

Date: 24/03/2023

Venue: 32, Triq il-Parrocca, Mosta & Online via Zoom

Present:

Colette Farrugia Bennett (CFB), Amanda Cossai (AmC), Joe Grima (JG), Aurora Attard Coleiro (AAC), Kirsty Farrugia Guiga (KFG), Cynthia Chircop (CC), Frederick Bartolo Parnis (FBP), Alex Caruana (AC), Robert Attard (RA), Julian Chircop (JC), Mark Harwood (MH), three other MGRM members whose names are not being shown for GDPR purposes.

Chaired by:

Claire Azzopardi Lane

Apologies: Mohamed Ali Aguerbi

Agenda

Appointment of chairperson

Statutes

Annual report

Presentation of MGRM Workplan 2023

Nomination

Election of candidates

Appointment of auditor

Appointment of lawyer

Minutes

1. Appointment of Chairperson

CC nominated Claire Azzopardi Lane as chairperson. CFB seconded Claire's nomination. Members approved unanimously. The chair thanked the members for their nomination and approval.

2. Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the 2022 AGM were read and approved with minor suggested changes to improve legibility but without real changes to content.

3. Presentation of Annual Report 2022

The Annual Report was introduced by CC and respective members of the committee who contributed to the writing of the report, and then presented its various sections and subsections.

Introduction

CC introduced the Annual Report by stating that 2022 has been a very busy year, where we organised several activities and welcomed the youth subcommittee. One of the main activities was the book and exhibition dedicated to Katya Saunders made possible in part through the 2022 VOPS grant. In 2022, MGRM also participated in an Erasmus project that welcomed youths from several countries to Malta. Dar il-Qawsalla is progressing, and we are in the process of restoring the house. MGRM welcomed back Alex Caruana who is our second employee, and is responsible for Dar il-Qawsalla related projects. The blood donation ban was lifted, making the system of donating blood more equitable. HIV Malta has organised a conference on HIV. Progress on the Equality Bill has stalled. MGRM has also taken a position to support the decriminalisation of abortion. MGRM has joined the Voices for Choice Coalition. CC ended their introduction by thanking the volunteers, employees and members of the committee.

Social Welfare

CFB reiterated the importance of the partnership with the MFWS (Malta Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society). 27 families joined the RFN (Rainbow Families Network) in 2022, and went through the several events that happened during the year. RSS (Rainbow Support Service) continued to organise a safe space for LGBT youths through the Youth Group, and described the role and the activities carried out.

RSS continued, this year offering meetings in person or online. Several issues were seen such as health matters, trans specific health issues, anxiety and mental health issues, and some also related to the impact that the pandemic still has on the community. The service through the helpline continued. Six social workers give this service. PSP (Public Social Partnership) negotiations for the new agreement have been concluded and the agreement will be signed in early 2023. RSS was in contact with 173 cases, an increase of 60 cases over the previous year. Some service users needed regular sessions, with an estimated number of interventions amounting to 869, an increase of 109 interventions over 2021.

Psychological support was given to over 10 persons. 30 other sessions were provided to professionals and educators. Supervision was received from professionals in the field and 12 supervision sessions were held. CFB insisted on the importance of supervision in this area of work.

RA went through the work on LGBT migrants. MGRM participated in a campaign called 'You Say Fair, We Say Unfair'. MGRM gave its support in several campaigns, in particular a campaign by Aditus to remove countries that criminalise homosexuality from the safe country list.

MGRM supported several students who researched LGBTIQ issues, in various areas of study. The National Gay Helpline retained its call divert system. Through RSS, MGRM gave training to 10 organisations. MGRM was also a participant of the Awareness Raising of 16 Days of Activism against Gender Based Violence campaign. MGRM also supported MG (Moviment Graffiti) in December 2022 in the 'Fit-Triq Bla Biza' campaign.

Youth Subcommittee

AAC introduced the youth subcommittee. She went through the workshops that were carried out, with the first one held in November 2022. The first workshop was given on current affairs, transgender issues, HIV and migration. The youth subcommittee consists of 6 active members who organised several events including a football match and two thrift shop events, through which EUR 505.50 were raised.

LGBTIQ+ Health

CFB stated that RSS keeps liaising with the GWC (Gender Wellbeing Clinic), often facilitating referrals to the clinic. RSS also liaises with the Ministry and GWC to provide feedback following feedback sessions held with the community.

