulnerable members of the community and to reach community cohesion. An example of this is the Santa Maria Group Project being coordinated by ACTS's community development workers and laypersons representing Sta. Maria Parish Church in Birkirkara. This initiative provides a space for all participants to receive moral and physical support. Another project is *Għeruq il-Komunità*, a community-based review board where Valletta residents of different ages come together to discuss prospective projects aimed at the Valletta community.

Encouraging businesses, non-profit organisations and public enterprises to involve older persons as consumers in the planning and design of goods and services.

The Maltese Government believes in hearing the views and opinions of all citizens in policy making. Policies which are being developed are open to public consultation, and the general public is encouraged to put forward suggestions and recommendations in relation to that policy.

The Active Ageing and Community Care takes on board suggestions from service providers and aims to develop and improve services based on service recipients' feedback. An example is the telecare on the move, which is a service recently added to the Telecare plus service which was already available. The

telecare on the move was developed to provide people with dementia the right to achieve the highest quality of life with the least restrictions placed on their personal liberties. This service thus encourages people with dementia over 60 years of age to continue living in their own home and in the community. This device enables two-way communication with relatives or a 24 hour call centre, and includes Geo-fencing, fall-detection, and GPS detection in case of emergencies.

The Active Ageing and Community Care has carried out a telephone survey with older men about their preferences for social participation. Considering the lack of participation in social activities already being organised, this survey was useful to identify those social activities preferred by older men and regions across Malta where such services are most required. The results of this survey are the basis of a programme which is being planned. Furthermore, a client satisfaction survey was conducted on the Domiciliary Nursing and Caring Services managed by the Active Ageing and Community Care (AACC). This survey's main aim was to give older adults living in the community the opportunity to express any recommendations for improvements in the service provision for elderly requiring caring/nursing assistance. This survey reported that 97.7% of the older adults were satisfied with the overall service, 95.7% felt that the health care professionals understood and sympathized with their needs, 97.1% felt that the nursing professionals are competent in their field, and 94.9% felt that the nurses are true professionals in their work.

Another survey carried out by the Active Ageing and Community Care measured customer care satisfaction with the Telecare service managed by the Active Ageing and Community Care (AACC). The majority of respondents have rated the Telecare service excellent (58%) and very good (29%). Most of the respondents were satisfied with the service being provided by the operators working in the telecare section. This positive result encourages the AACC to continue working to improve the satisfaction of the remaining percentage of service users. There seems to be a wide consensus that the *Telecare plus* service should continue to be provided, because it is giving an essential service to the elderly community who live alone.

Ensuring that older persons can attain and maintain their highest possible level of health and functional capacity by supporting the development of age-friendly environments and housing.

In Malta there are no official age-friendly communities, however the government strives to ensure that the physical environment in public places is accessible to all. Guidelines have been issued to ensure that

public buildings are accessible to all. However, it is also important to ensure that such accessibility is maintained over time through adequate maintenance, and by not altering the design in such a way to create barriers.

The Dementia Intervention Team within the Active Ageing and Community Care are working on creating dementia friendly communities. This is being carried out in conjunction with a new Dementia day centres which opened in October 2021. The team is carrying out an educational programme to increase dementia awareness to persons living and working within the villages where these day centres are located. The programme tackles the needs of persons with dementia, as well as dementia friendly directional signs.

The Silver T service consists of local transport for older persons to conduct their daily errands within the community by booking transport according to their needs. This is provided free of charge. These services enable older adults who have difficulty to walk long distances to be more independent within the community. It enables them to access services and to enhance their social interaction. In Malta there is also a public transport system which is provided at a subsidised rate for older adults and free of charge to those who are 70-year-old and over. As from October 2022, all Maltese citizens will be provided free public transport as stated in the budget for 2022.

1.2 Please also reflect on your country's participation in the relevant global/UN-wide campaigns:

1.2.1 Does your country take part in a Global Campaign to Combat Ageism led by the World Health Organisation (WHO)? Do the activities in your country contribute to the endeavours of this WHO-led campaign? Which ones? Did your participation in the campaign contribute to the implementation of the MIPAA/RIS in your country? Which measures have been set in this context?

Malta supports the campaign to combat ageism led by the WHO. There are multiple initiatives that contribute to avoid ageism. Promoting elderly to be independent as much as possible and enabling elderly to speak up and continue participating actively in the community is a means to address ageism. The Ministry for Senior Citizens and Active Ageing is planning to set up an Inter-ministerial committee to work towards mainstreaming ageing, including addressing issues of ageism. The introduction of

intergenerational projects which have already been discussed earlier on in this report also assist in addressing stereotypes related to age. Moreover, these projects help reduce loneliness amongst seniors. Discussions about ageing are being encouraged through these intergenerational programmes. An example is the fictional storybook for children introduced as part of the PSCD syllabus which also includes training for teachers. In March 2021, all Active Ageing Centre members in Siġġiewi were invited to take part in a theatre production *titled F'Ħakka T'Għajn*, which forms part of the project AMASS (Acting on the margins, arts as social sculpture). This project is taking place across eight different countries within different marginalised communities. The University of Malta is represented by the Department of Arts, Open Communities and Adult Education within the Faculty of Education. This project aims to engage older adults in theatre production and researches the capacity of theatre in combat ageism. Professionals worked with the older adults to write a theatre performance based on female participants' experiences, wishes, hopes and dreams that emerged during the improvisation and drama workshops. The performance challenges stereotypical perceptions of senior citizens and emphasises their importance as active citizens in society. The performance was filmed by a professional media crew on a TV set and is being screened in all the centres around Malta. It is also planned to be screened in schools, and at the university. These screened sessions will be followed by a Q&A with the audience and the participants. It will eventually be available online for the general public.

The Active Ageing and Community Care has also signed an agreement with *Teatru Malta* to provide theatre workshops for persons over 60 years of age. These workshops are open to persons who have experience in theatre but also to those who have never had such an opportunity and would like to give it a try. The ultimate aim of the workshops is to stage a theatrical performance open to the public. Such a project will promote a more positive image of ageing.

1.2.2 Does your country take part in the United Nations Open-ended Working Group on Ageing (OEWG-A) for the purpose of strengthening the protection of the human rights of older persons? Do the activities in your country contribute to the endeavours of the OEWG-A? Which ones? Do national policies ensure protection of the human rights of older people in your country? Do you see any legal gaps?

Malta participates in the UN open Ended Working Group on Ageing.

Ageism is being given greater importance in the *National Strategic Policy for Active Ageing 2021-2027* which has been launched for public consultation in October 2021. The policy highlights the importance of intergenerational programmes; adequate education about ageing in schools from primary spanning to tertiary education that involve practical interaction with older adults; and education of professionals and workers on myths related to ageing in order to decrease ageism amongst occupational services.

Malta's government has appointed an independent Commissioner for Older Persons. The role of the Commissioner is to create more awareness on the rights of older persons, to push for stricter legal measure against age discrimination and to raise awareness about loneliness and social isolation in later life. The Commissioner can also investigate any alleged breaches of the rights of older persons and initiate measures which safeguard their rights.

