


Fact-check: How much was the Gozo swimming pool meant to cost?

The oft-delayed project is suspected to have gone over-budget

National

Fact-check

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 1 min read

A dispute between Jason Azzopardi and Clint Camilleri took on a new twist this week. Main photo: Shutterstock. Inset: Matthew Mirabelli & Chris Sant Fournier

Claim: The Gozo aquatic centre was meant to cost €9m but has gone way over budget.

Verdict: The €9m refers to one of the project's seven tenders. A total of €19.8m worth of tenders were awarded linked to the project, but even this figure may have been exceeded. Between 2019 and 2023, the government spent nearly €6.6m more on the project than what was budgeted.

The news that lawyer and former PN MP Jason Azzopardi had requested a magisterial inquiry into alleged overspending on an Olympic-sized swimming pool and aquatic centre in Gozo prompted a harsh response from Gozo minister Clint Camilleri.

In his request, Azzopardi [said](#) that the construction of the project was meant to cost €9m but costs had ballooned to over €17m, prompting suspicions of embezzlement.

Later that same afternoon, Camilleri took to Facebook to accuse Azzopardi of spreading “misinformation”, [arguing](#) that the figures cited in the inquiry request ignored a series of tenders into the project and instead only focused on a single €9m tender.

Several readers wrote to *Times of Malta*, asking for help as they wrapped their heads around the labyrinthine situation.



Clint Camilleri rebutted claims of over-spending. File photo: Mark Zammit Cordina

Is there more than one tender?

Yes, as is often the case with large-scale government projects, the works were divided into a series of tenders, each addressing a different part of the aquatic centre's construction.

In total, there were seven tenders issued over a span of six years, amounting to some €19.8m.

The project began with a tender for excavation works into the site back in early 2019, costing some €230,000.

Later that year, a second tender was issued, this time for the civil works on the complex. This was eventually awarded to local consortium Poliexcel Construction in April 2020, to the tune of €9.2m.

That same summer, another tender for electrical and mechanical works was issued, eventually being secured at the cost of €3.2m by Excel SIS Enerji Uretim Construction, a Turkish-fronted consortium believed to include several local developers, including Gozitan magnate Joseph Portelli.

The following year, the project's fourth tender was issued, this time to build the pool's adjustable floor. This went to Italian pool specialists Fluidra Commerciale for €697,000.

Another tender followed a few months later, with local construction company Excel System Construction winning a €635,000 bid to install the centre's roof panelling.

By the time 2023 rolled in, another tender was on the horizon, this time a hefty €5.2m for stone cladding and finishes, again going to Excel SIS Enerji Uretim Construction.

And the project's seventh and final tender was issued last year, with Excel System Construction pocketing another €648,000 for the aquatic centre's equipment.

The Gozo pool project's seven tenders

The tenders amounted to a total of €19,839,018.

Tender	Date awarded	Amount	Awarded to	Number
Excavation works	9 January 2019	€230,096	Little Rock Quarry Ltd	MGOZ/MPU T 56/2018
Civil and finishes works	27 April 2020	€9,170,413.33	Poliexcel Construction Consortium	CT2141/2019
Supply, installation, testing and commissioning of mech and elec services incl. the provision of EE monitors	3 November 2020	€3,238,519.02	Excel SIS Enerji Uretim Construction	CT2235/2020
Design and build and maintenance of an adjustable pool floor	25 March 2022	€697,000	Fluidra Commerciale Italia SPA	SPD3/2021/088
Supply, delivery and installation of a trapezoidal insulated panel system	2 May 2022	€635,325.18	Excel System Construction (Malta) Limited	SPD3/2021/086
Design, supply and install of stone cladding and curtain wall, and supply and install of finishes using env fr materials	29 May 2023	€5,219,764.57	Excel SIS Enerji Uretim Construction	CT2236/2022
Adjustable aquatic competition bulkhead and equipment for the aquatic pool	21 March 2024	€647,900	Excel System Construction (Malta) Limited	SPD3/2023/092

Table: Neville Borg, Times of Malta • [Get the data](#) • Created with [Datawrapper](#)

So the project isn't over budget after all?

It's not quite that straightforward.

This is an oft-delayed project that has been in the works for years, ever since the government [announced](#) that it had signed an agreement for the nattily titled Gozo Natatorium project in 2016.

Several years (and one name change) later, it's likely that the project's original expected outlay may have ballooned over time.

Press reports over the years do little to clarify the project's planned costs.

[Reports](#) shortly after excavation works were completed in 2019 described it as a “€10 million complex”, but by the time the foundation stone was being laid [two years later](#), it was said to cost a global total of €16m.

How the project's budget has changed over the years, and whether those changes are justified, is now a matter for the courts to examine.



A request for a magisterial inquiry was filed by lawyer and former MP Jason Azzopardi. File photo

Did they spend more than the amount listed in the tenders?

With the dust yet to settle on the project, it's difficult to tell just how much it will cost, but what appears certain is that there were instances in which the government forked out more than it had originally planned.

A notice in last year's government gazette shows that the project's roof panelling would cost an extra €91,000, with the original €635,000 contract bumped up to €726,000.

