

Addressing gender imbalance in top decision-making posts

The online Directory of Professional Women, launched last year, aims to give visibility to qualified women in various sectors of the economy. NCPE Commissioner RENEÉ LAIVIERA tells Stephanie Fsadni more about its scope.

Over 200 women have registered with the Directory of Professional Women since its launch last year. However, there are surely more qualified women in the workforce who deserve to be listed, according to the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality.

The directory forms part of NCPE's 2015 project 'Gender Balance in Decision Making'. According to the latest statistics, women occupy a mere 2.1 per cent of senior positions.

Only 2.8 per cent of board members in large listed companies are women – the majority of whom are appointed as secretaries; just 24.5 per cent of managers are female and only 13 per cent of parliamentary members are women. As regards the judiciary, women make up 23 per cent, this owing to the recent appointment of more female magistrates.

These figures jar with the fact that more females than males have graduated from university in the past 10 years.

"This precious human resource is not being tapped," says NCPE commissioner Renee Laiviera.

"The government spends substantially on education and it only makes sense for us to use these resources"

"The government spends substantially on education and it only makes sense for us to use these resources efficiently."

This directory aims to give visibility to women who are competent in various fields and who might not be that well known.

"One often tends to look for people in their social or professional circle, who were perhaps with them at school or university, or like-minded people."

"This directory can help employers and other decision-makers like politicians or voluntary organisations to find other and perhaps more qualified professionals for their committees and boards."

Laiviera is certain that the presence of more women could lead to more constructive discussions and better informed decisions because women could present more varied opinions on any particular issue at stake.

"Such decisions could affect society in the most efficient way possible. Thus, by involving more women, one would be giving a

The NCPE home page where one finds the Directory of Professional Women. Searching for qualified women in the various sectors of the economy is easy.

better service to the community at large," she says.

"Thus it's not only a matter of figures, but there is an actual need for the participation of more professional women in top posts."

The online directory could also help women take a more active role in politics, by, for example, their participation in political debates.

So far, 233 women are registered on the directory. The eligibility criteria are: a minimum of five years' experience in a decision-making/management position and/or 10 years specialised expertise in a particular field or fields.

Some complained to the Commission that these criteria are too restrictive, but the NCPE wanted to make sure that "only very valid professional people" are featured on the directory.

The directory is easy to use. One must log on to www.ncpe.gov.mt

and click on the Directory of Professional Women tab on the home page. A drop down menu appears and one can click on 'search' to look up an area and a sub-area of expertise. A list of professional women in that particular field will then pop up. One can contact the said professionals through NCPE.

A simple search will reveal that there are professional Maltese women in all kinds of sectors.

"Some might think that Maltese women do not have experience in a particular area, for example, the economy, but if you then look up the sector on the directory, you will realise there are," points out Laiviera.

Registering is also a simple process and does not take much time, assures Laiviera.

When asked if there were scope for this directory in the age of LinkedIn, Laiviera said that it's yet another tool but that this directory is more structured than LinkedIn.

As part of the same project, the Commission held a mentoring programme, the objectives of which were to provide professional training and mentoring sessions to women who aspire to hold decision-making positions.

The feedback was very encouraging and after a long selection and matching process, 30 trainees were mentored by 30 of the

140 professionals who applied for the programme.

These mentoring sessions, spread over a year, supported participants in their educational and career development. Mentors helped them identify their own strengths and weaknesses, and showed them how they could improve their work-life balance. These sessions also helped mentees reflect on their career paths.

"Some of the participants eventually got promoted at their workplace or changed jobs. Mentorship is a very useful form of training and organisations should assign individuals to act as mentors," recommends Laiviera.