The Minister for Senior Citizens and Active Ageing also appoints a National Commission on Active Ageing tasked with drafting strategies and policies that improve the quality of life and wellbeing of older persons.

Malta is working towards improving its action on elder abuse. Discussions between different entities have started so as to address issues of elder abuse, in order to ensure that victims of abuse are given the maximum support and protection, while ensuring a more timely, efficient and person-centred response. These discussions include several entities including the Victim Support Agency, the Active Ageing and Community Care, *GEMMA* (an organisation working on Financial capacity), and the police. It is anticipated that such collaboration will eventually lead to legislative amendment where required, and better protection for older adults.

Give some examples how thinking, feeling and dealing with ageing has changed during the last 20 years and give some recommendations for future action to avoid ageism.

In the last 20 years there has been a big change in the policy regarding ageing. The Maltese government has recognized the implications of an ageing population and the challenges brought about by this phenomenon. The responsibility for the elderly has been separated from the Ministry for Health. Initially it was entrusted to a Junior Minister within the Ministry for the Family, Children's Rights and Social

Solidarity and in the last quarter of 2020 it was entrusted to a Ministry solely dedicated for senior citizens and active ageing. This also reflects the change in mentality from focusing on the elderly sector from a medical point of view to the perspective of ageing as a wide spectrum of abilities and skills. There was a shift from a perspective of just providing for the elderly to a drive to enhance opportunities for self-fulfilment and active citizenship. In 2014 the Maltese Government launched the first *National Strategic Policy for Active Ageing*. The Maltese Government has also identified the increased prevalence of dementia proportionally with an ageing population and that this condition could bring significant challenges to older persons and their loved ones. Dementia also brings on significant economic challenges to families and to the state. Therefore in 2015 the national strategy for dementia has been launched with a focus on increasing awareness and understanding of dementia, timely diagnosis and intervention, workforce development, improving dementia management and care, and an ethical approach to dementia management and care.

These policies have given rise to a drive to strengthen the Active Ageing and Community Care which offers services to older adults in the community and in residential care. The government invested in recruiting human resources and in training the workforce, which has enabled the strengthening of existent services and the development of new services.

In the last 20 years there has been a strong shift in mentality to not only lengthen life but to give meaning to the longer life expectancy. Therefore, the Maltese Government has not only invested in promoting primary health, acute and geriatric care services but also promoted opportunities for active engagement of older adults through lifelong learning, volunteering, paid employment, grandparenthood, digital literacy, and many others.

2. Encouraging longer working life and ability to work

2.1. Which measures have been implemented to recognize the potential embedded in the employment of older workers and developing labour market strategies to promote maximum participation opportunities for workers of all ages along the RIS commitments 3, 4, 5, 6, 8 and 10 and the goals of the Lisbon Declaration?

❖ promoting lifelong learning opportunities

- ❖ **fight unemployment at all ages, reducing financial inequalities and poverty, taking up measures to reduce the gender pay gap**
- ❖ **encouraging employers to value the experience of, and to retain and hire, older workers**

Jobsplus (Malta's Public Employment Service) is aware that the demographic factor is becoming an important issue in the EU's economies. Thanks to scientific and technological evolution and improvement of living conditions, the average life expectancy is growing and will continue to grow in the coming years. Thus, it is necessary to make better use of the potential that experienced and skilled older workers may provide to the labour market. In this regard, Jobsplus is committed to fight unemployment by promoting full and productive employment for all and recognising the potential embedded in the employment of older workers. Within this context, Jobsplus recognises the challenges encountered by older workers and aims at providing opportunities for old persons to re-join the workforce.

Among the schemes available at Jobsplus, through the Mature Workers Scheme, employers, including self-employed individuals, who as from 2014 employ persons aged between 45 and 65, and who have been registering for work on Parts 1 and 2 of the unemployment register for the preceding six months, will have their income tax deducted pro-rata. Employers will receive up to a maximum of €11,600 in tax deductions on the chargeable income for the first two years of employment for each eligible employee. This will result in savings of €5,800 per annum. Moreover, employers who engage eligible employees may benefit from a further tax deduction of 50% of the cost of training up to a maximum of €400 per employee. In order to be eligible employers must employ individuals who are 45+ years old, have been on the unemployment register for the preceding 6 consecutive months prior to employment, and the gap between the last registration date and engagement form should not exceed 15 days.

The Access to Employment Scheme (A2E) also encourages employers to hire and retain older persons in employment. The A2E provides assistance through a financial subsidy to enterprises in Malta and Gozo to promote the recruitment of the more challenged amongst jobseekers and inactive persons. An employer who employs a person older than 50 years who does not have a job may be eligible for 52 weeks of assistance.

However, in addition to the schemes mentioned above, unemployed people in Malta are encouraged to register with Jobsplus, who can provide targeted support via its employment advisors, and job coaches. Unemployed persons registering with Jobsplus are introduced to an employment advisor who after the initial profiling, will direct them to one of Jobsplus schemes or training initiatives that best suits their needs. Jobsplus, in fact, offers several schemes which aim to enhance the employability skills by providing participants with the transversal skills needed to re-enter and/or retain gainful employment. Ultimately, all individuals including older workers and jobseekers who would like to increase their employability prospects have the opportunity to participate in several training courses offered free of charge by Jobsplus targeting employability skills, language and numeracy skills, clerical, accounting, trades, care workers and business skills amongst others.

Malta has introduced several measures with the aim of increasing the labour market participation rate of women, in particular through the promotion of flexible working arrangements. Other measures have included free early- and after-school care services, the provision of free childcare and out-of-school centres, as well as income tax deductions for the use of private childcare centres, and tax exemption for females joining the labour market. Women in employment are also benefitting from an increase in the maternity leave benefit while adoption leave is being aligned with maternity leave. With a view to decrease gender discrimination in employment, the Government has also set up a special fund to finance maternity leave in the private sector.

The Maltese Government also encourages lifelong learning opportunities for senior citizens. The lifelong learning directorate provided various lifelong learning opportunities for all ages, including older adults. The Active Ageing and Community Care provide informal lifelong learning sessions in Active Ageing Centres to make lifelong learning more accessible to persons who are not usually inclined to learning. Moreover, these sessions have also been introduced in residential homes for the elderly. In Malta there is the University of the Third Age which offered learning programmes for senior citizens in several regions across Malta. This has been extended to the University of the Fourth Age, which provided learning programmes to older adults in residential homes for the elderly.

- ❖ **providing incentives for longer working life opportunities and more flexible retirement choices**

- ❖ **planning and implementing pension reforms, that take into account the increasing longevity and the extension of working lives**
- ❖ **facilitating the reconciliation of employment and care work.**

The government has introduced an increase in pension for those public service or public sector employees who, despite having enough social security contributions, did not opt to retire at the age of 61 years. Previously this was awarded only to private sector employees.

