

Editorial:

Unemployment and Tourism in Gozo

The double-deficit that Gozo suffers from being a small island dependent on a bigger sister island has long been emphasised. Economic issues have plagued Gozo from time immemorial, and have resulted in an unstable population which has tended to find employment beyond its shores. The migration rate from Gozo has been much more pronounced than that which applies to Malta as a whole, and many of those who remained have travelled daily to Malta to get their daily bread.

It is not surprising, therefore, to read in a recent article in *The Times* (24th June 2009) that Gozo has a higher unemployment rate than Malta as a whole. While the unemployment rate is not necessarily alarming, and would be taken as a gift by most countries around the world, it is nonetheless worrying that there has been an upward trend in unemployment rates in the past year.

The Parliamentary Secretary Dr Chris Said, who hails from Nadur, blames the loss of jobs in the manufacturing sector as contributing significantly to this trend. No doubt, the major global economic meltdown that has occurred over the past couple of years has had a significant impact, with a reduction in the number of tourists coming to Malta and Gozo this year.

More significant perhaps is the differential distribution of unemployment throughout the island. The highest unemployment rates were in Zebbug (4.7%) and Nadur (2.7%) with the lowest unemployment rates present in Ghasri (0.7%). Similar discrepancies were to be found

in Malta itself, with highest unemployment being in Cospicua (4.7%) and lowest in Lija (0.7%). Lack of an adequate education has been adduced to explain these discrepancies in Malta, but they hardly explain the situation in Gozo.

Depending on a tourist industry as it does, unemployment shows marked seasonality. It is therefore important to encourage tourism that can be sustained throughout the year, including establishing government-related services, encouraging niche areas like financial services, diving and agri-tourism. At a time when cruising the Mediterranean is becoming more and more popular, it is also of interest to see that some companies have put Gozo on the agenda as a separate port of call.

Gozo can never be an economically viable independent entity, and will always depend on the bigger island for support. However, issues affecting unemployment in Gozo are distinct from those in Malta, and in particular are unlikely to be greatly affected by more emphasis on education. It is also important that Gozo does not put all its eggs in one basket and be so overwhelmingly dependent on tourism for its existence. It is said that on the Amalfi coast, one of the most sought-after tourist attraction centres in the world, the local population is employed for about seven months of the year with the rest of the time being dependent on government hand-outs for their existence. We do not particularly wish that scenario on anyone.

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