

Sustainable Development

ANNUAL REPORT 2022



GOVERNMENT OF MALTA
MINISTRY FOR THE ENVIRONMENT,
ENERGY AND ENTERPRISE



FOREWORD



Building a sustainable future that works for everyone and development that leaves no one behind may seem too ambitious given the multitude of factors which are having an impact on our economy, environment and people's lives on a daily basis. Achieving this, however, is not an impossible task if we all work together. Such challenges can be mitigated when more focus is put on introducing and implementing new and innovative sustainability strategies, policies, and initiatives. It is for this reason that the Maltese Government is committed to making the shift towards a more sustainable, just, inclusive and resilient economy to build a better future for all.

The past year has seen vibrant discussions about the future sustainability of the Maltese Islands and the challenges we face. Challenges are particularly significant for all citizens, especially, for people in vulnerable situations. This Annual Report demonstrates the Maltese Government's commitment to achieving its sustainable development targets. While significant progress has been made, gaps remain, in some areas more than others.

Malta's Sustainable Development Strategy for 2050 outlines the Government's ambitious targets to foster sustainable development for the next three decades.

The transition towards a climate-neutral green and blue economy, sustainable urban development and cultural heritage, healthy lives and well-being for all, digital transformation, smart mobility and connectivity, and social fairness and prosperity for all are the main pillars of this strategy for the future.

Given its overarching nature, this strategy was drafted by virtue of the commitment and participation of all stakeholders, including local authorities, civil society, the private sector, academia, and individual citizens. Their work and contributions were instrumental to establish a solid, ambitious, and holistic strategy which seeks to tackle current and future challenges and establish a healthy, sustainable and resilient society, economy and environment for our country.

In designing our long-term plan for mainstreaming sustainable development across all sectors, we are aware of our responsibilities in the global context. All our actions and decisions are guided by the global development plan set out in the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Our transformation towards a sustainable future that has people, the planet, and prosperity at heart can only succeed if we walk this path together. Sustainable development is indeed a call for action by all, and it is only by establishing strong collaborations among all actors and stakeholders, including international cooperation, that we can shape our future into one that is truly sustainable. We will continue working with a multitude of partners in setting up the right conditions required to transform challenges into opportunities and inspire behavioural and cultural change which places the values of sustainable development at its very core.

Miriam Dalli
Minister for the Environment, Energy and Enterprise

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD	4	1.4.1.3 Agricultural Consultative Council (ACC)	54
TABLE OF CONTENTS	6	1.4.1.4 Fisheries Conservation and Management (Amendment) Act	54
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	10	1.4.1.5 BFT Aquaculture Operations Regulations	54
INTRODUCTION	16	1.4.1.6 Offences, Proceedings and Sanctioning (Fisheries and Aquaculture) Regulations 2022	55
About the Report	17	1.4.2 Sustainable Aquaculture Practices	55
Malta’s Sustainable Development Strategy for 2050	18	1.4.3 Sustainable Agriculture and Food Security	56
Integration of the SDGs in the Budget Process	19	1.4.3.1 Initiatives to Promote Sustainability in the Agriculture and Food Sectors	56
Malta’s Statistical Information on the 2030 Agenda and Performance	20	1.4.4 Projects, Schemes and Initiatives to Support the Agriculture and Fisheries Sectors	57
Communicating Sustainable Development and the SDGs	21	1.4.4.1 The Pitkalija Reform	57
Raising Awareness Through Online Platforms	21	1.4.4.2 Agricultural Rent Reform	58
European Sustainable Development Week (ESDW) 2022	22	1.4.4.3 Malta AgriFair	59
The SDGs Projects Competition	24	1.4.4.4 Pig Welfare Scheme	59
The SDG Champions Initiative	25	1.4.4.5 Young Farmers Scheme	59
The Sustainable Development Fund	25	1.4.4.6 Let’s Talk Farming Programme	60
		1.4.4.7 AgriHub Project	60
		1.4.4.8 Plant Protection Directorate (PPD)’s Projects	60
		1.4.4.9 National Viticulture and Oenology Centre	61
		1.4.4.10 Increasing Resilience of the Local Meat Industry and Valorising Meat Products	61
		1.4.4.11 Crop Intelligent Tools Project	61
		1.4.4.12 Other EU-Funded Projects, Schemes and Initiatives	62
		1.4.4.12.1 Initiatives Implemented as Part of the Control Programme of the EMFF	62
		1.4.4.12.2 Seminars for Various Stakeholders in the Fisheries Sector	62
		1.4.4.12.3 Awareness Campaign on the CFP and IUU Fishing Regulations	62
		1.4.4.12.4 Installation of Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) Devices Onboard Fishing Vessels	62
		1.4.4.12.5 Data Collection Multi-Annual Programme (DC-MAP)	62
		1.4.4.12.6 BLUEfasma	63
		1.4.4.12.7 LIFE PanPuffinus	63
		1.4.4.12.8 BYTHOS	63
		1.4.4.12.9 SIMTAP	63
		1.4.4.12.10 Pest Survey Programme	63
		1.4.5 Consolidation of Services Offered to Farmers	64
		1.4.6 Promoting Organic Production	64
		1.5 Investing in Sustainable Finance for a Greener and Climate-Neutral Economy	65
		1.5.1 Government’s Fiscal Policy	65
		1.5.2 Government’s Debt Trajectory	66
		1.5.3 Green Budgeting	66
		1.5.4 Sustainable Financial Services	66
CHAPTER 1: TRANSITIONING TOWARDS A CLIMATE-NEUTRAL GREEN AND BLUE ECONOMY	26	CHAPTER 2: TOWARDS THE PRESERVATION OF SUSTAINABLE URBAN DEVELOPMENT AND CULTURAL HERITAGE	68
1.1 Towards a Resilient and Climate-Neutral Economy	28	2.1 Placing Culture and Heritage at the Heart of the Development of Our Local Communities	70
1.1.1 Public Procurement	29	2.1.1 Investment in Hospitality, Tourism and the Film Industries	70
1.1.2 Climate Action	29		
1.1.3 Air Quality	32		
1.1.4 Noise Pollution	33		
1.1.5 Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy	34		
1.1.5.1 Energy Efficiency in Public Buildings	37		
1.2 Responsible and Efficient Use of Resources which Safeguards Environmental and Socio-Economic Well-Being	39		
1.2.1 Waste Prevention and Management	39		
1.2.2 Water Management	41		
1.3 Protecting, Conserving and Enhancing Natural Capital to Improve Ecological Resilience and Sustainability	43		
1.3.1 Protecting and Enhancing Biodiversity	44		
1.3.1.1 Terrestrial Ecosystems and Biodiversity	44		
1.3.1.1.1 Afforestation and Woodland Areas	45		
1.3.1.1.2 Desertification and Land Degradation	45		
1.3.1.1.3 Valley Management	46		
1.3.1.2 Marine Environment and Biodiversity	46		
1.3.1.2.1 Marine Litter Projects and Campaigns	48		
1.3.1.2.2 Coastal Management Initiatives	50		
1.4 Developing Sustainable Food Systems to Achieve Food Security and Ensure Environmental and Socio-Economic Welfare	51		
1.4.1 Policies and Legislation	52		
1.4.1.1 Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)	52		
1.4.1.2 The First Agriculture Act	53		

2.1.1.1 Human Resource-Related Investment	71	5.1.2.1 Initiatives to Combat Poverty	113
2.1.1.2 Product Development	72	5.1.2.2 Analysing Social Behavioural Patterns	114
2.1.2 Preserving Malta’s Tangible Heritage	74	5.1.2.3 Initiatives to Promote Children’s Rights and Youth Empowerment	115
2.2 Sustainable Urban Planning and Development for Liveable and Resilient Towns and Villages	78	5.1.2.4 Support Services for the Vulnerable Groups	117
		5.1.2.5 Encouraging an Independent Way of Life	118
		5.1.2.6 Tackling Human Trafficking and Domestic Violence	119
CHAPTER 3: ENSURING HEALTHY LIVES AND WELL-BEING FOR ALL	82	5.1.3 Supporting Developing Countries and Providing Humanitarian Aid	120
3.1 Fostering Good Health for All by Strengthening our Public Health System	84	5.1.4 Grants and Schemes to Empower Citizens	120
3.1.1 Improving Treatment and Access to Free Medicines	85	5.1.4.1 Supporting Persons with Disability	120
3.1.2 Investing in Healthcare Workforce	86	5.1.4.2 Assisting Organisations	121
3.2 Promoting Good Nutrition and Active Lifestyles for a Healthy Society	87	5.1.4.3 Grants to Assist Gozitan Residents	121
3.2.1 Towards the Prevention and Containment of Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR)	87	5.2 Ensuring Accessible Products, Services and Public Spaces which Address the Needs of a Diverse and Changing Population	122
3.2.2 Safeguarding Animal Welfare	89	5.3 Building Safer Communities and Ensuring a Timely and Effective Justice System	123
3.2.3 Active and Healthy Lifestyle	90	5.3.1 Reforms in the Justice System	123
		5.3.2 Renovation and Training Initiatives Within the Courts of Justice	124
CHAPTER 4: ACCELERATING DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION, SMART MOBILITY AND CONNECTIVITY	92	5.3.3 A Digital Justice Strategy	125
4.1 Towards a Digitally Empowered Economy and Society	94	5.3.3.1 A Digital Transformation of the DoJ	125
4.1.1 A Digital Transformation of the Public Administration and the Public Service	94	5.3.3.2 Digital Reforms in Legal Aid and Asset Recovery	127
4.1.1.1 Sector-Specific Digitalisation Investments in Public Administration	96	5.3.3.3 Digitalisation Within the CSA	127
4.2 Promoting Digital Literacy and Innovative Digital Technologies	98	5.3.4 Reforms Within the Offices of the AG and SA	128
4.2.1 The National eSkills Strategy 2022-2025	98	5.3.5 The Notary to Government	131
4.2.2 Initiatives to Enhance Digital Literacy	98	5.3.6 Data Protection and Freedom of Information	131
4.2.2.1 The One Tablet Per Child and the One Device Per Child Projects	98	5.3.7 Compensation to Victims of Crime	132
4.2.2.2 eBiznify 2022	98	5.3.8 Strengthening the Discipline Forces	132
4.2.2.3 Digital Skills Bootcamp 2022	98	5.4 Achieving High-Quality Education Responsive to Labour Market Needs	135
4.2.2.4 EU Codeweek	99	5.4.1 Ensuring Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education	135
4.2.2.5 Cloud Computing	99	5.4.2 Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)	137
4.2.2.6 Get Smarter Project	99	5.4.3 Career Guidance	140
4.2.2.7 Women4IT Project	99	5.5 Equal Opportunities and Fair Access to the Labour Market	142
4.2.2.8 ICT 4 The Elderly Project	99	5.5.1 Enhancing the Workforce and Providing Better Opportunities to All	143
4.2.3 Initiatives to Innovative Digital Technologies	99	5.5.2 Enhancing Social Dialogue	146
4.3 Building Sustainable Communities Through Smart Mobility and Connectivity	101	5.5.3 Income Tax and Tax Refunds	146
4.4 Investing in Research and Innovation for Sustainable Growth	104	5.5.4 Supporting and Rewarding Businesses	147
		CONCLUDING REMARKS	150
CHAPTER 5: ACHIEVING SOCIAL FAIRNESS AND PROSPERITY FOR ALL	106	Annex 1- List of Milestones in 2022	152
5.1 Empowering Citizens and Communities Through Policy Instruments and Measures for the Benefit of All	108		
5.1.1 Policies and Reforms	111		
5.1.1.1 National Disability Reforms	111		
5.1.1.2 Anti-Racism Reforms	112		
5.1.1.3 Gender Mainstreaming Reforms	112		
5.1.1.4 Supporting Children and Youths	113		
5.1.2 Eliminating Discrimination and Promoting the Principles of Equality for All	113		

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACC	Agricultural Consultative Council	DC-MAP	Data Collection Multi Annual Programme
ACTS	Agency for Community and Therapeutic Services	DFA	Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture
AFM	Armed Forces of Malta	DIER	Department of Industrial and Employment Relations
AG	Attorney General	DKS	Dar Kenn Għal Saħħtek
AHWD	Animal Health and Welfare Department	DLAP	Directorate for Learning and Assessment Programmes
AI	Artificial Intelligence	DoJ	Department of Justice
AKIS	Agricultural Knowledge and Information Systems	E4D	Empowerment for Diversity
AM	Additional Measure	EAFRD	European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development
AMR	Antimicrobial Resistance	EDIH	European Digital Innovation Hub
API	Application Programming Interface	EEA	European Economic Area
ARPA	Agriculture and Rural Payments Agency	EHR	Electronic Health Record
AWAS	Agency for the Welfare of Asylum Seekers	eID	Electronic Identification
AWD	Animal Welfare Directorate	EIRA	Employment and Industrial Relations Act
BCA	Building and Construction Authority	EIT	European Institute of Innovation and Technology
BFT	Bluefin Tuna	ELI	European Legislation Identifier
BREEAM	Building Research Environmental Assessment Method	EMFF	European Maritime and Fisheries Fund
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy	EPD	Economic Policy Department
CAP SP	Common Agricultural Policy Strategic Plan	ERA	Environment and Resources Authority
CAT	Computer Aided Translation	ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
CCF	Corradino Correctional Facility	ESD	Education for Sustainable Development
CEER	Centre for Environmental Education and Research	ESDW	European Sustainable Development Week
CETP	Clean Energy Transition Partnership	ESF	European Social Fund
CFP	Common Fisheries Policy	ESG	Environmental, Social and Governance
CIF	Cost, Insurance, and Freight	ESIF	European Structural and Investment Funds
CIHEAM	International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies	ESPAD	European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs
CION	European Commission	EU	European Union
CIPD	Critical Infrastructure Protection Directorate	EUAA	European Union Agency for Asylum
CO₂	Carbon Dioxide	EWA	Energy and Water Agency
COP	Conference of the Parties	FEAD	Fund for European Aid
CPD	Civil Protection Department	FSWS	Foundation for Social Welfare Services
CRO	Criminal Records Office	FVE	Federation of Veterinarians in Europe
CRPD	Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability	GBV	Gender-Based Violence
CSA	Court Services Agency	GDP	Gross Domestic Product
CSR	Community Social Responsibility	GE	Global Education

GENE	Global Education Network Europe	MedSPAD	Mediterranean School Survey Project on Alcohol and other Drugs
GHG	Greenhouse Gas	MEEE	Ministry for the Environment, Energy and Enterprise
GPP	Green Public Procurement	MERCA	Managing Essential Resources in Retail through Consumption Analysis
GRDA	Gozo Regional Development Authority	MEYR	Ministry for Education, Sports, Youth, Research and Innovation
GRETA	Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings	MFA	Malta Food Agency
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions	MFE	Ministry for Finance and Employment
HNA	Holistic Needs Assessment	MFET	Ministry for Foreign and European Affairs and Trade
HPWH	Heat Pump Water Heater	MFH	Ministry for Health
HRD	Human Rights Directorate	MFJ	Ministry for Justice
HVSC	High Voltage Shore Connection	MFSA	Malta Financial Services Authority
ICT	Information and Communications Technology	MFT	Ministry for Tourism
IFE	Institute for Education	MGOZ	Ministry for Gozo
IMC	Inter-Ministerial Committee	MHSR	Ministry for Home Affairs, Security, Reforms and Equality
INDIS	Industrial Innovative Solutions	MICE	Meetings, Incentives, Conventions and Exhibitions
IoT	Internet of Things	MMA	Malta Medicines Authority
IPM	Integrated Pest Management	MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
IPS	Institute for Public Services	MPF	Malta Police Force
IT	Information Technology	MSFD	Marine Strategy Framework Directive
ITS	Institute of Tourism Studies	MSPC	Ministry for Social Policy and Children’s Rights
IUU	Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated	MTA	Malta Tourism Authority
JPI	Joint Programming Initiative	NAP	National Agricultural Policy
KNŻ	Kunsill Nazzjonali taż-Żgħażaġh	NBSAP	National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan
L.N.	Legal Notice	NCPE	National Commission for the Promotion of Equality
LCDS	Low Carbon Development Strategy	NEEMO	Networking for Excellence in Electric Mobility Operations
LEI	Learning-Exchanging-Integrating	NEET	Not in Employment, Education or Training
LPG	Liquefied Petroleum Gas	NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
LSE	Learning Support Educator	NIS	Non-Indigenous Species
MAFA	Ministry for Agriculture, Fisheries and Animal Rights	NLA	National Literacy Agency
MAU	Migrants Advice Unit	NLTP	National Language Technology Platform
MBR	Malta Business Registry	NO₂	Nitrogen Dioxide
MCAST	Malta College of Arts, Science & Technology	NSO	National Statistics Office
MCCAA	Malta Competition and Consumer Affairs Authority	NSSS	National School Support Services
MCESD	Malta Council for Economic and Social Development	NVL	National Veterinary Laboratory
MCST	Malta Council for Science and Technology	ODA	Official Development Assistance

OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development	STILC	Sonia Tanti Independent Living Centre
PA	Planning Authority	SUMP	Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan
PCJ	People-Centred Justice	SUP	Single-Use Plastic
PM	Particulate Matter	SWH	Solar Water Heater
PPD	Plant Protection Directorate	TDP	Technology Development Programme
PRIMA	Partnership for Research and Innovation in the Mediterranean Area	TF	Task Force
PROs	Producer Responsibility Organisations	THB	Trafficking in Human Beings
PSCD	Personal Social Career Development	TSI	Technical Support Instrument
PV	Photovoltaic	UK	United Kingdom
PWD	Public Works Department	UN	United Nations
R&I	Research and Innovation	UNCRPD	UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
RBMP	River Basin Management Plan	UNWTO	United Nations World Tourism Organization
RDP	Rural Development Programme	UoM	University of Malta
RED	Research and Evaluation Directorate	VAT	Value-Added Tax
REP	Research Excellence Programme	VMS	Vessel Monitoring System
REWS	Regulator for Energy and Water Services	VRA	Vulnerability and Risk Assessment
RIS	Regional Innovation Scheme	WCMP	Water Catchment Management Plan
RRF	Recovery and Resilience Facility	WE MAKE	Water and Energy Management and Knowledge Transfer in Manufacturing Enterprises
RRP	Recovery and Resilience Plan	WFD	Water Framework Directive
S.L.	Subsidiary Legislation	WSC	Water Services Corporation
SA	State Advocate		
SCP	Smart Cities Programme		
SDD	Sustainable Development Directorate		
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal		
SDI	Sustainable Development Indicator		
SEM	Servizzi Ewropej f’Malta		
SFFD	State Funded Food Distribution		
SIMTAP	Self-sufficient Integrated Multi-Tropic AquaPonic		
SLECI	Self-regulating, Low Energy, Clay based Irrigation		
SMEs	Small and Medium-sized Enterprises		
SO₂	Sulphur Dioxide		
SOPs	Standard Operating Procedures		
SRF	Space Research Fund		
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics		

INTRODUCTION

About the Report

This Annual Report has been prepared by the Sustainable Development Directorate (SDD) within the Ministry for the Environment, Energy and Enterprise (MEEE) and fulfils the purpose of compliance with Part VI, Article 14 of the Sustainable Development Act (Chapter 521). This requires the Competent Authority to produce a report, which is then submitted to the Minister responsible for sustainable development, where all the sustainable activities carried out by the Competent Authority during the previous financial year are outlined. A copy of this report is to be presented by the Minister to the House of Representatives for debate.

One of the main objectives of the SDD is to track progress and report on the achievement and progress of each of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at a local and national level while identifying areas and gaps that require further action. Thus, this report will provide an overview of the policies, measures and initiatives that incorporate the principles of sustainable development and address the SDGs, which were carried out by the various ministries and other government bodies, departments and entities during the year 2022. The report also highlights areas that require more effort and improvements.

All of this is being done in view of the fact that, throughout the previous year, the SDD worked on translating Malta's Sustainable Development Vision for 2050 into a strategic policy direction that will ensure the protection of the environment and the socio-economic development of the Maltese Islands for 2050. Malta's Sustainable Development Strategy for 2050 is based on five Strategic Goals that focus on transitioning towards a climate-neutral green economy; the preservation of sustainable urban development and cultural heritage; ensuring healthy lives and well-being for all; accelerating digital transformation, smart mobility and connectivity; and achieving social fairness and prosperity for all. Therefore, this Annual Report presents all the work carried out during the previous year in accordance with these specific Goals.

Malta's Sustainable Development Strategy for 2050

During 2022, the SDD worked on a national strategy for Malta that encompasses the objectives and targets that the Maltese government aims to achieve by 2050 to secure a future in which nature and the environment are safeguarded and one in which economic prosperity is sustained and the citizen's good health and well-being are maintained.

Integrating these social, economic and environmental objectives, as well as their implications for different socio-economic groups and for future generations, pose a number of difficulties. Such complex challenges cannot be tackled *ad hoc* or in isolation. Henceforth, this requires the intervention of, and concrete actions among the public as well as other actors across the political and economic spectrum, including representatives of government and the business and civil society to examine available policy options and translate the broad strategic direction into specific short- and long-term objectives at the national and local levels.

Malta's Sustainable Development Strategy for 2050 builds upon the Vision 2050 document, which was adopted in 2018 as well as the United Nations (UN) 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Strategy was drafted after extensive consultation with government ministries, entities and departments as well as various voluntary organisations, businesses and other interested parties.

The Strategy sets out five Strategic Goals:



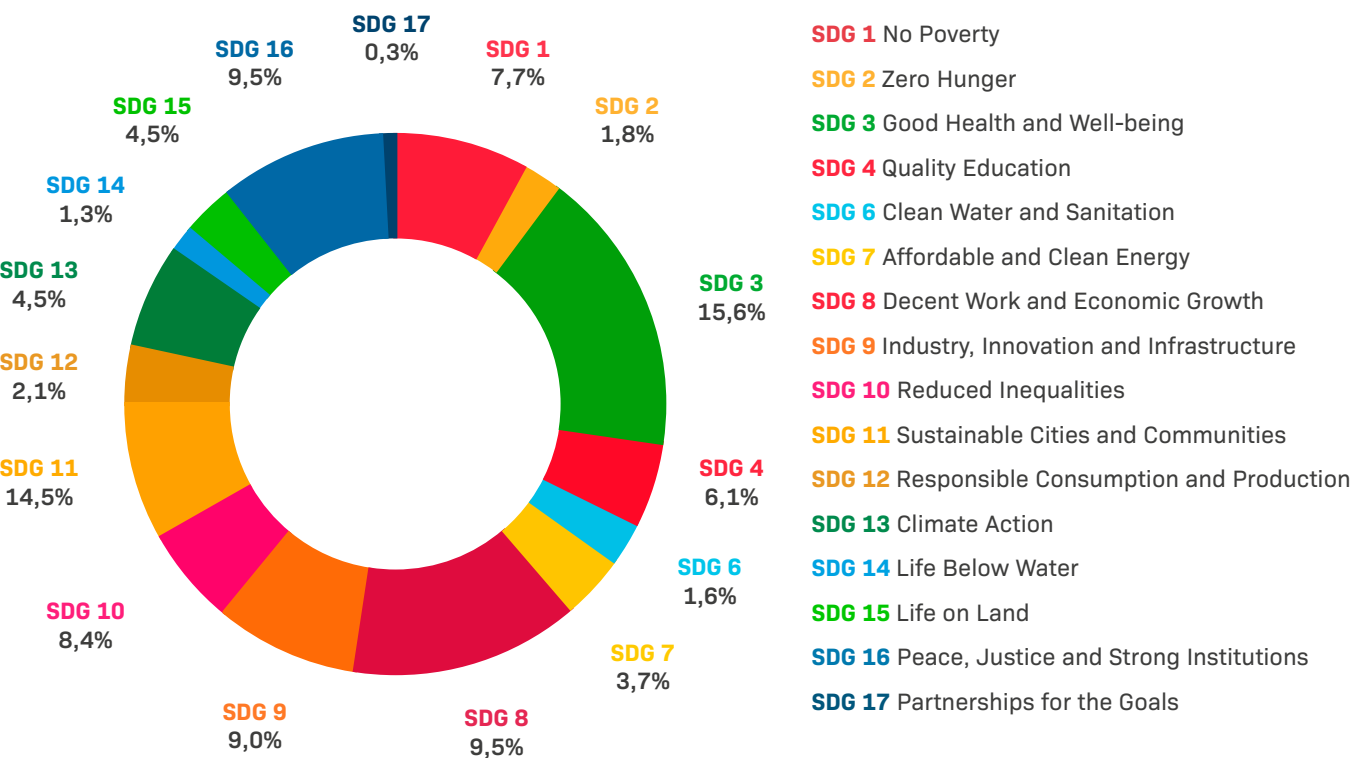
Malta's Sustainable Development Strategy for 2050 was launched for public consultation on 9th December 2022. These Strategic Goals will be monitored through a defined set of targets that will be translated into concrete actions in the next phase of the Strategy, which will be Malta's Sustainable Development Action Plan for 2030.

Integration of the SDGs in the Budget Process

The integration of the SDGs in the budget process is an exercise that the Maltese government has been carrying out annually since 2019 with the aim of improving the overall policy coherence and being in a better position to realise the ambitions and targets set out by the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In this regard, the Government undertook a long and intensive process in which all ministries were required to analyse and assess the contributions of the measures and initiatives towards the implementation of the SDGs. This leads to better transparency and accountability of the Government's decision-making processes, whilst ensuring that the three pillars of sustainable development: economic, social and environmental, are always considered.

The 2023 Budget was directed towards sustaining economic recovery, safeguarding employment, enhancing social protection, ensuring the health and well-being of individuals, as well as incentivising sustainable, innovative and digital solutions. These are being realised through the introduction of new schemes aimed at assisting businesses to become more resilient and competitive, the provision of decent work and high-quality jobs, improvements in the education system, and projects designed to promote the adoption of new and innovative carbon-neutral technologies across all sectors. Various measures were introduced to promote the circular economy and waste reduction across the sector, including measures that combat environmental degradation and climate change. Furthermore, the 2023 Budget continued to build on previous years' initiatives that were aimed at further reducing the risk of poverty among the most vulnerable in society; it sought to combat discrimination and inequalities, and addressed any past injustices.

270 measures of Budget 2023, spreading across various sectors, were integrated with the SDGs.



Malta’s Statistical Information on the 2030 Agenda and Performance

Malta’s progress in relation to the SDGs is reported mainly through international platforms, these being the Sustainable Development Report, which is prepared by the Sustainable Development Solutions Network and the Bertelsmann Stiftung, and the monitoring report of the European Union (EU) that is presented by Eurostat. The data provided by the 2022 Sustainable Development Report placed Malta 33rd out of 163 countries, with an SDG Index overall score of 76.8 out of a maximum of 100.

In order to ensure that all national stakeholders contribute equally and effectively towards data collection and the production of statistics related to Sustainable Development Indicators (SDIs) a National Expert Group on SDIs was established through Cabinet Decision CAB/627/XIII/21/2. Preparation for the National Expert Group on SDIs started in 2022. This Group met once in the ‘plenary’ format and then in different Task Force (TF) formations. The ‘plenary’ met on 24th February 2022, while the TF meetings were held on the following dates:

- SDG 1 TF meeting: 3rd and 18th October 2022
- SDG 2 TF meeting: 21st October and 10th November 2022

Following several internal meetings, the National Statistics Office (NSO) produced detailed technical reports to guide the discussions of the TFs, which were shared with the nominated SDG experts prior to the meetings. These reports contained relevant information about all the indicators falling under the specific Goal addressed, including:

- the type of statistical product used for the monitoring of the sustainable development targets;
- the availability of statistics for Malta;
- the information from meetings held with custodian agencies; and
- a detailed breakdown of each indicator, including definitions, data sources, data flows and data availability.

Following the TF meetings, reports were drawn highlighting the topics discussed, significant observations and conclusions, and the actions required for each specific SDG indicator. Following the TF meetings, the NSO carried out additional work in line with what was agreed upon during the meetings.

On the 3rd and 4th of November 2022, the NSO also organised a high-level meeting with the Director Generals and presidents of the national statistical offices of Croatia, Greece and Cyprus. The aim of this meeting was to discuss salient issues related to the production of statistics and issues related to the national coordination of statistics. One of the agenda items for this meeting was a discussion of the SDIs, in particular, of the approach taken by NSO towards the SDIs and of how national cooperation and coordination on data could improve.

Additionally, throughout the year, several requests for data from custodian agencies were sent to the NSO. For each request, internal and/or external consultations were conducted, and feedback in relation to the existing data and/or revised or new data were submitted to the international agencies.

Communicating Sustainable Development and the SDGs

During 2022, the SDD continued to ensure that, throughout its work, activities, events and initiatives, sustainable development is promoted and adopted by all actors throughout all workings of government as well as across all the different sectors in the Maltese Islands.

Raising Awareness Through Online Platforms

All throughout 2022, the SDD continued to raise awareness of the 17 UN SDGs and initiatives and measures related to sustainable development through its website, which presented information and data in a more interactive and user-friendly way. The website (<https://sustainabledevelopment.gov.mt/>) is available in English and Maltese and provides users with updates on the latest sustainable initiatives, projects, and developments; information on the Sustainable Development Governance Framework, as well as on the existing bodies and entities that work on the promotion of sustainable development while fostering the exchange of views and national dialogue.



Furthermore, the SDD also continued its efforts in encouraging and promoting sustainable initiatives and practices, as well as stakeholders’ and the public’s engagement, participation and action when it comes to sustainable development and lifestyles, through its Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/sustainabledevelopment.mt>), where features, statistics, information, stories and news concerning sustainable development and the SDGs are constantly being uploaded.

European Sustainable Development Week (ESDW) 2022

Since its first edition in 2015, the ESDW has stimulated and brought to light numerous initiatives, projects, activities and events carried out by a multitude of diverse entities all over Europe. As it did in previous years, the SDD also actively participated in ESDW 2022, which took place between 18th September 2022 and 8th October 2022 with the core of the Week happening between 20th September 2022 and 26th September 2022.

The chosen theme for ESDW 2022 was *Shaping our Sustainable Future*, during which the SDD organised a number of activities related to sustainable development whilst promoting a total of 40 sustainable initiatives organised by government entities, local councils, businesses and civil society organisations, which were all showcased on both the local and European platforms.



The following events were carried out by the SDD as part of ESDW 2022:

21 September 2022 Lejla fil-Park

During this event, St Clement Park in Żabbar was transformed into a space for the promotion of good health and sport to live a healthier and more sustainable life.

The programme was varied and those present had the opportunity to meet a number of Maltese Olympic athletes. Also present were a number of organisations, namely the Malta Skateboard Association, the Malta Football Association, Malta Cricket, Badminton Malta, Special Olympics Malta, the Malta Wheelchair Basketball Association, and the Boċċi Clubs Federation.

There were also representatives from the Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Directorate who offered information on how to live a healthy life and the type of balanced diet one can eat.

Additionally, apart from exhibitions of sports talent, there were also games for children, Zumba, crafts and sports activities taking place as well as a performance from the Scouts Ħaż-Żabbar band.



22 September 2022 Sustainable Baby Products Workshop

The Sustainable Baby Products workshop was organised as part of the Sustainable Baby Box Project, through which every newborn receives a starter-kit that will help guardians to shift towards a more sustainable and eco-friendly up-bringing of their child from a young age. This project is being implemented by MEEE together with Ministry for Home Affairs, Security, Reforms and Equality (MHSR) and the Ministry for Gozo (MGOZ).

The workshop, which followed another workshop previously held online in May, focused mainly on the benefits of using cloth nappies and other sustainably sourced baby products.

To date, more than 4,000 sustainable baby boxes have been distributed since the start of the project in November 2021.



The SDGs Projects Competition

During 2022, Junior Chamber International Malta and MEEE organised a competition with the aim of increasing knowledge and awareness about the SDGs and presenting sustainable innovative ideas for safeguarding the socio-economic and environmental sustainability of the Maltese Islands. The competition was open to young people, aged between 18 and 40, who truly have sustainability at heart and who want to inspire change. The competition gave them the opportunity to suggest project ideas for implementation, in order to encourage sustainable alternatives for growth to be introduced in the Maltese Islands.

The top three ideas that were selected received a cash prize that was presented at an awards event in August 2022.



The SDG Champions Initiative

On 22nd September 2022, MEEE and the Kunsill Nazzjonali taż-Żgħażaġh (KNŻ) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in relation to the SDG Champions Initiative with the aim of creating more awareness among young people about sustainable development and the SDGs. Through this initiative, the government gave an opportunity to five young people, known as SDG Champions, who have sustainability at heart and who wish to inspire positive change, by representing and advocating for one of the five pillars of the SDGs, these being people, planet, prosperity, peace, and partnership.

KNŻ was provided with the sum of €5,000 to assist the SDG Champions in carrying out their tasks and responsibilities while enabling them to better promote a culture that embraces the principles of sustainability within our communities.



The Sustainable Development Fund

During the final quarter of 2022, voluntary organisations were given the opportunity to apply for a scheme issued by the SDD and the Malta Council for the Voluntary Sector. Through the Sustainable Development Fund for Voluntary Organisations, which was launched on 26th September and included an investment of €50,000, MEEE, on behalf of the government, offered financial support to voluntary organisations engaged in projects and initiatives in sustainable development more specifically in the environment, society and the economy.

The main objectives of this scheme are aimed at supporting voluntary organisations in undertaking tangible sustainable development projects and initiatives that have the potential to cover activities and initiatives in line with the SDGs. It was also an opportunity for voluntary organisations to improve their capacity and skills while allowing them to develop community projects that promote sustainability in different areas as well as engage in initiatives that lead to a fairer and more equal society, a clean environment, and a healthy economy.

A total of 18 applications were received by the closing date with the winners being announced in early 2023.



CHAPTER 1



Transitioning Towards a Climate-Neutral Green and Blue Economy

Climate change, pollution, the loss of natural resources, and social and income disparities are all pressing issues, which Malta is currently facing in some way or another. These are among several factors that pose numerous challenges to our natural resources and the environment. These challenges are continuously increasing due to the high population density and the increasing arrival of tourists. Though the latter create more opportunities for economic growth, they are putting even more pressure on the country's infrastructure, services, resources, and environment at large.

Over the past years, an urgent need to address these matters has become the focus of the government's work, with the principles of "blue" and "green" economies featuring ever so higher on the government's agenda.

The concept of a green economy has been vastly linked to the term "sustainable development" since it strives toward achieving sustainable economic growth by focusing on resource management and investments, employment rates, and inflation, among other things. To transform the different economic sectors into a green economy, it is essential to develop tools and policies, as well as knowledge both at the national and regional levels. The resulting green economy will then serve as a catalyst for improving human welfare and social equity, while at the same time significantly reducing ecological risks and environmental degradation.

Similarly, the concept of the "blue economy" stems from the idea of linking the notions of conservation and the sustainability of our sea. It seeks to focus on a healthy marine environment while maintaining growth and promoting "blue" businesses and jobs. A "blue economy" should also promote alternative sources of renewable energy, manage and enhance resource efficiency and deal with scarcity issues, while ensuring that the necessary technical capacities and knowledge are in place to achieve them.

Thus, the government is adamant to continue to work towards increasing the efficiency of resource use through sustainable production methods and consumption, thereby reducing the negative impacts on the climate and also, on the terrestrial and marine environment. In this way, several educational campaigns are held regularly, whereby their main aim focuses on changing the social and cultural mindsets of people, while encouraging further investment in businesses that have environmental, social and governance (ESG) principles at heart. Moreover, the government will also be working with all economic operators to ensure a transition towards a climate-neutral and green economy, attaining carbon neutrality and net zero emissions as well as nurturing the principles of environmental responsibility from a young age.

In this respect, considerable progress was made on the development of Malta's *National Strategy for the Environment 2050*. This Strategy will set the direction for protecting and managing the environment in the long term by creating an overarching framework for Malta's environmental strategies and plans. Throughout the year 2022, extensive consultations were undertaken with numerous stakeholders from all sectors of society and from the environmental, economic and social fields, whilst the Strategy was published for public consultation in September 2022.

Therefore, this chapter will highlight the measures and initiatives undertaken by the government which are linked to the 2030 Agenda, namely SDGs 1, 2, 3, 6-9, 11-15 and 17.

2030 AGENDA-RELATED GOALS



1.1 Towards a Resilient and Climate-Neutral Economy

Relevant UN SDG Targets	
3.9	By 2030, substantially reduce the number of deaths and illnesses from hazardous chemicals and air, water and soil pollution and contamination
6.3	By 2030, improve water quality by reducing pollution, eliminating dumping and minimizing re-release of hazardous chemicals and materials, halving the proportion of untreated wastewater and substantially increasing recycling and safe reuse globally
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
6.5	By 2030, implement integrated water resources management at all levels, including through transboundary cooperation as appropriate
6.b	Support and strengthen the participation of local communities in improving water and sanitation management
7.1	By 2030, ensure universal access to affordable, reliable and modern energy services
7.2	By 2030, increase substantially the share of renewable energy in the global energy mix
7.3	By 2030, double the global rate of improvement in energy efficiency
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
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
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
12.1	Implement the 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns, all countries taking action, with developed countries taking the lead, taking into account the development and capabilities of developing countries
12.7	Promote public procurement practices that are sustainable, in accordance with national policies and priorities
13.2	Integrate climate change measures into national policies, strategies and planning
13.3	Improve education, awareness-raising and human and institutional capacity on climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning
15.9	By 2020, integrate ecosystem and biodiversity values into national and local planning, development processes, poverty reduction strategies and accounts
17.14	Enhance policy coherence for sustainable development

1.1.1 Public Procurement

Following the publication of the second Green Public Procurement (GPP) National Action Plan in 2021, throughout 2022 the MEEE provided support to various entities and ministries on the implementation of the new GPP-related criteria. In June 2022, a comprehensive Contracts Circular (including annexes) detailing the provisions emanating from the second GPP National Action Plan in relation to public procurement procedure, was published.

The MEEE continued to monitor the uptake of the GPP and undertake the necessary quality assurance exercises to ensure that each Ministry is contributing to the greening of public expenditure. In view of this, in 2022, the MEEE concluded a comprehensive monitoring system through the existing national e-procurement system. The proposed enhancement aims to simplify the collection of GPP data from all contracting authorities on a pre-publication basis.

In line with the published second GPP National Action Plan and to continuously engage economic operators, contracting authorities and other relevant stakeholders were provided with extensive training through information sessions, workshops and established communication channels. Certified training programmes continued to be offered through the Institute of Public Services (IPS). To further improve the process even at the stage of evaluation of bids, by 2023 one voting member sitting on the evaluation board was recommended to have successfully attended a training course in GPP. The second GPP National Action Plan is therefore committed to providing a training strategy rather than one-off training courses, which would specifically address the different audiences.

In addition, policy documentation in relation to the requirements emanating from Article 6 of Directive 2012/27/EU (and its corresponding transposition in subsidiary legislation (S.L.) 623.07) on Energy Efficiency has been updated in view of the new rescaled EU energy labels. Specifically, the relevant Procurement Policy underlines that the procurement of products, services and buildings that offer high-energy-efficient performance has been revamped to emphasise appropriate energy labelling, eco-design and efficiency in the relevant procurement procedures.

1.1.2 Climate Action

Following the adoption of the *Low Carbon Development Strategy* (LCDS) in 2021, Government launched the Climate Vulnerability and Risk Assessment (VRA) for the Maltese Islands. More precisely, in 2022, impact chains identifiers and sensitivities in terms of assets and economic activities were modelled economically towards a general estimation of the economic impact of climate change. This would then support increased preparedness and strengthen resilience towards the impacts of climate change. Work on the VRA is expected to continue and be finalised in 2023.

Recognising the need for instigating action at all societal levels, including individual citizens, for the second consecutive year, MEEE launched a nationwide public awareness campaign to promote climate action. The *ClimateOn* campaign aims at changing the general public's habits towards a more innovative way of life, by instilling thoughts for solutions and highlighting the benefits of a low-carbon society. The objective of the campaign is to turn into action to find practical solutions to address climate change through climate mitigation and adaptation initiatives, youth empowerment, education, training and awareness dissemination. In 2022, based on the identified policy themes addressed in the LCDS, specific policy sectors were addressed, including sustainable transport and mobility, sustainable energy use in buildings, and energy efficiency and sustainable financing.

In 2022, climate change was the theme adopted for the work carried out by the European Network of Ombudspersons for Children. The Maltese youth advisors who form part of the European Network of Young Advisors have put forward the following recommendations regarding climate action:

- Children's right to participation should be guaranteed by providing spaces for children to share their opinions and ideas regarding climate change.
- All children should have access to information regarding the issue of climate change.
- Formal education should actively incorporate sustainable development.
- Legislation regarding climate change should be implemented and the necessary structures should be put in place to protect resources in order to safeguard the future of young people.

- The issue of fake news and disinformation needs to be addressed through media literacy and the development of critical thinking skills.

Additionally, through Europe Direct Valletta, Servizzi Ewropej f'Malta (SEM) organised 25 sessions for children attending different Skolasajf centres in Malta and Gozo. The activities with the theme European Union Climate Heroes were intended to provide participating children with a better understanding of their responsibilities on active citizenship as well as of the EU's commitment towards climate change. The children were also made aware of their responsibilities to protect the environment and how they can contribute actively in their own ways as young children. In total, 350 children aged between 8 and 12 years participated in 26 sessions, spread over six weeks.

In 2022, as part of youth engagement, the MEEE launched the second edition of the *SeedGreen* programme with a view to supporting young innovators seeking to come up with solutions which will aid Malta's transition towards climate neutrality. The Programme aims at supporting potential start-ups which can identify and implement solutions in highly-polluting sectors such as transport, construction, waste, agriculture, retail and energy efficiency.

In November 2022, Malta further reaffirmed its commitment towards climate action at the 27th Conference of the Parties (COP). As part of its pledges, Malta committed to doubling its contribution towards the Green Climate Fund for the second year in a row. Moreover, Malta committed to work on the Islands for Islands Initiative, providing technical assistance to small island developing countries. Malta will also contribute to enhancing the capacity building of these countries by providing scholarships to students in climate-related studies.

Tourism can also contribute towards a green economic transition. In May 2022, a proposal under the Interreg Europe programme was submitted for EU funding for a project entitled *Decarbonising the Tourism Industry Post COVID-19 Support*. The Ministry for Tourism (MFT) is one of the partners forming part of a consortium of 13 partners. The proposal includes actions in an effort to identify and assess sustainable solutions towards the recovery of the EU tourism infrastructure sector following the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic, including the new scenery of the energy crisis. Sustainable and low-carbon emission solutions complying with EU long-term policies for the de-carbonisation of the economy is the main challenge addressed in this project. During project implementation, good practices will be exchanged among partner regions while the regional policies will be improved with capacity building in the participating regions and the adoption of policies that have been successful in other regions. The project aims to include the facilitation of the de-carbonisation of the tourism infrastructure, increase the energy efficiency of the tourism infrastructure, increase the energy self-sufficiency of the tourism sector, promote new and novel types of tourism such as “virtual tourism” of low-energy consumption and carbon footprint, and assist the industry in coping with the current energy crisis. The University of Malta (UoM) is also a partner in this project. The project was selected for funding by the European Commission (CION) and the results were communicated in December 2022.

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

Furthermore, during the period under review, the Institute of Tourism Studies (ITS), in collaboration with SUNx Malta, 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 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 EU Green Deal. The developed training programme is in the form of a Diploma at MQF Level 4, with 120 total credits. The programme is being taught over a 12-month period in two semesters followed by a one-year International Institute for Peace Through Tourism internship.

Following the success of the Diploma in Climate Friendly Travel, which has seen 28 local and international students

graduating with this qualification in December of 2022, the collaboration between ITS and SUNx Malta has been taken further by the planning and development of a Master of Science in Strategic Management for Climate Friendly Travel. Both institutions are currently undertaking curricular and market research with the aim of concluding the development of the study programme and initiating the accreditation process. The target commencement of this programme is October 2024.

The Malta College of Arts, Science & Technology (MCAST) continued with its activities aimed at boosting the Climate Innovation ecosystem, as part of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) Climate-KIC Regional Innovation Scheme (RIS) Malta Hub. In particular, MCAST worked on Malta's Cleantech Innovation Ecosystem Map, focusing on existing start-ups with the aim of developing innovative technologies which will significantly improve energy consumption and sustainable use of resources.

MCAST also participated in the second stage of the project funded through EIT Climate-KIC, *Higher Education Innovation Growth and Training: heightening sustainable innovation in our higher education institutions (HEIs) and societies, known as HEIght*. This is an initiative of a pan-European consortium of four forward-thinking HEIs, namely MCAST in Malta, the University of Central Lancashire in the United Kingdom (UK) and Cyprus, and Özyeğin in Turkey, together with the National Centre for Entrepreneurship in Education UK. Through training, designed and tailored to developing innovation and enterprise, these activities support the development of academic and non-academic staff and students. Through this project, MCAST piloted challenge-led learning addressing the SDGs within its related units as well as offered continuing professional development for its lecturers to use systems-innovations visual tools to overcome SDG challenges.

MCAST is also a partner in the *Mediterranean Island Cleantech Innovation Ecosystem*, which is funded through Horizon Europe. The consortium partners represent the quadruple helix (academia, industry, public bodies, civil society and citizens), and will involve all relevant stakeholders in Cyprus and Malta. They will work towards the creation of innovative ecosystems that will enable a climate-neutral Europe by 2050. The consortium aims to build interconnected and inclusive innovation ecosystems, that will assist them in tackling the innovation gap and in achieving the energy and climate targets set out in the National Energy and Climate Action Plan.

In addition, the same college also delivered the *Young Innovators* programme, which receives 55% EIT- Climate-KIC funding and is an experiential programme providing teachers and youth with skills and competencies needed to become change agents and lead systemic innovation towards a net-zero carbon economy and resilient society. Besides, MCAST is also working with the Malta Resources Authority on *Land User Land Cover Mapping of the Maltese Islands*. This mapping exercise is used for the purposes of national reporting of emissions and removals from Land Use, Land-Use Change and Forestry activities in accordance with the international and EU obligations of Malta. Furthermore, it provides an empirical basis for policymaking by the Maltese government that enhances the GHG removal potential of the sector. The outcome of this project is a classification of the land use in the Maltese Islands leading to a mapping of the annual shift in land use, also known as the delta. The project uses the European Space Agency Copernicus Sentinel-2 satellite data, and the classification is represented as geographical shapefiles that annotate the various land uses, all of which are accessible via a Geographical Information System.

MCAST also delivered the place-based *RIS MED ClimAccelerator* programme, which receives 55% EIT Climate-KIC funding. Through the programme, 10 local clean-tech entrepreneurs were supported and were provided with state-of-the-art coaching and training as well as access to financial support and networking opportunities. MED ClimAccelerator is the only EU acceleration programme focused on climate impact by clean-tech commercialisation. The programme brings the knowledge, resources, tools and the coaching of a climate impact start-up needs for success in three stages.

Furthermore, the college conducted the Atmospheric Toolbox project, known as *AEROTOX*, financed by the Malta Council for Science & Technology (MCST), for and on behalf of the Foundation for Science and Technology, through the Space Research Fund (SRF) under contract number SRF-2019-1S2. The aim of this research project was to use the Satellite Sentinel-5P datasets daily to predict the Saharan desert movement over the South Mediterranean region in advance at a very high resolution of 7x3km as opposed to 10x10km which is available today.

