

**NCPE International Women's Day Conference 2022**

**Women and Intersecting Identities**

**3<sup>rd</sup> March 2022**

**Villa Arrigo, Naxxar**

**Outcomes**

**Introduction - NCPE Commissioner, Ms Renee Laiviera**

- Individuals have intersecting identities deriving from social relations, history, and structures of power
- An intersectional analysis seeks to unveil the complexity of everyday life and bring to light discrimination that occurs due to a combination of identities
- Women can experience intersectional discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion/belief, disability, age, sexual orientation, and gender identity, among other grounds
- It is also important to acknowledge the heterogeneity of women and men within a social group, which may lead to further differences and distinct circumstances and needs
- A focus on intersectionality is encouraged as it helps us understand and respond effectively to the real-life experiences of people encountering discrimination

**Minister for Equality, Research and Innovation - Hon. Dr. Owen Bonnici**

- During the past few years, Malta has made significant progress on gender equality in several areas
- Various measures were taken to empower more women to enter or remain in employment; the first-ever National Anti-Racism Strategy which aims to confront and eliminate racism in all its forms; measures to continue improving the lives of persons with disability, including women; initiatives to achieve equality in practice on the

grounds of sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics; support to pensioners through different initiatives

- Whilst recognising the significant progress made to enhance equality, more work needs to be done to continue to progress without leaving anyone behind

### **Intersectionality Concepts and Reflections - Dr Andreana Dibben**

- Challenges to integrate intersectionality in our policy
  - Policy is reductionist and incrementalist - policy makers try to simplify policies
  - Policy solutions need to be politically feasible
  - Organisations try to work within short time horizons
  - It is a struggle to capture the complexities
  - Policy often and purposefully excludes groups
  - It often embodies the oppressive consequences of intersecting social identities
- How to overcome these challenges
  - Strong political will
  - Adequate economic and human resources
  - A broad base of stakeholder engagement to generate coalitions and alliances between equality seeking groups
- Questions for reflections
  - Have we taken the time to engage in self-reflection and accountability?
  - How are we engaging the plurality of voices of those impacted by policy?
  - Are we employing intersectionality in all its multi-dimensionality?
  - Have we thought about the complexity of our lives? Are we employing intersectionality in our policies, research, etc?
- PowerPoint Presentation available [here](#)

## Panel discussion on the experiences of women with different identities

Moderated by **Ms Renee Laiviera**, NCPE Commissioner

**Ms Maali Boukadi**, Manager of the Chadian Community in Malta

**Dr Ibtisam Sadegh**, Assistant Lecturer, Faculty of Laws - University of Malta

**Ms Samantha Pace Gasan**, Commissioner for the Rights of Persons with Disability

**Dr Mary Vella**, Commissioner for the Older Persons

**Ms Gabriella Calleja**, Head (LGBTIQ Unit) - Human Rights Directorate

- **Ms Laiviera: How important is the issue of intersectionality?**
  
- **Race/ethnic origin**
  - **Ms Maali Boukadi**
  - A lot of work is needed on this issue of discrimination.
  - Women of colour are not heard in the health care sector.
  
- **Religion/belief**
  - **Dr Ibtisam Sadegh**

People should understand how important intersectionality is and we cannot fit a person in boxes.
  
- **Disability**
  - **Ms Samantha Pace Gasan -**
  - It is not just the impairment but also the social aspect of it, for example the right to have a family. We need to have this discussion, despite it does not appeal to the mainstream.
  - More disabled men are in employment than disabled women.
  - We have to create spaces for discussion about intersecting identities.
  - Younger women with disability are considered to be more vulnerable and this might not be the case.

- The sexual orientation of people with disability also needs to be taken into account.
- **Age**
  - **Dr Mary Vella**
  - Older persons are often defined only by their age.
  - When we think about age discrimination we tend to think only about that subgroup. However, there are more forms of discrimination.
  - Older women are at a disadvantage, particularly when they are of different colour or sexual orientation.
  - Up to 1981, women had to stop working when they got married. Things have now changed, and younger women today have more opportunities.
- **Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity**
  - **Ms Gabi Calleja**
  - LGBTI women are in themselves diverse and also fall under different categories even if they intersect with other identities.
  - We don't know a lot since the equality data is lacking, but in the last FRA LGBTI survey, bisexual women reported higher discrimination than lesbians.
- **Ms Laiviera: What are the specific areas where discrimination exists mostly-media, justice/legislation?**
- **Race/ethnic origin**
  - **Ms. Maali Boukadi-**
  - We need improvement in all aspects.
  - Migrant women are not seen on screening programs.
  - Migrant women also suffer from gender-based violence. Some of them are submissive even by their mannerisms.

