

Questionnaire

Implementation of the Beijing Platform of Action

Part One  
Overview of Trends

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## 1.0 Overview

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The Maltese islands constitute a republic in the Mediterranean Sea, strategically placed between Italy and North Africa. Malta's location and its varied history under rulers as diverse as the Phoenicians, the Romans, the Arabs, the Knights of St John and the British have made for a cosmopolitan culture where north and south coexist with comfort.

Malta attained independence in 1964, and is based on parliamentary democracy and the rule of law. The Republic is based on a constitutional model with limited powers attributable to the Presidency. The Prime Minister and Cabinet direct and control Government and answer to Parliament. The judiciary is independent and answers to the Constitution.

The island's economy is largely based on manufacturing, tourism and services. The Maltese enjoy a high standard of living with universal health care, education and social security. Malta is a candidate country to join the European Union and is currently undergoing negotiations along with other candidates for accession.

Maltese society largely reflects the values and lifestyle of Mediterranean Europe. The predominance of Roman Catholicism as well as the British administrative tradition have both contributed to Malta's distinctive character. The islands are densely populated, and its 378,000 inhabitants speak their own language derived from semitic roots.

Communities in Malta are closely knit and extended families often live in close proximity to each other. The empowerment of the Maltese family underpins Maltese social policies. The Maltese family has decreased consistently in post-war years, and now consists on average of two parents and two children.

As at the last Census in 1995, women outnumbered men by 50.6% to 49.4% respectively. Women outlive men, with practically double the

number of females over 80 than men. 84.7% of females in Malta have completed primary education, as have 87.1% of males. Of the total employed population, 27.6% are female while 72.4% are male. Women are predominantly employed in the manufacturing, clerical, sales, educational and health sectors. Employed women tend, on the whole, to have more educational qualifications than employed men. 4.6% of all male employees perform both a full-time and a part-time job. Unemployment currently stands below 5%.

There are almost four female lone parents to every male. Most of these are widowed, although the number of separated and unmarried parents is gradually rising too. The majority of female lone parents are either retired or homemakers; 11% of female lone parents are in full-time employment, typically in the private sector, while 1.6% are in part-time employment. According to the Census of 1995, over 56% of lone parents claim to have a gross annual income equal to less than 50% of the median wage, that is, a typical poverty measure.

## 1.1 Malta's Priorities

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Successive administrations have upheld a firm commitment to the following policy goals since 1989:

- ✓ The promotion of equality between women and men
- ✓ The removal of all forms of discrimination on grounds of sex
- ✓ The advancement of women in political, social, economic and cultural spheres of Maltese life.

Critical areas of concern for Malta, as identified in the Platform for Action, include:

- ✓ The mainstreaming of equality throughout Maltese society
  - ✓ Equal female participation in decision-making
  - ✓ Balancing of work and family responsibilities
  - ✓ Eradication of violence against women
  - ✓ Assistance to women facing new forms of poverty and social problems
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## 1.2 Major Achievements

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Pursuit of these goals has resulted in legislative reform, policy development and the implementation of programmes in favour of women. Women today enjoy *de jure* equality with men and far higher levels of education and participation in local government than in the previous decade. A zero-tolerance attitude to violence against women has been consistently promoted, and professional services for both survivors and perpetrators of violence have been established. Measures have been introduced to enable the balancing of work and family responsibilities, and such measures are equally accessible to male parents. A definite shift in public attitude towards women's social and economic participation has definitely occurred in the direction of equal status.

However, women's very low participation in top decision-making positions, particularly in political and judicial life as well as the top echelons of the civil service and senior management, still pose a considerable challenge to a *de facto* equality.

## 1.3 Situation since 1995

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As regards sectors not covered by the national action plan, more attention needs to be given to the social and economic status of women in precarious situations outside the labour market, particularly lone parents unable to work and elderly or disabled women in substandard housing and in need of care. Over 50% of lone parents declare income below half the median wage; and there is broad anecdotal consensus that the living conditions of a number of elderly disabled women verge on the substandard.

