

### Background

Women's empowerment and their full participation are crucial for development and a truly democratic society. The promotion of gender equality is EU and Malta national objectives, both at law and in practice.

Following the Beijing Platform in 1995<sup>1</sup>, the Maltese Government implemented an integrated approach towards advancement in the legal, civil, political, economic and social spheres. It focused on *de facto* equality measures, namely, gender mainstreaming<sup>2</sup>, the elimination of violence against women, women in decision making, the reconciliation of work and family responsibilities, and the working conditions.<sup>3</sup>

In the past years, we have seen the introduction of a number of initiatives aimed to realise equality between women and men. These have been effective in varying degrees<sup>4</sup> but a great deal still needs to be done.

### Milestones of gender policies in Malta

Even before the Beijing Conference, the Government introduced the concept of gender mainstreaming, way back in 1989<sup>5</sup>, when by Cabinet decision the national machinery for women's issues was introduced. Under the responsibility of the Minister for Social Policy, this first "attempt" consisted in the Commission for the Advancement of Women (an advisory body) and the then Secretariat for the Equal Status of Women.

But without any doubt, the OPM Circular 24/2000, on 26 June 2000, outlined better the official policy on gender mainstreaming and its implications. In particular, Ministers, Parliamentary Secretaries, Heads of Government Departments and Heads of Parastatal Corporations, were enjoined *inter alia*, to include women's concerns in all policies, and not only in the public sector.<sup>6</sup>

Since 2003, a new legal mechanism ensures full gender equality in all spheres, as it was established by the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality for Men and Women (NCPE), an independent, government funded body which primary task is to monitor the implementation of:

- ✓ Cap 456 - Equality for Men and Women Act (9th December, 2003)<sup>7</sup>
- ✓ Legal Notice 85 of 2007 - Equal Treatment of Persons Order
- ✓ Legal Notice 181 of 2008 - Access to Goods and Services and their Supply (Equal Treatment) Regulations.
- ✓ Legal Notice 316 of 2011 - Procedure for Investigation Regulations.

<sup>1</sup> It seeks to promote and protect the full enjoyment of all human rights and the fundamental freedoms of all women throughout their life cycle. **UN Fourth World Conference on Women: Action for Equality, Development and Peace** 4–15 September 1995 in Beijing, China.

<sup>2</sup> "Mainstreaming a gender perspective is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. See Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-Second Session, Supplement No. 3 (A/52/3/Rev.1), chapter IV, paragraph 4.

<sup>3</sup> Beijing + 10, Progress made within the EU; Report from the Luxembourg Presidency of the Council of the European Union, pp.41-42.

<sup>4</sup> One of the most notable success refers to the number of them attaining tertiary level of education.

<sup>5</sup> OPM (Office of the Prime Minister) Circular 133/89;

<sup>6</sup> Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women Combined initial, second and third periodic report of States parties, Malta, CEDAW/C/MLT/1-3, December 2012

<http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N02/761/60/PDF/N0276160.pdf?OpenElement>

<sup>7</sup> In 2002, the Industrial Relation Act has already provided for equality of pay, of working conditions and of access to training.

All these acts represent milestones in Maltese policies<sup>8</sup> about the fight against direct, indirect or multiple discriminations due to gender; it's relevant to consider that most of them are part of the transposition process of EU directives into the national laws,<sup>9</sup> as Malta joined the European Union in 2004.

### National impact of equal opportunities and gender mainstreaming EU regulations

While the United Nations and OSCE have served as global catalyst of gender awareness, the European Union, as a multi-level governance framework, plays a crucial role enabling a more established gender equality concept in Member States' policies, gender norms and cultures from the international and EU level to national, regional and local levels.<sup>10</sup>

### Structural and institutional interventions

Even if, in Malta all Ministries are responsible for the implementation of the official policy on gender equality and above all the Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity<sup>11</sup>, the main gender body is NCPE.<sup>12</sup> Its remit and priorities<sup>13</sup> consist of:

- Monitoring the implementation of national policies with respect to the promotion of equality for men and women and assessing their effects;
- Identifying the needs of persons who are disadvantaged by reasons of their sex and to take such steps within its power, proposing appropriate measures in order to cater for such needs in the widest manner possible; establishing and updating all policies directly or indirectly;
- Liaising between, and ensure the necessary co-ordination between government departments and other agencies;
- Developing the capacity of key institutions and stakeholder involved to promote gender equality effectively, through the support for the exchange of information, good practices and networking.