The Personal Retirement Scheme and the Voluntary Occupational Pension Schemes can be mentioned in this regard. In the spirit of further enhancing the fiscal measures already in place to incentivize the second and third pillar pension system in Malta, the Voluntary Occupational Pension Scheme Rules and the Personal Retirement Scheme Rules have been further amended as announced in October 2020 during the Budget Speech for 2021.

The maximum annual tax credit on contributions to a qualifying scheme paid by employers for the benefit of employees was increased from €500 to €750 per employee. On the basis that the tax credit is calculated at 25% of the contributions paid, this means that the maximum annual contributions in respect of which the tax credit is triggered was increased from €2,000 to €3,000 per employee. Similarly, the maximum annual tax credit for employees who voluntarily also make contributions into the employer's scheme increased from €500 to €750. This increase has also been applied to the annual tax credit resulting under the Personal Retirement Scheme Rules when an individual makes contributions to a qualifying personal retirement scheme. These changes are effective as from year of assessment 2022.

2.2. Which special measures did your country set to close the gender pay and pension gap as well to take into account the special situation of older women?

With regards to measures adopted by Malta to close the gender pay and pension gap, the Malta-EU Steering and Action Committee (MEUSAC) has devised a wide consultation on this subject and the general public is being invited to participate. Through public participation, more awareness is raised on the subject and thus increasing the chances of gender pay gap being narrowed. Following the completion of the consultation activity, other measures such as pay transparency measures may be implemented.

In the spirit of further enhancing the fiscal measures already in place to incentivise the second and third pillar pension system in Malta, the Voluntary Occupational Pension Scheme Rules and the Personal

Retirement Scheme Rules have been further amended as announced in October 2020 during the Budget Speech for 2021.

The maximum annual tax credit on contributions to a scheme paid by employers for the benefit of employees was increased from €500 to €750 per employee. On the basis that the tax credit is calculated at 25% of the contributions paid, this means that the maximum annual contributions in respect of which the tax credit is triggered was increased from €2,000 to €3,000 per employee. Similarly, the maximum annual tax credit for employees who voluntarily also make contributions into the employer's scheme increased from €500 to €750. This increase has also been applied to the annual tax credit resulting under the Personal Retirement Scheme Rules when an individual contributes to a qualifying personal retirement scheme. These changes are effective as from year of assessment 2022.

2.3. Highlight in a nutshell the most important achievement during the last 20 years in recognizing the potential embedded in the employment of older workers and developing labour market strategies to promote maximum participation opportunities for workers of all ages? Give some recommendations for future action (what is planned/needs to be done)

Malta has always committed itself towards achieving a society for all ages, and in view of declining fertility and improvements in life expectancy, the Maltese Governments throughout the years introduced policy responses to address challenges arising from changing demographic trends. The Governments also recognised the potential embedded in the employment of older workers. In fact, Malta registered a significant increase in the employment rate of older workers. In 2001 the employment rate of older workers (55-64 years) stood at 28.1% compared to 52.9% in 2020. Malta's unemployment rate for the same cohort for 2020 is also below the EU27 with 3.5% and 5.2% respectively. Additionally, after remaining unchanged for several decades, the pensionable age in Malta started to rise in 2012. This process, which will continue until 2026, was introduced to help boost the workforce and promote maximum participation opportunities for workers of all ages.

An aspect, which needs further attention, is the special situation of older women. Traditionally women did not usually work in Malta because higher value was given to raising children and providing informal care to family members. Women would resign from paid employment upon marriage or upon the birth of their first offspring. This left a cohort of older women in a disadvantaged position in old age since they

would not have contributed to social security contributions that entitled them to a contributory pension. The government gave special consideration to the needs of these older women to ensure that they do not end up in poverty.

Another important aspect is reconciliation of employment and informal care. Informal care is highly associated with women. Moreover, it affects participation in paid employment since women who provide informal care often decrease the number of hours engaged in paid employment or stop altogether. Although with the increase in participation of women in paid employment many carers are ending up in a more challenging situation, having to balance work, family commitments and providing informal care. Presently respite services for persons with dementia are being increased, as well as domiciliary and residential respite services for older persons. The government offers free childcare for children younger than three years when both parents are engaged in paid employment. As announced during the budget for 2022, free childcare services will be extended for parents who work late hours, shift and weekends. The government also offers *Klabb 3-16* which offers care for school aged children before and after school hours to support working parents. The government offers flexible working hours and family friendly measures to support a better balance between work and family commitments. All the above measures will thus allow more time to be spent within the family setting and also allow time to assist elderly parents. The increased Carers Allowance may be granted to a single, married, in civil union, or cohabiting person who is over 18 years of age and is taking care of a relative, with high dependency, living within the same household on a full-time basis. The government is ever more committed to facilitate a balance between providing care and gainful employment.

3. Ensuring ageing with dignity

3.1. Which measures have been contributing to protecting older persons' enjoyment of all human rights and dignity, promoting their autonomy, self-determination and participation in society, and making sure that no law, policy or programme leaves room for discrimination of any kind along RIS commitments 7, 8, 9 and 10 and the goals of the Lisbon Declaration?

- ❖ **protecting older persons' enjoyment of all human rights and dignity, promoting their autonomy, self-determination and participation in society,**
- ❖ **supporting the necessary infrastructure and assistance to prevent all types of abuse and violence against older persons,**

- ❖ **fostering the development of innovative methods and services as well as user and age-friendly technology and products,**

In Malta there is a Commission on gender-based violence and domestic violence (CGBVDV) which although not specific on ageing, includes older adults. The national legislation on gender-based violence and Domestic Violence (Kap 581, 2018 Laws of Malta) does not discriminate on the basis of age. Thus, all national services are available to older persons to ensure their protection should such individuals experience Gender Based Violence or Domestic Violence. Moreover, *Malta's National Strategy on Gender based violence and domestic violence (2021-2022)* targets all forms of violence, and various awareness raising campaigns are directed towards older persons. This policy may be accessed from: [https://stopviolencecms.gov.mt/en/Documents/Docs/20524%20-%20Second%20Strategy%20\(another%20duplicate\).pdf](https://stopviolencecms.gov.mt/en/Documents/Docs/20524%20-%20Second%20Strategy%20(another%20duplicate).pdf)

Malta's government has appointed an independent Commissioner for Older Persons. The role of the Commissioner is to create more awareness on the rights of older persons, to push for stricter legal measures against age discrimination and to raise awareness about loneliness and social isolation in later life. The Commissioner can also investigate any alleged breaches of the rights of older persons and initiate measures which safeguard their rights.

The Minister for Senior Citizens and Active Ageing also appoints a National Commission on Active Ageing tasked with drafting strategies and policies that improve the quality of life and wellbeing of older persons.

FSWS is the national agency that provides various services in relation to social problems. Through its work and its services, FSWS seeks to provide the required services to all persons requesting/needing its services including protection of elderly from abuse and ensuring their protection.

