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Provision of Evidence-Based Research and Delivery of Training: Enhancing Female Participation in Social Dialogue

Final Research Report

Malta Council for Economic and Social Development

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1 Executive Summary

This report was commissioned by the MCESD in efforts to establish the current status of participation in social dialogue and to determine ways of enhancing participation of females thereto. The directive was to analyse the information available and propose a number of related recommendations for definitive actions which would yield tangible results to enhance female participation.

Both desk research and in-depth interviews and workshops were carried out with relevant stakeholders in order to gather the necessary information for the purposes of this research.

Through the study, it was noted that females make up around 25% of the current representation in social dialogue. However, this is not necessary through lack of effort or discrimination against the female gender. In fact, it was noted by many, including females, that their participation is merit-based and that there are no particular attempts made to discourage females from being a part of social dialogue. Rather, the situation has slowly been improving through a natural process over time and is reflective of the market itself.

There are however certain areas of concern, primarily relating to work-life balance, lack of flexibility, lack of resources and lack of adequate visibility and information about the social dialogue framework and available opportunities to skilled potential participants. Furthermore, it would seem that the commitment necessary and the resources available are not always ideally balanced.

A number of actionable recommendations have been presented in this report which have been designed to encourage participation of females within the social dialogue forums. These include recommendations which could be implemented in the market which would increase female participation at industry level and would in turn be reflected in increased participation at social dialogue level, such as establishing a gender diversity index and market data reporting. The topic of quotas was widely debated, and whilst international studies have shown their effectiveness, it would seem that locally a less forceful approach could be more effective; hence, recommendations were made to encourage the market to engage more female participants at higher levels.

Recommendations were also made for direct application at social dialogue level, such as enabling participation through flexibility and secondary less onerous roles, creating a pool

of specialists which would include skilled females for referral by social partners when needed, engagement and marketing of social dialogue roles and setting agendas for discussions specific on gender parity and participation in social dialogue.

The intention is to create a space for merit-based growth and shift the social paradigm naturally towards a greater participation of valid skilled individuals who happen to be females both at industry level and in social dialogue.

2 Introduction

2.1 Purpose, Scope and Design of the Research

In a study held by the International Labour Office (ILO) in 2008, it was found that Malta had one of the lowest rates of female participation in social dialogue with just 3.33% of the total body being represented by women (Breneman-Pennas & Rueda Catry, 2008). In 2015, in an attempt to gain a better understanding of the issue, the MCESD provided the opportunity to 2 individuals to gain first-hand insight of the operations of the Economic and Social Committees in Italy and Brussels through the Leonardo Da Vinci Programme – People in the Labour Market (The Malta Business Weekly, 2015).

The MCESD is today seeking to invest in quality social dialogue in efforts to enhance female participation therein and is looking to yield definitive action for tangible results:

> *Through in-depth research, the MCESD intends to bring about a* ***shared commitment*** *among social partners on thematic areas for the common good, to work together to* ***clarify issues, formulate strategies****, and* ***develop action plans****, and for social partners to build a* ***sound understanding*** *in a bid to engage in* ***objective discussions*** *and to gradually build* ***mutual trust*** *leading to further positive results.* ***The research will serve as a basis of discussions and its final outcome will provide unbiased and factual material****. This will promote more* ***robust social dialogue based on facts rather than speculation****, highly important for targeted policies at Government level.*

In-depth research was undertaken in order to determine which factors impact female participation and in what way. The objective was to present a report which would incorporate factual information with recommendations on how to enhance female participation and which would be supplemented with training.

The scope is therefore threefold:

1. To determine the current status of female participation in social dialogue forums;

2. To identify any challenges and gaps within the current framework as compared to structures where female participation rate is more enhanced;

3. To draw from the research undertaken, both primary and secondary, and make relevant actionable recommendations for tangible improvement in female participation in social dialogue to be communicated to and developed with the relevant stakeholders.

This report, together with the in-depth research conducted to compile it aim at stimulating objective discussion amongst the social partners, formulate effective strategies and action plans, and generate commitment and joint work on a number of thematic areas.

The involvement of the social partners throughout the research process is critical in determining the status quo, but more importantly in enabling a more formative plan of action with a high degree of collaboration.

Following delivery of the final research paper, relevant training will be developed and delivered to MCESD staff with the aim of enhancing their capacity to communicate with stakeholders and drive the process of actioning the relevant recommendations within social dialogue forums.

2.2 Methodology

2.2.1 Research Methods

The project involved compiling desk research[1] coupled with questionnaires, focus groups and in-depth interviews with the aim to achieve the results outlined. The target population was the social partners due to the fact that participating delegates are appointed therefrom.

[1] Desk research can be defined as qualitative type of research, in that involves gathering and analysing non-numerical data to understand concepts, opinions or experiences. Qualitative research is by definition exploratory and it is used to define the problem or to develop an approach to the problem / matter under analysis.

The population continued to be involved throughout the process to ensure relevance and practical application of the recommendations, and to enhance buy-in.

Therefore, the research includes a combination of:

- Desk research – a literature review[2];
- Questionnaires completed by existing MCESD council and working group members in order to determine the current status and the effects on the dialogues, as well as the perceptions and beliefs of the cohort;
- One-to-one in-depth interviews with identified parties;
- Workshops with identified groups to discuss potential solutions to enhance female participation will be organised to obtain direct feedback from stakeholders after presenting the Feedback Report.

Through the research, we have been able to:

- Analyse the degree to which each entity involves females as delegates to the social dialogue forums;
- Assess female representation within the structures of each of the main stakeholders (i.e. employers organisations, trade unions and government) and their respective roles;
- Determine the current position of Malta and other countries in female participation in social dialogue;

[2] According to Snyder (2019), a literature review can broadly be described as a more or less systematic way of collecting and synthesizing previous research. An effective and well-conducted review as a research method creates a firm foundation for advancing knowledge and facilitating theory development. By integrating findings and perspectives from many empirical findings, a literature review can address research questions with a power that no single study may have.

- Analyse successful and less successful implementation of various initiatives to enhance female participation in social dialogue around the world.

- Analyse the impact of the various gender gaps[3] (labour market participation, wage, education, career progression and the infamous "glass ceiling", etc.) on the resulting female participation in social dialogue.

- Determine the resulting output when female participation is enhanced.

Consolidated, the information collected has been analysed and a number of relevant and actionable recommendations are being presented for further discussion with the social partners, who will themselves be expected to discuss and action them with the aim of effectively enhancing female participation. As a result, economic and social policies developed through social dialogue would be expected to become more inclusive and enriched.

Finally, the buy-in of the social partners has been sought through genuine involvement throughout the research process, both at data collection stage and by obtaining feedback following the preparation of the draft report (Feedback Report – see Annex).

2.2.2 Data Sources

As part of the initial desk research, the following information and documentation was provided by the MCESD:

- List of members of the Council and Committees of MCESD, and their representatives within social dialogue;

[3] "Gender Gaps" refers to a gap in any area between women and men in terms of their levels of participation, access, rights, remuneration or benefits.

- Data relating to form and structure of social partners' membership and management;

- SEM research report and presentation entitled *Promoting Improved Social Dialogue in Malta: Comparative Research on Social Dialogue in Norway and Malta* (MISCO, 2021).

In terms of additional information sources, in-depth research has been carried out on the identified thematic area via reviewing and analysing reports and data provided by public sector at both national and European levels, EU policy documents or legislative instruments on the subject, and academic studies. A complete list of information sources can be found under the Bibliography section.

Furthermore, identified stakeholders have been directly consulted to obtain their perspective and feedback. This includes:

- MCESD Staff;

- MCESD Council, Committee and Working Group Members;

- Members and beneficiaries of Social Partners.

2.2.3 Data Gaps and Limitations and Alternative Solutions

Data limitations have been identified and analysed before and during the preparation of the report. Efforts have been made to ensure that the report remains representative and provides reliable and valid results.

Hereunder is a summary of the identified limitations:

Limitation	Relevance	Mitigation Measure
Sample Size / Sample Bias	Each person may give an individual result, but it does not mean that the same result belongs to the whole population	There is no hard and fast rule to dictate sample size, though sample size impacts the level of analysis that can be performed (e.g. reduce independent variables in regression analysis).

		The sample size has been communicated in the relevant sections of the report.
Replies obtained may not be a representative sample	An overall low response rate or a lower response from particular segments of the population may jeopardise the research findings.	Reminder emails were circulated in relation to the surveys and interview meetings to encourage participation. Adequate time was provided for survey responses to be completed. Flexibility was offered with regards to interview sessions in order to increase participation. Response rates have been communicated in the relevant sections of the report. All segments of the population have been represented, and the results are being considered representative and reliable.
Length of survey may impact response rate	Lengthy surveys may impede participation	Draft surveys were circulated to the MCESD for review. Survey questions were drafted simply, to ensure understanding. Trials were done to identify time taken to complete interviews – 10 minutes. The average time was communicated to participants. Actual average time taken to complete the

		survey was in line with the estimate +/- 1 minute.
Reliance on the information provided in responses by participants. Incorrect replies would impact data integrity	Respondents may want to be perceived positively, which may result in untruthful and/or inaccurate responses.	Data obtained from surveys was verified through the interviews and feedback sessions. It was also shared with the Contracting Authority for feedback and to report any discrepancies. Participation was on a voluntary basis, so although they were encouraged, organisations/persons were not made to feel coerced to respond. Questions were designed in a neutral manner to avoid positive or negative bias.
Inadequate gender representation	Due to the current gender composition of the social partners, with a vast majority being male, the perception of females may be underrepresented within the results. Since the study is centred around the involvement of females, it is important that adequate and representative data is collected from females in order to ensure effective results.	Response rates by gender have been communicated in the relevant sections of the report. Gender representation in the sample was aligned to the population and the results are being considered representative and reliable.

3 Research Report

3.1 Effective Social Dialogue

Social dialogue involves continuous interactions through negotiations, consultation or exchange of information, amongst representatives of governments, employers and the workforce on issues of common interest relating to economic and social policy (International Labour Organisation, n.d.). Social dialogue is undertaken in an effort to build consensus amongst the main stakeholders and to promote democratic participation. When executed successfully, social dialogue may have a positive impact on and the potential to resolve important economic and social challenges (International Labour Organisation, n.d.).

The inherent intention of social dialogue is to instigate discussions which would bring about change to ultimately improve the social conditions of those it represents through agreement between all the social partners. With tripartism, where there is true collaboration among unions, employers and the government, the discussions held will account for the perspective of each of these parties in the negotiations held.

In Malta, the MCESD's role is to issue opinions and recommendations to government on matters of economic and social relevance prior to the implementation of any measures or reforms, essentially being the bridge connecting the social partners to government (MCESD, 2021).

The ILO identified 6 essential conditions which would facilitate the effectiveness of social dialogue at a national level (ILO, 2013), namely:

1. Independent social partners who have the freedom to organise and express themselves;

2. Social partners who are both strong and representative, which also have the necessary competences and capabilities;

3. A mutual desire and commitment to engage, including politically;

4. Institutional support, including funding and any necessary mandates;

5. The equal treatment of social partners, within an environment of trust and adequate negotiation and cooperation skills;

6. Transparency and adequate information exchange.

Indeed, it is accepted that **inclusion** is an important contributory factor for effective social dialogue. Diminishing gender diversity within these important discussion will not only deprive those not included from the opportunity of improved social conditions on matters specifically concerning them, but will also result in biased, less constructive outcomes. Quoting a 2021 study which takes the point of view of businesses:

> "*International research has shown that increasing the representation of women on board is not only the right thing to do; it also leads to better business outcomes. Increased gender diversity at all levels leads to smarter decision-making, contributes to an organisation's bottom line, powers innovation, and protects against blind spots, among other benefits.*" (BusinessMed, 2021, p. 2)

Social dialogue is bound to suffer through its forfeiture of more fruitful discussions through the input of valid individuals of any gender. It is in the interest of all social partners to examine ways to enhance gender parity and to ensure that solutions are found which may lead to a positive domino effect into society through policies and measures.

3.2 The Impact of Gender Gaps on Female Participation in Social Dialogue

"Gender Gaps" refers to a gap in any area between women and men in terms of their levels of participation, access, rights, remuneration or benefits. Gender-sensitive gaps have been prevalent for thousands of years, with historians linking this phenomenon to Neolithic times, where men were found to have been over-represented in cave wall paintings (Marta Cintas-Peña, 2019).

Today, we can still identify gaps when it comes to labour market participation, wage, education, career progression and the infamous "glass ceiling", etc. in Malta, there are still just 29% of managerial positions filled by females (BusinessMed, 2021).

Based on the National Statistics' Office (NSO) Labour Force Survey for Q3 2021, 46.8% of females aged over 15 in Malta are classified as having an "inactive" status, compared to 28% of males. The employment rate[4] of females was 66.2% when compared to a rate of 83.0% for males (see Table 1).

Table 1. Employment rates by gender and age group

Age group	Males	Females	Total
	%		
	July-September 2021		
15-24	52.3	52.9	52.6
25-54	92.6	77.7	85.7
55-64	68.6	34.1	51.7
Total (15-64)	**83.0**	**66.2**	**75.1**

Adapted from: NSO, Labour Force Survey Q3 2021

[4] Employment rate is defined as persons in employment (15-64 years) as a percentage of the population of working age (15-64 years).

Furthermore, just under half of females who did not participate in the workforce reported that the main reason for being inactive was due to personal or family responsibilities (44.6%), whereas none of the inactive males stated that this was the main reason for their inactivity (see table 2).

Table 2. Main reasons for being inactive by gender

Reason for inactivity	Males		Females		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
	July-September 2021					
Personal or family responsibilities	0	0	44,180	44.6	44,914	27.5
Education or training	10,317	16.1	9,030	9.1	19,347	11.9
Reached retirement age or uptake of early retirement	45,020	70.4	22,756	22.9	67,776	41.5
Other reasons	7,895	12.3	23,189	23.4	31,084	19.1
Total	**63,966**	**100.0**	**99,155**	**100.0**	**163,121**	**100.0**

Adapted from: NSO, Labour Force Survey Q3 2021

The same survey reports that the average monthly basic salary for female employees was €1,553, whereas that for male employees is almost 10% higher (€1,700).

These societal discrepancies undoubtedly impact the rate of female participation in social dialogue, and/or the respective roles and input.

3.3 Analysis of Initiatives to Enhance Female Participation in Social Dialogue around the World

The Global Gender Gap Report 2021 (World Economic Forum, 2021) provides an index benchmark of 156 countries, comparing data and the approach of different countries to close gender gaps in 4 key gap areas: Political empowerment, Economic participation and opportunity, Educational attainment and Health and survival. According to the report, "*Political Empowerment remains the largest of the four gaps tracked, with only 22% closed to date*", while "*[t]he gender gap in Economic Participation and Opportunity remains the second-largest of the four key gaps … [with] 58% of this gap … closed so far*".

Malta ranks 84th in the index, with 70% of gender gaps closed, however looking how this is translated from the key gap areas would provide a deeper insight of the country's position:

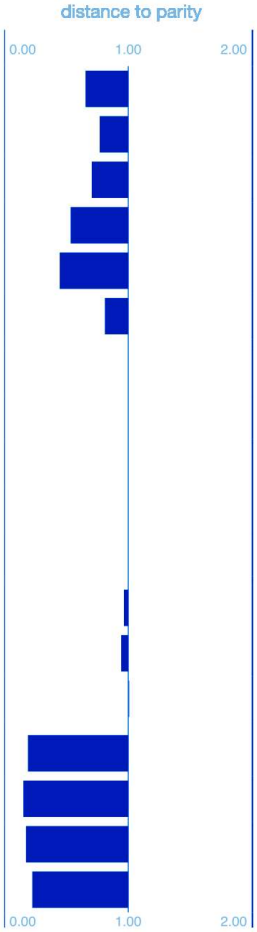
Table 3. Malta's Ranking in Key Gender Gap Areas

Key Gap Area	Malta's Rank	Malta's Score (% of gap closed)
Political empowerment	80th	19.2%
Economic participation and opportunity	94th	65.6%
Health and survival	116th	96.5%
Educational attainment	1st	100%

Adapted from: the Global Gender Gap Report 2021 (World Economic Forum, 2021, pp. 18-19)

Malta's Score Card from the Global Gender Gap Report 2021 (World Economic Forum, 2021, p. 271)

	rank	score	avg	female	male	f/m
Economic participation and opportunity	**94**	**0.656**	**0.583**			
Labour force participation rate, %	95	0.770	0.655	64.5	83.8	0.77
Wage equality for similar work, 1-7 (best)	49	0.706	0.628	–	–	4.94
Estimated earned income, int'l $ 1,000	112	0.536	0.494	26.6	49.6	0.54
Legislators, senior officials and managers, %	85	0.448	0.349	30.9	69.1	0.45
Professional and technical workers, %	97	0.812	0.755	44.8	55.2	0.81
Educational attainment	**1**	**1.000**	**0.950**			
Literacy rate, %	1	1.000	0.897	96.0	93.0	1.03
Enrolment in primary education, %	1	1.000	0.755	–	–	-
Enrolment in secondary education, %	1	1.000	0.950	94.5	91.5	1.03
Enrolment in tertiary education, %	1	1.000	0.927	63.2	46.0	1.37
Health and survival	**116**	**0.965**	**0.957**			
Sex ratio at birth, %	116	0.943	0.925	–	–	0.94
Healthy life expectancy, years	122	1.014	1.029	71.9	70.9	1.01
Political empowerment	**80**	**0.192**	**0.218**			
Women in parliament , %	129	0.155	0.312	13.4	86.6	0.15
Women in ministerial positions, %	102	0.176	0.235	15.0	85.0	0.18
Years with female/male head of state (last 50)	17	0.227	0.144	9.2	40.8	0.23



Within **Malta**'s legal framework, equality is addressed at various levels and areas of social interest including employment, health and education. At a constitutional level, Article 32 is concerned with the Fundamental Rights and Freedoms of the Individual "*whatever his … sex, sexual orientation or gender identity, but subject to respect for the rights and freedoms of others and for the public interest*".

