



# I focus

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## Budgetary season in a southern European island state

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Malta's budgetary season comes within a context of plural crises around the world. Impacts and repercussions of Covid-19, the Russia-Ukraine war, and the climate emergency, amongst others, are there for us to see, for example in terms of inflation and energy supply, with other ramifications yet to come.

Being a small island EU member state in the Mediterranean sea, Malta shares various challenges being experienced elsewhere. Yet we also have our own particularities, some resulting from external factors, and others resulting from internal ones including policy-making.

For example, the absorbing of the energy inflation shock has allowed Malta's economy to fare relatively well in comparison to what is being seen in various countries. At the same time, the sustainability of measures such as subsidies on fossil fuels is doubtful.

Malta's social policy system has its challenges too. On the one hand, the country offers generous schemes, such as free childcare for kids with parents in formal employment (which at the same time, however, excludes other kids from the free service). On the other hand, sectors such as housing are very much dominated by a neoliberal model and increasingly unaffordable prices. One paradox in the housing sector is that while many cannot afford the current prices of properties for sale or

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Photo from last year's budget presentation [maltaindependent#info@um.edu.mt](mailto:maltaindependent#info@um.edu.mt)

rent, other people from different socio-economic backgrounds invest in this sector, which, in turn, is highly dependent on the influx of foreign workers, in what looks like an unsustainable treadmill of economic dependence.

Within the budgetary context, there are various proposals emerging from the public sphere. For example, the editorial of yesterday's Malta Independent, as well as an interview with David Spiteri Gingell last Sunday, gave much food for thought on the pension reform – an area which, I believe, requires cross-party and cross-sector consensus in view of its cross-generational ramifications.

Other voices, such as trade unions and left-leaning NGOs, are emphasising the needs of people who are either experiencing

poverty, or who are at risk of falling behind in view of rising costs. At the same time, Malta's economic competitiveness within a global economy has its own challenges.

One area which I believe should be given increased importance in Malta's fiscal policy is the green economy, something which I wrote about in my article in The Malta Independent on 25th August ('A Climate Pact for Malta'). This sector is linked to different aspects of Malta's society and environment, and to our obligations, risks and opportunities as a small island in a global economy.

Incidentally, in the coming days, a sociological book which I co-edited with Maria Brown will be launched in an online public event organised by the Malta Sociological Association, in collaboration

with the Department of Sociology, Faculty of Arts, and the Department of Arts, Open Communities and Adult Education in the Faculty of Education at the University of Malta.

This volume is the first of its kind to discuss social welfare issues using case studies from a broad range of Southern European countries, both large and small, a decade after the financial crisis. It identifies similarities and differences in the ways in which Southern European countries engage with specific welfare issues, and examines whether Southern European welfare is distinct from that of the rest of the continent.

The book also engages with the impact of Covid-19 on the social welfare issues under investigation. The volume is divided into four sections, with each one ex-

amining in detail issues including employment, education, health, sexuality, globalization, social movements and migration. With its contributions from experts in the field, the volume is recommended for academics, researchers and students of sociology, social policy, economics, education, politics and social movements.

'Social Welfare Issues in Southern Europe' will be launched on Thursday 26 October between 1730 and 1900 CET, and authors of different chapters and from different Southern European countries will be discussing various aspects of their respective research.

More details, including registration, are available at [maltasociologicalassociation.com](http://maltasociologicalassociation.com)