



GOVERNMENT OF MALTA
MINISTRY FOR ENERGY, ENTERPRISE
AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Sustainable Development Annual Report

2020





Foreward



The year 2020 will remain synonymous with the COVID-19 global pandemic; a time of extraordinary turbulence and uncertainty which has had an impact on a global scale. Malta has shown its resilience in this aspect and it has proved that as a nation we have already come a long way to focus our economy agenda towards a transition to a green and sustainable one. To secure a truly sustainable future, we need a competitive business environment to anchor and grow a sustainable economy, ensuring the wellbeing of our citizens, residents and visitors alike, whilst paving the way for a more sustainable energy future.

Malta is committed to continue delivering successfully so that we can have a country which is sustainable in all aspects of society, the economy and the environment. Our goal is to maximize our focus on all the three pillars and achieve a better balance between them, providing the foundation for development which is sustainable not only for ourselves and our country but also for generations to come. This is being built on the ongoing work and progress in line with the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

This Report details our activities during 2020 and builds on our actions on sustainability and transparency. It provides insight and considers exceptional circumstances brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic while covering the Government's socio-economic and environmental measures taken throughout 2020. In Malta, the pandemic has led to the introduction of several

urgent measures which were directly linked to health-care, education, the economy and social well-being and therefore much of the work linked to sustainable development was oriented towards COVID-19.

It is crucial to focus on progress while also recognizing any remaining gaps which require additional efforts to be addressed through policy-making and project implementation. Therefore, while we are determined to implement concretely our vision towards decarbonization and greening the economy, the Maltese Government is committed to accelerate action towards the sustainable development of the Maltese Islands; economically, socially, and ecologically by 2030. We are driven to provide opportunities which allow the Maltese citizens to be part of the solution. I strongly believe that in a fast-paced world, achieving a balance for sustainable development is not an easy task and change does not come overnight, but this highlights our determination to deliver on our commitment to gradually drive positive change for a better future. We must continue to make a real contribution to people's lives. We can only do this by keeping our approach to sustainability at the heart of the way we live and do business.



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List of Abbreviations

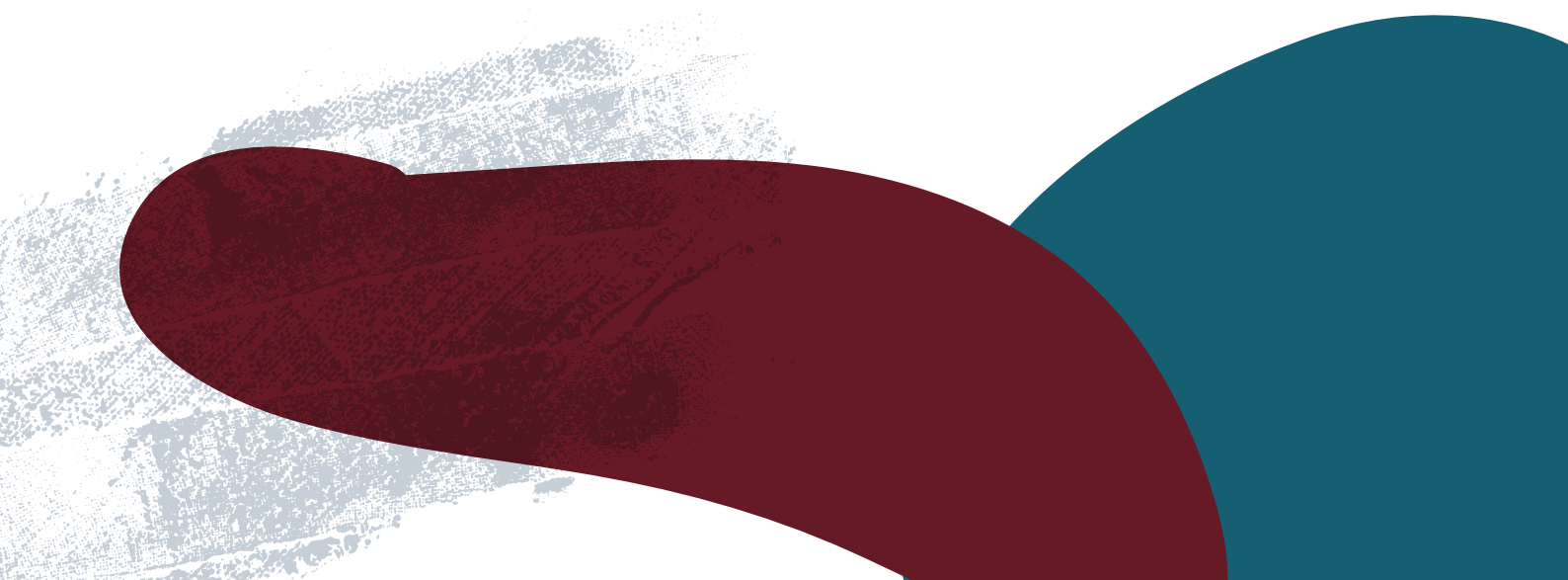
A2E	Access to Employment
ACM	Arts Council Malta
AFM	Armed Forces of Malta
AHWD	Animal Health and Welfare Department
AI	Artificial intelligence
AMR	Antimicrobial Resistance
APOs	Assistant Psychological Officers
ARPA	Agriculture and Rural Payments Agency
AWAS	Agency for the Welfare of Asylum Seekers
AWLs	Automated Weighing and Labelling Stations
BFT	Bluefin Tuna
BYTHOS	Biotechnologies for Human Health and Blue Growth
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy
CFP	Common Fisheries Policy
CIPD	Critical Infrastructure Protection Directorate
CMS	Case Management System
CO₂	Carbon Dioxide
CONvErGE	Connected eGovernment
CPL	Central Public Library
DC-MAP	Data Collection Multi Annual Programme
DFA	Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture
DIER	Department of Industrial and Employment Relations
DLAP	Directorate for Learning and Assessment Programmes
EAFRD	European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development



EDEN	European Destinations of Excellence
EEA	European Economic Area
EMA	European Medicines Agency
EMFF	European Maritime and Fisheries Fund
ePPs	Electronic Public Procurement System
ERA	Environment and Resource Authority
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESF	European Social Fund
EU	European Union
EWA	Energy and Water Agency
F-gases	Fluorinated greenhouse gases
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FITA	Foundation for Information Technology Accessibility
FSWS	Foundation for Social Welfare Services
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GE	Global Education
GENE	Global Education and Network Europe
GES	Good Environmental Status
GHG	Greenhouse Gas
GLOBE	Global Learning and Observations to Benefit the Environment
GPP	Green Public Procurement
GREVIO	Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence
HM	Heritage Malta
HRD	Human Rights Directorate
IACD	Inter-Ministerial Administrative Committee on Disability
IAS	Invasive Alien Species
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IIPBD	Inter-Ministerial Interdisciplinary Professional Board for Disability Services
INDIS	Industrial Innovative Solutions
IRC	Initial Reception Centre
IT	Information Technology
ITS	Institute of Tourism Studies
IUU	Unreported and Unregulated
IVSS	International Virtual Science Symposium
LCDS	Low Carbon Development Strategy
MAFA	Ministry for Agriculture, Fisheries, Food and Animal Rights
MCA	Malta Communications Authority
MAST	Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology
MCESD	Malta Council for Economic and Social Development
MCST	Malta Council for Science and Technology

MDIA	Malta Digital Innovation Authority
MECP	Ministry for the Environment, Climate Change and Planning
MEI	Ministry for the Economy and Industry
MESD	Ministry for Energy, Enterprise and Sustainable Development
MEUSAC	Malta-EU Steering and Action Committee
MFCS	Ministry for the Family, Children's Rights and Social Solidarity
MFE	Ministry for Finance and Employment
MFEA	Ministry for Foreign and European Affairs
MFED	Ministry for Education
MFH	Ministry for Health
MGOZ	Ministry for Gozo
MJEG	Ministry for Justice, Equality and Governance
MPF	Malta Police Force
MQF	Malta Qualifications Framework
MSD	Market Surveillance Directorate
MSE	Malta Stock Exchange
MSFD	Marine Strategy Framework Directive
MTA	Malta Tourism Authority
MTCP	Ministry for Tourism and Consumer Protection
MTIP	Ministry for Transport, Infrastructure and Capital Projects
NAP	Noise Action Plan
NAPCP	National Air Pollution Control Programme
NBFP	National Biodiversity Financial Plan
NBSAP	National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan
NCPE	National Commission for the Promotion of Equality
NECP	National Energy and Climate Plan
NEETs	Not in Education, Employment or Training
NGOs	Non-governmental Organisations
NSO	National Statistics Office
NSSS	National School Support Services
NTG	Notary to Government
NVL	National Veterinary Laboratory
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OP	Operational Programme
OPM	Office of the Prime Minister
PA	Planning Authority
pH	Potential of hydrogen
PoMs	Programme of Measures
PPD	Plant Protection Directorate

PRIMA	Partnership for Research and Innovation in the Mediterranean Area
PSP	Public Social Partnership
PV	Photovoltaic
R&D	Research and Development
R&I	Research and Innovation
RAD	Rural Affairs Department
RBMP	River Basin Management Plan
RES	Renewable Energy Source
REWS	Regulator for Energy and Water Services
RRF	Recovery and Resilience Facility
RRP	Recovery and Resilience Plans
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SDH	Social determinants of health
SEC	Secondary Education Certificate
SMEs	Small and Medium Enterprises
SMITHS	Sustainable Multi Intermodal Transport Hubs across Malta and Gozo
SO₂	Sulphur dioxide
SOPs	Standard operating procedures
SRIA	Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
TEN-T	Trans-European Transport Network
UN	United Nations
UNCCD	United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
VET	Vocational Education and Training
VMPs	Veterinary Medicinal Products
VMS	Veterinary Medicines Section
VRA	Vulnerability and Risk Assessment
VRD	Veterinary and Phytosanitary Regulation Division
WCMP	Water Catchment Management Plan
WFD	Water Framework Directive
WSC	Water Services Corporation



Introduction

About the Report

This Report is being prepared by the Sustainable Development Directorate within the Ministry for Energy, Enterprise and Sustainable Development (MESD). During the period under review, the Sustainable Development Directorate was part of the Ministry within the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM).

This Annual Report 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 to be submitted to the Minister responsible for sustainable development, delineating the activities carried out by the Competent Authority during the previous financial year. In terms of the Act, the Minister shall provide a copy of this Report to be presented to the House of Representatives for debate.

This Report provides an overview of the measures which were, and are, currently being implemented by the Government of Malta to address and further mainstream sustainable development across all sectors. It is therefore an important source that provides accountability regarding the progress made in sustainable development, while also serving as a guideline for those sectors that require improvements.

This Report revolves around the three pillars of sustainability: economic development, environmental protection, and social well-being. Therefore, its approach assimilates the collaborative efforts of all Ministries and offers an integrated way to achieve a sustainable future for the Maltese Islands, a future where 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.

Malta's Commitments towards Sustainable Development

Malta's Progress

Malta's achievements are continuously being reported through two major means: the UN SDG Index and Dashboards Report, and the EU SDG monitoring report. Data published in the 2020 SDG Index and Dashboards Report, tracking progress in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) across the Member States of the United Nations (UN), placed Malta 32nd out of 166 countries.

Malta retained its positive rating when it comes to SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy), and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth). Meanwhile, there seems to have been small yet steady improvements with regards to all the other SDGs, except for SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), and SDG 13 (Climate Action). Thus, to an extent, this highlights the key areas which Malta needs to put more focus on particularly when it comes to climate action, consumption, and production. In this regard, Malta has put such topics at the top of the agenda and aims for continuous successful improvement.

This further demonstrates Government's commitments towards the implementation of the UN Agenda 2030 and the SDGs.

New Sustainable Development Strategy for 2050

Following the publication of the Vision 2050 document, the Directorate for Sustainable Development is in the process of drafting a new National Sustainable Development Strategy. This is being drafted with the technical assistance of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) under the Structural Reform Support Programme 2017-2020 (EU Regulation 2017/875).

Integration of the SDGs in the Budget Process

During 2020, three specialised workshops for Government officials were held on long-term strategic planning of policies as well as on the integration of the SDGs within the budget measures. The aim of these workshops

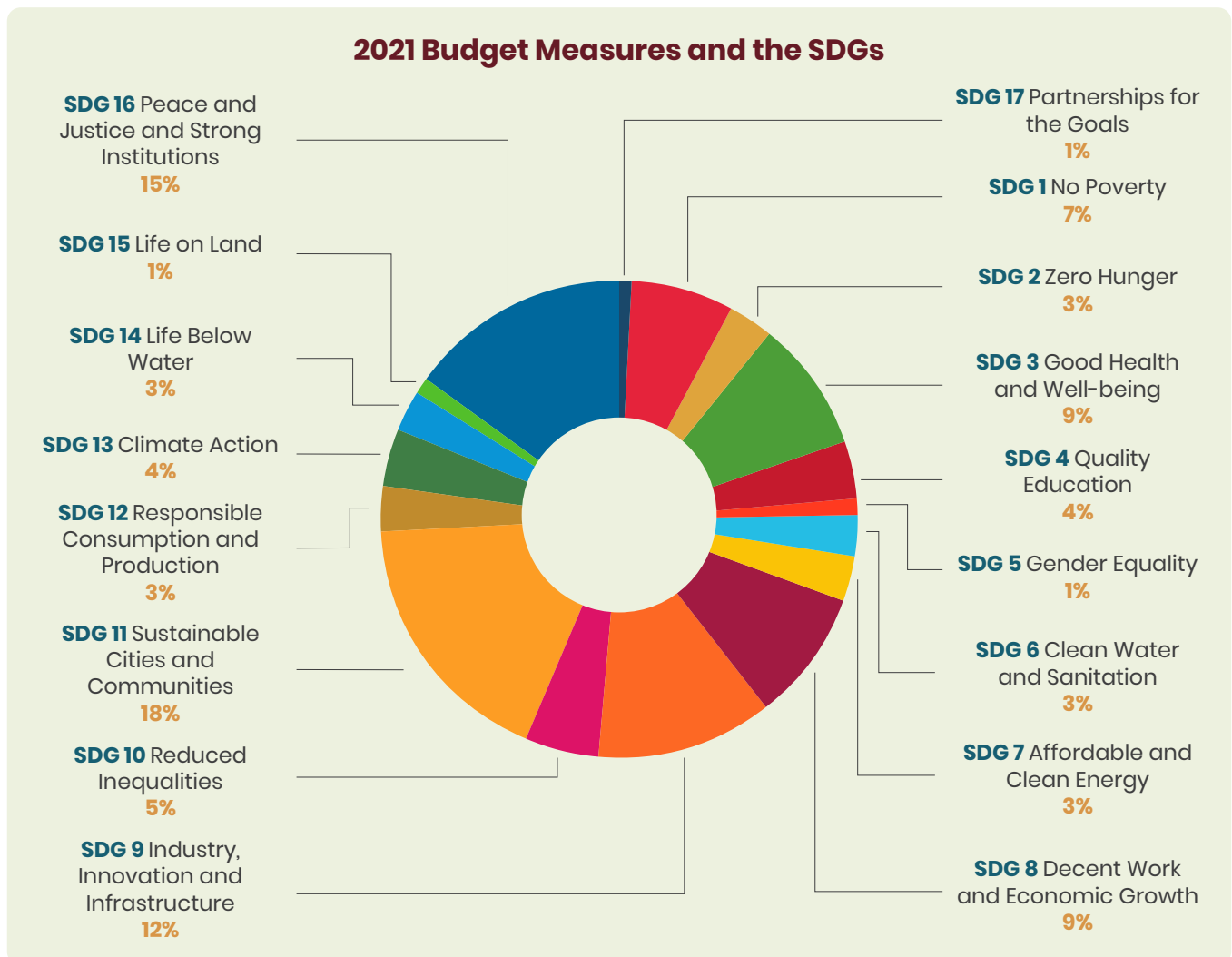
¹ Sustainable Development Act, available at: <https://sustainabledevelopment.gov.mt/en/Documents/Sustainable-Development/Sustainable-Development-Act.pdf>

was to assist Government to develop actions that are practical, innovative, and collaborative to drive forward the agenda for sustainable development, even within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The efforts of the Government of Malta to integrate the SDGs within the budget process were announced in September 2019. Since then, work continued with the aim of ensuring that the UN Agenda 2030 is reflected accordingly in the budget process. The aims behind the SDG alignment process which will be conducted annually are the following:

- Strengthen and consolidate the planning process by Ministry through the integration of the SDGs in the planning phases of a policy, programme, project, or initiative; and
- Establish milestones in Action Plans, through which Ministries will be expected to contribute towards mainstreaming sustainable development practices whilst also addressing SDG indicators.

374 measures of Budget 2021, spread across various sectors, were integrated with the SDGs.



Communicating Sustainable Development and the SDGs

During 2020, the work of the Sustainable Development Directorate focused on increasing the level of awareness on sustainable development across the different sectors in the Maltese Islands.

In this regard, the Directorate set up a new website focusing on sustainable development (sustainabledevelopment.gov.mt), where one can not only access the latest developments regarding sustainable development, but also follow the progress Malta is making with regards to the indicators established by Eurostat. Since sustainable development concerns a multitude of sectors, one can also find a collection of existing national strategies and policies listed according to the different sectors. This makes it more straightforward both for the public to keep informed about the various policies, and for Government officials to refer to when designing new actions and strategies.



Between 26 September 2020 and 02 October 2020, the Directorate organised a number of activities related to the European Sustainable Development Week 2020. The chosen theme was 'Working Together for a Sustainable Future'.



The following events were carried out as part of the ESDW 2020:

26 September 2020

Virtual Conference on Youth and Sustainable Development

The conference had the objective of encouraging further youth engagement in the development of Malta's Sustainable Development Strategy for 2050. The conference focused on the social dimension of sustainable development, namely education, employment, social cohesion, and well-being.

The outcome of the workshops were consolidated into a Resolution, and youths had the opportunity to discuss the Resolution with the Members of Parliament in a virtual debate held on Friday, 02 October 2020.

28–29 September 2020

Workshop on Strengthening Government Capacities for Strategic Policy Planning and Foresight

This workshop, targeted at key high Government officials involved in policy and programme implementation, was organised within the framework of the project led by the OECD and funded by the European Commission's Structural Reform Support Programme (DG REFORM).

2 October 2020

Virtual Youth debate with Members of Parliament on Sustainable Development

The proposals stemming from the conference on Youth and Sustainable Development, which was held on Saturday, 26 September, were consolidated and presented in the form of a Resolution. This Resolution was presented by the National Youth Council and discussed virtually with the Members of Parliament responsible for social affairs.

On 27 November 2020, the Guardian of Future Generations, whose aim is to safeguard inter-generational and intra-generational sustainable development in Malta, organised a virtual conference on the topic 'Sustainability issues in times of unprecedented uncertainty: Towards a sustainable society'. This event focused on various issues relating to sustainable development from the social, economic, and environment domains in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sustainable development principles, such as equality, freedom, respect, solidarity, democracy, and rule of law, were promoted further by the Malta-EU Steering and Action Committee (MEUSAC) through the publication of a storybook for children with the collaboration of renowned author Trevor Żahra. The publication 'Mas-Sigra tal-Ballut' aims to increase awareness and education on European Union (EU) values, which directly contribute and emphasise the importance of sustainable development in celebrating diversity in our society.

Moreover, between July and August 2020, sessions were held with school children participating in Skolasajf. These sessions reached 360 children in 30 Skolasajf centres across Malta and Gozo. In line with the Skolasajf theme, 'My Planet, My Home', the sessions were aimed at increasing knowledge about the principles and values that represent the EU including sustainability, unity in diversity, and a fair and equal society.

Furthermore, MEUSAC also organised a series of discussions on key priorities linked to the SDGs. Such events brought together Government representatives, EU Institutions, and civil society organisations to discuss matters such as the transition towards a sustainable economy in line with the objectives of the European Green Deal, digital transformation, work-life balance, and a fair and just society for citizens.

EU Funds and Sustainability Objectives

EU funds already invest substantial amounts on actions in line with the SDGs. In Malta the European Structural and Investment Funds support 12 out of the 17 SDGs and up to 94% of the expenditure is contributing to them.

The Operational Programme I (OPI) contributes to different dimensions of sustainable development, with some of the Priority Axes contributing to a particular dimension more than others. These include efforts to promote sustainable economic development through support to enterprises and stimulating investment in research and innovation, as well as initiatives to promote the development of new market processes and niche markets (Priority Axes 1 and 3). The promotion of sustainable development is also envisaged through interventions to improve the quality of life of citizens, including through actions aimed to improve transport infrastructure (Priority Axes 7 and 11), investment to achieve environmental sustainability including sustainable water management (Priority Axis 10), investment contributing towards climate change mitigation and adaptation (Priority Axes 5 and 10), and the promotion of energy efficiency and use of renewable energy sources (Priority Axis 4).

Interventions are also envisaged to promote sustainable urban development, improved accessibility, and social cohesion. These all have the objective of fostering sustainable communities (Priority Axis 6). Within the context of sustainable development, the Operational Programme (OP) also supports initiatives in terms of the sustainable use of water, including through measures which promote water conservation, wastewater recycling, and rainwater harvesting amongst others.

Under Priority Axis 1, as at the end of December 2020, there were two mainstream operations and one Aid Scheme, with an overall investment of approximately €62 million. These aim at contributing towards economic growth and providing job opportunities. This, in turn, promotes innovation and technology development, providing the necessary incentives for people to upgrade their skills. With regards to the

environmental dimension, ERDF.01.122 Sustainable Living Complex is providing a direct contribution to research in the built environment in Malta. Specifically, the project will provide a significant contribution to the research undertaken on local materials and conditions in buildings for improving energy efficiency and renewable energy systems, as well as direct research on photovoltaic (PV) systems and materials, and solar cooling and heating technologies.

Priority Axis 3 aims at promoting a robust, diversified, and competitive industrial base whilst moving towards a low-carbon economy. In this regard, with an overall investment of €44.6 million, this axis is sustaining five Aid Schemes and three operations aimed at supporting and encouraging Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) to adopt and develop innovation measures as part of product development, or where new concepts are explored as a means of further expanding their businesses. With the aim of increasing opportunities for the workforce, interventions under this priority axis will also contribute to the creation of new and better jobs. In this context, ERDF.03.014 The Extension of Xewkija Industrial Park will enable further economic growth through better diversification in the economy and to provide further job opportunities for Gozitans.

Priority Axis 4 aims at increasing the share of renewable energy sources through interventions and initiatives for households, enterprises, and the public sector. As at December 2020, there were eight operations and one financial instrument implemented under this axis, representing a total investment of circa €35.7 million. These investments aim at enhancing energy savings and promoting energy efficiency systems and buildings. Infrastructural investments undertaken seek to maximise the use of renewable energy and energy efficiency in all interventions co-financed include the upgrading and retrofitting of street lighting to efficient lamps and retrofitting of energy, efficient systems in public buildings, the installation of renewable energy sources in the form of PV panels on domestic and private premises operated by Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs), producing electricity with the least damage to the environment, and promoting resource efficiency and climate change mitigation.

Under Priority Axis 5, the preservation of Malta's natural and cultural assets is the objective of most operations under implementation, which contribute towards the amelioration of the Maltese environment. As at the end of 2020, there were twenty-five operations approved under this axis, representing a total investment of €64.9 million. Most of the operations under implementation support investments in cultural heritage in the public domain with a view to sustain business development and sustain Malta's tourism industry, which is one of the main pillars of the Maltese economy. Within this context, as at December 2020, ERDF.05.027 the Invest in Chadwick Lakes for Tourism Purposes project has increased the water catchment by 35,000m² thanks to the removal of c. 50,000m² of material. Old rubble

walls were re-constructed and new ones built to restore the water course and enhance the ecology of the lakes.

Priority Axis 6 is funding ERDF.06.996 The Regeneration of Lower Valletta with an investment of circa €24 million. This operation carries out a set of integrated actions aimed at improving the urban environment, revitalising cities, preserving cultural heritage as well as sustaining social housing and community needs, enhancing the competitiveness of SMEs, and sustaining vulnerable people. As at end 2020, a number of activities were implemented under the project, including extensive restoration works of 12.5 km² of bastions, the facades of the Auberge de Bavière and that of the House of Catalunya, and the refurbishment of pavements in the Marsamxett area. Eleven families have benefitted from refurbished social housing units after extensive works carried out on a previously dilapidated building in Carmelite Street.

Under Priority Axis 7, ERDF.07.091 - Introduction of Sustainable Multi Intermodal Transport Hubs across Malta and Gozo (SMITHS), an investment of circa €35.5 million is encouraging a modal shift from private car usage to collective, sustainable, and alternative low-carbon transport modes through the introduction of various intermodal choices to reduce traffic congestion, improve air quality, and reduce Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions. Initiatives funded under this operation will significantly contribute towards a reduction in GHG emissions in Malta.

Priority Axis 10 aims at preserving and protecting the environment through investments to reduce waste and make better use of water resources. More specifically, with regards to waste, the envisaged increase in recyclables generated through CF.10.135 – The setting up of a multi-material recovery facility will result in a reduction in the production of plastic, paper and cardboard, metal, and glass. This will in turn lead to savings in carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions. Through an increase of both recyclable and organic waste, the amount of waste thrown in the landfills is expected to decrease.

As regards social cohesion, CF.10.138 Encouraging Sustainable Waste Practices in Households and Beyond has carried out a publicity campaign by providing the necessary information and guidelines on how to separate waste at source. Complementing the awareness campaign, the project also provided ventilated and stackable bins which were distributed to all households in Malta and Gozo, as well as a number of kerbside collection vehicles which collect waste from localities which would otherwise end up in landfills.

As to making better use of water resources, CF.10.998 Towards a Net Zero Impact Water Utility – ensuring Integrated Water Resource Management aims at balancing desalination and abstraction so as to ensure the quality of the groundwater resource for future generations, as well as security of supply.

In relation to drinking water, the overarching aim of the project is to lower the level of chlorides and electrical conductivity across all water quality zones that supply the entire Maltese Islands, while supplying consumers with a standard level of high quality water across the whole network. At the same time, the project aims to contribute towards a national objective to lower the existing pressures on groundwater resources, through several measures that manage groundwater more sustainably. As at December 2020, there were seven projects being implemented under Priority Axis 10, of which there were three projects with an investment of €24 million targeting Waste, and four projects with an investment of €118 million targeting Water.

Under Priority Axis 11, the main thrust is to increase competitiveness by decreasing existing bottlenecks on road and sea infrastructure. Given that Malta depends heavily on exports of goods and services for job creation, there is a constant need to step up Malta's

productivity to improve its competitiveness and to develop new areas of competitive advantage. As at December 2020, there were three projects approved under this axis, representing an investment of €92.7 million. In terms of implementation on the ground, works continued on the Santa Lucija Underpass as well as the Marsa Junction which will result in 1.34 km of enhanced Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) road section, with increased road safety and reduction in journey time.

The Operational Programme II (OPII) also contributes towards the promotion of sustainable development. Interventions include efforts to promote sustainable economic development through support to enterprises and stimulating investment in research and innovation as well as initiatives to promote the development of new market processes and niche markets. The promotion of sustainable development is also envisaged through interventions to improve the quality of life of citizens. Capacity building



interventions that include education, training, knowledge, and information also strengthen the knowledge and skills and to foster job creation.

Priority Axis 1 supports measures reconciling work and family life, increased gender equality as well as supporting the shift from the unemployed to the employed segment. Through these types of measures, including those implemented under Access to Employment (A2E), the investments are bridging the gap between the supply and demand in the labour market; facilitating access to the labour market including upgrading of skills through further training and education (ESF 01.001 - Training for Employment); and promoting the employability of the Maltese labour force, including youth (ESF 01.002 - Youth Guarantee), thereby increasing the employment rate and hence reducing the rate at risk of poverty which is strongly correlated to unemployment.

Priority Axis 2 is sustaining operations geared towards enabling people, experiencing poverty and social exclusion, to live in dignity and take an active part in society (ESF 02.048 - VASTE). Several projects, such as ESF 02.063 - Knowledge, Training, Communications and Support Measures in Support of Vulnerable Groups, support measures addressing the specific circumstances of groups at particular risk at different junctures of their life through education, training and therapeutic services. The promotion of sustainable development is also envisaged through interventions to improve the quality of life of citizens and to improve accessibility

and social cohesion with the objective of fostering sustainable communities.

Under Priority Axis 3, operations under implementation directly contribute towards improving the educational experience to empower the future workforce by adapting to new conditions, reduce unemployment, and raise productivity through an improved educational experience. In terms of strengthening the research performance, Priority Axis 3 is sustaining investments in post-graduate (ESF 03.015 - ENDEAVOUR Scholarships Scheme) as well as post-doctoral research (ESF 03.009 - Reach High Scholars Programme Post-Doctoral Grants) to increase the human capital supply that can effectively contribute towards Research and Innovation (R&I) investment, thereby contributing towards economic growth. In addition, through the Investing in Skills Scheme, interventions seek to consolidate the skills of the current workforce. Additionally, ESF.03.059 - One Tablet per Child, besides instilling in children skills which would eventually improve their employability prospects, the project is also contributing towards the protection of the environment through digitalisation of resources, hence reducing printed material.

Projects approved under Priority Axis 4 are supporting investment in institutional capacity of public administration, which is considered of key importance for the effective functioning of the Maltese economy and society. The majority of operations under implementation aim at strengthening public administrative and financial



management capacities, introducing new technologies to deliver public services, identifying training and development needs for Public Officers in the Public Administration, and carrying out campaigns and research aiming at adapting services to the changes in society. All these actions will increase productivity, decrease excessive bureaucracy in the workforce, and create a more economically-robust society.

In environmental matters, operations approved under OP11 propose actions focused on the environment itself and on environmental awareness raising efforts. Some of the measures proposed include: increasing awareness of energy and water conservation; ensuring that training rooms and offices are equipped with energy-saving lighting and equipment and that full use of natural light is made; as well as the use of websites and emails to disseminate documents and to communicate. In the area of economic growth and social cohesion, projects approved under both Axes 3 and 4 are supporting actions, which are crucial for establishing a skilled workforce able to sustain economic and social growth as well as increasing productivity.

Throughout 2020, MEUSAC has raised awareness, promoted dialogue, and even assisted organisations directly involved in the implementation of various SDGs to obtain funding to implement their projects.

MEUSAC was also able to better-assist NGOs, local councils, schools, government entities, and trade unions to tap into EU funds for the implementation of EU policies in several different fields including the environment, citizens' rights, education, research and innovation, entrepreneurship, and youth participation. This was done via projects such as ENGAGE, which was aimed at improving stakeholder engagement and ensuring that participation is strengthened and improved. It also provided mentoring sessions that were aimed at helping stakeholders upgrade their skills in stakeholder engagement, effective use of communication tools, and accessing EU funding opportunities.

A total of 102 applications were submitted for funding, which meant that tens of organisations were to implement projects in the areas identified in the SDGs including sustainable buildings, combating poverty and inequalities, adaptation of skills to labour market needs, lifelong learning, and protection of the natural environment. All these projects will enhance the country's economic growth and will contribute effectively towards the key priority areas identified such as sustainable community cohesion, sustainable use of resources, quality of life and sustainable and competitive growth.

Supporting developing countries

In 2020, a number of measures and initiatives were taken to target a number of SDGs that particularly addressed the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects on the developing country population

through international cooperation and coordination efforts. One success story in particular was the provision of 468 tonnes of ware potatoes to Namibia in the summer, having suffered a food shortage resulting from severe drought exacerbated by the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. This meant that Malta's assistance helped around half a million Namibians, while also supporting Maltese farmers from losses following a drop in demand for potato export to the Netherlands. Another mission that was accomplished by the Ministry for Foreign and European Affairs (MFEA) was that of a humanitarian flight operation to send a 45-ton laden aircraft with products donated by Maltese companies and the general public to Beirut following the city's port August explosions that reportedly killed more than 190 persons and left more than 4,000 injured.

Besides Lebanon and Namibia, through MFEA, Malta also contributed towards humanitarian assistance lent to Albania, Afghanistan, Libya, Syria, and the Sahel, amongst others, to alleviate suffering caused by conflict and natural disasters. The Ministry also responded to several COVID-19 related appeals made by reputable international multilateral organisations, including various United Nations agencies, particularly to assist afflicted countries, especially in Africa and the Neighbourhood, with the aim of leaving no one behind.

Towards the end of 2020, the Ministry issued an Expression of Interest for Official Development Assistance (ODA) projects to be carried out by voluntary organisations registered with the Commissioner for Voluntary Organisations in Ghana and Ethiopia with the aim to address and support these two countries accelerate their SDGs, especially in education, health, biodiversity, and employability, while also respecting gender equality.

Despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, education remains one of the main measures that MFEA has relentlessly worked on, led by its strong conviction that this tool is a vital contributor for human development that promotes higher living standards and resultant community wellbeing. To this effect, about €147,000 in scholarships and courses were offered to citizens from different ODA-eligible countries, in various areas, such as in Humanitarian Action, in Maritime Law, as well as in Information Policy and Governance at tertiary and postgraduate levels.

In 2020, the Directorate for Consular Services and Maltese Living Abroad managed to convert the Scholarships application form into a K2 Form (online form) intended for those applying for a scholarship, offered by a foreign country or a foreign organisation through MFEA. Such scholarships are published on the Ministry's website in the Scholarships section: <https://foreignandeu.gov.mt/en/Pages/Scholarships.aspx>, which means that prospective Maltese candidates can apply for any scholarship without the need to print applications and visit the Ministry to submit the application and relevant documentation in person.

Chapter 1: Enabling Sustainable and Competitive Growth



The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 has brought about unprecedented stresses on the global economy. As the pandemic unfolded, the Maltese Government acted swiftly and decisively to protect the health of its citizens and 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 helping the most vulnerable. The most notable interventions for businesses included the introduction of wage supplement schemes, commercial rent aid, refund of electricity bills, tax credits, skills developments schemes, re-engineering of operations and sustaining digital promotions.

These were further 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/civil union ceremonies.

Malta has adopted a pro-active sustainable approach, which was pivotal in our plans for economic recovery where social dialogue has also proved to be a key approach.

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% gross domestic product (GDP) growth per annum in the least developed countries.

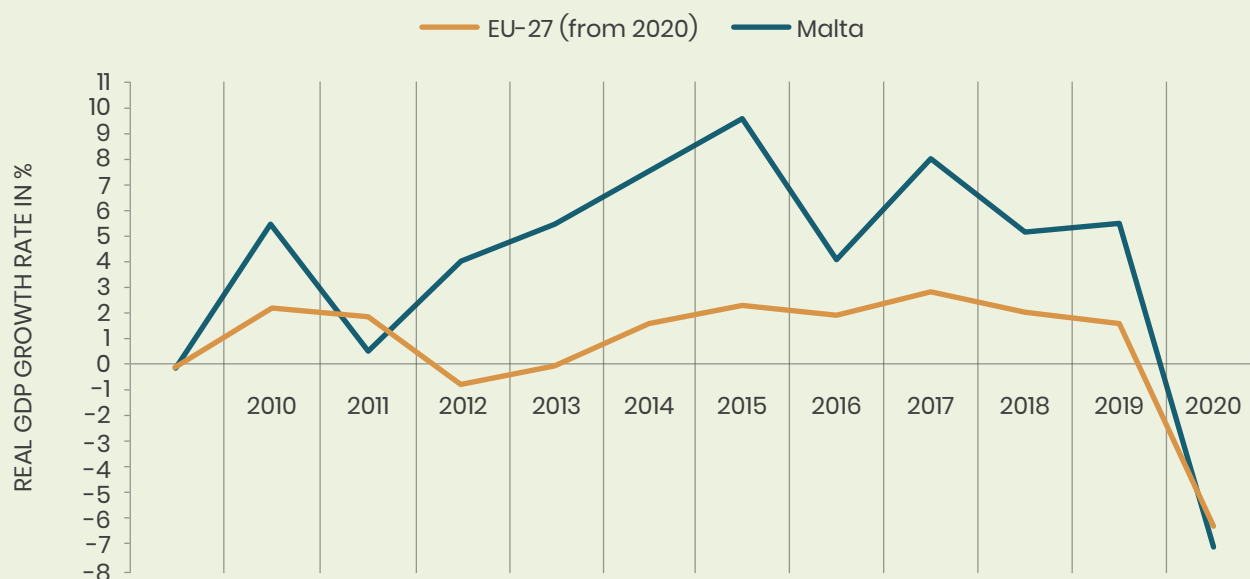
SDG 8.2 Achieve higher levels of economic productivity through diversification, technological upgrading and innovation, including through a focus on high-value added and labour-intensive sectors.

SDG 8.3 Promote development-oriented policies that support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, and encourage the formalisation and growth of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises, including through access to financial services.

The provisional estimates indicate that the GDP for 2020 amounted to €12,823.8 million, registering a decrease of €768.4 million, or 5.7%, when compared to 2019². This development comes on the back of a decade of sustained economic growth where GDP growth averaged 5.6% over the period 2010–2019.

² Data available at: https://nso.gov.mt/en/News_Releases/Documents/2021/03/News2021_040.pdf

Real GDP Growth Rate - Volume



1.2 Government's fiscal policy

The Maltese Government's prudent fiscal policy over recent years – running headline budget surpluses and establishing a Contingency Reserve Fund – made possible the countercyclical response to the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result of this approach, the economy can absorb a short-term increase in borrowing, particularly since financing conditions remain favourable.

Notwithstanding the above, as of 2020, the level of public debt relative to GDP is expected to have increased to 55.0%, reflecting the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on public finances. From the revenue side, a substantial fall in tourist expenditure and household spending led to a deterioration in the indirect tax revenue whilst corporate losses and reductions in employment income led to a significant drop in direct tax revenue. Furthermore, Government expenditure increased substantially reflecting the fiscal impact of COVID-19 related support measures as well as measures legislated by means of the 2020 Budget. Nevertheless, proceedings from personal income, tax revenue and social security contributions were relatively shielded by the contained impact on the labour market.

1.3 Recovery and Resilience Plan

Considering the COVID-19 pandemic, the EU provided additional instruments to regenerate the European economy as whole, ensuring no country is left behind. Amongst these instruments there is the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) requiring Member States, including Malta, to prepare Recovery and Resilience Plans (RRP) setting out a coherent package of reforms and public investment projects.

The priorities to be included in Malta's recovery and resilience plan are being discussed informally with the European Commission. The priorities include digitalisation, green transition, health, and education. In drafting the plan, the Maltese authorities are taking into account the Country Specific Recommendations as well as the priorities and challenges that emerged from the country's SWOT analysis undertaken in the programming of EU funds for the 2021-27 period. Additional inputs concerning possible investments to be funded from the RRF were also received from several stakeholders. It is planned that Malta's National RRP will be presented to the European Commission by the end of April 2021.

1.4 Sustainable Finance

In 2020, the Ministry for Finance and Employment (MFE), together with the representatives from the Ministry for the Environment, Climate Change and Planning (MECP), continued to contribute to discussions of the Member State Expert Group on Sustainable Finance. This group is intended to discuss the political steering of the Commission's Action Plan on Financing Sustainable Growth. MFE played an instrumental role in consulting different stakeholders to establish a Maltese position to the Taxonomy Delegated Act, which was presented by the Commission in late December, with the aim of classifying economic activities as environmentally sustainable.

Further to this, research work is being carried out to study the possibility of issuing sovereign green bonds. This falls in line with what the Malta Stock Exchange (MSE) has been working on where it has been developing a regulatory framework which would allow for the listing and trading of green bonds on its market. In fact, in 2020, the MSE drew up a set of bye-laws based on the International Capital Market Association's Green Bond Principles to regulate this specific market. This market will help motivate issuers to raise finance in an environmentally sustainable manner in line with Malta's National Energy and Climate Plan (NECP). It is envisaged that this market will be functional by the second quarter of 2021.

1.5 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 formalisation and growth of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises, including through access to financial services.

SDG 9.2 Promote inclusive and sustainable industrialisation and, by 2030, significantly raise industry's share of employment and GDP, 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.

1.5.1 Supporting 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. 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 throughout 2020, aimed mainly 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 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. The first tranche of refund payments under this scheme was disbursed during the month of December 2020. This scheme is assisting 3,280 companies and 1,860 self-employed with a total expenditure of €6 million.

Malta Enterprise also launched the 'Business Plan Re-engineering Scheme' with the main aim of supporting small and medium-sized businesses to realign their business activities, re-train their employees, restructure their products/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 provided '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. A COVID-19 Research and Development

Fund was also created 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.

Apart from measures aimed at mitigating the economic impact of COVID-19, Malta Enterprise remained committed to help small and medium-sized companies train and upskill their workforce. To this end, Malta Enterprise continued building on an existing measure – the Skills Development Scheme – in order to reach more businesses through a top-up of €5 million on the budget allocation for this scheme. This top-up is directed towards those businesses with less than 50 employees.

In order to contribute towards environmental protection, a scheme was launched in October 2020 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 the main purpose of decreasing the environmentally harmful emissions released by the activity.

In order to facilitate investments in technological solutions that provide higher energy efficiency and contribute directly towards a reduction in the energy requirements of the beneficiaries, the “Investment Aid for Energy Efficiency Projects” was launched in May 2020 (this is also referred to in the Energy section). The aid awarded through this measure shall be in the form of a cash grant or a tax credit (which can be utilised against tax payable by the beneficiary) or a combination of both. The assistance is intended to facilitate investments in technological solutions that provide higher energy efficiency and contribute directly towards a reduction in the energy requirements of the beneficiaries.

The Ministry for Gozo (MGOZ) also contributed to the COVID-19 relief by incentivising two existent schemes of support, namely the Supporting Marketing Initiatives for Specific Niche Markets in Gozo scheme and the Gozo Employment Refund Scheme. The former supported Malta Tourism Authority (MTA)-licensed business operators in Gozo to embark on an international promotional campaign relating to one of the tourism niches offered, which was upgraded. The changes applied were an extension of the eligibility of the scheme by an additional month and the increase in the financial incentive capping from 50% up to 75%. The uptake of this scheme in 2020 was 16, an increase of 60% over the previous year.

From October till December 2020, the Gozo Employment Refund Scheme was extended to make those employers who generated employment in Gozo eligible for application since the original launch of the scheme in 2018, as long as those same employees are currently and uninterruptedly employed with the employer in question.

1.5.2 Sustainable and innovative industrial estates

The Industrial Innovative Solutions (INDIS) Malta Ltd is responsible for the administration of the Government-owned industrial parks and related facilities around Malta and Gozo, as well as supporting and promoting their further development. Through the introduction of policies, INDIS Malta Ltd further substantiated the focus on sustainability through the:

- Nomination of a company officer to act as the Green Champion within INDIS and related projects;
- Implementation of favourable policy guidelines to encourage PV installations on factory rooftops. Target achieved by 2020: 15,000 square meters of PV panel coverage;
- Aiming for BREAM or equivalent certification in INDIS new development projects; and



- Promotion and allocation of industrial land for circular economy projects.

Action Measures taken during 2020 include:

- Installation of Green Walls in Kordin, Mosta, and Marsa Industrial Estates.
- Innovation Partnership for the land mining of Luqa Dump to result in the cleaning of approximately one million cubic meters of contaminated waste and in the process freeing up over 100,000 square meters of space for industry, sports usage, and green open spaces.
- The re-use of construction and demolition waste as secondary raw material to be used in construction projects.

1.5.3 Green Public Procurement

Green Public Procurement (GPP) has been recognised as an enabler to promote sustainable investments in the public sector in the European Green Deal, with specific measures targeting such sector. GPP is a market-based mechanism, which serves as a stimulus to drive the economy in an environmentally friendly direction with Government leading by example.

In 2020, MECP moved closer towards the finalisation of the GPP Second National Action Plan, with criteria being updated according to newly adopted EU Directives and guidelines. The Second National Action Plan, due to be adopted in 2021, aims to increase the share of green purchasing.

During 2020, Government's expenditure amounted to €611,052,134.30 of which €204,138,869.7 were GPP applicable, of these €92,755,085.3 were 'greened'. Monitoring the uptake of GPP and undertaking the necessary quality assurance exercises is one of the core functions to ensure that each Ministry is contributing to the greening of public expenditure. Through this monitoring system, the contribution to sustainable production and consumption patterns was tracked by keeping tabs on the Government's procurement of products and services.

Amongst the actions listed in the Second National Action Plan is improved communication with economic operators and contracting authorities, and facilitating the procurement process, which is often perceived as riddled with unnecessary burden. A GPP mobile web-based application launched in early 2021, serves as a one-stop-shop for all GPP-related information in addition to the GPP help desk. 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 your products, or to book GPP training sessions and much more. Individuals are also able to communicate directly with the GPP office through the built-in chat function found in the app.

With the initial slowdown in GPP training due to the pandemic, MECP took the opportunity to upgrade training materials and shift training online to continue enhancing the knowledge of those working in the procurement sections, addressing on-the-job case studies which hinder the smooth running of procurement processes when it comes to the integration of GPP criteria in tenders, and their evaluation. Circularity and sustainability were the focus of specialist training delivered in collaboration with ICLEI (Local Governments for Sustainability network) to GPP coordinators, for them to better understand their role and the benefits arising from the systems they run.

1.6 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 formalisation 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.

1.6.1 Digital transformation of the Public Service

During 2020, the Public Service continued to implement the strategic plan for the digitisation of public administration through the Mapping Tomorrow Strategy (2019–2021) with the primary aim of introducing the ‘once-only’ principle for online services through technology. The Mapping tomorrow Strategy fully transforms the way the public administration delivers services to people, whereby a citizen using any government service is asked for personal information only once. In this way, the silos in the Public Service will be removed by Ministries’ databases and will no longer be isolated, while facilitating transfer of information between departments.

Discussions with various stakeholders were initiated in 2020 to develop the concepts for the next Public Administration Strategic Plan (2022–2027).

During 2020 the Maltese Government continued to implement initiatives under the below projects with the aim of transforming the way citizens and business interact with Government and providing public services of excellence:

ERDF 02.035 – Connected eGovernment (CONvErGE) (Strategy and Implementation – OPM)

This project aims at capitalising further the use of innovative Information and Communication Technology (ICT) solutions within Government to enable a better and more efficient online public services for citizens and businesses.

ESF.PA4.0078 Mystery Shopper – Enhanced performance in the Public Administration (People and Standards Division – OPM)

The Mystery Shopper project aims at improving the customer experience at the various public service stations throughout the Public Administration with the aim of achieving a service of excellence. Throughout its lifecycle, 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 enable 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 internationally by customers living abroad, thus fulfilling one of the general principles of the Mapping Tomorrow strategy – 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 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 focuses also on ensuring that services are offered in the preferred language of the customer (English or Maltese).

ESF.PA4.0085 – Towards a More Professional Workforce in the Public Administration – (Institute for Public Services – IPS)

The European Social Fund (ESF) project entitled Towards a More Professional Workforce in the Public Administration 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 Institute for Public Services 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 improvement of its services and policies.

These measures were further complemented by the provision of free Wi-fi access points in various localities in Malta and Gozo. In fact, currently, over 400 free Wi-Fi access points are provided to citizens in all municipalities throughout the Maltese Islands.

There was an improvement in servizz.gov's renewal process to offer its customers top quality services and to make these services accessible 24 hours a day from anywhere. During the year 2020, servizz.gov agency headquarters were relocated to new premises and the services provided by the District Social Security Offices came under the leadership of servizz.gov. New centres have been opened together with the launch of the fourth mobile-accessible package of government services. This further strengthens the concept of services available 24 hours a day, all year round from any location. This could be made possible by an unprecedented investment of 150 million euros in five years in technology. In addition to these new services, services that were already accessible from maltapps, continued to be trimmed and improved.

The Economic Policy Department and the Department of Contracts have digitalised a number of procurement processes so as to enhance sustainability. In this regard, the Evaluation Report has been integrated within the Electronic Public Procurement System (ePPS), and Contract Agreements have been digitalised, thus, reducing administrative and environmental burdens.

Furthermore, the said Department finalised and shall soon be launching an integrated system for the submission of the Compliance Certificates through the ePPS, including direct links to e-Certis where further information can be obtained as well as aiding in the verification of these documents.

On a similar note, various officially-appointed bodies within the Ministry for the Economy and Industry (MEI), such as the Lands Authority and the Malta Digital Innovation Authority (MDIA), have opted for more

digitisation within their daily operations. The former is in the process of updating its current website to a more modern version, therefore encouraging more users to make use of its online services, rather than pay physical visits to the Authority. This reduces commutes, paperwork, and ensures access to all users.

Additionally, in September 2020, the Lands Authority launched a new online Application Forms system aimed at improving efficiency and providing a better streamlined customer experience. The first phase sees the streamlining of the application process into a very user-friendly interface, using the Government's e-ID system.

The same can be said about online rental payments and the payment of tenders online. In order to reduce commutes to and from the Authority, this service is now being provided online. Similarly, all Requests to buy Tender Documents can now be submitted using an e-ID Account.

Efforts to ensure that online public services continue to evolve around the clients' needs did not stop. Starting in 2020, the Foundation for Information Technology Accessibility (FITA) is assisting the Malta Communications Authority (MCA) with the implementation of the EU Web Accessibility Directive. This project will ensure greater access to online resources to a much wider range of potential clients, including the elderly and persons with disability. This has a long-term positive impact on the use of e-services with the environmental benefits associated with such measures.

The Lands Authority, for instance, is collaborating with the MCA in order to ensure that its website is accessible by all. The MCA has conducted a Web Accessibility Report, whereby it has examined the Authority's current website in detail and has come up with a number of recommendations that will ensure that it is accessible by people with different abilities. These recommendations are being implemented on the new website that is to be launched in the coming months.

Following a review of the processes and services offered, a strategy will be launched which will lead to the modernisation of the work of the Lands Authority where eventually all the services offered by the Authority and the processes operated by it will be digitised. This should lead to increased efficiency and transparency, substantially reducing paper use, improving the use of resources, and drastically reducing file storage space.

Similarly, during 2020, Heritage Malta (HM) worked towards a digital economy transition in its operations. In fact, COVID-19 has expedited the Agency's plans to implement a shift towards digitisation. With the aid of the European Economic Area (EEA)/Norwegian funds a Digitisation Unit was set up, new staff were employed, and new equipment was bought to initiate the digitisation process to make them available online to the general public. The facility of an online

shop for selected museum shop items was also introduced. Furthermore, new digital platforms to improve project management and communication within the organisation was introduced in order to shift from a paper to a digital driven way of daily management.

HM also invested in high-skilled and high-value added jobs where a number of high-skilled and specialised personnel have been employed with the agency during the past year. These were engaged in the newly setup Digitisation Unit, Marketing, Conservation, Business Management, Finance and Curatorial. Moreover, further investment was carried out in research and innovation through the investment of new equipment for the Underwater Cultural Heritage Unit, the Digitisation Unit and the Diagnostic Science Labs, in order to develop further their research and innovation roles.

Agenzija Sapport has also further invested in digital projects. Over the last couple of years, the number of cases referred to Agenzija Sapport has increased exponentially. This has placed a further strain on current resources, which has made follow-ups, and the relevant actions to be taken for service users of the multidisciplinary team all-the-more difficult. The introduction of a Case Management System (CMS) will ensure that the Agency moves to an online system of case management. This will in turn increase and improve the efficiency of the Agency and ensure that it keeps up with the demands of its growth. This will also further enhance the Agency's ability to share information according to GDPR and apply the once-only principle in its customer satisfaction. The CMS will also reduce the Agency's carbon footprint and move it closer to a paperless system.

Furthermore, Agenzija Sapport quickly adapted its provision of normally close contact services to largely remote and distanced service provision, where possible. This was implemented by investing in a PABX System (remote telephony) allowing the smooth transition to telework for most office-based workers with minimal downtime of services or contact with service users. Increased training in ICT software (primarily in Microsoft Office 365) and practice for all workers allowed service users and front-liners to retain contact, resume programmes, and provide ongoing support in all services. Purchasing specialised equipment for the Sign Language Interpreting team allowed for more professional remote interpretations in various settings (e.g. school, hospital, work), further increased accessibility to the service, increased service availability and service user safety and satisfaction. This investment in ICT and equipment has opened the Agency's services for further reach and accessibility for persons with a disability, increasing the overall efficiency of the Agency whilst ensuring the safety of staff and service users alike.

Throughout 2020, FITA continued to maintain the SPOT project, which is a platform that consists of an APP and Website that document the levels

of accessibility of different venues across the Maltese Islands. The platform information is sourced publicly, so the public not only makes free use of this information, but also gets to contribute directly to the updating of the platform content.

1.6.2 Enhancing Digital Skills

The key challenge in digital skills is the low number of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), and open data, graduates. The improvement of digital skills is vital to enhance the integration of digital technologies at enterprises and digital public services.

The digitisation of education is one of the priorities of Government. Through various initiatives, gaps in educators' digital competences are identified in order to support them accordingly. Digital literacy support teachers, Heads of department and Education Officers coordinate support for educators to make use of various technologies that are available in schools and include them in their lesson plans to engage the students and to facilitate learning. Students are supported to foster their critical and confident use of technologies, as well as their digital competence development. A number of initiatives in education have been taken to promote digital literacy, coding and computational thinking like family coding sessions and Code Week, internet safety, eTwinning, SELFIE and DigComp. Moreover, Government has been investing in digital skills in compulsory education learning programmes through an investment in ICT infrastructure in classrooms. The EU's digital competence framework, DigComp, is used to target teaching and learning of digital skills in a lifelong learning perspective, including the training of teachers, mainly by focusing on digital literacies and 21st century skills. In this regard, the Institute for Education offers a whole range of continuous professional development courses, including courses related to digital competences.

The Directorate for Learning and Assessment Programmes (DLAP) within the Ministry for Education (MFED) has developed a range of new STEM initiatives targeting both primary and secondary sectors to nurture scientific and digital skills and to encourage students to pursue STEM studies and careers. DLAP also organises internship opportunities for students and teachers through the GO4Research and GO4Industry internship programmes respectively.

Reflecting Government's commitment towards popularisation of STEM initiatives, DLAP actively supports the Global Learning and Observations to Benefit the Environment (GLOBE) Programme. GLOBE, as will be elaborated further on in this Report, is a worldwide community of students, teachers, scientists, and citizens working collaboratively in data collection to facilitate, sustain, and improve the global environment.

Through a number of European and national projects, Tech.mt has also addressed the shortage

of digital skills by launching campaigns to increase the numbers of STEM graduates and careers, and educational programmes/training opportunities addressing different segments of society.

In 2020, Tech.mt has proposed a successful budget measure to create a digital tool to facilitate STEM educators in delivering their lessons in a virtual format, which is still engaging and creative for students. Work on the development of such a tool will be ongoing during 2021.

Furthermore, through the Get Smarter project, which is aimed at helping mobile users maximise the use of their smartphones, Tech.mt created informative training manuals, which takes the users through some very useful tools that are available on a smartphone and offers interesting tips for effective usage. On a similar front, Tech.mt leads the ICT 4 the Elderly project which offers the public a learning opportunity on how the Internet can play an important role in improving the quality of life through online social interaction.

In today's digital economy there are significantly less women than men, consequently further widening the digital and gender gap. It is also perceived that as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, more women will be further marginalised. Thanks to the EEA and Norway Grants Fund for Youth Employment funded "Women4IT" project, Tech.mt initiated the process of preparing the training content to assist young women to take successful steps into digital job-related employment by building their digital skills capacity that address specific skills shortages.

Both the MDIA and MCST are also ensuring that gender equality is adhered to in the fields of research and digital innovation. This is not only evident in anti-discriminatory processes present amongst all employees and candidates, but also in training and learning opportunities, among other things. MCST, as an example, participates in the 'GenderAction' project, which aims to:

- Map and analyse Members States' progress towards implementation of gender equality in R&I through national European Research Area action plans and strategies;
- Provide training events to build consistent and professional capacity in gender equality in R&I among responsible national representatives and Horizon 2020 National Contact Points;
- Provide mutual learning opportunities to maximise existing experience among policy makers and other relevant stakeholders;
- Prepare policy briefs on advancing gender equality in the European Research Area;
- Build new collaborations to advance gender equality in international cooperation in science, technology, and innovation.

1.6.3 eBusiness Awards

During 2020, Tech.mt launched the ninth edition of the eBusiness Awards, which seeks to recognise and celebrate the best of Maltese talent, ambition



and achievement in multiple categories of our digital ecosystem. Over the years, the Awards have evolved in refining categories and introducing new categories to promote and endorse, with previous winners achieving both local and international success. Today, the Awards are a highly valued and anticipated recognition of exceptional entities, whether governmental or private, which have had a significant impact on our society.

Amongst the 2020 awardees, solutions that were aligned to sustainable development actions included an integrated Electronic Patient Record Information Technology (IT) system within the Primary Healthcare, a digital logbook for the then Ministry for Energy and Water Management to optimise the transport service, and a campaign to create awareness about the pollution of our waters.

1.7 Research and Innovation

2020 was the final year of the seven-year plan on R&I set up by the Government of Malta. The Research and Innovation Strategy 2020, which will be revised post-2020, aimed at embedding research and innovation at the heart of Malta's economy and encourage and promote knowledge-driven and value-added growth, as well as sustain improvements in the quality of life for the country's residents. This was done through a comprehensive R&I support ecosystem, by investing in a stronger knowledge base, as well as through smart and flexible specialisation.

Besides the Strategy, Malta participates in various international fora and initiatives that discuss and address issues relating to R&I. One such initiative is the Partnership for Research and Innovation in the Mediterranean Area (PRIMA), which primarily focuses on research and innovation actions in the Euro-Mediterranean region (including non-EU Mediterranean countries), in the following thematic areas:

- Innovative solutions in water management
- Innovations in sustainable agricultural techniques
- Novel agro-food value systems

The national contribution towards the PRIMA initiative is of €5 million spread over a ten-year period. Since the start of the PRIMA programme in 2018, Maltese-based entities are participating in three ongoing PRIMA projects focusing on aquaponics, innovative approaches to parasitism in the Mediterranean and the use of digital platforms to assess food integrity and traceability in food supply chains.

Apart from participation in PRIMA, MCST is also involved in the ERA-NET Co-fund Blue Bio, an R&D funding scheme that aims to strengthen Europe's position in the blue bioeconomy sector. Maltese researchers are also engaged in one of the ongoing international projects focusing on aquaculture technologies for the production of innovative feeds for improved fish stocks.

1.7.1 Outreach on Innovative Technologies

Awareness raising on R&I and innovative technologies is also something that Government is emphasising. With the assistance of bodies or entities like Tech.mt, the message is getting across to more players in the Maltese economy, thus allowing them to become more well-versed in the benefits and value of implementing and adapting to innovative technology. As the promotional arm of the technology sector in Malta, Tech.mt has provided an ecosystem that allows companies to be exposed to opportunities in terms of innovative technologies. In this respect, during 2020, Tech.mt has committed to raise awareness and facilitate innovation in technologies such as Cloud Applications, Internet of Things, Distributed Ledger Technology, Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning, Regulatory Technology, and Big Data Analytics.

Through specific campaigns such as showcasing success stories, Tech.mt has scouted local talent that have shown technological upgrading and innovation in their operations and promoted their innovative solutions and services. Finally, to assist the tech start-up and academic ecosystem, Tech.mt also embarked on an initiative to link big industry players up with start-ups and academia, by means of which knowledge and innovation will be transferred, thereby encouraging the transition from academia to industry.

Furthermore, MEUSAC and MCST organised a virtual conference on R&I, bringing together stakeholders from various sectors for a focused discussion on the future of innovation in the EU. Discussions focused on high-performance computing, quantum technologies, cyber-security, STEM education and the role of digital innovation hubs.

1.8 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% 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.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought about its fair share of challenges also for the tourism sector. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) World Tourism Barometer, International tourist arrivals (overnight visitors) fell by 72% in January–October 2020 over the same period last year on a global level. The effect of the pandemic on the tourism sector has emphasised the importance of the sector towards the local economy and brought to light the spill-over effects and how the sector is integrated with various sectors across the Maltese economy.

In this context, throughout 2020, MTA redrafted Malta's Tourism Strategy for the period 2021–2030 to cater for the unprecedented situation brought about by COVID-19. The proposed Strategy is built on a three-staged premise:

- A recovery effort from the chaos wrought by the COVID-19 pandemic, focused on protecting and preserving the vital components of Malta's Visitor Economy in the background of the challenges posed by the pandemic.
- A longer-term re-evaluation and repositioning to reflect evolutionary forces as well as new post-pandemic realities – both positive and negative.
- A detailed and committed programme of deliverables covering the various strategic challenges addressed by this strategy with a view to being able to deliver a stronger, more sustainable, and competitive, tourism industry by 2030.

In November 2020, the IT Unit within MTA was awarded the ISO 9001:2015 certification. An effective Quality Management System was successfully implemented to ensure a commendable level of performance. This Unit has demonstrated its ability to consistently provide products and services to meet the Authority's requirement. Moreover, it has enhanced customer satisfaction through the improvement of processes, assurance of conformity throughout and applicable statutory and regulatory requirements.

The pandemic did not stop the Maltese Government from pursuing new measures and initiatives that directly benefited both the tourism sector and the Maltese heritage. The Gozo campaign was kickstarted mainly through TV interviews highlighting the different activities one can enjoy and engage in while visiting Gozo, with the intention to spread the geographical reach of visitors around the Island. Moreover, in order to decrease concentration of visitors during the weekends, an incentive during the month of July was provided to visitors to enjoy a mid-week holiday, by subsidising ferry fares during the week.

The Interreg project 'Destinations SMEs', which had been ongoing since 2019, entered its final stages during 2020. One of the main objectives of this project was to ensure the longevity of artisan and crafts heritage. A new Association was launched to bring together operators from this niche to form a plan on how to increase their competitiveness and to augment their representative clout. This project does not only provide sustainability to a particular niche market, but also to tourism in Gozo on a general level, curbing shoulder period challenges.

1.8.1 Investment in Human Resources

Human Resources are the backbone of Malta's hospitality sector. During 2020, together with the MTA, the Ministry for Tourism and Consumer Protection (MTCP) launched a €6 million training scheme directed at the idle tourism workforce, with opportunities to reskill and upskill the current human resources complement in order to prepare the sector to be able to provide an improved and stronger tourism product in the post COVID period.

Another initiative coordinated by MTA, aimed at 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 2020. 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 something back to the local community.

Other actions undertaken by MTA during this period to address investment in human resources relate to the STAR Awards and the Erasmus+ 'Improving the Digital Skills and Quality Performance' within the catering sector in Malta. The latter has been selected for a second time and has also been extended to Destination Management Companies and Visitor Attractions, while The STAR Awards Scheme which recognises persons who contribute to the hospitality industry has grown to boast 12,000 nominations. In addition, two other projects are in place: the 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.

1.8.2 Infrastructure and Maintenance Interventions

In 2020, Malta registered a decrease of 76.1% in the number of inbound tourists when compared to 2019. During this period, MTCP took the opportunity to increase 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 our social, cultural and natural environment. The Cleansing and Maintenance Division and the Foundation for Tourism Zones were instrumental in this regard.

Through various entities, MTCP continued to implement a number of projects to regenerate coastal areas. Malta depends heavily on coastal and maritime tourism and it is marketed as an island destination with relatively warm weather for most of the year. During the period under review, maintenance and improvements have been carried out in several coastal towns and beaches, including:

- Beaches, which have been carefully restored and replenished due to natural erosion. These projects were undertaken to improve product offering and increase the number of sandy beaches in Malta, since tourists tend to favour sandy beaches; and
- Arrangements for accessibility and increase in frequency of beach cleansing and general maintenance.

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

- Beach management by MTA;
- Support offered to management plans for Marine Protection Areas (MPAs), Special Areas of Conservation and Natura 2000 sites;
- Two EU-funded projects managed by MTA together with two NGOs, Din l-Art Helwa and Fondazzjoni Wirt Artna, which aimed to restore five coastal towers that were built by the Knights of St John. MTA also undertook the restoration of the ditch surrounding the White Tower overlooking Armier Bay in the limits of Mellieħa. These coastal towers will provide interesting attractions for tourists in off-the-beaten track locations.



Initiatives were aimed also to other localities, which are not traditionally related to tourism activities in order to offload pressure from more frequently visited areas, while at the same time improving and regenerating areas and attractions to provide an interesting and authentic tourism product. For instance, regeneration projects are being undertaken in Marsaxlokk and in Birżebbuġa.

MTCP also participated in two European Destinations of Excellence (EDEN) projects to promote lesser-known localities in the Maltese islands and provide information about their tourism product. The Ministry has been participating in the EDEN Initiative, which was launched by the European Commission, since 2006 and has awarded six localities for different tourism offerings according to the theme of the competition. The aim is to encourage tourists to visit these destinations, divert tourist flows and to enhance the overall tourism product while encouraging local councils to continue improving their localities.

