



LGBTIQ EXPERIENCES IN PACEVILLE



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A REPORT BY THE MALTA LGBTIQ RIGHTS MOVEMENT

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INTRODUCTION

At the end of October 2019, the Malta LGBTIQ Rights Movement (MGRM) launched an online questionnaire to obtain more knowledge about the experiences of people from the LGBTIQ community in Paceville, Malta's entertainment and club Mecca. The initiative to conduct this study was primarily instigated by media reports claiming that members of the LGBTIQ community were being treated unfairly, harassed or refused to be served because of their gender identity, sexual orientation or gender non-conforming appearance and/or behaviour. Furthermore, through its interaction within the LGBTIQ community, it is not uncommon for the members of the community to speak to members of MGRM of their negative experiences in Paceville. One specific

police report was filed by a person within the LGBTIQ community for being thrown out of an establishment for showing affection to his partner. Consequently, there are those who refrain from frequenting clubs in Paceville because they do not feel safe, as one of the respondents claimed:

My friends and I don't like to go to Paceville since we don't find it as safe and as open... the only time we are in the Paceville areas is for parties specifically organised for LGBT+ people.



STUDY OBJECTIVES

The main objective of the study was to gauge whether members of the LGBTIQ community feel safe in Paceville, and whether reporting an incident to the police has positive outcomes.

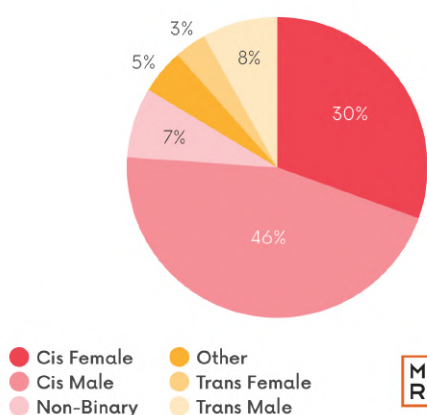
THE QUESTIONNAIRE

The questionnaire, containing 15 thematic questions was posted on social media through the MGRM's Facebook page and promoted for around a week. The questionnaire was also posted on LGBTIQ-related Facebook groups. Members of the LGBTIQ community were encouraged to fill in and share the questionnaire. The questionnaire was available from 31st October to 14th December 2019.

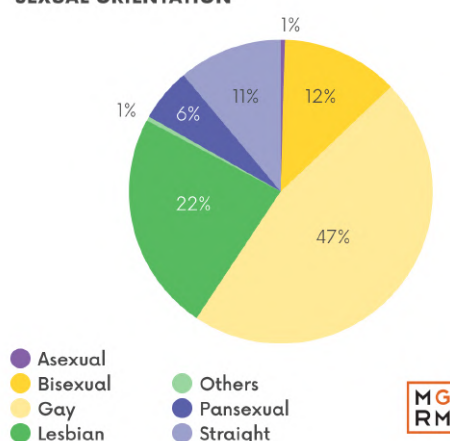
CHARACTERISTICS OF RESPONDENTS

In all, MGRM received 210 responses. The majority (45.7%) of respondents identified as cis male, followed by 30% who identified as cis female. Trans males made up 8% of the respondents. A smaller percentage of respondents identified as trans female, non-binary or intersex. Most respondents claimed to be gay (46.7%), 22.4% said they were lesbian, 12% stated that they were bisexual and 11% claimed to be straight. A few respondents identified as pansexual or asexual. The age of respondents ranged from 14 to 59 although most of them were in their 20s or 30s.