The Standards and Metrology Institute within the Malta Competition and Consumer Affairs Authority (MCCAA) continued to provide certification services against international standards ISO 14001:2015 *Environmental management systems - Requirements with guidance for use*. The aim of the standard is to provide a management

tool to all types of organisations that want to demonstrate sound environmental performance by controlling the impacts of their activities, products and services on the environment. This International Standard specifies requirements for an environmental management system to enable an organisation to develop and implement a policy and objectives which take into account legal requirements and information about significant environmental aspects and hence, support environmental protection and prevention of pollution in balance with socio-economic needs. During 2022, MCCA has certified 27 local organisations against this standard.

1.1.3 Air Quality

During 2022, the Maltese Government continued its work in reducing congestion and emissions through the upgrading of Malta's infrastructure, as well as the promotion of public transport, alternative transport means, and other plans, strategies and schemes contributing towards an improvement in air quality levels, namely:

- Environmental permitting through the Industrial Emissions Directive (2010/75/EU) and the Medium Combustion Plants Directive (2015/2193/EU).
- Scrappage scheme on vehicles.
- Grant Scheme on the purchase of electric vehicles, including exemption from registration tax on the purchase of electric or hybrid vehicles (plug-in) and exemption from Annual Circulation License for the first five years.
- Gas Conversion Scheme to convert vehicles to autogas/liquefied petroleum gas (LPG).
- An increase in roadside and roadworthiness checks.
- Bike-sharing schemes and government grants on the purchase of bicycles and pedelec bicycles as well as on the purchase of bicycles and pedelecs by companies that offer such bicycles for hire.
- Fund to cover the expenditure incurred by local councils and enterprises that install bicycle racks.
- The improvement of ferry landing places, including a fast ferry service which started operating between Malta and Gozo in 2021, reducing the kilometres travelled by private vehicles and also encouraging the use of sustainable modes of transport.
- Free school transport for all school children.
- Free public transport for youths, students, and the elderly, which was then made free for all as of October 2022.
- Measures relating to the public transport system, such as bus priority lanes, improved waiting infrastructure, vehicle tracking, reduced fees when using Tallinja Card on the ferries and when using the IoScoop e-bike sharing services, TD Plus, and others.
- A car-sharing scheme.
- Pilot cycling corridors.
- An increase in the use of intelligent transport management systems.
- The Public Service Garage Reform, including the introduction of a maximum age limit for the date of registration of leased vehicles to ten years, and fifteen years for taxi- or chauffeur-driven passenger vehicles.
- Electric buses in Gozo, operating between the Park and Ride facility in Xewkija Heliport and Mgarr Harbour.

Apart from the above, several sustainable projects were carried out in relation to the maritime sector. One such project is the North Harbour and Boiler Wharf Shore Connection project, which will cut over 90% of the air pollution that cruise liners and roll-on/roll-off ships produce when visiting Malta's principal port. Rather than using their auxiliary engines, these vessels will plug into the onshore power supply while at berth. By switching off their auxiliary engines, cruise liners visiting Valletta will emit 93% less nitrogen dioxide (NO₂), 92.6% less particulate matter and 99.6% less sulphur dioxide (SO₂). These pollutants are among the principal causes of respiratory illnesses and other health issues. This project is envisaged to be ready in 2023 and will cut 39.6% of the cruise liners' carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions.

Furthermore, a 13.4 million Euro project to install a High Voltage Shore Connection (HVSC), which will be co-

financed through the Joint Transition Fund, will provide the opportunity for berthed vessels to switch off their electricity generating auxiliary engines running on marine oil and connect with the national grid. The HVSC will result in a reduction in noise pollution coming from the auxiliary engines and a reduction of emissions by circa 4000 tonnes of CO₂ which will result in a better health factor for the surrounding community and the environment.

The Environment and Resources Authority (ERA) continued to monitor air pollutants through five monitoring stations in near real-time. This is complemented by a passive diffusion tube network, consisting of one hundred sites for volatile organic compounds and NO₂, and a smaller network for SO₂. Additional monitoring was also continued in a number of schools, state nursing homes, and hospitals as part of the national government's priorities. The existing monitoring network is being complemented by an additional monitoring system measuring radioiodine in the air, in collaboration with the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Monitoring continued in Senglea's Gardjola Gardens, using ERA's mobile station, to study and quantify the impact of the shipping sector on ambient air. Pollutants monitored at the station are nitric oxide, NO₂, SO₂ and Particulate Matter (PM), namely PM₁₀ and PM_{2.5}. This monitoring programme will lead to further studies in the coming years. ERA also continued monitoring the impact of pollutants on ecosystems, as per the requirements arising from the Limitation of Emissions of Certain Atmospheric Pollutants Regulations (S.L. 549.124).

Moreover, ERA has also finalised an advanced draft of the Air Quality Plan, a reporting obligation under the Ambient Air Quality Directive (2008/50/EC) to address the exceedances of PM₁₀ in Msida reported in 2018. This was further discussed at the inter-ministerial level throughout 2022 and additional studies were carried out in this area to assess the composition of such PM.

1.1.4 Noise Pollution

In 2022, ERA concluded an extensive stakeholder consultation on the drafting of the Noise Action Plan and issued the plan for public consultation. The Noise Action Plan is designed to address the management of environmental noise issues and effects from transport noise including road and air, together with industrial noise in the Maltese Islands. It presents a summary of the results of the round 3 strategic noise maps within Malta and showcases actions which will be undertaken in the next five years.

The objectives of the proposed Noise Action Plan are to (i) outline a long-term plan aiming to prevent and reduce environmental noise which produces harmful effects on human health; (ii) set out the monitoring and management of environmental noise in Malta; (iii) assess the existing levels of environmental noise from the different noise sources to identify potential locations for actions using a prioritisation exercise; and (iv) preserve relatively quiet areas in the agglomeration and in the open countryside through the identification and delineation of such areas.



1.1.5 Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy

The Regulator for Energy and Water Services (REWS) launched the following schemes to encourage the use of renewable energy:

- Feed-in Tariffs to promote the purchasing of photovoltaic (PV) systems were made available to both residential and commercial systems for PV systems with a capacity of less than 40kWp.
- The competitive bidding process for the award of support for electricity generated from renewable energy sources was extended to cover renewable energy source generators with a capacity of between 40kW up to less than 1MW.
- Solar Water Heater (SWH) Grant Scheme provides a grant of 75% of the total eligible cost, up to the maximum of €1,400. This scheme also provides for a €500 grant to cover maintenance costs after 5 years. For the year 2022, 525 individuals benefitted from the 2021 SWH Grant Scheme.
- Heat Pump Water Heater (HPWH) Grant Scheme that provides a grant of 50% of the total eligible cost, up to the maximum of €1,000. For the year 2022, there were 99 beneficiaries of the 2021 HPWH Grant Scheme.
- Renewable Energy Sources Grant Scheme which provides a grant based on the below options. For the year 2022, there were 921 beneficiaries of the 2021 Grant Scheme.

	Number of beneficiaries
Option A – PV system with standard solar inverter: 50% of eligible costs up to a maximum of 2,500 euros per system and 625 euro/kWp.	591 beneficiaries totalling €1.676.529.11 grants paid for PV-only systems.
Option B – PV system with hybrid inverter: 50% of eligible costs up to a maximum of 3,000 euros per system and 750 euro/kWp.	
Option C – Hybrid/Battery inverter and battery: 80% of eligible costs of the Battery Storage up to a maximum of 3,600 euros per system and 600 euro/kWh plus 80% of eligible costs of the Hybrid inverter up to a maximum of 1,800 euros per system and 450 euro/kWp.	214 beneficiaries totalling €1.373.464.52 grants paid for PV and battery systems.
Option D – Battery Storage only: 80% of eligible costs of the Battery Storage up to a maximum of 3,600 euros per system and 600 euro/kWh.	116 beneficiaries totalling €480.861.67 grants paid for battery-only systems.

The Regulator also launched a new scheme entitled 2022 Grant for the Purchase of Systems for Domestic Use that Reduce the Consumption of Energy offering a grant of 50% of the total eligible cost, up to a maximum of €1,000 for retrofitted double glazing and a grant of 50% of the total eligible cost, up to a maximum of €1,000 for retrofitted roof insulation. For the year 2022, there were 11 beneficiaries totalling €10,226.02 grants paid.

In the same context, the Energy and Water Agency (EWA) embarked on two Pilot Projects in 2022, consisting of the installation of PV panels and a Battery Storage System in two public buildings. Two local councils were selected for these Pilot Projects. To disseminate information regarding PV and Battery storage, information screens shall also be installed in the respective local councils.

Throughout 2022, EWA continued with its efforts in its sector-specific projects, namely the Managing Essential Resources in Retail through Consumption Analysis (MERCA) and the Water and Energy Management and Knowledge Transfer in Manufacturing Enterprises (WE MAKE) projects. Under the MERCA project, carried out with the Malta Chamber of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs), a few energy and water audits have been commenced at a number of retail outlets in the food and beverage sector, thus providing them with specific advice on their consumption and how to reduce it. This information will also be used to compile a list of best practices that will be shared within the sector in order to help it become more sustainable.

The WE MAKE project on the other hand, which is focused on the manufacturing sector, is a cooperation agreement between EWA and the Malta Business Bureau, partnered with the Malta Chamber of Commerce, Enterprise and Industry. The aim of the project is to achieve a higher level of engagement within the business community on aspects of energy and water conservation and efficiency, including a higher rate of implementation of energy and water-related projects by businesses. The WE MAKE project has already launched a number of workshops tackling technical, financial and Research and Innovation (R&I) topics, which have been well-attended by manufacturing companies, and is also assisting SMEs in benefiting from EWA's energy audit scheme in order to identify areas of improvement.

In March 2020, the first Energy and Water R&I Grant Scheme was launched and is currently supporting five projects, three of which are targeting water-related problems whilst the remaining two address renewable energy concepts. Projects from this call are nearing their final stages and the 2020 call should finish by the first half of 2023. In 2021, the scheme was re-launched and a total of 6 projects are currently being supported - projects that are focusing on offshore renewables and energy storage, the improvement of renewable performance and a project working on identifying offshore groundwater storage with the use of electromagnets. The scheme will be supporting another array of beneficiaries for the third consecutive year, as in 2022 another call was announced. To promote the concept of producing a more tangible result from research projects, the 2022 call has also obliged prospective participants to produce a prototype by the end of the funding cycle, as well as work in conjunction with a partner coming from a different sector (private, public and academia).

Further to the above, the Malta Enterprise, together with EWA, provided support to undertakings carrying out investments leading to improved energy efficiency. The scheme referred to as *Investment Aid for Energy Efficiency Projects* intends to facilitate investments in technological solutions that contribute directly towards a reduction in the energy requirements of the beneficiaries. Through this measure, aid is granted in the form of a cash grant, a tax credit, or a combination of both.

Moreover, EWA set up the Guest Owners and Users Embarking on a Sustainable Transition, known as *GUEST*, an initiative which focuses specifically on guesthouses. Focus groups involving guesthouse owners were carried out to evaluate their interpretation of the term sustainability, the type of energy and water investment they carried out, and their awareness with regard to existing opportunities. The Agency will be providing energy and water audits within a number of guesthouses in order to take stock of the current situation and identify possible areas of improvement. This individual approach will also allow the possibility to handhold such operators in this transition by providing technical guidance, given that they do not usually have personnel with technical expertise. Furthermore, this exercise would also indicate whether there are key common weaknesses in energy and water management within the sector which could be addressed through training, sector-specific financial schemes or other measures. The Agency aims to target around 30 guesthouses in this exercise; however, it is expected that key improvement messages would be shared and best practices showcased with all operators in the sector.

Throughout 2022, EWA continued to identify vulnerable households, conduct home visits, and provide advice on how to reduce energy and water consumption, and, if merited, replace the most inefficient appliance with a new model. This appliance, being a washing machine, an air-conditioning unit, or a fridge/freezer, is replaced with a new energy-efficient model, free of charge. The scheme allows families to reduce consumption costs and generate savings, which count towards Malta's energy efficiency targets. 156 new appliances were distributed during 2022 with 62 being fridge-freezers, 66 washing machines, and 28 air-conditioning units.

In this regard, EWA carried out 864 visits in total, out of which 158 visits were to vulnerable households. 2022 was the first year post-COVID where the service was provided all throughout the year, and during which a very high number of visits took place. Additionally, for the first time in 2022, the Energy and Water Saving Tips booklets started being distributed during house visits. A number of booklets were also distributed to all local councils in Malta and Gozo.

Further to the above, in line with the *Long-Term Renovation Strategy*, the Building and Construction Authority (BCA) has taken the initiative to upgrade properties in the Grand Harbour district where renovations are particularly difficult to achieve. The scheme named *Irrinova Darek* allows for the renovation of dwellings to upgrade properties in the Grand Harbour district with the aim of achieving the dual goals of conserving energy in homes and transforming them into cost-effective units that can be supported by families. The renovations may be adjusted to the unique demands of the household and are flexible enough to allow for multiple energy-saving measures, the integration of renewable energy sources, and associated interventions. This scheme is instrumental in exploring the building-specific challenges typically encountered to carry out renovations on a broad scale, and inform public and private entities as to the best way forward for similar schemes in the future.

Additionally, the Planning Authority (PA) assisted several local councils and other organisations, which implemented or proposed energy-efficient projects in the form of aid schemes. The following table indicates the number of local councils and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that benefitted from this scheme.

Project		Applicants	Amount
GS/50044/2021	Joint application between Neptunes WPSC and Central Regional Council for investment in a water-to-water heat pump which will reduce operational costs by over 50%, saving circa 75000ltrs of LPG per year, equivalent to planting 5,500 trees/yr. Works included upgrading club infrastructure to cater for a new heating system.	Neptunes WPSC – Kunsill Reġjonali tal-Lvant (Formerly taċ-Ċentru)	€ 449,800.00
LCF/23/2020	Replacement of railings, and installation of new energy-efficient lighting.	Żebbuġ Local Council – Gozo Regional Council	€ 67,623.44
GS/50001/2022	To supply and install underlying infrastructure for the solar panels servicing the Social Band Club.	Għaqda Mużikali Immakulata Kunċizzjoni, Ħamrun	€ 3,304.00
GS/50023/2022	Replacing existing lamps with LED Classic style Luminaries.	Mosta Local Council	€ 43,612.80

In line with the above, MCAST also coordinated the *Joint Universal activities for Mediterranean PV integration Excellence*, known as JUMP2Excel, funded from the EU’s Horizon 2020 R&I programme under grant agreement No 810809. JUMP2Excel aimed to step up and stimulate the scientific excellence and innovation capacity of MCAST Energy in the field of PV integration, including related technologies such as energy storage and ancillary services and electricity markets.

Further to the above, MCAST is also coordinating the Networking for Excellence in Electric Mobility Operations (NEEMO) project, which received funding from the EU’s Horizon 2020 R&I programme under grant agreement No 857484. NEEMO aims to steadily set in the Electric Mobility research, the related integration of technologies, and the modes and operations within the MCAST Energy Research Theme in Transportation from terrestrial to marine mobility and from heavy-duty vehicles to micro-mobility solutions.

Moreover, the Clean Energy Transition Partnership (CETP) is a new transnational initiative on joint Research, Technological Development, and Innovation programming aimed to empower the energy transition and contribute to the EU’s goal of becoming the first climate-neutral continent by 2050. The CETP launched the first transnational call in 2022 to fund projects that develop applicative solutions and provide results for the clean energy transition in one of the seven set thematic configurations of the partnership. These include the integrated net-zero energy systems at the regional and industrial levels and within the built environment, as well as enhanced zero-emission power technologies, storage technologies, renewable fuels and efficient heating and cooling solutions. The results of the 2022 call are expected by mid-2023 and it is expected that the CETP will launch five other calls by 2027.

With regard to other alternative sources of renewable energy, the Government is exploring all options to integrate the use of biofuels in the national energy production plans. In view of this, it is adamant about reaching its 14% target for the share of renewable energy in the road transport sector by extending the biofuel substitution obligation, which now obliges automotive petrol and diesel fuel suppliers to achieve a 14% biofuel and 3.5% advanced biofuel-blending share by 2030. In order to effectively implement this obligation, the Legal Notice (L.N.) 336 of 2021 amended the Sixth Schedule of S.L. 545.17 and imposed a minimum biofuel content on fuel suppliers, which includes increasing annual obligations from 2021 to 2030.

1.1.5.1 Energy Efficiency in Public Buildings

The Government is working to ensure that new buildings are built in such a way that they follow the highest environmental standards, particularly in relation to energy efficiency, to mitigate climate change and combat the Urban Heat Island Effect. In 2022, a number of energy efficient measures, projects and initiatives were carried out especially in public buildings. The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) project, *Improving Energy Efficiency within the People & Standards Division* (ERDF.04.168) is one such example. This project consists of energy-efficient interventions within the premises of the Department of Information and the People and Standards Division. It is part of a larger overall infrastructural project wherein an additional floor was constructed over the existing block. Thus, the project co-finances those interventions which are energy-efficient. It also introduced energy-efficient measures in the whole block, namely roof insulation, the installation of LED luminaries and energy-saving electrical fittings within the new floor, as well as the installation of double-glazed external and internal apertures of the entire block.

The Institute for Education (IFE) has focused on transforming its premises to achieve a near-zero carbon footprint. This involves retrofitting the roof with insulation, installing PV panels and chargers, and using cladding materials that are environmentally friendly. The Institute has also taken steps to collect rainwater from the roof, which will be used for irrigation and other purposes.

Further to the above, in 2022, the Public Abattoir became the first entity in Malta to systematically monitor electricity consumption. The constant monitoring of consumption on each circuit will enable the Abattoir to identify areas for the reduction of energy wastage and optimisation of energy efficiency with operational requirements. In parallel, an energy efficiency audit of the administration block was being undertaken with the support of Social Innovative Projects Management Ltd. to identify improvements to the built fabric to further improve efficiency.

Similarly, Industrial Innovative Solutions (INDIS) is committed to effecting environmental improvements in the properties within its portfolio, as well as incorporating sustainable development measures in new builds, through the implementation of specific corporate policies such as:

- incentives aimed at encouraging the installation of PV panels on factory roofs and other suitable spaces;
- the attainment of Building Research Environmental Assessment Method (BREEAM) or equivalent certification in new development projects; and
- the promotion and allocation of land for circular economy projects.

Furthermore, 52,000 sq. mtrs. of PV panels have been installed by tenants housed throughout INDIS’ estates, with more installations underway through an incentive scheme launched by INDIS. Stretches of green walls have been set up and are being maintained at the Kordin, Mosta and Marsa Industrial Estates; with a fourth green wall being



integrated within a new perimeter wall being built by INDIS at the Dbiegi Crafts Village in Gozo.

INDIS’ commitment to environmental sustainability has been publicly recognised by the award of the prestigious Sustainability Award at the 2021 Malta Architecture and Spatial Planning Awards. The award, sponsored by the PA and held under the distinguished patronage of the President of Malta, was given for the development of the Gozo Innovation Hub, built at the Xewkija Industrial Estate.

Furthermore, the Armed Forces of Malta (AFM), through the EU-funded project *Towards Carbon Efficiency within AFM Buildings*, continued to improve the energy efficiency of some of the buildings within the Defence Estate through the replacement of apertures, light fixtures and hot-water systems. The same can be said for the Notary to Government and the Department of Justice (DoJ), which introduced several energy and water efficiency measures including LED lighting installation, the fitting of water purification units, the systematic switching-off of office lights and electrical items when not in use, the installation of sensory lights with motion sensors to reduce electricity consumption and the installation of a glass door at the main entrance for better insulation.

Works also resumed on the project of refurbishment and restoration of MGOZ Administration Centre, a project which will modernise the building with respect to all the necessary standards.

In parallel with the refurbishment project, MGOZ is currently undertaking the EU-funded project on the upgrading and retrofitting of the same Administration Centre, ERDF.04.070, which shall lead to a substantial reduction in energy consumption and hence, making the building an energy-efficient one. Throughout 2022, works continued on the installation of insulation on the external facing single-leaf walls and under the upper roof. Other mechanical and electrical works carried out during 2022 consisted of:

- a new variable refrigerant flow air-conditioning system,
- ducting works for a new ventilation system,
- a new false ceiling, and
- a supply of heat pumps and new efficient lighting.

1.2 Responsible and Efficient Use of Resources which Safeguards Environmental and Socio-Economic Well-Being

Relevant UN SDG Targets	
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
12.1	Implement the 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns, all countries taking action, with developed countries taking the lead, taking into account the development and capabilities of developing countries
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
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
12.5	By 2030, substantially reduce waste generation through prevention, reduction, recycling and reuse
12.c	Rationalize inefficient fossil-fuel subsidies that encourage wasteful consumption by removing market distortions, in accordance with national circumstances, including by restructuring taxation and phasing out those harmful subsidies, where they exist, to reflect their environmental impacts, taking fully into account the specific needs and conditions of developing countries and minimizing the possible adverse impacts on their development in a manner that protects the poor and the affected communities

1.2.1 Waste Prevention and Management

In 2022, Malta commenced the implementation of the adopted Waste Management Plan 2021-2030, which features a set of over one hundred and thirty short-medium and long-term measures aimed at improving waste prevention and management and will complement the *Single-Use Plastic and the Construction and Demolition Waste Strategy*.

Government undertook legislative reforms to implement the regionalisation reform vis-a-vis the door-to-door collection of municipal waste. In order to foster the establishment of economies of scale, reduce the environmental footprint of door-to-door collection of waste and strengthen separate collection, as of January 2023, through such a reform, the door-to-door collection is performed at the regional level rather than the local council level, by contractors selected through regional tenders. The implementation of this reform in the management of municipal packaging waste also envisaged the shift of the organisational responsibility from the Producer Responsibility Organisations (PROs) to the regional councils, whilst the PROs will finance the management of such waste.

In 2022, measures to improve the separate collection of waste were drafted. The latter aim to establish waste separation at source as a legal obligation for both households and economic operators alike as of 2023.

The new European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) – 2021-2027 programming period, continued to deploy support on projects targeting waste separation and the sustainable management of organic and recyclable waste. In this sense, there will be an effort to increase the capacity and develop additional facilities to treat organic waste so as to ensure full circularity of the organic waste stream.

In parallel with regulatory and legislative reforms, Malta continued to work on the set-up of waste facilities. In 2022, four reuse centres were opened with a view to improving the better use of existing resources and facilitating

patterns towards a circular economy. Wasteserv Malta continued the project implementation for the set-up of a Material Recovery Facility to be in a better position to process recyclable waste so that it finds a market for its recovery. Wasteserv Malta also implemented the set-up of an organic waste treatment plant to not only recover renewable energy but also produce compost that farmers can use on their farms to improve soil quality.

ITS also participated in an ongoing EU co-financed LIFE project which is led by the Italian network for vocational education and training, more commonly referred to as VET, ENAIP NET. In line with SDG 12, the LIFE FOSTER project consists of direct and indirect actions aimed at raising awareness about the problem of food waste and optimal food storage in the catering sector. Apart from equipping personnel with the necessary skills to reduce consumption and waste, this project developed a methodology for measuring waste in the restaurant environment with a view to helping restaurateurs become more efficient and to promote responsible buying. This is especially relevant in an environment that is recovering from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, whereby businesses have reduced revenues and are trying to identify creative solutions to reduce their operating costs. The project was concluded on 31st August 2022.

Additionally, the placement on the market of new products such as the *kirxa*, *mazzit* and *animelli*, enabled the Public Abattoir to also achieve new environmental milestones and national sustainability goals in terms of the reduction of food waste. In total, it is estimated that by the end of the year, around four tonnes of animal-by-products a week were being diverted away from incineration, or around 10% of the average weekly production of such by-products of the meat production were processed at the Public Abattoir.

2022 also saw the launch of the Beverage Containers Refund Scheme, which involves the installation of the necessary infrastructure and machines for returning empty containers. Furthermore, the Government, through Circular Economy Malta, is increasing its efforts to encourage the shift from a linear to a circular economy pattern, thereby providing an opportunity to promote a new economic niche.

Similarly, MCCAA organised a National Workshop called *Standards Supporting Circular Economy Initiatives*. The main aims were to:

- i. demonstrate how standards support environmental policies and the transition to a green and circular economy;
- ii. to inform participants on how environmental NGOs can participate in standardisation processes;
- iii. provide information on policies and initiatives taking place in Malta to promote the Circular Economy; and
- iv. present case studies and best practices from local and foreign businesses supporting the Circular Economy.

The Governance of Agricultural Bioresources Agency has stepped up its efforts towards a temporary and long-term solution in order to ensure the sustainable management of livestock manure. New initiatives follow up on previous actions which have so far been necessary to better understand the management of farm manure/slurry at the farm level and beyond. The short-term and long-term solutions will ensure that the activities of all livestock farms which produce slurry will not be of concern or threat to environmental protection.

As of January 2023, all livestock farms producing slurry have been directed to deliver slurry to the Water Services Corporation (WSC)'s dewatering facility at Sant'Antnin Urban Wastewater Treatment Plant in Marsascala. This action shall be fully enforced during the first quarter of 2023 and will allow all farmers in Malta to dispose of their farm waste slurry in a sustainable way which shall be adequately stored to be utilised as an agricultural bioresource.

The long-term proposal will focus on the transformation of raw slurry into utilisable resources and the maximisation of their utilisation while adhering to all local and EU regulations, particularly the Nitrates Directive. This proposal entails the identification of two sites in Malta and one in Gozo where specialised processing plants will be set up in order to receive and process raw slurry. The initial process would efficiently separate slurry into a solid and liquid fractions followed by further processing/treatment of the solid fraction into a soil enhancer/other reusable product, and of the liquid fraction in line with all applicable directives for water re-use. This permanent solution will (a) provide for the complete disconnection of livestock manure from the sewage network, (b) introduce sustainable livestock slurry management in line with the National Agricultural Policy (NAP) 2018-2028 and the Code of Good Agricultural Practice and the Nitrates Directive, (c) generate green jobs and resources in line with

the EU's Circular Economy Action Plan Objectives, (d) provide measures to combat water security and availability, (e) mitigate against the low soil organic content of the Maltese Islands, and (f) mitigate against GHG emissions of ammonia from livestock slurry.

Furthermore, the Public Service launched a new initiative to reduce the waste generated within it in a coordinated way, and also ensure that the waste generated is separated. Through waste stewards in each Ministry and focal points in each building, information is being collected on existing practices in government departments. This will be evaluated and based on the information collected guidelines, and best practices will be prepared which will lead to the reduction in waste generation through monitoring and increased separation. This will be done while increasing knowledge through courses and training programmes.

In 2022, ESPLORA Science Centre ran a campaign called *Waste, an Untapped Resource* whereby six cases of scientists inventing additional methods of using waste material by reproducing it into other products were showcased.

Furthermore, ERA undertook inter-ministerial consultations for the implementation of measures as part of the *Construction and Demolition Waste Strategy* (2021-2030). ERA collaborated with the MCCAA, BCA and PA for the adoption of standards for the Construction Industry. These standards have been incorporated within the regulatory framework and shall be an essential requirement prior to the issuance of an executable permit. The latter entailed the enactment of L.N. 340 of 2022 Construction Management Site Regulations.

Additional reforms entailed the recovery of construction and demolition waste through backfilling void spaces (quarries). ERA undertook a study to identify the quarries declared as partly exhausted, exhausted or inactive. Subsequently, mechanisms were identified to incentivise the crushing of material prior to backfilling. An incentive mechanism involved the development of the Restoration of Void Spaces scheme through the Environment Fund, which aims to incentivise the crushing of inert excavation waste and Construction and Demolition Waste prior to its recovery in void spaces by means of market-based mechanisms. This would increase the density of the backfilled material, thereby increasing the capacity of the limited void space available in that more waste may be deposited due to better compaction, leading to the restoration of void spaces with higher environmental standards.

This complements Malta Enterprise's scheme, which provides fiscal support to eligible companies on the purchase of crushers, dust suppression equipment and the replacement of old construction equipment related to crushing operations. The maximum aid that can be awarded per project is capped at €100,000.

MCCAA published a National Standard SM 810:2022 *Recycling oriented deconstruction, controlled excavation works and classification of waste*. The scope of the standard is to be a guide for good practice and a reference for everyday use by building owners, developers, designers, and contractors. It prioritises the reduction of waste generation and highlights the importance of saving raw material resources. It also serves as an aid for the construction industry to facilitate the planning, classification of waste and carrying out of demolition operations through deconstruction, and excavation operations with a view to reuse and recycling. Therefore, the standard refers to recycling-oriented deconstruction and controlled excavation works to reduce or eliminate waste disposal.

1.2.2 Water Management

The government is also increasing its efforts to conserve water in its daily practices. This is being done through the implementation of various initiatives intended to recycle and harvest rainwater. REWS introduced a scheme related to water conservation in the domestic sector. This scheme for the restoration of wells in old residential homes was launched in 2018, continued over the years and was extended until 31st December 2023 through Government Notice 173 of 2022. For the year 2022, there were 108 beneficiaries totalling €86,544.60 grants paid.

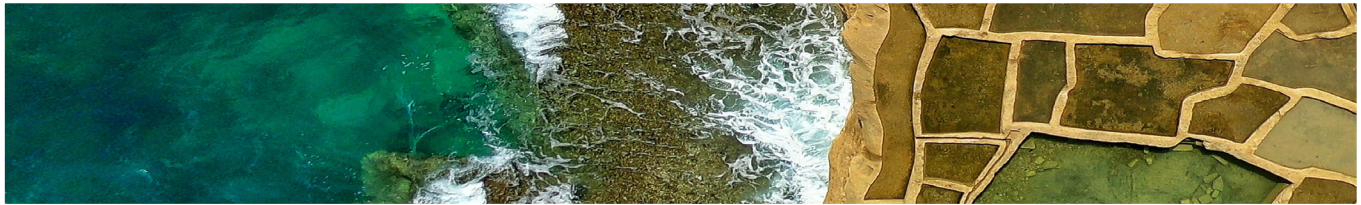
During 2022, MGOZ also continued with its participation in the LIFE 16 IPE MT 008 Project. Throughout the year, work on the planning for the implementation of Concrete Action C.6 'Demonstration Site for the Application of New Water Resources – Gozo' was continued. This action is being implemented in three stages:

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

Additionally, in 2022, the WSC continued expanding the New Water network that will eventually cover about 1,200 hectares of arable agricultural land across Malta and Gozo, with circa 1.6 million cubic metres of ‘new water’ supplied for irrigation during the reported year.

Further to the above, achievement of targets for surface freshwaters and associated aquatic ecosystems is primarily sought through the implementation of Malta’s Water Catchment Management Plan (WCMP) pursuant to the EU Water Framework Directive (WFD). Malta’s freshwater resources are scarce, with surface waters constituting generally localised small water bodies that are characterised by fluctuating water levels and intermittency. Despite this, such water bodies support important aquatic ecosystems and nine of the ten inland surface and transitional waters delineated for the purpose of the WFD, also fall within Natura 2000 sites, consequently forming part of the EU Natura 2000 network.

In this vein, Malta initiated the necessary processes for updating the WCMP for the third implementation cycle of the WFD. A Stakeholder Public consultation for the development of the 3rd River Basin Management Plan (RBMP) took place in October 2022, to outline the main challenges which need to be addressed and the measures which need to be implemented. The plan will provide a status assessment of waters in the Maltese Islands and will identify the measures necessary to enable the progressive achievement of good status conditions in the WFD water bodies, which include inland surface and transitional waters.



The WCMP objectives related to good-quality surface waters in terms of their chemical status are closely linked to the environmental permitting system. In this regard, ERA has significantly invested in the environmental permitting system, through the Structural Reform and Support Programme Reform and Capacity Building in Permissions and Compliance both in terms of human resources and regulatory framework, thus strengthening the Authority’s capacity to regulate activities with potential impacts on aquatic environments.

In addition, the WCMP ensures the monitoring of waters with a view to continuously assess the status of such waters and inform management processes. Following the development of a monitoring strategy for contaminants of emerging concern through the LIFE IP RBMP project, work will continue to implement the strategy through a two-year monitoring exercise to screen for the said contaminants. The monitoring strategy is at a national river basin district scale for contaminants of emerging concern in four water categories, namely surface waters (coastal and inland surface waters), rainwater runoff, groundwater, and new water (highly polished water resulting from urban wastewater treatment). The results will act as a guide to the development of future monitoring programmes and inform management and licensing processes. The monitoring will also extend its scope to cover diffuse sources of pollution in water. A two-year monitoring programme of Malta’s inland surface water bodies and transitional water bodies also commenced in 2022 to assess the ecological and chemical status of these waters.

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

1.3 Protecting, Conserving and Enhancing Natural Capital to Improve Ecological Resilience and Sustainability

Relevant UN SDG Targets	
1.6	By 2020, protect and restore water-related ecosystems, including mountains, forests, wetlands, rivers, aquifers and lakes
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
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
14.3	Minimize and address the impacts of ocean acidification, including through enhanced scientific cooperation at all levels
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
14.5	By 2020, conserve at least 10 per cent of coastal and marine areas, consistent with national and international law and based on the best available scientific information
14.6	By 2020, prohibit certain forms of fisheries subsidies which contribute to overcapacity and overfishing, eliminate subsidies that contribute to illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and refrain from introducing new such subsidies, recognizing that appropriate and effective special and differential treatment for developing and least developed countries should be an integral part of the World Trade Organization fisheries subsidies negotiation
14.a	Increase scientific knowledge, develop research capacity and transfer marine technology, taking into account the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission Criteria and Guidelines on the Transfer of Marine Technology, in order to improve ocean health and to enhance the contribution of marine biodiversity to the development of developing countries, in particular small island developing States and least developed countries
14.c	Enhance the conservation and sustainable use of oceans and their resources by implementing international law as reflected in United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, which provides the legal framework for the conservation and sustainable use of oceans and their resources, as recalled in paragraph 158 of "The future we want"
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
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
15.3	By 2030, combat desertification, restore degraded land and soil, including land affected by desertification, drought and floods, and strive to achieve a land degradation-neutral world
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
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
15.9	By 2020, integrate ecosystem and biodiversity values into national and local planning, development processes, poverty reduction strategies and accounts
15.a	Mobilize and significantly increase financial resources from all sources to conserve and sustainably use biodiversity and ecosystems

1.3.1 Protecting and Enhancing Biodiversity

Throughout 2022, the Maltese Government continued to ensure that safeguarding the biodiversity and natural ecosystems of Malta remains a priority. Thus, a number of measures, projects, and initiatives aimed at protecting our woodland areas, natural habitats, and freshwater ecosystems, as well as others targeted at increasing awareness and educating the public, were undertaken by several entities during the year.

The National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) serves as a national policy driver to integrate and mainstream biodiversity into relevant sectoral or cross-sectoral plans, programmes and policies. The intent and objectives for Malta's NBSAP to 2030 were published in July 2020 for public consultation, following which, ERA started working on the development of a new set of national targets and actions, in line with the post-2020 *Global Biodiversity Framework* under the *UN Convention on Biological Diversity* and the *EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2030*. A first set of considerations received by the public and building on the lessons learnt from the implementation of Malta's NBSAP 2012-2020, were integrated through following the identification of the strengths and gaps. Works on the development of an updated NBSAP based on the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework and the EU Biodiversity Strategy towards 2030 continued throughout the year with the intent to launch public consultations in 2023.

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

On the international level, Malta contributed to the formulation and adoption of the new Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework, agreed upon at the 15th COP at the Convention on Biological Diversity in cooperation with other State Parties. Reaffirming the importance of natural and marine resources, Malta also hosted the 8th Meeting of the Parties of the Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and Contiguous Atlantic Area, or ACCOBAMS, attended by over 20 State Parties.

1.3.1.1 Terrestrial Ecosystems and Biodiversity

Malta continued working on the implementation of the Management Plans for Terrestrial Natura 2000 Sites in Malta and Gozo, as adopted in December 2016. In 2021, the revision process for the conservation objectives and measures for terrestrial Natura 2000 was initiated and in 2022, stakeholder consultations were carried out in relation to specific sites. In this regard, management agreements are in place for some Natura 2000 sites which aim to address conservation actions related to the control and removal of alien species, habitat restoration, and to improve the conservation status of species within the sites.

As part of these management plans, Birdlife is implementing an initiative known as *Establishing Ecological Corridors for Fauna* species, which falls under the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) Community Fund. This focuses on the purchasing of a set of tags that trace the mobility of two endangered species to ensure their protection in the long term.

In terms of habitat restoration, Ambjent Malta continued working on the removal of invasive alien species such as acacia with a special focus on Natura 2000 sites. Other habitat restoration measures included the restoration of rubble walls, removal of artificial structures, pruning when necessary, cleaning and maintenance, patrolling of rangers in Natura 2000 sites, cordoning of sand dunes, the planting of trees/shrubs, conservation of local stock and habitat expansion of the salt marsh in Comino.

Additionally, ERA and Ambjent Malta also participated in the implementation of various EU-funded projects that include actions to address invasive alien species, including:

- Fight Alien Species Transborder - an Italia-Malta Interreg Project.
- SIMASEED Project - an Italia-Malta Interreg Project.
- LIFE IP-RBMP Project (LIFE 16 IPE MT 008).

A citizen science mobile application on invasive alien species developed by the Joint Research Centre has been adapted to the Maltese national context, including species of national interest. With respect to the protection of the honeybee, in 2022 ERA carried out a number of stakeholder consultations with a view to issuing a national strategy on pollinators in 2023.

Furthermore, the Wild Birds Regulation Unit within MGOZ centralised the relevant regulatory functions pertaining to the implementation of the Conservation of Wild Birds Regulations (S.L. 549.42) and other policies in relation to sustainable hunting governance and the conservation of wild birds. The Unit coordinated work with various institutional structures including Ornithology Committee and liaised with the Police, Customs, ERA and other entities to ensure proper implementation and enforcement of applicable legislation on the ground. The Unit ensured the continuation of regular awareness-raising activities to inform all members of society about the various aspects of local legislation concerning the conservation and sustainable use of wild birds together with information regarding conservation measures adopted to safeguard these species.

1.3.1.1.1 Afforestation and Woodland Areas

Following the launch of the development of the *National Trees and Woodlands Strategy and Action Plan 2022-2030*, work commenced on the establishment of a set of guidelines for good forestation practices for the Maltese Islands with the aim to assist in the carrying out of successful and functional tree-planting projects in natural, rural and urban environments. The guidelines provide a general code of practice to take into consideration during the different stages of a tree-planting project, from design to implementation and can be used by the public and interested parties to support planting initiatives through various projects. Scientific studies to better understand local woodland ecosystems were also launched together with local experts. This facilitated taking informed decisions when it comes to conservation projects and initiatives.

With regard to forest management, forest/wooded areas in Malta are very limited and are protected through various local and EU legislation. Forest areas are managed and maintained to preserve and improve their biodiversity value. Ambjent Malta continued to work on a draft Fire Prevention Strategy for the three main woodland areas of Buskett, Aħrax tal-Mellieħa and Miżieb in collaboration with ERA and the Civil Protection Department (CPD) with the main aim of mitigating the impacts of fires through legislative and sustainable practices via the implementation of three separate action plans for each site in line with climate adaptation principles.

In 2022, Ambjent Malta continued working on afforestation with over 22,825 trees and shrubs planted in projects involving habitat restoration within Natura 2000 sites and other protected sites. Also, work was carried out on the rehabilitation of abandoned rural areas, and the embellishment of urban areas, gardens and schools. Over €1.5 million covered works which addressed habitat restoration measures such as rubble walls, signs, trees/shrubs, wooden stakes, preservation and maintenance of structures of historical importance in Natura 2000 sites, removal of invasive species, and support to NGOs with management agreements, amongst other initiatives and actions.

Similarly, Parks Malta continued with the planting of trees whereby 3,200 trees/shrubs were planted in various sites including Ta' Qali, Bengħajsa and Wied Santa Katerina. Moreover, for the second consecutive year Parks Malta, together with several public and private entities, local councils, and other voluntary organisations, embarked on a Clean-Up Campaign in more than 40 sites to boost even further the educational importance of environmental awareness. Throughout this clean-up campaign, sites were cleared from fly-tipped material, construction waste and invasive species and Parks Malta has pledged its commitment to plant 3,600 trees - two trees for every tonne of waste collected.

1.3.1.1.2 Desertification and Land Degradation

In view of the NBSAP and the requirements of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification, MEEE continued to undertake work on the National Action Plan on Desertification and Land Degradation. This has progressed in relation to the overarching policy areas, which were incorporated into the National Strategy on the Environment and the NBSAP. In this respect, these overarching thematic strategies addressed land degradation through the introduction of maintenance mechanisms to strengthen natural processes and reduce vulnerability to climate change. Further mitigating actions also continued on soil preservation, site management within Natura 2000 areas, the promotion of green infrastructure and the protection of high landscape features.

Additionally, in 2022, the EcoGozo Directorate within MGOZ continued to implement a number of projects related to the restoration of rubble walls along various road sections in Gozo. These projects consist of 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. Throughout 2022, works on the restoration of the rubble walls along Ramla Valley continued and were almost implemented by end of the year.

1.3.1.1.3 Valley Management

Throughout 2022, the Valley Management Unit within Parks Malta carried out works aimed at the conservation of natural habitat areas for various endemic and indigenous flora and fauna in order to further rehabilitate valleys. Removal of alien species and dumped material were the main tasks to restore these areas and help in the flow of water.

Parks Malta concluded the project at Wied Liemu funded through the European Agricultural Fund under Measure 4.4 (support for non-productive investments linked to the achievement of agri-environment-climate objectives). This measure is intended to contribute to the achievement of agri-environment-climate objectives, which include the restoration of habitats and landscaping, soil conservation and water management where there is no significant economic return to a farm or rural business. Works at Wied Liemu consisted of the restoration of the channel which dates back to the Knights of St John. The channel was also cleaned from silt and the rubble walls were restored. Furthermore, two additional bridges were constructed so that farmers could have access to the nearby fields. The investment of this project amounts to €192,582.10.

Furthermore, the RainWiin project co-financed through the Cohesion Fund, continued throughout 2022. In this project, Parks Malta concluded two studies which complement each other. A structural study of 70 dams and 70 reservoirs was conducted. The second study focused on sediment build-up behind these dams. Modern technology was used to identify the volume of sediment accumulated behind these dams. Works continued on the interconnected valleys Wied il-Għasel and Wied Santa Katerina. The eighth basin was cleaned and two dams were repaired to reach the objective of increasing the water harvest capacity by 45,000 cubic metres.

Additionally, the implementation of the LIFE IP RBMP continued wherein the primary focus was to rehabilitate Wied Speranza. The majority of the administrative works related to the methodology of the onsite works which include the cleaning of the valley from debris, the removal of invasive and alien species as well as the planting of indigenous trees and shrubs have been concluded and have been submitted for the necessary permits. €460,000 are being invested in this project.

MGOZ also embarked on a project, aiming to rehabilitate Gozo's valleys, and enhance rain-capturing and soil retention methods. This project is an investment of over €10 million under the European Rural Development Programme for Malta 2014-2020. During 2020, 2021 and 2022 applications were submitted for PA permits regarding the rehabilitation of more than 10 valleys. By the end of 2022, most of these permits were in place. Besides, as part of the same EU-funded project, implementation of the restoration of rubble walls started across Gozo. This project was almost fully implemented by the end of the year 2022 with almost 25 km of rubble walls being restored or reconstructed.

1.3.1.2 Marine Environment and Biodiversity

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

For this purpose, Malta is implementing management measures as part of the WFD and MSFD Programme of Measures, targeting the achievement of good ecological status and good chemical status of coastal waters, as well as the good environmental status of marine waters. In this respect, the Government adopted conservation objectives and measures for the eighteen Marine Protected Areas within the twenty-five nautical mile boundary designated under the Habitats Directive, with the aim to publish in 2023. The conservation objectives guide management processes and enable the measurement of progress towards maintaining or achieving a favourable

conservation status of key habitats and species through the implementation of the conservation measures. These are major steps towards the protection of coastal and marine ecosystems.

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. Plans will seek the achievement of healthy marine ecosystems in line with the objectives of the *EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030*.

Malta also implemented monitoring processes for the continuous assessment of the marine environmental status. Also, it is in the process of updating the monitoring programme based on long-term monitoring strategies developed as part of the EU-funded project European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) 8.3.1. Through the implementation of this project in the period 2017-2022, ERA developed a long-term monitoring strategy for seabirds, marine mammals and marine turtles. These monitoring strategies will be reflected in the revised monitoring programme for the marine environment.

Further to the above, in 2022, ERA embarked on a number of initiatives aimed at addressing the restoration of the wetland of Santa Maria at Kemmuna with the financial assistance of the Priority Actions Programme Regional Activity Centre within the UN Environment Programme/Mediterranean Action Plan. Works on the implementation of this project started soon afterwards with the cooperation of Ambjent Malta and the UoM.

In addition to the above, Posidonia seagrass meadows are an important priority habitat under the Habitats Directive and local legislation and are affected by various pressures including non-indigenous species (NIS). In this regard, Ambjent Malta developed a pilot project in Marsaxlokk with a view to elaborate a methodology and assess the viability and potential to remove select invasive alien species at a local level. This shall be the basis for the removal of this invasive algae in marine protected areas including Posidonia meadows affected by NIS.

Data collection processes are a key response to policy implementation and habitat conservation measures to safeguard this vital habitat. In view of this, Ambjent Malta, in collaboration with a number of stakeholders launched the implementation of the Mapping & Monitoring of Posidonia Oceanica using the Remote and Sentinel Technology project, also known as *MAARES* (SRF-20211S2), with a view to increasing knowledge to implement applied habitat conservation initiatives in Marine Protected Areas and Territorial Waters of the Maltese Islands.

Additionally, as part of the ongoing actions that are being funded through LIFE 16 IPE MT 008, more information in relation to the coastal and marine areas that are subject to anchoring and mooring activity, both in terms of the extent and intensity of such pressures was relayed. The impacts of such anchoring/mooring activity in selected sites have also been assessed and the data collected through in situ surveys will be further analysed in order to inform the identification of management options.

MCST also actively participates in the Joint Programming Initiative (JPI) Healthy and Productive Seas and Oceans, known as JPI Oceans, and, in fact, organised one of the management board meetings in Malta in October 2022. Through participation in this intergovernmental platform, Malta is co-leading the JPI Oceans Joint Action, Science for Good Environmental Status, in collaboration with Italy and Belgium to adopt an innovative approach to the evaluation of the marine 'Good Environmental Status'. This joint action aims to coordinate research and innovation to introduce a complementary approach to the Marine Strategy Framework Directive. In 2022, through an open expression of interest, MCST supported a Maltese Marine Environmental Professional to work with a team of transnational researchers on board a state-of-the-art research vessel in the North Sea in July 2022. In addition, a team of Maltese experts attended a follow-up workshop in Venice to further discuss and analyse the data collected from the research cruise.

In February 2022, the JPI Oceans Management Board agreed to launch a Scoping Action with the objective of assessing the scope, feasibility, relevance, and design of a potential JPI Oceans Joint Action addressing Blue Carbon as a key nature-based climate mitigation ecosystem service in the broader context of negative emissions technologies and in providing scientific advice and evidence to help meet national, EU and international environmental and climate policy goals. During the Autumn JPI Oceans management board meeting 2022, Malta expressed interest to participate in this Scoping Action and has since nominated Maltese experts to be part of the expert group to write the concept paper that will be presented to the JPI Oceans Management Board in Spring 2023.



In 2022, the MCST also officially joined the Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership which is a Horizon Europe partnership that enables an unprecedented effort to pool research and innovation investments and align national programmes at a pan-European scale, taking into consideration the sea-basin and Atlantic Ocean dimension. This partnership shall be launching annual calls with the first one being launched in the first quarter of 2023 until 2027 for proposals on addressing one of several intervention areas, these being the development and validation of Ocean Digital Twins at sub-sea-basin scale; blue generation marine structures; the planning and managing of sea-uses; healthy blue food under a one health-approach; and the enabling of the green transition of blue food production.