1.8.3 Moving towards circular tourism

Tourism also contributes heavily towards a green economic transition. Measures and initiatives aimed at increasing operational efficiency, reduction of GHG emissions, waste and resource management practices are instrumental for the achievement of 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 sustainable development pillars.

MTCP implemented a project entitled CIVITAS DESTINATIONS under the Horizon 2020 programme. This project was undertaken together with five other islands which 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, Transport Malta, and the Valletta Local Council to implement different measures connected with this project. MTCP implemented a competition to select the best hotel mobility plans which were submitted by hotels and awarded three projects (two of which submitted one joint application) with a total fund of €70,000. The Ministry also launched a Green Mobility Label in connection with this award.

During 2020, MTA continued to operate the Eco-certification scheme, a national voluntary award scheme which focuses on best practices covering environmental, socio-economic and cultural sustainability of hotels and farmhouses on the Maltese Islands.

Furthermore, during the period in review, the Institute of Tourism Studies (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. This LIFE FOSTER project aims at reducing waste in the restaurant industry and focuses on training and education, prevention, and communication³.

Furthermore, MGOZ has also actively participated in projects promoting more sustainable tourism practices. The InCircle Interreg Med Project provides support for island and low-density areas in their transition towards circular tourism. This will be crucial in rendering the tourism sector in these areas in the Mediterranean a more sustainable and responsible one. The project, partnered by MGOZ, officially kicked off in 2020 with the signing of the subsidy contract and the kick-off meeting being held. In January 2020 a Quotation for the First Level Control Function (Audit Services) in connection with the Incircle project funded through the Interreg Med Programme 2014-2020, was issued. Towards the end of 2020, the Tender for the construction of a water reservoir as part of the Interreg MED 2014-2020 Incircle Project was also issued. Further developments are expected during 2021. In 2020 Gozo was awarded the prestigious title of being one of the Top 100 Global Sustainable Destinations by Green Destinations, a respectable international organisation in sustainable tourism.

1.9 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.

During 2020, the Culture Directorate concluded the process of drafting a new National Cultural Policy that Malta will take up in the coming decade. This is the second National Cultural Policy; ten years after the launch of the first document. The need for a new Policy was amplified by the fact that, during the last few years, Government spending in the cultural and creative sectors tripled since 2012. More than ever, the creative industries and cultural infrastructure became valuable resources for generating livelihoods. Cultural goods and services are providing impetus for the local market, which in turn provide employment opportunities.

³ More information may be found on the project's website - <https://www.lifefoster.eu/newsletter-foster/>

Furthermore, the new policy addresses issues such as climate change, working towards greener cultural and creative industries, and is synchronised with the New European Bauhaus initiative.

Another initiative undertaken by the Culture Directorate, which against all odds pursued their operations successfully in 2020, is the Culture Pass programme. Under this programme, students from kindergarten through the whole compulsory education phase, can experience cultural and creative productions as well as come into direct contact with artists. This programme assures and promotes sustained inclusivity for students and brings sustainable economic growth, full of productive employment and decent work for cultural practitioners.

The highlight of 2020 was achieved by the Culture Directorate when, on 17 December, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) inscribed the Maltese 'ftira' on the humanity list of intangible cultural heritage. This will strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the Maltese 'ftira', given that it is now part of the world's cultural and natural heritage.

In 2020, Arts Council Malta (ACM) implemented a number of measures, some of which were directly based on actions from its Strategy 2020 and others which while in line with the principles of its strategy, aimed to address the immediate needs that emerged as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. During 2020, ACM engaged in a project addressing cultural rights as defined by the UN, by taking a participatory approach involving members of civil society working with people from socio-demographic groups that might be marginalised in relation to their cultural participation. This will result into a toolkit to be launched in 2021 that will aid cultural operators when working within diverse social contexts. ACM in collaboration with the National Statistics Office (NSO) has also been working on analysing data from a national survey on creative and cultural practice to better understand the conditions faced by artists and practitioners when participating and working within the cultural and creative sector, in order to inform policymaking.

A number of funding programmes which also have socially-oriented objectives such as Creative Communities, Kreattiv, il-Premju tal-President għall-Kreattività, have all resulted into grassroots and community-based projects which aim towards a more equitable approach to cultural participation in local communities, whether they are adults, or young people. ACM has also facilitated and supported artistic and creative entrepreneurs in realising their goals through the Investment in Cultural Organisations Programme and Creative Industries Platform towards a more professionalised and innovative approach while keeping sustainability practices at the core.

The year 2020 also saw the finalisation and launch of the Regional Cultural Strategies which, following a

participatory research approach, resulted in cultural strategies that take into account the localised cultural assets and diverse characteristics of the different localities in Malta. ACM was also quick in creating a Special Call for its Malta Arts Fund. This call was a response to the pandemic in order to provide more opportunities for artists and creatives to develop their work even during such a difficult time. This also introduced the COVID-19 Taskforce for the Arts to involve the sector and keep track of its needs for its decision-making and budgetary allocations.

Moreover, this was complemented by a survey on audiences' preferences and behaviours, as impacted by the pandemic to provide public, private, and third sector cultural organisations with a knowledge-base on how they could reach out to their audiences in a sustainable manner within the current constraints. It also offered online training in cultural management to our beneficiary organisations and public cultural organisations to enable them to be more resilient during these trying times. On an international scale, ACM has engaged actively in a number of international networks while also supporting the promotion of Maltese works across borders adapting to digital platforms where needed in view of the pandemic restrictions.

1.9.1 Restoration and regeneration projects

2020 saw a number of projects being carried out with the aim of regenerating, conserving, and restoring Malta's cultural heritage, while also promoting an environment where information is more easily accessible to all.

In 2020, MTCP continued its work on the development of a Digital Tourist Platform. The platform aims to provide tourists with information about localities of interest such as museums and other visitor attractions. It will also study the preferences of tourists and will aim to guide tourists to lesser-known localities in order to distribute tourists from congested areas. The project also includes an app utilising augmented reality and virtual reality to improve the visitor experience. This aims to improve the services provided to tourists. Augmented reality and virtual reality are also being employed in the projects concerning the Mediterranean Conference Centre and the Regeneration of Lower Valletta. These projects include the use of cutting-edge technology in the development of apps to provide a unique visitor experience.

HM was instrumental in acquiring Villa Guardamangia, which served as a former residence to the Queen of the United Kingdom. This property will be conserved and restored as a Museum. The Villa will be complemented by the restoration of Villa Frere and its gardens, another historical landmark in the vicinity. Both properties are entrusted to HM to safeguard these iconic buildings for both present and future generations.

Furthermore, HM proceeded and completed the restoration and refurbishment works on a number of

its sites and buildings. These included a refurbished visitors' centre at Għar Dalam, the restoration of the back façade at the Malta Maritime Museum, the restoration of the courtyard at the National Museum of Archaeology. Restoration and refurbishment works continued on the Grand Masters Palace in Valletta and the Inquisitor's Palace in Birgu and others started at the Malta Maritime Museum.

Following the drawing up of a Management Plan for the setting of a park at Għar Dalam, in 2020, the implementation of several identified actions in this plan was initiated. These included the removal of invasive alien species from the area, the nursing and planting of indigenous plants and trees and restoration of rubble walls in the area. The environmental monitoring at Għar Dalam, which is a Natura 2000 site, continued. Rubble walls are an important ecosystem feature within our rural landscape. Besides the rubble walls at Għar Dalam Park, the Agency restored other rubble walls through the traditional construction methodology at the Haġar Qim Archaeological Park and at the Ġgantija Archaeological Park. At Għar Dalam, three artificial ponds were formed in order to propagate the natural biodiversity one finds in natural ponds, with this forming part of an educational facility which can be used for outdoor lessons as part of the Ġnien Dinja Waħda network.

During 2020, work continued on the restoration, conservation and modernisation of the National Library building with the aim of rendering the site more attractive to tourists and researchers as well as making the physical libraries safer for both staff and users. Works consisted of fumigation and conservation, modernisation and improvement of the building and risk assessment in order to implement the appropriate safety measures. Further investment was directed at the Central Public Library (CPL) to create an interactive space to support inclusion and serve as a resource tool to increase literacy. Furthermore, a comprehensive fire risk assessment was also drawn up and started being implemented both for the CPL as well as the two main libraries in Gozo.

There were also further improvements in the digitalisation of Malta Libraries, including the development of a new Digital Asset Management System based on the principle that a user is given a single research source, thus requiring minimal effort.

During 2020, the Restoration Directorate adopted the reduce, reuse, and recycle approach through its mission to restore the built heritage. The restoration of built heritage automatically reduces the need for newly quarried stone and consequently the need of disposing of construction waste by reusing and



recycling the material, which had been already utilised. However during the last 20 years or so a large quantity of good quality material which could not be re-utilised (mainly hardstone, lava and porvido) has been collected in the restoration Directorate's premises in Floriana and is currently being cut into external pavers for the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) funded Malta International Contemporary Art Space (MICAS) galleries and locally funded ancillary spaces.

The Fondazzjoni Kottonera was also instrumental in overseeing the restoration of several historical landmark buildings in the Cottonera region. In liaison with the Restoration Directorate and the Grand Harbour Regeneration Corporation, it oversaw the restoration of St Michael's Bastion and the Entrance Gate in Senglea, the restoration of the Cottonera and Sta Margherita lines, the courtyard of the Auberge de France in Birgu and improvements in Xatt ir-Risq. It also supervised the conclusion of several restoration projects on niches, the façade of the La Vincitrice Band Club, in Senglea and St Philip's Dome and Belfry and the timber lantern of the Verdala School in Cospicua.

Work also continued towards preserving and restoring several cultural properties in Gozo. By late 2020, the restoration and preservation of Tal-Gordan

lighthouse was nearing its end. Preparations are also underway for the preservation of the remnants of the Gozo Aqueducts.

MGOZ is continuing investing in the Cittadella to ensure that this attraction continues delivering an adequate visitors experience. During 2020, more investment was made with the conservation and restoration project of the clock mechanism located in the tower of St. Michael's Bastion in the Citadel. To improve the product and the whole experience and to attract more tourists to the citadel, MGOZ is planning to install a Citadel 3D model in bronze on the roof of the Visitors' Centre. The model will include braille descriptions. In 2020, a 3D plastic model has been commissioned and eventually sent to Rome to be cast in bronze.

Għar Gerduf, an ancient Roman burial site hewn in the rock, within the confines of Kerċem, is another forgotten ancient heritage site, which MGOZ is committed to restore. In 2020, MGOZ embarked on a process of expropriation of land near the site.

Finally, the 'eight corner windmill', an icon in the heart of Gozo, is on course to be restored to its original glory. This EU funded project is expected to be inaugurated in the early weeks of 2021.



Chapter 2: Empowering People



Throughout 2020, Government continued to develop and implement a number of measures and initiatives with the aim of ensuring that the wealth generated by the country is spread widely across society. These include, amongst others, measures aimed at the reinforcement of the social benefits framework, including assistance to pensioners, elderly persons, and persons with a disability, while at the same time measures aimed at safeguarding and investing in employees, their families, and their children.

It is pertinent to note that despite the disruptions caused by the onset of COVID-19, the Maltese unemployment rate has only been slightly affected as the rate for December 2020 stood at 4.5%, at par with the previous month and 0.9% more than December 2019.⁴

This Chapter highlights the measures and initiatives undertaken by 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

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, health and well-being became even more of a priority for the Maltese Government. 2020 brought to the surface a number of vulnerabilities that were present not only locally, but also in healthcare systems all around the globe. Despite this, and despite the vast number of challenges faced yet, the national healthcare system demonstrated significant resilience.

In spite of the limited human resources, it was ensured that the existing resources were maximised to make certain that all the needs that arose from the pandemic were met. When cases started to increase exponentially in Italy at the end of February, all Public Health doctors were called in to support national efforts to manage the emergency situation that was developing. From the onset of the pandemic in Malta, work related to COVID-19 took precedence, and a number of health professionals from various public health fields, including environmental health, nurses, physiotherapists, pharmacists, dentists and other staff, were asked to support the COVID-19 response effort.

Early on in the pandemic, Malta curtailed its non-urgent medical services, postponed elective surgeries and outpatient appointments, which served the dual purpose of keeping people at home, while allowing for resources to be focused where they were most needed. Where possible, certain services were offered over the telephone and online. A team of family doctors offered a service through telework, carrying out the daily follow-up service offered to COVID-19 positive patients in mandatory isolation in their homes, following discharge from hospital or in mild cases not requiring hospitalisation. Despite the pandemic, essential services continued to be delivered. Towards the end of May 2020, more non-urgent health services started to increase.

⁴ Reference: NSO News Release 013/2021

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.

2.1.1.1 COVID-19 Pandemic

Most departments within the Ministry for Health (MFH) have been heavily involved in pandemic-related work since February 2020, working on the development and promotion of standards and guidelines for the prevention of transmission of COVID-19, testing, contact tracing, epidemiological surveillance, and follow-up care. A data management team set up several systems that ensured collation of accurate data in a seamless manner. Through a data portal, daily reporting was done on the number of people swabbed, number of new diagnosed cases, number of recoveries and number of deaths.

A milestone in tackling the ongoing pandemic is the development and production of an effective vaccine. Malta was one of the first among EU Member States to call for the joint procurement of the COVID-19 vaccine in February 2020 and took an active role throughout the discussions to ensure equitable access to the vaccine once this became available.

Furthermore, other Directorates were also heavily involved in the coordination of the national positions, in collaboration with other Ministries, to be presented during discussions taking place at various levels in European and international fora on the prevention of the spread of COVID-19.

2.1.1.2 Antimicrobial Resistance

The World Health Organisation has declared Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) one of the top 10 global public health threats facing humanity. It is a costly threat, which requires a united and multisectoral approach. During 2020, the Strategy and Action Plan for the Prevention and Containment of AMR in Malta 2020-2028 was published. This is a cross-sectoral response to the threat of AMR in Malta, with the aim of controlling and possibly reversing the current trends.

The Strategy recognises the interconnectedness of humans, animals, and the environment. In view of the complexity of the issue, it adopts a whole of Government, a whole of society and a comprehensive One Health Approach to AMR. The Strategy, therefore, underscores the need for co-ordinated action by many stakeholders in Malta who are responsible for the different action within the Strategy including Government, private and public partners and the public across the human, animal and environment sectors. Whilst individual actions are important, many are interrelated, and specific actions in one area contribute to the achievement of multiple objectives.

Malta also forms part of the One Health Global Leaders Group, which was launched in 2020 and which is focused on bringing global leaders together to work on tackling the problem of AMR. These efforts work towards decreasing the number of bloodstream infections due to selected antimicrobial-resistant organisms.

2.1.2 Addressing Non-communicable Diseases

Key Sustainable Development Goal Targets

SDG 2.2 By 2030, end all forms of malnutrition, including achieving, by 2025, the internationally agreed targets on stunting and wasting in children under 5 years of age, and address the nutritional needs of adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women and older persons.

SDG 3.4 By 2030, reduce by one-third premature mortality from non-communicable diseases through prevention and treatment and promote mental health and well-being.

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.

2.1.2.1 Cancer Care

As part of Government's commitment towards ensuring a reduction in premature mortality from non-communicable diseases, through prevention and treatment and promoting mental health and well-being, it has continued to boost the services offered in 2020.

The challenges posed by the demographic and epidemiological changes have driven the demand for equitable access to cancer treatment. The Nurse Navigation Services were extended to provide cancer care in Urology, Head and neck, and Upper Gastrointestinal cancers.

The situation brought about by the pandemic has also triggered the Cancer Care Pathways Directorate to innovatively provide sustainable care. During 2020, it launched a follow-up clinic, whereby the Lung Nurse Navigator contacts patients two years after the end of their treatment, to check on their health and any symptoms, providing any required advice. This service makes the Oncology Outpatient services more sustainable as it is releasing slots that can be used to manage new oncology cases in a manner that is more timely.

This year, the Survivorship Rehabilitation Coordination project, which seeks to assist cancer patients in identifying and overcoming or better managing challenges that they might meet following the end of their treatment, established itself as a fully functional service for Colorectal survivors. A multidisciplinary team programme for survivors was also set up, seeking to provide patients with the required skills and knowledge for a better return to 'normality' or adaptation to new realities.

2.1.2.2 Treatment Abroad

Despite the challenges encountered over the last year, a number of visits by Overseas Visiting Consultants, as well as the necessary travel by patients to the UK for treatment that was not available in Malta, continued to be coordinated by MFH. These services also demonstrate the Government's continuous commitment towards ensuring a reduction in premature mortality from non-communicable diseases.

2.1.2.3 Provision of new medicines

In 2020, new medicines were introduced on the Government Formulary List to treat cardiac, renal, endocrine, and respiratory diseases, amongst others. The Exceptional Medicinal Treatment Committee also approved numerous exceptional medicines to treat rare conditions.

2.1.2.4 Obesity and Eating Disorders

Patients referred to Dar Kenn Għal Saħħtek for eating disorders and weight behavioural problems continued to receive treatment and support during 2020, while fully respecting the measures implemented to control the transmission of COVID-19. The aim of this was to provide them and their relatives with the support required to follow a healthy lifestyle and a healthy diet. An increase in the number of adolescents experiencing eating disorders, as well as in the cases of selective eating disorders in children between the ages of 12 and 15, was registered in 2020. The past year also saw an increase in the number of calls asking for guidance from various professionals. During this period, workshops were held and a detailed work plan as



well as an outreach plan for the community were drawn up for the year 2021. Due to the onset of COVID-19, the educational campaign in schools had to be postponed and instead an information campaign was conducted on social media. These efforts form part of the essential health services the Government seeks to offer to all.

2.1.2.5 Addressing Social Determinants of Health

The aim of this ESF funded project is to establish a national platform to address social determinants of health (SDH) and create a whole of Government approach towards socio-economic difficulties encountered by sectors of the population that may eventually influence their health. Besides forming part of efforts to ensure essential health services are made available to all, this project forms part of endeavours to 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 and decrease the proportion of people living below 50% of the median income. Research was carried out on the relationship between mental health and sexual health and the effect of COVID-19 on sectors of the population, which already face socio-economic difficulties.

Information and capacity building sessions amongst stakeholders, health care professionals and public service employees were held during late 2019 and early 2020. Regrettably, pandemic-related restrictions forced many of the planned activities to be disrupted and, therefore, re-designed or moved to 2021. The SDH awareness campaign was another casualty of the pandemic and, following agreement with contractors and other parties, this has now been shifted to 2021.

2.1.3 Training of Healthcare Professionals

Although the COVID-19 pandemic led to inevitable challenges in the academic and training sectors too, it provided an opportunity to strengthen online communication and make better use of existing technological resources to sustain the Continuing Medical Education of all our Healthcare Professionals.

Furthermore, the Nursing Services Directorate continued to participate in the establishment of a 'Health Workforce Planning and Forecasting Unit,' headed by the People Management Division, as part of the 2020-2030 Health Strategy. Its aim is to communicate and work continuously with stakeholders, especially educational and financial institutions, to establish future professional needs.

In a continued bid to encourage more young people to consider a career in nursing, members of the Nursing Services Directorate together with nurses from other entities, continued to carry out various activities that promote the nursing profession among primary and secondary school level students and to encourage them to take up this profession.

These efforts are part of the investment in the recruitment, development, training, and retention of the health workforce and of the efforts made to eliminate gender disparities and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for all.

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. Both present, as well as future, generations need to be provided with a good quality of life with access to all basic needs and an adequate standard of living for a country or entity to be considered sustainable. For this reason, all throughout 2020, various Government Ministries, Departments and Bodies made it a priority on their agenda to address this goal.

2.2.1 Adequacy, Sustainability and Solidarity of the Pension System

The Social Security Act (Chapter 318 of the Laws of Malta) stipulates that a strategic review report must be drawn up and tabled in Parliament every five years. Within this context, the Strategic Review on the Adequacy, Sustainability, and Solidarity of the Pension System as Mandated by Article 64B of the Social Security Act – 2020 Pensions Strategic Review Document for Public Consultation was tabled in Parliament on 15 December 2020 by the inter-ministerial Pension Strategy Group. This Strategy Group is mandated to prepare a Strategic Review that assesses the workings of the pension system since the 2015 Strategic Review as well as future impacts that may arise due to changing circumstances, with regards to its adequacy, sustainability, and social solidarity.

In terms of its findings, this Strategic Review urged Government to continue to strive to strengthen the sustainability, adequacy, and solidarity, of the pensions system. The Strategic Review re-iterated that the Government should continue to undertake calibrated reforms of the pension system over a five-year period as mandated by the Social Security Act and, in doing so, adopt several incremental measures and initiatives aimed at having a long-term impact towards the adequacy, sustainability, and solidarity of the pension system.

In view of the foregoing, the 2020 Strategic Review presented an analysis, which is aimed at stimulating public consultation and feedback on issues which relate to, or affect, the adequacy and sustainability of Malta's pension system.

On the topic of pensions and the ageing population, in order to ensure the long-term sustainability of public finances, a number of policies are advocated with the view to ensure that Governments have enough room for manoeuvre to absorb such projected increases in expenditure. Over the years, the Maltese Government has 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. Throughout 2020, a review of the pension system was performed and several proposals on how the pension system can improve its sustainability were tabled in Parliament.

2.2.2 Income, Social Benefits, and Social Welfare Services

The Department of Social Security issued notifications with a view to encourage more people to make use of the direct payment facility. As of December 2019, there were 82% of beneficiaries having their social benefit payments paid by direct credit, this percentage increased to 90% during 2020.

In 2020, the cost-of-living increase was of €3.49 per week. This increase was given to pensioners and those on social benefits. Further increases in pensions were also implemented. In this regard, all social security pensioners; that is, Retirement, Widows, Invalidity, and Old Age Pension beneficiaries, received an increase of €3.51 per week. Furthermore, there was an additional cost of living allowance. In total, pensions were increased by €7.00 per week equivalent to €364 per annum.

Measures and initiatives targeting people who were in the Police Force, the Army, Civil Protection, or the Kordin Correctional Facility, and who, after retiring from service, continued working, were also implemented. These measures and initiatives implemented reforms to the assessment of the contributory retirement pension. As a result, persons who have retired from the disciplined forces benefited from a higher contributory retirement pension.

When it comes to Public Service or Public Sector employees who continued working after reaching pensionable age between 2016 and 2018, employees in both the private and public sectors now have the same rights and can continue working after reaching pensionable age, thus increasing their pension according to the length of their employment before retirement.

Service Pensioners were exempted a further €200 from their Service Pension in the assessment of the Social Security pension. Thus, the exempted sum reached €2,666. It is estimated that about 4,400 people have benefited from this change.

Widowed pensioners with children under the age of 18 were entitled to an allowance of €4.54 per week if the widows were working, and €9.32 per week if they were not in employment. A new revised allowance of €10 per week started to be provided to all cases. Such initiatives assisted towards retaining working widows in the labour market.

When it comes to the Compensation Fund for past pensions injustices and anomalies, €13 million were allocated. This fund is targeted to pay compensation to former shore workers, former employees of parastatal bodies who were later employed by the government, and police officers, with the aim of making amends to these past anomalies and injustices.

With a view to reduce poverty, an Increased Supplementary Assistance was also introduced. Within this context, the Supplementary Aid paid to low income people aged 65 and over who are at risk of poverty was increased by €50, thus reaching €150 per year.

In addition, the Grant for seniors living at home was also increased. About 30,000 elderly people aged 75 or over and living in their homes or with relatives were given a grant of 300 euros. People above the age of 80 and over were in receipt of an increased grant of €350.

The Maltese Government also introduced a Childbirth or Adoption Bonus. This new one-time bonus of €300 per child or adoption was provided to parents to help alleviate increased household expenses.

With the aim of safeguarding the rights of persons with a disability, the last phase of the Disability Pension reform was carried out. In this regard, this last phase of the three-year reform of the Disability Assistance benefit saw the introduction of an Increased Assistance for Severe Disability targeting people who cannot work at all. Furthermore, the Disability Assistance was also increased so as to be equal to the net National Minimum Wage. As part of the reform in connection with the Disability Assistance, the medical criteria were broadened in such a way that the deaf or the hard of hearing people became eligible for the Disability Assistance at the age of sixteen.

With regards to the Invalidity Pension, people in receipt of an Invalidity Pension who are severely disabled started receiving pension increases similar to those granted to people with disabilities. The new rate applies equally to married or single persons, however, to qualify for this increased rate, the highest level of impairment must have been certified by the doctors in accordance with the Social Security Act (Chapter 318 of the Laws of Malta). In the case of people with insufficient contributions, this benefit is paid pro-rata. The income derived from Disability Assistance started to be disregarded for the means test if the household was also eligible for Social Assistance or Old Age Pension.

A reform in the calculation of the non-contributory Sickness Assistance Capital Means test removed an anomaly which differentiated between the source of income.

As for the Sickness Assistance, the Department of Social Security automatically continued to pay for

uninterrupted Sickness Assistance, regardless of the widow's or widower's pension rate. Thus, a widow or widower who is already a beneficiary does not have to reapply in the event of the death of a spouse. In addition, the income derived from any disability benefits will be exempted from the eligibility criteria with regards to the Sickness Aid.

An initiative targeting parents of children with rare diseases was also implemented. This measure targeted the parents of children with rare diseases who, due to their caring responsibilities, have to leave the labour market, and thus have reduced social security contributions. These parents will be given credited social security contributions so that their social security contribution records are not negatively affected. The period of credited contributions will be up to a maximum of eight years, which is the same amount that applies to the parents of children with disabilities.

Persons with Fibromyalgia and Myalgic Encephalomyelitis were also assisted by the Government. These two conditions started to form part of the list of non-contributory Medical Assistance conditions. Thus, those people who, due to these conditions, cannot work were able to start receiving medical assistance provided that they met the means test and the medical eligibility criteria. In such cases, a medical evaluation will be conducted by a multi-disciplinary board in consultation with the medical professionals on behalf of the competent health authorities. Furthermore, regular medical reassessments will also be held.

In terms of provision of the Sickness Benefit, reforms were implemented in the Sickness Benefits payments schedule for people who are receiving medical treatment at the Sir Anthony Mamo Oncology Centre.

An Active Ageing and Community Care Customer Care Call Centre was also launched to provide information on the services offered by the Active Ageing and Community Care.

From an international perspective, an additional measure to combat fraud and collect undue amounts from pensioners living in Australia was carried out. In this process, the life certificates were sent to every pensioner living in Australia and receiving a pension both from Malta and Australia. This process was held in order to ensure that the amounts of pensions issued by the Department of Social Security are verified and corrected according to the circumstances of the pensioner.

A Business Process Review of the services/processes provided by the International Relations Unit was also carried out. The aim of this review was to simplify internal processes, prevent information already available to the Government from being re-requested from customers, as well as to increase accessibility for customers and to provide them with a timely and efficient service.



Moreover, a training session, through a Train the Trainer Approach, was provided to servizz.gov agents, regarding all the services provided by the International Relations Unit within the Department of Social Security, including those services which fall under EU Regulations and Bilateral Agreements with other countries. In this regard, the necessary material was transmitted to servizz.gov management to ensure that this training could be repeated with all servizz.gov customer care agents at the hubs and 153 call-agents.

2.2.3 Work-life balance

Government and the Public Administration have embraced a 'hybrid' way of working particularly as post pandemic measures. Remote workspaces for the public service will be inaugurated in January 2021 as a new way in which the public service can be provided remotely. The OPM is leading the discussions together with the Malta Council for Economic and Social Development (MCESD) and the Employment Relations Board for more flexibility in the workplace as it aims to bring into place a national remote-working policy. This is further complemented by ongoing discussions on the first draft of a legislative framework that regulates 'right to disconnect' law for workers.

Furthermore, ongoing consultations and discussions are taking place 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. This Directive calls 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 02 August 2022.

Another measure that was undertaken by the Department of Industrial and Employment Relations (DIER) concerns special leave for couples receiving in vitro fertilisation (IVF) treatment. The legal notice for this measure has entered into force during the year 2020.

2.2.4 Working Conditions

DIER assisted around 1,000 companies to implement short-time work arrangements through 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.

Addressing the gender pay gap is of national priority and as part of the Government's initiative for a fair and inclusive labour market, an action plan is currently being drafted to identify businesses that operate both in Malta and Gozo with the necessary investigations expected to take place in the coming months.

2.3 Poverty Reduction and Social Inclusion

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.

During 2020, the Research, Policy and Operations Division within the then Ministry for the Family, Children's Rights and Social Solidarity (MFCS) continued with the monitoring and evaluation of initiatives within the context of Malta's strategic policy – National Strategic Policy for Poverty Reduction and for Social Inclusion 2014–2024. In December 2020, the second Implementation and Evaluation Report for this strategic policy covering the period 2017–2019 was published⁵. The report outlines Malta's efforts and progress towards the most vulnerable who are at-risk-of poverty or social exclusion, across various sectors and Ministries including those responsible for income and social benefits, employment and education, health, social services, and culture. Special focus is given to the four main target groups of children and young people, elderly persons, unemployed persons, and the working poor, while also briefly analysing the challenges arising from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Division has also embarked on the development of a strategic document, which will provide an overarching framework for social policy in the medium-to-long-term. This document will aim to provide a framework highlighting how the social dimension is expected to develop within the next ten to fifteen years and enable Government to adopt a proactive approach towards the challenges which Maltese society is expected to face in the coming years.

2.3.1 Children and Young Persons

The Office of the Commissioner for Children continued with the implementation of a project entitled 'Child Friendly Towns and Villages in Malta and Gozo', which is co-funded by the Environment and Resource Authority (ERA) and carried out by the Centre for Resilience and Socio-Emotional Health within the University of Malta. As part of the project, a case study that focuses on the central town of Hamrun is being conducted in collaboration with the Faculty for the Built Environment within the University of Malta. This case study consists of several focus groups conducted by the Centre for Resilience and Socio-Emotional Health as well as walkabout sessions that will be organised by the Faculty for the Built Environment. The information gathered from this study will be used to promote more awareness on the need for more child friendly spaces in Maltese towns and villages and to inspire and encourage key stakeholders to create such spaces in their locality in collaboration with the children themselves.

During 2020, work continued on the development of a new National Youth Policy 2021–2030. This will build on the policy entitled 'Towards 2020 – A shared vision for the future of young people' which addressed 13 to 30-year olds and was implemented over the period 2015–2020.

The National Youth Policy 2021–2030 entitled 'Towards 2030 – Reaching out to, working with, and supporting young people' will cover the period 2021 to 2030 and focus on all young people between the ages of 13 and 30. The vision of this policy will be:

- Flexibility and innovation – ranging from local to national, and from national to European and Global.
- Supporting and encouraging young people, both as individuals and as citizens, in schools and educational institutions, at work, in the community and through social media.
- Empowering young people through the effective practice of youth work, including the digitalisation of youth work; national programmes, projects and cross-sectoral initiatives with the voluntary, state, and private sectors and youth work for young people.

⁵ <https://family.gov.mt/en/Documents/National%20Strategic%20Policy%202014-2024.pdf>

The following are examples of how Aġenzija Żgħażaġh, in implementing the National Youth Policy, sought also to contribute to achieving sustainable development:

i. Supporting young people at risk of poverty

Youth.inc is 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. Since Aġenzija Żgħażaġh commenced the programme in 2014, over 70 young people enrol yearly.⁶

ii. Promoting the health and well-being of young people

Aġenzija Żgħażaġh regularly undertakes and participates in EU funded programmes that aim to enhance the health and well-being of young people such as:

- Polifest; a project aimed at creating safe spaces where young people and policy makers can discuss issues that affect the wellbeing of young people; and
- Less Stress, More Fun; a collaborative programme between Malta, Ireland, Estonia, and Poland that focused on the causes of stress and stress management among young people.

iii. Providing quality non-formal educational opportunities through effective youth work

Aġenzija Żgħażaġh has created new spaces and facilities at local community level, including youth activity centres, youth cafes, 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 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.

iv. Promoting equality, citizenship, and democratic participation

Aġenzija Żgħażaġh has undertaken a range of projects and initiatives that aim to enhance equality and actively promote active citizenship and democratic participation, including:

- Model European Parliament Malta; 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.
- Student Councils Democracy Award; 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. This programme is underpinned by the values of democracy, active citizenship, participation, dialogue, leadership and equality.

2.3.2 Persons with a Disability

During 2020, the Disability Unit within the then MFCS took over the processing and monitoring of 14 Public Social Partnership (PSP) contracts in the area of disability. With an investment of almost €5.4 million in 2020, around 223 persons with a disability benefitted from accommodation, respite or services related to their needs and level of support to continue to live in the community and to enjoy the best quality of life possible, through a PSP Agreement.

