

Equality mark promotes equal opportunity employers



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Equality Mark

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In brief

The Maltese Equality Mark is a national gender equality initiative aimed at increasing women's participation in employment (the women's employment rate in Malta is low), by promoting practices amongst employers that facilitate the reconciliation of work and care roles. The initiative is led by the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE) which launched the mark in 2010. The initiative established a standard for 'gender equality employers' and runs a certification scheme for public and private bodies which show that they implement gender equality

in employment, including family friendly measures, and also in the way they provide goods and services.

The methodology includes an audit and a questionnaire to employees. Award of the Equality Mark is based on assessment of minimum criteria that entities need to fulfil. It has provided a standard and a brand, and helps employers to develop their policies.

The mark's launch was accompanied by an effective media campaign which ran until the end of 2012. So far 55 employers employing some 16,000 people have qualified for the mark.

The initiative is innovative in the Maltese context, and could be replicated in other countries. As the programme was considered a success, NCPE decided to continue with its promotion after 2012, when the EU co-funded project which was financing the initiative came to an end.

Too few women go out to work in Malta

Malta's female labour force participation rate is the lowest in the EU: Eurostat puts the 2012 figure at 46.8% for women aged 20-64.[1] Women who are already in employment still face situations which make it difficult for them to stay in their job or make progress in their career.

The Maltese government therefore decided to promote the advantages of equal opportunity employment policies by launching a certification scheme for employers.

The aim was to increase female participation in the labour market by providing indirect incentives for women to remain at or return to work. The scheme therefore seeks to make employers and managers more gender equality aware, and to encourage them to recognise and promote the potential of all employees irrespective of their gender and caring responsibilities.

The measure was designed and implemented by the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE) in the framework of an EU co-funded project which ran between 2010 and 2012 (under the Cohesion Policy 2007-2013, Operational Programme II, Empowering People for More Jobs and a Better Quality of Life, European Social Fund, Investing in Your Future). From 2013 until the present the measure has been run and funded solely by NCPE. The activity is in line with government policy on national gender mainstreaming as declared in various documents, the most recent being OPM Circular 15/2012.

Going beyond the legal minimum

The initiative aimed to create a standard for gender 'equal opportunities employers' and to certify public and private companies, bodies and departments which go over and above the minimum level required by law in relation to gender equality, family-friendly measures and gender equality in access to and provision of goods and services. The Equality Mark is awarded for a period of two years, at which point a recertification process is carried out. During recertification NCPE reassesses the criteria, provides training and evaluates the company, through a questionnaire to a sample of employees on the outcomes in relation to gender equality and the Equality Mark.

The main activity of the Equality Mark is certifying private and public employers by assessing their policies and practices regarding gender equality and family-friendly measures in the workplace and in access to and provision of goods and services. It is a full-scale certification process, and employers who apply for and achieve the standard required are awarded the certificate. The certification process is outlined on the NCPE website.[2]

An Equality Mark committee, formed of NCPE members, assesses and decides whether the employer has fulfilled the requirements for certification. The methodology and tools used include a gender audit of policies and practices, an in-house audit and training. As for the training component, the certification process requires that at least one representative from every company undergo a training session on equality and the Equality Mark. At the two-year recertification, a percentage of all staff is also required to undergo a training session and a re-evaluation is carried out.

The Equality Mark assesses the following areas to ensure that the equality measures go over and above the minimum required by law:

- policies and initiatives
- recruitment and employment
- equality representative or committee
- equality in career and personal development opportunities
- family-friendly measures for men and women with caring responsibilities
- gender equality in the access to and supply of goods and services

Top management commitment

NCPE lays great stress on the need for top management to be fully committed to gender equality and to lead by example. Therefore, if they are to be awarded the mark, employers are expected to

and to lead by example. Therefore, if they are to be awarded the mark, employers are expected to:

- inform all employees that they intend to apply for the Equality Mark to make the process transparent;
 - formalise agreements and explicitly endorse official policies;
 - support equality representatives in charge of the implementation of relevant policies;
 - ensure direct involvement of employees whenever possible;
 - support data collection in relation to gender equality monitoring and assessment;
 - encourage an organisational culture that is capable of maintaining the Equality Mark standards;
 - make a corporate commitment to become a leading organisation in equality best practices;
 - earmark specific resources to improving equality practices in every sector of the organisation.
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Benefits of accreditation

Accreditation is free of charge. Certificates are officially presented at a ceremony presided over by the minister responsible for equality, giving maximum exposure to companies. It is accompanied by an effective media campaign, and a list of successful applicants is presented on the website.[3]

The NCPE points out the advantages employers can reap from becoming certified: they can access the full pool of talent, boost profitability through diversity, be an 'employer of choice' in the modern labour market, cut costs by retaining staff, understand and meet customers' needs better and reduce the risk of litigation.

Rita Schembri, Director General of IAID, the Internal Audit and Investigations Department, the first government department to qualify for the mark, testifies:

"It is very difficult to attract the best talent from the audit profession and hence flexi time and reduced hours are offered to BOTH women AND men – since we practice what we preach in terms of equality – and in today's day and age, when the young male professionals we're employing want to contribute at home and in the upbringing of their children, such availability helps to attract the right professionals to our Department which promotes a healthy work-life balance to ensure that we obtain the best performance from our auditors."

Fifty-five employers employing some 16,000 people and ranging from the Medicines Authority and the Labour Dept. to Burger King and Pizza Hut have so far been awarded the Mark.

Employers want to enhance their brand

At the end of the project in 2012, the Equality Mark was evaluated by an external evaluator who highlighted the strengths of the certification as well as areas for further development. The mark has increased awareness of equality issues among employees and employers, increased awareness and understanding of family-friendly measures amongst employees, and improved equality perspectives in customer services.

The evaluation investigated what attracted employers to apply for the mark. Reasons cited included obtaining formal recognition of the existing work culture, enhancing the company's brand, and the effective media campaign. At the same time it concluded that the Equality Mark could be improved by stimulating employers to move beyond the initial administrative exercise. The recertification process presents a step in this direction as the de facto work environment and work practices are discussed with the employees and NCPE delivers training to staff on the Equality Mark and gender equality. Further training to more staff members in each company could improve the practice.

For Malta the idea of an equality certification promoting family-friendly measures was innovative in itself, as this was the first time it had been carried out in Malta. Owing to the success of the initiative NCPE decided to continue with the Equality Mark certification even after the project funding ended in 2012.

[1] http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/themes/31_labour_market_participation...

[2] http://msdc.gov.mt/en/NCPE/Documents/Home/Welcome/equality_mark_info_doc...

[3] <http://msdc.gov.mt/en/NCPE/Documents/Home/Welcome/Certified%20Gender%20E...>

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Further information

Website



Certification process



List of Mark holders



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Logo is from Equality Mark website: http://msdc.gov.mt/en/NCPE/Pages/NCPE_Home.aspx

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