Article 26 of the Employment and Industrial Relations Act (Cap. 452) and Article 4 of the Equality for Men and Women Act (Cap. 456), it is unlawful for any person to discriminate in any way in the processing of determining who should be offered employment, terms and

conditions of employment (including pay, conditions and other benefits) and in determining whether a person's employment should be terminated.

The Equality for Men and Women Act (Cap. 456 of the Laws of Malta) established the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE) in 2004 and safeguards the equality of opportunities and treatment in employment, education, and financial services on the grounds of gender and family responsibilities.

In 2021, *Servizzi Ewropej f'Malta* (the "SEM") carried out research which compared the **Norwegian** and Maltese social dialogue models in efforts to determine actions which may be taken in order to improve social dialogue in Malta (MISCO, 2021). One of the key findings of the research was that Norway's model is based on engagement, whereas Malta's is based on information sharing. The report also seems to point towards an approach which is more adversarial locally, as opposed to a more cooperative one as can be seen in Norway and the European models in general. On the other hand, the Norwegian model does not incorporate civil society within the context of social dialogue, which has a narrower remit than the Maltese model, focussing on labour market issues.

The topic of quotas in general is fiercely debated worldwide, with views spanning across a wide spectrum. Those for quotas would have followed the results of countries like **Belgium**, where *"[u]ntil the mid-1990s, on average women accounted for no more than 5–10 per cent of those elected. From the second half of the 1990s when the first quotas act was adopted, however, the number of women standing or elected rose spectacularly at all levels of elections"* (Drude Dahlerup, 2008).

Various studies have also made reference to **Norway's** success in applying quotas to enhance gender equality. In Norway, board gender quotas were introduced in 2003, where the boards of public limited companies were required to be composed of at least 40% of each gender within 5 years. A "hard quota" was imposed, and *"[n]on compliant firms faced stiff penalties such as delisting, nonregistration, and fines"* (Ruth Mateos de Cabo, 2019, p. 611). This was later extended to cover quotas in managerial teams, in delegations, project

groups, etc. (Olsen, 2003). Any deviations from the quotas set would need to be reported, and there is also a supplementary push to encourage women to apply in areas of competency where they are underrepresented (ibid.).

In their research, Mateos de Cabo et al. note that although Norway had a successful implementation by the deadline, "hard" quotas are not always the best way to achieve gender parity in the boardrooms (or other structures). In their research, they distinguish between "hard" and "soft" quotas as follows (Ruth Mateos de Cabo, 2019, pp. 611-612):

"A "hard quota" refers to a binding instrument that prevents companies lacking a gender-balanced board from remaining listed on a stock exchange, and compensating the board members or even operating. In contrast, a soft quota is not binding; hence, a firm that lacks a gender-balanced board can continue to operate, and only faces recommendations, warnings, and reports on the causes of noncompliance, or receive tax rebates and/or public subsidies for compliance, as in the Spanish case."

In **Spain**, a "soft" quota model was introduced in its Gender Equality Act of 2007. Following the strongly-voiced opposition of businesses (including women in business) against the introduction of hard quotas, Spain's non-mandatory quota of 40% was introduced, giving all impacted 8 years to align follows (Ruth Mateos de Cabo, 2019, pp. 611-612). Article 78 of the act reads:

> *"For the intents and purposes of this Act, balanced membership will be understood to mean the presence of women and men in the context in question in a manner such that neither sex accounts for more than sixty nor less than forty percent of the total."*

The quota applies to larger public and private firms[5], but interestingly, sanctions do not apply as it is more so in the form of a recommendation rather than an obligation. Instead, an incentive is offered through Article 34 of the legislation to those who comply with the guidelines in the form of preference in awarding contracts.

The **EU** followed suit with its 2012 proposal for a directive on improving the gender balance among non-executive directors of companies listed on stock exchanges and related measures (document reference: 52012PC0614 - 2012/0299 (COD)), known as the "Women on Boards" proposal. The proposal establishes the objective that boards should be composed of at least 40% of either gender, offering Member States the option of applying a hard or soft approach, at their discretion (Ruth Mateos de Cabo, 2019, pp. 611-612). To date however, the proposal is still awaiting the Council's first reading position and is not yet effective (Adrián Vázquez Lázara, 2020).

The use of both voluntary and legislative quotas is also seen in **Slovenia**'s parliamentary system. In its National Assembly Elections Act 2006, Articles 43(6) and 43(7) state that "*[i]n a list of candidates, no gender shall be represented by less than 35% of the actual total number of female and male candidates on the list*"[6]. For local elections, the quota is set at 40%. Any candidate list not meeting these criteria would not be acceptable.

The EU's paper on Electoral Gender Quota Systems and their Implementation in Europe reports that "*it was widely believed that the introduction of quotas in the national legislation was an urgent step forward in this respect. Before this, women's representation was visibly stagnating and no improvement was expected in these circumstances unless there were firm quota provisions*" (Drude Dahlerup, 2008, p. 83).

[5] i.e., firms that fulfil two of the following conditions: (i) more than 11.4 million euros in total assets, (ii) more than 22.8 million euros in annual revenue, and/or (iii) more than 250 employees.

[6] The law also provides that in the case of 3 candidates, at least 1 needs to represent the opposite sex (33.33% rather than 35%).

The main political parties have also set representation conditions voluntarily. Taking the example of the Social Democratic party, which introduced hard quotas in 1992 at 33%, the approach was successful in increasing the number of female candidates, with 42% percent being women in the 1996 election. However, it is interesting to note that none of their elected candidates were women. The model was changed to a "soft" quota in 1997, currently targeting a 40% rate of participation by either gender.

In **South Africa,** participants in social dialogue extend beyond the traditional tripartite model (i.e. government, employers and employees, also representing vulnerable groups such as young people, women, the unemployed and others. It is believed that by through this inclusive process, the effectiveness of social dialogue in general is greatly enhanced (Venkata Ratnam, 2005).

In **Ireland**, the Irish Country Women's Association is represented in the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF) as a part of Employer, Trade Union and Farm Organisations. Similar to the South African model, in addition to the tripartism model, the NESF is also composed of members of a fourth group, namely the "community and voluntary sector", which represents the interests of some segments of society which have traditionally been considered economically and socially disadvantaged, including women. (O'Donovan, 2000).

Research undertaken by BusinessMed (BusinessMed, 2021) has indicated that in countries where one would normally expect males to have a dominating role, such as Turkey, Tunisia, Egypt and Lebanon, have recorded a higher rate of female participation in board representations when compared to Malta:

WOMEN ON BOARDS	2021	2020	2019	2018
TURKEY	NA	17,5%	16,3%	17,3%
TUNISIA	11,3%	NA	NA	NA
EGYPT	NA	13%	10,1%	10,2%
LEBANON	NA	NA	14%	NA
ALGERIA	NA	NA	NA	8,36%
MALTA	NA	9,9%	10%	9,6%

Source: BusinessMed, 2021, p. 29

Nonetheless, the average rate of participation (13%) remains much lower than the target of 30% which has been attributed to "major social resistance against [women on boards], because of the traditional role of women" (BusinessMed, 2021, p. 30).

In their "Practical Guide for Strengthening Social Dialogue in Public Service Reform", Ratnam and Tomoda suggest that gender equality can be achieved by introducing policies and programmes which address the following areas (Venkata Ratnam, 2005):

- Decent work for women;
- Improved access for women to education and employment, including;
- Improved programmes for women's remuneration, training and career development;
- Equal and visible opportunities for women in managerial and leadership roles at all levels, including decision-making forums;
- An environment which promotes work-life balance and addressing the concerns and needs of workers with family responsibilities.

3.4 Female Representation and Involvement in the Local Social Dialogue Forums

During a workshop on *Effective Social Dialogue* in Brisbane in 2019, social dialogue was earmarked as an "essential tool for advancing the [United Nation's] 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda[7], whose implementation requires active engagement of the tripartite actors" and as particularly relevant for a number of Sustainable Development Goals, including Goal number 10 on reducing inequalities (Gerasimova, 2019).

The Malta Council for Economic and Social Development Act, Cap. 431 of the Laws of Malta (the MCESD Act) outlines the composition of the MCESD Council and how members must be appointed. Members include representatives of organisations representing employers, representatives of organisations representing employees, the Gozo Regional Committee, the Civil Society Committee, the Governor of the Central Bank, and persons nominated by government.

At the time of writing[8], the MCESD had a total of 92 representative members from across a number of organisations, forming part of its Council, Gozo Regional Committee (GRC), Civil Society Committee (CSC), European Economic and Social Committee (EESC). Only 25% (23) of the members are female. APPENDIX - Gender Distribution Data for MCESD Members summarises the distribution of genders within the various MCESD fora.

As defined by Article 4 of the MCESD Act (Cap. 431), members of the MCESD must have both a representative and a substitute in order to ensure continuity where the primary representative is unavailable. It is worth noting that females make up 21% of representatives and 24% of substitute members. On average, 21% of current representatives are male, whilst the proportion of female substitutes is greater in comparison at 24%.

Focusing specifically on the representation of the main stakeholders[9], proportions are slightly higher yet still low overall, with 25% of representatives and 29% of substitutes being

[7] https://sdgs.un.org/goals
[8] Based on data provided by the MCESD on 20th December 2021.
[9] The 8 main stakeholders being considered here are the following:

female. The greater proportion of female substitutes may indicate that females are more likely to take on a secondary role in social dialogue.

Looking at the overall organisational representation, it also transpires that 18 out of the 35 organisations have no female representation at all (51%). Of the 8 main stakeholders, only 6 (75%) have some form of female representation (i.e. as a representative or a substitute).

1. General Workers Union (GWU)
2. UHM, Voice of the Workers
3. Confederation of Malta Trade Unions
4. Malta Employers Association
5. The Malta Chamber of Commerce, Enterprise and Industry
6. Malta Hotel & Restaurants Association
7. Malta Chamber of SMEs
8. Forum Unions Maltin (For.U.M)

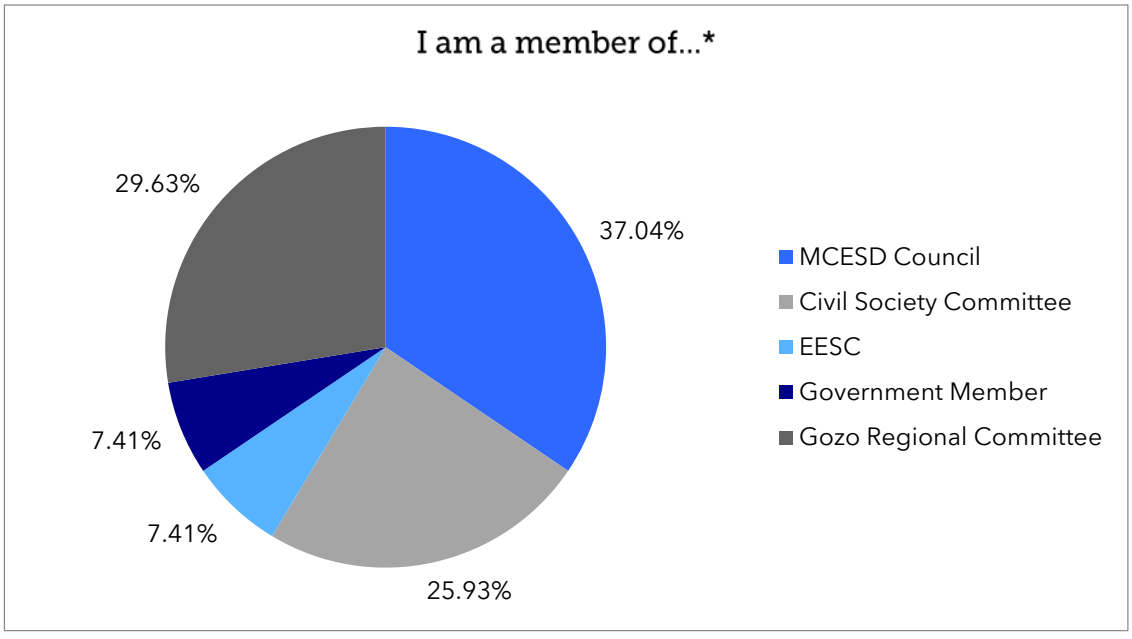
4 Primary Research Findings: A Needs Analysis

In order to gauge the social partner's positions, practical outlook and suggestions, direct first-hand feedback was sought through quantitative (survey) and qualitative (interview) methods. This made it possible to gauge the current level of involvement and the roles of females within this space.

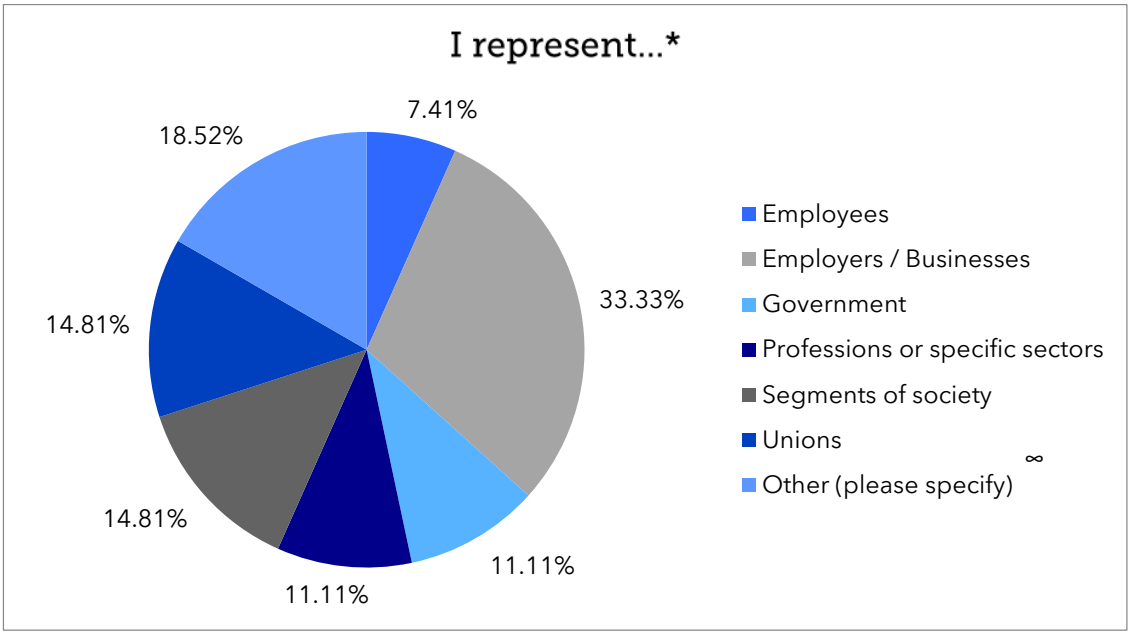
4.1 Questionnaire Findings

Quantitative data gathering was carried out through an online survey which was circulated to all members of the social partners for completion. See APPENDIX – Survey.