The Disability Unit, in collaboration with Aġenzija Sapport amongst other relevant stakeholders, completed a standardised PSP Agreement for residential homes providing residential and/or respite services to persons with a disability. The main scope was to refine existing key performance indicators and improve the monitoring tools of such PSP Agreements with a view to enhance government effectiveness and transparency.

A helpline for persons with a disability and their family members was launched to serve as a means of contact and help with Aġenzija Sapport when they require any service from the Agency. In addition, professionals in the human resources area were recruited by the Aġenzija Sapport to train and develop the skills of workers working directly with people with disabilities in the community.

Furthermore, over the past two years, Aġenzija Sapport has increased its fleet to cope with and increase its overall service supply. The eleven wheelchair accessible vehicles and a further four 7-seater vehicles have increased the Agency's overall outreach.

⁶ Further information is available at: <https://youth.gov.mt/mt/youth-inc/>



The Inter-Ministerial Administrative Committee on Disability (IACD) and the Inter-Ministerial Interdisciplinary Professional Board for Disability Services (IIPBD), both structures under the remit of the Research, Policy and Operations Division, commenced their third term in 2020. The IIPBD is the professional arm of the IACD whose main role is to facilitate and oversee the operation of the IIPBD in terms of the recommendations put forward regarding the assessment, service plan and allocation of services to persons with disability.

The IIPBD finalised a report with a detailed summary of completed tasks and its visions for the third term. During this term, the IIPBD continued with regular meetings in relation to the planning, development, and procurement of services to meet short, medium, and long-term needs in the field of disability.

In line with what has been mentioned above, through the Jobsplus Bridging the Gap scheme, registered persons with disabilities and people in disadvantaged situations who are unemployed, are provided with the necessary support in the transition period towards employment. The scheme allows the employer to evaluate the performance of the individual in the workplace, prior to proper engagement. Participants receive a weekly allowance of 80% of the minimum wage from Jobsplus while they can retain any social benefits being received. However, if the work exposure period exceeds the twenty-eight weeks, social benefits will have to be forfeited. Additionally, employers participating in this scheme will be exempted from social security contributions, wages, and sick leave benefits until proper engagement.

Moreover, together with the Lino Spiteri Foundation, Jobsplus runs the VASTE Programme, a €13 million project aimed at assisting disabled persons and vulnerable inactive individuals in finding and retaining suitable employment. The Programme provides a holistic assessment to participants through multiple training options and professional support, which may then lead to several employment opportunities. Training opportunities under the Programme include pre-employment training (PET) and sheltered employment training (SET). The latter is a one-year programme aimed at preparing individuals with mental, physical and/or intellectual disabilities for employment by stimulating working environment and possible 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, and job coaching and mentoring.

The A2E scheme seeks to provide employment aid to enterprises in Malta and Gozo to promote the recruitment of the more challenged amongst jobseekers, unemployed and inactive persons. Through this scheme, the integration into the labour market is facilitated by enhancing opportunities to access the labour market and providing work

experiences to those least likely to be in gainful employment, bridging the gap between labour market supply and demand, and increasing social cohesion.

The then Ministry for Finance (MFIN), continued to administer the Grant scheme on the Purchase of Special Equipment for use by Persons with Disability, which was introduced in 2017. Through this scheme, the Government is assisting persons with disability that need to purchase special equipment required to live an independent life.

In 2020, the Local Government Division launched the Community Inclusive Employment Scheme – CIES, granting assistance to local councils to employ persons with disabilities. This scheme is in line with the National Disability Strategy at the local level as it provides employment opportunities to people with special needs thus promoting an all-inclusive society and assist in reducing inequalities.

2.4 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 4.6 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.

Responsible citizenship, critical thinking, digital literacy, lifelong learning, and the pursuit for knowledge are buttressed by an inclination towards education for sustainable development and global education. The former is a cross-curricular theme supported by a set of learning outcomes. MFED supports educators in developing student-centred learning strategies for effective teaching and in fostering a globalised worldview promoting healthy and responsible lifestyles. Inclusive and quality education can thus be an effective channel to address socio-economic and cultural gaps such as the gender participation gap, wealth disparities and, ultimately, social justice; hence making education an effective social equaliser. The National Curriculum Framework (2012) promotes such an approach, thereby aiming for Education for Sustainable Development and Global Education as a form of reaching the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goal 4 – Ensure Inclusive and Equitable quality Education and Promote lifelong Learning opportunities for all (UN, 2015). At a micro-level, frequent initiatives to promote environmental and social responsibility and sports, amongst others, are the main drivers for the Government's approach across schooling.

In line with the above, the Government of Malta has also made sure to support public servants in education and training to further their qualifications by following undergraduate and post-graduate courses.

2.4.1 Education and Training for all

Malta provides free education, which is compulsory from ages 5 to 16. During the scholastic year 2019/2020, 27,201 students (excluding post-secondary and Alternative Learning Programme Plus) were enrolled in primary and secondary education in Malta and Gozo. Including students attending Kindergarten, the number rose to 34,240 before schools closed in February 2020. As of October/November 2020, the figure stood at 33,111. The MFED's inclusion policy was updated to complement the draft Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area

and beyond (Council of the EU, 2020). This policy adopts a whole-school approach philosophy of how schools are to develop conducive learning environments for all stakeholders. This policy views individual differences as opportunities for enriching learning and offers flexibility to schools to transform existing pedagogical, personal and professional beliefs, attitudes and discourse, as well as re-design processes and practices in a manner that respond effectively to all learners' needs and social realities. This transformation will take place by working on various goals related to disability, attendance, gender, promoting a healthy lifestyle and managing behaviour in schools that will address inequalities in our schools.

Furthermore, several academics at the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST) are undertaking research studies within educational diversity, inclusion, and effectiveness of vocational education.

MFED, through the National School Support Services, set up a helpline, Nisimgħek, whereby students and parents could reach out to various practitioners including counsellors, social workers, psychologists, career advisors amongst others. Besides personal issues, students were also provided with support related to curricular difficulties, study difficulties, changes in the postsecondary course requirements due to COVID-19, queries related to exams, and concerns related to transition to post-secondary education, among others. This service was set up two weeks after the schools closed.

During these circumstances, the National School Support Services (NSSS) also felt the need to offer career guidance services to Year 11 students through online one-to-one sessions through the use of Microsoft Teams. This particular year group was targeted as these students were transitioning to post-secondary education and/or employment, and it was clear that these students could not be left on their own. NSSS also undertook the development of specific resources for students and/or parents/guardians. The aim was to reach out to students with the information that would help them during the different phases in their educational pathway. For instance, these resources included the development of infographics written in student-friendly language to explain the new qualifications required for post-secondary education, video outlining the skills required to succeed in today's world of work and how to sit for an online interview.

Furthermore, the eSkills Malta Foundation swiftly launched the Free Online Education page on the Foundation's website to assist students during the onset of COVID-19 lockdown. The free online education links provide invaluable learning opportunities and material, which is instructive and fun for the students.

In addition, the My Journey project constitutes a new direction in including vocational and applied subjects as a tangible measure to reduce early school leavers and, potentially, increase tertiary

education attainment. My Journey is being heralded as a driver for inclusion and equitable education for all students, which makes it relevant to SDG 4 by way of economically involving individuals who previously would have potentially left school. As of September 2019, through the My Journey – Achieving through different paths Reform, secondary school students can choose from blended learning streams of academic, vocational, and applied subjects in addition to the core curriculum. The reform involves moving away from a 'one size fits all' education system to a more inclusive and equitable one. The aim is to respond to different education needs and give parity of esteem to general, vocational, and applied qualifications. My Journey seeks to promote increased links between education and industry. Close cooperation between schools and workplaces assures the currency of subject learning outcomes, provides real-life work environments thus warranting the assimilation of the aims of work life, establishes fruitful relationships with companies, and facilitates the learning of entrepreneurship competencies.

As in previous years, during 2020, Year 8 students participated in the Choice of Subjects exercise, whereby they choose two Option Subjects which they will study from Year 9 till Year 11. Career guidance practitioners organise specific programmes for students and parents to guide students towards making 'an informed choice', that is a choice based on pre-acquired information so that students become well aware of the choice being made. During 2020, students were again given the opportunity to choose from Academic subjects, Vocational subjects, and Applied subjects. The latter included a more practical content suitable for students who adopt different ways of learning, which is more hands-on. The choice of subject programme for parents and students is made up of several talks about the various option subjects and decision-making, while students are also given the opportunity to attend a one-to-one career guidance session so that their choice would be made on self-reflection and based on one's strengths and abilities.

For the year 2020, the I Choose – Nagħżel il-Karriera Tiegħi fair was held on 31 July 2020 and 01 August 2020. The purpose of this fair is to guide Year 11 students towards their post-secondary choices, namely further studying or engaging in employment. In-depth preparations took place to adhere to COVID-19 protocols. Post-secondary education institutions occupied stands, which Year 11 students and parents could visit and speak to guidance personnel to acquire the information necessary about the study courses which they were interested to pursue. Around 209 participants attended several talks, which were held by representatives from various employment sectors. These employer representatives provided information about the respective sector and about the career opportunities that exist within the same sector. Another group of 60 students availed themselves of one-to-one career guidance sessions that were available on both days by career guidance practitioners.

In line with Government policies and educational frameworks, the Institute for Education ensures that the current supply and prospective educators have access to flexible academic and practical training. Since 2017, the Institute for Education has been offering several accredited stand-alone courses and short programmes to support the continuous professional development of educators. More streams were developed within the Bachelor and Master of Education programmes adopting an almost completely online approach in 2020 due to the pandemic. The Institute was well prepared for this adaptation. Subject areas include primary education, humanities, physical education, English, science, social studies, European studies, mathematics, religious education and VET subjects including engineering technology, fashion and textiles, agribusiness, hospitality, hair and beauty. Moreover, the Institute for Education is continuously developing professional development awards from which professional educators can choose in order to progress in their professional growth. The Institute has also started promoting research and has published its first Malta Journal of Education. The theme was “internationalisation and multiculturalism in Maltese education and society” and included 13 peer-reviewed articles written by national and international authors. The Institute for Education has also organised its first symposium on the same theme. This was delivered online and gave the opportunity to researchers in the field to expose their findings and recommendations.

The DLAP within MFED, in collaboration with Global Education and Network Europe (GENE), coordinated a 16-hour training course across a number of sessions

between February and April in relation to Global Education (GE). The course, ‘Introduction to GE’, was organised for educators across all cycles and sections and school Senior Management Teams. This voluntary educator training will be offered again in March 2021. A second GENE funded training module entitled: Global Education for Social Justice will commence in April 2021.

In addition, the following grants continued in 2020 with the aim of enhancing further socio-economic development:

- Grant Payable to Malta Resident Students Following Full-Time Courses in Gozo;
- Grant Payable to Gozitan Resident Students Following Full-Time Courses in Malta; and
- Additional benefit covering rental cost for Gozitan students studying in Malta.

2.4.2 Skills Development

The positive trends recorded in Malta, both in economic and social aspects, have been the results of reforms and enhancements introduced by the Maltese Government in the last years to reap the benefits of a changing world. Despite the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic globally, the Maltese government has put in place timely and effective measures to diminish the effects of the global pandemic on the labour market and the population, shielding not only financial losses but also protecting individuals from the threat of poverty. The global pandemic has accelerated the need for skills enhancement, most prominently digital skills, and the need for reskilling.



Equipping the workforce with the skills required for the jobs of today and tomorrow is a strategic concern in the national growth and development outlooks of all countries.

In line with SDG 4 'Equality Education' and its sub-targets for 2030 to increase the number of youths and adults to have relevant skills for employment, Jobsplus provides the necessary training opportunities and initiatives to help individuals in up-skilling and re-skilling, to keep pace with rapidly changing skill needs. To assist youths who are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEETs), Jobsplus administers the Youth Guarantee Scheme, which includes the NEET Activation Scheme II, ICT Courses, SEC Revision classes and MCAST preventive classes.

The NEET Activation Scheme provides young people aged between 15 and 24 years, who are NEETs with personal and professional training, mentoring, and constant support, thereby facilitating their transition from education to gainful employment, while consequently improving their employment prospects, quality of life and social integration. The programme consists of three phases: training, work exposure or further education and a traineeship component. In the first phase, every applicant receives approximately four weeks (80 hours) of life skills and industry related skills based on their profile. During phase 2, a participant is offered two options:

- Option 1 – a work placement of maximum 240 hours with an employer based on the applicant's skills and desires. This placement lasts approximately 12 weeks (80 hours every 4 weeks).
- Option 2 – If the applicant desires to further their education level, they can choose a course from an accredited institution such as MCAST or ITS and enrol in a course. In this case, the Youth Guarantee scheme would also cover a maximum of 240 hours.

Upon completion of the work exposure phase, participants enter phase three, which consists of a traineeship whereby participants will be able to put into practice what they have learnt during the previous two phases.

The ICT Courses are offered throughout the year, and aim to help young people who are inactive or students who in their last year of compulsory schooling had indicated that they will not further their education, to improve their digital skills. The option for the participants to undergo either the Practical ICT course at Level 2 or the European Computer Driving License (ECDL) at Malta Qualifications Framework (MQF) Level 3, allows the project to reach a broader spectrum of students having diverse abilities, attitudes, behavioural issues and objectives. As a result, the eligibility criteria were widened to also include youths referred by the school guidance teams, and inactive youths aged between 15-24 who are not in education, employment, or training. Participants are obliged to attend a minimum of 80% of the course and, upon successful completion, they gain a qualification and

receive an allowance equivalent to the minimum wage. To address deficiencies in social skills, non-obligatory psychological services are also provided. Following completion of the ICT Course, young people are encouraged to either enrol in an educational institution or participate in the NEET Activation Scheme II.

The Secondary Education Certificate (SEC) Revision Classes are aimed at young people who do not attain a grade 1 to 5 (1 being the highest) in the SEC mandatory subjects. Revision classes are provided in core subjects such as Maltese, English, Mathematics, Physics and Biology and students can apply for up to three subjects. These classes are provided free of charge during the summer period and last for five weeks. At the end of the classes, participants sit for an exam and are encouraged to enrol in a post-secondary educational institution.

In addition to the initiatives listed above, the Youth Guarantee provides MCAST with preventive classes where students under the age of 25 who fail one of the exams through Level 1, Level 2 or Level 3 of their respective course at MCAST are offered free remedial classes during the summer period, in preparation for their final assessments the following September. Preventive classes give students another chance to finalise their certification and be able to move on to the next level of education.

Moreover with the aim to promote further upskilling, Jobsplus has the Training Pays Scheme in place, which aims at encouraging individuals to participate in lifelong learning by offering assistance in the form of a training grant to aid participants with costs related to training. In addition, Jobsplus administers the Investing in Skills Scheme, which promotes the training of persons actively participating in the Maltese labour market through a financial assistance for employers to further upskill their personnel. With the aim of providing quality training, all individuals residing in Malta who are within the working age group can apply to follow a course at the Jobsplus' Training Centre. The courses that are offered at Jobsplus are all demand-led and offered all day while being pegged to the national qualification framework.

Additionally, the Traineeship Scheme is based on the dual system of vocational training providing a combination of on-the-job and off-the-job training. The programmes offered are labour market driven where job preferences of jobseekers are matched with the requests made by employers participating in the scheme. Moreover, the Work Exposure Scheme is intended to facilitate 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. A number of training courses started being offered through online

learning. Courses that involve practical sessions are being offered through physical learning. Jobsplus is also offering classroom training to clients who prefer such learning styles. When lessons and practical sessions are conducted within Jobsplus premises, all preventive measures recommended by the Health Authorities are being observed.

In 2020, an agreement between MGOZ and the Foundation for Social Welfare Services (FSWS) was signed, by which €300,000 were allocated to FSWS for a training and integration programme for jobseekers to be offered in 2021, aimed at strengthening inclusiveness and independent living.

Another scheme issued by the Local Government Division was *Korsijiet ta' Taghlim tul il-Hajja* (Lifelong Learning), which highlights the importance and benefits that lifelong learning has on the general well-being of society. These courses aim at addressing health, social, and financial issues, thus facilitating the lives of participants.

2.5 Sports

In the run up to the Games of the Small States of Europe, SportMalta has committed itself to have the necessary facilities for these Games to be a success and to leave a legacy after the Games. Several venues are being refurbished to cater for these Games while several others are being constructed, most of which are being built on existing built footprints.

The projects in conjunction with the Games, namely Tennis Courts in Pembroke, Basketball Pavillion at Ta' Qali and the Squash and Weightlifting Centre in Marsa will be of a resilient nature, promote inclusivity and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation. They will develop quality, reliable, sustainable, and resilient infrastructure to support economic development and human well-being, with a focus on affordable and equitable access for all. The venues will cater for a proportion of the rural population who live across the Maltese islands.

Apart from venues related to the Games of the Small States of Europe, SportMalta is also catering for other sport and physical activity. A Handball Court in Hamrun and an Adventure Family Park in Cospicua, incorporating an Indoor Rowing Tank within, are being constructed to cater for the Handball and Rowing communities and for outdoor activity in the inner harbour area. The projects catering for various sports will be of a resilient nature, promote inclusivity and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation.

2.6 Combating Violence and Discrimination

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.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.

The process of modernisation of the Armed Forces of Malta (AFM) continued during 2020 with the project to purchase a new offshore patrol vessel, built according to the Army's own specifications and investment in sophisticated equipment for the Special Operations Unit contributing to SDG Goal 16. To remain relevant and up-to-date, AFM carried out training opportunities. Training was carried out, following the updating of the curriculum, as a result of cooperation which was established with educational institutions such as MCAST, ITS and the University of Malta as well as with the Emergency Department of Mater Dei Hospital.

With the aim of strengthening the Police Force's work against economic crimes, and thereby contributing towards Goal 16, the Malta Police Force (MPF) set up a new Economic Crimes Squad building.

MPF continued enhancing its capabilities through several approaches to combat violence and crime. In October 2020, front-line police officers attended training to prevent and combat racism, xenophobia, and other forms of intolerance, particularly hate crime and hate speech. Furthermore, in October 2020, police officers from the Cyber Crime Unit and the Information and Technology Department undertook training courses related to security and network on critical infrastructure.

Throughout 2020, MPF focused on a national initiative that was funded through EU funds to introduce the Community Policing concept. The interaction between MPF and the Maltese citizens is crucial in creating a violence free society, whereby both the officers and the citizens can collaborate in preventing violence and crime.

Furthermore, MPF is focusing to increase the border management controls through several EU funded projects. The Entry Exit System (EES), the European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS) and the Implementation of the Schengen Information System (SIS II) Recast focus on the prevention of border crime and crime prevention.

In September 2020, MPF launched its Transformation Strategy, whereby the mission statement focuses on providing a professional and trusted policing service to ensure safety and security in partnership with the community also contributing towards SDG Goal 16. The strategy is a product of an EU funded project that assisted MPF in identifying the gaps needed towards a stronger and transparent institution.

2.6.1 Gender-based and Domestic Violence

In November 2020, MPF officially launched the Gender-Based and Domestic Violence Unit in tackling any crime/violence related to these specific areas.

Throughout the year 2020, the Commission on Gender-Based Violence and Domestic Violence continued its mission by addressing the local prevalence of gender-based and domestic violence through four main approaches:

2.6.1.2 Legislation, Policy and Services

The development and continuous amelioration of policy and legislation are both necessary components in the fight against a nationwide problem. Relevant legislation and policy frameworks are products of Malta's ratification of the Istanbul Convention back in 2014. To ensure its full endorsement by the state, the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO) followed through a process of evaluation as mapped out in the Convention itself. The process started in late

2019 and was concluded in 2020. The latter year saw an evaluation visit from a GREVIO delegation and the subsequent publication of the First Baseline Evaluation Report on Malta as well as the responses of Maltese authorities and the Committee of Parties. The above served to inform the Commission's work on compiling a second National Strategy on Gender-based and Domestic Violence for the years 2021 and 2022. GREVIO's recommendations were consolidated with local objectives to ensure a cohesive approach. This task also necessitated the Commission to chair ten Inter-Ministerial Committee meetings throughout 2020.

In addition, the unforeseen circumstances brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic warranted the adoption of special measures to ensure that women in abusive environments are not disproportionately impacted by the restrictions imposed by the state. Concerns about this crisis were addressed through four meetings between NGOs and government stakeholders, coordinated by the Commission itself. The Commission's input on a collaborative project entitled 'Violet Support Online – Improving Support Structures for Victims of Gender Based Violence' further enhanced multisectoral participation through its coordination of a Steering Group Committee. Nine Steering Group meetings were held throughout 2020, in which numerous professionals met to address concerns surrounding the gender-based violence and domestic violence phenomena.

2.6.1.3 Awareness Raising

The Commission prioritised community awareness in its fight for gender equality through numerous initiatives and multiple mediums. What follows is a list of activities the Commission engaged in to increase community awareness of this present problem:

- Through an EU co-financed project entitled 'Breaking the Cycle of Violence', the Commission held an awareness raising campaign including information sessions, educational programmes tailored for children and young people and a festival entitled "Be the Change". In response to the pandemic, the Commission adapted this campaign to include messages to women suffering in their confinement in various languages and public spaces.
- The Violet Support Online project also included awareness raising, this time specifically targeting workforces.
- Mid-2020, the Commission launched a campaign entitled '#intkapaci'. This campaign comprised a series of video clips featuring various local personalities, all sharing messages of empowerment to victims. It ran over the span of three months and was relaunched towards the end of 2020.
- The Commission honoured the UN's annual '16 Days of Activism' by raising awareness in relation

to the chosen theme: “Not every home is a Haven – Reach out for the Life you deserve”. The campaign was mainly delivered through social media, comprising a variety of stirring images, Ted Talks, articles, and a lyric video production as tribute to all victims of gender-based violence and domestic violence. The traditional media also played its part by delivering the Commission’s and other collaborators’ messages through newspapers, television and radio. Other activities in this campaign included a photography competition, a drawing competition and writing workshops.

2.6.1.4 Training and Education

With hopes of having a sufficiently trained workforce, equipped with the skills and knowledge with which a professional may aid a victim or the perpetrator himself, the Commission devoted ample time to the creation, delivery and evaluation of training programmes for various professionals. The following is a summary of all training-related activities engaged in by the Commission in 2020:

Target Audience	Training Activity	Outcome
Students at MCAST	General course on Domestic Violence	Launched on 10 December 2020 and currently being delivered
Police officers at the new Gender-Based and Domestic Violence Unit within the Malta Police Force	Induction training on relevant legislation and local governmental and non-governmental services specialising in this area	Delivered in September 2020
Relevant professionals	Webinar on elderly abuse	Delivered on the 07 and 18 December 2020
Legal Aid lawyers	Social aspects of gender-based violence	Delivered during the 16 days of activism in December 2020
Probation Officers	Training in relation to understanding the perpetrator to protect families	Delivered during the 16 days of activism in December 2020

2.6.1.5 Research

In addition to the annual data on gender-based and domestic violence generated and standardized by the NSO, the Commission embarked on numerous other research projects, all of which lent unique insight to the phenomena under study. Moreover, in 2020, the Commission signed a memorandum of understanding with MCAST so as to ensure better collaboration in relation to research and training. What follows is a list of all the research projects which the Commission, along with various other collaborators, invested in throughout the year 2020:

- **The Economic cost of Violence against Women** – A portion of the Commission’s annual budget was channelled towards empirically estimating the costs of services related to supporting victims of gender-based and domestic violence. This project was led by Prof. Joseph Falzon in collaboration with Dr Marceline Naudi and Dr Vincent Marmara together with relevant governmental and non-governmental service providers.
- **Research on Gender-based and Domestic Violence Trends** – this research formed part of the EU co-funded project ‘Breaking the Cycle of Violence’. The results of the research were presented in a final conference held in September 2020 and are also available online.
- **‘Situation of Gender-Based Violence in Malta: Experiences and Effects at the Workplace’** – This study addressed risk and mediating factors with regards to gender-based violence. It formed part of the Violet Support Online project in which the Commission took part. The results of this research were disseminated during a webinar, with hopes that these guide policy makers as necessary.

2.6.2 Human Rights and Equality

As per Goal 5 of the SDGs, the Human Rights Directorate (HRD) has continued its work in the development of the first national framework on Gender Equality and Gender Mainstreaming in order to systematically address inequalities and challenges which are mostly faced by women in Malta. Society cannot reach its full potential without allowing each and every person to thrive, without gender-based obstacles. This highlights the aim of the Strategy, which is to identify and eradicate those obstacles, by introducing a gender perspective at all levels and stages of policy making. It also adopts an intersectional element, taking into account not only gender, but gender in combination with other personal characteristics or identities, ensuring that gender



mainstreaming truly results in equality for all women, therefore ensuring that no one is left behind.

In parallel, a strong legislative framework that protects the right to equal treatment and non-discrimination is equally essential. Malta is now in the final stages of two legislative proposals. First, the Equality Bill,⁷ which harmonises Maltese law on equality and non-discrimination, strengthens the legal framework, and increases legal protection for victims of discrimination. Secondly, the Commission for Human Rights and Equality Bill,⁸ which will establish Malta's first National Human Rights Institution in line with the UN Paris Principles.

When it comes to equality, the 'TRANSFORM: Raising standards of health care service provision for LGBTIQ people' being implemented by HRD, co-funded by the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme, aims to tackle inequality and discrimination in access to health care services by LGBTIQ people. This project will run until October 2021.

A Bill to amend the Constitution of Malta and to introduce a temporary positive measure which is necessary and reasonable in a democratic society to ensure de facto equality between men and women in politics, was tabled in Parliament in March 2020. The proposal caters for the introduction of a Gender Corrective Mechanism so that the percentage of Members of Parliament constituting the 'under-represented' sex in the House of Representatives will be as close as possible to 40%. The 'Gender Corrective Mechanism' will be activated to elect such number of candidates from the under-represented sex up to a maximum of 12 new seats. The number of additional seats will be apportioned equally between the two parties. It is to be noted that, for decades, Malta has consistently lagged behind other countries when it comes to gender balance in Parliament as evidenced by the European Institute for Gender Equality's 2020 Gender Equality Index

and the 2020 Global Gender Gap Report. The latest 2020 data shows that women's representation in the Maltese Parliament stood at a mere 13.4% compared to the European (EU 28) average of 32.8%. This positive measure is clearly necessary to break the status quo and address gender inequalities stemming from historical and structural barriers experienced by women in society. The implementation of the proposed measure will be instrumental towards the strengthening of a democratic society with the equal participation of women and men in the highest national decision-making institution.

In 2020, the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE) continued to carry out its functions as laid down in the Equality for Men and Women Act (CAP. 456). It investigated complaints lodged on alleged discrimination and sexual harassment; monitored adverts published on daily newspapers and contacted publishers to draw their attention on discriminatory adverts by providing recommendations on inclusive language and/or images; and provided feedback to requests for information from the general public on areas falling within NCPE's remit.

Awareness raising was also carried out through contributions to traditional and through social media platforms on various equality related topics; and NCPE online conferences on Artificial Intelligence and gender equality, the gender pay gap and NCPE's work.

During 2020, NCPE was also instrumental in raising awareness through the issue of two newsletters. The first was on maternity, paternity, and parental rights, which tackled the discriminatory practices in employment faced by pregnant women and new mothers. The newsletter emphasised the importance of equality rights for both women and men with family responsibilities, the importance of the adoption of the EU Work-Life Balance Directive

⁷ <https://www.parliament.mt/en/13th-leg/bills/bill-no-096-equality/>

⁸ <https://www.parliament.mt/en/13th-leg/bills/bill-no-097-human-rights/>

by Member States, as well as the benefits obtained by companies in which maternity leave is well managed. The second newsletter – Equality and COVID-19 pandemic – looked at the effects of the pandemic on gender, family responsibilities, age, race and ethnic origin, religion and belief, and sexual orientation and gender identity. With respect to gender and family responsibilities, light was shed on the realities, which reaffirmed, and in some cases aggravated, gender inequalities particularly due to:

- Greater economic hardship due to women being more likely to work in temporary, part-time and precarious employment because of caring responsibilities; and
- When working remotely, women were more likely to carry out unpaid work including childcare and schooling, adult care, and domestic work.

In 2020, NCPE continued with its policy-work by providing input from an equality perspective to policies, legislation, and other documents from European and international bodies; and to nine national public consultations. Moreover, NCPE carried out 'Research on distribution of work in household during the COVID-19 pandemic' and started research regarding public awareness on pension entitlement. 35 training sessions were delivered on equality, diversity, and non-discrimination to a wide range of participants in the private and public sectors.

During 2020, NCPE continued to certify and recertify organisations with the Equality Mark; a certification awarded to organisations that make gender equality one of their values and whose management is based on the recognition and promotion of the potential of all employees irrespective of their gender and caring responsibilities. By end of 2020, there were 112 certified organisations with 26,500 employees.

NCPE promoted the online Directory of Professional Women that gives visibility and more opportunities to professional and competent women for appointment on boards and committees, and/or to assume decision-making positions in the labour market. By end of 2020, there were 265 professional women registered on this online Directory.

It further implemented specific initiatives through EU co-financed projects, namely:

- Prepare the Ground for Economic Independence (PGEI) that focused on addressing the gender gaps over the life-cycle. Most notable activities implemented throughout this project include training sessions to career advisors and students, two research studies, three promotional campaigns and the development of an equal pay tool;
- Empowerment for Diversity (E4D) that will focus on the grounds of sexual orientation, gender identity, sex characteristics and gender expression. In 2020, NCPE commenced preparatory and administrative work so as to implement the project's activities in 2021–2022. Activities will include: research, capacity-building, workshops with the LGBTIQ+ community and an awareness raising campaign.

The media can shape public perception on gender roles and gender issues in general. Following a study by the Broadcasting Authority that gave a snapshot on the participation of women and men in discussion programmes on television, which showed that women lack behind in the representation and in the portrayal of such programmes, the Authority was tasked to provide guidelines for media service providers and this will help them to produce a balanced picture on the participation of men and women in discussion programmes. A sub-committee was set up in 2020 to draft guidelines, which would address a fair representation of male and female in discussion programmes. It is envisaged that the guidelines would be finalised and published in March 2021.

2.7 Migration Management and Integration

Key Sustainable Development Goal Targets

SDG 8.8 Protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers, including migrant workers, in particular women migrants, and those in precarious employment.

SDG 10.3 Ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities of outcome, including by eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices and promoting appropriate legislation, policies and action in this regard.

SDG 10.7 Facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies.

SDG 11.3 By 2030, enhance inclusive and sustainable urbanisation and capacity for participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement planning and management in all countries.

In 2020, so as to match Government's priority to ensure safe and effective returns, the Ministry for Home Affairs, National Security and Law Enforcement (MHSE) committed itself to establish a newly dedicated Returns Unit in early 2021. The overall objective of the Returns Unit will be to adopt a holistic approach in the management of return of third country nationals to their country of origin, including forced, voluntary, and assisted voluntary returns. There will be an increased focus on reintegration assistance, with Government's aim being to encourage sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all in the countries of origin.

The Government of Malta, seeking to better the quality of life for the various migrants and ethnic minorities in the country, also saw to it that the health of migrants was not neglected. Placing the well-being of migrants as a priority in the services being provided for migrants, the below initiatives were undertaken by MHSE in 2020.

A Therapeutic Team which consists of Assistant Psychological Officers (APOs), Interpreters, Counsellors and Psychologists has been established to provide their services in the centres. A voluntary assessment is undertaken allowing migrants to receive the necessary referrals to suit their individual needs. The APOs also provide Information Sessions at the Initial Reception Centre (IRC) about Agency for the Welfare of Asylum Seekers (AWAS) psychosocial services, mental health, symptoms of anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

In 2020, AWAS, in coordination with the European Asylum Support Office (EASO), introduced a new team entitled Vulnerability Assessment Team. This team is assessing potential vulnerable persons who are at the IRC and closed and open centres. AWAS already has a history and extensive experience of carrying out vulnerability assessments. This was set up to ensure that vulnerable adults in the centres are assessed accordingly.

The nursing staff at the Immigration, Residency and Citizenship was also increased. Special attention is given to pregnant women and vulnerable people including children and persons with special needs. All mothers are accompanied by social workers and other relevant staff including interpreters.

In November 2020, a new Migrants Advice Unit also started operating within the centres. This Information Service Unit is made up of a team of professionals who can provide information and assistance to asylum seekers so that they can better integrate into Maltese society. This team is also able to provide information regarding the Assisted Voluntary Return (AVR).

