

Press Statement

Alarmingly low fertility rate calls for national work-life balance measures in upcoming Budget

The most recent study on Malta's population by the Central Bank of Malta sounds the alarm over Malta's extremely low fertility rate, which, at 0.98, is the lowest in the EU. Malta's persistently low fertility rate is deeply concerning and will increasingly have serious social and economic repercussions.

The Maltese Government has recognised this pressing challenge and has introduced budget measures that provide strong financial incentives for women and men to have more children, including revised tax brackets and increased children's allowances. The upcoming Budget should now address another crucial dimension of this reality: the ability of women and men to reconcile family life with employment.

The National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE), as Malta's equality body, has long maintained that the desire and ability to have children are closely linked to the availability of measures that enable both women and men to raise a family while remaining active in employment and generating income. An NCPE study highlighted that one of the main barriers to family growth in Malta lies in the difficulties parents face in reconciling work and family responsibilities.

The research shows that although both women and men would like to have more children, many are dissatisfied with the short duration and limited compensation offered under current leave arrangements. Respondents expressed a clear need for longer and better-paid family leave, including maternity, paternity and parental leave, as well as dedicated leave for parents when children are unwell.

In view of this, the NCPE calls on Government to prioritise work-life balance measures in the Budget for 2027. These should include increasing paid parent-related leave entitlements, specifically by extending maternity leave to six months, paternity leave to four weeks, and parental leave to six months on full pay, with three months allocated on a 'use-it-or-lose-it' basis. Moreover, legal provisions and structures supporting work-life balance measures, such as remote working and flexitime, should be strengthened and financially supported.

The Government should also invest further in improving the quality of childcare services and the provision of the Klabb 3-16 service to make them more accessible and attractive to parents

and children. In particular, Government should subsidise non-state schools to enable them to provide these services on school premises. These measures should support stronger work-life balance for parents.

By investing in an environment that holistically supports working families, Government would strengthen the economy and enhance its resilience to the growing challenges associated with low fertility rates. Such measures would also promote greater gender equality by enabling both women and men to share caring and employment responsibilities more equitably, while improving the wellbeing and quality of life of parents and families.

The NCPE urges Government to take immediate and decisive action to ensure that women and men who wish to have children are supported in doing so. The choices being made by prospective parents, as reflected in Malta's exceptionally low fertility rate, demonstrate the urgency of the situation.

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