

## Conclusion

The findings suggest that there exists a mutual desire among both women and men to have additional children. On average, women express a personal ideal of 2 children, while men report a slightly lower figure of 1.86, resulting in an overall average of 1.93. Nonetheless, impediments such as shifts in societal norms regarding family size and financial constraints emerge as primary obstacles in realising these aspirations.

In addition, the study highlights the importance of addressing challenges in relation to the reconciliation of work and family responsibilities, as well as gender imbalances in caregiving responsibilities to support individuals in their decisions regarding family size. It emphasises the need for comprehensive policy revisions including new policies where necessary.

Awareness campaigns to promote gender equality, sensitise men to share care responsibilities, and facilitate the uptake of family leave options are also vital in order to challenge traditional roles and stereotypes. It is important that the work undertaken in implementing the recommendations of this study should be gender mainstreamed to ensure specific focus on answering to the aspirations of both women and men in planning the size of their family.



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## Perceptions and Attitudes of women and men in Malta towards Work-Life Balance: with a specific focus on family size

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## Introduction

The study focuses on the perceptions and attitudes of women and men of reproductive age in Malta regarding work-life balance, with a specific focus on family size. Total fertility rate (TFR) in Malta started declining way back in the early nineties, from comfortable levels close to the replacement rate (in 1992 it was at 2.07).

In 2001 it fell below 1.5 and in 2017 it was below 1.3. Currently Malta's TFR is at 1.13 the lowest among all EU MS. The study aims to determine whether women and men aged 18 to 39 want to have (more) children, identify factors influencing their decisions, understand challenges in reconciling work and care responsibilities, and propose recommendations to support couples in having more children.



## Findings and Recommendations

Findings indicate that both **women and men express a desire for more children**. On average, women report 2 children and men 1.86 as their personal ideal, averaging at 1.93 overall. However, factors such as changes in normative values about number of children and financial difficulties are the main challenges. Women with higher level of education who already have one child, and who are best positioned to reach their intended number of children report in 45.5% of cases no intention of having another child because they already had all the children they wanted. 33.9% of all respondents described their household situation as 'living day-by-day, cannot plan for the future'.

Challenges in reconciling work and childcare responsibilities are evident with **67.6% of women and 58.6% of men finding it difficult to fulfill their family responsibilities at times or frequently**. Gender imbalances still exist, with women shouldering a larger burden of childcare and household chores. **Only 1% of the men take on most of the work** in relation to the care of the children, whilst 5% of males indicated they do most of the housework (cooking, cleaning, ironing). 46.1% of female respondents agree that **gender imbalances in care work** (looking after children) influence decisions about family size and 46.9% deem that **gender imbalances in house-work** (cooking, cleaning, ironing) influence such decisions. Younger cohorts are particularly sensitive to such imbalances. 85% of 19-24 year olds agree with the statement that the mother who is not supported by her partner justifiably decides not to have a child or another child.



Regarding support measures, the study evaluates current family policies, including maternity leave, paternity leave, parental leave, and leave for parents when children are sick. Findings reveal dissatisfaction with the duration and compensation levels of existing leave policies. There is a **strong call** for longer maternity leave, increased paternity leave, extended parental leave, and specific leave for parents when children are sick. Policy recommendations include **revising existing leave policies to better support working parents**, introducing leave for parents when children are sick, and raising awareness of gender equality and family leave rights.