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## Heatwave

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Thursday, 21 July 2022, 07:30

Last update: about 2 days ago



It is no surprise to climate scientists that wildfires, heatwaves, floods, drought and other forms of extreme weather are becoming increasingly common around the world. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which is a United Nations body, has warned that such problems are likely to get worse as the world moves towards an increase of 1.5°C over pre-industrial levels in the next two decades. Not to mention forecasts that point towards even higher increases in open erature.



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The world is witnessing negative impacts on health, food, quality of life, security, wildlife, and so many other areas. Whereas some years ago we used to read about the 'future' or 'far away' impact of such climatic changes, today these are becoming parts of our everyday lives.

Different social groups in different parts of the world may be experiencing the impact of rising temperatures in different ways. A recent study by the European Trade Union Institute, which was quoted by Euractiv, gives some vivid examples. In the employment sphere, various workers are more at risk of exposure to heat than others. Think of workers in agriculture, construction, and other outdoor activities. Or workers involved in particular types of manufacturing. The study urges public authorities to consider heat stress as an occupational risk.

Another study quoted by Euractiv, this time by the American Geophysical Union, states that lower income populations have higher exposure to heatwaves in view of factors such as location and access to air conditioning. The European Environment Agency is also quoted in the report, wherein it asserts that in wealthy countries, the worst-affected social groups are those who already face disadvantages due to age, health or socio-economic status.

In the public sphere, there are various positions on what should be done to tackle the climatic challenges ahead. In the first instance, there are the global agreements, such as those sponsored by the IPCC, which, in turn, represent the construction and interaction of political compromise with scientific evidence. In the midst of these complex policies, there are those who say that changes in people's behaviour are essential to adapt to climate change, whilst others say that we need a wholesome system change into another form of society which is sustainable. Others point towards the need for technological changes which adapt to change within the type of social systems in which we currently live, and whilst some have given up, say it is too late, or are in denial of the situation.

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unintended ones and sources of influence.

For example, one may consider the direct political influence of economic interests which oppose green policies. This may manifest itself across various stages in politics, including the less-visible ones of political financing, media ownership and so forth.

Another challenge may be that across governments, climate 'competes' with other areas in the policy sphere. For example, both Covid-19 and the war in Ukraine destabilized various policy programmes, and at times, even elbowed out climate change as a major policy concern. Yet we also learn that such events may also be linked to climate change. The current European challenge in relation to dependency on Russian fossil fuels is a case in point.

Climate may also compete with other policy spheres even in more parochial terms, for example, when different Ministers and respective bureaucracies compete with each other for budgetary funding.

At the same time, the positioning of climate on the policy agenda may also be influenced by people's priorities and voting patterns, civil society, and material interests which are versed towards more sustainable methods.

Some may ask whether Malta should play a role at all in the global politics of climate change, in view of its miniscule impact on climate around the world. Two answers to this question may be that first, we are witnessing impacts of climate change on our islands, and second, Malta happens to have a unique role in global politics: We are a small-island state which is also an EU member-state. We can and should punch above our individual weight, for example by speaking up for small islands, in global and European fora and be a champion of contextualized sustainable climate policies.

In the meantime, we keep learning that whether we give importance or not to climate change, its impact is a lived reality.

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