

# Editorial

**Rosette Farrugia-Bonello<sup>1</sup>**

## Introduction

Countries are experiencing one of the greatest demographic disruptions in history - the rapid ageing of their populations. Longer lifespans and reduced birth rates will drive an unprecedented growth in the proportion of the population aged 60 plus. As people age, their need for both health and social care is likely to become increasingly multifaceted. Governments around the World are beginning to experiment with new policies to address these challenges and hence become prepared and well-equipped to secure the needs of population shifts.

Malta, like any other country is also ageing. Malta's population is expected to reach 461,100 persons by 2035 and to reach 476,700 persons by 2060. Life expectancy at birth during 2015-2060 period is projected to increase by 6.4 and 6.3 years from 78.7 to 85.1 and 82.8 to 89.1 for males and females respectively. The fertility rate for the same period is projected to increase only from 1.44 to 1.79. All this makes Malta, one of the fastest ageing countries in the European Union.

This volume of the *International Journal of Ageing in Developing Countries (IJADC)*, with the exception of the last paper, basically focusses on the realities of ageing and the related upcoming and needed policies to face these challenges in Malta. The editorial board have selected three papers, to be published in this peer-reviewed, on-line journal, from the book 'Active and Healthy Ageing in Malta: Gerontological and Geriatric Inquiries' (Formosa, 2018). This book is a timely addition in providing a broad ranging view of the challenges and responses to the increasing age and its implications amongst the Maltese population. The papers chosen to be published in this volume addresses 'Communication training for informal caregivers of persons with dementia in a rehabilitation hospital' (Roberta Said), 'Elder Abuse: An evaluation of Criminal Act XXXI(2014)' (Rene Darmanin) and 'The Adequacy Pension Income Conundrum' (David Spiteri Gingell). The authors of all the papers include academics and policy professionals, and as such bring a range of expertise and insights to the issue. This issue contains also one book review on 'Age-Friendly Cities and Communities: A Global Perspective' (Buffel, Handler & Phillipson, 2018), reviewed by Jacqueline Wong.

---

<sup>1</sup> International Institute on Ageing United Nations - Malta. (rosette.bonello@inia.org.mt)

The first article on 'Measuring and modelling demographic trends in Malta: Implications for ageing policy' by Marvin Formosa sets the background for all the following three papers. This article reviews demographic changes relating to population ageing that took place in Malta and future population projections which anticipate even higher numbers and percentages of older persons. Population projections indicate clearly that Malta will be one of the fastest ageing countries in the European Union. Moreover, Formosa writes about the ageing-related challenges that the Maltese government is currently facing through three key overlapping areas of policy boundaries, namely the labour market, health care and long-term care. Formosa concludes his article by putting forward other policy issues which will need to be addressed in the foreseeable future. These are policy relating to ethnic minorities, LGBTIQ ageing, palliative care and capacity building.

Roberta Sultana and Andee Agius explore 'Pathways to residential respite care in Malta: A qualitative study'. In this contribution, Sultana and Agius found that the decision for informal caregivers to apply for such a service very often involves conflicting perceptions and ambivalent judgements. This paper reports on a qualitative study exploring the underlying factors that steer informal caregivers to seek publicly-funded residential respite in Malta. The major finding was that the majority of the caregivers who resorted to residential respite were taking care of older persons with relatively high dependence and while some caregivers referred to respite as the only solution to enjoy privacy for a brief period of time in their own home, others perceived respite as filling the gap, until their care recipient was admitted permanently to a long-term care facility. Moreover, this study found also that there is a lack of co-operation from care recipients and limited trust in formal care systems, both of which were the key factors that hindered the possibility that caregivers use the service more frequently or at all.

