

## International Youth Day

It is a saying that we have heard many times over and one which continues to ring true: Children are the future of our nation. Indeed, they are. It is for this reason that they must be involved in nation building, if we are to ensure that they have a bright future ahead of them. This requires first raising awareness and secondly, engaging them in order to sustain developmental goals. This must also specifically include the type of society we should aim to evolve, where all enjoy equality of opportunity and harmonious living.

The records at the Equal Opportunity Commission (EOC) show that youth are generally not aware of the EOC and their rights that are protected in the Equal Opportunity Act (the Act). The EOC conducted a nationwide perception survey in 2017 and the results showed that of the respondents, only 14.74% of persons between the ages of 18 and 34 heard about the EOC. Consequently, this survey also revealed that young people perceive that they experience more discrimination than the older surveyed groups.

This data is significant if we are to consider that the categories covered by the Act include and impact young people. The four categories covered by the Act are education, employment, provision of goods and services and provision of accommodation. It is critical that students and young professionals understand their rights and their avenues for redress.

Further, of the complaints lodged at the EOC over the last five (5) years (2017-2022), only six (6) persons under the age of 18 years lodged a complaint. It should be noted that while persons under the age of 18 are unable to lodge complaints on their own, their parent or guardian can lodge complaints on their behalf.

Since the publication of the nationwide perception survey in 2017, the EOC has been working diligently on its public education efforts and have sought to engage youth over the years to ensure that they are aware of their rights so that they can be empowered to exercise them. Social media and digital communication form a critical part of the public education machinery and various initiatives geared towards young people such as school open days, the nationwide community outreach caravan and partnerships with stakeholders with a youth base.

The EOC is endeavouring to conduct another nationwide perception survey in 2024 and it is our fervent hope that there is a marked improvement in the statistical data as it relates to youth, based on the EOC's efforts to educate the populace.

As we commemorate International Youth Day, our youth should be encouraged to be proactive and take ownership of your skillset and your ability to seek knowledge through the government and community organisations to protect your rights. The EOC has prepared and published guidelines for the avoidance of discrimination. They can be found on the EOC's website and social media. Youth with its constant use of the internet can gain valuable knowledge and insight with these online tools.

Talk with your friends and family. There is a saying: see something, say something. Just because you are a young person does not mean that you do not have a voice or rights. Speak to your friends

if you witness them discriminating against someone else and influence them to do better. Speak to your parent, guardian or teacher if you have been experiencing discrimination and need support.

Community organisations associated with or who represent youth can request guidance from EOC regarding inclusive policies to protect their members. EOC also provides guidance and inclusivity training to organisations regarding their policies on equality and equity, respect for diversity and social inclusion.

The EOC is mandated to work towards the elimination of discrimination and the promotion of equality of opportunity has a critical role to play in the national development process and in helping Trinidad and Tobago contribute to the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs) for youth.

To lodge a complaint: Visit the EOC's website, [www.equalopportunity.gov.tt](http://www.equalopportunity.gov.tt) and go to the lodge a complaint tab. You can also send an e-mail to [complaints@eoc.gov.tt](mailto:complaints@eoc.gov.tt). The EOC investigates all complaints and provides conciliation. All services provided by the EOC, up until the stage of conciliation, are free of charge.