



FIDEM
Foundation

“GIVE TO GAIN”: BUILDING A BALANCED FUTURE FOR 21ST CENTURY WORK AND LIFE

6TH MARCH, 2026

CONFERENCE REPORT

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INTRODUCTION

On 6th March, 2026, FIDEM Foundation organised its 4th annual conference focusing on the international theme “Give to Gain”. This theme highlighted the urgent need to address outdated policies in Malta that do not reflect the needs of the 21st century workforce.

Current work structures often fail to support a healthy work-life balance, leaving workers whether parents or not, facing daily personal and professional challenges. Thus, the theme selected for the conference was *“Give to Gain”: Building a Balanced Future for 21st Century Work and Life*.

The conference, held at The Xara Lodge, was attended by Ambassadors, Members of Parliament, Policy Makers, students, teachers and members of the public representing the private and public sectors.

Through two engaging panel discussions attendees had the opportunity to hear from speakers representing diverse family structures and life situations. The discussions explored the daily challenges faced by Malta’s workforce , focusing not only on the visible struggles but also on the often over-looked invisible load.



Two workshops followed the panel discussions, during which attendees could split up according to their choice of workshop, led by life coaches. The aim was to help participants identify the changes needed at personal, national and organisational levels, and to develop concrete recommendations for future planning.

The overall objective of the conference was to explore real life challenges and forward looking solutions that can support the development of modern, inclusive and adaptable policies suited to the needs of the 21st century workforce. Ultimately these efforts aim to contribute towards achieving a healthier and more sustainable work-life balance in Malta.

This conference was led by Marc Cabourdin, the Master of Ceremonies, who thanked the sponsors for supporting the organisation of the conference, both financially and in other ways.

Rebecca Toutoungi
2026 Conference Rapporteur

OPENING SESSION

INTRODUCTION BY DR. SABINE AGIUS CABOURDIN, FOUNDER OF THE FIDEM FOUNDATION



Dr. Sabine Agius Cabourdin, Founder of the Foundation, opened her address by reflecting on the theme *"Give to Gain."* She emphasised that giving, whether time, energy, or commitment, is not always driven by the expectation of return, but often by a deep sense of conviction. In this context, the cause itself becomes both the means and the purpose.

She highlighted that growth is a continuous process shaped by both success and failure.

Reflecting on her journey, Dr. Agius Cabourdin noted that her involvement with the Foundation has been transformative, with some of the most valuable lessons coming directly from the Foundation's service users. She mentioned that the Foundation extends far beyond its annual conference, pointing to initiatives such as SkillUp, that supports women and children in building confidence, developing skills, as well as other services like mental health and wellbeing services.

Addressing the theme of work-life balance, she acknowledged the complexity of achieving it in practice. She observed that many individuals are navigating multiple roles simultaneously, often within a fast-paced environment, making balance challenging to sustain.

Dr. Agius Cabourdin also referred to her personal responsibilities that changed in the previous months, where she stepped back from her active role within the Foundation to take on new responsibilities.

Despite this shift and now being in the back seat, she reaffirmed her enduring passion and commitment to the Foundation's mission.

She expressed strong confidence in the Foundation's future leadership under Judith Valletta, describing her as a person of integrity and capability. She conveyed her trust in Valletta to guide the organisation forward, marking this transition as a continuation of the Foundation's ongoing growth and impact.

INTRODUCTION BY JUDITH VALLETTA, MANAGING DIRECTOR OF THE FIDEM FOUNDATION



Judith Valletta, who was appointed Managing Director of the Foundation in October 2025, started her address by thanking Dr Sabine Agius Cabourdin not only for her inspiring opening remarks, but for the trust she placed in her when she handed over the day-to-day operations of the Foundation. She described this role as an honour that she will carry out with great pride.

Having been part of the Foundation since its very beginnings in 2018, she saw firsthand the passion, resilience, and purpose that shaped the Foundation's mission, and she assured the audience that she remains fully committed to continuing the work Dr. Agius Cabourdin started and the shared vision.

Valletta described that this year's theme, Give to Gain, invites us to reflect on something deeply relevant to all of us; the balance, and often imbalance, between work and personal lives. It challenges us to consider what we give of ourselves, what we hold back, and how we can create healthier, more sustainable ways of living and contributing both professionally and personally.

RECAP OF LAST YEAR'S CONFERENCE

Before paving the way for the conference, Coryse Borg, the Rapporteur of the 2025 Annual Conference addressed the participants by presenting a recap of the previous year's conference, *Accelerate Action*.

Somewhere in between the 2025 and 2026 conference, FIDEM Foundation followed up with Ministries and 2025 panelists to gather any feedback or progress noted post-conference.

In this respect, during her address, Coryse touched upon the discussions that were held during the 2025 conference, and that link directly with the feedback that FIDEM Foundation received on any developments.



For instance, with regards to gender equality, Professor Briguglio had argued that this requires coordinated, systemic policy responses, and not isolated measures. During her feedback a few weeks before the 2026 conference, Prof. Briguglio stated that the tax cuts for families with children, including new parent and married tax bands, alongside increased children's allowances, help reduce direct financial pressure on families and may benefit women.

The increase in the Carer's Grant also signals growing recognition of unpaid care work. However, most of Malta's Budget measures so far relied on cash benefits rather than structural change. She also mentioned that discussions around extending maternity, paternity, and parental leave, the introduction of neonatal care leave and leave following miscarriage, references to remote working commitments and family leave schemes are all positive signals. However, Professor Briguglio cautioned that what matters the most are the specifics: the length of leave, levels of pay, and whether these measures are inclusive across sectors.

Representation is crucial and this is important in the sports sector as well. In his recent feedback provided to FIDEM, Charlo Bonnici, CEO of the Mediterranean College of Sport in Malta, who was on one of the panels in 2025, confirmed that while the College has succeeded in attracting more female athletes through the expansion of disciplines that traditionally draw higher female participation, such as tennis and dance, this growth has not yet translated into a significant increase in female enrolment within its football programme.

Last year, Bonnici stated that local female athletes are more likely than their male counterparts to pursue careers abroad due to limited financial stability within Malta's sporting ecosystem.

However, he highlighted that Maltese female footballers such as Bugeja and Maria Farrugia continue to make an international impact.

Domestic violence was another topic that was discussed in 2025, where discussions focused on the reality that one in three women experiences domestic abuse and that reporting violence does not always result in protection.

Since March 2025, there have been some developments that matter. Prior to the 2026 conference, Superintendent Sylvana Gafa', the Head of Victim Support Services within the Malta Police Force, one of the speakers of last year's event shared latest developments in this sector. Gafa mentioned that now, shortly after a domestic violence report is filed, victims are now contacted by the Police Victim Support Unit and are offered emotional support, legal guidance, and court accompaniment from the outset. This is so they are not left to face an intimidating process alone and are supported to continue with their case.

