

Utility bills among top national concerns at 50%

mt survey

As the cold winter months set in, concern on immigration is at its lowest ever – 4% – with utility bills and the cost of living earning top spot for people's worries. By JAMES DEBONO

CONCERN on utility bills has increased threefold in the past 20 months, a MaltaToday survey reveals.

National concern on the increasing energy bill had already shot up 17% in June 2008, when the surcharge was still in place, to 33% last year following the introduction of the new tariff system.

However, despite the compensation announced in the last budget following the latest tariff increase, the number of those who consider utility bills as their top concern has now reached 50% – nearly overtaking the number of those who consider the cost of living as their major concern.

On the other hand, concern on the cost of living dropped by 16%, possibly reflecting a slight drop in prices in the past months. However, this could also indicate that people consider utility bills as a more pressing concern.

Concern on the cost of living is highest among those in lower-paid occupational groups and lowest among the self-employed.

The latter show more concern on the economic recession and the decline in business.

Another startling revelation in the MaltaToday survey is the number of respondents who consider immigration as one of their two main concerns, which dropped sharply from 27% in March 2009, to less than 4% now. This represents an overall 85%

drop in the number of respondents who consider immigration as one of their two top concerns.

The sharp drop in concern about immigration coincides with a dramatic lull in arrivals, itself a by-product of a secret agreement between Italy and Libya which saw forced repatriation of migrants in the Mediterranean.

It's a massive drop when the situation is compared to 2009, when unlike previous years boatloads of immigrants began arriving in winter after being rescued in Maltese waters. This is a clear indication that concern on immigration fluctuates according to the number of immigrant landings and that the Maltese appear more worried over numbers of arrivals, than by preconceived cultural or economic threats.

While concern on immigration dropped sharply, concern on the environment has increased from less than 2% last year to 7% even if this is mostly expressed by those in white-collar and professional jobs. Significantly those mentioning the environment as a top concern are equally divided between those concerned by land use issues, and those concerned by pollution.

The survey also shows that that employment anxieties have shot up from 11% in June 2008 to 21% now. Significantly, only 36% of those employed in the private sector do not have any anxiety on their job security while 50% feel a degree of uncertainty.



Do you consider your job to be...

	Public*	Private	All
Safe	63.8	35.7	43.3
I feel a degree of uncertainty	34	50	46.5
I fear losing my job in the next months	2.2	14.3	10.2

Public sector also includes civil service as well as companies and authorities controlled by the government

Changing concerns over the past 20 months

	2008 (June)	2009 (March)	2010 (February)
Cost of living	55	67.3	51.3
Utility bills	17.3	32.7	50
Employment	11.3	19.3	21.3
Immigration	9	27	3.7
Environment	9	1.7	7.3
Roads	3.7	11.3	4
Low wages	4.3	9.3	7
Recession	0	8.7	7.7
Health	1	1	4.7

(Totals do not add up to 100 as respondents were told to mention their top two concerns)

Concerns of different occupational groups

	AB/C1	C2/DE	SE	P
Cost of living	53.1	58.8	39	50.5
Utility bills	45.7	52.5	56.1	49.5
Employment	25.9	27.5	21.7	8.8
Immigration	3.7	2.5	2.4	3.3
Environment	12.3	3.8	4.9	5.5
Low wages/Pensions	3.9	11.3	9.8	11.2
Recession	6.2	5	19.8	8.8
Health	1.1	6.3	2	15.4
Decline in business	2	0	14.6	1.1
Corruption	3.7	1.3	4.9	2

(AB/C1 includes professionals, administrators and people in clerical, technical and vocational jobs, C2/DE includes skilled and unskilled workers and people on social relief, SE includes self-employed)



Part-time, less hours favoured to achieve work-life balance

JAMES DEBONO

PRIVATE sector employees are demanding more and more to switch to part-time employment to achieve a better work-life balance, according to 75.7% of businesses that were surveyed by the Employment and Training Corporation.

Additionally, this was followed by requests to reduce working hours and work on a flexi-time basis.

The demands appear to be met with favourable responses: when probed about whether they were actually implementing such measures, 77% of employers indicated they were already implementing forms of work-life reconciliation measures in their company.

But companies operating in the manufacturing, construction and real estate sectors were the least likely to implement these measures. Some employers claimed there was no need to introduce such measures because their workforce was either predominantly male, unmarried or made up of mainly new graduates who had neither family nor other commitments as yet.

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Some 44.5% of the respondents pointed out that employees making requests for work-life reconciliation measures were generally married or have a partner.

Persons working at supervisory and/or management or senior management levels were less likely to make such requests.

Employers were most likely to grant requests for reconciliation measures when these were tied to family matters: 96.7% were positively inclined to grant such requests; 77.9% were likely to agree to such requests when related to further education; and up to 71% for voluntary or philanthropic work.

However, employers were less likely to accept requests on measures related to sports.

The survey also revealed that 66% of private sector employers agree that the government should extend school opening hours, while 54% of them welcomed the possibility of flexible working arrangements for female employees returning to work after maternity leave.

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But 14% actually think they will lose their job in the next months.

Even 34% of those in state employment – mostly those working in government controlled corporations – feel a degree of uncertainty.

Health is a growing concern, especially among pensioners and lower-income groups. The fact that health is less of a concern among higher-income groups could also reflect growing inequalities.

Methodology

452 persons were randomly chosen from telephone directories between Monday 25 and Friday 29 January. 300 accepted to be interviewed. The results of the survey were weighed according to the age and sex ratios of the population. The survey has a margin of error of +/-5.7%.

Julia Farrugia appointed acting editor of Illum



Julia Farrugia

Julia Farrugia has been appointed acting editor of Illum.

Farrugia, 32, joined MediaToday in October 2006 and since its inception served as a senior journalist for sister newspaper Illum. She has specialised in investigative reporting and dealt with cases of discriminatory treatment against vulnerable people, bringing to light various cases of injustice.

Hailing from a banking background, she stepped in the media scene in 1997. As a TV producer, she has produced successful TV documentaries and current affairs programmes. Her various international assignments have taken her to Africa, Russia, and most European countries. She was the first Maltese woman journalist to report from Sri Lanka in 2004 in her daily reports on the tsunami aftermath.

"This is such an exciting point in my career. I'm proud to form part of MediaToday's team. We have established ourselves in having an independent agenda that reveals the news no matter what," Farrugia said.

"We noted in Julia a person who understands the importance of reporting the truth without fear or favour. We are sure Illum will grow in strength," said MediaToday's managing editor Saviour Balzan.

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