

Webinar – NCPE Annual Conference

27th May 2021

Hosted online on Microsoft Teams

- **Opening Address – Hon. Dr. Edward Zammit Lewis, Minister for Justice, Equality and Governance**

- The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the exacerbated inequalities in our society, however has also strengthened our commitment towards addressing said inequalities.
- With respect to gender equality, Malta has made positive strides forward and this is reflected in the increase of women graduates and in employment.
- Action towards increasing women in political decision-making is needed since Malta consistently lags behind in this regard; the balanced representation of women and men in political decision-making is and will remain on the Government's agenda. The gender corrective mechanism Bill was approved through a cross-party agreement in April 2021, which means that the mechanism will be in place for the next general election.
- The Notarial Professions and Archives Act was discriminatory on the basis of gender since only women were asked to declare their civil status upon entering a notarial contract. In December 2020 this Act was amended accordingly to remove discriminatory provisions.
- The Government continues to work for an inclusive society with respect to the LGBTIQ+ community. A new centre is being set up for this community providing a number of services and facilities both by the Government and civil society. In line with the work being carried out by the Government in this regard, the NCPE is carrying out an EU co-funded project *Empowerment for Diversity (E4D)*.
- In October 2020 the Government carried out a public consultation for the National Action Plan Against Racism and Xenophobia (NAPRAX) - the NCPE had provided its input.
- In September 2020, a public consultation on the National Youth Policy was launched and will cover the period 2021 to 2030. The NCPE submitted its input to this policy.
- Moving forward, Hon. Dr. Zammit Lewis stated that it is envisaged that the NCPE's mandate will be extended. The upcoming decisive reforms will result in the enactment of two legislative proposals – The *Equality Bill* and the *Human Rights and Equality Commission Bill*. Once approved by Parliament, Malta's legal framework on human rights and equality will be strengthened with the widening of NCPE's remit and sanctioning powers.

- **An overview of NCPE's work in 2020 – Ms Renee Laiviera, NCPE Commissioner**

- Highlighted the NCPE's remit as an independent equality body, as stipulated in Cap. 456.
 - Gave an **overview of the NCPE's work in 2020**, particularly with respect to: investigations; policy review and recommendations; media and communications strategy; NCPE's research *The COVID-19 Pandemic: Research on the Distribution of Work in Households*; finalisation of the *Prepare the Ground for Economic Independence* (PGEI) project; the introduction of the *Empowerment for Diversity* (E4D) project; training; monitoring media for discriminatory adverts; the Equality Mark; organisation of conferences; and the provision of information upon request.
 - **NCPE's Annual Report 2020 gives gender disaggregated statistics** in the spheres of employment, public administration, politics, the judiciary, education and the media. Said statistics continue to show the underrepresentation of women in most areas, particularly with a persistent gender imbalance in decision-making positions.
 - The NCPE **investigated 15 complaints**; investigations are a crucial aspect of the NCPE's work to ensure that equality is safeguarded in our society.
 - **9 documents** were reviewed and **recommendations submitted** to promote equal treatment and equal opportunities to women and men in different spheres and in different vulnerable situations, while also taking into account intersectionality. These included:
 - **Consultation process leading to the 2021 Budget**
 - **Malta's first National Action Plan on the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security**, launched in October
- The NCPE also kept abreast with policy debates and developments.
- The NCPE continued participating as an expert member of the **European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE)**.
 - Work continued as an active member of the **European Network of Equality Bodies** (Equinet) Working Groups on gender equality, policy formation, equality law, communication strategies and practices, and research and data collection.
 - The **NCPE contributed to 45 traditional media appearances** and also increased its appearance and following on the social media platforms.
 - Raising awareness continued through its **newsletters**.

- **Investigations Report – Ms Renee Laiviera, NCPE Commissioner**
 - **15 complaints** were lodged, and one ex officio investigation was initiated on the grounds of gender and age.