The number of persons in each category has increased somewhat since 1995, and has not yet been adequately or systematically addressed, through for instance, universal access to childcare services or to care and repair services. It must be noted that although the

tackling of female poverty was an identified priority in the Platform for Action, this goal does not feature among the national machinery's principal objectives for the year 2000.

The issue of the sexual and reproductive health needs, particularly of young females in a time of changing social norms, also needs to be examined more closely and opened up to public debate.

#### 1.4 Attention to Gender Equality

The validity of gender equality is widely accepted today, and is reflected in political communications, civil service circulars, portrayal of women in the media and a move to incorporate gender perspectives across University faculties.

The concept of gender mainstreaming and the requirement for gender impact assessments across policy sectors has – in policy if not thoroughly in practice – become an accepted wisdom, and methodologies for consistent application are being developed. Initial efforts at institutionalising mainstreaming have been directed towards the public service, typically the trend-setter in employment relations. Greater effort to extend mainstreaming principles will now be directed towards the private sector, education, religious institutions and the media.

#### 1.5 Globalisation

Global change has had little impact upon women's lives in Malta to date, although the prospects offered by IT services and e-commerce may yet prove to open up a new and fruitful employment market for women. Equal access to technological education and training must be more actively promoted if this is to come about.

A privatisation programme for state-owned enterprises is underway in Malta, but it is far from clear that this will have any unwarranted effects on employment in general, or on women in particular. A shift

towards contract work is also perceptible in Malta, but as women in Malta have generally tended to have interrupted careers in the private sector, this is unlikely to impact largely upon typical work patterns.

The most positive aspect of global change for Maltese women has been the inspiration and solidarity provided by attendance at various international conventions and conferences, planting the seeds of equality in Malta which continue to be carefully nurtured and are bearing fruit.

Part 2.

Financial and Institutional Measures



## 2.1 The National Budget

The Budget makes the following provisions for gender-specific matters:

- o Recurrent expenditure for the running of the Department for Women in Society.
- o A grant to the Commission for the Advancement of Women, under the *Programmes and Initiatives* section of the Expenditure Account of the Ministry for Social Policy.
- o Financing of the Domestic Violence Unit and the Child Protection Services Unit under the Foundation for Social Welfare Services.
- o Financing of a residential programme for female teenagers with behavioral problems.
- o Maintenance and subsidy of the Childcare Pilot Project.
- o A new allocation has been made for 2000, targeted at the provision for a new shelter for female survivors of domestic violence.

While budgetary allocations on the above have all increased since 1995, no efforts are yet being made to undertake Gender Impact Assessments prior to the formulation of the Budget, nor is there any formal monitoring and analysis of budgetary allocations to ensure equitable expenditure across genders.

Another area in need of development concerns the establishment of indicators of progress, both for programme analysis and for credibility in pressing for budgetary increases.

## 2.2 Structures and Mechanisms

**The Platform for Action has been implemented by Malta's national machinery, that is, the Commission for the Advancement of Women and the Department for Women in Society. These two entities were established by Cabinet decision in 1989. The role of the former is to advise Government on matters relating to the promotion of equality, the eradication of discrimination and the advancement of women. The role of the latter is to execute the ideas and initiatives proposed by the Commission, through a mainstream approach and in liaison with the focal points across the public sector.**

### **2.3 Post-Conference Coordination**

**After Beijing, the final report of the Conference was widely disseminated. Workshops on the implementation of the Platform of Action were held with key policy makers, civil servants, the social partners, all interested entities and professional bodies as well as focal points within government. The Department for Women in Society was responsible for this co-ordination.**

**In more general terms, whenever a Maltese representative attends a conference abroad, s/he is bound to present a report, on return, detailing the main themes of the conference, learnings made and follow-up action required. These reports are then disseminated to relevant sectors.**

### **2.4 Role of NGOs**

**The role of NGOs in post-Beijing action has been minimal. The NGOs mostly involved in women's issues in Malta provide invaluable assistance on the Supportline for women and children undergoing abuse, and, through religious organisations, provide shelter for such persons. In general, there is still much scope for further fostering of innovative collaborations between government and civil society in Malta.**

Part 3.