Furthermore, the 'Learning Exchanging Integrating' project, implemented by the HRD and co-financed by the Asylum, Migration, and Integration Fund (AMIF), supports the implementation of the National Migrant Integration Strategy and Action plan, namely, Integration = Belonging (Vision 2020). The project includes the setting up of Maltese, English, and cultural orientation classes, to conduct awareness campaigns, and to implement several other measures listed in the migrant integration action plan.

In 2020, continuous development was also made in the setting up of an Integration Academy that will offer services to those who will be obliged to follow an integration program. The aim here is to continue to promote equality and diversity in an intercultural society, to strengthen the rights and duties of both Maltese Society and the newcomers, as well as the skills that are necessary for everyone to succeed together.

2.8 Justice and Strong Institutions

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.

2.8.1 Stronger Institutions and Good Governance

2.8.1.1 Institutional and Constitutional Reforms

During 2020, the importance of good governance and the rule of law were prioritised to ensure national stability, trust in institutions, and economic growth. In this regard, a Governance Cabinet Committee was set up, tasked with ensuring that Malta complies with the recommendations on good governance and the rule of law put forward by the Venice Commission and the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO).

As part of the process of Institutional and Constitutional reforms in the Maltese Parliament, the first set of six reforms out of a package of ten were completed based on the Opinion of the Venice Commission of June 2020. The first six reforms included:

- i. Reform of the appointment of the President of the Republic
- ii. Reform of the appointment of the Chief Justice and the Judiciary respectively
- iii. Reform of the discipline and abolition of the Judiciary
- iv. Reform of the Attorney General's office
- v. Reform of the Ombudsman's office
- vi. Reform of the Standing Commission against Corruption.

Work also continued to bring forward the last four bills to pass the parliamentary process, thus closing the first set of the most crucial Institutional and Constitutional reforms, and then continuing the discussions in the Constitutional Convention headed by the President of the Republic. These drafts will include:

- Amendments to the act on the Auditor General and the National Audit Office;
- Amendments to the appointment of the Principal Permanent Secretary and the Permanent Secretaries respectively;

- Amendments to various laws aimed at reforming the procedure for making various public appointments; and
- Amendment of appointments of trustees.

Following the establishment of the Office of the State Advocate in December 2019, the State Advocate took over the advisory functions that previously were performed by the Attorney General, whereas the Office of the Attorney General became exclusively an independent Public Prosecutor. By virtue of Legal Notice 378 of 2020 and with effect from 01 October 2020, the Office of the Attorney General took over from the Police the decision to prosecute and the actual prosecution of serious offences. In fact, prosecutors at the Office of the Attorney General have already charged and are presently prosecuting criminal cases before the Court of Magistrates.

2.8.1.2 The Protection of Whistleblowers

The Protection of Whistleblower Act (Cap 527) came into force in September 2013. Directive 2019/1937/EU on the protection of persons who report breaches of Union law was published on 23 October 2019. All EU Member States are to transpose this Directive into national law by 17 December 2021. The transposition of this Directive will require Malta to amend its current legislation on whistleblower protection. Directive 2019/1937/EU has a wide remit and common minimum standards for the protection of whistleblowers are provided across a large number of areas, including areas such as 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.

A Working Group (WG) was established by the Ministry for Justice, Equality and Governance (MJEG)



to look into the provisions of the Directive (EU) 2019/1937 and to assess matters in relation to its implementation and transposition. MJEG made the necessary arrangements for the implementation of the Directive through the setting-up of a dedicated administrative set-up. A "Whistleblowing Co-ordinating Office" has been established within the Directorate Strategy Support at MJEG with a view to see to the Directive's obligations on the part of Malta and to assist Government Ministries, Authorities and Entities in achieving full compliance with this Directive. In this regard, a Bill on the Whistleblower Act will be launched for public consultation.

2.8.1.3 Digitalisation of Malta's Justice System

For some time, ICT developments within the field of justice have largely been taken within the limited scope of the implementing entities or departments. At the same time, major developments in cyber justice and Artificial intelligence (AI) were being registered at an international level. This development led MJEG to work on a project that will see the First Digital Strategy being drawn for the Maltese Islands. This strategy sets the vision for a unified digital strategy within justice and make a coordinated effort at creating a justice ecosystem that utilises information technologies and AI to the best of their advantage. This strategy will introduce reform through digital means that involve Justice stakeholders, such as the legal profession, arbitration, mediation, and the courts of justice, and aims to increase access for the public.

During 2020, the Ministry also embarked on various digitisation programmes within its entities with a

view of providing a more efficient service. A Case Management System was introduced in our Courts (Digicourts). This new system is based on the use of web technology as well as digital infrastructure that allows for more efficient and adequate services in today's world. Furthermore, a new process was introduced to make available all Chapters of the Laws of Malta in a machine-readable format. This measure simplified further the process of law searching so that legal professionals and other stakeholders have the necessary tools required.

In a bid to provide a more efficient and effective service the Court Services Agency introduced further digitisation services through the provision of:

- an online filing system of the Criminal Acts as a measure that provides access to the legal professionals, the Prosecuting Officers at the office of the Attorney General, and the Police to file any criminal act by logging onto the website ecourts.gov.mt;
- a newly developed e-form which facilitates the request of copies of Acts from the Court Archives, accessible 24/7;
- a new online access to Court Sentences for lawyers; and
- electronic submission of Letters for Mediations to be presented at the Family Court.

Further digitisation services were also undertaken by the Notary to Government (NTG) through an EU funded project (CONvErGE) that enabled the digitisation of original contracts at the main archives. Moreover, a user-friendly online system was created that offers the facility to order and procure copies of Notarial Deeds electronically. This online system



proved to be an efficient and effective time-saving measure that helped in reducing the number of people visiting the archives as well as safeguarding the volumes from being handled too often. The NTG embarked also on an initiative to have a pool of volunteers to assist in the Main Notarial Archive's initiatives, whilst simultaneously launching a series of sponsorship schemes, which will help the NTG in its upkeep, maintenance and preservation of volumes to be enjoyed by both present and future generations.

Transparency is often seen as a powerful tool to transform government. In this regard, in 2020, the Strategy and Support Directorate took the initiative to compile and publish policies and regulations followed or being drawn up by MJEG Departments. The compilation of policies and regulations is now accessible under the Resources section of the MJEG official website justice.gov.mt, in an effort for MJEG clients, including the general public, to be aware of which policies form the basis of the Ministry's main duties and objectives.

2.8.1.4 The CIPD and the IAID

The Critical Infrastructure Protection Directorate (CIPD) continued its efforts to support designated critical infrastructures, critical information infrastructures, operators of essential services, digital service providers and other critical and relevant entities within the public and private sectors in Malta with the objective to ensure they are resilient. The principal objective of the CIPD is to ensure that critical essential services to the country are delivered with the least disruptions contributing towards SDG Goal 16. On a daily basis, the CIPD monitors the cyber space for potential threats, hazards, vulnerabilities, malware as well as for other potential adverse cyber issues that can adversely impact designated critical entities and issue relevant alerts, warnings and advisories on a need-to-know-basis.

During 2020, the CIPD embarked on several EU funded projects to heighten its infrastructure with a view to strengthen its operational capabilities. Throughout the said period, the CIPD provided specialist training to its own staff and other specialist personnel within designated critical entities within the public and private sectors in Malta. Moreover, the CIPD is currently building a state-of-the-art Security Operations Centre (SOC) for the specific purpose to monitor for indicators of compromise, threats, and potential malware within the cyber space more effectively. By monitoring for indicators of compromise, the CIPD can detect potential attacks and act quickly to prevent breaches from occurring or limit damages by stopping attacks at an earlier stage.

The CIPD collaborates with peer organisations within the EU and beyond on a day-to-day basis to share sensitive information on potential malware and communicate relevant Indicators of Compromise (IOCs) with its constituents.

Finally, with regard to the Internal Audit & Investigations Department (IAID), work was undertaken 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 an up-to-date anti-fraud and anti-corruption measures will contribute to a more sustainable economy and society as well as stronger more just institutions in place.

2.8.2 Equal Access to Justice

During the year 2020, Legal Aid Malta Agency continued its efforts to promote equal justice to all. A total of 388 persons were scheduled a meeting with a resident legal aid lawyer at the Agency to assess their legal issues before initiating Courts of Law procedures to assign a legal aid lawyer and legal procurator by Court decree. During March up to June 2020, when Malta was under partial lockdown and the Agency's offices were closed for public, it continued to provide information to clients through telephone and email communication; a total of 272 clients were given the necessary legal aid information, that is an average of 5 calls per working day for the same period.

Through foresight of the social impact that persons within households might encounter during a time of pandemic, on 24 April 2020, a new legal aid service for victims of domestic violence was launched. This service provides victims with legal advice they would need to know about their domestic violence cases.

In July 2020, the Agency transferred its offices to new premises in Valletta, closer to the Courts of Justice, to provide easier access to legal aid offices to both clients and legal aid lawyers. The new premises provide better accessibility to less physically able persons, offices for lawyers to meet clients in a more private environment and video conferencing for lawyers to schedule meetings with prison inmates. During the last quarter of 2020, a fresh call for applications was issued for legal aid lawyers and legal procurators offering better financial package for a three-year contract, thus expecting them to give a better service to legal aid clients.

2.8.3 Enhancing Stakeholder Participation

Public participation in decision-making is an essential feature of sustainable development.

The project ENGAGE: Enhancing Stakeholder Participation in Social Dialogue, implemented by MEUSAC, built on the overarching aim of improving stakeholder engagement and ensuring that participation is strengthened and improved. Mentoring sessions were aimed at helping stakeholders upgrade their skills in stakeholder engagement, effective use of communication tools and accessing EU funding opportunities.

Chapter 3: Protecting the Environment



The year 2020 will remain synonymous with COVID-19 and the restrictions imposed to curb the spread of the disease, which, in turn, provided positive and negative impacts on the environment. With certain activities being curtailed, direct, short-term improvement in air and water quality, lower greenhouse gas emissions and lower levels of noise pollution were registered. However, there have also been negative impacts such as an increase in production and use of single-use plastics. In this respect, in 2020, Malta has once again seen an appreciation towards environmental conservation and awareness to restore balance through sustainable choices and actions.

At the EU level, Malta continued to follow and contribute to the discussions on the European Green Deal. The European Green Deal aims to address the key challenges facing the environment and ensure that the EU economy is sustainable. The intention is to ensure that the EU is resource-efficient whilst maintaining its competitive advantage. Additionally, the MECP has continued to provide technical review of other EU environmental dossiers, including review of the proposals for an 8th Environment Action Programme (EAP), which supports the environment and climate action objectives of the European Green Deal. Technical input was also provided towards the European Semester process through the EU Expert Group Meeting on Greening the European Semester and the Environmental Implementation Review (EIR). Discussions focused mainly on how the greening of the annual macro-economic processes at the EU level can contribute to the delivery of the European Green Deal.

On a national level, NSO carried out a second study concerning green jobs. The main scope was to update data gathered in 2016 and publish a second version of the Green Jobs Survey. The target population for this survey consisted of enterprises employing five or more employees based on a number of pre-selected economic activity codes (NACE codes). A custom-made questionnaire was mailed out to enterprises in March 2020 with data collection concluding in mid-June. Economic activities covered by the survey included: agriculture, forestry and fishing, mining and quarrying, manufacturing, electricity, gas steam and air conditioning supply; water supply sewerage, waste management and remediation activities, construction, wholesale and retail trade, repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles, accommodation and food service activities, information and communication, a part of financial and insurance activities, transportation and storage, professional, scientific and technical activities, and finally administrative and support service activities.

International science and education programs, such as the GLOBE Programme, in which Malta is actively participating, are also key in advancing and promoting the teaching and learning of science, enhancing environmental literacy and stewardship, and promoting scientific discovery.

In the 2019/20 scholastic year, GLOBE Malta registered 43 State, Church, and Independent schools (22 Primary schools, 3 Middle Schools, 15 Secondary Schools, and 3 Post-Secondary Schools), 3 Field Study Centres and 139 Citizen Scientists participating in the programme. Projects conducted within the GLOBE program framework included:

- A Weather Observer Programme, which is a Citizen-Science Project in local schools supported by the University of Malta.
- Cloud observations, culminating in The Cloud Challenge supported by the US Embassy and the Malta Embassy in Washington, D.C. Cloud type and cover, which were observed through the GLOBE Observer App.
- The participation of ten schools in the European Phenology Campaign. Students selected a tree, observed its growth from buds to leaves and upload their measurements into the GLOBE database. Following the success of the previous year there was an increase of schools participating in the campaign. All schools successfully completed all four activities and were awarded virtual badges, certificates, and honour rolls. This investigation also led to the development of a joint project with Israeli schools on the biological, social and cultural value of fig trees.
- Turtle Nest Site Observations and establishing a new International Collaboration with Del Mar Academy of Costa Rica. GLOBE students collected data about sand temperature at various depths, surface temperature, air pressure, humidity and air temperature from the turtle nest site at Ramla Bay, Gozo. Through the GLOBE Programme, students collected and compared data and investigated whether different environmental conditions and climate change are affecting turtle nests.
- A GLOBE school developed an international collaboration through eTwinning that investigated whether plastic affects seawater temperature and potential of hydrogen (pH) levels. The investigation was presented at the International Virtual Science Symposium (IVSS) 2020 and was awarded 4 merit badges.
- A GLOBE school collected, observed and recorded rainfall, rainwater pH level and air temperature during winter. They compared it with data from previous years and analysed if there was a change in amount of rainfall through the years and any trend in temperatures. The investigation was presented at IVSS 2020 and was awarded 3 merit badges.

The policies and measures delineated in this Chapter are linked to a number of SDGs namely SDGs 2, 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 line with the obligations as an ANNEX I nation under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Malta successfully submitted its Fourth Biennial Report on Climate. At an EU level, Malta has agreed to an increased Union-wide target to reduce emissions by 55% by 2030 over 1990 levels. This renewed commitment was reflected in Malta's National Determined Contribution, which was submitted to the UNFCCC jointly by the EU on behalf of Malta and the other 26 Member States. During 2020, the annual National Inventory Report of GHG for the 2021 submission to the UNFCCC, covering the year 2019, was prepared and reviewed for submission in January 2021.

On climate change mitigation, work on Malta's Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS) has continued. Following continued consultation with relevant stakeholders and Governmental bodies, a draft is near completion and is expected to be approved for public consultation by Quarter 1 of 2021. The LCDS outlines the pathway for decarbonising Malta's economy through a series of mitigation and adaption measures across sectors. To achieve its scope, the Strategy will aim to ensure a cost effective, fair, and just transition to reach carbon neutrality by 2050. It shall mainstream decarbonisation across all economic sectors reducing emissions in the process without hindering economic growth, at the same time addressing vulnerabilities

through adaptation action. Steps began in parallel to begin a plan of an Action Plan outlining the steps to be taken to implement the LCDS. The Action Plan and the implementation of the LCDS are expected to begin in 2021.

On climate change adaptation, Malta is preparing to kick off the works related to a Climate Vulnerability and Risk Assessment (VRA) for the Maltese Islands. The VRA is expected to be conducted between 2021-2022 and finalised in 2023. Furthermore, MECP has continued monitoring the implementation of the National Climate Change Adaption Strategy, published in 2012.

Climate change and climate action have also become an integral part of the education system, whereby educators, together with schoolchildren, are receiving education and training on issues relating to this subject. The DLAP within MFED, in collaboration with MCAST and MECP, will soon launch the Young Innovators Initiative. The programme is being coordinated by Climate KIC. Through this initiative, educators within participating schools will benefit from a training programme that empowers educators to take supported steps towards systems change thinking, creativity and entrepreneurial mindsets. Climate change is one of the major themes also addressed by the EkoSkola programme.

In addition, ITS and SUNx Malta have partnered to develop a Climate Friendly Travel Education Capacity Building programme, which is part of an EU-led programme for 100,000 STRONG Climate Champions in all UN Member States by 2030. The aim is to have a Strategy Support System for Malta as a Global Centre of Climate Friendly Travel that will be consistent with the Paris Agreement, the SDGs and the European Green New Deal. The developed training programme is in the form of a Diploma at MQF Level 4, with Total Credits of 120 ECVET. It will be taught over a 12-month period in two semesters followed by a one-year internship with the International Institute for Peace through Tourism (IIPT).

3.2 Secure, Clean and Efficient Energy

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.

During 2020, Malta continued to sustain its efforts in ensuring a shift towards cleaner energy through the promotion of renewable energy sources and energy efficiency measures. This was reflected in the various initiatives and projects that took place over the course of the year.

Government Ministries, Departments and Entities were also instrumental in adopting energy-efficient practices in their operations and implement energy efficiency upgrading and retrofitting of buildings, with measures ranging from investments in energy-efficient electrical hardware, sensor-based electricity switches, electric vehicles, PV systems, double glazing and efficient lighting systems, upgrading and retrofitting of public buildings.

As part of the 5th Dimension of the Energy Union Strategy required to be covered by the NECP, the Energy and Water Agency (EWA) within MESD has been entrusted with the development of Malta's National Strategy for R&I in both Energy and Water. The Strategy document is intended to provide a high-level framework for research activity in these two sectors for the period 2021-2030. This was officially launched on 17 June 2020.

The development of the National Strategy for R&I in Energy and Water is closely linked to the European drive to expand and further R&I activities. This is increasingly viewed as a cross-cutting 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 national and EU energy and water policy, with a view towards the wider goals of decarbonisation, sustainability, and affordability.

3.2.1 Renewable Energy

By the year 2020, Malta committed to meet a 10% renewable energy target in line with the Union's international commitments under the Paris Agreement. As part of Malta's drive to maximize its effective renewable energy potential, Government continued to increase its efforts to support the deployment of local renewable energy by encouraging the deployment of technologies such as solar PVs, solar water heaters and heat pump water heaters. This was done through a number of policies, projects and initiatives as outlined in various key policy framework documents such as the revised National Renewable Energy Action Plan (NREAP, published in 2017) and the National Energy and Climate Plan (NECP, published in 2019).

The Government continued to extend various financial initiatives and grant schemes for renewable energy deployment in 2020, such as the purchasing of solar water heaters (SWHs) and heat pump water heaters (HPWHs) through a grant covering 50% of the eligible cost (capped at €700). Feed-in Tariffs (FiTs) to promote the purchasing of PV systems were also made available to both residential and commercial systems. Moreover, the competitive bidding process for solar PV installations of more than 1 MW was amended to allow for systems above 400 kWp, providing a wider range of installations the opportunity to compete for a tariff above the administratively set tariff. Also launched in 2020 was the Battery Storage Scheme, administered by the Regulator for Energy and Water Services (REWS). This scheme aims to increase a consumer's flexibility in their ability to utilise energy generated by PV systems (own-use).

The biggest contribution towards Malta's renewable transport share in 2020 was met by its successful implementation of the substitution obligation target for biofuel blending, which obliged automotive petrol and diesel importers to achieve a 10% blending share in 2020 as well as a 0.1% share of advanced biofuels. As highlighted in the NECP, Malta is planning to extend this obligation to achieve a 14% biofuel and 3.5% advanced biofuel-blending share by 2030.

As part of Malta's forward outlook and ambition in continuously increasing its renewable energy contribution, the Government is currently focusing on the potential deployment of offshore renewable solutions at pilot level, whilst also acquiring further information on Malta's offshore Renewable Energy Source (RES) 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, the Connecting Europe Facility and the Union RES financing mechanism, which are key to bridging the financial gap of such projects thus enabling in the attainment of commercial feasibility.

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.

EWA has continued providing its service in households through home visits carried out free of charge; sharing knowledge with residents on how to lower their energy and water bills through the implementation of small everyday changes with regards to energy efficiency and water conservation. For these last 4 years, until the end of 2020, circa 3,500 household visits have been carried out. Furthermore, during the COVID-19 pandemic period, assistance was also given to residents over the phone, whereas issues with utility billing and high consumption were still dealt with.

EWA, in collaboration with Agencies for the Community and Therapeutic Services, Appoġġ and other agencies within the Foundation for Social Welfare Services identified vulnerable persons within the Maltese



social strata who could best benefit from targeted energy efficiency measures. 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 (depending on the condition of the appliance), 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. A publicity campaign was also launched to promote this initiative. The scheme was launched in 2017 and during 2020, new appliances continued to be distributed. A new contract for supply of appliances was signed in late 2019, with 375 new appliances to be distributed all throughout 2020 until March 2021.

The Market Surveillance Directorate (MSD) within the Malta Competition and Consumer Affairs Authority (MCCAA) participated in a joint market surveillance action funded by the EU to help deliver the intended economic and environmental benefit of the Ecodesign Directive 2009/125/EC and the Energy labelling Directive 2010/30/EU (repealed in 2017 and replaced by Regulation (EU) 2017/1369). This project aimed at testing and building capacity in the Member States on household and professional refrigeration with regards to efficiency requirements. Through cooperation with other EU Member States, the project has generated significant benefits for both the environment and the consumers. Joint

actions taken as part of this projects resulted in the estimated saving of primary energy loss of 80 GWh per year for the period 2020-2030 for all participating Member States, which translates into substantial energy-related cost savings.⁹

Another initiative that took place in 2020 was a Double-Glazing Scheme for Birżebbuġa Residents, administered by REWS, which has been fully exhausted, and applications were deactivated from 18 December 2020. The scope for this scheme was to aid those households of Birżebbuġa to replace any external facing apertures that are antiquated or inefficient and change them to better sound insulating ones.

To assist sport organisations in reducing their energy consumption by improving their overall energy performance through an increase in energy efficiency, EWA, together with SportMalta have launched the 'Leading sport organisations to higher energy efficiency' scheme. During 2020, through a €1 million Fund, a total of 41 sport clubs invested in renewable and energy efficient interventions achieving more than 650 MWh annual savings.

The Promotion of Energy Audits in Small and Medium Sized Enterprises Scheme was also extended throughout 2020. This scheme encourages SMEs to carry out an energy audit in order to identify actions leading to energy improvement.

During 2020, EWA launched a report analysing the trends related to energy in the local manufacturing

⁹ https://eepliant.eu/images/Documents/EEPLIANT2/EEPLIANT2-Laymans_Report.pdf

sector. The aim of the report was that of understanding the tendencies that industries have when it comes to energy patterns in their plants. Through a series of in-depth interviews with tens of local SMEs and non-SMEs, the report highlighted the struggles and challenges that they face in their operations.

In recent years, Enemalta plc embarked on an extensive programme to ensure an efficient distribution system that minimises losses, operating the system in an efficient manner. This included the upgrading and expansion of major nodes of the national electricity network to improve the quality of service. Enemalta plc has also installed 99% of its consumers with smart meters and has adopted a tariff system that favours prudent energy use and energy efficiency, with the aim of fostering such behaviour in its final consumers. The smart metering project is now complete.

In the year 2020, Malta had also started undertaking an Electricity Supply Study that will be continued in 2021, which shall determine the country's electricity needs and optimal energy mix until 2035–2040. This will determine the future energy needs of the country and possible options for further investments in Malta's energy system.

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 2020, MECP presented the new Waste Management Plan for the Maltese Islands 2021–2030 for public consultation. The ten-year Plan represents Government's ambitious vision towards a circular economy.

In line with SDG Target 12.3, food waste features prominently in Malta's Waste Prevention Programme. The latter includes a range of measures to reduce food waste at retail and consumer levels, as well as post-harvest losses. Some examples include banning food waste to landfill, prohibiting supermarkets from throwing away food following a voluntary industry agreement to limit food waste and educate consumers, research into reasons for food waste and loss at primary production, amending restrictive legislation, which limits redistribution, promoting 'gleaning', and supporting digital applications and channels for redistribution and food sharing initiatives. The plan also discusses measures that will indirectly help to reduce food waste such as promoting local and seasonal food and expanding education on cooking within schools and communities.

In addition, and in line with SDG Target 12.5, the Waste Prevention Programme for the Maltese Islands 2021–2030 will aim to facilitate the prevention of waste and the reuse of materials by industry, government, citizens, and tourists. This implies a collaborative approach from all who generate waste in their personal, professional, or corporate capacity. The goal is to reduce the generation of food waste, electronics, textiles, single-use plastics, packaging, non-packaging paper, and waste from construction and demolition.

Through the Waste Prevention Programme, the Ministry aims to:

- Foster a culture of resource efficiency by encouraging sustainable consumption, changing attitudes towards preventing unnecessary use, repairing and reusing items and making sustainable choices the norm;
- Create new business opportunities for greener products, repair services and secondary markets; and
- Provide economic incentives to support civil society organisations with voluntary prevention and reuse initiatives.

The Programme proposes a range of measures to incentivise greener business processes and prompt societal change towards smarter consumption patterns. Efforts include economic incentives, legislative measures, the promotion of voluntary measures, capacity building, digitalisation, research and development, and education and awareness-raising.

Some examples include supporting food redistribution initiatives, creating a regulatory framework to enable people to opt out of unaddressed mail, the establishment of a repair and reuse centre for repair and resale of second-hand items including textiles, electronics, toys and furniture, encouraging skills training for repair and reuse activities, promoting education and awareness on waste prevention across various sectors, and working to embed waste prevention into the curriculum.

This is also in line with the EU funded project 'Encouraging Sustainable Waste Practices in Households and Beyond', which carried out a publicity campaign providing the necessary information and guidelines on how to separate waste at source. Complementing the awareness campaign, the project also provided ventilated and stackable bins, which were distributed to all households in Malta and Gozo as well as a number of kerbside collection vehicles which visit localities and collect waste which would otherwise end up in landfills.

In addition to the above, MECP held discussions with the hospitality sector in the year 2020 to reform the criteria related to waste management within the Eco-Certification Scheme.

Moreover, MECP, in collaboration with Malta Enterprise, has worked on an investment grant-guiding document to support retail outlets and other undertakings in the retail value chain to invest in in-store solutions to support the reduction of packaging and single-use plastic through bulk dispensers. The implementation of this grant is envisaged for 2021.

The Waste Management Plan also addresses specifically waste arising from commercial establishments, which is an untapped resource, since it is less regulated. Incentives to increase waste separation at source leading to lower volumes of mixed waste and increase the recycling rate are at the core of the measures proposed therein. The intention is to implement measures to promote the prevention of waste and secure the correct separation at source to maximise the recycling potential of organic and recyclable waste from commercial entities. This is to be achieved not least through the introduction of a pay-as-you-throw mechanism in line with the Polluter Pays Principle.

Recently, in collaboration with key stakeholders, a set of guidelines to assist event organisers in limiting the environmental impact of their events were also developed. Event organisers are encouraged to implement initiatives to reduce the generation of

food waste and single-use plastics, and guidance has been offered for small, medium and large-scale events. Such a document proposes guidance on selecting sustainable products for use, ensuring effective waste management, and communicating environmental initiatives to attendees.

Furthermore, during 2020, ERA worked on the Construction and Demolition Waste Strategy, which will further help the transition for Malta to move towards a more circular economy and hence closing the loop of products' lifecycles. 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 highlight the possible short-term and long-term measures to be adopted, with a view to shifting the treatment of such waste from backfilling to the re-use and recycling.

The Strategy identifies four main priority areas that are crucial for the management of construction and demolition waste:

- Planning and design: targets the construction industry, with specific measures aiming to tackle the problem at source by demolishing or constructing in a sustainable manner;
- Waste management: lists specific measures to improve waste logistics both at the development site as well as off-site;
- Quality management: focuses on measures associated with increasing the confidence in construction and demolition waste management practices as well as improving the quality of construction and demolition recycled materials; and
- Policy and regulatory framework: deals with improvements in policy and framework conditions to break the link between development and waste generation.

Moreover, the Strategy seeks to:

- Establish standards for the construction industry;
- Promote innovation through research and development;
- Introduce a new regulatory framework directed at the management of construction and demolition waste;
- Allow for mandatory training;
- Encourage home restoration projects;
- Improve waste classification and source separation;
- Explore ways of introducing the Polluter Pays Principle;
- Extract resources at development sites; and
- Promote markets for secondary raw materials.

Several Ministries, Departments and Entities have been instrumental in implementing waste management strategies within their daily operations. These new practices range from appointment of Green Leaders, adopting email policies and use of recycled paper that reduce paper usage to the introduction of waste containers and water dispensers to better recycle waste and reduce the use of plastic.

3.4 Chemical Management

Several studies linked with the assessment of land degradation in Malta, in line with the obligations under the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), are currently being drafted and awaiting to be published. Throughout these studies, the state of soil contamination in the Maltese Islands will also be assessed, albeit for a limited number of chemical pollutants. Furthermore, these studies will include a more detailed soil analysis, as previously carried out for Malta Soil Information System projects (MALSIS 1 and 2).



Furthermore, through the process of environmental permits, air and water quality is ensured through the stipulation of conditions aimed at controlling emissions to air and water and hence ensuring minimal impacts on the environment. Management of chemicals and wastes in permitting facilities is catered for through permit conditions, which require adequate storage, handling and disposal of both chemicals and waste generated. Through the Annual Environment Reports submitted by operators of environmentally permitted installations, ERA gathers information on waste generation and management, air and water emissions.

In relation to monitoring of soil (land), ERA is involved in the reviewing of land contamination studies which are requested as part of consultation on developments where there is suspected or known history of contamination and through the baseline report, which operators of IPPC installations are required to undertake following submission of a risk assessment in line with Regulation 16(2) of the Industrial Emissions Regulations (S.L. 549.77).

From a compliance and enforcement perspective, ERA carries out monitoring of conditions in environmental permits, takes any enforcement action as necessary, and carries out investigation of complaints related to any such pollution. For installations utilising chemicals and waste management sites that receive and/or treat waste, ERA has continued to strengthen its environmental permitting system to ensure that the impacts on the environment is minimised and mitigated as much as possible.

3.5 Water Conservation

Key Sustainable Development Goal Targets

SDG 6.3 By 2030, improve water quality by reducing pollution, eliminating dumping and minimising release of hazardous chemicals and materials, halving the proportion of untreated wastewater and substantially increasing recycling and safe reuse globally.

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 6.b Support and strengthen the participation of local communities in improving water and sanitation management.

SDG 12.2 By 2030, achieve the sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources.

The scope of ERA's environmental permitting procedures has been widened to cover additional industrial sectors to ensure a holistic approach towards the protection of waters through regulation of direct and indirect emissions to waters in line with the EU Water Framework Directive (WFD) and its daughter Directives. A feedback mechanism is ensured throughout the whole process targeting alignment of the permitting processes with WFD provisions, as well as implementation of any follow-up action deemed necessary to achieve WFD objectives.

A monitoring strategy for contaminants of emerging concern was developed in 2020 through the LIFE IP RBMP project (LIFE 16 IPE MT 008), a project led by the EWA with the objective of supporting the implementation of the 2nd River Basin Management Plan (RBMP) under the WFD. The programme for the assessment of the contaminants of emerging concern targets a list of contaminants, selected for four water categories (including inland surface waters and groundwater) based on their use characteristics and risks to human health and the environment. The monitoring will now be implemented over a period of 3-4 years and will encompass detailed analytical assessments on the presence of emerging contaminants of concern in the water environments. The results will help guide the development of future monitoring programmes and, depending on the toxicity of the contaminants, can also inform management and/or licensing processes.

Throughout 2020, work on the planning for the implementation of Concrete Action C.6 "Demonstration Site for the Application of New Water Resources – Gozo" under LIFE 16 IPE MT 008, continued. This action is being implemented in three stages:

- the construction of a bi-partisan reservoir for the storage of New Water and groundwater;
- the necessary infrastructure and pumping equipment for efficient irrigation of different sections of the farm; and
- trials to demonstrate the safe use of New Water relative to groundwater and rainwater for crop irrigation.

During the period under review, there was an agreement on the site for the construction of the bi-partisan reservoir. During this same year, a tender for the geotechnical investigations was published. The results from the geotechnical investigations should enable the Architect in Charge to complete and finalise the construction drawings for the reservoir. Coring on site shall begin in early 2021.

As part of the drafting of Malta's 3rd RBMP, consultation was made on 'Significant Water Management Issues' for Malta for the coming 7-year period. The identification of these significant issues marks the first part of the consultation process leading to the formulation of the 3rd RBMP of which aim is to continue on the 2nd RBMP. The latter fully recognises Malta's challenges to meet an increasing demand for water. It thus introduced an action framework based on the conjunctive use of water demand management and supply augmentation measures to ensure that such demand is met in a cost-effective and sustainable manner, which affords a high level of protection to the natural water environment.

