



THE GOZO BUSINESS CHAMBER



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Press Release: Act Immediately to Save Jobs

It is an undisputed fact that in problems of national relevance and especially those of an international dimension like the Covid-19, businesses on the island of Gozo are the first to be hit and the last to recuperate. The Gozo Business Chamber and the Gozo Tourism Association are for this reason making a strong joint appeal to Government to heed to the particular difficulties being encountered by businesses on the island of Gozo. Being reliant on tourism more than the mainland, business on the island region of Gozo has been delivered a mortal blow.

1. Government has not yet made any contact with Gozo's constituted bodies to consult and enquire how businesses in Gozo are faring in this COVID-19 scenario. Whilst many of the problems are common to the national ones, Gozo suffers from double insularity and prolonged seasonality that accentuates some problems and creates others.
2. Government is asked to act immediately and in an incisive manner to save jobs that have started being lost. The incentives announced are a non-starter and will not contribute in any way to make up for the business lost through the pandemic that has hit the islands.
3. By being incisive we mean that Government should follow other Governments throughout Europe by contributing at least the minimum wage for every employee in the private sector as long as these have stopped being productive as a result of the pandemic. A contribution related to the loss in business should be made in lieu of other workers in the private sector. It is imperative that workers in the private sector are given immediate assurances that their jobs will not be lost. Government owes this to these employees who have not sought the assurance of a job in the public sector.
4. Government should look into ways how to reduce the prices of oil, gas and electricity so that the prices will reflect that of international markets which have also been hit worldwide by the pandemic. Prices have plummeted and so charges to business should reflect this scenario. All extra charges that have to be borne by industry are additional blows in an already knockout situation. Furthermore Government is to provide moratoria on all utility bills dues until cashflows are again recovered and forfeiting the licenses, rents and dues of 2020 payable by the business establishments to the various entities like MTA, MRA, Transport Malta, Malta Industrial Parks, Lands department and other public entities.
5. Government needs to team up with local Banks so that international funds that have been made available arrive to local businesses unencumbered by additional charges and superfluous interests. This is the required lifeline needed by our businesses always but especially in this particular moment.
6. Government's intervention with Banks to provide loan guarantees, its help in securing for businesses loan repayment moratoria and interest rates subsidies should be announced forthwith and outlined clearly, before businesses start collapsing.
7. Government's commitment that its' payments and those of its agencies to businesses should be accelerated has to be implemented with immediate effect.

8. Government has to announce swiftly, with clear and non-bureaucratic guidelines how incentives are to be availed of by businesses. The Gozo Business Chamber and the Gozo Tourism Association offer their help to Government so that an ad-hoc unit is set up in Gozo to accept applications and process the required funds. Such a unit comprising Malta Enterprise (including Business First), Jobs Plus, and with the assistance of the Ministry for Gozo should be set up instantly, so that it can assist Gozitan businesses and provide the required advice even if this is online or through the phone. This is the time where the footprint of these entities on the island needs to be felt. Time is of essence if we are to save businesses from going down.

Again, the Gozo Business Chamber and the Gozo Tourism Association make a total commitment in defence of their members and ask Government to consult with them as the main representatives of business on Gozo. This is the moment of truth for businesses on the islands. If Government does not act with expeditiousness we risk losing what many people have been building up strenuously over the last decades, against all odds. It is at this time, when help is most needed, that our businesses expect Government to understand what they stand for. At the moment, the general feeling of our members is that they have been left alone and that their calls to a distant administration have fallen on deaf ears.