Critical Areas of Concern

## 1.0 Women and Poverty

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### 1.1 Background

Poverty is by no means -marked in Malta. There is no evident homelessness and the level and coverage of noncontributory assistance are such as to ensure that nobody falls through the safety net – albeit a very modest one in need of revision. However, anecdotal evidence of new forms of poverty is on the rise, and as in the rest of the developed world, concerns mainly female-headed lone parents and elderly women. Furthermore, a gap is emerging between women in two-income households and those reliant upon their husband's sole income; the latter group may also be thought to be at risk of relative poverty.

### 1.2 Examples of Success

Close liaison between agencies in civil society, particularly parish networks and religious organisations, has served to ensure basic standards of wellbeing for all. Universal social security coverage has served to mitigate the misfortunes of many. Strong extended families have meant that a number of women are able to work despite the lack of organised childcare facilities.

### 1.3 Examples of Obstacles

Malta's social institutions are still largely based on the male-breadwinner model and are thus proving somewhat slow to respond to new forms of gendered poverty. There are as yet no appropriate indicators to track the feminisation of poverty. The burden of unpaid work still falls largely upon women. The absence of widely available and accessible childcare also has consequences on many women's ability to work. This inhibits them from joining the contributory arm of social security, which offers more generous benefits than the noncontributory one.

Certain anomalies in the Maltese Social Security Act require revision; for instance, contributory benefit replacement rates for married women are calculated on a single person's basis while married men enjoy a married person's rate.

#### 1.4 Commitment to Further Action

The Central Office of Statistics is shortly to convene a working group to study best practice in measuring income and poverty, and a gendered perspective will be taken, among others.

Plans are underway for the opening of a second statutory childcare centre, as well as a state-funded childminding scheme for working women.

A report on the identification of gender bias within the Social Security Act has been commissioned and will be considered by the National Commission on Welfare Reform, established in 1999 to review the Social Security Act.

## 2.0 Education and Training

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### 2.1 Background

The National Curriculum in Education has been reformed and is based on principles of gender equality. Ongoing effort has been made to eradicate stereotyping in schools and to promote gender equality through secondary school awareness raising. Female participation in tertiary education has increased steadily. While in 1990 only 39.6% of females continued studies after the obligatory secondary school, by 1999 51.6% of all university graduates were female.

### 2.2 Examples of Success

A whole chapter of the new National Curriculum for Education is dedicated to matters of gender equality and focuses on the need for a gender mainstream approach in education.

A manual for teachers of Personal and Social Education in secondary schools has been launched and disseminated. This manual aids teachers to instill gender awareness in its pupils. Follow-up meetings were held with teachers.

A Gender Issues Committee has been established at the University of Malta. The Commission for the Advancement of Women is liaising with the Committee to include gender in various faculty studies and to develop a Gender Impact Assessment methodology.

A multidisciplinary two-year Diploma on Gender and Development is run by the Department for Women in Society together with the Workers' Participation Development Centre. This course is free of charge and widely advertised.

Just under half of the persons attending training and retraining at Malta's public employment service – the Employment and Training Corporation – are female. The Corporation organises various courses for women returners and has itself received training from the UK-based Women Returners' Network in this regard.

The Staff Development Organisation in the Office of the Prime Minister has started to hold training courses for female public employees.

The Centre for Schoolgirl mothers, under the Department of Education, provides education and support to school age mothers.

The restructuring of the Technology Education Programme in 1996 allowed for girls to have the same opportunities as boys in this field.

### 2.3 Examples of Obstacles

Although women can be said to have true equality of opportunity in the education and training systems, greater attention needs to be paid to the link between the requirements of a restructuring workforce and women's occupational preferences.

#### 2.4 Commitment to Further Action

Further awareness raising with primary and secondary school teachers will be carried out. The Employment and Training Corporation is also committed to enhance its efforts to promote equal opportunities in its training programmes with targeted action at women returners.