The 'Chadwick Lakes Regeneration Project', referred to earlier in the Report of which EWA is responsible, progressed significantly throughout 2020. 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 2020, works included the restoration of rubble walls, planting of new trees and the restoration of the Fiddien Box – a structure built when Malta was still under British rule and which was used to supply water. The latter will now be used as an interpretation centre, whilst the surroundings will be recreational areas. Works are also progressing on the removal of waste that has built up along the years and which has covered important features of the 19th century structure which forms part of the water passageway. Various studies have so far been carried out to establish a nature-trail, which will facilitate access to the public to enjoy and to learn about the valley's biodiversity.

During 2020, works continued on the reservoirs of the South of Malta and on the extension of the distribution network for reclaimed water (also known as 'New Water') in the North and South of the island. Currently, New Water is being produced by three polishing plants and provides an alternative resource for agricultural irrigation, thus contributing to achieving sustainable water use outcomes, in good part by reducing extraction of groundwater. To note that New Water is treated wastewater thoroughly filtered using a tertiary treatment process. This results in the production of high-quality water, which is safe for the environment and for use by the agricultural, industrial and landscaping sectors.

The Water Services Corporation (WSC), continued with the implementation of the €130 Million major project titled 'Towards a Net Zero-Impact Utility', which is partly funded by the EU. This consists of a number of large separate projects each contributing to substantially increasing the quality of tap water, reduce carbon emissions, increase efficiencies and safeguard Malta's groundwater resources.

To decrease leakage risks and at the same time contribute towards the conservation of water, WSC started offering a free-of-charge monitoring service to consumers, which service is designed to analyse water consumption. This system helps consumers (residential households and businesses alike) to monitor their water usage and consequently detect any abnormal use, which would possibly be the result of a leakage.

Continuation of the 'Water – Be the Change' campaign entered in its second year, being launched in 2019 for a period of three years. This campaign is the National Water Conservation Campaign and was launched with the aim to address all consumers and deliver an effective educational and awareness raising campaign on the optimised and efficient use of water resources. Town tours were temporarily suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic but had then resumed in summer. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, EWA's National Conservation Awareness Centre had to close. Nonetheless, the Centre was still committed to delivering its educational and awareness sessions, this time in a virtual way. Throughout 2020, in fact, a number of short lessons on water were launched. To note, these lessons could be easily used by parents to teach their young ones on water as well as by teachers to be used in online classes.

3.6 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.

During 2020, the Rural Affairs Department (RAD) has embarked on a project that will see the implementation of several measures identified in the National Agricultural Policy¹⁰ for the Maltese Islands 2018–2028.

¹⁰ National Agricultural Policy available at: https://agrikultura.gov.mt/en/agricultural_directorate/Documents/nationalAgriculturalPolicy/napFinal.pdf

Moreover, throughout 2020, the Agriculture Directorate has continued to work on the drafting of the first ever National Agricultural Act while it continued to strengthen existing legislation. One Legal Notice published in 2020 is the Preservation of Fertile Soil (Amendment) Regulations 2020, which amended the parent Act 236 Fertile Soil Preservation Act published as LN342/2020. This Legal Notice is intended to regulate even further the preservation of fertile soil particularly when an activity is intended to take place, which could result or may risk degeneration or loss of fertile soil. The Legal Notice equips the Competent Authority with the required tools to assess and evaluate any intended activity pertinent to fertile soil and prevent its loss.

Legislative changes were also carried out by the Animal Health and Welfare Department (AHWD). Two noticeable Legal Notices published in 2020 were the Animal Health Problems Affecting Intra-Community Trade in Bovine Animals and Swine (Amendment) Regulations, 2020 published as LN340/2020, and the Bovine Animals (Identification and Registration) and Beef Labelling (Amendment) Rules, 2020 published as LN341/2021.

The amended legislation entitled Animal Health Problems Affecting Intra-Community Trade in Bovine Animals and Swine Regulations provides better tools to the Veterinary and Phytosanitary Regulation Division (VRD) to implement the legislation effectively and safeguard more the public interest to assure the traceability of the end product (traceability from stable to table). Furthermore, in case an outbreak of a particular disease occurs, it will facilitate the VRD's work in identifying the animals' origin.

The Bovine Animals (Identification and Registration) and Beef Labelling Rules empowers the Director responsible for Veterinary Services to order DNA tests on a selected number of bovines for traceability purposes, in line with EU Regulation 1760/2000.

Another legislative change is the public consultation for a Draft Legal Notice on the Keeping of Wild Animals in Zoos Regulations 2020. The proposed Legal Notice aims to amend and update existing legislation, Legal Notice 265 of 2003, The Keeping of Wild Animals in Zoos Regulations, 2003. The proposed Legal Notice also intends to address unregulated areas in the protection of wild fauna and the conservation of biodiversity by providing for the adoption of licensing, registration and inspection of zoos on the territory of Malta in order to strengthen the role of zoos in the conservation of biodiversity, protect the health and well-being of wild animals, and to protect the public from these animals. Over 1,400 responses, including a good number of detailed submissions by advisory bodies, public authorities, NGOs, private individuals, veterinarians, and animal keepers, were received through the government portal by its closure on 07 December 2020. The feedback is being analysed and this Legal Notice is planned to be published in 2021.





3.6.1 New Services to Farmers

Following the Agriculture and Rural Payments Agency (ARPA)'s work on the drafting and adoption of Legal Notice 99 of 2019¹¹, which sets out the legal framework required for the setting up, recognition and registration of Farm Advisory Services, such service has been set up through which farmers/beneficiaries may benefit from technical advisory support which assists them to satisfy their legal obligations pertaining to applicable legislation in the agricultural sector and the relevant funding schemes under which they are benefitting.

In fact, 2020 also marked the establishment of AgriConnect, a one-stop-shop advisory service for farmers. The AgriConnect has been established to act as the Government's Farm Advisory Service provider for Malta to provide a free and holistic advisory service, which ensures that hard-working farmers in Malta and Gozo have access to the qualitative technical support which they need and deserve. The goal is to support farmers in fully exploiting the fruit of their work, whilst catalysing the achievement of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) objectives most particularly those related to agri-environmental climate measures. Such support facilitates the achievement of all the necessary compliance and technical requirements to access other types of funding and advisory support which can help

farmers tap into diversification opportunities, produce higher quality and/or innovative products and explore new farming techniques, as well as plan and structure their farming business effectively in every respect.

As part of the promotion of quality food products, efforts are being made in promoting sustainable farming practices, in particular organic production. This promotion is aimed at the farming community to encourage the shift to sustainable agricultural practices through decreased farming inputs such as chemical pesticides or synthetic fertilizers. While yields from organic production tend to be lower, this sustainable practice plays a significant role in food security, enhancing biodiversity, and promoting ecosystem services in general, such as improving soil quality and organic matter.

3.6.2 Support during the COVID-19 Pandemic and Beyond

The COVID-19 pandemic has hit the local agricultural sector hard. Due to the pandemic, Malta has lost one of its main economic pillars; the tourism industry. This decline in tourism, together with other precautionary measures taken on a national level to contain the virus such as the temporary closure of bars and catering establishments, has affected heavily other dependent sectors including the agri-food sector.

¹¹ Legal Notice available at: <http://justiceservices.gov.mt/DownloadDocument.aspx?app=lp&itemid=29584&l=1>

Some sectors, especially the milk sector, are finding it difficult to adapt to the current situation due to a fall in demand for fresh milk. A similar sudden fall in demand has been experienced by our wine industry in view that local wines are usually consumed as a local product by tourists in hotels and restaurants. This is also the case for the supply of fresh products such as fruit, vegetables and fish aimed at the catering industry. For this reason, in order to support the agricultural sector, the RAD launched a media campaign titled Aghżel Frisk, Aghżel Bnin to promote local and fresh agricultural produce with the aim to boost demand among the local population.

The negative impact of the pandemic has also brought about a need for financial support for the local agricultural sector. In this regard, ARPA has worked on the development of nationally funded schemes, which provide financial support to land and livestock farmers whose activities and income has been negatively impacted by the pandemic. A total of €4 million (€1.5 million to Land Farmers and €2.5 million to livestock farmers) were disbursed.

Further to the support schemes related to the negative impacts brought about by the pandemic, the Ministry through ARPA has also proceeded with implementation of other nationally funded support scheme providing compensation to farmers suffering from losses due to damages caused to their structures by the bad storm, which hit the Maltese islands in February 2019. ARPA has also worked on the drafting and adoption of the national legislative framework required for quick and effective roll-out of future compensation schemes if/when such need arises.

3.6.3 Increase in CAP Funding for the next Programming Period 2021-2027

Throughout the past year, the Ministry for Agriculture, Fisheries, Food and Animal Rights (MAFA) has remained as one the primary stakeholders in the discussions and negotiations on the future CAP reform, ensuring that Malta's interests are safeguarded at all times and that the best possible package for the local agricultural sector is achieved. While negotiations on the legislative package are still to be concluded, albeit being at an advanced stage, the financial package for support over the next years has been adopted and guarantees Malta a 38% increase in CAP funding 2021-2027 when compared to the current period. In this regard, the Ministry, through the ARPA, has also began making the necessary adaptations in order to ensure smooth and correct implementation of the provisions of the transitional regulation and the future CAP legislation.

3.6.4 Responsible Consumption and Production

As of last year, food coming from the Pitkali Markets that is still fit for consumption but is not sold is collected and given to NGOs which help people in need – this will not only help reduce hunger but also reduce food wastage.

The Pitkali central vegetable market is also undergoing a reform that will place farmers as the central focus point in all activities but particularly to ensure they have a more just price return for their products. The Pitkali Reform will lead to greater controls and better governance as well as improvement in organisation transparency. The reform will not change the current system but will give a better account of sales and will cover waste while the farmers will have information on their sales and the sale price there and then. The proposed reform also covers better packaging and presentation of agricultural produce.

As part of this Reform process, Pitkali is also implementing a new IT system, which, as a result, will enable to reduce food wastage by processing food along with helping people in need with food which is not sold during market days and all operations will go online. This new IT system will also allow a significant reduction of the amount of paper used for the collection of the data of the produce sold at the Pitkali Markets.

3.6.5 Towards Sustainable Management of Livestock Manure

Throughout 2020, the Government's Agricultural Bioresources Agency (GAB) has invested in the purchase of three mobile dewatering trucks capable of efficiently dewatering farm slurry. This investment paves the way for a long-term solution for the sustainable management of livestock manure. Farm slurry, which currently is considered as a problem to manage, shall be eventually dewatered on-farms and the resulting solid and liquid fractions while being managed separately will also be subject to a battery of chemical analysis so as to better understand the composition of the different matrix and thus be in a better position to implement a long-term sustainable process. This action will allow for a better understanding and management of farm manure/slurry and will ensure that the activities of livestock farms will not be of concern or threat to environment protection.

3.6.6 Investments to Reduce the Carbon Impact of the Public Abattoir

Over the last year or so, the Public Abattoir has invested around €500,000 to reduce its carbon impact and enhance the sustainability of its operations by improving process efficiency and reduce the environmental impact of production.

One particular investment is the installation of circa 700 PV panels for the generation of 250 kWp. The Public Abattoir's electricity demand ranges from an average of 4,000 kWh in winter to an average of 5,500 kWh in summer. A substantial part goes to the operation of the chillers that maintain the temperature of the meat at a level of about 1-2°C, and to keep the processing halls at an adequate temperature to reduce the risk of contamination. The investment will reduce the electricity bill over a year by a third and cover the maximum demand

for most of the day as well as minimising emissions. It is expected that the system will generate circa 377,500 kWh of electricity per year, saving around 245 tonnes of CO₂.

Moreover, the public abattoir has invested in the installation of a hybrid system that combines solar water heaters and gas boilers instead of a water heating system based on old heavy fuel oil boilers. The boiler system consists of five gas-fired boilers of different sizes and four solar water heaters. Between them, they ensure a continuous supply of hot water at temperatures of 83°C, 60°C, and 40°C throughout the slaughterhouse. This investment enhances efficiency, fosters cleanliness in the plant and at the same time substantially reduce emissions of CO₂ and other gases and thus help meet the country's targets in the field of climate change, air quality.

3.6.7 Towards the Prevention and Containment of Anti-Microbial Resistance

The National Veterinary Laboratory (NVL) Veterinary Medicines Section (VMS) within the AHWD has also worked on the aforementioned National Anti-Microbial Resistance Strategy and Action Plan for the Prevention and Containment of AMR in Malta (2020-2028).

In 2020, changes in legislation which contain new provisions directly related with the prudent use of antimicrobials and also effective ways for enforcement have been proposed through a draft bill that amends the current Veterinary Services Act (Chapter 437) and Legal Notice that amends the current Veterinary Medicinal Products Regulations. This bill is planned to be published in 2021.

Moreover, an increase in staff complement dedicated to the authorisation of Veterinary Medicinal Products (VMPs) is leading to a more robust evaluation procedure for the authorisation of such VMPs. This 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 2020 as well, a number of VMPs were also removed from the 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. Several SOPs were compiled about antimicrobial sales data collection, data collection methodology during farm inspection and official call for wholesalers to submit antimicrobial data. This ensures that the necessary infrastructure is in place. Data on expired products for year 2019 was collected from veterinary wholesalers and veterinary pharmacies.

Throughout 2020, the NVL worked to strengthen relevant surveillance and feedback systems on anti-

microbial use and resistance in human and animal health. In 2020, various laboratory equipment had 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.

The consultants were to determine the feasibility of an extension within the current location or an alternative location and provide cost estimates for the different options. This feasibility study was led by three experts who carried out a three-day visit in October and issued the final report in January 2021.

Discussions have continued with the University of Malta (Agriculture Department) and MCAST to deliver more lectures to undergraduate agricultural students as visiting lecturers. The AHWD already delivered two lectures in 2020 and lectures are planned to resume in 2021.

In the meantime, several presentations and educative sessions have been organised for staff of the VRD, which focus on antimicrobial resistance and data on VMPs that can be collected from farms during official inspections. These sessions were mainly conducted online, although a number of them were made during joint inspections between staff member of VMS and VRD.

A circular about the latest European Medicines Agency (EMA) categorisation of antimicrobials has been sent to all prescribers and veterinary pharmacists. This categorises antimicrobials according to their importance (avoid, restrict, caution, prudence). This circular adds to the list of circulars issued by the VMS in previous years about antimicrobials.

The AHWD has continued to participate and collaborate with its EU and international partners, in particular the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) and EMA, through the European Surveillance of Veterinary Antimicrobial Consumption (ESVAC). Staff members of the AHWD have also attended Better Training for Safer Food (BTSF) on AMR and shared their knowledge with their peers.

3.6.8 Projects for Sustainable Agriculture and Food Security

In parallel to policy and services, MAFA has resumed with the implementation of the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020, which complement sustainability in agricultural policies. Malta's Rural Development Programme 2014-2020¹², jointly implemented by the Managing Authority and the

¹² Further information available at: <https://eufunds.gov.mt/en/EU%20Funds%20Programmes/European%20Agricultural%20Fund/Pages/Rural%20Development%20Programme%20for%20Malta%202007-2013/The-Rural-Development-Programme-for-Malta-2014---2020.aspx>

ARPA, sets out priority approaches and actions to achieve Malta's set agri-environmental-climate objectives. To achieve such objectives, financial support for farmers is provided through this programme to incentivise them to apply agricultural and farming practices that go over and above the mandatory baseline requirements. During the period under review, the following agri-environmental-climate measures committing farmers to apply these practices were undertaken:

- Control weeds in orchards and vineyards by mechanical, instead of chemical means;
- Maintain recommended tree species planted on slopes and terraces, and those planted to replace invasive alien species;
- Introduce bee boxes on holdings;
- Implement an Integrated Pest Management Plan targeting vineyards and orchards;
- Implement a Soil Management and Conservation Plan; and
- Integrate and maintain autochthonous Maltese plant species (carob and mulberry).

In addition, 2020 marked the year in which the Ghammieri Government Farm started being transformed into an Agricultural Research and Innovation Centre in which certain innovative agricultural practices such as precision farming are tested and which can ultimately serve as a showcase to local farmers.

Another milestone project that was approved for funding under the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) in 2020 was the AgriHub project. This project aims to intensify 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 artificial intelligence 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.

The AgriHub project will also be offering the necessary infrastructure for the Agriculture Directorate to be in a position to monitor areas of agricultural importance in Malta and to use information gathered from these sites to advise farmers on how to improve their agronomic practices. Through the project, the Directorate will also be developing a set of manuals that could be used as guidelines to the farming community on sustainable methods to be adopted to produce crops. Another aspect of the AgriHub project will be that of evaluating different fodder crops that could be cultivated in Malta and yield a higher nutritional to the livestock sector in Malta.

In parallel, the Plant Protection Directorate (PPD) is working in conjunction with other relevant stakeholders on the establishment of a National Gene Bank for the ex-situ conservation of indigenous agricultural crops and trees and wild indigenous and endemic plants species (plant genetic resources), both of which are of importance to Malta's natural heritage.

In 2020, the PPD finalised the implementation of a project financed by the European Food Safety Authority and continued to work on another project financed by the same authority. Both projects focus on the harmful organism *Phyllosticta citricarpa*, which causes citrus black spots on citrus species. These projects aim at providing a network between EU Member States, surveillance and the development of guidelines on the monitoring and control on this organism, which can cause devastating effects on the citrus market. The main work that has been carried out in 2020 consisted of compilation



of technical reports, collection of samples and submission for laboratory testing.

Additionally, the 2020 Pest Survey Programme (co-financed by the European Commission) involved the monitoring of 51 pests that attack a wide range of plants of agricultural, ornamental, and landscaping importance. These pests are considered of high importance at EU level and were classified into five priorities or classes. This work consisted of visual inspections, placing of traps, collection of samples and laboratory analysis of such samples, and awareness raising at national level.

Similarly, the NVL continued the Salmonella National Control Programme (SNCP) which aims to monitor and control zoonotic Salmonella infection in broilers and laying hens flocks. This Programme is according to provisions laid out in Commission Directive 2160/2003. The criteria established for broiler flocks by the said Directive aims to reduce the prevalence of Salmonella by achieving a reduction of the maximum annual percentage of flocks of broilers remaining positive for Salmonella enteritidis and Salmonella typhimurium including Monophasic Salmonella typhimurium serotypes equal to 1% or less, and in the case of laying hen flocks equal to 2% or less. The Union target shall be achieved every year based on the monitoring of the previous year.

The PPD has also initiated the administrative preparations for the FAST project – “Fighting Alien Species Transborder” that will be funded under Interreg Italia-Malta 2014-2020. MAFA will be a partner in this project. The main actions shall be aimed at the protection of the land and marine biodiversity of the area and in the sites of the Natura 2000 network. The UN has declared the year 2020 as the International Year of Plant Health with the aim of raising global awareness on how the protection of plants can help the environment, reduce poverty, eradicate hunger and increase economic development, thus achieving the SDGs adopted by this organisation. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the International Year of Plant Health 2020 was officially extended until mid-2021. The PPD launched the International Year of Plant Health 2020 at national level through a press conference and a technical workshop for relevant stakeholders held in October 2020. Promotional material has been prepared as part of the awareness campaign by Malta.

MGOZ has also been working towards promoting the value of sustainable agriculture in Gozo more. ‘Project Support for Conservation and Sustainable Use and Development of Genetic Resources in Agriculture’ is an EU funded project currently being implemented in Gozo. It includes the undertaking of research for the identification, conservation, and propagation of the genetic resources of Malta’s indigenous fruit trees (figs, almonds, and pomegranates) and the repopulation of the Maltese bee.

The project’s objectives are:

- To introduce and implement the concept of Functional Agrobiodiversity;
- To re-establish three of the local fruit trees; and
- To create an apiary in the Gozo Experimental Farm (GEF) to breed queens of the local honeybee race.

During 2020, a tender for the supply, delivery, and installation, testing and commissioning of laboratory equipment was issued in relation to this project. The delivery and installation of the equipment is expected to be carried out later in 2021.

3.7 Animal Welfare

During the year 2020, the Animal Welfare Directorate has been catalyst in taking measures that further placed animal welfare at the heart of sustainability.

A National Digital Conference on the Importance of Animals within our Community was held in 2020. This conference was addressed at NGOs and Local Councils. The conference highlighted the benefits reaped by citizens of all ages by engaging in activities with animals such as feeding and caring of local strays by the retired persons in the community or disabled persons working with animals such as horses, rabbits, cats and dogs. The aim was to encourage NGOs and Local Councils to work together on projects, which combine the welfare of stray and pet animals while engaging communities for the wellbeing of their residents.

The Local Council Care Fund, which is now in its second year, has allocated funds to 50 Local

Councils, which applied to set up projects that address the needs of animals in their communities. Projects ranged from the setting up of cat cafés, dog parks, management of veterinary care for stray animals, setting up of post-surgery care rooms, etc. This measure addresses the care of domestic animals while offering the opportunity to residents to engage with animals in their community.

Two neutering campaigns for stray cats were also launched in 2020. Feeders of stray cats were offered the opportunity to neuter the cats in their community. Controlling the population of stray cats not only helps to alleviate the spread of disease and possible zoonoses, but also curbs the loss of local biodiversity as cats tend to hunt and prey on small birds and reptiles.

Similarly, the Animal Welfare Fund, the Adoption Policy and Free Vet Services to NGOs help to curtail the proliferation of stray dogs and cats and thus protect biodiversity loss while ensuring the welfare of these domestic animals.

The Animal Welfare Department continued to offer on-call Animal Ambulance Service while the Department has continued its efforts to educate and raise awareness about animal welfare among the general public in the ultimate ambition that the greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated.

3.8 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) 2012–2020 for Malta serves as a national policy driver to integrate biodiversity concerns into relevant sectoral or cross-sectoral plans, programmes and policies, especially those that can have a bearing on Malta's biological and natural resources. In 2020, ERA finalised a review on the progress of implementation of the NBSAP 2012–2020, which was submitted to the UN Convention of Biological Diversity as Malta's Sixth National Report.

The intent and objectives for the Malta's NBSAP to 2030 have been published in July 2020 for public consultation. Following the public consultation, ERA has started working on the development of a new set of national measures and targets, in line with the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework under the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2030, integrating the first set of considerations received by the public and building on the lessons learnt from the implementation of Malta's NBSAP 2012–2020. In parallel with the drafting of the NBSAP, ERA will draft the relative National Biodiversity Financial Plan (NBFP) for the included measures. The aim of the NBFP is to identify funding requirements to effectively implement national measures for biodiversity, whilst prioritising potential new conservation funding mechanisms and/or sources to fill financial gaps.

In the context of the management of Natura 2000 sites, Malta has prepared a 'Prioritised Action Framework' (PAF), which is considered to be a strategic multiannual planning tool, aimed at providing a comprehensive overview of the measures that are needed to implement the EU-wide Natura 2000 network for the period 2021–2027.

Malta has identified the pathways of unintentional introduction and spread of Invasive Alien Species (IAS) of Union concern that require priority action. In 2020, an Action Plan Addressing Escape from Confinement of Invasive Alien Species of Union Concern, targeting pets, aquaria and terrarium species, was published along with the National Strategy for Preventing and Mitigating the Impact of Invasive Alien Species in the Maltese Islands and the accompanying National Codes of Good Practice on IAS. This has bolstered Malta's policy on IAS, whilst leading the way to the consideration of further policy development and effective implementation towards effectively tackling the issues concerning IAS.

The IAS Strategy consists of 25 recommendations and relevant measures intended for implementation between 2020–2025, focusing on various areas of implementation.

3.8.1 Land ecosystems and their services

Malta is implementing management measures within the terrestrial Natura 2000 sites, in line with the conservation measures adopted in December 2016 for the sites. Management agreements are also in place for some Natura 2000 sites, which aim to address conservation actions related to the control/removal of alien species, habitat restoration and to improve the conservation status of species within the sites. Furthermore, work has been ongoing in the identification and designation of new protected areas, including Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas, which host important natural habitat types and species, to expand further the Natura 2000 network in the Maltese Islands.

In line with the NBSAP and the requirements of the UNCCD, ERA is preparing a "National Action Plan on Desertification and Land Degradation in the Maltese Islands" that covers the period 2019–2030. The main objectives of the proposed National Action Plan are to:

- achieve soil protection, sustainable use of soil and land-degradation neutrality;
- enable progress on identifying contaminated and degraded soil sites, restoring degraded soils, defining the conditions for their good ecological status, introducing restoration objectives, and improving the monitoring of soil quality;
- identify the factors contributing to desertification and practical measures necessary to combat desertification and mitigate the effects of drought;
- identify the areas at risk of or subject to soil degradation on the basis of common elements/threshold values or rates. Once risk areas

are identified, risk reduction targets will be established, and programmes of measures developed to achieve the targets;

- develop long-term strategies to combat desertification, land degradation and the mitigation of the effects of drought, emphasising implementation;
- streamline and integrate the strategy with other policies, linked with biodiversity, climate change, soil, agriculture and land use, sustainable development and other relevant environmental policies;
- identify the factors contributing to desertification and practical measures necessary to combat desertification and mitigate the effects of drought; and
- specify the respective roles of government, local communities and land users and related resource needs.

Control or eradication of IAS (including IAS of EU concern) will remain a priority as part of the Malta's commitment towards the implementation of the terrestrial Natura 2000 conservation measures, while taking into consideration the EU Regulation on IAS.

To this end, the relevant entities, in particular ERA, Eco-Gozo and Ambjent Malta, are carrying out, or financing, various activities regarding the removal of IAS, focusing their efforts on key areas of ecological importance and IAS of Union concern. Other entities and interested parties, for instance environmental NGOs (eNGOs) and site managers, are also involved. ERA also embarked on both targeted and "ad hoc" surveillance to detect new IAS of EU concern, as well as to monitor present populations, verify reports submitted by stakeholders and the public, and assess the success of control actions undertaken. A number of locations considered as the most likely introduction points (or sites already hosting some of the recorded IAS of the EU concern) were identified for periodical (seasonal, annual or following removal actions as relevant) surveys, to allow an early detection or monitor success of control actions.

ERA has also undertaken various communication, education and public awareness activities aimed at educating the public on the risk and impacts caused by IAS. In this regard, various information material was produced and distributed to the public and relevant stakeholders through media platforms, particularly TV and social media.

In addition, SiMaSeed, an Interreg project currently being implemented by MGOZ, will see the setting up of seed banks for the conservation of biodiversity in Malta and Sicily. The project will focus 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 sites. During 2020, the tender for the Lab equipment was republished

and a steering committee meeting was also held online. The project will be extended until 27 October 2021 and during this period the installation of the equipment will continue to be undertaken.

During 2020, the Directorate for Rural Gozo within MGOZ continued with its programme of contributing to the greening of the island. Shrubs and trees continued to be planted along verges and roundabouts across the island 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. The Directorate has also a programme in place where it distributes up to five indigenous trees to the public to be planted in their fields.

Furthermore, ERA is also in the process of drafting an Action Plan for the conservation of the Maltese honey bee (*Apis mellifera ruttneri*), where relevant stakeholders, such as farmers and beekeepers, will be involved in contributing to the effectiveness of the Action Plan. Similarly, ERA will be assessing whether additional Action Plans for other important species need to be developed.

3.8.1.1 Valley Management

The second Water Catchment Management Plan (WCMP) identified the need to develop a strategic policy framework to encourage integrated valley management, taking into consideration the unique function of each valley environment. Such approach is being achieved through one of the actions of the LIFE 16 IPE MT 008, which is being implemented by Parks Malta, whereby a national structure is being developed to guide policy and management decisions balancing human and environmental needs in Malta's water catchment area. The project involves the formulation of Master Plans and Technical Guidelines for 16 major water catchments in Malta and Gozo. To date, the project has implemented ecological, hydrological and land-use studies in most water catchment areas, including the Wied il-Baħrija, Wied il-Kbir and Wied tax-Xlendi. One of the measures that has been published in July 2020 is the "Terms of Reference for the Management and Disposal of Dredged Material", which outlines the methodology to be used to determine the extent of contamination of dredged material and the ways by which the material should be managed and disposed.

Furthermore, Parks Malta implemented a number of initiatives directed at restoring the characteristics of valleys in order to strengthen their agro-environmental qualities. These valleys include Garnaw Valley in Santa Luċija, Ġnejna Valley in Mgarr, Ir-Rum Valley in Dingli, Fiddien Valley, Ġhomor Valley in San Ġwann and Swieqi. Parks Malta also implemented another separate project to restore Wied Liemu, involving the restoration of limestone water channels, removal of debris accumulated in the channels, restoration and substitution of crossings with arched stone bridges in order to complement and be consistent with existing

structures. Parks Malta also implemented a third project involving the rehabilitation of Wied Ġhajn Rihana in order to improve the water channels, remove invasive plants and trees and rebuild stone walls, plant 1,600 indigenous trees and shrubs in order to re-create habitats. The project also included the installation of gates, refuse bins and handrails.

Additionally, throughout 2020, the Eco-Gozo Directorate within MGOZ started to implement several related projects:

- The restoration of rubble walls along Marsalforn Road, which aims to restore around 4,000 metres of rubble walls and to conserve approximately 24,000m³ of soil annually due to the reduction in the occurrence of run-off and field flooding. 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 call for tenders for the restoration of rubble walls was combined with the same call for tenders for the upgrade of the same link between Victoria and Marsalforn. The tender was awarded late into the same year and works on the road and rubble walls across large stretches of Marsalforn road shall be starting in mid-2021.
- 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 Planning Authority (PA) permits for the rehabilitation of more than 10 valleys were submitted. By the end of the year, there were a number of these permits that were awaiting decision from the PA. Approvals or otherwise are expected in early 2021. Tenders for the works for the rehabilitation of valleys will be issued by the beginning of the second quarter of 2021. In the meantime, as part of the same EU funded project, implementation of the restoration of rubble walls across Gozo started. Works are currently ongoing on nine sites – Qasam San Ġorġ, Triq Hamimiet, Triq Santa Katarina Tal-Qabbieža, Triq Ġhajn Abdul, Triq Wied Junu, Triq il-Lanterna, Triq Daħlet Qorrot, Triq Sant' Antnin, Triq Klula.
- Works also started on the restoration of rubble walls along Ramla valley through EAFRD-EU funded project.
- Establishment of a Walking, Jogging and Cycling Trail in Ulysses Grove, Xewkija, Gozo. Once completed this partially EU co-funded ERDF project shall contribute towards the development of a family park and increase in open and green spaces in Gozo. A new application for a PA permit was submitted. Through this development proposal, the Ulysses Grove shall have its entrances upgraded, a link between two of its entrances will be established as well as the development of a public convenience and an overhead recreational facility area.

3.8.1.2 Forest Management

Forestry 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 their preservation.

The Ambient Malta department, together with ERA, proceeded with a number of management plans to conserve sites, such as Buskett Forest, il-Mizieb and il-Ballut tal-Wardija.

Moreover, a number of afforestation projects were carried out in 2020:

- Over 6,000 trees and shrubs have been planted in Comino.
- More than 800 trees and shrubs were planted in Buskett Gardens.
- About 500 trees and shrubs were planted in Bengħajsa.
- Over 600 trees were planted inside the Salini.
- Around 1,000 trees and shrubs, sponsored by the Embassy of Turkey, were planted in the Majjistral Park.

Furthermore, a number of terrestrial habitat restoration projects were also carried out in 2020:

- Restoration works in Natura 2000 sites, which include the cliffs of the Madonna in Aħrax tal-Mellieħa and Selmunett.
- Habitat restoration works are currently underway around Fort Madliena. From 2018 to 2020, over 2000 trees have been planted at this site.

3.8.2 The Marine Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture

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% 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.

Malta is implementing management measures as part of the WFD and the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD), targeting the achievement of good ecological status and good chemical status of coastal waters and good environmental status of marine waters.

Targeted action that has been implemented as part of this legislative framework in 2020 includes:

- The identification of chemicals of emerging concern that are relevant to Malta's coastal and marine waters on the basis of a use characterisation exercise. Monitoring processes are currently being developed in relation to chemicals of emerging concern as part of the actions of LIFE 16 IPE MT 008.
- A study on the impact of the National spoil grounds off Xgħajra commenced in 2020 and will conclude in 2021. The aim of this study is to assess the characteristics and status of Malta's National spoil ground and its environs in terms of (i) the volume of material deposited; (ii) the capacity for deposition of dredged and inert waste and (iii) impacts on the marine environment with a focus on chemical quality in line with the requirements of Malta's Second WCMP's measure KNO 1. The spoil ground and its neighbouring environs have been extensively surveyed using side scan sonar and the resulting acquired data is currently being

reviewed. The next step in the study will include a chemical analysis, which would assess the quality of sediment on site. This will also provide information about the natural environment in the area of study. The results will feed into policy processes, thus working towards informed management regimes aimed at achieving sustainable use of Malta's marine waters.

