

Using the media to encourage women to work



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SHARING WORK-LIFE RESPONSIBILITIES

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NISTA

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In brief

In Maltese, nista' means 'I can'. It was the name of a €1.3 million media awareness-raising campaign run in 2010-2012 to promote women's participation in the labour market, which remains at a very low level in Malta. It was initiated by the Gender Unit of the national Employment and Training Corporation and was embedded in national policy on gender equality, with funding from the European Social Fund (ESF). The campaign aimed to challenge traditional stereotypes, reduce the care gap and promote men's active role in the family, with a view to enhancing women's employment participation. It was carried out through pre- and post-campaign research, sharing of experiences from other countries, radio and TV adverts, a 13-week television series, a poster campaign and an information booklet.

The project was implemented in four phases, which first raised awareness of the issue across society, secondly challenged stereotypes, thirdly promoted men's roles in the family, and finally encouraged employers to improve work-life balance by highlighting best practice and the benefits of reconciliation. The campaign had a noticeable impact on women's employment participation and better awareness about childcare. The initiative has been evaluated.

NISTA provides a solid example of a wide-ranging approach to addressing reconciliation by challenging traditional gender stereotypes, which is very relevant in the Maltese context. Eurostat statistics from 2013 show that there was a notable increase in female employment participation during and after the media campaign. The example has good transferability prospects, particularly for countries where traditional roles of women and men prevail.

I can

Malta has a low female employment participation rate and the highest female inactivity rate within the EU. There is a deeply-ingrained culture that emphasises the traditional roles of the male breadwinner and the female homemaker and mother, and few parents use outside childcare. Furthermore Malta has a decreasing fertility rate which has economic and demographic implications. The Maltese government has acknowledged the need for reconciliation policies in order to engage the unused female resource for economic growth, which have resulted in the introduction of reconciliation policies and support to parents. Lobbying and pressure for more gender awareness has been forthcoming from women's groups such as the Malta Confederation of Women's Organisations (MCWO).

A media publicity campaign was therefore initiated by the Gender Unit at the Employment and Training Corporation (ETC), a public body which falls under the remit of the Ministry of Education and Employment and which helps jobseekers to enter the labour market or improve their career prospects. The stakeholders involved in designing the campaign included the media industry, experts in gender issues and in the labour market and gender in the media, together with researchers. It followed a previous campaign by the Gender Unit to promote high-quality childcare in Malta. NISTA became one of the largest and longest-term awareness-raising projects with a broad involvement from the media.

The scope and context for the project is set within the strategic objectives of the Maltese government on gender equality, enshrined in the Constitution of Malta (1964), the ratification of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1991, and specific laws enacted to promote gender equality and prohibit discrimination, such as the Equality for Men and Women Act, Chapter 456 of 2003.

A multi-disciplinary consortium

NISTA was developed by a multi-disciplinary consortium of experienced professionals, including the ETC and other key experts in research, media buying, public relations, television and radio production, outdoor marketing, and gender and the media.

The campaign targeted women, including inactive young women, inactive older women, single mothers, men and fathers, employers, and society at large.

Firstly, it aimed to challenge the existing traditional stereotypes about women's and men's roles in the family and work, thus encouraging men to take a more active role in the family and reducing the care gap through the sharing of unpaid work at home. Secondly, it aimed to increase the number of women doing paid work. Part of this involved changing the workplace mentality by convincing employers of the benefits and win-win solutions that can be achieved through the introduction of various work-life reconciliation measures. The other side of the coin involved putting forward the benefits of formal employment and self-employment in terms of making women financially independent, raising families' standard of living by bringing in a second income, and combating the feminisation of poverty and women's financial dependence on the state and/or their spouse/partner.

Research, advertising, a 13-week TV series and a booklet

To achieve these objectives, NISTA carried out several activities.

- It started by designing a pre- and post-campaign research exercise, which comprised a qualitative research study using a Computer Assisted Telephone Interview (CATI). This was carried out to gain a better understanding of people's views on sharing work/life responsibilities. It was backed up with focus group sessions and a Delphi meeting (Nov 2010), pre-campaign quantitative research (Dec 2010), a qualitative research study on employers' perceptions (June 2012), highlights of research findings regarding private

individuals and employers (2012), a qualitative research study on employers' perceptions (Sep 2012), and post-campaign quantitative research (Sep 2012).