Additionally, the BlueBio initiative is an ERA-NET Cofund that aims to strengthen Europe's position in the blue bioeconomy sector, through coordinated research and development. It is made up of 32 partners from 17 countries which collectively organise annual joint calls for proposals to support transnational research projects in the sphere of blue bioeconomy. The 2nd additional call was launched in 2021 to facilitate research and innovation projects that are expected to deliver impacts on one of the following topics; sustainable exploration of the aquatic environment and biological resources, sustainable and resilient biomass production and processing, and traceability and regulatory constraints. Two projects involving Maltese entities within the consortia were awarded in 2022. Following this, a third additional call was launched in 2022, entitled *Amplifying project reach and knowledge impact*. This call is open to BlueBio beneficiaries with the aim of increasing the impact of awarded BlueBio projects through additional activities related to dissemination of research and results; training exchange and capacity building; business and commercialisation preparation; mapping of relevant policy landscape; and barriers to a commercialisation pathway.

1.3.1.2.1 Marine Litter Projects and Campaigns

Marine litter and plastic pollution continue to pose a serious threat towards biodiversity and marine ecosystems. This is further accentuated by the risks posed by transboundary marine pollution and the impact on various socio-economic activities at the national level. Recognising the impacts caused by single-use plastic (SUP) and building on the regulatory reforms already undertaken in 2021, amendments were carried out to the restrictions on the placement on the market of certain SUP products in 2022 (L.N. 236 of 2022).

In 2022, Malta further continued its legislative work by transposing the remaining articles emanating from the SUP Directive into national legislation, including amendments to existing legislation, as well as the drafting of new

framework regulations. These regulations set out a number of measures aiming to reduce the consumption of SUP products most commonly found in litter together with fishing gear containing plastic, whilst also addressing product requirements, marking requirements and extended producer responsibility obligations.

In this context, the Ministry for Agriculture, Fisheries and Animal Rights (MAFA) launched a scheme known as the *Lost Fishing Gear Retrieval Initiative*, aimed at recovering lost fishing gear (nets, lines, traps, and any other fishing equipment) from the marine environment around the Maltese Islands. This initiative was aimed at reducing marine litter in our seas, as well as preventing the negative impacts of ghost fishing. If the fishing gear is found to be in good condition, it was returned to the fishers for further use, minimising waste.

Similarly, in 2022, the Fisheries Research Unit successfully applied as an international partner in the *NETTAG+* project, which officially kicks off in January 2023. The project aims to reduce and prevent marine litter derived from fisheries by working directly with fishers through an integrative preventive approach including the reduction of lost gear by using new technologies (acoustic localisation system) that help fishers locate and recover lost gear. *NETTAG+* also promotes better practices on the management of fishing waste through awareness-raising actions organised by fishers' associations for fishers.

The project is in line with the previous project NetTag and intends to upscale the technological acoustic solution to locate and recover fishing gears in case of loss, and thus, prevent lost gear; capitalise the key role fishers have on marine litter (including fishing activities litter) reduction/prevention by promoting awareness actions for best practices on-board and off-board regarding litter management; and develop a solution to detect and remove lost gear, clean hotspots and promote the recovery of impacted environments.

Work also continued through cross-sectoral collaboration on the implementation of the measures highlighted in the *SUP Strategy 2021-2030*. Such measures were also brought to light through SEM's efforts. In this regard, Europe Direct Valletta, which is one of the 424 CION-funded information centres found across the EU and managed by SEM, visited four different localities in Malta between the 18th and 23rd of April 2022 to raise public awareness of the damage of SUP locally and in the EU. Visitors at the information stand were able to learn more about the damage caused by the use of SUPs and their adverse effects as well as about any EU actions to address this problem. They were also encouraged to take action by reducing the use of plastic through their participation in a competition.

Furthermore, the removal of marine litter from the seafloor has been pivotal for habitat restoration in marine protected areas. In this regard, 1.5 tonnes of marine litter were collected from the seabed. Various locations included Anchor Bay, Sirens, St Paul's Islands, Fekruna, Wied Iż-Żurriq, Xlendi, Comino and Marsalforn. Several clean-ups were conducted by Ambjent Malta, the Professional Diving School Association and other technical divers. In the summer of 2022, MEEE also launched the Marine Litter Campaign – *Saving Our Blue* for the fourth consecutive year, with the aim of continuously educating and encouraging the public to stop littering, reduce waste generation and opt for alternative products to single-use items. The fourth edition further focused on sustainable recreational activities, and the importance of protecting marine protected areas. The campaign continued to focus on alternatives to SUPs, which were banned at the point of sale at the beginning of 2022, as per L.N. 236 of 2022.

In this regard, an extensive marketing campaign has been carried out in order to further inform the public and raise awareness about the importance of switching to more environmentally sustainable products. As per previous editions, beach clean-ups and dive clean-ups were carried out in collaboration with NGOs and other government entities. A total of 11 dive clean-ups were undertaken in collaboration with Żibel, which resulted in the collection of 12,406 kg of waste. Moreover, 19 beach clean-ups were carried out throughout the year, culminating with the collection of over 1,667.86kg of waste. On 17th September 2022, four events were held simultaneously to commemorate World Clean-Up Day. As part of the awareness activities, different communications and promotional activities were undertaken through various social media. Additionally, the *Get in Motion to Save the Ocean* project has been launched, mirroring the principles of SDG 13 and SDG 14 by engaging students from Years 9 to 11 in a series of activities, including beach clean-ups and seed-planting.

In line with the above, the EcoGozo Directorate within MGOZ continued the implementation of another Interreg Med Italia-Malta project called BIOBLU. Through this project, universities, together with the support of the same Directorate, aimed to give their innovative contribution towards mitigating the effects of plastic and microplastic debris which litter our seas and beaches.

Besides, the enhancement and protection of the ecologically sensitive beaches under study, the development of a WebGIS will help to compile and visualise results for the identification of marine litter in the areas under study. Moreover, an automatic approach for litter collection followed through the development of a prototype robot that was tested at Ramla l-Hamra beach. During the testing, a drone was used to survey the beach and identify the ‘littered’ areas. In turn, a robot on the ground moved to the ‘littered’ areas and successfully collected the litter. A control room was set up to control both the drone and the robot respectively. In view of this, the *BIOBLU* project’s final results helped to promote a new management approach for Ramla l-Hamra and Capo di Milazzo beaches, relying on new technologies related to artificial intelligence (AI).

1.3.1.2.2 Coastal Management Initiatives

Throughout 2022, works on the protection of coastal sand dunes and saline marshlands were carried out in various sites in the Maltese islands. These include works at Ir-Ramla in Gozo, Ir-Ramla tat-Torri in the northeast of Malta and Il-Qala ta’ Santa Marija in Comino. The interventions included the cordoning of the dune area, the removal of invasive species, the control and removal of marine litter, the restoration of the wetland habitats at Il-Qala, the installation of wooden fences at l-Armier and related upkeep and maintenance works. Promotional campaigns were carried out in marine protected areas and coastal areas in order to increase educational awareness. Coastal walks initiatives and the organisation of boat trips to promote this ecologically sensitive area were also introduced to educate more people about the need to safeguard the said areas.

During 2022, work in relation to the Marsalforn breakwater project resumed wherein geotechnical investigations were undertaken at the proposed site. The information gathered through the geological investigations was analysed and submitted to the contractor compiling the Environmental Impact Assessment for integration and further evaluation.

Further to this, the implementation of the Coastal-Climate Overall Vulnerability and Exposure Risk project, known as C-COVER continued. This is a joint project between the Public Works Department (PWD) within the Ministry for Public Works and Planning, the Malta Tourism Authority (MTA) and CION’s Technical Support Instrument (TSI), which seeks to ensure economically secure and environmentally sustainable coastal protection management, whilst considering the effects of climate change. Thus, the project aims to develop a tool to highlight the range of policy priorities to decrease coastal pressures; determine coastal risks while establishing sustainable, suitable, and effective protective solutions; advocate for national harmonisation among policymakers and stakeholders; and determine a consistent and holistic strategic framework at the national level.

In addition to the above project, the PWD partnered with UoM in the *Coastal – SAGE* (Coastal Satellite Assisted Governance (tools, techniques, models) for the Erosion) project, which is a coastal erosion monitoring programme that uses Remote Sensed Earth observation data to determine ground displacements, whilst being validated by in-situ sensors. The innovative aspect of this project is the use of AI techniques to address the denoising of the interferometric phase and phase-unwrapping - essentially super sampling of lower resolution Synthetic Aperture Radar data from Sentinel missions.

In line with the above, during 2022, MFT continued with its maintenance efforts in tourism hotspots 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, MFT also continued to implement a number of projects to regenerate coastal areas. Coastal and maritime tourism is important for Malta’s tourism policy. Therefore, during the period under review, maintenance and improvements were carried out in several coastal towns and beaches. Beaches were carefully cleaned (including sand-sifting), and accessibility was improved, to ensure a safe and pleasurable environment for tourists who visit Malta.

The Cleansing and Maintenance Division is heavily investing in this regard, where, during 2022, investment was made in the procuring of 9 sand-sifters, 7 electric pedestrian sweepers, 2 refuse collection vehicles and a hook loader truck. In the near future, the Cleansing and Maintenance Division is planning to electrify its fleet to further contribute to the environment, as well as to increase the use of technology in its daily operations.

1.4 Developing Sustainable Food Systems to Achieve Food Security and Ensure Environmental and Socio-Economic Welfare

Relevant UN SDG Targets	
2.1	By 2030, end hunger and ensure access by all people, in particular the poor and people in vulnerable situations, including infants, to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round
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
2.3	By 2030, double the agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers, in particular women, indigenous peoples, family farmers, pastoralists and fishers, including through secure and equal access to land, other productive resources and inputs, knowledge, financial services, markets and opportunities for value addition and non-farm employment
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
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 utilization of genetic resources and associated traditional knowledge, as internationally agreed
2.c	Adopt measures to ensure the proper functioning of food commodity markets and their derivatives and facilitate timely access to market information, including on food reserves, in order to help limit extreme food price volatility
3.9	By 2030, substantially reduce the number of deaths and illnesses from hazardous chemicals and air, water and soil pollution and contamination
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
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
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
12.2	By 2030, achieve the sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources
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

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
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
14.6	By 2020, prohibit certain forms of fisheries subsidies which contribute to overcapacity and overfishing, eliminate subsidies that contribute to illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and refrain from introducing new such subsidies, recognizing that appropriate and effective special and differential treatment for developing and least developed countries should be an integral part of the World Trade Organization fisheries subsidies negotiation
14.a	Increase scientific knowledge, develop research capacity and transfer marine technology, taking into account the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission Criteria and Guidelines on the Transfer of Marine Technology, in order to improve ocean health and to enhance the contribution of marine biodiversity to the development of developing countries, in particular small island developing States and least developed countries
14.b	Provide access for small-scale artisanal fishers to marine resources and markets
14.c	Enhance the conservation and sustainable use of oceans and their resources by implementing international law as reflected in United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, which provides the legal framework for the conservation and sustainable use of oceans and their resources, as recalled in paragraph 158 of "The future we want"
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
15.9	By 2020, integrate ecosystem and biodiversity values into national and local planning, development processes, poverty reduction strategies and accounts

1.4.1 Policies and Legislation

1.4.1.1 Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)

The Government has continued with the implementation of the Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014-2020 which complements sustainability in agricultural policies. This programme aims to assist Malta in achieving the SDGs through various measures and initiatives that support the development of sustainable rural communities and promote sustainable economic growth and development in rural areas.

Malta's RDP 2014-2020, jointly implemented by the Managing Authority and the Agriculture and Rural Payments Agency (ARPA), sets out priority approaches and actions to achieve Malta's set agri-environmental-climate objectives. In order to achieve such objectives, financial support for farmers is provided through this programme to incentivise them to apply agricultural and farming practices which 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:

- Controlling weeds in orchards and vineyards by mechanical, instead of chemical means.
- Maintaining recommended tree species planted on slopes and terraces, and those planted to replace invasive alien species.
- Introducing bee boxes on holdings.
- Implementing an Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Plan targeting vineyards and orchards.

- Implementing a Soil Management and Conservation Plan.
- Integrating and maintaining autochthonous Maltese plant species (carob and mulberry).

In line with this, ARPA continued with the implementation and disbursement of the direct payments to both arable and livestock farmers, disbursing an amount of €5,070,022.82 in EU-funded support in 2022.

In the meantime, throughout 2022, MAFA remained one of the key stakeholders in the discussions with CION, particularly focusing on the adaptations required to Malta's draft CAP Strategic Plan (CAP SP) 2023-2027, offering its technical input at all stages of the process as required. Malta's CAP SP was subsequently formally adopted by CION in December 2022. Furthermore, MAFA, through ARPA, proceeded with the necessary preparations to ensure the smooth and correct implementation of the provisions of the future CAP legislation.

Excluding technical assistance, the total budget from CAP for 2023-2027, added to the local co-financing, is around €167 million. The CAP SP will cover the whole territory of the Maltese Islands and will build upon the support offered via CAP measures, direct payments and schemes, whilst 10% of the whole expenditure will go towards supporting initiatives in this sector for Gozo. The CAP SP, which will provide funding and support from 2023 to the end of 2027, was developed following a series of meetings and evidence-gathering and discussions with relevant stakeholders and Government entities. These were held since 2019 and are in line with Malta's Agricultural Policy 2018-2028. The CAP SP is also in line with the European policies and regulations for the same time period and will support all three general objectives set in the regulatory framework.

As a novelty from the previous programme (the RDP14-20), the CAP SP includes support from two Funds which are the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD).

Through these Funds, the CAP SP will support farmers and contribute towards food security as well as environmental and climate objectives. Resources will be mobilised to provide improved basic income support rates for farmers (€15.6 million); continue the provision of coupled income support (€15 million); and to provide schemes for young farmers (€8 million) and small farmers (€2.4 million) as well as measures supporting the shift towards more ecological agricultural methods (€10 million). Such initiatives will be coupled with investments to improve farm resilience, new technologies, digitalisation, smart and improved irrigation systems (€21.3 million), incentives for organic farming practices (€2.3 million), and animal welfare (€1 million), amongst others. Measures related to slurry management and wastewater networks (€31 million), knowledge and exchanges and training for farmers (€4.3 million), as well as measures directed at improving and fostering apiculture practices (€141,000) are also foreseen.

Moreover, the EAFRD, in addition to enhancing farm competitiveness and the farmers' position in the value chain, is also addressing the needs of the rural areas in collaboration with stakeholders from civic society, and the public and private sectors to create sustainable communities. This is being done through the LEADER initiative.

1.4.1.2 The First Agriculture Act

Moreover, throughout 2022, MAFA has completed the work on the drafting of the first-ever National Agricultural Act.

This new legislation shall serve as the umbrella framework for all regulations related to agriculture whilst repealing and replacing all previous agriculture-related legislations. This Act shall thus contain all sectorial-related subsidiary legislations, whilst clearly delineating the responsibilities of the Agriculture Directorate under this Act.

This Act lays down articles that address the development and implementation of the NAP; the measures that may be used by the Agriculture Directorate for the protection, conservation and sustainability of the agricultural land and livestock; the collection of data on all aspects of the production and processing of agricultural products; and the regulatory provisions for land fragmentation and consolidation.

The Act also regulates the issue, variation, suspension and revocation of permits and licenses for agricultural operations together with the related collection of fees for such permits and licenses.

The stakeholders affected by this Act, which is expected to enter into force in 2023, include, but are not limited to, farmers, primary food producers, landowners and farmers’ organisations.

1.4.1.3 Agricultural Consultative Council (ACC)

MAFA was also engaged to further strengthen the ACC and incorporate a wider range of important stakeholders operating in the agricultural field to have a more active and effective Council which provides a platform where local stakeholders can be consulted by the Ministry and/or put forward their proposals in a rapidly evolving European and local agricultural policy scenario.

This Additional Measure (AM) addressed the NAP Measure No. 55 to “*Strengthen or recast the role of the ACC to transform it into a rural partnership geared towards rural diversification, social integration and landscape management. This council will focus on the monitoring of key priorities set out in this Agricultural Policy*”.

L.N. 248/2022 published on 11th October 2022, provides amendments to both the composition and the operation of the Council designed to provide a more representative, active and effective Council through appointed members in possession of professional qualifications or technical expertise, knowledge and/or experience from a wide array of agricultural sectors; this ensures a more holistic appraisal and representation through technical approaches.

A more representative, active and effective ACC shall better represent the interests of the agricultural sector as it is in a better position to provide the best advice to the government to proactively build a greater potential for agriculture’s role in the Maltese economy, society and environment for the benefit of the farming sector.

1.4.1.4 Fisheries Conservation and Management (Amendment) Act

In 2022, the Fisheries Conservation and Management Act was amended to aid fishermen expedite the enforcement procedure and at the same time, mitigate the administrative burden on the Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture (DFA). This is deemed to be of utmost importance given that an Infringement Procedure against Malta with regard to Controls on the Bluefin Tuna (BFT) Sector (reference 2020-2181) was imposed, whereas CION criticised Malta’s sanctioning system as too slow while noting that Malta failed to introduce dissuasive sanctions accordingly.

The previous Act provided for criminal proceedings, which proceedings have been criticised by CION for being too lengthy to reach judgement and unfair on the alleged offender, that is, the fisherman. The newly adopted Bill has removed most criminal penalties, which have been provided for under a specific S.L. that will have all sanctioning in one place. The said S.L. is also intended to provide an alternative administrative sanctioning regime.

Furthermore, Article 30 stipulates that any person who contravenes any provision of this Act or any S.L. made thereunder for which no penalty is specifically provided, shall on conviction by a competent court be liable to a fine of not less than €150 but not exceeding €80,000. This is increasing the bracket set for the amount of penalty to be imposed in case of an infringement. On the other hand, the limit of the administrative fines is €60,000 maximum and €50 minimum.

The new Bill also includes certain enforcement procedures related to seizure and financial guarantees, which have in the past put a significant financial burden on the fishermen pending Court proceedings. Article 20 of the Bill has also been amended as a response to Operation Tarantelo through the collaboration of the Malta Police Force (MPF). This Article highlights the powers of entry and searches on land by Fisheries Protection Officers and of carrying out roadblocks as needed in harbour areas.

1.4.1.5 BFT Aquaculture Operations Regulations

In the previous legislation, there were no adequate provisions specifically addressing the industry from the origin of the BFT to its caging in Malta’s aquaculture establishments. Over the years and due to the expansion of this industry, it transpired that there existed several lacunae within the said legislation, which needed to be addressed.

The purpose of this L.N. is to implement the provisions of the 19-04 International Commission for the Convention of Atlantic Tunas Recommendation and endorse the relative provisions within Maltese law which include but are not limited to the:

- responsibilities of towing vessel owners;
- responsibilities of the BFT farm owners; and
- responsibilities of the Department in controlling the sector and enforcing against relevant violations.

The introduction of these Regulations has been specifically intended to control and address the BFT farming industry and ancillary operations related to the same industry. Consequently, by means of these Regulations, the DFA will be able to better monitor the industry’s operations and take the required action.

1.4.1.6 Offences, Proceedings and Sanctioning (Fisheries and Aquaculture) Regulations 2022

In terms of the procedure regarding offences, proceedings and sanctioning aspects, the need was felt to repeal the existing regulations by introducing new regulations, which would provide for measures applicable for all offences falling under the scope of the aforementioned Act, when these are not provided for in the Act itself.

Moreover, under the previous Act, most offences were addressed via criminal proceedings, and it was, therefore, important to generate an alternative administrative resolution system, applicable according to the provisions of these regulations and at the choice of the offender.

Therefore, the main articles being introduced by means of these regulations, are aimed at:

- consolidating all penalties, measures, offences and sanctions into one regulation;
- adjusting the range of penalties in order to make it more equitable and to conform with sanctioning guidelines under EU law;
- providing for the possibility of ‘administrative settlement’ instead of having recourse to the criminal law system in every case; and
- clarifying the already existent ‘penalty point system’ to assist in reaching the requisite aims provided under EU law.

1.4.2 Sustainable Aquaculture Practices

In 2022, MGOZ laid the preparatory work to upgrade the landing sites at Hondoq ir-Rummien, Daħlet Qorrot and Mġarr ix-Xini. The first phase of the project shall consist of the commissioning of the necessary studies as well as the procurement of project management services.

With regard to technology development intended to address aquaculture sustainability, MCAST launched the project *AMBULANT* (AutonoMous Bio-mimetic underwater vehicle for digitAl cage monitoring) which receives funding from MCST and the Ministry for Science and Technology of the People’s Republic of China, through the Sino-Malta Fund 2021 (Science and Technology Cooperation) under grant agreement number SINO-MALTA-2021-18. The development of far-reaching sea cage aquaculture represents an important strategic direction to promote more sustainable development of the aquaculture industry, breaking through the ecological, environmental, and natural resource constraints. Since the deep-sea cage aquaculture is located in the open sea, the complexity, variability, and uncontrollability of parameters associated with the marine environment represent a major challenge to the development of such systems. Efficient and high-quality monitoring of cage water quality, together with fish-biomass estimation, represent two key technical needs that deep-water cage aquaculture industry must address. Thus, this project is aimed at developing a lightweight, low-power monitoring module, based on an underwater bionic robot platform, thus providing a solution for realising high-efficiency and high-quality comprehensive monitoring of deep-water cages.

1.4.3 Sustainable Agriculture and Food Security

1.4.3.1 Initiatives to Promote Sustainability in the Agriculture and Food Sectors

The project *Support for Conservation and Sustainable Use and Development of Genetic Resources in Agriculture* is an EU-funded project being currently 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;
- re-establish three of the local fruit trees; and
- create an apiary in the Gozo Experimental Farm to breed queens of the local honeybee race.

During the period under review, work continued on the procurement of items needed for the project and the collection of genetic material to be used during the studies that will be carried out on the trees.

Furthermore, the EcoGozo Directorate within MGOZ continued with the implementation of the MED-WET Project - Improving Mediterranean irrigation and Water supply for smallholder farmers by providing efficient, low-cost and nature-based technologies and practices. This project is being funded by MCST through the Partnership for Research and Innovation in the Mediterranean Area (PRIMA) initiative of Member States, associated countries and participating countries under grant agreement number PRIMA-2020-02A. An expression of interest for farmers was published to gather interest from farmers to participate in this project. Two farmers showed interest in participating in this project. One farmer will be implementing a Self-regulating, Low-Energy, Clay-based Irrigation (SLECI) component of the project while the other farmer will be implementing both components, that is, the Solar Desalination Greenhouse and SLECI. Together with these two farmers, the Xewkija Experimental Farm will also be used as a testing ground for both components of the project. In this respect, an appointed architect submitted an application with the PA for the construction of the Solar Desalination Greenhouse (a simple desalination system whereby saline groundwater is converted into good quality freshwater employing a combination of passive and active technologies for a more efficient freshwater production suitable for crop irrigation) at the Government Experimental Farm. An appointed mechanical engineer also started the drafting of the technical specifications for the publication of the tenders for the procurement of the systems required for the solar desalination greenhouse. This project will ultimately improve the irrigation efficiency of small farmers in the Mediterranean region, especially through the optimal use of scarce water resources for lasting food and water security.

The objectives to be reached by the MED-WET project are:

- The development of new irrigation technologies and solutions widely applicable to smallholder farmers.
- The equipping of smallholder farmers with knowledge and skills to install, adapt and operate more efficient and effective irrigation options.
- The increase of irrigation water availability from salinised and secondary sources.
- The enhancement of farm profitability and environmental footprint of pilot farming practices.

Further to the above, there is also the Young Farmers Scheme, where young farmers were also given a class-based course to complement the skills being acquired with a theoretical underpinning. This will now be replicated for young fishers as well. Moreover, MCAST is now offering a Farming and Business Management course that will empower students with skills in managing both a farm and a business.

Additionally, MCAST is a partner amongst 35 beneficiaries in the project *Modernisation of Agriculture through more efficient and effective agricultural knowledge and information systems (AKIS)*, known as *modernAKIS*, which receives funding from Horizon Europe. The main objective of the modernAKIS project is to improve AKIS actors' capacities to leverage individual, organisational and systemic resources needed for transformation towards more coherent, effective and efficient AKIS systems and the transition to more sustainable management and use of natural resources in farming and forestry. To achieve this, the project will work towards fostering a European

network of AKIS actors, building capacities amongst such actors towards systems understanding, and improving knowledge and innovation sharing.

MCAST is also participating in the *Empowering Women in Agrifood* programme funded through EIT Food. The programme aims to provide up to 210 women entrepreneurs (10 by country and year) across RIS countries with the required knowledge, confidence, support and networking opportunities to successfully start and develop sustainable businesses. The programme will run for a period of 6 months supporting early-stage female entrepreneurs and it will seek out and assist women to grow and develop their businesses with a tailored, focused approach that specifically takes into account the concrete challenges that female entrepreneurs face generally as well as the barriers which can limit their entrepreneurial activity due to other discriminating factors.

Furthermore, MCAST is also delivering the *Malta Food Citizen Lab* programme which receives EIT-Food funding. Malta and Turkey Citizen Labs will be positioned as a dynamic platform to support ongoing efforts of the countries to increase consumer trust in food safety whereby consumers will be given access to up-to-date information from trustworthy sources including scientists, consumer organisations, farmers and government bodies in an understandable and engaging format, and to facilitate active and transparent dialogue opportunities between citizens, farmers/producers and authorities. Consumers who are engaged with the Citizen Labs will also be instructed to use online tools for promotion and engagement activities and will be offered materials to disseminate among their communities. It is intended that the community of Turkey and Malta Citizen Labs will then be connected to the EIT Food Ambassadors programme and most importantly, connect with a wider community within RIS countries who are facing similar problems.

Moreover, in February 2022, the Sustainable Development Network, together with the then Ministry for Energy, Enterprise and Sustainable Development and the then Ministry for Agriculture, Fisheries, Food, and Animal Rights, organised a webinar *Sustainability in the Food Business Sector*, with the aim of exploring the motivations, the opportunities, and the practical ways by which food businesses, particularly those operators in the middle part of the food supply chain, can translate the principles and aspirational objectives of the EU Code of Conduct for Responsible Business and Marketing Practices: *A common aspirational path towards sustainable food systems* into customer value and benefits for all. The webinar was also intended to show how responsibility in business and marketing practices by operators of the food supply chain can serve to further empower consumers, stimulate businesses, and support producers in their everyday work and operations.



1.4.4 Projects, Schemes and Initiatives to Support the Agriculture and Fisheries Sectors

Further to the support schemes related to the negative impacts brought about by the pandemic, MAFA has also launched and implemented various other measures and nationally-funded support schemes.

1.4.4.1 The Pitkalija Reform

During 2022, the Malta Food Agency (MFA) continued with the implementation of the Pitkalija Reform. This involved consolidating the Sales & Marketing Agents by assigning refurbished sales areas, implementing new processes, and applying enforcement through the Surveillance Unit. The office of the Surveillance Unit was officially established and inaugurated within the MFA at the Ta' Qali Pitkalija on 23rd June 2022. The priorities of the Surveillance Unit

include fraud on local agricultural products (Pitkalija and Farmers Market); farmers' market management and control; and marketing standards implementation.

The core of the Pitkalija Reform is Information Technology (IT). During the year, all the Farmers' Central Cooperative Society Ltd. Agents were incorporated within the same process and IT system as the other agents. In addition, the MFA continued to invest in IT infrastructure. During 2022, the Pitkalija Market Management System was enhanced and further upgraded to meet the requirements of the Agents as well as improve traceability and auditability.

To further improve the services, web applications were implemented to provide real-time information to farmers and buyers. The *ilbidwi.gov.mt*, for instance, is a web app earmarked for farmers that was launched in March 2022. Through this platform, farmers can view their sales, stock balances, payments received and statements. The app also enables the Agency to stop printing end-of-month statements, hence, saving time, money, and paper. Due to this app, the MFA made approximately €500 savings per month as the monthly statements are now available online, without the need to print and send via post. The *ixxerrej.gov.mt* on the other hand is an app for buyers. Through this app, buyers can view all their purchases, prices for individual products, amount dues, statements and management of credit terms.

Additionally, to improve the Crates Management Service, the MFA purchased and implemented a new crate washing machine to enable more cleanliness. Various changes to processes were implemented to improve the customer experience and improve services. The facilities management team was also reorganised to provide continuous maintenance and preventive maintenance conducted to improve the Pitkalija facilities and implement measures to ensure business continuity; new processes and procedures were implemented to improve the Customer Care services and the Cash Office was reorganised to provide a better service to the buyers.

In view of this, the MFA also worked on the design of a new farmers market which shall have all the necessary facilities both for the sellers as well as for the consumers. Lastly, the MFA is also actively involved in the design of a new Pitkalija where it engaged consultants, visited state-of-the-art markets similar to the Pitkalija, and worked directly with architects and engineers to compile the first design of the new Pitkalija.

1.4.4.2 Agricultural Rent Reform

An important reform in this sector involved the amendments made to the Act on the Renewal of Agricultural Leases which was brought before Parliament in 2022. These legislative interventions shall create more balance between the interests of the owners of the private agricultural land, of the tenants, and also, the interest of the public in general in order to have a supply of local agricultural products. This reform was based on the principle of proportionality, aiming at protecting the agricultural activity from speculation and not jeopardising the title of the lessee of the farm based on a lack of proportionality, with values that are not in the agricultural context.

Primarily, the Act will introduce new legal provisions to empower the Rural Leases Control Board to amend the rent in a manner related to a fair rental price. This should take into account the estimated value of the land as agricultural land for agricultural use which can be obtained from the open market taking into consideration the means of the lessee, the circumstances and condition of the land and any burden which may be proportionate to the lessor and not only in relation to adjacent fields.

The main principles on which the proposed amendment is based are the following:

1. Agricultural land shall be valued as agricultural land and not according to the market economy of the land in general.
2. The amount of compensation due to the lessor shall be objectively estimated and shall relate to the land in question without being bound by the conditions of other nearby fields which may also be subject to unfair conditions that create a vicious circle at the expense of the owner.
3. Put an end to taking back agricultural land from farmers who rent out their land privately by requiring a review of the conditions and value of the rent before the eviction.

Moreover, in October 2022 MAFA launched a public consultation on the white paper on the reform of agricultural land. The aim of the reform is to protect the land in the public interest in a legitimate and proportionate manner to do justice to all parties, including the owner, reduce over-speculation, protect areas and above all, support agriculture in the wake of its importance for guaranteeing an ample food supply.

1.4.4.3 Malta AgriFair

From the 20th until the 22nd of May 2022, MAFA organised the first edition of the Malta AgriFair, which was a national agricultural fair organised at the Malta Fairs and Conventions Centre in Ta' Qali based on the following main principles:

- Promoting local products from the agrifish sectors.
- Promoting new technological developments within the agrifish sectors.
- Bringing together stakeholders in the field from large organisations to SMEs all under one roof.
- Providing a platform for both the local farming/fishing community, as well as producers, to not only inform and communicate to the general public about the industries' products and services, but to also create a level of networking between the community *per se*.

The concept behind this first edition of the Malta AgriFair was the *Farm-to-Fork Strategy* whereby the food chain system of food production, harvesting, processing, distribution, and consumption was shown in a visual, innovative and interactive manner.

1.4.4.4 Pig Welfare Scheme

2022 also saw the continuation of the nationally funded Pig Welfare Scheme under which aid is granted to undertakings active in the primary agricultural production sector that voluntarily undertake certain specific actions to improve animal welfare on their farm. In order to be eligible, these actions must go beyond the relevant mandatory standards established pursuant to Article 3(1)(b) of the Minimum Standards for the Protection of Pigs Regulations (S.L. 439.02). This scheme grants aid to swine producers for increased sow-spacing allowance considerations for pig farms. The scheme enables eligible beneficiaries to enter into a multi-annual commitment for a period of up to five years, during which the farmers opting in would ensure that the stocking density and space available for sows would meet dimensions as set out by the Veterinary Regulation Directorate within the scheme guidelines and grant agreement against a pre-determined annual payment based on a rate per sow.

1.4.4.5 Young Farmers Scheme

Agricultural production in Malta is characterised by a constant production throughout the year with an ageing farming community where, nowadays, new generations tend not to pursue a career in the agricultural sector, due to various factors that make this career path unattractive.

Young farmers face a wide array of barriers to entering agricultural activity, especially in obtaining land, due to the high costs of purchasing or renting agricultural land. In Malta and Gozo, the fragmentation of land resulting from succession and inheritance is another factor that makes the sector unattractive. Difficulties in obtaining loans for business investments, problems in accessing markets, together with resistance from older farmers to pass on their experience to non-family individuals, also pose struggles for a new farmer to enter the industry.

In this regard, in 2022 ARPA launched a third call for applications under this scheme which aims to alleviate modern challenges and facilitate the transfer of knowledge from older farmers. Under this scheme, young farmers can enter an arrangement with an established local land farmer whereby under the coordination, supervision and guidance of MCAST, they spend an allocated number of hours assisting in the everyday work planned by the host farmer. The aim is for the young farmer to attain the necessary experience both through hands-on training by an experienced farmer, as well as through structured theoretical learning, which will, in turn, encourage potential individuals to enter the agricultural sector. The ultimate benefit of this scheme is to identify, nurture and develop the next generation of farmers in the present times. In 2022, the implementation of 2021 contracted applicants proceeded, with payments pertaining to them being carried out in Q1 2022 with an amount totalling €152,448.

1.4.4.6 Let's Talk Farming Programme

MAFA, in collaboration with Ministry for Education, Sports, Youths, Research and Innovation (MEYR), launched the first *Let's Talk Farming Programme*, which is a programme aimed to promote farming and food production in primary schools.

The aim of this programme is to educate and increase awareness related to food systems. This subject covers numerous themes such as how food is produced, who produces it, the many jobs associated with farming, the role of farming in the upkeep of the countryside, the impact of climate on farming, and animal welfare. The programme aims to look into the benefits of the responsible consumption of food and the need to limit food waste to generate a basic link between what we eat and our general health, together with the effect our food consumption may have on the environment.

The programme's intention is to help integrate the themes of food and farming through the curriculum areas of Maltese, English, Maths, Geography or Science and Creativity (Arts, Design, and Drama). In the end, the programme aims to acknowledge and reward those schools which endeavour to promote food production and the role of food producers within their school environment. In-house activities will be supplemented with hands-on exposure to the food industry through educational outings to farms and other food-producing organisations.

These measures strive to increase awareness and inspire children to value food and gain a basic understanding of how it is produced while presenting the sector as one where one can develop and eventually seek a career.

1.4.4.7 AgriHub Project

In 2022, the Agriculture Directorate organised the first technical conference of the *AgriHub* project, where the first results of the first part of this project were discussed, together with International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies (CIHEAM) experts, stakeholders, and officials within the Directorate. It is clear from this conference that through ongoing research, farmers will benefit from more sustainable production, which is ultimately the main aim of the Agriculture Directorate.

The Agriculture Directorate, through AgriHub, also organised a seminar where, together with experts from CIHEAM, information was provided regarding the results obtained so far while, for the first time in Malta, publishing a set of guidelines of IPM in relation to five crops that have the greatest economic value in the agricultural sector: tomatoes, potatoes, olives, grapes and strawberries. Through these guidelines, both experienced farmers and new ones will have access to current information on how to best protect their products. This seminar was targeted at both full-time and part-time farmers, as well as Agriculture Directorate officers.

Throughout the year, also in collaboration with CIHEAM, AgriHub organised courses related to the cultivation and pruning of orange trees, olive trees, vines and stone fruit trees. This training helped officers enhance their knowledge and stay up-to-date with current practices. In addition to this, on-site farm demo visits were also organised for farmers.

1.4.4.8 Plant Protection Directorate (PPD)'s Projects

The 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, as well as wild indigenous and endemic plants species (plant genetic resources), both of which are of importance to Malta's natural and cultural heritage. Construction was completed in 2022 while the project is to be inaugurated in 2023.

Furthermore, in 2022, the PPD also built new diagnostic laboratories to be able to improve its plant diagnostic services. New equipment was purchased to improve the efficiency of testing for plant pathogens, in particular for *Xylella Fastidiosa*. The Directorate also continued to implement the project financed by the European Food Safety Authority which focused on the harmful organism *Phyllosticta citricarpa* which causes citrus black spots on citrus species. This project, which ended in March 2022, aimed at the smart monitoring of this airborne plant pathogen to support risk-based plant health surveillance in the EU. The main work that was carried out in 2022 consisted of the collection and submission of samples for laboratory testing to determine the presence or absence of this plant pest, data collection from the weather station, and the drafting of a technical manuscript with the other project partners.

Moreover, a national survey was carried out on the presence of *Cerambyx nodulosus*, which is a polyphagous beetle that develops in living or moribund trees such as Acer, Crataegus, Malus and Pyrus. The monitoring survey consisted of 20 traps distributed amongst 6 farmers and installed in their fields. Various samples have been collected from six different locations across Malta. By this measure, the Monitoring and Control Unit within the PPD strives to promote sustainable agriculture by improving food production systems and implementing resilient agricultural practices that increase productivity and production.

1.4.4.9 National Viticulture and Oenology Centre

Efforts continued during 2022 on the conservation and valorisation of the local varieties. The first phase of structural works on the National Viticulture and Oenology Centre in Buskett was concluded with the second phase of the project currently underway. Once the project is finished, the Agriculture Directorate will be able to promote and disseminate information on the indigenous vine varieties through the interactive museum that will be established in this building. These varieties shall also be studied and may be added to the D.O.K and I.G.T production protocols.

Furthermore, in January 2022, the Agriculture Directorate launched the D.O.K and I.G.T new traceability system and commenced its implementation soon after with all stakeholders being provided with necessary one-to-one training.

1.4.4.10 Increasing Resilience of the Local Meat Industry and Valorising Meat Products

During 2022, around €1 million were invested in the Public Abattoir as it continued to implement a number of measures to enhance the resilience of the Maltese livestock sector in general and the local meat industry in particular, as well as strengthen the economic and environmental sustainability.

Furthermore, the largest single investment was made in an extension of the existing Cutting and Deboning facility forming part of the Public Abattoir with the new 750m² pork processing plant's inauguration planned for early 2023.

The refrigeration capacity within the Public Abattoir was doubled through the installation of an additional two 40ft high cube reefer containers to achieve a freezer storage capacity of circa 300m³. Furthermore, in view of increasing global risks, in January 2022, the Public Abattoir entered into a framework contract with a local cold-storage operator for the storage of pork to increase its backup storage capacity. Such storage capacity enabled the local pork industry to weather the substantial fall in demand in the first three quarters of the year when compared to 2021 and keep stocks until the demand for pork improved, thus minimising losses. It also enabled the local swine cooperative to avail itself, for the first time since EU Accession, of private storage aid. The increase in refrigeration capacity is also giving the Maltese Islands the ability to keep a buffer stock to mitigate against the risks related to food security.

1.4.4.11 Crop Intelligent Tools Project

MCAST also collaborated with the *Crop Intelligent Tools* project financed by MCST, for and on behalf of the Foundation for Science and Technology, through the FUSION: R&I Technology Development Programme under grant agreement number R&I-2016-031T. The project aimed to cross the bridge from research projects to ready commercial reliable, affordable systems, which could be used by grape vines and possibly, by other agriculture farmers and industries.



1.4.4.12 Other EU-Funded Projects, Schemes and Initiatives

As in previous years, during 2022, the DFA worked on several initiatives part-financed through the EMFF 2014-2020, Interreg Europe, PRIMA, Horizon 2020 and Life Projects 2019. Amongst others, these initiatives include seminars for various stakeholders in the Fisheries Sector, the LIFE PanPuffinus Project, the BYTHOS Project, the Self-sufficient Integrated Multi-Tropic AquaPonic system (SIMTAP) Project and the implementation of several measures forming part of the EMFF's Control Programme.

1.4.4.12.1 Initiatives Implemented as Part of the Control Programme of the EMFF

The primary objective of the DFA is to ensure the sustainability of fish species in the seas and to address the requirements of the fishing sector. To sustain this, a lot of initiatives and projects were, and are, being implemented by the Department's Fisheries Control Unit. Below is a list of initiatives and projects undertaken by the Department in this regard.

1.4.4.12.2 Seminars for Various Stakeholders in the Fisheries Sector

In 2022, the DFA concluded a series of five seminars to raise awareness amongst various stakeholders on the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) rules and the importance of combatting Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing. The final seminar, which was held on 2nd March 2022, revolved around swordfish fishing and was primarily attended by local fishers.

1.4.4.12.3 Awareness Campaign on the CFP and IUU Fishing Regulations

In November 2020, the DFA launched a publicity campaign to raise awareness of the rules of the CFP and the importance to combat IUU fishing activities, as well as to inform the public on other initiatives taken by the DFA with respect to controls in the Fisheries Sector.

In 2022, the DFA produced and aired eight adverts that were primarily concerned with promoting the initiatives undertaken by the DFA in recent years to increase monitoring and control in the sector, thanks to investments made by the EMFF.

1.4.4.12.4 Installation of Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) Devices Onboard Fishing Vessels

To strengthen the management and monitoring of the Maltese fishing fleet, in 2022, the DFA installed 119 VMS devices onboard local fishing vessels whose size exceeds 10 metres. The equipment installed on the vessels is accompanied by VMS software, which allows the DFA to continuously monitor fishing vessels for compliance and enforcement purposes. The DFA had already implemented a similar initiative in 2014 and installed VMS hardware on all eligible vessels. Having said this, the hardware installed had since then been exposed to years of harsh climatic conditions, resulting in frequent technical faults and consequential interruption in satellite transmission to the DFA's Fisheries Monitoring Centre and, therefore, needed to be changed. Through this investment, the DFA aims to better fulfil its obligations and give an overall better service to the local fishing community.

1.4.4.12.5 Data Collection Multi-Annual Programme (DC-MAP)

The DC-MAP provides a common framework for the EU community to collect, manage, and share data within the fisheries sector. With this project, the EU aims to ensure the collection of fisheries data needed to implement and support the CFP. The DC-MAP lays down the requirements for the collection of biological, environmental, and socio-economic data in the fisheries and aquaculture sectors. The data collection aims to provide reliable information on the state of fish stocks, provide advice on the sustainable management of fish stocks, upon which the industry depends and ensure the conservation and management of the marine environment. The work initiated in previous years was continued by the DFA, in line with Malta's approved National Work Plan, whereby data on fishing capacity and effort, catch and landing statistics, biometric parameters, scientific surveys at sea and economics of the fishing fleet, fish processing and aquaculture industries were collected.

1.4.4.12.6 BLUEfasma

The BLUEfasma project, co-financed by the ERDF through the Interreg MED Programme 2014-2020, was concluded in June 2022, with the aim of integrating and implementing circular economy principles in the fisheries and aquaculture sectors. The main objective of this project was to empower the innovation capacity of SMEs, maritime clusters and networks in Mediterranean islands and coastal areas to support the blue circular economy.

1.4.4.12.7 LIFE PanPuffinus

LIFE PanPuffinus, a project launched by Birdlife Malta in June 2021, aims at improving the conservation status of two endangered pelagic seabirds across the Mediterranean Sea and the Atlantic coast of Portugal, by tackling two major threats on land and at sea through transboundary conservation efforts. This will be achieved through the development of an improved system of data collection and monitoring.

1.4.4.12.8 BYTHOS

The BYTHOS project, co-financed by the ERDF through the Interreg V-A Italia-Malta Programme ended in April 2022. Its main objective was to explore, through scientific studies, the commercial potential of fish waste in the pharmaceutical, nutraceutical and cosmetic industries. This project also demonstrated that it is possible to produce fish feed from fish waste, making it possible for the industry of aquaculture to move closer towards a 'Zero-Waste' operation, thus potentially having the capacity of reducing its impact on the environment and achieve circular economic targets.

1.4.4.12.9 SIMTAP

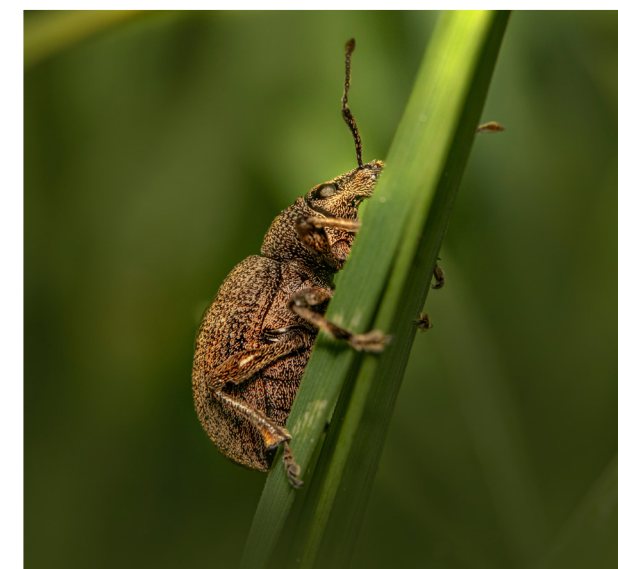
The SIMTAP project, co-financed by Horizon 2020 – Research and Innovation Framework Programme (2014-2020), will reach its fruition in June 2023. The main aim of this project is to develop an ecosystem-based approach to the production of vegetable crops and fish in a circular economy perspective with applicability in different climate and production contexts.

During 2022, the Aquaculture Directorate successfully constructed and fully installed a SIMTAP system capable of combining saltwater hydroponic production in greenhouses and in-land aquaculture. In this system, waste from one level of multi-tropic cultivation is recycled to become input (fertiliser/feed) for another organism. The Directorate concluded its first research trial during the last month of 2022.

Results obtained from this research project will provide knowledge to the aquaculture industry in Malta that it is possible to conduct aquaculture operations in a more environmentally-friendly manner that is sustainable and in harmony with the natural ecosystem. Furthermore, it will also demonstrate the benefits of the concept of having a fixed space with a dual-use purpose that maximises the potential of existing infrastructure.

1.4.4.12.10 Pest Survey Programme

The 2022 Malta's Pest Survey Programme, co-financed by CION, was envisaged to cover the monitoring of 48 different pests that attack a wide range of plants of agricultural, ornamental and landscaping importance. These pests are considered of importance at the EU level and were classified into three priority groups. Malta benefitted from the co-financing of 19 pests, and the work consisted of visual inspections, the placing of traps, and the collection of samples and laboratory analysis of such samples. The work that was planned for the remaining pests, including awareness raising at the national level was covered by national funds.



1.4.5 Consolidation of Services Offered to Farmers

AgriConnect opened a new regional office in Haż-Żabbar early in 2022 to cater for farmers in the southern part of the Islands. This office complements the services currently being offered at Għammieri, Pitkalija and Mellieħa.

Through the Agricultural Services Laboratory and the farm extension/advisory service provided by AgriConnect, the Directorate for Agriculture will be able to continue to serve as a point of reference to the sector. Soil samples can be examined as part of the obligations of EU-funded schemes such as the measure for the Implementation of a Land Management and Conservation Plan on Land (Agri-Environment-Climate Measures), which concerns the testing for organic material.

1.4.6 Promoting Organic Production

As part of the promotion of quality food products, efforts are being made in promoting sustainable farming practices, in particular organic production. Throughout 2022, the Organic Farming Advisory Board set up in line with Regulation 6 of S.L. 427.93, worked on the establishment of a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats analysis to identify the potential and the challenges in the sector and establish methodologies to overcome them. Furthermore, the website for organic production and labelling has been completely revamped to ensure there is all the required information for potential operators interested in participating in the scheme. It also provides information for the public, in general, to better understand the concept of organic farming and the weight the logo and certification hold.