Social workers within the Active Ageing and Community Care advocate for the clients' rights. The aim is also to motivate and empower elderly to cope with their social problems whilst continuing to live an active and independent life as much as possible. Older adults continue to be supported until their situation improves. While the focus is on the senior person, social workers also work with the rest of the family to help ameliorate the quality of life of the senior person. Social workers provide their service also in Long Term Care facilities. In fact, social workers are present during the Home Committee Meetings which are

held every four weeks during which the management, social workers, and a representation of the residents are present. During such meetings residents can voice their concern as well as propose new initiatives. Elderly people are also given the opportunity to attend training sessions organized by the Active Ageing and Community Care on elderly abuse. The aim of such a seminar is to educate and to empower the elderly to identify the signs of abuse and to help them deal with different types of abuse. The seminar includes a session on avoiding and dealing with economic fraud. Due to COVID-19 restrictions a webinar was streamed live in all care homes. The webinar was open to the general public but was specifically focused on older persons. Participants had the opportunity to ask questions to the speakers.

A working group has been set up to discuss and act on financial abuse. The working group includes representatives from GEMMA which is a small group of people within the Ministry for Social Justice and Solidarity, the Family and Children's Rights, who work with different stakeholders to educate the public about different aspects of financial capability. This working group involves different professionals from Active Ageing and Community Care, amongst them the social workers' manager, community nursing, the Dementia Intervention Team, and allied health professionals. In this working group there are also representatives from the victim support unit, from the fraud section of the police, from a banking company, and from the guardianship board. Discussions are ongoing on how to better tackle financial abuse. One of the main outcomes of the first meeting was that there should be better collaboration between different entities and the need to create an action pathway to facilitate better action on cases of reported abuse by older persons. This working group is giving rise to a better collaboration between different entities. Another aspect which the group is planning to act on is education to the general public, especially older adults.

❖ **raising quality standards for integrated social and long-term care and health services and continuously adapting the status, training and working conditions of professional care workers,**

In Malta, the Social Care Standards Authority (SCSA) is the authority which oversees the regulation, licensing and setting standards in social services. It assesses the quality of service being delivered and puts forward recommendations for improvement of services. Licencing is only awarded if the service meets the required standards. All long-term care facilities in Malta need a licence issued by the SCSA to operate as do all community services. Issues of abuse are also addressed by the SCSA.

SCSA also issued the National Minimum Standards for Care Homes for Older People; Guidelines for High Dependency Chronic Care Services for Older Persons; Guidelines on Residential Services for Persons Living with Dementia in Homes for Senior Citizens; and Guidelines on Community-based and Outreach Services. Abuse and mistreatment have been addressed by the first *National Strategic Policy for Active Ageing*. Nevertheless, although there is more awareness on the issue of elder abuse in Malta, it remains relatively hidden compared to other policies such as domestic violence, hate speech and child abuse. This issue is being re-addressed in the new *National Strategic Policy 2021-2027*. The policy outlines measures such as obliging professionals to report suspicions of abuse without facing prosecution if the suspicion turns out to be ill founded, as well as implementing rigorous training programmes in all areas of ageing welfare. Such measures also include initiatives such as providing training to professionals, a clear method on how to report abuse, and several awareness campaigns.

❖ **supporting research on individual and population ageing processes to better address emerging needs in ageing societies**

The Ministry for Senior Citizens and Active Ageing is planning a national survey among a representative sample of older persons. This survey will include aspects such as any difficulties faced by older adults, use of technology, quality of informal care, and any services and opportunities required for older adults to reach their maximum potential.

❖ **promoting the participation of both persons with dementia and/or mental and behavioural disorders and their informal carers in social and community life**

The Active Ageing and Community Care is providing respite services for persons with Dementia and their informal care givers. In 2021, two new dementia day centres have been opened to cater for the higher demands of respite services. These centres provide a sheltered environment for the persons with dementia where they can engage in stimulating activities while their loved ones can have some time during which they may have a well-deserved break. The new dementia day centres also include night respite services for persons with dementia who are active during the night, so that their loved ones may rest at night, while the person with dementia may continue to be engaged in activities during the night.

The Maltese Government is also investing in respite services in care homes, where the older person is admitted to a residential care home for a short period. The aim is to provide relatives with a short break.

This service is very useful for informal carers who may require hospitalisation, any other treatment, or who need to go on holiday to take a break from informal care provision.

In Malta there is also domiciliary respite for those persons who, due to their health status or because they may become more confused with a change in environment, cannot avail themselves of day centre respite services or residential respite services.

The Active Ageing and Community Care has started online discussion sessions with older persons about issues such as anxiety, stress, loneliness and isolation. These sessions are held through a collaboration with SOS Malta, a Non-Governmental organisation. Sessions are delivered by psychologists through online sessions, and participants meet in AACC's Active Ageing Centres. The aim of these sessions is to help older adults identify psychosocial issues that they are experiencing, discuss them in a group setting, and be able to access further individual assistance. These talks are linked to a 24-hour service (*kellimni.com*) through which anyone may access online psychological support by means of an online chat.

- ❖ **respecting the self-determination, independence and dignity of older persons, especially, but not limited to, towards the end of life.**

When residents reach the last few weeks / days of their life, they should be taken care of in the Care homes where they live. A needs analysis carried out by Active Ageing and Community Care (AACC) resulted that residents who were in their end stage of life were being referred to other institutions mainly Mater Dei Hospital (the acute care hospital), for hydration and pain relief.

As a result, AACC felt the need to look into ways how residents in Care Homes who require palliative care are to be kept and cared for during their last stage of life. A proposal for a pilot project to be implemented in one of the Care Homes was drafted and approved. A working group was set up in order to devise the framework for this project. The Hospice Movement and Sir Anthony Mamo Oncology Centre (SAMOC) will provide hands on training and job shadowing to AACC staff.

A palliative care team shall consist of the following professionals: doctors, nurses, psychiatrists/ psychotherapists, social workers, religious/faith personnel, pharmacists, dietitians, physiotherapists, speech language pathologists and other professionals as necessary.

The main objective of this project is for older persons:

- ❖ to be holistically cared for when facing a terminal illness;
- ❖ to be provided, supported and treated along with their family with dignity, respect, empathy and compassionate caring;
- ❖ to be made aware of the right to self-determination when it comes to choices such as their medical care;
- ❖ End of life care must restore control and be able to empower older persons to make the best care decisions and understand the reality of their prognosis.

3.2. Highlight in a nutshell the most important achievement during the last 20 years to protecting older persons' enjoyment of all human rights and to raising quality standards for integrated social and long-term care and health services as well as adapting the status, training and working conditions of professional care workers. Give some recommendations for future action (what is planned/needs to be done).

This issue has been given greater importance in the last 20 years. A commissioner for older persons has been appointed. The role of the Commissioner is to create more awareness on the rights of older persons, to push for stricter legal measures against age discrimination and to raise awareness about loneliness and social isolation in later life. The Commissioner can also investigate any alleged breaches of the rights of older persons and initiate measures which safeguard their rights.

