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The Global Gender Gap Report, comparing the situation of women in 2014 with that in 2013 in four particular areas of concern, included eight new countries in the Index. Five of these countries were placed above Malta's position and therefore Malta moved down the ranks.

It is important to note that the Global Gender Gap report does not take into consideration other important factors in women's lives such as forced marriages, rapes, infant mortality rates and standards of women's health. This may put countries like Zimbabwe, Senegal, Kenya and Uganda ahead of Malta, but it suffices to say that all these countries also rank among the worst in the world when it comes to human rights violations in contrast to Malta's high standing in this sphere.

In this context, it is important to analyse the index in the framework of the developments that have been registered on the national level.

The number of women in employment has increased from 66,500 (December 2013) to 67,328 (June 2014). This welcome increase had the side-effect of raising the percentage of women in low-paid jobs as their main occupation. For instance, women working as 'Service and Sales Workers' went up from 27.8%, of the total number of female workers, to 29.4%. This increase could in fact have lowered the average of the wage earned by women in employment as reported in the said report with regard to Malta's score under the '*estimated earned income*'. While showing a positive trend towards more female participation in employment, it also indicates that the problem of a gender segregated labour market persists. However, this increase in women's employment is also producing a positive effect, in the gainfully occupied population, where the rate of female full-time employment has increased by 5.8% over 2013 levels (NSO, June 2014).

A higher score was reported on enrolment in secondary education in Malta with a stable score in the areas of literacy and enrolment in primary and tertiary education.

Malta also registered stable scoring in the sex ratio at birth (female/male) but obtained less points on the '*healthy life expectancy*'. In this case, there needs to be further study of the sources of the 2014 report since the data upon which this score is based (World Health Organisation database) provides figures up to 2012.

While the number of women ministers in the period under review remained two, there was a higher total number of ministers in 2013, automatically lowering the percentage of female ministers for that year. On the other hand, an increase was scored on the "years with female Head of State" with a stable score on women in parliament. Malta has also registered a noteworthy increase in the gender representation among members in the EU Parliament in May 2014. Currently 66% of Maltese MEPs are women.

In view of the fact that caring responsibilities may have an impact on the participation and progression of women and men within the labour market and in leadership positions, NCPE recognises the importance of measures such as free child care which enhances equality of opportunity to persons with caring responsibilities in the labour market which were introduced in April for children of parents who are in employment or who are studying. This is a measure which is gaining momentum and is yielding benefits both for the working parents and the economy.

The opening of the Breakfast Club programme, which is free of charge, for state primary schools with the aim of establishing more services and structures that support working parents, together with summer school for primary school children which was integrated with *Klabb 3-16*, are other initiatives which enhance equality of opportunity to persons with caring responsibilities offering further flexibility for working parents.

The National Commission for the Promotion of Equality is currently working on a number of initiatives to support gender balance in the political and decision making spheres. The Directory of Professional Women is being set up to enable the easy identification of qualified women in the various fields; a mentoring programme will be started to support women aspiring to hold decision-making positions and a research study will be initiated to shed more light on this subject matter. Moreover, two research studies are also in hand – one on the gender-balanced representation in decision making in various fields and another on gender quotas and related measures.

Furthermore, as part of this process, a Conference was organised some days ago to raise awareness on the need of higher participation of women in the political sphere. This event brought together representatives from political parties, Members of Parliament, policy-makers and academics, as well as representatives from civil society and the media. This Conference was organised by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), in partnership with the House of Representatives, the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE) and the National Council of Women. Experts from Malta, UK, Sweden and Czech Republic also shared experiences and good practices from their own countries.

Progress in this area of policy is not registered overnight. NCPE looks forward to better positioning as a result of the recent various measures that have been put in place as well as of others that are underway.

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