HIV Malta remained active in the community with several projects. Collaboration was also done with Checkpoint Malta. Medication is being distributed normally, now one or two pills are the regime being provided to HIV positive persons. One counsellor in RSS has gained considerable experience and knowledge on the topic. Testing remains a problem, where waiting time is 5 months (6 months as of 2023). With respect to PrEP and PEP, electoral promises have not been fulfilled but these are made for 5 years so there is no idea when this will happen in the next 5 years.

An HIV conference was organised, inviting the medical community, who listened to speeches by London trained doctors and activists specialised in HIV and one speaker who specialises in the topic of chemsex. This event was also the first to include an HIV positive person recounting their experience. The conference was very successful, because the Maltese government now endorses U=U (Undetectable equals Untransmittable).

HIV Malta does not do all of this on its own. Checkpoint Malta is present, but they still need to find their feet. It makes sense for us to merge these groups with meetings on this scheduled for 2023.

The blood donation ban removal was another success story. Now any person, regardless of sexual orientation, can donate blood as long as they have had a maximum of one sexual partner in the last four months.

Projects

The VOPS 2022 project was about Katya Saunders, one of Malta's first openly transgender women. The project consisted of a biography written by Ramona Depares, alongside an exhibition at Spazju Kreattiv co-curated by Romeo Roxman Gatt and Charlie Cauchi. We printed 150 copies of the book, which were quickly taken up. We have printed more copies, which are being distributed via Agenda. The book is a best seller in the local section as of early 2023. The book was launched at the exhibition in December 2022, at Spazju Kreattiv. The takeaway from this is that trans stories interest people and they want to know more about them.

CC presented the book launch of 20 Years of Trailblazing, held at Roza Kwir in Balzan, attended by around 40 people. The event included speeches by MGRM's coordinators, Gabi Calleja and Ruth Baldacchino.

RA stated that 52 new books were donated to the Rainbow Library. Some new members registered however more work needs to be done to promote the library.

AC introduced the section on Dar il-Qawsalla. A contractor has now been chosen, meetings with the San Gwann Local Council were held and work will continue in 2023.

CC stated that the Erasmus+ Project, Tale & Tell, took place in April and July. Project partners were Giosef, Altero, Stowarzyszenie Fabryka Rownosci and Aktive Kosmos. Marthese Formosa managed this project which had the aim of increasing the competences of youth workers working with vulnerable youth, and providing tools and methods to better facilitate the learning process. A training session for youth workers was held in Italy, and then several youths were invited to Malta where the youth workers gave sessions based on what they had learned in their own training sessions.

International Relations

AmC stated that MGRM remains an active member of TGEU (Transgender Europe). AmC attended the Trans Feminine Leadership Academy in Berlin. AmC also had several meetings with TGEU and in 2023, this relationship will prove fruitful because a big project is being planned. TGEU also has a Trans Refugee Network which held 3 meetings, one of which dealt with Ukrainian refugees.

MGRM remains a member of IGLYO (International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex (LGBTQI) Youth & Student Organisation), and Nick Ebejer from the Youth Subcommittee attended the AGM on behalf of MGRM. MGRM is also a member of ILGA Europe and RA attended the AGM on behalf of MGRM. On TCEN (The Commonwealth Equality Network), MGRM remains a full member although correspondence declined. It is hoped that in 2023, more work will be done now that TCEN has its own staff. PHROM (Platform of Human Rights Organisations in Malta) has been inactive in 2022 and although the group remains present, it is not active.

Media

CC stated that MGRM remained present in the media, in various reports related to homophobic hate speech, trans issues and the exhibition and book on Katya Saunders.

Advocacy and Lobbying

In 2022, MGRM continued to work with various entities through the LGBTIQ Council, and strengthened relations with YMCA. Other entities are the MFWS, Checkpoint Malta, Aditus, Moviment Graffiti, MMSA (Malta Medical Students' Association) and Beta-PSI. In 2023, MGRM also joined the Voice for Choice Coalition.

PL (Partit Laburista) had included equality legislation in its 2022 electoral manifesto however in 2022 no work was done. Similarly, there has been no progress on the sex work reform. More progress was done w.r.t. the blood donation ban. No progress was made in terms of constitutional amendments, although in 2023, government suggested amendments to the conversion therapy ban which will be reported in next year's AGM. In 2022, MGRM took a position on abortion in favour of

decriminalisation. CC highlighted the current issues with the legislation, and the reasons why MGRM decided to join the Voice for Choice coalition.

Marketing

CC said that MGRM continues to supply merchandise, t-shirts and tote bags designed by Kim Cauchi.

