

The NCPE's International Women's Day Conference 2024

Is our work-life balance supporting family size?

Thursday 7th March 2024

AX, The Palace, Sliema

Conference proceedings

Welcome - Ms Renee Laiviera, NCPE Commissioner

- Today's Conference is a cry for help, a call for action:
 - to further support women and men to reconcile work and family life;
 - to address prevailing gender imbalances in relation to care and household responsibilities;
 - to support parents to have more children.
- Increase in the participation of women in the labour market
- Malta's fertility rate lowest across the EU stands at 1.13
- Various incentives and measures to support parents to reconcile their work with family responsibilities.
- Women are more likely than men to reduce their working time to care for children and other relatives.
- Gender inequalities not only negatively impact women's earnings and career advancement opportunities, but they can also have an impact on the decisions taken in terms of family size.
- NCPE's study on the perceptions and attitudes of women and men in Malta towards work-life balance, with a specific focus on family size.
- Two leaflets were distributed: a [leaflet](#) highlighting the main findings of the research study, and another [leaflet](#) with an overview of the family-friendly measures in Malta.

Opening remarks - Dr Helena Dalli, EU Commissioner for Equality

- We need to take stock of gender equality in our society

- Work life balance measures are crucial – not to sacrifice our personal life but to find a balance
- Gender stereotypes - women are more likely to be tasked with the care responsibilities
- There has been a drop in the employment gap since joining the EU
- Gender employment gap – Malta: 16.4%, EU: 10.8%
- 90% of people working in the care sector are women - Low paid sector
- 30% of employees in AI are women
- Nearly 8 million women who are not in the labour market because of care responsibilities
- Malta's free childcare, making it easier for women with care responsibilities to enter the labour market
- Work life Balance Directive strengthened measures to support families
- Financial stability can also incentivise parents to have children
- We need action on all levels – EU and Local

Opening remarks - Hon. Mr. Chris Fearne,

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for European Funds, Equality, Reforms and Social Dialogue

- The gender pay gap – women are in the low paid jobs
- We need to tackle equal pay for work of equal value
- Since 2014, the female employment rate has increased significantly, reaching 73.2% from 51.1%
- Men tend to continue participating in training throughout their life
- We need to shift 'Work-life Balance' into a 'Work-Life Learn Balance'

Opening remarks - Hon. Ms. Rebecca Buttigieg,

Parliamentary Secretary for Reforms and Equality

- Gender stereotypes persist – women are more likely to be asked about how they are going to manage with their job and their care responsibilities

- 2024 Budget announced various measures to continue helping families with children their needs, such as the increase of children's allowance and in the Childbirth and Adoption Bonus
- In 2022, around 97% of public service employees who made use of the work life balance options were women
- Acknowledging that Malta's fertility rate is decreasing and that Malta registered the lowest fertility rate across the EU in 2021, we are committed to support families
- The findings of the NCPE's research study can be utilised to support the development and implementation of policies and actions for the benefit of society.

Opening remarks Hon. Ms. Graziella Attard Previ,

Opposition Spokesperson for Equality, Human and Civil Rights, and Children's Rights

- 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
- This year's international theme focuses on investing in women to accelerate progress
- We need to implement measures in order to register real and lasting progress
- The NCPE conducted a research study on the distribution of work in households during the COVID-19 pandemic which indicates that the increase in the number of hours spent doing household tasks and childcare increased more for women than for men, while the time spent on leisure, personal care and sleep decreased more for women than it did for men
- The EU Work-life Balance directive aimed to invest in the modern family

In view that Malta put in place the minimum requirements, the Nationalist Party tabled a motion for further amendments to better support modern families

NCPE's research study: 'Perceptions and Attitudes of Women and Men in Malta towards Work-Life Balance: with a specific focus on Family Size'

- **Prof. Anna Borg - Associate Professor**
PowerPoint Presentation available [here](#)
- **Dr Maja Miljanic Brinkworth**

PowerPoint Presentation available [here](#)

Comments by Prof. Anna Borg:

- Childcare is not only beneficial for the work-life balance of parents but also for the early socialising of children
- There is a need for stronger work-life balance measures – especially for men
- This is an important investment for the future
- Parents want to stay with their children – there are ways to balance things out

Work-life balance measures in Malta

- **Ms Renee Laiviera, NCPE Commissioner**
PowerPoint Presentation available [here](#)

Workshop questions

- What is your opinion on the proposals regarding the revisions of family-friendly measures (maternity, paternity, parental) in terms of duration and compensation? Why are such revisions required?
- Besides these proposals, do you have any other suggestions that you consider relevant to strengthen family-friendly measures?
- What needs to be done to strengthen an equal take-up of family related leaves by women and men? What needs to be done to increase the take-up of family related leaves by men?
- What needs to be done to encourage more men to take on more caring responsibilities and household tasks?
- Will the strengthening of family-friendly measures be enough to encourage parents to have more children? What other measures are required to support parents?

Workshop reporting

- Remote working:

- restrictive conditions in the Public Service – only 20% of the hours can be worked remotely, unless for a specific case
- we need broader entitlement parameters

- Society:
 - puts stress on the parents – school, work, extracurricular activities
 - Why is there no childcare in Valletta? There are a lot of ministry workers there. The University and MCAST have their own childcare centres

- School/Education:
 - Parents have to do so much after work including children’s extracurricular activities
 - School is there to make children employable
 - Gender mainstreaming in early childhood in schools is important
 - Summer schools to teach life skills, gender equality issues
 - Children nowadays are more observant, question more – critical thinking

- General comments by participants:
 - Appointments for children with disabilities are in the morning Why can’t these services be given at school?
 - Carers’ leave cannot be taken if the dependant does not live in same household
 - Having more children has become really difficult – unsustainable
 - There are no appropriate measures for headship posts
 - Teleworking is not equally granted – depends on management
 - There are less training opportunities for women on telework
 - If parental leave is not adequately paid there will be no uptake
 - The health sector has no telework options
 - Caring is not being sufficiently valued

- Recommendations:

- Increase the paternal leave entitlement
- Having a 35-hour full-time week would be ideal
- We need to provide similar provisions to the private sector
- We need to strengthen family-friendly measures
- Education – the driver for change; we need to change the mentality
- More participation of men in these conferences – we need more men to know what is happening

Concluding remarks - Ms Renee Laiviera, NCPE Commissioner

- Thank you all for participating in today's NCPE International Women's Day Conference
- Presentations will be uploaded on the NCPE's website – ncpe.gov.mt
- You may give your feedback by filling in the evaluation forms
- The NCPE will study the issues raised and take them on board wherever possible
- We also encourage you to follow the NCPE's website and NCPE's social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter)
- Thank you all.

7th March 2024