A sample of 28 responses were collected, 30% of the total population of representatives who participate in social dialogue. This is considered to be representative of the population, more so since responses were obtained from at least one participant from each committee/working group and sector, meaning that 100% of the social partners were represented (see Demographic Profile of Respondents for a full summary):



**Multiple replies to this question were possible.*



**Multiple replies to this question were possible.*

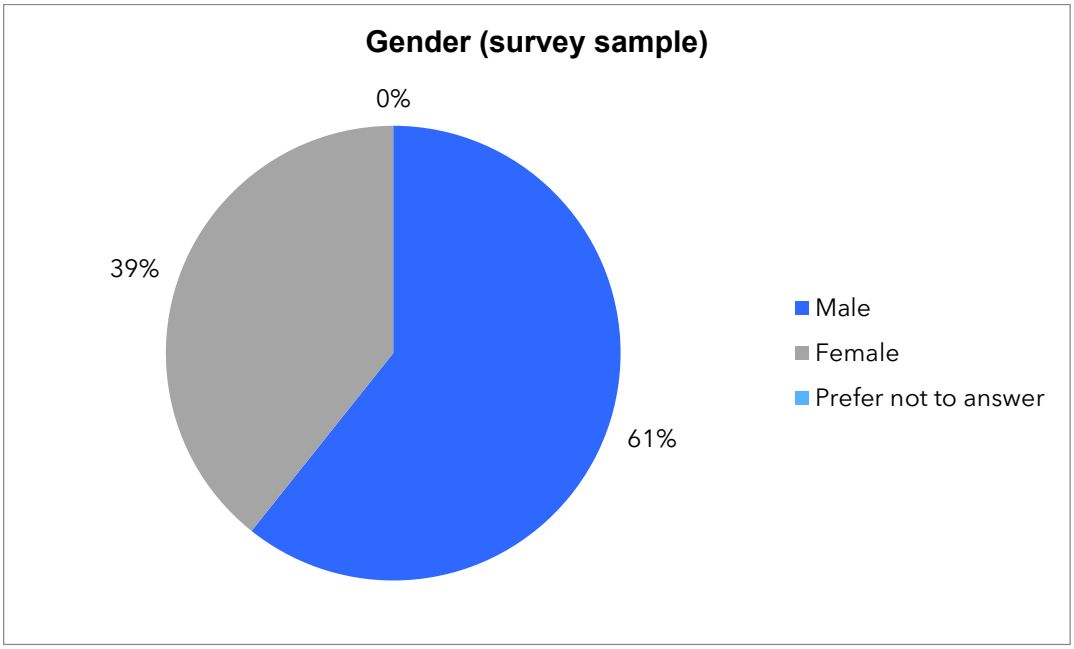
∞ 'Other' included: Disability Sector, Voluntary Organizations, NGOs, Local and Regional Councils, Students

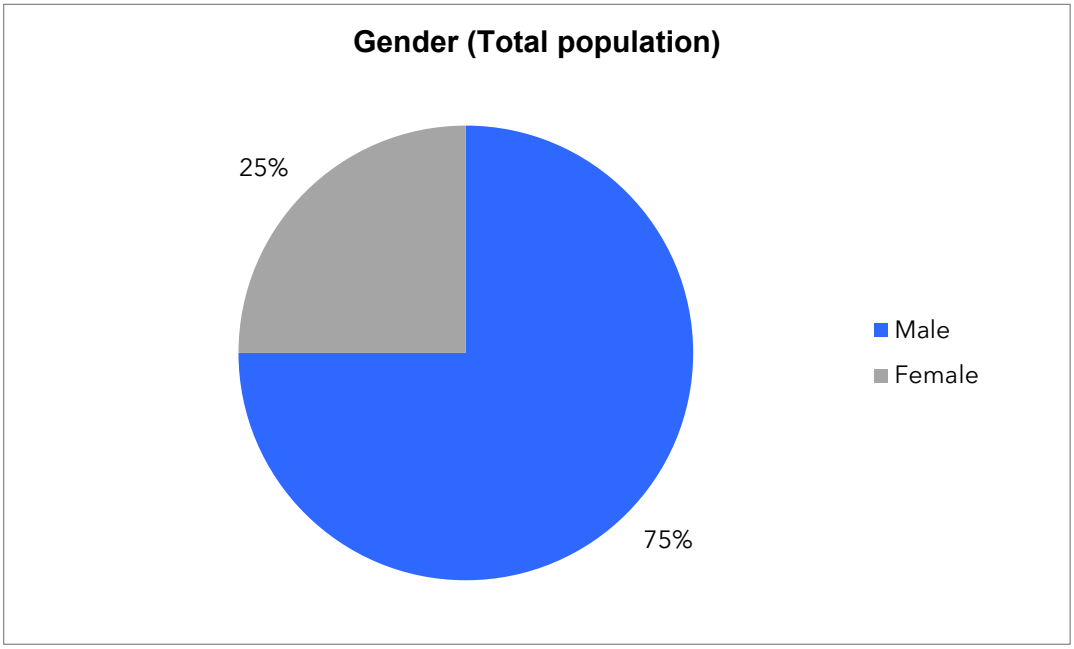
The completion rate was that of 68%[10], with the average time taken to complete the survey being approximately 9 minutes.

A full summary of the research results can be found in APPENDIX – Survey Results.

61% of respondents were male, whilst the other 39% were female. This is comparable to the actual population, where one-quarter of the members are female:

[10] The Completion Rate is the percentage of survey takers that completed the entire survey.





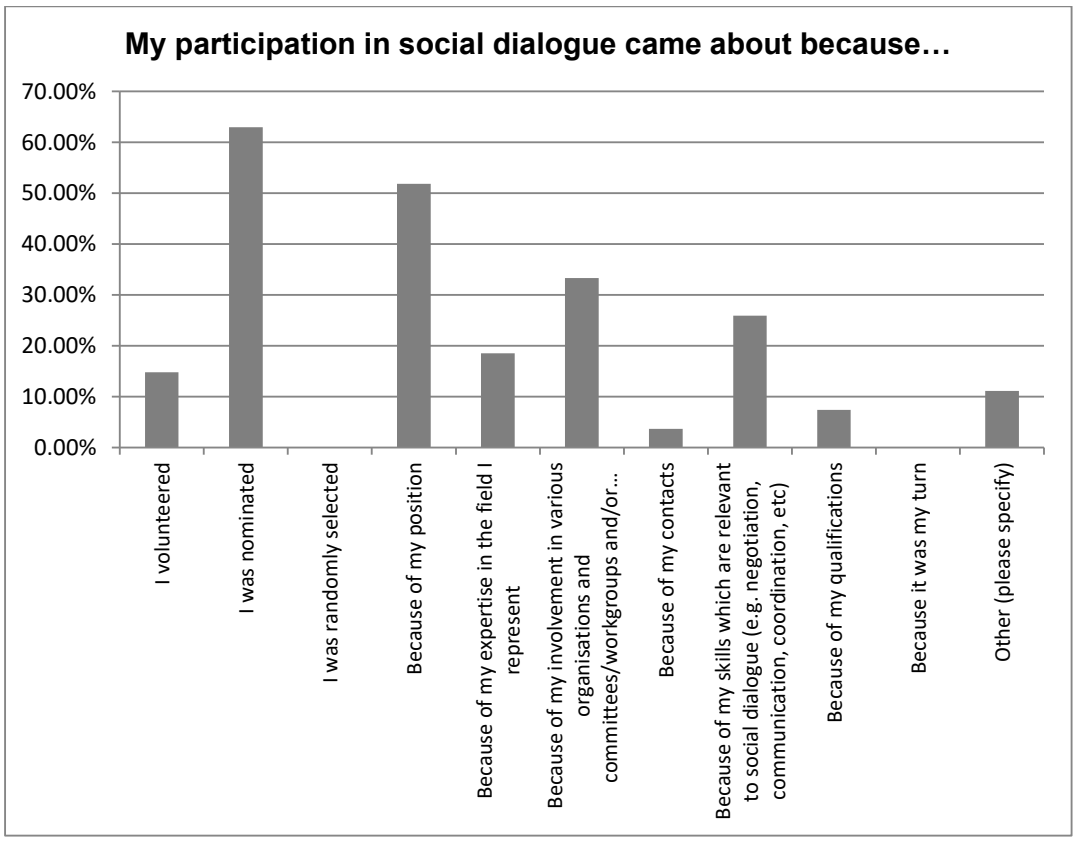
The following points of note emerged from the survey responses:

4.1.1 Appointment to social dialogue forums

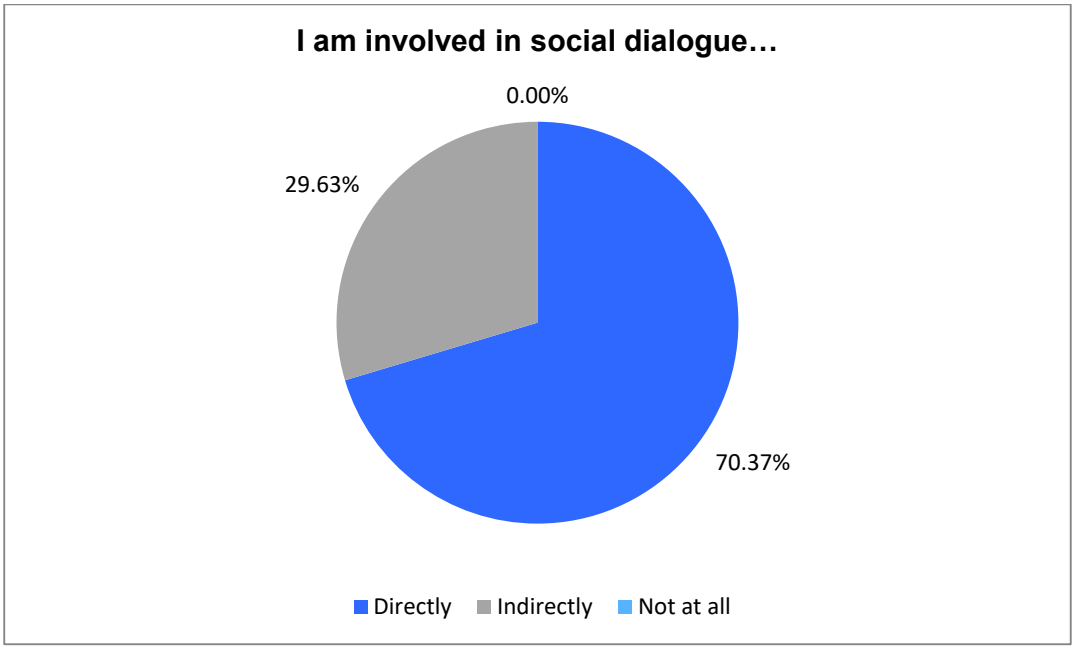
- The majority of respondents were nominated to be a representative in social dialogue fora (62%) by their peers and members. This is generally deemed to be a democratic manner of selecting candidates.

- A large number stated that they have taken on representation because of their current position (50%) or because of their involvement and/or exposure in various relevant groups (35%).

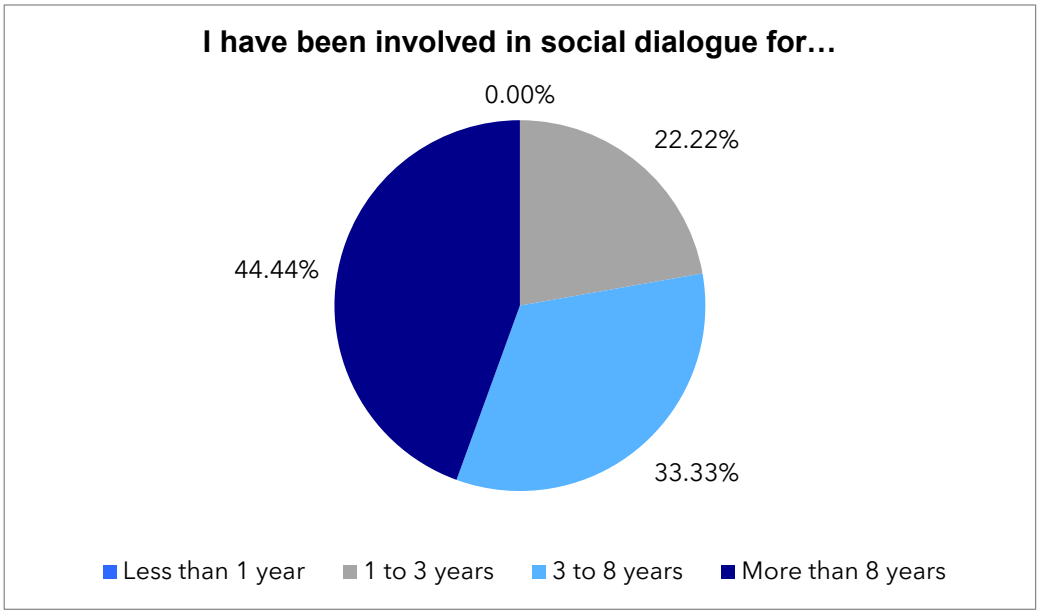
- On the other hand, very few stated that they are participants due to their qualifications (8%) or expertise (19%). Furthermore, just over a quarter of respondents (27%) stated that they have become involved as a result of the relevant skills which they possess.



- Most respondents (70%) are directly involved in social dialogue:

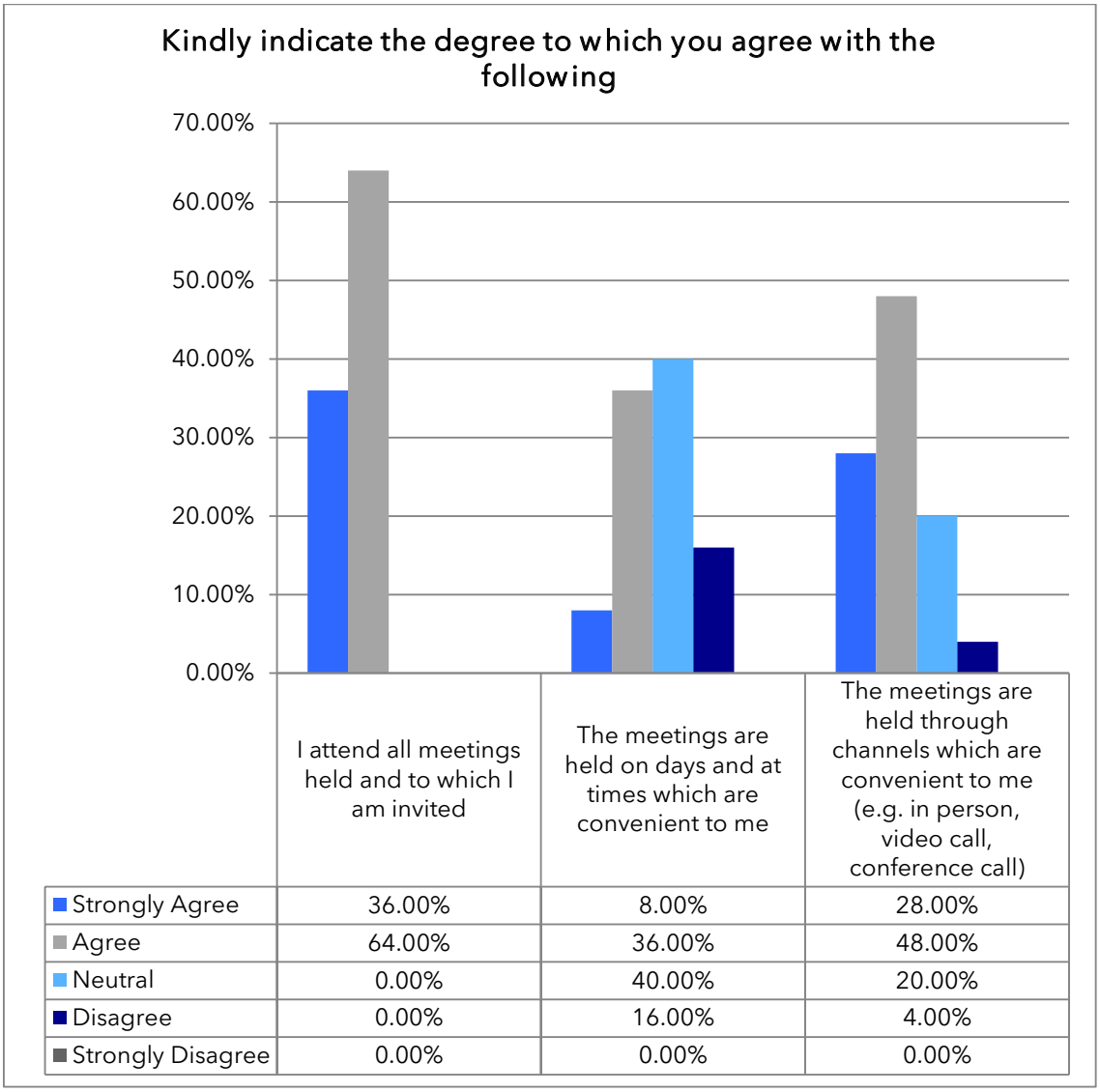


- 78% of the respondents have 3 or more years of experience participating in social dialogue, with 44% having experience of more than 8 years.



4.1.2 Involvement and Participation

- Less than half (46%) find that meetings are held on convenient days and times.
- The majority (79%) find the channels used for holding meetings (online, in person or other) convenient to them.

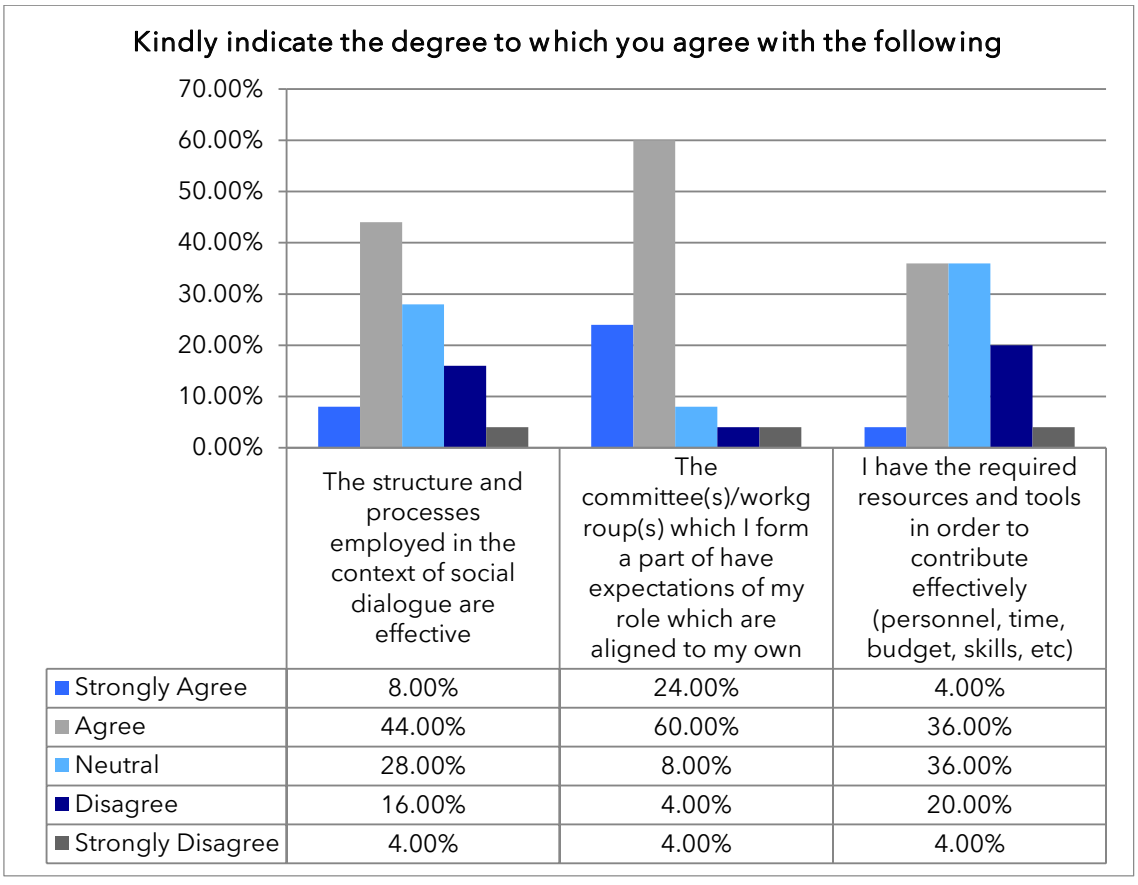


	I attend all meetings held and to which I am invited	The meetings are held on days and at times which are convenient to me	The meetings are held through channels which are convenient to me (e.g. in person, video call, conference call)
Strongly Agree	36.00%	8.00%	28.00%
Agree	64.00%	36.00%	48.00%
Neutral	0.00%	40.00%	20.00%
Disagree	0.00%	16.00%	4.00%
Strongly Disagree	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%

- Just over half of respondents (52%) have stated that they believe that the existing processes and methods of social dialogue are effective. 28% have no particular opinion on this matter and a fifth (20%) believe that it is ineffective.

