



GOVERNMENT OF MALTA
MINISTRY FOR THE ENVIRONMENT,
ENERGY AND ENTERPRISE



SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Annual Report 2021



Foreword



2021, similarly to the year preceding it, was characterised primarily by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has had a severe impact on global human and planetary health as well as on the world's economic stability.

In spite of all the challenges and hurdles faced, Malta nevertheless remained resilient and kept on striving towards becoming a nation that is green, inclusive and economically sustainable. The Maltese Government made it a point to place the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which was launched by the United Nations in 2015, as a top priority and, throughout 2021, continued to make certain that its policies, measures and initiatives all align with the 17 Sustainable Development Goals and work towards securing a truly sustainable future for all.

As seen in this Annual Report, Malta's commitment to continue delivering successfully in the field of sustainable development is clear and evident. One of the Government's main goals is to direct its efforts towards addressing all the three pillars of sustainable development and achieve a good balance between them, thus helping to create a country that has sustainability at heart and one that aspires to establish an economy, a society and an environment that are sustainable not only for ourselves but also for future generations to come.

This Annual Report details all the activities and initiatives that the Government and its Entities initiated or completed during 2021 with the aim of addressing physical and mental health and social well-being, education, digitisation and economic growth, national security, climate change and the protection of both the land and marine environment.

While this Report highlights the significant progress made, gaps still remain and, in some areas, more than others. It is for this reason that the Government is continuously committing itself to accelerate action that promotes the sustainable development of the Maltese Islands.

Becoming sustainable in all aspects and sectors is no easy task and the Government cannot achieve this goal alone. Therefore, it is of vital importance that we keep on exploring new ways by which the Maltese Government can work in tandem with the private sector and Voluntary Organisations in order to continue to anchor and grow a sustainable economy, society and environment. I strongly believe that through such collaboration, the overall well-being of the country's population, its economy and environment can be secured. We are committed and determined to keep sustainability at the core of our work and daily lives. By doing so, we will be ensuring that the rights, interests and well-being of future generations are safeguarded.

The Hon. Miriam Dalli
Minister for the Environment, Energy and Enterprise

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List of Abbreviations

AAC	Augmentative and Alternative Communication
AD	Agriculture Directorate
ADF	Academy for Disciplined Forces
AgriHUB	Agriculture Research and Innovation Hub
AHWD	Animal Health and Welfare Department
AM	Additional Measure
AMIF	Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund
AMR	Anti-Microbial Resistance
ARPA	Agriculture and Rural Payments Agency
AWAS	Agency for the Welfare of Asylum Seekers
AWD	Animal Welfare Directorate
AWL	Automated Weighing and Labelling
BPR	Business Process Re-Engineering
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy
CAP SP	Common Agricultural Policy Strategic Plan
CCTV	Closed-Circuit Television
CEMalta	Circular Economy Malta
CFP	Common Fisheries Policy
CGBVDV	Commission on Gender-Based Violence and Domestic Violence
CGS	COVID-19 Guarantee Scheme
CIF	Cost, Insurance, and Freight
CIHEAM	Bari International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies
CO₂	Carbon Dioxide
COP	Climate Change Conference
CPD	Civil Protection Department
CRO	Criminal Records Office
DC-MAP	Data Collection Multi-Annual Programme
DCS	Directorate for Corporate Services
DFA	Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture
DIER	Department of Industrial and Employment Relations
DMCs	Destination Management Companies

DoJ	Department of Justice
DPP	Department of Probation and Parole
E4D	Empowerment for Diversity
EAFRD	European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development
EC	European Commission
ECRIS-TCN	European Criminal Records Information System – Third Country National
EEA	European Economic Area
EFCA	European Fisheries Control Agency
ELI	European Legislation Identifier
EMFF	European Maritime and Fisheries Fund
EPD	Economic Policy Department
Epps	Electronic Public Procurement System
ERA	Environment and Resources Authority
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESDW	European Sustainable Development Week
ESF	European Social Fund
ESG	Environmental, Social and Governance
EU	European Union
EWA	Energy and Water Agency
FAST	Fighting Alien Species Transborder
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FSWS	Foundation for Social Welfare Services
GAB	Governance of Agricultural Bioresources
GHG	Greenhouse Gas
GPP	Green Public Procurement
GRETA	Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings
GREVIO	Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women
HRD	Human Rights Directorate
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
ILO	International Labour Organisation
INDIS	Industrial Innovative Solutions
IPS	Institute for Public Services
IT	Information Technology
ITS	Institute of Tourism Studies
IUU	Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated

KTAIP	Kirkop Tunnels and Airport Intersection Project
KWP	Kilowatts Peak
LCDS	Low Carbon Development Strategy
LED	Light-Emitting Diode
L.N.	Legal Notice
LNG	Liquefied Natural Gas
LTRS	Long-term Renovation Strategy
MAFA	Ministry for Agriculture, Fisheries, Food and Animal Rights
MCA	Malta Communications Authority
MCAST	Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology
MCC	Mediterranean Conference Centre
MCCAA	Competition and Consumer Affairs Authority
MCESD	Malta Council for Economic and Social Development
MCST	Malta Council for Science and Technology
MDB	Malta Development Bank
MECP	Ministry for the Environment, Climate Change and Planning
MERCA	Managing Essential Resources in Retail through Consumption Analysis
MESD	Ministry for Energy, Enterprise and Sustainable Development
MFA	Malta Food Agency
MFE	Ministry for Finance and Employment
MFHEA	Malta Further and Higher Education Authority
MFJG	Ministry for Justice and Governance
MGA	Malta Gaming Authority
MGOZ	Ministry for Gozo
MHSE	Ministry for Home Affairs, National Security and Law Enforcement
MICE	Restoring and Upgrading Venues with the Capacity to Host Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibition
MITA	Malta Information Technology Agency
MPF	Malta Police Force
MSA	Ministry for Social Accommodation
MSE	Malta Stock Exchange
MSFC	Ministry for Social Justice and Solidarity, the Family and Children's Rights
MSFD	Marine Strategy Framework Directive
MTA	Malta Tourism Authority
MTCP	Ministry for Tourism and Consumer Protection

MW	Megawatt
NAP	National Agricultural Policy
NAPCP	National Air Pollution Control Programme
NBSAP	National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan
NCP	National Cultural Plan
NCPE	National Commission for the Promotion of Equality
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
NLTP	National Language Technology Platform
NO₂	Nitrogen Dioxide
NPK	Nitrogen, Phosphorus and Potassium
NSO	National Statistics Office
NSSS	National School Support Services
NVL	National Veterinary Laboratory
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OPM	Office of the Prime Minister
OSA	Office of the State Advocate
PA	Planning Authority
PM	Particulate Matter
PPD	Plant Protection Directorate
PRIMA	Partnership for Research and Innovation in the Mediterranean Area
PSP	Public Social Partnership
PV	Photovoltaic
QA	Quality Assurance
R&I	Research and Innovation
RBMP	River Basin Management Plan
RDP	Rural Development Programme
REC	Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme
REWS	Regulator for Energy and Water Services
RRF	Recovery and Resilience Facility
RRP	Recovery and Resilience Plan
SAQ	Small Animal Quarantine
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SDIs	Sustainable Development Indicators
SDN	Sustainable Development Network

SEM	Servizzi Ewropej f'Malta
SET	Sheltered Employment Training
SIMTAP	Self-sufficient Integrated Multi-Trophic Aquaponic
S.L.	Subsidiary Legislation
SMEs	Small and Medium Enterprises
SO₂	Sulphur Dioxide
SOPs	Standard Operating Procedures
SRSP	Structural Reform Support Programme
SUMP	Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan
TEN-T	Trans-European Transport Network
THB	Trafficking of Human Beings
TNO	Netherlands Organisation for Applied Scientific Research
ToBRFV	Tomato Brown Rugose Fruit Virus
TSI	Technical Support Instrument
UN	United Nations
UNFCCC	UN Framework Convention on Climate Change
UoM	University of Malta
US	United States
VMPs	Veterinary Medicinal Products
VMS	Vessel Monitoring System
VOCs	Volatile Organic Compounds
VRA	Vulnerability and Risk Assessment
VRD	Veterinary Regulation Directorate
WCMP	Water Catchment Management Plan
WE MAKE	Water and Energy Management and Knowledge Transfer in Manufacturing Enterprise
WFD	Water Framework Directive
WMP	Waste Management Plan
WSC	Water Services Corporation



Introduction

About the Report

This report is being prepared by the Sustainable Development Directorate within the Ministry for the Environment, Energy and Enterprise and fulfils the purpose of compliance with Part VI, Article 14 of the Sustainable Development Act (Chapter 521). ¹ This requires the competent authority to produce a report that is to be submitted to the Minister responsible for sustainable development, in which the activities carried out by the competent authority during the previous financial year are outlined. A copy of this report is to be presented to the House of Representatives for debate by the Minister.

Furthermore, this annual report provides an overview of the measures which were, and are, currently being implemented by the Government of Malta. This will serve to not only showcase what was done in terms of sustainable development throughout the previous financial year, but also to encourage further mainstreaming of sustainable development across all sectors. This report will thus act as a source of accountability with regard to the progress made in sustainable development and will act as a gauge for those sectors that require improvements.

This annual report revolves around the three pillars of sustainability: economic development, social well-being, and environmental protection. As such, its approach assimilates the collaborative efforts of all ministries and offers an integrated way to achieve a sustainable future for the Maltese islands, one in which no one is left behind.

Information and statistics in this report should be interpreted in context of the unprecedented developments related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

¹ Sustainable Development Act, available at: <https://sustainabledevelopment.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/ACT521-%E2%80%93-Document.pdf>

Malta's Commitments towards Sustainable Development

Malta's Statistical Information on the 2030 Agenda and Performance

Malta's achievements in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are continuously being reported through international platforms, namely the Sustainable Development Report prepared by the Sustainable Development Solutions Network and the Bertelsmann Stiftung, and the European Union (EU)'s monitoring report of the SDGs produced by Eurostat. The data provided by the 2021 Sustainable Development Report placed Malta 33rd out of 165 countries, with an SDG Index overall score of 75.8 out of a maximum of 100.

Malta retained its very positive rating when it comes to SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 4 (Quality Education), and SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy), while staying on track in maintaining the achievement of SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities). Meanwhile, there seems to have been moderate improvements with regard to all the other SDGs, except for SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions). In addition, in spite of the improvements recorded, the report highlighted that major challenges remain when it comes to SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), SDG 14 (Life Below Water) and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals). Having said this, the fact that the country is registering significant improvements across most SDGs is an indication that Malta is putting sustainable development at the top of the agenda, while committing itself to achieving better results in those areas in which significant challenges remain.

During the past few years, the Sustainable Development Directorate worked with the National Statistics Office (NSO) to address the gaps in the production of statistics for the Sustainable Development Indicators (SDIs).

For the past year, the NSO has been working to identify existing national and international data sources and statistical products that are compliant with the methodologies of the UN SDIs framework. Moreover, to reduce the data-gaps, the NSO has also identified other data and statistical products, which, although not in conformity with the methodology of the SDIs, are still relevant for the monitoring of progress towards achieving the SDGs' targets. The NSO has also identified other national statistics that can supplement the UN indicators and proxies with additional information relevant for a Maltese context.

The results of these processes are reflected in the 'Sustainable Development in Malta: Statistical Information on the 2030 Agenda in Malta – 2021'. ² This publication collates all existing data related to Malta and presents them as statistics related to the monitoring of the Sustainable Development targets.

In order to further address these gaps, in 2021 a National Expert Group on SDIs was established through Cabinet Decision CAB/627/XIII/21/2. The National Expert Group will facilitate the coordination of activities relating to the SDIs by the various stakeholders. ³

² The document is available at: <https://nso.gov.mt/en/nso/Media/Salient-Points-of-Publications/Pages/2021/Sustainable-Development-in-Malta--Statistical-Information-on-the-2030-Agenda-in-Malta---2021.aspx>

³ Further information about the National Expert Group on SDIs is available at: <https://sustainabledevelopment.gov.mt/national-expert-group-on-sustainable-development-indicators/>

New Sustainable Development Strategy for 2050

Following the publication of the Vision 2050 document, the Sustainable Development Directorate is currently working on the development of a new National Sustainable Development Strategy for 2050. This strategy, which will be published in 2022, is being drafted with the technical assistance of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) under the Structural Reform Support Programme (SRSP) 2017-2020 (now known as Technical Support Instrument (TSI)) (EU Regulation 2017/875) and is founded upon strategic priorities with operational goals in various interconnected and interrelated areas.

A follow-up project under the European Commission's (EC) TSI commenced in 2022, with bilateral meetings with relevant key stakeholders taking place on 23 November 2021. These meetings were followed by a conference titled 'Malta's Sustainable Development Strategy 2050 and Action Plan 2030: Multi-Stakeholder Formulation Process and Next Steps' that was held the next day. This conference addressed the findings of the first EC's TSI project (mentioned above) while highlighting the importance of strengthening Malta's existing sustainable development governance mechanisms and to move forward with the implementation of the internationally agreed SDGs at a national level. The upcoming project, together with the next steps, were also highlighted at the end of the conference.⁴

Integration of the SDGs in the Budget Process

During 2021, a number of meetings with government officials were held on the long-term strategic planning of policies as well as on the integration of the SDGs within the budget measures. The aim of these meetings was to assist the Maltese government to develop actions that are practical, innovative, and collaborative so as to drive forward the agenda for sustainable development, this whilst keeping in mind the ever-present challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.

318 measures of Budget 2022, spread across various sectors, were integrated with the SDGs.

The 2022 Budget continued to sustain economic recovery, safeguard employment, ensure social protection, and invest in sustainable development. This included measures aimed at assisting companies to retain employment, bolstering their investment initiatives, and helping start-ups with the implementation of innovative technological projects.

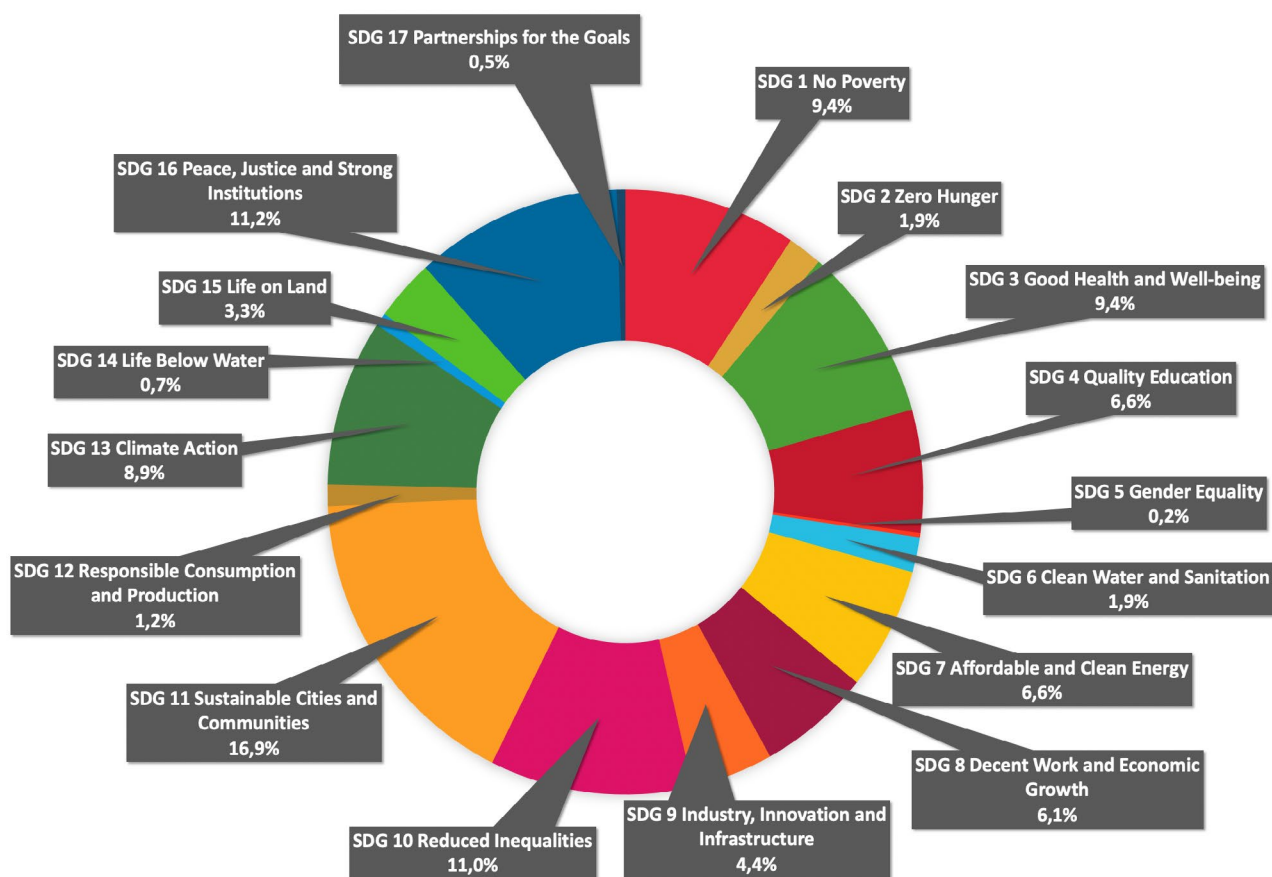
The 2022 Budget built on previous years' initiatives aimed at further reducing the risk of poverty for the most vulnerable in society, whilst also addressing past injustices and assisting in the purchase of residential property by means of the extension of existing reduced stamp duty schemes.

In view of the government's vision of achieving a carbon neutral economy by 2050, the 2022 Budget outlined initiatives that ensure that the environment, which is crucial for achieving sustained economic growth and a better quality of life, is indeed prioritised. These included measures incentivising a circular economy by seeking circular consumption and production patterns, exploring waste prevention and management, while ensuring the responsible re-use of resources and enhancing green procurement to safeguard the environment. These initiatives create opportunities to build a strong green economy to transform Malta into a modern, resource-efficient, and competitive economy in line with the European Green Deal vision. The government is also assessing how the tools of budgetary policymaking can be used to help achieve environmental goals. This includes evaluating the environmental impacts of budgetary and fiscal policies and assessing their coherence as regards the delivery of national and international commitments.

⁴ Further information is available at:
<https://www.oecd.org/gov/pcsd/public-governance-sdgs/malta-2050-sustainable-development-strategy-for-malta-and-action-plan.htm>

By means of funds allocated in the 2022 Budget, the Maltese government continues to invest in Malta's infrastructure to be able to meet both current and future economic, social, and environmental challenges.

2022 Budget Measures and the SDGs



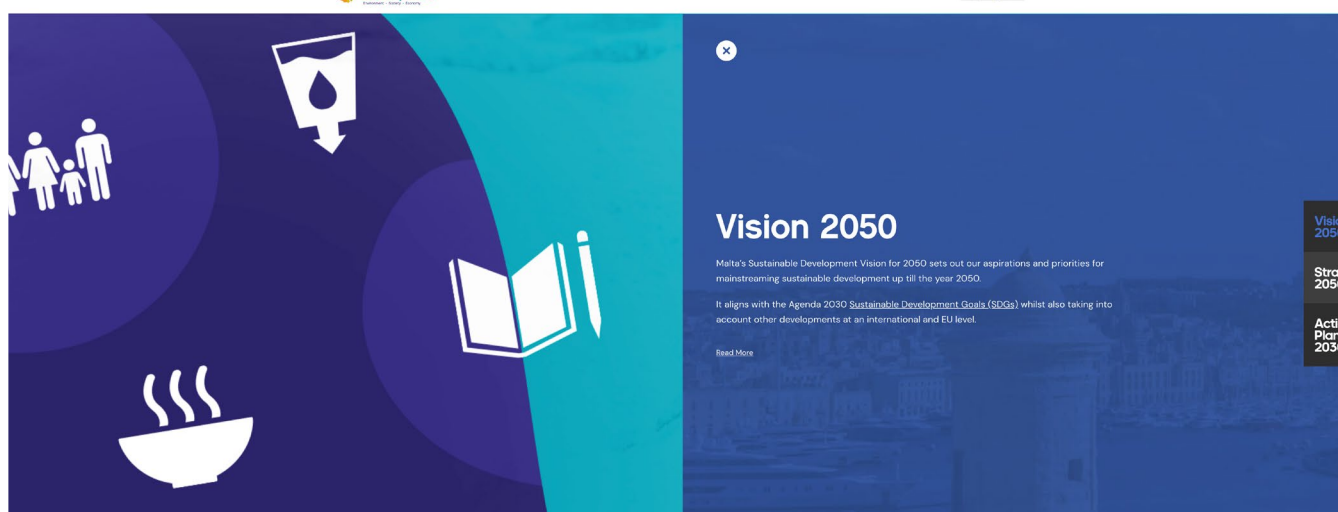
Communicating Sustainable Development and the SDGs

During 2021, throughout its daily operations, work, and activities, the Sustainable Development Directorate made sure to further increase the level of awareness on sustainable development together with its necessity and importance across the various departments within government as well as across different sectors in the Maltese islands.

Raising Awareness through Online Platforms

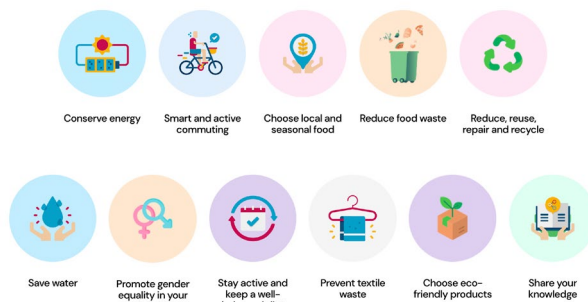
During 2021, a new website was launched with the aim of showcasing the work carried out in terms of sustainable development and raising awareness on the 17 UN SDGs in a more interactive and user-friendly way. This new website (<https://sustainabledevelopment.gov.mt/>) is available in English and Maltese and provides users with updates on the latest sustainable initiatives, projects, and developments; information on the Sustainable Development Governance Framework; together with information relating to the existing bodies that seek to foster the exchange of views and national dialogue. The new website presents data concerning Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) reporting, together with tips to lead a more sustainable life and means of participating in current and upcoming sustainable events taking place around the country.

In addition to the website, as part of its efforts to increase engagement, action, and participation, the Directorate also set up a Facebook page aimed at increasing awareness on ongoing initiatives and activities both on national and international levels, while also instilling a higher level of education on sustainable development in the Maltese islands. The page (<https://www.facebook.com/sustainabledevelopment.mt>) also provides an opportunity for people to share their own ideas on how to lead a more sustainable lifestyle.





These steps will be a good starting point for your journey towards sustainable living.



European Sustainable Development Week (ESDW) 2021

The Sustainable Development Directorate was also actively involved in ESDW 2021, which took place between 18 September 2021 and 8 October 2021 with the core of the Week happening between 20 September 2021 and 26 September 2021. The chosen theme for ESDW 2021 was 'Together for Sustainable Growth: Resilient – Green – Inclusive', during which the Sustainable Development Directorate organised a number of activities related to sustainable development whilst reaching out to local councils, civil society, and the business sector in order to showcase their sustainable initiatives both on local and European platforms.



The following events were carried out as part of ESDW 2021:

20 - 26 September 2021

Malta Sustainable Development Action Days: Be Part of the Change

The aim of the Malta Sustainable Development Action Days was to promote and foster awareness on sustainable development and the related UN SDGs and to inspire more individuals, entities, businesses, and organisations to take more action and showcase their commitment towards sustainability.

The then Ministry for Energy, Enterprise and Sustainable Development (MESD) showcased 27 sustainable initiatives and practices that local councils, industry, and civil society undertook during the core week of ESDW 2021. The activities, which included community events, conferences and workshops, digital events, educational and awareness-raising events, excursions, outings and clean-ups, as well as online platforms, were promoted on websites and social media as well as on the ESDW website at EU level, which can be accessed via this link: <https://esdw.eu/>.

24 September 2021

Launch of the Sustainable Development Story Book

The Sustainable Development Directorate collaborated with renowned local author Trevor Żahra on a storybook entitled *Sustainable Development*, the aim of which is to increase awareness on sustainable development and the 17 UN SDGs. The three pillars of sustainable development - social, economic, and environmental - are all given prominence in the book and the importance of attaining greater synergies between the three pillars in order to achieve sustainable development is highlighted all throughout.

The book, which was distributed among Year 6 students across Malta and Gozo, was launched on 24 September 2021.

The pilot project 'Youths for Sustainable Communities' was also launched during the ESDW 2021. This pilot project will be encouraging youths to come forward with proposals on how to develop sustainable communities, particularly through entrepreneurship. The pilot project was led by the Junior Association of Young Enterprise together with the Żurriq Local Council and the participation of entrepreneurs, who acted as mentors throughout the project.

Work Carried out by the Sustainable Development Boards

On 7 October 2021, the Sustainable Development Network (SDN) organised a webinar entitled 'The Evolving Workplace: Beyond the COVID-19 Pandemic'. The main objective of this webinar was to address and discuss the shift from traditional ways of working towards remote working and an agile working environment brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Further to the above, on 3 December 2021, the Guardian of Future Generations organised a conference on 'Malta's Demographic Challenge', where issues relating to the demographic challenges and opportunities Malta faces, migration flows, an ageing population, and lower fertility rates—among other things—were discussed.

You Hold Their Future: Sustainable Baby Box

During 2021, the then MESD also embarked on a new project through which every newborn will receive a starter kit that will help guardians to shift towards a more sustainable and eco-friendly upbringing of their child from a young age. The sustainable baby box, which includes items made from sustainably sourced and eco-friendly material, promotes the use of such products among guardians from the initial stages of childhood and, thus, brings about environmental benefits. Using such products will help to minimise waste while boosting green businesses, adding value to environmental goods and services and, in turn, also addressing a number of the SDGs, namely SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), and SDG 13 (Climate Action).



EU Funds and Sustainability Objectives

Throughout 2021, Servizzi Ewropej f'Malta (SEM), which was previously known as the Malta-EU Steering and Action Committee, has continued to raise awareness, promote dialogue, and even assist organisations directly involved in the implementation of various SDGs to obtain funding to implement their projects.

During 2021, SEM continued to assist non-governmental organisations (NGOs), local councils, schools, government entities, and trade unions to tap into EU funding for the implementation of EU policies in several different fields, including the environment, citizens' rights, education, research and innovation (R&I), entrepreneurship, and youth participation. A total of ninety-five applications were submitted for funding, which will allow these organisations to implement projects in the areas identified in the SDGs including those relating to sustainable buildings, combatting poverty and inequalities, the adaptation of skills to the labour market's needs, lifelong learning, and the protection of the natural environment. All these projects will contribute effectively towards the key priority areas such as sustainable community cohesion, sustainable use of resources, quality of life as well as sustainable and competitive growth. Following the re-launch, the agency is now also providing assistance during the project implementation phase, thus providing additional support to organisations benefitting from funding to implement these projects successfully.

The EU motto and the founding values of equality, freedom, respect, solidarity, democracy, and the rule of law were promoted further through the publication of a second storybook for adolescents with the collaboration of renowned author Clare Azzopardi. The book, *#noħlomlixdarba*, aims to increase awareness and education on EU values that directly contribute and emphasise the importance of sustainable development in celebrating diversity in our society.

The agency continued to organise other events and discussions which were aimed at bringing together representatives of the government, EU institutions, and of civil society organisations such as the Review of the Action Plan on Trade and Sustainable Development, the Energy Taxation Directive, the future of work, and the green and digital transitions, amongst others.

The Recovery and Resilience Plan (RRP)

On 13 July 2021, Malta submitted the official RRP for Malta to the Commission. This plan sets out the reforms and public investment projects that Malta plans to implement with the support of the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF). The RRF is at the heart of NextGenerationEU, which will provide €800 billion to support investments and reforms across the EU. It will play a crucial role in helping Europe to emerge stronger from the COVID-19 pandemic and secure the green and digital transitions.

Malta has requested a total of €316.4 million in grants under the RRF. The Maltese Plan covers six areas, including sustainable transport, circular economy, clean energy and energy-efficiency in buildings, digital transformation of the public administration and the legal system, projects targeting the health and education sectors, as well as institutional reforms. Projects in the plan cover the entire lifetime of the RRF until 2026. The plan proposes projects in five of the seven European flagship areas. ⁵

⁵ Malta's RRP is available at: <https://eufunds.gov.mt/en/Operational%20Programmes/Pages/Recovery-and-Resilience-Facility.aspx>

Supporting Developing Countries

In 2021, numerous measures and initiatives were taken by the Maltese government to assist overseas developing communities in their efforts to achieve the SDGs, with a particular emphasis on efforts to combat the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects on developing countries' populations. One particular success story was the provision of COVID-19 related personal protective equipment and medicines as a measure of solidarity with countries in need, including Egypt, Ghana, India, Iran, Libya, Nepal, Rwanda, and Tunisia. A total of 471,690 COVID-19 vaccines were shared.

Malta also contributed towards humanitarian assistance lent to Afghanistan, Libya, Lithuania, the Occupied Palestinian territories, Syria, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Venezuela, and Yemen to alleviate suffering caused by conflict and natural disasters. The then Ministry for Foreign and European Affairs also responded to several humanitarian appeals made by reputable international multilateral organisations, including various UN agencies, particularly to assist afflicted countries, especially in Africa and the Neighbourhood, with the aim of responding to shortfalls in funding or urgent humanitarian crises. Maltese Official Development Assistance (ODA) is also supporting a project aimed at strengthening the health sector in Ghana.

Despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, access to education remained one of the main SDGs priorities for Malta, and the Maltese government continues to believe that higher education standards can promote higher living standards and resultant community well-being. To this effect, slightly more than €187,000 in scholarships and courses were offered to citizens from different ODA-eligible countries in various areas, such as maritime law, diplomatic studies, gender, conflict and peacebuilding, international relations, and the study of islands and small states, at both tertiary and postgraduate levels.



Enabling Sustainable and Competitive Growth

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 has brought about unprecedented volatility and challenges for the global economy. As the pandemic unfolded, the Maltese government acted swiftly and decisively to protect the health of its citizens and simultaneously safeguard thousands of jobs. To limit the resulting socio-economic damage, the Maltese government implemented several measures aimed at easing pressures on the liquidity of businesses, stimulating domestic demand, protecting jobs, and supporting the most vulnerable.

The most notable interventions for businesses included the introduction of the wage supplement schemes, commercial rent aid, refunding of electricity bills, tax credits, skills developments schemes, re-engineering of operations, and sustaining digital promotions. At the same time, measures to stimulate further employment growth and the attraction of new foreign direct investment (FDI) were bolstered further. These were then complemented by incentives to enhance consumer confidence, such as a voucher scheme for Maltese residents to be used in retail outlets, hotels, and catering establishments, temporary moratoriums on credit facilities, as well as refund grants on the deposits paid for postponement of weddings and civil union ceremonies.

Malta has adopted a pro-active sustainable approach which was pivotal in the country's plans for economic recovery where social dialogue has also proved to be a key approach. Most of the measures introduced to support businesses in 2020 were maintained or amended in 2021. Through such measures, Malta has managed to maintain a low unemployment rate and remained one of the top EU performers in terms of unemployment.

In order to maintain the level reached by our country's economy and even improve upon it, the need was felt for an economic vision which leads to longer-term plans for the benefit of the whole country. 'Malta's Economic Vision 2021-2031 A Future-Proof Malta: A nation of courage, compassion and achievement', ⁶ which was launched for consultation in June 2021, sets out the framework for how all public and private players will contribute to reshaping the country's economic model to achieve inclusive and sustainable growth for the long-term by:

- redefining the measures of success;
- sustaining and supporting investment as a key driver;
- safeguarding and enhancing competitiveness;
- improving productivity by leveraging digital technologies; and
- strengthening economic sectors and developing new clusters and niches.

Chapter 1

⁶ Malta's Economic Vision 2021-2031 is available at:
<https://mimcol.com.mt/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/A-Future-Proof-Malta-Consultation-Documents.pdf>

This approach supports efforts to achieve internationally agreed **SDGs 4, 6-9, 11-15**.

2030 AGENDA-RELATED GOALS



1.1 Gross Domestic Product

Key Sustainable Development Goal Targets

SDG 8.1

Sustain per capita economic growth in accordance with national circumstances and, in particular, at least 7 per cent gross domestic product growth per annum in the least developed countries.

SDG 8.2

Achieve higher levels of economic productivity through diversification, technological upgrading and innovation, including through a focus on high-value added and labour-intensive sectors.

SDG 8.3

Promote development-oriented policies that support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, and encourage the formalization and growth of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises, including through access to financial services.

Government debt declined below the 60% treaty reference value in 2015 and continued to decline to a debt to GDP ratio of 40.7% by end 2019. On account of the severe economic situation and the large fiscal policy response, in 2020, general government debt increased to 53.3% of GDP, and is expected to have increased further to 61.3% in 2021.

While the level of uncertainty regarding the short and medium-term path for the economy is unprecedented, cognizant of the positive bearing that fiscal consolidation and sustainable debt levels have on potential growth, the government will continue to prioritise fiscal consolidation once the pandemic is over. The Maltese government remains committed to put the debt-to-GDP ratio back on a declining path once the recovery is firmly established and the extraordinary fiscal support introduced during the crisis is lifted. Indeed, it is the express view of the government that once these exceptional circumstances cease to prevail, the government will support a fiscal strategy to revert to the medium-term objective of a balanced budget in structural terms and ensure that the debt ratio declines below 60% of the GDP.

1.2 Government's fiscal policy

The Maltese government's prudent fiscal policy over recent years made the countercyclical response to the COVID-19 pandemic possible. Various measures have been implemented to limit the impact of the pandemic on employment and enterprise, including the Covid-19 Wage Supplement Scheme, higher healthcare funding to increase the amount of medical and protective equipment, vouchers to people over the age of sixteen, tax rebates on property sales, expenditure on the carriage of persons and goods following airport closures, interest rebates on loans, as well as other social measures.

Over the two years during which these COVID-related measures have been in place, their cost is estimated at around €1,600 million, including tax deferrals aimed at supporting corporate liquidity. To further alleviate liquidity challenges, the government launched the Malta Development Bank (MDB) COVID-19 Guarantee Scheme (CGS) for the purpose of guaranteeing new loans granted by commercial banks for working capital purposes to businesses facing liquidity shortfalls as a result of the pandemic. The scheme enabled credit institutions to leverage government guarantees up to a total portfolio volume of €777.8 million. By end-November 2021, six hundred and fifty-three facilities were approved under the CGS, covering a total sanctioned lending of €507.3 million.

Discretionary policies have complemented the full operation of automatic fiscal stabilisers, as a result of which the general government balance turned negative. The severe economic situation and the large fiscal policy response resulted in a budget deficit in both 2020 and 2021, as well as an increase in general government debt.

Although the economic situation improved when compared to 2020, the extension of the temporary social and economic support measures is estimated to have led to a further increase in general government expenditure in 2021. Furthermore, higher government expenditure also factored in the fiscal impact of measures legislated by means of the 2021 Budget. Nevertheless, proceeds from personal income tax revenue and social security contributions, as well as from indirect tax revenue, were relatively shielded by the contained impact on the labour market and are estimated to have rebounded strongly in 2021.

1.3 Sustainable Finance

Key Sustainable Development Goal Targets

SDG 8.2

Achieve higher levels of economic productivity through diversification, technological upgrading and innovation, including through a focus on high-value added and labour-intensive sectors.

SDG 8.3

Promote development-oriented policies that support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, and encourage the formalization and growth of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises, including through access to financial services.