Since last year, victims assessed as being at high risk, are also being offered panic alarms. Within six months of this initiative being introduced in Malta, 105 panic alarms were issued. The equipment is provided at the initiative of the Agency for Victims of Crime (VSA), the police and the FSWS. As at March 2026, around 50 people in Malta have a panic alarm, including 5 (five) in Gozo.

Gafa also mentioned how practical barriers are also being addressed. With the support of the Victim Support Agency, victims may opt for free transport to attend court, and where necessary, free childcare is provided during testimony.

She also noted that after five consecutive years of rising domestic violence reports and following the establishment of the Gender-Based and Domestic Violence Unit in 2020, 2025 marked the first marginal decline, at 2%. This is attributed to a more professional, sensitive, and empathetic policing approach.

At the same time, reports in Gozo rose by 30% in the first year after a specialised unit dedicated to domestic violence and sexual offences was introduced there. This rise mirrors the initial trends observed in Malta after the introduction of centralised professional services and reflects increased victim confidence, enhanced professionalism, and greater empathy. Ultimately, this contributes to a reduction in the dark figure of crime rather than an increase in offending.

At a policy level, Malta hosted a high-level meeting under the Istanbul Convention framework, focusing on improving legal and institutional responses to gender-based and domestic violence.

More developments were noted in relation to domestic violence as economic safety has begun to be addressed more directly with the introduction of a rent subsidy for domestic violence victims undergoing separation proceedings.

Moreover, the opening of the third 24/7 domestic and gender-based violence hub in Mtarfa also marked a significant milestone, expanding a network that already includes centres in Santa Luċija and Gozo. These hubs will further strengthen the services provided by approximately 70 specialised officers delivering domestic abuse support across Malta and Gozo, and that has supported over 3,500 people through its hubs.

FIDEM Foundation also received feedback from the Ministry for Education and Employment about how gender equality is being shaped through education, guidance, and early intervention.

The approach begins in primary schools, where career awareness is introduced before stereotypes have time to harden into limits. Year 5 workshops expose both boys and girls to careers in nursing, teaching, the creative arts, and hospitality, delivered in partnership with national institutions such as the Nursing Directorate, Arts Malta, the National School Support Services, and the Malta Tourism Authority.

Alongside this, STEM Career Days allow primary students to meet professionals working in science, technology, engineering and mathematics, and to engage in hands-on learning.

ICT Talks for Year 7 girls, led by the eSkills Malta Foundation and National School Support Services, are designed to address the gender gap in technology by introducing female role models, personal stories, and real pathways into the digital sector.

Engineering is being reframed through partnerships with the Chamber of Engineers and the University of Malta, career orientation visits, engineering clubs, and national initiatives.

Students are also supported through national platforms and fairs. Career guidance services across state colleges reinforce this through one-to-one sessions, school-to-work transition programmes, orientation visits, and personalised guidance pathways.

This work is also supported by resources such as the My Career Journal, which helps students reflect on future pathways while actively challenging stereotypical thinking, and by the expansion of applied, vocational, and academic routes.

Career guidance practitioners are being trained through continuous professional development programmes focused on gender equity, unconscious bias, and inclusive guidance models - with ongoing collaboration between the Ministry, NSSS, and the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality.

Migrant girls and young women are supported through induction programmes, language assistance, targeted career guidance, and integration into mainstream education pathways.

A new national partnership was launched on the International Day of Women and Girls in Science this year with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between Xjenza Malta and the Human Rights Directorate, at Esplora, aimed at strengthening gender equality and empowering women across STEM fields.

PANEL DISCUSSION I

THE VISIBLE STRUGGLE: MALTA'S WORK-LIFE (IM)BALANCE

INTRODUCTION BY PROF. ANNA BORG

Prof. Anna Borg, Co-Founder of the Malta Women's Lobby, opened the session by introducing the theme of Malta's work-life (im)balance.

She highlighted the significant level of work-family conflict in the country and pointed to stark disparities in caregiving responsibilities. She referred to her study that shows that only 1% of men take on the primary caregiving role, a factor that continues to influence both work-life outcomes and Malta's fertility rates.

A key theme emerging from her opening address was the gap between perception and reality. While 96.5% of respondents agreed that both parents should share responsibility for raising children, actual practices tell a different story. Data shows that men's uptake of family-support measures remains very low, including parental leave (1.9%), career breaks (2.8%), and reduced working hours (5–7%).

This disparity extends into the household. While some men perceive themselves as sharing responsibilities, women consistently report carrying the greater burden.



This includes not only visible tasks such as cooking and cleaning, but also “invisible” labour, such as organising schedules, managing school communications, coordinating childcare, and providing emotional support. As a result, many women undertake a “second shift,” balancing full-time employment with the majority of domestic and caregiving responsibilities.

During her introductory address, Prof Borg also highlighted the broader societal implications of these inequalities. Women's disproportionate workload limits their time for civic and political participation and contributes to persistent economic

disparities, including a gender pay gap (5.1%) and a significantly larger pension gap (41.7%).

This impacts Malta's fertility rate that is at 1.06, indicating that women are opting out of having children due to the unequal distribution of responsibilities.

At the national level, recent developments were acknowledged, including the launch of a government reform process. Prof. Borg emphasised the importance of ensuring that any new measures are

evidence-based and designed with adequate compensation and incentives to encourage greater uptake by men and ease the conflict.

The first panel discussion, supported by the Malta Women's Lobby, brought together workers from diverse backgrounds to share first-hand experiences of balancing work and family life in Malta.

OVERVIEW OF PANEL DISCUSSION

Moderator: Prof. Anna Borg

Panelists:

- Anthea Maria Ellul - Physiotherapist
- Caroline Zammit - Head of HR, AX Group
- Fabian Demicoli - Head of Communications & Business Development, Malta Chamber of SMEs
- Josef Bugeja - General Secretary, General Workers' Union (GWU)
- Dr. Stephanie Mifsud - Assistant General Counsel



The first panel discussion, supported by the Malta Women's Lobby, brought together speakers from diverse professional and personal backgrounds to share lived experiences of balancing work and family life in Malta. The discussion moved beyond policy into the realities faced by working parents, employers, and society at large.

Personal experiences of work-life realities



Anthea, a young mother of three children aged 7, 5, and 3, shared her experience of raising a closely spaced family while navigating career interruptions.

Initially working as a physiotherapist in a hospital setting, her career trajectory was significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, pregnancy, and family needs. Attempts to transition into private practice were halted due to the pandemic, while subsequent responsibilities, including relocating to the UK for her husband's

medical training and later caring for a child with spina bifida, required her to repeatedly pause her career. Her experience highlighted the disproportionate caregiving burden often placed on mothers, particularly when children have additional needs, and the resulting impact on career continuity. In her case, she takes her youngest daughter to weekly therapy sessions and other doctors' appointments since her husband is the breadwinner.