GENDER IDENTITY



SEXUAL ORIENTATION



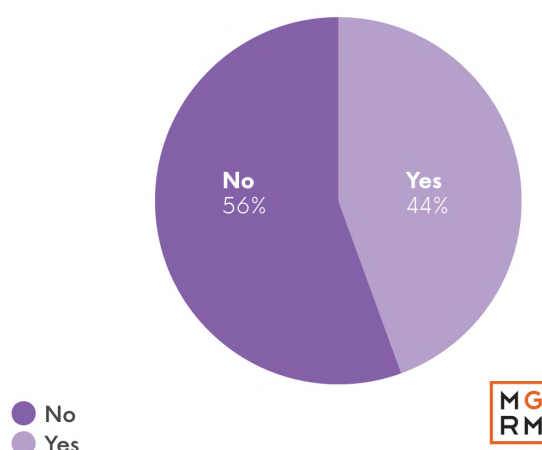
GENERAL SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

The majority of members of the LGBTIQ community does not consider Paceville to be a safe place while over a third of respondents report cases of discrimination, verbal and physical abuse, harassment, catcalling and even rape. Members of the LGBTIQ community claim to have been thrown out of establishments, harassed, insulted or ridiculed because of their gender non-conforming appearance, clothing or behaviour; because of their sexual orientation or for holding hands or kissing their partner. For trans and non-binary persons, one of the biggest problems is being banned from using the bathrooms in which they feel more comfortable while lesbians have to put up with sexist harassment and sexualisation of their bodies as women, apart from other forms of harassment also targeted at cis gay men.

DISCRIMINATION AND LACK OF SAFETY IN PACEVILLE ESTABLISHMENTS AND STREETS

From the responses, it is clear that members of the LGBTIQ community do not consider Paceville to be a safe place. More than half of the study respondents (55.6%) stated that they did not feel safe in Paceville while 35% claimed to have suffered some form of discrimination in Paceville. The discrimination was reported to have occurred between 2010 and 2019, with the majority of cases happening during 2019. Respondents mentioned a number of establishments in Paceville where they experienced discrimination due to their gender identity or sexual orientation, some of which were mentioned more than once by different respondents.

DO YOU FEEL SAFE IN PACEVILLE?



A number of cases (19% of all incidents) involved aggression by bouncers. In other cases, the incidents involved bartenders and other patrons who had a problem with a same-sex couple kissing or even holding hands. Apart from the discrimination practised in establishments, members of the LGBTIQ community also claimed to have been victims of discrimination in the streets of Paceville.

A CASE OF UNDER-REPORTING

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We have been kicked out, and couldn't report because we are asylum seekers.

We don't know if we have the right to report or not.

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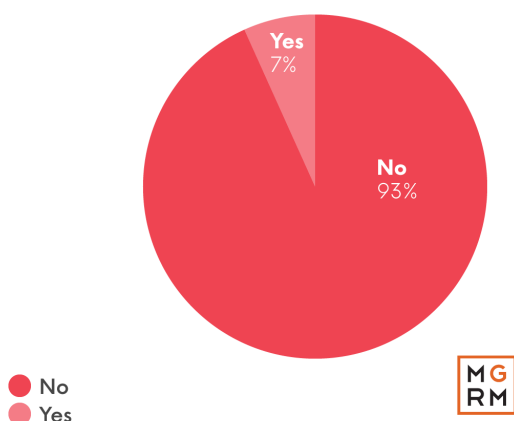


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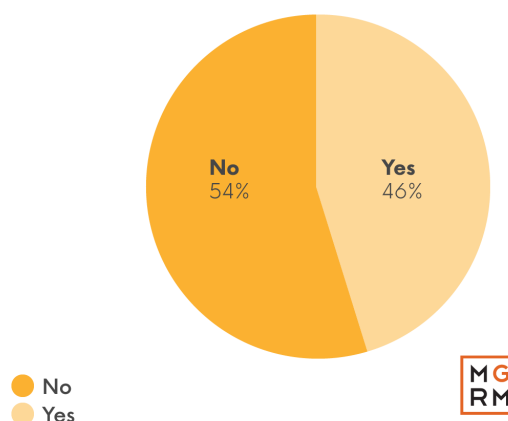


Most respondents who reported an incidents have stated that the incidents did not involve violence. Indeed, only 14% of those who claimed to have experienced discrimination described the experience as violent and only a few required the assistance of a medical professional (less than 5%). Most (93%) of those who suffered some form of discrimination stated that they did not report the incident to the police. Of those who did not report, 54% stated that they would still have not reported the case were they accompanied by a member of MGRM.