- **Equality Mark Certification – Award Ceremony**
 - This year marks the eleventh year of the NCPE awarding organisations with the Equality Mark certification.
 - To date, there are 113 Equality Mark certified organisations with over 26,400 employees.
 - The Equality Mark certification is awarded to organisations that make gender equality one of their values and whose management is based on the recognition and promotion of the potential of all employees.
 - The NCPE provides guidance to organisations in implementing the necessary measures needed for the Equality Mark certification.
 - The NCPE has recently developed an Equal Pay Tool which will form part of the Equality Mark certification. The aim of the Equal Pay Tool is to check the organisation’s equal pay for work of equal value between women and men during Equality Mark audits. Pilot-testing of the Equal Pay Tool was carried out with nine organisations last year.
 - During the award ceremony carried out on 19th May 2021, **11 organisations were newly certified with the Equality Mark; 8 received their first Equality Mark re-certification; and 6 their second Equality Mark re-certification.**

- **An overview of stereotypes in different types of media – Prof. Brenda Murphy, Associate Professor, Faculty for Social Wellbeing, University of Malta**
PowerPoint Presentation available [here](#)

- Online workshops – Equality in the Media

- Workshop 1: Print media (newspapers, magazines, books, banners, billboards, brochures, flyers) – Moderated by Ms Romina Lopez



- Media and culture influence one another
 - Media content is leading and influencing the ‘pop culture’ – music videos are hypersexualised and are somewhat viewed as soft porn that is followed by younger men
 - Media content is leading to the grooming culture
 - Prior to the media, the grooming culture starts earlier on in one’s life – Toys to date are stereotypically designed; girls’ toys are passive, whereas toys for boys are engaging and encourage violence and aggression
- Workshop participants were asked to make free association of the first two magazine covers (above) and state what comes to mind:
- The woman in the cover is “tacky”
 - The difference between both covers is that the woman is hypersexualised
 - The male figure is presented as being smart
 - “Mara biex tidher sabiħa trid tkun nofsa għarwiena”

- Wording used in the cover is very sexualised in the left cover (“Red-Hot American Summer”)
- Male figure is positioned to show that he is in control, in a position of power, and is assertive
- Female pose implicates that she is childish and “għall-pjaċir”, whereas the man is being considered as “tal-karriera”
- The context highly affects the image of the person
- The media is portraying a certain type of image and if you do not look like that image, then you are not beautiful and have no worth; it is becoming common practice for many, but mostly women, to go under the knife and undergo plastic surgery from a very early age – self-worth is not the same now as it was years back
- Print material can have repercussions if it is present, for instance, at the workplace – this may lead to verbal abuse towards other female employees who might not fit into the ‘ideal’ way of looking nowadays
- Even though it is important for everyone to explore their sexuality, it might be hindered if ideas are based on stereotypical and hypersexualised media
- The sex media is very much in the print media and yet not a lot of people acknowledge this
- The rise of societal expectations is leading to mental health issues since a lot of people feel pressured to be something which they are not



Discussion on two magazine covers (above):

- Images reiterate that the porn industry is making its way to pop culture
 - It is odd that the woman and girl seem to have switched roles
 - The woman is consciously being made to look childish and assertive – this is in line with the porn industry since women are willing to do as told by male counterparts
 - The girl is being heavily sexualised and made to look much older than she is; this encourages pedophilia
 - Discussions in the workshop on the girl posing on the right led to questioning on how and why would her parents give her consent to do so. The moderator stated that we live such a hectic life that many a time people just look at the image and not at the wording; hence we might not be fully aware of the message getting across. We are all very brainwashed and such photos have become common practice. We have subconsciously become accustomed to this culture and, at face value, are not seeing anything wrong with it.
- **Workshop 2: Broadcasting media (television, radio, movies) – Moderated by Ms Louiselle Vassallo**
- Workshop discussion narrowed down to news and current affairs programmes as the most followed type of information sources
 - Gender balance was observed in newscasters that presented the news on a given week:



- On the contrary, women on local current affairs/discussion programmes are heavily underrepresented:



- Participants discussed the culture that we were brought up in and the fact that it's just what we got used to, as reasons why people are unaware of this gender imbalance and why it is still a reality today