Fabian Demicoli mentioned that he was sitting on one of the most difficult panels as he is a father of three children, while he is also representing employers.

This conference coincided with his son's parents' day, so while listening to the opening session of the conference, he joined an online meeting with his son's teachers. This was an example of balancing responsibilities, and he stressed that there is an ongoing challenge of balancing professional responsibilities with family life, particularly following the birth of the twin girls.

While both he and his wife, who works in a demanding legal profession, strive to share responsibilities, he acknowledged that the bulk of caregiving and household management still falls on his wife. Their approach includes dividing responsibilities, such as school communications, and adapting to seasonal work pressures, but challenges persist, particularly during peak work periods.

For instance, his wife is more flexible during the summer period when court is closed, and due to the nature of his work, he is less present in the months of October and November.

He also highlighted the reality that even reduced working hours often do not translate into reduced workloads.

Asked on what she had to give to gain, Dr. Stephanie Mifsud reflected on the sacrifices required for career progression.

She explained that advancing professionally required significant personal investment, including pursuing further studies alongside full-time work and delaying personal milestones such as marriage, where she delayed getting married from the age of 29 years to 32 years.

She also pointed to workplace stereotypes affecting both parents and non-parents, noting that employees without children are often perceived as more available, while mothers are assumed to be less so.

Dr. Mifsud emphasised the importance of maintaining balance to avoid burnout and sustain long-term productivity. The support of the other spouse is also important – her husband was also progressing in his career so every step she did was agreed upon beforehand.



Dr. Stephanie Mifsud

Caroline Zammit



Caroline Zammit, a senior HR leader and mother of two, shared her experience of being promoted while on maternity leave.

She highlighted the importance of supportive employers in retaining talent, noting that without such opportunities she may have left her role.

Despite having a supportive partner, she described carrying the “mental load” of organising family life, from school activities to daily logistics. She also reflected on the emotional dimension of motherhood, particularly the sense of guilt and the difficulty of fully disconnecting from work, even during extended leave.

Following her first born, Caroline benefitted from 18 weeks of maternity leave. Later, following the birth of her second child, she had a longer maternity break – 8 months.

Planning is important, and she mentioned that in order to be able to take this long break, she had a Deputy in place to ensure business continuity. She expressed that flexibility and support goes two ways and recalled how just 2 weeks before giving birth, she was dealing with a negotiation on collective agreement with the General Workers’ Union (GWU).

Structural and cultural challenges

Josef Bugeja



Mr. Josef Bugeja focused on systemic issues within the labour market, describing it as rigid and time-based rather than outcome driven. He noted that women are disproportionately affected, often undertaking a “double shift” of paid work followed by unpaid domestic responsibilities. He highlighted the mental load carried by women, including planning, coordination, and emotional labour, and the resulting stress and burnout.

He also reflected on cultural shifts, noting that while attitudes towards childcare have evolved, traditional expectations persist. Here he recalled that he was a single parent himself 23

years ago and when he opted for childcare options for his daughters, his parents refused to talk to him as they were ashamed of him leaving his daughter under the care of strangers.

Although there are cultural changes, structural barriers remain, including limited flexibility, slower career progression for women, and subtle discrimination, particularly towards mothers, creating stereotypes.

Linked to this, Anthea expressed how while her time is stretched very thin as her husband (a doctor) works very long hours, his profession still helps a lot with their daughter’s care.

The panel also addressed the blurred boundaries between work and personal life, constantly affected by connectivity and expectations of availability. While flexibility is increasingly discussed, participants noted that it often results in extended working hours rather than genuine balance.

Workplace flexibility and employer perspectives

Flexibility emerged as a central theme, though with differing perspectives. Caroline Zammit described flexibility as an investment with clear returns, enabling employees to navigate different life stages while maintaining productivity and engagement. She emphasised the importance of outcome-based performance rather than presenteeism.

Fabian Demicoli, however, highlighted the challenges faced by small and micro-enterprises, which form a significant part of Malta's economy. He noted that implementing reduced working hours or accommodating extended leave can place additional strain on small teams and require redistribution of workloads.

Josef Bugeja advocated for rethinking traditional working models, including the possibility of a 32-hour work week, arguing that productivity should be measured by output rather than time. However, concerns were raised that such changes could unintentionally increase pressure if workloads remain unchanged. He added that Artificial Intelligence can be of an added value to companies.

Policy, national context, and societal realities

The discussion also touched on broader policy issues, including maternity and parental leave. Concerns were raised about the adequacy of current provisions in Malta, particularly the limited duration of paid leave and low parental leave compensation, which may discourage uptake and contribute to low fertility rates.

QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR (Q&A)

Participants stressed the need for policies grounded in real-life experiences rather than theoretical frameworks, with a focus on inclusivity across different professions, including those unable to work remotely.

The conversation also expanded to include social realities such as domestic violence, with contributions highlighting the need for greater sensitivity and support systems. The importance of community-level interventions, including childcare support, was emphasised as essential to enabling participation in education and employment.

Employer-employee flexibility and mutual expectations



Ariadne Massa

Ariadne Massa, Moderator of Panel 2, opened the floor with a question that raised the topic of working from home, noting that moving from one extreme to another may not be ideal.

She highlighted that international studies emphasise the importance of maintaining strong networks among employees, which benefit both organisations and staff. In this context, she questioned how a balance can be achieved between workplace flexibility

and maintaining in-person collaboration, while still supporting employees' family life responsibilities.

In response, Josef Bugeja referred to the experience during the COVID-19 pandemic, during which many individuals experienced social isolation. He suggested that a hybrid working model represents the most effective approach, as it combines the benefits of remote work with opportunities for in-person collaboration with colleagues. He emphasised that a traditional requirement of 40 hours in the office is no longer necessary for many roles, excluding positions that require physical presence or direct contact.

He further noted that while automation and digital technologies have significantly transformed the workplace, many organisational structures still reflect outdated models from over a century ago, prior to the widespread availability of digital connectivity. He cautioned against developing a work culture where integration leads to an expectation of constant availability, including after working hours, stating that such practices blur the boundaries between work and personal life.

Vella also reflected on the evolving nature of employment, suggesting that future workplace structures may shift away from traditional employer–employee relationships toward more service-based models. He stressed the importance of ensuring that health, safety, and workers' rights remain protected within this evolving context.

Additionally, he advocated for a results-based approach to work, where performance is measured by output rather than hours spent in the office. He reiterated that if remote working is feasible, it should not be unnecessarily restricted but should instead be integrated in a way that supports both organisational efficiency and employee wellbeing.

With regards to this statement, Caroline highlighted the challenges faced from the employer's perspective, noting that while employers are expected to demonstrate flexibility, there is also a question of whether employees are equally flexible in return. She added that this is a common challenge encountered in her role within HR.