### 3.0 Women and Health

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#### 3.1 Background

A policy on women's health was drawn up at the end of 1994 by the Commission for the Advancement of Women, and national consultation was held on matters concerning women's specific medical problems, sexual health, and psychosocial problems. The need was identified for greater female participation in decision-making in the health sector. The need for greater dissemination of health information was also noted, as was the need for the establishment of Well-Women Clinics and helplines.

#### 3.2 Examples of Success

Sex-disaggregated statistics are compiled on a regular basis by the Department of Health Information, and some improvement has been noted as to the incidence of diseases suffered mostly by women.

Series of television programmes on issues related to women's health are held every few years.

#### 3.3 Examples of Obstacles

Evidence of female consultation and participation in the health decision-making progress is limited.

The dissemination of women-related health information is limited, and outreach through the television and written media although not infrequent is sporadic.

Heated public debate over the utility of national breast cancer screening programmes has impeded the scientific and health services research approach to the magnitude of the problem and the best ways of dealing with it.

Increased attention needs to be paid to women's sexual and reproductive health.

Prevention programmes have been carried out on substance abuse or mental health but not on a gender-specific basis.

### 3.4 Commitment to Further Action

Further to recent recommendation, the Director of Health is committed to:

- (a) improving the current diagnostic and therapeutic services for women suffering from breast disease
- (b) introducing specialised services for women of higher risk of contracting breast cancer
- (c) addressing the general female population through health promotion activities.

## 4.0 Violence against Women

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### 4.1 Background



An Inter-Agency Forum on Violence against Women was set up in 1994, and a Domestic Violence Unit was set up later that year to offer social work services to survivors of domestic violence.

#### 4.2 Examples of Success

The Domestic Violence Unit, established within the quango Social Welfare Development Programme in 1994, continues to meet a busy caseload and to liaise with other related entities such as the police and voluntary organisations in empowering its clients.

The Unit carries out regular awareness-raising activities and promotes a message of 'zero tolerance' of violence.

Sensitisation of professionals and the police is carried out regularly, and guidelines for teachers and doctors have been prepared and disseminated.

Sessions for perpetrators of violence are run on a regular basis.

A White Paper has been published which incorporates amendments to strengthen national legislation on domestic violence, with an increased focus on perpetrators' responsibility. The Paper was widely distributed within government, professionals, academia and women's organisations. This launch was accompanied by a seminar and a media campaign, which enjoyed a large turnout from the political, judicial, professional and academic fields. New draft legislation has subsequently been finalised and awaits to be submitted for enactment.

Research on domestic violence and on the shelter needs of survivors is being carried out.

Research studies on sexual harassment at work and on the adequacy of social structures in dealing with women in difficult situations is being commissioned, and their findings will be incorporated into programme improvements.

### 4.3 Examples of Obstacles

The number of social workers dealing with cases of domestic violence is inadequate, leading to case overload and restricted service.

There is not sufficient shelter space for women leaving an abusive partner.

### 4.4 Commitment to Further Action

A recruitment exercise for more social workers is underway.

Work is underway to operate a new shelter for persons leaving abusive homes.

## 5.0 Women and Armed Conflict

### 5.1 Background

There is no armed conflict in Malta.

### 5.2 Examples of Success

Recruitment to the Armed Forces of Malta is open to women.

Legal refugees in Malta have a right to basic health care and education.

### 5.3 Examples of Obstacles

Women in the Armed Forces do not fully enjoy the working conditions of women in the rest of the public service.

Although Malta only has a relatively small influx of refugees, there is need to provide for physical and psychological support for them, and particularly for those who have undergone gender-specific abuse.

## 5.4 Commitment to Further Action

## 6.0 Women and the Economy

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### 6.1 Background

Malta complies with international labour conventions and the European Social Charter on matters affecting female labour participation. Women's share of gainful employment remains on the low side, as does their representation at middle- and high- levels of management. In 1999 women made up 28.9% of the gainfully occupied population, having risen only slightly from 26.5% in 1980. Women make up 14.09% of all registered unemployed. 59.8% of all persons whose primary occupation is part-time are women, two thirds of whom are married.