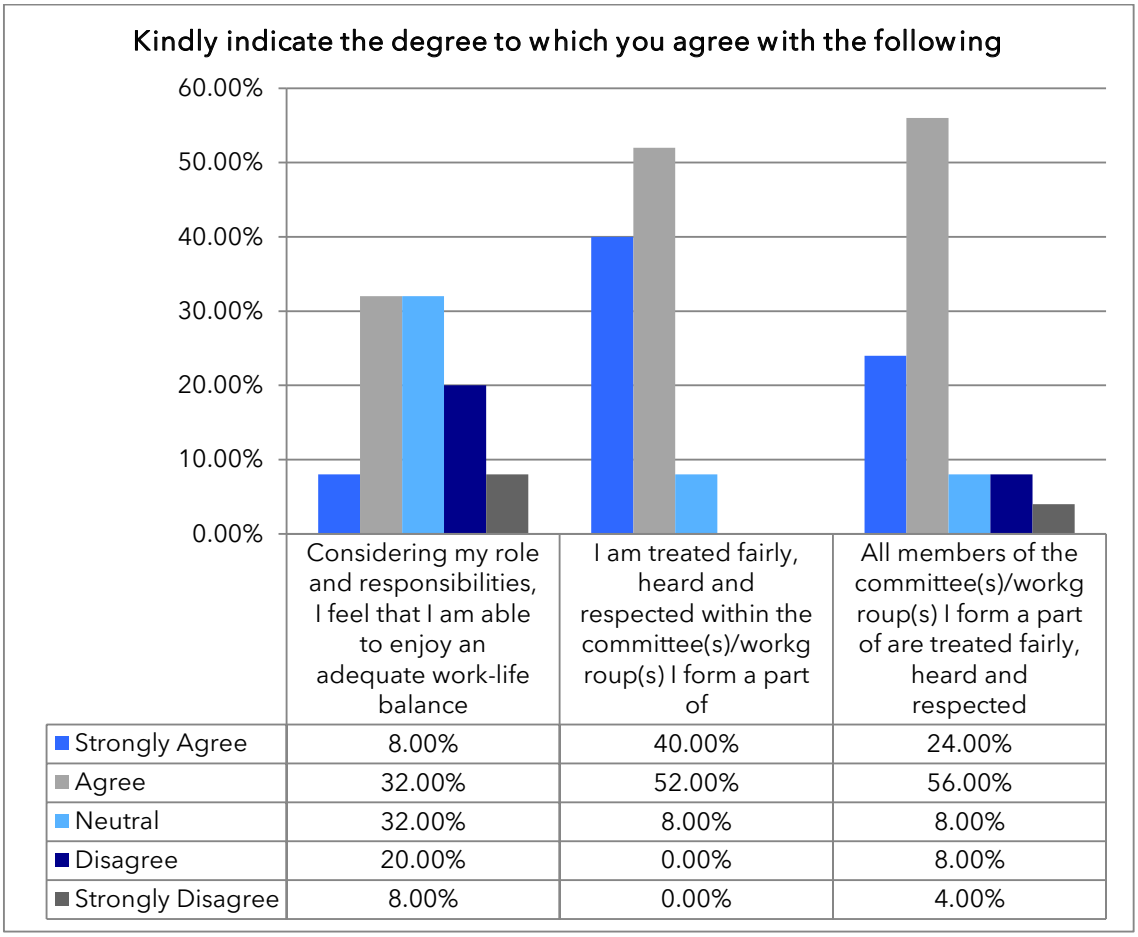
- The vast majority (84%) find that their roles are aligned to their and the social partners' expectations. 78% of female respondents concurred.

- Less than half (40%) find that they have adequate tools and resources for effective social dialogue, around a third (36%) are neutral in this respect whilst a quarter (24%) of respondents have stated that they have inadequate tools and resources. Looking specifically at female responses, 56% believe they have adequate tools and resources.



	The structure and processes employed in the context of social dialogue are effective	The committee(s)/workgroup(s) which I form a part of have expectations of my role which are aligned to my own	I have the required resources and tools in order to contribute effectively (personnel, time, budget, skills, etc)
Strongly Agree	8.00%	24.00%	4.00%
Agree	44.00%	60.00%	36.00%
Neutral	28.00%	8.00%	36.00%
Disagree	16.00%	4.00%	20.00%
Strongly Disagree	4.00%	4.00%	4.00%

- The topic of work-life balance resulted in fragmented responses:
    - 41% agree that they are able to enjoy an adequate work-life balance, whilst 25% do not. The remaining 33% of respondents were neutral on this matter.
    - More female respondents (67%) felt that they have a good work-life balance compared to the average across all responses
- The vast majority of all respondents think that they (96%) and others in the group (83%) are treated fairly, heard and respected. Female respondents gave slightly less optimistic replies, with 89% feeling they are treated well and two-thirds (67%) believing that all members are.



	Considering my role and responsibilities, I feel that I am able to enjoy an adequate work-life balance	I am treated fairly, heard and respected within the committee(s)/workgroup(s) I form a part of	All members of the committee(s)/workgroup(s) I form a part of are treated fairly, heard and respected
Strongly Agree	8.00%	40.00%	24.00%
Agree	32.00%	52.00%	56.00%
Neutral	32.00%	8.00%	8.00%
Disagree	20.00%	0.00%	8.00%
Strongly Disagree	8.00%	0.00%	4.00%

4.1.3 Representation in social dialogue:

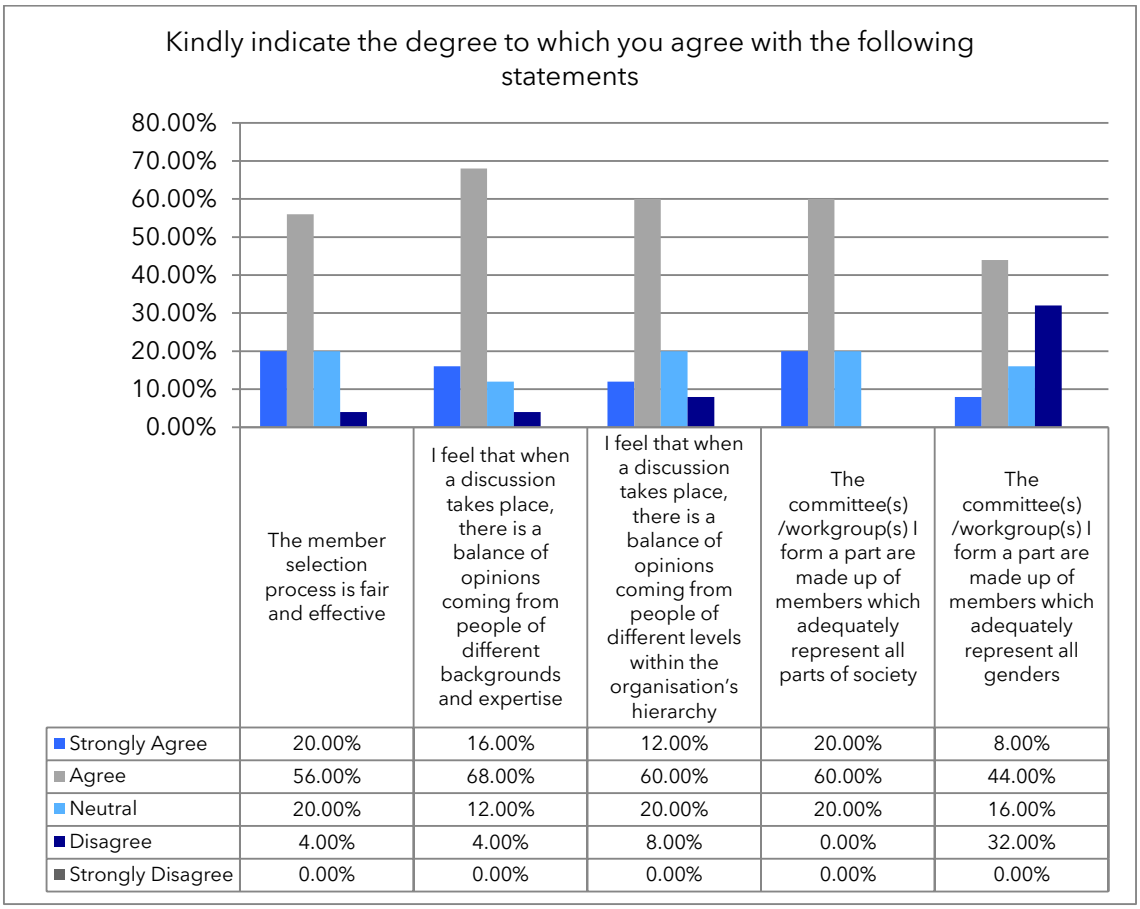
- The majority (76% of all respondents and 67% of female respondents) believe that the member selection process is fair and effective, whilst 20% are neutral in this regard.

- The general feeling seems to be that there is an adequate level of diversity across the members participating in social dialogue:

    - Different backgrounds and expertise are represented – 84% of all respondents and 67% of female respondents agree.

    - Persons at different levels within the organisational hierarchies are represented – 76% of all respondents and 56% of female respondents agree.

    - The various fractions of society are represented – 74% and 67% of female respondents agree.



	The member selection process is fair and effective	I feel that when a discussion takes place, there is a balance of opinions coming from people of different backgrounds and expertise	I feel that when a discussion takes place, there is a balance of opinions coming from people of different levels within the organisation's hierarchy	The committee(s) /workgroup(s) I form a part are made up of members which adequately represent all parts of society	The committee(s) /workgroup(s) I form a part are made up of members which adequately represent all genders
Strongly Agree	20.00%	16.00%	12.00%	20.00%	8.00%
Agree	56.00%	68.00%	60.00%	60.00%	44.00%
Neutral	20.00%	12.00%	20.00%	20.00%	16.00%
Disagree	4.00%	4.00%	8.00%	0.00%	32.00%
Strongly Disagree	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%

- However, just about half of all respondents (54%) and less than half of female respondents (44%) feel that there is adequate representation of all genders.

- All female respondents feel that their participation in social dialogue is positively contributing to society.

- More than half of female respondents (56%), and 41% of all respondents feel that female participation is not being given due importance during social discussions.

- When asked which topics discussed during social dialogue are of critical importance to them, less than half (44%) referred to female participation, although it was the fourth most commonly mentioned topic:

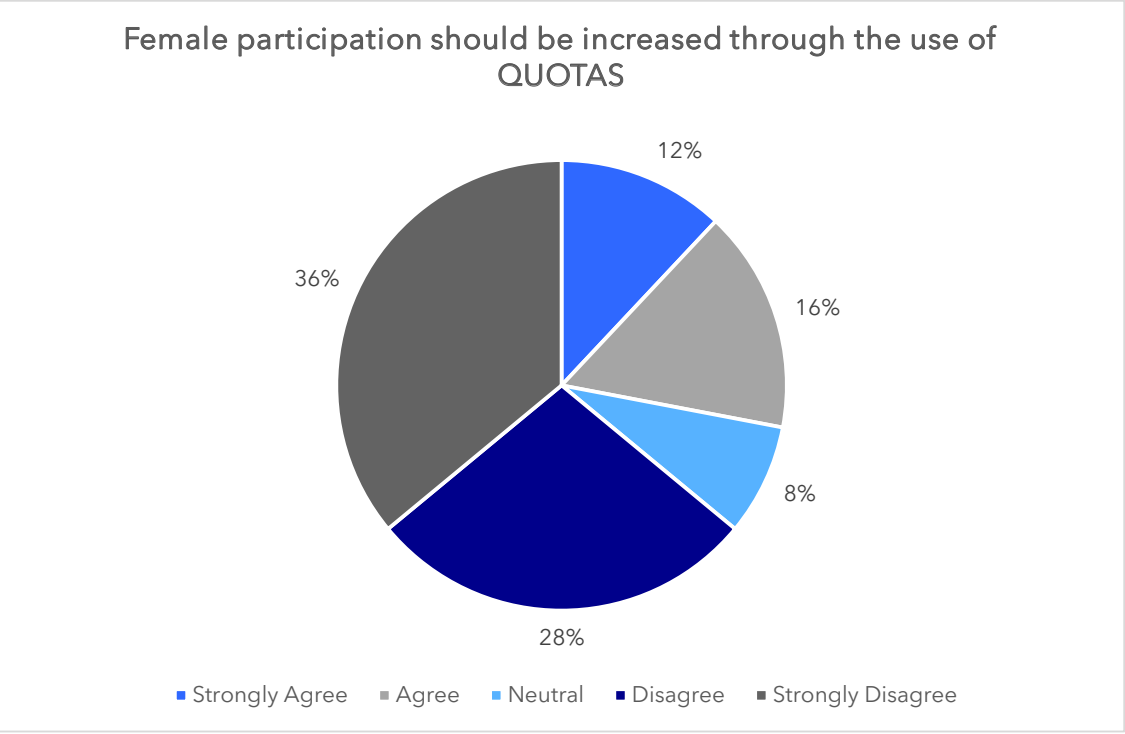
Impact of COVID-19	62.96%
Environmental Issues	62.96%
General Employment conditions, the workforce and labour legislation	51.85%
Female participation	44.44%
Work-Life Balance	44.44%
Social Issues	40.74%
Technology and digitisation	40.74%
Pensions	37.04%
Funding and financial considerations	29.63%
Legislation	25.93%
Other (please specify)*	25.93%
Foreign Policy	7.41%

*'Other' included: Disability, Tourism, Cultural Heritage, Good Governance and Operational Costs and issues in business.

- When asked whether female participation should be increased through the use of Quotas, 28% of all respondents agreed to some extent, which can be broken down further by respondent gender:

    - A third of female respondents (33%) strongly agreed or agreed whilst the other two-thirds (67%) either disagreed or strongly disagreed, and

    - 25% of male respondents agreed, 62.5% either disagreed or strongly disagreed whilst 12.5% did not provide an opinion either way.



4.2 Findings from Interviews with Social Partners

In order to supplement the surveys, qualitative data was collected through 5 in-depth interviews which were carried out with representatives of the social partners. This was done in an effort to determine the perception on the ground of the status quo and to obtain better visibility of how any efforts could be practically applied within the context.

Interviews were held online, with some conducted on a one-to-one basis and others in groups of 3 or 4 persons. 17 individuals, with at least one representative of each of the main stakeholders, were invited to provide input through the interviews. Due to time restrictions and other commitments, a total of 7 members participated in the interviews, representing 4 of the 7 main social partners (60%) and 2 of the 3 main forums of discussion at MCESD (66%), being the Council and the Civil Society Committee.

Participation came from 4 males (57%) and 3 females (43%). The participants are listed in APPENDIX – Interviewee List.

The following points of interest emerged out of discussions held:

4.2.1 Appointment to Social Dialogue Forums

- Representation to social dialogue forums within the majority of the organisations represented is selected through a bottom-up approach, where members select their representatives, who may in turn elect delegates to form committees which would contribute to social dialogue through selected individuals. Interviewees seem to deem this a fair and democratic process overall.

- There does not seem to be a manner of filtering those who are appointed to represent their respective groups on social dialogue forums, nor a certain minimum level of requirements. The only requirement, as per the MCESD Act, is to include representation of specific sectoral groups within the core group. Within the MCESD Council itself, the representatives would normally be the top people of each of the organisations being represented.

- Where participation is sectoral, it has been noted that there are a number of represented groups which are female-driven, and that it is actually the participation of males which is in fact lacking. However, in the overall scheme of social dialogue, the representation of genders does not seem to be equal.

- The current membership / representation seems to be reflective of the market situation, where currently only around 9.9% of management positions are held by women (BusinessMed, 2021, p. 29).

- In contrast to the questionnaire, there is a strong opinion from some of the social partners against the introduction of quotas, because it is seen as a hindrance to the preferred merit-based approach and has also been perceived to be in itself degrading to women (in that they would be invited on the basis of their gender rather than their abilities).

  It would seem to stakeholders who provided feedback that the overall participation is slowly but surely increasing and today females are equally recognised for the values they offer, albeit there still being a long way to go. Quotas would appear to be an unnatural push which some have said would be counterproductive and could possibly harm the industry through abuse or inadequately skilled participants. The sentiment in general was that this form of discrimination would essentially undermine the validity of skilful women.

  It was noted that in order for true equality to exist, participations should not be based on gender, that quotas could also hinder valid participation from valid male participants simply because of their gender – effectively going against the concept of equality.