Josef agreed with this perspective and emphasised that workplace flexibility should be based on a principle of reciprocity, a “give to gain” approach, where flexibility is balanced by mutual understanding. For example, if an employee needs to start early or attend to personal matters such as a school-related issue, they should also be willing to make up the time or adjust their schedule accordingly when needed.

As a reply to Ariadne's question, through Slido, a member of the audience suggested a solution to introduce core hours for meetings, while having the remaining working hours as “flexible”.

Work–life reality, domestic violence, and employment challenges



Kerry Hermitage

Kerry Hermitage from Fondazzjoni Sebħ provided a reflection on the concept of “work–life balance,” suggesting that it should instead be understood as “work–life reality.”

She highlighted that women and children experiencing domestic violence often face rapidly changing and unstable life circumstances, including the sudden need to leave their homes, relocate possessions, and change children's schools. These disruptions significantly affect their ability to sustain employment,

particularly when there is limited access to childcare support or informal care networks.

She emphasised that such situations can lead to job insecurity and, in some cases, job loss. She also noted the resilience of individuals living in shelters, including those pursuing higher education while managing significant personal and emotional challenges. However, she raised concerns about continued insensitivity within some workplace environments. As an example, she referred to a case where a mother with a university degree lost her job after being unable to attend work due to her child being unwell and having no safe childcare alternatives, as her only available caregiver was the abusive individual.

Kerry stressed the need for greater workplace adaptability to such realities, highlighting that hybrid working arrangements can provide meaningful flexibility. However, she underscored that flexibility must translate into genuine opportunities for individuals to remain employed and financially independent despite difficult personal circumstances.

Prof Anna Borg remarked that this issue would be addressed further in the second panel discussion, however she noted that approximately one in four women in Malta experience some form of violence, emphasising the importance of HR professionals adopting a more empathetic and “listening mode” approach within the labour market. She highlighted that employment is often essential for individuals experiencing violence, as it enables them to support their children and maintain stability.

She further questioned existing approaches to safeguarding, asking why in some cases mothers and children are required to leave the matrimonial home while the perpetrator remains, rather than prioritising the safety and stability of victims within their own homes.



As a reflection on this scenario, Dr. Sabine Agius Cabourdin explained that FIDEM Foundation seeks to reduce both the financial and psychological burden faced by individuals in vulnerable situations by providing practical support, including childcare facilities.

She noted that many mothers who wish to pursue education or professional development are often constrained by the lack of safe and reliable childcare options. In this regard, the Foundation aims to alleviate such pressures as much as possible.

Dr. Agius Cabourdin further emphasised that as a society, supporting individuals in extreme and challenging circumstances ultimately benefits the wider community, and this is where “give to gain” comes into practice. While acknowledging the severity and complexity of these situations, she stressed that they are real and present within society and thus, require collective attention and action.

In relation to employer–employee relations, Dr. Agius Cabourdin highlighted that mutual respect forms the foundation of a healthy working environment. She underscored the importance of empathy in the workplace, questioning the extent to which such values are being upheld in modern organisational culture.

She provided an example illustrating the need for flexibility and understanding, referring to a situation where an employee who asked to bring a sick child to the workplace as she had particular work to carry out from the office. While the employer accommodated the situation, the employee was thankful that she could remain productive while ensuring the child’s wellbeing.

Dr. Sabine Agius Cabourdin concluded that fostering empathy and respect within human resource practices is essential, reinforcing that workplaces function most effectively when guided by basic principles of dignity, understanding, and mutual consideration.



Lisa Spiteri built on Sabine's points by sharing her personal experience. As a self-employed individual, she reflected on her previous roles, noting that her former employers demonstrated a high level of understanding and flexibility.

This enabled her to manage family responsibilities effectively, such as dropping off and picking up her children, as well as supporting their participation in extracurricular activities. She was able to resume work later in the afternoon, with further support from her spouse in balancing responsibilities.

She also highlighted that being granted such flexibility fostered a strong sense of belonging and loyalty towards the organisation. As a result, she felt motivated to contribute more, including working later hours when necessary, demonstrating how supportive work environments can positively influence employee commitment and productivity.

Support for low-income workers and parental policies



Reflecting on questions raised through Slido, concerns were highlighted regarding individuals earning minimum wage and how they can navigate challenging personal circumstances while managing financial obligations such as loans.

Marc Cabourdin emphasised the broader societal importance of sustaining the workforce, particularly in light of declining birth rates mentioned earlier in the introduction of the discussion.

He noted that a shrinking working-age population has long-term implications, including pressures on pension systems

and public finances, as future generations are essential to support economic continuity through taxation.

Prof. Anna Borg stressed that every worker has personal responsibilities and life circumstances that must be considered when designing workplace policies. She highlighted the importance of ensuring that flexible working arrangements are accessible to all employees, both women and men, to avoid perceptions of inequality or unfair treatment.

She further emphasised the need for stronger national support systems for parents. Current parental leave provisions, she argued, are not sufficiently generous in duration or compensation, often requiring women to return to work shortly after childbirth. Referencing international recommendations, she noted

that organisations such as the World Health Organization advocate for a minimum of six months of leave, ideally with adequate financial support. Evidence from other countries indicates that when parental leave is compensated at higher rates (e.g. at least 80% of salary), there is greater sharing of caregiving responsibilities between men and women.

In contrast, she pointed out that current provisions in Malta, such as a relatively low daily payment rate of €25, may contribute to ongoing challenges, including low fertility rates. She concluded that while flexibility in the workplace is essential, it must be complemented by meaningful financial and structural support for working parents.

Marc Cabourdin also raised a question to the panel regarding the feasibility of hybrid working models across various industries, noting that while such arrangements are viable in many sectors, their implementation remains uneven and warrants further discussion.

In response, Josef Bugeja highlighted the distinction between roles that require physical presence and those that can be performed remotely. He noted that employees working in shift-based or frontline roles, such as police officers, nurses, doctors, and receptionists, receive shift allowances and generally accept that their duties necessitate on-site presence. In contrast, roles such as clerical positions may be more adaptable to remote work; however, employees in such roles are not always given the opportunity to discuss or access flexible arrangements, despite the nature of their work allowing it.

He also pointed to the rigidity of certain institutional structures, citing an example where Fabian's wife was expected to attend court proceedings in person shortly after maternity, reflecting limited flexibility even in situations involving new parents. This rigidity, he argued, reflects broader systemic expectations that do not adequately account for family responsibilities.

Josef further noted that while employers increasingly monitor employee productivity and recognise human resources as a critical asset, there remains a need to ensure inclusivity in access to flexible working options. He emphasised that if organisations aim to engage and support all employees, they must provide equitable opportunities for flexibility where feasible.

This exchange sparked broader discussion among panel members, including reflections on the positive contributions of working parents. Through comments on Slido, it was suggested that while society speaks about balance, parents need to start enjoying parenthood without juggling. Another comment mentioned that employees, particularly women returning to work after childbirth, often demonstrate enhanced skills and perspectives.