### 6.2 Examples of Success

Gender discrimination in recruitment and selection is strongly discouraged, as for instance in the public service where binding circulars have been issued to this effect.

A Children Act has been drafted, which will regulate childcare in both the public and private sectors. The Bill is currently being discussed.

Incentives and subsidies have been included in the recently promulgated Industrial Development Act for industries who set up a childcare centre at their workplace.

Conditions of part-time work have been improved, with part-timers eligible since 1996 to pro-rated social benefits such as vacation and sick leave. One-year unpaid parental leave and three-year career

breaks for full-time public employees, both male and female, have been introduced.

Legislation protecting pregnant employees has come into force.

In 1998 a national conference on gender-specific statistics was held, following which the first two gender-disaggregated statistical publications were issued. These publications present tabular data and analysis on women's position in various sectors of Maltese society, and they should prove to be of great help for planning purposes.

A number of research studies have been commissioned by the national machinery, the results of which should enhance planning efforts. These studies include research into women's invisible contribution to the Maltese economy; women's perception of female political participation; analysis of Census data; values of Maltese women and men; analysis of Maltese social welfare structures with particular focus on women in difficulty.

### 6.3 Examples of Obstacles

Women continue to carry a far greater part of unremunerated work, and there persists insufficient sharing of domestic tasks and responsibilities with men in two-earner households. Men are not yet sufficiently encouraged to reconcile professional and family responsibilities.

The statutory pilot project offering childcare to working parents of children under three has been running for over two years.

Regulatory structures for greater flexibility in working patterns, such as telework or jobsharing, have not yet been developed. In fact, the need for flexible working practices is not yet part of public debate.

### 6.4 Commitment to Further Action

A firm policy decision has been taken to enable women's participation in the labour force.

Decisions are to be taken as to the state's role in the enabling of childcare provision.

A commitment to the collation of gender-disaggregated data will be maintained.

## 7.0 Women in power and decision-making

### 7.1 Background

Women obtained the right to vote and to stand for elections in 1947. Notwithstanding the absence of legal barriers, women have been conspicuously absent from political life. The situation is slowly changing as more women have contested, and been elected to, local government since its inception in 1993.

### 7.2 Examples of Success

The number of females elected to Local Councils has increased steadily, rising from 19.4% in 1993 to 21.17% of all local councillors in 1999. The Department for Women in Society undertakes various media engagements with local newspapers, radios and television stations, to encourage female contestation of local elections. Workshops for female candidates of local council elections are held by the Department for Women In Society. Social gatherings for these candidates are also held, and addressed by the Minister for Social Policy and the Minister for Justice and Local Government.

The number of women serving on Government Boards and Committees has gradually increased from 6% in 1990 to reach 17% of all public committee members in 1997. This is partly due to nominations from the Directory of Maltese Women held by the national machinery, which contains profiles of qualified women in Malta.

### 7.3 Examples of Obstacles

Female representation in Parliament is still extremely low, with only one female Minister in 1999.

Female representation on the judiciary is still low. There are no female judges in Malta, although 25% of magistrates are now female.

Female representation in the higher echelons of the Public Service is also very low. 6.12% of women in the top Scales 1 to 5 of the Public Service are female.

### 7.4 Commitment to Further Action

Malta's national machinery has requested the assistance of the Commonwealth Secretariat in drawing up a strategy to increase female representation in decision-making positions in the Public Service.

## 8.0 Institutional Mechanisms

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### 8.1 Background

Established by Cabinet in 1989, the Maltese National Machinery comprises the autonomous Commission for the Advancement of Women and the statutory Department for Women in Society. The Department executes the Commission's decisions and implements its initiatives. Since 1991, focal points in all Government Departments and Corporations have sought to inculcate gender issues in mainstream administration.

### 8.2 Examples of Success

Through its outreach efforts, the status and visibility of the national machinery has steadily increased over the past decade.