  Overall, interviewees do not seem to give gender importance when looking to fill roles. On the other hand, there should be more focus on understanding the basic minimum requirements for someone to fill particular roles.

- During the process, it was noted that a number of interviewees had the impression that the proportion of females participating in social dialogue, within the various sub-groups and also at a committee and council level, was greater than it actually was. This could be for a number of reasons, which may include:

    - The level of female participation is deemed to be adequate;

    - There is no real attention given to one's gender, but rather their merits;

    - Data suggests that the level of participation has slowly been increasing for the past few years, and therefore when compared to the previous status there is the impression of having attained the right level of equality.

4.2.2 Participation and Involvement

- In the general course of activities of the social partners, members of the respective represented groups put forward topics for further discussion within their own sectoral group. The sectoral group's internal committee would discuss and, if it deems that the topic or feedback merits further discussion, it would be taken up to be discussed further within the respective social dialogue forums. Some organisations would have additional levels of participation from members through approval processes before matters are finalised.

- Where a subject is outside the specialisation of the member groups themselves, some will seek to collaborate with other parties within their network in order to enable more effective discussions based on expert guidance and opinions.

- It has been noted that the effort of members to participate in social dialogue varies based on the topic being discussed. Some topics seem to stimulate less enthusiasm, and consequently input, than others. This would be dependent on the relevance to the particular participants' needs and focus.

- The impact of COVID-19 also resulted in the use of online interfaces for meetings, training and other contact requirements, which has proven to be convenient for many participants due to time efficiencies, and specifically to women who juggle with familial responsibilities. However, it was noted that online participation was discouraged and some have found it difficult to gain support and approval to participate in this manner.

- Some social partners have taken to organising meetings, seminars and other interactions at particular times which are most convenient for the majority (10am – 11.30am and 2pm to 3pm), whenever possible. Some social partners organise meetings a number of weeks ahead to allow for adequate planning.

- Certain organisations also provide for individual or collective member grievances to be put forward through the system should any member(s) feel that they are unfairly treated.

4.2.3 Representation (and Diversity) in Social Dialogue

- Some social partners have reported an increase in female participation in the past few years[11], including more significant roles such as CEOs and presidents. Whilst improving, the participation rate is still deemed to be low, and many have attributed this to a number of factors, including:

    - Family commitments may hinder participation:

        - Whilst males may also sometimes have certain responsibilities that impact availability, it is far less prominent than with females. For example, certain meetings would normally be held after-hours in order to avoid disrupting operations, which may not be convenient for those with family commitments.

[11] For example, female participation at the General Workers Union (GWU) is reported to have increased from 24% to around 31% in recent years, with 2 of the 8 section secretaries being females today. Around a quarter of council members at the Malta Chamber of Commerce are female.

- Whilst online meetings are deemed very helpful, some form of physical interaction is often necessary as well.

- The commitment associated with involvement in social dialogue is beyond the normal "8am to 5pm" workday.

- Certain roles and sectors (for example, industrial relations) are normally regarded as male roles, and many may therefore either overlook female candidates, or females would not aspire to be candidates for the positions in the first place.

    - The remuneration of associated roles is reported to be low when compared to alternatives.

    - Efforts are underway by some to break the perception of who can and should be a member and participate in social dialogue. The focus is on one's skills and capabilities, and there is no link to gender.

    - It seems that input is obtained from all those who are participants to social dialogue during discussions and that this is obtained in a fairly balanced manner. Many a times, the level of participation depends on the topic being discussed, wherein specialists in the specific area would be likely to take the lead and contribute to a greater degree in social dialogue. The level and type of participation seems to also be dependent on one's background and experiences, and whether they are coming from the public or private sector.

4.2.4 Challenges in Social Dialogue Scenarios

4.2.4.1 Obtaining Feedback

- A recurring theme emerging in the majority of discussions was that social partners are frequently asked to provide feedback on important matters within a short period of time. This creates a strain, but sometimes also means that feedback provided cannot be of the desired level or is not comprehensive enough, especially where specialist input is required.

- It would seem that it is sometimes difficult to effectively obtain feedback from members, even when the various entities attempt to entice its members to provide input by organising meetings, ad hoc working groups, online information sessions, surveys and the like.

- There seems to be an ambition to encourage those who participate in social dialogue to be more in touch with the members which they represent by enhancing communication skills as well as interaction opportunities. For example, the MEA is attempting to strengthen discussions with members by creating online forums for open feedback and discussion, although the success of these efforts is yet to be determined.

4.2.4.2 Providing Feedback

- Social partners seem to be given short feedback periods, making it difficult to enable comprehensive and adequately constructive feedback to be provided.

- Social partners voiced their frustration with regards to feedback which they would have provided or issues which they raise, where they receive no feedback or see no action being taken. This is even more so considering the time and efforts made in their otherwise busy schedules to ensure that their participation is of a certain quality and offers value.

- Information on various subject matters is shared with social partners for feedback, but this often seems to happen at an advanced point of progress, which would likely make it difficult for social partners to influence government's decisions

- Taking this argument further, some interviewees noted that at times it would seem that their feedback is only requested as part of a process, but is not genuinely considered since a decision would already have been made. It would also seem that this is done in order to enable policy-makers to state that the decision to move forward was based on feedback obtained from the various partners.

4.2.4.3 Lack of Human Resources and Expertise

- Many participants in social dialogue wear multiple hats, which some interviewees have attributed to resource levels. This causes two main issues:

    - Even though social partners may want to participate, the time available to do so is limited since they are not fully dedicated to the role and their other commitments are often onerous;

    - Specialisation is difficult, and this may also be reflected in feedback which is provided, especially when it is in certain fields requiring expertise. The members themselves may not always have the necessary expertise to contribute to discussions in a significant manner.

- Social partners repeatedly stated that they lack enough time and resources to enable effective participation in social discussions at the level they deem appropriate. Collaboration with partners may be sought when certain expertise are necessary, however it was repeatedly stated that gaps still exist.

4.2.4.4 Lack of Participation in Social Dialogue

- Work-Life balance also seems to be an issue when it comes to social dialogue, especially so when it involves female participants. The times and channels used for meetings may not be convenient for those who have familial responsibilities, which may in itself detract from one's eagerness to participate in such forums.

- There seems to be an overall lack of desire to become involved in social dialogue, hence dialogue seems to be made by practically the same cohort. Some interviewees commented that there is lack of visibility and general understanding of what social dialogue entails, and that there is not much effort to encourage more involvement in this area.

4.2.4.5 Other Challenges

- It was noted that a large number of members in social dialogue have had a very long tenure, which would naturally lead to similar views and ideas being shared time after time. This has been improved through the involvement of the various working groups and through certain work being subcontracted to experts in relevant fields.

- There were also mentions of certain political focus when it comes to discussions held, in that political priorities may still impact the processes and outcome of social discussions. Some interviewees noted that some social dialogue meetings feel driven by the government agendas, with state-supported discussions becoming dominant on the agenda; the chairperson is appointed by government and the agenda set by the ministers involved. Whilst there would seem to be an environment which fosters healthy discussion, the dominance of political power seems to be felt at times.

- Social partners commented on the disorganised nature of meetings. Although an annual calendar is usually shared by the MCESD, meeting dates would normally change and be advised at shorter notice, making it sometimes difficult to organise attendance. Furthermore, the meeting locations could at times make it inconvenient to attend a meeting and, whilst online communication has become the norm, it would appear that

online participation would only be approved on an exception basis. Such an approach could be a barrier to participation.

5 Recommendations and Conclusions

Based on the research undertaken, one could pinpoint a number of factors which may directly or indirectly impact the level of female participation in social dialogue at a local level.

5.1 Recommendations

Based on the research analysis and results as outlined herein, a number of actions are being listed for consideration in efforts to enhance female participation and encourage more inclusive and effective social dialogue.

1. More social dialogue on female participation and gender parity as a subject matter in general should be included on the agendas of the various forums and may include:

    - Participation in the labour force;
    - Closing income gaps;
    - Encouraging the involvement of females in male-dominated sectors, and vice versa;
    - Balancing family responsibilities across genders to offer equal opportunities for work-life balance.

2. A Gender Diversity Index (GDI) could be established as a local measure which is collected and presented regularly and automatically shared with the relevant local and international institutions such as the World Economic Forum. This has also been indicated in research carried out by BusinessMed, which also recommends that "*Partnership with public or private institutions like the stock exchange institutions or universities can facilitate the data collection and build an annual GDI that is automatically generated and analysed to measure the mind set evolution and the cultural change management impact*" (BusinessMed, 2021, p. 31).

3. Businesses (or certain classes thereof) may be required to report on participation of women at different levels of the business. This should create some form of awareness within business and instigate discussion which may hopefully lead to more participation of women in the economy. This should in turn likewise be reflected in social dialogue forums, with a greater participation therein.

4. Quotas create a fair deal of divergence in social discussion, with strong arguments both for and against them. Those against quotas argue that they go against the system of meritocracy, whilst others state that by introducing quotas, the inevitable consequence is that more doors are opened for women who merit the positions in question. The results indicate that locally there is a strong bias against them.

   A balance could be achieved by introducing measures where the market is encouraged, but not forced, to increase female involvement. While competence and merit would continue to be considered to the fullest extent, consideration of female candidates would be encouraged while ensuring that gender is only one of the factors which is being considered in the decision-making process. This can be supplemented by:

   - Positive incentives for those organisations that comply, rather than strict penalties for those which do not (adjustment period could also be provided for). This could be in the form of:

     - Preference in state contract bids for those who abide by the guidelines, similar to the approach of Spain.

     - Availability of certain tax credits and other fiscal benefits to businesses based on maintaining quotas.

     - Other benefits based on measures introduced over time.

   - Creating a database of female professionals and their respective areas of specialisation and qualifications which can be referred to by businesses and social partners alike for the recruitment of candidates and members respectively even if

for consultative roles. Individuals would knowingly be listed, and should be given prior approval to offer their services when needed.

This will offer visibility of available female candidates to the network when it requires expertise or resources in specific areas if they are also looking to increase female participation. This would also counter the arguments made by organisations which claim there is an inadequate supply of women who are qualified and who wish to compete for certain positions.

5. Greater encouragement to incentivise women to apply in areas of competency where they are underrepresented, or in industries and roles which are normally perceived to be male dominated. Involvement and participation could be encouraged through:

   - Engagement;
   - Information sharing with the public to explain and provide more visibility of what it means to participate in social dialogue and the personal satisfactions that one can achieve from contributing to it;
   - Marketing positions externally from the closed group, to create awareness and encourage participation.

   Furthermore, there should be developed a better understanding of the basic minimum requirements for specific roles which could be referred to when filtering candidates. Thus, rather than making gender the basic requirement, the underlying skills and experience would be duly considered

6. Bringing together a team of experts in various fields of specialisation, both male and female so long as both genders are equally involved, which are made available to the social partners for reference as needed. These individuals would participate in social dialogue based on their various areas of specialisation and referred to depending on the topics being discussed.

Inclusion and participation would be based on each individual's merit, and their role would be to discuss ideas and provide more insight to the government and social partners outside of the current circle.

In order to make these specialists more accessible, a defined application process should be developed for pre-approval. Referral of social partners to approved specialists could then be quicker and more efficient, especially considering the tight time frames to provide feedback which have been reported. Further support should be provided through adequate resources and structures to enable stakeholders to access this pool of specialists as and when required.

This approach would not only seek to increase participation of females, but also adjust for certain other challenges which were highlighted, such as the length of tenure which hinders innovative discussions, lack of resources and expertise.

7. The time and effort required to contribute in social dialogue may itself be discouraging for some, particularly women who already have other onerous commitments which may or may not include family responsibilities. A number of measures may be introduced to enable participation, such as:

    - Flexible working times and conditions, including working from home.
    - Use of digital meetings.
    - Ability for participants to take on secondary, consultative roles, which would require less intensive contribution but which would nonetheless allow them to participate effectively in discussions where they would be able to provide valuable input.

Note that feedback from all social partners was sought at different stages of the research process, including the initial information-gathering phase through surveys and in-depth interviews and workshops.

A Feedback Report was prepared and shared with all social partners, summarising the research and recommendations. A copy of the Feedback Report can be found as separate annexes to this report. An open feedback discussions session was organised, allowing

stakeholders to participate at their convenience to provide any feedback. Alternatively, feedback could be provided in writing via email.

The feedback obtained in the final phase (i.e. after sharing the Feedback Report) was received from 3 of the stakeholders. The low level of feedback can be attributable to 2 main factors:

- Limited resources and time to invest in reviewing the preliminary research report and provide adequate feedback; and/or

- Discussions with the majority of stakeholders were already held throughout the research process, and their views duly reflected in the research and recommendations outlined in the Feedback Report.

Nonetheless, all efforts to provide feedback were deemed to be adequate and helpful in finalising the report and have been taken into account herein. Some of the recommendations have been updated accordingly following feedback.

Once these recommendations are discussed amongst the stakeholders in greater details and any relevant action plans developed, a review on the progress and status of implementation would also be recommended as a part of the action plan to ensure success and make any necessary adjustments.

5.2 Conclusions

It is evident from the data that the female gender is lagging behind in social dialogue forums when compared to the male counterparts. However, does this necessarily mean that females are under-represented? Indeed, this may be perceived as a "chicken and egg" situation[12] (the inception and conception problem).

As such, if we look at the data related to the social and economic scenes, one can note that female participation is at a lower level than that of males. The same can be said of those representing various fractions of society in social dialogue forums. The question then becomes: should increasing participation levels in social dialogue forums lead to the same effect on society, or would increasing participation in society naturally result in more female participants in social dialogue forums which would represent them? And ultimately, what level of focus should be placed on one's gender, rather than their capabilities, when enrolling them to particular roles, whether within society or in social dialogue?

This report has analysed the current status from these angles, looking to make actionable recommendations which would lead to merit-based growth and shift the social paradigm naturally towards a greater participation of valid skilled individuals, who just happen to be females.

[12] The "chicken and egg" analogy refers to a situation in which it may be impossible to decide which of two things caused the other thing, or which of two things existed first.

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7 APPENDIX – Gender Distribution Data for MCESD Members

Based on information provided by the MCESD on 20th December 2021, the following data has been extracted and summarised.

TABLE A1.1 Number of MCESD Members who are Representatives or Substitutes in the various MCESD Committees and Working Groups, by Gender

	Council	Government Members	Gozo Regional Committee	Civil Society Committee	EESC	Total
Representative						
M	9	3	16	7	5	40
F	3	1	2	5	0	11
Substitute						
M	9	3	9	8	0	29
F	3	0	5	4	0	12
Total						
M	18	6	25	15	5	69
F	6	1	7	9	0	23

TABLE A1.2 Percentage of MCESD Members who are Representatives or Substitutes in the various MCESD Committees and Working Groups, by Gender

	Council	Government Members	Gozo Regional Committee	Civil Society Committee	EESC	Average
Representative						
M	75%	75%	89%	58%	100%	79%
F	25%	25%	11%	42%	0%	21%
Substitute						
M	75%	100%	64%	67%	-	76%
F	25%	0%	36%	33%	-	24%
Average						
M	75%	86%	78%	63%	100%	80%
F	25%	14%	22%	38%	0%	20%

TABLE A1.3 Number of MCESD Members who are Representatives or Substitutes in the MCESD Social Partners, by Gender

	Representative		Substitute		Total	
	M	F	M	F	M	F
General Workers Union	3	0	2	1	5	1
Union Haddiema Maghqudin	2	0	1	0	3	0
Confederation of Malta Trade Unions	2	0	1	0	3	0
Malta Employers Association	0	1	1	0	1	1
Malta Chamber of Commerce & Industry	0	2	2	0	2	2
Malta Hotel & Restaurant Association	1	0	1	1	2	1
Malta Chamber of SMEs	1	0	0	1	1	1
For.U.M.	2	0	1	1	3	1
Total	11	3	9	4	20	7

TABLE A1.4 Percentage of MCESD Members who are Representatives or Substitutes in the MCESD Social Partners, by Gender

	Representative		Substitute		Average	
	M	F	M	F	M	F
General Workers Union	100%	0%	67%	33%	83%	17%
Union Haddiema Maghqudin	100%	0%	100%	0%	100%	0%
Confederation of Malta Trade Unions	100%	0%	100%	0%	100%	0%
Malta Employers Association	0%	100%	100%	0%	50%	50%
Malta Chamber of Commerce & Industry	0%	100%	100%	0%	50%	50%
Malta Hotel & Restaurant Association	100%	0%	50%	50%	67%	33%
Malta Chamber of SMEs	100%	0%	0%	100%	50%	50%
For.U.M.	100%	0%	50%	50%	75%	25%
Average	75%	25%	71%	29%	74%	28%

TABLE A1.5 Organisational Representatives forming part of MCESD Committees and Working Groups, by Gender