Some statistical data can help us to have a brief overview of the past two decades achievement/challenges in the Maltese context.

Although the national machinery has pressured political parties to organise several training sessions/awareness campaigns to encourage women to overcome cultural obstacles in the field of politics, meanwhile, media professionals have been engaged in initiatives to get the message across to the general public. "Current female rate of elected members to Parliament stands at 24.3% in OSCE countries, while current rates in Malta stand at 14.3%. If current

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<sup>8</sup> Lauwers, Sophie and Van der Wal, Femke (2008): Report Analysing Intersectionality in Gender Equality Policies for Malta and the EU, QUING Project, Vienna: Institute for Human Sciences (IWM), [http://www.quing.eu/files/results/ir\\_malta.pdf](http://www.quing.eu/files/results/ir_malta.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> Peter G. Xuereb, Implementation of the Gender Acquis of the Union in Malta, Survey. <http://www.euroinfo.ee/malta/pdf/12.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> Gender equality is a fundamental right enshrined in the all EU Treaties and guaranteed by the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. For more recent development, see for example the European Pact for Gender Equality (2011–2020) (7349/11) and the European Commission's Strategy for Equality between Women and Men (2010–2015) (COM(2010) 491 final) that reaffirm how gender equality is vital to economic growth, prosperity and competitiveness, stressing the Council's commitment to fulfil EU ambitions on this matter.

<sup>11</sup> Other key ministries are: MJHA (Justice and Home Affairs); MEYE (Education, Youth and Employment) and in particular its section Employment and Training Corporation (ETC); SAHHA (Health, the Elderly and Community Care).

<sup>12</sup> [https://socialdialogue.gov.mt/en/NCPE/Pages/NCPE\\_Home.aspx](https://socialdialogue.gov.mt/en/NCPE/Pages/NCPE_Home.aspx);  
[https://socialdialogue.gov.mt/en/NCPE/Pages/About\\_Us/Functions.aspx](https://socialdialogue.gov.mt/en/NCPE/Pages/About_Us/Functions.aspx)

<sup>13</sup> NCPE Annual Report 2004  
[https://socialdialogue.gov.mt/en/NCPE/Documents/Our\\_Publications\\_and\\_Resources/Annual\\_Reports/annual\\_report\\_2004\\_en.pdf](https://socialdialogue.gov.mt/en/NCPE/Documents/Our_Publications_and_Resources/Annual_Reports/annual_report_2004_en.pdf)

trends persist, it will take 50 years to reach gender equality in the OSCE and 150 years worldwide<sup>14</sup>. Unfortunately, data on women and economic decision-making, especially in areas relating to business ownership, remains sparse. With regard to employment “The rate of female participation in the labour market stood at 35.8 in 2000, while in 2013 it stood at 49.8. This fast growth was the result of a number of factors including: take up of post-sec education; family-friendly work; increasing social acceptability of non-family child care, remunerated work for females and secularisation.”<sup>15</sup>

About education “Out of 4500 students, the rates of male graduates is 82% while the female stands at 86% graduate from the University of Malta, which is not reflected in the workforce rates by gender. The EU average gender participation gap rate in the labour market is 5% while in Malta it is 15%. Occupations in Malta still remain ‘stubbornly male’.<sup>16</sup>

## Gender mainstreaming models and interventions

From 1995 to 2005, thanks to a joint effort of national/international institutions, media professionals and NGOs <sup>17</sup>, we can observe positive actions<sup>18</sup> (sometimes with significant and fruitful results) in the following key areas:<sup>19</sup>

- ✓ The increase in the representation of women in decision-making, giving women a more effective voice in Parliament, local councils, political parties, trade unions, public boards and committees, Government delegations, public service, the judiciary and education, employment, health and economy.
- ✓ The reconciliation of family, work and civic responsibilities, through equal opportunities in employment and co-ordination between employees, trade unions and NGOs.
- ✓ The reduction of violence against women, particularly domestic violence.
- ✓ A better assistance to women for overcoming specific social problems, mainly single parent families, difficulties and vulnerabilities related to drugs, alcohol and gambling.
- ✓ Continuation of the process of legislative reforms in order to ensure the elimination of gender discrimination.

