

**Press statement by the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE)**

**The NCPE's International Women's Day Conference 2024**

**'Is our work-life balance supporting family size?'**

International Women's Day, celebrated each year on 8<sup>th</sup> March, is a day to reflect on the positive developments towards the empowerment of women in various spheres and a call for action to achieve gender equality.

On this occasion, the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE) organised a conference to present the findings of a research study titled: 'Perceptions and Attitudes of Women and Men in Malta towards Work-Life Balance: with a specific focus on Family Size'. This study is particularly relevant in the context of Malta's lowest fertility rate in 2021 (1.13 live births per woman) and the increasing participation of women in employment, whereby the reconciliation of work and family life is crucial.

EU Commissioner for Equality, Dr Helena Dalli reflected on the relevance of enhancing work-life balance for working parents across the European Union to create a Union of Equality where women can lead, thrive and be free. Commissioner Dalli highlighted that the Work-life Balance Directive introduced paternity leave and parental leave, with at least 10 working days of paternity leave and 4 months parental leave of which 2 months are paid and non-transferable.

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for European Funds, Equality, Reforms and Social Dialogue Chris Fearne encouraged the audience to take the principle of work-life balance a step further by considering the need for life-long learning and training. He therefore emphasized on the need of a work-life-learn balance, whereby both men and women are given the necessary support to evolve their knowledge and training to keep up with the ever-changing needs of the workforce. The Deputy Prime Minister referred to various initiatives taken by Government to enforce the principle of equal pay for work of equal value and

announced that further legislation enforcing this principle in the private sector too will be presented to Parliament shortly.

Parliamentary Secretary for Reforms and Equality, Hon. Ms Rebecca Buttigieg highlighted Malta's developments towards gender equality and the Government's commitment to continue addressing remaining challenges and gender gaps in line with the Gender Equality and Mainstreaming Strategy and Action Plan adopted in 2022. Hon. Buttigieg remarked that the Public Service provides work-life balance policies to support employees through their life cycle. Several other measures to assist families with children were included in the 2024 Budget.

Hon. Graziella Attard Previ, Shadow Minister for Equality and Children's Rights, said that Women's Day brings mixed reactions; it is a celebration of what women have achieved, whilst it is also a reinforcement of the stereotype that being a female automatically denotes an inferior status. Ms Attard Previ said that this year's international theme focuses on investing in women to accelerate progress, and from a political perspective, it affirms Partit Nazzjonalista's commitment to continue proposing and ensuring implementation of measures that register real and lasting progress.

NCPE Commissioner Ms Renee Laiviera emphasized the pressing need for a transformative shift in societal attitudes towards gender roles in view of the disproportionate burden on women in terms of childcare and household responsibilities. Ms Laiviera outlined the aims of the NCPE's research study, which analyses whether women and men aged 18 to 39 are interested to have more children, the factors influencing their decisions, the challenges in reconciling work and care responsibilities, and proposes recommendations to support couples in having more children.

The findings of the NCPE study were then presented by Prof Anna Borg and Dr Maya Miljanic Brinkworth. These indicate that both women and men express a desire for more children. However, changes in normative values about number of children and financial difficulties are the main challenges. Moreover, difficulties in reconciling work and childcare responsibilities

are evident with 67.6% of women and 58.6% of men finding it difficult to fulfill their family responsibilities at times or frequently. Gender imbalances also influence decisions about family size with 46.1% and 46.9% of female respondents suggesting it does in the case of caring for children and housework respectively.

Ms Laiviera presented an overview of work-life balance measures in both the public and private sector, delving into the definitions of maternity leave, paternity leave, parental leave, and carers' leave. Reference was made to gender imbalances in the uptake of family friendly measures, particularly when it comes to parental leave, career break and work on a reduced-hour schedule.

Participants also had the opportunity to discuss the research findings and recommendations, which were also delineated in leaflets published by the NCPE to facilitate this discussion.

In her concluding remarks, Ms Laiviera thanked all participants for participating in the Conference, and reiterated that the NCPE will study the issues raised and take them on board to ensure that equality is truly safeguarded in our society.

**7<sup>th</sup> March 2024**