	M	F	T	M%	F%
Agriculture Rural Affairs and Fisheries	2	0	2	100%	0%
Central Bank	2	0	2	100%	0%
Confederation of Malta Trade Unions	3	0	3	100%	0%
Consumer Affairs	0	2	2	0%	100%
CSC	1	0	1	100%	0%
Deputy Chairperson	1	0	1	100%	0%
Education, Social and Community Advancement	2	0	2	100%	0%
EESC	5	0	5	100%	0%
Environmental Protection and Improvement including the Protection of Animals, Culture, Arts and National Heritage	2	0	2	100%	0%
For.U.M.	3	1	4	75%	25%
Gender Equality	0	2	2	0%	100%
General Workers Union	5	1	6	83%	17%
Gozo Business Chamber	4	0	4	100%	0%
Gozo Diocese	1	1	2	50%	50%
Gozo NGO Association	3	2	5	60%	40%
Gozo Tourism Association	4	0	4	100%	0%
Gozo University Group	0	2	2	0%	100%
GRC	2	0	2	100%	0%
Health, Elderly and Pensioners	1	1	2	50%	50%
Local Councils	2	0	2	100%	0%
Local Councils Gozo Region	6	0	6	100%	0%
Malta Chamber of Commerce & Industry	2	2	4	50%	50%
Malta Chamber of SMEs	1	1	2	50%	50%
Malta Employers Association	1	1	2	50%	50%
Malta Hotel & Restaurant Association	2	1	3	67%	33%
Ministry for Finance and Employment	2	0	2	100%	0%
Ministry for Gozo	1	1	2	50%	50%
OPM	0	1	1	0%	100%
Persons with Disability	1	1	2	50%	50%
Professions	1	1	2	50%	50%
Sports	2	0	2	100%	0%
The Malta Chamber of SME's	1	0	1	100%	0%
Union Haddiema Maghqudin	3	0	3	100%	0%
Youth and Students	0	2	2	0%	100%
Others	2	0	2	100%	0%
				71%	**29%**

Total number of organisations represented in MCESD Committees and Working Groups	35
Number of organisations with no female representatives	18
% of organisations with no female representatives	51%

TABLE A1.6 Representatives of Social Partners forming part of MCESD Committees and Working Groups, by Gender

	M	F	T	M%	F%
General Workers Union	5	1	6	83%	17%
Union Haddiema Maghqudin	3	0	3	100%	0%
Confederation of Malta Trade Unions	3	0	3	100%	0%
Malta Employers Association	1	1	2	50%	50%
Malta Chamber of Commerce & Industry	2	2	4	50%	50%
Malta Hotel & Restaurant Association	2	1	3	67%	33%
Malta Chamber of SMEs	1	1	2	50%	50%
For.U.M.	3	1	4	75%	25%
Total / Average	**20**	**7**	**27**	**72%**	**28%**

Total number of Social Partners represented in MCESD Committees and Working Groups	8
Number of Social Partners with no female representatives	2
% of Social Partners with no female representatives	25%

8 APPENDIX – Survey

ADVISORY MCESD EU funds for Malta 2014 2020

MCESD Enhancing Female Participation in Social Dialogue & Technical Capacity of Social Partners

8.1 Demographic Data

Question	Answer
Gender	Male Female Prefer not to answer
Age	18-34 35-54 55-64 65+
I am a…	MCESD Council Civil Society Committee EESC Government Member Gozo Regional Committee
I represent…	Employees Employers / Businesses Government Professions or specific sectors Segments of society Unions Other

Position / Title	
Highest level of education	Secondary Post-secondary Technical or Occupational Certificates Bachelor's Degree Master's Degree Doctorate Professional Qualifications
Area of Study	Arts Business Administration Business and Economics Education Engineering Finance Information Technology Languages Law Medicine Political Science Public Administration Sciences (other) Other

8.2 Research Questions – Female Participation

PART I

Question	Answer
I am involved in social dialogue…	Directly Indirectly Not at all
My participation in social dialogue came about because… (select all that apply)	I volunteered I was nominated I was randomly selected Because of my position Because of my expertise in the field I represent Because of my involvement in various organisations and committees and/or exposure in various countries Because of my contacts Because of skills which are relevant to social dialogue (e.g. negotiation, communication, coordination, etc) Because of my qualifications Because it was my turn Other (please specify)
I have been involved in social dialogue for…	Less than 1 year 1 to 3 years 3 to 8 years More than 8 years
During meetings, I am expected to… (select all that apply)	Present information to participants for discussion Provide critical feedback in relation to the topics being discussed (e.g. during a consultation process) Report back to my organisation about the discussions held Offer a personal and professional opinion in relation to the topics being discussed Other (please specify)

The most important issues on my agenda are currently the following (select all that apply)	General Employment conditions, the workforce and labour legislation Female participation Pensions Impact of COVID Foreign Policy Environmental Issues Social Issues Funding and financial considerations Technology and digitisation Legislation Work-Life Balance Other (please specify)

PART II

Question	Answer
I attend all meetings held and to which I am invited	Scale from 1 to 5 (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree)
The meetings are held on days and at times which are convenient to me	Scale from 1 to 5 (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree)
The meetings are held through channels which are convenient to me (e.g. in person, video call, conference call)	Scale from 1 to 5 (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree)
The structure and processes employed in the context of social dialogue are effective	Scale from 1 to 5 (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree)
The committee(s) / workgroup(s) which I form a part of have expectations of my role which are aligned to my own	Scale from 1 to 5 (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree)
I have the required resources and tools in order to contribute effectively (personnel, time, budget, skills, etc).	Scale from 1 to 5 (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree)

Considering my role and responsibilities, I feel that I am able to enjoy an adequate work-life balance	Scale from 1 to 5 (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree)
I am treated fairly, heard and respected within the committee(s) / workgroup(s) I form a part of.	Scale from 1 to 5 (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree)
All members of the committee(s) / workgroup(s) I form a part of are treated fairly, heard and respected.	Scale from 1 to 5 (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree)
The member selection process is fair and effective.	Scale from 1 to 5 (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree)
I feel that when a discussion takes place, there is a balance of opinions coming from people of different **backgrounds and expertise**.	Scale from 1 to 5 (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree)
I feel that when a discussion takes place, there is a balance of opinions coming from people of different **levels** within the organisation's hierarchy.	Scale from 1 to 5 (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree)
The committee(s) / workgroup(s) I form a part are made up of members which adequately represent all parts of **society.**	Scale from 1 to 5 (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree)
The committee(s) / workgroup(s) I form a part are made up of members which adequately represent all **genders.**	Scale from 1 to 5 (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree)
I feel that my role is important, and that I play a role in helping society.	Scale from 1 to 5 (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree)
I feel that the issue of female participation is not being given due importance during social discussions.	Scale from 1 to 5 (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree)
Female participation should be increased through the use of QUOTAS	Scale from 1 to 5 (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree)

Operational Programme II - European Structural and Investment Funds 2014-2020
"Investing in human capital to create more opportunities and promote the well-being of society"
Project part-financed by the European Social Fund
Co-financing rate: 80% European Union; 20% National Funds

9 APPENDIX – Interview Questions

	PARTICIPANT 1	PARTICIPANT 2	PARTICIPANT 3
Name			
Organisation			
Role			
Date of Interview			

1. Please provide some background on the history of your involvement in social dialogue.
    a. How did you become a member?
    b. When?
    c. What is your role?
    d. What are you expected to contribute as a member?

2. What is the process of selecting members?
    a. Do you think it is fair?
    b. What is done to ensure adequate representation?
    c. How is balance sought?

3. How are committee meetings conducted?
    a. Do all members actively participate?
    b. Are all members given the same importance and opportunities?
    c. How are dates/times set?

4. Do you feel there is any disruption to work-life balance as a result of meetings or the responsibilities brought on by your role(s)?

5. Do you think all members are treated fairly and equally?

6. Do you think there are enough females participating in discussions held?

a. What roles do female members normally take on?
b. Are female-led discussions treated with the same importance and attention as others?

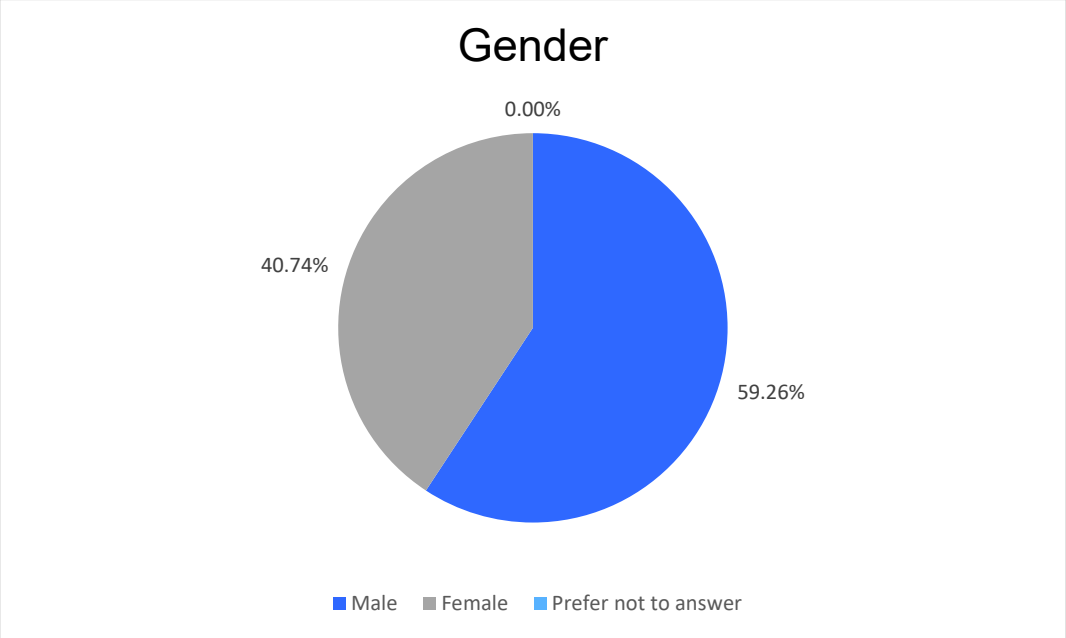
7. What would you recommend to improve female participation in social dialogue?
    a. To increase the number of female members
    b. To give strength to the female voice

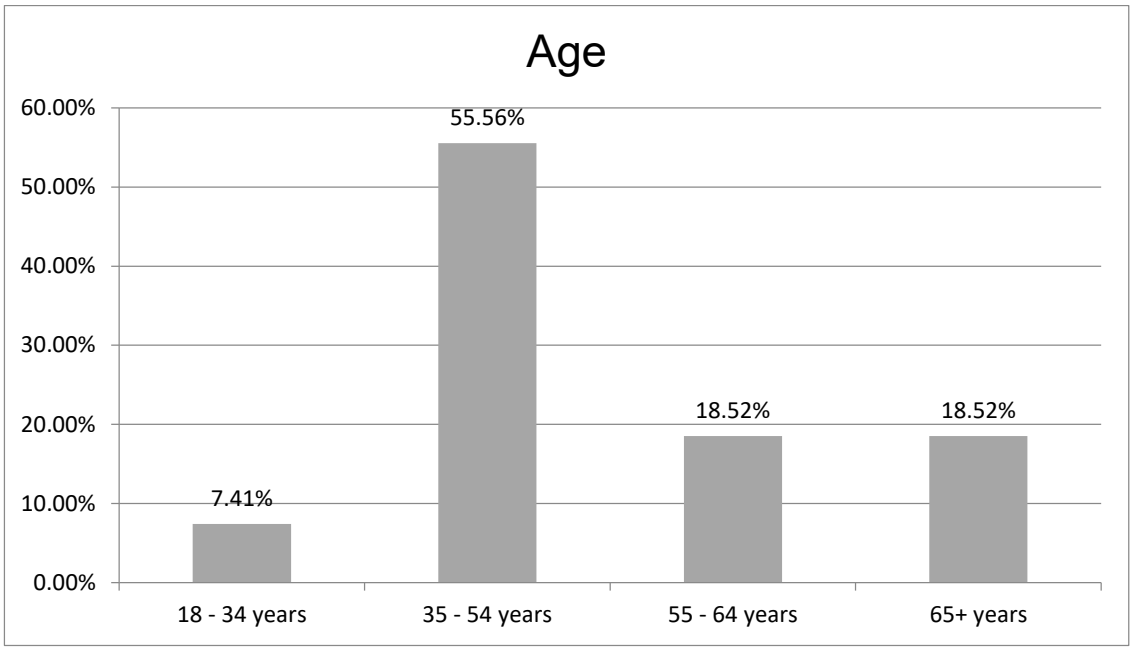
8. What tools/resources do you need for enhanced social dialogue participation?
    a. What challenges do you face?

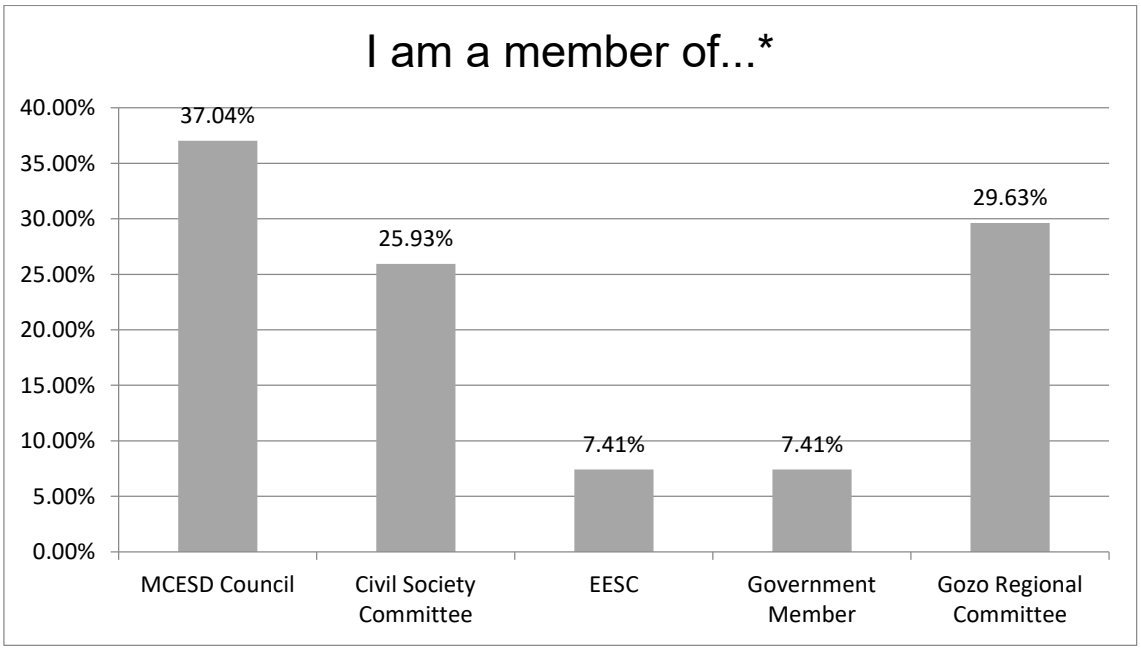
9. Any other additional comment or recommendations in general?

10 APPENDIX – Survey Results

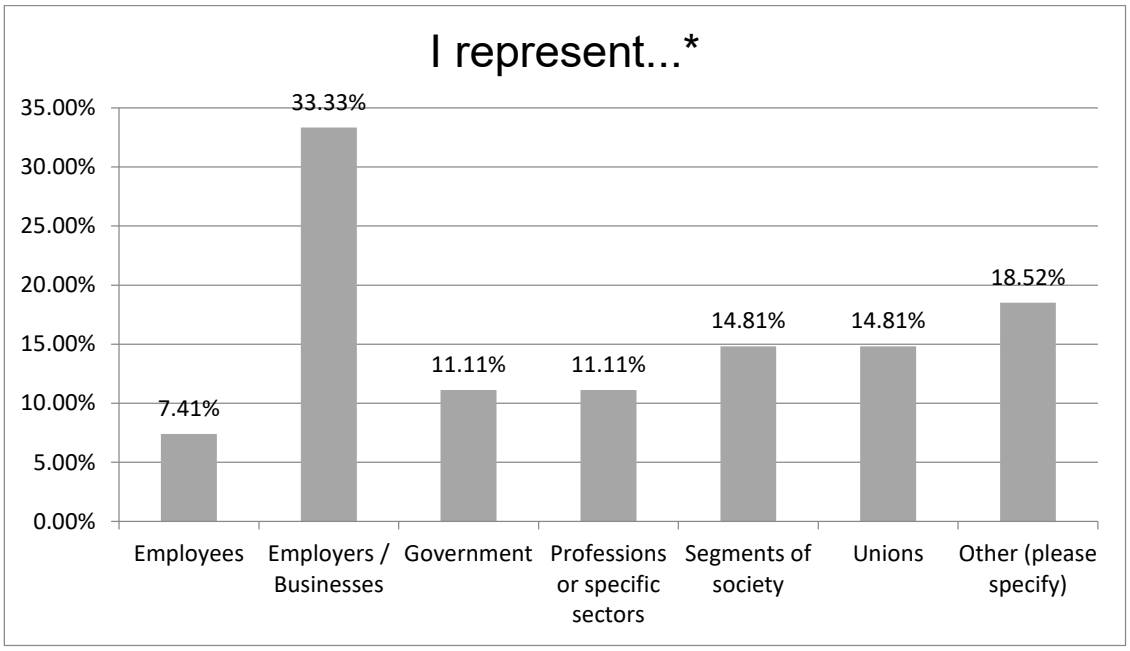
10.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents







