

Opening Speech delivered by Mr Ivan Refalo, President of the Malta Employers Association on the occasion of a Conference entitled:

# “Debating the Concept of a Four-Day Week in Malta”

“Grand Hotel Excelsior”, Floriana – 5<sup>th</sup> February 2026

Good morning, everyone!  
Distinguished guests, colleagues, partners, and friends!

It is our pleasure to welcome you to this conference, our first for 2026, to debate "**The Concept of a Four-Day Week in Malta**". We have been hearing and reading about this with views for and against expressed by different stakeholders in various media.

We, at Malta Employers Association, didn't want to just sit back and listen to the talk; we wanted to lead it. We're here to move past the generalizations and "*what-ifs*" and get into the real facts of how this affects our businesses and our people.

This morning, Malta Employers Association is proudly and proactively leading the national debate on working hours, which has intensified, both locally and internationally, over the past months.

So today, with the intention of ensuring a complete, factual and objective debate, we have invited the key stakeholders, being our political leaders, our colleagues in the driving seats of the major trade unions, economists, academics and the leaders of industry, to present to us a 360 degree view of the arguments before us.

I thank you all for being with us and accepting our invitation to participate with us today.

Leading up to today's event we surveyed our members on *Working time* and *Flexible work arrangements*. More importantly, we have formulated a position paper on the 4 Day Week in Malta, which our former Director General, now our Advisor, Joe Farrugia will present shortly.

Our intention today is to lead an informed debate about working time and flexibility. Our economy competes in a global market and requires dynamism and smart decision-making to continue to prosper. We felt compelled to hold this public debate because we are convinced

that going forward the country cannot afford to base decisions on generalisations, biases, unrealistic expectations and false assumptions.

In the run up to today's conference, we surveyed our members over the course of January on the subject:

- Just over 56 per cent of our members told us that they are NOT in favour of any 4-day week variations which have been muted in the public domain in the past months.
- 31 per cent of surveyed employers said they would favour a 4-day week defined as a condensed 40-hour week with the same pay.
- A further 10 per cent favour a 4 day week of 32 hours with a pro rata reduction in salary.
- In addition, we were rather surprised to note that, the remainder of respondents (14%), would also consider a 32-hour, 4-day week with the salary remaining in full.

Although this latter group of respondents is in the minority, the percentage cannot be ignored.

The opinions expressed by our members point to the fact that in the scenario of a dire shortage of workers, employers require strong leadership on this matter of crucial importance.

**We believe that :**

- 1) every employer should be free to offer any conditions of work that suit the organisation and its nature of business.
- 2) of course, no two businesses are the same, even if they operate in the same sector, and there should be no blanket measures imposed.
- 3) competition for workers is already intense enough and the **public sector** should not offer flexible working arrangements that are not viable in a competitive, commercial environment.

Without wanting to pre-empt this morning's debate, what I believe is for certain, is the key role of **Technology** and **Artificial Intelligence** which are looking at us straight in the eye.

We need to embrace this reality to our advantage because we believe that smart investment, especially in the areas of digitalisation and automation, is the key towards breaking new productivity boundaries in the relationship between work and output.

With the help of our distinguished line-up of speakers, throughout the course of our proceedings, we shall today consider the different models of the Four-day week. We shall examine the experience of other countries with these models, we shall bear in mind our own realities and limitations, and together we shall seek to navigate between the options open to us.

In the public debate we have seen different interpretations of the Four Day Week. Whether you see this as a productivity tool, a family-friendly measure, or just a way for people to take on a part-time job on that fifth day—all views are welcome.

We're here to ask the hard questions and learn from one another. Our goal should be that of coming closer to the true meaning of the Four day week and its implications.

Today isn't about finding a quick fix; it's about a **win-win**. We want to protect our competitiveness while keeping our industrial relations as harmonious as they've been over past years.

This is exactly why Malta Employers is taking such a proactive approach. We are not shying away from the call to action and are holding today's discussion to deepen our understanding of what the options are and what are the implications of *our actions* or *our inaction*. It is our intention to yet again, ask pertinent questions and to learn from each other's perspectives.

As always, we believe that by bringing together, different stakeholders and hearing different views, we can harness our collective experience and knowledge to turn challenges into opportunities.

I invite you to approach our discussions today with openness and resolve. Together, we can formulate a common vision of a competitive and resilient future for Malta within the realities and opportunities that influence our way forward.

I close with an appeal to continue to work together to shape a future that promotes Malta's standing as a leader in excellence.

I wish you all an inspiring and fruitful conference.

Thank You.