During 2021, the then MESD launched the ESG dashboard. This is a platform that helps illustrate the ESG credentials of companies listed on the Malta Stock Exchange (MSE), and this in turn allows investors to incorporate these credentials into their investment decision-making. It will also identify the actual carbon footprint of these companies as they invest in renewable sources of energy. Efficient use of water and other resources employed in these companies' operations is also measured to quantify their environmental impact. A number of ESG reports from various companies have already been collected and published on the new Sustainable Development website (<https://sustainabledevelopment.gov.mt/esg/>).

Promoting inclusive and environmentally sustainable economic growth is considered a priority area for the Malta Development Bank (MDB). Following various stakeholder consultation meetings, the MDB worked on developing financing tools to push Malta's economic regeneration and renewal further. To this end, the bank is in the process of launching two new schemes supported by the European Investment Fund's European Guarantee Fund, which will make available more than €100 million for local businesses. Whilst these schemes will be available to all economic sectors, the MDB will be prioritising those investment projects that aim to build a greener and more digitally-oriented sustainable economy.

Furthermore, following the approval of the Green Bond bye-laws by the Malta Financial Services Authority in February 2021, the MSE launched its Green Market on 10 March 2021. This regulatory framework, which is based on the International Capital Market Association standards, provides issuers with a dedicated platform for the listing of green bonds. The main criteria for green bonds to be listed on the MSE Green List is that a substantive contribution is made towards the achievement of environmental objectives. In its bid to promote green investments and motivate issuers, the MSE is also applying a 50% discount on the listing fees applicable to green bonds.

1.4 Sustainable and Innovative Businesses

Key Sustainable Development Goal Targets

SDG 8.3

Promote development-oriented policies that support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, and encourage the formalization and growth of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises, including through access to financial services.

SDG 9.2

Promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and, by 2030, significantly raise industry's share of employment and gross domestic product, in line with national circumstances, and double its share in least developed countries.

SDG 9.3

Increase the access of small-scale industrial and other enterprises, in particular in developing countries, to financial services, including affordable credit, and their integration into value chains and markets.

SDG 9.4

By 2030, upgrade infrastructure and retrofit industries to make them sustainable, with increased resource-use efficiency and greater adoption of clean and environmentally sound technologies and industrial processes, with all countries taking action in accordance with their respective capabilities.

SDG 12.6

Encourage companies, especially large and transnational companies, to adopt sustainable practices and to integrate sustainability information into their reporting cycle.

SDG 12.7

Promote public procurement practices that are sustainable, in accordance with national policies and priorities.

1.4.1 Supporting and Rewarding Businesses

Safeguarding the economy proved to be a challenge in light of the fact that Malta, like the rest of the world, grappled with the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic throughout 2020 and well into 2021. In order to limit the resulting economic damage, the Maltese government had announced several measures as part of a financial package to help the Maltese economy, most of which continued in 2021. These were mainly aimed at easing pressures on the liquidity of businesses, protecting jobs, and helping the most vulnerable during this most challenging period.

Through Malta Enterprise, the government adopted a number of employment-related measures as a response to the pandemic. These include the Wage Supplement Scheme, refunds on expenses incurred to adopt teleworking arrangements, and payment for quarantine leave. With the aim of helping the industrial sector, the Rent Subsidy was launched in May 2020 and continued in 2021 to support undertakings that require industrial spaces as a temporary or permanent solution to aid their business activities. The scheme was applicable to businesses engaged in manufacturing, maintenance and repairs of motor vehicles, machinery and equipment, and other industrial activities. Assistance was also provided in the form of electricity bill refunds to help businesses cope with energy costs.

Malta Enterprise also launched the Business Plan Re-engineering Scheme with the main aim being that of supporting

SMEs to realign their business activities, re-train their employees, restructure their products and services, and optimise the use of technology whilst embracing green technology and practices. Assistance was given in the form of a cash grant to cover half of the costs incurred, up to a maximum of €5,000 per advisory service that businesses employed to assist them in the transition.

Malta Enterprise also continued to provide the Investment Aid for the Production of COVID-19 Relevant Products. To this effect, cash grants not exceeding 80% of the eligible costs were provided to support undertakings to carry out investment projects with the aim of increasing or initiating production of pandemic-related products or to diversify existing production to be able to produce such products. Moreover, a COVID-19 Research and Development Fund with a pool of €5.3 million was set up by Malta Enterprise in collaboration with the Malta Council for Science and Technology (MCST), with the main aim of financing research on COVID-19, namely to explore innovative and improved approaches related to the current pandemic and also any potential future waves. The maximum duration of the projects could not exceed 18 months with all the projects being required to start by 31 December 2020.

In order to contribute towards environmental protection, a scheme was launched in October 2020, and which continued in 2021, to assist operators in the construction industry to scrap and replace old machinery and equipment with new ones that generate less environmentally harmful emissions, and to invest in new equipment that has as its main purpose the decreasing of environmentally harmful emissions released by the activity. The scheme had very good uptake, with the amount of aid requested exceeding the allocated budget of €4,000,000.

Malta Enterprise also launched several new schemes to further support the enterprises and entrepreneurs with a view to enable their successful twin digital and green transition. In July 2021, Malta Enterprise launched the Restart Incentive Scheme 2021, through which entrepreneurs are being offered the possibility to engage a professional business advisory. Businesses and entrepreneurs who had to close their business or had a significant downturn in activity will be supported through the Restart Incentive Scheme 2021 with full reimbursement of costs capped at €5,000 for advisory to restart their business activity or venture into a new business. The advisory costs can be extended to €10,000 to support the implementation phase of the new business initiative.

Another scheme, launched in July 2021, entitled Change to Grow, finances consultancy services of up to €10,000 for businesses to renew their business models and increase competitiveness. The purpose of this incentive is to support self-employed persons, micro-enterprises, and SMEs to realign their business activity, restructure their employees, product or service portfolio, optimise the use of technology, and embrace green technology and practices. SMEs with a vision to develop can seek support from external advisors to assist them in carrying out significant changes that will enable them to accelerate development, address sustainability, and improve market access.

In addition, Malta Enterprise has launched a new scheme to support businesses in their investments to incentivise the adoption of twin transition paths for growth, with applications opening in December 2021. The Smart and Sustainable Investment Grant Scheme will provide business funding to support the undertaking of investments that lead to more sustainable and digitalised processes resulting in the enhancement of competitive element of enterprises through the optimisation of the use of resources in their activities. This includes measures to improve energy efficiency, water efficiency, waste minimisation, use of sustainable materials, and sustainable digitisation.

In order to advance the skills agenda of the Maltese government and support continuous development and re-skilling of the workforce, Malta Enterprise provided support in 2021 via two main schemes:

- The Skills Development Scheme, which supports business undertakings to provide training to develop and update the skills and knowledge of their workforce.
- The Get Qualified Scheme, which supports the personal development of individuals who aim to obtain qualifications and certifications required by industry. The incentive is applicable to students following a course of studies leading to a certification, diploma, degree, or post-graduate degree courses. On successful completion, the student will benefit from a tax credit, hence recovering part of the costs incurred.

During 2021, the Energy and Water Agency (EWA) also launched two sector-specific projects, namely the Managing Essential Resources in Retail through Consumption Analysis (MERCA) and the Water and Energy Management and Knowledge Transfer in Manufacturing Enterprises (WE MAKE) projects. The MERCA project, carried out in collaboration with the Malta Chamber of SMEs, aims to assist a number of retail outlets in the food and beverage sector in becoming more energy efficient. Through this project, best practices are being gathered and areas of improvements for the sector are also being identified.

The WE MAKE project on the other hand, which is focused on the manufacturing sector, is a cooperation agreement between the Agency and the Malta Business Bureau, partnered with the Malta Chamber of Commerce, Enterprise and Industry. The aim of the project is that of achieving a higher level of engagement within the business community on aspects of energy and water conservation and efficiency, including a higher rate of implementation of energy and water-related projects by businesses. The WE MAKE project has already launched its first workshop, specifically on financing, which was well-attended by manufacturing companies, and is also assisting SMEs in benefiting from EWA's energy audit scheme in order to identify areas of improvement.

Throughout 2021, a number of support schemes administered by MGOZ were offered to establishments and businesses in Gozo:

- Supporting Marketing Initiatives for Specific Niche Markets in Gozo, a scheme that aims to promote and kindle investment in particular niche markets through marketing campaigns by increasing awareness of the niche market and related activities, developing applicants' brands on an international level, enhancing Gozo's branding value, and further stimulating investment in the quality of the local product. This scheme supports marketing initiatives falling under two categories, namely participation in specialised fairs and events abroad and/or advertising on an international level, covering up to 75% of the eligible expenditure capped at a maximum of €3,000 or €4,000 if falling under either one or both categories respectively. In 2021, a total of €26,635.77 were disbursed from funds allocated under this scheme.
- Restoring and Upgrading Venues with the Capacity to Host Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (MICE) Events in Gozo, a scheme that aims at providing aid to private undertakings and voluntary organisations in restoring and upgrading venue facilities to enhance the capabilities of hosting qualitative MICE events in Gozo. The overall maximum that applicants can obtain is capped at €50,000 and €25,000 for voluntary organisations and private businesses respectively. In 2021, a total of €82,657.97 were disbursed from funds under this scheme.
- The Gozo Employment Refund Scheme which offers eligible employers a 30% refund of pay up to €6,000 for every new job created within the private sector based on a three-year contract. The aim is to support full-time recruitment in Gozo in a sustainable manner, create increased and higher quality full-time jobs in Gozo, as well as address the issue of a higher dependency on the public sector for full-time employment in Gozo.
- The Gozo Back Office Employment Refund Scheme which provides a partial reimbursement of salaries for full-time work in back-office operations in Gozo on a minimum three-year contract with the aim of attracting highly skilled and educated workers, whilst reducing the existing disparities in average basic salaries between Malta and Gozo. Beneficiaries receive partial reimbursement of the Annual Net Salary of each employee carrying out back-office operations in Gozo with the annual maximum financial aid capped at €65,000 per single undertaking. In 2021, a total of €268,986.16 were disbursed from funds allocated under the Gozo Employment Refund Scheme and the Gozo Back Office Employment Refund Scheme.
- The Gozo Teleworking Scheme a scheme consisting of a financial grant to employers up to a maximum of €10,000 spread over a three-year period in proportion to the number of days an employee is granted telework. The scheme also offers a 75% financial grant with a maximum of up to €850 related to the technological and capital investment to equip the employee with the necessary tools to perform tasks. In 2021, a total of €124,081.96 were disbursed from funds allocated under this scheme.

In order to further support businesses during the pandemic, the government issued a €100 voucher scheme, which enabled citizens living in Malta and Gozo to redeem vouchers in exchange for goods and services offered by hotels restaurants and restaurants, and by service and retail professionals and outlets. Since the scheme's inception on 7 June 2021, more than €16 million in vouchers have been redeemed through 500,000 transactions carried out at several Maltese and Gozitan business outlets.

1.4.2 Sustainable and innovative industrial estates

The Industrial Innovative Solutions (INDIS) Malta Ltd is engaged in the administration, maintenance, and upkeep of all industrial parks within the public sector, with the concurrent responsibility of providing new industrial space to meet demand by both local and foreign investors, both in Malta and in Gozo. INDIS Malta Ltd is committed to affect environmental improvements in the properties within its portfolio, as well as incorporate sustainable development measures in new builds.

The achievements in 2021 include the following:

- All flagship developments are being designed to BREEAM standards, while the Procurement Department remains tasked with ensuring that all new developments are undertaken utilising environmentally friendly methods and materials to the fullest feasible extent.
- INDIS Malta Ltd won the prestigious Sustainability Award at the Malta Architecture and Spatial Planning Awards sponsored by the Planning Authority (PA) for the Gozo Innovation Hub built at Xewkija.
- A total of 51,500 square metres of PV panels were installed by tenants throughout the industrial estates administered by INDIS Malta Ltd.
- Green walls have been set up and maintained at the Kordin, Mosta, and Marsa Industrial Estates with a fourth green wall is to be integrated within a new perimeter wall built at the Dbiegi Crafts Village in Gozo in 2022.
- The re-utilisation of construction and demolition waste as a secondary raw material to be used in construction projects, in the form of reconstituted stone, continued to be evaluated through the testing of materials and the building of prototype structures.

1.4.3 Green Public Procurement

Green Public Procurement (GPP) has been recognised as an enabler to drive sustainable investments in the public sector. The European Green Deal and the EU Circular Economy Action Plan 2020 have been increasingly highlighting the need that governments lead by example in ensuring that their procurement embeds circular and low-carbon concepts to reduce the impacts on the environment. GPP is defined as a process whereby governments procure goods, services, and works that have have a minimal impact on the environment throughout their life cycles. Moreover, GPP is a market-based mechanism which serves as a stimulus to drive the economy in an environmentally friendly direction with the government leading by example.

In 2021, the Maltese government adopted the 2nd GPP National Action Plan 2022-2027. This ambitious plan sets out technical specifications for seventeen different product groups of which fourteen are mandatory in nature. These include copying and graphic paper; gardening products and services; computers and monitors; imaging equipment; textiles; cleaning products and services; road lighting and traffic signals; transport; office building design, construction and management; road design, construction and maintenance; paints, varnishes and road markings; sanitary tapware; toilets and urinals; and hospitality and catering services. The only three non-mandatory product groups include furniture; vending machines; and electric and electronic equipment. This National Action Plan aims to progressively increase the share of the government's procurement in greener products and services to 90% by 2027, a target which will drive action on the ground, promoting sustainable consumption and production.

Monitoring the uptake of GPP and undertaking the necessary quality assurance (QA) exercises is one of the then Ministry for the Environment, Climate Change and Planning (MECP)'s core functions. This will ensure that each ministry is contributing to the greening of public expenditure. In view of this, the then MECP launched a comprehensive monitoring system through the existing national e-procurement system. The proposed enhancement aims to simplify the collection of GPP data from all contracting authorities on a pre-publication basis by answering a set of questions prior to publishing a tender document.

In line with the adopted 2nd GPP National Action Plan, in order to continuously engage economic operators, contracting authorities and other relevant stakeholders, extensive training is provided through information sessions, workshops, and established communication channels. Certified training programmes are offered through the Institute for Public Services (IPS). Moreover, to further improve the process even at the stage of the evaluation of bids, by 2023, one voting member sitting on the evaluation board must have successfully attended a training course in GPP.

The GPP office within the then MECP will also be launching a GPP mobile web-based application in early 2022 as a one-stop-shop for all GPP-related information. Users of this app will have available a pool of information such as lists of GPP-certified products, GPP publications, current GPP technical specifications, applications to certify products, or to book GPP training sessions. Individuals will also be able to communicate directly with the GPP office through the built-in chat function found in the app.



1.5 Digital Transition

Key Sustainable Development Goal Targets

SDG 4.4

By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship.

SDG 5.b

Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women.

SDG 8.2

Achieve higher levels of economic productivity through diversification, technological upgrading and innovation, including through a focus on high-value added and labour-intensive sectors.

SDG 8.3

Promote development-oriented policies that support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, and encourage the formalization and growth of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises, including through access to financial services.

SDG 9.5

Enhance scientific research, upgrade the technological capabilities of industrial sectors in all countries, in particular developing countries, including, by 2030, encouraging innovation and substantially increasing the number of research and development workers per 1 million people and public and private research and development spending.

1.5.1 Digital transformation of the Public Service

During 2021, the Maltese government continued its efforts in achieving a smooth and swift transition towards the digitisation of the Public Service, which is a key element of the Public Service Strategy. Initiatives 3 and 42 of the strategy aim at ensuring that digital public services are user-centric and that service users have a say in the design of the public services which affect them. The former addresses a Digital Transformation Hub, which will see to the re-engineering of existing services, as well as the smart design of new services, such that they become more user-centric. The latter, on the other hand, speaks of the Smart Service Design, which will ensure that each service is built around a digital workflow platform, with a clear set of steps, of which a subset will be made visible to the client through the Citizen Portal. All the information about the service will be made available online through a single portal prior to the service being advertised. This will improve interoperability between public services and the entities providing them, minimise rework, and ensure a seamless service for clients.

In addition, two other initiatives, namely those revolving around Unified Communication and a Document Management System, will respectively enable users to utilise tools through the cloud and will allow for an updated filing system and processes. The latter will particularly focus on the entire process covering the lifetime of a document, beginning with its creation within official government communication channels and ending with its transfer to the national archives in accordance with relevant retention policies.

During 2021, the government continued to implement initiatives under the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) 02.035 – Connected eGovernment (CONvErGE). This project, which is being implemented by the Strategy and Implementation within the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), aims at capitalising further the use of innovative information and communication technology (ICT) solutions within the government to enable better and more efficient online public services for citizens and businesses.

Furthermore, the ESF.PA4.0078 Mystery Shopper – Enhanced performance in the Public Administration, being implemented by the People and Standards Division within OPM, contributes to the improvement of efficiency in the Public Sector, the consolidation of public finances, and contributes towards the reduction of various forms of poverty and social inequalities by also enhancing the social inclusion of disadvantaged and vulnerable persons. Throughout its life cycle, more than 1,350 recommendations have been made to improve access to public services, most of which have already been implemented and the rest are in various stages of implementation. These recommendations impacted different areas of service provision, including—among others—online accessibility of services, implementation of the Once-Only Principle, training provision for customer-facing employees, and improving service delivery through Directive 4-1.

The recommendations improving online accessibility of services enables the customer to access information and services online without leaving their locality or place of residence. Improving these services include changing PDF forms into e-forms, ensuring that websites are customer-friendly and up-to-date, and checking that services listed on government websites are available in the appropriate languages for customers. Work was also done to check that mobile apps are updated with the latest information, which helps the customer access government services 24/7 from any location. This also means that local public services are also accessible on an international scale by customers living abroad, thus fulfilling one of the general principles of the Mapping Tomorrow Strategy, i.e. interoperability and cross-border services.

The implementation of the Once-Only Principle is another goal of the Mapping Tomorrow Strategy on which many of the recommendations emanating from the Mystery Shopper project are centred. By exercising the Once-Only Principle, the Public Administration ensures that customers access government services in a more efficient and accessible way. Information does not need to be provided to the Public Administration more than once, but will be shared and used across government, in accordance to relevant legislation. Through the Mystery Shopper project, it is emphasised that the customer should not need to approach the department or entity more than once, but is served at the first point of contact.

Recommendations for the training of customer-facing employees focus on improving the latter's ability to deal with customers, especially those customers who may need someone to go the extra mile to assist them. This includes making the employees aware of how to deal with barriers in communicating with customers, such as language and cultural barriers. The effort from the Public Administration to train its employees on how to provide a better services to its customers is one of the mainstays of its determination to provide a Service of Excellence, which is also one of the goals of the Mapping Tomorrow strategy. The Mystery Shopper project also contributes, through its recommendations, towards the implementation and observance of Directive 4-1, which delineates Standards for Service of Excellence offered by the Public Administration to the Public and to Public Employees. This Directive ensures that the services offered by the Public Administration are done so efficiently and in a timely manner. Moreover, it also focuses on ensuring that services are offered in the preferred language of the customer, either English or Maltese.

Work also continued on the European Social Fund (ESF) project entitled 'Towards a More Professional Workforce in the Public Administration' (ESF.PA4.0085) which is being implemented by IPS within OPM. This builds on the professionalisation of staff through various funding initiatives aimed at increased academic qualifications and even assistance to medical doctors to obtain specialisation experience abroad.

By securing the professionalisation of a number of public employees, the IPS invests in their development, ensuring that the administration remains in a position to spearhead and maintain economic growth. Economic growth needs

a robust administration that is in line with this economic development and also facilitates it through continuous renewal and the improvement of its services and policies.

In addition to the above, during the year under review, monitoring continued on the DigIT-X: Digital and Interoperable Public Services Designed on Client Experience project submitted under the TSI, formerly known as the SRSP. This project, which is a follow-up and consistent with the recommendations of a previous project under the same programme, is being implemented in line with the Strategic Plan for the Digital Transformation of the Public Administration (2019-2021). Through this project, the Maltese government is seeking support to increase the use of its e-services by Maltese stakeholders. Consequently, this project contributes to a number of SDGs, namely SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure), and SDG 13 (Climate Action).

Throughout 2021, another project entitled 'Regional and local authorities: Enhancing cooperation and Quality of public administration - Development of a strategic foresight and anticipatory innovation governance capacity across Government' was submitted under the same instrument. With good governance being a top government priority, systematically embedding a culture and practice of regular, useful, impactful foresight and its subsequent use in decision-making is what is expected out of modern, skilled, and effective leadership throughout the public service. Citizens deserve a better and more resilient future with capabilities to effectively meet any expectations and, most of all, mitigate actions against the hurdles encountered. As its title suggests, this project will be implemented across government, and it is being envisaged that all ministries will be involved. Hence, since this project touches upon various policy areas, it will contribute practically to each and every SDG.

1.5.2 Digital Transformation of Public Procurement

It is worth noting that the digital transition of public procurement in Malta started gradually over a decade ago. However, the Department of Contracts continuously strives to develop new initiatives and deploy the relevant enhancements to the government's national Electronic Public Procurement System (ePPS) to further expand the digital progress. To this end, there was the integration of additional modules such as the Compliance Certificates and Tenders Electronic Daily Interconnection, amongst others. Moreover, during 2021, the process by which economic operators access the ePPS has been further improved, including a simpler approach to supplier registration. Such developments create an efficient and effective system that enhances sustainability, offers an enriched user experience, and harmonises the government's endeavours towards the Once-Only Principle concept.

1.5.3 Enhancing Skills

The global pandemic has accelerated the need for enhancements in skills, most prominently digital skills and the need for reskilling. Equipping the workforce with the transversal skills required for the jobs of today and tomorrow, whilst considering the ongoing digital and green transitions, is a strategic concern in the national growth and development outlooks of all countries. Maltese economic activity will continue to be supported by several government-led initiatives as well as several EU-funded projects. The new National Employment Policy 2021-2030⁷ will aim towards ensuring a holistic policy whose vision is to improve the quality of the labour market for the workforce. The new policy will seek to support individuals in acquiring the needed and industry demanded skills, empower all workers to actively participate in Malta's labour market, enable employers to continue investing in business growth and employment, and will seek to support and build responsive work institutions.

⁷ The National Employment Policy 2021-2030 is available at:
<https://finance.gov.mt/nep/Documents/NATIONAL%20EMPLOYMENT%20POLICY%202021.pdf>

Furthermore, eBiznify, a web-based learning system offering an online training programme in e-commerce, is further supporting individuals and SMEs in obtaining the competencies, experiences, knowledge, and understanding of e-commerce concepts needed to pursue online activities. The eBiznify project directly impacts lifelong learning in an area that has become fundamentally important for local business to survive, compete and grow. It upgrades the competences of individuals, fostering employability and adaptability, and provides the industry with a pool of workers with the necessary e-commerce-related skills in support of the government's commitment to locally proliferate digital initiatives.

The training programme is open to all individuals and is fully-funded by the the Malta Communications Authority (MCA) and the eSkills Malta Foundation. The online environment, which also hosts an online library of book titles related to digital business and other related subjects, allows participants to follow the training programme entirely from the comfort of their home or another preferred location, from where they can easily follow online tutorials, access content, and download course material as needed.

1.6 Sustainable Tourism Practices

Key Sustainable Development Goal Targets

SDG 4.4

By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship.

SDG 6.4

By 2030, substantially increase water-use efficiency across all sectors and ensure sustainable withdrawals and supply of freshwater to address water scarcity and substantially reduce the number of people suffering from water scarcity.

SDG 7.3

By 2030, double the global rate of improvement in energy efficiency.

SDG 7.a

By 2030, enhance international cooperation to facilitate access to clean energy research and technology, including renewable energy, energy efficiency and advanced and cleaner fossil-fuel technology, and promote investment in energy infrastructure and clean energy technology.

SDG 8.4

Improve progressively, through 2030, global resource efficiency in consumption and production and endeavour to decouple economic growth from environmental degradation, in accordance with the 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production, with developed countries taking the lead.

SDG 8.9

By 2030, devise and implement policies to promote sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products.

SDG 9.4

By 2030, upgrade infrastructure and retrofit industries to make them sustainable, with increased resource-use

efficiency and greater adoption of clean and environmentally sound technologies and industrial processes, with all countries taking action in accordance with their respective capabilities.

SDG 12.2

By 2030, achieve the sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources.

SDG 12.3

By 2030, halve per capita global food waste at the retail and consumer levels and reduce food losses along production and supply chains, including post-harvest losses.

SDG 12.4

By 2020, achieve the environmentally sound management of chemicals and all wastes throughout their life cycle, in accordance with agreed international frameworks, and significantly reduce their release to air, water and soil in order to minimise their adverse impacts on human health and the environment.

SDG 12.8

By 2030, ensure that people everywhere have the relevant information and awareness for sustainable development and lifestyles in harmony with nature.

SDG 12.b

Develop and implement tools to monitor sustainable development impacts for sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products.

SDG 13.2

Integrate climate change measures into national policies, strategies and planning.

SDG 14.1

By 2025, prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds, in particular from land-based activities, including marine debris and nutrient pollution.

SDG 14.2

By 2020, sustainably manage and protect marine and coastal ecosystems to avoid significant adverse impacts, including by strengthening their resilience, and take action for their restoration in order to achieve healthy and productive oceans.

SDG 14.5

By 2020, conserve at least 10 per cent of coastal and marine areas, consistent with national and international law and based on the best available scientific information.

SDG 15.9

By 2020, integrate ecosystem and biodiversity values into national and local planning, development processes, poverty reduction strategies and accounts.

During 2021, the tourism industry experienced a relatively slow recovery across the world with an increase of just of 4% rise in international tourist arrivals compared to 2020 according to the UN World Tourism Organisation World Tourism Barometer. The latter also indicates that the European region has enjoyed the largest increases at 19%. Persistence of resilience remains the key challenging factor to those regions' economies that predominantly depend on tourism related activities. The Maltese islands' performance during 2021 can be considered as very promising, with a rise of 47% in the number of visitors as compared to 2020, while the number of nights spent increased by 61%.

During this period, the then Ministry for Tourism and Consumer Protection (MTCP) and the Ministry for Gozo (MGOZ) directed many of their efforts towards mitigating the effects of the pandemic and outlining the government's strategy for recovery, which provided strategic direction to the tourism industry.

1.6.1 Tourism Strategy

In 2021, the then MTCP, together with the Malta Tourism Authority (MTA), launched a strategy for the years 2021-2030 entitled Recover, Rethink, Revitalize.⁸ The ten-year strategy is based on key principles that are considered as fundamental for guiding the development of tourism in Malta. These principles take into consideration the current domestic situation and sets out the national priorities for the sector. The strategy is based on the three-pronged approach of recovering, rethinking, and revitalising this important pillar of Maltese economic activity. It presents an opportunity at an important juncture in Malta's development and considers international tourism's next evolutionary steps following the turmoil that commenced in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This opportunity allows the country to re-establish its tourism industry on a sounder footing and in line with international ideals and commitments in the fields of sustainable development and climate change that are rapidly requiring urgent action on a global level.

1.6.2 Human resource-related investment

Human resource are the backbone of Malta's hospitality sector. Back in 2020, together with the MTA, the then MTCP had launched a €6 million training scheme directed at the idle tourism workforce with opportunities to reskill and upskill the current human resource complement in order to prepare the sector to be able to provide an improved and stronger tourism product in the post-COVID period. This is an ongoing project, which continued during 2021 and is still active till this day.

Another initiative coordinated by the MTA, which has the aim of encouraging the private sector to invest in staff development and to reward the efforts of those employees who excel, is the Quality Assured Scheme, which continued to be implemented in 2021. The scheme provides public recognition of quality services which are provided by restaurants, destination management companies (DMCs), and visitor attractions. Environmental and social sustainability are two pillars that quality assured partners must be accountable for in order to give back to the local community.

Other actions undertaken by the MTA during 2021 to address investment in human resources are the following:

- Erasmus +: Improving Quality of Service Standards within the Catering Sector in Malta 2020 – 2023. A nine-day traineeship is being offered to 36 key restaurant personnel, with training taking place at the headquarters of Gambero Rosso in Rome. This programme focuses on the importance of delivering quality service.
- Apprezza Campaign and the Choice Programme: The aim of these initiatives is to entice the younger generation to take up careers in the hospitality industry. The former is for primary school students and the latter for secondary school students. Furthermore, the visitor attractions, restaurant establishments, and DMCs were given subsidies towards first aid courses to ensure that at least one member of the staff per shift is trained in first aid.

⁸ Malta Tourism Strategy 2021-2030 available at: https://meae.gov.mt/en/Public_Consultations/MTCP/PublishingImages/Pages/Consultations/MaltaTourismStrategy20212030RecoverRethinkRevitalise/maltatourismstrategy_2030.pdf

1.6.3 Product Development

During 2021, the then MTCP continued with its maintenance efforts in tourism hot spots and continued working on the planning and implementation of several infrastructural projects related to sustainable development and the safeguarding and improvement of Malta's social, cultural, and natural environment. The Cleansing and Maintenance Division and the Foundation for Tourism Zones were instrumental in this regard.

During the period under review, maintenance and improvements have been carried out in several coastal towns and beaches. Beaches have been carefully cleaned (including sand sifting), and accessibility improved to ensure a safe and pleasurable environment for tourists who visit Malta.

There was also a sustained effort to protect the country's marine environment by the relevant authorities. Key measures related to coastal areas included:

- beach management by the MTA;
- support offered towards management plans for Marine Protection Areas, Special Areas of Conservation and Natura 2000 sites; and
- two EU-funded projects managed by the MTA together with two NGOs, Din l-Art Helwa and Fondazzjoni Wirt Artna, to restore five coastal towers built by the Knights of St John. These coastal towers will provide interesting attractions for tourists in off-the-beaten track locations.

Initiatives were also aimed towards localities that are not traditionally associated with tourism, with the objective of improving Malta's tourism product and offload pressures from more frequently visited tourism zones. Furthermore, regeneration projects are currently being undertaken in Marsaxlokk and in Birżebbuġa, whilst the MTA is also working to identify lesser-known areas which can be developed and regenerated for tourism.

The management of cultural attractions is crucial for improving the tourism product and supporting sustainable tourism development. One important restoration project is that undertaken by the Mediterranean Conference Centre (MCC). This project involves the restoration and upgrading of the MCC to enhance the visitor experience and increase tourism attendance at this location which is one of Malta's foremost historical sites.

The Interreg project 'Destinations SMEs' concluded in 2021. One of the main objectives of this project was to ensure the longevity of artisan and crafts heritage. An Action Plan was developed that proposes measures that would help producers of authentic products team up in a network, share ideas, and devise strategies to put to the fore Gozo's products, culture, and heritage, and, thus, enhance the visitor experience. Interestingly, not only does this project provide sustainability to a particular niche market, but also to tourism in Gozo on a general level, thereby curbing shoulder period challenges. The action plan led to the establishment of an Association of Artisans, the Gozo Artisan Network, and the launch of a territorial Quality Label, known as the Gozo Quality Mark, to certify art, crafts, and artisanal products through the workmanship and experience of artisans based in Gozo.

1.6.4 Green and Circular Tourism

Tourism can also contribute towards a green and circular economic transition. Measures and initiatives aimed at increasing operational efficiency, the reduction of Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions, and waste and resource management practices, are instrumental for the achievement of the SDGs. Investing in sustainable production and consumption models in relevant economic sectors not only addresses environmental issues but also enhances social cohesion and social responsibility, thus reinforcing the link between the three pillars of sustainable development.

The then MTCP implemented a project entitled CIVITAS DESTINATIONS under the Horizon 2020 programme. This project was undertaken together with five other islands that are popular tourist destinations in order to improve competences and skills to address mobility requirements for tourists and residents in these islands. The ministry partnered with the University of Malta (UoM), Transport Malta, and the Valletta Local Council in order to implement different measures connected with this project. The ministry also implemented a competition to select the best hotel mobility plans, which were submitted by hotels, and awarded three projects with a total fund of €70,000.

MGOZ and EWA also continued participating in an Interreg MED programme named INCIRCLE Knowledge Platform. The purpose of the project is to promote sustainable water and energy use in the tourism sector. During the past year, EWA collated actions from existing national strategies which affect the tourism sector and discussed with stakeholders in the sector to get information on the implementation of these measures. As part of this activity, EWA used a Strategy Assessment Framework which helped in identifying different sustainable measures that can be implemented within the tourism sectors in the Mediterranean. Furthermore, MGOZ finalised works on the local demonstrator for the Gozo pilot area, consisting of an underground water reservoir capable of holding approximately 550 cubic metres of water.

During the period of review, the Institute of Tourism Studies (ITS), in collaboration with SUNx Malta, developed a Climate Friendly Travel Education Capacity Building programme, which is part of an EU-led programme for 100,000 STRONG Climate Champions across all UN States by 2030. The developed training programme is in the form of a diploma, equivalent to Malta Qualifications Framework (MQF) Level 4, with total credits of 120 European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET). The programme is taught over a 12-month period in two semesters followed by a one-year International Institute for Peace Through Tourism internship.

The ITS also participated in an ongoing EU co-financed LIFE project, which is led by the Italian network for vocational education and training (VET), ENAIP NET. In line with SDG 12, the LIFE FOSTER project consists of direct and indirect actions aimed at raising awareness about the problem of food waste and optimal food storage in the catering sector. Apart from equipping personnel with the necessary skills to reduce consumption and waste, this project developed a methodology for measuring waste in the restaurant environment with a view to help restaurant owners become more efficient and to promote responsible buying.

Furthermore, the then MTCP also launched a project with the aim to draft a long-term plan aimed at the decarbonisation of the tourism sector, called 'Toward Net-Zero Tourism Accommodation'. The tourism sector is highly vulnerable to climate change, and at the same time contributes to GHG emissions, which cause global warming. Accelerating climate action in tourism is therefore of utmost importance for the resilience of the sector. Once this project is finalised, the government would be in a better position to monitor the carbon footprint of the collective accommodation sector and direct initiatives to leverage the necessary investments to accelerate the decarbonisation of tourism operations, with a view to attain our overall climate ambitions and the SDGs. This is also in line with Malta's national Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS) and the new Tourism Strategy 2021-2030, which includes an overarching vision of being a leading example of a carbon-neutral tourism destination, offering real solutions to the public and private sectors to become more competitive in the new paradigm.

1.7 Conserving and Protecting National Heritage and Arts

Key Sustainable Development Goal Targets

SDG 11.4

Strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage.

In 2021, The Cultural Directorate spearheaded the launch of the National Cultural Policy (NCP) 2021.⁹ Covering a multitude of topics pertinent to the cultural sphere, it is guided by a set of principles, one of which is the creation of a sustainable framework within which culture can operate in line with the SDGs while promoting other vital aspects such as social inclusion, the enhancement of the vitality of the sector, and ensuring its economic fundamentals.

In line with international commitments undertaken by Malta, this policy seeks to address with a certain urgency some of these global concerns. This will be achieved through a series of measures which will first and foremost strengthen the public bodies in the cultural heritage sector with the necessary tools and resources in order to be better able to carry out their designated roles in a more effective manner. This drive will be underpinned by a boost in research and funding to ensure that future developments and consultations are based and buttressed with scientific fundamentals.

Secondly, Malta will be promoting the importance of sustainable cultural tourism practices that integrate the management of cultural heritage, arts events, and tourism activities in collaboration with local communities to create positive spill overs to achieve social, environmental, cultural, and economic benefits for all stakeholders.