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 fertilisers. 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.

Furthermore, access to organic pesticides already registered in other Member States of the EU but not registered in Malta has been simplified. In 2022, a pilot project with three plant protection products was successfully carried out and these new products were authorised by the MCCA. One of these products can be used in organic farming. The other two are insecticides and fungicides which are used on specific pests that attack herbs, mainly grown by farmers.

The new procedure will ensure better competition practices between locally grown fruit and vegetables and those grown in other countries, as Maltese farmers will now have the same products available to them. As a result, our farmers will no longer be disadvantaged by foreign farmers and will be assisted to continue working and investing in the agricultural sector.



1.5 Investing in Sustainable Finance for a Greener and Climate-Neutral Economy

Relevant UN SDG Targets	
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
8.3	Promote development-oriented policies that support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, and encourage the formalization and growth of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises, including through access to financial services
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
8.10	Strengthen the capacity of domestic financial institutions to encourage and expand access to banking, insurance and financial services for all
12.6	Encourage companies, especially large and transnational companies, to adopt sustainable practices and to integrate sustainability information into their reporting cycle
13.a	Implement the commitment undertaken by developed-country parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change to a goal of mobilizing 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 capitalization as soon as possible
17.14	Enhance policy coherence for sustainable development

1.5.1 Government’s Fiscal Policy

The Maltese government’s prudent fiscal policy over recent years made possible the countercyclical response to the COVID-19 pandemic, supported the subsequent recovery and later sustained the economy throughout the energy price shocks in the aftermath of the war in Ukraine. A wide range of support measures have been implemented to limit the economic impact on output, employment and consumption whilst supporting households and enterprises, including subsidies to stabilise the price of electricity, water, grains and animal feeds, a Wage Supplement Scheme, higher healthcare funding, vouchers to people over the age of 16, tax rebates on property sales, interest rebates on loans, as well as other social measures. Discretionary policies complemented the full operation of automatic fiscal stabilisers, as a result of which the general government balance turned negative. Persistent international economic challenges and the large fiscal policy response resulted in recurring budget deficits since 2020 and a corresponding increase in general government debt.

Estimates presented in the Draft Budget Plan indicate that, in the absence of government support, the economy would have sustained a negative shock of at least 2.3 per cent whilst inflation would have been 7.1 percentage points higher. The risk of poverty in the absence of government support would also have climbed by almost 1.0 percentage points. This evidence suggests that the present policy stance was essential to protect the most vulnerable, mitigate inflationary pressures and protect economic growth.

The support to the economy in 2022 to stabilise prices is expected to exceed €390 million or 2.4 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP). It will be further sustained by public investment, which is expected to exceed the level of 2021, supported also by the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) as well as projects funded from the Multiannual Financial Framework for the period 2021-2027.

1.5.2 Government's Debt Trajectory

Government debt declined below the 60 per cent treaty reference value in 2015 and continued to decline to a debt-to-GDP ratio of 40.7 per cent by the end of 2019. On account of the severe economic situation and the large fiscal policy response, in 2020, the general government debt increased to 55.2 per cent of GDP and is expected to have increased further, to 57.0 per cent in 2022.

While the level of uncertainty regarding the short- and medium-term path for the economy is unprecedented, cognisant of the positive bearing that fiscal consolidation and sustainable debt levels have on potential growth, the government will continue to prioritise fiscal consolidation over the medium-term. The Maltese government remains committed to putting the debt-to-GDP ratio back on a declining path once economic conditions allow. Whilst the government is budgeting for the continuation of extraordinary fiscal support and the anticipation of persistent energy price shocks on the international markets, countervailing expenditure consolidation measures will nonetheless limit the deficit and ensure that the debt remains close to the 60 per cent of GDP target over the medium-term.

1.5.3 Green Budgeting

In view of the Government's intention to achieve a carbon-neutral economy by 2050, further to initiatives outlined in the recent Budgets that ensure that the environment is indeed prioritised, the Government is also assessing how the tools of budgetary policymaking can be used to help achieve environmental goals. This includes evaluating the environmental impacts of budgetary and fiscal policies and assessing their coherence towards the delivery of national and international commitments.

1.5.4 Sustainable Financial Services

During 2022, the Malta Financial Services Authority (MFSA) enhanced its efforts to align with the increased focus on this policy area by the EU and at the national level and took active participation in the work of the European Supervisory Authorities and the Network for Greening the Financial System.

Further to this, it continued its work with a view to adopting a more holistic and strategic approach to sustainable finance for our national context. Sustainable finance is also one of the three cross-sectoral themes in focus as included in the MFSA Supervisory Priorities 2022. Work in this area focused on integrating the requirements emanating from the applicable legislative instruments relating to sustainable finance with other supervisory requirements. The Authority also focused on raising awareness and guiding market participants to assist them in better addressing the challenges in this new supervisory area and ensuring a stable regulatory environment.

Moreover, in April 2022, the MFSA presented its first supervision exercise into the state of readiness and compliance by financial market participants and financial advisors that fall within the scope of application of the Sustainable Finance Disclosure Regulation. The 2022 Report intends to increase awareness of sustainable finance among the entities under the Authority's supervision. It also guides entities in scope to make any necessary improvements to the information they provide in relation to sustainability.

Furthermore, during the same year, the MFSA was largely involved in the preparation work leading to the launch of the EU TSI multi-country project which officially started in January 2023. The MFSA, together with the national competent authorities of Croatia, Poland, and Romania, is participating in this TSI multi-country project, which will provide technical support on supervisory capacity enhancement in sustainable finance. The project is implemented through funding by the European Union through the TSI, in cooperation with the European Commission Directorate General for Structural Reform Support.

The project will seek to contribute to institutional, administrative, and growth-sustaining structural reforms in the four participating jurisdictions, by assisting national authorities to improve their capacity to design, develop and implement reforms, specifically by enhancing supervisory capacity in the field of sustainable finance. This

project is expected to enable the MFSA to continue strengthening its capacity to develop and implement reforms in the area of EU sustainability disclosure and reporting regime while supporting supervisory convergence among competent authorities in the implementation of this framework.

As the single regulator for financial services in Malta, the MFSA remains committed to contributing to the achievement of national and EU sustainability goals. The Authority seeks to ensure that, in addition to being prepared for the impact of the relevant legislative frameworks, supervised entities make sustainable development a core part of the internal organisation, strategy and values.

Further to the above, in 2022, a number of ESG reports from various Malta Stock Exchange-listed companies have continued to be collected and published on the Sustainable Development website.





Towards the Preservation of Sustainable Urban Development and Cultural Heritage

Malta's culture and heritage play an important role in ensuring the social, environmental, and economic development of the Maltese Islands. When it comes to this sector, considerable progress has been made in the last decade as cultural heritage has grown into becoming a supplier of meaning, identity and belonging, and is now considered to be the central pillar of social interaction and stability. The population dynamics of Maltese society are continuously changing, whereby the proportion of elderly people is increasing, and society is becoming more diverse due to the influx of migrants with different cultures. Thus, while addressing these factors in an effective manner is challenging, it can bring about new opportunities that will further assist the country in achieving its sustainability targets and ambitions.

In this respect, the government is willing to integrate this approach into public and private decision-making processes, including those that have to do with the development of urban areas in Malta. This, however, cannot be achieved without the introduction of new mechanisms, regulations and procedures for managing culture and urban heritage. Apart from this, a vital element would also be that of having in place a just process of participation, production and preservation of culture and heritage. This entails a process where multiple stakeholders and actors work together in identifying the role of culture and heritage in developing sustainable cities, towns and villages all across the Maltese Islands.

Social cohesion and resilience are widely considered to be crucial for citizens to feel satisfied within their society. This is because citizens in a cohesive and resilient community tend to feel supported by those around them, feel a sense of belonging, and socialise with others in their community, all of which are important for a person's social well-being. Cohesive and resilient communities are also less likely to experience problems within their neighbourhood and others surrounding them. Thus, it is in the interest of the government to be aware of, and address, the factors which affect the cohesion and resilience of a community, even because residents living in a cohesive community are less likely to move away. In this regard, the government is working towards building greater connections and interactions among citizens to improve such community cohesion and resilience while ensuring that there is active participation both in the labour market as well as in social processes and activities in order to safeguard the health and well-being of all citizens and enable them to reach their full potential.

Through a more equitable and cohesive society that respects cultural diversity, people are presented with more opportunities to protect and conserve their heritage and cultural identity. Thus, one of the government's main ambitions is to create an environment which allows culture and the arts to thrive. This will further ensure that everyone is empowered to exercise the right of freedom of artistic and cultural expression while creating a more open and creative society and nurturing a country that actively seeks to promote and preserve its cultural heritage.

Therefore, this chapter will highlight the measures and initiatives undertaken by the government which are linked to the 2030 Agenda, namely SDGs 1, 4, 6, 8, 9, and 11-15.

2030 AGENDA-RELATED GOALS



2.1 Placing Culture and Heritage at the Heart of the Development of Our Local Communities

Relevant UN SDG Targets	
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
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
8.9	By 2030, devise and implement policies to promote sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products
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
11.4	Strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage
12.8	By 2030, ensure that people everywhere have the relevant information and awareness for sustainable development and lifestyles in harmony with nature
12.b	Develop and implement tools to monitor sustainable development impacts for sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products
13.2	Integrate climate change measures into national policies, strategies and planning
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
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
14.5	By 2020, conserve at least 10 per cent of coastal and marine areas, consistent with national and international law and based on the best available scientific information
15.9	By 2020, integrate ecosystem and biodiversity values into national and local planning, development processes, poverty reduction strategies and accounts

2.1.1 Investment in Hospitality, Tourism and the Film Industries

The year 2022 continued to be dominated by the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic which had significant repercussions on the tourism industry and resulted in a severe drop in tourists and visitors to our islands during the preceding years. The effect of the pandemic on the tourism sector has emphasised the importance of tourism as a robust sector contributing substantially to the local economy and highlighted the spill-over effects and how the sector is integrated with various other sectors across the Maltese economy. During this period, MFT directed much of its efforts towards mitigating the effects of the pandemic and the attainment of exceptional tourism figures by focusing on the Government's strategy for recovery and strategic resilience of the tourism industry.

Such efforts revolved around, among other things, the implementation of the *Strategy for the years 2021-2030* entitled Recover, Rethink, Revitalize launched in 2021. This Strategy presents an opportunity, at an important juncture in Malta's development and considers international tourism's next evolutionary steps following the turmoil that commenced in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This opportunity allows the country to re-establish its tourism industry on a sounder footing and in line with international ideals and commitments in the fields of sustainable development and climate change that is rapidly requiring urgent action on a global level.

In September 2022, the Malta Tourism Observatory was launched and charged with executing the Strategy and, *inter alia*, starting work on devising a number of Sustainable Tourism Indicators. In this respect, EU-Funded technical support was secured from EU DG REFORM which has appointed the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to work with MFT and MTA to devise a set of Sustainable Tourism Indicators which will be delivered by December 2024. These tools will give Malta the necessary framework to possess adequate resources to incorporate sustainability into decision-making processes.

The Malta Tourism Observatory in collaboration with MTA's Research Unit is also working with the French company Murmuration in the creation of a dashboard providing real-time data on a number of air-, land- and sea-related variables linked to identified SDGs which are impacted by tourism. UNWTO has recently designated Murmuration as the winner of its Awaken Tourism challenge launched in April last year for the Tech for Good category. More than 2000 companies from 120 countries competed in this challenge, and UNWTO underlined that Murmuration won "given its demonstrated capacity to support the SDGs".

At the EU level, a fundamental dossier that was unveiled by CION in 2022 related to the Transition Pathway for Tourism and the complementary Action Plan. This transition process is the first in a series of transition pathways for the industrial ecosystems involving broadly public and private stakeholders across sectors. This co-creation process with tourism stakeholders focuses on the green and digital transition as a means to help the recovery from COVID-19 and increase the long-term resilience of the tourism ecosystem. The tourism transition pathway reflects an ongoing process, and CION invites tourism stakeholders to publicly express their commitments and plans for concrete actions to support the tourism transition. As part of this consultative process, MFT carried out constant consultations with stakeholders and has also reached out to the industry through a seminar held in October 2022.

2.1.1.1 Human Resource-Related Investment

Professional skills development and career formation are vital for employees working in the hospitality and tourism industry to carry out daily tasks serving tourists and visitors under the highest standards and quality. Human resources development within the local tourism industry remains imperative to maintain Malta's destination market share, securing repeat tourism and safeguarding customer satisfaction. Actions undertaken by MTA during the year 2022 to address investment in human resources were the following:

- Safety and security training which is a fundamental aspect to ensure the well-being of both the employee and the tourist. Mandatory training such as First Aid courses and Fire Warden courses continue to be offered annually to tourism employees to ensure that at least one member of the staff per shift is adequately trained in safety and security. Such courses have been particularly tailored for employees working in hotels, restaurants and visitor attractions.
- MTA has invested in Quality Service Training by collaborating with Gambero Rosso under the sponsorship of Erasmus+ VET with a 9-day fully-funded traineeship which was organised in Rome. Restaurant managers and supervisors were welcomed to benefit from this initiative during the year 2022. Along with focusing on serving skills, such training also included studies on the art of contemporary hospitality and service, modern interpretation of traditional cuisine, digital social marketing for the catering sector and gastronomy and wine customisation.
- Culture is a prominent motivator for tourists to visit Malta and thus, it has been recognised as a priority that foreign employees receive general knowledge training of the Maltese archipelago, history, heritage sites, local customs and gastronomy. Several cultural tours have been offered to foreign workers occupying positions as front liners working in the tourism industry to learn and discover the highlights of the Maltese tourism product. The training programme consisted of a set of three tours: Mdina - The Silent City tour, Valletta - The Capital City Tour and the Three Cities and Temples Tour. Participants were given the opportunity to receive a complete cultural training experience.

- Hotel in-house training on Maltese culture and introduction to the Maltese tourism industry to foreign employees was organised. Such training included a presentation on the Maltese language, indigenous traditions, and local food followed by a culture-themed quiz.
- MTA also participated in various students' careers fairs and conventions, and tourism institutions' open weeks, and offered support to educational bodies, schools and students to encourage careers in the local tourism industry and support the future generation of the hospitality workforce.

ITS has also embarked on a project to construct a new campus for tourism studies. This will contribute to increasing the quality of education provided in such institutions whilst investing in the future generation of people working in the tourism industry.

Furthermore, ITS and the Diving Alert Network Europe launched a successful Bachelor of Science programme in Diving Safety Management which has an important component of marine sustainability. This programme was also another success following which the institutions decided to extend their work by planning and developing a Master of Science in Underwater Environment Operations. This qualification is in the process of drafting and shall be submitted for accreditation by the end of 2023. The plan is to launch this master's in October of 2024.

On 16th March 2022, ITS' application to be part of the Pact for Skills network was accepted. The Pact for Skills aims to mobilise a concerted effort for quality investment in skills for all working-age people across the Union by bringing together all stakeholders, private and public, which share the objective of upskilling and reskilling Europe's workforce and facilitating public-private cooperation. ITS shall be represented by the ITS Training School in this network. The training school, which has been set up as part of ITS' strategy aims at upskilling and reskilling the local tourism and hospitality workforce thus, making this sector more efficient, effective, and sustainable.

ITS also participated in an ongoing EU co-financed LIFE project which is led by the Italian network for vocational education and training, more commonly referred to as VET, ENAIP NET. In line with SDG 12, the LIFE FOSTER project consists of direct and indirect actions aimed at raising awareness about the problem of food waste and optimal food storage in the catering sector. Apart from equipping personnel with the necessary skills to reduce consumption and waste, this project developed a methodology for measuring waste in the restaurant environment with a view to helping restaurateurs become more efficient and to promote responsible buying. This is especially relevant in an environment that is recovering from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, whereby businesses have reduced revenues and are trying to identify creative solutions to reduce their operating costs. The project ended on the 31st of August 2022.

Furthermore, the Malta Film Commission in collaboration with MFT has been constantly investing in the filming industry to ensure that the current capabilities of Malta's labour force are aligned with the needs of this industry. Strong professional crew resources enable the industry to deliver a full range of services that complement what it already offers, resulting in a more stable workforce. Sustainable development in this sector also requires that new entrants must have the right technical know-how and work ethic. This is accomplished through close partnerships with the educational sector and by encouraging a cross-sectoral approach that allows those in other industries to transition to the film sector, such as carpentry, fashion design, and accountancy, among others. Focused attention at the grassroots and an active outreach campaign with a bottom-up approach allow this sector to create a long-term sustainable industry that enables both the domestic and servicing sectors to develop.

2.1.1.2 Product Development

During 2022, measures continued towards the promotion of Maltese artisanal food products. More specifically, the Public Abattoir was at the forefront of the promotion of locally produced meat. In May, it hosted a hugely successful Festa Majjal, whereby, for the first time in 125 years, visitors were given the opportunity to enter parts of the Public Abattoir and appreciate the levels of hygiene that underpin the premium quality of Maltese fresh meat products.

In September, the Abattoir entered into an agreement with the Centre for Carcass Classification at the University of Ghent, in Belgium. Through this agreement, this leading Belgian research centre is providing training to the staff at the Public Abattoir on beef and pork grading, as well as helping the Public Abattoir to have, for the first time, an

automatic classification system for pork approved by CION in line with EU regulations. In addition, it is also advising on the establishment, monitoring, and renewal of review and verification processes of classification and related processes at the Public Abattoir and other entities within MAFA.

The Public Abattoir has also contributed towards the strengthening of the resilience of the local meat industry through the re-launching of a number of traditional Maltese meat products on the market. These included the kirxa and the mazzit as well as other products with a centuries-old tradition including local pork fat, as well as the animelli. The placing on the market of such products enabled local producers to achieve a higher value-added per carcass whilst at the same time reducing the volume of food waste going for incineration. By the end of the year, local demand for kirxa outstripped supply while the demand for blood to produce mazzit reached 400 litres a week. It has taken a leading role in the Mazzit Stakeholders group which, in December 2022, submitted an application for mazzit to be recognised under the EU's Protected Geographical Indication label.

In October 2022, the Malta Food Agency organised the Festa Ikel Malti as part of the World Food Day celebrations. For the first time in more than 40 years, the vegetable market (Pitkalija) was opened to the public, where everyone had the opportunity to buy products and take part in thematic activities related to the principle of 'leave no one behind'.

During 2022, efforts were also made to continue promoting and shedding light on the importance of Maltese cultural events. This was most evident in the Mnarja 2022 event. Apart from being a traditional Maltese feast, the Mnarja festa serves as a means to promote local produce on many levels. The Mnarja 2022 event's activities included amongst others: a fruit and vegetable exhibition; an exhibition and competition of fancy poultry, rabbits and various breeds of birds; traditional crafts; traditional food and sweets; and a children's area with traditional Maltese games. Traditional għana music and folk dancing also formed part of this traditional event. During the event, one could also admire an exhibition and competition of animals, including various breeds of typical Maltese indigenous livestock and demonstrations on how to shear sheep and milk sheep and goats in the traditional way. The programme included guided tours to the Verdala Palace with donations in aid of the Community Chest Fund. On-site, there was also the In Guardia Parade and an exhibition of old machinery.

Various cultural, traditional and entertaining events were organised in Gozo in 2022. These events not only served as a boost to local talent to get back to the industry that was highly affected by the pandemic, but also as an additional touristic product that sustains tourism during the off-peak period. As a result, the festive period in 2022 experienced very positive results, with 339,962 passengers visiting Gozo amounting to a 44% increase over the same period last year. Addressing the off-peak period was also a main priority in VisitGozo's international marketing campaigns which mainly promoted the Island with narrative content on the spring and autumn periods while increasingly establishing a brand that is synonymous with experiential travel.

The Malta Film Studios launched a project to build the first-ever sound stage on the Maltese Islands which will contribute to further economic growth through a home-grown 'producing' ecosystem backed by the required infrastructure and investment to support the delivery of a consistent level of quality productions each year. The ongoing actions being carried out in this sector will create a conducive environment that accords the film and audio-visual sector to channel further sustainable growth.

With a view to further consolidating the local tourism product, the MTA is also working to identify lesser-known areas which can be regenerated for tourism. Furthermore, MTA is also currently reforming the eco-certification label for tourism accommodation. This certification aims to improve the sustainable performance of tourism accommodation on the Maltese Islands.

Regeneration projects are currently underway in both Marsaxlokk and Birżebbuġa. Furthermore, in 2022, the Tourism Zones Regeneration Agency prepared the tender documentation related to the call for consultants for the preparation of the Regeneration Plan for the area of St Paul's Bay including Xemxija, Qawra, Buġibba and Salina. The Regeneration Plan will aim to improve, amongst others, the social, economic, spatial, infrastructural and tourist attractions of the area once the Regeneration Plan is completed and it will be implemented in phases over a period of 10 years. The new measures to be proposed in the Regeneration Plan will aim to generate a positive effect on the circa 30,000 population of the area of St Paul's Bay which increases to over 70,000 in summer, in addition to the influx of tourists in the area.

With regard to beach management and the general environment of tourist places, the Tourism Zones Regeneration Agency worked closely with the MTA and Local councils. In 2022, around 200 benches were repaired and painted, and several areas were embellished. These measures should improve the general environment of the tourism zones but will also improve the well-being of the residents.

The diving industry is another important niche in Malta as it attracts high volumes of tourists to the island all year long, due to the fact that Malta offers favourable weather throughout the year. In 2022, a new diving strategy was launched following months of consultations between interested parties, entitled *Developing a Sustainable Diving Industry in the Maltese Islands: A Strategy for the Future*. The Strategy outlines a framework to guide the sustainable development of the diving industry in Malta in line with the guiding principles of the new Tourism Strategy.

Divers are always on the lookout for new underwater attractions, and the Hephaestus tanker which ran around Malta in 2018 was an ideal vessel to be scuttled in Maltese waters. The Hephaestus vessel was cleaned from fuel, lubricants, and equipment, and eventually scuttled off ix-Xatt L-Aħmar in Gozo in August 2022. The 855-tonne vessel is now resting at around 40m below sea level, making this an ideal wreck for advanced-level divers as it can be accessed both from shore and by boat. This new artificial reef is expected to attract sea life and will act as a nursery for smaller fish while allowing marine life in the area to thrive.

In 2022, MTA also collaborated with the Nature Trust Malta to create the first marine park in Ċirkewwa and also with university institutes on citizen science to create awareness of jellyfish and alien species.

During 2022, discussions also progressed on the concept of Town Centre Management for Paceville. The scope of town centre management is to coordinate the management of the area with stakeholders and to provide a better place for safety, cleanliness, internal movement of people and vehicles, and the mix of services offered. In this regard, it was agreed to consider obtaining the UK-based accreditation of the Purple Flag and membership of the UK-ATCM, which was effected in 2022. This accreditation process will provide best practices for the entertainment and leisure hubs, thus aiming for a general improvement in the area that shall affect over 300 service providers in Paceville and the several thousands of visitors to the area.

Furthermore, in 2022, preparations reached an advanced stage for the eventual commencement in 2023 of the upgrading of Paceville Avenue in St Julian's where new drainage services will be installed through the support of Infrastructure Malta and WSC. The Tourism Zones Regeneration Agency will be responsible for the finishing by means of new paving and lighting.

2.1.2 Preserving Malta's Tangible Heritage

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

In line with the above, in 2022, the Restoration Directorate maintained its commitment towards the restoration, rehabilitation and conservation interventions on public historical buildings across Malta, through direct labour or tendered projects. A total of 20 projects were concluded, whereas ongoing works add up to 25 more. The main projects focused on major sites such as the Jesuits Church in Valletta, the defensive lines of Cottonera and Santa Margherita Lines in Cottonera, Fort Ricasoli, and stretches of the Victoria Lines. One particular highlight was the conclusion of the Madonna tal-Ħniena Chapel in Qrendi which has brought to light invaluable information about the chapel's use over multiple centuries. The Restoration Directorate also kept investing in the preservation of tangible cultural heritage whilst further improving the quality of public spaces and the quality of life of nearby communities through projects falling under the Local Councils Restoration Scheme. To name a few, one can mention the Water Tower in Ħamrun, the Wardija Tower in Żurrieq, Saint James Arch in Kirkop and St Publius Statue in Floriana.

Further to the above, in 2022, the Cultural Heritage Directorate within MGOZ continued embarking on a series of

projects targeting tangible cultural heritage in Gozo. As part of a landscaping programme, a number of niches, statues and monuments around Gozo continued to be restored. These included the niche of Our Lady of Rummiena, in the limits of Xewkija, the niches on the road to Ta' Pinu, the statues in front of the Capuchin Monastery in Victoria and the monuments at Villa Rundle.

Għar Gerduf, the ancient 3rd/4th Century Roman burial site excavated in the rock, in the limits of Kerċem, is an area of significant archaeological importance. During the period under review, a preliminary geological investigations report on the state of Gerduf Cave was completed. This archaeological site is in a very poor state of preservation and at risk of imminent structural collapse. The process began in order to issue a tender for a detailed and in-depth geological study to be carried out on it.

An agreement was also signed in order to continue the exploration of the remains and findings of the Punic treasure outside Xlendi. The results require work and studies by a team of international experts led by the UoM. This will facilitate a holistic approach to the study of the site which will certainly result in more substantive and tangible results.

The aqueducts, located outside the limits of Victoria, which were built by the British between 1839 and 1843 to transport water from the springs in Għar Ilma to the reservoirs under the Citadel, are in the process of being restored. Following geological investigations which were carried out in 2021, in 2022 a temporary scaffolding structure was installed along the main archway that overarches the main road in order to stabilise the same arch. Meanwhile, following the award of an open call for tenders, preparatory works are underway to install similar structures along the remaining arches.

Aware of the economic potential of religious tourism in Gozo, MGOZ continued to improve accessibility to various religious sites on the Gozitan island. A case in point is the bridge leading to the Sanctuary of Ta' Pinu in Għarb. Furthermore, a geological study of the Citadel ramparts was launched in 2022. In addition, maintenance and restoration work began on the outer walls that surround the Cultural Centre of the Citadel - from Fosos Road to St John's Bastion.

Complementing the above initiatives with regard to the renovation of buildings and locations, three sites have been earmarked for renovation and a new lease of life, these being the Evans Building and the old fish market in Valletta, and the Chalet in Sliema. With regard to the former, the renovation aims to promote investment in the restoration of properties showcasing Maltese heritage and old derelict properties, while the Chalet project aims to reinstate the Chalet site into its former state.

The PA also dedicated funds for the restoration of heritage and historical features around Malta and Gozo, given that these form an integral part of the character of the traditional towns and villages. The following projects commenced in various towns and villages:



Project		Applicants	Amount
LCF/18/2019	Porto Salvo Statue Restoration.	Isla Local Council	€3,540.00
GS/50038/2021	To carry out repair works in the main dome, structural slabs and pilasters due to structural damages. Painting will follow.	Patrijiet Franġiskani Hamrun	€23,849.00
GS/50034/2021	Joint application: Restoration of wooden balcony; timber apertures and iron railings; Replacement of stone balusters; and timber flagpole to fibre.	Lija Local Council – Lija Athletic FC	€9,800.00
GS/50035/2021	Joint application – Repairs to back garden wall - no alterations or changes proposed.	Lija Local Council – Soċjetà Sant' Andrija	€5,800.00
GS/50036/2021	Joint application submitted between Każin San Piju X and Lija LC, for the maintenance of timber apertures and wrought iron.	Lija Local Council – Każin San Piju X	€ 6,500.00
GS/50037/2021	To excavate existing cellar to achieve clear internal height and cleaning of internal walls, rendering of internal walls and installation of new lighting system to the oratory building.	Arcikonfraternità tas-Santissimu Kurċifiss, Valletta	€ 35,052.63
GS/50006/2022	Restoration of Parish Church of St Sebastian Qormi using external protective coating.	Parroċċa San Bastjan – Reġjun Nofsinhar	€82,128.00
GS/50010/2022	Joint application between Rotary Club La Valette and Sliema Local Council to restore various niches around Sliema.	Sliema Local Council – Rotary Club La Valette	€34,202.30
GS/50015/2022	Joint application between Sliema Wanderers FC and Sliema LC to erect a proposed monument at Pjazza Sant' Anna.	Sliema Local Council – Sliema Wanderers FC	€6,549.00
GS/50035/2021	Joint application - Repairs to back garden wall - no alterations or changes proposed Soċjetà (Każin) Sant' Andrija, Triq Sant Andrija, Lija.	Lija Local Council – Soċjetà Sant' Andrija	€5,800.00
GS/50021/2021	Restoration, reconstruction and installation of the windmill mechanism of Tal-Ghaqba Windmill.	Naxxar Local Council	€405,000.00
LCF/08/2019	To decrease built structures on site in order to minimise ground disturbance. A proposed embellishment of area surrounding Xarolla Mill.	Żurrieq Local Council	€164,336.83
LCF/91/2018	Construction and finishing of pavilion, recalling position and proportions of former Railway Station Building which will accommodate a public library (2B) as well as be used for other educational activities.	Attard Local Council	€150,539.41

Additionally, an investment of more than €1,000,000 in the restoration of the historic water tower at the Public Abattoir and the entrance of the same facility, which dates back to the last years of the nineteenth century, was inaugurated. The water tower, which had deteriorated over time was restored. This will now be used again for the storage of purified water that will be used in the water heating system in the plant. The restoration was carried out through the use of innovative technologies giving the tower increased resilience against climate-change deterioration as well as anti-seismic properties. A system has also been installed in this tower, which keeps it under continuous monitoring so that, as part of the same research, these innovative materials are observed in different environmental and operating conditions.

The unique Victorian entrance gate to the Public Abattoir was also restored with a total investment of around €150,000. The metal gate itself was partly reconstructed in line with the original designs from the 1890s. In March 2022, the gate, the water tower and the visual link between them were given the highest protection under Maltese legislation by the PA, namely Grade 1 status, being one of the first industrial heritage structures in the Maltese Islands to be accorded such level of protection.

In order to give more importance to the tangible heritage, MGOZ invested in digital and interactive tools where 15 monuments of prominent people who made a name for themselves in the cultural heritage scene came to life and narrated their stories. This is an innovative mobile technology which presents a unique opportunity for a new form of dissemination of our cultural heritage in urban space.

Furthermore, through the Northern Coastal Watch Project and in collaboration with Din l-Art Ħelwa, MTA restored two historical forts along the Northern Coast of the Maltese Islands, one coastal tower in Mellieħa and the other on the island of Comino and is currently restoring the third one in Dwejra, Gozo. Moreover, MTA together with Fondazzjoni Wirt Artna is currently restoring St Thomas Tower which is found on the Southern Coast of Malta.

Finally, in 2022, for the fourth consecutive year, the DFA launched the Boat Restoration Scheme. The scheme entailed the provision of financial assistance to boat owners who are either full-time or part-time fishermen and have one of the traditional Maltese wooden vessels, these being the Firilla, Frejgatina, Kajjik and the Luzzu.

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

Given that most of the maintenance work required on traditional wooden vessels is primarily carried out by fishers themselves, it was deemed appropriate that the assistance provided should be in the form of reimbursement of maintenance and repair costs incurred directly by the owners. In 2022, 84 small-scale fishers benefitted from this scheme.

The support granted as part of the scheme can be considered 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.



2.2 Sustainable Urban Planning and Development for Liveable and Resilient Towns and Villages

Relevant UN SDG Targets	
1.5	By 2030, build the resilience of the poor and those in vulnerable situations and reduce their exposure and vulnerability to climate-related extreme events and other economic, social and environmental shocks and disasters
6.b	Support and strengthen the participation of local communities in improving water and sanitation management
8.1	Sustain per capita economic growth in accordance with national circumstances and, in particular, at least 7 per cent gross domestic product growth per annum in the least developed countries
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
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
11.1	By 2030, ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and upgrade slums
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
11.3	By 2030, enhance inclusive and sustainable urbanization and capacity for participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement planning and management in all countries
11.5	By 2030, significantly reduce the number of deaths and the number of people affected and substantially decrease the direct economic losses relative to global gross domestic product caused by disasters, including water-related disasters, with a focus on protecting the poor and people in vulnerable situations
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
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
11.a	Support positive economic, social and environmental links between urban, peri-urban and rural areas by strengthening national and regional development planning
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
13.1	Strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters in all countries
13.3	Improve education, awareness-raising and human and institutional capacity on climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning



The creation and promotion of more resilience and sustainable local communities is a priority for the Maltese Government. For this reason, a lot of efforts have been made to secure EU funding to achieve this all over the Maltese Islands. Thus, through the various Priority Axes of the Operational Programme I of the ESIF Funds – 2014-2020 programming period, support was directed at initiatives that assisted enterprises and stimulated sustainable economic development and investment in R&I, as well as others that promoted the development of new market processes and niche markets (Priority Axes 1 and 3). Such efforts contributed to the development of a stronger economy and more resilient communities and societies in Malta.

Furthermore, actions also aimed to improve the transport infrastructure (Priority Axes 7 and 11), the investment to achieve environmental sustainability including sustainable water management (Priority Axis 10), the 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). Actions also focused on the sustainable use of water including measures which promote amongst others water conservation, wastewater recycling and rainwater harvesting.

In the area of environment and in an effort to make communities more sustainable, operations approved under Operational Programme II proposed actions focused on the environment itself and environmental awareness-raising efforts. Some of the measures included: 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 communicate. In the area of economic growth and social cohesion, projects approved under both Priority Axes 3 and 4 supported actions considered crucial for establishing a skilled workforce able to sustain economic and social growth as well as increase productivity. All actions helped in securing more resilient communities throughout Malta and Gozo.

Further to the above, in 2022, Ambjent Malta allocated €700,000 for 12 urban greening projects in accordance with the Urban Greening scheme for Local councils in 11 different locations in Malta and Gozo (Għajnsielem, Paola, Santa Luċija, Ħal Safi, Ħ'Attard, Żejtun, Mtarfa, Hamrun, Reġjun Nofsinhar and Rabat (Malta)). Moreover, Ambjent Malta was responsible for the implementation of different urban greening projects and the management of existing gardens for a value of circa €1.5 million.

Additionally, ERA allocated €500,000 for the Scheme entitled *Better Environment in our Local Urban Spaces*, under the Environment Fund, to six urban greening and environmental education projects targeting the development of an educational centre, green infrastructure projects and water management and restoration.

In line with this, MGOZ embarked on a project to develop 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. In 2022, the EcoGozo Directorate obtained the PA permit to upgrade the Ulysses Grove Garden. Such an upgrade will see its entrances upgraded, the development of a link between two of its entrances and the establishment of a public convenience and an overhead recreational facility area.

In 2022, the Government also introduced a grant, which is aimed to assist people buying their first residential property and a grant which addressed the regeneration and restoration of abandoned and dilapidated properties, contributing to affordable and sustainable housing.

Several local councils and other organisations have also been given the opportunity to embellish green and other public spaces in their localities and improve other areas of communal interest. The following projects were all financed by the PA:

Project		Applicants	Amount
GS/50042/2021	The project aims to create a sustainable, living platform for young people by regenerating the space in Żebbuġ (Malta).	Don Bosco Foundation, Żebbuġ, Malta	€373,464.67
GS/50009/2021	Construction of entrance hall for lift at ground floor level; Installation of a four-storey lift; and construction of openings on each floor. The project includes the installation of a stair lift on the second floor.	Għaqda Mużikali Marija Bambina Vittorja, Naxxar	€67,500.00
GS/50007/2022	The Enhancement of public space which includes a skatepark and the installation of playing equipment for children.	Paola Local Council	€536,141.25
GS/50045/2021	Joint application: A proposed improvement to the existing playing field at Żabbar.	Żabbar Local Council – Reġjun tal-Port	€ 160,400.00
GS/50030/2021	Eco-friendly boat hull washing project. Washed-away water runs directly into gutters leading to an underground sump which loads into intermediate bulk containers.	Għaqda Sajjieda Dilettanti, Birżebbuġa	€3,330.31
LCF/10/12019	Embellishment of the playing area.	Qrendi Local Council – Kunsill Reġjonali Nofsinhar	€75,258.07
LCF/94/2018	Redesign and upgrade of Xewkija Playing Field including new playing equipment and lighting system.	Xewkija Local Council	€254,746.33
GS/50011/2022	Proposed living green wall with ancillary pump room, mechanical room and reservoir along the existing wall	Marsa Local Council – Skola Primarja San Ġorġ Preca, Marsa	€366,543.00
LCF/20/2020	Local Council Offices (Change of use on the first floor) from Football Club to Local Council's Offices Class 4a including alterations.	Attard Local Council	€171,700.83
GS/50024/2021	Embellishment of Recreational Area including the construction of a reservoir for irrigation purposes at Ġnien Saverju Zarb	San Ġiljan Local Council	€199,746.28
GS/50004/2022	Proposed embellishment of public open space nursing green infrastructure.	Luqa Local Council	€215,000.00
GS/50014/2022	The installation of a lift as part of the setting up of Victor Pasmore Gallery for the promotion of education and facilitation of community initiatives in relation to the Maltese modern art movement of the 20 th Century.	Fondazzjoni Patrimonju Malti	€20,000.00

GS/50020/2022	Demolition of existing buildings and reconstruction of a new gym, indoor pool and ancillary facilities. This is a continuation of another application LCF/03/2019.	Sirens ASC	€478,175.87
GS/50016/2021	Joint Application. Enhancement of existing roundabout as per class 3 (V).	Għajnsielem Local Council – EcoGozo, MGOZ	€164,889.79
GS/50032/2021	Project seeks to embellish an existing old belvedere, through new paving, railing, street furniture and lighting. Site outlooks the picturesque San Blas Valley within the outskirts of Nadur.	Nadur Local Council – Gozo Region	€61,012.00

There is no doubt that education, particularly STEM education, plays a critical role in the development of more sustainable cities and communities. Through the STEM Community Fund launched by ESPLORA Science Centre in 2021, the beneficiaries of *Code4Earth* encouraged primary school children to inquire, tinker, and build models representing more sustainable cities. By encouraging hands-on learning, this project also enabled students to transfer knowledge into practice. It also increased the students’ interest in science and research and encouraged them to take up a STEM career.





Ensuring Healthy Lives and Well-Being for All

Sustainable health behaviours, consuming a healthy and balanced diet and engaging in regular physical activity are health-promoting behaviours that are constantly being encouraged across Maltese society. Good health usually facilitates societal development, and development often encourages improved health. However, while good health may be a prerequisite for a strong and stable society, some behavioural determinants of health, such as the attitudes towards the environment, and people’s lifestyles and consumption patterns, can impede the sustainability of the development process in the longer term. In this respect, the government is encouraging all citizens to follow the best dietary and physical activity behaviour patterns to improve the overall population’s health. Therefore, through a variety of schemes and initiatives, people of all ages are now more able to make use of an efficient and effective healthcare system, while becoming more aware of the importance of consuming nutritious food and maintaining an active lifestyle.

The government is also addressing several health behavioural risk factors such as tobacco use, obesity, and physical inactivity through a number of continuous health promotion programmes. Other areas which are continuously being targeted include mental health, injury prevention, drug abuse and alcohol control, and sexual health. Disease prevention and health promotion share many goals, and there is considerable overlap between functions. However, the government is adamant about engaging more professionals and urging all health workers to pursue programmes to increase their development to meet the health needs and face the challenges of current and future generations. In this regard, multiple initiatives are being rolled out to recruit, train, incentivise and retain healthcare providers to stabilise and steadily grow the workforce. This plan will see hundreds of additional professionals joining the health system in Malta.

Achieving a sustainable healthcare system and services, therefore, remains a priority for the Maltese Government. Investments in primary care, increasing healthcare workforce capacity, the development of specialised clinics to ensure affordable access to timely and curative medical treatment together with increasingly innovative and expensive drugs are among the measures being adopted to confront the challenges brought about by an ageing population and a fast-growing expat residency,

Therefore, this chapter will highlight the measures and initiatives undertaken by the government which are linked to the 2030 Agenda, namely SDGs 3, 4, 5, 7 and 9.

2030 AGENDA-RELATED GOALS



3.1 Fostering Good Health for All by Strengthening our Public Health System

Relevant UN SDG Targets	
3.1	By 2030, reduce the global maternal mortality ratio to less than 70 per 100,000 live births
3.2	By 2030, end preventable deaths of newborns and children under 5 years of age, with all countries aiming to reduce neonatal mortality to at least as low as 12 per 1,000 live births and under-5 mortality to at least as low as 25 per 1,000 live births
3.3	By 2030, end the epidemics of AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and neglected tropical diseases and combat hepatitis, water-borne diseases and other communicable diseases
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
3.7	By 2030, ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services, including for family planning, information and education, and the integration of reproductive health into national strategies and programmes
3.8	Achieve universal health coverage, including financial risk protection, access to quality essential health-care services and access to safe, effective, quality and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all
5.6	Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences

Malta’s increase in health expenditure has been driven towards the expansion of facilities and an increase in a variety of services resulting from technological innovations which in turn have influenced the level of demand for public healthcare. These healthcare provisions have had a positive effect, as universal health coverage access, mortality from preventable causes and life expectancy remain favourable when compared with EU averages. Life expectancy gains have been driven by a decline in premature deaths from leading non-communicable diseases such as cancer, diabetes and obesity.

In 2022, a Clinic for Holistic Needs Assessment (HNA) was introduced for patients who received cancer treatment. This clinic is run by the Cancer Survivorship team at the Sir Anthony Mamo Oncology Centre. The HNA clinic focuses on gynaecology and breast cancer patients aimed at providing a holistic assessment of post-treatment needs. Services have been extended to patients with lung and urological cancer. In addition, the nurse navigator service designed to bring a personalised approach to cancer care, both during and after treatment, has been fully integrated into the management of the cancer pathway process. The continuing and increasing collaboration with Hospice Malta on palliative care is a commitment that is to be maintained for all chronic conditions needing palliative care. Capping this will be the new St Michael Hospice Centre, which is scheduled to open in the later months of 2023. In addition, the inpatient unit will accept its first patients in the Autumn of 2023. With this unit in operation, the number of palliative beds in the country will double and for the first time, not only oncology cases but all conditions needing palliative care will be treated.

Communicable disease management during 2022 primarily focused on COVID-19 cases and the monitoring of the pandemic situation. The epidemiological surveillance process included the reporting of cases, operation of the Swabbing Hubs and the delivery of the Helpline service. It was crucial that regular communication with the public with respect to COVID-19 and respiratory problems was continued via public broadcasting, information via electronic sites, and communication with healthcare professionals, whilst combating misinformation.

At the end of 2022, the influenza vaccine was administered among the population in conjunction with the Omicron vaccine. In accordance with sustainable development targets aimed at combatting sexually transmitted diseases, water-borne diseases and other communicable diseases, around 1,900 persons were affected and treated in 2022.

In 2022, the new mental health services helpline 1579 was launched. This will be offering the first assistance to people who feel the need to turn to help when they experience mental health problems. This helpline will be receiving calls 24 hours a day and is managed by a group of psychologists specifically trained for this type of service. On this note, ESPLORA Science Centre oversaw a campaign called *Mental Wellness Challenge*, which encouraged mental health awareness through regular tips on social media. In parallel, the Richmond Foundation, together with MEYR, embarked on a project to train Year 9 students in Mental Health First Aid.

The national patient portal (myHealth portal) is earmarked for further development to achieve the objectives of Europe’s Digital Decade initiative which has the objective of empowering patients to make informed healthcare choices and interact with healthcare professionals by means of their personal Electronic Health Record (EHR). Investments in the e-health infrastructure as well as the governance around the national EHR platform are expected to make substantial inroads into the two main communication constraints within the Maltese healthcare system, between the private and public sector, and between primary and secondary care, both of which are critical for the continuity of care and consequently, patient safety.

In 2022, the priorities of the digital health sector centred around the development of the informatics system in secondary care and the management of the *Patient Dashboard* in all the healthcare facilities across the islands. This platform enables a seamless care provision, allowing healthcare professionals to access their patients’ information on their mobile devices, in addition to documenting information while recording the care they provide to patients.

3.1.1 Improving Treatment and Access to Free Medicines

Target 3.8 of the SDGs highlights the need for access to safe, effective, quality, and affordable essential medicines. With this target in mind, the Directorate for Pharmaceutical Affairs provides a wide range of services that include technical support and decision-making in relation to the inclusion of new medicines on the Government Formulary List. The list comprises of medicinal products, vitamins and food supplements which are made accessible to patients with chronic conditions, following a hospital or outpatient referral.

With the main aim of increasing access to medicines, in 2022, 6 new medicines were introduced into the national formulary which is expected to benefit some 9,000 patients. An assessment was also made of 57 medicines that were presented and approved to be included in the formulary. These cover a wide range of conditions including diabetes, multiple sclerosis, blood circulation and mental illness. Considerable interest was also shown in the number of requests to include new medicines in the formulary with over 40 new applications. The commitment continues to ensure that innovative and high-cost medicines are being used according to the established protocols and are leaving the expected benefits. This year, the use of 9 medicines by patients was evaluated. Access to medicines in the formulary continued to be strengthened with several initiatives including the removal of 4 protocols so that more patients are entitled to free medicines. A number of medicines have been mapped for 11 different conditions to further open up accessibility to most pharmaceutical treatments, while 26 processes have been simplified.

Moreover, throughout the year, the Malta Medicines Authority (MMA) participated in online campaigns including #MedSafetyWeek and World Antimicrobial Awareness Week, the objectives of which include the sustainable and safe use of medicines.

Furthermore, the MMA is participating in the EU4Health Programme 2021-2027 which aims to provide instruments and solutions to support Member States in enhancing access to medicines, improving public health, and sustaining national health systems. The MMA was nominated for participation in the Joint Actions and is leading Working Packages on:

- reinforcing market surveillance of medical devices and in vitro medical devices;
- increasing capacity-building of the EU medicines regulatory network; and
- supporting the maintenance of the European Medical Device Nomenclature.

3.1.2 Investing in Healthcare Workforce

Countries with developed healthcare systems are faced with a great challenge to recruit and maintain the required health workforce to support the increasing demands in healthcare provisions. To address this challenge, Malta launched a national health workforce strategy, with the scope of meeting the shortage of health workers while addressing gaps in their training, retention, and professional development.

In light of this reality, in 2022, Malta has been actively engaged in attracting new healthcare training institutions within the UoM. The Higher Education sector has been expanded further through the establishment of at least, three additional higher education institutions, that is, intake in professions such as nursing.

Together with a number of initiatives which the government has embarked upon, the public health workforce strategy aims at increasing the supply of the domestic workforce by attracting and retaining the current workforce and improving the responsiveness of higher education facilities to the medium-term requirements of the healthcare system through improved collaboration with such institutions. Furthermore, the Ministry for Health (MFH) is working on alternative ways on performing Health Work-Force planning. Efforts to target the retention of nurses also remain a priority. Thus, training of midwives and nurses, both in management and specialisation programmes have been extended, while a project for these professions to fully integrate into the work environment, was launched. Moreover, a survey was conducted in 2022 to explore the needs and expectations of nurses on their workplace. The results established in the survey are serving as the foundation for the continued evolution of provisions and to cater for the needs of these essential professions.

In 2022, the Government continued to implement educational sustainability measures in relation to the health sector and health services in Malta. These included the organisation of accredited courses and seminars through the Academy for Excellence and Innovation in Patient-Centered Regulatory Sciences as a Higher Education Institution, establishing Malta as a centre for educational development, scientific research, and innovation in regulatory sciences. Courses and seminars are developed considering national and global exigencies, and emerging circumstances. In 2022, the seminar on Monkeypox for Healthcare Professionals, the seminar on Vaccinology relevant to COVID-19, the workshop on the Dimensions of Cannabis for Medicinal and Research Purposes and the Award in Good Distribution Practice were also conducted.



