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For equality in the workplace to be safeguarded, providing equal opportunities to everyone is imperative

European Equal Pay Day – why is it important?

Employers have the obligation to safeguard equal treatment including in the pay, perks and allowances they offer or negotiate with their employees.

When employers make a difference between men's and women's hourly earnings for doing work of equal value, they are contributing to widen the gender pay gap, which is a form of gender discrimination and hence illegal.

In order to continue raising awareness of the existence of this difference in men's and women's salary packages, the European Commission launched a European Equal Pay Day which became an annual event across Europe. Its date, which varies every year depending on the average EU gender pay gap, marks the day up to which women need to work in order to earn the same salary as men during a full year of work. This year, the European Equal Pay Day falls on February 28. In other words, this date marks the EU average extra number of days in 2013 that women must work to match the amount of money earned by men in 2012.

According to Eurostat statistics, in the 27 EU countries, a 16.2% gender pay gap was registered in 2010. During the same year, the gender pay gap in Malta was 13.4%. These figures reflect discrimination, inequality and specific life choices in the workforce.

There are a number of complex and often interrelated factors that explain

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the existence of the gender pay gap. One of the main causes for the gender pay gap is the way women's competences are valued compared to men's. Jobs requiring similar skills, qualifications or experience tend to be poorly paid and undervalued when they are dominated by women. In addition, the evaluation of performance, and hence pay level

and career progression, may also be biased in favour of men.

Another factor that leads to the gender pay gap involves traditions and stereotypes which may influence, for example, the choice of educational paths and, consequently, professional careers that girls and women make. Because of these traditions and stereotypes, women are expected to reduce their working hours or exit the labour market to carry out child or elderly care. In fact, family and care responsibilities are still not equally shared, since generally the task of looking after dependent family members is borne by women.

Why is it important to tackle the gender pay gap? Besides helping to create a more equal society, closing the gender pay gap is vital for the creation of quality jobs and for greater profitability to the economy as a whole. Another reason to tackle the gender pay gap is that it promotes social justice and equal opportunities. By increasing women's earnings throughout the lifecycle, the risk of falling into poverty will be reduced.

The Equality Mark initiative which is being carried out by the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCEPE) helps to tackle the gender pay gap in entities or organisations. The Equality Mark is awarded to companies or organisations which prove that they are gender-equal in the opportunities they offer. NCEPE is meeting these entities, where various work practices are evaluated, including

comparing different pay slips for male and female employees who are holding the same positions and assessing if they provide equal pay for work of equal value.

Persons who believe they are victims of discrimination on the basis of their gender because of a difference in pay for the same work or work of equal value, can lodge a complaint with NCEPE or other competent authorities.

Although NCEPE constantly raises awareness in this regard, further awareness raising remains crucial among employees and the general public to know their rights and obligations and find it easier to speak out when they feel discriminated against. NCEPE also offers training to companies' management and staff to foster gender equality at the place of work. Those companies which are interested in training or reviewing/implementing policies in relation to equal treatment should contact NCEPE for further information on tel: 2590-3850, by email: equality@gov.mt or visit the website: www.equality@gov.mt

The gender pay gap... What can be done?

- value women's and men's work equally
- address segregation in the labour market
- tackle gender stereotypes
- promote the reconciliation of family and work life
- safeguard a workplace culture of equality