This policy also promotes the retention, preservation, and promotion of both tangible and intangible culture in a sustainable manner. In the case of the former, this will be done through a myriad of measures ranging from the retention of traditional streetscapes to the protection of underwater heritage. On the other hand, intangible heritage will be protected through approaches which integrate education and the encouragement of active citizenship at a local level.

The priorities identified in the NCP 2021 and their envisaged outcomes aim at ushering a new era of cultural development in Malta. Through tangible actions in legislation, funding, research, strategy development, capacity building, and infrastructure, this policy presents a framework built on evidence, consultation, and expertise. The NCP 2021 is an opportunity to transform a collective, bold, and ambitious vision for Malta into a creative future that is open, resilient, regenerative, and sustainable.

During 2021, the government introduced several new projects with the aim of safeguarding and conserving Malta and Gozo's national heritage and arts. Through EWA, for instance, the government completed a restoration project on the underground reservoir in Vittoriosa's Victory Square. The restored reservoir has a water holding capacity of 800,000 litres of secondary water to be used in the locality for landscape irrigation and street cleaning, among other uses. Through these works, the reservoir underwent extensive rehabilitation works to enable the reinstatement of its water catchment capacity, with the removal of over sixty-four tons of sludge.

During 2021, the Cultural Heritage Directorate within MGOZ embarked on a series of projects. For instance, the Ravelin, in the main road up the hill to the Ċittadella, went through a restoration and rehabilitation process. Moreover, custom-made benches made of local marble, wood, and an iron back with a design showing the Three Hills were placed in Cathedral Square inside the Ċittadella.

⁹ Malta Tourism Strategy 2021-2030 available at: https://meae.gov.mt/en/Public_Consultations/MTCP/PublishingImages/Pages/Consultations/MaltaTourismStrategy20212030RecoverRethinkRevitalise/maltatourismstrategy_2030.pdf

As part of a landscaping programme, several niches and monuments around Gozo were restored. These included the Niche of St Anne and that of Our Lady of Solitude, both at the Ċittadella, the Niche of Our Lady located in the limits of Xagħra, the stone statue of St John the Baptist, in Xewkija, and the monument of Pope John Paul II, in Victoria.

In 2021, geological investigations were also carried out at the aqueducts, located outside the limits of Victoria, which were built by the British between 1839 and 1843 to transport water from the springs in Għar Ilma to the reservoirs below the Ċittadella. These are now in the process of being restored.

There was also work carried out in relation to Għar Gerduf, which is an ancient 3rd/4th century Roman burial site excavated in the rock, in the limits of Kerċem and is an area of significant archaeological importance. The site was fully expropriated in 2021 and, in collaboration with the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage, the process of carrying out archaeological investigations is underway.

The eight corner windmill, an icon in the heart of Gozo, was fully restored. It was inaugurated in the early weeks of 2021 and is now open for the general public.



Empowering People

Throughout 2021, the government continued to develop and implement a number of measures and initiatives with the aim of facilitating greater social mobility and reducing poverty, while investing in the social and health sectors. These include, amongst others, measures aimed at the reinforcement of the social benefits framework, including assistance to pensioners, elderly persons, and persons with disabilities, as well as measures aimed at supporting and investing in human capital and safeguarding the well-being of families and children.

A Social Vision for Malta 2035: Shaping the Future of our Society, which was launched for public consultation in 2021, provides an overarching high-level framework to guide the development of the social sector in the medium-to long-term. This vision document is intended to build upon existing strategies, while at the same time pave the way to ameliorate policy development and, thus, better address current and future challenges. The Social Vision 2035 is set upon the principles of social justice and solidarity and targets a broad range of cohorts and vulnerable groups, inter alia families, children, young people, elderly persons, persons with disability, persons at risk of poverty and social exclusion, persons with addictions, ex-offenders, persons identifying as LGBTIQ, migrants, and persons experiencing or at risk of violence, abuse, and exploitation.

Chapter 2

This chapter highlights the measures and initiatives undertaken by the government which are linked to the 2030 Agenda, namely **SDGs 1-5, 8, 10, 11 and 16**.

2030 AGENDA-RELATED GOALS



2.1 Good Health and Well-being

Health and well-being have always been placed high on the agenda of the Maltese government. This became even more of a reality with the unrelenting COVID-19 pandemic, which has put a lot of strain on governments worldwide. However, despite these challenges and Malta's limited resources, it has to be said that the country's healthcare system managed to stay resilient while ensuring that all the needs arising from the pandemic were met and addressed in the most efficient and effective manner possible.

Malta's national health service remains increasingly challenged by an ageing population, a fast-growing expat population, together with increasingly innovative and expensive new drugs. That being said, an integral part of the government's plans to address a sustainable healthcare system is investment in primary care, both in terms of retaining the healthcare workforce and of developing specialised clinics to ensure affordable access to timely and curative medical treatment. Currently, the mortality rate from preventable causes in Malta is among the lowest in the EU, with the treatment of non-communicable diseases expecting to rise with the introduction of these specialised clinics due to more timely and effective diagnosis and treatment.

2.1.1 Addressing Communicable Diseases

Key Sustainable Development Goal Targets

SDG 3.3

By 2030, end the epidemics of AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and neglected tropical diseases and combat hepatitis, waterborne diseases and other communicable diseases.

SDG 3.8

Achieve universal health coverage, including financial risk protection, access to quality essential healthcare services and access to safe, effective, quality and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all.

Combatting communicable diseases in a period of an ongoing pandemic proved to be a challenging experience during 2021. The services relating to existing diseases continued to be provided, however, the prevailing focus was on establishing an epidemiological surveillance programme that met with national and international standards so that once vaccines were approved by the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, a vaccination policy could be implemented. Awareness campaigns on sexual health and sexually transmitted diseases were conducted. On a more general level, the INTEGRATE Joint Action project has been launched to develop strategies on how to continue with the treatment for the human immunodeficiency virus, better known as HIV, hepatitis, tuberculosis, and sexually transmitted diseases.

The strategic emphasis in combatting the COVID-19 pandemic predominantly focused on test, track, and trace provisions to effectively prevent transmission of the virus and minimise hospital admissions. In addition, pandemic action plans focused on strengthening healthcare capacity, designing policy based on evidence, and devising campaigns with the purpose of informing citizens on methods in fighting and preventing the spread of the pandemic.

The management, storage, and analysis of statistical data presented an increased challenge during the pandemic. The demand in statistical data increased, as the pandemic response team coordinated data being gathered from a variety of sources, such as contact tracing and case management information. The records stored by the Health

Department assisted in identifying patients suffering from health conditions that put them at risk of serious illness or death should they become infected. This information was then used to facilitate and prioritise the vaccination of vulnerable patients.

To assist in the transmission of data information, ICT and data management systems were introduced, such as a travel site, a COVID-19 results site, a test recording and tracking system, a dynamics test registration application, and other systems including the continuation of the daily reporting on COVID-19-related information.

2.1.2 Treatment of Non-Communicable Diseases

2.1.2.1 Cancer Care

The Joint Action Innovative Partnership for Action against Cancer was a major focus during 2021. This project, which concluded in December 2021, aimed to introduce a number of measures towards the strengthening and development of a new National Cancer Plan and further establish a feasible implementable work process in this important field for 2022 and beyond.

On a more tangible level, the FastTrack Electronic Referral platform for cancer patients today boasts 270 doctors who are able to refer and fast-track suspected cancer cases through this system.

Furthermore, during 2021, the number of new cancer patients who benefited from Nurse Navigation Services increased. Such services check on the health and symptoms of patients two years after the end of their treatment, providing advice if necessary. This service makes the Oncology Outpatient services more sustainable, as it releases slots that can be used to manage new oncology cases in a timelier fashion. In 2021, the Cancer Care Directorate issued the call to extend the Nurse Navigation Services to breast cancer patients. Moreover, a new follow-up clinic for prostate cancer patients was set up, led by the Urology Nurse Navigator, as well as other new nurse-led clinics.

During 2021, the Survivorship Rehabilitation Coordination project, which seeks to assist cancer patients in identifying and better managing challenges that they might meet following the end of their treatment, continued to expand its services to cover prostate, lung, breast, gynaecologic and blood cancers. Work also continued on the Holistic Needs Assessment Clinic, which was also extended to Gozo, with the aim of carrying out individual evaluations on cancer patients who have finished treatment. Furthermore, work started on expanding short courses on tailoring recovery after cancer, and which provide information and support to these patients to cover other types of cancer.

All these projects seek to address current needs and cover developments in the area, including the goal that each EU Member State must have a Comprehensive Cancer Centre accredited in its territory by 2025.

2.1.2.2 Obesity and Eating Disorders

Obese people are at an increased risk of developing chronic non-communicable conditions associated with hypertension, diabetes, and heart disease, and it is for this reason that significant measures are taken to prevent this and decrease premature mortality. During 2021, healthcare professionals referred individuals suffering from obesity and eating disorders to attend programmes tailored to their needs by a multidisciplinary team. Various services have been provided to a number of patients, particularly adolescents and their relatives, such as awareness-raising and educational campaigns on healthy dietary and physical activity patterns, particularly focusing on the reduction of sugar intake, while giving other dietary advice.

Activities within the Dar Kenn Għal Saħħtek facility were also organised to promote healthy living and the importance of being active in one's daily life. These included discussions organised by the resident multidisciplinary team made up of physiotherapists, psychiatrists, and nutritionists.

2.1.3 Strengthening treatment and access to free medicines

In an effort to enhance access to safe and affordable medicines, the Exceptional Medicines Committee examined a number of applications to provide medicines for the treatment of rare conditions that are not on the Government Formulary List. In addition, during 2021, fifteen new medicines were introduced in the list, from which 23,000 patients are expected to benefit. The medicines are intended to assist patients in the treatment of both communicable and non-communicable diseases.

An assessment of fifty-six innovative medicines for fifteen new indications that are expected to improve the lives of 55,000 patients in the coming years was also made. Access to medicines has been further strengthened with several changes to the formulary, including the revision of seventeen protocols for more new conditions. Four new conditions have also been added to schedule V and a considerable number of medicines have been mapped.

To this, one can also add that in 2021, in a bid to improve the management of medicines, government officials continued to participate in European-funded projects with the purpose of increasing efficiency and governance in public service practices.

2.1.4 Expanding digital health solutions

The digital transformation agenda is presenting opportunities to deliver digital health solutions in a way designed to reduce the strain on secondary healthcare and increase access to care. In 2021, the Remote Patient Monitoring service towards strengthening the prevention of chronic diseases was launched as part of a pilot project addressing Type 1 diabetes in children and adolescents, where patients were provided with continuous glucose monitors to monitor their blood sugar levels.

Furthermore, in reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic, certain developments to the ICT infrastructure and the hardware used by medical professionals were necessitated. A COVID-19 vaccine digital certificate system was introduced and healthcare professionals were provided with mobile hardware in order to facilitate documentation access and provide better treatment and medical advice to their patients.

2.1.5 Health workforce management

During 2021, work continued on the establishment of a Health Workforce Planning and Forecasting Unit, headed by the People Management Division, as part of the 2020-2030 Health Strategy. The aim is to have ongoing communication and work with stakeholders, especially with educational and financial institutions, to establish the needs of the health workforce in the future with a visit by World Health Organization officials to discuss the strategy and tools for calculating needs taking place. Efforts to enhance retaining the allied health workforce are also ongoing and training projects funded through the ESF continued to be provided.

2.2 Better quality of life for all

Key Sustainable Development Goal Targets

SDG 1.1

By 2030, eradicate extreme poverty for all people everywhere, currently measured as people living on less than \$1.25 a day.

SDG 1.2

By 2030, reduce at least by half the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions.

SDG 1.3

Implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable.

Improving the quality of life of people is one of sustainable development's main key objectives. Thus, throughout 2021, the government continued to ensure and safeguard the prosperity and overall well-being of all through various measures aimed at improving current income, social benefits, and social welfare services.

In collaboration with the Joint Research Centre of the EC, the Economic Policy Department (EPD) within the Ministry for Finance and Employment (MFE) continued to assist in modelling Malta's tax and benefits system using the micro-level simulation model, EUROMOD. EUROMOD is a static model that allows the simulation of different tax and benefit policies, using the EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions micro data to assess the distributional impact of these policies on disposable household income.

In 2021, the EPD conducted research on the impact of the pandemic on poverty and income distribution in Malta, particularly by modelling the impact of the wage supplement scheme in 2020 and 2021 on households and individuals. The model was also used for research on the minimum wage and for the simulation of social benefits reforms, as part of a project with the World Bank.

2.2.1 Pensions, Social Benefits and Social Welfare Services

The population-ageing phenomenon is associated with an increase in age-related expenditure. In order to ensure the long-term sustainability of public finances, a number of policies are advocated with a view to ensure that government has enough room for manoeuvre to absorb such projected increases in expenditure.

Over the years, the Maltese government made significant efforts to reform the pension system with the aim of safeguarding its fiscal sustainability. The main initiatives included the progressive increases in the retirement age, increases in the contributory period required to be granted full pension, and the provision of fiscal incentives to those who choose to defer retirement beyond retirement age. In addition, the government has also progressed in enabling the diversification of retirement income through the introduction and subsequent strengthening of tax incentives with respect to voluntary third pillar pensions and voluntary occupational pensions.

For instance, in 2021, the fiscal incentive for persons who invest in a private pension, as well as for employers offering a voluntary scheme that is non-contributory on the part of the employee was improved so that the annual financial investment upon which a tax exemption applies was increased by €1,000 bringing the tax-exempt value up to €3,000 per year.

Moreover, for 2021, the maximum pension income that is exempt from income tax was increased to €14,058, while pensioners who are taxed using the married tax computation, benefitted from an increase of €3,600 in the income that is exempt from income tax. Finally, there was also an increase in the VAT-exempt threshold for SMEs from €20,000/€24,000 to €30,000. As a result, this measure has reduced significantly the administrative burden and costs for a substantial amount of small Maltese enterprises.

Following the submission of the Strategic Review to the House of Representatives in 2020, an exercise projecting pension expenditure was carried out during 2021, which included an extensive sensitivity analysis whereby a number of scenarios borne out of recommendations were individually modelled and analysed.

In addition, it should be mentioned that, during 2021, a follow-up of the Pensions Strategic Review Document took place. This document had been tabled in Parliament on 15 December 2020 and issued for public consultation, in accordance with the Social Security Act (Chapter 318 of the Laws of Malta), which stipulates that a strategic review report has to be drawn up and tabled in Parliament every 5 years.

Following a three-month period for public consultation, the inter-ministerial Pension Strategy Group, appointed back in 2017, analysed the feedback received and submitted its final report with recommendations to the government in September 2021. These are currently under consideration by the government although some recommendations were already taken on board.

Further to the above, a number of tax refund schemes, allowances, and grants were introduced as part of the government's strategy to effectively address issues concerning income and social benefits in Malta. One such allowance relates to the cost of living, where €1.75 per week were awarded. Additionally, both contributory as well as non-contributory pensioners were also paid, in addition to the cost-of-living allowance, the amount of €3.25 per week.

Moreover, a tax refund was granted to persons who were in employment during 2019 and who did not earn more than €60,000 from such employment. This measure benefitted 250,000 persons with the amount issued equalling €18 million.

2021 also saw the introduction of the Carer Grant. Following the reform of carers' benefits, a new benefit was introduced with effect from January 2021 for parents who have to leave work to care for a child with a disability over the age of 16 years who is entitled to the Increased Assistance for Severe Disability. This benefit amounts to €300

per year with the parents remaining eligible to receive the grant until they reach the age of retirement. In the event of a beneficiary failing to qualify for a pension, the grant will also continue to be paid.

Following the 2017 carer benefit reform, coupled with a sharp improvement in pay rates, the number of carers who take care of their relatives within the same residence has more than tripled and reached around 1,500. Retired people were excluded from qualifying for these benefits, known as the Increased Carer's Allowance and the Carer's Allowance. Within this context, the eligibility criteria were extended with a view to give such persons the opportunity to also qualify as long as they are not caring for their spouse and as long as they periodically undergo a medical examination to ascertain that they are physically fit and mentally capable of giving this treatment.

During the period under review, the following subsidies and schemes aiming for sustainable socio-economic development in Gozo were sustained, these being:

- A grant payable to Malta resident students following full-time courses in Gozo;
- A grant payable to Gozitan resident students following full-time courses in Malta;
- Financial assistance to patients travelling between the Maltese islands;
- The Gozitan Sportsperson Assistance Scheme;
- An additional benefit covering rental cost for Gozitan students studying in Malta; as well as
- A Gozo resident workers subsidy including the collective transport subsidy for Gozitan residents working full time in Malta both in the public sector and in the private sector.

In 2021, subject to an agreement between MGOZ and FSWS that was signed in 2020, €350,000 were allocated to FSWS, whereby a training and integration programme for jobseekers aimed at strengthening inclusiveness and independent living was undertaken.

MGOZ also continued with the service of active-ageing day centres around Gozo, where several activities such as Be Active, gilding lessons, and several outings are held and organised to keep the elderly population active both mentally and physically. The University of Third Age also offers lectures to the elderly population in Gozo to keep them continuously mentally active and updated on recent technologies. Santa Marta Day Care Centre also continued its service to persons with a disability from the age of eighteen upwards. At the Santa Marta Day Care Centre, clients are taught basic life skills through several outings including weekend breaks to make them more independent and to help with inclusivity within the community.

2.2.2 Safeguarding Working Conditions

The Department of Industrial and Employment Relations (DIER) continued to assist companies to implement short-time work arrangements through the issuing of permits as per Article 42 of the Employment and Industrial Relations Act (EIRA, Chapter 452 of the Laws of Malta). This article of the law allows for employers to implement different working conditions on a temporary basis in order to avoid redundancies. Currently around twenty companies are still renewing these short-time work arrangements with the majority of temporary working conditions implemented being either a reduction in hours or periods of unpaid leave. It has been estimated that around 25,000 jobs were saved due to these permits.

Ongoing consultations and discussions continued within the ambit of the Employment and Relations Board as part of the transposition process for Directive (EU) 2019/1158 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on work-life balance for parents and carers. The objectives of this directive call for changes in parental leave, paternity leave, as well as the addition of carers' leave. The deadline by which this directive needs to be fully transposed is 2 August 2022.

The DIER also engaged in discussions at EU level on the proposal for a directive to strengthen the application of the principle of equal pay for equal work or work of equal value between men and women through pay transparency and enforcement mechanisms. While negotiations with the European Parliament are still to commence, once in force, this Directive will introduce or consolidate existing provisions which ensure that there is no discrimination on the basis of gender which disadvantages women in terms of remuneration and possibilities for advancement at work.

To this, one can add the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE)'s work on the Equal Pay Tool that was developed as part of the EU-funded project Prepare the Ground for Economic Independence to check an organisation's equal pay for work of equal value between women and men during Equality Mark audits. Currently, the NCPE is working to enhance the Equal Pay Tool software to finetune it and produce more reliable results that are easier to interpret.

As from 1 October 2021, thirteen government departments have started working remotely, offering increased work-life balance and flexible working arrangements for public officers, in particular those with family responsibilities, hence contributing to family well-being.

The remote working policy allows public officers to adopt differing work schedules to meet their own personal needs and also those of their family, while also helping them avoid rush hour traffic and reduce the number of times they commuted to their respective offices and places of work. The latter in turn contributed to the minimisation of car emissions. Additionally, this policy is also contributing to less crowded offices, making for a more sustainable working environment that is cleaner, safer, and more comfortable for employees.

2.3 Empowering Children and Young People

Key Sustainable Development Goal Targets

SDG 3.5

Strengthen the prevention and treatment of substance abuse, including narcotic drug abuse and harmful use of alcohol.

SDG 10.2

By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status.

Initiatives supporting youth and children continued all throughout 2021 with the government, through entities like Aġenzija Żgħażaġh, developing new policies, measures and programmes favouring the empowerment, growth and well-being of children and young persons residing in Malta. During 2021, the new National Youth Policy 'Towards 2030 – Reaching out to, working with, and supporting young people' ¹⁰ was launched. This policy will focus on all young people between the ages of 13 and 30 and will coincide with a number of other strategies including the UN Youth Strategy, Youth 2030, and the 2030 Agenda. The policy puts forth a vision where all young people should be respected, valued and listened to, and be supported and encouraged in building fulfilling personal and social relationships, in developing their innate abilities and talents for the benefit of themselves, their communities and society, and in empowering them to take action on global issues.

¹⁰ The National Youth Policy is available here: https://meae.gov.mt/en/Public_Consultations/MEDE/Pages/Consultations/NationalYouthPolicyTowards2030Reachingouttoworkingwithandsupportingyoungpeople.aspx#:~:text=Towards%202030%20%2D%20Reaching%20out%20to,and%20opportunities%20that%20lie%20ahead.

2.3.1 Supporting young people at risk of poverty

Throughout 2021, a number of programmes and initiatives were set up to support young people at risk of poverty. One such initiative is Kickstart, which is an educational initiative for young people residing at the Centre of Residential Restoratives Services at Mtaħleb. The aim of this programme is to empower the participants to better recognise their potential and foster more confidence in their successful reintegration into the community.

In addition, Aġenzija Żgħażaġħ continued a programme called Youth.Inc, which had been launched in 2014 as an education and learning programme for young people between the ages of 16 and 21 who wish to continue to build on their educational experience and gain more knowledge, values, and skills to either enter the labour market or gain qualifications to continue further education and training. Through these programmes, the government is actively seeking to eradicate the problem of poverty within younger generations.

Furthermore, the National Action Plan for a Child Guarantee 2022-2030 aims to tackle poverty and social exclusion among children and their families by providing children with effective and free access to social protection, inclusive and quality healthcare and education, as well as adequate nutrition and housing.

2.3.2 Promoting the health and well-being of young people

Aġenzija Żgħażaġħ developed a Lifeskills Programme which is made up of different initiatives intended to promote a holistic approach to the health and well-being of young people. Initiatives in the Lifeskills Programme aim to:

- enhance young people's capacity to deal with stressful situations effectively by identifying and expanding their emotional vocabulary;
- further enable young people's competences to deal with hate speech and equip them with skills to counter intimidating behaviour, such as bullying, both within and outside schools, as well as online;
- provide young people with platforms through which they can express themselves on issues that affect their well-being through different media;
- enable young people to manage to their digital health and well-being effectively; and
- retain young people's participation in sport while catering for their overall well-being.

In the area of sport, during 2021, works continued at an advanced rate on the Gozo Aquatic Centre and Sports Complex. Once finished, this project will promote the well-being of citizens of all ages.

In addition to the above, in 2021, the Human Rights Directorate (HRD) launched the Young Achievers Campaign Against Drugs Scheme, which is intended to provide funding to Voluntary Organisations in support of national efforts to promote community-based interventions and to prevent the onset of substance abuse and related addictions. The scheme will create awareness among the younger members of our community on the harmful social and health effects of addictive substances and promote the well-being of members of the community through their participation in the scheme.

Furthermore, the HRD and Aġenzija Sedqa within the Foundation for Social Welfare Services (FSWS) also signed an agreement for a €1,053,684.87 investment to strengthen the prevention and treatment of substance abuse and addictions. This agreement will focus on four key areas, including the consolidation and strengthening of the T.F.A.L 5 and the Think Outside The Box prevention programmes; the implementation of a new S.A.F.E. programme aimed at workplaces; visibility campaigns to raise awareness of the services provided; and activities to promote the human rights dimensions of working with people with addiction.

2.3.3 Promoting equality and active participation among youths

Aġenzija Żgħażaġh has created new spaces and facilities at a local community level, including youth activity centres, youth cafés, youth hubs and regional and detached youth work services to support the development of young people through their active involvement and participation in non-formal learning opportunities. In this context, Aġenzija Żgħażaġh has provided programmes, projects, and cross-sectoral initiatives in the field of visual arts, literature, music and film for the active engagement, empowerment, and participation of young people with the aim of providing them with the necessary life skills to support their effective transition to adult life.

Aġenzija Żgħażaġh has also undertaken a range of projects and initiatives that aim to enhance equality and actively promote active citizenship and democratic participation. These include:

- Young parliamentarians, which is a programme that gives young people the skills needed for active citizenship through training and information on public speaking, debating, political lobbying, and pitching of ideas. The programme is also giving the students the opportunity to represent their respective schools in a debating competition—#ejjewniddibattu.
- IdeAzzjonisti is a programme for young people aged 14-18 who would like to participate in a community-based active citizenship programme. Throughout its course, this programme offers young people the opportunity to undergo training, carry out research and, as IdeAzzjonisti, present their communities with their ideas and work related to the chosen theme.
- The Model European Parliament Malta is an opportunity for young people aged from 16 to 19 years to take part as Maltese delegates in the international Model European Parliament sessions, which are held every six months in different European countries.
- The Student Councils Democracy Award is a programme for all secondary schools, where participating student councils compete for gold, silver, and bronze awards as they implement their action plans over a period of one scholastic year. This programme is underpinned by the values of democracy, active citizenship, participation, dialogue, leadership, and equality.

2.4 Inclusion and Social Well-being

Key Sustainable Development Goal Targets

SDG 10.2

By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status.

During 2021, Malta's 2021-2030 National Strategy on the Rights of Disabled Persons ¹¹ and the Malta's National Autism Strategy 2021-2030 were launched. Malta's 2021-2030 ¹² National Strategy on the Rights of Disabled Persons addresses key issues necessary for ensuring implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities at domestic level, with particular attention being paid to Malta's particularities, strengths, and key challenges. Malta's National Autism Strategy 2021-2030 details all the measures and initiatives that the government will be undertaking in the coming years in this sector, particularly with respect to increasing awareness as well as working towards the early identification and ensuring access to services to those on the autism spectrum, especially young children.

Throughout 2021, new projects and initiatives were put in place to support people with disabilities, while already existing services were further developed and improved. During the year, many services provided by Aġenzija Support were delivered remotely with professionals holding sessions with individuals and assisting them accordingly online. Having said this, the one-to-one contact of community services still continued to operate as usual according to the service users' wishes.

In August 2021, Aġenzija Support launched a new static driving simulator, hosted in the Sonia Tanti Independent Living Centre, which is a centre that provides information, guidance, and assessment by professionals to persons with disability and their families to lead an independent life within the community through the use of mobility equipment, assistive devices, and/or training. The new driving simulator provides an opportunity to assess service users' physical abilities by testing their reaction time, strength, and coordination in a simulated driving environment. It is an objective measure which contributes to the occupational therapists' complete assessment on a service users' ability to drive and is indicative of readiness for an on-road assessment.

Furthermore, in 2021, as part of the Access to Communication and Technology Unit's services, which specialise in providing augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) assessment and an electronic assistive technology service, Aġenzija Support procured liberator devices to provide service users with more comprehensive and objective assessments. This will also allow the clinicians to have access to a range of AAC devices that are suitable for children and adults with learning disabilities and, hence, enhance the overall service delivery.

By July 2021, all existent public-social partnership (PSP) agreements, except for 3, were renewed by the then Ministry for Inclusion and Social Wellbeing following their expiration in June 2021. In this regard, a new template for the PSP agreements has been introduced. With an investment of €8.2 million in 2021, around 223 persons with a disability benefitted from accommodation, respite, or day services related to their needs and level of support in order to continue living in the community and enjoy the best quality of life possible through such agreements.

During 2021, agencies and departments involved in the sector have also developed referral pathways for persons with disabilities to provide a clear guide to facilitate access to the required services. These entities also presented a list of services and a brief summary of the services offered to persons with disabilities over 18 years of age and have made it easier for people to understand where, to whom, and how a referral should be made.

Following the increase of the Severe Disability Increased Assistance payment to the same level as the net national minimum wage, the parameters of the Barthel Index were extended from 0 to 8 and from 0 to 9, with a view to provide more opportunities to those who really cannot work because of their disability to qualify for this increased assistance. The parameters for intellectual disability conditions were also expanded, from 14 to 13, thus making

¹¹ Malta's 2021 – 2030 National Strategy on the Rights of Disabled Persons, available at: https://meae.gov.mt/en/Public_Consultations/MISW/PublishingImages/Pages/Consultations/Maltas20212030NationalStrategyontheRightsofDisabledPersons/Proposed%20National%20Disability%20Strategy%20%E2%80%93%20Standard%20English%20version.pdf

¹² Malta's 2021 – 2030 National Autism Strategy, available at: https://meae.gov.mt/en/Public_Consultations/MISW/PublishingImages/Pages/Consultations/MaltaNationalAutismStrategy20212030/National%20Autism%20Strategy%20ENG.pdf

more people with intellectual disabilities who are unable to work eligible for the increased assistance as well.

In order to assist persons with a disability who need to purchase special equipment in order for them to live an independent life, MFE has a scheme in place, whereby eligible applicants may apply for a grant on the purchase price of the special equipment.

Moreover, MFE, together with Agencija Sapoort, administers the Scheme for Exemptions/Reductions/Grants related to Motor Vehicles for Persons with Disability. This scheme is targeted at three categories of beneficiaries:

- i. persons whose disability precludes them from driving;
- ii. persons with a disability who can drive; and
- iii. parents (carers), first-line family members, husband or wife of the persons with disability.

The beneficiaries benefit from an exemption/subsidy on the vehicle's registration tax and annual circulation tax, from a grant equivalent to VAT on cost, insurance, and freight (CIF) and import duty, where applicable, and a grant equivalent to the duty and VAT incurred on local modifications of vehicles, where applicable. This scheme targets the well-being of the disabled person and his or her carers, who, on a daily basis, ensure that the said person is able to participate equally in all areas of life.

The government continued to assist philanthropic and charitable institutions through the scheme entitled Exemptions/Subsidies related to Motor Vehicles for Philanthropic Organisations/Charitable Institutions. This scheme is targeted at charitable and philanthropic institutions, old people's homes and lay movements, which, if eligible, may benefit from exemption or subsidy on a vehicle's registration tax and a subsidy on the annual circulation tax. These organisations, whose aim is to provide relief of poverty, pain and suffering, and other humanitarian needs, are thus facilitated by this scheme to provide mobility to the persons in their care, contributing to their well-being.



2.5 Education, Knowledge and Skills

Key Sustainable Development Goal Targets

SDG 4.1

By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes.

SDG 4.2

By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education.

SDG 4.3

By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university.

SDG 4.4

By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship.

SDG 4.5

By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations.

SDG 4.6

By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy.

SDG 4.7

By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development.

SDG 8.6

By 2020, substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training.



Sustaining lifelong learning and life-wide and high-quality literacy practices has always been at the forefront of the government's agenda. These are being promoted primarily by the National Literacy Agency, which also strives to improve literacy outcomes, resulting in inclusive practices, higher educational qualifications, and better job prospects. In 2021, the agency adapted the delivery of its programmes to the prevailing needs and restrictions arising due to the COVID-19 pandemic. To abide by COVID-19 mitigation measures, the programmes normally delivered in person in schools continued to be delivered online for the most part of the year until a gradual return to onsite delivery became possible. Furthermore, schemes that sustain access to literacy resources were extended. This is seen, for instance, in the project aimed at supporting the creation of home libraries in the homes of socio-economically vulnerable children in the 0-5 years age bracket, which was extended to vulnerable children of up to 16 years. Thus, a scheme originally devised to enable children in quarantine to have access to books to read at home was extended to all children up to 16 years.

In addition, the Policy on Inclusive Education in Schools was updated to become the overarching measure and include various goals related to disability, attendance, gender, promoting a healthy lifestyle and managing behaviour in schools. The policy adopts a whole-school approach philosophy of how schools are to develop conducive learning environments for all. Moreover, the autism units and multisensory room projects are ongoing together with the implementation of the inclusion policy.

Further to the above, the MFHEA developed the 2030 Further and Higher Education Strategic Vision, which identifies the priority areas and the related objectives forming the direction for further and higher education strategy in Malta for the next decade. This vision is aimed at ensuring innovative, flexible, accessible, and inclusive quality further and higher education that inspires individuals to develop relevant skills to contribute as community members and active citizens towards a digital and green sustainable global economy.

In February 2021, the MFHEA published the MQF impact assessment report, which identified areas for MQF policy developments. It proposes recommendations for implementing, promoting, and regulating the MQF and any further developments and changes concerning this framework. These recommendations have guided the design of the workplan for the European Qualifications Framework (EQF)–National Coordination Point project for 2021-2023, with the MFHEA being the national coordination point for the EQF responsible for the implementation of this project. From 2021-2023, the project will mainly focus on capacity training for stakeholders on the use and understanding of the MQF and the EQF and will seek to update the National Referencing Report which was published in 2016.

In 2021, the MFHEA continued to update the National Qualifications Database, which had been launched in November 2020, so that includes details on all accredited programmes, information on licensed institutions as well as all the National Occupational Standards related to the Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning. The database is compatible with the Qualifications Dataset Register of the EC, which allows study programmes in Malta to appear on the EUROPASS portal ensuring a more comprehensive database of qualifications in Europe. Since summer 2021, the database, which was further improved and developed following an original trial period, has fully replaced the register previously kept on the MFHEA website.

2.5.1 Educational projects and initiatives

During 2021, several initiatives such as the My Journey programme, the I Choose – Nagħżel il-Karriera Tiegħi fair, and further commitment by the National School Support Services (NSSS) to work on resources to be utilised as career guidance tools for practitioners among others, continued. In 2021, 68 students availed themselves of online one-to-one sessions with career guidance practitioners.

2021 also saw the launch of an Option Subjects' Handbook, which was distributed to all Year 8 students to provide them with more information about subjects which they could choose to study from Year 9 to Year 11. This handbook also includes decision-making tips to guide students in making the right choice. Moreover, the 'Nisimgħek online' helpline launched for students and their parents in 2020 due to the pandemic was extended during 2021. This helpline enabled students and parents to call at the respective college or at the NSSS to seek the professional service they require. These professional services vary between psycho-social services, which include counselling, career guidance and social work, among others, and those directly related to inclusive education.

During 2021, more than 600 boys and girls in Years 4, 5 and 6 from state, Church and independent Schools were given the opportunity to participate in the project entitled 'X'tixtieq issir la tikber', which was a competition organised by the Office of the Principal Permanent Secretary in collaboration with the NSSS. All students had the opportunity to spend some time at the place of work related to the career of their interest.

The NSSS, together with Institute for Education, is also involved in the peer learning event organised by the EC entitled 'Developing national frameworks for school education careers'. This framework was established so that a person entering into a career in education would know the pathways available throughout their professional lifetime and thus have ambitions to continue improving this identity in order to progress and have ownership and responsibility of this progression.

In addition, the NSSS also administers the Euroguidance Network, which involves developing actions in relation to training, mobility opportunities, development of resources for practitioners and end users, as well as organising conferences and stakeholders' fora.

2.5.2 Skills Development

In line with SDG 4 and its sub-targets for 2030 to increase the number of youths and adults to have relevant skills for employment, in 2021, Jobsplus continued to provide the necessary training opportunities and initiatives to help individuals in upskilling and reskilling so as to keep pace with rapidly changing skill needs. The Youth Guarantee Scheme continued to be administered targeting youths not in education, employment or training (NEETs). This scheme, which is administered by Jobsplus, includes the NEET Activation Scheme II, ICT Courses, SEC Revision classes, and the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST) preventive classes, and has now been widened to include individuals up till the age of 29 years.

Skills forecasting will be crucial to ensure sustainable economic growth and the sustainable employability of the workforce, thus safeguarding economic growth. In line with this, Jobsplus has launched the ERASMUS+ funded project – SMARTLY, which is a project that incorporates a survey and needs analysis with industry stakeholders, the design of training content in green and digital jobs, the design and testing of an enhanced profiling tool, which features specific elements relevant for digital and green skills, and a general awareness and promotion of these sectors.

