

Debate & Analysis



VALERIE VISANICH

I am a mother too. A human. At times, balancing on the edge of exhaustion.

Last week's tragedy left a hole in our hearts. A deep, aching one. Silence is better than empty words in such circumstances. The heart aches especially by women who are carrying too much, running on empty, and saw themselves in her story. Women who thought, "That could have been me." Because it could. And that truth is what makes it so unbearably heavy. Behind every packed lunch, every clean uniform, every smile that says "I'm fine," there's a woman who is tired, doing her best to hold it all together: They love their children fiercely, but also ache for rest and

crave space to simply be.

I don't work a typical nine-to-five, but I deeply empathize with mothers who do. Honestly, how is it even possible in the system we live in? The day starts before sunrise with packing lunches, finding missing shoes, getting everyone out the door. Then the mad rush through traffic, only to be sitting at your desk by nine, pretending to have it all together. Work your way till five o'clock. But school ends at two. That three-hour gap is an impossible equation that too often gets solved through guilt and relying on grandparents for support. Another option, is the Klabb 3-16, providing supervised care to children after school hours. When you finally clock out, that's not the end. The second shift starts.

Homework, dinner, laundry, after-school activities, prepping for tomorrow, making sure everyone's clean, fed, and emotionally okay. Then, maybe, just maybe, there's time to breathe and to make yourself a cup of tea before you collapse into bed, ready to do it all again.

Don't call us superwomen just because we manage. We don't want the title. We're humans trying our best to stay afloat in an avalanche of tasks, deadlines, and endless to-dos. We're not asking for praise; we're asking for balance, for understanding, for a system that doesn't demand the impossible. And through all of this, we act surprised when women make the conscious decision *not* to have more children. As if it's a mystery, when in reality it's a response to stress, to impossible expectations, to a system that asks everything and gives so little back. It's not a lack of love or desire for family, as the research of my colleagues Prof. Anna Borg and Prof. Liberato Camilleri found out in their study last year. It's self-preservation in a world that offers no room to breathe.

It's no wonder so many mothers feel like they're running on fumes. The system wasn't designed for working parents. It was built on the assumption that someone else would always be home. But times have changed. Work hasn't. Too often, when the system fails, the

blame falls on women. Just this week, we read headlines about children being sent to school without lunch. Such stories made to sensationalize and invite the usual chorus of cavemen finger-pointing at working mothers. These comments add to the frustration for the total majority of women who work and always send their children to school clean and with fresh healthy lunch.

When things don't add up, she's the one expected to compromise, to scale back her ambitions, reduce her hours, or somehow 'manage better'. But the solution isn't to make her step away from work. The real question is: how do we reshape the system so that *life-work balance* isn't just a glossy phrase used in HR and electoral campaigns, but something that actually exists in practice?

The proposal for a four-day work week is an important step toward achieving genuine work-life balance, offering families the time and flexibility they urgently need. By reducing the rigid demands of traditional work struc-

tures, such a model enables both parents to share family responsibilities more equitably, from childcare and education to household management. Because balance isn't a luxury. It's a foundation for well-being, creativity, and sustainability. It's what allows people, especially mothers, not just to survive, but to thrive. Until we stop treating balance as a perk and start treating it as a right, the burden will keep falling on women to make an impossible system somehow work.

Women deserve more than applause and flowers on women's and Mother's Day. They deserve a system that supports them, a culture that values their humanity, and moments of true rest. Their exhaustion is not a badge of honour. It is a signal for needed action to balance out the system, even for the sake of the economy if we want a higher birth rate. And my heart aches because too often, there is an eerie silence about this reality until tragedy strikes.

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CLARENCE PACE

Healthcare is not just about treating illness — it's about safeguarding dignity, opportunity, and quality of life. This week the opening of the Vincent Moran Regional Health Centre has made the headlines and for good reason. In addition to this however over the past year, Malta's health sector has seen a multitude of transformative developments that reflect a growing commitment to deliver care that is both accessible and compassionate.