**Part-time release from work is granted to public officers in the Maltese Public Service who are eligible to follow the two-year Diploma in Gender and Development. This should have positive spillover effects in public administration.**

**Competency in conducting Gender Impact Assessments has been developed by the Department for Women in Society. In 1999, such impact assessments have been carried out on three legal bills, relating to the establishment of the Tourism Authority; to Equal Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities; and the establishment of an Occupational Health and Safety Authority.**

**Arrangements are being made with the Commonwealth Secretariat to conduct gender training for trainers in the year 2000.**

**Conditions of work in the Public Service have been improved, to include the opportunity for working reduced hours and for taking responsibility breaks for working parents with dependent children or relatives. This measure is largely utilised by women.**

### **8.3 Examples of Obstacles**

**There is as yet insufficient understanding of gender equality and gender mainstreaming in the Maltese public sector.**

**Focal points in Government Departments require further training and empowerment to participate in policy making if they are to ensure that gender issues have the necessary impact.**

**Greater flexibility is required in the utilisation of the 13 weeks' statutory maternity leave, some of which is forfeited if the actual date of birth differs from that initially envisaged.**

### **8.4 Commitment to Further Action**

Gender Impact Assessment methodology will be refined further and made an integral part of the formulation and analysis of all law, policy and programmes.

Maternity leave will be extended to 14 weeks in the year 2001.

Legislation regarding protection of maternity at the place of work will be strengthened as from the year 2001.

## 9.0 Human Rights of Women

### 9.1 Background

The human rights of both women and men are upheld in the Maltese Constitution and enforced through the Courts of Law. In 1991 the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women was ratified by the Government of Malta. The 1993 amendments to the Civil Code brought about equal rights and obligations within marriage. The Constitution was also amended in that year to afford enforceable protection against gender discrimination.

### 9.2 Examples of Success

Discriminatory regulations have subsequently been brought into line with the Constitution. For instance, all discriminatory provisions have been removed from the Income Tax Act, and married women can now opt to be treated as individuals for income tax purposes or opt to sign the tax form together with their husband. The Social Security Act has been amended; 'head of household' is no longer associated automatically with the husband.

The National Machinery has actively participated in a review of the structure and procedures in the resolution of family litigation, which will eventually translate into a Family Court that should offer a swifter, more personalised and private service to its clients.



In 1999 amendments were made to the Citizenship Act which gave rise to an amendment regarding women's status. Children of Maltese men and women born before 1989 are granted the right to dual citizenship.

### 9.3 Examples of Obstacles

### 9.4 Commitment to Further Action

At the end of 1997, a project was established to review all legislation to ensure that women enjoy full legal protection. This was carried out by a local group of experts within a project established between the Maltese Government and UNDP. The report was submitted to the Commission for the Advancement of Women and the Minister for Social Policy in July 1999. Plans are underway for the requisite legal drafting.

## 10.0 Women and the Media

10.1 In 1994 a national seminar on Women and the Media was held, kicking off public debate on the way women are portrayed in the media, and on the absence of women in news and current affairs. Awareness was raised and debate on the matter has been sustained.

### 10.2 Examples of Success

The Department for Women in Society has distributed to all local media entities the EU Resolution on the Representation of Women in the Media, towards promoting a realistic and balanced picture of women in society.

Positive use is made of the media at regular intervals, as all local television stations transmit TV spots that promote gender awareness in key sectors of Maltese society.

As mentioned above, since Beijing much effort has been made to reduce negative stereotypes and to promote gender equality in primary and secondary schools.

## 12.2 Examples of Success

Attendance at science and technology classes has increased although not yet on a par with male children.

Participation by female children in sports, drama and cultural activities is similar to that of male children.

A residential, therapeutic home has been established for teenage girls with behavioral problems, and is run by the Department of Family Welfare.

The Child Protection Services Unit was set up in 1994 and, in liaison with health, education, police and other entities, deals with cases of violence against minor girls. Supportline 179 was set up in 1996 to respond to women and children suffering abuse.

## 12.3 Examples of Obstacles

Insufficient number of social workers in the Child Protection Sector.

There has been heated public debate as to whether or not educational campaigns on sexual and reproductive health, and contraception in particular, should be carried out with young people.

## 12.4 Commitment to Further Action

Recruitment of more social workers in Child Protection is underway.

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