The newly launched National Employment Policy (2021-2030) sees the commitment of the government to equip its workforce with in-demand skills. Reskilling and upskilling efforts remain at the forefront of the Maltese government's agenda. In this regard, Jobsplus has also launched the INTERCEPT programme aiming to motivate, mobilise, and support NEETs through a Green Career Pathway. The project is funded through the EEA and Norway Grants and is set to be fully implemented by 24 January 2024. It will seek to activate youths through a series of deliverables aimed at increasing awareness and competences in green skills, creating a better equipped workforce. The project will be utilising research and meta-analysis to activate NEETs aged between 25-29 years through an outreach strategy, career counselling, tailored activation, training, and workplace exposure, which will increase their competences in green skills. The project will also see an innovative pilot training programme leading to three hundred trained youths in green skills in three countries, of which one hundred participants will be trained in Malta.

Furthermore, in order to promote more upskilling, in 2021, Jobsplus continued to offer the Training Pays Scheme to encourage the workforce to participate in lifelong learning by offering assistance in the form of a training grant and aid participants with costs related to training. In addition, Jobsplus continued to administer the Investing in Skills Scheme with the aim of encouraging the training of persons actively participating in the Maltese labour market through financial assistance for employers to further upskill their personnel. Moreover, in order to ensure the sustainable upskilling of the labour force and guarantee that a level playing field for all is provided, all individuals residing in Malta who are of working age can participate in Jobsplus' free of charge courses, which are pegged to the national qualification framework and are demand-driven, aiming to equip participants with the necessary skills and knowledge to enter and retain gainful employment.

Additionally, the Traineeship and the Work Exposure Schemes continued to be available for jobseekers. The Traineeship Scheme provides a combination of on-the-job and off-the-job training where the programmes offered are demand-driven. Additionally, the Work Exposure Scheme is intended to facilitate the transition into employment by providing jobseekers with initial hands-on training that will help individuals obtain the knowledge, skills, and competences required to find and retain gainful employment.

Due to the onset of the global pandemic, Jobsplus has adapted its delivery methods of providing its services and training courses. From 2021, training courses started being offered through a hybrid model of online and in-class training with courses that involve practical sessions continuing to be offered through physical learning.

In line with SDG 8 to promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all, the Maltese government has also introduced targeted measures towards the most vulnerable groups within the Maltese labour market, including registered disabled persons. The Bridging the Gap Scheme continued to assist registered persons with disabilities and people in disadvantaged situations who are unemployed through the provision of the necessary support during the transition period from unemployment to employment. The scheme allows the employer to evaluate the performance of the individual in the workplace prior to proper engagement.

Moreover, together with the Lino Spiteri Foundation, Jobsplus continued to run the VASTE Programme, a €13 million project aimed at assisting disabled persons and vulnerable inactive individuals in finding and retaining suitable employment. In 2021, the programme was widened to include long-term unemployed and migrants, these being refugees, third-country nationals with a subsidiary protection status or temporary humanitarian status, and asylum seekers. The programme provides a holistic assessment to participants through multiple training options and professional support which might lead to several employment opportunities. Training opportunities under the programme include pre-employment training and Sheltered Employment Training (SET). SET is a one-year programme aimed at preparing individuals with mental, physical and/or intellectual disabilities for employment by stimulating a working environment and possibly move towards sheltered employment and, eventually, to open employment. Additionally, through the VASTE Programme, persons with disabilities and vulnerable jobseekers can also benefit from occupational therapy, professional support, job carving, job coaching, and mentoring.

2.6 Combatting Violence and Safeguarding Human Rights and Equality

Key Sustainable Development Goal Targets

SDG 5.1

End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere.

SDG 5.2

Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation.

SDG 5.3

Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation.

SDG 5.5

Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life.

SDG 5.c

Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels.

SDG 16.1

Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere.

SDG 16.2

End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children.

SDG 16.a

Strengthen relevant national institutions, including through international cooperation, for building capacity at all levels, in particular in developing countries, to prevent violence and combat terrorism and crime.

Throughout 2021, the government continued to ensure that the Maltese society is free from inequalities and discrimination and that it embraces the notions of civil liberties and intercultural inclusion, where everyone can live in a safe, fair, and just environment.



2.6.1 Policy Development

During 2021, the Commission on Gender-Based Violence and Domestic Violence (CGBVDV) chaired nine inter-ministerial committee meetings, three of which included representatives from NGOs. The aim of these meetings was to bring together the stakeholders and discuss recent developments, current issues, and best practices relating to the topic in question. Moreover, the Commissioner and team members visited a number of shelters in recognition of their invaluable work with victims, both adults and children, of gender-based and domestic violence. These visits established or strengthened the Commission's ties with civil society organisations and enabled insight into the realities being faced primarily by service providers and the victims they support.

The CGBVDV also launched the second National Strategy on Gender-based Violence and Domestic Violence¹³ which is based on the recommendations of the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO) and stakeholders' input. Furthermore, the CGBVDV is monitoring the implementation of GREVIO's recommendations which were not addressed in the strategy through biannual requests for feedback. In addition to this, during 2021, the Malta Observatory on Femicide was launched by the Women's Rights Foundation in partnership with the CGBVDV. Its aim is to bring together multiple stakeholders and academics in order to guarantee the implementation and strengthening of the policy development with regard to femicide, and promote awareness, conduct research, and offer insights, as well as serve as a base to develop domestic homicide evaluations in Malta.

During 2021, the HRD started spearheading a legislative proposal that, if approved by Parliament, will lead to the creation of Malta's first independent Paris Principles-compliance National Human Rights Institution. This Human Rights and Equality Commission Bill will transform the NCPE into an independent commission with a broad mandate.

In 2021, the Maltese Parliament approved Act XX of 2021, which amended the Constitution of Malta to introduce temporary positive measures which are necessary and reasonable in a democratic society to ensure de facto equality between men and women in politics. This Bill also amended the General Elections Act to increase the number of electoral commissioners and ensure equal representation.

Continuing on the topic of gender equality, during 2021, the HRD carried out intensive efforts in order to finalise Malta's first National Strategy and Action Plan on Gender Equality and Mainstreaming, which is expected to be launched in the coming months. This document aims to strengthen gender mainstreaming in all stages and in various sectors of policymaking by committing the government to specific and comprehensive measures to achieve full gender equality. The action plan will be addressing a number of areas, namely education, employment and financial independence, justice, health, power, and co-responsibility between family and work.

Further to this, the guidelines entitled Gender Representation Guidelines for Discussion Programmes have been published in October 2021. These guidelines, which were published in both Maltese and English, aim to provide a fairer representation of both sexes in discussion programmes, particularly those which discuss current affairs issues. These guidelines are targeted for the media service providers and stakeholders that fall within the remit of the Broadcasting Authority with the intention of narrowing the representation gap between women and men in discussion programmes.

The government also recently launched and began implementing the Anti-Racism Strategy 2021-2023, which is Malta's first national action plan against racism and xenophobia. The strategy, which is in line with the EU's Anti-Racism Action Plan 2020-2025, was launched on 30 September 2021 and presented to stakeholders on 15 October 2021. This comprehensive strategy aims to confront and eliminate racism in all its forms and to stimulate and support intercultural inclusion.

Pursuant to the Anti-Racism Strategy, a high-level inter-ministerial committee was set up in 2021 to ensure a whole-of-government approach to mainstreaming anti-racism and intercultural inclusion across all policy fields and

¹³ National Strategy on Gender-based Violence and Domestic Violence, available at: [https://stopviolence.gov.mt/en/Documents/Docs/20524%20-%20Second%20Strategy%20\(another%20duplicate\).pdf](https://stopviolence.gov.mt/en/Documents/Docs/20524%20-%20Second%20Strategy%20(another%20duplicate).pdf)

public services. Each ministry will design an intra-ministerial anti-racism action plan addressing the policymaking, employment, and service provision functions relevant to the ministry and their contribution under each of these functions to achieve intercultural inclusion. Furthermore, the EU-funded project “Towards the implementation of an Anti-Racism Strategy for Malta” (END-RACISM-MT), to be implemented over a two-year period beginning on 1 March 2022, will support the implementation of key measures in the Anti-Racism Strategy and aims to improve the Maltese public authorities’ responses to multiple and intersectional discrimination, racism, and xenophobia.

With regard to LGBTIQ equality, in 2021, the HRD continued to implement the LGBTIQ Equality Strategy and Action Plan 2018-2022 that includes over fifty measures primarily aimed at mainstreaming LGBTIQ equality across a number of life spheres such as employment, education, health, and sport, and to address a number of intersectional areas such as ageing, migration, and disability. These efforts complement the robust legal and policy framework that has seen Malta top the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association-Europe’s Rainbow Index for six consecutive years.

The HRD also launched the Maltese Government Guidelines on Sex, Sexuality and Gender ensuring that current legal frameworks are adequately reflected in public sector service provision.

During 2021, preparations began for the drafting of the next LGBTIQ Strategy and Action Plan, to be implemented from 2023. In line with this, the HRD began the design of a project to be submitted for EU funding in 2022, which aims to support the gathering of LGBTIQ equality data and a public consultation with key stakeholders to ensure that the new strategy is evidence-based and reflects the lived experiences of all those in the LGBTIQ+ community, especially those that are the most marginalised.

Furthermore, the HRD is leading the government’s reform on anti-human trafficking and acting as a coordinating body for stakeholders working in this field. To this end, in 2021, the HRD successfully applied for EU assistance under the TSI in the drafting of a National Strategy to Combat the Trafficking of Human Beings (THB). This reform aims to enhance multi-agency cooperation, improve the coordination of existing processes, and take an active approach in combatting trafficking in all its forms.

2.6.2 Awareness-raising campaigns

During 2021, the CGBVDV prioritised community awareness in its fight for gender equality through numerous initiatives and multiple media. Two such initiatives are online awareness-raising campaigns, one of which is #ilkollumani/#weareallhuman, focusing on same-sex intimate partner violence, and another campaign, My Disability Does Not Mean Consent for Abuse, which addressed violence against people with disabilities, which saw a collaboration between the CGBVDV and the Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability.

The CGBVDV also collaborated with Malta Dairy Products to display messages on milk cartons to encourage people to report abuse, as well as with shelters for victims through which the latter shared empowering messages for other women who may be experiencing gender-based violence or domestic violence. Throughout the year, there was a distribution of awareness-raising stickers to various hair and beauty salons promoting the 179 helpline, which were placed on their sellable products to encourage anyone who falls victim of some form of abuse or violence to seek help. Further to this, the CGBVDV also collaborated with the Kunsill Studenti Junior College to set up a stand during freshers’ month where information and promotional material were presented and disseminated to all the students throughout the month of October.

For the annual sixteen days of activism, the CGBVDV carried out a number of initiatives to promote its mission and assist people in issues relating to gender-based and domestic violence. One such initiative involved a collaboration with the then Ministry for Social Justice and Solidarity, the Family and Children’s Rights (MSFC) to set up an

awareness-raising stand at Palazzo Ferreria in Valletta, where Commission staff manned the stand, handed out informational and promotional material, and offered assistance to the general public. Moreover, the CGBVDV also collaborated with *Lovin Malta* on a social media awareness-raising campaign and tried to showcase as much as possible the experiences of individuals living in Malta who suffered from violence and abuse through interviews that were adapted into animated video clips and shared on the Commission's social media platforms and on national television during prime time.

During 2021, CGBVDV also organised a drawing and a writing competition for primary and secondary students with the aim to promote and raise awareness on the importance of healthy and respectful relationships among students of all ages and collaborated with the National Book Council to organise a book donation to five local shelters.

Throughout 2021, the HRD carried out a series of awareness-raising initiatives calling for the elimination and zero tolerance of gender-based and domestic violence, sexual violence in conflict, and female genital mutilation, as well as the elimination of discrimination against women and girls in all spheres of life. The HRD also carried out a series of communications activities throughout 2021 to promote shared responsibility within the household and the family.

The same can be said for the NCPE, which made several efforts in raising awareness on the importance of having a society that promotes equality. This was done primarily through traditional and social media platforms, and the organisation of conferences on topical themes.

Throughout 2021, awareness-raising campaigns and training courses were organised on several aspects and subjects related to justice and crime, most notably those revolving around the THB. As it does every year, during 2021, the HRD joined the Blue Heart Campaign, which is a global awareness-raising initiative under the auspices of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, to fight human trafficking and its effect on society, and encourages involvement to help prevent this crime. The theme for 2021 was "Victims' Voices Lead the Way", where one was given the opportunity to learn from survivors of human trafficking.

In addition, the then Ministry for Equality, Research and Innovation launched a campaign aimed to raise public awareness on the trafficking situation in Malta. The campaign included an outdoor display at Pjazza Tritoni in Valletta, whereby survivors of trafficking were given a voice to share their stories in the form of anonymised canvas banners.

2.6.3 Research, Training and Education

In addition to the annual data on gender-based and domestic violence generated and harmonised by the NSO, the CGBVDV signed an MoU with the Faculty for Social Wellbeing at the UoM. With this agreement, the Commission is able to access academic support and research on all areas under its mandate and ensure that the policies it promotes are evidence-based. Moreover, through this MoU, the CGBVDV commissioned a prevalence study on children's experiences of maltreatment and witnessing violence.

In 2021, there was also the launch of the Safe Dates programme, which is an evidence-based dating violence prevention programme that will be piloted with Year 10 students in four secondary state schools during PSCD lessons. This was done in collaboration the then Ministry for Education. The main objective of this pilot study is to evaluate whether this programme is effective in changing the beliefs and attitudes of Year 10 PSCD students on dating abuse and to gather feedback from PSCD teachers on the implementation of the programme.

Further to the above, during 2021, the CGBVDV organised several training initiatives including multiagency training on the Domestic Abuse, Stalking, Harassment and Honour-based Violence, known as DASH, risk assessment tool,

as well as training on child-to-parent violence to social workers, risk assessors, counsellors, psychologists, probation officers, police from the Gender-Based and Domestic Violence Unit within the Malta Police Force (MPF), lawyers, doctors, nurses, and representatives from domestic violence shelters and NGOs.

The CGBVDV also conducted multiagency training on Spousal Assault Risk Assessment, called SARA, for professionals working within the services for perpetrators at Aġenzija Appoġġ, including those forming part of the Gender-Based and Domestic Violence Unit within the MPF and the Department of Probation and Parole, and organised a training seminar for health professionals addressing the legal aspect of sexual assault management.

On a similar note, NCPE held training sessions on equality, diversity and non-discrimination to a wide range of participants in both the private and public sectors and disseminated an online survey aimed at targeting people aged 15 to 29 years to gather data on their awareness on discrimination and sexual harassment, their knowledge on the NCPE's role in this regard, and their expectations with respect to the NCPE's implementation of its mandate. Furthermore, during the 2021 NCPE Conference that marked International Women's Day, the NCPE presented the findings of a study carried out in 2020 on the distribution of tasks between women and men during the pandemic in order to look into how working from home was affecting both women and men, and in which ways. ¹⁴

During 2021, the HRD also continued to implement the 'I Belong Programme' as part of the 'Learning – Exchanging – Integrating' Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) project. The programme, which is being delivered by the UoM and MCAST, is designed in two stages, the first of which includes a beginner's course in the Maltese and English languages and Maltese culture, with the second stage involving further learning in the Maltese language and culture. Upon completion, students are awarded recognised certifications in all three subjects, which can be used for entry into the labour market. As of January 2021, over 5,200 individuals have applied under the programme since its inception in 2018 with over 1,200 graduates having successfully completed Stage 1 thus far. In 2021 alone, 657 students graduated from Stage 1, with 409 more students awaiting Stage 1 certification.

Furthermore, within the framework of this AMIF project, the HRD implemented the Diploma in Education for Cultural Mediation, which began to be delivered by the University of Malta in 2021. This is a course that trains professionals in facilitating harmonious relations between migrants and citizens in the host country and promoting mutual exchange of knowledge, as well as in the establishment of positive relations between individuals of diverse cultural backgrounds and ethnic origins.

Moreover, the HRD is leading a two-year project, Equality for All in Malta, in partnership with Aditus Foundation, the European Network against Racism, and the European Network on Religion and Belief. The activities under this project, financed under the EU's Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme (REC), include:

- a training developed and delivered to members of minorities, that may include victims of discrimination based on religion or belief, race and/or ethnic origin, and/or multiple discrimination, to empower them to enjoy their rights and the new remedies laid down in the law. Training has been given to 120 representatives of religious belief and race and ethnic minorities in April and September 2021 and in February 2022. Two further training rounds are going to be held throughout the second and third quarters of 2022;
- an awareness-raising campaign, which was held between December 2021 and January 2022, on discrimination based on religion or belief, race and/or ethnic origin, and/or multiple discrimination, as well as on intercultural understanding and equal opportunities, targeting the public. This was done through newspaper and bus shelter - adverts, while posters and social media were utilised to spread the message of equality;
- an outreach model targeting the grassroots, through the support and participation of local councils.

When it comes to LGBTIQ equality, fifty care workers in elderly care settings were trained on making care homes LGBTIQ-inclusive. The HRD also continued to implement the TRANSFORM project, another of its REC-supported projects, which has included a range of initiatives and activities to ensure that the LGBTIQ community enjoys

¹⁴ https://ncpe.gov.mt/en/Documents/Our_Publications_and_Resources/Research/The_COVID_19_pandemic_Research_on_the_distribution_of_work_in_households.pdf

equal and non-discriminatory access to health services by enhancing the awareness and capacity of those involved in mainstream healthcare provision to meet their needs. Through the project, training was delivered to over 650 persons working in health care settings, including general practitioners and family doctors, Accident and Emergency and Assisted Reproductive Technology Clinic staff, healthcare practitioners, reception staff, and psychiatry trainees. A website, www.transhealth.gov.mt, on trans healthcare was launched, while campaigns were carried out to raise awareness among LGBTIQ+ persons on sexual health, mental health, and the services of the Gender Wellbeing Clinic in Mtarfa.

Further to the work undertaken by the HRD, the NCPE also carried out several initiatives that further promote and support equality in the country. As part of the project Empowerment for Diversity (E4D), in 2021, the NCPE organised four Capacity-Building Sessions its staff to strengthen knowledge on LGBTIQ+ issues through sessions on the Laws of Malta relating to the grounds of sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics; reaching out to the LGBTIQ+ community and awareness-raising; addressing under-reporting and current goods and services available to the public; and mainstreaming LGBTIQ+ policies into regular policies.

Through the E4D project, during 2021, the NCPE also conducted a qualitative research study to analyse the discrimination faced by LGBTIQ+ persons in Malta in various sectors of life, such as education, employment, and in the access to and supply of goods and services, and carried out an awareness-raising campaign to provide further information on the NCPE and the services it offers.

The HRD is also currently carrying out a research study on the effectiveness of the national institutions established under the Constitution and domestic legislation to protect the rights of the child.

Further to the above, in 2021, a member of the HRD's Human Rights Initiative Unit participated in the International Visitor Leadership Programme. The programme is sponsored and organised by the Government of the United States (US) with the assistance of US embassies around the world. The programme is designed to give professionals working on human trafficking in their respective countries an opportunity to meet with counterparts from other countries and the US, and to learn about the latest development in the US in the area of mutual professional interest. Moreover, a representative of the unit also participated in government-funded training workshops offered by the International Centre for Parliamentary Studies on Human Trafficking.

Furthermore, the Department of Justice (DoJ), in collaboration with the Policy Development and Programme Implementation of the then Ministry for Justice and Governance (MFJG) and the HRD, is working on a study relating to compensation to victims of crime. This is being done through an inter-ministerial committee made of representatives from the above-mentioned entities. This study follows the recommendations made by the GRETA in one of its reports on Malta in which it was recommended to review the legislative framework in connection with compensation to victims of human trafficking.

The DoJ is also participating in a study embarked on by the then MESD concerning an intended change in mobility management in the Maltese Public Service, through the procurement of a cleaner fleet of government general-use vehicles. The aim is to improve efficiency of the current operations by eventually introducing the concept of ride sharing between various ministries and government departments. For the purpose of this study, tracking devices were installed in vehicles, one of which was the DoJ's vehicle, to get an accurate representation of how the current fleet is being utilised. The fleet of vehicles was tracked over a period of two months for an accurate representation of a typical working week.

2.6.4 Schemes and Initiatives

As at end of 2021, 123 organisations employing over 29,250 individuals, were given the Equality Mark certification administered by the NCPE. Furthermore, by the end of 2021, there were 267 professional women registered on the online Directory of Professional Women Directory.

In 2021, Malta continued to recognise and value unpaid care and domestic work by offering the Free Childcare Services Scheme, first announced in Budget 2014. The scheme provides free childcare services, available for children aged up to 2 years and 9 months, to families in which both parents or guardians work, and single parents or guardians engaged in employment and education. Children coming from disadvantaged backgrounds, particularly families in which household income is lower than €10,000 per year and in which parents or guardians are not eligible for the Free Childcare Scheme, are catered for through childcare centres administered by the state through the Foundation for Educational Services. The Free Childcare Scheme has also been extended to parents or guardians who are not in employment or education due to severe illnesses and has been improved to cater for a child's absence over and above the allotted 25% absence entitlement due to hospitalisation. This scheme will be extended in 2022 for parents who work late hours, on a shift basis, and on weekends.

In addition to the above, the government ensured that child minding facilities were offered by its various departments, bodies and entities.

2.7 Strong Institutions, Good Governance and Justice

Key Sustainable Development Goal Targets

SDG 16.3

Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all.

SDG 16.6

Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels.

SDG 16.10

Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements.

SDG 16.B

Promote and enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development.

2.7.1 Stronger Institutions and Good Governance

The Public Service launched a five-year strategy focused on 'Quality, Accountability and Sustainability'.¹⁵ In line with its commitments to the principles of the UN's 17 SDGs, the Public Service made sustainability one of the main pillars of its strategy, given its impact on future generations. The Public Service five-year strategy aims to achieve the following sustainability outcomes:

- i. Creating and preserving intellectual capital;
- ii. Reducing the Public Service's impact on ecology;
- iii. Becoming an adaptable, agile, and lean organisation; and
- iv. Retaining the perceived status of a model employer.

Throughout 2021, the then MFJG strived to continue with giving priority to good governance and the rule of law. In particular, work continued to ensure that Malta complied with the recommendations on good governance and the rule of law put forward by the Venice Commission and the Group of States against Corruption, also known as GRECO. During the 1st quarter of the year, the last set of four reforms out of ten, which were based on the Opinion of the Venice Commission of June 2020, were concluded. These included:

- i. Amendments to the act on the Auditor General and the National Audit Office;
- ii. Amendments to the appointment of the Principal Permanent Secretary and permanent secretaries respectively;
- iii. Amendments to various laws aimed at reforming the procedure for making various public appointments; and
- iv. Amendment of appointments of trustees.

Other reforms to address the recommendations made by the Committee of Experts on the Evaluation of Anti-Money Laundering Measures and the Financing of Terrorism, known as Moneyval, were carried out. These included a reform to regulate the legal profession, as well as a reform to strengthen the structure of the Asset Recovery Office with measures to provide for the recovery of proceeds of crime. Furthermore, during 2021 four judges and four magistrates were appointed to the bench in accordance with the new procedure introduced in 2020 by way of Acts XLV and XLIII of 2020.

In line with the above, one must also mention the Internal Audit and Investigations Department's work to finalise the updated National Anti-Fraud and Corruption Strategy following months of discussions within the Coordinating Committee set up in terms of the Internal Audit and Financial Investigations Act, Cap. 461 of the Laws of Malta. Having up-to-date anti-fraud and anti-corruption measures will contribute to a more sustainable economy and society.

It is worth mentioning that a component of the RRP for Malta, approved in October 2021, addresses a number of institutional and governance challenges. The objective is to improve the capacity and governance of the justice system, reinforce the institutional framework to fight against corruption, strengthen the anti-money laundering regime, and target aggressive tax planning.

During 2021, the Office of the Attorney General entered the second phase of the reform surrounding the conduct of prosecutions. By virtue of L.N. 367 of 2021, and with effect from 1 October 2021, an additional number of offences and decisions to prosecute were taken over by the Office of the Attorney General from the MPF. These offences include trafficking of persons, piracy, rape, abduction, defilement of minors and instigation, encouragement or facilitation of defilement of minors, offences against adults, computer misuse, wilful damage or destruction of cultural property, endangering safety at airports, and attempts or conspiracy to commit or complicity in these offences.

During 2021, the Office of the Attorney General developed and adopted its Anti-Money Laundering Strategy covering the years 2021-2023. The principal aim of this strategy is to effectively ensure that:

¹⁵ The Public Service Strategy, available at: <https://publicservice.gov.mt/en/Documents/Achieving-A-Service-of-Excellence-2021.pdf>

- investigations are translated into a number and type of prosecutions and convictions in line with Malta's risk profile;
- investigations and prosecutions are of better quality to effectively combat high-level and complex money laundering cases;
- professional enablers that facilitate the offence of money laundering are likewise prosecuted;
- assets of the accused and the relative criminal proceeds are not dissipated during the proceedings so as to ensure their confiscation; and
- cooperation and coordination with other authorities, including foreign judicial authorities, involved in the fight against money laundering takes place.

Furthermore, the Protection of Whistleblower Act (CAP. 527) has been amended in terms of Directive 2019/1937/EU on the protection of persons who report breaches of Union law, as published on 23 October 2019 and transposed by the 17 December 2021 deadline. The new Act has a wider remit and common minimum standards for the protection of whistleblowers which are now being provided across a large number of areas, including those of public procurement, financial services, product safety, transport safety, protection of the environment, radiation protection and nuclear safety, food safety, animal health and welfare, public health, consumer protection, data privacy, competition law and state aid rules, and corporate tax laws.

Following the establishment of the Office of the State Advocate (OSA) on 18 December 2019, several changes in the organisational structure were undertaken in 2021 with the aim of creating a hierarchical framework that defines the internal division of duties and responsibilities, the identification of roles, and staff complement requirements.

The Office established the Committee for the OSA to serve as a consultative forum consisting of nine members with the aim of facilitating the operational management of the OSA, ensuring the timely and expeditious delivery of legal services provided by the OSA, and enhancing a safe and healthy working environment for all employees at the OSA.

During 2021, efforts were made towards strengthening the institutions responsible for law enforcement and civil protection in Malta. One such effort was the setting up of an employee assessment system and completing relevant employee skill profiling within the law enforcement institutions in the country, with constant professional development and ongoing delegation of authority being carried out.

With regard to civil protection, developments have been taking place within the Civil Protection Department (CPD) to improve and enhance its effectiveness and service. In 2021, this department carried out changes directed at its vehicle and vessel fleet, with the vehicle equipment and personnel increasing in number, resulting in the further improvement of its operational capacity. The upgrades and improvements became even more of a priority owing to Malta's infrastructural progress along the years, which includes the construction of tall buildings and tunnels that have made the need to have more specialised vehicles and equipment more pronounced. Additionally, the CPD had to open new temporary fire stations in Delimara and Pembroke, especially when keeping in mind that complex buildings and infrastructure, as well as an increase in urban traffic, have made it vital to ensure a timely and efficient response to incidents in these areas.

The CPD has also embarked on several initiatives in order to increase public awareness through EU projects, exercises, and an informal outreach programme that sought to inform the public of the danger and the risks involved when it comes to civil protection. Moreover, in order to try to address part of the Hyogo and Sendai obligations, the CPD has started an outreach programme with local councils to identify and mitigate the known risks of each individual locality.

Training is also an area in which the CPD has made substantial progress. Training courses are held on a regular basis, through which personnel are being trained in industrial firefighting, high-rise fires, electrical cars, liquefied natural

gas (LNG), rescue diving, and aviation fires amongst others. The value of this training is being acknowledged by the government and has, in fact, increased the available training budget from €2,000 to €200,000 annually. Of course, this can only cover a part of what is required by the CPD, especially when considering its need for a fully functional training ground; however, the efforts being made are certainly a step in the right direction in achieving the best possible civil protection service.

Training courses relating to the subject in question were also offered by the MPF and the Academy for Disciplined Forces (ADF). During 2021, the former continued working on sustaining employee professional development, while also participating in exchange programmes with international police agencies. The ADF, on the other hand, has been accredited as a Further Education Institution by the MHFEA as an award-giving institution to provide accredited courses at MQF Level 4 and has embarked on the process of accrediting the Basic Training Course for Constables in the Malta Police.

Moreover, from 2021 onwards a plan of action was initiated with the purpose of attracting and accrediting other basic training that is essentially required for other law enforcement institutions in Malta. The Academy had started the process of working on the accreditation of two courses, one for border guards, which is based on the Common Core Curriculum and the Sectoral Qualification Framework for Border Guards as established by Frontex, and the other for the warders of the Correctional Services Agency.

Ad hoc basic and advanced training was also designed and provided to professionals engaged in the sector, whilst relevant departments were equipped with the necessary skills and competencies. To this, one can add international cooperation that proved useful both in terms of the sharing of skills and knowhow, as well as when it comes to investigating, apprehending, and arraigning organised crime groups.

As in previous years, during 2021, the government continued to adopt measures to ensure a stronger and more effective border control and migration management. This was done by carrying out work to implement new large scale IT systems, including the Entry/Exit System and the European Travel Information and Authorisation System and European Criminal Records Information System on Third Country Nationals, and upgrade current ones such as the Schengen Information System, the Visa Information System and the European Asylum Dactyloscopy Database, known as Eurodac, to render them interoperable.

Meanwhile, during 2021, efforts were made to revise the Immigration Act and relevant S.L. through the setting up of a task force to suggest various amendments to the said Act.

Furthermore, it is also important to add that the Agency for the Welfare of Asylum Seekers (AWAS) and the International Protection Agency have been working on a digital application to provide information to their clients and support them in keeping track of their asylum progress and appointments. In 2021, AWAS had already embarked on developing a Reception Entry Card System where, with the support of the EU Agency for Asylum (EUAA), it is working on a system to facilitate and keep track of entries within the residential centres. In addition, AWAS invested in a CMS for its professionals so that all information is kept in a single database. This was being done while the agency was expanding the use of the National Asylum Seekers Management System, which also saw the introduction of two new modules, namely a Vulnerability Module and an Unaccompanied Minors Module.

2.7.2 Digitalisation of the Justice System

The first national Digital Justice Strategy for 2022-2027¹⁶ was launched on 3 December 2021. The aim of this strategy is to achieve a more efficient administration of justice. In preparation for the investment needed to implement the strategy, legal acts on the digitalisation of the law courts have entered into force to make it possible for civil proceedings to be held via live video conferencing facilities and for criminal judicial acts to be filed electronically.

¹⁶ The Digital Justice Strategy Malta 2022-2027, available at: https://justice.gov.mt/en/justice/Documents/DJS_2022_2027_ENG.pdf

During 2021, the OSA continued with the EU-funded European Legislation Identifier (ELI) project that saw the launching of the <https://legislation.mt/> website in May 2020. During the first phase of the ELI implementation, all types of documents, including the Chapters of the Laws of Malta, S.L., Acts, L.N., and Bye-Laws, have been attributed a particular Uniform Resource Identifier, facilitating the identification and reference of laws. This was followed by the attribution of metadata to legislation, such as the date of publication, the status of the law, and the different points-in-time when the law was amended. This process has been completed for all the Chapters of the Laws of Malta in 2021, with subsidiary laws to follow suit. To this, one can add that on 23 July 2021, the ELI Taskforce confirmed that the Maltese ELI implementation is consistent with ELI standards.

The OSA is also embarking on an initiative to provide an add-on feature to the current Laws of Malta website, <https://legislation.mt/>, in order to provide users such as lawyers, the judiciary, various professionals, and other users from the general public the ability to subscribe and be notified via email or text message that the laws they most frequent have been duly updated or amended. This notification subscription-based feature will also apply for future laws as well, through which users can choose, in their preferred language, the laws of a particular field or nature that may be of interest to them. Thus, it will enable all those who subscribe to this feature to keep themselves adjourned with the law, and for those concerned to provide up-to-date legal advice.

During 2021, work also continued on the National Language Technology Platform (NLTP) project that aims at combining the most advanced language technology tools and solutions in a new state-of-the-art, AI-driven platform. The purpose of the project is to develop a customisable and easy to set-up NLTP, which will be equipped with essential AI-based functionality, including custom machine translation, e-translation, terminology management, translation memory management, and speech technology. The NLTP will have a ready-to-use user interface and integration options, the goal of which will be to remove language barriers, promote language equality, increase accessibility, and foster cross-border integration in the use of public digital services in countries forming part of the EU and the European Economic Area (EEA).

This tool will provide public administrations and the general public with a secure access to high quality tools for the translation of texts, including sensitive information, as well as the translation of confidential documents and regulations across all the languages of the Single Digital Market in an efficient and cost-effective way.

Additionally, the NLTP will be open for integration with other technology providers and will be linked to e-translation services enabling translations into and from the 24 official EU languages, which will, consequently, enable users to obtain a complete, formatted, and easily editable translation within a few seconds. This will also be enhanced with the integration of speech technologies in order to facilitate the access of the tool for users with disabilities, such as those who are visually impaired.

In a sustainable transition towards a digital economy, the DoJ, in collaboration with the Information Management Unit of the then MFJG and other stakeholders, has initiated the process of rendering conduct certificates and conviction sheets digital by default, which will, in turn, lead to the digital inputting of court judgements. Work on this is already underway, wherein it is envisaged that the criminal records information system will be digitised in several phases over a number of years.

The Criminal Records Office (CRO), currently under the responsibility of the Commissioner of Police, operates its processes and provides its services mainly through a manual procedure, wherein only very minimal processes are digitised. Keeping in mind that the CRO will soon be moved onto the responsibility of the DoJ, the then MFJG has envisaged that it will be of primary importance to have a digitised system, providing an enhanced service to society. Thus, in view of this, KPMG has been engaged to carry out the Business Process Re-Engineering (BPR), starting by analysing the current processes of the CRO operations and identifying improvements which need to be made through the implementation of a digitised national criminal records system. This project aims at providing an enhanced service to the public, various authorised entities, and the justice administration, promoting greater efficiency in the respective processes and procedures, as well as reducing paper usage and minimising the duplication of work. In this way, one may continue to ensure that justice-related processes are made more accessible and served in the most expeditious manner.

The DoJ is also carrying out a laborious exercise regarding the CRO history books, currently located at the General Headquarters, Conducts Office of the MPF. These history books, amounting to approximately 3,000 books, contain criminal records of individuals dating back to the 1800s. The current project phase entails DoJ officials going through all the books to identify which of those books do indeed contain records of deceased persons only. The respective history books are envisaged to be scanned for a digital back-up and transferred to the National Archives of Malta. This exercise is, in the meantime, being undertaken as part of the digitalising process of the conducts and criminal records operations.

The transposition and implementation of the exchange of information on criminal records between EU Member States on third-country nationals within the EU is due in the coming months. In view of this and of the continued transfer of the CRO in a staggered process from the MPF to the DoJ, the latter is actively involved in the project of locally implementing the EU Regulation on the European Criminal Records Information System – Third Country Nationals (ECRIS-TCN), which is an enhancement of the current ECRIS. This regulation mainly relates to the criminal conviction exchange of TCNs between EU Member States and is expected to be operational in May 2023. This regulation aims to protect the public, maintain public safety, ensure fair and consistent court and sentencing processes, and further security, border, and migration management.