3.2 Promoting Good Nutrition and Active Lifestyles for a Healthy Society

Relevant UN SDG Targets	
3.d	Strengthen the capacity of all countries, in particular developing countries, for early warning, risk reduction and management of national and global health risks
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
7.3	By 2030, double the global rate of improvement in energy efficiency
9.1	Develop quality, reliable, sustainable and resilient infrastructure, including regional and transborder infrastructure, to support economic development and human well-being, with a focus on affordable and equitable access for all

3.2.1 Towards the Prevention and Containment of Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR)

The Animal Health and Welfare Department (AHWD) worked on the implementation of the *National AMR Strategy* and Action Plan for the Prevention and Containment of AMR in Malta (2020-2028) with several measures being taken in 2022.

The amendments in the legislation are the apex of the measures that are being taken in the Prevention and Containment of AMR. To this end, legislative changes proposed by the AHWD were approved by Parliament and published in 2022. Namely, this concerns amendments in Chapter 437, the Veterinary Services Act. The amendments were made through Act No. XIV were published on 28th October 2022 and came into force on 28th December 2022. The amendments added the necessary vires for the enactment of important legislation related to anything concerning veterinary medicinal products. Amongst other important changes, there are those related to enforcement action, collection of data on sales, penalties, the application for licences for veterinary pharmacies and alignment with Regulation (EU) 2019/6 in force since January 2022.

Further to the above, throughout the year, a more robust evaluation procedure started being applied for the application of authorisation of veterinary medicinal products in view of the new legislative requirements and also recent guidelines. 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 on antimicrobial sales data collection and data collection methodology during farm inspection with an official call being issued for wholesalers to submit antimicrobial data.

Moreover, a project is underway for the upgrade of the National Veterinary Laboratory (NVL). The objective is to establish diagnostic services and sensitivity tests, making them available to local stakeholders even for their private practice. In view of this, there are plans to expand the AMR monitoring programme.

Throughout 2022, the NVL continued working on strengthening relevant surveillance and feedback systems on anti-microbial use and resistance in human and animal health. In 2022, the plans for a new site of the NVL were submitted to the PA and are currently passing through the PA approval procedure. Towards the end of 2022, the NVL started collaborating with Mater Dei Molecular Biology Lab for the whole genome sequencing of *Salmonella* and *Campylobacter* isolates in line with the one-health approach and to be also able to sequence veterinary samples locally; this will enable the link between human cases with animal ones.

In addition, discussions continued with the Agriculture Department of the UoM to deliver lectures to undergraduate agricultural students as part of their syllabus. In 2022, a number of lectures were delivered to undergraduate tertiary college students, namely MCAST, by visiting lecturers. The lectures all focused on the development of AMR.

In light of this, a number of educative or informative sessions were held with farmers and their representatives throughout the year. In addition to the subject of AMR, these also delved into the updates to the legislation, the collection of data from farms and the importance of biosecurity measures. Many of these sessions were held in collaboration with farmers' cooperatives.

Furthermore, Continuing Professional Development sessions were delivered to veterinary surgeons by experts of the AHWD on AMR and related subjects. Related subjects include legislation and the use of the electronic veterinary prescription.

Aside from the above, the collection of information on the use of veterinary medicinal products from farms during official inspections continued. This information is providing deep insight into such use in Malta and it has been essential to formulate the necessary policies, for example, on the electronic veterinary prescription, animal health programmes, the preparation of educative sessions and the drafting of the legislation. This information complements other information obtained from several surveys sent to key stakeholders. The surveys relate to the electronic veterinary prescription and the use of diagnostic services.

Further to this, a number of guidance presentations related to the use of antimicrobials, distribution/prescribing of veterinary medicinal products and biosecurity measures were published on the website. Additionally, two leaflets were also published by the AHWD about the mandatory Animal Health Programme and the veterinary medicinal products. These complement the other leaflets published in previous years. Apart from being disseminated and explained to farmers during official inspections, these were sent to all farmers by post and also disseminated and explained during events.

Several articles on AMR were also penned for a popular magazine published by MAFA which has wide readerships amongst farmers and other interested parties. This publication is called *Nisġet Artna*. Such articles aim to expand the educational animal health campaigns targeted specifically at farmers, and animal and pet owners emphasising the risks of non-prescribed use of antibiotics or acquisition of antibiotics from unlicensed sources, as well as the benefits and cost-effectiveness of greater hygiene. Discussions also started with farmers' cooperatives for joint educative sessions that are planned to be held in 2023.

Consequently, officers from the AHWD participated in various live television and radio interactive programmes on local stations where the importance of the prudent use of antimicrobials was explained to the general public. Some were made jointly with the Health Department to emphasise the principle of 'One Health'.

Similarly, the AHWD also continued to participate and collaborate with its EU and international partners, in particular, the World Organisation for Animal Health, through the collection of antimicrobials sales data and the European Medicines Agency through the European Surveillance of Veterinary Antimicrobial Consumption. Several Departments officers attended Better Training for Safer Food on AMR and shared their knowledge with their peers. Additionally, officers also participated, and are participating, in a number of international fora and Working Parties on AMR, including the CION AMR Network and CODEX TF meetings organised by the Food and Agriculture Organization. There was also a collaboration with the Federation of Veterinarians in Europe (FVE) whereby an infogram in Maltese about Regulation (EU) 2019/6 was published on the FVE's website. It is hoped that this will kickstart further collaborations in the field of the prudent use of antimicrobials.

Furthermore, an important milestone is the implementation of the electronic platform My-Pet/My-farm. This electronic platform can be considered as an enhancement of the electronic veterinary prescription implemented in 2021 and rolled out mostly in 2022. My-Pet/My-farm includes the use of electronic animal health documents, such as treatment records and vaccination schedules which is extremely useful for users as it provides an efficient way for organising their records and ensuring more efficient monitoring of prescriptions.

Lastly, the system for the safe disposal of antimicrobials in the community implemented in Q4 of 2021 continued to be in use. Wastebins for expired/unused veterinary medicinal products that were provided to veterinary pharmacies began to be collected at regular intervals, while efforts directed at improving hygiene standards in farms continued, in order to prevent the cross-transmission of animal pathogens. The biosecurity checklist used during official inspections is in regular use and is a great opportunity to educate farmers on this subject.

3.2.2 Safeguarding Animal Welfare

A public consultation in preparation for the drafting of the *National Animal Welfare Strategy* was launched on the 19th of May 2022. The consultation has collected and collated feedback from the public and relevant stakeholders based on the following objectives:

- To review current animal welfare measures with an aim of identifying strengths which can be built upon and weaknesses which can be addressed.
- To consult activists, NGOs, local councils, sanctuaries, shelters and citizens with the aim of exploring how these entities can be supported and work in tandem with public authorities to improve animal welfare.
- To explore the potential benefits of increased public awareness and education campaigns with the aim of developing relevant targeted campaigns to address identified shortcomings within various sectors.
- To consider an increase in scope for animal welfare measures within Malta looking into groomers, boarding kennels, trainers, and other related professions, sporting activities and public projects to assess whether more needs to be done to increase the level of legal protection for certain species of animals.
- To prepare a strategic framework to help build partnerships with interested stakeholders, improve coordination, reduce duplication of effort, and deliver a more effective and consistent national approach to improving the welfare of animals.
- To gauge the willingness of citizens as consumers to look out for products produced by means of better welfare measures and potentially pay more for those products.
- To acknowledge the role of primary producers and work to prevent disproportionate burdens being placed upon them whilst considering geographical and climatic specificities.
- To align the strategy with the work being done at a European level within the context of the European Green Deal, Farm-to-Fork and Biodiversity Strategy.

During this period, a number of public consultation sessions were held mostly with the interested stakeholders, including NGOs, cat feeders, livestock farmers, local councils, pet shop owners, registered breeders, registered boarding kennels and registered zoos. In addition to the feedback received from the above face-to-face consultation meetings, several email submissions from the stakeholders and the public, in general, were also received through the specific consultation process email address during the abovementioned timeframe. The outcome following the public consultation was reviewed by a *National Animal Welfare Strategy* Task Force and, on the basis of the input received, the strategy is being formulated with a view of finalising it in 2023.

Furthermore, in June 2022, L.N. 187/2022 was published, adopting regulations with regard to the prohibition of force-feeding a bird, that is, that no one shall force-feed a bird for the purposes of enlarging the bird's liver, and with regard to the prohibition of fur farming, that is, no person shall keep an animal for their fur or breeding progeny.

In 2022, the Animal Welfare Directorate (AWD) continued to offer financial support to non-government, not-for-profit organisations that improve the welfare of animals in recognition of the valid and effective effort and contribution they make in the sector. These include animal sanctuaries, organisations promoting responsible animal ownership and awareness, and groups that provide animal support services. The objective of this financial assistance is to improve the well-being of animals; promote responsible ownership of animals and raise awareness of animal welfare responsibilities; assist in progressing good animal management practices; provide a platform from where to develop and foster closer cooperation between these organisations and the AWD; strengthen the network of animal welfare treatment, quality of care and rehabilitation services to the community and provide improved animal welfare facilities; and enhance the provision of community education and similar programmes, including the development of necessary material regarding animal welfare and care.

Additional financial assistance to local councils continued through the Local Council Care Fund. Planned projects started to be finalised and ranged from the setting up of cat cafés, and dog parks, the management of veterinary care for stray animals, food to be distributed to feeders etc. The AWD continued to offer an on-call Animal Ambulance Service where, during 2022, the Directorate received 5,058 calls for assistance.

In 2022, the Directorate also felt the need to improve the current facilities for animals rescued and kept for rehoming within the Għammieri complex. In this regard, the AWD embarked on four AMs that included the identification of four areas suitable to have a meet-and-greet area to facilitate meetings with both prospective adopters and the chosen animal together, a run-free area holding two dog pools for dogs to exercise during the summer months, together with two new isolation facilities, one for dogs and one for cats. The latter are currently being used to hold animals that still need care and treatment following discharge from the animal hospital.

A new cattery was also inaugurated with a project consisting of 900m² which was divided into four separate areas. This makes it possible for the staff to monitor the behaviour of all cats within each section and easily detect any abnormal behaviour or symptoms that the cats may develop. This cattery together with the three isolation units has the capacity to hold around 150 cats. All cabins present in this cattery are airconditioned and have both electrical and water supplies for utmost hygiene. The cattery also enjoys the facility of three isolation units to treat and care for those cats and kittens needing further daily treatment before they are healthy enough to join the cats within the open cattery. This cattery is also equipped to reuse bedding and provide onsite veterinary examinations, vaccinations and follow-ups to avoid the transportation of cats to the hospital, thus reducing the amount of stress that cats encounter during transportation.

Furthermore, the neutering of cats to control the stray cat population continued throughout the year; public awareness to microchip and neuter their animals also continued throughout 2022 with the Animal Welfare Fund, the Adoption Policy and Free Vet Services to NGOs being instrumental in controlling the stray cat and dog population.

3.2.3 Active and Healthy Lifestyle

In 2022, the Maltese Government strengthened its efforts to promote sports and healthy lifestyles among all citizens residing in Malta as well as improve the quality of athletes and local sports facilities.

Educational campaigns were carried out on the choice of healthy food and a good diet, with information also being provided on the prevention of chronic non-infectious diseases. An educational campaign was launched to reduce the stigma associated with cancer as well as a programme on mental health and resilience wherein a Healthy Weight for Life approach was promoted. A national campaign was carried out with the theme *Know your Sugar* to reduce sugar consumption targeting patients living with diabetes, overweight and obesity. In addition, the Dar Kenn Għal Saħħtek (DKS) facility continued to provide therapeutic services on an out-patients, residential and semi-residential basis. The DKS offers programmes to people who suffer from eating disorders while promoting and building awareness among teenagers around this topic. In 2022, psychological assistance was offered to the parents of underage children and group therapy sessions were carried out in a psycho-educational way with families of identified patients.

Furthermore, several Aġenzija Support service users were supported to follow sports through collaboration with Special Olympics, including the participation of around 100 athletes in the Invitational Games in May 2022.

Through SportMalta, several initiatives were implemented in preparation for the Small Country Games which Malta will be hosting in 2023.

Such initiatives include further investment in the Olympic-sized swimming pool in Cospicua, continued work on the Marsaskala water polo pitch, and the building of a new football ground for Msida St Joseph F.C. Moreover, SportMalta will invest in a national rowing tank for both rowing enthusiasts but also to enable the training of this national sport. Moreover, SportMalta has also launched a plan for a motorsport facility with an investment of €20 million, in collaboration with the Malta Motorsport Collaboration.

Furthermore, SportMalta will continue to extend the facilities provided at the Marsa Complex to accommodate a gymnastics centre where athletes can carry out their training with adequate and safe facilities. This project will continue to build on various initiatives and projects so that local athletes have state-of-the-art facilities.

In addition to the above, in 2022, Gozo was formally accepted by the International Island Games Association. This means that Gozitan athletes can compete in the International Island Games. Not only will this be another platform to promote the island of Gozo abroad, but it will also encourage sports and physical activity in youths and adults alike resulting in a healthier lifestyle and thus, improving the sustainability within the healthcare system on the island of Gozo.

In 2022, work also continued at an advanced rate on the Gozo Aquatic Centre and Sports Complex. Once finished, this project will promote the well-being of citizens of all ages. The general public will benefit from this project which is unique in its kind on the island of Gozo. Furthermore, this project will promote sports tourism in Gozo.





Accelerating Digital Transformation, Smart Mobility and Connectivity

Digital technologies are continuously transforming Malta’s economy as they are the forces that can enhance productivity and drive positive change.

In this regard, the government is playing a key role in promoting an efficient and inclusive digital transformation by ensuring that the necessary complementary factors are in place. This involves the upgrading of skills by enhancing education and training systems’ ability to provide the technical and managerial skills that are necessary for people to thrive in digital economies. The government will also ensure adequate access to high-speed internet for all by incentivising infrastructure investment to improve coverage in all areas of Malta. It is also working to reduce administrative barriers on start-ups, facilitating job transitions, reducing financial constraints that hinder digitalisation and transitioning to more digital government services. This is being done by broadening the range of public services accessible online and making more government data available to the public.

The government is also determined to encourage investment in digital transformation. To maximise the use of smart machines, policies need to be smarter too. As a result, the necessary adoption of policies is the result of these changing economic patterns, whereby Malta will be able to capture potential gains in productivity, stimulate economic growth and address possible inequalities.

Furthermore, through innovations in digitalisation and alternative energies, the government is striving to optimise transport and communications to consolidate new standards of sustainability, efficiency, safety and air quality. Through such smart mobility and connectivity, all citizens will experience, among other things, improvements in their health, resulting from better air quality, fewer traffic accident victims and reduced traffic congestion.

Therefore, this chapter will highlight the measures and initiatives undertaken by the government which are linked to the 2030 Agenda, namely SDGs 3-5 and 8-11.

2030 AGENDA-RELATED GOALS



4.1 Towards a Digitally Empowered Economy and Society

Relevant UN SDG Targets	
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
5.b	Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women
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
8.3	Promote development-oriented policies that support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, and encourage the formalization and growth of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises, including through access to financial services
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

4.1.1 A Digital Transformation of the Public Administration and the Public Service

Public Service Week 2022 triggered the fulfilment process of the new strategy of the Service Public for the next five years. This was done through conferences focusing on the implementation of the strategy, with the participants being divided into cohorts that discussed specific measures. The cohorts focused on Artificial Intelligence, Data and Information, Service Facilitation, Governance and People. The 5-year Strategy focuses on ‘Quality, Accountability and Sustainability’. The Public Service made sustainability one of the main pillars of its Strategy considering its impact on future generations and the environment in general.

Throughout 2022, the Government continued to encourage and promote the digital transformation of the public administration and the public service through the implementation of various projects and initiatives. One such project is the Digital Transformation Hub, which aims to transform public services with the help of technology while keeping the citizen at the centre of the improvement journey. The project will create an environment in which citizens are given not only importance but also a dedicated space where they can express their expectations with regard to public services.

Building on Malta’s commitment towards providing a service of excellence requires that services be taken into account in their entirety, both in design and supply. It is important that services are designed in such a way as to make sense for the citizen. The Digital Transformation Hub will help the Public Service through the application of methodologies and tools related to improvements. The ultimate goal of the Digital Transformation Hub is to serve as a repository of information and support for the Public Service. This is to keep ensuring that our services continue to meet the quality standards desired by the citizen.

In addition to the above, a lot of work was carried out under a number of EU-co-funded projects that were designed to enhance economic growth through a transition towards a digital economy and increase efficiency in the public services offered. One such project is the Connected eGovernment (ERDF 02.035 – CONvErGE) project, co-funded through the ERDF, which continues to capitalise on the use of innovative Information and Communications Technology (ICT) solutions within the government to enable a better and more efficient online public service for citizens and businesses. Apart from promoting the principles of smart connectivity and innovation, this project is

ensuring equal access to justice, better work-life balance, as well as the protection of the environment through the introduction of new eServices, which are more easily accessible through different platforms, thereby reducing paper usage and fuel emissions. By the end of 2022, 28 eServices were developed through this project.

Similarly, the European Social Fund (ESF) and the co-funded Mystery Shopper (ESF.04.0078) project presented more than 1350 recommendations to improve access to public services, most of which have already been implemented, while others are in various stages of implementation. These recommendations impacted different areas of service provision, including among others the online accessibility of services, implementation of the Once-Only Principle, training provisions for customer-facing employees, and improvement of service delivery through Directive 4-1.

The recommendations for 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 the services listed on government websites are available in the appropriate languages for customers. Work was also done to check that mobile apps are updated with the latest information, which helps the customer access government services 24/7 from any location. This also means that local public services are also accessible on an international scale by customers living abroad, thus fulfilling one of the general principles of the *Mapping Tomorrow Strategy*, which is that of 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. The information does not need to be provided to the Public Administration more than once but will be shared and used across the government, in accordance with relevant legislation. The Mystery Shopper project emphasises that the customer should not need to approach the department or entity more than once but is served at the first point of contact.

Recommendations for the training of customer-facing employees focus on improving the latter’s ability to deal with customers, especially those customers who may need someone to go the extra mile to assist them. This includes making the employees aware of how to deal with barriers in communicating with customers, such as language and cultural barriers. The effort by the Public Administration to train its employees on how to provide a better service 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*.

Through its recommendations, the Mystery Shopper project also contributes towards the implementation and observance of Directive 4-1 which delineates the Standards for Service of Excellence offered by the Public Administration to the Public and 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).

Furthermore, in 2022, the DigIT-X: Digital and Interoperable Public Services Designed on Client Experience project implemented under the TSI was concluded. This project, which followed up on the recommendations of a previous project under the same Programme, was implemented in line with the Strategic Plan for the Digital Transformation of the Public Administration (2019-2021). Through this project, the Maltese government sought support to increase the use of its e-services by Maltese stakeholders.

Furthermore, the *RRF investment* (C3-I1) on strengthening the resilience, security and efficiency of the government digital backbone and investing in appropriate digital solutions, devices and tools, will enable the government to provide proactive action, secure services and streamlined operations to citizens and the business sector. Enhanced security and a flexible environment are critical for the government’s continued digitalisation and business continuity. The digital backbone is intended to also serve as the horizontal interoperable foundation to enable the implementation of, for example, the Once-Only Principle and sharing of data. In addition to the positive effect on digital public services, the investment shall improve the interface with businesses, for example, by facilitating licences.

RRF investment C3-I3, then, addresses further the digitalisation and modernisation of public administration. The objective of the investment is for the public administration to provide a better customer experience to citizens and

business organisations, to increase the uptake of online services and ultimately to enhance the competitiveness of the Maltese economy. This investment shall also develop modern and remote means of working for public officers, which is expected to enable the public administration to be a model employer, whilst providing for business continuity, promoting gender equality and caring for the environment.

In June 2022, the project which will see the establishment of a European Digital Innovation Hub (EDIH) in Malta was approved by CION. The sum of €2.65 million EU grant was allocated from the Digital Europe Programme, which will cover part of the operational costs of the project. The Malta Digital Innovation Authority is the entity leading the establishment of an EDIH in Malta. The Hub is focused on technologies such as AI, cyber security, high-performance computing, and cloud solutions, with the aim of becoming a support facility that helps SMEs, start-ups, and companies become more competitive by enhancing their business/production processes as well as their products and solutions through digital technology and digital transformation. The EDIH shall also support start-ups across various industries, seeding the development of new knowledge and skills for diverse and sustainable economic growth while bridging the digital gap.

4.1.1.1 Sector-Specific Digitalisation Investments in Public Administration

In 2022, MGOZ also sought to adopt digital technologies and methods where, through its Information Management Unit, it developed a new electronic system, which works with AI. This system enables eligible persons, namely hunters, to register for the Spring Hunting Derogation. Licensed hunters can register through a telephone call which is answered automatically, whereby the provided details would be incorporated directly into the central database system of the Wild Birds Regulation Unit and the licence would then be issued automatically. Through this system, applicants would not need to go physically to the relevant offices for the necessary services.

Similarly, MGOZ introduced an online system which carries out the automatic evaluation of applications for projects and initiatives in Gozo which are submitted for the Gozo Regional Development Authority's (GRDA) consideration. This system will eventually determine if a Regional Impact Assessment for the respective application would have to be submitted to the GRDA. Through this system, the usual manual processing for such applications and any related delays will be avoided.

In line with this, the Malta Business Registry (MBR) also stepped up its efforts to increase efficiency and ease customer interaction between practitioners and the MBR. In this context, during 2022, MBR was working towards



the updating of its current online system, which will have a new user interface that will include the digitalisation of MBR processes such as the registration of all companies and commercial partnerships, more electronic statutory forms, and provide users with their own qualified digital signatures in order to sign and submit documentation.

Moreover, Act LX of 2021 introduced the requirement for companies to indicate their electronic mail address in the memorandum, in terms of Article 69 (1)(d) of the Companies Act. Electronic communication serves to increase efficiency through timely communication by reducing the reliance on paper format communication to a company's registered office. Certain correspondence may well be served to a company electronically and is many times more effective in reaching the concerned company officers. Consequently, through such measures, the MBR is reducing the use of paper and associated materials.

In 2022, the Lands Authority continued to implement two projects which when concluded will see the Authority transition smoothly towards the digitalisation of its applications and services, and the digitisation of all the documentation and data the Authority currently possesses.

The first project seeks to build a digital workflow platform, with a clear set of steps. A subset of these steps was made visible to the applicants, hence improving communications between the Authority and the applicants. This workflow platform was only made possible by a fuller digital process which transformed all the applications into e-applications which are now accessible from the Authority's online portal. These measures have lessened paper usage within the Authority but have also aggrandised the services offered by the Authority. Furthermore, online application forms have also created a sense of convenience, as clients can submit an application from any location and device, thus completely eliminating the need to commute physically to the Authority in order to submit an application. Therefore, the Authority's project to digitalise its processes forms part of a larger effort being implemented by both the private and the public sectors to reduce road pollution.

The second project seeks to digitise the Authority's records, data, and documentation. This project aims to digitise all existing documentation to soft copy while also adopting a policy to only accept soft copy documentation, thereby drastically reducing paper usage. Besides the environmental aspect, this project also creates a philosophy of higher mobility, thus allowing the staff to access any relevant information from any location across the country.

During the past year, various sections and units took the initiative to create and implement various additional projects which will aid the Authority in the steps it is taking towards digitisation and digitalisation. For example, the Contracts Section launched an initiative which plans to digitise all deeds published by the Authority (or any of its predecessors) dating from the start of 1968 to the present day.

The Valuations Unit within the Authority also started to implement a new project which aims to facilitate the analytic process architects are expected to carry out before presenting a valuation to the Authority. The Unit started to plot each valuation purchased by the Authority on a Geographic Information System and consequently, once the project is fully implemented, architects will have the means to extract and filter data based on locality, geographical features, and planning constraints, among others.

All the above-mentioned projects have multiple benefits. These projects will boost work efficiency, lead to improved customer service, make data easier to store while making it more accessible and easier to extract. Above all else, once these projects are concluded, and once the Lands Authority transforms itself into a paperless office, it will drastically reduce its carbon footprint and transform the Authority into an eco-friendly Lands Authority.

The Department of Contracts continued to strive to digitise procurement processes. To this end, in 2022, the review and preparation for a new Government's national e-procurement system more commonly known as ePPS and the implementation of e-forms were undertaken. Accordingly, in 2023, the deployment of such initiatives shall take place as necessary.

4.2 Promoting Digital Literacy and Innovative Digital Technologies

Relevant UN SDG Targets	
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

4.2.1 The National eSkills Strategy 2022-2025

In 2022, the eSkills Malta Foundation launched the *Maltese National eSkills Strategy 2022-2025* which aims at the attainment and availability of digital skills, now and in the future, whilst keeping in view the domestic national, sectoral and specialist strategies and initiatives affecting the digital skills domain. It aims to build further upon the foundations laid through the previous *National eSkills Strategy* and takes stock of the opportunities and challenges currently being faced by Malta in digital skills and competencies. Moreover, the Strategy aligns with the EU's Path to the Digital Decade, which highlighted targets to be reached by all Member States by 2030.

The Strategy encompasses several principles, which include a comprehensive and inclusive approach to all cohorts of society and the economy, accompanied by education, awareness, multi-stakeholder engagement and alignment to relevant strategic direction. The Strategy has a four-dimensional model that includes the goals, outcomes, strategic pillars, and common governance enablers.

4.2.2 Initiatives to Enhance Digital Literacy

4.2.2.1 The One Tablet Per Child and the One Device Per Child Projects

The launch of the *One Tablet Per Child* project in 2016 has provided all Year 4, 5 and 6 primary students attending state and non-state primary schools with a digital tablet. The aims of the project are to enhance the numeracy and literacy levels of students as well as their digital skills. The project is now being extended to cover all state and non-secondary schools in a staggered manner under the project name *One Device Per Child*. The first rollout will provide all Year 7 middle school students with a laptop during the scholastic year 2023 – 2024. Both teachers and students in Year 7 middle schools will be trained in the best use of the laptop for teaching and learning.

4.2.2.2 eBiznify 2022

In 2022, eBiznify Lite was launched. This new digital commerce training programme is a self-study programme that gives more flexibility and control. The eBiznify initiative contributes to the upskilling and skills development recommended in the *National eSkills Strategy 2022-2025*.

4.2.2.3 Digital Skills Bootcamp 2022

In line with the digital skills skilling, upskilling and reskilling mandates, the eSkills Malta Foundation organised training courses and sessions as part of the *Digital Skills Bootcamp 2022* initiative for citizens, including youth, adults 18 and over, and pensioners; the labour force, including employees, executives or leaders of SMEs and enterprises; ICT practitioners; teachers and students; and girls and women.

The overall objective is to increase digital skills and upskill or reskill the target groups mentioned. The subject themes were designed to address Malta's needs for digital skills and to focus on skills and contribute towards the goals of the European Digital Decade 2030.

The Digital Skills Bootcamp attracted sixteen training providers who organised sixty-course sessions for over 320 individuals and ran mostly in the last three quarters of 2022.

4.2.2.4 EU Codeweek

EU Code Week is a grassroots initiative which aims to bring coding and digital literacy to everybody in a fun and engaging way. The eSkills Malta Foundation is the EU Code Week Ambassador for Malta and in October 2022, it organised various code-related sessions for anyone from children, youth and adults to try their hand at coding. 516 coding-related activities were organised for persons in Malta, ranking second amongst the EU countries who joined EU Code Week for the number of activities organised per capita.

4.2.2.5 Cloud Computing

The eSkills Malta Foundation organised Amazon Cloud courses in order to encourage the industry sector to pursue additional learning to improve their digital skills in Cloud Technology. Through Amazon Industry Certifications, the industry has become more aligned with industry needs. The Foundation has been collaborating with Amazon Web Services on this locally funded programme to bring several 'Cloud' certifications from the world leaders in the field to Malta. The eSkills Malta Foundation has made a significant contribution to the development of digital skills and the ICT profession. Individuals seeking employment, particularly school graduates, must possess relevant in-demand industry skills to compete in the marketplace. These courses were funded by the Melita Foundation, eSkills Malta Foundation and Tech.mt.

4.2.2.6 Get Smarter Project

Through the *Get Smarter* project, which is aimed at helping mobile users maximise the use of their smartphones, Tech.mt created an informative training manual which takes users through some very useful tools that are available on a smartphone and offers interesting tips for effective usage. Although this is a past project, to date, the training manual remains available for the needs of the general public.

4.2.2.7 Women4IT Project

Thanks to the European Economic Area (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 addresses specific skills shortages.

4.2.2.8 ICT 4 The Elderly Project

ICT 4 the Elderly, was aimed at enhancing the digital skills of the elderly, by creating awareness of internet use among the elderly, and their communities. It aimed to create networking and capacity-building between project partners and stakeholders involved from five different countries with Malta as a leading partner together with Slovenia, Germany, Switzerland and Belgium. Consequently, the objective of this project was to facilitate a pathway for up-skilling individuals between the ages of 55 and 75 years in their digital competences and to make them aware of some of the many opportunities and benefits that the internet has to offer. Although the project was concluded in November 2021, the online academy remains available for the perusal of the general public.

4.2.3 Initiatives to Innovative Digital Technologies

In 2022, Tech.mt continued to promote innovation in the areas of cloud computing, the Internet of Things (IoT), AI, machine learning, Web 3.0, big data and other novel technologies.

Through targeted campaigns such as *Tech Heads*, Tech.mt identified local tech businesses that have developed innovative solutions or enhanced their operations through the use of tech and provided them with a platform to promote their solutions, with the overarching goal of inspiring others to follow suit.

In 2022, Tech.mt also embarked on a campaign and video series to promote the use of IoT and its benefits to local tech companies. A report was also formulated by Tech.mt which highlights the state of play of IoT locally. The report also features a good number of case studies of local companies that developed sustainable solutions through the use of IoT.

Furthermore, Tech.mt through its brand *Valletta Tech Summit*, held the first edition of the Summit, bearing the name, *IoT and Beyond* which gave local and international businesses an opportunity to showcase their innovative technologies in the realm of IoT and a platform to network and explore business opportunities both locally and internationally.

Tech.mt, together with MCAST, also developed *The Entrepreneur’s Handbook*, aimed at students, which delves deeper into harnessing entrepreneurial matters relating to company formation, finances, business plans, market analysis and other topics. The handbook is an excellent resource for students looking to start their entrepreneurial journey and supports those looking at developing their creative and innovative ideas further.

Furthermore, throughout 2022, 13 beneficiaries benefitted from Tech.mt’s Strategic Partnership Initiative – Helping Start-ups and Students Reaching New Heights. This initiative aims at helping start-ups and/or students who have an innovative concept but don’t have the knowledge and experience to reach the next stage of their entrepreneurial journey. The aim is to help tech entrepreneurs, start-ups and students to act on their innovative ideas and develop novel solutions in tech. Through Tech.mt’s consultation partners, which at the time of writing stand at over 35, a predetermined number of hours of free consultancy are being offered to eligible beneficiaries, providing their expertise in a number of key areas ranging from concept validation to consultancy on emerging technology, market assessment and go-to-market strategies, digital strategies, e-commerce and digital marketing, and internationalisation.

Complementing the above, one can also mention the eBusiness Awards, which, over the years, evolved with existing categories being refined and new categories introduced to support and promote the successes of the local tech ecosystem.

In 2022, Tech.mt held the eleventh 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. This event is highly-valued and anticipated the recognition of exceptional entities, which have had a significant impact on our society. In previous years, the awards recognised various solutions which were aligned with sustainable development, most of which were developed locally or aimed at the local market.



4.3 Building Sustainable Communities Through Smart Mobility and Connectivity

Relevant UN SDG Targets	
3.6	By 2020, halve the number of global deaths and injuries from road traffic accidents
9.1	Develop quality, reliable, sustainable and resilient infrastructure, including regional and transborder infrastructure, to support economic development and human well-being, with a focus on affordable and equitable access for all
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

In order to promote the development of sustainable towns and villages across Malta and Gozo, the Maltese government has introduced a number of initiatives to encourage the adoption of cleaner and more eco-friendly and energy-efficient practices. One such initiative is the *Hand-in-hand for the Environment* campaign, which shed more light on how the Public Service is taking a proactive role to safeguard the environment and on the importance of opting for transport that does not pollute as well as adopting effective waste management systems, among others.

The Public Service has also announced a policy to support sustainable and environmentally friendly solutions that will lead to an improvement in the environment and the air quality in relation to its fleet of vehicles. All new vehicles that will be purchased for those in a ‘headship’ position will only be electric cars. This complements other efforts for the Public Service to reduce polluting vehicles. At present, the Public Service has 866 vehicles of which only 7% are electrically-powered. The goal is to have an effective sustainable plan for an innovative model of electric vehicle fleet usage. Such changes are also being seen in entities and law enforcement bodies such as the CPD where, in 2022, it continued the process of changing its old vehicle and vessel fleet.

This falls in line with the RRF investment C2-I3, which revolves around the decarbonisation of the Public Service fleet. The objective of this investment is decarbonising the transport sector in Malta by promoting the uptake of electric vehicles in the Public Service. The investment consists of the purchase of electric vehicles in order to replace internal combustion engine vehicles and achieve a share of electric vehicles in the Public Service fleet used by government departments by 38%. The investment shall result in a cleaner and reduced Public Service vehicle fleet on the road network, reducing emissions and congestion.

This is also linked to the introduction of a new concept of finding the service one wants closer without having to travel. To be served, one no longer has to go to Valletta from one department to another, because the 24 servizz.gov hubs in different locations offer all government services under one roof. Incidentally, all government services are now accessible both online or through the freephone 153.

Furthermore, throughout 2022, infrastructural works continued and were carried out by entities such as Infrastructure Malta to better manage traffic, introduce safer pedestrian and cycling crossings, and improve road connections, as seen in the Mrieħel Underpass and the Central Link projects.

Moreover, with regard to the Kirkop Tunnels and Airport Intersection project, works on the Ħal Kirkop tunnels have been completed whilst construction works continued on the Airport Intersection zone. This project includes the redevelopment of this critical junction on the Maltese road network to reduce travel times and accident risks to commuters travelling through the Kirkop Tunnels, to and from Kirkop, Mqabba, Qrendi, Żurrieq and Safi, whilst introducing new facilities for alternative modes of travel. The new intersection design features new footpaths, improved public transport amenities, as well as new cycle lanes and safe cycle routes. Holistically, this will improve

access to the Malta International Airport and to the Malta Freeport, two strategic locations for several sectors of the Maltese economy.

Additionally, in 2022, multiple financial grants concerning road vehicles were increased with the aim of making road transport more sustainable, through the increase of the uptake of environmentally-friendly vehicles. These were:

- The financial grant to incentivise the purchase of new electric vehicles or plug-in hybrids.
- The financial grant for the scrapping scheme for highly-polluting vehicles.

Extended measures relating to the purchase of electric vehicles including relief from registration tax and exemption from the annual road licence fee for a period of 5 years from the date of first registration, for electric vehicles and electric plug-in vehicles, also relate to this aim. Other extended schemes were to incentivise the purchase of motorcycles, scooters, pedelecs and power-assisted bicycles, as well as the scheme to incentivise the conversion of vehicles to LPG/Autogas/ Heavy-Duty Dual-Fuel. In this regard, two new schemes were also launched: one related to the grant awarded to vehicles such as minibuses, coaches and trucks with PV panels installed on them, and the other one to encourage operators of similar vehicles, such as minibuses and coaches as well as trucks, to reduce smoke emissions from their vehicles through the installation of diesel particulate filters and selective catalytic reduction systems.

Furthermore, following the success achieved through the fast ferry between Malta and Gozo, works will also continue to increase the number of quays so that alternative routes can be created and thus reduce dependence on private vehicles. The benefits of this are anticipated to extend to the entire population in terms of air quality and to reduce traffic congestion during peak hours by encouraging a modality shift to other forms of transport. In April 2022, the operator of public transport in Malta, Malta Public Transport, introduced two fully electric buses onto the scheduled public transport network. Moreover, as of 1st October 2022, public transport started being accessible for free to all persons holding a personalised travel card (Tallinja card).

On a similar note, the *Multi-modal Hub* (park and ride) part of the Sustainable Multimodal Intelligent Transport Hubs across Malta and Gozo, known as the SMITHS project, aims to encourage a modal shift from private car use to collective, sustainable and alternative low-carbon transport modes in order to reduce traffic congestion. In the meantime, during the period under review, works were accelerated on the site which shall permanently serve as a hub, at Ta' Xhajma. These works consisted mainly of excavation and the laying of foundations.

In 2022, MCAST with the support of MEEE delivered a training programme for individuals and corporates on *Shifting to Electric Vehicles*. MCAST is also in the process of designing new courses to upskill the workforce for electric mobility.

MCAST participated in the *Promoting Innovation Capacity in RIS countries* project, known as InnoCap, which receives 95% funding from EIT Urban Mobility. This project aims to empower citizens in RIS countries to innovate and engage in helping to shape the mobility of the future and overcome current mobility challenges. The mobilisation and involvement of communities in the EIT Urban Mobility ecosystem consist of a three-tier approach:

- A Mobilithon in-person competition was organised by MCAST with Transport Malta where citizens were invited to design and present solutions for mobility challenges in relation to sea transport.
- An Urban Mobility Ambassadors, which is a pilot programme of ambassadors, conducted to disseminate the EIT urban mobility activities within the consortium countries' academic community.
- Education and training where actions/workshops/events were held to empower citizens to engage in online actions to discuss and shape the future of cities or even help to define new solutions to existing problems in relation to urban mobility.

MCAST also conducted a study as part of the *EIT Urban Mobility Booster* project which receives 80% EIT-Funding. The study addresses the adaptability of open-innovation collaboration among corporates and start-ups in the urban mobility and transport sector.

MCAST was a partner in the development of a course offering key competencies on real experiences from mobility-innovation leaders as part of the *Mobinno 2.0* project which receives 90% EIT-Funding.

Moreover, the Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan (SUMP) for the Valletta region, was presented for public consultation in December 2022, following which the plan was approved by the Cabinet and published online. A set of measures were identified for implementation while work started simultaneously on the development of a SUMP and a Sustainable Urban Logistics Plan for the remaining regions in Malta and Gozo.



4.4 Investing in Research and Innovation for Sustainable Growth

Relevant UN SDG Targets	
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
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

There are several programmes currently being managed in order to promote further funding when it comes to R&I. One such programme is the Research Excellence Programme (REP), which aims to spur the growth of new knowledge through experimental evidence following scientific hypotheses. The programme is intended to fund projects which are still in the early stages of research, but which nonetheless boast a high degree of scientific excellence as well as national and international relevance and provided grants of up to €50,000 in 2022. The REP makes up part of the FUSION portfolio which aims to support Maltese entrepreneurs to develop their concepts into market-ready reality. Under the 2022 call, one project related to waste management was granted.

The Technology Development Programme (TDP) is another programme within FUSION, with the aim of providing state financing in the form of grants for research, development and innovation in science and technology. The focus of the programme is to fund the actual development of the research and innovation proposal with the possibility of having a prototype of the proposed solution. The TDP provides a grant of up to €295,000 to a consortium of at least two Maltese partners. Three projects have been provided with two focusing on waste reduction and one on renewable energy.

Related to this is the TDP Lite programme, which aims to facilitate expedited applied research intended to support the research involved in the development of novel products, or processes. The TDP Lite will optimise the potential and commercial impact on both the Maltese and foreign markets by exploiting the first-mover advantage. The scheme falls under the FUSION portfolio and provides grants of up to €150,000 to perform research activities leading up to Technology Readiness Level 7 in the areas noted in Malta’s *Smart Specialisation Strategy 2021-2027*. Under the 2022 call, one project related to renewable resources was granted.

Finally, the *Smart Cities Programme* (SCP) was a one-off thematic call released in 2022 determined after consultation with representatives from the Maltese R&I community. The SCP supports innovative projects under the theme of smart cities. The programme focused on developing cities where the interaction between different forms of data across buildings, vehicles, citizens and assets is used to manage and improve all aspects of city life. The goal of smart cities is to make them more efficient and sustainable to improve the quality of life for their residents. The scheme provided grants of up to €150,000. Two grants were provided to projects related to air quality and water scarcity.





Achieving Social Fairness and Prosperity for All

The Government strives to continue building a fairer economic system that leaves no one behind. By embracing the principles of equality, efforts are being made to ensure that every person has access to the necessary resources and services while acquiring the skills required to participate effectively in economic, social and community life.

The Government will therefore continue enhancing and introducing measures that provide all citizens with equal opportunities to flourish and live dignified lives while at the same time continuing to strengthen all institutions and regulations protecting the public’s freedom, order, safety, and peace.

Therefore, this chapter will highlight the measures and initiatives undertaken by the government which are linked to the 2030 Agenda, namely SDGs 1-5, 8-13, 16 and 17.

2030 AGENDA-RELATED GOALS



5.1 Empowering Citizens and Communities Through Policy Instruments and Measures for the Benefit of All

Relevant UN SDG Targets	
1.1	By 2030, eradicate extreme poverty for all people everywhere, currently measured as people living on less than \$1.25 a day
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
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
1.4	By 2030, ensure that all men and women, in particular the poor and the vulnerable, have equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to basic services, ownership and control over land and other forms of property, inheritance, natural resources, appropriate new technology and financial services, including microfinance
1.5	By 2030, build the resilience of the poor and those in vulnerable situations and reduce their exposure and vulnerability to climate-related extreme events and other economic, social and environmental shocks and disasters
1.b	Create sound policy frameworks at the national, regional and international levels, based on pro-poor and gender-sensitive development strategies, to support accelerated investment in poverty eradication actions
2.1	By 2030, end hunger and ensure access by all people, in particular the poor and people in vulnerable situations, including infants, to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round
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
3.5	Strengthen the prevention and treatment of substance abuse, including narcotic drug abuse and harmful use of alcohol
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
4.5	By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations
4.6	By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy
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
5.1	End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere
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

5.3	Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation
5.5	Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life
5.b	Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women
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
8.1	Sustain per capita economic growth in accordance with national circumstances and, in particular, at least 7 per cent gross domestic product growth per annum in the least developed countries
8.3	Promote development-oriented policies that support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, and encourage the formalization and growth of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises, including through access to financial services
8.5	By 2030, achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value
8.6	By 2020, substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training
8.7	Take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms
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
9.1	Develop quality, reliable, sustainable and resilient infrastructure, including regional and transborder infrastructure, to support economic development and human well-being, with a focus on affordable and equitable access for all
10.1	By 2030, progressively achieve and sustain income growth of the bottom 40 per cent of the population at a rate higher than the national average
10.2	By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status
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
10.4	Adopt policies, especially fiscal, wage and social protection policies, and progressively achieve greater equality
10.7	Facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies
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
16.1	Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere
16.2	End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children
16.7	Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels

16.10	Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements
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
16.b	Promote and enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development
17.2	Developed countries to implement fully their official development assistance commitments, including the commitment by many developed countries to achieve the target of 0.7 per cent of ODA/GNI to developing countries and 0.15 to 0.20 per cent of ODA/GNI to least developed countries; ODA providers are encouraged to consider setting a target to provide at least 0.20 per cent of ODA/GNI to least developed countries
17.3	Mobilize additional financial resources for developing countries from multiple sources
17.6	Enhance North-South, South-South and triangular regional and international cooperation on and access to science, technology and innovation and enhance knowledge sharing on mutually agreed terms, including through improved coordination among existing mechanisms, in particular at the United Nations level, and through a global technology facilitation mechanism
17.9	Enhance international support for implementing effective and targeted capacity-building in developing countries to support national plans to implement all the Sustainable Development Goals, including through North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation
17.13	Enhance global macroeconomic stability, including through policy coordination and policy coherence
17.14	Enhance policy coherence for sustainable development
17.15	Respect each country's policy space and leadership to establish and implement policies for poverty eradication and sustainable development
17.16	Enhance the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development, complemented by multi-stakeholder partnerships that mobilize and share knowledge, expertise, technology and financial resources, to support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in all countries, in particular developing countries
17.17	Encourage and promote effective public, public-private and civil society partnerships, building on the experience and resourcing strategies of partnerships
17.19	By 2030, build on existing initiatives to develop measurements of progress on sustainable development that complement gross domestic product, and support statistical capacity-building in developing countries



5.1.1 Policies and Reforms

During 2022, the government continued to work on introducing and implementing several policies and reforms directed at assisting vulnerable communities in Malta. The *Social Vision for Malta 2035: Shaping the Future of Our Society*, which was launched in December 2022, aims to provide a comprehensive framework to guide the development of future policies within the social sectors. This document intends to reinforce existing strategies and improve policymaking to effectively address both current and future social challenges. Malta’s Social Vision outlines eleven thematic areas representing various stages of life and aspects of society namely: poverty and social exclusion; families; childhood; youth; ageing; addictions; re-integration of ex-offenders; persons with disability; persons identifying as LGBTIQ; violence, abuse and exploitation; and migration.

For each thematic area, Malta’s Social Vision identifies policy goals aimed to improve the quality of life of individuals and that of society as a whole.

5.1.1.1 National Disability Reforms

Throughout 2022, efforts were directed towards the implementation of Action 1.3 of the *National Disability Strategy*, particularly the development of a system that will streamline multiple divergent bureaucratic processes which disabled people have to navigate, in order to access both recognition of their disability status as well as relevant supports, such as allowances from social services, services from Aġenzija Sapport, and supports from JobsPlus. This process, which will eventually roll multiple assessment systems into one centralised system, under the aegis of Aġenzija Sapport following a societal functioning model, will only leave the programme eligibility determination under the respective entities.

This reform aligns with SDG Target 1.3 and implements relevant stipulations in Article 28 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). Furthermore, relevant structures mandated by the UNCRPD and in support of its precepts continued to be developed and strengthened. This work aligns with SDG Targets 1.3, 10.2 and 10.3, as well as with several provisions of the UNCRPD, such as Article 5 thereof, and Actions of the National Disability Strategy, in particular Action 1.1, fulfilling the said targets and provisions. In this regard, better coordination with respect to implementing the UNCRPD was the aim behind the adoption of the UNCRPD National Coordination Mechanism Regulations, 2022 (S.L. 627.01), with a view to curtailing the duplication of efforts and silos, and increasing efficiency between stakeholders in implementing relevant SDG targets, UNCRPD Articles and *National Disability Strategy* Actions.

This rationale additionally underpinned amendments to the Persons within the Autism Spectrum (Empowerment) Act (Chapter 557 of the Laws of Malta), aside from strengthening and widening the Autism Advisory Council set up by this Act. These amendments were adopted by Parliament, strengthening the Autism Advisory Council, and delineating, implementing and monitoring functions with respect to the *National Autism Strategy*.

The UNCRPD National Coordination Mechanism Regulations, 2022 (S.L. 627.01) were adopted by the Cabinet of Ministers. Adopted in terms of the UNCRPD Act (Chapter 627 of the Laws of Malta), and further to Article 33(1) of the UN Convention, these Regulations set up a centralised structure bringing together representatives of different Government entities and line ministries, to be able to work together on key issues critical to the development of the Maltese disability sector. The new system aims to increase efficiency while stamping out duplication of efforts and silos.

The ENGAGE Regulations, 2022 (S.L. 672.02) were also adopted by setting up a civil society participation mechanism stipulated in the UNCRPD Act, and further to Article 4(3) of the UNCRPD and the General Comment No. 7 thereto. ENGAGE is responsible for considering all legislative, policy and strategy measures affecting the lives of disabled people before their adoption by the government.