Separate comments asked what measures in Malta would help fathers play a more active role in the early days, and another person suggested having children's perspectives on work-life balance.

In light of this, Dr. Agius Cabourdin asked the students attending the conference to voice their opinions and this resulted in a particularly impactful segment of the conference.

Amber from St Benedict's College noted that observing parental stress and imbalance can discourage young people from wanting to start families, highlighting the long-term societal implications.

Ella Aquilina from St Martin's College reflected that having both parents in leadership roles has constant presence of work in family life, raising concerns about its influence on future aspirations as works seem to be an ongoing cycle.

Lyla Micallef St Martin's College shared a more positive perspective, describing how her parents balanced sacrifices and priorities to provide stability and opportunities, demonstrating that different models can lead to different outcomes. She mentioned how her mother built a salon in her house to be able to work closely with her family including young kids. In light of this, she mentioned that she is grateful that her parents put her first and believes that her parents have a good balance.

Yolande Spiteri



Yolande Spiteri, a member of the second panel added a personal reflection on how parental attitudes towards work shape children's perceptions, emphasising the importance of framing work positively and inspiring children that it is something as an extension of ourselves rather than something that we have to do.

Fabian mentioned how sometimes it is parents themselves who create the struggles, like the choice of extra curricular activities and their respective locations.

From his end, Josef Bugeja said that it was an inspirational moment listening to the student say that our parents are a reflection, and Caroline added that while growing up, she barely saw her father. However, the importance is that even if there is little time in contact with parents, the level of quality time is important.

Key reflections and overall insight

The panel underscored the complexity of work-life balance, revealing a gap between policy, perception, and lived experience. While flexibility and shared responsibility are increasingly recognised as important, structural constraints, cultural norms, and workplace expectations continue to place a disproportionate burden on women.

A recurring theme was the need to shift from the concept of "work-life balance" to "work-life reality," acknowledging the diverse and often challenging circumstances individuals face. The discussion also highlighted the importance of mutual respect between employers and employees, as well as the need for systemic change to support both current and future generations.

Ultimately, the panel emphasised that achieving meaningful progress requires coordinated efforts at individual, organisational, and national levels, with a strong focus on equity, flexibility, and lived experience.

PANEL DISCUSSION II

THE INVISIBLE LOAD: UNSEEN PRESSURES SHAPING THE MODERN WORKFORCE

Moderator: Ariadne Massa

Panelists:

- Daniela Calleja Bitar – CEO, Richmond Foundation
- Elaine Compagno – General Manager, Women for Women Foundation
- Prof. Marceline Naudi – Activist, Academic and social worker
- Peter Gatt – Senior Employer Branding Manager, APS Bank
- Yolande Spiteri – Head of Corporate Communication, Hudson Group



OVERVIEW OF PANEL DISCUSSION

Opening Reflection



Ariadne Massa opened the second panel with a reflection on the often-unseen realities individuals bring with them to work, such as lack of sleep, illness in the family, or personal challenges.

Despite these burdens, productivity continues to be assessed primarily on visible outputs.

Reflecting on the first panel discussion, she highlighted that many women undertake a “second shift” of unpaid responsibilities at home, while simultaneously navigating professional demands.

She noted that although the panel was originally intended to distinguish between visible and invisible workloads, in practice these cannot be separated, as individuals experience them simultaneously.

She thanked FIDEM Foundation for bringing attention to the often-overlooked mental and emotional strain faced by employees and emphasised the importance of translating these discussions into practical policy measures.

Care responsibilities and the “sandwich generation”

This panel kicked off with addressing the “sandwiched” roles between supporting parents while taking care of children.



Yolande Spiteri addressed the challenges faced by individuals who simultaneously juggle between these roles. She reflected on generational expectations, noting that millennials were often encouraged to “have it all,” balancing career and family life.

She shared a personal experience of caring for her young child while her mother was diagnosed with aggressive bone cancer.

As an only child, she faced significant emotional and logistical pressures, particularly when her mother required treatment abroad. Yolande highlighted the critical role her employer played during this period, offering flexibility through remote working and fostering a supportive workplace culture.

She emphasised that trust and flexibility are built over time, describing them as a two-way relationship between employer and employee. She also noted that flexible arrangements should not follow a “one-size-fits-all” approach, as different employees have varying needs and circumstances.

Workplace Response to Domestic Violence

“Are employers becoming more aware that domestic violence can directly impact the workplace?”

Elaine Compagno addressed this question by asking the audience to show off hands if they work in HR or manage a team, and then asked them whether they would recognise if someone is going through domestic violence, which many did not.

Compagno stressed how workplaces should respond when employees disclose situations of domestic violence, including stalking or threats to personal safety. She stressed that domestic violence often extends beyond the home and can impact employees within the workplace.

She outlined common warning signs, such as frequent lateness, visible distress, or changes in behaviour, and highlighted a lack of training among managers to identify and respond to such situations. She emphasised the importance of adopting an open-minded approach when addressing changes in employee performance, recognising that underlying personal issues may be contributing factors.

Drawing from personal experience, Elaine described how her employer provided practical and emotional support during a difficult period. Measures included ensuring her physical safety at work and maintaining her employment and salary while she temporarily withdrew from work to seek shelter. She stressed that both small and significant interventions can have a lasting impact.

Elaine highlighted the need for increased awareness, training, and clear communication within organisations to ensure that employees feel safe to disclose sensitive issues and access support.



Workplace culture and mental health

Ariadne started this segment by asking Daniela Calleja Bitar whether more employees are struggling with mental health challenges or whether they're willing to talk about it, to which Daniela replied that “it's both”.



Calleja Bitar discussed findings from work with over 250 organisations in Malta, noting that there has been both increased awareness and ongoing challenges in addressing mental health in the workplace post-COVID-19.

She emphasised that while employee assistance programmes are valuable, research indicates that organisational culture plays a more significant role in supporting mental wellbeing. Flexible working arrangements were identified as a key factor in helping employees manage workloads and personal responsibilities.

Daniela also observed that unfortunately, many organisations adopt a reactive approach - “management by crisis”, seeking support only in times of crisis such as when suicides happen. She stressed the importance of proactive measures, including the implementation of mental health policies and preventive strategies. She also referred to Richmond’s services where they can assist clients by guiding them through all the services offered in Malta.

Societal norms and gender inequality



Prof. Marceline Naudi highlighted the broader societal context, noting that gender inequality and patriarchal norms continue to influence workplace experiences.

She explained that societal attitudes, shaped by education, media, and cultural institutions, can perpetuate inequality and contribute to issues such as intimate partner violence. As individuals part of society, we have absorbed everything from the context around us and even when we are elderly adults, these ideas are still reinforced. She mentioned that from her experience working across Europe and with the Council of Europe,

this happens not only in Malta but continuously across Europe.