Furthermore, during the year 2021, the DoJ incorporated and implemented an online secure payment system through the Government Payment Gateway to the online application form for Registration to Practise the Legal Profession in Malta under the Home-Country Professional Title. This is in line with the objective of incorporating more the digital element in existing procedures, whereby there has been a fuller digitalisation of the application for one to register in Malta to practise the legal profession under the respective home-country title within the EU. Finally, a BPR was developed, which was needed to facilitate a fuller digital process with the relative e-application being developed and implemented. This development is yet another step forward towards the digitalisation of justice-related processes.

2.7.3 Ensuring Equal Justice to All

Throughout 2021, the services of the Legal Aid Malta Agency continued, while efforts were made to work with other entities in order to provide a continual holistic service, thus improving services given to all clients requesting legal aid assistance in the name of equal justice to all.

During the second quarter of 2021, an MoU was signed between the agency and the MPF to establish the terms and conditions under which the police and legal aid lawyers assist the accused person before, during and after their arraignment, and for representation during proceedings at the Courts of Justice. This MoU enhanced legal aid services provided to the accused to have a fair trial. During the same quarter, the agency also proceeded to restructure its administrative aspect, where a legal aid manager was employed to oversee that eligibility criteria and administrative matters proceeded as regulated by law, and a resident legal procurator employed to hasten court processes relating to the provision of legal aid services and legal aid representation at the Court of Magistrates.

Furthermore, during May 2021, the Legal Aid Malta Agency also embarked on a new project for the digitisation of legal aid services following the hiring of an audit company to draw up a report with an analysis of the present legal aid services and recommendations for a new digitisation process of same. This project, which is estimated to take twenty-four months to complete, will, among other things, enable indigent people a more fair, reasonable means testing law which would reflect the current cost of living of poorer people in society.

During the third quarter of 2021, the Legal Aid Malta Agency also signed a declaration of intent with the Victim Support Agency within the then Ministry for Home Affairs, National Security and Law Enforcement (MHSE) to assist and cooperate with each other to support victims of crime through a referral system. Moreover, the agency signed an MoU with the FSWS in order to delineate the provision of services by both entities relating to cross-border disputes in relation to European maintenance obligations.

Statistically, during 2021, the Legal Aid Malta Agency had in total 1,445 requests for information about the services provided. During that same year, 218 clients were given an appointment with the means testing office to verify their eligibility and 534 clients were scheduled a meeting with the resident legal aid lawyer for merits testing. Furthermore, by the end of 2021, the agency facilitated the provision of 265 client cases to the assigned legal aid lawyers after obtaining a court decree, while more than 400 criminal cases were directly appointed by the Court of Magistrates.

Further to the above, in 2021, the Court Services Agency acquired a property in Strait Street Valletta and started the process of regenerating this property into a new court building. This property will eventually house three new court halls and a number of offices for the use of the Members of the Judiciary. The Court Services Agency also embarked on an ambitious project of scanning all the Criminal Court files. This project will allow the parties to the case to be able to access the respective documentation online in a fast and secure manner, eliminate the conveyance of the court files to and from the Attorney General's offices, and will allow for different parties to work on the same file at the same time.

Additionally, during 2021, the Court Services Agency embarked on a project to install video-conferencing systems in all thirty court halls in Malta and Gozo. This project involved the procurement, installation, and commissioning of several monitors and cameras in all court halls to facilitate online sittings. This project was well-received, and several sittings were done online with the video-conferencing system being put to use during the heights of the COVID-19 pandemic and in situations where parties to the case could not physically be present during the court sitting.

2.7.4 Strengthening prison-based rehabilitation programmes and post-release services

Throughout 2021, the Maltese government worked on ensuring that prison-based rehabilitation programmes and the post-release services offered were of the highest standard and made readily available and easily accessible to all current and former inmates respectively.

Any inmate granted a parole licence by 2021 can be referred to or followed-up by the Psychology Unit within the Department of Probation and Parole (DPP). In fact, a number of services, including a Cognitive Skills Programme, a community-based Sex Offender Programme, and an Anger Management Programme were offered by the same unit. These services are available right after release from prison and therefore serve as a continuation of their correctional care plan.

Furthermore, the DPP also provided a Cognitive Thinking Skills Programme to inmates residing at the Rise Foundation. This served to offer professional services to NGOs that are providing therapeutic interventions to offenders in the community.

2.7.5 Enhancing Stakeholder Participation

The government is committed to further enhance public dialogue and stakeholder participation.

For instance, the ESF project 'ENGAGE: Enhancing Stakeholder Participation in Social Dialogue' (ESF.04.086) implemented by SEM and concluded in 2021, built on the overarching aim of improving stakeholder engagement and ensuring that participation is strengthened and encouraged. Mentoring sessions were aimed at helping stakeholders upgrade their skills in stakeholder engagement, effectively use communication tools, and access EU funding opportunities.

Strengthening the Malta Council for Economic and Social Development (MCESD), which acts as a bridge between government and social partners from across different sectors, will greatly improve social dialogue in Malta and Gozo. In this regard, the ESF project 'Enhancing the Positive Contribution of Social Dialogue through Evidence-Based Research' (ESF.04.158), which is being implemented by MCESD, targets research and training activities to promote the capacity-building of the MCESD in the field of social dialogue.

The aim of the research is to bring about a shared commitment among social partners on thematic areas for the common good, to work together to clarify issues, formulate strategies, and develop action plans, and for social partners to build a sound understanding in a bid to engage in objective discussions and to gradually build mutual trust leading to further positive results. The research will serve as a basis of discussions and its final outcome will provide unbiased and factual material. This will promote more robust social dialogue based on facts rather than speculation, which is highly important for targeted policies at government level.

The research and the associated training to MCESD staff will improve the role of the council in being a catalyst in social dialogue on economic matters. Strengthening the MCESD has a tangible and direct impact on improving the outlook of Malta's economic growth through strengthened social dialogue and policymaking.



Protecting the Environment

During 2021, the government continued to work tirelessly on crosscutting dossiers addressing circular economy, nature, and biodiversity, as well as international environmental issues. The international environmental discussions in 2021 were still heavily influenced by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, which led to the postponement of a number of major conferences including the UN Climate Change Conference (COP) 15 on the Convention on Biological Diversity and the UN Conference on Oceans. Nevertheless, whilst the post-COVID recovery remained very much at the forefront of international discussions, preparations for COP15 continued throughout 2021.

In this regard, the then MECP and the Environment and Resources Authority (ERA) followed a number of preparatory meetings, including the High-Level Ministerial Segment in preparation to COP15 and the High-Level Ministerial discussions on a new global legally binding instrument on marine plastic pollution in preparation to the UN Environment Assembly 5.2.

Throughout 2021, the then MECP also contributed to the negotiations of various EU legislative and non-legislative dossiers, including the final approval of the Climate Law Regulation and the adoption of the 8th Environment Action Programme. The latter is intended to provide a horizontal and holistic framework for environmental policy for the EU as whole for the coming nine years towards 2030 and is very much central to the implementation of the environmental pillar of sustainable development and forms the basis for the EU's delivery of the SDGs. Additionally, the then MECP continued to follow the European Semester process, specifically the greening of the European Semester, which further focused on the development of the national RRP.

Throughout 2021, relevant regulatory reforms were undertaken, including the setting up of the Building and Construction Authority (Act XIV of 2021 – Building and Construction Authority Act) which is responsible for the regulation, improvement, and sustainable management of the building and construction industry in Malta.

In this regard, the new authority has embarked on a number of EU obligations, including the finalisation of a Long-term Renovation Strategy (LTRS),¹⁷ which provides an overview of the national building stock addressing key areas such as energy poverty and public buildings; indicates milestones for 2030, 2040 and 2050; reviews policies and actions implemented as part of the previous LTRS and proposes new ones to stimulate cost-effective deep renovation of buildings; defines initiatives to promote skills and education in the construction and energy efficiency sectors; and provides an estimate of expected energy savings and wider benefits. The overall purpose and implementation of the strategy will complement those measures already identified in the LCDS, as well as contribute to the attainment of SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy).

Chapter 3

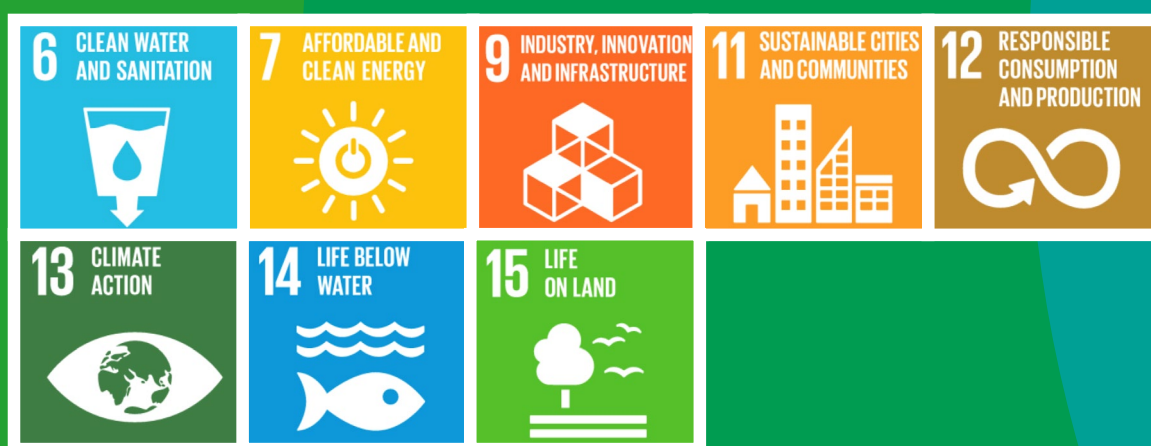
¹⁷ MLong-term Renovation Strategy 2050, available at: <https://sustainabledevelopment.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/longTermRenvationStrategy2050.pdf>

In the last quarter of 2021, the government, through the then MECP, also issued a tender for a study with the aim of enabling and fostering a greener and environmentally friendly economy on a sectoral level. With the conclusion of this study, the then MECP will be obtaining recommendations on how several highly polluting industries could be transformed and be better-equipped to reach higher environmental standards on the ground during the production phase. Moreover, the study will recommend feasible options to ensure that the sector is turned into a sustainable one without compromising its economic rendition.

Throughout 2021, the government also continued with its efforts to protect the environment by reducing plastic use and promote activities that contribute to cleaner water and sanitation.

A more receptive audience to new policies and measures augurs well for improvements towards the attainment of the SDGs, these being **SDGs 6-7, 9, 11-15**.

2030 AGENDA-RELATED GOALS



3.1 Climate Action

Key Sustainable Development Goal Targets

SDG 11.b

By 2020, substantially increase the number of cities and human settlements adopting and implementing integrated policies and plans towards inclusion, resource efficiency, mitigation and adaptation to climate change, resilience to disasters, and develop and implement, in line with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, holistic disaster risk management at all levels.

SDG 13.1

Strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters in all countries.

SDG 13.2

Integrate climate change measures into national policies, strategies and planning.

SDG 13.3

Improve education, awareness-raising and human and institutional capacity on climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning.

SDG 13.a

Implement the commitment undertaken by developed-country parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change to a goal of mobilising jointly \$100 billion annually by 2020 from all sources to address the needs of developing countries in the context of meaningful mitigation actions and transparency on implementation and fully operationalize the Green Climate Fund through its capitalisation as soon as possible.

In 2021, Malta adopted its LCDS,¹⁸ which outlines the decarbonisation of Malta's economy towards a fair, cost-effective, and just transition to carbon neutrality by 2050, as well as to identify measures in the shorter term to achieve Malta's 2030 emission reduction targets. The strategy undertook consultation processes with stakeholders and the general public. The implementation of the strategy will mainstream decarbonisation across all economic sectors, reducing emissions in the process, without hindering economic growth, while at the same time addressing vulnerabilities through adaptation action. In 2021, Malta launched works related to a Climate Vulnerability and Risk Assessment (VRA) for the Maltese islands. Moreover, other works also focused on analysing impact chains to identify sensitivities in terms of assets and economic activities.

Recognising the need for instigating action at all societal levels, including individual citizens, the then MECP launched a nationwide public awareness campaign to promote climate action. This ClimateOn campaign aims at changing the general public's habits towards a more innovative way of life by instilling thoughts for solutions and highlighting the benefits of a low carbon society.

The then MECP also launched the SeedGreen Programme with a view to support young innovators seeking to come up with solutions that will aid Malta's green transition. The programme was aimed at supporting potential start-ups which can identify and implement solutions in highly polluting sectors such as transport, construction, waste, agriculture, retail, and the energy sector.

At EU level, Malta has agreed to an increased unionwide target to reduce emissions by 55% by 2030 compared

¹⁸ Malta's LCDS, available at: https://meae.gov.mt/en/Public_Consultations/MECP/PublishingImages/Pages/Consultations/MaltasLowCarbon-DevelopmentStrategy/Malta%20Low%20Carbon%20Development%20Strategy.pdf

to 1990 levels as part of the Climate Law Regulation 2021/1119. Moreover, the then MECP has been the leading ministry on the coordination of the national position on the Fit-for-55 Package that will support the EU's climate policy framework.

In 2021, the annual National Inventory Report of GHG submission to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), covering the years 1990-2020, was prepared and was reviewed for submission in January 2022. Malta also submitted its biennial report on national adaptation action, pursuant to Article 19(1) of Regulation (EU) 2018/1999 of the European Parliament and the Council.

During 2021, Malta also actively participated in the climate negotiations at the 26th Conference of the Parties at the UNFCCC. In this forum, Malta reaffirmed its commitment towards climate action at national level, whilst committing to support international initiatives by doubling its contribution to €200,000 towards the Green Climate Fund.

3.2 Secure and Clean Energy and Water Management

Key Sustainable Development Goal Targets

SDG 7.1

By 2030, ensure universal access to affordable, reliable and modern energy services.

SDG 7.2

By 2030, increase substantially the share of renewable energy in the global energy mix.

SDG 7.3

By 2030, double the global rate of improvement in energy efficiency.

SDG 7.a

By 2030, enhance international cooperation to facilitate access to clean energy research and technology, including renewable energy, energy efficiency and advanced and cleaner fossil-fuel technology, and promote investment in energy infrastructure and clean energy technology.

SDG 11.6

By 2030, reduce the adverse per capita environmental impact of cities, including by paying special attention to air quality and municipal and other waste management.

SDG 11.7

By 2030, provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, in particular for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities.

2021 marked the first year of the new decade, which meant that the government could look back and assess whether it had achieved its national targets for 2020 in the area of renewable energy, energy efficiency, and electricity interconnectivity. In the area of energy, from 2021 onwards, Malta is operating under a new legal framework, whereby it has to ensure the implementation of additional policies and measures over the next decade in order to contribute to the Union's 2030 targets.

Sustainable water management continued to be at the top of the Maltese government agenda during 2021. Several measures were carried out in 2021 with the aim of effectively managing the supply and demand to ensure the availability of sufficient water resources, while ensuring the sustainable use of groundwater resources.

During 2021, the implementation of the National Strategy for R&I in Energy and Water, which is closely linked to the European drive to expand and further R&I activities, commenced. This is increasingly viewed as a crosscutting measure necessary to enable Member States to realise their national ambitions, and the EU as a whole, to deliver on its overarching objectives. The national strategy is expected to build on existing strengths and seek to address current gaps. It also identifies high level priority areas for R&I activities for the next decade, aligned with the country's long-term vision of the national and EU energy and water policy, with a view towards the wider goals of decarbonisation, sustainability, and affordability.

In March 2020, the first Energy and Water R&I Grant Scheme was launched and is currently supporting five projects, three of which are targeting water-related problems whilst the remaining two address renewable energy concepts. In 2021, the scheme was re-launched and another six projects are gearing up to embark on their respective R&I journey following the completion of an evaluation process.

3.2.1 Renewable Energy

During 2021, the government continued to extend various financial initiatives and grant schemes for renewable energy deployment in 2021. In this regard, the Regulator for Energy and Water Services (REWS) administered several initiatives that encourage the use of renewable sources of energy. Feed-in Tariffs to promote the purchasing of photovoltaic (PV) systems were also made available to both residential and commercial systems for PV systems with a capacity of less than 40 kilowatts peak (kWp). In line with this, the competitive bidding process for the award of support for electricity generated from renewable energy sources was extended to cover renewable energy source generators with a capacity between 40 kilowatts up to less than 1 megawatt (MW), while continuing to cover solar PV installations with a capacity of 1MW.

In 2021, two new schemes that stemmed from grants issued in 2018 were also put in place. These are the 2021 Solar Water Heater Grant Scheme, which provided a grant of 75% of the total eligible cost, up to the maximum of €1,400 when purchasing a solar water heater, and a €500 grant to cover maintenance costs after five years, as well as the 2021 Heat Pump Water Heater Grant Scheme, which provided a grant of 50% of the total eligible cost, up to a maximum of €1,000 when purchasing and installing an air to water heat pump. The total number of beneficiaries receiving the grant towards the purchase of a solar water heater or a heat pump water heater during 2021 was 498.

REWS also introduced a new scheme entitled 2021 Renewable Energy Sources Grant Scheme. This scheme provided a grant based on the following options:

- Option A – A PV system with standard a solar inverter: 50% of eligible costs up to a maximum of €2,500 per system and €625 per kWp.
- Option B – A PV system with a hybrid inverter: 50% of eligible costs up to a maximum of €3,000 per system and €750 per kWp.

- Option C – A hybrid/battery inverter and battery: 80% of eligible costs of the battery storage up to a maximum of €3,600 per system and €600 per kilowatt-hour (kWh) and 80% of eligible costs of the hybrid inverter up to a maximum of €1,800 per system and €450 per kWp.
- Option D – Battery storage only: 80% of eligible costs of the battery storage up to a maximum of €3,600 per system and €600 per kWh.

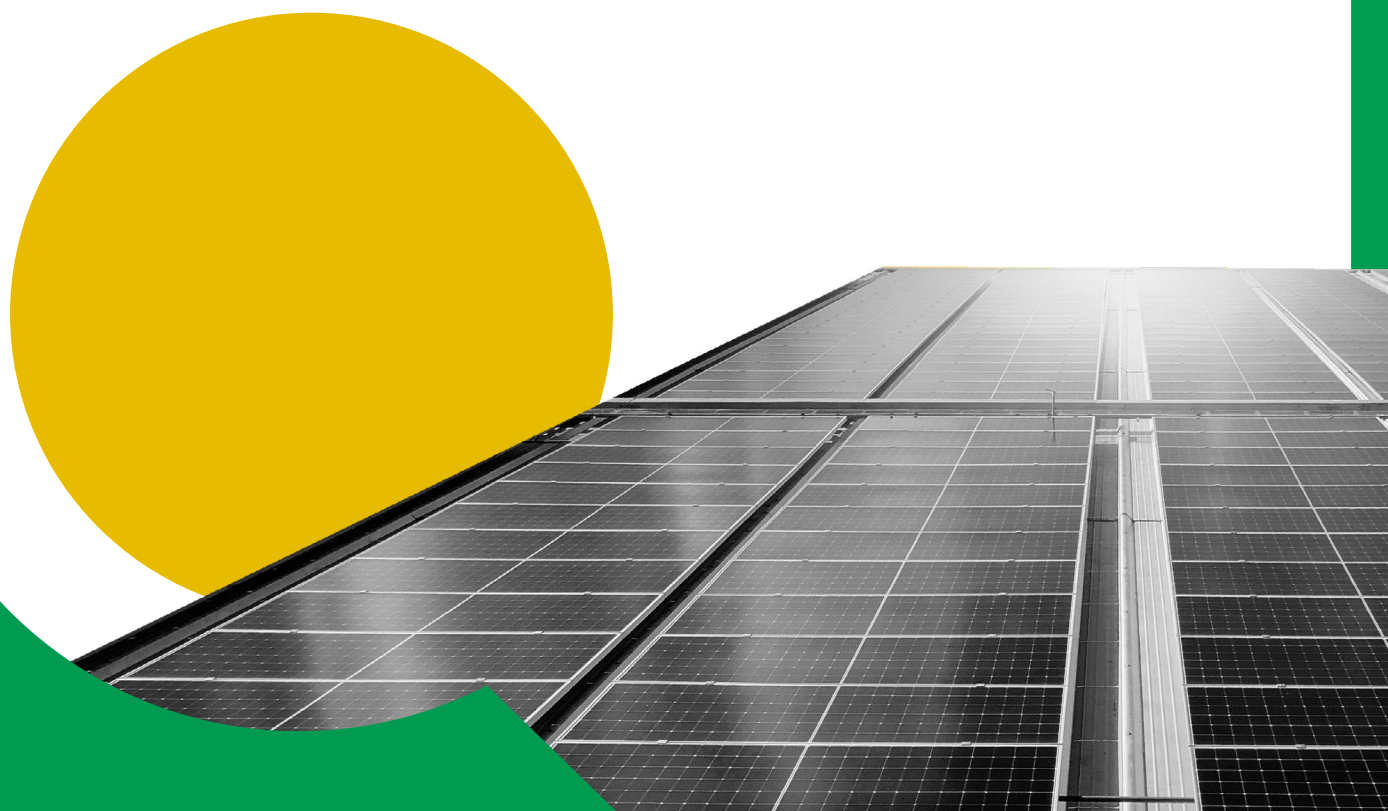
Out of 1,252 beneficiaries of the PV grant scheme during 2021, 78 benefitted from the Battery Storage Scheme and installed a battery storage system. This scheme aims to increase a consumer's flexibility in their ability to utilise energy generated by PV systems (own-use), in particular by storing excess renewable energy generated by PV systems instead of exporting to the grid.

Furthermore, entities such as the Malta Information Technology Agency (MITA) are installing PV panels to make use of cleaner and renewable sources of energy. In this particular case, thanks to EU funding, MITA kicked off with the third phase of a PV project, which saw the realisation of another 50kW PV installation at MITA Data Centre. This project generates around 85,000kWh units, which is equivalent to the consumption of twenty-two households.

In addition to the above, Malta is planning to reach its 14% target for the share of renewable energy in the road transport sector by extending the biofuel substitution obligation, which now obliges automotive petrol and diesel fuel suppliers to achieve a 14% biofuel and 3.5% advanced biofuel-blending share by 2030. In order to effectively implement this obligation, L.N. 336 of 2021 amended the Sixth Schedule of S.L. 545.17 and imposed a minimum biofuel content on fuel suppliers, which includes increasing annual obligations from 2021 until 2030.

As part of Malta's forward outlook and ambitions in continuously increasing its renewable energy contribution, in 2021, the government continued to focus on the potential deployment of offshore renewable solutions at a pilot level, whilst also acquiring further information on Malta's offshore renewable energy source potential. This is being done with a view of establishing the necessary administrative and financial frameworks, which will enable the future deployment of larger scale projects, as these technologies reach market maturity. Within this context, the government is also following opportunities for offshore renewable deployment through the support of EU funding instruments such as the Innovation Fund, and the Connecting Europe Facility, which are key to bridging the financial gap of such projects thus enabling in the attainment of commercial feasibility.

Furthermore, MGOZ continued working on the Interreg Europe project RESINDUSTRY, which aims to increase the energy independency of the EU industry sector, by decreasing its energy intensity through the higher integration of renewable energy sources.



3.2.2 Energy Efficiency

Key Sustainable Development Goal Targets

SDG 7.3

By 2030, double the global rate of improvement in energy efficiency.

SDG 7.a

By 2030, enhance international cooperation to facilitate access to clean energy research and technology, including renewable energy, energy efficiency and advanced and cleaner fossil-fuel technology, and promote investment in energy infrastructure and clean energy technology.

SDG 8.4

Improve progressively, through 2030, global resource efficiency in consumption and production and endeavour to decouple economic growth from environmental degradation, in accordance with the 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production, with developed countries taking the lead.

The increase in Malta's population, labour force, and tourism is expected to drive energy demand even higher in the coming years. As a result of this expected increase in demand, over the course of 2020 and 2021, the government carried out a national Electricity Supply Study, the outcome of which will be used to determine the country's electricity needs and cost-optimal energy mix until 2035. Based on the results of the study, in 2021, a decision was taken by the government to invest in a second electricity interconnector. The second interconnector linking Malta to Sicily is expected to be commissioned by 2026, providing Malta with an additional capacity of 200MW and contributing to security of supply.

EWA continued to provide its service in households through home visits carried out free of charge, as well as sharing knowledge with residents on how to lower their energy and water bills through the implementation of small everyday changes with regard to energy efficiency and water conservation.

During 2021, EWA carried out 76 visits to vulnerable households and 297 visits to general households. As in the previous year, in 2021, there was a period between March and May where visits were reduced or postponed due to the second partial lockdown. During such times, assistance was provided to residents over the phone, whereas issues with utility billing and high consumption were still dealt with.

Additionally, a specific scheme was designed to identify vulnerable households, conduct home visits, and provide advice on how to reduce energy and water consumption, and, if merited, replace the most inefficient appliance with a new model. This appliance, being a washing machine, an air-conditioning unit, or a fridge/freezer, is replaced with a new energy-efficient model, free of charge. The scheme allows families to reduce consumption costs and generate savings, which count towards Malta's energy efficiency targets. Out of the total 375 new appliances distributed, 257 were fridge-freezers, 76 washing machines, and 42 air-conditioning units.

Furthermore, The Promotion of Energy Audits in Small and Medium Sized Enterprises Scheme was extended until 2023. This scheme, which is administered by EWA, encourages SMEs to carry out an energy audit in order to identify actions leading to energy improvement and investments that may be carried out in order to reduce energy consumption on a daily basis, resulting in lower bills and overall expenditure.

The EU energy label has been a key contributing driver in assisting consumers choose more energy-efficient products. At the same time, it also encourages manufacturers to drive innovation by using more energy efficient technologies. In March 2021, the new rescaled energy labels were introduced for four product groups, namely

fridges and freezers, dishwashers, washing machines and washer-driers, and electronic displays including televisions. Subsequently, new rescaled energy labels were also introduced on light sources as of 1 September 2021. In this regard, the Regulatory Affairs Directorate within the Malta Competition and Consumer Affairs Authority (MCCAA) carried out media campaigns on the introduction of the new energy labels on domestic appliances with the aim of informing consumers and economic operators about the rights and obligations with respect to product safety.

3.2.3 Water Management

Key Sustainable Development Goal Targets

SDG 6.3

By 2030, improve water quality by reducing pollution, eliminating dumping and minimizing release of hazardous chemicals and materials, halving the proportion of untreated wastewater and substantially increasing recycling and safe reuse globally.

In the area of water, considerable work has been carried out in upgrading the national hydrological monitoring network. In 2021, fifteen monitoring boreholes were drilled in agricultural sites with the aim of providing an adequate assessment of hydrogeological conditions within the unsaturated zone by providing both a qualitative and a quantitative assessment of the water recharging the watertable underlying various agricultural areas in Malta. In addition, in 2021, EWA commenced a non-destructive coring exercise in a number of sites to determine the primary hydrogeological and geological properties of the main geological formation and members present on the island. These sites will soon be part of a continuous groundwater monitoring network. A geological core storage facility has also been set up in 2021 to store and analyse the recovered cores. The highlighted efforts were funded through the Priority Axis 10 Operational Programme 1 (2014-2020).

As of April 2021, the Water Services Corporation (WSC) commenced a dewatering facility at the Sant'Antnin Urban Wastewater Treatment plant in Marsascala through a €9 million project, which allows farmers to dispose of farm waste slurry generated from farms located in the south of Malta in a more sustainable way, while also leading to an increase in the production of New Water. Furthermore, farm slurry, which is currently considered problematic to manage, is being dewatered on a selected number of farms with the resulting solid and liquid fractions being subject to chemical analysis to better understand the composition of the different matrix. This will allow for a better understanding and management of farm manure or slurry and will ensure that the activities of livestock farms will not be of concern or threat to the environment. The Governance of Agricultural Bioresources (GAB) was also responsible for presenting a national solution model covering Malta for the transformation of raw slurry into a utilisable resource. This was issued in August 2021 following the experience gained from the MCST/GAB research grant launched in February 2018 and the outcomes of a Preliminary Market Consultation launched in mid-2020.

In 2021, the Eco-Gozo Directorate within MGOZ embarked on the MED-WET Project – Improving Mediterranean irrigation and water supply for smallholder farmers by providing efficient, low-cost, and nature-based technologies and practices. The objectives of the MED-WET project, which commenced in June 2021 and will be ongoing for the next three years, are to:

- develop new irrigation technologies and solutions widely applicable for smallholder farmers;
- equipping smallholder farmers with knowledge and skills to install, adapt, and operate more efficient and effective irrigation options;

- increase irrigation water availability from salinized and secondary sources; and
- enhance farm profitability and environmental footprint of pilot farming practices.

With regard to water conservation, it is important to note that the Chadwick Lakes Regeneration Project, for which EWA is responsible, was completed in 2021. This project, partly financed by the EU, focuses on the reinstatement of the storage capacity of the existing dams of the area and the restoration of the valley's ecology. In 2021, works continued, included the restoration of rubble walls, planting of new trees, installation of railing and the construction of pathways and picnic areas. These areas will serve as recreational areas for tourists who visit the lakes, while offering a place where one can appreciate nature. A website has been established to promote and provide information on the project's progress while serving as an educational portal to the public where one can enjoy and learn about the valley's biodiversity.

In line with this, there was also a continuation of the 'Water – Be the Change' campaign, which entered its third and final year, after being launched in 2019. This campaign is the National Water Conservation Campaign and was launched with the aim to address all water users and deliver an effective educational and awareness raising campaign on the optimised and efficient use of water resources. The Join the Drops outreach programme continued in touring every locality in Malta and Gozo with the use of the mobile unit and the campaign office at the Ghajn National Water Conservation Awareness Centre as distribution hubs for the water saving gift packs and kit boxes. The outreach programme continued to be the main contact point to engage face to face with water users when it comes to raising awareness.

Throughout 2021, the water champion pilot study continued with the installations of the possible interventions in the homes, agricultural lands, and public offices of the applicants. Monitoring of water conservation began on the cases where interventions were completed. The campaign message on the importance of water conservation was also spread through the use of social media, TV and radio adverts, online articles, and the development of an animated series aired on local TV.

In addition to the above, in 2021, the Ghajn National Water Conservation Awareness Centre developed two more interactive educational programmes together with the past four educational water programmes. These two components specifically target pupils studying between Levels 4 and 6, offering an interactive and engaging experience with the intention of helping them understand the concepts of renewable energy, energy efficiency, and energy labelling.

Achievement of targets for surface freshwaters and associated aquatic ecosystems is primarily sought through the implementation of Malta's Water Catchment Management Plan (WCMP), pursuant to the EU Water Framework Directive (WFD). In this regard, ERA has significantly invested in the environmental permitting system, both in terms of human resources and regulatory framework, thus strengthening the authority's capacity to regulate activities with potential impacts on aquatic environments. This is primarily achieved through screening of activities and imposition of conditions and monitoring in environmental permits. Complementing the permitting functions, ERA has also strengthened the enforcement and compliance arm in order to ensure that conditions stipulated in environmental permits are followed-up, take any enforcement action as per necessary, and carry out investigation of complaints related to any pollution incident.

In addition, the WCMP ensures monitoring of waters with a view to continuously assess the status of such waters and inform management processes. In order to address emerging water contamination risks, a monitoring strategy for contaminants of emerging concern was developed through the LIFE IP River Basin Management Plan (RBMP) project (LIFE 16 IPE MT 000008).¹⁹ The action involves the development of a monitoring strategy at a national river basin district scale for contaminants of emerging concern in four water categories, namely surface waters (coastal and inland surface waters), rainwater runoff, groundwater, and new water (highly polished water resulting from urban wastewater treatment). The results will act as a guide to the development of future monitoring programmes and inform management and licensing processes. A grounds investigation of the allocated site for the implementation of this action was conducted and concluded in 2021.

Action C.4 under this project focuses on educational activities promoting the conservation of water resources. One of these activities includes an annual call for project initiatives to be undertaken in schools to promote the better use of water resources. These project initiatives include an educational dimension aimed at ensuring the active participation of students in the development and implementation of the initiative, this in order to increase awareness in students of the need to optimise the use water in the Maltese islands.

This year the fourth call for projects was launched, which focuses on supporting water conservation educational activities in schools. The themes for this year's projects are rainwater harvesting and water conservation, where projects may tackle one or both of these themes. The projects need to be identified by the students and the activities envisaged as part of the project need to be undertaken in the schools and/or their immediate surroundings. A comprehensive approach and, therefore, involving the whole school, must be applied for the activities concerning this year's theme. The involvement of students both during the preparation and the implementation of the project is encouraged.

Moreover, work on Action C.6 under the same project which proposes the development of a demonstration site in Gozo for the application of New Water to agricultural irrigation continued. To this end, an application was submitted to the PA for the civil works and infrastructure work related to the construction of the bi-partisan reservoir for the storage of New Water and groundwater and the necessary infrastructure and pumping equipment for efficient irrigation of different sections of the farm, while an application for an Environmental Permit was submitted to ERA during the final quarter of 2021.

Furthermore, Malta is in the process of updating the WCMP for the third implementation cycle of the WFD. A public consultation process was finalised in February 2021. The plan will provide a status assessment of waters in the Maltese islands and will identify the measures necessary to enable the progressive achievement of good status conditions in the WFD water bodies, which include inland surface and transitional waters.



¹⁹ The LIFE Integrated Project supports the implementation of Malta's 2nd RBMP through the undertaking of several measures aimed at optimising the use of water resources in the Maltese islands.

3.3 Waste Management

Key Sustainable Development Goal Targets

SDG 11.6

By 2030, reduce the adverse per capita environmental impact of cities, including by paying special attention to air quality and municipal and other waste management.

SDG 12.3

By 2030, halve per capita global food waste at the retail and consumer levels and reduce food losses along production and supply chains, including post-harvest losses.

SDG 12.4

By 2020, achieve the environmentally sound management of chemicals and all wastes throughout their life cycle, in accordance with agreed international frameworks, and significantly reduce their release to air, water and soil in order to minimize their adverse impacts on human health and the environment.

SDG 12.5

By 2030, substantially reduce waste generation through prevention, reduction, recycling and reuse.

SDG 12.6

Encourage companies, especially large and transnational companies, to adopt sustainable practices and to integrate sustainability information into their reporting cycle.

SDG 14.1

By 2025, prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds, in particular from land-based activities, including marine debris and nutrient pollution.

In 2021, the then MECP adopted Malta's Waste Management Plan (WMP) 2021-2030,²⁰ which features a set of over one hundred and thirty short-medium and long-term measures aimed at improving waste prevention and management. The new WMP focuses specifically on waste prevention, waste collection, waste management, enforcement, and data management. This strategic document complements those actions that will be undertaken as part of the Single-Use Plastics Strategy²¹ and the Construction and Demolition Waste Strategy.²²

Food waste features prominently in Malta's WMP 2021-2030. This new WMP will increase the prevention of waste through measures such as encouraging food donation, incentivising product repair and reuse, establishing a regulatory framework to enable people to opt out of receiving unaddressed mail, and fostering a collaborative approach from all generators of waste, including industry, government, and private citizens. Considerable attention is given to preventing food waste and collecting source-separated organic waste even from commercial establishments. Waste separation at source will in fact be made mandatory both for industry and households, leading to lower volumes of mixed waste. This goes hand in hand with the development of new infrastructure resulting in higher rates of recycling and maximising the potential of organic waste. Assessing the feasibility of a pay-as-you-throw mechanism, in line with the Polluter Pays Principle, will lead to identifying whether the introduction of such a mechanism could further contribute to achieve these aims.

