



PRESS STATEMENT:

Prepare the Ground for Economic Independence

Equal economic independence for women and men is a prerequisite for gender equality. In this context the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE) launched a set of initiatives to address the gender gaps over the life course that hinder women's economic independence through the two-year project *Prepare the Ground for Economic Independence* (PGEI).

The Conference was opened by Minister for European Affairs and Equality Hon. Dr Helena Dalli during which she remarked that equal economic independence for women and men, not only strengthens gender equality, but it also boosts the country's economic growth, prosperity and competitiveness.

Minister Dalli asserted that equal economic independence can generally be achieved through equal access to, and control over, economic resources and opportunities, and equal access to employment. Therefore, various measures such as the free childcare services, the Breakfast Club, the Klabb 3-16, and the maternity leave trust empowered more women to enter or remain in the labour market with a significant increase of 12.3% in the female employment rate in the last five years.

Alongside an enhanced participation in employment, Minister Dalli referred to the Government's commitment to ensure that 'equal pay for work of equal value' is safeguarded in practice through an appropriate structure that will be set up in the Department for Industrial and Employment Relations to compile the necessary information and investigate complaints of unequal pay.





In light of this, Minister Dalli commended the project that will seek to empower more stakeholders to foster equal opportunities to mitigate the gender gaps in pay and pensions.

In her address, NCPE Commissioner Renee Laiviera remarked that the gender pay gap does not only weaken the economic independence of women while in employment, but that inequalities tend to accumulate with age translating into a significant gap in pensions at retirement age. In effect, women in Malta are at a higher risk of poverty or social exclusion than men across the life course, with such risk increasing in old age.

Ms Laiviera provided an overview of the current situation in Malta with regards to gender inequalities related to economic independence that lead to the gender pay gap, including gender segregation in education and the labour market; the unequal sharing of caring responsibilities that tend to impact negatively women's careers; underrepresentation of women in decision-making positions; and the undervaluing of jobs in sectors dominated by women.

In view of this, Ms Laiviera pointed out that the project launched today will address inequalities throughout the life course, including raising awareness on the gendered patterns in education, supporting women to remain in quality employment and strengthening equal economic independence.

Ms Annalise Frantz, NCPE Senior Executive (Projects), gave an overview of the activities that will be carried out. Particularly, NCPE will enhance the Equality Mark, which is awarded to companies/organisations that make gender equality one of their core values, by developing a tool for the auditing of equal pay.





In order to disseminate further information with different stakeholders, NCPE will launch information campaigns on the gender pay gap and on gender pension gap respectively, and will carry out consultation sessions with union representatives on equal pay for women and men. A train-the-trainers course will be delivered to career advisors, career guidance teachers and guidance teachers to empower young students to make wise choices in school subjects.

The project will include two research studies on: successful European Equal Pay tools in order to develop a similar tool that is suitable for Malta's labour market and tailor-made for the Equality Mark certification process; and another on how European Trade Unions address the monitoring of equal pay for women and men during collective agreement negotiations in order to share this knowledge with local trade unions.

The project, *Preparing the Grounds for Economic Independence*, is co-financed by the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme 2014-2020.

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