

Creative Women Conference 2018

“BRINGING ENTERPRICES CLOSER TO WOMEN “

4-5 May, Elysium, Paphos

It is with great pleasure that the Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance accepted the invitation to participate in the annual Creative Women Conference, which brings together female leaders and entrepreneurs, providing them with a platform for networking, interacting and exchanging ideas, while stimulating their creativity and motivating them for greater achievements. On behalf of the Minister Mrs Zeta Emilianidou, may I take this opportunity to convey her very best wishes for a successful, effective, and productive conference.

An ideal business world would be one that allows for women's creativity and intelligence to be channelled into action and translated into entrepreneurship; one that favours the realization of innovative ideas, whether having been inspired by men or women; one that offers a favourable environment for women to combine their multifaceted role -that of professionals, mothers and carers. In an ideal business world, offering women equal opportunities to demonstrate their skills and climb an organization's hierarchy, would be given, while ensuring equal pay for equal work between men and women would be not a prerogative, but just the norm. During the course of this conference we have heard the "success stories" of creative women and how they have excelled even in male dominated fields, however this is not feasible in every-day life. Women actually strive to reconcile work and family life, prove their abilities and advance in their career. Even if they manage to break the glass ceiling, they need extra effort to “convince” that their family responsibilities will not interfere with the demands of their new managerial duties.

Eliminating practical barriers to women's professional development lies at the heart of the Ministry's strategy for promoting equal opportunities and equal pay between men and women, which are key priorities of the employment and social policy. Tackling the gender pay gap in specific, has been a priority during the last decade, as the Ministry recognises that wage discrimination against women can adversely affect women's future pensions, their standard of living and their well-being. A Project of a €2 million budget and co-funded by the European Social Fund, under the title “Actions for Reducing the Gender Pay Gap”, was implemented during the period 2010-2015 in this respect.

The Project consisted of a broad mix of measures, aiming at eliminating the causes of the gap, and involved interventions in every relevant field, incentives for companies, education and occupational counselling, labour law enforcement mechanisms, exchange of best practise

between Member States, training and guidance of social partners, raising public awareness. The successful implementation of the measures, has contributed, amongst others, to the significant decrease of the gender pay gap. The gap has decreased significantly since 2007 (22%) and keeps following a downward trend reaching a percentage as low as 13.9% in 2016. With a percentage higher than the EU average in 2010, Cyprus currently ranks 9th amongst the countries with the lowest rate, and has achieved a rate significantly below the EU average (16.2%)

At least some of the measures are worth mentioning:

- a. Strengthening and upgrading of the inspection mechanism for the enforcement of equality in employment and equal pay legislation. The training included job evaluation methods.
- b. Training programmes for careers advice professionals, teachers and parents.
- c. Tripartite Conference for the exchange of good practice between the Member States of the EU: In October 2012, a Tripartite Conference was organised under the auspices of the Cyprus Presidency of the Council of the European Union titled “Tackling the gender pay gap: Best practices around four perspectives”. Government officials, trade union and employers’ associations members from all Member States of the EU participated, exchanging their experience on four dimensions, (a) occupational segregation, (b) job classification and pay systems, (c) enforcement and sanctions, (d) social dialogue
- d. Reviewing all signed collective agreements and identifying any direct or indirect discrimination on pay based on sex.
- e. Training of social partners representatives and members of professional associations: i.e. lawyers, accountants, human resource professionals and members of professional associations.
- f. Equal Pay Day: An “Equal Pay Day” event was organised contributing to raising public awareness on the gender pay gap and its detrimental consequences on women’s economic and social life.
- g. Certification for promoting gender equality: Last but maybe one of the most important measures of the Project, was the development of a national model for certifying enterprises which adopt policies promoting gender equality in the workplace, and the establishment of a National Certification Body responsible for granting these certifications, by decision of the Council of Ministers. The National Body is chaired by the Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance, while its members are the Gender Equality Commissioner and representatives of the employers’ and employees’ associations. According to the model of certification, companies have the right to apply for two types of certification namely (a) “Best Practice” for individual practices applied, and (b) “Equality

Employer” for adopting a comprehensive system of promoting gender equality in their workplace.