- A desk-based ecological risk assessment on 'Same Risk areas' for Non-Indigenous Species was carried out in 2020 through the HARMONY project. This considered the ports of Malta (Valletta, Marsaxlokk) and 4 ports in Sicily (Augusta, Catania, Palermo, Trapani); the information will inform the measure KNO 2-3 (Study the need for ballast water management and control).

In parallel, Malta implements monitoring processes for the continuous assessment of the marine environmental status. This enables the development and updating of management measures targeting the most relevant pressures in the marine environment. Monitoring processes were implemented as part of the EU funded project EMFF 8.3.1 during the period 2017-2019. The project was subsequently extended until 2021 to cater for additional monitoring and assessment of marine mammals and reptiles, seabirds, and marine food webs.

An update to Malta's assessment of its marine waters under the MSFD was published in 2020 utilising the monitoring data collected. This updated assessment of status enabled an informed

revision of environmental targets addressing the most relevant pressures for achievement of Good Environmental Status (GES). Such revised environmental targets, together with the revised definitions of GES for all biological elements and pressures thereon, will enable the development of an effective management framework targeting the sustainability of coastal and marine ecosystems.

Specifically in relation to SDG target 14.1, the updated assessment indicates that Maltese waters are considered to be in GES in terms of nutrient and organic matter conditions. However, more long-term data is needed for determining thresholds that are more specific and applicable to Malta's marine waters, and to ensure that the input of nutrients is maintained below established emission limit values. In relation to marine debris, a good status was deemed to have been achieved in relation to litter on the coastline, although continued management is needed to maintain and improve the status, while further effort is required in relation to floating litter and litter on the seabed.

Marine litter is also one of the Significant Water Management issues identified in preparation of the Malta's Third WCMP. The WCMP, together with the Programme of Measures (PoMs) pursuant to the MSFD, seeks a holistic approach towards the protection of marine ecosystems through management of anthropogenic activities on the basis of an ecosystem-based approach.

The PoMs for coastal and marine waters will also be taking into consideration the conservation measures that are required to achieve the site-specific



conservation objectives of the marine Natura 2000 sites, to ensure that a coordinated and consistent approach is taken to Malta's management of its marine waters.

Malta has a total of 18 Marine Protected Areas within the 25 nautical mile boundary designated under the Habitats Directive. This was a major step towards the protection of coastal and marine ecosystems, and ERA is in the process of defining the conservation objectives and measures for the management of these marine areas, in consultation with all relevant stakeholders.

While the WCMP and MSFD Programme of Measures provide an overarching framework for management at a national scale, site-specific management measures for the marine Natura 2000 sites will ensure a holistic framework of complementary actions targeting the protection of such ecosystems at different scales. These plans or measures will seek the achievement of healthy marine ecosystems in line with the objectives of the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030 and will be taking into consideration to the extent possible the goals of the Circular Economy Action Plan, particularly in relation to litter and plastics; the Chemicals Strategy and the Zero-Pollution Action Plan, as well as other European Green Deal initiatives related to clean waters.

With regards to the marine environment, monitoring of marine non-indigenous species including IAS in Marine Protected Areas and 'hotspot' areas was completed in 2019 through the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund project being led by ERA. Following this, actions were taken to control the invasion of marine alien species. However, further actions are deemed necessary to target the various

pathways identified. In 2020, Malta also participated in an exercise with the Joint Research Centre in quantifying pathways and such information will be used to inform future actions.

Moreover, the Maltese Government issued two Legal Notices to restrict the placing on the market of lightweight plastic carrier bags and of certain Single-Use Plastic products and of products made from oxo-degradable plastics. The Legal Notices aim at providing a holistic approach to tackle the issue of plastic litter in a local context.

In addition, MECP has further directed its efforts towards combating marine litter through the 'Saving Our Blue' campaign, with the aim to further educate and encourage the public to stop littering, reduce waste generation, and opt for alternative products to single-use plastic items.

The 'Saving Our Blue' campaign seeks to address the main causes of the problem through:

- educating and engaging citizens;
- collaborating with NGOs and the private sector; and
- promoting a unified call to action that can support national movements to influence change.

The second edition of the 'Saving Our Blue' campaign took place during summer 2020. Four concurrent clean-ups were held at Golden Bay, Ghadira Bay, Pretty Bay and St George's Bay to commemorate World Clean Up Day. During these clean-ups, MECP brought on board various groups and NGOs in the fight against marine litter. Several other clean-ups were held on various beaches throughout the rest of



summer 2020 by MECP and several NGOs. With this, the total amount of waste collected in 2020 amounts to 5,202.4 kg. Dive clean ups were also organised through collaborations with stakeholder groups.

Apart from the clean-ups, the 'Saving our Blue' campaign also collaborated with Skola Sajf and the National Literacy Agency within the then Ministry for Education and Employment, to raise further understanding of the repercussions of single-use plastic and marine litter amongst the younger generations. This was achieved through videos shared with Skola Sajf, which were disseminated to all Skola Sajf classes. Furthermore, together with the National Literacy Agency, a writing competition on environmental aspects and marine pollution for four different student age categories was organised.

The Campaign included also the carrying out of a national survey on public behaviour in relation to single-use plastics, the launch of an initiative involving commitment pledges from individuals, businesses and industry and the carrying out of dedicated education and awareness campaign on social media platforms, local TV stations, radio stations and other media platforms.

Another notable initiative that seeks to preserve and safeguard the marine environment is the BLUEMED Coordination and Support Action (CSA) project, which functions as the operating arm of the BLUEMED Initiative. One of the goals of this project is that of fostering collaboration between EU and non-EU Mediterranean countries. The BLUEMED Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda (SRIA) contains a number of goals and actions targeting technology transfer in marine and maritime areas. MCST, as a partner in this Horizon 2020 project, is tasked with launching start-up actions that will strive to include countries from the Southern bank of the Mediterranean, while the Continental Shelf Department grants licences for marine scientific research. The plans with regards to this initiative include the continued participation in the BLUEMED Group of Senior Officials (GSO), facilitating BlueMed SRIA adoption, promoting cooperation/joint actions in Mediterranean region, fostering the BlueMed Pilot Action on A Healthy Plastic-Free Mediterranean Sea as well as sustaining the national coordination of the Blue Economy European Partnership, which is the umbrella R&I initiative for blue growth.

During 2020, the Interreg Med Project 'BESS' continued with its implementation. The project's aim is 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. Partners include MGOZ, University of Malta, Università degli studi di Messina, Università degli studi di Palermo and Istituto Nazionale di Geofisica e Vulcanologia.

Furthermore, the plan for the Marsalforn breakwater was revised. The project description statement and Environmental Impact Assessment needed for the PA permit were drafted. A new call for tenders for

geotechnical investigations was drafted and vetted with an envisaged publication in early 2021.

3.9 Sustainable Fisheries and Aquaculture

The Fishing Conservation and Management Act (Chapter 425) was originally introduced in 2001 and was aimed at providing a basis that would better regulate the sector and its operations. However, in the current scenario, due to the crisis that has ensued as a result of COVID-19, the need was felt to introduce legislation to support fishers, whose main business of activity used to be focused on sales to Restaurants and Hotels. For this reason, through the Fishing Vessels Suspension Regulations, 2020 published as LN236/2020, an article has been introduced within the existing legislation that suspended the need for such fishers to meet the thresholds established by the law. Such legislative change provides a baseline for fishing communities and fisheries to remain sustainable.

Another Legal Notice published in 2020, which deserves specific reference, is the Fisheries & Aquaculture (Amendment) Regulations, 2020 published as LN431/2020. This legislation eliminated the additional burden imposed on Aquaculture Operators by means of the introduction of Article 4 in Subsidiary Legislation 425.05. The introduction of these regulations has been specifically intended to delete the existing regulation that requires Aquaculture Operators to pay a fee of €230 for each tonne of live tuna caught. These regulations were necessary given that Aquaculture Operators already pay other fees to the Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture (DFA) for services rendered by the Department to such Operators. Such legislative change provides improved economic gains to the aquaculture operators.

The Data Collection Multi Annual Programme (DC-MAP) is instrumental to achieve sustainable development within the fisheries sector. The DC-MAP stipulates the requirements for the collection of biological, environmental, technical, and socio-economic data in the fisheries and aquaculture sectors. The fisheries data provided by the DC-MAP database is used to assess the health of fish stocks and the marine environment and meet the EU's objective of ensuring sustainable fisheries by 2020 at the latest. Furthermore, this data collection is essential for the implementation of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), as a basis for founding it on the best possible scientific advice. Data is also used to evaluate the profitability of the different segments of the sector and the effects of fisheries and aquaculture on the ecosystem.

During the period under review, work in this regard initiated in previous years was continued by the DFA; Malta collected 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.

In December 2020, the DFA launched the 'Fishing for Recipes' competition, consumption of local underutilised fish species in Malta and encourage the public to make sustainable choices when purchasing fish. The DFA will keep working to shift the culinary and gastronomic focus from unsustainable fish to local underutilised fish and to disseminate information on sustainable consumption to the public.

3.9.1 Nationally Funded Schemes

Boat Restoration Scheme

In 2020, for a second consecutive year, the DFA implemented the Boat Restoration Scheme. The scheme entailed the provision of financial assistance to MFA and MFB boat owners that have one of the traditional Maltese wooden vessels, these being Firilla, Frejgatina, Kajjik and Luzzu.

The implementation of this scheme was deemed necessary by the DFA as the maintenance costs of wooden vessels is substantially higher than that associated with vessels made from fiberglass. As a result, in recent years some fishers have switched from owning a wooden vessel to one made from fiberglass in order to lower their maintenance and repair costs.

Around ninety small-scale fishers were supported through the implementation of this scheme. The support granted as part of the scheme can be considered as a direct investment towards the sustainability and cultural preservation of the traditional Maltese wooden fishing fleet. This scheme in the long run is expected to help in the preservation of Maltese seaside towns and villages

and increase tourism in port areas, both of which help generate employment in these localities and keep local businesses alive.

COVID-19 Grant Scheme for Bluefin Tuna (BFT) Fishers

Through national funds, in 2020, the DFA launched and concluded the COVID-19 Grant Scheme for Bluefin Tuna (BFT) Fishers. The scheme aimed at preserving employment by compensating fishers for a loss of income resulting from measures adopted at national level to respond to the COVID-19 outbreak. The aid scheme provided financial assistance in the form of a direct financial grant based on a rate of €2 per kg of assigned BFT quota in 2020. A total of 145 small-scale fishers benefitted from the aid granted as part of the scheme.

3.9.2 EU and UN Funded Initiatives

As in previous years, during 2020, the DFA worked on several schemes and projects part-financed through the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) 2014-2020, including:

Swordfish Temporary Cessation Scheme:

Launched in November 2020 and provides financial compensation to MFA and MFB fishing vessel owners that fish for Swordfish. The aim of the scheme is to promote further the recovery of Swordfish stocks by extending the closed season by an additional month by providing financial compensation to fishers that opted not to go out at sea during the month of December.

Marsaxlokk Landing Office: During 2020, the DFA has completed the construction of a landing office in



the designated fishing port of Marsaxlokk. This office was deemed necessary by the DFA to facilitate fish landing in the South Eastern region of the Maltese Islands. In addition, the office enables the DFA to extend accessibility of its services to fishers, such as transfer of vessels, registration of fishing gear and collection of fishing licences, through the placement of a DFA official on site. The building was designed in a way to promote a more environmentally friendly approach to traditional building methods. Natural lighting was used as much as possible to ensure that electricity consumption is kept at a minimum. Energy saving lighting, a solar water heater and environmentally friendly equipment were procured to reduce the carbon footprint of the building itself. Furthermore, innovative building materials and structures were utilised. The ceiling of the building is thermally insulated to ensure that temperature dissipation is minimised, and skylights were installed. Moreover, as part of this investment a movable crane was also procured to help fishers unload their catch from vessels and at the same time directly weigh the catch through a hanging balance.

Modernisation and the introduction of new related amenities of fishermen's facilities located at the designated fishing ports of Imġarr and Xlendi:

The works in the Xlendi area, were completed and the project was inaugurated in June. The works on the facilities in this area included, amongst others, the reconstruction of the dry standing area along with the installation of new service pillars to enable fishermen carrying out repair and maintenance works on their fishing vessels. The works in the Imġarr Port which included an overhaul of the docking area as well as upgrade of other facilities for the fishermen, progressed well during the period under review and the project is expected to be completed during 2021. Besides this, the health and safety of fishers was safeguarded through the replacement of the present winches with more modern and energy efficient models that contain several safety features. Furthermore, the surface of the Xlendi dry-standing was reconstructed and a firewall constructed to better contain any potential fire outbreaks.

Training for Fishers: In 2020, the DFA was able to promote further human capital in the local fisheries sector through the provision of specialised training courses to fishers and their spouses. The main aim of the training courses was to improve knowledge amongst fishers about food safety and hygiene, health and safety at sea and training on how to make the best use of navigation equipment. All training forming part of this initiative was meant to be concluded in the second quarter of 2020; however, due to the outbreak of COVID-19, all remaining sessions that were scheduled to take place after 16 March had to be suspended to the last quarter of 2020 and the first quarter of 2021. In total, 181 fishers applied to participate in one or more of the training courses offered.

Installation of GPRS devices: Between the period of 01 October 2019 and 01 October 2020, 750 vessels

were equipped with a GPRS tracking device which enables the DFA to monitor the movement of the vessels as part of its EU obligations for control of the fleet. These vessels are all under 10 meters and fall under the MFA and MFB categories.

Installation of CCTVs at the Automated Weighing and Labelling Stations (AWLs): To date, 13 sites where the AWLs are installed have been equipped with CCTV equipment. The AWLs are utilised by fishers to weigh and label their fish prior to selling it. The CCTVs were installed to ensure that these scales remain in good functioning order and deter vandalism for the benefit of the fishers.

Seminars for various stakeholders in the Fisheries Sector: To date, two seminars from a series of five have been organised by the DFA to raise awareness amongst various stakeholders on the CFP rules and the importance to combat Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing. The first seminar was held on 29 November 2019 for Control Authorities who work hand in hand with the DFA during the daily controls related to the fishing activity. The second seminar was held on 13 November 2020 for Importers of Fishery products and officials from the Customs Department.

Other online training by other institutions such as the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) also made it possible for more DFA officers to participate and gain more knowledge regarding sustainable fisheries concomitantly raising further awareness of the principles of sustainable development.

Awareness Campaign on the CFP and IUU Regulations: In November 2020, the DFA launched a campaign to raise awareness on the rules of the CFP and the importance to combat IUU fishing activities as well as to inform the general public on other initiatives taken by the DFA with respect to controls in the Fisheries Sector. The campaign consists of a total of fourteen 30-second clips that were and are currently still being aired during prime time on local television and radio stations. These adverts are aimed at informing the general public of the importance every individual has to keep the fishing industry sustainable whilst taking care of the marine environment and fish stocks.

Other EU funded projects include the following:

HARMONY Project: A joint Interreg Italia-Malta project between a number of Maltese and Sicilian partners focusing on seafloor integrity and the impacts of non-indigenous species on local marine ecosystem functioning in a cross-border context. The aim is to create a common framework between the two islands for the monitoring and control of invasive species, and joint strategies for the management of Natura 2000 sites and habitats. The project is expected to be concluded in early 2021. In Malta, this project is being implemented by the DFA and ERA.

Biotechnologies for Human Health and Blue Growth (BYTHOS) Project: The BYTHOS lab is a joint space set up in Sicily and Malta where researchers and experts in biotechnology, business and industry meet together with local enterprises with the aim of increasing investment in innovation and research in biotechnology for human health and blue growth.

The DFA also pursued work on two UN FAO regional projects:

- MedSudMed “Assessment and Monitoring of the Fishery Resources and the Ecosystems in the Straits of Sicily” is made up of four participating countries in the Strait of Sicily (Italy, Libya, Malta and Tunisia). The MedSudMed project supports various research activities related to the interaction between demersal and small pelagic fishery resources, and biotic and abiotic environmental factors. Amongst other activities, in 2020, Malta has contributed towards the assessment of the *Merluccius merluccius*, *Parapenaeus longirostris* and *Mullus barbatus* stocks.
- CopeMed II “Coordination to Support Fisheries Management in the Western and Central Mediterranean” covers the western and central sub-regions of the Mediterranean, consisting of eight participating countries (Spain, France, Italy, Malta, Algeria, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia). The CopeMed II project aims to contribute to the sustainability of the marine fisheries in the Central and Western Mediterranean Sea and its ecosystem through the development of capacities and strengthening of scientific cooperation among participating countries. Malta, as part of this project, has contributed to the assessment of the common dolphinfish (*Coryphaena hippurus*) and participated in regional discussions.

Furthermore, a ‘Fishing for Litter Scheme’, aimed to collect plastic waste gathered by trawling vessels, was concluded in 2020. The scheme provided bottom trawl fishers with financial compensation for retrieving plastic from the sea whilst conducting their routine bottom trawl operations. The data collected from this project is currently being analysed and all results will be published in a scientific report.

The DFA also participates in two international projects that are closely linked to sustainable development. On the one hand, the BLUEfasma project aims at integrating and implementing circular economy principles in the fisheries and aquaculture sectors. Specifically, the main objective is to empower Small and Medium-sized Enterprises to boost economic growth through the use of circular economy tools. On the other hand, LIFE PanPuffinus is a new project aiming at improving the conservation status of two endangered pelagic seabirds, through the creation of an improved system of data collection and monitoring.

3.10 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 11.6 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.

3.10.1 Sustainable buildings

Malta had prepared its first strategy for mobilising investment to support the renovation of, public, residential and commercial buildings in 2014, with an update in 2017. During 2020, however, this Strategy was developed and built upon, whereby the Ministry for Transport, Infrastructure and Capital Projects (MTIP) undertook the drawing up of the 2020 Long Term Renovation Strategy, which covers the period up to 2050¹³. It is a key action of Malta’s efforts for clean energy and energy efficiency and to achieve the decarbonisation of the building stock by 2050. The Strategy aims to address:

- Worst-performing buildings,
- Split-incentive dilemmas and market failures;
- Provide an overview of the national building stock addressing key areas such as energy poverty and public buildings;
- Provide indicative milestones for 2030, 2040, and 2050;
- Review policies and actions implemented as part of previous LTRS,
- Propose new ones to stimulate cost-effective deep renovation of buildings;
- Define initiatives to promote skills and education in the construction and energy efficiency sectors; and
- Provide an estimate of expected energy savings and wider benefits.

Furthermore, this Strategy¹⁴ is also a pre-requisite for Malta to be able to use EU Funding in the 2021-2027 programme and the strategy itself is considered a component of Malta’s NECP.

¹³ In line with the EU Energy Performance of Buildings Directive (EPBD) (Directive (EU) as amended by Directive 2018/844.

¹⁴ The 2020 LTRS was drawn up by the EU appointed consultants, Trinomics B.V. of The Netherlands together with Altern Ltd. as national resident expert, following a request for support through the Structural Reform Support Programme.

The Strategy proposes a policy mix that uses different levers to ensure public spending and regulation to incentivise private investment in order to achieve the Long-term goal of GHG emissions reduction by 90–95% (baseline 1990) by 2050. The draft addresses actions that trigger renovation; the revision of the methodology for calculating the energy performance of a building and enforcement; the implementation of energy management systems in public buildings; incentives to promote energy generation in buildings and the Promotion of smart technologies. Cost and benefits of effective approaches to renovation are also identified and analysed.

The Strategy concluded that intensified investment of an average of €100 million/year to support residential and non-residential sectors to renovate buildings in the next 10–15 years is required to achieve the 2030 targets. These include €44m per year for public buildings over the period to 2035.^{15 16}

3.10.2 Air pollution

Environmental impacts are reduced through sound environmental policies, which are in turn based on air quality data. To this effect, ERA monitors, in near real-time, air pollutants through four monitoring stations. This is complemented by a Passive Diffusion Tube Network, consisting of 100 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 several schools, state nursing homes and hospitals as part of the national Government's priorities. Moreover, ERA has also started working on an 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 in 2018. This plan will aim to propose additional measures to the National Air Pollution Control Programme (NAPCP) highlighted below, that will reduce emissions from the major source of air pollution in Malta, the road transport sector.

To help reduce pollution and improve the quality of air, specific measures related to the transport, energy and industry sectors were also implemented in 2020, namely:

- The installation of a mobile monitoring station in Senglea's Gardjola Gardens to study and quantify the impact of the shipping sector on ambient air.
- The finalisation of the procurement process for an additional monitoring station in Xemxija, which will be a traffic site outside the agglomeration.
- Continued monitoring the impact of pollutants on ecosystems through soil and foliage samples, as per the requirements arising from the Limitation of Emissions of certain atmospheric pollutants Regulations (S.L. 549.124).
- The publication of Malta's policy document, the NAPCP, which supports Member States in planning national policies and measures. The aim of the policy document is to limit annual anthropogenic emissions of five key pollutants, namely NO_x, NMVOC, SO₂, NH₃ and PM_{2.5}, with the aim to comply with the national emission reduction commitments as laid down in Annex II of the National Emission Ceiling Directive (2016/2284 EU) for years 2020–2030. The NAPCP highlights the progress made by the current policies and measures in reducing emissions and improving air quality in various sectors. It also includes policies and measures planned for Malta to comply with the emission reduction commitments on a national scale for the period between 2020–2029, and for 2030 onwards. These policies and measures relate to several sectors including transport, industry, agriculture, and energy demand.

In 2020, the MSD carried out fifty-five investigations with regards to Fluorinated greenhouse gases (F-gases). F-gases are particularly used in refrigeration and air conditioning systems. These gases are powerful GHGs with a significant global warming effect. The investigations resulted in the prevention of over 81,000 tons of CO₂ equivalent of illegal F-gases from being introduced on the Maltese market. It is claimed that this is equivalent to the carbon sequestered by more than one million tree seedlings grown for 10 years¹⁷.

Other measures implemented recently to help improve the quality of air quality include:

- The Environment permitting through the Industrial Emissions Directive (2010/75/EU) and the Medium Combustion Plants Directive (2015/2193/EU).
- A Scrappage scheme that provides a grant of between €800 to €2,000 when scrapping a vehicle and purchasing a new vehicle.
- A grant for electric vehicles, includes a grant of up to €7,000 when deregistering/scrapping another vehicle, while when one registers an electric vehicle without scrapping another vehicle, they are eligible for up to €6,000.

¹⁵ These are provisional figures.

¹⁶ The draft LTRS and Impact Assessment referred to MECP as part of the hand over from MTIP, are compatible and in line with current energy performance policy and legislation through the Energy Performance in Buildings Directive, Energy Efficiency Directive, the National Energy and Climate Plan, National Energy Efficiency Action Plan and Low Carbon Development Strategy.

¹⁷ <https://www.epa.gov/energy/greenhouse-gas-equivalencies-calculator>

- A €200 grant when one converts an M1 or N1 vehicle to Autogas or liquefied petroleum gas (LPG).
- An increase in roadside and roadworthiness checks.
- Bike-sharing schemes.
- An Improvement of Ferry Landing Places.
- Free school transport for all school children.
- Measures relating to the public transport system, such as vehicle tracking, reduced fees when using tallinja card on the ferries and when using the IoScoot e-bike sharing services, TD plus and more.
- Free transport for youths, students and the elderly.
- A review of Malta's national Electromobility Plan.
- Car-sharing scheme, a pay-per-use service consisting of electric vehicles.
- A Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan for Valletta.
- Pilot cycling corridors.
- Developing a shore-supply action plan for TEN-T ports.
- Infrastructure interventions.
- An increase in the use of intelligent transport management systems.
- A Public Service Garage Reform, which included introducing a maximum age limit for the date of registration of leased vehicles to 10 years and 15 years for taxi/chauffeur-driven passenger vehicles.
- Measures related to energy demand/supply highlighted above.
- Measures related to the agricultural sector highlighted above.

3.10.3 Noise Pollution

In 2020, ERA has concluded an extensive stakeholder consultation on the drafting of the Noise Action Plan (NAP), which will be soon issued for public consultation. The NAP 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 NAP 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 also presents a summary of the results of the round three strategic noise maps within Malta and presents actions, which ERA together with the relevant entities intends to take in the next five years.

The objectives of the draft NAP 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 and preserving environmental noise quality where it is good.
- To set out objectives for the monitoring and management of environmental noise in Malta.
- To 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.
- To preserve relatively quiet areas in the agglomeration and in open countryside through the identification and delineation of such areas.

3.10.4 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.

Despite the challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government of Malta has continued its work in implementing its holistic plan towards less congestion and less emissions, through the upgrading of its road infrastructure, 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 reduction in journey time.

Amongst the several projects of 2020, works on the Multi-level Junction in Marsa have continued, resulting in the opening of all of the seven flyovers. Around these new connections, Infrastructure Malta is forming new landscaped areas with hundreds of new trees. It is also building underground reservoirs to harvest more than 1.5 million litres of rainwater for the irrigation of these new green areas. The longest green wall in Malta at the Marsa-Hamrun Bypass, using 27,600 flowering plants in a €500,000 environmental investment, was also installed.

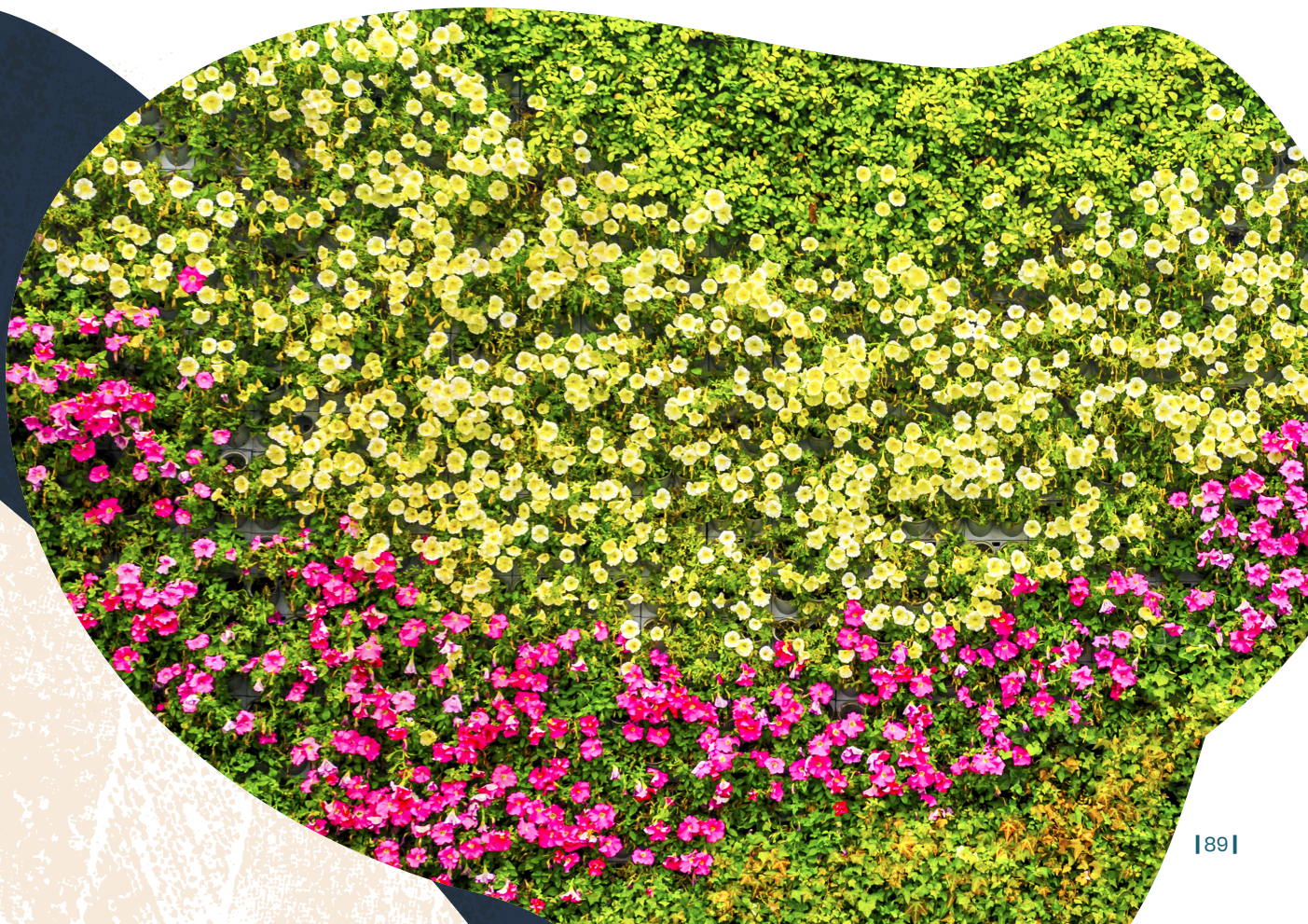
Moreover, works on the Santa Luċija Roundabout Underpass were finalised, creating an uninterrupted connection between Santa Luċija Avenue and Tal-Barrani Road, along the principal route to southern Malta. These new tunnels are cutting over 30% of journey times, whilst reducing congestion emissions caused by the previous roundabout junction. The first phase of the €3.5 million safety upgrade of Burmarrad Road was also completed in 2020, while the first new road of the Central Link Project was opened. The latter is a €55 million investment to reduce travel times, accident risks and congestion pollution along the principal arterial road corridor in central Malta, whilst creating safer spaces for alternative modes of travel in this part of Mrieħel, Birkirkara, Balzan, Attard and Ta' Qali.

Incidentally, funding schemes were also issued for the provision of vertical green walls, green roofs,

green facades and the green retrofitting of front gardens, as a measure to improve the quality of public space, as seen with the Kordin green wall, which has been built in an Industrial estate with a project cost of €150,000. In addition, there was also a grant scheme for the restoration of facades of old buildings promoting the reuse of existing buildings rather than just new construction, as well as a funding scheme for Local Councils to carry out sustainable projects and improve the quality of life within their respective localities.

Furthermore, 2020 marked the second year of the 7-year plan, with an annual investment of €100 million to rebuild and upgrade Malta's roads. Further residential roads were rebuilt, whilst extensive repair and maintenance works were carried out. These upgrades include new footpaths, storm water catchments and pipelines and resurfacing works. Over €15 million were invested in the reconstruction and upgrading of 102 countryside roads.

Malta is also committed in investing in safer transport infrastructure that encourages more road users to choose walking, cycling, and other alternative, more sustainable, modes of travel. In 2020, Infrastructure Malta installed further pedestrian bridges, namely at Aviation Avenue, Corradino, and Blata l-Bajda, opening quicker and safer routes for pedestrians, cyclists and public transport users. The inclusion of lighting systems, surveillance cameras and access through elevators have ensured the safety and security of commuters, whilst also provided comfortable access for vulnerable persons. Cycling lanes were built through the Marsa project linking to Santa Luċija and thence these shall extend further to



tal-Barrani through an upcoming project. Other cycling lanes were also included as part of road infrastructure projects including in Triq Haġ-Luqa, Triq Buqana, and Triq Bormla.

Furthermore, foot and bicycle traffic shall be encouraged through the continued pedestrianisation of Gozo's main tourist localities. Within this context works to partly pedestrianise the Marsalforn are underway and phase One was concluded in September 2020. It focused on upgrading the walking infrastructure at and around Menqa Area. Works have now shifted towards repaving and upgrading of the Marsalforn waterfront.

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 Ro-Ro ships produce when visiting Malta's principal port, using shoreside electricity to power onboard systems.

In 2020, the Consultative Council for the South of Malta concluded the Paola Square project, which created a traffic flow improvement and a large pedestrian zone with a lot of newly planted trees for the enjoyment of the public. The Consultative Council refurbished also Ġnien il-Mediterran, later devolved to the Paola Local Council to maintain its upkeep. The garden is now accessible from three main points namely from Paola Square, Paola Mosque and from MCAST, and accesses were also complimented with the construction of a new pedestrian bridge to prevent traffic accidents and ensure pedestrians' safety. Apart from acting as a new safe zone for the local community, this project contributed to an overall improvement of the health and well-being of the residents in these areas.

In order to have more sustainable communities, a number of grant schemes have been issued by the Local Government Division whereby financial assistance was given to those councils in whose locality a major capital project was carried out by central Government.

During 2020, the Government continued to invest in a greener transport system by extending several incentives to reduce traffic congestion during peak hours by encouraging a modality shift to other forms of transport such as ferryboats and public buses. Government 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 2020, over €2.5 million in grants were allocated to the purchasing of environmentally friendly vehicles and electric vehicles (including pedelecs).