DID YOU REPORT THE INCIDENT TO THE POLICE?



WOULD YOU HAVE BEEN MORE LIKELY TO REPORT IF MGRM ACCOMPANIED YOU TO THE POLICE STATION?



There are many possible reasons for not reporting. MGRM did not gather much information regarding reasons for not reporting. However, it could be due to ignorance of the law, i.e. not realising that such behaviour is against the law or whether one is covered by the law. For example, one respondent claimed that he and his friends were thrown out of an establishment but he did not report the incident to /the police because he thought that the law will not apply to them as asylum seekers:

We have been kicked out, and couldn't report because we are asylum seekers. We don't know if we have the right to report or not.

Non-reporting could also happen because one may think that the incident was not serious enough or not violent enough to warrant a report:

Me and my boyfriend were kissing, and then some old, fat man decided he didn't like us and chucked his drink at us, luckily it didn't escalate from there and a friendly women came up to us and talked to us to see if we were ok we then just came to the conclusion that he was a sad and bitter man. Due to it being non-violent we didn't report it, and just walked off. I personally just stick to the outskirts of Paceville nowadays I don't go into the central area.

There is also the possibility of lack of trust in the police i.e. that reporting would not lead to effective action. In one of the cases, one respondent claimed that some police officers outside one of the establishments were laughing at a black drag queen who emerged from the establishment:

A number of police men were outside [] and when a black drag queen went out, they started looking and laughing at her. Disgusting. When I asked one of them why he was laughing, he started being arrogant and asking me why he cannot laugh.

In another instance, a cis gay man claimed that while he was intimate with his boyfriend without being inappropriate, he was approached by a patron within an establishment who told him that the place was for heterosexuals only. He however did not feel that reporting to the policy would lead to any action being taken:

If an incident as small as mine were to be reported to the police in England, the police would take action, whereas over here, if violence is involved, they would not bat an eye.

The few who reported the case to the police did not provide much information about their experience of reporting the incident. One respondent claimed to have been “scared and angry”, while another respondent stated that the report was not recorded on the first occasion and had to be repeated on a second occasion. These few who reported the incident either claimed that they did not receive any feedback at all from the police or that they did not receive any feedback for a long time.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCES IN PACEVILLE – SOME UNDERLYING TRENDS

It is clear that despite the recent changes in legislation and the introduction of LGBTIQ-friendly policies, members of the LGBTIQ community still face difficulties in some contexts, as this study reveals in relation to Paceville, Malta’s club and entertainment hub. Although respondents experience Paceville in unique ways, there are a number of patterns which appear to emerge from the data of this study. While members of the LGBTIQ community seem to be easy targets of harassment, abuse and discrimination, just because they are “different”, specific members of the community are more likely to have similar experiences because they belong to the same sub-category.



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I was roughly separated by bouncers who thought I was dancing too close to another guy (he was straight and we were friends). Another time because I kissed a boy they ran to us and shoved us apart.

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REPORT: LGBTIQ EXPERIENCES IN PACEVILLE



It has been noted that cis gay men are harassed, insulted or thrown out of establishments because they are deemed to be effeminate, a characteristic which does not conform to the stereotypical cis male. Cis males are also socially expected to be heterosexual and not to be seen holding hands with or kissing another man. This suggests that gender and sexuality stereotypes are still dominant in our society and that homophobia and transphobia are still rife, despite equality legislation and a seemingly greater acceptance of diversity.

Consequently, cis gay men tend to be the target of different forms of abuse or discrimination ranging from ridicule to rape. To make it worse, abuse came not only from bartenders and by other patrons in the establishment but also from those who are supposed to ensure the safety of patrons, such as bouncers, who seem to be the category with the least sensitivity to LGBTIQ issues, as the following narratives indicate:

I was dancing with my boyfriend, we kissed. The bouncer specifically stopped us and threatened to kick us out if we continued. Couples around us (heterosexual) were doing the exact same thing. Even when we held hands he started shouting at us. I have never set foot in that club since.