The fact that the Maltese government has issued a *National Strategic Policy for Active Ageing*, a *National Strategy for Dementia*, *National Minimum Standards for Care Homes for Older People*; *Guidelines for High Dependency Chronic Care Services for Older Persons*; *Guidelines on Residential Services for Persons Living with Dementia in Homes for Senior Citizens*; and *Guidelines on Community-based and Outreach Services* shows real and tangible commitment on behalf of the Ministry to address the issues concerning the human rights of older adults. Moreover, a Social Care Standards Authority has been set up to ensure good quality care in care homes. At the same time, several initiatives have been implemented to promote social

participation of older persons and to encourage empowerment of senior members. Amongst such initiatives there are:

- ❖ increased opportunities for lifelong learning in the third and fourth age;
- ❖ increased the number of Active Ageing Centres and enriched the programmed of activities;
- ❖ increased opportunities for physical activities through sessions delivered free of charge;
- ❖ enabled opportunities for improving competency and security in IT;
- ❖ enhanced opportunities to engage in cultural programmes and events, as well as participate in projects in collaboration with other entities;
- ❖ intergenerational programmes showcasing the abilities of older persons; and
- ❖ the creation of the National Awards for Active Older Citizens.

Community services have been strengthened by introducing new policy initiatives which support older person to age-in-place and to support informal carers, especially informal carers of persons with dementia. The Active Ageing and Community Care offers several services in the community including: Active Ageing Centres, Carer at Home Scheme, Community Geriatrician Service, Community Psychogeriatric Consultation, Psychotherapy Service, Continence Service, Dementia Activity Centres, Dementia Intervention Team, Domiciliary Dietitian Service, Domiciliary Nursing and Caring, Handyman Service, Home Help Service, Meals on Wheels Service, Night Shelter Service , Allied Health Therapy Service, Phlebotomy, Respite at Home, Silver-T Service, Social Work, Telecare+, Telecare on the Move. Domiciliary services are offered to persons who are housebound or who have difficulties to attend the outpatient clinics offered by primary health sector or other entities.

Acquiring and updating skills in the area of active ageing forms part of the continuum of care for older persons. Delivering good-quality health care requires the recognition of best practices in gerontological and geriatric care. Active Ageing and Community Care also focuses on providing ongoing training to its employees and this is achieved by organising yearly specialised courses, as well as by creating a learning environment for its employees. This includes training in dealing with persons with dementia for carers in residential homes as well as training on organising stimulating activities. A group of carers has been identified to lead activities and encourage active ageing amongst residents in residential homes. The Active Ageing and Community Care has coordinated the development and delivery of two training modules with the University of Malta, one of them is aimed at carers in Residential Homes and Social Assistants in Active Ageing Centres, which is titled 'Enhancing Work with Older Adults Using Applied Arts'.

Another learning programme titled ‘Vulnerabilities in Older Adults’, is being delivered to home help assistants and handyman personnel who visit the homes of older persons on a regular basis. This course helps them to identify issues such as abuse and neglect among older adults and to refer them accordingly. The Active Ageing and Community Care is also sponsoring a training on dementia care with the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology. AACC, in collaboration with the University of Malta, is currently providing a course to staff in residential homes titled “Understanding diversity for positive communication amongst different cultures”. This study-unit gives students a better understanding of diversity within residential care homes for older adults focusing on:

- Different ethnicities – race, religious beliefs, and migrant background;
- Sexual identity and sexual orientation - Sexism, sexual abuse, and violence towards the LGBTIQ+ community;
- Social identity - how the above can effect a person’s well-being when interacting with one another;
- Intersectionality – with attention to how the above may impact the individual’s wellbeing when interacting with one another.

Future Action:

In the future it is imperative that legislation about abuse on older adults and discrimination is amended to ensure better enjoyment of human rights and dignity for all. The Maltese government will continue working on providing community services which meet the needs of older persons and their loved ones and to support them to age in place. The presence of social workers in the care homes will increase to ensure that elderly people who are currently in residential homes would have more access to such services. Currently if the manager of the care home sees that there is someone who might benefit from social work help, they will refer the case to Active Ageing and Community Care’s social unit. Psychotherapists have also been engaged in government homes and in the community and this service will continue to expand to meet the demand.

The government has recognised the importance of informal carers and the important role in the care of older persons, and is committed to continue expanding the services offered to include not only the older person but his/her loved ones in the care plan. For the achievement of this aim, continuous training of health professionals and employees will continue to be given priority. Moreover, case managers will be introduced to better coordinate complex issues of some older persons

Further research will be done to ensure that the needs and expectations of senior citizens are met and that they are enabled to enjoy the best quality of life possible.

Part III: Healthy and Active Ageing in a sustainable world

1. Contribution of ageing-related policies to the implementation of the 2030 agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals(s)

1.1 Has your country already submitted voluntary national report (VNR) to the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF)

Malta has submitted the voluntary national report (VNR) to the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) on the implementation of the SDGs.

Population ageing and older persons' issues were addressed in Malta's VNR(s) as it reported upon how new care homes for older persons were being launched for frail people who can no longer cope with living on their own, even with Malta's extensive number of public community care services. It also reported how the *National Strategic Policy for Active Ageing* launched a range of services for older persons living in the community that included a physical education programme to maintain and improve physical wellbeing.

1.2. Within the national political planning are there any established links between ageing issues and the 2030 Agenda?

Malta's national political planning is committed to enacting measures that ensure social protection across the life course and prevent poverty in old age, contributing to the implementation of SDG 1 which is to end poverty in all its forms everywhere. The Maltese government advocates that a hallmark of a just and equitable society is the valuing and provision of support for older people in recognition of their past and present contribution to the economy, whilst also respecting their right to live in relative material security. In this respect, adequate levels of retirement income are essential, both to provide older persons with enough financial resources to sustain an optimal quality of life, as well as in some cases, to alleviate poverty. In the mid-2000s, a Pensions Working Group was appointed to provide recommendations to the Government to reform the Maltese pension system. Following the submission of a technical report, the Government took on-board a number of recommendations

that were eventually launched in 2007. Although the proposed pensions system still follows a pay-as-you-go arrangement, among the most important elements of the reform there was a staggered rise in pensionable age to 65 years by 2026, and the gradual lengthening of the contribution period for full entitlement to the two-thirds pension from 30 years to 40 years. More specifically, the Maltese *National Strategic Policy for Active Ageing 2014-2021* advocates ensuring a safe, adequate and sustainable income for all older persons, since this is indispensable to guard against poverty and material deprivation; educating the community on the benefits of building one's personal financial resources through savings, investment and other options to support a favourable standard of living following retirement; and maintaining the equitable value of retirement pensions, with adjustments being made in line with movements in cost of living.