Furthermore, the new WMP incorporates policy measures related to the investment in infrastructure aimed at substantially improving Malta's recycling rate, such as the establishment of a material recovery facility and converting organic waste into biogas and agricultural compost through an Organic Processing Plant. In addition, non-recyclable waste generated will be converted into energy through a waste-to-energy plant for material and a thermal treatment facility for hazardous waste.

²⁰ Malta's Waste Management Plan, available at: <https://era.org.mt/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Long-Term-Waste-Management-Plan-v1.4.3-Spreads-Digital-Version.pdf>

²¹ Single-Use Plastic Strategy, available at: <https://era.org.mt/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Single-Use-Plastics-Strategy.pdf>

Other policy measures in the new WMP include the improving of waste collection by moving towards a regional model which utilises more environmentally friendly collection vehicles, increasing enforcement resources and bolstering legal frameworks, and enhancing data management by using digital systems to gather higher quality waste-related data.

As far as food waste is concerned, the Pitkalija is addressing the issue at point of sale by directing food that is not sold to organisations and social enterprises that help people in need. More recently, the Malta Food Agency (MFA) is also engaging with entrepreneurs who are willing to buy unsold food and use it as raw material for processing. Apart from this, the notion of responsible consumption and production is also featuring in the meat processing facility where, in order to limit waste generation, animal by-products such as tripe and blood are being utilised to make new products such as the traditional kirxa and mazzit, both of which are highly sought after by Maltese consumers.

In addition to the above, Malta has increased its efforts to shift from a linear to a circular economy pattern that could provide an opportunity to promote a new economic niche. In 2021, the then MECP launched the Circular Economy Malta (CEMalta), which will promote new business conditions, whereby producers will be responsible for part of the whole lifecycle of productions, starting from their placement on the market to the end of the products' life, identifying alternative streams of products prior to waste. In this respect, CEMalta continued to work on the implementation of the Beverage Containers Refund Scheme, ensuring that the necessary infrastructure is in place by 2022, including the machines through which the general public will be able to return empty containers.

In 2021, following public consultation, the Construction and Demolition Waste Strategy (2021-2030) was adopted. This will help in contributing further to Malta's transition towards a more circular economy thereby closing the loop of products' lifecycles. Moreover, the strategy aims to identify options for the management of waste arising from construction and demolition activities by, primarily, addressing the current issues within the sector as well as highlighting the possible short-term and long-term measures to be adopted, with a view of shifting the treatment of such waste from backfilling to re-using and recycling. The strategy identifies several gaps that need to be addressed, including the high rates of construction and demolition waste generated as a result of intensive development, leading to high dependency on backfilling and, consequently, a lack of void space.



²² Construction and Demolition Waste Strategy, available at: <https://era.org.mt/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Construction-and-Demolition-Waste-Strategy-for-Malta-2021-2030-Managing-Construction-Demolition.pdf>

3.4 Sustainable Fisheries and Aquaculture

Ever since the introduction of the Fishing Conservation and Management Act (Chapter 425) in 2001, the fishing industry on the Maltese islands became better supported and regulated. This was further enhanced with the introduction of L.N. 178 of 2021 Fees Ordinance (CAP. 35), Fisheries Conservation and Management Act (CAP. 425). The Wholesale Fish Market Fees Regulations, 2021, empowered the Director to ensure that all fees and deductions made in accordance with the Wholesale Fish Market Fees Regulations are paid by the retailers and made according to the same set of regulations under the same Act.

Furthermore, on 1 June 2021, L.N. 233 of 2021 paved the way for the adoption of Subsidiary Legislation (S.L.) 425.15 Fisheries Conservation and Management Act (CAP. 425); Work in Fishing Convention (Amendment) Regulations, 2021, which further supports the implementation of the provisions of the International Labour Organisation (ILO); and Work in Fishing Convention C 188 that specifies the requirement that fishers' conditions on board fishing vessels are to be endorsed through certain agreements. In addition to this, the L.N. Fishing Vessels (Amendment) Regulations, 2021 (L.N. 305 of 2021) published on 16 July 2021 will now provide a means of correcting large discrepancies relating to the utilisation of resources and the accuracy of data concerning the Maltese fishing fleet against a payment of a fee, which would, in turn, be used to provide more services to fishers.

3.4.1 Nationally Funded Schemes and Initiatives

3.4.1.1 Schemes

For the third year running, the Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture (DFA) within the then Ministry for Agriculture, Fisheries, Food and Animal Rights (MAFA) launched the Boat Restoration Scheme, which provided financial assistance to those boat owners that are in possession of one of the traditional Maltese wooden vessels, namely the *firilla*, *frejgatina*, *kajjik*, and the *luzzu*. This scheme, through which 143 small-scale fishers benefitted in 2021, is also an incentive for fishers to keep utilising the wooden vessels, which arguably require higher maintenance and repair costs.

In 2021, the DFA embarked on the implementation of the Incentive Scheme for Sustainable Fishing, which aims to promote more responsible fishing and awareness of the negative impacts of practices that are currently in place. This was carried out in order to promote sustainable fishing, as well as the conservation of marine biological resources and the marine environment.

During 2021, the DFA also managed to acquire the State Aid Monitoring Board's approval for the allocation of €800,000 through national funding for the administration and implementation of the COVID-19 Financial Aid Grant Scheme for fishers. The scheme is aimed at supporting those fishers who were so negatively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, and helped them preserve their employment through compensation measures, whilst boosting their engagement and work. The financial assistance proposed via this scheme is based on the value lost per fish caught from the reduction in demand in 2020, totalling to €0.98c per kilogram of fish caught throughout that year. 506 micro-, small- and medium-scale fishers benefitted from the aid granted as part of the scheme with a total of €713,150 being disbursed.

3.4.1.2 Initiatives

The Lost Gear Response Initiative was launched by the MAFA with the aim of recovering lost fishing gear at sea. This will serve to not only reduce marine litter polluting our seas but will also safeguard the lives and well-being of hundreds of marine species inhabiting them. Any fishing gear found to be in good condition will be returned to the fishers for further use.

At the end of 2020, the DFA launched a children's competition entitled "Fishing for Recipes", the purpose being the promotion of consumption of local underutilised fish species in the Maltese islands, whilst also encouraging the public to make sustainable choices when purchasing fish. The submitted winning recipes were then chosen by a team of judges in February 2021.

With the assistance of Malta Libraries, a specialised reference-only library was set up at the Aquaculture Directorate Malta. This library will be very useful to both the Directorate as well as students attending courses related to the Fisheries and Aquaculture Science at the UoM and MCAST, and those students showing interest in nature and the marine biome attending primary and secondary schools.

During 2021, by allocating specific locations of catch to fishing enthusiasts and the usage of the rixa and other specific fishing floats, the DFA tried to ensure that all fishers acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development and adopt sustainable lifestyles. In order to regulate this, a Fisheries App was set up so that individuals and organisations interested in getting involved would be able to apply for a permit.

The imrejkba—a traditional method of fishing dating centuries—is nowadays a recreational sustainable fishing method due to its selective way of fishing. In 2021, a consultation with recreational fishers was launched by the DFA with regard to this particular type of fishing in order to establish parameters and guidelines for sustainable fishing.

Throughout 2021, seeing the value of having officers improve their skills, competencies, and knowledge, the DFA, in collaboration with the European Fisheries Control Agency, developed a workshop that served as an induction course for new members that form part of the Fisheries Control Unit in promoting the highest common standards for control, inspections, and surveillance under the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP).

Training was also given to officers with regard to the effective use of the vessel monitoring system (VMS) and on the application that operates solely for extraction and general data reporting. Through the VMS, fishing vessels and fish carriers are monitored while having their positioning, real tracking, and activity at sea constantly updated on the system.



3.4.2 EU-funded Schemes, Initiatives and Projects

3.4.2.1 Schemes

The Swordfish Temporary Cessation Scheme provides financial compensation to both full-time and part-time fishing vessel owners that fish for swordfish. Since swordfish stocks are still on the road to recovery, this scheme's aim was to prolong the closed season by an additional month, while providing compensation to those fishers that chose not to go out at sea during the month of December, with a total of 37 potential eligible applicants applying for it since its launch in October 2021.

3.4.2.2 Initiatives and Projects

Throughout the first quarter of 2021, further training to fishers and their spouses was made available through a number of specialised training courses. The aim of these courses was to impart upon the participants knowledge about food safety and hygiene, health and safety at sea, as well as know-how on the best use of navigational equipment. A total of around €450,000 was invested in this training, with 363 fishers benefitting from the courses offered.

With regard to combatting illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, a number of seminars were organised by the DFA. Furthermore, a publicity and awareness-raising campaign was launched whereby the general public was also made aware of the importance of having a sustainable fishing industry, the problems caused by IUU fishing, as well as of what the DFA is doing with respect to controls in the fisheries sector.

In order to address the requirements of the fishing sector and ensure the sustainability of our seas and the marine life found therein, a number of projects under the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) were undertaken. One such project involved the installation of CCTV equipment on automated weighing and labelling stations (AWLs), which are utilised by fishers to weigh and label their fish prior to selling it. This added a layer of security as the good condition of the scales is ensured and any vandalism is prevented.

In addition to the above, through EU funding, the DFA obtained the necessary funds to invest in the development of an Integrated Fisheries Management System and to purchase smart waterproof tablets. This proposed system, which will be compatible with the Fisheries Language for Universal Exchange, will enable the DFA to capture, integrate, process, and display real-time data from multiple sources, including VMS, satellite radar, an automatic identification system, oceanographic/meteorological data, and an electronic catch and activity reporting system. It will also integrate other data which is being generated by equipment currently in use by the Fisheries Directorate such as the e-logbooks and AWL machines. This investment will help save time and energy and reduce costs relating to reporting obligations as well as eliminate the need to correspond with third parties when it comes to data and reporting requirements.

During 2021, the DFA continued any work or initiatives started in the previous years, including those related to the collection and compiling of statistics and information relating to the fishing industry whereby data on fishing capacity and effort, catch, and landing statistics, biometric parameters, scientific surveys at sea and economics of the fishing fleet, fish processing and aquaculture industries were collected.

2021 saw the conclusion of the DFA and ERA's joint work on the project 'HARMONY', which was a joint Interreg Italia-Malta project carried out in collaboration with various Maltese and Sicilian governmental, academic and research partners. The purpose of this project was to create a common framework between Malta and Sicily through which invasive species and their impact on the local marine ecosystem could be controlled and monitored, whilst developing joint strategies for the management of Natura 2000 sites and habitats. Thus, through this project, the

seafloor's integrity and health was ensured.

During 2021, work continued on the 'BYTHOS' project. Like 'HARMONY', this project is also a joint Interreg Italia-Malta project through which a joint space for researchers and experts in biotechnology, business, and industry was set up in both Malta and Sicily. Through the project, investment was made when it comes to the purchasing and setting up of furniture and equipment such as a freeze dryer and high speed refrigerated centrifuge, the installation of which were currently ongoing at Malta's Aquaculture centre in Fort San Luċjan during 2021, together with the purchasing of a Complete Direct Mercury Analysis System and Automated Fat Extraction System.

With the support of the EU and participating Member States, through the Partnership for Research and Innovation in the Mediterranean Area Programme, the DFA embarked on a project regarding the setting up of Self-sufficient Integrated Multi-Trophic AquaPonic (SIMTAP) systems. This project, which is partly financed by MCST, focuses on R&I, whereby there will be a shift from the integrated multi-trophic aquaculture approach towards an innovative SIMTAP system for small-scale, labour-intensive, and environmentally friendly marine fish and halophytic plants production adapted to the typical socio-economic and climatic condition of Mediterranean areas.

The DFA's participation in the BLUEfasma and LIFE PanPuffinus, which are two international projects, carried on in 2021. The former is looking into means of integrating the principles of circular economy within the fisheries and aquaculture sectors while empowering SMEs to use circular economy tools to boost economic growth. The latter, which was launched in June 2021 by Birdlife Malta, will aim to protect and safeguard two endemic Mediterranean seabirds that are currently under threat—the Yelkouan Shearwater (*Puffinus yelkouan*) and the Balearic Shearwater (*Puffinus mauretanicus*). This will be done by improving the way data is collected and monitored.

During 2021, Infrastructure Malta finalised works on the new 110-metre breakwater project at Ponta tal-Qrejten. This project was funded with the help of the EU and was aimed at providing shelter to the port of Marsaxlokk and the surrounding beaches. This will also benefit the fishers since their vessels and equipment will be protected even when heavy storms hit the area.

Throughout 2021, final works continued on the upgrading of the fisheries' infrastructure of Gozo, a project funded through the EMFF. This project is aimed at modernising the fishermen's facilities located at the designated fishing ports of Mġarr and Xlendi, together with the introduction of new related amenities. The project is expected to be officially launched in early 2022.

3.5 Sustainable Agriculture

Key Sustainable Development Goal Targets

SDG 2.4

By 2030, ensure sustainable food production systems and implement resilient agricultural practices that increase productivity and production, that help maintain ecosystems, that strengthen capacity for adaptation to climate change, extreme weather, drought, flooding and other disasters and that progressively improve land and soil quality.

Throughout 2021, the Maltese government continued to work towards steering the agricultural sector towards becoming more sustainable. This is being done according to the guidelines and vision set out by the National Agricultural Policy (NAP) for the Maltese islands 2018-2028, whilst following the parameters set by the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and other international regulations. Over the course of 2021, a number of bilateral meetings were held with a number of stakeholders relating to the policy measures, an exercise that was very useful

in identifying gaps in the implementation process of the NAP.

During 2021, work also continued on Malta's first National Agricultural Act, which is still in its drafting stage. In addition to this, L.N. 266 of 2021: Supplies and Services Act (CAP. 117), which sets the legal basis for the provision of unfair trading practices in the food supply chain, was published in June 2021. As a result of this, the S.L., small food producers and retailers are protected from any unjust or unfair practices.

Legislative changes were also carried out by the Animal Health and Welfare Department (AHWD). Two noticeable Legal Notices published in 2021 were the Veterinary Medicinal Products (VMPs) (Amendment) Regulations, 2021 published as L.N. 179 of 2021, and the Administrative Penalties relating to Offences committed against the Animal Welfare Act Regulations, 2021 published as L.N. 342 of 2021. The National Veterinary Laboratory's (NVL) Veterinary Medicines Section within the AHWD has also worked on the National Anti-Microbial Resistance (AMR) Strategy and Action Plan for the Prevention and Containment of Anti-Microbial Resistance in Malta (2020-2028).

Moreover, an increase in the staff complement dedicated to the authorisation of VMPs is leading to a more robust evaluation procedure for the authorisation of such VMPs. This has led to a number of applications that were either refused or modified in order to reflect the principles of prudent use according to EU guidelines. In 2021 as well, a number of VMPs were removed from retail sale as they were not in line with the current requirements. Internal systems were also made more efficient through the preparation of standard operating procedures (SOPs) that help staff members carry out their regulatory functions.

Throughout 2021, the NVL worked on strengthening relevant surveillance and feedback systems on anti-microbial use and resistance in human and animal health. This was further supported by training opportunities for official veterinarians by professionals in this field. In 2021 various laboratory equipment has been purchased following calls for quotations and tenders. A feasibility study was contracted out to a French company, Lab Science, to evaluate the feasibility of expanding the NVL's testing capacities in three main areas: i) molecular biology; ii) confirmatory analysis of residues of veterinary drugs and contaminants; and iii) veterinary diagnostics, primarily using microbiology and serology techniques. This feasibility study was led by three experts who carried out a 3-day visit in October 2020 and issued their final report in January 2021.

An important milestone is the implementation of the electronic veterinary prescription, which will be rolled out in phases in the near future. Work also continued to improve hygiene standards in farms so as to prevent cross-transmission of animal pathogens.

In 2021 work was carried out on the reform of the Fruit and Vegetable Market, also known as the Pitkalija. The purpose of this reform is to ensure that farmers have a more just price return for their products through the recruitment of sales and marketing agents to manage the sales, barcoding of all crates that are delivered to the Pitkalija, as well as the refurbishment of the sales areas. Moreover, there will be better governance and control as well as more transparency through an Information Technology (IT) system reform which will also be utilised to provide farmers and stakeholders with information and data.

In January 2021, the MFA was set up through L.N. 7 of 2021 and launched in July of the same year. The aim of the agency is to identify new opportunities for the creation of new markets for local food producers, including short supply chains and export by engaging with operators in the food chain. The Agency, which will be the competent body of the marketing standards, will be helping local producers to meet the requirements of buyers so that they will be able to sell their products. The MFA shall also be assisting producers, either financially or through other types of agreements, to invest in the necessary infrastructure for the grading, packaging, and branding of their products in order to meet the marketing and certification standards and quality marks currently in place.

The MFA will also have the capacity to be a regulator, both in terms of the farming market as well as that concerning fishing, whilst administering the operations of the Pitkalija, Pixkerija, and the Abattoir. It should be added that, on 28 December 2021, the Marketing of Agricultural Produce and Agricultural Marketing Centres Regulations, 2021, known as L.N. 506 of 2021, was introduced so that the legal framework for the operation and implementation of the agricultural marketing centres and the marketing of agricultural produce are consolidated in tandem with the

regeneration and modernisation plan of the marketing centres. In addition, the MFA will also be responsible for the systems that are in charge of regulating food businesses and will act as the driver in achieving greater harmony among the various players in the value chain by promoting further collaboration and cooperation between them. Finally, the MFA will also administer a centralised system that will allow for more transparency and traceability of the sale of local fresh produce and give a level playing field for all stakeholders involved in the market.

Malta's Common Agricultural Policy Strategic Plan (CAP SP) 2023-2027 was launched for public consultation in November 2021. The CAP SP will build upon the support offered by the CAP measures, direct payments and schemes and will cover both Malta and Gozo. The CAP SP is also in line with the European Policies and Regulations for the same time period and will support all three general objectives set in the regulatory framework, namely fostering a smart, competitive, resilient, and diversified agricultural sector to guarantee long-term food security; supporting and strengthening environmental protection including biodiversity and climate action; and strengthening the socio-economic fabric of rural areas.

3.5.1 Grants, Schemes and Services Offered to Farmers

In 2021, the Agriculture and Rural Payments Agency (ARPA) continued to provide nationally funded schemes directed at land and livestock farmers severely impacted by the pandemic, with a total of €4,005,564.23 million being disbursed. The School Milk Scheme also continued throughout 2021 despite all the challenges present. With the closure of schools to contain the pandemic, no fresh milk could be distributed to schools and, therefore, as a countermeasure, the ARPA set up a system based on vouchers which allowed participating children to exchange milk vouchers for a portion of fresh milk at their convenience, and from any shop selling milk in Malta and Gozo.

The Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014-2020 carried on in 2021 with ARPA continuing the implementation and disbursement of direct payments to both arable and livestock farmers. Through this programme, such assistance is provided in order for the farmers to apply agricultural and farming practices which go over and above the mandatory baseline requirements, including the use of mechanical, not chemical, means of controlling weeds in orchards and vineyards; the maintaining of recommended tree species to replace invasive species; the introduction of bee boxes; the implementation of an integrated pest management plan in orchards and vineyards; the implementation of a soil management and conservation plan; and the integration and maintenance of the autochthonous Maltese carob and mulberry plant species.

ARPA and MCAST have designed the Young Farmers Scheme, a financial assistance scheme of €428,000, which is being offered to young farmers through which they enter into arrangements with locally established farmers who, under MCAST's coordination, supervision and guidance, spend time assisting the farmer. With this scheme, young farmers will start gaining the experience and know-how related to the work involved both through a hands-on approach as well as via a structured theoretical approach and theoretical learning.

Another scheme developed and launched by the ARPA is the Pig Welfare Scheme, which is a grant aimed at supporting efforts in the primary agricultural production sector that voluntarily undertake certain specific actions to improve animal welfare on their farm.

The Grant for Production Planning to Farmers based on the Sale of Agricultural Produce is another scheme that was launched in 2021. As a result of this scheme, farmers will be given financial assistance through which they can develop and manage a production plan based on supply and demand. This is all being done with sustainability in mind whilst adhering to international guidelines and European strategies such as the European Green Deal and the Farm-to-Fork Strategy, which are all aimed at having a more sustainable agricultural sector by encouraging responsible production and the reduction of waste.

In 2021, the Plant Protection Directorate (PPD) launched a financial compensation scheme to compensate registered farmers for the costs of the control and eradication of the Tomato Brown Rugose Fruit Virus (ToBRFV) and to make good for the damage caused by the spread of ToBRFV.

In 2021, AgriConnect continued and started offering a number of services such as:

- Soil management plans;
- Support related to agricultural leases;
- Advice in relation to agri-environment climate measures;
- Drafting of crop plans and fertiliser plans; and
- Advice on cross-compliance.

AgriConnect is also helping farmers tap into diversification opportunities by providing advisory support when it comes to funding, as well as by offering them training sessions and disseminating promotional material and articles in Nisġet Artna and television interviews. In addition to the above, AgriConnect has also developed a Crop and Fertiliser Plan system that will facilitate the process by which farmers get advice on what is the optimal amount of Nitrogen, Phosphorus and Potassium (NPK) required for the crops being grown in their fields.

In order to better complement all the services being offered, in particular at Għammieri and Pitkalija during 2021, AgriConnect launched a new office in Mellieħa, with a new regional office being planned for early 2022 in Haż-Żabbar to cater for farmers in the southern regions of the island. During 2021, a €200,000 renovation investment project of the Agricultural Services Laboratory located at the Agricultural Research and Innovation Hub was inaugurated, where a laboratory providing all the necessary equipment required by farmers to test the soil and water for irrigation as well as more professional services relating to the sustainable management of crops and fields, among other things, was set up. The results of these tests can then be used by the farmers in the application of fertilisers according to the fertilisation plan and thus preventing over-fertilisation.

3.5.2 Projects for Sustainable Agriculture and Food Security

Work on the Agriculture Research and Innovation Hub (AgriHub) Project continued throughout 2021. This project, a collaboration between the Bari International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies (CIHEAM), MCAST and MAFA, will aim at intensifying national research into the agricultural sector to deliver better methods using more precision. This will primarily be based on monitoring pests through traps as well as identifying areas in Malta and Gozo that are of agricultural importance. The monitoring stations are equipped with sensors to collect various information that will lead to the delivery of recommendations to farmers. While traps are common in agriculture, they have been improved using AI to provide a snapshot of the pest situation in an area in real time. This will result in timely pest management by the farmers; thus, the use of pesticides is reduced and targeted.

In addition, a survey consisting of 400 questionnaires was conducted over a two-month period in which farmers were interviewed to gauge the current practices employed by the local farming community with respect to soil, crop, and water management as well as the application of pesticides and fertilisers, among others being explored. The data was then analysed by CIHEAM, resulting in the development of the Compendium of Agronomic Practices, which is currently in its finalising stages and which will act as a cultivation guideline for the five primary crops cultivated within the Maltese islands, namely tomatoes, potatoes, grapevines, olives, and strawberries.

There are currently 31 installations of TrapView™ pest monitoring stations installed with 26 being on private agricultural plots. Moreover, throughout 2021, work continued on the Siti 4 Farmer web application with testing being carried out in order to determine the capabilities and applications of the technology at hand as well as to identify and mitigate technical issues. In 2021, further investment and upgrading was carried out with regard to the

AgriHub monitoring room so that it would be better equipped to adapt and respond to the changing needs of the project.

Another deliverable of the AgriHub project relates to trials with multiple species of fodder, of which harvesting continued in 2021. These early trials allowed researchers to observe what types of fodder crops would be most receptive to the local agronomic conditions. In the second half of 2021, extensive preparations were made in terms of procuring of seeding material, equipment and trial testing logistics to prepare for the second phase of the trials, both for test sites within Ghammieri, as well as on privately owned agricultural plots.

The PPD is currently collaborating with several relevant stakeholders on the establishment of a National Gene Bank for the ex-situ conservation of indigenous agricultural crops and trees, wild indigenous and endemic plants species, both of which are of importance to Malta's natural and cultural heritage. This gene bank, the construction of which started towards the end of 2021, will provide space for the storage of seeds and plant tissues for in vitro storage and cryo-preservation, while complementing the existing infrastructure at the Directorate to produce and store artificial seeds. This facility will also have the role to generate and analyse genetic diversity for the germplasm stored within its chambers, therefore filling large gaps in the knowledge of national plant genetic heritage.

Throughout the course of 2021, an autochthonous grapevine variety conservation programme took place at the National Viticulture and Oenology Centre, with the aim of reducing the use of plant protection products through the use of varieties that are more adaptable to the Maltese environment, whilst increasing the demand for the local product through the existing demand for niche products linked to particular territories.

Furthermore, the PPD conducted a national survey on the presence of insects which can potentially be a vector for *Xylella fastidiosa*, which is a bacteria that can infect a wide range of host plants including plants of agricultural economic importance for Malta, including olive, almond, citrus, grapevine, rosemary, polygala myrtifolia, and oleander. The survey involved the trapping and identification of insects during the months of May and July, which were chosen as these dates coincide with the adult stage of the vector *Philaenus spumarius* that had been previously identified in the Maltese islands.

In 2021, the PPD continued to implement a project financed by the European Food Safety Authority which focuses on the harmful organism *Phyllosticta citricarpa*, which causes the black spot on citrus species. Throughout 2021, collection and submission of samples for laboratory testing took place to determine whether this plant pest is present.

During 2021, the NVL continued the Salmonella National Control Programme in accordance with the provisions laid out in Directive 2160/2003, through which zoonotic Salmonella infection in broilers and laying hens flocks could be monitored and controlled. During 2021, poultry farmers were given training and were provided with guidelines on themes and issues relating to biosecurity.

3.5.3 Awareness Raising

During 2021, a number of campaigns to promote short supply chains, fresh produce and quality products, such as the media campaign titled *Aghżel Bnin*, *Aghżel Frisk*, continued. Moreover, in September 2021, the Agri Kwalità campaign was launched by the Agriculture Directorate (AD) in order to promote and bring together the Organic Production and Labelling Scheme, Products of Quality National Scheme, and the D.O.K and I.G.T Wines Scheme, which help in increasing the awareness and appreciation of, as well as participation in, local agricultural produce.

A strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis was carried out by the Organic Farming Advisory Board so as to identify any challenges present in the sector and establish a means with which to overcome them. Such challenges, together with information relating to the concept of organic farming and the organic certification scheme are all visible on the ministry's website ²³, which will be beneficial to both the potential operators interested in participating in the aforementioned scheme and the general public alike.

The campaigns are all aimed at encouraging a shift towards more sustainable agricultural practices while at the same time presenting ways of improving yields, food security, biodiversity, and soil quality. Although the Mnarja festivities—normally held in Buskett on 29 June—were cancelled as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, an online Mnarja promotional campaign took place instead, whereby information on the history and the traditions linked to the annual celebration was shared.

In the area of antimicrobials, several guidance notes were made available online, while a leaflet related with the same subject, started being disseminated to farmers during inspections and other occasions. The AHWD has also contributed with informative articles about AMR. Such articles aim to expand the educational animal health campaigns targeted specifically at farmers, animal and pet owners emphasising on the risks of non-prescribed use of antibiotics or acquisition of antibiotics from unlicensed sources, as well as the benefits and cost effectiveness of greater hygiene. Discussions also started with farmers' co-operatives for joint educative sessions. These are planned to be held during 2022. AHWD officers also participated in various television programmes on local stations, where they explained the importance of the prudent use of antimicrobials to the general public.

With an investment of €100,000, MAFA launched the first phase of the renovation and conversion of an old building at Buskett into an interactive museum to raise awareness on vine growing in Malta as well as on areas designated for viticulture, on the production of wine and other viticulture information. The building will also serve to disseminate studies and results emanating from local research on vine cultivation as well as the wine process with the relative winegrowers.



²³ Information on Organic Production and Labelling, available at: https://agrikultura.gov.mt/en/agricultural_directorate/Pages/organicProductionAndLabelling.aspx

3.6 Animal Welfare

Malta has also recognised that animal welfare is also at the heart of sustainability. Through the Animal Welfare Directorate, during 2021, financial support was provided to various NGOs whose work revolves around improving the welfare of animals in the country either through the management of animal sanctuaries, the provision of animal support services, or even through their participation in awareness raising campaigns. Moreover, the same Directorate continued to offer an on-call animal ambulance service while also embarking on an initiative to improve the current facilities for animals rescued and kept for rehoming within the Għammieri complex.

In addition, 49 local councils have gone through the Local Council Care Fund and have applied for funding to set up projects that address the needs of animals in their communities with projects ranging from the setting up of dog parks and cat cafés to the management of veterinary care for stray animals and the setting up of post-surgery care rooms, among others. This, together with other grants and services like the Animal Welfare Fund, the Adoption Policy, and Free Vet Services to NGOs continued to help control the stray cat and dog population in the Maltese islands.

During 2021, the Veterinary Regulation Directorate (VRD) also worked to promote animal welfare in Malta by embarking on a budgetary measure enabling upgrades to commence on the Small Animal Quarantine (SAQ) facility in Luqa. The SAQ is the facility where pets arriving in Malta who do not comply with Regulation (EU) 576 of 2013 on the non-commercial movement of pet animals are housed for a stipulated period.

Through such projects and awareness-raising initiatives, together with other events such as the organisation of the first edition of the Animal Honours Awards that took place on 4 October 2021, the Government of Malta continued in its efforts to educate and raise awareness about animal welfare among the general public.

3.7 Safeguarding Biodiversity

Key Sustainable Development Goal Targets

SDG 2.5

By 2020, maintain the genetic diversity of seeds, cultivated plants and farmed and domesticated animals and their related wild species, including through soundly managed and diversified seed and plant banks at the national, regional and international levels, and promote access to and fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the utilisation of genetic resources and associated traditional knowledge, as internationally agreed.

SDG 6.6

By 2020, protect and restore water-related ecosystems, including mountains, forests, wetlands, rivers, aquifers and lakes.

SDG 15.1

By 2020, ensure the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of terrestrial and inland freshwater ecosystems and their services, in particular forests, wetlands, mountains and drylands, in line with obligations under international agreements.

SDG 15.2

By 2020, promote the implementation of sustainable management of all types of forests, halt deforestation, restore degraded forests and substantially increase afforestation and reforestation globally.

SDG 15.8

By 2020, introduce measures to prevent the introduction and significantly reduce the impact of invasive alien species on land and water ecosystems and control or eradicate the priority species.

SDG 15.9

By 2020, integrate ecosystem and biodiversity values into national and local planning, development processes, poverty reduction strategies and accounts.

SDG 15.a

Mobilize and significantly increase financial resources from all sources to conserve and sustainably use biodiversity and ecosystems.

The National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) serves as a national policy driver to integrate and mainstream biodiversity into relevant sectoral or cross-sectoral plans, programmes, and policies.

The aim and objectives of Malta's NBSAP to 2030 were published in July 2020 for public consultation, following which ERA started working on the development of a new set of national targets and actions, in line with the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework under the UN Convention on Biological Diversity and the EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2030. This new NBSAP was built upon the lessons learnt from the implementation of Malta's NBSAP 2012-2020 together with a first set of considerations received by the public, both of which helped in identifying existing strengths and gaps.

3.7.1 Land Ecosystems and their Services

Furthermore, in 2021, ERA launched the development of the National Trees and Woodlands Strategy and Action Plan 2022-2030 which aims to promote trees and woodlands and further integrate forestation and restoration concerns into the plans, programmes, and policies of related sectors in Malta. Indeed, it is recognised that the management of trees and woodlands is a long-term activity capable of providing a range of social, economic, and environmental benefits, whilst also contributing significantly towards mitigating the effects of climate change. This Strategy and Action Plan also aims at improving the status of tree and woodland species and their genetic diversity by reducing various direct and indirect pressures and threats affecting their range and distribution, and hence their future prospects. In 2021, public consultations were carried out on its aim and objectives.

Malta is also implementing the Management Plans for Terrestrial Natura 2000 Sites in Malta and Gozo, as adopted in December 2016. The revision process for the conservation objectives and measures for terrestrial Natura 2000 sites has initiated and public consultations were carried out during 2021 on the relevant aims and objectives. In addition, management agreements are in place for some Natura 2000 sites which aim to address conservation actions related to the control and removal of alien species, habitat restoration, and to improve the conservation status of species within the sites.

Monitoring and reporting of the status of species, habitats, and ecosystems was also accomplished through field visits, commissioned studies, and participation in projects. Various equipment was also attained to assist in the monitoring and assessment of various parameters in relation to habitats, which would support the reporting obligations under the EU Nature Acquis.

As part of the enforcement protection of Natura 2000 sites, Ambjent Malta recruited ten environment rangers responsible for promoting public awareness on activities that can be undertaken in protected sites without harming biodiversity.

During 2021, work started on the Fight Alien Species Transborder (FAST) Project that is being funded under the Interreg Italia-Malta 2014-2020. The main aim of the project is to address biodiversity loss and the degradation, as well as restoration, of the ecosystem services in the area and sites of the Natura 2000 network.

SiMaSeed Project, an Italia-Malta Interreg Project, was finalised on 27 October 2021. This project involved the setting up of seed banks for the conservation of biodiversity in Malta and Sicily. The project focused on the identification of priority species for conservation in Natura 2000 sites, the collection of seeds for seed bank storage, the development of germination protocols for selected species, the mass propagation of these species using in vitro and conventional methods, and the reintroduction of the propagated species in selected intervention seed sites.

ERA has also undertaken various communication, education and public awareness activities aimed at educating the general public on various biodiversity-related topics through various media platforms, particularly TV and social media. Meanwhile, other work for online dissemination was carried out, especially in connection with the development of an online delivery service related to protected areas, while the development of other services is underway. Similarly, delivery services that will assist in the centralisation of data gathered from different entities have been developed and are being tested for further dissemination with relevant stakeholders and the general public. Moreover, a citizen science App on IAS developed by the Joint Research Centre has been adapted to the Maltese national context, including species of national interest.

Furthermore, ERA continued to work on the development of an action plan for the conservation of the Maltese honeybee (*Apis mellifera ruttneri*), where relevant stakeholders, such as farmers and beekeepers, will be involved in contributing to the effectiveness of the action plan.

In line with the NBSAP and the requirements of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification, the Government of Malta continued to undertake work on the National Action Plan on Desertification and Land Degradation. This has progressed in relation to the overarching policy areas, which were incorporated into the National Strategy on the Environment and the NBSAP. In this respect, these overarching thematic strategies include the adoption of measures addressing land degradation with the aim of maintaining natural land functions and processes and reducing vulnerability to climate change. Various actions were identified, some also implemented through EU-funded projects, such as the EU C-Cover Project, and ongoing activities in relation to soil preservation, site management within Natura 2000 areas, the promotion of green infrastructure, and the protection of high landscape features.

3.7.1.1 Valley Management

The rehabilitation and restoration of valleys is of ecological importance as it sustains biodiversity when considering that it is the habitat for various endemic and endangered species. The cleaning of valleys is aimed at reducing the risk of water flow blockages resulting in floods and, consequently, soil loss through erosion and biodiversity degradation, as well as water loss in the watercourses that would, in time, seep and replenish the groundwater table. Such preservation would also prevent field and crop damages leading to loss in production. On the other hand, valley rehabilitation is beneficial to the public as valleys provide cleaner and safer walk trails. Controlled and safe public access should help increase awareness and appreciation by the public of our country's natural gems.

To this end, throughout 2021, the Valley Management Unit within Parks Malta led numerous projects and capital works co-financed by European Funds, the latter being the Life Fund, the European Agricultural Fund, as well as the European Cohesion Fund. With the aid of these funds, Parks Malta has undergone several works in relation to valley management, including necessary structural maintenance and restoration, general cleaning, as well as the planting of trees and shrubs.

