

MICRO ENTERPRISES ASSISTED TO UNDERTAKE ENVIRONMENTAL INITIATIVES

Energy efficiency is an important element for enterprises to ensure their business sustainability, whilst it would also benefit the environment and its protection. By becoming more efficient in their consumption of energy, enterprises can redirect their savings to develop new markets, products and services, and ultimately become more profitable.

In this light, Malta Enterprise runs a number of schemes to assist local businesses to invest in solutions that enhance energy efficiency, either by reducing their energy needs or else by investing in renewable, alternative or clean energy sources.

These schemes include the MicroInvest scheme, which provides a tax credit of up to 40 per cent of the expenses incurred to invest in one's own business to improve its operations. Indeed, investment on ma-

chinery and technologies which save or generate energy are among the expenses eligible for support under this scheme.

The assistance, which has an additional 20 per cent for businesses based in Gozo, thus benefitting from a tax credit of 60 per cent, is capped at €25,000. Other eligible expenses include the refurbishing and upgrading of premises as well as machinery and technologies to improve operations, investments to ensure compliance with regulations, wage costs for new jobs created, and also costs for one commercial vehicle used in the running of the business.

The MicroInvest scheme is aimed at the smallest of businesses, namely those micro enterprises employing less than ten workers, including start-ups and the self-employed, which have a turnover that does not exceed €2 million.

The wide range of expenses eligible for tax credits was reflected in the number of applications submitted in just over a year since it was launched, which exceeded 450. However, the scheme is ongoing and covers the investments made between January 1st, 2010 and December 31st, 2011, with applications being received until March 31st, 2012. ■

For further information on MicroInvest and other schemes that encourage initiatives in favour of the environment, visit www.maltaenterprise.com or contact Malta Enterprise on tel: 2542 0000 or email: info@maltaenterprise.com



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IMPLEMENTING A SEXUAL HARASSMENT POLICY AT THE PLACE OF WORK

Sexual harassment is unlawful under Maltese law and is defined as unwelcome behaviour of a sexual nature or other sex based conduct, affecting the dignity of women and men at the workplace. Victims of sexual harassment may experience emotional and physical stress, low morale which may lead to higher rates of absenteeism, high employee turnover and low job performance. It is understood that an employer has a direct interest in ensuring that sexual harassment does not occur at the place of work and that preventing sexual harassment is part of good management. This stems both from the legal obligation to safeguard the health and safety of employees as well as the potential loss of business, decreased performance, reputation damage and financial cost, should the organisation face claims and be found liable of allegations of sexual harassment.

So what are the legal obligations of an employer? Apart from taking appropriate remedial measures should a sexual harassment claim occur, an employer should also ensure adequate preventive measures such as implementing and monitoring a sexual harassment policy. It is worth noting that, whilst sexual harassment is illegal, there is no legal requirement for an organisation to implement a sexual harassment policy. Yet,

amongst the advantages of having a written policy, it establishes an organisation's formal position with regards to harassment thus leaving little margin for misinterpretation on rights, obligations, expected procedures and disciplinary action should such a situation arise.

The National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE) regularly assists individuals and employers with queries related to sexual harassment at the workplace. The Commission feels that this is an important issue which needs to be given more attention by the management of any organisation and that is why 'addressing sexual harassment' has been included as one of the criteria of assessment for obtaining the Equality Mark.

The Equality Mark is a certification awarded to organisations that demonstrate a commitment towards gender equality at the workplace. Apart from evidence of equality in recruitment, equal opportunities in training and access to family-friendly measures, the criteria of assessment for the Equality Mark also includes adopting a sexual harassment policy and ensuring that all employees are aware and regularly trained on both their rights and obligations in relation to harassment at the place of work.

A number of organisations have already been certified with the Equality Mark, yet far more are still working on having the right documentation in place. What has transpired through the various discussions held with employers is that not having written policies is actually quite a common practice. Procedures and practices are sometimes just verbally explained to new recruits and somehow assimilated as part of the working culture. Nevertheless, anyone who is responsible for employees, however small the number, can appreciate the importance of establishing clear guidelines that are conducive to a safe and non-discriminatory working environment, and this is more likely to be achieved when such guidelines are clearly expressed and communicated to all members of the organisation. ■

If you are interested in drafting a sexual harassment policy for your place of work and/or would like further information on applying for the Equality Mark, feel free to contact NCPE on tel: 2590 3850 or email us on equality@gov.mt



NCPE