

NCPE Annual Conference

Communicating with different audiences through the execution of a widespread communication action plan was one of the achieved objectives of the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE) FOR 2018. This work as well as the rise of audits of Equality Mark applications, alongside the new set of initiatives to address the gender gap throughout the life cycle were the main highlights of NCPE's 15th Annual Conference which took place on 4th June.

In her address, the Minister for European Affairs and Equality, Dr Helena Dalli congratulated the NCPE for the work undertaken during the past 15 years to promote equality and address discrimination within Maltese society. Dr Dalli explained how the government's commitment translated into various initiatives to strengthen equality for everyone, particularly those initiatives to facilitate the reconciliation of work and family life and enhance equal economic independence for women and men, the latest being the introduction of the option for married couples or partners (registered as such under civil union) to file separate tax returns and hold separate tax accounts. Such measures contributed to a significant increase of 15.8% in the female employment rate between 2013 and 2018.

Minister Dalli also highlighted the reform that seeks to increase the participation of women in politics through various positive measures which will eventually ensure gender balance in Parliament. Concluding, Minister Dalli recognised the important role of the NCPE in safeguarding equality and reiterated the government's commitment towards the establishment of a National Human Rights and Equality Commission with a stronger remit and widened powers.

NCPE Commissioner Renee Laiviera gave an overview of NCPE's work in 2018, highlighting the progress achieved and the remaining challenges towards enhancing equality in specific areas, including the representation of women and men in employment and decision-making positions. Despite a steady increase of women in employment, there is still a gender gap in employment, gender segregation and the gender pay gap that inhibit equality at the workplace. Stereotypes on the roles of women and men still prevail and this is manifested by the high number of women who make use of family-friendly measures in public administration, which can have implications on their career advancement. Moreover, gender segregation in education is very visible with women being prominent in courses such as Education and Health Sciences, whilst males in Engineering and ICT that in turn is reflected in the segregation of the labour market.

During the conference, 10 new companies were awarded the Equality Mark certification and 31 companies were recertified as a confirmation of their commitment towards equality in the policies and practices at the workplace. In total there are currently 91 entities with the Equality Mark award employing more than 21,600 employees in equality certified conditions.

Ms Laiviera explained NCPE's role to investigate cases of alleged discrimination. In 2018, 37 complaints were investigated on specific spheres, 9 of them being ex-officio. In total, last year 19 cases were finalised. Ms Laiviera reiterated how these investigations give NCPE the chance to identify and address issues that obstruct equality in everyday life.

NCPE staff members gave a brief presentation of their 2018 work. Particularly, NCPE continued to disseminate information on rights and responsibilities related to equality through training to 940 participants in different sectors, and an enhanced commitment towards communications through different means including articles and press statements in the printed media, participation in TV and radio programmes, posts on social media, events and conferences. NCPE also seeks to mainstream



equality through its policy work, mainly by reviewing and contributing to the development of national and international policies and legislation. Last year, NCPE launched its project 'Prepare the Grounds for Economic Independence' to address the gender gaps throughout the life-cycle.

Being the fifteenth anniversary of the Establishment of NCPE, Ms Laiviera presented the main highlights of the work during these years focusing on the principal developments in NCPE's remit, investigative work, discriminatory adverts, training, research, resources and tools, policy review and recommendations, requests for information, Equality Mark certification, awareness raising and communications, events and conferences.

The Conference concluded with workshops for participants discussing NCPE's work and how to continue strengthening its commitments to enhance the promotion of equality in Maltese society. NCPE looks forward to study the proposals raised and to take them on board wherever possible.

NCPE's Annual Report 2018 can be accessed from www.equality.gov.mt