The National Certification Body for Gender Equality continues its work, although the project has been completed, and a call for companies to be certified is publicised annually. A satisfactory number of companies interested in being certified, gets engaged in the certification procedure every year. Every candidate company has to submit evidence of its good practice in the field of gender equality, which is later assessed by labour relations officers, through interviews with staff members, data collection and analysis. A report is prepared for each candidate company, based on which the National Certification Body decides whether granting the award or not. Following the certification decision, a special ceremony is organised by the Ministry, during which the Minister awards prizes to the companies, followed by the publication of the event to local media. Almost 50 companies have been awarded a certification so far. It is worth mentioning that enterprises that have been awarded a certification, are in an advantageous position as regards their participation in public procurement tenders.

During the certification procedure, our Department has come across various good practices that proved to have a genuine impact in promoting gender equality and for which companies were awarded a certification. It is worth mentioning some, as we would like more companies to follow these valuable examples:

1. Appointment of Equality Officers, or establishment of an Equality Committee within the enterprise with the participation of both male and female employees, responsible for receiving and handling complaints of discrimination on grounds of sex, or more general equal treatment issues between men and women within the organization.
2. Organising workshops about Women in Leadership, addressed to female employees who are either already in senior management positions or are candidates for such positions, with the aim of encouraging them to identify career barriers, engage in self-evaluation, improve their communication skills and upgrade their professional profile.
3. Providing mentoring to high performance female employees with the goal of supporting them in setting and pursuing individual goals and offering them experiences and opportunities for their personal development.
4. Applying a Working Mothers Scheme under which female employees have the right to flexible working arrangements after having children (and before they reach 18 years of age), as a way of balancing their work and family life better (flexible working hours, reduced hours, compressed work week, tele-working).

5. Granting part of the kindergarten cost incurred by an employee (25% -50%), on the provision that the choice of school allows the immediate response of the employee to the child's needs, while at the same time ensuring the employee's uninterrupted execution of duties at work.
6. Offering summer school for employees' children, organised at the employer's premises, the cost being largely subsidized by the employer, while providing creative time, education and entertainment to children.
7. Training programmes targeted to employees after long-term absence from their duties, aiming at their smooth reintegration, and their equal treatment in terms of evaluation, pay and career prospects.
8. "First-day-of-school leave" granted to working parents, in order to be able to escort their children on the first day of elementary school, or the first "adaptation" week of attending a kindergarten.
9. Special working facilities for pregnant workers during the last month of their pregnancy, providing the right to work from home several days a week, or allowing for unexpected absence from the workplace without loss of earnings.
10. Temporary movement of a pregnant employee, from a position that requires manual work or increased physical effort, to office duties, until she returns from maternity leave.
11. Complementing the maternity allowance of employees up to their salary level.
12. Actions to increase the representation of women in technical departments of the enterprise / organization through the provision of full-time and part-time jobs, flexible working hours and recruitment of trainees.
13. Extension of the maternity facilities provided by the legislation after the mother returns to work, for a period longer than the one the legislation provides.
14. Professional guidance offered by the enterprise to employees' children, for guiding them in choosing education fields and professions.
15. Establishing an on-line training platform within the enterprise, ensuring that every employee, regardless of their gender, family status, work duties or family responsibilities, has access to life-long learning.

Undoubtedly, the certification procedure has encouraged companies to review and assess their own policies in order to enhance the promotion of gender equality in their workplace. In this respect, enterprises have been motivated to apply policies promoting the reconciliation of work and family life, promoting women in managerial positions, eliminating discriminatory provisions from assessment and pay methodologies, and generally creating a working environment friendly enough for women to pursue their professional aspirations. The interest demonstrated each

year by new companies to apply for certification, proves that the procedure ***has actually brought enterprises closer to women*** and their needs, and has made the business world recognise the value added of integrating the principle of gender equality in their policies, and realize that enabling women combine their multi-faceted role and exploiting their creative nature is in the interest of companies' both competitiveness and growth potential. As acknowledged by Muhtar A. Kent himself, CEO of the business giant Coca-Cola, *"We need the three W's – women, water and wellbeing"*.

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