Investing in health

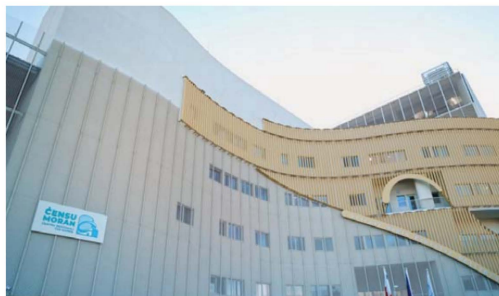
These investments are not abstract figures; they are tangible steps toward a system that listens, responds, and evolves with the people it serves.

1400, private hospital collaboration and Mater Dei investments

One of the clearest examples of this new approach is the launch of the 1400 helpline — a nurse-led service designed to connect patients seamlessly with the right care, whether in public or private settings. In just a few months, nearly 10,000 calls have been handled. Behind those numbers are real people — a parent seeking after-hours advice, an elderly patient looking for guidance, or a family trying to navigate healthcare options. The helpline demonstrates how technology and compassion can work hand in hand to simplify access and reduce uncertainty for patients.

Equally important has been the collaboration between public and private hospitals, a partnership that has reduced waiting times for elective surgeries. Procedures such as total knee replacements, ligament repairs, and endoscopies — which once involved long delays — are now being managed more efficiently.

At Mater Dei Hospital, another milestone was reached with the inauguration of the Vascular Hybrid Theatre. Built through a €2.7 million investment, this state-of-the-art facility allows specialists to perform complex interventions without the need for inva-



sive surgery. More than 20 patients have already benefited from procedures that, only a short time ago, would have required longer recovery and higher risk.

Gozo's healthcare infrastructure, new medicines and elderly care

While high-tech innovation is essential, access to medicine remains the foundation of an equitable system. The Government Formulaire, now comprising 1,355 medicinal products, ensures that both in-patient and out-patient treatments are widely covered. Through the Pharmacy of Your Choice (POYC) scheme, around €55 million worth of medicines and medical devices reach people every year. Importantly, new treatments for diabetes, ADHD, cancer, and rare diseases continue to be added — reinforcing the principle that health should never depend on income or circumstance.

The government's vision for health also extends to Gozo's healthcare infrastructure — from a direct link between Xewkija Helipad and Mater Dei to new MRI, CT, and ultrasound equipment — are narrowing the gap in access between regions. A new service for children and young people is also being developed, recognizing that preventive care and early intervention are as critical as hospital beds.

Perhaps the most powerful expression of this investment in humanity is found in care for the elderly. At St Vincent de Paul Residence, 2025 has been a year of unprecedented progress. The launch of a CT-Scan service — capable of supporting patients up to 300kg — and the introduction of portable X-ray machines mean that even the most vulnerable can receive diagnostic care without the stress of transportation. Each innovation reflects respect for dignity and individual need. Other developments at the resi-

dence include the establishment of the Geriatric Assessment Team (GAT), Intermediate Care services — including the upgraded-Ruzar Briffa Ward, and the Day Clinic which continues to expand its range of services for those aged 60 and above. Meanwhile a 16-bed Palliative Care Ward now provides a dedicated space for end-of-life support — and as we look ahead a Psychogeriatric Ward is being developed to address mental health among the elderly. A new Renal Unit is also in its planning stage.

Taken together, these initiatives form a picture of a health system not only expanding in capacity but evolving in purpose. They reflect a philosophy that healthcare should be personal, inclusive, and forward-looking. The numbers — investments, patients treated, facilities opened — are important, but the real story lies in how these improvements touch individual lives: the mother who receives faster treatment, the elderly man who can now be scanned safely, the child in Gozo who no longer has to travel for care.

The task ahead is to sustain this momentum. As the population grows and ages, Malta must continue to innovate — not only with technology and infrastructure, but with empathy and foresight. Healthcare is, at its core, a collective responsibility. These investments show what is possible when policy, planning, and compassion align.

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