Referring to global trends, she raised concerns about regressive attitudes among younger generations, including beliefs about gender roles. She emphasised the need for continued efforts to promote equality and challenge ingrained societal norms.

Ariadne pointed out that the day before the conference, it has been reported that from 29 countries where a study was carried out, almost a third of GenZ men (born between 1997 – 2012) believe that a wife should obey her husband.

In response, Naudi noted that there is currently a growing backlash against women and LGBTIQ individuals. She explained that the rapid spread of information through social media means that developments in other parts of the world, particularly in the United States, are immediately felt and reflected in local contexts. She emphasised the importance of promoting equality, stating that men, women, and non-binary individuals should work together as equals.



Organisational adaptation and policy development

Peter Gatt started off by mentioning that through his kids in their 20s, he has noted a step forward in society dominated by males.

He shared insights from APS Bank, highlighting how organisational policies have evolved to address changing workforce needs. Over a period of significant growth and with a demography of the bank consisting of 35% millennials, the bank introduced flexible working arrangements, including hybrid models and remote working policies, even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

He noted that workforce demographics, including a high proportion of millennials and an increasing number of international employees, have influenced organisational practices. APS bank has implemented policies that recognise diverse employee needs, including support mechanisms such as provident funds to assist employees facing personal or family challenges.

Peter emphasised the importance of leadership support in implementing such initiatives, noting that both structural policies and a culture of care are essential in addressing employee wellbeing.

Workplace values and collective support

In closing, Yolande reiterated that the values practiced within families, such as care, empathy, and solidarity, should also be reflected in the workplace. She shared an example of collective support within her organisation, where colleagues contributed financially to assist her during a difficult period, reinforcing the importance of community within professional environments.

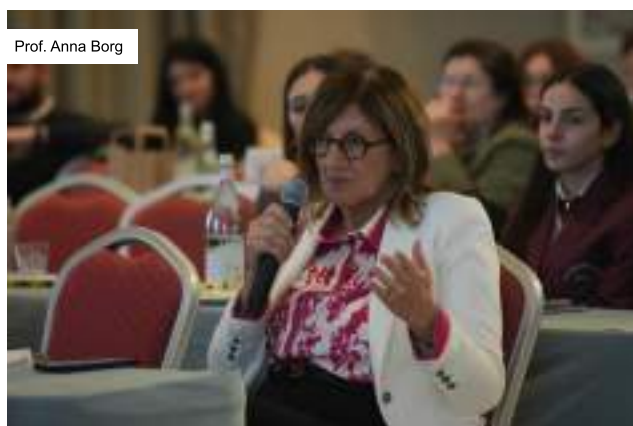
QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR (Q&A)

Upon opening the floor to questions, Dr. Sabine Agius Cabourdin highlighted that while initiatives such as workshops can help employers recognise signs of distress among employees, not all organisations have the capacity to implement such measures. She also noted that not all employees feel comfortable disclosing personal challenges, even when support is available. Although some individuals may be able to identify signs of distress through emotional intelligence, this does not always translate into open communication from those affected.

Elaine responded by emphasising that clearly communicating approachability is a critical first step in encouraging disclosure. She pointed out that practical measures can also make a significant difference, such as providing employees with a separate work phone to safely contact support services without being monitored. Additionally, discreet resources, such as informational flyers with QR codes placed in private spaces like restrooms, can offer accessible support options.

Prof Naudi added that while support should be made available, it is equally important to respect the decisions of individuals who may not be ready to seek help. Ensuring that employees are aware of available support is essential, even if they choose not to act on it immediately.

Yolande noted that communication approaches may need to be tailored depending on individual circumstances, including differences in how men and women experience and respond to workplace and family-related challenges.



Prof. Anna Borg

Prof. Anna Borg also shared her insights and referred to the impact of gender roles and stereotypes.

She highlighted that gender-related challenges affect both women and men, noting, for example, the prevalence of mental health issues such as suicide among men.

She explained that many men strongly identify with their professional roles and may feel unable to take career breaks, reflecting broader societal expectations.

Prof. Naudi added that the persistence of stereotypes, including perceptions that women benefit from maternity leave, continue to face criticism. She illustrated this with an example from her own family, where years ago her brother was denied a job opportunity due to his inability to commit to extended working hours because of family responsibilities and his hobby, demonstrating that rigid expectations can affect both genders.

Dragan Donkov, a Senior Coach Practitioner and Team Coach, acknowledged that progress has been made in addressing issues such as mental health, noting that societal attitudes have shifted from stigma and silence to greater openness and awareness.



Addressing harassment and workplace safety

In response to questions from Slido, the issue of stalking was raised. Elaine emphasised that stalking is a serious matter that can escalate if not addressed and should be treated as a criminal offence. She noted that harassment can occur through various channels, including financial and digital platforms, making it difficult to completely block perpetrators. In such cases, it is essential for HR to take appropriate action, including involving law enforcement authorities.

Organisational policies and leadership responsibility

Peter highlighted that APS Bank has implemented a zero-discrimination policy and designated officers to support employees. However, he noted that a key challenge remains the reluctance of individuals to speak up about their experiences.

He reiterated the importance of shifting from the concept of “work–life balance” to “work–life blend,” reflecting the increasingly integrated nature of professional and personal responsibilities.

In response to questions about limited access to remote working, Peter emphasised that responsibility extends beyond HR to organisational leadership. He stressed that leaders must recognise changing societal realities and adopt more flexible approaches to work.

Support for small businesses and confidentiality

Addressing concerns through Slido related to smaller organisations like family businesses and freelancers, Daniela Calleja Bitar explained that Richmond Foundation’s services are also extended to small and family-run businesses. She emphasised the importance of confidentiality, noting that individuals seeking support through workplace channels are protected to prevent identification or stigma.

Closing reflections

Yolande reflected on the influence of role models, sharing how her mother balanced a successful career while continuing to contribute to advocacy efforts in healthcare, highlighting the importance of purpose and resilience.

Peter reiterated that flexibility is not a one-size-fits-all solution and noted that employment stability, such as indefinite contracts, can also contribute to employee wellbeing by enabling better family support.

Elaine stressed that empathy must remain central to workplace practices when addressing complex employee needs.

Prof. Naudi observed that modern life is increasingly fast-paced and demanding, reinforcing the need for supportive structures.

Daniela concluded by emphasising the importance of engaging directly with employees to understand their needs, noting that flexible working arrangements remain a priority. She also encouraged individuals to seek support at Be Brave and speak up in cases of bullying or workplace challenges.

WORKSHOPS

Before the commencement of the workshops, participants were invited to answer a number of questions through slido. This exercise enabled the facilitators to gain further insight into participants' priorities and perspectives regarding the improvements needed at personal, organisational and national levels to achieve a healthier work-life balance.

The two workshops were carried out simultaneously so that one workshop focuses on "The visible struggle": Malta's work-life (im)balance" and the other one "The broader spectrum: The invisible load".