- It was also observed that this is a portrayal of the patriarchal society we live in
- Women on local broadcasting are very present, however, in the so called 'lighter' programmes relating to cuisine, home economics or animals etc.
- Participants put forward a number of recommendations on what can be done to change this situation and how we can be pro-active to affecting change:
 - Local broadcasting to look out for talented women as anchors in current affairs programmes
 - Stations to develop gender policies and not wait for the Broadcasting Authority to do so – ideally change occurs internally
 - To raise awareness with producers
 - To have guidelines on how to integrate gender equality in every stage of production
 - To break the cycle of inviting the same hosts/guests
 - Provide Role Models to enable 'women seeing women'
 - Once consumers start to demand such change, then this change will need to happen
 - Need for compulsory media literacy in the national curriculum
 - Need for a media literacy policy that goes beyond compulsory education
 - To launch educational campaigns on the media itself
- Another picture portraying a recent current affairs programme that discussed the new NGO regulations was shown:

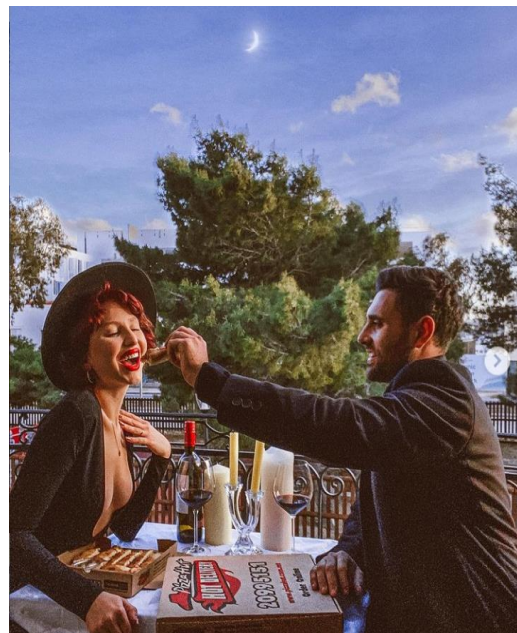


- It was observed that the host and guests were all men so, women were not represented at all despite that NGOs in Malta rely heavily on women's contribution
- Rather than a balanced panel, we are presented with 'menals' that is Panels made up solely by men
- Once again, participants discussed that this is allowed to happen because it became a norm – people got used to it and do not even notice it
- It was highlighted that there is a lack of channels where people may voice their opinions without being threatened or attacked thus, there is a need for more safe and accessible platforms where people can file complaints, even anonymously
- Women representation is needed not just on screen but behind the screen as well i.e. Production, amongst others
- Interesting research on gender equality and the media:
 - Surveys published by the Public Broadcasting Authority

- Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) reports

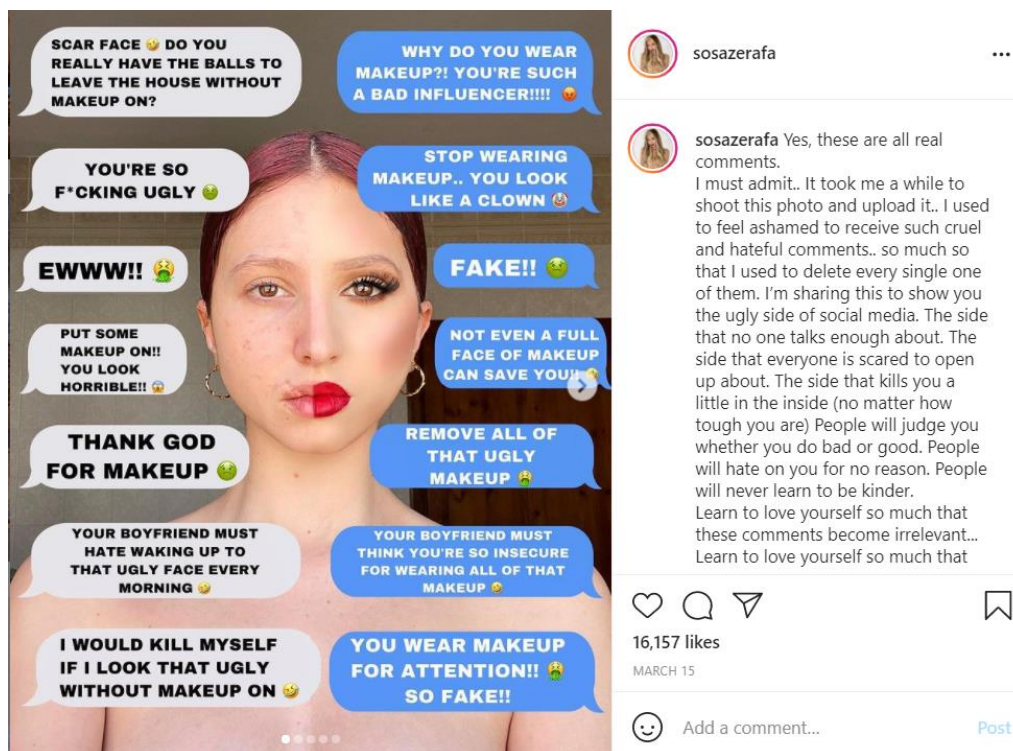
➤ **Workshop 3: Online media (social media platforms, websites, online forums, podcasts)**
– Moderated by Ms. Sandy Calleja-Portelli

