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## Summer heatwaves: A wake-up call for sustainability and justice

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Amid hot summer temperatures, during Tuesday 8th July the demand for Malta's electricity reached a record high, with a peak of 612MW. According to Enemalta, this was an increase of 100MW compared to the same time last year. Some power cuts resulted - hopefully Enemalta's recent upgrades in infrastructure will spare us from frequent cuts.

open · countries are also being affected by energy issues related to high temperatures. And it does not seem that this will get any better. A rapid analysis by researchers from Imperial College London

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disproportionately affected. Cities like London, Madrid, Milan, and Barcelona experienced extreme highs, exacerbated by human-induced warming of 1-4°C above expected temperatures. The message is clear: reducing fossil fuels is now a matter of both climate and public health.

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The Mediterranean region, including Malta, is especially vulnerable. According to the 2024 Special Report on Climate and Environmental Coastal Risks in the Mediterranean by the Mediterranean Experts on Climate and environmental Change (MedECC), the region faces escalating risks from rising sea levels, heatwaves, coastal erosion, and water scarcity. These threats endanger not only fragile ecosystems, but also key sectors such as agriculture, tourism, fisheries, and urban infrastructure.

In response, various stakeholders are raising the alarm. For example, in Europe, Climate Action Network (CAN) warns of growing summer energy poverty, where many households-particularly those that are low-income, elderly, or living in poorly insulated housing-are unable to afford adequate cooling. Similarly, industriAll European Trade Union, which represents over 7 million workers, is calling for enforceable protections against dangerous working conditions in extreme heat, especially in construction and manufacturing.

In Malta, these challenges are increasingly visible. The government highlights that Maltese households enjoy one of the lowest electricity burdens in the EU, due to blanket subsidies. However, civil society voices, including the Malta Anti-Poverty Forum (APF), warn that such policies may be regressive, disproportionately benefiting high-consumption, higher-income households. Similarly, <sup>open</sup> ~~energy~~ <sup>energy</sup> transition must prioritise vulnerable communities. <sup>energy</sup> ~~energy~~ <sup>energy</sup> transition must prioritise vulnerable communities.

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poverty. While this is a step forward, as is the push towards increased use of renewable energy, stakeholders continue to call for more robust data and targeted action-particularly in light of climate-induced heat.

Ultimately, while heatwaves affect everyone, they are not experienced equally. A person's class background, housing situation, health status, and employment conditions all shape their exposure and ability to respond. The elderly person in a top-floor flat with no ventilation, the construction worker on a blazing rooftop, and the low-income family that avoids using an air conditioner to save on bills-all face summer in vastly different ways.

This is why ongoing, interdisciplinary analysis of the economic, social, and environmental impacts of climate change is essential. Climate policies must be based on evidence and grounded in justice. Adaptation strategies should not only aim to cool down overheated buildings and streets-but also to reduce inequality, protect workers, and support the most vulnerable. We need to make sure that our villages, towns, and cities are designed in a holistic way that adapts to changing climate.

As the heat continues to rise, so must our commitment to a just, inclusive, and sustainable future.

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