Malta's national political planning is also committed to promote healthy ageing and ensure access to health services, social and long-term care in order to contribute to achieving SDG 3 which deals with ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all. To promote active ageing and independent living in old age, Malta's health care system takes a life course perspective in the promotion of health and the prevention of disease. A number of strategies are in place to address modifiable risk factors such as unhealthy diets, physical inactivity, tobacco consumption, alcohol abuse, obesity, raised blood pressure, raised blood sugar and serum cholesterol levels, that are all associated with non-communicable diseases that are the most common causes of mortality of older persons in Malta. Malta's national planning mechanisms - as far as community care is concerned - include (i) the development of domiciliary, day, and respite services, (ii) ensuring the delivery or information and practical support to informal carers, (iii) assessment of need and case management, (iv) promoting a flourishing independent sector alongside public services, (v) determining the responsibilities of agencies so as to hold them into account for their performance, and (vi), introducing a new funding structure for social care. More specifically, the Maltese *National Strategic Policy for Active Ageing 2014-2021* advocates facilitating access to community care through a variety of access points across primary and acute care sectors, and, in collaboration with Local Councils, provide advice and information, as well as a coordinated pathway to professional assessment. The policy also specifies the need to ensure alternative community care settings to cater for the needs of older persons and guaranteeing that beneficiaries of community care services have the opportunity to participate meaningfully in both service planning and provision, with consumer feedback being present at all levels.

Malta's policies on participation in lifelong learning and training opportunities for older persons contribute to the attainment of SDG 4 which relates to ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promotion of lifelong learning opportunities for all. To this effect, the Maltese *National Strategic Policy for Active Ageing 2014-2021* advocates supporting local councils in taking a leading role in the provision and coordination of late-life learning initiatives in their community, also through partnerships with the private and voluntary sector; employing a 'wide participation agenda' in older adult learning through outreach strategies that attract older adults who would not generally be motivated to participate in traditional educational provision; and improving learning opportunities in long-term care so that all older persons, irrespective of health status, have an opportunity to engage in learning activities. Malta's national planning also includes policies that are designed to reduce gender gaps in old age which are often the result of lifelong accumulated disadvantages experienced by women. This policy contributes to achieving SDG 5 which relates to achieving gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls. Policies in Malta that encourage longer working lives and the ability to work contribute to achieving SDG 8 which deals with promoting sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all. There are various such policies, and these include:

- improving services in health prevention and promotion, acute and geriatric rehabilitation, mental health and well-being, and community care services targeting older and ageing adults;
- supporting initiatives that facilitate the creation of age-friendly and dementia-friendly communities and services;
- maximising autonomy in long-term care;
- raising the recognition of elder abuse and neglect; and
- investing further in end-of-life care.

National planning procedures in Malta promote inclusion and participation of older persons, and this contributes to achieving SDG 10 which deals with reducing inequality within and among countries by rejecting homogenising discourses and ageistic generalisations and narratives about ageing. Malta recognises the significance of intersectionality by highlighting the mutually constructed nature of social division and the ways that these are experienced, reproduced and resisted in everyday life, and instigates policy directives that have the potential to improve the wellbeing of subaltern older

persons. National Maltese policies aimed at creating age-friendly environments, including accessible and affordable housing, transport, and public space contribute to achieving SDG 11. These policies aim to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. These include:

- promoting age-friendly communities to meet the needs of older adults;
- formulating inter-sectoral guidelines to create age-friendly communities through the appropriate development of accessible public spaces, housing, and methods of transportation sensitive to the needs and responsive to the input of older adults; and
- creating the necessary structure for communities to integrate their social services and voluntary organizations through home services, day centres, and intergenerational initiatives that serve the social and security needs of older adults and caregivers living in that community.

Finally, policies aimed at involving older persons in decision-making, combating age-based discrimination and ageism, and fighting elder abuse contribute to SDG 16. This SDG promotes peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, outlines the need to provide access to justice for all, and the requirement to build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. The above are all part and parcel of Maltese national planning mechanisms.

1.3 Given the information reported about MIPAA/RIS implementation, what are the most relevant SDG's which could be nourished by current policy measures? (give examples)

The most relevant SDGs which are being nourished by current policy measures include:

- SDG 3 - ensuring healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages
- SDG 4 - ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promotion of lifelong learning opportunities for all.

The Active Ageing and Community Care has launched several community services which address SDG3, including the domiciliary phlebotomy service for housebound senior citizens and persons with a disability. This service consists of the withdrawal of blood for blood investigation and transportation of the blood samples to the Pathology Department at the acute hospital. Psychotherapy services have been introduced both in residential homes and in the community to assist with addressing the psychosocial well-being of individuals. The Community Geriatrician and Psycho-Geriatrician consultation services have been

introduced to facilitate more in-depth analyses of complex medical conditions in seniors. Continence services in the community have been set up to assess persons with continence problems and advice accordingly. The Dementia Intervention Team has an important role in assessing persons with dementia within their living context and provide information and guidance accordingly. Several Dementia Day Centres and Night Shelters have opened to increase respite options for informal carers and provide a stimulating and entertaining environment for persons with dementia. The Domiciliary Dietitian Service is designed to assess, diagnose and treat diet and nutrition problems. Domiciliary Nursing and Caring services aim to provide a nursing and caring service at home. The Handyman Service aims to assist people in their maintenance needs in their own home so that they can live as independently as possible. The Home Help service is a long-standing service which assists persons with domestic chores and everyday shopping. Other services include the delivery of meals at home for persons who cannot prepare a meal themselves and the night shelters, which have been introduced to offer a sense of security to independent older persons. Domiciliary Allied Health services, such as physiotherapy, occupational therapy and podiatry services are offered to housebound older adults. Social workers are a valuable resource for older persons, they carry out assessments to evaluate the needs for services but also assist with social issues. The Silver T is a transport service within the older person's locality, which is being expanded throughout Malta and assist seniors to carry out errands close to their home. The Respite at Home service provides companionship, socialisation and/or personal care within the senior citizen's home and is a valuable means of respite for family members. The Telecare+ service provides an emergency call system connected to a 24 hour call centre and to which several alert systems may be connected. The Telecare on the Move scheme was also recently introduced as a pilot project for persons with dementia. The device has several features such as GPS tracking, geo-fencing, a 24 hour call centre and 2-way communication. This service is heavily subsidised by the Maltese Government

Amongst the practical examples which address these SDGs, Malta has launched the University of the Fourth Age. Maltese public policy on ageing includes a University of the Fourth Age that provides opportunities for learning to persons who are residents in long-term care facilities and that experience a range of physical and cognitive disabilities. Older persons living with dementia are also included in learning programmes administered by the University of the Fourth Age (SDG4).

Bearing in mind the importance of digital literacy for all ages and knowing that the use of IT is least amongst older persons, Malta is focusing on several IT training programmes which are being delivered free of charge to older persons. On the occasion of the International Day for Older Persons 2021, Malta

launched a video to highlight the benefits of using IT for daily use. This video is meant to encourage older adults overcome their fears of using technology. This initiative is being coupled with workshops that are being held in different regions around the Maltese Islands to discuss the use of IT, the difficulties encountered, and what could be done to assist in overcoming these challenges.

ICT-4-the-Elderly is a strategic partnership project funded by the Erasmus+ program of the European Union, locally coordinated by Tech.mt. This initiative offers the public a learning opportunity on how the Internet can play an important role in improving the quality of life through online social interaction.

