

FEMIFESTO | INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2022

Preamble

Whilst equality between women and men affects us all, this issue has not been given the attention it merits, and whilst progress has been made in some areas, in others a regression has been noted.

Women victims of violence have to wait years before they are allocated a date for their hearing, and justice is hard to come by with such delays. There seems to be a reluctance to issue temporary protection or emergency barring orders in cases of violence against women. This is putting women victims of violence more at risk and leaving them without protection.

Reconciling paid work and family still causes a lot of stress for parents, especially mothers. Children get sick and parents are only allowed 15 hours of urgent family leave a year. Fathers get just one day of paternity leave, and parental leave is unpaid resulting in caring gaps between women and men that continue to discriminate against women. Whilst during the pandemic, flexible work was encouraged, now that the COVID measures have been relaxed, many workers have been ordered back to their place of work. This has had a negative impact on workers, especially those who have a family, and because it involves more commuting, it also works against the environment.

Women trying to open up a business still face more hurdles than men.

Pay gaps and pension gaps are on the increase, and the more a woman is educated, the more the discrepancy there is in the pay. In spite of having more female graduates for many years, the number of women in top positions remains disappointingly low.

Till now, the morning after pill is not readily available everywhere, and there is no rebate on contraception or sanitary products. Abortion is still illegal on all grounds, and those who are pro-choice are still demonised and threatened. Yet, at the same time, there were attempts to legalise prostitution, which largely works against women and in favour of pimps and traffickers. Not criminalising the buyer fuels a rape culture, increases violence on women, and adds to the existing inequalities between women and men.

A strategic plan for equality between women and men is still lacking, and gender mainstreaming and gender budgeting have not materialised beyond empty rhetoric.

For these reasons, and many others, as a women's umbrella organisation bringing together 14 organisations that all support gender equality, we are calling all political parties to be clear about their objectives on issues related to equality between women and men.

The following are the priorities which we would like to be included in the electoral MANifesto of all parties.

If parties are keen to receive votes from women, we expect them to work in ways that make a positive difference in women's lives.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

1. Resolve the massive backlog in cases of violence against women by proposing sufficient dedicated magistrates who would work exclusively on cases of violence against women. There is currently only one magistrate dealing with such cases, and the backlog exceeds a thousand cases.
2. Provide FSWS, specifically Aġenzija Appoġġ, Domestic Violence Services with better funding to increase the number of social workers who assist women in cases of domestic violence.
3. Ensure that Temporary Protection Orders are requested by the police and issued by the court to provide protection. Also, ensure that other forms of emergency barring orders are available and accessible.
4. Ensure that the enactment of the law regarding femicide goes through all the stages in parliament in the new legislature

PROSTITUTION

5. Introduce the Equality Model which criminalises the buyers, and reduces the demand for trafficked women and girls.

GENDER OMBUDS

6. Introduce an office to settle cases related to equality issues between women and men.

WOMEN IN THE MEDIA

7. Ensure a better, balanced representation of women and men in the local media.
8. Avoid the use of sexist material; and the use of diminishing/damaging, objectifying, hypersexual stereotypes - through guidelines and training.
9. Establish a clear set of regulations that can be enforced across all media sectors. Guidelines alone have not been effective.
10. Implement and enforce sanctions for those who breach these regulations.
11. Address barriers and challenges that women face in the media industry that impact on their professional and personal lives. These barriers include, but are not limited to: harassment and bullying, glass ceiling, sticky floor, recruitment and promotion, especially to senior/decision making positions, under-representation in middle and upper management, and board rooms and committees.

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

12. Remove VAT on sanitary products and provide free contraception
13. Continue the discussion on bodily autonomy within parties, with women's NGOs and across society in general.
14. Before proceeding with the law on surrogacy, ensure that women's organisations are involved in the discussion, as this law brings with it many challenges that largely impact women.

WORK RELATED ISSUES

15. Allow workers, both women and men, regardless of their status - parents or not - to work flexibly in terms of choosing their working hours and working from home, where possible.
16. Increase paid paternity leave for fathers and introduce generous paid parental leave for both parents, with reserved quotas for both so as to close the caring gaps between women and men. Government should fund these incentives so as not to burden employers.
17. Workers - parents or not - should be granted leave to be able to care for their sick or disabled family members.
18. Ensure that the Club 3-16 and the after school service run seamlessly, as working parents of school aged children are still facing care gaps.
19. Ensure that persons registering for part time work as their primary employment, the majority of whom are women, are also eligible for unemployment benefits, as they are currently being discriminated against.
20. Re-introduce schemes for those receiving social assistance, allowing them to work for some hours as a means to top up their benefits, without putting them on the tapering of benefit scheme.
21. Ensure that migrant mothers housed in open centres are well supported with childcare services in order to allow them the possibility to enter the labour market.

EDUCATION

22. In order to break from traditional stereotypes, gender equality between women and men needs to be given more attention in the curriculum, and teachers need to be given more training on how to adopt a gender-neutral approach in class.

WOMEN IN BUSINESS

23. Women face many more hurdles than men to open up a business in Malta. More incentives targeted at women need to be given for women to start their own business.

WOMEN ON BOARDS

24. Introduce quotas and incentives, as well as sanctions on the private sector to ensure that, at least, 30% of board members are women, or are from the least represented gender.

FUNDING FOR WOMEN'S ORGANISATIONS

25. Women's organisations should be allocated specific funds to enable them to improve their services. For more efficiency, women's NGOs who help other women need more funding and human resources at hand. This will eliminate competition for funds with all other voluntary organisations.
26. Money should also be allocated to women's NGOs to help them in their administrative capacity.

STRATEGIC PLAN

27. A well-funded, strategic plan that tackles inequalities between women and men in a holistic manner is much needed. This should have clear milestones and timelines.

RISING COST OF LIVING

28. The need to analyse the impact of the increasing inflation and cost of living from the gender lens. Generally, such issues, impact women more harshly, and any proposed solutions need to take this into consideration.

INDEPENDENT EQUALITY SET-UP

29. There is a need for a well-funded, adequately resourced, independent set-up that would focus on issues related to equality between women and men.
30. This entity would be responsible for the implementation of gender mainstreaming, as well as gender budgeting, and would oversee and provide independent research that would inform government policy before laws are implemented.

We hope that the 30 proposals listed above will be taken up by the party in government, as well as supported by the opposition.

On International Women's Day 2023, we will be checking whether, one year later, women are still largely ignored by the political class.
