

Reshaping the future – women and girls in technology

“Women will be the centre of the government’s vision to ensure economic growth...and not because they are women but because women can contribute more towards economic success”¹

This was announced by Prime Minister Robert Abela during a special Cabinet meeting held on the 11th August 2020, when he presented a new economic vision for the country. During the meeting Prime Minister said that he wanted to see more competent women come forward and give their own perspectives, especially in technological subjects.²

This situation is developing in a context where globally, only 35% of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) students in higher education are women.³ Furthermore, in the EU, only 17% of ICT specialists are women, whilst “women working in ICT earn almost 20% less than men do.”⁴ Indeed, in Malta, female academics who pursue their careers in STEM sectors stand at 28%, whereas male academics stand at 72%.⁵

Technological advances including artificial intelligence and machine learning, the Internet of things, automation and robotics are expected to create massive changes across all spheres of life.⁶ In effect, technology in its various forms continues to redefine and revolutionize the way individuals live and work.

A thematic analysis on women in the changing world of work, which is undergoing rapid and deep transformations, was published in the report⁶ of the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls within the United Nations Human Rights Council. This analysis looks

¹ <https://www.independent.com.mt/articles/2020-08-11/local-news/PM-presents-new-economic-vision-No-point-in-economic-growth-if-society-isn-t-living-a-better-life-6736226016>

² <https://www.independent.com.mt/articles/2020-08-11/local-news/PM-presents-new-economic-vision-No-point-in-economic-growth-if-society-isn-t-living-a-better-life-6736226016>

³ <https://en.unesco.org/stemed>

⁴ <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/women-digital>

⁵ https://www.um.edu.mt/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/380219/Graduates17-18.pdf

⁶ Report of the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls - Human Rights Council
https://undocs.org/A/HRC/44/51?utm_source=Unknown+List&utm_campaign=10250d60a3-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2020_07_06_11_27&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_-10250d60a3-&utm_source=Unknown+List&utm_campaign=10250d60a3-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2020_07_06_11_27&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_-10250d60a3-&utm_source=Unknown+List&utm_campaign=10250d60a3-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2020_07_06_11_27&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_-10250d60a3-

at how such technological changes present new opportunities and challenges for women's human rights at work.

The report outlines some of the opportunities to harness technology in order to advance gender equality and women's rights to work and at work. Indeed, the proliferation of digital platforms and other changes associated with the digital revolution may create new possibilities to support women's employment, including more flexible work arrangements which will better enable them to balance paid work with unpaid care work.

Nevertheless, in the same context, women are at greater risk of potential replacement by robots and artificial intelligence. In fact, the data for the global North shows that women have a 13% higher chance than men of being in occupations and sectors that involve more routine tasks, thus leading to greater economic inequality for women, with the most vulnerable groups of women being most affected.

Moreover, gender stereotypes and discrimination in education limit young girls' aspirations for careers in these areas. In order to challenge the realities in the technological sector, the Working Group recommends that States establish measures such as quotas and targets to increase women and girls' participation in STEM, provide targeted programmes for women's training and reskilling for occupations and industries that are at risk of automation, and introduce specific measures to increase men's participation in female dominated sectors and women's participation in male-dominated areas.

To ensure equal opportunities for all individuals in society, the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE) works to safeguard gender equality and provides training to different groups of women and men as well as girls and boys on gender stereotypes and their negative effects on people's lives.

Furthermore, the NCPE is empowered by Chapter 456 of the Laws of Malta to investigate complaints of alleged discrimination on the grounds of sex/gender and family responsibilities, sexual orientation and gender identity in employment, education and vocational training as well as by banks and financial institutions and provides the necessary assistance and information in the compilation of a complaint.



As António Guterres, the UN Secretary-General, said on the *International Day of Women and Girls in Science*, “to rise to the challenges of the 21st century, we need to harness our full potential. That requires dismantling gender stereotypes.”⁷

The National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE) can be contacted on: 2295 7850 or equality@gov.mt or our Facebook page.

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⁷ <https://www.un.org/en/observances/women-and-girls-in-science-day>