

Integration of migrants in Malta: Presentation of “Stepping Up” research project & launch of partnership initiative with Microsoft Malta

[Salutations]

Let me begin by congratulating the Migrant Women Association, and the Foundation for the Promotion of Social Inclusion, for organising today’s event, alongside your many collaborators.

It is my pleasure to join you at this morning’s event, launching this partnership initiative with Microsoft Malta, and also promoting the findings of the “Stepping Up” research project.

The partnership initiative shows us just how important, and how powerful, a corporate social responsibility commitment can be in promoting inclusive and participative strategies, of benefit to our diverse communities. I must therefore congratulate Microsoft Malta, for making this initiative part of your CSR approach.

I am pleased to note that the “Stepping Up” project, which is being presented today, looks at the essential role played by the economic participation of migrant women in the Maltese Islands.

The inclusion of migrants, particularly women, in the Maltese workforce, and across the European Union, promotes the need for real and inclusive opportunities.

Efforts to promote the inclusion of migrant women are especially vital, because migrant women often face multiple levels of discrimination. Discrimination takes place not only on the basis of their gender, but also because of their ethnicity, race, or cultural backgrounds.

There is also much more that we must do to achieve substantial progress, in areas which are of concern to all women. The issues of a healthier work-life balance, women's participation in decision and policy-making roles, and combatting negative gender stereotypes within society, are some of the most important concerns.

However, a particular focus on the experiences of migrant women is lacking, and there is a lack of research on the issue from the national context especially.

We need proper information about the situation currently faced by migrant women in Malta, in order to address gender-based inequalities, and promote equity and social justice.

Against the backdrop of these research gaps, I am confident that the study being presented today will offer us vital insight into the situation faced by migrant women in the Maltese labour market.

I would like to take the opportunity, to encourage other groups and institutions, to take up the challenge to deepen this research further. In this way, we will be strengthening our knowledge, with the aim of proposing and exploring new areas, of relevance to migrant women.

This focus on research and consultation, is a particular area of interest, in the work of my Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society.

I am pleased to note that, through its migrant-led NGO platform, of which the Migrant Women Association is a member, my Foundation has engaged with migrant groups, on issues of education, employment, and advocacy.

It is only through sustained dialogue with all stakeholders, alongside research, that we can achieve effective and positive change.

For this reason, I am pleased to note that during a series of consultation sessions, with members of Malta's business community and trade unions, a number of important issues emerged. It was interesting to discover the particular concerns faced by migrants, and these concerns may not otherwise have emerged, had members of the NGOs not been participants.

Therefore, I believe we must do more to ensure, that the voices and experiences of migrants are shared, and in this case migrant women, in the workforce.

We must ensure that their narratives are heard, to influence the development of sensitive and relevant policies. In this way, we will create an inclusive approach, with long-lasting benefits for migrants, their families, and our society.

For this reason, we cannot allow our policies to be fragmented.

Our policies must be holistic and integrated, to ensure the dignity of migrant women.

Moreover, our policies must remain open, to other research being carried out in this area. A recent study carried out by Dr Gordon Sammut and Professor Maryanne Lauri investigated intercultural relations between the Maltese and five other ethno-cultural groups.

This study looked into the attitudes and expectations which Europeans showed towards migrants.

Surprisingly, and in contradiction to much of the literature, the most affluent Maltese, and those who feel very confident, were the least likely to endorse a multicultural approach.

However, Maltese people with friends from diverse ethnic groups, and who met these friends more frequently, were more likely to embrace multiculturalism.

Therefore, we must invest in programmes and projects which nurture friendships and new connections among different groups.

We must also invest in strategies that tackle the disadvantages faced by migrant women, in particular. These disadvantages must be tackled from multiple perspectives.

In so doing, we can ensure that, our future investment in migrant women and girls, will be of benefit to our society as a whole.

Therefore, I would like to take the opportunity to encourage our national authorities, the private sector, civil society activists, and community members themselves, to continue advocating for the development of a coherent policy approach, which confronts the challenges faced by migrant women.

We cannot allow a populist approach to prevail. Scaremongering or unfounded fears, about the pressures placed by migrants on public services, or concerns about terrorism threats, should be addressed, by increasing education and access to information.

Let me share an experience with you, which will help us analyse the attitudes of some Maltese people, when we discuss the work force.

I was recently approached by a man, who said that he was being pushed into precarity, because he was out of work. He explained

that due to an unfair situation, in terms of prices, he was being under-cut and could no longer care for his family.

I believe that migrants taking up such jobs are not being treated with full dignity. Therefore, I appeal to our authorities to regulate employment, to ensure that migrants and Maltese workers are not being exploited in their work.

We must ensure that our policies create a level playing field, which responds to the valid concerns of all members of society. There must be an enforcement of regulations which ensure the dignity of all workers, regardless of their ethnicity.

Above all, we cannot allow ourselves to deviate from the path of human rights and respect for human dignity, which must underpin all our efforts.

It is essential for us to provide evidence, including reports and projects such as the one being launched today, to inform the public and respond to their concerns in a timely and effective manner.

We cannot allow migrants to be scapegoats, because of the failures in our policies.

We must act in favour of equity, and equality.

We must be bold, and vociferous, for what is right.

We must speak openly, in favour of the benefits that are possible when solidarity replaces division, when equity replaces injustices, when equality replaces discrimination, and friendship is stronger than mistrust.

Governmental authorities and European institutions have an important role to play in all this, due to the power they have in shaping public perceptions and understanding of migration, and the contribution that migrants bring to host societies.

All of these efforts, to promote education and sustainable policies, are vital contributors, to create a culture of positive peace. It is for this reason that we are committed, as a nation and also globally, to implement the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, with their powerful trust, towards solidarity and peace.

I am convinced that stronger synergies between our authorities, institutions, and civil society activists, can promote and enhance solidarity, unity, and positive peace in our societies.

On concluding, I look forward to the outcomes of today's event, and I wish you every success with your future initiatives.

Thank you for contributing to the wellbeing of migrant women in Malta, and, in so doing, contributing to the wellbeing of Maltese society as a whole.