- The moderator introduced the topic of social media, paying particular attention to Instagram and its influencers
- An influencer is a person who attracts followers and brands to make a living off it
- Social media is gendered



- Participants were asked to give their opinion on the images above, in which one of Malta's prominent social media influencers is advertising products:
 - The participants agreed that both advertisements are stereotypical; the male model is the person in power, holding her in the first photo and feeding her in the second, whereas she is portraying herself as being needy and submissive.
 - During discussions it was stated that both photos are hypersexualized and are objectifying the female model, especially in view that the advertisements are for a toothpaste brand and a pizza.

- The hypersexualized and passive portrayal of women in advertisements, especially on social media, has become the norm. The general public who view advertisements such as the ones being discussed, do not see an issue with or view them as being derogatory. Rather, people look up to these influencers and aspire to be them.
- The participants were then asked to look at the below photo by the same influencer to discuss it. In this photo, the influencer posted messages she received on the side of her face that was made up and on the side that was not.



- The following points were raised and discussed by the workshop participants on the social media influencer's post above:
 - The participants pointed out the fact that even though in the previous photos she seemed very confident, she also posted an image like the one above, showing her flaws and how she is affected by the comments of her followers. She is making a living from this, but she is also aware of what damage these messages can make.
 - The participants agreed that such derogatory comments are more likely to be made on online platforms behind a screen, rather than in real life, mainly due to the possibility of posting anonymously.

- Posts similar to the one above, alongside the comments that have been made, convey the idea that there is a standardized and expected way of looking and if your appearance does not fall within a particular category, then you are not worthy/beautiful. This is why most of the participants agreed that online platforms can be very toxic since people, especially women, are continuously looked down upon. Some participants added that whatever you do and however you look, people will always comment, which is why it's important to do what makes you feel good about yourself. That being said, something needs to be done to tackle the negative repercussions that social media is causing, especially to young women.
- It has become the norm for people working as influencers to get these reactions, thus we are living in a society where this has become justified.
- The mention of Sarah Zerafa changing her job and not being a social media influencer was also discussed, since when one receives such negative backlash, one has to ask himself/herself whether the job is more worth than one's mental health.
- It had been stated that Sarah Zerafa as an influencer is 'real' in that she posts and puts the different sides of her on social media. She is very conscious of the damage that the platform can do to people.
- Women are more likely to write negative comments on other women's posts than men. Additionally, the motive behind such comments are not made in a caring and/or helpful way to the person posting, thus it does not matter if such comments are made online or otherwise.

Finally, the moderator showed the below screenshot of an advert by the Health Department as a way of showcasing how stereotypes are present in all spheres of the media and not just on Instagram.



Participants were asked to access the Saħħa page and look at the video. The image above is what is appearing on the Saħħa page. The advert is for 16+ representation. The lady in the video tussles her hair, does this posture and that's all we have in the clip. Such stereotypical representations are so wide ranging, I wouldn't say that the government wanted to sexualise this woman, however when you see it in action and take into account that this is a campaign designed to attract people to sign up for vaccination, you might think otherwise. On their Facebook page there is a collage of many people, but this is the only character that actually moves in this clip.

- **Concluding remarks – Ms Renee Laiviera**

- The NCPE will be taking on board all the comments and suggestions highlighted during this Conference to strengthen its work in the coming years.
- The presentations used during the conference will be uploaded on NCPE's website – www.ncpe.gov.mt.
- The NCPE Commissioner thanked all the speakers, participants and members of staff.