



MIND THE GAP

WHOEVER SAID THAT FEMINISM IS NOT REQUIRED ANY LONGER, IS CLEARLY UNAWARE OF THE DISCREPANCIES BETWEEN THE WAGES OFFERED TO MEN AND THOSE OFFERED TO WOMEN, FOR DOING THE SAME JOBS. **JOHNATHAN CILIA** FINDS OUT WHY THE GENDER GAP REMAINS A REALITY. ►

All around the world, more and more women are taking a stronger, more active part within the workforce, and the results are finally starting to show. As of 2017, women make up 40 per cent of the labour force in over 80 countries, globally. While some countries, like India, have a worryingly low level of working women, Malta has been making headway in this area.

Women made up 57 per cent of University graduates in 2016, and 5.9 per cent more women have found jobs this year than in 2014. While the economy booms, more opportunities are being made for women to find decent employment.

However, like many countries, Malta faces a problem that stems from traditional power structures in society. While things might slowly be changing, it is still more common to hear of a 'housewife' than a 'househusband' – and it is still more common to see a practicing male engineer than a female engineer.

All of these things contribute to the gender pay gap.

"The gender pay gap is the difference between women's and men's earnings, expressed as a percentage of men's earnings," explains Renee Laiviera, Commissioner of the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality. "This mainly shows that women earn less over their lifetimes when compared to men, resulting in lower income during their lifecycle and lower pensions in old age."

A gender pay gap results from pay inequality, when there are two people working in the same or similar jobs who are not paid equally solely due to their gender. This is a form of discrimination between women and men, and is actually illegal under Maltese law.

Unfortunately, the gender pay gap is a reality across the EU, including in Malta, even though women may be seen to be doing better than men in their educational achievements.

While women might be graduating in higher numbers, one major reason there a gender pay gap in the first place is because of the tendency for people to go with a career that is stereotypical of their gender. To put it simpler, men become scientists, engineers, and mathematicians whereas women go into areas like health and education.

These gender-stereotypical career paths lead to very different wages.

"There are complex and, in some instances, overlapping causes that lead to the gender pay gap," says Ms Laiviera. "Women are more likely to be concentrated in jobs that offer narrower scope for financial reward when compared to men who are more likely to work in highly-paid sectors. This depends on the fields of study women and men choose, as these are commonly influenced by stereotypes and traditions associated with their roles in society." ▶





These stereotypes and traditions also impact the working patterns adopted by women and men, leading women to work part-time or to take time out of the labour market to look after the family more often than men. This has an impact on their opportunities for training and career advancement, thus affecting their earnings.

"Another cause is the way women's competences and skills are valued when compared to men's," continues Ms Laiviera. "Jobs requiring similar skills, qualifications or experience tend to be poorly paid and undervalued when they are dominated by women. In addition, women also continue to be under-represented at top-level positions."

Only about 30 per cent of management roles in Malta are held by women. And, as the loss of Hillary Clinton in last year's US Presidential election showed, there is still fierce opposition from some sectors to having a woman in charge, regardless of her experience and competence.

Not only are women underrepresented in management positions but, in 2014, the average hourly pay of women in Malta was 10.6 per cent lower than that of men.

To combat this growing trend in Malta, the NCPE has started the PayM€qually campaign to raise further awareness on the gender pay gap in Malta.

"This campaign is in line with the European Equal Pay Day established by the European Commission to raise awareness on the

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gender pay gap that is a concern for most of the EU member states," says Ms Laiviera.

"In light of this, the NCPE is participating in TV and radio programmes and publishing articles on the topic. The hashtag #PayM€qually is being used for regular posts on NCPE's Facebook page that include infographics, video-clips and quotes of renowned personalities," she says.

Through the PayM€qually campaign, the NCPE is emphasising that equal pay for work of equal value between women and men needs to be safeguarded, not only because these principles are enshrined in the Constitution of Malta, but also to enhance equal opportunities for women and men, and to ensure that all employees and employers can reap the benefits of equal pay.

There are different measures that can be taken by different stakeholders to address the gender pay gap.

Through payroll transparency, employees are able to request information on pay levels to ensure that they can make sense of ►



their earnings and those of their colleagues, minimising any suspicions of discrimination, favouritism and general unfairness.

Another measure is to utilise gender-neutral job evaluation schemes that provide a basis for grading and a pay structure, as well as a means to check and demonstrate that a company is providing equal pay for equal work. The aim is to evaluate the job, not the jobholder, and to provide a way of assessing the demands of a job that is free from gender bias and as objective as possible.

"The NCPE encourages organisations to adopt an Equality Policy that ensures equal terms and conditions offered to women and men in the same grade and in the same type of employment or doing work of equal value," points out Ms Laiviera. "This is crucial to affirm a company's commitment to equal pay. Such an Equality Policy is also a prerequisite for organisations that apply for NCPE's Equality Mark."

The NCPE awards the Equality Mark to organisations that have shown their commitment towards gender equality, including equality in recruitment and working conditions such as equal pay for work of equal value. The NCPE provides the necessary assistance to organisations to strengthen their policies and practices in this regard.

"We also encourage employees who deem that they are getting unequal pay to report their case to the relevant authorities. The NCPE is empowered to investigate such cases and we do encourage employees to lodge a complaint so it can be investigated and, if necessary, acted up," says Ms Laiviera.

Campaigns like PayMEqually are just one way we can combat pay discrimination in Malta. This is something that potentially affects every working woman you know – indeed, every working woman in the country.

There is need for a better balance in the amount of men and women choosing certain career paths, and for companies to commit to equal pay for their employees at the same scale. Until this, this is one more area in society that will remain unjust and unequal.

You can contact NCPE on 2590 3850, or via email at equality@govmt or on Facebook. 



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