In terms of good governance and to ensure the autonomy of the independent monitoring mechanism from the government, as required by the UN Convention and the UN Paris Principles, the Fifth Schedule of the Public Administration Act (Chapter 595 of the Laws of Malta) was amended by virtue of L.N. 287 of 2022, requiring that in future, the Commissioner for the Rights of Persons with Disability be only appointed after being confirmed by the Social Affairs Committee of the House of Representatives.

In addition, work continued on the finalising of the Personal Autonomy Bill. This legislation will give better effect to Article 12 of the UNCPRD with respect to the exercise of the legal capacity by all, including disabled people, as well as to the Protection of Adults in Situations of Vulnerability Bill.

In view of this and with respect to ensuring an international dimension to the safeguards and protections being introduced or strengthened by these Bills, Malta signed the 2000 Hague Convention on the International Protection of Adults in November 2022. In this respect, legislation was prepared to authorise the Government of Malta to ratify it.

Further to the above, amendments to the Criminal Code (Chapter 9 of the Laws of Malta) were enacted, thereby extending hate crime protections to disabled and older people, addressing a lacuna which had rendered both complainants and the Courts powerless.

5.1.1.2 Anti-Racism Reforms

In 2022, the implementation of Towards the Implementation of the *Anti-Racism Strategy in Malta* (END-RACISM-MT) began. This is a project co-financed by the EU under the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme. This project, which will be implemented over a period of two and a half years, will support the implementation of key measures in the Strategy.

Work also continued with representatives of each government ministry, nominated by their respective Permanent Secretary, in the Inter-Ministerial Committee (IMC) established in 2021. This IMC aims to ensure a holistic approach to anti-racism and intercultural inclusion to reach all policy areas and public services. This includes the integration of anti-racism in all areas of policy and public services, allowing peer support, mutual exchange, and stimulus for best practices.

Through the Anti-Racism IMC, the Human Rights Directorate (HRD) is collaborating with each ministry to design an intra-ministerial anti-racism action plan to address the policymaking, employment and service provision functions relevant to the ministry and their contribution to achieving intercultural inclusion.

Furthermore, under the ambit of the Anti-Racism Strategy, the UoM is carrying out a research study with the aim of deepening the Maltese government's understanding of the experiences of minority groups in Malta.

In 2022, HRD handed over the responsibility to Kopin, a local NGO, to run the Anti-racism Platform; the latter was established in July 2021 in collaboration between the HRD and the United States Embassy in Malta. This was done to enable shared leadership for the implementation of the Strategy in all sectors, foster a continuous dialogue with key partners on the content, provide reports with direction and impact of the Strategy, and enable critical reflection on its implementation. The Platform is made up of representatives from minority groups, civil society organisations, international organisations, local councils, academics, and social partners, reflecting the whole of society.

5.1.1.3 Gender Mainstreaming Reforms

In November 2022, the first National Strategy and Action Plan on gender mainstreaming was launched with the aim of eliminating all forms of structural discrimination that still distinguish between sexes. The strategy is based on eight main strategic objectives, which include, *inter alia*, the introduction of gender mainstreaming in the world of work, and in the fields of health and education. Some of the key measures also include the strengthening of research on statistical computations; reforms in the law eliminating unnecessary gender differences; mentoring programmes and training to get more women into work; and awareness and training campaigns for professionals to ensure that the services being provided are based on the principles of equality and gender mainstreaming. This strategy builds on the government's commitment to equality over the years and comes into force after extensive public consultation with stakeholders in the sector while recognising a number of international gender commitments including the EU's Gender Equality Strategy.

5.1.1.4 Supporting Children and Youths

In 2022, the National Youth Policy *Towards 2030 – Reaching out to, working with, and supporting young people* was in its first year of implementation. This policy focuses on all young people between the ages of 13 and 30 and will coincide with a number of other strategies including the *UN Youth Strategy*, *Youth 2030*, and the 2030 Agenda. The policy puts forth a vision where all young people should be respected, valued and listened to, and supported and encouraged in building fulfilling personal and social relationships, in developing their innate abilities and talents for the benefit of themselves, their communities and society, and in empowering them to take action on global issues.

In addition to the above, to address poverty and social exclusion among children and their families, the Research and Evaluation Directorate (RED) within the Ministry for Social Policy and Children's Rights (MSPC), developed the *National Action Plan for a Child Guarantee 2022-2030*, which was launched in June 2022. This action plan is another step towards the fight against poverty and will enhance access to crucial services such as education, early childhood education and care, school-based educational activities, nutrition, healthcare, and adequate housing. The National Action Plan is a vital tool for the government to improve the quality of life for children and to allow all children to reach their full potential, especially the most vulnerable.

Moreover, RED also initiated desk-based research and analysis with a view to developing a Policy Framework for Children 2023-2030. This Policy Framework is intended to contribute towards improving the quality of life and improved life chances of children within a rapidly changing environment and realities through the implementation of a number of initiatives. In June 2022, RED also organised a pre-consultation conference, which saw the participation of a number of key stakeholders who work closely with families, aimed to shed light on the challenges faced by families. The ultimate goal of this pre-consultation event was that of gathering more knowledge on how to address the new realities that are impacting the lives of the families. This pre-consultation conference is the first step towards the development of a comprehensive Policy Framework for Families 2023-2030.

5.1.2 Eliminating Discrimination and Promoting the Principles of Equality for All

Throughout 2022, the Maltese government continued to introduce a number of measures in order to further support those most marginalised within our society and protect them from abuse and discrimination. Such measures were implemented through various policies as well as other initiatives carried out by the respective government entities and agencies.

5.1.2.1 Initiatives to Combat Poverty

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

Throughout 2022, the EPD has established the impact of the measures announced in the Budget for 2022, which analysis is published annually. In 2022, the EPD also continued its internal research on the impact of the pandemic on poverty and income distribution in Malta, particularly by modelling the impact of the wage supplement scheme from 2020 to 2022 on households and individuals. The model was also used for research on the simulation of social benefits reforms, as part of an ongoing project with the World Bank. In addition, the model was also used to assess the impact of higher energy prices on households, in the scenario where there was no Government intervention. This analysis was published in the pre-budget document and Draft Budgetary Plan 2023.

Furthermore, during 2022, the EU-funded project, *Provision of Material Aid and Support Services to Assist Asylum Seekers*, continued to be implemented. This project provides basic needs to asylum seekers and thus contributes to elevating the effects of poverty through the provision of mother and baby bags, welcome packs, and support

packs that include grooming kits, clothing, and daily essentials.

Moreover, several initiatives to ensure the eradication of the stigma against those experiencing poverty and social exclusion were carried out. These included the following:

- The Foundation for Social Welfare Services (FSWS) is collaborating closely with the Housing Authority to facilitate bank loans for families currently leasing a property or requiring shelter to obtain a loan without having to pay the 10% down payment. An agreement between two local banks facilitates such referrals and follow-ups.
- In 2022, a report was produced by FSWS, which sought to expand the homeless shelter in Gozo.
- The Gozo Directorate proceeded with the continuation of food distribution in Gozo while conducting a profile assessment to improve their financial situation.
- In 2022, the Community and Therapeutic teams within FSWS, continued to work with individuals and families to address issues contributing to poverty and social exclusion. This was done through targeted interventions. Furthermore, through the work being done with communities, residents are becoming more sensitive towards community care and the social inclusion of individuals who are passing through difficult periods in life.

In addition to the above, during 2022, FSWS was responsible for the distribution of the Fund for European Aid (FEAD) and State Funded Food Distribution (SFFD) as per the below statistics:

- FEAD 20th distribution (March 2022): 4,998 boxes collected out of 5844 boxes - 85.5% collection rate.
- FEAD 21st distribution (July 2022): 6,307 boxes collected out of 7270 boxes - 86.75% collection rate.
- FEAD 22nd distribution (November-December 2022): 6,555 boxes collected out of 7615 boxes - 86.08% collection rate.
- SFFD 11th May 2022: 15,888 boxes collected from 19,680 boxes ordered - 80.73% collection rate.
- SFFD 12th September-October 2022: 14,269 boxes collected from 19,027 boxes ordered - 75% collection rate.

With respect to the SFFD, the remaining uncollected boxes are distributed amongst the various entities in Malta and Gozo that are in direct contact with vulnerable families. These include the food bank and Djakonia in operation in various parishes in Malta and Gozo.

5.1.2.2 Analysing Social Behavioural Patterns

Throughout 2022, the government continued to analyse societal patterns to become better equipped to address challenges related to the development of safer, equitable and inclusive environments.

The *Equality for All in Malta* project continued throughout 2022, through which training sessions on Malta's anti-discrimination laws and remedial avenues were developed and given to representatives of religious beliefs, race and ethnic minorities, to empower them to enjoy their rights established in law. This sought to address the underreporting of cases of discrimination based on race, ethnic origin, religion or belief. As part of this project, three rounds of training were held in 2021 and 2022, which sessions took place online on Zoom in English, available also with interpretation in French and Arabic available, while the training material was also translated into French, Arabic, and Serbian. The last training session took place virtually in February 2022 for which more than 60 participants attended. A total of 111 participants were reached. This project was co-financed by the EU under the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Fund in partnership with the Aditus Foundation and European Network Against Racism.

Further to the above, in 2022 the project *Equal by Nature* by the Malta Chamber of Scientists, was implemented. The project, which falls under the STEM Community Fund, aimed to bring to the limelight the targets of SDG 10 that address the reduction of inequalities between and within countries. It addresses the issue of racial inequalities

through a biological lens, arguing that race is a social construct, not an accurate representation of the human genetic variation. Thus, this project aims to eliminate bias by tackling human biology, highlighting how genetically similar humans are in reality, and how the minor differences between them are what makes the human race so resilient.

On a similar note, in November 2022 the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE) embarked on a project entitled *Strengthening Knowledge on Integration and Non-Discrimination* focusing on the grounds of race and ethnic origin. The main aim is to identify the needs and discrimination faced by vulnerable groups namely migrants and Muslims.

Furthermore, NCPE also continued its work to keep Malta among the most inclusive in Europe, where work will be carried out on the Empowerment for Diversity (E4D) EU- co-funded project. A campaign was concluded in March with a study being conducted and disseminated, while a conference was held in November. Moreover, through the E4D project, NCPE concluded an online advert campaign regarding the services it offers. To this one can also add actions falling under the Operational Programme II of the ESIF Funds - 2014-2020 programming period, which are directed at ensuring the promotion of equality between men and women through mainstreaming. This is done throughout the preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the operational programme. This mainstreaming obligation is facilitated by the NCPE and the Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD).

In 2022, a *Qualitative Research Study on LGBTIQ+ Discrimination* was also published by the NCPE. The study analysed the discrimination faced by LGBTIQ+ persons in Malta in various sectors of life such as education, employment, and the access to and supply of goods and services. Two workshops were hosted with members of the LGBTIQ+ community to discuss the issues being faced by the community, and identify the needs to be addressed as well as the current deterrents resulting in underreporting. The results of the project were presented at a final conference in November 2022.

Furthermore, the FSWS Research Team started a process of data sharing with the National Focal Point for Drugs and Drug Addiction and the National Focal Point for Domestic Violence to continue promoting good quality health and well-being, thereby contributing to the development of a comprehensive picture regarding these issues on a national level. Moreover, during the same year, FSWS announced a pilot project which will provide buprenorphine (free at the point of use), to people looking to recover from the misuse of drugs.

In this regard, the FSWS Research Team contributed towards the production of the fourth, recently launched, Mediterranean School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs (MedSPAD) report. The MedSPAD project, which falls under the Pompidou Group of the Council of Europe, aims to provide information about potentially addictive behaviours among young people in the Mediterranean region. The report presents data and comparative, contextual information on, *inter alia*, national legislation and policies on alcohol, tobacco, drugs and gambling.

The Research Team also contributed towards the work of the European Group on Gender and Drugs, which aims to promote a gender perspective within the area of drug misuse. The programme for 2022 included the organisation of a side event during the Lisbon 2022 Addiction Conference. An interesting pattern indicates that in 2022, there was an increase in female residents at the Komunità Santa Marija.

Additionally, following the collection of data for the *European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs* (ESPAD) in 2019, in 2022 FSWS further analysed and disseminated the data emanating from the study. ESPAD is a project that collects data from 16-year-old students on alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use. It also examines other potentially problematic behaviour such as social media, gaming, and gambling. This study is conducted every four years in Malta and across many other countries in Europe (35 countries in the last ESPAD wave) using a standardised methodology that provides data that can be compared over time and across countries.

5.1.2.3 Initiatives to Promote Children's Rights and Youth Empowerment

In 2022, initiatives pertaining to children's rights continued to be implemented both online as well as in various localities around Malta and Gozo. One such initiative, launched by the Office of the Commissioner for Children, involved a social media campaign that was carried out to commemorate the ESDW. Social media posts were issued throughout the week to create awareness about the impact of the SDGs on children's rights. These included the

need to end child poverty and ensure equal access to services; ensure children's good health and well-being; ensure access to good quality education; and create sustainable cities and communities.

Additionally, Aġenzija Sapport launched the *Super Sibs Groups* for children between 8 and 13 years of age who have a sibling with a disability to meet and socialise with other children who can understand each other's situation in a supportive and safe space. The group sessions are held during summer allowing children to share their positive and negative experiences whilst having fun during age-appropriate play and activities and the facilitation of additional support when required. Thus, through this initiative, young people are being educated from a young age on the importance and values of accepting others regardless of their flaws and disabilities. On this, an MoU was signed with the Ronald Mc Donald Learning Centre in Qawra where the latter agreed to host these groups. Group social work interventions for youths were also held by the Assessment and Intervention Team.

Further to the above, the Office of the Commissioner for Children launched a research study entitled *Healthy Spaces: Co-creating Child-friendly Towns and Villages*, which focused on child-friendly towns and villages. The study addressed safety and security; recreational, play and social spaces for children and young people; spaces where nature and the outdoor environment can be enjoyed; cleanliness; inclusive spaces; and the voice and participation of children in the community. The study was carried out in collaboration with the Centre for Resilience and Socio-Emotional Health and ERA and made a number of key recommendations that should be implemented to make towns and villages more responsive to children's needs.

In 2022, the Commissioner for Children also set up an inter-sectoral committee on Child-friendly towns and villages with the collaboration of MSPC. The aim of this committee is to create an index which would support and guide local councils to be more child friendly. This would lead to the setting up of a quality label initiative to accredit localities depending on how child-friendly they are. This initiative will enable local councils to evaluate to what extent their town/village is child-friendly; take action for improvement; and enable the sharing of good practices.

During 2022, the Sonia Tanti Independent Living Centre (STILC) services also continued to support children and teens through wheelchair and seating assessments to ensure optimum seating positions that ensure their safety and well-being. To this end, these clients can actively participate in society by ensuring their safe physical mobility using the wheelchair. Furthermore, Aġenzija Sapport introduced the drive from wheelchair vehicle and training for the driving team including the assessment of occupational therapists, the admin team, and the driving instructors. It also continued to invest in upskilling its teams to provide better services to its clients by sending the adaptive driving team for another training course in the UK. The same can be said for the upskilling of professionals within the Access to Communication and Technology Unit and the STILC service where the latter were enabled to maintain their current knowledge and become better able to guide clients according to the latest technology available on the market.

In light of the above, a number of programmes supporting young people, especially those at risk of poverty, also continued. One such programme is *Kickstart*, which is an educational initiative for young people residing at the Centre of Residential Restoratives Services in Mtaħleb. The aim of this programme is to empower the participants to better recognise their potential and foster more confidence in their successful reintegration into the community.

Further to this, Aġenzija Żgħażaġħ also continued running the Youth Worker Online service through which young people can contact a youth worker online and discuss any issues they are concerned with. Through this service, the agency is providing a safe space where young people can talk to a professional and get the information they would need.

Moreover, in 2022, Aġenzija Żgħażaġħ carried out several activities while continuing to undertake a range of projects and initiatives that aim to enhance equality and actively promote active citizenship and democratic participation. These include:

- The EU Youth Dialogue, a mechanism that facilitates dialogue between young people and decision-makers taking place in the framework of the EU Youth Strategy to ensure that the opinion, views and needs of young people and youth organisations are taken into account when defining the EU's youth policies. The dialogue works in 18-month cycles and is currently in its 9th Cycle with the overarching theme of *A Sustainable and Green Europe*.

- *IMPATT* was a project undertaken by the Directorate for Learning and Assessment Programmes (DLAP) in partnership with the Maltese National Commission for the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and Aġenzija Żgħażaġħ. The aim of this project was to encourage young people to actively participate in democratic decision-making at both the local and national levels. The project was divided into 4 parts, starting with student teams engaging in historical and cultural research related to the town/village where their school is located. This was followed by training where the students tackled sustainable development, framing concepts, recommendations, and public speaking. Subsequently, the students finalised the critical analysis and proposals for further sustainable development measures in their school's locality and in the end, presented these recommendations to various policymakers.
- *Insafħħu l-iSkola bi Studenti Attivi*, known as I.S.S.A., are a series of sessions that aim to explore how secondary school students can experience active citizenship. These sessions present ways for them through which they can contribute during their daily routines and in their free time, whether at home, at school or in their communities.

Furthermore, in 2022, through RED, MSPC was successfully awarded a grant by CION aimed to improve children's participation in decision-making in Malta. The project entitled *Empowering Children's Participation in Malta* has been awarded around €155,000 under the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme and will be implemented in collaboration with the University College Cork and the Office of the Commissioner for Children.

The project aims to contribute towards improving child participation and enable children to freely express their views and influence any decisions that will affect them. In this regard, this initiative will ameliorate the quality of policymaking as well as enhance the quality of life of children through the appropriate design of measures and initiatives. Moreover, this project will enable and empower children's participation in Malta's democratic process in line with the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child – the *Participation in Political and Democratic Life and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*.

5.1.2.4 Support Services for the Vulnerable Groups

Throughout 2022, the Government of Malta increased its efforts to ensure the well-being of all individuals, by providing services to the most vulnerable people and marginalised communities in society.

One specific community is that of migrants and asylum seekers, for which the Agency for the Welfare of Asylum Seekers (AWAS) is responsible, especially in terms of the provision of reception facilities. The support provided by AWAS is not limited to accommodation in open centres; the Agency offers psychosocial services, information provision, financial assistance, support to enhance one's employability and other services which are meant to help asylum seekers lead an independent life. In 2022, AWAS also continued its community outreach programme, whereby it makes its services also available to asylum seekers who do not necessarily reside in one of the centres run by AWAS.

In 2022, AWAS also sought to provide a better environment for persons in open centres by undertaking the refurbishment of Dar il-Liedna, the minors' section in Ħal-Far tent village and others. Trees were also planted in two of the open centres where embellishment was undertaken. Other initiatives to improve the well-being of persons living in open centres include:

- the introduction of music sessions;
- football training in collaboration with the Malta Football Association and The Activity team;
- the establishment of a new protocol for age assessment including the attendance of a legal representative in each assessment including appeals;
- the establishment of a Central Referral System Team;
- the provision of mental health support groups to Ukrainians;
- the introduction of the permanent presence of a social worker in the minors' area;
- the creation of an isolation unit in high-transfer vinyl to prevent a lockdown;
- the refurbishment of the Marsa Centre, including the common kitchen; and

- work on a Facebook page for AWAS beneficiaries by the Migrants Advice Unit (MAU).

Similarly, the Returns Unit continued to adopt a holistic approach in the management of the return of third-country nationals to their country of origin, including forced, voluntary and assisted voluntary returns. During the same year, there was an increased focus on reintegration assistance with the government's aim to encourage sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all in the countries of origin.

In parallel, the Agency for Community and Therapeutic Services (ACTS) worked with clients, communities, and residents to develop their capacities to respond to their own social mobility. This was done by encouraging them to remain in education and by creating opportunities for informal and non-formal learning. For this reason, ACTS continued to work in collaboration with other entities to build community awareness of healthy living and mental health well-being. Such collaborations included Mental Health Services, Primary Health and Anzjanità Attiva.

Hiliet il-Komunità, which is part-financed by the European Structural and Investment Funds 2014-2020, also strives to support communities to overcome challenges and reach their full socio-economic potential. It also carries with it the social dimension reasonability of the urban regeneration of the Marsamxett area in Valletta. This project started in December 2020 and will end in December 2023.

The project has two main components, the first one is the focus on participatory research on community mapping to understand community readiness for social mobility. It also entails skills auditing to take stock of the existing skills and talents in Valletta to address gaps and/or areas for upskilling.

The second component focuses on:

- professional assistance including social mentoring, homemaking, and parenting coaching, complemented by an assessment and outcome-based care planning;
- skills capacity building for social well-being and economic sustainability through community-based education and training grants;
- advocacy to overcome any structural barriers that might be interfering with community social mobility; and
- advocacy and implementation of participatory approaches that encourage communities to determine their priorities, and act on them.

Additionally, the Gender Wellbeing Clinic was officially relocated on 12th October 2022 to a more accessible and modern space from which specialised health services catering for the needs of trans and non-binary persons continue to be offered. This clinic opened its doors for the first time in 2018 when it started operating from Mtarfa. Since then, there have been more than 340 people who have made use of the clinic's services, with the clinic often receiving feedback on the difficulty to reach it due to poor public transport connection. Thus, the need to find an alternative place was felt in order to be able to meet this demand. The clinic is envisaged to be the first of a number of services which will be offered from the LGBTIQ+ Hub, a centralised location catering for the needs of the community.

5.1.2.5 Encouraging an Independent Way of Life

In 2022, efforts that promote independent living, especially among vulnerable communities, continued. Therefore, Aġenzija Sapport began working towards a transitional service within a residential setting to move from dependent services to more empowering and self-determined support.

In this respect, the Day Services within Aġenzija Sapport coordinated a number of programmes about health and well-being across Malta and Gozo, whilst the Independent Supported Living Service encouraged hygiene practices amongst its resident service users, particularly following COVID-19, as per directives implemented by the Social Care Standards Authority and Health Authorities, and through the provision of accessible guideline charts.

Furthermore, ongoing discussions were held by the Independent Supported Living Service with psychiatric professionals to reinstate individual meetings outside of the national mental health facility and primary healthcare centres. This was done to facilitate the follow-up of mental health support plans with individual service users, moving towards deinstitutionalisation. Further discussions were held on challenges encountered by service users

in relation to access to the Young People's Unit's services. Through this discussion, suggestions were made to facilitate a better procedure in relation to mental health support and better access to crisis intervention support. Throughout 2022, the Independent Supported Living Service also promoted the use of MyHealth for resident service users and ensured that they have access to their private account and details.

Moreover, as part of its goals to move towards deinstitutionalisation in line with the UNCRPD, Aġenzija Sapport signed an MoU with the Housing Authority to facilitate better access to independent living for persons with disabilities in the community. The Agency embarked on a seven-year collaborative project towards reforming current Personal Assistance schemes with the goal of developing a secure structure for transitional services and independent living for persons to be successful.

5.1.2.6 Tackling Human Trafficking and Domestic Violence

AWAS, in addition to the support services, carried out other initiatives to continue improving the services provided so that it would be better able to assist survivors of human trafficking and help victims of gender-based violence (GBV) and domestic violence. Therefore, in 2022, training was carried out in the following fields:

- Understanding Human Trafficking Trends;
- Working with survivors of human trafficking;
- Effective Initial Assessment for the early identification of victims of trafficking;
- Mental Health Issues in Victims of Trafficking; and
- First Aid, Fire Fighting and Conflict Resolution.



Moreover, in March 2022, a specific booklet for women was developed and distributed during information sessions. This booklet includes basic information on female genital mutilation, family planning, sexual health, GBV and domestic violence. Furthermore, beneficiaries residing in AWAS reception centres received training and information related to human trafficking and GBV in collaboration with other stakeholders such as the FSWS, Migrant Women Association Malta and the Jesuit Refugee Service.

Beneficiaries also had the opportunity to participate in the Skin and Sexually Transmitted Infections Knowledge, Attitude and Practice project, known as Project SSKAPP, where they were informed about sexually transmitted diseases and were offered free medical testing.

Furthermore, an MoU was also signed between Aġenzija Sapport and the FSWS Domestic Violence Service to ensure collaborative efforts between entities to support victims of domestic violence. Aġenzija Sapport participated in writing a short paper entitled *Informal Coalition on Sexual Violence* with the goal of addressing the needs and lacunae in services offered to persons who experience sexual violence. Research was also conducted by Aġenzija Sapport's Assessment and Intervention Team on acquired disabilities for future planning of services and the development of adequate support structures.

On a similar note, Aġenzija Sapport empowered service users to be strong self-advocates and report any injustices and malpractices within the service to ensure that their human rights are being respected. Several services, including the Supported Independent Living Service, provided support to service users in court hearings to testify in court on situations where they were placed in vulnerable positions.

5.1.3 Supporting Developing Countries and Providing Humanitarian Aid —

In 2022, several measures and initiatives were taken by the Maltese government to assist overseas developing communities in their efforts to achieve the SDGs, with amongst other things, a particular focus on two of the biggest recent crises ever: the COVID-19 pandemic and the ramifications of Russia's war against Ukraine.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought a change to our country's Official Development Assistance (ODA) plans, and in 2020, the Ministry for Foreign and European Affairs and Trade (MFET) sought to channel development funds with a renewed focus on geographic and thematic priorities. One particular success story, which has carried in since the inception of this pandemic, was the provision of COVID-19-related personal protective equipment and medicines as a measure of solidarity with ODA-eligible countries in need. During 2022, and in collaboration with MFH, a total of almost 500,000 COVID-19 vaccines were shared with Antigua and Barbuda, Egypt, Iraq, Ivory Coast, and St. Kitts. Malta also contributed towards humanitarian assistance, providing support to Afghanistan, Moldova, Pakistan, Syria, and Yemen, amongst others, to alleviate the suffering caused by conflict as well as natural disasters.

Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Malta responded immediately by offering a shipment of medicines and medical equipment worth €1.4 million that arrived in Ukraine on 22nd March 2022. Additionally, through its humanitarian and development fund, Malta also contributed close to €250,000 in funding to UN organisations that provide humanitarian assistance in Ukraine or neighbouring countries. Towards the end of 2022, Malta covered the amount of €52,000 for the purchase of two generators assisting towards the Ukraine winterisation project.

Moreover, Malta responded to several humanitarian appeals made by reputable international multilateral organisations, including various UN agencies, to assist Ukraine as well as afflicted countries, especially in Africa and the Neighbourhood, with the aim of responding to shortfalls in funding and addressing urgent humanitarian crises. Maltese ODA also supported a project aimed at strengthening the health sector in Ghana. Support has been extended through ODA projects led by Maltese Embassies in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia and Ankara, Turkey.

Access to education remains one of the main SDG priorities for Malta, aiming at being at the centre for dialogue, research and training. In 2022, MFET provided around €130,000 in funding and support for various capacity-building programmes and scholarships to students from various developing countries, benefitting from academic opportunities offered by the UoM, the International Maritime Organization International Maritime Law Institute, the Mediterranean Academy of Diplomatic Studies, and the Islands and Small States Institute, to further their capacity and knowledge in maritime law, diplomatic studies, gender studies, conflict resolution and peacebuilding, international relations, and the study of islands and small states.

5.1.4 Grants and Schemes to Empower Citizens —

5.1.4.1 Supporting Persons with Disability

In line with SDGs 3 and 10, the Ministry for Finance and Employment (MFE), together with Aġenzija Sapport, administers the Scheme for *Exemptions/Reductions/Grants related to Motor Vehicles for Persons with Disability*. This scheme is targeted at three categories of beneficiaries:

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

The beneficiaries benefit from an exemption/subsidy on the vehicle's registration tax and annual circulation tax, from a grant equivalent to Value-Added Tax (VAT) on Cost, Insurance, and Freight (CIF) and import duty, and a grant equivalent to the duty and VAT incurred on local modifications of vehicles.

The 2022 Budget widened the eligibility of beneficiaries falling under the above-mentioned categories. The scheme now entitles these persons, owning a manual-driven or an automatic vehicle, to benefit from an exemption/subsidy on the vehicle's registration tax and annual circulation tax, from a grant equivalent to VAT on CIF and import duty, and a grant equivalent to the duty and VAT incurred on local modifications of vehicles.

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

5.1.4.2 Assisting Organisations

SEM continued to deliver on its core functions by assisting various organisations directly involved in the implementation of various SDGs to obtain EU funding to implement their projects in various fields including education, community infrastructure, environmental improvement, and social cohesion.

Since its inception, SEM has assisted various organisations to obtain over €82 million in European funds. In 2022, 410 individual meetings were held to help organisations access European funds and 84 project proposals were submitted. This adds to over 413 requests for information on EU-related issues which were provided to individuals and organisations. In addition, the Agency is assisting 37 organisations which are currently implementing EU-funded projects. All these projects will contribute effectively towards the key priority areas such as sustainable community cohesion, sustainable use of resources, quality of life as well as sustainable and competitive growth.

The Agency organised over 74 different activities, including training and information sessions to continue to raise awareness of the opportunities available and how EU funds may be a vehicle to achieve sustainability objectives. In addition, 76 articles were written in printed and online newspapers together with constant uploading of updates on the Agency's website and social media channels.

Further to the above, one can also mention the *Exemptions/Subsidies Related to Motor Vehicles for Philanthropic Organisations/Charitable Institutions*, which MFE administers. This scheme is targeted at charitable and philanthropic institutions, old people's homes and lay movements. If eligible, these organisations may benefit from an exemption/subsidy on a vehicle's registration tax and a subsidy on the annual circulation tax.

5.1.4.3 Grants to Assist Gozitan Residents

During 2022, a number of grants and subsidies targeted at enhancing and promoting sustainable socio-economic development in Gozo were sustained. These included the following:

- Grant Payable to Malta Resident Students Following Full-Time Courses in Gozo;
- Grant Payable to Gozitan Resident Students Following Full-Time Courses in Malta;
- Financial assistance to patients travelling between the Maltese Islands;
- Gozitan Sportsperson Assistance Scheme;
- Additional benefit covering the rental cost for Gozitan students studying in Malta; and
- The Gozo resident workers subsidy including the collective transport subsidy for Gozitan residents working full time in Malta both in the Public Sector and the Private Sector.

5.2 Ensuring Accessible Products, Services and Public Spaces which Address the Needs of a Diverse and Changing Population

The Directive (EU) 2019/882 on the Accessibility of Products and Services, known informally as the European Accessibility Act, was transposed into Maltese law by virtue of the Accessibility Measures (European Accessibility Act) Regulations, 2022 (S.L. 627.03). This exercise was completed after discussions with CION and other national focal points, as well as consultations with policy development counterparts in different line ministries. Additionally, further SDG targets such as Target 9 in general, and more specific targets such as 4.7 and 8.9, are covered by implementing this measure.

CRPD was designated Malta’s market surveillance authority for products and services under the Directive, and a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the Commission and the MCCA to facilitate measures such as product withdrawal and training of officials. Furthermore, such Memoranda are being discussed between the Commission and other entities with specific expertise, such as the Malta Communications Authority. Moreover, discussions with the Ministry for the Economy, European Funds and Lands are ongoing, in order to draft user guidelines for economic operators, that will then be finalised in conjunction with representatives of the business sector, prior to commencing outreach exercises for both this sector, the public in general and specifically, for disabled people.



5.3 Building Safer Communities and Ensuring a Timely and Effective Justice System

Relevant UN SDG Targets	
8.7	Take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms
16.1	Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere
16.2	End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children
16.3	Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all
16.4	By 2030, significantly reduce illicit financial and arms flows, strengthen the recovery and return of stolen assets and combat all forms of organized crime
16.6	Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels
16.10	Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements
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
16.b	Promote and enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development

5.3.1 Reforms in the Justice System

During 2022, the Ministry for Justice (MFJ) continued with the implementation of reforms to the Maltese justice system, which was initiated back in 2020. Apart from implementing reforms that are included in the Recovery and Resilience Plan (RRP), such as the transfer of prosecutions from the police to the Attorney General (AG) and the relative increase in prosecutors in the Office of the AG, work also continued on measures aimed to increase the efficiency of justice, mainly by modernising the system through digitisation, reducing delays in courts and ensuring that justice is carried out within a reasonable timeframe.

In this regard, in 2022, two Judges were appointed to the Bench whereas in December 2022 a call for four magistrates was also issued to be subsequently appointed in Q1 of 2023. Increasing the number of members of the Judiciary is also a commitment undertaken in order to reduce the caseload and delays. Furthermore, a number of laws were passed to make the judicial system more efficient, as well as to address the fight against crime. To this effect, the inclusion of the concept of femicide in the criminal code of Malta placed Malta amongst the first countries in Europe to establish that femicide is a factor that militates against the awarding of a punishment that is not aggravation, in a case of homicide or attempted homicide with femicidal motives. The introduction of this concept was intended to send out a clear and strong message against violent crimes against women.

Strengthening the democratic framework of our country is also a sustainable way of ensuring that the Rule of Law is upheld. In this regard, work was undertaken to introduce legislations aiming at strengthening the profession of journalism, while giving greater protection to journalists to perform their work. Once these legislations are enacted, Maltese journalism will truly be recognised as the fourth pillar of Maltese democracy, while journalists and other professionals in the media field will be given the highest certainty and protection through the inclusion of guarantees even in the Constitution.

In addition, MFJ was the beneficiary of the TSI by DG-Reform by means of which a business reorganisation of the Office of the AG and the Office of the State Advocate (SA) was carried out with the expertise of the World Bank. The ultimate aim of the project, which is expected to conclude in Q1 of 2023, was to achieve operational excellence, accountability and higher levels of public trust in both Agencies. The project evolved over an 18-month period, between June 2021 and December 2022. The findings, compiled into a 5-year operational and strategic plan, addressed three main pillars of activity, namely, organisational development, personal professional development, and enhanced service delivery. In order to attain these goals, eight different projects were identified and time-planned progressively and inter-relatedly over five years, with scheduled-interim monitoring and evaluation exercises to ensure adaptability.

Furthermore, in 2022, MFJ, in line with the strategic directions being provided by OECD, increased its efforts related to people-centred justice (PCJ) and a more concrete understanding of how the justice system can be adapted to embrace these principles was crystallised. In view of this, the event organised for the European Day of Justice was themed on PCJ, with three selected representatives of special populations being invited to present the obstacles their clients face when accessing justice to justice entities within MFJ. Following this event, the Office of the Permanent Secretary started working more closely with these representatives to formalise concrete actions that would alleviate identified barriers. In the meantime, the Ministry is studying ways in which a roadmap for implementing a PCJ system can be formalised and implemented.

Moreover, in October 2022, MFJ implemented the first phase of a reorganisation process in its organisational structure. The former Policy Development and Programme Implementation Directorate was split, and two new directorates were formed, these being the Strategy & Support Directorate responsible for providing support, coordination, strategies and programme implementation with emphasis on the coordination of the Electoral Manifesto proposals and EU-funded projects; and the Legal Affairs and Policy Directorate, which is responsible for all policy issues and legal matters. Moreover, another unit within the Office of the Permanent Secretary was also set up to focus on research in order to provide a more data-driven aspect to policies and decisions and to supervise the digitisation strategy in the justice system.

5.3.2 Renovation and Training Initiatives Within the Courts of Justice

Throughout 2022, the Court Services Agency (CSA) invested in the acquisition of a property next to the Court which will host three new courtrooms, as well as in the work being done to build a new courtroom in the current building of the Court of Malta. Furthermore, the Agency commissioned a Property Surveying firm to prepare updated plans for the Main Court Building. Through this measure, the CSA administration will be in a position to better identify and maximise the space available. In addition, three Court Halls were renovated with the installation of new furniture and a new air-conditioning system, and with making the Court Halls more accessible to persons with special needs. Moreover, in 2022, the necessary preparatory work for the publication of the tender for the renovation of the Portico flooring was carried out and a tender for the necessary works was published with works expected to conclude by the end of June 2023.

Moreover, other initiatives were also taken to renovate the Offices of the Registrar and Assistant Registrar, Civil Courts and Tribunals. The renovation involved the replacement of office furniture, plastering, painting, and wall paintings. All renovation works were completed by the end of 2022. Additionally, plans are underway to relocate the Subbasti Office to another area within the Law Courts' building. The relocation of this office was required in view of the new employees recruited to meet the increase in workload at the Subbasti Section. The work on the new office will commence in 2023. Once relocated, the present Subbasti Office will be assigned to the six scanning officers who are tasked with scanning most of the judicial acts scattered throughout the Civil Registry.

Further to the above, during the Courts' summer recess, the Civil Directorate organised a set of information sessions aimed at the Deputy Registrars assigned with the Civil Courts explaining the legal tariffs established in

the Code of Organisation and Civil Procedure, Chapter 12 of the Laws of Malta. The information sessions were categorised according to the Courts' competencies. In other words, the Civil Directorate grouped the Deputy Registrars according to the Court(s) assigned to them as it affected the tariffs workings (i.e taxation). The scope of the sessions was intended to reduce the cases filed against the Civil Registrar as well as any other costs incurred in view of inaccuracies in the legal fees/tariffs' working, due to the legal professionals following the Court's orders if it transpired that the calculations were calculated incorrectly.

Additionally, since the establishment of the CSA, in 2022, the first Collective Agreement for all CSA employees was signed. Training is also being offered to CSA staff and, in 2022, CSA customer care employees, as well as contractor employees, attended internal training with a total of 61 employees attending Advanced Customer Care training. These employees were also provided with Data Protection and Privacy training to ensure that the public's privacy is guaranteed at all times, with a total of 255 employees benefiting from it.

5.3.3 A Digital Justice Strategy

In 2022, MFJ started rolling out the *Digital Justice Strategy* (2022-2027) launched during the previous year, which aimed at improving the quality of the national justice system, with specific goals related to the digitalisation of justice. In line with the strategy, throughout the year, work continued on the massive investment in digitalisation from the RRP where an investment of over €10 million in the justice sector was allocated. Apart from achieving a more efficient administration of justice, this investment shall implement a number of secure digital solutions and tools to support justice sector users through collaboration and integration, increased accessibility to justice, and the strengthening of efficiency. The primary stakeholders are the Law Courts, MPF, SA, AG, Legal Aid and Asset Recovery Bureau.

In preparation for this investment outlay, legal acts on the digitalisation of the law courts have entered into force in order to introduce the possibility for civil proceedings to be held via live video conferencing facilities, and for criminal judicial acts to be filed electronically. Moreover, 2022 was the foundational year that focused mainly on the preparation and publication of tenders for digital services. Most notable were the award of a contract related to a new case management system for the Legal Aid Agency; the award of a contract for the supply, delivery and installation of video conferencing equipment in MFJ; the procurement of Wi-Fi equipment and installation, including laptops for the CSA; and the publishing of a tender for a new Freedom of Information System. The Ministry worked on the publication of a tender related to the mapping of processes in justice entities.

Additionally, a Digital Justice Steering Committee to oversee the implementation of the Digital Justice Strategy was set up and a multi-disciplinary project team composed of key stakeholders working within the court setting, was also set up. This project team has been reviewing legislation to enable digitalisation from a legal perspective and is also working on the specifications required for a new court case tracking system. At the same time, an assessment of the requirements of the Office of the AG and the Office of the SA in terms of case management systems has also been carried out. This foundational work will lead to having interoperable systems that will facilitate the communication between the justice entities themselves, but also between these entities and legal and natural persons both at a national and international level.

5.3.3.1 A Digital Transformation of the DoJ

In order to ensure the effective implementation of the Digital Justice Strategy, bodies and departments within the justice sector implemented a number of reforms and initiatives to ensure a smooth transition to a more digital justice system. In this regard, the DoJ, introduced an online application form for the Registration to Practise the Legal Profession in Malta under the Home-Country Professional Title, while ensuring the continued use of online secure payment systems through the Government Payment Gateway. Thus, in 2022, there were enhancements for a fuller digitalisation of the application for one to register in Malta to practise the legal profession under the respective home-country title within the EU; the application process was reviewed and assessed on various levels coupled with an assessment for seeing into any legal implications that might ensue with the IT changes needed.

Moreover, in a sustainable transition towards a digital economy, the DoJ, in collaboration with the Information Management Unit of MFJ and other stakeholders, is working on rendering conduct certificates and conviction sheets digital by default and eventually over the years, on having court judgements inputted digitally at sources. Work started in previous years and is still ongoing wherein it is envisaged that the criminal records information

system is digitised in several phases in the next few years. This project addresses other targets of sustainable development including industry, innovation and infrastructure, as well as research and development, whereby a real-time efficient and effective system is being envisaged, enabling citizens and authorised entities to access the required information through online self-service provisioning means. This leads to the administration of justice being improved with an increased facility, where authorised persons shall be provided with access to search for previous convictions.

Furthermore, the DoJ is representing Malta at the e-CODEX Commission, which offers a European digital infrastructure for secure cross-border communication and information exchange in criminal and civil law. The e-CODEX boosts judicial cooperation by improving the interoperability between legal authorities within the EU, by building upon national systems and infrastructures supporting e-Justice activities. This network results in increased security and reliability along with time-saving in completing cross-border processes.

Notwithstanding the above, it must be mentioned that the current processes and procedures of the Criminal Records Office (CRO) within MPF are currently all handled manually with minimal digitisation. In view of the fact that the CRO will soon be moved under the responsibility of the DoJ, MFJ has envisaged that it will be of primary importance to have a digitised system, providing enhanced service to society.

In previous years, a business process re-engineering exercise started, whereby the processes “as is” were documented, and the processes “to be” have been developed and completed. This addressed lacunae that existed and shall also facilitate improvements required for the best way forward in the implementation of a digitised national criminal records system mentioned above. The project aims at providing enhanced service to the public, various authorised entities, and the justice administration; promoting greater efficiency in the respective processes and procedures; reducing paper usage; and minimising the duplication of work.

The purpose of this project is to render digital the bulk of the administrative processes pertaining to conduct certificates and conviction sheets with full criminal records. This will provide the possibility for the DoJ to provide a more efficient service to the public and those authorised entities requiring the service of the Conducts Office and the CRO. In this way, one may continue to ensure that justice-related processes are made more accessible and served in the most expeditious manner.

In addition, the DoJ also embarked on a project to draw up and document SOPs relating to the main processes and procedures of the CRO. The aim is to understand better the operations of the CRO and, also, to identify any processes in the CRO’s operations which can be improved and digitalised. This is intended to lead to the proper design of the information system that shall facilitate the front- and back-office operations, promoting greater efficiency and utility for better services to the general public and the competent authorities making use of the services.

Furthermore, the DoJ is carrying out a laborious exercise regarding the CRO history books, currently located at the MPF General Headquarters. These history books, amounting to approximately 3,000 books, date back to the 1800s and contain the criminal records of individuals. The current project phase entails DoJ officials going through all the books by way of identifying which of those books contain records of only deceased persons, i.e. where the General Data Protection Regulation does not apply. The respective history books are being scanned for a digital backup and transferred to the National Archives of Malta for permanent preservation. This exercise is, in the meantime, being undertaken as part of the digitalising process of the conducts and criminal records operations. The aim of this exercise is to reduce the volumes and the need for physical space and for the CRO to become eventually more paperless.

A sub-project in this matter involves active criminal record books that contain criminal records of individuals who are still alive and therefore, such books are needed for the day-to-day operations and provision of services at the CRO. In this sub-project, the best way forward is required to be identified for the eventual digitalisation of these books without jeopardising the operation and services of the CRO. These books are the backbone of the day-to-day CRO operations with the current manual system. Once the active books are digitalised, more efficient and effective services may be provided whilst also having the processes transformed into a more paperless mechanism.

5.3.3.2 Digital Reforms in Legal Aid and Asset Recovery

In 2022, the Legal Aid Malta Agency continued to provide its services to meet the demands of its eligible clients thus providing equal justice to all people in society irrelevant of their financial standing. Furthermore, the legal aid system framework continued to be improved with the introduction of an increased threshold for persons to be eligible to benefit from legal aid. The threshold was increased from €7,000 to €13,000 for the preceding 12 months, regarding requests for legal aid.

In January 2022, the Agency launched its first online application whereby prospective clients could initiate the legal aid application. The online application, which is the Legal Aid Referral System, is accessible through electronic identification (eID) and eID and trust services, better known as eIDAS. The online referral system can be filled in by the prospective client for legal aid and it can also be used by professionals in other entities and NGOs to apply on behalf of their clients.

During the first quarter of 2022, the Agency continued to embark on delivering awareness of the legal aid services available to domestic violence victims. An information campaign was broadcasted over the national television station for a duration of three months as well as via the Agency’s Facebook page. During the year, the Agency also issued the call for tenders of the digitisation project for the Legal Aid Malta Agency, the tender of which was awarded during the last quarter of 2022. A contract was signed with the winning bidder to deliver a new database, an online application and a new interactive webpage over a period of twenty-four months. Throughout the year, the Agency also met various other government entities and NGOs in order to discuss how to better collaborate to deliver its services to their clients in the most efficient manner. During the last quarter of 2022, the Agency initiated discussions with various stakeholders on delivering specialised legal aid services to its clients in the coming years.

Statistically, in 2022, the Legal Aid Malta Agency had in total 2,616 requests for information on legal aid services through walk-ins, telephone queries, emails and referrals by other entities and NGOs, with an average of 50 queries every week throughout the year. During the year, 191 clients were given an appointment with the means testing office to verify their eligibility and 523 clients scheduled a meeting with the resident legal aid lawyer for merits testing. By the end of 2022, the Agency had facilitated the provision of 275 client cases to the assigned Legal Aid Lawyers after obtaining a Court decree.

Further to the above, the Asset Recovery Bureau in Malta is presently working to improve its operation and processes through better implementation of policies in its activities and the digitalisation of present procedures and practices.

Moreover, an analysis of the SOPs was carried out to set the requirements for a tender to design and develop a digital operational platform to streamline work processes within the Bureau. The tender will be issued in the first quarter of 2023. With discussions underway on a new proposed EU directive on asset recovery and confiscation, the Asset Recovery Bureau is presently working on updating its policy documents and, subsequently, legislation and operating procedures to reflect this directive.

5.3.3.3 Digitalisation Within the CSA

Given that priority to efficiency in the judicial procedure is a continuous effort, the CSA continues to do its best to offer the best support to members of the judiciary and to provide an efficient, effective and accessible service to citizens who resort to the services of the court. With the investment that was made in the audio system in the courtrooms and in the system of the recordings of the hearings, which are kept in a centralised, secure repository and accessed only by authorised persons, the best efforts shall be maintained when it comes to the process of digitisation and the scanning of all criminal procedures both in the lower jurisdiction as well as in the higher jurisdiction. These initiatives are intended to improve the quality of the service that the Agency offers to facilitate better access to the acts of the proceedings.

In the criminal field, the online filing of acts in Inquiries continued throughout 2022. This means that with the implementation of this measure any applications, replies, or notes that are filed in connection with a magisterial inquiry, can now be filed online. This measure is available to advocates and legal procurators and with its implementation, all acts pertinent to the courts of criminal jurisdiction can now be filed online.

In addition, a number of SOPs were introduced in order to standardise procedures in the different halls pertinent to the Court of Magistrates and the Criminal Court. The SOPs range from legal procedures in connection with the scanning and transmission of acts to the AG, to other administrative procedures such as the gathering of data for statistics and the assignment of cases to different halls.

In the civil camp, the CSA's website offers two new online applications, which refer to the judicial protest application and counter-judicial protest application that could be filed in the Civil Courts (i.e. Court of Magistrates, First Hall, Civil Courts and Constitutional Jurisdiction, Civil Court (Family Section), the Commercial Section, and the Asset Recovery Section). The applications could be filed online by legal professionals who have their names registered with the CSA.