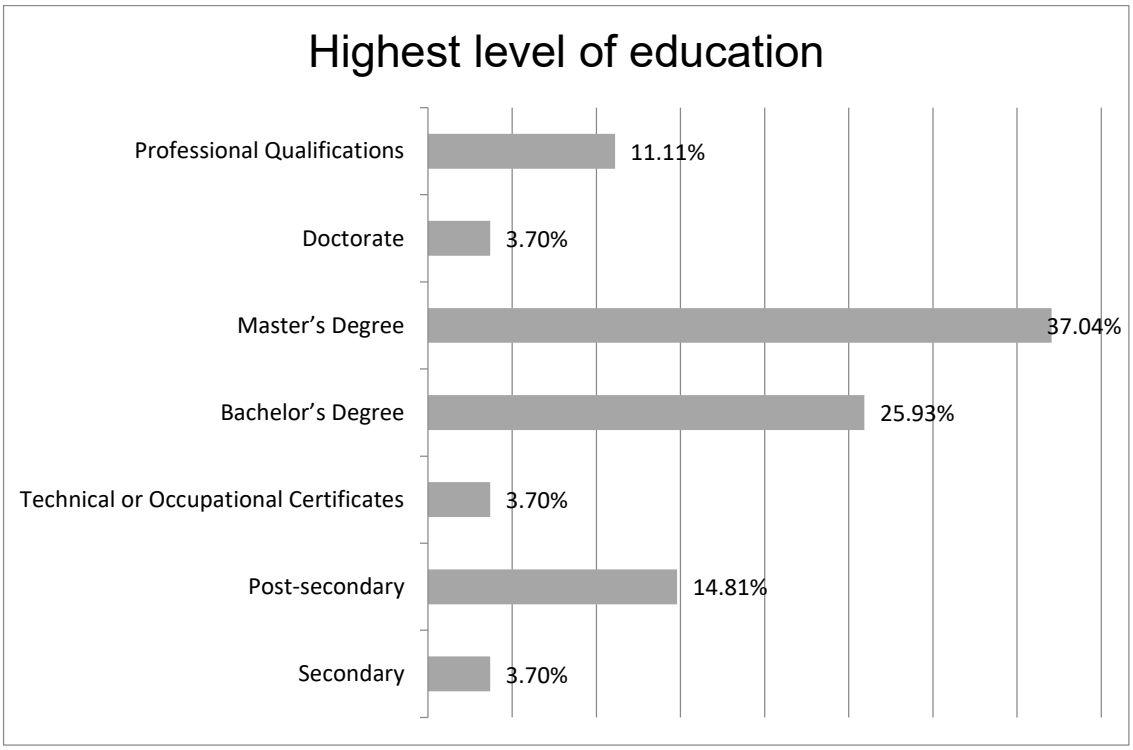
**Multiple replies to this question were possible.*

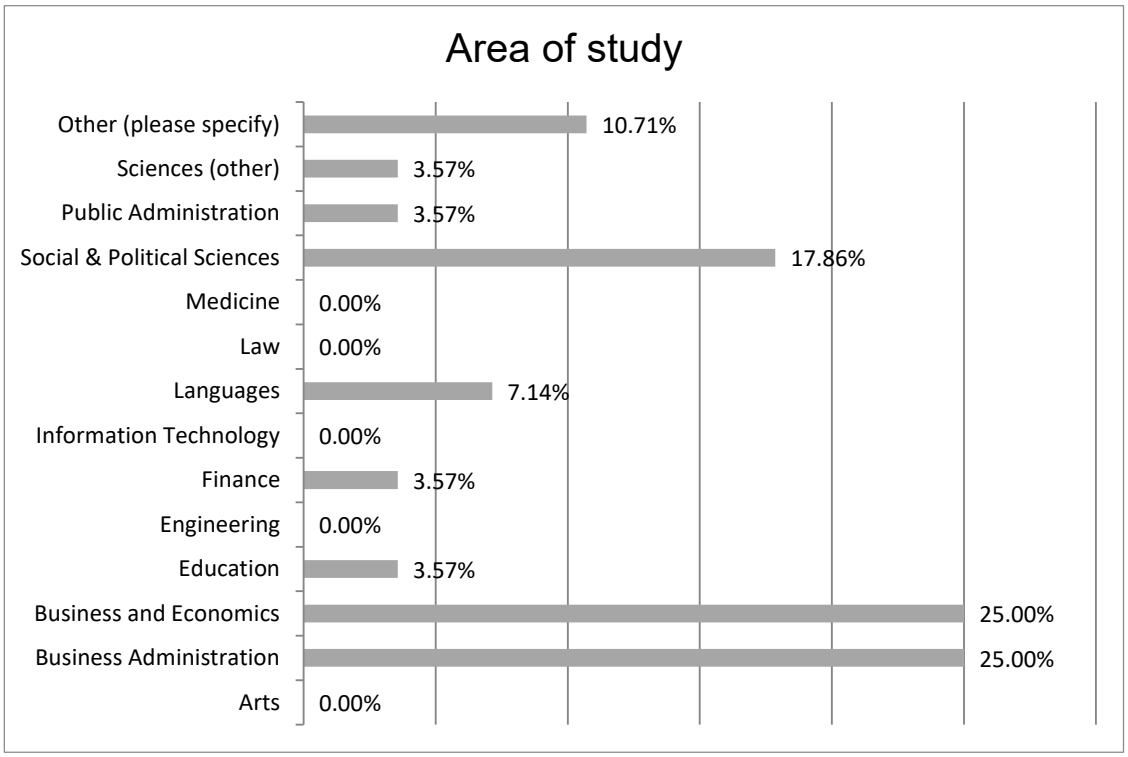


**Multiple replies to this question were possible.*

'Other' included: Disability Sector, Voluntary Organizations, NGOs, Local and Regional Councils, Students

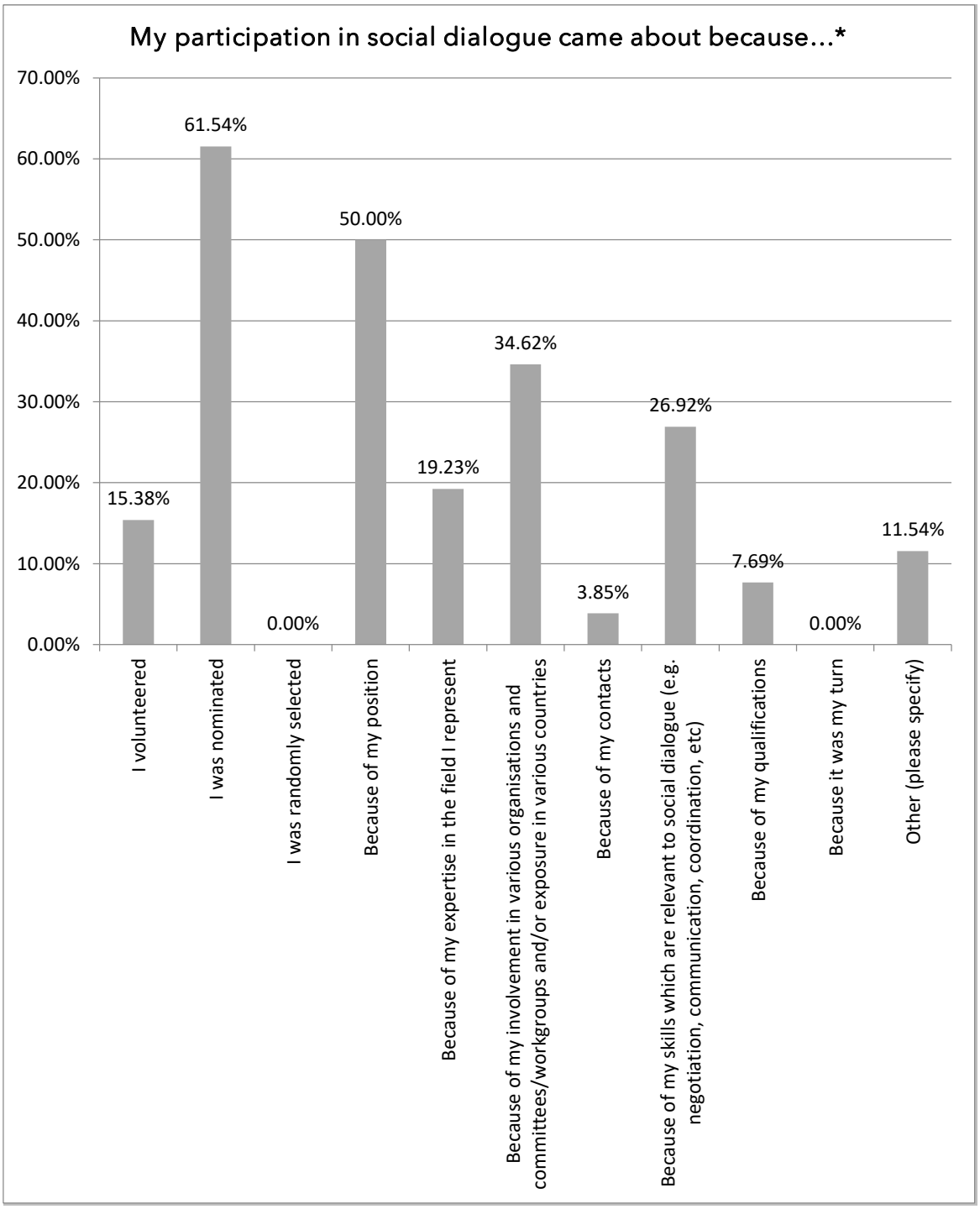
Position: wide range, including chairmen, presidents, CEOs, management and other members.



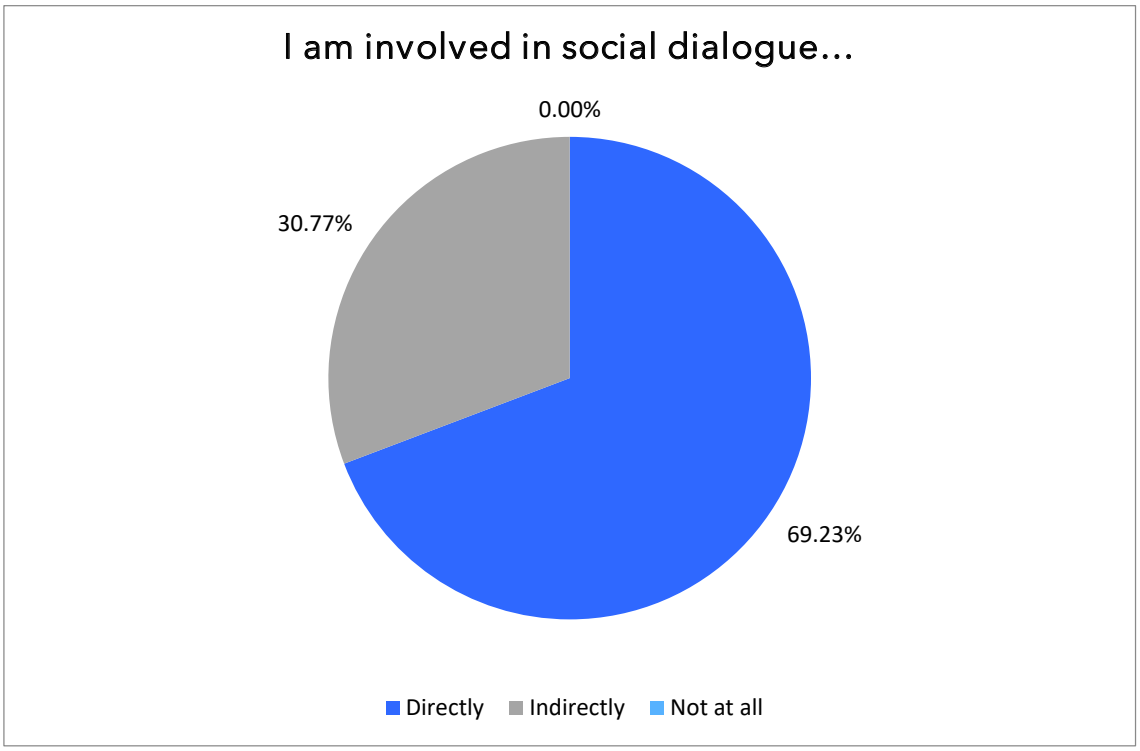


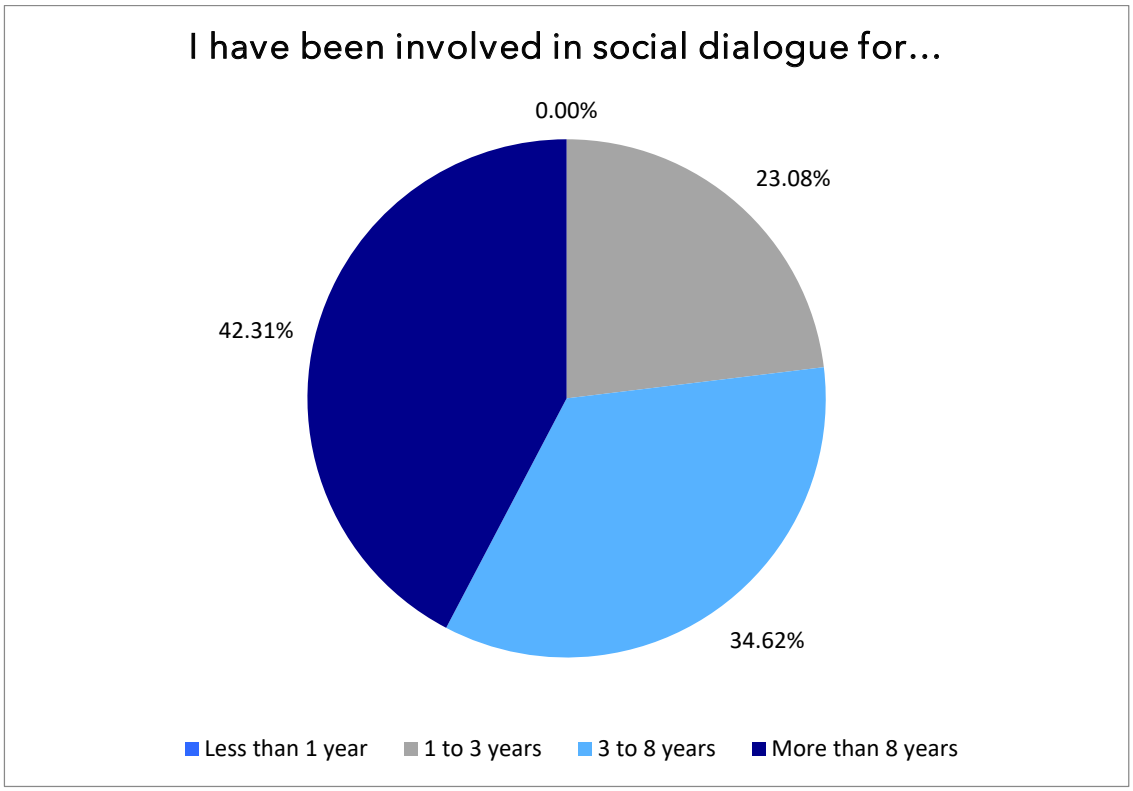
Others included: Environmental studies and aviation.

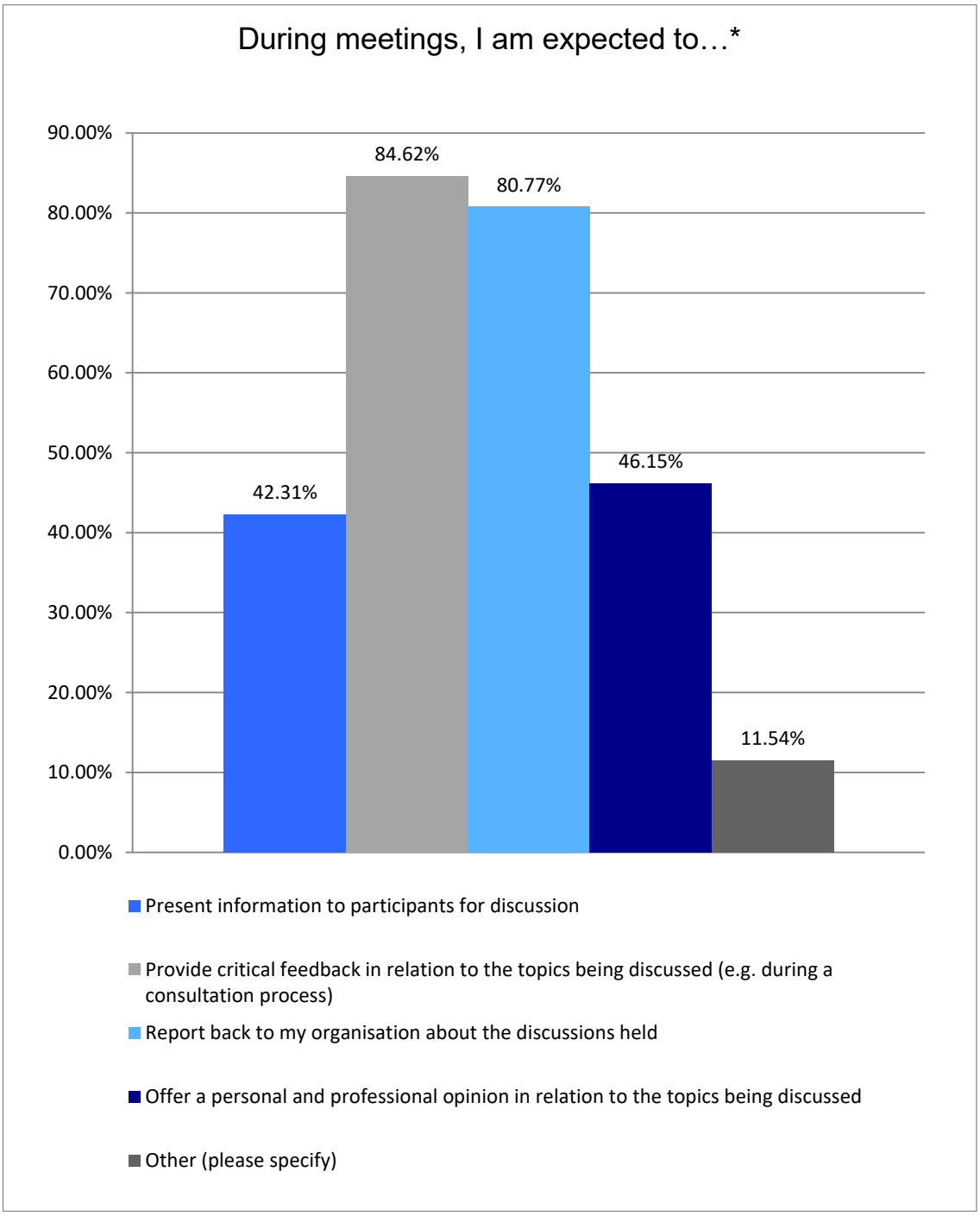
10.2 Appointment to Social Dialogue Forums



*Multiple replies to this question were possible.