Parks Malta has concluded two projects that were co-financed by the EU through the European Agricultural fund under Measure 4.4 (Support for non-productive investments linked the achievement of agri-environment-climate objectives). This measure is intended to contribute to the achievement of agri-environment-climate objectives, which include the restoration of habitats and landscaping, soil conservation, and water management where there is no significant economic return to a farm or rural business.

One of the completed projects was the Restoration of Valley Features for the Environment of Agri-Environmental Values in Wied Garnaw, Wied il-Ġnejna, Wied il-Fiddien, Wied Ġhomor, and Wied ir-Rum. The other completed project was the small-scale ecological restoration of a coastal site in the Park Nazzjonali tal-Inwadar. €170,000 and €40,000 were invested in these projects respectively.

These projects focused on the restoration of rural structures such as stone bridges, water course channels, and rubble walls. Other interventions included the removal of debris and waste material, and the clearing of invasive and alien species that would have accumulated over time. Furthermore, the Inwadar project also consisted of a scientific study removal of material which has been dumped on the site over the years.

During 2021, Parks Malta also continued with the implementation of the LIFE IP RBMP project (LIFE 16 IPE MT 000008). Masterplans have been drawn up through Action A.8 giving specific attention to the main water catchment areas. The objective of the masterplans includes the vision and strategic direction up until 2050. Furthermore, through these masterplans, targeted actions to address key issues within each catchment area for the enhancement of the ecosystems are also outlined. The relevant actions and specific challenges and threats such as flooding and runoff generation, rainwater harvesting, and protection of biodiversity are also included in these masterplans. This part of the project was completed in May 2021 with an investment of €300,000.

By the end of 2021, under the same action, Parks Malta published a book on the studies carried out in relation to valleys, as well as the historical value and the characteristics that one finds in Malta and Gozo's valleys. This book is titled 'VALLEYS Discovering Malta and Gozo's watercourses and their value to society' and will be made publicly available through an online portal.

Other works included the rehabilitation of Wied Speranza through the cleaning of the valley from debris, the removal of IAS, as well as the planting of indigenous trees and shrubs with an investment of €460,000.

In 2021, Parks Malta continued to work on the RainWiin Project co-financed through the Cohesion Fund. More than €3,000,000 are being invested in this project, which consists of various interventions from field studies of several dams and reservoirs to actual intervention on restoration of both Wied il-Ġhasel and Wied Santa Katerina, which are interconnected valleys with the objective of increasing water harvesting by 45,000 cubic metres.

Works also continued on the rehabilitation of Gozo's valleys to enhance their rain-capturing and soil-retention capabilities. This project is an investment of over €10 million under the European Rural Development Programme for Malta 2014-2020. During 2020, applications for PA permits for the rehabilitation of more than ten valleys were submitted. By the end of 2021, a number of these permits were in place. In the meantime, as part of the same EU-funded project, implementation of the restoration of rubble walls across Gozo started. On this, works are currently ongoing on nine sites, namely Qasam San Ġorġ, Triq Hamimiet, Triq Santa Katarina Tal-Qabbieža, Triq Ġhajj Abdul, Triq Wied Junu, Triq il-Lanterna, Triq Daħlet Qorrot, Triq Sant' Antnin, and Triq Klula. Works also started on the restoration of rubble walls along Ramla valley as part of another EAFRD-EU-funded project. Restoration of rubble walls along Marsalforn Road, which aims to restore around 4,000 metres of rubble walls and to conserve

approximately 24,000 cubic metres of soil annually due to the reduction in the occurrence of run-off and field flooding, also continued. Where applicable, the retaining walls of this road will be built in a dry-wall manner to ensure an ideal habitat for existing ecosystems.

The field studies are intended to provide a clearer understanding of the present condition of the various dams and reservoirs in the Maltese Islands. It will provide significant and invaluable data on the sediment of each valley and its foundation and the magnitude of intervention needed to restore each valley. This information is required to develop project plans for each intervention in each valley for the coming years.

During 2021, Parks Malta, together with several public and private entities, local councils, and other voluntary organisations, also embarked on a new initiative through a clean-up campaign in various valleys within different localities to boost even further the educational importance of environmental awareness. Through this campaign, Parks Malta has pledged its commitment to plant twice the number of trees for every tonne of waste being collected.

3.7.1.2 Forest Management

Forest areas in Malta are very limited and are protected through various local and EU legislation. The role of forest areas in Malta is only for environmental purposes and forestry practices are limited to the conservation, maintenance, and the preservation of forests.

In 2021, Ambjent Malta planted 19,112 indigenous trees and shrubs and 5,640 non-indigenous trees and shrubs, which amount to a total of 24,752 trees and shrubs. The planting has been categorized in different categories, these being Natura 2000 Sites, Protected Areas, Rural Areas, Urban Areas, Botanic Garden, KSU and Fundazzjoni, Kaċċaturi, Nassaba u Konservazzjonisti Sites. Moreover, Ambjent Malta, together with ERA, proceeded with further conservation activities, namely in Buskett Forest, il-Miżieb and L-Aħrax tal-Mellieħa.

In addition to the above, throughout 2021, Parks Malta invested in several afforestation projects which contributed to the increase of carbon sequestration and biodiversity. More than 1,500 indigenous and endemic trees were planted in various localities in Malta. One third have been planted in valleys namely in Wied Għomor, Wied il-Ġnejna, and Wied Santa Katerina. The remaining trees were planted in parks and open public spaces including the Inwadar Natural Park and the Marsaskala Family Park.

During 2021 the Directorate for Rural Gozo within MGOZ continued with its programme of contributing to the greening of the island, whereby shrubs and trees continued to be planted along verges and roundabouts across Gozo, thus contributing to the general uplift of public areas. The Directorate was also responsible for the planting of indigenous trees in various parts of the island, thus enhancing the stock of local trees.

3.7.2 The Marine Environment

Key Sustainable Development Goal Targets

SDG 14.1

By 2025, prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds, in particular from land-based activities, including marine debris and nutrient pollution.

SDG 14.2

By 2020, sustainably manage and protect marine and coastal ecosystems to avoid significant adverse impacts, including by strengthening their resilience, and take action for their restoration in order to achieve healthy and productive oceans.

SDG 14.4

By 2020, effectively regulate harvesting and end overfishing, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and destructive fishing practices and implement science-based management plans, in order to restore fish stocks in the shortest time feasible, at least to levels that can produce maximum sustainable yield as determined by their biological characteristics.

SDG 14.5

By 2020, conserve at least 10 per cent of coastal and marine areas, consistent with national and international law and based on the best available scientific information.

SDG 14.b

Provide access for small-scale artisanal fishers to marine resources and markets.

SDG 15.5

Take urgent and significant action to reduce the degradation of natural habitats, halt the loss of biodiversity and, by 2020, protect and prevent the extinction of threatened species.

SDG 15.9

By 2020, integrate ecosystem and biodiversity values into national and local planning, development processes, poverty reduction strategies and accounts.

The management of the marine environment is primarily undertaken through the synergistic implementation of the EU Habitats Directive for the marine environment, the WFD for coastal waters, and the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) for all marine waters under jurisdictional rights.

For this purpose, Malta is implementing management measures as part of the WFD and MSFD Programme of Measures, targeting the achievement of good ecological status and the good chemical status of coastal waters, as well as the good environmental status of marine waters.

A study on the impact of the national spoil grounds off Xgħajra, which commenced in 2020, was completed in 2021. The outcome of this study will be considered for future implementation of specific measures.

Furthermore, part of the ongoing actions that are being funded through Life 16 IPE MT 000008 include:

- Anchoring and mooring surveys targeting a better understanding and quantification of impacts from anchoring and mooring activity on sensitive seabed habitats. The scope of the action is to facilitate decision-making processes with respect to management of impacts arising from anchoring and mooring activity in coastal and territorial waters through improved knowledge of such impacts as well as assessment of different management options on the basis of environmental and socio-economic considerations.
- The characterisation of hydrographical conditions of Maltese coastal and marine waters with a view to enable assessment of ecological status of such waters and assessment of potential impacts from hydro-morphological changes. In this regard, the action is seeking a significant improvement in Malta's capabilities to characterise hydro-morphological conditions through the setting up of dedicated observation and modelling systems.

- The assessment of the presence of chemicals of emerging concern in coastal waters of diffuse sources of pollution with a view to inform management processes for the marine environment.

In parallel, Malta has issued conservation objectives and measures for the eighteen Marine Protected Areas within the twenty-five nautical mile boundary designated under the Habitats Directive. This was a major step towards the protection of coastal and marine ecosystems. ERA is now in the process of revising the conservation objectives and measures on the basis of the public consultation processes, which were undertaken in 2021.

Furthermore, Malta also implements monitoring processes for the continuous assessment of the marine environmental status. Malta is in the process of updating the monitoring programme on the basis of long-term monitoring strategies developed as part of EU funded project EMFF 8.3.1. Through the implementation of this project in the period 2017-2022, ERA has developed a long-term monitoring strategy for seabirds and is developing long-term monitoring strategies for marine mammals, marine turtles, and food webs. These monitoring strategies will be reflected in the revised monitoring programme for the marine environment.

In addition to the above, the Interreg Med Project, BESS, was completed in early 2021. The project's aim was the monitoring of the small pocket beaches in Malta and Sicily and the relative monitoring of the coastal erosions with respect to the particularities of these beaches. The manual on beaches was published in the early weeks of 2021 as planned. During the same period, work continued on the installation of cameras and coastal monitoring equipment in Ramla l-Hamra Bay, Gozo. These cameras monitor the impact of the waves on the sand line and the general movement of the sand.

During 2021, work in relation to the Marsalforn Breakwater project continued. The first draft of the environmental impact assessment pertaining to the Marsalforn Breakwater project was submitted to ERA and was subject to public consultations. Meanwhile the geological investigations together with other studies required by ERA and the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage are underway.

In 2021, the Continental Shelf Department engaged the services of the Netherlands Organisation for Applied Scientific Research (TNO), which is the Geological Survey of the Netherlands, to carry out a preliminary study to assess the potential for the offshore geological storage of CO₂. The study, based on an analysis of existing geological and geophysical data, identified geological plays for possible storage of CO₂, also highlighting the considerable risks and uncertainties.

3.7.2.1 Addressing Single-Use Plastic Measures

Marine litter and plastic pollution continue to pose a serious threat towards biodiversity and the natural ecosystem. This is further accentuated by the risks posed by transboundary marine pollution and impacts towards various socio-economic activities at national level.

Recognising this challenge, in 2021, Malta undertook the implementation of regulatory reforms for the ban of certain single-use plastic products (S.L. 549.140). Furthermore, from a waste management perspective, ERA worked on the finalisation of the Single-Use Plastic Strategy 2021-2030, which aims to ensure the protection of the environment, including the marine environment and human health from plastic litter and pollution. The strategy includes twenty-four measures targeting various plastic products and is meant to ensure that a cultural shift takes place and that the public is aware of the negative impacts of consuming certain plastic products, in line with the circular economy values and the waste hierarchy. In this vein, the strategy highlights the impacts of incorrect disposal of certain plastic waste, the importance of reuse and recycling, and the importance of choosing alternative products made with more sustainable material. It also promotes the development of secondary markets for end-of-life resources.

In 2021, the then MECP continued to undertake legislative reform processes on the transposition exercise of the EU Single-Use Plastics Directive, which targets the most commonly found single-use plastic products in litter together with

fishing gear containing plastic through a set of different measures tailored to achieve the most effective results, whilst also considering the availability of more sustainable alternatives. Such measures range from market restrictions and separate collection for recycling targets to consumption reduction measures, certain product requirements as well as new extended producer responsibility obligations.

In summer 2021, the then MECP also launched, for the third consecutive year, the Marine Litter Campaign – ‘Saving Our Blue’, with the aim of continuously educating and encouraging the public to stop littering, reduce waste generation, and opt for alternative products to single-use items. The third edition focused mainly on the damage caused by microplastics, and the importance of protecting Marine Protected Areas.

The campaign also focused on alternatives to single-use plastics which will be banned at the point of sale by beginning of 2022, as per L.N. 481 of 2020. In this regard, an extensive marketing campaign has been carried out in order to further inform the public and raise awareness about the importance of switching to more environmentally sustainable products.

As per previous editions, beach clean-ups and dive clean-ups were carried out in collaboration with NGOs and other government entities. A total of eleven beach clean-ups were carried out, culminating on 18 September 2021, when four events were held simultaneously to commemorate World Clean Up Day. Approximately over 145 kgs of waste were collected throughout these events. Finally, as part of the awareness-raising activities, different communications and promotional activities were undertaken through various social media platforms.

In 2021, the Eco-Gozo Directorate, within MGOZ embarked on another Interreg Med Italia-Malta project called BioBLU. Through BioBLU, universities, together with the support of the same directorate, aim to give their innovative contribution towards mitigating the effects of plastic and microplastic debris that litter our seas and beaches. In order to achieve the results, an innovative prototype for beach cleaning using high levels of technology and automation will be developed.

Apart from aiding litter collection, it will also provide useful information for five biological studies on the different benthic and nektonic species, to understand the amount of pollution in different levels of the food chain and, above all, to trace the origin of such pollution. The BioBLU project aims to promote a new management approach, relying on new technologies and newly available knowledge.

3.8 Sustainable Cities and Communities

Key Sustainable Development Goal Targets

SDG 3.9

By 2030, substantially reduce the number of deaths and illnesses from hazardous chemicals and air, water and soil pollution and contamination.

SDG 11.1

By 2030, ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and upgrade slums.

SDG 11.4

Strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage.

SDG 11.6

By 2030, reduce the adverse per capita environmental impact of cities, including by paying special attention to air quality and municipal and other waste management.

3.8.1 Sustainable buildings

The then Ministry for Social Accommodation (MSA) has, since March 2019, invested in implementing the Sustainable Communities, Housing for Tomorrow policy, a programme that aims at building affordable housing by developing solutions at neighbourhood level, which are developed following sustainability and energy efficiency principles. The policy is implemented through the collaborative method, wherein a public call for NGOs to make submissions is published, and thereafter a shortlist of projects that fulfil the aims and objectives of the programme is chosen and communicated to the Chamber of Architects (Kamra tal-Periti - KTP) as the main institutional partner.

Subsequently, the then MSA, in collaboration with the KTP, co-organised an international design competition, with architects submitting designs on the basis of the brief provided by the selected NGOs. In all cases, submissions had to ensure compliance with sustainable development principles, energy efficiency standard buildings, and respect for the cultural heritage of the surrounding areas. Furthermore, in 2021, three projects were shortlisted to benefit from the Specialised Housing Programme with YMCA in Valletta, the Malta LGBTIQ Rights Movement in San Ġwann and Fondazzjoni Sebħ in Birkirkara being the beneficiaries. In March 2021, the jury selected the winners, 1st runners-up, and 2nd runners-up of the international design competition. The implementation of the projects then commenced in the following months.

During 2021, there was also the initiative of the retrofitting of the Żabbar Housing Estate, which is related to a retrofitting project in one of the housing estates falling under the remit of the Housing Authority. The aim of this initiative is to increase the energy efficiency of the building that is housing low-income families and individuals. This is being perceived as a flagship project by the Housing Authority and, following the results of the first initiative, a decision will be taken on whether to scale up or replicate such initiatives nationwide.

In addition to the above, MFE has also launched a grant which is aimed at assisting people buying their first residential property and a grant which addressed the regeneration and restoration of abandoned and dilapidated properties, contributing to affordable and sustainable housing.

Other governmental ministries, departments, and entities were also instrumental in adopting energy-efficient practices in their operations and implement energy-efficiency upgrading and retrofitting of buildings.

For instance, the ERDF project entitled ERDF.04.168 - Improving Energy Efficiency within the People and Standards Division within OPM, consists of energy efficient interventions within the premises of the Department of Information and the People and Standards Division. It is part of a larger overall infrastructural project wherein an additional floor is being constructed over the existing block. Thus, the project co-finance those interventions that are energy efficient while introducing energy efficient measures in the whole block, namely roof insulation, the installation of LED luminaries and energy-saving electrical fittings within the new floor, as well as the installation of double-glazed external and internal apertures of the entire block.

This project contributes directly towards achieving the Specific Objective, Development Needs and Expected Results for ERDF Priority Axis 4, which consists of energy efficient measures. It also contributes towards reaching SDG 7, which has the objective of ensuring access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all while also addressing SDG number 13, which aims at taking urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.

The project is paramount within the context of the government's targets as per the National Energy Efficiency Action Plan, one of which is that government buildings should be gradually refurbished to meet at least the established minimum energy performance standards of buildings, or otherwise reach equivalent saving. Furthermore, this is also in line with the Nearly-Zero Buildings National Plan, which specifies that effective energy efficient design strategies are to be incorporated in all public sector projects, and that passive energy efficiency design strategies are to be incorporated and prioritised in all new building projects and, where practical, in existing building projects.

In line with the above, MGOZ has been pondering in recent years on the need to renovate the Administration Centre building to ensure it is accessible for everyone and to tackle several other statutory requirements, which the premises, in their current condition, do not meet, while improving its overall efficiency.

In parallel with the refurbishment project, MGOZ is currently undertaking the EU-funded project on the upgrading and retrofitting of the same Administration Centre, ERDF Priority Axis 04.070, which will lead to a substantial reduction in energy consumption and, hence, making the building an energy-efficient one. Throughout 2021, works were focused on the installation of insulation on external facing single leaf walls and under the upper roof. Once the relevant works are completed, it is envisaged that an estimated 123.59 tonnes of CO₂ equivalent will be displaced annually as a result of the corresponding decrease in power consumption.

This unique historical edifice will be upgraded and transformed into a modern and accessible ministry building that is there to serve the public while providing an enabling environment to the staff in full respect to the statutory requirements and environmental considerations.

A number of premises belonging to MFE also commenced or continued a refurbishment or restoration process, whilst some others have recently been completed. In these refurbishment projects, energy-efficient methods are being applied as much as possible whilst ensuring that they are in line with the stipulated guidelines and regulations. A Smart Energy Saving Plan for future projects is also being implemented to incorporate energy efficiency and low carbon initiatives.

Refurbishment and upgrades were also carried out in the Commissioner for Revenue's premises, where double glazing apertures were installed throughout all the refurbished blocks. Moreover, light-emitting diode (LED) energy-saving bulbs were also used throughout. This was replicated within entities like the Financial Intelligence Analysis Unit (FIAU), which invested in sensor-based electricity switches to reduce the use of electricity. The Malta Digital Innovation Authority, MITA, the MBR, the MCA, and the Malta Gaming Authority (MGA), among others have all adopted systems that increase the energy efficiency both in terms of their operations as well as when it comes to the buildings and premises themselves.

In order to be more energy efficient, the abovementioned entities adopted measures ranging from the use of energy efficient lighting, heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems to the sharing of physical infrastructure and other modes of collaboration that have a positive impact on the environment as it prevents energy-wasteful infrastructure works, as well as the deployment of more energy efficient new technologies such as via the assignment of radio spectrum for 5G. Concerning the latter, such networks have also facilitated remote working, which avoids the need to commute to work, resulting in lower GHG emissions.

3.8.2 Air pollution

ERA continued to monitor, in near real-time, air pollutants through four monitoring stations. This is complemented by a passive diffusion tube network, consisting of one hundred sites for volatile organic compounds (VOCs) and nitrogen dioxide (NO₂), and a smaller network for sulphur dioxide (SO₂). Additional monitoring is also being undertaken in a number of schools, state nursing homes, and hospitals as part of the national government's priorities.

In 2021, ERA initiated a study focusing on particulate matter (PM) 10 at its traffic site in Msida. The main objective of this project is to obtain a full chemical characterisation of PM10 which could act as evidence base for air quality policy in the future.

In 2021, a new air monitoring station started operating in Xemxija in order to further expand the monitoring range, while monitoring continued in Senglea's Gardjola Gardens, using ERA's mobile station, to study and quantify the impact of the shipping sector on ambient air. Pollutants monitored at the station are nitric oxide, NO₂, SO₂, carbon monoxide and PM10 and PM2.5. Moreover, during 2021, ERA also finalised the installation of an additional monitoring station in St Paul's Bay, which is a traffic site outside the agglomeration.

ERA also continued monitoring the impact of pollutants on ecosystems, as per the requirements arising from the Limitation of Emissions of Certain Atmospheric Pollutants Regulations (S.L. 549.124).

In line with Malta's National Air Pollution Control Programme (NAPCP), the following measures implemented in 2021 contributed towards an improvement of air quality levels:

- Environmental permitting through the Industrial Emissions Directive (2010/75/EU) and the Medium Combustion Plants Directive (2015/2193/EU).
- A scrappage scheme which provides a grant of between €800 to €2,000 when scrapping a vehicle and purchasing a new vehicle.
- A grant for electric vehicles, including one of up to €9,000 when deregistering or scrapping another vehicle, and another one of up to €8,000 when one registers an electric vehicle without scrapping another vehicle.
- Exemption from registration tax for those who buy electric cars or hybrid cars (plug-in). They will also be exempted from paying the Annual Circulation Licence for the first five years.
- A €200 grant when one converts an M1 or N1 vehicle to Autogas or Liquefied petroleum gas, more commonly referred to as LPG.
- An increase in roadside and roadworthiness checks.
- Bike-sharing schemes and government grants on the purchase of bicycles and pedelec bicycles as well on the purchase of bicycles and pedelec by companies that offer such bicycles for hire.
- Fund to cover the expenditure incurred by local councils and enterprises that install bicycle racks.
- The improvement of ferry landing places, including a fast ferry service from Gozo to Malta, which started operating in 2021, reducing the traffic burden to and from the Ċirkewwa ferry landing service.
- Free school transport for all school children as well as free transport for youths, students, and the elderly.
- Measures relating to the public transport system, such as vehicle tracking, reduced fees when using Tallinja Card on the ferries and when using the Iscoot e-bike sharing services, TD plus, and others.
- A review of Malta's national Electromobility Plan.

- A car-sharing scheme, which is a pay per use service consisting of electric vehicles.
- A Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan (SUMP) for Valletta.
- Pilot cycling corridors.
- The development of a shore-supply action plan for Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) ports.
- Infrastructure interventions.
- An increase in the use of intelligent transport management systems.
- The Public Service Garage Reform, including the introduction of a maximum age limit for the date of registration of leased vehicles to ten years and fifteen years for taxi or chauffeur-driven passenger vehicles.
- Measures related to energy demand and supply.
- Measures related to the agricultural sector.

Moreover, ERA has also finalised an advanced draft Air Quality Plan, which is a reporting obligation required under the Ambient Air Quality Directive (2008/50/EC) to address the exceedances of PM10 in Msida reported in 2018. This plan will aim to propose additional measures to the NAPCP that will reduce emissions from the major source of air pollution in Malta, this being the road transport sector.

Both plans include measures aimed at improving air quality in the short-, medium-, and long-term, such as sustainable mobility measures, free school transport, road infrastructure measures, improvement of ferry landing places, and the study on the introduction of low emission zones. Such sustainable mobility measures will also contribute to alleviate noise levels.

3.8.3 Noise Pollution

In 2021, ERA continued an extensive stakeholder consultation on the drafting of the Noise Action Plan, which is soon to be concluded, to be then issued for public consultation. The Noise Action Plan is designed to address the management of environmental noise issues and effects from transport noise including road and air, together with industrial noise in the Maltese islands. The Noise Action Plan will provide an overview of the requirements and obligations of the national regulations transposing the Environmental Noise Directive into the Assessment and Management of Environment Noise Regulations (S.L. 549.37). It will also present a summary of the results of the round 3 strategic noise maps within Malta and will showcase actions, which ERA, together with the relevant entities, intends to undertake in the next five years.

The objectives of the draft Noise Action Plan are to:

- Outline a long-term plan aiming to prevent and reduce environmental noise where necessary and, particularly, where exposure levels can induce harmful effects on human health, as well as aiming to preserve environmental noise quality where this is not harmful.
 - Set out objectives for the monitoring and management of environmental noise in Malta.
 - Take a staged approach in assessing the existing levels of environmental noise from the different noise sources to identify potential locations for actions using a prioritisation exercise.
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- Preserve relatively quiet areas in the agglomeration and in open countryside through the identification and delineation of such areas.

Furthermore, in 2021, ERA conducted a study to research more about the sonic environment of the historical city of Mdina. Through this project, one can appreciate the distinct characteristics of Mdina and educate the general public about the surrounding sonic environment.

3.8.4 Sustainable Regeneration and Infrastructure

In 2015, Malta adopted the Strategic Plan for the Environment and Development which addresses spatial issues for the Maltese islands, based on an integrated planning system that regulates the sustainable use and management of land and sea resources, while, in 2020, a review process was launched. Throughout 2021, the PA, within the then MECP, continued to undertake several studies.

In 2021, the PA initiated a Partial Local Plan Review of the Grand Harbour Local Plan (2002) Marsa Inner Harbour Policies, whose objectives include the regeneration of the Marsa Inner Harbour area, which is currently an urban area requiring attention and improvement. In November 2021 a public consultation on the set objectives was launched with a view to be finalised in January 2022. The Strategic Vision for the Marsa Regeneration Area (Inner Harbour Area and Inner Coast) includes the following objectives:

- The Marsa Regeneration Area (Inner Harbour Area and Inner Coast) will be transformed into a prime tourism and leisure harbour destination, integrated with a socially diverse coastal residential neighbourhood on the site of the ex-Marsa Power Station and its immediate areas, with the Menqa tal-Braken acting as an ideal space for organised moorings. There will also be a high quality innovation hub with facilities and shared spaces for start-ups in the creative industries, niche areas for research and development, such as smart technologies, maritime technologies, and other industries located in the Albert Town area.
- Public access to the coast will be restored as part of a network of public green open spaces and recreational areas.
- A major transport interchange will accommodate the widest possible range of public transport including buses, taxis, ferries, and water taxis to facilitate the modal shift. Furthermore, access and circulation in the area by private car will be managed through the necessary road network improvements and parking facilities.
- Buildings will adopt innovative architectural designs evoking the maritime history of the harbour location. These designs will be done in a way to complement existing buildings of cultural importance, such as the Chadwick Building, the ex-Sea Malta Building, and other traditional warehouse buildings on the quays.
- The closure, scaling down, or relocation of heavy industries and cargo handling from within the Marsa Regeneration Area, such as the ship repair facilities and the abattoir, and of other obnoxious industries on the outside periphery of the Regeneration Area.

3.8.5 Urban Greening

When it comes to urban greening, the PA and Ambjent Malta continued to follow a number of specific measures that further support the achievement, both directly and indirectly, of having more sustainable cities and communities in Malta. These include the following:

- A funding scheme for local councils to implement environmental projects that will contribute to the positive well-being of local citizens.
- Grant schemes for the restoration of the façades of old buildings promoting the reuse of existing buildings rather than just new construction.
- A funding scheme for the provision of vertical green walls, green façades, and the green retrofitting of front gardens as a measure to improve the quality of public spaces.
- In 2021, €400,262 were allocated for urban greening in twelve different localities in Malta, these being St Julian's, Santa Luċija, Hamrun, Valletta, Birżebbuġa, Birgu, San Lawrenz, Qala, L-Ghasri, Il-Munxar, Tas-Sliema, and Għajnsielem. These projects consisted of urban tree planting projects, green canopies and installation of planters, and the greening of urban squares. During the same year, other projects which had been previously funded were also being implemented. These include green projects at Haż-Żebbuġ, Hal-Qormi, and Marsa.
- In 2021, there was the installation of green wall projects in industrial areas such as Marsa, Kordin, and Mosta where the number of plants amounted to 27,600, 10,687, and 11,430 respectively. This was done in collaboration with INDIS Malta.

3.8.6 Sustainable Transport and Infrastructure

Key Sustainable Development Goal Targets

SDG 3.6

By 2020, halve the number of global deaths and injuries from road traffic accidents.

SDG 9.1

Develop quality, reliable, sustainable and resilient infrastructure, including regional and trans-border infrastructure, to support economic development and human well-being, with a focus on affordable and equitable access for all.

SDG 11.2

By 2030, provide access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all, improving road safety, notably by expanding public transport, with special attention to the needs of those in vulnerable situations, women, children, persons with disabilities and older persons.

SDG 13.2

Integrate climate change measures into national policies, strategies and planning.

During 2021, the government continued its work in implementing a holistic plan towards less congestion and less emissions, through the upgrading of Malta's road infrastructure, as well as the promotion of alternative means, including public transport, alternative transport, and schemes towards cleaner means.

Malta's small size and high urban density pose significant challenges to the transport sector. A way of addressing such challenges is to further develop the road network by supporting investment to address traffic bottlenecks and road congestion in road infrastructure whilst ensuring the optimisation of routes, better journey planning, and a reduction in journey time.

In line with Malta's 2017 National Transport Strategic Vision for 2050 and Operational Plan to 2025, the general approach aims at achieving more sustainable mobility through improving Malta's strategic road network, particularly the TEN-T roads, by removing traffic bottlenecks and introducing measures aimed at achieving more sustainability in the way people travel. Furthermore, the 2025 National Transport Master Plan will be reviewed and updated during 2022 in order to reflect projects that, although not included, have since been implemented, to account for other measures necessary to reach the emission reduction targets.

The removal of traffic bottlenecks will reduce traffic congestion in urban areas, thus giving prominence to more sustainable transport as well as promoting further modes of transport including cycling and pedestrian facilities. Predictions from studies carried out on seven major projects, namely St Andrew's Road, Buqana Road, the Marsa-Hamrun Bypass, Santa Luċija Underpass, Tal-Balal Road, the Marsa Junction, and the Central Link Project indicate a reduction of 14% in costs of congestion over a number of years. Infrastructural works have been completed on Buqana Road (Q4 2019), Marsa-Hamrun Bypass (Q3 2020), Santa Luċija Underpass (Q1 2021), Tal-Balal Road (Q2 2019), Marsa Junction (Q1 2021) and Central Link Project (Q1 2022), while work on the St. Andrews Road Project are foreseen to start in 2023, once all studies are concluded.

In this regard, Malta will therefore aim to include investment in roads as part of potential investment under the EU Cohesion Policy for the upcoming programming period. In order to address congestion and pollution, the government has committed an investment of €700 million over seven years from the national budget to upgrade the road network, starting in 2019. This upgrade is part of a holistic approach towards sustainability, air quality, a reduction in cars and traffic congestion, and the modal shift. By 2021, more than €400 million have been invested in these projects.

Additionally, road infrastructure works began to be undertaken in 2021 on the Kirkop Tunnels and Airport Intersection Project (KTAIP). By channelling three of the routes currently connected through the roundabout to the underpass and overpass lanes, Malta is reducing roundabout conflicts and the resulting collision risks and waiting times for thousands of road users who use this junction every day. Through the KTAIP, Malta will also introduce safer facilities for alternative modes of travel through its new intersection design, which includes new footpaths and improved public transport amenities. It also comprises new cycle lanes and safe cycle routes that will complement the cycle lanes and the cycling and pedestrian bridge at L-Avjazzjoni Avenue and the segregated cycling and walking track at San Tumas Road and Hal Qormi Road, which were developed during the last three years. The roundabout's new design will include safer pedestrian and cycling crossings as well. Such a project is being complemented by the embellishment of surroundings, through planting of mature trees and other plants.

Work also started on the walking, jogging, and cycling trail in Ulysses Grove, Xewkija, Gozo. Once completed, this partially EU co-funded ERDF project will contribute towards the development of a family park and an increase in open and green spaces in Gozo. In 2021, the embellishment of Marsalforn in accordance with the corresponding masterplan was completed. Emphasis was accentuated towards encouraging more foot and bicycle traffic.

Sustainable infrastructure projects are not limited to road transport, but a number of projects were, and are being implemented, in the maritime sector. An important project in this regard is the kicking-off of the first phase of the Grand Harbour Clean Air Project. This project will cut over 90% of the air pollution that cruise liners and roll-on/roll-off ships produce when visiting Malta's principal port through the use of shoreside electricity to power onboard systems. Infrastructure works on the shore-to-ship project in the Grand Harbour commenced in Q4 2020 and works are scheduled to be completed in Q2 2023, with contractual closure targeted for end November 2023 (Phase 1).

The planned measures under Component 2 of the RRF will also support Malta's commitments towards the reduction of national GHG emission reduction targets and will contribute towards national efforts aimed at cleaner, smarter and more sustainable mobility. The reforms and investments under this component particularly address the green transition, sustainable transport, and the reduction of traffic congestion. The component also follows the concept of the European Flagship 'Recharge and refuel' by promoting future-proof clean technologies and accelerating the use of sustainable transport through zero emission vehicles, thus contributing to reaching the 2050 climate neutrality objective.

Through the RRF, the government will continue to address the challenges of road traffic congestion and GHG and pollutant emissions through improved transport planning by expanding the use of public transport as well as by introducing and implementing a Plan SUMP for the Valletta Region. The plan itself will capture over 40% of the total population of the Maltese islands and will seek to improve the quality of life and mobility in Malta by facilitating cost-effective, energy-efficient, and seamless mobility. Subsequently, measures from the SUMP will be implemented in at least nine local administrative units within the Valletta region, with at least one measure per local administrative unit.

The government will also complement the above with designated regeneration areas through the Slow Streets Project. The latter will promote the regeneration of public squares and community spaces of village and town cores and will help in reducing the dependency of private vehicles, which will, in turn, create more opportunities for local businesses and merchants as well as spaces for artists and local organisations to organise activities. This will be achieved through the completion of at least three regeneration areas in urban environments over a span of three years, with at least one area per year.

3.8.6.1 Greener Ways of Transport

During 2021, the government continued to invest in a greener transport system by extending several incentives to reduce traffic congestion during peak hours through the encouragement of a modality shift to other forms of transport such as ferryboats and public buses. The government also continued to promote the upgrade of more environmentally friendly vehicles through various schemes in order to reduce emissions generated from road traffic thereby improving air quality.

In 2021 the first National Policy for Electric Vehicle Public Charging Infrastructure ²⁴ was launched. The aim of this policy is to make charging infrastructure accessible to the public, to enable electric vehicles to circulate in urban and densely populated areas as well as facilitate charging for all residents across Malta and Gozo. The government also continued to promote incentives to reduce private vehicle use and emissions, through:

- Incentivising alternative modes such as car sharing, maritime transport, and cycling. With regard to car sharing, it is to be noted that there are currently 12,653 user subscribers to this service, of which 4,000 are active users.
- The electrification of cars. As a result of an investment of €12,400,000 in incentive grants in 2021, 1,079 electric vehicles and 2,917 pedelecs and motorcycles were registered by the end of December 2021.

Other specific investments include increasing funds for a scrappage scheme supporting the purchase of zero emission electric vehicles in the private sector. The scheme will support the purchase of new passenger cars, goods carrying vehicles, minibuses and coaches, quadricycles and motorcycles, e-kick scooters, and pedelecs.

To further reduce congestion, the government continued promoting remote working in the public sector, investing in one-stop shops and online public services, increasing the efficiency of the public sector vehicle fleet with zero emission electric vehicles, and purchasing of zero emission electric buses for public transport. This last investment will consist of

²⁴ National Policy for Electric Vehicle Public Charging Infrastructure, available at: https://meae.gov.mt/en/Public_Consultations/MEW/Documents/ELECTRIC%20CARS%20INFRASTRUCTURE%20DOC_rev1.pdf

the purchase of one hundred and twenty-one electric twelve metre buses for use on the public bus transport routes. The financing will cover the difference in the purchase price between internal combustion engine buses and electric buses. These zero emission buses will replace diesel buses in the current public transport stock.