Primarily, the aim of these e-forms or simplification measures was to allow legal professionals to file these applications online without the need to be present at the Law Courts. With this measure, the lawyer and the legal procurator will be able to make use of this application from his/her office and thus file and pay the established legal fees online.

5.3.4 Reforms Within the Offices of the AG and SA

In 2022, the Office of the AG entered into the third phase of the reform surrounding the conduct of prosecutions which reform started in 2019 through the separation of the roles performed by the AG. By virtue of L.N. 241 of 2022 and with effect from the 1st of October 2022, an additional number of offences and decisions to prosecute were taken over by the Office of the AG from the Police. These offences include:

- forgery of government debentures and government judicial or official acts, and the counterfeiting of the public seal of Malta;
- forgery of acts by public officers and forgery or uttering of currency;
- prostituting of a descendant underage by the ascendant, of a spouse underage or of a minor by husband or wife or tutor, of a descendant or spouse of age, by the ascendant or husband or wife;
- instigation with violence of persons underage to prostitution or to participate in a pornographic performance, inducing persons underage to prosecution or to participation in a pornographic performance, participation in sexual activities with persons under the age of sixteen years, unlawful sexual activities, compelling or inducing a person of age to prostitution, non-consensual acts of a sexual nature, meeting a child following sexual grooming, and advertisement of sexual tourism, among others;
- female genital mutilation, enforced sterilisation, forced marriage, and luring of a person to the territory of another state to marry forcefully;
- causing explosions likely to endanger life or property, discharge, among other things, of a lethal device, possession and use of nuclear material, use of radioactive material, lethal devices or nuclear facility with the intent to cause death, unlawful possession of radioactive material or making or possession of a lethal device, and setting on fire of arsenals, among others;
- arson endangering life, arson to the common danger, arson without danger of life, and arson of vineyards, among others, destruction by the springing of a mine, and exhibition of false lights, with danger to navigation and setting on fire of one's own property; and
- illicit importation of radioactive waste and attempts or conspiracy to commit or be complicit in these offences.

In 2022, the Office of the AG also developed and adopted its Anti-Human Trafficking Strategy Document. The strategy makes it clear that the Office is fully committed to ensuring the effective prosecution of human trafficking with the principal aim of this strategy being to effectively ensure:

- that investigations are translated into prosecutions and convictions;
- better quality investigations and prosecutions to effectively combat human trafficking cases;
- that the assets of the accused and the relative criminal proceeds are not dissipated during the proceedings to guarantee their confiscation; and

- cooperation and coordination of the actions of the Office of the AG with those of other authorities, including foreign judicial authorities, involved in the fight against human trafficking.

Moreover, throughout 2022, the Office of the AG continued with its capacity-building process in line with the commitments undertaken through the RRP. Fourteen new prosecutors were recruited in 2022 and so, by the end of the same year, the Office of the AG was composed of fifty prosecutors.

Furthermore, an area within the Office of the AG building was identified to set up a library populated with books, journals and articles dealing with criminal matters, with a view of assisting the prosecutors to perform research. The library will be completed by early 2023, while a call to recruit a manager to coordinate training and also supervise this library was issued in December 2022.

With regard to the Office of the SA, throughout 2022, a focus was placed on revamping the current website in order to create a more professional and accessible site for all users.

Furthermore, in 2022, the Office of the SA continued with the implementation of EU-funded projects, namely the European Legislation Identifier (ELI) project and the National Language Technology Platform (NLTP). With regard to the former, the <https://legislation.mt/> website was launched in May 2020 and is based on ELI, a European law identification standard, established by Council Conclusions of 6th November 2017 on the European Legislation Identifier (2017/C 441/05).

During the first phase of the ELI implementation (Pillar I), all types of documents (i.e. the Chapters of the Laws of Malta, Subsidiary Legislation, Acts, L.Ns. and Bye-Laws) were attributed a particular Uniform Resource Identifier, facilitating the identification and reference of laws.

The core of the implementation of ELI (Pillar II) consisted of the attribution of 'metadata' to legislation, such as the 'date of publication', the 'status' of the law (i.e. not yet in force/in force/partially in force/repealed) and the different points-in-time when the law was amended. This process has been completed for all the Chapters of the Laws of Malta in 2021 but still needs to be carried out on subsidiary laws.

The metadata collected was then used to construct the timeline for each of the Chapters of the Laws of Malta, a visual way that shows the history of each chapter. The timeline is designed on two levels where the upper level shows the respective consolidations and the lower level shows the legal instruments that are related to that chapter. Each related act is accompanied by a hovering tooltip which provides more information on the related act. The idea of the timeline is to provide an attractive, visual way of presenting laws, which should facilitate access not only for the legal professions but also for citizens generally.

On the 23rd of July 2021, the ELI Taskforce confirmed that the Maltese ELI implementation is consistent with ELI standards.

In addition, funds were approved in order to undertake necessary enhancements towards introducing basic AI capabilities through user profile facilities including:

- The publication of legislation is a chain of events which depends on the expediency of every phase for its efficiency. This track changes-enhancement will facilitate the smooth running and efficacy of the review stage of legislation and is intended to simplify and expedite communication between the Legislation Unit and the drafters of legislation across ministries and public entities.
- The inclusion of *schema.org* as an add-on to the current website <https://legislation.mt> will assist in the creation of an enhanced description which appears in search results. This will provide users with better information relating to their conducted search. The purpose of utilising *schema.org* is to give priority ranking to the website when searched, thus providing more legal certainty to end-users. This will ensure that users access the correct source of information when searching for Maltese legislation given that they will be promptly directed to the website. This enhanced website visibility will assist the Office of the SA in ensuring the better extraction of accurate legal information and legal terms and in diminishing the use of incorrect legal sources and misquoting of information.

- The development of the Client Self-Care Portal is intended to provide a personalised service to end-users, thus serving the legal and judicial professions and the public at large more efficiently. The scope of this service is to provide real-time notifications to subscribers through their preferred method of communication. Subscribers will be given the option of receiving daily, weekly or monthly notifications of new publications (Acts, L.Ns. and Bye-Laws) and also, of receiving keyword notifications on selected types. This portal will allow the Office of the SA to create a customised experience for visitors to the website, monitor activity on the website and gather periodic statistics.

These additional enhancements will complement and address the new operative requirements which transpired following the deployment of the ELI project by the Legislation Unit. Once the above enhancements are concluded, end-users will have more real-time information at hand, resulting in much more efficient and effective access to justice.

In addition to the above, the NLTP aims at combining the most advanced language technology tools and solutions in a new state-of-the-art, AI-driven platform. The scope of the project is to develop a customisable and easy-to-set-up NLTP, which will be equipped with essential AI-based functionality: custom machine translation, e-Translation, terminology management, translation memory management, and speech technology. The NLTP will have a ready-to-use user interface and integration options. The NLTP goal is to remove language barriers, promote language equality, increase accessibility, and foster cross-border integration in the use of public digital services in the EU and EEA countries.

The NLTP will integrate a comprehensive range of tools, including those developed in the framework of the previous Connecting Europe Facility-funded actions and other projects, as follows: translation workspace (2016-EU-IA-0121 and 2018-EU-IA-0079); translation memory (2017-EU-IA-0149) and terminology management (2016-EU-IA-0122); computer-aided translation (CAT) workspace (FP7-ICT GA 287688); an online translation assistant, webpage translation widget, speech-to-text, and text-to-speech (ERDF Project No. 2.2.1.1/16/I/004); and functionality via an Application Programming Interface (API), enabling high quality and secure translations. The developed solution will provide public administrations, and the general public with secure access to high-quality tools for the translation of texts, including sensitive information, as well as translations of confidential documents and regulations across all the languages of the Single Digital Market in an efficient and cost-effective way. Through combining and matching the existing solutions, the developed NLTP will be customisable to the specific needs of each public administration.

Additionally, the NLTP will be linked to e-Translation services enabling translations into and from the 24 official EU languages. In addition, the NLTP platform will be open for integration with other technology providers. As a result, the NLTP will enable users to translate entire documents by uploading or dragging/dropping a document and to obtain a complete, formatted and easily editable translation within a few seconds. To facilitate the use of a professional translation environment with integrated terminology databases, it will be possible to integrate the translation into the CAT tool. This will contribute towards increasing the efficiency of translation, reusing translation memories and taking advantage of high-quality machine translation technologies. This will also contribute towards integrating speech technologies to facilitate the access of the tool to users with disabilities, for example, visually-impaired users.

Further to the above, the Office of the SA performed work on the following:

- (i) Add-on feature to the current Laws of Malta website

This proposed measure will provide an added feature to <https://legislation.mt/> for users, namely lawyers, the judiciary, various other professionals, and other users in general, for them to subscribe and be notified via email or text message (with in-built Malta Information Technology Agency notifications Portal Web API), that the laws they frequent mostly have been duly updated or amended, using the eID logging facility by free subscription. This notification subscription-based feature will also apply to future laws, and the users may choose the laws of a particular field or nature, such as financial, medical, and policing, among others, which may be of interest to them, also in a preferred language. It will enable all those who subscribe to this feature to keep adjourned with the law and for those concerned to provide up-to-date legal advice.

- (ii) Renovation of the premises adjacent to the Main Office

The Office will embark on a project to renovate the premises (No. 15) adjacent to the Main Office. The present offices of the SA located at Casa Scaglia in M.A. Vassalli Street Valletta, are nearing their full capacity. The renovation of these premises would create additional office space to accommodate new staff. Moreover, these offices will also house a fully-fledged repository for the storage of the numerous files held by the Office of the SA. Following the completion of the structural works, the property will be refurbished through the procurement of high-quality furnishings including modern workstations and an updated IT infrastructure which can assist the staff in the ongoing exigencies of the Office such as the digitisation process of current files which commenced earlier this year. This project is expected to be concluded in 2023.

5.3.5 The Notary to Government

The Office of the Notary to Government houses all notarial deeds and wills, gathered in coded volumes. These are incorporated in two separate but linked archives, including the Main Notarial Archive which houses all original copies of the notarial deeds and wills, and the Secondary Notarial Archives which houses the registered copies of the original deeds and wills housed in the Main Notarial Archive.

The Secondary Notarial Archive is currently undergoing a holistic rehabilitation project co-funded by the ERDF, which has two components and is now nearing its termination after years of meticulous planning and effort. The structural component includes the restoration, conservation, and adaptation of two adjacent interlinked palazzos to house the archive itself, which will also house a paper conservation laboratory, a digitisation laboratory, a well-equipped reading room, a visitors' centre and a museum, as well as residencies for artists and researchers. The non-structural component includes the disinfestation of all volumes within the secondary archive, the conservation and restoration treatments on a selection of these volumes, the installation of properly adequate horizontal shelving systems, the purchase of appropriate digitisation equipment, the setting up of a museum using the latest display technology related to historic artefacts, as well as furnishings and furniture. This component also includes project management as well as professional services to steer forward and channel the conservation efforts within the secondary archive and the historical aspects of the archive and its collection. The project will be concluded in 2023 and will subsequently be transferred to the National Archives.

This project within the Secondary Notarial Archive has paved the way to embark on a similar project concerning the Main Notarial Archive. Likewise, this project will also have two components, which will include the structural and non-structural components. Mapping and surveying services covering the facades of the building have already been procured to assess the external state of the building fabric. This will now be followed by the restoration and conservation of the said facades. Subsequently, the project will concentrate its efforts on the interior of the building and the refurbishment and maintenance of the structural fabric of the archive's 14 rooms spread over two floors. The non-structural component will include the procurement, purchase and installation of adequate shelving, as well as the procurement, purchase and installation of disinfestation equipment.

The restoration of the facades is estimated to cost about €500,000, while a further €1,000,000 is estimated to be invested to cater for the rest of the project over a span of 5 years.

5.3.6 Data Protection and Freedom of Information

Following the first months of the implementation of the Protection of the Whistleblower Act (CAP 527) that transposes Directive 2019/1937/EU on the protection of persons who report breaches of Union law, MFJ undertook the setting up of a body as a Whistleblower Helpline that may be reached for information and general queries. The body has also undertaken the task of gathering statistics within the public administration to be better equipped with establishing operating procedures in this area.

MFJ undertook the task of spreading information on its duties and operations through a wide information campaign aimed at both the public administration and the general public. Information and awareness of principles of Data Protection were disseminated via social media and national television.

5.3.7 Compensation to Victims of Crime

In 2022, the DoJ worked on a study on the compensation to victims of crime. The purpose for such a study ensued following the recommendations made by the Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA) in one of its reports on Malta in which the review of the legislative framework in connection with the compensation to victims of human trafficking was recommended. The study is focusing, among others, on the legal and financial implications should the recommendations be positively implemented and go beyond victims of human trafficking to incorporate all victims of crime, not necessarily those of human trafficking only.

In view of the above, an IMC composed of a representative from the DoJ, a representative from the Strategy and Support Directorate of MFJ and the HRD, was set up on Victim Statutory Compensation including trafficking in human beings (THB) as follows:

- in terms of the recommendations of the GRETA Report specifically on compensation to victims of human trafficking (revision of statutory compensation aspects);
- the terms of reference of this IMC go beyond the GRETA recommendations, which cover only victims of THBA; and
- to conduct a comparative study between Member States in connection with the specific aspects highlighted by GRETA in connection with Statutory Compensation further to meetings with relative stakeholders in the field, and come up with conclusions/informed recommendations on the recommendations by GRETA, which recommendations must also include research on the financial implications involved for the government.

It is envisaged that the study be conducted in various phases, with phase one concluding in 2022 and phase two continuing in 2023. In 2022, various meetings and discussions were held with the relative stakeholders, while a comparative study was being undertaken in parallel. The study shall explore the possibility of introducing a Victim Fund dedicated to victim compensation with funds coming directly from the liquidation of confiscated assets of aggressors and perpetrators in victim cases.

The ultimate deliverable would be the drafting of any legislative amendments required to the current legislative framework available, which would support and facilitate the rights of victims of crime as envisaged also in the *EU Strategy on Victims' Rights 2020-2025 and the EU Strategy on Combating THB 2021-2025*.

5.3.8 Strengthening the Discipline Forces

In order to ensure that settlements and communities are more inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable, in 2022, the CPD continued to increase its operational capacity through enhanced recruitment, its increased focus on procurement, and the increase in vehicle equipment.

Moreover, ongoing work within the CPD has ensured that, in the medium term, two fire stations will be constructed for operational use. In order to meet operational requirements, the Department had to open new temporary fire stations in Delimara and Pembroke, while also working on the construction of a new fire station in Floriana and the expansion of its headquarters and the Xemxija fire station.

The CPD also embarked on several initiatives in order to increase public awareness through EU projects, exercises and an informal outreach programme that sought to inform the public of the danger and the risks that civil protection entails. Furthermore, in line with Malta's Hyogo and Sendai obligations, the CPD has continued its outreach programme with local councils to identify and mitigate the known risks of each individual locality.

Training is another area in which the CPD has made substantial progress. Training courses are held on a regular basis, and the CPD has trained personnel in industrial firefighting, hi-rise fires, electrical cars, liquefied natural gas, rescue diving, and aviation fires, amongst others. The CPD has also taken part in another two exercises to increase its knowledge and public awareness, these consisting of a simulation of a tsunami hitting the low land areas of Marsaxlokk, and the SIMIT Tharsy exercise that simulated the aftereffects of a tsunami and how to restore the situation to normal in the shortest time possible.

Further to the above, in 2022, 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 aim of ensuring their resilience. The principal objective of the CIPD is to ensure that critical essential services are delivered with the least disruptions. The CIPD monitors cyberspace for potential threats, hazards, vulnerabilities, and 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) on a daily basis.

Moreover, throughout 2022, the CIPD embarked on a number of EU-funded projects to heighten its infrastructure with a view to strengthening its operational capabilities. During the year, 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 for the specific purpose of monitoring more effectively the indicators of compromise, threats and potential malware within cyberspace. 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 with its constituents.

In addition to the above, the MPF continued to implement the EU-funded project *2PS - Prevent and Protect Through Support*. The project is a highly innovative action offering a paradigm shift in the approach to tackling child sexual abuse and exploitation across Europe. By addressing the support needs of people with a sexual interest in children, sharing the best practices for guidance, therapy, and treatment methods, combined with new training and awareness for frontline support workers, among others, it aims to move preventive actions to the forefront, offering alternative courses of action to existing offenders and individuals at risk of offending, including people with a sexual interest in children. In view of this, several prevention projects have been implemented in identified schools, in collaboration with the FSWS Youth Services. Other preventive outreach projects that have been implemented in 2022 in several communities include:

- a Sex Work Programme aimed at preventing human trafficking and exploitation; and
- a Returns Unit Outreach Programme aimed at migrants and offering long-term relocation.

Furthermore, throughout 2022, the MPF continued to strengthen measures to tackle organised crime through domestic action and international cooperation. The measures include the identification and targeting of members of organised groups. This was aided by the designing and provision of *ad hoc* training, both basic and advanced, whilst equipping the relevant departments with the necessary skills and competencies. There was also international cooperation with regard to investigating, apprehending, and arraigning organised crime groups. This was successful by engaging with multiple stakeholders regularly and maintaining policy via regular assessments.

Additionally, the MPF strengthened its operational capacity through the employee assessment system and by carrying out relevant employee skill profiling. This was further enhanced through constant professional development, unit-specific training, exchange programmes with international police agencies, as well as an ongoing delegation of authority at the right levels.

Also, in fulfilment of the Anti-Racism Strategy, training for community police officers within the MPF has begun. Training for officers of the CPD and District Police is scheduled to start in 2023. This initiative aims to train law enforcement and immigration officers on human rights and equality standards, to create a culture where racist abuse or failure to meet these standards is regarded as having no place within law enforcement agencies or immigration services and where racism is actively prevented and combatted under all circumstances.

In addition, training will be provided to 500 public officers over the span of two years by Kopin in collaboration with IPS. The aim of the training is to assist public officers in mainstreaming anti-racism across all sectors and to support them in fostering change and ensuring respect for anti-racism in key ministries. It will raise awareness of why anti-racism is important and how to promote anti-racist behaviours while providing an opportunity to exchange strategies and a variety of ways of combating racism and discrimination.

Services provided by the MPF front office will also be made available through *servizz.gov* hubs in order to provide a more accessible, convenient, and efficient service to the general public. In 2022, the first set of agent training continued in order for them to provide services from *servizz.gov* agency hubs. Training has been completed, and the service has begun in four locations, namely Żabbar, Żejtun, Qawra, and Hamrun, with the final goal of expanding this to all *servizz.gov* hubs.

In terms of stronger border control and migration management, the priority is that of implementing new large-scale IT systems (Entry/Exit System, European Travel Information and Authorisation System, and European Criminal Records Information System on Third Country Nationals) and upgrading current IT systems (Schengen Information System, Visa Information System and Eurodac) to render them interoperable. Meanwhile, a TF has also been set up to suggest various amendments to the Immigration Act.

Furthermore, in 2022, the AFM continued to work on the EU-funded project *Midlife Mission System Upgrade of the AFM's King Air Maritime Patrol Fixed Wing Aircraft*. The midlife mission system included the upgrading and replacement of obsolete components in the mission systems, whilst also providing enhanced sensor capabilities. The project had an investment of around €5 million where one upgraded aircraft was delivered in June 2022 and another one in October 2022.

Additionally, with an investment of around €50 million, in 2022, work for the procurement of a new vessel continued, which was added to the Armed Forces Maritime squadron. The P71 is equipped with state-of-the-art equipment and is over 70m in length and equipped with the capability to land a helicopter of up to 7,000kg. Training for the crew was also initiated. This vessel is the largest of its kind in Malta and will contribute towards enhancing offshore surveillance and the reaction capability of the AFM.

Moreover, the new AFM Operations Centre is designed to enhance communications and situational awareness so that decision-makers would be able to take informed decisions in a safe and secure environment. Its main objectives include:

- ensuring business/operational continuity, even during major disasters, by building a self-sufficient seismic-resistant facility;
- allowing for improved situational awareness in order to make informed and timely decisions;
- guaranteeing that the structure acts as a safe and secure C3 from where operations can be coordinated even during major disasters;
- facilitating communications between national security entities such as the Malta Police;
- being able to accommodate all current functions and identifying additional tasks; and
- ensuring that measures are all in place to deny unauthorised access, and protect equipment and resources, thus promoting operational security.

Further to the above, by May 2022, all construction work of a new Operations Centre within the Luqa barracks, which commenced in January 2020, was completed. Additionally, the construction of trenches for services around the building is currently underway with a number of them already completed. When these are finalised, asphaltting of the affected roads and the reservoirs will take place.

In tandem, mechanical and electrical works on the project commenced in August 2021, while finishing works commenced in January 2022. Several internal partitions have now been completed on all three floors, while the installation of raised flooring has reached an advanced stage. In 2023, the continuation of the installation of finishing and furniture throughout the site will ensue. By the end of 2022, electrical and mechanical works were completed for all the major lighting and power points within the building. Moreover, internal and outdoor ventilation and air-conditioning units have been installed, and the ducting and final electrical installation, testing and commissioning of all systems are expected to be completed in 2023.

5.4 Achieving High-Quality Education Responsive to Labour Market Needs

Relevant UN SDG Targets	
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
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
4.3	By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university
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
4.5	By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations
4.6	By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy
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
4.a	Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all
12.8	By 2030, ensure that people everywhere have the relevant information and awareness for sustainable development and lifestyles in harmony with nature
13.3	Improve education, awareness-raising and human and institutional capacity on climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning

5.4.1 Ensuring Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education

During 2022, several developments and initiatives were undertaken with the aim of enhancing social inclusion in schools and throughout the whole education system in Malta. The first development relates to *Malta's National Strategic Action Plan for Further and Higher Education 2022 – 2030*, which was launched on Friday 9th December 2022 and was open for public consultation until 9th January 2023.

With regard to initiatives, there was the launch of the Inclusive Education in Schools – *Route to Quality Inclusion Policy and the National Inclusive Education Framework*, which was held on the 6th of February 2022. One of the

main targets implemented as part of this policy was the development of a learning support educator (LSE) toolkit aimed at supporting newly-appointed LSEs in their induction process. Moreover, two more Reach Units were opened in two secondary schools in Malta. Therefore, during the last scholastic year, there were four functioning units, two in the secondary and another two in the middle schools. The main scope was to develop specialised units within mainstream schools to support students on the autism spectrum or those with other intellectual disabilities.

In line with the policy outlined above, the procurement of brailers was essential to facilitate the inclusion of a number of learners in our schools. These brailers are intended for school children who are completely blind since birth or due to a serious illness and will allow learners to read, write and access the curriculum through braille. In line with this, the Early Intervention Team increased in personnel to a total number of 26 practitioners. This service supports learners from birth till the age of five. The service can be provided at home, in childcare or kindergarten. When supported in kindergarten, a whole-school approach is adopted.

Additionally, service users within the Day Services provided by Aġenzija Sapport also had the opportunity to attend food-handling and first-aid training courses to further enhance supporting skills development. Moreover, through a collaboration with Book Distributors Limited, an online platform for books for all service users was provided, increasing access to educational and leisure reading material. Furthermore, Aġenzija Sapport employees continued to receive in-house certified training to guarantee good quality-of-life standards within the Agency.

In 2022, AWAS provided group information sessions in all centres. Topics included asylum procedure, education, employment, health, budgeting and assisted voluntary return. These information sessions were carried out in conjunction with the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA), and the content was developed by MAU and tested together. Furthermore, this unit continued to provide its drop-in service in all centres.

MHSR is also encouraging migrant integration by providing the *I Belong Programme*, which falls under the *Learning-Exchanging-Integrating* (LEI) Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund project. The Programme is designed in two stages, the first of which includes a beginner's course in Maltese, English and Maltese culture, and the second stage involves further learning of the Maltese language and culture. Foundation courses in Maltese and English are being offered to support students with literacy difficulties in coordination with Lifelong Learning. The programme is delivered by the UoM and MCAST. Upon completion, students are awarded recognised certifications in all three subjects, which can be used for entry into the labour market. In 2021 alone, 657 students graduated from Stage 1, with 409 more students awaiting Stage 1 certification. In 2021, work also began on ensuring the longevity of *I Belong*, given that further EU and national funds will need to be allocated in subsequent years after the LEI's conclusion at the end of 2022. Meanwhile, the Stage 1 contract with MCAST was extended until June 2022.

Key figures related to the *I Belong Programme* include the following:

- Over 7,000 individuals have applied under the programme since its inception in 2018.
- Over 900 graduates have successfully completed both stages.
- Over 2,300 students have successfully completed Stage 1.
- 26 persons have successfully completed the Foundation Course.

In 2022, around 2,304 new applications were received, of which:

- 125 persons were allocated to the Foundation Course.
- 1,016 persons were allocated to Stage 1 courses.
- 350 persons were allocated to Stage 2 courses.

In the framework of the LEI project, the HRD continued to implement the Diploma in Education for Cultural Mediation, after its launch by the UoM in 2021. This course trains professionals to facilitate harmonious relations between migrants and citizens in the host country, promoting a mutual exchange of knowledge, and the establishment of positive relations between individuals of diverse cultural backgrounds and ethnic origins. The graduation of the first cohort took place in November 2022 with a total of 11 graduates.

Further to the above, one can also add that there are currently 256 programmes at MCAST approved by the Get Qualified Scheme. This is an initiative that supports the personal development of individuals for the achievement of qualifications and certifications required by the industry.

Moreover, with regard to equality and LGBTIQ+, particularly in the education sector, several initiatives were carried out by MCAST:

- In 2022, the work of the MCAST Equality Consultative Committee, which was established in 2021, continued. The Committee's primary responsibility is to work towards realising the goals outlined in the equality policy, which is why it exists in the first place. To further ensure that the policy is always current with the most recent legislation and practices, the committee also stays current with local and European legal provisions pertaining to equality and inclusion. This helps to ensure that the policy is always current with the most recent legislation and practices. In addition, it is the responsibility of the Committee to interact with the Human Resources and Student Support Services regarding equality matters, and it is also responsible for ensuring that there is equality awareness throughout the entire College. This also falls in line with what the Centre for Professional Development at MCAST is doing where, throughout 2022, it continued with the upskilling of its academics through continuous professional development who work with youngsters, especially, the most vulnerable.
- Both the MCAST Equality Policy and the Gender Equality Plan constitute significant milestones towards the overall goal of promoting equality throughout the community. The College makes every effort to ensure that the environment and education offered are available to all individuals, that every student and member of the faculty and staff is secure and comfortable, and that everyone accomplishes their full potential.
- In 2022, MCAST was audited by NCPE and was awarded the Equality Mark during Q1, 2023 due to the above developments.
- In 2022, it was planned that inclusion, equality, LGBTIQ+ and other such matters will start to be addressed by an expert who would lead training for employees serving in management grades.

Apart from this, in order to mitigate the learning loss due to COVID-19, the Catch-Up programme was introduced in July 2021. The programme was extended to winter and currently, it is still being offered. The programme caters for students who need revision in academic subjects, mainly in the primary sector and for maths, Maltese, English, science and physics for students attending middle and secondary schools.

Further to the above, in 2022, multiple personnel from the International Protection Agency attended the following training modules developed by the EUAA, which included gender, gender identity and sexual orientation; introduction to vulnerability; and trafficking in human beings.

5.4.2 Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)

During the last scholastic year, the ESD and Global Education (GE) section within DLAP continued to work on their vision of ensuring the fulfilment of students' ESD and GE entitlement. Being a cross-curricular theme, the provision of this entitlement currently relies entirely on the goodwill of school administrators who are keen on developing a balanced ESD and GE programme and culture within their schools. The support provided by DLAP officials encourages a school-based policy that promotes the fostering of principles, values, skills, and competences towards the nurture of national, European, and global citizens willing to opt for sustainable lifestyles that reflect environmental stewardship while advocating for a democratic and just society that values inclusion, diversity, and solidarity.

DLAP carried out a number of initiatives to encourage and support schools in their ESD and GE endeavours. One such initiative is the Global Education Network Europe (GENE) School-Based Project with Phase 2's continuation and conclusion. In January 2020, DLAP launched the second phase of the GENE school-based project initiative. This empowered state, non-state, and independent schools at primary, middle and secondary levels to plan, develop and implement school-based projects that provided scholastic communities with an opportunity to participate in activities that promoted the acquisition of knowledge, skills, competences, attitudes, and behaviours conducive to responsible and active, national, European and global citizenship. Project proposals by schools needed to be aligned with the following priorities:

- Multiculturalism and interculturality,
- Human rights,
- Global Citizenship, and
- Quality STEM education for global well-being and development.

Potential project participants were encouraged to develop projects that involved collaboration with external entities, including non-governmental organisations, civil society organisations, and local councils. Following the evaluation of proposals, twelve projects were selected for implementation.

Schools participating in this second GENE school-based project phase were to conclude their initiatives and submit their final project portfolio by May 2022. During this two-year project phase, schools were continuously supported to ensure sound project implementation and dissemination to local and national communities.

Furthermore, as a national leader in GE curricular development and implementation, DLAP also coordinates the procurement and development of related teaching and learning resources related to the area. Considering the shortage of GE and ESD resources in the Maltese language/resources that feature the local scenario, DLAP took the initiative to develop a set of short stories addressing global themes. These short stories are adaptable to students within several skill levels and will be shortly uploaded on teacher and student resource platforms administered by MEYR. These stories will be promoted as a cross-curricular tool that can be used in classrooms during the embedding of GE and ESD principles, values, attitudes, and behaviours. These will be presented in text and will be accompanied by a set of educator guidelines to promote innovative teaching methodologies that nurture critical thinking, research, and debate towards active and responsible national, European and global citizenship. The first four stories from this series, along with respective illustrations and teacher activity guide have been completed with this first batch to be launched and disseminated by the second term of the scholastic year 2022 – 2023.

Since 2019, DLAP also organised the GENE Encounters event as a concluding seminar for schools participating in the GENE school-based project initiative. During the scholastic year 2021 – 2022, DLAP took the initiative to broaden its efforts to collaborate with the Centre for Environmental Education and Research (CEER) to organise the National Symposium on ESD and GE, an event that was financed through the GENE Technical Assistance fund.

The symposium took place between the 28th and 29th of April 2022 at Maria Regina College Middle School in Naxxar, with a turnout of 70 participants, including educators, educational leaders, academia and NGO representatives. During this event, stakeholders working in the field shared work implemented within the formal, informal and non-formal educational sectors, and at academic and policymaking levels. Symposium participants also took part in workshops to discuss the state of ESD and GE at a national level, while sharing their views on the latest research in the field. The main scope of the symposium was to serve as a change agent towards strengthening national policymaking and implementation in nurturing responsible National, European and Global citizenship in line with the United Nations' social, environmental and economic priorities. It also served as a launch platform to initiate a research exercise to assess the state of ESD and GE in Malta. This exercise, financed directly by GENE was carried forward to 2023, with data collection from schools, academia, industry and civil society. The data from this research exercise will provide a solid platform towards the compilation of a national policy on ESD and GE.

Furthermore, ESD and GE implementation in schools is continuously being supported by DLAP through frequent school visits, meetings with School Leadership Teams and curriculum time sessions with educators. During the last scholastic year, ESD and GE support was also provided through several Community of Professional Educators sessions.

Additionally, for the fifth consecutive year, DLAP also collaborated with the IFE in organising GE Phase Sessions for educators and educational leaders. These sessions entitled *Opening Eyes and Minds to the Realities of the World* were delivered on Friday 26th November 2021 and Monday 28th March 2022 respectively.

In parallel to this, as highlighted above, CEER within the UoM promotes ESD and related research in the Euro-Med region by seeking to catalyse change towards a sustainable society. CEER offers a hub that coordinates ESD initiatives, increases the opportunity for ESD research, makes scientific and technological research results more accessible and facilitates resource transfer and capacity building in Malta and, particularly, in the Euro-Med region.

The main measures include the following:

- CEER delivers a Master in ESD, which has been open for registration for about ten years but has recently gone through a periodic programme review in which its learning outcomes and actual effectiveness were analysed externally and internally and improved. It has been successful in producing a number of skilled professionals that have become change-makers in a number of different entities.
- The Certificate in Environmental Education and Interpretation has just been introduced by CEER. This undergraduate certificate is a first of its kind and is instrumental in training students and practitioners in sustainability and the environmental applied aspect.
- A new addition in 2022 was the introduction of a unit (DOC6056) directed at doctoral students from all faculties at the UoM. The main aim is to align the research to the SDGs and, in turn, help in disseminating ESD and GE areas and principles through a broad range of new researchers.
- CEER researchers edited the 17-volume SDG encyclopaedia by Emerald these last three years.
- CEER staff is involved in school programmes like Ekoskola, Young Reporters for the Environment and LEAF as well as in outreach activities within the community like the Pastoral Formation Institute.
- CEER staff was also involved in publishing research at the highest level in peer-reviewed journals.

Further to the above, the *Film 4 Energy* contest, which is a European-wide initiative by the CION Directorate General for Energy also took place. In this regard, DLAP took the initiative to extend this opportunity as a national contest with prizes sponsored through GENE funds. Film 4 Energy encouraged schools to create short videos highlighting the importance of energy efficiency and the benefits of saving energy within their school, community, or city, to successfully promote the economic environmental and social benefits of saving energy across the EU.

Apart from this, MEYR has recently entered into an agreement with the Aquaculture Directorate within MAFA to collaborate on a student and educator resource pack that promotes sustainable consumption of fish products from sustainable aquaculture. An MoU, signed in 2022, highlights the creation of a short, animated video clip promoting the theme for primary students, an e-book containing the same story, a multidisciplinary and cross-curricular student task package, an informational video for middle and secondary cycle students, and an aligned digital information pack aligned to learning outcomes in several learning areas. The primary student task package is complete, while the primary and secondary videos are in an advanced stage of completion with the DLAP's role in this project being to provide pedagogical expertise, nominate the script writer related to the primary animated video, and facilitate the compilation of the primary student task pack.

Additionally, in 2022, the subject of Personal Social Career Development (PSCD) saw the introduction of new learning outcomes that focused on sustainable development. Year 5 students were expected to recognise the importance of the SDGs, specifically "Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure", "Reduced Inequalities", "Sustainable Cities and Communities", and "Responsible Production and Consumption". Year 9 students were expected to be able to define and discuss the idea and practice of sustainability, as well as discuss current challenges related to sustainability issues. These new learning outcomes build upon the ones already introduced in previous years. It is worth noting that PSCD Teleskola recorded lessons on sustainable development are also available and that the Year 6 PSCD Learning Outcomes, to be introduced in the next scholastic year, will also include the SDGs.

In relation to the topic of ESD, MCAST is also coordinating the Community Social Responsibility (CSR) programme, which has engaged students in over 75,000 hours of voluntary work with NGOs.

The MCAST CSR programme is a compulsory key skill unit offered in parallel with MQF Level 1 – 6 courses throughout the six MCAST institutes. The CSR unit presents an opportunity for learners to better understand themselves and others, as well as to establish life goals.

In 2022, the MCAST CSR programme continued to enrich learners' studies with experiences that add value to their knowledge base. Opportunities include areas such as entrepreneurship, creative and performing arts, sports, social and environmental initiatives, and culture among others.

With regard to educational water programmes, MCAST is the coordinator amongst 10 beneficiaries and 5 associated partners of the project *Transforming advanced water skilling through the creation of a network of extended-reality water emulative centres (WATERLINE)*. This project receives funding from the EU's Horizon Europe HORIZON-WIDERA-2021-ACCESS-05 under grant agreement No 101071306. *WATERLINE* aims to create a European Digital Water HEI Alliance, based on the quadruple helix model of innovation, leading to the development of the Alliance's research, educational and entrepreneurship capacities. This shall leverage the individual, institutional and regional resources required for a transformative structural and sustainable learning and innovation environment. All this falls in line with MCAST's commitment to promoting sustainable development within its programmes and curricula.

5.4.3 Career Guidance

In 2022, several initiatives were continued, such as the *My Journey* programme, the *I Choose - Nagħżel il-Karriera Tiegħi Fair*, and further commitments by the National School Support Services (NSSS) to work on resources to be utilised as career guidance tools for practitioners among others. The *My Journey* programme included option talks at schools to students and their parents/guardians, one-to-one sessions, transition programmes and assistance days which included online/face-to-face/telephone sessions that enabled students and parents/guardians to call the respective college to seek the professional service of a career advisor or guidance teacher. At the end of 2022, work also started on the development of an online options application form, besides a hard copy options form, to be submitted by parents/guardians for the 2022-23 Options exercise.

With regard to the *I Choose - Nagħżel il-Karriera Tiegħi Fair*, which was held on the 22nd and 23rd of July 2022 for Year 11 students from state, church and independent schools, provided an opportunity for students to meet post-secondary institutions and employer representatives to offer guidance and information on education and career paths. Several talks outlining the different employment sectors were also held. Over 1,000 students visited the fair, 78 students benefitted from one-to-one career guidance sessions with professional career guidance practitioners and 677 (students and parents) attended 20 talks.

During the same year, the Option Subjects Handbook was updated by all subject Education Officers and the Career Guidance Education Officers; the latter were responsible for overseeing the exercise in state schools. The aim of the handbook is to provide Year 8 students with more information about subjects which they could choose to study from Year 9 to Year 11. This handbook also includes decision-making tips to guide students in making the right choices. This handbook is also complemented by further information uploaded on the web portal <http://exploremoreproject.eu/en/>. This portal which is available in both Maltese and English is also administered by NSSS and specifically targets students in compulsory education. A number of videos showcasing different careers, information on educational paths and a questionnaire for students to identify their interests can be found on the website which is updated regularly.

In 2022, NSSS career guidance teachers organised career lessons and a careers fair for students attending Servizz Għożża. The programme is specifically intended for prospective young mothers. The themes covered included the following: understanding own abilities and skills; an information session by Jobsplus; and how to write a Curriculum Vitae in collaboration with the EUPA. Mock interview sessions were also conducted. A careers fair included the participation of all post-secondary institutions.

Moreover, in 2022, due to the pandemic, orientation visits could not be held physically on-site; however, NSSS coordinated a number of online information sessions with the following sectors: health, ICT, STEM/Esplora; agriculture and fisheries, AFM, the Financial Intelligence Analysis Unit, tourism, finance and engineering. Information sessions with post-secondary institutions were also coordinated by NSSS whereby all Year 11 students could attend online talks or onsite talks held at the secondary school.

Furthermore, Year 4, 5 and 6 students from state, church and independent schools were given the opportunity to participate in the project entitled *X'tixtieq issir la tikber* organised by the Office of the Principal Permanent Secretary in collaboration with NSSS. More than 912 boys and girls from state, church and independent schools participated in the competition. All students had the opportunity to spend some time at the place of work related to the career of their interest. This competition is related to a job exposure experience where more than 700 students participated in various sectors including education, health, finance, ICT, Police, AFM, engineering, art, aviation, sport, science, law, music, hospitality, agriculture and fisheries, photography, journalism, and culture/history amongst others.

NSSS, together with the IFE is also involved in the peer learning event organised by CION entitled *Developing National Frameworks for School Education Careers*. The aim of the framework is to guide a person entering a career in education so they would know the pathways available throughout their professional life and thus have ambitions to continue to improve this identity to progress and have ownership and responsibility of this progression. Within the Maltese context, an educator may not always be aware of career progression pathways and may feel stuck in one particular role. The framework can help address the problem caused by teacher shortages and decrease the number of teachers who opt to move to another profession since they would know that being an educator can lead to several other opportunities.

In the summer of 2022, NSSS also coordinated the Summer Walk-In Service in the Colleges and Giovanni Curmi Higher Secondary School. 636 students made use of this career guidance service. Related to this, the training of guidance teachers and career advisors was once again re-launched with training organised covering the health, engineering, ICT, heritage, and STEM sectors, amongst others.

Furthermore, NSSS and DLAP in collaboration with the Nursing Directorate will once again be organising workshop sessions in Primary Schools for Year 5 students with the aim of making students aware of nursing as a career from an early age. In April 2022, NSSS together with DLAP launched the *Career Learning and Development: Framework for Schools*. The framework is intended as a referral point for schools to help professionals involved in the delivery of career education and guidance.

In addition, NSSS also administers the Euroguidance Malta Centre which involves developing actions in relation to training, mobility opportunities, development of resources for practitioners and end users, and organising conferences and stakeholders' fora. Representatives from NSSS also participate in Euroguidance Network Meetings and contribute towards the development of international training, and the collection of EU good practices amongst others. As part of its work, Euroguidance Malta publishes two newsletters every year with the aim of showcasing the work done by the latter. The Centre also hosts its website (www.euroguidance.gov.mt), which is regularly updated with news, publications and updates on lifelong career guidance taking place on an international level.

Sustaining lifelong learning and life-wide and high-quality literacy practices has always been at the forefront of the government agenda. These are being promoted primarily by the National Literacy Agency (NLA), which also strives to improve literacy outcomes, resulting in inclusive practices, higher educational qualifications, and better job prospects. In 2022, the NLA sought to gradually transition many of its programmes and services back to their in-person version. These included the return, later in the year, to in-person intervention sessions delivered in small groups, after school hours. Nevertheless, schemes and programmes that were created in response to the COVID-19 pandemic that proved successful, were maintained and extended. These include the strengthened scheme that allows families to borrow books that are delivered to their homes for children to read, and the extension of the online one-to-one read-aloud programme beyond summer to the rest of the year.



5.5 Equal Opportunities and Fair Access to the Labour Market

Relevant UN SDG Targets	
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
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
8.3	Promote development-oriented policies that support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, and encourage the formalization and growth of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises, including through access to financial services
8.5	By 2030, achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value
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
8.9	By 2030, devise and implement policies to promote sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products
9.2	Promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and, by 2030, significantly raise industry's share of employment and gross domestic product, in line with national circumstances, and double its share in least developed countries
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
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
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
12.6	Encourage companies, especially large and transnational companies, to adopt sustainable practices and to integrate sustainability information into their reporting cycle
16.b	Promote and enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development

5.5.1 Enhancing the Workforce and Providing Better Opportunities to All —

A strategic concern, felt mostly in the national growth and development outlooks of all countries including Malta, involves the furnishing of the workforce with transversal skills required for present and future jobs, whilst considering the ongoing digital and green transitions. To such end, the Maltese economic activity will continue to be supported by several government-led initiatives as well as several EU-funded projects to ensure a level playing field for all.

The ESF project, *Towards a More Professional Workforce in the Public Administration* (ESF.04.0085), builds on the professionalisation of staff through various funding initiatives aimed at increased academic qualifications and assistance to medical doctors to obtain specialisation experience abroad. By securing the professionalisation of a number of public employees, IPS invests in their development, ensuring that the administration remains in a position to spearhead and maintain economic growth. Economic growth needs a robust administration that is in line with this economic development, which is also facilitated through the continuous renewal and improvement of its services and policies.

Throughout 2022, another TSI project, *Regional and local authorities: Enhancing cooperation and Quality of public administration - Development of a strategic foresight and anticipatory innovation governance capacity across government*, was approved by CION. Modern, skilled and effective leadership through the public service is essential, given that governance is a top government priority to embed a culture and practice of regular, useful, impactful foresight and its subsequent use in decision-making.

In 2022, Jobsplus continued to work on the ERASMUS+-funded project, *SMARTLY*. The project incorporates a survey and needs analyses with industry stakeholders, the design of training content in green and digital jobs, the design and testing of an enhanced profiling tool which features specific elements relevant to digital and green skills, and general awareness and promotion of these sectors. Through the project, Jobsplus ensures that youths benefit from focused training in digital and green skills, strengthening their employability and prospects for quality work in growth sectors.

The use of SMARTLY's innovative profiling method dedicated to green and digital jobs is expected to reinforce the job-matching process and eventual job retention. The first phase of the project which included a survey and needs analysis has been completed. The programme included the administration of surveys in different partner countries to gain insight into the local situation in relation to individuals not in employment, education or training (NEET) and the green and digital sectors. The main trends have been extracted through thorough data analyses and findings have been presented to the partners.

In 2022, reskilling and upskilling efforts remained at the forefront of the Maltese Government's agenda. In this regard, Jobsplus continued its work on the *INTERCEPT* programme aiming to motivate, mobilise and support NEETs through a Green Career Pathway. The Project, funded through EEA and Norwegian funds, seeks to activate youths through a series of deliverables aimed at increasing awareness and competences in green skills, creating a better-equipped workforce. The project will be utilising research and meta-analysis to activate NEETs aged between 25-29 years through an outreach strategy, career counselling, tailored activation, training, and workplace exposure which will increase their competences in green skills.

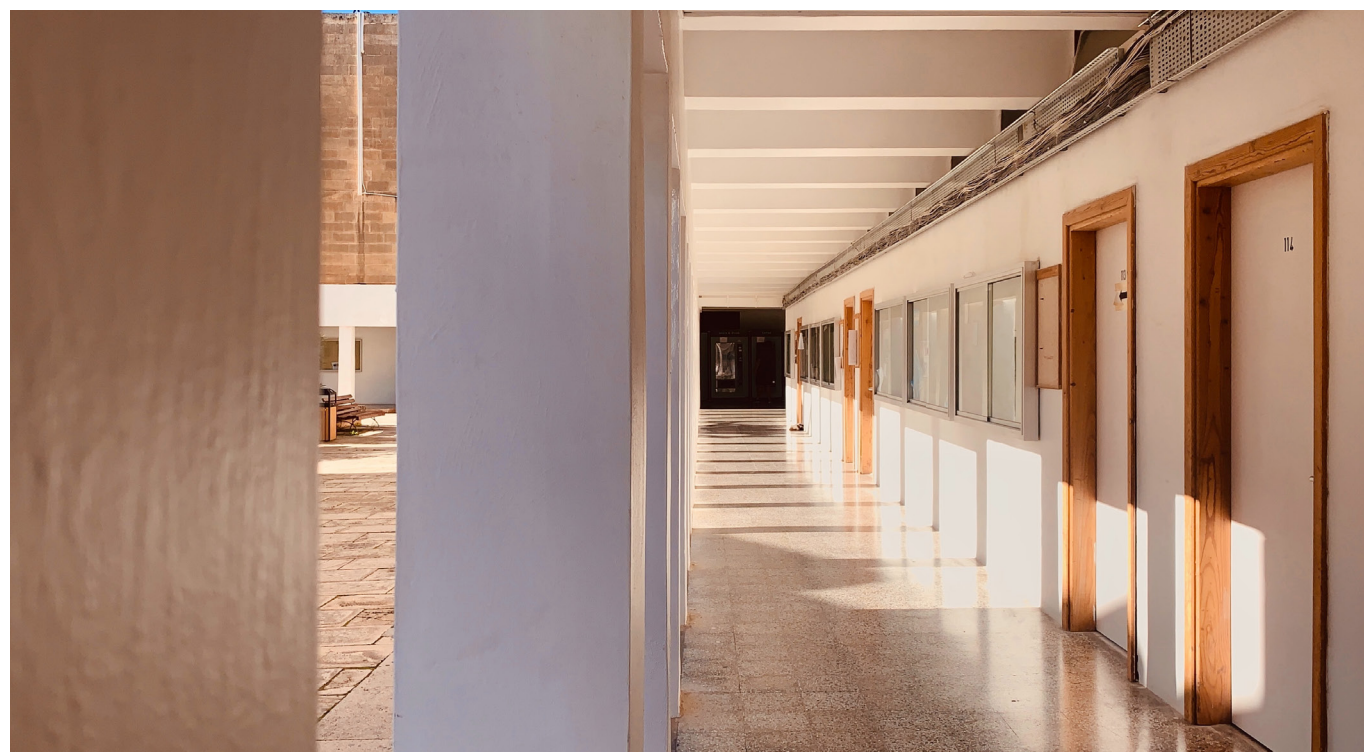
The pilot scheme in Malta was launched in September 2022 and training developed for NEETs is being delivered to the first group of participants. As the greening of the economy will increase in importance, the scheme will boost the pipeline of specialised skills needed for the new green sectors, as well as for modified roles in other key economic sectors. As a result, the initial research phase on NEETs trends, needs and challenges together with the relevant stakeholders' perspective on competences related to green jobs was finalised. These have, in turn, contributed to the development of a training programme.

