



**INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2023**

# **FEMIFESTO UPDATE**



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### **PREAMBLE**

With 2022 being the general election year, the Malta Women's Lobby (MWL) compiled a list of 30 proposals, published on Women's Day. These covered various topics that can have a significant impact on women's lives, including the issue of violence, paid and unpaid work, and the media amongst others.

These proposals were sent to all political parties and, following the elections, they were also presented to the then newly appointed Parliamentary Secretary responsible for Reforms and Equality, Hon. Rebecca Buttigieg.

At the time, apart from submitting our proposals, we also promised that a year later, on Women's Day, we would conduct a stocktake, so as to analyse which of these proposals had been taken up.

Out of 30 proposals, only the following have been implemented. These include:

1. Our call to introduce murder 'with femicidal intent' which allows the judges to consider the highest form of punishment (life imprisonment) whilst removing the argument of 'crime of passion' as a defence in such cases. This came into force in June 2022.
2. An increase in paternity leave (from 1 to 10 days).
3. The launch of a Gender Equality and Gender Mainstreaming Strategy and Action Plan 2022-2027.

This means that the rest were ignored.

An update on each and every proposal follows:

## **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

### **UPDATE**

- *A second magistrate has been promised. We await to see when this transpires, even if it will still not be sufficient to clear the existing backlog.*
- *The number of professional staff in Domestic Violence Services has increased, even if not up to the required amount.*
- *There is a major issue with both temporary protection orders (emergency barring orders), as well as longer term protection orders, made even more evident by Bernice Cassar's femicide. This issue must be prioritised.*
- *The law introducing murder 'with femicidal intent' has been passed.*
- *Furthermore, we demand that the recommendations made in the Bernice Cassar inquiry be implemented without any delay.*

## **PROSTITUTION**

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

### **UPDATE**

- *To date, Government has not embraced the Equality Model that best protects women and girls.*

## **GENDER OMBUDS**

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

### **UPDATE**

- *To date, this has not been implemented.*

## 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.

### UPDATE

- *To date, no measures promoting better representation have been proposed.*
- *Although some training, albeit with limited scope, is being designed, this has not yet commenced and is presently only aimed at informing the state broadcaster's employees.*
- *There are no proposed regulations and, thus, nothing to enforce.*
- *No gender-specific employment and promotion guidelines have been introduced for media houses.*

## 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

### UPDATE

- *VAT removal and free contraception have not been considered, even though both major political parties pledged to introduce this in their electoral manifestos.*
- *The discussion on bodily autonomy needs to continue in a non-partisan manner.*
- *There has been very little discussion with women's NGOs and across society in general on the issue.*

## 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.

### UPDATE

- *Whilst during the pandemic government pushed people to work from home, some workers who can work remotely are no longer allowed to do so.*
- *Apart from the additional 9 days of paid leave for fathers, the work-life balance directive was transposed in a way which goes against the spirit in which it was written, which had the aim of reducing the caring gaps between mothers and fathers.*
- *In 2018 the government had started discussions on leave granted to enable caring for sick or disabled relatives, but nothing materialised.*
- *Eligibility for unemployment benefits for part-time workers has not been addressed.*
- *Fairer schemes for those receiving social assistance to top up their benefits have not been addressed.*
- *Migrant women are still facing many hurdles in accessing the labour market. They need to be offered 24 hour childcare and access to public transport if they work on shifts or finish work late at night.*

## 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.

### UPDATE

- *This has not been addressed. Guidance teachers need to be included in the conversation.*

## 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.

### UPDATE

- *This has not been adequately addressed.*

## 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.

### UPDATE

- *The EU directive designed to ensure 40% representation on boards of the underrepresented sex was issued in 2022, but it has not yet been transposed into Maltese law.*

## 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.

### UPDATE

- *This has not been addressed.*

## STRATEGIC PLAN

27. Women's 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.

### UPDATE

- *Government launched the Gender Equality and Gender Mainstreaming Strategy and Action Plan 2022-2027 in 2022. Whilst noting that the document has valid proposals, there is concern over whether the funds and resources needed to implement all the proposals will be made available.*

## 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.

### UPDATE

- *This has not been addressed.*

## 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.

### UPDATE

- *This has not been addressed.*
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