I was with my back then boyfriend and some friends dancing. While I was dancing I had decided to kiss my boyfriend a couple of times. At a point in time some other party goers decided to throw ice at us and shout homophobic slurs. At which point I decided to leave the establishment. I had felt offended and disgusted considering how many heterosexual couples engage in kissing in such establishments.

Got forced out of the establishment for kissing a man. Bouncer wouldn't let me back in to get my clothes back.

Kissed the guy I was with and got pushed by the bouncer and told that these things shouldn't happen

I kissed a guy and was told by the bartender to stop immediately. The bar was also completely empty so we were not 'bothering' other customers.

Been called "pufta", by the bouncer just because of the way I dance

I was roughly separated by bouncers who thought I was dancing too close to another guy (he was straight and we were friends) another time because I kissed a boy they ran to us and shoved us apart. A third time a friend who was leaving the country came to give me a hug and the same thing happened.

I can't drink alcohol and I asked for a bottle of water. I drank a little bit and I left on the table I was. After 5 minutes, I drank a lot and I felt a weird taste. After some minutes, I started to feel weird and I thought someone might have put something in my bottle but I thought I was paranoid. The next thing I remember was me asking for a taxi, injured and high. When I arrived home, my ass was bleeding. I have intestinal problems, so I thought the drugs could have hurt me. I went to the hospital only because of the anxiety, so they cleaned my blood, they checked my heart and they gave me pills. After some time, I remembered I was in a room with

black walls and a man was pulling down my jeans. Without any doubt, I was raped.¹

Cis gay men may experience refusal to be served because of their sexual orientation, appearance or clothing:

A guy behind a burger counter refused to serve me and told me to go away; prior to that he was asking what is wrong with me!

A guy who was working in one of the take out shops, refused to get my food order due to the fact that I was wearing gender-neutral clothing

Such forms of harassment are not necessarily restricted to clubs or other establishments in Paceville but may also happen in the streets:

A group of guys were trying to insult me just because I look "feminine" for them. Some of them were trying to provoke me while pushing me, while I decide to ignore them this were making them mad and they start shouting at me for no reason...

I was on a date with a guy, and we were holding hands and every Arab looking guy and more people of colour stopped to stare at us in a "that's very wrong" kind of way. Some even decided to follow us. I felt scared to be out in public.

I was walking along the streets if PV minding my own business and a bunch of bouncers started shouting and pointing at me " qieghed sew ja pufta" I kept walking but felt very scared.

Cis Lesbians may also experience similar situations as their male counterparts. They may be thrown out of establishments or refused entry into establishments. Like their male counterparts, it is clear that they are victims of discrimination and differential treatment because they are part of the LGBTIQ community:

Because two women, my friends kissed, we were all asked to leave. When right next to us there was a couple doing more than just kissing and were not approached.

¹ MGRM has attempted to reach this person in order to offer its legal and support assistance. Unfortunately the individual did not leave any contact details and attempts made to get in touch were not successful. MGRM, through its Rainbow Support Services is able to offer free support, counselling and legal assistance. We urge anyone who has come across any form of abuse to open a police report, and get immediate medical advice.

They didn't let us in because we were a group of lesbians.

They said I'm a lesbian and I'm gonna harass women there.

I was kissing my partner at that time and we were told to stop because it wasn't that kind of establishment.

However, the responses of cis women who are seen to be intimate with their female partner seem to indicate that they are not exempt from gendered stereotypes, particularly those attached to the sexualisation of the female body and certain men's assumed right over women's bodies. Harassment was reported to come largely from straight men, once again mostly from bouncers but also from other employees as well as patrons within clubs. These women reported various forms of abuse and harassment:



I've ended up drugged by my own drink although it has been in my hand all time and experienced sexual harassment from employees and random people due me being in a bar with my companion.