And a 2018 direct order to MBRV Consultants for consultancy services on the project will not have featured in any of the seven tenders.

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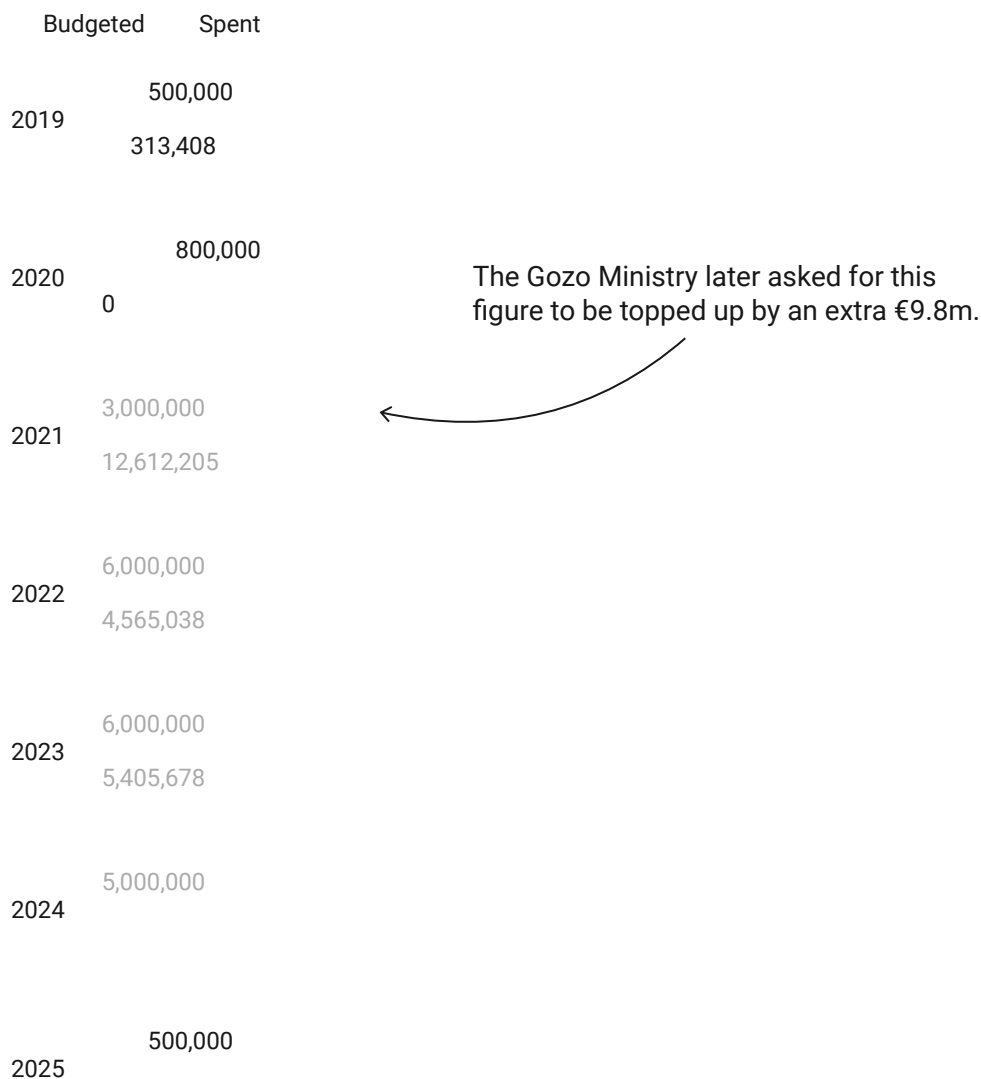


Meanwhile, budget figures show that the government forked out almost €23m on the project between 2019 and 2023, nearly €6m more than had been budgeted for those years.

Budget figures tabled in parliament show that in 2021 alone, the Gozo ministry asked for its €3m allocation to be bumped up by an additional €9.8m, eventually spending €12.6m throughout the year.

How much was budgeted and how much was spent?

Between 2019 and 2023, the government spent almost €6.6m more on the project than it had originally budgeted.



Data for how much was spent in 2024 and 2025 is not yet available. All figures are in €.

Chart: Neville Borg, Times of Malta • Source: Finance Ministry • [Get the data](#) • Created with [Datawrapper](#)

Back in 2022, Clint Camilleri told parliament that payments related to the project’s construction had reached just north of €13m by that point.

Earlier still, in response to a 2021 parliamentary question, he revealed that the Gozo ministry had spent €306,000 on excavation works at the site throughout 2019, some €76,000 more than had been allocated in the tender, together with an additional €7,000 for an archaeologist to monitor excavation works.

Verdict

Seven tenders were issued for the project, amounting to a total expenditure of €19.8m.

The largest of these tenders, a €9.2m tender for civil works awarded in 2020, is frequently incorrectly taken to be the project's global cost.

The global cost of the project remains unclear, but it appears likely that the government went over budget in several aspects of the projects. Between 2019 and 2023, the government had spent nearly €6.6m more than it had budgeted.

With the topic now the subject of a magisterial inquiry, courts will look into whether or not any excessive spending is justified.

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