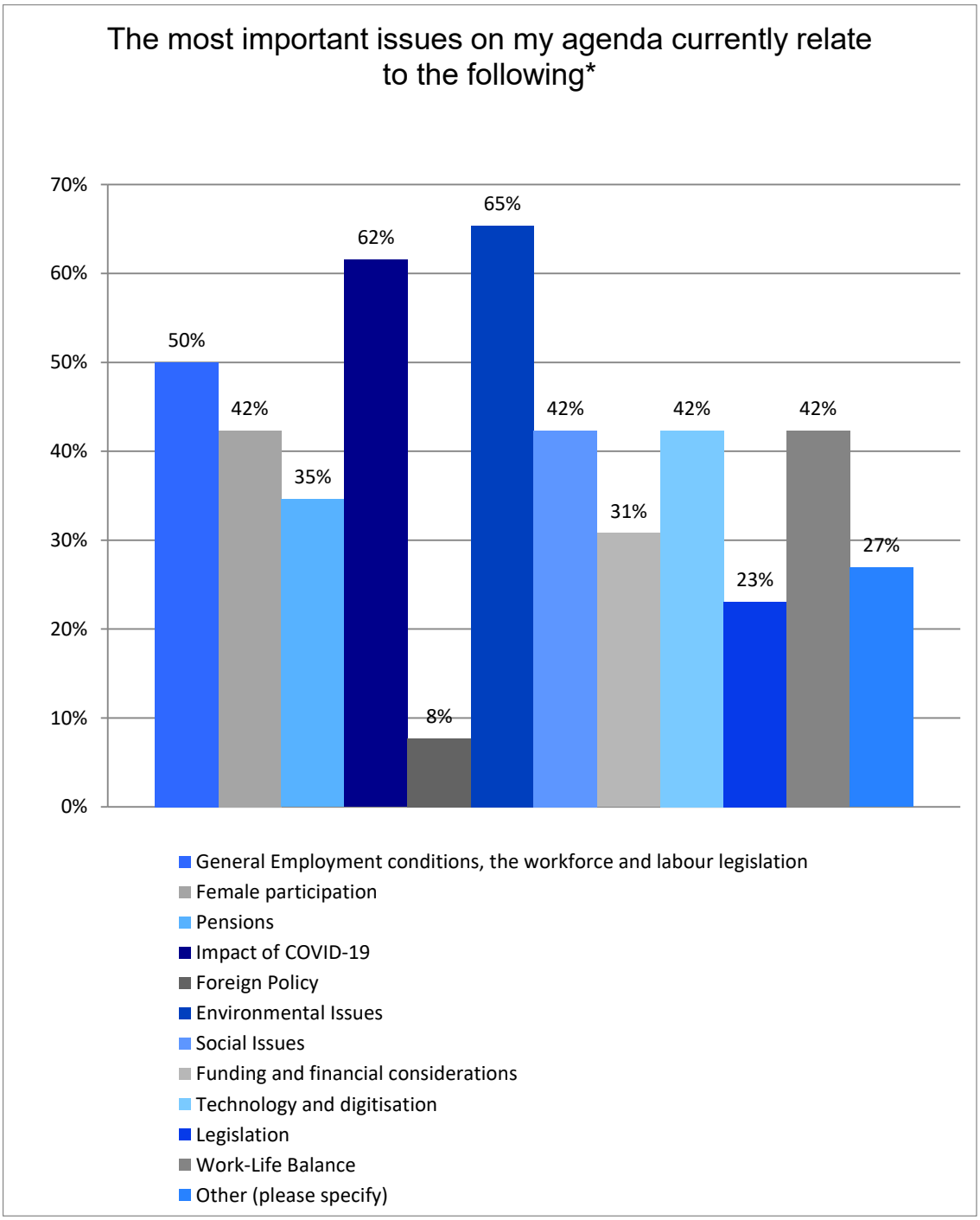



I have been involved in social dialogue for...
0.00%
23.08%
42.31%
34.62%
Less than 1 year
1 to 3 years
3 to 8 years
More than 8 years



**Multiple replies to this question were possible.*

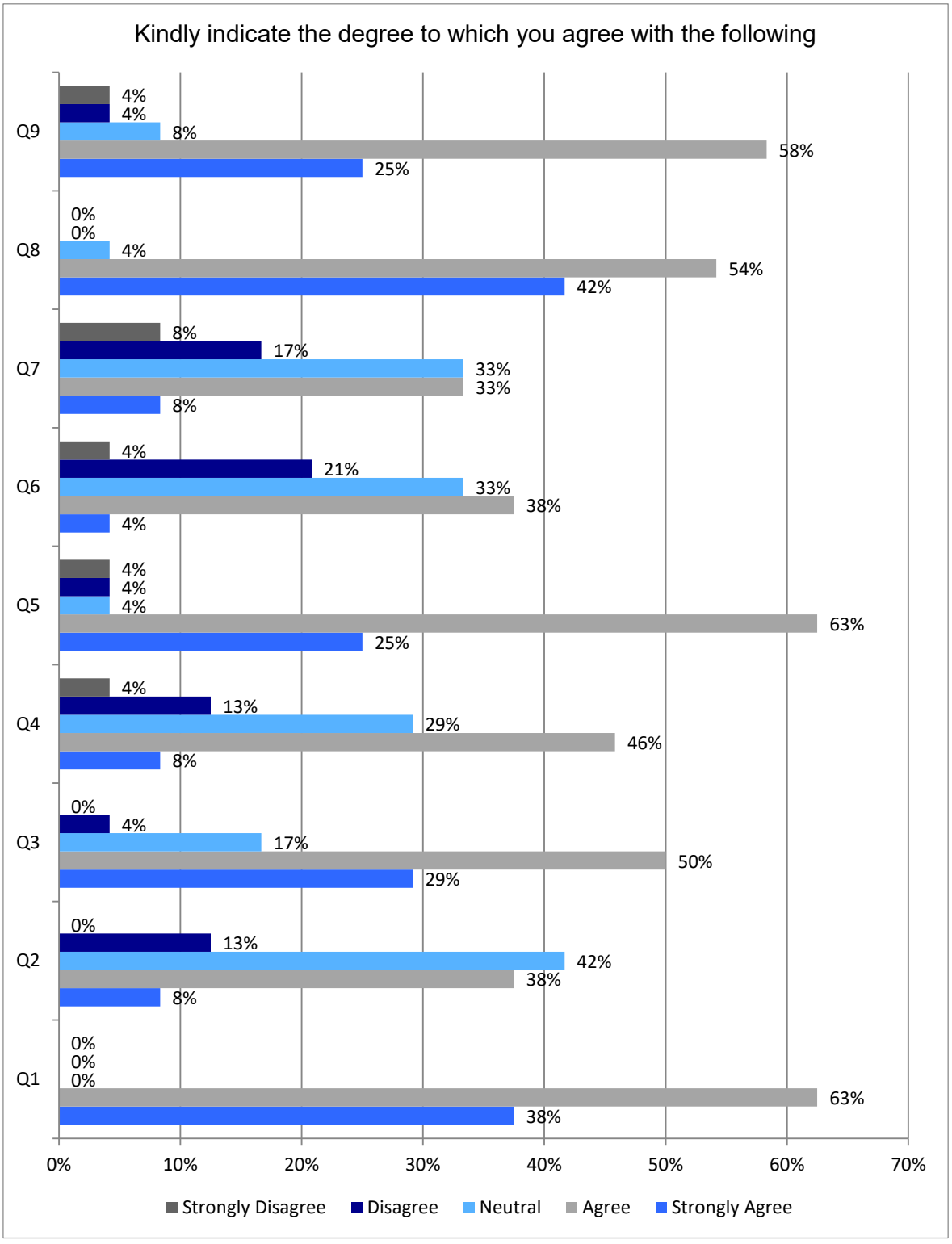
'Other' replies were by those who did not directly participate in meetings and the questions were therefore not applicable.



**Multiple replies to this question were possible.*

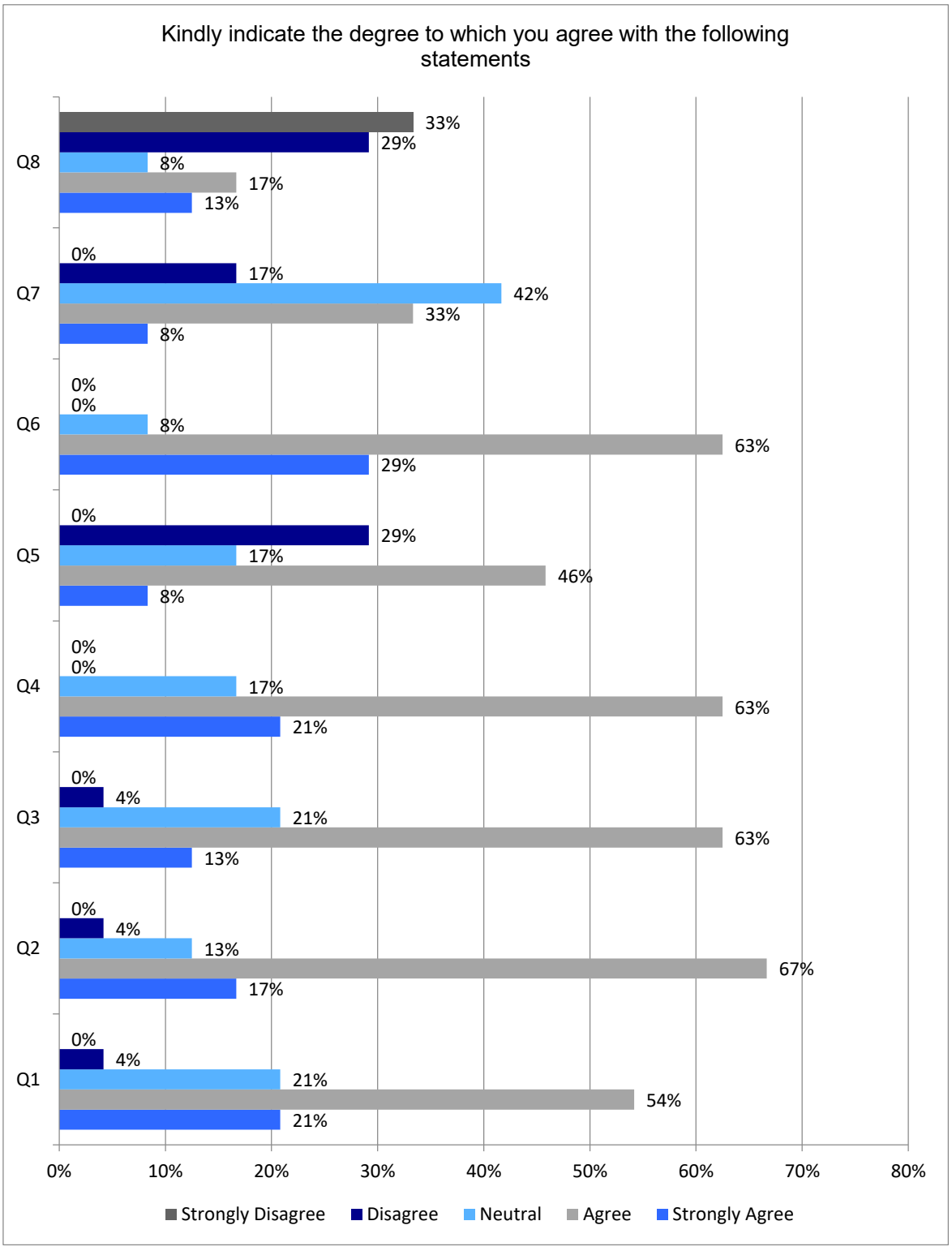
'Other' included: Disability, Tourism, Cultural Heritage, Good Governance and Operational Costs and issues in business.

10.3 Participation and Involvement in Social Dialogue



Q1	I attend all meetings held and to which I am invited
Q2	The meetings are held on days and at times which are convenient to me
Q3	The meetings are held through channels which are convenient to me (e.g. in person, video call, conference call)
Q4	The structure and processes employed in the context of social dialogue are effective
Q5	The committee(s)/workgroup(s) which I form a part of have expectations of my role which are aligned to my own
Q6	I have the required resources and tools in order to contribute effectively (personnel, time, budget, skills, etc)
Q7	Considering my role and responsibilities, I feel that I am able to enjoy an adequate work-life balance
Q8	I am treated fairly, heard and respected within the committee(s)/workgroup(s) I form a part of
Q9	All members of the committee(s)/workgroup(s) I form a part of are treated fairly, heard and respected

10.4 Representation in Social Dialogue



Q1	The member selection process is fair and effective
Q2	I feel that when a discussion takes place, there is a balance of opinions coming from people of different backgrounds and expertise
Q3	I feel that when a discussion takes place, there is a balance of opinions coming from people of different levels within the organisation's hierarchy
Q4	The committee(s) /workgroup(s) I form a part are made up of members which adequately represent all parts of society
Q5	The committee(s) /workgroup(s) I form a part are made up of members which adequately represent all genders
Q6	I feel that my role is important, and that I play a role in helping society
Q7	I feel that the issue of female participation is not being given due importance during social discussions
Q8	Female participation should be increased through the use of Quotas

11 APPENDIX – Interviewee List

The following individuals were invited to attend an interview:

MCESD Body	Organisation	Name	Gender	Interview Ref. No.
Council	General Workers Union	Josef Bugeja	M	1
	UHM Voice of the Workers	Mario Sacco	M	2
	Malta Employers Association	Sharon Farrugia	F	3
	Malta Chamber of Commerce & Industry	Andre Fenech	M	4
	Malta Hotel & Restaurant Association	Tonio Cini	M	5
	Malta Chamber of SMEs	Abigail Mamo	F	6
	For.U.M.	Elaine Germani	F	7
Council / GRC	GRC	Joseph Borg	M	8
	GRC	Joe Muscat	M	8
Gozo Regional Committee	Gozo University Group	Estelle Scicluna	F	8
	Gozo NGO Association	Miriam Portelli	F	8
Civil Society Committee	CSC	Benjamin Rizzo	M	9
	Consumer Affairs	Catherine Polidano	F	9
	Gender Equality	Mary Gaerty	F	9
	Restorers and Conservers	James Licari	M	9
	Local Councils	Mario Fava	M	9

The following individuals actually participated in the interviews:

MCESD Body	Organisation	Name	Gender	Interview Ref. No.	Interview Date
Council	General Workers Union	Josef Bugeja	M	1	18th Jan 2022
	Malta Employers Association	Sharon Farrugia	F	3	18th Jan 2022
	Malta Chamber of Commerce & Industry	Andre Fenech	M	4	24th Jan 2022
	Malta Chamber of SMEs	Abigail Mamo	F	6	8th Feb 2022
Civil Society Committee	Gender Equality	Mary Gaerty	F	9	19th Jan 2022
	Restorers and Conservers	James Licari	M	9	
	Local Councils	Mario Fava	M	9	

12 ANNEX – Feedback Report

SEE ATTACHED DOCUMENT

13 ANNEX – Simplified Summary

The MCESD engaged IDEA Advisory Limited to carry out research and present a report which would include recommendations on how to enhance female participation within social dialogue in Malta.

The research carried out involved both the review of existing studies and first-hand feedback which was obtained from the social partners themselves.

Through the study, it was noted that females make up around 25% of the current representation in social dialogue. However, this is not necessary through lack of effort or discrimination against the female gender. In fact, it was noted by many, including females, that their participation is merit-based and that there are no particular attempts made to discourage females from being a part of social dialogue. Rather, the situation has slowly been improving through a natural process over time and is reflective of the market itself.

There are however certain areas of concern which were highlighted through the research, for example work-life balance, lack of flexibility, lack of resources, lack of understanding of what social dialogue is or how to participate, and the high level of commitment required to participate.

A number of recommendations were presented in the report which have been designed to encourage participation of females within the social dialogue forums on the basis of the research. These include recommendations which could be implemented to increase female participation in the market, in the hopes that an increase at an industry level would then be reflected in social dialogue as well. In this regard, the topic of quotas was widely debated, and whilst international studies have shown their effectiveness, it would seem that locally a less forceful approach could be more effective; hence, recommendations were made to encourage the market to engage more female participants at higher levels.

Recommendations were also made for direct application at social dialogue level, such as enabling participation through flexibility and roles which required a lesser commitment, creating a pool of specialists which would include skilled females for referral by social partners when needed, engagement, marketing of social dialogue roles and setting agendas for discussions specific on gender parity and participation in social dialogue.

The intention is to create a space for merit-based growth and to shift the culture naturally towards a greater participation of valid skilled individuals who happen to be females both at industry level and in social dialogue

14 ANNEX – Press Brief

MCESD engaged IDEA Advisory to analyse female participation in social dialogue. The study found that 25% of representatives in social dialogue are females. Nevertheless, participation is primarily merit-based and no attempts discourage females from being part of social dialogue. Rather, the situation has been improving over time and is reflective of the market itself. With a strong focus on capabilities rather than gender, recommendations were made to encourage and enable participation through flexibility, visibility and engagement of social dialogue forums.