

Press Statement

Challenges faced by Women in Politics

Increasing the participation of women in politics has been challenging for some years. The National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE) in 2016 issued a press statement which highlighted the barriers that hinder women's full participation in political life.¹ These include a male-dominated environment that makes it harder for women to participate and succeed, a predominantly male incumbency, lack of women candidates, direct and indirect discrimination in the choice of candidates and weak support structures for people with family responsibilities.

Furthermore, harassment and hate speech towards female politicians and parliamentarians constitute one of many such barriers. In spite of the passing of some four years, the NCPE has observed an increase in cyber harassment of Maltese women parliamentarians. Suffice it to have visited social media platforms during the last week to find hard evidence of this unacceptable sexually abusive behaviour.

This is very much in line with research undertaken within the EU context which found that while 58.2% of female politicians from 45 European countries had been the target of online sexist attacks on social networks,² whilst around 47% have received threats of death, rape and violence during their parliamentary term.³ This shows that women not only face the usual scrutiny of those assuming a public role, but also a greater degree of risk due to the ways that women are targeted for threats and personal attacks through social media platforms.

Such an environment continues to be the reality in Malta. So much so, that about two years ago, a Technical Committee was set up to address the current democratic deficit resulting from an acute and persistent gender imbalance in Parliament again highlighting the challenges that women face in the world of politics in Malta. As a result, *The Gender Balance in Parliament Reform* was unveiled in April 2019 for public consultation. The document put forward several positive measures in a multi-tiered approach, acting on both the causes and consequences of

¹https://ncpe.gov.mt/en/Documents/News_and_Events/Press_Releases/2016/Press%20Statement%20Gender%20Balance%20in%20the%20political%20sphere_EN.pdf

² <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/issue-briefs/2018-10/sexism-harassment-and-violence-against-women-in-parliaments-in-europe>

³ <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/blogposts/digitalrespect4her-campaign-highlights-online-risks-women>

gender inequality in the political sphere, whilst taking into account the political and social specificities of the Maltese context.⁴

Considering the meaningful work being carried out, the NCPE urges all members of society to acknowledge these endeavours and refrain from posting comments on social media platforms that may undermine the commitment of both government and the opposition in applying proactive measures to obtain a gender balanced participation in the Maltese Parliament.

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⁴[https://ncpe.gov.mt/en/Documents/Our Publications and Resources/Annual Reports/NCPE Annual Report 2019.pdf](https://ncpe.gov.mt/en/Documents/Our_Publications_and_Resources/Annual_Reports/NCPE_Annual_Report_2019.pdf)