- It produced and aired a number of radio and television spots with a common underlying message of challenging traditional gender roles. The TV clips were aired on the national TV stations TVM and TVM2 twice a week back-to-back and at prime time on Sunday, attracting high audiences. Creating real-life scenarios using media that people could relate to their own situations represented an innovative approach. On radio various time bands were selected to reach the highest possible number of listeners.
- It designed a set of billboards, which were strategically placed so as to ensure the widest possible audience was reached. The billboard campaign portrayed the messages for the different groups targeted in the four phases of the campaign.
- It produced and aired a 13-week television programme. Different themes related to work-life balance issues and which emerged during the different campaign phases were chosen for each programme. The programmes were fast-paced and included packets of information, a regular feature on women and human rights through legislation, stories of women and men who are taking on non-stereotypical roles and making a success of it, and stories of ordinary women who do exceptional things in their life. Best practices regarding flexible working solutions (telework, job sharing, extended parental leave and reduced hours) which permit employees to better balance their work and their life were included, together with practical tips on how to choose high-quality childcare, women and pensions, women and financial literacy, women and cooperatives, women and unions, etc.
- It published an information booklet called Thinking of going back to work? for women wishing to go back to work.
- In addition, a meeting was held with the project partner from Belgium to discuss and share ideas about similar projects, and a logo was developed for the project. The project's name, as well as meaning 'I can' in Maltese, echoes the word feminist (feminist).

A four-phase campaign

The campaign went through four phases (each of them lasted about 4-5 months):

- **Phase One: Generating awareness in society in general**

This phase was aimed at society in general and at raising awareness about the project and the subject of work-life balance.

● **Phase Two: Challenging traditional roles for women**

The second phase was aimed at inactive young women, inactive older women and single mothers, to promote the importance of paid employment and financial independence for women, as opposed to either inactivity or dependency on social benefits. It consisted of television adverts depicting testimonials, radio adverts and billboards, amongst other things.

● **Phase Three: Promoting men in the family sphere**

This phase focused on challenging traditional gender roles and more specifically men's roles within the family, which are often limited to their breadwinning role. This part of the campaign targeted and promoted men's involvement in family life through a number of television adverts and testimonials, radio adverts and billboards.

● **Phase Four: Employers for work-life balance**

Employers were targeted through television spots and articles in specific employer-focused magazines. This element of the campaign aimed to highlight best practice employers who have implemented measures favouring better work-life reconciliation for their employees, and demonstrated the benefits that work-life reconciliation measures have for businesses, thus creating a win-win solution for all involved.

A measurable impact

The NISTA campaign was monitored and evaluated, and research was carried out during and after the campaign. Eurostat statistics (Employment Rate by Sex, 2013) show that there was a notable increase in female participation during and after the media campaign: 2009: 39.8%, 2010: 41.5%, 2011: 43.4%, 2012: 46.8%. There was also an increase in take-up of childcare places. There were also a number of online comments in social media and online papers by people commenting on the TV and radio clips which showed another element of awareness-raising and discussion.

Monitoring and post-campaign research demonstrates that the general public became more aware of stereotypes about working fathers and stay-at-home mums and also about the need to share caring responsibilities for a better work-life balance. The public also became aware of the benefits that a second income can have on the family's quality of life. Employers also could see that offering best practices in reconciliation policies brings a better solution for everyone.

The post-campaign research exercise revealed that 88% of respondents believed that it was possible for partners to balance their work and family responsibilities if there is an agreement between both partners to share family responsibilities, and depending on the working hours and flexibility offered by employers. 81% of respondents also stated that the marketing campaign message was clear enough and they also agreed with it. The survey led to recommendations for more awareness-raising on the availability of childcare facilities, and better promotion of incentives and facilities which allow women or caring parents to join the workforce.

The results of the practice could be enhanced by launching another similar media campaign and giving much greater prominence to the wider public relations function, especially by using social media networks and platforms that exist apart from the traditional 'above the line' broadcasting media such as television and radio.

The project can be easily replicated in other countries looking to encourage inactive mothers to enter the labour market, mothers to consider retaining their jobs, fathers to shoulder more caring responsibilities within the domestic sphere, and employers to change attitudes towards female workers.

Contacts/Further Information

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Further information

[NISTA website](#)



[Pre-campaign survey report](#)



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[EIGE's approach to good practices](#)



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EN (PDF, 388.37 KB)

Metadata

TOOL: Awareness-raising