In line with the above, it is important to mention that, apart from its clients' well-being, the Public Service is also conscious of its employees' well-being as well as that of society. To this end, the Public Service is focusing on a shift towards alternative means of mobility to make sure employees can safely get to where their work requires them to be in a sustainable manner while reducing the carbon footprint. It is exploring the possibility of offering employees benefits when using shared transport and greener alternatives to and from their workplace.

The Public Service launched a study agreement to look at its current fleet of vehicles with the aim of analysing its current usage and propose new sustainable and environmentally friendly solutions that will lead to an improvement in the environment and the air quality. At present, the Public Service has 866 vehicles of which only 7% are electrically powered. The goal is to have an effective sustainable plan for an innovative model of electric vehicle fleet usage, including a car-pooling plan and route optimization by AI. This will lead to more effective mobility, less fuel use and less emissions.

Furthermore, the 'Multi-modal Hub' part of the Sustainable Multimodal Intelligent Transport Hubs across Malta and Gozo, known as the SMITHS project, aims to encourage a modal shift from private car use to collective, sustainable and alternative low-carbon transport modes in order to reduce traffic congestion. Pursuant to discussions with the competent authorities as well as with the Malta Public Transport, the park and ride system was launched during the last quarter of 2021. Until works are completed on the facility at Ta' Xhajma, the service is operating from a temporary site, Ta' Lambert, located adjacent to the Xewkija Helipad.

3.8.6.2 Encouraging a modal shift from private to collective transport

In an effort to encourage more people to use public transport instead of their own private vehicle, the government continued to incentivise scheduled public transport usage by offering free public transport to certain cohorts of passengers. From 2021, free public transport was expanded further to include persons over the age of 70. Free public transport is also offered to persons with disability, to young people aged 14-20, and to full-time students 21 years and over. The government has also introduced free transport to all school children to and from school.

Furthermore, encouraged by the increase in patronage of the harbour ferry, a decision was taken to upgrade three of the existing ferry landing sites, namely those of Cospicua, Marsamxett, and Sliema Ferries to introduce passenger waiting facilities and real-time information services on ferry and bus schedules, among others. Additionally, there was further investment to decarbonise the transport sector by promoting the use of intermodal transportation through new ferry services in Buġibba and St. Paul's Bay. The investment consists of the construction of maritime infrastructure including ferry-landing facilities, a passenger terminal, berthing and landing facilities, and safer platforms, taking into account adverse weather conditions. The ferry terminal will include a sheltered ticketing and waiting area for commuters. Complementing this investment, a bus feeder service has been put in place using the existing bus network in order to increase its practicability and efficiency.

Finally, to engage in better transport planning, the government completed Malta's National Household Travel Survey in December 2021. This important tool will now assist in providing important data on current travel patterns and behaviour, and gauge public opinion on new potential actions to be included in the updated Transport Master Plan.

Concluding Remarks

During 2021, the Maltese Government made considerable efforts to ensure that the principles of sustainable development are adhered to, not only in its day-to-day operations, but also when designing, drafting, and implementing new policies and projects.

Despite the challenges and difficulties brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, which severely impacted the workings of the Public Administration, reaching the targets set by the UN in Agenda 2030 remained at the top of the government's list of priorities. As highlighted throughout this report, several new measures and initiatives were introduced to reinforce and promote the notion and importance of sustainable development in a myriad of policy areas, namely economic and competitive growth, digitalisation, tourism, culture and heritage, physical and mental health and well-being, the ageing population and youth, education, research and training, violence in all its forms, national security, climate change, energy and water, waste, agriculture, aquaculture and fisheries, and the land and marine environment.

Furthermore, the government also introduced several schemes to help businesses and self-employed individuals recover from the repercussions of the pandemic while enabling them to become more competitive and sustainable and be better equipped to adequately address and overcome new challenges.

Having said this, achieving sustainability in all fields is a daunting task. Therefore, sustainable development should never be seen in isolation and must be approached with a long-term vision in mind. For the country and its economy, society, and environment to be truly sustainable, it is crucial that the involvement of all relevant stakeholders, coming from the public, private and voluntary sectors, is sought and encouraged. For this reason, as highlighted in this report, the government is working tirelessly to bring to the forefront the value of active participation and communication and of working together towards a common goal. Only through such a process can Malta implement comprehensive and forward-looking strategies and find the most effective solutions to the ever-persistent risks and realities of economic uncertainty, social discrimination and inequalities, and threats to human and environmental well-being.

Nurturing a mentality and environment of collaboration and partnership, while fostering the principles of sustainability, will bring about a positive change, and will ensure that actions are mainstreamed across all levels and forms of development. By working coherently and consistently, Malta will be able to achieve the highest level of sustainability in all the three pillars of sustainable development and reach the milestones and goals set by the UN in the most impactful, efficient, and practical way.

Annex 1 – List of Milestones in 2021

SDGs	Main Initiative Measure	Description	Reference page in document
All SDGs	Sustainable Development in Malta: Statistical Information on the 2030 Agenda in Malta – 2021	This publication collates all existing data related to Malta and presents them as statistics related to the monitoring of the sustainable development targets.	13
All SDGs	The establishment of the National Expert Group on SDIs	The National Expert Group will facilitate the coordination of activities relating to the SDIs by the various stakeholders.	13
All SDGs	New Sustainable Development Directorate website and Facebook Page	Increase awareness and provide updates on the latest sustainable initiatives, projects, and developments both on a national and international level.	15 - 16
4,8,17	European Sustainable Development Week (ESDW) 2021	The Sustainable Development Directorate organised a number of activities during ESDW 2021. The chosen theme was "Together for Sustainable Growth: Resilient – Green – Inclusive".	17-18
3,10	Malta's Demographic Challenge Conference	The conference was organised by the Guardian of Future Generations, where issues relating to the demographic challenges and opportunities Malta faces, migration flows, an ageing population and lower fertility rates, among other things, were discussed.	18
8,10, 12,13	The Sustainable Baby Box	The sustainable baby box includes items made from sustainably sourced and eco-friendly material.	18
4,10,17	The publication of #nohlomlixidarba	The publication aims to increase awareness and education on EU values that directly contribute and emphasise the importance of sustainable development in celebrating diversity in our society.	19
3,17	The provision of COVID-19-related personal protective equipment and medicines as a measure of solidarity with countries in need	A total of 471,690 COVID-19 vaccines were shared with Egypt, Ghana, India, Iran, Libya, Nepal, Rwanda, and Tunisia.	20

17	Humanitarian assistance	Humanitarian assistance lent to Afghanistan, Libya, Lithuania, the Occupied Palestinian territories, Syria, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Venezuela, and Yemen to alleviate suffering caused by conflict and natural disasters.	20
17	ODA Scholarships	More than €187,000 in scholarships and courses were offered to citizens from different ODA-eligible countries in various areas.	20
8	The launch of the MDB CGS	The MDB CGS was launched for the purpose of guaranteeing new loans granted by commercial banks for working capital purposes to businesses facing liquidity shortfalls as a result of the pandemic.	23
All SDGs	The launch of ESG dashboard	This is a platform that helps illustrate the ESG credentials of companies listed on the MSE, and this in turn allows investors to incorporate these credentials into their investment decision-making.	24
8	The launch of the Green Market	This regulatory framework, which is based on the International Capital Market Association standards, provides issuers with a dedicated platform for the listing of green bonds.	24
8	Business Plan Re-engineering Scheme	The scheme aimed at supporting SMEs to realign their business activities, re-train their employees, restructure their products and services, and optimise the use of technology whilst embracing green technology and practices.	26
8	Restart Incentive Scheme 2021	Entrepreneurs are being offered the possibility to engage a professional business advisory.	26
8	Change to Grow	The purpose of this incentive is to support self-employed persons, micro enterprises, and SMEs to realign their business activity, restructure their employees, product or service portfolio, optimise the use of technology, and embrace green technology and practices.	26

8	The Smart and Sustainable Investment Grant Scheme	The scheme provides business funding to support the undertaking of investments that lead to more sustainable and digitalised processes resulting in the enhancement of competitive of enterprises through the optimisation of the use of resources in their activities.	26-27
6,7,8	The MERCA and the WE MAKE project	The MERCA project aims to assist a number of retail outlets in the food and beverage sector in becoming more energy efficient. The WE MAKE project, which is focused on the manufacturing sector, aims to achieve a higher level of engagement within the business community on aspects of energy and water conservation and efficiency, including a higher rate of implementation of energy and water-related projects by businesses.	27
8	Supporting Marketing Initiatives for Specific Niche Markets in Gozo	This scheme aims to promote and kindle investment in particular niche markets through marketing campaigns by increasing awareness of the niche market and related activities, developing applicants' brands on an international level, enhancing Gozo's branding value, and further stimulating investment in the quality of the local product.	27
8,12	MICE scheme	This scheme aims at providing aid to private undertakings and voluntary organisations in restoring and upgrading venue facilities to enhance the capabilities of hosting qualitative MICE events in Gozo.	28
8,10	Gozo Employment Refund Scheme and the Gozo Back Office Scheme	The Employment Refund Scheme aim is to support full-time recruitment in Gozo in a sustainable manner, create increased and higher quality full-time jobs in Gozo, as well as address the issue of a higher dependency on the public sector for full-time employment in Gozo. The Gozo Back Office Employment Refund Scheme aim is to attract highly skilled and educated workers, whilst reducing the existing disparities in average basic salaries between Malta and Gozo.	28

8	Gozo Teleworking Scheme	This scheme consists of a financial grant to employers up to a maximum of €10,000 spread over a three-year period in proportion to the number of days an employee is granted telework.	28
8	Voucher scheme	The government issued a €100 voucher scheme which enabled citizens living in Malta and Gozo to redeem vouchers in exchange for goods and services.	28
12	The adoption of the 2nd GPP National Action Plan 2022-2027	This National Action Plan aims to progressively increase the share of the government's procurement in greener products and services to 90% by 2027.	29-30
4, 8	The National Employment Policy 2021-2030	The policy will aim towards ensuring a holistic policy whose vision is to improve the quality of the labour market for the workforce.	33,57
8	eBiznify	eBiznify is a web-based learning system which offers an online training programme in e-commerce, supporting individuals or SMEs in obtaining the competencies, experiences, knowledge, and understanding of e-commerce concepts needed to pursue online activities.	33
8	The launch of 'Recover, Rethink, Revitalize - Malta Tourism Strategy 2021 – 2030'	The ten-year strategy is based on key principles that are considered as fundamental for guiding the development of tourism in Malta.	35-36
8	Erasmus +: Improving Quality of Service Standards within the Catering Sector in Malta 2020 – 2023	A nine-day traineeship is being offered to 36 key restaurant personnel. This programme focuses on the importance of delivering quality service.	36
8	Apprezza Campaign and the Choice Programme	The aim of these initiatives is to entice the younger generation to take up careers in the hospitality industry.	36
11,14	Key measures related to coastal areas: -beach management; -support offered towards management plans for Marine Protection Areas, Special Areas of Conservation and Natura 2000 sites; -restoration of five coastal towers built by the Knights of St John.	Measures aimed at protecting the country's marine environment.	37

13	Climate Friendly Travel Education Capacity Building programme	The developed training programme is in the form of a Diploma, equivalent to MQF Level 4, with a total of 120 ECVET credits.	38
11	The launch of 'Toward Net-Zero Tourism Accommodation'	The aim of the project is to draft a long-term plan aimed at the decarbonisation of the tourism sector.	38
11	The launch of the NCP	The NCP 2021 will serve as the main instrument through which Malta will implement, monitor, and measure its commitments towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the cultural sector.	39
6	Vittoriosa - Water saving city	Through these works, the reservoir underwent extensive rehabilitation works to enable the reinstatement of its water catchment capacity, with the removal of over sixty-four tons of sludge.	39-40
11	Restoration projects in Gozo: -The Ravelin, in the main road up the hill to the Ċittadella; -The restoration of Niche of St. Anne and that of Our Lady of Solitude, both at the Ċittadella, the Niche of Our Lady located in the limits of Xaghra, the stone statue of St. John the Baptist, in Xewkija, and the monument of Pope John Paul II, in Victoria; -Works carried out on Għar Gerduf; -The restoration of the eight corner windmill.	Restoration projects aimed at safeguarding cultural heritage.	40
3	The launch of the INTEGRATE Joint Action project	The aim of the project is to develop strategies on how to continue with the treatment for the human immunodeficiency virus, better known as HIV, hepatitis, tuberculosis, and sexually transmitted diseases.	42
3	The setup of a new follow-up clinic for prostate cancer patients	This is led by the Urology Nurse Navigator, as well as other new nurse-led clinics.	43
3	The introduction of new medicines in the Government Formulary List	The medicines are intended to assist patients in the treatment of both communicable and non-communicable diseases.	44

3	The Remote Patient Monitoring service	This service was launched as part of a pilot project addressing Type 1 diabetes in children and adolescents, where patients were provided with continuous glucose monitors to monitor their blood sugar levels.	45
1	Pension Expenditure Exercise	An exercise projecting pension expenditure, which included an extensive sensitivity analysis whereby a number of scenarios borne out of recommendations were individually modelled and analysed.	46
1, 10	Follow-up of the Pensions Strategic Review Document	Analysis of the feedback received from the public consultation and final report with recommendations submitted to the government in September 2021.	46-47
3,10,16	Lifeskills Programme	Initiatives within the Lifeskills Programme intended to promote a holistic approach to health and well-being of young people.	50
3,10	The launch of the Young Achievers Campaign Against Drugs Scheme	The scheme will create awareness among the younger members of our community on the harmful social and health effects of addictive substances and promote the well-being of members of the community through their participation in the scheme.	50
3	Agreement signed between HRD and Aġenzija Sedqa	The agreement is for a €1,053,684.87 investment to strengthen the prevention and treatment of substance abuse and addictions.	50-51
16	Young parliamentarians programme	A programme that gives young people the skills needed for active citizenship through training and information on public speaking, debating, political lobbying, and pitching of ideas.	51
16	IdeAzzjonisti programme	IdeAzzjonisti is a programme for young people aged 14-18 who would like to participate in a community-based active citizenship programme.	51
16	The Model European Parliament Malta	This is an opportunity for young people aged from 16 to 19 years to take part as Maltese delegates in the international Model European Parliament sessions, which are held every six months in different European countries.	51

16	The Student Councils Democracy Award programme	A programme for all secondary schools whereby participating student councils compete for gold, silver and bronze awards as they implement their action plans over a period of one scholastic year.	51
10	Malta's 2021-2030 National Strategy on the Rights of Disabled Persons	Addresses key issues necessary for ensuring the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities at a domestic level, with particular attention being paid to Malta's particularities, strengths, and key challenges.	52
10	The Malta National Autism Strategy 2021-2030	Details all the measures and initiatives that the government will be undertaking in the coming years in this sector, particularly with respect to increasing awareness as well as working towards the early identification and ensuring access to services to those on the autism spectrum, especially young children.	52
10	The launch a new static driving simulator	The new driving simulator provides an opportunity to assess service users' physical abilities by testing their reaction time, strength, and coordination in a simulated driving environment.	52
10	Scheme for Exemptions/ Reductions/Grants related to Motor Vehicles for Persons with Disability	This scheme targets the well-being of the disabled person and his or her carers, who, on a daily basis, ensure that the said person is able to participate equally in all areas of life.	53
10,16	Exemptions/Subsidies related to Motor Vehicles for Philanthropic Organisations/ Charitable Institutions scheme	This scheme is targeted at charitable and philanthropic institutions, old people's homes and lay movements, which, if eligible, may benefit from exemption or subsidy on a vehicle's registration tax and a subsidy on the annual circulation tax.	53-54
4,5,10	Policy on Inclusive Education in Schools	The policy adopts a whole-school approach philosophy of how schools are to develop conducive learning environments for all.	55

4	2030 Further and Higher Education Strategic Vision	This vision is aimed to ensure innovative, flexible, accessible and inclusive quality further and higher education that inspires individuals to develop relevant skills to contribute as community members and active citizens towards a digital and green sustainable global economy.	55
4	MQF Impact Assessment Report	The report identified areas for MQF policy developments.	55
4,8	The launch of an Option Subjects' Handbook	This handbook includes decision-making tips to guide students in making the right choice.	56
4,8	'X'tixtieq issir la tikber' project	A competition organised by the Office of the Principal Permanent Secretary in collaboration with the NSSS.	56
8	Developing national frameworks for school education careers	This framework was established so that a person entering into a career in education would know the pathways available throughout their professional.	56
8	The launch of SMARTLY project	SMARTLY is a project that incorporates a survey and needs analysis with industry stakeholders, the design of training content in green and digital jobs, the design and testing of an enhanced profiling tool, general awareness and promotion of these sectors.	56
4	The launch of the INTERCEPT programme	The programme will seek to activate youths through a series of deliverables aimed at increasing awareness and competences in green skills, creating a better equipped workforce.	57
5,16	The launch of the second National Strategy on gender-based violence and domestic violence	The strategy is based on the recommendations of the GREVIO and stakeholders' input.	59
5	The launch of Malta Observatory on Femicide	Its aim is to bring together multiple stakeholders and academics in order to guarantee the implementation and strengthening of the policy development with regard to femicide, and promote awareness, conduct research and offer insights, as well as serve as a base to develop domestic homicide evaluations in Malta.	59

5, 16	The approval of the Maltese Parliament Act XX of 2021	The act amended the Constitution of Malta to introduce temporary positive measures which are necessary and reasonable in a democratic society to ensure de facto equality between men and women in politics.	59
5, 16	Gender Representation Guidelines for Discussion Programmes	These guidelines are targeted for media service providers and stakeholders that fall within the remit of the Broadcasting Authority with the intention of narrowing the representation gap between women and men in discussion programmes.	60
10	The launch of the Anti-Racism Strategy 2021-2023	This comprehensive strategy aims to confront and eliminate racism in all its forms and to stimulate and support intercultural inclusion.	60
5,10	Maltese Government Guidelines on Sex, Sexuality and Gender	These guidelines ensure that current legal frameworks are adequately reflected in public sector service provision.	60
5, 16	Awareness campaigns: -#ilkollumani/ #weareallhuman, focusing on same-sex intimate partner violence;-My Disability Does Not Mean Consent for Abuse, which addressed violence against people with disabilities; -179 helpline promotion; Drawing and a writing competition for Primary and Secondary students.	Community awareness measures concerning the fight for gender equality.	61
5,16	Blue Heart Campaign	The theme for 2021 was "Victims' Voices Lead the Way", where one was given the opportunity to learn from survivors of human trafficking.	62
16	The launch of the Safe Dates programme	The main objective of this pilot study is to evaluate whether this programme is effective in changing the beliefs and attitudes of Year 10 PSCD students on dating abuse and to gather feedback from PSCD teachers on the implementation of the programme.	62

16	DASH training to social workers, risk assessors, counsellors, psychologists, probation officers, police from the Gender-Based and Domestic Violence Unit, lawyers, doctors, nurses, and representatives from domestic violence shelters and NGOs; SARA training for professionals working within the services for perpetrators at Aġenzija Appoġġ.	Training initiatives carried out by the CGBVDV.	62-63
10,16	Training sessions on equality, diversity and non-discrimination	These training sessions were given to a wide range of participants in both the private and public sectors and an online survey aimed at people aged 15 to 29 years was disseminated to gather data on their awareness on discrimination and sexual harassment.	63
4,10	Diploma in Education for Cultural Mediation	This is a course that trains professionals in facilitating harmonious relations between migrants and citizens in the host country and promoting mutual exchange of knowledge, as well as in the establishment of positive relations between individuals of diverse cultural backgrounds and ethnic origins.	63
10	Equality for All in Malta project	This project consisted of training sessions delivered to members of minorities as well as awareness-raising campaign on discrimination based on religion or belief, race and/or ethnic origin, and/or multiple discrimination, as well as on intercultural understanding and equal opportunities.	63-64
10	Qualitative research study to analyse the discrimination faced by LGBTIQ+ persons in Malta	The research study analysed the discrimination faced by LGBTIQ+ persons in various sectors of life, such as education, employment, and in the access to and supply of goods and services.	64

16	Achieving a Service of Excellence: A 5-Year Strategy for the Public Service	The Public Service's five-year strategy aims to achieve the following: i. Creating and preserving intellectual capital; ii. Reducing the Public Service's impact on ecology; iii. Becoming an adaptable, agile, and lean organisation; iv. Retaining the perceived status of model employer.	66
16	Reforms carried based on the Opinion of the Venice Commission of June 2020	These included: i. Amendments to the act on the Auditor General and the National Audit Office; ii. Amendments to the appointment of the Principal Permanent Secretary and Permanent Secretaries respectively; iii. Amendments to various laws aimed at reforming the procedure for making various public appointments; and iv. Amendment of appointments of trustees.	66
16	Anti-Money Laundering Strategy covering the years 2021-2023	The strategy clearly showcases the commitment of the Office to eradicate the offence of money laundering.	67
16	Amendment to the Protection of Whistleblower Act	The new Act has a wider remit and common minimum standards for the protection of whistleblowers.	68
16	Development within CPD	The Department carried out the following: -changes to vehicle and vessel fleet; -the opening of new temporary fire stations in Delimara and Pembroke.	66
4,16	Awareness raising concerning the risks involved when it comes to civil protection	This included the following: -Outreach programme with local councils to identify and mitigate the known risks of each individual locality; -Training courses on industrial firefighting, high-rise fires, electrical cars, LNG, rescue diving, and aviation fires amongst others.	68
16	The launch of the Digital Justice Strategy for 2022-2027	The aim of this strategy is to achieve a more efficient administration of justice.	70

16	Online secure payment system through the Government Payment Gateway	This is in line with the objective of incorporating further the digital element in existing procedures, whereby a fuller digitalisation of the application for one to register in Malta to practise the legal profession under the respective home-country title within the EU has been effected.	72
16	MoU signed between the Legal Aid Malta Agency and the MPF	The MoU established the terms and conditions under which the police and legal aid lawyers assist the accused person before, during and after their arraignment, and for representation during proceedings at the Courts of Justice.	72
16	Declaration of intent signed between Legal Aid Malta Agency and the Victim Support Agency	This declaration of intent is to assist and cooperate with each other in support to victims of crime through a referral system.	72
16	MoU between Legal Aid Malta Agency and FSWS	This MoU was signed in order to delineate the provision of services by both entities relating to cross-border disputes in relation to European maintenance obligations.	72
16	New property acquired by the Court Services Agency in Strait Street, Valletta	This property will eventually house three new court halls and a number of offices for the use of the members of the judiciary.	73
16	Installation of video-conferencing systems in all thirty court halls in Malta and Gozo	This project involved the procurement, installation, and commissioning of several monitors and cameras in all court halls to facilitate online sittings.	73
11	The set-up of the Building and Construction Authority	This authority is responsible for the regulation, improvement, and sustainable management of the building and construction industry in Malta.	75
13	ClimateOn Campaign	The aim of the campaign is to change the general public's habits towards a more innovative way of life by instilling thoughts for solutions and highlighting the benefits of a low carbon society.	77
13	SeedGreen Programme	The programme aimed at supporting potential start-ups, which can identify and implement solutions in highly polluting sectors.	77-78
6,7,9	National Strategy for R&I in Energy and Water	The National Strategy is expected to build on existing strengths and seek to address current gaps.	79
7	Feed-in Tariffs initiative	This initiative promotes the purchasing of PV systems.	79

7	2021 Solar Water Heater Grant Scheme	The scheme provided a grant of 75% of the total eligible cost, up to the maximum of €1,400 when purchasing a solar water heater, and a €500 grant to cover maintenance costs after five years.	79
7	2021 Heat Pump Water Heater Grant Scheme	The scheme provided a grant of 50% of the total eligible cost, up to the maximum of €1,000 when purchasing and installing an air to water heat pump.	79
7	2021 Renewable Energy Sources Grant Scheme	This scheme aims to increase a consumer's flexibility in their ability to utilise energy generated by PV systems (own-use), in particular by storing excess renewable energy generated by PV systems instead of exporting to the grid.	79-80
7	Electricity Supply Study	The outcome of this study will be used to determine the country's electricity needs and cost-optimal energy mix until 2035.	81
7	New rescaled energy labels	New rescaled energy labels were introduced for four product groups.	82
6	The drilling of fifteen monitoring boreholes in agricultural sites	The aim of this is to provide an adequate assessment of hydrogeological conditions within the unsaturated zone.	82
6	Dewatering facility at the Sant'Antnin Urban Wastewater Treatment plant in Marsascala	This facility allows farmers to dispose of farm waste slurry generated from farms located in the south of Malta in a more sustainable way.	82
6,8,15	MED-WET Project	The objectives of this project is to: -develop new irrigation technologies and solutions widely applicable for smallholder farmers; -equipping smallholder farmers with knowledge and skills to install, adapt, and operate more efficient and effective irrigation options; -increase irrigation water availability from salinized and secondary sources; and -enhance farm profitability and the environmental footprint of pilot farming practices.	83

6	Chadwick Lakes Regeneration Project	The project focuses on the reinstatement of the storage capacity of the existing dams of the area and the restoration of the valley's ecology.	83
4,6,7	The Ghajn National Water Conservation Awareness Centre	The Ghajn National Water Conservation Awareness Centre developed two more interactive educational programmes. These two components specifically target pupils studying between Levels 4 and 6, offering an interactive and engaging experience with the intention of helping them understand the concepts of renewable energy, energy efficiency, and energy labelling.	83-84
12	Malta's Waste Management Plan 2021-2030	The new WMP focuses specifically on waste prevention, waste collection, waste management, enforcement, and data management.	85-86
12	Circular Economy Malta	Circular Economy Malta will promote new business conditions, whereby producers will be responsible for part of the whole life cycle of productions, starting from their placement on the market to the end of the products' life, identifying alternative streams of products prior to waste.	86-87
12	The Construction and Demolition Waste Strategy (2021-2030)	The strategy aims to identify options for the management of waste arising from construction and demolition activities by, primarily, addressing the current issues within the sector as well as highlighting the possible short-term and long-term measures to be adopted, with a view of shifting the treatment of such waste from backfilling to re-using and recycling.	87
8,12	Boat Restoration Scheme	The scheme provided financial assistance to those boat owners that are in possession of one of the traditional Maltese wooden vessels.	87-88
14	Incentive Scheme for Sustainable Fishing	This scheme aims to promote more responsible fishing and awareness of the negative impacts of practices that are currently in place.	88

8	COVID-19 Financial Aid Grant Scheme for fishers	The scheme is aimed at supporting those fishers which were so negatively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.	88
14	Lost Gear Response Initiative	The initiatives aim to recover lost fishing gear at sea.	88
4	The setup of a specialised reference-only library at the Aquaculture Directorate Malta	This library will be very useful to both the Directorate as well as students attending courses related to the Fisheries and Aquaculture Science at the UoM and MCAST, and those students attending primary and secondary schools showing an interest in nature and the marine biome..	88
4	Fisheries App	The app tries to ensure that all fishers acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development and adopt sustainable lifestyles.	88
8,14	The Swordfish Temporary Cessation Scheme	The scheme provides financial compensation to both full-time and part-time fishing vessel owners that fish for swordfish.	89
4,14	Awareness Raising about IUU fishing	To combat IUU the following initiatives took place: -organisation of seminars -publicity and awareness-raising campaign whereby the general public was also made aware of the importance of having a sustainable fishing industry, the problems caused by IUU fishing.	87
14	SIMTAP systems project	This project focuses on R&I, whereby there will be a shift from the integrated multi-trophic aquaculture approach towards an innovative self-sufficient integrated multi-trophic aquaponic system for small-scale, labour-intensive, and environmentally friendly marine fish and halophytic plants production adapted to the typical socio-economic and climatic condition of Mediterranean areas.	90-91
11	Breakwater project at Pontal-Qrejten.	This project was funded with the help of the EU and was aimed at providing shelter to the port of Marsaxlokk and the surrounding beaches.	91

8	The reform of the Fruit and Vegetable Market	The purpose of this reform is to ensure that farmers have a more just price return for their products through the recruitment of sales and marketing agents to manage the sales, barcoding of all crates that are delivered to the Pitkalija, and also the refurbishment of the sales areas.	92
2,8	The Establishment of the Malta Food Agency	The aim of the agency is to identify new opportunities for the creation of new markets for local food producers, including short supply chains and export by engaging with operators in the food chain.	92-93
2,4,8	The Young Farmers Scheme	With this scheme, young farmers will start gaining the experience and know-how related to the work involved both through a hands-on approach as well as via a structured theoretical approach and theoretical learning.	94
8,15	The Pig Welfare Scheme	The scheme is aimed at supporting efforts in the primary agricultural production sector that voluntarily undertake certain specific actions to improve animal welfare on their farm.	94
2,8,12	Grant for Production Planning to Farmers	Through this grant, farmers will be given financial assistance through which they can develop and manage a production plan based on supply and demand.	94
2	Eradication of the Tomato Brown Rugose Fruit Virus	A financial compensation scheme was launched to compensate registered farmers for the costs of the control and the eradication of the ToBRFV and to make good the damage caused by the spread of ToBRFV.	94
2	Crop and Fertiliser Plan system	This system will facilitate the process by which farmers get advice on what is the optimal amount of NPK required for the crops being grown in their fields.	94
2	Renovation investment project of the Agricultural Services Laboratory	The setting up of a laboratory providing all the necessary equipment required by farmers to test the soil and water for irrigation as well as more professional services relating to the sustainable management of crops and fields, among other things.	94-95
2	Trials with multiple species of fodder	These early trials allowed researchers to observe what types of fodder crops would be most receptive to the local agronomic conditions.	95

2	Autochthonous grapevine variety conservation programme	The aim of the programme is to reduce the use of plant protection products through the use of varieties that are more adaptable to the Maltese environment, whilst increasing the demand for the local product through the existing demand for niche products linked to particular territories.	96
2	Xylella fastidiosa study	The survey involved the trapping and identification of insects during the months of May and July.	96
2	Agri Kwalità campaign	The aim of the campaign is to promote and bring together the Organic Production and Labelling Scheme, Products of Quality National Scheme, and the D.O.K and I.G.T Wines Scheme.	96
4,15	Guidance notes and articles concerning antimicrobials	The aim of this is to expand the educational animal health campaigns targeted specifically at farmers, animal and pet owners emphasising on the risks of non-prescribed use of antibiotics or acquisition of antibiotics from unlicensed sources, as well as the benefits and cost effectiveness of greater hygiene.	97
15	Local Council Care Fund	49 local councils applied for funding to set up projects that address the needs of animals in their communities.	97
15	Animal Honours Awards	The first edition of the Animal Honours Awards which took place on 4 October 2021.	98
15	The National Trees and Woodlands Strategy and Action Plan 2022-2030	The strategy and action plan aims to promote trees and woodlands and further integrate forestation and restoration concerns into the plans, programmes, and policies of related sectors in Malta.	99
15	FAST project	The main aim of the project is to address biodiversity loss and the degradation, as well as restoration, of the ecosystem services in the area and sites of the Natura 2000 network.	99
15	Restoration of Valley Features for the Environment of Agri-Environmental Values project	Restoration of Wied Garnaw, Wied il-Gnejna, Wied il-Fiddien, Wied Ghomor, and Wied ir-Rum.	101

15	Inwadar project	The project consisted of a scientific study of the removal of material which has been dumped at the site over the years.	101
4,15	VALLEYS: Discovering Malta and Gozo's watercourses and their value to society publication	The book focuses on the studies carried out in relation to valleys, as well as the historical value and the characteristics of Malta's and Gozo's valleys.	101
4,15	Clean Up Campaign	The campaign took place in various valleys within different localities to boost even further the educational importance of environmental awareness.	102
15	The planting of 19,112 indigenous trees and shrubs and 5,640 non-indigenous trees and shrubs	The planting has been categorized in different categories, these being Natura 2000 Sites, Protected Areas, Rural Areas, Urban Areas, Botanic Garden, KSU and Fundazzjoni, Kaċċaturi, Nassaba u Konservazzjonisti Sites.	102
15	Afforestation projects	More than 1,500 indigenous and endemic trees were planted in various localities in Malta.	102-103
14	Monitoring processes for the continuous assessment of the marine environmental status	A long-term monitoring strategy for seabirds was developed.	104
14	The installation of cameras and costal monitoring equipment in Ramla l-Hamra Bay, Gozo	These cameras monitor the impact of the waves on the sand line and the general movement of the sand.	104
14	Geological Survey of the TNO	The study identified geological plays for possible storage of CO ₂ , also highlighting the considerable risks and uncertainties.	105
14	Third edition of Marine Litter Campaign – 'Saving Our Blue'	The third edition mainly focused on the damage caused by microplastics, and the importance of protecting Marine Protected Areas.	105-106
14	Beach and dive clean-ups	A total of eleven beach clean-ups were carried out and approximately over 145 kgs of waste were collected throughout these events.	106
14	BioBLU project	The project aims to give their innovative contribution towards mitigating the effects of plastic and microplastic debris that litter our seas and beaches.	106

11	The retrofitting of the Żabbar Housing Estate	The aim of this initiative is to increase the energy efficiency of the building that is housing low-income families and individuals.	107
11	Grant for first-time buyers	The grant will reimburse eligible expenditure that is incurred by the applicant related to the restoration and finishing of privately owned residential properties within Urban Conservation Areas, properties that have been built for more than 20 years and have been vacant for more than seven years, and new properties that are developed in conformity with approved criteria.	108
11	The launch of Grant to Assist Owners in the Construction and/or Completion or Rehabilitation of their First Home	The grants aim to assist people buying their first residential property and the regeneration and restoration of abandoned and dilapidated properties, thereby contributing to affordable and sustainable housing.	108
13	Study focusing on PM10 at the traffic site in Msida	The main objective of this project is to obtain a full chemical characterisation of PM10 which could act as evidence base for air quality policies in the future.	109, 111
13	New air monitoring station in Xemxija and the installation of an additional monitoring station in St Paul's Bay	The aim is further expand the monitoring range of pollutants.	109
11	The sonic environment study of the historical city of Mdina	Through this project, one can appreciate the distinct characteristics of Mdina and educate the general public about the surrounding sonic environment.	112
11	Partial Local Plan Review of the Grand Harbour Local Plan	This includes the regeneration of the Marsa Inner Harbour area, which is currently an urban area requiring attention and improvement.	112
11	Urban greening projects in twelve different localities	These projects consisted of urban tree planting projects, green canopies and installation of planters, and the greening of urban squares.	112-113
11	Installation of green wall projects in industrial areas	The number of plants amounted to 27,600, 10,687, and 11,430 respectively.	113

11	KTAIP project	Through the KTAIP, Malta will also introduce safer facilities for alternative modes of travel through its new intersection design, which includes new footpaths and improved public transport amenities.	115
3,11	The embellishment of Marsalforn	Emphasis was placed on encouraging more foot and bicycle traffic.	115
13	Grand Harbour Clean Air project	This project will cut over 90% of the air pollution that cruise liners and roll-on/roll-off ships emit when visiting Malta's principal port through the use of shoreside electricity to power onboard systems.	115
7,11,13	National Policy for Electric Vehicle Public Charging Infrastructure	The aim of this policy is to make charging infrastructure accessible to the public, to enable electric vehicles to circulate in urban and densely populated areas, as well as to facilitate charging for all residents across Malta and Gozo.	116
11,13	Multi-modal Hub	The project aims to encourage a modal shift from private car use to collective, sustainable, and alternative low-carbon transport modes in order to reduce traffic congestion.	117
11	Malta's National Household Travel Survey	This important tool will now assist in providing important data on current travel patterns and behaviour, and gauge public opinion on new potential actions to be included in the updated Transport Master Plan.	118



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