

Press statement by the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality

NCPE's International Women's Day Conference 2019

Women in Malta account for 29% of all managers. The causes of this underrepresentation are various and include inequalities in opportunities between women and men in career advancement. On the occasion of the International Women's Day, the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE) created a forum for further discussion to highlight a way forward during the Conference "*Avvanz fil-karriera: Opportunitajiet ugwali?*" (Career Advancement: Equal Opportunities?).

International Women's day is a celebration of the accomplishments of women and the work done by various stakeholders around the globe to secure women's rights. It is also a day when society reflects on the remaining challenges that need to be addressed to empower many women whose full potential is not being realised because of societal barriers and discrimination.

In her opening address, Minister for European Affairs and Equality Dr Helena Dalli held that despite the progress achieved in various spheres of governance, such as in employment and education, various obstacles still hinder gender balance in decision-making positions. Minister Dalli highlighted the key measures implemented by the Government to sustain the social and economic empowerment of all women, such as the provision of free childcare services, the Klabb 3-16 after school programme, the breakfast club, and the Maternity Leave Trust.

Such measures have resulted in a substantial spike in the employment rate of women, which has increased by a record 15.8% between 2013 and 2018¹. Nonetheless, an enhanced commitment is required to promote equal sharing of caring responsibilities between women and men in line with the objectives of the proposed directive on work-life balance. In conclusion, Minister Dalli reiterated the Government's commitment to safeguard equal pay for equal work and to curb the gender pay gap, which not only impinges on women's financial independence, both at working and retirement age.

NCPE Commissioner Renee Laiviera provided an overview of the situation in Malta with regard to career advancement. In spite of the increasing participation of women in the labour market and their positive attainment in education, gender gaps are still evident in employment, in decision-making positions particularly as managers and on company boards, in pay, as well as in carrying out unpaid care work. Commissioner Laiviera stressed that this glass ceiling is preventing women from rising to the top jobs also due to prevailing traditional stereotypes and discrimination. Ms Laiviera described the initiatives carried out by the NCPE to strengthen equal opportunities, including initiatives which will address the gender gaps over the life cycle as part of the project *Prepare the Ground for Economic Independence*; the Directory of Professional women that enhances the visibility of profiles of professional women from various fields and backgrounds; and the Equality Mark which is awarded to public and private entities and companies.

Senior Lecturer Dr JosAnn Cutajar gave a presentation on the meaning of the gender pay gap, its causes and how the gender pay gap varies between different sectors particularly in decision-making positions. Professor Godfrey A. Pirota analysed equal opportunities in the reconciliation of work and family life in relation to career advancement; addressing the importance of measures that facilitate

¹ NSO, Labour Force Survey. Difference between Q3/2018 and Q3/2013.

work-life balance and how these can positively and negatively impact career advancement. The measures proposed in the new Work-Life Balance Directive were presented alongside recommendations for the way forward.

Personal achievements in career advancement were discussed with panel members hailing from different backgrounds, moderated by Mr Mario Mallia, analysing the difficulties and successes of women and men and what needs to be done to strengthen the gender balance in these positions. Moreover, another panel of NGOs and social partners, moderated by Ms Claudine Cassar, explained their role and work towards the achievement of gender balance in decision-making positions at the workplace, and how they address related issues such as the reconciliation with family responsibilities and the gender pay gap.

This conference was an opportunity to further analyse, with the different stakeholders, the challenges that still need to be addressed to ensure a level playing field for the career advancement of both women and men. The NCPE will take on board the issues raised by all stakeholders in order to strengthen its work and highlight the remaining barriers in this sector.

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