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<sup>14</sup> Sources: Il Mara, July-September 2014, pp. 6-7. Speech of Ms Ajla van Heel, Gender Officer, OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights and Presentation of Dr. Godfrey Baldacchino, Professor of Sociology at the University of Malta. NCW Conference held on the 30 April 2014 at the Palace Hotel, Sliema.

<sup>15</sup> Ibidem. For more detailed information on this issue, please see visit this website of the ETC

<http://etc.gov.mt/Category/5/22/Research-and-Reports.aspx>

<sup>16</sup> Ibidem

<sup>17</sup> Among more influential there are National Council of Women (NCW); Malta Confederation of Women’s Organisations (MCWO); Malta Association of Women in Business (MAWB); General workers Union’s female works Committee; UHM’s (Union Haddiema Maghqudin); Cana Movement; Malta Gay Rights Movement (LGTB rights); Moviment Graffiti, Association for Men’s Rights Malta, Malta Unborn Child Movement (MUCM), Malta Pro-Life Movement... Please see Quing, 2008, [http://www.quing.eu/files/results/ir\\_malta.pdf](http://www.quing.eu/files/results/ir_malta.pdf).

<sup>18</sup> For all recent official initiative <http://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/policy-initiatives/search?c%5B%5D=336> and Report “Good Practices for Gender Equality”, Project VS2006/0322, August 2008 pp.11-13

[https://socialdialogue.gov.mt/en/NCPE/Documents/Projects\\_and\\_Specific\\_Initiatives/TGLC/TGELC%20-Final%20English%20research%20report.pdf](https://socialdialogue.gov.mt/en/NCPE/Documents/Projects_and_Specific_Initiatives/TGLC/TGELC%20-Final%20English%20research%20report.pdf); NCPE Report, A National Public Service and Public Sector. Initiatives and Good Practices ... Implementing Gender Mainstreaming, 2009 [https://socialdialogue.gov.mt/en/NCPE/Documents/Projects\\_and\\_Specific\\_Initiatives/Living\\_Equality/good\\_practices.pdf](https://socialdialogue.gov.mt/en/NCPE/Documents/Projects_and_Specific_Initiatives/Living_Equality/good_practices.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, Thirty-first session, Summary record of the 656th meeting And Summary record of the 663rd meeting (CEDAW/C/SR.656, August 2004- CEDAW/C/SR.663, July 2005); <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N04/422/66/PDF/N0442266.pdf?OpenElement> <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N04/430/18/PDF/N0443018.pdf?OpenElement>

- ✓ Equal access to education and training, with particular reference to the areas of new technologies and to the mainstreaming of gender equality through the education system.
- ✓ Improvement in women's health by giving adequate attention to issues related to women's health such as breast cancer, mental and emotional health and occupational health and safety.
- ✓ Enhanced Co-operation/Coordination among key stakeholders.

### Development perspectives

- ✓ "Far from the label of 'feminist', women in Malta today still have to strive to safeguard their rights on the workplace. We earn less than men, do more unpaid domestic work, raise children silently while holding down a full-time job and, yet, face differentiation when it comes to progression in the work place. No wonder young female graduates are in no hurry to start a family."<sup>20</sup>
- ✓ Facing inequalities is a necessary precondition to improve the human and productive potential of a country. There is the need to link work back to education and/or training, to feminise more occupations, addressing the rise of the precariat, health risks, stress and vulnerability (even more important if we consider the global financial and economic crisis repercussions), to better take into account the wider and different necessities of men and women with disabilities. The promotion of a gender-sensitive, professional working environment and management culture is also important in order to ensure a regular impact assessment and evaluation reporting related to it; ultimately, to further develop and strengthen a continuous and sustainable gender-mainstreaming process.

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<sup>20</sup> <http://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20140222/opinion/Women-s-silent-revolution.507784>