In an effort to encourage more people to use public transport instead of their own private vehicle, in 2020 the provision of free public transport to young people was expanded from previous measures to include persons over the age of 75. The use of public transport and the use of ferry has been experiencing significant increase until the start of the pandemic and the introduction of restrictions.

In 2020, Malta Public Transport added 50 new buses to its fleet. The brand-new vehicles will replace older buses with more efficient models that will increase carrying capacity across the network while further decreasing the carbon footprint of public transport.

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. Works on the Sliema and Cospicua landing sites progressed in 2020.

In Gozo, the 'Multi-modal Hub' (Park and Ride), which is part of 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. During 2020, the PA issued the permit for the construction of the Park and Ride facility in Ta' Xħajma, Xewkija. In the meantime, during the same year, the construction drawings for the same facility were finalised with works envisaged to start in early 2021. During 2020 as well, six fully electric powered buses were delivered to Gozo. These buses, with a range that exceeds 200 km on a single charge, shall be used to operate the Park and Ride service from Ta' Xħajma to Mgarr terminal.

MGOZ launched a Smart Parking solution initiative at St. Francis Square in Victoria with displays installed on two roads leading to the same square. Drivers are informed in real time with parking availability. This helps in providing sustainable infrastructure and a cleaner environment since drivers will not drive to St. Francis Square to look for a parking.



Concluding Remarks

As a result of the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, 2020 saw numerous hurdles, which significantly influenced the workings of the Public Administration and how policies and projects were implemented in the various policy sectors. In spite of all the challenges, Government was, and still is, committed to ensure that sustainable development remains the topmost priority. This was reflected in not only the day-to-day operations of Governmental Ministries, Entities, Departments and Bodies, but also in the amount of sustainable initiatives that were being financed and supported.

There is still a lot of work to be done at all levels, especially if the targets set by the UN and Agenda 2030 are to be reached. The persistent global realities relating to economic uncertainty, political instability, social discrimination and human and environmental hazards are making it all the more difficult for all countries, including Malta, to effectively and coherently work towards achieving the highest levels of sustainability in the economic, social and environmental spheres.

Nevertheless, the Maltese Government remains committed to continue to be a role model in encouraging and promoting new and better sustainability practices within the various policy

sectors. As highlighted throughout this Report, new measures aimed at achieving the 17 UN SDGs have been introduced in various fields and policy areas including: economic growth, digitalisation, research and innovation, tourism and national heritage, health and well-being, quality of life, education, foreign affairs, social affairs, national security, the land and marine environment, climate change, energy, waste, water, agriculture, aquaculture and fisheries, among others.

Sustainable development calls for the incorporation of stakeholders into the decision-making process. This Report is a clear reflection of the Maltese Government's commitment to provide opportunities for meaningful participation and work in partnership with all relevant stakeholders when designing new policies and strategies for Malta. This is done to ensure the implementation of the most efficient and effective solutions.

Fostering these key principles will ensure sound and solid foundations on which sustainable development actions can be mainstreamed across all forms of development. It is in this manner that we will make a difference, and together we can achieve the milestones and goals in the most impactful, comprehensive, and compelling way.

Appendix 1 – List of Main Initiatives and Measures

The table is not an exhaustive list of all initiatives and measures contained within the Report that were carried out in 2020 but provides an overview of the main initiatives and measures.

SDGs	Main Initiative/ Measure	Description	Reference Page in Document
12	European Sustainable Development Week 2020	The chosen theme was 'Working Together for a Sustainable Future'.	12-13
3, 5, 8, 10, 12, 14, 15	Sustainability issues in times of unprecedented uncertainty: Towards a sustainable society	Virtual conference organised by the Guardian of Future Generations.	13
4, 5, 10, 16	Mas-Sigra tal-Ballut publication	The publication of a storybook for children with the collaboration of renowned author Trevor Żahra and MEUSAC.	13
7, 9, 11, 12	Sustainable Living Complex	This project will be providing a direct contribution to research in the built environment in Malta.	14
8, 9	The Extension of Xewkija Industrial Park	This project will enable further economic growth through better diversification in the economy and to provide further job opportunities for Gozitans.	14
6	The Invest in Chadwick Lakes for Tourism Purposes project	- Increased the water catchment by 35,000m² thanks to the removal of c. 50,000m² of material - Old rubble walls were re-constructed and new ones built to restore the water course and enhance the ecology of the lakes - Planting of new trees - The restoration of the Fiddien Box	14,70
9, 11	The Regeneration of Lower Valletta	- Extensive restoration works of 12.5 km² of bastions - The facades of the Auberge de Bavière - House of Catalunya - The refurbishment of pavements in the Marsamxett area	14
11, 12, 13	Sustainable Multi Intermodal Transport Hubs across Malta and Gozo	This project is encouraging: - Modal shift from private car usage to collective, sustainable - Alternative low-carbon transport modes - Improve air quality - Reduce GHG emissions	14
12, 13	The setting up of a multi-material recovery facility	This project will result into: - The reduction in the production of plastic, paper and cardboard, metal, and glass - Turn lead to savings in CO₂ emissions - Decrease of the amount of waste thrown in the landfills	14
12	Encouraging Sustainable Waste Practices in Households and Beyond	This project has carried out the following: - A publicity campaign by providing the necessary information and guidelines on how to separate waste at source - Ventilated and stackable bins which were distributed to all households - A number of kerbside collection vehicles	14,67

6	Towards a Net Zero Impact Water Utility – ensuring Integrated Water Resource Management	This project aims at: • Balancing desalination and abstraction to ensure the quality of the groundwater resource and security of supply • Lower the level of chlorides and electrical conductivity across all water quality zones • Lower the existing pressures on groundwater resources	14,70
8	Access to Employment Scheme	The scheme provides employment aid to enterprises in Malta and Gozo.	16, 46-47
8	Training for Employment	The investments are bridging the gap between the supply and demand in the labour market.	16
4, 8	Youth Guarantee Scheme	Promoting the employability of young people.	16, 50
8, 10	VASTE	This project is sustaining operations geared towards enabling people, experiencing poverty and social exclusion, to live in dignity and take an active part in society.	16,46
3, 8, 10	Knowledge, Training, Communications and Support Measures in Support of Vulnerable Groups	This project support measures addressing the specific circumstances of groups at particular risk at different junctures of their life through education, training, and therapeutic services.	16
4	ENDEAVOUR Scholarships Scheme	This project is sustaining investments in post-graduate research.	16
4	Reach High Scholars Programme Post-Doctoral Grants	This project is sustaining investments in post-doctoral research.	16
4, 12	One Tablet per Child Scheme	This scheme ensures that all children are given a fair and equal opportunity to be closer to technology.	16
8, 10, 13	Enhancing Stakeholder Participation in Social Dialogue	This project aimed at improving stakeholder engagement and ensuring that participation is strengthened and improved.	17, 59
2, 17	The provision of 468 tonnes of ware potatoes to Namibia	Malta's assistance helped around half a million Namibians, while also supporting Maltese farmers from losses following a drop in demand for potato export to the Netherlands.	17
17	Humanitarian Assistance	• A humanitarian flight operation to Beirut • Humanitarian assistance lent to Albania, Afghanistan, Libya, Syria, and the Sahel, amongst others	17
4, 17	ODA Scholarships and Courses	About €147,000 in scholarships and courses were offered to citizens from different ODA-eligible countries.	17
1, 8, 9	COVID-19 pandemic response measures	These include the Wage Supplement Scheme, refunds on expenses incurred to adopt Teleworking Arrangements, and payment for Quarantine Leave, Rent Subsidy and Electricity Bill Refunds. Other measures also included the Business Plan Re-engineering Scheme and the Investment Aid for the Production of COVID-19 Relevant Products.	21
4, 9	A COVID-19 Research and Development Fund	The aim of this fund is to explore innovative and improved approaches related to the current pandemic and any potential future waves.	21-22

7	Investment Aid for Energy Efficiency Projects	The assistance is intended to facilitate investments in technological solutions that provide higher energy efficiency and contribute directly towards a reduction in the energy requirements of the beneficiaries.	22
8	Specific Niche Markets in Gozo scheme and the Gozo Employment Refund Scheme	- The uptake of the Specific Niche Markets in Gozo scheme in 2020 was 16, an increase of 60% over the previous year - The Gozo Employment Refund Scheme was extended to make those employers who generated employment in Gozo eligible for application	22
11, 12, 13	INDIS Action Measures	- Installation of Green Walls in Kordin, Mosta, and Marsa Industrial Estates - Innovation Partnership for the land mining of Luqa Dump - The re-use of construction and demolition waste as secondary raw material to be used in construction projects	23
9	Mapping Tomorrow Strategy (2019-2021)	The Public Service continued to implement the strategic plan for the digitisation of public administration through the Mapping Tomorrow Strategy (2019-2021) with the primary aim of introducing the 'once-only' principle for online services through technology.	24
7, 8, 12	Connected eGovernment	This project aims at capitalising further the use of innovative ICT solutions within Government to enable a better and more efficient online public services for citizens and businesses.	24, 58
3, 8, 10	Mystery Shopper – Enhanced performance in the Public Administration	Throughout its lifecycle, more than 1,350 recommendations have been made to improve access to public services.	24
3, 8, 9, 10	Towards a More Professional Workforce in the Public Administration	- Provision of free Wi-fi access points in various localities in Malta and Gozo - Re-location of servizz.gov agency headquarters - The opening of new centres - The launch of the fourth mobile-accessible package of government services - The digitalisation a number of procurement processes - The launch of new online Application Forms system - Online shop for selected museum shop items - Newly setup Digitisation Unit, Marketing, Conservation, Business Management, Finance and Curatorial - The introduction of a CMS within Aġenzija Support	25-26
4	Initiatives in education to promote digital literacy	- Family coding sessions - Code Week - Internet safety - eTwinning - SELFIE - DigComp	27
4	Internship opportunities for students and teachers	GO4Research and GO4Industry internship programmes.	27

4, 8, 10	Get Smarter project	• Tech.mt created informative training manuals • Tech.mt leads the ICT 4 the Elderly project	27
4, 5, 8, 10	Women4IT project	Tech.mt initiated the process of preparing the training content to assist young women to take successful steps into digital job-related employment by building their digital skills capacity that address specific skills shortages.	27
4, 13	GLOBE Programme	• In the 2019/20 scholastic year, GLOBE Malta registered 43 State, Church, and Independent schools • 3 Field Study Centres and 139 Citizen Scientists participating in the programme	27, 61
4, 5, 10	GenderAction project	• Map and analyse Members States' progress towards implementation of gender equality in R&I • Provide training events • Provide mutual learning opportunities • Prepare policy briefs on advancing gender equality in the European Research Area • Build new collaborations to advance gender equality in international cooperation in science, technology, and innovation	27
8, 14	ERA-NET Co-fund Blue Bio	The mentioned R&D funding scheme aims to strengthen Europe's position in the blue bioeconomy sector.	28
8, 12	Malta's Tourism Strategy for the period 2021-2030	MTA redrafted the strategy to cater for the unprecedented situation brought about by COVID-19.	30
8, 12	Destinations SMEs	A new Association was launched to bring together operators from this niche to form a plan on how to increase their competitiveness and to augment their representative clout.	30
8, 12	Quality Assured Scheme	The scheme provides public recognition of quality services which are provided by Restaurants, DMCs and Visitor Attractions.	30-31
12, 14	Regeneration of coastal areas	• Beaches which have been carefully restored and replenished due to natural erosion • Arrangements for accessibility and increase in frequency of beach cleansing and general maintenance	31
12	CIVITAS DESTINATIONS	The launch of a Green Mobility Label.	32
4, 12	The LIFE FOSTER project	This project aims at reducing waste in the restaurant industry and focuses on training and education, prevention, and communication.	32
12	InCircle Interreg Med Project	This project aims to provides support for island and low-density areas in their transition towards circular tourism.	32
12, 13	Second National Cultural Policy	The new policy addresses issues such as climate change, working towards greener cultural and creative industries.	32-33
11	Maltese 'ftira' added to the humanity list of intangible cultural heritage	UNESCO inscribed the Maltese 'ftira' on the humanity list of intangible cultural heritage.	33

4, 8, 11	The Culture Pass programme	Under this programme, students from kindergarten through the whole compulsory education phase, can experience cultural and creative productions as well as come into direct contact with artists.	33
8, 9, 12	Investment in Cultural Organisations Programme and Creative Industries Platform	Facilitating and supporting artistic and creative entrepreneurs in realising their goals.	33
11	The launch of the Regional Cultural Strategies	This has resulted in cultural strategies that take into account the localised cultural assets and diverse characteristics of the different localities in Malta.	33
11	Regenerating, conserving, and restoring of Malta's cultural heritage	• Acquiring Villa Guardamangia and restoration of Villa Frere and its gardens • Restoration and refurbishment works at Għar Dalam • The restoration of the back façade at the Malta Maritime Museum • The restoration of the courtyard at the National Museum of Archaeology • Restoration and refurbishment works on the Grand Masters Palace and the Inquisitor's Palace and others started at the Malta Maritime Museum • Continued restoration, conservation and modernisation of the National Library building • Fondazzjoni Kottonera • The restoration and preservation of Tal-Ġordan lighthouse	33-35
3	Strategy and Action Plan for the Prevention and Containment of AMR in Malta 2020-2028	This is a cross-sectoral response to the threat of AMR in Malta, with the aim of controlling and possibly reversing the current trends.	38, 74
3	Lung Nurse Navigator	The Lung Nurse Navigator contacts patients two years after the end of their treatment, to check on their health and any symptoms, providing any required advice.	39
3	The Survivorship Rehabilitation Coordination project	The project established itself as a fully functional service for Colorectal survivors.	39
3	The introduction of new medicines on the Government Formulary List	New medicines were introduced to treat cardiac, renal, endocrine, and respiratory diseases, amongst others.	39
3	Establishing a National Platform to Address Social Determinants of Health	• Research was carried out on the relationship between mental health and sexual health and the effect of COVID-19 on sectors of the population • Information and capacity building sessions • The SDH awareness campaign	40
1	Direct payment facility	Beneficiaries having their social benefit payments paid by direct credit to 90% during 2020.	41

1, 3	Income, Social Benefits, and Social Welfare Services	• Cost-of-living increase amounting to €3.49 per week • €3.51 per week for all Social Security Pensioners • Pensions were increased by €7.00 per week • A higher contributory retirement pension for people retired from the disciplined forces • Increasing the pension according to the length of employment for Public Service Employees who continue to work after their retirement age between 2016 and 2018 • Service Pensioners were exempted a further €200 from their Service Pension • Widowed pensioners with children under the age of 18 were entitled to an allowance of €4.54 per week if the widows were working, and €9.32 per week if they were not in employment • Compensation Fund for past pensions injustices and anomalies, €13 million were allocated • The Supplementary Aid paid to low income people aged 65 and over who are at risk of poverty was increased by €50 • The increase of the Grant for seniors living at home • The introduction Childbirth or Adoption Bonus • Disability Pension reform • The Introduction of an Increased Assistance for Severe Disability • A reform in the calculation of the non-contributory Sickness Assistance Capital Means test • The Department of Social Security continued to pay for uninterrupted Sickness Assistance, regardless of the widow's or widower's pension rate. • Implementation of an initiative targeting parents of children with rare diseases • Fibromyalgia and Myalgic Encephalomyelitis started to form part of the non-contributory Medical Assistance conditions • Reforms were implemented in the Sickness Benefits payments schedule for people who are receiving medical treatment at the Sir Anthony Mamo Oncology Centre • An additional measure to combat fraud and collect undue amounts from pensioners living in Australia	41-42
3	Active Ageing and Community Care Customer Care Call Centre	The launch of an Active Ageing and Community Care Customer Care Call Centre.	42
1, 10	Second Implementation and Evaluation Report for the National Strategic Policy for Poverty Reduction and for Social Inclusion 2014-2024	The report outlines Malta's efforts and progress towards the most vulnerable who are at-risk-of poverty or social exclusion, across various sectors and Ministries including those responsible for income and social benefits, employment and education, health, social services, and culture.	44

1, 3, 4, 16	Development of a new National Youth Policy	- Supporting young people at risk of poverty - Promoting the health and well-being of young people - Providing quality non-formal educational opportunities through effective youth work - Promoting equality, citizenship, and democratic participation	44-45
11	The processing and monitoring of 14 Public Social Partnership contracts	Around 223 persons with a disability benefitted from the accommodation, respite or services related to their needs and level of support to continue to live in the community and to enjoy the best quality of life possible.	45
3	The launch of a helpline for persons with a disability and their family members	The aim is to serve as a means of contact and help with Aġenzija Sapport when they require any service from the Agency.	45
8, 10	Jobsplus Bridging the Gap scheme	This project registered persons with disabilities and people in disadvantaged situations who are unemployed.	46
8, 10	Community Inclusive Employment Scheme	The scheme aims to grant assistance to local councils to employ persons with disability.	47
3, 4	Nisimgħek Helpline	The aim of the helpline is that students and parents could reach out to various practitioners including counsellors, social workers, psychologists, career advisors amongst others.	48
4	Free Online Education page	The aim of the page is to assist students during the onset of COVID-19 lockdown.	48
4, 8	I Choose – Nagħżel il-Karriera Tiegħi fair	- Around 209 participants attended several talks - Another group of 60 students availed themselves of one-to-one career guidance sessions	48
4	GENE training course	The GENE coordinated a 16-hour training course across a number of sessions in relation to Global Education.	49
4	Grants for Gozitan students/residents	- Grant Payable to Malta Resident Students Following Full-Time Courses in Gozo - Grant Payable to Gozitan Resident Students Following Full-Time Courses in Malta - Additional benefit covering rental cost for Gozitan students studying in Malta	49
4, 8	The promotion of upskilling	- Training Pays Scheme - Investing in Skills Scheme - Traineeship Scheme - The Work Exposure Scheme	50
4	Korsijiet ta' Tagħlim tul il-Hajja	Local Government Division scheme, which highlights the importance and benefits that lifelong learning has on the general well-being of society.	51
16	Modernisation of the AFM	The purchase of a new offshore patrol vessel.	51
16	Economic Crimes Squad building	The aim is to strengthen the MPF's work against economic crimes.	52
16	Front-line police officers training	The training aimed to prevent and combat racism, xenophobia, and other forms of intolerance, particularly hate crime and hate speech.	52

16	Community Policing	The interaction between MPF and the Maltese citizens is crucial in creating a violence free society.	52
16	MPF's Transformation Strategy	The mission statement focuses on providing a professional and trusted policing service to ensure safety and security in partnership with the community.	52
5,16	Gender-Based and Domestic Violence Unit	The launch of the Gender-Based and Domestic Violence Unit is in tackling any crime/violence related to these specific areas	52
5, 16	Violet Support Online – Improving Support Structures for Victims of Gender Based Violence	Nine Steering Group meetings were held throughout 2020, in which numerous professionals met to address concerns surrounding the gender-based violence and domestic violence phenomena.	52–53
5, 10	Awareness on gender equality	- Information sessions and educational entitled “Be the Change” ‘#intkapači’ campaign - Not every home is a Haven – Reach out for the Life you deserve campaign - Online conferences on Artificial Intelligence and gender equality, the gender pay gap and NCPE’s work - NCPE Newsletter on maternity, paternity, and parental rights - NCPE Newsletter on Equality and COVID-19 pandemic	52–55
5, 16	Commission for Gender Based Violence and Domestic Violence Training and Education	- General course on Domestic Violence - Induction training on relevant legislation and local governmental and non-governmental services specialising in this area - Webinar on Elderly abuse - Social aspects of gender-based violence - Training in relation to understanding the perpetrator to protect families.	53
5, 16	Research Projects invested by the Commission of Gender-Based Violence and Domestic Violence	- The Economic cost of Violence against Women - Research on Gender-based and Domestic Violence Trends - Situation of Gender-Based Violence in Malta: Experiences and Effects at the Workplace	53
10	TRANSFORM: Raising standards of health care service provision for LGBTIQ people	This project aims to tackle inequality and discrimination in access to health care services by LGBTIQ people.	54
5, 10	The introduction of a Gender Corrective Mechanism	The implementation of the proposed measure will be instrumental towards the strengthening of a democratic society with the equal participation of women and men in the highest national decision-making institution.	54
5, 10	Research on distribution of work in household during the COVID-19 pandemic and regarding public awareness on pension entitlement	35 training sessions were delivered on equality, diversity, and non-discrimination to a wide range of participants in the private and public sectors.	55
5, 10	Equality Mark	By end of 2020, there were 112 certified organisations with 26,500 employees.	55

5, 10	Directory of Professional Women	By end of 2020, there were 265 professional women registered on this online Directory.	55
5, 10	Prepare the Ground for Economic Independence	The project focuses on addressing the gender gaps over the life-cycle.	55
5, 10	Empowerment for Diversity	The Project focuses on the grounds of sexual orientation, gender identity, sex characteristics and gender expression.	55
3, 10	Vulnerability Assessment Team	This team are assessing potential vulnerable persons who are at the IRC and closed and open centres.	56
3, 10	Migrants Advice Unit	This Information Service Unit is made up of a team of professionals who can provide information and assistance to asylum seekers so that they can better integrate into Maltese society.	56
10	Learning Exchanging Integrating	This project supports the implementation of the National Migrant Integration Strategy and Action plan, namely, Integration = Belonging (Vision 2020).	56
16	The set up of a Governance Cabinet Committee	This Committee is tasked with ensuring that Malta complies with the recommendations on good governance and the rule of law put forward by the Venice Commission and the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO).	57
16	Institutional and Constitutional reforms in the Maltese Parliament	• Reform of the appointment of the President of the Republic • Reform of the appointment of the Chief Justice and the Judiciary respectively • Reform of the discipline and abolition of the Judiciary • Reform of the Attorney General's office • Reform of the Ombudsman's office • Reform of the Standing Commission against Corruption	57
16	Whistleblowing Co-Ordinating Office	This was set up with a view to see to the Directive's obligations on the part of Malta and to assist Government Ministries, Authorities and Entities in achieving full compliance with this Directive.	58
16	Digicourts	A Case Management System was introduced in our Courts.	58
16	Digitisation services in the Court services agency	• An online filing system of the Criminal Acts • A newly developed e-form which facilitates the request of copies of Acts from the Court Archives • A new online access to Court Sentences for lawyers • Electronic submission of Letters for Mediations to be presented at the Family Court	58
16	A new legal aid service for victims of domestic violence	This service provides victims with legal advice they would need to know about their domestic violence cases.	59
16	Legal Aid Malta Agency new premises	Agency transferred its offices to new premises in Valletta, closer to the Courts of Justice, to provide easier access to legal aid offices to both clients and legal aid lawyers.	59

4, 13	Climate Friendly Travel Education Capacity Building programme	This is part of an EU-led programme for 100,000 STRONG Climate Champions in all UN Member States by 2030.	63
7	Grant schemes for renewable energy deployment	- The purchasing of solar water heaters and heat pump water heaters through a grant covering 50% of the eligible cost - Feed-in Tariffs to promote the purchasing of PV systems - The competitive bidding process for solar PV installations of more than 1 MW was amended to allow for systems above 400 kWp	64
7	Battery Storage Scheme	This scheme aims to increase a consumer's flexibility in their ability to utilise energy generated by PV systems (own-use).	64
7, 11	Double-Glazing Scheme for Birżebbuġa Residents	The scope for this scheme was to aid those households of Birżebbuġa to replace any external facing apertures that are antiquated or inefficient and change them to better sound insulating ones.	65
7	Leading sport organisations to higher energy efficiency scheme	A total of 41 sport clubs invested in renewable and energy efficient interventions achieving more than 650 MWh annual savings.	65
7, 9	The Promotion of Energy Audits in Small and Medium Sized Enterprises Scheme	This scheme encourages SMEs to carry out an energy audit in order to identify actions leading to energy improvement.	65
7	A report analysing the trends related to energy in the local manufacturing sector	The aim of the report was that of understanding the tendencies that industries have when it comes to energy patterns in their plants.	65-66
7, 11	Smart Metering Project	Enemalta plc has installed 99% of its consumers with smart meters and has adopted a tariff system that favours prudent energy use and energy efficiency, with the aim of fostering such behaviour in its final consumers.	66
6	LIFE 16 IPE MT 008 project	This project is led by the EWA with the objective of supporting the implementation of the 2nd River Basin Management Plan under the WFD.	69, 79-80
2, 12, 13, 15	AgriConnect	The AgriConnect has been established to act as the Government's Farm Advisory Service provider for Malta to provide a free and holistic advisory service.	72
2, 3, 8	Nationally funded schemes, which provide financial support to land and livestock farmers	A total of €4 million (€1.5 million to Land Farmers and €2.5 million to livestock farmers) were disbursed.	73
2, 8, 9, 12, 16	The Pitkalija Reform	- The reform will lead to greater controls and better governance as well as improvement in organisation transparency - Pitkalija is also implementing a new IT system	73
2, 8	Government's Agricultural Bioresources Agency investment	The purchase of three mobile dewatering trucks capable of efficiently dewatering farm slurry.	73

2, 14	Agricultural Research and Innovation Centre	Ghammieri Government Farm started being transformed into an Agricultural Research and Innovation Centre.	75
2	AgriHub project	This project aims to intensify national research into the agricultural sector to deliver better methods using more precision.	75
14, 15	FAST project – Fighting Alien Species Transborder	The main actions shall be aimed at the protection of the land and marine biodiversity of the area and in the sites of the Natura 2000 network.	76
2, 15	International Year of Plant Health 2020	A press conference and a technical workshop for relevant stakeholders was held.	76
15	Project Support for Conservation and Sustainable Use and Development of Genetic Resources in Agriculture	• To introduce and implement the concept of Functional Agrobiodiversity • To re-establish three of the local fruit trees • To create an apiary in the Gozo Experimental Farm to breed queens of the local honeybee race	76
3	National Digital Conference on the Importance of Animals within our Community	The conference highlighted the benefits reaped by citizens of all ages by engaging in activities with animals such as feeding and caring of local strays by the retired persons in the community or disabled persons working with animals.	76
15	Action Plan Addressing Escape from Confinement of Invasive Alien Species of Union Concern	This action plan was published along with the National Strategy for Preventing and Mitigating the Impact of Invasive Alien Species in the Maltese Islands and the accompanying National Codes of Good Practice on IAS.	78
15	SiMaSeed	The project will focus on the identification of priority species for conservation in Natura 2000 sites.	78
15	Eco-Gozo restoration/rehabilitation projects	The Eco-Gozo projects included: • The restoration of rubble walls along Marsalforn Road • The rehabilitation of Gozo's valleys. • Establishment of a Walking, Jogging and Cycling Trail in Ulysses Grove, Xewkija, Gozo	79
15	Afforestation projects	• Over 6,000 trees and shrubs have been planted in Comino • More than 800 trees and shrubs were planted in Buskett Gardens • About 500 trees and shrubs were planted in Bengħajsa • Over 600 trees were planted inside the Salini • Around 1,000 trees and shrubs, sponsored by the Embassy of Turkey, were planted in the Majjistral Park	80
15	Terrestrial habitat restoration projects	• Restoration works in Natura 2000 sites, which include the cliffs of the Madonna in Aħrax tal-Mellieħa and Selmunett • Habitat restoration works are currently underway around Fort Madliena	80

14	Initiatives aimed at achieving good ecological status and good chemical status of coastal waters and good environmental status of marine waters	• The identification of chemicals of emerging concern that are relevant to Malta's coastal and marine waters on the basis of a use characterisation exercise • A study on the impact of the National spoil grounds off Xgħajra commenced in 2020 • A desk-based ecological risk assessment on 'Same Risk areas' for Non-Indigenous Species was carried out in 2020 through the HARMONY project	80–81, 85
14	EMFF 8.3.1 Monitoring Sites	Malta implements monitoring processes for the continuous assessment of the marine environmental status.	81
14	Saving Our Blue Campaign	• Four concurrent clean-ups were held at Golden Bay, Għadira Bay, Pretty Bay and St George's Bay • Several other clean-ups were held on various beaches throughout the rest of summer 2020 • The total amount of waste collected in 2020 amounts to 5,202.4 kg	82–83
14	BLUEMED Coordination and Support Action project	This project functions as the operating arm of the BLUEMED Initiative. One of the goals of this project is that of fostering collaboration between EU and non-EU Mediterranean countries.	83
14	The Interreg Med Project 'BESS'	The project's aim is 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.	83
8	Boat Restoration Scheme	Around ninety small-scale fishers were supported through the implementation of this scheme.	84
8	COVID-19 Grant Scheme for Bluefin Tuna Fishers	A total of 145 small-scale fishers benefitted from the aid granted as part of the scheme.	84
8,14	Projects part financed by the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund 2014–2020	• Swordfish Temporary Cessation Scheme • Marsaxlokk Landing Office • Modernisation and the introduction of new related amenities of fishermen's facilities located at the designated fishing ports of Imġarr and Xlendi • Training for Fishers where 181 fishers applied to participate in one or more of the training courses offered • Installation of GPRS devices where between the period of 01 October 2019 and 01 October 2020, 750 vessels were equipped with a GPRS • Installation of CCTVs at the Automated Weighing and Labelling Stations where to date, 13 sites where the AWLs are installed have been equipped with CCTV equipment • Seminars for various stakeholders in the Fisheries Sector • Awareness Campaign on the CFP and IUU Regulations	84–85
9,14	Biotechnologies for Human Health and Blue Growth Project	The aim of BYTHOS is to increase investment in innovation and research in biotechnology for human health and blue growth.	86

14	UN FAO regional projects	• MedSudMed “Assessment and Monitoring of the Fishery Resources and the Ecosystems in the Straits of Sicily • CopeMed II “Coordination to Support Fisheries Management in the Western and Central Mediterranean	86
14	Fishing for Litter Scheme	The scheme aimed to collect plastic waste gathered by trawling vessels.	86
14	BLUEfasma	The project aims at integrating and implementing circular economy principles in the fisheries and aquaculture sectors.	86
14, 15	LIFE PanPuffinus	The project aims at improving the conservation status of two endangered pelagic seabirds, through the creation of an improved system of data collection and monitoring.	86
7	Long Term Renovation Strategy	It is a key action of Malta’s efforts for clean energy and energy efficiency and to achieve the decarbonisation of the building stock by 2050.	86-87
3, 7, 11	The reduction of pollution and the improvement of air quality	• The installation of a mobile monitoring station in Senglea’s Gardjola Gardens • Continued monitoring the impact of pollutants on ecosystems through soil and foliage samples • The publication of Malta’s policy document, the NAPCP, which supports Member States in planning national policies and measures • The Environment permitting through the Industrial Emissions Directive (2010/75/EU) and the Medium Combustion Plants Directive (2015/2193/EU) • The Scrappage scheme • A €200 grant when one converts an M1 or N1 vehicle to Autogas or liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) • An increase in roadside and roadworthiness checks • Bike-sharing schemes • An improvement of Ferry Landing Places • Free school transport for all school children • Measures relating to the public transport system • Free transport for youths, students and the elderly • A review of Malta’s national Electromobility Plan • Car-sharing scheme • A Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan for Valletta • Pilot cycling corridors • Developing a shore-supply action plan for TEN-T ports • Infrastructure interventions • An increase in the use of intelligent transport management systems • A Public Service Garage Reform • Over €2.5 million in grants were allocated to the purchasing of environmentally friendly vehicles and electric vehicles (including pedelecs)	87-88, 90

3, 9, 11	Infrastructural projects	• Opening all seven flyovers • Building underground reservoirs to harvest more than 1.5 million litres of rainwater for the irrigation of these new green areas • The longest green wall in Malta at the Marsa-Hamrun Bypass, using 27,600 flowering plants in a €500,000 environmental investment, was also installed • Santa Luċija Roundabout Underpass. These new tunnels are cutting over 30% of journey times, whilst reducing congestion emissions caused by the previous roundabout junction • The first phase completion of safety upgrade of Burmarrad Road • The Paola Square project • Refurbishment of Għnien il-Mediterran	89–90
3, 11, 13	Grand Harbour Clean Air Project	This project will cut over 90% of the air pollution that cruise liners and Ro-Ro ships produce when visiting Malta's principal port, using shoreside electricity to power onboard systems.	90
7	Encouragement to use public transport	• The provision of free public transport to young people was expanded from previous measures to include persons over the age of 75 • Malta Public Transport added 50 new buses to its fleet	90
7	Multi-modal Hub (Park and Ride)	• The PA issued the permit for the construction of the Park and Ride facility in Ta' Xhajma, Xewkija • Six fully electric powered buses were delivered to Gozo	90
3, 7, 11	Smart Parking solution initiative	The launch of a Smart Parking solution initiative at St. Francis Square in Victoria with displays installed on two roads leading to the same square.	90

Notes