Constant verbal attack against me and my female partner at a club, when a straight guy does not get attention from us they do not understand it and he became really annoying, they think is a porn show or something even if we were just kissing.

My girlfriend at the time and I were severely sexually harassed while flirting with each other and making out at the back of the club. Even the bouncers were calling more people and colleagues to come watch us and make a show out of us. I tried to ignore the crowd of men gathering around us to watch but could not anymore when they were starting to touch and grab at us and had to rush out of the club.

Once, my girlfriend and myself were sexualised, catcalled and people tried to make us make out for their pleasure. On another occasion, my cis male gay friends were verbally threatened for being "too feminine" and were given looks. In situations where alcohol is involved, you never know how people will react after a comment is passed or a look is given.

Sexual comments were made to myself and my girlfriend as we were dancing. We did not instigate the man. He ridiculed us and sexualised what was meant to be a fun night out.

Three Italian guys, not knowing that my girlfriend and I understood their language, started making gross comments at us, especially body shaming my partner. Once I asked them to stop, they threatened to beat us and they told me I deserved to be raped (my partner was too "ugly" for their taste). Unfortunately for them, we were both strong and trained women (my partner had martial arts knowledge too) and at the end of the day they literally ran away from us...

My friend and I were walking and a group of men attacked us and one put their face in my friend's chest and the other one put their hands in mine... besides from that when I was with my partner and we were holding hands and being close in a club male figures come close and started to touch us and ask us questions and even require some action.

Trans*, non-binary persons and cross-dressers also tend to have experiences which are more specifically linked to them, even if, as with other categories within the LGBTIQ community, it does not mean that such experiences are exclusive to them. However, from the responses, there are indications that members of the Trans* community are more likely to be denied access to venues and services, to be ridiculed and to face barriers when it comes to the use of gender-segregated bathrooms. As indicated

earlier, there are instances when members of the Trans* community are even ridiculed by those who are supposed to lead by example. The following narratives are some of the experiences that Trans*, cross-dressers and non-binary members of the community had to deal with in Paceville:

Tried to get into [this club], got out my ID card which was just changed to M at the time. I just had started hormones a few weeks back so I still looked like a female. The bouncer looked at the ID, then said that I thought he was stupid trying to get in with a fake ID of a man as clearly I am a woman. I then said that I am a man and he gave me back my ID card. I then mentioned that I was trans and just changed my Id

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The bouncer looked at my ID, then said that I thought he was stupid trying to get in with a fake ID of a man, as clearly I am a woman. I then said that I am a man and he gave me back my ID card. I then mentioned that I was trans and just changed my ID because it was my friend's birthday and I wanted to get in, but when I said that he grabbed me from my jaw and pushed me off the 3 stairs there are outside of the establishment. The other bouncers just stood there and people just watched.

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because it was my friend's birthday and I wanted to get in, but when I said that he grabbed me from my jaw and pushed me off the 3 stairs there are outside of the establishment. The other bouncers just stood there and people just watched.

From the responses, it appears that gender non-conformity in appearance and attire are as problematic as gender non-conforming behaviour such as kissing a person of one's own sex. The following two experience suggest that a cis lesbian woman with short hair and a person who identifies as non-binary who was wearing gender non-conforming clothes also had difficulty in accessing gender-segregated bathrooms:

I needed to use the bathroom, my friend went in before me and I got stopped at the door by a bouncer telling me it's a female toilet. I thought okay maybe with short hair I may look like a man, I politely told him I'm a female but still he wouldn't let me in the bathroom.