KFG stated that three memberships tiers remain available. New members can join through the website or during MGRM events. Throughout 2022 MGRM had 53 active members. Members receive updates on MGRM's ongoing work.

The RSS social media mainly promotes the youth group events and studies carried out locally by university departments and students. The RSS Facebook and Instagram pages are not as active. The MGRM website continues to be updated throughout 2022 and visits ranged between 1,000- and 2000-page views per month. Reach remains relatively low on the website. The Facebook page gained 743 new followers with 394 new likes on Instagram. The TikTok page was updated more often in 2022.

The internet presence of HIV Malta remained quite good, which saw an increase of 44% in visits over the previous year. Google searches were the source of most traffic. The mailbox has shown there is increased international interest in the website. This has mostly come from migrants from non-EU countries thinking of moving to Malta to see how they can access healthcare. We have distributed 132 self-testing kits. The Facebook page has been less active, resulting in lower reach but reach increased towards the end of the year as a result of the HIV conference. While we have not had a substantial increase in likes, visits have increased. This shows us that we must keep putting up information because people check the page for information.

Events & Fundraising

In 2022, MGRM held 23 events not including projects related to Katya, which have been discussed separately. These included workshops, film screenings, community dance classes, music events, roller skating events, dance events, discussions on various topics including non-binary identities and bisexuality, open mic sessions, community dialogues, karaoke events, one WomenSpace event, and Christmas events.

Finance

JG went through the finances. He commented that MGRM performed well in terms of income which was much higher than the previous year. The last year of the PSP agreement was slightly higher than the previous year, however this increased again with the new agreement. One notable income, and expense for MGRM was a grant of 20,000 euros which was received from Agenzija Zghazagh which was paid out in full to Saydon Studios for the work carried out on the theatrical production called Teatru tal-Miskin. Donations increased from around EUR 8k to around EUR 30k. This was mainly due to a donation by Hili, amongst other fundraising events, all of which centred around the need to fund expenses for Dar il-Qawsalla. Expenses too increased from around EUR 80k to around EUR 96k. MGRM closed the year with a surplus of around EUR 5k.

In terms of our balance sheet, we remained quite strong. A good chunk of this comes from the Dar il-Qawsalla fund, which will decrease as the works on the shelter commence. JG reminded members that as per accounting rules, MGRM recognises grants received for specific projects as liabilities. Our main liability is towards the PSP fund, for which we offer the Rainbow Support Service. 2022 was the last of three years under the previous PSP agreement, however this was renewed again for another three years in 2023.

Presentation of the Workplan for 2023

CC went through the main objectives of the Workplan. This included work related to legislation, healthcare, advocacy for establishment of inclusive policies, raising awareness and sensitivity training, and strengthening MGRM's capacity and presence in the community.

4. Nomination & Presentation of the Candidates

Appointment of Co-coordinator

CFB nominated Cynthia Chircop as co-coordinator, seconded by JG.

No objections.

Approved.

Appointment of Co-coordinator

KFG nominated Mohammed Ali Aguerbi as co-coordinator, seconded by

CC.

No objections.

Approved.

Appointment of Treasurer

JG nominated Amanda Cossai as treasurer, seconded by CC.

No objections.

Approved.

Appointment of Administrator

MH nominated Kirsty Farrugia as administrator, seconded by JG.

No objections.

Approved.

Appointment of committee member

MA nominated Joe Grima as committee member, seconded by CC.

No objections.

Approved.

Appointment of committee member

AmC nominated Julian Chircop as committee member, seconded by JG.

No objections.

Approved.

Appointment of committee member

CC nominated Mark Harwood as committee member, seconded by JG.
No objections.
Approved.

Appointment of committee member

CC nominated Colette Farrugia Bennett as committee member, seconded by JG.
No objections.
Approved.

Appointment of committee member

CFB nominated Fredrick Bartolo Parnis as committee member, seconded by CC.
No objections.
Approved.

5. Appointment of Accountant

Cynthia Chircop nominated Bernard Mallia and Justin Vassallo, seconded by AC.
No objections.
Approved.

6. Appointment of Lawyer

CC nominated Dr Neil Falzon, seconded by AmC.
No objections.
Approved.

7. Motions

JG suggested that the legal process is initiated for MGRM to be given a legal personality during 2023. CFB and FBP asked what this would entail, and JG summarised the process by explaining that this would mean that MGRM would be registered with the Malta Business Registry. Dr Neil Falzon had suggested an external lawyer specialised in these matters. Members agreed with this course of action.

Members thanked the chair, and the meeting was adjourned.