In phase 1 of the project a study will be conducted to research any existing training materials related to digital skills, which could be adopted for this project. In phase 2 an engaging training manual for people aged 55 to 74 as well as an online academy will be developed. A Project Exploitation Guide will be developed in phase 3 to facilitate the transferring and scale-up of the project results to organisations outside the project consortium, including key stakeholders and policy makers. More information may be accessed from: <https://tech.mt/media/project/ict-4-the-elderly/> (SDG4)

2. Lessons learnt from managing the consequences and impacts for older people in emergency situations: the COVID-19 pandemic

2.1 How were older people affected by COVID-19 in your country?

The pandemic has had a significant effect on the well-being of older persons, both in relation to their psychological well-being, as well as their physical well-being. Many older individuals have suffered social isolation with a resultant effect on their mental well-being. A number of older persons are still reluctant to engage in social situations due to fear of the virus. Malta has enacted several measures related to the protection and care of senior individuals during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In residential homes for the elderly all visits were stopped during the peaks of the pandemic, with the exception of visits for those in critical conditions through the provision of a special permission. Some residential homes opted for a voluntary lockdown, with staff living in the residential home for several weeks. This limited the number of people who could transmit the virus to this extremely vulnerable group. However, this also significantly increased the feeling of social isolation and loneliness. Staff put extra effort to organise activities with the residents, including video calls with the relatives, and other activities such as crafts, grooming sessions, gardening, cooking, reading sessions, and holding activities related to special events to try to keep residents' spirits high.

On 28th March, Legal Notice 111 of 2020 was enacted. This Protection of Vulnerable Persons Order quarantined several classes of vulnerable persons to their homes for their protection against the COVID-19 virus. The Order specified that vulnerable persons, which included persons 65 years and over, were to remain segregated in their own home. These individuals were only allowed to leave their homes to “attend medical appointments, obtain medical care or treatment, acquire food, medicine, other daily necessities, or to attend to any other essential or urgent personal matter” as stated in Article 2(3). There were some exemptions for persons employed in specific roles. To help accommodate and aid those affected by the Order, a system was set in place to distribute medicines and other essential food supplies to the homes of those affected.

All these measures contributed to protect the older persons from the virus, however the Maltese government has realized that some of these measures were also having significant psychological impact of the wellbeing of older person. During the second wave of the pandemic the Maltese government continued to encourage limited social interaction but lifted the legal notice stating that vulnerable persons must remain segregated in their own homes. None the less, many older adults are still afraid of social interaction.

2.2 What has been done to ensure that difficult health-care decisions affecting older people are guided by a commitment to dignity and the right to health?

Throughout the pandemic many health care services continued to be delivered, this included mental health services, palliative and geriatric care, domiciliary services to housebound older persons and services in health centres and at the acute hospital. Non-essential surgical interventions were stopped during peak periods of the pandemic to enable healthcare professions to cater for the needs of persons in highly intensive care sections, however essential medical interventions were still carried out.

In these last 18 months, COVID-19 was not only a threat to life, but also a great risk of isolation to the residents. Moreover, residents in care homes were discouraged from socialising and encouraged to remain in their rooms to minimise the risk of cross-infection thus, increasing the likelihood of physical and psychological health problems. The situation of older persons in care homes was particularly challenging, as isolating measures to protect them from infection meant suspending visits from their loved ones, and minimising human contact with other residents and staff. Challenging procedures to protect the most

vulnerable with life saving measures were diligently taken to respect the human rights and dignity of all residents in care homes. As soon as the physical visits were stopped within the care homes, AACC encouraged the use of digital technology and provided tablets so that residents kept close contact with their loved ones. This opportunity was crucial and vital for all during the lockdown period to alleviate the risk of isolation.

The Nursing Unit implemented several measures in all Government Care Homes to prevent and control the spread of COVID-19 in these homes. The Unit worked in collaboration with the Public Health, Infection Control Unit at MDH, and Social Care Standards Authority to enhance infection control measures. During the early stages of COVID-19, where Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) was very scarce, the Nursing Unit, with the support of the Procurement Office, procured all PPEs and other medical equipment required during the pandemic. Active Ageing and Community Care gave out a number of PPEs to Care Homes which found themselves in crisis and short of PPEs.

The Nursing Unit ensured appropriate staffing levels to perform caring activities and to monitor the residents' and clients' health status. The Nursing Unit drew up contractual agreements with service providers to provide carers to replace those on quarantine. Guidelines and Standard Operating Procedures were developed to help and guide everyone to stay safe. The Nursing Unit also devised Infection Prevention and Control policies to units such as Active Ageing Centres and AACC premises. The unit embarked on a comprehensive training programme to ensure that all staff had the required skills to tackle the COVID-19 situation and demands. The Nursing Unit also worked in full collaboration with service providers to continue giving services in the community.

2.3 What has been done to strengthen social inclusion and solidarity during physical distancing?

The Maltese Government recognizes that social isolation is detrimental to the physical, mental and social wellbeing of older persons. The importance of social solidarity was stressed, and family, friends and neighbours were encouraged to support each other, especially vulnerable people, during this difficult time, by keeping frequent contact by phone or/and social media. Several services have been introduced to support older adults during and following the pandemic, including psychotherapy service in care homes and in the community. The psychotherapists offer the service both in the clinic as well as within the

person's own home, discuss issues of concern to the individual and also refer to different services when required.

Although Active Ageing Centres had to close during the peaks of the pandemic, the staff still kept regular contact by phone and video calls with members. Some centres also held online sessions with members including quizzes, physical activity sessions, discussions, cooking sessions, and various other online activities. Lectures of the University of the Third Age were transferred to online learning mode and also on radio. An exercise programme for older adults was being carried out on national television station by physiotherapists. Physical activity sessions resumed in person as soon as the spread of the virus was under control, and several Active Ageing Centres have introduced walks as part of their programme of activities.

In view of the social challenges brought about by the pandemic, a new IT training programme has been developed with a particular focus on mental health well-being. This project aims to provide training to older persons living in the community and those living in residential care on the basic use of the tablet, with the aim of facilitating social interaction and prevent isolation. The project also aims to increase the knowledge regarding access to applications and support groups which encourage mental health and wellbeing. These sessions are delivered by psychology assistants. Several other IT training programmes are currently being developed, including specific training on learning outcomes identified by older adults themselves, such as specific training on sending emails, or on internet banking.

The Active Ageing and Community Care is collaborating with SOS Malta, a non-governmental organisation, to provide online support groups to older persons. During these sessions, which are delivered free of charge, the older adults are encouraged to discuss issues related to several topics including communication, loneliness, empathy, anxiety, self-care, and other topics. These sessions are led by psychologists and are delivered online in Active Ageing Centres. The workshops also inform members of the online service of Kellimni.com which is a 24hr online service that encourages persons of all ages to have instant access to a psychologist to chat with when they require.

2.4 What has been done to fully integrate a focus on older persons into the socio-economic and humanitarian response to COVID-19?

Following a Ministerial re-shuffle in October 2020, a Ministry has been set up with the sole responsibility to take care of Senior Citizens and Active Ageing. This move is providing more focus on the needs of older adults, which is especially required following the impact of the pandemic. In October 2021 the Ministry launched a new Policy for Active Ageing for public consultation.