Me, being biologically male, I identify as non-binary, I wear makeup in public very comfortably, and don't discriminate when it comes to what I want to wear regardless of gender. On that night I was all dressed up fabulous and all (makeup) and I personally when I look like that I prefer using the women's toilet, but on this occasion the bouncer didn't let me use the women's restroom, so I ended up using the males toilet (which I have no problem doing, as I find women's toilets cleaner anyway) but as I was about to enter the restroom or more precisely as I entered the restroom there was this "gentleman" (not so gentle) who proceeded to tell me that I couldn't use the men's restroom because I was wearing high heels and looked like a woman. So I ended up going back to the women's toilet. Then because I used the women's toilet the bouncer decided to kick me out of the bar. Of course me being slightly tipsy I proceeded to yell at him how homophobic and (they thought I was transsexual) transphobic he was.

Since I'm a cross-dresser I sometimes wear or heel with male clothing and some makeup or wear like a woman the prostitutes that work there immediately come on me and saying why you wear that but you're a boy and stuff like that of course I jump back for my rights and tell her its none of her business what I wear but when she calls me ugly and faggot I jumped more back and I don't like to get violent so I talked harsh verbally I jump to any person that experience this as it's not fair for us when these foreign prostitutes are working in my country.

Bathroom - males in the female bathrooms knocking hard on door and calling names (non-binary person).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Just before this report was concluded, more news of assaults in Paceville have reached the Malta LGBTIQ Rights Movement and the media. A gay man, who was enjoying himself on a night out was assaulted because someone took umbrage at the way he was dancing. A bouncer who saw what was happening, aggressively kicked *him* out of the club. Going to the police for shelter proved futile. “What can I do?”, the policeman asked, laughingly.²

This story is not unique. Several cases highlighted recurring instances of violence in Paceville nightclubs, often by bouncers.³ Further exposing the complex nature of the problem in Paceville, is a case of two cis-men who were kicked out of a restaurant in Paceville for kissing.⁴ Days later, the owner of the restaurant was arrested for importation of cocaine.⁵ This could possibly suggest that some establishments may be acting as a front, with the real intention being not necessarily that of operating as an actual business, affording therefore to refuse custom from people they do not approve of.

Based on our findings, we are proposing five recommendations, which we believe may lead to a safer Paceville for all patrons, not just the LGBTIQ community. Some of the recommendations will require pro-activity from various stakeholders, including NGOs like ourselves. The remaining recommendations are not impossible to implement, with most having already been announced or promised in the past.

² Cilia, Jonathan (12 January 2020) [‘I was punched and kicked out of Paceville club for being myself’, Gay Maltese man says](#). *lovinmalta.com*. Retrieved 13 January 2020.

³ Zammit, Simon (2 May 2019) [‘They Can Beat Me Up But Not Take Away My Spirit’, Says Gay Tourist Allegedly Attacked By Paceville Bouncer](#) *lovinmalta.com*. Retrieved 14 January 2020.

⁴ Jacobsen, Baryn (29 October 2019) [Paceville Restaurant Pledges Action After Two People Were Kicked Out For Sharing A Kiss](#) *lovinmalta.com*. Retrieved 14 January 2020.

⁵ Diacono, Tim (8 November 2019) [Paceville Restaurant Owner Arrested At Airport With Two Kilos Of Cocaine In His Suitcases](#) *lovinmalta.com*. Retrieved 14 January 2020.

RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION NO. 1 - PRESENT AND PASS BILL REGULATING BOUNCERS

Following an assault that took place in Paceville, where a bouncer grievously injured a man in an incident that was caught on camera, the Home Affairs Ministry confirmed that a bill intended to introduce regulations on bouncer services, was being drafted, and would be presented in the first months of the new year (2020).⁶ Considering that similar promises were made in 2017⁷, we would like to urge the Ministry to accelerate work on this bill, in order to avoid any further incidents of this nature.