The decision to divide participants into 2 separate workshops was based on feedback received following the previous year's conference. It recognised that not all attendees are parents and wanted to create a space where the experiences, challenges and needs for individuals from different life situations could also be acknowledged and addressed.

Before the beginning of each workshop, participants were encouraged to answer some questions on slido so that FIDEM Foundation gains additional insight into participants' priorities at the personal, organisational, and national levels for improving work-life balance.

The visible struggle: Malta's work-life (im)balance

The first workshop explored what participants feel they need to let go of in order to gain a greater sense of control and balance in their lives. Several consistent themes emerged from the responses.

Participants frequently identified the urge to control every aspect of their lives as a significant source of stress and fatigue. There was a clear recognition that prioritising control can be emotionally draining and counterproductive.



Many participants reflected on the pressure to meet high personal and societal standards. This included the expectation to perform flawlessly across multiple roles, particularly in balancing professional and family responsibilities. Participants acknowledged the need to adopt more realistic and compassionate expectations of themselves.

Responses also highlighted a strong sense of individual responsibility, with some participants expressing the belief that they must carry all burdens independently. This mindset was recognised as isolating and unsustainable, pointing to the importance of seeking support and sharing responsibilities.

Some participants noted a tendency to over-structure their days and become overly attached to plans and routines. In this respect, there was a shared desire to introduce greater flexibility and allow for a more natural flow in daily life.

Feelings such as guilt and persistent tiredness were commonly mentioned, indicating the emotional toll associated with maintaining high levels of control and expectation.

Collectively, participants expressed a desire to let go of control, perfectionism, unrealistic expectations, self-imposed isolation, and emotional strain. Doing so was seen as essential to creating more balance, flexibility, and space in their daily lives.

During the initial questions that participants were encouraged to answer on Slido in relation to the changes that they would like to see, the most significant personal change identified was prioritising mental and physical wellbeing (50%), highlighting a strong need for self-care and personal sustainability. Improving time management and planning (25%) and sharing caregiving or household responsibilities more equally (25%) were also noted as important.

33% of participants identified flexible working hours and hybrid or remote work options as the most impactful organisational measures. Additional areas included outcome-based performance measurement (17%) and leadership modelling healthy boundaries (17%). It is interesting to note that other options that have been presented to participants, such as limiting after-hours communication, increasing leave, childcare support, or reducing workloads, were not selected.

At the national level, the strongest priority was the introduction of a national caregiver recognition and support scheme, with 40% of participants who answered this question chose this as the most important priority. This was followed by affordable eldercare services (20%). Other areas, including shorter working weeks, social benefit reform, improved infrastructure, and longer maternity leave, each received lower levels of support (10%).

This shows that there is a multi-level need for change. At a personal level, there is a clear emphasis on wellbeing and shared responsibility. Organisationally, flexibility in how and where work is performed is seen as critical, and nationally, a stronger structural support for caregivers emerges as the most urgent priority.

The broader spectrum: The invisible load

The second workshop highlights a distinct shift in participant priorities, with a stronger emphasis on behavioural and cultural change, particularly around personal boundaries and organisational support structures.



The most prominent personal change identified was learning to say no without guilt. 41% of participants who participated in this workshop chose this answer, and this indicates that participants experience difficulty setting boundaries and managing expectations placed on them. Thus, reflecting a need to strengthen assertiveness and reduce overcommitment. Prioritising mental and physical wellbeing (22%) remained an important theme, with 22% of participants choosing this option. Improving time management and planning (16%) and sharing caregiving or household responsibilities more equally

(16%) were also recognised as contributing factors.

3% of participants expressed the need to set firmer boundaries around work hour, suggesting that participants may perceive the challenge less in structural boundaries and more in their ability to enforce them interpersonally.

Flexible working hours emerged as the most important organisational intervention, with 40% of the participants choosing this option. This reinforces the value of autonomy in managing work schedules.

Other priorities were more evenly distributed, including outcome-based performance measurement (20%), on-site or subsidised childcare support (20%), and leadership modelling healthy boundaries (20%). These findings suggest that participants are looking for both practical support and cultural change driven by leadership behaviour.

Interestingly, hybrid or remote work options and limits on after-hours communication received no responses, which may indicate either that these are already in place or are not perceived as the primary barriers in this context.



Workshop 2 results point to a more internalised challenge compared to Workshop 1. While structural flexibility remains important, the dominant theme is the need for individuals to feel empowered to set limits, particularly by saying no without guilt. This is complemented by a call for organisational environments that support these behaviours through flexible policies, visible leadership practices, and practical supports.

CLOSING REMARKS

During the closing remarks delivered by Judith Valletta and Marc Cabourdin separately after the workshops ended, they both thanked all participants for attending the conference and participating in the conversations.

They mentioned how the panel discussions and workshops were meant to spark reflections and challenge perspectives, with the hope of encouraging small but powerful changes in how we approach work, our wellbeing and our lives.

Valletta and Cabourdin stressed on FIDEM Foundation's commitment that will extend beyond the day of the conference. They mentioned how the Foundation holds education close to the heart of its mission. In fact, through the Educate to Empower programme and the Skill Up initiative, the Foundation continues to support women in accessing education, gaining qualifications and building brighter futures.

They further mentioned how FIDEM is also deeply committed to mental and emotional wellbeing. By means of its two peer support groups, *Isma' Habib* (led by men for men) and *Bejnietha* (led by women for women), the Foundation creates spaces for the community to listen and share experiences, leading to healing and growth.

APPENDICES

DISTINGUISHED GUESTS ATTENDED ON THE DAY

H.E. Djoeke Adimi-Koekkoek – Ambassador, Kingdom of Netherlands
H.E. Victoria Alice Markland Busby – High Commissioner, British High Commission Valletta
H.E. Valentina Setta – Ambassador of Italy
H.E. Matt Skelly – Australian High Commission
Martina Jones, British High Commission Valletta
H.E. Stella Bezirtzoglou – Ambassador, Greece
H.E. Caroline Whelan – Ambassador of Ireland
Mr. Lawrence Walsh – European Investment Bank Group Office Malta

Hon. Ivan Bartolo – Shadow Minister
Hon. Ivan Castillo – Shadow Minister
Sarah Bajada

