

Press Release

NCPE's reaction to media reports quoting a study published by MBB on the economic impact of an extended maternity leave

The National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE) acknowledges the importance of a reasonable extension, of up to 18-week maternity leave, through an adequate implementation period. NCPE is reacting to media reports quoting a study published this week by the Malta Business Bureau (MBB). This study analyses the economic impact of an extended paid maternity leave of 20 weeks as proposed by the EU.

NCPE deems that the economic implications of such measures cannot be taken in isolation. Furthermore, current legislation and potential future maternity leave entitlement, as well as any other measure related to family responsibilities shall not be utilised as a deterrent in establishing employability and wages of individuals. Hence, it would be unlawful to consider family responsibilities as a determining factor in recruitment and employment, given that this is already safeguarded through current gender National legislation, and that respective discriminatory practices may also be investigated by NCPE.

The social impact of such measures needs be taken into account for the benefit of both the family and society. This is important especially in light of a decreasing birth rate, and other challenges related to the family. Besides, studies also demonstrate that flexible working arrangements boost productivity and enhance employee satisfaction, hence strengthening accessibility for such family-friendly measures is a dire need.

Currently, the maternity leave measure entitles full-time women employees for 14 weeks of paid leave of which six weeks are to be availed of compulsorily after confinement. On the other hand, fathers working in the public administration are entitled to paternity leave consisting of two working days paid leave, to be taken within 15 days on the occasion of the birth of their child. There is also the possibility for parents, including adoptive parents, to request parental leave to take care of each of their children under the age of eight. In effect, parents working in the public administration can avail themselves of one year unpaid leave, and parents within the private sector can avail themselves of three months unpaid parental leave each (non-transferable). Further measures may exist depending on respective organisation collective agreements and working arrangements.

The purpose of the extension of maternity leave is to enhance the health and safety of pregnant women, women who have recently given birth, as well as their babies. In light of this discussion it is important to also clarify the distinction between maternity leave and other leave provisions. Parental leave is important since it safeguards the accessibility for parents to equality of opportunity, and their active participation in family life and responsibilities, as well as in employment. Indeed, parental leave facilitates the reconciliation of professional and private lives for parents. Work-life balance is essential in order to secure the opportunity to parents to actively care for their children or other dependant family members. Moreover, these measures also enhance equality of opportunity to participate in employment, considering that the employment figure for women in Malta is about 38 per cent. Therefore, continuous is the need for parents to have equal opportunities at the place of work. Increased

participation in the labour market requires also substantial attention in the economic calculations.

NCPE reiterates the need that such family-friendly measures are to be complemented by adequate support structures, including childcare facilities and the possibility of other family-friendly measures, including telework. NCPE acknowledges the importance of these family-friendly measures and of such facilities so as to assist parents in their responsibilities, and also to enable them to remain or enter the labour market.

NCPE offers assistance to employers and employees for any difficulties in accessing and/or managing family-friendly measures, as well as to the general public or entities in any other matter related to equal treatment. NCPE can be reached on 25903850 or equality@gov.mt

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