

'Equality Beyond Gender Roles' JUST/2014/RGEN/AG/GEND/7785

### Press Statement

***“Government is working on amendments to our labour law towards a more family-friendly approach to reflect today’s realities” – Minister Helena Dalli***

Launching a business breakfast for employers on work-life balance and the use of family-friendly measures for both men and women, organised by the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE), Minister for Social Dialogue, Consumer Affairs and Civil Liberties, Dr Helena Dalli emphasised the importance of combining the needs of family and work which would benefit society as a whole.

Minister Dalli remarked how Malta has experienced an increase of six percent in the number of women who entered the labour market in the past three years, following the introduction of various family-friendly measures, including free child care, pre-school breakfast clubs, and after-school services.

“At times, it is society which changes the law and hence, government has now started to address this reality to make our labour law more family-friendly to reflect modern times” stated Minister Dalli.

Ms Renee Laiviera, NCPE’s Commissioner, highlighted the importance of gender equality at work and in private life in the context of NCPE’s project ‘Equality Beyond Gender Roles’. She said that men are finding it more difficult to benefit from FFMs, due to gender stereotypes that have to be challenged. Ms Laiviera emphasised that further action is needed to enable men and women to reconcile the demands of remunerated work with the demands of non-remunerated work related to the home and family.

A panel of speakers made up of employers’ associations, unions and employers and facilitated by Dr JosAnn Cutajar, Senior Lecturer, Gender Studies Department University of Malta shed further light on this important issue. Dr Cutajar launched the panel discussion by a presentation on the psycho-social benefits related to the provision and uptake of Family Friendly Measures for all stakeholders. Dr Cutajar called on companies to offer a full range of Family Friendly Measures and encourage more men to make use of them, whilst inviting policy makers to provide incentives to promote the uptake of Family Friendly Measures, particularly by men.

Mr Josef Bugeja, General Secretary GWU and Ms Antoinette Aquilina, Employment Relations Manager UHM, highlighted the provision of FFMs within Collective Agreements; employee-employers relations; employees’ well-being; as well as possible obstacles faced by employees when applying for FFMs.

Ms Abigail Psaila Mamo, Chief Executive Officer GRTU and Mr Joe Farrugia, Director General MEA, shared the employers’ viewpoint on FFMs including policies of enterprises; the

economic and financial implications of FFM on businesses; as well as the main obstacles and benefits of offering FFM to employees.

Employers offering FFM at their workplace stated that they can observe affirmative results with regards to employees' motivation, reduced stress levels and sick leave. This is being reflected in higher productivity. Evidence to this are the 71 companies certified by NCPE with the Equality Mark. Dr Vanessa Borg Chief Executive, Argus Insurance and Ms Mary Christine Sant-Bezzina, Personnel Executive Enemalta, as panel members highlighted the benefits of offering FFM to their employees and how more awareness is needed for employers and employees to have new knowledge and skills on the management of work-life balance.

In her concluding remarks, NCPE's Commissioner, Ms Renee Laiviera, addressed the issue of abuse of FFM raised by employers. She stated that FFM should be granted on the basis of an agreement between the parties concerned, and as all agreements, once broken it is rendered null and void with the employee facing the consequences. Moreover, good monitoring systems are important to minimise abuse. Ms Laiviera gave as an example the monitoring systems used to address abuse of sick leave. There is no reason why this cannot be done in terms of FFM. After all, these measures, once well managed can be of benefit to both employees and employers as research has amply proved. Ms Laiviera concluded by highlighting the importance of gender equality at work and in private life and encouraged employers to strengthen FFM in their companies and for both men and women employees, particularly men, to make use of such measures.

The business breakfast was organised as part of a two year project co-financed by the European Commission entitled 'Equality Beyond Gender Roles', which will come to an end in December this year.

**Tuesday 24th January 2017**