- Empowerment is the key – more visibility and participation of women of colour is required
- **Religion/belief**
  - **Dr Ibtisam Sadegh**
  - Self-identifications give us a sense of belonging
  - I am always asked – where are you really from? If I wear the hijab, I am oppressed...even if I don't, I cannot win
- **Disability**
  - **Ms Samantha Pace Gasan –**
  - It's not a matter of discrimination but also an ideology, the way we think and make our own judgement.
  - When it comes to disability, we cannot speak of it as one homogenous group. Sign language in conferences and in campaigns are a good example of inclusivity.
- **Age**
  - **Dr Mary Vella**
  - Older women of pensionable age either do not have a pension of their own or social security contributions were not paid.
  - Older women tend to accrue lower pensions as certain choices may not have been voluntarily done.
  - We live in a patriarchal society where men were more respected than women.
  - Society still expects older women to provide care.
- **Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity**
  - **Ms Gabi Calleja –**
  - We need disaggregated data in order to understand the real scenario.

- In fact, it was very important to include this question in the census. It is very difficult to understand the experiences of intersectional identities without data.

### Workshop discussions

- **Race/ethnic origin**

- **Employment:** third-country nationals find it difficult to find employment due to residency permit issues
- **Education:** females bring baggage with them when they come from foreign countries. Baggage as in culture, and the way they have been raised
- Maltese families are adopting children from Asian/African countries, who tend to get bullied at schools because of their skin colour
- **Discrimination based on language:** there is a difference between females who speak with a Maltese accent but have a different skin colour to those who actually come as adults or as young adults from different countries
- **Service provision** – the banks are still not treating women equally, particularly in relation to loans. Their automatic default is the husband. Even the police conduct...it is always the daughter of your father not your mother. We are living in a patriarchal society.
- There are horrible comments on social media especially on Facebook coming from people with high level of education
- Sometimes people mix race with religion. For example, that Arabs are Muslims.
- Due to lack of positive role models, the home environment may limit children from learning about discrimination and racism. The media play an important role in this too.
- More training and awareness at work is needed
- Violence against women – complete isolation of migrant women – for example, migrant women, women of colour are invisible in high positions

- **Religion/belief**

- Topics such as FGM and early marriages are often related to religion and women
  - A change in attitude is necessary
  - **Education** – the necessity of children being taught to be critical. Ethics should be taught across the board to children of all religions and to those who might not identify with any religion and the need to have educators of other backgrounds and faiths
  - **Employment** – questions on religion should never be asked during an interview
  - The assumption that women in hijab are oppressed – Can a woman with hijab be a manager, in a high position?
  - Whereas in the past face veiling was associated with negative connotations, today, in the context of the COVID pandemic, you can go in a bank with a mask for example...so we are seeing a trend where we can be more inclusive to people who wish to wear face veiling
  - People often discriminate because they do not know enough about other cultures
  - The notion of forced marriages is not given enough its due mention
- **Disability**
    - People with a disability have their physical and the sexual needs as well and there is no point in trying to hide them. The best way to address these needs is through education. We should differentiate between the physical needs and the sexual needs of these people and their want or wish to have a family.
    - Less women with disability find a full-time employment. Together with awareness and education, incentives need to be given to employers
    - There is a perception that women with disability have less opportunities for education
    - People tend to patronise persons with a disability, in the sense that we are overprotective
    - The way forward is awareness

- **Age**

- Self-determination of older people demands a very sensitive approach from the carers in particular codes of ethics, attitudes, changing the mind sets of certain individuals with regards to our vulnerable elderly population
- Mentorship programmes where employers approach employees reaching retirement age to share their knowledge and expertise with new recruits
- The possibility of creating a policy where employees close to retirement age would be given the possibility of receiving a retirement pension whilst at the same time also given the opportunity, especially if they are women, to be able to work on reduced hours or flexible work programmes, so they may be able to enjoy the family whilst at the same time working
- The age and gender digital divide are very important today
- The husband's pension should not be deducted when both husband and wife become pensioners.
- Husband's pension rate would be passed on to widow instead of widow's pension if this is less or having no pension at all.
- Five days carers' leave in terms of the Work-Life Balance Directive that needs to be put in force by August 2022.
- Facilities for young working mothers should also be available and addressed for more mature working women who require flexibility having to juggle work, family and as caregivers to senior family members and grandchildren.

- **Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity**

- Transgender women are not always accepted by their communities
- Change in mentality can be evolved with time
- Open discussion, more exposure, good communication, good will and the right attitude are crucial
- There should be more reproductive rights for LGBTIQ+ people

- The need to address the remaining legal gap regarding anti-discrimination protections in the provision of goods and services which should have been addressed by the Horizontal Directive
- The positive discourse by politicians and the political will to bring about the legal and policy change had a positive effect on the Maltese society in raising awareness and increasing acceptance
- The continued importance of visibility and personal narratives to continue to foster acceptance

**Concluding remarks – Ms Stephanie Magro Gazzano, NCPE Senior Manager (Policy and Administration)**

- Thank you all for participating in today's Conference, and thank you to the speakers and panel members
- Presentations will be uploaded on the NCPE's website – [www.ncpe.gov.mt](http://www.ncpe.gov.mt)

**8<sup>th</sup> March 2022**