2.5 What has been done to expand participation by older persons, share good practices and harness knowledge and data?

The Government has launched the National Post-Pandemic Strategy with a three-year period of implementation. The National Post-Pandemic Strategy rests on three pillars:

- Improving the quality of life and wellbeing;
- Sustaining businesses and employment; and
- Remaining resilient and competitive as a country.

As part of this strategy, detailed studies will be launched on the impact of the pandemic on different segments of society. Furthermore, a “population committee” will be set up to report back to the government on the status of different groups within society.

The strategy also aims to enhance social cohesion and equality. Focus will be put on the “under-served segments of the country, championing inclusion, building trust, and combatting all forms of discrimination and exploitation to create structures which support and empower communities.” The strategy aims to achieve this by building social cohesion on the basis of human rights, equitable wealth generation, and increase in employment. (Malta Independent, June 2021).

Moreover, although not specifically related to the pandemic, a public consultation webinar about the national political strategy for active ageing 2021-2027 was set up. Several key players in the elderly sector took part in this webinar and there were also 4 different workshops. These were:

- Employment
- Participation in society
- Independent, healthy and secure living in the community
- Ensuring dignity, autonomy and empowerment in care homes and long-term facilities for older persons

The aim of this webinar was to pursue a policy that strengthens and improves inclusion and the quality of life of older persons in the community and in residential homes, and one that encourages and incentivizes increased participation by the elderly in our society.

Another webinar was held in June 2021 by the Active Ageing and Community Care which focused on active ageing opportunities. The webinar consisted of a presentation of the work being carried out in the sector of active ageing and also included several workshops with the active participation of various stakeholders, including older persons themselves. The workshops included the following topics:

- digital access,
- lifelong learning opportunities,
- social participation in the community, and
- active ageing in care homes.

On the world elder abuse awareness day, a webinar was held to increase awareness on different types of abuse and to identify the psychological effects of abuse. Particular emphasis was given to promoting safety, including prevention of frauds and scams, and cybersecurity. The webinar included the involvement of the police and the victim support agency. The webinar also outlined how victims could reach out for help and support.

Conclusions and Priorities for the future

In Malta, nearly a quarter of the population is aged 60 years and over. Malta has been at the forefront in addressing these challenges and in fact the sector of ageing has made very significant advances. In 2014, Malta had its first *National Strategic Policy for Active Ageing*, followed by a renewed policy launched in October 2021 for public consultation. Several other policies have been launched such as the *National Strategic Policy for Active Ageing, (2014-2020)*, the *National Strategy for Dementia in the Maltese Islands (2015 – 2023)*, the *National Minimum Standards for Care Homes for Older People; Guidelines for High Dependency Chronic Care Services for Older Persons; Guidelines on Residential Services for Persons Living with Dementia in Homes for Senior Citizens; Guidelines on Community-based, Outreach Services and the National Strategic Policy for Active Ageing 2021-2027*. In the last 20 years the sector of ageing in Malta has seen a shift from policy and action aimed at addressing the medical needs of older persons, to policies

which target ageing from a more holistic perspective, acknowledging the wide spectrum of abilities of older adults and promoting opportunities which enhance the potential of older adults to achieve their potential. In the later years greater importance is being given to lifelong learning and empowerment of senior citizens. Thus, several lifelong learning sessions have been introduced, including in residential homes. The University of the Third Age has been strengthened and other centres opened to facilitate access. This lifelong learning has also been extended to residential homes through the University of the Fourth Age. Active citizenship is encouraged, older adults are being encouraged to use their knowledge and experience including through intergenerational programmes. These intergenerational programmes aim not only to exchange knowledge and ideas between generations, but also to address issues of ageism. Despite considerable work in the area of ageism, stereotypes are still prevalent and social solidarity needs to be strengthened. Many older people need a lot of encouragement to actively participate in society, especially in high level political fora, and the government is determined to continue addressing this challenge by continuing to empower senior citizens. Empowerment of older adults helps them voice their concerns on issues that matter in the sector of active ageing. The government is working to reach out to older persons whose needs are seldom heard. The Ministry is planning to move towards outreach services so that there would be a shift from having a centralised entity offering community services to regional hubs with multidisciplinary teams who would be in a better position to target the needs of senior citizens in a holistic and person-centred approach. This would also involve community workers or social welfare professionals who could interact with senior citizens, identify their needs and skills, adapt services accordingly, and encourage active citizenship. Moreover, the Ministry is also planning a survey with a random sample of older persons to delve deeper into the needs of older adults and their expectations. This would enable the Ministry to reach out to older persons who generally would not come forward to express their needs. The results of this survey will be used to guide the development of policy and services in Active Ageing.

Considerable work has been carried out on elder abuse and this needs to be sustained. The government will ensure that discussions about this topic are done amongst different sectors in society in order to increase awareness, including amongst healthcare professionals. Further collaboration between different entities is important to ensure that action pathways are developed, and victims of abuse are adequately supported.

Social isolation and solitude are serious problems amongst older adults that carry serious psychosocial and physical repercussions. This tends to lead to decreased independence and may eventually lead to institutionalisation. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on social isolation and increased loneliness amongst older adults. Many older adults are still reluctant to engage in social situations. This is leading to further action to reach out to individuals who may be reluctant to engage in mainstream social opportunities. The social needs of housebound older persons need to continue to be addressed as has been happening over the past years with the development and expansion of various services.

Digital access is important in today's era. IT literacy has improved amongst older adults, however participation amongst older adults is still less compared to other age groups, especially amongst persons over 75 years of age. The Maltese government is providing various learning opportunities for older adults to encourage use of IT, and this training will also eventually involve housebound older adults.

Malta has launched a new *National Strategic Policy for Active Ageing* with a period of implementation between 2021 and 2027 which, at the time of writing of this report, is open for public consultation. This policy aims to target several issues which previously had been seldom addressed, such as addressing the different social and health care challenges experienced by the LGBTIQ+ population, and improve the provision of health care services for older persons from ethnic minorities to ensure equity and eliminate disparities in later life. The Maltese government is committed to continue addressing the needs of older persons with dementia and their loved ones.

Ageing is a multifaceted phenomenon which involves a large group of older adults and requires action from several Ministries to take a dynamic role in meeting the goals, objectives and recommendations. The Ministry for Senior Citizens and Active Ageing is committed to set up an inter-ministerial committee to coordinate the implementation of the *National Strategic Policy for Active Ageing*. Moreover, it is also committed to actively involve older adults, caregivers, and family members in the various phases of its implementation.

Annex:

National Strategic Policy for Active Ageing: 2021-2021

https://meae.gov.mt/en/Public_Consultations/MSCA/PublishingImages/Pages/Consultations/NationalStrategicPolicyforActiveAgeingMalta20212027/NSPAA%20DOC%20ENG.pdf

National minimum standards in care homes

<https://activeageing.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/NationalMinimumStandardsforCareHomeEN.pdf>

EMPOWERING CHANGE: A National Strategy for Dementia in the Maltese Islands 2015-2023

https://activeageing.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/book_english_book-LR.pdf

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