RECOMMENDATION NO. 2 - IMPROVE SECURITY IN PACEVILLE, INCLUDING SECURITY FOR THE POLICE

Police patrols and security measures need to be put in place without delay. The incidents being reported are shocking in their level of violence. This gives the impression that certain acts can be done with impunity. This is not aided by the fact that police officers themselves are often victims of assault, possibly contributing to their reluctance to act.⁸ ⁹ ¹⁰ We believe that security is paramount, including security for the police. This recommendation can be achieved by increasing the number of police officers patrolling the area, providing them with training and the necessary equipment to avoid injury and to allow for prudent self-defence without increasing the risk of further assault and aggression. CCTV cameras and body cameras for police officers may be installed within the parameters of the law, to

⁶ Schembri Orland, Kevin (3 November 2019) Law for regulator on bouncer services expected early next year *The Malta Independent*. Retrieved 13 January 2020.

⁷ Falzon, Glen (4 November 2017), Is there a need for a guardian on bouncers' service? *TVM.com.mt*. Retrieved 4 January 2020.

⁸ The Malta Independent (8 January 2020) Woman charged with assaulting policewoman in Paceville *The Malta Independent*. Retrieved 13 January 2020.

⁹ Agius Monique (22 December 2019) Man attacks police in Paceville *Newsbook*. Retrieved 13 January 2019.

¹⁰ Agius, Matthew (8 January 2020) Woman 'unable to recall' drunken assault on police officer in Paceville. *MaltaToday*. Retrieved 13 January 2019.

serve as a deterrent and for the peace of mind of the police officers patrolling the area.

RECOMMENDATION NO. 3 - SENSITIVITY TRAINING FOR POLICE, ESPECIALLY THOSE SERVING IN PACEVILLE AREAS

From the responses received, it is evident that police presence in Paceville is not achieving its expected aims. Cases are being underreported and the few incidents that were reported to the police did not receive the attention they deserved. There are also allegations of police officers being abusive, by laughing at passersby. Furthermore, it has been noted that when police were approached for help, the action taken was reported to be insufficient. In order to improve the situation, police officers serving in the Paceville areas should receive more training akin to the training being given to the Victims Support Unit, and to be better staffed to handle the diversity and the number of people frequenting the area.

RECOMMENDATION NO. 4 - EDUCATION CAMPAIGNS FOR THE PUBLIC

Education campaigns are needed, in order to address the number of underreported incidents. The new Hate Crime and Speech Unit, inaugurated by the Home Affairs Ministry in October 2019 could have a role in implementing this recommendation.¹¹ The education campaigns should address the type of behaviour that is criminal and therefore reportable, how to open a report and how progress can be monitored. It should also focus on providing information to the public about hate crime, and the rights and the duties of members of the public. The education campaigns can take place on local media including social media, in schools and in Paceville itself, through posters, billboards and infographics on the various LCD screens, amongst others. Human rights NGOs can participate in these campaigns by offering to accompany hate crime victims to the police in order to open a report safely.

RECOMMENDATION NO. 5 - TRAINING FOR STAFF WORKING IN PACEVILLE TO CREATE SAFE SPACES

In 2019, the Human Rights and Integration Directorate launched a campaign intended to help establishments create a business environment that is respectful

¹¹ Hudson, David (23 October 2019) [Special police unit to monitor online hate speech](#) *MaltaToday*. Retrieved 13 January 2020.

of its LGBTIQ workforce, clients and business partners.¹² Parts of the campaign received some criticism, however MGRM has insisted that the core concept of training businesses to become more inclusive is a very positive aspect of the campaign. NGOs can have a role in providing this type of training, however in order to ensure consistency and a wider reach, we believe that with some small improvements, the campaign will be well received and effective in its core aims. The Directorate may consider introducing a campaign akin to the 'Ask for Clive' campaign in the UK, where patrons who witness an incident can report to the staff by "asking for Clive", thus discretely alerting staff that a homophobic or transphobic incident may be taking place.¹³

¹² Human Rights and Integration Directorate (3 June 2019) [#ILKOLLMERHBA #ALLWELCOME Campaign meae.gov.mt](#) . Retrieved 13 January 2020.

¹³ Card, Kirsty (6 August 2019) [Arena Birmingham and Resorts World launch 'Ask for Clive' anti-homophobia campaign BirminghamLive](#). Retrieved 13 January 2020