Further to the above, the Youth Guarantee Scheme available to individuals up to the age of 29 years continued to be administered by Jobsplus and targeted NEETs. This includes the NEET Activation Scheme II, ICT Courses, Secondary Education Certificate Revision classes and MCAST preventive classes.

To promote further upskilling, in 2022 Jobsplus continued to offer the Training Pays Scheme to encourage the workforce to participate in lifelong learning by offering assistance in the form of a training grant and aid participants

with costs related to training. In addition, Jobsplus continued to administer the Investing in Skills Scheme with the aim to encourage the training of persons actively participating in the Maltese labour market through financial assistance for employers to further upskill their personnel. Moreover, to ensure the sustainable upskilling of the labour force, all individuals of working age residing in Malta can participate in Jobsplus' free-of-charge training courses. Jobsplus' training courses, which are pegged to the national qualification framework, are demand-driven aiming to equip participants with the necessary skills and knowledge to enter and retain gainful employment. Jobsplus' courses continued to be offered in a hybrid mode, incorporating both online and in-class learning.

Additionally, the Traineeship and the Work Exposure Schemes continued to be available to jobseekers. The Traineeship scheme provides a combination of on-the-job and off-the-job training where the programmes offered are demand-driven. The Work Exposure Scheme is intended to facilitate the transition to 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.



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

Furthermore, together with the Lino Spiteri Foundation, Jobsplus continued to run the *VASTE* Programme targeting vulnerable jobseekers including individuals with registered disabilities, former substance abusers, former prison inmates, long-term unemployed and migrants (refugees, third-country nationals with a subsidiary protection status or temporary protection and asylum seekers). The overarching target of the project is to bring participants closer to the labour market through training, job coaching/mentoring and job exposure opportunities, which could lead to employment in the open market or self-employment.

The main activity of the project is the development of a Vocational Multi-Disciplinary Assessment Centre, to offer detailed assessment services to the targeted individuals. Such assessment helps Jobsplus and the Lino Spiteri Foundation's guidance service to tailor a personal action plan and employment exposure to targeted jobseekers. Multiple training options such as pre-employment training, basic ICT training, sheltered employment training, the Headstart Programme, job carving and supported employment (on-the-job coaching) are also offered to the clients.

In 2022, through the *VASTE* job carving component, Jobsplus sought to increase the number of work placements and employment retention of other vulnerable individuals. Through job carving, companies who want to integrate persons with disabilities may be assisted by the Lino Spiteri Foundation's corporate relations unit. This unit supports companies in the recruitment of persons with disabilities by using the job-carving approach. This approach aims to rearrange tasks in a company to tailor a job opportunity for a person that has constraints to fulfil certain tasks while keeping in mind the company's needs. Mentoring services are also being provided to clients prior to and during employment as necessary. Job coaches are assigned to facilitate the integration of the individual at the place of work by the identification of a volunteer to handhold the vulnerable individual on an ongoing basis to retain employment.

Similarly, through the newly launched *Way To Work* service, Aġenzija Sapport strived to support persons with disabilities in understanding their employment rights and learning how to speak up when these rights are being impinged. Through *Way To Work*, young people were supported to enter gainful employment by focusing on more individualised programmes reducing the risk of poverty later in life. This was done through one-to-one sessions and group settings. Furthermore, support groups were organised for Sharing Lives volunteers to ensure they are given adequate support throughout their experience. Sharing Lives was launched in April 2017 to offer opportunities where volunteers and persons with disabilities share experiences and create social interactions.

In the same context, the Corradino Correctional Facility (CCF) continued to implement the ESF-funded project *Participation for Employment at CCF: Social Inclusion through Education and Training*. The project aims towards the active inclusion of prison inmates within the labour market and society in general through education and training. This is carried out by supporting inmates to evaluate their skills, strengths and weaknesses, in order to formulate a sentence plan that supports them in reaching their goals. The project focuses on four main areas, these being education, holistic well-being, restorative justice measures, as well as issues related to housing and employment.

The Department of Industrial and Employment Relations (DIER) continued to assist companies to implement short-time work arrangements through the issuing of permits as per Article 42 of the Employment and Industrial Relations Act (EIRA) (EIRA, Chapter 452 of the Laws of Malta). This Article of the Law allows employers to implement different working conditions on a temporary basis in order to avoid redundancies.

A clear example of this was the ongoing consultations and discussions that were held 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 20th June 2019 on work-life balance for parents and carers. The objectives of this Directive, which was transposed in August 2022 called for changes in parental leave, paternity leave as well as the addition of carers' leave.

Moreover, DIER continued to engage in the discussions at EU level on the Proposal for a Directive to strengthen the application of the principle of equal pay for equal work or work of equal value between men and women through pay transparency and enforcement mechanisms, as negotiations with the European Parliament intensified in 2022. Once in force, this Directive will introduce or consolidate existing provisions which ensure that there is no discrimination on the basis of gender which disadvantages women in terms of remuneration and possibilities for advancement at work.

DIER was also heavily engaged throughout 2022 in the discussions at the EU Level on the proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on *Improving Working Conditions on Platform Work*. The objective of this proposal is geared towards providing a safety net for both employed and self-employed persons performing work such as couriers.

Further to the above, more than 100 collective agreements were agreed to, which led to better conditions and wages for the workers in the Public Service. This means that apart from the improvement in working conditions and salaries of the general collective agreement of 2017, the working conditions of government workers continued to improve with these agreements. From 2017 until now, a total of 67 collective agreements have been closed in the Public Sector and 42 sectoral agreements within the Public Service.

5.5.2 Enhancing Social Dialogue

The ESF project, *Enhancing the Positive Contribution of Social Dialogue through Evidence-Based Research* (ESF.04.158), which was finalised by the end of 2022, consisted of research carried out by leading researchers with the aim of presenting such outcomes to the Malta Council for Economic and Social Development (MCESD) and other stakeholders. Furthermore, the project also enabled the training of MCESD staff on communication and means to convey its message in the best possible way. Thus, the course was tailor-made and aimed to equip MCESD with the necessary skills to cater for its members' needs in the social dialogue process.

Further to the above, the project targeted research and training activities to promote the capacity-building of the MCESD in the field of social dialogue. Strengthening MCESD, which acts as a bridge between the government and social partners from across different sectors, will greatly improve social dialogue in Malta and Gozo. Additionally, through the Gozo Regional Committee, MCESD brings together regional constituted bodies and aims to promote new ventures for Gozo and boost its social, economic and ecological sustainability. Furthermore, through discussions and proposals, the Committee addresses the constraints brought about by the double insularity of Gozo.

To this end, the scope was to bring about a shared commitment among social partners on thematic areas for the common good, formulate strategies, and develop action plans, and for social partners to build a sound understanding in a bid to engage in objective discussions and to gradually build mutual trust leading to further positive results. The research served as a basis for discussions and its final outcome provided unbiased and factual material. This promoted a more robust social dialogue based on facts rather than speculation, highly important for targeted policies at the government level.

Hence, the research and the associated training given to MCESD staff improved the role of MCESD in being a catalyst in social dialogue on economic matters. Strengthening this Council has a tangible and direct impact on improving the outlook of Malta's economic growth through strengthened social dialogue and policymaking.

5.5.3 Income Tax and Tax Refunds

In 2022, the Office of the Commissioner for Revenue focused its efforts on measures targeted at alleviating tax burdens on individuals and employees. Thus, to further reduce the income tax rate, as of 2022, employees whose basic annual pay does not exceed €20,000 and who are not in a managerial position started being taxed at 15% on the first €10,000 overtime income. This measure has been estimated to have impacted around 40,000 employees.

Moreover, the tax refund went up to between €60 and €140 with the highest refund given to those with the lowest incomes. More than 250,000 people working and earning less than €60,000 a year benefitted from this scheme. Tax Credit on Higher Educational Qualifications was also granted to individuals willing to pursue a course of studies. The benefit consists of a tax exemption on employment income which may be claimed by way of a tax credit.

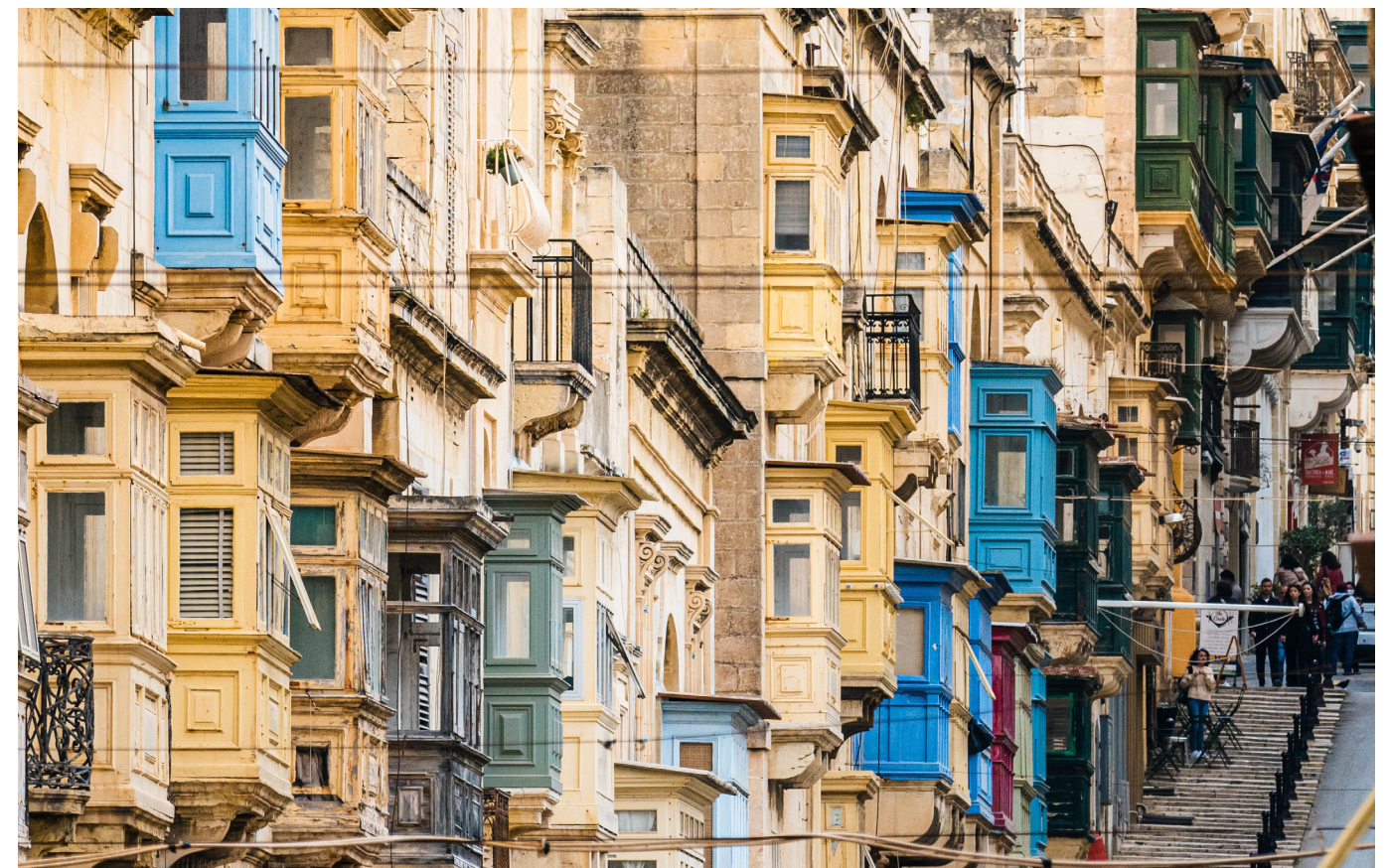


5.5.4 Supporting and Rewarding Businesses

In the past years, the Malta Enterprise launched the following schemes to aid businesses to flourish, grow and expand in various ways:

- Wage Supplement Scheme,
- Rent Subsidy 2020,
- Rent & Electricity Refund Scheme, a COVID support measure, where assistance was also provided in the form of electricity bill refunds to help businesses cope with energy costs in the form of rent and electricity bill refunds,
- Business Re-Engineering & Transformation Scheme,
- Investment Aid for the production of COVID-19-relevant products,
- Support for Reducing the Environmental Impact of Construction Activities,
- ReStart,
- Change to Grow,
- Smart & Sustainable Grant,
- Skills Development Scheme 2020, and
- Get Qualified Scheme 2017.

Moreover, Malta Enterprise introduced another scheme called *Innovate*. This scheme aims to facilitate the creation of Business Research Partnerships between SMEs and Research Knowledge-Dissemination Organisations to carry out projects, leading to SMEs being able to access expertise, knowledge and resources to facilitate innovative product, process and service design. This measure can provide funding for the secondment of a highly-qualified person, and access to innovation advisory and support services. The maximum support per Business Research Partnership is capped at €100,000. Aid for innovation advisory and support services is capped at €200,000.



In addition, to further stimulate economic growth and sustain establishments and businesses in their operations, MGOZ offered a number of schemes of support, including:

- The Gozo Employment Refund Scheme and the Gozo Back Office Scheme. The former offers eligible employers a 30% refund of pay up to €6,000 for every new job created within the private sector based on a three-year contract. The aim is to support full-time recruitment in Gozo in a sustainable manner, create increased and higher quality full-time jobs in Gozo as well as address the issue of a higher dependency on the public sector for full-time employment in Gozo. The Gozo Back Office Employment Refund Scheme provides partial reimbursement of salaries for full-time work in back-office operations in Gozo on a minimum three-year contract with the aim of attracting highly-skilled and educated workers whilst reducing the existing disparities in average basic salaries between Malta and Gozo. Beneficiaries receive partial reimbursement of the Annual Net Salary of each employee carrying out back-office operations in Gozo with the annual maximum financial aid capped at €65,000 per single undertaking. In 2022, a total of €433,458.90 were disbursed from funds allocated under both schemes.
- The Gozo Teleworking Scheme. This scheme consists of a financial grant to employers up to a maximum of €10,000 spread over a 3-year period in proportion to the number of days an employee is granted telework. The scheme also offers a 75% financial grant with a maximum of up to €850 related to the technological and capital investment to equip the employee with the necessary tools to perform tasks. In 2022, a total of €138,127.24 were disbursed from funds allocated under this scheme.
- Restoring and Upgrading Venues with the Capacity to Host Meetings, Incentives, Conventions and Exhibitions (MICE) Events in Gozo. This scheme aims at providing aid to private undertakings and voluntary organisations in restoring and upgrading venue facilities to enhance the capabilities of hosting qualitative MICE events in Gozo. The overall maximum that applicants can obtain is capped at €50,000 and €25,000 for voluntary organisations and private businesses respectively. In 2022, a total of €62,199.24 were disbursed from funds under this scheme.
- Supporting Marketing Initiatives for Specific Niche Markets in Gozo. This scheme aims to promote and kindle investment in particular niche markets through marketing campaigns by increasing awareness of the niche market and related activities, developing applicants' brands on an international level, enhancing Gozo's branding value and further stimulating investment in the quality of the local product. This scheme supports marketing initiatives falling under two categories: participation in specialised fairs/events abroad and/or advertising on an international level, covering up to 75% of the eligible expenditure capped at a maximum of €3,000 or €4,000 if falling under either one or both categories respectively. In 2022, a total of €24,490.89 were disbursed from funds allocated under this scheme.
- Supporting Marketing Initiatives for the Accommodation Sector in Gozo. This scheme supports domestic and international digital marketing initiatives by accommodation providers in Gozo. Accommodation providers are encouraged to invest in continuous and intensive professional digital marketing for the attraction of sustainable high-quality tourism and the overall promotion of the VisitGozo brand. MGOZ covers up to 65% of the eligible expenditure for undertaking a digital marketing campaign, up to a maximum of €8,000. The scheme was launched in Q3 of 2022 and a total of 7 applications were received with financial disbursement to be carried out in 2023.
- Supporting the Adventurous Tourism Industry in Gozo through Hiring Equipment Refund Scheme. This scheme provides operators within the adventurous tourism niche with a partial cash grant to stimulate further investment in eco-friendly and zero-emissions equipment that is hired to clients, ultimately giving further credibility to the Gozo brand as an all-year-round sustainable holiday destination. MGOZ covers up to 50% of the eligible equipment pertaining to the eligible activities, up to a maximum of EUR 5,000 for each approved application per calendar year.

The scheme was launched in Q3 of 2022 and a total of 7 applications were received with financial disbursement to be carried out in 2023.



CONCLUDING REMARKS

The Annual Report illustrates the importance of adopting an integrated approach towards sustainable development by harnessing synergies and addressing trade-offs in reaching the SDG targets. It also presents a range of initiatives being undertaken by the various government entities in Malta that adhere to the fulfilment of the SDG targets. Through this Report, it becomes clear that the role of ministries and other government entities is essential in determining that Malta’s targets are reached and that no one is left behind, especially in view of the fact that they are the ones that have the authority to develop and implement policies and initiatives that can have positive impacts for Malta’s environmental and socio-economic development.

Further cross-disciplinary collaboration and engagement between the various sectors, decision-makers, public bodies, professionals, and other stakeholders could be a way of achieving the mutual learning and transfer of information that would enable knowledge to be transformed into practical strategies to harness the synergies and address the trade-offs between the three areas of sustainable development. Achieving any goal will require a combination of factors, which may range from legal and regulatory frameworks to initiatives designed to bring about positive societal, economic and environmental changes.

Over the past year, all government institutions partook in a sustainability process that laid down several targets and actions which were embraced in a local strategy for sustainable development. This strategy, the objectives of which have been reflected throughout the workings of the government highlighted in this Annual Report, will shape the future towards a healthy, diverse and resilient local economy; the creation of new quality jobs; an attractive natural and built environment; good-quality housing; sound social patterns and political systems; an efficient public service; and a shift from fossil fuel usage to more renewable sources of energy.

Finally, the focus on adopting an approach that champions the principles of a sustainable green and blue economy bears an invaluable potential for correcting unsustainable patterns by changing human activities linked with social as well as technological innovation. This will be key in driving Malta’s ambitions of reaching its sustainability targets and in promoting the values of sustainable development and the SDGs across all sectors.

Annex 1 – List of Milestones in 2022

SDGs	Main Initiative/ Measure	Description	Reference page in document
All SDGs	Launch of <i>Malta's Sustainable Development Strategy for 2050</i> for public consultation	This Strategy will encompass the objectives and targets that the Maltese government aims to achieve by 2050 to secure a future in which nature and the environment are safeguarded and one in which economic prosperity is sustained and the good health and well-being of citizens are maintained.	18
1-2	Meetings organised by NSO on SDIs	Meetings were held to ensure that all national stakeholders contribute equally and effectively towards data collection and the production of statistic related to SDIs. The meetings took place first in 'plenary' format and then in different TF formations, the latter focusing primarily on SDGs 1 and 2.	20
All SDGs	ESDW 2022	The chosen theme for ESDW 2022 was 'Shaping our Sustainable Future', during which the SDD organised a number of activities related to sustainable development. These activities included: ▪ <i>The Sustainable Baby Products workshop.</i> ▪ <i>The Lejla fil-Park event.</i> During the ESDW, a total of 40 sustainable initiatives organised by government entities, local councils, businesses and civil society organisations, were also promoted and showcased on both local and European platforms.	22-23
All SDGs	The SDGs Projects Competition	A competition with the aim of increasing knowledge and awareness about the SDGs and present sustainable innovative ideas for safeguarding the socio-economic and environmental sustainability of the Maltese Islands.	24
All SDGs	The SDG Champions Initiative	Through this initiative, the government gave an opportunity to five young people, known as SDG Champions, who have sustainability at heart and who wish to inspire positive change, by representing and advocating for one of the five pillars of the SDGs, these being people, planet, prosperity, peace, and partnership.	25
All SDGs	The Sustainable Development Fund	The main objectives of this scheme aimed at supporting voluntary organisations in undertaking tangible sustainable development projects and initiatives that have the potential to cover activities and initiatives in line with the SDGs.	25

13	Climate VRA for Malta	Impact chains identifiers and sensitivities in terms of assets and economic activities were modelled economically towards a general estimation of the economic impact of climate change.	29
7, 9, 11-13	Second edition of the <i>SeedGreen</i> Programme	The second edition aimed at supporting young innovators seeking to come up with solution which will aid Malta's transition towards climate neutrality.	30
7-9, 11, 13	<i>Decarbonising the Tourism Industry Post Covid-19</i> Support project	The proposed project includes actions to identify and assess sustainable solutions towards the recovery of the EU tourism infrastructure sector following the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic including the current energy crisis.	30
4, 13	<i>Climate Friendly Travel Education Capacity Building</i> programme	The aim of this programme is to have a Strategy Support System for Malta as a Global Centre of Climate Friendly Travel.	30-31
4, 9, 11, 13	<i>Young Innovators</i> programme	This is an experiential programme providing teachers and youth with skills and competencies needed to become change agents and lead systemic innovation towards a net-zero carbon economy and resilient society.	31
13	<i>RIS MED ClimAccelerator</i> programme	Through this programme, 10 local clean-tech entrepreneurs were supported and were provided with state-of-the-art coaching and training as well as access to financial support and networking opportunities.	31
13, 15	<i>AEROTOX</i> project	The aim of this research project was to use the Satellite Sentinel-5P datasets daily to predict the Saharan desert movement over the South Mediterranean region in advance at a very high resolution of 7x3km as opposed to 10x10km which are available today.	31
7, 13	Registration tax exemptions on the purchase of electric or hybrid vehicles	Grant Scheme on the purchase of electric vehicles, including exemption from registration tax on the purchase of electric or hybrid vehicles (plug-in) and exemption from Annual Circulation License for the first five years.	32
3, 7, 11, 13	Bike-Sharing Schemes and Grants	Bike-sharing schemes and government grants on the purchase of bicycles and pedelec bicycles as well as on the purchase of bicycles and pedelec by companies that offer such bicycles for hire.	32
13	<i>North Harbour and Boiler Wharf Shore Connection</i> project	The project aims to cut over 90% of the air pollution that cruise liners and the roll-on/roll-off ships produce when visiting Malta's principal port.	32
7, 13	Installation of an HVSC	This will provide the opportunity for berthed vessels to switch off their electricity generating auxiliary engines running on marine oil and connect with the national grid.	33

3, 11	Stakeholder consultation on the Noise Action Plan	The action plan is designed to address the management of environmental noise issues and effects from transport noise in the Maltese Islands.	33
7	Grant for the Purchase of Systems for Domestic Use that Reduce the Consumption of Energy	This scheme offers a grant of 50% of the total eligible cost, up to a maximum of €1,000, for retrofitted double glazing, and a grant of 50% of the total eligible cost, up to a maximum of €1,000, for retrofitted roof insulation.	34
7, 9, 13	<i>Investment Aid for Energy Efficiency Projects</i> scheme	The scheme intends to facilitate investments in technological solutions that contribute directly towards a reduction in the energy requirements of the beneficiaries.	35
6-7	<i>GUEST</i> initiative	Focus groups involving guesthouse owners were carried out to evaluate their interpretation of the term sustainability, the type of energy and water investment which they carried out, and their awareness with regards to existing opportunities.	35
7, 11	<i>Irrinova Darek</i> scheme	This scheme allows for the renovation of dwellings to upgrade properties in the Grand Harbour district with the aim of achieving the dual goals of conserving energy in homes and transforming them into cost-effective units that can be supported by families.	36
7, 9	<i>JUMP2Excel</i> project	The project aimed to step up and stimulate the scientific excellence and innovation capacity of MCAST Energy in the field of PV integration, including related technologies such as energy storage and ancillary services and electricity markets.	36
7, 9	<i>NEEMO</i> project	NEEMO aims to steadily set in the Electric Mobility research, related integration of technologies, modes and operations within the MCAST Energy research Theme in Transportation from terrestrial to marine mobility and from heavy-duty vehicles to micro-mobility solutions.	36
7	Improving Energy Efficiency within the People & Standards Division	This project consists of energy efficient interventions within the premises of the Department of Information and the People and Standards Division.	37
7, 11, 13	<i>Towards Carbon Efficiency within AFM Buildings</i> project	This project continued to improve the energy efficiency of some of the buildings within the Defense Estate through the replacement of apertures, the replacement of light fixtures and the replacement of hot-water systems.	38
7, 12	Opening of four reuse centres	Making better use of existing resources and facilitating patterns towards circular economy.	39-40
11-12	Beverage Containers Refund Scheme	Installation of the necessary infrastructure and machines for returning empty containers.	40

12	<i>Waste, an Untapped Resource</i> campaign	A campaign showcasing six cases of scientists inventing additional methods of using waste material by reproducing it into other products.	41
11-12	National Standard SM 810:2022 <i>Recycling oriented deconstruction, controlled excavation works and classification of waste</i>	The scope of the standard is to be a guide for good practice and a reference for everyday use by building owners, developers, designers, and contractors.	41
6, 14	Stakeholder public consultation for the development of the 3 rd RBMP	A Stakeholder Public consultation for the development of the 3 rd RBMP to outline the main challenges which need to be addressed and the measures which need to be implemented.	42
15	<i>Establishing Ecological Corridors for Fauna species</i> initiative	The initiative focuses on the purchasing of a set of tags that trace the mobility of two endangered species to ensure their protection in the long-term.	44
15-16	Implementation of government policies in relation to sustainable hunting governance and conservation of wild birds	Centralising the relevant regulatory functions pertaining to the implementation of the Conservation of Wild Birds Regulations (S.L. 549.42) and other policies in relation to sustainable hunting governance and conservation of wild birds.	45
14	<i>MAARES</i> project	The aim of this project is to increase knowledge to implement applied habitat conservation initiatives in Marine Protected Areas and Territorial Waters of the Maltese Islands.	47
12,14	<i>NETTAG+</i> project	The project aims to reduce and prevent marine litter derived from fisheries by working directly with fishers through an integrative preventive approach including reducing lost gear by using new technologies (acoustic localisation system) that help fishers to locate and recover lost gear.	49
13-14	<i>Get in Motion to Save the Ocean</i> project	The aim of this project is to engage students in Years 9 to 11 in a series of activities, including beach clean-ups and seed planting.	49
9, 14	<i>SAGE</i> project	This is a coastal erosion monitoring programme using Remote Sensed Earth observation data to determine ground displacements, whilst being validated by in-situ sensors.	50
9, 14	<i>AMBULANT</i> project	This project is aimed at developing a lightweight, low-power monitoring module, based on an underwater bionic robot platform, thus providing a solution for realising high-efficiency and high-quality comprehensive monitoring of deep-water cages.	55
12, 15	Support for conservation and sustainable use and development of genetic resources in Agriculture	This project 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.	56

9, 12, 15	modernAKIS project	The main objective of this project is to improve AKIS actors' capacities to leverage individual, organizational and systemic resources needed for the transformation towards more coherent, effective and efficient AKIS systems and the transition to a more sustainable management and use of natural resources in farming and forestry.	56-57
5, 8, 10	Empowering Women in Agrifood programme	The programme aims to provide up to 210 women entrepreneurs across RIS countries with the required knowledge, confidence, support and networking opportunities to successfully start and develop sustainable businesses.	57
9, 12	Malta Food Citizen Lab programme	Citizen Labs will support ongoing efforts of the countries to increase consumer trust in food safety whereby consumers will be given access to up-to-date information from trustworthy sources including scientists, consumer organisations, farmers and government bodies in an understandable and engaging format and to facilitate an active and transparent dialogue opportunities between citizens, farmers/ producers and authorities.	57
2, 8-9, 12	Pitkalija Reform	This involved consolidating the Sales and Marketing Agents by assigning refurbished sales areas, implementation of new processes, and applying enforcement through the Surveillance Unit.	57-58
9, 15	Proposed amendments on the Renewal of Agricultural Leases Act	The Act will introduce new legal provisions to empower the Rural Leases Control Board to amend the rent in a manner related to a fair rental price which should take into account the estimated value of the land as agricultural land for agricultural use which can be obtained from the open market taking into consideration the means of the lessee, the circumstances and condition of the land and any burden which may be proportionate to the lessor and not only in relation to adjacent fields.	58
2-4, 13, 15	Let's Talk Farming Programme	The aim of this programme is to educate and increase awareness related to food systems. This subject covers numerous themes such as how food is produced, who produces it, the many jobs associated with farming, the role of farming in the upkeep of the countryside, the impact of climate on farming and animal welfare.	60
12, 15	New diagnostic laboratories	New diagnostic laboratories were built to be able to improve on the PPD's plant diagnostic services. New equipment was purchased to improve the efficiency of testing for plant pathogens, in particular for Xylella Fastidiosa.	60
12, 15	Cerambyx nodulosus National Survey	A national survey was carried out identifying the presence of Cerambyx nodulosus. The monitoring survey consisted of 20 traps distributed amongst 6 farmers and installed in their fields.	61

2, 9, 12	Increase resilience of the local meat industry and valorising meat products	Around €1 million were invested in the Public Abattoir as it continued to implement several measures to enhance the resilience of the Maltese livestock sector in general and the local meat industry in particular and strengthen the economic and environmental sustainability.	61
9, 12, 15	Crop Intelligent Tools project	The project aimed to cross the bridge from research projects to ready commercial reliable and affordable systems, which could be used by farmers or other industries.	61
12, 15	Pest Survey Programme	The 2022 Malta's Pest Survey Programme, co-financed by CION, was envisaged to cover the monitoring of 48 different pests that attack a wide range of plants of agricultural, ornamental and landscaping importance.	63
9, 12	A new AgriConnect regional office in Haż-Żabbar	AgriConnect opened a new office in Haż-Żabbar to cater for farmers in the southern part of the Islands.	64
3, 12, 15	Promoting 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 fertilisers. 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.	64
3, 12, 15	Simplified access to organic pesticides for Maltese and Gozitan farmers	The new procedure will ensure better competition practices between locally grown fruit and vegetables and those grown in other countries, as Maltese farmers will now have the same products available to them. As a result, our farmers will no longer be disadvantaged with foreign farmers and will be assisted to continue working and investing in the agricultural sector.	64
4, 14	Launch of a Bachelor of Science programme in Diving Safety Management	ITS and the Diving Alert Network Europe have launched a successful Bachelor of Science programme in Diving Safety Management which has an important component of marine sustainability.	72
8-9, 12, 14	Diving Strategy	The Strategy outlines a framework to guide the sustainable development of the diving industry in Malta, and in line with the guiding principles of the new Tourism Strategy.	74

11	Restoration Projects in the Jesuits Church in Valletta, the defensive lines of Cottonera and Margherita Lines in Cottonera, Fort Ricasoli, and stretches of the Victoria Lines, Madonna tal-Hniena Chapel at Qrendi, the Water Tower at Hamrun, the Wardija Tower Żurrieq, the Saint James Arch Kirkop and St Publius Statue Floriana	A number of restoration, rehabilitation and conservation interventions on public historical buildings across Malta.	74
11	Restoration projects in Gozo: Għar Gerduf, Our Lady of Rummiena, the niches on the road to Ta' Pinu, the statues in front of the Kapuċċeini Monastery in Victoria and the monuments at Villa Rundle, and the aqueducts located outside the limits of Victoria	Restoration projects aimed at safeguarding cultural heritage in Gozo.	75
11	Restoration works at the Public Abattoir	An investment of more than €1 million in the restoration of the historic water tower at the Public Abattoir and the entrance of the same facility which dates back to the last years of the nineteenth century was inaugurated.	77
11	Urban Greening scheme for Local Councils	Allocation of €700,000 for 12 urban greening projects in accordance with the Urban Greening scheme for Local Councils in 11 different locations in Malta and Gozo.	79
4, 6, 9, 11	<i>Better Environment in our Local Urban Spaces</i> scheme	Allocation of €500,000 for six urban greening and environmental education projects targeting the development of an educational centre, green infrastructure projects and water management and restoration.	79
11	<i>Code4Earth</i> project	The project's aim is encourage primary schoolchildren to inquire, tinker, and build models representing more sustainable cities.	81
3	A Clinic for HNA	The HNA clinic focuses on gynaecology and breast cancer patients aimed at providing a holistic assessment of post-treatment needs. Services have been extended to patients with lung and urological cancer.	84
3	<i>Mental Wellness Challenge</i> campaign	A campaign organised to encourage mental health awareness through regular tips on social media.	85

3	Development of an informatcs system in secondary care and the management of the <i>Patient Dashboard</i> in all the healthcare facilities across the islands	This platform enables a seamless care provision, allowing healthcare professionals to access their patients' information on their mobile devices, in addition to documenting information while recording the care they provide to patients.	85
3	<i>Know your Sugar</i> campaign	A national campaign was carried out with the theme <i>Know your Sugar</i> to reduce sugar consumption targeting patients living with diabetes, overweight and obesity.	90
9	Strengthening the resilience, security and efficiency of the government digital backbone and investing in appropriate digital solutions, devices and tools	This investment will enable the government to provide proactive action, secure services and streamlined operations to citizens and the business sector.	95
8-9	Digitalisation and modernisation of the public administration	Investment to provide better customer experience to citizens and business organisations, to increase the uptake of online services and ultimately to enhance the competitiveness of the Maltese economy.	95-96
9	Establishment of an EDIH in Malta	The EDIH is focused on technologies such as AI, cyber security, high-performance computing, and cloud solutions, with the aim of becoming a support facility that helps SMEs, start-ups, and companies become more competitive by enhancing their business/production processes as well as their products and solutions through digital technology and digital transformation.	96
9	Electronic Registration for the Spring Hunting Derogation	This system allows Licensed hunters to register through a telephone call which is answered automatically, whereby the provided details would be incorporated directly in the central database system of the Wild Birds Regulation Unit.	96
4, 8-9	Launch of the <i>National eSkills Strategy 2022-2025</i>	The strategy aims at the attainment and availability of digital skills, now and in the future, whilst keeping in view the domestic national, sectoral and specialist strategies and initiatives affecting the digital skills domain.	98
4, 8-9	Launch of <i>eBiznify Lite</i>	The eBiznify initiative contributes to the upskilling and skills development recommended in the National eSkills Strategy 2022-2025.	98
4, 9	<i>Digital Skills Bootcamp 2022</i> initiative	Training courses and sessions organized by the eSkills Malta Foundation to increase digital skills, upskilling and reskilling.	98-99

9	Launch of campaigns such as <i>Tech Heads</i>	These campaigns offer and provide local tech businesses that have developed innovative solutions or enhanced their operations through the use of tech, with a platform to promote their solutions.	99
6-7, 9, 11-13	<i>Hand in hand for the environment</i> campaign	The Public Service is taking initiatives to safeguard the environment, the use of transport that does not pollute and the implementation of effective waste management systems.	101
7, 11, 13	Decarbonising the public service fleet	The purchase of electric vehicles to replace internal combustion engine vehicles in the public service.	101
4, 7, 11	<i>Shifting to Electric Vehicles</i> training programme	MCAST with the support of MEEE, has delivered a training programme for individuals and corporates on 'Shifting to Electric Vehicles'.	102
4, 9-11	<i>Promoting Innovation Capacity in RIS</i> countries project	The project aims to empower citizens in RIS countries to innovate and engage in helping to shape the mobility of the future and overcome current mobility challenges.	102
11	The SCP	The SCP supports innovative projects under the theme of Smart Cities. The programme focused on developing cities where the interaction between different forms of data across buildings, vehicles, citizens and assets is used to manage and improve all aspects of city life.	104
1, 5, 8, 10-11, 16	Launch of the <i>Social Vision for Malta 2035: Shaping the future of our society</i>	This document aims to provide a comprehensive framework to guide the development of future policies within the social sectors.	111
10	Adoption of the UNCRPD National Coordination Mechanism Regulations	These regulations set up a centralised structure bringing together representatives of different Government entities and line Ministries, to be able to work together on key issues critical to the development of the Maltese disability sector.	111
10	Adoption of ENGAGE Regulations	The regulations set up a civil society participation mechanism stipulated in the UNCRPD Act.	111
10	Implementation of <i>Towards the Implementation of the Anti-Racism Strategy in Malta</i> (END-RACISM-MT)	This project, which will be implemented over a period of two and a half years, will support the implementation of key measures in the Anti-Racism Strategy.	112
3-5, 8, 10	National Strategy and Action Plan on gender mainstreaming	The aim of the strategy is to eliminate all forms of structural discrimination that still distinguish between sexes.	112

1-4, 10-11	<i>The National Action Plan for a Child Guarantee 2022-2030</i>	This action plan is another step towards the fight against poverty, and will enhance access to crucial services such as education, early childhood education and care, school-based educational activities, nutrition, healthcare, and adequate housing.	113
1-2, 10	Distribution of the FEAD and SFFD	FSWS was responsible for the distribution of the FEAD and SFFD to alleviate poverty and address social exclusion.	114
10	<i>Equal by Nature</i> project	This project aims to eliminate bias by tackling human biology, highlighting how similar humans really are genetically and how the minor differences between them are what makes the human race so resilient.	114-115
10	<i>Strengthening Knowledge on Integration and Non-Discrimination</i>	The project focuses on the grounds of race and ethnic origin with the main aim being to identify the needs of and discrimination faced by vulnerable groups namely migrants and Muslims.	115
4, 8, 10-11	Publishing of a <i>Qualitative Research Study on LGBTIQ+ discrimination</i>	The study analysed the discrimination faced by LGBTIQ+ persons in Malta in various sectors of life such as education, employment, and in the access to and supply of goods and services.	115
4, 10	<i>Super Sibs</i> Groups programme	This programme encourages children between 8 and 13 years of age who have a sibling with disability to meet and socialise with other children who can understand each other's situation in a supportive and safe space.	116
10-11	Launch of the <i>Healthy Spaces: Co-creating Child-friendly Towns and Villages</i> research study	The study addressed safety and security; recreational, play and social spaces for children and young people; spaces where nature and the outdoor environment can be enjoyed; cleanliness; inclusive spaces; and the voice and participation of children in the community.	116
10-11	Inter-sectoral committee on Child friendly towns and villages	The aim of this committee is to create an index which would support and guide Local Councils to be more child-friendly.	116
4, 16	Project <i>IMPATT</i>	The aim of this project was to encourage young people to actively participate in democratic decision making at both local and national level.	116-117
4, 16	<i>Insahhu l-iSkola bi Studenti Attivi</i> programme	The aim of this programme is to explore ways of how secondary school students can experience active citizenship.	117
10, 16	<i>Empowering Children's Participation in Malta</i> project	The project aims to contribute towards improving child participation and enable them to freely express their views and influence any decisions that will affect them.	117

3, 10	Health and well-being programmes	The Day Services within Aġenzija Support coordinated a number of programmes about health and well-being across Malta and Gozo.	118
3, 10	<i>The Scheme for Exemptions/Reductions/Grants related to Motor Vehicles for Persons with Disability</i>	The beneficiaries benefit from an exemption/subsidy on the vehicle's registration tax and annual circulation tax, from a grant equivalent to VAT on CIF and import duty, and a grant equivalent to the duty and VAT incurred on local modifications of vehicles.	120-121
3, 10	<i>Exemptions/Subsidies related to Motor Vehicles for Philanthropic Organisations/Charitable Institutions Scheme</i>	This scheme is targeted at charitable and philanthropic institutions, old people's homes and lay movements which may benefit, if eligible, from exemption/subsidy on a vehicle's registration tax and a subsidy on the annual circulation tax.	121
5, 10, 16	The inclusion of the concept of femicide in the criminal code of Malta	The introduction of this concept was intended to send out a clear and strong message against violent crimes against women.	123
9, 16	Rolling out of the <i>Digital Justice Strategy</i>	This Strategy aims at improving the quality of the national justice system, with specific goals related to the digitalisation of justice.	125
9, 16	The setting up of a Digital Justice Steering Committee and a multi-disciplinary project team	A Digital Justice Steering Committee was set up to oversee the implementation of the Digital Justice Strategy, while a multi-disciplinary project team composed of key stakeholders working within the court setting was also set-up to review legislation to enable digitalisation from a legal perspective and work on the specifications required for a new court case tracking system.	125
9, 16	CRO history books exercise	The respective history books are being scanned for a digital back-up and transferred to the National Archives of Malta for permanent preservation.	126
9, 16	Launch of Legal Aid Malta Agency's first online application	Through this online application, prospective clients could initiate the legal aid application.	127
16	Development and adoption of the Office of the AG's Anti-Human Trafficking Strategy Document	The strategy makes it clear that the Office of the AG is fully committed to ensure the effective prosecution of human trafficking.	128-129
9, 16	Inclusion of <i>schema.org</i> as an add-on to the current website https://legislation.mt/	This inclusion will assist in the creation of an enhanced description which appears in search results and will provide users with better information relating to their conducted search.	129
9, 16	Development of the Client Self-Care Portal	The development of the Client Self-Care Portal intended to provide a personalised service to end-users, thus serving the legal and judicial professions and the public at large more efficiently.	130

16	Setting up of a body as a Whistleblower Helpline	This body may be reached for information and general queries.	131
4, 16	Information campaign on MFJ's duties and operations	An information campaign aimed both at the public administration and the general public. Information and awareness on principles of Data Protection were disseminated via social media and national television.	131
16	Study on compensation to victims of crime	The purpose for such a study ensued following recommendations made by GRETA in one of its reports on Malta in which it was recommended to review the legislative framework in connection with compensation to victims of human trafficking.	132
16	Setting up of an IMC on Victim Statutory Compensation	An IMC composed of a representative from the DoJ, a representative from the Strategy and Support Directorate of MFJ and the HRD, was set up on Victim Statutory Compensation including THB.	132
16	Opening of two new fire stations and commencement of construction and expansion works by the CPD	The CPD opened new temporary fire stations in Delimara and Pembroke and started work on the construction of a new fire station in Floriana and the expansion of its headquarters and the Xemxija fire station.	132
4, 8, 16	Providing specialist training to CIPD staff	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.	133
16	Sex Work Programme	This programme was aimed at preventing human trafficking and exploitation.	133
10, 16	Returns Unit Outreach Programme	This programme was aimed at migrants and offering long-term relocation.	133
4, 8, 16	Training for Community Police officers within the MPF	This initiative aims to train law enforcement and immigration officers on human rights and equality standards.	133
9, 16	Accessibility of MPF front office services through <i>servizz.gov</i> hubs	Services provided by the MPF front office are available through <i>servizz.gov</i> hubs in four locations in order to provide a more accessible, convenient, and efficient service to the general public.	134
10, 16	Setting up of a TF in relation to the Immigration Act	A TF has been set up to suggest various amendments to the Immigration Act.	134
16	New vessel P71 added to the Armed Forces Maritime squadron	This vessel will contribute towards enhancing offshore surveillance and the reaction capability of AFM.	134

4	Launch of <i>Malta's National Strategic Action Plan for Further and Higher Education 2022 – 2030</i>	<i>Malta's National Strategic Action Plan for Further and Higher Education 2022 – 2030</i> , which was launched on Friday 9 th December 2022, aims at enhancing social inclusion in schools and throughout the whole education system in Malta.	135
4	Launch of the Inclusive Education in Schools – <i>Route to Quality Inclusion Policy and the National Inclusive Education Framework</i>	One of the main targets implemented as part of this policy was the development of an LSE toolkit aimed at supporting newly appointed LSEs in their induction process.	135-136
4	Opening of two more Reach Units	Two more Reach Units were opened in two secondary schools in Malta.	136
4, 8, 10	Group information sessions by MAU	Topics included asylum procedure, education, employment, health, budgeting and assisted voluntary return.	136
4	Development of a set of short stories addressing global themes	These short stories are adaptable to students within several skill levels and will be shortly uploaded on teacher and student resource platforms.	138
4	Introduction of a unit (DOC6056) directed at Doctoral students from all faculties at the UoM	The main aim is to align the research to the SDGs and, in turn, help in disseminating ESD and GE areas and principles through a broad range of new researchers.	139
4, 7, 11	The <i>Film 4 Energy</i> contest	<i>Film 4 Energy</i> encouraged schools to create short videos highlighting the importance of energy efficiency and the benefits of saving energy within their school, community, or city, to successfully promote the economic environmental and social benefits of saving energy across the EU.	139
4, 12, 14	Promoting sustainable consumption of fish products	The creation of a short, animated video clip promoting the theme for primary students, an eBook containing the same story, a multidisciplinary and cross-curricular student task package, an informational video for middle and secondary cycle students, along with an aligned digital information pack aligned to learning outcomes in several learning areas.	139
4	Introduction of new learning outcomes focusing on sustainable development in PSCD	The subject of PSCD saw the introduction of new learning outcomes that focused on sustainable development. These new learning outcomes build upon the ones already introduced in previous years.	139
4, 9	<i>WATERLINE</i> project	The project aims to create a European Digital Water HEI Alliance, based on the quadruple helix model of innovation, leading to the development of the Alliance's research, educational and entrepreneurship capacities.	140

4, 8	Summer Walk in Service in the Colleges and Giovanni Curmi Higher Secondary School	636 students made use of this career guidance service, which was co-ordinated by NSSS.	141
4, 8	Launch of the <i>Career Learning and Development: Framework for Schools</i>	The framework is intended as a referral point for schools to help professionals involved in the delivery of career education and guidance.	141
9	Regional and local authorities: <i>Enhancing cooperation and Quality of public administration - Development of a strategic foresight and anticipatory innovation governance capacity across government</i>	The project aims to embed a culture and practice of regular, useful, impactful foresight and its subsequent use in decision-making, reflecting what is expected out of modern, skilled and effective leadership through public service.	143
8, 10	<i>Way To Work</i> service	Aġenzija Support strived to support persons with disabilities in understanding their employment rights and learn how to speak up when these rights are being impinged.	145
4, 8-9	Tax Credit on Higher Educational Qualifications	The benefit consists of a tax exemption on employment income which may be claimed by way of a tax credit.	146
11-13	<i>Support for Reducing the Environmental Impact of Construction Activities</i> scheme	This scheme targets its support to investments that reduce the impact of such activities by facilitating the reduction in volume of construction waste, control dust emissions and facilitate the replacement of old construction equipment.	147
8-9	<i>Innovate</i> scheme	This Scheme aims to facilitate the creation of Business Research Partnerships between SMEs and Research Knowledge-Dissemination Organisations to carry out projects, leading to SMEs being able to access expertise, knowledge, and resources to facilitate innovative product, process and service design.	147
8-9	Supporting Marketing Initiatives for the Accommodation Sector in Gozo	This scheme supports domestic and international digital marketing initiatives by accommodation providers in Gozo.	148
8, 11-12	Supporting the Adventurous Tourism Industry in Gozo through Hiring Equipment Refund Scheme	This scheme provides operators within the adventurous tourism niche a partial cash grant to stimulate further investment in eco-friendly and zero-emissions equipment that is hired to clients, ultimately giving further credibility to the Gozo brand as an all-year round sustainable holiday destination.	148



Ministry for the Environment, Energy and Enterprise

Sustainable Development Directorate

6, Qormi Road,
Santa Venera, Malta

T: +356 2331 6200

E: sustainabledevelopment@gov.mt

W: <https://sustainabledevelopment.gov.mt/>