The third paper in this volume, by Roberta Said focuses on 'Communication training for informal caregivers of persons with dementia in a rehabilitation hospital'. In Malta, the number of people living with dementia in 2015 was estimated to be 6,071, equivalent to 1.5 per cent of the population. This number is predicted to rise to around 10,000 persons in 2030, making up 2.3% of the Maltese population and to about 12,955 persons by the year 2050, making up 3.3% of the Maltese population. Communication impairment in individuals with early to moderate dementia becomes more prominent as the condition progresses and this makes the caring process stressful due to the difficulties encountered. In this article, Said explains the various difficulties encountered by the caregivers and the challenges that they are faced with. Moreover, the study - through purposive sampling, shows that the challenges brought about by the communication difficulties, affects the caregivers' and persons living with dementia's physical and emotional health. The article concludes that necessary and timely information is imperative to be provided to the caregivers so as to facilitate communicative interactions between them and their care recipients.

'Elder abuse: An evaluation of Criminal Act XXX1 (2014)' is discussed in the fourth paper of this volume. This study by Rene Darmanin, examines the legal provisions enacted by the Maltese Act XXXI of 2014 (Ministry for Justice, Culture and Local Government, 2014) whilst contrasting them to the former provisions of the Criminal Code regulating elder abuse. The

article shows that several studies reveal that older persons are less inclined to report abuse to the police, but are more likely to report abusive behaviour to members of the clergy. In long-term care settings, an office has been set up whereby residents in care homes and long-term care facilities including their relatives, could report any form of elder abuse. Such a service is also required in the community as till the present, older persons suffering from abusive behaviour in their own home may only report such abuse to the executive police. The article concludes by suggesting the idea of introducing an offenders' register. This would create a sense of security for the general public and employers could use this register to search the names of potential employees and hence determine whether prospective employees were at some point in time convicted of any abuse against older persons or otherwise.

The fifth and last contribution by Marvin Formosa and Jolanta Maćkowicz is on 'Elder abuse: International and Polish perspectives'. This paper shed insights into the realities of elder abuse. Elder abuse is a violation of human rights and a significant cause of injury, illness, lost productivity, isolation and despair. The paper gives a clear definition of elder abuse and goes on to explain the five dominant types - physical abuse, material and financial abuse; psychological or emotional abuse; sexual abuse; spiritual abuse and neglect. The paper then goes on to mention the key international policy frameworks that targets the issue of elder abuse. The United Nations (2002) *Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing* (MIPAA) This plan of action addressed elder abuse and offers several recommendations. It calls for changes in attitudes, policies and practices at all levels and in all sectors in order to ensure that people everywhere are able to age with security and dignity, as citizens with full rights. The authors in this paper refer also to the World Health Organisation (WHO) which also recognises the need to establish a global strategy for the prevention of the mistreatment of older people. Moreover, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe's (UNECE) urges member states to safe guard the dignity of older persons. The paper than focuses on a study carried out in Poland. The findings demonstrate that legislation is urgently required in order to enact and implement programmes to safe guard older persons from abuse and hence maintaining their dignity.

The topics researched, findings and analyses presented in the first four papers, show that whilst ageing is increasingly evident on policy agendas in Malta, there are still significant challenges and obstacles ahead as we strive to build an active and healthy ageing society for all. Moreover, the last paper demonstrated clearly that legislation on elder abuse is needed in Poland. The messages from all papers are relevant to all policy makers particularly in low-income countries and for countries with economies-in-transition, where by 2050, 80% of people aged older than 60 years will live. It is crucial that research findings in these studies be translated into action. It is imperative that countries need to adapt their own systems so as to answer local needs. As the main editor for this volume, I am delighted to commend to you the collection of these five papers as an important contribution to an active and healthy ageing policy.

## References

- Buffel, T., Handler, S. & Phillipson, C. (eds). (2018). *Age-friendly Cities and Communities: A Global Perspective*. UK: Policy Press
- Formosa, M. (ed.) (2018). *Active and Healthy Ageing in Malta: Gerontological and Geriatric Inquiries*, Malta: Book Distributors Ltd.
- Ministry for Justice, Culture and Local Government, (2014). *ACT No. XXXI of 2014*. <http://www.justiceservices.gov.mt/DownloadDocument>. Accessed 10 November 2019.