

Now is the time to empower girls

More than ever, girls' voices are rising. We are witnessing young women as agents of positive change, organizing and leading global movements. [Fridays for the Future](#), which seeks to tackle climate change and the [#MeToo movement](#) against sexual violence and harassment, are showing the power of girls as changemakers.

With this year's United Nations theme, 'Our time is now – our rights, our future,' we commemorate the 10th anniversary of the [International Day of the Girl Child](#). This theme calls for greater attention, investment, and action on strengthening services for girls at all times, particularly during crisis response and recovery, promoting girls in leading positions and providing resources that support girls' education and well-being.

Over the past years, various initiatives were undertaken in Malta to address the underrepresentation of women and girls in employment and in decision-making positions. Such initiatives include free childcare services, breakfast club, Klabb 3-16 afterschool programme, in-work benefit scheme, family-friendly measures, flexible work arrangements, and the gender corrective mechanism, amongst others.

Despite these initiatives, and despite gains in gender equality, *"indicators show that the [girl child](#) is discriminated against from the earliest stages of life, through her childhood and into adulthood"*.

Around [30% of women](#) worldwide aged 15 years and older have been subjected to physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence, non-partner sexual violence, or both at least once in their life. Moreover, [12% of 15-year old girls](#) have been cyberbullied by messages at least once compared to 7% of boys, which consequently hinder girls from feeling comfortable using [digital tools](#).

Gender segregation is still a powerful social phenomenon, mostly evident in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). In fact, in Malta, only 10.3% of female graduates [choose to pursue a career in STEM](#), compared to 32.5% of male graduates.

The underrepresentation of women and girls is not limited to STEM subjects, since women continue to be underrepresented at all levels of political leadership. This is because girls are less likely to be encouraged to learn about and participate in society's social, political, and economic functioning, resulting in not being given the same opportunities as boys to participate in decision-making processes.

All barriers must therefore be eliminated to enable girls to reach their full potential. In this context, putting an end to all forms of discrimination against the girl child has been highly placed on the international agenda. Indeed, in 1995, the adoption of the [Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action](#), became *“the most comprehensive policy agenda for gender equality”*, which upholds the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). The CEDAW entered into force in 1981, and *“set an international standard for what was meant by equality between women and men”*.

On a national level, the [National Commission for the Promotion of Equality \(NCPE\)](#) works to promote gender equality. The NCPE is empowered to investigate complaints of alleged discrimination on the grounds of sex/gender and family responsibilities in employment, education and vocational training, by banks and financial institutions as well as in the provision of goods and services.

Moreover, the NCPE works to safeguard gender equality by creating awareness-raising campaigns and providing training to different groups of women and men on challenging and addressing gender stereotypes.

On the International Day of the Girl Child, let's recognize the challenges girls are facing in today's world. Now is the time to empower girls to embrace their rights!

The [National Commission for the Promotion of Equality \(NCPE\)](#) can be contacted on: 2276 8200 or equality@gov.mt or our Facebook page.

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