AGENDA

📅	Date:	6th March, 2026
🕒	Time:	08:30 – 14:15
📍	Location:	The Xara Lodge, Rabat



“GIVE TO GAIN”: Building a Balanced Future for 21st Century Work and Life

AGENDA	SPEAKERS/PANELISTS	TIME
REGISTRATION & WELCOME COFFEE		08:30 – 09:00
OPENING SESSION - Brief introduction by the Founder and Managing Director of the FIDEM Foundation. - Recap of last year's conference: initiatives, completed actions, and ongoing progress.	Dr. Sabine Agius Cabourdin Founder – FIDEM Foundation Judith Valletta Managing Director – FIDEM Foundation Coryse Borg 2025 Conference Rapporteur	09:00 – 09:20
PANEL 1: THE VISIBLE STRUGGLE: MALTA'S WORK-LIFE (IM)BALANCE <i>Moderator: Prof. Anna Borg (Malta Women's Lobby)</i> Prof. Anna Borg will open the session by introducing the theme of Malta's work-life (im)balance, highlighting the country's high work-family conflicts, the fact that studies show that only 1% of men take the largest share of caregiving, and the resulting impacts on work-life outcomes and fertility. This panel will bring together workers from diverse backgrounds to share first-hand experiences of balancing work and family life in Malta. It will assess the implications of this on Malta's workforce and identify practical, evidence-based actions to better support work-life balance.	Caroline Zammit Head of HR, AX Group Dr. Stephanie Mifsud Assistant General Counsel Anthea Maria Ellul Physiotherapist Fabian Demicoli Head of Comms & Business Development Malta Chamber of SMEs Josef Bugeja General Secretary, GWU	09:20 – 09:30 09:30 – 10:45
QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR (Q&A)		10:45 – 11:10
BRUNCH BREAK		11:10 – 11:55
PANEL 2: THE INVISIBLE LOAD: UNSEEN PRESSURES SHAPING THE MODERN WORKFORCE <i>Moderator: Ariadne Massa</i> This panel looks at the broader spectrum of pressures facing Malta's workforce and explores the less visible challenges affecting workers' wellbeing and performance in Malta. Discussions will address pressures that influence employees' mental health, productivity, and participation in the labour market. It will examine how workplaces and national policies can adapt to recognise and relieve these hidden burdens	Elaine Compagno General Manager Women for Women Foundation Yolande Spiteri Head of Corporate Communications Hudson Group Peter Gatt Senior Employer Branding Manager APS Bank Prof. Marcelline Naudi Activist, Academic & Social Worker Daniela Calleja Bitar CEO – Richmond Foundation	11:55 – 12:55



AGENDA

 Date:	6th March, 2026
 Time:	08:30 – 14:15
 Location:	The Xara Lodge, Rabat



“GIVE TO GAIN”: Building a Balanced Future for 21st Century Work and Life

AGENDA	TIME
QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR (Q&A)	12:55 – 13:20
WORKSHOPS 1. The Visible Struggle: Malta’s work-life (im)balance Facilitated by: Daphne Grech Cumbo; Executive Trainer & Coach Stephanie Galea; Business Trainer 2. The Broader Spectrum: The invisible load Facilitated by Dragan Donkov; Senior Coach Practitioner & Team Coach Through these workshops, the aim is to identify the changes needed at personal, national and organisational levels and to develop concrete recommendations for future planning. The first workshop will focus on the practical and structural challenges of balancing professional responsibilities with parenthood. The second workshop will explore the invisible load, addressing the often-unseen pressures that extend beyond parenthood and impact overall wellbeing and professional engagement. Alongside this policy focus, the coaches will guide participants in exploring practical, personal strategies for improving work-life balance. Participants will be encouraged to reflect on the changes they would like to see at a personal level, what is within their control, and where broader structural action is needed.	13:20 – 14:05
CLOSING REMARKS	14:05 – 14:15

The Visible Struggle: Malta's Work Life (Im)balance?

Prof. Anna Borg



What is this panel about?

1

Looking at Work-Life Conflict – is it real?

2

How are women and men dealing with the demands of paid work and family

3

What can help ease the conflict?

Women and Men at Work

MEN
94.8%



WOMEN
85.8%



The time squeeze is real

67.6% of women
58.6% of men

report having difficulties fulfilling their family responsibilities at times or frequently

More women are struggling

||| The perceptions of women and men are shifting

In relation to Gender roles when it comes to Parenting roles



96.5% agree that both parents should contribute to looking after/bringing up the child

Data Source: Bang & Cambien, NCP 2004

||| Does the perception match the reality? ||| Family leave uptake by MEN

Are men really contributing to looking after their children.

In what ways are they doing so?

- **1.9%** - Parental leave
- **2.8%** - Career break
- **5-7%** - Reduced hours

See <https://hqs.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/Annual-Report-2024-online-version.pdf>

MEN and CARE Work

1% of men take on most of the work in relation to the care of the CHILDREN

Borg & Carstén - MCP 2020



WOMEN and CARE Work

46.6% of women take on most of the work in relation to the care of the CHILDREN

Borg & Carstén - MCP



SHARING the CARING load?

32.7% - Share the care between them
More males report they are doing so!



Borg & Carstén - MCP 2024

HOUSEWORK who is doing the bigger share?



5.9% men

51.5% women



Borg & Carstén, MCP 2024

HOUSEWORK being shared?



71 % men

45%
women



Berg & Carstensen, WZL 2024

The other invisible work at home

Apart from Care work + Housework:

- Logistics and coordination work
- The Managerial role
- The Mental role
- The Admin role
- Invisible emotional labour
- Kinkeeping - provide the relationship and social glue



Women are working the second shift and carrying the heavier loads

- This means normalising unfairness
- This means normalising unequal time – so they have less time for rest, less flexibility
- This normalises unequal opportunities at work – promotions, career compromises:



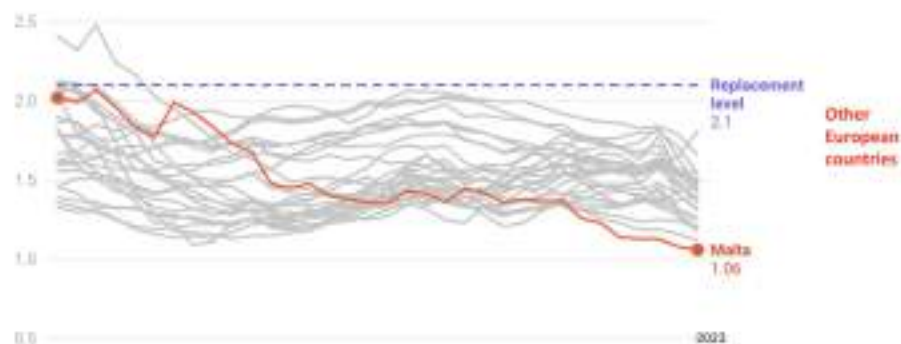
The impact of normalising unfairness

- Pay Gap - 5.1%
- Pension Gaps - 41.7%
- Leadership Gaps (EOs, Board members, Directors)



Impact? Malta's lowest low fertility rate (1.06)

Timeline showing fertility rates of European countries including Malta since 1990 to 2023.



Data Source: Eurostat

What can government do to ease the work family conflict ?

National Reform on Work Life Balance launched in February 2026

Improve family leaves and measures to support working parents?

How generous will the leaves be in terms of compensation level and duration

Will there be measures to close the caring gaps between parents?



Hear real life stories about work life struggles

+

Discuss solutions that could ease the conflict.

